MUTANTS & MASTERMINDS
A MORE PERFECT UNION
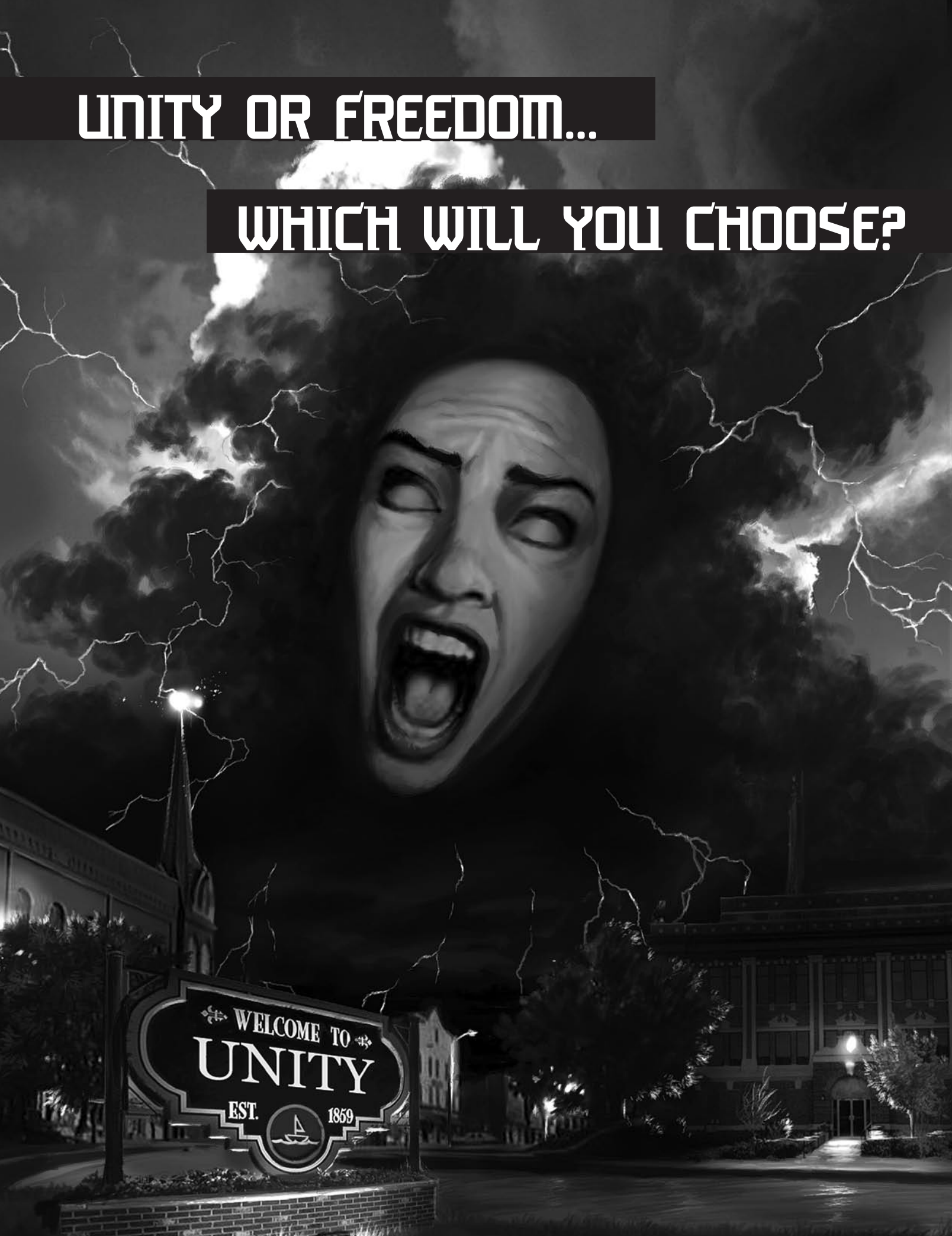## UNITY OR FREEDOM...WHICH WILL YOU CHOOSE?

WELCOME TO
UNITY
EST. 1859

A PARAGONS ADVENTURE BY STEVE KENSON

A MORE PERFECT UNION

A GREEN RONIN PRODUCTION

A PARAGONS ADVENTURE

Printed in the USA

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INTRODUCTION

A More Perfect Union is an introductory adventure for the *Paragons* campaign setting for the *Mutants & Masterminds* roleplaying game. It is designed for PL 6–8 characters, but can challenge higher power level characters with little modification. It is intended to give players a taste of the power and responsibility of being paranormal and places their characters in conflict with a newly emerged paranormal whose powers are a potential threat to the entire world if they're allowed to grow unchecked. Or perhaps this new paranormal is the future of humanity, depending on how the characters choose to look at it.

In this section you'll find the background information needed to run *A More Perfect Union*. If you are planning to play in this adventure, *you should read no further*. The rest of this book (except for the sample characters in the **Appendix**) is intended solely for the Gamemaster. You have been warned!

This **Introduction** describes the *Paragons* campaign setting in brief, summarizes the challenges of this adventure, how to get the player characters involved, the story's prime antagonist, and how to present this challenge to the players and deal with their characters' actions in response to it.

WHAT IS PARAGONS?

Paragons is a campaign setting sourcebook for the *Mutants & Masterminds* roleplaying game, focusing on the effects of people with superhuman powers—"paragons"—appearing and existing in a world not unlike our own, and therefore quite unlike the world seen in the traditional superhero comic books. *Paragons* looks at a world where power and its use have consequences and paranormals do more than just maintain the *status quo.*

Paragons is something of a do-it-yourself game setting in that many of the details of the world are left for the individual Gamemaster to decide from a variety of options. For example, the exact source of paranormal powers is unknown and no "official" explanation is forthcoming, allowing the GM to decide from a variety of choices (perhaps even more than one) as best suits the type of game the GM and players want.

A More Perfect Union is intended as a "pilot" adventure for a *Paragons* series. As such, it also doesn't make assumptions about the true origins or nature of paranormal abilities. So far as anyone knows, they simply exist, without any known reason or mechanism. After all, it's not the powers themselves that really matter, but what people do with them. That's what the *Paragons* setting (and, by extension, this adventure) is all about.

You can find out many more details about the setting in the *Paragons* campaign setting sourcebook, also from Green Ronin Publishing. However, you don't need that sourcebook in order to run this adventure; all that's required is the *Mutants & Masterminds* RPG rulebook, some dice, and players willing to venture into a new world or power and consequences, to become paragons and see where it leads them.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Trauma often triggers a paranormal's breakout, the realization of their superhuman potential. A traumatic event may also influence the shape and form of a paragon's powers. This is certainly the case with Carol Molloy, the inadvertent antagonist of this story. Carol—a married suburban elementary-school teacher—has always strongly valued and supported her family and her community.

Recently, a car accident left her comatose, and triggered her latent paranormal potential in a most unexpected way. Carol's unconscious mind sought out connections with the people around her, forging a telepathic link. This link brought about a literal "meeting of the minds." The people mentally connected to Carol mingled their consciousnesses, becoming a single mind, strongly influenced by her subconscious. What's more, they served as "carriers" of their mental connection, and passed it on to other people by physical contact. This has continued and the group-mind is expanding.

Guided by Carol's subconscious, this new "Unity" has taken on a life of its own. To the components of the Unity, their existence is infinitely better than that of ordinary people. They are connected in a most profound way. They are truly united in understanding and without hate, fear, or prejudice, and they want to share their newfound understanding with others, for their own good... whether they want it or not. Soon, everyone will understand the true meaning of belonging, and the world will be one, and finally at peace, unless someone does something to stop it.

GETTING THE CHARACTERS INVOLVED

Some of the exact details of *A More Perfect Union* have been left deliberately vague so you can tailor the story to suit your own ideas, and perhaps your own plans for an ongoing *Paragons* series. Therefore there are a number of different ways of getting the player characters involved in the events of this adventure.

The general assumption is Carol Molloy lives somewhere in North America, most likely the United States or Canada, but you should feel free to set this adventure (and the town of Unity) anywhere in the world you wish. The coordinating paranormal of the Unity could be in a hospital in Brussels, Hong Kong, New Delhi, Pretoria, Rio de Janeiro, or anywhere else you like. Likewise, the town itself might have a different name, or even be a borough, neighborhood, or a larger community.

Given the nature of the Unity's powers, there could even be "cells" scattered across the world as "carriers" make their way to different cities and countries, passing on their connection to the Unity as they do so. The Unity spreads much like an infectious disease, and the characters may encounter it in the same way they would an outbreak of a new plague. Keep in mind, however, that if the characters are some distance away from the Unifier when they encounter the Unity, their options for stopping the spread of the group-mind are more limited, at least until they track the "outbreak" back to its source.

Options for getting the characters involved in the adventure and incorporating their background into the world of *Paragons* include, but are by no means limited to, the following. Feel free to put your own spin on these ideas or come up with an entirely different one that suits your game. If your players are running the pre-generated characters from the **Appendix**, you can skip this section; their reasons for being in Unity at just the right (or wrong) time are already provided in their individual backgrounds.

FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS

It's possible the characters have crossed paths with Carol Molloy before she suffered her accident and became a paranormal. Perhaps they are part of Carol's community of family, friends, or neighbors. When they are exposed to her power for the first time, some of them become paranormal—or breakout—as well! Do they fall to the power of the Unity or escape and try to find some way to contain and overcome it?

Even if they don't know Carol, the characters might have friends or family who do. Perhaps someone close to the characters is one of the first people incorporated into the Unity, giving the characters a strong motivation to intervene. What do they do when they finally confront their loved one(s) as part of a collective entity out to assimilate them as well?

If you have normal human supporting characters as part of the player character's backgrounds, consider incorporating some of them into the Unity to give the dilemma a little extra personal weight for the players. Even if the supporting characters aren't from the town of Unity, they might go there for work, be passing through, or investigating some odd reports on their own when they run afoul of the group-mind.

ONGOING M&M GAMES

Perhaps you're more interested in using *A More Perfect Union* as an adventure in an ongoing *Mutants & Masterminds* series, either set in the *Freedom City* world or one of your own creation, rather than using it as an introduction to the *Paragons* setting and series. That's perfectly fine, and the adventure adapts well to other types of superhero settings with just a few adjustments.

First, if superhumans are well known in your setting (such as in a traditional comic book world), then what's happening in Unity isn't quite so unusual, although it's still out of the ordinary for the citizens of the small town. Still, the heroes and other characters may have a better idea of how to deal with "invasion" scenarios if they've faced alien hordes and invasions from the inner earth and such before encountering the Unity. In fact, if you have aliens in your setting, you can even make the adventure into more of a "body-snatching" scenario, with some kind of alien virus or "psychic parasite" at work.

If the characters are costumed superheroes of some kind, you'll either want to start the adventure with a low-key investigation or find some reason for the heroes to come swooping into town in full costume. In the first case, it's fairly easy: costumed heroes attract a lot of attention and, whatever is going on in Unity, its better if the heroes don't attract attention right away. So they might choose to investigate in their secret identities. If they work with the authorities in any capacity, they'll be encouraged to do so.

In the second case, the heroes either have a good idea of what's happening in Unity and want a show of strength, or they have no idea and they're in town for another reason, such as a charity, goodwill tour, or similar event. In the latter case, odds are it's a trap created by the group-mind to lure the heroes to Unity so they can be assimilated and it can control their powers.

Speaking of powers, in a more superheroic scenario, you may want to give the Unity additional powers so it can take on the heroes in a fight. Confronting the characters with the dilemma of fighting otherwise innocent people suits *Paragons* quite well, but makes for a somewhat dull comic book story if the players are expecting a big slugfest. You can have incorporation into the Unity grant some people enhanced Strength and Toughness, making them suitable "shock troops," or you can have some other superhumans fall victim to the group-mind before the heroes come along (perhaps during the **Prologue**) so they can serve as the Unity's protectors against the heroes later in the adventure.

Lastly, if you're using *A More Perfect Union* in a fairly four-color comic book game, you should offer a simpler solution to the dilemma of what to do about the Unity than those offered in **Chapter 3**. In essence, characters should be able to come up with a "cure" for the problem, and probably even bring Carol Molloy out of her coma to reunite her with her family for a nice and tidy comic book style happy ending. Forcing hard moral choices upon the heroes at the end of the adventure can jar the players out of what is otherwise an easygoing and light-hearted series

MOVED BY DESTINY

One element of the *Paragons* setting is the apparent power of coincidence: some might call it fate or destiny, others the intervention of higher powers. Whatever the case, sometimes events seem to conspire to make things happen in a certain way, and there are strange occurrences not linked to any particular paranormal agent. The gathering of the characters at the start of this adventure could be one such destined moment.

Essentially, each character, by apparent chance, ends up in or near Unity at the same time as the others, just in time for the start of the adventure. This is the approach taken with the pre-generated characters for this adventure, since their backgrounds are written out in advance. It requires a bit of work on your part to craft the necessary back-story if some or all of the players are using original characters, but it can be worth it since it creates a richer narrative.

The individual events landing the characters in Unity are practically endless, depending on their backgrounds and capabilities. Just a few possibilities include:

- The character feels drawn to the town by premonitions, strange dreams, or similar forebodings. This suits characters with any sort of paranormal sensory or mental powers.

- A mishap with a movement power like flight or teleportation literally lands the character in or near Unity and right in the middle of the unfolding situation.

- The character has to go to the town on business, for a job interview, to visit a relative or friend, or maybe is just passing through on the way to somewhere else when the events of the story begin.

- The characters all used to live in Unity and are returning for a planned event like a high-school reunion or even a family reunion. Little do they know how much they now have in common as paranormal forces are loose in their old hometown.

- One or more characters work for a government agency or secret organization investigating paranormal phenomena. They're sent to Unity to look into reports of unusual activity there. See the *Paragons* campaign setting sourcebook for a number of different factions or organizations that could employ the characters.

- Any combination of the previous options could apply to the characters, depending on how complex a back-story the GM wants to set up for the adventure.

THE UNITY AND FREEDOM CITY

If you want to use this adventure in a *Freedom City* series rather than in the *Paragons* campaign setting, you'll need to make a few other modifications to fit it into the world of Freedom. The easiest is to simply use the recommended four-color modifications described previously, making Carol Molloy an uncontrolled psychic and letting the heroes potentially cure her problem at the end of the adventure.

If you want to root things more in the world of Freedom, then perhaps the Unity is the result of more than just out-of-control mental powers. Instead, it is a kind of alien infection resulting from secret experimentation with Grue DNA (see *Freedom City*, page 233, for details). The alien genome is altering infected humans, creating a powerful group-mind not unlike the Grue Unity, with similarly xenophobic and aggressive tendencies. For an added complication, the virus could also be granting victims Grue-like shape-changing powers! These could start out as simple ranks in Morph but progress to true Shapeshifting, making the Unity a serious threat even for a team of superheroes! They have to come up with a way of reversing the condition and of applying it before the virus can spread beyond the town of Unity to infect others.

CALL FOR HELP

When the telepathic group-mind first begins spreading through Unity, it's possible for a small number of people to initially resist its influence. Someone might try calling one or more of the characters for help, telling them something strange is going on.

You can also have one of Carol Molloy's kids (see the **The Molloy Family** in the **Prologue**) contact one or more of the characters. It might be anything from an anonymous e-mail to a direct phone call (probably placed from a phone booth or somewhere outside the Molloy home to avoid suspicion). You'll need to come up with a reason why the young Molloys would contact the characters rather than someone else, perhaps some kind of pre-existing relationship (as in the **Friends and Neighbors** section, previously).

Keep in mind that the people in town aren't likely to understand exactly what's happening: they're not going to phrase their call for help in terms of a sinister telepathic group-intelligence taking over their town, although they might use terms like "body snatchers," "pod people," or things like that to describe how others around them are acting strangely.

If the characters ask why this isn't a matter for the police, the victim can explain that the cops seem affected too and it's impossible to know who to trust. For added effect, you can have the call mysteriously get cut off, or make it so the characters are unable to make contact with their friend later, so they don't know what's happening until they get to Unity.

WITH GREAT POWER...

If the characters are already paranormal, then perhaps they caused Carol's coma! A power flare-up or a near miss dur-ing a paranormal battle could have caused Carol Molloy's injuries, putting her in the hospital and triggering her powers to breakout. Perhaps the characters were involved in the car accident in some fashion (passengers on a bus, perhaps) or simply witnesses to it, the shock and adrenaline leading to a breakout of their own powers. This gives the characters an immediate connection. In a way, they are ultimately responsible for the situation and the events that follow.

ON A MISSION

Paranormal characters working for the authorities might investigate the initial outbreak of the Unity. Characters with paranormal senses—particularly Psychic Awareness—may detect the Unity's activities and choose to investigate. Any authority is sure to consider the Unity a grave threat, and order its agents to do whatever they can to deal with the problem.

When the Unity first manifests publicly, do the local or national authorities insist on dealing with it, or are they willing to accept aid from foreign or United Nations paranormals? What happens if the locals refuse outside aid, but then fall prey to the Unity? Do foreign authorities choose to violate national boundaries and launch a pre-emptive strike against the Unity? The characters may choose to defy the authorities in order to deal with the threat while it is still manageable.

THE RELIEF TEAM

Finally, it's possible the characters are not the first paranormals to encounter or attempt to deal with the Unity. If so, the Unity may already include paragons among its number, and it will certainly use them and their powers to deal with any other paranormal threats to its existence (incorporating them into its structure as well, if possible). If you use this option, you might want to modify the **Prologue** to include paranormal investigators rather than police officers, having them incorporated into the group-mind so the characters can encounter them later in the adventure.

THE UNITY

The entity that calls itself "the Unity" is a collective consciousness created by the paranormal telepathic powers of Carol Molloy, but not really under her conscious control. Since Carol is comatose, her powers are directed entirely by her subconscious mind and her own desire for community, peace, and understanding. While these impulses are driven by the best intentions, combined with her unleashed powers they've created a being that is more than the sum of its parts and poses a real threat to the free will and individuality of everyone who comes into contact with it.

The Unity—which refers to itself in the plural as "us"—is a collective being. Its primary drive is the feeling of peace and oneness people experience when incorporated into the collective consciousness. Individual drives (and concerns) are overwhelmed by the experience of the whole, while new

THE UNIFIER (CAROL MOLLOY)   PL 10

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
−1	+0	+0	+12/+1	+12/+1	+1
8	10	11	34/12	35/13	12

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+0	+2	+2	+15

Skills: Diplomacy 4 (+5), Knowledge (civics) 2 (+14), Knowledge (current events) 4 (+16), Knowledge (history) 4 (+16), Notice 2 (+14), Profession (teacher) 6 (+18), Profession (writer) 4 (+16), Sense Motive 2 (+14)

Feats: Second Chance (Will saves vs. Mind Control), Ultimate Effort (Will saves)

Powers: Enhanced Intelligence 40 (Limited to a bonus equal to the force modifier of the Unity; see the **Appendix** for details, effectively at rank 22), **Enhanced Wisdom 40** (same as Enhanced Intelligence, effectively at rank 22), **Mind Control 9** (Mind Blank, Mind Link, Subtle; Conscious, Contagious, Sensory Link, Sustained Duration; Requires Grapple, Touch Range), **Mind Reading 9** (Sustained Duration; Limited to Mind Control subjects)

Combat: Attack +0, Grapple −1, Damage −1 (unarmed), Defense +0, Knockback −0, Initiative +0

Drawbacks: Disabled (comatose, very common, major, −5 points)

Abilities 6 + Skills 7 (28 ranks) + Feats 2 + Powers 88 + Combat 0 + Saves 7−Drawbacks 5 = Total 105

experiences, knowledge, and memories are incorporated into the collective. In essence, the Unity is an addict. It exists to incorporate new minds (and therefore new experiences and knowledge), and it firmly believes it is the future of humanity. After all, it represents a society of perfect peace and understanding. Who wouldn't want that?

Physically, Carol Molloy is still an ordinary human being. Her paranormal power is entirely psychic in nature. However, the Unity has a "body" made up of numerous individual people, which "they" see as analogous to the cells or organs of an individual creature. Its components are all parts of it, but the collective consciousness exists beyond any one component. Still, Molloy is the key component of the Unity, its brain or heart. Without her powers, it could not exist. (Although it's possible it may evolve beyond that point, see **Chapter 3**, for more details.) Carol's game statistics are given here.

THE MECHANICS OF THE UNITY

The Unity is based on Carol Molloy's paranormal power, namely her Mind Control (see the Unifier's game stats for
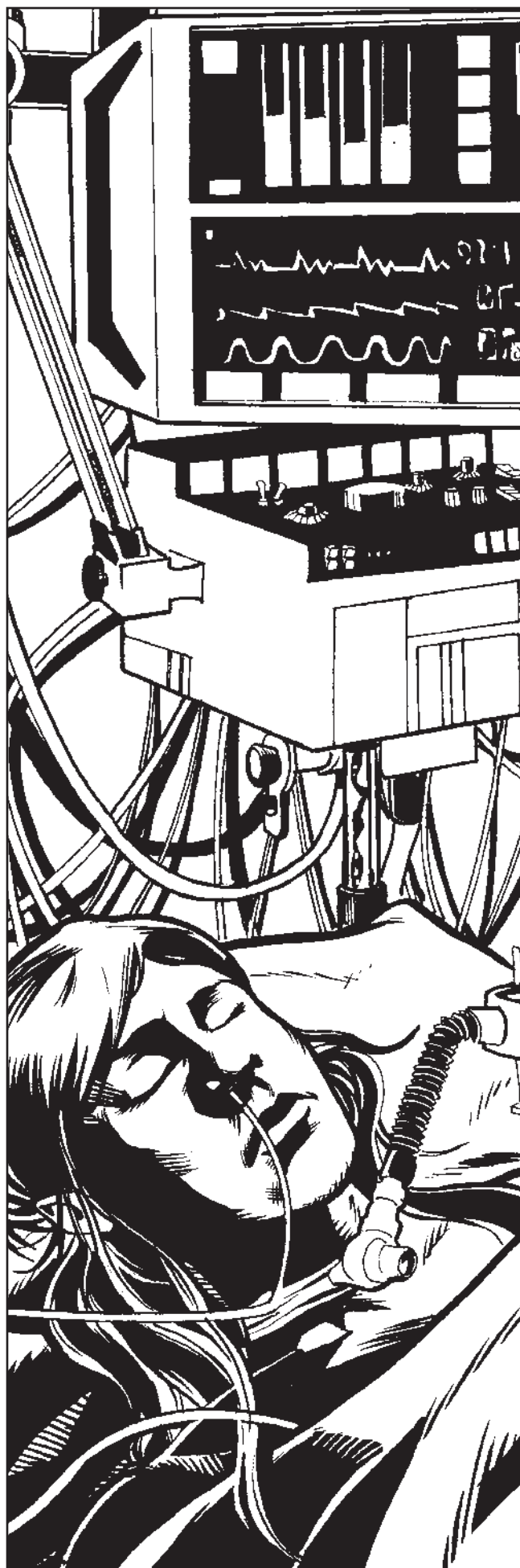
more information). Because the Mind Control effect is Contagious, the entire Unity can "use" the power effectively.

Whenever someone comes into prolonged physical contact with a member of the Unity, they must make a Will saving throw (DC 19 for the power's rank). A failed save means the victim falls under the influence of the group-mind and begins the process of assimilation into the Unity. A successful save means the victim is able to shake off the mental influence, and the Unity cannot attempt to incorporate that mind for at least 24 hours as it "adjusts" to the subject's mental defenses (of course, potential victims don't necessarily know this).

Note that the operative word in the previous condition is "prolonged" physical contact: simply touching someone who is part of the Unity won't "infect" you with the group-mind. It takes at least several seconds for the effect to take hold. In game-terms, this means a member of the Unity must successfully grapple or be grappled by someone in order to infect them. Out of combat, physical contact like a prolonged handshake or embrace can also do the trick, but give the potential victim a Sense Motive check (DC 15) to pick up that something is amiss and pull away at the last possible moment. Groups of Unity hosts can (and do) work together to grapple potential targets in order to infect them.

Once someone falls under the Unity's influence, the victim's subconscious continues to struggle, trying to break free. This is represented by additional Will saves for each interval on the Time Progression table that passes (see *M&M,* page 70); so a victim gets a new Will saving throw after one minute, then 5 minutes, 20 minutes, and so forth. The intervals get progressively longer as the subject's resistance weakens until, after about a month's time, the victim is essentially

MENTAL CONTACT

If there is a paragon in the group with mental powers, particularly Mind Reading or Mind Control, you may also wish to include "mental contact" as a means of passing on the influence of the Unity. So any character attempting to read or control the mind of someone who has been assimilated feels a powerful presence reaching back across the link to touch their mind!

If you're feeling merciful, or don't want to trip the players up too soon, you can give the player of the mentalist the opportunity to "pull out" of the mental contact, either willingly or by granting a Will save to represent reflexively pulling away before it's too late (this is in addition to the normal Will save the character would get to resist the Unity's influence). It's sure to make the players wary about using their characters' mental powers casually while in Unity.

Note this doesn't apply if the characters go directly into "mental space" intending to *fight* the Unity. The drawback is, if they lose, they're certain to be either incorporated into the group-mind or dead. See **Combating the Unity** for details.

incorporated entirely into the group-mind (gaining another save only after a year passes).

Given the difficulty of the Will save, few ordinary people can overcome the Unity's influence, although a small percentage manages to do so. Like people who succeed on the initial Will save, they are protected for 24 hours as the Unity adjusts to their resistance, but it can then infect them again, and few people manage to escape influence more than once.

The spread of the group-mind is also insidious: the Unity's Mind Control is Subtle, so victims need to succeed on a Sense Motive check (DC 20) in order to even be aware of the mental influence! Their efforts to fight off the effect (the Will saving throw) is an entirely subconscious response, so potential victims might not even be aware of narrowly escaping incorporation into the group consciousness. Potential victims with Mental Awareness or a similar mental sense can detect the Unity's influence, and the group-mind is wary of such people, as they represent a potential threat.

Members of the group consciousness are capable of behaving like their "normal" selves (because the Mind Control effect has the Conscious modifier), but observers might pick up on hints of unusual behavior (Sense Motive check to notice influence, DC 19). Members of the Unity tend to look a bit distracted and they all tend to respond in unison, even to the point of often blinking and breathing in rhythm.

THE UNITY AND KNOWLEDGE

Since all components of the Unity are in constant telepathic contact, it can draw upon their collective knowledge. It's up to the Gamemaster whether or not the Unity "knows" particular skills or information, and to what degree, but the larger the collective mind grows, the more capable it becomes, as the limits on the Unifier's Enhanced Intelligence and Wisdom continue to increase. Also keep in mind the Unity knows anything an incorporated player character knows, which may compromise the characters' secrets or plans.

You can generally assume the Unity needs to make Mind Reading checks to learn specific information from a character's mind until that character is fully incorporated into the group consciousness, after failing several Will saves. Then the Unity knows everything that person knows, automatically.

At least initially—when the Unity is made up of the people of a small American town—its skills and knowledge are not overly broad, although you can assume it has an effective bonus of +5 in the most common skills, particular things like Knowledge and Profession. As it grows and incorporates more people from outside the area, its skill-base will grow rapidly. Should it come into contact and assimilate military personnel, particularly career officers, its Knowledge (tactics) skill in particular will increase, along with awareness of what to do to counter any military offensive against it...

COMBATING THE UNITY

There are essentially three ways for characters to combat the Unity: physically, mentally, or using paranormal powers to neutralize its mental "network." Each option has its strengths and weaknesses.

PHYSICAL

Physically, the Unity is much like any other collection of individuals, except they are all aware of what the other components know and feel, and can communicate instantly and silently. You may want to use the Mass Combat guidelines from the **Appendix** for some encounters with the Unity, particularly its normal human components. Paranormals are more likely to encounter hordes of ordinary humans; along with whatever paranormals the Unity has incorporated, if any. Depending on the circumstances, the Unity's bodies may have the opportunity to arm themselves. If the Unity starts taking over a military base, watch out!

By paranormal standards, the physical components of the Unity are fairly harmless—they're ordinary human beings—but there are likely to be a *lot* of them. The greatest danger they pose is passing on the group-mind's mental influence by touch, although a huge, coordinated mob can still threaten many paranormals. Even if the characters are capable of inflicting tremendous damage—essentially killing the Unity's components at will—the entity isn't significantly affected by the loss of any of its components, and the paranormals have to consider whether or not they're willing to kill otherwise innocent people for basically no great effect.

The exception, and the Unity's sole physical vulnerability, is Carol Molloy's body. If she is killed, the Unity ceases to exist. Naturally, the Unity does everything it can to prevent this information from getting out, and protects Carol's body at all costs. Actually killing the comatose schoolteacher is relatively easy; she's completely helpless and physically a normal human. It requires only a full-round *coup de grace* action to do the deed (see **Helpless Defenders**, *M&M,* page 162), provided nothing stops the attacker. Of course, it's another matter whether or not the characters are willing to kill a helpless and unaware person in cold blood.

MENTAL

Paranormals with mental powers may try fighting the Unity psychically. This is a more effective approach, since the entity's collective mind *can* be attacked and overcome in psychic combat. However, so long as Carol Molloy is still alive, psychic combat cannot truly defeat the Unity. Use Carol's game statistics to reflect the entity's mind, meaning it has a Will save of +15 and the Ultimate Will Save feat. You can also use Gamemaster Fiat to give the Unity temporary power feats like Mental Blast. For an extended mental combat with the Unity, use the mental grappling rules (see *M&M,* page 157).

If the characters overcome the Unity in mental combat, they have a shot at destroying it. Essentially, Carol's mental defenses are down until she would normally recover. If the characters press the mental attack, they can cause a fatal cerebral hemorrhage, killing Carol and dissolving the Unity. If they don't, however, the Unity continues to exist and recovers from the effects of the mental combat. Simply "knocking out" the entity won't get rid of it for good (since Carol is technically unconscious all the time already).

On the other hand, if the characters lose the mental combat with the Unity, they're automatically assimilated into the group-mind, just as if they'd lost their Will save against it. Hopefully the next group will have better luck.

If you want to avoid simply pitting the paranormals with mental powers against the Unity while the others just stand around, you can have all of the characters psychically enter a "mindscape" to struggle with the Unity on a psychic level. Use the characters' mental abilities in place of their physical ones and allow their symbolic struggle to support the efforts of the psychic paranormals.

PARANORMAL

Lastly, characters might try and use powers like Nullify to overcome the Unity's Mind Control. If the Unity's power is successfully countered or otherwise negated, the affected components in the area are freed from its influence, able to think for themselves once again. Anyone freed from the Unity is permanently free—the Mind Control effect won't reassert itself—but they can still be reassimilated into the group-mind through contact with other members of the Unity.

NEGOTIATED RESULTS

ATTITUDE	RESULT
Hostile	If negotiations go poorly, the Unity considers the characters a serious threat to its existence and will do whatever it takes to either assimilate or destroy them in order to remove that threat. It attacks the characters practically non-stop so long as they are in or around the town.
Unfriendly	Unmoved by the characters' arguments, the Unity decides its original assumptions were correct: most of humanity will never willingly accept its existence or incorporation into the group-mind and therefore they must be assimilated by force or cunning for their own good, starting with the characters. It may not attack outright, but will lie or try to otherwise try to trick the heroes so it can overcome them.
Indifferent	The Unity agrees the characters are not a threat to it and will allow them to go, if they absolutely refuse incorporation into the group-mind. However, it insists that they allow their memories of their experiences in town to be adjusted to remove all knowledge of the Unity's existence (via a power stunt of the entity's Mind Control power). If they refuse, the Unity has no choice but to assimilate them or forcibly mind-wipe them and eject them from its territory.
Helpful	The Unity is willing to let the characters leave the town, knowing of its existence, provided they promise not to reveal what they know about it to the outside world. It agrees to stop assimilating new minds for the time being and to continue negotiating with the characters and learning more about the wider world and its place in it.
Friendly	The Unity is actually willing to allow the characters to represent its interests with the outside world. It agrees to let them leave Unity and inform others of its existence, and to carry its wishes to the authorities, if they are willing to do so. It even lets them take Kevin and Derek Molloy with them, if the characters argue that the boys would be happier and safer living outside the Unity.
Fanatic	If the characters somehow manage to achieve this tremendous level of success, they actually convince the Unity to end its own existence by freeing everyone from the group-mind. Note that given the incredibly high DC for this result (even if they first shift the Unity to a Friendly attitude), this outcome is extremely unlikely unless one or more of the characters have superhuman Charisma and interaction skills to match.

If Carol's power is directly Nullified, the *entire* Unity ceases to exist for as long as her power is negated. If and when the Nullify effect wears off, however, the Unity reasserts itself, although it has to start rebuilding itself again and adding new components. Unless a paranormal guard intends to continue Nullifying Carol's power 24 hours a day, and insulating her from all human contact, the threat of the Unity is not truly ended.

People freed from the Unity have no conscious memory of their time under its influence. You may decide that the Unity experience is psychologically addictive, however. Former components of the consciousness might seek to return to it, which can further complicate things for the player characters. People "rescued" from the Unity—including their friends—may not be very grateful, just the opposite, in fact. They may turn on the paranormals in order to try and regain the psychic union and bliss they once had. The long-term effects of incorporation into the Unity are left for the Gamemaster to explore.

NEGOTIATING WITH THE UNITY

It may be that characters don't want to fight the Unity (at least, not right away). They may try communicating and negotiating with the group-mind in order to avoid conflict, or to try and put a stop to it, once it starts.

Generally, the Unity's initial attitude towards the characters is likely to be Unfriendly (see **Interaction**, *M&M,* page 175), not because it has any reason to dislike them but simply because the entity is relatively inexperienced, and somewhat frightened and threatened by individuals. It knows enough from the experiences of its hosts to understand that most people will perceive it as a threat to them and won't willingly become a part of it, even if it's for their own good. This is why the Unity has moved cautiously and why it conceals its existence as long as possible. In fact, the group-mind won't negotiate with the characters at all so long as there's a chance they don't know it exists; they'll have to call it out in order to begin a dialog.

Once they begin open discussion with the Unity, the group will find it highly intelligent (since it's able to draw upon the brain-power and knowledge of all its components, like a massively parallel computer system), but also somewhat naive and alien. It is capable of speaking through any of its hosts, possibly even multiple bodies at once, unless the characters insist on speaking to a single "representative."

The outcome of negotiations with the Unity, that is, what it is willing to accept, is based on the group-mind's final attitude as shown on the **Negotiated Results** table.

PROLOGUE: TO PROTECT AND SERVE

This **Prologue** is an optional introduction to the events in *A More Perfect Union.* It presents an opportunity for the players to get a hint of what's going on in Unity before their characters do so, much like a television teaser before the credits or a movie trailer before seeing a film. It helps to drive home the potential threat of the Unity and its effect on ordinary people's lives without necessarily risking the player's characters right from the very start (since there will be plenty of that in the other chapters of the adventure).

Read over the **Prologue** and see if it's something you're interested in running for your players. If so, use the pre-generated characters at the end of the adventure to do so. If you'd rather the players have no hint of what is happening before their characters arrive in Unity, you can simply skip this part of the adventure and begin with **Chapter 1: Welcome to Unity** as described in the following pages.

THE SET-UP

Make copies of the pre-generated Unity Police Officer archetype sheet from the **Appendix** of this book and give one to each of the players. You can either run any extra characters as NPCs in this part of the adventure or simply save them for later use in the story. Give the players a few moments to acquaint themselves with the character sheets, answer any question they might have, and then read the following introduction aloud to them:

> *Just another quiet night in Unity and not a lot is going on at the local police department. A couple of you just returned to the station from a coffee run to Ruth's Diner when the call comes in from the dispatcher: a 911 call from a kid at number 27 Holloway Drive, claiming his father is trying to kill him! In no time, you're out to the cars and on the way!*
>
> *Number 27 is a split-level in one of the nearby neighborhoods of Unity. The name on the mailbox is "Molloy" and from the outside, there's nothing to indicate any trouble at the house.*

Make a secret Notice check for the characters (DC 10). Any who succeed recall the name on the mailbox: Carol Molloy, a local elementary teacher, and her two kids were recently in a bad car accident—one or more of the officers might have even responded on the scene. The kids were okay but Mrs. Molloy suffered some serious injuries and was hospitalized. (If you prefer, you can simply roll dice out of sight of the players and then give them this information, whatever the result.)

Allow the players to approach the situation however they feel is best, reminding them that for a domestic disturbance such as this, they're supposed to knock on the door and identify themselves first.

When they do so, Tom Molloy answers the door with a somewhat dejected look on his face. He's in his late 30s, with sandy-colored hair and a few laugh lines around his eyes and mouth, dressed casually in a polo shirt and a pair of jeans. He asks if there's a problem and invites the officers inside the house.

When told about the emergency call, Molloy apologizes profusely, shaking his head. "I was afraid Kevin might have called you," he explains, going on to tell the officers how his wife, Carol and their two children were in a serious car accident only a few days ago. The boys suffered only minor injuries, but Carol Molloy was left hospitalized in a coma. He has been doing his best to take care of the boys since then, but he's afraid the trauma of the accident, combined with some wild imaginations and displaced anger, has led them to act out, thus the false 911 call.
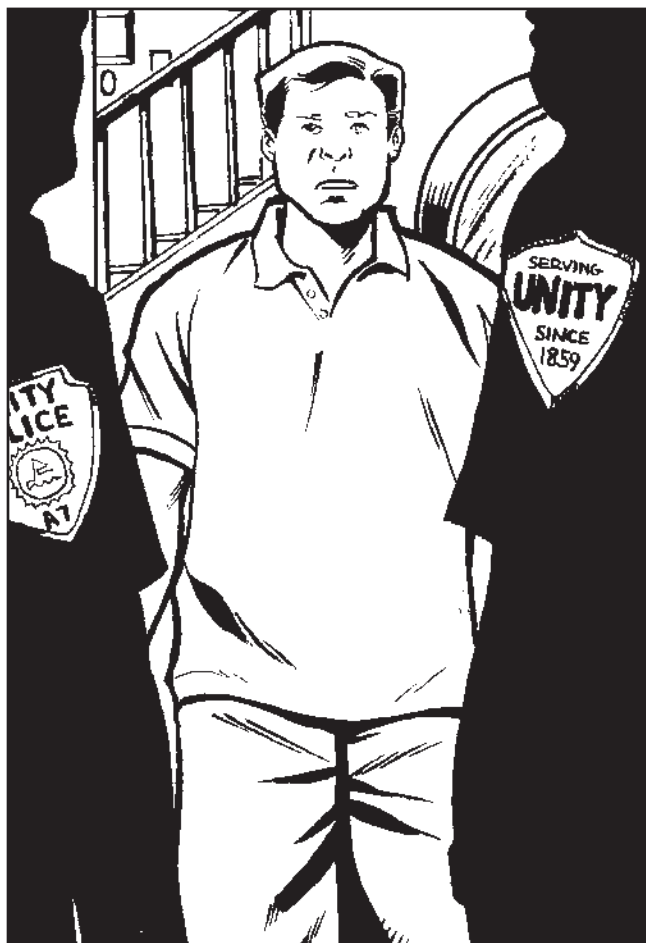
"I'd really appreciate it if you could overlook this," Mr. Molloy asks. "They're good kids and have never done anything like this before."

Just then, the characters notice a pair of eyes peeking out from between the rails of a banister on the stairs.

FATHER KNOWS BEST

Read the following aloud to the players:

> "Kevin," Mr. Molloy says in a flat, level tone, "come down here." When the boy on the stairs hesitates, he adds, "now!" in a sharper tone.
>
> A sheepish and scared-looking kid, about eight or nine years old, slumps down the stairs, avoiding looking at his father.
>
> "I want you to come over here and apologize to these police officers for calling them out here like this."
>
> "No," the boy mutters.
>
> "What did you say?"
>
> "No!" he says louder, looking up to meet your eyes for the first time. "Don't listen to him! He's not my dad! He's one of them..."
>
> "Kevin, that's enough!" Mr. Molloy says, taking a step towards his son. Kevin backs away with a look of terror on his face.
>
> "Don't touch me!" he yells, scampering backwards towards the stairs. "Stay away! Leave us alone!" Bursting into tears, the boy runs up the stairs, followed by the slamming of a door moments thereafter.

Feel free to paraphrase the above exchange, allowing the players to break-in with their own comments and dialog, and let them react as they see fit to the situation.

They might be able to calm Kevin Molloy down (DC 20 Bluff or Diplomacy check, given his current agitated state). Any suggestion that they're on his father's side, however, increases the DC to 30, convincing Kevin the cops are "in on it" and just as out to get him.

If any of the characters attempt to forcibly restrain Kevin, have them make an attack roll (against Defense 10) to grab him and a grapple check to hold him (or just assume the character is successful in doing so, given Kevin's size and relatively weak Strength, which give him a –2 grapple modifier). He kicks and screams to be let go and doesn't stop until he's freed or rendered unconscious.

Either way, Tom Molloy apologies again for his son's behavior and claims that it has to do with his wife's accident, but otherwise he has no idea what to do. If the characters suggest taking Kevin (and possibly his brother) to see a doctor, Mr. Molloy agrees and cooperates however he can.

If the officers let Kevin go, make a Notice check (DC 10) for the characters. Those who succeed hear noise from outside the house a few minutes later from Derek and Kevin climbing down from their bedroom window using a large nearby tree. They try to sneak out of the house and run away, but they're not especially stealthy, nor are they fast enough to outrun the officers for very long if pursued. If one or more officers go upstairs immediately, they might catch the boys headed out the window. Otherwise, they just find the open window and no sign of Derek or Kevin.

If questioned, Derek Molloy is a bit more articulate than his brother, although he's no less frightened by what's happening. He can essentially—in the words of a fairly well spoken twelve year-old—tell the officers the following:

- He and his brother were in the car with their mother when the accident happened. They got banged up (Derek can point out various cuts and scrapes) but weren't seriously hurt. Their mother, on the other hand, ended up in the hospital and she's in a coma.

- After the accident was when things started getting strange. Their father stopped taking the boys to the hospital to visit their mother after a few days. He also became increasingly distracted: forgetting to do routine things and often staring off into space. Derek even heard him muttering to himself from time to time but, when asked, he denied anything was wrong.

- Then both boys noticed a frightening sensation, "Like bugs crawling all over your brain," Derek says, "trying to get inside." Worse was that they both noticed it whenever their father touched or hugged them. He became even more distant, forcing them to stay home, or even in their rooms, when they weren't at school. This morning, he told them not to go to school at all, but also kept them inside the house.

- "He's just not acting like our dad at all," Derek tries to explain. "It so creepy, but I don't understand..."

REACH OUT...

At some point during the encounter, Tom Molloy attempts to touch one or more of the characters, just for a few moments. It might be an overly long handshake initially (Sense Motive check, DC 19 to pick up on it). If an officer is wrestling with Kevin, Molloy might jump in to "lend a hand," allowing him to come into contact with that person. If a character gets distracted, Molloy might sneak up behind him (opposed Stealth vs. Notice check, using his +0 Stealth modifier), clapping a hand on his shoulder and leaving it there just long enough. He might even fake a breakdown in order to get a sympathetic hug or arm across the shoulders (Sense Motive check, DC 15, to pick up that he's faking it).

Make a Will saving throw for any character who comes into contact with Tom Molloy for more than a few seconds (DC 19). A failed save means the character falls under the influence of the Unity and will attempt to do the same to the other characters. Take the player(s) aside and tell them their characters have fallen under outside mental influence and must spread it to the other characters by coming in

MOLLOY HOUSE

Climbing Tree

Backyard

Living Room

Kitchen

Laundry

Study

Dining

Garage

Porch

1 SQUARE = 5FT.

Climbing Tree

Backyard

Boys' Bedroom

Closet

Guest Room

Master Bedroom

SCM

physical contact with them; you can also pass the players of the affected characters a note to the same effect, if you want them in on it.

Alternately, you can simply assume control of the officers influenced by the Unity, having them act in accordance to the group-mind's wishes to assimilate the others. How this scene unfolds depends on how the players react to the characters initially falling victim to the Unity: it's unlikely Molloy will be able to affect more than two of them at once, so the others may have an opportunity to react. Let the players take whatever actions they want, keeping in mind they don't really know anything about the nature of the Unity or its powers.

FADE TO BLACK

Once all or at least a majority of the police officers are assimilated into the group-mind, you can simply fade out on this scene. Play it out for as long as it's tense and interesting. If it seems like the officers are getting the upper hand, feel free to fudge things a bit, perhaps giving one of the Unity members a "lucky" die roll. You can always have some other members of the growing group-mind show up to give Molloy some help, since every member of the Unity knows what every other one knows.

Some players might get the idea from this **Prologue** that Tom Molloy is behind whatever strange things are happening in Unity, and even that he is somehow responsible for his wife's accident. Let them; it will keep them guessing when

their paragon characters arrive in town and start investigating on their own. Likewise, they might wonder what happens to the police officers: to find out, go on to **Chapter 1**.

THE MOLLOY FAMILY

Central to the events of *A More Perfect Union* are Carol Molloy's husband, Tom, and two children, Derek and Kevin (ages 12 and 8, respectively), in particular because Derek and Kevin are the only people in town (including the player characters) who are immune to the Unity's influence, creating an opportunity for the heroes and a conundrum for the Unity it has not yet resolved.

The exact reason for Derek and Kevin Molloy's immunity is unknown and no explanation is provided. It might be an inherited genetic immunity or latent paranormal power, a flaw in the Unifier's powers, the result of their being involved in the same car accident, or some other completely unknown factor(s). It's given as a "power" in the brothers' game stats, but that doesn't mean they are necessarily paranormals for the purposes of anyone able to detect such things, unless you specifically decide they are

The Molloy brothers can serve as both innocent victims for the heroes to protect and potential allies, given their immunity and awareness of what's going on in the town. They can provide useful pieces of information to fill-in the puzzle of the Unity and, depending on how you want to end the adventure, they may even be instrumental in stopping it. See Small Miracles on page 42 for additional information.

cooperate with plans to directly harm people, especially his family, and might even betray the characters to the Unity if they reveal to him a plan to hurt his mother, for example.

KEVIN MOLLOY   PL 1

Str 6	Dex 10	Con 10	Int 13	Wis 13	Cha 11

Skills: Concentration 2 (+3), Knowledge (popular culture) 2 (+3), Notice 2 (+3), Sense Motive 2 (+3)

Feats: None

Powers: Immunity 1 (Unity powers)

Combat: Attack +0, Grapple −2, Damage −2 (unarmed), Defense +0, Knockback −0, Initiative +0

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

Abilities 3 + Skills 2 (8 ranks) + Feats 0 + Powers 1 + Combat 0 + Saves 2 = Total 8

Eight year-old Kevin is a precocious, bookish kid who loves to read and bug his older brother, including beating him regularly at video games. He actually enjoys school for the most part, perhaps because his mother is a teacher and instilled in him a love of learning from an early age.

Closer to their mother than Derek, Kevin was devastated by the accident and her condition. Things got worse when his father and other people began acting strangely. Everyone Kevin would have normally turned to for help and guidance was gone. They said they really wanted what was best for him and Derek, but Kevin could tell it wasn't true, that they just weren't themselves. He didn't know what to do, except to try and call for help, but even the police were in on it.

Kevin is, among other things, a fan of comic books and superheroes, so he's more likely than his brother to grasp at straws of hope offered by the characters, especially if they demonstrate any "cool" powers in his presence. Kevin will associate them with his beloved superheroes and try and get them to save the day. He might even try giving them proper "code-names" ("Superheroes need code-names," he'll explain quite seriously.)

If the characters are in dire need of a helpful hint or a plan of action (or a player spends a hero point for inspiration), you might want to have Kevin Molloy pipe up with an innocent insight or suggestion in an "out of the mouths of babes" fashion.

DEREK MOLLOY   PL 1

Str 7	Dex 11	Con 11	Int 10	Wis 12	Cha 12

Skills: Acrobatics 2 (+2), Climb 2 (+0), Knowledge (popular culture) 2 (+2), Perform (wind instruments) 2 (+3), Sense Motive 2 (+3), Stealth 2 (+2)

Feats: None

Powers: Immunity 1 (Unity powers)

Combat: Attack +0, Grapple −2, Damage −2 (unarmed), Defense +0, Knockback −0, Initiative +0

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

Abilities 3 + Skills 3 (12 ranks) + Feats 0 + Powers 1 + Combat 0 + Saves 5 = Total 12

Twelve year-old Derek Molloy is an active, energetic boy interested in sports (he plays soccer at school), video games, and music (he plays the saxophone). He does well at school, although not quite as well as his younger brother. Derek likes to think of himself as very grown-up and has taken responsibility for looking after Kevin since the accident. He really doesn't know what's happening in his hometown, but all the possibilities freak him out, so he's scared, although he tries not to show it in front of Kevin.

Derek's primary goal is getting help for himself and his brother and, by extension, for their parents and whole town. In spite of everything that has happened, Derek loves his parents and his home very much and just wants things to go back to normal. He's initially indifferent in attitude to any strangers, but willing to be convinced the characters mean no harm and can perhaps even help. He won't in any way

TOM MOLLOY   PL 1

Str 10	Dex 10	Con 10	Int 11	Wis 12	Cha 11

Skills: Computers 6 (+6), Gather Information 4 (+4), Knowledge (popular culture) 2 (+2), Knowledge (technology) 6 (+6), Notice 2 (+3), Profession (writer) 6 (+7), Sense Motive 2 (+3)

Feats: None

Powers: None

Combat: Attack +1, Grapple +1, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +1, Knockback −0, Initiative +0

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

Abilities 4 + Skills 7 (28 ranks) + Feats 0 + Powers 0 + Combat 4 + Saves 4 = Total 19

Carol Molloy's husband Tom is a loving husband and father. A technical writer by trade, Tom has worked mostly from home since Kevin was born, allowing him to work while the boys are in school and care for them while his wife is working. He was the first outsider assimilated into the Unity when he visited Carol at the Marshfield Clinic, but his attempts to bring the children into the fold proved confusingly ineffective, leading to the current situation.

Like everyone else in the Unity, Tom is normally a pretty reasonable and decent person, but he's not himself in more ways than one. Most of the time, he's fully a part of the group-mind, acting in concert with everyone else in the Unity. However, the plight of his children is tearing at Tom deep down and (at the GM's discretion) could give him the strength he needs to overcome the Unity's influence, temporarily or even permanently. This can happen at a critical moment when the characters need help, or if a player makes an especially effective plea to Tom as a father to help his children.

CHAPTER ONE: WELCOME TO UNITY

In this initial chapter, the characters arrive in the town of Unity, where they become aware (if they're not already) that something strange is going on, and they're the only ones able to do something about it.

The primary focus of this chapter is a description of the town of Unity itself and information on the major inhabitants of the town the heroes might encounter during the course of the adventure, with some outlying details about the area left for the GM to handle as suits the flow of the adventure.

The second part of this chapter talks about the heroes' arrival in Unity, how they might get together (if they're not already a team), what they notice about the town, and the first hints that there is something very wrong going on in the seemingly happy and normal community.

THE TOWN OF UNITY

Unity is a small rural town, consisting primarily of the intersection of a minor local highway with another main road as the central "hub" of the community, and the clusters of suburban neighborhoods surrounding it. The town has its own elementary and high schools and most of the services and businesses you'd expect from a small North American town.

Unity has been around long enough to have some history and local traditions, and many of the people living in town have lived there all their lives. The local population has remaining fairly stable, with residents lost to jobs and larger cities elsewhere replaced by newcomers drawn to quiet small-town life.

Unity is a town of thousands of people, far more than can be summarized here. This section looks at the major residents of Unity important to the locations and events of this adventure. You should feel free to include additional town residents and personalities as needed, and to change around the characters described here as much as you'd like. Unless specified otherwise, assume you can use the Bystander archetype (see *M&M,* page 226) for any of the inhabitants of Unity.

FEATURES AND LOCATIONS

Mapping out and describing the entire town of Unity is beyond the scope of this adventure, but fortunately, most of the town is made up of suburban streets and clusters of houses. The majority of locations of interest for this adventure are centered on the "downtown" area, where Main Street meets the highway running alongside the river.

1. UNITY POLICE STATION

Size: Small; *Toughness:* 10 (reinforced materials); *Features:* Communications, Computer, Fire Prevention System, Garage, Holding Cells, Power System, Security System (DC 20)

Unity's police station is a small, relatively new brick-front building with glass double doors and a sign standing out by the road as well as a bronze plaque by the doors proclaiming what the building is. It houses the town's small municipal police force of a dozen officers and a half-dozen support personnel. There are four police cruisers (see midsize car, *M&M,* page 143), normally parked in a fenced-in portion of the parking lot in back when not in use. The police station is open and has someone available at the front desk 24 hours a day, although the night-shift is well known for being very quiet most of the time.

As the **Prologue** makes clear, the Unity has already made its way through the town's police: all the officers and personnel are part of the group-mind. This is vital to the Unity's protection and continuation: townsfolk who noticed anything unusual and called-in to the police were quietly deflected while officers were dispatched to deal with the problem. Those the Unity cannot immediately assimilate can be brought in and kept in one of the holding cells until they

THE TOWN OF UNITY

MACON ST.

ST. JAMES AVE

MAIN ST.

HIGHWAY 9

ROSE RD.

Marshfield Clinic

Unity High School

MAIN ST.

Downtown Area

Holloway Drive

HIGHWAY 9

1 MILE

1.

6.

3.

4.

2.

8.

7.

9.

5.

10.

11.

12.

13.

- Legend -

1. Unity Police Station

2. St. James Methodist Church

3. Unity Town Library

4. Ruth's Diner

5. Unity Elementary School

6. Our Lady of Mercy

7. Unity Town Hall

8. Go-Gas

9. Plowman's Tavern

10. Highway 9 Plaza

11. Riverside Center

12. The Main Street Motor Inn

13. Riverside Convenience

Distance in Feet

0   200

SCM

HOLY GROUND?

The *Paragons* setting doesn't assume a particular source for paranormal powers; that decision is left up to the individual Gamemaster and group using the setting. People may understand that such powers exist, but how they work, or where they come from, remains a mystery. If you're running *A More Perfect Union* simply to try out the *Paragons* setting, you may want to leave it that way, since it's unlikely the characters will find many answers in the course of this adventure.

However, should you be using this adventure as a kick-off to an ongoing *Paragons* series, or if you want to inject an element of mysticism or horror into the adventure or series, you can make use of the following option: both churches in Unity (St. James and Our Lady of Mercy), as consecrated ground, actually provide some protection against the group-mind! Elements of the Unity are reluctant to enter the grounds of either building, repelled by the "psychic aura" there. The Unifier must succeed at a DC 30 Will save in order to compel a part of it to enter consecrated ground. Additionally, those standing in a church or on its consecrated ground (such as the cemetery) gain a +10 bonus to Will saves against the Unity's powers.

The down side, if this option is in use, is that consecrated ground might interfere with the heroes' powers as well! You can require Concentration skill checks (DC 10 or higher) for the characters to use their active powers while on consecrated ground or you can even have them not work at all, as if the area were under a continuous Nullifying Field (see *M&M,* page 94) with a rank equal to the heroes' power level. This makes the churches havens from the Unity, but also limits what the characters can do there, if their own powers don't work either.

group-mind can bring them to heel and smooth over any questions about their disappearance.

Matt McGrath is Unity Police Chief. For the other members of the town police force, use the characters created by the players for the **Prologue**, noting their names and whatever other information the players provided, filling in the rest as needed. You can use the Unity Police Officer archetype from the **Appendix** for the officers and the Police Chief archetype (see *M&M,* page 228) for McGrath, keeping in mind the extra equipment available at the police station.

POLICE EQUIPMENT

The police station is also an important resource to the Unity because it provides the entity with weapons and equipment for its defense. The police station has the following equipment; feel free to add to, or modify, this list as suits the events of the adventure. Refer to **Chapter 7** of *M&M* for details on this equipment.

- 24 heavy pistols
- 12 shotguns
- 6 assault rifles
- 24 canisters of pepper spray
- 24 tonfas
- 12 sets of spare handcuffs
- 6 tear-gas grenades
- 6 undercover bulletproof vests
- 6 tactical vests

2. ST. JAMES METHODIST CHURCH

Size: Medium; *Toughness:* 6; *Features:* Fire Prevention System, Security System (DC 20)

St. James is the larger and older of the two churches in Unity, located across the street from the Town Hall and in front of the town cemetery. It's a traditional white steepled building with tall stained-glass windows and double-doors opening into an anteroom outside the chapel. In additional to religious services (including holidays, weddings, funerals,

and baptisms), it also serves as a meeting and function hall from time to time.

The cemetery out behind the church is actually owned and controlled by the town rather than the church itself and residents of all religious denominations (or none, for that matter) are interred there.

The **Reverend Doctor Helen Whitfield** is the pastor of St. James Church. She and her husband, Wayne, have lived in Unity for almost twenty years, since Helen first became pastor here. The couple is childless, but well loved in the community and Pastor Whitfield is an honorary aunt to many children in town.

The church maintains a parsonage (a home for the minister and his or her family) but the house is located off the grounds some distance from the church.

3. UNITY TOWN LIBRARY

Size: Small; *Toughness:* 8 (exterior walls); *Features:* Computer, Fire Prevention System, Library

The Town Library (technically the Josiah Blackwood Memorial Library) is one of the oldest buildings in Unity, established by a grant from a well-to-do local resident over a hundred years ago. The small library building is faced in yellow brick and cornered in granite, with small granite columns and a neoclassical arch around the main entrance facing Main Street, although the secondary entrance facing the parking lot is used more often now.

The library has a modest collection of several thousand books, along with microfiche archives and collections of old periodicals, particularly yellowed back-issues of the *Unity Free Press* newspaper. It has recently upgraded to both a computerized catalog and reference system and a set of three Internet capable terminals for public use.

The library has a single full-time librarian aided by a part-time staff made up of retirees and high-school students. The most common patrons are school-age children and teens

doing schoolwork, and town residents checking out the latest in light reading.

Patricia "Pat" Schrier is the town librarian and manages the Blackwood Memorial Library. She has held the job for seventeen years and seen a whole generation pass through the doors of her library over that time.

The library is likely to be of interest to the characters primarily as a place to do research and try and dig up information about what's going on in Unity. They can use the library's reference materials and resources to take 20 on most Knowledge skill checks.

Characters who think to look for clues about what's happening in Unity at the library can potentially dig up the *Unity Free Press* article about Carol Molloy's accident from a few weeks prior: the Difficulty Class varies depending on the search parameters. If the characters are specifically looking for the article, it's DC 10 (they can find it automatically by taking 10 on an unskilled Knowledge check). If they're just looking for "strange happenings" or something similar, the DC is 15. The accident is the only really unusual thing to happen in town for at about a year: newspaper files and such otherwise indicate Unity is a fairly sleepy small town.

It's not an assumed part of the adventure, but if you want the Blackwood Memorial Library to happen to have a copy of some obscure occult manuscript or similar folio, particularly if you decide the Unity is supernatural in origin, feel free to give the characters something to dig up.

4. RUTH'S DINER

Size: Small; *Toughness:* 6; *Features:* None

A fairly major local landmark in Unity is Ruth's Diner, right along the highway where it meets Main Street leading into the town itself. The diner used to be the town post office until about 25 years ago (when it moved down the road to the Riverside Center), and postal memorabilia and photos hang on the walls. The style of the diner is a classic 1950s American diner or drive-thru.

Ruth Emerson has owned and worked at her namesake diner since it opened and she still greets customers coming into her place. The fare is typical diner food, although well prepared and generous in terms of portions. A lot of the locals like to eat lunch at Ruth's and police officers commonly come here for coffee, while townsfolk often come on the weekends for breakfast and older residents spend time at the diner in the early evenings, especially Friday.

Ruth's is of particular interest simply because it's the most likely place for visitors to first mingle with the residents of Unity, and possibly the place where the characters might meet each other, if they're not already acquainted (see **All-Night Diner**, later in this chapter). Naturally, as a center for social activity also frequented by the local police, Ruth's has also become a center from which the Unity has spread its influence outward, and all the diner's regulars and staff (including Ruth herself) are incorporated into the group-mind.

5. UNITY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Size: Large; *Toughness:* 8; *Features:* Fire Prevention System, Gym, Library

Across the street from the police station stands Underhill Elementary School, Unity's center for 1st through 8th grade education. The town's high school is a few miles away from the town center (not shown on the map). Carol Molloy was a teacher at Underhill Elementary, teaching the Second Grade, until her fateful accident. **Mrs. Ann Paladino** is the principal of the Underhill Elementary School. She is a former teacher herself and a good friend and mentor to Carol prior to her accident.

After visiting co-workers were incorporated into the Unity, it didn't take long for the group-mind to spread throughout all the teachers and children in the school... all except two. Carol Molloy's own children have proven resistant somehow to her powers and therefore incorporation into the Unity, but there is little, if anything, they can do to help their mother or to stop what she is doing, at least until help arrives.

Nowhere is the Unity's influence quite so clear as at the Elementary School. Characters investigating the school are more likely to notice somewhat odd behavior from the children (Sense Motive check, DC 10). They seem subdued and unusually quiet and mature, especially the younger children. They're very friendly and affectionate however, always willing

to give out hugs or asking for adults to pick them up (providing the ideal opportunity to bring others into the Unity).

The school also presents one of the most serious challenges for the characters: while individual children are certainly not a threat, hundreds of them can be, especially if the characters are (understandably) reluctant to fight back against them.

6. OUR LADY OF MERCY

Size: Small; *Toughness:* 8; *Features:* Fire Prevention System, Security System (DC 20)

On the opposite side and just a bit further down the street from St. James is Unity's other church, Our Lady of Mercy Catholic Church. It's somewhat smaller, much like the town's Catholic population, but also a bit newer than St. James, having been built about fifty years ago. It features stained-glass windows a central chapel and smaller vestry, and office space for the priest, **Father Michael Polochik**. Father Michael (as he is commonly known) has been the priest of Our Lady of Mercy for sixteen years and is well known in the community.

As with St. James Church, if you decide "holy ground" has some sort of protective properties against the influence of the Unity, then Our Lady of Mercy serves in the same capacity. See the **Holy Ground?** sidebar for details, earlier in this chapter.

7. UNITY TOWN HALL

Size: Small; *Toughness:* 8; *Features:* Computer, Fire Prevention System, Security System (DC 20)

The center of Unity is the Town Hall, where weekly town council meetings are held. It also houses the town offices and administration. Like many towns, Unity's Town Council makes administrative decisions, although they now do so under the guidance of the group-mind.

Allen Jiworkski is head of the Unity Town Council, a local businessman who owns the Harvest Market and Highway 9 Plaza. The receptionist at Town Hall, **Holly Morris**, will make an appointment for characters to see Mr. Jiworski, if they ask, but otherwise they won't find him there (since very little governing actually happens in Unity these days). They also won't find him particularly cooperative if they do get the chance to talk with him.

Character might go to the Town Hall looking for someone in authority, but they won't find any help here. They also won't find much in the way of information, although they can look through the town's records (primarily tax and property information) in order to find addresses and similar information. This is a Computers skill check, DC 10 if the characters have the appropriate passwords and access, DC 20 if they do not and have to "crack" the system.

8. GO-GAS

Size: Tiny; *Toughness:* 7; *Features:* None

This small corner gas station and convenience store serves as the primary refueling station for several miles in either direction along Highway 9. It's locally owned and managed by **Ralph Berrnaro**, a middle-aged grease monkey who loves both cars and local gossip almost equally; it's a toss-up on any given day which one wins out. He's normally a wealth of information on local happenings, but as a part of the Unity, he's primarily on alert from people passing through town, and tries to engage them in conversation and find out their business. He'll do the same with the characters, given the opportunity.

One way Ralph tries to engage visitors in conversation is by running a "full service" place. He'll approach the vehicle and offer to pump gas, clean the windshield, and so forth. Astute observers (Notice check, DC 13) note that the "Self" signs on the pumps have been covered with hand-made "Full Service" signs fairly recently. If asked about them, Ralph says the decision to go full service was a recent one. "People appreciate it when you go just a bit further for them," he'll say jovially. "It's all about service, you know, how we can help each other."

If there's reason to strand the characters in Unity, Ralph sabotages their car if he gets the opportunity (offering to "check the oil" and such under the hood). Then he'll gladly tow the disabled car back to his service-station and stall the

"UNITY WHERE?"

Obviously, the exact location of the town of Unity has been left deliberately vague to allow you to place it anywhere you wish as best suits the adventure, your group of characters, and plans for your own *Paragons* series. The town's description can fit any small American or Canadian community in a fairly rural area. If you want to set Unity (and the adventure) outside of North America, some additional modifications are likely necessary to make the details fit; feel free to change things as needed.

Once you've decided on a location for Unity, you can also add some measure of "local color" to fit the setting. For example, if the town is in rural New England it might feature a Colonial-era church or a historical monument, while a Mid-western community could be surrounded by farmland and fields. A southern town would have a larger African-American population and some local accents, while a southwestern Unity would have fewer trees and a more "desert" style.

Don't forget about things like local cuisine available at the town diner or including things like the weather, seasons, and customs of the area where you place the town, along with any local businesses or chains to help root Unity in its location and make the town seem to come alive to the players.

characters with talk about needing a particular part or the like, requiring them to stick around for a while and enjoy Unity's "hospitality." Someone else examining Ralph's handiwork can make a Craft (mechanical) check, DC 18, to notice the problem appears to have been caused deliberately.

9. PLOWMAN'S TAVERN

Size: Small; *Toughness:* 7; *Features:* None

This roadside tavern is the center of adult social life in Unity, a place to come for a drink after work with friends, to get away from whatever is going on at home, or to play a quick game of pool or two while catching whatever game is playing on the tavern's over-the-bar television. Plowman's owner and operator **Mitch Connelly** is a friendly guy on good terms with his customers and more than a little adept at lying to their significant others who call looking for them from time to time.

In addition to the aforementioned pool table and TV, the Plowman (as it is often known) has a jukebox (which actually plays CDs) and serves various appetizers along with its selection of beer and liquor. Alcohol consumption is not what it used to be with the Unity guiding the population's behavior. People still visit the Plowman for a beer or the like, but seemingly more out of habit than anything else, and drunkenness is virtually unheard of now. The group-mind doesn't seem to like the "fuzziness" it creates in its host's thoughts.

In fact, consuming enough alcohol can actually block out the Unity's influence temporarily, allowing the host to think and act freely. The only problem is the amount of alcohol required is enough to make most people very drunk, so any dire warnings or talk about "invasion" or "mind control" are likely to be dismissed as drunken ravings, especially when the person later claims not to remember the incident and claims it was nothing (once he or she is under the Unity's influence again). For an example of this, see **Just Enough to Drink**, later in this chapter.

Characters might hit on the idea of force-feeding someone alcohol to temporarily remove the Unity's influence; a workable, albeit difficult and somewhat risky, plan. If they try it, have the subject make a Fortitude saving throw (DC 13) to avoid passing out or becoming violently ill before being able to provide the characters with any useful or coherent information.

10. HIGHWAY 9 PLAZA

Size: Medium; *Toughness:* 8; *Features:* Fire Prevention System

This shopping center off the highway is part of modern Unity. The anchor is a Harvest Market chain supermarket. It drove the local grocery out of business after more than twenty years in the community, but most still welcome lower prices and a greater range of choice. There's also a chain drug store, Leona's (an Italian restaurant), and Video 9, a local video rental place.

Characters who visit Leona's find the place empty, even at peak hours like lunch- and dinnertime, although the staff is on-hand and will serve the characters and engage them in pleasant conversation. They deflect any questions about business being slow and, right after the characters think to ask, some people show up out of the blue and the restaurant starts to fill up. A Sense Motive check (DC 19) notes this is more than just a coincidence, and the other patrons behave just a bit "off."

If the characters need some pharmaceuticals, they might try raiding the drug store. After hours, this requires a Disable Device check (DC 25) to overcome the security system, which includes video surveillance cameras. While the store is open, use whatever plan the characters come up with to rob the place, based on their powers and resources, and keeping in mind that the Unity may just decide to stop trying to fool them and go right for capturing and assimilating them. The drug store staff is made up of three or four ordinary bystanders and not much of a match for determined paranormals.

The Harvest Market and Video 9 have little that's likely to interest the characters, although, if they investigate and you want to drop hints, you can always have a suitably atmospheric film playing in the video store, such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* or *The Stepford Wives.* The Unity apparently either has an unusual sense of humor or is trying to do some research...

LET YOUR FINGERS DO THE WALKING

A great many of the town residents the characters encounter will basically be faceless, nameless members of the Unity's group-mind, so you won't have to know the details of their lives, jobs, or even names, unless you want to have a town resident free of the Unity's influence call out names or point out individuals in order to emphasize that these *are* people with lives and names and not just a faceless horde for the heroes to mow down.

Since you might need to come up with various townsfolk on the fly during the course of this adventure, you might want to use a particular Gamemaster's trick: have a local phone book handy while running the adventure. When you need a name, flip to a random page and pick one, making up the details to go with it as needed.

Alternately, you can go through the directory in advance and write down a list of twenty or thirty likely sounding names. When you use one during the adventure, put a check mark or the like next to it, along with a brief note of any details about that character. Such a resource helps to keep the story flowing during the game and gives your players the impression that Unity is a town full of all sorts of people (to say nothing of making you look even more prepared than you are!).

11. RIVERSIDE CENTER

Size: Large; *Toughness:* 8; *Features:* Fire Prevention System

On the river side of the highway a stone's throw from the newer Highway 9 Plaza is the Riverside Center, displaced from its pinnacle as the newest and largest shopping center in Unity. It's a 1970s era strip mall of connected storefronts, currently housing the Unity Post Office, the Hair Experience (a local salon), a Java Hut, and All for a Buck (where everything costs one dollar). None of the businesses are particularly remarkable or likely to be of more than casual interest to the characters; feel free to invent suitable details, if they choose to investigate.

The only thing of note is, like many of the other businesses in town, the Riverside Center seems fairly listless, particularly the usually busy Java Hut, which sees a steady trickle of customers, and the salon, which is about the same. The Post Office is virtually abandoned; although still staffed, it does the bare minimum of business, even for a small town.

12. THE MAIN STREET MOTOR INN

Size: Large; *Toughness:* 7; *Features:* Fire Prevention System, Security System (DC 20)

This hotel off the highway is likely where the characters will end up staying if or when they spend a night or more in Unity. It's a fairly typical small town roadside motel, although clean and well maintained. The rooms are in desperate need of redecoration and reek of mid- to late-1970s style (down to the burnt orange, brown, and mustard color scheme). Like many motels, each room has its own entrance facing the parking area, with the office located at the front nearest to the road.

A roadside sign proclaims the Motor Inn's name and whether or not there are any vacancies, although the latter seems to vary almost at a whim. Characters may notice there are no vacancies at the motel when they enter town (Notice check, DC 13) but discover a room or rooms have "opened up" when they need to stay in town, and even when "full" there are very few cars parked in the Motor Inn's lot.

Ken Cornell is the owner and manager of the Motor Inn, along with his wife, **Jeanne**. The two of them take turns managing the front desk and the motel's small staff. Jeanne does the books while Ken handles the vendors who supply the motel's business needs. The Cornells are often found reading behind the counter when things are slow: Ken likes science fiction while Jeanne prefers trashy romance novels.

Investigation of the Main St. Motor Inn's other rooms finds only two of them actually occupied: one by a traveling businessman the other by a vacationing family. Both became too suspicious of goings-on in the town and were assimilated into the Unity and are simply being housed at the motel for the time being until permanent quarters can be arranged. Characters may pick up that the same is intended to be their fate if they get too close to the truth.

13. RIVERSIDE CONVENIENCE

Size: Tiny; *Toughness:* 7; *Features:* Fire Prevention System, Security System (DC 20)

This small, independently-owned convenience store stocks the usual selection of slightly overpriced food and household staples, available late into the night (although not at all hours; the store closes at midnight and opens again at 6:00 a.m.). It also sells bags of ice and refills propane tanks; the large propane tank in back of the establishment is a potentially spectacular target for collateral damage if a fight breaks out involving paranormal powers. It is Toughness 9 and, if it suffers more than a "damaged" result, it explodes for +9 fire damage with the Explosion modifier.

If the characters arrive in Unity late at night, or are active after-hours, the convenience store may be somewhere to go. Otherwise, it's of little interest unless the characters are looking for simple hardware or similar supplies for some reason.

OTHER LOCATIONS

The following locations are not shown on the map of the central area of Unity, but are potentially important to the adventure and are described here, along with their relative location to the main area of the town. You should feel free to flesh out additional locations in and around Unity as best suits the adventure. If events in your version of *A More Perfect*

WHY THE UNITY HESITATES

If the Unity has practically taken over the entire town, why hasn't it spread beyond the town limits yet? Plenty of people living in Unity work elsewhere and vice versa, and there's very little stopping the spread of the group-mind until the characters happen to come along. So what's the hold up?

The primary plot reason is to give the heroes a bit more of a fighting chance. If the Unity was spreading like wildfire throughout the region, there might be no stopping it. Having it relatively contained in one town give the characters, and therefore the players, a few options when it comes to combating the entity, if it comes down to that.

There are also in-game reasons why the Unity hasn't made the leap from one town to the surrounding area or entire state. First, the entity is still relatively newly born. It assimilated people in Unity in its first heady rush of coming into being, almost more by accident, and finished the job to ensure no one could stop it or warn others of its existence (particularly given events like in the **Prologue**). Now the Unity is pausing to catch its psychic "breath," correlate information, and smooth out any "growing pains" while it contemplates its existence and what to do next. It's pretty well convinced the world needs the gift of peace and understanding it has to offer, but there's a small chance the characters could convince it otherwise.

The other main reasons why the group-mind has hesitated are the Molloy boys and the potential of other paranormals. In the latter case, the Unity is vaguely psychically aware of the existence of others with unusual powers and it is both curious and concerned about them. If you choose, any strange or unexplained impulse that brought the characters to town could be connected to the Unity's awareness or powers; perhaps it brought the other paragons to it unconsciously, or maybe they were able to sense it in the same way it sensed them. In either case, the Unity feels the need for caution until it better understands other paranormals and how to deal with them.

Lastly, the stubborn resistance shown by Carol Molloy's children against becoming part of the Unity has given Carol's unconscious mind—and therefore the group-mind—a source of nagging doubt. In addition to the question of what to do with the kids are other concerns: what if they can *never* join the Unity? Would it be fair to make them the only "unconnected" people in the entire world? Worse, what if there are others with the same sort of "immunity" they possess? How will the Unity deal with such people? This may prove to be a useful point for the characters in dealing with the group-mind.

Union call for a nearby farm, for example, there's plenty of room to add one. The same goes for most other locales to be found in a rural suburban area.

MOLLOY HOME

Size: Medium; *Toughness:* 6; *Features:* Living Space

The Molloys live in a split-level suburban house on 27 Holloway Drive, just a few miles from the middle of Unity. Derek and Kevin Molloy currently take the bus to and from school. They used to go with their mother but not since her accident and their release from the hospital. The boys know that their classmates and neighbors watch them all the time, although they still don't know exactly why everyone is acting strangely. They're left to their own devices when they come home from school, because their father returns to his home-office after finding out how their day went. This routine gives them the opportunity to try and take action, if the characters provide them with a reason to do so.

The Unity is, not surprisingly, very protective of Carol Molloy's home, an almost unconscious impulse on the group-mind's part. Any perceived threat to the house or the children will provoke a response from the entity, most likely a mob out to get the intruders. While it's an underhanded tactic, threatening the Molloy boys can also give the Unity pause (a +5 or greater bonus to checks like Intimidate). On the other hand, trying to take the boys away from Unity is almost certain to raise the group-mind's collective ire.

See the descriptions of the Molloy family in the **Prologue** for more details.

UNITY HIGH SCHOOL

Size: Large; *Toughness:* 8; *Features:* Fire Prevention System, Gym, Library

Located about a mile west of the downtown area is Unity High School, home of the Unity Hornets football team. The group-mind's influence spread through the high school primarily from the elementary school system and affected parents by bringing their children into the fold.

Now the school is perhaps the quietest and most orderly high school in the world. It is maintained largely for appearances at the moment, although the students don't mind (it was, after all, "their" idea). Should anyone investigate the school, they find everything running smoothly, entirely too smoothly, in fact. There's complete lack of normal teenage attitude and rebellion, and the students cheerfully do their work for their own betterment.

If you want to run *A More Perfect Union* with a group of teenaged paranormals, the characters can either be Unity locals who discover something strange is going on at their school and in their town. Alternately, they can be transfers, foreign exchange students, or regular students away from the school for a while. When they arrive, practically everyone at Unity High (and in the town itself) is part of the Unity and the new paranormals have their work cut out for them!

THE MARSHFIELD CLINIC

Size: Medium; *Toughness:* 7; *Features:* Fire Prevention System, Infirmary, Security System (DC 25)

North along the highway a few miles is the Marshfield Clinic, a small private health-care facility owned and run by the Marshfield Medical Associates. It is primarily important because it is where Carol Molloy lies in a coma, and where the Unity came into existence. The doctors, nurses, and other clinic personnel in regular contact with Carol were among the first people assimilated, giving the Unity a considerable amount of "education" right away. It understands both that Carol Molloy is apparently the source of its existence (from experience with things like infection vectors and the like) and it also understands Carol's continued well-being, such as it is, may be the key to its continued existence.

Security at the clinic has relaxed only slightly since the group-mind dominated Unity. It will return full force should strangers visit, especially if they're looking for Carol Molloy. Clinic personnel will deny entrance and call security if visitors refuse to cooperate (security, in turn, will "restrain"

the intruders, allowing the Unity a chance to assimilate them). Intruders in the clinic resistant to assimilation will be expelled by any means possible, including violence, so long as it does not endanger the Unifier herself. Keep in mind the medical staff has a wide range of drugs and the like at their disposal and will think nothing of drugging or poisoning the characters as a means of dealing with them.

Dr. Ahmad Suri is Carol Molloy's attending physician at the Marshfield Clinic. Dr. Suri is Pakistani by birth, but has lived in Unity for the past twelve years with his family. He was one of the first people assimilated into the Unity and won't be overly cooperative with the characters, although he'll appear friendly enough at first to find out more about who they are and what they want.

If the Unity learns the characters know about Carol Molloy or seem to be investigating her, it will take the first opportunity to move the Unifier to another, more secure, location. The police station is a good possibility, but it could be anywhere in town, just to keep the characters from finding the group-mind's most vulnerable point.

GETTING STARTED

This chapter is intended to do three things: get the characters to Unity, introduce them to each other (if they're not already acquainted), and give them their first hints that something is very, very wrong in the otherwise ordinary town.

FASTER THAN A SPEEDING…

How does everyone get to Unity in the first place? That depends somewhat on how you choose to get the characters involved, but unless one or more of them have their own mode of transport (flying, teleporting, etc.), odds are they'll arrive by car, either individually or separately.

If you want to simplify this scene a bit, you can set up a reason for the characters to all be driving into Unity together. Otherwise, you can run this scene for one of the characters in order to give the players as a group an idea that something is going on in town and foreshadow future events.

Read the following narration out loud to the players. "You" can either be the entire group or simply the character or characters involved in this scene.

There's fairly little along Highway 9 until you pass a billboard and spot signs of civilization off in the distance… followed almost immediately by the blue lights of a police car right behind you. He must have been lurking behind the billboard, checking for speeders, although you're pretty sure you were doing the speed limit.

Ask the player(s), "What do you do?" Most characters will simply pull over to avoid a confrontation with the police, especially if they have no reason to believe anything is amiss.

If so, have the officer pull up behind the car and come up to the driver's side window. Read the following to the player(s):

> An officer approaches the car. "License and registration, please?" he asks, standing by the driver's side window. He flicks a seemingly disinterested glance over you and your vehicle for a moment.

Make a secret Sense Motive check (DC 19) for any characters present. Those who succeed sense something out of sorts with the officer; nothing they can pinpoint exactly, just a feeling something more than a routine traffic violation is going on.

For an added touch of concern, make the officer who pulls the character(s) over one of those run by the players in the **Prologue**, if you've run the players through it. Let them wonder exactly what happened to this officer and the others. He asks the characters the following questions along with any others that seem reasonable and natural upon interacting with them.

> What are you plans in Unity?
> What brings you here?
> How long are you planning to stay?

After each question he waits for a response and when he gets some answers from the characters he tells them:

> You were over the speed limit a bit more than we're comfortable with and we don't have much patience for lawbreakers. Be a bit more careful. Now, be on your way and drive carefully.

The characters may know they weren't speeding and that the officer is lying, or they might pick up that something isn't quite right about the officer with a DC 15 Sense Motive check (you should make this roll for the players in secret).

HIGH SPEED CHASE, ANYONE?

If, for some reason, the characters *don't* comply with the police, then they may find themselves in conflict with the Unity much sooner. The Unity police attempt to arrest them and put them in a cell in the police station, where they'll be assimilated into the Unity at the first opportunity. You can handle the chase as you see fit, perhaps using the pursuit rules from the *Mastermind's Manual,* if you have access to that book. Then move on to **Chapter 2** of this book, as the later scenes in this chapter will be largely moot.

HERO POINTS

Award a hero point to players who handle this scene well, either keeping their cool or using good roleplaying (and perhaps the application of interaction skills or paranormal powers) to ensure there isn't a problem. You may also want to award hero points liberally when the characters do some investigating around town, they may well need them later in the story.

ROOM AT THE INN

Characters might want to check into a room at the Main Street Motor Inn immediately upon their arrival in Unity, or they could decide to make a stop first at the diner or the tavern in order to get something to eat or drink while getting the lay of the land. You can run the following scenes in whatever order you wish, based on the characters' course of action and their intentions in Unity.

The "Vacancy" sign is lit at the local motel when the group arrives. Ken Cornell, or his wife Jeanne, checks the characters into as many rooms as they wish, citing a "slow tourist season" for the largely empty establishment. The couple displays a friendly interest in who the characters are and what brings them to Unity. They encourage a visit to Ruth's Diner or the Ploughman's Tavern, depending on the group's apparent interests and the time of day.

Make another secret Sense Motive check (DC 15) for the characters upon meeting the Cornells; success means they notice the same sort of slightly "off" behavior they picked up from the police officer. It should start becoming apparent to anyone who made both checks that something is not right in Unity.

ALL-NIGHT DINER

A visit to Ruth's Diner finds the place fairly quiet, although the characters are welcomed and offered a table or place at the counter. Ruth (or another member of her staff) takes their orders and engages them in conversation, trying to find out more about them. Sense Motive checks are again appropriate to see if the characters pick up on anything out of sorts in the place.

If the characters are not already acquainted with each other, the diner or tavern are good places for them to meet up. Being the only strangers in town, they are likely to draw the same sort of attention and, once they encounter some evidence of what's happening in Unity (or of each others' paranormal abilities), odds are good they'll band together, if only for their own survival.

The initial visit to the diner will pass without incident so long as the characters behave themselves. The Unity is still assessing them at this point, and any attempt to assimilate them would be too suspicious, particularly since the group-mind doesn't yet know if it needs to reveal itself. Of course, things might change if the characters happen to visit the tavern, or even happen to pass by.

JUST ENOUGH TO DRINK

This encounter takes place outside the Ploughman's Tavern when the characters decide to visit, or if they should happen to pass by. If need be, it can also take place outside of Ruth's

Diner or even in the parking lot of the motel, but it should ideally be after the characters have had the opportunity to poke around a bit. When you decide the encounter takes place, read the following aloud to the players:

From the way he staggers, it's clear the fellow headed in your general direction has had more than a little to drink. He looks a bit haggard, perhaps from the drinking, but otherwise seems like a pretty average guy. He seems to notice you for the first time and his eyes come to focus on you with a confused look on his face.

"You…" he mutters, slurring his speech, "you're not… you're not like them… like… us. You're not… of Unity. I can't hear them right now, but they're always… with us."

Whatever the characters say in response, the man's manner becomes more agitated.

"You have to leave!" he declares forcefully, drawing upright and gesturing as if to shoo you away. "Get away from here, while you still can!"

Any attempt to assist or approach the man results in him crying out, "No! Don't touch me!" he protests. "You mustn't… mustn't touch…"

Before the group can find out more from the drunken man, a couple of other men show up. They say they're friends of his and that their friend has had a few too many. They're going to see that he gets home safety. They politely, but firmly, refuse any offer of help, and chalk up anything the characters might have heard to their friend's drunken state.

Should they decide it's important enough to start a confrontation, the characters don't get much out of it. The two men fight to defend themselves, but the drunk quickly passes out. When he regains consciousness, he claims he doesn't remember anything about talking to the paranormals or anything they might repeat to him. A Sense Motive check (DC 17) reveals he's lying, and his behavior is slightly different, more so than just someone who is sobering up.

HERO POINTS

The encounter with the drunk is another good opportunity to award the players a hero point if they handle it well and get some initial clues about what's going on in Unity. This is particularly true if the players portray their characters as willing to press on and continue investigating in spite of the strange happenings in town, in order to get to the truth and help anyone in Unity who might be in need. Such heroism in the face of danger should be rewarded.

CHAPTER TWO: A MEETING OF THE MINDS

How the adventure proceeds from here on out depends on how the player characters become involved in dealing with the Unity and what sort of action they take. This and the following chapters look at how the conflict may begin, how it's likely to develop, and how it can be resolved, respectively. These are by no means the only options or scenes, but give an overview of the major possibilities.

UNILATERAL DECISIONS

Sooner or later, the strange behavior in Unity becomes too prevalent for the characters to ignore, or they take some action the group-mind considers threatening, including attempting to leave the town with information about the Unity's existence. Once that happens, one side or the other will have to take action. If it's the Unity, there are a number of different tactics it may attempt. They're discussed here, but feel free to expand upon them or modify them as best suits the characters and the flow of the adventure.

PARAGONS TO THE RESCUE?

One or more of the player characters may interact with a Unity "carrier." For example, a component of the Unity could be apparently endangered by an accident or a "random" crime. When the paranormal comes into contact with the carrier, the Unity attempts to extend its influence.

This naturally tips off the characters, telling them something strange is going on. They may assume at first the carrier is a paranormal of some sort, but investigation (or interrogation of the Unity) eventually turns up evidence there is much more to the problem than meets the eye.

Alternately, one or more paranormal non-player characters might fall victim to the Unity in this way. The characters might not be the only paragons drawn to Unity for one reason or another. If so, then the group-mind could already include some paranormals among its number, and it won't hesitate to draw on their powers to help bring the characters "into the fold."

If the players are running their own original paragons in *A More Perfect Union,* you can use one or more of the pre-generated characters from the **Appendix** as paranormals lured to Unity and incorporated into the group-mind, providing some additional super-powered opposition for the characters in the course of the adventure.

The primary purpose of this type of initial encounter is to give the characters an idea of the kind of danger the Unity represents. Once they understand that prolonged physical contact with any components of the group-mind can spread its influence, they'll begin to take precautions, making it more difficult for the Unity to assimilate them by cunning and stealth.

If an original player character *is* assimilated into the Unity, the pre-gen characters from the **Appendix** also make effective replacements, as other paranormals drawn to Unity in the same fashion.

GET OUT OF MY MIND!

While the Unity's mental influence is considerable, some people may manage to resist it, at least long enough to try to warn others about the danger. Naturally, hysterical people talking about psychic entities trying to control their minds aren't the most believable, but in the *Paragons* world, people have probably seen stranger things. After all, the characters all have superhuman powers!

Maybe a relatively recent member of the Unity manages to succeed on a Will save to break free and tries to contact the characters directly, to get their help or warn them about the danger. Do they believe the story about mind-control and gestalt psychic entities? What about when they hear similar stories cropping up in the same general area?

This encounter is a good opportunity to point players in the right direction if they have absolutely no idea what's going on in town and no good avenues for follow-up. Having a former component of the group-mind lay it all out for them may help motivate the characters to action.

Keep in mind that even a former Unity "insider" may not know everything: some recollections about what the group-mind knows are likely to be fuzzy or vague. In particular, the informant probably shouldn't be able to tell the characters Carol Molloy is the coordinating force behind the entity. On the other hand, an informant might be able to point out the Molloy family, especially the boys, as somehow important to the Unity, people it wants to protect (a potentially useful clue).

You can also decide whether or not the informant gets pulled back into the group-mind. Anyone who successfully saves is immune to assimilation for a day, but the Unity is almost

certain to come looking by then, to try and "reclaim" what it has lost. Moreover, the informant might start experiencing "separation anxiety" and feel a need to rejoin the peace and serenity of the group-mind, especially if it seems like the characters can't, or won't, do anything about it.

It's up to you to decide just how skeptical authorities and the general public outside of Unity are about claims of a "mind control cult" spreading through an area. If paranormals are a relatively new phenomenon in the campaign, people are less prepared for such things. On the other hand, if paranormals are well known, then authorities may be quick to try and deal with any potential paranormal threat.

If you haven't decided how you'd like to proceed in your own *Paragons* series, or you're just running this adventure on its own, assume paranormal phenomena is relatively unknown and likely to be met with skepticism unless the characters can present clear evidence that what they claim is true.

WHOSE SIDE ARE YOU ON?

A variant of the previous "informer" encounter sure to inspire paranoia in the players is to have the Unity send a drone *pretending* to have shaken off the group-mind specifically to spin some story to mislead the characters and send them down a blind alley or off into a trap. It takes a DC 19 Sense Motive check to pick up on signs that the "victim" is lying and may be under some outside influence.

How much of the truth the Unity reveals to the group is up to you, but probably just enough to keep the story interesting. The entity might spin out a tale of alien invaders, androids, or something else from the plot of a popular horror film (remember it has been watching movies at *Video 9* for a while now). If you want to drop a subtle hint, have the characters notice a particular movie playing at the video store and then have the informer basically tell them the same story, or vice versa (having them later discover the tale they were told is the plot of a horror movie).

After being betrayed once or twice in this manner (and in scenes like **Paragons to the Rescue?**) odds are good the players, and their characters, won't trust *anyone* in Unity, and will probably be suspicious of everyone else! This particular trick is mean enough to award the players a hero point the first time you pull it on them.

SIGNS AND PORTENTS

Paranormals with extraordinary or psychic senses may have some inkling of the Unity's existence and activities before anyone else notices. Certainly precognitive paranormals might have visions of groups of people coming together, driven by a single, overriding consciousness, perhaps even catching a glimpse of Carol Molloy lying in her hospital bed.

Postcognitives (able to see visions of the past) might witness Carol's car accident, or see the first components of the Unity influenced by her powers. Telepaths and other paranormals with Psychic Awareness (or its equivalent) may sense the

telepathic "web" connecting the components of the Unity, or simply sense the presence of a powerful, vast, and growing intelligence in the area.

Attempts to learn more about the Unity psychically could open some paranormals up to mental invasion and control, causing them to become part of the Unity (see the **Introduction**). Alternately, one or more psychics could escape an encounter with the Unity and try to warn others, as mentioned above.

INVESTIGATION

Once the characters notice the events associated with the Unity, they are likely to begin investigating. There are a number of avenues for investigation, including research into the patterns of the Unity's emergence, studying its powers and growth, interrogating it, and finding out more about the mind creating it. The more the characters learn, the better their chances for dealing with the Unity now and in the future.

RESEARCH

Characters pursing an investigation should make appropriate skill checks, using Computers, Gather Information, Knowledge, or Search (or other skills at the GM's discretion). Characters can take 10 on their investigation checks and can take 20 given the right access to research mate-

rials. Investigators can discover the information on the **Research** table.

INTERROGATION

Interrogating the components of the Unity isn't particularly fruitful, given the Unity's Will save bonus and general disregard for the safety of any individual drone. The Unity is careful not to reveal too much about its nature, how it works, or especially how it came into being. It knows Carol Molloy is its weakness, so it conceals her existence and whereabouts as much as possible. Give the Unity a +4 bonus on any saves or skill checks to avoid revealing information about the Unifier, given its importance.

Clever players might try getting a drone drunk (using guile or force): this weakens the connection to the Unity, negating

RESEARCH

Roll	Result
DC 15	This level reveals the general area where the Unity "outbreak" began. It's clear the Unity spreads through physical contact, but can be maintained over a distance once established. It appears many of the initial drones are medical personnel and elementary school teachers.
DC 20	The character traces the initial appearance of the Unity to the hospital where Carol Molloy is being treated. The pattern of assimilation makes it clear the first drones were employees, patients, and doctors at the Marshfield Clinic.
DC 30	In addition to hospital personnel, the first people assimilated into the Unity were apparently all visitors of a coma patient named Carol Molloy, a married schoolteacher. Not long thereafter, Molloy was moved to a private room at the Marshfield Clinic. While there's nothing unusual in Molloy's background to indicate she is a paranormal, she was in a traumatic accident, which some characters may know can trigger paranormal powers.

PARANORMAL POWERS

ESP Sense(s)	Search DC
Visual	25
Mental	25
Auditory	30
Tactile	40
Olfactory	40
Radio	30
Special	30

its resistance to revealing information about the Unifier, and giving the characters a +5 check bonus.

PARANORMAL POWERS

Characters may use various powers to learn more about the Unity. Telepathy and related powers fall under the category of interrogation (see the previous paragraph), and making telepathic contact with the Unity runs the risk of assimilation. Powers like Precognition and Postcognition may provide some useful information (perhaps even a forewarning about the Unity's appearance, in the case of Precognition). ESP is useful for searching large areas. In conjunction with a power like Psychic Awareness, a character may be able to "trace" the telepathic network of the Unity back to Carol Molloy. This requires sufficient ESP range (Rank 5 or higher) and a Search check. Searching with ESP takes two hours, minus 15 minutes for every 5 points by which the searching character exceeds the DC. The DC required depends on what sense (or senses) work with ESP. The senses and their associated DCs are listed here.

For each sense after the first that a character can use with ESP, reduce the DC by 5, but the DC cannot be reduced by more than 10 in this way.

Characters can take 20 on this check, but it may take more time than the players are willing to spend. The GM can adjust this time in favor of advancing the story if the characters are stumped.

THE MOLLOY KIDNAPPINGS

If Derek or Kevin Molloy come into contact with the characters and reveal to them what they know, odds are good the Unity will eventually find out about it. Even if it does not, the group-mind has to decide how to deal with the two boys, who have already tried to run away once, and who are immune to its influence. Guided by Carol Molloy's subconscious mind, the entity has no wish to harm either child, and prefers to keep them safe, but also can't abide the idea of allowing them to leave Unity or be taken away from their home.

The boys may be taken and hidden somewhere to keep the characters from talking to them. Apart from simply being confined in their home, they could also be taken to the Marshfield Clinic (possibly sedated or otherwise restrained), or tucked away in another home or at their school. They could even be held at the police station, although that's only likely if a strongly defensible location is needed. If the boys are placed near their mother, they'll be moved when she is (see the following paragraphs), or she may be moved to their location, if they're hidden away first.

Eventually, the Unity realizes the potential for opposition to the life it offers, to its very existence. It understands some people will want to attack or destroy it, so it takes steps to protect itself. Drones remove Carol Molloy's comatose body from the Marshfield Clinic and move her to a secret location. Since the Unifier is the Unity's weak-spot, it does everything it can to protect her.

Where it chooses to hide her depends on the resources it currently has available. It might choose the police station or town hall, a private home, an abandoned storefront, or some other location. Carol Molloy's "kidnapping" might be the first clue the player characters get that something is wrong, particularly if her loved ones, the hospital staff, and the local authorities show no interest or concern over the whole matter.

Characters investigating the disappearance might assume at first that Mrs. Molloy is some kind of threat to the Unity rather than its coordinating force. Still, finding her may be the key to dealing with the psychic entity she has inadvertently created.

TORCHES AND PITCHFORKS

If the Unity becomes unable to assimilate the newcomers through guile because they have become aware of the danger and taken precautions, then the entity may abandon all pretense of normality in town and simply send mobs of people after the characters in hopes of trapping and assimilating them, thus removing them as an obstacle.

You can make secret Notice checks (DC 15) for the characters to pick up on the approach of a mob of people, anywhere from 50 to 100 or more to start. Such a mob could trap the paranormals wherever they happen to be: inside their motel rooms, at the diner or tavern, or even inside the school or library (imagine an initial mob made up of a hundred or more schoolchildren!). Use the guidelines given in the Mass Combat Rules in the **Appendix** for the mob, modifying its traits based on size (and possibly increasing them as more people join the hunt for the characters).

The encounter with the mob can become a running chase as the group tries to escape or find temporary sanctuary, or a running battle as the paranormals unleash their powers and fight back. Even still, it should be fairly difficult for them. If the characters fight, use the following guidelines:

• Split the mob into roughly same-sized groups for each paragon involved in the combat and handle each separately. This makes things easier to adjudicate and keeps the characters from simply taking out the entire mob in one fell swoop.

• Arm the townsfolk as you see fit (keeping the arsenal in the police station in mind, as well as things from local homes, stores, and so forth). However, the primary tactic of the mob is to grapple any characters they can reach, giving the Unity's mental influence time to go to work on them. Such groups have a substantial grapple check bonus, especially against characters with normal human Strength levels.

• Feel free to yank on the players' guilt chains liberally. After all, these people are clearly not entirely in their right minds or in full control of their actions. If the characters resort to violence, don't have the townsfolk drop bloodlessly like faceless video game characters, give them a measure of humanity and emphasize the effects of characters' attacks. This is doubly true if the paragons resort to lethal force to defend themselves.

- Allow the characters opportunities to use buildings, vehicles, and the like in the town for cover or as a means to hold off the mob for a short time. The Unity isn't going to needlessly destroy the town, but won't be overly concerned about property damage, either. If cut off from their vehicle(s), characters might be able to steal one, but keep in mind they'll need keys or the ability to hotwire it *very* quickly.

- Finally, if the Unity loses an initial scuffle with the characters, and they prove themselves capable of handling a mob of 100 or more, the entity retreats and most likely makes an effort to talk to the paragons, if only to keep them in Unity and buy some additional time. See **Unified Talks** (following) for more information.

HERO POINTS

For each major challenge the paragons overcome, or for each significant complication you put in their path, award the players a hero point. This is in addition to any such points the players earn for other setbacks and complications, including uses of GM Fiat.

UNIFIED TALKS

The Unity only reveals itself and speaks directly to the characters if left with no other choice, such as if they have fairly definitely concluded it exists, or have dealt it a decisive setback (like in **Torches & Pitchforks**). In either case, the Unity considers negotiation preferable in order to find out more about the characters and to delay them getting aid or informing anyone else about what's happening in the town.

Note that negotiation is not the Unity's preferred method of operation. It would rather assimilate outside minds than engage in "clumsy" and "crude" vocal communication. Since telepathic contact offers the potential for assimilation, however, verbal interaction is the only real safe option for outsiders looking to talk to the Unity.

While the Unity is a reasonable and intelligent being, it is also an alien one in many ways. It will not agree to any plan involving its own dissolution unless the characters are *superhumanly* persuasive, nor is it willing to "release" anyone it has assimilated, any more than a person can declare independence for their liver cells. It may agree to limit its own growth, perhaps only to those people who *want* to join it, for example. It may also agree to dwell in a particular area (tied with a limit on its growth), but it won't be particularly happy about either option.

As the Unity sees it, total assimilation of humanity will bring about an ideal civilization of peace and harmony and the ultimate fulfillment of its purpose. The desire of others to avoid this future in order to maintain their illusion of "freedom" and "self-determination" is entirely irrational in its view. See **Negotiating With the Unity** in the **Introduction** for some general guidelines on what negotiation may achieve.

If the characters successfully negotiate an agreement for the Unity to let them leave, it might even ask them to become its emissaries to the outside world, particularly if it thinks they're likely to inform the world of its existence anyway.

One thing the group-mind understands is the importance of family and relationships, so it is likely to insist some of the characters stay behind so others can leave, as a sign of good faith that the paragons will uphold their side of any bargain.

Of course, if the Unity thinks it can get away with it, the entity won't hesitate to use negotiations as an opportunity to carry out some other plans while the characters are occupied. After all, the paragons might not be able to do multiple things at once, but the Unity can. So it could be setting a trap or ambush, sabotaging the characters' vehicle, or putting other plans in motion while also talking to the group, all without showing any indication of its true intentions. The Unity gets a +20 bonus to Bluff checks to mislead the characters in this particular case, because the subtle signs they're looking for aren't even coming from the people to whom they are talking!

UNITED WE... RUN!

Finally, either before the events described in this chapter, during, or after them, the characters may simply decide to make a break for it and get out of Dodge so they can either warn the authorities or dump the problem in somebody else's lap.

Naturally, the Unity doesn't want word of its existence to get out prematurely, which is to say before it is assured of continued existence if not outright victory. It has gained enough insight from the minds it presently includes to know much of humanity will not welcome it initially. Therefore it has kept a tight lid on what is happening in town and will do whatever it can to keep the characters there.

For starters, characters may find things like cell phones and other means of communication stolen out of their motel rooms, vehicle(s), or even off their persons (although the last requires an opposed Slight of Hand and Notice check, with a +0 bonus for the Unity since it has no particular skill in thievery). Sabotage is also a real possibility, simply taking or draining batteries, chargers, and the like. Phones in town prove mysteriously "out of order."

Likewise, the group's vehicle(s) may be sabotaged, with essential engine components removed. The Unity has considerably more finesse in this department, and an effective Craft

(mechanical) skill of at least +10 or so, allowing it to easily render any vehicle its drones can reach inoperable in minutes.

The group might try and steal a car in order to escape Unity. Defeating a typical car lock is a Disable Device check (DC 20), while hot-wiring the ignition is a DC 15 Craft check (electronic or mechanical will do). Of course, neither is necessary if the characters simply manage to lift someone's keys (possibly involving a Sleight of Hand check, the use of powers, or simple coercion).

HIGH SPEED CHASE, REDUX

If the characters make a run for it, either on foot or by car, the Unity tries to prevent their escape. If they're on foot, then they're likely to have a mob coming after them, although particularly athletic characters might be able to outdistance them: have the players make Constitution checks for their characters (DC 10) while doing the same for the Unity's drone(s). If the players can win three out of five rolls, they're able to get away, although what they do and where they go from there is up to them.

If the group heads out of town in a vehicle, the Unity police attempt to pull them over, as in **Faster Than a Speeding...** at the start of this chapter. If they refuse, the cops give chase and try to *force* the characters off the road. You can handle this with some opposed Drive checks or the pursuit system from *Mastermind's Manual*, if you want to play it out in more detail. Paragons may be able to use their powers to tilt a chase in their favor, disabling pursuer's cars, for example, or creating concealment or distractions.

RIVER RUN

Some paranormals might try to use the river as a means out of Unity, particularly if they have water control or aquatic abilities, but also perhaps if other means of exit are cut off. The town doesn't have much more than small pleasure-craft, basically rowboats, some with outboard motors, and smaller canoes and kayaks available. The river itself is rocky in spots, and you might want to ask for either a Notice or Drive skill check (DC 15) to avoid potential hazards that can damage a boat enough to sink it. If that happens, Swim checks may also be required, although the river isn't generally too rough (DC 10).

There might be some pursuit on the water if characters choose this course, probably using other available boats, but it's also the route least likely to be watched carefully so a stealthy group (succeeding on a DC 10 Stealth check) could leave Unity by river without being spotted.

PARANORMAL EXIT

If the characters have some paranormal means of leaving Unity under their own power, such as flying, teleporting, or even burrowing out of town, there isn't much the group-mind can do to stop them. However, unless the characters *all* have such capabilities, or the ability to take the whole group along

with them, they end up with the original problem of getting out of town or choosing to leave somebody behind. Characters might try to rig up some conveyance for getting everyone out, or use extra effort for a suitable power stunt (with or without a hero point). By all means, allow them to do so.

ALL-POINTS BULLETIN

Even if the paranormals do get clear of Unity, their troubles are not necessarily over. Unless they left with the Unity's permission, the entity has the local police department put out an all-points bulletin (APB) on the characters and whatever vehicle(s) they're using, claiming they are wanted for questioning.

If the group committed any potential crimes in Unity, they will make up the charges against them, from property damage to kidnapping or complicity in the deaths of local townsfolk. Otherwise, the charges will be completely trumped-up, but state and local law enforcement will have no reason not to believe them, unless the characters bring some kind of proof.

Therefore, if the group doesn't intend to go to the authorities with what they know, you can have the authorities come find them. Depending on what the characters do, this could turn into another chase or conflict scene, or simply provide a reason for the group to talk to the local (and perhaps state or national) authorities about what's happening in Unity.

Either way, once the Unity and the characters have revealed their hands and engaged in conflict or the paranormals have escaped the town (or both), it's time to move on to the final phase of the conflict.

CHAPTER THREE: TYRANNY OF THE MAJORITY

Once the characters are aware of the Unity's existence and abilities, they need to decide what they intend to do about it. It's also likely the Unity won't remain a secret for very long at this stage. Other people—including the authorities and other paranormals—could learn of the Unity, and they have their own agendas where it is concerned. This chapter looks at the possible responses to the Unity, what the psychic entity does in return, and what the final outcome of the conflict might be.

Things in this chapter are fairly freeform: rather than location- or event-based encounters, it provides an outline of actions and possible responses taken by either side. It's up to you to decide what happens next based on the group's chosen course of action, the events in the adventure up to this point, and the type of ending you're aiming towards. If you want to offer the players a potential happy ending, with things neatly resolved, take a look at **The Sleeper Wakes** and **Small Miracles** under the **Unity or Freedom?** section and work back from there to get the characters to that point.

WE'RE FROM THE GOVERNMENT...

The first thing characters have to decide is whether or not to try and get outside help or to deal with the group-mind on their own. Depending on what happened in **Chapter 2**, the decision might already be made for them. If the group can't leave town, then they have to deal with things on their own. If they do manage to escape, the police report on their supposed activities may end with them having to do some fast explaining to the authorities.

If the paranormals are on their own for the conclusion of the conflict, keep that in mind when the following sections discuss options. Otherwise, you should consider the reactions of the authorities when the group reveals what they know and seeks help.

PARANORMAL PREPAREDNESS

When considering responses to news of a psychic gestalt mind taking over a small rural town and threatening to grow beyond its borders, you should first decide whether or not there is *any* chance the authorities will consider such a story anything other than crazy. In other words, do the local, state, or national governments (or the general populace, for that matter) have any knowledge of the existence of paranormals and their powers?

If the answer is "yes," then the group's story is at least potentially believable, especially if they happen to demonstrate their own powers and point out that, if they *were* criminals, they could have easily escaped capture. The authorities are likely to believe them, if for no other reason than the need to treat all such possible threats as credible until they can determine otherwise.

If the answer is "no," the paranormals have a more difficult time. Their story initially comes off as some crazed yarn spun by criminals looking to mount an insanity plea (or who are

really insane). Demonstrations of their paranormal powers might win the characters some points, at least making clear what they say *could* be true. If they can somehow provide evidence, it will be taken into account, but odds are good they'll be passed up the chain of command to become somebody else's problem.

That's also likely the case if the answer is "maybe," in that some higher-ups in the government know the truth about paranormals, but most people do not. In that case, government agents might show up to question the characters and either take them into custody, or assist them in dealing with the potential threat posed by the Unity, or possibly both: taking them from any local authorities, but then agreeing to let them go, *if* they help deal with the larger threat.

LOCAL RESPONSE

The local police and sheriff's departments are going to be looking for the characters based on the APB the Unity police put out. They attempt to arrest and detain the group until they can verify what is going on; resisting arrest or trying to escape only compounds the problem, giving the authorities an initial attitude of hostile towards them. If they turn themselves in, the characters might get a bit more cooperation (an initial attitude of indifferent), otherwise, the local authorities are generally unfriendly, based on what they've heard about the characters.

The group might try to convince the local police of the danger of the Unity. Handle this through roleplaying and the use of interaction skills, particularly Diplomacy. Give the characters appropriate bonuses to their skill checks based on their story, how they present it to the authorities, and what else they tell them. Demonstrations of their powers can provide a bonus (anywhere from +2 to +10, depending on what they do); at the very least, they'll convince the cops *something* weird is going on, possibly getting attention from higher-ups.

Even if you decide paranormals are publicly known phenomena, the locals aren't likely to have had much experience with them. Still, the revelation the characters are paragons could improve their standing, automatically improving attitudes towards them a step (from indifferent to friendly, for example). The police won't necessarily drop the charges and give the paranormals whatever they want, but they may be more inclined to believe them.

Unfortunately, about the best response the characters can get is for local authorities to agree to either pass information on to state or national authorities or for them to send personnel to Unity to check out the situation. The latter response is essentially useless, as anyone sent to Unity is assimilated into the group-mind (telling the Unity everything those people know). Smart characters will advise against sending just a few police officers, or even an armed team, back to the town and will prefer to take what they know to a higher authority.

STATE AND NATIONAL RESPONSE

Unless the characters are somehow associated with the state or national authorities in your *Paragons* campaign, pretty much the only way characters get attention at this level is if they've convinced the local authorities there is a serious threat in Unity. That's when the state and national authorities step in to try and contain the situation and figure out what to do next.

How quickly the authorities react depends on how soon they're informed, how much they believe what the characters have to say, and basically how soon you *want* them to respond. Given some proof of a paranormal "outbreak" in Unity, combined with things like terrorist threats and natural disasters, assume the authorities choose to act quickly and decisively (for a change).

The first orders of business will be containment and organization. The National Guard or other military units may be mobilized to seal off the area around Unity and keep it contained until the situation is under control. At the same time, military and civilian officials will set up lines of communication and a nearby command post to oversee the operation. As the people with the most direct experience with the situation, the characters are likely to be kept at the command post to provide information, and consulted about potential courses of action (see **A Unified Response**, following).

You can use the following supporting characters in situations where state and national authorities get involved.

COLONEL DAN PAULSON

Colonel Paulson is a U.S. Army officer placed in charge of troops in and around Unity and in command of the overall emergency effort. He's a career military officer with over twenty-five years of experience, but a bit out of his depth in dealing with the paranormal. He tends to focus on conventional tactics, and might need some reminding that he's dealing with forces outside his experience.

So long as characters are respectful in their suggestions, they'll find Col. Paulson a receptive audience, willing to consult them for their expertise. He's a bit more reluctant to rely on them to carry out missions, as they are civilians, but he can be convinced otherwise, especially if the paranormals are the only ones reasonably able to do the job and it will potentially save lives.

Use the Soldier archetype (see *M&M,* page 229) for Col. Paulson, increasing all skills by 4 ranks.

SPECIAL AGENT WILLIS DEMETRO

Special Agent Demetro is the ranking FBI agent and civilian authority on-hand, with experience dealing with domestic terrorism, separatist and survivalist groups, and the like. He's not quite as nonplussed as Colonel Paulson by the Unity situation, although exactly how much experience or understanding he has of the paranormal is up to you. If you feel the players need a bit more guidance, Agent Demetro can serve as a helpful mouthpiece to feed it to them. On the other hand, if they're taking charge and have plenty of their own ideas, Demetro is glad for their assistance, although he, too, reminds them they are civilians regardless of their special abilities.

If it so happens the characters are government agents themselves, then Demetro might be their liaison or contact in the area, they might even outrank him! If they don't, Demetro might be able to give them orders, although he'll also be

THE PRA AND THE INITIATIVE

The *Paragons* setting sourcebook describes to agencies of particular relevance to this chapter of *A More Perfect Union:* the Paranormal Regulatory Agency and the Initiative.

The PRA is a United States government agency overseeing paragons, their powers, and cases involving them, particularly criminal cases and matters concerning national security. PRA agents tend to be police-, FBI-, or even CIA-trained, experienced field agents willing and able to take on paranormal threats, often without any such abilities of their own.

The Initiative, on the other hand, is a shadowy alliance of international power-brokers gathering information and resources concerning the paranormal for the longterm security and advancement of its patrons. The Initiative is far more of a "black ops" (or at least "grey ops") organization with its own agenda and interests.

Representatives of either or both agencies could make contact with the characters after learning about their visit to Unity and what they discovered there. Use the Government Agent archetype from page 227 of *Mutants & Masterminds* for the agents, unless you want to include paragons among their number, in which case you can use the characters from the **Appendix** as models, applying their powers to the Government Agent archetype. Special Agent Demetro could be an agent from either organization rather than the FBI, in this case.

The government agents will want to take charge of the situation (and the characters). This can result in a rather unsatisfying ending if the player characters end up benched, so you're probably better off making the government-types human and having them rely on the characters for paranormal assistance. This is assuming the characters themselves aren't government agents; see **On A Mission** in the **Introduction** for this possibility.

more inclined to rely on their abilities, since they're not civilians involved in a national security matter.

Use the Government Agent archetype (see *M&M,* page 227) for Special Agent Demetro.

PARANORMAL RESPONSE

If the characters aren't the only known paranormals, then it's possible the government has the assistance of at least a few trusted and cooperative paragons; perhaps even their own super-powered agents. The authorities could deploy paranormals to help deal with the Unity, although such a plan has its advantages and drawbacks.

Obviously, the primary advantage is drawing upon the powers of any government paranormals to contain and deal with the Unity. The disadvantages are two-fold: first, the more paragons involved in the matter, the greater chance of the group-mind gaining control over them, thereby gaining a significant advantage. Second, if a lot of other paranormal

non-player characters get involved in the adventure, the role of the player characters is diminished.

Unless you want the players to switch characters, playing the newly arrived paranormal agents, it's probably best to decide either the government doesn't have any paragons available to help deal with the problem, or it isn't willing to risk the possibility of losing them to the Unity, at least not until absolutely necessary. That puts the normal authorities and the paranormal characters on their own for handling the problem.

SPIN CONTROL

One response both the characters and the authorities will want to avoid is information about the Unity getting out to the general public and starting a panic, and possibly a mob mentality almost as dangerous as the paranormal group-mind itself.

Up until now, any strange goings-on in Unity have been below the radar of the press, the media, and the Internet, but that won't last if the characters are involved in any spectacular incidents, or if information about military operations leaks to the media. The same may be true if the characters (for whatever reason) take their story to the media and the court of public opinion.

Even if paranormals and their powers are public knowledge, the authorities will want to come up with a cover story for what's happening in Unity and why they are mobilizing. The most likely story involves a disease outbreak in the town, since it nicely fits all the existing circumstances and provides an ideal excuse to cut off all contact and set up containment. Similar stories could involve things like a dangerous chemical spill or even a terrorist attack, although the latter is a bit less believable, considering Unity is an isolated small town with no strategic importance.

The more things happen, the more the media will take notice and start digging for information. If the characters work openly with the authorities, you can assume reporters and perhaps online bloggers and the like will quickly get photographs or video footage of them and will start asking who they are and how they are involved. The Unity police APB can easily get into the press (since it was transmitted on an open police band), leading some to speculate if the characters are criminals, somehow responsible for what's happening in the town or, worse yet, disease carriers or the like.

The authorities will limit press access to a degree, but film crews and reporters will still flock to the operations or command center and get as close as they can to find out what's going on. All it would take is for one intrepid reporter or camera crew to try and sneak into Unity and sneak back out with one or more assimilated personnel for things to start getting *really* tricky...

If you need a convenient reporter character, you can use the following:

SHARON BARBER

Ms. Barber is a reporter for a local network affiliate news program, and sees this incident, the "Crisis in Unity" (as the press quickly dubs it), her ticket to national attention and a step up to the big time. She and her crew (a cameraman, Alex Jacobson, and a technical guy, Juan Carral) pursue the story from every possible avenue. The more the authorities try to cover it up, the more Sharon is certain there's something the public needs to know. Appeals to patriotism or the need for public calm only earn sarcastic retorts about cover-ups, governmental corruption, and the importance of freedom of the press, although Sharon's true motive is none of those things. Threats or intimidation may get her to back down temporarily but only redouble her efforts later on. It may be possible to buy her off with promises of an exclusive when matters are resolved, but then it becomes a matter of dealing with the other fifty or so reporters on the story.

Use the Reporter archetype (see *M&M,* page 228) for Sharon Barber's game stats.

A UNIFIED RESPONSE

The characters and the outside world can take a number of different responses to the Unity: attack, containment, negotiation, infiltration, or even cooperation, depending on where the characters' loyalties lie. This section looks at each response and how they might play out in the adventure, whether the group acts on their own or in cooperation with the authorities and allies.

As in other parts of this chapter, this section tries to cover the situations in broad strokes, letting you fill in the details as best suits the adventure.

ATTACK

Some are likely to be sufficiently threatened by the existence and actions of the Unity and all it represents to immediately go on the offensive. Of course, the problem is the Unity itself is made up of many otherwise innocent people. While a capable paranormal can likely take down any number of the Unity's drones, there's the question of whether or not the paranormals (or the human authorities) are willing to take that step.

The authorities will generally do their level best to avoid violence, considering it a last resort. Paranormals—including the characters—may decide to do otherwise. This could put them at odds with the authorities, and probably won't make them too popular with the general public, although the willingness to take quick and decisive action to eliminate a threat like the Unity *might* carry some weight in the court of public opinion.

Speaking of public opinion, the general public may be the first to take violent action against the Unity, once it finds out about the entity's existence and the danger it poses. The specter of an invisible, mind-controlling, conspiracy cult could induce massive paranoia and bouts of violence against anyone who even seems to be a "mind-control drone" or the like. Of course, an angry mob of ordinary people confronting the Unity is more likely to compound the problem as they are assimilated and incorporated into the entity.

Some characters will come up with alterative means of attacking the Unity (discussed in the **Introduction**). Paranormals with mental powers may try contacting the entity directly and breaking its "hold" over its drones. This might prove successful or disastrous, as the mental contact becomes a channel for the Unity to spread its influence. Any attacker aware of Carol Molloy and her role as Unifier will certainly target her directly, assuming they can find her.

The Unity, for its part, will defend itself if attacked, but will generally not initiate hostilities. It doesn't have to, after all, unless it is backed into a corner. Individual drones fight and struggle heedless of their safety. The Unity won't sacrifice parts of itself needlessly, but it *will* sacrifice them, if need be, suffering no more damage from the loss of some drones than a person might from a few cuts and bruises. If the Unity gains control over paranormals, military or police assets, or both, its options for offense and defense become stronger, and it will use them to the best of its (considerable) intelligence.

THE BATTLE FOR UNITY

If things deteriorate to the point where the authorities feel they have no alternative but to attack, or the Unity feels going on the offensive is its only option, you can run a sizeable battle in and around the town between military forces, paragons, and the drones of the group-mind. The Mass Combat Rules in the **Appendix** should be useful for this kind of scene. Keep the focus on the actions of the characters and whatever challenges they confront, with the rest of the fight as a backdrop.

Overall, the Unity doesn't stand much of a chance against long-range military weapons and tactics, but the problem lies in how willing to military is to use lethal force against its own citizens. Even non-lethal weapons are only a stop-gap measure: something will still need to be done about the unconscious bodies of the group-mind's drones, and physical contact with them (even using things like bio-hazard gear) will only spread the Unity's influence. Without some kind of paranormal aid, the only truly decisive combat victory will be to kill everyone in Unity to wipe out the group-mind, or at least reduce it to a more manageable and containable size.

Needless to say, the authorities will be extremely reluctant to follow this course of action, but it will remain as an option of last resort. The deaths of thousands of people in a para-

normal incident are almost certain to affect how the outside world views and treats paragons and, even in victory, the characters may have a great many challenges ahead.

CONTAINMENT

The most likely response on the part of the authorities to the Unity's existence is an effort to contain its spread and limit its influence. Very early on, authorities will treat the paranormal "outbreak" as just that, similar to the spread of a virulent disease. Authorities may, in fact, use the disease story as a cover, allowing them to evacuate and quarantine areas around Unity to prevent the entity from assimilating any other people. Considerable effort will go into finding out how the Unity "mind virus" is transmitted and how to protect against it. Unfortunately, other than limiting contact, the only real countermeasures are paranormal in nature.

The characters may also hit upon the idea of trying to contain the Unity and limit its growth. This can involve anything from erecting impenetrable force fields around affected areas to "scorched earth" tactics, destroying large swaths of territory to hem the Unity in and keep it from spreading. If the paranormals are working with the authorities, they may be enlisted to help with evacuations or to provide containment. If they're not, then they could find themselves at cross-purposes with the authorities as they try to implement two different plans at once.

The Unity resents any attempt to contain it, and it will cautiously probe any such attempts and try to overcome them. It won't react violently unless attacked, but it will do everything it can to insinuate itself outside of the containment area(s). Given the way the group-mind spreads, it should have plenty of opportunities. Any containment effort will probably trap free-willed people in with the Unity, and it may spend some time assimilating them before dealing with the issue of overcoming the containment.

Unfortunately, containment is a strictly temporary measure. Sooner or later, one side or the other has to take decisive action, either going on the offensive or making contact to arrange for negotiations.

One thing containment does provide is time: time for the characters and the authorities to gather more information and formulate a better plan of action. How much time depends heavily on how long the Unity is willing to wait before it takes action on its own or when circumstances force the characters and their allies into action. For example, if information starts to leak to the press, the timetable may be moved up in order to act before public panic sets in.

NEGOTIATION

Once the Unity is contained, and perhaps even before then, comes the option of negotiating with it. The Unity is, after all, an intelligent (*very* intelligent) entity, capable of communicating its wants and needs. Once its existence is known, it sees no reason to hide and is willing and able to negotiate with outsiders, if necessary.

Since the Unity only negotiates when it is in an inferior or at least equal position, the characters may be able to force concessions from the entity during talks. The Unity is more than willing

to bargain in order to gain time and breathing space. Keep in mind that it knows everything known to its component minds, which may give the entity an edge, depending on who has been assimilated. While the Unity negotiates in good faith, and will generally uphold any agreements it makes, it won't allow those agreements to threaten its safety or long-term existence.

The long term is exactly what the Unity considers in any negotiation. It believes (rightly) that it can survive the loss of any of its drones and continue to exist. What it doesn't yet know for certain is whether or not its continued existence is dependent on Carol Molloy and her paranormal powers. Until it does know, the Unity will make her security and continued existence its number one priority, and it will do its best to keep anyone from finding out about the Unifier or her role in the group-mind's existence.

It's up to you whether or not the characters even get to negotiate with the Unity. The authorities may prefer to send their own expert negotiators, and it's entirely possible more than one party will contact the Unity to negotiate, if word has spread to the outside world. The paranormals could attend a meeting of several influential nations, organizations, and paranormals, all looking to negotiate with the Unity for their own benefit. Such a meeting could be a true roleplaying challenge, one where many paranormal powers are of little, if any, use.

If you want to give the characters the opportunity to negotiate, you can have the Unity specifically request them as part of the initial terms. Characters may rightly suspect a trap, and the truth could be anything from the entity preferring to speak with people it already knows something about to trying to use the negotiations as a ruse to assimilate the paranormals and gain control of their valuable powers.

Use **Negotiating With the Unity** in the **Introduction** as a general guideline to what the characters can accomplish in talks, modifying the entity's reactions and demands based on how well the paranormals argue their case (and make the necessary skill checks).

FAMILY MATTERS

A potential point of negotiation may be the fate of the Molloy boys, Derek and Kevin. If the characters took them from Unity, then the Unity wants them back, driven by Carol's own love for her children. If the kids are still in Unity, the characters might want to try and negotiate for their freedom, which is something the group-mind is reluctant to grant at best.

The group could try using the boys as a bargaining chip, offering to return them in exchange for concessions, or even holding them hostage and trying to negotiate the Unity's surrender. This is a tricky proposition and certainly won't earn the

UNITY POWER STUNTS

Don't overlook the potential for the Unifier to perform power stunts (see **Extra Effort**, *M&M,* page 120) using her not inconsiderable powers under the Unity's guidance or, for that matter, for the Unity to undergo a secondary "breakout," like the initial unleashing of a paranormal's powers. After all, Carol Molloy's breakout was a fairly unusual one, and her comatose state may be inhibiting or even *enhancing* her powers in unforeseen ways, allowing them to develop unexpectedly.

In other words, you have *carte blanche* to use Gamemaster Fiat to give the Unity additional powers as suits the course of the adventure, although you should probably award the players a hero point for each new complication you introduce via this method, since it's sure to make the challenges they face more difficult.

It's entirely up to you what the Unity's power stunts or developments are, when and if they occur. Here are some possibilities to further complicate the adventure:

- The Unity goes into a primal "survival mode" and turns decidedly violent. Its drones become more like remorseless antibodies, attacking and attempting to assimilate any invaders, or destroy them, if they can't bring them into the group-mind. Give the drones the benefits of the Rage feat (see *M&M,* page 63) when in this kind of "fight or flight" response.

- The Unity acquires the paranormal ability to grant its drones powers! This might affect a particular drone or several (depending on how powerful it is). The affected drones become paranormals themselves. They may not necessarily be as powerful as the characters, but there may be more of them, and they use their newfound abilities with perfect coordination and teamwork. The empowerment effect might also "burn out" the affected drones, causing them to overload and die when it wears off (and also limiting how often the Unity can use it).

- The Unifier's mental powers expand momentarily, assimilating all the minds in a particular area at once (the Area extra, possibly with levels of Progression). This may happen whether the Unity intends it or not and, as a kind of "reflex" response and once the additional minds are assimilated, they're as much a part of the entity as any others. Such an inadvertent power stunt could seriously damage efforts to negotiate with the Unity, or to see it as anything other than a threat.

- Finally, the Unity might make the evolutionary leap from dependence on Carol Molloy's paranormal powers to becoming a truly independent psychic entity, a new form of life. Its psychic essence is distributed throughout the brains of all of its drones, meaning so long as any one of them survives, the Unity continues to exist (much like the Survival extra of Duplication, see *M&M,* page 83). At this point, merely eliminating the Unifier isn't sufficient to overcome the Unity; all of its components must be destroyed in order to kill it, or it simply begins assimilating and growing again. This could make the group-mind almost unstoppable.

characters any appreciation from the group-mind. Still, they may be able to get it to back down, at least temporarily.

An additional complication is Kevin and Derek don't *want* to return home unless they're assured things are back to normal. Otherwise, they'll object and may even try and run off on their own. Also, should any harm befall the boys, all bets are off with the Unity, which becomes almost murderously enraged and attacks immediately (see **Attack** for what might happen then).

INVESTIGATION

While the paranormal characters may, or may not, be of assistance in direct military confrontation or diplomatic negotiations, one area in which their powers can be quite useful is investigation, intelligence-gathering, and infiltration of Unity in order to put the group-mind at a disadvantage or even shut it down.

On the one hand, the authorities will be reluctant to send the group into the area again just because the Unity could gain control over them and their powers. On the other hand, those selfsame powers might allow the paranormals to succeed where human soldiers might fail, and they know less about mil-

itary plans and operations than anyone else capable of taking on the mission. In the end, if the characters are willing, or offer, to gather information, the authorities allow them to do so.

COOPERATION

It's possible one or more of the characters might decide to cooperate with the Unity for various reasons. After all, the entity is an entirely new form of "life" and arguably has some right to exist, and it is not likely to have many advocates. The paragons might find themselves the only things standing in between an aggressive military response and a defensive paranormal entity, and a fight nobody really wins.

If the characters decide to try and help the Unity (while still refusing to accept assimilation, presumably), it will accept their help, but it takes some time before it trusts them entirely. Outsiders might perceive the paranormals as traitors or even puppets of the group-mind, and they won't have made many friends among normal humans unless they handle the delicate situation *very* carefully and come up with a mutually acceptable solution for everyone.

UNITY OR FREEDOM?

The conclusion of *A More Perfect Union* depends a great deal on how the characters choose to deal with the Unity. In the end, they may manage to negotiate some sort of peaceful coexistence with the new entity. Alternately, they

SIDENT CALLS UNITY RESOLUTION "A N|

may choose—willingly or otherwise—to fight the Unity to the finish in order to eliminate a threat to freedom and individuality. The characters might come up with a means of waking the Unifier from her coma, causing the Unity to cease to exist or become something else altogether. They might get some unexpected aid from a new paranormal, perhaps one or both of the Molloy kids. Finally, it's possible the Unity overcomes all obstacles in its way and takes over the world. All of these possibilities are discussed below.

AN UNEASY PEACE

The paranormals might come to an agreement with the Unity that satisfies all sides, at least enough to put an end to any immediate hostilities. The terms of the agreement are whatever the characters (and their allies) can negotiate and the nation, the world community, and the Unity are willing to accept. Note the government should be very leery of allowing the Unity to continue to exist, even as an "independent state" of some sort. It will be difficult to convince many that the Unity is anything other than a kind of hostile contagion, and a terrible threat to the safety of the world.

If the characters are successful in negotiating a truce with the Unity, odds are good they'll be called upon to help if trouble arises in the future. They might become "ambassadors" of a sort, acting as go-betweens for the Unity and the authorities. They may also be given the role of safeguarding the world from the Unity and making sure it keeps up its end of the bargain (whatever that may be). These might be additional duties for paranormals already concerned with political and security matters, or the start of a new paranormal force working for the authorities.
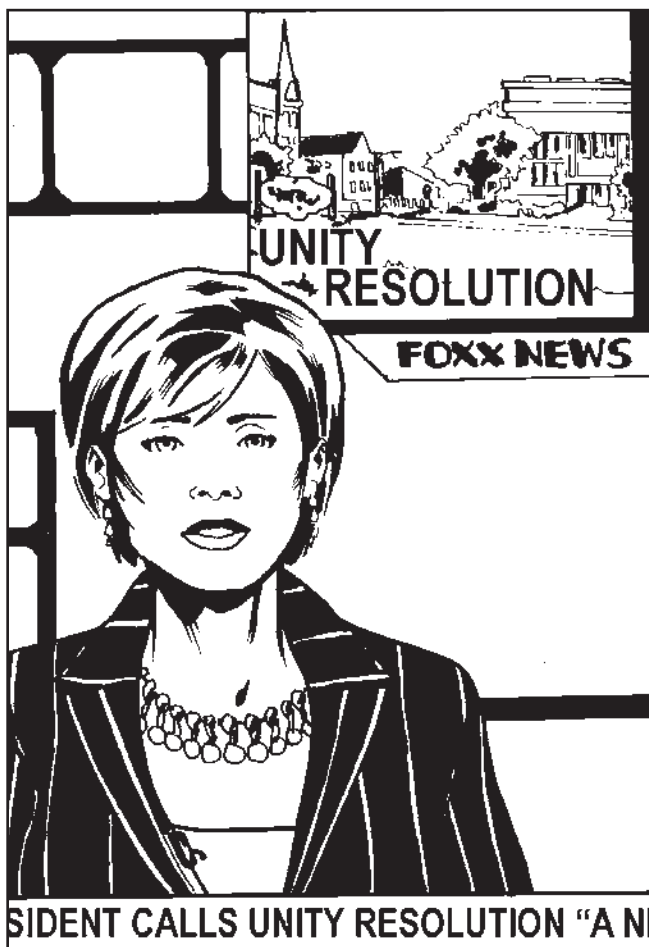
A peace agreement with the Unity buys all sides time, but won't necessarily end hostilities. At first, both sides will likely be involved in espionage against each other, looking for potential weaknesses they can exploit. The authorities will be interested in curing the "Unity infection" and freeing the people assimilated into the group-mind. The Unity will be looking to preserve and advanced its own existence, perhaps incorporating people covertly to use them as spies: all it would take is one or two drones outside a contained area for the Unity's influence to spread.

Even if the government agrees to a cessation of hostilities, it won't prevent others from taking action. Vigilante militia groups might riot out of fear of assimilation and even try to attack Unity. At the least, people in the surrounding area will flee, fearing what might happen if they stay. Other nations will lobby for action to neutralize the Unity as a threat and may take such actions upon themselves, even if it means invading an ally. Likewise, certain black ops factions within the government might maintain the ruse of cooperation (since they don't know just how telepathic the Unity is) while working covertly to come up with some means of destroying the group-mind.

PULLING THE PLUG

Confronted with the Unity and aware of its origin, some paranormals may choose to stop the entity at its source: the mind of Carol Molloy.

The paragons can learn of Carol's role in the Unity in various ways, mostly by piecing together the evidence: her accident, her children's immunity to the group-mind, the Unity's protectiveness of them and her, possibly her relocation from the Marshfield Clinic. Those with some sort of mental powers may be able to confirm Carol as the coordinating mind of the Unity simply by seeing her or tracking the telepathic links back to their source.

Getting to Molloy won't necessarily be easy. The Unity is aware of her importance and will sacrifice anyone else to protect the Unifier. The easiest approach is stealth, but if one drone detects them, everyone in the group-mind will know it, and react accordingly. The group could get some help from the authorities, such as soldiers to run interference or even distract the Unity with an offensive. Let the players come up with whatever sort of plan they wish.

Once they find the Unifier and get to her, the rest is relatively easy, at least in a physical sense. Carol Molloy remains comatose and helpless. Killing her is simple, using whatever means the characters wish. If they kill or otherwise neutralize the Unifier, the group-mind she created dies with her, unless you decide the Unity has somehow evolved beyond the need for a single coordinating mind (see **Unity Power Stunts** in the previous section). The danger to the world is over, and all the characters had to do was kill a helpless coma victim and mother of two, who was completely unaware of what she had unleashed.

It's a virtual certainty the authorities will clear the paranormals of any criminal charges involving Carol Molloy's death

in light of the extraordinary circumstances, although there will likely be an investigation. There's a possibility of her family bringing a civil suit for wrongful death against the paranormals, although they probably wouldn't win. (Wealthy paranormals might settle out of court just to avoid the hassle, however.) How the general public and the paranormal community react to Molloy's death depends on what happened, how much information gets out, and how the characters and the authorities play it in the media.

While the decision to kill the Unifier might be an easy one for the players, it might not be for their characters. It's one thing if the paranormals are a trained and experienced commando force, able and willing to kill when necessary. It's another when they are otherwise ordinary people with unusual powers who have never taken a life, and never expected to be entrusted with such dire choices. Even if the characters are convinced killing Carol Molloy is the right thing to do and their only option, when the moment comes, they may hesitate. Will saving throws to have the determination to go through with it are certainly appropriate, and you should encourage the players to roleplay the difficulty of their characters' choice.

If you want to make the ending a bit less harsh, you can always put the characters through the wringer of having to choose, and then, after Molloy is dead and the Unity is gone, use one of the other endings like **The Sleeper Wakes** or **Small Miracles**, having her come back to life as a result of the Unity's destruction. It might be a manifestation of her

power, that of one of her children, or just another mystery of the paranormal world of *Paragons*. Whatever the case, it may lighten the burden on the characters' consciences and open up new story possibilities, as outlined in the other endings.

THE SLEEPER WAKES

The players may want to try waking Carol from her coma, in hopes that her conscious mind can rein in the Unity in some fashion. Whether or not they can do it, and if so, how, is up to you. Paranormals with healing powers may be able to repair the damage to Carol's brain. This requires a DC 25 Healing power check, or perhaps a DC 10 check with the use of the Regrowth power feat, which might need extra effort for a paranormal who doesn't have it.

Telepathic paranormals might try a trip into Carol's subconscious mind to bring her out of her coma. This can lead to an entire "dreamscape" adventure (or even a *series* of adventures) as the paranormals confront embodied aspects of the Unifier's personality and memories to reach the core of Carol's buried persona and bring it to the surface. Such a mindscape could also be accessible to the Unity, meaning the various minds making it up could "follow" the paragons there and try to prevent them from waking the Unifier.

See the **Mental** section under **Combating the Unity** in the **Introduction** for some guidelines on handling mental combat, or simply run the "mental" conflict as a normal, physical, one taking place on an alternate plane of existence, where things work as they normally do simply because that's how characters *expect* them to work.

Lastly, simply talking to Carol might rouse her, especially if the need is urgent and she has been on the mend all this time. Allow the players to roleplay the situation and possibly use interaction skills, particularly Diplomacy, to try and bring Mrs. Molloy around. A substantial bonus is appropriate if one or more of Carol's family is present and calls for her to awaken and help them.

Of course, restoring Carol Molloy to consciousness is not a guaranteed victory. Her conscious mind might bring a measure of individuality and independence to the Unity, or even dissolve it altogether, canceling the unconscious effects of her Mind Control power. On the other hand, a conscious Unifier might actually *strengthen* the Unity and give it greater direction and purpose. Once conscious and aware of what she has created, Carol might decide the Unity is a good thing and has the right idea: humanity is better off as part of a collective consciousness, and she intends to "help" them whether they want it or not!

A conscious Unifier might even draw additional power from the number of minds under her influence, giving her formidable physical or psychokinetic abilities as well, making her a match for the paragons in a direct conflict. Now they have to overcome the Unifier in combat (hopefully without having to kill her) and either force her to dissolve the Unity or hope that her defeat does so; all this while other members of the Unity hammer at the door trying to aid their "queen."

SMALL MIRACLES

If you want to give the players a helping hand and a relatively easy way out of the scenario, especially if you want something approaching a happy ending for the whole adventure, you can use one or both of the Molloy brothers as a plot device for dealing with the Unity and its repercussions.

Both brothers have a mother with paranormal powers, powers to which they are mysteriously immune, so it shouldn't come as a great shock to anyone if either or both of the boys turn out to be paranormals themselves. The stress of the events in the story is certainly enough to justify a breakout and development of their full powers, especially at a suitably dramatic moment.

What are those powers? Depends on the needs of the story and what you decide, but some good possibilities include the following:

- **Healing:** The Healing power can save an injured or dying character at a key moment, and potentially heal Carol Molloy's injuries and awaken her from her coma (as mentioned under **The Sleeper Wakes**). Healing can also save Unity drones injured during the story; with Resurrection it can even bring back the dead! Later, of course, the community will deal with the repercussions of a school-aged boy with the miraculous power to heal, but that's a hook for a future story. "Healing" could also just be an aspect of a larger power like Life Control (see *M&M,* page 90).

- **Mind Control:** Like mother, like son; the Mind Control power can potentially counter the effects of the Unity's influence, freeing that individual from the group-mind and rendering him or her no longer "contagious," although the Unity continues to exist unless or until Carol's power is directly countered. Mind Control with the Area extra can free even more people at once. Of course, this power could also be used to *force* the characters to do things and there's the unpleasant possibility this Mind Control power is Contagious as well, and just creates a rival group-mind for the Unity rather than solving the problem.

- **Nullify:** This power can likewise counter the Unity's Mind Control, and with less mess or concern for side effects. Perhaps it usually manifests as Power Resistance (explaining the resistance to the Unity's influence in the first place) but can also be directed outward. An Area Nullify can do the job even faster.

- **Telepathy:** Telepathic powers make sense in the context of the boys' inheritance from their mother. They can provide an avenue to send the paragons into the depths of Carol Molloy's unconscious mind to help bring her back to consciousness and sanity, if none of the player characters have the capability themselves. Telepathy can also potentially counter the Unity's Mind Control, and may even include powers like Mind Control, Mental Blast, and the like, as Alternate Power feats (see **Telepathy**, *M&M,* page 105).

- **Teleport:** Need to get the characters somewhere in a hurry, past the hordes of the Unity? Teleport, probably with enough Progression to bring at least one other person along and the Accurate modifier, can do the trick. Alternately, perhaps it's Teleport with the Portal extra (see *M&M,* page 106), which the paragons can simply step through to get to their destination. Such a power can also provide a quick escape from an otherwise hopeless situation.

Either or both brothers could have paranormal potential, and they don't have to have the same powers (or set of powers), so you've got two possible plot devices. You could have Kevin develop the power to Nullify the Unity's Mind Control while Derek gains Healing to aid his mother's recovery, for example, or whatever other combination suits your plans and the flow of the story.

You can also use the brothers as pure plot device characters (see *M&M,* page 211), giving them such tremendous power they can banish the Unity, awaken their mother, and restore the town so everything is back to normal and nobody but the characters even remember what happened, but the players might consider that a bit too convenient and unsatisfying. They might also feel a bit cheated if the whole adventure is resolved in the end by fiat, unless their characters had a pivotal role in bringing it about.

Whatever the outcome, future adventures can deal with the repercussions of the Molloy brothers and their powers, since they may be the first paranormals their age, and the Molloys could be the first example of a family of paragons.

THE TERRAN UNITY

Finally, there's a chance the characters simply *fail* to stop the Unity. There are plenty of opportunities in the adventure for the paranormals to screw-up royally. They might be killed, incapacitated, or assimilated into the Unity's group-mind. Barring any other sort of opposition, the Unity eventually expands to assimilate everyone on Earth. Efforts to stop it only manage to slow the spread of its influence; once the Unity begins incorporating other paranormals and gains access to their powers, too, it becomes virtually unstoppable.

If the player characters fail, you can either declare the *Paragons* story is at an end and start a new one, or you can ask the players to take the roles of other paragons dealing with the aftermath of the original group's failure. The next group of characters is faced with the same difficult choices, except now the Unity has had more time to expand, and now it probably includes other paranormals (such as the original player characters) among its drones. Should the next group of characters simply nuke the center of the Unity (figuratively or literally) in hopes of eliminating the Unifier? Will such a tactic even work with paranormals protecting the Unity's coordinating intellect? Does the Unity even *need* a coordinating intellect any longer? It's entirely up to you.

This ending can easily spin-off into an entire *Paragons* series with the Unity as the prime antagonist. You can play out all of the group-mind growth and conquest, right from the end of this adventure, or you can start the series some time later,

when the Unity has already grown considerably and assimilated the entire state, nation, or even most of the world.

To give the characters—and the series—some hope, perhaps there are others like Derek and Kevin Molloy, people who are naturally immune to the Unity's takeover, who cannot be assimilated. These people, including the heroes, form the core of a resistance against the growth of the entity's "utopia" of perfect peace and harmony. There may be only a handful of resistance fighters or thousands or even millions of them, depending on how common the natural immunity is and how extensive the Unity's reach has become. The series culminates in the eventual discovery of a way to defeat or destroy the Unity, then the paragons are left to pick up the pieces of a shattered nation or world and rebuild them, a challenge worthy of people with god-like powers.

FURTHER ADVENTURES

What further adventures await the paranormals after this adventure depends greatly on its outcome, but there are a number of things to consider.

First, the characters might decide to stay together as a group, both to help each other understand and cope with their paranormal abilities as well as for mutual protection. If nothing else, *A More Perfect Union* should show them that it can be a dangerous world out there for paragons, and it's easier when you have friends to help you along.

Second, chances are good the paragons came to the attention of the authorities somewhere along the line in the course of the story, whether the local police or the national government. Those authorities are in a position to make life easier or harder for the characters, depending on how things went. They could end up hunted fugitives, running from government agents who want to bring them in for testing and experimentation, or they could accept an offer to work for the police, FBI, or military as special agents trained to deal with other paranormal threats. This can be the start of a new type of campaign for the characters.

Even if Derek and Kevin Molloy didn't manifest any powers in this story, that doesn't mean they won't ever do so in the future. Characters who keep tabs on the boys could learn about some strange things happening around them. If one or both of them have powers like their mother's, it's possible the Unity—or another group-mind like it—could return in the future!

If Carol Molloy survived the adventure, there's the question of her fate. In addition to recovering from a traumatic accident, she has awakened to find herself responsible for a terrible and potentially tragic situation! If townsfolk and the general public become aware of her role as the Unifier, there may be criminal or civil actions against her and her family. The authorities could take Carol into custody, separating her from her loved ones yet again, until they are satisfied what happened in Unity won't ever happen again. Some unscrupulous types may seek to kidnap Mrs. Molloy in order to turn her powers to their advantage, and such a scheme could go terribly wrong if they find out such power is more than they can handle.

Similarly, the long-term effects of being part of the Unity are left for you to decide. Certainly, the people of Unity are going to need counseling and guidance to return to their normal lives. It's possible the experience could trigger more paranormal breakouts in the town or, conversely, turn it into a hotbed of anti-paragon sentiment, perhaps the heart of a new movement claiming paranormals are too dangerous to live among ordinary humans and should be segregated or even imprisoned. Townsfolk "withdrawing" from the experience of the Unity could form a secret cult that tries to recapture the serenity and bliss of their psychic union with tragic results. Any of all of these things could draw the characters back to the town of Unity at some point.

There are also the potential long-term effects of the characters' exposure to the Unity: perhaps it has some unexpected repercussions on their powers or minds at some point. Could the group-mind have escaped destruction by hiding "seeds" of itself in the paranormals' minds, waiting for the opportunity to grow and take over? When the characters begin having strange dreams about doing things they can't control, then wake up to discover those dreams are coming true, what will they do about it?

On the other hand, perhaps their close exposure to the Unity has affected the paranormals in somewhat positive ways. One possibility is they are now "sensitive" (like the Awareness power of Super-Senses) to certain kinds of psychic or paranormal phenomena. This gives them a kind of "early-warning system" when it comes to other potential threats like the Unity. Will the characters continue using their powers to protect an unsuspecting world from dangers they can hardly imagine, or will they try and find some way of ridding themselves of the unwanted ability to foresee paranormal disaster? If there is even a way to do so, can they without feeling responsible for what might happen next without *any* warning?

Another option is to "award" the characters a mental Communication Link (*M&M,* page 103); as a side effect of exposure to the Unity, they can now all communicate telepathically! This can come in handy in future adventures but might also be a cause for concern, especially if the characters fear they are becoming a new paranormal group-mind!

Lastly, there's the interest various factions and characters in the *Paragons* setting may take in the Unity and its powers, and in the paranormals who brought about the group-mind's downfall. Take a look through the *Paragons* Campaign Setting sourcebook for information on the individuals and groups you can use to populate your own paranormal world and consider their reactions. For the characters, the story may just be starting!

APPENDIX I: MASS COMBAT RULES

While you can run *A More Perfect Union* using just the rules from the *Mutants & Masterminds* rulebook, handling an unusual entity like the Unity—made up of so many individuals—can require a lot of die-rolling if, say, the characters get involved in a conflict with an entire mob of dozens or even hundreds of people.

This **Appendix** provides some additional guidelines for handling a conflict between characters and large groups, based on the Field Battle Rules from the *Golden Age* sourcebook. An expanded version of these rules will also be in the *Paragons* campaign setting sourcebook.

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 campaign and the story (refer back to Rule Number One, *M&M*, page 7).

FORCES

The mass combat rules sum up the actions and traits of a number of less powerful combatants and treat them as a single more powerful character for the purposes of combat and conflict. This combined entity is called a *force* (as opposed to an individual *character*).

FORCE TRAITS

Like characters, forces have their own particular traits, measuring their capabilities. In general, the traits of a force are based on the individuals making up that force, with certain traits gaining a modifier based on the overall number of individuals.

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 into smaller forces, as suits the dramatic needs of the story. Sometimes having the characters deal with two or more smaller forces can be more interesting than a single massive force, particularly if more than one character is interacting with the force(s) at the same time.

A force's size determines its *force modifier*, which is an increase in certain traits based on the total number of individuals in the force. Each step up the Progression Table from one individual provides a +1 force modifier. So a force of two individuals has a force modifier of +1, five individuals +2, ten individuals +3, and so forth, as shown on the following table.

TROOP QUALITY

Troop quality refers to the capabilities of the individuals making up a particular force and forms the basis for the force's traits. In this adventure, the components of the Unity have the following traits as their troop quality:

Attack +1, Damage +4, Defense +1, Toughness +0, Initiative +0

FORCE MODIFIER

Force Size	Modifier
2	+1
5	+2
10	+3
25	+4
50	+5
100	+6
250	+7
500	+8
1,000	+9
2,500	+10
5,000	+11

ATTACK

A force's *attack bonus* is the total of its base attack bonus for quality and the force modifier, 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 and using coordinated tactics and such. It doesn't assume all the troops attack or hit at once; like other traits, it abstracts the entire force's capability. this increase to attack bonus does affect grapple checks.

DAMAGE

A force's *damage bonus* is the total of its base damage bonus and the force modifier. This assumes larger forces of troops have access to both more and more powerful weapons in addition to tactics like coordinated attacks and such. The force's damage capabilities are generalized and summed up as single damage bonus.

Generally speaking, a force's damage bonus is lethal damage, unless the GM decides the force is specially armed with stun-damage and incapacitating weapons. A force's damage bonus works just like an individual's damage bonus and is saved against in the same way.

DEFENSE

A force's *defense bonus* represents how difficult it is to inflict a successful attack on that force, although not necessarily how difficult it is to "hit" the force. Defense is based entirely on the force's quality, with no modifier for size; essentially the force modifier and an effective size modifier cancel each other out. A larger force is easier to "hit" overall, but can also suffer more damage than a smaller force (represented by applying the force modifier to Toughness save (see the following section)).

Note that a force does not have a dodge bonus; conditions on the battlefield change too rapidly for dodge bonus to be considered a factor in the force's overall Defense. The Gamemaster may permit certain maneuvers to modify a force's Defense, but otherwise situational modifiers only apply if they affect the *entire* force.

TOUGHNESS

Add the force modifier to base Toughness bonus for troop quality to determine the force's total Toughness saving throw bonus.

For a force as a whole, this Toughness save doesn't quite represent the ability to shrug off damage (as it does for individuals) but rather how long a force can suffer damage and continue fighting. See **Force Damage** for details on force Toughness saves.

INITIATIVE

A force's Initiative modifier is likewise based solely on troop quality, unaffected by force size. A force uses its Initiative modifier just like a character, and all parts of the force are assumed to act together during its turn in the initiative order. Unlike characters, forces are not flat-footed before their first turn in the initiative order (since, in order for a force to act at all it needs a certain degree of readiness).

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 combat round, or one minute, 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), or a full-round action. Free actions and reactions are also allowed, up to the limits imposed by the GM.

A force makes an attack like an individual: a d20 roll, plus the force's attack bonus, against the Difficulty Class of the

target's Defense, whether the target is another force or an individual character. A force may also move before or after an attack (but not both). Typically a force's movement is limited so long as a significant portion of the force is on foot. Motorized forces may be able to move more quickly at 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 and are described here.

OFFENSIVE POSTURE

A force that takes an offensive posture sacrifices Defense in exchange for greater attack accuracy: for every –2 penalty (up to –4) that the force takes to its Defense, it gains a +1 attack bonus (up to +2).

DEFENSIVE POSTURE

A defensive posture is the opposite of an offensive posture; the force sacrifices attack ability for improved Defense (including intercepting some incoming attacks using the force's offensive capabilities): for every –2 penalty (up to –4) that the force takes to its attack rolls that round, it gains +1 to Defense (up to +2).

CHARGE

A force can charge, moving up to twice its normal movement in a relatively straight line. A charging force suffers a –2 modifier to Defense, but gains a +2 bonus on attack rolls for the round.

SPLIT

A force can choose to split off into smaller forces with reduced force bonuses, but greater maneuverability and freedom of action. Splitting a force is a full-round 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 modifier recalculated according to its new troop compliment. If the original force suffered damage, both of the split forces have the same damage conditions.

At the start of a conflict the GM may divide a large group into any number of smaller forces and doesn't need to split them. Otherwise, a large force would spend its first few rounds splitting into enough forces to challenge the heroes individually. Only after combat starts do you need to worry about splitting a force.

COMBINE

Two forces may also choose to combine to form a single, larger, force. Combining forces is a full-round action. This increases the force's size, and therefore force modifier, normally. For example, if two forces of 250 troops combine to form a single force of 500, that force has a force modifier one higher than the original forces.

If any of the forces are disrupted when they combine with another force, the combined force has the highest total of hits from among its components. The components' hits are not added together. Disabled forces cannot combine with others.

COORDINATED ASSAULT

Two or more forces may attempt to make a coordinated assault on a target. Each assisting force makes a normal attack roll against the target. Each successful attack inflicts no damage, but grants the coordinating force a +2 bonus on its attack roll 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 modifier (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 attack bonus against that target.

TERRAIN & CONDITIONS

Certain kinds of terrain and environmental conditions make things difficult (or easier) for large forces in combat.

A force fighting in difficult terrain (rocky, broken, confined urban areas, etc.) suffers a –1 penalty to attack, defense, and initiative. A force fighting in an area under cover of darkness, heavy fog, severe weather, and so forth must deal with concealment modifiers, unless the force has equipment or traits to overcome these penalties (such as lights or night-vision equipment to overcome darkness penalties).

Gamemasters can also make liberal use of the positive and negative condition modifiers, adding a +2 or –2 modifier to any of the force's checks or rolls for favorable or unfavorable conditions. This general modifier is a very useful tool for handling all the different battlefield conditions quickly and easily.

FORCE DAMAGE

Forces successfully attacked during a round attempt Toughness saving throws as per the standard *M&M* rules. The results of Toughness saves are found under the **Force Damage** table below.

FORCE DAMAGE

TOUGHNESS SAVING THROW...	EFFECT
Succeeds	No Effect
Fails	Disrupted
Fails by 5 or more	Shaken + Disrupted
Fails by 10 or more	Staggered + Disrupted + Disabled
Fails by 15 or more	Destroyed

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 battlefield round.

DAMAGE CONDITIONS

The potential damage conditions resulting from mass combat damage are as follows:

DISRUPTED

The force is suffering from the chaos of battle. Casualties and wounded are starting to add up and it is beginning to feel the pinch of lost manpower. As a result, each disrupted condition enforces a –1 penalty to all the force's die rolls, including further Toughness saves and morale checks. The penalties for multiple disrupted conditions are cumulative with each other and with any other penalties incurred.

SHAKEN

The force suffers a dramatic loss. The force cannot take any actions during the next battlefield round. During this time, it suffers a –2 penalty to all rolls, but any additional shaken results are ignored. The force recovers automatically on the following round, but may then be shaken again as normal.

STAGGERED

The force's members are no longer fighting at peak efficiency, as losses weaken their strength. The force is limited to a standard or move action each round, not both.

DISABLED

A disabled force has been demoralized or damaged to the point where it can no longer fight effectively. It may not attack other forces or characters, but it may still attempt saving throws to resist attacks against it, and take actions to retreat from the field of battle.

DESTROYED

A destroyed force is 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, disabled, or has taken flight in a disorganized retreat.

POWERS

For the most part, powers affect forces in the way they affect individuals, with a few exceptions.

- Powers that inflict damage are assumed to do their normal damage against the force as a whole, even if the power does not normally affect an area. The wielder is assumed to be making multiple attacks with that power during the battle round.

    Damaging powers with the Area extra inflict +2 damage to a force, with each Progression feat increasing this bonus by +1, but the total additional damage from Area and Progression cannot exceed the target's force modifier (since the damage 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 Area extra and sufficient Progression to encompass the entire force. So a character with the Mind Control power, for example, could not attempt to Mind Control an entire force unless he possessed sufficient area 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.

- The GM may wish to allow non-damaging powers with a save Difficulty to act as damaging powers for purposes of affecting a force. For example, powers like Dazzle and Mind Control on the individual scale would normally have no effect on a force, but, properly targeted, could disrupt a force's cohesion and organization, inflicting "damage" on the force. In this case, simply treat the power as if it were a damaging effect, including having the force make a Toughness save against it. This is just part of the abstraction involved in mass combat; apply the appropriate description to the outcome: for example, if a Dazzle staggers the force, tell the players how the well-placed Dazzle attack has caused some members to stagger about, making it more difficult for the rest to get around them to act.

- Impervious Toughness is compared against the force's *total* damage (including force modifier) before determining whether or not the character has to make a Toughness saving throw against the force's attack. This is one of the advantages of larger forces: they can overcome—through superior numbers—Impervious Toughness that would render a target immune to the attacks of a smaller force.

SPECIAL RULES FOR THE UNITY

The full mass combat rules in the *Paragons* campaign setting detail other elements of mass combat with conventional forces. The Unity, however, is not a conventional force, so there are a few noteworthy exceptions to the rules where it is concerned.

First, although the standard mass combat rules include guidelines for troop morale (measuring how long a force is willing to go on fighting), these do *not* apply to the Unity, which exists and acts as a single entity, so they are not given in this **Appendix**. Although it is made up of many individual bodies, the group-mind makes decisions and takes actions like an individual NPC.

Similarly, since the components of the Unity are all in telepathic contact, they have no need to communicate verbally,

to issue orders, and so forth. This has no direct game effect, but you should note the group-mind's ability to react like a single being, and the fact that it knows what any individual component of it knows or experiences. Anything the characters do in the presence of any part of the Unity is known to the whole almost instantly.

Lastly, countering the Unity's Mind Control is a particularly effective technique against it, provided the character can affect an area large enough to encompass multiple people at once. If successful, simply reduce the size of the force by the affected number of individuals, reducing force modifier accordingly. So if a character is able to counter the Mind Control effect on five out of ten people in a Unity force, reduce the force's size to five and its force modifier by 1.

SAMPLE CONFLICT

A force of 25 members of the Unity is defending the police station and the paranormal speedster Ken Bae (see the pre-generated paragons on the following pages) needs to disable them. The Unity force has a +4 force modifier for numbers. This gives the force the following traits:

Attack +5, Damage +8, Defense +1, Toughness +4, Initiative +0

Ken doesn't have an Impervious Toughness (in fact, he relies a lot more on being fast than tough), so he can't shrug off any of the force's attacks, if they hit him. Ken has the following traits:

Attack +7, Damage +0, Defense +8, Toughness +4, Initiative +26

It comes as no surprise that Ken gets initiative (since he can't actually fail to do so). He only needs to roll a 4 or better to hit the force, given his attack bonus. The force needs to make a Toughness save (DC 15 for Ken's +0 damage). However, he has an area attack, giving him a +2 damage bonus (increasing the save DC to 17). With their +4 Toughness save bonus, they need to roll a 13 to succeed. They roll a 12, and manage to suffer only a disrupted result.

The force attacks Ken. They roll an 11 on their attack roll for a total of 16, which isn't sufficient to hit Ken's fairly high Defense of 18, so he's able to dodge all their various attacks. Note that the force made a single attack roll to summarize their assault, rather than dozens of individual attack rolls.

Ken attacks again and hits. The force makes another Toughness save. This time they roll only a 7, which fails the save by 10, meaning the force is disabled. The GM declines to use Gamemaster Fiat to re-roll the Toughness save, and so rules that Ken scatters the members of the group with a flurry of super-speed attacks. Mere seconds after his arrival, he frees the Molloy kids from the police station and leaves the defeated members of the Unity behind, although the group-mind already knows full well what has happened and prepares a larger force for next time....

APPENDIX II: PREGENERATED CHARACTERS

UNITY POLICE OFFICER — PL 3
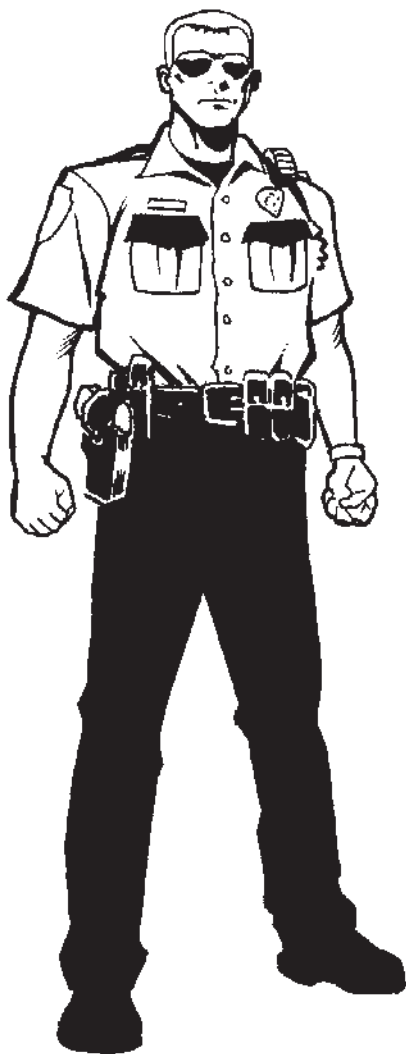
STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+2	+1	+1	+0	+1	+0
14	12	13	10	12	10

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+1	+3	+1	+3

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

Feats: Equipment 2

Equipment: pistol (+3 damage), tonfa (+1 damage), handcuffs

Combat: Attack +3, Damage +2 (unarmed), +3 (tonfa), +3 (pistol), Grapple (+5), Knockback (-0), Defense +2, Initiative +1

Abilities 11 + Skills 7 (28 ranks) + Feats 2 + Powers 0 + Combat 10 + Saves 4 = Total 34

UNITY POLICE OFFICER — PL 3

KEN BAE

PL 6

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+0	+2	+1	+2	+1	+0
10	14	12	14	12	10

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+4/+1*	+5	+6	+5

*Flat Footed

Skills: Acrobatics 4 (+6), Concentration 4 (+5), Diplomacy 2 (+2), Escape Artist 2 (+4), Knowledge (art) 2 (+4), Knowledge (theology and philosophy) 4 (+6), Language 1 (Korean), Notice 4 (+5), Profession (massage therapist) 6 (+7), Profession (yoga instructor) 6 (+7), Sense Motive 5 (+6)

Feats: Move-by Action

Paranormal Powers

Enhanced Attack Focus (melee) 4: His speed grants Ken an advantage in striking in close combat, giving him a bonus on his attack rolls included under **Combat**.

Enhanced Defensive Roll 3: His super-speed gives Ken a better chance of "rolling" with an attack to eliminate the brunt of it, giving him a bonus included in his Toughness save.

Enhanced Dodge 4: Ken's heightened reaction speed gives him a better chance to dodge attacks than most people. This bonus is included in his Defense bonus under **Combat**.

Super-Speed 6: Ken is capable of moving at superhuman speed, up to 500 MPH! (He can break the sound barrier going all-out for brief periods of time.) In addition to being able to run faster than any land vehicle, Ken gains the following abilities from his power:

- He can perform routine tasks 100 times faster than normal.
- He gains a +24 bonus to his Initiative (included in the **Combat** line following).
- He can make rapid melee attacks against opponents within a 30-foot radius, provided he can physically reach them. Make one attack roll for Ken and compare it against the Defense of all targets in his range.

Combat: Attack +7 (melee), +3 (ranged), Grapple +7, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +8 (+2 flat-footed), Knockback –2, Initiative +26

Abilities 12 + Skills 10 (40 ranks) + Feats 1 + Powers 41 + Combat 14 + Saves 12 = Total 90

DAMAGE TRACK

Bruised	Staggered	Unconscious
	❑	❑
	❑	❑
Injured	Disabled	Dying

BACKGROUND

Ken Bae's family emigrated from Korea, but he has never been to his ancestral home, despite being raised in a traditional Korean-speaking household. Ken's family stressed academic achievement and success in life, but he wanted an escape from the pressure he felt to perform and conform to his family's expectations of him. Eventually, he explored more of his Buddhist heritage, in spite of the fact that his parents and siblings were Christians (one of the reasons his family left Korea).

Ken found a center, a sense of peace, in meditation. He also studied yoga and eventually became certified as a yoga instructor and a massage therapist, starting his own business with an eye towards getting his own studio eventually. In a roundabout way, Ken fulfilled his family's expectations in that he *was* successful in his chosen profession.

He continued to seek stillness and peace in his meditations until, one day, he found it like never before. The world simply seemed to... stop. Ken later figured it was became he was moving so fast, faster then than he is capable of now, so fast the world seemed to stand still. Ever since that day, Ken Bae has possessed paranormal speed.

RANDY "BUZZ" BUCZINSKI

PL 6

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+1	+1	+1	+1	+0	+2
13	13	12	12	10	14

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+3/+1*	+5	+5	+5

*Flat Footed

Skills: Climb 4 (+5), Concentration 4 (+4), Craft (mechanical) 7 (+8), Drive 7 (+8), Intimidate 4 (+6), Knowledge (streetwise) 4 (+5), Notice 4 (+4), Profession (racer) 6 (+6), Sense Motive 4 (+4)

Feats: Attack Focus (ranged) 2, Defensive Roll 2, Dodge Focus 2, Improved Initiative

Paranormal Powers

Fire Control 6: Randy is a pyrokinetic, with paranormal control over fire. He can create the following effects with his power:

- Ignite a flammable object in his line of sight by taking a full-round action to stare at it and concentrate. As long as Randy continues to concentrate, the object continues to burn, taking +4 fire damage per round. (**Blast 4** [Perception Range, Concentration Duration, Full-Round Action]). He can use this effect to ignite someone's clothing, but can't ignite living beings.
- Hurl handfuls of fire up to 60 feet with a normal ranged attack roll, for every additional increment of 60 feet, he suffers a –2 attack roll penalty. If he hits, the flames inflict +6 damage (**Blast 6**).
- He can control the spread and movement of normal flames in his line of sight with a damage bonus of +6 or less. (**Move Object 6** [Perception Range, Limited to Fire]).
- He can extinguish flames in a radius of up to 30 feet anywhere in his line of sight by taking a full-round action to do so. (**Nullify Fire 6** [Burst Area, Perception Range, Full-Round Action]).

Immunity (fire) 10: Randy is completely immune to fire-based effects, including damage from fire. He automatically makes any saving throw against a fire-based effect.

Combat: Attack +4 (melee), +6 (ranged), Grapple +5, Damage +1 (unarmed), +6 (fire blast), Defense +8 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback –1, Initiative +5

Abilities 14 + Skills 11 (44 ranks) + Feats 7 + Powers 25 + Combat 20 + Saves 13 = Total 90

DAMAGE TRACK		
Bruised	**Staggered**	**Unconscious**
	❏	❏
	❏	❏
Injured	**Disabled**	**Dying**

BACKGROUND

Randall Buczinski always loved cars from the time he was a little kid. He became a big fan of car-racing as well, so it was no surprise that he was a grease-monkey and ace shop student by the time he was in high-school, tearing down and rebuilding engines and even building his first car (which was the only way he was able to afford one).

Randy eventually made his way into the world of professional car racing on the strength of his skill as a mechanic, but he really wanted to be a driver. He worked in the pits, learning the ins and outs, and eventually got an opportunity to break into driving. It was everything he'd hoped it would be, and the thrill of the race quickly became addictive. Of course part of that thrill was the danger, but it wasn't something Randy really thought about... until the accident.

His car rolled over several times but what was worse was the tremendous fire. Rescue workers rushed to the burning wreck and a suddenly hushed and anxious crowd expected to see a charred body pulled from the car. Instead, there was Randy Buczinski, stumbling out of the wreckage without so much as a hair singed by the flames all around him.

It was called a miracle, an amazing stroke of luck, but Randy knew different. He knew whenever he felt a slight pull from any nearby flame, and especially when he discovered how he could exercise his will over fire.

KRISTIN DUSHANE

PL 6

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+8	+0	+7	+0	+1	+1
26/10	11	25/13	10	13	12

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+7	+9	+4	+5

Skills: Acrobatics 4 (+4), Bluff 2 (+3), Gather Information 4 (+5), Knowledge (current events) 4 (+4), Knowledge (popular culture) 7 (+7), Knowledge (streetwise) 2 (+2), Notice 4 (+5), Perform (dance) 4 (+5), Perform (singing) 4 (+5), Profession (beautician) 7 (+8), Sense Motive 6 (+7)

Feats: Takedown Attack, Taunt, Ultimate Effort (Strength checks)

Paranormal Powers

Enhanced Constitution 12: Kristen is remarkably tough for her size and build, able to shake off the kind of damage that would take down normal people.

Enhanced Strength 16: Kristen has paranormal strength, letting her do things like bend iron bars, in spite of her normal looking (even slight) build. She also hits like a piledriver (see her unarmed damage bonus).

Super-Strength 5: In addition, Kristen has superhuman lifting capabilities: she can lift a heavy load of up to nearly 15 *tons* over her head (14.7, to be exact), meaning she could pick up a bus or SUV without too much difficulty. She does +5 additional damage when breaking objects.

Combat: Attack +4, Grapple +17, Damage +8 (unarmed), Defense +5 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback –3, Initiative +0

Abilities 9 + Skills 12 (48 ranks) + Feats 3 + Powers 38 + Combat 18 + Saves 10 = Total 90

DAMAGE TRACK

Bruised	Staggered	Unconscious
	❏	❏
	❏	❏
Injured	Disabled	Dying

BACKGROUND

Kristen Dushane wanted to be a model, or a dancer, it varied depending on the day of the week. Growing up in an inner city neighborhood and attending a poor public school, Kristen's dreams were about all that she had. She wanted to make her "big break," but it never really came. Instead, she ended up going to cosmetology school to become a hairdresser and make-up artist, working in a local beauty salon. She's good friends with most of the girls she works with, and everyone tells her she should try out for shows or to be on television whenever they hear her sing in the shop or at karaoke in a club.

It was coming home from one of those nights out that Kristen's life changed. She and her friend Yvonne were hassled by a couple of guys who were drunk and turned violent. Next thing Kristen knew, one of the guys was flying the length of the alley when she shoved him away, and she was able to pick up the other guy with one hand and fling him against a wall!

The drunks never reported what they saw, but Yvonne remembered and encouraged Kristen to experiment with her newfound strength. She learned she was *really* strong, able to pick up cars without much effort! But what was she going to do with something like that? Join the circus? She wanted to be famous, but did she want to be a famous freak? Kristen felt like she needed some time alone, away from the city, to think.

LIZ JOHNSON

PL 6
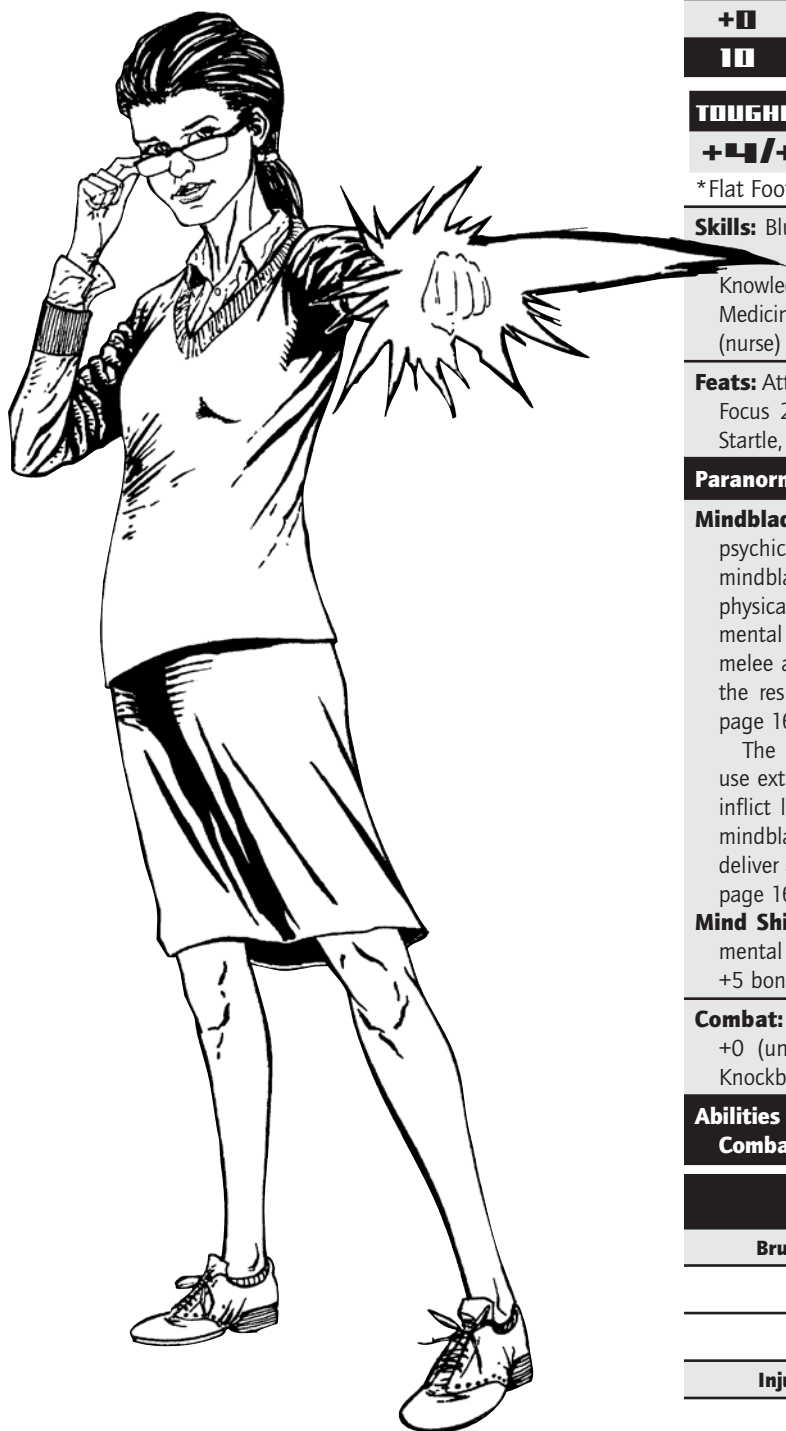
STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+0	+1	+1	+1	+3	+2
10	12	12	12	17	14

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+4/+1*	+5	+5	+6

*Flat Footed

Skills: Bluff 4 (+6), Concentration 6 (+9), Diplomacy 4 (+6), Drive 2 (+3), Gather Information 4 (+6), Intimidate 4 (+6), Knowledge (history) 4 (+5), Knowledge (life sciences) 4 (+5), Medicine 6 (+9), Notice 6 (+9), Perform (acting) 4 (+6), Profession (nurse) 6 (+9), Search 4 (+5), Sense Motive 6 (+9)

Feats: Attack Specialization (mindblade) 2, Defensive Roll 3, Dodge Focus 2, Improved Critical (mindblade), Seize Initiative, Set-Up, Startle, Takedown Attack, Teamwork

Paranormal Powers

Mindblade 6: Liz has the power to manifest a "blade" of visible psychic energy that looks like a double-edged sword. Her mindblade isn't actually material; it passes harmlessly through physical objects and only affects thinking creatures (those with mental ability scores). Targets struck by it (requiring a normal melee attack roll from Liz) must make a Will save (DC 21), with the results read on the Toughness Saving Throw table (*M&M*, page 163).

The mindblade does non-lethal damage, although Liz *can* use extra effort to strike for lethal damage with it. She can also inflict lethal damage on a target rendered unconscious by her mindblade by continuing to attack them; essentially, she uses it to deliver a *coup de grace* against an unconscious target (see *M&M,* page 162).

Mind Shield 5: Liz automatically succeeds on Will saves against mental effects with a save DC modifier of +5 or less and gains a +5 bonus on Will saves against other mental effects.

Combat: Attack +2, +6 (mindblade), Grapple +2, Damage +0 (unarmed), +6 (mindblade), Defense +8 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback –1, Initiative +1

Abilities 17 + Skills 16 (64 ranks) + Feats 13 + Powers 17 + Combat 16 + Saves 11 = Total 90

DAMAGE TRACK		
Bruised	**Staggered**	**Unconscious**
	❏	❏
	❏	❏
Injured	**Disabled**	**Dying**

BACKGROUND

Elizabeth Johnson loved fairy tales and fantasy stories as a child, although she rarely ever wanted to be the princess waiting for her brave knight to come and rescue her, she wanted to be the knight, putting enemies to flight with her flashing sword! Her childhood fantasies led Liz into a lifelong love of fantasy novels and, later, computer roleplaying games, and Renaissance and medieval re-enactments.

On the occasional weekend off from her day job as a nurse, Liz would attend a Ren Faire or a class on costuming, acting, or, her favorite, sword fighting. It was during a particularly vigorous performance that Liz first manifested what she now calls her "mindblade," a shimmering "sword" of energy that stuns anyone it strikes. She used it to fell her opponent after being disarmed to thunderous applause from the audience, who believed it was some kind of clever special effect and in-joke. Liz's fellow performers knew otherwise, however, and so did she.

Liz has been giving a lot of thought about what to do with her newfound gift. She has learned to control it, and to use the mindblade like an extension of her own body. Still, she's uncertain: should her extraordinary ability be nothing more than a sideshow attraction or should she apply it to become something akin to a real "knight" like her childhood dreams?

SEAN MACKLIN

PL 6

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+1	+0	+1	+1	+3	+2
12	11	12	12	16	14

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+3/+1*	+5	+4	+7

*Flat Footed

Skills: Climb 4 (+5), Concentration 6 (+9), Drive 2 (+2), Knowledge (art) 4 (+5), Knowledge (business) 4 (+5), Knowledge (current events) 4 (+5), Knowledge (popular culture) 5 (+6), Profession (chef) 8 (+11), Ride 4 (+4), Search 4 (+5), Sense Motive 3 (+6), Survival 4 (+7), Swim 4 (+5)

Feats: Attack Specialization (telekinesis) 2, Defensive Roll 2, Dodge Focus 3, Improved Block (telekinesis)

Paranormal Powers

Flight 4: By lifting himself telekinetically, Sean can fly through the air at a speed of 100 MPH. He can also carry his usual telekinetic capacity while flying.

Telekinesis 6: Sean is a telekinetic, able to move objects with his thoughts. He can lift any object in his line of sight, up to 1,600 pounds, about twice that much (enough to lift a car, for example) if he concentrates and takes a full round to use his power. (**Telekinesis 6** [Perception Range, Precise, Subtle]). In addition to just picking up and moving objects, he can do the following:

- He can grapple using his Telekinesis with an effective grapple bonus of +12.
- He can pick up and fling objects at people, making a normal ranged attack roll and doing +6 damage if an object hits. He can even throw large objects like area attacks (see *M&M,* page 159) for the same damage.
- If he's prepared, he can block melee attacks and thrown weapons coming at him (see the Block action, *M&M,* page 155) as a move action rather than a standard action (**Deflect 6** [Move Action]). He can't block things like bullets, because they move too fast for him to see.

Combat: Attack +2, +6 (telekinesis), Grapple +3 (unarmed), +12 (telekinesis), Damage +1 (unarmed), +6 (telekinetic projectiles), Defense +6 (+2 flat-footed), Knockback –1, Initiative +0

Abilities 17 + Skills 14 (56 ranks) + Feats 8 + Powers 29 + Combat 10 + Saves 12 = Total 90

DAMAGE TRACK

Bruised	Staggered	Unconscious
	❑	❑
	❑	❑
Injured	Disabled	Dying

BACKGROUND

When Sean Macklin once joked he could use an extra hand or two in the kitchen, he had no idea just how close to the truth he was. Cooking was always Sean's first love, and he went to culinary school to become a chef, spending summers and some weekends camping, mountain biking, and enjoying the outdoors. After he graduated, he worked a number of restaurant jobs, always with an eye towards eventually opening his own restaurant, once he'd managed to save up enough money and build-up the right credit and contacts in the business.

He thrived on the chaos of a bustling kitchen, but that didn't mean he could handle it all without help. One long and frustrating week of being especially shorthanded led to the incident where several kitchen utensils began moving of their own accord. When Sean noticed, he freaked out a bit and several things went flying. He went home early with a splitting headache, doing his best to pretend the whole thing never happened, but when he reached for things that night–a bottle of aspirin, a glass, and such–they came flying into his hands.

Sean's newfound telekinetic abilities were a wonder at first, and he has learned to control them, but he's still not quite sure what to do with them: although the idea of a "show" restaurant with a chef able to cook entire meals with his hands literally behind his back has crossed his mind more than once.

BEN VISTAN

PL 6

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+0	+1	+1	+3	+0	+0
10	12	12	17	10	10

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+1*	+3	+3	+4

*Immune to physical attacks while in swarm-shape

Skills: Computers 6 (+9), Concentration 8 (+8), Disable Device 4 (+7), Drive 2 (+3), Knowledge (current events) 2 (+5), Knowledge (popular culture) 2 (+5), Knowledge (life sciences) 4 (+7), Knowledge (technology) 5 (+8), Notice 3 (+3), Profession (bee-keeper) 5 (+5), Profession (programmer) 7 (+7), Search 4 (+7)

Feats: None

Paranormal Powers

Swarm-Shape 10: Ben can transform himself into a swarm of bees, maintaining his human-level intelligence and awareness, but able to function as a swarm.

In his swarm-shape, Ben is essentially immune to physical damage, although energy attacks and area attacks still affect him, and he can swarm through any small gaps or openings (**Incorporeal 2**). The swarm can fly at about 25 MPH (**Flight 2**), and Ben is aware of everything each member of the swarm perceives (**Super-Senses 2**: microscopic vision 1, radius sight). It can also cling to walls or ceilings (**Super-Movement 1**: wall-crawling)

Ben can attack anyone inside his swarm body by stinging them: the attack hits automatically and the target must make a Fortitude saving throw (DC 16). Failure means the target suffers a –2 penalty to all rolls and checks. Failure by 5 or more means the target can only take a standard or move action each round (not both) and failure by 10 or more renders the target helpless. Targets get a new save each round to overcome the effects. (**Nauseate 6** [Sustained, Aura]).

Ben can split his swarm-shape up into two smaller swarms, each with the same abilities, but a reduced stinging attack (DC 13 Fortitude save). While split, he can't revert back to human form unless at least 75% of his swarm mass is in contact (**Anatomic Separation 1**).

If Ben is ever stunned, he must make a Concentration check (DC 20) to remain in his swarm-shape. Otherwise, he reverts to his human form. The same happens if he is rendered unconscious.

Combat: Attack +2, Grapple +2 (n/a in swarm-shape), Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +2 (+1 flat-footed), Knockback –0, Initiative +1

Abilities 11 + Skills 13 (52 ranks) + Feats 0 + Powers 50 + Combat 8+ Saves 8 = Total 90

DAMAGE TRACK		
Bruised	**Staggered**	**Unconscious**
	❏	❏
	❏	❏
Injured	**Disabled**	**Dying**

BACKGROUND

Ben Vistan did well in school academically, even if he wasn't part of the largest social circle. He went on to college and got a degree in Computer Science, leading him into a job as a programmer in the high-tech industry. He enjoyed solving creative problems in code and design, although he didn't always get those kinds of challenges. Work was drudgery sometimes, as it so often is.

Ben's hobby is bee-keeping, something he's been interested in since he was a child, but only took up once work provided him with the income and free-time to pursue it, along with the space to set up hives. Ben not only found working with his bees a relaxing distraction from work, but he felt that he really learned things from them: their organization, their seamless communication and synergy. There were times when Ben felt like he *understood* the bees in a deep—he would almost say spiritual—manner. It wasn't something he shared with people, only partially because of concern he'd sound crazy. It was a personal experience, something that was his and his alone.

Then, one day, the experience, the empathy and understanding, went further than ever before, *way* further. Ben felt like he *became* the hive and, in fact, he did! He transformed into a human-sized mass of bees, all connected in a deep and inexplicable way. While extensive research (mostly online) hasn't turned up much evidence of people exactly like him, Ben has come across a lot of strange stuff, and believes there are others, possibly many others, with paranormal experiences and abilities like his.

APPENDIX III: PARAGON CREATION

Although *A More Perfect Union* is set up for play with the characters provided, it's also a suitable adventure for kicking off your own *Paragons* series, in which case the players might want to create their own *M&M* characters for use in the game, rather than choosing from a selection of pre-generated characters.

This section takes a look at creating *Paragons* characters suitable for use in the adventure and in an ongoing series. The *Paragons* campaign setting sourcebook goes into more detail on paranormal character creation suitable for a wide range of different series and styles. This section focuses on characters like those designed for this adventure: power level 6, built with 90 starting power points, and fairly focused.

To use this material, you'll want a copy of either the *Mutants & Masterminds* rulebook or the *M&M Pocket Player's Guide* for reference.

STAGE ONE: NORMAL

At this stage of character creation, consider your character's life before breaking out. Take up to 50 power points and create that character. Consider the character's early life, professional experience, hobbies, and so forth and choose the appropriate traits.

Your character doesn't have *any* powers at this stage, and don't choose unusual or heroic traits without a good reason for them. Perhaps your character was a police officer, soldier, government agent, or the like before breaking out, but

paranormals come from all walks of life, most of them fairly ordinary.

Note you can spend *up to* 50 power points creating your character at this stage, but you're under no obligation to spend *all* of them. Any unspent points from this stage simply "roll over" to Stage Two, where you can spend them normally. So don't feel compelled to create a 50-point normal character if everything you have in mind comes to, say, 28 points, and that's it.

ABILITIES

Keep in mind the ability benchmarks on page 30 of *M&M:* unless a character is a truly extraordinary person to begin with, an ability score above 14-15 is unlikely, and the GM may well prohibit scores above 20 or so (although 24-25 is rated the peak of "human achievement"). The guidelines in the **Under the Hood** sidebar on page 31 of *M&M* may also be helpful in assigning mental abilities to your character based on his or her personality traits and your conception.

SKILLS

When choosing your character's skills, keep the **Skill Benchmarks** and **Under the Hood** sidebars on pages 38 and 40 of *M&M* in mind: 5-8 ranks in a skill is a "professional" level of training, while 9-12 qualifies the character as a true expert. A power level 6 character is limited to no more than 11 ranks in a skill. Likewise, consider the character's life skills; most new paragons aren't "adventurers" as

EMPOWERING YOURSELF

One option for a *Paragons* series is for the players to take the roles of fictionalized versions of *themselves,* who awaken to the potential for paranormal powers and have to deal with the impact those extraordinary abilities have on their lives and on the world.

The first step in such a character creation process is largely the same: creating non-powered versions of the players as *M&M* characters and determining their relevant game traits. The benchmarks given for ability scores and skills in *Mutants & Masterminds* may be helpful, and the GM should encourage the players to be objective (but also not too harsh) in figuring out what their own game traits should be. The GM should exercise good judgment in helping the players in balancing out the right trait ratings.

It's likely the characters won't all have the same point totals at this stage, which is just fine, so long as the players all have the same number of points to spend total. As with normal character creation, the GM should decide if the players will determine their characters' paranormal traits or if they will be decided for them, and kept a secret until the characters learn more about what they can do.

Playing yourself in a *Paragons* game can be fun, but groups should also be aware this sort of roleplaying can be intensely personal, and some players may take offense at either discussion of what their game traits should be or at things that happen to the fictional versions of themselves in play, identifying with them even more so than with entirely fictional characters. If any of the players are uncomfortable with the idea of playing themselves, they should be encouraged to create fictional characters using the regular guidelines instead.

SECRET POWERS

Of course, paranormals don't necessarily break out with complete and comprehensive knowledge of what they can do, or even what their powers *are* initially. Some Gamemasters may wish to keep knowledge of the characters' paranormal powers secret from the players, either choosing them based on player input or even choosing them *for* the players and revealing them over the course of play. Naturally, this should be done with the players' foreknowledge and permission, and players who prefer to choose their characters' own powers should be allowed to do so.

If this option is in use, you can allow players to spend a hero point for inspiration (*M&M,* page 122) to learn more about what their powers do, or what power (if any) applies to their current situation. So, for example, a character cornered at the edge of a precipice might get a sudden "instinctive" urge to jump to escape from pursuers, discovering in the process the ability to fly!

If you play out the characters' breakouts, you might want to keep their powers secret during just that scene, allowing players full knowledge of their characters' paranormal traits once regular play has begun. This also allows the opportunity to "fine-tune" paranormal traits between the prelude and the actual start of the series, if the players wish.

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such. They might have ranks in skills like Craft or Profession, various types of Knowledge, and some interaction skills like Diplomacy and Sense Motive.

FEATS

Apart from skill feats like Connected, Contacts, and Well-Informed, and general feats like Equipment or Benefit, most normal characters aren't likely to have many feats at all. Combat feats and combat-applicable feats are more likely to show up after a character's breakout than before, unless the character was involved in a combat-intensive profession.

CHARACTERISTICS

A normal character's saving throws and attack and defense bonus should generally reflect his or her prior experience, although saves in particular might have an amount of "untapped potential" the character hasn't yet drawn upon simply because of not having the need to make many saving throws in life! Like other traits, you can set these at a reasonable rating for your character's normal life with an eye towards increasing them later on.

Once you've created your normal character, it's time for a breakout....

STAGE TWO: PARANORMAL

Now spend 40 power points, plus any remaining power points you have left over from Stage One, to give your character paranormal powers and other suitable traits resulting from the breakout and becoming a paragon.

Not all of your power points at this stage need to be applied to powers: you can also use them to enhance your character's abilities, and acquire new or improved skills and feats, representing either training following the character's awakening or direct savant-like enhancement. The same goes for things like Benefits or Equipment your character acquires as a paragon, perhaps from belonging to a particular faction or organization.

Don't overlook things like attack and defense bonus or saving throws, which are probably also enhanced from the

character's normal values, closer to the power level limits. Again, this might reflect training and experience or simply a benefit of becoming paranormal.

OPTION: PLAYING THE BREAKOUT

As a prelude to a *Paragons* series, you and the GM may wish to roleplay the circumstances of your character's breakout and discovery of any paranormal powers. Essentially, you start out playing the Stage One (normal) version of your character, then during the course of the scene, something happens and your character becomes a paragon, gaining some or all of the additional traits from Stage Two of the character creation process.

Players may have a great deal of input in advance into how this breakout scene occurs or the GM can set the stage and allow the scene to unfold, creating the character's background in play. This is a useful means for fleshing out a character's history and motivations in the game.

A breakout prelude can also include whatever post-awakening training or other benefits a character receives. For example, if a character joins a particular faction or organization after the breakout, the prelude can include the invitation to join, or a "training montage" describing the character going through whatever additional training or education is needed to acquire the remaining traits from Stage Two of the design process.

IMPROVED AND ENHANCED TRAITS

Changes to traits like abilities, skills, feats, and characteristics during Stage Two come in two forms: improved and enhanced.

Improved traits are just that: improvements on the existing traits from Stage One. So a character might learn some wisdom from experience, gain confidence (and therefore Charisma), pick up some new skills (or improvements in existing ones) from training, or acquire additional feats, combat training (attack and defense bonus), or learn some hard lessons about avoiding certain hazards (with commensurate improvements in saving throws).

OPTION: RANDOM POWER GENERATION

Stuck for ideas on what power(s) to give your character? Roll a d20 and consult the **Random Paranormal Powers** table for inspiration. You're not necessarily stuck with what you roll, and you can just as easily choose something off the table, if you prefer. You can also modify the power packages for something more customized to your character concept.

RANDOM PARANORMAL POWERS

Roll	Powers
1	*Animator:* **Animate Objects 8** (one construct up to 120 points; Continuous, Perception Range)
2	*Anti-Paranormal:* Choose one of **Nemesis 5** (25 points) or **Nullify 6** (all powers at once, Burst Area) and **Nullify 4** (Power Resistance). If necessary, roll a die: taking the first option on a 1-10, the second on an 11-20.
3	*Controller:* **Mind Control 6** (Conscious, Sustained), **Mind Shield 6**
4	*Energy Controller:* **Blast 6** (choose a type of energy; *Alternate Powers:* choose three of the following: **Blast 4** [Burst Area], **Blast 6** [Cone Area, Touch Range], **Blast 6** [Burst Area, Touch Range], **Dazzle 6** [one of sight or hearing with Burst Radius], **Deflect 6** [all ranged attacks], **Environmental Control 6** [one environment], **Telekinesis 6**), **Flight 5**, **Force Field 6** (Impervious), **Sensory Shield 3** (choose a sense)
5	*Giant:* **Growth 10** (huge, +20 Str, +10 Con, +10 ft. movement). Trade-off attack and defense bonus as needed for power level limits.
6	*Hardbody:* **Immunity 40** (all physical damage). Note you're still affected by energy damage.
7	*Healer:* **Healing 8** (Energizing, Resurrection, Total)
8	*Illusionist:* **Illusion 6** (all senses), **Morph 4** (any form, Continuous)
9	*Phasing:* **Insubstantial 4** (incorporeal, Subtle 2), **Strike 6** (Affects Corporeal, Fortitude save)
10	*Power Mimic:* **Mimic 10** (any one power up to 50 points; Perception Range)
11	*Powerhouse:* **Enhanced Constitution 10**, **Enhanced Strength 10**, **Impervious Toughness 5**, **Leaping 5**, **Super-Strength 5**. Trade-off attack and defense bonus as needed for power level limits.
12	*Psychic:* **Enhanced Feats 10** (Defensive Roll 3, Distract, Dodge Focus 2, Seize Initiative, Set-Up, Uncanny Dodge [mental], Well-Informed), **Enhanced Skill 2** (Sense Motive +8), **Mind Shield 6**, **Super-Senses 9** (danger sense [mental], detect minds [acute, accurate, ranged, radius], psychic awareness [acute]), **Telepathy 6** (*Alternate Powers:* **Mental Blast 3**)
13	*Rocket:* **Enhanced Feats 6** (Acrobatic Bluff, Evasion, Interpose, Move-by Action, Takedown Attack 2), **Flight 10**, **Force Field 7** (Impervious). Trade-off defense bonus as needed for power level limits.
14	*Shape-Shifter:* **Shapeshift 5** (25 points)
15	*Skill Mimic:* **Mimic Skills 8** (all skills at once up to 40 points; Perception Range)
16	*Speedster:* **Super-Speed 7** (*Alternate Powers:* **Air Control 7**, **Deflect 7** [all ranged attacks], **Strike 7**; *Power Feats:* Wall Run, Water Run). Trade-off attack and defense bonus as needed for power level limits.
17	*Spirit Traveler:* **Astral Form 7** (Dimensional), **Mental Blast 2**
18	*Time Warp:* **Super-Movement 3** (temporal, any time), **Time Control 5** (*Alternate Powers:* **Deflect 5** [all ranged attacks], **Paralyze 7** [stop time; Burst Radius, Continuous Duration]),
19	*Unkillable:* **Regeneration 39** (bruised, injured, staggered, disabled, resurrection, and ability damage, all once per round with no rest; Regrowth)
20	*Visionary:* **Enhanced Feats 3** (Dodge Focus 2, Uncanny Dodge [mental]), **ESP 7** (all senses), **Super-Senses 9** (danger sense [mental], postcognition, precognition)

The player simply applies additional power points towards improving the affected traits with the Gamemaster's permission and a suitable back-story. Keep in mind the series power level limits when improving traits, although most of the character's normal traits are likely to be below the limit before Stage Two.

Enhanced traits are essentially an expanded version of the Enhanced Ability power (*M&M,* page 84) and work exactly the same way: they have the same cost as ordinary traits, but

are paranormal powers, so they can be improved with extra effort, or taken away by Nullify.

For example, a "super-smart" paragon might start out in Stage One with fairly ordinary Intelligence (say a score of 12) but during Stage Two gain Enhanced Intelligence up to the PL limit (+10 Int, for an ability score of 22). Similarly, a "savant" character may acquire Enhanced Skills which are essentially paranormal rank in those skills, or even traits like

attack and defense bonus, which are treated as skill traits (see **Trait Types**, *M&M*, page 68). So a "combat savant," for example, might have Enhanced Attack and Enhanced Defense as paranormal powers.

Similarly, characters can have Enhanced Feats as a power, costing 1 point per rank, with each rank granting a feat (or a rank in a ranked feat). These feats are paranormal powers rather than "normal" feats, subject to the same guidelines. Some a combat savant could gain paranormal combat feats like Attack Focus, Elusive Target, Power Attack, and so forth without any prior combat training or experience. Similarly, a "social savant" or a "social paragon" with Enhanced Charisma might also pick up Enhanced Feats like Distract, Fascinate, Taunt, or even Fearsome Presence.

POWERS

A substantial portion of your remaining power points should go towards your character's paranormal powers. These are whatever powers the Gamemaster chooses to permit from the *Mutants & Masterminds* rules, including expansions such as the *Mastermind's Manual* and *Ultimate Power*, limited by the series power level (PL 6 in the case of this adventure).

As always, the GM has the final say as to whether or not a particular improved or enhanced trait or power is appropriate within the bounds of the series' power level and can veto any player proposed trait or power for the overall good of the game. Work with your GM to come up with a suitable set of traits and powers for your character's paranormal phase.

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CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

STEVE KENSON, DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT

Steve came up for the original concept for Paragons when proposing the second edition of *Mutants & Masterminds*, and the concept for *A More Perfect Union* while working with Patrick Sweeney of Firefly Games on a related superhumans RPG that never materialized. Never one to waste a perfectly good idea, Steve brought it over to *M&M* and this adventure came into being.

Steve has worked as an RPG writer and designer since 1995, authoring books for games like *Shadowrun*, *Earthdawn*, *Changeling*, and *Aberrant*, among others. He became *Mutants & Masterminds* line developer in early 2005 and began working on the second edition of the game almost immediately. Steve lives in New Hampshire with his partner, Christopher Penczak, and maintains a website at www.stevekenson.com.

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Jon Leitheusser works as a freelance game designer, writer, and editor. He's had the pleasure of editing a number of *Mutants & Masterminds* books (including the rulebook and *Ultimate Power*) and is looking forward to the release of the *Iron Age* sourcebook, which he co-wrote with his good friend Seth Johnson. Jon originally hails from Burlington, Wisconsin, but now calls West Seattle his home.

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Hal has been involved with roleplaying games since he was 9 years old, and shows no sign of stopping now. His graphic design skills have been applied to over well over sixty gaming and comic-related products, and he's written material for Pinnacle Entertainment Group, White Wolf Publishing, Atlas Games, Twilight Creations, and Green Ronin Publishing. Hal resides in Alexandria, VA with far too many books and CDs, and a temperamental cat.

BRIAN HAGAN, COVER ART

Brian has spent the last 10 years working in the comic, RPG, film and gaming industries. He has worked for companies such as Marvel, Hasbro, Wizards of the Coast, Midway and Upper Deck. He currenty serves as the lead concept artist at Midway Studios-Austin on the game *Blacksite: Area 51* as well as working on freelance projects. His wife and 2 children, Noah and Audrey, are his greatest joy and a constant source of inspriation.

GREG KIRKPATRICK, ART

Greg graduated from the University of Kansas with a Bachelors of Fine Arts. He currrently resides in South Florida with his wife and children. Greg has worked on *Savage Dragon*, *Living in Infamy* and other small press publications.

BRETT BARKLEY, ART

Brett Barkley has always been driven to create. As a boy, drawing and writing occupied the majority of his energies, as a long list of disappointed teachers will attest. As he grew, he explored building and working with his hands. Today, a professional comic artist, illustrator and writer, as well as having served in the television and print advertising industries, he pulls from a wide spectrum of life experience and interests.From working on the home he and his wife share, to restoring his '67 Camaro RS, to building computers, illustrating and coloring comics, and through his writing, Brett seeks to discover the inherent expression of the Lord's work. It is his sincere hope and ambition this search can be evidenced in all he does.

SEAN MACDONALD, CARTOGRAPHY

Sean Macdonald has worked in the roleplaying industry as a writer and cartographer for a number of years. He began his freelance career in 2003 with the *Dragonlance Campaign Setting* for Wizards of the Coast. Since that time he has worked on over forty different roleplaying products for many of the industries leading companies, such as Green Ronin, Sovereign Press, Margaret Weis Productions, Paizo Press, Profantasy Software and Wizards of the Coast. Sean has a variety of skills and has done writing for many *Dragonlance* books, graphic design and layout for the *Castlemourn Setting* by Ed Greenwood and cartography for products such as Freeport, *Mutants and Masterminds*, *Dragon Magazine* and the novels *Saving Solace* and *Dragons of the Dwarven Depths*. In 2006 Sean won a gold Ennie for his cartography work in *Tasslehoff's Map Pouch: War of the Lance* and is the sole cartographer behind all three T*asslehoff Map Pouch* products. Sean lives in Auburn, Alabama, with his wife and four daughters. (He swears he used to have hair before they were born.) During the day he is an Internet programmer and spends his free time thinking up new and deadly ways to destroy the players of his regular Sunday *D&D* game.

YOU'VE PLAYED THE ADVENTURE...

I f you enjoyed your first taste of the world of *Paragons* in this adventure, take a look at the *Paragons Campaign Setting* sourcebook, available in Fall of 2007, for much more information about the explosion of the paranormal into the world of the ordinary.

The *Paragons* sourcebook provides everything you need to create your own complete series of normal people with paranormal powers; from people trying to cope with having impossible abilities to godlike paragons with the power to reshape the future of humanity, *Paragons* give you all the options.

All the power is in your hands when it comes to creating the world you and your players want to explore. It looks at the possible origins of paranormals and their powers, and the effects they might have on the world. Play out the changes or decide how those who'd prefer to keep paragons and their powers secret cover them up, perhaps with the aid of your characters!

Paragons opens up whole new worlds with the realm of imagination. This "thought-space" corresponds to all the "otherworlds" of human myth and belief. It is the astral plane, Heaven, Hell, Asgard, Olympus, the Underworld, and more. It is the collective unconscious made manifest, the Imageria. Explore its unknown depths and encounter a myriad of beings there, from gods and demons to dreams and nightmares (assuming there's a difference). Touch the lands of legend, and how they intersect with the real world.

The sourcebook's toolkit includes chapters detailing the many factions and characters of the *Paragons* setting, suitable for use in many different kinds of stories as allies, antagonists, rivals, or just background color. They range from the Paranormal Action Executive (PAX) and the intergovernmental Initiative to the powerful Pantheon, the mercenaries of Foregone Conclusions, and the Seven Thunders, an anti-paranormal movement that believes paragons are agents of the devil!
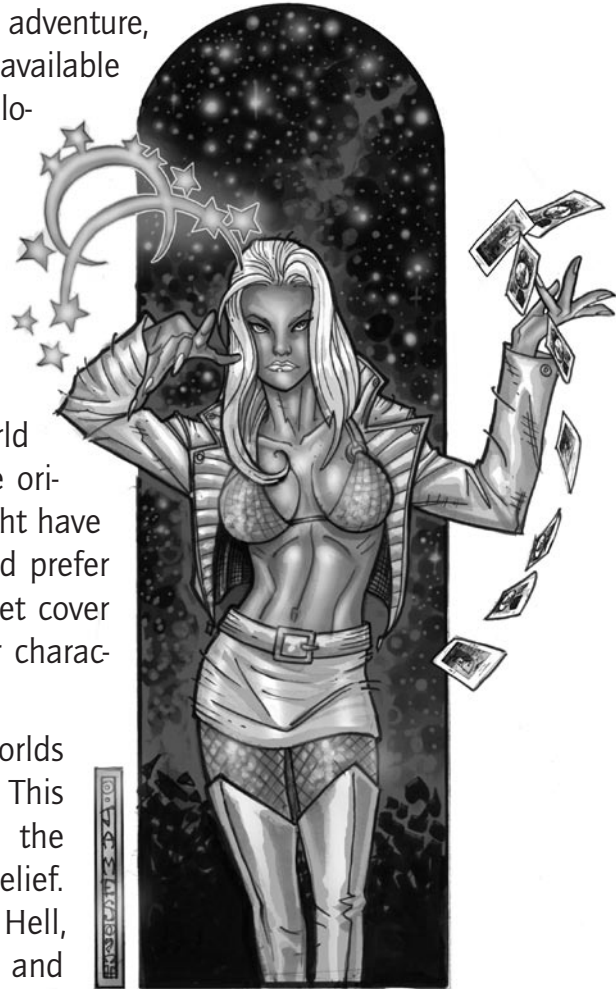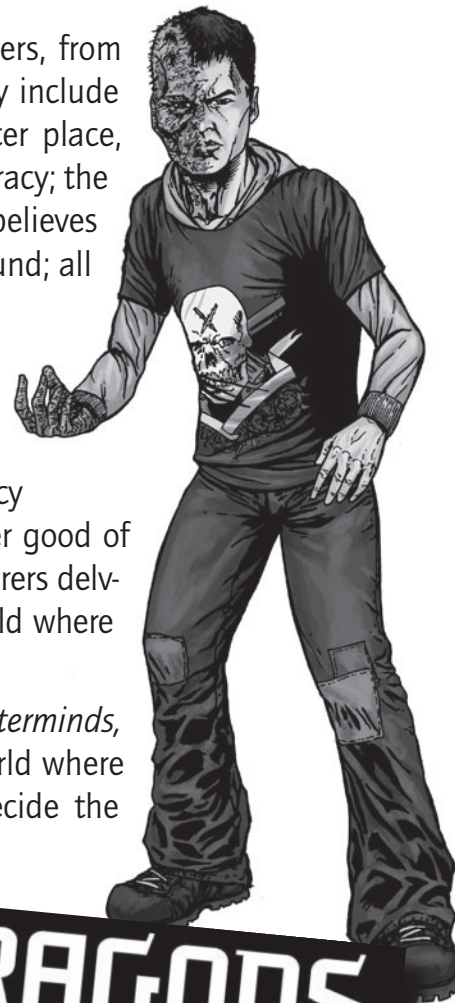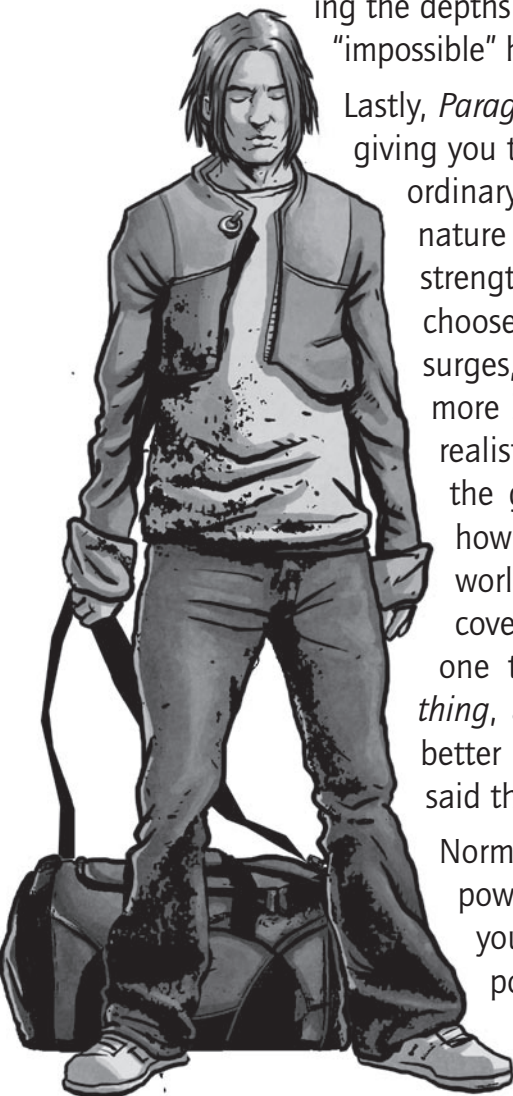
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The characters chapter features dozens of developed paranormal characters, from the tremendously powerful to those cursed by their unusual abilities. They include the Vanguard, a team of paragons devoted to making the world a better place, sometimes whether the world wants it or not; Mr. Zero, the one-man conspiracy; the U.S. agent called the Patriot and the secret of his powers; the Ghost, who believes death unlocked his paranormal powers, and Panacea, able to heal any wound; all these and many more personalities for your characters to meet.

Paragons gives you numerous "series frameworks," to get you started, ideas of the many types of stories you can tell. Create agents of PAX out to change the world, or members of the mystical Pact, playing out a timeless conflict between cosmic archetypes. Play agents of the Paranormal Regulatory Agency enforcing the law, or the shadowy Initiative, defying the law for the greater good of humanity. You can be paranormal mercenaries fighting others' wars or explorers delving the depths of the Imageria. Anything is possible in a world where "impossible" has lost its meaning.

Lastly, *Paragons* expands on the rules of *Mutants & Masterminds,* giving you the essential options you need to create a world where ordinary people wield extraordinary powers. You decide the nature of the paranormal: its origins, strengths, and weaknesses. You choose to apply options like power surges, taint and corruption, and more lethal combat options for a realistic edge. You can also use the guidelines for determining how the paragons change the world around them, and discover that when you change one thing, you change *everything*, and making the world a better place is sometimes easier said than done.

Normal people, paranormal powers, and a world that's yours to make: take on the power, with the *Paragons* campaign setting!

THEY'RE THE BEST THERE IS AT WHAT THEY DO...

...AND WHAT THEY DO ISN'T VERY PRETTY. GO BACK TO THE GRIM DAYS OF THE '80S AND '90S, WHEN SUPER-VIGILANTES IN LEATHER AND CHAINS DISPENSED HARSH JUSTICE. IRON AGE LOOKS AT THE DARKEST ERA OF COMIC BOOK HISTORY AND HOW YOU CAN BRING IT TO LIFE IN YOUR **MUTANTS & MASTERMINDS** GAME. IT INCLUDES AN OVERVIEW OF THE PERIOD, HOW TO CREATE AND RUN IRON AGE CHARACTERS AND GAMES, AND DETAILS ON THE IRON AGE OF GREEN RONIN'S AWARD-WINNING **FREEDOM CITY** CAMPAIGN SETTING. **IRON AGE** IS A SHOTGUN BLAST OF SUPER-POWERED CRIME, BETRAYAL, AND VENGEANCE. IT AIN'T PRETTY, BUT SOMEONE HAS TO CLEAN UP THE STREETS.

IRON AGE – A MUTANTS & MASTERMINDS SOURCEBOOK
AUTHORS: SETH JOHNSON AND JON LEITHEUSSER • **FORMAT:** 128 PAGES, FULL COLOR, SOFTBACK
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