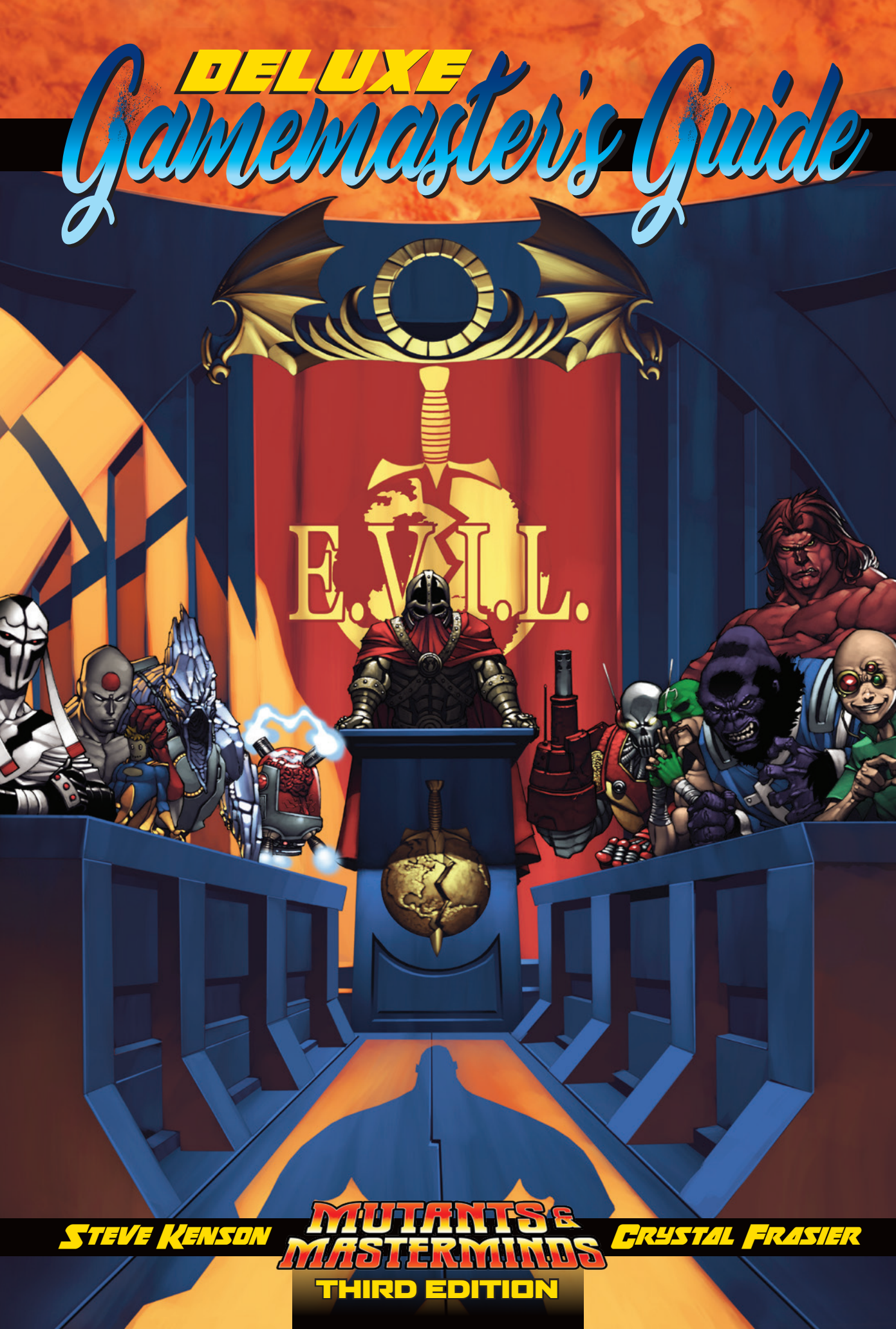
DELUXE Gamemaster's Guide



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MUTANTS & MASTERMINDS

THIRD EDITION

DELUXE Gamemaster's Guide

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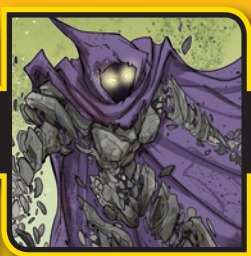

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PRINCESS

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the new and improved *Deluxe Gamemaster's Guide* for the third edition of the *Mutants & Masterminds* superhero roleplaying game! This is an updated and expanded version of the original *Gamemaster's Guide* first published in 2011, and includes text and art from that volume, along with new information on building your own *Mutants & Masterminds* adventures, sample adventures to run right out-of-the-box, and an expanded selection of villains and threats to throw at your players.

It's no secret that being a Gamemaster (GM) is hard work. You fill the role of director, cheerleader, writer, teacher, and occasionally babysitter to your friends. This guide aims to make that job a lot easier by not only providing tools, but also tons of information about the superhero genre and its tropes. Much of this book focuses on the "why" of superhero stories rather than the "how," delving into motivations for villains, how to build an interesting world, and the sorts of things superheroes do when they aren't punching evil in the jaw. The expectation isn't that you, the GM, need to use everything in this book as soon as you begin, but rather that you know what those elements are and how to find them when needed.

Odds are, if you're reading this, you've already run a few games. You might be a veteran Gamemaster with years of experience, or a new GM with the drive to learn and improve. Whatever your level of experience, you will find useful tools and tips throughout this guide.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The tools in this book are yours to use as you see fit for your *M&M* game. **Chapter 3** and the **Appendix** offer pre-built time-savers, while **Chapter 1** and **Chapter 2** have more theory for world-designers. **Chapter 4, Chapter 5**, and **Chapter 6** offer plenty of adventure ideas, while **Chapter 7** is for the system-tinkerers. Regardless of your particular interest, read through all the chapters in the *Gamemaster's Guide*, chances are you'll find something useful for your game in each one.

CHAPTER 1: SETTINGS

Chapter 1: Settings discusses creating an entire universe for your *M&M* heroes: choose a setting, scope, and style, look at different genres, time periods, and cosmologies. The chapter includes ideas about the nature and origin of super powers in the setting, and the role of super-powered characters in it.

CHAPTER 2: ADVERSARIES

Chapter 2: Adversaries talks about villains: their roles in the series, different types, motivations, backgrounds, and goals. It also looks at villain tactics, how to play villains, and how to use them to the greatest effect in your games. It concludes with a look at villain teams and organizations.

CHAPTER 3: ARCHETYPES

Chapter 3: Archetypes provides *M&M* Gamemasters a whole toolbox of ready-to-use characters. It starts off with a discussion on villain design, then provides eighteen fully detailed villain archetypes of varying power levels, with plenty of options to customize and create a wide range of foes. The chapter concludes with a catalog of animal, minion, and monster archetypes you can use to fill out the ranks of a villain's henchmen or as foes in their own right.

CHAPTER 4: PLOTS

Chapter 4: Plots is all about villainous schemes, from conquest to theft, looking at the various goals of the nefarious in detail, including various examples and springboards for your own ideas. It includes a random adventure idea table along with some advice on constructing *M&M* adventures.

CHAPTER 5: CHALLENGES

Chapter 5: Challenges looks at the various non-villainous threats heroes may encounter, from natural disasters to harsh environments. It also looks at various types of traps, from cunning captures to deadly deathtraps and how to use them effectively in your game.

CHAPTER 6: CREATING ADVENTURES

Chapter 6: Creating Adventures combines the elements of previous chapters to explain story structure, pacing, and the various scene types that *Mutants & Masterminds* uses as a guide to adventure.

CHAPTER 7: OPTIONS

Chapter 7: Options gives you some ways to modify the *M&M* system to suit the type of game you want to run, along with some additional tools for the Gamemaster's

toolbox, including fighting styles, systems for reputation, wealth, and mass combat, and ways to make the game more dynamic or more lethal, as you prefer.

APPENDIX 1: VILLAINOUS LAIRS

Appendix 1 of the *Deluxe Gamemaster's Guide* provides nine ready-to-use villainous lairs, from an abandoned amusement park to an island lair (perhaps complete with volcano). You can use the maps and descriptions of these lairs with the villain archetypes and plots in this book, in conjucntion with your own villains and adventures, or just as inspiration to create lairs for your own villains, or even headquarters for the heroes!

APPENDIX 2: ASTONISHING ADVENTURES

Appendix 2 presents two heroic adventures created from the various bits and pieces presented in this book, including maps and villain archetypes. The first adventure, *The Isle of Dr. Sersei*, takes the heroes to the island lair of a mad scientist bent on "saving" humanity from itself. The second adventure, *Power Play*, takes the heroes through the streets and back alleys of the city as they try to understand a new criminal organization making their move to take over the local underworld. They can be used as-written, modified to suit your own table, or used as a toolkit from which you can pull useful scenes, names, or ideas.

COMING FROM THE BASIC HERO'S HANDBOOK?

The *Mutants & Masterminds Basic Hero's Handbook* is designed to be a quick and easy start to the game, but does not contain the same depth of options found in the more detailed *Deluxe Hero's Handbook*. This book refers to several Effects and Advantages not found in the *Basic Hero's Handbook*. The Advantages presented are often simple to figure out based on their context, but if you can't decide on a fair use, feel free to ignore them.

DELUXE POWERS

The *Basic Hero's Handbook* includes many of the Effects needed to build some of the most iconic super powers from your favorite comics, shows, and films, but leaves out some of the more complex powers. The following text lists the basic rules needed to use those additional powers found in the *Deluxe Hero's Handbook* as they are presented in the various characters in this book, including their default Action, Range, and Duration, as well as a short description.

Several powers, such as Summon, Variable, and Weaken, mention Power Points. You can find basic information on Power Points in the **Rewards** section on page 94 of the *Basic Hero's Handbook*.

More detailed information on all these effects can be found in the *Deluxe Hero's Handbook*.

BURROWING — FREE ACTION • PERSONAL • SUSTAINED

You can dig through the ground. You move through the ground at a speed equal to your rank minus 5; harder substances may slow you by 1 or 2 ranks. You can choose to leave a passable tunnel behind you.

COMMUNICATION — FREE • RANK • SUSTAINED

You can communicate silently with other people or creatures over a distance (listed in each character's statblock), even if you can't see them. Pick a descriptor, such as radio or psychic; some characters with unusual senses may be able to overhear your communications.

COMPREHEND — NONE • PERSONAL • PERMANENT

Choose a descriptor, such as animals or machines. You can understand and speak to that descriptor. This does not give you any control over them, and some things may not be especially smart or helpful.

DEFLECT — STANDARD • RANGED • INSTANT

As a Standard action, you can use the Defend action against any attacks within normal Ranged distance, using your Deflect rank instead of your normal Defenses. Because this is a Defend action, add 10 to any die roll lower than 11. This does not work against area attacks or attacks targeting Defenses other than Parry and Dodge.

ELONGATION — FREE • PERSONAL • STANDARD

You can stretch your body or limbs. Add your Elongation rank to your normal size rank (–2 for most characters). You can make "close" attacks within this reach, but suffer penalties for Concealment if you can't see what you're attacking. You gain a +1 bonus to Grab checks per rank.

ENVIRONMENT — STANDARD • RANK • SUSTAINED

You can control one or more effects of the environment (listed in the power) within 30 feet of you at rank 1; each additional effect rank increases this area by one rank. Characters in this area suffer the effects or penalties of the environment—such as intense cold or darkness—normally (see the **Hazard** rules on page 86 of the *Basic Hero's Handbook*).

EXTRA LIMBS — NONE • PERSONAL • PERMANENT

You have one additional, functional limb per rank in Extra Limbs. You do not gain any additional actions, but gain Improved Grab as a bonus Advantage, and you gain a +1 bonus to Grab checks per rank (to a maximum of +5).

GROWTH — FREE • PERSONAL • SUSTAINED

You can grow larger, stronger, and more durable. Every rank of Growth adds +1 Strength, +1 Stamina, and adds +1 to your Mass rank (2 for most characters), but subtracts –1 to Stealth skill checks. Every 2 ranks (rounded up) adds +1 to Intimidation skill checks, but subtracts –1 Parry, and –1 Dodge. Every 4 ranks adds +1 to your Size rank (–2 for most characters). Every 8 ranks adds +1 Speed. Growth that is Permanent and Innate reflects the creature's natural size.

HEALING — STANDARD • CLOSE • INSTANT

You can heal with a touch by making a DC 10 effect check. Every Degree of Success heals one damage condition, starting with the worst.

IMMORTALITY — NONE • PERSONAL • PERMANENT

You can come back from death. Subtract your Immortality rank from 19 to determine the Time rank it takes you to return to life if killed. You must declare one method of death or destruction that can circumvent your Immortality.

INSUBSTANTIAL — FREE • PERSONAL • SUSTAINED

You can transform into a less-solid form. At **Rank 1** you transform into a fluid; you can be damaged and affect the world normally, but can pass through small openings. At **Rank 2** you transform into a gas; you can move through small openings and are immune to physical damage; energy damage affects you normally. At **Rank 3** you transform into energy; you can pass through barriers that allow your energy type (such as metal barriers for electricity, or glass for light), you are immune to physical damage, and are immune to the type of energy making up your body, but other energy damage affects you normally. At **Rank 4** you are completely incorporeal; you can move through any solid object and are immune to physical and energy damage; choose one descriptor that can still affect you.

At **Rank 2** and higher you cannot use your Strength or powers to affect solid objects unless they have the "Affects Corporeal" extra. Some attacks have the "Affects Insubstantial" extra, and will inflict half damage to Insubstantial targets.

LUCK CONTROL — REACTION • PERCEPTION • INSTANT

You can spend a Hero Point to affect someone else's luck. Each rank of Luck Control allows you to select one of the following: Spend a Hero point to help another character, give a Hero Point to another character, spend a Hero point to negate someone else's use of a Hero Point, or spend a Hero point to force someone else to re-roll a check they just made and take the *worse* of the two results.

MORPH — FREE • PERSONAL • SUSTAINED

You can shapeshift into other forms, gaining a +20 bonus on Deception checks made to disguise. At **Rank 1**, you can transform into one specific form. At **Rank 2**, you can transform into a narrow category, such as "people my size" or "fish." At **Rank 3**, you can transform into a broad category, such as "humanoid" or "animals." At **Rank 4** you can transform into anything roughly your size. This change does not affect your statistics or senses, or provide you any abilities of your new form.

NULLIFY — STANDARD • RANGED • INSTANT

Choose a descriptor, such as fire or electronics. You can shut down any effect with that descriptor with an opposed effect check (see **Countering Effects** on page 48 of the *Basic Hero's Handbook*).

REMOTE SENSING — FREE • RANK • SUSTAINED

You can extend the senses listed with this power to scan a distant area. The Distance rank you can project your senses is equal to your Remote Sensing rank.

SHRINKING — FREE • PERSONAL • SUSTAINED

You can shrink in size at will, becoming stealthier and harder to hit. Every rank adds +1 to Stealth skill checks. Every two ranks adds +1 Parry and +1 Dodge. Every 4 ranks subtracts –1 Strength and –1 from your Size rank (–2 for most characters). Every 8 ranks subtracts –1 from your Speed. Shrinking that is Permanent and Innate reflects the creature's natural size.

SUMMON — STANDARD • CLOSE • SUSTAINED

You can summon or animate a loyal creature to serve you, built from a number of Power Points equal to your rank × 15. Summoned creatures use the minions rules unless the summoning power has the "Heroic" extra, and have the Daze condition unless the summoning power has the "Active" extra. The "Multiple Minions" extra allows you to summon the listed number of creatures rather than just one.

SWIMMING — FREE • PERSONAL • SUSTAINED

You can swim through water at high speed. You have a water speed rank equal to your Swimming rank –2. This does not allow you to breathe underwater.

TRANSFORM — STANDARD • CLOSE • SUSTAINED

You can change one object into another, depending on the power's descriptor. Transform may only let you change a specific item into one other thing or substance, or anything into anything else. Transform only affects inanimate matter, not living creatures. You can transform a mass rank of material equal to your Transform rank –6, and it transforms back once you stop sustaining the power.

VARIABLE — STANDARD • PERSONAL • SUSTAINED

Choose a descriptor or theme. You have a pool of 5 Power Points per Variable rank that you can assign to any effect within that theme or description, effectively allowing you to do anything related to that concept. You must use a Standard action to change how these points are assigned and what your Variable power can do. Variable with the "Slow" flaw can only be changed outside of combat.

WEAKEN — STANDARD • CLOSE • INSTANT

Select a trait. You can reduce that trait in a target as an attack. If your attack check hits, your target makes a Fortitude or Will Resistance check against (10 × Weaken rank). If they fail, they lose a number of Power Points equal to the difference between their check result and the DC, to a maximum of your Weaken rank. Lost points return at a rate of 1 per round.

CHAPTER 1: SETTINGS

Run a few *Mutants & Masterminds* adventures and, before you know, you will have an ongoing series, just like a comics series created by you and your players! While you can simply create and run adventures and let the rest take care of itself, it is often helpful to have a map of roughly where your series takes place and is going, much like the outline of an adventure's various encounters. This section looks at creating your own *Mutants & Masterminds* series and setting, in effect, your very own universe!

GENRE

Mutants & Masterminds series are naturally influenced by the genre of the comic books. The comics have several distinct "ages" or genres to them you can use as a basis for your *Mutants & Masterminds* game. Note that while the different ages discussed below are based on the superhero comic books, they're not necessarily exact matches for the terms used by comic book historians. For one thing, there's no general agreement on things like the exact beginning or end of an age, or even what some ages should be called. However, they're similar enough to provide a framework to capture the genre of a particular era.

GOLDEN AGE

The Golden Age of comics, and the modern superhero comic book, began in the late 1930s with the publication of the first comic books featuring heroes in colorful costumes fighting crime. These "super heroes" (as they quickly became known) were a great hit with comics' mostly young audience, and publishers quickly began turning out new titles, new stories, and new heroes to meet the demand.

The first comic book stories were simplistic by modern standards, but also featured heroes with a surprisingly aggressive vigilante attitude. Golden Age heroes who willingly killed their foes, for example, might surprise fans familiar with the more "polished" heroes of the Silver Age.

During World War II, many comics told stories of heroes off to fight the evil of the Axis powers. Looking for things to do while deployed in the European and Pacific Theatres, many soldiers took up reading comic books, and the demand skyrocketed. Comics brought to post-war Japan by U.S. soldiers sparked the Japanese *manga* and *anime* industries of the modern day. The Golden Age was the beginning of it all, the appearance of a new medium and new kind of mythology, the super-hero, or the so-called "mystery man."

PULP HEROES

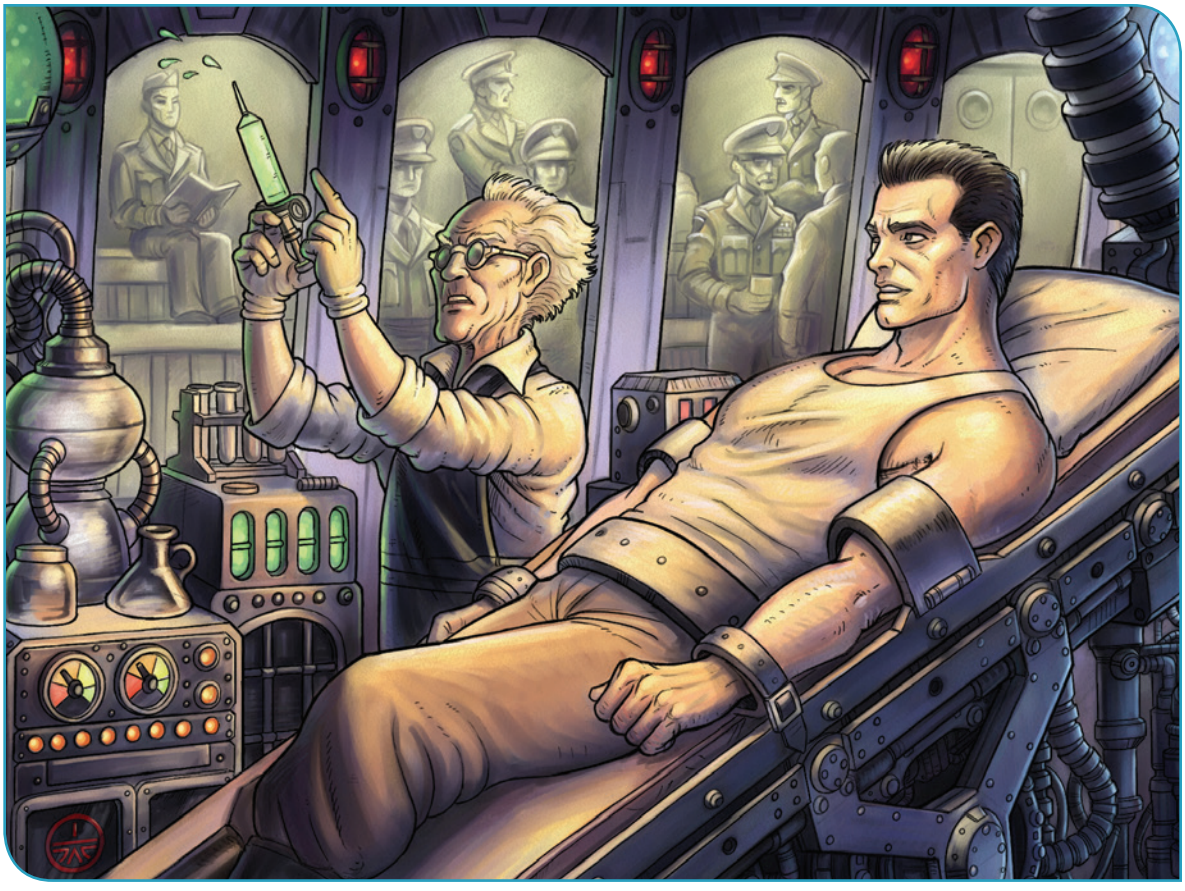
Some of the ancestors of the Golden Age comics were the pulp magazines of the 1920s and '30s, particularly pulp adventure stories featuring heroes with more-than-human abilities. Pulp heroes had many of the trappings of superheroes: unusual powers, code-names, masks, secret hideouts, and a bizarre rogues gallery of enemies. They helped inspire early comic book writers (many of whom also wrote for the pulps).

MYSTERY MEN

The heroes of the Golden Age are often known as "mystery men" because they were originally shadowy vigilantes rather than the brightly clad heroes that appeared later. Certainly, the first costumed heroes to appear in public were mysterious; no one knew who they were, where they came from, or what they could do. Some believed stories about their super-human powers were just exaggerations; in some cases, they were right! Many Golden Age heroes used gadgetry and outright trickery to convince people they had strange powers. Generally, in the pre-war years of the Golden Age, heroes are mysterious and not entirely trusted by the authorities, who don't yet know what to make of them. By the start of World War II, the mystery men have begun to more closely resemble modern superheroes.

Golden Age heroes fall into certain broad categories. GMs may want to guide players to choose these types of heroes and use them as archetypes for Golden Age NPCs.

- **Avengers** are crime-fighters at heart, two-fisted foes of injustice. They're often motivated by a desire for vengeance because of the loss of a loved one or some other wrong done to them. Others are bored playboys who find purpose in their costumed identities. However, they choose the high road and try to bring criminals to justice. Avengers typically operate at night, and rely on their fists and their athletic skills—sometimes along with a small array of gadgets—to get the job done.
- **Adventurers** are explorers, scientists, and scholars by nature. They usually gain their powers from an encounter with unusual forces in some distant, exotic land. Adventurers tend to be intelligent and knowledgeable, although some are a little more shady and skilled in acquiring "antiquities" primarily by stealth. Adventurers are well traveled. Their abilities range



from athletics and some skill in combat supplemented by their knowledge and experience to unusual abilities or devices they've picked up in their travels.

- **Patriots** are firm believers in their nation. Usually, they're average ordinary folk gifted with extraordinary abilities by fortunate circumstance (whether by accident or design). Patriots tend to be either extremely humble or more than a little loud-mouthed when it comes to their country being the best in the world. Either way, their dedication can't be questioned; they love their country and there's nothing they wouldn't do for it. Patriots tend to go in for costumes showing their patriotism (based on their homeland's flag, for example).

- **Gimmicks** have a particular unique device, trick, or even origin that makes them what they are. Most gimmicks tend to be fairly ordinary apart from the one thing that gives them their powers. For example, a gimmick might be a blue-collar workman who found a magic lamp, or an ordinary kid able to transform into a powerful adult hero. Gimmicks tend to have a strong theme and stick with it, like the heroine who can see in the dark, with gadgets for blacking out an area so she has the advantage.

- **Godlike** heroes possess tremendous power, usually magical or cosmic in nature. They may operate under certain restrictions that keep them from exercising their power freely, otherwise they tend to overshadow their mortal allies. Often godlike heroes have greater concerns than mere mortals. They may deal with equally godlike foes while their fellow heroes tackle the more mundane problems. Generally, godlike heroes are best kept as NPCs in a Golden Age game, unless all of the heroes are equally powerful (and face equally cosmic challenges). They're often treated as plot devices.

WORLD WAR II

The central and defining event of the Golden Age of comics is the Second World War. Even before America's entry into the war, comic book heroes were fighting fascists and fifth columnists. Following the declaration of war, their prime adversaries were Nazi and Japanese super-soldiers (as well as the aforementioned fifth-columnists and saboteurs).

The presence of super-powered champions on both the Axis and Allied sides of the war usually accounts for the fact that the war follows much the same course as in our world. The usual assumption is Allied and Axis super-soldiers counter each other, so the war follows pretty close to the same course. You can always change this assumption in your own world, creating an alternate history (see page 41) or coming up with some other reason why superheroes don't change the course of the war.

The span from the beginning to the end of World War II (usually starting around the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor and the U.S. entry into the war) is an excellent period for a Golden Age *Mutants & Masterminds* series.

THE BEST OF TWO WORLDS

If the players are neither sticklers for authentic Golden Age comic-book details nor diehard fans of grim-and-gritty stories, Gamemaster are free to choose whatever elements are going to create the most fun in their series. In many ways, this is the best approach, because it satisfies the players' likely affinity for modern storytelling conventions while leaving the Gamemaster free to create the widest possible range of stories.

The eclectic approach can encompass the tighter continuity and greater emphasis on superpowered feats found in modern comics, while at the same time avoiding the oft-preachy moralizing common to both the Golden Age and postmodern eras. Stories can be lighthearted without the lowbrow comedy of the Golden Age, or they can be serious without the nastiness of the postmodern era.

Ultimately, the specifics must be left to each individual Gamemaster. Thankfully, doing so is a natural process. Simply read over the tropes of each approach, and go with whatever elements are going to be the most fun for all.

THE SUPER-GAP

In the real world, superhero comics went into a decline after World War II, with things like monster, horror, and pirate comics becoming more popular. Many comic book universes choose to explain the general lack of superhero adventures in the 1950s as a reaction to the "Red Scare." For example, superheroes and masked vigilantes are often persecuted during the 1950s, accused of being communist sympathizers. This leads many of them to retire or go into hiding, or to go outside the law altogether.

You can come up with your own explanations for a "gap" in superhuman activity during this time. Perhaps an invasion of shape-shifting aliens leads to mistrust of superheroes, or even results in the deaths of many heroes and villains before the aliens are themselves defeated. Golden Age heroes may choose to retire and fade into obscurity over time. The cosmic tides allowing super-powers to exist may wax and wane in a twenty-year cycle, peaking in 1940, dropping off by 1950, only to peak again in 1960, and so forth. Generally, the mid- to late-1950s are regarded as the end of the Golden Age and the start of something new.

THE POSTMODERN GOLDEN AGE

The Golden Age of comic books, as with any "golden age," eventually reached its end. Yet even as it came to a close, time drew both readers and creators ever nearer to its eventual rediscovery. When costumed superheroes reappeared at the dawn of the Silver Age, so did most Golden Age storytelling conventions, with many of the era's most popular characters following suit, albeit often as shiny new Silver Age revamps. Science fiction was all the rage in comic books' second great era, and the Golden Age greats re-emerged covered in sci-fi trappings: aliens, weird science, mutants, and just generally more space-y all around.

The process of revisiting and revising comic books' first great era repeated itself throughout the ages that followed, as creators viewed the primal majesty (and magnitudes-greater sales) of the Golden Age with envious eyes. Today's comic books are no exception, as Modern Age writers and artists interpret the kid-centered comic books of the '40s for the adult audience of the 21st century.

These efforts have yielded some of the very best stories and titles of the Modern Age, and have shaped our contemporary understanding of what constitutes a "Golden Age book" as much as the titles that were actually published back in the 1940s. It's useful to take a look at the various ways these "Postmodern Golden Age" tales differ from the Real McCoy.

DECONSTRUCTING THE HERO MYTH

Since the early 1960s, it's been *de rigueur* to depict costumed heroes as having the same real-world problems as we non-superpowered folk. This trend has produced many fine, popular stories over the years, and their success led to the inevitable envelope-pushing, which reached its zenith in the mid-to-late 1980s. Just as unavoidably, the boundary-stretching continued well past this point, until costumed heroes weren't all that heroic anymore.

This z re-invention drove postmodern Golden Age stories as well. Just as characters introduced in the 1940s reappeared as typical smiling, happy Silver Age characters during the 1960s, in the 1990s they became dour, humorless vigilantes like seemingly everyone else in comics of that time.

"ANTI-HEROES"

The '90s aesthetic dictated that anyone who puts on a costume to fight other people wearing costumes (whether ostensibly a hero or a professed villain) is to some degree insane. In fact, the degree and intensity of their craziness is often the only way to tell the putative good guys from the bad guys. The costumed protagonists are prone to obsessive-compulsive manias, and putting on a mask and a cape are just a manifestation of their particular type of craziness. By some degree of contrast, the antagonists are brutal killers, rapists, pederasts, or a combination thereof.

Creating characters for a postmodern Golden Age style series is a matter of selecting classic costumed-character archetypes and putting dark spins on them. In this fashion, flag-costumed characters become ultra-nationalist zealots, blind to the flaws of their home country as well as the virtues of any other nation.

Similarly, masked avengers become bloodthirsty vigilantes, executing scores of criminals as part of a bloody war on crime in which no target is off limits for either side. Other types of costumed characters cease to fight lawlessness and tyranny out of a sense of justice or higher obliga-

tion, but instead coincidentally do the right thing while battling their own psychological quirks and defects.

With heroes like that, the villains have to be real pieces of work. Forget bank robbers and juvenile delinquents in this style of series. It takes serial murderers, mutilators, genocidal racists, and the sleaziest sexual deviants to make the protagonists seem like heroes.

THE NOT-SO-GOLDEN AGE

Naturally, characters such as these cannot live in the generally optimistic world depicted in Golden Age comics. In the name of "realism" (always a tricky term to use in regards to superhero comic books), stories inevitably focus on the most sensationalistic, violent, and lurid aspects of life in the 1940s. When the era itself disappoints in any of these criteria, exaggeration and outright fabrication step up to close any perceived gaps.

To be sure, the world depicted in Golden Age comic books wasn't realistic, but then again it was never intended to be. Indeed, the very notion of "realism" in stories about flying men of steel from alien planets was considered utterly laughable at the time. By the same token, playing up any sort of alleged "realism" is every bit as ridiculous at face value, but not without its appeal to many comics fans and gaming groups. It's simply worth noting for accuracy's sake that putting a serial-killer supervillain into a story set in the 1940s is by no measure more "realistic" than any actually published during that time period.

RACISM, SEXISM, & HOMOPHOBIA

In addition to ramping up the grim and gritty, postmodern Golden Age tales require a healthy sampling of the era's very real and open prejudices. The heroes themselves are usually above such things, but almost everyone else they encounter is not nearly as enlightened.

During the 1940s, large numbers of people casually believe a dame's proper place is serving her man, blacks, Asians, and Hispanics are naturally inferior to whites, Jews are a source of social ills, and homosexuals are perverts akin to rapists and pedophiles. Consequently, minority characters are subjected to the depredations of segregation, harassment, racial or ethnic slurs, and hate crimes are regular plot points.

These elements are usually included in comic-book stories to highlight the era's perceived hypocrisy (and reassure the reader how much more enlightened the writer is), and to show how much more "realistic" (again, a slippery term) his storytelling is. More commonly, the bigotry is there simply to shock the supposedly jaded readers.

In a roleplaying game, prejudiced characters can serve more constructive dramatic purposes. Reminding players just how far cultural attitudes have progressed in the intervening decades is a good and healthy thing, and it can be fun for them to confront and triumph over racism, sexism, and homophobia. It's even more fun for them to beat a racist, sexist, and/or homophobic villain senseless. Never forget the point of a roleplaying game is to have fun, no matter how grim and gritty the game.

ENCOURAGING POSTMODERN GOLDEN AGE CONVENTIONS

Historical trappings aside, postmodern Golden Age series differ very little from Iron Age series. Sure, there are fewer tattooed heroes in sunglasses, but there are just as many heroes blazing away with guns, a greater emphasis on "realistic" superpowers, and more than a few ninjas (or ninja-like) characters running around.

GOLDEN AGE GEAR

Within the boundaries of the era's technology, rules for equipment in the Golden Age are just the same as in the *M&M Hero's Handbook*. Wartime rationing may affect the availability of some items, but assuming it can be had (and it exists in this era), all the normal rules are in play.

THE GOLDEN AGE ARSENAL

The following is a list of weapons found in the hands of cops, crooks, and civilians during the Golden Age. There are also some military-grade weapons from World War II and the Korean War. Military-grade weapons are, of course, normally found in the hands of soldiers, but they can also turn up in civilian use, such as with ex-GIs who kept a few souvenirs from their days in uniform or gangsters who found them after they "fell off the back of an Army truck." These weapons are in addition to those available in the *M&M Hero's Handbook*.

PROJECTILE WEAPONS

- **Pistols** are issued to officers, air crews, tank crews, and any other personnel who either work in confined spaces or otherwise can't easily carry a heavier weapon.
- **Carbines** were intended to replace pistols in the American military, but only really found favor in the hands of the U.S. Marine Corps, who preferred their more compact size for jungle fighting in the Pacific Theater.
- **Service rifles** were the standard-issue weapons for infantrymen of all nations.
- **Shotguns** can fire shot, which does the listed damage with Accurate 1 due to the spread, but Limited to Damage 3 against targets with Protection. It can also load solid slugs, which inflict the same damage, but without the Accurate bonus or the Limit on Damage.
- **Submachine guns** are issued to commando units, low-ranking unit leaders on the front lines, paratroopers, and some vehicle crews—essentially anyone who needs a lot of firepower at close range. These weapons were also popular in Soviet service, perfect for the brutal house-to-house urban warfare seen on the Eastern Front.
- **Light machine guns** are issued singly or in pairs to squads of infantrymen to give them some much-needed extra firepower on the battlefield.
- **Medium and heavy machine guns** are usually found mounted on vehicles or in dug-in emplacements

PROJECTILE WEAPONS

WEAPON	EFFECT	CRITICAL	COST
	Longarms		
Sawed-off Shotgun	Ranged Damage 6	20	12
Skeet Shotgun	Ranged Damage 4	20	8
Carbine	Ranged Damage 4	20	8
Light Service Rifle	Ranged Damage 5	20	10
Service Rifle	Ranged Damage 6	20	12
Light Submachine Gun	Ranged Multiattack Damage 3	20	9
	Machine Guns		
Light Machine Gun	Ranged Multiattack Damage 4	20	12
Medium Machine Gun	Ranged Multiattack Damage 5	20	15
Heavy Machine Gun	Ranged Multiattack Damage 6	20	18

HEAVY WEAPONS

NAME	DAMAGE	CRITICAL	COST
Antitank Rocket	Ranged Burst Area Damage 9, Penetrating 9	—	36
Light Mortar	Ranged Burst Area Damage 5	—	15
Medium Mortar	Ranged Burst Area Damage 7	—	21
Heavy Mortar	Ranged Burst Area 2 (60 feet) Damage 9	—	36
Light Antitank Gun	Ranged Damage 7, Penetrating 7	—	21
Medium Antitank Gun	Ranged Damage 8, Penetrating 8	—	24
Heavy Antitank Gun	Ranged Damage 9, Penetrating 9	—	27
Light Field Artillery	Ranged Burst Area Damage 8	—	24
Medium Field Artillery	Ranged Burst Area Damage 9	—	27
Heavy Field Artillery	Ranged Burst Area 2 (60 feet) Damage 10	—	40

protecting important positions, like field headquarters. Heavy machine guns were sometimes deployed in multi-weapon mountings for use against enemy aircraft.

HEAVY WEAPONS

Sometimes even a machine gun isn't enough to get the job done. Maybe the enemy's too far away, too well dug-in, or there's just too many of them. Maybe the enemy's skin is bulletproof, and a bigger bang is the only hope of stopping him.

Whatever the cause, here are the statistics for some of the most common heavy weapons found in the armies of the Korean and Second World Wars. For obvious reasons (just glance at their game statistics), the Gamemaster should incorporate these truly big guns into their games with care, lest their perfectly crafted adventures be ruined by a hail of shells fired from a mile away.

HEAVY WEAPONS AND EQUIPMENT POINTS

Many of the weapons listed here are pricey equipment point-wise. This is for reasons of game balance, but in some cases it can bend history a little bit, denying real-world soldiers weapons they got to use on a daily basis during the various wars of the Golden Age era.

As it happens, most of the higher-cost weapons are also crew-served weapons that don't work (or at least, don't work well) unless they're fired as a group effort. Therefore, as an optional rule Gamemasters can allow characters acting as a dedicated crew for a certain weapon to acquire it using equipment points contributed by each of them.

For example, the two GIs responsible for the unit's Light Mortar can split up the 15 equipment point cost to account for the fact that without one of them loading and the other aiming, the weapon is pretty much useless. Likewise, a Heavy Field Artillery Gun isn't as much of a point burden if all ten guys in its crew chip in 3-4 equipment points each.

As an option, the Gamemaster can simply choose not charge military characters for equipment issued to them by their government as part of their assigned duties. In a series centered around the crew of a tank haunted by the ghost of a Confederate general, for instance, the player characters receive the tank itself for zero equipment points (though they may have to pay for the ghost, depending on how much help he is to the crew).

FRIENDLY FIRE

In any given war, the trouble with artillery is that it's always landing somewhere it's not wanted. The enemy being targeted certainly may not always appreciate it, but when the shells come up short, the soldiers getting hit with "friendly fire" are even more upset. This is because artillery is foremost used for indirect fire, which is a fancy way of saying the men operating the gun can't actually see what they're shooting at. Instead, they're relying on the word of someone who can see the target, who may or may not be describing its position well enough to result in a hit. Even when they are, words get misheard in the heat of battle, men under pressure forget to carry the two, and mistakes get made—like shelling their own troops, for instance.

Any attack made with a hand grenade, mortar, or field artillery gun that results in a natural one hits a friendly target instead. Grenades, distrusted during the war because of their unpredictable fuses, might even blow up in the hands of those throwing them.

- **Antitank rockets** are fired via a number of different systems, including the American bazooka, the British Commonwealth PIAT, and the German *Panzerfaust* and *Panzerschreck* launchers. Whatever the type, it can only fire once; reloading requires a both a move and a standard action. Antitank rockets have the Penetrating extra, allowing them to damage heavily armored targets. Typically, one such weapon was issued per infantry company, but the Germans issued them in much greater numbers during the closing months of the war, usually to troops barely trained in their use.
- **Mortars** are basically metal tubes capable of launching shells at targets in a high, slow arc. They are relatively easy to transport, set up, conceal, and operate. Most mortar rounds are high explosive, and thus have the Burst Area extra. Mortars need a crew of two or three men to operate normally. Typically, a light (60mm) mortar is issued to an infantry company, six medium (81mm) mortars to a heavy weapons company, and six heavy (120mm) mortars assigned to an infantry regiment. Medium mortars were also mounted on halftracks to provide mobile fire support.
- **Antitank guns** are direct-fire artillery weapons designed to take out armored vehicles. Light models are fairly portable, but as the war dragged on, heavier and less mobile models were necessary to defeat the newer, better-armored tanks. Antitank rounds have the Penetrating extra on their damage. Antitank guns need a crew of three to five to operate normally. Typically, an antitank company had 12 such weapons: lighter ones (37mm) at the start of the war, and then progressing to medium (50mm) and heavy (75mm or 88mm) guns later in the conflict. Antitank guns were also mounted on lightly armored chasses and put into a dedicated armor-killing role as tank destroyers.
- **Field artillery** is the king of the battlefield, raining destruction down on enemy positions and softening them up for attack by tanks and infantry. Most artillery rounds are high explosive, and thus have the Burst Area modifier. Artillery pieces also have the Extended Range extra, since they fire in such long ballistic arcs.

Artillery is large and heavy, and requires some sort of transport, be it horses, trucks, or being self-propelled on lightly armored chasses. Each gun requires a crew of 5 to 10 men to operate normally. Typically, an infantry regiment had 6-8 light (75mm) and/or medium (105mm) guns assigned to it, while an infantry division had 12 heavy (155mm) pieces at its disposal.

GOLDEN AGE VEHICLES

Transportation in the 1940s (both civilian and military) was in a time of transition. Passenger train service began to lose ground to the airlines, and jets supplanted prop-driven planes. On the oceans, the feared dreadnought battleships of days gone by lost their naval dominance to the aircraft carrier.

This section provides all the necessary *Mutants & Masterminds* game information to incorporate Golden Age vehicles in your series, from giant airships like the *Hindenburg* to Sherman tanks. Some types included here are also mentioned in the *Hero's Handbook*, but note that changes in time and technology give the Golden Age versions somewhat different capabilities than their modern descendants.

GROUND VEHICLES

Golden Age automobiles lack most of the standard car features listed in the *M&M Hero's Handbook* (see page 170), in part due to the fact that new car production (and thus innovation) was halted for the duration of the war. Automobiles did have heaters, and the first car with air conditioning rolled off the assembly lines in 1940. Radios (AM, of course) were available throughout the Golden Age, but did not become standard features until later in the era.

Military vehicles are even more no-frills. A radio receiver/transmitter and a fire extinguisher are about the only standard features to be found, courtesy of Uncle Sam (or his other-national equivalents).

- **Jeeps** (and similar vehicles used by other countries) were versatile workhorses for the army, whether towing guns or transporting officers or wounded men wherever they needed to go. Some jeeps had a medium machine gun on a pedestal mount in the back, and the cost for these models goes up accordingly (by 18 equipment points).
- **Halftracks** were essentially armored trucks with the rear wheels replaced by tank tracks. Examples include the American M3, British Bedford BT, and the German SdKfz 250. They were designed for moving troops in close proximity to the battlefield, where their armor provided passengers with some degree of protection. A halftrack mounts a light machine gun.
- **Light tanks** were used primarily for reconnaissance and scouting missions. An example is the American M5 Stuart or the German Panzer II. A light tank mounts a medium machine gun and a light antitank gun, capable of firing either antitank rounds (as specified under the gun's description) or antipersonnel rounds (as an Alternate Effect, with the Burst Area extra instead of Penetrating).
- **Medium tanks** are the most common types seen on the battlefield, and consequently carry on most of the fighting. Examples include the American M4 Sherman, the German Panzer III and IV, and the Soviet T-34. A medium tank mounts a medium machine gun and a medium antitank gun, capable of firing either antitank rounds (as specified under the gun's description, above) or antipersonnel rounds (as an Alternate Effect, with the Burst Area extra instead of Penetrating).
- **Heavy tanks** were relatively scarce on the battlefield, a fact for which any who faced them were grateful. An example is the German Panther or Tiger tank. A heavy tank mounts a medium machine gun and a heavy antitank gun, capable of firing either antitank rounds (as specified under the gun's description, above) or antipersonnel rounds (as an Alternate Effect, with the Burst Area extra instead of Penetrating).

WATER VEHICLES

Naval vessels were required to spend months away from port. They had to function as self-sufficient floating cities during these times, providing three square meals, laundry, and even the occasional movie for their crews. In addition to the facilities needed to provide these services, they came equipped with radar and sonar systems that gave much-needed warnings of approaching carrier-based planes and submarines (the two deadliest anti-ship weapons of the war).

- **Patrol boats** like the American PT boats, the British MBTs, or the German S-boats were small, short-range patrol craft intended for coastal defense and interdiction of narrow waterways where larger craft could not operate. They were armed with heavy machine guns and torpedoes (Ranged Damage 8, Penetrating 8).
- **Cruisers** are intermediate-size warships used to screen smaller vessels away from the larger capital ships, or to perform missions where a destroyer is too little and a battleship too much. They are equipped with medium naval guns (equivalent to heavy field artillery).
- **Battle cruisers** or "pocket battleships" were built in the prewar era on the presumption they would outgun smaller vessels and outrun larger ones; in short, providing a battleship on the cheap. As often as not, it turned out that smaller vessels just ran away from them and larger vessels outgunned them too badly to risk a confrontation. A battle cruiser's main guns are equivalent to heavy field artillery.
- **Escort carriers** were born of desperation at the height of the U-boat threat to Allied convoys. They were about as basic a design as could be imagined, amounting to little more than a tiny floating airbase. These ships performed their antisubmarine role magnificently, and were key in finally eradicating

GROUND VEHICLES

NAME	SIZE	STRENGTH	SPEED	DEFENSE	TOUGHNESS	COST
Jeep*	H	8	5	7	9	8
Army Truck	H	9	5	6	10	9
Halftrack*	H	10	4	6	10 Impervious	31
Light Tank*	H	9	5	6	11 Impervious	58
Medium Tank*	H	10	4	6	12 Impervious	63
Heavy Tank*	H	11	4	6	13 Impervious	69

WATER VEHICLES

NAME	SIZE	STRENGTH	SPEED	DEFENSE	TOUGHNESS	COST
Freighter	G	20	3	4	13	16
Patrol Boat*	G	12	5	4	11	50
Cruiser*	A	20	5	0	15 Impervious	65
Battle Cruiser*	A	20	4	0	16 Impervious	66
Escort Carrier*	A	20	4	0	15 Impervious	51
Aircraft Carrier*	A	24	4	0	18 Impervious	61

AIR VEHICLES

NAME	SIZE	STRENGTH	SPEED	DEFENSE	TOUGHNESS	COST
Airship	A	20	4	0	15	13
Autogyro*	H	8	6	8	9	16
Military Transport Plane	G	13	6	4	12	17
Flying Boat*	G	12	6/7	4	11	34
Prop Fighter*	H	8	6	6	9	32+
Jet Fighter (WWII)*	G	12	7	4	11	35+
Jet Fighter (Korean War)*	G	12	7	4	12	36+

**See individual descriptions for more information.*

the German submarine menace. Escort carriers were armed with medium field artillery, but their primary weapons were the aircraft they carried aboard (use the statistics for a carrier squadron).

- **Aircraft carriers** proved the decisive naval weapon, as their dive-bombers and torpedo planes could sink any other vessel afloat. The war in the Pacific quickly became a battle of carriers, which American industrial might could produce in numbers no other country could match. Carrier air power was also used against land targets, usually to soften up the enemy prior to an amphibious landing. Normally, aircraft carriers were armed with light naval guns (medium field artillery) and a mixture of fighters and bombers. During World War II, these types were propeller-driven planes like the F6F Hellcat fighter and the SB2C Helldiver dive-bomber, but by the Korean War jet fighter-bombers like the F9F Panther and F2H Banshee were the norm. A carrier's air group can be simulated in game terms either by three or four carrier squadrons or one carrier group.

AIR VEHICLES

Forget the free bag of peanuts in the Golden Age, frequent flyers. People are still gawking at those weird new flying contraptions, so things are a mite primitive by comparison. In this era, aircraft came equipped with a radio receiver/transmitter, some basic gauges, and a fire extinguisher. Military planes didn't add much more, as only bombers had the room to do so, and even then it's basic stuff like bombsights and toilets (for those long missions). Even radar was scarce, though some fighter aircraft were fitted with sets so they could function as night-fighters.

- **Autogyros** are propeller-powered airplanes with additional overhead rotor blades. Examples like the Pitcairn models have been around since the 1920s. They were the forerunner of the helicopter, but were slower and incapable of hovering. They did require a lot less runway than other fixed-wing aircraft, however.
- **Flying boats** like the American PBY Catalina could land and take off from either solid surfaces or

(reasonably calm) waters, and thus were vital during World War II for air/sea rescue missions. In the air, a flying boat could manage Flight 6; in the water, Swimming 7 (as an Alternate Effect). Flying boats were also armed with heavy machine guns.

- **Prop fighters** like the American P-51 Mustang, the British Spitfire, the German Messerschmitt Me-109, and the Japanese Zero were primarily used to escort bombers to their targets, or to try to shoot down said bombers before they got there. As the war progressed, fighters were increasingly called upon for close air support, strafing ground targets that were largely helpless against them. Prop fighters came equipped with heavy machine guns and often carried a light bomb or rocket load (Ranged Burst Area Damage 8) for ground-attack missions.
- **Jet fighters** entered combat for the very first time during World War II in the form of the German Messerschmitt Me 262. Its speed and maneuverability made it an instant threat to the Allies' propeller-driven air forces. Later models, such as the American P-80 Shooting Star and F-86 Sabre, clashed with Soviet-made MiG-15s over "MiG Alley" in Korea, alternately trying to strafe enemy ground targets or prevent the same from happening on their side. Jet fighters came equipped with heavy machine guns and often carried a light bomb or rocket load (Ranged Burst Area Damage 8) for ground-attack missions.

SILVER AGE

The Silver Age of comic books began with the "second generation" of superheroes from 1959 to 1963 or so. Silver Age comics tended to feature more powerful heroes than their Golden Age predecessors (with the exception of a few godlike Golden Age characters). Silver Age comics also had a decidedly science fiction bent to them, with more aliens, fantastic technology, and scientific origins, especially involving atomic energy and related mutations. Many classic comic book characters first appeared in the Silver Age, or settled into their now-familiar forms and mythologies during this time.

LIGHTHEARTEDNESS

The Silver Age comics are characterized by a certain lighthearted tone and innocent sense of fun. The heroes are not the grim and angry avengers of the early and war-era Golden Age, but shining examples of the best in humanity. The Silver Age sees the development of things like heroic codes against killing and support for the law, justice, and American values. In part this is due to the Comics Code (see **The Comics Code** sidebar), which prohibits some of the darker elements of older comics. In the Silver Age, heroes are heroes, villains are villains, and that's all there is to it.

Silver Age comics also don't take themselves too seriously. They're not satires—although they are often campy—but they don't focus on the realism of a world of costumed heroes and villains. Generally, the consequences of superpowers are cheerfully ignored to make for better stories.

THE COMICS CODE

In 1954, psychiatrist Dr. Frederic Wertham published his book *Seduction of the Innocent*, in which he claimed reading comic books had a detrimental effect on America's youth. Hearings in the U.S. Senate scrutinized the "questionable" content of comics and threatened to shut down the entire industry.

Taking preemptive action, the major publishers proposed and adopted their own code for regulating the content of comic books. Among other things, the new Comics Code Authority banned any sort of explicit violence, sex, gore, or other "mature" content. It generally sanitized the contents of comic books, and nearly wiped out the industry (or saved it, depending on your point of view). Many publishers went out of business and entire genres of comics, especially horror and crime comics, ceased publication altogether.

Ironically, the Comics Code caused the remaining publishers to turn back to superheroes, since it was easiest for them to fit into the restrictions of the Code. These guidelines were the source of much of the innocence and lightheartedness of the Silver Age.

Nobody wonders how a hero can pick up a battleship, he just does it! The same is true for any of a number of other elements. Collateral damage is mysteriously cleaned up in between issues (or panels, for that matter!). Captured villains go to jail, without any concern for lengthy trials or legal entanglements. There are no questions about why a genius inventor doesn't develop Teflon or a cure for cancer rather than super-science "vita-rays" or rocket ships. In general, the watchword of the Silver Age is "don't worry about it!" If it's fun and works as part of the story, go ahead and use it and don't worry about the consequences or implications for the larger world.

THE COLD WAR

During the decades of the Silver Age, the Cold War was in full swing, and in full evidence in the pages of the comics. Nazi villains from the Golden Age were replaced with Communist villains from the Soviet Union or the People's Republic of China (less often from Latin America or other parts of Asia like Vietnam or Cambodia).

Communist villains (communists were *never* heroes) were just as much caricatures as the fascists of the 1940s. They were either mindlessly loyal to the State, even brainwashed by their Party handlers, or thoroughly corrupt and willing to serve the Communist Party so long as it furthered their own ends. Communist emblems like the red star (or the Chinese yellow stars on a red field) and the Russian hammer and sickle were all but required for the costumes of Red villains.

As the Silver Age progressed, attitudes toward communist characters (or at least those from communist nations) softened somewhat, although they remained stereotypical. Some characters chose to defect to the West, rejecting communism and showing their heroic side. Their former "comrades" from home typically hunted them for their betrayal.

THE ATOMIC AGE

The Silver Age is also the beginning of the atomic age, with the proliferation of both nuclear power and nuclear weapons. The looming specter of the Bomb during the Cold War only increased the mystique of "atomic power," which became the origin for many Silver Age characters. Uncontrolled exposure to radiation—whether cosmic rays, gamma bombs, or bites from radioactive animals—figured into many origins. Comics also speculated that rising levels of background radiation (due to atomic tests and such) were causing widespread genetic mutations, leading to a new generation of super-powered mutants.

In many ways, these "children of the atom" embodied fears about nuclear power. They also served as proxies for the social upheavals of the 1960s and '70s, especially the civil rights movement. They were the strange children their parents couldn't understand. People hated and feared them for being who and what they were. Yet some mutants took the high road, using their powers to protect a world that wanted to destroy them. This analogy appealed to many comic readers (often alienated teenagers themselves), leading to the popularity of mutant heroes. The **Mutation** origin (see page 29) has more information on incorporating this theme into your series.

SECOND-GENERATION SUPERS

The heroes of the Silver Age made up a new generation of superheroes, often following in the footsteps of their Golden Age predecessors. Some comic publishers created updated versions of their Golden Age characters for an all-new comic book audience, while other Silver Age heroes were completely new. The explosion in comic publishing in the 1960s certainly meant there were more of them than the handful of surviving heroes from the Golden Age.

Like the postwar generation of the time, Silver Age heroes often held different attitudes from the previous generation. Their Golden Age mentors, if they showed up at all, were often seen as "old fashioned." Golden Age heroes who made the transition to the Silver Age sometimes felt they belonged to a bygone era, and wondered what they had to offer this new generation.

You can incorporate these elements into your series in two ways. First, you can create Golden Age heroes for the new generation to follow, perhaps even having some of them take up the mantles (and names) of their predecessors, just as many Silver Age heroes did in the comics. Second, you can provide opportunities for the heroes to interact with the previous generation, perhaps emphasizing the "generation gap" in terms of attitudes. This is especially effective if one of the player's heroes was around during the Golden Age and is now adjusting (or not!) to a new generation.

FANTASTIC FRONTIERS

More so than the Golden Age, the Silver Age of comics is one of *wonder*. In the era when humanity first went into space and reached for the Moon, the comics featured an

endless array of lost worlds, hidden cities, fantastic dimensions, alien planets, and cosmic forces. Many Silver Age heroes are explorers by nature, blazing trails into new frontiers. These exotic places often hold danger, for the heroes and the world.

- **Lost Worlds** include isolated plateaus where dinosaurs still roam (and maybe hunt primitive tribes of humans). Living examples of dead civilizations like ancient Greeks, Romans, Aztecs, or Mayans may still exist, and could have technology (or magic) in advance of their ancestors, or even the modern world.
- **Hidden Civilizations** are sources of heroes and villains. Cities hidden in isolated places like the Himalayas, Antarctica, or the bottom of the ocean are home to offshoots of the human race. Sunken cities like Atlantis and Lemuria are common in the comics, inhabited by aquatic or mer-people. Perhaps legendary cities like Shangri-La, El Dorado, Lyonesse, and Brigadoon exist in one form or another. You can decide just how well hidden these civilizations are, what the inhabitants are like, and what adventure possibilities they offer.
- **Fantastic Dimensions** range from abstract places like the astral plane and the dimension of darkness (or similar conceptual dimensions) to parallel Earths where history took a different course. Heroes can use the Dimension Travel effect to reach these dimensions, while their inhabitants might do the same to reach Earth.
- **Alien Worlds** are numerous and diverse in most comic book universes. They're home to alien civilizations, many of them humanoid and possessed of technology advanced enough to reach Earth. Alien races can be peaceful and uninterested in a cosmic backwater like our planet, but many more are would-be invaders. The **Alien** origin (see page 25) has some additional ideas on using aliens in your series.

GOING APE!

Julius Schwartz, an editor at DC Comics for decades, first noticed that comics sold better with an ape or gorilla on the cover (especially an ape talking or engaged in some other human behavior). So much better, in fact, that DC instituted an editorial policy limiting the number of apes on the covers of their books each month! The popularity of primates led to a number of Silver Age simian characters. They include heroes and villains, as well as sidekicks and supporting characters. Most Silver Age ape characters retain their simian physical traits, but have human level (or greater!) intellect.

GLOATING

Oh, how Silver Age villains love to gloat! Gamemasters who want to encourage the Silver Age tradition of villainous gloating (or "monologuing") can use the following guidelines.

A hero can make a Deception skill check against the result of a villain's resistance check to encourage the villain to waste time gloating, giving the hero an opportunity to do something. This works like the Fascinate advantage, except the hero doesn't need to do anything to maintain it. Each round, make a new check for the villain, if it fails, the villain goes on gloating. Generally, any attack or other action from the hero directly affecting the villain ends the villain's gloating. Players can (and often should) spend hero points on the interaction check to encourage villains to gloat.

SILVER AGE GEAR

The following is a list of military-grade weapons found in the hands of cops, crooks, and civilians during the Silver and Bronze Ages. Military-grade weapons are of course normally found in the hands of soldiers, but they can also turn up in civilian use, such as with ex-GIs who kept a few souvenirs from their days in uniform or bad guys who found them after they "fell off the back of an Army truck." Big guns like these also seem to have an annoying habit of winding up in the hands of the super-villains' goons as well.

HEAVY WEAPONS

Sometimes even a machine gun isn't enough to get the job done. Maybe the enemy's too far away, too well dug-in, or there's just too many of them. Maybe the enemy's skin is bulletproof, and a bigger bang is the only hope of stopping him.

Whatever the cause, we present the relevant numbers for some of the most common heavy weapons found with Cold War armies. For obvious reasons (just glance at their game statistics), the Gamemaster should incorporate these truly big guns into their games with care, lest their perfectly crafted adventures be ruined by a hail of shells fired from a mile away.

The weapons listed below are in addition to any listed in the Golden Age section (earlier in this chapter) and in the *M&M Hero's Handbook*.

HEAVY WEAPONS

WEAPON	EFFECT	CRITICAL	COST
Light Recoilless Rifle*	Ranged Damage 7 Penetrating 7 or Burst Area	—	21
Medium Recoilless Rifle*	Ranged Damage 8 Penetrating 8 or Burst Area	—	24
Heavy Recoilless Rifle*	Ranged Damage 9 Penetrating 9 or Burst Area	—	27

**See individual descriptions for more information.*

- **Recoilless Rifles** are direct-fire artillery weapons designed to take out armored vehicles. Light models are fairly portable and can be fired from the shoulder like a bazooka. Heavier and less mobile models were better able to defeat newer, heavier-armored tanks. The rifle's antitank rounds have the Penetrating extra on their damage, while anti-personnel rounds have the Burst Area extra. Recoilless rifles need a crew of three to five to operate normally. Heavier models were also mounted on jeeps. The light (57mm), medium (75mm), and heavy (90mm or 106mm) rifles were all phased out during the Vietnam War in favor of light anti-tank weapons (LAWs, equivalent to the rocket launcher, see the *M&M Hero's Handbook*, page 167).

BRONZE AGE

The Bronze Age of comics follows on the tail end of the Silver Age, sometime in the 1970s and into the 1980s. It's characterized by an increasing sophistication in terms of characterization and story, particularly a willingness to tackle more complex and mature issues skirting the limits of the Comics Code. Bronze Age comics also feature particular fads and social trends of the time.

HUMAN HEROES

The heroes of the Bronze Age have feet of clay. While many Silver Age heroes were given foibles, they truly come to the fore in the Bronze Age. Rather than just heroes who bicker amongst themselves, for example, there are heroes dealing with serious problems like alcoholism, drug use, and racism. Heroes are portrayed as *people*, who sometimes make mistakes or have flaws they need to overcome.

This creates plenty of opportunities for complications in Bronze Age style games. Heroes can have marital and relationship problems, dark personal secrets, struggles between their heroic and super identities, and battles between conscience and duty. A particular issue for patriotic heroes in the Bronze Age is increasing cynicism toward patriotism and national loyalty in general.

SOCIAL ISSUES

Bronze Age comics began to deal with some of the issues forbidden by the Comics Code by handling them in what was considered a helpful way, offering positive role-models for young readers. For example, the comics addressed the issue of drug abuse by clearly portraying it as something bad. So long as it wasn't glorified, the Code didn't pose any problems (particularly since it was largely self-enforced anyway).

The major social issues of the 1970s and '80s all showed up in the comics to one degree or another. Among the most popular were:

- **Women's Rights:** Feminist heroines and empowered women became more common in the Bronze Age. Female heroes made it clear they weren't going to serve solely as "secretaries" to hero teams and they were just as capable as any male hero, if not more so. Female *villains* often had enough of male-domination and were prepared to serve it up in spades. Stories ranged from serious issues of discrimination to campy "battles of the sexes" where empowered heroines who'd had enough fought it out with their male counterparts (usually under some sort of villainous influence).
- **Black Power:** Minority heroes—notably black heroes—become more common in the Bronze Age, although it was all but required for such heroes to have the word "Black" in their names. Such heroes were often angry crusaders for equal rights as well as justice for all.
- **Substance Abuse:** Drug and alcohol abuse, previously forbidden by the Comics Code, became issues in the Bronze Age. Heroes fell victim to the "demon in a bottle"—alcohol—and were forced to deal with the consequences, or discovered their young wards were addicts, much as unsuspecting parents were forced to deal with children on drugs. In later years, the "War on Drugs" became a common theme, and drug-dealers common foes for street-level heroes. Some heroes even *gained* their powers from accidents involving designer drugs, echoing some of the deliberate "super-serum" heroes of the Golden Age, some of whom discovered they had a drug problem stemming from the source of their powers.
- **Youth Empowerment:** From the flower children of the 1960s to the "Me Generation" of the 1980s, the Bronze Age of comics featured more young people who weren't just loyal sidekicks of older mentors, but full-fledged heroes in their own right. Often, the younger generation had a new way of doing things, and they were looking for independence from their elders.
- **Multinationalism:** Following the trends of minority-rights, comics in the later years of the Bronze Age began to introduce more heroes and villains from nations outside North America. Often they were simply guest-stars, but some comics included regular foreign characters, with different cultural backgrounds. Comics also took place outside of North American cities and went to other places on Earth.

FADS AND FASHIONS

Bronze Age comics gleefully incorporated fads and fashion-trends of the day, even more than Golden and Silver Age comics. So characters based on things like disco, breakdancing, skateboarding, roller-blading, video games, heavy metal music, and similar trends were common (albeit mostly short-lived). Gamemasters looking to capture the feel of the Bronze Age should consider some of the fads and fashions of the time and base some non-player characters on them, encouraging players to do the same.

IRON AGE

The Iron Age or "Dark Age" of comics began sometime in the 1980s. It's characterized by a shift away from the bright colors and simple themes of the Silver Age toward more mature, often violent and explicit, stories and characters. In particular, the Iron Age features a rise in vigilante heroes far more willing (if not eager) to kill their opponents. It finds echoes in Hollywood action-adventure films featuring exaggerated gunplay, violence, and sexuality.

SHADES OF GRAY

A key element of the Iron Age is the often morally ambiguous nature of heroes and villains. Sometimes it's difficult to draw a clear line between the two. For example, in the Silver Age, a hero whose family is murdered devotes himself to bringing criminals to justice, and is sworn never to kill, since that makes him no better than the scum he fights. In the Iron Age, the same origin creates a vigilante hero who swears to wreck bloody vengeance against all criminals. He does what the law cannot, because the system is flawed and corrupt, gunning down criminals and fighting villains to the death.

The moral ambiguity of the Iron Age extends beyond just violence. It touches upon other issues like drug use, sexuality, personal problems, and heroes making money off their powers. Some Iron Age heroes are mercenaries, doing their job for pay. Others are ruthless businesspeople, cashing in on their costumed identities with licensing deals and personal appearances. An Iron Age setting should reflect these more complex and adult issues.

BLACK OPS

Many Iron Age characters and stories adopted a paramilitary style. Instead of superheroes, characters were "special operatives" often working for a government, corporation, or organization. Elements of the espionage and action-adventure genres seeped into the comics. Code-names were used as much for secrecy and covert operations as for splashing across the headlines. Costumes tended to be less flashy, more body armor and camouflage, military-style jumpsuits. Characters often adopted military attitudes, ranks, and backgrounds.

Iron Age villains also took on a more practical and political tone. Terrorists of various stripes became common, along with gangsters and drug-lords (reflecting the 1980s "War on Drugs"). Villains were more likely to be found in boardrooms than secret volcano lairs, and they controlled international networks of influence. Solo Iron Age villains were often psychotic serial killers and similar monsters.

GUNS, GUNS, GUNS!

Iron Age heroes like guns, and lots of them. Even some heroes who didn't particularly *need* guns carried and used them. These were real guns, too, not Silver Age "blasters," guns loaded with "mercy bullets," or similar science-fiction weapons, but guns firing live ammo (preferably armor-piercing and at full-auto).

In addition to guns, other lethal weapons are common, including swords, knives, and various martial arts weapons, especially shuriken, sais, katana, and nunchaku. Some characters have high-tech or magical versions of these weapons, but more often they are simply mundane tools of bloody violence wielded by expert hands.

LEATHER & LATEX

Just as guns became fashion accessories for the well-dressed hero or villain, costumes in the Iron Age took on a more "mature" appearance. Tight-fitting leather, with as many straps and buckles as possible, or form-fitting latex or spandex became common. Various sorts of body armor showed up (to protect against all those guns) and costumes had a paramilitary style to them: jumpsuits, bandoliers, web-belts, combat boots, and so forth, were common elements. Sunglasses, goggles, and helmets often replaced masks, and heroes as well as villains sport tattoos, piercings, and other body-art.

NINJA!

The Iron Age of comics saw a fascination with martial arts, ninja in particular: dark clad assassins wielding almost mystical powers of stealth. Rogue ninjas became vigilante heroes while villains often sent ninja minions or lieutenants against the heroes. A common archetype was the westerner trained in the secret ninja arts (who then almost always turns against ninja tradition to become a hero). Rivalries between student and teacher or former fellow students provided conflict for heroes and villains. Any Iron Age team worth its salt had at least one ninja-like member (if not several). See the ninja archetype (page 150).

LONE WOLVES

The heroes of the Iron Age were often solo acts, lone avengers on a personal quest. Since most *Mutants & Masterminds* games are group experiences, you may need to play down this aspect of the Iron Age. Fortunately, Iron Age heroes *did* occasionally band together into teams, albeit more loosely organized than the superhero teams of the Silver Age. Iron Age teams were often modeled on police or military special operations units rather than a crime-fighting "league." Team members still occasionally struck out on their own, especially when dealing with personal matters they preferred to keep to themselves.

REALISTIC POWERS

Super-powers in the Iron Age were often treated more realistically than before. Writers sought to power-down many characters and offer at least somewhat reasonable explanations for the fantastic powers of others. More importantly, they explored many of the consequences of such powers, beyond using them to fight crime and injustice. What did it really *mean* to be a god among mortals, an alien among humans?

Generally, the realistic implications of powers made them more lethal. After all, strength sufficient to lift tons should easily smash flesh and bone. Laser beams should be able to melt steel and inflict horrible burns, and so forth. Gamemasters looking to capture an Iron Age feel should ratchet up the realism and lethality of the series in general.

A NEW GENERATION

Part of the Iron Age revolution in comic books was the appearance of new publishers (and characters) for the first time in decades. Often, these new publishers were creating their own superhero "universes," independent from established superhero mythologies. That meant their new heroes were the first of their kind in their respective worlds. There was no back-story, no previous generations of heroes or villains (or, if there was, it simply wasn't mentioned or important). One very effective means of setting an Iron Age genre world apart from the rest is to simply start things off that way from the very first appearance of super-powers in the world, creating a setting that never had a Golden or Silver Age for comparison.

IRON AGE GEAR

Iron Age characters relied heavily on mundane equipment and the occasional device; even those who normally didn't use equipment like guns or armor in prior ages of comics carried some. It was particularly common for hero teams to have "standard issue" equipment like communicators, team uniforms with built-in armor, shared vehicles, and so on.

This section looks at some of the common equipment for an Iron Age game, expanding upon the equipment lists from the *Mutants & Masterminds Hero's Handbook*. Iron Age GMs should also refer to the equipment lists in the Golden Age and Silver Age sections of this chapter for more weapons.

THE IRON AGE ARMORY

Many Iron Age heroes opted to arm themselves with a variety of realistic weaponry, from pistols and automatic weapons to swords and other martial arts weapons.

This section provides detail on the expansive real-world armory used in the Iron Age.

LONGARMS

- **Pump shotguns** are commonly used both as military and sporting weapons. Models modified for use by soldiers or the police, sometimes called "combat shotguns," have increased ammunition capacity via a tube or box magazine. Shotguns can fire shot, which does the listed damage with Accurate 1 due to the spread, but Limited to Damage 3 against targets with Protection. It can also load solid slugs, which inflict the same damage, but without the Accurate bonus or the Limit on Damage.

WEAPONS

WEAPON	EFFECT	CRITICAL	COST
	Longarms		
Pump shotgun	Ranged Damage 5*	20	11
	Land Mines		
Anti-Personnel	Triggered Burst Area Damage 5, Penetrating 2	-	13
Anti-Tank (m-kill)	Triggered Burst Area Damage 10, Penetrating 6	-	27
Anti-Tank (k-kill)	Triggered Burst Area Damage 15, Penetrating 8	-	39

**See individual descriptions for more information.*

EXPLOSIVES

- **Anti-personnel land mines** were buried explosives detonated by an above-ground trigger when they were first invented in the nineteenth century. By the Iron Age, AP mines are much more sophisticated. They include stake mines mounted above ground, bounding mines with lifting charges that raise the explosive above the ground before detonation, and directional mines that shape their explosive power into a particular arc.
- **Anti-tank land mines** come in two varieties: m-kill AT mines (for "mobility kill") designed to immobilize the vehicle that detonates the mine, and k-kill AT mines (for "catastrophic kill") designed to disable or destroy both the vehicle that detonates the mine and its entire crew. Both kinds of AT mine use pressure triggers requiring a heavier weight to detonate, in order to prevent them from being set off by passing infantry.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Whether atop an intercontinental ballistic missile or as part of a terrorist's homemade bomb, the threat of nuclear arms is a crucial part of the Iron Age. However, given the sheer destructive power of a nuclear weapon, should one make an appearance in an Iron Age *Mutants & Masterminds* series it's best handled as a story element by the Gamemaster. In some games a nuclear explosion might mean the end of the game, in others it might not be a huge challenge for the heroes.

Those lucky enough to survive the initial flash, thermal radiation, and blast damage of a nuclear detonation might wish they hadn't. The aftermath of a nuclear detonation includes the following:

- **Earthquakes** may follow surface or underground detonations of nuclear weapons if the pressure wave from the explosion causes geologic fault lines to release stored-up pressure. These are usually minor, but could be augmented intentionally as a secondary effect of the detonation.
- **Electromagnetic Pulses** emanating from the detonation of a nuclear weapon will induce a sudden high electric current in electronic devices, melting their circuitry and disabling most electronic systems from wristwatches to jet airplanes.
- **Ionizing Radiation** released by a nuclear detonation is not only fatal to more than half of those exposed, but also takes significant time before it can be dispersed. In the meantime, the ionized upper atmosphere disrupts wireless communication among any devices that survived the electromagnetic pulse.
- **Fallout** is created when solid material vaporized by the explosion combines with ionizing radiation. It gets drawn into the stratosphere by air currents and rains down for months or even years—not only on the site of the explosion, but worldwide, as the fallout is carried by the winds of the upper atmosphere.

MODERN AGE

The modern (or "post-modern" according to some) era of comics isn't definitively named, largely because, as the saying goes, once an age is named, it's usually over. It is sometimes referred to as the "Platinum Age," "Electrum Age," or the "Retro" genre. It harkens back to the Gold and Silver Ages of comics, but tempered with modern sensibilities and a measure of wonder and nostalgia regarding previous ages. In many respects, the Modern Age seeks to recapture the experiences of comic creators raised on Silver Age comics, and runs counter to the cynicism of the Iron Age (which sought to break established molds and take comics in different directions). Much of the advice in the **Silver Age** section applies to the Modern Age as well, with a few notable differences.

SENSE OF HISTORY

Modern Age comics draw upon a long history of comic book publishing, and the previous ages, especially the Silver Age. The Modern Age has a sense of tradition and familiarity; superheroes aren't something new, but have been around for a long time. The rich background and history of the setting is a source of inspiration for stories about the present.

This sense of history is harder to achieve in your own *Mutants & Masterminds* setting, unless you happen to

HIGH AND LOW REALISM

Readers will note that the rules in *Mutants & Masterminds* reflect the "reality" of the world of the comic books, not the real world (where people can't fly under their own power or bend steel with their bare hands). For example, is it realistic that someone able to bench press a tank doesn't put his fist right through normal people when he hits them? Is it realistic that a man (no matter how strong) can pick up a building without it collapsing under its own weight? Of course not, but that's the way it works in the comics. The same is true of many other super-powers that violate physical laws as we know them. The goal of *Mutants & Masterminds* isn't to rigorously simulate the real effects of super-human strength or heat beams capable of melting steel, it's to simulate how these things work for comic book superheroes.

If you're looking to inject more realism into your *Mutants & Masterminds* game, however, keep the following tips in mind:

LETHAL DAMAGE

The lethal damage options from **Chapter 7** make the whole application of Damage effects more realistic and dangerous.

LIMIT EXTRA EFFORT

You may limit or reduce the effects of extra effort (*M&M Hero's Handbook,* page 19), saying that characters cannot use it to gain extras, for example, or that it cannot increase effective power ranks. You may also reduce extra effort, saying that it cannot improve a bonus more than +2 or eliminate more than a –2 penalty, for example.

LIMIT HERO POINTS

Limiting the number and use of hero points adds greater realism to the game and forces heroes to rely more on their traits and the whims of fate (as represented by the die roll). You can award fewer hero points or limit players to only having so many at once. You also can change the things hero points can do. Eliminating the ability to overcome fatigue makes extra effort that much more costly. Eliminating the ability to recover makes combat faster and tougher while eliminating the ability to avoid death makes it more likely for characters to die during the game. Eliminating hero points altogether gives the game a more realistic and less comic book feel.

MODIFY POWERS

You can require that certain abilities, like a high Strength rank, work more realistically than they do in the current rules. For example, you may say that Strength over rank 6 always does lethal damage when used in combat, and that characters must have a certain amount of leverage to use their strength. A super-strong character can't stop a car without damaging it, or pick up a structure without having it collapse under its own weight. Other powers and abilities can be modified in a similar way.

SLOW RECOVERY

Characters in *Mutants & Masterminds* recover from damage and injury fairly quickly. In a more realistic game, characters may recover slower. This means damage conditions put characters out of action for longer and players will likely go to greater lengths to avoid them.

have a setting the players have been enjoying for years (which is certainly possible). Fortunately, there are some things you can do to achieve the same sense of history in your own series.

The first is to give the series a rich and detailed history. It's more difficult to run a Modern Age series in a setting where superhumans have only just appeared, for example. There's no historical context for them. The more context you provide, the more alive the setting becomes. Be careful not to overwhelm the players with too much information right off, but create the history and use it as a source of ideas for adventures in the present day.

One particularly good use of a heroic history is the "legacy character," a hero or villain based on a previous character in the setting. For example, a modern-day hero might be the second or third in a line of heroes with the same name (and perhaps similar powers and costumes). Heroic (and villainous) identities are passed on across generations, creating characters with built-in histories, enemies, and story hooks.

You can also create a sense of familiarity in your series by playing off many of the standard comic book archetypes. Create characters in your setting's history that are familiar in style, if not identical, to published comic book characters. Perhaps a well-known hero is a strange visitor from another world, or there is a dark avenger active in the Golden or Silver Age (perhaps with a modern heir). Model hero teams on existing ones from the comics, and they'll seem familiar to the players, even if they have totally different characters. Set most of these characters in the past, and you give the setting context while allowing the players to take things in new directions in the present. You can even take the Golden and Silver Ages of published comics and use them as the history and backdrop of your series, creating a totally new and different Modern Age based on them.

SENSE OF WONDER

Many Modern Age comics tried to restore the "sense of wonder" found in the Silver Age, although a trifle more se-

rious. They went in the opposite direction of the Iron Age's realism and tried to restore lost worlds, fantasy settings, alien cities, talking apes, and so forth, just updated to a modern context.

Essentially, you can take the elements of the Silver Age and include them in your Modern Age series. Just emphasize some of the fantastic elements. Whereas a lost city or a planet-sized spaceship was nothing unusual in the Silver Age, stress how amazing it is to characters in the Modern Age. They encounter the impossible on a regular basis, but it's no less amazing because of that. Some Modern Age comics try to provide consistent explanations for why the universe is so fantastic, but you don't necessarily have to—not knowing why can be simply part of the wonder and mystery of it all.

SENSE OF PURPOSE

Modern Age comics go beyond some of the simple themes of the Silver Age. While they're not as gritty as the Iron Age, they're also more mature and sophisticated. So modern-day issues show up and characters are better rounded and less stereotypical. Modern Age stories deal with social issues, politics, terrorism, poverty, and the like alongside alien invasions, world-conquering supervillains, and magical menaces from beyond.

While heroes often adhere to a more Silver Age code of ethics, there are reasons for them to do so; it's a choice rather than simply the way things are. In some ways, this can make Modern Age characters even more heroic (or villainous) than their Silver Age counterparts. They're not blindly following an ideology; they're making conscious decisions about right and wrong.

Watch out for moral discussions and debates starting to dominate your game. There's no problem with them if your group enjoys roleplaying them in character, but they can sometimes become heated, or simply dull and repetitive. The occasion moral dilemma or debate can add flavor to the game, but don't neglect opportunities to include clear-cut situations where the heroes can act decisively without any concern.

ORIGINS

What is the origin of superhumans and their powers? In most comic books, it's more accurate to say, "What are the origins of super-powers?" There are usually several, creating worlds where mutants, aliens, robots, sorcerers, and gods may all be members of the same team. This section looks at the various superhuman origins and how to use them in your *Mutants & Masterminds* series.

ALIENS

A wide variety of aliens are common in the comic books, ranging from humanoid aliens virtually indistinguishable from humans to extremely strange alien life (since comic artists aren't limited in their "special effects" budget). Aliens may not be carbon-based or even organic life: silicon-based, amorphous, or even crystalline or energy beings show up.

Most comic book universes have numerous alien races, often with very advanced technology and civilizations. These aliens have some sort of contact with Earth, although it's usually sporadic. Militaristic alien civilizations seek to conquer Earth while more benign ones usually have some policy of non-interference regarding worlds as "primitive" as Earth.

Aliens in the comics often have super-powers, but not the same variety of powers found among Earth superhumans. Instead, aliens tend to have racial abilities, making them superhuman compared to Earthlings, but not unusual for members of their race. For example, aliens from a heavy-gravity world might have superhuman strength while a race from a planet with unusually strong magnetic fields might have magnetic control powers. Sometimes an alien mutation shows up, with powers outside the racial norm, but they appear less frequently among aliens than among humans (see **Mutation**, page 29).

STRANGE VISITORS

Alien superheroes and villains are fairly common. When creating an alien character, give some thought to the character's race and home world. Is the character the last survivor of a dead race, an exile from home, or simply an explorer or visitor from another world? Other members of the character's race may be potential allies, antagonists, or supporting characters. Also decide if the character's powers are typical for that alien race or unusual in some way.

ALIEN TECHNOLOGY

Many alien races, at least ones with the ability to reach Earth, have technology in advance of our own. Typical comic book alien technology includes things like faster-than-light travel, beam or blaster weapons, force fields, robots, and possibly things like matter transporters, teleportation, and anti-gravity. Pretty much any super-science technology can show up in the hands (or claws, or pseudopods) of aliens. Advanced technology may actually be the source of an alien character's powers.

Of course, aliens are not limited solely to technology. Some alien races also use magic, although oftentimes alien "magic" is just technology so advanced it is practically the same thing. Alien magicians may be sinister or benign, and magic in alien societies may be secretive (as it usually is on Earth) or more overt.

ALIENS AMONG US

A common comic book theme involves shape-shifting or mind-controlling aliens infiltrating and influencing human society. (This was particularly common during the Communist scares of the Cold War era.) You may wish to introduce a race of alien shape-changers, mind-controlling slugs, or disembodied "psychic parasites," as adversaries for the heroes. Such foes stir up fear and mistrust by imitating or co-opting authority figures or other heroes. They may also set off a wave of xenophobia among humans, perhaps in addition to (or substituting for) a fear of mutants and mutation (see **Mutation**, later in this chapter).

THE PROGENITORS

Many comics include the idea of ancient alien races visiting Earth in the distant past (often based on the "ancient astronaut" theories of aliens interacting with civilizations like the Egyptians and the Mayans). These "Progenitors" may be a single race or many different races over the millennia. They influence human evolution and development in different ways, providing technology, performing genetic modifications, even interbreeding with Earth creatures. Alien intervention is one means of explaining the development of superhumans on Earth. It may also explain various mythological or historical oddities.

COSMIC POWER

Aliens may include various "cosmic" beings, forces of great age and power in the universe, essentially alien gods (see **Gods**, following). These beings often draw upon "the power cosmic," also known as the power primordial, primal power, cosmic energy, and so forth. This cosmic power may be the source for various super-powers, giving them the "cosmic" descriptor. In the comics, cosmic power ranges in versatility from a form of energy control to a force limited solely by the imagination of its wielder.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS

- An alien police officer sent to track down a criminal hiding out on Earth. After apprehending his quarry, the officer might be assigned to safeguard Earth full-time. Alternately, the officer might be killed, passing on his uniform and weapons (and perhaps even powers) to a worthy human.
- The last survivor of an alien race finds a new home on Earth and tries to blend in with humanity, while using the powers granted by Earth's environment to fight crime.
- Aliens abduct an otherwise ordinary human and use advanced technology to give their subject super-powers. They may intend the subject to become one of Earth's protectors or the aliens might have a more sinister purpose in mind. Perhaps they're simply curious and testing the limits of human potential.
- An alien energy being merges with a human host to experience corporeal life, granting its host various powers while in turn learning about human compassion and goodness.

- An alien-human hybrid develops unexpected powers and abilities, and becomes the target of a secretive government agency dealing with alien influences.

GODS

Superheroes are like modern gods or mythic heroes in many ways. So it's not surprising some mythological gods also *become* superheroes. Gods in the comic books—at least those who become superheroes—tend to be as powerful as other superheroes, perhaps at the high end of the power scale, but still peers to superhuman heroes. Godly villains or elder gods less involved in human affairs may be more powerful, achieving even cosmic levels of power.

In most settings, different pantheons of mythic deities co-exist. Such pantheons rarely have much to do with human worship any longer, usually by mutual agreement (also possibly related to the rise of monotheism in Western culture). The occasional godly hero or villain is the exception to the rule of divine non-interference.

Gods may visit Earth in physical form. They're often very much like humans with extraordinary powers. In other cases, gods invest their power in particular mortals. A god may take a mortal host, possibly transforming the host into a semblance of the god's own form. Gods also grant mortals super-powers, although this falls more under the category of magical origins (see **Magic & Mysticism**, immediately following this section).

Gods typically have super-human abilities, including immortality. They may be truly unkillable or merely long-lived. The average god is more physically capable than a human, and some specific gods have tremendous abilities (such as heroic gods associated with great Strength or deities with superhuman Awareness or Presence). Magical powers associated with the god's portfolio or area of influence are also common. For example, a storm god usually has weather control powers, a sun god wields light or fire powers, and so forth.

ONE TRUE GOD?

The comics tend to be (deliberately) vague about the theological implications of mythological gods co-existing, and of the existence or nature of the Judeo-Christian God. Generally, the question of contradictory creation myths and similar things is simply ignored, or treated with some vague hand waving about how the cosmos actually came into being in many ways (that is, all mythologies are true, even the contradictory ones). The creator God (associated with the Judeo-Christian Jehovah) is a distant, largely uninvolved and unknowable figure, although He may have various angels, saints, and other agents, usually on par with the power of other mythic gods.

HEAVEN, HELL, AND BEYOND

The existence of a god or gods also implies the existence of various mythic dimensions, including (but not limited to) Heaven, Hell, Asgard, Olympus, Heliopolis, Nirvana, the Dreamtime, and so forth. These and many other celestial (and infernal) dimensions may exist in the setting, opening up literal new worlds of adventure for heroes.

While the comics don't usually bother with a comprehensive or cohesive cosmology for all the various other dimensions, the Gamemaster is free to invent one, if desired. The dimensions or planes inhabited by the gods (and other mystical or divine beings) may relate to each other in a particular way. For example, perhaps Heaven lies "above" Earth in the cosmic scheme of things, with Hell "below" and the other godly dimensions arrayed in a ring or wheel "around" the Earth's plane. A particular arrangement of divine planes may result in more or less access to Earth for certain divine powers.

Visiting the home dimensions of the gods requires the Dimension Travel effect. The same is true for gods intending to visit Earth and return home, making it a common effect for godly characters.

CHARIOTS OF THE GODS

The gods might actually not be "gods" as such. In some settings aliens or other types of superhumans are mistaken for gods and may actually be the sources of historical myths about the gods. Such beings can exist even in settings with real gods; some myths reflect the reality of the gods, while others are cases of divine mistaken identity. The real gods may not look kindly on these divine imposters, or they may not care about them.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS

- A heroic god comes to Earth to defend humanity. Most people believe the "god" is simply another superhuman who has adopted a mythological motif. The god's ancient enemies may also come to Earth to become supervillains.
- A mythological god mates with a mortal with their half-divine offspring as a new hero. The hero has only a portion of godly power, which may be better suited to some settings.
- The divine spirit or essence of a god possesses a mortal host.
- One or more gods invest a mortal with portions of their power to create a superhuman champion.
- A guardian angel volunteers to accept mortality and life on Earth in order to actively defend humanity from the forces of evil.

MAGIC & MYSTICISM

Magic is a real and active force in most comic book universes, although it may operate behind the scenes. The average person probably doesn't believe in magic as such, attributing the abilities of sorcerers and wizards to more "mundane" super-powers, the same with magical creatures and dimensions. Even in a world with caped people who fly and bend steel in their bare hands, magic is a strange and barely understood force.

Magic tends to produce three types of super-powered characters: magicians, the magically empowered, and magical creatures.

MAGICIANS

Magicians—also known as sorcerers, mages, wizards, witches, and so forth—are people (not necessarily human) who have learned to harness and control magical forces, allowing them to cast various sorts of spells. In most settings, the ability to use magic is a learned ability, although not everyone has the will, talent, or dedication to learn it. Indeed, magicians tend to be a rare and select group, although there are often many minor dabblers and adepts compared to true masters of the mystic arts.

Magicians are a secretive lot, for the most part. They deal with forces and beings few others understand, so they tend to keep to themselves, even as members of a team. The control and discipline magical training requires may make them seem distant, even cold, and villainous magicians tend to have tremendous egos.

Comic book magicians may cast spells by invoking names and entities of power (often alliterative ones, like the "Mystic Mists of Malador" or the "Silent Serpents of Set"). Players should feel free to come up with suitably atmospheric spells and incantations for their characters, and GMs should reward players who belt out spells with aplomb by giving them minor bonuses to attack rolls, power checks, or saving throws involving those spells. Note many magicians are deprived of their powers if they cannot speak or gesture to cast their spells, a complication for the Magic power.

MAGICALLY EMPOWERED

Magic can also be a source of superhuman origins, much like the fruits of science (see **Mutation**, later in this chapter). Simply substitute "ancient artifact" or "magical spell" for "chemical spill" or "radiation leak" and you've got an origin! The primary differences for magically empowered characters are their style and power descriptors.

Someone or something may deliberately endow a character with magical powers. A deity is one example (see **Gods**, earlier in this chapter). Others include ancient wizards, witches, angels, demons, spirits, and other magical entities, along with sentient magic items. A classical example is the ancient Greek hero Achilles. His mother dipped him in the waters of the underworld to make him invulnerable, but since she held him by his heel, it becomes his only weak spot. Magical empowerment may be intended as a curse rather than a gift. Examples include the curse of lycanthropy (turning someone into a werewolf or similar creature) or transforming someone into an undead creature.

Characters empowered by magic have traits and powers much like any other, except their powers typically have a magic or mystic descriptor applied to them.

JUST LIKE MAGIC

One option for a setting is to assume *all* super-powers are actually magical in nature, even those with other apparent causes, like accidents of birth or science. Essentially, the forces of magic bend or ignore scientific laws, much like most comic book super-powers. So when a child is born a "mutant" with the potential for superhuman powers, it's not because of some genetic anomaly, but the position of the stars, the force of fate, or some other mystic tide in the universe. Likewise, magic allows otherwise ordinary people to not only survive otherwise fatal accidents, but to transform into something more than human. They may think it was radiation or toxic waste, but it was actually magic! This approach has the advantage of being unified and simple. It also explains away all the improbabilities by chalking them up to magical forces. However, it can create a certain feeling of sameness in the series, and may affect the use of some powers if every character has a "magic" descriptor.

CREATURES OF MAGIC

All the various creatures of myth and legend show up in the comics in various forms, particularly classics like werewolves, vampires, zombies, mummies, demons, elementals, spirits, and golems (animated statues). Any or all of these can become heroes, villains, or minions of either.

Heroes and villains are often unique examples of their kind, particularly because they possess free will, which many otherwise mindless magical beings do not.

A common origin in the comics is for an ordinary person to merge with a magical creature in some way. For example, the character might be possessed by a demon or spirit (or even an angel or god). Conversely, a human spirit might "possess" the unliving body of a zombie, elemental, or golem, combining human free will and intelligence with mystic power.

MAGICAL DEVICES

Magical devices, ranging from enchanted rings to magic swords, often show up as sources of power. A magical device may be the sole source of a character's super-powers, or merely a supplement to other inherent powers. Magicians often have one or two magical devices at their disposal, and fantasy warriors might have an enchanted weapon or armor.

Magical devices make useful story hooks, since villains may be out to steal them, either to gain their power for themselves or simply deprive the heroes of them. Perhaps a villain has a matching device, and wants to combine the two of them for greater power. You can even create a team of heroes (or villains) where each member has a magical device from a combined set, like magical gemstones, weapons, or suits of armor.

MYSTIC DIMENSIONS

The existence of magic implies other dimensions beyond Earth. The homes of the various gods and divine powers are one example (see **Gods**, earlier in this chapter) but there are an almost infinite number of other dimensions. Usually, the inhabitants of these other dimensions are potential threats to Earth, so portals to them are carefully guarded. The rulers of mystic dimensions (nearly always their most powerful magicians) may have designs on Earth.

SLEIGHT OF MIND

In some settings, the common belief that magic is nothing more than other superhuman powers clothed in a cloak of mysticism and misunderstanding is actually true. Supposed "sorcerers" and "witches" are superhumans who consider their powers "magical," even though they are not. Some may be deluded while others are charlatans. Of course, superhuman powers still exist, and some characters may still need ritualistic actions like "casting spells" in order to use them. So these powers are *effectively* still magic, even if they aren't "real" magic. The prime difference is in the background of the setting and in the descriptors applied to "magical" powers.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS

- A student of a master of the mystic arts, trained to assume the aged master's mantle and continue guarding humanity against forces lurking beyond this dimension.
- A hereditary witch, gifted with great magical talent, but also faced with ancient enemies, and perhaps even family members who do not choose to use their gifts responsibly.
- An archeologist who discovered an ancient magical talisman, gaining super-powers from it.
- A golem created as a protector for a repressed people. Having outlived its creator, it seeks to continue and expand its duty as a guardian while learning more of what it means to be human.
- A former criminal bonded with a demonic spirit, creating a new entity with a mission to hunt and punish the guilty.

MUTATION

Mutation, in one form or another, is probably the most common origin for superhumans in the comics. Technically, a "mutant" is a creature genetically different from parent creatures, but the term "mutation" in the comic books usually means any sort of change induced by outside forces. Some settings differentiate between *mutants*, born with at least the potential for superhuman abilities, and *mutates* (sometimes called "altered" or "enhanced" humans), otherwise normal humans exposed to forces which change them in some way.

ACCIDENTAL MUTATION

Accidental mutation is perhaps the most common origin story in the comics. Essentially, an ordinary person is accidentally exposed to some catalyst, which changes the character into a super-being. The catalyst can be almost anything, although certain eras of comics tended towards certain catalysts. In the Golden Age of the 1940s and '50s, chemical catalysts were the most common: secret potions, "wonder vitamins," experimental acids, "hard water," and so forth. In the Silver Age of the 1960s and '70s radiation was the catalyst for nearly all super-powers, from atomic bomb tests to strange isotopes, glowing meteorites, or even the radioactive blood or venom of certain animals. In more recent years technology like genetic engineering, recombinant DNA, and even nanotechnology have become catalysts for mutations.

Of course, accidental mutations aren't limited to scientific catalysts. They also result from uncontrolled exposure to magic, strange inter-dimensional forces, or completely unexplained phenomena. Sometimes the "triggering" of innate genetic mutations (see below) is mistaken for accidental mutation, particularly in times of stress where another catalyst is present.

Accidental mutations are nearly always impossible (or at least extremely dangerous) to duplicate. They often happen in batches, with multiple people mutated by the same event or catalyst. This can provide a common origin for a team or a hero/villain pair. If the catalyst affects a large enough group, it can even be the origin for *every* superhuman in the world!

GENETIC MUTATION

Genetic mutation refers to pre-natal changes, resulting in people born with the potential for super-powers. Such mutations are usually attributed to things like rising background radiation, chemicals in the environment, and so forth, although they can just as easily come from things like proximity to a powerful source of magic or genetic tinkering performed by aliens.

Genetic mutations are typically what most comic books mean by the term "mutant." They usually go through a "cuckoo" stage, where they seem like ordinary people, until something triggers their latent mutations. Most often the changes brought on by puberty do this, although it may be some other form of stress. A rare few mutants are born with obvious physical mutations, making it even harder for them to find acceptance in human society. Stories tend to stress the uncontrolled nature of newly activated mutant powers. A newly "awakened" mutant may have the Uncontrolled flaw (*M&M Hero's Handbook,* page 151) on his powers.

MUTANT HYSTERIA

More than any other origin, mutation, particularly genetic mutants, tend to frighten ordinary people. The possibility of *anyone* being a latent mutant, combined with the idea of mutants as a "Homo superior" evolution of humanity, destined to make normal *Homo sapiens* extinct, is enough to stir up fear and paranoia against them. In some settings, the same feelings may be directed against all superhumans (particularly if all superhumans are mutants), while in other settings, they may be reserved solely for mutants, who are easily categorized as a separate "race" with designs on humanity's future. Still other settings may treat mutants as no different than any other superhuman origin, provoking no more or less prejudice.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS

- A teenager discovers a newfound "gift" or "talent," which is initially confusing and frightening, and may be as much as curse as a gift.
- An otherwise ordinary person is exposed to a mutagen and gains superhuman powers. Was it an accident or a staged experiment? Can the mutagen give similar powers to others?
- An astronaut is bombarded by strange radiation, or exposed to the power of an alien artifact. Perhaps the entire crew is exposed, each acquiring different powers.
- An extended family of mutants, with a history stretching back for generations, has hidden from ordinary humanity. Now the latest generation has decided it's time to "go public" with their abilities (if not their entire family history).
- A mutant "preview" of humanity's future, born with the capabilities of a human 10,000 years (or more) in the future. Is the next stage in human evolution humanity's protector or conqueror?

PSIONICS

The term *psi* or *psionic* refers to powers of the mind, such as telepathy or telekinesis. In the comics, it's often broadly used to refer to any super-power originating from the mind. Psionics can be a somewhat vague category, which has its advantages and drawbacks.

Some settings feature low-level psionic powers, often called "psychic" abilities. They tend to be subtle and not entirely reliable. Comic book superheroes have psionic powers with much wider scope and greater power level.

The exact origin of psionic powers is often unclear. Sometimes it may be genetic mutation (see **Mutation**, immediately preceding this section) but it's just as often unknown. The potential for psi-powers may be latent in all humanity, perhaps even in all thinking creatures, as part of the interaction between consciousness and the physical universe. In some settings, psi powers (or the potential for them) are detectable, trainable, and even reproducible to some degree. In others, "the talent" is entirely random and unpredictable.

While the terms "psionic" and "mental power" are often used interchangeably, they are actually two distinct categories. While psionic powers are all mental in nature, mental effects like Mind Reading are not necessarily psionic. They might just as easily exist through magic, divine power, or super-science.

ALL IN YOUR MIND

It's quite possible *all* super-powers are ultimately psionic! Since psi is such a broad category and virtually any super-power can be rationalized as a function of the user's mind, will, or imagination, psionics are sometimes used as a catch-all explanation for super-powers, especially in settings featuring a single, unified origin for superhumans (see **One Origin** later in this chapter). Characters may believe their powers are actually magic or reliant on super-science gadgets, and effectively they might be. After all, if a character has to speak spells or use a device to make things happen, then those powers are functionally the same as magic and super-science. The only difference is the real power source (and therefore descriptor) is psionic.

MIND SCARE

Powers like Mind Reading and Remote Sensing have frightening potential for abuse. Some settings may feature restrictive laws about violating the privacy of others and reading thoughts without consent. They may also see some prejudice toward mind-readers and clairvoyants, out of fear of what they could do. If technology for defeating Mind Reading and Remote Sensing exists, odds are people like government officials and law-enforcement will use it. The GM may also want to address the legality of information obtained through mind reading.

In a more four-color series, the GM can largely ignore these issues, especially if Mind Reading and Remote Sensing are relatively rare effects.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS

- A famous debunker of "psychic phenomena" who is secretly a powerful psychic investigating fraud and misuse of psionic powers.
- A powerful psionic mind trapped in a crippled or otherwise weakened body, possibly paraplegic, blind, even totally paralyzed or comatose.
- A teenager whose newly awakened psionic powers (usually physical powers like telekinesis or pyrokinesis) sometimes get out of control.
- The representative of a hidden society of enlightened humans with psionic powers, hoping to teach ordinary humanity the qualities of peace, reason, and mental empowerment.
- A psionic with mental powers disguised as physical abilities: telekinesis for "super-strength" and an invisible force field, levitation for flight, remote sensing for "x-ray vision," and so forth.

SUPER-SCIENCE

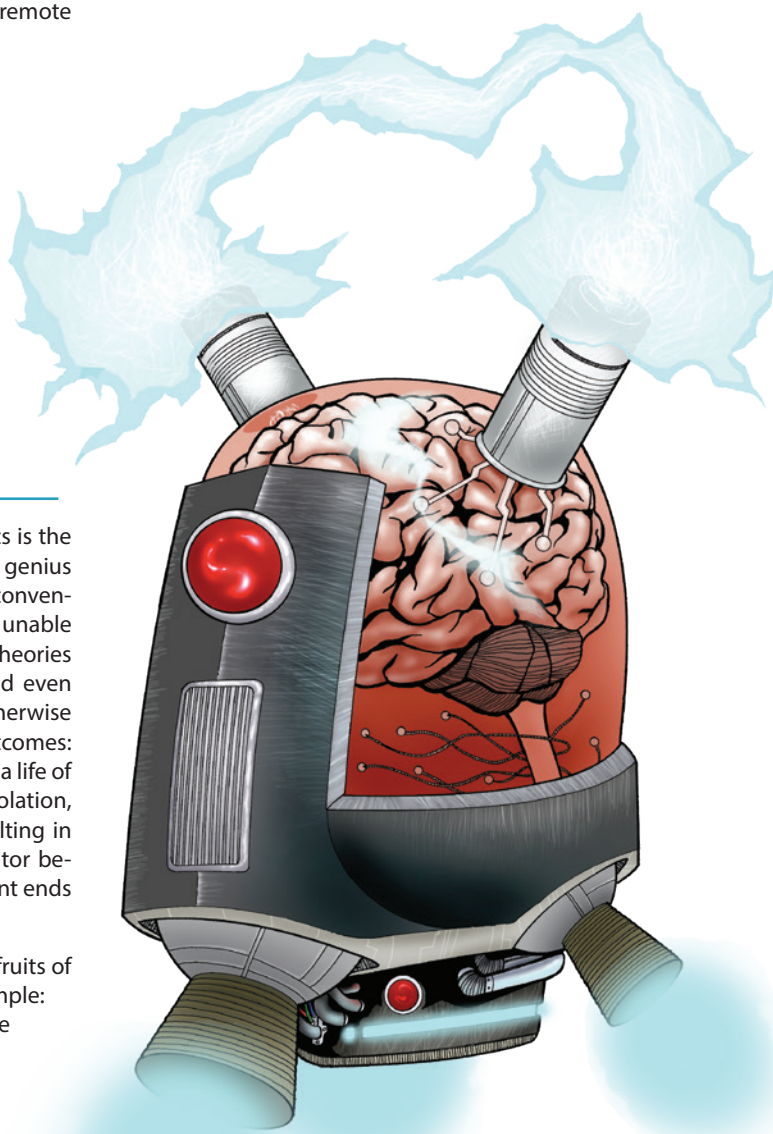
The line between science fiction and comic books has been blurry since the very beginning. Many early science fiction writers also wrote comic books, and superhero comics have always included science fiction elements, although they became especially prevalent in the Silver Age of comics. Many comic book heroes (and especially villains) feature science and technology far beyond the understanding of ordinary people.

THEY CALLED ME MAD!

A common element of super-science in the comics is the "mad scientist" or "lone inventor." Essentially, some genius discovers or invents something so far beyond conventional science the scientific community is either unable or unwilling to acknowledge it. The inventor's theories are dismissed, applications for grants denied, and even experimental results are rejected as falsified or otherwise "impossible." This usually results in one of two outcomes: either the scientist swears vengeance and turns to a life of crime, or else he is forced to continue his work in isolation, without the usual safeguards and oversight, resulting in some sort of accident. In the first case, the inventor becomes a super-villain, in the second, the experiment ends in the origin of a new super-being of some kind.

But *why* does the scientific community reject the fruits of super-science? The reason in the comic books is simple: to keep the world portrayed in the stories as close to our own world as possible. If the inventions of super-scientists were commonly available, the comic book world wouldn't resemble ours for very long. So writers either come up with reasons why such advanced technology doesn't proliferate, or they simply gloss it over and assume it doesn't. You can do the same in your own setting, although you may want to decide the reason super-science remains limited. The most common explanations include the following:

- Super-technology is too far beyond the understanding of most people. It takes years to figure out how to replicate it. It may also require rare components or processes, so in the end it's just not economically viable. Extremely wealthy governments, corporations, and individuals might have super-technology, but it isn't mass-produced.
- Governments and corporations deliberately suppress some technology, either because it's potentially hazardous or it could be economically ruinous. Oil companies, for example, might pay a great deal to keep a cheap, clean alternative energy source off the market. The same is true of computer manufacturers and cutting edge new chips, and so forth.
- Super-technology depends on some in-



nate or subconscious power of its inventor. It's not like normal technology, it's more an extension of the inventor's own powers. So it cannot be replicated and may not even work at all outside of its creator's possession. This explains both the uniqueness of super-technology "inventions" and why the scientific community rejects them: they really *are* impossible ideas that shouldn't work, except somehow they do!

- Some outside force is retarding technological progress, save for a few especially brilliant minds able to overcome its resistance. It might be the work of aliens, interdimensional beings, gods, time travelers, or any number of other things. The scientific community truly is blind to the genius of its most exceptional members, but through no fault of their own.

INTENTIONAL MUTATION

Experimental procedures can grant super-powers to ordinary test subjects. Usually, there's some reason why the procedure or treatment cannot be easily replicated. It may be a one-time success, or the secret may die with the scientist (killed following the initial success). The process may be dangerous, resulting in death or hideous mutations most of the time. It might be extremely expensive, requiring staggering amounts of time, money, or both. There may be side effects, such as experimental subjects going mad, continuing to mutate, or simply "burning out" and dying after a while.

The less powerful the outcome of the process, the more likely it can be replicated. Villains in the comics often have the capability to create low-powered "super-soldiers" or minions, and the government might have a similar process. Such characters are usually below the setting's normal power level, suffer from serious side effects, or both.

Many intentional mutations are inventors who used themselves as experimental subjects, having no others available. This is particularly common for villains, either seeking great power or the victims of such experiments gone horribly awry.

Other intentional mutations are experimental subjects. Some may be volunteers, others victims experimented on against their will or without their knowledge or consent. Such characters are often bitter and vengeful toward the people responsible for their mutation.

GADGETS AND GEAR

Otherwise "ordinary" characters may derive their powers from technological gadgets and equipment. A character with a ray gun, an anti-gravity belt, and a force field projector can have the same capabilities as another with innate powers of flight, invulnerability, and energy projection, for example. The prime difference is characters can be separated from their gadgets, which may also malfunction or otherwise not work properly.

SERUMS AND SUPER-PILLS

Exotic chemicals and pharmaceuticals sometimes grant super-powers, usually temporary, although they may be permanent (which becomes more of a case of induced mutation, above). Characters dependent on a drug or serum for their powers may have a power loss complication (when they are deprived on the power's catalyst) and may have other modifiers applied to their powers.

BATTLESUITS AND IRON MEN

One of the more common super-science devices is the battlesuit, also known as power-armor. It's a suit of high-tech armor equipped with technology providing a range of powers, including (but not limited to) enhanced strength, flight, offensive weaponry, enhanced senses, and a range of Protection and Immunity effects (particularly Life Support). The wearer of a battlesuit may be its inventor or simply chosen to pilot it (particularly if the suit originates with the military, a government agency, or a corporation). A battlesuit might even have *multiple* wearers. If the suit is sufficiently bulky and concealing, most people wouldn't know. Some battlesuit wearers have teams of supporting NPCs providing assistance via remote communication.

A variation on the battlesuit is the *mecha*, essentially a humanoid tank, inspired by the giant robots of Japanese *anime*. Mecha have abilities similar to battlesuits, although the GM may permit a mecha to be treated as a vehicle, so long as it's subject to the same rules as vehicles. A mecha functioning as smoothly as a giant-sized character should be acquired as a set of Removable powers (when the hero is denied access to the mecha).

MAN AND MACHINE

Technology may actually be integrated or implanted into living creatures, creating *cyborgs*, part flesh and part machine. Cyborg powers are like those of any other character, they simply have a technological descriptor rather than mutation, alien, or the like. A cyborg may have complications based on the need for regular maintenance or even the Removable modifier, if there are ways to damage or disable the cyborg's machine parts.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS

- A brilliant inventor develops a high-tech suit for peaceful exploration (of space or the ocean, for example). When the military attempts to turn it into a weapon, the inventor steals the plans and the prototype and uses it to fight crime.
- An injured soldier receives bionic implants and replacement organs, creating a "super-soldier" either working for the military or serving as a government agent.
- A young genius has a talent for building useful gadgets out of any collection of spare parts, using them to become a superhero.

- A scientist invents a life-like, intelligent android, gifted with abilities beyond those of humans. When criminals kill its creator, the android embarks on a quest for justice and understanding the nature of humanity.
- A secret government agency trains superheroes and equips them each with devices giving them superhuman powers.

TRAINING

While some superhumans are born and others have powers thrust upon them by circumstance, a few are self-made. Rigorous training and unshakable dedication can go a long way in the comic books, taking otherwise ordinary people beyond the limits of what most consider possible.

Training generally hones and improves a character's innate potential, granting increased ability scores, skills, advantages, and sometimes other effects that can be explained as learned abilities. Sometimes training awakens other latent powers, like mutant, magical, or psionic abilities (see earlier in this chapter). Characters may also supplement physical and mental training with various technological devices (see **Super-Science**, immediately preceding this section).

MORE HUMAN THAN HUMAN

It's up to the Gamemaster to define the limits of training as a power source. Generally, the more realistic the setting, the more limited training becomes. In four-color comics, otherwise normal human beings train to superhuman levels of competence. While high ability scores are considered "superhuman" they're still available through training, if the GM sees fit. Other effects are left to GM interpretation. Usually any effect suitable as an advantage (even an advantage with multiple levels) is suitable as a training effect.

ESOTERIC SECRETS

While training can and does develop things like psychic abilities and esoteric martial arts, these effects usually require additional descriptors, such as "psychic" or "chi," to properly define them. As always, the GM decides which descriptors are appropriate for a particular effect.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS

- A foundling left at the doorstep of an isolated monastery in Asia, raised by the monks there and trained in every aspect of physical and mental discipline, perfect in mind and body as well as being taught a rigorous moral code and a duty to justice.
- The child of a Westerner and one of the last scions of a fabled Japanese ninja clan. Trained in the secret arts of invisibility, stealth, and assassination, but choosing to use them to bring down the clan and all it represents.
- Student and disciple of a renowned martial arts master whose previous student used his training for evil.
- A former Olympic athlete who lost friends and family to terrorism and undertook a rigorous program of training to fight such criminals and become an international agent of peace.
- Coming from a long line of police officers, a youngster trains to become the world's greatest detective and law-enforcer, working to reform a corrupt police department from both the inside and the outside.

ONE ORIGIN OR MANY?

One of the first things to consider about superhuman origins is which one(s) to have in your series. Is there a single source of super-powers or many? Which origins are more common if there's more than one and are any origins prohibited or restricted in some way?

ONE ORIGIN

There may be only one source of super-powers available in your setting, although people may not necessarily know the true source's nature. For example all superhumans might be genetic mutants, psionics, or magical in nature.

A unified origin provides a degree of predictability to the setting. It is also more plausible, better suited for more realistic settings. On the other hand, a single origin limits or prohibits certain character types. It may create a certain sameness among the superhuman characters in the series.

A single origin also limits the descriptors applied to super-powers. Keep in mind this may affect how some descriptor-based effects work. For example, having an effect work against only one descriptor (such as "psionic powers") doesn't qualify as a flaw if every effect in the setting has that descriptor.

MULTIPLE ORIGINS

You may allow more than one origin in the series, but set specific limits in terms of suitable powers, effects, and modifiers for any given origin. For example, in a series about super-powered mutants in the near future, you decide to allow the mutation and super-science origins, along with the alien origin (although the existence of aliens is not widely known). You might also limit super-science powers, disallowing effects like Dimension Travel and Mind Reading, for example, although they are available to the other power sources.

Multiple origins allow for some variety in the series, but also require more work on the Gamemaster's part to define and limit the options available for each power source. You may want to do this on a character-by-character basis or just establish guidelines for the entire series.

ANY ORIGIN

Finally, a series may allow any origin for super-powers. This is the case with most comic book superhero settings: anything goes. This approach gives the players the widest range of options, but also tends to make for the most complex sort of setting. Nearly anything is possible in a world where aliens, gods, magic, mutants, super-science, and psionic powers co-exist!

PREVALENCE OF POWERS

Although *M&M* series usually feature powers of one sort or another, the prevalence of powers among the general populace can vary greatly from setting to setting. In some, only the main heroes and a few antagonists have any powers at all, while in others nearly everyone has powers!

Not all powers or origins need be equally prevalent, either. Indeed, in many settings some powers are more common than others. A world could have common superhuman physical powers but rare mental powers, with divine and magical powers being unique or unknown.

UNIQUE POWERS

In a unique powers setting, only a small handful of characters have powers. This may not include the heroes! Usually, though, it means the heroes and a small group of antagonists are the only ones in the world with strange abilities. This may mean everyone gained their powers in the same way, even at the same time. It may also mean all powers come from the same source, although neither has to be the case.

For example, perhaps everyone in the world with powers was present when one of the gods fell to earth and died, with each of them gaining a portion of the god's essence (and power). When one power-wielder slays another, he gets that portion of divine essence, thereby increasing his power, and setting the scions of divine power at each others' throats. As another example, perhaps the small number of super-powered characters in the setting are all from alternate worlds, brought together in a single place and time on a world where no one else has powers (perhaps even our world!). The heroes may come from diverse backgrounds with virtually any origin or power, and the same is true of the antagonists.

Unique powers may not remain so, depending on their origin. In some settings, unique powers are just a stage the world passes through on its way toward powers becoming more widespread.

RARE POWERS

Powers in this setting are rare; everyone may have heard of someone with powers, but hasn't necessarily met one. This tends to be the default for most *M&M* settings; there are a substantial number of super-powered individuals, but few enough that they're not everywhere.

COMMON POWERS

Common powers show up often enough that nearly everyone knows someone with powers. The empowered population is a sizeable minority, perhaps even the majority. This may affect how powers are perceived (see **Powers and Society** in the following section).

Common powers may be homogeneous, coming from a single source or origin. Everyone may even have the same power! For example, a world might have common mental powers, or even just Telepathy as a common power. On the other hand, a setting with common powers might have diverse smaller populations from multiple power sources and origins: there are people with divine powers, psionic powers, magical powers, and other powers they acquired in various ways.

UNIVERSAL POWERS

In some unusual settings, *everyone* has powers! This can range from everyone having the same power to everyone having their own unique power, from one origin or power source to multiple ones.

For example, in a far future setting, humanity may become a psionic species, with mental powers universal (although some individuals have different degrees of power and talent, the same as with any innate ability). A fantasy setting may feature inborn magical knacks, with individual talents determined by the position of the stars, the time of the year, phase of the moon, or some other mystic tide in the universe.

Note that "universal" is also relative. For example, if the series takes place in a hidden city where everyone has super-powers, and adventures take place there primarily, then it seems to be a universal powers setting, even if the no one in the rest of the world has any powers.

POWERS AND SOCIETY

How does society at large react to super-powers and those who wield them? Do people with powers hold a special place in society, or are they treated just like everyone else? If the latter, then why? (They're definitely *not* "just like everyone else!")

Society can react in a number of different ways to powers, and these are not all mutually exclusive. Some segments of society and particular individuals react differently, and there may be different attitudes toward different powers. A culture regarding divine power as a sign of great favor may at the same time see magical powers as a mark of evil. Some powers may be lauded as "natural" while others are seen as "unnatural" or "perverse." The classic example is mutant powers, often looked upon with suspicion compared to other sorts of super-powers.

Society may view super-humans as ordinary citizens, special talents, or outcasts. Some super-humans may even set themselves up as rulers of society! Certainly, that's the wish of many super-villains.

ORDINARY CITIZENS

People with powers are no different from anyone else, at least in terms of society and its laws. There are three reasons for this: first, society is simply unaware anyone has powers, so there are no laws or social mores concerning them. How society reacts if and when powers become known is up to the GM. Second, society has deliberately chosen to treat power-users equally and fairly (or at least relatively so); third is everyone has powers, so they're not "unusual!"

This does not mean there are no laws concerning the use of powers, only that they're no more restrictive than the laws concerning everyone else. For example, a crime committed using powers is still a crime. It also means the empowered have no special privileges; they're not immune to prosecution for misusing their powers.

SPECIAL TALENTS

Society acknowledges the "special talents" of supers in some fashion. Of course, this acknowledgement isn't always positive, since it may entail legal or social restrictions on powers and their use. Powers may also affect society as supers find different ways to use their talents. Powers may completely transform some professions and social institutions, including the following:

COMMUNICATION

Although technological forms of communication are common in the modern world, they don't exist in earlier societies. This power may greatly speed up communication, especially in settings where the speed of messages is that of the fastest horse or ship. Instantaneous communication can hold together a large civilization, but can also dog the heroes wherever they may go.

EDUCATION

Some mental powers may be effective in providing education and monitoring the progress of students.

ENTERTAINMENT

A wide range of powers have entertainment value, ranging from putting on shows to using powers to provide special effects. Some powers even create entirely new forms of entertainment, or addictions, for that matter.

EXPLORATION

Super-explorers can reach places others cannot, at least not easily. Movement effects like Flight or Teleport expand the bounds of exploration. Effects like Dimension and Time Travel expand it even further. Sensory effects allow explorers to perceive entirely new things about the places and things they explore.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Various combat-related powers are useful to police officers, giving them innate weapons and protection. Even

more likely to transform law enforcement are mental powers. Imagine "thought police" able to read a suspect's mind to know whether or not he's guilty, or empowered to arrest people just *thinking* about committing a crime! Abilities like Detect and Postcognition are useful for gathering evidence and, with the aid of someone with Precognition, police may even stop crimes *before* they happen. Of course, this raises questions like: if you intend to commit a crime, and a telepath or precognitive senses you will, are you just as guilty as if you had actually done it?

MEDICINE

While the Healing effect is likely to have the greatest impact on the practice of medicine, other powers may also be useful to empowered physicians. For example, Penetrating Vision or Remote Sensing can replace X-ray machines, Precise Move Object can perform surgery without cutting open the body, and the ability to place a subject into a deep sleep or coma can replace the use of anesthetics. There's also the issue of how traditional medicine reacts to the existence of super-powered healers. Are they practicing medicine without a license? How do you license them?

POLITICS

The political implications of powers are vast, but some can affect the political process directly. In addition to simply using super-powers to grab political power (see **Overlords** in the following section), abilities like superhuman Presence or outright Mind Control can have a significant impact. Conversely, powers like Mind Reading and Detect (truth) change the character of political hearings, allowing society to know if their politicians are being honest!

PSYCHOLOGY

Mental powers can be a tremendous boon to psychology, allowing neuroses and even psychoses to simply be wiped away. Of course, there may be long-term side-effects to such a "brute force" approach to mental health. There's also the danger of unrestricted "editing" of minds. It's one thing for someone to volunteer to have his antisocial tendencies corrected, but what about convicted criminals? For that matter, what happens when society begins "correcting" other behavior, such as rebelliousness, unacceptable religious beliefs, or "sexual deviancy" (which may all have far-ranging meanings, depending on who defines them).

RELIGION

The existence of divine super-powers may or may not prove the existence of a God or gods (or various other supernatural entities like spirits and demons). At the very least, many powers and power sources have religious implications. Clerics can benefit from the use of powers in their roles as healers, intermediaries, spiritual leaders, and counselors. Some may claim their powers give them special insight into people's souls, and they may be right! Just as many might claim a super-powered religious figure is false and misleading. Powers could lead to a new era of religious understanding and tolerance or one of schism and holy war.

SCIENCE

Scientific study and understanding of some powers may lead to major breakthroughs in science. For example, learning the mechanism of a teleportation power may lead to artificial teleporters, and the mechanism of telepathy can provide the key to faster-than-light communication (or even travel). Of course, some powers may be beyond the understanding of science, especially those powers without a scientific basis (such as magic). Many powers can also be helpful to scientists, allowing them to study phenomena directly without instruments or perform certain experiments without the need for expensive equipment.

TRANSPORTATION

Teleporters with enough carrying capacity could revolutionize travel, at least for some. Even if abilities like Teleport aren't widespread enough for general use, they remain an option for those with access to them in emergencies. Super-fast couriers can carry messages from place to place, or even transport items instantly.

OUTCASTS

In some settings those with powers are outcasts: feared, hated, or disdained by society. This becomes more likely if powers originate from something outside of society's control, making normal people jealous of abilities they can't have and fearful of what they can't understand or control.

Prejudice against supers may take many different forms. At the most basic level, society may institute draconian laws to keep powers under control and prevent supers from having an "unfair advantage." At greater levels, people might consider certain powers (and their wielders) innately evil or dangerous. Governments may ban the use of super-powers and closely monitor and known supers for infractions. The empowered may lose their civil rights, forced to wear identifying marks (clothing, tattoos, bracelets, even tracking implants) to warn "normal" people about them. In the extreme, supers are hunted down and imprisoned, enslaved, or killed.

Strict regulation and even oppression of powers is often justified by the greater good of society. Some supers may even buy into this, working to police their own kind, or becoming "hounds" to track down and imprison or kill other supers. Collaborators looking to advance their own lot, or trying to keep revolutionaries from rocking the boat, use their powers to support the existing structure.

Societal prejudice may inspire human rights organizations and political groups supporting supers. Some sort of resistance among those with super-powers is also likely. They may try to work within the system to educate and overcome fears toward them, or work in secret to escape from an oppressive society or to overthrow it! In the latter case, supers may one day find themselves in charge of the world that once oppressed them, whether they want to be or not.

OVERLORDS

Supers can use their abilities to set themselves up in charge of society, whether ordinary people like it or not (or whether the supers like it or not, for that matter). Superhuman overlords might be ruthless dictators or enlightened guardians of humanity, doing what they feel is best for everyone. The second type of overlord must always be on guard against turning into the first kind, abusing power and privilege, even if it seems justified at first.

If the overlords all draw their power from the same source, then control of that power source ensures rulership and may be a key weakness for rebels to target. Overlords with different power sources may come into conflict because of them. Perhaps there is a hierarchy or caste system of overlords based on different powers or origins.

Consider what powers overlords have at their disposal and how powerful they are individually. A small handful of overlords can rule the world if they're powerful enough to sweep away conventional military forces on their own, or if they have sufficient mental powers to pull the strings behind the scenes. "Power" does not always mean fighting ability, however. Less powerful overlords must be on their guard against mundane threats. Some overlords may even be physically weaker than normal humans, such as psionicists with atrophied bodies but powerful minds.

Settings with empowered overlords may have renegades of one sort or another. Perhaps a member of the ruling class has grown dissatisfied with the status quo, or a commoner has somehow tapped into the power reserved solely for the elite. Imagine a theocracy ruled by those empowered by the gods faced with a strange new prophet who claims to have the gods' favor, and the powers to prove it. Rebels among despotic overlords may try to create a rebellion to overthrow them while renegades from benevolent overlords may be corrupted by power, and even taint the whole of society with their schemes.

SECRECY

How well known are powers in the setting? In some settings, powers are a well-kept secret (although they may not stay that way). Powers in other settings are public knowledge (for good or ill). Knowledge of powers affects the style and tone of the series, since it determines how openly supers use their own abilities.

SECRET

The existence of powers may be kept secret for a number of reasons. Supers may fear society's reaction to their existence (and rightly so). Keeping powers secret provides the element of surprise. Powers may be inherently dangerous or corrupting, things best kept out of the wrong hands. A higher power or powers may forbid revealing their existence to anyone; secrecy may even be a requirement to keep powers functioning!

Whatever the case, a secret powers series has two "worlds": the mundane world where everyone is ignorant of the existence of powers, and the empowered world, hidden behind the scenes. The mundane world may be similar to our own (from any time in history) or it may not. Layers of secrecy are possible; imagine a setting with physical super-powers but secret mental powers. Psychics have concealed their existence and true nature out of fear others would hunt them down as threats.

Subtle powers are best suited to a secret series, since keeping powers secret is an important part of the setting. Therefore mental powers and others with little or no noticeable effect are best. Characters have to be careful how and when they use their powers to keep them a secret. Generally, the consequences of discovery should be grave enough to encourage them to do so.

PRIVATE

In some settings, powers aren't generally known, except to a particular subculture, usually made up of the empowered themselves. This subculture is large enough to constitute a kind of "world" of its own, where powers are used relatively freely. Supers only need to be careful when they are forced to interact with "normals." This approach allows for a bit more freedom than a secret setting, where characters are constantly looking over their shoulders to avoid discovery.

As an example of a private setting, imagine a "society of night" made up of various monsters and supernatural beings (including humans with supernatural powers). At night, among their own kind, they are free to use their powers as they wish, limited only by the laws of their culture. During the day, or among normal humans, they have to hide their true nature and rely on subtlety to get the job done.

A world may even have multiple empowered subcultures: a secret magical society, for example, as well as a hidden society of psis, another of genetic mutants, and so forth. These groups may be entirely open with each other or only barely aware of the others. Perhaps the different factions are all locked in a shadowy war behind the scenes with the mundane world none the wiser.

OPEN

On many worlds with powers, their existence is public knowledge. People have different opinions and ideas about powers, but pretty much everyone knows about them. This is usually the case in *M&M* settings.

Of course, just because the general public knows of powers doesn't mean they know everything about them. They may not know how they work, for example (in fact, it's possible nobody knows). Public beliefs about powers may even be entirely wrong. For example, a conspiracy may have convinced the general populace supers are the chosen of divine forces, when in fact their powers come from an entirely different source. In some cases even supers might not know that public beliefs about their powers are incorrect. Superstition, folk-beliefs, and urban legends may color the perception of powers.

COSMOLOGY

Once you have tackled Earth, there's the rest of the universe to consider! Superhero comics rarely confine themselves to one world, and there's no reason you have to, either. Give some thought to the cosmology of your setting, of the infinite possibilities of worlds beyond Earth, and the adventures waiting there.

SPACE AND ALIENS

Is there alien life in your setting? If not, then you're overlooking a *lot* of potential stories and origins. Aliens of all kinds are common in the comics, and alien worlds make great settings for adventures, either for a change of pace or an entire series. Some of the typical aliens include the following (see the **Alien** origin earlier in this chapter for more).

HUMANOIDS

Aliens in the comics are often humanoid, if not completely human looking. The common differences are things like skin color, pointed or otherwise odd-shaped ears, unusual hair color (or complete baldness), and so forth. This allows many "strange visitors" to pass for human on Earth without being immediately picked out as extraterrestrials. Among mutants, androids, and other strange earthly superhumans, aliens don't necessarily stand out!

Humanoid alien races—at least the ones capable of visiting Earth—tend to be more advanced than humanity, often *much* more. Even if aliens don't have powers of their own, their technology can more than make up for it.

INVADERS

Aliens rarely "come in peace." Alien invaders are by far more common. (The peaceful aliens tend to bypass Earth altogether.) Invading aliens tend to be far less powerful than individual superheroes, but there are usually a *lot* of them, along with their aforementioned advanced technology. Sometimes the invaders are a smaller group of more powerful aliens, or even one or two *really* powerful aliens (see **Monsters**, in the following section).

Typically, the invaders have some sort of advantage at the beginning, whether a special power, advanced technology, overwhelming numbers, or some combination of the three. Powers include things like shapeshifting aliens able to blend into the human population, a "silent invasion" of seizing control of governments from within, or things like mind control, or perhaps the power to possess Earth's superhuman defenders! Fortunately, the invaders usually have a weakness as well. It may be sunlight, fire, rare minerals, spam e-mails, or even common bacteria, but once the heroes figure it out, they've got a weapon to turn the tide.

MONSTERS

Alien worlds are sources of various monsters in the comics, from the giant, rampaging types capable of flattening cities to cunning hunters lurking in the shadows. Virtually every type of alien monster has shown up at some point. Alien monsters are like homegrown menaces, except sometimes they turn out to be something other than what they appear. The classic example is the alien "monster" that's actually a child or infant of its species; it doesn't intend harm, but it doesn't know any better! Similar examples include abandoned alien war-machines, genetic experiments from long-dead worlds, and alien parents come looking for those rambunctious youngsters.

COSMIC BEINGS

The remaining aliens in the comic books are "cosmic" beings, so powerful and advanced even the most powerful of Earth's superhumans pale by comparison. These entities may embody primal forces of the cosmos, or represent races of aliens so ancient they arose in the first epoch of the universe (or even before!). They may exist to maintain certain cosmic principles, or simply for mysterious purposes known only to them. Cosmic beings may have defined traits in some high-powered *Mutants & Masterminds* games, but usually they function best as plot devices.

PARALLEL EARTHS

A common element of comic book universes—or, more properly, "multiverses"—is the existence of parallel dimensions. The Earth the heroes inhabit is but one of an infinity of Earths, each in a different parallel dimension, each with its own heroes and villains, and often unique twists on history and cosmology. Dimensional travel (intentional or accidental) allows heroes to visit these other Earths, which may be designated by numbers (Earth-1, Earth-221, etc.), letters (Earth-A, Earth-B, etc.), or some other naming scheme (alpha, beta, gamma, etc., for example). Likewise, people from parallel worlds may visit the heroes' Earth for various reasons. A few particular types of parallel Earths are common:

- **Disaster-World:** The world was all but destroyed by disaster, perhaps one the heroes prevented on their world, or perhaps one that has yet to happen back home!
- **Evil-World:** On this world good is evil and vice versa, so there are evil versions of the heroes, but also likely good versions of some or all of their enemies, and so forth.
- **Golden-World:** Superhumans have been around on this Earth longer, or it is otherwise more like the "Golden Age" of comics than the heroes' Earth.
- **Nazi-World:** The Axis won World War II and now rules the world. Parallel versions of the heroes may be freedom fighters or Nazi super-soldiers!

- **Normal-World:** This is a parallel world where there are no super-powers! Essentially, Normal-Earth is like our world: no costumed heroes or villains, no aliens, no super-science or other comic book elements to it at all.

OTHER DIMENSIONS

Any number of other dimensions may exist in a *Mutants & Masterminds* setting. The following are just a sample of the possibilities. Existing dimensions should be reachable via Dimension Travel (see **Movement**, *M&M Hero's Handbook,* page 120).

ASTRAL PLANE

The astral plane is usually a psychedelic dimension of abstract forms, located adjacent to the physical world. It's where psychics and magicians in astral form duke it out in mental struggles, and may be the source of certain psychic or spiritual phenomena. The astral plane is accessible to those with the Astral Projection power (see the Mystic archetype, *M&M Hero's Handbook,* page 42) in addition to Dimension Travel, and visitors often go there solely in spiritual form, leaving their physical bodies behind.

DREAM DIMENSION

Potentially connected to the astral plane, the dream dimension is the realm of the unconscious or sleeping mind. It is the source of dreams, or perhaps created by them. In some settings the dream dimension has a ruler or overseer. In others it has none. It is usually inhabited by the various figments of the imagination, which are effectively "real" there. The dream dimension is well suited for fantastic adventures in various dreamscapes, where nearly anything can happen.

MAGICAL DIMENSIONS

Many dimensions in the comics are magical, realms where the laws of magic, rather than the laws of nature, hold sway. They may feature islands of matter floating in an endless void, great cosmic trees or ladders, and fantasy worlds inhabited by human as well as non-human races. Magical dimensions are often ruled by their most powerful wizard or sorcerer (with high ranks in the Magic power, see the *M&M Hero's Handbook,* page 116). These mighty spellcasters may have designs on other dimensions, including Earth's.

MYTHIC DIMENSIONS

Mythic dimensions include all the various realms of mythology and religion: Heaven and Hell, the homes of the gods like Asgard and Mount Olympus, and the various afterlives of the dead like Tartarus, Gehanna, and Hel. Any or all of these may be real places in the vastness of the multiverse. Mythic dimensions are sources of heroes and villains drawn from human mythology: gods, demigods, angels, demons, and so forth (see **Gods** in this chapter).

POWER DIMENSIONS

Some comic book dimensions exist simply as manifestations or sources of a particular power. For example, there

may be a "dark dimension" filled with nothing but an infinity of inky black force, which certain superhumans tap into to produce darkness-based effects. Another dimension could contain nothing but proto-matter which powers like Create or Growth draw upon for their effects. Teleporters might actually move through a "pocket" dimension on their way from point A to point B, while other dimensions serve as "pockets" for storing weapons and other devices. Power dimensions are rarely places to visit, although they can provide story hooks and ideas, and a visit to one can be a change-of-pace adventure, especially if the power dimension isn't entirely what the heroes expected.

HISTORY

The history of your setting provides a context for the present-day. Is there a long history of costumed heroes and villains, with the player characters as the next generation, or are they the first superhumans the world has ever seen? How has the presence of super-powers changed things, if it has changed them at all?

EMERGENCE OF SUPERHUMANS

The first, and most likely, thing to affect history in the setting is the presence of superhumans. Have they always been around, or are they a fairly recent innovation? If people with super-powers have existed for a while, then how long, and what effect has their presence had on history?

PREHISTORY

In most comic book universes, super-powers of one sort or another have been around from the very beginning, even before recorded human history. Of course, most of these super-beings are known in the modern world only as legends or myths, and their existence throughout history hasn't changed things much from the world we know.

A common prehistoric source for superhumans is a mythic civilization like Atlantis, Lemuria, or Mu (or all of them and then some, in many worlds). These fantastic places may possess super-science, magical power, or any number of other origins. Remnants of their civilizations often still exist in the modern world, usually as sunken cities or underground domains (see **Fantastic Frontiers**, see page 16). You can run a prehistoric *Mutants & Masterminds* series set in an earlier age of the world, or just make it a place for modern heroes to visit via time or dimensional travel.

ANCIENT HISTORY

Superhumans in the ancient world tend to be rare, except as myths or legends. Either they were mistakenly identified as gods or wizards, or they actually *were* gods and wizards (see **Gods** and **Magic & Mysticism**, both earlier in this chapter). So it's possible the mythic gods and heroes of the ancient world were really powerful superhumans and the legends of their deeds were retellings of actual events. Imagine a mythic *Mutants & Masterminds* game based around the voyage of the Argonauts, for example, or the Knights of the Round Table, each possessed of a particular mystical power.

As with prehistoric superhumans, ancient history is often a source of modern origins: from actual survivors of the ancient world (immortal or cast into the future in suspended animation) to modern inheritors of ancient mantles of power.

RECENT HISTORY

Established comic book settings usually place the major emergence of superhumans around the same time as the appearance of superhero comics as a genre: in the late 1930s and early 1940s, the "Golden Age" of comics (see **Golden Age** earlier in this chapter). This is when superhumans go from mythic heroes and mysterious forces to costumed champions of truth and justice with super-criminals as their foes.

Some settings start back as early as the Victorian era and the Wild West in America (the late 1800s) or the "pulp" era of early "mystery men" and masked adventurers (in the 1920s and '30s). The first true modern "superheroes," however, don't show up until the Golden Age.

Did your setting progress through Golden, Silver, and Iron Ages to the modern day? Maybe superhumans didn't appear until the Silver or Iron Age and there were no earlier ages. On the other hand, maybe the Golden or Silver Age never ended and are still going on in the modern day. It's easy to imagine a modern setting with a Golden Age aesthetic, looking something like visions of the future from the 1939 World's Fair, for example.

EMERGING POWERS

The easiest sort of setting is an "emerging powers" world, where super-powers are something fairly recent and new. The heroes and their contemporaries are either the very first super-beings in the world, or among the first. This means the setting can be exactly the same as the real world up until the point where superhumans first appear.

The primary advantage of an emerging powers series is familiarity; you don't need to describe the real world to your players and you don't have to make up any alternate history or back-story. Such a setting also offers lots of opportunities for the player characters to be the first at things: the first public superhumans, the first super-team, the first to visit Mars or another dimension, and so forth.

They're the stars of the story, perhaps even the only superheroes in the world at all!

The main drawback to an emerging powers setting is the lack of context. If super-powers are new to the world, then society has to adapt, and quickly. There are no laws dealing with superhumans or their powers, no prisons for holding super-criminals, no established relationships between super-teams and law enforcement (in fact, no established super-teams at all!). In being first, the heroes have their work cut out for them when it comes to blazing new trails.

ALTERNATE HISTORY

Established comic book universes assume history in their world is essentially as we know it in ours. The same things happened at the same times and events unfolded in basically the same way. The history of superhumans is an "add-on," often a "secret" history, with little overall effect on the modern world. So, even though there was a real Atlantis, and a real Camelot (complete with true wizards and magical knights), even though superhumans fought on both sides of World War II, the modern world is pretty much the same as the one outside our windows.

The reason for this is obviously because the real world is familiar to readers of the comics, and it's far easier for comic book creators to use it as the "default" setting for their stories. The same is true of your *Mutants & Masterminds* series: it's easier to assume things are the same as the real world except for the existence of superheroes and villains.

Of course, this doesn't *have* to be the case. You can have some fun playing around with the idea of how the presence of superhumans could have *changed* history as we know it, creating an alternate world for your setting. The changes can be small ones or large ones. What if superheroes prevented the assassinations of President Kennedy and Martin Luther King? What if Atlantis openly sided with the Nazis during World War II? What if scientific geniuses created new technologies years before they were invented in the real world? The possibilities are endless.

Generally, it's best to choose just one or two points of divergence to start your alternate history, then follow things from there. The more changes you make, the less familiar the final result will be.

TIME TRAVEL

Time travel (usually via the Time Travel option of the **Movement** effect, *M&M Hero's Handbook,* page 120) is an extremely potent ability. It can cause all sorts of problems if unrestricted, so Gamemasters are advised against allowing player characters to have it. It's up to the GM to decide if time travel is even possible in the setting and, if so, how temporal mechanics work. The main options are as follows:

- **Immutable Time:** History cannot be changed, so any attempt to do so automatically fails. Either travelers into the past become intangible wraiths, able to observe but not interfere, or any actions they take are somehow prevented from altering history (the gun used to shoot at a historical figure jams, someone jostles or distracts the shooter at a critical moment, etc.). This option preserves history but also rules out the possibility of history-altering villains and the need to protect the past from them.
- **Mutable Time:** History can be changed, although it might be easy or difficult to do so. Everyone and everything existing "after" the change remains unaware anything is different. To them things are as they have "always" been. Characters involved in the change remember the original timeline, and so might characters with temporal powers of their own. This allows villains (and even heroes) to attempt to change the past, and means the future is not necessarily fixed.
- **Alternate Timelines:** Any attempt to change the past creates an alternate timeline instead. The original timeline remains unchanged while the alternate goes off on its own path. This allows for the changing of history without it having an impact on the present (although heroes may still want to prevent a time-traveling villain from their world from conquering an alternate Earth in the past). It also means the future is not fixed, since knowledge of the future may cause the present to split off into an alternate with a different future.

In general, time travel is best used as a plot-device and a power in the hands of certain villains, allowing them to try to trap heroes in the past or travel into the past to plunder it or change history to suit their whims. An alternate history can make for a fun place for the heroes to visit for an adventure or two. Time travel also may be suitable for a team of heroes that travels through time as well as space thwarting the forces of evil. Perhaps the team is assembled from the greatest heroic figures in history, including the future!

WHAT ARE THEY CALLED?

In *Mutants & Masterminds* the generic terms "superhuman" and "super" are used to refer to people with powers. However, that isn't necessarily what everyone in the setting calls them. Some worlds have their own unique names for superhumans, creating a distinct feel and style to the setting. Possibilities include the following:

aberrants, aces, alphas, angels, avatars, awakened, capes, chosen, deltas, deviants, elites, exarchs, extraordinaries, freaks, gammas, geeks, gene-freaks, gifted, godlings, *Homo Superior*, hyper-humans, incredibles, inhumans, inspired, marvels, masks, metas, metahumans, mutates, mutants, nephilim, novas, omegas, paragons, paranormals, post-humans, powers, psis, psions, psychics, psykes, scions, seraphim, specials, stalwarts, super-humans, superiors, superlatives, supernaturals, super-powered beings (SPBs), talents, *übermenschen,* ultras, unnaturals, unusuals.

GMs should feel free to come up with any naming scheme that suits the setting and style of the series.

SOCIETY

Consider what impact (if any) the existence of superhumans has had on society in your setting. Four-color superhero settings tend to have fewer societal changes, while gritty or realistic settings have the most changes, based on the power and prevalence of superhumans. The more powerful they are and the longer they've been around, the more society has had to adapt to their presence.

TECHNOLOGY

Superhumans have the potential to change the kind of technology available in a setting, especially if super-genius inventors patent and market their ideas. This can also affect the sort of devices available to characters as equipment.

Give some thought as to whether or not you want your setting to have more advanced technology and, if so, how prevalent it is. Keep in mind most superhero settings have super-science, but it stays in the realm of devices rather than equipment, available only to heroes, villains, and some supporting characters like government agencies, major corporations, and villain organizations.

POLITICS

What are the political issues surrounding superhumans? How do nations and governments deal with the presence of people with powers? For that matter, how do the new "super-powers" in the world deal with the old national "super-powers"? Some potential political issues include the following.

POLITICAL INFLUENCE

A popular superhero can exert considerable political influence by supporting a particular cause or candidate (much like any celebrity). In some settings, heroes may be active in politics, while in others a more "hands off" approach is considered best, and politically active heroes are frowned upon.

Super-powers can exert more direct political influence. Mind control is the most common scare, but individuals with superhuman levels of Presence and influence skills can be just as effective, if not more, since there's no evidence of direct mental manipulation. A "super-demagogue" might sweep a popular election into office, with the heroes the only ones resistant to his power and aware of his true intentions.

SUPER-MILITARY

Superhumans are potent military assets; some have the power of an entire battalion of soldiers! In some settings, there is a strong motivation to recruit superhumans into the military, from national armies to international peace-keeping forces and mercenary companies. A gritty world might make super-powers the "next wave" in modern warfare, making conventional forces almost obsolete.

In more four-color settings, military super-soldiers are nearly always top-secret "special ops" or otherwise covert, and super mercenaries are seen as dubious at best, practically super-criminals at worst. True heroes, while they support their nation, do not want to be seen as a military asset, and refuse to be made into one. Some settings may ban the military use of superhumans, although enforcing that ban is usually up to other superhumans (like an international police or peace-keeping force).

SUPER-RIGHTS

The issue of whether or not superhumans are due the same rights as everyone else is a potential political football (see **Law** in the following section). Some politicians may try using issues surrounding superhumans to their advantage. For example, in a setting where mutants are misunderstood and feared, there are certain to be politicians capitalizing on that fear to further their agendas (and perhaps some fighting for mutants' rights as well). Different issues may also apply to different origins (see **Origins** earlier in this chapter), with some types accepted and others mistrusted or even outright hated or feared.

LAW

How has the law changed to deal with the existence of superhumans, costumed vigilantes, and super-criminals? Just as in the real world, legal issues can be complex, and Gamemasters should consider what (if any) legal adaptations would enhance the setting.

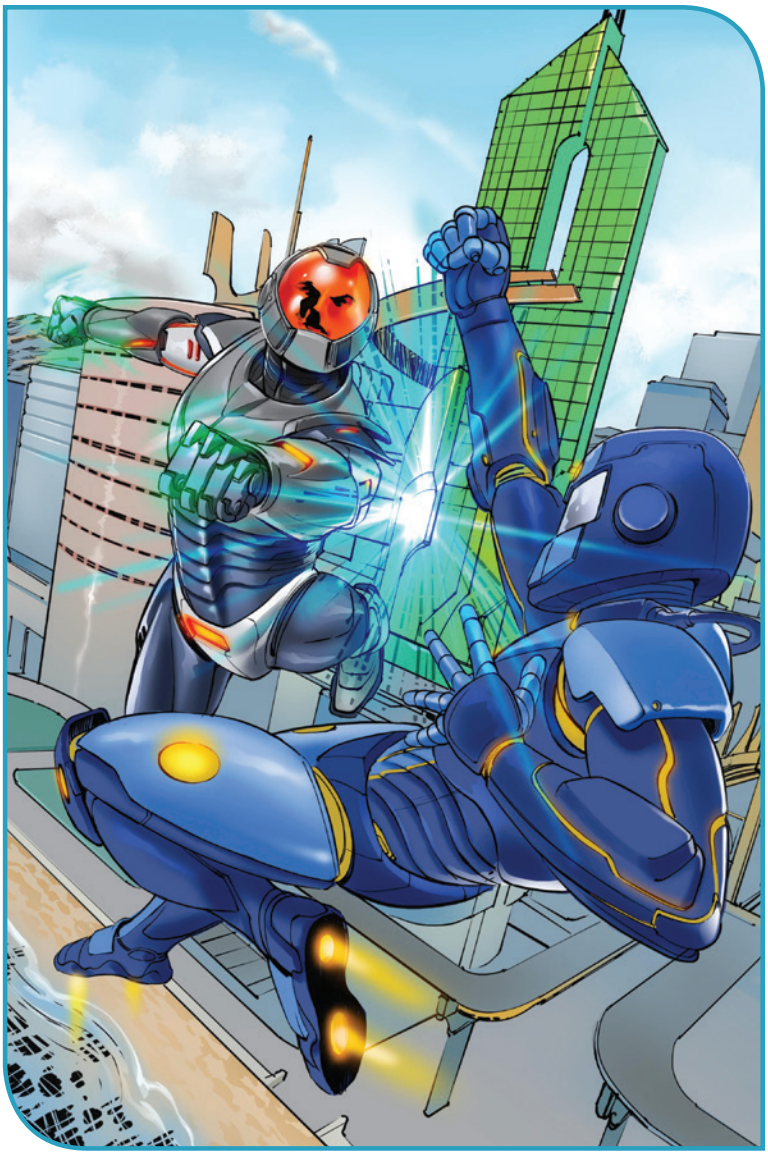
VIGILANTISM AND SANCTION

In the four-color comics, superheroes can generally make "citizens arrests" of super-criminals without any problems. Some heroes are particularly endorsed or supported by the local authorities (officially or unofficially) while others are simply tolerated. Where the authorities draw the line between "helpful citizen" and "dangerous vigilante" depends heavily on the style and tone of the setting. In some, only vigilantes using lethal force or other illegal methods earn official condemnation. In others, anyone putting on a costume or mask to fight crime (whether they have powers or not), is breaking the law and is in just as much trouble with the authorities as the criminals themselves!

LEGAL RIGHTS

Are superhumans legally "human" and entitled to the same rights as everyone else? This may vary, depending on the

setting and the type of superhuman. While otherwise normal humans granted powers by accident of birth or twist of fate may be seen as legally human, what about aliens, robots, androids, spirits, the undead, and the myriad other beings inhabiting the comics? Some of these may have no legal existence whatsoever, while others may even be considered the "property" of their creator (such as in the case of a robot or other construct). The four-color comics tend to gloss over these issues, except for the occasional story about the legal rights of an unusual being, but it may be a major issue in another sort of series.



MASKS AND SECRET IDENTITIES

Does the law recognize the right of superheroes (or villains, for that matter) to wear masks and conceal their identities? The American justice system, for example, says a defendant has the right to face his accuser, and allowing the accuser to wear a mask might violate that right. If the law bends the rules to allow masked heroes to testify in criminal cases, what about other situations? If a costumed criminal is arrested, can the police unmask him immediately? This might not seem important to the heroes, until *they* get arrested for something!

There's also the issue of legally proving your identity when you wear a mask or costume, especially when it's a mask or costume *anyone* could wear. Can costumed heroes receive checks or contracts under their "super" name? Can others use or license their image without their permission?

MENTAL AND SENSORY POWERS

Some mental and sensory powers raise legal concerns. Is evidence gathered by reading a person's mind admissible in court? What about the power to sense when someone is lying? Is it illegal to read someone's mind without their permission, or to use abilities like Enhanced Senses or Remote Sensing to spy on somebody without their knowledge? If so, how do you prove someone has done these things? If someone senses via one of these abilities that someone else is *intending* to commit a crime, what (if anything) can they do? Is criminal intent illegal and at what point can the authorities intervene?

Again, four-color settings tend to ignore these problems. Responsible superhumans don't use their powers to invade others' privacy, and evidence gathered using them is usually inadmissible in court. More realistic settings may deal with some of the consequences of these and other powers, ranging from legally banning them to using them to set up a "thought police" to enforce draconian laws.

INCARCERATION

Once you have a super-criminal in custody, what do you do? Keeping people with powers imprisoned may be a simple or very difficult issue. The main problem is restraining the criminal's powers to ensure he *stays* in prison.

In four-color settings, prisons usually have various technological options like power dampeners to block most criminals' powers. Other settings might not have such options, in which case, holding super-powered prisoners becomes more problematic. Measures like super-alloy cells and shackles may be used alongside drugs, punitive countermeasures (like taser collars or explosive armbands), and guards armed with powerful weapons. In extreme cases, criminals may be put into drug-induced comas, virtual realities, or suspended animation, or simply executed because there's no effective way to imprison them at all.

POPULAR CULTURE

Unless their very existence is hidden, superhumans are virtually certain to become instant celebrities and the focus of much popular attention. Consider the effects, if any, of superheroes and villains on popular culture and day-to-day life in your setting.

COMIC BOOKS

Comic books, the source of the modern superhero, may benefit or suffer from the existence of *real* superheroes. In some settings, comic books might become a dead medium. After all, who wants to read about fictional superheroes when there are real people with super powers on the news every night? On the other hand, superhero comics might undergo a boom in popularity, as a fascination with all things superhuman grips the public. Publishers might stick with pre-existing characters or embrace a new trend in 'reality comics," telling fictionalized accounts of real superhero adventures. This is the case in many comic book universes, with the publisher "retelling" the heroes' stories (often with some unwelcome "artistic license"). You can have some fun with heroes visiting a comic book publisher, or doing comic stories within stories. Maybe the fictional comic book heroes in your setting are actually *real* on some parallel world where the player characters are the "fictional characters"!

ENTERTAINMENT

Superhumans are likely to influence other popular forms of entertainment. Television is certain to devote shows to them, especially "reality" shows for fans eager for anything and everything about their idols. Publishers provide books and magazines about superheroes (and perhaps villains). They may be specialty channels or publications devoted solely to the super-powered set.

Super-powers may also provide their own entertainment. In some settings, superhuman actors can do amazing stunts and special effects. Super-artists can use their powers to enhance their performances, although this can lead to problems like mind-controlling musicians. Some superhumans may not *want* to use their powers as heroes and villains, preferring to make a fortune in entertainment!

FASHION

While comic book heroes and villains usually don't have much fashion sense, some settings may feature their influence in popular fashion trends. Spandex and similar skin-tight materials are sure to become popular (perhaps whether people can pull them off or not). Capes or cloaks could be a common fashion accessory, along with swash-topped boots and various sorts of gloves. If "super-fashion" is prevalent enough, it may be hard to tell the super-powered from the normal population!

RELIGION

Superhumans, especially those with mystic or divine origins, raise any number of religious issues. Settings may include actual angels and demons, witches and sorcerers, and even true gods walking among mortals. Even completely "mundane" superhumans may find themselves the focus of cults or religious beliefs. Four-color comics tend to skirt around religious issues, usually claiming all religions are at least somewhat correct, and making the most omnipotent divine powers largely aloof and distant.

More realistic settings might tackle these issues head-on, with new religious sects springing up in response to superhumans, super-powered cult leaders, and so forth. Perhaps a particular religion has it right and there is actual proof! Of course, it may be more interesting if the "proof" is debatable, allowing for further conflict between believers and non-believers.

ORGANIZATIONS

Various organizations play roles in the setting. The Gamemaster may want to include some or all of the types of organizations in this section, or at least take them into consideration when creating the setting.

AGENCY

The agency is ostensibly a force for good, or at least law and order. It's usually a governmental agency, ranging from a national government to an international peacekeeping force. In more realistic settings, the agency is often based on such real-world organizations as the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Interpol, or the Office of Homeland Security. Four-color agencies tend to be fantastic super-spy organizations, often with high-tech gadgetry and perhaps even their own cadres of power-armor troops or super-powered agents.

Agencies in the comics primarily exist to deal with super-powered threats, beyond the capabilities of the regular authorities. They may also have various mundane police or law enforcement powers, depending on the agency's charter and mission. Agencies are often prone to getting bogged down in bureaucracy and they're sometimes vulnerable to corruption and takeover from within, some of the things that make superheroes more reliable in general.

CONSPIRACY

The conspiracy's goal is control, over organizations, nations, economies, even the world. Conspiracies are by

ORGANIZATIONS AND ACRONYMS

Comic book organizations, especially agencies and conspiracies, tend toward acronyms for names: that is, names where each letter of the name stands for a word in a phrase, such as SHADOW: the Secret Hierarchy of Agents for Domination Over the World, or AEGIS: the American Elite Government Intervention Service. You might want to think of suitable acronyms for organizations in your own setting, since they provide an element of the comic book feel.

their nature secret. They may masquerade as other organizations or agencies, or exist within them, unnoticed until it is too late. A conspiracy often takes over other organizations from behind the scenes, pulling the strings in accord with its own agenda. In a world of super-powers, conspiracies can be frighteningly effective, using things like mind control, shapeshifting, and telepathy to carry out their plans. Uncovering and then overcoming a conspiracy can be the focus of an entire *Mutants & Masterminds* series.

CULT

A cult or secret society is similar to a conspiracy in many ways, the prime difference being that a conspiracy is focused solely on power and control while a cult has its own philosophical or religious agenda. For example, a conspiracy might seek to control the world's governments from behind the scenes, a cult seeks to do the same in order to impose its religious beliefs or to further some philosophical goal. Cults in the comics are nearly always mystical in nature, and often high-ranking cult members possess magical powers of some kind. The cult may worship powerful extradimensional entities, or serve entirely at the will of a powerful guru or demagogue. Cult members are often fanatical in their devotion to the cause, and cult agents may have a means of self-destructing, both to ensure they are not captured and to try and take as many of their enemies as they can with them when they die.

INSTITUTE

The institute is devoted to learning and knowledge. This is usually scientific knowledge, although it can also be occult or arcane knowledge in some cases. It may be a branch of a college or university, a research corporation, an independent think-tank, or a division of a government agency (see **Agency** earlier in this section). In the comics, the institute is often devoted to studying unusual phenomena involving superhumans and their powers. It may focus on a particular origin—such as a Psionics Studies Institute, an Arcane College, or an Extraterrestrial Intelligence Project—or it may try to cover them all.

An institute is a source for experts to advise the heroes on tricky technical questions, to study their powers, and to provide them with the occasional experimental device. It's also a source for new superhumans and potential disasters, both the results of either deliberate experiments or accidents. In some settings, the institute takes on a more sinister tone, usually as part of an agency or conspiracy devoted to controlling superhumans and performing unethical experiments to learn more about them.

SPACE PATROL

Many comic book settings feature one or more interstellar (even intergalactic) organizations devoted to maintaining law and order, essentially a kind of interstellar "police force." This "space patrol" is often empowered by a higher authority, either an interstellar government or a highly advanced and powerful alien race or being. Typically, officers of the space patrol possess special devices granting them the power necessary to enforce the law throughout the cosmos. The patrol may be made up of representatives of numerous alien races from across space, or only a few, depending on its origin. Its officers might even be artificial beings created by the patrol's founders, such as androids, or cyborgs created by transplanting the brains or minds of living creatures into powerful artificial bodies.

A particularly common element of a space patrol in the comics is a patrol officer assigned to Earth, who takes on the role of a superhero there (and may or may not reveal affiliation with the patrol, or even its existence). Another is the rogue patrol officer, exiled from the organization for misdeeds, who has become a powerful super-criminal and nemesis of the patrol and its officers.

SYNDICATE

Where a conspiracy seeks power and a cult tries to further an ideology, a syndicate wants one thing: profit. A syndicate is a criminal organization devoted to generating wealth, by whatever means it can. Real world syndicates include organized crime factions like the Mafia, the Japanese Yakuza, Chinese Triads, drug cartels, the Russian *Mafiya*, and so forth. Comic book settings often have fictional equivalents of these various organizations, as well as world-spanning criminal syndicates beyond their wildest dreams, such as a "World Crime League" or a "Megasyndicate" of international criminals.

Four-color comic book syndicates tend to be sanitized versions of the real thing, often with different names because the comics code forbade portraying real life organized crime. So there are stereotypical gangsters in pinstripe suits with Tommy guns and slick Japanese mobsters in dark business attire, wearing sunglasses and commanding ninja henchmen.

Realistic syndicates get more into the grit and grime of organized criminal activity, particularly issues like drugs, vice, influence peddling, and assassination for hire. Taking down a powerful criminal syndicate can become the focus of an entire series, especially an Iron Age series involving grim and gritty costumed vigilantes (see the **Genre** and **Style** sections of this chapter for more information).

CHAPTER 2: ADVERSARIES

The Gamemaster's role in the "roleplaying" sense of the term is portraying all the *other* characters in a *Mutants & Masterminds* game that are not the players' characters: the supporting cast, the bit players, and, especially, the villains.

This chapter looks at villains and what makes them tick. We start off with a look at the different categories of villains: levels of power, types of wrongdoing, and relationships between villain and hero. The chapter moves on to what motivates villains, their goals, and how they justify their actions to themselves and others. A series of detailed supervillain archetypes provide examples and ready-made bad guys Gamemasters can use or build upon. Then come supervillain teams and villainous organizations, followed by a discussion of villain tactics (from combat to traps and escape plans). The villain section concludes with some advice to Gamemasters on creating villains *M&M* players will truly enjoy hating and defeating time and again.

BRING ON THE BAD GUYS!

What makes a good villain? What defines villains people love to hate—enemies with staying power, able to menace heroes again and again without becoming stale or repetitive? What makes bad guys compelling, intriguing, and worthy foes for the world's greatest and most powerful heroes? These are all questions this chapter tackles as we take a look into the dark heart of supervillainy.

In their own way, supervillains are just as iconic as their heroic counterparts. They have different levels of power and ability, and individual goals and motifs. Villains also play particular roles in the lives of the heroes they bedevil, from bothersome nuisances to hated archfoes locked in a struggle to the death. This section looks at the various ways of classifying villains and how they apply to a *Mutants & Masterminds* game.

LEVELS OF VILLAINS

Just like heroes, villains come in different levels. This means both overall levels of capability of threat, as well as power levels in *M&M* game terms. The two categories do tend to overlap: naturally, the higher a villain's threat-level, the higher their power level tends to be.

Power level, however, is relative to the overall power level of the series (and, therefore, the heroes). A power level 8 bad guy might be a low-level lieutenant in one game and a powerful master villain in another. In a high power level series, that PL 8 character could even be a mere henchman, beneath the mighty heroes' notice!

HENCHMEN

At the bottom of the villain hierarchy of are the vast hordes of henchmen: criminals, goons, and hired muscle working for a villain primarily as cannon fodder. They might delay the heroes, or even get the drop on them with a cleverly planned ambush, but otherwise they aren't much of a threat, except for the fact that henchmen tend to come in large numbers (some sort of bulk discount for the villain, no doubt).

Henchmen are usually built at around half the series power level, if not less. So in a PL 10 game, henchmen rarely rise above PL 5, and usually fall between PL 2 and 4. You can see this in the supporting cast archetypes: the goons and other henchmen types are at around this power level for the default PL 10 series.

The typical henchman has no powers, maybe a weapon or two and a halfway decent attack and damage bonus. Other villains have "henchmen" who are not men, aren't even human at all in many cases. These minions might be robots, animated trees, demonic imps, or the walking dead. They have a variety of powers, but still mainly rely on numbers and brute force to get the job done. More exotic underlings still tend to be low in power level compared to the series standard. They also make the human street toughs employed by other villains look like Rhodes scholars by comparison: exotic minions tend to be dumb, if not completely mindless.

LIEUTENANTS

Villainous lieutenants are criminal middlemen. They're in charge of henchmen, often answering to a boss or master villain. They tend to be around the same power level as the series default (and, therefore, the heroes), give or take a level or two. So a power level 8 series tends to feature PL 8 lieutenants, with some in the PL 6-7 range, others PL 9, perhaps even 10.

A lieutenant is essentially the opposite number of a player character hero, roughly equal in power, although rarely in depth or breadth. Lieutenants are often combat heavy, simply because they are expected to take on the heroes on their boss' behalf. Some lieutenants are more "management" than hands-on types, but they can still defend themselves in a pinch.

A villain team (see **Villain Teams** later in this chapter) is most often made up of lieutenant-level villains banded to-

gether in an opposing version of the traditional superhero team, sometimes backed up or brought into existence by a more powerful master villain.

Lieutenants tend to be individuals, as opposed to henchmen who are largely faceless masses. Lieutenant villains have their own motifs, code names, costumes, and so forth. They may match a particular theme (chess pieces, playing cards, mythic figures, etc.), especially one of a powerful leader. Some teams of lieutenants resemble henchmen: take for example a group of lieutenants wearing power armor designed by their boss, which makes each of them nearly the equal of a hero. Otherwise, however, they're still faceless (and largely nameless) minions.

MASTER VILLAINS

The master villain is what many people think of when they think "supervillain": the evil mastermind with the hidden lair, army of minions, and the fiendish plan for world-domination. Master villains are the prime-movers of the supervillain hierarchy. They are the ones who come up with the plans lieutenants and henchmen execute, the ones heroes look to track down, confront, and finally—at long last—bring to justice. Even then, however, no prison can truly hold them, and they will inevitably escape—or return from seemingly certain death—to menace the world anew.

Master villains most often have a higher power level than the player characters, from one level to 150% or more of the series power level. So in a PL 10 game, a master villain could be anywhere from PL 11 to PL 15 or more. This is because master villains are expected to take on an entire team of heroes on their own, although they can often call upon henchmen or lieutenants to run interference for them.

In high (15+) power level series, master villains are often omnipotent (see the following), or nearly so. They have to be, simply because the heroes are so powerful! They may simply be a very high power level, above PL 20, but at such levels it is often easier to simply treat the villain as a plot device rather than a character with defined game traits.

Even more than lieutenants, master villains have clearly defined personalities and goals, because they are the ones driving the sinister plots the heroes must thwart. When creating a master villain for your series, definitely look over the section on **Villain Motivations** and carefully consider why the villain does what he or she does, to better understand how the bad guy will react to the heroes' inevitable interference.

OMNIPOTENT VILLAINS

At the pinnacle of the villain pyramid are the foes better classified as natural or cosmic forces than people. These are the opponents heroes *cannot* overcome with mere force and the exercise of their powers; they require cleverness, courage, and often very specific circumstances to defeat.

Technically, omnipotent villains are not always truly all-powerful; if they were, there would be *no* defeating them. Some are simply on such a different scale of power compared to the heroes as to be effectively omnipotent, such as the living star capable of engulfing and consuming entire planets in a solar system, or a time-traveling villain able to reshape history to suit his desires. Even the foes with virtually limitless power are rarely ever all knowing, so the good guys can outwit or trick them into defeat.

Omnipotent villains are "Power Level X" plot devices. There is little point in detailing their game stats because they are so far beyond those of characters on the heroes' scale. Still, all such antagonists should have some kind of weak point or vulnerability, something the heroes can exploit in order to defeat them. It does not necessarily have to be easy for them to figure out or employ, but it should be there at least close enough to the surface for a player to figure out on his own or spend a hero point for enough inspiration to get a solid clue.

TYPES OF VILLAINS

Supervillains come in a variety of types—as many as there are costumed heroes, really. These types are broad categories describe what the villain does, as opposed to the villain's specific relationship with the heroes (that's covered in **Villain Roles** in the following section) or *why* the villain does what he does (see **Villain Motivations** for that discussion).

BRUTE

The brute is an extremely straightforward villain who primarily exists to fight. Some brutes are cool professional soldiers or mercenaries, others are hot-blooded berserkers or savage killing machines, and some are in-between. All brutes have their own reasons for why they fight but the key element is that they do, and their most common opponents are heroes. Brute villains tend to be optimized for combat but not very much else; they tend to be lieutenants, although a single powerful brute can challenge an entire group of heroes.

DISASTER

A disaster villain is similar to a brute; however, where brutes just want to fight, disaster villains just want to *destroy*. They are like personified natural disasters rather than simple sparring partners, and heroes often focus more on containing them and the tremendous damage they cause than fighting them directly. Disaster villains may be almost mindless (or at least impossible to reason with) or avatars of destructive forces, unable to be anything other than what they are.

MANIPULATOR

The manipulator is rarely seen, at least at first. This type of villain works behind the scenes, pulling strings and making things happen. It takes time for the heroes to piece things together and follow the strings back to the hands of the puppet-master. Some manipulators like for their victims to know who is tormenting them but ensure they cannot prove anything, while others truly remain in the shadows until someone manages to track them down. A manipulator may be the head of a massive conspiracy, or wield consider wealth or influence. Some have powers of mind control, brainwashing, or illusion to increase their reach and conceal their identities.

SCHEMER

The schemer is a true master villain: a planner and a plotter. Schemers continuously come up with ways to achieve world conquest or another desired goal; they keep trying, no matter how many times those "lacking in vision" (in other words, the heroes) manage to interfere. Along with manipulators, schemers are the prime movers of villainy. Unlike manipulators, schemers tend to take more of a direct hand in things. Often their egos are simply too great for them to operate behind the scenes. They *need* everyone to know who they are and what they have accomplished!

SKULKER

Like a manipulator, a skulker operates in the shadows, out of sight. Skulkers, however, prefer to work solo, rather than pulling others' strings to make things happen. Skulker villains are the slippery thieves and sneaky assassins who strike suddenly and then vanish just as quickly before anyone can stop them. Heroes are confronted with figuring out where they will strike next, or trying to track them to their lairs in order to capture them and bring them to justice. Skulkers generally avoid confrontation unless it is inevitable or they have an overriding motivation.

VILLAIN ROLES

Some villains play a particular role in relationship to a hero (or heroes) beyond merely "antagonist." Such villains tend to be important characters in the hero's mythos, and some of the most enduring ones because of this additional role. Just as heroes are often defined by their villains, so too does a relationship to a particular hero help define the nature of a villain.

These roles give villains depth and character and, by definition, make them important to the heroes. Consider assigning at least one (if not more) of these roles to the major villains in your series, and keep them in mind when you are filling out your roster of bad guys. Have you overlooked any major role opportunities? Now might be a good time to bring in a new foe to fill that niche.

DARK REFLECTION

"There but for the grace of God go I," says the hero faced with a dark reflection, a villain who could *be* the hero under different circumstances, or who represents an aspect of the hero's nature.

This can be as obvious as the "evil twin" concept, where the villain outwardly duplicates the hero's appearance and even powers. Such dark reflections might be clones, shadow-selves, divergent duplicates from parallel universes, or the like. Perhaps an obsessed fan goes to great lengths to copy the hero, ending up a twisted and bitter imitator.

In other cases, the dark reflection is one of motive or goals. For example, a hero dedicated to preserving the environment might have a foe with a similar goal, but willing to wipe out all human life to achieve it. Likewise, a good guy seeking to use science for the betterment of humanity might face off against a former colleague who believes scientists should control society for its own good, or an example of science or technology run amok. In this case, it is not only the goal, but also the methods used to achieve it that matter.

ESTRANGED FAMILY

As the saying goes, "You can choose your friends, but not your family." A villain may actually be related to a hero in some fashion, either by blood or through marriage (or living arrangements) interconnecting families. Comic book villains have been fathers, mothers, siblings, and children of heroes, as well as step-siblings, cousins, and other relations.

If super-powers are inheritable and passed down through family lines, then it's likely every family will have a "black sheep" or that a criminal dynasty might have one good-hearted exception to the rule. Similarly, a family might obtain powers at the same time, including both the good and bad members (or those inclined to use their powers responsibly, and those more likely to be corrupted by them).

A family relationship can both intensify the conflict between hero and villain (nobody fights like family) and also make both sides more inclined to go easy on the other, with the hero trying to reform the criminal relative, and the villain less likely to simply kill the hero, out of respect for their family ties.

FORBIDDEN LOVE

If opposites attract, then what about the ultimate opposition of hero versus villain? There are plenty of examples where the conflict between characters on opposite sides of the law hides a subtle (or not-so-subtle) attraction. Villains may try and seduce heroes, while a true hero is also an attraction to bad guys in need of someone to believe in. A bad-boy or bad-girl can be quite tempting for some, although heroes generally hope to reform the objects of their affections.

Sometimes, the attraction is one-sided, usually with the villain as an obsessed stalker who wants to win the hero's love. Some of the foe's actions might be driven by jealousy and feelings of rejection, even to the point of becoming quite irrational. After all, there is a fine line between obsessive love and vengeful hate.

Perhaps the romantic relationship predates the current roles of hero and villain: an ex-lover or partner might adopt a costumed identity in order to settle or renew a former relationship. An ex-wife becomes a hero to put a stop to her former husband's crimes, for example, or an old girlfriend becomes a super-criminal to get her former hero-boyfriend to finally pay attention to her.

NEMESIS

A nemesis often fills another role, like antithesis or dark reflection (see previously), but the primary role of a nemesis is to thwart a particular hero or heroes. Essentially, a desire for revenge on, or at least absolute victory over, the hero drives the nemesis.

The reasons for this can be as simple as an embarrassing defeat handed to the villain during the first encounter with the hero, or as complex as the other roles and relationships in this section. The enemy typically blames the hero for some wrong, whether or not it is entirely justified. So, for example, a hero who gained his powers in a lab accident that also severely scarred and empowered a lab assistant might have the vengeful former assistant as a nemesis, even if the accident wasn't the hero's fault. It can be especially poignant if the villain's reasons for hating the hero are valid. What if the accident *was* the hero's fault, and he became a hero to try and make up for it? He has managed to win over everybody except the person most directly harmed by his mistake. Does the hero truly feel he deserves his foe's forgiveness?

A nemesis keeps coming back over and over trying to get revenge, and won't stop until it is achieved. Ideally, the hero is the bigger person and willing to deal with the nemesis each time. Otherwise, it is a true battle to the death between them.

NUISANCE

Some villains are less menacing and more... annoying. Nuisance characters primarily exist to make heroes' lives difficult, and to provide some amusement for the GM (and, hopefully, the players) as the good guys struggle to deal with the pests.

The key elements with nuisances are that they are more bothersome than truly threatening, and that they are difficult to get rid of, at least right away. The nuisance might be well intentioned, perhaps wanting to help the heroes, or could be malicious, or at least unconcerned about the trouble they cause. Examples include the would-be team member or sidekick, following the heroes around and trying to "help" but causing disaster instead, or the bush-league villain who *thinks* he is the hero's nemesis but who is little more than a bother.

THE STEREOTYPE VILLAIN

One other role villains have often played is that of the "evil stereotype," showing all the traits associated with the particular race, class, nationality, or other group considered suspect or outright evil by mainstream society. This is often in the form of propaganda, although more often simple ignorance or societal prejudice in recent decades. Classic examples of stereotype villains include various "yellow peril" Oriental masterminds (inherited from the sinister Asian villains of the pulps), World War II Axis supervillains, and most Cold War-era Communist villains, often wearing over-the-top emblems of the Party or their home nation.

Stereotype villains are best reserved for four-color series. Even then, they should be used sparingly, since they tend to come off as parody rather than serious threats. Modern comics have made various efforts at rehabilitating older stereotype bad guys, making them into legitimate threats and more realistic characters. The Oriental mastermind, for example, has sometimes gone from old-world mandarin in silken robes to Hong Kong power broker enamored with *The Art of War*, almost as much of a cliché, but with more detailed motives and goals.

The classic nuisance villain is incredibly powerful, even to the level of being omnipotent, but uses that power to do petty and childish things that bedevil the heroes. The heroes cannot simply overcome their foe in a fair fight; they have to play by the villain's rules or use cunning and trickery to win.

OPPOSITE

A common idea in the comics is to make a villain the hero's opposite, a natural enemy. It can be a simple theme, such as a brawny hero opposed by a brainy (but physically weak) villain, or fire versus ice, light versus darkness, snake versus mongoose, and so forth. A single hero can have many potential antitheses, depending on which way the lens of interpretation is turned.

Perhaps the most potent opposite is one of philosophy or outlook. So a patriotic American hero devoted to the ideals of liberty and freedom might face a foe who is the embodiment of tyranny and fascism, for example. A hero who represents control and order could be archenemies with a villain representing chaos and madness. This makes the villain especially offensive to the hero, beyond just a motif.

TURNCOAT

Superheroes are not necessarily above pursuing vendettas and personal grudges, especially when it comes to their costumed foes. A hero's personal enmity towards a villain may be due to not just antisocial behavior, but a personal betrayal.

Some villains start out as heroes, or at least *pretend* they are heroes. They win people's trust and then show their true colors. Others are sincere, at first, but fall victim to temptation, or find themselves trapped by their own mistakes. They betray their heroic ideals and become hunted villains. A betrayal might tie into the origins of hero and villain, such as a former friend who turned on a rival, resulting in the accident that gave the hero his powers and ended their friendship.

In some rare cases it is the *hero* who is seen as the betrayer, most often a hero who started out on the wrong side of the law and reformed, leaving former criminal associates with a desire for revenge. One example is the hero trained by a villainous mentor who chooses to use his powers for good, earning his former master's disfavor. There are also situations where heroes turn against their government, sometimes with a legitimate disagreement over what is fair and just, leading to government-employed villains or shadowy criminal conspiracies working against the heroes and ostensibly for the authorities.

VILLAIN MOTIVATIONS

Comic book villains are often the prime movers of the world: they are the ones who come up with new schemes, take action, and shake things up. They are looking to *change* the world the heroes are content to merely defend.

Given this role as motive force and *raison d'être* for the heroes, it is important to consider exactly *why* villains do what they do, since that influences things like how they go about it, and what happens when those bothersome heroes choose to get in the way once again. This section looks at what motivates villains: what they want, and how they justify trying to get it.

GOALS

Conflict happens in a story because one character wants something, and one or more other characters want something else, putting them in conflict. In the case of the classic superhero story, the heroes want safety and stability for the world, while the villain wants something that upsets those things. The exact goal varies but, by definition, it is something the heroes will most likely want to oppose.

ANNIHILATION

The good guys are *definitely* opposed to this goal, as it means destruction, possibly of the entire universe! The villain may be a nihilist or a manifestation of an annihilating force, destroying for the mere sake of destruction, or it could be a means to achieve another goal, such as tremendous power (by destroying the world and then *recreating* it) or a truly over-the-top revenge scheme!

Whatever the case, the heroes should be aware of the potential threat and of their foe's ability to carry it out, given the opportunity. The focus of the struggle against the villain is preventing terrible destruction, or at least contain-

ing it. Most such villains do not succeed, obviously. If they do, either the heroes need a means of undoing the destruction or the series will take a very significant turn (see **What if the Villain Wins?**, later in this chapter).

CHAOS

The villain wants to sow chaos and confusion, flouting the laws of the land and the conventions of society. This might be out of an ideological devotion to chaos or anarchy and a desire to overthrow lawful institutions, or simply a childish desire to break the law and get away with it. Some villains want to riot simply to watch things *burn*.

Chaotic villains are dangerous due to their unpredictable nature and their willingness to upset the status quo just for the sake of it. They sometimes try to enlist heroes in their efforts, or at least put them in the difficult position of having to choose the lesser of several evils in order to prove the criminals' devotion to chaos and randomness is the only thing that makes sense in a disordered universe.

CONTROL

Some villains seek to control people and things, from their immediate lives to everyone in the world! A villain's desire for control may stem from a simple lust for power or a sincere belief that everyone involved would be better off. Control may be a means to an end (such as acquiring power) or the end in and of itself.

One particular type of control villains seek is to corrupt the innocent and heroic, to exert influence over their choices and futures. Some do this because it feeds their power or egos; others want to prove *everyone* is corruptible, given the right circumstances, justifying the villain's cynical attitudes and beliefs.

FAME

The limelight is a powerful draw, and villains may commit crimes simply for the attention it brings them, believing "there's no such thing as bad publicity." Other criminals want acknowledgement and fame for some achievement, often the fame they feel has been unjustly denied them. This may come with a competitive streak in the villain's area of expertise, such as a mad scientist who wants the acclaim of the scientific community for a particular discovery or invention, or a martial artist looking to claim the title of world's greatest fighter.

Famous heroes serve to inspire jealousy, and they cannot win; heroes who bask in the adoration of their fans are vain and arrogant and need to be taken down a notch, while those who humbly demure are putting on a show of false humility the villain wants to expose to the world. In either case, the adversary's dislike for the heroes may approach a need for revenge (see that motivation, following).

FORTUNE

Greed is a powerful motivation, and many villains simply want to "cash in" on their abilities with some get-rich-quick scheme or another. It may be as simple as knock-

HOW EVIL IS TOO EVIL?

A question that arises in dealing with supervillains in an *M&M* series is: how "evil" is evil? That is, how explicit and unpleasant is the evil or villainous element of the series?

In the vast majority of comic books, "evil" is a caricature: supervillains hatch terrible plots to conquer or destroy the world, which they describe with great relish to hapless heroes, but their schemes are largely abstract. Even when the bad guy manages to do something terrible, it happens "off panel" with a minimum of spectacle, and the heroes are able to undo the damage in the end. In these types of scenarios, life is sometimes cheap—particularly the lives of villainous minions—but even then deaths tend to be more a matter of disintegration or "off panel" demises than bloody murder, if for no other reason than it makes it easier to explain away the victim's survival or mysterious resurrection.

More modern comics have dealt more directly with the kind of human suffering that results from a supervillain scheme or a clash between powerful superhumans—the equivalent of any great natural disaster. There are descriptions of casualties in a shattered city, even scenes of violent death and destruction, although still largely a byproduct of the plot rather than a direct part of it. Playing up this element can make the plight of the people the heroes protect more real, but it can also become a buzz-kill if what the players are looking for is slam-bang superhero fights with little regard for things like property damage.

A step further and we find comics looking dead-on at some truly evil characters and actions: implicit (or even explicit) depictions of torture, rape, serial murder, child abuse, and worse. These sorts of things create a grim atmosphere, motivating heroes toward vigilantism and "street justice" for the perpetrators. They best suit an Iron Age style of play similar to a police procedural or a *film noir* story.

When considering the sort of evil you want in your *M&M* series, think about both what you and your players are comfortable with, and the style of play you want to create. Once you settle on an approach, try and stick with it as much as possible, and make an agreement with your players to largely ignore other "types" of evil in your game. This is much like the comics, in that heroes who regularly stop world-conquering megalomaniacs do not often wonder why it is they are not dealing with the very real evils of, say, domestic violence or torture of political prisoners. The agreement works both ways, however, and means nobody can call the heroes to account for not addressing these things, as they effectively do not "exist" for purposes of the game (since, if they did, the heroes would likely be trying to do something).

This may come off as a simplistic approach, but it fits the style of the comics. If you want to run a more nuanced game, where wrestling with the question of evil and the limits of a hero's power is left to the players, by all means, feel free. This will tend to produce debate and conflict, however, and take time away from the superheroic action and foiling of villainous schemes, although it can produce satisfying stories in its own right.

ing over banks and jewelry stores or as complicated as a massive extortion or fraud scheme to make millions or even billions. It might not even be strictly cash, but other sorts of assets, like stock or valuable commodities; the key point is control of considerable wealth, and all that comes with it.

In some cases, pursuit of fortune is simply a means to achieve another goal. This one assumes the wealth is the ultimate end unto itself; obviously, the villain also has to ensure the means to actually *spend* all that new-gotten wealth, or it is worthless.

Of course, using amazing superhuman powers (or worse, super-scientific inventions) simply to knock-over banks is largely a trope of the four-color comics. More realistic super-powered settings may focus on other ways superhumans can use their powers to make money, some legal and some illegal (complete with new laws to deal with some of the new things supers can do). If the idea that a guy capable of inventing a working freeze-ray would use it to rob jewelry stores snaps your suspenders of disbelief, you're probably better off with a more realistic approach to supervillainy in your game.

MISGUIDED

A misguided villain is one who does the right thing in the wrong way, or the wrong thing for the right reasons, who could *almost* be a hero under different circumstances. More than any other type of villain, the misguided bad guy feels and appears justified, and may place the heroes in a quandary about dealing with such a sympathetic foe. Sometimes, a misguided villain sees the light and reforms, perhaps even becoming a true hero, while others stubbornly cling to their own views and never change.

Misguided villains might even start out appearing to be heroes, until the main characters discover their true motivations or witness them about to step over the line. Handling a misguided superhuman poorly can also lead to them *becoming* true villains, embittered by their defeats and those who could not understand what they were trying to do. They may easily change their motive to revenge (see the following)... against the heroes!

POWER

For some it is all about power: having it and using it. No matter how powerful they may be already, many villains lust after more power and will go to great lengths to achieve it. True master villains often seek ultimate power, apotheosis—to become like unto a god. Obviously, the heroes are going to have objections on that score, even if the steps their foe need to take to get there are benign, and that is rarely the case.

Usually, acquiring greater power takes ruthlessness and a willingness to steal, murder, and do whatever is necessary. Some attempt to rationalize this as a sacrifice for the

greater good; once they have ultimate power, they will be able to fix everything, perhaps even undoing all the wrongs they have done! For most villains the only justification they need for their power-lust is that the world would be better off with them in charge (see **Justifications** for more).

REVENGE

The path to villainy often begins with steps toward revenge. It can be an obsession that takes over someone's entire life, starting from the very moment a supervillain attains greater-than-human power. For example, many villains are born in tragedy: terribly disfigured in the accident that grants them their powers, driven mad by the arcane secrets they unlock, denied their ultimate triumph at the last moment, but gaining some measure of power in exchange. These are all moments that burn the need for revenge into one's soul.

The object of a villain's hatred is often one or more of the heroes. If a crime-fighter causes an arsonist to fall into a pit of burning chemicals, transforming him into a charred creature with superhuman power over fire, the villain may obsess on seeing the hero die in flames for it. Likewise, a scientist who blames a hero for ruining his career and reputation may seek to do the same before finally ending his foe's life.

The same may apply to other objects of revenge, putting the heroes in the position of protecting people: politicians, attorneys, judges, police officers, and the like. It becomes even more complicated when the revenge focuses on the criminal elements of society! What about a revenge-obsessed vigilante going around killing the city's criminals? Some grudges are more than personal; a villain could seek revenge on an institution, a city, or even the entire world for some perceived wrong.

SAFETY

Sometimes the motivation of an apparent "villain" is not wealth or power, revenge or madness, but simply the desire to be safe and sound. It is a dangerous world, after all, especially for people (or creatures) with strange, threatening appearances and abilities. Imagine the confused alien visitor who stumbles out of a farmer's fields, only to be confronted with a shotgun and barking dogs. When the alien disarms the farmer, realizing in so doing just how fragile these "humans" are, things only escalate. Similarly, consider a giant beast barely more intelligent than an animal, driven out of the ocean depths by pollution, sonar testing, or some other surface-world intervention. When it emerges in the harbor, people panic; suddenly it is an "attack"!

What is really needed in cases like this is heroes willing to find some means to communicate and learn what the "villain" wants so they can put a stop to the misunderstanding. Of course, this can be difficult when dealing with creatures from other planets or lacking a language or even real intelligence. Plus there's almost always a gung-ho military or authority figure unwilling to take the risk of communicating with a potential threat rather than simply wiping it out. The heroes might need to convince *both* sides of the conflict to talk.

THRILLS

Lastly, some villains are just out to have a good time, often regardless of who gets hurt or what gets broken. They want to have *fun!* Unfortunately, their definition of "fun" includes mayhem and general chaos for everyone else. Thrill-seekers are similar to bad guys motivated by chaos, but the key for them is all in the excitement. The chaos (if any) is merely incidental.

Even the definition of thrills varies from one costumed foe to another. For some it is danger and risk-taking, from performing hazardous stunts that may endanger others to committing crimes and daring the police and the heroes to stop them. Others find excitement in challenge, from the warrior in need of a worthy foe to the hunter in search of more difficult prey. For some the challenge is intellectual, a battle of wits or proof of who is superior in a particular field of endeavor.

JUSTIFICATIONS

Good villains, even in the most four-color style superhero setting, never use the terms "villain" or "evil" to describe themselves, except as irony. The best villains think *they* are the ones doing "the right thing," however it is that they define it. It is the so-called "heroes" who are always getting in their way and causing trouble!

How supervillains justify their actions is as important, if not more so, than their motive for acting in the first place. A number of different rationalizations come into play, and they can give added depth and character to foes with the same essential motive. For example, one villain might be seeking power because she believes it is her "divine birthright" and she has a destiny to rule over mortals as their benevolent goddess, while another feels greater power can finally rid the world of super-powered beings altogether, preventing anyone else from losing their family in the crossfire of a superhuman conflict like he did; both are power-hungry, but for very different reasons.

ENTITLEMENT

Entitled villains feel they *deserve* whatever motivates them, whether it is power, vengeance, or even universal annihilation! Whatever it is, it is their due, and they will have it! Anyone attempting to stand between entitled antagonists and their goals is the real villain in their eyes. Some may even try to reason with the heroes and show them the truth of this, but others know they cannot explain or make them understand; they can only get them out of their way. They're entitled to it, after all.

While a villain's sense of entitlement is most often sheer arrogance, in some cases a foe may truly be entitled to whatever it is he is after! The spoiled and undisciplined heir to an ancient power may have a right to it, just as one can argue everyone has a right to safety from harm and persecution. That does not mean, however, it is a good idea to let the villain have it! This may put the heroes in the position of denying someone their rightful due for the greater good.

THREE-DIMENSIONAL VILLAINY

Giving some thought to a villain's role, motivation, and justifications can add considerable depth to otherwise stereotyped or limited characters. Sometimes all you need to liven up an old villain concept or archetype is to change around one of those elements normally associated with them, substituting something fresh and new. For example, the Overlord archetype is often motivated by a desire for control or power, justified by nobility or pride. What about an Overlord villain who is seeking the thrills and challenge of brinksmanship against worthy adversaries, or one who *must* conquer in order to continue to exist, being an avatar of a god or spirit of war?

Even archetypal villains can have some amount of character and personality to them. Consider a villain's motives when you are creating an adventure and chances are you will come up with a better story than simply having a bad guy doing bad things for their own sake. Take a look at the **In-Depth Villains** section at the end of this chapter for more ideas.

NOBILITY

Noble villains certainly do not consider themselves "villains" at all; indeed, they do what they consider right and just, with such dedication they will not be swayed, even if the rest of the world decides they are wrong and labels them "evil" because of it.

Although they are almost admirable, villains justifying their actions as "noble" are really driven by ego: the idea that they and only they can possibly do what needs to be done for the good of the world (or at least the good of those the villain thinks to benefit). Some have martyr complexes, considering themselves persecuted and willing to sacrifice for "the greater good" (although it is not always *self*-sacrifice). Others have a true messiah complex and believe they have been "chosen" (by destiny or divine providence) to change the world.

> **"PAIN? PAIN IS LIKE LOVE, LIKE COMPASSION! IT IS A THING ONLY FOR LESSER MEN. WHAT IS PAIN TO DOOM?"**
>
> **- DR. DOOM, FANTASTIC FOUR #5**

There are even those noble foes who seem almost heroic: they claim they do not want to oppose the law and the heroes upholding it, but circumstances give them no choice. They will fight for what they believe, regardless of the cost. Of course, it is the heroes' job to prove there is *always* a choice, and the very assumption that they "must do what must be done" is often the antagonist's ego speaking, a blind spot they cannot easily overcome.

PRIDE

They say "pride goeth before a fall," and this is certainly true in the world of supervillainy. Whatever their other justifications, a great many adversaries are driven by the simple motivation of pride. They have something to prove to the whole world because they were rejected or abused. They want revenge to soothe a wounded ego, or they have to prove they are the better of some rival, usually a hero who gets all of the accolades and attention of an adoring public.

Proud villains come with sizeable egos to match and a tendency to pontificate and show off. They are some of the easiest to get talking about their successes and their brilliant plans, and to anger with taunts and disdain. About the worst thing you can do to a proud villain is ignore him, perhaps even worse than denigrating his accomplishments.

REBELLION

In every society there are those who cannot, or will not, follow the rules. "I will not do as I am told," they say. Like Lucifer's fall from grace, they feel it is better to rule as a free outsider than it is to conform. They reject society's laws and become a law unto themselves, resisting any attempt to stop or restrain them.

Some rebels are looking to reform the system in some way. They defy what they see as unfair or unjust laws, hoping to demonstrate to others and inspire them to do the same. They don't reject the concept of following rules altogether, but often go too far to make their point. Examples include the mad scientist "oppressed" by regulations on research and experimentation in dangerous areas, or the fanatic opposed to a particular law of the land, seeking to advance a political cause.

Other rebels are true anarchists, obeying no law but their own. They might be philosophically devoted to the ideals of anarchy and self-determination, or so egotistical as to place themselves "above" or "beyond" the laws of lesser beings.

SURVIVAL

Remember this phrase: "Does the lion concern himself with the fate of his prey?" It is one you will get a lot of use out of when it comes to foes who justify their actions as part of their right to survive. Many villains have powers or unusual needs requiring them to prey upon others: vampires must feed on human blood, fear-demons feast on terror, radioactive mutants must consume nuclear waste products, zombies eat brains, and so forth. To the bad guys' view, they are just doing what comes naturally to them, no different than ordinary humans killing animals or plants to feed and clothe themselves.

Of course, this justification is often just that, an excuse for the villain doing what he *wants* to do. Still, there are cases where it is valid, and a villain's survival means death and destruction to others. Imagine the foe who is a living black hole, consuming matter in an annihilating vortex. Without the constant stream of matter, the villain will collapse into himself, so he must "feed," even if it devastates the city, world, or the whole universe! A vampire

might be able to feed on packaged blood, or take minute amounts without killing a victim, but perhaps not.

Survival is a potent justification, especially if it rings true, since defeating the villain may be the same as sentencing him to death—a choice some heroes are reluctant to make.

MADNESS

This one is listed outside the alphabetical order because it is less a reason for the villain's deeds and more anti-reason... literally! Sometimes there's *no* justification for what a villain does; it is sheer madness. Many villains are insane and any justifications they offer for their actions are just as crazy. Of course, the villain is not necessarily aware of this! Insane foes often *think* they are perfectly justified, but it is inevitably all in their fevered imaginations. So a crazed villain might truly believe he is a noble hero trying to save the world from alien invaders, only he is really a raving paranoid who sees "invaders" everywhere.

Some lunatic villains do not intend harm, but also cannot understand that their "games" or "hobbies" are dangerous, or that real people are being hurt. A madcap toymaker who believes the world is nothing more than a giant funhouse, for example, is likely to treat people as if they were dolls or action figures. A crazy dog-lover might go to great lengths to rescue a poor Pomeranian while letting the pooch's owner be hit by a bus (or, worse yet, punishing said owner for "enslaving" so noble a canine)!

Other foes embrace their madness with a devil-may-care "why not?" attitude toward their actions. True sociopaths or psychopaths, they cannot feel any sympathy or concern for others, seeing them as merely playthings or obstacles. They often want to demonstrate that madness is the only "sane" reaction to an ultimately random and meaningless existence, that chaos and insanity are the true nature of things.

CHANGES OF HEART

Once in a great while villains see the error of their ways, seriously reevaluate their whole reason for being and reconsider, perhaps amending or changing previously villainous behavior. Villains may have changes of heart and find it within themselves to reform, redress the wrongs they have committed and, perhaps ultimately, redeem themselves.

Sometimes this change of heart truly means removing the villain from the series as a potential threat, and it can be a significant victory for the good guys. Having a long-time villain turn over a new leaf is a good way of retiring the character while also giving the players a sense of change and development in the series and a feeling that their heroes really are making a difference.

In some stories, a villain's change of heart comes quite quickly. This is most often the case with conflicted, misguided, or otherwise noble antagonists doing the wrong things for the right reasons. Realizing what they have been doing, these villains change their minds just in time to not throw the fatal switch, or to attempt to disarm the doomsday device themselves. It is a way of writing out a short-term bad guy only intended to show up for a story or two. By the end of the adventure, the villain has made the ultimate sacrifice and is no more.

Other times, a supervillain's attempt to reform fails to "take." Some bad guys tried to walk the straight and narrow, but found it too difficult and fell back into their old ways. Others seem to reform, but later reveal it was all a ruse to gain the trust of the heroes and the public as part of their latest schemes. Having a bad guy switch sides for a time before returning to villainy can be an interesting way for the heroes to get to know their enemy, and one more thing for them to hold against him when he finally shows his true colors. Don't do it too often, lest the players stop trusting *anyone*, but used sparingly, it can be an effective plot development.

VILLAIN TACTICS

Sooner or later, even the subtlest mastermind will come into direct confrontation with the heroes, while other villains practically live to fight. Super-foes use a variety of tactics, depending on their abilities, goals, and personal styles. From a gamemastering perspective, villainous tactics help to make for challenging encounters for the heroes (and the players) without being so overwhelming as to be completely unfair (and un-fun).

This section looks at some tactics used by supervillains (including one-on-one combat and one villain versus a team of heroes), sinister plans to give the bad guys an advantage, and escape plans for when things start to go badly. It also discusses the pacing of hero versus villain combats and the constructive and creative use of complications to help make such conflicts exciting and fun without being either too easy or overwhelming.

VILLAINS IN COMBAT

Generally speaking, villains follow the same combat rules as all characters in *Mutants & Masterminds,* as detailed in the *M&M Hero's Handbook*. Their combat capabilities are defined by their traits, including whatever powers and advantages they possess. The main differences between villains and heroes are that villains (like all non-player characters) do not have hero points. Any "luck" a villain may have is due to instances of complications created by the GM. The he-

roes also often outnumber villains; unless a group of bad guys band together, the villain is typically a singular character, sometimes assisted by various minions.

COMBAT ACTIONS AND MODIFIERS

What combat actions a villain chooses from round to round depends greatly on the style and abilities of the villain; some are extremely aggressive, always on the attack and using actions such as charge and maneuvers like all-out attack and power attack, perhaps combined with attempts to demoralize or startle opponents with Intimidation. Other foes fight more conservatively, using normal attacks, occasionally balanced with block or defend actions, whereas villains simply trying to escape from the heroes might go entirely defensive, using move and defend to focus on avoiding attacks long enough to make their getaway.

SINGULAR VILLAINS

Quite often, it is one bad guy versus a team of heroes, since *M&M* is a group-oriented game. Singular supervillains can be more powerful than the good guys (sometimes quite a bit more powerful), but they also suffer from certain limitations in game terms, and Gamemasters may wish to use different tactics when setting up a confrontation between one villain and a whole group of heroes.

ACTION LIMITS

Perhaps the biggest limitation faced by one villain fighting a group of heroes is the villain only gets one set of actions (standard, move, and free) per round, while the heroes each get a set, allowing them to make many more attacks and giving them more tactical options than their opponent. Some of the following maneuvers and ideas discuss counteracting this effect using area attacks and limiting how much the heroes can gang up on their opponent.

One possibility is to give your solo villains more actions; provide the villain with powers that are free actions or reactions, essentially "triggering" certain responses from the villain when the heroes act. This allows you to scale the villain's responsiveness to the heroes. An example is a counterattack; perhaps the villain has a reactive energy field and when a hero attempts to grab the villain, a surge of power rushes back at the attacker. This is basically a Reaction Damage effect. You can do similar things with Reaction level defensive or even movement effects that allow the villain to "act" without taking an action. Consider a villain who turns Insubstantial or Teleports as a Reaction to being grabbed or targeted, for example.

AREA EFFECTS

One way villains can deal with many heroes at once is by using area effects to hit all of them at the same time! This is particularly effective with Close Range Burst Areas, since they fill the space all around the user, sure to catch any

heroes closing or engaged in close combat. Such an attack may encourage heroes to keep their distance and not group together too closely, giving the villain some breathing space.

Villains with minions rarely concern themselves with their underlings' fates when it comes to making area attacks that can hit the heroes. On occasions when it matters, the villain might have the Selective extra to exclude the minions, or use abilities to which the minions are immune, such as biological (Fortitude) attacks that do not affect robots or the undead, for example.

Even if a villain does not normally have an area attack, you can provide one using extra effort for a power stunt: channeling electricity through metal flooring or a puddle of water, creating a powerful burst of flame in all directions, and so forth. You can counteract the fatigue the villain would normally suffer as a complication for the heroes, or leave it to give the heroes a slight edge once they rebound from the bad guy's surprise attack!

COUNTERING THE VILLAIN

A group of heroes might make liberal use of the rules for **Countering Effects** (see the *M&M Hero's Handbook*, page 95) having one member of the team focus on countering everything the villain does, while the rest of the team goes on the offensive. If the heroes have the means to pull it off, this can become a frustrating game of waiting for the countering hero to fail a roll so the villain can actually do something before the rest of the heroes knock him into next week.

Fortunately, the GM is the one who decides if a particular power can counter another. If the heroes try to counter *everything* the villain does, try switching tactics. For example, a super-strong water-controller, confronted with a flame-using hero turning his water blasts to steam, might simply grab something big and heavy to hit the hero with! This is one reason why it is a good idea for solo villains to have some flexibility and options when it comes to attacks, so one hero won't be easily able to counter them all.

Another way of dealing with this problem is having some minions provide a distraction for the countering hero. (Perhaps the villain can summon some up, if there aren't already some there.) Alternately, a power stunt can provide a novel attack or effect that is more difficult for the heroes to counter. Again, you can counteract the fatigue the villain would normally suffer from the extra effort as a complication for the heroes. Similarly, you can just impose a complication to have the villain's opposed countering check break through the hero's defense this time around.

SUSTAINED EFFECTS

A particularly effective tactic is to have one hero stun the villain so he cannot sustain defensive powers, then have all the other heroes gang up and hit their foe with everything they've got. It's so effective, in fact, you might want to take it into account in your villain designs.

Rather than having the villain's defense tied up in a single sustained power, consider "layering" defenses, such as a combination of Protection and Force Field, so if the villain loses the latter, the drop in Toughness won't be as massive.

If all else fails, and the heroes take down the villain's defenses too quickly, you can always fall back on complications. Hand the player(s) responsible a hero point, say "nice try," and just have the villain knocked back into a building or smashed spectacularly through a wall, slightly shaken, but otherwise unharmed and ready to rejoin the fray. This is best reserved to avoid real game-spoilers that turn your climatic encounter into anti-climax, however.

VILLAINOUS MINIONS

Solo villains may have the assistance of various minions: hired goons, loyal followers, summoned creatures, robot legions, and so forth. Minions can go a long way toward evening the odds between a hero team and a singular villain, since they can run interference for the villain and give the heroes other things requiring their actions.

Minions can even turn the tables on heroes to a degree, using some of the same "ganging up" tactics heroes might use on solo villains. In particular, large groups of minions often try to grab heroes, or make team attacks (see the *M&M Hero's Handbook*, page 199) to overcome their defenses.

Because they are relatively "fragile," you can make minions more formidable in terms of power level or more numerous than you might otherwise. At fairly evenly matched levels, each hero can expect to eliminate a minion every other round, perhaps more. With lower-level minions, the rate goes up, and things like area attacks and the Takedown advantage can increase it even more, dealing with multiple minions each round. It would not be unreasonable to challenge a group of PL 10 heroes with three to four times their number in PL 5 minions.

ADVANTAGES AND MINIONS

Certain advantages can enhance a villain's use of minions. The Sacrifice extra for Summon allows a villain to use summoned minions as "fall guys," essentially letting one of them take the brunt of an attack rather than the villain. This counts as a complication for the heroes and awards the successful attacker a hero point along with a "nice try, but..." from the GM. Indeed, the extra is so useful, you may wish to allow a version of it as an advantage that works in conjunction with the Minions advantage.

Leadership, on the other hand, is largely useless to villains, since it affects the spending of hero points, which they don't have. You might want to require it for a villain able to remove conditions from minions as a complication, but it isn't really required, since you can simply do so as a complication anyway.

Lastly, minions themselves can benefit from having various advantages. In particular the Teamwork advantage

OPTIONAL MINION RULES

In order to better duplicate how villainous underlings tend to work in the comics, you may wish to consider some or all of the following optional rules for minions in your *M&M* game. Except as noted otherwise, these options do *not* cost the villains any power points; they are simply how the rules apply to them. If you wish, you can make some aspects of these options into new advantages, allowing for more of a pick-and-choose menu:

- **Minions as Cover:** If a villain has even one of his minions between him and a hero, the villain is considered to have complete cover against that hero, meaning the hero cannot attack the villain, except with an Indirect or Ricochet attack. Alternately, minions might grant a lesser degree of cover, such as total or partial, making attacks possible with a circumstance penalty.
- **Opportunity Attacks:** Attempting to bypass a minion by moving around it gives the minion an immediate attack against the hero. The minion gets to make an attack as a reaction, not taking up any of the minion's other actions for the round.

The main thrust of these options is to encourage heroes to deal with a villain's minions before going after their boss, allowing the minions to run interference and challenge the good guys while the villain finishes calibrating the doomsday weapon, sets up the deathtrap, or simply flees down the escape tunnel.

is useful for cannon fodder, since they usually work with others. It can reflect particularly well-trained or coordinated minions.

VILLAINS AND COMPLICATIONS

Complications are a vital game mechanic when it comes to dealing with villains in *M&M*. Only the player characters have and use hero points, which are intended as a special resource for the players to influence the outcome of the game beyond just the random roll of the die.

Gamemaster-controlled characters do not have hero points or some equivalent. Why not? Well, largely because these characters can already have whatever traits the GM sees fit to give them. A villain can easily be PL 20 or more, even Power Level X with effectively infinite power! Compared to that, what are a few hero points? Besides, the flow of an *M&M* adventure is based on the idea that the harder it gets for the heroes, the greater their determination and chances of succeeding.

Complications function as the "villain points" of the game, with the caveat that whenever the Gamemaster falls back on this option to make things more challenging for the players, or to brush off the result of a particular die roll for the good of the story, the players (and their heroes) benefit. You can think of it like this: villains in *M&M* effectively all draw from an *infinite* pool of "villain points," but whenever they do so, the heroes also *gain* hero points! Thus the GM wants to measure the pace of "villain point" spending (use of Complications) to fit the progress of the story and the game.

THE LUCK ADVANTAGE

The Luck advantage is a bit problematic where villains are concerned, since it grants one of the prime benefits of hero points. Since villains do not have or use hero points, you can interpret this advantage to only apply to player characters, which is its primary intent. Giving Luck to villains circumvents the way the hero point system of the game is intended to work, and should be limited to *at most* half the power level of the *series* (not the villain!) in ranks, usually less. By doing so, you're essentially giving the villain "free" Complications for which the players do not earn hero points, which can make them understandably disappointed. In general, you're better off reserving luck solely for the heroes.

PLAYER CHARACTER VILLAINS

The only exception to the previous guidelines is when the player characters *are* villains! In this case, the GM may want to assign the players "villain points" (or whatever you'd like to call them) that serve the same role in the game as hero points, with Complications awarding the players more of them as things progress.

PICKING YOUR BATTLES

One way villains try and get the upper hand is by choosing where and when they will fight. Not all bad guys get this luxury, especially when the heroes catch them red-handed in the midst of committing their latest crime! Some, however, can plan for their next encounter with their foes and ensure they are prepared and able to fight on their own turf, and their own terms.

An application of this principle is for the GM to set up different places for the villains to battle heroes, with the bad guys having the advantage of knowing the terrain and preparing for the fight accordingly. There might be various traps awaiting the good guys, along with the villain's minions. A foe can choose a battleground that specifically limits opponents, taking advantage of their known flaws and complications. For example, a villain dealing with a hero with a weakness to non-urban environments might seek out a lair far from the city, just as a villain fighting an opponent with magnetic powers could try to ensure the surroundings are relatively free of metal to manipulate.

If the setting for the fight proves a true complication for a hero, award the player a hero point. However, if the villain is merely taking advantage of a known power flaw, you do not have to give the player anything; the "payoff" is in the form of the reduced cost for the flawed power.

CREATING WEAKNESSES

One way villains exploit weaknesses is to *create* them! That is, the villain specifically does something aimed at taking the heroes out of the game, or at least ensuring they will be easier to deal with later on. These villain-created weaknesses are generally complications for the heroes to overcome, with the assistance of the hero points they earn for having the complication put in their path in the first place.

Examples of creating weaknesses include kidnapping friends and loved ones for use as bargaining chips; weakening, nullifying, or altering the heroes' powers in some fashion; turning the public or the authorities (or both) against the heroes with a frame-up or false accusations; arranging a fail-safe like exposing the heroes to a toxin or nanotechnology usable to threaten them later on; even strange things like switching the heroes' powers or minds to disorient them for when the villain makes his move!

ESCAPE PLANS

When the heroes gain the upper hand, the smart villain has an escape plan handy to live to fight another day. Escape plans are also important for the intermediate parts of a plot (such as stealing necessary components) or any other encounter where the villain is not yet ready to simply crush or eliminate the heroes and must retreat to regroup and continue working (and to further the adventure).

ESCAPE ROUTE

The simplest escape plan is some route planned out in advance to get away from the scene, anything from a secret or hidden passage to a vehicle or "escape-pod" to take the villain away faster than the heroes can easily follow.

An escape route is most effective when combined with some other type of escape plan, such as a distraction to keep the heroes from following right away or a fake-out to confuse their pursuit. For example, an escape tunnel might be mined with explosives to collapse after the villain flees, while a fleeing vehicle might have several drone duplicates to force the heroes to choose which one(s) to pursue.

DISTRACTION

It is easier for the villain to make a quick getaway if the heroes have more important things to do than get in the way. Some distractions are planned, such as threatening hostages or innocent people with hidden explosives ("You can either stop me or save them, heroes, your choice!"), or placing someone in a deathtrap.

Other distractions are more makeshift, including classics such as blasting away a building's support structure, setting a fire, or causing some other minor disaster to occupy the heroes with rescuing innocent people while the villain gets away. Minions and even lieutenants make good distractions, provided they are loyal enough to play the part, knowing their boss is making a break for it. So is trig-

WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS, CHEAT!

So, it may well happen that, no matter how well you plan for an encounter, or what brilliant tactics you give your villain, a poor die roll or a cunning move on the part of the players threatens to undo it all and end the climatic encounter of the adventure in a single round. There are instances when the climax of your story is about to turn to *anti*-climax, where it is perfectly reasonable and fair for you to "cheat."

Now, by cheating, we mean making use of resources at your disposal such as complications, which basically let you shrug off any setback the villain encounters, or impose any condition you like, in exchange for offering the players a hero point. This capability is not intended to rob players of their justly earned victories, just to smooth out the sometimes-fickle nature of the die and unforeseen twists, given that the Gamemaster is just one person, outnumbered (and sometimes out-maneuvered) by the players.

So rolling a "1" for your villain's first Toughness check probably justifies awarding the attacking player a hero point and saying the attack does nothing more than the minimum. On the other hand, if the players come up with a truly effective and original plan or tactic, it's probably best to let them succeed, or at least give them a fair chance. But they should win on their own merits, rather than just the immediate luck of the draw.

gering a doomsday device or other threat, even when the villain's plan can no longer succeed. While the heroes are dealing with it, the villain can make good his escape.

FAKE-OUT

The heroes *appear* to win, but it turns out the villain is not really who or what they thought. Their defeated foe might turn out to be a robot, android, clone, shapeshifter, or other proxy for real villain, who is safely hidden away (although perhaps capable of taunting the heroes a bit through the proxy before signing-off). A lieutenant or flunky could be dressed-up as the villain, either to provide a distraction or as the real bad guy behind it all (the true villain was never involved). A villain might even set-up an innocent victim in a duplicate costume or other camouflage to trick the heroes into unleashing their full powers on the poor, defenseless soul.

EXTORTION

Backed into a corner, the bad guy threatens the heroes or offers them something they want in exchange for freedom. Threats might include knowledge of the hero's secret identity, loved ones, or some dark secret, while bargaining chips include antidotes, vital clues the heroes want ("I can tell you where to find your father..."), the return of valuable items, and so forth.

The trick with this approach is that the heroes might not be willing to bargain, or may try to call the villain's bluff (if indeed he is bluffing). This can lead to a tricky situation; see **What If the Villain Can't Escape?** in the following section.

HOSTAGE

Similar to **Extortion**, the cornered bad guy grabs or makes use of an existing hostage as a ticket to freedom, threatening to harm or kill the hostage if the heroes do not do as they are told. Sometimes, a hostage turns out to be more capable than the villain expected, leading to a capture, or even a mysterious death (see the following), which the hostage narrowly escapes. In others, the heroes manage to rescue the hostage and capture the villain.

As with extortion, there is a chance the heroes will choose not to bargain with a villain holding hostages or will otherwise try and rescue them and capture the kidnapper. If so, you'll either need to improvise or invoke a Complication to ensure the bad guy's escape.

TELEPORT

The most foolproof escape is for the villain to simply vanish into thin air, using a power like Teleport or Dimensional Travel. This might be an innate power (making the villain quite difficult to capture in the first place) or part of some fail-safe: a device, part of a vehicle or lair, or even an ability of a minion or lieutenant charged with rescuing the boss from certain capture. For example, some villain teams have a "transporter" able to provide members, or at least the leader, with a quick escape.

Even a method as sure-fire as teleporting has its countermeasures, of course. Some heroes may be capable of nullifying the villain's power or even countering the teleport. Keep in mind that characters can often counter as a power stunt, although instant countering is generally only available for powers used offensively against the character.

MYSTERIOUS DEATH

The ultimate "escape" is when a villain apparently *dies* during a conflict, but in such a way that no body is (or can be) found. The classic example is a massive explosion that destroys the villain's lair or escape vehicle, with no corpse found among the wreckage. Is the villain truly dead, or has he escaped somehow? Perhaps the heroes' foe was never truly there to begin with!

Generally speaking, every villain in a four-color style *M&M* game effectively has Immortality, in that "dead" villains can return any time the Gamemaster wishes. In fact, you should really only bother to assign an Immortality effect to villains capable of returning from death within the context of the same adventure (or even the same *encounter*). Anything longer than that is better handled as a plot device. Either every villain can do it as the story demands, or only certain specific ones can. In either case, it is purely at the GM's discretion.

WHY THE VILLAIN LOSES

There is a famous Internet document called the "Evil Overlord List" (also known as "If I Were An Evil Overlord"), which is essentially a long collection of "to-do" reminders of all the dumb things fictional villains either do or allow, which permit the heroes to eventually defeat them. Examples include: "I will never say, 'I am invincible,' because no one is" and "No matter how much I desire vengeance, I'll never issue the order 'Leave him! He's mine!'" The list—and any list like it—is very tongue-in-cheek, and it can help to point out some of the clichés of heroic and comic book fiction. However, keep in mind that in a great many *M&M* series you do *not* want to avoid them! On the contrary, in a four-color or Silver Age style game, you want to *use* them as much as possible.

It is often all too easy to give villains airtight schemes and such realistic expectations and reactions that the heroes simply don't stand a chance. After all, realistically speaking, a truly good evil scheme would not even become *known* to the heroes until it was far too late for anyone to do anything about it. The first warning they would get about the villain's plan to destroy the world would be the Earth cracking in half! While it can sometimes be fun to confront the heroes with a *fait accompli* by a villain, such as having them wake up to find the world transformed into their enemy's personal empire, it only works as a superhero story if they can then do something about it.

Ultimately, that is why villains lose: they're flawed, and they slip up, giving the heroes a chance to take action. Once that happens, it's just a matter of time, since true heroes are not going to give up until they've succeeded. The villain can put obstacles in their way, but the heroes will fight on and, eventually, prevail. Even if it seems the bad guys have won the day, there will be another day, and another after that.

> **"I'M NOT A REPUBLIC SERIAL VILLAIN, DAN. DO YOU SERIOUSLY THINK I WOULD EXPLAIN MY MASTERSTROKE TO YOU IF THERE WERE EVEN THE SLIGHTEST POSSIBILITY YOU COULD AFFECT THE OUTCOME?"**
>
> **- OZYMANDIAS, WATCHMEN**

So, unless you are specifically running a series intended to turn the comic book standards on their heads and give players opportunities to make post-ironic comments about how dumb they are in the first place, you're probably better off having your villains emulate the Evil Overlords of comics, films, and pulp novels rather than trying to have them improve on long-standing traditions of evil. On the other hand, if you *are* running a more realistic, postmodern game, then feel free to have a villain who captures the heroes decide to just shoot them in the back of the head, mob execution style. Just be sure to tell the players it's a possibility they can expect up-front, or you can end up with some serious clashes in styles!

WHAT IF THE VILLAIN WINS?

In comic book stories, it is generally assumed the villain is not going to win: the world won't be destroyed, or conquered, or sold to aliens. If any of those things happen, they're temporary and the heroes find some way to reverse them. They pull out a desperate save at the last possible second and, even if a hero has to make the ultimate sacrifice, they ensure the evil scheme is thwarted.

While a roleplaying game can have the same sort of built-in assumption, for some the idea that a heroic win is a sure thing can ruin their enjoyment of the story, so for many groups the question must be asked: what happens if the villain wins?

The likelihood of an evil victory depends heavily on how the GM sets things up, particularly whether or not the heroes have any second (or third) chances. Hero points and the system of handing out more of them as the complications pile up for the good guys are intended to help prevent heroic losses due to simple poor die-rolling. They allow the players to have an ace in the hole for that critical check. Still, hero points are a limited resource, and even they do not always ensure success.

So, barring the intervention of some *deus ex machina*, such as NPC heroes swooping in to save the day, there has to exist *some* possibility of the bad guys winning. If this happens, let the chips fall where they may, and have events unfold according to the actions of the characters and the momentum of the plot. If the villain's doomsday weapon isn't stopped in time, then the world may suffer greatly, although heroic action could still prevent its complete destruction. Similarly, if the villain's scheme for world conquest is successful, the heroes might end up prisoners or outlaws on the run from the new ruler of the Earth! A villainous victory can entirely change the nature of an *M&M* series.

The next question is, how long will it last? In other words, is the change to the series permanent, or can the heroes potentially undo what the villain has done? This is where you can offer the players a second chance and a way to get the series back on track, if you and they prefer the old style to the new one. If everybody is having a blast dealing with a post-apocalyptic world or playing the last superheroes, on the run from a world-controlling mastermind, then run with it!

On the other hand, if the novelty begins to wear off, it might be time to introduce a "reset" option the players can use. Fortunately, most comic book universes are full of time travel, reality manipulation, magic, and other means of fixing just about anything short of the end of all existence (and maybe even that at times).

WHAT IF THE VILLAIN CAN'T ESCAPE?

The first question to ask yourself in this situation is: does the villain really *need* to escape? If it is the middle of the story and the answer is "yes," then this is what complications were made for. Give the players a hero point they can use for the final confrontation with the bad guy and arrange things so the escape is a *fait accompli*.

If you absolutely *cannot* come up with a plausible way for it to happen (given all the suggestions in the **Escape Plans** section), you can let the heroes capture the villain and have the escape occur later "off-panel" after they have turned things over to the authorities. The good guys get the somewhat sheepish call from the police commissioner or warden, telling them their foe has escaped custody and is doubtlessly up to no good again.

If it is the end of the adventure, and the heroes have got the villain dead to rights, there's little reason not to let them enjoy their victory, unless the villain is one who refuses to be captured alive (in which case, trigger the self-destruct and give their foe a mysterious death instead). Otherwise, it's a suitable reward for the good guys to capture the villain and have the last word.

Just as in the middle of a story, you can later have the captured villain escape custody. You can also make the villain's eventual trial and sentencing a part of the series, with the heroes called upon to testify and to keep an eye out for anything the defendant might try, wondering all the while what the villain has up his sleeve.

If the heroes simply want to execute the defeated villain themselves (as may well be the case in some settings), you can either let them or have the villain go with the self-destruct approach mentioned previously. In either case, the villain can potentially stage a miraculous resurrection, or perhaps someone else takes up the villain's mantle. Otherwise, in a series where the heroes act as judge, jury, and executioner, you have to content yourself with the fact that you're going to lose some bad guys from time to time.

IN-DEPTH VILLAINS

Some comic book villains are just flashes-in-the-pan, one-time foes destined to never appear again, or at least not to play a major role in your series as a whole. Others are just obstacles, little more than bundles of powers with a name and a theme attached to them to menace the heroes during adventures and provide them with a bit of a challenge.

Then there are those bad guys who seem to take on a life of their own, becoming the villains the heroes swear to bring to justice, the ones the players truly love to hate. Creating these iconic foes for your *M&M* series involves just a few easy to remember elements, the four "I's": interaction, information, integration, and infrequency. If you follow these steps, you will soon have villains in your series every bit as intriguing and compelling as the heroes, and your players will want them to show up over and over just so their heroes can get another shot at them!

INTERACTION

The first element to in-depth villainy is interaction, meaning the heroes need to have and develop a *relationship* of some sort with the villain beyond just do-gooder versus law-breaker. It is through interaction that the players get to know their foes and build a history with them. Interaction primarily means roleplaying, and so is fairly freeform. Players can make use of interaction skills, but the primary element is what the characters say to each other, rather than who has the higher skill check result.

In order for this interaction to take place, you need to provide the players with opportunities to talk to the villain. This can include the classic banter during combat or when the bad guy has the heroes trapped and is expounding on his plans for world conquest, but consider other avenues of interaction to help bring your villains to life.

If your villain has a secret identity or a legitimate "cover" (such as a "humble businessman" or a "noted philanthropist"), have the heroes encounter that persona, perhaps in their own secret identities. This lets them in on another side of the villain. If the characters come to trust the public persona, then the shock of discovering the truth is that much more potent.

Perhaps there are some "neutral" venues in your setting, places where members of the super-powered set can meet on equal terms, regardless of which side of the law they operate on. If so, then it's a great opportunity for the heroes to interact with some of their foes in a social setting. Imagine playing chess with Overshadow or discussing Greek Stoicism with Talos outside of the "game" of hero versus villain. Interesting new facets of the characters' personalities can emerge.

Villains might also seek out heroes in order to interact with them. The relationship between enemies can be complex, and often close to a friendship or even romance. A foe might feel the hero is a worthy adversary and the only one able to appreciate the villain's genius, or capable of grasping certain truths. Some villains become romantically obsessed with their heroic opponents, and vice versa, adding an element of flirtatious danger to the relationship.

INFORMATION

A goal of interaction is to convey *information* about the villain to the heroes (and therefore to the players). The better they know the details of a character's background, motives, habits, and so forth, the more the players come to view the antagonist as an individual and not just a faceless foe for their heroes to overcome.

A lot of this information can come in the form of "tags," particular elements about the villain that make him or her unique. For example, a master villain might have a habit of capturing and brainwashing beautiful female superhumans to serve as a kind of "hench-girl harem." This could be because the villain is misogynistic or manipulative, or because he is lonely and looking for a mate worthy of him (or

some combination thereof). Another bad guy might target journalists. Initially, the heroes don't know why, but they learn the villain is actually a washed-up television personality who feels his career was ruined by the paparazzi.

You can also impart information to the players as their heroes investigate a new villain or series of crimes. The briefing with the police chief or the government official can impart some background. You can even print up a mock "dossier" on the villain as a handout for the players to read and learn the basics. However, it can be even more effective if the heroes turn up the information themselves while investigating. Allow them to crack the secret of the villain's identity and piece together the motive for a series of apparently unrelated crimes, and they're more likely to remember it all because it is part of their accomplishments.

Keep in mind that, unlike comic book readers, RPG players generally do not get an "omniscient" view of a villain's thoughts and actions. They only know what their heroes have experienced, typically by interacting with the villain directly.

INTEGRATION

The process of *integration* involves making a villain a part of your overall setting and of the heroes' lives, rather than just a random element or a passing problem, quickly forgotten. Integration puts interaction and information into a context, relating it to the rest of the world and the characters in it.

INTEGRATION WITH THE SETTING

What is the villain's relationship with the world beyond just being a "villain"? Everybody comes from somewhere, and most characters have lives from before they embarked on criminal careers. Consider a villain's ties with your setting and how they might come into play, particularly how the players might learn about them during a game (providing **Information**, previously).

For example, imagine a Crime Lord who masquerades as a wealthy and beloved philanthropist with a long history of civic responsibility and charity. Although the heroes know him as a dastardly and ruthless foe, the rest of the world thinks quite highly of him. There's no escaping his presence for the heroes in the city—not when there are parks, streets, and municipal projects named after him, news stories of his latest works, photos in the society pages, and so forth. The extensive integration of the Crime Lord's innocent façade is a powerful motivation for the heroes to finally expose him as the fraud he is.

You can connect villains with the themes and background of the setting. In a modern conspiracy series a villain could be part of the conspiracy, or even the founder of it. Conversely, the villain might also be an enemy of the conspiracy, with different goals and motives than the heroes, but a potential ally on occasion. If the series is about the next stage of human evolution, the adversary could be like one of the heroes gone bad, or someone opposed to the idea of *Homo sapiens* becoming obsolete. Just pick a thematic element and look for a way to integrate it with the villain's background.

INTEGRATION WITH THE HEROES

Once you have established connections with the setting, consider how to integrate the villain into the heroes' lives as more than just an opponent.

You can do this from the very start by adding some hooks to the enemy's background, establishing connections with the heroes. Consider a villain who shares a common origin with the heroes. If one or more of the good guys gained their powers in an accident, perhaps a villain or villains acquired powers at the same time.

What about a villain who *created* one or more of the heroes? A mad scientist might have built an android, robot, or cyborg, or genetically modified a test subject or clone. A sinister mystic could have conjured a demon, elemental, or fey creature, perhaps resulting in a bonding with an otherwise ordinary human. Plus there's the more mundane possibility of a villain being a hero's parent, stepparent, or other relative.

Likewise, perhaps one of the heroes created the villain in some fashion. A scientist hero's attempts at creating new life or artificial intelligence could go wrong, spawning a powerful new foe. Perhaps a mystic's past failure results in a demon or other occult creature entering the world to menace the innocent. Such ties give the heroes a strong sense of responsibility regarding the villain's actions.

Does the bad guy have a supporting cast? Sometimes recurring henchmen and lieutenants can provide more of a connection for the heroes and signal the villain's involvement by showing up. An estranged family member can become part of the heroes' supporting cast, such as when a member of the team is dating a villain's daughter, or the hero's mentor is also the villain's parent.

INFREQUENCY

The last element to make a villain an interesting and desired part of the series is *infrequency;* the opponent needs to make enough return appearances to work on the elements of interaction and information, but not so many that the players get tired of seeing the bad guy over and over again and lose interest.

Take a look at your recent game sessions. If the villain has appeared recently, perhaps it is time for a break and an unrelated adventure. You can also set up intervening adventures that are part of a villain's master scheme where the prime mover operates behind the scenes. Until the last adventure, the heroes may not even know about the villain's involvement! For example, a scheme could have minions or other villains gathering elements of their master's plan, or the manipulation of several factions against each other. The main villain is involved without actually showing up in each adventure to plague the heroes.

Similarly, consider that if the heroes have only recently overcome one of the villain's major plans, it is probably a good idea to put that character on the back burner for a while and bring other villains to the forefront. Let the bad guy cool his heels in prison, or let the heroes believe that he is dead and gone before bringing him back with an even more sinister plan. You can easily rotate out a half-dozen or more regular enemies in this way, sometimes even mixing-and-matching them into temporary alliances or teams (see **Villain Teams**, following).

Lastly, once an antagonist has gotten played out, consider wrapping up that villain's story and taking him or her out of the game altogether. This can be as simple as having the heroes put the bad guy away for good or as permanent (relatively speaking) as dramatically killing the villain off, complete with proof the heroes can accept that their foe is truly gone this time. Maybe their enemy has a change of heart and seeks to reform, or finds peace on another world, leaving Earth and the criminal life behind. The evolution of the character can provide players with a sense that the series is a living and changing world, and that their heroes are having a real impact.

You don't even have to give up on the villain entirely; there's always the possibility of someone else coming along to take up the now-fallen mantle and motif. A long-lost child or heir could seek revenge on the heroes, or a new super-criminal might use an established and fearsome identity for instant recognition (as well as to confuse potential foes). You can bring a version of the villain back into the game with different motivations, changes in abilities, or new twists on the modus operandi.

VILLAIN TEAMS

While criminals are less prone to cooperating than heroes, sometimes villains find it advantageous to band together in groups and form teams. Usually, it is because their archenemies tend to work in teams, making it difficult for a solo villain who isn't powerful enough to take on an entire group of heroes at once (see **Villain Tactics**, earlier this chapter, for more on this).

This section looks at the phenomenon of villain teams: their different types, how they are formed, their goals and resources, and how to create and use them in your *Mutants & Masterminds* series.

TYPES OF VILLAIN TEAMS

Villain teams tend to come together—and stay together—for particular reasons. Super-criminals might team up when it suits their needs, or when the opportunity is put in their path, but true villain teams are comparatively rare and require some special circumstances to bring them about.

FOLLOW-THE-LEADER

The most common means of creating and organizing a group of super-powered criminals is when a single master villain wills the group into being, assembling a team of followers or lieutenants to assist her in carrying out some master plan.

Given the treacherous nature of most villains, a team leader needs considerable power and influence to keep the group together, and to bring it together in the first place—but not so much power that the master villain does not need the team at all; otherwise there would be little reason to create it! Typically, the leader is either a behind-the-scenes type who wants other villains as front-line fighters, or has some other limitation a team can circumvent.

Villain teams with singular leaders are driven by that leader's agenda, although the individual members may have goals and plans of their own (see **Sudden—But Inevitable—Betrayal** for when those plans conflict with the leader's). The leader is also the one who decides who joins the team and who is out (often by summarily executing the offender!). Some team leaders recruit villains using blackmail and other forms of leverage, appealing to their greed, or manipulating them based on a keen knowledge of their psychological quirks.

ALLIANCE

A few villain teams are run as democracies or cooperatives of a sort, with the members all having a roughly equal say in how the group is organized and run, at least ideally. The villains are all allies, typically out of a need for self-preservation and protection against hero teams, who are often far too capable of dealing with the villains individually.

Even in the most democratic and loosely organized alliances, some villains are likely to rise to positions of leadership, even if only as temporary "tactical tyrants" chosen to coordinate the team's actions in the midst of combat or some other crisis. Villain alliances that do not follow this approach end up soundly beaten by the heroes and their superior teamwork, which may or may not teach the bad guys a lesson. Of course, such opportunities to lead result in villains who do not want to give up the reins of power, either resulting in a follow-the-leader type group (at least temporarily) or a rift in the group as the would-be leader and any allies are ousted.

Unlike hero teams, which tend to focus on ideals (justice, fairness, progress, and the like), villain alliances tend to be brutally practical: protection, profit, mutual self-interest, and so forth. If the reason the criminals are cooperating goes away, odds are the alliance will crumble as well. The team may find a new purpose, or morph into one of the other types described here, but is more likely to come apart, either mutually and peacefully or—in all probability—in a big conflict.

FAMILY TIES

"Blood is thicker than water," as they say, and sometimes the bonds holding together a team of criminals are family ties, some of the strongest around. Crime may just be "the family business" or the clan could be outcasts, forced into a life outside the law by circumstance, particularly if there are laws against particular types of superhumans (mutants, mystics, etc.) or prejudice regarding them. A family of freaks with strange appearances or uncontrollable powers might choose to go on the run rather than dealing with the consequences of living in one place for any length of time.

Indeed, "family" is often used in the broadest possible sense when it comes to villain teams. The members could all belong to the same culture or species, such as an extended "family" made up entirely of mutants or alien-human hybrids, rather than being strict blood relations. They could be a religious cult, or a group of related supernatural creatures like a nest of vampires or pack of werewolves.

Family teams tend to be extremely loyal to one another, although some members of the family might feel blackmailed into staying and helping with their relations' criminal schemes simply out of duty or guilt. Family teams are also more likely to share a particular motif (see **Villain Team Motifs** later in this section). A family line that passes criminal training and behavior down across the generations qualifies as a legacy team, as described under **A Legacy of Villainy**, following.

REBELS WITH A CAUSE

A common cause can bring people together, supervillains included, and some teams form around furthering a particular cause or pursuit of a goal. This is usually something beyond the kinds of mutual-self interest that unites villain alliances, like profit or protection. Causes are often political or social including (but not limited to) political ideologies, ecology, religion, and advancing or retarding the agenda of a particular nation or social group. So, for example, a villain team might form around the idea that the western world is a threat to world peace, and only the weakening of western governments can ensure freedom for other nations. Radical eco-activists might ally to curtail pollution in the world—by force, if necessary.

Note that many, if not all, such "villain" groups do not see themselves as villains, even if some nations' laws consider them criminals. They are doing what they be-

MIXED DOUBLES

In this section, a "team" of villains generally means a group similar in size to the heroes' team, perhaps slightly larger or smaller. Sometimes villains work in *pairs* rather than as a team of three or more—this is usually either a lead villain and a loyal sidekick or lieutenant, or a true partnership between two bad guys who regularly work together.

Even more than teams, villainous pairs tend to follow a particular motif. Examples may include a pair of opposites (light and dark, heat and cold, fire and water, and so forth) or a complementary or related pair, like the Gemini twins, Punch and Judy, a King and Queen, or a *daisho* (paired Japanese swords, *katana* and *wakizashi*). The villains may just be criminal partners, but more often they share a deeper relationship, such as spouse, lover, sibling, or even parent and child.

lieve is right and necessary, in spite of the consequences (and often without regard for the rights of others). Such groups are often fanatical about their causes, although some might only be involved due to non-political connections with the group (see **Family Ties**) or because they have their own agendas, using the group to further it while it is convenient.

THE REVENGE SQUAD

Few motives are as strong as the thirst for revenge, and if there is one thing a group of unstable criminals can agree upon, it is that their mutual enemies must suffer and pay for what they have done! Villain teams are thus often organized around getting revenge on a particular target or targets, either an individual hero, a hero team, or an institution of some sort. The archenemies of individual heroes on a team might decide to band together and form an opposing team to crush their mutual foes.

"GUY NAMED OTTO OCTAVIUS WINDS UP WITH EIGHT LIMBS. WHAT ARE THE ODDS?"

- J. JONAH JAMESON, SPIDER-MAN 2

A Revenge Squad tends to be extremely focused on its mutual goal, although its members may well have their own agendas. The group can be a temporary alliance or a long-term arrangement, depending on how difficult achieving their revenge turns out to be. Some are quite informal, while others approach something like a cause-oriented group (previously).

THE VILLAIN ARMY

From time to time, a villain gets the bright idea: "There are more of us than there are heroes, so why don't we just all gang up on them?" This leads to the formation of the Villain Army, a massive collection of supervillains, usually anywhere between two and ten times the size of the average hero team of five or six heroes. Such gangs tend to be heavy on the muscle, with a lot of front-line fighters or artillery and sniper types (with range attacks), even more so than the average villain team.

Fortunately for the good guys, the Villain Army rarely manages to sneak up on them to attack *en masse*. At best, the heroes usually get some inkling of what is coming and have a shot at dealing with it, even if that means fortifying themselves inside their headquarters and preparing contingency plans for when the villains break in. They might also see it as an opportunity to call together their fellow heroes to help out (if there are any).

The Villain Army generally provides the GM with an excuse for over-the-top fight scenes featuring lots and *lots* of bad guys. One way of handling the concept without completely overwhelming the heroes is to treat the majority of the villains as minions. Even if they normally are not, in *this* circumstance they certainly qualify! Only the master villain who organized the Army and perhaps

A LEGACY OF VILLAINY

Some villain teams become more than just temporary alliances of convenience; they attain an almost legendary status, becoming institutions of a sort. This is particularly true in settings with a long history of supercriminals; why start up a completely new team of villains no one has ever heard of when instead you can revive the fearsome name and reputation of "the Masters of Villainy" or "E.V.I.L."?

Of course, such criminal legacies can cause trouble when more than one heir-apparent steps up to claim them, or when the original criminal groups who used them don't care for the newcomers who have adopted their monikers. You can easily build an adventure around a war between two or more factions of supervillains who claim to all belong to the same group!

In many cases, a legacy team of villains adopts methods and even resources similar to their predecessors; they might have similar goals, take up the previous incarnation's headquarters or equipment, perhaps even dust-off and revive some of their former schemes: "Dr. Molor's Volcano Trigger would have worked, if only he had compensated for the internal temperature variations..." and such. On the other hand, some new versions of old villain teams bear little resemblance to them apart from the name, a potential source of trouble for any old-timers who feel disrespected by such a lack of regard for the past.

If you are running an *M&M* series with a long history, especially one where the heroes follow a particular legacy (either individually or as a team), consider pitting them against a similar legacy team of villains. For an additional twist, perhaps one or two characters from the series have switched sides, a heroic legacy going over to the bad guys while a the inheritor of a villain's mantle becomes a hero!

some direct lieutenants are treated as full-fledged adversaries. This means the heroes have a good chance of thinning the villains' ranks before things get too ugly. Awarding the players extra hero points is also a good idea; they should get *at least* one just because you're using the Villain Army idea against their characters!

VILLAIN TEAM MOTIFS

In addition to the types of villain teams discussed in the previous section, many groups of super-criminals have a particular motif or theme. This is more common with villains than heroes; in the comics it is largely because heroes tend to be more individual, while villains, especially those conceived of as a group, are more interchangeable. In an RPG this works out because player characters tend to be more varied and distinctive, while a shared motif helps make a villain team more memorable for the players.

COMMON ORIGIN

All the members of the team might share a common origin: they gained their powers in the same way, or at the same time. They can have similar origins—such as villains who are all superhuman mutants or aliens—or even the *same* origin. For example, a team exposed to the same mutagenic gas in the same accident and became freaks might have a vendetta against the company that made the gas, and the "normal" world in general.

Some examples of common origins for a villain team include the following:

- The villains all gained their powers in a similar fashion, which unites them against a world that rejects or does not understand them, such as mutants, occultists, psychics, and so forth.
- The villains all belong to the same race, species, or even extended family (see the **Family Ties** type of team for more).
- The villains share an element of their background, such as all having served in the same military conflict, worked as mercenaries, or survived the same disaster.
- The villains all met and gained their powers in prison, possibly as a result of interacting with another superhuman there or some sort of accident involving super-technology, magical artifacts, or the like.
- The villains were all empowered by the same master villain to serve as his agents.
- The villains were all *created* by the same person, being artificial beings such as clones, androids, or magical constructs.
- The villains all invented their powers in various fashions. Such a team of mad inventors is almost certain to be full of competitive overblown egos.
- The villains were all empowered as a result of the actions of the same *hero*, perhaps even one of the player characters. They might be vengeful, particular if the incident left some scars, or they could even be grateful—although all bets are off if the heroes tries to stop them. Maybe they hope to gain even *more* power by defeating and using the hero in some fashion.

COMMON POWERS

Villains on a team might share certain powers in common, or have a common theme to their powers. For example, "the Weathermen" all have various weather-based powers: Air Control for one, a Lightning Blast for another, Cold Control for a third, and so on. The Factor Four have powers based on the classical four elements. The Power Corps all wear similar suits of power armor, and so forth.

COMMON STYLE

Lastly, a villain team may share a common style or theme as part of its overall image. Sometimes this is accidental (or at least unintended by the team), while other times it is entirely intentional. The common powers mentioned previously are one form of a common style. Others include elements such as team uniforms, themed code names, and possibly themed resources such as their headquarters. So a group of aerial thieves known as the Felonious Flock might all have bird or avian motifs, winged costumes al-

lowing them to fly (or actual wings), and share a high-rise headquarters they call the Aerie.

VILLAIN TEAM RESOURCES

One thing groups of super-criminals can do is share various resources, much like hero teams do. This includes things like team equipment, bases or lairs, and vehicles.

Team equipment includes useful items such as commlinks or tracking devices (handy for when they are carted off to prison and the heroes are not around to escort them any longer). Equipment could also mean weapons and armor, although that sort of gear tends to be reserved for organizations and their agents (see **Villain Organizations**). Members of villain teams tend to be more individualistic, preferring their own capabilities to any standard-issue gear.

A villain team might share a headquarters, which they either set up and use as a group, or which belongs to a single member—usually the team's leader or organizer. Thus, a master villain might house his super-powered followers at his secret lair, while an independent cooperative of villains could share a hideout, and a family group might even have an inherited estate or the like as their shared property.

Lastly, transportation allows a villain team to get around more easily as a group and perhaps to escape pursuit by the authorities and the heroes. Vehicles have to be fairly fast and maneuverable, able to slip under radar detection and evade interception; otherwise, they need to be so tough they can just roll over any opposition without worrying about it. A villain team's "vehicle" may well consist of a single member able to transport the others: creating flying platforms or bubbles, opening spatial or dimensional gates, or able to teleport with a substantial number of passengers. Devices or equipment able to perform these functions are also possibilities, like an HQ with the Teleport power (locking on to tracers or beacons the villains carry) or "recall bands" the members wear to allow them to transport in an emergency.

Whether or not the GM wishes to track the point costs of the villains' team resources and allocate the necessary Equipment ranks among the members is largely a matter of style. It does not really matter if the team resources are accounted for in the villains' point totals, but some Gamemasters may prefer it for the sake of completeness. For *player character* villains, the GM will likely require they share the cost of team equipment, unless it is provided by a patron, in which case the resources might come with various strings attached that the team is unaware of initially.

SUDDEN—BUT INEVITABLE—BETRAYAL

Super-criminals are an untrustworthy lot, to say the least. They are either egotistical and power-mad, or sycophantic and willing to side with whomever they think is winning. Unless the team's leader is an iron-fisted tyrant completely invulnerable to attacks from underlings, a schism or double-cross is almost inevitable (and even then some villainous lieutenants can't resist *becoming* the iron-fisted leader, if the opportunity presents itself).

You can use conflicts within a villain team to liven up an adventure, giving things an unexpected twist when the bad guys turn on each other. It's all well and good for the heroes until something vital gets damaged in the scuffle, or the new leader of the group decides to alter the plan the good guys figured out, leaving the heroes back at square one.

The crime-fighters can also sometimes take advantage of mistrust and ambition among the villains. Cunning uses of interaction skills (and related powers) can sow seeds of dissent and betrayal, nurturing them to full bloom. Insight can suss out a foe's reasons for working with the team, allowing the hero to use Deception or Persuasion to get the villain to do something rash. Hero points spent for inspiration can yield valuable clues or opportunities for interaction, such as a bad guy coming to the hero's containment cell to gloat.

VILLAIN ORGANIZATIONS

A villainous *organization* is different from the gathering represented by a villain team in several ways. First, organizations are usually hierarchical, with a clear leader, various lieutenants and sub-commanders, and so forth. Second, organizations tend to have fewer actual *super*-villains, and indeed might not have any! Sometimes the leader of the organization is a superhuman, or some of the leader's lieutenants are, but the rest of the organization is made up of lower-powered or non-powered minions: soldiers, technicians, support staff, and other followers. An organization might also have a villain team associated with it, super-powered agents intended to carry out their agenda and deal with superheroes who try to interfere. Lastly, organizations tend to have broader goals than individual villain teams, devoted to the multi-tentacled schemes of the organization's leader(s).

ORGANIZATION GOALS & MOTIF

The two foremost things to determine about any villain organization are its goals and motif, or signature style: for example, SHADOW is dedicated to world conquest and is made up of legions of neo-Nazi clones led by a secret council of shadowy masterminds and the megalomaniacal Overshadow. The Foundry is an underground organization of robots building and selling illegal technologies to criminals in order to fund their expansion and the development of artificial "life." The Labyrinth is an ages-old conspiracy exerting power and influence behind the scenes, with a "maze" of fronts, façades, and blind alleys

to confuse its enemies, using experimentation to create super-powered agents.

Organizations with similar goals may come into conflict or (worse for the heroes) find common ground and cooperate, at least for a time. Organizations with divergent goals may try to step around each other, although they can still come into conflict if their goals do.

ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE

With some rare exceptions, villain organizations tend to follow a pyramid structure, with a supreme leader at the summit, one or more levels of lieutenants in the middle, and legions of followers or agents at the base. This tends to ensure the organization follows a singular vision, although underlings may have agendas of their own, and even attempt coups or rebellions against the existing leadership. Not surprisingly, this hierarchy is the same as the different levels of supervillainy (see **Levels of Villains** earlier in this chapter).

A few villain organizations are more egalitarian in structure, essentially functioning like very large alliances (see **Types of Villain Teams**). A network or "co-op" of supercriminals pooling their information and resources might work like this. Even then, such groups tend to develop members who exert greater influence over the organization and its direction.

LEADER

The organization's leader is typically a master villain of some sort: manipulators and schemers are the villains most given to creating and leading organizations, since it plays to their strengths. Note that the leader is not necessarily the most powerful member of the organization in terms of power level; he's simply the most influential. A criminal mastermind might have no real powers to speak of other than a keen intellect and a ruthless cunning, relying on super-powered lieutenants and large numbers of agents to accomplish his goals.

The leader of an organization might also be a formidable supervillain in his own right, a challenge for an entire team of heroes. Confronting the leader can be the climax of an adventure or series focusing on the organization and its schemes. Removing the leader from power can topple the organization, set up a power struggle within its ranks, or establish a new leader, and possibly a new direction for the group as a whole.

Some organizations have a council or other group of co-leaders, but even then they may have a single leader elected from their number to direct the organization day-to-day. Otherwise, the group is likely heavy with intrigue and slow to respond except in a true crisis, when a member or faction of the governing body may attempt to seize power. More often, any sort of council serves as an advisory body to the true leader.

LIEUTENANTS

The various lieutenants of a criminal organization are the ones most likely to deal with the heroes on a regular basis. They are the next in command to the leader and tend to control specific factions or divisions. Some agencies are arranged in a cell structure, with each lieutenant in com-

mand of a largely autonomous unit that answers solely to the leader. If any given cell is captured or taken out, the others remain, allowing the organization to continue to function.

In particularly large organizations, the lieutenants may themselves have underlings: assistants, second officers, administrators, and so forth before reaching the lowest ranks of the agents. For example, a worldwide organization might have operations on all of the major continents, each overseen by a lieutenant who reports to the supreme leader. Those lieutenants might have local or regional commanders who report to them, and so forth.

As with leaders, lieutenants in a villain organization may be superhumans, perhaps even a team of superhumans that operates together, but they can just as easily be otherwise ordinary humans with the skill and ruthlessness necessary to survive and succeed in criminal enterprise. Unlike the leader of an organization, lieutenants tend to be fairly evenly split between schemers and manipulators and more overt brute and skulker types, with the latter often having more of a "hands-on" approach to dealing with problems.

By providing an organization with a variety of lieutenants, you can effectively create different sub-organizations with their own style and flavor, extending the usefulness of the organization as a whole in different adventures. So, if you need a mad scientist corporation performing illegal genetic experiments in one scenario, and suppliers of weapons to terrorist cells in another, they might be different facets of the same larger organization, each with their own leaders and agents.

AGENTS

The lowermost, and broadest, level of the organization is made up of agents, the rank-and-file members who do the grunt-work and carry out the orders of their superiors. Agents are the textbook definition of minions in *Mutants & Masterminds* game terms, and are nearly always treated as such, with the exception of special "elite" units.

"Agents" can be almost any type of character, although they are usually soldiers of some sort. In more four-color settings, a villain organization might call upon legions of clones, robots, zombies, demons, or other nonhuman creatures to do their bidding. Such agents have the advantages of being extremely loyal (often programmed or ensorcelled for that trait) and highly expendable, at least so the organization does not have to fear their capture and interrogation.

Some organizations make do with human agents, recruiting those who share the group's philosophy and goals, or simply mercenaries and hired guns willing to fight for the promise of decent pay. Authorities and heroes may be able to trace the organization's recruiting efforts, and such agents are more likely to crack under interrogation or betray the organization to the law in order to save their own skins. This is the prime reason why agents are not told any more than they absolutely need to know.

Human agents are typically outfitted with the most advanced equipment the organization can provide, like blaster weapons. They may also have combat vehicles and even resources like power armor or heavy weapons to take on superhuman opponents.

Lastly, villain organizations often ensure agents have some sort of "self-destruct" mechanism to prevent their knowledge or equipment from falling into the wrong hands and to guard against betrayal. This can be anything from implanted explosives or slow-acting toxins to post-hypnotic commands, magical curses, or agents with a built-in brief lifespan, ensuring they expire shortly after capture. In game-terms, this is a plot device rather than a game trait; although it is certainly a significant drawback from the *agent's* perspective, it is an overall advantage for the organization and an additional difficulty for the heroes, so the "value" tends to balance out.

ORGANIZATION RESOURCES

One thing villain organizations usually have in abundance is resources: secret lairs, armies of agents, military-level vehicles, orbiting mind-control rays, giant laser cannons, and so forth. The largest organizations are as well equipped as many nations, capable of challenging conventional armies. Most four-color settings don't particularly worry about where the organization is getting the money for all this stuff; at best they provide some hand-waving explanation about criminal cartels, front-companies, or caches of Nazi gold. In more realistic settings, Gamemasters may want to give heroes the option of "following the money" to track down a secret criminal organization by tracing their sources of funding, and perhaps even cutting them off to weaken the organization.

CHAPTER 3: ARCHETYPES

Creating villains can be one of the most fun elements of running a *Mutants & Masterminds* game, but it can also be one of the most time-intensive. This chapter looks to take some of the effort out of the process while retaining all of the fun by giving you resources and options when it comes to villain creation, so you can whip up new bad guys for your *M&M* adventures in no time flat.

The chapter starts off with a look at how to design villains in *M&M* game terms, including design considerations like balancing them against the game's power level, the number and types of heroes, and the villain's intended function in the game. It looks at the various game traits—abilities, skills, advantages, and powers—from a villain-design perspective, and provides some advice on how to design faster and smarter.

The bulk of the chapter offers a collection of villain archetypes with complete game stats and detailed information about that type of villain, different themes and variants, tactics and adventure ideas, even suggested names. You'll be able to quickly choose an archetype, customize some details, and have a ready-to-run villain in minutes! With just these archetypes, you can create entire rogues galleries of dozens of supervillains to fill out your series.

The chapter concludes with a selection of minion archetypes for a villain's various followers and henchmen, as well as different creatures a villain might summon or create to battle the heroes.

VILLAIN DESIGN

Designing a villain for *Mutants & Masterminds* is mechanically similar to creating a hero, but differs in some important ways. First, villains are usually non-player characters, and therefore not subject to the limits of player character heroes. Second, villains have a different intended purpose, especially bad guys designed as foes for entire teams of heroes.

This section looks at the different aspects of villain design, from concept to the assignment of game traits, and points out the various considerations to keep in mind when creating your own villains for *M&M* games, as well as adapting or including villains from published sources.

CONCEPT

Generally, the first step in creating a villain is the concept: is this an arch-fiend who dreams of world domination and plans to remove obstacles from his path, starting with the heroes; or is it a petty crook motivated solely by greed, and perhaps a desire to put aside some money for his poor, sick mother, who doesn't know about her boy's nightly forays or criminal career?

The possible concepts for supervillains are nearly endless, and as plentiful as the inspirations for heroes. If you are looking for a concept to help get you started, take a look through the villain archetypes in this chapter, including their variations, for many of the classics of the genre. You can also find plentiful inspiration in your favorite comic books, ranging from long-standing villains that have defined the genre to minor "Z list" bad guys the players probably haven't even heard of—but so much the better when it comes to surprising them!

Take a look through the previous chapter for ideas on the different roles your villain can play. Is there a particular niche your series is lacking? What about the types given in the **Villain Roles** section? Maybe a particular hero in your game is ripe for a Dark Reflection or an Opposite villain to bring out some interesting qualities about the hero. Perhaps you want to set up a long-term plot with a Turncoat villain, creating a supporting character the heroes come to trust, only to learn the terrible truth too late.

It is often a good idea to keep a small notebook (or electronic notes file) where you can jot down villain ideas as they occur to you. Players may bring up potential villains they'd like to see during games, and inspiration can strike almost anywhere. You might find new villains in your favorite television shows or books, in the news or current events, or others' descriptions of their own games, in person or online.

POWER LEVEL

Just as a setting's power level is the first consideration in designing a hero, so too is it the first thing in designing a villain for that setting. However, whereas power level determines starting power points and sets limits for spending them in the case of heroes, villains have an essentially unlimited power point budget, and their power level is based on their traits rather than the other way around. So why start with power level?

It's a good idea to have a "target" power level in mind that fits the villain's overall concept and role in the series. Appropriate power level varies based on the overall power level of the series itself: henchmen tend to be in the PL 4-PL 6 range, about 4-5 power levels lower than the he-

roes, although rarely much lower than PL 3 if they're to be much use as henchmen at all (since PL 0-2 encompasses fairly ordinary people). Superhuman henchmen are often just 1-3 power levels lower than the heroes, maybe even closer, if they are minions (see the next section).

Lieutenants should generally be close to the power level of the series, matching that of the heroes, maybe off by a level or two. This makes a lieutenant a fairly even match for a single hero and a group of them a match for a team of heroes. A powerful lieutenant might be a couple levels higher than the series PL.

Master villains nearly always have a higher power level than the heroes, from one or two levels to as many as five or more, depending on the villain and the design. Note that less combat-intensive villains should generally be closer to the series power level, to ensure aspects such as resistance difficulties against their powers are reasonable. So, for example, a villain such as the Puppeteer (see page 118)—able to mind control victims from a distance and have them carry out his bidding—should be closer to the series PL to give the heroes a fair chance of resisting his Mind Control, whereas a Brute (see page 79)—intended to fight a whole team of heroes—needs to be higher power level, with trade-offs for commensurately large damage attacks (but lowered attack bonus, giving nimble heroes a chance to avoid getting hit altogether).

Choose a power level for your villain suitable for the character's role in the series as compared to the series power level.

MINION POWER LEVEL

Villainous minions have a special consideration in terms of power level because minions are essentially one-shot opponents; a single successful attack removes them from a conflict, so a minion can potentially be higher powered than would otherwise be appropriate for a henchmen or lieutenant villain in the series. Master villains are, by definition, never minions, although it is possible to have minions with an even higher power level than the heroes!

If a "minion" is intended as a truly challenging fight, such as a team of heroes versus a mad scientist's unleashed monster or the like, then chances are the opponent should *not* be treated as a minion in game-terms. This ensures the villain can provide a sustained back-and-forth conflict rather than being taken out of the fight by the first successful attack.

POWER LEVEL X

Some characters—particularly villains—have capabilities so broad and powerful as to be outside the conventional definitions of the game system. Certainly, the comic books have a number of foes and threats so "cosmic" in scale that it is hardly worth assigning numerical values to their capabilities. In these cases, you don't *need* to assign any game traits to the character at all!

We call these characters "Power Level X" and refer to similar game traits as "rank X." In mathematics, X is often used to designate an unknown variable. In *M&M,* it means the trait in question is as high as the Gamemaster wishes or the adventure or situation requires. Essentially, a rank of X in a trait means it is effectively unlimited in game terms, a plot device.

Any foe that can be defined with the phrase "invincible except for..." is potentially a plot device character, although the heroes won't necessarily know that until they try some of the more conventional means and discover they're not working.

One of the key points of plot device characters is there should be *some* way for the heroes to "win"—which is to say, to end the threat posed by the character. This may not necessarily include defeating their foe in a straight-up fight. Indeed, it probably does *not* include that option! Power Level X villains aren't intended for fights, unless it's a fairly hopeless one where the heroes learn even their vast powers are essentially useless, but soldier on regardless of the odds. Plot device villains are a Gamemaster's prerogative, but completely unbeatable ones are unfair and likely to make the players frustrated and the game no fun.

See the Imp archetype (see page 92) for an example of a plot device villain with virtually unlimited power and some ways of handling such a character in play.

PLOT DEVICES AND HERO POINTS

In some ways, a Power Level X villain is like a personified complication, where the GM is going to say "nice try, but no," a lot. Because of this, you'll want to pay close attention to the awarding of hero points when dealing with a plot device villain.

First off, you do not have to hand out hero points every time the villain appears, or even every time he does something. A lot of the challenges the foe raises are no different than those posed by other villains. For example, if a PL X imp decides to bring a set of fictional or legendary historical villains to life, that's just part of the plot, not necessarily a setback for the heroes—especially if said villains are conventional characters the heroes can fight. Similarly, if a hero attacks a plot device character to no avail, that's not necessarily a setback, either. On the other hand, if the villain arbitrarily does something like remove the heroes' powers, turn them into small animals, or transport them to medieval times or the like, that counts as a complication and should earn them a hero point.

The primary reason to hand out hero points when dealing with plot device characters is to allow the good guys to deal with the threats and challenges the villain places in their path, and to encourage the use of hero points for inspiration or extra effort aimed at overcoming the villain. So you want to give the players enough hero points, without necessarily handing them out for things that are just routine challenges with an unusual twist or explanation to them. As with all Gamemastering decisions, use your best judgment based on the flow of the adventure, keeping in

mind that it is easier to make up for a deficiency in hero points by giving out more than it is to take away points you've already given to the players.

ABILITIES

A villain's ability ranks tend to be less defining in many ways than a hero's. Depending on how the game plays out, the players may never even know what a villain's Awareness or Strength score is. Plus villains aren't restricted in terms of how many points they can spend on abilities in the way player characters are.

Use benchmarks like those in the *M&M Hero's Handbook* to assign the ability ranks you feel the character should have, without worrying about the point values. Just add them up after, if you feel like keeping track of point totals. Generally speaking, the easiest thing to do when creating a villain is to focus on the one or two most important abilities and give them modifiers at or near the power level, leaving the other abilities around +0 (maybe +1 or +2) unless you conceive of the character as particularly weak in one or more of them, in which case you might want to assign a negative modifier.

ABILITIES AND POWERS

For villains with permanent ability-modifying power effects, take their bonuses and penalties into account when you're assigning ranks. You may find it easier to assign the *final* desired ability rank and then work backwards, subtracting the modifier provided by powers. The remainder is what the villain pays for the ability. So, for example, if you want a growing villain to have a Strength of 13 and you envision the villain 50 feet tall, look at gargantuan Growth (12 ranks) and the +12 Strength it provides. Subtracting 12 from 13, the villain needs to pay just 2 points, for 1 rank of Strength, to get the desired result.

SKILLS

Skills for villains come in two primary types: *active* and *passive*. Active skills are those you expect will see use during direct confrontations with the villain. They include interaction skills, or combat-useful skills such as Acrobatics. Passive skills are those more likely to come up "off panel" or when the heroes are not around, based mainly around routine check results.

For active skills, take the series power level into account when you are assigning a bonus (and therefore skill ranks) to the villain: in a PL 10 series, a hero isn't going to have an interaction skill bonus greater than +20, and it'll probably be closer to +10-15 or so. Thus the villain's skills in that area should be commensurate, unless you want the bad guy to have extraordinary skill or resistance.

Set passive skill bonuses at whatever amount fits the concept of the villain and is sufficient to let the character accomplish appropriate routine checks. So a scientific genius villain is most certainly going to have ranks in Expertise and Technology. Assign these based on the sort of things you want the villain able to know and do. For example, the most difficult Knowledge questions are around DC 30, so a villain with a +20 bonus can answer them routinely. Similarly, a master sneak-thief able to get past DC 30 security needs a +20 skill bonus, if able to accomplish it routinely.

You do not have to worry about any odd or unspent ranks from the villain's skill total, so long as the skill modifiers are where you want them. Since villains have unlimited points, it doesn't really matter if they "waste" a half of a point on an odd skill rank.

ADVANTAGES

Assign whatever advantages are appropriate for the villain, keeping in mind that you'll have to manage those advantages during play. You might want to keep to a relatively simple set of options where combat advantages are concerned, taking the time to include any and all applicable modifiers in the villain's game traits.

While you could assign a villain who has equipment or minions the appropriate ranks in the Equipment and Minions advantages, there really isn't any real *need* to do so, since those advantages are just placeholders for the points assigned to those traits, and villains do not have the same point-budget concerns. You can figure out the necessary advantage ranks and totals if you wish, but not doing so won't really affect the villain in play either way (see the **Don't Sweat the Small Stuff...** sidebar for more).

FORTUNE ADVANTAGES

A particular category when it comes to villain design in *M&M* (and non-player character design in general) is fortune advantages. These advantages rely on or influence the use of hero points in some fashion. Of course, by definition, villains do not *have* hero points! This makes assigning fortune advantages to them somewhat problematic, even in cases where it would be entirely appropriate.

Fortune advantages that require spending a hero point (such as Inspire, Leadership, and Ultimate Effort) can be treated as complications; when you activate the advantage for the villain, award the players of any characters affected by it a hero point. Having the villain automatically gain initiative (Seize Initiative) or exhort a minion to shake off a condition (Leadership) is essentially a complication for the heroes anyway.

Things get trickier in dealing with the Luck advantage. Since this advantage grants die re-rolls like hero points, can villains (who have no access to hero points) take it at all? If they can, it's potentially upsetting to the hero point "economy" of the game, since it means villains can spend those "points" without awarding any hero points to the characters. This might be appropriate for some especially fortunate bad guys, with no more than a couple of ranks to keep it from getting out of hand. Otherwise, it is best not to assign Luck to villains; "lucky" foes tend to either have the benefit of GM-defined complications or powers like Probability Control.

POWERS

Villains often have both a broader range of power choices than heroes, and a more restricted range of actual powers. This is because villains have unlimited power points to spend but are more often "one-trick ponies" compared to heroes. Master villains may have as much or more variety as heroes, but lieutenants and henchmen rarely do.

Assign the powers necessary to describe the villain as you imagine him or her. If a particular power doesn't fit within the power level you've chosen, consider either restricting that power (and rethinking your concept a bit) or changing the villain's power level to compensate. Keep in mind a great many powers in *M&M* are not restricted by power level at all, so a villain can have unlimited ranks in movement effects, for example, regardless of assigned PL.

Pay particular attention to the following aspects of a villain's powers: stunned capabilities, overall range or "reach," and the negation of heroic advantages.

STUNNED POWER CAPABILITIES

Odds are good that your villain will suffer a dazed or stunned result in combat sooner or later. Unless you intend to negate all of them by handing out hero points to the players, you should consider what happens if the villain loses actions. In particular, is the character heavily dependent on concentration or sustained duration effects like Flight or Sustained Protection?

Generally, the more important the villain, the less vulnerable he or she should be to this tactic. Lieutenant and henchmen villains can suffer more from being stunned than master villains, giving players the satisfaction of bringing down their defenses, messing up their power use, or knocking them out of the air. You might want to use complications to keep it from happening too soon or too often, but you are generally safe to make it at least possible in the design phase, and to allow it to happen regularly in play.

POWER RANGE OR REACH

Consider the overall range of the villain's powers, particularly offensive ones. Is the villain primarily a distance fighter with ranged attacks, a close-in fighter relying on Strength and close attacks, or a mixture of the two? Power range helps determine how you want to focus the villain's attack bonus (via skills and advantages) and how effective the villain is in different situations. A close-combat villain may have difficulties if the heroes decide to simply pepper him with ranged attacks, never getting close enough for the villain to get his mitts on them. Similarly, a ranged combatant might be in trouble in a hero manages to slip past his attacks and close to hand-to-hand combat.

Also consider the villain's range in terms of area effects. These work best for solo villains, who do not have to worry about hitting any allies; team villains should at least be a *little* concerned about taking an ally out of the fight, even if they care nothing for them personally. Does the villain need the Selective extra for certain area effects? Does that fit your concept of the character? If not, and the villain simply has to be cautious, that's a weakness clever heroes may exploit.

NEGATION OF HEROIC POWERS

Lastly, consider to what degree the villain's powers can and should overcome various advantages possessed by the heroes.

As Gamemaster, you have a certain advantage when it comes to designing villains: You can customize them to the heroes in order to make them more of a challenge. For example, if there is an Insubstantial hero in the group, you can create villains with the Affects Insubstantial extra. Similarly, you can give villains Senses that defeat a hero's Concealment, Immunity to certain of their attacks, or Afflictions that target their weakest defenses.

There's a delicate balance between using this advantage to make a villain or villain-team challenging and using it to build unbeatable villains specifically designed to exploit every one of the heroes' weak points. It's unfair to always confront the Insubstantial hero with foes who just "happen" to have Affects Insubstantial or to have every villain "coincidentally" possess a sense capable of defeating a hero's invisibility. Unless the bad guy is specifically designed as a counter to the hero, you may want to consider a negating ability a villainous power stunt.

VILLAIN POWER STUNTS

Villains can make use of power stunts in the same way other characters do. The primary difference comes in when looking to shake off the fatigue from the extra effort. Doing so for a villain is a complication for the heroes, essentially granting the villain the benefit of a spent hero point. Of course, while creating the villain you can assign potentially any power stunt you can think up as a regular Alternate Effect of the adversary's powers, since the character does not have a limited power point budget like a player character hero. However, it is generally easier to assign only those Alternate Effects the villain uses regularly, treating others that come up in play as powers stunts (and possibly complications).

COMPLICATIONS

Why give a villain complications? As previously mentioned, villains in *M&M* don't earn or use hero points, so what use are complications to them?

The answer is: villainous complications aren't useful to the *villain,* but they do provide the Gamemaster with some handy references for handling the villain in play. They may also provide heroes with a weakness they can exploit to help defeat the villain. In the latter case, the villain's complication provides the heroes with an advantage, much like a circumstance modifier. Since the GM chooses the complications for the villains, this advantage does not have a "cost" in game terms; it's just there for the heroes to exploit, if they figure out how to do so.

Even more than heroic complications, villainous complications are not set in stone. The ones provided with the archetypes in this chapter are merely suggestions. Feel free to modify or add to them however you like to fit the type of villain you have in mind for your game.

DON'T SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF...

... and points and stats are all *small stuff.*

Unless you particularly enjoy creating elaborately detailed character sheets for your *M&M* villains, don't bother. You don't need to. A lot of those fine details—like specific Benefit advantages, or an enumerated list of every Alternate Effect you can imagine—are just going to go to waste. If this is a first-time villain, you should see if the concept is even going to stick with the players before you get too attached, and find out in play if the bad guy is worthy of a rematch. Then you can give some additional thought to the villain's hobbies or other details, if you want.

One of the Gamemastering "secrets" of *M&M* is this: **You do not have to bother figuring out a villain's power point total!** It doesn't matter. After all, since power points are not dependent on power level (or vice versa) and GM-created characters have as many points as they need and whatever power level you choose to give them, it doesn't really matter how many (or how few) points a villain "costs"! Again, if you really *enjoy* adding up a villain's points and building traits (or you're using design software such as Lone Wolf's *Hero Lab* for *M&M*), don't let us get in the way of your fun, but if you don't want to do those things, there's really no need!

By the same token, there's nothing to stop you from adding or subtracting details even in the midst of a game. If, for example, it suits the flow of the story for the villain to turn out to have membership in a particular exclusive club, then feel free to make it so, even if you didn't think to give the character the appropriate Benefit advantage in advance. If a particular retroactive change to a villain constitutes a real complication for the heroes, throw a hero point award their way. Otherwise, changing the villain "behind the curtain" is entirely your prerogative. If you do it deftly, your players don't even have to know that it wasn't always planned that way!

QUICK & EASY VILLAINS

Given that power point totals and such really don't matter for villains. You can even quickly and easily "fake" a character in *M&M* using the following guidelines.

Choose a power level for your villain based on the character's role: within 1 level of the series PL for a lieutenant, 1–5 levels higher for a master villain, and 3–5 levels lower for a henchman. So for a PL10 series, aim for PL11-15 for a master villain, PL9-11 for a lieutenant, and PL 5–7 for a henchman.

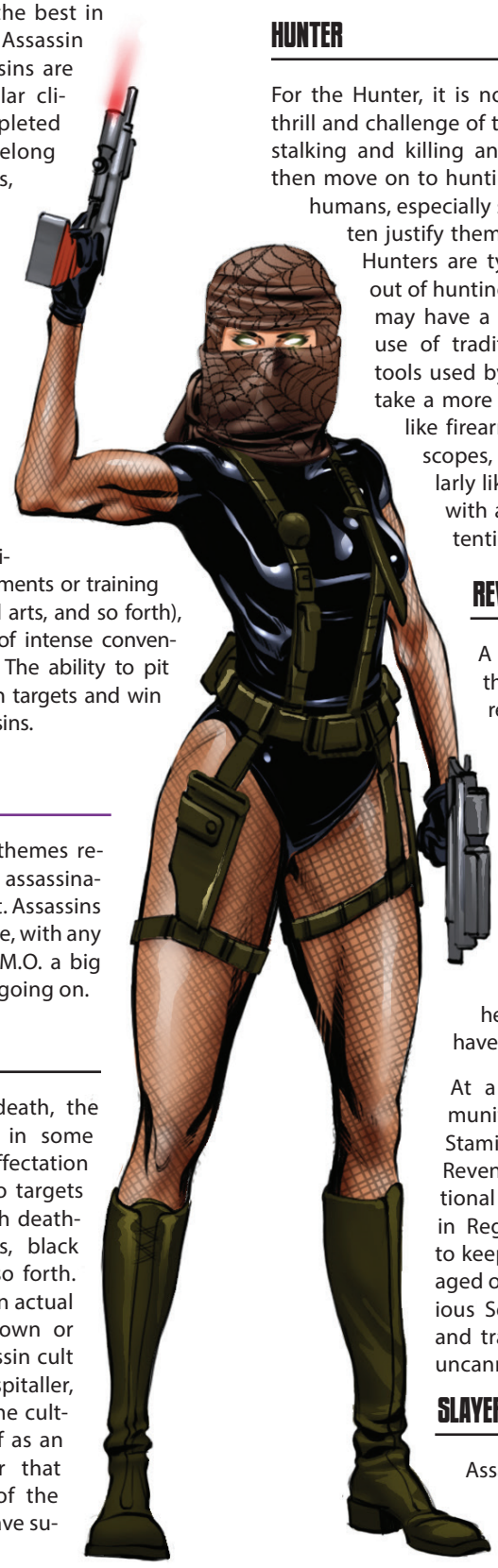
Whenever you need to know one of the villain's ranks, use the chosen power level if it is for an important trait like an attack bonus, defense, power rank or ability the character is known for, such as Strength for a strong villain or Intellect for a smart one. If it's a skill, use the chosen power level, plus 8. If it is a fairly unimportant trait, use either half the chosen power level, or a rank of 0.

Using this method (and some knowledge of the game's traits and basic effects) you can whip up characters out of "thin air" on the spur of the moment. Need a quick generic crook? Given him PL4 and a commensurate rank in all appropriate abilities, and you're done! Sure, this approach lacks fine detail, but chances are the players won't know the different in the middle of a game.

ASSASSIN

The Assassin is a professional killer, often for hire to the highest bidder. More than a mere "hit-man," this archetype is a living weapon, "the best in the world"—or at least so the Assassin frequently claims. Most Assassins are loners, working for a particular client until their contract is completed and then moving on. Some belong to an entire guild of assassins, although this archetype is generally an exemplary member of such a group—one of their very best—unless they feature in a higher power level series (PL 13+).

Assassins typically have few, if any, superhuman powers, although they are the pinnacle of human athletic achievement and combat skill, with a ruthlessness to match. Some assassins have their abilities heightened by special treatments or training (drugs, chemicals, secret martial arts, and so forth), while others are the products of intense conventional training and experience. The ability to pit themselves against superhuman targets and win is a point of pride for most assassins.



THEMES

Unsurprisingly, most assassin themes revolve around death, choice of assassination method, or choice of target. Assassins tend to stick close to their theme, with any variation from their expected M.O. a big clue that something strange is going on.

DEATH-CULTIST

More than just a dealer of death, the Death-Cultist *worships* death in some fashion. It might just be an affectation intended to throw a scare into targets or an unhealthy obsession with death-themed imagery: skull masks, black clothing, crypt-like lairs, and so forth. The assassin might belong to an actual death-cult, worshipping a known or fictional deity, such as an assassin cult dedicated to St. Julian the Hospitaller, patron saint of murderers. Some cultists might worship Death itself as an embodied concept, whatever that might mean in the context of the setting. Some Death-Cultists have supernatural powers due to their faith and training, while for others, it's all just outward trappings.

HUNTER

For the Hunter, it is not the kill that matters, but the thrill and challenge of the hunt. Hunters often start out stalking and killing animals, for survival or for sport, then move on to hunting "the most dangerous game": humans, especially superhumans. Although they often justify themselves as "sportsmen," villainous Hunters are typically sadists who get a thrill out of hunting and killing their prey. A Hunter may have a primitive style, focusing on the use of traditional hunting techniques and tools used by an indigenous people, or may take a more modern approach, using things like firearms (or tranq guns), night-vision scopes, and the like. Hunters are particularly likely to take an interest in heroes with animal themes or powers as potential prey.

REVENANT

A Revenant is an undead assassin that targets the living for various reasons, most often vengeance for the Revenant's own death. A Revenant might also seek out targets it hated in life, such as an undead soldier who assassinates military and government personnel from a nation against which he fought a war, even if that war is long since over. Alternately, a Revenant Assassin might go after targets he once cared about, feeling they have betrayed him.

At a minimuma Revenant has Immunity to Fortitude Effects and no Stamina rank, being already dead. Revenant Assassins may have additional powers, particularly high ranks in Regeneration or even Immortality to keep coming back after being damaged or destroyed. Some also have various Senses, allowing them to detect and track their preferred targets with uncanny accuracy.

SLAYER

Assassins are equal-opportunity killers, while Slayers target a particular type of victim. It

ASSASSIN PL10

STR	STA	AGL	DEX	FGT	INT	AWE	PRE
3	3	4	4	8	1	2	3

EQUIPMENT

Arsenal: Array (16 points)

- **Flash-Bang Grenades:** Ranged Burst Area Dazzle 4 • *16 points*
- **Assault Rifle:** Ranged Multiattack Damage 5 • *1 point*
- **Combat Knife:** Strength-Based Damage 2, Improved Critical • *1 point*
- **Fragmentation Grenades:** Ranged Burst Area Damage 5 • *1 point*
- **Heavy Pistol:** Ranged Damage 4 • *1 point*
- **Sleep Gas Grenades:** Ranged Cloud Area Sleep 4 • *1 point*
- **Smoke Grenades:** Ranged Cloud Area Concealment Attack 4 • *1 point*
- **Sniper Rifle and Targeting Scope:** Ranged Damage 5, Improved Aim, Improved Critical • *1 point*
- **Tear Gas Grenades:** Ranged Cloud Area Affliction 4 • *1 point*

Body Armor: Protection 2 • *2 points*

Commlink: Feature 1 (Communication) • *1 point*

Mini-Tracers: Feature 1 (Tracking) • *1 point*

Rebreather: Immunity 2 (Suffocation), Limited • *1 point*

VEHICLE: MOTORCYCLE • *11 POINTS*

Medium; Str 1, Speed 6, Def 10, Tou 8; Smokescreen

SKILLS

Acrobatics 8 (+12), Athletics 8 (+11), Close Combat: Blades 4 (+12), Deception 9 (+12), Expertise: Assassin 8 (+9), Expertise: Streetwise 8 (+9), Expertise: Tactics 6 (+7), Insight 8 (+10), Intimidation 6 (+9), Perception 8 (+10), Ranged Combat: Guns 7 (+11), Sleight of Hand 8 (+12), Stealth 9 (+13), Technology 8 (+9), Treatment 2 (+3), Vehicles 5 (+9)

ADVANTAGES

Accurate Attack, Assessment, Benefit (Alternate Identity), Contacts, Defensive Attack, Defensive Roll 2, Equipment 8, Evasion 2, Improved Aim, Improved Critical (Sniper Rifle), Improved Grab, Improved Initiative 2, Power Attack, Precise Attack 4 (Close and Ranged; Cover and Concealment), Ranged Attack 4, Takedown, Throwing Mastery 4, Ultimate Aim, Uncanny Dodge

OFFENSE

INITIATIVE +12	
Assault Rifle +15	Ranged, Damage 5
Knife +12	Close, Damage 5, Crit. 19-20
Pistol +15	Ranged, Damage 4
Sniper Rifle +15	Ranged, Damage 5, Crit. 18-20
Unarmed +8	Close, Damage 3

DEFENSE

DODGE	13	**FORTITUDE**	9
PARRY	13	**TOUGHNESS**	7/5*
WILL	11	*Without Defensive Roll.	

POWER POINTS

ABILITIES	56	**SKILLS**	56
POWERS	0	**DEFENSES**	29
ADVANTAGES	38	**TOTAL**	179

COMPLICATIONS

Addiction: To performance-enhancing or emotion-deadening drugs, or to the act of killing itself.

Enemy: Rival assassins or vengeful victims.

Honor: A rigid "assassin's code."

Obsession: With completing a job.

Reputation: A particular style that makes the assassin predictable.

might be mutants, the undead, mystics, psychics, or even superheroes in general, to name a few. A Slayer's reasons for choosing a particular target vary, from a religious belief in cleansing the world of a terrible evil to a personal vendetta extended against an entire group. Many Slayers see themselves as righteous (if misunderstood) and their foes—and anyone allied with them—as evil. Others are akin to Hunters (previously) with a particular type of chosen prey. The Favored Foe advantage is all but required for Slayers, and they often have powers suited to hunting and killing their preferred targets.

VIGILANTE

A Vigilante walks a gray line between "hero" and "villain" as he assassinates criminals, acting as judge, jury, and especially executioner. Some Vigilantes act out of a sense of duty and justice (at least justice as they see it). Others are driven more by vengeance, ruthlessly eliminating anyone standing between them and their targets, making little distinction between the innocent and the guilty (or at least assuming anyone working against them is guilty by association). Vigilantes often serve as dark reflections of costumed heroes, who are also vigilantes of sorts. In the Silver Age they are out-and-out villains, while in the Iron Age they frequently became protagonists. The Modern Age style tends to place Vigilantes in a gray area, posing some moral quandaries for the heroes.

WEAPON SPECIALIST

For Weapon Specialists, the kill is simply an expression of their mastery of a chosen weapon, their dedication to a particular "art" of assassination. Choices for weapon specialists range from all kinds of archaic weapons like swords, knives, shuriken, and garrotes to modern firearms, unique super-tech gadgets, or even particular unarmed combat styles. A Weapon Specialist's skill is so great as to be almost superhuman, with advantages and even pow-

ers based around the things the Specialist can do with his chosen weapon.

In addition to conventional targets, Weapon Specialists are prone to going after any hero who also specializes in their chosen weapon, simply to prove their superior skill (or get revenge for past losses, as the case may be). A Weapon Specialist villain might have even trained with the same teacher as a hero, or could *be* the hero's teacher! Similarly, a Weapon Specialist Assassin might be a failed student of a hero, gone over to the side of evil.

NAME IDEAS

Caliber, Carnifex, Dirge, Finale, Hitman, Hunter, Killer, Reaper, Slayer

CLASSIC BITS

Some classic elements associated with the Assassin include the following:

CODE OF HONOR

Most assassins have some sort of honor code, primarily as a plot device to keep them from simply killing heroes outright with cowardly (but highly effective) methods like sniping or remote-controlled explosives. The assassin either wants to test the target in honorable combat (which usually means face-to-face) or has a compulsion about giving targets a "fair chance," whatever that may mean in the killer's own twisted terms. Some assassins have a secret death wish and a tendency to either self-sabotage or set up potentially deadly confrontations with their foes, such as giving clues about their plans or whereabouts. Smart heroes can exploit an assassin's code of honor to at least ensure a fair fight. Many professional assassins place a great deal of emphasis on "my word is my bond," and will not go back on an agreement once they have made it.

SIGNED IN BLOOD

Assassins—like many supervillains—have sizeable egos, particularly where their area of expertise is concerned. They often like to "sign" their work in some fashion, so everyone knows who pulled off such an impressive job. This might involve leaving something at the scene—such as a calling card, note, or symbol—or killing in a particular fashion. Such signatures serve as clues for heroes investigating the killings and can alert them to an old foe who is active again. Someone else might also use an Assassin's signature to try and mislead the heroes or frame the villain, but runs the risk of having to deal not only with the heroes but with an angry Assassin out for revenge!

IT'S A TRAP!

Code of honor or no, Assassins are not stupid, and they try and arrange confrontations in their favor whenever possible. Heroes can expect an Assassin after them to set up various traps, ranging from rigged battlefields to kidnapping loved ones for use as bait. An Assassin is not above setting up various feints to test the heroes' capabilities: sending disposable hirelings after them to gather information, for example, or placing innocents in traps, forcing the heroes to rescue them and demonstrate their abilities (and limitations) for monitors and cameras. A cunning Assassin might even infiltrate a hero team with an imposter (like the Master of Disguise) to learn all about them before making a move.

CAPERS

Adventures involving an Assassin may include the following:

MARKED FOR DEATH

The heroes have crossed the wrong people, who want them out of the picture, permanently. Guess who they've hired? The Assassin might even tip the potential victims off, either as a "professional courtesy" or out of sheer arrogance. Even if the Assassin does not, the employer might, or word could reach the heroes through the grapevine. This is especially likely once the Assassin starts sniffing around for information: rather than going after the heroes right away, their new foe takes time to do research, probe for weaknesses, and generally set the targets up for the kill. Fortunately, this gives the heroes time not only to prepare their defenses, but to go on the offensive and take the Assassin out before he has a chance to make his move.

KISS, KISS, BANG, BANG

A hero's new love interest is a figure of mystery: suave, smart, and sophisticated, with a wicked sense of humor, and a job the interest is vague about that seems to allow for a lot of free time. Not long thereafter, somebody makes an attempt on the hero's life, using intimate knowledge of his or her activities. Is the new love interest the Assassin in disguise? An informant? Somebody trying to protect the hero from the Assassin? Or just a coincidence? For a twist on this, perhaps the new love interest is romancing someone else in the hero's life: a relative, friend, or even ex-romantic interest, in order to get close to and find out more about the hero and perhaps to create a distraction.

NOTHING TO LOSE

The only Assassin more dangerous than the paid professional is one with nothing left to lose. The Assassin might be a fanatic willing to die for a cause, or someone with a death wish, looking for a hero willing and able to use lethal force. If the heroes are not willing initially, then perhaps the Assassin can find a way to encourage them, such as threatening loved ones, ruining the heroes' reputations, or putting them in a kill-or-be-killed situation, especially if lives other than their own are at stake. Of course, it's possible the slain Assassin might not rest easily and could come back as a Revenant....

BRUTE

The Brute's concept is as straightforward as the villain itself is: a physically powerful engine of destruction, capable of plowing a swath of devastation through the city and surrounding countryside until the heroes manage to stop it.

The archetypal Brute is large and clearly physically powerful, although still packing far more power than anything its size should. Brute origins range from alien beings and powerful robots to mystical creatures and atomic mutants, but all share similar physical traits: big, strong, tough, and not all that bright.

THEMES

Most Brute themes vary some element of the archetype's essential theme of "big, strong, and tough" so every Brute the heroes encounter is not the same, even if their Strength and Damage ranks are. Some of these themes can even combine for a particularly unusual Brute adversary, such as a Fast, Mindless Brute, or a Titanic, Sympathetic one.

TITANIC

The Brute is big, but some are truly *gigantic*, towering like the skyscrapers they walk amongst and threaten. The Titanic Brute trades off ranks of Strength and Stamina for Growth. Titanic Brutes tend to be rampaging monsters (and may also be Mindless, see the following), but they can also be foes able to *change* size. If so, the Brute's Growth should not be Permanent, allowing him to shrink to normal human size, either voluntarily or as a complication.

UNSTOPPABLE

The Brute archetype is already tough, but this variation is nigh-invulnerable, having an even greater degree of Impervious Toughness, or perhaps even Immunity to physical damage! Punches, blasts, perhaps even nukes are not enough to deal with an Unstoppable Brute; indeed, no mere physical attack can do the job. This calls for the heroes to get creative to deal with the Unstoppable Brute. Perhaps it has some sort of weakness they can figure out, such as extreme cold, high-frequency sound, or particular wavelengths of radiation. Whatever the case, the GM should provide some clues, and allow for the use of hero points for inspiration to figure things out before it's too late.

FAST

"How could something so big be so fast?" is the phrase you most often hear about the Fast Brute. Rather than big and clumsy, this theme defies expectations by having higher active defenses and ranks of Improved Initiative, if not outright Quickness or Super-Speed. The Fast Brute might merely have quick and predatory reflexes, or a measure of tactical speed intended to outmaneuver opponents.

SMART

Although the classic brute is both big and dumb, there is nothing that says this *has* to be the case. A smart brute is, in many ways, far more dangerous, as he knows full well how (and where, and when) to use his physical might to his advantage. A Smart Brute uses tactics and knows to go after opponents who can potentially target his weaknesses (such as mentalists or mystics).

MINDLESS

The Mindless Brute makes the basic archetype look like brilliant by comparison. It is a true "mindless engine of destruction," having no thoughts (or Intellect rank) at all, only preprogrammed instructions or instincts. It might be an animal or machine. Unfortunately for the heroes, this tends to cover one of the Brute's weak spots—namely, its mind. Mindless Brutes are immune to interaction skills and mental effects; characters may be able to trick the Brute if they understand what drives it, but they certainly cannot reason with or control it.

DRIVEN

While a Brute may just be out to wreck downtown (or the state, or the planet...) or pound the heroes into the pavement, some are driven by other impulses. Knowing what drives a Brute can be a key to overcoming it, or at least luring it away from the most densely populated areas to deal with it.

A Brute may be driven to attack a particular target: going after things that enrage or annoy it, for example, or preprogrammed to focus on superhumans, mutants, mystics, or another class of opponent, particularly if the Brute was originally designed as a weapon of sorts.

SYMPATHETIC

Just because a Brute is a tremendous force for destruction does not mean it is *evil*—at least, not intentionally. Brutes might turn out to be anything from pain-maddened beasts lashing out in their agony to lost and confused creatures unaware the tiny, screaming things around them are actually people with thoughts and feelings of their own. Some Brutes are essentially animals, perhaps enslaved to a villainous master. Other Sympathetic Brutes include aliens lost or stranded on Earth, unable to comprehend the environment or even driven mad by some aspect of it (such as industrial pollutants, or electromagnetic "smog" from radio and cell phone transmissions). If the heroes take the time to figure out what is going on with the Sympathetic Brute, perhaps having seen some hints as to its true nature, they might be able to remove the cause of its rampage or otherwise reason with it rather than just pounding on it until it drops.

BRUTE PL13

STR	STA	AGL	DEX	FGT	INT	AWE	PRE
18*	17*	1	0	4	-2	0	-1

POWERS

Big: Growth 4 (Innate, Permanent) • *9 points*

Strong: Enhanced Strength 4, Limited to Lifting (100,000 tons); Leaping 12 • *16 points*

Strength Tricks: Strength Damage Array (18 points)

- **Shockwave:** Burst Area Affliction 9 (Resisted by Fortitude; Dazed, Stunned, Incapacitated) • *1 point*
- **Thunderclap:** Burst Area Auditory Dazzle 9, Close Range • *1 point*

Tough: Immunity 12 (Cold Damage, Disease, Heat Damage, Poison), Impervious Toughness 12 • *24 points*

SKILLS

Close Combat: Unarmed 2 (+8), Intimidation 12 (+13*), Perception 2 (+2), Ranged Combat: Throwing 8 (+8)

ADVANTAGES

Close Attack 2, Great Endurance, Improved Hold

OFFENSE

INITIATIVE +1	
Shockwave —	Close Burst, Dodge DC 19
Thunderclap —	Close Burst, Dodge DC 19
Unarmed +8	Close, Damage 18

DEFENSE

DODGE	8*	**FORTITUDE**	17
PARRY	8*	**TOUGHNESS**	17
WILL	9	*Includes Growth modifiers.	

POWER POINTS

ABILITIES	58	**SKILLS**	12
POWERS	51	**DEFENSES**	24
ADVANTAGES	4	**TOTAL**	149

POTENTIAL COMPLICATIONS

Gullible: Easily tricked by anyone who seems friendly or trustworthy.

Identity: The Brute is an ordinary person who transforms.

Temper: Dominated by unchecked emotion.

NAME IDEAS

Brute, Joten, Minotaur, Ogre, Ox, Piledriver, Smasher, Tank. Many Brutes—especially mindless ones—do not name themselves but are instead named by the media, military, first victim, etc. Of course, these names are often appropriate!

CLASSIC BITS

Some classic elements associated with the Brute include:

THE MORE YOU FIGHT...

... the stronger the Brute gets. Many Brutes start out tough but then get *tougher* as you fight them! The reasons for this vary: the Brute might get stronger as he gets madder (ranks of Reaction Enhanced abilities). He may absorb physical punishment, turning it into sheer strength or mass, or seek out sources of energy ranging from heat and electricity to the psychic energy of fear and panic, transforming it into greater power. The key point is, the longer the fight against the Brute goes on, the more powerful and difficult to defeat it becomes. Overcoming the Brute typically involves cutting it off from its source of power, which may at least reduce it to manageable levels if it doesn't stop it outright.

YOU AND WHAT ARMY?

More than most other super-foes, Brutes tend to attract the military, which appreciates a big, nigh-invulnerable target to shoot at. Unfortunately, conventional military forces are nearly always useless against the Brute, serving only to anger or further empower him (see the previous bit). So the heroes often have to deal not only with the rampaging Brute, but with military hard-cases who do not care for costumed civilians telling them how to do their job.

If nothing else, military personnel and equipment serve as great opportunities to show off just how tough and capable the Brute is, in case the heroes are not getting the message. The military can also be the ones to start a fight, if it looks like the heroes are being entirely too reasonable or successful in talking the Brute down. All it takes is one hotshot military salvo to destroy delicate negotiations and send the Brute off on another rampage.

DR. JEKYLL, I PRESUME...?

It is common for a Brute to have a normal identity, often with the complication of transforming into the Brute, and possibly back again, depending on the circumstances. Some normal identities are completely separate personalities, unaware of what the Brute does and trying—somewhat futilely—to contain it. Others are fully aware of their Brute nature and revel in it, looking for ways to retain the Brute's power at all times. Having an effective innocent trapped within the rampaging form of a Brute can create additional complications for the heroes, if they are looking to find a way to separate the man from the monster.

GETTING HIT WITH A TRUCK (LITERALLY)

Although Brutes get along quite well with just their unarmed attacks, most of them lack ranged attacks to deal

with bothersome foes who can fly or snipe at the Brute from a distance. Fortunately, the urban environments where heroes commonly fight are full of things to pick up and throw at annoying heroes, especially when you are strong enough to toss an SUV like a Major League fastball. Brutes also use tricks like the Shockwave and Thunderclap Alternate Effects of their Strength Damage to hit groups of foes at a distance.

TACTICS

Brutes are not usually big on tactics beyond "hit it until it stops fighting back." Still, even dim or mindless Brutes often demonstrate cunning in fights, using makeshift weapons to deal with foes they cannot safely hit (or reach), creating barriers with vehicles or rubble to block dangerous attacks, and so forth.

The typical Brute fighting style also creates additional headaches for heroes, since Brutes tend to do things like hurl buses full of people as weapons, create shockwaves that shatter windows and collapse buildings, and so forth. Fighting a Brute anywhere around innocent people should provide plenty of opportunities for heroics, as some characters rescue people imperiled by the fight while others try to contain the Brute. On the upside, the players are at least earning hero points for their characters to turn the tables on the Brute eventually (the ones they do not use to soak up all the damage coming their way, that is).

CAPERS

Adventures involving the Brute may include the following:

ON THE RAMPAGE!

The classic and straightforward Brute adventure: the Brute shows up and goes on a rampage, tearing up the city or countryside until the heroes intervene and manage to stop it. This can just be a ripping good fight using parts of the terrain for cover and makeshift weaponry, or a desperate struggle to delay the Brute from reaching a densely populated area (or a particularly vulnerable target such as a fuel depot or nuclear plant) as the heroes search for a weakness or a way to stop it in time. For an added twist, perhaps the Brute's rampage is not as random as it initially appears, and some other villain arranged it to distract the heroes from some other aspect of his plans.

MEET MY BIG FRIEND

Somebody encounters the Brute and manages to become his de facto "friend" and therefore influence what he does. This can be anything from a Sympathetic Brute mistaking an unscrupulous character for a real friend to someone getting the magic words or special device that controls a Mindless Brute. Naturally, the newfound "handler" decides to use the Brute's abilities to further his own ends, maybe settling a few scores along the way. Things get more interesting if the Brute's newfound "friend" is not a villain, but somebody like an angry child or teenager, a homeless or mentally ill person, or another relative innocent with issues. For a "beauty and the beast" option, the Brute's friend might actually be a love-interest of sorts, right up to a climatic confrontation at the top of the tallest skyscraper in the city.

RIGHT WHERE WE WANT HIM

The military (see **Classic Bits** earlier in this section) finally manages to come up with a tactic or experimental weapon to capture and secure the Brute. Perhaps they even rely on the heroes to do the job, showing up in the aftermath to cart the Brute away with vague assurances about "top men" handling things from hereon in. Either way, the heroes quickly discover certain factions within the government intend to turn the Brute into a weapon or, worse yet, use it as a template to create more like it, but under government control. What could possibly go wrong with a plan like that? Chances are the heroes will find out sooner or later—sooner if they decide to intervene and later if they do not, and the results of the military's failed plan end up rampaging through the city.

COMPOSITE

Where one might fall, a thousand may prevail! The Composite is made of countless smaller pieces—grains of sand, drops of water, individual animals, or tiny robots—that operate as a singular entity with a single mind and will. Slithering, formless masters of their component elements, they are tricky adversaries who often sidestep the most common tactics employed by superheroes.

Composites double as bruisers, but also benefit from their unusual bodies. They can sneak through any opening large enough to accommodate a single unit of their mass, stretch and distort their forms, and shrug off certain kinds of damage. A single intellect is shared across the entire mass, or each unit holds a tiny piece of the Composite's identity or a single memory, and so long as one piece of the Composite survives its encounter with heroes, it can return to menace them again in the future!

THEMES

A Composite's theme usually revolves around their physical structure. A Composite made of stone may be immune to electricity as a nonconductive material, while a Composite made of water would be immune to fire.

You should consider what Complications accompany their structure and what effects they may be vulnerable to. A water-based Composite might be vulnerable to electrical attacks and freezing, while one made of insects could be controlled or repelled by effects that affect their component bugs.

The default statblock assumes the Composite is made from liquid or small, solid particles: water, sand, gravel, oil, clay, coins, broken glass, and garbage are all longtime comic book staples.

CAUSTIC

If the Composite is made of a heated or acidic substance, their touch may cause devastating burns. They gain ranks of Reaction Damage to represent their dangerous nature. A Caustic Composite may be made of molten tar, burning sulfur, or acid; or if also Gaseous, steam or poison gas.

GASEOUS

The Composite is already difficult to contain, but if made from gas particles rather than a solid or liquid, they become almost impossible to contain. Gaseous Composites have Insubstantial rank 2, often combined with ranks of Flight and either Affects Corporeal on their Strength or another means of inflicting damage, such as being Caustic or an Affliction or Weaken Stamina effect that represents suffocating victims with their bodies.

POSSESSION

The physical pieces of the Composite rampaging through the city may only be a visible manifestation of another, more subtle being using magic, psychic powers, or other powers to interact with the physical world. In this case, the Composite itself is essentially a summoned creature, maintained and commanded by another villain. It may be a way for an Elder Evil to interact with our world before summoned, a marionette created by a combination of the Mastermind's telekinesis and psychic senses, or created by the Puppeteer's influence applied to insects or animals. This doesn't change the game statistics of the Composite, but the entity creating the animate swarm can simply summon a new one as a standard action every time the heroes defeat it, requiring them to track down and defeat the true villain responsible. The controlling entity may even be a Composite itself, with rank 4 Insubstantial and no other way to interact with the physical world!

SWARM

Composites made from rats, bees, spiders, leeches, and other tiny creatures may have additional abilities based on their component species. Most will provide additional Senses, and likely a new form of movement such as Flight, Swimming, or Burrowing. Venomous or stinging creatures may also provide a Reaction Affliction or Reaction Damage as individual pieces of the Composite attack anyone who draws near. A Swarm Composite may also represent a mass of tiny animals controlled or summoned by another villain via magic or psychic powers, such as a swarm of bats directed by a Vampire.

TECHNOLOGY

Tiny robots or powerful microscopic computer chips making up the Composite's body may allow the villain to interact with computer networks or possess machines in addition to its normal suite of abilities. Possessed machines can be represented with the various robot minion archetypes, or by using the statistics for vehicles found in Chapter 7 of the *Deluxe Hero's Handbook*.

NAME IDEAS

Aggregate, Avalanche, Backfill, Colony, Hydraulic Woman, Johnny Butane, Mulch, the Pack, Plague, Quarry, Rat Queen, Throng

CLASSIC BITS

The following elements are often associated with Composite villains:

A CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK

Composites (especially those made from animals) can often split one or more pieces off themselves to act independently, usually as spies but sometimes to lure heroes into a trap. These smaller components can be treated as minions, and are generally not combat-effective. It's not uncommon for these independent slices to go rogue or even forget their creator, and become sympathetic to the heroes, who must then protect this newborn sentient when its parent comes to re-absorb it.

EVOLUTION

Many Composites struggle to become greater by evolving beyond humanity or reaching an intellectual singularity. Composites like this often grow cleverer as they grow larger, with individual members no smarter than a rat or cockroach, but by "networking" thousands of minds together they can develop intellects far beyond humanity. An advanced Composite may even transform into a Mastermind, retaining its Composite powers but gaining increased intelligence and a suite of psychic abilities.

HUMAN AGAIN

Some Composite villains were humans caught in tragic accidents, and can no longer return to their normal, solid form. These villains commit crimes just to survive or to lash out at a cruel world, and many of their schemes revolve around curing themselves and regaining their lost humanity.

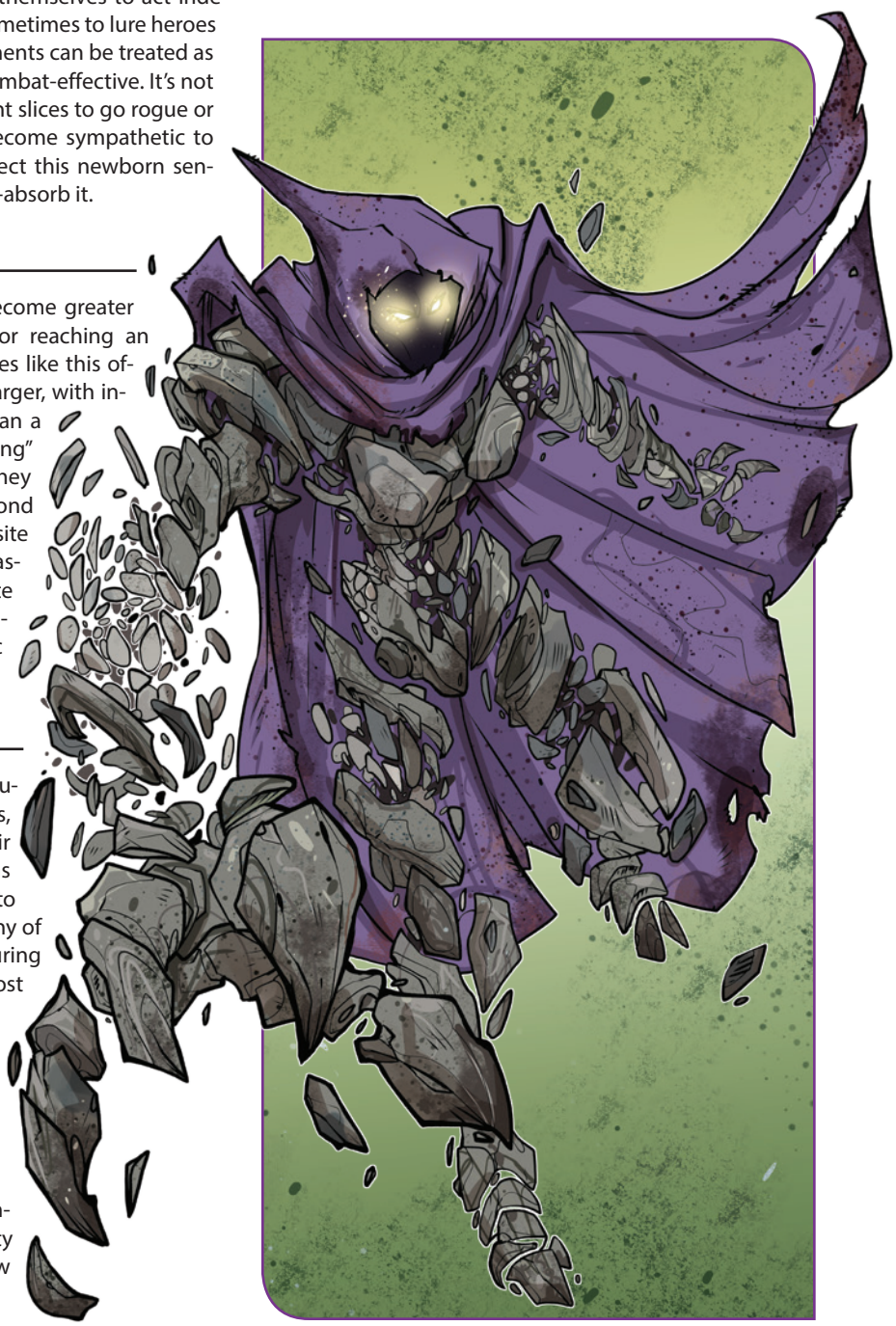
A THOUSAND FACES

Some Composites have such fine control over their elements that they can take on human-seeming forms at will, while others temporarily develop this ability after an accident or acquiring new technology.

WE ARE GREATER THAN I

Multiple personalities and dissociative disorders sometimes manifest in Composites who began their lives as humans, especially if their mind is spread across multiple brains, like a computer- or animal-based form. These personalities may battle for control or—like their physical body—may commune toward a single purpose, allowing the Composite to multi-task.

Conversely, Composites who have always existed as multiple entities working together usually refer to themselves as a collective and long to demonstrate the superiority of their collaborative mind. These ant colonies, rat nests, or nannite swarms are entire cities unto themselves.



COMPOSITE PL11

STR	STA	AGL	DEX	FGT	INT	AWE	PRE
8	9	6	2	8	-1	4	0

POWERS

Fusillade: Line Area on Strength Damage • *8 points*

Particulate Form: Elongation 2 (30 feet); Enhanced Advantages 5 (Defensive Attack, Defensive Roll 2, Diehard, Evasion, Instant Up); Immortality 1 (Return after 2 weeks); Immunity 40 (All Physical Damage; Limited to Half Effect); Insubstantial 1 (Fluid); Movement 4 (Safe Fall, Slithering, Wall-crawling 2) • *43 points*

Resilient: Immunity 20 (Life Support, Select one common power descriptor) • *20 points*

SKILLS

Acrobatics 4 (+10), Athletics 2 (+10), Close Combat: Unarmed 6 (+14), Perception 4 (+8), Stealth 2 (+8)

ADVANTAGES

Defensive Attack, *Defensive Roll 2*, *Diehard*, *Evasion*, Improved Grab, Improved Trip, *Instant Up*, Move-by Action, Power Attack

OFFENSE

INITIATIVE +6

Fusillade —	Line Area, Damage 8
Unarmed +14	Close, Damage 8

DEFENSE

DODGE	11	**FORTITUDE**	13
PARRY	10	**TOUGHNESS**	11/9*
WILL	9	*Without Defensive Roll.	

POWER POINTS

ABILITIES	72	**SKILLS**	9
POWERS	51	**DEFENSES**	16
ADVANTAGES	4	**TOTAL**	152

POTENTIAL COMPLICATIONS

Form Vulnerability: The Composite may take extra damage or suffer unusual conditions from certain kinds of attacks.

Identity: The Composite is an ordinary person who transforms.

Impulse Control: The Composite's distributed mind wars with itself, making them erratic and easily confused.

Insensate: The Composite lacks a sense of touch, which may affect some skills checks and alienates them from human society.

TACTICS

In combat, Composites operate much like other melee-focused villains. They have more mobility than a Brute or Hybrid, but their strategies often default to "hit it again." Where a Composite villain stands apart from other villains is their resilience: they are resistant to physical and energy damage and regenerate quickly, requiring heroes to employ unusual tactics to stop or capture the villain. Heroes can't put handcuffs on a pile of rats, or expect a woman made of water to stay put in a standard prison cell. Composite villains often have Complications stemming from their makeup that heroes must exploit, such as freezing water or dispersing sand with strong winds.

Thanks to the Composite's elongation power, they can engage distant foes with melee attacks, and their flexibility allows them to punch through or pelt every opponent in a continuous line. This Fusillade ability allows them to direct other applications of Strength over a 5-foot by 30-foot area, such as Smash and Trip attacks. They commonly use Extra Effort to change the shape of the Area extra applied to their Strength damage.

CAPERS

Adventures involving a Composite may include the following:

A QUIET SORT OF EVIL

Composite villains can slip into and out of secure facilities without triggering security devices or leaving the usual trace evidence behind, creating an unusual mystery for the heroes to solve—particularly if they are unaware of the Composite's existence, or only accustomed to random violence from them. Composites with lower expectations may focus on robbery, but those with ambition may perform sabotage, espionage, or assassinations as mercenaries or agents for more powerful villains.

MAXIMUM MAYHEM

The Composite somehow buds or reproduces, creating an offspring—this may be a natural experience for an alien or a new mutation for a villain transformed into their current state. This new creature lacks whatever compassion or humanity that stops the original villain from committing truly heinous acts, and wields considerably more power or greater numbers. Can the heroes tackle this bigger threat on their own, or will they team up with a former enemy to stop the offspring before they can destroy the city (or worse: reproduce again). Rampaging Composites may even draw unexpected allies from other chaotic villains.

NOW YOU'LL NEVER STOP ME

With the help of technology or a mystic artifact, the Composite manages to overcome the most obvious weakness to its form that heroes have exploited in the past, allowing them to now commit crimes with no apparent way to stop them. The heroes will need to find some flaw in these newly-reinforced defenses—perhaps something related to the plot element shields the Composite—to stop the Composite's one-villain crime wave.

YOU MADE ME A MONSTER

The Composite has a special hatred for whatever organization, villain, or mad scientist is responsible for their origin, and begins a campaign of harassment and violence against them. The heroes become involved either to aid the accidental creator, or to save a city caught in the crossfire. The creator takes some insight from the heroes once they become involved, and develops a technique to reverse the Composite's mutation. But before the heroes can attempt to capture the multitudinous menace, the Composite kidnaps their creator and forces them to begin the treatment. Is the cure a genuine shot at normalcy for the villain? Or do the heroes discover that the technique is intended to kill the Composite instead, and what do they do with that information?

CRIME LORD

While some supervillains go for wanton destruction, world conquest, or grandiose schemes, others prefer to work quietly, behind the scenes, sinister spiders at the center of a web of connections, influence, and corruption. Crime Lords prefer not to get their hands dirty, letting others do the work and take the risks while they reap the rewards. That is not to say Crime Lords are not capable of handling a physical confrontation, although most are not as powerful as their superhuman foes. On the other hand, Crime Lords tend to be the sort that world-spanning heroes often overlook, being busy protecting the planet from alien invasions and cosmic megalomaniacs.

THEMES

Crime Lords may be distinguished by the style and proclivities of their criminal empires; some may refuse to indulge in the "dirty business" of drugs or the sex trade, for example, while others prey on every dark instinct and impulse in the human soul.

HEAD OF THE CONSPIRACY

More than a mere Crime Lord, this villain is the head of a powerful criminal conspiracy. On the surface, it might appear to be just another syndicate, but its mundane criminal operations funnel resources into its true motives. These goals range from subtly influencing society to outright world domination, either covertly or openly, once the time is right to enact the master plan. The Head of the Conspiracy may even have various underlings who are Crime Lords in their own right, each controlling just one head of a vast hydra; the heroes stop the organization in one place, only to find it springing up in another. Conspiracies tend to adopt long-range plans, and some have existed for a *very* long time. The Head of the Conspiracy might be just the latest in a series, or an immortal, shadowy mastermind who oversees plots spanning lifetimes.

CULT LEADER

Similar to the Head of the Conspiracy, a Cult Leader is not just in it for the money. Indeed, profit is often a sideline to the cult's real goals, which may range from world domination to world destruction, or simply increasing the Leader's own power and influence. Some Cult Leaders are true believers, as fanatical as their followers, if not more so. Others are cynics using the beliefs of the cult to further their own ends, and playing a very dangerous game, should their loyal followers ever discover the scope of their betrayal.

NOT FROM AROUND HERE

Although the Crime Lord is typically a very human problem, you can mix things up by creating a Crime Lord who is not human at all, or at least not your run-of-the-mill syndicate boss. For example, the Crime Lord might be an alien, perhaps capable of assuming human form or possessing a human host body. It could have either taken over an existing criminal syndicate by impersonating and replacing its leader, or created one for its own purposes. Who knows what sorts of things aliens might consider "contraband" from Earth? Otherwise harmless foodstuffs or materials might be addictive drugs or weapons for them. They might deal in human slaves, organs, or meat, for that matter. Similarly, you can create a Crime Lord who is from another dimension, another time, or a similar offbeat origin.

THE NAPOLEON OF CRIME

A common crossover for the Crime Lord is a touch (or more) of the Mad Scientist archetype (later in this chapter). Not just ruthless, the Crime Lord is also a fiendishly brilliant inventive mind, capable of coming up with devices, treatments, and techniques to commit crimes and deal with those bothersome heroes. A Mad Scientist Crime Lord might not just hire supervillain muscle, but also *create* it from time to time, from building robots and growing clones to developing special treatments or devices. These opportunities are often one-time deals, too unstable for the inventor to use himself, but ideal for the right dupes. These techniques can also conveniently eliminate any potential rival or evidence in the process—if a prototype's spectacular self-destruction should happen to take out the heroes as well, so much the better!

NAME IDEAS

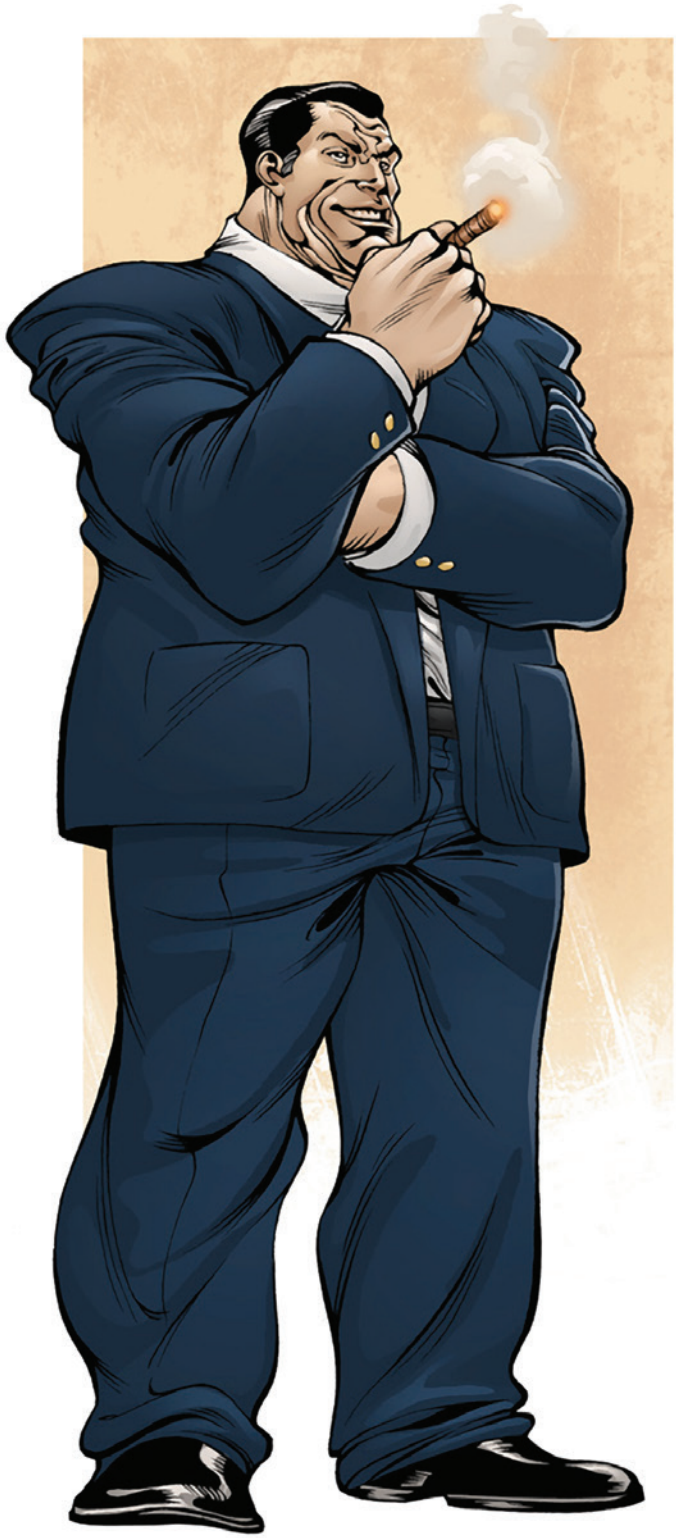
The Baron, The Cardinal, Crimelord, The Director, El Jefe, Mister Big, Shadowboss

CLASSIC BITS

Some classic elements associated with the Crime Lord include:

A TOUCH OF CLASS

Crime Lords often pose as members of polite society, maintaining the façade of "humble entrepreneur" and "philanthropist" to the outside world. Even Crime Lords who came from poor beginnings aspire to a degree of class, and often enjoy hobnobbing with the rich and famous who would once have never given them the time of day. Having powerful and influential friends also serves as a degree of protection; it is harder for the heroes to bust in on a Crime Lord when he is having cocktails with the mayor, a local Senator, and several captains of industry.



CAN'T TOUCH ME

More than any other sort of villain, the Crime Lord often hides behind the letter of the law, twisting it into a shield against "vigilantes" like the heroes (as well as the legitimate authorities). With plausible deniability and an army of highly paid lawyers, the Crime Lord can reliably squirm out of any charges the heroes might bring, getting right back to business as usual. It is not enough to know the Crime Lord is responsible for something: you have to be able to *prove* it. This makes dealing with a Crime Lord particularly challenging for heroes used to a "nail 'em and jail 'em" approach to crime-fighting.

Another element of this bit is the Crime Lord often has the resources for various traps, security safeguards, and the like to make things more difficult for the heroes. Some Crime Lords might not intend to put heroes into deathtraps, but do so anyway when the do-gooders come after them and stumble into the "home defense system."

A major turning point in a hero team's conflict with a Crime Lord is when they finally get the vital evidence they need to bring their nemesis to justice. Consider doing this when it is clear the players are getting tired of the plotline, as it is an important payoff. Just because they take down the Crime Lord publicly does not mean things are over: some villains manage to go underground while others even continue to run their organization from their jail cell! The characters may still have to dismantle the syndicate and deal with any of the Crime Lord's would-be successors.

THE NEW HIRE

Crime Lords prefer to delegate a lot of the messier tasks of their business, including dealing with those annoying costumed vigilantes busting up valuable operations. This makes Crime Lords prime employers for mercenary supervillains, as well as financiers to sponsor the creation of new bad guys to take on the heroes. A Crime Lord can gather a group of formerly unrelated villains together and forge them into a team, or pay a Mad Scientist (see page 98) to whip up some new underlings in the laboratory. Naturally, there will be nothing to link the Crime Lord to these criminal elements, and should the heroes manage to defeat them... well, there are always more where they came from.

TACTICS

The Crime Lord's watchword is "subtlety," balanced against a colossal ego and a need to have foes know who is responsible for their downfall. Quite often, heroes only encounter the Crime Lord in the form of taunting notes or recordings, or via anonymous phone calls, hidden audio systems, or video links.

CRIME LORD PL8

STR	STA	AGL	DEX	FGT	INT	AWE	PRE
4	3	1	1	8	6	5	7

EQUIPMENT

Heavy Pistol: Ranged Damage 4 • *8 points*

Smartphone: Features 2 • *2 points*

Walking Stick: Array (8 points)

- **Taser:** Affliction 8 (Resisted by Fortitude; Dazed, Stunned, Incapacitated) • *8 points*
- **Bludgeon:** Strength-Based Damage 2 • *1 point*

HEADQUARTERS: MANSION • *15 POINTS*

Huge; Tou 10; *Features:* Communications, Computer, Garage, Gym, Infirmary, Library, Living Space, Power System, Security System 2 (DC 25)

VEHICLE: ARMORED LIMO • *11 POINTS*

Huge; Str 8, Speed 5, Def 8, Tou 10; *Features:* Alarm

SKILLS

Deception 8 (+15), Expertise: Business 7 (+13), Expertise: Law 8 (+14), Expertise: Streetwise 8 (+14), Expertise: Tactics 6 (+12), Insight 10 (+15), Intimidation 8 (+15), Perception 4 (+9), Persuasion 8 (+15), Ranged Combat: Guns 6 (+7), Vehicles 5 (+6)

ADVANTAGES

All-Out Attack, Benefit (Status), Benefit 3 (Millionaire), Connected, Contacts, Defensive Roll 5, Equipment 9, Great Endurance, Languages 2 (French, Mandarin, Russian, Spanish), Minions 10, Set-Up, Well-Informed

OFFENSE

INITIATIVE +1	
Bludgeon +8	Close, Damage 6
Pistol +7	Ranged, Damage 4
Taser +8	Close, Affliction 8, Resisted by Fortitude
Unarmed +8	Close, Damage 4

DEFENSE

DODGE	8	**FORTITUDE**	8
PARRY	8	**TOUGHNESS**	8/3*
WILL	8	*Without Defensive Roll.	

POWER POINTS

ABILITIES	70	**SKILLS**	39
POWERS	0	**DEFENSES**	15
ADVANTAGES	36	**TOTAL**	160

COMPLICATIONS

Enemies: Rival criminal bosses and gang, police.

Honor: Personal criminal code.

Relationship: Family, a lover, or a secret child.

Rivalry: With opposing criminals.

Temper: When defied or challenged.

Confrontations between the Crime Lord and the heroes tend to happen at the time and place of the villain's choosing, typically with various traps and bodyguards close at hand, or in a public place where the heroes are reluctant to make a move without conclusive proof.

CAPERS

Adventures involving the Crime Lord may include the following:

THE BOSS OF BOSSES

The first task for an ambitious Crime Lord is unifying all criminal activity in the city, nation, or even world under the direction of one organization. It begins subtly, with certain gangs and bosses united under new leadership and others eliminated. As the Crime Lord's targets start fighting back, things erupt into a full-scale gang war, with innocent people (and the heroes) caught in the crossfire. As much as a group of crime-fighters might prefer to let the various criminal gangs wipe each other out, they have to consider the consequences. In fact, the Crime Lord may even try to manipulate events so the heroes weaken or eliminate some rival organizations, making the task of uniting the rest that much easier!

JUST BUSINESS

The Crime Lord's organization moves into a lucrative new area of criminal enterprise. It might be some new designer drug, unusual vice, or means of committing more mundane crimes like robbery, such as cyber-crime or use of a new, experimental technology. As the crime wave expands, the heroes have the opportunity to intervene and try to cut off the syndicate's newest moneymaking venture. Of course, that may be easier said than done, although taking out black-market warehouses, secret drug labs, and other resources may make a difference. Naturally, the Crime Lord does not take this challenge lightly and tries to eliminate the heroes, or at least distract them with other matters.

SO YOU WANT TO PLAY ROUGH?

One means of emphasizing the Crime Lord's considerable social and "soft" power is for the villain to make a project out of ruining the heroes' lives. The Crime Lord gathers as much information about them as possible, ferreting out their secret identities, the names of family and friends, their jobs, hobbies, and weaknesses or dark secrets, and them exploits them viciously.

Heroes find themselves evicted from their homes, their credit ratings ruined, their reputations smeared (both in

and out of costume). Professional organizations investigate and take action against them. Authorities begin to distrust them, and even their friends may turn away from them. The Crime Lord may go so far as to publicly "out" the heroes, so their other enemies can join in on the fun, making fugitives out of the good guys in their own city. All the while, the Crime Lord makes certain the heroes know just who is responsible for their misfortunes, but also ensures they cannot prove it in a court of law. Will they step over the line to exact revenge? If the Crime Lord fakes his own death in the process, will it just turn out to be his last laugh?

Obviously, this can be a series-changing plot, best reserved for fairly gritty or Iron Age-style games, although it virtually ensures the Crime Lord will be a foe the players grow to hate!

ELDER EVIL

While heroes often face off against foes who can rightly be called villains, from time to time they confront true *evil,* an embodiment of wickedness and corruption, or an alien entity of such power it is beyond mere labels of good or evil, but certainly not good for humanity as a whole. Elder Evils tend to be powerful master villains, operating behind the scenes for some time before the heroes finally confront them. Ideally, they never have to confront them at all! Elder Evils may be imprisoned or barred from the earthly plane by ancient wards or pacts, requiring the assistance of mortal cults or dupes (perhaps even the heroes!) to break their bonds and permit them access. The **Cultists** (see the minion archetypes, page 136) are suitable followers of the Elder Evil.

THEMES

Elder Evils in the comic books tend to fall into one of three major categories or themes: the Devil, the Evil God, and the Eldritch Horror.

THE DEVIL

Maybe not *the* Devil, but *a* devil, certainly. The villain fits the archetype of the mythic underworld evildoer, often complete with horns, forked tail, cloven hooves, and shroud of hellfire. Exactly how various demons and devils fit into the cosmology of the setting is left up to the GM: they might represent different religious or spiritual beliefs, or have inspired said beliefs without necessarily being bound by them.

Devils are often tempters (see **Classic Bits** later in this section); indeed, they may be prohibited from involving themselves in mortal affairs without being asked or invited in some fashion. In this case, they rely heavily on cults and the occasional novice sorcerer to get a cloven foot in the door. They're often interested in souls, either corrupting the good and innocent, or collecting the souls of the willing in exchange for what the Devil can provide. In either case, they can serve more as plot devices than anything else.

For Devils with game stats, you may want to substitute Fire Control or Magic for the Aura of Madness power and remove the Permanent modifier on the Growth power, allowing the Devil to become a threatening giant, or remain relatively human-size. Devils often have Morph to tempt victims in different guises as well.

THE EVIL GOD

Always willing to dip into the well of mythology, comic books have turned most historical deities of death, war, disease, or other unpleasant matters into supervillains at some point or another. Usually the deity in question rules over some extradimensional domain and wants to extend greater power over the Earth and its inhabitants, usually to their detriment. An Evil God is a natural enemy for a heroic deity acting on Earth as a superhero. The archetype also shows up in opposition to heroes empowered by or following in the footsteps of mythological deities.

An evil god's powers are largely dictated by his or her area of influence: death gods may have Darkness Control or Magic, often legions of skeleton or zombie warriors or ghostly minions. War gods tend to have considerable combat prowess, allowing them to go head-on with a team of superhuman heroes. Sly tricksters focus on shapeshifting and illusions, allowing them to get away before the heroes are even wise to their schemes. Modify the archetype's game stats accordingly, using the other archetypes in this book as examples, such as Sorcerer for a death god, Brute for a war god, and Mastermind for a trickster.

THE ELDRITCH HORROR

There are *things* in the unknowable realms beyond space and time that care little if mortals exist at all... squamous things, madness and amorphity in motion, whose very forms defy rationality and the sight of which twists perceptions and minds... things whose very existence is simply *wrong*.

Whether such things even have names other than what foolhardy mortal summoners attribute to them is a matter for debate in the mystic community. Elder Evils answer invocations when it suits them, not at the whim of a summoner reckless enough to reach across that final barrier.

Physical descriptions are rather useless when dealing with creatures with no true shape or form. GMs should use whatever comes to mind during a scene involving Elder Evils, the grosser and more disgusting the better: sharpened bills and hooks that slide in and out of view, razor-scaled carapaces that harden and melt without warning, vents that open and close to spew sticky acidic goo or flaming mucus, and so on. Similarly, add whatever additional traits the Eldritch Horror may require to make it a unique threat.

ELDER EVIL PL16

STR	STA	AGL	DEX	FGT	INT	AWE	PRE
16*	16*	-1	0	7	9	9	4

POWERS

Aura of Madness: Array (64 points)

- Perception Range Damage 16, Resisted by Will • *64 points*
- Affliction 12 (Resisted by Will; Entranced, Stunned, Incapacitated), Visual Perception Area, Reaction (looking at the Elder Evil) • *1 point*
- Affliction 12 (Resisted by Will; Dazed, Stunned, Controlled—causes evil or irrational behavior), Visual Perception Area, Reaction (looking at the Elder Evil) • *1 point*

Freedom of Movement: Flight 1 • *2 points*

Ghost Grasp: Strength Affects Insubstantial 2 • *2 points*

Inhuman Awareness: Senses 8 (Cosmic Awareness, Vision Counters All Concealment and Illusion) • *8 points*

Massive: Growth 16, Permanent, Innate; Immunity 21 (Aging, Life Support, Mental Effects); Protection 5, Impervious 12 • *71 points*

Voice of the Mind: Mental Communication 5, Dimensional (Earth and the Elder Evil's home dimension) • *21 points*

SKILLS

Close Combat: Unarmed 6 (+13), Expertise: Magic 12 (+21), Intimidation 4 (+16*), Perception 8 (+17)

ADVANTAGES

Fearless, Improved Grab, Ritualist, Seize Initiative

OFFENSE

INITIATIVE -1

Unarmed +13 Close, Damage 16

DEFENSE

DODGE	4*	**FORTITUDE**	16
PARRY	6*	**TOUGHNESS**	21
WILL	16	*Includes Growth modifiers.	

POWER POINTS

ABILITIES	56	**SKILLS**	15
POWERS	170	**DEFENSES**	27
ADVANTAGES	4	**TOTAL**	272

POTENTIAL COMPLICATIONS

Ancient: Bound by certain ancient covenants, rules, or customs.

Outsider: Must be summoned and can be banished.

NAME IDEAS

Asmodeus, Baal, Bargainer, Diabolus, K'thuul, Lord of Chaos, Lord Shaitan, the Whisperer of Forbidden Secrets

CLASSIC BITS

Classic elements associated with the Elder Evil include the following:

CULTS

As mentioned previously, Elder Evils are often limited in their ability to visit and influence the mortal world, so they need servants to do so. Since their power tends to inspire awe and worship, these servants usually belong to some sort of cult. The **Cultist** minion archetypes fit Elder Evils quite well.

People join cults for various reasons; some search for meaning or belonging, others opportunistically look for power and influence. Truly apocalyptic cults want to end the world, either because they believe it would be better off, or out of a foolish hope that their eldritch master will spare them when the time comes for everyone else, perhaps even making them rulers of the shattered post-apocalyptic world.

Stopping the cult of an Elder Evil from achieving its purpose can form the basis of an adventure or even an entire series. The moment where the cult completes the ritual to summon its dread master to the world and the Elder Evil appears makes for a great cliffhanger or chapter break in the adventure!

POWER

The game traits provided here assume the Gamemaster wishes to assign an Elder Evil any defined traits at all. Elder Evils are ideal for use as Power Level X plot devices, with powers and motives literally beyond human comprehension. Indeed, this archetype could serve as a *servant* or herald of such a greater Elder Evil.

Given the variety found among such spawn of chaos, you have *carte blanche* to change around the Elder Evil's game traits as you see fit to create a horror suitably powerful to challenge the heroes. In particular, you may wish to change the Elder Evil's Aura of Madness effects to others better suited to a particular theme, such as blinding smoke, a burning aura, and talons of flame for an Elder Evil associated with a fiery realm.

Although Elder Evils are tremendously powerful, they often have strong limitations as well. Even a plot device demon might be unable to usurp a mortal's free will, for example. The demon can tempt and threaten, even maim and destroy, but it cannot compel *cooperation* or a willing acceptance of the corruption of one's soul, which is the creature's ultimate goal. Similarly, other Elder Evils might be held at bay by certain rituals, signs, or substances, things the heroes can use to give themselves a breather and come up with a plan to defeat the villain.

TEMPTATION

Elder Evils often seek less tangible things compared to conventional villains. Although they have the power to conquer worlds (and may do so, when summoned), many are more interested in trafficking in souls or expanding their extradimensional realms through complex schemes or rituals. Just as they may need mortal agents (see **Cults**, previously), so do many Elder Evils seek to tempt mortals into serving them, directly or indirectly.

The real challenge of dealing with an evil tempter is not to give in, no matter how much the hero might want to do so. The villain is certainly not going to make it easy, either. While heroes can usually refuse such transparent ploys as offers of godlike power or dominion over the Earth, it is much more difficult to ignore opportunities to help others: bringing a loved one back from death, for example, or curing someone of a fatal or debilitating disease.

TACTICS

Their sheer power makes Elder Evils less tactical foes. If it comes to combat, they typically swat aside mortal opponents like insects, using parts of the terrain (vehicles, buildings, trees, and so on) as makeshift weapons, when they're not just using their powers to blast the heroes into oblivion.

A lot of dealing with Elder Evils is about *avoiding* combat, however. The heroes want to stop the Elder Evil from being summoned or unleashed in the first place, while the villain would prefer to tempt and corrupt the good guys rather than destroy them outright. Both sides tend to dance around each other, with a full-fledged fight meaning one or both of them have failed to achieve their primary objectives.

CAPERS

Adventures involving an Elder Evil may include the following:

WAKE THE SLEEPER

The classic Elder Evil scenario involves a ritual intended to summon the creature from whatever hellish netherworld it calls home. The summoners might be delusional enough to believe the Elder Evil will serve them (willingly or bound by the power of the ritual) or, at least, slay them last and mercifully when it destroys the world. Others are mad nihilists who care nothing for the fate of the world or even wish to actively hasten its end.

For a twist, the summoners might be other heroes, looking to bind the Elder Evil or seal a rift to its realm, but do so in secret to avoid alerting its earthly worshippers or panicking the general public. When the player characters stumble upon and interrupt the ritual, things go badly wrong and all the heroes need to work together to prevent the Elder Evil's escape.

WHOM THE GODS DESTROY

Members of an Elder Evil's cult begin shadowing a particular hero, taking no hostile action. When confronted, one admits the hero is the prophesized avatar of their master! The cult claims the Elder Evil in fact engineered the hero's origin, and the hero's powers derive from it. What's worse, the story *could* be true, in which case every time the hero's powers are used, the barrier between dimensions weakens a little more, bringing the Elder Evil closer to freedom. Does the hero give up crime-fighting and all use of his powers to safeguard the world, or is that simply what the cult and its master would like him to believe?

ELEMENTAL

Like many heroes, some villains are embodiments of a particular primal element, energy, or force. These range from the primal elements of air, earth, fire, and water to the forces of nature or the energies or elements of modern science, like gravity and radiation. Elemental villains are often the result of cosmic or scientific accidents, but may also be the pinnacle of a lifelong quest to command a particular force through scientific or mystical means.

THEMES

The Elemental's theme revolves around the villain's particular power source: what energy or force does the Elemental command? From whence does this power originate? Some elementals are mystic embodiments of their power, while others are mutants, magicians, or empowered by technology (either devices or altered by scientific treatments or accidents).

Roll on the **Elemental Themes** table or choose a suitable type for the Elemental.

NAME IDEAS

See the individual elements on the **Elemental Themes** table.

CLASSIC BITS

The following are some things regularly associated with Elemental villains.

THE UNDISPUTED MASTER

Self-proclaimed "masters" of their particular focus, Elementals are often supremely arrogant. They are so confident in their unmatched power they are often left at a loss when confronted with a problem their powers cannot solve. This isn't to say Elementals are not clever (many of them are), just that they tend to see everything in terms of their power and what it can do.

Elementals are particularly peeved by heroes who either claim to rival their ability, or who possess an opposite (but surely not equal!) power. So, for example, a Cold Elemental might be the arch-foe of a hero with similar powers—perhaps even gained from the same source as the villain—or of a hero with fire-control powers. Part of the villain's motivation is to demonstrate superiority over the rival hero.

THE UNEXPECTED ATTACK

Elementals are often able to use their unparalleled mastery in their particular specialty to pull off some unusual attack or effect against the heroes, from debilitating dehydration or heatstroke to electromagnetic interference with brainwaves or fine gravitational control to disrupt blood flow. The main idea is the attack tends to bypass ordinary defenses to overwhelm the targets. Some Elemental villains have unusual attacks as regular parts of their powers, typically some type of Affliction. This attack is more in the form of a villainous "power stunt," although actually it should be considered a complication you include in the adventure for the heroes to overcome. Thus, when you invoke the Elemental's unexpected attack, award the affected player(s) a hero point.

The idea is that the villain's initial use of the effect catches the heroes entirely off-guard and puts them at a serious disadvantage, perhaps even defeating them outright the first time (allowing the Elemental to escape or to capture them). Later, the heroes are forewarned about the villain's ability and can use their own powers and ingenuity to counter it. In particular, encourage players to make use of power stunts, inspiration, and inventions (all potential uses for the heroes points they have earned) to neutralize the villain's advantage.

VULNERABILITY TO OPPOSITES

An Elemental's power also tends to imply certain vulnerabilities, usually to the opposite element or force: a fire controller weakened by water or cold, an ice manipulator vulnerable to fire, or a master of magnetism weakened by heat, for example. Heroes may be able to exploit an Elemental's weakness, although the villain will certainly take steps to safeguard against it, especially once a weakness is known; keep in mind even the villain might not know about it initially!

Some Elementals play a variation on this theme by reversing or twisting the expected weakness. For example, a Cold Elemental might act as a kind of "heat vampire," creating intense cold by draining the surrounding heat, in fact being dependent on absorbing some heat in order to function. Thus the villain is actually weakened by an intensely *cold* environment, and might, say, freeze solid in sustained sub-freezing temperatures. Similarly, a Shadow Elemental might "feed" on light, but lose power in complete and total darkness, as "shadows" only exist because of light.

TACTICS

Elementals tend to be ranged fighters, standing around hurling blasts of their element while shielded by it as well, rarely mixing it up in close combat. Elementals use their powers to the fullest advantage, typically striking at foes with various ranged attacks, from straightforward blasts to more exotic effects.

The Elemental's biggest tactical vulnerability is reliance on sustained effects. There is the potential for Elementals to drop their guard if unable to focus and maintain their powers.

CAPERS

The following are some adventure concepts involving the Elemental:

UNLESS MY DEMANDS ARE MET...

With mastery over a particular force, the Elemental can threaten and blackmail an entire city, state, nation, or even the world! The Elemental starts off with a relatively showy display of power: destroying an abandoned building, or unleashing forces against a mostly deserted area, so the populace and authorities know the threat is for real. Claiming credit, the Elemental then issues demands, such as ransom, delivery of an item of technology (see the **More Power!** caper, following), or even some political concession, such as the elimination of an environmental threat.

The initial demonstration and the villain's demands give the heroes something to go on. They have to track down the Elemental and neutralize the threat; otherwise, the authorities may have no choice but to give in. Of course, if the heroes are not careful, their battle with the Elemental could be almost as devastating as the original threat!

For an additional level of danger, some mad Elementals make no demands: their threat is in deadly earnest, and the only reason they provide a preview of it is to heighten public fear and panic, and so the survivors know who has brought this down upon them. This is suitable for revenge-obsessed or nihilistic Elementals. The heroes must stop the villain before the threat is carried out.

MORE POWER!

Not satisfied with merely tremendous power, the Elemental seeks to attain *absolute* power. The method de-

ELEMENTAL THEMES

D20	ELEMENT
1	**Air Control** with wind blast (Ranged Damage 18), cyclone (Burst Area Damage 12), fog (Visual Concealment Attack 2, Cloud Area 16 – 120 mile radius), suffocation (Ranged Affliction 9, Concentration, Cumulative; Resisted by Fortitude; Dazed, Stunned, Incapacitated), and jetstream (Line Area Move Object 12). *Name Ideas:* Aeolus, Aero, Jetstream, Pneumatic, Silver Fog, Windshear, Zephyr
2-3	**Cold Control** with ice blast (Ranged Damage 18), ice sculptures (Create Object 18, Permanent), ice storm (Environment 9: Intense Cold, Impede Movement –2 ranks, Visibility –2 modifier), ice block (Ranged Cumulative Affliction 12; Resisted by Dodge; Hindered and Vulnerable, Defenseless and Immobilized; Extra Condition, Limited Degree), flash-freeze (Ranged Weaken Toughness 18, Affects Only Objects). *Name Ideas:* Absolute Zero, Coldsnap, Frigid, Ice Queen, Mr. (or Ms.) Winter, Sub-Zero
4-5	**Darkness Control** with dark blast (Ranged Damage 18), darkness field (Visual Concealment Attack 4, Burst Area 9), shadow scrying (Remote Sensing 18, visual and auditory, Medium: darkness or shadow), shadow snare (Ranged Cumulative Affliction 12, Resisted by Dodge; Hindered and Vulnerable, Defenseless and Immobilized; Extra Condition, Limited Degree), shadow-step (Teleport 18, Accurate, Medium: darkness or shadows). *Name Ideas:* Darkmane, Shadowlord, Silhouette, Umbra
6	**Earth Control** with rock throwing (Ranged Damage 18), avalanche (Burst Area Ranged Damage 12), rock-shaping (Create 18), rock hands or chains (Ranged Cumulative Affliction 12, Resisted by Dodge; Hindered and Vulnerable, Defenseless and Immobilized; Extra Condition, Limited Degree), earth-moving (Perception Ranged Move Object, Limited to Earth and Stone). *Name Ideas:* Gaia, Earth Mother, Rockslide, Slate, Terra-Fist
7-8	**Electrical Control** with ball lightning (Burst Area Ranged Damage 12), lightning flash (Ranged Burst Area Affliction 9; Resisted by Fortitude; Visually Impaired, Visually Hindered, Visually Unaware), power drain (Burst Area Nullify Electronics 12), electrical aura (Damage 9, Reaction), taser blast (Ranged Cumulative Affliction 12; Resisted by Fortitude; Dazed, Stunned, Incapacitated). *Name Ideas:* Bolt, Gigahertz, Lightning, Megawatt
9-10	**Fire Control** with flame bolt (Ranged Damage 18), fireball (Burst Area Ranged Damage 12), fire blast (Cloud Area Ranged Damage 12), fire aura (Damage 9, Reaction), heat wave (Burst Area Cumulative Ranged Affliction 9; Resisted by Fortitude; Fatigued, Exhausted, Incapacitated). *Name Ideas:* Firebug, Firestarter, Igneous, Pyro, Torch
11	**Gravity Control** with force blast (Ranged Damage 18), force burst (Burst Area Ranged Damage 12), force beam (Line Area Ranged Damage 12), force wave (Ranged Burst Area Cumulative Affliction 9; Resisted by Dodge; Dazed, Stunned, Incapacitated), gravitic manipulation (Move Object 18). *Name Ideas:* Counterweight, Gravitar, Gravitas, Heavyweight
12	**Light Control** with laser blast (Ranged Damage 18), laser burst (Burst Area Ranged Damage 12), blinding light (Cumulative Ranged Affliction 12; Resisted by Dodge; Visually Impaired, Visually Disabled, Visually Unaware), blinding burst (as blinding light, but also Burst Area and rank 9), holographic projection (Visual Illusion 12). *Name Ideas:* Hologram, Lazer, Lightwave, Photon, Sunlord
13-14	**Magnetic Control** with magnetic blast (Ranged Damage 18), magnetic burst (Burst Area Ranged Damage 12), magnetic field (Perception Ranged Move Object 18, Limited to Metal), magnetic pulse (Burst Area Nullify Electronics 12), metallic bonds (Ranged Cumulative Affliction 12; Resisted by Dodge; Hindered and Vulnerable, Defenseless and Immobilized; Extra Condition, Limited Degree). *Name Ideas:* Attractor, Lodestone, Master Magnet, Polarity
15	**Motion Control** with kinetic blast (Ranged Damage 18), kinetic deflection (Deflect 18), kinetic drain (Ranged Weaken Movement Effects 12, Broad), impart momentum (Move Object 18), momentum burst (Burst Area Move Object 12). *Name Ideas:* Erg, Go-Girl, Kinetron, Motion Master
16	**Plant Control** with animate plants (Summon), grow plants (Create 18, Permanent), pollen cloud (Burst Area Ranged Affliction 12; Resisted by Fortitude; Fatigued, Exhausted, Incapacitated), sicken or poison (Burst Area Ranged Affliction 12; Resisted by Fortitude; Dazed, Stunned, Incapacitated), root transport (Teleport 18, Medium: Plants). *Name Ideas:* Erl King, Flora, Forest Lord, Jack-in-the-Green, Rose
17-18	**Radiation Control** with radiation blast (Ranged Damage 18), radiation burst (Burst Area Ranged Damage 12), blinding burst (Burst Area Ranged Affliction 12; Resisted by Fortitude; Visually Impaired, Visually Disabled, Visually Unaware), irradiate (Ranged Weaken Stamina 9, Progressive), meltdown (Ranged Weaken Toughness 18). *Name Ideas:* Fusion, Meltdown, Nuke, Radion, Radium
19	**Water Control** with water blast (Ranged Damage 18), water burst (Burst Area Ranged Damage 12), hard water constructs (Create 18), blinding splash (Burst Area Ranged Affliction 12; Resisted by Fortitude; Visually Impaired, Visually Disabled, Visually Unaware), water movement (Perception Ranged Move Object 18, Limited to Water). *Name Ideas:* Aqua, Riptide, Tsunami, Undertow, Wave
20	**Weather Control** with lightning bolt (Ranged Damage 18), thunderclap (Burst Area Ranged Affliction 12; Resisted by Fortitude; Hearing Impaired, Hearing Disabled, Hearing Unaware), harsh weather (Burst Area Ranged Affliction 11; Fatigued, Exhausted, Incapacitated; Variable Descriptor: Weather), icing (Environment 18: Impede Movement –2), precipitation (Environment 18: Visibility –5). *Name Ideas:* Coriolis, Cumulous, Nimbus, Stormfront, Stormlord, Stratos, Thunder

ELEMENTAL PL14

STR	STA	AGL	DEX	FGT	INT	AWE	PRE
0	3	0	1	4	4	2	4

POWERS

Elemental or Energy Control: Array (36 points) based on theme (see **Elemental Themes** sidebar) • *40 points*

Elemental Movement: Flight 10 • *20 points*

Elemental Shield: Protection 15, Impervious 10, Sustained • *25 points*

SKILLS

Expertise: Magic or Science 6 (+10), Insight 8 (+11), Intimidation 10 (+14), Perception 8 (+11), Ranged Combat: Elemental Control 4 (+10)

ADVANTAGES

Accurate Attack, Power Attack, Precise Attack (Ranged, Cover), Ranged Attack 5

OFFENSE

INITIATIVE +0

Elemental Control +10	Ranged, Damage 18 or other effect

DEFENSE

DODGE	10	**FORTITUDE**	13
PARRY	8	**TOUGHNESS**	18/3*
WILL	15	*Without Protection bonus	

POWER POINTS

ABILITIES	38	**SKILLS**	18
POWERS	85	**DEFENSES**	36
ADVANTAGES	8	**TOTAL**	185

COMPLICATIONS

Undisputed Master: Arrogant and competitive about elemental mastery.

Weakness: To opposite or related element.

pends on the villain and the plot hook you wish to use. A legendary mystic idol or talisman might promise mastery over a particular element or force. A new technology could offer the potential of increasing the Elemental's power, perhaps by channeling vast amounts of suitable energy: an Electrical Elemental might seek out a new dynamo or generator, while a Radiation Elemental is drawn to an experimental cyclotron or even fusion reactor!

Whatever the case, the Elemental jumps in power level from 14 to 16, 18, or even off the scale altogether to PLX, becoming a living embodiment of the element, able to control unlimited amounts of it to any degree, anywhere. Imagine a villain with complete command of all of the electrical energy on Earth much less a foe able to command and shape the gravitic forces of the entire solar system or galaxy! The heroes have to come up with a counter-plan to remove the Elemental's added power, while surviving long enough to implement it.

ELEMENTAL ASSISTANCE

The Elemental stuns the world by performing a series of good deeds, the exact nature of which depend on the element involved, but can include alleviating natural disasters, bringing much needed rain or fertile soil to parched areas, stopping wars or border skirmishes, restoring environmentally ravaged areas, building or repairing housing or infrastructure, and so forth. The formerly feared supervillain claims to have reformed, and asks no reward for these good deeds. However, the villain still refuses to surrender to authorities, who have an increasingly difficult time trying to arrest the criminal, given the groundswell of public goodwill (and sovereign governments willing to provide asylum).

What is the Elemental's scheme? The villain might be looking to garner public support and a new power base from some grateful populace, making them dependent on their benefactor's continued aid. Perhaps the Elemental is looking to make the heroes look bad in the bargain, wondering aloud (and in front of the media) why they have not taken more measures to improve the world for the better. Who knows? Perhaps the Elemental actually *has* had a change of heart and wants to help, but remains too arrogant to answer to any outside authority, or to surrender and answer for any previous crimes

THE ELEMENTS OF EVIL

The only thing worse than one elemental villain is an entire group of them. Elements often come in paired opposites (fire and water, light and darkness, etc.) or in themed groups, such as the four classical elements of air, earth, fire, and water, or a spectrum of "fundamental forces" like electromagnetism, gravity, and nuclear force (strong and weak). One elemental villain might begin gathering those with similarly themed powers in order to form a stronger team to deal with those troublesome heroes. The Elemental's new teammates could be equally powerful, or lower power level underlings (perhaps using the Elemental archetype from the Hero's Handbook as a basis). Certainly, a team of PL14 Elementals would be a force to be reckoned with!

The heroes have to find some way of overcoming a group which may command considerable power, perhaps by exploiting the Elementals' innate weaknesses or even their oppositions to each other. They may also be able to find the source of the Elementals' power and use it, either to remove or weaken their foes' powers, or to increase their own long enough to defeat them.

HYBRID

Like the Brute, the Hybrid is often a tragic figure, a amalgam of human and beast. Some are creations of science gone wrong while others are the victims of mystical curses (such as lycanthropy). Some Hybrids revel in their condition and the power it brings, while others desperately seek a cure to restore them to normal, willing to do whatever it takes to achieve it.

THEMES

Hybrid themes are based around the type of animal or beast the villain resembles. The appearance may be strictly cosmetic—with the character having just the traits listed for the archetype—or it may include certain additional traits. Roll on the **Animal Types** table or choose a suitable species for the Hybrid..

While the Hybrid is often a human transformed by science or sorcery, it may also be a natural creature, perhaps an alien that resembles a humanoid beast or a member of a super-evolved race of beast-men. In this case, the Hybrid is usually a confused stranger in the modern world, in need of a means of returning home rather than restoring a humanity it never had.

NAME IDEAS

Generally something based on the Hybrid's animal associations (Ophidian for a snake-man, for example, or Hammerhead for a shark Hybrid) or a general description of the villain's beast-like nature: Feral, Primeval, Atavist, Fierce, Rabid, and so forth.

CLASSIC BITS

Classic bits for the Hybrid include:

THE CURE

The Hybrid's condition is often the result of an accident or curse, leaving the victim searching for a cure of some sort. This may be a scientific formula or treatment, or a magical spell or talisman, but the result is the same. The Hybrid engages in a series of thefts and kidnappings to get whatever is needed to put a stop to the madness and reverse the transformation. Heroes can offer to help, and might be able to convince the Hybrid to let them. More likely, however, the villain is too far gone to trust anyone, and has already committed serious crimes the authorities are not going to simply forget.

Finding the cure may be the end of the Hybrid, but there is always the possibility of the transformation happening again; perhaps the cure is only temporary, or circumstances force the Hybrid to accept the transformation once again in order to, for example, save a loved one or deal with a threat. If the cause can be repeated or the transformation is contagious then someone *else* could become the Hybrid, perhaps even at the same time as the original!

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

The Hybrid's buried humanity is often obsessed with a particular person. This may be a spouse, partner, child, or other family member of its human self, or simply someone who has shown the creature kindness and compassion, earning its devotion in return. The Hybrid stalks this person, trying to protect him or her in its own way—usually by threatening or even killing any perceived danger. Eventually, the creature may abduct the object of its obsession in order to keep that person

ANIMAL TYPES

D20	ANIMAL (ADDITIONAL TRAITS)
1	**Ant:** STR +2, STA +2, Movement 2 (Wall-crawling 2) • *+12 points*
2	**Ape:** Protection 3, Movement 1 (Swinging) • *+5 points*
3	**Bat:** AGL +2, Flight 2, Senses 3 (Accurate Radius Hearing) • *+11 points*
4	**Bear:** STR +1, STA +1, Protection 2; *+6 points*
5	**Cat:** AGL +2, Movement 1 (Slow Fall) • *+6 points*
6	**Chameleon:** Concealment 4 (Visual, Blending), Movement 1 (Wall-crawling) • *+6 points*
7	**Cheetah:** AGL +2, Speed +2 • *+6 points*
8	**Crocodile:** STR +2, STA +2, Movement 1 (Environmental Adaptation: Aquatic), Protection 2, Swimming 1 • *+13 points*
9	**Dog/Wolf:** AGL +1 • *+2 points*
10	**Earthworm:** Burrowing 2, +1 Regeneration rank, Senses 1 (Ranged Touch) • *+4 points*
11	**Electric Eel:** Damage 4 (electricity, Reaction), Immunity 1 (Drowning), Movement 1 (Environmental Adaptation: Aquatic), Swimming 2 • *+21 points*
12	**Elephant:** STR +4, STA +4, Protection 4 • *+20 points*
13	**Fly:** AGL +2, Enhanced Advantages 2 (Improved Initiative, Seize Initiative), Flight 2, Senses 1 (Radius Vision) • *11 points*
14	**Hawk:** AGL +1, Flight 3 (Wings), Senses 1 (Extended Vision); Perception +2 • *+7 points*
15	**Monkey:** AGL +2, Movement 1 (Swinging); Acrobatics +4; *+8 points*
16	**Octopus/Squid:** STR +2, Concealment Attack 4 (ink, Visual, Cloud Area, Limited to underwater), Extra Limbs 7, Immunity 2 (Drowning, Pressure), Movement 1 (Environmental Adaptation: Aquatic), Protection 4, Swimming 3 • *+30 points*
17	**Shark:** AGL +1, STA +1, Immunity 1 (Drowning), Movement 1 (Environmental Adaptation: Aquatic), Protection 3, Swimming 2 • *+12 points*
18	**Snake:** AGL +2, Enhanced Advantages 2 (Improved Grab, Improved Hold), Movement 1 (Slithering), Protection 2 • *+10 points*
19	**Spider:** STR +2, STA +2, Movement 3 (Swinging, Wall-crawling 2), Senses 1 (Ranged Touch), Web (Ranged Cumulative Affliction 6; Resisted by Dodge; Hindered and Vulnerable, Immobilized and Defenseless; Extra Condition, Limited Degree) • *+33 points*
20	**Whale:** STR +6, STA +2, Movement 1 (Environmental Adaptation: Aquatic), Senses 3 (Accurate Radius Hearing), Swimming 1 • *+22 points*

close by and safe. The heroes need to rescue the kidnap victim, which only enrages the creature.

True danger to the victim may cause the Hybrid to relent and even surrender or sacrifice itself. This can lead to a tragic ending, with the creature dead or presumed dead after giving itself to save the object of its affection.

CONTAGIOUS TRANSFORMATION

In some cases, like recombinant DNA or a magical curse such as lycanthropy, the Hybrid's condition may be contagious, usually to anyone bitten or scratched by it. This leads to a slow transformation of the victim into a similar hybrid creature. If these new Hybrids are contagious, a plague of the creatures could quickly infest an area, giving the heroes a major problem to deal with.

Things get worse if the transformation not only affects superhumans, but allows them to retain their powers! This can lead to super-powered Hybrids able to shoot flames, control minds, bounce bullets, and much more.

You can handle the transformation as a plot device, making it slow enough to not immediately overwhelm characters, but fast enough to create a sense of urgency. Alternately, you can handle it as an Affliction effect. See the **Vampire** archetype for guidelines on this.

ANIMAL MASTERY

In addition to their various other powers, Hybrids often have empathy with, and control over, creatures similar to themselves. This is essentially the Communication (Animals) effect or Summon Animals at a suitable rank, often Limited to the same type of creature as the Hybrid's basic stock. So a reptilian Hybrid may be able to control other reptiles, particularly snakes or alligators, while a feline Hybrid can control cats, possibly including big cats like lions and tigers.

UNEXPECTED IDENTITY

One twist about the Hybrid has almost become cliché: namely the villain's human identity turning out to be

HYBRID PL10

STR	STA	AGL	DEX	FGT	INT	AWE	PRE
6	6	5	3	8	-2	4	1

POWERS

Claws: Strength-based Damage 2, Penetrating 6 • *8 points*

Healing Factor: Regeneration 10 • *10 points*

Animal Senses: Senses 6 (Acute Smell, Danger Sense, Darkvision, Tracking, Ultra-hearing) • *6 points*

Bestial Speed: Leaping 2 (30 feet), Speed 4 (30 MPH) • *6 points*

SKILLS

Acrobatics 10 (+15), Athletics 9 (+15), Close Attack: Claws 4 (+12), Expertise: Survival 12 (+10), Insight 8 (+12), Intimidation 12 (+13), Perception 10 (+14), Stealth 11 (+16)

ADVANTAGES

Agile Feint, All-out Attack, Defensive Roll 2, Evasion, Fearless, Great Endurance, Improved Initiative, Improved Trip, Move-by Action, Power Attack, Startle, Takedown, Uncanny Dodge

OFFENSE

INITIATIVE +9

Claws +12	Close, Damage 8, Penetrating 6

DEFENSE

DODGE	12	**FORTITUDE**	10
PARRY	12	**TOUGHNESS**	8/6*
WILL	10	*Without Defensive Roll.	

POWER POINTS

ABILITIES	62	**SKILLS**	38
POWERS	30	**DEFENSES**	21
ADVANTAGES	14	**TOTAL**	165

COMPLICATIONS

The Beast Within: Subject to uncontrolled animal impulses.

someone other than who you would expect. For example, if the heroes think the Hybrid is the obsessed geneticist experimenting with his own work, the creature will turn out to be his lovely wife or daughter, either the victim of an accident the scientist is attempting to protect while he looks for a cure, or a willing test subject trying to prove his theories (often without his knowledge).

TACTICS

The Hybrid's tactics tend to be as its name implies: direct and brutal. It attacks like a wild animal, relying on its strength and speed.

Still, when faced with multiple opponents, the Hybrid can be a cunning foe. It often tries to lead pursuers into ambush or takes advantage of the natural features of the terrain, if it operates in the wilderness. So a Hybrid might lead heroes into quicksand or sinkholes, off of cliffs, or into riptides, as well as constructing crude traps such as deadfalls and snares.

CAPERS

Adventures involving the Hybrid may include the following:

THE HUNT

After a few attacks by the Hybrid in which some people have been hurt (but no one killed as yet), the authorities agree to work with a noted bounty hunter and mercenary who offers to track down the creature and bring it back, dead or alive. A friend of the Hybrid's human identity comes to the heroes and begs them for help, saying the Hybrid is not really responsible for his actions under the influence of the beast. The mercenary is a heartless killer who intends to make the Hybrid just another trophy for his wall, unless the heroes intervene.

KINGDOM OF THE BEAST

The Hybrid is involved in a series of thefts of scientific equipment and supplies, just like in **The Cure** bit, perhaps even kidnapping experts in the field. Evidence points to the villain's human identity and the accident or experiment that caused the initial transformation. However, it turns out the Hybrid is *not* looking for a cure, but a way of replicating the transformation on a much wider scale! The villain is creating a formula or device that will turn everyone in a city, nation, or even the world into a human-beast hybrid like it is, with the Hybrid as ruler of a new kingdom, unless the heroes find a way to stop it.

THE VESSEL

A Hybrid known to the heroes unexpectedly returns, perhaps even after being cured in a previous adventure. Shortly after the creature is sighted, however, it is captured by parties unknown and whisked away. Evidence points to the Hybrid's transformation being deliberately arranged and triggered by a secret mystical cult. The entity they worship has a half-human, half-beast avatar that sounds very much like the Hybrid. The cult members have taken this as an omen that the creature is destined to be the vessel of their god, and they intend to use the Hybrid in an occult ritual to summon it into the world. The heroes have to find the cult's hidden lair and put a stop to the ritual, or find a way to banish the cult's patron after it has possessed a physically powerful body to use in conjunction with its own mystical abilities.

IMP

The Imp is less of a "villain" and more a high-level nuisance or a bother—a foe intended more to make heroes want to bang their heads against walls than anything else. Some Imps are potentially deadly, but even these like their elaborate games and twisted ideas of what constitutes "fun."

Entertainment is the main idea of the Imp... for the Imp, anyway. The character is generally bored and seeks challenge or excitement by pestering the heroes in different ways. Some Imps are deadly serious about this, looking for ways to humiliate or even destroy their chosen opponents, while others are just out for some fun, even if they turn the world upside-down in the process.

Thus the Imp tends to combine a childish sense of amusement and cruelty with almost unlimited power. The Imp is usually nigh omnipotent, making it that much harder for heroes to get rid of him (or simply punch his lights out, as they will no doubt be tempted to do).

THEMES

Some themes common with Imp adversaries include the following.

COSMIC BRAT

The most common type of Imp is the bothersome pest who just won't leave and who is far too powerful for the hero to get rid of any way other than according to the rules of the Imp's game (or trickery involving said rules). The Imp may be an actual child (or at least look and act like one) or an adult or other being with childish qualities. Some Imps *seem* like adults at first, but demonstrate increasingly childish behavior, revealing their true nature.

In addition to an inherent weakness or winning the terms of the Imp's game, the Cosmic Brat may have another limitation: sooner or later, Mom and Dad might come looking....

PLAYER OF GAMES

Some "Imps" are hardly deserving of the title, being almost full-fledged devils, except these cunning figures are not the primordial forces of evil (see the **Elder Evil** archetype for that). Instead, they are nigh-omnipotent nuisances for heroes in one manner or another, just as insistent on their "game" (and their rules) as other Imps tend to be.

One example is the Game-Master, a cosmic game-player interested in various tests of wit and skill involving the heroes. Sometimes they play against the Game-Master, other times they are just pawns in one of his larger games, pitting them against other heroes or villains on an opposite team.

Another Player of Games is the Tester, who puts heroes in situations similar to the Game-Master, but for purposes of testing their abilities and limitations. This might be scientific curiosity or some need to put heroes through a "crucible" to refine their power and determination in some fashion. Some Testers are self-appointed judges of "worthiness," and may seek to eliminate those who do not meet their high standards.

THE TRICKSTER

Mythologies from many different cultures have stories of trickster gods and spirits who use cunning and guile to get into and out of a lot of trouble. A trickster Imp causes problems for the heroes largely because he can, out of a sense of boredom or to "lighten up" the otherwise overly serious good guys. For some it's childish good fun, for others, it's a vicious attempt to tear down the heroes and make them look foolish.

In spite of their tremendous power, tricksters tend to be cowardly when confronted, and sometimes get caught up in their own web of lies and deception. Smart heroes can play on their weaknesses and might be able to get some help from other members or factions of the trickster's "pantheon" (whomever they may be). Otherwise, it's up to the good guys to come up with some clever plan to outtrick the trickster.

YOUR NEW BEST FRIEND!

Sometimes an Imp means well, even if things do not work out that way for the object of its attentions. Rather than seeking to play against the heroes, the Imp wants to work *with* them, becoming their new partner, teammate, or sidekick. Unfortunately, as initially tempting as it might appear to have an ally with unlimited power, the heroes quickly learn that having the Imp on your side isn't nearly as helpful as it might seem.

For one thing, the Imp still doesn't understand human limitations or customs, going around violating all kinds of laws and procedures to get the job done. Then there's the inability to tell a serious supervillain from some rude newspaper publisher who calls the heroes names ("But I thought you said you didn't like him?" "That's no reason to turn him into a rat!") or problems that should not be solved with superhuman powers ("You wished he loved you, now he does!" "But it's not *real!*"). Lastly, there's the temptation for the Imp to "liven things up" by making them even *more* challenging for the heroes! After all, stopping a routine mugging is *dull,* but thwarting a massive alien invasion by an alliance of a dozen different races... now *that* sounds *awesome!*

NAME IDEAS

Anansi, the Brat, Coyote the Trickster, Kilroy, Mister Muggles, Pooka, Puck, Rumpelstiltskin, Sidekick, Storytime, the White Rabbit

CLASSIC BITS

The following are some things regularly associated with the Imp:

JUST LIKE MAGIC

The exact descriptors of the Imp's almost limitless power are left up the nature of the character; it almost doesn't matter. An Imp could wield powerful magic, science so amazingly advanced as to be indistinguishable from sorcery, higher-dimensional forces, or simply the ability to reshape reality at will. Whatever the source of the power, it is, for all intents and purposes, limitless (with possibly one exception, see **One Weakness**, following).

C'MON, LET'S PLAY!

Looking for entertainment, the Imp is more prone than most antagonists toward playing games, often childish or cruel (or both), such as high-powered versions of hide-and-seek, scavenger hunts, tag, checkers (perhaps played with buildings or landmarks, or living "pieces"), or various sports or board games. The Imp may pull mean pranks intended to make heroes look bad or just show them up, such as altering their powers or costumes, threatening their personal lives, trying to expose a hero's secret identity, steal away a significant other, and so forth.

IT'S MY IDIOM

Although the Imp is capable of accomplishing nearly anything, he tends to stay within a particular theme or style. For example, an Imp could be a shape-changer able to turn into anything he can imagine; or the Imp might be obsessed with 18th century pirate regalia, so all his various effects are associated with it (flintlocks, cannons, parrots, peg-legs, and so forth), even when they're fantastic in nature (firing energy beams or growing to giant size). There might be a reason for the Imp's particular style or it could just be a matter of taste. Whatever the Imp's idiom, it often has something to do with his weakness as well.

PASSIVE AGGRESSION

Although the Imp might have unlimited power, even when it comes down to a direct confrontation, Imps do not do things like simply making heroes vanish, turning them into stone (or any other inert matter), controlling their minds, or otherwise destroying or defeating them outright with nothing more than a thought. Why? The exact reason varies, but generally because it would offend the Imp's sense of "fair play" or make the whole conflict too easy, especially when the idea is provide some challenge and entertainment.

So when you are running a confrontation between the Imp and the heroes, be creative when it comes to challenging them. Instead of a big, damaging blast, the Imp is more likely to bring buildings or statues to life to fight the heroes, or enlarge ordinary urban rats or roaches into giant monsters. Maybe the Imp transforms into something the heroes can fight, such as a creature, giant robot, or fighter plane, and gives them a fair shot. Even when it comes to mind control, Imps are more likely to force heroes to dance a jig uncontrollably than to simply entrance them. It should be a challenge the players can find a clever way around rather than just "make this resistance check or you're dead."

ONE WEAKNESS

There is *always* a way to get rid of the Imp, and it is usually fairly easy to suss out or even trick the Imp into admitting what it is. Of course, it may then be a matter of fulfilling that condition, but smart heroes can often exploit loopholes in the requirement to get the cosmic pest to go away.

The nature of the weakness can be almost anything: learning and saying the Imp's true name (or getting the Imp to say it, perhaps backwards), winning a particular contest, waiting for a particular time (such as an Imp who only appears at night, or only on a particular night, like Halloween), or confronting the Imp with some intangible quality, such as love, hope, fear, or the like.

Once the Imp's weakness is triggered, he's gone, at least for a while. Some Imps have the same weakness, and it's a matter of knowing and using it when the Imp reappears. Others change weaknesses, often within a theme, such as the Imp who always leaves if you can beat him at a game, but the game (and its rules) change with every appearance.

TACTICS

Imps do not have a lot of use for tactics beyond "this sounds like fun!" The Imp usually has enough power to do just about anything, so the tactic of choice is usually the one that makes things the most difficult for the heroes but also gives them the opportunity to show what they're made of.

CAPERS

Adventures involving an Imp may include the following:

THERE'S A NEW HERO IN TOWN

An amazing new superhero shows up in the same area as the characters and begins showing them up with a dizzying array of incredible powers. He wraps up a dangerous hostage situation in no time, stops natural disasters, captures escaped super-monsters, and so forth, all without raising a sweat.

As the heroes begin to suspect this new champion of justice is too good to be true, they discover they are right: he's just a disguise for the Imp, who is actually *creating* many of the crises in order to swoop in and handle the problem! He might mean well, sincerely wanting to help his idols (the heroes) but he's too impatient to wait around for actual things to happen. On the other hand, the Imp might be maliciously messing with the "do-gooders" by showing them up and making them look bad in public. Either way, they have to figure out how to get rid of him before his grandstanding creates a real disaster!

THE IDEAS GUY

It's the heroes' worst nightmare come true: the Imp latches on to a cunning and dangerous supervillain (such as the **Psycho** archetype) and, like a magical genie, starts making all of his wishes come true! Now the guy who gave the heroes trouble with limited or no powers of his own has almost unlimited source of power! The heroes have to contend with the problems their newly empowered foe causes for them while trying to figure out how to separate the Imp from the new "ideas guy" so they can deal with them both.

BUILDING BETTER HEROES

In an effort to be "helpful," the Imp decides heroes need challenges to not only stay sharp, but to hone and improve their skills. Therefore, he takes it upon himself to become their "hero coach" and provide them with all sorts of new and innovative challenges. At first, the good guys might not know the Imp is behind it all. They just notice an uptick in strange happenings and crises. The more they deal with things, the worse they seem to get, however, until the heroes cannot seem to catch a break. Only when all seems lost (the Moon begins falling out of the sky toward Earth, or a giant monster threatens to eat the Sun), does the Imp appear to harangue the hopeless heroes and tell them they need to meet this latest challenge! Lack of gratitude might well turn the Imp away from helping and back to just causing trouble, not that the heroes will be able to tell the difference.

CHALLENGE OF THE CHAMPIONS

The Imp takes the role of referee in a contest (or series of contests) between two or more teams of superhumans. The teams could be the classic "heroes versus villains" or various superhero teams competing, mixed groups of heroes and villains, the heroes versus heroines, adults versus teens, or anything else that catches the Imp's fancy. Perhaps the teams even vary from one contest to the next. Similarly, the prize can be anything from the Imp *not* wiping out life as we know it on Earth to the promise of fulfilling the winner's every wish, something the good guys are *not* going to want their archenemies to get!

This adventure is an excuse to put the heroes through any series of contests you care to think up, including staging interesting fights with various opponents in exotic locales, around the world or in the far corners of the universe.

IT'S A MAD, MAD WORLD

A series of just plain *weird* things start happening to the heroes: clouds made of actual cotton; cartoon characters coming to life; inanimate objects talking to people and developing temperamental personalities, and so forth. The more surreal the idea, the better it is. After a series of incidents that make everyone doubt their sanity, the Imp shows up to explain how the physical world needed some "livening up." Incapable of fully understanding the divide between imagination and solid reality, the cosmic visitor has begun blurring it, causing dreams, imagination, and nightmares to bleed over into the real world.

The good guys have no end of crises and emergencies to handle, along with ultimately convincing their strange visitor to stop and put things back to normal.

JOBBER

Not every villain is cut out to rule the world or bring society to its knees, and not every villain wants to. For many, villainy is a strict 9-to-5 day job. Once all is said and done, they punch out and hit the bar to complain about their kids' braces and the overbearing mastermind signing their checks. Others may simply have a schtick or gimmick they love that's never amounted to much more than holding up jewelry stores and shaking down tourist busses, continuing their villainous schemes for the art, rather than for power or profit.

The Jobber is a classic low-power goon who nonetheless brings some powers to the fight. They are lieutenants who lead minions or support more powerful villains with clear-cut agendas. The typical Jobber excels at something (see the Jobber Themes table), and applies that skill to criminal activities, but without the style or raw power of more experienced villains. Some are happy with their brand of "casual villainy," never quite being leadership material, while others resent their role as second-string evil. Some earn a measure of respect working as the strong arms for a criminal syndicate under a Crime Lord or Mad Scientist, and just as many still trash talk and posture no matter how many times they're defeated.

What they lack in terms of power, most Jobbers make up for with personality. They lovingly embrace their gimmicks with an appropriate costume for themselves and minions, themed crimes, and strings of bad puns. Most inexplicably escape prison with ease to haunt their favorite heroes time and time again.

THEMES

A Jobber's theme revolves heavily around whatever particular power set they possess. Most have a particular obsession or theme to their abilities that both limits the theme and scope of their crimes and provides a curiously savant-like mastery of some subject. A clock-themed Jobber may not be able to do multiplication in his head but can track and predict timing within a tenth of a second, while a Jobber with a freeze ray may build it herself but otherwise be unable to change her own oil or set the clock on her microwave. Consider where a Jobber's powers come from: Are they natural abilities? Are they provided and maintained by another villain? Are their abilities from a magic source, strange radiation, or a strangely specific mastery of science?

CAN'T TOUCH ME

While Jobbers are generally considered a joke, most have one unexpected area where they shine or easily outmatch even veteran heroes. This is sometimes played for laughs but other times represents a serious challenge the heroes must overcome. The most common example is the amphibious villain who is a joke on dry land but extraordinarily powerful, swift, or skilled underwater. Other Jobbers may be frustratingly difficult to catch in a chase or possess oddly specific scientific expertise relevant to a problem the heroes must solve, forcing them to persuade or intimidate the Jobber into working with them willingly. This ability is best reflected with advantages like Favored Foe or Favored Environment—perhaps even allowing Jobbers to stack two ranks of these advantages to improve the provided circumstance bonus to +5.

IT'S ALL THE SUIT

Many Jobbers rely on advanced technology to provide their powers, having no abilities of their own and instead using a weapon, suit, or other gadget for their power. Consider where this technology comes from: Is it a mystical artifact they found? A gift from a mad scientist? Equipment provided by an employer? Or did they build it themselves? If the technology is provided by someone else, consider what happens if the Jobber goes rogue, or if their boss is taken down. If the villain provides their own technology, can they provide a similar (less powerful) version of that same technology to their minions, or even sell it to other criminals? Also consider if their device is removable or easily removed; a gravity gun can be disarmed, while a villain with a wearable "cosmos rig" has to be taken down before the heroes can take their powers away.

THAT'S ODDLY SPECIFIC

Many Jobbers rely on amazingly advanced technology they build themselves, despite having no special genius or other technical skills. Many could become wealthy if they learned to apply their technological insights or patented their creations, but somhow never manage to. This savant-level tinkering is always limited to their theme or represents one particular discovery they stumbled across. It is considered a plot device rather than anything requiring appropriate skills or advantages.

NAME IDEAS

See the individual elements on the **Jobber Themes** table.

CLASSIC BITS

Some classic elements associated with the Jobber include:

CHECK THIS OUT

Jobbers have a tendency to reinvent themselves along their theme, returning with new skills, new advantages, different minions, or changes to their powers. They may upgrade or change out their arsenal of gimmick weapons or learn a new alternate power, always keeping heroes on their toes. These new abilities are an excellent excuse to introduce plot devices used to kick off the real adventure, such as a mirror-themed Jobber's new ray gun

JOBBER PL8

STR	STA	AGL	DEX	FGT	INT	AWE	PRE
2	3	1	1	4	0	1	0

POWERS

Armored Costume: Protection 5 • *5 points*

Jobber Schtick: Powers based on theme (see **Jobber Themes** sidebar)

SKILLS

Athletics 5 (+7), Expertise: Streetwise 8 (+8), Intimidation 6 (+6), Perception 4 (+5), Ranged Combat: Powers 7 (+8), Technology 4 (+4)

ADVANTAGES

Beginner's Luck, Close Attack 2, Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Takedown, Teamwork, Ultimate Effort (Toughness checks)

OFFENSE

	INITIATIVE +5
Jobber Attack +8	Effect Varies
Unarmed +6	Close, Damage 2

DEFENSE

DODGE	8	**FORTITUDE**	9
PARRY	8	**TOUGHNESS**	8/3*
WILL	7	*Without Protection bonus	

POWER POINTS

ABILITIES	24	**SKILLS**	17
POWERS	varies	**DEFENSES**	23
ADVANTAGES	8	**TOTAL**	72+

COMPLICATIONS

Accident: The Jobber is especially prone to causing mayhem and accidents, or losing control of their powers.

Goober: No one seems to take the Jobber seriously.

Quirk: The Jobber has a personality quirk or obsession related to their power set.

Responsibility: The Jobber has obligations to a more powerful villain or group.

accidentally swapping the heroes' minds or a Nightmare-themed Jobber's new sleeping dust trapping everyone in a shared dream for the session.

COLD OPEN

A recurring narrative device in comics is to open with the heroes already engaging a minor threat such as a criminal gang caught mid-heist. Because they are neither especially threatening nor especially subtle, Jobbers make excellent leaders for otherwise ordinary criminals in opening encounters like this, adding some special effects to a short and exciting opening scene.

DOUBLE TROUBLE

Jobber powers sometimes straddle multiple themes, and because the effects listed generally don't stack you can feel free to select two different themes to provide more interesting power options and increased mobility, such as a stilt-themed villain whose powersuit also provides them with super strength, or an aerialist who throws trick feathers that explode or entangle targets.

IT'S A LIVING

For many Jobbers, crime is a day job and they still have a regular life outside the suit. They hang out at bars with other minor villains, hold down apartments, and may have families to support. Some turn to villainy because their expertise or powers ruined their chance at a normal life, and a criminal record prevents them from finding legitimate work, feeding a vicious cycle of criminal behavior. Many of these "blue collar" villains are happy to leave business at the office and sit down for a drink with heroes out of costume, though they generally want to leave "shop talk" at the office and discuss anything else, from sports to the local gossip.

Most workaday Jobbers have shockingly mundane concerns, like how to pay for healthcare, save for retirement, or get their kids to respect them, and invariably turn to villainy to solve these problems.

MY RIGHT HAND

Jobbers who take their career more seriously often serve as lieutenants for more powerful villains, assisting them in combat and leading their minions on jobs. While this doesn't necessarily make a Jobber more powerful, it grants them access to better vehicles and equipment, and may mean they can readily escape custody to rejoin their criminal master. Those who lead minions usually have higher ranks of the Intimidate skill.

Multiple Jobbers—often with complimentary powers—may even serve the same master and provide a potent one-two punch that helps a mastermind manage an entire team of heroes in combat. A villain who creates icy environments, for example, would benefit from lieutenants who can survive or thrive in icy conditions, while a villain with powerful psychic powers and a fragile body may turn to super-strong Jobbers to defend them. A Jobber who can maneuver around on the ceiling pairs well with another who lays out sticky traps on the floor, and so forth.

VILLAINS WITHOUT NUMBER

Jobbers straddle the Power Level between villains and minions, and can also represent "elite" minions of

especially powerful villains, such as an Elder Evil's demon-imbued shock troops or an Overlord's royal guard. Simply apply the minion rules (or don't, if you want to use them sparingly) and select a theme reflective of their employer.

Even when they aren't minions, Jobbers often flock together for strength in numbers against a city's heroes. They are more likely than most villains to work well together, forming a criminal league or gallery of rogues who focus on one hero in particular they have in common.

TACTICS

When all you have is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail. Jobbers typically have one strategy and stick with it, often getting creative in how to best apply their limited powers. They select their targets, environments, or even time of day based on what provides an advantage—especially those with movement powers. In combat, they are direct and overconfident, opening up with their strongest power before trying alternate powers or maneuvers.

While they easily outmatch local law enforcement, Jobbers are rarely on equal footing with superheroes. Jobbers often lead minions—either their own or other criminals loyal to their employer—and use Aid actions and Team Attack maneuvers with their minions to match a hero's power level. Others may use their minions for cover—in this case, consider applying the Interpose advantage to minions or even a mandatory Interpose-like effect that allows a Jobber to sacrifice an adjacent minion to block a hero's attack.

CAPERS

Adventures involving a Jobber may include:

A CONTEST OF CRIMINALS

Over a few drinks, several Jobbers decide to settle which of them is the best by all targeting the same treasure. The first to attack may provide a red herring, making heroes believe that an unaffiliated employer is after the treasure or that a wave of theme-robberies is about to begin, but as more and more villains make a run at the same target the situation becomes more obvious. Once the heroes get involved, the rules change, and the Jobbers split into teams to see who can catch the most heroes unprepared and take them down.

HEROIC EFFORTS

A Jobber accidentally manages to stop a crime in progress while waiting to rob the same business, leaving them basking in the adulation of a crowd and smiling for news cameras. After this, he begins fighting street crime. Do the heroes get involved and help their old foe reform, or do they watch and wait for him to relapse into his formerly felonious ways?

I MISS THE OLD GUY

A long-running Jobber who has opposed the heroes before finally retires, disappears, or dies. More a colorful character than a dangerous criminal, her loss leaves the hero community and local news feeling awkwardly down. But soon, a new criminal picks up her mantle and equipment, but with far darker, more violent tendencies, sensible tactics, and possibly even powerful minions. This new legacy Jobber may even have an increased power level. What is their tie to the original villain and what is motivating their new crime wave, and can the heroes stop them from tarnishing the legacy of a far less dangerous criminal that may even think of as a peer?

JOBBER THEMES

D20	ELEMENT
1	**Aerialist** with wings (Winged Flight 8), wing slash (Strength-Based Damage 4; Accurate 2), and avian senses (Senses 6 [darkvision, extended vision, infravision, tracking 2]). *Name Ideas:* Butcher Bird, Con-dor, Dragonfly, Flying Fox, Kingfisher, Pinfeather, Rocketrix • *20 points*
2-3	**Energy Projection** with energy blast (Ranged Damage 8), stun blast (alternate; Ranged Affliction 8, Resisted by Fortitude; Dazed, Stunned, Incapacitated), Energy Wall (alternate; Create 8), Blast Off (alternate; Leaping 5), and energy battery (Immunity 10 [one energy type]); *Name Ideas:* Combustor, Lighter, Living Frost, Master Ohm, Mr. Hot, Shakedown • *29 points*
4–5	**Glue/Traps** with snare (Ranged Cumulative Affliction 8, Resisted by Dodge; Hindered and Vulnerable, Defenseless and Immobilized; Extra Condition, Limited Degree), snare trap (alternate; Cumulative Affliction 7, Resisted by Dodge; Hindered and Vulnerable, Defenseless and Immobilized; Extra Condition, Limited Degree; Triggered), and snare bomb (alternate; Burst Area Cumulative Affliction 6, Resisted by Dodge; Hindered and Vulnerable, Defenseless and Immobilized; Extra Condition, Limited Degree); *Name Ideas:* Adheser, Flypaper, Goo Girl, Handy Man, Mountain Man, Snap-Trap, String King, Trapules, the Welder • *26 points*
6–7	**Leaping** with super leaping (Immunity 5 [falling damage], Leaping 5, Speed 4) and power kick (Strength-Based Damage 4, Accurate 2). *Name Ideas:* Bullfrog, Triathlete, Hare Trigger, Hopscotch, Kangarude, the Leapist, Pole Vault • *20 points*
8–9	**Mirrors/Illusions/Shadows** with projections (Visual Illusion 8), reflection/misdirection (Deflect 7; Redirection, Reflect), illusion damage (alternate; Ranged Damage 7; Alternate Resistance [Will]), invisibility (alternate; Visual Concealment 4); and mirror-step (alternate; Extended Teleport 10; Medium). *Name Ideas:* Adonis, Bloody Mary, Chiaroscuro, Figment, Mirror Miser, Refractor, Shadowplay • *40 points*
10–11	**Poison** with venom (Weaken Stamina 8, Resisted by Fortitude; Accurate), hallucinogenic poison (alternate; Affliction 8, Resisted by Fortitude; Dazed, Compelled, Controlled; Accurate), paralytic poison (alternate; Affliction 8, Resisted by Fortitude; Dazed, Stunned, Paralyzed; Accurate), poison spray (alternate; Line Area Weaken Stamina 4, Resisted by Fortitude), and sneaky (Enhanced Stealth 10, Movement 1 [slithering *or* wall-crawling 2]). *Naming Ideas:* Dr. Feelbad, Ghost Shrew, Injector, Mr. Medici, Pusher, Scorpion X • *19 points*
12–13	**Stilts/Spiders/Striding** with long-legs (Elongation 4 [limited to legs], Speed 4), kickback (Strength-Based Damage 4; Accurate; Linked to Close Move Object 8 [limited to away]), and Teflon-coating (Immunity 1 [being climbed]). *Name Ideas:* Bowlegged Man, the Crane, the High Heel, Leg Man, Lifts, Mommy Longlegs, Power Walker • *17 points*
14–15	**Spinning** with whirlwind spin (Concealment 4 [visual; partial], Senses 1 [radius vision], Speed 6), dizzying embrace (Affliction 8, Resisted by Will; Dazed, Defenseless, Incapacitated; Accurate), and tornado control (alternate; Close Cone Area Move Object 4). *Name Ideas:* Brawllerina, Gustnado, Gyro-Master, Madame Centrifuge, Pinwheel, Spin Cycle, Turnabout, Whirligig • *21 points*
16–17	**Strength** with powerhouse (Enhanced Strength 7, Enhanced Advantage [Close Attack, Improved Grab]) and resilient (Immunity 10 [life support; limited to half effect]). *Name Ideas:* Buffalo Gal, Crusher, Gravestone, Johnny Legbreaker, Miss Grizzly • *26 points*
18–19	**Throwing Weapons** with exploding ammo (Ranged Damage 8), entangle ammo (alternate; Ranged Affliction 8, Resisted by Dodge; Hindered and Vulnerable, Defenseless and Immobilized; Extra Condition, Limited Degree), flash ammo (alternate; Ranged Burst Area Affliction 8, resisted by Fortitude; Impaired, Debilitated; Limited Degree), thrown flurry (alternate; Strength-Based Ranged Damage 6; Split 4), and swingline (alternate; Movement 2 [safe fall, swinging]). *Name Ideas:* Boomerage, Captain Javelin, Deadeye, Throwing Star, Zuboshi • *20 points*
20	**Whips/Tentacles** with lash line (Strength-Based Damage 6; Accurate 2; Fast Grab, Improved Grab, Improved Hold), power pull (Enhanced Strength 6; Limited to Grappling and Pulling), and swingline (Movement 2 [safe fall, swinging). *Name Ideas:* Bullwhip, Cat-O-Nine, Chainbringer, Creeping Ivy, Filament, Lash Master, Man-O-War, Ribbondancer, Rocktopus, Urumi • *19 points*

THE NEW ORDER

After the heroes take down a local crime lord, one or more of the Jobbers in their employ decides to pick up the reins and take over the organization. While not as criminally brilliant as their ex-boss, the Jobber offers unique firepower by creating replicas of their own power suite at an appropriate rank for their minions. With power and no subtlety, they begin a more overt and violent crime wave than the ones the heroes just stopped, and taking the Jobber down becomes even harder when they begin outfitting their criminal headquarters with powered traps.

YOU'RE NOT LAUGHING NOW

A common element of the Jobber life is humiliating defeat, and the Jobber has taken one too many quips or right-hooks from their rival hero at this point. With some outside help, they have upgraded their power significantly, increasing their PL to 12 or higher (or consider using the Elemental or Jumped-Up Nobody archetypes) and are now rampaging through the city to draw out the heroes or take revenge on old rivals. They're eager to settle the score and see how many jokes the heroes can crack through a broken jaw.

JUMPED-UP NOBODY

If it were not for a strange twist of fate, the Jumped-Up Nobody would be just that: no one of any consequence. After a lifetime of frustration and obscurity, suddenly a great Item of Power has found its way into his hands and the nobody *finally* has a chance to be somebody, to make the world sit up and take notice! Now he will show them what *real* power can do! He'll show them all!

More often than not, the Jumped-Up Nobody is a temporary villain, a character who gets his powers at the start of the story and loses them by the end. Still, that does not necessarily have to mean the end of the villain, since the Nobody may be looking for a way to regain the lost power; he might even succeed, if a return appearance is desired.

THEMES

The primary variations on the Jumped-Up Nobody involve the exact nature of the Item of Power. It can be a book of spells, a magical talisman, cosmic artifact, piece of advanced alien technology, or anything else the GM cares to make up. Likewise, the Nobody could have come by the Item in any number of ways. Some find them by accident, literally in the mud at the character's feet (or in the trash, washed up on the beach, etc.). Others hunt for the Item for years until they are rewarded with success. A few stumble across an Item of Power meant for somebody else, such as the hapless henchman who ends up with the Item a villain has worked to acquire, or the cosmic mistake that assigns something meant for a heroic wielder to a less worthy subject. The Item often "imprints" on its wielder such that no one else can use it.

You can further customize the archetype by assigning different or additional powers to the Item of Power's array. They can round out the character's arsenal of attacks and provide some additional effects. You can also leave some or all of them undefined and fill them in during game play as ideas suggest themselves (see **Classic Bits** for more on this).

POWER SOURCE

Some Jumped-Up Nobodies don't gain their power from an item, but from another outside source. The classic example is a "D-list" sorcerer who has sold his soul to a demon or other entity in exchange for tremendous power. Naturally, once the sorcerer is defeated, his master calls the debt due, and he is dragged down into some hellish afterlife. These Nobodies have the same sorts of powers, just without the Removable modifier (and with a corresponding increase in cost). In its place, they may have another flaw, usually involving the temporary nature of their powers or a price they must eventually pay.

BLUNDERING NOBODY

The default archetype assumes a villainous character, but some Jumped-Up Nobodies are actually average or even well-intentioned people suddenly gifted with enormous power without the ability to understand or control it. They are like giants in a sandbox, capable of unleashing blasts that can level buildings or even worse with a glance; they're usually frightened by the circumstances, then angry at being attacked, and therefore unable to exercise the mental discipline needed to keep their new powers in check. Heroes dealing with Blundering Nobodies have to keep them calm and under control while containing their incredibly dangerous powers. It can get even worse when the Nobody wants to "help out" by joining the team before he or she is ready, and it appears the influence of the Item of Power is starting to corrupt the user....

OMNIPOTENT NOBODY

The most extreme type of Jumped-Up Nobody is a plot device character with truly limitless power, even beyond that of the item given in the archetype's stats. The Nobody might possess a literal plot device, an item capable of turning thought into reality or granting wishes, or may be granted untold power by an outside agency. The basic principles of the archetype still apply, but coming up with a way of defeating the villain is even more based on the heroes figuring out the Nobody's weakness and putting it into use, rather than engaging him in toe to toe combat. It might require taking away the Item of Power, or tricking the villain into over-extending his abilities or using them in some way that ensures his defeat.

NAME IDEAS

Typically over-the-top and grandiose monikers like "the Master," or anything with Cosmic, Mega-, Power, Supreme, or Ultimate in it.

CLASSIC BITS

The following are some classic bits associated with the Jumped-Up Nobody villain archetype:

SHOWS OF POWER

Ignored before he possessed such might, the Jumped-Up Nobody likes to show off with displays of now-amazing power, such as blasting away at anyone foolish enough to defy his pronouncements, or going after those who previously tormented him and forcing them to grovel and beg for their lives. "Subtle" tends to be something the Nobody needs to grow into, and most rarely get the time for it.

When choosing additional powers for the archetype's array, go for things that make a good show. Attack effects such as various kinds of Damage or Move Object (usable for throwing around massive objects, or hitting heroes with them) are good choices.

JUMPED-UP NOBODY PL12

STR	STA	AGL	DEX	FGT	INT	AWE	PRE
0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0

POWERS

Item of Power: 135 points, Removable (–27 points) • *108 points*

Amazing Confidence: Enhanced Advantages 5 (Beginner's Luck, Ranged Attack 6); Enhanced Defenses 18 (Dodge 6, Parry 6, Fortitude 6) • *25 points*

Energy Mastery: Array (36 points)

- **Energy Blast:** Ranged Damage 18 • *36 points*
- **Energy Burst:** Burst Area Ranged Damage 12 • *1 point*
- **Energy Bonds:** Perception Ranged Cumulative Affliction 9 (Resisted by Dodge; Hindered and Vulnerable, Defenseless and Immobile), Extra Condition, Resisted by Dodge, Limited Degree • *1 point*
- **Transmutation:** Ranged Transform 6 (50 lbs.), any material into any result • *1 point*

Immunity 11 (Life Support, Own Powers) • *11 points*

Invulnerability: Impervious Protection 18 • *36 points*

Mental Shield: Enhanced Will 12, Impervious • *24 points*

SKILLS

Expertise: Magic or Science 6 (+7), Expertise: Pop Culture 6 (+7), Insight 4 (+4)

ADVANTAGES

Beginner's Luck, Ranged Attack 4

OFFENSE

INITIATIVE +0	
Energy Blast +6	Ranged, Damage 18 or other effect
Energy Burst	Ranged, Burst Area Damage 12

DEFENSE

DODGE	6	**FORTITUDE**	6
PARRY	6	**TOUGHNESS**	18/0*
WILL	12	*Without Protection bonus	

POWER POINTS

ABILITIES	2	**SKILLS**	8
POWERS	108	**DEFENSES**	0
ADVANTAGES	0	**TOTAL**	118

COMPLICATIONS

I'll Show You! Angered by reminders of previous nobody status.

Short-Sighted: Has a lot of power, but doesn't know what to do with it.

"I DIDN'T KNOW I COULD DO THAT!"

Given their typically accidental origin stories, Jumped-Up Nobodies rarely understand their powers very well. (It's not as if they come with a user's manual.) They may have no idea of what they can do until they try. You can use this for comedic effect by showing the villain attempt something with nothing happening, or having abilities produce unexpected results, such as a shattering blast rather than the delicate beam intended to carve the villain's name into a wall.

You can also use this trope as a way of introducing new powers (or Alternate Effects) for the villain, based on what is going on in the adventure. Necessity is, as they say, the mother of invention, so the Nobody is more likely to try something if there's a reason than just pulling out new powers at random. If you feel this sudden power development constitutes a complication for the heroes, the equivalent of a villain "power stunt," then award the players a hero point for it.

POWER CORRUPTS

Even if a Jumped-Up Nobody doesn't start out as a power-mad villain, they tend to end up that way, given the kind of might at their command. The archetype is often used as an example of the maxim "power corrupts," with the opportunity to fulfill any whim making the empowered Nobody selfish and cruel, becoming increasingly disdainful of self-control and the "little people" who are no longer a threat or concern.

Some Items of Power even *actively* corrupt their wielders, their essences tainted by evil magic, or perhaps possessed of malevolent intelligences of their own. The more the villain uses the item, the worse the effects get. The heroes should get an opportunity to convince the villain to turn back and reject the tainted power, although it does not necessarily have to succeed.

TACTICS

The Jumped-Up Nobody is a terribly unbalanced character, and intentionally so. Note the 18 ranks of Impervious Protection along with the Immunity and Mind Shield granted by the Item of Power makes the archetype highly resistant to a direct assault. He's likewise highly resistant to mental assault and immune to mere mortal concerns like having to breathe.

Still, he's far from invulnerable. The Nobody's weaknesses lie in human frailties: a fairly low Fortitude defense and a mediocre Insight modifier. Nobodies often forget just how powerful they are, and old (human) habits die hard.

Offensively, Jumped-Up Nobodies tend to go for big, showy effects, especially dishing out a lot of damage to blast their foes through buildings and across town. When they go up against opponents with sufficient defense to evade their direct attacks—given the relatively low +6 attack bonus—most are smart enough to go for area

attacks or to use any perception ranged effects they may have in their array. The Area Perception Affliction attack is there for just such a reason: it lets the Nobody entangle a group of heroes in energy bonds (earth manacles, the grasping skeletal hands of undead minions, or whatnot) and then let them have it while their mobility is limited.

CAPERS

Capers involving the Jumped-Up Nobody might include the following:

I'LL SHOW THEM!

With the power he now wields, the Jumped-Up Nobody goes after a "hit list" of everybody who ever crossed him, and it's a *long* list. The heroes' first encounter with the villain is when panicked calls for help come from the people threatened by his vendetta (directly or indirectly). The Nobody might be kidnapping former tormenters in order to give them a taste of their own medicine, or simply going out and blasting them (or turning them to stone, or into newts, or the like). Some of the victims might also be the Nobody's attempts to show affection for those who were nice to him. For example, he might kidnap the girl he never had the courage to talk to, hoping to finally win her love. Ideally, the heroes can figure out a pattern to the attacks and anticipate where the villain will strike next, perhaps allowing them the opportunity to lay a trap.

MASTER OF THE WORLD!

Using the Item of Power, the Nobody transforms the heroes' home city into his personal fiefdom, with himself as its supreme ruler. The city might be surrounded by an impenetrable shield, or even transported off the earthly plane altogether. To add insult to injury, the villain might also seize control of the minds of the populace, remove the heroes' powers, or both. On the run in a strange version of their familiar stomping grounds, the heroes must rely on their skills, wits, and advantages to figure out what's happened and what they can do to reverse it. This caper concept best suits the Omnipotent Nobody version of the archetype, given its scope.

YOUNG GUN

Following the tremendous rush of power, the Jumped-Up Nobody goes looking to kick some capes and demonstrate what a powerful super-being he is now. Naturally, the costumes he finds are the heroes, and he challenges them to a battle for supremacy. He might do something showy like take a bus, train, or building full of people hostage to get the heroes' attention and encourage them to play along, or he might simply show up at their headquarters or a public event and attack them. Ideally, the Nobody wants an audience to witness his inevitable victory; if they're not cheering him on, well, there's always the possibility of a Visual Area Affliction with a control effect....

MAD SCIENTIST

The Mad Scientist is a classic villain archetype, isolated by a combination of brilliance, arrogance, and madness, driven to prove something by hatching schemes for conquest and plunder. Some Mad Scientists are motivated by a desire for revenge against a society that mocked and rejected the fruits of their genius. Others want to carry out experiments no ethical society could condone, arrogantly disdainful of "lesser" intellects and their so-called scruples. A few are motivated by sheer lust for power or knowledge, no matter the consequences. Mad Scientists naturally have formidable intellectual abilities but most rely heavily on devices, equipment, and minions for physical matters.

THEMES

Mad Scientists tend to be distinguished by two things: the ways in which they are "mad" and the areas of science they focus on. There can be a considerable difference between a geneticist obsessed with the creation of new life versus a chemist looking to perfect a wonder drug to grant superhuman powers, or a physicist seeking the secrets of the universe's creation (even if it means its destruction as well). Some common Mad Scientist themes in the comics include the following.

ARMS MERCHANT

Rather than directly confronting the authorities and the heroes who back them up, a Mad Scientist might prefer the quiet life of tinkering in a lab or workshop. Unfortunately, their work costs, and often costs big, so to arrange a source of income, the scientist sells high-tech devices to customers willing to pay, usually providing weapons to criminals and even other supervillains. A Mad Scientist arms merchant can explain the widespread use of super-tech gadgets in a setting when the heroes start wondering, "Where are people getting all this stuff?"

ASIAN MASTERMIND

The Asian Mastermind is based on the "yellow peril" stereotype of pulp adventure stories translated into the comic book medium. Typically the villain is an older Asian scholar or scientist who styles himself after the mandarins, daimyo, or other aristocratic or warrior classes of the past, and wishes to combine modern science and ancient ambition to conquer the world. Some Asian Masterminds mix alchemy or Taoist sorcery with their science.

CORPORATE CRIMINAL

Not all Mad Scientists are solo acts, unable to profit from their genius. A few manage to fit into the business world and climb the corporate ladder, perhaps even to the very top. These geniuses may become the heads of top-secret research organizations, "black science" laboratories, government projects, or even presidents or CEOs of major corporations. So far as most of the world is concerned, they are legitimate businesspeople and inventors, putting their skills to work for the good of the company and the world. The heroes quickly learn the truth when they come face-to-face with the Corporate Criminal's brand of mad science in action.

MONSTER-MAKER

Ever since *Frankenstein,* a classic image of the Mad Scientist is as "the modern Prometheus," stealing fire from heaven and creating new life in defiance of the laws of nature. Advances in genetic engineering, biotechnology,

ANY SCIENCE CAN BE MAD, IF YOU'RE DOING IT RIGHT!

In the comics, engineering sciences with their "big iron" (and later, life sciences, by way of Dr. Frankenstein) get all the attention. After all, Mad Scientists are always *building* (or growing) things to trouble the heroes. Still, that doesn't mean the other sciences cannot get in on the action. Indeed, it can be interesting to play around with ways to make other scientific disciplines just as evil. Some possibilities to consider:

- **Chemistry:** Great for brewing up all sorts of concoctions, from acids to wonder drugs, indestructible polymers and adhesives, or chemically created life forms (living embodiments of the periodic table of elements are a popular option). Possibly mixed with alchemy and mysticism.
- **Mathematics:** While it often seems *evil,* mathematics might not seem all that *powerful,* until you realize that it is the science underlying many other disciplines. Esoteric or "mad math" could grant a villain power over probability or even the foundational building blocks of reality itself! A Mad Mathematician might quest for "The Implicate Theorem" or some other formula that unlocks unlimited power.
- **Psychology:** The science of the mind might produce methods of brainwashing, psychological prediction or "profiling," or base-level reprogramming (through means like neurolinguistics, for example). Mad psychologists are often obsessed with phobias or other mental disorders.
- **Sociology:** On a broader level than individual psychology, a "mad sociologist" (or perhaps a "mad anthropologist") could develop means of manipulating entire societies or subcultures, perhaps through "energized memes" or "social engineering." Such a villain could potentially take over the world without anyone even knowing it! Perhaps they already have...

MAD SCIENTIST PL9

STR	STA	AGL	DEX	FGT	INT	AWE	PRE
-1	0	0	2	2	11	3	1

SKILLS

Expertise: Science 8 (+19), Insight 4 (+7), Ranged Combat: Guns 4 (+6), Technology 8 (+19), Vehicles 4 (+6)

ADVANTAGES

Eidetic Memory, Equipment 20, Inventor, Second Chance (Technology skill checks), Skill Mastery (Technology)

OFFENSE

INITIATIVE +0	
Ranged Weapon +6	Ranged, typically Damage 12 or similar effect
Unarmed +2	Close, Damage –1

DEFENSE

DODGE	6	**FORTITUDE**	6
PARRY	4	**TOUGHNESS**	0
WILL	12		

POWER POINTS

ABILITIES	36	**SKILLS**	14
POWERS	0	**DEFENSES**	23
ADVANTAGES	24	**TOTAL**	97

POTENTIAL COMPLICATIONS

Arrogant: Underestimates intellectual inferiors (which is everyone).

They Called Me Mad! Obsessed with success.

and nanotechnology have only solidified this kind of foe in the comics, a maker of monsters in various forms.

Of course, most Monster-Makers don't see themselves that way. In their view, they are expanding the boundaries of knowledge regarding life and adding to the biological diversity of the world. They are seeking new ways to understand and control life, perhaps improving it, even to the point of conquering death! Those who call them dangerous are short-sighted fools unable to see the value of their work.

Monster-Makers have the Minions advantage for their various creations, perhaps in place of Equipment. Some may have Summon as well, being able to call their monstrous minions out of nowhere or control them directly. A few have other innate powers, either direct control over biology or improvements made to their own physiology, using themselves as experimental subjects.

A sub-type of the Monster-Maker is the Robot-Builder, who creates new "life" out of steel, silicon, and plastic. The Robot-Builder's creations may be nothing more than mindless machines or a true new form of intelligent life, potentially threatening to displace its organic predecessors.

SINISTER SIMIAN

As apes are common characters in the comics, so are simian super-criminals. The Sinister Simian is just that—an intelligent (usually *very* intelligent) Mad Scientist ape. The combination of intellect, super-science, and simian physical traits makes for a formidable, if unusual, supervillain. In addition to the usual Mad Scientist traits, add the physical abilities and skills of an ape: STR 6, STA 4, AGL 3, Athletics 6 (+11), Growth 4, Protection 2, and Senses 2 (Low-light and Acute Smell).

Some Sinister Simians have innate powers other than just their intellect, ranging from mental powers or mystical abilities (perhaps associated with some mythological ape-god or spirit) to more traditional super-powers. The Simian might have the ability to assume human form (Morph), either a human who turns into a super-simian or an ape able to disguise itself as a human.

NAME IDEAS

Whatever it is, it should most *definitely* include a title like "Doctor" or "Professor" ("I didn't attend eight years of evil university to be called 'Mister'!"). It might be the villain's real name or a suitable "surname" like Arkana, Improbable, Malevolence, Malific, Quark, and so forth.

CLASSIC BITS

Some classic elements associated with the Mad Scientist include:

SIGNATURE DEVICES

Mad Scientists are intensely egotistical and competitive, so they tend to develop distinctive *modus operandi*. In particular, there are usually devices or technology associated with that Scientist and no other. So the Monster-Maker, for example, engineers unique life forms and biotechnology whereas the Robot-Builder creates machines capable of independent action. Sometimes Mad Scientists have even more refined themes, like one who creates only human-like androids and another who focuses on nanotechnology, for example. One might be known for inventing invulnerable force fields, while another specializes in adhesives and chemical solvents.

Signature devices can create adventure hooks when a Mad Scientist feels threatened by a similar invention in the same field, such as parallel development (or even *improvement*) of the breakthrough signature technology. Similarly, others may steal the villain's technology, provid-

ing a clue for astute heroes and also provoking the villain's wrath when the theft is discovered!

THE LAB

Every scientist needs somewhere to work, and setting up, maintaining, and supplying a lab or workshop is important. Heroes may be able to track a Mad Scientist by following a trail of thefts or black-market purchases to supply a lab, and it can offer clues as to the villain's eventual plans.

ASSISTANTS

In addition to a lab, Mad Scientists often need assistants to do the grunt work around the place. Some may create their own, making do with robots, uplifted animals, or mole-men; others need human assistance, often with at least a minimal amount of training. Assistants may double as effective minions, if they have other useful abilities. Otherwise, they are primarily part of the Personnel feature of a lair.

In some cases, a Mad Scientist needs *expert* assistance, which usually involves kidnapping other scientists or scholars and forcing them to work on a particular project, allowing heroes the opportunity to thwart the kidnappings or track the missing scientists to the villain's lair.

RANTS

Their tremendous egos make Mad Scientists especially prone to ranting and bragging about their accomplishments and their brilliance. After all, they *want* others to appreciate their genius and find it difficult to pass up an opportunity to explain their latest invention or scheme to the ignorant dolts who think they can stop it. One of the prime functions of assistants (other than stepping and fetching) is to listen to their bosses' ongoing rants.

TACTICS

Mad Scientists tend to be behind-the-scenes bad guys, troubling the heroes with the spawn of their fevered intellects while they watch from afar in their hidden labs. When the inevitable confrontation does happen, the Mad Scientist tends to flip a switch (or whatever) that unleashes some fearsome new invention on the heroes, or else orders loyal assistants and minions to "get them!" A Mad Scientist with the heroes in his clutches can go on for some time about his brilliance, but catch one out in the open and he's more likely to cower behind his flunkies or try and make a break for it.

If you are keeping with the archetype's listed power level, then the Mad Scientist has the capacity for ranged attacks with a rank of up to 12, or 9 for those not requiring an attack check. Modify this as suits the desired power level for the character and series.

Similarly, the archetype does not account for whatever minions the Mad Scientist may have, from hired goons to home-made monsters. Include them to help run interference for the villain and provide the heroes with more of a physical challenge.

CAPERS

Adventures involving the Mad Scientist may include the following:

THEY CALLED ME MAD!

The scientific community has panned the Mad Scientist's latest discovery or invention, claiming it is flawed, too dangerous, or simply won't work. The enraged scientist disappears, along with all of the experimental data and even prototypes, leading the heroes to investigate. The (now mad) scientist intends to provide "those fools" with clear evidence of success, most likely by using the new invention on them! You can choose almost any sort of new scientific device or gadget, from weather control to shrink ray, and set the villain up to use it on an unsuspecting world.

INTELLECTUAL RIVALRY

A hero famous for his or her intellectual and scientific accomplishments is being honored by the city or a national organization. All of this pomp and circumstance surrounding such an "obvious intellectual inferior" enrages the Mad Scientist, who swears to prove once and for all who is the greater genius. Perhaps the villain kidnaps whoever is giving the award to force them to acknowledge him, or simply plans to attack the award

ceremony with an army of robots or some new fiendish device to show up his rival.

THE VILLAIN-MAKER

A sudden flood of black-market mad-science devices is responsible for a crime-wave in the city. The heroes not only have to deal with formerly two-bit criminals armed with photonic blasters and quantum phase shifters (and whatnot) but also discover the source of the gizmos. A Mad Scientist Arms Merchant is turning a tidy profit from sales of the devices. The heroes learn of an underground auction and look to break it up, but have to deal with the Scientist, his minions, and his customers in the process.

MARTIAL ARTIST

Whether a rogue ninja, master of unarmed combat, or a peerless mercenary soldier, the Martial Artist is often an agent used to remove obstacles for a master villain or organization. Usually, this includes the heroes. Some are true masters themselves, the opposite numbers of martial artist heroes, peerless mercenaries, or the leaders of secret orders of assassins.

Martial Artists are built for combat, and may be capable of taking on superhuman foes with the right planning and tactics. They're often coldly professional, claiming there's nothing personal in their missions of mayhem. It's just their duty to their employer and their devotion to the arts of combat and killing.

THEMES

Martial Artist themes tend to revolve around the character's combat style and background. You can use the fighting styles mentioned in **Chapter 7** as templates for different sorts of Martial Artist villains, varying the archetype's advantages and other traits accordingly, even adding appropriate weapons for fencers or stick-fighters, for example.

EVIL NINJA

Black-clad ninja have been staples of the comic books for decades. The villainous ninja archetype might be an inheritor of the traditions and secrets of the fabled ninja of medieval Japan, or a more modern interpretation of their legend. Historical ninja worked as assassins—likely employment for their modern successors as well. In addition to their formidable collection of advantages and skills, a ninja may also carry a selection of equipment including a sword (the straight-bladed *ninjato* is their traditional weapon) and the equivalent of a utility belt with throwing stars, smoke bombs, and other devices uses to carry out their missions and ensure their escape. A ninja master may also have lesser ninja as minions (see the **Minion Archetypes** for details).

KUNG FU REVENANT

The Martial Artist is not a living person, but an undead revenant returned from the grave! Some revenants are mystical undead like zombies or Chinese "hopping vampires" while others are products of scientific research or a fusion of science and sorcery. In some sources, undead suddenly seem to develop considerable hand-to-hand combat skills as part of their unlife, which can create this type of villain. Simply add Immunity 30 (Fortitude Effects) to the archetype's powers, along with any other undead traits (such as Regeneration) it may have. If the Revenant does not recover on its own, remove its Stamina score as well.

A revenant may also represent other types of unliving Martial Artists, like statues imbued with a semblance of life and considerable fighting skill, or even kung-fu robots programmed with the hand-to-hand styles of old masters.

SUMOTORI

The Martial Artist archetype is built, like most Martial Artists, around speed, agility, and accuracy. One unarmed fighter type is quite different: the criminal sumo wrestler or *sumotori*. This massively built foe relies on strength and sheer bulk rather than quickness, although he is often far quicker than most expect. For this type of Martial Artist, reverse the archetype's Strength and Agility scores, reduce base attack bonus by 2, and exchange Defensive Roll advantage for the Protection effect (keeping Toughness the same).

ULTIMATE FIGHTER

The Ultimate Fighter is all about the "art" in "martial artist," and all about the win after going one-on-one against a tough opponent. Natural competitors, Ultimate Fighter types test their skills in the crucible of the fighting ring or cage-match, and they're often driven to seek out new challenges by taking on costumed heroes as opponents, inside and outside the ring.

The Ultimate Fighter may be a cold and heartless mercenary, interested only in proving he is the best there is against any and all opponents, putting his skills to work for the highest bidder. Alternately, the character might be a reluctant warrior, masterfully trained but seeking peace, until circumstances force him into the ring to earn money or protect a loved one from criminal elements. The character is often young, with something to prove, although an older fighter trying to hold on to his glory days is a good alternative.

NAME IDEAS

Black Hand, Bloodsport, Golden Tiger, Shadow Dragon, Steel Fist, Thunder Fist, White Crane

CLASSIC BITS

The following are some classic bits associated with the Martial Artist archetype:

THE OLD RIVAL

If one or more of the heroes are martial-arts experts, then odds are good the Martial Artist knew them once. They might have been students of the same master, probably rivals although perhaps good friends back then. They could also have been master-and-student, with either the hero turning against a teacher who stepped over the line or unable to save a student who followed the wrong path. This kind of rivalry can add an interesting roleplaying element to the Martial Artist's appearance, along with an opportunity for complications and hero points.

THE SECRET TECHNIQUE

Some Martial Artists know one or more esoteric techniques, allowing them to perform super-human feats. Most often this technique is some sort of close combat attack, with an Affliction or Weaken effect. Some have modifiers Alternate Resistance and Progressive to represent attacks that work on a target's *chi* or life force. Other secret techniques can justify a range of powers based on sheer skill or mystical focusing of the user's *chi*. They include things like walking up walls or across water, passing through solid barriers, leaping great distances, and rapid healing or resistance to injury.

SENSE OF HONOR

While they are ruthless killers, some criminal Martial Artists still have a sense of personal honor. Heroes may be able to turn this to their advantage by having the villain swear an oath to uphold a particular agreement, or by challenging their foe to a fair contest or single combat. If the Martial Artist agrees, then the outcome is binding. Honorable villains can be counted on to follow their codes, even if they sometimes look for ways out of them.

STRIKING FROM THE SHADOWS

Martial Artists—especially the ninja types—tend to strike with surprise. Even those who prefer a direct confrontation are likely to take advantage of a vulnerable opponent. The surprise and feinting rules from the *M&M Hero's Handbook* are particularly relevant to Martial Artists.

TACTICS

The Martial Artist is a close-in fighter with plenty of tactical options, thanks to a full range of combat advantages. Initially, the villain is likely to rely on surprise and a Power Attack to inflict the maximum damage. After mixing it up in melee combat, the Martial Artist relies on a combination of high active defenses, Improved Defense, and the Defensive Attack manuver to make it more difficult for opponents to counter-attack. The Startle advantage provides additional opportunities to catch foes vulnerable. Do not overlook the Martial Artist's ability to use Redirect when fighting multiple opponents, setting up situations where the heroes attacks hit each other as

MARTIAL ARTIST PL11

STR	STA	AGL	DEX	FGT	INT	AWE	PRE
4	3	6	4	10	0	2	0

SKILLS

Acrobatics 10 (+16), Athletics 8 (+12), Close Combat: Unarmed 6 (+16), Insight 6 (+8), Intimidation 10 (+10), Perception 6 (+8), Stealth 10 (+16)

ADVANTAGES

Accurate Attack, All-out Attack, Assessment, Defensive Roll 4, Evasion, Grabbing Finesse, Improved Defense, Improved Disarm, Improved Grab, Improved Hold, Improved Initiative 2, Improved Smash, Improved Trip, Instant Up, Move-by Action, Power Attack, Precise Attack 2 (Close; Cover and Concealment), Prone Fighting, Quick Draw, Redirect, Skill Mastery (Acrobatics), Skill Mastery (Athletics or Stealth), Startle, Takedown, Trance, Uncanny Dodge, Weapon Break

OFFENSE

INITIATIVE +6

Unarmed +16	Close, Damage 4

DEFENSE

DODGE	14	**FORTITUDE**	10
PARRY	15	**TOUGHNESS**	7/3*
WILL	12	*Without Defensive Roll.	

POWER POINTS

ABILITIES	58	**SKILLS**	28
POWERS	0	**DEFENSES**	30
ADVANTAGES	32	**TOTAL**	148

COMPLICATIONS

Code of Honor: Fights by the rules.

Obsession: The Martial Artist is often obsessed with vengeance or a desire to be the very best fighter in the world.

their foe dodges out of the way!

Note that the archetype as written can have up to an additional +2 Damage bonus (from weapons or other Strength-based Damage effects) and an additional +1 Dodge defense while remaining at PL11.

CAPERS

Adventures involving the Martial Artist may include the following:

THE BEST OF THE BEST

An underground freestyle, no-holds-barred martial arts competition is held at a particular place and time each year, and the best unarmed fighters in the world are invited to attend and fight each other for the prize of being declared the greatest combatant in the world. Naturally, the Martial Artist—indeed, *all* of the great martial artists—are there. Heroes known for their skilled fighting techniques may attend as well, but they are expected to follow the rules of the competition.

The fight may be a simple grudge match for a trophy and bragging rights, or there could be more going on than meets the eye. Perhaps the organizers of the bout are offering a bigger prize, or are looking to gain something from it. The winner might be chosen for ultimate power, or sacrificed to an evil force that values combat prowess. It might be staged by aliens looking to recruit the Earth's best fighters. The fights could offer valuable information to certain parties, perhaps even allow a mimicking villain to copy the moves and fighting styles of the world's greatest!

SECRETS OF THE MASTERS

The already formidable Martial Artist begins searching for a legendary scroll from a lost temple. This instruction manual contains martial arts secrets lost to the ages and can give the student untold powers: invisibility, immortality, the ability to kill with a mere touch, and more. The clues to its location are scattered, requiring the villain to gather various artworks and items now in museums and private collections.

A hidden order of monks and mystics might be charged with protecting the secret, calling upon the heroes for help in preventing the villain from finding the scroll. Perhaps the Martial Artist's first step is to wipe out the scroll's guardians so they cannot stand in his way. The last survivor manages to reach the heroes and warn them of the danger facing the world before he, too, perishes. Now they are all that can stop the villain from becoming the ultimate assassin!

SCHOOL OF SHADOWS

The heroes notice a disturbing increase in the quality of hired muscle available to the criminal underworld: men who are trained far beyond just street toughs and more like professional soldiers or ninja (see the Ninja minions on page 140 for examples). After a brush or two with these "shadow ninja" goons, they investigate and learn of a new "broker" offering muscle-for-hire to the highest bidders. The Martial Artist is teaching crooks in the "School of Shadows" how to fight, how to obey orders and, worst of all, how to work as an actual team. The heroes have to locate the secret school and break it up, all the while dealing with the "Shadow Sensei" and the latest class of students, for whom this may be their graduation exercise.

MASTER OF DISGUISE

The Master of Disguise is a specialist in deception, able to appear as anyone, or perhaps even anything! The Master of Disguise could be a spy or assassin for hire, a thief relying on misdirection and deception to get the job done, or a master villain using various guises to sow dissent, confusion, and trouble.

While not much of a direct threat to a group of superheroes, the Master of Disguise is capable of doing quite a bit of damage to their reputations and personal relationships, given the opportunity. The villain often works to "soften up" heroes for an employer, infiltrating their group to learn about their abilities and weaknesses, then sowing mistrust and conflict to keep the good guys busy while the real scheme unfolds.

THEMES

While the typical Master of Disguise is fairly low-powered, you can create a more formidable version by applying the Mimic or Shapeshift powers, allowing the villain to copy others' physical traits as well as appearance. At the highest level, the Master of Disguise becomes more of a Mimic (see the **Mimic** archetype).

DISGUISE DEVICES

The villain's power(s) may come from a Device, such as a "chameleon belt" or a series of realistic masks; apply the Removable modifier to the villain's Morph effect. The villain's powers might also be dependent on a serum or other source.

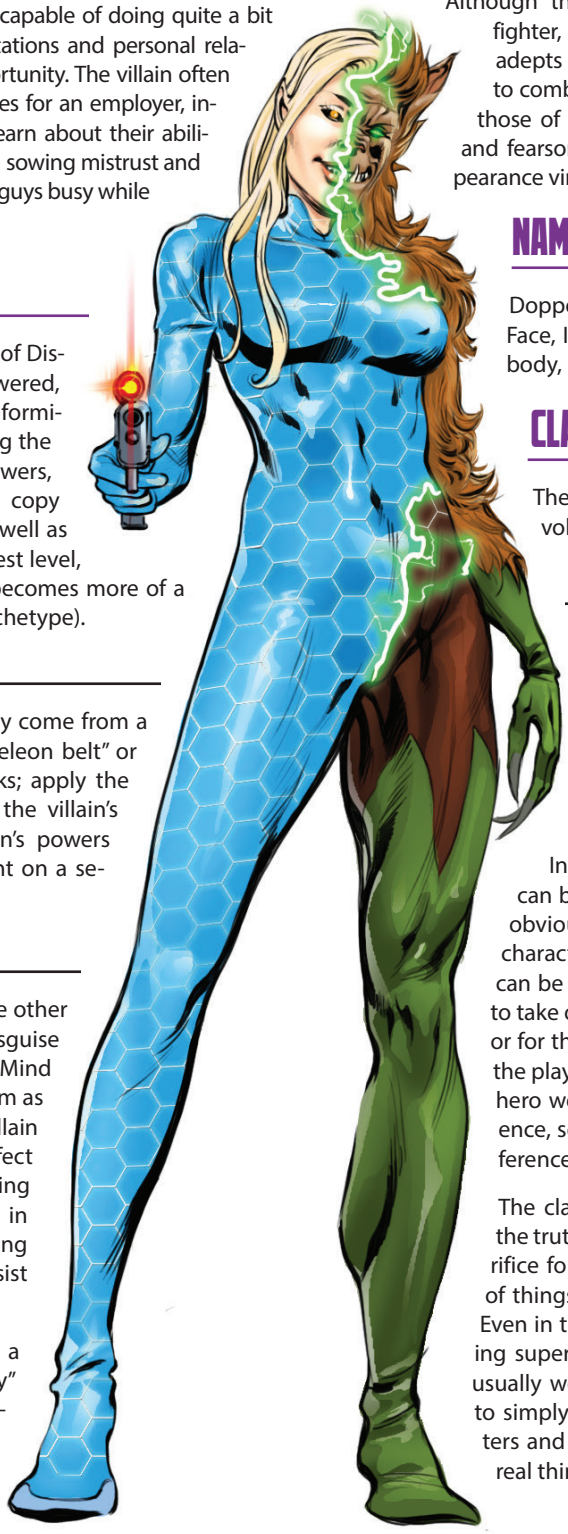
DOPPELGANGER

In addition to *looking* like other people, the Master of Disguise has sufficient ranks of Mind Reading to think like them as well. In essence, the villain can pull off a near-perfect deception, circumventing discovery due to gaps in knowledge, at least so long as the victim fails to resist the mental effect.

Perhaps the villain has a form of "mental mimicry" able to fool unusual senses. This is essentially a Limited form of Illusion (affecting only the villain and only to match thought to appearance). Unless the mind reader has a reason to believe the villain is not whom he appears to be, there isn't even a resistance check!

MASTER OF THE MARTIAL ARTS

Although the archetype is a fairly formidable fighter, some Masters of Disguise are true adepts in the arts of combat. You may wish to combine the traits for this archetype with those of the Martial Artist to create an agile and fearsome fighter capable of changing appearance virtually at will to confuse opponents.



NAME IDEAS

Doppelganger, Effigy, Everyman, False-Face, Imitator, Incognito, Manikin, Mr. Nobody, Nemo (meaning "no one")

CLASSIC BITS

The following are some classic bits involving the Master of Disguise:

"NO, I'M THE REAL ONE!"

Sooner or later, the Master of Disguise will take on the appearance of one of the heroes or a trusted ally, and the genuine article and the fake will be seen together. How do the heroes tell them apart?

In the case of a player character, this can be tricky to handle, since the players obviously *know* who is playing the real character and who is playing the villain! It can be best to either encourage the player to take on both roles and play them equally, or for the GM to temporarily take control of the player's character, just the same as if the hero were otherwise under a villain's influence, so the other players can't tell the difference quite so easily.

The classic way the good guys figure out the truth is the real hero's willingness to sacrifice for the greater good, and knowledge of things the villain couldn't possibly know. Even in the case of a doppelganger possessing superior knowledge, the former method usually works. Many players may be inclined to simply capture or knock out *both* characters and then sort out which of them is the real thing!

MASTER OF DISGUISE PL7

STR	STA	AGL	DEX	FGT	INT	AWE	PRE
2	2	4	5	7	2	2	6

POWERS

A Thousand Faces: Morph (humanoid forms) • *15 points*

SKILLS

Acrobatics 8 (+12), Close Combat: Unarmed 4 (+11), Deception 10 (+16), Insight 12 (+14), Intimidation 5 (+11), Investigation 10 (+12), Perception 10 (+12), Persuasion 4 (+10), Ranged Combat: Guns 6 (+11), Sleight of Hand 10 (+15), Stealth 11 (+15), Technology 8 (+10), Vehicles 4 (+9)

ADVANTAGES

Daze (Deception), Defensive Roll 2, Equipment 4, Evasion 2, Grabbing Finesse, Improved Defense, Improved Initiative, Improved Trip, Instant Up, Precise Attack (Ranged, Cover), Quick Draw, Redirect, Skill Mastery (Deception), Taunt, Ultimate Effort (Deception checks), Uncanny Dodge

OFFENSE

	INITIATIVE +6
Light Pistol +11	Ranged, Damage 3
Unarmed +11	Close, Damage 2

DEFENSE

DODGE	10	**FORTITUDE**	6
PARRY	10	**TOUGHNESS**	4/2*
WILL	8	*Without Defensive Roll.	

POWER POINTS

ABILITIES	60	**SKILLS**	51
POWERS	15	**DEFENSES**	19
ADVANTAGES	21	**TOTAL**	166

POTENTIAL COMPLICATIONS

Devious: Fond of overly complex plots.

Vindictive: Wants to tear down others' lives.

Who Am I?: The Master of Disguise has identity issues from the ability to be almost anyone.

"HOW DID YOU KNOW IT WASN'T ME?"

Sometimes a Master of Disguise is foiled by a hero with the right Senses effect to penetrate the villain's disguise and notice the deception: X-ray vision to see through a mask, Scent for noticing the villain is not who he appears, or abilities such as Mind Reading for sensing the thoughts behind the guise.

In general, if the villain genuinely wouldn't know about a hero's particular sensory advantage, it's best to let the good guy learn the truth and act on it. Of course, if he has the opportunity, the Master of Disguise might assume that hero's identity and proclaim *he* is the real one and the other is a fake! (See the previous bit for details.) Otherwise, the villain gets caught red-handed.

Once the Master of Disguise knows about a particular sensory advantage, either because it is public knowledge or it was used against him before, you can be sure of him taking it into account next time. The villain can prepare countermeasures, from special layered materials to chemical sprays to mind-shielding devices, to fool or defeat heroes' Senses. This is just a villain doing his homework, unless you truly didn't take a Sense effect into account and do not want to let the hero spoil things by revealing the villain prematurely, in which case a hero point award for the player is fair.

QUESTION AUTHORITY

"Thanks, heroes, we'll take it from here," says the police officer, paramedic, or government official in the dark suit and sunglasses. The good guys hear that all the time and turn criminals and victims over without question. Only with the Master of Disguise, they can later discover they've been tricked, and the bad guy they thought they were handing over to "authorities" has actually escaped!

Used sparingly, this provides the villain with an excellent opportunity to pull one over on the heroes. In some cases, particularly in the midst of an adventure, you might want to consider it a complication, especially if the good guys don't get an Insight or Perception check to discover the villain. If so, award the players a hero point when they learn the truth.

Try not to overuse this trick, as it is likely to make the players paranoid and mistrustful of everyone, unless that is the specific effect you are going for. In that case, the villain can often get edgy heroes to take the kind of extreme steps likely to alienate them from the authorities and the people who rely on them.

TACTICS

Although capable of handling fights against normal opponents, the Master of Disguise tends toward the better part of valor when it comes to superhumans, opting to retreat when discovered. The villain's first line of defense is to try and convince foes to look the other way, distracting them long enough for a getaway.

If that doesn't work, then ideally the villain prefers to get out of sight long enough to change appearance again, either blending into a crowd or (if that's not an option) looking like someone else known to be in the area long enough to get the heroes distracted and slip away once more. For example, the villain might change appearance and then tell the pursuing heroes, "He went that way!" pointing down a corridor or dark alley. Only after the good

guys realize they've been hoodwinked do they discover evidence (a discarded mask or the unconscious form of the real person) that the villain is long gone.

When forced to fight, the Master of Disguise relies on agility and confusion, particularly mixing things up in close combat. The villain might assume a hero's appearance and grab that character so the two of them are mixed-up enough to momentarily confuse the hero's teammates.

CAPERS

Adventures involving the Master of Disguise may include the following:

YOU STOLE MY LIFE!

The hero starts having personal trouble, first with close friends and associates who are upset about things they say the hero has done, but which he can't recall. In some cases, he has a clear-cut alibi, being away on a mission or the like. Things get worse when there are public sightings of the hero causing trouble or even committing crimes! Naturally, the police get involved and have to investigate, and may want to arrest the hero on suspicion while they do so. Resisting arrest only makes matters worse, but surrendering and being locked up, even for a short while, allows the hero's foes to act unopposed.

Of course, this is exactly what is supposed to happen, as the Master of Disguise is impersonating the hero to cause trouble and provide a distraction, either for one of his own schemes or for a villainous employer.

For a twist on this scenario, the villain might not be impersonating the character's heroic persona, but his secret identity, especially if he is someone of importance, such as a wealthy industrialist, political figure, respected journalist or television personality, or the like. The villain simply has the misfortune of choosing a target who is secretly a superhero, although the incident might also clue the Master of Disguise in on the hero's secret, especially if, say, the villain breaks into the hero's home or place of business and finds evidence of a double life.

WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE...

A villain or team of villains moves against the heroes in a devastating lightning attack that targets their weaknesses, secret identities, and even families and loved ones in ways that practically ensure their defeat (and racks up the hero point awards). The crushing blow comes when the characters learn that a close friend and confidant of the team has betrayed them, revealing all their secrets to their archenemies! Now the heroes are left in the clutches of the villains' deathtrap while their foes go on an unrestricted crime spree in the city.

When they escape, the heroes find their supposed betrayer trapped in the villains' lair as well. It turns out the person they thought was their friend was actually the Master of Disguise, who kidnapped the real ally and infiltrated the heroes lives to learn everything about them. This revelation is a great element to insert into a series retroactively; after all, so long as all the evidence is consistent, there's no way for the players to know their trusted friend *hasn't* actually been a disguised supervillain for the past several months!

MASTERMIND

The Mastermind is a mentalist supervillain, possessing considerable intellect and psionic abilities which compensate for a relative lack of physical prowess. Masterminds tend to emphasize the cerebral over the merely physical, making them effective foes of physically powerful heroes (who might be more vulnerable to their powers), as well as mentalist heroes, for whom they are a kind of dark reflection.

Some Masterminds have little outward sign of their mental superiority, looking like ordinary people, while others have clear examples of their emphasis on the mind, such as baldness, an enlarged cranium (often with pulsating veins), and an atrophied, almost vestigial body. Taken to extremes, the villain might have a transparent skull, a brain-like pattern of folds on his head as though his brain were escaping, or even being *all* brain, with no physical body at all! (See the **Brain in a Jar** theme for an example of this.)

THEMES

The primary themes of the Mastermind, in addition to "mind over matter," are the source of the villain's extraordinary mental prowess, and the exact types of powers the Mastermind possesses.

ALIEN MASTERMIND

In keeping with the comic book concept that evolution is headed toward the superiority of the brain over the body (as described for the **Evolved Mastermind**), some alien villains from advanced species and civilizations have Mastermind qualities: an enlarged head or brain and extraordinary psionic powers. These powers may be native to the villain's species (perhaps with the Mastermind an extraordinary example) or the villain could be a mutant of some sort, or even an outcast.

An Alien Mastermind typically has access to advanced technology along with his other powers: assign the villain appropriate devices for personal gadgets such as weapons, force fields (perhaps in place of the innate Psionic Force Field power), and the like, as well as big equipment such as a starship or outer space headquarters. The villain could be alone in exile on Earth or the leader of an alien armada bent on conquest.

BRAIN IN A JAR

The Brain in a Jar is a truly "cerebral" villain: a disembodied brain kept in a container and sustained by life-support equipment. In addition to the listed traits, the Brain has no Strength or Dexterity (having no physical body) but does have equipment providing it with Immunity—Life Support at a minimum, perhaps even Immunity to Fortitude Effects in general.

The Brain is primarily a plotting villain, operating through minions and underlings, although capable of acting through Telekinesis. The Brain may exult in its current "evolved" state or seek to acquire a new body, perhaps targeting one of the heroes for this dubious "honor"!

The brain might belong to some infamous historical villain (Hitler, Stalin, Mordred, etc.), preserved over the years. Perhaps the "brain" is actually just a disembodied intellect, such as an artificial intelligence, digitized personality, or a spirit lacking a physical body. In this case the "life support" is some other equipment allowing it to function, such as a computer or magical touchstone. Alternately, the Brain might be an entire severed head kept alive in a similar manner, or a villain with a massively enlarged head but atrophied and useless body, left immobile and in need of special life support while his mind is free to roam and plot.

EVOLVED MASTERMIND

Comic book "evolution" often depicts far-future humans as small and big-brained, with superhuman mental powers. The Evolved Mastermind is an example of such a character, either a "future being" from a potential future time, or a present day human, hyper-evolved to this state by scientific means, accidentally or by deliberate experiment. For Silver Age villains, exposure to exotic radiation is often the source of the hyper-evolutionary effect.

Evolved Masterminds have a major superiority complex around their "exalted" state. They often seek to rule the world as their due, given that they are the most evolved and developed intellect, and some even wish to bestow the same "gift" on the rest of humanity, turning others into beings like themselves. Whether or not it can actually work is up to the GM, but generally superheroes aren't inclined to let villains "improve" the human race without its consent.

ILLUSIONIST

The Mastermind's powers are generally the combination of telepathy and telekinesis listed for the archetype. The Illusionist is a type of Mastermind focused on deception, controlling victims' perceptions, and therefore their reality. Typically, the Illusionist drops the Mind Control, Telekinesis, and Telekinetic Blast powers and replaces them with **Illusion 5** (all senses; Selective, Resistible by Will), **Illusion 6** (all senses; Limited to One Subject, Resistible by Will), and **Morph 4** (any form; Continuous, Resistible by Will).

With an Illusionist, heroes can never be entirely certain what is real and what isn't, and neither can anyone else. Illusionist villains often rely on psychological attacks, particularly if they can read opponents' minds to learn their deepest fears and desires. Illusionists' schemes often involve tricking heroes into doing the wrong thing, or otherwise framing

MASTERMIND PL13

STR	STA	AGL	DEX	FGT	INT	AWE	PRE
-1	0	0	0	0	9	8	2

POWERS

Levitation: Flight 2 (MPH) • *4 points*

Psionic Force Field: Protection 14, Impervious 10, Sustained • *24 points*

Psionics: Array (26 points)

Mind Blast: Perception Ranged Damage 6, Resisted by Will, Subtle 2 • *26 points*

Mind Control: Perception Ranged Affliction 8 (Resisted by Will; Dazed, Compelled, Controlled), Subtle 2 • *1 point*

Telekinesis: Perception Ranged Move Object 8, Subtle 2 • *1 point*

Telekinetic Blast: Ranged Damage 11, Indirect 3, Subtle • *1 point*

Telepathy: Mind Reading 13 • *1 point*

Psychic Senses: Senses 4 (Danger Sense; Mental Awareness, Extended 2) • *4 points*

SKILLS

Expertise (Choose One) 4 (+13), Insight 10 (+18), Intimidation 8 (+10), Investigation 6 (+15), Perception 7 (+15), Persuasion 8 (+10), Ranged Combat: Telekinetic Blast 9 (+9)

ADVANTAGES

Contacts, Eidetic Memory, Ranged Attack 3, Second Chance (Resistance checks vs. mental effects)

OFFENSE

INITIATIVE +0

Mind Blast —	Perception, Damage 6
Mind Control —	Perception, Affliction 8
Telekinetic Blast +9	Ranged, Damage 11

DEFENSE

DODGE	9	**FORTITUDE**	10
PARRY	9	**TOUGHNESS**	14/0*
WILL	15	*Without Protection bonus	

POWER POINTS

ABILITIES	36	**SKILLS**	26
POWERS	62	**DEFENSES**	35
ADVANTAGES	6	**TOTAL**	165

COMPLICATIONS

Disdainful: Prefers to avoid physical conflict and effort.

Superiority: The Mentalist is better than "lesser minds."

them for criminal acts. They also delight in using illusions to trick their foes into attacking each other, or that some crisis is occurring when actually nothing is happening (or something else entirely is going on).

One variation on the Illusion is the Dream-Master, whose mental powers only affect sleeping targets, but can trap them in a "nightmare world" where the villain is seemingly all-powerful.

For a Mastermind who focuses on *controlling* others' minds, see the **Puppeteer** archetype.

NAME IDEAS

Brainscan, Cerebrax, ESPer, Mentallus, Mr. Mind, Professor Psi, Psithon, Psyche

CLASSIC BITS

The following are some classic bits involving the Mastermind archetype:

CONTEST OF WILLS

Quite often, the conflict between a Mastermind and one or more heroes comes down to a contest of wills. Whose mind is stronger: the heroes' or the villain's?

The process of resisting the Mastermind's Mind Control Affliction can reflect this kind of struggle. A team of heroes can even cooperate to win it: allow the target's allies to make supporting Will resistance checks, granting the primary character a circumstance bonus to resist the villain's power.

TACTICS

Masterminds often prefer to use their powers against opponents from afar, rather than risking any sort of physical confrontation. This is not always the case, however, and some Masterminds are quite willing to prove their superiority face-to-face, given that their Force Field makes them effectively bulletproof and their Telekinesis is capable of picking up cars and similar heavy objects to wield as weapons.

Even in a direct combat encounter, Masterminds prefer to keep their distance from the heroes, making full use of their mental powers. Note that the archetype's Perception Ranged Move Object effect is capable of grabbing anything the villain can see, but grab checks are still required to hold on to a struggling opponent, and telekinetic attacks made with grabbed objects do *not* hit automatically, but require a ranged attack check.

Masterminds commonly use telekinesis to pin opponents to a wall, ceiling, or floor or to hurl objects at them. Those too strong or tough for such maneuvers receive the villain's Mental Blast, or become subject to Mind Control, turning against the other heroes.

CAPERS

Adventures involving the Mastermind may include the following:

MIND OVER MATTERS

The Mastermind has come up with a way of expanding his Mind Control power, granting it enough area to blanket a huge area like a city, nation, or even the entire world! To build the full-size device, however, the villain needs certain components, perhaps a power source, and so exerts an improved mental influence to send various mind-controlled thralls to acquire them.

For a classic "hero vs. hero" conflict, the Mastermind might control another team of heroes. For a deeper mystery, the villain could control the characters without their knowledge; they only learn about the incident when the authorities come knocking on their headquarters with some questions they want answered! This can also set up a hero-fight, as another team aids the police in tracking down the "fugitives"! The good guys have to deal with the thralls or prove their own innocence while also tracking down the Mastermind and putting the kibosh on his scheme.

PERCHANCE TO DREAM...

A strange "sleeping sickness" is spreading rapidly through the city and surrounding area: people are falling asleep and then into a coma from which they cannot be awakened. Brain scans show considerable activity and rapid eye movement indicates a dreaming state. The plague even affects the heroes, should they happen to sleep anywhere within the area.

A Mastermind villain is exerting his influence, which is only expanding as the number of victims under his sway increases. Heroes who fall asleep are trapped in a nightmare world where they must find a way to save people from the villain's vampire-like drain on their mental energies. The good guys in the waking world have to track down the villain somehow, without succumbing to their own fatigue and falling asleep as well.

MIMIC

Sometimes, imitation is the sincerest form of *villainy*. The Mimic is a villain capable of duplicating one or more of the heroes' qualities—most often their powers, but sometimes abilities, skills, advantages, and other traits as well. Mimics are a kind of ready-made dark reflection, an example of what the heroes' abilities could do, if turned to evil.

In keeping with their imitative style, Mimic villains in the comics are often artificial beings—such as androids or clones—with little or no life experience, or aliens with no real understanding of human life or culture save what they absorb through imitation. This makes the Mimic a way of looking at human foibles and virtues from an outsider's perspective. When a confused Mimic asks, "Explain this thing you call 'justice,'" how do the heroes respond?

A Mimic's power level is somewhat difficult to peg, being highly variable. The archetype is set at PL 15 to allow for targeted offensive traits (like Damage) of up to rank 20, given a +10 attack bonus. However, you may wish to simply treat the villain's power level as fluid, changing it as needed to reflect the Mimic's current capabilities.

THEMES

Mimic themes revolve around the types of traits the villain duplicates and how it does so. Different themes allow for a wide range of different Mimics in a setting without too much overlap between them.

ANIMAL MIMIC

An Animal Mimic does not duplicate the traits of other people, but rather the abilities of animals, sometimes limited to one at a time, others able to mix-and-match. An Animal Mimic might be a spiritual champion of the animal kingdom, or a super-science user of DNA/RNA adaptations. Of all the various Mimics, this one has the least interest in studying heroes, since it gains little from doing so. It shares more in common with the Hybrid and Elemental archetypes.

ARTIFICIAL MIMIC

An Artificial Mimic is not a living being, but a construct such as an android, robot, or even magical golem of some sort. It is designed to mimic the traits of others and alters its structure to do so, perhaps using nanotechnology, morphic materials, or a magical process such as alchemy or transmogrification. In addition to its other traits, the Artificial Mimic has Immunity 30 (Fortitude Effects).

POWER MIMIC

This is the classic Mimic type: a villain able to duplicate the subject's powers, often the powers of multiple subjects at once. Power Mimics are often Limited to particular power types or descriptors to give them a more coherent theme and differentiate them from others with similar capabilities. So one villain might mimic only mutant or mystical powers, while another can duplicate racial or species traits, but not deviant powers possessed by individuals of a species. Mimics able to copy all powers tend to be either limited to settings with a common power origin or are also Unlimited Mimics, able to duplicate *any* power in any amount (see the following).

SKILL MIMIC

Skill Mimics only duplicate powers with a "skill" or "training" descriptor (or something similar). Instead, they primarily

MIMIC PL15

STR	STA	AGL	DEX	FGT	INT	AWE	PRE
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

POWERS

Mimic: Variable 20 (100 points), Continuous, Move Action • *180 points*

Sense Powers: Senses 4 (Detect Powers, Ranged, Acute, Analytical) • *4 points*

ADVANTAGES

Assessment

OFFENSE*

INITIATIVE +0

Unarmed +0 Close, Damage 0*

DEFENSE*

DODGE	10	**FORTITUDE**	10
PARRY	10	**TOUGHNESS**	10
WILL	10	*Varies based on mimicked traits	

POWER POINTS

ABILITIES	0	**SKILLS**	0
POWERS	184	**DEFENSES**	40
ADVANTAGES	1	**TOTAL**	225

COMPLICATIONS

Freakish: The Mimic is often an outcast due to its physical appearance, origin, or manner.

Identity Crisis: Mental or psychological confusion due to mimicking different subjects.

copy skill ranks and related traits like combat bonuses and sometimes advantages, particularly those that come from training. A Skill Mimic able to copy multiple subjects can become incredibly skilled in many different areas, able to rival a whole team of heroes. Some Skill Mimics are limited to physical skills, others to mental or knowledge skills, while some can do both.

TAINTED MIMIC

Tainted Mimics not only duplicate the powers of their targets, but also their power-related complications and weaknesses. This is a -1 cost per rank flaw and, if it's applied to the villainous Mimic's power, looks like this:

Mimic: Variable 20 (100 points), Continuous, Move Action, Limit—Tainted Mimicry (Acquires subjects' complications and weaknesses as well as their traits) • *160 points*

Now, when the Tainted Mimic copies another character's powers, it has to take all of the complications related to those powers. A Tainted Mimic that duplicates powers from too many different subjects can quickly become overwhelmed by inherent weaknesses.

UNLIMITED MIMIC

An Unlimited Mimic is a Power Level X character with essentially *limitless* Variable points, although the effect might still be limited in terms of what it can duplicate, perhaps using one of the other themes.

So an Unlimited Mimic might be able to duplicate an endless number of powers, for example, possibly even the powers of every superhuman in existence! Needless to say, Unlimited Mimics grow exponentially in power as they gather subjects, unless there is something that "resets" the Mimic's tally and forces it to start over again (such as having to have subjects in close proximity or line of sight). The GM sets any limitations on the Mimic's power in accordance with the villain's concept and the needs of the adventure.

VAMPIRE MIMIC

Vampire Mimics do not just copy powers; they *steal* them! In addition to the Mimic power, the villain has a long-lasting Nullify effect against the powers it copies. Some Vampire Mimics must kill or even *consume* their victims in some fashion in order to gain their powers, making them particularly gruesome and dangerous foes.

NEMESIS

The Nemesis is a kind of Mimic who, rather than using the heroes' own powers against them, has the traits necessary to counter their powers, replacing the Mimic power with a Variable effect called **Nemesis.** This typically means a Mimic specifically designed to be "the ultimate opponent" for a wide range of foes, from a hero-fighting construct to an alien super-gladiator. A Nemesis may be limited to one foe at a time (the default and common limitation of the power) or could potentially adapt to multiple opponents, even an entire team of heroes.

A variation on the Nemesis is a villain with super-adaptation abilities; however the heroes overcome the villain, he effectively gains Immunity to it or adapts a power to deal with it, forcing the good guys to come up with a new way of beating him (or even affecting him) each and every time.

SCAVENGER

Scavenger villains are kind of "do-it-yourself" Mimics. They pick up "discarded" powers to add to their arsenal and use them against the heroes. The typical Scavenger collects different devices and equipment, often stolen from their prior owners, or copied from existing items.

However, a Scavenger could also collect the "residue" left behind by certain powers, either by means of a device

or power, allowing the villain to duplicate the effect. Similarly, a Scavenger might even collect traits from deceased subjects in some fashion, either like a Vampire Mimic (previously) or a grave robber.

NAME IDEAS

Archetype, Doppelganger, Dupplex, Echo, Legion, Template, Totem, Touchstone

CLASSIC BITS

Some classic elements associated with the Mimic include:

FACE-OFF

Some Mimics do more than just copy their subject's traits; they can also duplicate someone's appearance, essentially Morphing into the subject. Some Mimics do this deliberately, to further confuse opponents about who is the genuine article or even to replace a subject and impersonate them. Mimicking multiple subjects often results in a strange composite appearance for the Mimic.

KNOW YOUR ENEMY

Since Mimics often benefit from first- or even second-hand knowledge of their subjects, they may make an effort to observe a group of heroes carefully and gather information before confronting them. The Mimic arranges means of surveillance and intelligence gathering (spy-cams, magical scrying, hired minions, etc.) and may also set up particular encounters to test the heroes' capabilities in various ways. This can range from staged crimes to phony tests for scientific research or exhibitions for charity or the like. The more the villain learns, the more effective he becomes, until the time is ripe to confront the heroes and defeat them with their own abilities!

THE BAD WITH THE GOOD

A common complication for Mimics is a tendency to acquire their subjects' *weaknesses* along with their strengths. This may allow the heroes to capitalize on their known weaknesses to slow or overcome the villain, although some Mimics learn to compensate in various ways, such as combining the traits of two or more subjects to reduce or eliminate a particular weakness; if one subject's Protection is overcome by a particular attack, and another's is not, the Mimic might be able to "layer" them to ignore or reduce the attack. If it loses one set of powers, it can switch to others, and so forth.

Sometimes this particular problem extends to taking on some of the subjects' personality traits (and related complications) as well as abilities, especially for Mimics that are essentially blank slates otherwise. This might allow heroes to appeal to their own better qualities to convince the Mimic to change its planned course of action.

TACTICS

The standard Mimic tactic can be summed up as: "Study, copy, strike." The Mimic take the opportunity to do whatever is necessary for it to duplicate a target's traits, then uses them against its foes in the most efficient manner possible. Mimics often use novel combinations of traits from different targets—such

as super-speed and shrinking, or stretching and super-strength—to do things their individual subjects cannot.

A Mimic capable of doing so may well imitate targets' tactics as well as their traits, allowing the villain to use the heroes' most effective tricks against them.

CAPERS

Adventures involving the Mimic may include the following:

LEARNING CURVE

The heroes encounter a new Mimic villain for the first time. Their foe is either a relative innocent, unaware that it is endangering people or causing harm, or else is deliberately looking to engage the heroes in order to study them. In either case, the more the good guys fight the Mimic and show off their abilities, the more their opponent learns and can duplicate. Eventually, the Mimic will have copied *all* of their abilities, gaining considerable power. The heroes have to figure out a way to stop their foe without using their powers, or come up with a plan to trick or disable the Mimic before it can learn too much.

THE RETURN

A hero believed dead (perhaps even a former player character) suddenly returns with no explanation or clear memory of what has happened since his or her death. The resurrected hero has some adjusting to do but, as time goes on, things don't seem right. Eventually, the good guys discover the hero is not the genuine article, but the Mimic, accidentally trapped in the hero's form, suffering memory loss from an accident or some overload of its powers. Initially it truly believes it is the hero it appears to be, but what happens when its real memories begin surfacing, or the impersonation imposes too much mental strain?

OVERLORD

The Overlord is a true master villain, possessed of a brilliant mind and formidable force of will. The Overlord's ambitions are nothing less than domination over the nation, world, even the cosmos! Overlords tend to have extensive headquarters; they may be wealthy business tycoons, and some are already rulers of their own small nations! This gives them considerable resources for their various world-conquering schemes.

THEMES

Overlord themes involve the villain's origins and particular goals or reasons for conquest. The Overlord archetype is often connected with totalitarian and dictator archetypes from history, especially recent history, building ties between the Overlord and forces such as the Axis powers of World War II or the Communist regimes of the Cold War.

ALIEN OVERLORD

From beyond the stars, the Alien Overlord comes to conquer! The villain is a warlord or military leader of an alien empire or invasion force, seeking to crush whole worlds beneath his heel.

The Alien Overlord's powers may be innate, part of a non-human physiology or the result of an accident or genetic experimentation (perhaps to create some type of super-soldier). Alternately, the villain may wear a high-tech battlesuit of some type, like the Armored Overlord (following). Some Alien Overlords have additional powers, most commonly those of the Alien Mastermind; see the **Mastermind** archetype for details.

ARMORED OVERLORD

A common archetype in the comics, the Armored Overlord derives all of his listed powers from a device. This is usually an advanced suit of power-armor, although it can just as easily be a suit of ancient magical armor or something else such as a pair of gauntlets, a belt (magical or projecting a high-tech force field), a helmet, and so forth. Apply the Removable modifier to the archetype's powers.

Typically, the Overlord created the device himself, or sought out and won it. If not the villain's own work, you might wish to lower the archetype's Intelligence rank somewhat. Armored Overlords are often initially motivated by a rejection of the same genius that allows them to create or discover the powers they use to gain revenge on the world.

IMMORTAL OVERLORD

For some Overlords, the process of conquering the world (or dimension, or cosmos) is a long-term game indeed. The Immortal Overlord has Immunity to Aging, at the least, and often Regeneration or true Immortality, meaning the villain may have lived for centuries or even millennia. This may explain the Overlord's considerable intellect and wide breadth of knowledge, as well as formidable combat skills.

Immortal Overlords predictably take the long view of things; their schemes can take considerable time to come to fruition and they are often patient enough to even wait out years in prison. After all, they will still be around long after their present-day enemies are nothing but a memory. They can afford to wait.

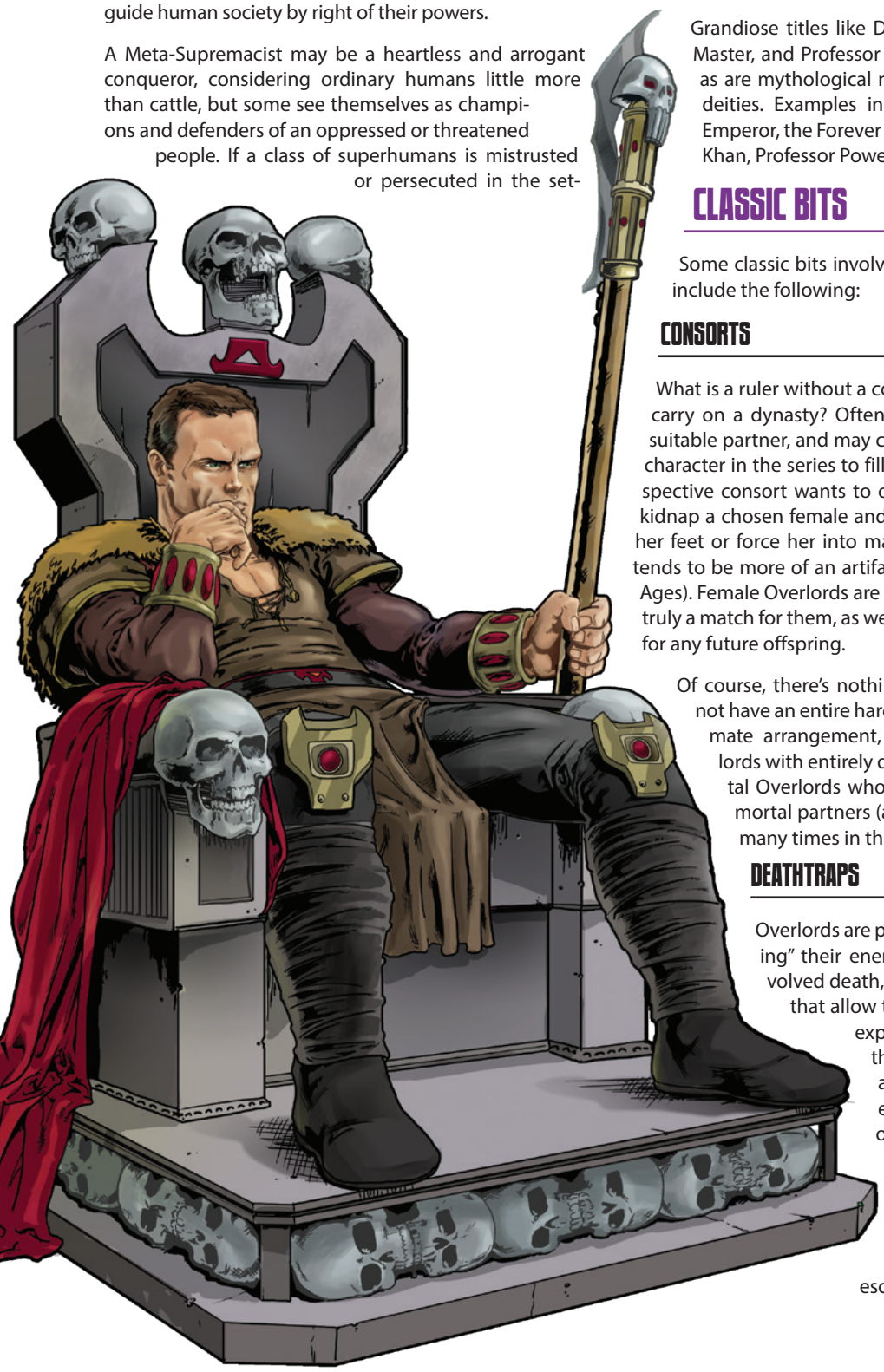
A variant of the Immortal Overlord is the Temporal Overlord, who may also be ageless, but appears throughout history due to the ability to move back and forth between different eras. Most often, the Temporal Overlord hails from a far-future period, but parallel realities are also a possibility.

META-SUPREMACIST

Every Overlord comes with a massive ego and a belief in his or her own superiority, but the Meta-Supremacist believes in the superior nature of an entire class of beings, of which the villain is the ultimate example, of course. This might be a particular origin for super-powers in the setting, such as mutants, psychics, or mystics, or a general belief that superhumans are clearly better than ordinary people and should guide human society by right of their powers.

A Meta-Supremacist may be a heartless and arrogant conqueror, considering ordinary humans little more than cattle, but some see themselves as champions and defenders of an oppressed or threatened people. If a class of superhumans is mistrusted or persecuted in the setting, then a Meta-Supremacist villain may arise to defend them... by conquering humanity!

Some Meta-Supremacists have the power-sets of the Elemental or Mastermind archetypes rather than the one given here, or some combination of the three power-sets, although even more exotic powers are possible.



NAME IDEAS

Grandiose titles like Doctor, Emperor, King, Lord, Master, and Professor are common for Overlords, as are mythological names, particularly those of deities. Examples include Doctor Genesis, the Emperor, the Forever King, Lord Hyperion, Master Khan, Professor Power, and War-Lord.

CLASSIC BITS

Some classic bits involving the Overlord archetype include the following:

CONSORTS

What is a ruler without a consort to help establish and carry on a dynasty? Oftentimes, an Overlord seeks a suitable partner, and may choose a hero or supporting character in the series to fill that role, whether the prospective consort wants to or not! Male Overlords may kidnap a chosen female and either try to sweep her off her feet or force her into marriage (although the latter tends to be more of an artifact of the Golden and Silver Ages). Female Overlords are often seeking a mate that is truly a match for them, as well as a good potential father for any future offspring.

Of course, there's nothing to say an Overlord cannot have an entire harem, or some sort of multiple mate arrangement, especially for Alien Overlords with entirely different customs, or Immortal Overlords who expect to out-live all their mortal partners (and have no doubt done so many times in the past).

DEATHTRAPS

Overlords are particularly given to "rewarding" their enemies with a showy and involved death, placing them in deathtraps that allow the villain time to gloat and explain their glorious plans to the only ones truly able to appreciate them before the end. Of course, the villain often has to attend to those plans for conquest or is called away by something, leaving the heroes to their fate and giving them the opportunity to escape.

OVERLORD PL15

STR	STA	AGL	DEX	FGT	INT	AWE	PRE
13	2	1	1	8	12	7	7

POWERS

Force Field: Protection 15, Impervious 10 • *25 points*

Life Support: Immunity 10 (Life Support) • *10 points*

Power Blast: Ranged Damage 15 • *30 points*

Propulsion: Flight 6 • *12 points*

Sensory Enhancements: Senses 11 (Accurate and Extended 2 Radio (radar), Darkvision, Direction Sense, Distance Sense, Infravision, Radio, Time Sense) • *11 points*

SKILLS

Close Combat: Unarmed 7 (+15), Expertise (Choose One) 8 (+20), Insight 8 (+15), Intimidation 8 (+15), Investigation 4 (+16), Perception 4 (+11), Persuasion 8 (+15), Ranged Combat: Power Blast 7 (+8), Technology 12 (+24), Vehicles 4 (+5)

ADVANTAGES

Assessment, Equipment 20, Improvised Tools, Inventor, Ranged Attack 7, Second Chance (Insight checks), Skill Mastery (Technology), Takedown

OFFENSE

INITIATIVE +1

Power Blast +15	Ranged, Damage 15
Unarmed +15	Close, Damage 13

DEFENSE

DODGE	13	**FORTITUDE**	14
PARRY	13	**TOUGHNESS**	17
WILL	16		

POWER POINTS

ABILITIES	102	**SKILLS**	14
POWERS	88	**DEFENSES**	38
ADVANTAGES	33	**TOTAL**	296

COMPLICATIONS

Destined to Rule: The Overlord is obsessed with power and rulership.

Megalomania: Convinced of superiority and eventual success.

RANTS

Overlords are particularly fond of the sound of their own voices, and tend to rant or ramble at the slightest opportunity. When the heroes are not around for them to threaten or gloat at, the villains rant to their underlings (who know enough to either agree or keep their mouths shut), and when no one else is available, they will often rant out loud to themselves (or to the heroes, even if they are not present and cannot possibly hear them: "So, you think to approach my stronghold unnoticed, do you? Little do you know that I have eyes everywhere!"). You can use various rants, delivered in a haughty and arrogant tone, to liven up encounters with an Overlord.

STRONGHOLD

Overlords typically have some kind of secret lair or stronghold from which they launch their schemes of conquest. Invest some of the villain's equipment points in a suitable headquarters, and stock it with appropriate minions.

TACTICS

In spite of their considerable personal power, Overlords tend to be hands-off opponents, preferring to enact their schemes from afar. Indeed, they often take great offense to any hero who dares to lay hands on them, focusing their wrath on that character before turning against other foes. The villain often has various minions to do his dirty work, including defending the Overlord's lair and keeping the heroes busy.

Of course, once it comes down to a direct confrontation, the Overlord is no pushover. In early confrontations, the Overlord often has a trap prepared to deal with any interlopers. In the final match-up, the villain has to rely more on his own abilities.

Given their supreme arrogance, many Overlords refuse to accept the ignominy of defeat and capture; they may rush into the exploding ruins of their lairs, trying to salvage a last-minute victory or save a priceless artifact or device. Some even deliberately self-destruct, hoping to take the heroes with them or, more likely, faking their own deaths so they can return at a later date with a new scheme for conquest.

CAPERS

Adventures involving the Overlord may include the following:

KING'S GAMBIT

As the first stage of an ambitious scheme, the Overlord seeks to eliminate opposition by removing the heroes from the board, sending various minions to capture or even kill them outright. These might be fairly run-of-the-mill (albeit tough) minions like those from the **Minion Archetypes** section or hired or created supervillain lieutenants. Naturally, the threat to the heroes tips them off to the villain's scheme and gives them the opportunity to take action.

If this is an early adventure in the series, it can even serve as a way of getting the heroes together in the first place. By attempting to eliminate the opposition, the villain instead unites them into a team to oppose him! Perhaps the

Overlord is successful in capturing some of the setting's more experienced or established heroes, leading to a group of novices coming together to help them (and perhaps avenge and replace them, if the Overlord has killed the captives or rendered them powerless).

The Overlord's plans for the heroes might involve more than just getting them out of the way. Perhaps the captives are brought back to the villain's lair so they can be brainwashed into an invincible superhuman army, or their powers can be copied into an artificial Mimic (see the **Mimic** archetype) or transferred to the Overlord himself, making him virtually unstoppable.

THE ENEMY OF MY ENEMY

Faced with a world- or even cosmos-destroying threat, the Overlord reluctantly offers to help the heroes to overcome it, since there is not much point in trying to conquer the world when there's no world left to conquer! Certainly, the villain's genius and considerable resources can be useful in the fight.

Of course, the Overlord is looking for just the right moment to double-cross the heroes, either betraying them to their common foe in exchange for some consideration (such as being made ruler over the Earth or some other corner of the cosmic villain's domain), or seizing the cosmic foe's power for himself and turning it on the good guys. Just when the heroes have won and think the universe is saved, the Overlord reveals it was all a larger scheme to get the bigger threat out of the way and secure power!

SOVEREIGNTY

The Overlord petitions the United Nations for recognition as the head of a sovereign nation: either because the villain really does rule some corner of the world, or perhaps as a representative of a people (a good approach for the Meta-Supremacist), or simply on the basis of the Overlord's sheer power. To the heroes' surprise, the UN grants it! Now the arch-villain is a head of state with diplomatic immunity, who wastes no time establishing an "embassy" in the heroes' home city, perhaps in full view of their headquarters just to taunt them.

The Overlord carries out schemes against the heroes, who can do nothing but turn the defeated villain over to the "justice" of his home nation, unless they want to step outside the law. Perhaps the entire exercise is an effort to get the heroes to do just that, forcing them to violate international law and become vigilantes while the Overlord reveals the foe they think they captured and punished was nothing but a decoy or doppelganger. Maybe the villain used underhanded means to get the UN to cooperate—anything from blackmail to mind control—but can the heroes prove it and gets his diplomatic status revoked?

PSYCHO

The Psycho is, to put it bluntly, completely crazy. The villain's madness opened the door to a certain genius, however, coupled with a particular obsession. The Psycho is an excellent foil for edgy, driven heroes and often a dark reflection of their own obsession with vengeance or justice. The background of the Psycho is typically tragic—horribly scarred physically, psychologically, emotionally, or all three. Psychos deal with their pain just like some heroes do: by inflicting it upon others. The only difference is that Psychos are less selective (or at least less socially acceptable) about their targets. This often leaves only a thin line between them and obsessed vigilante heroes.

THEMES

A Psycho most often has a focus for his or her madness, a way in which it manifests itself other than mere bloody carnage. It is this obsession that leads the Psycho into a career in supervillainy rather than just being a run-of-the-mill criminal. Psycho obsessions can be almost anything, but are often either whimsical or connected to the Psycho's condition in some way. For example, a villain who snaps over an international crossword puzzle competition or the like might become "Mr. Acrostic," a criminal obsessed with crossword style puzzles and games.

The Psycho tends to take an obsession to, well, crazy lengths, making it into a motif for costume and weaponry as well as a means of choosing crimes and leaving clues for the heroes. For example, a Psycho obsessed with threes might target the Holy Trinity Church, or memorabilia from a famous sports triple-play, for example. If you're in need of inspiration for a Psycho obsession, take a look at the **Psycho Obsessions** table.

REVENGE

A common variation on the Psycho theme is a need for revenge for whatever happened to leave the Psycho wandering in the fields of madness. This may or may not be tied to the Psycho's main obsession. For example, a brilliant game designer robbed of his rightful credit for a particular design might turn to crime with a variety of game-based gimmicks and seek revenge on the unscrupulous publisher as his first crime, discovering that he enjoys the challenge of this new "game" and transferring some of his desire for revenge to the heroes who defeat him (but not necessarily abandoning his original vendetta).

Revenge-obsessed Psychos tend to want more than just to kill the target of their revenge; they want their vengeance to be *poetic* in some way. So if a Psycho is targeting the police officer who gave her a parking ticket (leading to some personal tragedy in her twisted view), better to kidnap him and arrange for him to be crushed inside an impounded car at a junkyard, rather than just killing him and dumping the body somewhere. The lighter a story is

PSYCHO OBSESSIONS

D20	OBSESSION
1	**Animals:** Obsession with pets or "animal friends," targeting animal rights issues or the fur industry, a preference for animals over people, perhaps a desire to be an animal or a focus on a particular type of animal (such as cats, dogs, birds, and so forth).
2	**Art:** Equipment based on art supplies (paints, brushes, canvases, etc.) or art icons (famous works), obsession with art critics or artists or particular styles.
3	**Books:** Obsessive collecting of different rare volumes, literary references, stalking authors, committing crimes based on famous novels, perhaps a focus on a particular genre.
4	***Clowns:*** Comedy props (squirting flower, seltzer bottle, cream pie, etc.), elaborate—and often deadly—"jokes" or pranks.
5	**Computers (and possibly the Internet):** Hacking and computer skills, complex programming, computer-crimes, perhaps even a delusion of being a robot.
6	**Conspiracies:** Spy-tech or "psychic" devices; complex schemes based around "the Truth" about the Conspiracy and whoever is behind it, paranoid precautions and security measures.
7	**Fear:** A fascination with fears and phobia, fear-inducing weapons or techniques, setting up frightening scenarios.
8	**Finance:** Either a "moneybags" or "poor-house" persona, obsession with obtaining or destroying wealth, banking and finance gimmicks (bags with dollar signs, fountain pens, "free toasters," barrels, bears and bulls, etc.).
9	**Gambling:** Casino gambling props (cards, dice, chips, roulette wheels), targets casinos, poker tournaments, etc., cannot resist a gamble or game.
10	**Games:** Complex games (puzzles, board games, even RPGs) as crimes, use of game tokens as props and weapons.
11	**Halloween:** "Spooky" devices and crimes intended to frighten or spook. Alternately, choose another holiday or season as the villain's obsession.
12	**Heroes:** Delusions of being a costumed hero or having powers, stalker-like obsession with a particular hero or team, gadgets intended to duplicate various powers.
13	**Medicine:** Doctor or nurse lab coats or uniforms, medical instruments, paraphernalia, and terminology, perhaps a germ-phobia or targeting the medical profession.
14	**Occult:** Mystical, occult, or "Satanic" paraphernalia and trappings, often delusions of supernatural powers or possession by demonic entities (or *is* it a delusion...?)
15	**Religion:** Religious iconography and costuming, targets religious enemies or "heretical" members of a particular religion. Perhaps an insane hatred of *all* religions.
16	**Science Fiction:** "Futuristic" gadgetry, interest in technology and fandom (conventions, Hollywood premieres, etc.). Alternately, substitute another fan subculture.
17	**Sports:** Sporting equipment devices and weapons, crimes around major sporting events or team rivalries.
18	**Stage Magic:** Elaborate "magic tricks" and use of props such as top hats, magic wands, vanishing cabinets, and sawing people in half (often *not* a trick...).
19	**Time (and timepieces):** Brilliant split-second timing, devices based on clock-faces, hands (making pointed weapons), springs, clockworks, ticking bombs, etc. Perhaps actual devices for controlling or affecting time.
20	**Toys:** Weapons and devices styled as toys: boomerangs, yoyos, tops, jacks, bouncy balls, pogo sticks, etc. Crimes based on or targeting toys.

in style, the more elaborate a Psycho's revenge schemes necessarily become.

NAME IDEAS

In addition to names based on the Psycho's obsession are ones referencing his or her mental condition: Cuckoo, Loon, Madman, Noose, Nutcase, Screwloose, Straitjacket, and so forth.

CLASSIC BITS

The following elements are often associated with Psycho villains:

DEATHTRAPS

Psychos love deathtraps associated with their particular obsession in some way. So a Halloween-themed Psycho might trap the good guys in a "house of horrors" with a

PSYCHO PL9

STR	STA	AGL	DEX	FGT	INT	AWE	PRE
4	6	3	3	9	5	5	4

SKILLS

Deception 8 (+12), Insight 8 (+13), Intimidation 8 (+12), Perception 4 (+9), Ranged Attack: Guns or Throwing 8 (+11), Sleight of Hand 8 (+11), Stealth 8 (+11), Technology 6 (+11), Vehicles 4 (+7),

ADVANTAGES

Chokehold, Close Attack 2, Contacts, Daze (Intimidation), Defensive Attack, Defensive Roll 2, Diehard, Equipment 6, Fascinate (Intimidation), Great Endurance, Improvised Tools, Leadership, Minions 6, Set-Up, Startle, Taunt, Well-Informed

OFFENSE

INITIATIVE +3

Unarmed +11	Close, Damage 4

DEFENSE

DODGE	10	**FORTITUDE**	9
PARRY	10	**TOUGHNESS**	8/6*
WILL	9	*Without Defensive Roll.	

POWER POINTS

ABILITIES	78	**SKILLS**	31
POWERS	0	**DEFENSES**	15
ADVANTAGES	29	**TOTAL**	153

COMPLICATIONS

Obsession: Utterly obsessed with something (see the **Psycho Obsession** table).

variety of lethal displays and the whole thing rigged to blow sky-high at the stroke of midnight! Similarly, a video-game-obsessed Psycho could place the heroes in deathtraps based around various classic arcade games.

Psycho deathtraps also tend to come into play when dealing with the villain's other victims; the snares are intended for particular targets who aren't the crime-fighters! The heroes just blunder into these traps, rather than being placed in them deliberately. The same goes for heroes interfering in a Psycho's "fun" in other ways. So characters might run into things like exploding Easter eggs or hallucination-inducing fear toxins as they try to protect people from a rampaging Psycho.

MINIONS

Psychos tend to have at least a few minions around to do the heavy lifting and run interference if necessary. They're typically hired goons, possibly dressed up to fit the villain's theme, although they can also be cult-like followers (Psychos tend to have a strange sort of personal charisma) or equally crazy, perhaps even buying into the villain's particular

delusions. A few Psychos have non-human minions based on their obsessions, such as a sci-fi obsessed Psycho who has cobbled together some robots, or a toy-obsessed one with mechanical toys able to move and act on their own.

Allocate points from the Psycho's Minions advantage as needed to suit the character's particular brand of underlings, including increasing the rank to accommodate more powerful or plentiful minions as you see fit.

TACTICS

Psychos tend to be cat-and-mouse opponents. Heroes hear about their latest crime-spree and receive some cryptic clue or taunting challenge. Then they must investigate, figuring out the villain's current plan and hideout before eventually confronting the Psycho, either at the site of the next intended crime or at the villain's lair.

In either case, the final confrontation often consists of different cunningly designed traps and minions to keep the heroes busy. The Psycho might take the opportunity to rant to them, or instead seize the better part of valor and look to escape while the good guys are occupied. Psychos who manage to capture the heroes usually put them into an appropriate deathtrap.

When finally cornered, most Psychos are fierce fighters, even if they lack superhuman strength and resilience. If the final confrontation takes place somewhere potentially dangerous (in a factory, atop a moving train, etc.), the Psycho will almost inevitably appear to die (lost in a fall or explosion, for example), only to manage to return in the future. Even a captured Psycho is rarely sent to prison, but rather to an asylum of some sort, from which the villain may eventually escape.

CAPERS

Adventures involving the Psycho may include the following:

IT'S MY PARTY...

The Psycho begins a series of kidnappings, snatching various people from their homes, workplaces, and even public venues or on live television! Each crime is carefully planned, providing the heroes with a suitable distraction and the kidnappers with an escape route. No ransom demands or other forms of contact from the villain appear, leaving the police baffled as to the motive. The heroes must investigate the crimes in order to find out where the victims are being held, and whatever pattern there might be, in order to guess the next target.

It turns out the villain is kidnapping people involved with his or her particular obsession and getting them all together for a crazy "dream dinner party" wherein the Psycho gets to meet and spend time with such a wonderful group of interesting people! The victims are treading on thin ice, since the slightest thing can send the villain over the edge, and the heroes are running out of time before the Psycho gets bored or angry and decides to end the "party" early, by killing all of the guests!

OH, WE'RE ALL MAD HERE

A series of crimes involving the theft of various chemicals gets the heroes' attention, particularly when later crimes leave victims affected by strange, but familiar, manias. Investigation reveals the Psycho is developing—and testing—a chemical compound that induces madness. Having decided to "enlighten" the whole city, the villain plans to release the compound into the water supply (perhaps tainting a reservoir or processing plant) or even in the air over the city via balloon or plane.

Ideally, the heroes can piece together clues from the crime scenes and early encounters with the Psycho's gang and find the villain's new hideout. This gives them a chance to prevent the release of the madness compound. Otherwise, they also have to deal with a city full of people suffering from the same sort of insanity as their foe!

For a twist, perhaps the villain has *already* released the chemical into the environment. However, it requires some sort of activator, such as a binary compound released in a spray or aerosol to match the one in the water supply, or some sort of broadcast signal that triggers the latent chemical in the system. If the heroes can stop the trigger from being used, the substance should pass harmlessly from everyone's system, given time.

PUPPETEER

The Puppeteer is a manipulator of the first order. The typical Puppeteer has Mind Control powers of some sort, often far-reaching. Other Puppeteers are more subtle, manipulating people through a web of influence, contacts, blackmail, and extortion.

Physically, Puppeteers are little threat, but heroes rarely confront them directly, dealing instead with their various pawns and schemes. A Puppeteer may maintain the guise of an ordinary citizen or even a hero to throw off suspicion.

Although Mind Control is a formidable power in and of itself, a Puppeteer backed into a corner may also use extra effort to develop other power stunts, perhaps including a devastating Area Damage effect resisted by Will or an Illusion sufficient to fool the heroes and provide an escape route.

THEMES

Puppeteer themes revolve around how the villain controls and manipulates people, what effect it has on them, and what the heroes find when they work their way to the center of the villain's web of influence.

FOCUS PUPPETEER

While the archetype as given can attempt to control subjects simply by seeing them, a Focus Puppeteer requires some talisman or focus in order to establish control. This could be the classic elements of sympathetic magic, such as hair or nail clippings or a blood sample, perhaps incorporated into a small doll or other representation of the victim. It can also include a particular device, or an artistic representation like a sculpture, painting, or photograph. Imagine a villain with a camera that really *does* capture people's souls, allowing him to control them through their photograph!

MINION MASTER

Rather than directly controlling the heroes or their allies, the Minion Master is a Puppeteer with legions of loyal or mind-controlled minions. These may range from large numbers of low-powered opponents to a small number of very powerful minions, typically "monsters" of some sort. The villain may have some defensive capabilities, but relies heavily on sending wave after wave of minions against the heroes.

PHANTOM PUPPETEER

The Puppeteer is a disembodied entity, having Insubstantial 3 or 4, and exerting influence over the material world almost entirely through mental power. The villain might be a ghost or spirit, an astral form, energy being, or even an intelligent virus or meme spread through physical or social interaction. They tend to be among the most alien and creepy of Puppeteers (along with the **Spawn Puppeteer**, following).

POD PUPPETEER

Rather than controlling victims, the Pod Puppeteer *replaces* them with exact duplicates under its control. These are often clones or alien replicants, although they can just as easily be convincing androids or even mystical changelings created out of previously inanimate matter. The victims are generally kept alive and unconscious, either to feed memories and life force to the duplicates, or as a back-up in case a new duplicate is needed. The appearance of a Pod Puppeteer is often a prelude to an invasion intended to replace all of humanity with duplicates.

SEDUCTIVE PUPPETEER

Although Puppeteers can be disembodied brains, alien slugs, and hideous dwarfs with giant heads, they can also be quite attractive. A Seductive Puppeteer exerts at least some influence through sheer appearance and attractiveness, often a sexual allure. The Puppeteer's motif may involve acquiring a "harem" of thralls willing to do anything to please the object of their affections. Of course, many Seductive Puppeteers turn out to be truly hideous, their appearance of beauty an illusion or some other manifestation of their powers.

SOCIAL PUPPETEER

Similar to the Seductive Puppeteer, the Social Puppeteer manipulates people through Presence, interaction skills and guile. In fact, the character might not have Mind Control powers at all, simply a high Presence and skill rank. Add some minor mental powers on top of that (perhaps with the Check Required flaw), and you've got a formidable foe.

PUPPETEER PL10

STR	STA	AGL	DEX	FGT	INT	AWE	PRE
-1	0	0	0	0	3	5	5

POWERS

Mind Control: Perception Ranged Affliction 10 (Resisted by Will; Dazed, Compelled, Controlled), Cumulative, Progressive, Subtle; Linked to Senses 1 (Communication Link with Target) • *62 points*

SKILLS

Deception 6 (+11), Expertise: Behavioral Sciences 8 (+11), Insight 8 (+13), Perception 4 (+9), Persuasion 8 (+13), Stealth 4 (+4)

ADVANTAGES

Assessment, Connected, Contacts, Daze (Deception), Fascinate (Deception)

OFFENSE

	INITIATIVE +0
Mind Control	Perception, Affliction, Will DC 20
Unarmed +0	Close, Damage –1

DEFENSE

DODGE	6	**FORTITUDE**	5
PARRY	4	**TOUGHNESS**	0
WILL	15		

POWER POINTS

ABILITIES	24	**SKILLS**	19
POWERS	62	**DEFENSES**	25
ADVANTAGES	5	**TOTAL**	135

COMPLICATIONS

Cowardly: Prefers to avoid direct physical confrontations.

Manipulative: Sees people as objects to manipulate.

SPAWN PUPPETEER

A Spawn Puppeteer does not control thralls directly, but instead creates a type of "spawn" that does so: a parasite, offspring, implant, or the like that takes control of the victim, allowing the Puppeteer to issue commands. Spawn Puppeteers are most often aliens, using parasitic spawn to seize control over populations as a prelude to reproduction or invasion, but they can also be mutants or even technological, with their "spawn" being artificial or nanotech implants they manufacture.

NAME IDEAS

Ant Queen, Chess-Master, Director, Marionette, Poppet, Prime-Mover, Shadowplay, Voodoo, Web-Master

CLASSIC BITS

Some classic elements associated with the Puppeteer include:

MY FRIEND, MY ENEMY!

The Puppeteer provides a perfect excuse for the comic book classic of heroes fighting each other: the villain simply controls one or more heroes and sets them against the characters.

There may be a strong temptation to have the Puppeteer seize control of one or more of the player characters, using them against their teammates. This can be fun for some players, especially if they're competitive, but others just find it annoying, since it takes away the one thing they control in the game (their character). It's best to make sure you have the player's "buy-in" on the idea in general before using this option. If you do use a player character as the Puppeteer's pawn against the other heroes, be sure to at least award the player a hero point for being a good sport and going along with the complication. Chances are it will see use during the next confrontation with the villain!

NO, NEVER!

In many scenarios where a hero is under a Puppeteer's control, the villain will order the thrall to do something like attacking a friend or loved one, or dooming the entire city or world to fall under the fiend's control. At the last moment, through a massive effort of will, the hero manages to shake off the villain's domination and resist the command, at least long enough for fellow heroes to take action.

M&M handles this with both regular resistance checks against Afflictions and in particular the Resistance aspect of the extra effort rules, which permit an immediate resistance check. Players can spend hero points to aid these checks to break free of the villain's control.

TACTICS

Puppeteers tend to be behind-the-scenes bad guys, using their thralls to do their dirty work and take all the risks for them, while they remain safely out of sight. Some (like the Phantom Puppeteer) are literally beyond the heroes' grasp without some special measures.

CAPERS

Adventures involving the Puppeteer may include the following:

CAN'T FIGHT CITY HALL

The public and the media in the city suddenly become increasingly critical of the heroes and their activities. Editorials dig up every mistake they've ever made and headlines over their photos read "Threat or Menace?" Not long thereafter, the Mayor and other city officials come to see the team. Rather than supporting them, the government demands they leave the city immediately! Any security clearance or other privileges they have are revoked, their landlord tries to evict them, vehicles are ticketed or impounded, and so forth. If the heroes defy any of this legal harassment, a warrant for their arrest is posted almost immediately and they become hunted fugitives.

Naturally, the sudden change of heart on the part of the city and its populace is the work of the Puppeteer, influencing key people to turn public opinion against the heroes. The goal is to either chase them out of the city so the villain can work there unopposed, or to force them into a confrontation with otherwise innocent people that puts the good guys on the wrong side of the law. Either they'll be jailed and out of the way or their reputations will be ruined and no one will believe them when they claim some sinister puppet-master is secretly taking over the city!

WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE...

Another team of heroes (perhaps with a friendly rivalry with the player characters) has gone on a sudden and unexplained crime spree! Authorities are baffled and largely helpless against the world-famous heroes, so the characters are the only ones who can stop them. This is a set-up for the classic "hero vs. hero" battles of the comics, and a great opportunity to use a group of non-player heroes.

The rogue heroes are under the Puppeteer's control, and are stealing the components for the next stage of the villain's plans: a super-science gadget or magical artifact or ritual to massively increase Mind Control range, allowing the villain to take over the city, country, or even the entire world! The good guys might be able to snap them out of it, but otherwise they have to figure out how to stop them without harming them too badly. Of course, then the Puppeteer might decide the player characters would make even better pawns....

ROBOT

A common theme in the comics onward is technology run amok, when advances intended to improve the human condition turn against humanity. The evil Robot is one such advance, an artificial intelligence lacking in morality, coldly devoted to the domination or even extermination of humanity. Some Robots are alien in origin, but most come from well-intentioned human experimentation gone awry. Robots typically have formidable physical and intellectual capabilities and a vast array of technological weapons and devices at their command.

THEMES

The Robot's themes tend to involve the nature of its creation and what type of robot it is, ranging from a fairly human-looking android to more industrial shapes or even immobile computers, giant machines, or magical creations.

ANDROID

To the casual observer, the Android looks like an ordinary human being. There might be some "tells"—such as slightly glowing eyes, a plastic sheen, or a completely expressionless face—but under most circumstances, the villain can "pass" for a human, providing the opportunity to blend in and move among us. Often, an Android's human façade is torn away during conflicts, revealing metal and circuitry beneath.

Some Androids might not only look human, but have the capability to change their outward appearance, a combination of the Robot and Master of Disguise archetypes. Add the Morph effect to the archetype's powers, and any skills or advantages from the Master of Disguise you find appropriate. Perhaps the Android was originally intended as a kind of "infiltration" unit. At the extreme level, it may be an Artificial Mimic (see the **Mimic** archetype for details).

EVIL COMPUTER

The villain is an evil or amoral artificial intelligence that exists as software running on a computer, rather than in a specific robotic body. An Evil Computer may control a number of different "slave" robots, perhaps even able to directly perceive whatever they do as a Remote Sensing effect.

The Evil Computer is more like the Brain in a Jar version of the **Mastermind** archetype, with powers such as Datalink and various machine minions rather than mental powers that target living beings. Evil Computers often make use of the **Rebuild and Return** bit.

GIANT ROBOT

Rather than blending in, the villain is a *huge* robot, with one or more ranks of (most likely Permanent) Growth. A "small" giant robot (no more than Growth 6-7) may be a master villain or lieutenant. Larger giant robots are nearly always minions, although you can break type and go with a giant robot master villain. In the latter case, the giant robot tends to be a vehicle or supplemental body for the true villain operating it from afar or within.

MAGICAL CONSTRUCT

In a superhero setting, a "robot" may actually be an artificial construct given animation and intelligence by

means other than technology. The Magical Construct is a golem, animated statue, or even steampunk clockwork, some creation of mysticism or "weird science" rather than conventional technology. The game traits are largely the same, although the Robot may have different skills, such as Expertise: Magic in place of Technology, for example.

A Magical Construct is often the lieutenant of an occult master villain, while lesser Magical Constructs may be the "robotic" minions of a mystic (see the **Minion Archetypes** for examples). The Construct might also be a master villain in its own right.

ROBOTIC BRUTE

The archetype as presented assumes the Robot is highly intelligent and programmed with extensive technological information, but that does not have to be the case. A robot villain might have only average intellect by human standards, and little or even no knowledge other than its programmed instructions. This can be by design of the robot's artificial intelligence or a limitation in its programming. For example, a robotic soldier may be only modestly intelligent and possess extensive tactical information, but not much else. Robotic brutes tend to be lieutenants or minions rather than master villains by nature. See the end of this chapter for sample robot minions.

NAME IDEAS

Artifice, Galatea, Mechanix, Tin-Man, Techno, Tronix

CLASSIC BITS

The following are some classic bits associated with the Robot archetype:

REBUILD AND RETURN

Robots are notoriously difficult villains to get rid of; never having been alive in the first place, they're essentially impossible to "kill." Even a destroyed robot can potentially be rebuilt, and robotic computer "minds" can be copied to backup files and downloaded into new bodies, potentially including upgrades and improvements.

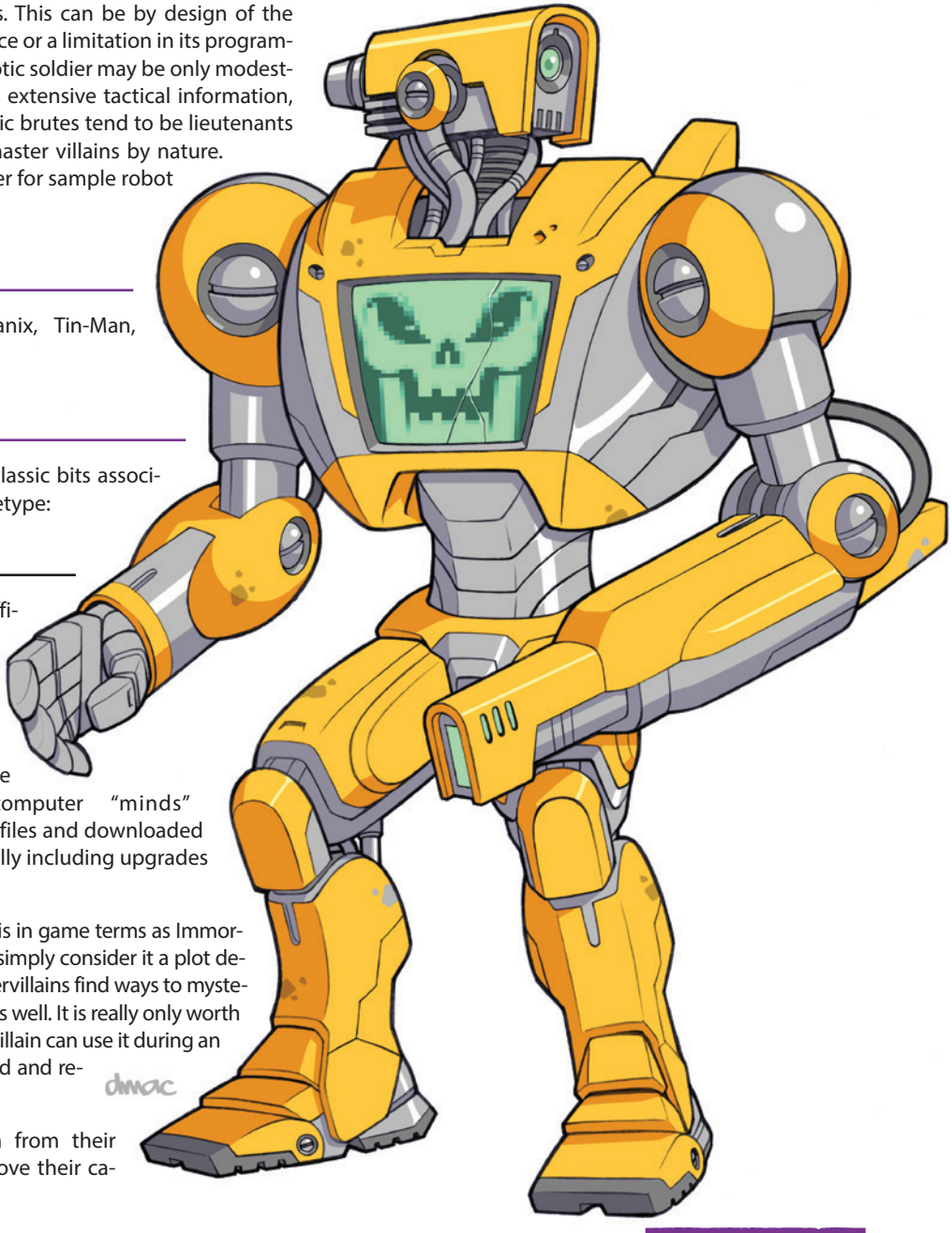
You can choose to treat this in game terms as Immortality. Alternately, you can simply consider it a plot device, since most other supervillains find ways to mysteriously return from death as well. It is really only worth defining as a power if the villain can use it during an adventure, being destroyed and returning multiple times.

Some Robots also learn from their mistakes. They may improve their capabilities based on prior defeats. So, for example, if the heroes beat the Robot by melting it in the last encounter, the new version may have potent heat shielding that grants additional Protection or even Immunity to heat damage. This can create a villain the heroes can never defeat the same way twice.

A CREATED RACE

The Robot is often a unique entity, created by accident or with a creator who is now dead (often by the creation's own hand). Many Robots seek to build others like them, creating a "family" or even a "race" of sorts, subservient to their maker, of course.

The Robot typically lacks some key element, preventing it from doing all the work itself. It might need the creative genius of its original maker, or someone equally skilled in robotics, the brainwave patterns of living hu-



ROBOT PL13

STR	STA	AGL	DEX	FGT	INT	AWE	PRE
15	—	0	2	8	10	6	1

POWERS

Armor: Protection 16, Impervious • *32 points*

Datalink: Comprehend Machines, Radio Communication 4, Rapid 3 • *23 points*

Energy Beams: Ranged Damage 15 • *30 points*

Robot: Immunity 30 (Fortitude Effects) • *30 points*

SKILLS

Close Combat: Unarmed 3 (+11), Insight 6 (+12), Intimidation 12 (+13), Ranged Combat: Energy Beams 3 (+5), Technology 12 (+22)

ADVANTAGES

Accurate Attack, Assessment, Eidetic Memory, Power Attack, Precise Attack (Ranged, Cover), Ranged Attack 6

OFFENSE

	INITIATIVE +0
Energy Beams +11	Ranged, Damage 15
Unarmed +11	Close, Damage 15

DEFENSE

DODGE	10	**FORTITUDE**	Immune
PARRY	10	**TOUGHNESS**	16
WILL	13		

POWER POINTS

ABILITIES	74	**SKILLS**	18
POWERS	115	**DEFENSES**	19
ADVANTAGES	11	**TOTAL**	237

COMPLICATIONS

Inhuman: Lacking both living physiology and human emotions.

Machine: Vulnerable to certain effects like electricity, magnetism, and so forth.

mans on which to base new neural matrices, rare earth elements, special technology, or the like. This gives the Robot something to acquire and the heroes something to guard, or recover if the Robot manages to get its artificial hands on it.

Even if the Robot manages to create others like it, they often end up turning against their maker, being more innocent or sophisticated, capable of emotion and empathy for humanity. Thus the prodigal creations of the Robot are new potential heroes. On the other hand, some might have just as much ego and lack of empathy as their maker, deciding they are superior by virtue of being later models. In this way the Robot may end up creating new rival villains as well!

TACTICS

Although intellectually brilliant, the Robot tends to be something of a brute in combat, relying on inhuman strength and durability, blasting away at foes it cannot reach with its crushing grip. All the while the Robot lectures its foes on their innate inferiority and how the odds are mathematically stacked against them.

A cunning Robot sometimes takes advantage of its freedom from the needs of the flesh, distracting foes with brutal physical combat while also exposing them to environmental dangers such as airborne toxins, radiation, or a slow depletion of oxygen, to name a few. By the time the heroes realize their danger, it is usually too late to stop the Robot from overwhelming and defeating them.

Similarly, Robots often lair in places dangerous or lethal for organic beings, such as radioactive or toxic sites, making it more difficult for heroes to locate and reach them. Coincidentally, the hazards might also screen the lair from things like sensors or certain superhuman powers.

CAPERS

Adventures involving the Robot may include the following:

THE BRIDE OF THE ROBOT

It all begins with the theft of electronics parts and equipment, and the kidnapping of prominent roboticists and technicians. Then an important female supporting character goes missing, abducted in public by the Robot or its minions! The heroes may have a chance to try and prevent the abduction, but it can succeed as a complication, if necessary, awarding the players one or more hero points.

By the time the heroes manage to track the Robot to its hidden lair, it has already completed the construction of a mechanical "bride" and hooked its kidnapped victim to a device intended to transfer her brain patterns—perhaps even her memories and life force—into the new automaton to activate it. The heroes have to act quickly if they are to save her!

Even if they interrupt the process, the Robot's "bride" might still come to life, but with the unexpected "fault" of having an all-too human sense of feeling. The Bride may reject its creator-suitor, preferring to ally with the heroes to defeat it. Or it could be dangerously insane, making it just as much of a threat as the Robot, giving the heroes twice the trouble!

Even if the Bride is initially an ally, "she" may have a difficult time adjusting to her new "life," especially if she shares

some of the personality and traits of her original human template, such as affection for one of the heroes. Driven by a desire to have a normal life, the new robot may become unstable and dangerous, forcing the heroes to take action.

KILL ALL HUMANS!

A government or corporate facility researching deadly bioengineered diseases is locked down after a major security breach releases a deadly cocktail into the air, killing everyone in the facility. The lockdown has managed to prevent the release of the pathogens into the general environment, and steps are being taken to sterilize the facility, but there is evidence the systems failure was caused by a break in, by someone—or something—that managed to escape.

Now the hunt is on for the thief of several types of deadly microorganisms. The good news is the Robot engineered the theft, and the villain (or its mechanical minion) is immune and therefore not a carrier. On the other hand, the metal menace intends to reproduce the diseases and then release an amount sufficient to wipe out all human life on Earth!

The heroes have to trace the theft, and later heists of the necessary materials and equipment, back to the villain's hidden lair. (Use a suitable earthbound headquarters from later in this chapter.) They have to stop the Robot from releasing the bio-weapons, without doing so accidentally themselves. To further complicate matters, the Robot might use captured humans as carriers, leaving the heroes with the dilemma of whether or not they can rescue these innocent people and what to do with them once they have.

SORCERER

The mystical arts offer the potential of tremendous power, and some fall victim to the temptation to misuse their arts for evil. The Sorcerer is much like the Mystic hero archetype but eager to strike deals with evil forces in exchange for power or willing to explore and use forbidden secrets. Some Sorcerers are ancient menaces, their lives unnaturally sustained by their sinister arts. Others are more contemporary, but no less powerful or dangerous, having bargained with powers beyond human ken for mystical forces no mortal was meant to wield.

THEMES

Themes for the Sorcerer typically involve what type of magic the villain commands, and the marks that power has left on the Sorcerer's body, mind, and soul.

ALCHEMIST

The alchemist works with mystical forces of transmutation and transformation, seeking mastery of the primal elements and the perfection of the legendary Philosopher's Stone, a talisman able to transmute and control the elements and grant immortality. An alchemist villain typically relies on various potions, powders, and other magical formulae to cast spells and rituals, although the character may be so powerful as to possess the legendary Stone and its abilities. A minor alchemist who stumbles upon the Philosopher's Stone is more of a Jumped-Up Nobody archetype, but a masterful alchemist is easily the equal of a full-fledged Sorcerer.

DEMON SORCERER

The Sorcerer is not human at all, but an infernal creature: a demon, devil, or some similar being from a hellish dimension. The villain may simply look different, having demonic features like red skin, horns, a forked tail, cloven hooves, and so forth, or could have different physical game traits as well, including increased Strength and Stamina, Protection for improved Toughness, Immunity (up to or including Immunity to Fortitude Effects), and so forth. Demonic Sorcerers are often vulnerable to certain holy rituals and relics.

NECROMANCER

The necromancer works with the dead, particularly reanimating corpses as zombie or skeleton minions (see the **Minion Archetypes**) and summoning the shades of the dead to provide knowledge and forbidden lore. Necromancers often survive by draining the life force of victims, in a vampire-like fashion, and may intend to turn the entire world into a graveyard they can control.

SEDUCTIVE SORCERESS

The Seductive Sorceress matches sinful beauty with arcane power, often using her magic to sustain her youthful good looks and enhance her considerable charms. Although the Sorceress often uses seduction to get her way, she can be as ruthless and powerful as any Sorcerer, perhaps even more so. Like the witches and sorceresses of legend, she often has a penchant for enchanting men or transforming them into her bestial servants.

UNDEAD SORCERER

Not even death can trap a true master of the mystic arts. The Undead Sorcerer exists in a kind of half-life, either trapped there by the decree of foes who bound and entombed him, or through his own machinations, transcending the limits of mortality at the price of the pleasures and aesthetics of the flesh. Undead Sorcerers are almost universally hideous, desiccated corpses, although some conceal their true nature beneath masks and heavy robes or spells of illusion. Often the undead state is merely

a steppingstone toward an eventual goal of apotheosis—the achievement of virtual godhood—even if the whole world must be sacrificed on the altar of the Sorcerer's ambition.

NAME IDEAS

Arcanix, Eidolon, Infernus, Magus, Morgan, Umbrus, often with a title like Doctor or Master in front of it for men and Lady or Madame in front of it for women. Some sorcerers also draw names from myth and legend.

CLASSIC BITS

The following are some classic elements involving the Sorcerer archetype:

AGELESS EXPERIENCE

If not actually immortal, Sorcerer villains are often far older than they seem. Mighty magics sustain the villain's life far beyond a natural span, whether the Sorcerer is an ageless beauty or a hideous living corpse. Sorcerers often belong to a world of myth and magic now all but forgotten, and may seek to return to it, perhaps by transforming the modern world into one better suited to their tastes.

FORBIDDEN LORE

Villainous Sorcerers by definition dabble with forces man was not meant to know. Sorcerers seek power, usually in the form of lost and forbidden occult knowledge. So the villain is often after a particular tome, scroll, or magical item, or the equivalent of the Item of Power wielded by the Jumped-Up Nobody archetype. If such a talisman can turn a virtual no one into a world-class supervillain, just imagine what it could do in the hands of a masterful evil Sorcerer!

MYSTIC MINIONS

More than heroic magicians, Sorcerers are prone to using their powers to summon up various magical creatures as minions to deal with bothersome pests such as superheroes. These minions include all sorts of monsters: animated statues and suits of armor, demons of all shapes and sizes, dragons, goblins, ghosts, and undead such as skeletons and zombies. See the **Minion Archetypes** section for inspiration.

You can either assign the villain appropriate ranks in the Minions advantage for the associated minions—cultists or demons in particular—or a Summon spell with the suitable qualities for the villain's Magic array.

SORCERER PL14

STR	STA	AGL	DEX	FGT	INT	AWE	PRE
-1	0	0	2	2	3	8	2

POWERS

Magic: Array (36 points)

- **Mystic Blast:** Ranged Damage 18 • *36 points*
- **Mystic Bonds:** Ranged Cumulative Affliction 12 (Resisted by Dodge; Hindered and Vulnerable, Defenseless and Immobile; Extra Condition, Limited Degree) • *1 point*
- **Mystic Passage:** Teleport 18 • *1 point*
- **Scrying:** Remote Sensing 9 (visual, auditory, mental) • *1 point*

Mystic Levitation: Flight 4 • *8 points*

Mystic Senses: Senses 2 (Danger Sense, Magical Awareness) • *2 points*

Mystic Shield: Protection 18, Impervious 12, Affects Insubstantial, Sustained • *31 points*

SKILLS

Deception 4 (+6), Expertise: Magic 16 (+19), Intimidation 9 (+11), Persuasion 4 (+6), Ranged Combat: Magic 3 (+5), Sleight of Hand 4 (+6)

ADVANTAGES

Artificer, Ranged Attack 5, Ritualist, Trance

OFFENSE

INITIATIVE +0

Mystic Blast +10	Ranged, Damage 18
Mystic Bonds +10	Ranged, Affliction 12
Unarmed +2	Close, Damage –1

DEFENSE

DODGE	10	**FORTITUDE**	11
PARRY	8	**TOUGHNESS**	18/0*
WILL	16	*Without Mystic Shield	

POWER POINTS

ABILITIES	32	**SKILLS**	20
POWERS	80	**DEFENSES**	35
ADVANTAGES	8	**TOTAL**	175

COMPLICATIONS

Arrogant: Superior and overconfident.

Power Loss: Requires magical rituals or talismans.

RITUALS

Rituals are a Sorcerer's doomsday machines and infernal devices; defeating an evil Sorcerer is often a matter of preventing the villain from acquiring the necessary elements for a ritual, or stopping a ritual before it is complete and unleashes whatever corrupt magical powers the villain wishes to call upon.

Rituals are usually elaborate, having to be performed at a particular place and time, and needing exotic ingredients ranging from a rare flower from the highlands of Tibet to the heart of a pure maiden (symbolically or literally). Circumstances often mean the Sorcerer has only one shot at performing the ritual: the necessary astrological or cosmic conjunction might occur only once every 3,000 years, for example, or the primary ingredient is so rare that the rite will use up all of it known to exist. This means if the heroes are successful, the villain is not likely to try the same scheme again. Unfortunately, there's always another forbidden ritual hidden in an arcane book or ancient scroll somewhere.

Exactly what the ritual is intended to do is up to the GM and depends on the Sorcerer's ultimate goals. Typically, a ritual grants the villain almost limitless power, or summons a being capable of doing so. For more nihilistic Sorcerers, the ritual may be intended as a means of destroying the world, perhaps by unleashing eldritch monsters from beyond the veil of our reality, such as demons or elder gods. See the **Elder Evil** archetype for some possibilities.

VANISHING ACT

More than any other villain, Sorcerers are prone to simply disappearing into thin air when their business is concluded or they need a quick escape. The Mystic Passage spell of the archetype's Magic array is sufficient to permit the Sorcerer to go virtually anywhere in the blink of an eye, although limited to places the villain knows fairly well.

This power allows the villain to escape earlier confrontations with the heroes leading up to the final encounter, when the Sorcerer is usually too busy to pull another vanishing act, or unwilling to abandon the culmination of a scheme to the heroes.

TACTICS

Sorcerers almost universally prefer to fight at a distance, overseeing a battle and using their spells to hinder or disable foes. As mentioned under **Mystic Minions**, they most commonly summon up various creatures to engage their enemies, allowing them to work their magic unhindered. Sorcerers tend to favor broad area effects, particularly trapping foes in webs of arcane force, hands of earth and stone, or the cold grip of undead shades, allowing the villain time to gloat and arrange a proper demise for the interfering heroes.

Sorcerers often become invisible or teleport, vanishing and reappearing elsewhere on the battlefield, or attempting escape if the heroes gain the upper hand.

CAPERS

Adventures involving the Sorcerer may include:

THE LOST TREASURES OF POWER

The Sorcerer kidnaps several friends or loved ones of the heroes, holding them hostage in another dimension or other inaccessible realm; the villain demands the heroes do exactly as they are told, or the prisoners will be tormented in a hellish netherworld for eternity. The Sorcerer wants them to find and recover certain mystical artifacts, which are the key components of a grand ritual that will bring the villain unlimited power and mastery over reality.

In a series of encounters, the heroes—transported by the villain's magic—face a variety of mystic guardians and traps protecting the talismans. They can visit exotic locales, or even other dimensions or times, from European castles to remote Asian monasteries or South American ruins. The collection of items can be a series of short encounters or even whole adventures of their own, with heroes getting involved in local affairs or running into competition for the talismans.

Eventually, their task complete, the heroes are summoned into the Sorcerer's presence, giving them the opportunity to pull a double-cross (perhaps substituting fakes for the real talismans) or arrange a distraction while they or their allies rescue the hostages. The villain does not give up easily, of course, trying to seize the desired items and complete the ritual or, at least, gain revenge on the heroes and their friends.

DEVILISH DOUBLE-DEALING

The Sorcerer shows up unexpectedly and challenges the heroes to a fight to the finish. The already-powerful villain displays massive and previously unknown levels of power, able to overcome the heroes with ease; either increase the archetype's power level to 20 (improving all PL-limited traits accordingly) or simply make the villain a PL X plot device, able to withstand anything the heroes can dish out and capable of defeating the heroes, one per round.

The villain's victory is short-lived, however. It turns out the desperate Sorcerer literally sold his soul to gain revenge on the heroes—not once, but twice! The villain cut deals with two different demon-lords, gaining virtually untold power from each, but at the cost of surrendering his soul to them once the day was done. Now both infernal powers are coming to collect their due, and neither will be satisfied with anything less than payment in full. The demon-lords will use the slight offered by the other's pact to engage in a struggle that will devastate the earthly plane, unless the heroes can exercise something akin to the wisdom of Solomon to prevent it!

VAMPIRE

The Vampire is a common villain in folk legend. Comic book Vampires tend to focus less on the horror aspects of the legend and treat them more as an exotic type of super-human. The archetype is a powerful example of the type, and may even be based on an existing Vampire from legend, such as Count Dracula, Elizabeth Báthory (the "Blood Countess" of Hungary), or the Nosferatu from the film of the same name. Vampires have an array of mystic powers and minions at their command, but also a number of distinct vulnerabilities.

THEMES

More powerful Vampires have greater and more varied powers. They may have higher Strength and a Mind Control Affliction (dependent on sight) rather than Fascinate, plus Magic or Weather Control. Some Vampires have the Ritualist advantage, allowing them to perform magical rituals (a good intermediate step before full-blown Magic powers). Vampires fitting some of the Hollywood and comic book interpretations of the legend may have the ability to transform into a bat, wolf, or other shapes (typically Morph with the Metamorph modifier).

LIVING VAMPIRE

Rather than a supernatural undead creature, the Vampire is biological in nature: a mutant freak, alien humanoid, or the result of a biological accident or experiment, perhaps concerning tissue regeneration or blood-borne diseases. The villain often has the various qualities of a Vampire, particularly great strength, regenerative abilities, and a need for human blood, but may lack some of the more supernatural powers such as Insubstantial or Summon, along with some of the weaknesses such as holy symbols and perhaps even sunlight, although bright light usually still pains Living Vampires (perhaps due to a skin condition or more light-sensitive eyes).

Living Vampires may revel in their new condition or, more commonly, seek a cure for it. Usually this involves nighttime thefts from hospitals and biomedical companies, perhaps even kidnapping doctors and world-famous authorities on mutation and blood diseases. In this regard, the Living Vampire is quite similar to the Hybrid archetype.

QUEEN OF THE DAMNED

Although a great many Vampire villains are male, female Vampires are common, often with a femme fatale element, as they seduce their prey and lure them to their doom.

A female Vampire may fixate on a hero as a potential "consort," seeking to transform him into a Vampire as well. Some might even collect a number of "suitors," creating a kind of male harem of mind-controlled or influenced servitor Vampires or thralls.

NAME IDEAS

The Baron, The Blood Count (or Countess), DeGhul, Diable, Nosferatu, Sangré, Schreck

CLASSIC BITS

The following are some classic bits associated with the Vampire archetype:

HAUNTED MANOR

The archetypal lair for the Vampire is a spooky old castle or manor house. Since Vampires have limited mobility during the daylight hours, they tend to remain fairly close to their lair, so they can return to it before the sun rises. The first sign an investigator gets of a Vampire moving into an area may be the acquisition of a suitable lair there, a task usually entrusted to one of the Vampire's thralls.

THRALLS

Vampires often have various sorts of minions at their disposal. In particular, their Summon allows them to control swarms of bats and rats, or packs of wolves to do their bidding.

A Vampire's other thralls include victims under its mental influence, lesser Vampires of its creation, and possible other monsters, such as an assistant or some creation of the Vampire's science or magic.

If the Vampire's bite is addictive or in some way grants supernatural influence over the victim, assign the archetype a suitable Affliction, Limited to victims of the Vampire's Drain attack. For an added complication for the heroes, thralls can be supporting characters connected with them, perhaps even other heroes who have fallen under the Vampire's sway.

Lesser Vampire thralls have traits similar to the archetype, although abilities, skills, and combat bonuses likely differ somewhat. Newly made Vampires may be under the control of their "sire," or could have a measure of free will, serving the master Vampire for other reasons. A Vampire able to create others of its kind quickly can potentially assemble a small army of undead, given the opportunity.

Lastly, the Vampire might have minions that are other monsters, such as demons, gargoyles, golems (perhaps even a combination of reanimated corpses as a single flesh golem), skeletons, werewolves, or zombies. A powerful Vampire could even be the leader of a legion of such nightmare creatures.

TRANSFORMATION

Although in many legends only those slain by a vampire will become one, in the comics, vampires often possess the ability to slowly transform victims into Vampires over time. They accomplish this either through the power of their bite, or by feeding the victim small amounts of the Vampire's own blood, filled with corrupt, transformative power.

You can treat the transformation like a slow, progressive Affliction, with the victim making Fortitude or Will checks against it to fight it progression. After a number of failed checks, the victim irrevocably becomes one of the undead. Often, the proto-vampire falls into a death-like coma (incapacitated) as the final transformation takes place, although there may still be time for heroes to reverse the process with the right arcane ritual or other technique. Slaying the "master" Vampire often serves to free any victims.

VAMPIRE PL9

STR	STA	AGL	DEX	FGT	INT	AWE	PRE
6	—	1	2	6	1	3	3

POWERS

Children of the Night: Summon Animals 2 (Bats, Rats, or Wolves; Horde, Mental Link, Multiple Minions 6 (64 minions)) • *31 points*

Form of Mist: Insubstantial 2 • *10 points*

Spider-Climb: Movement 1 (Wall-crawling) • *2 points*

Undead Invulnerability: Immortality 10 (Not When Staked or Beheaded), Immunity 30 (Fortitude Effects), Impervious Protection 7 (Limited: Not Versus Blessed, Magical, or Silver Weapons), Regeneration 10 (Source: Blood) • *52 points*

Vampiric Bite: Weaken Stamina 9 (Resisted by Fortitude), Limited to Draining 1 rank per round, Grab-based • *3 points*

SKILLS

Close Combat: Unarmed 3 (+9), Deception 7 (+10), Expertise: Magic 4 (+5), Insight 6 (+9), Intimidation 9 (+12), Perception 8 (+11), Persuasion 10 (+13), Ranged Combat: Throwing 6 (+8), Stealth 9 (+10)

ADVANTAGES

Animal Empathy, Fascinate (Deception), Fearless, Improved Hold, Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Startle

OFFENSE

INITIATIVE +5

Unarmed +9	Close, Damage 6

DEFENSE

DODGE	9	**FORTITUDE**	Immune
PARRY	10	**TOUGHNESS**	7
WILL	9		

POWER POINTS

ABILITIES	34	**SKILLS**	31
POWERS	98	**DEFENSES**	18
ADVANTAGES	7	**TOTAL**	188

COMPLICATIONS

Dependence: The Vampire must feed on blood or weaken.

Weaknesses: Traditional vampires are destroyed by exposure to sunlight and repelled by religious icons and certain plants (particularly garlic).

You can usually treat this slow transformation as a plot device and an aspect of the Vampire's Weaken attack; set a resistance difficulty appropriate for the series' power level. If you want to build it as a full-fledged power, treat it like an Affliction. The victim makes one resistance check per day, and three successive failed checks result in transformation into a vampire over the course of the final 24 hours.

TACTICS

The Vampire as presented is a somewhat low-powered foe for a group of superheroes, unless the characters are PL 8 or less. The villain tends to stay in the shadows, striking from surprise and using gaseous form to slip in and out of places and as a means of escape. The Vampire usually prefers getting a single victim alone, using Fascinate in preparation for a bite attack (with a fair grab bonus for holding an ordinary human victim immobile).

A Vampire expecting to confront a group of heroes relies on assistance from thralls, perhaps even co-opting the legal authorities to provide protection. The Vampire likely flees if confronted or thwarted in claiming a victim. If unable to escape, the creature fights fiercely, summoning whatever potential minions might be at hand.

If you are looking for a more formidable Vampire to confront the heroes as a team, increase the archetype's power level and associated traits (particularly combat bonuses and defenses). Alternately, you can confront the good guys with an entire *team* or "family" of vampires at roughly their power level.

CAPERS

Adventures involving the Vampire may include:

BRIDE OF THE VAMPIRE!

After uncounted years of unlife, the Vampire has chosen a woman worthy to be his bride and consort for all eternity: a heroine of great power and beauty. He begins to visit her in the night, slowly drinking her blood and beginning her transformation into a vampire like him. Friends and teammates notice changes in behavior and a general malaise and do their best to help, but the heroine is in the Vampire's thrall and resists their efforts. Eventually, she goes to join her new lord and master so he may complete her transformation. If the heroes do not prevent it, the Vampire will have a new super-powered thrall with all the abilities of a vampire as well!

This scenario works best with a non-player character as the Vampire's victim, unless a player is particularly willing to play the role. With the player's permission, it is a suitable part for a character whose player is absent or otherwise unable to participate, keeping the character involved in the game. Naturally, it also works as a "Groom of the Vampire" story as well, with a seductive female vampire after a hero for her new consort.

DAWN OF THE DAYWALKER

The Vampire has located a legendary lost artifact reputed to grant the undead immunity to their traditional weak-

nesses, such as holy water, garlic, wooden stakes, and—most of all—sunlight. A Vampire with this talisman would be virtually indestructible, able to move about during the day and immune to the concerns of others of its kind. The heroes learn of the Vampire's quest for the artifact when an archeologist or renowned collector of ancient manuscripts turns up missing or dead, and drained of blood.

Then the race is on to keep the Vampire from acquiring the item, as both parties visit libraries, museums, tombs, and ruins to piece together the clues to its location. Perhaps more than one villain is interested in it, pitting the heroes against multiple foes and the bad guys against each other. Eventually, it comes down to a confrontation at the artifact's resting place, where the heroes have to keep it out of the wrong hands and ensure it remains safe. Maybe the Vampire gets it, and the good guys have to find a way of neutralizing a foe who lacks any apparent weaknesses!

MINION ARCHETYPES

Although the villain archetypes in this book provide a full roster of threats for a team of heroes, many villains prefer not to sully their hands with the dirty work of dealing with heroic pests. They leave that to their various minions, who also run interference, fetch needed components, or kidnap "guests" the villain wishes to "entertain." Heroes often spend more time in an adventure interacting with minions than they do with their boss, since the minions tend to compose the majority of the challenges leading up to the final confrontation with the villain.

This section offers a variety of ready-made minion archetypes suitable for use with different villains, power levels, and adventures. You can use them as given in your own *M&M* games, or as examples for creating or customizing suitable minions for your villains and evil organizations. Keep in mind these characters are intended to be treated according to the rules for minions, so their effective power level is somewhat less than their game traits indicate. Of course, you can choose to treat a particularly exceptional minion or lieutenant as a full-fledged character, not subject to the minion rules.

After its power level, each minion archetype has "MR" which stands for "Minion Rank." This is the rank of the Minion advantage or Summon effect needed to have a single example of that archetype as a minion. Creatures with a power point total less than 15 (including 0 points) are listed as MR1.

ANIMALS

With various villains possessing powers like animal control, shapeshifting, and mimicking the traits of different animals, as well as a tendency to acquire pets, heroes may encounter many different types of animals.

All animals have certain game traits in common: they have an Intellect rank of –5 or –4 (any creature with a higher Intellect isn't a normal animal). Most animals have a low Dexterity rank, since they have no manipulative limbs. Animals tend to have a higher than average Awareness, particularly those in the wild that need to remain alert to either potential threats or prey. Senses effects, particularly Low-light Vision and Acute Smell, are common for many animals. Aquatic animals are adapted for life underwater: they effectively have Immunity to Drowning and the Movement (Environmental Adaptation) effects. These are not accounted for in their point totals, since they also lack the ability to move and operate on land for any length of time.

The archetypes here can serve as a baseline for creating more exotic creatures. You can create similar animals from a basic archetype, such as basing a rhino off the elephant's traits, or an antelope off the herd animal or horse. You can create giant animals by adding ranks of Growth (and its associated modifiers) to an archetype or robotic or undead animals by adding Immunity 30 (Fortitude Effects) and removing the animal's Stamina rank.

Please note that all modifiers for Growth and Shrinking have already been taken into account in the creatures presented here.

APE — PL4 · MR3

STR 6 **STA** 4 **AGL** 3 **DEX** 1 **FGT** 3 **INT** –4 **AWE** 1 **PRE** –1
Powers: Growth 4 (Permanent, Innate), Protection 2, Senses 1 (Accute Smell). **Skills:** Athletics 6 (+12), Perception 6 (+7). **Offense:** Init +3, Unarmed +3 (Close, Damage 6). **Defenses:** Dodge 3, Parry 3, Fortitude 6, Toughness 6, Will 2. **Totals:** Abilities 10 + Powers 12 + Advantages 0 + Skills 6 + Defenses 7 = Total 35 points.

BAT — PL3 · MR1

STR –5 **STA** 0 **AGL** 2 **DEX** –3 **FGT** 0 **INT** –5 **AWE** 2 **PRE** –3
Powers: Flight 3 (16 MPH; Wings), Senses 2 (Accurate Hearing), Shrinking 12 (Permanent, Innate). **Skills:** Perception 4 (+6), Stealth 2 (+16). **Offense:** Init +2, Bite +0 (Close, Damage –5). **Defenses:** Dodge 8, Parry 6, Fortitude 0, Toughness –2, Will 2. **Totals:** Abilities –18 + Powers 30 + Advantages 0 + Skills 3 + Defenses 0 = Total 15 points.

BEAR — PL6 · MR3

STR 8 **STA** 4 **AGL** 1 **DEX** 0 **FGT** 3 **INT** –4 **AWE** 1 **PRE** –2
Powers: Growth 4 (Permanent, Innate), Protection 2, Senses 2 (Low-light Vision, Acute Smell). **Skills:** Athletics 4 (+12), Perception 4 (+5). **Offense:** Init +1, Claw +3 (Close, Damage 8). **Defenses:** Dodge 4, Parry 5, Fortitude 6, Toughness 6, Will 3. **Totals:** Abilities 6 + Powers 13 + Advantages 0 + Skills 4 + Defenses 13 = Total 36 points.

Bears stand nearly 12 feet tall on their hind legs and weigh in at 1,200 pounds. This archetype suffices for most species of bear. Polar bears have +1 Str and Environmental Adaptation (Cold).

CAT — PL3 · MR1

STR –4 **STA** –2 **AGL** 3 **DEX** –2 **FGT** 2 **INT** –4 **AWE** 1 **PRE** –2
Powers: Shrinking 8 (Permanent, Innate), Senses 1 (Low-light Vision). **Advantages:** Benefit 1 (Athletics based on Agility). **Skills:** Acrobatics 3 (+6), Athletics 3 (+6), Perception 4 (+5), Stealth 2 (+13). **Offense:** Init +3, Claw +2 (Close, Damage –4). **Defenses:** Dodge 7, Parry 6, Fortitude 0, Toughness –2, Will 1. **Totals:** Abilities –12 + Powers 18 + Advantages 1 + Skills 6 + Defenses 2 = Total 15 points.

CROCODILE — PL7 · MR3

STR 8 **STA** 8 **AGL** 1 **DEX** –2 **FGT** 4 **INT** –5 **AWE** 1 **PRE** –4
Powers: Growth 8 (Permanent, Innate), Senses 1 (Low-light Vision), Swimming 4. **Advantages:** Environmental Adaptation (Aquatic). **Skills:** Perception 4 (+5), Stealth 12 (+5). **Offense:** Init +1, Bite +4 (Close, Damage 8). **Defenses:** Dodge 4, Parry 6, Fortitude 8, Toughness 8, Will 3. **Totals:** Abilities –10 + Powers 22 + Advantages 1 + Skills 8 + Defenses 15 = Total 36 points.

The crocodile described here is up to 20 feet long, with powerful, toothed jaws. The archetype also serves for large alligators, including ones sometimes encountered in city sewers in the comic books.

DOG — PL2 · MR1

STR 1 **STA** 1 **AGL** 1 **DEX** –2 **FGT** 2 **INT** –4 **AWE** 1 **PRE** –2
Powers: Senses 3 (Acute Smell, Tracking, Ultra-hearing), Shrinking 2 (Permanent, Innate). **Skills:** Athletics 2 (+3), Perception 4 (+5). **Offense:** Init +1, Bite +2 (Close, Damage 1). **Defenses:** Dodge 3, Parry 3, Fortitude 3, Toughness 1, Will 1. **Totals:** Abilities –4 + Powers 8 + Advantages 0 + Skills 3 + Defenses 3 = Total 10 points.

A popular sidekick among Golden-Age heroes, the trusty dog is loyal and easily trained. These same traits make them common adversaries, as criminals and legitimate security forces employ them as guardians. Smaller lap dogs are better represented with the cat, above.

DOLPHIN — PL4 · MR3

STR 1 **STA** 1 **AGL** 3 **DEX** 1 **FGT** 2 **INT** –2 **AWE** 1 **PRE** –2
Powers: Senses 4 (Accurate Hearing, Low-light Vision, Ultra-hearing), Swimming 4 (8 MPH). **Skills:** Athletics 8 (+9), Close Combat: Unarmed 2 (+4), Perception 8 (+9). **Offense:** Init +3, Unarmed +4 (Close, Damage 1). **Defenses:** Dodge 4, Parry 4, Fortitude 5, Toughness 1, Will 3. **Totals:** Abilities 10 + Powers 8 + Advantages 0 + Skills 9 + Defenses 9 = Total 36 points.

ELEPHANT — PL8 · MR2

STR 10 **STA** 9 **AGL** 0 **DEX** –1 **FGT** 2 **INT** –4 **AWE** 1 **PRE** –2
Powers: Extra Limbs 1 (Trunk), Growth 9 (Permanent, Innate). **Skills:** Perception 6 (+7). **Offense:** Init +0, Attack +2 (Close, Damage 10). **Defenses:** Dodge 0, Parry 0, Fortitude 9, Toughness 9, Will 6. **Totals:** Abilities –6 + Powers 20 + Advantages 0 + Skills 3 + Defenses 11 = Total 28 points.

This archetype represents the African elephant. Indian elephants are –1 Str, but +1 Awe. This archetype also suits prehistoric mammoths and mastodons, which have Environmental Adaptation (Cold).

HAWK — PL4 · MR3

STR –2 **STA** 0 **AGL** 3 **DEX** 0 **FGT** 3 **INT** –4 **AWE** 2 **PRE** 0
Powers: Flight 4 (30 MPH; Wings), Senses 2 (Extended Vision, Low-light Vision), Shrinking 8 (Permanent, Innate). **Skills:** Close Combat: Unarmed 4 (+7), Perception 6 (+8). **Offense:** Init +3, Unarmed +7 (Close, Damage 2). **Defenses:** Dodge 7, Parry 7, Fortitude 2, Toughness 0, Will 2. **Totals:** Abilities 8 + Powers 23 + Advantages 0 + Skills 5 + Defenses 2 = Total 38 points.

The statistics here may represent other birds of prey.

HERD ANIMAL — PL3 · MR1

STR 4 **STA** 4 **AGL** 0 **DEX** –4 **FGT** 0 **INT** –4 **AWE** 0 **PRE** –3
Powers: Growth 4 (Permanent, Innate), Speed 3 (16 MPH). **Skills:** Perception 4 (+4). **Offense:** Init +0, Attack +0 (Close, Damage 4). **Defenses:** Dodge 2, Parry 2, Fortitude 4, Toughness 4, Will 0. **Totals:** Abilities –22 + Powers 12 + Advantages 0 + Skills 2 + Defenses 8 = Total 0 points.

This archetype includes cows, bison, and buffalo, typically 5 to 6 feet tall at the shoulder, weighing 1,500 to 2,400 pounds.

HORSE — PL3 · MR1

STR 4 **STA** 4 **AGL** 1 **DEX** –4 **FGT** 2 **INT** –4 **AWE** 1 **PRE** –3
Powers: Growth 4 (Permanent, Innate), Senses 2 (Extended Vision, Low-light Vision), Speed 4 (30 MPH). **Skills:** Perception 4 (+5). **Offense:** Init +1, Attack +2 (Close, Damage 4). **Defenses:** Dodge 2, Parry 2, Fortitude 5, Toughness 4, Will 1. **Totals:** Abilities –14 + Powers 15 + Advantages 0 + Skills 2 + Defenses 6 = Total 9 points.

This archetype represents most horses. Heavier workhorses have +1 Str. Trained war-horses have higher Fgt or Close Combat skill. Exotic winged horses (like the mythical Pegasus) have Flight with the Wings modifier. Characters use Athletics to ride horses, unless the GM wishes to require an Expertise: Riding skill.

HYENA — PL4 · MR2

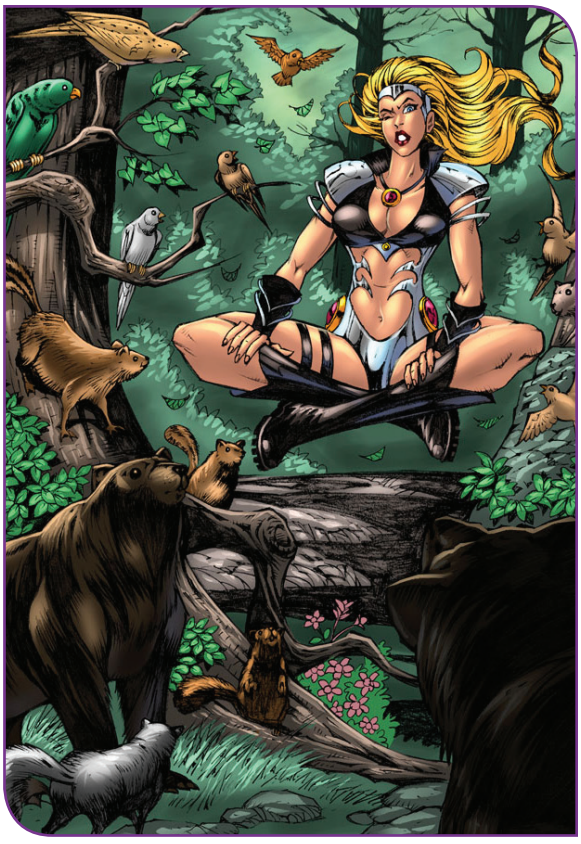
STR 3, **STA** 4, **AGL** 1, **DEX** –3, **FGT** 4, **INT** –4, **AWE** 1, **PRE** 0

Powers: Damage 1 (Bite; Strength-Based), Senses 4 (Acute Smell, Low-light Vision, Tracking, Ultra-hearing). **Skills:** Perception 4 (+5). **Offense:** Init +1, Bite +4 (Close, Damage 4). **Defense:** Dodge 4, Parry 4, Fort 6, Tou 4, Will 2. **Totals:** Abilities 12 + Powers 5 + Advantages 0 + Skills 2 (4 ranks) + Defenses 6 = 25 points.

LION — PL6 · MR4

STR 5 **STA** 2 **AGL** 3 **DEX** 1 **FGT** 4 **INT** –4 **AWE** 1 **PRE** 0
Powers: Growth 2 (Permanent, Innate), Protection 4, Senses 2 (Acute Smell, Low-light Vision). **Skills:** Close Combat: Unarmed 3 (+7), Perception 5 (+6), Stealth 8 (+9). **Offense:** Init +3, Unarmed +7 (Close, Damage 5). **Defenses:** Dodge 6, Parry 6, Fortitude 6, Toughness 6, Will 3. **Totals:** Abilities 16 + Powers 11 + Advantages 0 + Skills 8 + Defenses 13 = Total 48 points.

The lion may also be used to represent other large felines.



MONKEY — PL3 · MR2

STR –1 **STA** –2 **AGL** 4 **DEX** 0 **FGT** 0 **INT** –4 **AWE** 1 **PRE** –3 **Powers:** Extra Limb 1 (Tail), Feature 1 (Use feet as hands), Shrinking 6 (Permanent, Innate). **Advantages:** Benefit 1 (Athletics based on Agility). **Skills:** Acrobatics 7 (+11), Athletics 4 (+8), Perception 4 (+5), Stealth 3 (+13). **Offense:** Init +4, Attack +0 (Close, Damage –1). **Defenses:** Dodge 7, Parry 5, Fortitude 2, Toughness –2, Will 2. **Totals:** Abilities –8 + Powers 15 + Advantages 1 + Skills 9 + Defenses 7 = Total 24 points.

This archetype represents small, tailed monkeys like the capuchin and spider monkey. Larger simians have fewer ranks in Shrinking and correspondingly greater Str.

OWL — PL2 · MR2

STR –2 **STA** –2 **AGL** 2 **DEX** –2 **FGT** 1 **INT** –4 **AWE** 2 **PRE** –3 **Powers:** Flight 3 (16 MPH; Wings, Subtle), Senses 2 (Low-light Vision, Ultravision), Shrinking 8 (Permanent, Innate). **Skills:** Perception 6 (+8), Stealth 2 (+12). **Offense:** Init +2, Attack +1 (Close, Damage –2). **Defenses:** Dodge 6, Parry 5, Fortitude 2, Toughness –2, Will 2. **Totals:** Abilities –12 + Powers 23 + Advantages 0 + Skills 4 + Defenses 4 = Total 19 points.

RAT — PL3 · MR1

STR –4 **STA** 0 **AGL** 2 **DEX** –1 **FGT** 1 **INT** –4 **AWE** 1 **PRE** –4 **Powers:** Senses 2 (Low-light Vision, Acute Smell), Shrinking 10 (Permanent, Innate). **Advantages:** Benefit 1 (Athletics based on Agility). **Skills:** Athletics 3 (+5), Stealth 1 (+13). **Offense:** Init +2, Attack +1 (Close, Damage –4). **Defenses:** Dodge 7, Parry 6, Fortitude 2, Toughness –2, Will 1. **Totals:** Abilities –18 + Powers 23 + Advantages 1 + Skills 2 + Defenses 4 = Total 12 points.

SHARK — PL4 · MR3

STR 2 **STA** 1 **AGL** 2 **DEX** 1 **FGT** 4 **INT** –4 **AWE** 1 **PRE** –4 **Powers:** Strength-based Damage 1, Protection 3, Senses 2 (Acute Smell, Low-light Vision), Swimming 4 (8 MPH). **Advantages:** All-out Attack, Power Attack. **Skills:** Athletics 4 (+6), Close Combat: Bite 1 (+5), Perception 5 (+6). **Offense:** Init +2, Bite +5 (Close, Damage 3), Slam +4 (Close, Damage 2). **Defenses:** Dodge 4, Parry 4, Fortitude 5, Toughness 4, Will 3. **Totals:** Abilities 6 + Powers 10 + Advantages 2 + Skills 5 + Defenses 8 = Total 31 points.

Many aquatic supervillains rely on shark minions for protection and offense, while tyrants and mad scientists may employ shark pools as traps to protect their layers. Mad scientists in particular may "modify" their sharks to add cybernetic weapons or the ability to run across dry land. For a giant shark, add Growth to the desired level and alter the shark's abilities appropriately.

SNAKE, CONSTRICTOR — PL4 · MR2

STR 3 **STA** 1 **AGL** 2 **DEX** 0 **FGT** 3 **INT** –5 **AWE** 1 **PRE** –4 **Powers:** Movement 1 (Slithering), Protection 2, Senses 2 (Infravision, Acute Smell). **Advantages:** Improved Grab. **Skills:** Athletics 6 (+9), Perception 8 (+9), Stealth 8 (+10). **Offense:** Init +2, Attack +3 (Close, Damage 3). **Defenses:** Dodge 5, Parry 5, Fortitude 4, Toughness 3, Will 3. **Totals:** Abilities 2 + Powers 6 + Advantages 1 + Skills 11 + Defenses 10 = Total 30 points.

This archetype represents constrictor snakes large enough to threaten a human, like boa constrictors and anacondas.

SNAKE, VIPER — PL4 · MR3

STR –3 **STA** 0 **AGL** 3 **DEX** 0 **FGT** 3 **INT** –5 **AWE** 1 **PRE** –4 **Powers:** Movement 1 (Slithering), Senses 2 (Infravision, Acute Smell), Shrinking 8 (Permanent, Innate), Weaken Stamina 4 (Progressive, Linked to Strength Damage, venom). **Advantages:** Benefit 1 (Athletics based on Agility). **Skills:** Athletics 4 (+7), Perception 7 (+8), Stealth 3 (+14). **Offense:** Init +3, Attack +3 (Close, Damage –3 plus Weaken). **Defenses:** Dodge 7, Parry 7, Fortitude 2, Toughness –2, Will 3. **Totals:** Abilities –10 + Powers 33 + Advantages 1 + Skills 7 + Defenses 6 = Total 37 points.

This archetype represents a wide variety of small, poisonous snakes: asps, cobras, rattlesnakes, vipers, and so forth. Feel free to vary the venom effect to suit the particular breed, including using or adding an appropriate Affliction.

SQUID, GIANT — PL8 · MR4

STR 12 **STA** 12 **AGL** 2 **DEX** 0 **FGT** 4 **INT** –4 **AWE** 1 **PRE** –4 **Powers:** Concealment Attack 4 (Visual, Cloud Area, Limited to Underwater), Extra Limbs 4 (Tentacles), Growth 12 (Permanent, Innate), Swimming 6 (30 MPH). **Advantages:** *Improved Grab*. **Skills:** Perception 6 (+7). **Offense:** Init +2, Attack +4 (Close, Damage 12). **Defenses:** Dodge 0, Parry 2, Fortitude 12, Toughness 12, Will 4. **Totals:** Abilities –2 + Powers 43 + Advantages 0 + Skills 3 + Defenses 11 = Total 55 points.

Giant squids are popular minions for seafaring heroes and villains, usable for attacking ships and water-borne foes. This archetype can also represent a giant octopus or similar creature.

SWARM, DEVOURING — PL5 · MR2

STR 2, **STA** 5, **AGL** 5, **DEX** –1, **FGT** 2, **INT** –4, **AWE** 0, **PRE** –5

Powers: Damage 5 (Shapeable Area), Insubstantial 1 (Innate; Permanent), Movement 1 (Wall-crawling). Offense: Init +5, Shapeable Area Damage 5. Defense: Dodge 5, Parry 2, Fortitude 5, Toughness 5, Will 0. Totals: Abilities 8 + Powers 18 + Advantages 0 + Skills 0 (0 ranks) + Defenses 0 = 26 points.

*No effective Strength due to Insubstantial effect

SWARM, IRRITATING — PL3 · MR1

STR —* **STA** 0 **AGL** 3 **DEX** –2 **FGT** 0 **INT** — **AWE** 0 **PRE** — **Powers:** Burst Area Affliction 3 (Resisted by Fortitude; Dazed, Stunned, Incapacitated), Insubstantial 2 (swarm, Permanent, Innate), Flight 2 (8 MPH). **Offense:** Init +3, Burst Area Affliction (Fortitude DC 13). **Defenses:** Dodge 3, Parry 0, Fortitude 0, Toughness 0, Will —. **Totals:** Abilities –18 + Powers 21 + Advantages 0 + Skills 0 + Defenses 0 = Total 3 points.

*No effective Strength due to Insubstantial effect

Rather than a single creature, a Swarm represents hundreds or thousands of tiny insects or animals acting as a single entity. The swarm is immune to direct physical attack, although area effects and energy attacks still work against it. It attacks by engulfing targets and using its Affliction, which represents numerous stings or bites. Targets Immune to Fortitude effects or with any rank of Impervious Toughness can ignore the swarm's attack. An insect swarm that is incapacitated is dispersed.

A Devouring Swarm causes physical damage to targets, biting or clawing anything they overrun. Irritating Swarms sting or poison, or overwhelm victims with fear.

For non-flying creatures, remove the swarm's Flight. For unusual swarms like undead or robots, remove the swarm's Stamina and give it Immunity to Fortitude Effects.

WHALE — PL8 · MR4

STR 12 **STA** 0 **AGL** 2 **DEX** –3 **FGT** 2 **INT** –3 **AWE** 2 **PRE** –3 **Powers:** Growth 12 (Permanent, Innate), Protection 1, Senses 4 (Accurate Hearing, Low-light Vision, Ultra-hearing), Swimming 5 (16 MPH). **Skills:** Athletics 2 (+14), Close Combat: Unarmed 2 (+4), Perception 10 (+11). **Offense:** Init +0, Unarmed +4 (Close, Damage 12). **Defenses:** Dodge -4, Parry -2, Fortitude 12, Toughness 13, Will 4. **Totals:** Abilities –6 + Powers 35 + Advantages 0 + Skills 7 + Defenses 7 = Total 43 points.

A roughly 50--foot long humpback or sperm whale. For larger whales such as the blue whale, or smaller whales, adjust the ranks of Growth.

WOLF — PL3 · MR2

STR 2 **STA** 2 **AGL** 2 **DEX** 0 **FGT** 3 **INT** –4 **AWE** 2 **PRE** –2 **Powers:** Senses 3 (Acute Smell, Low-light Vision, Tracking). **Advantages:** Improved Trip. **Skills:** Perception 4 (+6), Stealth 4 (+6). **Offense:** Init +2, Unarmed +3 (Close, Damage 2). **Defenses:** Dodge 4, Parry 4, Fortitude 4, Toughness 2, Will 2. **Totals:** Abilities 10 + Powers 3 + Advantages 1 + Skills 4 + Defenses 5 = Total 23 points.

The wolf may also be used to represent other large canines.

CIVILIANS

Numerous innocent people are under the heroes' protection, but their game traits don't often matter in the context of the game. The following are some examples of "civilians" the heroes may interact with on a regular basis, and can be used as templates for similar types of characters in other situations.

BYSTANDER — PL0 · MR1

STR 0 **STA** 0 **AGL** 0 **DEX** 0 **FGT** 0 **INT** 0 **AWE** 0 **PRE** 0 **Equipment:** Cell phone. **Advantages:** Equipment 1. **Skills:** Expertise: Choose One 4 (+4), Expertise: Current Events 2 (+2), Expertise: Pop Culture 2 (+2). **Offense:** Init +0, Unarmed +0 (Close, Damage 0). **Defense:** Dodge 0, Parry 0, Fort 0, Tou 0, Will 0. **Totals:** Abilities 0 + Powers 0 + Advantages 1 + Skills 4 + Defenses 0 = Total 5 points.

The bystander represents the people that populate the world, the sort a supervillain or other criminal might take hostage or otherwise endanger. Customize the bystander by choosing an expertise such as a profession or trade skill.

REPORTER — PL1 · MR2

STR 0 **STA** 0 **AGL** 0 **DEX** 0 **FGT** 0 **INT** 2 **AWE** 2 **PRE** 1 **Equipment:** Camera, computer, digital recorder, smartphone. **Advantages:** Contacts, Equipment 1. **Skills:** Deception 4 (+5), Expertise: Current Events 4 (+6), Expertise: Pop Culture 2 (+4), Expertise: Streetwise 2 (+4), Expertise: Writing 4 (+6), Investigation 2 (+4), Perception 4 (+6), Persuasion 4 (+5), Stealth 4 (+4), Vehicles 2 (+2). **Offense:** Init +0, Unarmed +0 (Close, Damage 0). **Defense:** Dodge 0, Parry 0, Fort 0, Tou 0, Will 2. **Totals:** Abilities 10 + Powers 0 + Advantages 2 + Skills 16 + Defenses 0 = Total 28 points.

In a world filled with superheroes and supervillains, there are always reporters around to get the latest story—or just get in the way. The reporter archetype can also be used for any other type of professional by swapping out the Expertise specialties for others.

SCIENTIST — PL1 · MR2

STR 0 **STA** 0 **AGL** 0 **DEX** 1 **FGT** 0 **INT** 4 **AWE** 1 **PRE** 0 **Equipment:** Camera, smartphone. **Advantages:** Equipment 1. **Skills:** Expertise: Current Events 2 (+6), Expertise: Pop Culture 2 (+6), Expertise: Science 6 (+10), Technology 6 (+10), Vehicles 2 (+3). **Offense:** Init +0, Unarmed +0 (Damage 0). **Defense:** Dodge 0, Parry 0, Fort 0, Tou 0, Will 2. **Totals:** Abilities 12 + Powers 0 + Advantages 1 + Skills 9 + Defenses 1 = Total 23 points.

Scientists are specialists in their chosen field. This archetype can be used as anything from an archaeologist to zoologist, or for anything with a lot of knowledge about a particular subject, such as a professor.

CULTISTS

Cults have a strong recurring role as threats in the comics, often in service to a powerful master villain or an even greater plot-device-level threat. Some cults may be trying to infiltrate normal institutions to exert secret control over society, while others may be trying to summon alien masters from another dimesnion—or even trying to bring

about the end of the world. Cultists are often fanatically loyal to their cause, making them effective minions willing to do anything for their master.

A cult need not be religious in nature: some are "cults of personality" dedicated to a particular leader (typically a master villain) while others are more political, social, or cultural in nature. Trade out appropriate Expertise skills and trappings for members of these cults, such as arcane lore, civics, or even popular culture in place of theology and philosophy.

CULT ACOLYTE — PL1 · MR1

STR 0 **STA** 0 **AGL** 0 **DEX** 0 **FGT** 0 **INT** 0 **AWE** 0 **PRE** 0
Equipment: Dagger (Damage 1). **Advantages:** Connected, Equipment. **Skills:** Close Combat: Dagger 1 (+1), Deception 4 (+4), Insight 3 (+3), Persuasion 4 (+4). **Offense:** Init +0, Dagger +1 (Close, Damage 1), Unarmed +0 (Close, Damage 0). **Defenses:** Dodge 1, Parry 1, Fortitude 2, Toughness 0, Will 0. **Totals:** Abilities 0 + Powers 0 + Advantages 2 + Skills 6 + Defenses 4 = Total 12 points.

CULT INITIATE — PL2 · MR2

STR 1 **STA** 1 **AGL** 0 **DEX** 0 **FGT** 0 **INT** 0 **AWE** 0 **PRE** 1
Equipment: Dagger (Damage 1), Pistol (Damage 3). **Advantages:** Connected, Equipment 2. **Skills:** Close Combat: Dagger 1 (+1), Deception 4 (+5), Expertise: Cult Lore 4 (+4), Insight 4 (+4), Persuasion 4 (+5), Ranged Combat: Guns 1 (+1). **Offense:** Init +0, Dagger +1 (Close, Damage 2), Pistol +1 (Ranged, Damage 3), Unarmed +0 (Close, Damage 1). **Defenses:** Dodge 2, Parry 2, Fortitude 3, Toughness 1, Will 1. **Totals:** Abilities 6 + Powers 0 + Advantages 3 + Skills 9 + Defenses 7 = Total 25 points.

CULT ADEPT — PL3 · MR3

STR 1 **STA** 1 **AGL** 1 **DEX** 0 **FGT** 1 **INT** 0 **AWE** 0 **PRE** 1
Equipment: Dagger (Damage 1), Pistol (Damage 3). **Advantages:** Connected, Equipment 2. **Skills:** Close Combat: Dagger 2 (+3), Deception 6 (+7), Expertise: Cult Lore 6 (+6), Insight 5 (+5), Persuasion 6 (+7), Ranged Combat: Guns 3 (+3). **Offense:** Init +1, Dagger +3 (Close, Damage 2), Pistol +3 (Ranged, Damage 3), Unarmed +1 (Close, Damage 1). **Defenses:** Dodge 4, Parry 4, Fortitude 4, Toughness 1, Will 2. **Totals:** Abilities 10 + Powers 0 + Advantages 3 + Skills 14 + Defenses 11 = Total 38 points.

The Acolyte, Initiate, and Adept represent the rank-and-file worshippers of a cult. Most have additional skills to help them blend into society until called upon.

CULT MASTER — PL4 · MR4

STR 2 **STA** 2 **AGL** 1 **DEX** 1 **FGT** 1 **INT** 2 **AWE** 0 **PRE** 2
Equipment: Dagger (Damage 1), Pistol (Damage 3). **Advantages:** Connected, Equipment 2, Quick Draw, Ritualist. **Skills:** Close Combat: Dagger 3 (+4), Deception 6 (+8), Expertise: Cult Lore 8 (+10), Insight 6 (+6), Persuasion 6 (+8), Ranged Combat: Guns 3 (+4). **Offense:** Init +1, Dagger +4 (Close, Damage 2), Pistol +4 (Ranged, Damage 3), Unarmed +1 (Close, Damage 2). **Defenses:** Dodge 6, Parry 6, Fortitude 4, Toughness 2, Will 4. **Totals:** Abilities 22 + Powers 0 + Advantages 5 + Skills 16 + Defenses 16 = Total 59 points.

The term "Cult Master" is a bit of a misnomer, since many so-called Masters are in fact servants of a master villain, evil entity, or some other power. Still, compared to most members of the cult, the Master has considerable power, not the least of which is use of the Ritualist advantage and the ability to perform magical rituals, using Expertise in Cult Lore in place of Magic Expertise.

ARCANE CULTIST — PL6 · MR6

STR 2, **STA** 4, **AGL** 2, **DEX** 2, **FGT** 2, **INT** 4, **AWE** 1, **PRE** 2

Powers: Shadow Magic Array (Ranged Damage 6 [Icy Shadows], Ranged Affliction 6 [Paralyzing Fear; Hindered, Immobile, Paralyzed; Resisted by Will], Teleport 3 [250 feet; Extended [8 miles], Increased Mass 3], Move Object 6). **Equipment:** Knife. **Advantages:** Artificer, Equipment 1, Extraordinary Effort, Ritualist, Trance. **Skills:** Close Combat: Dagger 4 (+6), Deception 6 (+8), Expertise: Cult Lore 6 (+10), Expertise: Magic 6 (+10), Ranged Combat: Spellcasting 4 (+6), Treatment 2 (+6). **Offense:** Init +2, Icy Shadows +6 (Ranged, Damage 6), Knife +6 (Close, Damage 3), Paralyzing Fear +6 (Affliction 6), Tendrils of Darkness +6 (Move Object 6), Unarmed +2 (Close, Damage 2). **Defense:** Dodge 8, Parry 7, Fortitude 4, Toughness 4, Will 6. **Totals:** Abilities 38 + Powers 15 + Advantages 5 + Skills 14 (28 ranks) + Defenses 16 = 88 points.

While most cults grant their followers little true arcane power, devotees of sorcerers, elder evils, and similar villains may wield a degree of magic power that makes them more dangerous than their robe-clad brethren. Rather than serving some powerful master, an Arcane Cultist may replace a Cult Master as the leader of a secret society. Their shadow magic animates darkness to attack on their behalf, but the description of their magic can be changed to suit their cult or master.

DEMONS

A "demon" is generally an evil creature from a hellish realm, which resembles various places from human myth and legend. Not all demons are created equal, nor are they all the same. While some appear as the bestial, horned monsters that immediately strike fear into those around them, others look human... at first glance. When confronted or angered their true nature is revealed by a slip in their façade: an intense fiery glow held within their eyes that not even the contact lenses can mask. The majority of demons—no matter their appearance—do share common abilities, such as bat-like wings and a penchant for flinging hellfire at their targets when in their natural form.

DEMON, IMP — PL4 · MR5

STR 1 **STA** 2 **AGL** 1 **DEX** 1 **FGT** 3 **INT** 0 **AWE** 1 **PRE** 0
Powers: Strength-based Damage 2 (Claws), Flight 2 (8 MPH; Wings), Immunity 18 (Acid Damage, Aging, Cold Damage, Fire Damage, Poison, Disease), Senses 2 (Darkvision), Shrinking 4 (Permanent, Innate). **Advantages:** Defensive Roll. **Skills:** Close Combat: Claws 2 (+5), Deception 4 (+4), Expertise: Magic 4 (+4), Insight 4 (+4), Perception 4 (+4), Stealth 4 (+9). **Offense:** Init +1, Claws +5 (Close, Damage 3). **Defenses:** Dodge 5, Parry 5, Fortitude 5, Toughness 3 (2 without Defensive Roll), Will 3. **Totals:** Abilities 20 + Powers 33 + Advantages 1 + Skills 11 + Defenses 7 = Total 72 points.

Imps are small demonic creatures, usually with bat-like wings, forked tails, and horns. Sorcerers commonly summon them as spies and minions.

DEMON, WARRIOR — PL6 · MR5

STR 6 **STA** 5 **AGL** 1 **DEX** 0 **FGT** 5 **INT** –1 **AWE** 1 **PRE** 0
Powers: Strength-based Damage 1 (Claws), Immunity 18 (Acid Damage, Aging, Cold Damage, Fire Damage, Poison, Disease), Protection 2, Senses 2 (Darkvision). **Skills:** Intimidation 4 (+4), Perception 4 (+5). **Offense:** Init +1, Claws +5 (Close, Damage 7). **Defenses:** Dodge 5, Parry 5, Fortitude 7, Toughness 7, Will 5. **Totals:** Abilities 34 + Powers 23 + Advantages 0 + Skills 4 + Defenses 10 = Total 71 points.

Warrior demons tend to be human-sized, with powerful builds and tough (often scaly or bony) hides. They have horns, claws, and a vicious temperament. Evil Sorcerers summon them as minions and foot soldiers.

DEMON, BRUTE — PL8 · MR7

STR 10 **STA** 5 **AGL** 0 **DEX** 0 **FGT** 6 **INT** –1 **AWE** –1 **PRE** –1
Powers: Immunity 32 (Critical Hits, Fortitude Effects), Leaping 2, Impervious Protection 5. **Advantages:** Diehard, Improved Grab, Power Attack. **Skills:** Intimidation 8 (+7). **Offense:** Init 0, Unarmed +6 (Close, Damage 10). **Defenses:** Dodge 6, Parry 6, Fortitude —, Toughness 10, Will 6. **Totals:** Abilities 36 + Powers 44 + Advantages 3 + Skills 4 + Defenses 13 = Total 100 points.

Brute demons are dull-witted creatures that bully and pummel their prey. Usually standing well over seven feet in height, these demons are typically a rotted green in color, with massive builds and dark eyes. They are known to favor the use of grabs as they lay into their target.

DEMON, TEMPTER — PL8 · MR9

STR 0 **STA** 4 **AGL** 2 **DEX** 2 **FGT** 3 **INT** 1 **AWE** 2 **PRE** 5
Powers: Affliction 8 (Resisted by Will; Dazed, Stunned, Controlled), Strength-based Damage 3 (Claws), Flight 2 (8 MPH; Wings), Immunity 18 (Acid Damage, Aging, Cold Damage, Fire Damage, Poison, Disease), Morph 1 (Human guise), Impervious Protection 5, Senses 2 (Darkvision). **Advantages:** Attractive, Close Combat 4, Diehard, Fascinate (Deception). **Skills:** Deception 8 (+13), Expertise: Magic 6 (+7), Insight 8 (+10). **Offense:** Init +2, Claws +7 (Close, Damage 3). **Defenses:** Dodge 7, Parry 7, Fortitude 7, Toughness 9, Will 7. **Totals:** Abilities 38 + Powers 48 + Advantages 7 + Skills 11 + Defenses 17 = Total 121 points.

The Tempter Demon's primary purpose is to lure the moral into betraying their beliefs. Appearing as beautiful men and women, They often keep their large, leathery wings concealed under clothing. Otherwise, they tend to wear very little, opting for leather straps or stylish clothing when prowling for victims.

DINOSAURS

Dinosaurs are most commonly the minions of monster-makers who have resurrected them using cloning, or time-manipulating villains able to bring them from the distant past into the present. They also show up in "Lost World" scenarios where the heroes visit places where the giant beasts still thrive or end up stranded in the distant past. Some villains may specifically grant them other powers; by adding Immunity to Fortitude Effects, you can easily create robotic or undead dinosaurs as well.

BRACHIOSAURUS — PL9 · MR3

STR 17 **STA** 15 **AGL** –2 **DEX** –4 **FGT** 0 **INT** –5 **AWE** 2 **PRE** 0
Powers: Line Area Damage 8 (Tail Smash; Alternate Effect of Strength Damage), Growth 14 (Permanent, Innate), Protection 3, Senses 3 (Low-light Vision, Acute Smell, Ultra-hearing). **Skills:** Perception 4 (+6). **Offense:** Init –2, Tail Smash (Dodge DC 18, Damage 8), Unarmed +0 (Close, Damage 17). **Defenses:** Dodge –5, Parry –5, Fortitude 15, Toughness 18, Will 2. **Totals:** Abilities –10 + Powers 36 + Advantages 0 + Skills 2 + Defenses 6 = Total 34 points.

One of the most massive land animals ever, the long-necked brachiosaurus is suitable as a template for similarly massive and placid dinosaurs such as the brontosaurus.

DEINONYCHUS — PL6 · MR4

STR 3 **STA** 3 **AGL** 4 **DEX** 0 **FGT** 8 **INT** –4 **AWE** 3 **PRE** 0
Powers: Strength-based Damage 1 (Bite), Leaping 1 (15 feet), Protection 1, Speed 2 (8 MPH), Senses 4 (Low-light Vision, Acute Smell, Tracking, Ultra-hearing). **Advantages:** Improved Grab, Improved Initiative. **Skills:** Perception 6 (+9), Stealth 4 (+8). **Offense:** Init +8, Bite +8 (Close, Damage 4). **Defenses:** Dodge 8, Parry 8, Fortitude 7, Toughness 4, Will 5. **Totals:** Abilities 34 + Powers 9 + Advantages 2 + Skills 5 + Defenses 10 = Total 60 points.

Six-foot-tall carnivorous pack-hunters, deinonychus are noted for their ability to chase down prey. They're often confused with their smaller cousin, the velociraptor.

STEGOSAURUS — PL9 · MR4

STR 11 **STA** 8 **AGL** 0 **DEX** –2 **FGT** 6 **INT** –5 **AWE** 2 **PRE** 0
Powers: Strength-based Damage 1(Tail Strike), Growth 8 (Permanent, Innate), Protection 6, Senses 3 (Low-light Vision, Acute Smell, Ultra-hearing). **Skills:** Perception 8 (+10). **Offense:** Init +0, Tail Strike +6 (Close, Damage 12). **Defenses:** Dodge 2, Parry 4, Fortitude 13, Toughness 14, Will 5. **Totals:** Abilities 8 + Powers 27 + Advantages 0 + Skills 4 + Defenses 16 = Total 55 points.

This archetype can serve for most of the larger, "armored" dinosaurs such as the stegosaurus, ankylosaurus, and triceratops.

TYRANNOSAURUS REX — PL11 · MR5

STR 13 **STA** 12 **AGL** 0 **DEX** –1 **FGT** 8 **INT** –4 **AWE** 3 **PRE** 0
Powers: Strength-based Damage 1 (Bite), Growth 10 (Permanent, Innate), Protection 2, Senses 4 (Low-light Vision, Acute Smell, Track, Ultra-hearing). **Advantages:** Improved Grab, Improved Initiative. **Skills:** Perception 8 (+11). **Offense:** Init +4, Bite +8 (Close, Damage 14). **Defenses:** Dodge 4, Parry 6, Fortitude 12, Toughness 14, Will 6. **Totals:** Abilities 22 + Powers 28 + Advantages 2 + Skills 4 + Defenses 15 = Total 71 points.

The "king of dinosaurs," the infamous "T. Rex" is the most aggressive predator of its type. A slightly smaller version can suffice for the similar allosaurus. Reduce Growth—and therefore Strength, Stamina, and related traits—by 2 ranks.

PTERANODON — PL5 · MR3

STR 2 **STA** 2 **AGL** 4 **DEX** 0 **FGT** 6 **INT** –4 **AWE** 3 **PRE** 0
Powers: Strength-based Damage 1 (Beak), Flight 3 (16 MPH; Wings), Senses 3 (Extended Vision, Low-light Vision, Ultra-hearing). **Skills:** Perception 6 (+9). **Offense:** Init +4, Bite +6 (Close, Damage 3). **Defenses:** Dodge 8, Parry 6, Fortitude 5, Toughness 2, Will 5. **Totals:** Abilities 26+ Powers 7 + Advantages 0 + Skills 3 + Defenses 9 = Total 45 points.

This archetype is a medium-sized flying dinosaur, although its wingspan is some 25 feet. You can create larger pterosaurs by adding ranks of Growth to increase size and other traits accordingly.

MONSTERS

"Monsters" is a catch-all category of creatures that show up as minions, ranging from hostile plant-life to fantasy creatures and giant, monstrous versions of otherwise mundane things. Comic book monsters may be creatures out of legend, the spawn of science run amok, aliens, beings from other dimensions, or anything else the GM wants.

ANIMATED TREE — PL8 · MR2

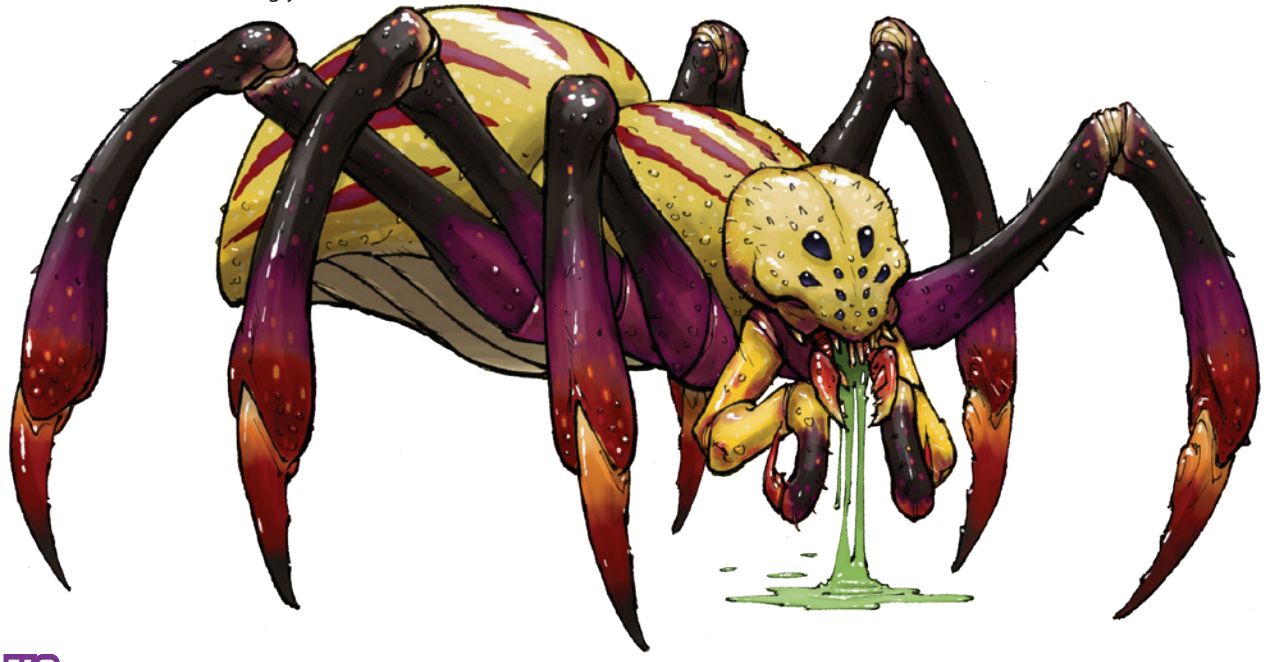
STR 8 **STA** 8 **AGL** –2 **DEX** 0 **FGT** 4 **INT** — **AWE** 0 **PRE** —
Powers: Extra Limbs 4 (Branches), Growth 8 (Permanent, Innate), Immunity 2 (Suffocation). **Advantages:** *Improved Grab*. **Offense:** Init –2, Attack +4 (Close, Damage 8). **Defenses:** Dodge 0, Parry 4, Fortitude 8, Toughness 8, Will —. **Totals:** Abilities –16 + Powers 23 + Advantages 0 + Skills 0 + Defenses 10 = Total 17 points.

This archetype represents a full-grown tree able to uproot itself and move about using its branches and roots. Animated trees are common minions for plant-controlling characters or those with nature-based powers.

BLOB — PL8 · MR3

STR 8 **STA** 8 **AGL** 0 **DEX** –4 **FGT** 4 **INT** — **AWE** 0 **PRE** —
Powers: Reaction Damage 5 (When touched), Growth 8 (Permanent, Innate), Insubstantial 1 (Permanent, Innate), Movement 1 (Slithering). **Advantages:** Improved Grab, Improved Hold. **Offense:** Init +0, Attack +4 (Close, Damage 8, plus Reaction Damage 5). **Defenses:** Dodge 0, Parry 4, Fortitude 8, Toughness 8, Will —. **Totals:** Abilities –20 + Powers 45 + Advantages 2 + Skills 0 + Defenses 8 = Total 35 points.

This archetype is a slithering blob of acidic ooze. It might be an escaped scientific experiment, a primordial creature from the dawn of life on Earth, an alien visitor, or demonic hellspawn. Larger and more powerful blobs are possibly by adding additional ranks of Growth.



DRAGON PL9 · MR6

STR 12 **STA** 12 **AGL** 0 **DEX** 0 **FGT** 6 **INT** –2 **AWE** 1 **PRE** –1
Powers: Ranged Damage 12 (Fiery breath), Flight 6 (120 MPH; Wings), Growth 12 (Permanent, Innate), Protection 3 (Scales). **Skills:** Perception 4 (+5), Ranged Combat: Fiery Breath 6 (+6). **Offense:** Init +0, Bite and Claw +6 (Close, Damage 12), Fiery Breath +6 (Ranged, Damage 12). **Defenses:** Dodge 3, Parry 3, Fortitude 12, Toughness 15, Will 6. **Totals:** Abilities 8 + Powers 58 + Advantages 0 + Skills 5 + Defenses 17 = Total 88 points.

This archetype is a fairly unintelligent monster. Some fantasy dragons, however, are highly intelligent: for these, increase the archetype's mental abilities and provide it with the necessary skills, including interaction skills, Insight, and possibly Expertise: Magic. Some intelligent dragons are also sorcerers with a Magic array and/or the Ritualist advantage.

The dragon may have a different descriptor to its breath weapon than fire, perhaps even a Variable Descriptor, allowing it to make different types of attacks. You can make larger and more powerful dragons by adding ranks of Growth to the archetype.

FAERIE, JINX PL4 · MR4

STR -1, **STA** 3, **AGL** 3, **DEX** 1, **FGT** 2, **INT** 0, **AWE** 3, **PRE** 0

Powers: Luck Control 2 (Force a Re-roll, Negate Luck), Shrinking 4. **Advantages:** Hide in Plain Sight, Luck 4, Redirect, Startle. **Skills:** Expertise: One Craft 4 (+4), Intimidation 10 (+8), Stealth 2 (+9). **Offense:** Init +3, Unarmed +2 (DC 14). **Defense:** Dodge 5, Parry 5, Fort 3, Tou 3, Will 3. **Totals:** Abilities 24 + Powers 14 + Advantages 7 + Skills 8 (16 ranks) + Defenses 1 = 54.

FAERIE, TRICKSTER PL5 · MR6

STR -2, **STA** 0, **AGL** 6, **DEX** 1, **FGT** 0, **INT** 0, **AWE** 2, **PRE** 0

Powers: Feature 1 (bright glow), Flight 4 (30 MPH), Illusion 5 (Affects All Senses), Shrinking 8. **Advantages:** Improved Initiative, Set-up, Taunt. **Skills:** Acrobatics 2 (+8), Deception 8 (+8), Expertise: Nature 4 (+4), Stealth 0 (+14). **Offense:** Init +10, Unarmed +0 (DC 13). **Defense:** Dodge 10, Parry 6, Fort 3, Tou 0, Will 6. **Totals:** Abilities 18 + Powers 50 + Advantages 3 + Skills 7 (14 ranks) + Defenses 9 = 87 points.

Faeries are capricious little creatures that dwell where magic still runs thick, or in their own magical realms. While not usually malicious, faeries love strong emotions, including embarrassment, anger, and fear, and so they rarely know when they've gone too far with their pranks. Jinx faeries are withdrawn and grumpy, and cause bad luck for anyone who disturbs them. Trickster faeries are hyperactive and social, and love using their illusion powers to sew chaos and steal food or shiny baubles.

GARGOYLE PL5 · MR3

STR 2 **STA** 4 **AGL** 1 **DEX** 0 **FGT** 4 **INT** –2 **AWE** 0 **PRE** –2
Powers: Flight 2 (8 MPH; Wings), Immunity 10 (Life Support), Impervious Protection 2. **Skills:** Perception 4 (+4), Stealth 4 (+5). **Offense:** Init +1, Claws +4 (Close, Damage 2). **Defenses:** Dodge 3, Parry 4, Fortitude 6, Toughness 6, Will 4. **Totals:** Abilities 14 + Powers 16 + Advantages 0 + Skills 4 + Defenses 8 = Total 42 points.

Gargoyles are flying creatures with stony hides. They may be animated from actual statues on the spur of the moment or stone-like creatures that simply look like medieval gargoyles. Gargoyles that are true unliving constructs have no Stamina rank, Immunity to Fortitude Effects and Protection 6 for their Toughness bonus.

GIANT FLYTRAP PL9 · MR2

STR 9 **STA** 9 **AGL** 0 **DEX** 0 **FGT** 6 **INT** — **AWE** 0 **PRE** —
Powers: Extra Limbs 4 (Vines), Growth 9 (Permanent, Innate). **Advantages:** *Improved Grab*. **Offense:** Init +0, Attack +6 (Close, Damage 9). **Defenses:** Dodge 0, Parry 6, Fortitude 9, Toughness 9, Will —. **Totals:** Abilities –8 + Powers 23 + Advantages 0 + Skills 0 + Defenses 8 = Total 23 points.

This archetype is a giant version of the normally innocuous insect-eating plant, a popular minion for plant-controlling villains. Even larger and more powerful versions are possible with additional ranks of Growth.

GIANT INSECT PL6 · MR1

STR 4 **STA** 4 **AGL** 1 **DEX** –1 **FGT** 3 **INT** — **AWE** 0 **PRE** —
Powers: Growth 4 (Permanent, Innate), Movement 2 (Wall-crawling 2), Protection 1, Senses 4 (Darkvision, Acute Smell, Tracking). **Skills:** Perception 6 (+6). **Offense:** Init +1, Bite +3 (Close, Damage 4). **Defenses:** Dodge 3, Parry 3, Fortitude 6, Toughness 5, Will —. **Totals:** Abilities –14 + Powers 18 + Advantages 0 + Skills 3 + Defenses 8 = Total 15 points.

Various sorts of giant insects appear as a result of scientific experiments, mutagens (like radiation or biochemicals), or as visitors from alien worlds. This archetype is a baseline giant insect. Add appropriate effects for particular types of insects, such as Flight (Winged) for flying insects, Affliction or Weaken effects for venomous insects, and snare Affliction effects for web-spinning insects. For even bigger creatures, add ranks of Growth. In spite of the name, this archetype also serves for giant arachnids like spiders and scorpions as well.

TULPA PL7 · MR5

STR 2, **STA** —, **AGL** 6, **DEX** 0, **FGT** 6, **INT** —, **AWE** 7, **PRE** —

Powers: Immunity 30 (Fortitude Effects), Close Damage 7 (Mind Lash, Alternate Resistance: Will). **Advantages:** Close Attack. **Skills:** Perception 4 (+11), Stealth 4 (+10). **Offense:** Init +6, Mind Lash +7 (Close, Damage 7; Will Resists), Unarmed +7 (Close, Damage 2). **Defense:** Dodge 6, Parry 6, Fortitude —, Toughness 8, Will —. **Totals:** Abilities 12 + Powers 44 + Advantages 1 + Skills 4 (8 ranks) + Defenses 8 = 69 points.

Formed from psychic energy, tulpas are servants created by psychics, or rogue thoughts that wander the astral plane or mystic dimensions. More aggressive tulpas may even spawn spontaneously from powerful fears or nightmares, particularly in people with psychic potential. Their touch inflicts agony to living minds.

Because they are created from the mind, tulpas can take almost any form, particularly those created from dreams, and may have additional powers related to their form, such as special forms of movement, additional limbs, and growth.

NINJA

The ninja have been a staple of comic books since the 1980s, particularly as minions for sinister cults and inscrutable Asian masterminds, although for a time they showed up almost everywhere. Highly capable ninja can be full-fledged villains in their own right (see the **Martial Artist** archetype, for one example). Ninja minions tend to have martial arts skills and weapons primarily as window dressing; they're capable fighters, but still no match individually for superheroes.

The listed archetypes are armed only with traditional ninja weapons: *shuriken* (throwing stars) and a *ninja-to* (straight-edged sword). Modern ninja can also have more conventional weapons; any weapon with a Damage rank of 3 or less—such as a light pistol—may be added without changing the ninja's overall power level.

NINJA NOVICE — PL3 · MR4

STR 1 **STA** 1 **AGL** 2 **DEX** 2 **FGT** 2 **INT** 0 **AWE** 1 **PRE** 0
Equipment: Sword (Strength-based Damage 3), Shuriken (Ranged Multiattack Damage 1). **Advantages:** Defensive Roll, Equipment 2, Improved Initiative. **Skills:** Acrobatics 6 (+8), Athletics 5 (+6), Deception 4 (+4), Expertise: Ninja Lore 4 (+4), Intimidation 4 (+4), Perception 4 (+5), Ranged Combat: Throwing 3 (+5), Sleight of Hand 4 (+6), Stealth 6 (+8). **Offense:** Init +6, Sword +2 (Close, Damage 4), Shuriken +5 (Ranged, Multiattack Damage 1), Unarmed +4 (Damage 1). **Defenses:** Dodge 5, Parry 5, Fortitude 3, Toughness 2/1 (without Defensive Roll), Will 3. **Totals:** Abilities 18 + Powers 0 + Advantages 4 + Skills 20 + Defenses 8 = Total 50 points.

Novice ninja are essentially themed crooks primarily noteworthy for their stealth abilities, which make them good at infiltration and surprise.

NINJA ADEPT — PL4 · MR5

STR 1 **STA** 1 **AGL** 3 **DEX** 3 **FGT** 4 **INT** 0 **AWE** 2 **PRE** 0
Equipment: Sword (Strength-based Damage 3), Shuriken (Ranged Multiattack Damage 1). **Advantages:** Defensive Roll 2, Equipment 2, Improved Initiative. **Skills:** Acrobatics 7 (+10), Athletics 6 (+7), Deception 6 (+6), Expertise: Ninja Lore 6 (+6), Intimidation 4 (+4), Perception 4 (+6), Ranged Combat: Throwing 4 (+7), Sleight of Hand 5 (+8), Stealth 7 (+10). **Offense:** Init +7, Sword +4 (Close, Damage 4), Shuriken +7 (Ranged, Multiattack Damage 1), Unarmed +4 (Damage 1). **Defenses:** Dodge 5, Parry 5, Fortitude 4, Toughness 3/1 (without Defensive Roll), Will 4. **Totals:** Abilities 28 + Powers 0 + Advantages 5 + Skills 25 + Defenses 8 = Total 66 points.

Adept ninja are solid mid-tier minions with fairly high combat accuracy and impressive stealth and acrobatic abilities for their power level.

NINJA MASTER — PL5 · MR6

STR 1 **STA** 1 **AGL** 3 **DEX** 3 **FGT** 6 **INT** 0 **AWE** 2 **PRE** 0
Equipment: Sword (Strength-based Damage 3), Shuriken (Ranged Multiattack Damage 1). **Advantages:** Defensive Roll 2, Equipment 2, Improved Initiative. **Skills:** Acrobatics 7 (+10), Athletics 6 (+7), Deception 6 (+6), Expertise: Ninja Lore 8 (+8), Intimidation 5 (+5), Perception 4 (+6), Ranged Combat: Throwing 6 (+9), Sleight of Hand 6 (+9), Stealth 8 (+11). **Offense:** Init +7, Sword +6 (Close, Damage 4), Shuriken +9 (Ranged, Multiattack Damage 1), Unarmed +6 (Damage 1). **Defenses:** Dodge 7, Parry 7, Fortitude 5, Toughness 3/1 (without Defensive Roll), Will 5. **Totals:** Abilities 32 + Powers 0 + Advantages 5 + Skills 28 + Defenses 12 = Total 77 points.

Master ninja are capable lieutenants for lower power level games. Their attack bonus can make them a threat against even more powerful characters, especially if they are armed with special weapons, such as poison or attacks aimed at a hero's weaknesses.

MYSTIC NINJA — PL7 · MR8

STR 2, **STA** 2, **AGL** 4, **DEX** 4, **FGT** 8, **INT** 0, **AWE** 3, **PRE** 1

Powers: Chi Powers Array (Concealment 10 [All Senses; Limited to in Darkness], Illusion 5 [Shadow Duplicate; Affects Vision and Hearing, Limited to recreating the ninja's image], Focused Strike [Penetrating 5 on Strength], Teleport 5). **Equipment:** Shuriken, Smoke Grenade, Sword. **Advantages:** Close Attack, Defensive Roll 3, Equipment 4, Evasion, Hide in Plain Sight, Improved Initiative, Precise Attack (Close, Concealment). **Skills:** Acrobatics 7 (+11), Athletics 6 (+8), Deception 8 (+9), Expertise: Ninja Lore 10 (+10), Intimidation 5 (+6), Perception 4 (+7), Ranged Combat: Throwing 6 (+10), Sleight of Hand 6 (+10), Stealth 10 (+14). **Offense:** Init +8, Shuriken +10 (Ranged, Damage 1, Multiattack), Sword +9 (Close, Damage 5, Penetrating), Unarmed +9 (Close, Damage 2, Penetrating). **Defense:** Dodge 9, Parry 9, Fort 7, Tou 5/2 (without Defensive Roll), Will 7. **Totals:** Abilities 48 + Powers 13 + Advantages 12 + Skills 31 (62 ranks) + Defenses 15 = 119 points.

Mystic ninjas are dedicated to the mastery of mysterious martial arts techniques that grant them superhuman powers, including the power to vanish into shadows, summon shadow clones to confuse enemies, and cleave through solid steel. They often represent lost societies or ancient warrior clans concealed from history.

USING MINIONS

Minions allow heroes to tackle large numbers of opponents and feel, well, super! But sometimes minions may feel like they slow combat down rather than improve the game. If your heroes face a dozen PL 2 criminals who can only hit with a roll of 19 or 20, what's even the point? Sometimes, players may feel like minions are such a minor threat, they ignore them entirely to focus on the primary villain. Sometimes feeling superhuman is the point, but other times you may want to use minions more creatively to help their villainous commander.

You can reliably use 2 to 4 minions per player character hero in an encounter without overwhelming your players. Use fewer minions if they are higher Power Level or if the minions have a full-fledged villain commanding them, and more if the villains are particularly puny.

Aid and Team Attacks

Minions can use the Aid action and Team Attacks to assist one another or villains. With the Aid action in particular, they only need to succeed at a DC 10 check rather than hit the PCs' defenses. Enough minions can reliably provide a +2 or even +5 circumstance bonus to their leader's attack checks and defenses, making a villain difficult to defeat before all their minions are dealt with. To save time and dice rolling, you may choose to count every two minions that contribute to an Aid action as one Degree of Success.

Ablative Minions

Some supervillains may use their minions as protection from heroes' attacks. Simply provide every minion with the Interpose advantage, allowing them to intercept attacks meant for their leader. This is appropriate for leaders who inspire great confidence in their minions, like the Crimelord, Overlord, and Puppeteer, but can represent any ruthless villain who uses their own henchmen as personal shields.

Minions and Takedown

The Takedown advantage is intended to let heroes feel more powerful by pummeling multiple opponents in a single action, but two ranks of Takedown combined with Speed or a ranged attack can easily sweep all the minions in an area in a single round. If this is the case at your game, you may consider not allowing heroes to make Takedown attacks against minions using a routine action; because the advantage requires a successful attack and has consequences for failure, each attack should be rolled, with missed attacks ending the hero's turn. You may also consider altering the rules for Takedown, so that the total ranks in the advantage determines the maximum number of minions that can be targeted in a round. You may also choose to have reinforcements arrive at a later point in the combat.

PUBLIC SERVANTS

The heroes' regular allies—and sometime rivals—are those entrusted with public safety and the enforcement of the law. These public servants have no special powers or heroic code-names but all the same risk their lives on a daily basis to do their jobs. Some take a dim view of "costumed vigilantes" getting involved in what they consider work for serious professionals, but most public servants appreciate the help of heroes in dealing with menaces no ordinary human beings can handle.

GOVERNMENT AGENT — PL4 · MR5

STR 1 **STA** 2 **AGL** 1 **DEX** 1 **FGT** 3 **INT** 2 **AWE** 2 **PRE** 2 **Equipment:** Pistol (Ranged Damage 3), camera, cell phone, computer, handcuffs. **Advantages:** Defensive Roll, Equipment 2. **Skills:** Athletics 4 (+5), Deception 2 (+4), Expertise: Behavioral Sciences 3 (+5), Expertise: Civics 2 (+4), Expertise: Current Events 2 (+4), Expertise: Government Agent 3 (+5), Expertise: Streetwise 2 (+4), Intimidation 4 (+6), Investigation 6 (+8), Perception 3 (+5), Persuasion 3 (+5), Ranged Combat: Chosen Weapon 4 (+5), Technology 2 (+4), Vehicles 4 (+5). **Offense:** Init +1, Unarmed +3 (Close, Damage 1), Pistol +5 (Ranged, Damage 3). **Defense:** Dodge 5, Parry 5, Fort 3, Tou 3/2, Will 3. **Totals:** Abilities 28 + Powers 0 + Advantages 3 + Skills 22 + Defenses 8 = Total 61points.

Government agents include members of organizations like the FBI, CIA, DEA, ATF, and even the DEO. Government agents are well-rounded with a good selection of skills and combat abilities.

POLICE CHIEF — PL3 · MR4

STR 0 **STA** 0 **AGL** 0 **DEX** 1 **FGT** 1 **INT** 2 **AWE** 2 **PRE** 3 **Equipment:** Pistol (Ranged Damage 3), cell phone, handcuffs. **Advantages:** Connected, Equipment 2. **Skills:** Athletics 2 (+2), Expertise: Streetwise 6 (+8), Expertise: Current Events 4 (+6), Expertise: Police Officer 6 (+8), Insight 8 (+10), Intimidation 4 (+7), Investigation 6 (+8), Perception 6 (+8), Ranged Combat: Pistol 2 (+3), Treatment 2 (+4), Vehicles 4 (+5). **Offense:** Init +0, Unarmed +1 (Damage 0), Pistol +3 (Ranged, Damage 3). **Defense:** Dodge 3, Parry 3, Fort 2, Tou 0, Will 4. **Totals:** Abilities 18 + Powers 0 + Advantages 3 + Skills 25 + Defenses 9 = Total 55 points.

The police chief can be a hero's greatest ally or worst enemy. Police chiefs may be dedicated public servants or corrupt politicians on the take, depending on the location and the style of your series.

POLICE OFFICER — PL4 · MR4

STR 2 **STA** 2 **AGL** 1 **DEX** 1 **FGT** 3 **INT** 0 **AWE** 1 **PRE** 1 **Equipment:** Bulletproof vest (+4 Toughness vs. Ballistic), pistol (Ranged Damage 3), tonfa, cell phone, handcuffs. **Advantages:** Equipment 3. **Skills:** Athletics 3 (+5), Expertise: Current Events 2 (+2), Expertise: Streetwise 3 (+3), Expertise: Police Officer 4 (+4), Insight 4 (+5), Intimidation 2 (+3), Investigation 2 (+2), Perception 4 (+5), Ranged Combat: Pistols 4 (+5), Treatment 2 (+2), Vehicles 4 (+5). **Offense:** Init +1, Unarmed +3 (Close, Damage 2), Tonfa +3 (Close, Damage 3), Pistol +5 (Ranged, Damage 3). **Defense:** Dodge 2, Parry 4, Fort 4, Tou 6/2, Will 2. **Totals:** Abilities 22 + Powers 0 + Advantages 3 + Skills 17 + Defenses 5 = Total 47 points.

This archetype focuses primarily on uniformed beat cops. Detectives, undercover. and plainclothes officers have more ranks in Investigate and often in other social skills like Persuasion and Intimidation.

SWAT OFFICER — PL5 · MR4

STR 2 **STA** 2 **AGL** 2 **DEX** 2 **FGT** 4 **INT** 0 **AWE** 1 **PRE** 1
Equipment: Submachine gun, riot gear (+4 Toughness), tonfa, cell phone, handcuffs. **Advantages:** Close Attack 2, Equipment 4. **Skills:** Athletics 3 (+5), Expertise: Current Events 2 (+2), Expertise: Streetwise 4 (+4), Expertise: Police Officer 5 (+5), Expertise: Tactics 5 (+5), Intimidation 4 (+5), Perception 2 (+3), Ranged Combat: Submachine Gun 4 (+6), Stealth 4 (+6), Treatment 3 (+3). **Offense:** Init +2, Unarmed +6 (Close, Damage 2), Tonfa +6 (Close, Damage 3), SMG +6 (Ranged, Multiattack Damage 4). **Defense:** Dodge 4, Parry 4, Fort 6, Tou 6/2, Will 3. **Totals:** Abilities 28 + Powers 0 + Advantages 6 + Skills 18 + Defenses 8 = Total 60 points.

SWAT (Special Weapons And Tactics) squads are made up of police officers with special training in squad-level tactics and weapon-use. They deal with serious criminal threats, including mutant criminals.

ROBOTS

Robots are the minions of choice for Mad Scientist types, unless they have a specific focus—such as life sciences—that prohibits them. After all, robots feel no pain, do not get tired, have no personal agendas, and don't have to be paid. They also generally can't be subverted, except by re-programming them.

The robot minions given here are non-intelligent, only capable of carrying out specific programmed instructions and orders, such as "guard this installation against anyone who does not know the password" or "attack!" More sophisticated intelligent robots are better handled as individual characters, although an interesting twist would be to have one of a villain's robot minions unexpectedly develop sentience (adding Intellect and Presence ranks to the archetype).

The archetype offers a basic model you can modify to suit robots with particular tasks. Common add-ons include sensor packages providing Senses, special Movement capabilities or Flight, and other weapons systems, typically as Alternate Effects of the built-in weapons package.

ROBOT, DRONE — PL3 · MR3

STR –1, **STA** —, **AGL** 1, **DEX** 0, **FGT** 0, **INT** —, **AWE** 1, **PRE** —

Powers: Ranged Damage 4 (Blaster), Immunity 30 (Fortitude Effects), Shrinking 6 (Innate; Permanent). **Skills:** Perception 4 (+5), Ranged Combat: Blaster 2 (+2), Stealth 2 (+9). **Offense:** Init +1, Blaster +2 (Ranged, Damage 4), Unarmed +0 (Close, Damage –1). **Defense:** Dodge 6, Parry 4, Fortitude —, Toughness 0, Will —. **Totals:** Abilities –26 + Powers 51 + Advantages 0 + Skills 4 (8 ranks) + Defenses 3 = 32 points.

Small, practical robots within the price range of more down-to-earth criminals and organizations, drones work as spies, sentries, and front-line defenses.

ROBOT, SMALL — PL4 · MR2

STR 0 **STA** — **AGL** 0 **DEX** 0 **FGT** 0 **INT** — **AWE** 0 **PRE** —
Powers: Immunity 30 (Fortitude effects), Protection 5, Shrinking 4 (Permanent, Innate). **Skills:** Close Combat: Unarmed 4 (+4). **Offense:** Init +0, Unarmed +4 (Close, Damage +0). **Defenses:** Dodge 3, Parry 3, Fortitude —, Toughness 5, Will —. **Totals:** Abilities –28 + Powers 44 + Advantages 0 + Skills 2 + Defenses 2 = Total 20 points.

Small robots tend to have non-humanoid forms, more often insect-like or snake-like, perhaps resembling quadrupeds such as cats or dogs. They may be intended for scouting or maintenance work, re-tasked to serve as attack drones.

ROBOT, MEDIUM — PL5 · MR2

STR 5 **STA** — **AGL** –1 **DEX** –1 **FGT** 0 **INT** — **AWE** 0 **PRE** —
Powers: Immunity 30 (Fortitude Effects), Protection 10 (Impervious 6). **Advantages:** Close Attack 5. **Offense:** Init –1, Unarmed +5 (Close, Damage 5). **Defenses:** Dodge 0, Parry 0, Fortitude —, Toughness 10, Will —. **Totals:** Abilities –24 + Powers 46 + Advantages 5 + Skills 0 + Defenses 1 = Total 28 points.

The stock robot is usually humanoid. Some are androids, designed to look like humans, while others are more clearly mechanical. They're slow moving, but quite tough, compared to most minions. Some robots may be equipped with built-in ranged weapons (guns or blasters), giving them Ranged Damage 5 and Ranged Combat 6 skill with them, increasing cost by 13 points and making them rank 3 Minions.

ROBOT, LARGE — PL7 · MR4

STR 9 **STA** — **AGL** 0 **DEX** 0 **FGT** 5 **INT** — **AWE** 0 **PRE** —
Powers: Ranged Damage 8 (Built-in Weapons), Growth 4 (Permanent, Innate), Immunity 30 (Fortitude Effects), Protection 6. **Skills:** Ranged Combat: Built-in Weapons 6 (+6). **Offense:** Init +0, Unarmed +5 (Close, Damage 9), Weapons +6 (Ranged, Damage 8). **Defenses:** Dodge 3, Parry 4, Fortitude —, Toughness 10, Will —. **Totals:** Abilities –10 + Powers 61 + Advantages 0 + Skills 3 + Defenses 6 = Total 60 points.

These hulking robots are easily a match for superheroes when they work in pairs. They can also represent various kinds of military and combat-oriented robots.

ROBOT, COLOSSAL — PL10 · MR6

STR 16 **STA** — **AGL** 0 **DEX** 0 **FGT** 4 **INT** — **AWE** 0 **PRE** —
Powers: Ranged Damage 11 (Built-in Weapons), Growth 16 (Permanent, Innate), Immunity 30 (Fortitude Effects). **Skills:** Ranged Combat: Built-in Weapons 6 (+6). **Offense:** Init +0, Unarmed +4 (Close, Damage 16), Weapons +6 (Ranged, Damage 11). **Defenses:** Dodge 0, Parry 0, Fortitude —, Toughness 16, Will —. **Totals:** Abilities –22 + Powers 85 + Advantages 0 + Skills 3 + Defenses 12 = Total 78 points.

The Colossal Robot is a city-demolishing minion suitable as the invention of a Mad Scientist or the basis for a giant *mecha*. It can constitute a threat for a whole hero team, especially if it is treated as a full-fledged villain capable of sustaining multiple hits.

ROBOT JOCKEY — PL7 · MR5

STR 5/0*, **STA** 2, **AGL** 4, **DEX** 1, **FGT** 4, **INT** 0, **AWE** 0, **PRE** 0

Powers: Piloted Robot (Removable; Ranged Damage 7 [Blasters], Enhanced Strength 5, Enhanced Advantage 9 [Close Attack 3, Ranged Attack 6], Protection 7, Senses 3 [Sensors; Darkvision, Radio]). **Advantages:** Accurate Attack, *Close Attack 3*, Improved Smash, Power Attack, *Ranged Attack 6*. **Skills:** Perception 4 (+4), Technology 4 (+4), Vehicles 8 (+9). **Offense:** Init +4, Blasters +7 (Ranged, Damage 7), Unarmed +7/+4* (Close, Damage 5/0*). **Defense:** Dodge 5, Parry 4, Fortitude 2, Toughness 9/2*, Will 0. **Totals:** Abilities 22 + Powers 34 + Advantages 3 + Skills 8 (16 ranks) + Defenses 1 = 68 points.

*without Piloted Robot

The Robot Jockey is a staple minion of mad scientists, invading alien forces, and law enforcement agencies tasked with policing superbeings. Each one pilots a small robotic vehicle that provides strength, durability, weapon systems, and sensors. Many power suits also provide some form of movement power and additional senses appropriate to their mission, or specialty weapons that inflict Affliction instead of Damage.

SOLDIERS

Soldiers are professional trained fighters used in military operations, as opposed to toughs and crooks (following), who are primarily hired muscle intended to intimidate and deal with criminal matters. Villains and organizations sometimes have both as minions, with soldiers handling the more direct fighting, and crooks the enforcement and internal matters. Ultimately, use whichever archetypes work best for the situation and modify accordingly.

The archetypes' equipment represents just their essential weapons and armor. Assign additional equipment as needed for particular missions, including different weapons, as appropriate.

MILITANT — PL4 · MR3

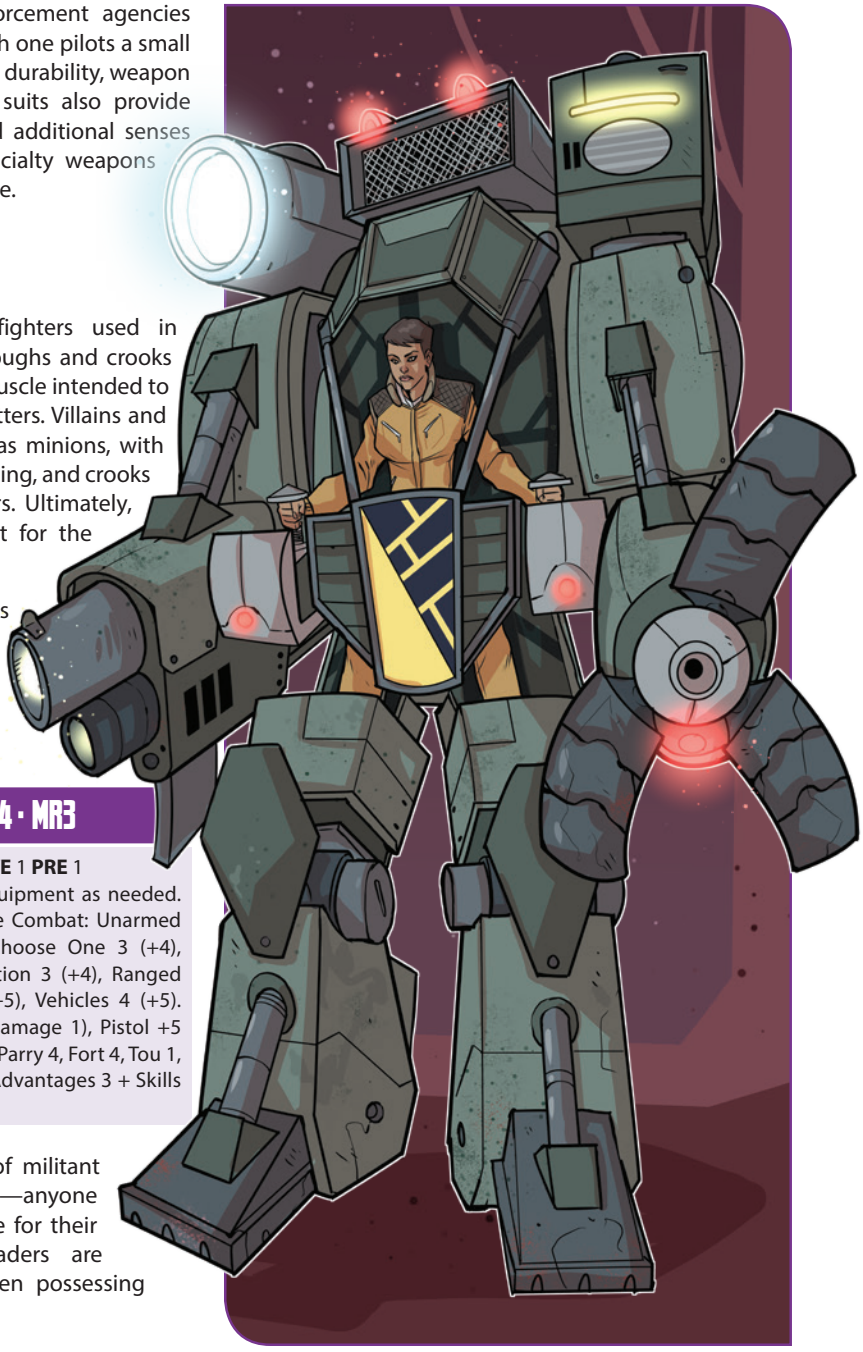
STR 1 **STA** 1 **AGL** 1 **DEX** 1 **FGT** 1 **INT** 1 **AWE** 1 **PRE** 1
Equipment: Light pistol, 9 points of equipment as needed. **Advantages:** Equipment 3. **Skills:** Close Combat: Unarmed 4 (+5), Deception 4 (+5), Expertise: Choose One 3 (+4), Expertise: Demolitions 6 (+7), Intimidation 3 (+4), Ranged Combat: Pistol 4 (+5), Technology 4 (+5), Vehicles 4 (+5). **Offense:** Init +1, Unarmed +5 (Close, Damage 1), Pistol +5 (Ranged, Damage 3). **Defense:** Dodge 4, Parry 4, Fort 4, Tou 1, Will 2. **Totals:** Abilities 16 + Powers 0 + Advantages 3 + Skills 16 + Defenses 10 = Total 45 points.

This archetype represents any sort of militant from militia members to terrorists—anyone who's trained and ready to kill or die for their cause. More capable militant leaders are supervillains in their own right, often possessing advanced equipment or powers.

SOLDIER, GREEN — PL4 · MR2

STR 1 **STA** 1 **AGL** 1 **DEX** 1 **FGT** 3 **INT** 0 **AWE** 0 **PRE** 0
Equipment: Body Armor (Protection 4), Assault Rifle (Ranged Multiattack Damage 5), Heavy Pistol (Ranged Damage 4). **Advantages:** Equipment 6. **Skills:** Athletics 2 (+3), Expertise: Soldier 2 (+2), Perception 2 (+2), Ranged Combat: Guns 2 (+3). **Offense:** Init +1, Pistol +3 (Ranged, Damage 3), Rifle +3 (Ranged, Multiattack Damage 5), Unarmed +3 (Close, Damage 1). **Defenses:** Dodge 3, Parry 3, Fortitude 3, Toughness 5 (1 without armor), Will 2. **Totals:** Abilities 14 + Powers 0 + Advantages 6 + Skills 4 + Defenses 6 = Total 30 points.

The green soldier is newly trained, but still quite capable, particularly with the benefits of their modern weapons and armor.



SOLDIER — PL5 · MR3

STR 1 **STA** 1 **AGL** 1 **DEX** 1 **FGT** 3 **INT** 0 **AWE** 0 **PRE** 0 **Equipment:** Body Armor (Protection 4), Assault Rifle (Ranged Multiattack Damage 5), Heavy Pistol (Ranged Damage 4). **Advantages:** Equipment 6. **Skills:** Athletics 4 (+5), Close Combat: Unarmed 2 (+5), Expertise: Soldier 4 (+4), Intimidation 2 (+2), Perception 4 (+4), Ranged Combat: Guns 4 (+5). **Offense:** Init +1, Pistol +5 (Ranged, Damage 3), Rifle +5 (Ranged, Multiattack Damage 5), Unarmed +5 (Close, Damage 1). **Defenses:** Dodge 5, Parry 5, Fortitude 5, Toughness 5 (1 without armor), Will 5. **Totals:** Abilities 14 + Powers 0 + Advantages 6 + Skills 10 + Defenses 15 = Total 45 points.

SOLDIER, VETERAN — PL6 · MR4

STR 2 **STA** 1 **AGL** 1 **DEX** 1 **FGT** 4 **INT** 0 **AWE** 0 **PRE** 0 **Equipment:** Body Armor (Protection 4), Assault Rifle (Ranged Multiattack Damage 5), Heavy Pistol (Ranged Damage 4). **Advantages:** Equipment 6, Improved Initiative. **Skills:** Athletics 4 (+6), Close Combat: Unarmed 3 (+7), Expertise: Soldier 7 (+7), Intimidation 4 (+4), Perception 6 (+6), Ranged Combat: Guns 6 (+7). **Offense:** Init +5, Pistol +7 (Ranged, Damage 3), Rifle +7 (Ranged, Multiattack Damage 5), Unarmed +7 (Close, Damage 2). **Defenses:** Dodge 7, Parry 7, Fortitude 6, Toughness 5 (1 without armor), Will 5. **Totals:** Abilities 18 + Powers 0 + Advantages 7 + Skills 15 + Defenses 19 = Total 59 points.

SOLDIER, ELITE — PL7 · MR5

STR 3 **STA** 1 **AGL** 1 **DEX** 1 **FGT** 5 **INT** 0 **AWE** 0 **PRE** 0 **Equipment:** Body Armor (Protection 4), Assault Rifle (Ranged Multiattack Damage 5), Heavy Pistol (Ranged Damage 4). **Advantages:** Equipment 6, Improved Initiative. **Skills:** Athletics 4 (+7), Close Combat: Unarmed 4 (+9), Expertise: Soldier 8 (+8), Intimidation 4 (+4), Perception 6 (+6), Ranged Combat: Guns 8 (+9). **Offense:** Init +5, Pistol +9 (Ranged, Damage 3), Rifle +9 (Ranged, Multiattack Damage 5), Unarmed +9 (Close, Damage 3). **Defenses:** Dodge 9, Parry 9, Fortitude 6, Toughness 5 (1 without armor), Will 6. **Totals:** Abilities 22 + Powers 0 + Advantages 7 + Skills 17 + Defenses 23 = Total 69 points.

UNDERWORLD

The criminal scum of the city's underworld comes in many different varieties, from run-of-the-mill street criminals and gangs to organized crime bosses and their lieutenants, guards, and professional killers. Their backgrounds may vary, as well as their allegiances to a particular mob, syndicate, or gang, but the following archetypes provide the major types of criminals heroes are likely to encounter in their nightly patrols and ongoing investigations.

Criminals aren't limited to the archetypes presented here. Boss's often recruit various Bystanders, such as politicians and journalists, for their exclusive access and influence. Cities rife with corruption likely have many Public Servants on the local Crime Lord's payroll. Especially powerful criminals may hire Soldiers or buy exotic Animals to guard their fortified estates, or even hire a Mad Scientist to provide them with Monsters

BODYGUARD — PL4 · MR4

STR 3 **STA** 2 **AGL** 1 **DEX** 1 **FGT** 4 **INT** 0 **AWE** 2 **PRE** 1 **Equipment:** Brass knuckles (Strength-based Damage 1), Handcuffs, Pistol (Damage 3), Pepper spray. **Advantages:** Chokehold, Equipment 2, Interpose, Quick Draw. **Skills:** Athletics 2 (+5), Expertise: Bodyguard 6 (+6), Intimidation 4 (+5), Perception 6 (+8), Ranged Combat: Guns 4 (+5). **Offense:** Init +1, Pistol +5 (Ranged, Damage 3), Unarmed +4 (Close, Damage 3, 4 with brass knuckles). **Defenses:** Dodge 6, Parry 6, Fortitude 5, Toughness 2, Will 3. **Totals:** Abilities 28 + Powers 0 + Advantages 5 + Skills 11 + Defenses 11 = Total 55 points.

The bodyguard is paid to stick close to the boss and provide cover—with his own body, if necessary. A fair number of supervillain bodyguards are women, and this archetype works just as well for them (add the Attractive advantage—or not—as you prefer).

BOSS — PL4 · MR4

STR 0 **STA** 1 **AGL** 1 **DEX** 0 **FGT** 2 **INT** 3 **AWE** 2 **PRE** 4 **Equipment:** Bulletproof vest (+4 Toughness vs. Ballistic), heavy pistol, cell phone. **Advantages:** Benefit 5 (Millionaire, Status: Crime Lord), Connected, Equipment 3, Well-informed. **Skills:** Expertise: Criminal 8 (+11), Expertise: Streetwise 6 (+9), Expertise: Current Events 2 (+5), Intimidation 6 (+10), Perception 2 (+4), Persuasion 4 (+8), Ranged Combat: Pistols 4 (+4). **Offense:** Init +1, Unarmed +2 (Close, Damage 0), Heavy Pistol +4 (Ranged, Damage 4). **Defense:** Dodge 3, Parry 3, Fort 3, Tou 5/1, Will 5. **Totals:** Abilities 26 + Powers 0 + Advantages 10 + Skills 16 + Defenses 8 = Total 60 points.

Sitting on top of the criminal underworld are the bosses—mob lords, mafia dons, yakuza oyabun, and triad dragons, among other—who command legions of specialized criminals and civilian assets. These are men and women who've come up through the ranks and now run the show. Physically a boss is no match for a hero, but their connections, resources, and knowledge of the underworld can be problematic. The boss presented here is a fairly small fish, who presents an organizational threat and likely controls a large swath of territory within a city; Gamemasters should make any changes needed to increase the crime lord's power and influence for the series.

The Crime Lord archetype, presented earlier, represents the ultimate evolution of the boss.

CRIMINAL — PL2 · MR3

STR 1 **STA** 0 **AGL** 2 **DEX** 1 **FGT** 1 **INT** 1 **AWE** 0 **PRE** 1 **Equipment:** Leather jacket (+1 Toughness), pistol (Ranged Damage 3), knife, cell phone. **Advantages:** Equipment 2. **Skills:** Athletics 4 (+5), Expertise: Choose One 4 (+5), Expertise: Streetwise 4 (+5), Expertise: Current Events 2 (+3), Perception 4 (+4), Stealth 6 (+8), Technology 4 (+5), Vehicles 4 (+5). **Offense:** Init +2, Unarmed +1 (Close, Damage 1), Knife +1 (Close, Damage 2, Crit. 19-20), Pistol +1 (Ranged, Damage 3). **Defense:** Dodge 3, Parry 3, Fort 2, Tou 1/0, Will 0. **Totals:** Abilities 14 + Powers 0 + Advantages 2 + Skills 16 + Defenses 5 = Total 37 points.

This archetype represents run-of-the-mill career criminals. Gamemasters should shuffle the criminal's skill ranks around to specialize as needed.

CROOK PL3 · MR3

STR 2 **STA** 2 **AGL** 1 **DEX** 1 **FGT** 2 **INT** 0 **AWE** 0 **PRE** -1
Equipment: Leather jacket (+1 Toughness), pistol (Ranged Damage 3), cell phone. **Advantages:** Equipment 2. **Skills:** Athletics 4 (+6), Expertise: Choose One 4 (+4), Expertise: Criminal 2 (+2), Expertise: Streetwise 4 (+4), Expertise: Current Events 2 (+2), Intimidation 4 (+3), Stealth 2 (+3), Vehicles 4 (+5). **Offense:** Init +1, Unarmed +2 (Close, Damage 2), Pistol +1 (Ranged, Damage 3). **Defense:** Dodge 2, Parry 2, Fort 4, Tou 3/2, Will 0. **Totals:** Abilities 14 + Powers 0 + Advantages 2 + Skills 13 + Defenses 3 = Total 32 points.

Crooks can be used as muggers, gangsters, gang members, and henchmen for supervillains. They rely on muscle. This stablock can also be used as any type of hired muscle from a bodyguard to security guards.

GANG LEADER PL2 · MR3

STR 1 **STA** 0 **AGL** 2 **DEX** 1 **FGT** 1 **INT** 1 **AWE** 0 **PRE** 1
Equipment: Leather jacket (+1 Toughness), pistol (Ranged Damage 3), knife, cell phone. **Advantages:** Equipment 2. **Skills:** Athletics 4 (+5), Deception 4 (+5), Expertise: Choose One 4 (+5), Expertise: Streetwise 4 (+5), Expertise: Current Events 2 (+3), Perception 4 (+4), Stealth 6 (+8), Technology 4 (+5), Vehicles 4 (+5). **Offense:** Init +2, Unarmed +1 (Close, Damage 1), Knife +1 (Close, Damage 2, Crit. 19-20), Pistol +1 (Ranged, Damage 3). **Defense:** Dodge 3, Parry 3, Fort 2, Tou 1/0, Will 0. **Totals:** Abilities 14 + Powers 0 + Advantages 2 + Skills 18 + Defenses 5 = Total 39 points.

Useful as the leader of a small gang of criminals or crooks. Give the gang leader more ranks in Deception, Expertise, and Persuasion if he leads a larger gang. Most small-time gang leaders rely on their wits and connections to keep them safe and aren't exceptional combatants, but Gamemasters should feel free to add extra combat options or skill to noteworthy gang leaders they intend to face off against the heroes, perhaps even granting them minor super powers.

For an even more influential and powerful gang leader, use the boss archetype.

GOON PL4 · MR3

STR 4 **STA** 5 **AGL** 0 **DEX** 0 **FGT** 3 **INT** –1 **AWE** –1 **PRE** 0
Equipment: Pistol (Ranged Damage 3). **Advantages:** Close Attack 1, Equipment 2. **Skills:** Intimidation 6 (+6), Ranged Combat: Guns 4 (+4). **Offense:** Init +0, Pistol +4 (Ranged, Damage 3), Unarmed +4 (Close, Damage 4). **Defenses:** Dodge 2, Parry 3, Fortitude 5, Toughness 5, Will 1. **Totals:** Abilities 20 + Powers 0 + Advantages 2 + Skills 5 + Defenses 6 = Total 33 points.

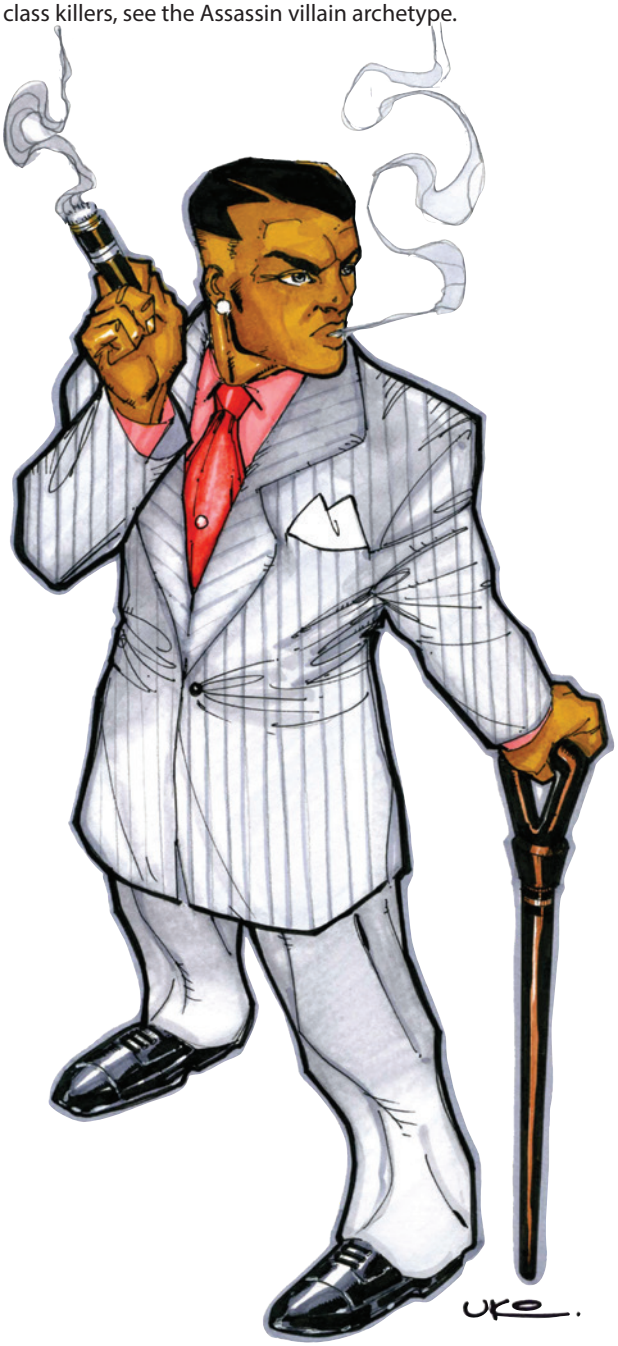
Similar to crooks, goons are the bruiser-types, even bigger and stronger, specializing in brutal, bare-knuckle beat-downs, but still none too bright.

Some villains might make goons more of a threat by enhancing them, either with their own powers or outside resources. Examples include Strength- and Stamina-enhancing drugs (boosting those abilities as high as 6) or things like magical enhancements to defenses. Othervillains may provide unique weapons, armor, or gadgets that add special attacks.

HIRED KILLER PL6 · MR5

STR 2 **STA** 2 **AGL** 2 **DEX** 4 **FGT** 5 **INT** 1 **AWE** 1 **PRE** 1
Equipment: Garrote (Chokehold and Improved Hold advantages), Sniper rifle (Ranged Damage 5, Improved Critical). **Advantages:** Improved Aim, Equipment 3. **Skills:** Deception 6 (+7), Expertise: Criminal 6 (+7), Perception 5 (+6), Ranged Combat: Guns 3 (+7), Stealth 8 (+10). **Offense:** Init +2, Rifle +7 (Ranged, Damage 5, Crit. 19-20), Unarmed +5 (Close, Damage 2). **Defenses:** Dodge 9, Parry 9, Fortitude 5, Toughness 2, Will 7. **Totals:** Abilities 36 + Powers 0 + Advantages 4 + Skills 14 + Defenses 20 = Total 74 points.

The hired killer is tasked with removing obstacles from her employer's path, usually with a high-range sniper rifle, although some prefer bombs, poisons, or other means. This archetype is suitable for a skilled contract killer, mob trigger-man, terrorist sniper, or the like. For truly world-class killers, see the Assassin villain archetype.



STREET INFORMANT — PL2 · MR3

STR 0 **STA** 0 **AGL** 1 **DEX** 1 **FGT** 1 **INT** 1 **AWE** 1 **PRE** 1
Equipment: Leather jacket (+1 Toughness), knife, pistol (Ranged Damage 3), cell phone. **Advantages:** Contacts, Equipment 2. **Skills:** Athletics 4 (+4), Expertise: Criminal 4 (+5), Expertise: Streetwise 6 (+7), Expertise: Current Events 4 (+5), Perception 4 (+5), Stealth 2 (+3), Vehicles 4 (+5). **Offense:** Init +1, Unarmed +1 (Close, Damage 0), Knife +1 (Close, Damage +1, Crit. 19-20), Pistol +1 (Ranged, Damage 3). **Defense:** Dodge 3, Parry 3, Fort 2, Tou 1/0, Will 1. **Totals:** Abilities 12 + Powers 0 + Advantages 3 + Skills 14 + Defenses 6 = Total 35 points.

Street informants are the eyes and ears of the underworld. They aren't usually involved in anything illegal, but they know what's going on. They're not the most physically capable or violent members of the criminal element, but they're useful contacts and can fill the role of street toughs and gang members.

TOUGH — PL3 · MR2

STR 1 **STA** 0 **AGL** 0 **DEX** 0 **FGT** 2 **INT** –1 **AWE** 0 **PRE** 0
Equipment: Pistol (Ranged Damage 3). **Advantages:** Equipment 2. **Skills:** Close Combat: Unarmed 2 (+4), Intimidation 3 (+3), Perception 4 (+4), Ranged Combat: Guns 3 (+3). **Offense:** Init +0, Pistol +3 (Ranged, Damage 3), Unarmed +4 (Close, Damage 1). **Defenses:** Dodge 4, Parry 4, Fortitude 4, Toughness 0, Will 2. **Totals:** Abilities 4 + Powers 0 + Advantages 2 + Skills 6 + Defenses 12 = Total 24 points.

Whether in a rumpled suit with a shoulder-rig for the gun or biker leathers with chains, the basic tough is a staple of criminal henchmen. Not overly bright, toughs have some basic combat capabilities. For the most part, they are around to keep heroes busy long enough for their boss to finish a job, or just get away.

ZOMBIES

Zombies are typically animated human corpses given a semblance of life through magic or sometimes by scientific means (exposure to a disease or toxic waste, for example). They're a common threat on their own in hordes as well as serving as minions of necromantic villains.

The following zombie archetypes are all based on humans. You can easily create other kinds of zombies and undead creatures by taking another archetype, removing its Stamina rank and applying Immunity to Fortitude Effects and sufficient Protection to make up for its lost Stamina in terms of Toughness defense. This way you can make zombie animals or zombie dinosaurs, or you can create intelligent undead that retain their various advantages, skills, and equipment, such as zombie soldiers or undead cultists risen from the grave to follow their sorcerous master.

ZOMBIE — PL2 · MR1

STR 2 **STA** — **AGL** –1 **DEX** –1 **FGT** 1 **INT** — **AWE** –1 **PRE** —
Powers: Immunity 30 (Fortitude effects), Protection 3. **Offense:** Init –1, Unarmed +1 (Close, Damage 2). **Defenses:** Dodge 0, Parry 1, Fortitude —, Toughness 3, Will —. **Totals:** Abilities –30 + Powers 33 + Advantages 0 + Skills 0 + Defenses 1 = Total 4 points.

This archetype is a typical low-level zombie. They are not much a threat to superheroes, but can be to ordinary people, particularly given their immunity to most things that concern living beings.

Variations on the basic zombie archetype include making them flesh-eaters (no real change in game traits, apart from the gruesome visuals) and making their condition contagious, either to anyone killed by them, or even anyone scratched or bitten (suffering at least an injured result from damage).

SKELETON — PL2 · MR2

STR 2 **STA** — **AGL** 1 **DEX** 0 **FGT** 1 **INT** — **AWE** –1 **PRE** —
Powers: Immunity 45 (Fortitude effects, Cold Damage, Half Damage from Slashing and Piercing Attacks), Protection 2. **Advantages:** Improved Initiative. **Offense:** Init +5, Unarmed +1 (Close, Damage 2). **Defenses:** Dodge 1, Parry 1, Fortitude —, Toughness 2, Will —. **Totals:** Abilities –24 + Powers 47 + Advantages 1 + Skills 0 + Defenses 0 = Total 24 points.

Skeletons are essentially fleshless zombies, faster and more agile because of it, and even more resistant to various forms of harm. The kind of skeletons that show up to fight heroes are often those of ancient warriors, and so may be equipped with appropriate armor and weapons, improving their damage and Toughness by +2 each and increasing their power level by 1 (although minion rank remains the same).

MIND-CONTROLLED ZOMBIE — PL0 · MR2

STR 0 **STA** 0 **AGL** 0 **DEX** 0 **FGT** 0 **INT** — **AWE** 0 **PRE** 0
Powers: Immunity 30 (Will Effects). **Offense:** Init +0, Unarmed +0 (Close, Damage 0). **Defenses:** Dodge 0, Parry 0, Fortitude 0, Toughness 0, Will 0. **Totals:** Abilities –10 + Powers 30 + Advantages 0 + Skills 0 + Defenses 0 = Total 20 points.

Otherwise ordinary people brainwashed or controlled by malevolent forces, these "zombies" are living people but in a profound trance that leaves them mindless and utterly obedient to their master's will. As a side effect it completely shields them against mental powers and interaction targeting Will (such as Intimidation).

Although not as powerful as even conventional undead zombies, mind-controlled zombies make up for it in two areas. First, they tend to be numerous, perhaps even the entire population of a city or world! Second, because they are innocent people, heroes tend to be reluctant to hurt them or even risk seriously harming them.

TEMPLATES

Minions are flexible and readily-available opponents for your adventures, but don't always fit your exact needs. To make quick adjustments, apply one of the following templates to change a minion's statistics and abilities on the fly to create new kinds of opponents. For example, adding the Flying template to a Lion creates the griffon of Greek mythology.

Each template includes a PL adjustment to help you determine how dangerous your new creation will be, but

this is only an estimate. Some minions—especially those that rely on firearms for their damage—may not see their offensive power level increased substantially. See what statistics are affected, use your best judgment as a Gamemaster, and adjust the final numbers where you see fit.

When you apply a template, consider if it adds a new Complication to a minion. Do Bestial minions become more easily enraged? Can Aquatic minions stay above water indefinitely, or are they limited to only a few minutes? Does a Flying minion have wings that can be targeted?

AQUATIC — TEMPLATE • 9 POINTS

PL Adjustment +0

Statistic Adjustments Immunity 1 (Drowning), Movement 1 (Environment Adaptation [underwater]), Swimming 6 (30 MPH)

Combat Adjustments None

Aquatic minions are perfectly adapted to an underwater environment, where many superheroes have a distinct disadvantage. They may represent a mystical underwater race like Lemurians or merfolk, or be minions of more powerful aquatic villains who provide them with technology, magic, or gene therapy to adapt them to the sea.

BESTIAL — TEMPLATE • 22 POINTS

PL Adjustment +2

Statistic Adjustments STR +4, STA +4, Ranged Attack 2, Senses 2 (Acute Smell, Low-Light Vision), Speed 2 (8 MPH)

Combat Adjustments Close Damage +4, Ranged Attack +2, Fortitude +4, Toughness +4

Bestial minions possess phenomenal strength and durability, able to rend opponents with their bare hands, but also possessing keen senses and reflexes. They may represent mythical animal-human hybrids like a minotaur, gene-spliced soldiers, or powerful alien beasts.

ELITE — TEMPLATE • 16 POINTS

PL Adjustment +1

Statistic Adjustments STR +1, STA +1, AGL +1, DEX +1, FGT +1, INT +1, AWE +1, PRE +1

Combat Adjustments Increase all skill modifiers, attack modifiers, and defenses by +1

Elite minions are a cut above the rest: faster, stronger, and smarter than others like them. Those with powers usually have their primary offensive abilities increased by +1 rank as well.

FLYING — TEMPLATE • 11 POINTS

PL Adjustment +0

Statistic Adjustments Favored Environment (airborne), Flight 5 (60 MPH)

Combat Adjustments None

Flying minions are swift and maneuverable masters of the skies. Their flight may be derived from technology, such as soldiers with jet packs, or the result of natural (or unnatural) wings.

GIANT — TEMPLATE • 11 POINTS

PL Adjustment +2

Statistic Adjustments Growth 4 (Permanent, Innate), Protection 2 (Impervious Protection 6)

Combat Adjustments Close Damage +4, Dodge –2, Fortitude +4, Parry –2, Toughness +6

Minions of unusual size stand twice their normal height and possess incredible strength and resilience. They may be unusually large "dire" versions of ordinary animals, or towering alien beings.

MYSTICAL — TEMPLATE • 12 POINTS

PL Adjustment +0

Statistic Adjustments Magic Array (10pp; Concealment 5 [all visual and auditory senses], AE: Teleport 5 [Extended; Medium]), Senses 1 (Magic Awareness)

Combat Adjustments None

Mystical minions are creatures of magic who can fade from sight and step great distances through shadows, mirrors, or other mystically-themed mediums. Most also possess a magical-themed Affliction, Damage, or Move Object effect in addition to the two spells listed here, with ranks appropriate to the PL.

ROBOTIC — TEMPLATE • 20 POINTS

PL Adjustment +0

Statistic Adjustments Immunity 30 (Fortitude effects)

Special: Remove the creature's STA score. Replace Toughness defense with equal ranks in Protection

Combat Adjustments None

Mad scientists may construct robotic versions of common minions or animals, while aliens may hunt alongside mechanical animals, and museums or movie sets may feature lifelike robotic dinosaurs.

ZOMBIE — TEMPLATE • COST VARIES

PL Adjustment +0

Statistic Adjustments No Stamina, Intellect, or Presence

Powers: Immunity 30 (Fortitude effects)

Combat Adjustments none

This template can be added to any creature to turn it into a zombie. It assumes the creature also loses any Intellect- or Presence-based skills, but that it retains its relative Toughness: apply ranks of Protection to make up for any Toughness lost due to having no Stamina rank.

> **Example:** *A necromancer in the Lost World raises a zombie tyrannosaurus rex! The creature loses its Stamina (from 12 to —) as well as Intellect and Presence but gains Immunity 30 (Fortitude) effects. The GM gives it an additional 2 ranks of Protection to make up for the loss of its Stamina, keeping its Toughness at rank 14, so the creature has a net increase in cost of 12 points, increasing the regular archetype's cost to 83 points (from 71). Now, of course, the monstrous dinosaur is tireless and immune to attacks which target Fortitude...*

Stevens '06

CHAPTER 4: PLOTS

When talking about the "plot" of a *Mutants & Masterminds* adventure you can be talking about one of two things. The first is plot in terms of story: how events develop and build on each other, flowing from one event to the next. The other use of plot refers to the plans developed by villains, ranging from a simple heist or revenge scheme to a complex plot to take over the world!

Villainous plots are often the driving force behind an adventure. The general assumption in superhero stories is that the good guys are defenders of the *status quo*. While they might patrol the streets and monitor the police bands on alert for crime, they generally do not act until there is a problem to solve or a threat to confront. Thus it isn't until a villain puts a plot into motion that the adventure really begins.

This chapter looks at six major types of villainous plots, including how the heroes learn about them, what they can do about them, and many different variations you can use. It also looks at some of the successful (and challenging) elements of creating a *Mutants & Masterminds* adventure and provides plenty of ideas you can use as inspiration for the creation of your own adventures. With the material in this chapter, you have potentially endless villainous schemes to challenge the heroes in your game!

CONQUEST

"The world will soon be mine!"

The goal of many a master villain is to conquer and rule the world (or even the galaxy or universe, for the truly ambitious). The motives vary from sheer arrogance and power-lust to a sincere belief that the world would be better off with the villain in charge of things, able to fix problems the petty and squabbling governments cannot.

ROADS TO CONQUEST

Comic book supervillains have tried nearly every way imaginable to take over the world, and comic book writers have invented more than a few. Here are some of the roads a villain might take toward world conquest, although they are by no means the only possibilities. Feel free to come up with your own mad schemes!

THREAT

By far the most common scheme for taking over the world is by threat: the villain comes up with some sort of doomsday device, capable of destroying or laying waste to the world (or at least civilization as we know it) and then threatens to unleash it if the world does not surrender immediately to his rule. Typically, the villain provides at least one demonstration of the threat in order to prove it exists, and sets a deadline for world leaders to respond, giving the heroes some time to take action. This demonstration might be the tell for the plot, or it could come earlier, with the villain's plans to acquire the necessary resources for the threat, or even the threat itself.

DOOMSDAY DEVICE

A "doomsday device" is any generic device capable of destroying the world, or at least ending human civilization, sufficient threat for a world-conqueror. Exactly what the doomsday device does varies, and is largely up to your imagination. Possible doomsday devices include:

- A generator of natural disasters: earthquakes, volcanoes, tidal waves, hurricanes, and so forth, either targeted wherever the villain wishes, or affecting the entire world.
- Melting the polar ice caps to flood the coastal areas of the planet, even putting most of the world under water—perfect for the aquatic villains.
- Technology able to launch long-range nuclear weapons from the world's arsenals, or simply set them off in their silos, provoking a thermonuclear war and a lingering "nuclear winter."
- A railgun able to hurl asteroid-sized rocks at targets on Earth, or a tractor beam able to pull asteroids or comets toward Earth, causing devastation with their impacts.
- Shifting the Earth or the Moon out of their orbits, wreaking havoc with weather patterns and causing massive natural disasters.
- Blotting out or blocking the sun so its light cannot reach Earth, causing plants to die and the world to slowly freeze.
- An artificial singularity or a black hole, capable of consuming all matter and crushing the Earth, solar system, or even entire universe into nothingness.
- Self-replicating "gray goo" nanotechnology, able to break down all matter at the molecular level and use the raw material to make more of itself until it consumes the entire world.

BIO-WEAPON

Life can sometimes be the greatest threat to itself, and minds can devise many biological hazards capable of wiping out human life on Earth. Villains with expertise in biology or powers over living creatures and processes might use them as weapons, as might ecological foes who consider themselves "champions of the environment." Some possible bio-weapons:

- An engineered disease, capable of spreading quickly through the population and causing almost certain death. Once released, it becomes almost impossible to stop without a vaccine or medical treatment (and perhaps not even then).
- A means of killing all plant life on Earth, ensuring the world's slow suffocation as the cycle of oxygen replenishment is disrupted. Alternately, causing plants to super-oxygenate the atmosphere could lead to disastrous levels of volatility.

COMPUTER CRASH

The modern world is more heavily dependent on computers and telecommunications than ever. Even a brief disruption of the world telecommunications network could have tremendous cost both economically and even in lives. Tech-savvy villains may seek to use this dependence to their advantage with one or more of the following threats:

- A computer virus designed to infect and disable computers worldwide, spreading across the Internet.
- Control over computers and machines sufficient to control the world's arsenal of military or even nuclear weapons to use them as a threat.
- Seize the world's financial markets, threatening to wipe out the global economy in one fell swoop.
- Control or threaten to disrupt worldwide air-traffic control, sending numerous planes into fiery crashes and effectively grounding all air travel.

BLACK MAGIC

Although mad science tends to be the preferred means of threatening the world, it is far from the only one. Mystical master villains can get into the game, too, with magic capable of doing anything science can, and more, such as:

- Raise an army of undead, demons, or other magical creatures capable of destroying humanity, and probably quite eager to do so.
- Wield supernatural control over the elements, sufficient to create world-threatening natural disasters.
- Transform ordinary people or animals into monsters (similar to the **Invasion** approach) or threaten to turn people to stone or some similar mystic curse.
- Overthrow the laws of science and institute a world ruled by magical powers. This often shifts over into full reality alteration (see that section, following).

THE DOOMSDAY BLUFF

In a world where super-criminals with doomsday machines are a regular and common threat, the authorities have to take any and all such threats at least somewhat seriously. This means a villain could actually try to *bluff* the world into surrendering! It would probably take more than just an idle threat broadcast over the Internet or the like, but a villain might be able to produce a small-scale threat (such as the destruction of an uninhabited island, for example) and then claim to be able to reproduce it on a larger scale. After all, the only way of knowing for certain that *any* villain's doomsday threat is for real is by calling his bluff and having him go through with it!

MIND CONTROL

If everyone in the world has to do as you command, then you already have conquered it! Some villains use various means of mind control to take over the world, although some find it unsatisfying; ruling over a world of mindless puppets is not

WE DIDN'T START THE FIRE

One world-conquering scenario that can be interesting to explore in an RPG is having the heroes decide to take over the world! People have long been aware that superheroes have the potential power to conquer nations or even the entire planet—of grave concern to some—and some comics have explored this theme.

Heroes usually start out with the best of intentions: perhaps the world is in dire straits following an alien invasion or other disaster and is in need of strong, decisive leadership, or the world is sliding into chaos and headed for disaster—such as a global war—unless the heroes intervene. The good guys might simply be tired of doing their best and not really having much effect; they decide taking over is the way to bring about real change for the good of everyone, whether they want it or not.

This scenario can pit heroes against heroes as some favor the takeover plan and others oppose it. It also creates unusual alliances as some villains oppose the heroes' plans—they don't want the competition! Other villains might support the takeover, especially in exchange for a pardon or a place in the "new world order."

Implementing or opposing a heroic takeover scenario can form the basis for an entire *Mutants & Masterminds* series, from the first steps of the plan through its consequences and permutations. The heroic conquerors might realize the error of their ways and abandon their plans, or they might have to be forcibly overthrown, fighting to the finish, with the future of the world hanging in the balance.

INVASIONS AND MASS COMBAT

If you are running an invasion scenario and the heroes are expected to join in the fight against the invaders directly, you may find the optional mass combat rules (found in **Chapter 7**) useful. They can handle large numbers of invaders and help determine the characters' overall effect on the course of the battle.

the same as forcing an enemy to capitulate, and there is often no one to lord it over! On the other hand, some villains are just fine with the concept of everyone in the world as their puppets, and are willing to take full advantage.

Techniques of villainous mind control vary, but the key element in nearly all of them is a mode of transmission—getting the effect to reach every person in the world. Gaining access to the medium is typically the plot's tell, allowing the heroes to figure something is up, and giving them a means to do something about it by interfering with the carrier medium. Some mind-control media include:

- Broadcasting on radio or television waves or, in the 21st century, over cell phones or other wireless devices. This could be a subliminal signal or some sort of "super-hypnosis."
- Biochemical agents placed in food, water, or even in the air. This often involves dosing sources of drinking water or creating a new "food craze" with a mind-control additive that subliminally encourages people to introduce others to it, spreading the effect.
- Enhancement of existing mental powers using technology or arcane devices or rituals. For example, a psychic villain might use a "mento-web" to exert control over nearly every mind on Earth, just as an evil sorcerer might use a potent mystic gem or long-lost rite to cast a spell over the entire world.
- Orbital satellites beaming down mind control rays on a hapless and unsuspecting populace.
- Sheer superhuman charisma or ability to control people who see or hear the villain, with influence spreading as public appearances do. This is the same as broadcasting control, if the power works over the airwaves. Otherwise, the villain has to do things the old fashioned way, arranging a lot of public appearances in different parts of the world, which gets harder as people figure out what is happening.
- A "contagious" form of mind control that spreads from person to person like a disease. It might be psychic or due to some physical agent (biochemical, nanotech, etc.).

HEROES HUNTED

A common theme of the mind control scenario is the heroes, for one reason or another, are the sole exceptions to the villain's absolute rule. Perhaps it is some quirk of biochemistry or circumstance, such as being off-world when the mind control is established. The villain might also deliberately exclude the heroes in order to enjoy turning the whole world against them. They retain their free will but are alone against an entire planet loyal to their enemy, including friends, loved ones, and even other heroic allies! Hunted fugitives, the heroes have to figure out some way of undoing the villain's control and freeing the world before it is too late.

INVASION

Some villains like to achieve their conquests the old fashioned way: through sheer military might. This approach involves building up an army or other invasion force and using it to conquer the world nation by nation, or all at once through a massive invasion. Sometimes a sufficiently large and powerful army is enough of a threat for the world to surrender without a single battle being fought—although for the most militaristic villains, that takes all the fun out of it.

THE INVASION FORCE

The key to an invasion is an army or invasion force, strong enough to overwhelm conventional military forces, but which the heroes might be able to defeat in some fashion. The build up or formation of the invasion force might be the scheme's tell, where the heroes learn about the plot and have a chance of stopping the army *before* it is unleashed. Otherwise, the invasion's tell is usually something else (see **The Weak Point**, following). Types of invasion forces include:

- Mercenaries or other human soldiers, but equipped with high-tech or otherwise superior weaponry to make them more than a match for a conventional army.
- Clones, often equipped with high-tech as well, although part of their advantage comes from superior numbers and the ability to replenish their losses (assuming a fairly rapid cloning process). They are often conditioned for absolute loyalty.
- Aliens—an army of alien soldiers, often loyal to an extraterrestrial warlord master villain. The aliens may have superior technology as well as super-powers of their own. An extreme example is a *small* alien army of *very* powerful soldiers, each of them PL 12 or more and equivalent to a whole battalion of conventional troops!
- Robots, in shapes and sizes from small to giant, with various weapons and capabilities. Perhaps the villain has a means of transforming ordinary machines such as cars or appliances into mechanical soldiers!
- Plants, capable of moving and attacking on their own. They might be ordinary vegetation animated by some process of the villain's, elemental spirits, alien plant-beings, or the like. Perhaps the villain is capable of stirring the slumbering forces of nature to attack!

- Animals, either ordinary non-human creatures or beasts altered or enhanced in some fashion. For example, a villain might have animal control powers or world-wide mind control that only affects lower life forms, but sufficient to turn them into a conquering army!
- Monsters, usually giant ones capable of taking on armies and flattening cities, although massive numbers of smaller monsters work, too. The villain may be capable of calling creatures from the hidden depths, the inner-earth, other dimensions, and the like, or simply growing them in laboratories until they are needed.
- Mind control victims, turned into utterly loyal soldiers for the conqueror's cause. If a mind control technique is not powerful enough to conquer the world all at once, it can still raise a powerful army for the villain to take over the rest of the world through brute force. People may be initially reluctant to fight back against mind-controlled innocents.
- Zombies! A massive army of the undead is a classic, best suited for the evil sorcerer, necromancer, or death-god type, but also suitable for some mad scientists. You can substitute skeletons, demons, or other occult creatures as well.

THE WEAK POINT

If the heroes do not get to prevent the invasion from happening in the first place, then the flaw in the villain's scheme is often some sort of weak point of the invasion force. The attacking animals are afraid of fire. Plant soldiers are vulnerable to herbicides. Aliens are allergic to Earth germs. Zombies are driven off by salt or religious icons. Flashbulbs free mind-controlled soldiers from the villain's thrall. Whatever it may be, the weak point is enough to potentially turn the tide of the invasion in favor of the defenders, provided the heroes figure it out and make use of it in time.

REALITY ALTERATION

For some villains, it is not enough to simple *conquer* the world; no, they have to *remake* the world in their own twisted image, as supreme ruler of a new reality! Like other world conquest schemes, reality-alteration scenarios tend to have two tells: one when the villain first puts the plan into effect, giving heroes a chance to *prevent* the changes to reality from coming about, the other after the change has occurred, giving heroes the opportunity to put things back the way they were (ideally without anyone else knowing anything has happened at all).

What are some of the ways villains seek to control and alter reality?

- Acquire a particularly powerful cosmic or magical device capable of reordering reality to fit the user's wishes. Examples include ancient vessels of magical power, mysterious cosmic artifacts, complex spells or rituals, alien "wishing machines," powerful genies or similar entities, and so forth.

WHOSE UNIVERSE IS IT ANYWAY?

A mind-bending approach to a reality alteration scenario is to confront the heroes (and the players) with the possibility that their "default" reality is not what it appears! What if, rather than getting a tell about a potential reality alteration, someone tries to warn the heroes that the world they have been adventuring in for the whole series is actually not what it is "supposed" to be? This gives the players a better sense of what it is like to have to doubt the reality that has been all you have known your entire life, which characters often must do in an alternate world scenario.

What will they do about it? Presumably, unless the series started out in a grim world ruled by villains, the heroes will wonder if the "real" world is that much better off than their own. Perhaps the whole thing is merely a ruse to get the heroes to trigger a change in reality to suit the villain's larger plans, or the "real" world is actually *worse* than the one in which the heroes now reside.

- Access a "higher" or "lower" level of reality in order to change the world as we know it. This might include divine or mystic dimensions, or other layers of the cosmos, such as the ability to "redraw" reality from the vantage point of the fourth, fifth, or higher dimensions.
- Travel in time and change history, rewriting the present into an alternate world where events follow a path set out by the villain. Classic examples include preventing archenemies from gaining their powers (thus ensuring there is no one to oppose the villain) or helping to make sure a previous scheme succeeds, giving the villain a second chance at success.
- Overthrow a higher cosmic entity (even a deity or the equivalent) and seize its power, using the being's might to recreate the cosmos according to the villain's wishes. A villain might even trick the heroes into weakening or defeating the chosen target!
- Destroy the universe (or even an omniverse of every possible universe) in order to trigger a cycle of re-creation the villain can direct. See the **Destruction** schemes for ways the villain might go about this.
- Create a virtual world—an extremely realistic computer simulation the villain controls, changing "reality" at a whim. Some villains find this an unsatisfying cheat, no equal for altering and ruling the real world, but others try to take their friends and foes there to enjoy the experience of absolute power, planning on trapping the heroes and returning to take over the real world!
- Shrink the whole world down and put it inside a bottle or other container (mystic gem, portable hole, etc.) so the villain literally "holds the world in the palm of his hand"! This often allows the villain to control the environment but, even if it doesn't, it is difficult to defy someone who can crush the world as easily as we might break a fragile glass bottle.

The reality-alteration effect itself is the very definition of a plot device. It requires no game stats, since it can literally do anything! The only chance the heroes have of preventing it is by stopping the villain from fulfilling the requirements of the effect, be it acquiring a particular device or changing a particular historical event. If they cannot do so, then they need to deal with the altered reality and find a way to undo it.

ALONE IN A WORLD NOT THEIR OWN

Typically, if a villain's reality alteration scheme succeeds, then the heroes are the only ones (apart from the villain) unaffected by the whole thing, or at least able to do something to put things right once again.

The heroes might be immune to the effect by virtue of being involved in the process in one way or another. For example, their proximity to the device or effect, or previous contact with it, could shield them in some way. If the villain uses time- or dimension-travel, and the heroes are in pursuit, then they remain "outside" of the changes that happen back home and find an altered world when they return. Their powers might protect them from the world-altering effect, or the villain could even deliberately exclude them, providing an opportunity to gloat over their defeat!

Sometimes the heroes are affected right alongside everything else, transformed into alternate versions of themselves, or even wiped out of existence altogether! In this case, the players take on the roles of the alternate characters, or even entirely new ones native to this reality, and they get a chance to find out what really happened and fix it.

Something informs the heroes that all is not right with the world. They might remember their previous existence, transformed physically but not mentally, for some of the previous reasons described. A particular trigger or circumstance could "awaken" them to an awareness of what has changed, especially for heroes with superhuman senses. Someone else from their original reality might find a way to get a message to them, or they could have even sent one to themselves!

RULING THE WORLD

Of course, there's the question of what to *do* with the world once you have it in the palm of your hand, or under your power-armored heel. This, more than anything, tends to trip would-be conquerors up, when they discover holding on to the world isn't the same as getting it in the first place.

In the event that a villain's scheme of conquest is successful, the plotter is faced with the prospect of actual rulership of his newly conquered realm. Depending on the nature of the series, you may be able to spin this

out into an ongoing plot. For example, a villain might manage to conquer and hold on to control of a city or country, forcing a stalemate with the heroes and world powers. Later adventures can deal with attempts to "dethrone" the villain and restore the legitimate government, and the repercussions thereof.

A villain might even manage to conquer the whole world, and then relinquish it once he finds out what the job entails! This works especially well for a scenario where everything returns to the way it was before the scheme even started, leaving no one the wiser that the villain had the world for a time, before giving it up.

DESTRUCTION

"Soon it will all be over... forever!"

The greatest threat a group of heroes can face is a foe willing to destroy a city, nation, world, or even the entire universe in pursuit of some mad scheme. The stakes could not possibly be higher, since a tremendous number of lives hang in the balance should the heroes fail. Some villains are willing to commit such acts of destruction to attain their goals (reasoning "there are always sacrifices") while others seek annihilation simply for its own sake, perhaps even intending to end their own existence in the bargain.

WHY DESTROY?

There are a number of reasons why villains choose to inflict destruction and devastation on the world. For some, it is merely a side effect of the attainment of their true goals.

POWER

Perhaps the most common motive for widespread destruction is the attainment of power. This is beyond just conquest (as described in the **Conquest** section); the villain doesn't use the *threat* of destruction to attain power, but the devastation itself in some fashion. Even if the world was willing to surrender, the villain might not consider it!

Here are some ways in which destruction might aid a villain in acquiring great power:

- The process of destroying the target unleashes tremendous forces, perhaps the equivalent of converting all matter in the affected area into usable energy the villain can then capture. This can range from part of a city to an entire universe!
- The villain gains the ability to re-create the destroyed target, shaped and re-ordered as he sees fit. A villain might plan to destroy the universe, for example, in order to re-form it in his own image.
- The destruction of the target is a sacrifice or offering to a higher being willing to grant the villain great power in exchange. Of course, there is a chance this offer is actually just a ploy to get a gullible mortal pawn to unleash destruction on the world, in which case the villain might be willing to help the heroes prevent it if they can reveal the truth.
- The devastation is merely a side effect of something else the villain is doing. For example, a foe might want to reach a powerful artifact at the center of the Earth, but the only way of doing so is to crack the world open like an egg. Similarly, a villain's ritual or process for attaining godlike power might have the secondary effect of unleashing enough energy to destroy the world. The villain doesn't care; he'll just create another world, if he feels like it.
- The true target is not an area, but a specific individual, group, or object the villain considers a threat. The rest is just "collateral damage." For example, it's not hard to imagine an alien empire devastating an entire world in order to eliminate a particular superhuman they consider dangerous, or a mystic villain seeking to destroy an ancient and powerful artifact, even knowing that doing so will unleash a cascade of destructive occult energies able to annihilate a continent.

SURVIVAL

Some villains destroy because they need to do so in order to survive. Indeed, it can be questionable whether or not such foes are "villains" at all. Often they are merely following their own instincts and nature. Others might have a choice in the matter and it is frequently the heroes' role to convince their destructive foe to take a different path. Then there are the truly selfish villains who destroy in order to extend their own lives beyond their natural means. Some examples of survival-based destroyers include:

- A cosmic entity that devours life force, planets, or even stars in order to feed. This galactic scourge might be just a massively powerful eating-machine with nothing resembling sentience, or a vastly intelligent and experienced being driven by impulses beyond its control.
- A villain sustaining his life by draining or sacrificing the lives of others. This might be part of a mystical pact or ritual, or a scientific process requiring massive amount of biological material or life-force "energy." The destroyer is essentially a vampire on a massive scale; perhaps the energy requirements grow exponentially as time goes on, and the villain is willing to kill all life in the world or even the universe if it means just one more day of existence for him.

- A being whose very presence is toxic in some fashion: radioactive, contagious, or inflicting some sort of madness. It might still have to go out among other creatures if only to stave off going mad from loneliness, knowing that all it touches or passes are doomed.
- Alien larvae that use worlds as "incubators" but then erupt from the planetary crust to consume everything on the surface, much like hungry grubs or caterpillars. Then they metamorphose into their space-faring adult form to seek out new planets and continue the cycle.
- A race or entity from outside our universe who feels threatened by our existence and believes destroying our universe is the only means to ensure we never pose a threat. Alternately, a dying universe might seek to revive or restore itself by draining or taking over ours.
- A villain imprisoned in such a fashion that escape requires destruction on a massive scale. This might be a sacrifice of sorts to re-empower the villain (particularly suitable for exiled gods of war or death), or the process of breaking the prison could do tremendous damage to the world or even the fabric of reality.

NIHILISM

For the nihilist, destruction is its own reward. A nihilistic villain seeks to destroy in order to make an offering to the gods or concepts of death, to create perfect order and peace by ending all life, or to satisfy the urge to prove that all existence is ultimately meaningless.

Nihilistic villains are some of the most dangerous because total destruction *is* their goal rather than just being a means to an end. Heroes might be able to talk power-mad or survival-driven foes out of their schemes, or find other options, but it is difficult to convince a true nihilist otherwise.

Nihilists are also often tremendously powerful, in order to carry out their plans, although that does not have to be the case. A nihilistic villain could be a mad (but otherwise human) genius who has created some type of doomsday weapon, for example.

SUICIDE

The villain seeks to end his own existence and taking a lot of others with him (perhaps even all of creation) is just a side effect or a fringe benefit, depending on how you look at it. Many nihilists (previously) are also suicidal, the final stage of their work being to end their own lives once they have destroyed everything else. Other suicidal villains don't particularly care whether or not anyone else dies, but they won't be dissuaded by the possibility that they will destroy entire civilizations.

Suicidal destroyers are, unfortunately, usually quite tough, since if it were easy to disable or kill them, they would have already managed it on their own. Some are hell-bent on taking a lot of others with them and going out in a blaze of glory, in which case they may not have any special protection. However, the typical suicidal villain is looking for a way to die, and it usually involves something big enough to kill everyone else, too. Examples include immortal or regenerating characters tired of continually living, imprisoned and exiled gods seeking oblivion, and cosmic beings tied to the very existence of the universe, who can only "die" if *everything* comes to an end.

THE THREAT

Once you know why the villain wants to destroy, the next question is: how? See the **Threat** and **Doomsday Device** sections of the **Conquest** scheme for various ideas on how a villain might attempt to destroy the world. The difference here is the bad guy is not just threatening, but fully intends on following through and actually carrying out the threat!

TEST RUN

Fortunately for the world, villains rarely ever come up with a doomsday weapon in secret and then throw the switch, making the first anyone learns of it the moment when the world ends. Instead, complex destructive plots usually involve steps that give the authorities and heroes some warning of what is coming. These include acquiring the doomsday method itself, any necessary components, and potentially testing it to make certain it will work when it is supposed to.

If the villain does not invent the threat, then it is most likely stolen, the first potential clue for the heroes. If a scientist known for his work with artificial singularities suddenly goes missing, for example, or the Department of Defense loses top-secret research on an alien super-weapon, the heroes know something bad is about to happen and can start investigating. They might even be on-hand when the villain steals the first stage of the threat, telling them exactly who is behind it!

Once the villain has the concept or plan for the threat, then comes the means of building or activating it. That could require getting particular parts, equipment, or exotic supplies. Again, when a series of thefts adds up to the equipment needed to build a bomb capable of turning reality inside-out, or the components of a ritual to throw open the gate to the Elder Gods, the heroes have a good idea of what's coming and can begin taking steps. Perhaps they figure out the next link in the chain and set a trap, or use the opportunity to track the villain back to his lair and find any hostages along with the rest of the stolen goods.

Finally, once the villain has the means, there may be a need to test the method, especially if it has never been used before. So, for example, if the villain's doomsday device is supposed to shift the entire world into a nightmarish other-dimension, the bad guy might try it out first on a smaller section of real estate—the heroes' headquarters, for example. The test is an opportunity to show off to the players the very real nature of the threat and what it could do on a larger scale, while also giving them another challenge. Now the good guys have to deal with a minor disaster (like finding their way back to Earth) and still stop the villain in time.

DOOMSDAY

Eventually, it comes to the moment of truth: the villain is ready to bring about terrible destruction and the heroes are the only ones who can prevent it.

Unless you are willing to allowing for the possibility that the villain *will* actually destroy things, the best way of handling this final confrontation is to make thing difficult for the heroes, but hand out lots of hero points as you do so, giving the players opportunities to spend them in last-ditch efforts to put a stop to the villain's plans. Place roadblocks in their way and encourage them to use extra effort, inspiration, and the other options hero points provide to find ways around them. This helps make for a more exciting conclusion than just showing up and knocking the villain for a loop.

Often, villains are hoist on the petard of their own doomsday plans: when the heroes stop the doomsday device it turns its destructive impulses inward, for example, or the villain loses control of whatever terrible forces he has unleashed when the heroes disrupt his concentration. This provides a good opportunity for a mysterious death as the bad guy plunges into the heart of the Annihilation Reactor, or is seemingly dragged off into some hellish netherworld.

KIDNAPPING

"There's no escape for you now!"

Rescuing someone held captive by a supervillain can be one of the greatest challenges that heroes face. Dealing with danger comes with the superhero game, but things are different when there are potentially innocent victims caught in the crossfire. Kidnap victims often have no superhuman powers to protect them, and heroes pledged to keep them safe sacrifice a certain amount of leverage. They must proceed cautiously, and their usual method of just bursting through a wall could get the victim killed. This becomes even more potent when the villain abducts someone personally important to one or more of the heroes; loved ones have a tendency to end up captured and held for ransom or used as bargaining chips.

The primary things to consider in a kidnapping scheme are: who gets abducted, why, how, and what (if anything) does the kidnapper want in exchange for their safe return?

THE MOTIVE

The reason for the kidnapping comes first, since it tends to dictate the choice of target. There are a number of reasons why a villain would seek to kidnap someone:

RANSOM

The first, and most common, reason for kidnapping is to use the victim as a bargaining tool in order to get something. This might be money, information, material resources, or even another, less accessible, target willing to surrender or trade places with the hostage. See **The Ransom** section for details on these various options.

Ransom targets are chosen for their value to the party with whom the kidnapper wishes to negotiate. The loved ones of notable wealthy individuals are potential targets for financial ransoms, for example. Sometimes the ransom people expect is not the one the villain is seeking; for example, a CEO's daughter is seemingly kidnapped for monetary ransom, when the kidnapper is actually looking for top-secret access to the executive's hidden files on an illegal research project.

RESOURCES

Sometime the kidnapper is looking to negotiate a ransom directly with the target of the abduction. This can be as simple as demanding the electronic transfer of funds or a more involved interrogation to find out something the victim knows, such as a password, vital piece of technical information, or the location of a stolen item, for example. The target is sometimes not an innocent in the whole matter, such as when the hero is unaware the victim stole something from the villain, leading to the kidnapping.

Kidnap victims who give up what the abductor wants usually serve no further purpose, meaning the villain might let them go or seek to eliminate them. Often, the kidnapper keeps the target around to ensure the information acquired was accurate or in case they are needed further to attain the villain's ultimate goal, giving the heroes a bit more time.

REVENGE

The villain has a grudge or vendetta and the abduction is the first step toward revenge. In this case, the target is either also the focus of the kidnapper's vengeance, or simply a means to an end. So, for example, a villain might abduct the man he blames for ruining his life, or he may kidnap one or more of that man's loved ones, intending to make him suffer by taking out his anger on them.

The exact nature of the kidnapper's revenge can be as simple as killing the victim or as elaborate as the villain's imagination (and that of the GM) can dream up. Revenge schemes tend toward the elaborate, both because it satisfies the villain's need for the victim to suffer and because it's more dramatically interesting, providing the heroes with time to actually do something about it.

REVELATION

The last sort of catchall category for kidnapping schemes is for those where the villain wants the victim(s) to learn or witness something. So a super-criminal might kidnap a woman only to reveal that he is actually her father, for example, or an obsessed stalker might kidnap the object of his "affection" in hopes of winning her over. This type of kidnapping is often the culmination of a subplot involving the relationship between the villain and a hero, where the hero learns what is really going on.

If and when the revelation does not go as the villain planned, this type of kidnapping can turn into another type. Thus the spurned abductor decides to get revenge by placing the former object of his affection in a death-trap, or to hold a victim for ransom after revealing a terrible truth, for the double-impact of returning the target, but not entirely "unharmed."

THE VICTIM

The victim of a kidnapping depends a great deal on the type of scheme: someone wealthy and connected for a ransom, someone involved with the kidnapper in some fashion for revenge or revelation. Chances are good the heroes will interact with the victim at least somewhat if they are successful, so give some thought to whom it is.

For added involvement, the kidnap victim can be someone connected to the heroes, or even a friend-of-a-friend, rather than a complete stranger. An abduction is that much more forceful if the heroes have a personal stake in finding the victim safe and sound. Sometimes the characters do not discover this connection until *after* the crime has occurred; for example, a third party might reveal the kidnap victim is a hero's long-lost sibling in order to encourage the good guys to help, or simply out of concern that the hero know the truth before it is too late.

MISTAKEN IDENTITY

A common element of kidnappings in the comics is a case of mistaken identity; the villain abducts the wrong person based on faulty information. It may be the person taken bears a startling resemblance to the intended victim, or the kidnapper was misinformed in some fashion. Perhaps a villain thinks he has stumbled upon a hero's secret identity and kidnaps that target; imagine the hero's surprise when she learns the villain thinks he is holding her hostage, or the villain's shock when the hero shows up for real!

Mistaken identity often involves heroes in the kidnapping because one of their supporting cast gets targeted, perhaps even the hero's civilian identity. This can turn an otherwise routine case for the police into something that gets superhuman attention.

SUPERHUMAN VICTIMS

In a typical *M&M* setting, a kidnap victim may be a fellow superhuman, particularly a well-known hero, or even

KIDNAPPING AND SECRET IDENTITIES

A common twist in the comics is for a hero's secret identity to become the target in a kidnapping attempt, often one aimed at the hero! This is particularly common if the secret identity is known to be a "friend" or person of importance to the heroic identity. Kidnappers might believe they are abducting a costumed crime-fighter's best friend, employer, or relative without knowing they have in fact captured the hero himself! Such schemes either end up succeeding due to blind luck, the hero's inability to take action without exposing his secret, or a hero's willingness to play along with the scheme in order to find out what is really going on and prevent anyone else from being endangered. After all, if the initial attempt fails, the kidnappers might go after one of the hero's other friends or loved ones.

The primary conflict comes in dealing with the kidnappers without exposing the hero's secret. There may also be some real danger, if the hero isn't invulnerable or the kidnappers have weapons capable of harming him. For example, a powered-armor heroine abducted in her secret identity is without the benefits of her suit, and as vulnerable as any other ordinary person. Even a hero with special protection has to be careful, lest the criminals discover it and put two and two together.

Teammates can assist in the rescue operation as well as covering for the captured hero's absence, perhaps using disguise, shape-changing, illusions, or even clever computer and audio/video tricks. An even more involved version can have multiple heroes captured in their secret identities, which gets even trickier if they are kept secret from each other!

a villain! A common plot device is to set up a situation wherein non-player character heroes are abducted and the player characters have to come to their rescue. It's a good way to introduce new heroes in a setting with established good guys, demonstrating to the established crime-fighters that the newcomers have what it takes to get the job done.

In a somewhat more gritty setting, it's also a way of thinning the ranks of the costumed hero set at the same time. The player characters might not be able to save the victims, only avenge them, or the kidnapped heroes may decide it is time to hang up their capes and cowls and turn things over to the new kids, especially if the abduction involved terrible revelations that have shaken their conviction in their heroic calling.

Capturing and holding a super-powered victim tends to require special preparation and resources. The kidnapper may need to overcome certain protective powers (including superhuman senses that might warn of an attack) and prevent the target from using powers to escape or fight back. The simplest measure is to keep a captured victim unconscious using drugs or similar measures, although it leaves the villain without an audience for taunts and rants, and certainly does not work for a revelatory kidnapping. Other abductors may have power-nullifying countermeasures or knowledge of the target's weaknesses, if any.

THE ABDUCTION

The actual capture of the victim often takes place before the heroes are even alerted to the crime. Indeed, it is the kidnapping itself that gets the crime-fighters involved. So they learn about it after the fact, meaning you should consider how the villain did it and what the heroes can find out from witnesses, examination of available evidence, and so forth. This sets up an investigative phase where the heroes' main job is to figure out who the kidnapper is, their motivation, and where the victim is being held in order to stage a rescue.

Occasionally, the heroes are around when the kidnapping occurs, although they may or may not have much chance to prevent it, depending on the nature of the scenario. If you intend to focus on the good guys rescuing the victim, then having the heroes present when the crime happens is primarily a reason to hand them clues directly and award the players hero points when the villain inevitably escapes with the victim. If the heroes can prevent the abduction initially, then the adventure becomes about safeguarding the victim against another attempt while tracking down the villain (or perhaps using the target as bait and setting a trap).

THE RANSOM

Kidnappers demand a variety of things as ransom for the return of their target(s)—assuming the abduction of the target was motivated by a desire for ransom of some kind, and not an end unto itself (as with the revenge and revelation types).

CASH

The simplest and most straightforward ransom is cash, and lots of it. The kidnapper may demand a particular kind of currency, delivered in a particular way, like the stereotypical "small, unmarked bills" left at a drop point. Others may demand more exotic forms of payment, ranging from electronic credit transfers to shares of common stock, bearer bonds, or even valuable items.

A demand for a monetary ransom may turn out to be a cover for some other goal, such as luring the person meant to deliver the ransom into a trap, or acquiring a valuable piece of jewelry that is also a powerful magical artifact or part of some larger scheme.

A common twist on the monetary ransom is for the kidnapper and the "victim" to turn out to be secretly working together to scam a large sum of money out of a rich relative or other associate. They then either disappear together, or the "victim" is returned home, only to vanish a short while later. This arrangement often ends in a double-cross of some sort to further complicate matters.

INFORMATION

Rather than mere cash, the kidnapper may demand information in exchange for the victim's safe return. In the right hands, passcodes and similar secrets can be more valuable than any portable sum of money. Obsessed villains might demand a heroic foe unmask in front of them, or on nationwide live television, for that matter. They can ask for the secret of a hero's powers, her closely guarded weakness, nuclear launch codes, the formula for Coca-Cola ... nearly anything that is potentially valuable to someone.

OBJECT

The ransom can be something the kidnapper wants other than money or information, from a personal keepsake to the Eiffel Tower, assuming the victim's friends and family are in a position to provide it. The value of the desired object might be obvious to everyone, or just to a select few—perhaps only the villain. As with cash, the apparent value might also be a blind for some other purpose. A sorcerer demanding a rare Indian ruby could have plans to use it as a component in an arcane ritual rather than just keeping it or selling it on the black market.

ANOTHER VICTIM

A common villain trick in the comics is to kidnap someone important to a hero in order to lure him into a trap or situation of the villain's choosing. The victim is merely bait, although the villain won't necessarily let a useful bargaining chip go while dealing with the hero. Sometimes the kidnapper tries to kill both hero and victim! Other villains claim more of a sense of "fair play," releasing the "pawn" in their scheme in order to capture the more important piece.

A cunning villain does not even have to actually abduct someone. The bad guy could simply fake the abduction of someone the hero cares about. Perhaps the supporting cast member is incommunicado and the villain uses a doctored video or an android simulacrum. After the hero has rushed to the rescue, the "victim" turns up safe and sound, wondering what's happening!

THE DROP

The planned delivery of the ransom is often a key dramatic moment in a kidnapping scenario. The heroes may seize upon it as their chance to get at the villain, or at least a lead to track the victim's location. The abductor may even insist that a hero deliver the ransom for some reason, from a simple power trip to luring the hero into a trap.

The typical ransom drop is placed in a predetermined place, from a trash bin to a train station locker, allowing the kidnapper or his associates to retrieve it later. The kidnapper may require a drop-off that moves in some fashion, such as a subway train car, dump truck, delivery van, or the like, allowing for a pick-up anywhere along its route and making pursuit more difficult. Of course, this need is lessened if the villain has some means of appearing and disappearing at will, making the drop perhaps the only shot the heroes will get at him. A common trick is to place a bug or tracer in or on the ransom, using it to track the villain back to his lair and, hopefully, the victim.

EXTORTION

"Unless you meet my demands, the city will pay a* terrible *price!"

Extortion, using force or leverage to demand something from a victim, is actually a very common crime, but much of what might be called extortion is covered by other sections of this chapter, particularly conquest, kidnapping, and theft. In this section, "extortion" is focused on using some kind of threat other than kidnapping to get something the villain wants from a victim. It may involve an ongoing relationship where the villain "squeezes" the target, using threats to ensure compliance. The longer it goes on and the deeper the victim gets, the more difficult it can be to get out from under the extortionist's influence.

An extortion scheme has two main elements: what the villain wants and the threats used to get it from the victim(s). Let's look at the threats first.

THREATS

The key things about an extortion threat are believability and degree of discretion. In the first case, the threat offered by the extortionist has to be credible. If the target does not feel threatened, or thinks the villain may be bluffing, then there's less of a tendency to go along with the demands. This is why villains often demonstrate their threat in advance to prove they are in earnest and capable of doing what they claim. So a villain looking to extort money out of a city with the threat of a powerful weapon, for example, may use the weapon on a smaller target where everyone can see it, then send demands to City Hall.

Related to and often restraining believability is discretion. Sometimes the villain wants to avoid notice, so no one else finds out about the extortion. This means more of a subtle threat that can be conveyed to the target behind the scenes without anyone else finding out. Villains going for this sort of extortion tend toward blackmail; after all, if the information they have gets out, it's useless in terms of exerting influence over the target, so both sides have an interest in keeping things quiet.

DEATH AND DESTRUCTION

Overt threats tend to take the form of super-powered terrorism, with villains promising death and destruction (often on a massive scale) if their demands are not met. The **Threat** section of the **Conquest** scheme offers a wide range of potential threats also usable for extortion. Rather than demanding outright surrender, the villain may require money or some other ransom to stave off the threat (see **Demands**, following).

Other threats are devastating, but somewhat less destructive. For example, a villain with transmutation abilities might threaten to flood the world markets with huge amounts of gold or other precious metals or commodities, essentially reducing the value of such things to almost nothing overnight. This could have a devastating impact on global economies and serve as a sufficient threat to extort cooperation from governments and businesses. Similarly, a villain could threaten to release certain national secrets, or disrupt other important infrastructure, ranging from blacking out global radio or satellite communications to crashing the entire Internet. Perhaps the villain can influence weather patterns enough to cause all kinds of trouble, or can incite machines to "revolt" against humanity.

BLACKMAIL

Blackmail threats tend to be subtle, since much of the threat is contained in even knowing the potential for blackmail exists. Essentially, the villain knows (and is able to prove) something someone would prefer to keep secret, and threatens to release that information if demands are not met.

The blackmail information can range from merely embarrassing (but with serious personal consequences, such as evidence of an affair or indiscretion) to devastating, such as proof of serious crimes. For example, a villain may learn that a certain pillar of the business community in fact earned much of his wealth through criminal means, and threatens to expose the truth unless the tycoon agrees to a big payoff.

Blackmail scenarios are often morally ambiguous, since they can put the heroes in the position of defending one criminal from another. Frequently the information the villain threatens to reveal is personal and private. It might be a youthful indiscretion, or a mistake the victim has long since repented that has come back to haunt them.

A variation on the blackmail scenario is for a villain to blackmail one or more of the heroes! The most common information is knowledge of a hero's secret identity, which a villain can potentially auction off to the highest bidder, unless a hero is willing to pay hush money or otherwise meet the blackmailer's demands to keep quiet. An extortionist might learn of other skeletons in a hero's closet, ranging from a secret criminal past to knowledge about the hero's true origins, such as being related to a notorious villain. How the heroes deal with the threat of blackmail can be a major turning point and a test of their convictions. In the comics, would-be blackmailers often end up either dead or robbed of their memories, or at least of whatever proof they might have, rendering their threat harmless. Keep in mind, however, that such scenarios have the potential to significantly alter a character's life and career.

DEMANDS

Once the threat is established, there's the matter of what the extortionist wants in exchange for holding off. Are the victims willing to meet the villain's demands and, if so, for how long? Or will they choose to call the extortionist's bluff, hoping the villain really is bluffing and won't carry out the threat? The range of demands varies depending on the extortionist's goals.

CASH

The most common demand is for cold, hard cash, usually as much of it as the extortionist thinks the victim is willing and able to hand over. As with the **Ransom** discussed for **Kidnapping** schemes, different villains require different kinds of currency, from small bills to bearer bonds or electronic transfers, handed over in various ways.

Commonly, extortionists (especially blackmailers) tend to get greedy. Once they get an initial cash payment, they are tempted to milk the scheme—and the victim—for all they can. So one payment may turn into several, slowly bleeding the victim dry. The criminal may even demand a "payment plan" up-front, expecting regular sums of money to stave off the threat. A common motive for murder is to eliminate an extortionist and put an end to their demands, while also ending the threat (at least until somebody else finds out about it).

OBJECTS

Rather than money, an extortionist may be interested in something else, usually a particular rare or hard-to-get item or piece of information. Thus a villain might extort the owner of a particular corporation to acquire some new piece of technology or a component in one of the villain's other schemes. An arch-foe could threaten the city with destruction in an effort to force a hero to unmask in public, or even just admit responsibility for the actions that led to the villain's vendetta.

Heroes may try and stage a fake hand-off of a demand in this case to draw the villain out, or at least buy them enough time to find the extortionist and nullify the threat. So passing off a fake for the item the mad scientist needs to complete his doomsday device may not only offer the good guys a chance at capturing him, but can also thwart his long-term plans... if the villain doesn't catch the switch right away.

FAVORS

Lastly, the extortionist may ask for certain favors or services from the victim. This is generally limited to blackmail

threats, wherein the blackmailer initially asks for something fairly innocuous. Once the victim is committed, of course, each additional favor digs the hole deeper, as they only give the criminal more material with which to blackmail the victim, until eventually the villain can demand almost anything.

A villain such as the Crime Lord (see page 82) may have an extensive network of blackmail and extortion, providing leverage throughout a city's government and judicial system. This is part of what makes the villain so dangerous, and one of the prime reasons why only an incorruptible and unknown (i.e., masked and mysterious) vigilante working outside the system can take that villain down.

MURDER

"Some might call this justice... I think of it as fun."

Outright killings are often more of a threat in the comics than an actual reality, although in some Iron Age and modern comics the body counts can be quite high. Still, murder (or, at least, *attempted* murder) is a common crime, and it is up to the heroes to ensure it remains just attempted rather than successful.

THE MOTIVE

Why does the villain want to kill someone? The motive is the driving force behind the scheme, so it is the first thing to consider. People are willing to kill for any number of reasons, but the assumption for a murder scheme is a *premeditated* crime, one the heroes can potentially thwart, which limits the range of motives somewhat.

REVENGE

One of the most common motives for murder is revenge: the villain feels wronged by the target and intends to exact vengeance. The good thing from the heroes' perspective is that a quick and unexpected death is not usually enough to satisfy revenge-obsessed villains. No, the victim has to know who is responsible and why. This means either a series of threats or near-misses intended to instill terror in the victim, along with taunting threats to make clear who is responsible, or else a kidnapping scheme (see **Kidnapping**) that culminates in the death of the victim, once the villain has had time to rant and rave and perhaps torment the target before finally finishing the deed.

Sometimes a villain's revenge killing may almost be justified, such as a monster created by callous scientific experimentation going after the scientists or the management-

types responsible. Still, heroes dedicated to the idea that killing is wrong should look to prevent the crime and convince the attacker not to sink to the level of the real criminals. There is a fine line between "justice" and "revenge," especially in the world of masked vigilantes, and a hero who crosses that line may become a fugitive from the law for executing criminals rather than bringing them to justice (a version of the Assassin or Martial Artist archetypes as vigilantes).

JUST BUSINESS

Murder-for-hire is a lucrative job for villains with the right abilities, and heroes may face off against mercenaries and assassins. They range from non-powered but highly skilled (and equipped) professionals such as the Assassin archetype (see page 76) to superhumans willing to use their powers to make a literal killing as mercenaries. Usually the good guys are tipped off by either a failed first attempt at a hit or the first in a series of assassinations of related targets. They might also learn about a known killer coming into their territory from underworld or police contacts and take the proactive step of trying to find the villain before anyone dies.

Professional killers generally do not have it in for the heroes unless they happen to get in the way of the job. Then all bets are off, unless the killer has a particular honor code about not taking out "bystanders" or simply "not doing freebies," letting the good guys live because nobody is *paying* to have them killed!

In fact, sometimes the hired killer is gunning for the heroes themselves. Master villains often hire assassins to remove heroic obstacles to their plans, and the first the heroes may learn of a villain's scheme is when someone takes a shot at them. Capturing and interrogating the assassin can provide clues to kick off the investigation and move the plot along.

MAKING AN EXAMPLE

Criminals use murder as a means of terrorizing others and keeping them in line by making an example of someone. The classic Silver Age master villain casually kills underlings who dare to question his judgment as an example to the others, while criminal syndicates murder those who refuse to toe the line or choose to defy them.

Knowing this, a potentially defiant underling or target may seek out a group of known superheroes for protection from the villain's inevitable wrath. Consider the agent of a criminal organization, willing to spill all that he knows in exchange for protection from the agency's assassins, or the target of an extortion racket willing to testify in court, provided the heroes can keep him alive long enough to do so.

COVERING TRACKS

A victim may be marked for death for knowing too much, information that could potentially damage the killer's future plans. For example, some victims of extortion schemes (see **Extortion**) try to kill the blackmailer to put an end to the threat. Villains often kill to cover their tracks, eliminating witnesses to their crimes, or killing the one expert who could figure out their scheme before it is too late, and in so doing triggering an investigation that brings the heroes right to their doors.

This motive is the one most likely to end up with the good guys investigating a murder rather than trying to prevent one, but a potential target who knows of the danger may come looking to trade information for heroic protection. Sometimes this ends with the heroes as witnesses to the murder, with the victim managing to gasp out one final clue. In other cases, the good guys can protect the target long enough to make use of the information and take down the villain.

THE PROTECTION

The primary obstacle between the killer and the target is often the heroes, but the villain's plans must take into account any other protection the target might have. High-profile types such as government officials, executives, and celebrities often have hired bodyguards or the direct protection of law enforcement. Witnesses to crimes and criminals willing to enter protective custody also have police protection, or even that of a federal agency.

Many of the same measures discussed under **The Security** in the **Theft** scheme are also used to protect people, although security measures also decrease the ability of someone to move about freely and without notice.

A target's protection may prove sufficient to thwart the initial attempt, but so narrowly that the heroes get called in to help deal with the problem before the killer tries again.

THE EXECUTION

When it comes down to exactly how the killing will be carried out, the answer is usually some sort of direct confrontation, although not necessarily between the person who orders the killing and the victim. Proxies are often used, from hired assassins to killer robots, but the key is the attempted killing is something the heroes can prevent through quick and decisive action. Comic book murders rarely use exotic poisons, for example, unless the heroes are likely to have the means of preventing the poisoning or saving the victim. A method that leads to a big fight generally works better than one that does not.

As with many things, the villain's motif may dictate the preferred method of execution. A professional assassin might use a sniper rifle from a distant rooftop, setting up a shot with great precision; a hero notices the targeting laser at the last instant and pushes the victim out of the way, or leaps in the path of the bullet. Conversely, a criminal obsessed with chess might send the victim a booby-trapped chess set or even go for an elaborate deathtrap where the victim is forced to play a live game of chess against murderous robot "pieces" that "take" other pieces in the game by smashing or destroying them!

As discussed under **Motive**, villains out for revenge are not likely to be satisfied with quick and clean killings. They want the opportunity to confront the victims, perhaps toy with them, draw out their torment. The same is also true of many serial-killer types, who often go for particular victim profiles and have complex rituals for carrying out their crimes. In terms of plot, these proclivities give the heroes the opportunity to locate the victim and arrive just in the nick of time to prevent the villain from following through.

THEFT

"Hello there, my pretties..."

Some villains do not want power, revenge, or attention ... they simply want *things,* and they are willing to steal them. Indeed, theft may be the only way of getting certain rarities, and a lot of super-criminals simply find it easier to use their abilities to steal rather than for honest work.

In other cases, theft is merely a means to an end for villains, providing them with either needed cash or various resources to further their other schemes. These thefts may tip off the authorities—and the heroes—about the villain's plans, giving them a chance to investigate and do something before it is too late.

The primary elements of a theft scheme are the target, what is between it and the thief (the security), and dealing with the goods after they have been stolen.

THE TARGET

The target of a theft may be something obviously valuable, such as cash, or an item whose value is known only to the thief (and, perhaps, its owner). Some targets are common but well protected, others rare.

CASH

Cold, hard cash is still a thief's favorite target, although it is more difficult than every for modern thieves to get away with large amounts of paper currency and still be able to spend it. Countermeasures such as tracking serial numbers, dye packs to permanently stain bills, ultraviolet imprints, and so forth make it easier to render cash both traceable and useless to the thief.

On the other hand, things like automatic teller machines (ATMs) can make stealing small amounts of cash relatively easy, especially for super-powered villains able to simply rip an ATM out of a wall or lift a freestanding one and carry it away! The crook can then simply crack open the case and pull out the cash at leisure.

Thieves looking for cash tend to target places and people with a lot of it: banks, major retailers, armored cars, and so forth. There is also the modern option of stealing cash electronically, although this is a harder crime for superheroes to thwart, unless they have computer- or electronic-related powers (for a confrontation with the thief in cyberspace, for example), or they can track the villain back to his lair.

VALUABLES

"Valuables" is a catch-all for things with a significant monetary value that are not usable as cash, ranging from jewelry and precious metals to antiques, electronics, and more. The items' value might be more historic or sentimental than strictly material; rare valuables are more difficult to sell, but also tend to have wealthier buyers interested in acquiring them.

This category can also include commodities, such as crude oil or other materials transported and sold in bulk. They're rarely the targets of supervillain attacks, however, unless the villain in question is leading a band of modern pirates or is otherwise interested in such resources (say, a villain in need of raw materials to build a new nation-state).

THEMED THEFTS

One way of differentiating thieves in an *M&M* series, especially one with a Silver Age flavor, is to give them a strong *modus operandi* and a tendency toward "themed" crimes. So, rather than just stealing anything of value, for example, the Luna Moth always goes for items of feminine luxury, like jewelry, rare perfumes, furs, and high fashion, while the Trawler hunts the ocean floor for shipwrecks, perhaps even causing one or two to provide opportunities for "salvage." Doc Holiday steals whatever is most prominent on the calendar—rare and priceless ornaments for Christmas, national treasures on Independence Day, and so forth—while Scrounge is only interested in the gadgets and devices of other costumed types.

Themed thefts provide villains with a degree of character and style, and they also help out the heroes, who may see a particular crime and immediately think of the villain behind it. They make the bad guys who just go after mere cash seem that much more pedestrian. Themed thefts also provide the occasional opportunity to play against expectations, having one villain use another's M.O. as a frame-up or to throw the heroes off-track. Don't do this too often, however, or you'll make the themes less useful overall.

INFORMATION

Information has always been a valuable commodity, from personal and state secrets to industrial espionage. In the modern world, information can be both easier to secure and simpler to steal and transport than ever. "Stealing" information generally means something recorded, from a notebook to a compact disc or computer hard drive. Digital information might also be stolen over the Internet, although security generally takes that possibility into account, often isolating the information offline and making it inaccessible in that way.

The value of the information depends a great deal on what it is. Personal information might be used for blackmail, especially if it is embarrassing or incriminating. Alternatively, it could be exploited for identity theft, used to acquire other valuables or information, such as emptying someone's bank account, or gaining access to a secure vault. Political or technical information may be valuable in its own right to certain parties, particularly competing nations and businesses.

HIGH TECHNOLOGY

Closely related to the theft of information is that of high technology, typically one-of-a-kind prototypes or production models. This may be instead of or in addition to stealing the plans and technical specifications of the technology. Just about any high-tech invention found in a comic book super-science lab is a potential target. If a scientist invents a matter-duplicating ray as a way of ending world hunger or economies based on scarcity, you can be sure a villain will see it as the key to endless personal wealth or power. The same applies to technology for invisibility, telepathy, memory alteration, teleportation, and just about every other well-intentioned scientific project.

THEFT AS PRELUDE

Often, a theft is merely the first step in a villain's larger scheme, and the first clue the heroes get of something afoot. Therefore, the theft often takes place *before* the start of the adventure. The good guys get called in or otherwise hear about the crime, and the investigation begins.

One offbeat way of staging this is to run a "prelude" scene wherein the players take the roles of security guards, bystanders, or other people who witness the theft. Then play out the crime, perhaps with one or more "citizen heroes" trying to stop the thieves. If the players do a good job, in spite of certain defeat, award them each a hero point, starting the good guys off with a slight advantage. You can also more easily skip over the police recap of what happened, since the players were "there" to see for themselves.

You can do the same sort of prelude and include one or more of the heroes, who might be present in their secret identities. Circumstances prevent them from stopping the crime, but they learn enough to tell their teammates where to start looking and get a jump on the thieves' next target.

In addition to prototypes, thieves may be interested in technological *components,* useful for creating said prototypes, and furthering a villain's own schemes. So a mad scientist who comes up with a design for an anti-gravity device may need certain items to actually build it, and have no choice but to steal them. The same goes for a great many villainous inventions, and the theft of the technology helps to clue heroes in on what the bad guy is planning.

THE SECURITY

Sometimes there's next to nothing standing between the villain and the target, in which case the theft is a simple matter of actually taking it. Most of the time, however, there is some kind of security in place to prevent theft, something the villain needs to get around.

Barring the use of various powers, the primary trait for getting past security measures is the Technology skill (*M&M Hero's Handbook,* page 75) and professional thieves will have as much training with it as reasonably possible. As a general guideline, someone with a +10 skill modifier can expect to overcome most common locks and simple alarms, a +20 modifier makes a character a major professional thief, while a +30 modifier is sufficient to beat virtually any security system in the world, with enough planning and preparation.

LOCKS

Locking systems restrict access, from keeping doors and windows closed to sealing display cabinets or shutting entire vaults and their contents. They include not only the latches on doors, windows, and other means of entering or leaving a building, but also locks on safes, vaults, and even containers holding items.

While older locks may still be simple mechanical tumblers or pin designs, more modern locks are often electronic and may include "keys" such as fingerprint, palm-print, and retinal scanners, along with voice identification and similar measures. A clever thief may be able to fake the information needed to open the lock (especially if the thief is a shapeshifter or illusionist) without having to overcome it through other means.

Some locks may present particularly difficult challenges, such as a magical seal only certain individuals can open, or a sophisticated encryption key with a complex mathematical formula. In some cases, it might be necessary for the thief to steal the *key* before being able to stage the theft of whatever is protected by the lock! Alternately, a frustrated thief might come after the key after discovering no other way around it.

ALARMS

Alarms alert guards, owners, and others of a potential theft. They are triggered by something, ranging from simple electrical circuits broken by opening doors or windows to sophisticated sensors capable of facial recognition or picking up human body heat, for example. If an

alarm is triggered, it sets off a predetermined alert, ranging from flashing lights and loud klaxons to a silent alarm flashing on a monitoring panel elsewhere.

In game terms, alarms have a trigger, often based around a passive Perception score for a sensor connected to the alarm. For example, an alarm may go off in a door is opened while it is active. Alternately, an alarm may have a computer-controlled camera, with a routine Perception check of 18, providing a DC for checks such as Stealth to avoid detection.

Attempts to disarm alarms use the guidelines given for the Technology skill. In some cases, a failed attempt to disable an alarm also sets it off. For others, the tampering is only detected if the alarm itself is monitored.

Some thieves may be so brazen as to set off an alarm deliberately once the theft is complete, in order to taunt the guards or owners, perhaps even to bring witnesses running just in time to see the thief escape. In other cases, the first "alarm" raised is when someone notices the theft!

SENSORS

Sensors provide information about the environment around a protected object or area. Unlike alarms, sensors are not usually triggered by anything, but are on all the time. They may be monitored by computer or by a living operator, with orders to trigger an alarm or take some other action if an intruder or other sensor information is detected.

The primary problems sensors create for thieves are acting as a kind of alarm (previously), where someone monitoring the sensor may discover the theft in progress, and capturing information about the thief and the theft that investigators may use after the fact to track down the missing item(s) and whomever took them. The latter is not so much of a concern if the thief *wants* everyone to know who did it. If not, then the sensors must be disabled, but in such a way that it does not raise suspicions. The Concealment power comes in very useful for a thief in these situations, and a silent, invisible intruder can get away with a great deal without fear of detection.

GUARDS

Guards serve as sentries to both keep watch (or monitor the sensors and alarms that do) and to take action to stop and capture thieves. In a superhero setting, guards do not have to be ordinary humans, but can be almost anything—robots, demons, animated statues, trained animals, or the like—that suits the owner's proclivities and resources. Still, the most common guards will be ordinary hired humans. See the **Minion Archetypes** in **Chapter 3** for some useful game information and ideas on who (or what) might be standing guard.

THE HEIST

Actually committing the theft can involve one of a number of different approaches, depending on the circumstances and the villain. The major ones are a break-in, a hold-up, or trying to take the target as it is moved from one place to another (en route). Any of these approaches might be done subtly or using brute force.

CLASSIC THEFTS

The following are some classic comic book style thefts you can use in your own *M&M* game:

BANK

Perhaps *the* ultimate comic book theft is holding up a bank, so much so it has become cliché. Comic-style bank heists—where criminals in ski-masks carrying guns ransack the place, stuffing money into sacks, with the getaway car idling out front—are relatively rare in reality. That doesn't mean you can't run such a scenario for your heroes, however. You can liven it up with twists such as having one or more of the heroes in the bank in their secret identities when the robbers show up, or the crooks associating with one or more villains to back them up.

JEWELERS

Next to a bank, a jewelers is the most popular theft target: jewelry is valuable, portable, and relatively easy to fence, since it can often be melted down or broken up. Modern gemstones often have microscopic serial numbers or ID tags to help identify and track down stolen goods, something criminals may or may not take into account.

CHARITIES

One of the lowest lows for villains is robbing a charitable event with a lot of cash on-hand, not only taking the money, but also depriving the most worthy and needy people from getting it. High-society charity events also tend to offer plenty of wealthy people with other valuables (jewelry, etc.) or worthy of ransom themselves.

TECHNOLOGY

It's quite common for villains to steal technology (or technological information). It is usually so they can use the tech or incorporate it into another scheme, although some just want to sell it to the highest bidder. Some technology thefts can lead to whole new villain origins, such as a criminal using a stolen military power-suit to become a new supervillain.

ARTIFACTS

In the same vein as technology, ancient artifacts tend to go missing, stolen not just for their historic or monetary value, but often for arcane secrets or powers they contain. In the comics, private collections, museums, and art galleries are always having run-ins with thieves looking to get their hands on the Mask of Mysteries or the Scarab of Life Eternal.

BREAK-IN

A break-in involves getting into where the target is kept, taking it, and leaving, with or without anyone else knowing you have done it. The subtle break-in approach is the classic "cat burglar" where a stealthy thief disables locks

and alarms, slips into a secure area, takes the item, and slips back out again. The first anyone learns of the theft is when the target turns up missing sometime later, although break-ins often encounter unexpected trouble if the thief manages to set off an alarm along the way.

The brute force approach is to simply smash in through any defenses, ignore alarms, disable guards, and take what you want, using force against anyone foolish enough to stop you. It's the preferred method for villains lacking in subtle skill, who generally don't care if anyone notices them (or actually prefer their actions be noticed), especially if said villains are physically powerful enough to ignore obstacles such as concrete walls and guards armed with nothing more than firearms. A brute-force break-in may partake of some of the less violent techniques—especially if, say, picking a lock happens to be faster than trying to break through it—but it aims for expediency.

HOLD-UP

A hold-up is much like a break-in, except it involves dealing with people present at the crime scene, usually forcing their cooperation. So, for example, sneaking into a closed bank, disabling the alarms, and opening the vault to empty it is a break-in, whereas coming into the bank while people are present, threatening them to ensure compliance, and perhaps forcing them to help you empty out the vault is a hold-up.

The simplest hold-up is essentially a mugging, where the thief takes something from someone by threat of force, with or without actually using it against the victim. More complex hold-ups can easily turn into hostage situations as the criminals try to enforce cooperation from the victims but also have to deal with alerted heroes or authorities. A break-in gone wrong can turn into a hold-up situation, if someone happens to notice what the thieves are doing and confronts them.

Hold-ups are brute-force arrangements by nature. Some are more carefully planned set-ups using only the threat of force, while others are more impromptu affairs where the villains gladly make examples of any would-be heroes among the hostages, and do not particularly care who gets hurt in the process.

EN ROUTE

One of the easiest times to steal something is often when it is in the process of being moved from one place to another. There is usually less security and you can sometimes simply grab whatever it is being moved in: hijack an armored car, snatch a briefcase or package from a courier, and so forth. That is not to say targets en route have no security with them; breaching an armored car is still tricky, but it is easier than opening a time-locked bank vault.

As an additional benefit, an en route theft usually provides for a quick getaway. Rather than being trapped in a bank or other building, the villains likely have vehicles or movement capabilities of their own and can simply run once they have what they came for. This can turn the confrontation into a chase scene.

FENCING THE GOODS

Once the theft is carried out, there comes the question of what to do with the stolen goods. If the primary motive for the theft was money, then the villains need to "launder" cash and fence stolen valuables, turning them into spendable funds. If the theft was done for-hire, then there is the matter of turning the goods over to the thief's employer.

These occasions provide opportunities for the heroes, since they can cover known fences and dealers in the kinds of goods stolen, hoping to pick up on signs of the thieves setting up a meeting. They can likewise attempt to trace the stolen goods, using means such as electronic tracking devices, or various superhuman senses.

The fencing of stolen goods can also provide an opportunity for investigators after the fact. Take the example of a stolen gemstone that is then sold to a private buyer who brags about it to the wrong person. Heroes can backtrack from the buyer to the fence who sold the stone, perhaps learning who originally brought it in. This can lead to a breakthrough in an investigation where a thief's identity is unknown, or provide information on a known thief's whereabouts.

ADVENTURE ELEMENTS

It's harder to provide challenges for heroes able to fly and ignore gunfire, and some powers can short-circuit plots altogether, if they are not handled properly. On the other hand, super-powers also provide plot hooks and opportunities for new rewards players can earn during the game.

There are a couple things to keep in mind running *M&M* adventures. The first is to allow heroes the opportunity to actually use their abilities. The second is to keep the game from becoming entirely about those abilities and not the heroes.

SPOTLIGHT TIME

An important part of having powers is the opportunity to use them. After all, each player has devoted points to powers, so they should be able to have fun with them. Therefore, every adventure should ideally offer "spotlight time" to each hero, letting them all show off their abilities.

This means spotlighting the particular abilities of each hero. You can spotlight combat-related abilities with a fight, but that doesn't necessarily suit the skulker, who needs to

sneak around, or the clairvoyant, who wants a chance to demonstrate his unique insight. It also includes any non-powered characters in the group. They need spotlight time just as much (if not more!) than the ones with powers.

Try and ensure each adventure has opportunities for all of the heroes to shine, whatever their powers and abilities may be. This usually means some get to take center stage in one scene, then step aside for others in another part of the adventure. Sometimes it's impossible (or just impractical) to include spotlight time for everyone in the same adventure. When this happens, at least try and balance things out over the course of multiple adventures. If you run a combat-intensive game where the skulkers and thinkers don't have much to do, try to have an espionage-style adventure not long thereafter to give them their time in the spotlight.

If there are particular powers or abilities you don't think you'll be able to spotlight in the series at all—either because you don't like the type of adventures involving them or because they don't fit into your idea of the game's style—you're better off asking players not to create heroes with those powers right from the beginning. That way, you can be sure to include everyone and the players won't feel neglected or cheated of opportunities for their characters to shine.

THE HUMAN TOUCH

While it's important to allow the heroes to show off their powers, it is equally important to have adventures and encounters where the heroes' powers don't really matter, where it's the human and not the superhuman element that's significant.

Focusing on interpersonal relationships and subplots is a good way of doing this. Provide a recurring supporting cast for the series to give the heroes opportunities to interact and form relationships. Encourage the players to roleplay and interact in-character during the game. Then you can include subplots to give the heroes a human touch: a powerful wizard worries about his ailing mentor and hopes to find a cure for the ravages of age; a teen superhero is hiding her powers from her family and trying to get a date for the prom while battling supervillains downtown; the monster-slaying hero has to reconcile his love for a beautiful and seductive vampire, who may or may not be leading him on; and so forth.

You can also introduce challenges in adventures where the heroes' powers don't make any real difference. Being immune to bullets and able to pick up buses doesn't necessarily give a hero an immediate solution to a tense hostage or rescue situation. Divinely granted powers may not help a hero resolve a schism over religious doctrine. Being able to read minds may actually *complicate* matters for a heroine trying to have a "normal" relationship with a non-psychic… especially when she suspects there's something her significant other isn't telling her.

When creating adventures, ask yourself these two questions: What are the best opportunities to spotlight the characters' capabilities, and what are the best opportunities to spotlight the characters as individuals?

POWERS AS PLOTS

Powers also serve as plot hooks, providing ideas for different adventures and complications. Some of the more common power-based plots include the following:

- **Secret Origin.** Clues may arise about the true origin or source of a mysterious power. Perhaps someone turns up claiming to be a long-lost relative with similar or identical powers and knowledge of a character's true origins. A religious cult might attach itself to a hero, proclaiming him their messiah and fervently believing his powers are divinely given (whether they are or not). Conversely, monster-hunters may attack, claiming the hero's powers are actually a sign of demonic influence, or even possession. Some claims may be misguided, delusional, or attempts to scam the hero, but others may be true (at least, from a certain point of view).
- **Power Alteration.** Some incident alters a hero's powers in some way, creating new opportunities and headaches. Examples include sudden temporary increases or decreases in power rank, shifts in power focus (a fire-controller switches over to harnessing cold or water for a time), temporary loss of powers altogether, or the sudden acquisition of new powers. An accident may even cause a group of characters to switch powers! Such alterations are usually temporary, lasting no more than one or two adventures, and resolved by the end of the story. Still, some power alterations may be permanent, or lead to less serious lasting changes once they're resolved.
- **Power Improvement.** Chances to improve powers can lead to adventures. Heroes may seek out teachers, guides, or experts to assist them. They may need rare elements or devices to expand or alter their powers, and some improvements may only be possible under certain conditions or at specific times. A patron may require a quest or similar undertaking before granting additional power. Conversely, heroes may take up a task to remove flaws or even rid themselves of an unwanted or uncontrolled power. Antagonists may dangle opportunities for power improvement in front of the heroes as bribes or temptations.
- **Uncontrolled Power.** An uncontrolled power can certainly cause complications. A normally controlled power can also *become* uncontrolled as a complication due to accident, injury, and so forth. This can create problems during an otherwise routine adventure, as the hero and his allies try to cope with the unpredictable power. Perhaps a particularly inauspicious event (celestial alignment, passing comet, holy day, sunspots, dimensional shift, or whatever) causes some or even *all* powers to become uncontrolled for a while!

MEANINGFUL CHALLENGES

How do you offer meaningful challenges to heroes able to shrug off bullets, fly through the air, see through walls, or read minds? (Or all of the above!) Some traditional adventure challenges become almost meaningless when superpowers get involved, so you need to either adjust the level of challenge according to the powers or find new things to challenge the heroes.

THREAT OF FORCE

In many settings a gunshot or dagger thrust is a serious concern. This isn't the case when you've got sufficient Toughness to shrug off such puny weapons, or even greater attacks, without even flinching. How do you threaten heroes who are practically invulnerable, or possess combat traits great enough to win any fight they get into?

The first, and most obvious, way is using overwhelming force. A hero is immune to bullets? How well can he handle a bazooka or a shoulder-fired missile? He is one of the world's greatest martial artists? What about one of his close rivals, or even one of the handful of fighters in the world *better* than him?

Oftentimes threats of force are a matter of scale: there's nearly always a greater force to use against the character, although it's difficult to justify that force all the time. An ordinary mugger isn't going to be carrying hand-grenades, and the guards at a top-secret facility aren't all going to be among the top ten unarmed fighters in the world. Such routine challenges just aren't challenging for someone with extraordinary powers, which is just as it should be.

One concern with overwhelming force is it can be *too* overwhelming; the hero virtually immune to gunfire might be seriously hurt by an anti-tank rocket. This becomes especially true when dealing with very powerful attacks and defenses. There's a huge difference between a conventional weapon and a tacnuke, for example. Beware that you don't overwhelm characters when trying to challenge them.

When high Impervious Toughness scores are an obstacle, you can use more exotic sorts of attacks, either Afflictions or modifiers like Alternate Resistance. Tough heroes may still need to breathe, or have other weak spots. Again, be careful attacks bypassing the target's Toughness aren't too powerful. Still, having unusual attacks show up from time to time can keep players on their toes and prevent them from becoming complacent in their invulnerability.

Then there are always threats of force against others. Sure, the hero may be nigh-invulnerable, but odds are his friends and loved ones, or even his teammates, aren't. Enemies may take hostages, or threaten the hero with attacks he could surely survive, but which will also devastate the surrounding area. Even if you can walk away unharmed from a nuclear blast, do you really want one to go off in the middle of your home town? The collateral damage around an otherwise invulnerable target can be as serious as personal injury in some ways, perhaps even worse. This is typically an advantage villains have over heroes; many care nothing for collateral damage or harm to others and so take full advantage of their own invulnerability.

MYSTERIES

Powers like Mind Reading and Remote Sensing can make a mockery of any mystery in an adventure. With a single successful check, the hero has it all figured out. Game over. How do you pose a mystery for such abilities?

The most straightforward means is to prevent the powers from solving the problem. For example, perhaps the murderer has amnesia and doesn't know he's the guilty party (keeping a mind-reader from solving it). Or the criminal has powers of his own and uses them to cover his tracks with, for example, a version of Nullify, clearing any trace evidence effects like Postcognition or other Senses might pick up later. These tend to be rather brute-force methods, since they render the powers the player paid points for relatively useless. You shouldn't over-use them or players may rightly feel cheated.

A more complex option is to make the powers key to solving the mystery without making it an easy solution. Perhaps it's a crime or riddle so baffling that powers are required to even have a chance of figuring it out (a good reason for the heroes to get involved in the first place: the problem is beyond the conventional authorities). Perhaps a medium can contact the spirit of a murder victim, but there are spiritual obstacles in the way. A special ritual is necessary to contact the victim, and even then things are not what they appear. For example, the victim may have actually committed suicide, but a guilty relative arranged things to look like murder to cover up the truth.

Finally, you can start a mystery based on an extrasensory ability. Perhaps someone has a precognitive vision of his own death, and has to figure out how and when it will happen in order to prevent it. A telepath may pick up a stray thought from someone in a crowd, suggesting a threat of violence. Now he must find the criminal before his scheme can go forward, and also find solid evidence to take to the authorities, since mind-reading doesn't constitute sufficient cause to arrest or convict someone!

TIME AND DISTANCE

Many challenges in adventures involve issues of time and distance: heroes have to travel from place to place (often through perilous terrain), cross yawning chasms, ford rushing rivers, and get where they're going in the nick of time. Such challenges are far less serious for those able to fly, teleport, or walk through solid walls, to say nothing of heroes able to travel through time or jump across dimensional barriers!

In some cases, the ability to ignore trifles (like travel time) suits *M&M* games just fine. For example, superheroes rarely worry about getting from place to place; they make the trip "between panels" in a negligible amount of time. On the other hand, some challenges rely on travel to one degree or another. If heroes can bypass every wall, fence, gate, and locked door with ease, then those things aren't viable challenges.

While lesser challenges of time and distance are simply irrelevant to those with the right powers, you can pose others. For example, if a teleporter needs to see or properly visualize his destination, then a maze or a location an indeterminate distance underground may make it more difficult (and risky) to make the jump. Perhaps a hero can assume insubstantial form to pass through a wall, but risks drawing the attention of evil wraiths, able to attack him

in that form; and should one of them happen to stun him while he's inside the wall….

SOCIAL TABOOS

Tremendous power allows its wielder to ignore many of the rules of society, both written and unwritten. This is particularly true for those largely immune to harm and having no need of society's protection or support. With the power to do as they please, heroes may wonder: why should they follow society's rules? Who's going to stop them, if they don't?

Probably no one, if the violations of social taboo are relatively minor and infrequent. Throughout history, the powerful have been able to get away with a great deal more than the weak and powerless. Odds are the same is true of those with superhuman powers. However, the greater the violation, the more likely someone or something will intervene to put a stop to it. Possibilities include the following:

- **Peers.** The first, and most likely, reaction comes from the character's close friends, family, and associates (possibly including other player characters). Unless the violator is a hermit with no social life, and his violations are comparatively minor, he will face the disapproval of those close to him. The GM can use the reactions of these characters to tell players they're making inappropriate choices.
- **Role Models.** A useful way of getting the message about socially unacceptable behavior across to players is through a role model, someone the character looks up to or respects. This might be a teacher, mentor, elder statesman, or other experienced NPC. The reprimand might come in the form of a stern lecture, the cold shoulder, or even stronger measures. For example, an experienced hero might feel compelled to bring a wayward peer back to the straight-and-narrow (or to the justice of a court!).
- **Social Outcry.** After the people closest to the offender, society in general reacts to any misdeeds. The offender may be shunned in polite society at best, or face legal prosecution at worst. A negative reputation is a virtual certainty, affecting reactions toward the character accordingly. In the extreme, there may even be an entire social movement against the character (or supers in general).
- **Higher Powers.** The ultimate social arbiters may be higher beings, either actual gods or others acting in their stead. In settings where higher powers intervene, they may do so to prevent abuses of power, especially if they control those forces! Characters with divine abilities may lose them for misbehaving, and wielders of other powers may still face higher judgment if they flout social and moral codes. GMs should feel free to give players due warning of such punishment, either in the form of tales of others who have suffered it in the past or a "first warning" from the Powers That Be when they stray too close to crossing the line.

NORMALS

When the heroes have powers, it can be difficult to make normal people much of a challenge. That's in keeping with the comic book superhero genre, where heroes mow through hordes of minions and lesser opponents, and stand head-and-shoulders above ordinary humanity. However, when you want to have an otherwise normal person pose a challenge, how do you do it?

The solution lies in the definition of "normal." While someone may be entirely normal physically, and have no powers of any kind, that doesn't mean he can't challenge a superpowered character, or even a group of them. Just consider some of the advantages a normal person might have:

- **Numbers.** One advantage of normal people: there sure are a lot of them. No matter how powerful a hero is, the normal population outnumbers him by a considerable amount. He may be able to take down one soldier easily, but what about ten, a hundred, or even a thousand? What about an entire army? While throwing armies at the heroes shouldn't be commonplace (except in the most over-the-top adventures), it is a potential threat leveled against supers who get out of hand. Even on a smaller scale, numbers can make a difference. Trained fighters will use flanking techniques, try and gang up on their opponents, and otherwise seek to take advantage of their superior numbers.
- **Resources.** Wealth (and associated resources) can be a great leveler. While a normal antagonist might not have the power to face the heroes in a head-on confrontation, he may be able to hire people who can, as well as bodyguards to keep any super enemies at bay. A wealthy foe can buy out businesses (or simply ruin them), bribe people to cause trouble, and spend money on things like media smear campaigns and whatever countermeasures are available for powers in the series.
- **Equipment.** Wealth and resources can also provide all sorts of useful technology. This includes countermeasures against powers and other things that help even out a mismatch. How much equipment can help depends on what's available: a normal person might only have access to common equipment, but some can also afford various devices, edging into the realm of having artificial powers of a sort.
- **Influence.** As useful as material resources, if not more so, is the goodwill of the community. A normal adversary with a good reputation and a lot of influence can cause plenty of trouble, and there's very little the heroes can do about it unless they want to provoke a tremendous public backlash. For example, they may know a certain philanthropic businessman secretly hates them and is trying to ruin them, but if they move openly against him, they'll only support his claim that they are a menace to society, and the authorities will try to protect him! The same can be true of an ambitious politician, or a crime-lord masquerading as an "honest citizen."

- **Blackmail.** Many people have skeletons in their closet, and the powerful can have *very* dark secrets. Perhaps someone uncovers a secret about the heroes important enough to provide leverage, especially if the blackmailer had the foresight to ensure it will get out should something happen to him.
- **Dependents.** A hero's dependents—friends, family, and loved ones—can become targets of foes looking for leverage or influence over him. A foe simply out for revenge may resort to striking at his target's loved ones, knowing it will hurt far worse than if he simply killed the hero outright!
- **Vulnerabilities.** Powers often come with weaknesses. In addition to the various countermeasures that might take away or neutralize a hero's powers, there may be other things a knowledgeable enemy can use against him. A demon vulnerable to holy relics might confront a normal foe who has surrounded himself with them, for example, and who seeks refuge on holy ground. A hero weakened by a mysterious glowing mineral finds his worst foe has acquired a supply he keeps close at hand. A vampire hero must deal with a crusading priest supplied with garlic, holy water, and wooden stakes, and so forth.

Normal adversaries may combine some or all of these advantages. For example, a government official designed as a foil may wield the influence of the law and have the support of public opinion (as well as law enforcement). A criminal businessman may have considerable wealth, some equipment, and the willingness to use both to ferret out his enemies' secrets. The "demon-hunting" priest combines the resources of the church with intimate knowledge of his prey's weaknesses and a flock of fanatically loyal followers.

MEANINGFUL REWARDS

Just like many challenges seem insignificant to heroes with the power to move mountains, so too the rewards of wealth, influence, and so forth may not matter much to them. What's the use of wealth when a hero has no material wants or needs? What influence equals the power to control minds? Gamemasters need to consider appropriate rewards for powerful heroes.

These rewards are in addition to the simple enjoyment of playing the game, of course, which is a reward everyone gets! It may well be enough for some players, who don't really care about getting rewards other than having fun. This section addresses options for those players who *do* care, and might find rewards otherwise lacking in a *M&M* game.

ACHIEVEMENT

Those with great power are capable of achieving great things, and players may want those achievements for their heroes. If so, you can make accomplishing a particular goal a reward of sorts. Encourage the players to come up with lists of goals or things the heroes want to accomplish. You can then work them into the overall series, introducing them as subplots or even building adventures around them.

The best goals for this purpose are ones you can break down into steps, allowing the heroes to accomplish them a little at a time until they reach the ultimate goal. Some goals may be short-term and others long-term, possibly lasting for the duration of the series.

For example, a group of heroes may have cleaning up crime in a city as their overall goal. Each also has individual goals: vengeance against an old enemy, attaining honor and recognition, redemption, finding a lost parent, and so forth. Achieving each goal provides a sense of accomplishment. The goals also suggest stories and may even create conflict in the game; for example, maybe they learn that the hero's lost parent has ties to another hero's nemesis. Gamemasters can use goals as story hooks while players can use them as roleplaying cues, and they may suggest complications for earning hero points.

KNOWLEDGE

Most stories have their mysteries and unanswered questions. Finding the answers to those questions can be a suitable reward. What is the secret source of powers in the world? What is the true origin of a hero or villain? What happened to the mentor who vanished years ago? What is the real nature of the conspiracy?

Like other achievements, knowledge may come in stages. You learn the name of a higher-up in the conspiracy, leading you to his superior, and so forth toward the heart of the matter. Investigations of an ancient ruin turn up fragments of information about a lost artifact, pointing toward additional clues as to its whereabouts, and so forth.

Knowledge can also come in the form of useful facts: things like the true name of a spirit, a villain's secret weakness, or a clue to a hero's missing past. These rewards help guide adventures and plots: once the heroes uncover the villain's weakness, or learn the secret to unlocking their own hidden powers, then they're ready for the big confrontation. Before that point, their nemesis may seem all but invincible.

POWER IMPROVEMENT

In a game focused on powers, opportunities for power improvement make suitable rewards, particularly unusual or limited opportunities. For example, if power improvement is normally a slow and steady process, then a transformation granting additional power makes an excellent and immediate reward. The same is true of things like finding a teacher, discovering information necessary to learn a new ability, or earning the favor of a higher power, who grants access to new abilities or powers.

CHAPTER 5: CHALLENGES

Not all of the threats *Mutants & Masterminds* heroes face are villains they can fight. Sometimes they must deal with other challenges, as outlined in the **Challenges** section of the *M&M Hero's Handbook*. This chapter looks at challenges in greater detail. In particular, it looks at two types of challenges common in the superhero comics: disasters (natural and otherwise) and traps, both capture traps and villainous deathtraps.

As a Gamemaster, you can use these challenges to liven up the plots of your adventures and provide some ideas of things to throw at your players during a game. The challenges in this chapter also offer some examples to base your own unique challenges upon.

DISASTERS

The *M&M Hero's Handbook* covers the basic environmental hazards heroes may encounter. This section expands on those dangers with true disasters that can befall a group of heroes. These challenges also provide some ideas for rescue missions, allowing heroes to save innocent people threatened by disaster.

Indeed, some disasters are deliberately arranged by villains, either as distractions to keep heroes busy while the villain is off doing something else or as part of a villain's larger scheme. For example, a bad guy looking for a mystical artifact in an ancient mountain shrine might trigger an avalanche or landslide that threatens a village or vacation lodge below. While the heroes rush off the save innocent lives, the villain absconds with the loot to start the next phase of the plan. These kinds of complications should earn the players hero points for doing the right thing when they happen.

AVALANCHES

The combination of high peaks and heavy snowfalls make avalanches a danger in many mountainous areas. While avalanches of snow and ice are common, it's also possible to have an avalanche of loose rock and soil (a landslide). Unless specified otherwise, the term "avalanche" covers both here.

Characters can spot an avalanche with a DC 5 Perception check (modified by distance). It's possible to hear an avalanche coming even if you can't see it. Under optimum conditions (no other loud noises occurring), a character who makes a DC 15 Perception check can hear an approaching avalanche.

An avalanche consists of two distinct areas: the bury zone (in the direct path of the debris) and the slide zone (the area the debris spreads out to encompass). Characters in the bury zone take Damage 8, half that if they make a DC 15 Dodge check. They are subsequently buried. Characters in the slide zone take Damage 4, or none if they make a DC 15 Dodge check. Characters in the slide zone who fail their Dodge checks are also buried.

Characters must make an additional Toughness check each minute while buried. The initial DC is 15 (equal to Damage 0), increasing by +1 per check. If a character is incapacitated, a failed Toughness check changes the character's condition to dying.

Characters who aren't buried can try to dig out others. Each minute, a character can clear a volume rank of debris equal to Strength rank. So Strength 10 can clear 1,000 cubic feet of debris in one minute (time rank 3). Armed with an appropriate digging tool, a character can clear debris twice as fast as by hand (increase volume rank by 1). You may allow a buried character to free himself with a DC 25 Strength check. Bonuses to lifting Strength, such as from Power-lifting, apply to this check.

The typical avalanche has a width of 120 to 500 feet (distance rank 2 to 4), from one edge of the slide zone to the opposite edge. The bury zone in the center is half as wide as the avalanche's full width (–1 distance rank). Avalanches move at around speed rank 5, for those attempting to outrun them.

COLLAPSES

Characters caught in the collapse of a building, tunnel, cave, or similar structure face damage and the possibility of being buried in the debris. Underground cave-ins are dangerous not only because of tons of falling rock, but also the possibility of being cut-off from the surface.

A collapse buries anyone in the middle of the collapsing area, while sliding debris damages anyone in the periphery of the collapse. The slide zone is generally about half the radius of the bury zone. Treat being caught in a collapse like an avalanche (previously), including characters getting buried and dug-out.

A hero strong enough to lift the collapsing mass overhead may be able to hold it up, at least until any support structures crumble, resulting in a rain of debris. Effects improving Toughness can protect against the damage

of a collapse like any other sort of damage; sufficient Impervious Toughness can even shield against the collapse altogether.

EARTHQUAKES

An earthquake knocks people down, collapses structures, opens cracks and fissures in the ground, and more. The specific effects depend on the nature of the terrain:

AVALANCHE

Cliffs and mountainsides may crumble, creating landslides. See **Avalanches**.

COLLAPSE

Buildings and other structures may collapse, the same for caves or tunnels. See **Collapses**. Building fires also often follow in the wake of an earthquake, see the following section for details.

FISSURE

Each person standing in the area of the quake must make a DC 15 Dodge check or fall prone. Fissures may open in the earth, and anyone in the area has a chance to fall in (Difficulty 20 Dodge check to avoid such a fissure).

FIRES

Large fires, such as building fires or forest fires, pose three main dangers: heat, flame, and smoke.

HEAT

Characters caught in a fire are exposed to extreme heat (see *M&M Hero's Handbook*, page 186). Those wearing heavy clothing or armor take a –5 circumstance penalty on their resistance checks. Characters with Immunity (Heat) are unaffected.

FLAME

Characters engulfed in a fire must make a DC 15 Dodge check each round. A failed check results in the character's clothing and/or hair catching fire. This inflicts Damage 1 immediately. Each subsequent round, the burning character must make another resistance check. Failure means additional rank 1 fire Damage, up to a maximum of rank 6 Damage. Success means the fire has gone out. Once the resistance check succeeds, the character is no longer on fire, but still has to make a check each round while engulfed.

A character on fire may automatically extinguish the flames by jumping into enough water to douse them. If no body of water is at hand, rolling on the ground or smothering the fire with blankets or similar materials grants the character another check with a +5 circumstance bonus.

SMOKE

Fires produce a great deal of smoke. A character breathing heavy smoke must make a Fortitude resistance check each round (DC 15, +1 per previous check, up to a maximum of rank 8) or become stunned, spending that round choking and coughing. A character who chokes for two consecutive rounds makes a Fortitude check against Damage 1. Also, smoke obscures vision, providing concealment to characters within it (see **Concealment**, *M&M Hero's Handbook,* page 192).

FLOODS

During a flood, rivers become wider, deeper, and swifter. A flooded river imposes a –5 circumstance penalty to Athletics checks to swim.

SWEPT AWAY

Characters failing an Athletics check to swim in a flood are swept away by it at a speed rank of 1. An Athletics check with two or more Degrees of Success can arrest their motion, catching onto a rock, tree limb, or other protrusion—they are no longer being carried along by the flow of the water. Escaping the flood requires a total of 3 Degrees of Success on an Athletics check before three degress of failure.

FOG

Whether a low-lying cloud or a mist rising from the ground, fog provides partial concealment for everything in the area it covers. (See **Concealment**, *M&M Hero's Handbook,* page 192.)

LAVA

Contact with lava or magma inflicts Damage 4. Immersion of any part of the character's body inflicts Damage 15, while immersion of more than half of the character's body inflicts Damage 18.

Immunity to heat damage also serves as immunity to damage from lava or magma. However, a creature immune to heat damage might still suffocate if completely immersed.

PRECIPITATION

Bad weather slows or halts travel and makes it difficult to navigate. Most precipitation is rain, but in cold conditions it can manifest as snow, sleet, or hail. Precipitation of any kind followed by a cold snap in which the temperature drops below freezing may produce ice.

RAIN

Heavy rain reduces visibility by half, resulting in a –5 circumstance penalty on Perception checks.

SNOW

Falling snow has the same effects on visibility as rain, and reduces ground movement speeds through the area by 1 rank. Heavy snow has the same effects and also restricts visibility like fog. It reduces ground movement speeds by 2 ranks.

SLEET

Sleet has the same effect as snow: –5 circumstance penalty to visibility and –1 rank of ground movement speed through the area.

HAIL

Hail does not reduce visibility, but the sound of falling hail makes auditory Perception checks more difficult (–5 circumstance penalty). Sometimes (at the GM's option or on a natural 20 on a d20 roll) hail becomes large enough to deal Damage 0 (per storm) to anything out in the open. Once on the ground, hail has the same effect on movement as snow.

QUICKSAND

A character approaching a patch of quicksand at a normal pace is entitled to a DC 15 Perception check to spot the danger before stepping into it, but characters moving at twice their normal pace (two move actions) don't have a chance to detect quicksand before blundering in.

Characters in quicksand must make a DC 10 Athletics check every round to tread water in place, or a DC 15 check to move 5 feet in whatever direction is desired. Two or more Degrees of Failure and the character sinks below the surface and begins to drown (see **Suffocation,** *M&M Hero's Handbook*, page 186).

Characters below the surface of quicksand may swim back to the surface with a successful Athletics check (DC 15, +1 per consecutive round of being under the surface, up to a maximum of +10).

Pulling out a character trapped in quicksand can be difficult. A rescuer needs a branch, pole, rope, or similar means to reach the victim. Make a DC 15 Strength check to successfully pull the victim, and the victim makes a DC 10 Strength check to hold on. If the victim fails to hold on, he must make a DC 15 Athletics check to stay above the surface. If both checks succeed, the victim is pulled 5 feet closer to safety. Effects like Flight, Elongation, or Movement (Water-walking) naturally make quicksand rescues *much* easier!

STORMS

The combined effects of precipitation (or dust) and wind that accompany storms impose a –10 circumstance penalty on Perception checks. Storms make ranged attacks with muscle-propelled weapons impossible; other ranged attacks have a –5 circumstance penalty on attack checks. Storms extinguish unprotected flames. They cause pro-

tected flames, such as those of lanterns, to dance wildly and have a 50% chance to extinguish them. Storms are divided into the following types:

DUSTSTORM

These desert storms differ in that they have no precipitation. A duststorm blows fine sand that obscures vision, smothers unprotected flames, and can even choke protected flames. There is a 10% (a 1 or 2 on a d20 roll, or at the GM's discretion) chance for a duststorm to be powerful enough to inflict Damage 0 each round to anyone caught out in the open without shelter and to also pose a choking hazard (the same as suffocation, see the *M&M Hero's Handbook,* page 186).

SANDSTORM

A sandstorm reduces visibility and imposes a –5 circumstance penalty on Perception checks. A sandstorm deals Damage 0 per hour to anyone caught in the open, and leaves a thin coating of sand in its wake. Driving sand creeps in through all but the most secure seals and seams, to chafe skin and contaminate carried gear.

THUNDERSTORM

In addition to wind and precipitation (usually rain, but sometimes also hail), thunderstorms are accompanied by lightning that can pose a hazard to characters without proper shelter. As a rule of thumb, assume one bolt per minute for a one-hour period at the center of the storm. Each bolt causes electricity rank 1–10 Damage (roll d20 and divide by 2, rounding up, to determine effective rank). Ten percent of thunderstorms (a 1 or 2 on a d20 roll, or at the GM's discretion) are accompanied by a tornado (see the following).

WIND

The wind can create a stinging spray of sand or dust, fan a fire, and blow gases or vapors away. If powerful enough, it can knock characters down, interfere with ranged attacks, or impose penalties on some checks. Wind challenges are categorized as follows:

LIGHT WIND

A gentle breeze, having no real game effect.

MODERATE WIND

A steady wind with a 50% chance of extinguishing small, unprotected flames, such as candles.

STRONG WIND

Gusts that automatically extinguish unprotected flames. Such gusts impose a –2 circumstance penalty on ranged attack checks with thrown weapons and on auditory Perception checks.

SEVERE WIND

In addition to automatically extinguishing unprotected flames, winds of this magnitude cause protected flames (such as those of lanterns) to dance wildly and have a 50% chance of extinguishing them as well. Ranged weapon attacks and auditory Perception checks are at a –5 circumstance penalty.

WINDSTORM

Powerful enough to bring down branches if not whole trees, windstorms automatically extinguish unprotected flames and have a 75% chance of blowing out protected flames. Ranged attacks with thrown or muscle-powered weapons are impossible, and other ranged attacks are at a –5 circumstance penalty. Auditory Perception checks are at a –10 circumstance penalty due to the howling of the wind.

HURRICANE

All non-powered flames are extinguished. Ranged attacks with thrown or muscle-powered weapons are impossible, and other ranged attacks are at a –10 circumstance penalty. Auditory Perception checks are at a –20 penalty (all characters can hear is the roaring of the wind). Hurricane-force winds often fell trees and even buildings (see **Collapses**).

TORNADO

All flames are extinguished. All ranged attacks are impossible, as are auditory Perception checks. Characters in close proximity to a tornado who fail a DC 20 Strength check are sucked toward the funnel. Those who come in contact with the funnel cloud are picked up and whirled around for 1–10 (d20/2 round up) rounds, resisting Damage 4 each round, before being violently expelled (falling damage may also apply, see the *M&M Hero's Handbook*, page 186). While a tornado's rotational speed can be as great as speed rank 7, the funnel itself moves forward at an average of speed rank 3. A tornado uproots trees, destroys buildings, and causes other similar forms of major destruction.

UNDERWATER

Land-based characters have some difficulties under water. The following applies whenever a character is swimming, walking in chest-deep water, or walking along the bottom.

CLOSE ATTACKS

Close attacks underwater have a –2 circumstance penalty on attack checks. Characters with Movement (Environmental Adaptation (Aquatic)) ignore this penalty.

RANGED ATTACKS

Attacks with ranged weapons through water take a –2 circumstance penalty on attack checks, in addition to the normal penalties for range.

ATTACKS FROM LAND

Characters swimming, floating, or treading water on the surface, or wading in water at least chest deep, have partial cover from opponents on land. A completely submerged creature has total cover against opponents on land.

FIRE

Effects with a fire descriptor are ineffective underwater. The surface of a body of water also blocks the effect of any such power.

INVISIBILITY

A solid invisible body displaces water and leaves a visible, body-shaped "bubble" in the water. The invisible character still has partial concealment, but not total concealment.

PERCEPTION AND STEALTH

How far you can see underwater depends on the water's clarity. As a guideline, creatures can see 60 feet (distance rank 1) if the water is clear, and half that (30 feet or distance rank 0) if it's murky. Moving water is murky, unless it's a particularly large, slow-moving river. It's difficult to find cover or concealment to hide underwater (except along the bottom).

TRAPS

Heroes encounter two types of traps when dealing with villains and their lairs. One, the deathtrap, is handled in its own section, since it is a particular challenge all its own. The other type is the *capture trap*, not intended to kill intruders, but merely render them helpless so the villain can dispose of them in a leisurely fashion with a proper deathtrap (and villainous soliloquy explaining the details of their impending doom and the brilliance of the plan they can no longer stop). Capture traps often turn into deathtraps once the heroes are captured and the villain has the opportunity to explain their inevitable demise.

CAPTURE TRAPS

Capture traps generally either render their targets immobile in some fashion (limiting their movements or containing them) or render them helpless and easily contained by villains or minions, usually by leaving them unconscious, stunned, paralyzed, or the like.

CONTAINERS

Container traps close the victims off in a small area from which they cannot easily escape. It may be as simple as walls sliding from the ceiling or walls to cut off escape routes, or it can be as complicated as an enclosing force field, magical ward, or similar effect. The key is the targets are contained inside the trap, but otherwise have their freedom of movement and their normal abilities (but see **Nullifying**, following).

A container trap is often just a prelude to another sort of trap to ensure the targets are neutralized and cannot easily escape. After all, even a tempered steel cage would be hard-pressed to contain heroes with superhuman strength and power blasts (to say nothing of the ability to pass through solid objects or transmute them). Containers prepared for specific targets often have countermeasures to deal with their powers, such as:

DAMAGING AURA

A container may have some secondary effect to keep trapped heroes from touching or attacking the sides of the container. Examples include electrified or superheated surfaces, a thin layer of acid or some other damaging material (which does not affect the container itself), or razor spikes. It might also have an energy field with one of the effects listed under **Stunners**, following.

ENERGY REFLECTION

The trap reflects back attacks used against it, causing the attacking hero to suffer their effects. It may do so through some sort of unique energy reflective material, a force field, sympathetic magic spell, or some other effect.

A particularly vicious sort of reflection trap is a container surrounded by a net or web or monofilaments (wires only a single molecule thick). Anyone physically pushing against or hitting the net will be slashed to ribbons, perhaps even losing a limb! This is Damage proportionate to the force used (that is the damage suffered by the hero equals the damage of the physical attack) with massive ranks of Penetrating (at least 20, enough to effect heroes in virtually all *M&M* games). On top of it, the monofilaments might be able to conduct other forms of energy like heat or electricity to reflect them or use them to further empower the trap.

SEALED

The container is "sealed" against certain effects such as Insubstantial, Movement (Dimensional Travel or Permeate), or Teleport, preventing victims from simply vanishing from the trap. The seal could be entirely passive like a Nullify effect (see **Nullifying**, following) or active, giving it a feedback effect: a character attempting to use a power to escape the trap and failing suffers damage against Fortitude or Will (like the Feedback flaw).

CAPTURE COMPLICATIONS

One simple and direct way of handling capture traps is as a kind of complication (see the *M&M Hero's Handbook,* page 27). In this case, the heroes do not get an opportunity to detect, avoid, or escape the trap; instead, the GM simply explains the circumstances, tells the players their heroes are captured, and gives each player a hero point for the complication. This has the advantage of simplifying matters (all you need to do is describe what happens) and speeding up play, but it may also be somewhat less dramatic, skipping over a potential opportunity for the heroes to struggle against the odds.

A player who refuses the hero point can theoretically attempt to evade the trap, but that is made more difficult by the capture of the other heroes, leaving just one (or maybe two) characters to deal with it on their own. If you want to run a "single hero escapes and rescues the rest" scenario, allow one character this option to get away.

If all the players refuse to go along with the capture, then perhaps it is best to re-think the scenario and come at it from another angle (and to ask the players how they want to deal with the issue of capture complications in future adventures).

NULLIFYING

One way to ensure a capture trap can hold super-powered targets is to simply take away their powers! Capture traps often involve some sort of Nullify effect (see *M&M Hero's Handbook,* page 121) although the descriptors, and the types of powers affected, vary from one trap to another. Villains expecting particular heroes will tune traps to target and remove their powers specifically.

SNARES

Snare traps, unlike containers, seek to immobilize targets, severely restricting their freedom of movement. They are Affliction effects that hinder and immobilize, with descriptors ranging from grappling steel tentacles and fast-hardening foam to paralysis beams and capture-webs. Trapped heroes may be able to break out of snares with sufficient strength or damaging powers, and the snares might impose additional conditions to further restrain their targets.

STUNNERS

Stunners are capture traps inflicting some form of damage or effect capable of leaving targets unconscious, allowing the villain to collect and imprison them at will.

Stunner traps may use simple Damage, or an Affliction effect that ends in incapacitated. Descriptors are as wide as those effects permit, anything from automated weapons (firing non-lethal ammunition) to gas attacks, vertigo beams, sonic screamers, and much more. A stunner trap often has the Alternate Resistance modifier, targeting Fortitude or Will rather than sheer Toughness, better allowing it to overcome targets. Many are also Area effects, filling an entire room or corridor so the attack cannot miss and is more difficult to avoid. Lastly, stunner traps tend to be ongoing, affecting targets in their area each round until the target escapes or the trap is shut down.

DEATHTRAPS

The heroes are defeated after a terrible battle and at the villain's mercy. What does the fiend do? Well, simply killing the helpless heroes outright would make for a very short series, wouldn't it? Similarly, killing off the title hero in a comic book is not usually an option (at least, not for very long). So comic book writers perfected the art of the deathtrap: putting heroes in perilous situations requiring cunning, skill, and effort to escape so they can come back and take the villain down for the count.

Deathtraps are a staple of the superhero genre, and an important element of any major villain (at least, any villain likely to ever manage to defeat the heroes). This section takes a look at the concept of deathtraps, details on how to handle them, and provides a selection of premade classic deathtraps for you to try out on heroes the next time they get a little cocky and think they've got the villain on the ropes!

THE CLOSING WALLS

So common a deathtrap it has become cliché: the heroes are trapped in a room and the walls begin closing together. If they cannot escape in time, they will be crushed between them! In some variations the walls might have spikes or some hazard that prevents the heroes from touching them (red-hot, having a powerful electrical charge, etc.) to make it harder to stop them from closing. In others, the ceiling lowers rather than the walls close, or the entire room shrinks somehow. The victims have to find a way out of the room before the walls finish closing in, often delaying or holding them off long enough for them to do so.

THE CREATURE PIT

The victims are cast into an environment with dangerous or deadly creatures. This includes (but is not limited to) alligators or crocodiles, lions, snakes, tigers, wolves, or flesh-eating insects. It can also include any number of more exotic creatures such as dinosaurs, alien monsters, gladiators, mutants, cyborgs, or robots. The victims may be expected to fight (although they may be restrained or handicapped in some fashion) but are also expected to lose and suffer a terrible death.

If the threat in the Creature Pit is almost instant and certain death (say a massive swarm of poisonous, flesh-eating insects), then this trap is a kind of Deadly Conveyor (see the following) with the tension coming from being lowered or put into it. If creatures are things the heroes can fight, it is more of a Death in the Arena trap (see the following).

THE DEADLY CONVEYOR

The Deadly Conveyor is *the* classic deathtrap: the victims are helpless as they move slowly towards inevitable

doom. Originally, it was strapped to a log and headed for a sawmill's whirling blade. Other variations include the following: on a smelting factory conveyor belt headed for a dip in molten metal, suspended above (and slowly lowered into) a vat of acid, and strapped to a table with a laser beam creeping closer and closer. The options are nearly endless, but the key elements are restraining the victim(s) and the slow approach of inevitable destruction, long enough to heighten the peril.

A variation on the Deadly Conveyor is **the Deadly Container**, where the victims are trapped in an area, and a fatal threat gets closer and closer to entering that space. Examples include a chamber about to be flooded with molten magma, radiation, or rocket exhaust, or slowly being crushed by the pressure of the sea floor, until tons of water burst through the walls. The Deadly Container differs slightly from the Killing Jar (following) in that once the danger gets in, it's generally all over in an instant, rather than prolonging the victims' suffering.

DEATH IN THE ARENA

As a somewhat less certain deathtrap intended to entertain the villain and any cohorts or minions, the heroes are placed in an arena and expected to fight to the death against various opponents. The choice of foes is as wide as the imagination, from fairly conventional gladiators (especially for Roman- or history-themed villains) to animals, robots, evil duplicates, super-powered fighters, or monsters.

This trap is somewhat like a Creature Pit, but the victims are expected to put up a fight (and, presumably, an entertaining show). They might even be permitted a chance to win as a means of escape, but other Arenas simply pile on greater and greater challenges until there is no chance for the heroes to make it out alive—unless the come up with an alternative plan.

THE FATAL FRIEND

In a fiendish twist the villain makes a friend or loved one into the instrument of the heroes' doom! The Fatal Friend scenario typically involves an ally or supporting character mind controlled or mesmerized into activating the fatal trap to finish off the heroes, or even attempting to kill them directly (for characters capable of it). The friend may not be conscious of what is happening, or could struggle against the villain's influence, perhaps encouraged by the victims.

This trap is either a variation on the Deadly Conveyor (with the Fatal Friend holding the switch that will save or destroy the heroes) or Death in the Arena, with the Friend as the opponent the heroes must fight to the death, banking on their unwillingness to hurt someone they care about.

In some variations, the Fatal Friend is *tricked* into the role; the villain's influence might convince the Friend the heroes are actually monsters, for example, or villains, robot doubles, evil twins, or whatnot. In others, the Fatal Friend is not the characters' friend at all, but an impostor—say, a robot double or shapeshifter—intended to fool them into fatally hesitating and falling victim to the rest of the trap.

THE MULTIPLE-CHOICE ENDING

For added zest, some villains combine different deathtraps into one. Pick any two of the examples and put them together, such as a Killing Jar (a sealed chamber filling with water) along with a Creature Pit (the water has sharks or cybernetic alligators in it!). Or Death in the Arena (the heroes are set to fight combat robots) with The Ticking Time-Bomb (all the robots' power cores are set to explode within a minute, win or lose). The Multiple-Choice Ending is a good complication to spring on your players if they figure out the initial deathtrap too easily and you want to provide some additional challenge and tension. It also helps to keep some of the classics from becoming too stale.

THE GAUNTLET

This trap tempts victims with the promise of escape: all they need to do is cross the length of a corridor or room to reach the other side. Unfortunately, the entire route is mined with deadly traps intended to prevent them from ever reaching their goal.

Most of a gauntlet is made up of weapons: flamethrowers, automated guns, spring-loaded arrows, spears or darts, spike-throwers, gas projectors, lasers, and so forth. These are conventional attacks, although the GM might want to encourage a more active resistance on the heroes' part by having them make defense checks against a fixed attack "difficulty class" rather than rolling attack checks for the weapons. Acrobatics and Technology checks are also appropriate for running a gauntlet, and attack checks can be attempted to disable the various weapons with counterattacks.

THE UNINTENDED DEATHTRAP

Some bad guys aren't clever or resourceful enough to deliberately set up a deathtrap. They may not have a tricked-out lair equipped with a crocodile pit or a giant laser cannon or what have you. That does not mean, however, that these villains cannot put heroes in deathtrap-style *situations.*

For example, a hero fights a ruthless mercenary supervillain in an abandoned building. During the fight, stray attacks set the building on fire. Then the villain manages to get in a lucky shot and pins the hero to a wall. Before he gets a chance to deliver the finishing blow, part of the burning ceiling caves in, separating them. The mercenary dives out the window and down the fire escape to a waiting getaway vehicle, where his employer calls to ask if the job is done.

"Don't worry," the bad guy growls, "there's no way he'll survive that!"

The same sort of thing can happen in any situation where a villain leaves a hero to a "certain death": for example, knocked into the tiger cage at the zoo, lying in the path of a lava flow, trapped in a building or vehicle that's about to explode, or with a foot caught in the tracks in front of an oncoming train.

As the Gamemaster, you decide if an unintended deathtrap counts as a complication (and therefore merits a hero point award). Generally, it does, although it may be a part of the complication of being defeated by the villain. If the situation keeps the heroes busy while enabling the villain's escape and the furtherance of the plot, it's a good idea to slip the player(s) a hero point. They'll want it to deliver payback to the bad guy later on.

Other gauntlet traps include pits opening in the floor (possibly lined with spikes or dropping victims into a creature pit or killing jar trap) or triggers for another sort of deathtrap, such as barriers that drop down and set up a Closing Walls scenario.

THE KALEIDOSCOPE OF MADNESS

Rather than attacking them physically to kill them outright, the villain uses this deathtrap to mount an assault on the heroes' sanity, seeking to destroy their minds and wills. The name of the deathtrap comes from a common version: a crazed kaleidoscopic display of flashing multicolored lights and deafening sound designed to overload the senses. It can also include subliminal conditioning, fear-inducing weapons or toxins, exposure to a sanity-threatening dimension, imagery tailored to personal phobias, and so forth. The key element is an ongoing mental or sensory assault. The heroes have to endure the assault as they find a way to stop it and escape.

If the effect of the Kaleidoscope of Madness is immediate and irrevocable, then it is a kind of Ticking Time-Bomb, with a mental rather than physical effect, and it is the lead-up to the unleashing of the assault that is the deathtrap. If the effect is resistible, at least for a while, then it can be seen as a kind of Gauntlet or Killing Jar affecting the mind rather than the body.

THE KILLING JAR

The victims are trapped in a room with no exits while the room slowly fills with a deadly substance, such as sand, water, or toxic gas. Eventually, the room will fill completely and the victims will suffocate, but before then they will have plenty of time to experience the terror of their situation as the breathable space in the room shrinks (or the gas has its effect) and they inch ever closer to their doom. Escaping the trap involves escaping any restraints and finding a way out of the room before it's too late.

THE TICKING TIME-BOMB

Another classic deathtrap: the helpless heroes are left by a bomb that is counting down to a fatal explosion, from the old-school bundle of dynamite with a clock-face attached to it to a modern suitcase nuke or super-science weapon. Sometimes the "bomb" is some other danger, such as an overloading nuclear reactor or even an out-of-control metahuman about to "go critical." It is usually an explosion; other threats tend to shift over to the Deadly Container trap (previously). The challenges to

"IT'S A TRAP!"

One case where the players *should* be able to avoid a deathtrap is if one of them figures out on their own that a situation is a trap and chooses, *in character,* to warn the others and try to avoid it. Note, the "in character" part is important: lots of *M&M* players can figure out when in an adventure a villain would likely spring a trap, but that does not necessarily mean they, as players, do not want their characters to face that challenge. After all, if it were entirely up to the characters, they would probably take a *lot* fewer risks!

When players make this decision, essentially what they are telling you is: "We do not want our characters to get caught up in this particular trap right now." If you want to be certain, you can offer the players a hero point each for going along and letting their heroes fall into the trap. If they refuse, then that should be that. If you do not want to let them refuse, then it's generally best to plan the trap as a complication so they do not even have the option in the first place. By the time anyone realizes it is a trap, it is already too late.

the heroes are to get loose from their bonds and find a way to disarm or remove the bomb without endangering anyone else.

THE WIND TUNNEL OF DOOM

This is a surprisingly common deathtrap, although it often shows up as an unintentional one (see **The Unintended Deathtraps** sidebar). The victims are trapped in a tunnel with a whirling fan at one end, creating a powerful suction that pulls them toward the fan and its spinning blades, which are almost certain to cut any vulnerable targets to ribbons. The heroes have to hang on against the wind and find some way of stopping the fan or escaping the tunnel before they are pulled in.

GETTING TRAPPED

Instead of a "fate worse than death," deathtraps are generally "a fate *instead* of death"—or at least a means of delaying a hero's death. For the villain, it draws things out and helps ensure enemies will suffer spectacularly. For the story, it does the same thing, but ensures the heroes get another chance at a comeback.

Ending up in a deathtrap requires the hero to suffer a defeat of some kind. It might be as simple as getting knocked out in a fight with the bad guy; the hero wakes up in a fiendish deathtrap! This is a good option if the heroes lose to the villain in one of the earlier encounters in an adventure.

On the other hand, if you're planning on putting the heroes in a deathtrap as part of the adventure, then you might not want to give them a fighting chance to avoid it. That means going the "certain capture" route. In this case, you use a complication to arrange for the heroes' defeat and capture so they can end up in the deathtrap. This can happen any way you would like, such as taking one of the capture traps and springing it on them, but not giving them a chance to avoid or resist it—essentially a built-in complication. That is why you award the players a hero point for the set-up, as a kind of "thank you" for going along with one of the major elements of the genre. Then they can also use that hero point later when it comes to dealing with the deathtrap.

Finally, there may be cases where the "capture trap" is also the deathtrap. For example, the heroes might come to rescue a supporting character, following the clues to a villain's hidden lair. They get into the room where the person is held, only to discover a holographic decoy! Then the armored doors slam closed and the villain's voice comes over a hidden loudspeaker, chuckling evilly and telling them they are now *doomed!* The trap is sprung. This sort of capture, even thought it does not render the heroes unconscious or helpless first, still rates a hero point if you choose to spring it on the players with essentially no chance of avoiding it with a good Perception check or Dodge check.

EVADING TRAPS

Assuming the heroes have a chance to avoid falling into the trap in the first place (see **Capture Complications** for discussion of this), how do they avoid and overcome traps?

Detecting a trap is a Perception skill check. Avoiding the trap once it is discovered might require a Technology check to disarm or disable it, or another appropriate skill check, such as Acrobatics to get through a triggered trap area without setting it off. A suitable Expertise skill check might allow a character to deal with a trap as well.

Avoiding a trap that gets triggered usually requires a Dodge resistance check, reflecting the characters dodging out of the way or ducking at the very last second. Similarly, the check can include things like holding one's breath or clasping a hand over the nose and mouth (for gas and suffocating traps) or bracing yourself for an impact or otherwise preparing for the trap's effect. This covers most area effect traps that allow a check for half effect.

Other sorts of traps may call for different resistance checks, such as Fortitude to overcome gas attacks and other toxins (perhaps following the initial Dodge check to simply get out of the affected area) or to resist things like sonic stunners. Will checks may apply to certain psychoactive chemical weapons or "psionic" technology that directly affects the mind.

FIGURING OUT THE TRAP

Once the heroes are in the trap, then comes realizing the nature of the trap and the potential fate awaiting them if they do not escape. If the heroes were unconscious when captured, they all regain consciousness. In fact, their captor will almost certainly insist upon it, since one of the main ways the heroes will learn about the nature of the deathtrap is directly from the trapper.

WHAT IF THE DEATHTRAP SUCCEEDS?

In superhero stories, it is generally a foregone conclusion that the hero will escape from the deathtrap *somehow*, and it's a major plot twist if that does not happen. The tension comes from how the hero will manage to escape at the very last moment, rather than any real belief that he will fail. In an RPG such as *Mutants & Masterminds,* however, it can be difficult to make deathtraps seem like much of a challenge if there's no real penalty for failure. If the players cannot come up with a way out of the trap, what happens then?

Ultimately, it depends on the style of your series and your game. You can always let the chips fall where they may and mercifully draw the curtain on the demise of the character(s) in the deathtrap. Perhaps the players' new heroes—who go after the infamous super-criminal responsible for the callous killings of so many of their fellow crime-fighters—will be more successful. For certain, players will be on their toes when it comes to deathtraps in the future!

You can also have it *seem* like the deathtrap is fatal, but have it turn out to be otherwise. Perhaps it is a hoax or illusion on the villain's part, intended to psychologically torture or break down the heroes. Maybe they do perish, but a higher power intervenes and restores them to life, possibly with some strings attached. Maybe, at the very last moment, time suddenly stops so a cosmic entity can offer the heroes a second chance.

For a somewhat less heavy-handed outcome, try a last-minute save from another hero or heroes, or a member of the supporting cast. Perhaps one of the villain's hostages manages to get free and release the heroes, or the villain's daughter (who is in love with a hero) does so. This is not necessarily a cop-out; there are plenty of times when a hero's significant other, friend, or even pet has saved him from otherwise certain death.

Finally, you can choose to impose a hero point "surcharge" on any or all of these last-minute rescues. At the very least, you should probably consider taking back the hero point awarded to the players for putting their characters in the deathtrap in the first place, since they didn't overcome the challenge. If it means saving a hero from otherwise certain death, you can potentially charge *all* of the player's remaining hero points, even though that probably means a tougher fight against the villain, or at least a longer one, as the player has to earn back some of those points!

"NOW THAT YOU ARE IN MY POWER..."

If there is one thing supervillains love more than anything, it is a captive audience. The only way it could be better is if the captive audience was made up of hated enemies helpless to resist and about to perish at the villain's own hand. When things are going *that* well, it is time to *gloat*.

Yes, supervillains are not only sore losers, they are not particularly graceful winners, either, and they love an opportunity to lord it over the heroes who have frustrated and thwarted them in the past. What better moment than when you have them right where you want them and are about to remove those bothersome heroes as an obstacle once and for all? At least part of the reason why villains gloat before they unleash a deathtrap is because they sincerely believe they won't get another chance, at least not with these heroes.

So, while the heroes are groggily regaining consciousness, or casting about trying to figure out what their foe has in mind for them, put on your best melodramatic tone and tell them in character as the villain *exactly* what you have planned for them, in loving detail.

Here's the payoff for the players: if the heroes listen to the villain gloat and rant or, better yet, *encourage* it, they might get valuable time and information when it comes to getting out of the deathtrap.

Have any player who interacts, in character, with the villain (even if it's just a defiant "You'll never get away with this!") make a skill check using Perception, Insight, or an interaction skill such as Deception, Persuasion, or even Intimidation. The skill used depends on the approach the hero takes in dealing with the villain, but generally players should focus on their heroes' strengths. The DC is the villain's routine Insight check (10 + Insight bonus), although you can give players a circumstance bonus for good role-playing and targeting the bad guy's ego.

A successful check awards the player a hero point usable *only* to help escape from the deathtrap. If the player does not spend it by the time the heroes escape, it is lost.

"OF COURSE YOU KNOW..."

In the process of gloating, the villain should essentially tell the heroes the nature of the deathtrap and what is expected to happen to them. This is essential for some deathtraps, since if the actual result of the trap were to occur in-game, the heroes would be dead! So the villain's taunts and threats are a primary way for the players to get a feel for the danger their heroes face.

The villain may also take the opportunity to gloat about plans that will reach fruition after the heroes' inevitable demise, reasoning they will not be able to do anything about it and, again, it is the bad guy's last chance to brag before this particular captive audience. This is your chance to lay out the villain's plans for the players, filling in any parts they might have missed or not figured out from earlier in the adventure so they know just what to do after their heroes have escaped the deathtrap.

Once all the gloating is done, the villain may leave the heroes to their fate, having to oversee the next stage of the master plan ("I would stay and enjoy your demise, but my robot armies await ... farewell!"). Sometimes, the captor stays around to watch, giving the heroes an immediate second chance against the villain after they escape the trap, although the villain might try and flee or move up the timetable in response.

ESCAPING THE TRAP

Escaping from a deathtrap requires a series of checks rather than a single die roll or resistance check. The exact traits checked depend on the nature of the trap and the victim's tactics in the escape attempt.

Essentially, the GM sets a Difficulty Class for the trap and a number of successful checks needed to escape. The characters must achieve that number of successes before rolling a total of three failures. The more successes required, and the higher the DC, the more the heroes must struggle to overcome the deathtrap before it is too late. Each failure brings the heroes closer to doom as the trap progresses.

The base Difficulty Class is equal to the series power level (so a PL 11 series would have a deathtrap DC of 11 as well) and the base number of successes is equal to half the power level, rounded up (six for the aforementioned PL 11 series, or 11 divided by 2, rounded from 5.5 up to 6). You can increase both the DC and required successes for more difficult traps.

The traits checked are based on the means of escaping from the trap. The GM may require certain checks, while the players can propose others based on whatever plan they come up with. For example, stopping a trap might require a Technology check at some point, but clever players could substitute another skill check (such as Expertise or Sleight of Hand) or even a power check. Figuring out how to deal with the trap may be an Expertise check, but perhaps the heroes can get the information out of the villain using Deception instead. The key to handling the escape sequence is to be flexible and adjust according to what the players think up rather than forcing them into a preconceived notion of how it should go.

TEAM CHECKS

Since escaping a deathtrap requires building up a certain number of successes while avoiding failed checks, it is generally a good idea for characters who do not have a decent chance of success to not do anything, since they may only make matters worse. For example, a hero with only a +0 modifier on the required check has a better than average chance of adding to the failures tally rather than the successes.

However, one option is for the character to make a team check for one of the others involved in the escape (see **Team Checks,** *M&M Hero's Handbook*, page 16). A successful check provides a bonus to the lead character but, more importantly, a failed check does *not* count toward failures on the escape attempt. Thus, characters can help out without hindering their teammates.

ESCAPE EXAMPLE

The sinister Doctor Shock, seeking revenge on the Rook for past defeats, has captured three of his Sentinels teammates—Victor, Ultramarine, and Dragoneye—and placed them in manacles after disabling Ultramarine's power armor. The heroes were left in a chamber beneath Emerald City when Doctor Shock activated an army of his new Shocktroopers; as the mad doctor left, he opened a water main which is flooding the chamber, threatening to drown the heroes!

Dragoneye's powers are nullified by the imprisoning chains (one of his complications). Their best hope is to either jam the mechanism allowing water to pour into the room, or to reboot Ultramarine's armor in time. Unfortunately, the brave heroine is without her cybernetic helm and cannot reach the armor's vital systems with her hands bound. Some teamwork is clearly needed!

The GM decides this particular trap is challenging; a DC 13 deathtrap, needing 7 successes before 3 failures. That means these PL10 heroes are potentially in serious trouble.

"Victor," Ultramarine says, "can you reach the access panel at the small of my back?"

"I think so," the man of action replies.

Victor's player tells the GM he's going to make a Technology check, which the GM approves. He rolls the die and gets a 9, plus Victor's skill bonus of +5 for a 14—success!

"Pull out the two leads, the black one and the white one," Ultramarine instructs.

"Dragoneye, give me a hand here," Victor says.

"I'll try."

The GM tells Victor's player to make a Sleight of Hand check, which is a Dexterity check for him. Fortunately, he's got Dexterity 5, so when he rolls a 10 he gets a 15 for another success.

Dragoneye, on the other hand, only has Dexterity 3, and his player rolls an 8 for an 11—a failure!

"Sorry!" Dragoneye says as Ultramarine yelps.

"Maybe you should let me," Victor says. "Hold this lead steady."

Not wanting to risk any more failures, Victor's player suggests Dragoneye provide assistance, which his player readily agrees to. The GM says Ultramarine's player may do the same by offering instructions.

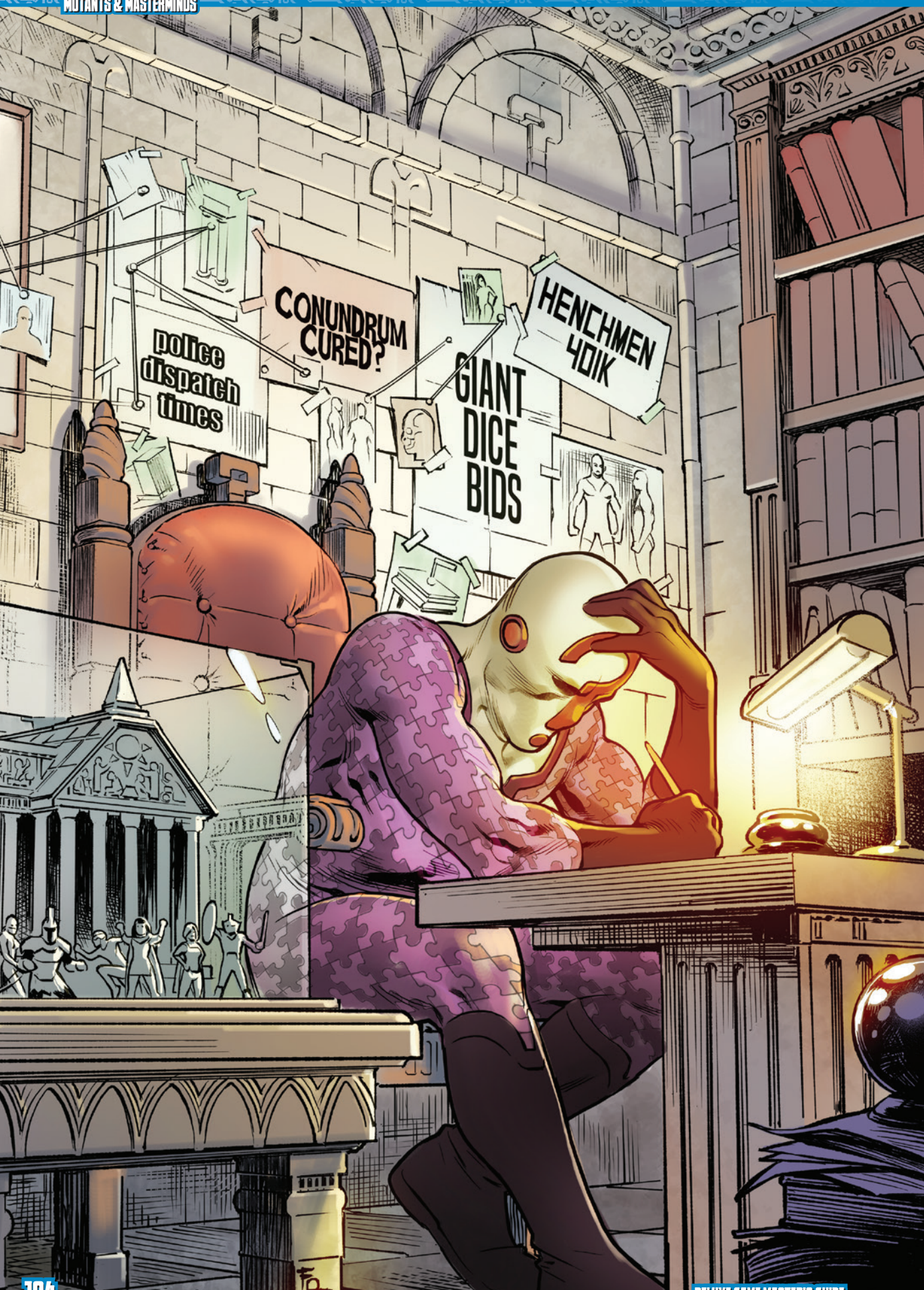
"Cross the circuits in the following order..." Ultramarine begins.

Victor does not have sufficient Expertise, so he must make Intellect checks with a +2 bonus (his Intellect rank). Fortunately, Ultramarine has a +13 bonus, and her player rolls an 18 on the die. A total of 31 provides a +5 circumstance bonus. Dragoneye's player rolls a 10, which—with his Intelligence of 3—is equal to the DC and does not reduce the circumstance bonus. Victor's player rolls a 6... with the total +7 modifier it's just enough! They now have three successes.

Ultramarine talks her teammates through the process as the water rises. They roll one more failure, leaving no more margin for error, but then Victor's player manages three more successes with the aid of his teammates, leaving just one more to go.

Not wanting to leave things to chance, Victor's player spends a hero point on the last roll, ensuring an 11, for a total bonus of 13, which is just enough: the armored avenger's battlesuit reactivates, and she is able to shatter the chains binding her and the other Sentinels, allowing them to rocket up out of the chamber before the water pulls them under entirely.

"Now let's go after Doc Shock," Ultramarine says, looking over the now-empty chamber that held the Shocktrooper army and the massive hole in the wall. "I doubt his trail will be hard to follow."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CHAPTER 6: ADVENTURES

The most common—and perhaps hardest—job as a Gamemaster is creating adventures, the stories heroes play through in the *Mutants & Masterminds* games. Each adventure should present a self-contained story, but also bring in enough familiar terrain, themes, or characters to feel like it's a part of a continuing saga. As the Gamemaster, you serve as your players' eyes and ears into the world, describing what they experience. Knowing how the world and its villains react to player actions is important.

This chapter begins by looking at basic story elements and where to get ideas for adventures and continues by laying out the most common adventure design techniques used by Gamemasters. Some of the advice may be familiar to Gamemasters who have studied creative writing. A good adventure also hinges on the unique way player characters contribute to the story, and this chapter explains how to negotiate with your players and adapt your plans to their actions at the table. Most of the major elements of *Mutants & Masterminds* can be divided into Challenge, Conflict, Investigation, and Roleplaying, and this chapter dives into building scenes around each of these ideas to present a fun and varied experience for your players.

Every Gamemaster has their own secrets and techniques for good adventure design. This chapter isn't intended to replace whatever skills experienced Gamemasters have developed, but provides tools and ideas to get new Gamemasters started while shoring up the skills of old hands.

ADVENTURE DESIGN

Creating adventures for *Mutants & Masterminds* is a lot like creating a story for any other medium: Consider who your characters are and what they want, then decide what obstacles stand in their way. Because the protagonists of any *Mutants & Masterminds* game are the player character heroes, the Gamemaster must decide what villains, NPCs, and events the heroes encounter, spurring them to action. The biggest challenge is formulating the villain's plot and deciding how they react once the heroes get involved.

As a Gamemaster, you can approach your adventures as an outline or a toolkit (both approaches are described later), but both techniques require a few basic elements.

CONCEPT

At the heart of every adventure lies a simple concept. The so-called "elevator pitch," a one- or two-sentence idea you could explain to get someone excited in the time it takes for an elevator to reach your stop. "Thieves steal jewels and unleash an ancient curse." "Crashed aliens build a portal to bring an invading army to Earth." "The hero's loved ones are taken hostage by gun-toting mole rats." You can add extra details as the story develops, but the central concept should be straightforward, punchy, and fun.

Once you have a central idea, build up from there. Who is the antagonist that threatens the PCs and forces them to confront the scenario? A villain? A natural disaster? An enthusiastic but ultimately misguided hero? A ticking clock? Look at later chapters for more ideas on handling Adversaries, Plots, and Challenges. Decide what your antagonists need, and how they accomplish it, and at what point the heroes become aware of their activities.

Ideas for plots and characters can come from all around you. Obviously comic books and superhero TV shows and movies are the easiest to borrow superhero plots from, but good ideas can come from science fiction, historical drama, romance, or any other genre of media.

Classic literature can inspire character depth: You can borrow the single-minded obsessiveness of *Moby Dick's* Ahab to color a superhero crossing the line to take down their longtime nemesis with your players in the middle, or your villain may train a protégé to enact her revenge against a whole caste of people in the style of Miss Havisham from *Great Expectations*. The real news may inspire heroic adventures as you ask how superheroes would change the same events, or how supervillains may be behind seemingly innocent human interest stories. Video games may give you ideas for fun missions, characters, or locations. Your local urban legends and tall tales may inspire adventure ideas, villains, strange events, or NPCs. Even architecture can inspire ideas, as anyone who has walked through a stylish hotel lobby or ultramodern convention center and thought "this would look good in a movie" knows.

FLESHING IT OUT

Once you have your core concept, you can begin to have fun with the details. What NPCs will the heroes interact with? Can you add challenges or opponents that allow each hero to shine in turn? What sort of fun scenes can help define the story and give the players a headache?

Every adventure needs a beginning, middle, and end. While the Gamemaster may think the adventure begins when the villains hatch the scheme, for your players—the protagonists of your story—the adventure begins when they get involved. How do the heroes become involved in the adventure? Does a robbery grab their attention? Does an informant tip them off to trouble? Does a henchperson have second thoughts and approach them with details about the villain's master plan? Is the disaster self-evident? What are your heroes doing when everything begins? Don't be afraid to ask your players how they want to get involved—especially what their heroes are doing as a new day dawns—and you might be surprised how many good ideas and story hooks they offer.

Endings are easy to imagine: They're the exciting climax with whatever villain is behind the whole adventure. Think of an exciting place for the showdown and what kinds of resources the villain ideally has to aid them. Accept that your heroes' actions may change all these plans, and be prepared to be flexible.

Middles are more challenging. You must guide your players from the beginning to the end in a way that feels natural. Think of what clues you can drop and when, and what resources the villain spends to stop the meddling do-gooders. If the heroes succeed at given scenes, does that affect their final confrontation at the adventure's climax? Perhaps if they defeat the hired mercenary sent to stop them, that character isn't around to help defend the villain at the climax. If the heroes stop the theft of a vital component, does the villain gather their forces and attack the heroes directly? Most adventures that last an evening have two to five scenes filling out their middle, so try and present different opportunities for different skills, powers, and personalities to shine.

COMPLICATING MATTERS

Look at your players' heroes and decide if any of their Complications make sense in the adventure you're designing. Does an old nemesis or rival show up? Does the villain use a hero's weakness? Are one or more heroes stuck in their secret identities as events unfold, requiring creative thinking before they can help out? Your heroes' Complications can help you fill out interesting scenes that feel personal or be springboards for adventure ideas all on their own. How do your heroes react if they discover their stodgy day-job boss actually funded the creation of their newest supervillain?

Remember that Complications help your players earn Hero Points, so don't shy away from using them. A well-spent Hero Point can mean the difference between defeat and victory in the final confrontation!

HANDLING DEFEAT

In comic book stories, heroes don't win every fight or find every clue, and the same goes for *Mutants & Masterminds* adventures. You should decide what defeat means in any given scene of your adventure. Whenever possible, defeat should lead the heroes into a detour rather than a dead end. Lower-power villains likely flee with their loot if they defeat the heroes, while masterminds may take them prisoner or lock them in an improbable deathtrap the heroes must escape. Missing clues in an investigation means the heroes are delayed and give the villain more time to gather their power, not that the villain can never be found. Failing to win over the public on an issue means the heroes will operate with increased scrutiny and angry mobs, not that they're run out of town.

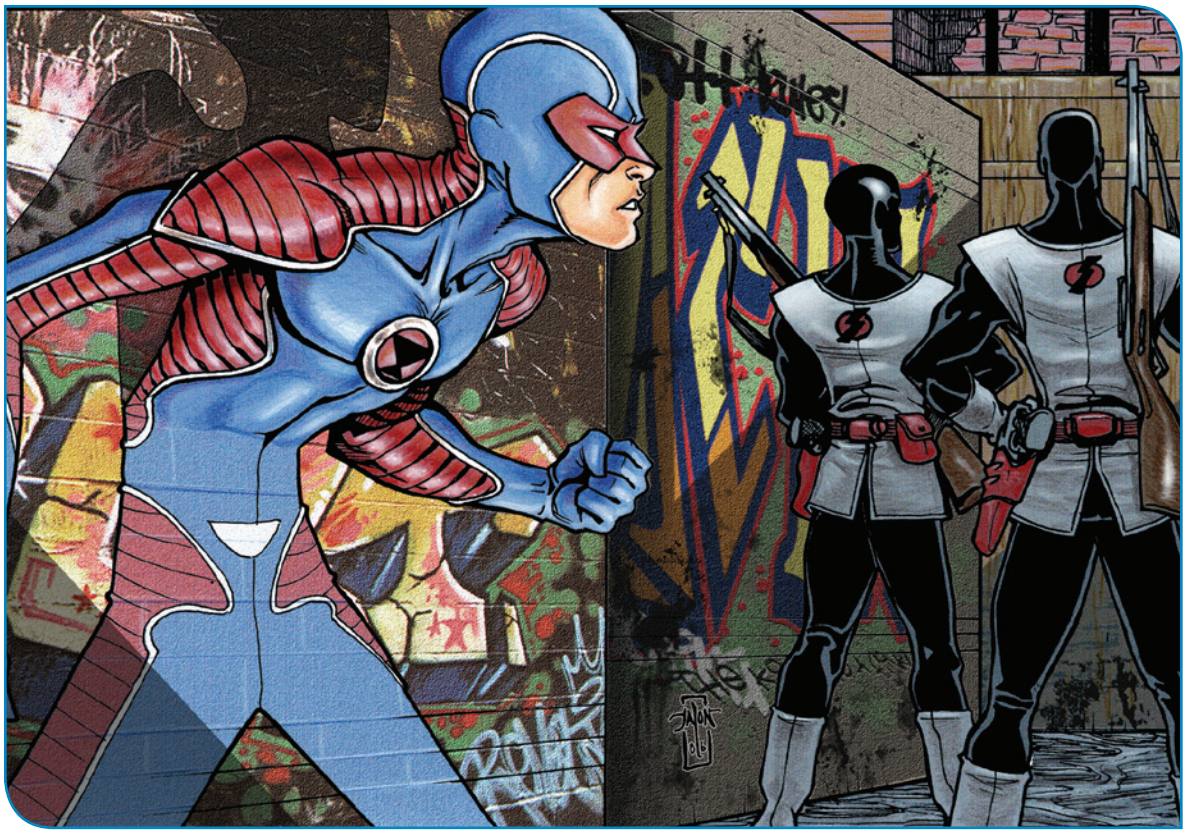
BALANCING ENCOUNTERS

It can be challenging to know exactly how threatening a villain is for your hero. Power Level only provides a rough estimate, and different powers and modifiers will affect the danger level of every encounter. In theory, a PL 10 hero has about a 55% chance of defeating a PL 10 villain, and a 45% chance of being defeated—a tough fight, but one the hero is likely to win thanks to advantages like Hero Points. The rules assume a villain is roughly twice as dangerous for every +2 increase in their PL, so a PL 12 villain would be a tough fight for two PL 10 heroes, while a PL 14 villain should be a tough fight for four PL 10 heroes. Conversely, four PL 6 minions should cause at least momentary concern for a single PL 10 hero. So a PL 12 villain and eight PL 6 minions should present a respectable fight that four PL 10 heroes would likely win.

But the above is just an estimate. *Mutants & Masterminds* is a complex system that allows for many exceptions. a PL 10 villain whose attacks affect a wide area may endanger multiple heroes every turn and can defeat multiple heroes with a few bad Toughness checks. An ice-themed villain vulnerable to heat likely won't last long against a hero with fire powers. A hero with the Takedown advantage might clear the scene of minions in a single action or two. There is no hard-and-fast rule for challenging your players that covers every possible character build. Use the above benchmarks as a guideline, and be prepared to learn and try different combinations in the future. Luckily, in *Mutants & Masterminds*, failure rarely means death. Instead, heroes receive a Hero Point for their defeat and get to try again.

THE OUTLINE APPROACH

The outline approach positions the Gamemaster as an author or director and the player characters as actors in your story, riding through a pre-set sequence of events to a final destination. This approach has all the benefits and drawbacks of a rail-shooter style video game, as the heroes advance through the story with their decisions and actions tallying up to a final success or defeat. This approach is often simpler for new Gamemasters—as it has fewer moving parts to track—but can make players feel like their decisions and initiative don't matter. Most published adventures are written using the outline approach, guiding Gamemasters through a pre-written story (sometimes with advice for how to handle things when players wander too far afield).



To create an adventure as an outline, imagine each of the scenes as a chapter in a story, or a scene in a movie. One scene leads into another, ideally dropping enough hints about what the next scene is that your players make the transition naturally and feel like they're making their own decisions. The player heroes become involved, jump from exciting scene to exciting scene, and finally arrive at the climax, just as they would if they were characters in a book. The Gamemaster makes notes for themselves ahead of time about what each scene is and what there is for the heroes to do—ideally with multiple possibilities, as they may succeed or fail at different approaches.

The sample adventure *Power Play* on page 260 is presented as an outline-style adventure.

FOR EXAMPLE

If you have a mad scientist who wants to hold the world ransom with a weather-control satellite, you must decide who that scientist is and how far along they are in the process. Are they trying to settle a grudge? Greedy? Proving their theories? Have they built the satellite yet? Is it in orbit? Can this mad scientist create other minions empowered by their weather-control technology, do they have the power to handle things first-hand, or do they hire goons to run errands for them? Let's call our villain Dr. Stormsurge (and use the Mad Scientist archetype from **Chapter 3**), who turned to villainy after their former employer—Front Dynamics—stole their designs and ruined their reputation. Front Dynamics has already launched the weather-control prototype, and now Dr. Stormsurge is going to hack into it and use it to target properties owned by Front Dynamics. Dr. Stormsurge knows that Front Dynamics will push back, so they've used the same weather-controlling technology to empower a few friends into superbeings—Sirocco and Windshear (using the Energy Controller and Speedster hero archetypes from the *Deluxe Hero's Handbook*, respectively)—and arm a few high-tech guards (using the Robot Jockey minion type). Dr. Stormsurge has established a secret lab in an old missile silo (see the headquarters maps in **Appendix: Villainous Lairs**) as a stronghold. Most of the threat the players face will be weather-related dangers.

Scene 1 (Challenge Scene): The heroes become involved when they witness a freak tornado form in the city. They must rescue civilians trapped in its path and minimize the destruction. They may stop the tornado itself (likely with creative power checks), but if not, they'll have to simply keep its path clear and stop any disasters in its wake. Several industrial buildings are destroyed and the heroes can try to investigate afterward, but all signs point to this being a one-in-a-million weather anomaly.

Scene 2 (Challenge Scene): The heroes can attend to whatever personal business they like (a mini roleplay scene, if you want to get technical), but the next day a sudden thunderstorm targets a private airport outside of town, endangering workers with sudden flooding, fires started by strikes, and planes about to crash as the air traffic control tower is struck by lightning. Once again, the heroes must protect whomever they can and may attempt to end the disaster with power checks, otherwise they must wait it out.

Scene 3 (Investigation Scene): Two impossible weather events in two days is too big a coincidence, and the he-

THE DREADED BLOCK

One of the worst opponents any Gamemaster can face is the dreaded block. Writer's block, gamer's block, general executive disfunction—whatever you call it, the part of your brain responsible for fun ideas and connecting dots simply refuses to work. Coming up with fun ideas on a regular schedule can be challenging, even stressful. It's natural that your brain rebels now and then.

If you're out of ideas for a new adventure, look at your favorite inspiration. Read a comic. Watch a movie. Stream a few episodes of your favorite TV show—superheroes or not—and just let yourself get excited. If nothing else, you can steal the plot and hope your players don't notice. You may also want to look for a random writing prompt generator on the internet and see if the hooks it provides strike your interest. If time is short, consider picking up a published adventure and either using it as-is or dropping in your own villains and supporting cast. You can even let your players do most of the work for the night by dropping some plot device in their laps—like a time-traveling pocket watch or duplication machine—and see what they do with it, assembling your own plot later from whatever ideas they spark.

Sometimes block strikes in the middle of a game session. Your players take an unexpected action or you lose your place in the notes and suddenly all your energy and momentum just stops as you try and fail to figure out what to do next. In this case, it's perfectly acceptable to call a break and review your notes. If that doesn't help, you can always throw in a random element of danger—such as a trap or a challenge or an assassin sent to attack your heroes (or their loved ones). Your players may even speculate about what's going on if you act cagey, providing you with inspiration for what just happened, or you can leave it random and mysterious, with vague allusions to a plot thread you can use in the future.

You can always ask your players to fill in the blanks on a new scene or development. They provide plenty of brain power you should be eager to tap. If one player seems left out of this new direction, ask them to describe the scene, the NPC their partners encounter, or some weird story element that complicates things. You might not have any idea how to portray the gas station attendant who witnessed last night's robbery, but you can simply tell your player they know this NPC and ask them how.

roes can now investigate. The airport is owned by a scientific think-tank called Front Dynamics, as was one of the buildings destroyed by the tornado. The right Expertise skills or Investigate can help the PCs uncover records of a secret weather-control device FD has been working on for over a year, while Persuasion-based skills may let them learn that a disgruntled employee was let go from the project several months ago. Front Dynamics insists their weather satellite is still entirely under their control, and even if it weren't, it's only a prototype and not powerful enough to cause such widespread (and expensive) destruction.

> **"WHEN IN DOUBT HAVE A MAN COME THROUGH A DOOR WITH A GUN IN HIS HAND."**
>
> **-RAYMOND CHANDLER**

Scene 4 (Conflict): Once the PCs begin investigating, Dr. Stormsurge is convinced the interlopers are working for Front Dynamics and sends Windshear and half their robot jockeys out to confront the heroes and scare them away from helping Front Dynamics. Once it becomes obvious the heroes are winning, Windshear and any remaining robot jockeys retreat, but they have mentioned enough about Dr. Stormsurge in the fight banter that the heroes know the scientist is operating from a nearby missile silo.

Scene 5 (Mixed Challenge/Conflict Scene): As the PCs arrive at their lair, Dr. Stormsurge activates the weather control satellite to create a hail storm, pelting the area with light damage and making the terrain slick while equipping themselves and their minions with technology to compensate. The PCs must battle Dr. Stormsurge, Sirocco, Windshear (if he escaped the last scene) and any remaining robot jockeys to finally end the threat to the city. Heroes can deactivate the weather satellite to improve conditions during the fight, or even create warmer conditions that the scientist's preparations leave the villain forces vulnerable to. How they handle this fight may lead to future adventures, such as busting Front Dynamics for their illegal business practices, but those are stories for another time.

THE TOOLKIT APPROACH

The toolkit approach positions the Gamemaster as a referee rather than an author, allowing the players more freedom in how they solve their problems and adjusting the world and the villain's plan accordingly. If the outline approach is a book, then the toolkit approach is more like a sandbox video game, where heroes can explore on their own, encounter enemies out of order, and possibly stumble across bigger problems than they can handle. This approach generally feels more realistic and allows players greater control and investment in the campaign, but also requires more research and improvisational skills on the part of the Gamemaster, or else a large archive of villains, NPCs, and locations they can draw on at a moment's notice.

The toolkit approach requires the Gamemaster to build a "kit" for each adventure, know who the villain is, their personality, their resources, and a rough schedule of the villain's plans, as well as likely locations the PCs will visit and information on relevant NPCs. Because the heroes can quickly go "off script" to investigate new angles and people, other creative tools, like name generators, NPC personality lists, or a handy folder of urban maps are all useful when the players select an unexpected strategy.

The Gamemaster needs to be ready to react organically as the PCs wander through the plot, and feed them enough information regardless of the approach they take to keep the adventure moving forward, but players must also be willing to accept that the Gamemaster may need a fifteen minute break during a session to review their notes and decide how a new scene plays out. Scenes generally flow more organically from one to the next, and while some will be pre-arranged (such as an attack the villain has already prepared, or a negotiation the PCs must find their way into the middle of), how they occur, and the fallout are more open to interpretation.

The Gamemaster might want to jot down a few notes on how to handle whatever possibilities they can think of, but there's no sense in going into detail: there's no guarantee any given NPC, location, or plot element will come up, and they'll likely invent a few on the fly. Ideally, a Gamemaster can cannibalize their unused notes into new plans—if the heroes skip fighting guards in the cannery, for example, the Gamemaster can use that map later for a robotics factory or that minion statblock to represent a crime lord's goons.

The sample adventure *The Island of Doctor Sersei* on page 274 is presented as a toolkit-style adventure.

FOR EXAMPLE

Using the same scenario, characters, and resources, we wouldn't break the adventure down into specific scenes, so much as events that will happen according to a schedule, and then figure out what's going on with Dr. Stormsurge and their minions as time goes on. Each event is separated by a few days, assuming the heroes don't get involved.

- **Event 1:** Dr. Stormsurge tests the weather-control satellite by creating a heat wave that wipes out one of Front Dynamic's experimental farms. Because this is away from the city, the heroes likely never learn of it, but it may come up in their investigations, and they may want to visit the farm later. Stormsurge sent Sirocco to observe the test, and so if the PCs investigate, they may find the webcam and monitoring equipment Sirocco set up, as well as her garbage.
- **Event 2:** Dr. Stormsurge uses the weather control satellite again to create a tornado in the city's industrial district, destroying a facility owned by Front Dynamics.
- **Event 3:** Dr. Stormsurge uses the weather control satellite to create a thunderstorm at Front Dynamics's private airport on the edge of town.
- **Event 4:** Dr. Stormsurge uses the weather control satellite to create a downburst to destroy the mansion of Front Dynamic CEO Eli Thrust.
- **Event 5:** Front Dynamic, having failed to re-take control of the satellite from Dr. Stormsurge, launches a private rocket to knock it out of orbit.

Dr. Stormsurge is paranoid and reactionary, certain that Front Dynamics controls the authorities and—by extension—the superheroes in the city. If the heroes get involved, Dr. Stormsurge immediately targets them, perhaps with bizarre weather at public appearances or their headquarters (if it is publicly known), but likely by sending one of their super-powered lieutenants and some robot jockeys to scare them. The heroes can investigate Front Dynamics once they recognize them as the common element in all the weird weather attacks, and learn about Dr. Stormsurge's history with the company. They may even take the scientist's side and win them as an ally by taking down Eli Thrust (and in this case, the Gamemaster should be ready to give Thrust a few super-powered or technologically-advanced guards of his own). If the heroes can't track Stormsurge by the time Front Dynamic's rocket knocks the satellite out of alignment, the scientist may launch their own satellite or a rocket of their own to reclaim the technology (or incorporate it into a space station, taking the adventure into orbit).

The adventure ultimately resolves when the heroes ensure Dr. Stormsurge no longer threatens the city, whether they ally with the scientist, defeat them, or temporarily drive them into space.

SCENE TYPES

Mutants & Masterminds roughly divides game events into four types of scenes: Challenge, Conflict, Investigation, and Roleplay, each described in detail over the next several pages.

- **Challenge scenes** are scenes that use skill checks, ability checks, and/or power checks to overcome or bypass a barrier.
- **Conflict scenes** are scenes that place the heroes in direct competition with other characters, including combat.
- **Investigation scenes** are scenes that use skill checks, ability checks, and/or power checks to uncover information.
- **Roleplay scenes** are scenes that use player interaction to uncover information, overcome barriers, or generally have fun.

These aren't hard and fast categories—simply ways of thinking about the challenges and story opportunities you present at your table—and can easily be combined or changed to suit your game style.

Generally, adventures mix and match scene types, with an evening's game using anywhere from three to eight scenes for one adventure.

CHALLENGE SCENES

Challenge scenes generally present some danger the heroes must escape or some goal they want to accomplish, often with a ticking clock or consequences for failure. While some are easily resolved with a single skill check or power use, most require multiple checks or challenge sequences to resolve and get the heroes to their goal. Challenge scenes are often broken down into action rounds or other small units of time, with each check representing a character's efforts during that period of time.

Examples of Challenge scenes include:

- Escaping a flooding room, crushing chamber, or other villainous deathtrap.
- Stopping a tidal wave as it rushes toward the city, or clearing citizens out of the area so no one is hurt.
- Breaking into a secure building with different alarms, guards, and even traps.
- Repairing an alien device or performing a magic ritual that can stop a rampaging kaiju.

Creating a fun Challenge scene only requires understanding what the heroes want, what keeps them from getting that prize, and what steps they can take to reach their goal. Sometimes a challenge is simple: A locked door can be circumvented with a Technology check to pick the lock, a Strength check to bash it open, or powers like Insubstantial. Other challenges might be more complex: Getting into a secret government base means using Expertise or Persuasion to learn its location, Sleight of Hand to steal a base guard's ID, Deception to craft a disguise, and Stealth to sneak in to restricted areas. You must decide if everyone needs to succeed at a check to bypass the challenge (everyone needs to sneak past the guards one way or another), or if only one person needs to succeed (there's only one doomsday device to diffuse).

You can decide the ideal way to solve each step of the problem, but be flexible with your players if they want to try a different approach or use a power or skill in a creative way. Be fair when assigning check DCs to these new solutions; an outlandish plan may be much more difficult, or it may be easier because it's a tactic no one would think to defend against.

You should also decide beforehand how much time the heroes have and how many failed checks they get before they fail. In general, heroes need twice as many successes to succeed as they need failures to lose, so heroes may need 4 Degrees of Success before they accumulate two failures for a simple task, or 10 Degrees of Success before they have five failures for a very complex challenge. Alternatively, instead of forcing the characters to fail the scene at a certain point, you can place some slowly-escalating consequences on failure, such as Toughness checks to resist increasing damage with every failed check.

Challenge scenes are an opportunity for everyone to get creative. Player input and planning can come up with fun solutions, while the Gamemaster must decide how these new tactics interact with the scene. If the heroes want to enter the secret base by burrowing through the earth, the Gamemaster should decide if the base has seismographs that can detect them, or sensors to detect superbeings, or burrowing defenders. Think on your feet and ask yourself the important questions: Is it fair, and is it fun?

Challenge scenes make excellent consequences for failure in other scenes: An investigation went poorly, and now the PCs must rush across the city as fast as possible to reach the villain before the bomb goes off. The heroes fail to win over the alien prince and are locked in the armada brig. The villain defeats the heroes, and seals them inside an overly-elaborate death trap that will *surely* finish them off while she oversees the final stages of her plan.

SUCCESS AND FAILURE

Success in a Challenge scene should have obvious rewards. The benefits of success are usually the whole purpose of the Challenge scene: the heroes escape the deathtrap, or rescue civilians, or find the secret information they need. You should feel free to reward heroes for exceptional creativity or good luck as well, including Hero Points, temporary (or even permanent) equipment, additional information, or positive morale that provides a circumstance bonus to certain checks in the next scene.

Failing a Challenge scene should never bring the entire adventure to a screeching halt, but it should usually have consequences: It may mean the villain gathers more resources, or the heroes go into the next scene with a condition or damage, or cost the heroes a resource like Hero Points (requiring them to edit the scene to resolve the challenge). Alternatively, the failure keeps pushing the story forward but triggers a new scene type, like a fight breaking out or a tense Roleplay scene as the heroes plead their case.

AWARDING HERO POINTS

The Gamemaster should award Hero Points in a Challenge scene whenever a player suggests a particularly fun or insightful solution, whenever failing the challenge makes the situation much more hazardous, or whenever the Gamemaster throws in new or unexpected challenges to keep the scene from being too easy. You should also reward heroes who make the challenge more difficult for themselves by trying to live up to a heroic ideal, like refusing to leave another prisoner behind or using their turn to comfort an NPC instead of make progress on the challenge sequence.

PLOT TWISTS TABLE

Sometimes a failed skill check doesn't end the challenge scene, it just makes the scene more interesting. Likewise, if things are too easy or predictable, you might throw in an unexpected twist. Roll a d20 and consult the following table, or pick the most interesting result.

D20	RESULT
1–2	**Family Arrival:** A friendly NPC somehow becomes involved in the challenge; *your daughter's field trip just happens to be to the museum you must rob, your boss gets caught by goons.*
3–4	**Bad Timing:** An Unrelated Villain Arrives; *another villain needs the same information you do, a C-list villain robs something nearby.*
5–6	**Okay, Creepy:** The hero stumbles across something unsettling but unrelated, delaying you briefly; *you find a guard's hero-worship shrine to you; this bathroom hasn't been cleaned in months.*
7–9	**Well THAT Wasn't It:** The challenge randomly gets harder in a way related to the check the PC just made; *you accidentally fry the keyboard, you insult the mayor's mother.*
10–12	**Disaster Strikes:** Another, smaller challenge interrupts and needs to be tended to; *you set off an alarm that now needs to be disabled, you break into the kitchens and must pass yourself off as a new chef or health inspector.*
13–14	**Oversight:** A superior, journalist, bureaucrat, or concerned citizen's group becomes involved; *student protesters make the guards edgy, your commanding office buzzes you on the radio to demand an explanation.*
15–17	**That Hurt:** The check goes wrong, and the hero picks up a condition like Entranced, Fatigued, Hindered, or Unaware; *crossing the wrong wires gives you a zap, someone flipped the lights on before you could remove your night vision goggles.*
18–19	**What Was That?:** A guard, villain, or dangerous monster shows up to investigate; *your cologne is too strong, museum patrons mistake you for an exhibit.*
20	**I Did Not Need to See That:** The hero learns some useful scrap of information as part of their failed check, but is also disturbed by the context, leaving them Impaired for the rest of the scene; *that mystical secret was not meant to be known by a mortal mind, the villain keeps his password in the folder with his vacation pictures folder.*

CONFLICT SCENES

Conflict scenes place heroes in direct competition with other characters to achieve a goal and move the story forward. The most common examples of this are fight scenes, where heroes use their skills and fantastic powers in exciting slugfests, but a conflict scene can also be a race, debate, or cooking competition. Any action-focused scenario that places the PCs primarily against opponents who can react and adapt to them qualifies as a conflict scene.

Some examples of Conflict scenes include:

- Brawling with supervillains in the street.
- Chasing down escaping bank robbers as they make their getaway.
- A cosmic dance-off.
- A training session in the Doom Room.
- Arm wrestling for the fate of California.

The key to any conflict scene is knowing who opposes the heroes and what their motivation is. It's important to know the antagonists' skills and powers, but it's just as important to have a feel for their Complications, personality, and goals. A team of professional thieves will have different strategies than an anarchist looking to tear down the system, even though either of them could be holding a bank hostage. Some criminals only want to get away, and want to distract the heroes long enough to make their escape. Unscrupulous sorts may threaten or endanger civilians and force the heroes to choose between saving innocent people or pressing the fight. Other antagonists may be cunning master planners who have three escape routes planned out beforehand and seem to vanish without a trace once the fight turns against them. Outside of a fight, knowing the adversary's personality means knowing if they are likely to cheat at competitions, how they will react to interactions, and whether they're the sort of character to prepare secret surprises for their opponents.

Understanding where a conflict happens can help add fun options. A battle in the park means trees and rocks may serve as cover while bushes can offer concealment, benches and statues are available for super-strong characters to throw, and lakes can change the fight environment. A rooftop chase becomes more treacherous in the middle of the night if a hero doesn't have nightvision or a light source. Make sure whatever environment rules you use are imposed on the villains as well as the heroes.

BEYOND COMBAT

While combat is the most common Conflict scene in *Mutants & Masterminds*, other conflicts can arise. By and large, use the way combat works to model other kinds of conflicts: Characters all roll initiative, time is tracked in rounds or turns of some sort, and characters make action rolls on their turns, with the affected character resisting with another roll. For a chase, action rolls might be effect checks using a movement power, or an Athletics or Vehicles skill check, with the target being chased making an opposed roll; a success for the pursuer brings them closer while a success for the prey widens the lead. A battle of the bands might be treated like combat, with the audience essentially being minions each band "attacks" with Expertise skill checks to win them over. As always, be flexible and be fun, and as with Challenge scenes, be open to new input from your players. The scenes presented later in this chapter present several ways of using the rules for alternative Conflicts.

SUCCESS & FAILURE

Success in Conflict scenes usually amounts to survival and pushing the story forward: The heroes defeat the villain's minions or win the competition and gain its rewards. In a fight, capturing some of the villains or their minions means the mastermind or organization involved can't use those same forces again (for now). Unlike many roleplaying games, *Mutants & Masterminds* doesn't generally allow players to loot their enemies—take their weapons, armor, or quantum manipulators—but in some fights taking a tool or plot device from a villain may be the whole point of the conflict, while at other times it can be fun for a hero to pick up a defeated enemy's weapon for a scene or two. Player characters generally only retain powers and equipment they have paid Power Points for, and so "loot" like this generally breaks down or runs out of fuel quickly.

The consequences of failure depend heavily on who the heroes' opponents are and their agenda. Villains trying to escape with their loot are likely to leave defeated heroes where they fall, while evil masterminds may imprison them, and mad scientists might strap them to tables for fun experiments. The consequences for failure in non-combat Conflicts are more similar to Challenge scenes, with failure costing the heroes resources, information, or pride. Some fights are true battles for survival, with failure meaning a hero's death, but these should be the exception unless your campaign is especially gritty or dark.

AWARDING HERO POINTS

The Gamemaster should award Hero Points in a Conflict scene whenever you use the environment to make the situation worse for the PCs or bring in reinforcements to help a villain. You can also give out a Hero Point to grant your villain the benefits a hero would normally get for spending one, such as shaking off a condition or rerolling a die; award this Hero Point to the player character most directly affected. If the villain wins, award every hero involved a Hero Point.

THAT WAS TOO EASY TABLE

Sometimes players roll a lucky critical success on the first turn of combat, or your master villain flubs a Toughness check and ruins what should have been a challenging final battle. If the heroes seem to have too easy a time with defeating your villain for a Conflict scene, consider rolling on this chart to figure out why their encounter went too smoothly (and award them a Hero Point).

D20	RESULT
1	**It Was All a Dream:** The fight was somehow a fake; the entire fight was a dream, hologram, or illusion meant to distract or test the heroes, leading to an Investigation as to what happened or a new Conflict.
2–3	**You Don't Understand:** The villain was on-scene to try and stop the same crime because they had a personal stake in the adventure, or they were blackmailed into helping by someone else.
4–5	**Deadman's Switch:** The villain's defeat initiates some disaster (their base collapses, a bomb countdown begins, an experiment runs out of control), starting a Challenge scene.
6–7	**This Isn't Even My Final Form:** The villain's true power is revealed in defeat, and they begin a new Conflict in with more power.
8–9	**All According to Plan:** The PCs winning somehow furthers the villain's true goal, possibly setting up a major plot hook for the next adventure.
10–11	**He's a Robot?:** The supposed villain was a robot, clone, or other duplicate sent for unknown reasons.
12–13	**We've Gone Too Far:** The PCs accidentally injured or (apparently) killed the villain, possibly triggering a Roleplay scene dealing with the consequences.
14–15	**NOW They Show Up:** The proper authorities arrive on the scene, and the PCs must negotiate with or evade them.
16–17	**Merely a Test:** This was just the villain testing the heroes to gauge their abilities, with a pre-planned escape and a feigned defeat.
18–19	**The True Master:** The apparent villain was only a minion for a more powerful villain lurking in the shadows, waiting to confront the heroes after they tired themselves out battling the puppet.
20	**Wrong Place, Wrong Time:** The heroes or the villain are accidentally in the wrong time or dimension, and defeat the villain well before or well after the crime in question. Getting back may be an adventure on its own.

INVESTIGATION SCENES

Like Challenge scenes, Investigation scenes focus on skill use. the difference revolves around the pacing and reward. Investigation scenes focus on uncovering knowledge rather than bypassing barriers or escaping danger. Investigation scenes generally don't have the tight time requirements of a Challenge scene, and so time can be tracked more loosely; each hero's efforts may amount to ten minutes' work, or an hour's, or a full day of chasing down leads.

Some examples of Investigation scenes include:

- Searching a crime scene and using various skills to analyze what was found.
- Hacking into a computer system.
- Uncovering remnants of a civilization that vanished thousands of years ago.
- Communing with spirits to learn about a supernatural menace.

Investigation scenes are generally reactive; the heroes investigate in the wake of something else happening. It may be the scene of a recent crime or a ritual chamber sealed 500 years ago, but in either case the players want to learn what already happened. The Gamemaster's job is to know what happened, what traces of it would be left behind, and how the heroes find and understand those traces. The Investigation skill is the most obvious tool for Investigation scenes, but the Perception skill can also be used to find clues and patterns, while various Expertise skills can be just as handy for recognizing their significance. The technology skill can be used to trace electronic crimes or tell when a lock or security system has been tampered with (and how), while Treatment can reveal the source of injuries, illness, or poisons if a mystery involves living creatures. Presence-based skills like Deception, Intimidate, and Persuasion can all be useful for getting information out of witnesses or suspects. Powers like Senses can be especially useful, granting one or more automatic successes during an Investigation scene depending on what the hero can detect.

Some powers may make Investigation scenes too easy, or redundant. Senses (Postcognition) allows a hero to see exactly what happened, while Mind Reading allows a hero to dive into a suspect's mind to determine what they saw or if they are lying. You may want to consider the ethical ramifications of using powers to violate peoples' privacy in your game, but you should generally allow players to enjoy the powers they've invested Power Points into. You don't need to address every mystery in perfect detail; instead look at these powers as new means of doling out information. Postcognition can reveal that a masked woman pulled the trigger on the murder victim—and even enough of their conversation beforehand to seed some leads—but uncovering who she was or why she killed him still requires old-fashioned detective work. Likewise, heroes may still need skills like Deception or Persuasion once inside a suspect's memories to tease out information; the criminal just can't shut up or refuse to answer like they can in real life.

Players will generally begin an Investigation scene with one big question, and the temptation is generally to answer that question once they have succeeded at a predetermined number of skill checks. For short investigations, this solution is practical and fast. For more detailed investigations, break that central question into many smaller questions and answer one with each successful check. If the heroes want to know who robbed the bank, tease out the villain's identity by revealing the powers used, the equipment they had, and a lead on where they came from—enough information to push the story forward while letting players speculate on the details and feel satisfied if their guesses were right. Always be ready to steal your player's speculations and adjust your own plot if they happen across a twist more clever than what you'd planned.

No mystery is entirely unsolvable. Every person leaves traces of themselves as they pass through an area, and even more evidence if they try to conceal their presence. Your goal in an Investigation scene is never to hide information from your players, only to make obtaining it fun and interesting.

SUCCESS & FAILURE

Most Investigation scenes boil down into Challenge sequences, with bits of information doled out as the reward for each successful test. Successful investigations might provide heroes with enough information to lay an ambush or trap, or provide additional information on their target—floor plans of a villain's lair, passwords, or guard schedules. Alternatively, they may uncover resources like new contacts or single-use equipment to help with the rest of the adventure.

Failure in an investigation should never lead the PCs to a complete dead-end, but may leave them chasing down a dangerous false lead before learning the truth, potentially leading to a Challenge or Conflict scene. Alternatively, a failed Investigation may point the heroes in the correct direction, but they arrive so late that the villain has additional time to prepare, recruiting additional villains, laying a trap, or otherwise making the climax more difficult.

AWARDING HERO POINTS

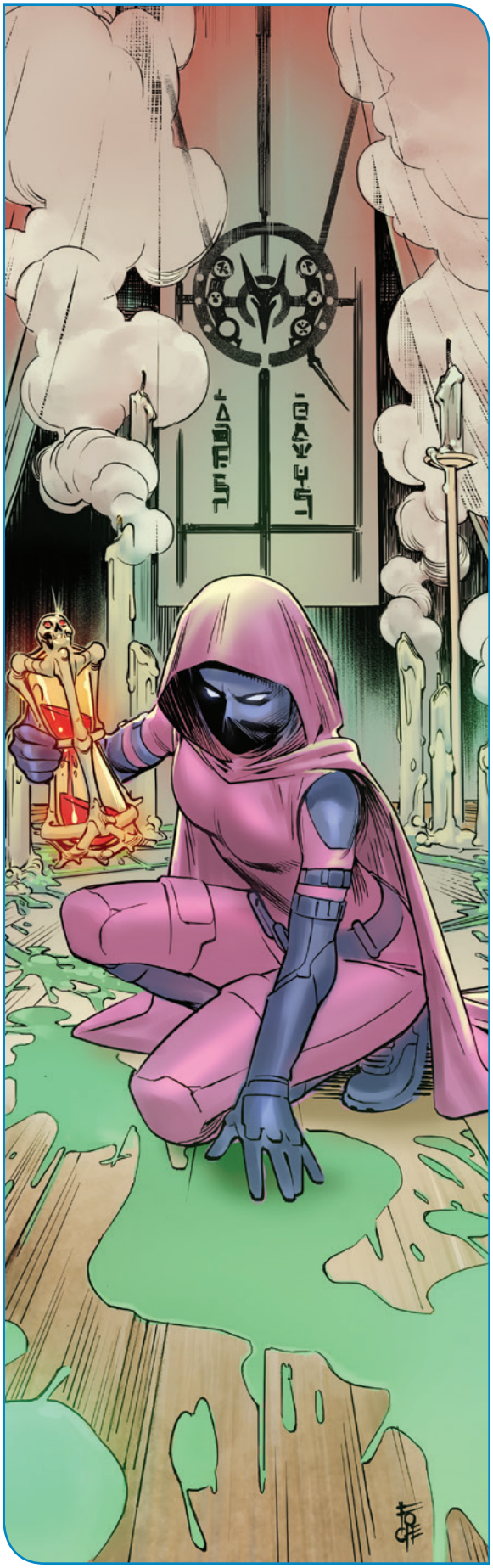
The Gamemaster should award Hero Points in an Investigation scene whenever a player makes a particularly good insight, observation, or leap of logic that moves the plot forward. You should also award a Hero Point whenever you throw in a new complication to keep the Investigation

NEW LEADS TABLE

No detective can catch every clue, and sometimes the best-laid trails go cold. If comic book heroes lose track of the investigation or can't seem to catch a clue, the plot often drops new leads into their lap to get them back on track. If your players are struggling, consider providing a new clue, lead, or solution by way of one of the following.

D20	RESULT
1	**Accident:** A complete accident allows the heroes to stumble into a new lead, often by accidentally damaging something important to a hero.
2–3	**Convenient News Report:** Television or social media picks up a relevant news story that directs the heroes to the trouble they seek.
4–5	**Anonymous Source:** An unknown figure offers the information without revealing their identity. Are they a concerned citizen, a heroic mentor, or a rival villain?
6–7	**Interested Party:** Some antagonist from the hero's life will provide information in exchange for a treasure or future favor.
8–9	**Helpful Authorities:** The police, a sheriff, or a government agency have a lead and would like the hero to follow up on it.
10–11	**Reluctant Authorities:** The authorities reveal they have more information than the heroes, but won't share, possibly forcing a Challenge or Roleplay scene to obtain it.
12–13	**Seen Too Much:** A friend or family NPC saw something, but was injured or captured in the process, and may need medical attention or rescue.
14–15	**Right Place/Right Time:** The heroes happen to arrive somewhere with a clue or a knowledgeable NPC.
16–17	**Heroic Cooperation:** Another hero—maybe a condescending old hand or an eager would-be sidekick—has information to share.
18–19	**Enemy of My Enemy:** Another supervillain wants to take down the target of the PC investigation, and offers them free information.
20	**Fan Support:** The hero's fans hear about the investigation and do their own snooping to pass the information along to the hero.

scene from being too easy for the heroes, or whenever a player does an especially good job of thinking in-character, especially in ways that complicate the Investigation.



ROLEPLAY SCENES

Roleplay scenes allow heroes to overcome a barrier or uncover information by use of character drama and description rather than skill checks, and help the campaign feel more realistic as character traits outshine mechanical bonuses. Roleplay scenes are especially important when drama or major reveals in the storyline shouldn't be ruined by a single bad roll of the die. They help highlight a character's unique flavor, abilities, background, and melodrama, and provide players a valuable opportunity to earn Hero Points.

Some examples of Roleplay scenes include:

- Talking down an angry mob.
- Negotiating with a captive villain to find out where she hid the doomsday device.
- Navigating a tense press conference.
- Picking your kid up from school on game day.
- Being a kid at the big game, and deciding whether or not to use your powers to help your team win.

Most Roleplay scenes revolve around dialogue as the heroes interact with their supporting cast, authorities, captive villains, reporters, or the general public. They may mentor their child after a hard day of school, run errands for a sickly uncle, describe their adventures to a skeptical reporter, or talk down an angry mob. Beyond dialogue, Roleplay scenes may involve tough character-building moments and choices, often tempting or requiring a hero to discreetly use their powers in their everyday. Sometimes this is for personal satisfaction—cheating on a test, getting the raise you need, getting the cute guy to notice them. Other times it's a matter of life and death—saving a friend from an accident, stopping a speeding car, or deciding whether to share information only a superhero would know while maintaining a secret identity. Players can generally narrate their activities with fewer or no dice rolls, with the Gamemaster acting as the final judge for what is reasonable or mediating disputes when two or more players argue. As always, don't forget your responsibility to keep the game moving and fun for everyone.

The challenge for a Roleplay scene comes from how much a character reveals (do they tell the police everything they know, even if it may leak their secret identity?) and what choices they make—perhaps they can't stop a carjacking *and* still get to work on time. Roleplay scenes are generally freeform, and Gamemasters don't need to track time beyond vague estimates, just as "over the course of the evening" or "in the next hour." Likewise, while skills and powers may come up—especially skills like Persuasion and Insight that revolve around character interaction—these should generally measure a hero's success or lead to plot twists rather than stymieing their progress.

Because Roleplay scenes involve tracking many freeform, moving parts and active characters, they can become confusing or overwhelming. When portraying multiple NPCs, make notes for each character's distinctive speech patterns, grimace, or accent in addition to a character sheet you may already have. Props, including character portraits and minis, but also distinctive headwear, glasses, and other quick costume details can help everyone keep track of who is speaking. For Roleplay scenes intended to communicate important facts, Gamemasters should make lists of what needs to be said and look for natural opportunities to slip those plot points into the scene.

One of the biggest challenges with running Roleplay scenes is dividing your attention and table time between your players equally. One player will often stand out as the dramatist while more introverted players may retreat into the background. If a player seems shy or doesn't want to participate, that's fine, but make sure you make space for them if they do and prevent other players from interrupting or hogging the spotlight.

SUCCESS & FAILURE

Success in Roleplay scenes is generally measured by participation. So long as a player felt like they got to participate as much as they were comfortable with, some measure of success should emerge, whether that's obtaining new information, overcoming a plot barrier, or just having fun and earning a few Hero Points.

When things do go wrong in a Roleplay scene, it should deepen the story and complicate the heroes' adventure rather than slow down the adventure. Nothing makes an awkward date even worse quite like a kidnapping, while a hero who sticks their foot in their mouth while talking to the FBI might suddenly find all their government contacts going quiet for the adventure.

AWARDING HERO POINTS

Roleplay scenes are an opportunity for a character's Complications to shine without endangering their lives. Gamemasters should draw on those Complications often and shamelessly in Roleplay scenes, and even take the opportunity to introduce temporary Complications a character must navigate for the rest of an adventure, like visiting family, powers going haywire, or an unknown family legacy popping up. Every use of a Complication earns the character a Hero Point for later, and Gamemasters should award additional Hero Points whenever a player puts their heart and soul into portraying their character. Keep introverted players in mind during Roleplay scenes as well, and award Hero Points when a player keeps the table on-task and moving forward, or when quiet contributions help everyone have fun.

NPC PERSONAL AND VERBAL QUIRKS

Sometimes heroes go looking for new friends when you don't have anything prepared. If you need a memorable hook for an NPC, roll on one or both of these tables.

D20	PERSONAL QUIRK
1	Always chewing on a toothpick, gum, or candy
2	Constantly mentions their romantic partner
3	Big fan of one hero
4	Big critic of one hero
5	Goes off on tangents; can't focus
6	Dresses for the wrong decade
7	Acts younger than they seem
8	Talks to someone who isn't there
9	Has a colorful catchphrase
10	Won't make eye contact
11	Flirtatious
12	Talks in an old-fashioned style
13	Clearly biased against a group
14	Pushy about a product
15	Thinks villains are sexy
16	Loud about a political belief or conspiracy
17	Seems distant or dreamy
18	Knows the hero or the hero's non-heroic identity
19	Always thinking about food and referencing restaurants
20	Might be in the wrong comic/attitude seems counter to the campaign mood

D20	VERBAL QUIRK
1	"...like you do."
2	"I tell you..."
3	"Don't you know?"
4	"Sorry."
5	"Yeah, no."
6–7	"Quite."
8–9	"That's fair."
10–11	"...you know."
12–13	Long pauses
14–15	"Absolutely."
16	"...I mean, technically."
17	"Whatchucallit..."
18	"Could be, yeah."
19	"Know what I mean?"
20	Excessive profanity

COMBINED SCENES

At the table, few scenes fall neatly into a single category. Your heroes will try to negotiate with a sympathetic villain even as they battle him, roleplay with one another and supporting cast as they work through an investigation, and split up to solve a mystery and gather the ingredients for a magic ritual at the same time. Combined scenes give players a choice in how to showcase their heroes' talents and personalities, as well as additional ways to solve their problems. Consult the previous pages for each of the component scenes for advice on how to construct the individual parts.

You may plan out combined scenes in advance, such as a fight where the heroes must also rescue civilians in harm's way, or emerge spontaneously as the players find creative solutions to other scenes, perhaps attempting to rewire an alien's spaceship while fighting off their champion.

SUCCESS & FAILURE

Success and failure are generally gauged and rewarded as they would be for the component scenes. Succeeding at a Conflict/Investigation scene means that the heroes defeat opponents and uncover valuable information, jointly moving the plot forward. Bear in mind that combined scenes will often see one component end in failure while the other leads to success, and you should consider how to deal with that.

In some cases, this may simply make the other half of the scene more difficult. Failing at the Challenge half of a Challenge/Conflict scene means the heroes never decrease the villain's maximum power and face a far greater challenge in the Conflict than they needed to. Refusing the compromise or relying on a Complication during an Investigation/Roleplay scene may mean the Investigation takes more time and risks failure. Alternatively, it's possible for mixed successes to complicate the final victory. The heroes may disarm the doomsday weapon during the final showdown, but at the cost of letting the mastermind escape or even defeat and capture them, or the heroes may focus on defeating the villain but the weapon goes off, leading to widespread destruction they must now help minimize. Neither outcome is entirely a win nor a loss, instead leading to new scenes and more complicated stories.

CHALLENGE/CONFLICT

Challenge/Conflict scenes generally make for fun, dynamic climaxes to adventures, where the heroes can use their skills to alter the battlefield or victory requires completing a task that the antagonist is violently opposed to. They provide a vital role for heroes who are less combat-inclined, or whose powers the villain may be invulnerable to. They also allow you to increase the stakes in a confrontation; the heroes must battle an opponent not just for the sake of victory or capture, but to stop some event they have laid in motion. Whatever danger you present, be sure to reduce both the threat of the Conflict's antagonist and the number of successes your Challenge requires to reflect the fact that heroes can't devote their whole attention to either one.

Examples of Challenge/Conflict scenes include:

- Completing an ancient ritual while an invading demon army attempts to overwhelm the heroes.
- Disarming a bomb while battling the villainous mastermind.
- Battling robots downtown while protecting civilians from collateral damage.
- Racing another starship to a mysterious location, tweaking and repairing your ship's systems as they overheat.

CHALLENGE/INVESTIGATION

Scenes combining elements of a Challenge and an Investigation often revolve around specific barriers the PCs must first find before they can uncover. Investigation scenes normally rely on skill and effect checks to uncover information, and so combined scenes often add consequences to failed skill checks or else place specific barriers in the PCs' way whose defeat doesn't yield any new information so much as open new avenues in the investigation.

Examples of Challenge/Investigation scenes include:

- Tracking down a courier with a thumb drive containing all your leads.
- Hunting for a weather control device while saving the city from the destruction it causes.
- Gambling for information against a cheating opponent.
- Performing a dangerous heist to recover clues.

CHALLENGE/ROLEPLAY

Roleplay scenes often include a few dice rolls to see how well a hero performs various tasks or how believable their bluffs are, but Challenge/Roleplay scenes generally raise these stakes to include consequences for failure and/or rewards for success beyond the Hero Points and character development Roleplay scenes normally provide. They may involve witty banter or tense standoffs, but these combined scenes generally present a situation where players must be creative in applying their skills to solve problems and Gamemasters must be equally creative in interpreting the results. A failed check may steer the tone of the interaction or raise new challenges that must be addressed before talks can continue. As Gamemaster, you

should decide early on how many Degrees of Failure end the interaction and how many Degrees of Success yield the best positive impression.

Examples of Challenge/Roleplay scenes include:

- Negotiating with a sympathetic criminal syndicate to ally against your mutual enemy.
- A cooking competition littered with smack-talk, support, and narration.
- Talking to a hostile AI to keep it distracted while teammates hack into it.
- Plunging into a comatose ally's brain and navigating their mental landscape to coax them back to life.

CONFLICT/INVESTIGATION

Sometimes information is protected, and when violence or competition is required to reveal important clues or protect the investigators, Gamemasters can combine the elements of Conflict and Investigation scenes for action-packed reveals. More than just roughing up a criminal and fighting off guards before forcing an informant to talk, Conflict/Investigation scenes blend the head-to-head competition into the process of revealing information, and rarely does a single fight reveal every bit of available information. Instead, a fight may reveal one piece of data while sleuthing uncovers more, or multiple opponents each only have a single clue, or part of the team must hold a threat at bay while others uncover information.

Examples of Conflict/Investigation scenes include:

- Fighting off assassins while grilling your informant.
- Chasing down a masked criminal to finally reveal their identity.
- Keeping a regenerating monster subdued while teammates study it.
- Defending an unconscious teammate from alien predators while they search the astral plane for clues about the beasts' origins.

CONFLICT/ROLEPLAY

Heroes love to banter during fights in the comics, and it's hard to draw a distinct line between a fight scene with smack-talk and a combined Conflict/Roleplay scene, so be flexible in interpreting it. The defining difference is often that the player's own in-character dialogue can affect the course of the fight without the need for dice rolls; an impassioned speech or dramatic reveal is enough to alter the plot, redoubling a villain's attack, persuading criminals to surrender, or driving a wedge between antagonists.

Examples of Conflict/Roleplay scenes include:

- Character-building banter while training in the Doom Room.
- Persuading a fallen hero to reform even as you battle their rampage.
- Talking the mastermind's mercenary into switching sides mid-battle.
- Distracting the conqueror from her mission of destruction with a dance-off.

INVESTIGATION/ROLEPLAY

Most Investigation scenes rely on skills and powers to uncover information, with players' descriptions adding fun and flavor. But sometimes a well-placed word, compromise, or exchange of information opens doors as part of that investigation without the need for a twenty-sided die. Investigation/Roleplay scenes often evolve organically from Investigation scenes, but you may also present heroes with opportunities to learn more during investigations by compromising their morals or falling back on their Complications.

Examples of Investigation/Roleplay scenes include:

- Grilling a suspect as part of an investigation.
- A tense romantic encounter where each member has an agenda, but also burning passions.
- Exploiting your relationship with your father the nurse to access a suspect's medical records.
- Using magic or psychic powers to commune with the spirit inside a clue.

EXAMPLE SCENES

The following pages present ready-made scenes to challenge heroes, filling in a number of superhero tropes like chase scenes, crowd control, and mass invasions. Each scene shares a few common sections:

- **In This Exciting Issue** describes the adventure, giving you the details of the plot and villains involved..
- **Involving the Heroes** offers you some advice on how to draw the player characters into the story.
- **Scenes** are the individual parts of an adventure. The scenes presented here are only one section of a possibly larger adventure.
- **Variations** describes adjustments you can make to the adventure to make it a whole new challenge or add a fun twist if you want to re-play it.

You can use a scene here as a short adventure, as a part of a larger adventure, or borrow the rules for your own ideas.

THE CHASE

The Chase focuses on catching escaping villains before they get away.

IN THIS EXCITING ISSUE

The Power Corps has stolen a hard-drive containing valuable data from ASTRO Labs. Upon spotting the heroes, the power-armored mercenaries make a run for it and split up, forcing the heroes to give chase.

INVOLVING THE HEROES

The simplest way to involve the heroes is for them to respond to an emergency call from ASTRO Labs. They arrive just in time to see the Power Corps split up and fly off, giving the heroes the opportunity to chase. The heroes might instead be at ASTRO Labs for other reasons when the theft occurs, perhaps in their secret identities.

PROBLEM POWERS

If one or more of the heroes has a significantly higher (or lower) movement speed rank than the Power Corps—who have Flight 7—then *The Chase* might seem like it's over before it begins! There are a few ways you can handle this problem.

Make sure the heroes have some movement options. If they split up and one or more of the heroes cannot move fast enough to keep up with the Power Corps, feel free to have ASTRO Labs lend them several sky-bikes—anti-gravity "motorcycles" with Flight 7. If a limited number of heroes have enough movement speed to give chase, you might want to split the Power Corps into larger groups, rather than having them all scatter in different directions.

If your heroes are fast, use the situations described in **Road Hazards** to justify slowing down the faster heroes. Because the villains split up, one or two swift heroes won't necessarily eliminate the whole chase, and catching up to the Power Corps members is just the first step! The first Power Corps members the heroes catch are probably not the ones with the stolen hard-drive.

SCENE: RUNNING THE NUMBERS

Read the following aloud to the players:

> When you arrive at the ASTRO Labs facility, there's no question as to the cause of the alarm: several members of the infamous Power Corps mercenary team hover in the air outside, near a good-sized hole punched in the side of the building. The armored criminals apparently spot you as you arrive, and immediately scatter. The boot jets from their power armor roar as they fly off in different directions!

Set the number of Power Corps members to match the number of heroes—they probably don't need their full complement of eight for a simple tech-heist. Either assume the other mercenaries are on another job, waiting at the group's meet-up point, or reserved as back-up.

If you don't have access to the Power Corps' statblock (available in *Threat Report* or the *Basic Hero's Handbook*), use the Battlesuit archetype from **Chapter 2** of the *Deluxe Hero's Handbook*.

THE PURSUIT CHALLENGE

The Power Corps members split up and rocket off, forcing the heroes to give chase. The pursuit itself is a challenge, a series of checks measuring maneuverability and speed.

Remember that the heroes and villains are navigating the canyons and hazards of a crowded city, not matching speed in a straight-off chase, and so control is as important as raw speed.

Time: 1 round

Checks: Acrobatics (for Flight or Leaping), Athletics (for Speed or Leaping), or Vehicles (for heroes piloting a vehicle) opposed by the Acrobatics check of the Power Corps member. If one side has a significant speed advantage, apply a circumstance modifier to their pursuit checks: a 2-rank advantage grants a +2 circumstance bonus, while 5+ ranks of difference grant a +5 bonus instead.

Success: If the hero generates 6 Degrees of Success, the hero catches up with the villain, although this doesn't mean they're defeated yet! If the hero catches up with the villain, roll for initiative and shift to a Conflict scene.

Consequences: If the fleeing villain obtains 6 Degrees of Success, the villain escapes.

ROAD HAZARDS

The pursuit is more than just a test of speed. The Power Corps pull off various maneuvers to slow the heroes down or shake them. Each round of the pursuit, choose one of the following or roll randomly to determine what the villains do to make things more difficult for the heroes.

d20	Challenge
1–3	**Blast Back:** The villain hurls an energy bolt that blows up a vehicle or building cornice, collapses a tunnel, or otherwise hurls damage the heroes' way. The hero must roll a DC 20 Dodge check. If they fail, they suffer rank 10 damage, and lose a number of successes from their threshold equal to their Degree of Failure on the Damage Resistance Check.
4–6	**Collision Course:** The villain flies straight at an obstacle, like the side of a building, before swerving at the last moment. Roll an opposed test of the villain's Acrobatics against the hero's Acrobatics or Vehicles (as suits their mode of movement). If the villain wins, the hero collides with the obstacle, suffering rank 8 damage, or their speed rank +1 (whichever is higher), and loses one success from their success threshold.
8–10	**Duck Out:** The villain uses quick maneuvers, attempting to lose the hero. Roll an opposed check of the villain's Deception against the hero's Insight or Perception (whichever is higher). Add the resulting Degrees of Success to the threshold of the winner of the test.
11–13	**Endangered Civilians:** The villain endangers civilians, cutting the line of a window-washing platform, knocking someone off a balcony, or using a power blast to send debris falling to the street below. If the hero pauses to save civilians, they lose a success from their success threshold, but gain a Hero Point.
14–16	**Flying Low:** The villain swoops down to street level, flying among busy traffic on the city streets. The pursuing hero needs to roll an opposed test of their pursuit skill against the villain's Acrobatics. If the villain wins, the hero loses the villain's Degree of Success from their accumulated successes.
17–19	**Tight Maneuver:** The Power Corps member makes a tight turn, bank, or flies through a narrow space. Roll an opposed test of the villain's Acrobatics against the hero's Acrobatics, Athletics, or Vehicles (as suits their mode of movement). If the villain wins, the hero must succeed at a DC 15 Perception check to stay on their trail or the villain gains another success.
20	No hazard this round

THE MEET-UP

The Power Corps members who escape have arranged to meet up at an abandoned airstrip outside the city. Any captured member of the Corps gives up the location to the heroes with a successful Intimidation check against them. Heroes may also be able to use their skills and powers to track the villains other ways—encourage the players to be creative! This can lead to another conflict encounter with the remaining villains, including any of the eight members who were not originally present. If outnumbered two-to-one, the Power Corps surrenders.

Hero Points: Award a Hero Point to any hero whose target escapes. Award a Hero Point to any heroes who come up with a clever plan to locate the escaped villains.

VARIATIONS

The Chase works as a model for similar kinds of chase scenes where the heroes pursue villains. You can adapt it by changing the setting of the pursuit and the challenges the heroes face, or replacing the flying villains with criminals on souped-up motorcycles or aquatic creatures diving into the ocean. You can reverse it for scenes where the heroes are being pursued, or make it into a race where whoever has the higher success total is ahead, and whoever reaches the threshold first wins.

You can also change things in the adventure by changing the villains and what they have taken. It might be a dangerous device, creating complications of its own during the pursuit for everyone.

THE FRAME-UP

The Frame-Up places the heroes on the wrong side of the law as they are accused of crimes they didn't commit.

IN THIS EXCITING ISSUE

Agents of AEGIS (the American Elite Government Intervention Service) or a similar law-enforcement organization show up at the heroes' headquarters or public appearance to arrest them on suspicion of a series of thefts. The authorities have video surveillance evidence implicating the heroes. Do the heroes surrender peacefully, or do they go on the run in hopes of clearing their names?

INVOLVING THE HEROES

Involving the heroes in this scenario is straightforward: The authorities show up to arrest them! This is easy if the hero team has a public headquarters. It gets more complicated if the heroes are less public. The team might make a public appearance at a charity event, arrive at a television studio for an interview, or some other activity the government agents can track. If the team is in communication with the authorities, AEGIS might call them in for a meeting and arrest them when they arrive! If nothing else, the heroes might hear about a warrant for their arrest. They have the choice of going right to the **On the Run** section or turning themselves in for the **Surrender Peacefully** option without confronting the agents sent to arrest them.

SCENE: YOU HAVE THE RIGHT...

Read the following to the players:

> Monitor systems report the arrival of the AEGIS agents before they reach the front entrance. Given there are nearly a dozen of them, decked out in full field-gear and carrying a battering ram, you're sure they're not here for a social visit.

Let the players decide what they want their heroes to do. If they go out to meet the government agents or let them in to speak with them, they find out the squad is under the command of Agent Derek Berrindino, a hot-shot who is none too fond of superheroes, and enjoying the prospect of taking the team "down a peg or two." He brusquely identifies himself and informs the heroes they are under arrest on suspicion of larceny, breaking-and-entering, and other charges. He orders the agents with him to cuff the heroes and read them their rights.

AEGIS AGENTS

Agent Derek Berrindino uses the **Government Agent** archetype from **Chapter 3**, except he carries a blast rifle (ranged, damage 8) and wears an armored vest (+4 Toughness) for the raid, increasing him to Power Level 6.

Berrindino's AEGIS team consists of eight agents who use the **SWAT Officer** archetype from **Chapter 3**, except their weapons are energy blasters and instead of handcuffs they have power-nullifying manacles able to exert a rank 10 effect that prevents the wearer's powers from working; heroes can use extra effort to roll their highest power rank against DC 20 to overcome the nullifier. If they succeed, they can use their powers for one round (ideally to escape). If they fail, they do not overcome the effect.

Additionally, the AEGIS squad is backed up by three more agents in power armor; use the **Robot Jockey** archetype from **Chapter 3**. The power-suit wearers stand back, but step in if things get violent (see **Fight Back**, following).

SURRENDER PEACEFULLY

If the heroes choose to surrender to the agents, they are taken into custody and brought to the local AEGIS headquarters for processing. If the arrest is made in public, it doesn't take long for the media to fixate on it, and smartphone videos of the heroes being led away in cuffs play on all of the networks. The heroes are put through the process of being booked and placed in holding cells. Exactly how much information the feds are allowed to collect depends on your setting, and whether or not there are any laws in place to protect the identities of costumed heroes. At worst, the authorities will unmask the heroes, take mug shots and fingerprints, and ask them for identification and their real names. In a more four-color world (like the Earth-Prime setting) known heroes get the benefit of the doubt and can maintain their secret identities—for now.

The heroes are permitted to make a call and provided with a lawyer, if they do not already have one—or if one of the heroes is the team's lawyer in their secret identity! Unfortunately, the wheels of the justice system grind slowly, and everyone involved wants to avoid any appearance of treating the heroes with favoritism. So the prosecutor assigned to their case makes an argument that they are most definitely a (possibly literal) "flight risk" and must be kept imprisoned until their arraignment, which seriously limits the heroes' option. If the heroes choose to wait things out regardless, the real villains might go to ground (so as not to give away their deception) or they might try and make things worse for the heroes by staging a "jail-break" for them and either capturing the heroes or leaving them to face the authorities while their "criminal allies" escape.

FIGHT BACK

If the heroes do anything that can be construed as "resisting arrest" or threatening, they give Agent Berrindino the opportunity he's craving, and he orders his squad to take the team down by force. Although the AEGIS agents likely outnumber the heroes, chances are they're outclassed when it comes down to a fight. If the heroes win, they must decide whether to go on the run (following) or wait

and surrender to Berrindino's back-up, which is twice as many agents and armor pilots. Chances are that a fight against the AEGIS agents also gets caught on video and shows up on the news almost immediately.

ON THE RUN

If the heroes prefer not to entrust their fate to AEGIS and the legal system, especially when it's clear they've been set up, they can choose to go on the run so they can investigate and clear their own names. It shouldn't be overly hard for a team of heroes to escape from the AEGIS agents, especially if they have various movement powers or a team vehicle at their disposal. They may have to adopt a lower profile to avoid the police, offering opportunities for heroes with stealth and disguise abilities to show off.

SCENE: INVESTIGATION

The heroes must prove their innocence, ideally by tracking down the real perpetrators and finding evidence of their impersonation. Part of this process involves the following challenge sequence:

Time: 1 hour

Checks: Investigation (DC 15) is the primary check, but various other abilities can come into play, depending on how the heroes approach things, including interaction skills, Expertise, and Technology, as well as unusual senses.

Success: If the heroes obtain 5 Degrees of Success, they're able to track down where the real thieves have taken their ill-gotten gains. This lets the heroes confront the real villain(s), possibly getting either a confession or evidence they can use to clear themselves.

Consequences: If the heroes accumulate 3 Degrees of Failure, the authorities are on to them and an AEGIS team similar to the previous one that came to arrest them shows up and tries to take them into custody.

VARIATIONS

Things get interesting for *The Frame-Up* in terms of who has framed the heroes, how they did it, and why. The following are some possibilities you can consider. Exactly what the villains are stealing, and why, is left for the GM to decide based on their larger plans. As a default, they're robbing banks, jewelers, or wealthy homes, either for the money or just the opportunity to frame the heroes.

IMPOSTERS

While the criminals *look* like the heroes, they're actually imposters, and any appearance that they have the heroes' powers are either faked or mimicked. For example, the Power Corps from the *Basic Hero's Handbook* might be using advanced hologram generators to look like the heroes, faking some of their abilities with their armor. A group of villains with the traits of the **Master of Disguise** or **Mimic** archetypes from **Chapter 3** could be doing the same, possibly with those powers granted by a master villain, or a team of **Jobbers** with visually-similar powers may be wearing copies of the heroes' costumes.

EVIL TWINS

The criminals committing the thefts not only look like the heroes, but *are* them—their "evil" twins or duplicates. They could be clones, evil versions of the heroes from a parallel universe, robot or android duplicates, or magical simulacra, to name a few possibilities. Villains like Overshadow and Malador the Mystic from the *Basic Hero's Handbook* or villain archetypes like the **Elder Evil**, **Imp**, **Mad Scientist**, **Overlord**, **Robot**, or **Sorcerer** from **Chapter 3** might be using the evil twins to accomplish their goals while at the same time getting the bothersome heroes out of the way. The thefts can be connected to the villain's larger scheme, or just an added bonus to framing the heroes.

MIND CONTROL

On the other hand, perhaps the heroes *are* guilty, after a fashion. They might have been mind-controlled or otherwise influenced into committing the crimes (and leaving evidence so they would get caught), with their memories of the whole experience erased! This could be the work of a *Basic Hero's Handbook* villain like Malador's sinister sorcery, Mindfire's telepathic powers, or even Luna Moth with a modified version of her pheromone formula. Similarly, the **Mastermind** and **Puppeteer** archetypes from **Chapter 3** are well-suited to this scheme.

HEARTS & MINDS

Hearts & Minds is a one-scene *Mutants & Masterminds* scenario focusing on a different kind of conflict between heroes and their rivals: social competition. The heroes have to succeed by winning over hearts and minds, rather than using fists and energy blasts.

IN THIS EXCITING ISSUE

An alien refugee has been taken into police custody following an incident where a bystander was injured by the alien. Now an angry mob is forming, looking to exact vigilante justice on the "alien monster" unless the heroes can find a way to defuse things before they get out of hand.

INVOLVING THE HEROES

If the heroes are a known group, authorities may contact them regarding the alien, asking for their advice or assistance. If you want, you can even run a short prelude to this scene where the heroes are around when the alien is first discovered and have to help capture it in the first place. This gives them some additional investment in its fate. Otherwise, the heroes may simply hear about the capture of the alien and reports in the media about a growing demonstration outside the jail where it is being held, with authorities concerned the situation might turn violent.

PROBLEM POWERS

A scenario like *Hearts & Minds* is largely aimed at the heroes *not* using their powers to solve a problem, but there are some powers that might come into play and influence the outcome. In particular, heroes with mind- or emotion-influencing powers might try and use them to "convince" an audience to go along with them. Generally, most heroes understand that such influence is problematic and may come back to haunt them at a later point, but feel free to have someone else point this out if none of the players do. Likewise, heroes resorting to force and intimidation to make their case might enhance a fearsome reputation, but are not likely to win over a lot of people in the long run. They might have later problems when it comes to not having the public's trust.

SCENE: WEB OF FEAR

Read the following aloud to the players:

> Reports of the capture of an alien being—a multi-limbed spider-like creature—in the downtown area are all over the news. Apparently, the creature was found by some public works personnel in a maintenance tunnel, and managed to bite one of them before it was captured by police. The injured worker is in critical condition in the hospital. Meanwhile, an increasingly agitated crowd has been gathering outside the police station where the creature is being held, with many people demanding action be taken to eliminate it, or at least interrogate it to ensure there isn't an invasion of some sort in progress. Police are deploying outside the station in case the scene turns violent.

Hero Points: If the heroes have any Relationship complications with law enforcement, media, or governmental authorities, those characters might be involved in this scene to give them added motivation.

THE ALIEN

The alien is an immature skr'ee, a four-limbed spider-like species. An absentee parent placed its egg-sac in the maintenance tunnel. Skr'ee care for their young communally, but there are no others of its kind around. How it got there in the first place may be a mystery for the heroes to solve but for now the young skr'ee is alone, frightened, and dependent solely on instinct and genetically-encoded race memories, without even a name to call itself.

The skr'ee has ability and skill ranks of 0 along with Movement 2 (Wall-crawling), Senses 4 (Darkvision, Acute Smell, Tracking) and a venomous bite (Cumulative Affliction 6, Resisted and Overcome by Fortitude; Dazed, Stunned, Incapacitated). Victims must make an initial resistance check, followed by another every hour, with the Affliction progressing a degree with a failed check. A successful resistance check ends the effect.

THE MOB

A large crowd of people 30 people strong has gathered outside the police station. As videos of the initial skr'ee incident go viral, people begin to panic about what is being done about the "alien invader" the police have in custody, whether or not they can hold it, or even if the alien is somehow influencing people or "using" the police for its own protection. Fear, anger, and rumors are spreading, and the crowd is growing, shifting into an angry mob. Use the **Bystander** archetype from **Chapter 3**.

THE AGITATOR

Egging the mob on is Conrad Zoraz, an anti-alien advocate who argues all alien beings are a potential threat to humanity and that governments must take more action to eliminate alien presences on Earth. Zoraz is a xenophobe who believes all outsiders are dangerous, and that humanity has a moral obligation to destroy aliens rather than allowing them to "infiltrate" Earth. He isn't much of a direct threat; base his abilities off the **Reporter** archetype in **Chapter 3** with Presence 2 and Expertise: Aliens 6 (+8) in addition to the other listed skills.

THE CHALLENGE

The heroes must convince the crowd to calm down and let the authorities or the heroes handle the alien, ideally before things get violent. This is a challenge sequence with the following parameters:

Time: 1 minute

Checks: Deception (if the heroes lie to the crowd), Intimidation (to threaten the crowd), Persuasion (to convince everyone). Some types of Expertise might work, too. The DC of the first check is 12 but, after that, Conrad Zoraz steps forward to question and counter the heroes, and the following checks become opposed by Zoraz's own. He has a +6 bonus with Deception and Persuasion and a +8 with Expertise: Aliens.

Success: The heroes need 5 successes to calm the crowd and convince them to leave peacefully.

Consequences: If the heroes fail two checks, the crowd becomes a violent mob and tries to rush the police station, but can be calmed with a successful check. If the heroes fail four checks, there's no convincing the mob any longer and the heroes must use other means to resolve the situation. Deceiving or intimidating the mob can temporarily defuse the situation but may have consequences for the heroes and their reputations later.

This initial incident can easily lead into a follow-up adventure. Once the heroes have handled the crowd, you can decide whether or not they have to get the infant skr'ee back home (if they have or can borrow a means of space travel) or just keep things calm until another hero can handle it. They may also find or manufacture an antidote for the skr'ee's venom.

VARIATIONS

The basic concepts of *Hearts & Minds* can work for other social competitions.

BATTLE OF THE BANDS

Rather than winning over an angry mob, the heroes could be trying to win over an audience in a performance competition. This could range from *Hero High* characters in a band looking to defeat their rivals to a group of heroes in an interstellar music competition to save the Earth! The heroes make a team check of their relevant Expertise skill(s) for the performance, with the DC based on how difficult the audience is to win over. Whoever gets the largest Degree of Success after a total of 3–5 checks is the winner!

THE DEBATE

One or more heroes are engaged in a public debate. This could be arguing with a prejudiced demagogue like Conrad Zoraz over the rights of aliens, mutants, robots, or any other group, arguing a legal case before a judge, or debating an opponent in front of a third party the heroes must sway, like the ruler of an alien empire. Each check is opposed and the side that gets 5 successes first wins the debate. Three or more successive failures on the part of the heroes might anger their audience, leading to them also being thrown in jail, a dungeon, or a gladiator pit!

THE FEAR-MONGER

For a bigger challenge, the heroes might be up against a foe with far greater interaction skills or powers that allow them to control people's emotions! From the *Basic Hero's Handbook,* Luna Moth's Pheromone Capsules might do this, as could Malador's Curse of Transformation, and Mindfire might power-stunt a version of her Terrifying Hallucination to do the same. From this book, the **Elder Evil**, **Imp**, **Mastermind**, and (especially) **Puppeteer** villain archetypes could do it, and the **Jumped-Up Nobody**, **Mad Scientist**, **Psycho**, **Sorcerer**, and **Vampire** archetypes could easily use Extra Effort for a power stunt.

RALLY

Rather than calming an angry mob, the heroes have to rally a frightened crowd to find their courage and stand up to some danger. If they get 5 successes, the bystanders all rush to their aid and help the heroes against the villain, providing them with a needed distraction or opportunity to escape the villain's trap, for example. Along with skill checks, uses of advantages like Inspire and Leadership can count as one success each, and suitably heroic actions, such as a use of Interpose to protect someone, can also count as one or more successes.

THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING HEROES

Incredible Shrinking Heroes is a one-scene *Mutants & Masterminds* scenario where the heroes must overcome larger-than-usual challenges, because they have become so small! It offers advice for dealing with heroes operating at different sizes.

IN THIS EXCITING ISSUE

The heroes track down the secret laboratory of a mad scientist and raid it, only to fall into a trap that shrinks them down smaller than mice! What's worse, another of the scientist's experiments, cybernetic lab rats, stalk the heroes through the now-giant (to them) laboratory.

INVOLVING THE HEROES

The heroes have been on the trail of a mad scientist. Use the **Mad Scientist** archetype from **Chapter 3**. The villain is at-large and the heroes have found a lead to his latest hideout, so they're off to apprehend him before he can do any further harm!

Alternately, you can start this adventure immediately after the heroes have been captured by a villain, either the mad scientist or another bad guy willing to trade them off to the scientist as experimental subjects. They're subjected to the shrinking field as part of a deliberate experiment, but the scientist is called away by something, allowing the heroes the opportunity to escape.

PROBLEM POWERS

Heroes with Growth ranks sufficient to counteract the Shrinking effect may seem to overcome the scene's unique challenge. The simplest solution is to say that the scaling effect of the shrinking field also nullifies or reduces those powers. This means a growing or shapeshifting hero cannot simply return to normal size, but they can grow "giant" compared to their tiny default size. Heroes with high ranks of movement powers find their top speed scaled down to match their new size. You should award the affected player(s) a Hero Point for this complication.

SCENE: A SMALL PROBLEM

Read the following aloud to the players:

> You've finally got a break on a case you've been working, a lead to the location of a criminal laboratory hidden beneath the city streets. Now that you know where it is, even its steel-reinforced secret door is no match for your abilities. The dimly-lit chamber beyond hums with the electrical power stolen from the city's grid. A second steel door slides down, closing the way you came, and a bright flash of shimmering light fills your vision, inducing a sense of vertigo, as the room spins around you!
>
> You find yourselves in a vast chamber—the ceiling hundreds of feet overhead—with strange, massive buildings surrounding you that … no, not buildings—workbenches and furniture. You haven't been transported. You're in the same room, only seeing it from the floor-level, only an inch tall! You hear the rattling of a cage door opening somewhere in the room and claws scrabbling against the tile floor...

Hero Points: Award the players a Hero Point for the trap: the field of an experimental shrinking ray, which has reduced them in size to just a couple of inches tall.

LITTLE HEROES, BIG CHALLENGES

The heroes are essentially under the effect of 16 ranks of Shrinking, reducing their size rank by 4 (see **Shrinking** in the *Deluxe Hero's Handbook*). However, rather than applying the modifiers for the Shrinking effect, it's easier to simply treat the world around them as larger, turning inches into yards from the characters' perspective. Thus the 30-by-30 foot lab becomes roughly a half-mile wide from the heroes' perspective—several city blocks! The three-foot high countertops are the equivalent of 100-foot tall buildings, while the spaces underneath them are like caverns with 15-foot ceilings. The lab's eight-foot ceiling and light fixtures are now a staggering 300 feet overhead.

There is a lot of scientific bric-a-brac in the lab the heroes can interact with, including:

- **Glassware:** Beakers, flasks, and test tubes are now huge compared to the heroes. It takes a proportionate Strength of 4 to lift a test tube and 6 for a beaker or flask, more if they are full. The heroes are small enough to climb inside any of the glassware as well (or fall into it accidentally). At this size, glass is as tough as stone (Toughness 5).
- **Bunsen Burners:** Burners emit a Line Area Damage 10 effect, if the heroes can ignite one. Turning the gas on takes Strength 3 and a Standard action.
- **Chemicals:** The smallest chemical bottles take Strength 4 to lift, while larger ones require Strength 7 or more. Tipping over a chemical container releases its contents in a Cone Area from the mouth of the container. Usually the effect is something like Damage 8 each round for anyone in the area, although some chemicals might cause Afflictions instead. Players can spend Hero Points to edit the scene and define the effects of a particular chemical.
- **Sinks:** Countertop basins are 30 feet deep from the heroes' perspective and 60 feet across. Turning on the facets takes Strength 5, and heroes are small enough to be washed down the drain. Swimming or moving against the current from the spigot is a DC 18 Athletics check.

- **Dissection Instruments:** A tray with scalpels, needle-like probes, and other instruments. A hero could wield one like a bulky spear (Damage 3), or the whole tray could be knocked over, striking the floor below with a Damage 6 attack in the equivalent of a 30-foot Burst Area.
- **Laser Pointer:** Takes Strength 4 to lift, but can be used as the equivalent of a rank 8 Dazzle attack against a single target.

RATS!

A small pack of cybernetically altered lab-rats—one for each hero—are released from their containment to attack the shrunken intruders. At the heroes' current size, the rats are monsters the size of elephants, with vicious claws, brain-implants to control their behavior, and cybernetic tails that can make grab or Trip attempts from the equivalent of 30 feet away.

CYBER-RATS	PL9
STR 10, **STA** 10, **AGL** 3, **DEX** 0, **FGT** 6, **INT** -4, **AWE** 1, **PRE** -4	
Powers: Brain Override Implant Enhanced Will 7, **Cyber-Claws** Damage 2, **Cyber-Tail** Elongation 2 (30 feet, Limited to Tail), **Enhanced Senses** Senses 2 (Acute Smell, Low-light Vision), **Frickin' Lasers** Ranged Damage 10	
Skills*: Athletics 3 (+6), Stealth 1 (+4); *The rats' Athletics skill is based on their Agility rather than their Strength	
Offense: Init +3, Claws +6 (Close, Damage 12), Frickin' Lasers +0 (Ranged, Damage 10), Unarmed +6 (Close, Damage 10)	
Defense: Dodge 8, Parry 8, Fort 10, Tou 10, Will 8	
Totals: Abilities 44 + Powers 32 + Advantages 0 + Skills 2 (4 ranks) + Defenses 7 = 85	
Complications: Rat: The lab-rats are just ordinary animals otherwise and, at normal size, have the traits of ordinary rats with a Damage 1 laser that has only a 3-foot range.	

GETTING BIG

The emitter for the shrink ray is located near the ceiling on the opposite side of the lab from the entrance, aimed in a wide beam at the area where the heroes entered. They must cross the room, get up to the top of the counter, and access the ray's control systems in order to reverse it. They need to be in the area of effect, back where they started, when the ray goes off.

Resetting the shrink ray is complicated by the fact that the controls are huge and hard to manipulate from the heroes' perspective. It takes at least Strength 4 to perform the necessary manipulations, so some of the heroes might have to work in tandem to do so. Resetting the ray is a challenge as follows:

Time: 1 round

Checks: Technology (DC 16)

Success: If the heroes obtain 6 Degrees of Success, they're able to reactivate the ray for a short burst (one round) with up to a one-minute (10 round) delay.

Consequences: If the heroes accumulate 4 Degrees of Failure, they short out the device and it takes an additional DC 18 Technology check for them to start the process over again. If they short it out a second time, the shrink ray is fried without extensive repairs.

VARIATIONS

The Incredible Shrinking Heroes can work for other adventures where the characters are reduced in size from their normal world.

LAND OF THE GIANTS

Heroes might visit a "land of the giants" in a hidden corner of the world or another dimension with a vastly larger scale, and people wander through "forests" of grasses 20-feet tall with giant insects. A fast and messy way to make a creature the "giant" version of itself is to simply add +8 to Strength and Stamina, though you may want to make specific statblocks for important creatures or characters.

BODY WARS

The heroes shrink to cellular size cells to enter someone's body, either to treat a serious medical issue, or to deal with another microscopic intruder. White blood cells are the equivalent of the **Blob** archetype from **Chapter 3**, and the heroes need life supports suits (or a vehicle) to navigate the circulatory system to their destination.

SHADOW INVASION

SHADOW Invasion is a one-scene *Mutants & Masterminds* scenario pitting the heroes against the forces of a clone army trying to take over their city.

IN THIS EXCITING ISSUE

The evil organization SHADOW invades the city! This scenario makes use of the **Mass Combat** rules in **Chapter 7**, as the heroes confront hundreds of SHADOW's clone soldiers. You'll want to familiarize yourself with those rules. With conventional authorities overwhelmed, it is up to the heroes to stem the tide of the invasion before it is too late and SHADOW has seized control.

INVOLVING THE HEROES

The heroes most likely get involved in this adventure when SHADOW's forces attack and they are called upon to help stem the invasion! You can always start things off slowly, as the heroes investigate leads they pick up, suggesting that SHADOW is about to launch a major operation. As they are interrogating informants and searching the city, the invasion begins. If you have run *Shadows of the Past* from the *Basic Hero's Handbook*, you can make this adventure a sequel: The elimination of the old SHADOW base in *Shadows of the Past* has triggered a failsafe mechanism and a SHADOW cloning facility has begun turning out an invasion force, unleashing them upon the city! The heroes have to find the hidden clone-factory and shut it down to stop the flow of soldiers.

PROBLEM POWERS

Heroes with powers affecting a substantial area have an added advantage in overcoming an enemy force (see **Powers** under **Forces in Action** in the **Mass Combat** section of **Chapter 7**). You may want to take that into account when running the adventure. In the case of damaging area powers, the heroes can only be so effective, since the attackers are invading the city and mixed among thousands of innocent civilians who are in the line of fire, so this advantage should not be overwhelming.

SCENE: SHADOW STRIKES

Read the following aloud to the players:

> Morning is ordinarily a quiet time: few emergencies other than the occasional rush-hour accident and this morning is no different—at first. But then the distant sound of weapons-fire reaches you. A lot of weapons-fire, followed by sirens and fearful cries from a panicked crowd of morning commuters. You spot the black-and-gray-clad troops moving through the streets in the distance, sweeping everything out of their way. It's an invasion!

SHADOW is sending waves of clone troops into the city via teleportal and they are moving out with perfect precision to seize targets of strategic value, particularly police stations, military installations, and government buildings. In terms of the mass combat rules, each SHADOW force is a company of 100 veteran troops, giving them a Force rank of 7. There is one company in the invasion force per player character. Each company has the following mass combat traits:

> **SHADOW Clone Troops:** Attack 11, Damage 13, Defense 4, Toughness 9, Initiative 4, Morale 3*
> **See description*

The combined force includes some heavy weapons, hover tanks, sky-bikes for air-support, and the like, which are all abstracted in the force's traits. Essentially, so long as heroes are in the area of a SHADOW company, it can potentially attack them, and be attacked in turn.

By default, the SHADOW clone troops are immune to morale checks, succeeding on them automatically. They are programmed and psychically linked and cannot be swayed from their orders, nor will they surrender under normal circumstances.

If the heroes are all together when the adventure begins (at their headquarters, for example), have one company appear close enough to begin to attack them. They quickly learn of other companies of SHADOW troops appearing throughout the city, so they may want to split up in order to deal with them. Using the mass combat rules, you can treat each company as an individual "opponent" for the heroes, keeping in mind that forces can split into smaller groups: essentially, each time a force splits in half, it creates two groups with the same traits, but –1 Attack, Defense, and Toughness.

Hero Points: If the heroes begin this scenario in their secret identities and break away to change before they can engage, award them a Hero Point.

IN THE LINE OF FIRE

The invasion allows plenty of opportunities for heroism, as there are a lot of innocent people in harm's way, and plenty of things for heroes to do other than just fight SHADOW troopers. Pose any or all of the following challenges to the heroes:

- They must rally and coordinate overwhelmed civilian police and emergency forces. This could be as simple as a DC 15 or better Persuasion or Intimidation skill check to snap them out of their shock, or a challenge sequence intended to accumulate at least 4 Degrees of Success to get them all working together.
- They must calm panicked crowds. Again, this could be a simple interaction skill check (especially Persuasion) or a challenge sequence.

- Use the guidelines from the *Disaster Strikes!* scenario from the *Basic Hero's Handbook* for heroes saving people from buildings damaged by weapons-fire.
- Abandoned or damaged cars or other debris may be blocking streets or bridges. It takes at least Strength 8 to clear it in one round. Lower Strength can clear the way in +1 time rank per –1 Strength rank, down to Strength 5 clearing the blockage in one minute (10 rounds).
- People may be trapped in damaged vehicles, threatened by fires or even explosions. Getting them clear requires breaking through a Toughness 8 barrier and making a DC 15 Acrobatics or Dodge check to avoid Damage 5 from the flames.

THE HIGH GROUND

One SHADOW company is aiming to seize control of the highest building or point in the city. There they set up equipment that projects a force field dome over the entire city to prevent outside aid from reaching it. The dome is Impervious Toughness 16, meaning most conventional weapons won't even scratch it. If they succeed, the heroes are largely on their own with whoever they rally inside the city, and they must take down the dome by destroying the machinery projecting it, which is Toughness 10.

VICTORY

If the heroes defeat every company of SHADOW troopers, they stop the invasion. They may also be able to achieve victory by other means, like finding a way to disrupt the troopers' psychic connection. This could be mental conflict like that in the *War of the Minds* scenario in this chapter. Similarly, the heroes might find a technological means of backtracking the clones' teleportal signatures and reversing the teleport so all of the SHADOW troopers are transported instantly back to where they came from. This should be a Technology skill challenge requiring access to some of the invaders' equipment, probably salvaged after defeating at least one company. Let the players come up with their own plans for achieving victory over the invaders, and encourage them to get creative.

VARIATIONS

SHADOW Invasion is a useful template for other types of invasion scenarios where the invaders are not clones but aliens, demons, mole-people, or some other force. The following are some common variations you can use.

ALIEN INVASION

Rather than clones, the invaders are alien troops, either landing in ships or teleporting down from orbit. Their abilities are similar to the forces of SHADOW troops, although they might have unusual powers or weaknesses. They may be led by an alien Overlord or Brute champion from the villain archetypes.

COMMANDERS

In addition to the ordinary troops, one or more supervillains may lead the assault, ranging from super-powered toughs like the **Assassin**, **Brute**, **Jobber**, or **Martial Artist** villain archetypes who fight alongside companies, to true leaders like the **Overlord**, **Sorcerer**, or **Mastermind**.

INFERNAL INVASION

The invasion is made up of magical creatures like demons, gargoyles, or city fixtures and appliances animated by fiendish magic. A supernatural invasion is generally the handiwork of a supernatural villain like Malador the Mystic, or a villain archetype like the **Sorcerer** or the **Jumped-Up Nobody** (perhaps using an ancient demon-summoning tome or magic item). The invaders may have additional advantages over mundane troops, having certain Immunities (such as to fire) but they may also be vulnerable to magical countermeasures.

PLEASE AND TANKS

In addition to the soldier companies, you may want to add military vehicles like tanks, APCs, and military helicopters as individual opponents the heroes must destroy to add variety to the encounters. Assume the pilot has a Vehicle skill modifier and ranged attack bonus of +8.

WAR OF THE MINDS

War of the Minds is a one-scene *Mutants & Masterminds* scenario involving a psychic struggle within a character's mind, where the heroes' extraordinary powers and abilities may not help them in the same ways they do in the physical world! It offers guidelines for scenes and adventures taking place outside of the physical realm.

IN THIS EXCITING ISSUE

Called to the bedside of a comatose teen injured during a psychic villain's crime spree, the heroes find themselves draw into a mindscape where the teenager struggles against the psychic manifestation of the villain's power and the victim's own psychic potential. They must help her overcome her trauma to return to the waking world.

The inciting villain may be Mindfire (*Basic Hero's Handbook*) or the **Mastermind** archetype from **Chapter 3**, or a supernatural villain wielding mind magic via extra effort.

INVOLVING THE HEROES

You can set up this adventure by pitting the heroes against the villain in question and having them rescue some injured bystanders during or after the fight. Hani Egal is among the injured. The heroes later visit Hani in the hospital or are called to her bedside. Alternately, you can assume all of the previous and just tell the players about the encounter, as in the introduction to this scene, and move on with the encounter with Hani's unusual abilities. Heroes may particularly be called in if they have known medical, healing, or psychic abilities, but in any case, Hani's doctor feels that the presence of the heroes the girl admires might do her and her family some good.

SCENE: MIND WARP!

Read the following aloud to the players:

> Hani Egal is thirteen. She was with her parents when she was caught in the crossfire of the villain's assault. Hani was among those injured in the ensuing conflict. She has been in a coma, unconscious and unresponsive since her arrival, and it is unclear when—or even if—she will regain consciousness.

Hani's parents, Daahir and Faduma Egal, are Somali immigrants. They both sustained minor injuries but are more concerned for their daughter. Dr. Amara Patel is Hani's attending physician. She tells the heroes Hani is physically in no danger. She suffered only minor cuts and abrasions from debris. The real concern is that she has been unconscious since being brought into the hospital and has shown no signs of regaining consciousness. Dr. Patel cannot explain the cause of the coma and, although she intends to run other tests, feels the only real course of treatment is to wait and hope Hani recovers.

INTO THE MIND ZONE

When the heroes visit Hani's hospital room and approach her bedside, her trapped mind recognizes and reaches out to them, pulling the heroes into her mindscape, where she struggles with a psychic impression of the villain she encountered that still haunts her.

> Hani Egal's small frame is almost lost in the broad whiteness of the hospital bed. The only sounds in the room are the quiet beeping and humming of monitors, but as you approach the bedside, Hani seems to stir, a faint groan escaping her lips as she exhales. Suddenly, the world seems to turn inside out and you feel like you're falling, plunging through a kaleidoscopic swirl of color. The ground lurches out from under you and then just as quickly, you find yourself standing on a city street. There's debris scattered around and panicked people fleeing from the figure who floats above the street, laughing at their terror!

Award the players each a Hero Point for the setback of becoming trapped in Hani's mindscape. They'll need it, as they quickly discover that the "rules" in this psychic realm are different from those in the physical world:

- The heroes' minds are linked by Hani's mind and a remnant of the psychic villain's telepathic influence. Nothing they experience is what it appears to be, but that makes it no less "real." The heroes can suffer damage and other conditions while in the mindscape, potentially even death.
- Physical abilities are essentially irrelevant here. The heroes *think* they have their usual traits. A weak imagination or will may even leave them less powerful than normal:
  - **Strength** becomes the lower of its usual rank or **Presence**.
  - **Stamina** becomes the lower of its usual rank or **Intellect**.
  - **Agility** and **Dexterity** become the lower of their usual rank or **Awareness**.
- A hero who specifically attempts to exert their will can use their mental ability rank in place of the appropriate physical ability if the mental rank is *higher*. So a hero with Str 0 and Awe 6 could act as if they had Str 6 in the mindscape.
- Since the mindscape is purely imaginary, heroes can exert their will and imagination to potentially make anything happen. In game terms, a player can spend a Hero Point to momentarily gain *any* power effect or ability, up to their Power Level! This includes things the hero would normally never be able to do in the physical world. At the Game Master's discretion, heroes can also do this by taking an entire round concentrating, and rolling a Will check with a DC

equal to 10 + the desired power rank. This can be useful if the players are short on Hero Points.

- The heroes' normal powers are unreliable, requiring a successful DC 15 Will check to activate.

The villain in Hani's mind is an illusion—a collection of Nani's overwhelming fear and lingering bits of psychic energy—who immediately attacks, taunting the heroes and telling them they should never have entered "her domain." Keep in mind the heroes' normal powers are unreliable; this is the perfect opportunity to hit them with new Complications like Disability or Power Loss, allowing the villain to bypass their defenses or otherwise overwhelm them. The psychic enemy clearly has the "home field advantage."

While the heroes can fight, and even defeat the villain, her psychic manifestation is feeding off of Hani's power and fear. In the mindscape, the villain effectively recovers from defeat or even "death," disappearing and reappearing a minute (10 rounds) later completely unharmed, with all her abilities restored. Until they can get Hani to eject the telepathic influence, the heroes cannot permanently defeat this manifestation of the villain.

EVER CHANGING SETTING

Because the encounter occurs inside Hani's mind, the backdrop can change according to Hani's thoughts. The scene begins in the city because she is still fixated on her dangerous encounter, but fleeing heroes may enter memories of Nani's home or school, their family vacation, or their original home in Somalia. Clever heroes may be able to use this to their advantage by asking Hani to think of safe places or places the villain may be at a disadvantage.

OVERCOMING FEAR

The heroes have to find a terrified Hani Egal—or her psychic self—hiding from the battle, much as she did in the real world. Then it is a challenge for the heroes to convince Hani to use her own power to stand up to the villain:

Time: 1 round

Checks: The heroes can use Presence or any Presence skills to try and convince Hani, although Persuasion is best. The Difficulty of the check is 15. At the GM's discretion, other actions taken by the heroes while convincing Hani may offer support and a circumstance bonus.

Success: If the heroes obtain 8 Degrees of Success, Hani gathers her courage and stands between them and the villain, shrugging off her psychic attacks and demanding that she get *out of her mind!* The heroes suddenly find themselves regaining consciousness in Hani's hospital room as she wakes up for a joyful reunion with her family.

Consequences: If the heroes accumulate 4 Degrees of Failure, the villain appears in the real world, seizes Hani, and vanishes before the heroes recover from the psychic shock. The heroes must track the villain down in order to confront her and rescue Hani. Use the **Search the City** challenge from the *Basic Hero's Handbook* as a guideline.

VARIATIONS

War of the Minds can form the basis for a number of different adventures where most of the action takes place in an otherworldly realm where the heroes' abilities may be different. You can easily substitute the **Elder Evil** or the **Imp** for a psychic villain.

PERCHANCE TO DREAM

You can substitute a "dream realm" for the "psychic realm" described in this adventure, using the same guidelines. Perhaps Hani's condition is part of a magical "sleeping sickness" that's spreading across the city or the world.

VIRTUALLY REAL

Instead of a psychic plane, the heroes visit a virtual reality inside a computer system. Rather than Will, they might use the Technology skill to reflect their ability to "hack reality" to perform power stunts. They could be caught in some type of virtual simulation, or go into one in order to rescue trapped scientists or experimental subjects.

FREE SPIRITS

The heroes visit an "astral plane" or other conceptual magical realm where the mind and spirit are more important than the body. They might be aided in doing so by a magical ritual or spell, or the assistance of a magician NPC.

ONE HUNDRED ADVENTURE IDEAS

Stuck for an idea or just not sure what to do for your next adventure? Look over this list and pick something that sounds interesting or roll 2d20, ignoring the "tens" digit, to generate a number between 1 and 100 (treating a roll of two zeroes as "100"). Instant adventure idea!

1. An asteroid, meteor, or comet is on a collision course with the Earth.
2. An intelligent super-virus begins taking over the minds of people exposed to it.
3. The heroes' archenemies band together to take out their foes by trading opponents.
4. Atlantis invades the surface world because of pollution of the oceans and underwater weapons testing.
5. A super-villain attempts to trigger a nuclear war.
6. A vigilante is assassinating criminals in the city and the heroes must enforce the law.
7. Criminals have stolen advanced weapon prototypes they are using to commit robberies.
8. A "monster" threatening the city turns out to be a confused alien infant.
9. An omnipotent entity comes to Earth looking to have some fun "playing" with a group of heroes.
10. A fire rages through the city, threatening lives and property.
11. Mercenary villains are hired to capture or kill the heroes.
12. A tidal wave or tsunami threatens a coastal area.
13. A villain transforms people in the city into creatures (demons, zombies, plants, etc.) under the villain's control.
14. A vampire is on the loose, feeding on innocent victims in the city at night.
15. A would-be sorcerer botches a spell, opening a gate to a demonic netherworld.
16. Cultists are kidnapping people to use as sacrifices to their evil god(s).
17. Villains commit crimes posing as the heroes to blacken their good names.
18. Shapeshifting aliens infiltrate the government and law enforcement and outlaw the heroes.
19. A villain attempts to use mass mind-control to take over a city, country, or the world.
20. A rampaging monster is let loose on the unsuspecting city.
21. An earthquake strikes a major city, causing numerous disasters and opportunities for looters.
22. Another team of heroes has gone missing.
23. Aliens invade the Earth. The "aliens" might also be from another dimension, demons, mutant monsters, etc.
24. A scientific accident creates giant insects that swarm through the city.
25. A villain captures the heroes in order to "play" against them in a life-or-death game.
26. The rightful ruler of an alien empire comes to Earth seeking help to reclaim her throne.
27. An alien warrior arrives looking for a worthy opponent to challenge him.
28. A villain attempts to steal all of the heroes' powers for himself.
29. The heroes are kidnapped to become gladiators in an alien arena.
30. A mythic god starts a modern cult of worshippers, but isn't exactly what he seems.
31. An accident sends the heroes to a parallel Earth where good is evil and vice versa.
32. A villain attempts to melt the polar ice caps to flood the entire world.
33. A murderous spirit goes on a killing spree, possessing innocent host bodies.
34. A hero is infected with lycanthropy, slowly transforming into a were-creature.
35. A villain steals a powerful weapon and attempts to blackmail the government with it.
36. A secret and corrupt government black-ops organization tries to co-opt or eliminate the heroes.
37. A new crime lord begins consolidating power in the city.
38. Assassination attempts are made against government or public figures.
39. A villain steals the components necessary for a procedure or ritual intended to vastly increase his powers.
40. A super-human with out of control powers steals the components necessary for a cure.
41. Villains abduct the heroes' loved ones in an attempt to blackmail them or lure them into a trap.
42. The heroes are trapped in their own headquarters, which is counting down to self-destruction.
43. The heroes are pulled into a dream world where their deepest fears and desires come to life.
44. A strange meteorite causes mutations and unusual phenomena.
45. An alien "world killer" weapon is headed for Earth.
46. A powerful hero turns to evil for no apparent reason. Is he an imposter, possessed, or something else?
47. Alien bounty hunters come to Earth looking to collect a price on a hero's head.

ONE HUNDRED ADVENTURE IDEAS

48. A mythic figure challenges a hero to a contest of skill or ability to prove who is better.

49. The heroes need to find a particular rare device or item to save a friend's life.

50. The heroes discover a lost or hidden civilization isolated from the rest of the world.

51. Subterranean creatures "steal" buildings by pulling them down into the Earth.

52. New super-villains are actually aliens trying to get the supplies they need to repair their crashed starship.

53. The entire population of a small town has mysteriously vanished without a trace.

54. A young and powerful superhuman needs guidance in the responsibilities of great power.

55. A major new rock star is mentally influencing fans through hypnotic music.

56. A villain blackmails the heroes into assembling the scattered parts of a powerful device or key.

57. An innocent man on death row appeals to the heroes as his last hope.

58. Someone is sabotaging various high-tech companies without setting off any of their security.

59. Archeologists inadvertently unleash a terrible force from the past during a dig.

60. A popular new nightclub in town is a front for criminal activity.

61. A psychotic killer leaves taunting clues for the heroes and the police.

62. Thieves hijack a shipment of valuables (gold, cash, jewels, etc.).

63. Terrorists seize control of a site with numerous hostages and begin issuing demands.

64. A ceremony to publicly honor the heroes is disrupted by super-villains.

65. A deceased hero (or villain!) leaves an unusual bequest to someone in his will.

66. On Halloween night the city is threatened by a plague of ghosts, zombies, or other monsters.

67. Someone conducts a media smear campaign against the heroes.

68. The heroes are invited to participate in a sporting event or competition for charity.

69. A hero's powers begin to go out of control.

70. Villains kidnap an important person for ransom, perhaps even a hero in his secret identity!

71. The heroes forget their super-heroic identities for some reason.

72. Everyone in the city suddenly develops super-powers while the super-powered people lose theirs.

73. The heroes are asked to help safeguard an important diplomatic meeting threatened by terrorists.

74. Super-villains hold up a bank or attempt a robbery.

75. A villain tries to steal all the parts of an ancient map to a hidden treasure.

76. An object on display in a museum turns out to be a powerful mystic artifact.

77. A scientific experiment causes time to behave strangely, perhaps mixing the past, present, and future.

78. A hurricane, tornado, or other severe weather threatens.

79. Animals of all kinds suddenly turn against humanity.

80. Damage to a tanker threatens to spill oil or chemicals into the ocean.

81. A new designer drug on the streets gives addicts temporary super-powers.

82. Two warring alien races want to use Earth as a battlefield for their conflict.

83. A traveling circus or carnival is actually a cover for a criminal organization.

84. A villain places an indestructible force field around a city to turn it into a personal fiefdom.

85. An accident involving mutagens alters a hero's powers.

86. A villain brings cartoon, movie, or literary characters to life.

87. New threats are actually the mental projections of a young mutant unable to control her powers.

88. Supervillains seize control of a small, isolated nation and the heroes are asked to oust them.

89. An accident splits the heroes into good and evil twins.

90. A villain poses as a hero to infiltrate the heroes' team.

91. A hero's actions or legal rights are called into question.

92. A villain kidnaps an NPC hero as the final component of a fiendish device.

93. A villain suddenly seems to turn over a new leaf. Is it for real or a scam?

94. The heroes are shrunk down to miniature size right before they have to deal with another crisis.

95. Super eco-terrorists are threatening targets and the heroes have to defend them.

96. An omnipotent being pits the heroes against their archenemies to determine whether good or evil is superior.

97. A cosmic crisis threatens to destroy the entire fabric of reality.

98. The heroes are displaced in time and have to get back home without changing history.

99. A villain asks for the heroes' aid against another, more dangerous, villain.

100. A super-villain assembles an army of villains to conquer the Earth.

CHAPTER 7: OPTIONS

Mutants & Masterminds is a game all about options: the hero creation system is designed to give players complete control over the type of characters they want to play, and the power design system is intended to allow you to build a wide range of powers to do just what you want them to do. This breadth of options requires group cooperation and Gamemaster oversight, but it is worthwhile for the flexibility and freedom it provides, making for a more fun and enjoyable game.

Of course, not every game system suits every player, Gamemaster, or group. That's why this chapter (and other *M&M* source material) offers you some options for changing or adding to the existing game rules to suit you particular tastes. Want an even more flexible game where players can create *any* character within a particular power level? How about more detailed guidelines for things like martial arts, mass combat, or character reputation? Options for more lethal damage or playing with different dice mechanics? They're all here in this chapter.

Just as the chapter title says, everything in here is *optional*. While you're never under any requirement to use any part of the rules as-written; this material in particular is not considered an "official" part of the game rules. Other *M&M* books may refer to it, but again only as an option to consider, rather than an expected part of the rules. It is up to the individual GM and game group whether or not to adopt any of these options and, if so, how. Read an option over carefully before you apply it to your *M&M* game, and feel free to change it if it doesn't work out like you want. The power is in your hands!

HERO CREATION

Mutants & Masterminds hero creation is intended to produce relatively balanced characters within the guidelines set for a particular power level. Some may prefer a looser and more open-ended approach, however, in which case the following options may be useful.

UNLIMITED POWER POINTS

This variant is recommended only for fairly experienced groups interested in setting aside some of the limitations of the hero creation system. The Gamemaster sets the power level for the series, with its limits on character traits. However, players are given an *unlimited* number of power points to create their characters within those limits. In essence, they don't need to track power point costs, since they have as many as they need.

This provides considerable flexibility, of course, since some character concepts may be more or less expensive than others. It also has considerable potential for abuse, so Gamemasters should review the players' characters carefully and discourage characters able to do anything in order to encourage teamwork and cooperation.

On the other hand, having an unlimited power point budget can free up some players from fretting over how to "conserve" points or how to spend a handful of unspent points rather than "wasting" them. It can open up hero concepts that might require a few more points than the players would otherwise have, or encourage looking at concepts that are less "point efficient" but might be fun to play.

UNLIMITED POWER LEVEL

This variant is also recommended only for fairly experienced groups interested in setting aside some of the limitations of the hero creation system. The Gamemaster may choose to remove power level and all its associated restrictions from the series, allowing players to spend their power points in any way they wish (with the GM's final approval).

This allows for considerable freedom in character design, but may lead to unforeseen problems in game balance or in some characters having major advantages over others in play (or, conversely, major disadvantages due to overspending elsewhere). The Gamemaster should carefully monitor such free-form character creation (even more than usual) and players should be prepared to modify their character designs as needed to fit the Gamemaster's guidelines for the series.

FREE EQUIPMENT

In some series settings, the GM may wish to give equipment *no* cost in power points, just a monetary cost using Wealth. So characters can have whatever equipment they can afford and the GM allows, keeping in mind some items may be legally restricted or simply unavailable. This option is best suited to series where equipment doesn't need to compete with innate powers, balancing the cost of a gun or bullet-proof vest against being able to shoot energy blasts or being invulnerable. Examples include super-spy games or pulp era adventures where powers and devices are fairly rare and most characters have equipment or some sort.

Devices may still exist in this type of series, and the GM may still charge power points for them, since devices are unique items that exceed the capabilities of normal equipment. Note, however, some series settings may consider some devices "equipment." For example, a high tech setting in the far future may have advanced equipment (see **Tech Levels** in this chapter). Likewise, a fantasy setting may have magical equipment that doesn't exist in our world but is common there. These things aren't devices if they're commonly available to everyone in those settings.

FIGHTING STYLES

In *Mutants & Masterminds* you can use various collections of advantages to duplicate different armed and unarmed fighting styles, including various styles of martial arts. This section expands upon that idea and offers some suggestions for putting together your own fighting styles.

HARD VS. SOFT STYLES

Most fighting styles, particularly unarmed styles like martial arts, can be divided into "hard" and "soft" categories. Hard styles focus on a strong offense and direct, powerful attacks to disable an opponent as quickly as possible. They tend to be built around advantages like All-out Attack and Power Attack that enhance accuracy and damage at the cost of defense and precision. Soft styles, conversely, focus on a strong defense and the use of holds, throws, and similar indirect attacks to restrain an opponent. Soft styles tend to be built around advantages like Accurate Attack and Defensive Attack, providing defense and precision over power and strength. Advantages like Improved Hold and Improved Trip are common in soft styles.

There's no specific game effect as to whether a style is hard or soft; it's entirely a matter of description (much as it is with real-world martial arts). Some styles are blends of the two approaches, and most soft styles have offensive moves just as many hard styles have defenses, throws, or holds.

UNARMED VS. WEAPON STYLES

Some fighting styles focus on fighting unarmed, others with a particular weapon or weapons, and a few with both. Like the distinction between hard and soft styles, the distinction between unarmed and armed fighting styles is largely one of flavor and description. Combat advantages work the same whether you're using them unarmed, armed, or with powers. The GM may choose to apply certain situational modifiers based on a style's usual weapons as needed.

SKILLS AND STYLES

Some fighting styles teach particular skills in addition to advantages. A true expert in the style is likely to have at least some training in these associated skills although, like the style's advantages, you can choose how many points (if any) to invest in them.

The most common skills for fighting styles are, of course, various Close Combat skills. Other common skills include Acrobatics, Deception (primarily aimed at feinting in combat), Intimidation (primarily aimed at demoralizing an opponent in combat), Insight (primarily aimed at detecting and avoiding the previous two effects), Ranged Combat, and Sleight of Hand (for quick hand movements and feinting dependent upon them).

CREATING FIGHTING STYLES

Creating a fighting style is a simple matter of building a list of the style's advantages, plus any associated skills, and weapon elements (if that option is in use). Characters trained in a style invest power points into its traits. They don't have to take all of them at once; indeed, most students do not gain complete mastery of a fighting style all at once.

Generally speaking, a complete style should consist of between a half dozen and a dozen or so advantages; fewer usually isn't enough to constitute a coherent style, while more tends to represent branching out to master multiple styles of combat, unless you want to create a "master style" or secret martial art for your game encompassing *every* combat advantage. (True masters of such a style should be rare indeed!)

A number of sample fighting styles are presented here. You can use them in your game as-is, modify them to suit your own view of the style, and use them as models for creating new fighting styles of your own.

AIKIDO

Aikido is a Japanese martial art school founded by Sensei Morihei Uyeshiba in the 1920s. It is the epitome of a "soft" martial arts style, strongly focusing on "flowing" with an attack and using the attacker's momentum against him. Aikido emphasizes throws and evading attacks, along with a few holds for "guiding" an attacker to the ground.

Advantages: Defensive Attack, Evasion, Fast Grab, Grabbing Finesse, Improved Grab, Improved Hold, Improved Trip, Uncanny Dodge

BOXING

Called "the sweet science" by some, modern boxing is a fairly brutal and direct fighting style involving powerful

OPTION: WEAPON ELEMENTS

If you want a more detailed way of defining what weapons or attacks are usable with what fighting styles, you can use the following guidelines.

Each fighting style gets one "weapon element," an attack it's intended to work with, automatically at no cost. So an unarmed style works automatically with unarmed attacks. An armed style must choose a particular weapon (or narrow category of weapons, like blades, at the GM's discretion). Adding another weapon element to the style is an advantage (called Weapon Element), allowing you to use that style with an additional type of attack.

> ***Example:*** *The kung fu style is defined as unarmed, so all of its advantages are usable with unarmed attacks automatically. However, various types of kung fu also teach the use of weapons, including nunchaku, swords, and staves. Each of these types of weapons is considered a Weapon Element advantage for the style. A character must have the advantage in order to use the style's combat advantages in conjunction with those weapons.*

Note that characters can spend a hero point to emulate the Weapon Element advantage like any other advantage, granting a one-time use of a different attack in conjunction with a particular fighting style when the character does not have that attack as a standard weapon element.

This option is best for fairly realistic games where it's important to differentiate between otherwise similar martial artists. For more general superhero settings, it's probably more detail than the setting or characters require.

punches and evasive footwork, usually close in with an opponent. Feinting is a common skill, used to get an opponent to lower his guard for a devastating attack.

Skills: Deception

Advantages: All-out Attack, Defensive Attack, Improved Defense, Improved Smash, Power Attack, Takedown

CAPOEIRA

The national martial art of Brazil, Capoeira originated with ritual dancing among African slaves. When these slaves rebelled, they developed an unarmed fighting style and disguised it as folk dancing. Capoeira involves many handstand moves, allowing practitioners to use it while their hands were bound or chained. It's usually practiced to music like a dance form.

Skills: Acrobatics

Advantages: Agile Feint, Defensive Attack, Improved Grab, Improved Trip, Power Attack, Prone Fighting

ESCRIMA

This Philippine stick-fighting style typically uses a pair of short batons, but is also practiced with a balisong knife or unarmed (and may include them as weapon elements at the GM's discretion). It focuses on deflecting or blocking attacks and fast strikes to the body.

Advantages: Accurate Attack, Defensive Attack, Improved Disarm, Improved Hold, Power Attack, Quick Draw, Weapon Bind

FENCING

"Fencing" is used here to describe western sword-fighting styles in general. Traditional fencing uses a slim, slight sword like a foil, but characters in *Mutants & Masterminds* can fence with whatever sort of sword the GM approves, including Japanese *kenjutsu* sword-fighting. The style focuses on speed, with a combination of defensive blocks and offensive strikes and thrusts, along with feints to fake-out your opponent. The more "swashbuckling" style of fencing also involves Acrobatics and Agile Feint.

Skills: Sleight of Hand

Advantages: Accurate Attack, Defensive Attack, Improved Defense, Improved Disarm, Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Taunt

JUJITSU

This style, also known as judo, grew out of a number of Japanese fighting styles over hundreds of years, and spread to the western world in the 19th and 20th centuries. Its primary techniques focus on throws and holds to put an opponent on the ground and keep him there. There are hundreds of modern sub-styles teaching variant techniques, allowing you to justify including most unarmed combat advantages in it.

Advantages: Accurate Attack, Defensive Attack, Improved Disarm, Improved Grab, Improved Hold, Improved Trip

KARATE

Karate originated on the Okinawa Islands. When Japanese conquerors forbade the natives from carrying weapons, they focused on this style of unarmed combat. Karate incorporated various farming tools that could be discretely carried as weapons, including the staff, nunchaku (threshing flail), kama (sickle), rope or chain, and tonfa (millwheel handle). Modern karate tends to focus on unarmed techniques. It spread widely to the west after American soldiers learned it in Japan after World War II. Karate is a "hard" style focusing on powerful punches and kicks. A karate teacher is called *sensei* and the practice hall or school is a *dojo*.

Advantages: All-out Attack, Improved Defense, Improved Disarm, Improved Smash, Instant Up, Power Attack

KRAV MAGA

Krav Maga was developed about 40 years ago for use by the Isreali Defense Forces (and later Isreali police and Mossad intelligence agents). It's a highly practical style borrowing moves from many different fighting styles and focused entirely on quickly and efficiently disabling an opponent. It lacks the "forms" of other fighting styles, since it's intende solely for fighting, not for show. This fighting style can be used for other modern, constructed styles taught to commandos and military personnel.

Advantages: All-out Attack, Chokehold, Improved Defense, Improved Disarm, Improved Hold, Improved Trip, Power Attack

KUNG FU

Kung fu means, essentially, "hard work" or "great skill." It is the common name of an ancient Chinese style of martial arts dating back a thousand years or more. It's most famously associated with the Shaolin Temple, where it was taught beginning in the sixth century AD. It spread to the west with Chinese immigration in the 1800s, but did not become popular among westerners until the mid-1900s. There are hundreds of kung fu variants and styles, many based on the movements of animals (Crane, Dragon, Leopard, Mantis, Monkey, Snake, and Tiger, to name some). A kung fu teacher is called a *sifu* and the practice hall is called a *kwoon*.

Skills: Expertise: Concentration

Advantages: Defensive Attack, Improved Critical, Improved Defense, Improved Smash, Improved Trip, Instant Up, Power Attack, Startle

MUAY THAI

Also known as Thai kickboxing, Muay Thai is a brutal fighting style of kicks, knee- and elbow-strikes, and punches. It relies on blocks for defense and has no holds or throws, the intention being to beat an opponent to a pulp as quickly as possible.

Advantages: All-out Attack, Improved Critical, Improved Defense, Power Attack, Takedown

NINJUTSU

Not a "fighting style" per se, ninjutsu is associated with Japanese ninja and similar stealthy assassins. The ninja fighting style is technically called *taijutsu*, but the style here assumes the broad range of "ninja" training. It does not include whatever superhuman capabilities the GM wishes to grant ninja; those are better acquired as powers.

Skills: Acrobatics, Athletics, Stealth

Advantages: Chokehold, Evasion, Hide in Plain Sight, Improvised Weapon, Startle, Takedown

SUMO

Sumo wrestling is a Japanese martial art, usually practiced by large, heavy fighters. The object of a match is to push the opponent out of the fighting ring or pin him down within the ring. Sumo matches tend to be short, but involve a great deal of lengthy ritual. Unlike most Asian martial arts, sumo focuses heavily on strength and size.

Advantages: Fast Grab, Great Endurance, Improved Grab, Improved Hold, Improved Trip, Power Attack

TAE KWAN DO

The name of this Korean martial art means "the way of kicking and punching." It's a forceful fighting style, widely taught in schools throughout the world. As its name implies, tae kwan do relies on both powerful strikes and various types of kicks, including side and flying kicks.

Advantages: All-out Attack, Defensive Roll, Improved Defense, Power Attack, Takedown

WRESTLING

Wrestling focuses on grabs and holds to restrain an opponent, rather than direct physical attacks, although a wrestler who gains the upper hand can do a fair amount of damage to a foe.

Advantages: Chokehold, Improved Disarm, Improved Grab, Improved Hold, Power Attack, Weapon Bind

REPUTATION

This system models how well known a character is and how that reputation affects interaction with others. A good reputation can be a useful advantage, but a bad one can be a troublesome hindrance.

Reputation affects non-combat interaction checks between characters by providing a modifier. A positive reputation makes others more likely to favor and help the character, while a negative reputation makes the character's social entreaties less effective.

FAME OR INFAMY

Reputation rank represents a character's notoriety. Those with a Reputation 4 or higher can be considered well known within their professional and social circles. Whether the character is famous or infamous depends on the point of view of the person recognizing the character.

REPUTATION AND SECRET IDENTITIES

Characters with secret identities effectively have two separate reputation ranks: one for their costumed identity and another for their secret identity. The character should use whichever value is appropriate. One reason many supers maintain secret identities is to leave their Reputation (and the recognition that comes with it) behind for a while to live a "normal" life.

REPUTATION CHECKS

Most of the time, the character doesn't decide to use reputation. The GM decides when your reputation is relevant to the scene or encounter. When it becomes relevant, the GM makes a reputation check for an NPC that might be influenced in some fashion by your character's notoriety. A reputation check is calculated as follows:

D20 + REPUTATION RANK + THE NPC'S INT MODIFIER.

The GM may substitute an Expertise skill bonus for the Int modifier if your activities, and therefore reputation, apply to a particular field. Non-intelligent characters do not make checks to recognize someone's reputation, nor do characters unable to interact.

The standard DC for a reputation check is 20. If the NPC succeeds on the check, he or she recognizes the character. That recognition grants a bonus or penalty on subsequent interaction skill checks based on the NPC's reaction. A character with Reputation 19 or more is instantly recognizable and known to virtually everyone.

SKILL CHECKS

When an NPC recognizes you and has a positive opinion of your reputation, you get a bonus on Deception and Persuasion checks equal to half your reputation bonus, rounded down.

When an NPC recognizes you and has a negative opinion of your reputation, you get a penalty on Deception and Persuasion checks equal to half your reputation bonus, rounded down, but gain a bonus of the same amount to your Intimidation checks, since the subject is more likely to believe the worst about you.

The bonus or penalty only applies when you are interacting outside of combat with an NPC who recognizes you and is therefore aware of your reputation. Those unaware of your reputation are unaffected by it either way.

NPC REPUTATIONS

Players decide how their characters act. Sometimes, however, it's appropriate for the GM to call for a skill check using an interaction skill affected by reputation. For example, an NPC might use Deception to lie to the heroes, who, in turn, use Insight to detect the lie. If an NPC tries to intimidate a hero, the GM can use the NPC's Intimidation check result to determine which heroes see the NPC as intimidating and which don't. Similarly, a Persuasion check can tell the GM which characters find an NPC persuasive and which don't. Players may also want to know if their heroes recognize a particular NPC. Reputation checks can be useful in these situations.

The GM should make a reputation check to see if player characters recognize an NPC in secret. This prevents the players from using the results of reputation checks as a means of measuring the importance of every NPC they encounter.

Modify the results of the NPC's interaction skill checks by their reputation bonuses when they interact with characters who recognize them.

DETERMINING REPUTATION

Determining a character's reputation is based on two factors: power level and points invested in the Benefit (Renown) advantage.

As a default, all characters have a reputation bonus equal to their power level. For heroes this is the power level of the series. For NPCs, it is their power level relative to the series; more powerful characters tend to be better known. So heroes in a PL11 series have a base Reputation of 11 (meaning their reputation comes into play on a roll of 9 or better with a DC 20 reputation check).

Each rank in the Benefit (Renown) advantage increases a character's reputation by +2.

EVENT-BASED REPUTATION

Reputation also changes based on the things characters do, at least the things other people know about. When a character performs some important action, the Gamemaster can assign a Reputation modifier based on it. This can range from +1 for acts of local fame (saving the city, stopping a major crime wave, etc.) to +4 or more for things like saving (or trying to take over) the world. Keep in mind that the Reputation bonus only measures how well known a character is, not how people feel about the character.

The GM can likewise decrease a character's Reputation for staying out of the limelight, lying low, and otherwise not attracting attention for a while. People move on and forget about old headlines. Still, a hero or villain with a significant Reputation usually has to be out of circulation for years before most people forget.

WEALTH

Mutants & Masterminds, like the comics, doesn't pay much attention to money. A character's wealth has little or no impact on the game. It is mainly for background color and whatever advantages the GM sees fit to provide based on the Benefit advantage. However, some may prefer to keep track of character wealth and resources in more detail, in which case the following system may be used.

Every character has a Wealth rank which reflects buying power—a composite of income, credit rating, and savings. A character's Wealth serves as the basis for a Wealth check, used to purchase goods and services.

WEALTH BONUS

A character's base Wealth rank is 8. The Benefit (Wealth) advantage (see the *M&M Hero's Handbook,* page 82) increases Wealth by 4 per rank. Decreases to base Wealth *grant* power points, similar to decreasing an ability: 1 point for Wealth 4, 2 points for Wealth 0.

Over the course of play, your Wealth rank may decrease as you purchase expensive items. A character's Wealth rank can never fall below 0, and there is no limit to how high Wealth rank can climb. If your Wealth is 0, you don't have the buying power to purchase any item or service with a purchase DC of 10 or higher, and you can't make routine Wealth checks (basically, *any* spending is significant for you).

WEALTH BONUS

WEALTH RANK	FINANCIAL CONDITION
0	Impoverished
1–4	Struggling
5–10	Middle class
11–15	Affluent
16–20	Wealthy
21–30	Rich
31 or higher	Filthy rich

MAKING PURCHASES

Wealth rank reflects buying power. Every item and service has a purchase Difficulty Class based on how expensive and hard to get it is. To purchase something, make a Wealth check against the purchase DC. As a general guideline, equipment purchase DC equals 10 + the equipment's point

SAMPLE PURCHASE DIFFICULTIES

ITEM	PURCHASE DC
Flashlight	4
Restaurant meal	4
Common household item	4-5
Casual clothing	8
Cell phone	9
Professional services	10 + skill rank
Weapon	10 + point cost
Expensive clothing	12-15
Tool kit	13
Plane ticket	14
New computer	22
New automobile	28
House	30
Mansion	36

cost. The GM sets the Wealth check DC for any particular purchase, using the examples given here as guidelines.

THE WEALTH CHECK

A Wealth check is a d20 roll plus your current Wealth rank. Wealth rank is fluid; it increases as you gain Wealth and decreases as you make purchases.

If you succeed on the Wealth check, you purchase the item. If you fail, you can't afford the item at this time.

You can make a routine Wealth check, just like any other routine check (see *M&M Hero's Handbook,* page 13). This means you can automatically purchase any item with a DC equal or less than your Wealth +10.

If you purchase an item with a purchase DC higher than your current Wealth rank, your rank decreases by 1 point for every 5 points the purchase DC exceeds your current Wealth rank (1 point for 1–5 points higher, 2 points for 6–10 points higher, etc.). Lost Wealth rank returns at a rate of 1 point per month.

You can try again if you fail a Wealth check, but not until your character has spent an additional number of hours shopping equal to the purchase DC of the object or service, looking around for a better deal.

SHOPPING AND TIME

Buying less common items generally takes a number of hours equal to the purchase DC of the item, reflecting the time needed to locate the item and close the deal. Getting a license or buying a legally restricted item may also increase the time needed to make purchases.

FINANCIAL AID

You can help someone else purchase an item by making a DC 10 Wealth check, just like a team check. If the attempt is successful, you provide the purchaser with a +2 bonus on their Wealth check, +5 for three or more degrees of success. If you assist a Wealth check for an item with a purchase DC higher than your current Wealth rank, it decreases as normal.

WEALTH AND INVENTING

Gamemasters may wish to add a Wealth check to the inventing process (*M&M Hero's Handbook,* page 159). Once the inventor has come up with a design for the device, make a Wealth check to obtain the necessary components (purchase DC = device's point cost). A failed check means you can't afford the materials. Spending a hero point to jury-rig the device out of materials at hand allows you to skip the Wealth check.

This requirement for inventing explains why so many villains look to *steal* the components they need!

MONEY TALKS

Wealth can be quite influential. To reflect this, the GM might wish to allow Wealth rank to substitute for an interaction skill bonus like Deception, Persuasion, or even Intimidation in situations where the character's wealth and influence can be brought to bear, either through bribery, more subtle shows of wealth, or "charitable donations."

> ***Example:*** *Hieronymus King is fabulously wealthy (Wealth +30). When negotiating with certain balky government officials, Mr. King makes it clear he can compensate them for their trouble. The GM decides to use King's Wealth rank in place of his Persuasion bonus, allowing him to seal the deal quickly and easily.*

Alternately, instead of substituting Wealth rank for a skill bonus, you can choose to treat Wealth as providing a circumstance bonus to the relevant skill check, much like a team check.

SYSTEMS

The options in this section affect how *Mutants & Masterminds* is played, from resolving checks using different randomizers or die rolls to variants on different sub-systems of the game rules. Most of these options can be plugged into the existing *M&M* rules without affecting the rest of the game significantly, except as noted in the discussion of the variant itself.

ABILITY STRAIN

With this option, characters can choose to suffer a temporary reduction in an ability rank in order to gain a brief, one-time bonus with an ability check, essentially "pushing" the ability beyond its normal limits, resulting in some strain from which the character must recover. Ability strain is in addition to the effects of spending hero points in play, allowing characters to go that extra distance when the odds are against them.

When attempting an ability check, you can accept a temporary –1 penalty to your ability rank to receive a +1 bonus on your check. The penalty goes into effect the round after the results of the check (successful or not). You can gain up to a maximum bonus of +5 (and therefore a maximum penalty of –5) in this way, but you cannot suffer a penalty great enough to debilitate the ability (lowering it below -5).

Once you've strained an ability to its limit, you can't do so again until it is fully recovered. A strained ability regains 1 rank per hour until back to its normal rank.

ABILITY STRAIN AND EXTRA EFFORT

Additionally, at the Gamemaster's option, ability strain can serve as a substitute for the fatigue caused by extra effort (see *M&M Hero's Handbook*, page 19). This may be across the board or only for particular abilities (such as physical abilities or only Stamina). Allowing ability strain for extra effort in conjunction with fatigue gives players some additional options and the opportunity to use extra effort much more without their heroes passing out from the fatigue.

ABILITY STRAIN AND POWERS

At the GM's option, ability strain can be expanded to power effects, suffering the same penalty to gain a one-time bonus with the effect. So a character might take a +3 bonus to a Damage effect that imposes a –3 rank penalty thereafter, recovering at a rate of 1 rank per hour. This option adds some flexibility to power use and extra effort, at the cost of requiring some additional bookkeeping and tracking.

ALTERNATE DICE

Mutants & Masterminds is designed to use only a single 20-sided die. This has certain effects on game play. A 20-sided die produces a "flat" probability curve; the chances of rolling a 20 on the die are the same as rolling a 1, 7, 12, or any other number: 1-in-20 or 5%. The chances of rolling a particular number *or better* differ, of course (which is where Difficulty Classes and modifiers come in), but the chances of any particular number coming up on the die are the same.

This produces a certain amount of randomness in the flow of the game. A character might make several successful checks in a row only to suddenly fail. Anyone might get a lucky shot (or, conversely, manage to miss the mark). Things like hero points and routine checks help to limit this randomness in some cases. There are also situations where the difficulty or difference in abilities is so great the die roll hardly matters. The "wildness" of the d20 roll contributes to the comic book feel of the game, where sudden strokes of luck or reversals of fortune are common.

These alternate die-rolling methods (either 3d6 or 2d10) produce more predictable results, with less of the randomness (and, to a degree, suspense) of a flat roll like 1d20. These more reliable results make certain aspects of the game more predictable and routine.

Gamemasters who want to switch over to an alternate die-rolling method may wish to change the DCs of some tasks slightly, since the chance of achieving a very high roll are somewhat less with a bell curve. For example, if using 3d6 instead of 1d20, reduce DCs about 20% to reflect the generally lower rolls that will occur (plus the fact that 3d6 only goes to 18 rather than 20). Regardless of the die-rolling option, characters should still be allowed to make routine checks and spend hero points to improve their rolls, as outlined in the standard rules.

Also note combats tend to be longer using a bell-curve die roll since the chances are lower that characters will fail resistance checks badly enough to knock them out or disable them quickly. These results tend to occur after characters have taken some hits, unless overwhelming damage is involved.

All the game systems in this book assume 1d20 as the die roll. Simply substitute the alternate dice (3d6 or 2d10) and adjust DCs as needed to change the die-rolling system.

HIGH-LOW ROLLS

Another means of adding a "bell curve" to M&M die rolling is by using high-low rolls: in place of any single d20 roll, roll three 20-sided dice and take the middle number (dropping the highest and lowest). If two or more dice come up the same number, use that number (since the third die is by definition higher or lower).

This method tends to produce results weighted more toward the middle range, with 10 as the average. Rolling a "natural 20" requires *two* of the dice to come up 20 (about a 1-in-400 chance or 0.025% rather than 1-in-20 or 5%). The same is the case for a "natural" 1. Generally, this means characters achieve the effect of their routine checks more often, but succeed at high Difficulty tasks less often, and have fewer critical successes or failures. High-low rolls involve more dice, but are only slightly more involved than rolling and reading a single d20.

Spending a hero point with high-low rolls allows the player to keep the *best* die roll of the three dice rather than the middle roll. So a roll of 4, 11, and 18 would normally count as an 11. Spending a hero point makes it an 18 instead. If *all three* d20 rolls are below 11, take the highest and add 10 to get the result of spending a hero point on that roll.

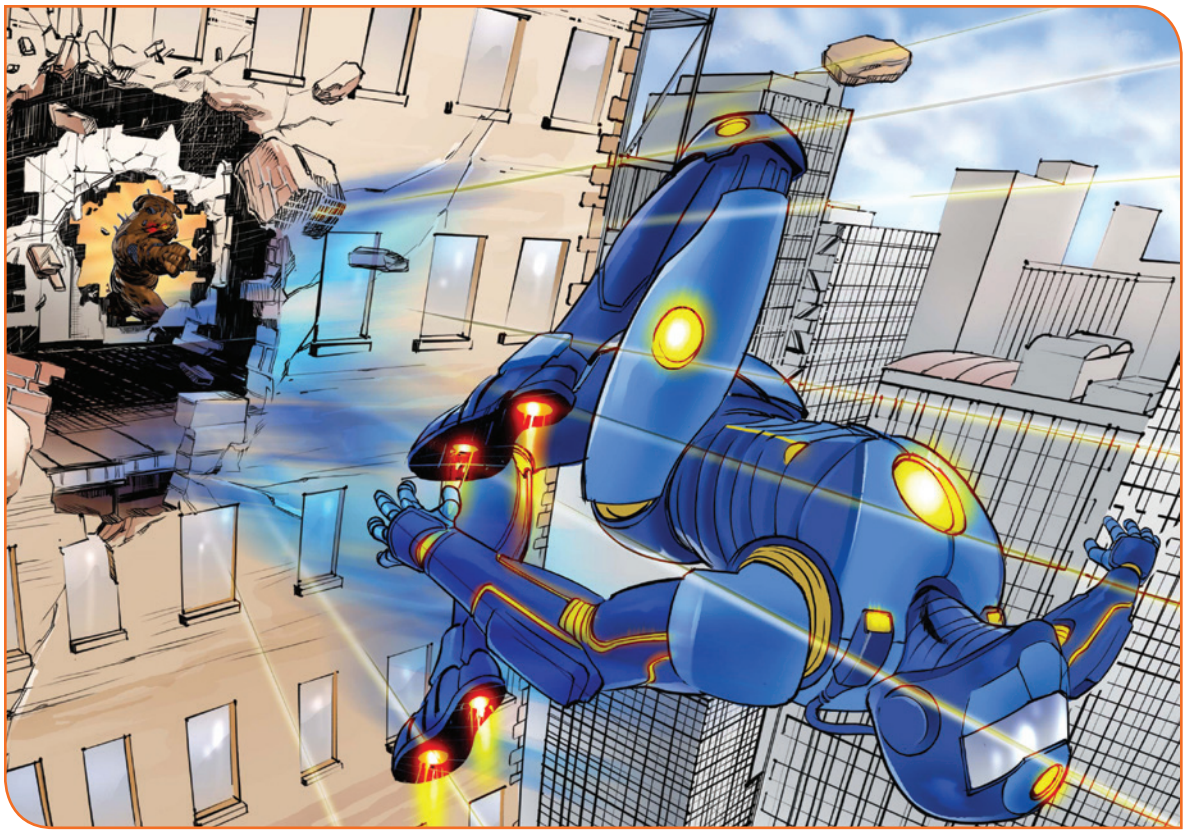
You may wish to have something special occur on the rare occasion that a high-low roll comes up with the same result on all three dice: a major or automatic success on a high roll or a serious or automatic failure on a low roll.

KNOCKBACK

Super-powerful attacks can send opponents flying. A character failing a Damage resistance check by two or more degrees may be knocked back. The distance is based on the rank of the effect and the target's mass and durability. Take the Damage rank and subtract the target's Toughness rank. Subtract the target's Growth rank (if any). In addition, an effect such as a Feature defined as extra weight or density should subtract its rank. *Add* the Strength modifier of a character with Shrinking (so +2 for a character with Shrinking 8, for example).

KNOCKBACK = DAMAGE - TOUGHNESS - MODIFIERS

The target is knocked back that distance value. A result of –5 or less results in no knockback. –4 or –3 means the character falls prone in roughly the same spot (although a knockback distance of a few feet may matter if the char-



acter is standing on a ledge, for example). So a knockback result of 5 means the character is knocked back 900 feet! (distance value 5).

The character suffers additional damage equal to the knockback result or the Toughness of any obstacle (such as a wall), whichever is greater. The obstacle suffers damage equal to the original attack (which may damage or break it). If the character breaks through the obstacle, he keeps going the remainder of the knockback distance. If the obstacle is another character, treat the result as a slam attack (see *M&M Hero's Handbook,* page 198) doing damage equal to the original attack to both parties. The character ends up prone and must get back up normally.

You can choose to inflict less than your attack's maximum knockback (just like you can choose to do less than your attack's maximum damage).

> ***Example:*** *Junkpile strikes Ultramarine with an enormous rusting fist resulting in two Degrees of Failure on her Damage resistance check. The armored avenger may suffer some knockback. Junkpile's strike does Damage 16. Ultramarine has Toughness 12 and no other modifiers for size or immovability. So the knockback result is 4, sending Ultramarine flying 500 feet and striking a wall before she skids to a stop. The wall's Toughness is 8, and it suffers Damage 16 (equal to the original attack). Ultramarine breaks through it and goes the remaining distance. She has to resist Damage 8 (the wall's Toughness), which she does easily. She's dazed and prone as Junkpile continues his rampage. Ultramarine picks herself up, flies back to the scene, and blasts Junkpile with her blue-green laser using the Power Attack maneuver for +2 Damage and scores a critical hit! Her laser does Damage 10 damage, +2 for the Power Attack, +5 for the critical, or 17 total. Junkpile has Toughness 16. He also has Growth 4 for a total knockback modifier of –20 and a result of –3. If the blast dazes Junkpile, it will knock him prone (and drive him back a mere 3 feet (distance value –3) if that's important). If it weren't for the critical hit, the knockback result would be –8 and have no effect.*

LETHAL DAMAGE

The default *Mutants & Masterminds* rules don't differentiate between lethal and non-lethal damage; Damage is Damage, and it can all potentially kill, but killing a character is difficult. For those who want more of an element of risk and realism in their damage, there is the option of categorizing some Damage as Lethal. This is a +0 modifier by default, but is permanent like other modifiers, so once a Damage effect is lethal, it cannot be used for non-lethal damage. Instead, take the non-lethal version as an Alternate Effect of the Lethal Damage.

The key difference with Lethal Damage is that it inflicts additional conditions on a failed resistance check, as follows:

- **Failure (three degrees):** In addition to being staggered, the target is disabled.
- **Failure (four degrees):** In addition to being incapacitated, the target is dying.

All of the conditions from lethal damage also recover at a slower rate: one hour per condition rather than one minute. Effects like Healing and Regeneration speed this up normally.

INSTANT DEATH

At the GM's option, a resistance check against lethal damage that fails by 5 or more degrees can result in immediate death, rather than changing the character's condition to dying. This is suitable for series with more realistic lethal damage; such massive damage is almost certain to kill poorly protected or unlucky characters. The players can, of course, still spend hero points to improve such poor resistance checks.

LETHAL KNOCKBACK

For greater realism, you may wish to have lethal attacks use only half their Damage rank when determining knockback. This reflects that lethal attacks tend to have less overall "push" compared to non-lethal attacks.

HERO POINT TRADEOFFS

Run into that situation where you really need a hero point, but have none left? In such instances, the GM may choose to apply the following option: a player may ask the GM for a hero point in exchange for a complication to follow immediately after that point is used. In essence, the player is "borrowing on credit" and "paying" for the hero point with the complication. Hero points acquired in this way can be spent normally.

> ***Example:*** *Ultramarine's player is out of hero points and really wants to make her next shot count. So she asks the GM for a point in exchange for an immediate complication. The GM agrees and Ultramarine makes her next attack against the villain using the hero point to help ensure a hit. The overcharge on her armor's laser shorts out some systems, however, and the GM imposes a power loss complication, saying Ultramarine's weapon is out of commission until she can make a Technology check to bring it back on-line.*

MASS COMBAT

While the basic *Mutants & Masterminds* combat rules handle the one-on-one superhero vs. supervillain clashes of the comic books quite well, large-scale battles, whether between armies or a small handful of superhumans against an army, are on a different scale altogether. Even superheroes can find themselves overwhelmed by a sufficient force, but some can take on entire armies and win! Things can get a little hectic for the Gamemaster, when a fight involves dozens or even hundreds of participants!

The following optional rules are designed to assist Gamemasters in simulating mass battles between large forces.

FORCES

The mass combat system sums up the actions and traits of a number of less powerful combatants and treats them as a single more powerful "individual" for the purposes of combat and conflict. This combined entity is called a *force*.

MILITARY UNIT SIZE

UNIT TYPE	APPROX. NO. OF TROOPS	FORCE RANK
Corps	20,000–50,000	14
Division	9,000–15,000	13
Brigade	6,000–8,000	12
Regiment	3,000–4,000	11
Battalion	500–1,000	9
Company	140	7
Platoon	30–50	5
Squad	10	3

Like individual characters, forces have their own traits, measuring their capabilities. In general, the traits of a force are based on the components making up that force (individual soldiers, for example), with certain traits gaining a modifier based on the overall size of the force.

FORCE SIZE

The most important quality of a force is its size, how many individuals make up that particular force. Gamemasters may choose to treat an entire group as a single force or split the group up into smaller forces, as suits the needs of the story. Sometimes having the characters deal with several smaller forces can be much more interesting than a single massive force, particularly if more than one character is interacting with the force(s) at the same time.

FORCE RANK

A force's size determines its *Force rank*. A force's size, read on the volume column of the **Measurements Table** (see *M&M Hero's Handbook,* page 11), gives the force rank. So a force of two individuals is Force rank 1, four individuals

Force rank 2, eight individuals (a squad) rank 3, and so forth. The **Military Unit Size** table shows the Force ranks for common military units. Generally speaking, it's easier to break entire armies down into corps, divisions, or brigades and use their Force modifiers.

TROOP QUALITY

Troop quality refers to the overall abilities of the individuals making up a particular force and forms the basis for the force's traits. There are three levels of troop quality: green, trained, and veteran. Gamemasters may want to divide a larger force into smaller forces in order to differentiate them by quality. For example, a battalion of 750 soldiers might be made up of three forces: a force of 50 veteran troops, a force of 200 trained troops, and a force of 500 green troops.

Green troops are inexperienced and largely untrained, unfamiliar with combat and working together as a unit. Conscripts and average people are green quality, as are troops in societies where armed conflict is rare.

Green Troops: Attack 1, Damage 4, Defense 1, Toughness 0, Initiative 0, Morale –3

Trained troops have experience and training in combat and unit tactics. Most trained military fall into this category, along with police officers and others experienced in combat situations.

Trained Troops: Attack 2, Damage 5, Defense 2, Toughness 1, Initiative 2, Morale 0

Veteran troops have considerable experience and training in warfare, tactics, and working together as a unit. They include special-forces units and other elite military units.

Veteran Troops: Attack 4, Damage 6, Defense 4, Toughness 2, Initiative 4, Morale 3

ATTACK

A force's attack bonus is the total of its base attack rank for troop quality and its Force rank, so a larger force has a greater attack bonus than a smaller one of the same quality. A force's total attack bonus is based on a large number of troops making simultaneous attacks, using coordinated tactics, and so forth. It doesn't assume all the troops attack or even hit at once; like other traits, it abstracts the force's capability.

DAMAGE

A force's damage rank is the total of its base damage rank and Force rank. This assumes larger forces of troops have both more attacks and more powerful weapons, so it takes into account that a large force is likely to be using grenades, rocket launchers, and eventually tanks, bombs, and other heavy weapons in addition to man-portable armaments. The force's damage capabilities are generalized and summed up as single damage rank.

Generally speaking, a military force's Damage is Lethal (see **Lethal Damage**, earlier in this chapter), unless the GM decides the force is specially armed with stun-damage and incapacitating weapons (more likely in a comic book setting, but becoming more plausible in the real world). A force's Damage works just like an individual Damage effect and is resisted in the same way.

DEFENSE

A force's defense represents how difficult it is to inflict a successful attack on that force, like a character's active defenses. A force's defense is used against both close (Parry) and ranged (Dodge) attacks. Defense is based entirely on the force's quality, with no modifier for Force rank. A larger force is easier to "hit" overall, but can also suffer more damage than a smaller force (represented by also applying the force modifier to Toughness).

TOUGHNESS

Add the Force rank to base Toughness rank for troop quality to determine the force's total Toughness resistance check bonus.

For a force as a whole, this Toughness doesn't represent the ability to shrug off damage so much as how long a force can suffer damage and continue fighting. See **Force Damage** for details on force Toughness checks.

INITIATIVE

A force's Initiative modifier is likewise based solely on troop quality, unaffected by Force rank. A force uses its Initiative modifier just like a character, and all parts of the force are assumed to act together as a unit during its turn in the initiative order.

SURPRISE

Under the right conditions, such as a well-planned ambush—the GM may rule that a force is surprised at the start of a combat. This has its normal effects: the attacker gets to take an action during the surprise round before combat begins. The force is not vulnerable unless the GM feels the *entire* force was caught by surprise, in which case the force's defense may be halved for the surprise round.

MORALE

A force has a modifier to its morale checks based on troop quality, unmodified by Force rank. When the force must make a morale check, apply its morale modifier to the check. See **Morale Checks** later in this section for details.

FORCES IN ACTION

When one or more forces are involved in a conflict, the combat shifts to *battlefield rounds*. Each battlefield round is approximately ten times the length of an ordinary six-second action round, or one minute (time value 3), and represents a considerable amount of maneuvering and activity on the battlefield during that time.

Individual characters and forces can take the normal allotment of actions during a battlefield round: one move action and one standard action (possibly trading the standard action for an additional move action). Free actions and reactions are also allowed, up to the limits imposed by the GM.

A force makes an attack just like an individual does: a d20 roll, plus the force's attack bonus, against the Difficulty Class of the target's Defense +10, whether the target is another force or an individual character. A force may also move before or after an attack. Typically a force's movement is limited so long as a significant portion of the force is on foot. Vehicle equipped forces may be able to move more quickly as the GM's discretion.

MANEUVERS

A force can use particular maneuvers in battle, much like individual characters. These maneuvers are similar in many ways to character-scale maneuvers.

ALL-OUT ATTACK

This works like the character maneuver: for each –1 the force takes to defense, it adds +1 to its attack bonus. Green forces can take up to a –2 penalty, while trained and veteran forces can take up to a –5 penalty (as if they had the All-out Attack advantage).

DEFENSIVE ATTACK

This also works like the character maneuver: for each –1 attack, the force gains +1 defense. Green forces can take up to a –2 penalty, while trained and veteran forces can take up to a –5 penalty (as if they had the Defensive Attack advantage).

CHARGE

A force can charge as its standard action, just like a character, with the same –2 modifier to the force's attack check at the end of the charge.

SPLIT

A force can choose to split off into smaller forces with reduced Force rank, but greater maneuverability and freedom of action. A force must be made up of troops of the same quality; the force uses the traits of its least qualified troops if it has troops of mixed quality.

Splitting a force is a standard action. When a force splits, it becomes two forces, each with a portion of the troops of the original force. Each separate force has its Force rank recalculated according to its new troop compliment. If the original force suffered any damage, both of the split forces have the same damage.

COMBINE

Two forces may also choose to combine to form a single, larger, force. Combining forces is a standard action that requires the forces be adjacent. This increases the force's size, and therefore Force rank, normally. For example, if two forces of 250 troops combine to form a single force, that force has a force modifier one higher than the original forces.

If any of the forces are disrupted (see **Force Damage**) when they combine, the combined force has the highest total of hits from among its components. The components' hits are not added together. Disabled forces cannot combine.

COORDINATED ASSAULT

Two or more forces may attempt to make a coordinated assault on a target. This works like a team check (see *M&M Hero's Handbook,* page 16): Each assisting force makes a normal attack check against the target. A successful check inflicts no damage, but grants the coordinating force a circumstance bonus on its attack against that same target.

Note that a coordinated assault does not increase the attack's damage, only the likelihood of a successful attack, so several small forces looking to increase their damage potential are better off combining into a larger force with a higher Force rank (see **Combine**, previously).

FLANKING

Two forces may attempt to catch an opponent in between them, *flanking* that opponent. If two forces are located on opposite sides of a target, each force gains a +2 circumstance bonus to attack checks against that target.

FORCE DAMAGE

Forces successfully attacked during a round attempt Damage resistance checks as per the standard *M&M* rules. The results of Toughness checks are found under the **Force Damage** table below.

Each round's attacks are considered to happen simultaneously in mass combat. Therefore, the effects of damage are not applied until the start of the following round.

FORCE DAMAGE

TOUGHNESS CHECK ...	EFFECT
Succeeds	No Effect
Fails (one degree)	Disrupted
Fails (two degrees)	Disrupted + Stunned
Fails (three degrees)	Disrupted + Staggered + Demoralized
Fails (four or more degrees)	Destroyed

DAMAGE CONDITIONS

The stunned and staggered conditions are the same for forces as for characters (see *M&M Hero's Handbook,* pages 18 and 19, respectively). The other conditions suffered by forces are as follows:

DISRUPTED

Casualties and wounded are starting to add up and it is beginning to feel the pinch of lost manpower. Cohesion is starting to break down under stress, making it difficult to relay orders from component unit to component unit. Moreover, the loss of officers or other leaders is adversely affecting the force's ability to fight effectively. The sight of dead and wounded comrades has begun to hurt the force's morale.

As a result, each disrupted condition enforces a –1 penalty to all the force's checks, including further Toughness and morale checks. The penalties for multiple disrupted conditions are cumulative with each other and with any other penalties incurred.

DEMORALIZED

The force has been damaged to the point where it can no longer fight effectively. It may not attack other opponents, but may still attempt resistance checks and take actions to retreat from the field of battle.

DESTROYED

A destroyed force has had its morale completely broken. Scattered elements may continue to fight, but their impact on the battle is negligible as the majority of the force has been killed, captured, or has taken flight in a disorganized retreat. The force in question is obviously done in the battle at hand—and likely for all battles to follow, for that matter.

PLAYER CHARACTERS AND FORCE DAMAGE

As a general rule, player characters—whether ordinary grunts or superhumans—are considered separate from a force with regard to damage. Damage to the overall force does not directly impact the heroes, except insofar as it weakens the support they can expect.

Gamemasters should handle possible damage to the heroes individually according to the standard *M&M* rules. So a mortar bombardment would require a Toughness check from the overall force, and the GM might call for Dodge and Toughness checks against a particular instance of Burst Area Damage for the player characters.

MORALE CHECKS

Certain events require a force to make a *morale check* to determine if it is still willing and able to continue the fight. A failed morale check has the same effects as a failed Toughness check, given on the **Force Damage** table, from disrupted (one degree) to destroyed (four or more degrees).

A morale check is a d20 roll plus the force's morale modifier (based on troop quality). The Difficulty Class for morale checks starts out at 10, but each disrupted condition the force suffers imposes a –1 morale check modifier.

Forces must make morale checks after any of the following events:

- The force fails a Toughness check.
- The force fails to inflict damage against any target for two successive battle rounds.
- The force suffers a serious setback or reversal (in the opinion of the Gamemaster).

Additionally, the Gamemaster may impose circumstance modifiers to the morale check based on the conditions. An especially effective use of Intimidation or powers by a superhuman foe may apply a –2 (or greater) penalty to a force's morale checks, while the presence of a skilled leader with a successful Expertise (tactics or leadership) check may add a similar bonus to the force's morale checks.

ADVANTAGES

The effects of most combat advantages are *not* incorporated into the mass combat rules. The Gamemaster might assign the Improved Critical advantage to a veteran unit, or Precise Attack to a platoon of expert marksmen. For the most part, however, combat advantages don't apply when dealing with mass battles, and the average soldier doesn't have that many of them, anyway. They're difficult to bring to bear in the chaos of mass combat in any meaningful way.

General and skill advantages are too small-scale and individual to figure into these rules. Sure, it'd be no fun to suffer the effects of the Taunt advantage from an entire regiment of troops, but it's hard to hear even the most cutting comment over machine-gun fire. In any case, their targets are probably more worried about being shot and killed than they are about the enemy making fun of them.

POWERS

For the most part, power effects work on forces like individuals, with a few exceptions:

- Damage effects do damage against the force as a whole, even if the effect does not normally have an area. The wielder is assumed to be making multiple attacks with that power during the battle round. Damaging effects with the Area extra inflict +2 damage to a force, with each additional Area rank increasing this bonus by +1, but the total additional damage cannot exceed the target force's Force rank (since the area effectively encompasses the entire force at that point). Essentially, the attack's additional area "cancels out" the force's Toughness bonus for being a large group.
- Non-damaging powers that do not normally affect an area have a negligible effect on a force in battle. The character can only use such powers if they have the sufficient Area ranks to encompass the entire force. So a character with a mind controlling Affliction, for example, could not attempt to control an entire force unless he possessed sufficient Area ranks for the power to affect the entire force. The GM can allow

these powers to operate normally at the individual scale; they just don't have much influence on the outcome of force-level conflicts. Of course, the GM is free to allow plausible power-use in a mass combat situation, if it can reasonably affect the outcome.

- A particularly spectacular or destructive use of powers may impose a modifier to a force's morale checks at the GM's discretion, either a penalty for an enemy force of a bonus (rallying the troops) for an allied force.
- Impervious Toughness is compared against the force's *total* damage (including the Force rank) before determining whether or not the character has to make a Toughness resistance check against the force's attack. This is one of the advantages of larger forces: they can overcome—through superior numbers and firepower—Impervious Toughness that would render a target immune to the attacks of a smaller force. So, for example, a character with Impervious Toughness 20 can ignore the damage of a platoon of green troops (Damage 9 total) but not that of a trained platoon (Damage 10) that knows how to apply its firepower.

SAMPLE CONFLICT

A force of 100 trained troops is defending a military base from Bruiser, a super-powered mercenary. The troops have a Force rank 6 for their numbers. This gives the force the following traits:

Troops: Attack 8, Damage 11, Defense 2, Toughness 7, Initiative +2, Morale +0

Unfortunately for them, Bruiser is a physically powerful foe with the following traits:

Bruiser: Attack 9, Damage 13, Defense 9, Toughness 11 (Impervious), Initiative +2. As an individual character, Bruiser doesn't have a morale bonus or make morale checks.

The troops win initiative and attack Bruiser. They roll an 11 on their attack check for a total of 19, which is a hit, so Bruiser makes a Toughness check (DC 26, the force's Damage 11, plus 15). He gets a 22 and suffers a –1 check penalty, grunting angrily at the "bugs" stinging at him.

Then the mercenary counterattacks: he only needs to roll a 3 or better to hit the troops, given his attack bonus, and does so. The force makes a Toughness check (DC 28 for Bruiser's Damage 13). They roll a 19, and manage to suffer only a disrupted result. However, the force has taken damage, so they must make a morale check (DC 10). The GM rolls and gets a 9. They suffer an additional disrupted result from the display of Bruiser's power.

The troops attack again and hit. The villain makes another Toughness check (modified for his check penalty) and succeeds, shrugging off their assault. He counterattacks and the force makes another Toughness check. This time they roll only a 10, which fails the check by three degrees, meaning the force is demoralized. The GM rules that Bruiser's fierce onslaught overturns vehicles, smashes bunkers, and sends the remainder of the force packing.

Mere minutes after his arrival, Bruiser leaves a devastated military base behind, carrying away what he came to get from the top-secret lab. Only a few scattered troops remain to tell others of the villain's assault so they can go after him.

THE LIMITS OF THE MASS COMBAT SYSTEM

The mass combat rules are intended to provide quick "shorthand" for Gamemasters to handle conflicts between superhumans and large forces. It can be quite tedious to run combats involving dozens, much less hundreds or thousands, of troops, and it's unfair not to give large forces at least a chance against super-powered foes. Seen one-on-one, no soldier has a prayer against a power level 10 superhuman with significant offensive and defensive powers, but working as a unit, a force of soldiers should have a chance (even if only a slight one).

The system is necessarily abstract, boiling down multiple rounds of normal combat into longer battle rounds that resolve many different exchanges of attacks and maneuvers in one or two die rolls. It's quite possible to resolve a conflict between a character (or a small group) and an entire army in just a couple battle rounds (as seen in the example previously). It also summarizes the inclusion of things like equipment, weapons, and tactics with few additional rules.

The GM is responsible for providing the description of the battle and what exactly occurs, while the system provides a general outline of things (who won and by how much, etc.). Gamemasters who feel that the mass combat system tends to run *too* quickly should try breaking a single large force into two or more smaller forces and running the battle with those, giving the individual characters a few more "opponents" to overcome. This is particularly true for battles involving multiple super-powered characters. As a rule of thumb, try to give each character involved in the battle either a superhuman foe or a single force as an opponent, preventing the characters from "ganging up" on a single force and quickly ending the battle.

As with all game systems, the mass combat system is not meant as a substitute for common sense. If a particular outcome seems unreasonable, the GM should feel free to modify it as needed to suit the series and the story. In fact, Gamemasters don't have to use this system at all if they're not looking to play out a battle in game terms. If a particular large-scale engagement is just background color for one of your adventures, it's perfectly fine for it keep it that way, providing the occasional complication for the heroes, but nothing more.

The mass combat system is *not* intended as a war game for resolving military conflicts between armies; its main intent is as an individual vs. force system. It's far better to handle large-scale military engagements as background color, modified according to the actions of the heroes and their major foes. There are plenty of far better and more detailed games for playing out actual battlefield conflicts, if that's what you're looking to do.

APPENDIX: VILLAINOUS LAIRS

While some super-powered criminals make do with a flophouse, cheap motel, or abandoned squat in the heart of the city, having a true *lair* is a real sign you have arrived in the world of supervillainy. Master-criminals often have complexes to rival powerful nations, concealed in mysterious and inaccessible parts of the world, or else hidden in plain sight, right under the heroes' noses, perhaps even out in the open, protected by diplomatic immunity or a façade of innocence.

This section looks at the various types of lairs villains may have and offers a number of pre-constructed lair archetypes, complete with maps, for *M&M* Gamemasters to use in their own games. Just choose a lair and have one of your villains move in and set up shop!

BUILDING LAIRS

When confronted with a massive underground complex threaded throughout a tropical island volcano one sometimes cannot help but wonder: who *builds* all this stuff?

In a four-color style series, the question can be hand-waved away. It hardly matters how the lair got there—it's there, the villain is a menace, and the heroes have a job to do. That's what really matters; the rest is mere details and trivia.

However, some games thrive on details, and a more realistic series might give some consideration to where villainous lairs come from, and how to use that information to create further story hooks for the game. Possibilities include the following:

MINIONS

The easiest explanation is that a villain's minions do all the grunt work of constructing (and, presumably, maintaining) the lair. This is particularly efficient for bad guys with non-human minions, such as robots or summoned magical creatures, able to work tirelessly and with great precision. It is certainly not difficult to believe an army of robots with industrial fabrication capabilities can hollow out a mountain and set up a high-tech complex. Myths and legends are full of stories of genies, demons, and other creatures creating palaces and castles virtually out of thin air for their masters.

Even ordinary human minions can construct a lair, given time and the right resources. Of course, it is more likely for such workers to slip-up, both in terms of construction and security. Word about the project might leak out, if only in the underworld as the villain looks for potential workers. Heroes might be able to pry information about the lair from current or former workers, unless the villain takes some countermeasures to ensure their silence, such as altering their memories or even imprisoning or killing everyone who worked on the project!

AGENCY

An outside agency can construct a lair for a villain, possibly without knowing what the headquarters will actually be used for, or by whom!

In this case, the agency is most likely a legitimate construction company or division of a larger business, such as a multinational corporation. The villain has sufficient influence to get the project authorized and underway without anyone the wiser, or at least without anyone willing to question orders from above. In some cases, particularly when the agency *is* the villain, the whole project is completely "legitimate" under the guise of their normal operations, such as a government "black ops" project or a criminal corporation.

REUSE AND RECYCLE

Supervillain lairs tend to be fairly short-lived; even if they are not destroyed in a massive explosion or super-fight when the bad guy is brought down, they are likely abandoned or placed under protective custody after their owner goes to prison or mysteriously disappears, presumed dead. Four-color settings may be littered with abandoned and former hideouts, and why go to the trouble of building a new headquarters when you can just move in and occupy an old one?

Of course, reusing an abandoned lair has its drawbacks, not the least of which is that heroes already know where it is and are certain to come sniffing around at some point. For some villains, this may be a feature rather than a detraction, since it is the perfect opportunity to lure said heroes into a trap! Other problems with a "used" lair include repairing previous damage and dealing with any leftover traps or machinations set up by the previous occupant. On the other hand, a recycled lair can be a form of hiding in plain sight, since heroes may not think to check a place they already consider "cleaned out".

From a practical point of view, reusing supervillain lairs in your *M&M* series can cut down on the amount of game-preparation work you need to do. Just pull out the map and game information for a prior hideout and put it back to work for this week's villain. The players may be able to take advantage of their prior knowledge about the place, but it can just as easily trip them up, if the new occupant has taken that into account and prepared accordingly.

Old villain hideouts are not the only reusable ones, either. A particularly daring bad guy might take over a defunct *heroic* base and turn it into a new lair! This is particularly poetic if the villain adopts one of the player characters' old hangouts, figuring it is the last place where the heroes would think to look for them!

Alternately, an agency may exist for the express purpose of constructing supervillain lairs, a kind of "villain's contractor" handling such tasks in exchange for a fee. It is certainly one way to make a great deal of money off a "captive audience" of customers, although negotiations may be required to avoid customers who promise payments they cannot deliver, especially if they are arrested before their big schemes come through! The Foundry from *Freedom City* can serve as such an agency, given its considerable resources and tireless robot workforce.

ENTITY

A single fairly powerful entity might be capable of and willing to create lairs for supervillains, either for a price or for reasons of its own. Such a being could potentially be a powerful villain in its own right, but perhaps it chooses instead to work behind the scenes.

In the World of Freedom setting, an amoral analog of Dr. Metropolis (from *Freedom City*) could fill this role. Perhaps Junkpile (from *Threat Report*) develops sufficient intelligence to understand the needs of others and seeks to fulfill them. Similarly Master Metropolis (the good doctor's evil twin from Anti-Earth) could do the same, or another as yet unknown "urban elemental" could fill the niche. The wish-granting Mr. Infamy could provide bad guys with incredible lairs, seemingly created out of nowhere, although his "gifts" tend to come with hidden price tags attached. The same can be said of the goddess Eris from *Threat Report*.

POWER

Some villains are fortunate (or focused) enough to have powers suited to creating their own lair to suit their needs. A "technokinetic" villain, for example, able to mold and shape technology, can easily create a high-tech headquarters out of collections of junk and spare parts, or even raw materials. Similarly, a transmuter or earth controller can easily bore tunnels, create walls and structures, and so forth. Inventor villains may create robotic construction crews or industrial fabricators and use them to build the lair (see **Minions**, previously).

The most common powers associated with lair building tend to be magical. Powerful spells and rituals can create palaces and strongholds out of thin air, summon ancient temples and sunken cities from their resting places, or open up portals to other dimensions and realms where the villain can hold sway. Such a magical lair is often linked to the villain's power, such that upon defeat the lair crumbles, collapses, or simply vanishes, at least until summoned anew.

INHERITANCE

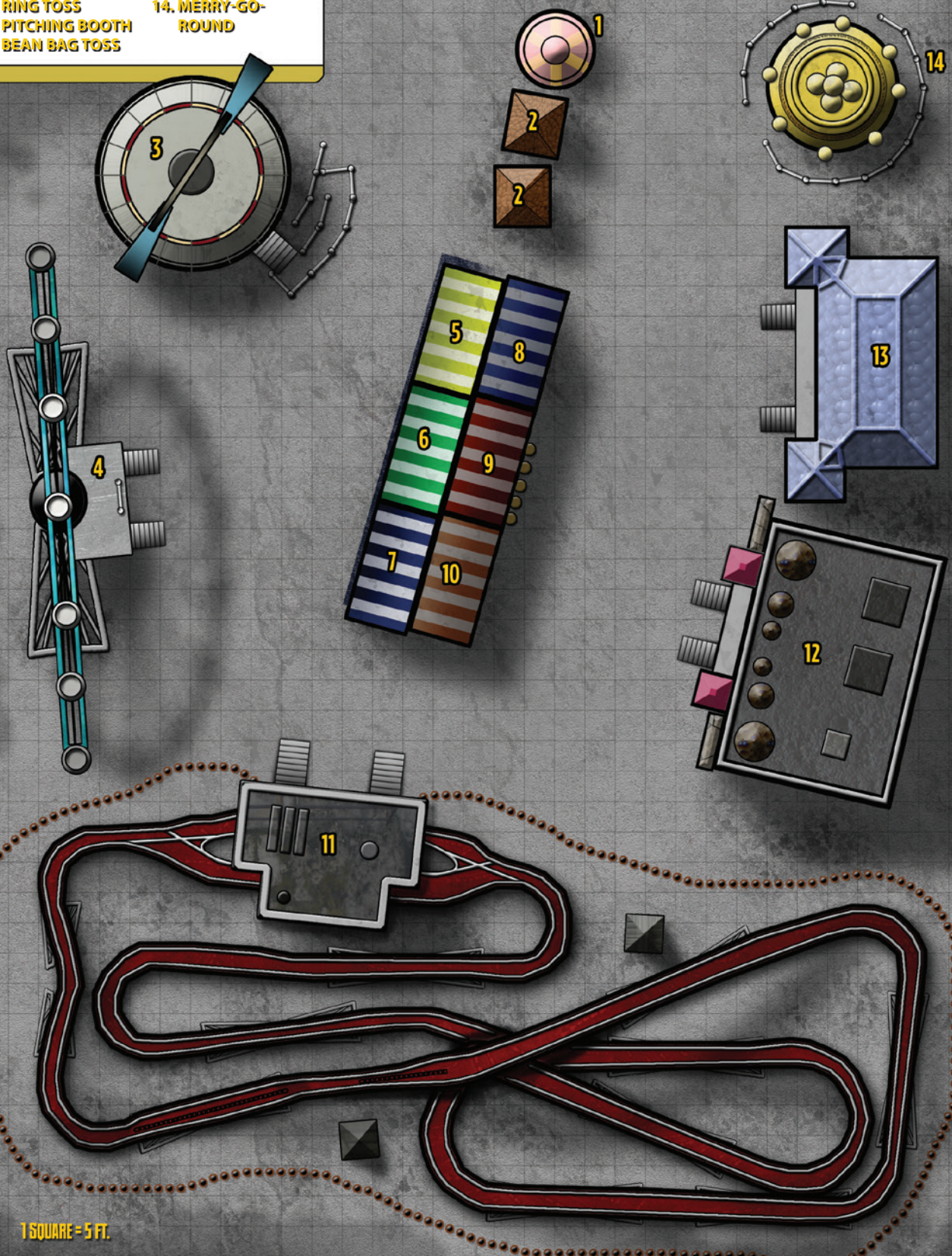
Lastly, a supervillain might well inherit a suitable lair from a relative, mentor, or other source. Of course, where villains are concerned "inherit" may well mean "steal" if the bad guy chooses to kill off a relation or former ally to gain control of the place.

Inherited lairs tend to be relatively mundane—mansions, family estates, or the like—although they can be as exotic as castles or even full-blown supervillain headquarters inherited from another bad guy. The new owner has to deal with any deficiencies or legacies connected with the place, making changes or upgrades as needed.

In addition to inheriting a lair, a villain might also seek out an abandoned headquarters and take up residence there. See the **Reuse and Recycle** sidebar for more on this.

AMUSEMENT PARK

1. TICKET BOOTH
2. CONCESSION STAND
3. GRAVITRON
4. FERRIS WHEEL
5. BALLOON DARTS
6. RING TOSS
7. PITCHING BOOTH
8. BEAN BAG TOSS
9. WATER PISTOLS
10. HORSE RACIING
11. ROLLER COASTER
12. HAUNTED HOUSE
13. HALL OF MIRRORS
14. MERRY-GO-ROUND



1 SQUARE = 5 FT.

AMUSEMENT PARK

AMUSEMENT PARK **9 POINTS**

Size: Colossal • **Toughness:** 5 (typically) • **Features:** Deathtraps, Power System, Secret, Workshop

A staple for villains with funhouse, circus, or arcade themes is the abandoned amusement park, either closed down for the season or shut down for good because of hard times or changes in entertainment interests. The villain either buys the place for a song or moves in when nobody is looking and modifies things to suit, usually by "upgrading" the harmless carnival games and rides and making them into dangerous weapons and deathtraps.

FEATURES

The main features of an Amusement Park lair are the various rides and attractions, turned into tools of villainy!

FERRIS WHEEL

The primary role of the Ferris wheel in an amusement park lair is a big object to break or hit someone with, although if there are any customers in the park (see **Behind the Scenes** under **Variations**), then a fully loaded Ferris wheel will almost inevitably break loose from its moorings, requiring a hero to come to the rescue (and earn a hero point for doing so).

A 30-foot Ferris wheel weighs around 60 tons and carries a maximum of 120 riders (adding another approximately 12 tons, fully loaded). It takes Strength 12 to hold up, although bracing and extra effort can enhance lesser Strength to do the job. Larger and more complex Ferris wheels are heavier and harder to lift.

HALL OF MIRRORS

The classic hall of funhouse mirrors is often a place where the villain will lure heroes or flee when pursued. The dozens of confusing reflections provide characters in the place with visual concealment (*Hero's Handbook,* page 192) allowing for, among other things, Stealth checks and surprise attacks. The mirrors can reflect light-based effects, making them suitable for certain stunts or to cause complications for characters with light-based powers.

A more exotic hall-of-mirrors trap causes the funhouse mirrors to create distorted duplicates of the characters, which step out of the mirrors to attack: a Summon effect that creates a near-exact duplicate of the onlooker. It is commonly magical, although the duplicates can be products of super-science as well.

HAUNTED HOUSE

A scare ride with various special effects, a haunted house may be modified with robotic or "live" versions of classic movie monsters to attack trespassers (zombies, skeletons, giant spiders, werewolves, etc., see **Chapter 3**). It could also create realistic Illusion effects (with a appropriate Will resistance DC for the series power level) or fear-causing devices (an Affliction effect with a similar Will DC).

SHOOTING GALLERY

One of the classic carnival games, this booth for target-shooting might be turned into a lethal back-and-forth where helpless heroes are shot at, having a certain amount of time to escape. Perhaps one of the heroes' teammates or loved ones is mesmerized into being the shooter! For heroes immune to ordinary bullets, the "gallery" might use specialized ammo or specific weaknesses instead.

THRILL RIDES

This includes roller coasters, tilt-a-whirls, and various other rides intended to induce terror and nausea in their screaming "victims." Villains often convert them into deathtraps, spinning or caroming off into terrible crashes as the heroes struggle to get loose. You can treat the ride's effects like an Affliction effect causing conditions like dazed and stunned. The heroes might need to escape from "safety" restraints (requiring a Damage effect or Sleight of Hand check) while struggling against the side effects to get free of the ride before it is too late.

VARIATIONS

Variations on the Amusement Park lair may include:

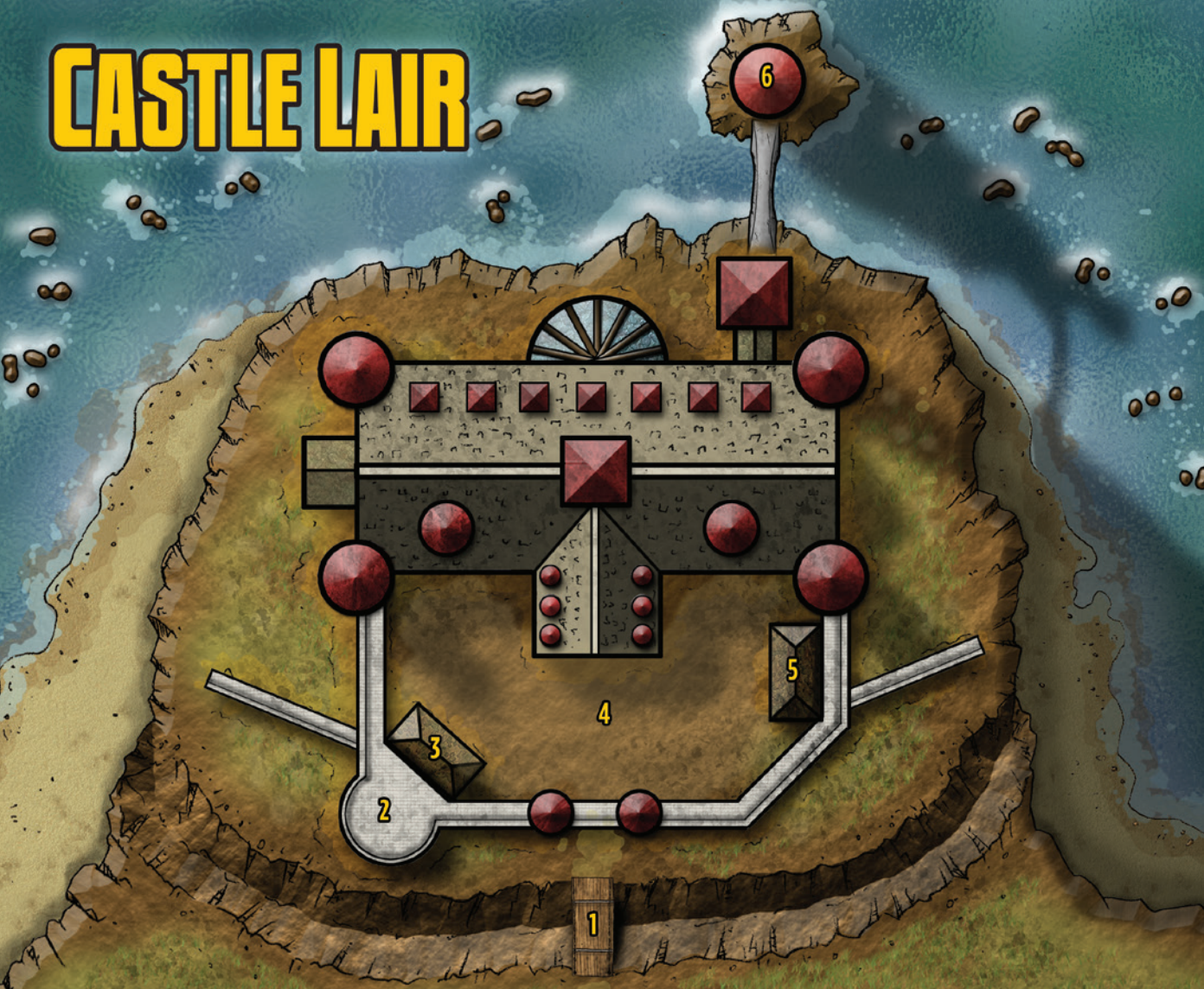
BEHIND THE SCENES

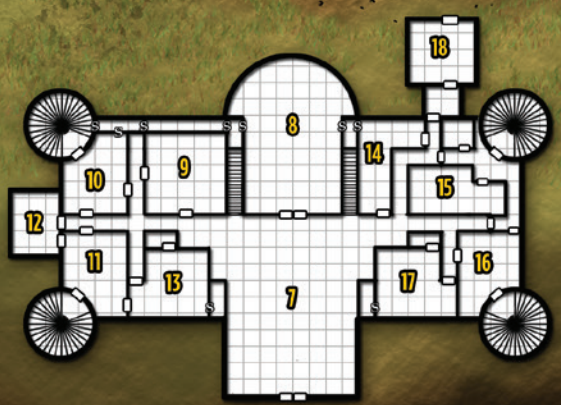
In this scenario, the amusement park is *not* abandoned, but continues to operate while also serving as cover for the villain's activities. The bad guy might hide in plain sight as one of the acts or operators of the park, or stay out of sight. He might be pulling the strings of everyone else working at the park, or remain hidden even from them, save for a select few allies or henchmen. Exactly why the villain hides out in a functioning amusement park depends on the villain. For some it is the only game in town; others might need the fair-goers in some way, whether to feed off their psychic energy, to use them as mesmerized pawns, or simply to be close to the life and fun and laughter they can never have. Whatever the case, having a park full of innocent people can pose all sorts of complications for the heroes as they try to deal with the bad guy without anyone getting caught in the crossfire.

UNDER THE BIG TOP

Rather than an amusement park, the villain's lair is a circus, with a similar midway hosting carnival games and the like, but also a big top with clowns, acrobats, and trained animals such as lions and elephants, any or all of which could be part of the villain's overall theme. The

CASTLE LAIR





1 SQUARE = 5 FT.

1. BRIDGE
2. BATTLEMENTS
3. GUARD HOUSE
4. COURTYARD
5. LIVERY
6. SEA TOWER
7. GRAND FOYER
8. THRONE ROOM
9. DINING HALL
10. LIBRARY
11. KITCHEN
12. STORAGE
13. SITTING ROOM
14. TROPHY ROOM
15. SERVANTS QUARTERS
16. GUARD BARRACKS
17. MEETING ROOM
18. CONSERVATORY
19. GUEST CHAMBERS
20. ROYAL SUITE
21. TORTURE CHAMBER
22. HIDDEN LAB
23. RITUAL CHAMBER

scm

master villain might style himself "the Ringmaster" or could be another member of the circus troupe. Maybe the lion they call "the King of Beasts" is smarter than anyone thinks and a "king" in truth, with the power to control the minds of humans and animals! Maybe the clown all the kids find scary is something *really* scary, like a demon in human form. The possibilities are many. See **Chapter 3** for game information on elephants and lions, along with other animals suitable as additional features for a circus lair.

CASTLE

CASTLE **10 POINTS**

Size: Huge • **Toughness:** 10 • **Features:** Holding Cells (dungeon), Laboratory, Library, Living Space, Power System, Security System

The dark castle on a hilltop, illuminated by flashes of lightning from the roiling clouds overhead, is a classic villainous lair. Castles suit "old world" bad guys, either villains who are literally from the past (such as immortal sorcerers or ghostly "black knights") or those with old-world ties, such as self-proclaimed European nobility.

Although one does not typically associate castles with North America (settled by Europeans well after the great age of castle-building was over), there are still a great many castle-like structures in the United States. Technically speaking, these are not true castles, as they were not designed as medieval fortress-manors. They are more properly private mansions or estates build as reproductions or along the same lines as European-style castles.

Many of these private castles were built during the 19th century, as the estate-homes of American business tycoons and robber barons looking to emulate European style and sophistication, declaring themselves a kind of "American nobility." Some are "follies," deliberately built for appearances and decoration rather than function. Later castles were built as or became public buildings or tourist attractions.

Although American castles are often situated on isolated estates, others can be found in the midst of urban areas, such as New York City's Belvedere Castle, a folly built in Central Park and used by the U.S. Weather Bureau to collect meteorological data in the park. It's not hard to imagine a "private investor" taking over such a castle and converting it into a supervillain lair!

FEATURES

Some important features of a castle lair include:

DUNGEON

Any castle worth its portcullis has a dungeon: dank and dark cells with chains bolted to the walls, complete with optional rats and cobwebs. This is where the villain imprisons captured heroes as well as hostages and where the good guys come to rescue them. The dungeon might be guarded (by anything from goons to robots to actual ogres) or the locks and chains may be considered sufficient to hold prisoners.

A dungeon may also serve as a deathtrap, if the prisoners are faced with a threat like a ticking bomb or a swarm of flesh-eating beetles, for example. But the more likely castle deathtraps are found in...

THE LABORATORY

Ever since the days of Dr. Frankenstein, Gothic castles have been associated with mad scientists challenging the limits of nature and tampering with forces Man Was Not Meant to Know. Therefore a castle lair often comes equipped with a laboratory for the archfiend to experiment. It is either filled with scientific apparatus, sparking or crackling with power, or—for mystical villains—with a magic circle and workbenches of arcane potions and powders. The centerpiece is a cage or worktable where heroes can be bound as they await the mastermind's attention.

SECRET PASSAGES

Castles frequently have secret or hidden passages or chambers, either part of the original structure, or added by their new occupants to suit their needs. The classic entrances and exits include rotating bookshelves in libraries or laboratories, shifting fireplaces, flagstones that serves as concealed elevators, and doorways hidden in otherwise ordinary seeming stone- or woodwork. Villains typically use these passage as escape routes, or to conceal their lair within an otherwise normal-seeming structure.

VARIATIONS

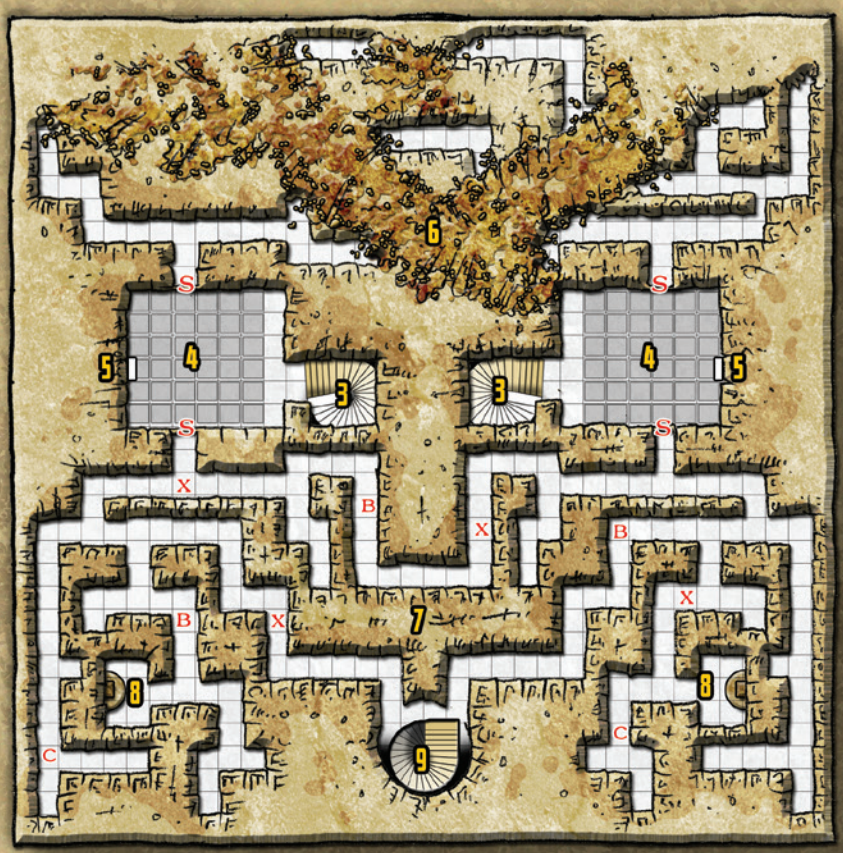
Alterations to the castle theme involve variations to suit the occupant's style, be it high-tech, mystical, or of a different cultural background.

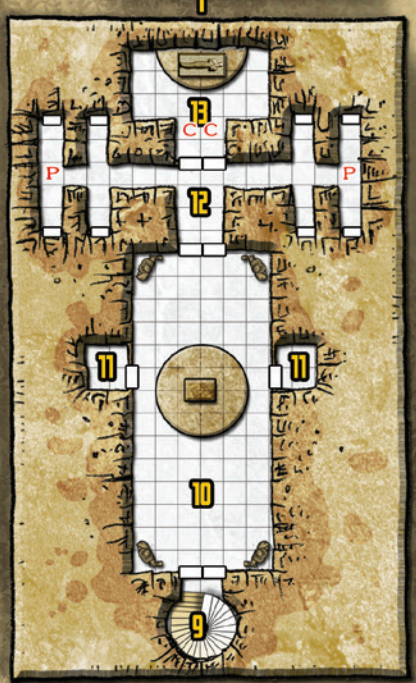
HIGH-TECH CASTLE

Just because a place *looks* like a castle does not mean it is limited to the materials and technology of the Middle Ages! Since mad scientists are also often fond of castles, chances are good a fortress lair may have some hidden surprises: anything from electronics and computers concealed inside the walls to a turret converted into a missile silo! Supposedly empty suits of armor make excellent guard robots (see the **Robot** minion archetypes in this book). Stone structures may be reinforced with advanced stone-like materials, or conceal layers of strange alloys or super-metals beneath them.

HIDDEN TEMPLE

S - Secrect Door ▢ - Pressure Plate X - Pit Trap C - Ceiling Drop P - Poison Dart Trap B - Blade Trap





1. MAIN ENTRANCE
2. HALL OF THE GUARDIANS
3. THE DESCENT
4. PATH OF RIGHTEOUSNESS
5. FALSE DOOR
6. COLLAPSING MAZE
7. TRAPPED MAZE
8. KEY ROOM
9. LAST STAIR
10. ALTAR CHAMBER
11. PRIEST ROOM
12. ROYAL CRYPTS
13. KING'S REST

SHOGUN'S CASTLE

Nothing says a "castle" has to be European in origin. It could just as easily be in the style of medieval Japanese castles, or from some other historical background that suits the villain.

SORCERER'S CASTLE

Mystical and fantasy villains often have castles right out of fairy tales and sword and sorcery yarns, complete with animated gargoyles, flaming moats, armored knights, and even dragons lairing down in the dungeons! You can use the gargoyle and dragon creature archetypes from **Chapter 5** for inspiration.

VAMPIRE'S CASTLE

The Gothic castle is the archetypal lair of the Vampire (page 130). It may appear abandoned: covered in dust and cobwebs, lit only by flickering candlelight and silvery moonlight, with coffins tucked away in the crypts below. Minions include various sorts of undead, lesser vampires (often "consorts"), or entranced servants.

HIDDEN TEMPLE

HIDDEN TEMPLE **8 POINTS**

Size: Huge • **Toughness:** 10 • **Features:** Deathtraps, Holding Cells (dungeon or tombs), Isolated, Secret

Many supervillains want to be worshipped like gods, but not all of them have their very own temples. Some megalomaniacal bad guys do, and use the hidden (and often ancient) structures as lairs from which to launch their schemes of conquest and domination.

A temple lair is most often hidden by virtue of being in some ancient and forgotten corner of the world: a ruin deep in a desert canyon, concealed beneath layers of jungle growth, or at the bottom of a ravine created by an earthquake, and so forth. The temple may have been the villain's tomb or prison for centuries before unwitting explorers ventured where they should not have and awakened the evil there. In other cases, a godly foe raises the ruins of a temple in order to restore it to its former glory.

A few other hidden temples are new—created by the villain's power or built by minions—or nearly new, having been raised or restored, such as a sorcerer lifting an ancient temple from beneath the desert sands or the bottom of the sea.

FEATURES

While not particularly high-tech, hidden temples do have a number of useful features, some originally intended to hamper the villain, but which turn into challenges for the heroes instead.

GUARDIANS

If the temple was originally a prison, then it may well have guards, able to wait out centuries or even millennia and keep watch over their prisoner. This typically means unliving guardians, such as animated statues, undead warriors, or even ancient robots. Alternately, they may be kept in suspended animation, revived only to defend their charge, like statues that suddenly become flesh upon sensing an intruder.

See the minion archetypes in this book for potential guardians. Examples include gargoyles, golems, robots (also suitable as magical constructs such as animated statues or suits of armor), warrior demons, skeletons, or zombies.

TRAPS

Also potentially guarding the temple are various traps, usually placed along the entry route to protect the tomb or central chamber. Once the temple is converted to a lair, the villain may use the traps to defend against intruders or as deathtraps for imprisoned heroes. Classic hidden temple traps include closing walls, a gauntlet, killing jars, and the kaleidoscope of madness, although a creature pit filled with deathless monsters is also an option (see **Deathtraps** in **Chapter 5** for details).

WORSHIPPERS

What is a temple without worshippers? Often, a villain's very next step after raising or creating the temple lair is to gather a group of fanatical followers there. They may be the remnants of the villain's ancient cult, perhaps responsible for his return, or otherwise innocent people who have fallen under the sway of their new "god." Worshippers are typically minions (using the archetypes in this book), either ordinary humans or minor creatures such as the undead remnants of the temple's ancient worshippers, raised from the dead to serve their master once again.

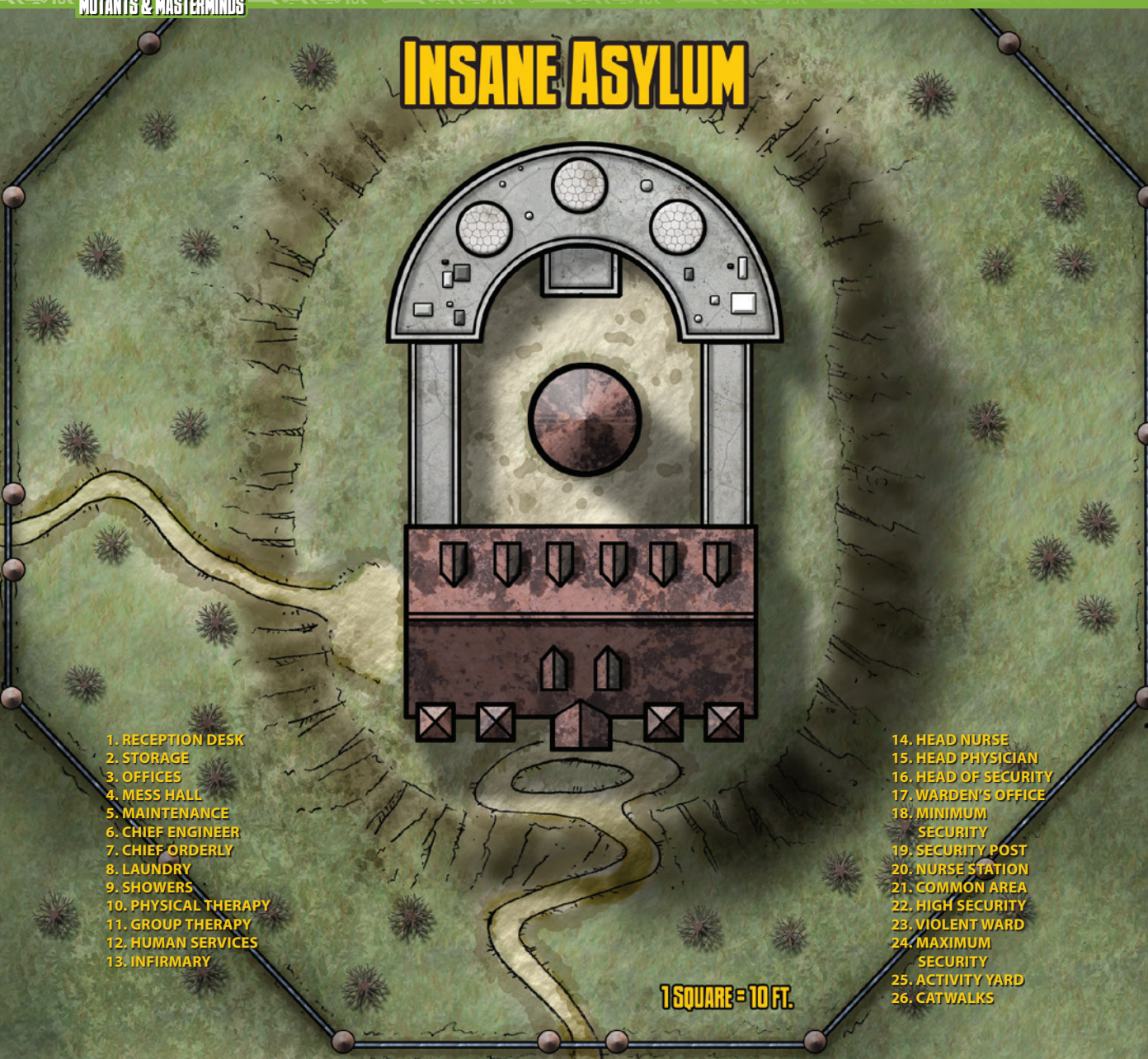
VARIATIONS

Some variations on the Hidden Temple lair include the following:

OTHERWORLDLY

An otherworldly hidden temple is *very* well hidden, in another realm or dimension altogether! The temple may lie on a dimensional rift or fold, or on the mysterious border between one realm and another, such as the shadowlands between life and death. Its current state could be the work of its creator, or part of whatever banished the temple (and its occupants) from the world long ago. This means reaching the temple requires some special route or means, such as a mystic ritual or the appropriate power(s). Add the Dimensional Portal feature to the temple, if it is

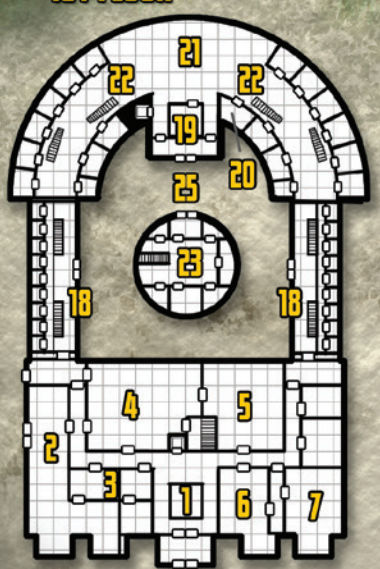
INSANE ASYLUM



1. RECEPTION DESK
2. STORAGE
3. OFFICES
4. MESS HALL
5. MAINTENANCE
6. CHIEF ENGINEER
7. CHIEF ORDERLY
8. LAUNDRY
9. SHOWERS
10. PHYSICAL THERAPY
11. GROUP THERAPY
12. HUMAN SERVICES
13. INFIRMARY
14. HEAD NURSE
15. HEAD PHYSICIAN
16. HEAD OF SECURITY
17. WARDEN'S OFFICE
18. MINIMUM SECURITY
19. SECURITY POST
20. NURSE STATION
21. COMMON AREA
22. HIGH SECURITY
23. VIOLENT WARD
24. MAXIMUM SECURITY
25. ACTIVITY YARD
26. CATWALKS

1 SQUARE = 10 FT.

1ST FLOOR



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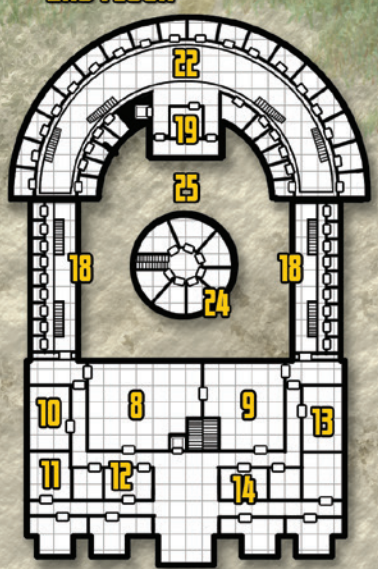
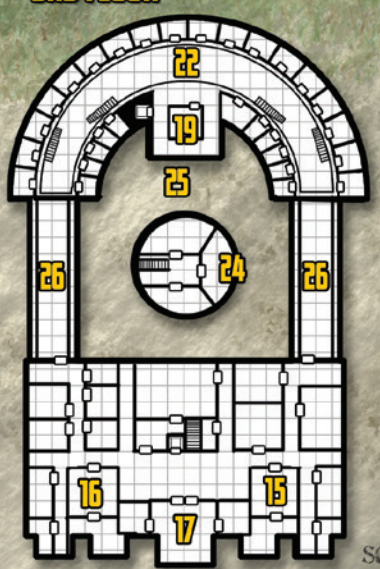


3RD FLOOR



possible to navigate to and from it with nothing more than an appropriate skill check. Otherwise, this is covered by Isolated. In either case, add the Concealed feature.

OVERT

This temple lair is far from hidden, instead, it appears right smack in the middle of an urban area, either erupting from the earth where the temple once stood in ancient times, or created out of thin air by the villain's power. It stands as a proclamation of its creator's divine might and a challenge to any who would oppose it, providing both the authorities and the heroes with a clear target. Unfortunately, just finding a godlike villain is often not the hard part of overcoming him! Remove the Isolated feature from the temple's stats.

INSANE ASYLUM

INSANE ASYLUM **10 POINTS**

Size: Huge • **Toughness:** 5 • **Features:** Holding Cells, Infirmary, Laboratory, Living Space, Secret, Power System, Security System

More than a few villains end up in asylums once the heroes catch them, but how many would think to set up shop there? It's an idea so crazy ... well, you'd have to be mad to try it! Still, some bad guys may use the very asylums intended to hold and treat them as hideouts, enjoying the symbolism or the irony of it. They work well for characters with a motif of fear or madness, such as the Psycho archetype. Villains occupy two types of asylums: abandoned ones or those still operating.

The abandoned asylum may have shut down due to lack of funding, some scandal over patient treatment, or a terrible incident such as a murder that took place there. Comic book asylums tend to come in either Victorian Gothic or 1950s Industrial styles, the former a spooky combination of turrets, wrought ironwork, and creaking staircases; the latter cinderblock walls with steel hatches for doors and barred windows, all painted in generic industrial gray, tan, green, or pale blue. The villain may adapt some of the asylum's facilities to create traps and use its cells to hold hostages.

A functioning asylum controlled by a supervillain is almost more frightening, in some ways. Obviously, the criminal has to operate behind-the-scenes (or the asylum exists in a truly corrupt setting, where the authorities don't really care who runs things). Perhaps the director or another important official is the villain's secret identity, or the villain has kidnapped and replaced that person, leaving him locked up in a cell and raving about how someone has stolen his life! As another example, maybe a psychologist obsessed with curing "aberrant" behavior crosses the line, turning the asylum he runs into the secret lair of his costumed alter ego.

FEATURES

Apart from being downright creepy, an asylum's main features involve its ability to hold people against their will (possibly enhanced by the new "management") and the various facilities normally used to treat patients.

PADDED CELLS

In addition to most hospital-style rooms, an asylum has the classic "rubber room," essentially a cell with padding on the floor and walls to prevent patients from injuring themselves if they become violent or have fits. They are typically of concrete or brick construction underneath (Toughness 7) with steel doors (Toughness 9), although a villain might reinforce them to hold super-powered prisoners (and the same would be the case in an asylum that routinely deals with superhumans). A super version of a "rubber room" might includes some kind of reflection field or material, causing any attempts to break out of the room to rebound against the character.

STRAITJACKETS

The accompaniment to a padded cell is a straitjacket, designed to hold the wearer's arms close to the body and limit mobility and the ability to manipulate things. A typical straitjacket is Toughness 4 with its reinforced straps, making it difficult for a wearer to break without proper leverage or damage (since the straps pull against the wearer as well). Slipping out of a straitjacket is a DC 25 Sleight of Hand check.

Straitjackets are excellent camouflage for means of neutralizing a wearer's powers, housing either dampening circuitry and some mystical enchantment. Villains might use power-nullifying straitjackets to keep heroes prisoner, or even in an effort to convince them they are legitimate patients and their "super-powers" and costumed identities are all just a delusion!

TREATMENT FACILITIES

Facilities normally used to treat the mentally ill in an asylum's care can become deathtraps and torture devices in a villain's hands. Examples include:

- Chairs and tables with restraining straps (Toughness 5, Sleight of Hand DC 20).
- Electroshock (or electroconvulsive) equipment, capable of delivering shocks for an Affliction or Damage effect of rank 1–6 or more.
- Psychopharmaceuticals used to treat various conditions, able to sedate, weaken the will, and disrupt concentration (Affliction effects, Fortitude or Will save to resist, as appropriate).

An asylum may have one or more full-fledged operating rooms for surgical procedures, although some do not have any. This can add an array of surgical instruments, drugs, and complications such as anesthetics to the arsenal.

Island Base

1. HANGAR
2. MACHINE SHOPS
3. WORKSHOPS
4. STORAGE
5. MESS HALL
6. MASTER'S QUARTERS
7. BARRACKS
8. LABORATORIES
9. GEOTHERMAL STATION
10. ARMORY
11. DOCKS
12. GUEST ROOMS
13. LIBRARY
14. HOLDING CELLS
15. SECURITY
16. COMPUTER SYSTEMS
17. TRAPPED HALL
18. MISSILE DEFENSE
UPPER LEVEL
LOWER LEVEL
CONCEALED ENTRANCE
1 SQUARE = 10 FT.

In some settings, an asylum's treatment facilities might include experimental super-science gadgets such as virtual reality rigs or "mind probes" able to read or even rewrite dreams, thoughts, or psychological conditions. Naturally, in the wrong hands, these devices can be instruments of terror and torture.

VARIATIONS

Although the asylum has one of the strongest themes, similar lairs use full-fledged hospitals or even prisons.

HOSPITAL

A hospital is a similar, but more extensive, facility; it may even have a psych-wing similar to the asylum in form and function. A small, private clinic may even have a layout essentially the same as the asylum building, but with more conventional patient rooms and treatment facilities.

PRISON

A prison can serve as a secret lair the same as an asylum. An abandoned prison facility is sturdy, with usable infrastructure and a good motif for "law and order" or jailer villains (such as Warden from *Freedom City*). A working prison might fall under the influence of an unscrupulous warden or governor, or a convict on the inside could exert control over the place, either through various powers or social means. The *Lockdown* sourcebook details a super-prison following this concept and the *Freedom City* sourcebook describes the Blackstone super-prison as an example.

ISLAND BASE

ISLAND **13 POINTS**

Size: Awesome • **Toughness:** 5 • **Features:** Defense System, Dock, Hangar, Isolated, Living Space, Power System, Security System

There are few lairs more private than your own island (at least still on Earth), and some villains manage to buy, claim, or even create an isolated island retreat where they can "get away from it all," including those bothersome heroes.

Often, an island lair is merely a setting for another type of headquarters, such as a castle, hidden temple, mansion, mountain (or volcano) lair, underground complex, or the like. The majority of the island's space may be unused or largely ignored, filled with wilderness or barren stretches. In this case, you may want to reduce the lair's effective size and ignore the extra land, or apply the Grounds feature as a midway measure to reflect the added space.

FEATURES

An island lair's main features are its relative isolation and size, offering lots of places to put the villain's real hideout, or even multiple bases or facilities on the same island.

DEFENSE SYSTEMS

The first challenge in storming a villain's island lair is actually reaching it; the island may have various defensive systems intended to keep unwanted visitors away. These may include air- and sea-based weapons systems. Examples include:

- Surface-to-air missiles for shooting down planes and flying heroes, inflicting Damage appropriate to the series power level and possibly having Area and Homing capabilities (with Homing usually based on heat sensors or radar). Aquatic versions include guided torpedoes. See page 173 of *Hero's Handbook* for some examples.
- Electromagnetic pulse weapons or similar devices intended to disable boats and aircraft (or at least their navigational and communications systems), a Nullify Electronics effect. This type of system might provide "mysterious losses at sea" for heroes to investigate.
- Creature minions acting as guard dogs, ranging from trained or mind-controlled dinosaurs to sea monsters, ordinary sea life (such as sharks), or various types of robots (possibly mimicking sea creatures, like robot sharks or robotic giant squids). See the **Minion Archetypes** in this book for some options.

LOCATION

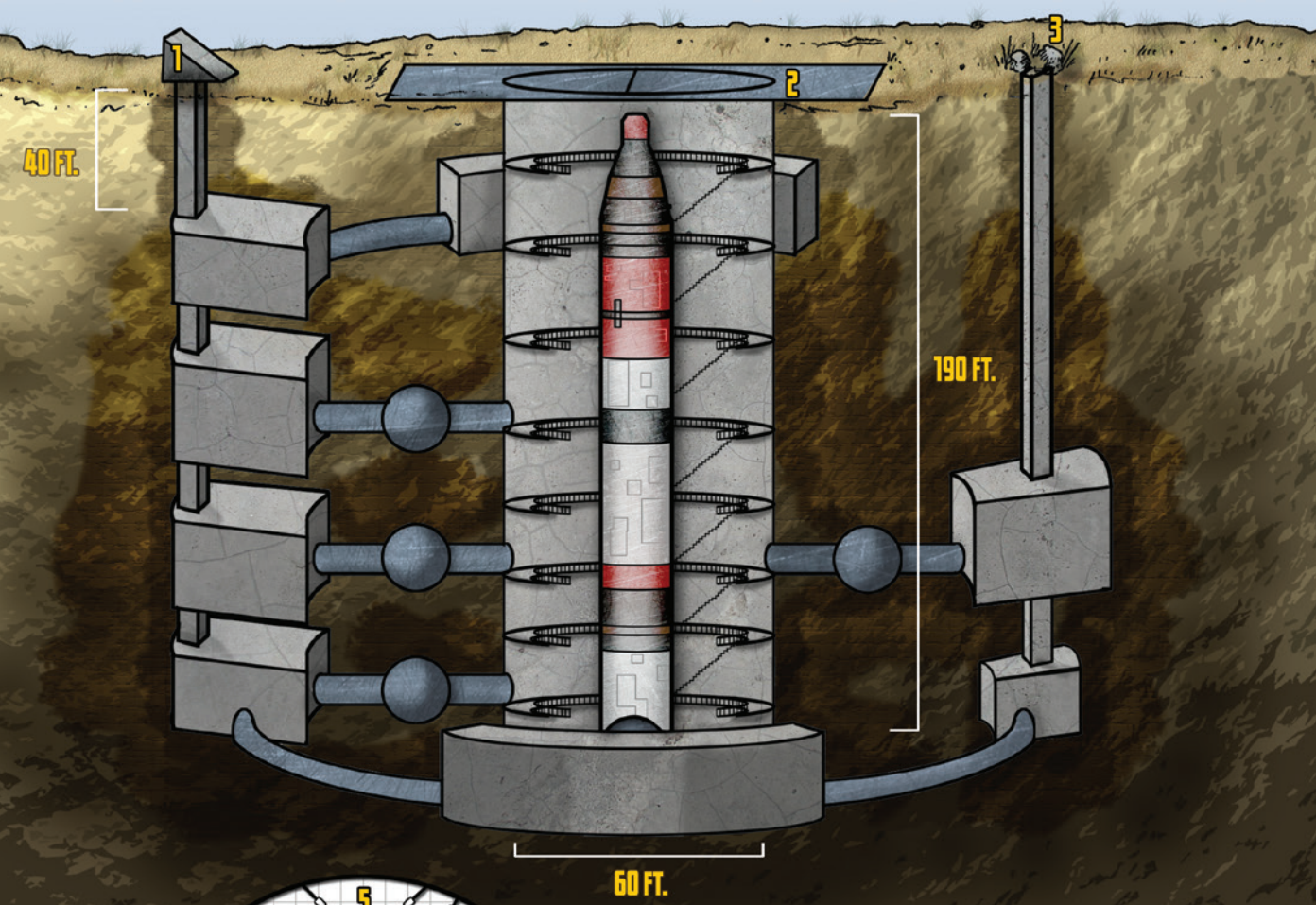
An island's location affects its style and overall usefulness as a villain lair. Ideally, the island is in international waters, not claimed by a particular nation or power, or at least largely ignored so no one notices a secret installation there. The villain might legitimately purchase the island through proxies or a front company before setting up shop there.

Tropical islands offer good weather (except during hurricane season) and often a prime location near the equator, important for some schemes and doomsday weapons. They tend to be hard on equipment and technology, however, and volcanic magma taps used to provide power can also overload and cause an eruption if things happen to go wrong—virtually assured once the heroes show up.

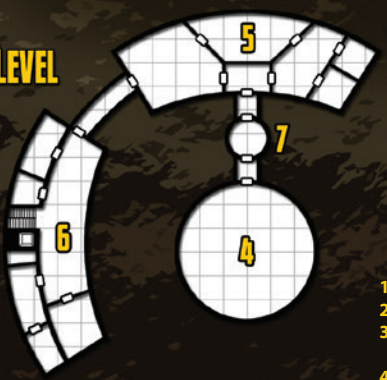
Arctic islands, conversely, tend to be plenty isolated, but are far from civilization, requiring special transport, and installations have to be properly shielded from the elements. Any waste heat often shows up too easily on scans of the area.

TERRAIN

Unlike many lairs, islands have terrain, which can provide opportunities and challenges of its own. Some island ter-

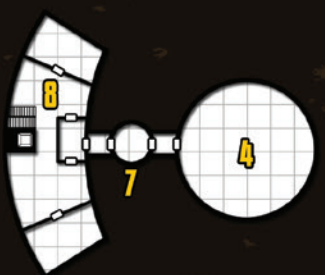


1ST LEVEL



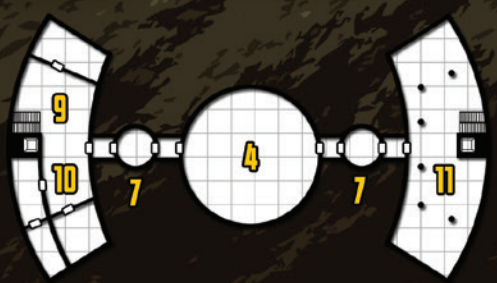
2ND LEVEL

1 SQUARE = 10 FT.



1. MAIN ENTRANCE
2. SLIDING DOORS
3. CONCEALED ENTRANCE
4. MISSILE SILO
5. BARRACKS
6. LIVING QUARTERS
7. BLAST LOCK
8. ARMORY / STORAGE
9. GALLEY
10. OFFICERS QUARTERS
11. CONTROL ROOM
12. DECONTAMINATION
13. INFIRMARY
14. LABS/WORKSHOPS
15. POWER STATION

3RD LEVEL



4TH LEVEL

MISSILE SILO

SCM

rain offers interesting new environments for chase scenes or combats, from outracing snowmobile-riding minions on a frozen isle to fighting on the slopes (or in the caldera!) of an active volcano in the tropics. See the Environment effect in *Hero's Handbook* and the information in **Chapter 5** of this book for further inspiration on how the terrain can challenge heroes.

VARIATIONS

Variations on the island lair include changing the nature of the island, its inhabitants, or its level of concealment.

ARTIFICIAL ISLAND

An island lair might be entirely artificial, a colossal floating platform or the top of a manmade mountain on the sea floor. The island's surface is typically covered with dirt and either real plants and sculpted terrain or artificial landscaping to make it *look* like a real island. Features of the artificial landscape might conceal elements such as listening outposts, buildings, weapon emplacements, and secret entrances or launch bays.

An artificial island might even be *mobile,* with propulsion systems capable of moving it slowly across the oceans to different positions or exotic means such as anti-gravity systems that allow it to hover or fly. In this case, the island might also have some means of concealment to hide its movements from satellite surveillance and other methods of detection.

HIDDEN ISLAND

Sometimes just being on a small, uncharted island hundreds of miles from civilization is not enough, especially for arch-villains wanted by authorities around the world. So an island lair might also be hidden from the outside world with the addition of the Concealed feature. The lair might be concealed on or in the island so it appears completely uninhabited, or the island itself might be hidden in some fashion, by an artificial fog bank, holographic or mystic illusion, or some similar measure.

INHABITED ISLAND

Although villain lairs are typically uninhabited, an island could be inhabited when the bad guy takes up residence. The locals might be previous residents, now under the villain's boot and in need of rescue, or they could be loyal subjects, especially if it is an island-nation under the "rightful" rule of an authoritarian overlord. A mad scientist type might populate an island with various creations, like the Island of Dr. Moreau (from the book of the same name), populated with the animal-men created by the island's master.

MISSILE SILO

MISSILE SILO	11 POINTS

Size: Large • **Toughness:** 10 • **Features:** Communications, Computer, Concealed, Fire Prevention System, Hangar (of sorts), Power System, Security System, Workshop

A missile silo is typically an underground shaft wide and tall enough to accommodate a large rocket with an explosive warhead (sometimes conventional, but potentially nuclear) and its support materials. Some missile silos are built above ground, but most are underground, both for security and safety. A hatch opens and closes to allow the missile to launch from the silo, and the rest of the facility is accessible via an elevator and/or ladder opening onto the surface.

A missile silo turned into a supervillain's lair was either constructed in secret for that purpose, or done without the knowledge of the original owner(s). It's certainly possible, especially in a four-color setting, for some post-Cold War era silos to have been decommissioned, then taken over by the villain. Other missile silo lairs still belong to their government owners, either used covertly by criminals without their knowledge, or provided to said criminals by a government "black ops" organization.

FEATURES

The central feature of a missile silo is, naturally, the silo itself and the missile or rocket it contains.

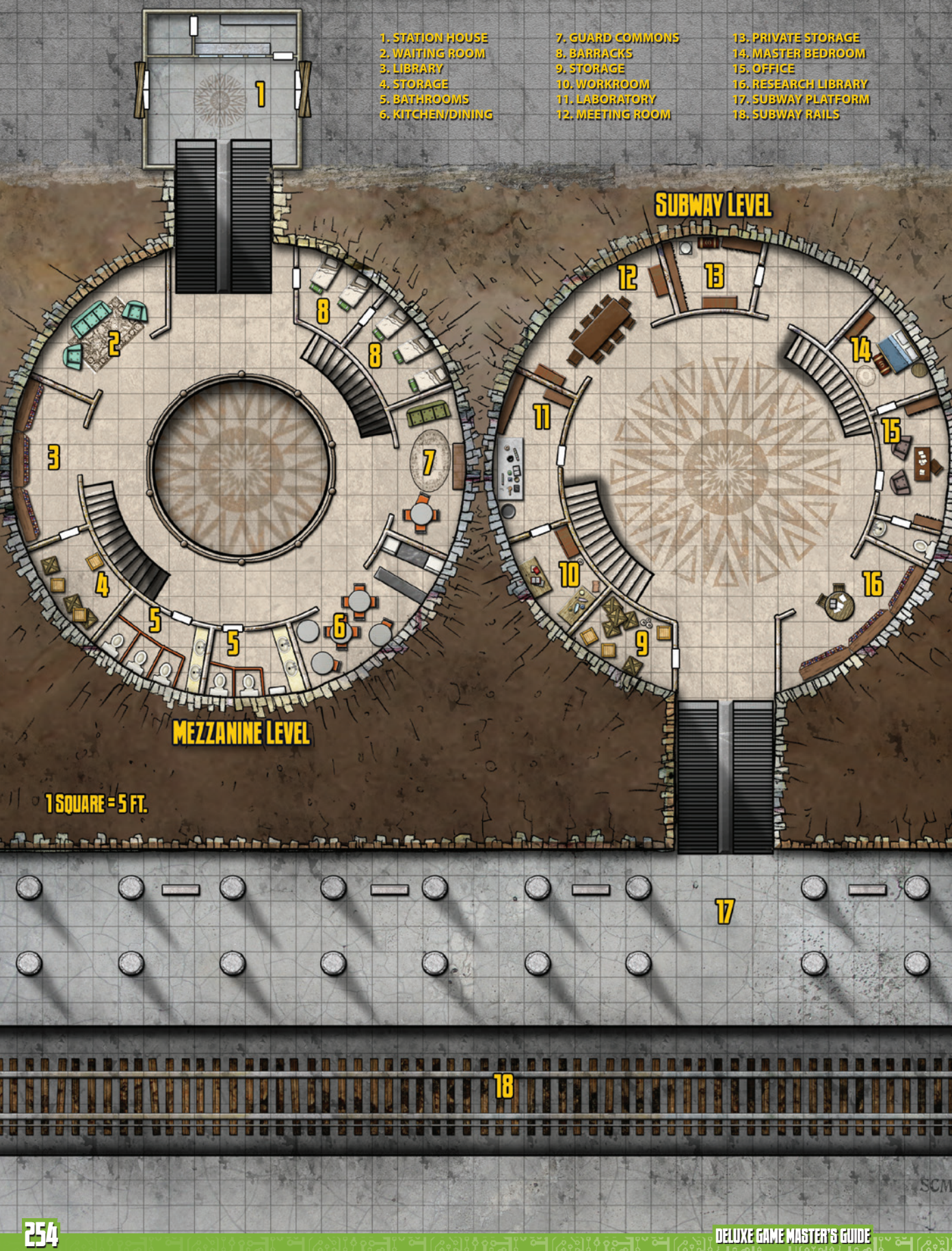
LAUNCH!

A missile silo large enough to serve as a headquarters generally holds an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) or the equivalent. These rockets have vast range, able to reach other continents or carry payloads into Earth orbit, suitable for any number of villainous schemes. Most often, the missile is used to carry a weapon to threaten or destroy an Earth-based target, or to carry a payload such as a satellite into orbit (which the villain can use to beam mind-control rays or the like down onto Earth).

Heroes may need to prevent the launch of the missile, or chase after it if they are unable to prevent the launch. Stopping the launch sequence might be a simple matter of a Technology skill check (possibly a challenge sequence involving Technology). You can use the guidelines for disarming a deathtrap given in **Chapter 5**, especially if the missile launch will trigger such a trap (see the following). Heroes may also be able to damage the missile or launch systems: figure Toughness 10-12 for most of the materials involved. However, damaging the missile might cause an explosion, the same with tactics such as preventing the launch hatch from opening. The blast is likely to have a damage rank from 10–15 or more, depending on the missile and its payload.

Chasing after a missile requires Flight 7 or using another power such as Teleport to reach the missile and grab onto it. You can use the challenge rules to model chasing after a missile but, generally, a hero either has suf-

SUBWAY STATION



ficient speed or range to catch the missile or not. Extra effort may be required to put on a final burst of speed to catch up, since the missile's flight speed remains fairly constant.

Once the hero has caught up, he can attempt to disarm or otherwise interfere with the missile's systems, requiring a Technology check, or damage the missile or push it off course. Treat it as Toughness 10 for damage purposes. Changing its course takes a Strength check with a DC of 25. Two or more Degrees of Success is sufficient to divert the missile toward another target, including crashing it into the ocean or an uninhabited area, or even sending it hurtling out of the atmosphere.

OUT OF THE FRYING PAN...

A common villainous deathtrap is to place heroes at the bottom of a silo, beneath the rocket's exhaust ports, where they will be flash-fried when the rocket launches. In terms of the material in **Chapter 5**, this is a Deadly Container variant on the Deadly Conveyor deathtrap. Damage from the rocket blast is about rank 12–15, so particularly tough heroes, or those immune to the intense heat, may potentially survive it. Heroes are typically restrained in some fashion to keep them from escaping the blast, although an impromptu deathtrap may simply leave them unconscious at the bottom of the silo, able to wake up just in time to find an escape route.

VARIATIONS

The large size version of the missile-silo lair given here should be considered the *minimum* size and capabilities. Some missile silos are much larger, even capable of holding and launching multiple rockets, or having an entire underground complex and support structure. Such a base would probably also have a sizeable staff, perhaps including soldier minions (see the **Minion Archetypes** in this book for ideas).

A missile silo can also be part of a larger headquarters, such as an island or mountain lair, with the silo concealed inside the mountain or other high ground, or in a castle lair, concealed inside a converted turret. See those lair archetypes for details.

SUBWAY STATION

SUBWAY STATION — 5 POINTS

Size: Medium • **Toughness:** 8 • **Features:** Concealed, Power System, Workshop

With mole monsters, earthquakes, and various other disasters, a superhero city can end up with various underground facilities such as subway stations declared unsafe or derelict and closed off to the public, but potentially useful for an enterprising supervillain. Whether classic art deco, cleaned up and classy, or urban post-apocalyptic, an abandoned subway station is a convenient lair often right under the heroes' feet.

FEATURES

The primary selling point of a subway station is the concealment of hiding in plain sight, along with conveniences such as built-in power connections and ways of getting in and out. Other features associated with the lair include:

STATION INTERIOR

Concrete walls and floor (Toughness 6), concrete support pillars (Toughness 7), ticket booths (weight rank 6, Toughness 8), turnstiles (weight rank 2, but anchored down and must be broken to lift, Toughness 6), and vending machines (weight rank 4, Toughness 7).

SUBWAY CAR

Size: Gargantuan • **Strength:** 10 • **Speed:** 3 • **Defense:** 6 • **Toughness:** 11 • Interior materials Toughness 4 (plastics) and 1 (glass), doors Toughness 7 (light metals and glass). Weight rank 11. An entire subway *train* is weight rank 14 or more.

GOT A TRAIN TO CATCH!

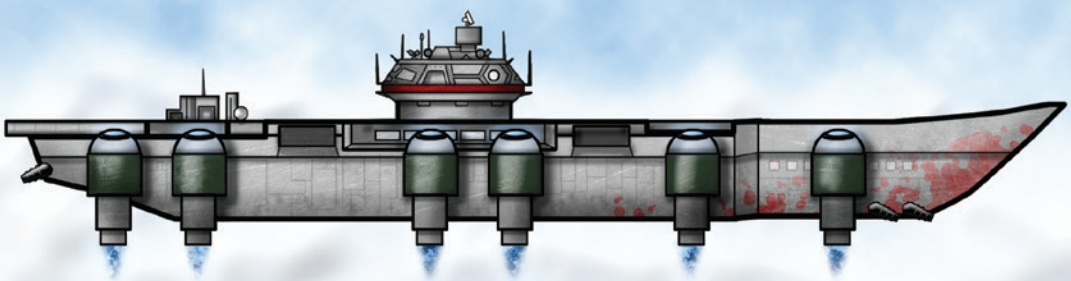
A staple of comic book action is stopping a runaway train before it crashes. To do this in *Mutants & Masterminds*, use the following guidelines:

STRENGTH CHECK DC = 10 + VEHICLE STR + SPEED

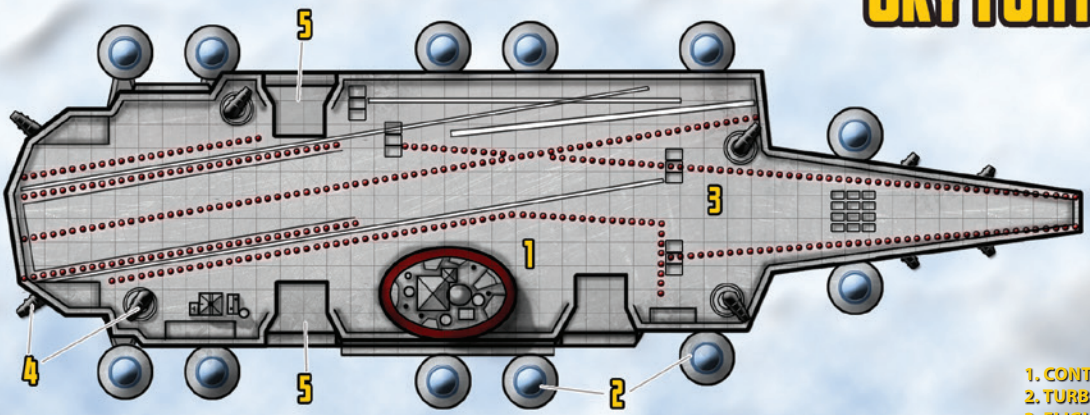
The character(s) trying to stop the train makes a Strength check against a DC of 10 + train's Strength and current Speed ranks. Each Degree of Success reduces the vehicle's speed by 1 rank. Extra effort is good for a +2 bonus on the check, along with the normal use of hero points for re-rolls or avoiding the fatigue of extra effort. At the Gamemaster's discretion, characters can add ranks of Flight for additional stopping power (since the vehicle is essentially using that guideline for its forward momentum).

Characters can use powers other than sheer Strength to try and stop a moving train. Substitute a power rank check for the Strength check.

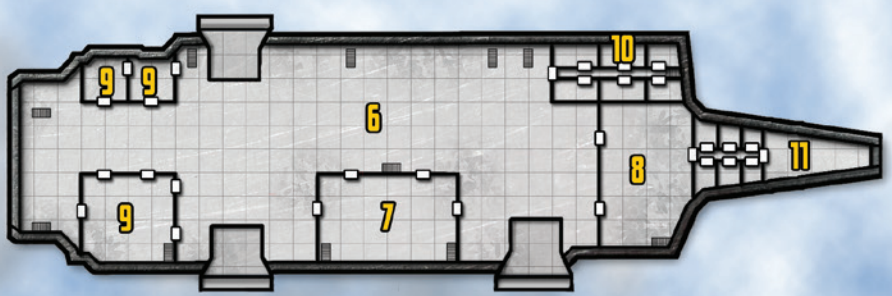
> ***Example:*** *Captain Thunder has only seconds (two rounds) to stop a runaway monorail before it jumps the tracks and crashes! Catching up to it, he tries to slow and stop the train with his tremendous Strength. The monorail has Str 10 and Speed 3, for a DC 23. Captain Thunder has a Strength 14. The GM also lets his 6 ranks of Flight apply to momentum, giving him an additional +6. His player rolls a 9, for a total of 29, two Degrees of Success. The train loses 2 ranks of Speed, but doesn't stop (it's still at Speed 1). With only moments to go, Cap's player decides to*



SKY FORTRESS

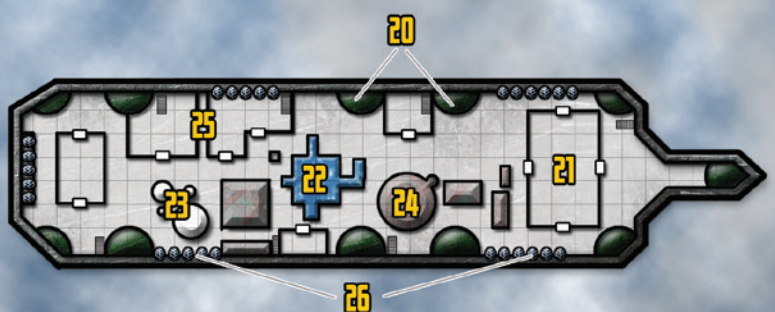


1. CONTROL TOWER
2. TURBO THRUSTERS
3. FLIGHT DECK
4. WEAPON MOUNTS
5. LIFTS



6. HANGAR
7. PLANNING ROOMS
8. MACHINE SHOPS
9. WORKSHOPS
10. OFFICES
11. SHIP'S STORES

12. BRIDGE
13. OPERATIONS
14. CREW QUARTERS
15. OFFICER QUARTERS
16. INFIRMARY
17. MESS HALL
18. PROVISONS
19. LAUNDRY



20. THRUSTER MOTOR
21. COMPUTER/ ELECTRONIC SYSTEMS
22. POWER CORE
23. COOLING SYSTEMS
24. PROPUSION SYSTEMS
25. ENGINEER QUARTERS
26. ESCAPE PODS

1 SQUARE = 20 FT.

exert extra effort, for a +2 bonus, but rolls only a 2! That's a result of 22, not enough. So his player spends a hero point and rolls again, getting a 13. That's a result of 33, more than enough to reduce the train's Speed to 0 and bring it to a halt.

VARIATIONS

The Subway Station archetype is also useful for similar underground structures with rooms and often tunnels.

BOMB SHELTER

The structural stats for a subway station can also serve as those of a good-sized bomb shelter, although the latter typically has less space and only one, or maybe two, entrances. A bomb shelter prepared with extra shielding against radiation might be a useful, and thematic, lair for a villain with radiation-based powers (such as Hiroshima Shadow from *Freedom City* or Fallout from *Threat Report*), blocking any radioactive signature from detection. Likewise, the shelter can shield the occupants from various exotic sensors or Senses effects from the outside.

SKY FORTRESS

SKY FORTRESS **16 POINTS**

Size: Huge • **Toughness:** 15 • **Features:** Communications, Computer, Concealed, Defense System, Hangar, Holding Cells, Living Space, Power (Flight 4), Power System, Security System, Workshop

Part vehicle, part floating headquarters, and part military carrier, the sky fortress is the lair for the villain whose motto is: "The one who controls the skies, controls the world!"

FEATURES

The sky fortress is essentially a flying aircraft carrier: a massive vehicle with a flat top-deck usable as a takeoff and landing strip for smaller aircraft it stores on board. The lower decks have crew quarters and facilities while the main control tower has the bridge and central systems. A series of massive turbofan engines provide lift, often assisted by super-science anti-gravity or similar systems, allowing the sky fortress to fly almost indefinitely.

The sky fortress has a default Toughness 15, but could have a Toughness score of up to 18, with as much as half of that score being Impervious (allowing the vessel to ignore damage from lesser weapons). It has an effective Strength rank of 20 and it requires a similar lifting Strength to lift or move the vessel, particularly should the sky fortress' engines fail.

AIRCRAFT

The sky fortress carries a complement of aircraft capable of launching from the deck of the vessel and returning to land there. The type of aircraft depends on the style of the fortress and its owner. They might be modern fighter jets, pulp weird-science planes, or even WWI vintage biplanes. The aircraft are used to raid or strafe targets on the ground or to defend the sky fortress from attack. See **Chapter 7** of the *M&M Hero's Handbook* for examples of aircraft a sky fortress may carry.

WEAPONS

A sky fortress may have batteries of different weapons, either for attacking incoming aircraft (or airborne heroes) or for bombardments or attacks against targets on the ground. These may include, but are not limited to:

- **Machine Guns:** Ranged Multiattack Damage 6
- **Heavy Gun Batteries:** Ranged Damage 10–12, Burst Area 6
- **Air-to-Air Missiles:** Ranged Homing Damage 10–12, Burst Area 8

If the owner of the sky fortress has a "signature" weapon, the vessel may also be equipped with it—anything from a freeze ray to a lightning cannon. The game traits for such weapons are left for the GM to develop as needed.

CONCEALMENT

The sky fortress has the Concealed feature, since a giant hovering aircraft carrier is more than a little conspicuous. The default assumption is the fortress creates its own artificial cloud cover, which surrounds the vessel and hides it from prying eyes, although the fortress is still visible to measures such as radar.

More extensive concealment may actually make the sky fortress invisible and conceal it from ground-based and aerial radar systems as well. This means the lair is a potential air-traffic hazard, and the first the heroes may learn of it is when an unsuspecting aircraft accidentally collides with it!

VARIATIONS

Most of the variations on the sky fortress are cosmetic, such as a turn-of-the-century "steampunk" style vessel reliant on propellers and strange anti-gravity elements and equipped with autogyros or biplanes. The game traits are essentially the same, although the GM may wish to modify the lair's Toughness and vehicle qualities accordingly.

ALIEN SKY FORTRESS

An alien invasion force might have a "sky fortress" of sorts using a starship or landing craft as a launching point for its forces. The image of a massive alien ship hovering over a city is a common one in the comics. You can use the sky fortress as a basis for such an alien base, substituting

SKYSCRAPER PENTHOUSE

space fighters and shuttles for the vehicles on board, and replacing the vessel's weapons with blaster- or laser cannons, "photonic" missiles, and similar technology.

FLOATING CASTLE

The technological sky fortress can also serve as a template for a magical "floating island" or "flying castle" headquarters. Just change the descriptions, substitute flying minions like demons, gargoyles, or dragons for the aircraft, and spellcasting lieutenants or magical devices for the weapon batteries. The island's Concealment may still be a magically created cloud or veil of invisibility. Its structure can be arcane-reinforced masonry and rock, tougher than steel plate. This type of lair suits the Sorcerer archetype well.

SKYSCRAPER PENTHOUSE

SKYSCRAPER PENTHOUSE	5 POINTS

Size: Small • **Toughness:** 5 • **Features:** Fire Prevention System, Gym, Library, Living Space, Security System

Not every villain has the means or even the desire for a hidden volcano lair, a secret underwater base, or a renovated missile silo. Some prefer to live the high life in style, in the city rather than apart from it, and overlooking the dominion they will eventually rule (or already do, in their estimation).

The exclusive penthouse is the lair of the wealthy and influential super-criminal, typically a Crime Lord (see the archetype on page 82). It may be paid for by legitimate wealth or part of the villain's criminal enterprise.

FEATURES

The interior of a penthouse is generally sheetrock or plaster over wood (Toughness 4) with wooden interior doors (Toughness 3), possibly a steel-case outer door (Toughness 8). The windows are either ordinary glass (Toughness 1), Plexiglas (Toughness 2), or possibly bullet-proof glass (Toughness 7).

There are plenty of things for combatants to throw about, from furniture to expensive electronics and kitchen appliances. The owner of the penthouse may have some bodyguards or other private security on-hand, see the **Soldier** or **Crook** archetypes in the **Minion Archetypes** section.

A LONG WAY DOWN

One of the more important elements of the skyscraper lair is its height, dozens or even more than a hundred stories above the street below. Reaching it from the outside is no challenge for flying heroes, but poses some problems from others, especially if they should happen to be thrown from a window or over a balcony railing during a conflict!

Rules for falling are found on page 186 of the *Hero's Handbook*. The maximum falling damage is 16 (a DC 31 Toughness check), likely for a fall from a penthouse. Catching a falling character is a Dexterity check (DC 5), fairly easy provided you can reach the character in time. Heroes may use movement effects to do so. Falling characters can likewise use such powers to save themselves, including teleporting safely to the ground or another floor of the building, or using a swing-line to arrest their fall and land on a ledge or nearby building.

Acrobatics can lessen falling damage somewhat: each Degree of Success reduces the fall's damage rank by 1. Acrobatics may also be useful to catch onto a flagpole, cable, ledge, or other protrusion to arrest a fall. The DC is equal to 15 plus the falling damage at that height (not the total amount of the fall). So if there is a flagpole 60 feet down from where the hero falls, amounting to falling damage 6 (4 + twice the distance rank of 1), then the DC of the Acrobatics skill check to catch it is 21 (15 + 6).

VARIATIONS

Variations on the skyscraper penthouse are usually based on where it is, keeping a somewhat similar layout.

EXCLUSIVE APARTMENT

Rather than the top floor, the apartment may be part of an exclusive high-rise on one of the upper floors, with one or more floors above it as well as below. In some ways, this improves security, since it's impossible to land on the roof of the apartment and you have to work your way down through the floors above or up through the floors below.

MODERN MANOR

The layout of the penthouse could also be for a small freestanding house located on a hilltop, cliff side, or other overlook, away from the prying eyes of the public. It's better suited as a getaway rather than a villain's main lair.

PENTHOUSE OFFICE

Rather than a residence, a penthouse could be an office for a CEO or other important executive, high atop a company headquarters. It is ideal for the villainous corporate raider or similar variations on the Crime Lord or Mad Scientist. The office may even still have some living space for occasions when its owner needs to stay over or perhaps have a guest—even an unwilling one.

APPENDIX: ASTONISHING ADVENTURES!

Each of these adventures is divided into Secret Origins, In This Exciting Issue, Involving the Heroes, Scenes, Conclusion, and Cast:

- **Secret Origins** describes the adventure background and the villain's plot and resources in more detail than the heroes may necessarily be aware of.
- **In This Exciting Issue** describes the adventure, giving you the details of the plot and villains, and telling you what happens if the PCs don't get involved.
- **Involving the Heroes** offers you some advice on how to draw the player characters into the story.
- **Scenes** are the individual parts of the story.
- **Conclusion** tells you how to wrap up the story.
- **Cast** offers details on the NPC villains and, where necessary, statblocks.

You can also use each adventure here as a toolkit to build your own adventures, pulling out elements, scenes, or characters for your own adventures. You can also bulk up these adventures by using the villains involved in other adventures, either before or after running these adventures as described. *The Island of Dr. Sersei* can feel more like a culmination of several adventures if the heroes have already defeated the not-so-good doctor or her minions on previous occasions.

You don't need to know the rules or the adventures perfectly. If you're not sure how to handle a situation, just make up a sensible solution and look up the exact rules later. It's more important to keep the adventure rolling and keep the players engaged. If you get stuck or frustrated, take a five-minute break to review your notes. You're a player, too, after all, and it's just as important for you to have a good time.

POWER PLAY

A bold new power makes its move to claim control of the city's criminal underworld. But their string of heists is more than random robberies—they've partnered with the notorious supervillain NegaWatt in a plan to bring the presumed-dead villain back to full power and hold the city hostage! Can the heroes stop the return of a long-vanished threat with the backing of an international criminal enterprise, or will they become yet more pawns in NegaWatt's *Power Play*?

Power Play is a sample adventure that uses the outline approach to adventure design, providing an organized, linear stream of events for players.

SECRET ORIGINS

Ten years ago, the electrically empowered supervillain NegaWatt was the unparalleled lord of lightning. In his ultimate bid for power, he held the city's infrastructure hostage until his defeat at the hands of the Freedom League (the Freedom League does not appear in this adventure, and you can swap in whatever hero group you like based on the city and setting you use). The League believed NegaWatt died in the confrontation—his body was never found after he seemingly fell to his death in the bay. But in fact the villain was discovered by the criminal Black Rose Syndicate. For years, they held NegaWatt in a medically induced coma while he healed, studying his powers all the while. But when NegaWatt awoke, he escaped, only to discover that his electrical super powers had been all but obliterated in his encounter with the Freedom League.

The Black Rose has never had a strong presence in the city, but has always coveted the various resources the city holds—and they had hoped NegaWatt might be their key to seizing them. NegaWatt's sudden departure threw a wrench in those plans.

After deposing the leader responsible for allowing NegaWatt's escape and replacing him with a new commander—the cold-blooded warrior Oleander—the Black Rose Syndicate eventually tracked NegaWatt down and made him a simple offer. They would use the information gained during their years spent studying the villain's powers to restore him to full strength, and in exchange he would use those powers to support their upcoming bid to take over the city's underworld and unite—or eliminate—all the competing gangs. Their initial attempt to restore NegaWatt's powers was a partial success, granting NegaWatt only enough electrical control to black out a single building or—with considerable effort—a city block. For a full restoration of the villain's legendary powers, the Syndicate would need additional resources.

The adventure begins as the Black Rose Syndicate makes its opening moves to seize control of the city's underworld. They target the resources of other crime lords and hit the strongest gangs hard and fast, using NegaWatt's powers to disable security systems, disrupt communications, and wipe out electronic assets. Thanks to this assistance, many of the gangs believe the Black Rose have supernatural powers. Those gangs who agree to work for the Syndicate have been given seemingly random criminal missions—in fact gathering resources to help fully restore NegaWatt's powers—to prove their loyalty. It is this spike in criminal activity that first attracts the heroes' attention.

IN THIS EXCITING ISSUE...

The heroes are called in to help with a bizarre heist, as members of a small-time gang in the city have stolen several tanker trucks of liquid nitrogen and make their getaway along the freeway. After subduing the thieves, they learn that a new crime syndicate in town—the Black Rose Syndicate—is strong-arming other gangs into performing random thefts. Further investigation reveals these seemingly unconnected events might not be independent after all, and that this new crime organization plans to produce superconductors on a massive scale.

As the heroes trace the stolen goods or stay abreast of conflicts in the city, they stumble across another heist in progress—this one personally conducted by the Black Rose Syndicate, though another of the city's gangs has taken its own action to stop the theft. Whether the heroes side with the Syndicate or the established gang, fight it out or talk one or both sides down, they draw the attention of the Black Rose Syndicate's members and are lured into a deadly trap.

In an unexpected alliance, one of the city's smaller crime lords, Barbie Sinclair, sends the heroes a message, asking to parlay. She explains the Black Rose Syndicate's recent aggressions and that the new organization has called a meeting of the city's gangs. The heroes can infiltrate or disrupt the meeting, where they learn the Syndicate's local leader, a woman named Oleander, now demands the gangs and criminals of the city unconditionally submit to the Black Rose Syndicate or be destroyed by the resurrected villain NegaWatt.

Further investigation reveals that NegaWatt is largely without his legendary electrical powers, but the items being stolen across the city could be combined with an enormous burst of electrical energy to restore his former abilities. Investigations also reveal the Black Rose Syndicate has quietly infiltrated the city's Transit Authority, which among other things controls incredibly powerful electrical transformers used to power the entire city's subway and electrical bus systems. The heroes must confront the Black Rose Syndicate's top leaders as they begin to restore the villain's power—and if they don't act fast enough, they must also overcome a newly empowered NegaWatt to save the city.

INVOLVING THE HEROES

Heroes can become involved in this adventure in any number of ways:

- The most obvious hook is for local heroes to respond to the in-progress liquid nitrogen heist, either as law enforcement called in to assist or simply being nearby when trouble breaks out.
- Technological heroes may have had important components stolen from them; in this case, simply add these thefts to the list in Scene 2.
- Proactive heroes may be aware that the city's underworld has recently fallen into chaos, whether through watching one particular gang that has started feeling the Black Rose Syndicate's pressure or simply noticing a general increase in unrest and disorder.

SCENE 1 CONFLICT SCENE

HANDLE WITH CARE

The heroes are called in to assist the local police force in preventing an in-progress heist! Several members of the local Nine Titans street gang have stolen a trio of tanker trucks filled with liquid nitrogen and are careening down the interstate to make their getaway. Characters with vehicles or powers that allow them to keep pace with a high-speed chase can make their own way to the site; others are conveyed by helicopter to an overpass to get the drop on the trucks as they pass below. Read or paraphrase the following once the heroes are in position and have sight of the trucks.

> The hurried description from the police scanner checks out: three full-size tanker trucks careen down the highway, their silver tanks reflecting the flashing red-and-blue lights of the police cruisers in pursuit. As a cruiser draws close to the cab of one truck, a pistol-wielding arm reaches out the window and fires wildly. The cruiser's front tire explodes, and as it veers off to the shoulder, a billowing cloud of white fog blasts out from the tanker, covering the police vehicle in a thick layer of frost while a goon clinging to the tank itself laughs maniacally. The other cruisers hang back as the distance to the speeding tanker trucks swiftly closes.

The heroes need to stop the heist, hopefully keeping the stolen goods intact—though the tanker trucks must be handled delicately (see **Hazardous Cargo)**.

If a character incapacitates a truck's driver, they'll need to take over operating the vehicle to bring it to a halt. Barring additional complications, finding a safe place to stop one of the speeding commercial vehicles and bringing it to a halt requires a successful DC 15 Vehicles check or DC 20 Strength check.

Once the trucks and their cargo have been recovered, the heroes can question any remaining members of the Nine Titans to learn more about the reasoning behind the heist.

HAZARDOUS CARGO

The tanker trucks are all full of liquid nitrogen. A criminal on the back of the truck can spray the stuff at a vehicle or a character, an attack which inflicts rank 8 damage. Stray bullets that puncture a tank can cause an ongoing jet of the same effect, targeting anyone who comes into range. Should a tanker truck crash (due to an intentional collision, a failed Vehicles check, or other explosive effects), the resulting explosion does area damage 8.

TACTICS

There are, in fact, nine Nine Titans spread across the three trucks. Three are occupied with driving the trucks, though they are all armed and won't hesitate to fire at anyone trying to stop them. The others are riding as passengers in and behind the cab and are much more prepared to fight off meddling heroes, going so far as to grab the tank hoses and spray liquid nitrogen at anyone who interferes with their heist.

If only one truck remains, the criminals riding in it turn their hoses onto the freeway, creating an ice slick that drives two cars into dangerous spins and threatens to cause severe accidents. If a hero pauses to save civilians, award them a Hero Point.

If captured, the Titans are uncooperative, knowing that the Black Rose Syndicate will bail them out if they keep quiet but will hunt them down if they talk. Powers like Mind Reading or Postcognition, or a DC 15 Expertise (Streetwise) check, reveals that the Nine Titans' boss is called Cronus, and that the gang members are hoping he's not too angry with their failure.

Success on a DC 15 Intimidation check scares the crooks more than the Black Rose Syndicate does, convincing them to share what they know. The Titans explain that a new criminal organization called the Black Rose Syndicate is moving into everyone's territory. The Titans have been promised protection and positions in the new syndicate in exchange for completing this job, but they don't know much beyond that.

Good roleplaying or tricks supplies the same information, which gives the heroes a leg up in **Scene 2**.

NINE TITANS (9) PL 3

Use the **Crook** archetype from **Chapter 3** for the Nine Titans. These crooks have a Vehicles modifier of +5.

WRAP-UP

The heroes' goal is to prevent the Nine Titans from getting away with the liquid nitrogen, or at least prevent any major injuries among motorists. Ideally, the heroes also learn about the new syndicate in town, but failing to do so won't impede their progress. The police gratefully apprehend any Titans captured by the heroes.

SCENE 2 INVESTIGATION SCENE

GETTING DIRT

Once the heroes have dealt with the stolen liquid nitrogen tankers, they likely want to learn more about this new syndicate and the reasons behind the theft. They can work as a team, or split up—this latter method allows each character to shine.

There are several avenues of investigation available to inquisitive heroes.

CONNECTING THE DOTS

While the Nine Titans don't know why the Black Rose charged them to steal a massive quantity of liquid nitro-

gen, the heroes might suspect a pattern behind the robberies. With a successful DC 13 Investigation check (which the heroes can perform as a routine check), they discover a series of thefts of seemingly random and unrelated items over the past few weeks, including the following:

- A theft similar to what the Nine Titans attempted, in which operatives successfully made off with several tanker trucks of liquid oxygen.
- A report from a ceramics manufacturer in the suburbs indicating a large number of kilns stolen from a warehouse.
- A missing train transporting a wholesale shipment of microwave ovens imported from China.
- An elaborate heist in which a series of Victorian-era statues were stolen from city hall. City officials have tried to deflect attention from the embarrassing affair by claiming the statues' removal was part of a larger redecoration.
- A subway station offline for weeks after much of its electrical cabling disappeared.
- A local grocery distribution center's entire stock of canned and smoked fish products has disappeared from the company warehouse.

While these thefts initially seem unconnected, a successful DC 25 Technology check reveals that most of the thefts involve items related in one way or another to the creation of superconductors. While the liquid oxygen, liquid nitrogen, and kilns have practical application in the manufacturing process, the stolen statues were made from a barium-copper alloy, and the yttrium oxide filters in the microwave ovens can be used as a base for a superconductor. The missing fish products are unrelated (in fact, an error in the distribution center's inventory management software has led to the entire supply being delivered to a small suburban grocer who now struggles to deal with the sudden influx of preserved seafood).

TRACKING THE GOODS

Using the Inventor or Ritualist feats, the heroes can easily assemble a plot device to track these missing items. They must know what was stolen and, if they haven't determined what the goods are being used for, must succeed at a DC 10 Technology check to determine that the rarest of the stolen materials (and thus the best for tracking) is the yttrium from the microwaves.

The most basic creation would be **Senses 3 [Ranged Detect Yttrium]** for a single Power Point and requiring 1 hour to design and 4 hours to assemble for an invention, or 4 hours to design and 10 minutes to cast as a ritual. This version is largely useless beyond 50 feet, which won't do the heroes much good at this point. The easiest addition is to add Tracking to the Senses power, allowing the heroes to follow the rare element to wherever it has gone now, though they are limited by their movement powers. This increases the creation's cost to 2pp and doubles the time needed to create it.

While devising a gadget or ritual is only one potential secret to success, learning the exact location of the stolen goods leads to the confrontation in **Scene 3**.

TITAN SHAKEDOWN

The heroes may have learned the name of the Nine Titans' boss in **Scene 1** and can learn his location with a DC 15 Investigation or Expertise (Criminal or Streetwise) check. Otherwise, a DC 18 check is required to learn his name and location.

Cronus (real name: Malcolm Getty; use the statistics for a **Gang Leader** in **Chapter 3**) has retired from the active aspects of gang life to focus on administrative tasks, and as such has lost some of his nerve in the face of opposition. If shown any demonstration of superhuman abilities, or if a character succeeds at a DC 15 Intimidate check, he spills the beans.

> The Nine Titans' boss shudders and holds his hands up to placate any hostilities. "All right, hold up. You'll find it all out soon enough anyway—just don't tell 'em it was me who told you. There's a new mob in town, part of a big ring called the Black Rose something, taking orders from a freak by the name o' 'Oleander.' They're takin' over the city's underworld, one gang at a time. Now, me and the Titans, we're happy enough to work with 'em, but others aren't so much. Ash Cats, for one, they've been makin' all kinds of noise and puttin' up a fight. Bad call, if you ask me. I wouldn't want to get on the Black Rose's bad side—thought they were normal enough, but last few weeks, seems they've got a bit of, you know, super something on their side.

The Ash Cats' resistance to the Black Rose Syndicate leads to **Scene 3**, where the two gangs battle openly in the streets. Cronus can answer other questions, but he knows little more than what he already revealed.

WRAP-UP

By the end of their investigation, the heroes should know about the recent thefts and perhaps the connections between them, as well as the existence of the Black Rose Syndicate. Whether through tracking the goods or following up on a separate tip, the heroes should proceed to **Scene 3**. Award each character a Hero Point for tracking down the trouble before it escalates.

Decide if the heroes can learn anything about the Black Rose Syndicate with appropriate Expertise checks. No matter the skill results, they won't know anything about the organization working locally.

If the heroes fail in their investigation, the party eventually hears about a confrontation between two gangs. This news might come from one of their contacts, from a TV report, or even as "unrelated" information gained in an otherwise failed attempt to gather information, but the heroes arrive late to a confusing scene and suffer a –5 circumstance penalty to Initiative checks.

SCENE 3 CONFLICT/ROLEPLAYING

SHOWDOWN ON THE STREETS

The heroes arrive on the scene, either having traced the stolen goods or receiving a tip from an ally.

A semi-tractor hauling a full-sized trailer has come to a stop in the middle of the road, and two groups face off alongside it. One side is dressed almost completely in black, with only a few flashes of color on their hands and costumes. The opposing team better fits the image of a street gang, its members sporting spiked leather jackets and carrying makeshift weapons—except for the woman in a sharp-edged super suit standing at the truck's front end, lifting it so its spinning wheels are just barely off the ground. She drops the truck with a resounding crash as the two forces close in, stomping into the fray.

THE GANGS

The black-clad fighters are members of the **Black Rose Syndicate**. They've stolen this truck and its cargo—a load of old CRT television sets whose picture tubes contain a high concentration of yttrium. This particular squad is accompanied by NegaWatt himself, who bolted for the shadows when the heist was interrupted. He now watches the conflict, waiting for a signal to unleash his powers.

The more traditional street gang is the **Ash Cats**, a minor operation that claims a rough industrial part of town as its turf. They've recently acquired the services of a minor supervillain named **Shrapnel** when they need heavy hitting (or to move a particularly large or heavy object). They responded to the theft of this truck on principle, as it was stolen from a recycling facility in their territory, and they mean to teach these trespassers a lesson.

If the heroes tracked down the cargo on their own, they can intervene in the conflict. The Ash Cats can be talked down from the fight if the heroes can convince the Black Rose Syndicate to turn over the stolen truck. The Syndicate doesn't care much about the truck, only its cargo, and the Ash Cats care far more about the truck—and their reputation—than the old TVs. A successful DC 20 Persuasion check convinces the Syndicate members to hand over the vehicle and for everyone to go their separate ways. However, the Black Rose Syndicate will not back down if the conflict has already started (as is the case if the party found out about the conflict from other means).

In the event of a full-fledged combat, the heroes can side with either gang or subdue both forces. During the fight, one of the Syndicate members makes an elaborate hand gesture. A moment later, NegaWatt uses his **Nullify Electronics** power at rank 8 to momentarily disrupt the heroes as well as Shrapnel, making it look like the gestures caused the effect. A character who succeeds at a DC 15 Insight check realizes that the Black Rose is in fact signaling someone else, though they can't tell who or where.

Heroes who defeat the Black Rose Syndicate find that each member wears a distinctive style of street fighting gloves in various colors with a stylized rose embroidered in black thread across the back of the hand. (The color is an indication of rank within the organization—a hero who succeeds at a DC 15 check with an appropriate Expertise skill, such as Tactics or Martial Arts, recognizes this system and the order of colors, from lowest to highest: blue, green, red, white, yellow, silver.) The members are also all carrying or wearing gas masks, which becomes relevant in **Scene 4** if the PCs follow them.

TACTICS

There are a number of **Ash Cats** here equal to the number of heroes. **Shrapnel** wades into any fray, throwing punches and soaking whatever her opponents dish out.

The **Black Rose Syndicate** force is the same size as that of the Ash Cats, in addition to their hidden asset of **NegaWatt** in the background.

Each gang prefers to focus its attacks on the members of the other gang. The Black Rose first works to contain the threat Shrapnel presents unless the heroes join in the fight, in which case they turn their attention on the more dangerous foe. If the heroes have Shrapnel occupied and the Syndicate sees an opening, they ignore the Ash Cats' rank-and-file members and attempt to flee with their stolen cargo—if they haven't made use of NegaWatt's **Nullify Electronics** power yet, they do so now. They otherwise flee rather than be taken into custody, hoping to lure the heroes into a trap (see **Scene 4**).

If the heroes side with the Black Rose Syndicate or try to take on both gangs, the Ash Cats fight only until it becomes clear that they are outmatched, whereupon they recognize that a single truck isn't worth their lives and surrender.

ASH CATS — PL 3

Use the **Tough** archetype from **Chapter 3** for the Ash Cats. They all carry chains, pipes, or other simple weapons: Makeshift Weapon +4 (Close, Damage 2)

SHRAPNEL — PL 8

See the **Cast** section.

BLACK ROSE ENFORCER — PL 4

See the **Cast** section.

WRAP-UP

The heroes can put an end to gang violence that might endanger nearby civilians. They may also have the opportunity to learn more about the Black Rose Syndicate—especially the fact that they seem to have some supernatural powers (or clever trickery) at their command.

If the heroes capture any members of the Ash Cats, the street gang is all too happy to share what they know about their new rivals, in particular that the Black Rose has

been using a nearby abandoned factory (see **Scene 4**) to meet with lower gangs and collect useless stolen goods.

SCENE 4 CONFLICT SCENE

GOING DOWN IN FLAMES

The heroes might reach this scene in several ways. They might follow the Black Rose Enforcers here from **Scene 3** or learn of the factory from the Ash Cats. Alternatively, their efforts to track the stolen yttrium could lead them to the materials stored in this warehouse. In these cases, the Black Rose Syndicate sets the entire building ablaze to trap the heroes. If the heroes are stumped, the Syndicate sets the warehouse ablaze to cover their own tracks, and the heroes are again called by the police to respond to the fire, as emergency responders have been stymied.

Flames blaze from the already-worn industrial facility, some flaring in shades bright crimson and distinctive green. Smoke hangs thick in the air, and shadowy figures slip through the darkness. Car horns and shouts rise up from a nearby intersection, where one of the city's electric buses seems to have stalled in the center of the intersection, blocking traffic.

THE FACTORY

This factory has been abandoned for several years, making it a perfect location for the Black Rose Syndicate to process their stolen materials. The extraction and distillation require a substantial array of chemical reagents, which are not only flammable but combust in particularly dangerous ways.

The Black Rose Syndicate team here is led by an assassin named **Lanius**, who delights in laying traps for his foes and outsmarting them in combat. Lanius has set the warehouse on fire for two reasons: he hopes to cover the evidence of the Black Rose Syndicate's efforts here, but he's also hoping to lure the heroes into the blaze to defeat them, discouraging further investigation. To ensure that the heroes are the ones to respond, he has worked with NegaWatt to disable several of the city's electric buses at particularly inconvenient intersections, causing traffic hang-ups and preventing emergency responders from interfering. If the heroes don't encounter the traffic jams and stopped buses in their own journey to the warehouse, they hear about them over police scanners, from the fire department (once they finally arrive on the scene), or later through news reports. This both reinforces NegaWatt's powers and foreshadows the fact that the city's transit authority has a significant source of electricity.

Most of the Black Rose's stolen goods have been moved after rendering down the TVs, microwaves, and stolen statues for their base elements, though the kilns remain. Most of the factory is open floor—valuable manufacturing equipment having long ago been auctioned off. Catwalks remain 30 feet overhead, with several ladders leading up to them.

WHERE THERE'S SMOKE...

The inside of the burning warehouse counts as extreme heat, requiring a successful Fortitude save every round to avoid becoming Fatigued (see the *Deluxe Hero's Handbook*, page 238). Sudden bursts of flame serve as a hazard (Damage 6, with the risk of the hero catching on fire unless they succeed at an additional DC 15 Dodge check), awarding the targeted player a Hero Point.

The fire's smoke is especially dangerous thanks to the factory's thick coating of industrial chemicals; the Fortitude check to resist the smoke (see Fires in **Chapter 5**) begins at DC 18. The factory is lit with strangely colored flames as the fire burns off residual barium and yttrium. A character who succeeds at a DC 15 Expertise (Science) or Technology check recognizes the effect and knows that inhaling those fumes is harmful.

If the heroes arrived at the warehouse without waiting for the scenario to prompt them (that is, by following the Enforcers from **Scene 3** or tracking the yttrium), Lanius sets the place on fire when they arrive. In this case, none of the hazards listed here affect the first three rounds of combat.

Extinguishing the fire requires a total of five successful DC 20 checks using appropriate powers.

TACTICS

Lanius is supported by four Black Rose Enforcers and any Enforcers who fled from **Scene 3**. They all have gas masks in addition to their listed equipment, which allows them to ignore the dangers presented by the smoke, but they are still affected by the extreme heat. Lanius begins in the upper catwalks of the factory, trying to pick off heroes through the fire with his sniper rifle.

The Enforcers are accustomed to Lanius' creative approach to problem-solving, but they all withdraw once more than one hero is down; they don't want to get stuck in the building for any longer than they have to. The Enforcers also flee if Lanius flees or is defeated, but otherwise stay in the fight as long as their leader does.

Should the heroes succumb to the blaze, Lanius and his accomplices escape. First responders make their way to the site soon thereafter and drag the fallen characters from the building.

ROLEPLAYING LANIUS

Lanius is a cruel and violent man who likes being paid to apply his poor social skills in creative ways. He's loud and likes to taunt his targets once they've been lured into a trap. While he leads with his sniper rifle, he likes to change tactics and weapons often, and especially enjoys incapacitating an opponent with tear gas or a flash-bang then using his Power Attack advantage with a heavier weapon.

Lanius has no regard for his minions' safety, but cares a great deal for his own. If singled out, he'll try to escape using a smoke grenade.

LANIUS PL 10

See the **Cast** section.

BLACK ROSE ENFORCER PL 4

See the **Cast** section.

WRAP-UP

Any surviving Black Rose members scatter when they flee the fight, but eventually reconvene at the old opera house where the Black Rose Syndicate plans a larger gathering (see **Scene 6**). Otherwise, emergency services arrive on the scene shortly after the conflict is resolved, with the police taking any prisoners the heroes have apprehended and taking reports of the situation.

If Lanius defeats the heroes, they are either left to their fate in the warehouse (where fire fighters eventually pull them from the blaze), or taken prisoner so Oleander can humiliate them and point out how useless the city's champions are against the Black Rose during her gathering of the city's gangs (see **Scene 6**), requiring the heroes to formulate their own cunning escape plan.

SCENE 5 ROLEPLAY SCENE

THE ENEMY OF MY ENEMY

The leader of the Ash Cats invites the heroes to her "office"—an old diner in a blue-collar district—to parlay. If the heroes have some kind of publicly available contact system or regular underworld contacts, she uses that channel. Alternatively, if the heroes talk to the police after the events of **Scene 4**, an officer might come by, say they're free to go, and quietly pass them a note with the invitation.

In any case, the heroes are invited to "Matt's," a 24-hour greasy-spoon diner near the railyards in the industrial part of town.

> The fluorescent lights overhead flicker, and the clatter of plates and mugs behind the counter muffles the murmur of conversation from the diner's handful of patrons. At the large corner booth, a burly woman in sturdy work clothes and bandana looks up and gives a nod in your direction.

MEETING BARBIE

The leader of the Ash Cats is a burly, hard-bitten woman named **Barbie Sinclair**. A hero who succeeds at a DC 15 Expertise (Police Officer) or Expertise (Streetwise) check recalls much of this information and knows that while Barbie's ventures aren't particularly objectionable as far as crime lords go, neither is she particularly friendly. The Ash Cats mostly work in smuggling and breaking legs on behalf of the local unions.

Barbie sits at the table by herself, but most of the diner's other patrons are in fact Ash Cat members—including four **Bodyguards** and a pair of **Elite Soldiers** (use the appropriate archetypes from **Chapter 3**)—ready to jump to her defense if the heroes turn violent. If **Shrapnel** escaped **Scene 3**, she has joined the gang members here and lurks in the dish room, watching over the meeting. So long as the heroes remain calm and don't present any threat, these guardians mind their own plates of hash browns and eggs.

This scene is an opportunity for the heroes to catch up on any information they missed up until this point. Feel free to add to the discussion below as necessary to fill in any gaps in the heroes' knowledge.

With a gesture to thank the server for fresh coffee, Barbie leans back and crosses her meaty arms. "So. There's a new crime scene in town. You heard? Yeah, the Black Rose Syndicate. International org, I hear. Never much of a presence here, but now they're moving in on all our territory. Ugly stuff. The usual, you know, but then they deal in some bad business. Got some hard-nose French twig named Oleander running their local arm. Hurt lots of people, real people, you know? Not just them cloud-nine types.

"The gangs that go along end up on weird runs. 'Steal some microwaves.' 'Get those cable spools.' Weird. But Black Rose doesn't like to hear 'no.' They got some strong fighters, and now it seems they got a super. A real one, not just a jobber in a suit, you know?"

Barbie pauses to take a swig of coffee, waiting to see if the heroes have any questions for her. Once they've gotten up to speed, she continues.

Barbie slaps a hand on the table. "Well, here's the deal. Tomorrow night, there's a big meet-up. Them Black Rose called up damn near every crew in town and told them to show up at the old opera house—you know, the abandoned art deco place? I bet they'll make their demand. Probably claim control of the city, kill anyone who refuses, all that." She leans in. "Lot of folks there. Bet they wouldn't notice a few more, you know? Good upright heroes like you, I'm sure you want to know all about these new mugs." She leans back and watches expectantly.

She hopes that the heroes infiltrate the meeting to learn more about this rising new power, with the unspoken goal that—sooner or later—the heroes take on the Black Rose Syndicate. If they imply or suggest attacking the Syndicate at this meeting, she pushes back: "That's a big fight. Messy. Like 'fight every goon in the city' messy. Even odds the gangs decide to join up against you lot instead of against the Black Rose."

The heroes might object to helping some of the city's criminal elements or ask why they should care that villains are attacking one another. Barbie pragmatically offers her perspective: "Right now, we all know our place. No one's big enough to put down the others. We all stick to our turf. But one big name? There's no stopping it. Bigger jobs. Bad ones. Lots of folks get hurt—us, people on the streets, bystanders. That's a harder nut for you lot and the boys in blue to crack, you know?"

While she strongly encourages the heroes to attend the upcoming opera house meeting, Barbie doesn't want to bring the heroes with her, and she laughs outright if the heroes make the offer. "More problems than it's worth. I don't want Black Rose to know who sent you, and if the other gangs know we're in cahoots, they'll make my life hell. No way."

Barbie hopes the heroes can disrupt the Syndicate's plans and maintain the status quo, but she admits that if the Syndicate isn't stopped, the Ash Cats will fall in line with their demands for the sake of survival.

WRAP-UP

The heroes should learn about the upcoming meeting at the opera house and plan to infiltrate or otherwise spy on this meeting. They likely also have more reason to go after the Black Rose Syndicate—to maintain the status quo within the city and prevent an escalation in crime.

SCENE 6 CHALLENGE SCENE

SETTING THE STAGE

Whether they take the time to plan out their moves in advance or simply rush in, the heroes eventually make their way to the old opera house.

The old opera house was once a magnificent specimen of art deco architecture, but its tiles are cracked and missing in places, and without any of the lights, it stands as a stark silhouette against the city's background glow. Despite the abandoned ambience, tonight it has attracted a motley audience. A posse of loud motorcycles pulls up, their riders swaggering in through the glass doors, while a series of shadowy figures slips up from the sewers and sidles toward a side entrance. At each entrance, a pair of black-clad fighters wearing bright-red gloves stands, carefully watching all who enter.

GETTING IN

Sneaking into the opera house on the ground floor requires a pair of successful DC 20 Stealth checks: the first to get into the building itself, and the second to find a good place to watch the meeting from. On a failure, a trio of **Black Rose Syndicate Enforcers** (see the **Cast** section) finds the heroes. Climbing (DC 15 Athletics), flying, or using other powers to reach the second floor reduces the Stealth check DC to 15; the Black Rose guards on the upper levels and roof are less attentive and less frequent.

The fact that there are so many gangs in attendance means that the heroes can disguise themselves. A character who disguises themselves as a member of an existing gang in the city must succeed at a DC 20 Deception check to avoid being noticed by actual members of that gang. Heroes posing as members of a fictional gang can convince attendees they belong at the meeting with a successful DC 10 Deception check to disguise themselves, but they must succeed at a DC 15 Deception check to get past the Black Rose doorkeepers, who know the guest list.

Other powers can provide a variety of other options for gaining access to the meeting or the presentation, whether generating portals into the building, lurking by an HVAC vent and using super hearing, or crafting a magical or technological device to spy on the meeting remotely.

Once the presentation starts, a character can attempt a DC 20 Stealth check to get into the green room, which offers a prime listening location. The room is mostly clean,

save for an overfull trash can including a few dozen old pamphlets from the 1980s boasting of the city's then-new electric transit infrastructure.

From the opera house floor, a hero can slip a tracker on one of the Black Rose guards or grab their phone with a successful DC 20 Sleight of Hand check. The guards use their +6 Perception bonus on their attempt to notice the theft.

WE DON'T WANT TROUBLE

The Black Rose Syndicate doesn't want this dramatic show being disrupted or devolving into a brawl, so any initial encounters with the heroes (such as catching them sneaking around or seeing through their disguises at the door) are surprisingly polite. The guards firmly ask the heroes to leave, but characters who promise not to cause any commotion (requiring a successful DC 15 Deception or Persuasion check) can persuade the Syndicate to let them stay; impose a circumstance penalty if the heroes are doing anything especially suspicious or fighting with other gangs. Only after repeated or blatant disruptions does the Black Rose turn to force; sending enough Black Rose Enforcers to outnumber the heroes two-to-one to eject them from the building as quietly as possible.

In the event that the heroes entirely disrupt the meeting, whether by trying to attack **Oleander** or large groups of the gang members in attendance, setting the opera house on fire, organizing a police raid, or so forth, the Black Rose Syndicate and the attendees flee. This is the only situation in which NegaWatt employs his power, again using Nullify Electronics 8 to black out the opera house's interior and facilitate escape while deterring pursuit. This outcome likely precludes the heroes from gaining key information and allows NegaWatt to return to full power uninterrupted before the heroes confront him (see **Scene 8**).

OLEANDER'S ULTIMATUM

As the heroes and the city's criminals settle into the opera house seating, Oleander begins her address to the crowd.

As the city's assembled underworld—perhaps a thousand people—settle on the floor of the dark opera house, a sudden, brilliant spotlight illuminates the stage. Once the afterimages of the sudden light fade, a handful of black-clad fighters can be seen across the stage, along with a scowling man in a power suit with long, whiplike tendrils trailing from each hand. In front of them all, a woman dressed in black with silver gloves looks out over the crowd.

After a tense silence, the woman speaks. "Good, those of you here tonight show uncanny wisdom. I'm glad to see you can all follow orders. I am Oleander, poisoned blossom of the Black Rose and leader of the United States branch of the Syndicate. I'm delighted to have your support. To those of you who have already been helping us execute our plans—you have my gratitude. To the rest of you, I assure you, your chance to prove your loyalty is coming soon.

"I'm sure you've all been wondering what this—the Black Rose Syndicate, the missions, this meeting—is all about." She grins with a fierce, cold ambition. "Ten years ago, the supervillain NegaWatt held the city hostage. It was only due to the meddling of the Freedom League that his plan failed. Eyewitness accounts claim NegaWatt was killed in that confrontation—but, I think we can all appreciate how unreliable eyewitnesses can be. NegaWatt lives!" A projection shines to life across the ragged curtain behind her, showing a scarred man, laughing manically. "Tonight, we will once again take the city's precious power grid hostage—and as part of the ransom, we will demand no less than the immediate and permanent exile of all heroes from the city!"

A murmur of surprise rushes through the assembled criminal underworld. When the muttering subsides, Oleander speaks once more. "As you are all now subsidiary arms of the Black Rose Syndicate, I'm looking forward to your complete cooperation as we move to fully seize control over our new territory. And you shall be the army with which we occupy this city. And I assure you, any of you who aren't interested in cooperation will find yourselves facing a rather shocking end as NegaWatt personally erases you from the city." With a sudden crackle of electricity, the stage lights flare to near-blinding, and the stage falls into darkness. By the time the house lights recover, the stage is empty.

The heroes might be familiar with the lash-wielding figure accompanying the Black Rose Syndicate. A successful DC 15 Expertise (Police Officer or Streetwise) check identifies the man as a mid-range Jobber named **Strand**. If the character gets 2 Degrees of Success, they also know that Strand is hardly ever seen without his partner, **Jumpstart**, and that Strand appearing here alone suggests something strange at work. (In fact, the Black Rose Syndicate is holding Jumpstart hostage to secure Strand's cooperation; see **Scene 8** for more information about how the heroes can leverage this information.)

EXIT, STAGE LEFT

After the presentation, the Syndicate members leave the stage through a back door, making their way out of the opera house via stagehand routes. A dull roar of murmurs and hushed conversation spreads through the audience, with a few vocal opinions carrying above the fray, but eventually the assembled underworld disperses.

The characters might try to follow Oleander back to her hideout after the meeting, although it might be difficult (she has Perception of +8 and her Enforcers are +6). One of the Enforcers watches Oleander's back during this tracking process. The route they're taking has 6 turns where they might realize they're being tailed. Each turn, the heroes and the Enforcer attempt an opposed check. The first time the Enforcer succeeds and notices the heroes are following them, the heroes can pretend they just happen to be headed in the same direction with a successful Deception check (opposed by the Enforcer's Awareness check).

WRAP-UP

The heroes now have the knowledge necessary to propel them to **Scene 7**—and the motivation to act quickly! If they find a way to follow a member of the Black Rose Syndicate, they have the option to bypass **Scene 7** and go directly to **Scene 8**. Savvy groups may still want to perform some investigation before confronting the Syndicate's leadership to get an edge in the fight.

If you want to add additional drama or danger, you can have one or more villains recognize the heroes as they try to exit the opera house, leading to a harrowing fight against dozens of criminals as they attempt to escape.

SCENE 7 INVESTIGATION SCENE

COUNTDOWN TO BLACKOUT

After learning about the Black Rose Syndicate's partnership with the notorious supervillain NegaWatt and their plans to hold the city hostage, the heroes likely want to find out more about their opponents. Even more importantly, they need to locate the Syndicate's lair so they can stop them before they restore NegaWatt to full power and hold the city hostage!

FINDING THE BLACK ROSE

There are several avenues this investigation can take, but time is of the essence.

If the heroes aren't able to track the Black Rose Syndicate to their base of operations within 3 hours, Oleander flips the switch to begin NegaWatt's repowering process (see **Scene 8**), and brownouts flicker over the city.

The heroes can split up and work independently to conduct their investigation. Not only does this allow each character to play to their own strengths, but it means the party can explore more avenues of research in less time. Heroes who lack investigation-focused skills may instead opt to aid their more skilled teammates.

There are two major areas the heroes might want to investigate. The first is the villain NegaWatt himself; characters digging into the villain's history may uncover his weakness to water. The second of the two is more urgent: beginning the search for the Black Rose Syndicate's base of operations.

RESEARCHING NEGAWATT

A hero can attempt a DC 10 Investigate or DC 15 Expertise (Criminal or Supervillains) check to learn more about NegaWatt and his history. Each check takes one hour; though the initial check takes no time for heroes with the Connected or Well-Informed advantages.

A character who gains at least one Degree of Success at either check learns about NegaWatt's previous attempt to hold the city hostage and his demand of a huge cash payment to restore power to the city. With two Degrees of Success, they also uncover the details of his defeat at the hands of the Freedom League, which ended with him trapped underwater beneath collapsing rubble. Media reports from the time indicate he drowned, but his body was never recovered. Three Degrees of Success reveal the origin of the supervillain's powers during an accident in a superconductor lab in the late '90s, which exposed the then-mundane researcher to a tremendous jolt of electricity. A character who gains three or more Degrees of Success realizes that NegaWatt's loss of powers after being submerged suggests the villain has a weakness to water.

Heroes who have mentorship from an older hero might be able to contact them to learn the first two points of information above.

If the party previously determined that the materials stolen at the behest of the Black Rose Syndicate were being used to construct massive superconductors, they may realize that NegaWatt isn't at full power. If they also learned his origin story, they might guess the villain is planning to recreate the original accident that granted his super powers. There aren't many places in the city that could provide a surge of electricity large enough, narrowing down their search substantially.

MISSED CONNECTION

Savvy heroes might have noticed in previous scenes that the city has an electrically powered public transit system, whether from noticing the strategically stopped buses in **Scene 4** or by finding the outdated transit brochures in the Black Rose's possession in **Scene 6**. Once they've made this connection, it takes only a successful DC 10 check using Investigate or a relevant Expertise to find the location of the Transit Authority's largest substation and guess that this would provide a suitable base of operations for electric-based endeavors.

FOLLOWING THE TRAIL

Heroes who successfully planted a tracker on a Black Rose Syndicate member during **Scene 6** can track the Enforcers to the Transit Authority power substation they've been using as a base of operations. They might also have been able to follow Oleander herself to this location if they managed to tail her away from the opera house (see **Scene 6**). A character who lifted a Syndicate cell phone can hack the device with a successful DC 15 Technology check (requiring one hour) to track the location data of the phone itself, which reveals that the owner had spent substantial time around a given location—the Black Rose substation.

Attempts to continue tracking yttrium in the city are difficult due to the residue floating over the city from the burned factory. If the heroes managed to prevent the blaze in **Scene 4**, they can use their tracking device or ritual to find the Transit Authority power substation.

WRAP-UP

By the end of their investigation, the heroes should know that the Black Rose Syndicate is operating out of a Transit Authority substation. They have likely also discovered that the gang is planning a massive event involving electricity, superconductors, and NegaWatt—and whether they truly understand the villains plans or not, this should be enough to spur them to make a move on the Black Rose hideout!

Once brownouts begin across the city, a successful DC 10 Technology check is all that's required for the heroes to trace the disruptions to their source, though NegaWatt will be fully restored by the time they arrive.

SCENE 8 CONFLICT SCENE

A SHOCKING CONCLUSION

Amidst flickering streetlights, the heroes make their way to the Transit Authority substation that now serves as Oleander's secret base of operations. Here, the Black Rose Syndicate begins their process to repower NegaWatt!

> The interior of the nondescript substation resembles a spaceship as much as a modern facility. In addition to the massive banks of transformers are huge pieces of equipment with countless dials, levers, blinking lights, and readouts. Fat hoses snake across the floor, leaking plumes of white gas as their coolants leak under the high pressure. Bundles of massive cables, sparking here and there, connect the transformers and the other equipment. The entire set-up is focused on a pod-capsule with a hinged lid and a giant latch, just large enough to hold a single person. Though the pod's window is only partially translucent, the form of a human figure can just barely be seen within.

The capsule at the center of the room is NegaWatt's repowering pod. If the heroes aren't fast enough, the repowering process completes and the villain emerges, ready to join the fray against whatever heroes remain.

THROW THE SWITCH

If the party couldn't find the substation until the brownouts began, they arrive as **NegaWatt** emerges from his rejuvenation pod, and must confront the supervillain as well as Oleander and her team.

Assuming the heroes didn't fail in their investigation, Oleander flips the switch to begin NegaWatt's rejuvenation as her first action as soon as the heroes initiate combat. This causes brownouts across the city and gives the PCs 3 rounds before NegaWatt emerges, fully charged. A hero can disrupt the process with a successful DC 15 Technology check or appropriate power stunts, delaying the villain's apotheosis by 1 round for each success or use. If the party delays him until the end of their fight, they can attempt a DC 25 Technology check (requiring a full minute) to safely draw off the remaining power, preventing him from regaining his full power.

Destroying the rejuvenation equipment wakes up a fully repowered NegaWatt immediately, but he's disoriented from the uncontrolled revival and attacks targets at random. In this case, the Black Rose Syndicate withdraws and leaves the PCs to deal with the problem.

TACTICS

If the heroes worked quickly and effectively in the last scene, the Black Rose Syndicate has had little time to gather its strength, and the PCs find themselves facing off against a relatively limited force. The longer they take

investigating, the more their enemy can gather, adding more and stronger foes to the final battle.

Regardless of when the heroes arrive at the substation, they face **Oleander** and a number of **Black Rose Enforcers** equal to the number of heroes, as well as **Lanius** (from **Scene 4**) if he escaped his prior confrontation with the heroes. If it took the heroes over an hour to track down the hideout in **Scene 7**, Oleander also has the **Black Rose Master** and the jobber **Strand** defending her.

ROLEPLAYING OLEANDER

Oleander is smug and overconfident, having bested several French heroes before her assignment to this new American operation. The heroes have been a thorn in her side since they began interfering in her plans, and once they arrive in her headquarters here, she excoriates them for interrupting her plans and promises them a swift destruction, directing her minions to attack and launching headlong into the fray herself. Her dialogue is clipped and controlled, and she shows little emotion beyond pride. In combat, she works with her Black Rose Enforcers, having them use Aid actions to defend her.

While determined, Oleander isn't unreasonable; she beats a hasty retreat if NegaWatt falls or if the heroes take out all her Black Rose allies.

ROLEPLAYING NEGAWATT

If restored to full power, NegaWatt joins the battle with incredible glee. His primary offensive power is a ball lightning blast that he hurls at groups of heroes regardless of lesser Black Rose members in the area. He also delights in deactivating electronics with his Nullify Electronics ability. NegaWatt is vulnerable to water and avoids it at all costs.

The villain is delighted to have his powers back and determined to make the most of them; if the heroes defeat Oleander or the majority of the Black Rose members, he withdraws and tries to make his escape.

If he wakes from his re-empowerment early and emerges confused, he attacks nearby characters at random and fights until defeated.

ROLEPLAYING STRAND

Strand has long tendrils extending from each hand, which he wields as whips. He and his partner Jumpstart (another Jobber, with the Jumper theme) were well integrated into the city's underworld when the Black Rose Syndicate turned up and declared dominance. Jumpstart and Strand initially tried to resist, but Oleander captured Jumpstart and now holds him hostage to ensure his partner's cooperation. If asked directly, Strand will explain Jumpstart's situation while continuing to fight.

Strand focuses on limiting the heroes' mobility, but his heart isn't in the fight. He flees alongside Oleander if she retreats or if the heroes subdue Oleander and he thinks he can take advantage of the opportunity to free Jumpstart. A hero who learns about Strand's predicament and promises to help free Jumpstart can gain Strand's aid in the fight.

OLEANDER PL 11

See the **Cast** section.

NEGAWATT PL 14

See the **Cast** section.

LANIUS PL 10

See the **Cast** section.

STRAND PL 8

Use the **Jobber** archetype with the Whip theme from **Chapter 3** for Strand.

BLACK ROSE ENFORCER PL 4

See the **Cast** section.

BLACK ROSE MASTER PL 5

Use the **Mystic Ninja** archetype from **Chapter 3** for Black Rose Master.

EPILOGUE

Shortly after the confrontation concludes, the city police show up, accompanied by specially outfitted SWAT team members prepared to take NegaWatt into custody (assuming the villain wasn't slain in the fight with the heroes). This second defeat is an utter humiliation for the villain, especially if he successfully regained his powers, and he vows to enact his revenge upon the city and the heroes. In response, the city authorities arrange to have him placed into another medically induced coma and held under constant surveillance, thus ensuring that he lacks the ability to override prison systems or collude with third parties to secure an escape.

With Oleander defeated, the Black Rose Syndicate lacks the leadership necessary to continue its bid for control of the city's underworld. Furthermore, the leaderless United States branch of the Syndicate falters as several members vie for leadership, weakening the organization's profile nationwide. While they may rise in power again—especially if any particularly skilled rising stars claim leadership over the enterprise—for now the city is safe.

If Oleander or NegaWatt escape, they hold a deep grudge against the heroes, working together (if they both survive) or independently to take revenge on the heroes and reclaim their power over the city. Their efforts may lead them to dabble further in experimental super-science in the hopes of developing sufficient powers to defeat the heroes in a later confrontation, making them more dangerous—and desperate.

If the heroes are defeated, Oleander refrains from slaying them, preferring instead to humiliate them and set an example. She instead demands they either join the Black

Rose Syndicate or leave town, confident that the powers of her restored ally NegaWatt will keep them in line. She uses their defeat as proof of her power to the other gangs, rapidly solidifying her control over the city. Though the heroes may have lost the day, their stories have not ended—whether their tales involve working to undermine the Black Rose Syndicate from within or a daring escape and ultimate showdown.

CAST

The following are the major characters encountered in *Power Play,* including their backgrounds and the relevant game stats from this book you can use to represent them.

THE BLACK ROSE SYNDICATE

An organized crime operation, the Black Rose Syndicate formed more than 200 years ago as a secret society of nobles fleeing revolutionaries, teaching themselves deadly combat arts and seizing control of various criminal gangs to conceal themselves and cling to power. Over time, they became far worse than corrupt nobility, evolving into a cultish sect of warriors and assassins convinced of the superiority of their bloodlines. Today they work primarily in extortion, smuggling, drugs, and (depending on the tone of your campaign) slavery.

The Black Rose are envisioned here as a French organization born from the French Revolution, but depending on your campaign they work just as well as a secretive ninja clan, ambitious Russian gangsters, or even home-grown American extremists. Either way, their preferred weapons are silence and ancient weapons, as well as fear.

OLEANDER

Fleur Epine, known as Oleander, is a deadly martial artist, having worked her way up through the ranks of the Black Rose Syndicate through a combination of physical skill and organizational savvy. She seized control of the United States branch of the enterprise after maneuvering the previous leader into a series of strategic fumbles—which she was conveniently in place to salvage. She is disciplined, skilled, ruthless, and slow to anger, but a raging storm once she finally reaches her limit.

OLEANDER	PL 5
Use the **Martial Artist** archetype from **Chapter 3** for Oleander.	

LANIUS

Wanted on three continents, Lazzaro "Lanius" Bloise, a.k.a. "The Butcher," is a notorious killer for hire. Oleander's opposite in most respects, he is unsubtle and bombastic, prone to gloating. While he has no powers, he is among the greatest sharpshooters in the world

LANIUS	PL 10
Use the **Assassin** archetype from **Chapter 3** for Lanius.	

BLACK ROSE MASTER

The Master is in fact the previous leader of the United States branch of the Black Rose Syndicate, Josh Rossander. Oleander kept him around both to delight in her own power and to maintain his institutional knowledge. Josh resents Oleander's authority and hates working for her, but he knows that he's only alive because she finds him useful, and he secretly thinks he'll be able to someday regain control of the organization. Heroes who pick up on this adversarial relationship might be able to persuade Josh to help them, or at least to not interfere.

BLACK ROSE MASTER	PL 7
Use the **Mystic Ninja** archetype from **Chapter 3** for Black Rose Master.	

BLACK ROSE ENFORCERS

The Enforcers practice a martial art known as *savate*, a blend of boxing and kicking with an unusual absence of knee strikes. They carry simple batons.

BLACK ROSE ENFORCERS	PL 4
Use the **Ninja Adept** archetype from **Chapter 3** for Black Rose Enforcers, with the following changes:	
Power Kick: Strength-based damage 3	
Equipment: Combat Baton (Close Damage 2, Improved Trip) Throwing Knives (Ranged Multiattack 1)	
Offense: Init +7, Baton +4 (Close, Damage 3), Power Kick +4 (Close, Damage 4), Shuriken +7 (Ranged, Damage 1)	

THE ASH CATS

The Ash Cats are a small, ragtag street gang operating out of the city's industrial district, with a few dozen dedicated members and twice as many willing informants or collaborators. They focus mostly on smuggling and racketeering—especially on behalf of the local labor unions—and even act as much as a neighborhood watch for the poorest corner of town as they do a criminal outfit. Their rank-and-file membership consists almost entirely of **Toughs** (see **Chapter 3**), but a few **Bodyguards** and **Elite Soldiers** work closely with their leader, Barbie.

BARBIE

Barbara Ann "Barbie" Beaty grew up in the working-class slums and watched the local economy slide from bad to worse as she worked as an engine mechanic, competing in strongwoman contests on the side. Now in her mid-40s, she took over the Ash Cats to intimidate other criminals and keep her neighbors safe. Now she oversees several criminal groups, including bikers who double as smugglers and enforcers, illegal gambling, and some protection rackets, but forbids drugs and orders her crew to let ordinary folks be. Barbie is corrupt and criminal, but sees herself as a cultured, old-fashioned criminal who respects the unwritten rules that crooks and cops used to live by.

Barbie may serve as a recurring foil to the heroes. She's a criminal, but also a useful (and antagonistic) source of information and even extra muscle.

BARBIE PL 8

Use the **Crime Lord** archetype from **Chapter 3** for Barbie, with the following modifications:

Working Class Crook: Barbie doesn't have the full resources of a Crime Lord. Her equipment is limited to a heavy pistol, brass knuckles, smartphone, a car, and her headquarters uses the statistics for an Urban Fortress (see Chapter 7 of the *Deluxe Hero's Handbook*) rather than the listed mansion.

Offense: Init +1, Brass Knuckles +8 (Close, Damage 5), Heavy Pistol +7, (Ranged, Damage 4), Unarmed +8 (Close, Damage 4)

SHRAPNEL

Deborah Wong worked in one of the city's rail yards, looking the other way on behalf of the Ash Cats' smuggling operations, until a misdirected railcar left her with debilitating injuries. The company denied her worker's comp, blaming the accident on her own negligence, and Wong wanted revenge. The Ash Cats loaned her some of the funds for a heavy-duty mobility suit and helped her upgrade it into a fighting system, and after tearing apart her former bosses' homes, Shrapnel now repays the gang by providing serious muscle when they need it.

SHRAPNEL PL 8

Use the **Jobber** archetype with the Strength theme from **Chapter 3** for Shrapnel, with the following changes:

Shrapnel Suit: All of Shrapnel's powers have the Removable flaw.

Offense: Init +5, Powerhouse Punch +7 (Close, Damage 9)

NEGAWATT

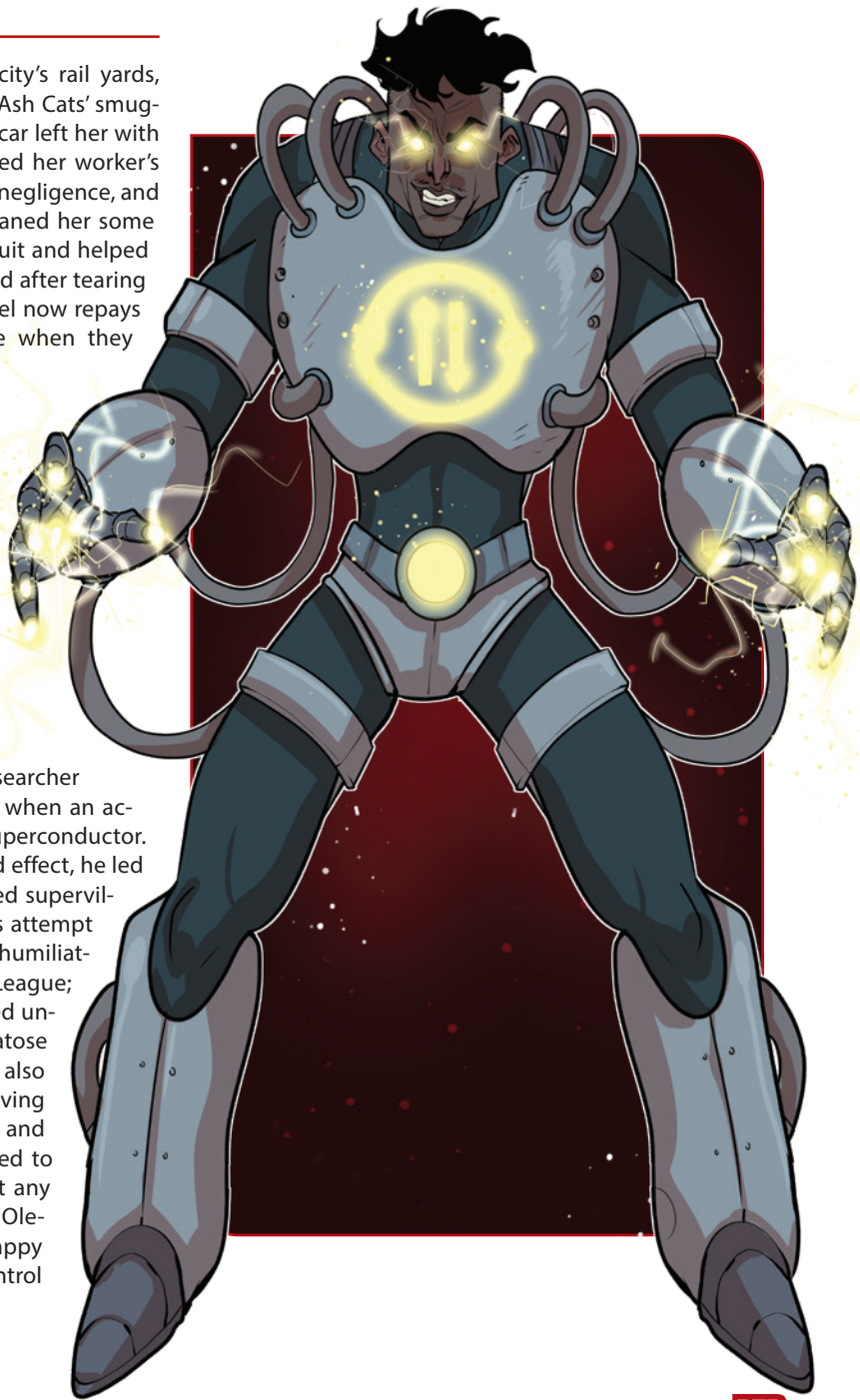
Daniel Watt was a mild-mannered researcher at a superconductor lab in the late '90s when an accident transformed him into a living superconductor. Smart enough to use his powers to good effect, he led a successful life as the increasingly feared supervillain NegaWatt for many years before his attempt to hold the entire city hostage led to a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Freedom League; he was knocked into the bay and trapped under falling rubble, which left him comatose for years. The prolonged submersion also burned out his electricity powers, leaving him with barely a joy-buzzer. He's bitter and desperate to be feared again, and agreed to the Black Rose Syndicate's offer without any major plans for a betrayal—although if Oleander dies in her gang war, he's all too happy to step into the power vacuum and control the city's underworld himself.

NegaWatt is arrogant and aggressive. He still overcompensates for his years of frustration as a softspoken nerd, ultimately becoming the same kind of bully he used to hate. While very intelligent, he is hotheaded and easily goaded into making mistakes.

NEGAWATT PL 14

Use the **Elemental** archetype from **Chapter 3** with the Electrical theme for NegaWatt.

Complication: Weakness Ordinary water causes NegaWatt's powers to short out, inflicting damage. A small spray from a faucet or garden hose inflicts rank 2 damage. A bucket of water inflicts rank 4 damage. A fire hose inflicts rank 8 damage. Full submersion inflicts rank 10 damage every round. His Toughness save is reduced by half against water-based attacks and his Impervious extra does not apply.



THE ISLAND OF DOCTOR SERSEI

An eccentric yet brilliant geneticist harbors ambitions to change the path of human evolution and save life on the planet from climate change. But her experiments have gone too far and now threaten everyone—the heroes must raid *The Island of Doctor Sersei* to put a stop to them. This is a moderately complex *Mutants & Masterminds* adventure presented as an open-ended sandbox as the player characters explore a fortified island overrun by a mad scientist's strange creations. It contains the information you need to run it, in conjunction with material in this book and the *Basic* or *Deluxe Hero's Handbook*. It also provides several examples of challenge sequences and using creatures and minions effectively in an adventure.

SECRET ORIGINS

Doctor Sybella Sersei is a brilliant, if unorthodox, expert in genetics and recombinant DNA. Fascinated with the science and development of life, she devoted herself to studying and protecting it, becoming a kind of "genetic artist" who works with the complex tapestry of biology. Dr. Sersei envisions a harmonious ecosphere, existing in near-perfect sustained symbiosis, continuing to diversify and express in endless variation due to natural selection and evolution. Unfortunately, her world does not exist—yet. The proliferation of humanity on Earth has had vast impact on the natural world: mass extinctions, eradication of natural environments, climate change, overpopulation, and runaway resource consumption, to name a few.

Dr. Sersei became an outspoken advocate for the environment—for the preservation of life itself—but it became clear that, as with other visionaries, no one was willing to listen to informed opinion, much less take the actions necessary to reverse the planet hurtling towards its inevitable doom. People and nations simply lacked the political will and determination. Dr. Sersei decided to take matters into her own capable hands. Significant adjustments were needed in order to preserve the tapestry of life. Left to their own devices, the chances were good those "adjustments" would simply mean nature finding a way to wipe out humanity. Dr. Sersei didn't want that, but hard choices and radical changes were required.

So Dr. Sersei left academia and its corporate sponsorship behind. She needed money and resources for her research and acquired them by whatever means she could, selling her gene-splicing expertise to the highest bidder—quickly branding her a criminal. She tried to raise awareness and slow the deterioration of the planet but was branded an eco-terrorist. She needed assistance in her work and proof of the potential that would save the planet, so she became a creator, the gardener of her own Eden on a hidden island.

IN THIS EXCITING ISSUE...

Now, after considerable time consolidating her position and delving into different avenues of research Dr. Sersei has hit upon an opportunity. Old connections within the scientific community have brought her attention to valuable new research into genetically engineered viral payloads, designed to be inserted into insect life and delivered to various plants as a means of enhancing and protecting crops. However, the same technology would provide Sersei with the means of delivering an engineered retrovirus of her own creation to a widespread population.

She has arranged to steal the necessary technology and information. With it, Dr. Sersei can spread a virus that activates certain latent introns in the human genetic code, causing widespread mutation into various human-animal "chimeras" with a mixture of genetic traits. The process is far from perfect, though—fatal in most subjects, which Sersei considers a feature, rather than a flaw. Once spread widely, her chimera virus will kill off the majority of the world's population, at the same time mutating those remaining into forms able to occupy different ecological niches and environments, both diversifying the humanoid ecosphere and reducing competition for land and resources. Isolated on her island, Dr. Sersei will be able to oversee the process and re-educate the surviving new population of Earth, teaching sustainability and respect for the environment and culling out undesirable traits until the perfect balance is achieved.

Dr. Sersei's plan requires the rapid breeding of engineered mosquitoes to carry the chimera virus and their transportation via drone capsules world-wide to begin "seeding" the viral propagation throughout the environment. Once the infected insects are released, there will be virtually no stopping a pandemic of world-ending proportions!

The breakdown of *Island of Doctor Sersei* is somewhat different than more linear *M&M* adventures, since what happens depends heavily on the heroes' approach to the island, reaching Dr. Sersei's lab, and what they do when they get there. Rather than chronological scenes, the scenes in this adventure are largely based on the area the heroes are in: approaching and on the island, dealing with the rebel chimeras who might offer them assistance in their underground hideout, or in Dr. Sersei's headquarters complex itself. Familiarize yourself with the whole set-up, since the heroes might take any number of approaches, and slot the scenes in as appropriate.

INVOLVING THE HEROES

Heroes can become involved with *The Island of Doctor Sersei* in a number of ways, depending on the sort of *Mutants & Masterminds* game you run.

- If the heroes are a traditional superhero team, the authorities alert them to the recent GenTech theft and the location of the island, allowing them the opportunity to investigate. If the heroes are government operatives or directly employed by law-enforcement, they might be assigned the case by their superiors. Otherwise, a contact within GenTech or the authorities might reach out to the heroes about the theft and their concerns about what it could mean.
- The heroes may have tangled with Dr. Sersei or her creations in the past, but remain unable to locate her base of operations until some lead points them to the villain's small island.
- If *The Island of Doctor Sersei* is your first *M&M* adventure or the kick-off to a new series, you can use the background as part of the team's origin and motives. Dr. Sersei conducted many genetic experiments in the course of her research, and could have created the hero's powers. This is particularly appropriate for heroes with animal-based powers of some sort. Likewise, heroes with powers involving animals or the natural world might receive warnings or premonitions of something happening on an isolated island in need of their attention.
- You could also start off the adventure with the players taking the roles of rebellious chimeras on Sersei's island—victims of her experiments, either with Roof's small rebel band or on their own (see **Scene 3** for details). Rather than the outside world being aware of Dr. Sersei's scheme, the chimeras may be the world's only hope, thwarting her plans from within her domain. This is a great opportunity to start a series with animal-hybrid heroes, either all one type or a group of mixed types. You can also mix-and-match by introducing other characters: escaped prisoners mutated by the doctor's technology or outside agents sent to the island to investigate.

AEAEA

Dr. Sersei calls her island home "Aeaea" (eh-EE-uh), after the island of the sorceress Circe from Greek mythology. You can set the island in any tropical or sub-tropical region you wish—or any region, if you also provide the island with some type of independent environment to maintain a constant livable temperature. By default, Aeaea is presumed to be a small volcanic island in the South Pacific (ideal for campaigns set in the western United States, Canada, Australia, or east Asia), but other possible locations include the Aegean Islands (for European campaigns), the Caribbean (for eastern United States and South American campaigns), or the Canary Islands (for African campaigns).

TERRAIN FEATURES

Aeaea is a lush, tropical volcanic island, with a high volcanic cone dominating the northwestern end of the island and a broad stretch of jungle filling the rest. The whole of the main island is not large, about a quarter of a mile across. Several smaller islands are scattered across a strait along the southeastern side of Aeaea. The island has tall sea cliffs, broken by stretches of rocky beach.

PROBLEM POWERS

Part of the adventure involves reconnaissance and exploration, and some powers may make that too easy or allow the heroes to skip over that element of the adventure entirely. In particular, movement powers like Flight, Speed, and Teleport might make the heroes too mobile, and abilities like Quickness and Remote Sensing might eliminate the need to search. **Scene 1** involves the island's defense systems disabling incoming aircraft, encouraging the heroes to take a stealthy approach. The heroes might also encounter various traps and hazards if they're too hasty in searching the island. See **Scene 1** for more ideas on encouraging heroes to scout and explore the island.

Concealment: The heavy jungle foliage on much of the island provides partial concealment under normal circumstances, and total concealment for characters using the foliage to hide or moving through the jungle at night. The jungle canopy provides total concealment for characters beneath it relative to observers above and vice-versa.

Movement: The jungle and the slopes of the volcano slow ground movement speed ranks by 1 unless the character has the Environmental Adaptation or Sure-Footed effects. Climbing the sea cliffs is a DC 17 Athletics check, allowing the character to move at ground speed rank –2 as a move action. Flying movement over or near the island may trigger the defense systems (see **Defenses**, following).

DEFENSES

Dr. Sersei has taken steps to secure her privacy and keep intruders away from the island, along with alerting her to their presence. Aeaea's prime defenses are a series of weapons batteries, passive sensors, and a cloaking field covering the installation on the slopes of the volcano.

- **Weapons:** A series of concealed weapons batteries protects the island, capable of firing surface-to-air missiles (+10 attack bonus, Ranged Damage 10, Burst Area 7, Homing 6). A launcher is Toughness 10 and two or more Degrees of Failure on a damage resistance check renders it inoperative. Two underwater launchers on either side of the concealed undersea entrance can fire torpedoes with the same stats.
- **Tractor Beams:** The hangar in the main base and the concealed location on the smaller south island are equipped with tractor beam projectors (Move Object 9) which can lock onto and grab objects, either to deflect them or to pull them in. If the tractor beam is able to capture an incoming vehicle, it may be drawn into the hangar or the strait in order for Dr. Sersei's mercenaries or chimeras to capture the crew. If a vehicle is able to fight free or avoid the tractor beams, it is shot down.
- **Sensors:** A network of passive sensors blankets the island, requiring a DC 15 Stealth check to avoid detection. The terrain provides no benefit for this check, as the sensors scan through the jungle foliage. Any unusual energy discharges or noises are automatically detected. The sensors can pin-point the location of anything they detect and provide a live video feed to monitors in the base. A new DC 15 Stealth check allows characters to disappear off of the sensor grid and full visual and auditory Concealment allows them to do the same.
- **Cloaking:** The installation on the slopes of the volcano is concealed by a cloaking field projector, essentially rendering it invisible to all visual senses. It requires a DC 25 Perception check to notice anything unusual about the area, slight distortions indicative of the field's operation. The field does not provide any physical barrier, and characters climbing the slopes of the volcano can literally run into the unseen walls of the structures there. If this happens, the character must make a damage resistance check against a Damage rank equal to their movement speed rank.

DR. SERSEI'S CREATIONS

The whole of Aeaea serves as a "living laboratory" for Dr. Sersei, meaning the jungle is home to a variety of dangerous creatures, primarily of her creation. You can have virtually any of the **Animals**, **Dinosaurs**, or **Monsters** from **Chapter 3** living on the island, particularly the following:

- **Animals:** Ape, Bear, Crocodile, Insect Swarm, Lion, Monkey, Shark, Snake (Constrictor), Snake (Viper), Squid (Giant)
- **Dinosaurs:** Deinonychus, Stegosaurus, Tyrannosaurus Rex
- **Monsters:** Blob, Giant Flytrap, Giant Insect (or Spider)

If you want to check for a random encounter with creatures, roll 1d20 for each scene the heroes are on the island. On a roll of 15 or greater, they encounter something. Many of the creatures on the island are the subjects of particular experiments, so they may have unusual abilities, or even be chimeric hybrids combining two or more creatures into one. Feel free to surprise the heroes with bears with laser eyes (Ranged Damage 8) for example, or teleporting monkeys (Teleport 5, Turnabout) that steal their equipment and disappear.

All of the experimental creatures on the island are implanted with special electronic chips in the upper spine. These allow Dr. Sersei to track the creatures, monitor their vitals and other data, and deliver a tiny electrical current sufficient to stun the creature for as long as it is applied. Island patrols and the chimeras working for Sersei have remote control units allowing them to stun the local creatures in order to keep them at bay or capture them as needed. If the heroes discover this and get hold of one of the remotes, they needn't be concerned with most of the local wildlife.

TRAPS

Along with the weapon systems and creatures, there are a number of traps hidden on the island. Ordinarily, these

are used to test or contain creatures, but they serve just as well for intruders moving through the jungle. Some of the island's large predators have learned that the traps can snare smaller prey for them, and so there is a 50/50 chance of encountering a dangerous animal after running into a trap.

The traps take two forms: pits and cages.

Pit Trap: A DC 15 Perception check is necessary to notice the false terrain covering the 10-foot by 10-foot opening of a pit trap, 10 feet deep. A character who fails to notice the pit trap and moves through its area must succeed on a DC 15 Dodge resistance check to avoid falling into it. The fall itself requires a DC 16 Toughness resistance check against damage. Furthermore, the metallic walls and floor of the pit trap emit an electric current each round to stun captives: a rank 6 Cumulative Affliction effect (Resisted and Overcome by Fortitude; Dazed, Stunned, Incapacitated). Climbing the smooth metallic walls of the pit trap to get out is a DC 20 Athletics check, unless the trapped character has some movement ability to simply jump or fly out.

Cage Trap: The flattened walls of a barred cage lie beneath a thin layer of soil, debris, and undergrowth. When a character passes over a pressure plate in the middle of the cage, the walls spring up and lock together, forming a 20-foot by 20-foot cage around them (and anyone with them). A modified tractor beam emitter in the center of the top of each wall shines down into the cage, creating a field designed to harmlessly hold creatures in place. The field has a total effective Strength of 12, but each deactivated emitter reduces that Strength by 3 ranks. Characters can take an escape action and make a DC 22 Strength check to break free from the tractor field's grip for one round. The emitters are Toughness 5 and DC 15 to hit with attacks (effectively Defense 5 due to their small size). The cage itself is Toughness 10.

PATROLS

Dr. Sersei employs some three dozen hired mercenaries to safeguard the island and do some of the grunt work. They usually operate in three shifts of twelve each, and often patrol the jungle in groups of four. The doctor supplies the mercenaries with various "bio-hacking performance enhancers" which improve their physical training benefits, but also make the mercs more pliable, and thus easier to keep under control. See the **Cast** section for details on the mercenaries. The patrols make use of sky cycles which carry a pilot and passenger, detailed in **Area 1** of **Scene 4**.

SCENE 1 CONFLICT

FIERCE LANDS, FIERCE MEN

As the adventure begins, read or paraphrase the following:

> The genetic activist Dr. Sersei has threatened the world multiple times in her crusade to protect humanity from itself, but all reports suggest she now controls a deadly, mutagenic virus and ballistic missiles with which to spread it across the world. Her stronghold is hidden somewhere on the abandoned island far below.

TACTICS

If the heroes approach the island openly by air or sea, the tractor beam attempts to lock on and capture them or their vehicle. If successful, they're drawn to the smaller island across the strait from Aeaea, where a squad of eight **mercenaries** led by **Rajah**, the tiger chimera (see the **Cast** section), wait to capture them.

Once the tractor beam activates, several nearby **pteranodons**—the results of Dr. Sersei's early experiments on local fauna—spot an opportunity for an easy meal by cracking open what looks to be an injured bird. There is one pteranodon for each hero.

PTERANODONS PL 5

Use the **Pteranodon** archetype from **Chapter 3**.

MAPPING THE ISLAND

The adventure assumes you use the **Island Base** map from **Appendix 1** for Aeaea, with the adjustments described here. Note that the numbered areas on the map correspond to different descriptions in this adventure; ignore the map key given in the **Appendix**.

If you want to extend the adventure, use only the installation map from the **Appendix**, but make your own large island map (or download one from your favorite mapping website), up to a few miles across. A larger map makes locating and disabling the missile batteries a greater challenge, and provides more chances for random encounters with the island's wildlife and traps.

SHOT DOWN

If the tractor beam does not successfully trap the characters, the island's missile or torpedo batteries open fire until the targets are either destroyed or disappear from their sensors. The heroes may need to abandon their transportation to avoid being blown up along with it, or damage to their vehicle might cause it to sink or crash onto the island.

Once a vehicle is downed, a "welcoming committee" of Rajah and his squad of mercenaries investigates any crash-site for evidence of survivors, arriving five minutes later.

If the heroes manage to destroy all of the island's defenses during their approach, all of Dr. Sersei's chimeras and mercenaries attack the heroes in force, hoping to hold them off long enough for the doctor to implement her plan. The heroes need to fight their way through them to reach Sersei's base on the volcano in time to stop her from launching her viral weapon—or at least in time to set off in pursuit of it. See **Scene 3** for details.

MERCENARIES (8) PL 6

See the **Cast** section.

RAJAH PL 11

See the **Cast** section.

WRAP-UP

If the heroes manage to defeat or evade the soldiers, they can explore the island. There isn't anywhere to imprison captives, and while defeated mercenaries either remain captured or lay low, Rajah attempts to return to the lab to eventually take his revenge on the warriors who defeated him.

If the heroes are defeated, the soldiers take them to Dr. Sersei's compound and lock them in the holding cells with **Meerar** (**Area 14** of **Scene 4**), which they will need to escape before they can continue. Alternatively, if the encounter with Rajah and his guards begins going poorly for the heroes, you can have **Roof** and his rebels (see **Scene 3**) step in here to stage a rescue or create a distraction.

SCENE 2 INVESTIGATION

SEARCHING THE ISLAND

Once the heroes arrive on the island they have three primary goals: disable the island's defenses so they can eventually leave, search for the location of Dr. Sersei's hidden base, and finally confront Dr Sersei to stop her plan. There's some overlap to these goals, since searching the island also involves crossing a lot of its terrain, such that by the time the heroes find the concealed base, they may be quite close to it. You can treat the whole process as a single challenge sequence:

Time: 10 minutes

Checks: Athletics (to cover the difficult terrain; DC 22), Expertise (suitable to the environment; DC 18), Investigation (DC 20), Perception (DC 20), Speed (to search at high speeds; DC 25).

Success: With 4 successes, the heroes determine there is a facility hidden somewhere on or in the volcanic peak on the island. With 6 successes, they discover the facility's cloaking field and the hangar or dock entrances. With 4 or more successes, the team also learns that the base has two to three dozen human guards and at least a half-dozen unusual creatures protecting it, based on the tracks—perhaps an overwhelming enemy force.

Consequences: If the heroes fail two checks, they trigger one of the traps on the island (see **Traps**, previously). If they fail three checks, they draw the attention of a patrol of four **mercenaries**, who attempt to intercept them (see **Patrols**, previously). In either case, if the heroes overcome the consequence and resume their search, they need a successful DC 15 Stealth check to resume, which doesn't count towards their successes for the challenge. If they fail that test, they encounter another trap, monster, or patrol (roll 1d20: 1–6 = trap, 7–14 = monster,15–20 = patrol).

WRAP-UP

The most likely outcomes of this scene are that the heroes are captured by Dr. Sersei's forces or they discover the location of Dr. Sersei's hidden base. Unless the heroes bypassed the process of searching for the base entirely, overcoming the doctor's forces in a massive frontal assault, there is an opportunity for them to receive assistance from an unexpected source in the following scene.

SCENE 3 ROLEPLAY

THE UNDERGROUND

In this scene, the heroes encounter a rebel element on Dr. Sersei's island, one that may be able to help them in their mission. They also discover the island itself has secrets.

One of the doctor's early experiments, a dog chimera

named Roof, accidentally discovered a series of caves and tunnels beneath the island. In exploring them, Roof's implant and mental conditioning were disrupted by the unusual forces at work in those caves, freeing him from Sersei's control. Since then, he has managed to free a handful of other chimeras and rescued a few of Dr. Sersei's experimental subjects. The caves provide the small group with shelter and protection, since they are invisible to conventional sensors. The disappearances have begun to concern Dr. Sersei, who has her personnel on the lookout, but she is also too focused on the completion of her plans to concern herself with a few stray experiments with nowhere to run.

Roof and his allies become aware of the heroes' arrival quickly: It's a small island and chances are the heroes make some noise in their approach or on arrival. Even if the heroes slip onto Aeaea undetected, the rebels find them right around the time the heroes are either in trouble or discover the location of Dr. Sersei's headquarters. Either of these occasions are the best times to introduce the rebel faction. They approach the heroes, either looking to rescue them from Sersei's forces, or hoping the strangers are enemies of the doctor and willing to help rid the island of her reign of terror.

ROLEPLAYING ROOF

Roof began life as an ordinary dog years ago as one of Dr. Sersei's earliest violations against the laws of nature. His changes are less powerful or sophisticated, but because they occurred more slowly he has had considerable time to adapt, making him a natural guide to others whose transformations have been sudden. Roof is compassionate and empathic but understands little about modern culture or humor; he speaks plainly despite his intellect.

Roof is patient and greatly values life. He acts slowly and deliberately, which frustrates some of his followers who would like to see swift action to free other test subjects.

ROOF **PL 3**

Use the **Scientist** archetype with the Bestial template applied. Roof's skills include Expertise (Jungle) 2 and Expertise (Philosophy) 2 in place of Pop Culture and Current Events, and Treatment 6 (+10) in place of Technology +6. Do not use the minion rules for Roof.

THE REBEL ENCLAVE

Use the **Hidden Temple** map from the **Appendix** for the underground tunnels and passages beneath the island. The Main Entrance (**Area 1**) on the map appears to be a natural cave formation rather than being the top of a structure, and the entire complex is underground. The area features curious tunnels and structures that appear almost melted out of the volcanic rock, with a disturbingly organic feel to them. Old pieces of statuary littering the complex depict inhuman creatures. It's unclear what the maze-like structure was used for or who built it.

The underground complex has the property of blocking all signals. Communications with the outside world are cut off, and sensors cannot even detect the complex, much less anything inside of it. This property has helped to free some of Sersei's chimeras and keeps them hidden. What causes it is unknown, and the heroes won't be able to determine it in the short time they have to explore the island.

The true nature and origin of the underground complex is left as a mystery for the GM to explore in later adventures, if desired. It may have been created by an ancient human civilization—either island natives or an outpost of some far-flung empire—or it could be distinctly non-human. Its creators could have been technologically advanced (with ancient functioning mechanisms still hidden in the complex), wielders of magic, or some combination of the two. There could be secrets and dangers there waiting to be unlocked by the unwary and seized by the ambitious—potential hooks for future adventures involving Aeaea and its inhabitants.

THE REBELS

A small band of nine rebel chimeras call the underground complex home: Roof (dog), Nocha (panther), Skraw (hawk), Calum (bat), Nara (rat), Wendy (alligator), Garcia (piranha), and Jono and Fono (monkeys).

How adversarial this scene is depends on the heroes and their actions. Roof and his fellow rebels approach the heroes, either to help them overcome a trap or other adversaries, or to offer them a safe haven. Some of them are not overly inclined to trust strangers, however, and may challenge Roof's decision to help the heroes and reveal the location of their hiding place to them.

The rebels' attitude towards the heroes starts out as indifferent. It takes a DC 15 Persuasion check to win over half of the rebels, and a DC 20 check to win them all over.

If the heroes fail the DC 20 check, Nocha the panther chimera challenges one of them to single combat to prove themselves. Use the Altar Chamber (**Area 10** of the **Hidden Temple** map) for their arena. Nocha sees this as both an opportunity to eliminate a potential threat and also to undermine Roof's position of respect and leadership with the rebels. How the heroes conduct themselves during the challenge affects attitudes at least as much as whether they win or not: Do they respect the chimeras' rules and do they demonstrate restraint and mercy? If so, Roof can convince the rest of his group that the newcomers are potential friends and allies.

ROLEPLAYING NOCHA

Nocha was a fisherman until Dr. Sersei offered him an extraordinary sum of money to participate in her "medical research." He was transformed using the same process that created Rajah, but has rejected the bloodthirsty instincts his new DNA provides. Even with his disgust at his new violent urges, he is antagonistic and aggressive, distrusting even his fellow rebels and especially Roof's long service to Dr. Sersei.

Nocha is considerably more powerful than the other rebels, and believes that if he must shoulder the burden of protecting the weak, he deserves to lead.

NOCHA **PL 11**

Use Rajah's statistics (see page 286).

REBELS **PL 6**

Use the **Soldier, Green** archetype with the **Bestial** template. In addition to this, Skraw, and Calum have Flight 2, Wendy and Garcia have Swimming 2, and Nara, Jono, and Fono have Leaping 1 and Movement 2 (wall crawling 2).

WRAP-UP

If the heroes win over the rebels, they gain their assistance in dealing with Dr. Sersei. The rebel chimeras know exactly where the hidden complex is on the volcano, where the entrances are, and about the security systems and layout within. They can also accompany the heroes, if they wish, or help create distractions to split the base's defenders.

If the heroes fail to win over the rebels, they remain captives and must escape before locating Dr. Sersei's headquarters on their own. If the heroes need a break, their arrival and capture might lead to the mercenary patrols discovering the underground complex. They launch an assault, which distracts the rebels and gives the heroes the opportunity to escape. The conflict also allows them a chance to strike at Sersei's base with fewer mercenaries present there.

For a twist in either outcome, a defeated Nocha might betray the rebels to Dr. Sersei in hopes of currying her favor, disappearing from the underground and moving quickly through the jungle to get to the hidden base first and warn them that the heroes are coming. The characters and their new allies might walk into a trap!

SCENE 4 CONFLICT

THE LAIR OF DR. SERSEI

This scene describes Dr. Sersei's headquarters, built in and on the volcano dominating the island. It also looks at the opposition the heroes face inside the installation and the risks they take in invading or infiltrating it.

THE ISLAND INSTALLATION

Dr. Sersei's secret headquarters on Aeaea is built around a central geothermal tap of the volcano, which provides all of the energy needed to run the base and its equipment. The installation has a ring-shaped underground structure, with several above-ground buildings connected to it on the upper slopes of the volcano. The whole of the above-ground structures are concealed by a sophisticated cloaking field (see **Cloaking** in **Scene 1**).

General Features: The construction of the installation is primarily light metallic panels with Toughness 8. All of the doors are sliding pocket doors, operated by adjacent control panels. The doors are also Toughness 8, unless specified otherwise. Ceiling light panels provide normal illumination throughout the installation, controlled from switches by the doors of each room.

Security: The doors of locations listed as *Secure Area* are usually kept closed and locked, only accessible to personnel with the right access code or biometric scan. Overriding the locks in these areas is a DC 25 Technology check. All areas of the base other than **Areas 6**, **12**, and **13** (Dr. Sersei's private apartments) are also monitored from the Security Station at **Area 15**. Overriding the monitors in an area is a DC 25 Technology check while avoiding their notice is a DC 25 Stealth check. Characters can pinpoint the sensors in a given area with just a DC 15 Perception check and they are only Toughness 3, making them fairly easy to attack and destroy, eliminating the ability to monitor that area until the sensors are repaired.

1. HANGAR

This long, wide area serves as both a landing strip and hangar bay for aircraft used on the island. Dr. Sersei's mercenaries have four two-person sky-cycles for patrols. There is also a small stealth aircraft called the Helios:

SKY-CYCLES — **30 EP**

Size L, **Strength** 5, **Speed** 7 (air), **Defense** 8, **Toughness** 7, **Features:** Blasters (Ranged Damage 7)

THE HELIOS — **46 EP**

Size H, **Strength** 8, **Speed** 8 (air), **Defense** 6, **Toughness** 11, **Features:** Blasters (Ranged Damage 8), Cloaking (Radar and Visual Concealment)

The hangar is floored in reinforced concrete (Toughness 8) and has a sliding bay door at the open end, which is Toughness 10. One of the island's tractor beam emitters is located in the hangar bay, near the bay doors, for guiding incoming aircraft, or capturing them and bringing them into the hangar. If an aircraft is captured, a squad of eight **mercenaries** led by one of the **chimeras** greets it upon arrival in the hangar, with prisoners taken to the holding cells in **Area 14**.

2. MACHINE SHOPS

The rooms immediately off the hangar contain machine shops, equipment, and spare parts for the maintenance of the island's aircraft, along with stairs down to the barracks in **Area 7** where the mercenaries bunk down. Heroes can find potentially useful equipment in the shops for jury-rigging devices, if they look. See **Jury-Rigging Devices** in **Chapter 7** of the *Deluxe Hero's Handbook* for details on this. Alternately, players can spend a Hero Point to Edit the Scene and add a needed piece of equipment in the machine shop.

3. WORKSHOPS

These workshops contain equipment and supplies for the maintenance of the installation, particularly the geothermal station. The workshops are minimally used and, in addition to supplies, hold a half-dozen industrial robots, used to construct the base, but only occasionally used for maintenance. The robots are normally shut down and stored in this area. Dr. Sersei can activate them remotely from any computer console in the installation, and dispatches them to supplement guards if she realizes she's under attack. Otherwise, they're inactive.

INDUSTRIAL ROBOTS (6) — **PL 7**

Use the **Large Robot** stats from **Chapter 3** of this book, except the built-in weapons are actually the robots' construction tools, like arc welders and water-saws.

4. STORAGE

These areas store bulk food items and other supplies, primarily for the mess hall, and contain stairs down to the armory in **Area 10**.

5. MESS HALL

An industrial dining hall with a series of long plastic tables and chairs (Toughness 5) where the mercenaries take their meals. A full kitchen is located in the back of the room, with two swinging doors that access it. Dr. Sersei usually eats alone in her quarters and the chimeras in the base rarely ever eat here.

6. DR. SERSEI'S QUARTERS

Secure Area. This area is set aside as Dr. Sersei's personal apartment. This upper portion serves as a combination bedroom and sitting room, with bathroom and closet space off the main room and a spiral staircase making its way down to the level below (**Areas 12** and **13**). The curved wall at one end is made of a high-strength transparent carbon composite (Toughness 9) affording a broad, spectacular view of the island below. At present, Dr. Sersei is only in her quarters to eat or sleep, and she does both sparingly now at this critical phase of her project.

7. BARRACKS

This large barracks contains rows of bunk beds and storage lockers for the mercenaries working for Dr. Sersei. There are usually about a dozen personnel sleeping on their off-shift in here at any given time.

SLEEPING MERCENARIES (12) — **PL 4**

Sleeping guards aren't wearing armor or carrying rifles but keep their pistols nearby. See the **Mercenaries** in the **Adversaries** section for details.

8. LABORATORIES

Secure Area. The labs are a series of "clean" rooms with sealed doors and air-filtration systems, allowing Dr. Sersei to work with any number of potentially dangerous biological materials and experiments. At present, the laboratories are dedicated to preparing the payload for the doctor's latest scheme: Large numbers of genetically-engineered mosquitoes, which will be dosed with her chimera virus once en route to their targets. The mosquitoes are being hatched and the larvae quickly cultivated to maturity to fill biological stasis containers for transport and release.

9. HIGH-ENERGY LAB

Secure Area. The high-energy lab is a long, vertical shaft running alongside the main magma vent of the volcano. Tall, bubbling cylinders of fluid run from floor to ceiling—the growth vats for Dr. Sersei's chimera virus—while robotic arms assemble the stasis containers being filled with mosquitoes in **Area 8**. The three large, robotic arms dangling from the ceiling can reach anywhere in the room and have Strength 10, Dodge and Parry 8, and Toughness 10; anyone operating their controls can use an Intelligence or Vehicles check in place of a normal attack check to strike or grab with the arms.

With access to the control panels in this station, the heroes could shut down all of the power to the installation, leaving only emergency power systems for lights and ventilation working. This requires a DC 20 Technology check. They could also overload the magma-tap, causing feedback that would lead to a massive volcanic eruption! This is a DC 16 challenge sequence, requiring five total Degrees of Success. Technology is the primary trait for checks, but allow the players to come up with their own approaches, which may include damaging or compromising some of the equipment. If the challenge is successful, the system overloads 1 minute (10 rounds) later, and the Damage rank 18 eruption destroys the entire installation.

Dr. Sersei is usually in this lab, assembling her missile engines. She is accompanied by her bodyguard, the serpent chimera **Saar**, as well as four **mercenaries**.

DR. SERSEI **PL 9**

See the **Adversaries** section for details. Dr. Sersei prefers to attack with the lab's robotic arms

SAAR **PL 12**

See the **Chimeras** in the **Cast** section for details.

MERCENARIES (4) **PL 6**

See Dr. Sersei's entry in the **Cast** section for details.

10. ARMORY

Secure Area. This room holds weapons and armor for the off-duty mercenaries along with extra armaments. Most of the time, the armory contains 20 each of the following:

- **Blaster pistols** (Ranged Damage 5)
- **Blaster rifles** (Ranged Damage 8)
- **Tasers** (Ranged Affliction 5 [Dazed, Stunned, Incapacitated; resisted and overcome by Fortitude])
- **Body armor** (Protection 4)

If you have access to the *Deluxe Hero's Handbook,* the armory can have up to 10 of each type of grenade listed in **Chapter 7**. Feel free to include any other equipment here, and players might want to spend Hero Points to Edit the Scene to add any piece of equipment they need.

11. DOCK

Holographic camouflage conceals a sea cave along the western cliffs of the island (DC 25 Perception check to detect from the outside). The back of the cave has been dug out and turned into a docking area for small watercraft. Another half-dozen sky-cycles can launch from here, and there is also a small exploratory mini-sub, designed primarily for scientific exploration.

MINI-SUB **11 EP**

Size L, **Strength** 6, **Speed** 5 (water), **Defense** 8, **Toughness** 8, **Features:** Robot Arms (Strength 8)

The dock also holds diving gear for a dozen people.

The chimera **Mako** spends most of her time patrolling and exploring the ocean around the island, but if alerted to intruders she returns to the docks to guard the area.

MAKO **PL 12**

See the **Chimeras** in the **Cast** section for details.

12. DR. SERSEI'S APARTMENT

Secure Area. This area and the adjoining library (**Area 13**) are the lower level of Dr. Sersei's private apartments, consisting primarily of a kitchen, bathroom, and storage areas, along with a small office next to the library. Dr. Sersei makes limited use of these facilities.

13. LIBRARY

Secure Area. This area is Sersei's private study and retreat, lined with shelves filled with books and taxidermy samples under glass: mounted and pinned insects, preserved bones and skeletons, stuffed and mounted animals, and more. A large tank filled with exotic fish takes up part of the far wall in place of a "window" (as this level is deep underground) and may give the impression that this room is underwater, though it is not. A search of this room and a successful DC 15 Perception check turns up some of Dr. Sersei's handwritten notes about the chimera virus. A DC 20 Expertise: Biology (or similar skill) check can decipher enough to get a clear sense of what the virus does: mutating a small fraction of people into human-animal chimeras, while killing the majority of those infected.

14. HOLDING CELLS

Secure Area. A circular area lined with 10-foot by 10-foot cells, this part of the base is primarily used to hold potentially dangerous experimental subjects but can serve just as well for prisoners. Each cell has a sliding door made of a carbon-composite with Toughness 11, capable of being rendered selectively transparent or opaque. The cells contain a fold-down cot and sanitary facilities and little else. When closed, they have their own air recycling system, which can pump in an anesthetic gas when triggered by the security station: Cumulative Affliction 10 (Resisted and overcome by Fortitude; Fatigued, Exhausted, Incapacitated). Overcoming the control panel set next to each cell door is a DC 25 Technology check. It is DC 30 from inside the cell, and requires cutting or breaking through the Toughness 11 material to get at the inner workings.

- **Meerar:** In one of the cells is Meerar, an experimental octopus chimera who proved resistant to Dr. Sersei's conditioning. While less powerful than other chimeras, she possesses a unique shape-shifting ability. She is mistrustful and has an Unfavorable attitude towards others. If freed from her cell, her attitude improves to Neutral and she might be willing to help the heroes—at least to escape—though she is quick to accuse them of plotting against her. Meerar knows

the layout of this level of the installation, but not what Dr. Sersei is planning.

- **Toro:** The only other inhabitant of the holding cells is Toro, a minotaur-like bull chimera. He also proved resistant to conditioning, but is uncontrollably violent. Toro is Hostile towards anyone, even if the heroes free him, and he has a +5 circumstance bonus on his Insight checks to interaction aimed at calming him or improving his attitude. Toro doesn't attack the heroes until he's free of the cell. While imprisoned, he's simply non-communicative and sits silently or paces inside his small cell.

MEERAR **PL 7**

Use the **Master of Disguise** archetype from **Chapter 3** for Meerar, with the addition of Extra Limbs 4.

TORO **PL 13**

Use the **Brute** archetype from **Chapter 3** for Toro.

15. SECURITY STATION

Secure Area. The circular chamber in the middle of the holding cell area serves as the security station for the base. From here, consoles control all of the sensors, monitors, and weapons systems, as well as the systems and doors of the cells in the holding area. Hacking into the security consoles without the thumbprint and retinal scan of an authorized user is a DC 30 Technology skill check. There are normally two **mercenaries** at the station to monitor and operate it. The security station can be sealed-off with Toughness 11 carbon-composite sliding doors the same as those used for the holding cells in **Area 14**, also with adjustable opacity. When the doors are closed and opaque, no one can see into the station, but those inside can use its monitors to observe what is happening outside.

MERCENARIES (2) **PL 6**

See the **Mercenaries** in the **Adversaries** section for details.

16. COMPUTER CORE

Secure Area. This climate-controlled room contains the main computer servers for the base, arranged in rows. The computer core is linked to systems throughout the base and the island and access to this room is strictly controlled, since it is only needed to address issues with the computer hardware itself. Characters with access to the computer core have a +5 circumstance bonus on Technology and related skill checks involving hacking the base's computer systems. Destroying the servers in this room (Toughness 5) takes down most computer-controlled systems on the island, leaving only emergency and manual back-ups functioning.

17. SECURE CORRIDORS

The corridors on either side of **Area 14** and either side of **Area 16** are lined with sensors and a series of six stun weapon platforms built into the walls. If anyone accesses the corridor without a proper authorization code (known to Dr. Sersei and her chimeras and mercenaries), the swivel-mounted weapons attack up to six targets in the corridor each round with a +8 attack bonus using an Affliction 8 effect (resisted and overcome by Fortitude; Dazed, Stunned, Incapacitated). If there are fewer than six possible targets, the turrets concentrate their fire, making a team attack. The turrets are Toughness 8, requiring a DC 15 attack check to hit one, although an attacker adjacent to a turret gains a +5 circumstance bonus to hit it.

18. MISSILE LAUNCH SITE

This area on the map is not physically connected to the main complex and is likely to remain unknown to the heroes. It is a concealed launch site for both defensive missiles and the long-range missile carrying Dr. Sersei's chimera virus. Most of the launch facility is underground, with the aboveground portions only visible during a launch. Otherwise, finding the site is a DC 25 Perception check. See **Scene 5** for details on the launch and the heroes stopping it.

Several smaller test missiles carrying mosquito payloads are already here and prepped for launch but can only reach the nearby mainland. This won't give Dr. Sersei the global distribution she wants, but she's willing to use them as a last-ditch effort to bring about her master plan (see **Scene 5**).

ADVERSARIES

In addition to the traps and devices described under **The Island Installation** previously, heroes invading the base face up to three dozen **mercenaries** working for Dr. Sersei, five **chimeras**, and the doctor herself, all described in greater detail in the **Cast** section. Their placement, actions, and tactics are:

MERCENARIES

The mercenaries work in three shifts of twelve each, so a third of them will be sleeping and another third off-duty unless the heroes alert the base to their presence. In that case, all of the mercenaries will be alert and on-duty. Some may be out patrolling the island or searching for intruders, depending on how the heroes arrived and what they have done since. At least a dozen mercenaries remain at the base at all times to handle operations and protect their employer. Under normal circumstances, the mercenaries remain at duty stations within the base. In alert situations, they patrol the corridors and rooms in pairs, looking for intruders. At least four stay with Dr. Sersei to protect her.

CHIMERAS

Saar the snake chimera stays by Dr. Sersei's side unless specifically commanded to do otherwise. **Rajah** is eager for a fight (especially if he encountered the heroes earlier), and travels with a team of eight **mercenaries** to respond

to any alarms. **Horn** and **Tusk** stick together, patrolling the Upper Level. **Mako** prefers to stay near the docks (area 11), but is quick to call Rajah to join her if she spots intruders. The chimeras all fight to protect Dr. Sersei, but they don't exercise much in the way of teamwork or coordination, and it is possible for the heroes to split them up and take them down one by one. Once the heroes begin attacking Dr. Sersei, any remaining chimeras will join the battle as quickly as possible, with one arriving every other round.

Note that although the chimeras all have Regeneration, you may want to decide that a defeated chimera stays down unless the story calls for their reappearance. Otherwise, dealing with all five chimeras can turn into a "whack-a-mole" scenario where the heroes take down one, only to have it recover in the time it takes them to take down the next ones. Clever heroes may take steps to restrain defeated chimeras to prevent this.

DR. SERSEI

Dr. Sersei is focused on completing her chimera virus carrier the whole time the heroes are on the island. She spends virtually all of her time in the high-energy lab in **Area 9,** even after the heroes enter the base. On the face of it, Dr. Sersei isn't much of a threat to a team of superheroes (although see the **Unleashing the Beast** sidebar).

WRAP-UP

While Dr. Sersei wants to spread her virus-laden mosquitoes worldwide, she does have several short-range missiles already prepared for launch in area 18. Thanks to her voice controls, she can order the launch if she fears defeat, allowing her to at least target several nearby human populations. Unless the heroes have located and destroyed the secondary launch site, move immediately to **Scene 5** (possibly giving Dr. Sersei or her chimeras time to escape).

SCENE 5 CHALLENGE

MISSILE CHASE

You can choose to have the heroes defeat Dr. Sersei and her followers before her scheme is fully realized, or you can make the final challenge of the adventure stopping the doctor's chimera virus from spreading across the world! If Sersei has the opportunity, she launches a missile from **Area 18** on the **Island Base** map, carrying stasis containers of the virus-laden mosquitoes. The missile is designed to split at a certain altitude, scattering smaller propelled containers toward nearby cities where they land and release their contents into the environment.

Time: 1 round

Checks: DC 18. Speed (to catch up with the missile), then an attack check (to damage the missile or knock it off course), Technology (to hack into the missile's guidance systems), or a Strength or a movement effect rank (to push the missile off-course). If the heroes pursue in a vehicle (either their own or one from the **Area 1** hangar), Vehicle skill checks may be required to maintain a close distance to the missile.

Success: The challenge proceeds in stages, with the heroes needing to accumulate 3 successes on Speed or movement effect checks to catch up with the speeding missile, then 2 or more successes on other checks to deal with the missile's threat.

Consequences: If the heroes fail two or more Speed checks, the missile outpaces them. If they fail a total of four or more checks before achieving a total of 5 successes, the missile splits and scatters its payload before the heroes can stop it.

WRAP-UP

If the heroes manage to stop the missile, a premature detonation kills the insects within, as does crashing in the ocean.

EPILOGUE

Ideally, the heroes are able to defeat Dr. Sersei and her minions and either prevent the launch of the chimera virus or stop the missile in mid-flight before it can be released. The criminal scientist can be turned over to the authorities to answer for her crimes, the same for her mercenary agents. The fate of the chimeras is a more complex matter. Those that assisted Dr. Sersei might also need to answer to the authorities, but there is the question of whether or not they are culpable, given they were essentially created to obey her and subjected to heavy conditioning. There is also the matter of the rebel chimeras on Aeaea. The heroes may simply choose to leave them there, but chances are international authorities will want to occupy the island to ensure no further threats, unless the heroes convince them it is not necessary.

The heroes may be able to take over the island base and make use of it themselves as an HQ. Aeaea is far from civilization, but heroes might have high-speed transportation or even teleportation or the like to get them to hot-spots quickly. Alternately, the island could serve as a kind of retreat or safe-house. They may want to hand it over to Roof and any surviving free chimeras to give them a safe home away from the outside world.

If you prefer a more "explosive" ending, Dr. Sersei might have some type of self-destruct mechanism that sends a feedback loop through the geothermal tap in **Area 9**. Heat and pressure quickly build up, causing a massive volcanic eruption that wipes the island off the map. The same might happen if the heroes deliberately tamper with the tap, as described in **Scene 3**.

This adventure can easily lead to new adventures:

- Thanks to their mental programming, any chimeras who escape capture will dedicate themselves to freeing Dr. Sersei.
- A handful of gene-altering mosquitoes may escape the exploding missile, leading to the random creation of animal-powered villains on the mainland.

- The mysterious complex inhabited by the rebel chimeras may lead to strange new discoveries, release alien magic, contain ancient technology, or imprison an ancient danger.

CAST

The following are the major characters encountered in *The Island of Doctor Sersei,* including their backgrounds and the relevant game stats from this book you can use to represent them.

DOCTOR SYBELLA SERSEI

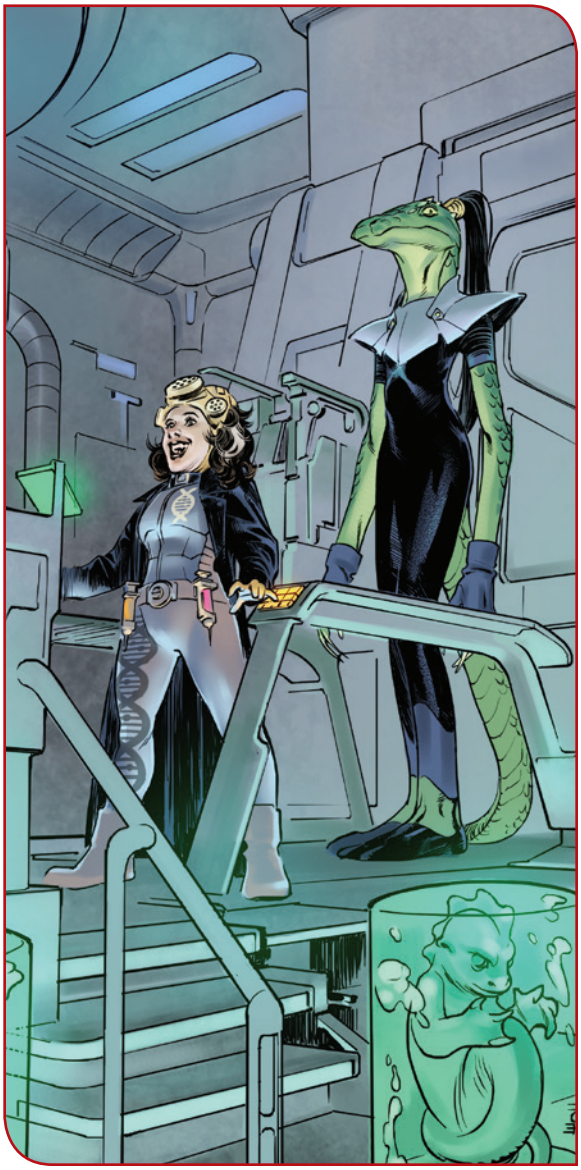
Dr. Sersei's crimes are those of execution, rather than goal. After a career of brilliant discoveries, dozens of respected scientific papers, and countless student lives improved, Dr. Sersei fell into deep depression as she watched the Earth's inhabitants continue to push their world to the breaking point.

The geneticist firmly believes only radical actions and transformation of humanity as a species can save the Earth and all life thereon from extinction. That her plan violates bodily autonomy on a global scale and will cause billions of deaths is merely an "unfortunate side-effect." At the least, their deaths will be relatively swift and painless in comparison to the inevitable collapse of civilization and the terrible wars that would follow.

The kind of towering arrogance that led Sybella Sersei to play God with the future of Earth and humanity is reflected in the environment around her, which is almost entirely bent to her will. She created the various chimeras on Aeaea, both to test her theories regarding hybrid DNA phylogeny and to provide capable and obedient guards and helpers. She has secretly experimented on her hired mercenaries as well, dosing them with biochemicals without their knowledge. Dr. Sersei feels any disagreement with her vision involves either a lack of intellectual capacity to understand it, a lack of will to pursue it, or both, so heroes have almost no chance of convincing her that she is wrong, either factually or morally. Give Dr. Sersei a +5 circumstance bonus to Insight and Will checks to resist any effort to sway her from her intended goals.

She is only PL 9 and, while armed, doesn't have a lot by way of defenses. However, a number of elements of the adventure are set up to give Dr. Sersei layers of defense between her and the heroes, allowing her the opportunity to challenge them before coming down to a final confrontation. These defenses include the following:

- Dr. Sersei has the benefits of the Sacrifice extra of the Summon effect for all her underlings, mercenaries, and loyal chimeras. This means when the doctor is successfully hit by an attack, she can choose to have one of her followers suffer the effects of the attack instead. A mercenary or chimera jumps into the path of the attack or otherwise gets between the attacker and Dr. Sersei. Award the player of the attacking character a Hero Point when this happens, but it's a means of using the doctor's followers to absorb the effects of some attacks that would otherwise take her out. Keep in mind the chimeras have Regeneration and might be able to absorb multiple attacks, given the opportunity to recover.
- Sersei has direct voice control over all of the systems of her headquarters, and uses them against the heroes as the opportunity allows. Unless the heroes disable the main computer systems or cut the base's power, Dr. Sersei can open and close (and lock and unlock) doors and direct automated systems, including the industrial robots in **Area 3**, should she need reinforcements. You may also create new systems on the fly she can control, like concealed turrets. If you do so, award each hero a Hero Point.
- Rather than directly confronting the heroes, Dr. Sersei tries to stay one step ahead of them. Her goal is to launch her chimera virus, so she allows her followers to run interference, and closes and seals doors between her and the heroes, long enough to distract them and complete the loading and launch. Once



UNLEASHING THE BEAST

If Dr. Sersei is cornered or in desperate straits, she may take the option of using a mega-dose of her own formula on herself! This causes an instant and massive transformation, turning the scientist into a powerful, hulking brute of a creature. Dr. Sersei gains all of the abilities of the **Brute** archetype from **Chapter 3**, a PL13 foe who should pose a fair challenge for a group of PL10 heroes! Sersei explodes into her new form by unleashing a Shockwave attack against everyone nearby, and flies into an unchecked rage against her foes.

Alternately, if you prefer to have Sersei escape, she might dose a chimera or one of her mercenaries with the formula, transforming them into the Brute to distract and occupy the heroes just long enough to cover her escape aboard the Helios or the mini-sub.

that is done, she gladly tells the heroes what is happening, assuring them they have no chance of stopping it. They must choose between capturing the criminal scientist or stopping her scheme (or splitting up in order to do both).

DR. SERSEI PL 9

Use the **Mad Scientist** archetype from **Chapter 3** for Dr. Sersei, with the following changes:

Containment Suit: Protection 12, Immunity 10 (life support)

BioChem Dart Gun: Ranged Affliction 12 (Variable 3; Dr. Sersei can effectively choose the effect of each degree of the Affliction just before she fires the weapon (as a free action). The effects are generally resisted and overcome by Fortitude (DC 22) but the doctor can also use dart payloads resisted and overcome by Will ("programmed neurotransmitters"). Mix-and-match as you see fit, based on Dr. Sersei's assessment of the heroes and their capabilities.

Offense: BioChem Dart Gun +6 (Ranged, Affliction 12)

Defense: Dodge 6, Parry 4, Will 12, Fortitude 6, Toughness 12

CHIMERAS

Dr. Sersei has created a number of human-animal hybrids she calls "chimeras," after the legendary beast made up of different animal parts. Some of her chimeras have proven disappointing, but a few have become loyal helpers, examples of Sersei's vision for a future world. Generally, the chimeras use the **Hybrid** archetype from **Chapter 3** with the appropriate modifiers for their "stock" animal type. To-date, Dr. Sersei hasn't experimented with any insect DNA, so there are no ant, fly, or spider type chimeras (yet), but most of the other types listed for the Hybrid archetype are possible. The heroes may encounter the following chimeras on Aeaea, along with Meerar and Toro, the octopus and bull chimeras, kept in the holding cells in **Area 14**, and the additional rebel chimeras from **Scene 2**.

RAJAH (TIGER CHIMERA)

Rajah was one of the first successful creations of Dr. Sersei's new, more refined chimera virus and is, by far, her most loyal. The fierce tiger chimera longs for the promise of a world where he will be free to roam and hunt and where there will be others of his kind. Rajah finds the secrecy and confinement on Aeaea frustrating, but is willing to abide as his maker wishes. He finds the arrival of intruders an exciting opportunity, and takes command of any effort to capture or eliminate them. Rajah hunts for the missing and escaped chimeras in his spare time and is similarly frustrated at his inability to find them. Once he engages in combat, the tiger chimera unlikely to back down.

RAJAH PL 11

STR 8, **STA** 8, **AGL** 7, **DEX** 3, **FGT** 8, **INT** 0, **AWE** 4, **PRE** 2

Powers: Claws 2 (DC 25; Penetrating 10), Healing Factor 10 (Every 1 round), Tiger Movement, Leaping 2 (Leap 30 feet at 8 miles/hour), Movement 3 (Safe Fall, Sure-footed 1, Wall-crawling 1: -1 speed rank), Speed 4 (Speed: 30 miles/hour, 500 feet/round), Tiger Senses 7 (Accurate: Hearing, Acute: Smell, Danger Sense: Choose Sense Type, Darkvision, Ultra-hearing)

Equipment: Blaster Rifle, Commlink

Advantages: Agile Feint, All-out Attack, Defensive Roll 2, Equipment 4, Evasion, Favored Environment (Jungle), Fearless, Great Endurance, Improved Initiative, Improved Smash, Power Attack, Startle, Takedown, Tracking, Uncanny Dodge

Skills: Acrobatics 8 (+15), Athletics 11 (+19), Close Combat: Claws 4 (+12), Expertise: Survival 12 (+12), Insight 8 (+12), Intimidation 12 (+14), Perception 10 (+14), Ranged Combat: Guns 6 (+9), Stealth 11 (+18), Vehicles 4 (+7)

Offense: Init +11, Blaster Rifle +3 (Ranged, Damage 8), Claws +12 (Close, Damage 10), Unarmed +8 (Close, Damage 8)

Defense: Dodge 12, Parry 12, Fort 9, Tou 10/8, Will 9.

Totals: Abilities 80 + Powers 41 + Advantages 19 + Skills 43 (86 ranks) + Defenses 15 = 198

HORN (RHINO CHIMERA)

The loyal Horn works as Rajah's lieutenant and is the strongest and most resilient of the chimeras serving Dr. Sersei. As a human, he was a scrawny office manager at the university with Dr. Sersei, who was enthralled by her passionate rants about how the world should work. Horn is loyal, but fairly lazy. He enjoys bossing people around. Although he respects Rajah, the only chimera Horn is friendly with is Tusk.

HORN PL 13

Use the **Hybrid** archetype from **Chapter 3** for Horn, with the following changes:

Rhino Animal Type: STR +3, STA +3 and Protection 3; rather than claws, his penetrating damage is a horn

Offense: Initiative +9, Horn +12 (Close, Damage 11)

Defense: Dodge 12, Parry 12, Fortitude 13, Toughness 14/12*, Will 10

MAKO (SHARK CHIMERA)

A former SCUBA diver and the most recent of Dr. Sersei's experiments, Mako was a "proof of concept" to demonstrate that her chimeras could manifest aquatic genetic traits and therefore settle the oceans as well as the land, further distributing the humanoid population. While Mako was enthusiastic about the chance to explore the ocean without her restrictive diving gear, the reality has been more uncomfortable and awkward.

Mako needs to spend at least an hour submerged in salt water every day, and spends much of her time in the dock area of the installation or exploring the island's reefs and waterways. Mako is solitary, which suits both her and the other chimeras, who dislike her. She has a difficult time controlling her bloodthirsty new instincts, even more so than Rajah, and might even turn on allies when seized with the frenzy of combat and the kill.

MAKO	PL 12
Use the **Hybrid** archetype from **Chapter 3** for Mako, with the following changes:	
Shark Animal Type: AGL +1, STA +1, Immunity 1 (drowning), Movement 1 (Environmental Adaptation: Water), Protection 3, Swimming 2; rather than claws, her penetrating damage is teeth	
Offense: Initiative +10, Bite +12 (Close, Damage 8)	
Defense: Dodge 13, Parry 12, Fortitude 11, Toughness 12/10*, Will 10	

SAAR (SNAKE CHIMERA)

Saar is a wiry and powerful wrestler, and speaks in a low, hissing tone. She is the most cold-blooded and detached of the chimeras loyal to Dr. Sersei, doing what she is told out of a sense of survival and the promise of eventual reward. She serves as Sersei's bodyguard out of a sense of practicality, keeping herself close to the seat of power until she can learn to escape her programming. Apply the **Snake** modifiers to Saar's abilities. In the Earth-Prime setting, Saar could easily be mistaken for a Serpent Person, and might even have some deep genetic ties to them. If the underground ruins on Aeaea are connected to Ophidian Lemuria, Saar might even be able to fool ancient spells or mechanisms there into thinking she is a Serpent Person. See **Atlas of Earth-Prime** and **Freedom City** for more about the Serpent People.

SAAR	PL 12
Use the **Hybrid** archetype from **Chapter 3** for Saar, with the following changes:	
Snake Animal Type: AGL +2, Enhanced Advantage 2 (Improved Grab, Improved Hold), Movement 1 (Slithering), Protection 2	
Smart: Saar has retained more of her intellect than most chimeras; her INT is 2	
Offense: Initiative +12, Claws +12 (Close, Damage 8)	
Defense: Dodge 14, Parry 12, Will 10, Fortitude 10, Toughness 10/8*	

TUSK (BOAR CHIMERA)

The boar chimera Tusk is almost as excited by the prospect of a fight as Rajah, but lacks the tiger's fierce ambition. A slacker by nature, he volunteered for the chance to gain super powers and so far finds the experience exciting, though he doesn't apply his new strength and senses to any particular end beyond playing video games. Tusk is fine following orders, hanging out with Horn, and awaiting the fruition of Dr. Sersei's plans to remake the world. He is assured that he will have a prominent place in the new world and be able to live like a king. The notion that he would not be rewarded doesn't even enter Tusk's fairly limited mind.

Of all the chimera's serving Dr. Sersei, Tusk is the least loyal. He sees the entire gig as a day job, and is beginning to miss the comforts of the mainland, like cheeseburgers and streaming services. Heroes who scout the installation and spy on the defenders likely see him complaining about the healthy food, missing a concert by his favorite band, or otherwise expressing his dissatisfaction.

TUSK	PL 11
Use the **Hybrid** archetype from **Chapter 3** for Tusk, with the following changes:	
Boar Animal Type: Str +2, Sta +2; rather than claws, his penetrating damage is tusks	
Offense: Initiative +9, Tusks +12 (Close, Damage 10)	
Defense: Dodge 12, Parry 12, Fortitude 12, Toughness 10/8*, Will 10	

MERCENARIES

A crew of three dozen hired mercenaries works for Dr. Sersei to provide security and added muscle on the island. In addition to their pay, the mercs receive regular "performance supplements" from the doctor, which include an additive to make the mercenaries more pliable and cooperative. Their attitude towards their employer is unusually Helpful and the mercs gain a +5 circumstance bonus on checks to resist efforts to get them to betray or compromise Dr. Sersei in any way. In spite of this, the mercenaries are not overly fond of the doctor's chimeras; their attitude is only Indifferent towards them and the feeling is largely mutual.

Apart from hunting or looking out for escaped rebel chimeras (see **Scene 2**), the mercenaries have little to break up their routine, making them lax. Heroes get a +2 circumstance bonus to Stealth and other checks to avoid the mercs' notice or otherwise catch them off-guard in an encounter until they are alerted to the characters' presence.

If the heroes choose to hit-and-run, taking down a few defenders at a time, keep track of the remaining soldiers and try to adjust defenders is various locations accordingly.

MERCENARIES (36)	PL 6
Use the **Soldier** archetype from **Chapter 3**, except their weapons are kinetic force-blasters rather than conventional firearms: blaster pistols +5 (Ranged Damage 5) and blaster rifles +5 (Ranged Damage 8).	

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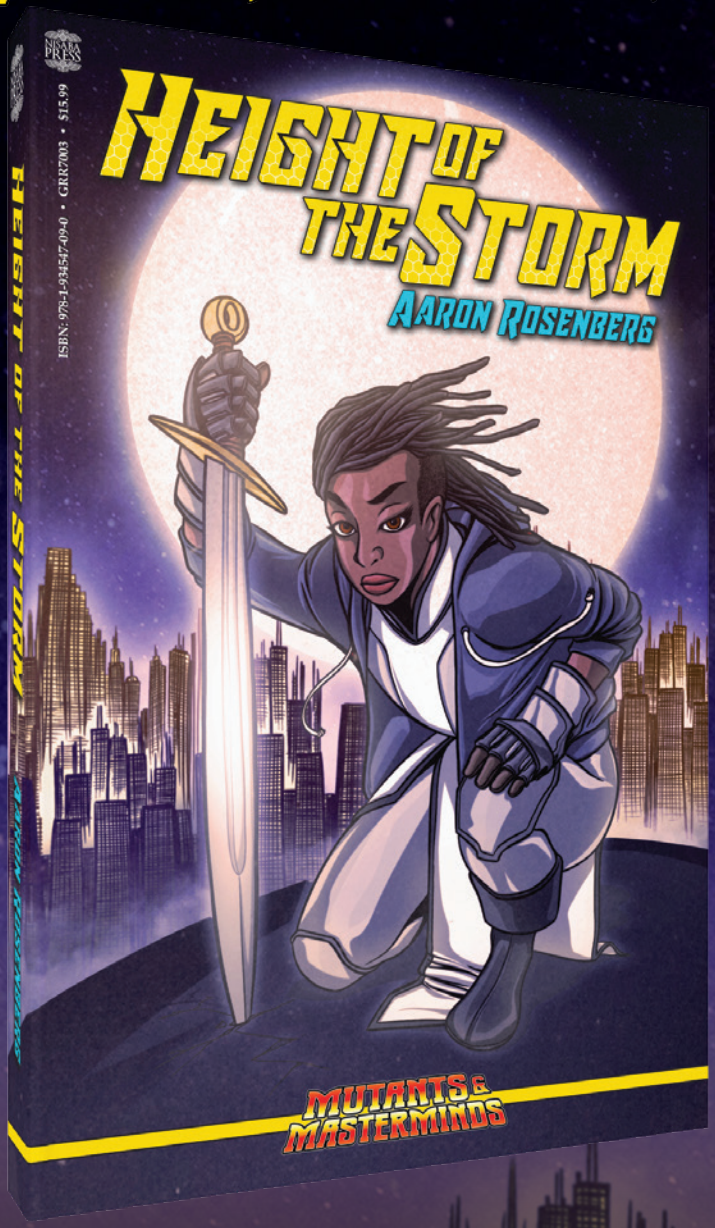

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