AARON ALLSTON'S

STRIKE FORCE

A SUPERHERO CAMPAIGN AND SETTING SOURCEBOOK

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FOREWORD

"...as my eyes grew accustomed to the light, details of the room within emerged slowly from the mist, strange animals, statues, and gold—everywhere the glint of gold. For the moment—an eternity it must have seemed to the others standing by—I was struck dumb with amazement, and when Lord Carnarvon, unable to stand the suspense any longer, inquired anxiously, 'Can you see anything?' it was all I could do to get out the words, 'Yes, wonderful things'."

-Howard Carter, *Tomb of Tutankhamen*

I felt very much like Howard Carter as I started to work my through the collected folders and files of Aaron Allston's Strike Force campaign. Oh, I'd seen parts of it before, sprinkled about in such Hero Games publications as **The Circle and M.E.T.E.** and **The Blood and Dr. McQuark**, as well as the GURPS Supers supplement **School of Hard Knocks**. I'd even read how Strike Force got its start, as Aaron spent three pages detailing the first six months of his campaign in issue 48 of *The Space Gamer*. And, of course, I'd read the more detailed account of Strike Force's origins, history, and makeup in the seminal work **Aaron Allston's Strike Force**, a campaign sourcebook for **Champions** that tried to cram seven years of world building into a mere 96 pages.

But now I wasn't reading a polished work scrubbed for publication. I was getting to look at the raw files. I could now look directly at the campaign's history and house rules, examine its custom martial arts styles, and marvel at the innumerable heroes and villains, as well as hundreds and hundreds of pages of session synopses, plotting notes, timelines, background details, and more. It might not have been a room crammed with strange animal, statues, and gold, but to me, it was just as valuable.

Along the way I discovered many surprising things, such as how Aaron incorporated everything into his setting, meaning the members of Strike Force not only dealt with such foes as the Overlord and the Affrighter, but also tussled with Darkseid and dialogued with Doctor Doom. That Superman was the first costumed hero, but the arrival (and subsequent death in battle) of Galactus cleared the slate for the modern slate of superheroes (such as the player characters you'll be meeting in this volume).

STRIKE FORCE BY THE NUMBERS

The first session of Strike Force was run on August 21, 1981. Aaron was just twenty at the time. Strike Force then ran for over 260 sessions, with the last known session run on January 11, 2003.

It was a voyage of discovery, as can be attested by my Lead Developer, Ross Watson, who received a constant stream of emails detailing my latest findings.

Which leads us to the question some of you might be asking: *"How did this come about?"*

Ever since the publication of the original Strike Force in 1988, Aaron apparently had plans for a larger, more comprehensive volume. In fact, based on a 1999 email to Hero Games, Aaron was planning on an entire series of books detailing every aspect of his universe, starting with the Strike Force team itself, and then moving on to such diverse subjects as magic, interstellar space, other dimensions, and so on. A number of factors delayed these plans, such as the purchase of Hero Games by DOJ Inc. and the publication of **HERO System 5th edition**. Aaron's health was also a factor. He suffered a heart attack in 2009, underwent surgery to hopefully correct the problem, returned to writing and attending conventions, and then passed away in 2014.

Aaron's death, while a devastating blow to the tabletop community, also served to rally several like-minded individuals together with the aim of producing a new Strike Force volume in order to honor Aaron's legacy as a game designer. There was also the desire to introduce Aaron's Strike Force setting to an entire new generation of gamers. Many newer HERO System players had heard of **Strike Force**, but few had been fortunate enough to see a copy. Now we had the chance to show some of the reasons why Aaron bore the moniker "the Champions guru" through most of the 1980s.

I count myself very lucky to be asked to be part of this project. When High Rock Press and Evil Beagle Games entered into a partnership to produce a new version of **Strike Force**, the question of who would be lead writer came up. According to Sean Patrick Fannon, he could think of no better choice than myself. Needless to say, I was both honored and a little apprehensive about tackling such a project. But there was no way I could say no. There was no way I could miss out on such a once-in-a-lifetime chance. I think my voice cracked when I said "yes".

THE INFLUENCE OF STRIKE FORCE

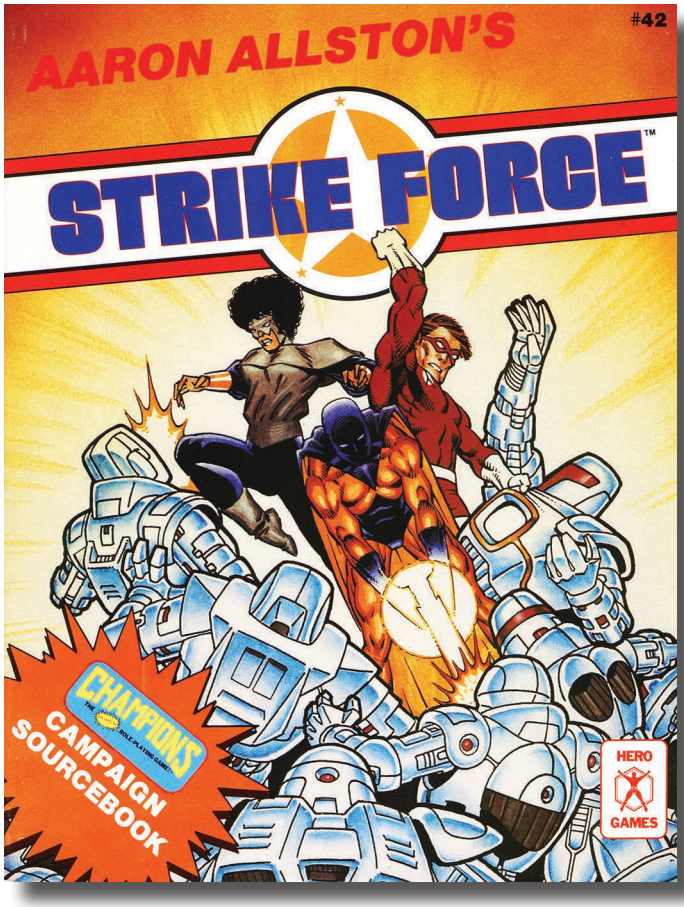
Ask anyone who played **Champions** during the late 1980s and early 1990s if they've heard of **Strike Force** and the answer is usually "yes". Anyone who answered "yes" usually owns a copy, used to own a copy, or wishes they could own a copy. eBay is no help, as the book rarely appears there, and when it does, it tends to start at around $50.00 and go up from there. At the time I was writing this, you could get a used copy for $80.00 off of Amazon, while a new copy would cost you $2,600!

Why?

Because **Strike Force** was the first time you could see a campaign from the GM's point of view. Oh, there had been RPG campaigns published before—Blackmoor, Greyhawk, and Glorantha, for example—but while these works tended to talk about what was in the world, none of them really talked about how to run the world. **Strike Force,** on the other hand, was the first time you could hear the world's creator talk about such subjects as incorporating a character (and the Character's Story) into the campaign, how to simulate the tone of four-color comics, how to painlessly introduce new players, and possibly the most important element—how to listen to your players and their desires.

Aaron also spent time discussing campaign problems and how to resolve them—another first. One of his major topics was the idea of a campaign's "ground rules"—codes of behavior the GM would expect from his players, and conversely, the players from the GM. These ground rules included such concepts as determining the setting's lethality, dealing with captured PCs, and players who constantly rebuild their characters. Aaron not only talked about what these rules covered, but how to deal with them during play. He also discussed the problem with trying to simulate everything you see in four-color comics, and noted which genre elements were best left to printed page and which worked at the table.

Along with his discussions of how to run a campaign, Aaron also talked about how to ruin one. His list of ten sure-fire ways to wreck a game was a huge eye opener, helping GMs to understand what they might be doing wrong in their own games. He also gave us a list of player stereotypes and what each one wanted out of a campaign (as well as ways to give them what they want). And most importantly, he gave advice on how to keep your game fresh over time, how to set



characters and the campaign itself in new directions, and how to pace your game to keep yourself (and your players) from burning out.

This is why people value **Strike Force** so much. The book discussed game mastering ideas and concepts many people hadn't considered before and in doing so helped mold an entire generation of **Champions** players. Many people, when asked, note that reading **Strike Force** caused them reevaluate their campaigns, style of play, and GMing methods. Many of the people I spoke to stated that Aaron's book was a direct influence on how they ran a game, and since their style of play has influenced how I run a game, and my style of play has influenced others, the cascade effect of Strike Force can't be underestimated.

And now, with this new version of Aaron's Strike Force campaign, I hope to reach another generation of players and GMs, and start the cycle anew.

—Michael Surbrook, August 2015

INTRODUCTION

So, before we continue, I think it's only proper to hear a few words from Aaron himself on how everything you're about to experience came about. On what, exactly, prompted him to create the Strike Force setting:

Really, it's all Steve Jackson's fault.

In 1981, I was working for The Space Gamer*, a gaming magazine then owned by Steve Jackson Games. My job was to keep track of circulation; I also did occasional articles and reviews on the side.*

At the national Origins convention that year, Steve Jackson picked up a copy of **Champions** *and later handed it over to me for evaluation and review. I played a couple of solo sessions to learn the game system, then started up a playtest campaign at the company's office to give the system a good wringing-out before writing my review. That was August 1981, and the playtest campaign—the Strike Force campaign—is still going strong, twenty years later.*

In 1988, I had a rare opportunity for self-indulgence. Hero Games and their new publisher, Iron Crown Enterprises, accepted my manuscript describing the Strike Force campaign. I condensed into 96 pages an abbreviated view of the campaign world and history, fulfilling the ambition held by thousands of GMs over the years: "I'll write up my campaign and somebody will publish it." *It was a very satisfying event and led to some very gratifying feedback from Hero System gamers, but it was, in another sense, very frustrating: To provide a really comprehensive view of the campaign, I would have had to have been given five times the pages I had.*

Unfortunately, I don't have 480 pages—I have 256. I hope to pack these precious pages with as much information as possible, and give you, dear reader, as detailed as possible a look at the workings of the Strike Force campaign and how it developed, evolved, and changed over the years.

Let's get started, shall we?

WHO IS AARON ALLSTON?

Game designer, game master, novelist, Aaron Allston was all that and more. If you're a fan of **Champions** and the HERO System, odds are you already know his name, as he created a number of memorable and influential products—such as **Justice Inc.**, **Lands of Mystery**, and **Super Agents**—for Hero Games over the years. But this only scratches the surface. His true output was far more extensive than some of you reading this volume realize. A fairly comprehensive look at this life and work is as follows:

Aaron Dale Allston was born on December 8, 1960 in Corsicana, a small town about an hour south of Dallas. He spent much of this youth moving about the state of Texas, before finally graduating from high school in the city of Denton, which is located on the northern end of the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. An avid fan of science fiction and fantasy, he joined his high school's science fiction club, where he acted as secretary and reporter.

After graduating high school, Aaron went to the University of Texas in Austin, where he majored in journalism. He worked briefly at the Austin American Statesman and far longer at Steve Jackson Games, where he assisted with the editing and production of *Space Gamer* magazine, and helped with the launch of *Fantasy Gamer* magazine. By 1983, Aaron had become a full-time game designer, writing such products as **The Circle and M.E.T.E.** and **The Blood and Doctor McQuark** for Hero Games, and **Autoduel Champions** for Steve Jackson Games. In 1986, he published his first product for Advanced Dungeons & Dragons—**Treasure Hunt**, following it up with **Skarda's Mirror**—then branched out into Rolemaster with **Mythic Greece** in 1988.

AARON'S OWN WORDS

Aaron Allston had written several notes and sections about an updated Strike Force project prior to his untimely death. We've included Aaron's own words as much as possible throughout this book. Whenever you see a section that looks like this:

Really, it's all Steve Jackson's fault.

...you're seeing Aaron's own words. We've done a bit of updating here and there to ensure compatability with Champions Complete, but every effort has been made to preserve Aaron's original writing.

1988 was a major year for Aaron's game designer career. Not only did he produce the aforementioned **Mythic Greece**, but he also was able to release the first version of his Strike Force campaign as a published sourcebook, with **Aaron Allston's Strike Force** for Hero Games. In addition, he wrote the **Dungeon Master's Design Kit** for TSR that same year, following it up with **The Complete Fighter's Handbook** in 1989, then the **Dungeons & Dragons Rules Cyclopedia** two years later, finishing up with **The Complete Ninja's Handbook** in 1995.

In 1990, Aaron made his foray into electronic game design, as co-writer of the computer game **Savage Empire**, which was named Best PC Fantasy RPG by *Game Player* magazine in the same year. That same year he wrote **Ninja Hero**, one of the most influential HERO System sourcebooks ever released (at least in this writer's opinion). He followed this up by authoring the HERO System 5th Edition version of **Champions** in 2002.

In 1988 Aaron wrote **Web of Danger,** his first novel. Several more books followed, with **Doc Sidhe**, one of his better-known works, appearing in 1995. Two years later he started writing books set in the Star Wars universe, contributing to the *X-Wing* series with the release of **Wraith Squadron**. He eventually wrote 13 Star Wars novels, along with two books for the Terminator franchise, and a number of stand-alone titles. Along with his full-length novels, he also wrote numerous short stories and magazine articles, as well as technical guides for aspiring writers.

In 2005 Aaron wrote, produced, and directed the independent film *Deadbacks,* but although it went into post-production, it was never released.

An honorary member of the Star Wars cosplay group the 501st Legion (a.k.a. "Vader's Fist"), Aaron went on numerous tours to promote his various Star Wars novels and attended gaming conventions all over the United States. In 2009, during one such tour (for the novel **Outcast**, part of the *Fate of the Jedi* series) he suffered a heart attack and underwent quadruple bypass surgery. Then, five years later, on February 27, 2014, Aaron suffered heart failure while attending VisionCon (located in Branson, Missouri). He collapsed at the convention, was rushed to the hospital, and then died later that day. He was 53.

WHAT IS STRIKE FORCE?

Taken at face value, Strike Force is "simply" a long-running tabletop RPG superhero campaign. But it's so much more than that. It wasn't until I started to look through all of the assorted files and folders that I began to appreciate the sheer scale of Aaron's creation. It is one thing to hear a campaign has been running for 20 plus years, it's another to actually see what that entails. What started out as a simple playtest of the **Champions** RPG in 1981, in which five heroes (DarkKnight, Lightrune, Phosphene, ShadowWalker, and Swashbuckler) battled the nefarious aims of the villainous Overlord and his companion, Lady Power, eventually grew into a setting as rich and complex as the worlds of DC and Marvel Comics.

The sheer scale of the Strike Force setting is staggering. In fact, simply calling it "Strike Force" is misleading. Aaron referred to his setting as "Earth-AU" (for Allston Universe), and it truly was a universe unto itself. Aside from Strike Force, there are (or were) 22 other campaigns set on Earth-AU. Now, before you think Aaron was some sort of game mastering machine, I do want to note that he didn't run all of these games… but he did run quite a few. Some campaigns ran for only a single session (such as Team Ronin, which was played in 1985), while others lasted much longer, such as the soap opera-inspired Twilight Falls, which ran for more than 120 sessions. Most campaigns, however, lasted for less than 20.

Along with the modern-era campaigns, which often ran concurrently with Strike Force, Aaron (and others) also ran games set in Earth-AU's past. Most of these games occurred during the pulp era, such as the 100+ sessions of the Empire Club. Others were set during the Second World War (Arsenal of Democracy and War Action Heroes). Another was set during the Golden Age of Piracy and was fittingly called simply: Pirates! Then there was the 48-session Zorandar campaign, which was set on an alien world, totally separate from the Earth.

Roughly 15 people formed the core playgroup of Earth-AU, but upwards of 48 people either played at least one session of Strike Force or otherwise contributed to Earth-AU in some fashion. Some of their names are well known: game designers Steve Jackson and Mike Nystul, and artist Denis Loubet all participated in play sessions. In fact, Denis was in more than 150 sessions of Strike Force, mainly playing the character Phosphene. All told, these 48 people participated in over 260 sessions of Strike Force, which were run over a period of at least 21 years.

STRIKE FORCE TESTIMONIALS

It's a bit hard to explain to a modern audience, with the wealth of gaming knowledge and advice available today, precisely how important and vital **Strike Force** *was when it came out in the dark days of 1988. I've occasionally resorted to a musical metaphor: Brian Eno once said of the seminal album* **The Velvet Underground & Nico**, "only thirty thousand people bought a copy of that album in its first five years. But, every one of those thirty thousand started their own band." *That influence, the way Lou Reed and company's sound made such an impact on other creators, meant that the ideas it contained spread far beyond the bounds of people who heard the first iteration. You may never have heard* **Velvet Underground & Nico**, *but if you've ever listened to punk or new wave, David Bowie, R.E.M or U2, you've heard part of that album. It's become part of the foundation of rock and roll.*

The same is true, I believe, of **Strike Force**, *though obviously on a bit smaller scale.* **Strike Force** *was the first example of Actual Play that many gamers and game masters ever encountered. Examples of how to run an actual campaign, one that might last for many sessions among a group of friends, were vanishingly rare in the early days of gaming. Usually, knowledge of how to do so was acquired by trial and error, with the wheel being invented over and over again in slightly different ways around kitchen tables. Players might carry successful strategies to new groups, or demonstrate them at conventions, but the transmission of ideas by these vectors was slow and haphazard. In Strike Force, Aaron told his readers how he did it, and fortunately many of us recognized that his way was, in fact, better.*

A lot of Aaron's original advice in the "Campaigning" chapter (which is only ten pages long, a burst of concentrated brilliance rarely seen before or since) wound up being reprinted elsewhere, in better-known books like the Fourth Edition of **Champions** *(the legendary "Big Blue Book"), often without direct attribution. The Character Creation Checklist, 23 simple questions for every GM to ask when handed a new character, is simply brilliant. The descriptions of common player types have become standards in the community, but more importantly Aaron was prescriptive; "here's what this kind of player is looking for out of his or her gaming experience, and here's advice on how to give it to them!" His group may not have invented bluebooking, but they certainly named it. And several of the characters in the book have two different character sheets, one representing their initial appearance and then a second showing how they developed over time. This recognition that campaigns (and therefore characters) by their nature progress, and that any given character sheet is only a snapshot of what is best treated as a living document that changes with each story a character is part of, had never to my knowledge been included in a game's text before.*

Our understanding of the art and science of roleplaying games continues to advance, and today there are countless fora, blogs and podcasts where we can debate ways of making our games better, however we decide to define "better." But the book you're holding in your hands right now comes from a time when that kind of discussion was truly rare, and represents Aaron's efforts to have that discussion on some level with every reader the best way he knew—by telling you step by step what he'd worked out for himself and his own group. It's a key piece of the foundation of every game we play today, and I'm delighted that Mike, Ross, Jason and crew are presenting it again to a modern audience who I hope can appreciate its importance.

—Darren Watts

Before actual play reports became a feature of the hobby, before the Internet's bits flowed into every home like running water, there was **Aaron Allston's Strike Force**, *and MAN did it blow my tiny high-school-aged mind when it landed on my table in 1988.*

While our hobby has always been a social one, our ability to reach out to one another, to really learn the ins and outs of its craft, was usually tucked away in publications, magazines, and the occasional convention in this seemingly prehistoric, pre-Internet time. So when Aaron's book debuted it was a revelation, a golden clarion call that resonated with any Champions GM lucky enough to grab a copy.

In many ways it was like going from the academic study of military strategy to an actual in-the-field exploration of the practical realities of combat. **Strike Force** *grew out of Aaron's own campaign-running experience, documenting how that game went, sharing resources he had developed to keep it going. The stories of that game were simple, clever, and realistic. When several characters meet simply by coincidence near the start of the campaign, Aaron gives a wink and a shrug to the reader, acknowledging that it was the superhero equivalent of* "so you all meet in a

tavern..." *and that sometimes you don't have to contort yourself further just to get your group together and playing. His villains and other important NPCs had backstories that informed and interacted with the PCs own, and ultimately built out the world.*

It all just felt very... organic, I suppose. And, familiar. Reassuring. Where things he did overlapped my own inchoate GMing choices, I gained confidence. When he did something I never thought of, I gained insight. At every turn, even if I never once used a stat-block straight from the book, I found my game improved. In this, it was already incredibly influential.

But Aaron didn't stop there. He also looked at the real, practical problems he would encounter while running his game—and then he'd show how to solve them. This went beyond the standard theory and advice offered in the core books of the system, and was a big part of that "academic theory" vs "boots-on-the-ground pragmatism" vibe I got from Strike Force. This was probably the first time I saw a book directly address the types of players who might sit down at a table. And how great is it to find a "How to Ruin Your Campaign" section in a book like this, planting signposts and warning glyphs around the landscape, warning fellow travelers where the dragons be? In a largely self-taught hobby, this sort of perspective was incredible.

While I may have eventually moved on from Champions as my game of choice, I never moved on from **Strike Force**. *It's a book that crawled straight into my DNA and rewrote every part of my gaming from then on forward. I'm so excited to see it live again!*

—Fred Hicks

Aaron Allston was one of the second generation of roleplaying greats: a luminary from the '80s. That began when he became an editor for Steve Jackson's magazines. He oversaw Space Gamer *from issue #51 (May 1982) to #65 (September/October 1983) and also edited the early issues of Steve Jackson's* Fantasy Gamer.

Today, Space Gamer *is largely forgotten due to its lackluster production during its later years, following its departure from Steve Jackson Games. However it was a cornerstone of the industry in the 'late '70s and early '80s, when it was the place to go for reviews, designer notes, and other articles about roleplaying. Allston was at the heart of that golden age, the man with his hand on the pulse of gaming. It was here that Allston influenced me the most personally, because he archived the history of the industry at his height—creating annals that I later plundered for my own work on* **Designers & Dragons** *(2014).*

Allston wasn't just an editor, he was also a writer. While at Steve Jackson Games he authored a very innovative book: **Autoduel Champions** *(1983). It was one of the industry's earliest crossovers—and the most comprehensive of them, because it didn't just mix together rule systems, but also settings. You want Car Wars superheroes or Champions autodueling? They're all here.*

The publication of that Car Wars / Champions crossover demonstrated Allston's interest in Hero Games' superheroic RPG. This was the game that he'd focus his freelance work on during the years after his departure from Space Gamer. *And that at last brings us to his next ground-breaking work:* **Aaron Allston's Strike Force** *(1988).*

The industry is full of stories of the house campaigns of famous designers, but too few have been fully documented. **Aaron Allston's Strike Force** *is one of the earliest exceptions: it offered a look at not just Allston's campaign world, but also how he* ran *his game. Allston talked about how to create good characters and how to run good campaigns — all in an era when substantive GMing articles were still few and far between. He statted up his setting's heroes and villains, sure, but he also offered some of the industry's first Actual Plays, describing both the course of his game and what real-life events influenced it. Though the book remains interesting and insightful today, in 1988 it was* amazing.

Strike Force *wasn't the end of Allston's innovation. He was also one of the prime movers in the expansion of Basic D&D in the late '80s. He wrote the first Known World Gazetteer,* **GAZ1: The Grand Duchy of Karameikos** *(1987) and then codified the rules in the* **Dungeons & Dragons Rules Cyclopedia** *(1991). Add two more products to his list of striking innovations.*

It's not surprising that Allston's talent allowed him to move on to become a science-fiction writer. But we had him for fifteen years, and roleplaying is better for it.

—Shannon Appelcline, Author, **Designers & Dragons**

As everyone knows, Aaron Allston was a creative genius. His imagination, and his incredible skill at helping audiences envision what he was seeing and thinking, are unparalleled. But more significant than that, for all of us who knew Aaron personally, we realize that he was simply an amazing man.

I remember the first time I met Aaron at a gaming convention. We had already interacted with each other through written correspondence, and I remained deeply impressed with his intellect, his classy demeanor, and his sense of mastery over just about every topic that came up. But when I met him in person, I gained a whole new appreciation for his deeply gentle spirit. Simply put, Aaron was kind... and that kindness was contagious. He conducted himself with humility, engaged with everyone freely, and provoked both depth and gentleness in every conversation.

Aaron soon invited me to be a part of The Rogues Gallery, *an APAzine for exchanging ideas and creativity amidst various gaming freelancers connected with Hero Games. I felt completely inadequate for the task. Who was I to submit material alongside someone as great as... well, as great as the one and only Aaron Allston? Yet I embraced the opportunity with a kind of fan-boy giddiness, just hoping that the feedback would not be too devastating. I admit that every time a new issue was sent out, I immediately turned to Aaron's submission and looked for his section of comments. Did he say anything about my work? Did he like it? Did he have suggestions for improvement? (A suggestion from Aaron was always priceless and helpful.) Such was my awe of not only his creativity but also his encouraging demeanor.*

Over the years, I've had a few opportunities to sit at a gaming table with Aaron and enjoy some shared imaginative adventure. I've even been a gamemaster for him on at least one occasion, which would have been an intimidating endeavor except for his relentless kindness and support. But I don't really remember the plot of those gaming experiences. The actual games with Aaron are somewhat lost to me in favor of having simply been with the man himself. And I am deeply grateful for those memories.

With Aaron gone, the world has not only lost an endless fountain of amazing ideas and riveting storytelling. We've also lost one heck of a great guy. And I've lost a wonderful friend. May his imaginative spirit—and his contagious goodness to others—live on through many, many shared adventures in the ongoing world of Strike Force.

—Scott Heine

Everyone has an Aaron story. He made time for people wherever he went, and he never put his talent first... it just was. And because it never got in the way he shared what ever he knew with anyone interested enough to ask. **Strike Force** *is an example of that sharing, and it changed the way many of us ran games. I got to hear some of the stories about the campaign direct from the players during in my time in Texas; never from Aaron of course, modest man that he was. He did always make time to listen to his players retell the campaign's great moments (ok, once in a while he'd add a witty remark).*

Dave and Martha Ladyman had a game club in north Austin where we would all end up a couple times a week when time permitted. I was fortunate enough to play with him a couple of times (not a thing he got a chance to do as often as he would have liked) and hearing that I made it a point to run a short story arc that he found time for (which was a joy). What I mean to say is at his heart Aaron was not a writer that gamed, he was a gamer who just happened to be a brilliant writer. Even though I don't believe he'd have even admitted it out loud, I think he'd be proud to see how his work continues to inspire writers and designers.

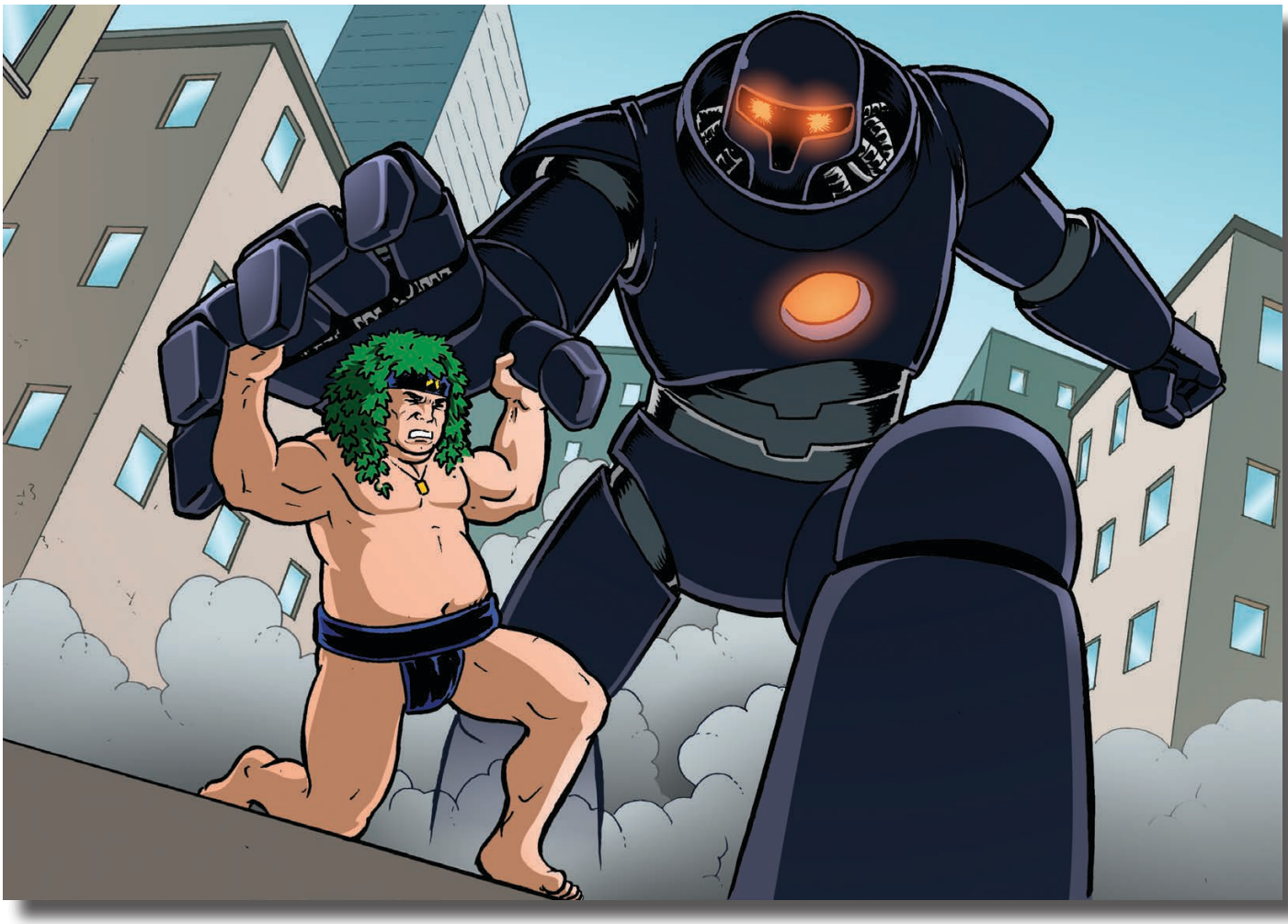
—Ray Greer

Aaron was an inspiration as a gamemaster, gamer, and author—from such subjects as to how to write RPG Detective adventures (which I still refer to when scripting mysteries), to his vast amount of superhero and Star Wars lore, but most of all, his willingness to share and give back to the gaming community. The world is a lesser place for his passing.

My first exposure to Aaron's work was **Strike Force***—and it was a superhero campaign book that was clearly a labor of love, both from the GM and players alike. It was one of the best superhero supplements and even better, one of the best role-playing game supplements I've ever read—from the "types" of players in a campaign section (which still hold true to this day from the "Buddy" to the "the Genre Fiend") to the detailed character and campaign breakdowns that embodied the rich world that GMs and players can breathe to life when they are committed to the game and are having a great time role-playing together.*

Strike Force *felt like it allowed me to peek inside both Aaron's campaign and his gamemaster mind. It was well-worth the read, both for entertainment value and for educational value in the RPG space—it is one of the best RPG supplements ever, and it deserves to be restored for a new generation.*

—Chris Avellone



THE STRIKE FORCE CAMPAIGN

Strike Force began as a simple playtest of the Champions rules set. Aaron sat down with four friends (Allen Sikes, Billy Moore, Denis Loubet, and Stacy Allston) and ran an adventure where the heroes ShadowWalker, Swashbuckler, Phosphene, DarkKnight, and Lightrune fought Overlord and Lady Power. This game session led to another, and another, and another, until, as Aaron put it in 2001, while writing the introduction to his intended expanded **Strike Force** sourcebook: *"the playtest campaign… is still going strong, twenty years later."* In addition, within 10 months these five heroes grew to a cast of nearly 20, and six to seven others joined the first four players.

Over time, people came and went. For example, game designer Steve Jackson—the man arguably responsible for Strike Force in the first place—left after only a few sessions. On the other hand, Denis Loubet played in nearly 200! Characters came and went as well. Some were killed in action (such as Napalm, cut down by gunfire), others retired (such as Defender, who left Earth to join a fleet of interstellar colonists). But for each hero who left, another would appear to take their place. Individual characters aged, grew, married, had children, and generally lived out their lives while battling villains, traveling to other words and dimensions, and periodically saving the Earth.

Starting out as disorganized group of superheroes who were forced to steal a bus in order to travel from Newark to Manhattan (we're looking at you, Ninja), the members of Strike Force would eventually evolve into a full-fledged super team, complete with a base, agents to man it, various forms of transport, and the respect of their peers. As the roster grew, the superheroes eventually split into two teams: the high-profile Strike Force, and the low-key Shadow Warriors.

But it didn't stop there. Strike Force itself became so large that the organization divided again, this time into several smaller teams, located in New York, Washington DC, Hawaii, and an orbiting space station.

As time passed, Aaron's world grew. It eventually dealt not just one Earth, but many, and the campaign world became known as "Earth-AU," since the campaign covered an entire multiverse. This growth was reflected in Strike Force's travels. Their first major trip may have been from Newark to Manhattan, but soon they were traveling all over New York State, then the United States, then the world. The heroes also went into space, setting foot on alien worlds, then entered other dimensions and visited parallel and alternate Earths. Strike Force even traveled back in time, viewing their first few adventures from a whole new perspective.

Not satisfied with maintaining the classic comic book status quo with regards to world events and technology, Aaron decided to take Strike Force in a new direction. After around eight years of play, he plotted two major shake-ups:

The first was the discovery and defeat of an alien being known as the Governor. Having landed on Earth in the 1830s, the Governor decided to study what would happen if a developing technological culture had its scientific progress artificially retarded. The result was a superhero universe where many super scientists found it impossible to distribute and profit off of their discoveries (not coincidentally, these frustrations gave rise to quite a few supervillains). With help from Overlord, Strike Force drew the Governor out of hiding. After defeating the Governor, Strike Force forced the being to leave Earth and swear to never return.

This story gave Aaron an in-game rationale to begin moving the Strike Force campaign in a new direction. It also allowed him change the world in drastic ways. For example, technology would leap forward in springs and bounds, as opposed to the previous plodding pace. Teleportation would become commonplace, and within a few years, Earth would start expanding into space on the interstellar level. It also allowed heroes to profit from their inventions and technological prowess.

The second major shakeup involved the entire world and everyone on it. In previous adventures, Strike Force had discovered a pocket universe known as the Chaos Zone. A large portion of the Chaos Zone was ruled by a powerful being known simply as Aswar the Darklord. Ever hungry for power, Aswar was persuaded to invade the Earth by the supervillain known as the Affrighter (who can be found in The Blood and Dr. McQuark). Over a number of sessions (and months of in-game time) Earth fought a war with Aswar and the Chaos Zone. The world was bombed repeatedly, cities were destroyed, millions (if not billions) died; the campaign went from costumed superheroics to World War III military action. Earth's heroes divided into two large groups: those who stayed on Earth to try and protect it, and those (such as Strike Force) who ventured into the Chaos Zone to bring the battle to Aswar the Darklord himself. Eventually, Strike Force (and a number of other heroes) was successful, and Aswar was forced to flee into exile.

Back on Earth, everything was in ruins. Cities were wrecked, nations shattered, and numerous world leaders had been slain. However, from a Game Master's standpoint, everything was perfect. Aaron could now watch as the players helped rebuild Earth from the ground up. With the Governor gone, technology could now develop at an accelerated rate, pushing Strike Force's world into a high-tech future. This also allowed Aaron to expand the campaign's focus. Stories would now allow for the exploration and colonization of alien worlds, of dealings with galactic empires, the expansion of science, keeping Earth safe from extra-dimensional invaders, and the visiting alternate Earths and dimensions, as well as the constant threats posed by Earth-bound organizations and villains.

The World War III plot really marked the turning point in the Strike Force campaign. It allowed Aaron to expand his horizons. It allowed Strike Force to operate on a larger scale, especially once they developed their orbital base (which made them somewhat akin to DC Comic's Justice League, which often operates out of a space station known as the Watchtower). It allowed for plots that were on a greater scale than ever before, in which the heroes dealt with global, interstellar, and inter-dimensional problems. It also allowed Aaron to present new geopolitical entities, new cultures and societies, and new questions with which to challenge the players (and their characters).

Once the dust from World War III settled, the heroes became more than crime fighters. They were world builders, both in and out of the game. Aaron regularly asked his players what their PCs intended to do during the upcoming campaign "season" (a period of four months or so). Thus, the players could not only guide the growth of their characters, they could guide the growth and development of post-war Earth. Players found that their decisions mattered, shaping the course of the world and the campaign.

In due time, the members of Strike Force would venture far and wide in their quest to uphold the common good and thwart evil in any number of guises. A short list of their adventures would include: preventing a cross-dimensional invasion from the ironically named "Nice World"; crossing dimensional barriers to help end a decades-long version of World War II on the parallel world of Earth-Kaiser; traveling to the exoplanet of Valhalla to stop the attempted rise of a Nazi Fourth Reich; traveling to the exoplanet of Paradise to resolve a dispute between Earth colonists and the Producer, then—some time later—returning to Paradise to settle differences between the Producer and his android creations; and finally, preventing a number of supervillains from Strike Force's Earth from conquering the fairly mundane dimension of Prey-World. All of this made Strike Force the premier superhero team of Earth, especially once the previous contender for the title of "Earth's Most Powerful Superhero Team" decided to disband and retire.

METHODS OF PLAY

How, exactly, did Aaron manage to run a campaign of this scope? In order to answer that, lets first take a look at how he handled the logistics of running (and playing in) various campaigns:

Per Aaron's notes, he ran his campaigns on Tuesday and Saturday of each week. The Saturday campaigns consisted of Strike Force, Age of Heroes (a mythological Greek fantasy campaign Aaron used to play-test his **Mythic Greece** book), and the Eldorado Society (a pulp-era action adventure game set in Earth-AU). The Tuesday campaigns were a far more mixed bag.

These featured the anime-style Astro-Warriors and Robo-Warriors games, Ninja Hero (initially created to play-test **Ninja Hero**), Shadows (a dystopian future world featuring low-powered superheroes), Twilight Falls (a soap operatic superhero game set in Earth AU), Zorandar (a Lost World setting linked to Earth-AU and described in Aaron's **Lands of Mystery**), and other games.

Normally, Saturday's games were broken up into three month "seasons," while Tuesday's seasons were six months. In addition, Saturday's games were the "main" campaigns, while Tuesdays were used for more experimental and niche games. However, these cycles were not adhered to slavishly—Aaron notes that he ran Age of Heroes and Strike Force for as long as 12 months before taking a break and switching campaigns. Still, regularly cycling the various campaigns allowed Aaron and his players to take a break from their characters and plots, and kept interest in the different settings high. Aaron credits this style of play with keeping Strike Force an on-going game since 1981.

Since Aaron knew approximately when a campaign's season was going to end, this allowed him to being preparing for the upcoming campaign's season. This preparation took the following steps:

1) THE ASSEMBLY OF STORY IDEAS.

Aaron started by reading over the synopses of the campaign's adventures from the previous seasons (see Campaign Chronicles on page 15). He looked to see if there were any unresolved plot threads and other loose ends; he examined the Psychological Limitations and any new powers of the regular characters to see if anything suggested a new plot seed. He then noted possible subplots—which would be storylines that continued from episode to episode (such as investigative processes and ongoing romances), thus providing background events to the primary plot.

It also seems that Aaron tracked what various NPCs were up to. Major supervillains, supervillain teams, criminal organizations, and so on; none of them existed in a vacuum. In fact, Aaron often linked past events to current plot lines. There are a number of instances in the Strike Force Chronicles were mysterious events from previous sessions (sometimes extremely previous sessions), are linked to current events and activities of some faction or individual. In addition, based on some plotting documents I looked over, Aaron had a general idea of what everyone was up to, what they were planning, and where they were going with those plans. Than it simply became a case of revealing those plans to the players when the time was right.

2) THE "WHAT I WANT TO DO" SHEET.

These letter-sized sheets had the PC's name at the top and asked the player what they wanted their character to do in the upcoming season. If the player ran more than one character, then each character received a separate sheet.

An earlier version (circa the mid-1990s) read as follows:

> *This sheet is a list of "Things I Want to Do" in the 1994 play-season in the Strike Force/ Shadow Warriors/Avant Guard campaign.*
>
> *Below, there may be notes you made on previous years' sheets. (Suggestions that have been dealt with or at least addressed, or that have been obviated by other campaign events, have not been listed on this sheet.)*
>
> *Please strike out any of these that you no longer want to pursue, and on the lines below write down any that you want to add.*

A version used about ten years later included the following to help players decide what to put down:

- Character Homes and Their Communities
- Personal Wealth (How to Get It and How to Spend It)
- Long-Term Goals
- Short-Term Goals
- Relationships With Other Characters (Romances, Enmities, Negotiations, Business Relationships, Seductions, Duels, Visits)
- Personal Training and Growth (Including Experience Expenditures)
- Plots You'd Like To See Your Character Experience

As you can see, both sheets allow the players to talk directly to the GM and let him know what they want their characters to do. In addition, the second part of the 1990s sheet contains a very important informative element, as it allows the player to tell the GM what plot elements the player no longer finds compelling or interesting.

One such "What I Want To Do," filled out by ShadowWalker's player in the fall of 2002, lists activities for both ShadowWalker's costumed identity and his secret identity of Andrew Steele. It notes what actions Andrew Steele intended to do with regards to his company of Steele Robotics (such as improving his company's product line and conducting research into artificial intelligence), his personal life (such as trying to develop his on-going relationship with NPC reporter Shari Taylor), an investigation ShadowWalker wanted to conduct, and continued martial arts training for the character. One part that I found particularly interesting was a section where ShadowWalker's player acknowledges the limitations of the genre and notes that while Andrew wanted to continue his relationship with Shari, *"in keeping with comic book genre it should be full of angst."*

These days, you can ether create and print out such sheets, or simply email them to your players. Once they have been returned, you can save them to a specific directory in your campaign folder on your hard drive. As for Aaron, once these sheets were handed in, he would then read over the responses and those that struck his fancy became a new story or subplot ideas.

3) CHANGE, RETIRE, OR "BACK BURNER" CHARACTERS.

This wasn't a requirement for Aaron's games, but did give those players who constantly want to try new things the chance to do so.

4) LIST PLOTS AND SUB-PLOTS FOR THE UPCOMING SEASON.

Aaron notes this list isn't a hard and fast one, as it tends to be reworked and reorganized as the season progresses. He would add, expand, and drop plots as needed, depending on how the campaign was progressing.

Most importantly, the primary goal of this list was to ensure that every player received at least one plot. This could be a major plot, with a storyline or adventure revolving directly around the character, or a subplot, with a continuing set of minor events engaging the character's attention. Even if he couldn't give every character a major plot every season, he tried to ensure they at least had a subplot. In any case, these plots would either be one-session adventures, or a mini-series lasting several episodes. Even then, he admits this wasn't always possible.

5) SIT DOWN FOR THE FIRST SESSION OF THE NEW SEASON.

Since four to six months (or more) had passed since the last season, Aaron noted that sometimes the first session of the new season might not actually see any roleplaying. Instead, the following may occur:

- The players go over their characters to reacquaint themselves with the character's design and abilities;
- The group reviews the previous season's adventures to help everyone recall what is going with characters and the campaign;
- The players ask Aaron for approval on the expenditure of experience points, spend said experience points, and occasionally engage in minor character redesign.

CAMPAIGN CHRONICLES

Periodically (Aaron states "every couple of years"), Aaron would gather up all of the files that had been created for the various campaigns, ensure they were formatted in a uniform style, and send them out to the players. The Chronicles included such things as: a breakdown of all the campaigns Aaron and other GMs were running, Aaron's house rules for his campaigns, Master Lists of characters that have appeared in the different campaigns (those for Strike Force included such elements as date of birth [and, if applicable, death]; date of costumed career [if applicable]; the character's appearance; and other relevant notes); Episode Chronicles (a written synopsis of play sessions, created by a campaign's GM); articles on various campaign subject matter, as well as interviews with characters, maps, floor plans, timelines, histories, and so on.

Having seen several of these Chronicles, I can tell you they are massive. One, complied in 1999, is 2,659 pages. The 2001 Campaign Chronicles is a whopping 3,290 pages! That said, they are crammed with information. You can find descriptions of more than 250 Strike Force sessions (as well as Age of Heroes, Ninja Hero, Zorandar, and others), an assortment of Earth-AU martial arts styles, lists of team memberships, art galleries, and even some blue-books (see page 16 for more on blue-booking).

Creating such a Chronicle isn't easy. Aaron produced one about every 18 months or so. However, they are certainly easier to make now than when Aaron first started in the mid-1980s. Modern word processors make it fairly easy to collate and combine multiple documents into one large one, and you can even create a hyper-linked table of contents with a simple menu command. In addition, most word processors can export files as a PDF, which then can either be emailed to players, or placed in an online repository for downloading as needed.

Probably the most important part of the Chronicles (at least in my opinion) was the adventure synopsis. Aaron wrote an account of every play session he ran, be it Strike Force, Ninja Hero, Zorandar, or others. Thus, reading through the Chronicles gives a strong feel for the game and its events. Reading all 251 sessions (and 797 pages) of Strike Force felt like I was binging on a storage box of full of Strike Force comics. The campaign came alive for me in a way that a simple time line or capsule history couldn't.

Creating an account of each session can be time-consuming. Aaron's first few session accounts are about a page-and-a-half (or around 800 words). By session 250, the accounts are anywhere from 3-6 pages and upwards of 2,000 words. Aaron used the following format for his Chronicles:

- Episode Number
- Episode Title
- Real World Play Date: When the game was played in real world time.
- Starring: This is where the PCs who were in the session are listed. Aaron liked to mark a PC's first appearance with an *. If a player was absent but their PC was in play, then the character was marked as so: (npc).
- Guest-Starring: This is where any notable NPCs are listed. This can include DNPCs, generally important NPCs, other superheroes, supervillains, and so on.
- Introducing: This indicates the first appearance of a notable NPC.
- In Game Date: When the episode occurred within the campaign's timeline.

BLUE-BOOKING

If you were to ask me what the biggest contribution Aaron's original Strike Force sourcebook had on myself (and my gaming group), it would be blue-booking. Named for the blue-covered 8"x10" examination books that were handed out to Aaron's players, these notebooks allowed them to dispense with handing the GM notes on scraps of paper. However, Aaron noticed something interesting happen soon after the notebooks were introduced. Players used them to conduct off-screen, private conversations during regular play. Then, players started to do the same with Aaron—he notes that an investigative player could do his character's detective work entirely within the pages of his blue-book!

Eventually, Aaron found he was spending entire play sessions participating in blue-booking. Players would be busy engaging their characters in solo activities or conversations and encounters with other characters. For example, one player might be working with Aaron (in his role as the GM) on an investigation; another might be romancing an NPC; another might be on vacation in Greece; and another might be engaged in a complete solo adventure! (For this last item, Aaron recommends having players pre-generate a large number of "to-hit" and damage rolls and cross them off a list as they are used.)

Blue-booking does have some drawbacks however. Some players may wish to move any conversation between a PC and an NPC to a blue-book, while other players may try and conduct a blue-book with the GM in the middle of an active game. This is something even the best GM isn't going to be able to do. Either a play session is given over to blue-booking or it's going to be an active game session. In my experience, you can't do both at once. In my gaming group, we never run blue-booking sessions at the gaming table. Instead, we've found email makes between-game blue-booking a very useful tool as well as an excellent creative outlet.

MORE ABOUT BLUE-BOOKING

Blue-booking is definitely one of the favorite lessons passed on by Aaron Allston to the creators of this book! Aaron's original words, plus some additional thoughts from Ross Watson and an extensive additonal section by Steve Kenson can be found in the Strike Force Method chapter. If you'd like to read more about this approach, see page 222.

With instant messaging and email, you can expand blue-booking far beyond the boundaries of mere pen and paper. For example, tablets and smart phones allow for instant communication at the gaming table, without the distraction of handing a notebook around. But, as noted, doing so during an active play session may go against the GM's wishes. If you're spending all your time looking at your smart phone, you might miss important events happening at the table. Since email takes place away from the table most of the time, this makes email generally preferable.

While Aaron conducted blue-booking during game sessions (or his players would blue-book with each other when not "on-screen"), my gaming group handles it somewhat differently. In my gaming group, blue-booking is what happens between game sessions. In fact, in many cases, blue-booking often starts before the campaign does, as players write little scenes introducing their characters. When a play session ends, players may decide to take up dangling plot points with the GM, or may decide to conduct in character conversation before the next session. All of this can be handed via email, with the result sent out to all of the players once finished. The concept probably reached its zenith while I was in Ross Watson's Shadows Angelus campaign. Over a period of 24 play sessions six players (and one GM) wrote nearly 100 blue-books! And when Ross announced Shadows Angelus II, we wrote roughly 20 blue-books before he even ran the first session!

How does one write a blue-book? In almost all cases, a blue-book is a prose story. You can be as detailed or sparse as you want (based on your desires and skill levels), but a blue-book is—in effect—an exercise in creative writing. The scene may be critically important (but if it's too important, you might want to save it for the table), or it might be a light-hearted piece that allows the other players to see a character under different circumstances. There may be a pre-planned end-point (especially if the blue-book is detailing what happened to a character off-screen between adventures) or it might be open ended (such as if two characters intend to argue a philosophical point). Blue-books are also a great way to show characters at home, while in their secret identities, or engaged in solo activities. And, as noted, they provide an excellent record of events and actions from previous sessions.

Aaron felt blue-booking provided a welcome addition to Strike Force. However it might not be for everyone. Which leads to the question of: should you blue-book? I think so. It can be very helpful addition to a campaign, especially for the following reasons:

PRIVACY

If a player wants to conduct a lengthy investigation, conversation, or other activity in private, a blue-book can offer the opportunity.

PERMANENCE

If using a physical book, you can easily sort them once they're filled and then look up events as needed. If using email, this process becomes even easier, as you can sort them by date, session number, and/or campaign.

BREAKDOWN OF INHIBITION

It might be difficult for someone playing a character of the opposite gender to properly convey certain emotions at the gaming table. But in a blue-book things are detached enough that a character's lines can be written out in such away that they get the point across and the right emotional tone can be reached.

GAMEMASTERING TOOLS

Here are some suggested tools for managing your campaign the Aaron Allston way:

Dropbox: Excellent for sharing files between GM and players.

Facebook: Not only can you post files and images, but you can use the calendar function to alert players of upcoming sessions.

Google Drive: Good for storing documents, images, and other materials. Better yet, everyone can edit files to add information and data as needed.

Google Groups: Good for setting up a shared mailing list.

Yahoo Groups: A mailing list and file storage site in one.

STRIKE FORCE THEMES

Although Strike Force started out simply as a "play-test" of the **Champions** rules, Aaron tried to make it much more. He had certain ideas as to what was the intent behind the campaign and tried to explore these ideas within the campaign itself.

The Campaign Tone

When **Champions** first came out, superhero comics were roughly a decade or so into the Bronze Age. This meant that while many traditional superhero titles were still being published (such as Batman, Fantastic Four, Spider-Man, Superman, and so on), new titles were being experimented with. The X-Men (who first appeared in 1963) had been rebooted with *Giant Size X-Men* in 1975, while DC did the same with the Silver Age Teen Titans, relaunching them as *The New Teen Titans* in 1980. All of this change and innovations would come to a head in 1985, with the publication of *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, the complete reboot of the DC Comics universe and the arrival of the Modern Age of Comics.

So what does this have to do with Strike Force? Simply put, the Bronze Age saw darker and more mature plot and story elements than the Silver Age, as well as the appearance of such issues as alcoholism, drug abuse, environmental concerns, racial tensions, and urban strife. It also saw a rise in more violent elements, with such lethal heroes as The Punisher, Wolverine, and Vigilante appearing. Because the Strike Force campaign began during this period of comics history, many of the sessions in the Chronicles reflect this sort of take on comic book superheroes. Aaron even notes that most of the initial cast of players were *"black-clad, weapon toting avengers of the night, while the others were relatively ordinary costumed folk."* In addition, the first group of heroes (acting more like such Pulp-era heroes as The Shadow) tended to kill opponents, while the *"ordinary costumed folk … tended to rescue helpless civilians."*

In the original version of Strike Force, the comment is made that most superhero campaigns come in three broad types:

- Comics Code Authority style of play, in which most everyone uses Normal Damage Attacks, there are little to no Killing Attacks, and almost no one dies (this could also be called Four Color or Silver Age style of play).
- Graphic Novel Variety style of play, which has an even mix of Normal and Killing Attacks, and frequently sees the death of nameless supervillain agents, police officers, and soldiers, and the occasional death of a costumed villain or hero (this could also be called Bronze Age or early Modern Age style of play).
- No Kid Gloves style of play, in which everyone has Killing Attacks or high-powered Normal Attacks, and the death of just about anyone, be it hero, villain, or bystander can occur at anytime (you could also call this late Modern or Dark/Iron Age style of play).

While Strike Force may have started as a mix of Four Color and Graphic Novel style of play, it definitely became more Graphic Novel as time went on. Death, while not commonplace, did occur, as did serious injury. This is especially true in the campaign's history, as seen in the 1964 arrival of a cosmic being intent devouring the Earth. While this being was destroyed after a battle with numerous superhumans, quite a few costumed heroes perished as well (allowing Aaron to "clear the slate" for the arrival of new heroes).

In addition, heroes often dealt with serious issues, such as: the rights of artificially created beings; attempts at ethnic cleansing and genocide; the exploitation of entire peoples and worlds; brain-washing, mind control, and other intrusive powers; and so on. Also, the issue of violence and when to use it was an occasional issue. Phosphene, despite being a black-clad avenger of the night, was not pleased with Ninja threatening the passengers of a bus and forcing them to flee the vehicle so he could steal it. Psycher was so opposed to killing that he'd dress down Bolo whenever he used his powerful Golden Gun, even if it was on something like a robot. Shiva eventually left Strike Force due to arguments over his lethal martial arts techniques. This list goes on and on.

SEX AND ROMANCE

In keeping with the Graphic Novel tone of Earth-AU, Aaron notes that Strike Force (and other campaigns he ran) had more romantic and/or sexual content than what normally appears in Silver and Bronze Age comics. Which is not to say that Strike Force adventures were sexually explicit, but that via blue-booking and other avenues, many players explored the ups and downs of their characters' love lives. In fact, in the Twilight Falls campaign, which was heavily inspired by daytime soap operas, romantic entanglements were a primary theme of the campaign. However, while the idea of romance often came up at the gaming table, more explicit sexual encounters were exclusively the province of blue-booking. The idea of "fade to black" was often used to cut away from such scenes at the gaming table.

Along with romance, there is also the question of sexual orientation. According to Aaron's notes, he often never really gave any thought to such things. Reading the Chronicles, it seems that his players followed suit. Thus, this issue is not generally explored in the heroes and villains of the Strike Force Setting. However, Aaron also notes that unless stated otherwise, any character's sexual preference is considered indeterminate, and you are free to answer the question yourself if the question ever comes up in your campaign.

CAMPAIGN THEMES

One can find a number of themes that are prevalent in Strike Force's many adventures. But the most common one—the one Aaron himself decided (after years and years of play) was central to the campaign—was the Role of the Hero.

When the first player characters entered Aaron's world in August of 1981, they were following a pre-established centuries-old heroic tradition and were joining a long line of costumed heroes that stretched back to the early 1930s. In doing so, they engaged in numerous "classic" superheroic activities (fighting crime, defeating costumed villains, stopping threats on a scale ranging from local to global), but also dealt with the question of "what does it mean to be a hero?," especially in a world that underwent such extremes of change as Strike Force's Earth.

One of the initial challenges the characters face was simply continuing in the face of adversity. Early on, the nascent members of Strike Force found themselves subject to a certain degree of scorn and apathy from the local authorities and certain other superhero teams. They were, after all, newcomers to the superhero scene and regarded as "baby" heroes. But, as their careers progressed, the heroes gained respect based on their accomplishments. At the same time, they also had to deal with situations that challenged their perceptions as to what they were and what they had to do. For example:

- Does a hero kill a foe when he doesn't need to? Lethal force is almost always a contentious issue in superhero games and Strike Force was no different. In fact, struggling with this question was what ended up splitting Strike Force into Strike Force and the Shadow Warriors.
- Does a hero use his fame and popularity to support and speak out about political causes? In Strike Force, some did, such as some characters arguing in support of citizenship for artificially-created beings.
- Does a hero follow the desires and instructions of the properly-elected government when that government legally demands he do things contrary to his ethics? This question came up at various times, but most notably after World War III with the collapse of the United States.
- Does a hero marry and have children, despite knowing that his costumed identity will put them at risk? He can't always be there to protect them, after all. Many Strike Force characters did, but then, as noted under Romance below, in Earth-AU, supers tend to marry supers.
- Does a hero seek and exact revenge?
- If a superhero goes off to war, should he be held to a different standard of behavior than one who acts as a super policeman?
- Does might make right? Does a superhero have the right to enforce his standards of ethics and justice on a country or on a world where the traditions are different? Strike Force tended to follow the idea of "when in Rome," at least until the traditions and rules of the country of world they were in were fully understood.

These questions, and many more like them, have been used as the basis of numerous adventures run through Strike Force's history. However, Aaron normally avoided making these questions obvious and preachy, preferring to make them the hidden foundation on which an adventure was built.

Reading through the Chronicles, I found a number of other fairly common themes as well. These were subjects that cropped up again and again, and posed interesting questions to the players and their characters.

Superhero Action: This is the most basic (and obvious) theme, but one that deserves some discussion. As Strike Force was a team of superheroes, Aaron made sure they were involved with—and dealt with—problems on a superheroic scale. The characters quickly moved beyond fighting "mere" street crime, as they encountered Overlord and his minions, battled the Affrighter (and in doing so saved a small town from destruction), and eventually were involved in an extended "mini-series" which pitted the team against a demon called the Mockery, as he tried to destroy the Earth by merging several parallel dimensions together. Oh, and in the final Chronicle episode that I read, the heroes fought a dozen Minuteman robots! While not every adventure involved the fate of the world, it is certain that as the PCs grew in power, Aaron raised the stakes just a little higher, ensuring that the answer to most any problem was costumed superheroics.

Curiously, Strike Force didn't always use fisticuffs and energy blasts to resolve problems. They also negotiated with their foes and attempted on many occasions to reach a compromise (if they felt such a thing as justified). But then again, they were often able to bring about such negotiations because they were powerful costumed supers with a strong reputations. So, while Strike Force may have had a lot of action in each episode, it certainly wasn't non-stop.

Romance: As mentioned, Strike Force (and related campaigns) featured a lot of romantic subplots. This is due to a number of reasons, such as the use of blue-booking, which allowed players to explore their character's love affairs in a more intimate manner than the game table; the sheer size of the player base, which meant there were a number of Plumbers, Romantics, and Tragedians (see page 220) to go along with the Builders, Genre Fiends, and Mad Thinkers; and Aaron's "Hollywood Model," which meant that supers tended to have romantic relationships with—and thus marry—other supers (it also didn't hurt that supers tended to be more attractive than non-supers).

Another reason for the romantic subplots was it allowed Aaron to present a certain degree of angst and hardship during gaming sessions (this is something he discusses in detail in the pages of **Lands of Mystery** if you happen to own a copy). Basically, it goes like this—a stable loving relationship is (or can be) boring. If Character A expresses romantic interest in Character B, then the GM should consider throwing a few monkey wrenches into the pair's plans in order to spice things up (such as various hardships and separations along the way to true love). Which isn't to say long-term relationships can't happen, it just might take some struggle before everything ends happily (as la Panthere and Phosphene or Commodore and Lorelei demonstrate). Then again, as ShadowWalker's "What I Want To Do" sheet notes, all comic book relationships are filled with a certain degree of melodrama.

Social Issues: Much like the Bronze Age comics of the 1970s that inspired Strike Force, Aaron sometimes presented the players with various society-related problems. A prime example of this was the fallout from World War III, in which the characters were asked by the provisional New York government to help with a multitude of real world problems. For example:

How would they help feed everyone? How would they shelter those who had been left homeless? How would they restore the economy, infrastructure, and even the local and national government(s)?

All of these questions (and more) were asked in the aftermath of World War III. Strike Force, by dint of being one of the most powerful superhero groups in the New York City area, was instrumental in answering them.

Another major social issue dealt with the integration of different peoples into society. As the campaign progressed, individuals from alien worlds, different timelines, alternate Earths, and distant dimensions all came to live on Earth-AU. In addition, numerous types of artificially-created beings, such as androids, self-aware robots, and computer intelligences, all wanted to be recognized as individual personalities and viable citizens of the regular and superhuman communities. Strike Force often argued in support of granting citizenship to all, in the process trying to make Earth society more inclusive.

Building a Better World: Part of the Social Issues theme can also be expressed as the desire to build a better world. Aaron noted that Phosphene's player was a Builder, which he defines as someone who wants "to have an impact on the world." And over time, this theme became more and more common, especially after the Governor was forced to leave Earth (thus opening up the development and distribution of technology) and in the aftermath of World War III. As Aaron wanted to get away from the genre convention that superhero technology doesn't enter the common marketplace, this meant Earth-AU looked less and less like the real world, as faster-than-light travel, flying cars, regenerative medicine, stasis-cloth body armor, wristwatch super-telephones, and other items became available. So, while Aaron may have brought widespread death and destruction to Earth-AU with his World War III plot, his players were able to help rebuild the Earth to be even better, cleaner, and more advanced than it had been before.

The Search for Identity: Another, more minor, theme, saw many characters try to understand who and what they were. A few examples:

- **Phosphene:** Initially, "Phos" thought he was alone in the world. His mother had died while he was still in his teens, and he never knew his father. But he eventually discovered he was one of the enigmatic Blood, who had come to this Earth from another (extra-dimensional) world. He soon wanted to know all about them, suffered a stint of Blood-madness, met all of his surviving relatives, fought some of them (such as the Affrighter), and earned the affection of most of the rest.

CHARACTERS FROM OTHER WORLDS

Aaron used characters from DC, Fawcett, and Marvel Comics, an assortment of famous Pulp-era heroes, and select modern creations. Most of their appearances have been glossed over in the timeline presented here. In cases where that's not possible, I've either used Aaron's choice for a character name or have used a classic Champions Universe equivalent.

- **Lorelei:** Over time and numerous superhero adventures, Lorelei found out that she was far more than a mere mutant girl. In fact, she was a member of a long-lived collection of secretive clans known as the Families. Initially she was hunted by one faction of the Families, but over time was able to break their hold on her, discover her true heritage, and take her place as a leader of her Family clan.
- **Jack Straw:** Appearing in the ruins of New York after World War III, Jack Straw didn't know he was a Producer-built robot. The truth came out after a series of events activated his programming and powers. Unamused by the fact that he looked like a famous actor and had powers and abilities reminiscent of a well-known cartoon character, Jack decided to manufacture a new identity, not coming to grips with his origins and nature until much later.
- **NoIDs:** There was also the curious case of those who wished to discard their identities. World War III destroyed a lot of public records, meaning that some people found they no longer had any sort of legal identity. This situation gave rise to the NoIDs—orphaned and devastated people who had lost their identities in the War or who had eradicated them on their own. The NoIDs eventually settled near New York City and set up their own society (an effort that combines the Social Issues and Building a Better World themes). Jack Straw, in fact, started out as a NoID, and even after joining Strike Force still worked to better the lives and lot of the NoIDs.

Using Themes

Aaron noted that when you get right down to it, the Strike Force Universe doesn't have a theme. However (and this is an important "however"), the Strike Force Campaign did. In fact, as we note, it has several. In order to present a strong campaign world, Aaron felt it needs to have a very strong, if intangible, underlying theme. Fiction of any type, be it the written word, a four-color comic, a film, or a roleplaying campaign, benefits from having a theme, something that can be used to ask questions of the character(s) and possibly force them to reevaluate their perspective on any number of subjects. In addition, themes can be used to introduce new plot elements in a logical manner, while players may realize they can use certain themes to redefine themselves and their relationship with the campaign as a whole.

In Strike Force, the Role of the Hero theme often forced characters to examine their actions in a different light to see if they were being heroic. It might make them question their motives—are they noble, righteous, and just? Or is the hero no better than the villains he fights? Aaron could also present the heroes with various complications and issues designed to make them confront their notion of what it meant to be a hero.

On a similar note, the theme of Superhero Action meant that donning a costume and engaging in fisticuffs may not have been the best answer to every question, but certainly was an acceptable one. After all if you're running a superhero campaign, you certainly can't penalize a player for wanting to be a superhero can you? Thus, this theme allowed players to define their characters and their character's actions within the realm of the superhero genre.

When running a RPG session (of any length) you should consider the theme behind the story. In can be simple as the aforementioned Superhero Action, which tells players exactly what to expect from the game. Or, it may be more subtle, and bring about deeper contemplation. What Does it Mean to be a Hero certainly allows for more introspective questions and plots. At the same time, don't worry if your campaign doesn't seem to have a theme or you haven't thought of one yet. As I noted earlier, it took Aaron years before he was able to express Strike Force's campaign theme in words.

STRIKE FORCE STORIES

As has been previously mentioned, the Strike Force campaign lasted for more than 250 sessions, meaning the players (and their characters) were involved in dozens of storylines. In this section we will look at some of the most notable stories and their effects on the campaign.

TIMELINE

A comprehensive timeline would be an extremely complex affair, as it would require the consolidation of a score of campaigns into one narrative. Instead, I'm just going to present events that are most relevant to the Strike Force team (and thus the campaign) itself in a somewhat concise and streamlined manner. Rest assured, a lot more went on than this timeline is able to show, such as members joining and leaving the teams, team vacations, romances between team members (and other characters), weddings, the birth of children, the death of a few characters, and the overall development of character's private lives.

- **circa 50,000-35,000 BCE**
  Unknown beings—apparently possessing power on a cosmic scale—seed early humanity on numerous worlds across the galaxy.
- **circa 10,000 BCE**
  Blood patriarch Azor is born in Eastern Europe. In due time he forms a vast empire, then transports his people to the extra-dimensional world of Eán.
- **circa 8,000 BCE**
  An alliance of rulers on the world of Eán rise up against Azor and imprison him.

AZOR AND THE BLOOD

For more on Azor and the Blood, see Champions supplement **The Blood and Dr McQuark,** written by Aaron Allston and Patrick E. Bradley.

- **circa 3,000 BCE**
  A warrior named Angiras lapses into suspended animation in a cave in what is modern Switzerland. When he awakes he will found the secret society known as the Families.
- **circa 1800-1900**
  Individuals in Africa, Mexico, the American Southwest, and elsewhere, don masks and distinctive costumes in order to fight injustice and tyranny.
- **1847**
  A multidimensional being called the Governor arrives on Earth and sets a scientific experiment into motion—he begins slowing the acceleration of technological advancement across the world.
- **circa 1900-1950**
  The "Pulp Era." The time period of the Eldorado Society, masked crime fighters, and the beginnings of costumed superheroes.
- **1914-1918**
  World War I. A small group of masked airmen and adventurers combat an assortment of criminals and mad scientists, both at home and abroad.
- **1926**
  Formation of the Empire Club, a social fraternity comprised solely of adventurers. Based out of New York, Hong Kong, London, and San Francisco, members often find themselves opposing villains who are attempting to despoil or conquer the world.
- **June, 1927**
  A gate is opened between the world of Eán and Earth by a Blood named Oto (a.k.a. Pathfinder). He brings himself and six other through, arriving in Leinster, MO.
- **circa 1930-1940**
  The Eldorado Society, based in New York City, gets involved with strange occurrences, assorted criminals, and evil masterminds.
- **1938**
  Appearance of the world's first costumed superhero.
- **1939-1945**
  World War II. Costumed supers take part on all sides of the war, many forming into groups. The use of atomic bombs to end the war has the added effect of speeding up the process of human mutation the world over.
- **1950s**
  The Red Scare produces a public backlash against superheroes for not disclosing their identities to the public.
- **1964**
  The Entropic God, a dimensional-crossing being of unimaginable power arrives in New York City, intent on consuming the life-essence of the planet. Opposed by the superheroes of Earth, the resulting battle saw the God driven off, but at the cost of a large number of heroes' lives.
- **1970s**
  Many superheroes from the previous decades choose to retire and few new supers debut. In addition, many supervillains stop their crimes sprees and various alien empires appear to lose all interest in Earth.
- **1978**
  This year sees a resurgence of superhuman activity, leading to the story that superheroes appear on a twenty-year cycle, responding to some future threat.

- **August 21, 1981**
  The costumed hero ShadowWalker teams up with fellow costumed heroes DarkKnight, Lightrune, Phosphene, and Swashbuckler to investigate a shady real estate transaction. They encounter Overlord and Lady Power. After the battle, Marie Jean Dell turns her superpowered daughter Jeannine (a.k.a. Lorelei) over to them. Strike Force Note: This is the first session of Strike Force.

- **September-December, 1981**
  ShadowWalker decides to form a superhero team, and recruits the heroes Napalm, Ninja, and Shiva. The heroes battle the Overlord again, during which Phosphene frees La Panthere from Overlord's mind control. Strike Force selects its name, gains more members and a base (in a junkyard), acquires its first vehicle (a Sikorsky Sea Stallion helicopter). Phosphene learns of his Blood heritage. The heroes battle Overlord, the Affrighter, and the Producer. Overlord tricks the hero Bolo into killing an innocent. They also battle and destroy the Mockery, during which the hero Napalm is killed. A superheroine ally gives Strike Force a plane with a robotic pilot named Nightwing.

  Strike Force Note: *This adventure was was Aaron's first "mini-series." Read more about it on page 28 of the Major Campaign Events section.*

- **January-March, 1982**
  The team starts to build their base. Strike Force battles the Affrighter, Denier and his team, the Producer, and rogue elements of the Sisterhood of Fire. On Eán, Azor is released from his prison.

- **April-June, 1982**
  Strike Force and other superhero teams save Earth from attack by a fleet of reptilian aliens. Afterwards, hero Defender leaves Earth and sells Strike Force his estate for $1. In June, arguments over the use of lethal force causes Strike Force to split into two teams: Strike Force and the Shadow Warriors.

SPLITTING THE PARTY

When Strike Force split up, Aaron ran Strike Force and the Shadow Warriors as two separate campaigns. However, he only ran four sessions of Shadow Warriors-specific game sessions. Eventually, the two teams became so intertwined that all Shadow Warriors stories were run during Strike Force sessions.

- **July-September, 1982**
  Strike Force fights Denier again, then works with the Circle to destroy vampires in New York City. The team also briefly visits the world of Eán.

- **October-December, 1982**
  The heroes battle the Hell-Raisers, deal with a giant baby created by the Producer, and have a peaceful dinner with Overlord. The Shadow Warriors debut. Strike Force travels to the Chaos Zone and afterwards starts recruiting personnel for their Main Mission Teams. Magicians from Eán ask Phosphene and Ichi-ban to help them get home. Phosphene is held captive on Eán and Lightrune becomes leader of Strike Force.

NEW YORK VAMPIRES?

The vampires in NYC plot can be found in the Champions supplement **The Circle and M.E.T.E.**, written by Aaron Allston.

The Shadows Warriors debut session appeared in Space Gamer as the adventure "*Microfilm Madness,*" written by George MacDonald.

- **January-March, 1983**
  The team searches for Phosphene. The Shadow Warriors complete their base. Shiva fakes his own death and becomes Sai. Lorelei becomes leader of the Shadow Warriors. Strike Force and the Shadows Warriors start to work together again.
- **April-June, 1982**
  Strike Force increases the size of its Main Mission Teams. The heroes (and the MMT) are given police powers by New York City. ShadowWalker combats copies of himself.
- **October-December, 1982**
  The Crimson Claw begins the Great Super-Villain Contest (in which supervillains the world over complete to see who is the most powerful). Phosphene appears as the supervillain Phantasm and kidnaps Lorelei. Phosphene is returned to normal and reassumes leadership of Strike Force. Lorelei and Commodore (of the Blood) become romantically involved. The Crimson Claw is slain towards the end of the Contest by the hero Tempis.

THE CRIMSON CLAW

You can find the Crimson Claw in the Champions adventure **The Great Super Villain Contest,** written by Dennis Mallonee.

- **January-March, 1983**
  Lorelei and Commodore wed. Soon after, Lorelei becomes pregnant and temporarily loses her powers.
- **April-June, 1983**
  Strike Force combats the Animal Kingdom and the Mark of Doom. They also defeat Foxbat. Lorelei creates the Salem Academy, a school for young superhumans.
- **July-September, 1983**
  Strike Force helps the world of Dekare rebel against the TkTk Horde. Back home they find the TkTk Horde negotiating with the United States.
- **October-December, 1983**
  Strike Force prevents the TkTk Horde from invading Earth and is assisted by numerous other superhero teams in repelling their invasion fleet.
- **January-June, 1985**
  Strike Force tangles with Black Enchantress, the Hell-Raisers, and Bloodletter.

THE BLACK ENCHANTRESS

You can find the Black Enchantress in the Champions adventure **The Coriolis Effect**, written by Dennis Mallonee.

- **July-September, 1985**
  Bloodletter and Strike Force battle to a standstill. Power Lord (Overlord's son) attacks Strike Force Mansion. Strike Force rescues the Mansion and captures Power Lord. Ichi-ban then murders Power Lord in his cell.
- **October-December, 1985**
  Strike Force determines Ichi-ban killed Power Lord and has him arrested. Lorelei and Psycher are captured by the Reapers and taken to Scotland. Lorelei meets her grandfather, Alasder Dell, learns about the Families, and is rescued by Commodore and the Shadow Warriors. Bloodletter poisons Phosphene, but Strike Force defeats him and gets the antidote. The Shadow Warriors find Psycher in Switzerland and free him, then free Jarret Arreth Dell, Lorelei's father.
- **January-June, 1986**
  Ichi-ban is put on trial. He is found innocent by reason of temporary insanity, but stripped of U.S. citizenship and Strike Force membership. He is then deported to Japan. Lady Power, having sold herself to the demon Scoff, attacks him at his trial, but fails to kill him.
- **July, 1986-November, 1987**
  Phosphene and La Panthere wed. Heroes join (and leave) Strike Force. Ichi-ban settles down in Japan and starts a family. Orrad (of the Alien Research Laboratories) gives Strike Force a map that shows Overlord's home-world. Strike Force travels there and learns a great deal about the Katari (Overlord's people).

  Returning home, Strike Force is asked to investigate Overlord's invasion of Haiti. They discover that Fire Hawk (Overlord's son) has committed a bloodless coup. Deciding he will be a good leader, they do nothing. Strike Force then talks to Overlord and learns of the Governor. Together, they defeat the alien and banish it to another universe. The heroes return to New York just in time for Aswar the Darklord's invasion of Earth.
- **December, 1987**
  World War III. Aswar the Darklord strikes at cities with large superhero populations, kidnaps hundreds of people as well as many national leaders, destroys most of Earth's military might, and disables its communications network. Strike Force picks up an artifact in Japan that will allow them access to the Chaos Zone (where Aswar lives), loses Nightwing in combat, but gains the aircraft Tenshi.
- **January-March, 1988**
  Earth's civilization starts to collapse. Strike Force, along with other superhero teams, enters the Chaos Zone to battle Aswar. Aswar starts saturation bombing of Earth, targeting Manhattan specifically. More superheroes enter the Chaos Zone. An assault is conducted on Aswar's homeworld and he is defeated.

  Back on Earth, 15% of the population is dead. War breaks out in the Balkans, while the United States breaks up along state lines. This leads to a new Constitutional Congress.

Strike Force Note: *You can read more about World War III on page 29 of the Major Campaign Events section.*

- **April-June, 1988**
  The United States becomes the United States Treaty Organization (or USTO). Europe experiences strong anti-Soviet sentiments, while in the Caribbean the Federation of Atlantia expands. The USTO signs and enacts its new Constitution and elects a new president. East and West Germany reunite.

- **July-September, 1988**
  Strike Force goes on a diplomatic mission to Alpha Centauri. The Shadow Warriors discover Nice World and its Grand Conclave of witches. Strike Force meet time-traveller Dr. Futurian and battle Denier and his Hell-Raisers. During the fight, the hero Shade kills a foe and later undergoes a team trial over his actions.

- **October-December, 1988**
  Strike Force deals with a crashed alien craft carrying devices capable of controlling minds and technology.

- **January-December, 1989**
  The heroes deal with personal relationships, develop their technological expertise into commercial applications, and expand on their civilian careers (This huge gap in time is due to Aaron taking a year off from running Strike Force.).

- ***January-March, 1990***
  Strike Force helps the demon Scoff bring the Black Enchantress back to life. The Shadow Warriors discover a Reaper cell creating human/animal hybrids and gain Fenris X as a member. Strike Force stop the Mark of Doom from killing alien POWs left over from WWIII.

- **April-June, 1990**
  Strike Force's capture of the super Darkwind allows them to discover that USTO President Jim Wright is an impostor. They defeat the impostor, topple the Washington D.C. government, and establish Strike Force/DC. The Shadow Warriors capture the Blue Man, a sentient computer program. Later, the Shadow Warriors battle Loc Ban Tor and his allies. The fight ends with Loc Ban Tor slain.

- **July-September, 1990**
  The Shadow Warriors investigate the strange history of the town of Brookpark and stop an attempted alien invasion. The Avant Guard battle the Toyman and convince him to be a hero. Strike Force saves the Black Enchantress from the Dream Thief.

- **October-December, 1990**
  Chinese super Ba Kien destroys the Circle (a team of mystic heroes) and attacks Strike Force Mansion. Strike Force bands together with several other superhero teams to stop Ba Kien and his army of Super Boxers.

BA KIEN AND THE SUPER BOXERS

Observant readers may recognize Ba Kien and the Super Boxers from the 4th Edition version of **Ninja Hero**, written by Aaron Allston. The Circle appears in **The Circle and M.E.T.E.**, also written by Aaron Allston.

- **January-March, 1991**
  The Shadows Warriors battle Ankylosaur and a team of Reaper agents, who are apparently after Lorelei. Strike Force travels back in time with Overlord in order to rescue the heroine SnowFalcon, who had been killed in 1981. They also witness their first game session and stop assassins from killing their past selves. In addition, the heroes battle and destroy the Crimson Claw (again), then return to the present.

  Strike Force Note: *This was Aaron's Tenth Anniversary Game for his Strike Force campaign. The 111th play session, it was run on August 17, 1991, while the first session occurred on August 21, 1981. For more on this, see page 30 of the the Major Campaign Events section.*

  The Shadow Warriors encounter Gray MacRae, a witch from Nice World, in Greece.

- **April-June, 1991**
  The Salem Academy is collected by Mokar the Collector. The Academy's students win their freedom by engaging in a super-powered game of American football. The Circle disbands, having never recovered from Ba Kien's attack. The hero Domino creates a device he thinks will make the world a nice place but ends up transporting Strike Force and the Shadow Warriors to Earth-Kaiser.

- **July-September, 1991**
  Strike Force and the Shadow Warriors recover Domino's device and return to Earth-AU.

- **October-December, 1991**
  Strike Force and the Shadow Warriors return to Earth-Kaiser for a summit conference. The Avant Guard have a Halloween adventure with some of Producer's creations. Strike Force frees Pathfinder from imprisonment in the Dreamlands. They also team up with the Wanderers, a space-traveling group of superheroes, and battle the Mark of Doom in Argentina.

- **January-March, 1992**
  Strike Force combats Mechanon, discovers it's a fake, then battles Minuteman robots attempting to free Nazi prisoners from Riker's Island. They fight the robots and the Mark of Doom. The Nazis flee empty-handed and escape to an orbiting spaceship, which then leaves the solar system. Strike Force decides they need an orbital facility.

- **April-June, 1992**
  The Shadow Warriors tangle with team of Family supervillains. They track down Angiras, battle the Reapers, then travel to Scotland to overthrow Alasder Dell.

- **July-September, 1992**
  Avant Guard visits the animal-themed world of Savoir-Ferret. Strike Force finds an asteroid suitable as an orbital base. They also speak with Dr. Futurian, discover Denier is at war with DEMON, and that Gray MacRae has gone rogue. They trap Denier and do battle in his extra-dimensional base of Necropolis. His defeat prevents the destruction of Earth.

  Strike Force discovers the existence of Jensik Medical Institute and their horrific history of illegal human experimentation.

JENSIK MEDICAL INSTITUTE

You can learn a bit more about Jensik Medical Institute in the GURPS Supers module **School of Hard Knocks**, written by Aaron Allston.

- **October-December, 1992**
  Strike Force has an asteroid in Earth orbit. They decide that Strike Force/Orbital will be a sovereign body, offering expert police services to all willing nations. Following up on the Jensik Medical Institute case, they also travel to France and discover Mechanon is behind the human experimentation as a part of his attempts to end all life on Earth. They destroy the genocidal robot.

- **January-March, 1993**
  Strike Force starts modifying their asteroid. While working they encounter strange burr-like aliens, engage in a ritual battle, and are presented with eight Earth astronauts thought lost during WWIII. Strike Force also returns to Earth-Kaiser, discovers the existence of Golgalar the Assembler and eventually defeats him and his "Assembled Man." Their actions upset the balance of power in Earth-Kaiser and spell the end of Nazi Germany. This causes hero Man Mountain Thunder (a Japanese hero from Earth-AU) to try and save what's left of Earth-Kaiser's Japan. Strike Force assemble teams of supers, plans their assault, and then engages in a brutal battle with Japan's superhumans. Once it is all over, Japan's military dictatorship is no more.

- **April-June, 1993**
  Strike Force settles matters on Earth-Kaiser and returns home. They put their satellite in its proper orbit and divide into Strike Force Orbital, Strike Force/DC, and Strike Force/NY.

- **July-September, 1993**
  Strike Force Orbital opens. The inaugural festivities are interrupted when Gray MacRae's agents attack. The heroes track Gray down to his base (in a parallel dimension) and do battle. After his capture, the team looks to improve diplomatic relations with Nice World. Strike Force/NY has their first mission—battling Mechros and his robots. Mechros escapes and Strike Force/NY searches for him.

STRIKE FORCE ROSTERS

The roster for the three teams after division:

Strike Force Orbital: Copperhead, Kestrel, Lightrune, Luster, Macabre, Man Mountain Thunder, La Panthere, Phosphene (leader), Plasma Ranger, and Void. Apex, Samiel, ShadowWalker, and SnowFalcon are also part of SFO, but not full-time members.

Strike Force/DC: Dreamer, Inmar, Psi-Devil (leader), and Skyrocket.

Strike Force/NY: Helix, Jack Straw, Jeremiah, Megabyte, Ore, Rampage, Spark, Sprint, Stunner (leader), and Wraith.

- **October-December, 1993**
  Ichi-ban starts a school of Japanese magic. Phosphene discovers news about a strange Affrighter-like (a Blood super villain) being. At Man Mountain Thunder's request, Strike Force meets with Japanese super villain team Yooso. They rescue Kami, a tree spirit, and recover Osore, who is a twin of the Affrighter. Strike Force/NY find Mechros and once again battle him to a draw. They also uncover and stop a lethal insurance scam.

YOOSO

You can find Yooso in the 4th Edition version of **Ninja Hero**, written by Aaron Allston.

- **January-March, 1994**
  Lorelei and Commodore agree to lead the Families and hold a council meeting in Switzerland. They discover Family member Blanco is recruiting people to colonize the planet of Valhalla. The Shadow Warriors determine Valhalla is a Nazi stronghold and work to locate it.

- **April-June, 1994**
  The Shadow Warriors investigate the Argentinian city of Córdoba, where people apparently take ship to Valhalla. They also meet with Blanco operative Friday 13, learn more of the Nazi "Animal Kingdom" program, and locate Valhalla. The heroes also discover Valhalla might be growing a clone of Hitler. Further investigation tracks Blanco to Germany, where the Shadow Warriors capture him, but he dies from a drug overdose.

  Members of Strike Force participate in a fundraising concert. They end up in a 'battle of the bands' with the satanic Harvester Hobbes, who turns out to be an illusion cast by a well-meaning (but misguided) priest. Phosphene takes the Tenshi to the planet of Paradise to mediate a dispute. Strike Force discovers Paradise is now the home of the Producer. Strike Force returns to Earth and travels to the East European nation of Georgia where they battle the supervillains of Mind Over Matter.

- **July-September, 1994**
  Strike Force determines that Transplanet, the people that asked them to look at Paradise, are up to no good—the company is nuclear-armed and intends to threaten New York City with a bomb. Strike Force finds and defuses it. The team then heads back to Paradise to find the rest Transplanet's bombs. The heroes cooperate with the Producer to stop Transplanet. The Shadow Warriors work to track down members of the Animal Kingdom, a Nazi animal-man project. There is also a meeting with most of the superhero teams of Earth to discuss the problem with Valhalla.

- **October-December, 1994**
  Investigation of Valhalla begins. Strike Force Orbital is invaded by silver arthropods. The team learns these arthropods are the Koualix and are an advance force from Valhalla—it seems the Fourth Reich is alive and well and intends to invade Earth in the near future. The superheroes of Earth decide to neutralize this threat. The Shadow Warriors stop a creature called Gathelit the Dispatcher from attacking Earth's primary mystical defender. Then, the bulk of Earth's superhero teams travel to Valhalla to stop the Fourth Reich before it can instigate World War IV. When it's all over, the Fourth Reich is destroyed and the people of the Animal Kingdom freed.

  Strike Force Note: *The fight versus Valhalla took five game sessions played out over two months. In game everything happened in just a few weeks. Fourteen superhero teams (numbering around 100 supers or so) participated. For more information, see page 31 of the the Major Campaign Events section.*

- **January-March, 1995**
  Strike Force deals with the political (and logistical) fallout of the battle for Valhalla. They also encounter and do battle with the The Lords of Fire, agents of the supervillain Vulcan. The Shadow Warriors deal with an attack by a Crystal Slayer, beings who serve of the Cult of the Beast. Phosphene tracks down his father and battles the Tennessee Torch. Jack Straw investigates Producer-technology and the world of androids and robotic supers. The heroes also assist the NoIDs (refugees from WWIII) in forming their own superhero team. During their investigations of the Cult of the Beast, the Shadow Warriors explore Borsippa, in Iraq, and find a lost civilization who worship the "Guardian of Law." The heroes defeat this false guardian and bring the civilization into the modern world. Following this, the Shadow Warriors work with Strike Force to battle Vulcan and the Lords of Fire to a draw.

  In February, the two teams work together to deal with the supervillain Mayhem, who is trying to transform Detroit into a place of nightmares. Phosphene enters the mind of his father, trying to remove the manifestations of the Tennessee Torch. The Shadow Warriors investigate the supervillain team the Night-Frights while Strike Force creates Strike Force/Hawaii. Strike Force also works to keep Israel from mounting a military assault on Valhalla. The Shadow Warriors enter the Dream-worlds to deal with the Night-Frights and Sokath, the Crystal Slayer. Strike Force battles what they think is Mechanon, but turns out to be the robot Radiance, a servant of Vulcan, desiring suicide by super. They also investigate a sleazy photo magazine taking unwanted photos of female supers. Strike Force eventually assists certain members of the Lords of Fire in setting themselves up as superheroes on the Pacific Rim.

  Strike Force Note: *For the adventures in the first quarter of 1995, Aaron was—as near as I can tell—running roughly four major and around a dozen minor plots simultaneously. Also, play sessions looked to regularly feature 15-20 Player Characters. On the flip side, one session starred only two Player Characters.*

  The time from April to October was covered in one play session, possibly as a blue-booking session (see the section on blue-booking).

- **April-September, 1995**
  Strike Force/Hawaii debuts, chasing off members of the Zhi-Xiong Temple. The USTO debuts an orbital superprison. Both Strike Force and the Shadow Warriors engage in a lot of private activities, including finding new homes, a wedding, engaging in various medical procedures, and the promotion of personal business concerns.

- **October-December, 1995**
  Strike Force deals with an attempted incursion into the Earth-AU dimension by the Entropic God, stopping an attempt to re-create Ragnarok at the same time. An experiment by Megabyte causes Strike Force Mansion to be attacked by Strike Force action figures under the command of supervillain Baby Doll. After a massacre at a concert in Detroit, Strike Force discovers the dead have been rising, leading to a battle with the new Hell-Raisers, who are led by Grave-Robber. Further investigations in Detroit lead Strike Force to encounter the nascent superhero team the Die-Hards. Lorelei decides to step down as leader of the Shadow Warriors and start a new, more covert version of the team.

  Strike Force continues to pursue Mayhem, investigating ways to both find and combat him. They also decide to counter his madness with a benefit concert. The concert occurs and draws Mayhem out of hiding; the team succeeds in destroying him. However, Mayhem's appearance caused the concert to shift into the Dreamworld, and Strike Force must work to keep the Hell-Raisers from attacking the musicians. Afterwards, Strike Force is involved investigating the destruction of the vampire-hunting Harker Foundation. The two teams also locate the Hell-Raisers HQ and decide to eliminate it. The Shadow Warriors tangle with a team of power-armored supervillains called the Ass-Kickers.

  Looking into the background of the Ass-Kickers, the Shadow Warriors discover the existence of a parallel Earth without supers. Numerous supervillain teams are exploiting this Earth, calling it "Prey-World." Strike Force battles Yooso

to prevent the death of Iron Ronin. The Shadow Warriors travel to Prey-World and eventually smash the supervillain ring looting that version of Earth. Returning from Prey-World, the Shadow Warriors discover a threat to the magical barriers that defend the Earth from intrusion by extra-dimensional beings. This leads them into combat with Gathelit the Dispatcher and his Army of Hell. Afterwards, the Shadow Warriors take a breather, recruit new members, and complete their plan to divide into two smaller teams. Meanwhile, the Strike Force/NY team arrives at the planet of Paradise and discovers the android and robot inhabitants have risen up in revolt against the Producer. The heroes manage to negotiate peace between the two sides and then speak to the Producer about personal issues.

The Shadows Warriors split into two teams, calling the new one the "Shadow Knights." The 'Knights base themselves in the Bahamas. Members of Strike Force visit Earth-Kaiser to attend a wedding. During the wedding, the heroes are pulled into another universe. There, Strike Force battles a being called Kreer High-Father, who has built himself a private world and is trying to create new superhumans. Upon returning home, they dig up (literally) the hero True-Blue, who was encased in stone for 42 years. Strike Force also deals with the former hero Starfarer and his attempts to hunt down the hero Wind-Witch. After Christmas, Strike Force escorts a diplomatic mission from the interstellar Rim Alliance to Earth. The team also discovers True-Blue's former partner, Banner, has been fathering children all across North America for a possibly sinister purpose.

- **January-March, 1996**
  The heroes spend January tying up loose ends, conducting research and investigations, and dealing with personal issues. Strike Force discovers a threat to the upcoming Winter Olympics. In addition, Man Mountain Thunder joins the Olympians, a part-time hero team of athletic supers. Strike Force Mansion is attacked by Kreer High-Father. The Winter Olympic threat turns out to be a blackmail threat by supervillain Temblor, who is defeated by Strike Force. The Shadow Warriors encounter a millennia-old warrior named Abaros, who warns them of a threat he calls "the Hyperborean." Strike Force find Banner and pursue him to an alternate Earth (Earth-Eden). Warned by Abaros, the two teams get together to track down Banner and stop him and his criminal activities. The Shadow Warriors also destroy the Actuator, a device that causes madness and suffering.

  Strike Force discovers they've been infiltrated by a Nazi super named Land's Knight. This is followed by an attack on Strike Force installations by UNTIL and the accusation that the heroes are trying to overthrow the American government. All of Strike Force gathers to oppose this declaration, discovering a Nazi Fifth Reich is behind it all, headed by USTO General Linus Hart. The Shadow Warriors find the Hyperborean and are able to free him from his "destiny" as ruler of the human race. Strike Force finds Land's Knight and stops a plan to flood New York City with a lethal virus. Meanwhile, USTO President Henry Chandler reinstates Strike Force's power to operate as a law enforcement organization in the USTO. Soon after Chandler is kidnapped by Nazi Minutemen robots. Strike Force assembles and rescues the President.

  Strike Force Note: *To give you a sense of scale, Aaron covered the events of March 1-10, 1996 over 13 sessions (238-251). In the campaign logs, these 13 sessions took up 45 pages.*

So, there you have it. 251 game sessions, comprising 797 pages of Campaign Chronicles, condensed down into no more than 4,500 words. However, that's not all there is for Strike Force. Although session 251 of Strike Force (which took place on 12/02/2000) is the most recent play session I have a typed synopsis for, I can document a session 260, which was played on 01/11/2003 and took place in April of 1996. At minimum, this means Strike Force lasted for 21 years, four months, and 21 days!

Major Campaign Events

Aaron ran hundreds of game sessions over the course of the Strike Force campaign, some of which had serious long-term ramifications (encountering alternate Earths, for example), while others (such as battling Foxbat)… not so much. In this section, I intend to examine several major campaign events and what made them so special. In order of appearance, they are:

The Battle With The Mockery

Strike Force's encounter with the Mockery is important on several levels. To start, as Aaron has noted in the initial edition of Strike Force, this was his first "full-length mini-series." Before the Mockery, all of Aaron's game sessions followed a simple pattern: "heroes hear of trouble, go to where the trouble is, attack the villain, and capture him or drive him off." This time, however, things were different. Tracking down the Mockery took four sessions, with the heroes slowly getting closer to the Mockery as they investigated the demon's actions, battled supers the Mockery sent to stop them, and dealt with the monsters pouring in through dimensional rifts. This sort of plotting gave Aaron the confidence to set up the multi-session story arcs that would become a staple of later Strike Force gaming seasons. While Strike Force (and the Shadow Warriors) would occasionally resolve a plot in a single session, most of the time it would take anywhere from three to five (or more).

The Mockery series was one of the few times a PC died in the course of play. Considering some of the foes Strike Force faced (and some of the battles they were in), that's fairly significant right there. On the other hand, several new PCs debuted during the mini-series (including long-term Shadow Warrior Psycher), with Aaron coming to realize his players were enjoying the campaign so much, they wanted to bring in new characters to experiment with (something every GM should be prepared for). Aaron also used the story arc to encourage his players to develop code-words and maneuvers by handing Strike Force a defeat from a team of supers that did. Built on 50-75 points less than the heroes, the villain team managed to decisively defeat Strike Force and encouraged the players to develop their own code-words and combat maneuvers.

Finally, the concept of the Mockery (an extra-dimensional being intent on conquering the Earth) sets the tone for the Strike Force campaign as a whole (at least, in my opinion). My reasoning for this opinion is thus—taken at face value, Strike Force seems to be strongly influenced by Marvel Comics (let's be honest, Aaron used a lot of Marvel Comics characters in his campaign). But with the Mockery, we see the first hints of something that will appear time and time again in the Strike Force campaign: the concept of parallel Earths (such as Earth-Kaiser, Nice World, Savoir-Ferret, Prey-World, and so on). This is a very DC Comics concept, and something Aaron turns to time and time again. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised to find out that at some point he intended to run (or did run) his own Crisis on Infinite Earth analog adventure for Strike Force.

The TkTk Horde

While not the first time Strike Force fought an alien invasion (and not the last), the TkTk Horde is notable because it shows Strike Force's transition from small-time super team to national (and even international) status. In addition, the heroes ended up opposing the United States for a time— since the US wanted to accept the technological gifts the TkTk Horde was offering, while Strike Force knew the Horde wasn't to be trusted. In addition, this adventure marks one of the first times Strike Force teamed up with a former foe—in this case the Producer, who created fake news broadcasts to fool the TkTk Horde into thinking the United States had decided to reject their offer.

This scenario is also significant as I feel it's the point where Strike Force started their rise to the top of the superhero team ratings. While they were far removed from their street-level origins by this point, they still weren't widely known on a global scale. This scenario changed that; from this point on out, Strike Force became more of a mover-and-shaker in the superhero community, a team people respected with a track record that gave weight to their words. It also illustrated an important aspect of game mastering—the PCs are the stars of the show. In this case, while there may have been a dozen superhero teams defending Earth from the TkTk Horde, Aaron make sure the Player Characters were the ones to take down the Horde's mothership.

World War III

No one event had more of a long-term impact on Earth-AU and the Strike Force campaign than Aaron's World War III scenario. Taking place over several months (both in game and in the real world), the WWIII arc saw Aaron turn to his dark side to present an epic story of conquest, destruction, and heroism. The reason for this plot was simple: Aaron was getting bored with his world and wanted to take it in a new direction. He wanted to get away from the typical published superhero comics convention that dictates nothing ever seems to change (at least, technology-wise). He wanted technological heroes (and villains) to be able to market their inventions, changing the world in all manner of ways. He wanted Earth-AU to look less and less like the real world and more and more like a world of super science and technological advancement. So he created the Governor to explain why technological development seemed to be restrained or inhibited. When Strike Force and the Overlord drove the Governor off of Earth, it allowed Aaron (and his players) to start an era of unprecedented technological growth. But that wasn't enough.

Aaron didn't want to just change Earth's technology, he wanted "to reshape the world from the ground up." In order to do so, he would need to have Earth undergo some sort of catastrophic event, an event that would allow him to nearly destroy the Earth and then build it back up again. So he started World War III.

To say Aaron's WWIII plot reshaped his campaign is something of an understatement. For starters, his notes indicate between 15 and 25 percent of the population died. Cities were bombed into rubble. Manhattan was nearly consumed by a firestorm.

Leaders of major nations were kidnapped, never to be seen again. The United States broke apart into many smaller nation-states. Mass chaos, rioting, civil disorder, starvation; Aaron pulled no punches when it came to describing the end results of Aswar the Darklord's attempted invasion. However, this dark cloud did have a silver lining. Once the heroes defeated the Darklord, they had a chance to assist with and oversee the rebuilding of an entire world. The end result took Earth-AU from a fairly standard comic book-level of technological development to something almost akin to the DC Comic's Legion of Super-Heroes, with teleportation systems, orbital stations, force field technology, anti-gravity, rejuvenation therapy, and faster-than-light starships.

Destroying your world is always a risk, but Aaron knew he needed to do something to keep his interest up. In addition, his players were amiable to the idea (well, to the advancement of technology part anyway, I'm not so sure they were ready for a third world war). But as Aaron notes in the first edition of Strike Force, this would allow him to expand his story ideas, bringing in more interactions with alien races and galactic empires, the possibility of planetary exploration and adventures, and the ramifications of the rapid advance of Earth scene and technology.

The Tenth Anniversary Arc

For the tenth anniversary of the Strike Force campaign, Aaron ran an adventure I found highly interesting: he sent the PCs back in time to the site of their very first adventure. In addition, this adventure is also noteworthy because it was the tenth anniversary of the game (and the 111th session). Personally, I've never been in a single continuous campaign that's lasted for ten years (I think the record was seven), and certainly haven't played anywhere close to 111 sessions of anything.

Aaron's extensive note keeping and Campaign Chronicles allowed him to pull this adventure off. The Chronicles gave him a good idea of who was present and what happened during the original session. Thus, he could fairly accurately recreate his first session, allowing those players who had been there (such as Phosphene) to revisit the action (albeit from a different angle), while newer players—and their PCs—would get to experience the session for the first time. In addition, the basic setup for the adventure allowed Aaron to show the PCs things the players might have known about, but the PCs who were there may not have. A prime example of this was Phosphene discovering exactly how Ninja managed to acquire the bus Strike Force had used to get to New York City. Apparently violently assaulting innocent commuters wasn't something Phosphene approved of.

As a final note, this entire adventure came about because Overlord wanted to save a life. He wanted to undo the death of SnowFalcon during an assault on one of Overlord's old bases, and Strike Force agreed to try. I find this notable, as it shows how Aaron was developing Overlord's character. For some time Aaron had been moving Overlord away from his would-be conqueror origins and giving him a more heroic outlook. It was Overlord, in fact, who came to Strike Force about the Governor, and during the time travel adventure, he also expressed dismay at how arrogant and volatile he was back then.

Adventures On Earth-Kaiser

Earth-Kaiser struck me as a chance for Aaron to run Golden Age adventures without resorting to time travel. I mean, when you look at it, Strike Force found not only a mirror to Earth-AU in Earth-Kaiser, but also a world where World War II was still raging (in a Cold War sort of way) roughly fifty years later. The whole series of Earth-Kaiser adventures are also notable in their scale. Strike Force, both by their mere appearance and actions on Earth-Kaiser, influenced events occurring across the globe. For example, by defeating the Golgalar the Assembler and his Assembled Men, they sparked the end of the Nazi regime and the war in Europe. This, in turn, triggered a desire to save Japan from further destruction, which Aaron allowed the players to do. Thus, Strike Force became superheroes operating on a global scale, dealing with issues and problems that affect entire nations. Speaking of scale, the sheer size of some of these adventures was staggering. One, titled "Thirty Supers over Manchukuo" featured thirty (or more) superheroes battling the Japanese. Another had Strike Force (and their allies) fight the entire Japanese roster of superhumans in a staggeringly destructive battle. Once it was all over, Strike Force could legitimately say they'd helped found a new nation.

Earth-Kaiser also influenced the campaign in other ways. Aaron was able to introduce an alternate world version of the Overlord (named Warlord) and Luster (named Light Princess). This allowed Luster to interact with a slightly different version of her father (and herself). In addition, Strike Force engaged in trade of information and technology with Earth-Kaiser, went there for vacations, and spent a great deal of time socializing with the supers of this parallel world. Here we can see the ideas he first put forth in the World War III story arc bearing fruit, with the heroes treating an alternate Earth as an almost commonplace destination and not just a one-off adventure.

The Rise And Fall Of The Fourth Reich

Nazis were a common foe in Strike Force adventures. Between the Mark of Doom, the Animal Kingdom, Earth-Kaiser, and Blanco, Strike Force and the Shadow Warriors tangled with Nazi-themed supers and organizations time and time again. Aaron brought all of this to a head in the Battle of Valhalla adventure. Much like the Earth-Kaiser adventures, the Battle for Valhalla involved an entire world, albeit one located around 200 light-years from Earth. It also involved possibly the largest collection of superheroes to ever be involved in a Strike Force scenario. The Chronicles show that roughly 14 super teams were part of the attack, meaning there were around 100 superheroes taking part. How Aaron tracked all of this I have no idea.

What is even more interesting isn't the battles themselves, but what happened afterwards. Not only did Strike Force (and the rest of the heroes) have to decide what to do with their captives (which included a number of individuals wanted for crimes back on Earth), the team was also saddled with a young clone of Adolf Hitler, millions of children being brought up to create a new army for the Fourth Reich, two alien races the Nazis had been exploiting, the Animal Men they had been creating, and an entire world of innocent and not-so-innocent people. This led to some interesting moral discussions (playing on Aaron's theme of "what does it mean to be a hero?") about what to do next. To make matters worse, they also had to deal with the political fallout of this back on Earth (such as allowing Israel to send a ship to Valhalla with the express purpose of plastering the planet's surface with nuclear weapons).

Even after the battle, Aaron touched on the events and aftershocks time and time again. Instead of fully resolving a plot thread, the Battle of Valhalla actually created many new ones. Time and time again, Aaron would introduce characters who had some connection to the Fourth Reich's activities, be it as an unwilling subject for experimentation, a child rescued from the planet, an Animal Man looking to start a new life, or even those who wish to start a Fifth Reich. I note that the last adventure listed in the time line deals with just that concept, as members of the new Nazi Fifth Reich try and kidnap the USTO President, only to be defeated by Strike Force.

STRIKE FORCE TESTIMONIAL

One night in 1995, upon his invitation, I called Aaron Allston from my apartment in Burbank, CA.. It was one of the many stops along my very long, winding road of trying to find a place to land in order to have a career in entertainment and gaming, starting some time after I left West Point and haphazardly tried to figure out what to do next.

I'd wound up in Southern California by way of pursuing a job with a computer game company. That was, for me (and so many others I know) a major mistake; as a writer and RPG designer, I didn't have the mindset or skills for computer game design, and that industry has rarely known what to do with most of us. I did manage to nail a gig writing a comprehensive non-fiction book about the entire RPG hobby and industry, and Aaron had been one of the many fantastic people who sat down for an interview with me for it, which improved it immensely as a definitive work.

Aaron Allston was a definitive source, you see—perhaps one of the most authoritative folks you could ever hope to talk to about RPGs, game design, storytelling, and most of all, creating memorable and long-lasting campaigns. **Strike Force** *was not simply a sourcebook for the Champions RPG, though it may have looked like that on the surface. It turned out to be one of the earliest and most complete guidebooks to setting up, running, and maintaining a long-lasting RPG campaign experience, regardless of genre or theme.*

You'll discover more about all that as you read through the rest of this book. However, I wanted to make sure you know that Aaron was not only a very gifted human being—his talents ran the gamut of excellent design, adventure creation, storytelling, and straight-up fantastic fiction—he was a very giving man.

Anyone who took the time to get to know him was gifted with access to his wisdom and advice, just like I was that summer night on the phone in Burbank, him speaking to me from his home near Austin, TX.

A home he shared with other creative, wonderful, loving folks, and as part of a larger community that was the envy of gamers and dreamers everywhere. I don't think it's at all outrageous to say that Aaron Allston helped make Austin the oasis of creative endeavors that it is. There remain many excellent creators, inventors, and designers in that area, all of whom knew Aaron by name, if not directly, and all knew of the magic he brought to gaming and entertainment overall.

For me, Aaron had some specific words of advice. He told me to get out of the electronic industry, find something—anything—that would pay the bills, and just start writing and creating what I would, as it came. He understood who I was, better than I did at the time, and he pointed me in a direction I needed to go. Even thought it took me a lot longer to get it through my head and actually do as he suggested, once I did, things fell much more in place.

The last time I saw Aaron was at Gen Con just a handful of years ago. We only got to catch up briefly, but he made it very clear that he was proud of my achievements and glad to see I'd gone on to do so many cool things. Of course, I thanked him profoundly for his advice and his support, asked him about his own projects (he was involved in a movie thing; always trying new things, that one), and told him I looked forward to the next time we might have time to catch up more thoroughly.

Sadly, that time did not come. So often we think we have more time...

Those of us who were blessed to know the man personally can only do our best to share his genius and his gifts with the rest of you, and I am proud to be a part of this effort to make that happen.

—Sean Patrick Fannon

THE STRIKE FORCE SETTING

The Earth of Strike Force—a.k.a. "Earth-AU"—is based on the real world, but has many points of distinction from the real world (i.e. the world you, the reader, belong to). During the first several years the campaign was being played, the Strike Force Earth resembled the real world to a great degree. The president(s) of the United States in the Strike Force world were the same ones as those in the real world; when a nation was established or fell on the real world, the same thing happened on the Strike Force world.

The process was chiefly a reflection of the way things tend to work in the titles produced by the major comic book publishers. Inevitably, the presence of super-powers, super-technology, interaction with alien races, and the existence of very powerful magic would gradually transform the world, making it resemble the real world less and less, and making it harder for new readers to find points of identification when reading the comics; consequently, mainstream superhero comics tend to ignore those factors and simply assume that a President Barack Obama in the real world means a President Barack Obama in their fictitious world.

However, this lack of continuity is less of a concern with dealing with a role-playing campaign setting enjoyed by a small number of regular players. As Aaron himself notes: "After about six years of play, I decided I'd done as much as I wanted to with the standard superhero-world model and wanted to explore additional consequences of the presence of supers. Of course, this left me with a question to answer—why would the presence of superheroes and super-science suddenly mean more to the world than it had previously? Why would they become a major force in politics and cultural development when they hadn't previously?"

Aaron answered this question with the creation and introduction of the multidimensional being whose title, as close as it could be translated into English, was the Governor—the word referring more to the

kind of governor installed on a car than to the kind installed in a state-owned mansion. The Governor was a scientist who wanted to see what would happen to a species with a rapidly developing level of technology if its scientific growth were suddenly and severely retarded. Operating since the 1840s, he had used his abilities to curtail the most dramatic of human scientific developments (usually by arranging accidents in the demonstration of those developments that would either kill or discredit their inventors).

The result of his experiment? The most brilliant and prolific of inventors saw that the world was just not friendly to their kind. They went underground, developing their new technologies in secret, spreading toned-down versions of their inventions through the world while keeping their best work for themselves. The first result of the Governor's intervention was, in fact, Victorian and Pulp-era Mad Scientists.

Various mystics and philosophers on Strike Force Earth have also theorized that there might have been an unconscious response to the Governor by the entire human race—that somehow a racial pressure to advance, blocked by the Governor's actions, may have manifested itself in a genetic fashion, resulting in the appearance of exceptional humans, the sort who in later decades went on to become superheroes and supervillains. And, since it was super-scientists and superheroes who eventually found the Governor and drove him off, the ultimate effect of the Governor's experiment was to bring about the circumstances leading to the end of the Governor's experiment.

The banishment of the Governor, the subsequent (unrelated) worldwide devastation of World War III, and changes to the very fabric of reality brought on by a powerful chaotic being called Scoff (see page 171) have, in the last several years, led to more and more points of distinction between the Strike Force Earth and the real world. This chapter will describe many of them in detail.

THE FEDERATION OF ATLANTIA

This region is a prime example of how Earth-AU differs from the real world. Just before World War III, Fire Hawk, one of Overlord's sons, conquered Haiti. He instituted sweeping economic, legal, and political reforms. He has since spread the border of the Federation to encompass a number of islands and nations found in the Caribbean.

SUPERHUMANS AND WORLD CULTURE

It is impossible to note all the influences the presence of super-powered beings have had on the culture of Strike Force Earth. The presence of the Governor kept those influences functioning at a very low level for most of the history of the Earth, but they still functioned... and since 1987, those influences have had more and more profound effects on Earth's cultures.

Numbers of Supers

Conservative estimates suggest that, in recent years, one person in a thousand on Strike Force Earth has innate powers that can be considered paranormal or even superhuman. With a world population between two and a half and three billion (A massive population drop occurred in the wake of World War III, largely from disease and starvation, which is why this Earth's population is less than half that of the real world's.), this yields a figure of two and a half to three million paranormals.

However, this doesn't mean that there are three million costumed supers running around the world. Most of these paranormals don't possess a level of power that would make them competitive in what is often referred to as the "superhero arena." The ability to predict with 80% accuracy which card will be drawn next from a random deck is definitely paranormal, but it doesn't allow a person to bounce bullets from his chest, doesn't brainwash him into believing that crime must be thwarted or banks must be robbed, and doesn't convince him that he'd profit from a rigorous physical training regimen and a set of colorful skintight clothes.

Most people with paranormal powers tend to conceal the fact. In many countries—including the United States during certain periods in history—possessing a paranormal power meant that the individual would be whisked off for study and probably lifelong exploitation in a military unit or government office. When paranormals can no longer conceal their strangeness, they sometimes make their powers appear to be erratic and undependable (and in many cases they are), making them less desirable (and exploitable) to others.

Some people with paranormal powers are ashamed or fearful of them, and never use them or train with them. Others prefer to use these abilities to improve their lives; someone with sufficient strength to lift a big car and scratch-resistant skin might become a tireless construction worker or a very well-paid night-club bouncer, attributing his skills to luck and training rather than to paranormal powers, and living a life far safer than that of a career criminal or costumed crimefighter.

So the number of paranormals with a level of power that would be competitive in the superhero arena is about one in a thousand among all paranormals, meaning that around 2,500 to 3,000 people worldwide are that powerful. Only a fraction of those ever decide to participate in the madness of superhero/supervillain interaction. But they are joined by people who are genetically normal but are augmented by sophisticated gadgetry (often of their own invention) or extraordinary training.

This yields a final total, worldwide, of superheroes and supervillains in the vicinity of 1,000 at any given time. There is a fair amount of attrition, especially among supervillains (more of them die in prison or are killed by peace officers and the military than superheroes), but the potential financial profit of the supervillain life is enough to keep the numbers fairly constant.

- **Earth's Population (1995):** 2.5-3 Billion
- **Paranormals (All Types):** 2.5-3 Million
- **Paranormals at Super Power Levels:** 2.5-3 Thousand
- **True Superheroes/Supervillains:** ~1,000

PARANORMAL, OR SUPER?

In Earth-AU, paranormals are those people who possess some sort of superhuman power. It may be a singular ability and of limited use, but it is a power normal humans don't normally have. A super is considered to be anyone with extensive paranormal powers, often of a far greater extent and level then a mere paranormal. Supers also tend to wear costumes and fight (or commit) crime.

THE SUPERHERO COMMUNITY

The world's costumed supers who tend to interact with one another on a regular basis are said to belong to the "superhero community" (the term applies to super-villains as well). The superhero community refers to those heroes and villains who clash regularly and sometimes work out informal rules of behavior when doing so; to those heroes to appear together on lecture circuits, patriotic rallies, and other public appearances; to former heroes and villains who are still active in some sense with those who have followed them; and so on.

THE HOLLYWOOD MODEL

On the Strike Force Earth, the way that superheroes and supervillains interact when they're not attacking one another closely resembles the world of Hollywood movie stars more than just about any other model. Among the similarities:

Supers tend to have romantic relationships with and marry supers: This is in marked contrast to mainstream comic books, where, on the average, supers tend to have relationships with non-powered people. As with Hollywood, this is in large part because exceptional people who work constantly to keep themselves fit are constantly thrown into high-pressure work situations with people like themselves.

Supers share a media attention and a fandom base with stars: Around the world, the press and public tend to look on supers as they do other celebrities, according them fame, scrutinizing their every public move, following and even fabricating news of their activities and interests, demoting the well-known and promoting the fresh and interesting, and so on.

Supers tend to grow wealthy: Not all supers look for wealth, of course. But most supers tend to benefit themselves financially, often in legal and ethical ways, through use of their powers and skills. Inventors patent their inventions; flying heroes save money they might have spent on cars or public transportation; super-strong heroes sometimes build their own homes. Some supers perform celebrity endorsements. Some become employees of well-funded teams and accept salaries—and salaries for superheroes can be quite substantial.

Supers tend to rely on old friendships: Increasing needs to maintain secrecy (especially if a secret identity is involved) and to be able to know when someone is attempting to get close in order to exploit their powers or resources cause many supers to distance themselves from new acquaintances, revealing their true faces (in both senses of the words) only to old friends.

Supers tend to be physically attractive: The training and physical exercise it takes to be a competent superhero results in large numbers of physically fit individuals. In addition, assorted superpowers and mutations allow for unusual concentration of perfect-body/hard-body/super-pretty people in the superhero community.

While researching this section of the book, I discovered an email in which Aaron discussed the concept of the "Hollywood model" and how it helped explain why supers tend to put on costumes and fight crime (or cause it). Aaron notes that the Earth-AU setting operates on the philosophy that people, granted super-powers, would not customarily turn to gestures of suicidal altruism. However, the world does have superheroes, based pretty much on the assumption that once someone is removed from the tyranny of personal economy—i.e. he no longer has to worry about a paycheck, the mortgage, and so on, and is constantly exposed to a high-wealth environment—such aberrant behavior is less unreasonable.

In other words, superpowers, for a variety of reasons, tend to be very profitable for those who possess them. The gadgeteers patent low-tech versions of their inventions and make money. Sorcerers make enclaves distant from street addresses, telephone solicitors, monthly payments, and the like, and have no problem summoning up all their daily needs. Even low-grade supers without other exploitable skills can accept lodging, substantial stipends, and access to extraordinary resources and opportunities from the superhero teams that offer them in order to pursue the lifestyle.

With these economic concerns removed, what you end up with is a society of millionaires and people who hang out with millionaires. And this society, instead of turning to race-driving or jet-setting or more mundane pursuits, goes into the ultimate thrill-seeking field—the superhero arena. Consequently, the world of superheroes more closely resembles Hollywood than anything else. It features celebrity fandom, star romances, extravagant financial expenditure, and a society that is elitist (though often unintentionally so).

Origins of Supers

It is a sad fact of the Strike Force project that there many things about the Earth-AU setting we just don't know. One case in point is a comprehensive breakdown of the possible origins of supers in Earth-AU. I have pieced together enough material from Aaron's notes on the subject to offer a breakdown of superheroic origins as they appear in the setting.

Saturation Force Fields

This is not an origin per se, but more of an "in-universe" explanation for how certain super powers work. In Earth-AU, many supers derive their powers from what are referred to as "saturation force fields." Most of these supers have powers based in psychic energy. Their nervous systems generate force fields that, rather than surrounding and lying atop the supers', suffuse their bodies, having the exact volume of the character's body and moving just as the body

does. Such force fields often manifest themselves as powers of invulnerability (having enough durability and integrity to deflect bullets, knives, lasers, and other forces) and super-strength (augmenting and protecting muscle and skeleton to allow the character to lift great weights and damage durable targets).

Such powers, requiring the constant expenditure of energy and resulting in the maintenance of a sophisticated energy matrix in and around the character, tend to be readily detectable by sophisticated sensor devices.

POWER ARMOR AND OTHER HIGH TECHNOLOGY

Powered armor heroes (and villains) are fairly common in Earth-AU. In fact, the first villain Strike Force fought (Overlord) wore a suit of powered armor to augment his already impressive physical abilities. For the most part, powered armor suits are fairly compact (relatively speaking, the hero Bolo is still 7' tall in his suit), and streamlined. Large, bulky, "mecha"-styled suits don't seem to exist, or if they do, are not very popular. Some suits (such as Overlord's) are nearly skintight (or appear to be). Not all powered armor suits grant such classic powers as super strength or augmented reflexes. Plasma Ranger, for example, wears a suit that "only" allows him to control plasma and augments his durability to attacks.

Other supers use more esoteric forms of high technology. Stunner, for example, has an assortment of "guns" that allow him to adversely affect his target's physiology; such as draining a target's physical momentum.

MARTIAL ARTS

There are many forms of martial arts in Earth-AU. All of the ones known in the real (i.e. "our" world) exist, as well some Earth-AU-specific styles (such as Paek-tu, which was featured in the original Strike Force). There are also alien martial arts forms, such as Daragak, a Katari spear-fighting style practiced by Overlord. On top of this, there are mystical martial arts techniques that tend to hover uncomfortably between normal human abilities and true superpowers. This would include invisible punches, rapid-fire punches, techniques akin to Bruce Lee's famous "one-inch punch", extreme balancing techniques allowing one to run across water or over grass without disturbing a blade, and so on. Many of the Cinematic and Wuxia powers seen in **Hero System Martial Arts** would certainly fit the bill.

MAGIC AND MYSTICISM

Earth-AU is a setting rife with magic. In fact, Lightrune, Aaron's own long-term GMPC, has a magical origin. And he's not alone. Ichi-ban was a magician who could cast spells by exchanging the aspects of two objects (for example, he could make an egg unbreakable by temporarily swapping the egg's fragility with the durability of a nearby safe). He could also exchange information the same way (once swapping a needed tidbit of info for an egg roll recipe). Along with numerous sorcerers, there were those who used magical artifacts, devices, and weapons (such as Red Archer), or had a magical heritage (such as Hercules the God, who really is the son of Zeus). Other supers have been imbued with magical energy (such as Lady Power, who exchanged servitude with the "demon" Scoff for additional power) or Man Mountain Thunder, who was "blessed" by a volcanic kami with superhuman strength and mystic kudzu vines for hair.

For more information on magical origins for supers, see page 49.

ALIEN OR MUTANT PHYSIOLOGY

A number of supers can claim such an origin. Earth-AU does have a population of classic comic book mutants, but as noted on page 40, there is no "mutant hysteria," and thus no anti-mutant sentiment among the general populace. As with classic comic book mutants, "mutant" allows for many kinds of powers, some obvious, some less so. Phosphene, for example, is technically a mutant. Apparently, so is the hero Stunner, although his mutation seems restricted to a very high reaction time, durability, and incredible running speed.

A super can also be alien, or part alien. Overlord, for example, has a Katari father and an Earth mother. The Mighty Pinchus and Samiel are both true aliens, with no relation to the human race. As noted on page 40, there are many alien races in Earth AU, some of which are closely related to humanity and can interbreed with them), and others that are not. Many of these races have innate powers, or can express various super powers (due to their own mutations, generic engineering, and other factors).

BIO-ENGINEERED OR ARTIFICIAL LIFE FORM

This is another common origin. Overlord is also an example of a biologically-engineered individual, although in his case it's all self-inflicted. A more wide-spread example are the members of the Animal Kingdom, a society of artificially-created life forms featuring the genetic characteristics of humans and several animal life-forms. Most were bipedal creatures resembling animals but with human-range intelligence. A supervillain named Blanco created them; he sometimes loaned them to the Fourth Reich or to other supervillain organizations for profitable missions.

The Animal Kingdom creatures were created in "lines," each one with its own specific form and characteristics. The first few examples of each line were referred to as "cutting edge," often for more reasons than one; then, if the line proved viable, subsequent examples were referred to as "the proven," while if the line was not viable it was not continued. Thousands of the Proven were created to live and serve on Valhalla, the adopted home planet of the Fourth Reich.

Prototypes were created in three groups. Group One consisted of fusions of human and a single animal tissue; they were created at a base located somewhere in New York State. Group Two was grown in Switzerland, but after accidental creations and a 1985 raid by the Shadow Warriors, the base moved to New York City; it is there Group Two finally emerged. These chimeras (using fusions of human and multiple animal types) added nanotechnology to the mix. Group Three returned to Switzerland and a new base; these were nanotech-heavy chimeras created with the ability to appear purely human when desired and work well within human culture. The Strike Force hero Fenris X is a prime example of the capabilities found in an Animal Man chimera.

Another possible origin is that of a truly artificial life-form. The Producer is responsible for most of these individuals. His first creation, "Radiance" was built in the 1930s, when the Producer was still a living human being. Later, his mundane self "died," returning as the Producer. After that, he built innumerable androids and robots. Some, like Radiance, were obviously mechanical; others, like the Strike Force hero Jack Straw, looked very human; some, such as the members of the Monster Squad (so named as they looked like several classic 1940s movie monsters) were capable of biological reproduction—provided the process was consciously activated.

In all cases, a wide variety of superpowers are possible, although in the case of the Animal Men, most powers are physical in nature (augmented strength, speed, durability, claws, leaping, running, fearsome roars, and so on). A robotic being will tend to also have physical powers (such as strength, extendable limbs, multiple limbs, and such), although a few examples of singular esoteric abilities (such as fiery breath or the ability to discharge electric shocks).

PSYCHIC POWERS

Psychic powers seem to be akin to mystic ones in Earth-AU. In some cases, the two seem to cross over each other. Macabre, for example, is a spiritualist who can see ghosts. Is her power psychic, mystical, or both? In some cases, psychic powers work along set lines. The Blood, for example, all possess a similar set of psychic powers, usually expressed as teleportation, an enhanced range of vision, and the projection of lethal energy.

As with most comic book settings, telepathy and telekinesis are typical psychic powers. Those with telepathy often have associated powers (the ability to sense danger, precognition, mind control, and so on), while those with telekinesis often have force fields, the ability to fly, force blasts, and assorted capabilities. Some heroes, such as Psycher of the Shadow Warriors, have a mixture of powers (in his case, a mixture of telepathic powers, teleportation, and the ability to see through solid objects).

SIZE-CHANGING

It is unknown how many size-changing supers there are in Earth-AU. The extra-dimensional "demon" Scoff is one, but his size changing comes about due to the magical background count of whatever plane he happens to be on—this is not an "at will" power. That said, Aaron did address the subject, stating:

When a character has no more compelling explanation for where his mass goes when he shrinks, we default to the following explanation: the character actually projects his body into a pocket dimension, where it retains its full mass and other characteristics, but leaves behind an interface with the real world. That interface is a projection of his body (at reduced size) and transfers such things as energy (kinetic and other) between the plane where the character now exists and the normal world. This tends to explain why many shrunken characters retain their full strength when tiny.

LEVELS OF ABILITY

Aaron never ascribed to the idea that characters with a high agility score were as graceful as an Olympic athlete. Instead, he felt a high agility score expressed itself differently depending on the character in question. Thus, the gymnast might display beauty and grace in their movements, while the brick might simply show quickness and effectiveness in combat. Aaron also felt that a character's skills (such as Professional or Knowledge Skills) helped defined how they looked when moving and fighting.

The Effect of Supers on Society

The presence of supers—especially increasingly powerful supers who are part of a growing proportion of the population—has had an interesting effect on the cultures, laws, and expectations of the people of Earth-AU.

LAW AND INSURANCE

Inevitably, laws have changed to accommodate the presence of supers—or because, despite efforts to discommode them, they're enduring.

Prior to World War II, laws making it illegal to wear a mask (outside of private functions such as parties) were widespread and enforced when possible. Masked crime-fighters often played a sort of dangerous game with law enforcement, aiding the police while working very hard to stay out of their clutches.

During World War II, the first era in which the widespread presence of masked paranormals was noted, things changed. National governments, especially the governments of the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, and Japan, were obliged to seek the help of supers—and could not generally demand that they abandon their costumed identities. Anti-mask laws stayed on the books, but were largely not enforced against supers who were seen by the public as do-gooders.

In the 1960s, it actually became possible for a masked crimefighter to testify in court. This required that his testimony be preceded by that of another super whose true identity was known and who could testify that he knew the true identity of the masked super about to testify. Some limitations to the testimony of masked persons remain in effect (they often cannot testify as professionals in a field, as their qualifications cannot reliably be checked), but at least they can testify to actions they have witnessed.

The immense damage that super-fights can cause is dealt with by insurance. In cities where there are a lot of supers, most buildings carry insurance that pays off in case of damage caused by paranormals. In cities where supers are rare, such insurance is quite cheap; in cities like Manhattan, it's a substantial cost.

HEROTALK MAGAZINE

In January 1982 a new publication hit the Earth-AU stands—HeroTalk Magazine. *HeroTalk* was a magazine about superheroes past, present, and future, as well as the superhero community as a whole. Its creation was a remarkable success story in of itself: journalist Shari Taylor, who'd made her name with a breakthrough interview of a flag-suited super soldier in 1981, borrowed money from her brother and launched into the risky enterprise of magazine publishing.

Each issue of *HeroTalk* had an interview with a superhero (or with someone who dealt with superheroes), a main feature article, a superhero-history article, a pictorial on a superhero, super group, or other superhero topic, and a host of short articles, mini-interviews, and news. The magazine was a smash success and reached the million-mark within a year. By 1987, the circulation was closer to eight million.

HeroTalk Magazine came to an abrupt end with the advent of World War III; their offices and printing facility, even then running off the (delayed) February 1988 issue, were flattened in a bombing raid in January of 1988. Publisher Shari Taylor had already accompanied Strike Force into the Chaos Zone during the retaliatory strike against the invaders when her offices were destroyed. When she returned she decided not to recommence publication of the magazine; instead, she created a video version for the Federation of Atlantia Communication System.

Earth-AU and Comic-Book Conventions

Some of the common literary conventions of comic-book worlds don't occur at all in the Strike Force world; others do, but we try to explain why they are there and how they came to be.

SUPERHERO TECHNOLOGY DOES NOT ENTER THE MARKETPLACE (AVERTED)

In comic books, if even a fraction of the inventions and processes developed by supers becomes widely available to the population, the world begins to look less than the real world. If super-world technology at the consumer level is identical to real-world technology, then it's far easier for creators to know what sorts of vehicles and personal equipment are available to characters, and it's easier for the readers to identify with the world they see.

In Earth-AU, Aaron had a mechanism in place for several years that he used to explain this situation. As noted on page 22, the Governor came to Earth in the 1830s and, as a scientific experiment, began suppressing scientific development—allowing new technology to be created, but only to concentrate in the hands of its creators; it was not allowed to filter down to the common man. Thus, for about 150 years, technological development at the consumer level on Earth-AU was nearly identical to that of the real world.

However, in 1987, Strike Force discovered the existence of the Governor and drove him away. After that, higher technology filtered down much more swiftly to the consumer level, and such items as flying cars, regenerative medicine, stasis-cloth body armor, wristwatch super-telephones, and other items became available in the commercial marketplace.

SUPERS DO NOT AGE AT NORMAL RATES (SUBVERTED)

In the comics, if a character that ages normally is popular, the publishers are going to want to continue his adventures even after his logical adventuring lifespan is done. At some comic book houses, this is done by having the character age at a rate of one character year for every three real years; at others, the world is reinvented every twenty five years or so; at others, adventures are set at some point in the past or future so that the progress of real-world time is irrelevant.

In the Strike Force universe, Aaron opted to let the game-world calendar closely parallel the real-world calendar (they are usually within a year of one another), but made options for extended lifespans readily available. Characters belonging to the Blood and the Families organizations tend to have quite long life-spans; magicians have easy access to techniques that prolong their lives; and, after the introduction of the Overlord/Vixen regeneration and antigeria techniques in the late 1980s, almost anyone with money has been able to prolong his life and maintain his youth greatly (see page 56 for more).

MUTATED SUPERS ARE HATED AND HUNTED (INVERTED)

There was never any "mutant hysteria" or other widespread anti-mutate hatred on Earth-AU. Mention was made of mutant hysteria in some Hero Games supplements based on Aaron's campaign, but this was merely an effort to "genericize" the material for easier introduction into more standard superhero campaigns.

SUPERHERO COSTUMES (PLAYED STRAIGHT)

Unlike some comic universes, costumes in Earth-AU tend to get ripped and torn during battle. There are no super-fabrics that are immune to tearing, immune to the wear's powers, and otherwise act akin to a second skin. Earth-AU does have stasis cloth, a form of body armor that appeared in 1959. There is also Mallodex, a stretchy fabric invented by Dr. Darren Mallory around 1980. It can be pretreated to change colors under certain types of electrical flows and is skintight. Many superhero costumes are made of it, as it is durable and can be patched if damaged.

CREATING THAT COMIC-BOOK FEEL

Having trouble developing your comic universe? Try taking a look at the website known as TV Tropes (tvtropes.org). They have a whole page dedicated to superheroes, listing some of the most common tropes found in the genre. Better yet, each trope listed leads to a page all of its own, complete with numerous examples from not only the comics, but also television, the movies, anime and animation, video games, and assorted RPGs.

In addition, the page lists many tropes you might be familiar with, and it also lists many you may have never heard of. Several of these tropes are highly useful for catching that comic book feel, such as the use of Alliterative Names, to a page describing the strongest supers (and other characters) in a variety of universes. And in between those two tropes are dozens more examples.

Geographic Distribution of Supers

Most of the supers in Earth-AU are found in the United States. Why? The answers involve war, tradition, and money.

The truth is that geographic distribution of supers is nearly constant, being approximately one in one million for people with enough power to "be competitive" in the superhero arena; this also includes mutants and mutates, psychics, magicians, inheritors of curses and traditions, and so on.

However, in the United States, Japan, other wealthy and highly industrialized nations, there are spikes for a couple of reasons.

- The likelihood improves that a normal human will receive enough training to be competitive in the arena.
- The number of corporations and individuals rich enough to purchase power suits increases.
- The likelihood of a foreign super to be interested in coming to a wealthier nation in order to exploit their abilities for better pay increases.

In addition, there are difficulties for those supers who live in war-torn nations. Supers in those regions tend to be pressed into service or volunteer for service in the armed forces and become casualties or fatalities.

Also, only the English-speaking nations have a longstanding tradition of putting on costumes, taking on code names, and campaigning as a costumed super. (This doesn't mean there aren't costumed supers in other nations, just that there is less of a tradition of it, hence a lower proportion.) In many nations, supers, when identified, become agents of their governments (depending on the nation, this may be willingly or unwillingly).

A final reason is publicity. The American public hears about subjects determined by the American press, which is notoriously uninterested in foreign supers. So someone reading a newspaper in New York City is not likely to hear about the heroes of Botswana, Cambodia, or New Zealand.

SECRET LANDS, ORGANIZATIONS, AND SOCIETIES

Aaron introduced numerous hidden lands and secret societies amid the various campaign that made up Earth-AU. Selected examples are listed below.

HIDDEN LANDS

The bulk of these lands appeared during the Pulp-era adventures of the Empire Club, although they all still existed (in some fashion) during the Strike Force campaign.

Alantia

This is a vast cavern located under the Atlantic Ocean. It was discovered in 1933 when the ocean liner Damascus Steel was sucked down and captured. The survivors of the crash were captured by the Alantia Empire and enslaved. However, members of the Empire Club managed to escape, join with rebel forces, and overthrow the cruel regime. The people of Alantia are Caucasian, speak English, and use fairly advanced technology (by 1933 standards).

ALANTIA OR ATLANTIA?

Alantia is not the same as the Federation of Atlania, described on page 34.

Eldorado

This hidden valley, located in Brazil, was the source of Aztec and Maya gold. The first European to find it was Luis Antonio de Borges y Guerrera, a Spanish conquistador, in the 1530s. It was rediscovered by the Eldorado Society in 1935, who helped the natives restore peace to their valley. The Society then left the valley to its own devices.

Ezida

This is an immense cavern found under Borisppa, in Iraq. It was founded by the Babylonian demigod Nabium and his wife, Tasmetum, an ageless mutant born millennia ago. In 1995, the Shadow Warriors, pursuing the Cult of the Beast, discovered the cavern and the long-lost civilization dwelling there. The Shadow Warriors then overthrew Nabium's despotic rule and brought Ezida into the modern world (see page 27).

P'Eng Lai

Located about 300 miles south of Iwo Jima, P'Eng Lai is a volcanic island surrounded by reefs and usually obscured by fog; it's referred to as the "land without stars." It was colonized by the first Chinese emperor, Chin-Shih-Huang-Ti, who sent many young men and women to explore the island and surrounding area. The island was considered mythical until it was discovered (and conquered) by General Hua Fu Sang (a Chinese warlord) in the 1920s. The island was liberated by the Eldorado Society in 1935, and became a spy- and way-station for the United States in 1942 (and later an official U.S. protectorate). The island is notable for its very old styles of martial arts, its Green Mountain Warriors (who defend the island from attackers), as well as the volcano-spirits who dwelt in the mountains granting magical abilities to certain priests. This latter element explains the island's other name: "Island of the Immortals."

Tarosia

A series of huge caverns that extend under the Pacific Ocean, Tarosia's upper reaches have vents leading to the surface through a vent in a volcanic island located near the equator. The cavern's ecosystem contains dinosaurs who have managed to survive into the modern era. The Eldorado Society discovered the island in 1937, while searching for the missing Amelia Earhart. In the 1940s, the supervillain Mayhem stole an atomic bomb, packed it with mutagenics, and then detonated it in the caverns. The resulting radiation and the widespread fall of mutagens caused death (and extinction) among many dinosaur species. Those that didn't die tended to mutate, often growing to immense size in the process.

Terranians

The Terranians are an advanced civilization located under Canada. Terrania was created when an alien genetics testing laboratory landed on Earth and burrowed down into some local caverns. The device then captured local life-forms and proceeded to "test them to destruction" and perform other examinations. As time passed, it started to capture humans from the surface and modify them, trying to determine what range of abilities it could give its test subjects and still have them considered "human". One of its experiments created the Winged Folk (see page 62). Eventually, the alien device decided it was time to end its experiments and terminate all subjects. However, one subject had developed psychic powers sufficient enough to defend herself and used them to seriously damage the master control device.

Over subsequent centuries, the survivors were able to develop an entire culture around the idea of studying the remaining technologies left in the labs. It was, however, a difficult prospect, as the Terranians were effectively primitives with no idea of what they were working with. That said, the Terranians achieved great heights, but never cracked the deepest portions of the technology available. The Terranians consistently kept clear of the outer world, especially in later centuries, for fear that outsiders would understand and exploit the technology that the Terranians themselves could no longer use.

Valley of Sylvaya

This hidden valley, located in the mountains near Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, is populated with the surviving descendants of ancient Rome. Sylvaya is actually the name of the Roman-styled city located in the valley. The valley was discovered by members of the Eldorado Society in 1936. The heroes managed to liberate the oppressed populace from the stranglehold of the Order of the Winged King, the elite guard of the Emperor of Sylvaya.

Secret Societies

Many of these societies had a direct impact on the heroes of Strike Force. Some were responsible for a hero's origin, others were constant foes.

The Black Robes

Based in Himalayan monastery called the Yu-Ch'eng (Jade City), the Black Robes are an ancient Asian mystic order who have studied various forms of martial arts and philosophy for hundreds of years. They promote the concept of the Pattern, a way of balance (both internal and external). The Black Robes are peaceful in outlook, for they believe that violence disrupts the Pattern. ShadowWalker's teacher, Master Chang, is a member of the order. Shiro Kodiai, who forged ShadowWalker's near-indestructible katana, is also a member.

The Cult of the Beast

The Cult is an organization whose members wield magic in order to achieve personal wealth and other goals. Some of its members are super-level magicians, but most are not. The Cult of the Beast is classed as a villainous organization because its members are most often encountered in opposition to superheroes. However, depending on political climate and other factors, the Cult of the Beast can also perform actions normally considered heroic—such as oppose supernatural intrusions and assist heroic sorcerers in need of aid.

The Cult of the Beast has been at odds with the Circle (see page 52) for more than fifty years. Ironically, at the time of their first meeting, the Cult of the Beast was considered a heroic society and the Circle a band of inhuman villains, as the History section details below.

HISTORY

In the late 19th century, a fascination with mysticism swept much of the western world. Self-proclaimed mystics, sorcerers, and holy saviors formed societies dedicated to the advancement and exploitation of the mystic arts. Most of them were fakes, some of them were self-deluded to believe they actually had powers, and a very few actually possessed mystical or magical abilities.

One of these was Evelyn Fairbanks, a prominent stage actress of the 1880s and 1890s. Born Jenny Coward to Cockney parents, she managed, through strength of will and native aptitude, to eradicate the mannerisms and speech of her humble origins and to become an accomplished actress. In 1893, when she was 45, she discovered that her backstage thespian rituals were doing more than preparing her for the performance to come: they were allowing her to assume the physical characteristics of the roles she was to play. In particular, she could shed two decades of age and wear and assume enough vigor to keep up with younger performers, all without displaying any apparent effort.

Though this power might have allowed her to maintain her prominence on stage for another thirty years, she soon retired from theater. She lived on the fortune she'd amassed and studied this amazing gift. Over time, she decided that some people, such as herself, were able to draw on amazing depths of human reserve and achieve magical effects. In so doing, she learned, they had to become reconciled to their basest desires and needs—a portion of the psyche she called the Beast, but which psychologists referred to as the id.

She attracted followers. Rather than form a huge international society, she discarded the followers who did not demonstrate any aptitude for her skill and kept only those who did. Rather than publicize her group's accomplishments, she kept them secret. And as she and her followers used the power of the Beast, they became devoted to a policy of self-improvement and self-satisfaction. Laws were made by the common people who did not share their powers; therefore laws could be ignored and lesser beings swept aside. Other societies of magic eventually adopted guidelines such as: *"An (if) it harm no one, do as ye please;"* the catchphrase of the society of the Beast merely was: *"Do as ye please."*

THROUGH THE 1930S

Through the early years of the 20th century, the society of the Beast grew. It did so slowly, as all members had to demonstrate some potential with this new form of magic. The members turned their attention toward cooperative rituals that would enrich them both at home and abroad. Though records do not exist on this matter, it may be that their manipulations of stock markets helped precipitate the Great Crash of 1929. Records do indicate that members of the society of the Beast weathered the Great Depression with their fortunes unharmed.

Other supernatural societies were flourishing in these same years. Some of them were oriented toward nationalist concerns rather than self-improvement. The Cult, for example, had several clashes with members of German occult societies.

THE SOCIETY AND WORLD WAR II

In 1939, Germany invaded Poland. Great Britain declared war on Germany. A coalition of German occult groups, acting to eliminate a tool that Great Britain might wield against the Fatherland, launched a preemptive strike against the society of the Beast. A strike team of German sorcerers and hired killers invaded the estate of Evelyn Fairbanks, killing the 91-year-old mystic and everyone else there. They had concocted this plan months before, and careful preparations—including bribery of some members of the society—had revealed crucial information about Miss Fairbanks' mystic defenses.

But the strike didn't destroy the society. Duncan Coward, Evelyn's illegitimate son, born 1863, and some of his cronies were hunting on other family property when the raid took place. Duncan returned home to find his mother and many of his friends slain. He vowed vengeance.

He quickly reorganized the survivors of the society. Those who were willing to do so abandoned, as quickly as possible, their names and families—although they took their fortunes with them, of course. They created new identities, and each would be the leader of a cell of the society. Cell leaders would report directly to Duncan or one of his designated aides. Each cell leader would know the identity of two other cell leaders, no more. He told the survivors who were unwilling to take this drastic measure that they belonged to his, Duncan's, cell.

He took his cell before British Intelligence and then the Crown, demonstrating what the society could do. The society was immediately assigned a role within British Intelligence, acting as a counter-agent to the German occult groups.

THE CULT AND GERMANY

During the war years, the society received its modern nickname, the Cult of the Beast, from the German supernaturalists it combated. Duncan's cell was responsible for action against the Germans, while the more secretive cells headed by the members who'd changed their identities were gradually assigned to combat the menace of Japanese sorcery. Within British government circles, the Cult of the Beast was lauded as a superpatriotic secret weapon.

Of course, things weren't that simple. The society still used its magic for profit, and companies owned by its members were awarded crucial defense contracts. In addition, Duncan recruited members from the United States, Australia, Canada and New Zealand to head new secret cells. The society flourished.

The members of Duncan's cell suffered for their unwillingness to follow Duncan's plan. After all, the German assassins had information on all of them; they'd been saved only by not being on hand when the first strike came. Over the course of World War II, in spite of their increased defensive preparations, these members were assassinated. Duncan's cell shrank until it consisted of himself and new members who kept their association with the society secret.

THE CULT AND JAPAN

As this was happening, Cult branches based out of Hawaii, Hong Kong, and other Pacific sites held by the Allies acted to curb the missions of the Circle (see page 52). Though individually none of the Cult sorcerers was as powerful as any costumed member of the Circle, when working together with time and intelligence they could foul up many a Circle objective. As things shook out, the Circle effectively nullified Allied superhero activities in Japan proper, and the Cult of the Beast effectively nullified Circle supernatural activities outside Japan—with at least one notable exception.

THE END OF THE PATRIOTIC CULT

In early 1945, Duncan Coward's researches led him to an artifact called the Dragon Crown. This was heavy black stone object carved in the form of an over-sized crown, the carving showing intertwined dragons. Its origin was unknown, but its effects were easy to discern: it opened portals between planes of reality and allowed British Intelligence to place commandos and special agents wherever it wanted them. This process sped the Allied conquest of Germany and led to Duncan's death.

In April 1945, Germany summoned its remaining supernatural might and launched one last assault on Duncan Coward. Its objectives were to eliminate him and acquire this artifact, which would allow Hitler to evacuate huge numbers of Nazi party loyalists to another plane, where they might flourish. The assault, as meticulously planned as the one that took Evelyn Fairbanks' life, was successful, destroying Duncan and his cell. But while the surviving German sorcerers made preparations to escape to their safe house, a wild card ruined the remainder of their plan and Hitler's hopes for an inter-dimensional exodus.

Mirror, the shape-changing spy of the Circle, was at the Coward estate at the same time, on a similar mission. In a European identity, she had infiltrated the Cult of the Beast and was now in position to steal the Dragon Crown. Injured by the Germans' attack, she feigned death until she found occasion to strike. She seized the Dragon Crown and fled with it.

THE POST-WAR YEARS

With the death of Duncan Coward, the reins of the Cult of the Beast were seized by Elisabeth "Bitsy" Lindstrom, a sorceress of English and Swedish ancestry. Born 1880, she'd been with the Cult since its foundation and had gradually grown in power and skill across 65 years.

Something very interesting happened when she gathered together Duncan Coward's papers and began planning for the Cult's future. She was visited by a projection of Duncan Coward—not a ghost, more like a magical recording—and was invested with knowledge of the Cult's cell leaders and a massive charge of magical power leeched from the various cells. She learned that Duncan had planned for the Cult to continue in spite of his death; he had arranged spells whereby his successor would receive the ben-

efits he enjoyed as Cult leader. Though no anointing ceremony had occurred, she had fulfilled Coward's criteria for assumption of the leadership position.

She contacted the cell leaders and instructed them to cease activities against the Axis. She let British Intelligence believe that the Cult had died with Duncan Coward. Then she began rebuilding.

Bitsy belonged to a family that had a centuries-long history of exploitation of magic for gain. Since the middle ages, her English ancestors had practiced a kind of animal husbandry, wedding their children only to others with magical potential. Breeding, in fact, was their specialty, and the family had created many species of mystical animals and monsters for its own use.

Under Bitsy's control, the Cult abandoned all patriotic projects and concentrated on improving its fortunes. This was particularly profitable during the post-war boom and rebuilding years. In addition, Bitsy instituted a new arrangement for the Cult. Each cell would be awarded the sole right to activity in a specific geographical region—this was referred to as the "rule" of an area. Typical areas constituted a large city or a portion of a county, province, or state. Exceptions were a number of cells devoted to magical research; they would receive some of the Cult's tax revenues so they didn't have to waste their magic on money-making schemes.

Rather than secretly leech power from all its members, the Cult would now acknowledge that some power of each of its members rose to the cult ruler. However, portions also rose no farther than cell leaders and other special positions within the society. This meant that cell leaders had more power than their own abilities and mere politics brought them, and competition for those roles became keen.

Bitsy set up the set of titles and duties still employed by Cult leaders:

- The overall leader was the Beast-King or Beast-Queen; Bitsy was the first. This role received the lion's share of power from the Cult's pyramid scheme.
- Leaders of the few research cells were called Beast-Lords and Beast-Ladies, and received somewhat less power than the Beast-King/Queen.
- Cell leaders were called Beast-Knights, and received some power as well.

Bitsy Lindstrom was drawn to the sudden eruption of magical power that took place in New York City in 1964. Unfortunately for her, this was the arrival of a monstrous dimension-crossing destroyer called the Entropic God, and she became one of its first victims.

Her younger sister, Eleanor, attempted to seize control of the Cult via the method instituted by Bitsy—a successional duel of wizards. However, Eleanor was beaten by MacKenzie Bannister, the former Hong Kong cell leader, and grudgingly accepted a position as Beast-Lady in charge of the Cult's breeding program.

THE 1960S AND BEYOND

In the last three decades, the Cult has experienced slow, steady growth and the implementation of increasingly thorough security measures. Despite the wishes of many members, the Cult has remained very low-key, never getting involved in the superhero arena. This choice on Bannister's part is because there is no profit in constant warfare when any death reduces available magical knowledge. In a world where mutants and technicians can achieve levels of power equal to the greatest sorcerers, it makes no sense to annoy and bring down the wrath of crusading superheroes.

MacKenzie Bannister has retained the title of Beast-King. Under his guidance, the Cult of the Beast has flourished, and there is every indication that it will continue to do so.

THE CULT TODAY

As in the past, the Cult of the Beast is an organization with a very strong English bias. The majority of cells are in the United Kingdom. There are quite a few in Canada and the United States, a few in Australia and New Zealand, and a scattering in places like Hong Kong, India, Switzerland, and Italy (these last are legacies of the Cult's WWII activities).

FRIENDS

The Cult has few friends; just about anyone who thinks kindly of the organization belongs to it. An exception was DEMON, which performed many cooperative efforts with the Cult's research cells. However, DEMON was destroyed by the Hell-Raisers, a supervillain group headed by Denier, in the summer of 1992.

In addition, certain influential people who served the British Crown and British Intelligence in World War II remember the Cult fondly. They don't believe the modern Cult has much to do with the old Cult, but might be convinced of its authenticity and be persuaded to help it for old time's sake.

DEMON

For more on DEMON, see Champions supplement **Primus and DEMON**, written by Andrew Robinson.

ENEMIES

The Cult also has few enemies, owing to its low profile. They include:

- **The Circle:** Because of the animosity that grew between the Cult and the Circle in the 1940s, and more because of the clashes between Nightwraith's family and the Cult (see Nightwraith, below), the Circle qualifies as the Cult's chief and tireless enemy.
- **Chance:** This one-time Watchlord of Earth fought the Cult many times because of its irresponsible inter-dimensional activities.
- **Mircea Dracula:** Older brother of Prince Vladislas Dracula ("Count" Dracula), he is no vampire, but a supernaturalist who does not approve of the Cult's willingness to sacrifice lives for its aims.
- **Lightrune:** The supernatural brick of Strike Force owes his origin, not to mention his inhuman condition and the death/unlife of his best friend, to the Cult of the Beast. That, and his relationship with WillowWitch, make him eager to oppose the Cult whenever he finds it.
- **Nightwraith:** An anti-occult detective who suffered at the Cult's hands for thirty years, Nightwraith works vigorously to contain and defeat it.
- **Manfried von Weintraub:** A onetime vampire and an expert on the sorceries of memory and adaptation, von Weintraub has clashed with the Cult since World War II; he wants the rest of the occult world to have access to the techniques the Cult has developed and keeps to itself.
- **WillowWitch:** Daughter of a slain Cult cell leader and target of Cult retrieval attempts for many years, WillowWitch has gradually convinced the Cult that she will never belong to them. They still clash frequently and are particularly punitive toward one another.

Knights of the Golden Cross and Knights of the Three Homelands

These are two societies who broke away from the Knights of Malta in St. Petersburg, Russia. This schism occurred at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th, when Tsar Paul I was the sole patron of the Order. The breakup occurred during a time of great changes, such as Paul I's creation of a Russian Orthodox branch of the hitherto all-Catholic Order of knights.

The first of the splinter groups, the Knights of the Three Homelands, has dedicated itself to the elimination of all Muslims, especially in Malta, Rhodes, and Jerusalem.

The second group, the Knights of the Gold Cross, is more philanthropic; they support archaeology and the preservation of artifacts, they delve into historical mysteries.

Both groups are highly secretive and accept members from all Christian denominations

Salkariah and the Sisterhood of Fire

The demoness Salkariah, a malefic being of great power, inhabits her own "mythos plane" (see page 82). Evidence shows her plane is associated with Earth-AU, but the fact that her name is only dimly remembered (in a few ancient Akkadian texts, under the name "Shalkararash"') indicates that it has been long since she was worshipped.

In 1933, two magicians named Quincey Harker and Clinton Avery (who would later become the superhero Doctor Arcane) observed certain details of Earth culture and history changing before their eyes. Correctly divining that some mystical being was meddling with the time-stream, they used Avery's abilities to travel back to the source of the changes. This led them to ancient Sumeria, around 2550 BC, shortly after the time of Gilgamesh and Enkidu. There, Harker and Avery encountered the demoness Salkariah attempting to force her way into this world and rule it. They were successful in preventing this catastrophe.

Additionally, the two magicians established an order of priestesses, the Sisterhood of Fire, which was composed of priestesses of the goddess Inanna (Ishtar). The Sisterhood monitored the signs which might indicate Salkariah's return, and maintained a guardian against her return—a warrior imbedded in

a gigantic block of a magical preservative resembling amber known as the Amphitrite Stone. The stone mystically prepared the warrior to be deadly to Salkariah. Harker and Avery did not know who the first guardian was, but described him as a huge, superior, red-headed fighter... possibly, even presumably, a son of Gilgamesh. Harker and Avery returned to the present soon after these events.

Avery, in his researches on the history of the Sisterhood, concluded that the "center"' of the Sisterhood moved to Crete a few centuries later. Around 1450 BC, at about the time of the eruption of the island of Thera, it appeared that Salkariah attempted another crossing to the Earth; if the eruption was part of these events, it was not known. Regardless, the first guardian was released. A new one was chosen: Tempis, a powerful Minoan priest of the Earth-Mother, and placed in the Amphitrite Stone, evidently by the legendary figure Circe. (Tempis, revived millennia later, maintains that he was imprisoned at the order of the jealous King of Crete, and that Circe was only acting under his orders, but it seems evident now that she was a member of or assisting the Sisterhood of Fire. If she was a member, it is further possible that worship of Ishtar was not required to be an element of membership, for Circe was evidently a priestess of Hecate or Helios.)

Salkariah did not make another attempt to enter the world for some 3500 years. The center for the Sisterhood of Fire apparently moved to Egypt around 1200 BC and survived the social collapse at the end of the Bronze Age in the Mediterranean. Subsequently, it seems to have been in Rome, starting about 300 BC for a period of four hundred years or more, then Constantinople. After that, the trail grows unclear.

In 1968, Dr. Avery, now paralyzed from the waist down, lived on Long Island with his daughter, son-in-law, and three-year-old granddaughter Donna. It is at this time that Salkariah struck again, killing Avery's daughter and son-in-law. Salkariah took Donna away to the demoness' own mythos plane. Avery used up much of his magical energy to reconstruct his youthful body temporarily, and followed. In Salkariah's plane, he met the demoness face-to-face for the first time, and was repelled by the chaos of her soul but attracted by her keen, questing mind and personal beauty. The demoness held him a short time, then peaceably returned his granddaughter. He left her plane; he also left her pregnant, as she had planned.

Through Salkariah's intervention, Avery returned to Earth in 1973, with an eight-year-old granddaughter who appeared only three years old. But Salkariah—or, rather, a part of her bearing her child by Avery—had briefly come to Earth in 1969, given birth to a daughter, and perished. By the time Avery returned made it back to earth, this other child was four years old.

Salkariah's babe grew into the young woman known as Sally Anderson (a.k.a. the Black Enchantress). She was infused with most of her mother's chaos and some of her power, and it seems evident that she was being used to learn about Earth and the human emotions Salkariah wanted to experience; she would probably have returned to Salkariah's plane eventually and been re-integrated into Salkariah. Sally, who was too young to cope with the chaos and power invested in her, killed two sets of foster parents through the use of a created "bogeyman," first in 1977, and again in 1982. Her third set of foster parents moved to Long Island with her and survived the rest of Sally's childhood.

The Sisterhood of Fire experienced short mystic alarms in 1968 and 1969, but their powers indicated that Salkariah had not come to this world. In 1982, several archaeologists found the Amphitrite Stone, which still contained Tempis. Later that year, Azor, patriarch of the Blood, released Tempis from his confinement for purposes only known to him. However, the chief Sister of the Sisterhood tracked down the stone and chose a new guardian, the hero called Red Archer.

Eventually the Black Enchantress began blossoming into her full powers and set about retrieving various scrolls left by Salkariah to help open and maintain a gateway between Earth and her mythos plane. At this time, Strike Force entered the picture. The Red Archer was freed and the Black Enchantress was apparently destroyed; her bogeyman servant definitely was.

Since Salkariah herself was not destroyed, the Sisterhood of Fire will continue. It is significant that the remains of the Amphitrite Stone, after Red Archer was freed, disappeared; it seems evident that the chief Sister has retrieved them and probably sealed another guardian within the Stone.

TEMPIS AND RED ARCHER

You can find a very brief description of Tempis on page 55 of the original **Strike Force**. In addition, you can find a brief character sheet for Red Archer on page 53 of the same volume. Strike Force's encounters with the Black Enchantress can be found on pages 24-25 of this book.

The Teutonic Order

This sorcerous society existed before the Second World War. They were pagan worshippers of the Norse mythos (using the Germanic names for the gods). While not Nazis per se, and separate from the Third and Fourth Reichs, their beliefs and rituals helped shape Nazi philosophy.

STRIKE FORCE MAGIC

Magic is a prevalent force in in the Strike Force setting. A number of members of Strike Force are magicians (such as Ichi-ban), or have magical origins (such as Big Pig and Man Mountain Thunder). There are also the Blood, who combine psychic and magical powers, the witches of Nice World, and an assortment of demons and other extra-dimensional beings (such as Scoff and the Mockery).

WHAT IS MAGIC?

Magic is both a form of energy and the techniques used to manipulate it. Magical energy has distinctive characteristics that allow it to be recognized and utilized by people with the capacity to do so. Magical energy can be used to achieve a broader set of ends than most other forms of energy—the general idea being that if someone has (a) access to enough raw magical energy, (b) sufficient skill, and (c) sufficient capacity to manipulate the energy, they can literally accomplish anything, from the creation of life to the destruction of entire universes.

Magical techniques are mental processes that allow someone with the ability to manipulate magic a structure by which to do so. Often—usually, in the case of older traditions of magic—they involve elements such as static objects, manipulation of objects, body movements, spoken words, and arrangement of participants.

Magical energy, when present or used, leaves a sort of "residue" behind that skilled practitioners can detect. Raw magic, unshaped by technique, is much the same regardless of where in the universe it manifests. Technique, however, alters the "flavor" of the residue, so that a practitioner schooled in or familiar with many techniques can make conclusions about the wielder of the magic that left the residue. However, magical energy in other universes will have other flavors.

Another way to look at this would be to compare magic to explosives. In general, when used (i.e. detonated), an explosive will do damage to its surroundings and leave residue and other physical evidence in its surroundings. Experts can examine this evidence and come to conclusions about the device and type of explosive (the magic) being used and even about the skill of the bomber (sorcerer).

Explosives are chemical compounds, and the precise mix of those chemicals often acts as pointers to the explosives' origin; in addition, manufacturers of many explosives add irrelevant chemicals to the compounds in order to make it easier to trace their origins. In a similar fashion, the magical examiner can examine the breakdown of magical energies and learn things about their origin; in addition, many magical instructors teach their students techniques that leave residues pointing to the school of magic and individual practitioner, to make it easier for the teacher to track down the source of magical practical jokes, among other things. (More accomplished students learn to divest themselves of these telltale traces, making it more difficult to determine precisely who did what.)

Just as time and weathering can remove traces of explosives, magical residue fades with time, much like a slowly-evaporating liquid. A minor spell-casting can be detected only for a few minutes or hours, while magical residue from a cataclysmic battle of the gods can be detected thousands of years later.

Explosives leave other types of physical evidence behind, such as breakage of surroundings and bomb materials. Magic often does much the same, but not always.

For instance, if a sorcerer casts an explosive ball of fire, when the spell goes off it will do heat damage to its surroundings and perhaps catch them on fire. Windows in the vicinity may be blown out. An examiner looking at the scorch marks, burn patterns, breakages, and other evidence could come to helpful conclusions about the intensity of the fire, force of the explosion, and so on—but note that this can be accomplished with an ordinary forensics skill rather than magical senses being employed.

MAGIC RULES

In HERO System terms, these elements are often defined as the following Limitations: Focus (possibly with Arrangement or Immobile added in), Gestures, Incantations, and Requires Multiple Users.

As another example, a sorcerer might regularly change himself into a cat. Once he has changed himself back into his true form, there is little physical evidence to point at magic use. However, cats shed hair and sometimes lose portions of their claws. A skilled forensic magician might find such cast-off evidence; if it did not return to human form when the sorcerer did, it will still have magical residue on it, allowing the examiner to make educated guesses about the origin of the fur and claws.

Measuring Magical Might

A person's magical might is roughly measured by three criteria: Capacity, Energy, and Knowledge.

Capacity is the amount of magical energy the character can channel at any given time—his maximum energy bandwidth, in communications terms. In game terms, it is represented by the Active Points of magical powers the character can use simultaneously. (Characters with power sets linked by the Unified Power Limitation are usually high-capacity characters.)

Energy is the amount of personal magical energy the character possesses. In HERO System terms, this is represented by things such as the character's END Characteristic, Endurance Reserves, and the Charges Advantage/Limitation, and boils down to the amount of time the character can sustain an output of energy.

Knowledge is the sophistication and versatility of the magical techniques the character knows. In game terms, this is represented by the character's magical skills and by the structure of his powers. (Characters with single powers or simple power sets linked by the Unified Power Limitation often rate low in Knowledge; those with extensive Multipowers rate higher; those with Variable Power Pools tend to rate highest.)

Magical supers tend to have very high values in all three criteria. Many magical supers have extraordinary knowledge, allowing them to accomplish almost anything with their magic; have the capacity to channel a lot of energy at once and thus accomplish these tasks quickly; and have the personal energy to do so without relying on the largesse of more powerful supernatural beings.

However, this is not the case with the majority of magicians, who have far more modest levels of Capacity and Energy regardless of their level of Knowledge. Interestingly, the majority of magical knowledge innovation takes place among less powerful magicians, as they often have to develop special techniques to get around their limitations of power.

A Brief History of Magic on Earth-AU

Many of the techniques of magic manipulation were already firmly established by the time the recording of history began in the Near East and Africa in the third and second millennia BCE. However, magical scholars have reconstructed a likely pattern of the development of magical knowledge, even deep into prehistory.

Prehuman

Scholars are certain that sapient beings existed on Earth before the rise of the primates that were humanity's ancestors. These beings were not living creatures; they were magical intelligences that were probably associated with wormlike pre-Cambrian life-forms. Those life-forms themselves were probably not intelligent, but were capable of interacting with the magical intelligences. The relationship between the two sets of beings was probably somewhere between that of mankind to its gods and pets to their masters.

With the extinction, natural or not, of the wormlike beings, the magical intelligences disappeared from the earth's surface. It is believed that they retreated to havens deep beneath the earth and entered a state of hibernation. They were awakened, eons later, when they felt the quickening of magical energy forms far above them. However, the energy was being manipulated by mankind, an entirely different class of creature, and these magical beings knew nothing but hatred for them. But since mankind was the sole wielder of magic, these creatures, now called the Cthonian Demons, hated humanity, but at the same time, needed them.

Since reawakening some 20,000 years ago, the Cthonian Demons have interacted often with humanity. They are incapable of imparting much knowledge to humans, or of communicating effectively with them; their minds are too different, their perceptions too strange. However, demons can sometimes impart raw magical power and understanding of their desires to humans, and can change the nature of some humans to make communications easier. Several demon-worshipping cults began in this manner.

Early Man

The examination of ritual objects carved and used by Neanderthal man makes it clear to scholars that some Neanderthals could wield magic. These objects were used as part of the earliest and most widespread forms of magic—rituals conducted by a tribal priest or shaman in order to beg the aid of powerful beings, or even merely begging that the tribe be ignored by those beings. As these rituals evolved they were eventually designed to call up a powerful being and make a deal with this being for magical power (such deals including pacts of servitude, the offer of sacrifices, and the ever-popular selling of one's soul). Finally, the most advanced rituals of this sort ignored the begging and deal making, and concentrated on channeling the being's power directly. The change from begging, to appeasement, to negotiation came from changes in the nature of the powerful god-like beings early man worshipped. This form of magic first appeared in the Nile and Tigris-Euphrates river valleys, then gradually spread elsewhere.

Other forms of early magic included the sacrifice of animals, people, and objects. This brought forth magical power all its own, and became a popular method for quick access to magical energy. As time passed, man also recognized the laws of homeopathy (or similarity) in magic. In other words, in order to topple a wall, the magician might need to knock over a symbolic model of the same wall; or, in order to make an invisible knife, the magician needs to start with a dagger made of glass. Later, as man's mastery of magic continued to improve, some of the need for similarity was set aside, and magicians concentrated on complex field manipulation, altering the flow of magic directly.

Later Man

Magic became codified during the millennia that passed between the initial attempts at magical ritual and the recognizable schools of magic that exist in the modern world. The Chinese, for example, developed alchemy and celestial calligraphy (the art of writing spells on slips of paper). Japan developed rituals for calling on the kami, the spirits inhabiting Japan. Egyptian magic often deals with putting the dead to rest and properly sending them on to the afterlife. Native American magic had the caster ask the animals to borrow some of their power. Europeans developed their own form of alchemy, as well as hermetic magic (derived from the writings of Hermes Trismegistus) and theurgy (calling upon the energies of one or more gods). Theurgy, in turn split, with "pagan" forms calling up the Greek and Roman gods, and Christian theurgy calling upon the powers of various biblical angels.

Modern Man

In the modern era, magic is alive and well, with multiple schools, traditions, superhero (and villain) groups, and individual sorcerers. A brief listing of the more prominent entities is a follows:

- **The Circle:** this mystical group has had four incarnations. First, there was a group who defended the island of Japan during World War II. Then, there was the 1960s group who gathered to seek answers to many metaphysical questions. In the 1980s, the Circle was a group of magical superheroes based out of New York. However, this group was destroyed and then reformed in the 1990s as superheroic students of matters arcane.
- **The Cult of the Beast:** a magical society that exists strictly for the personal gain of its members. The "Beast" in the cult's name refers not to any one specific being, but to unleashing a member's inner "beast" through supernatural arts. The Cult of the Beast figures in the origins and Hunteds of many, many supers in the Strike Force setting, including Aaron's PC Lightrune.
- **The Draculas:** Vladislas, Radu, and Mircea. Vladislas and Radu are vampires, but not much as they appear in film (in fact, Vlad regularly bankrolls Hollywood vampire movies, the better to spread disinformation about the vampire race). Mircea is a sorcerer, the lonely headmaster of the Scholomance. The Draculas interact with one another and the rest of the world in interesting ways.
- **The Hell Raisers:** a psychotic supernatural supervillain society led variously by Denier (a mortal man transformed into a demonic form through a magical bargain) and Mayhem (a 1950s equivalent of Denier, but much more subtle and ultimately more destructive).
- **The High Council:** a set of magical inheritances that pass from holder to holder across the centuries. Read more about the High Council below.
- **The Sisterhood of Fire:** a group of sorceresses who protect the Earth from certain types of magical invasion. However, they are often as ruthless and cruel as the villains the heroes of Strike Force must regularly face.

THE HIGH COUNCIL

This is a set of four magical entitlements that have passed from heroic soul to heroic soul throughout the ages. They are the Watchlord/Watchlady, the Hearthlord/Hearthlady, the Shieldlord/Shieldlady, and the Spearlord/Spearlady. Each of these individuals are always human.

The possessor of one of these entitlements can train a replacement and transfer his entitlement to that apprentice before he dies. Or, if he dies before the transfer, the entitlement will seek a worthy soul to possess. The entitlements don't possess any sort of intellect, but are driven by a unified cause to protect the world and/or dimension from any forces that would attempt to destroy it. Each individual has specific traits and abilities related to the nature of the entitlement they possess. Also, depending on the method of transference, members of the High Council may or may not be aware of their individual histories or each other's' existence, but a certain amount of luck or research will uncover some of the history of the Council.

The Watchlord/Watchlady is charged with the protection of this reality from attacks and attackers originating from outside it. Powers of this entitlement include the retention of all abilities at full power when outside this dimension—even in dimensions where magic is reduced or adversely affected.

The Hearthlord/Hearthlady represents a people—in other words they are a national identity incarnate—and seeks to raise that people to stand as a true representative of mankind. Powers include the ability to motivate individuals and groups, to draw strength from the populace, and to impart strength to the people when they need it. King Arthur was probably a Hearthlord, whether or not he was aware of it. Hitler was aware of the Hearthlord and thought he was the wearer of this entitlement, though he wasn't.

The Shieldlord/Shieldlady is charged with the creation of heroes, arming them, and motivating them to act. Powers include the ability to transform, to heal, and to strengthen. The Lady of the Lake was probably a Shieldlady, whether or not she was aware of it.

The Spearlord/Spearlady is a pure warrior, full of passion, unstoppable in battle. Powers include incredible durability and might. The Spearlord sometimes falls under the influence of the Hearthlord and acts as his champion, regardless of which one is older or more powerful. Lancelot, for example, was a Spearlord.

Which one of the four is most powerful at any given time is determined based on a number of random factors, including the age of the individual and their overall experience acting as one of the High Council.

In addition to the four primary members of the High Council, there are also a number of Captains; men and women visited by lesser manifestations of the same impulses and energies. Watch-Captains, Hearth-Captains, Shield-Captains and Spear-Captains tend to have mystical powers and impulses related to the various High Council Offices. They are drawn to the members of the High Council and each tends to have one remarkable ability. Some break away and carry their power with them. The Sisterhood of Fire is a Watch-Captain legacy. Mircea Dracula is at this rank, and, owing to his longevity, was years ago charged with being the Memory of the High Council. He seeks out members and brings them together when the titles transfer without knowledge of the rest of the High Council.

WHO CAN LEARN MAGIC?

The development of magic is akin to the development of the sciences, but flipped. When dealing with magic, the artistic temperament of the right brain is more useful then the rational left brain. Thus, the more scientific the study of magic, the less likely it is the observer can grasp it. In addition, a practitioner of magic has to be born with the aptitude; one cannot learn magic if one has no aptitude. Finally, the level of aptitude determines the amount of power one can channel. There are a few exceptions to this rule, however. The Japanese sorcerer Matagashiman, for example, may have actually learned how to infuse a non-magical individual with magical potential (in this case, Ichi-ban of Strike Force). A person can acquire the aptitude if he undergoes a radical change, often a magical transformation of some type. However, generally such aptitudes are limited to a certain type, flavor, or element of magic. Thus people who have undergone such a transformation seldom become masters of all magic, but may be very skilled and/or powerful with regards to a very specific type of magic.

MAGICIAN CAREER PATHS

A magician has two overall paths to follow through out their careers.

- They may take the path of the scholar. If they do so, they'll slowly grow older, eventually welcoming death, the afterlife, and possibly a rebirth. Sensei, from the Circle, is one such individual.
- They may take the path of the shaper. By doing so, the magician will tend to shape himself through magic, gradually becoming less human, and often losing touch with humanity. Eventually—perhaps after centuries—the shaper will seek his destiny elsewhere. Ichi-ban, from Strike Force, is an example of a shaper.

In the Strike Force universe, the careers and power structures of magicians (specifically PC magicians) tend to follow certain paths. However, not all such characters follow this path, but the majority do.

The novice superhero-level magician tends to be built with a Multipower, few or no other powers, and a set of skills appropriate to his mystical background. The Multipower typically has a base of around 60 Active Points.

As he gains in experience, the Multipower will grow, both in the points spent on the reserve and the number and strength of the slots within it. He tends to learn skills pertaining to specific fields of magic: cultural magic, magic dealing with limited special effects (air, earth, fire, and so on), warding magic, and so on. Simultaneously, the character tends to begin devoting Character Points to buying some powers separately—often ones that provide him with some defenses and additional senses at all times. In many cases, the character is simply breaking them out of his Multipower and making them separate powers.

At a certain point, the really dedicated magician switches over to a Variable Power Pool, using an extensive but well-defined list of spells. However, in the case of Ichi-ban, after a time the character wasn't limited to a list of spells. Instead, he had to create each new spell in accord with a strict set of defining characteristics that made it hard to simply whip up a new spell to solve every situation. In effect, the magicians of Earth-AU are sculptors, mystically modifying their bodies in much the same way some cyberneticists and nanotech experts do using technology.

Those characters who are not traditional magicians might instead confine themselves to a finite number of magical powers. Since they may wish to use most (or all) of their spells at the same time, the magician may forego the VPP route, instead using the Unified Power Limitation to link all of their powers and spells together. In addition, there are some very experienced magicians to whom magic use is a sideline study and thus they never abandon the Multipower framework.

It is presumed that a magician's power waxes or wanes when he travels into alternate dimensions. In dimensions much like Earth-AU, the character will have power levels identical to those on his native world. In others, he may have greater or lesser power... or he might have none at all. It is a measure of Earth-AU's greatest magicians that they retain most or all of their power in universes where magic just doesn't work for other, lesser, mages.

In general, magicians tend to be physically weaker than most other types of characters, but use their Power Frameworks to augment their Characteristics and achieve spectacular ends. This means that a mugger catching a magician by surprise with a baseball bat can sometimes wipe him out, and Strike Force has often had to rescue mage-teams. On the other hand, the mage-teams, with a little advance warning, can accomplish things no one else can, and Strike Force has also often called upon them for favors.

SUPERNATURAL ENTITITES

Aaron carefully avoided presenting any specific religious philosophy as being "the ultimate truth" within Earth-AU. In short, the characters of the Strike Force universe were in no better a position than the people of the real world to comprehend the meaning of life, the existence of a one true God, or the possibility of an eternal afterlife. However, they are sure of a few things that most of us are not. For example, between the mortal world and the ultimate fate of mortal beings, there's an intermediate phase.

Ghosts

The existence of ghosts, though debated by theologians and the common population, has been considered a fact by superheroes for almost as long as there have been superheroes. In addition, the members of Strike Force have fought powerful ghosts, and one member of the team, Macabre, makes use of ghosts in order to wield her full range of powers.

All ghosts appear to be an energy matrix preserving some of the personality and goals—and in some rare cases even the skills and memory—of a person who has died. Few ghosts can intellectualize; the prevailing theory is that this is because the very machinery of thinking, the brain, is lost to them. The few ghosts that have demonstrated the ability to think (among them Frederick Rutherford I, the ghost-companion of Macabre), seem to be able to do so because of a long symbiotic relationship with a living being; perhaps they are able, through a psychic link, to make use of their associate's mental processes. Movies and TV series about thinking, intelligent ghosts, who are pretty much human beings with insubstantial bodies, are nothing more than whimsical fiction.

The ghost energy matrix appears to be scalable and cannot be destroyed from outside. Few supers or scientists have had much luck draining ghosts of their energy; those that have managed to do so have not been able to destroy ghosts in this way. Ghosts drained of energy collapse into smaller and smaller traces, but over time regain their energy by drawing ambient heat out of the air. Some knowledgeable theologians assert that this indicates that the ghost is the same as a soul (in the Christian sense of the word).

Most ghosts are bound to a specific geographical area—usually no more than an acre in size, generally corresponding to the place where the person lived

most of his life or, on occasion, died violently. They don't appear there all the time; most of the time, they appear to be contracted into their smallest, trace forms, emerging at random times. They resume their full size through the absorption of heat from the surrounding air, resulting in the "cold spots" noted by many investigators of haunted houses.

Ghosts usually have specific needs or goals that drive them. Often, this is a lack of acceptance of death (some don't even realize they have died). Sometimes it's a need for revenge, a need to watch living children reach adulthood or escape a dangerous situation, or an extraordinary tie to a loved one.

Many (possibly all) people issue forth a ghost upon death. Generally, only the rare human with the ability to detect ghosts even when the ghosts are invisible will see this. These spirits usually do not linger long; most depart for the unknown next world after a few moments—at most, a minute or two. Some artificial beings (synthetic life-forms and even robots) have issued ghosts upon death; this has only happened with beings that achieved self-awareness and progressed intellectually and emotionally beyond their original programming or designed instincts. Others, sometimes within the same android or robot series, have not.

On Earth-Kaiser, a parallel world visited many times by the Strike Force heroes, a much more powerful type of ghost was discovered—essentially a "super-ghost." These beings inhabited a psychic plane adjoining the earth, living in a kind of uneasy orbit around the world. They had some of the characteristics of ghosts; though they had no memories, they did possess the ability to intellectualize; they carried with them a tremendous package of psychic energy. On occasion, two of these spirits would appear on the mortal world and bond with a human being, with their energy packages transforming their new hosts into superhumans. Subsequently, psychics looking at these Spirit-Men would detect two spirits within them, though fortunately the spirits did not tend to war with one another.

This is the one known example of the bonding of ghosts with living beings. Other than with these super-spirits, no one has had much luck bonding a ghost with a mortal body—natural or artificial, currently possessed of a spirit or not. However, there is one important exception to this statement: pagan gods and demons.

Pagan Gods and Demons

The heroes of Earth-AU have on many occasions encountered immortal or quasi-immortal magical beings referred to as "gods" or "demons." There does not seem to be any qualitative difference between gods and demons, other than this: If you worship or at least respect one of these beings, it's a god; if you reject or revile it, it's a demon. Some of these beings become permanently demonic in the theological record because the civilizations that revered them were destroyed by the civilizations that wrote the history.

Whole pantheons of beings closely corresponding to the gods of pagan mythology do exist. In most cases, these gods live on "pocket dimensions" or "mythospheres" (see page 82) corresponding closely to the appearance and topography of the historical nations where they were worshipped; the mythosphere occupied by the Greek gods, for instance, closely resembles the Mediterranean nations of the Bronze Age, Archaic, and Classical eras.

Comics and Magic

The comics take a curious look at magic. For starters, it's a real force in just about any superhero universe you can think of (except for a few specific settings in which super powers tend to have a common origin). In addition, most comic settings have various divine beings running around, usually from the Greek and Norse mythos. On top of that, mystic artifacts abound, as do strange realms, extra-dimensional entities, and creatures that are demons in all but name and form.

The end result is that on some levels, comics universes seem almost like fantasy settings, albeit one in which magic is not only prevalent, but very powerful. Certain comic book sorcerers look more than capable to cast the same sort of spells one normally associates with high-level fantasy RPG magicians, while their foes often seem to have walked right out of the pages of your favorite monster manual.

What does this mean for you? It means you have a number of questions to answer if you decide to make magic a major force in your games. Questions like "what is it" and "where does it come from" can provide background elements and long-term plot points for characters and your campaign. Deciding if gods exist and what they are (and how they interact with Earth) can allow you create numerous supers, artifacts, and realms. In addition, if there's magic, there's the supernatural, which allows you to introduce ghosts, vampires, werewolves, and numerous other entities.

STRIKE FORCE SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

With the removal of the Governor, Earth-AU has seen the development, introduction, and widespread use of various high-advanced technologies.

Antigravity

In the late 1930s, a gifted scientist made a once-in-a-lifetime discovery. He created an extremely complex metal compound. This compound was an ordinary-looking metal that looked much like and had the same approximate hardness of silver, and under ordinary circumstances was completely unremarkable. But, when subjected to a trickle of direct current, the metal repelled gravity!

Unfortunately for its inventor, the Governor's influence kept the process from being a reproducible result. Thus it wasn't patented decades later, in the late 1980s, after Strike Force drove the Governor away. Now that the process could be reliably demonstrated, it made its inventor an instant millionaire. The compound was used to create "flatblimps" (basically a sheet of compound with a gondola set underneath), flying cars, and similar modes of transport.

While incredible useful, the compound does have limitations. It only allows a object to go up, down, or hover. If used as part of a vehicle, then there must be an additional form of propulsion.

Artificial Intelligence

There are numerous examples of artificially intelligent and self-aware computers, robots, and other devices in Earth-AU. Many were made by the Producer, who built dozens (if not hundreds) of sophisticated androids during his career. In addition, he also created heroes such as Jack Straw (of Strike Force) who were self-aware robots.

The first known example of an artificially intelligent being was created in 1939. Known as "Radiance," it was a living chemical laboratory with rotating, battering fists. Built by Dr. Zacharia Albritton, Radiance only managed to discover his creator after Albritton committed suicide in 1957. Recovering the body, Radiance spent the next two decades building an android body for Albritton's brain, leading to creation of the Producer in 1977.

Live Paper

This isn't actually paper, but instead a foldable sheet of full-color LEDs. The sheet can accept cabled and wireless data transmissions from defined sources (such as cameras, smart phones, laptops, and so on). The standard size sheet is only 4"x7" but larger (and more expensive) sheets are available. Live Paper is used to read books, create maps that update on the fly, view digital media (such as films), to preview camera photos, and so on. Strike Force members carry a sheet of Live Paper and use them to receive updates from their standard-issue communicators.

HEALTH AND MEDICINE

Below are some examples of technology in the field of health and medicine:

Antigeria

One of the post-Governor changes in Earth-AU is the abrupt appearance of terribly effective, sophisticated and expensive antigeria medicines. Several of these treatments are being pioneered out of the Dirkson Institute on Samana Cay as a result of collaboration between Overlord and Vixen of Strike Force. The Dirkson Institute treatments break down into three categories, popularly called Brute-Force, Glaucazine, and Gene Replacement.

BRUTE-FORCE TREATMENTS

These treatments, developed by Overlord, are chemical and surgical treatments designed to detoxify and strengthen the patient and, possibly, to prepare the patient for Glaucazine treatments. They include:

- Blood cloning in vitro followed by complete blood replacement for the patient.
- Chemical detoxification of major organs.
- Organ cloning in vitro, followed by organ replacement surgery (since the new organ is a clone of the old, rejection by the body's immune system is nearly impossible).

- Standard pharmaceutical and surgical treatments of old-age ailments that can be so treated.

These treatments tend to improve the patient's health, give a boost to the patient's immune system, and, if the patient is old and weak, strengthen him. They also tend to add several years to an elderly patient's potential lifespan. In addition, they serve as preparation for later Glaucazine treatments, if the patient is in that program. They do not improve ailments such as nerve damage, joint damage from arthritis and rheumatism, and so on.

GLAUCAZINE

The Glaucazine-7 drug was developed by Dr. Felicity Daniels (i.e., the Strike Force heroine Vixen) based on the research she did into her own regenerative abilities. Vixen also studied shark regeneration (in collaboration with marine biologist Dr. Darren Mallory—a.k.a. Argus of Westguard) and other mutant regenerative systems.

In short, the Glaucazine drug gives an incredible temporary boost to the body's natural immune and healing systems. When properly used, Glaucazine treatments allow a patient to regenerate any sort of damage, including damage to nerve tissues. When improperly used, the drug results in quick destruction of the body's immune system—a sort of instant but non-communicable AIDS.

A patient treated with Glaucazine will see an immediate and comprehensive boost to the immune system, lasting several hours, as well as regenerating physical damage—including failing organs and damaged tissues. To regenerate a limb would require abrasion surgery on the healed tissues; the patient would then have to be kept on a trickle dose of Glaucazine for several days, under constant and very careful medical supervision.

To rejuvenate a geriatric patient from old age to healthy youth—say, a biological age of about 25, regardless of the cosmetic age—the medical staff prepares the patient through the Brute-Force techniques described above. Then, in a series of steps and operations, the staff deals with each geriatric problem the patient faces. The initial dose of Glaucazine boosts the immune system; if the patient is hooked up to detox machinery while undergoing this first step, the patient's organs will finish regrowth and detoxification. Each subsequent step consists of defining a problem, surgically abrading or preparing the area needing correction, and then introducing Glaucazine into the system, leading to regeneration and repair of that problem area. For instance, surgical abrasion of arthritic joints allows the drug to repair the joints to a youthful status. Chemical abrasion (acid treatment) of the scalp followed by Glaucazine introduction results in reversal of pattern baldness and growth of new hair. In this fashion, the staff can, step-by-step, return an aged patient to physical youth.

Obviously, not all patients will be psychologically fit to undergo such extensive treatments. Even among the large proportion of patients who are psychologically fit to take the treatment, about 7% of the population is allergic to Glaucazine. Patients with high blood pressure cannot use Glaucazine; it would kill them as described above, burning out their immune systems and leaving them subject to every germ and virus they encounter.

A problem with the drug is that it is very, very addictive. The hours-long rush granted by a regular dose is very seductive to normal people. And use of Glaucazine without very thorough, very expensive medical supervision inevitably—after only a few doses—results in the destruction of the entire immune system.

GENE REPLACEMENT

Currently, the theoretical human potential lifespan on Earth-AU is about 150 years. This would require that the patient live under no stress, eat only the most healthful of foods all his life, live in the most healthy of environments, exercise daily, never be injured, and so on. Today, even in the areas with the best medicine available, the combination of environment, foods, and lack of care drops the average lifespan to about 70—with a more likely potential of about 100.

Overlord has developed a gene replacement treatment which triples the theoretical human potential lifespan to about 450 years. This doesn't automatically result in people living to about 225 years—a person who is likely to drop dead at 50 of clogged arteries will do exactly the same thing, even with three times the potential lifespan. The long-life gene does not interfere with the body's tendency to develop cancers or for one's overall health to break down due to old injuries. But someone who keeps himself healthy is likely to live quite a long time.

The treatment consists of selection of one of several long-life gene sets that Overlord has encountered in his career, development of a gene-replacement virus (one which gradually affects every cell in the patent's body, replacing the old gene set with the new) tailored specifically to the patient, and introduction of the virus into the patient. The process takes seven to ten years—but it is a permanent genetic change, and can be passed on to the patient's children (reliably, only to those born after the replacement process is complete).

USED IN COMBINATION

When used in combination, the three treatments are amazingly effective—the Institute can take a geriatric patient, boost him to the best health he can have at his current age, then (probably) use Glaucazine treatments to return him to a biological age of about 25, then introduce the gene-replacement factor into his system, tripling his potential lifespan. With regular Glaucazine treatments at, say, ten-year intervals, the patient's life can be greatly extended—so extended that the Institute's doctors cannot yet accurately gauge it.

It is possible that the body will eventually build up a tolerance to the Glaucazine treatments, at which point aging will be inevitable. It is also possible that no such tolerance will ever develop, making the patients ageless—though, obviously, not immortal, as accident, injury, and many diseases will still be fatal. AIDS and genetic diseases such as muscular dystrophy cannot be cured by these treatments—though multiple sclerosis can be somewhat slowed by Glaucazine, which will renew muscle tissue.

TREATMENTS IN DEVELOPMENT

Treatments currently in development may allow the patient to have a sort of "staggered age pattern.'" It may, in the near future, be possible for a patient to have the health of a 25-year-old but the cosmetic age he chooses, from 25 to great old age—but the old age will be somewhat belied by the presence of healthy youthful muscle.

TREATMENT COSTS

Now, the bad news. The treatments are very expensive. The drugs cost a lot of money in materials and equipment to develop; the treatments require constant supervisions by highly-trained medical personnel.

In general, treatment cost (in pre WWIII US dollars) will go something like this:

- **Brute-Force Series:** $100,000
- **Organ Cloning & Replacement:** $85,000
- **Glaucazine Series:** $50,000 per 10-year rejuvenation step, or limb regeneration, or organ series repair
- **Long-Life Gene Replacement:** $120,000
- **Cosmetic Repair (Youthful Appearance):** $25,000

An example: George Witherspoon, 90-year-old model-agency head, former Texas Ranger, arthritic, deaf in one ear, and confined to a wheelchair, was the first full rejuvenation patient. He received this set of treatments:

- **Brute-Force Series:** $100,000
- **Liver Replacement:** $85,000
- **Glaucazine: Arthritis Repair:** $75,000
- **Glaucazine: Hearing Repair:** $75,000
- **Glaucazine: Age from 90 to 30:** $300,000
- **Gene Replacement:** $120,000
- **Cosmetic Repair:** $25,000
- **TOTAL COST:** $780,000

So, for three-quarters of a million dollars, the ailing Witherspoon is restored to biological health and youth and has the potential to live another 60 years—or even more, potentially.

In any case, even the simplest repairs are very costly. These prices are not the jacked-up costs of the first person with the technology; they reflect the minimum costs of necessary materials, personnel, equipment and facilities, plus a fair profit; they are, in fact, a fair representation of the costs that any rejuvenation facility is likely to charge.

AVAILABILITY

The Brute-Force and Gene Replacement techniques were spelled out in great detail when Overlord wrote his treatise on genetic-experimentation techniques. Strike Force then helped distribute this document, with the Glaucazine formulae appearing in print by the end of the first quarter of 1988 (soon after WWIII). Overlord and Vixen have freely distributed this knowledge so as not to be in the position of the man who finds and hides the Fountain of Youth:

with the information at everyone's disposal, no one will need to destroy the Federation of Atlantia in order to get it.

The Dirkson Institute began accepting patients in early 1988. By mid-1988, other facilities in various parts of the world were experimenting with the treatments and drugs, and by late 1988 other rejuvenation clinics opened across the globe.

There are illegal facilities manufacturing and distributing Glaucazine as a recreational drug, unfortunately. It is so addictive that it represents a tremendous source of income for organized crime; also unfortunately, anyone who takes two or three doses in short order (outside the care of a physician trained in its use) has destroyed his immune system and will soon die.

OTHER REJUVENATION TECHNIQUES

Obviously, the appearance of these techniques does not mean that competing techniques can't have appeared elsewhere. As a general guideline for GMs interesting in introducing other techniques, they should be as laborious and expensive as those above: Cheap, drugstore antigeria is not going to be available anytime soon, if ever.

RESULTS

Another thing for GMs to consider is the overall impact of such a process. Once word is out and a few famous individuals have undergone the treatment and endorse it, a steady flow of patients will be visiting Samana Cay and the sites of the other rejuvenation clinics. This will tend to result in the wealthy and famous living long beyond their allotted spans. This will also result in a lot of common-man resentment against the facilities and even their patients, so famous rejuvenated parties will have to be careful.

Another result is that almost any injury can be healed if the patient can be gotten to a Glaucazine treatment area fast enough. If the patient is not an alien, does not have high blood pressure, and is not of the 7% of the population allergic to Glaucazine, he can be healed. Even if he is allergic to Glaucazine, certain Brute-Force treatments—specifically, the cloning of new organs in vitro—can result in biological, not prosthetic, replacement of lost limbs and organs.

Drugs

There are several drugs unique to Earth-AU. They are:

- **Blank:** A depressant, Blank is popularly considered a "date-rape" type of drug. Needless to say, it is illegal to possess as it has no real medical use.
- **Gold:** This is a name for the illegal, street-level, form of Glaucazine. Distributed by various organized crime factions, it is commonly found in larger cities. Due to the side effects of its use, it has proved popular with certain nihilist sects, who promote it as "A Great Way To Die."
- **Jensik Mutagens:** Developed by the Jensik Medical Institute, these mutagens were designed to trigger superhuman powers in test subjects. However, the success rate is very low. In one case, out of 20 test subjects, 19 died in horrible fashions. However, for those who are desperate (or have no morals) it can be used to create new super humans.
- **Tobias Toxins:** These are madness-inducing mutagens that can be delivered by any number of vectors. They were created (in part) by Louise Tobias, a.k.a. Drill-Bit and the daughter of the Man-Drill (a technology-based supervillain). Their use as a terror weapon should be apparent.

OTHER TECHNOLOGIES

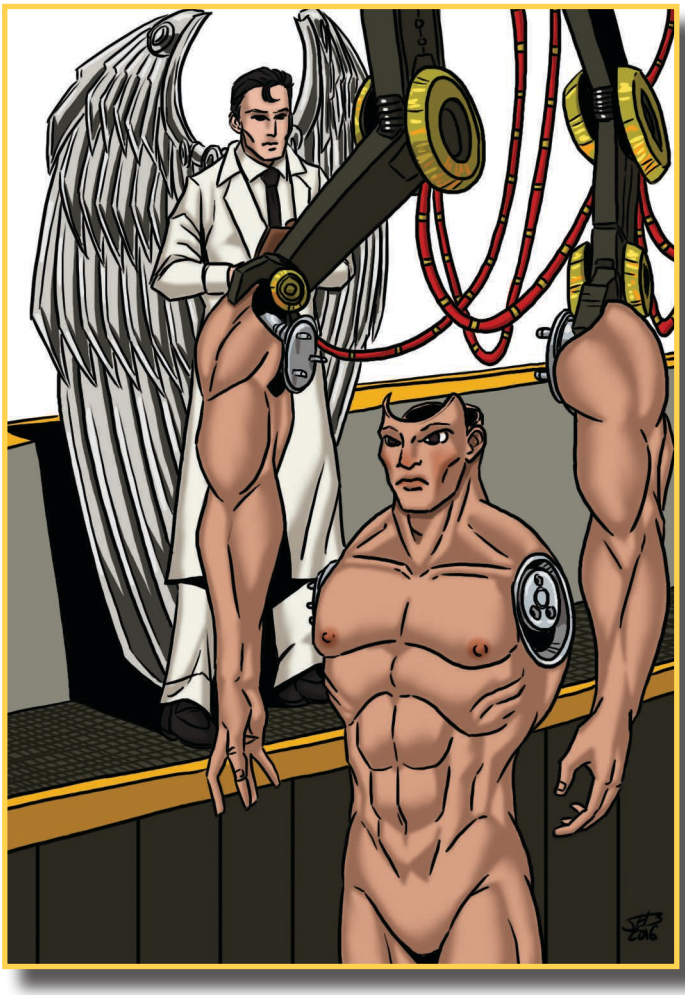
Listed below are a few samples of technologies developed on Earth-AU that do not fit into the other categories.

Ann Sterling Micro-Fusion Engines

Developed by Ann Amos Sterling (the wife of Plasma Ranger) these tiny fusion reactors are highly useful in a wide variety of applications. Strike Force, for example, used a Sterling micro-fusion device to power an artificial lighting system designed to illuminate a massive cavern. Similar reactors could be used to power space craft or emergency vehicles, supply electricity to remote bases and outposts, and so on.

Takamura Force Fields

The creation of Mary Takamura (a.k.a. SnowFalcon), this force field technology is incredibly adaptable. Among its uses are: aircraft composed entirely of computer-shaped and manipulated force fields, superhero masks, containment bottles, orbital mirrors, a flight harness, life support bubbles (mainly used in outer space), and even firearm stocks and barrels.



Teleport Technology

After World War III, teleportation technology became rather widespread. While expensive, it was very fast, reliable, and able to transport people around the world (and even to and from orbit). However, the threat of teleporting criminals also resulted in the development of teleport shielding, designed to keep people from teleporting in (or out) of a secure location. Security codes are used to allow access in such cases.

Commercial and large-scale teleportation is often by a stationary grid. Anti-teleporting shields are also stationary, but there are mobile anti-teleport field projectors. In addition, it is possible to detect and track a teleportation wake, which means it's not the totally secure escape method some have hoped it to be.

Space Exploration

Post-World War III, Earth quickly developed faster-than-light travel technology. Currently, the typical Earth starship can travel at a rate of around 11 light years a day. The typical superhero with innate FTL can "only" travel at a rate of 2.7 light years a day. For most of the galaxy, the rate is closer to 88 light years a day.

Metallurgy

Some Earth-AU-specific metals are:

- **Daniels Lattice Steel:** An incredibly tough steel formed through the precise shaping of the metal crystals during the forging process. It was invented by Robert Daniels, the father of Strike Force heroine Vixen. Although very durable, Daniels Lattice Steel is very rare, as it is hard to forge correctly. However, the rise of nanotechnology is making this process an easier one.
- **Diamond-Plate:** A synthetic diamond sheeting, this material is an increasingly common reinforcement for steel devices, tools, and weaponry.
- **Weldable and Flexible Ceramics:** A creation of Earth-Kaiser (see page 68), this technology was brought back to Earth-AU by the Strike Force hero Jack Straw.

Earth-AU Technology

One of the things that really makes Aaron's Strike Force universe interesting is Aaron's willingness to let the world evolve. Unlike the published comics worlds of DC and Marvel, in which little of the technology created and used by superhumans trickles down to regular humanity, Aaron was more than willing to let his PC and NPC supers create and market new technologies.

This is an aspect of your campaign you'll need to think about when you create your world. While leaving your setting static may make it easier to GM, allowing technology to change things can make for a lot of exciting gaming opportunities. For example, you could have something akin to the armor wars from the pages of **Iron Man**, where various characters fight over powered armor technology. Or, borrow a page from the animated series of **Batman Beyond** and have criminals and crimes that specifically use and target high-technology. And if the Legion of Superheroes has proved anything—superheroes and spaceships go hand-in-hand.

STRIKE FORCE ALIENS

The Strike Force universe featured a large number of alien races. In fact, aliens were a part of the setting from the first session, as the first villain the team faced—Overlord—was himself an alien. In addition, the history of the Strike Force campaign is rife with aliens, some who acted as invaders, or would-be conquerors, or destroyers, and even protectors of the Earth. On top of this, several of the Players Characters were themselves, aliens. Once Strike Force started to engage in periodic space travel, they ended up encountering, battling, and saving an assortment of aliens. And finally, they often worked with Alien Research Laboratories, meeting and assisting even more aliens.

The bulk of the alien races found in the Strike Force universe are human. Or, more accurately, are descended from humanity. As noted in the Strike Force timeline on page 22, at some point in Earth's distant past, powerful cosmic beings gathered up samples of humanity and seeded them on a number of worlds. Some of these samples were genetically altered and augmented to better survive their new homes, while others evolved and mutated naturally. Due to their common heritage, all human-descended alien races are still able to interbreed. Curiously, this mixing of genetic strains often results in children who express superhuman powers and abilities.

TYPES OF ALIEN RACES

Aaron broke down the broad types of alien races present in Earth-AU (as well as most comic book universes) in the following manner:

- **The Bad Imperials:** These aliens rule a vast empire and are constantly adding planets to it. Earth is on their wish-list, but the superheroes keep thwarting their plans.
- **The Neutral Imperials:** Like the Bad Imperials, these aliens have an empire, but they are not quite so concerned with conquering Earth or otherwise increasing the size of their territory. At various times, they can be enemies of Terra, allies, or indifferent to them.
- **The Bad Bugs:** This is an insectile race which is inordinately hostile and scary to Terrans. Typically, they are based on an insect race which real-world humans find frightening (spiders, wasps, and so on) and are very destructive.
- **The Neutral Bugs:** Much like the Neutral Imperials, the Neutral Bugs tend to be indifferent to humanity.
- **The Good Bugs:** Less common are insectile races which are friendly to humans; usually they possessed very unusual skills.
- **The Gladiatorials:** This race, like the Roman Empire, has a fascination with gladiatorial combat, and usually interacts with other races through this trait. They tend to kidnap Terrans and members of other races to fight in their arenas. They could easily be combined with the Bad Imperials.
- **The Sneaky Invaders:** This race conquers through use of sneakiness, often by mind-controlling victims or occupying their bodies.
- **The Nice Wimps:** This is a friendly race endangered by one of the nastier ones. Superheroes usually end up defending them in interplanetary wars.
- **The Not So Nice Wimps:** Although this race is threatened by another, they don't care for superhero defenders and may try to threaten races in turn.
- **The Conquered Guys:** This is a sympathetic race that is similar to the Nice Wimps but is already conquered by one of the Imperial races. Player Character alien supers sometimes come from these races; superheroes sometimes free them from oppression.
- **The Evil Shape-Shifters:** These people tend to invade other planets by using their shape-changing powers to simulate planetary natives to assume control.
- **The Good Shape-Shifters:** Rarer than their evil counterparts, these are more sympathetic shape-shifters who evolved their powers to cope with enemies or ecological problems; they often have a member in a superhero team somewhere.
- **The Mercenaries:** This is a warlike society, often high-tech, which hires its warriors out to fight other races' wars. Such cultures can be honorable and proud of their profession; others can be treacherous thugs.
- **The Slavers:** This race's economy thrives on slavery, so its ships scour the galaxy, landing on ill-defended worlds and carrying victims off to serve on the alien's homeworld.
- **The Gengineers:** This race has usually vanished into the mists of time before the campaign starts. They once ran amok all over the galaxy, fiddling with species wherever life-forms were found. They may have been responsible for Terran primates evolving into humans, or for the first mutant genes entering the Terran gene pool and creating mythic heroes and superheroes.

- **The Pure-Energy Folk:** These races have gone beyond the need for physical bodies. Some are bright, happy intellects; some are nasty invaders.
- **The Standoffish Observers:** These races sit back and observe the goings-on in the galaxy, usually through use of front-line observers.

SPECIFIC ALIEN RACES

This section describes some of the more notable, important, or just plain unusual races found in Earth-AU.

The Hidden Races

Although technically not aliens (since they are native to Earth), the following races are sufficiently different from regular humanity, so they deserve mention in this section.

CAT PEOPLE

The "Cat People" are not an offshoot of humanity, but instead were created due to an experiment by a 6th-century wizard, a contemporary of Merlinius and Morgan le Fay. The wizard magically altered a number of Felis catus into a sentient, bipedal humanoid form. However, the felinoids proved to be poor servants and didn't feel much gratitude to the wizard for creating them. Eventually, they escaped from his service and traveled to the Balkans, where they have lived in seclusion for hundreds of years.

SEA FOLK

The ocean-dwelling Sea Folk are descended from the inhabitants of the long-vanished island of Kalliste. Possibly the first real civilization to appear on Earth, the Kallisteans were a people dependent on magic, using it to create and sustain the island of Kalliste in a portion of the Atlantic Ocean where no such island could normally exist.

At some point in prehistory the island sank, destroyed in a cataclysmic explosion. Kallistean sorcerers used their powers to grant the survivors of the disaster the ability to withstand great pressure and breathe water. Restarting their civilization, albeit underwater, the Sea Folk eventually spread to all of the world's oceans, giving rise to legends of nymphs, mermaids, and similar beings.

WINGED FOLK

Survivors of genetics tests on ancient humans, the Winged Folk dwell on an immense flying island, kept hidden from sight through advanced technology. This island has wandered all over the world, often staying several steps ahead of the onrushes of civilization. At some time in the 17th century, it was located over the North American continent, where the Winged Folk interbred with several Native American tribes, chiefly the Sioux. Winged children were reared by the Winged Folk, non-winged children by the land-bound tribes.

From at least the advent of the 20th century to 1988, the land of the Winged Folk remained over a deep-interior region of Antarctica, one of the last regions where the Winged Folk could remain mostly undetected. After World War III, a new Winged Folk king decided his people could no longer remain secret and conducted negotiations with the government of Canada. The flying island now floats above Victoria Island, large sections of which have been ceded to the Winged Folk.

The Blood

Technically an extra-dimensional race, not an interstellar one, the Blood are descended from proto-Aryan tribesmen who underwent a remarkable mutation some 10,000 years ago. Under the direction of Azor, the Blood patriarch, the tribe departed Earth for the world of Ean, not returning to Earth until the early 1920s. As a rule, the Blood possess an assortment of psychic powers, usually involving telepathy, teleportation, and energy projection. They may also have magical talents on top of that.

Dekare

Strike Force first encountered the Dekare in May of 1982, soon after forming as a team. This encounter involved helping the human survivors of the Thekhariday Confederation, a destroyed space-faring civilization, defend their rag-tag fugitive fleet from a genocidal attack by the Phyherka. A reptilian race, the Phyherka had invaded Thekhariday Confederation, conquered it, and were intent on exterminating all survivors. While attacking the Thekhariday fleet, the Phyherka also tried to invade Earth, but were defeated by the combined might of the Strike Force and the rest of the world's superhero teams. It was after this battle that Defender sold his estate to Strike Force for $1.00

and left Earth. As for the Thekhariday, while they were grateful for the assistance the superheroes of Earth gave them, also realized they couldn't comfortably integrate themselves into Terran culture and society and continued with their voyage.

About a year later, Strike Force helped the people of Dekare rebel against the TkTk Horde (found on page 65). During this time Strike Force member Vixen detected numerous similarities between the syntax of the Dekarians and of the people of the Thekhariday Confederation. Thus, it is thought that Dekare is the 'lost colony' the Thekhariday humans were searching for. In addition, it is thought that Thekhariday and Dekare people were originally from ancient Egypt (or had some sort of influence on Egyptian culture) some 6,000 to 8,000 years ago. This is due to their language having a few proto-Egyptian roots, and certain similarities in art, architecture, clothing, and so on.

K'Pok

An ancient off-shoot of humanity by way of the Shivall, the K'Pok are fairly civilized, but also enjoy fighting and warfare. In general, this affection is sublimated into warlike sports and competitions. However, one imperialistic race who mistook this affection for weakness soon discovered they were unable to defeat the K'Pok in battle.

The K'Pok keep a standing space navy and an elite scout service, and many K'Pok join mercenary forces which hire out to fight in interstellar wars. The K'Pok as a planet are at peace with just about everyone, and just about anyone can hire a K'Pok mercenary force.

ORRAD

You can find a sample K'Pok in **The Circle and M.E.T.E.** Look for Orrad.

Katari

An off-shoot of the Shivall (see page 64), the Katari come from a high-gravity world, which helps explain their size and strength. They are an ancient race, with a technological history that goes back thousands of years. During that time they have possessed, lost, and regained spaceflight technology. A warlike race, the Katari take great pleasure in martial pursuits, and enjoy fighting, hunting, and similar demonstrations of prowess. They are known as space pirates and slavers, raiding other worlds with the intent of capturing their inhabitants to serve as thralls, workers, and members of harems.

The typical male Katari stands around 5'10" and weighs a muscular 300 lbs. They have somewhat leonine features, with thick manes of hair on their head. Due to their size and arrogance they consider many other races to be "lesser" beings. For example, any children resulting from the union of a "mighty" Katari and a weaker race (such as a Terran) is known as a *kutu*, and subject to ridicule and abuse.

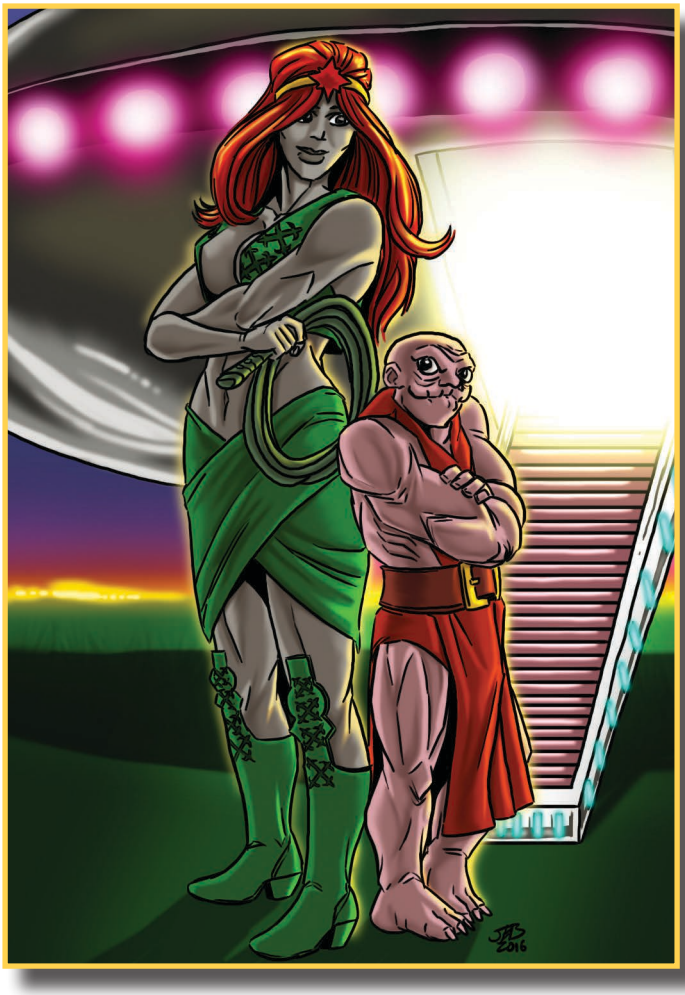
OVERLORD

Overlord is a Katari and a *kutu* (he has a human mother). You can find him on page 164.

Koualix

This immense race (they tend to weigh around 1,000 pounds) look like Terran rock crabs made from burnished stainless steel. Roughly the size of a subcompact car, Koualix have four legs and two arms that end in fearsome claws. Within the claws are the Koualix's "hands", which are used to manipulate tools and other delicate operations. They communicate via scent and can understand spoken languages, but can't speak them.

Koualix society is divided along clan and class lines. Every Koualix belongs to a clan, and a Koualix, if it wishes, can transfer from one clan to another. However, a Koualix cannot belong to or be loyal to two clans at the same time. A clan may have as few as a hundred members or as many as several hundred thousand. A Koualix also belongs to a social class within its clan. The examiners of the clan determine a member's class during its childhood based on its intelligence and level of physical perfection. The Koualix refer to their social classes by number, which range from 1 (most powerful) to 5 (least significant). The Koualix social classes are: 1 (clan leader), 2 (family leader, judge, or other noble), 3 (elite warrior, examiner, negotiator, and scientist), 4 (teacher, warrior), 5 (commoner). It is possible for a Koualix to change its social class. Those who excel can be promoted, while those who fail can be demoted (and even killed).



A very logical race, the Koualix prefer to think things over, unless time constraints require a more immediate decision. They also can purge their memories of information, forcing themselves to 'forget' knowledge. The Koualix can and do wage war, and have a systematized martial arts form based around the idea of pulling a foe in close before disabling him.

The only Koualix Strike Force encountered were found on the planet of Valhalla.

Mokar the Collector

A roughly humanoid being, Mokar apparently comes from a universe where the physical laws are very, very different from those of Earth-AU. Regardless, his mission (and passion) involves collecting and showcasing sentient animal species from all over the Galaxy. For the last 200+ years, he's scoured space around Earth's part of the Milky Way, collecting samples of sentient life. Gradually, he's come to know and appreciate the Earth as a source of different varieties of such life; because so many divergent races visit the Earth, he finds many special samples here.

The Collector lives in his mobile headquarters, the collection facility which Terran supers refer to as the "Scoop."' It is equipped with storage chambers, capture technology, and FTL travel. It is also known that he maintains a huge base, essentially a zoo, on a planet within the borders of the Shivall Empire.

Mokar collected two notable individuals—The Mighty Pinchus and Samiel—during his travels. However, both aliens were able to escape confinement at his hands and travel to Earth, eventually becoming members of Strike Force and heroes in their own right.

Samiel and the Mighty Pinchus

You can find The Mighty Pinchus (created by Kerry Gaber) in **The Circle and M.E.T.E.** You can find Samiel (created by Beth Ann Sikes) in the original version of **Strike Force**.

Shivall

The Shivall are a branch of humanity notable for being remarkably adaptable to harsh and unnatural physical conditions and environments. They achieved an agrarian culture some 50,000 years ago, meaning they are probably descended from one of the first groups of humanity to be taken from Earth and seeded elsewhere. In general the Shivall seem to be physically very tough. Mentally, they are capable of great intelligence, but on the average do not seem to be a very imaginative or free-thinking species. For the most part, the Shivall tend to be plodding, unimaginative, dogged, patient, and dogmatic. (These characteristics, while leading to dreary arts and entertainments, do lend themselves to steady scientific progress.) The Shivall seem to enjoy induced mutation experiments, especially on themselves and other human subjects, as the Katari, K'Pok, and Shivall themselves all show.

The Shivall have had spaceflight and stardrives for thousands of years, enabling them to create a sizable stellar empire. However, numerous forces—including taxing warfare and an extended economic slump— led to the collapse and destruction of this initial Shivall Empire. Many Shivall colonies regressed to pre-spaceflight technologies. Along the way, certain colonies eventually developed into the Katari, K'Pok, TkTk, and numerous other variant races. Eventually the Shivall redeveloped space-flight and and began an aggressive campaign of conquest

and colonization. This led to the foundation of the Second Shivall Empire, which is still politically viable, and is governed from the Shivall homeworld.

The People

The People are what the race of The Mighty Pinchus calls itself. The People are humanoid in shape and physically very powerful, possessing huge grasping feet which allow them to resist the effects of the impossible winds which scour their home-world.

Their pink pumice-like skin is capable of resisting tank shells. They have no external genitalia; People genitalia is located in the mouth, which is used only for consumption and reproduction. They subsist on cellulose materials, and Terran redwood seems to be the closest equivalent to their diet. The People are are telepaths and have no spoken tongue; this same telepathy allowed The Mighty Pinchus learned to understand spoken English very quickly.

Sparklies

Sparklies are energy life-forms which can form symbiotic relationships with other life forms. The Sparklies, which in their normal form can be touched (this is actually a force shield projected around the energy creature) can enter life-forms and seize control of their nervous systems. They are a conquering race and very tenacious.

Three types are known to exist, differing by temperament, methodology, and color:

- **Clear Sparklies** shun technology, choosing instead to use whatever natural means for expansion present themselves. They reproduce by means of a large fungus-like growth, which is grown in cool, moist, mildly radioactive locales. Upon maturity, a bud will split from the mass. When the buds are soaked with water they become Sparklies. Clear Sparklies tend to be silent, though they are capable of speech when in a host being. They are powerful mentalists and are capable of generating a force field strong enough to make them bulletproof, and, like all Sparklies, are intangible when in a host body.
- **Yellow Sparklies,** on the other hand, use every advantage that science can provide; however, they have become addicted to it and are unable to possess victims without the aid of mental enhancers. Much is unknown about this race because of its low reproductive rate (and consequent scarcity of examples). Generally, they will attempt to control key figures in a government rather than take over all members.
- **Blue Sparklies** are even less known than the Yellows. They appear to be geneticists; several sub-races have been reported. It is unknown whether they use tools, but it seems likely.

TkTk

The TkTk are a race of slender, physically weak, pale-skinned, and pointy-chinned humans. Sensitive to bright light, they're effectively an albino race, although they have enough melanin for some coloration to their eyes and hair. TkTk males average 5'8" in height, while females are 5'3", meaning they're roughly the same size as Earth humans.

The TkTk originated on the Shivall penal colony of Huraak ("the Rock"). Shivall felons were let loose on Huraak, made to form their own society, grow their own food, and survive under the stern management of Shivall guards. The Rock was an ugly world, cold, dark, distant from its sun, and barely habitable. Over the generations, the prisoners changed, becoming smaller and paler than the main Shivall race. They also developed a hissing, clicking language—easy to understand when whispered, hard to hear mere feet away, a perfect language for convicts under constant scrutiny.

When the Shivall Empire collapsed, the convicts of Huraak revolted and slew their captors. With no galactic government to hold them back, they utilized their captured machinery and spacecraft to get their own industries up and running. Calling themselves the TkTk ("High-High", or highest of the high, in their own dialect), they eventually conquered their world and again aimed for the stars.

Since then, they have set forth on a path of conquest. While the TkTk prefer not to engage in active warfare, they're more than willing to deal in subterfuge and manipulation to get what they want. For example, if a world is highly volcanic, they'll cause numerous eruptions to blanket the world in volcanic dust and ruin its agriculture. If a world's governments are near the brink of war, the TkTk push the governments into a devastating war and then move in to pick up the pieces. If a planet has a widespread world government, the TkTk will saturation-bomb the world's public buildings as a way of saying "Hello" and then descend to announce that they've taken over. One of their few defeats was attempting to invade the Earth in this manner.

Once in charge, the TkTk will pillage the planet's natural resources—new technology, scientific minds, prisoners, minerals, and so forth—and use the newly-conquered world as a staging area for the next assault on the next planet. By doing, they've built themselves a wide-reaching and very militaristic empire.

V'T'M

This is a species of felinoid carnivores. The V't'm are bipedal, with two arms used for rough manipulation and combat, and two others used for fine manipulation. They are strong, dense for their size (a 5'9" V't'm weighs 250 lbs), very fast, and aggressive. While their cultural doctrine is opposed to the consumption of sentient meat-creatures, they would probably do so in a pinch. Although they possess space-flight, the V't'm don't use it much. Apparently, they don't like to interact with other sentients and keep to their own planet for the most part.

T'T'SHIR

You can find a sample V't'm in **The Circle and M.E.T.E.** Look for T't'shlr.

OTHER RACES

There are numerous other races to be found in interstellar space. Some of them include: the Agaram, humans with a Roman Empire-like fascination with gladiatorial combat; the Seagar, a race of humans now ruled by a political party whose name translates as "The Mediocritists"; the shapeshifting humanoid Ranisians, the race to which Samiel (from Strike Force) belongs; and many others.

THE MULTIVERSE

The heroes of Strike Force journeyed to many alternate worlds, realities, and dimensions. In fact, dimensional travel was a staple of the campaign, and many plots centered around attacks from other dimensions, or the need to travel to another universe to find a foe (or an answer to a problem). Although Aaron created a large number of alternate planes and worlds, this section only describes those with the largest impact on the campaign.

THE CHAOS ZONE

This pocket dimension is immense, roughly the size of a globular cluster (meaning it is around 50-75 parsecs in diameter). However, it is not as densely populated with stars as a globular cluster, and thus many of the stars within the Zone have stable planetary systems in orbit around them. The Chaos Zone is home to a wide variety of peoples, cultures, creatures, and other beings. Many of these cultures have developed interstellar drives and are busily engaged in campaigns of conquest. As the name implies, the Zone's physical laws are different (sometimes very different) from those of Earth. In addition, for reasons not fully understood, access to the Chaos Zone is most easily accomplished from Earth.

PLACES IN THE CHAOS ZONE

Listed here are some of the notable locations found in the Chaos Zone.

DARKWORLD

This apocalyptic planet is ruled by Aswar the Darklord, and is the seat of his empire. Aswar rules a large portion of the Chaos Zone with an iron fist, crushing upstarts and rebellion as soon as they appear. His legions of Blast Troopers and Myrmidons are raised from birth to be fanatically loyal and will sacrifice themselves without a second thought if Aswar so commands. Aswar, while ruthless, is no fool, and doesn't kill all of his enemies. Many are captured and then digitized, so Aswar can access their minds, memories, and knowledge whenever he needs to. It was Aswar, at the Affrighter's urging, who launched the invasion of Earth, setting off World War III. Currently, his present whereabouts are unknown.

THE KARVIC EMPIRE

A high-tech culture of humans, Karvic explored, colonized, and conquered an expanse of the Chaos Zone before encountering Aswar. Now the Empire is a client state of the Darklord and its people are his to use as he pleases. During WWIII, for example, many of the bombing runs conducted against targets on Earth were carried out by Karvic forces.

There are a few Karvic refugees and prisoners-of-war living on Earth. Shelvastra, pilot for the Shadow Warriors (and Bolo's girlfriend) is from the Karvic Empire.

NARIAN

This world resides in the middle of a bizarre energy field. This field periodically draws in hapless people from Earth and other worlds. Sometimes the field lets its victims go (whereupon they return home), sometimes it doesn't. Very little is known about this field, why it pulls people in, why it lets some go, and what effect it has on its targets.

Narian is populated by a wide variety of people, some fairly human, others quite strange. There is a small town, also called Narian, on the planet's dark side. The town serves as a watering-hole for a curious collection of individuals. It is an anarchistic, dangerous, and frequently entertaining place.

ZORANDAR

Situated in one of the more empty regions of the Chaos Zone, Zorandar has had short-lived gateways been itself and Earth for millions of years. Most of these gates no longer exist—for the most part—but one or two may still open from time to time. In 1925 a party of explorers from Earth went through such a gateway and arrived on Zorandar. They found it to be populated by dinosaurs (some of them sentient and with their own civilization) as well as survivors of various lost Terran civilizations. Due to its isolation within the Chaos Zone, it will probably never be discovered by any Zone inhabitants capable of spaceflight.

THE DREAMWORLDS

It seems that every continuum inhabited by sentients has its own Dreamworlds, and Earth-AU is no exception. The Dreamworlds are a universe created from the pooled collective unconscious minds of the dreaming peoples of the Strike Force universe. However, how much the dreamers affect the Dreamworlds (and vice versa) is unknown. What is known is that the Dreamworlds can be a very disconcerting place to visit; it's half-fantasy, half-nightmare, with "rules" that change all the time.

Although the Dreamworlds are very dangerous to enter by any means other than dreaming, there are beings dwelling in the dream realm who like to meddle in the Waking World. Thus, it occasionally becomes necessary for Waking World peoples to enter the Dreamworlds via sorcery or projection. However, exploring the Dreamworlds is not to be taken lightly, as they are potentially infinite in size.

There are currently four known states of existence in the Dreamworlds:

- Projected Self: the manifestation of a sleeper's mind.
- Intruder: a foreigner, in both mind and body.
- Native: A being native to the Dreamworlds; it has no existence outside in the Waking World.
- Universal: a being native to the Dreamworlds, but which can exist outside in the Waking World. Unlike trans-dimensional travelers, Universals resonate with the energy of the Dreamworlds, and can thus be very difficult to detect.

EARTH-KAISER

A complex and superhuman-heavy world, Earth-Kaiser's history was very similar to our own, until 1916, when the extra-dimensional being called Golgalar the Assembler appeared. Golgalar's home universe is a very hostile dimension that lends itself more to mathematical processes, with constantly-changing scientific laws and unstable states of matter and existence. It is a dimension where entropy is maximized and great creativity is possible, but all such wondrous creations crumble and perish before they can be appreciated.

"The Assembler" gets his name because he creates new lifeforms out of pieces he has negotiated or tricked from other beings. He will give one person an ability in return for a different ability. Sometimes he seems to be losing on the deal, sometimes gaining. Eventually, though, he has enough leftover pieces to create a new being, which he then releases on the world, with cataclysmic results.

On Earth-Kaiser, Golgalar made a deal with Kaiser Wilhelm II. He gave Wilhelm whatever power the Kaiser needed in order to keep Germany from being subjugated by the Allied Powers. In return, Wilhelm renounced his rights to determine the fate of the German nation, granting that right to Golgalar. Wilhelm, desperate, agreed, convinced that the German people will never accept a bizarre alien as their king—they'll rule themselves first.

Golgalar repaired Wilhelm's withered arm, making him huge and mighty. He encased the Kaiser in form-fitting armor that rendered him nearly invulnerable. However, Golgalar also so implanted a weakness. Wilhelm could no longer set foot on German-controlled soil without becoming weak and eventually collapsing into a coma. Thus, Wilhelm could defend the German Empire... but only from outside its borders.

Now the world's first recognized super-being, Kaiser Wilhelm altered the course of the war. He smashed the Allied invasions and helped Germany regain control of itself and restore its pre-war borders. His work done, Wilhelm vanished from the public eye.

Although Wilhelm's actions changed history as we know it, certain constants remain. Russia had a revolution (but Communism fails and dies out); China and Japan went to war, with Japan conquering Manchuria and renaming it Manchukuo; Adolf Hitler rose to power in Germany; Germany, Italy, Japan, and Spain formed the Axis Powers. The United States enacted Prohibition, but avoided the Great Depression. Calvin Coolidge won four terms as president, not Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

In 1938, Germany attempted to annex Czechoslovakia and Romania. While Germany conquered the former, they were stalled by Russian reinforcements in the latter. The Kaiser stepped in to give his people heart and success... and he abruptly discovered he was facing enemies nearly as powerful as himself. These were the world's first superheroes, and they chose Romania as their battleground. Known as the Allied Shield, they managed to counter the Kaiser, but Germany still overran Romania. A year later, in 1939, Germany invaded Poland, which began the Great Fascist War, Phase I.

What followed was a true world war, fought in Europe, North Africa, China, the Atlantic Ocean, and the Pacific. It ended in a truce between the Axis and the Organization of Allied States. However, Japan wasn't part of the truce, and the OAS pitted its full might against the island nation. The military dictatorship of Japan fled to Manchukuo (Manchuria) and assumed control there. Phase I of the war ended in 1948.

An uneasy peace followed, with Phase II of the war starting in 1952. Germany, Italy, and Spain struggled to annex portions of North Africa, but were beaten back by the OAS. Phase II ended in 1954.

Phase III began in 1960, with OAS and Axis forces initially battling in orbit. Combat was almost exclusively fought above ground, in space, and the skies over Europe. It ended inconclusively in 1962, with both sides having run out of money and energy. However, the advances made during the fighting lead to increased space traffic, with colonization and mining missions common.

After five years of peace, Phase IV of the war was sparked by the arrival of Tanar t'Darthesin (calling himself Warlord), who decided to free Norway, home of his mother's ancestors, from the Nazis. Finally, in 1973, the German High Command gave up on taking Norway, and the Fourth Phase of the Great Fascist War ended.

Phase V launched in 1976 with the German invasion of Greece. It ended in 1979 with the defeat of the OAS as Germany reoccupied Crete and drove the allies out.

Ten years later, in 1989, the Sixth Phase of the war began as Manchukuo sent stealth bomber strikes against targets in Canada and the United States. Meanwhile, Germany struck at Cyprus. This led to a long-range war as Axis and Allied satellites performed high-orbit bombardments on cities below. As of 1993, the Sixth Phase of the war continues, with bombs and assassin-paratroopers a constant threat.

Effects of Golgalar's Intervention

Through the long years of the Great Fascist War, Golgalar has affected world events in specific ways to achieve specific ends. The most important change is that people who could affect certain important worldwide ills have not been allowed to. Thus, visitors from other worlds will see gaps where many of their most famous world figures should be. For example, on Earth-Kaiser, Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Harry Truman don't become presidents of the U.S.; was it because they might have led the Allies to triumph and the end of the war by in 1945, as they helped to do on countless other alternate Earths? Where is Martin Luther King in the workings of America's civil rights history? Was he, as a young man, offered the chance to save the life of a loved one, or advance his business career, at the cost of his political career? Why did Joe Kennedy have a turn as American president instead of John F Kennedy? Why was President Robert Kennedy assassinated; could it be that he wasn't willing to make a deal with Golgalar?

The reason for Golgalar's actions is because a world that is continually in crisis is a world that generates desperate situations... and people willing to make desperate choices. He's chosen to make Germany his focal point for the war and then made the nation indestructible. Oh, supers can stop Germany's advances, but conquering the nation is another matter altogether. The Kaiser can stop armed forces invasions. German super Donar can stop most superhero invaders. And if Allied supers get too skillful, Golgalar can create many, many more German supers. There is little danger of the world situation changing dramatically.

World Information

Because of its very divergent history, Earth-Kaiser differs substantially from most superhero Earths.

CLOTHES

Earth-Kaiser's fashions have followed some of the trends of real-world fashions since the 1940s. Men's pants waistlines are cut lower, as are their pants cuffs. Women have taken to wearing pants, especially for casual and non-office work wear, though skirted outfits are still more common. Currently, the trend in colors is toward bright, simple hues. These colors have saturated every part of the clothing industry; it's not uncommon to see a conservative, expensive wool suit in cyan blue or orange, for instance.

Men's Dress: Suspenders are as prevalent as they were in the 1940s. Ties and suit lapels tend to be broad. The current trend for suit fit is close-fitting; five years ago, they were supposed to be too large and baggy. In casual wear, blue jeans or slacks and dark shirts are most common. Ties are sometimes worn in casual wear. Clip-on ties never made an appearance on Earth-Kaiser. Most shoes, including casual shoes, are leather. The Earth-Kaiser equivalent of tennis shoes are suede-tops with rubber or gum soles. In most port cities and communities near military bases there will be a large number of men in uniform. Men do not have pierced ears in modern American and European cultures.

Women's Dress: Skirts did get shorter in the 1960s, but never as short as on the real world; currently they hover around knee-length. Women's dresses do not tend to be as daring as in the real world, but in recent seasons have been close-fitting and figure-accenting. To visitors from other worlds, they'll look a lot like over-colored versions of the garments worn by characters played by Mary Tyler Moore, Doris Day, and other actresses of the 1960s. Sandals (heeled or not), sensible-looking shoes, and low boots are currently in vogue. Pumps are out of season. The current trend is away from heavy makeup. Light makeups describing themselves as "the natural look'" are all the rage. Business pants suits came into fashion during the 1950s but disappeared a decade later and have not reappeared.

The Rebel Look: In the late 1950s, a distinct teenager subculture arose. Its uniform was the "rebel look'": blue jeans, white T-shirt, tennis shoes, and (with the wealthier would-be rebels) a black leather jacket and matching racing cap. Boys and girls both adopted the rebel uniform.

Nearly forty years later, there is still a rebel uniform, but it's different. The jeans are the same, but the white T-shirt has given way to any number of white styled shirts; this season, a pseudo-military blouse with too many buttons, plus pockets and epaulettes, is in fashion. The leather jacket is still around, but is as brightly-colored as most other garments and decorated with fringe. Headgear is still mandatory with the leather jacket, but it may be a cowboy hat, Australian wide-brimmed hat, or aviator's helmet with goggles instead of the still-common racing cap. Regardless of style, the headgear must be leather and dyed to match the jacket.

Materials: In civilian dress, natural fibers are most common. Artificial fibers are most often used for military garments and equipment. Pantyhose has gone the way of the dinosaur.

COMFORT

Even in the wealthiest nations, air conditioning is a rarity; fans are the most common means to remain cool.

COMPUTER SCIENCE

Earth-Kaiser computers are much better at graphics imaging and mass storage than computers of most Earths; their storage is based on artificial crystal storage devices not found in most alternate worlds. There is no personal computer market; mainframes are the only sort of computers seen, except for a few types of miniaturized analog computers used in superhero power armor and military machines.

ECONOMY

Because of the high cost of warfare, Earth-Kaiser is impoverished in comparison to most modern superhero Earths. (Yes, in the real world, World War II helped bring the U.S. out of its economic depression. That doesn't mean that decades of warfare will result in decades of economic growth, however.)

The middle class is much broader on Earth-Kaiser than on our world. Far fewer people live below the poverty line... but Earth-Kaiser places that poverty line much lower than our world does. The typical middle-class family lives in an apartment or wood-frame home with electricity, running hot-and-cold water, flush toilets, one television and one radio, and about a 33% chance of owning a car; a family in the poverty level omits the electricity, temperature control on the water, TV and radio, might not have a floor, and has only about a 10% chance of having access to a car.

ENTERTAINMENT

The most popular types of music are Big Bad (derived from Big Band, but more hard-edged), jazz, noove (a form of music much like our jazz-fusion), classical, and slum (a modern soul/R&B equivalent). Rock and roll hung in valiantly but faded in the 1970s, never bolstered by a creative British Invasion.

Movies tend to be more simplistic, like real-world U.S. wartime films, but Earth-Kaiser has retained mastery of the screwball and slapstick comedies where most worlds have lost them utterly.

MEDICINE

Medical science, especially in the preservation of life in seriously damaged bodies, is very advanced. There are a lot of doctors—it's a favorite profession among 4-Fs especially—and are not subject to frivolous malpractice suits, so medicine is also cheap. Most middle-class families can afford good health care.

MORALS

The social values most Earths enjoyed in WWII are still very much in effect here. In America, the divorce rate is very low by other-world standards, though it is higher than the pre-war years. A simple majority of American women are virgins when they marry... though a large portion of the minority "give it all'" to their young men to improve their morale, or because they fear they'll never see them again, or because they believe the world is sliding into ruin and that it doesn't matter anymore. As fewer and fewer non-virgin women are stigmatized by this choice, though, the proportion of virgin weddings declines.

POLITICS

The Earth is a world in a near-constant state of war. The Great Fascist War (the Earth-Kaiser sequence of conflicts starting with World War II) has been raging on and off since 1939, for periods of five or ten years at a time, followed by uneasy "peace times" lasting for a few years at a time.

Most nations in the world belong to one of four collectives: The Organization of Allied States (the Allies), the World Socialist League (the Axis Powers), the Asian Bloc, and the Islamic Bloc (those last two terms are informal; they are not official, treaty organizations).

By the 1990s, the last Communists are old philosophers; the last Communist uprising was put down in Cuba in the late 1950s. Most governments in the worlds are democracies, totalitarian states, military tyrannies (some good), or constitutional monarchies.

POPULATION

World population is two and a half billion.

POWER

Nuclear fission and fusion were never developed, either for peacetime or wartime uses. (Japan discovered the secret of atomic power in the first stage of the war, and then immediately lost it.) In the late 1960s, antimatter production provided power for very rare and expensive devices such as powered armor. It could be used for atomic-level bombs, but production can't keep up with the power needs of superhero devices such as power armor.

RACISM

Racism is prevalent in the America and many other nations.

The United States is in a state resembling the middle of the civil rights struggle of the 1950s. Most super-teams are white-only. Non-whites are not legally entitled to the same salaries as whites and have a hard time rising above menial positions. President Stephen J. Reynolds' efforts over the last few years to change things have had little effect, but he's placing more and more of the 1960s agitators who participated in the 1967 mixed-race "sock-hop friendship party" in important political positions.

Nazi Germany rules most of Europe, and its racist philosophies are well-known. In Manchukuo, most of the indigenous population has been killed or forced to emigrate to China. Oddly, though, several of the Islamic nations, chiefly Egypt, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, have been exploring stances of racial tolerance something like that enjoyed by Moorish Spain in the Middle Ages.

SCIENCES

This world doesn't lag behind other Earths in scientific development, but isn't as far along in scientific saturation—the most modern devices are used by the military and the very rich, while the poor and the middle-class live much as they did in the 1940s. Earth-Kaiser metallurgy is much better than that of most other analogue worlds, though creation of most composite materials lags far behind that of other worlds. For instance, Kevlar was a revelation to the Stars and Stripes superhero team when it was demonstrated by Strike Force.

SPORTS

Baseball is the most popular sport in the U.S.; in much of the rest of the world, it is football (soccer). The last Olympics were held in 1936.

TRANSPORTATION

Cars are expensive commodities; one family in three has a car, and most people rely on public transport. Buses and (especially) cable-cars serve for transportation throughout cities. Long-range transport is mostly by train for the middle and lower classes; the upper-classes use specialized train cars, zeppelins, ocean liners, and rare private propeller planes. Most jet planes are combat and re-connaissance vehicles designed along "flying wing" lines

WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND INFLUENCE

In the U.S., women have the right to vote and own property, but if married, must confirm major purchases with their husbands. Things are worse in the Axis countries, where noncompliance with traditional female roles is a criminal offense, but much better in Greater Russia, where women hold nearly equal power with men.

World Power Blocs

There are four significant power blocs in the world, two formal and two informal. The formal groups are the Organization of Allied States (a.k.a. the Allied Powers) and the World Socialist League (a.k.a. the Axis Powers). The informal groups are the Asian bloc (allied Eastern states dominated by China) and the Islamic bloc (nations of Africa, Asia Minor, Western Asia and Eastern Europe who loathe non-Islamic nations even more than they loathe one another).

Fifty-plus years of on-again/off-again war have destroyed the old imperialist system. However, nations on both sides of the war still retain conquered territories crucial to the advancement of their war aims. South American and African nations are either dominated by nations of one of the four power blocs or remain independent but backwater nations, sometimes involved in long-term wars with each other.

Antarctica is a no-man's-land. Scientific expeditions there are also armed expeditions.

The following lists are representative rather than complete.

THE ORGANIZATION OF ALLIED STATES (THE ALLIES)

- **Headquarters:** San Francisco, CA
- **Member Nations:** Australia, Canada, Cyprus, Egypt, England, Greater Russia, Iceland, Ireland, Norway, Scotland, Sweden, United States of America, United States of Mexico, Vietnam (also in Asian Bloc)
- **Nations Controlled by Members of the OAS:** Algeria, Brazil, Greenland, Hawaii, Japan (but see Manchukuo), Libya, Morocco, The Philippines

THE WORLD SOCIALIST LEAGUE (THE AXIS POWERS)

- **Headquarters:** Berlin, Germany
- **Member Nations:** Germany, Italy, Manchukuo (formally the island of Japan), Spain
- **Nations Controlled by the WSL:** Albania, Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Chile, Corsica, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Holland, Hungary, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Sardinia, Switzerland, Yugoslavia

THE ASIAN BLOC

- **Headquarters:** Peking, China
- **Member Nations:** China, Korea, Manchukuo (also in the World Socialist League), Thailand, Tibet, Vietnam (also in OAS)

THE ISLAMIC BLOC

- **Headquarters:** Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
- **Member Nations:** Afghanistan, Eritrea, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman. Pakistan, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Syria, Turkey, Yemen
- **Nations Controlled by Islamic Bloc countries:** Iran, Iraq

AUSTRALIA

Formerly part of the British Empire, now independent. Known for the quality of their commando units. The white majority seems easy-going, but racial repression is very bad here. The Aborigines are confined to the Outback and a high proportion of them are addicted to gasoline-sniffing.

CHINA

Perhaps the most politically corrupt nation on Earth, China has for decades been run by the Kuomintang, a military-backed political junta that has long been an ally of the Chinese Triads (organized crime). China is the center of the world's drug trade (which is still less prevalent than the drug trades of most alternate Earths) and a nation where literally anything can be had for money.

China remains independent of the OAS and WSL, and has clashed with member nations of both umbrella organizations. It is the bitter enemy of the government of Manchukuo and has waged an ongoing, not-much-talked-about border war with that nation continually since 1931, when Japan first invaded Manchuria. Formal war has never been declared and the fighting takes the form of guerrilla missions and acts of terrorism on both sides. China is no friend of the United States.

The Chinese president is Chiang Lee-gong, grandson of Chiang Kai-shek.

CYPRUS

Cyprus is a more prominent nation on Earth-Kaiser than in most worlds. It is widely regarded as a border between East and West, a place where Moslems and Christians have the same rights. Cyprus is a member of the Organization of Allied States and friendly with the Islamic Bloc; it is the headquarters of the Jolly Roger, an independent anti-Axis team. Cyprus is also the site of the Greek government-in-exile; many Free Greeks live here.

ENGLAND AND THE UNITED KINGDOM

The British Isles have, with stubbornness and inventiveness, managed to throw off every World Socialist League assault since 1940. King Andrew, who succeeded his slain mother and older brother in 1988 (both killed when a suit of powered armor exploded), is widely-regarded as a strong wartime ruler with a keen grasp of naval power. England is the home of two super-groups, the native Union Jack group, and the Frontline branch of the American Stars & Stripes group.

FRANCE

This is an occupied nation, broken down into four classes of society.

The Germans make up the top class. German officers may seize personal properties of the French without having to make compensation. The German office of land management may take land and buildings away from their owners with minimal difficulty. Rape of members of the native population by Germans is not a crime. Murder of native Frenchmen by Germans usually calls for an investigation but seldom leads to a trial.

French collaborators make up the second class. They enjoy many of the same privileges the Germans do, but not the legal immunity.

French citizens make up the third class. About 99% of all Frenchmen live in conditions at or just above the poverty level and work very hard for no reward.

The bottom class is that of the "Undesirables." These include blacks, Romani ("Gypsies"), Eastern Europeans, and so on; they are often forced to perform the worst type of labor for German officers, or sent to concentration camps set up on French soil.

The French Resistance still exists, but is very small and ineffective. Infiltration by German supers has successfully destroyed large numbers of Resistance cells over the decades.

GERMANY

The Germans have proved themselves to be a tough, resourceful enemy. The standard of living is comparatively high in Germany among documented Aryans, but extremely poor and repressive for all others. All the known indigenous Jewish and Gypsy populations have been removed or exterminated. The German munitions industry is among the finest in the world, and the nation's infantry is probably the best on the planet (as well-trained and well-equipped as any nation's, and more experienced).

GREECE

This nation has been occupied by the Axis since the mid-1970s. The Greek resistance movement is one of the most ferocious on Earth, demonstrating a remarkable capacity for self-sacrifice; the underground has not faltered in the face of German reprisals. In fact, some Greek Resistance actions will uncomfortably remind other-Earth visitors of Vietnamese resistance; Greek children have been known to carry grenades into bars filled with German soldiers and pull the pins, sacrificing themselves.

Greeks fighting the Axis refer to themselves as Free Greek, wherever they find themselves, even if they take citizenship in other nations.

GREENLAND

This island has no indigenous population, but is the home of several OAS military bases.

ICELAND

This nation is a staunch member of the OAS. It is ruled by a power-armor monarch called the Grey Lady.

IRELAND

On Earth-Kaiser, Ireland is a united nation facing formal separation from the British Empire in the year 2001.

ITALY

This nation has been ruled by Benito Mussolini's son, Vittorio Mussolini, since 1953. Mussolini is an old man ruling a tired country; Italy has for many years been deep in the shadow of Germany. As a junior partner in the World Socialist League, Italy profits less from conquest than Germany, and its military is little more than a branch of the more powerful nations.

JAPAN

This former nation is now a sort of park—a place preserved as a monument to the savagery with which the United States can respond to foreign attack. At the end of the first phase of the Great Fascist War, U.S. Naval and Marine forces, aided by U.S. superheroes, reached the Japanese coast. The Japanese never did surrender. Atrocities were common on both sides. Pacific Theater commander Chester Nimitz ordered the entire nation razed; every city was put to the torch as it was conquered. A massive refugee flotilla made the crossing to China, where the Japanese refugees found new homes in Japanese-controlled Manchukuo. Today, Japan has a native population of about 100,000, most of whom live in barbarism, and an OAS Armed Forces population of about two million.

MANCHUKUO

This is a nation of primitive farms and gleaming high-rise cities. It has been officially ruled since the 1930s by deposed Chinese emperor Pu Yi. He was installed in 1932 as President, but was later crowned king in 1935. Regardless, the presidency and kingship are puppet positions; the nation is ruled by a Japanese military junta.

EARTH-KAISER JAPAN

Not content with merely launching a sneak attack via aircraft as they did in the real world, in Earth-Kaiser Japan dropped an atomic bomb on Pearl Harbor and conducted conventional bombing raids on San Francisco and Los Angeles. This may help explain Nimitz's decision.

Pu Yi, an old and ailing man, is still king; his great-grandson, known to the west as Shoji Pu Yi, is three-quarters Japanese (and a descendant of former Emperor Hirohito as well). The head of the ruling military council is Yamaguchi Toji, the nation's most senior general.

NORWAY

Long under the thumb of the WSL, Norway was freed in the late 1960s by the extra-terrestrial super Warlord, who now rules the nation as its king. Norway has seen a little more detail in the Strike Force campaign than many other sites because it is the home of Warlord, a major world figure and a friend of the Strike Force team. Because it is widely known that the king of Norway has several "mistresses" and has not discouraged alternative lifestyles in his nation—nor allowed prosecution or sustained persecution of same—Norway is widely considered to be the most "sinful" of the nations on the face of the Earth.

RUSSIA (GREATER RUSSIA)

This is the largest nation in the world; it is also one of the poorest, having sustained the brunt of the World Socialist League offensives for the last several decades. It is a nation full of artists, dreamers, soldiers, and futurists; in spite of its economic hardships, it is one of the most cosmopolitan nations of the world.

It is home to one super-group, Red Sword, made up of patriotic Russian supers who cooperate with but are independent of the armed forces. Most other Russian supers are non-costumed and belong to the armed forces.

Because Greater Russia has such a cooperative ethnic mix in its population and because women here have nearly all the rights and opportunities men do, an embarrassing situation has arisen in the last forty years: people from the U.S. have been defecting to Russia in droves.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The 54-state U.S. is the richest nation in the world—for what that's worth in a world suffering continual recession and depression. It is still a segregated society, with blacks, Latin Americans, Chinese-Americans, American Indians, and the few *nisei* (Japanese-Americans) living in their own neighborhoods of cities or (especially in the case of nisei) in their own small communities.

The U.S. is home to more superheroes than any other nation. This is mostly because of a very aggressive recruitment program instituted by former President Douglas MacArthur. Where other nations told their supers to report to the armed service and put on a uniform, the U.S. encouraged them to form their own free, independent teams, and encouraged those teams to work with the government against the Axis powers. Supers seeking personal freedom and an opportunity to fight the fascists came to America.

VIETNAM

When France was overrun by Germany in 1925, the French government in exile set up shop in Vietnam. That government was scattered when the Japanese occupied Indochina in the First Phase of the Great Fascist War.

When the Japanese were driven out of Indochina in 1945, China attempted to gain control of the nation, but unofficial ruler Ho Chi Minh, an admirer of America, requested that President MacArthur help him retain independence. MacArthur complied, sending troops and military advisors. This kept Vietnam independent but created a rift between China and the U.S. that is still not completely healed.

Vietnam is an ally of the U.S., a member of the OAS, and a trading partner with the Asian Bloc (including, unofficially, Manchukuo); it is a very cosmopolitan country. Many spy movies are set (and shot) in Vietnam; Saigon is often referred to as the "Hollywood of Asia."

Vietnam is also the center for the intelligence war between the OAS and Manchukuo—think of it as an oriental Casablanca or Vienna, not as the setting of *Rambo* and *Missing in Action, Part II*.

Sites for Adventure

The best places to set Earth-Kaiser adventures include the United States (there is a certain amount of standard superhero-supervillain fare, plus a lot of warfare, civil defense, and counter-insurgency), China (the most secure homeland of organized crime, in addition to all those mysterious oriental trappings), England (a nation that's been fighting the Battle of Britain off and on again for more than fifty years), and Vietnam (the espionage capital of the world).

Glossary

Introduce the following terms into the ordinary speech of Earth-Kaiser residents to give it a more distinct flavor:

- **Bogey:** Common Parlance. No, not a mysterious blip on a radar screen; this term means to be cool or play it cool. "Okay, we're coming up on the guard station: bogey it." Yes, it does refer to Humphrey Bogart.
- **Cashmere:** Teen/Rebel. Good, wonderful; equivalent to groovy or copacetic.
- **Doggin':** Common Parlance. To understand. "Are you doggin' me?"
- **Engines firing:** Teen/Rebel. Very interested in; aroused by. "She's got my engines firing..."
- **Eugenics:** Common Parlance. Use this term instead of "genetics."
- **Icebox:** Common Parlance. Though cold-storage units for food in Earth-Kaiser are basically the same as the refrigerators we know, they're still universally called "ice-boxes."
- **Mask-Name:** Superhero Subculture. Superhero ID. "My mask-name is Captain Reaver."
- **On My Six:** Common Parlance. To understand. Same derivation (pilot lingo) as doggin'. "I'm on your six."
- **SAIRMISS:** Technical/Military. Surface-to-Air Missile Batteries. They're accurate enough to make long-range missiles impractical, but they depend heavily on curtain-wall-style radar lines. Orbital bombardment and human-piloted bombers have more success against SAIRMISS installations. (Don't use the term ICBM for long-range missiles.)
- **Skid:** Teen/Rebel. Bug/put out "I don't want to skid ya..."
- **T-Launcher:** Technical/Military. This term refers to a crude teleportation technology in the hands of supers and world leaders. T-Launchers have to have line of sight or use satellite imaging.

Earth-Kaiser Sources of Superpowers

Superheroes in Earth-Kaiser tend to have superpowers arising from the following sources:

THE SPIRIT-MEN

On Earth-Kaiser, there were once gods; beings such as Amaterasu, Heracles, and Thor. However, the rise of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam caused these gods to die out, as these new religions stole away their followers. But, the spirits of the ancient gods did not entirely perish. Some of their life-energy, motivation, and intelligence was, in fact, immortal. Even to this day, the spirits of the gods pass through the world, unseen and unnoticed… and sometimes find new mortal vessels for themselves.

These mortal vessels must be people who have a touch of old magic in their veins, and must have personalities that are not incompatible with the ghostly gods'. They must also have the potential to become heroes (in the Homeric sense), even without interference by the ghost-gods. When found, the god-spirits fuse themselves with these mortals. The mortals gain a portion of the gods' powers, interests, and appetites. The mortals acquire a sudden interest in myths about the gods, and these fusions often end up naming themselves after gods of old.

The interesting thing about these fusions is that the god-spirits communicate no memories or actual information to their new hosts. Do they still exist as mentalities? If so, what are their goals and intents? Nobody knows… not yet anyway. But since they communicate no knowledge or facts about themselves, the mortal fusions are not necessarily naming themselves after the correct gods. The German Spirit-Man Donar has named himself after the German aspect of the god Thor—but has he, in fact, been inhabited by the ghost of Thor? All he knows is that he has acquired incredible strength and lightning powers. But many, many gods had these traits—perhaps he has fused with the ghost of the god Almaquah, a prehistoric South Arabian moon/bull/lightning-god. Donar, of course, would never believe that; he believes he's been granted powers by the god Donar so that he can advance the cause of the German people throughout the world.

Spirit-Men tend to have great strength, high defenses, and powers related to the dead deity's field of interest. A mortal/wind-god fusion will be able to fly and control local weather; a mortal/bull-and-lightning god fusion will be able to project electricity (and will probably be very virile).

The Spirit-Men do not really know that they are inhabited by the remnants of dead pagan gods. They do know that they've been infused with some sort of spirit; they recognize that they have something in common with one another; and most of them, independently and (to the best of their knowledge) coincidentally, have chosen the names of ancient gods.

GOLGALAR

The demon-thing that set many of Earth-Kaiser's historic events in motion is still out there, watching and waiting to see how his intended world-destroying creation, the "Assembled Man" will perform. Meanwhile, he might be assembling a new creation, so he could be creating a new generation of supers.

He can grant almost any power and make it look like almost anything, but all of the supers he creates have something important in common: they've lost a part of themselves. Now, these are not simply body parts; more like rights, abilities, legacies, and other profound, intrinsic things. One may have lost the ability to love, another the ability to reason abstractly, another the ability to sire children. And at some point in their lives, these missing characteristics usually result in tragedy for these supers. Golgalar, meanwhile, uses these missing parts to build a new creation, such as his aforementioned "Assembled Man."

Powers granted by Golgalar also tend to distance their recipients from the rest of humanity; they almost always involve transformations of one sort or another. The Kaiser, for instance, is twice the height of a human being and is sealed permanently into his costume/armor. Descendants of Golgalar-supers sometimes inherit their ancestors' powers, usually without the tragic side effects.

ALIEN ORIGIN

There are a few beings of extraterrestrial origin on Earth-Kaiser. Most alien races who know anything about Earth do not visit, however. Visiting spacecraft tend to be shot at, mistaken for the latest enemy rocket.

EUGENICS

Several scientists in the field of eugenics are pursuing methods of genetic manipulation, and the most advanced of them—in particular, the Norwegian hero Warlord—has developed viral-replacement gene series that often give their subjects superpowers... and, sometimes, super-problems.

MAGIC

Magic on Earth-Kaiser is not like the sorcery of most worlds. It is simply a level of parapsychological phenomena that goes beyond any results that can be measured in a laboratory. A sorcerer from another dimension would recognize this form of energy as being "magical," but only of one specific type or flavor, and stemming out of psi activity.

MUTATION

Mutation is known on Earth-Kaiser. Beneficial "superhuman" mutations are attributed to two primary sources: the nuclear disaster in Hawaii early in the First Phase of the Great Fascist War, and some sort of strange genetic engineering which affected a series of families sometime in the 18th century.

POWERED ARMOR AND OTHER GADGETS

There are many power-armored heroes throughout Earth-Kaiser. They tend to be as keenly competitive and sarcastic toward one another as published academians tend to be on our Earth. Every designer of power armor believes most other designers to be inferior hacks and thieves. Power armor heroes seldom get along together.

Power armor supers tend to have high defenses. Most also have high strength, energy projection, life support, and improved sense powers.

NICE WORLD

The history of Nice World closely follows that of Strike Force's Earth until the mid-17th century. At that time, a coven of witches in the Scottish Highlands was able to call forth the Devil, dull his senses through hours of bacchanalia, and then imprison him in an specially-created magical glade. Satan was trapped, powerless, and the coven's subsequent spells stripped him and the Hells he ruled of their power. Because the Devil was trapped, his demons were bound in their Hells; the witches had time and freedom in which to operate.

Of the powers stripped from Satan, some were absorbed and utilized by the witches who trapped him. Others flew forth, wandering at will, until they were attracted by human souls of sufficient brightness and power; they attached themselves to those souls and so created new witches. This resulted in a wave of powerful witches appearing around 1650 or so. These witches all had similar powers of transformation, shapeshifting, and control of the elements. They always knew when a witch nearby was using powers. The witches could hide their activities from ordinary mortals but not from one another. Gradually these witches learned enough about their powers that they were able to take over the world—and surprisingly enough learned how to cooperate with each other while doing so.

The Grand Conclave

The witches soon formed an extended, and mostly peaceful, family. They quickly found it was no use trying to control one another; everyone had the same powers, just in varying degrees of strength. There was no need to conquer the nations of men for resources and slave labor; magical power gave them everything they needed: food, shelter, wealth, success, comfort.

So, instead of battling each other, the witches formed the Grand Conclave. Every person born with magical powers was a member of the Conclave, whether he wished to be or not. And everyone in the Conclave had to live by the same rules, called the Three Witch Rules. To break them was to invite death at the hands of the Conclave.

Fortunately, the rules were few and reasonable (at least in the opinion of the witches). The rules included:

- **Never Allow Mortals to Learn That Magic Exists.** When mortals began to suspect its presence, the witches used their powers to conceal it (by fiddling with the memories of mortals when possible, by eliminating troublemakers when necessary). Certain few exceptions were made when witches married mortals—an uncommon event.
- **Do Not Attack Other Witches.** Defending oneself from attack was allowed, but commencing aggression was illegal, except under special dueling circumstances governed by the Conclave.
- **Keep Things Nice.** It was the responsibility of the witches to keep their world a clean and healthy one—accelerating learning that would benefit humanity, retarding and eliminating learning that would dirty the world or endanger the witches' dominant position. For these reasons, medicine, engineering, and solar power are very advanced; but nuclear technology is unknown (for power or military needs), electronics are efficient but not miniaturized, fossil fuels are not burned, trash is reprocessed.

Other than disobeying the Three Witch Rules, the witches were able to do as they pleased: rule nations, live as hermits, or whatever. They and their descendants became free-living eccentrics, interacting with the mortal world as much or little as they desired. Over the centuries, they destroyed most religions—specifically the faiths which had hunted them so ruthlessly in centuries past. By the 20th century, persons ascribing to specific religions were considered lunatics. The witches allowed humans a faith dealing with reincarnation (which they'd never been able to refute) but destroyed other religions wherever they found them. They also allowed mortal men to go to war and do other stupid things, but limited the effects of such decisions. They kept wars from having devastating economic or social effects, prevented recessions and depressions, and so on.

Today, in the late 1980s, Nice World is both very similar to and very distinct from Strike Force's Earth. For example, the world population stands at two billion. In the U.S. and in other significantly multiethnic nations, there's no detectable difference in the standards of living of different ethnic types. The regions which are trouble-spots in Strike Force's Earth (such as the Middle East and South America especially) are mostly rigidly-controlled protectorates and colonies of the major imperial powers—the U.S., England, Japan, and the USSR especially.

Poverty is defined as no electricity or phones in your farmhouse, not having a car, or fine clothes, and so on. Everyone has a job and enough to eat. Terrorism is unknown. The streets are clean. Doors are left unlocked at night. Cars are electric, but big like 1950s cars. There is no space program (Kennedy's speech on making a paradise on Earth before seeking it elsewhere is a milestone in history). There are no jet planes. Trains are fast, quiet, and popular.

The US is a capitalist democracy. This works fine. The USSR is a communist dictatorship. This works fine. Britain is an absolute monarchy (Parliament having agreeably disbanded itself sometime in the past). This works fine. In fact, most everything works just fine….

Crime is mostly of the personal-dispute and theft sort. Burglary, fraud, confidence schemes, assaults, murders, and so on are uncommon. Drug trafficking, rape, and serial killings are rare. Psychotics and perverts tend to "commit suicide'" (via the Conclave) when their illness is known.

Through the influence of the sexual revolution of the 1960s, sex is much more open, but "perversion" is not tolerated. Oh, and there's no longer such a thing as a venereal disease. This is a world of sexy ingénues and clean-cut boy singers.

But as nice as this world appears, its niceness comes at a price. The Conclave ruthlessly suppresses social elements, technology, and anything else it doesn't like. The developers of "discredited" areas of technology tend to be blown up by malfunctioning experiments. The creators of boldly innovative new sorts of fiction, art, and drama seldom have their works purchased; when the works are purchased, they are savaged in the critical press and by the buying public. Cultural revolutions and fads only find popular acceptance if they are endorsed (or at least tolerated) by the Grand Conclave. In other words, for all its apparent advantages, it's a very bland, white-bread sort of world. There is nothing here to stretch the individual imagination or allow humanity to achieve its potential greatness. It is a safe and cheerful environment; it's also a gilded cage from which the Nice World human race might never emerge.

Witch Society

The 20,000 witches of Nice World get along by observing the Three Witch Rules, and by following codes of behavior which have evolved over the last 300 years or so. For example, all witches mark their property—homes, possessions, and favorite mortals—with a Signature spell. This spell radiates a faint essence of the witch who cast it. Any other witch in the presence of the Signature can feel its presence and will know who cast it.

Before a witch kills or seriously alters any mortal or destroys any personal property in any but the most life-threatening of circumstances, he's supposed to get physically close enough to the target to see if there's a Signature in place. If the target has a signature on it, the witch must weigh the possible anger of the Signature's caster before destroying the target. If the target has no Signature on it, there is no discourtesy involved in destroying it.

Crime and Punishment

Witch crimes include violations of the Three Witch Rules, plus anything which the Judiciary Board of the Grand Conclave currently considers an offense. For example, if a witch kills another witch's favorite mortal (not officially a witch crime), the second witch might decide to take up a grievance before the Judiciary Board. The Board, in its erratic wisdom, might decide this was a crime, and assign punishment; or it might decide it was merely an insult, and recommend the two witches duel out their disagreement.

The Judiciary Board, when it decides a witch has committed a crime, assigns one of six punishments, escalating in severity:

- **Apology and Reparation:** this is the least of the punishments. The offender is required to apologize to the Board or the offended party and use his powers to repair the damage as much as possible. If the offender refuses to apologize, he's instead given the Humility or Mortal punishment, at the Conclave's discretion.
- **Humility:** the Board punishes the offender by forever taking away something dear to him—a favorite mortal, a work of art, a personal success. This demonstrates to the offender that the combined Conclave can always punish him regardless of his personal power.
- **Mortality:** the Board Drains the offender's powers for a period of time—minimum one year, maximum one hundred years. If the Board is actually fond of the offender, a witch will secretly watch over the offender to keep him from real harm.
- **Genie:** the offender is transformed into recalling a bogus history—that he was a genie captured by King Solomon. The Transformation also gives him the Complication of Utter Slave of Finder. The witch is then shrunk, stuffed into a bottle, and dropped somewhere he'll be found by an idiot. He bears a Signature spell which warns other witches off from meddling with the Transformation. The duration of the Transformation (minimum ten years, maximum one thousand) is the duration of the sentence.
- **Death:** The offender is killed.
- **Kin-Death:** The offender and all his descendants are killed. This is seldom prescribed, especially when the descendants are adults and powerful witches themselves—in those cases it's very hard to enforce. Its victims are usually parents of adolescent children.

An offender who is punished and later tries to effect revenge on the Board will receive the next-highest penalty when caught. Remember it's impossible to lie to the Board, as Telepathy will always reveal a culprit.

Prey-World

Prey-World is an Earth with no superheroes whatsoever. Roughly analogous to the "real" (i.e. our) world, it does have few differences, such as the Sino-American war of 1952-1958. It also had the misfortune to be discovered by an assortment of supervillains hailing from Earth-AU in 1995. Realizing the potential profit to be had in looting an entire world, the villains divided up the planet into territories and proceeded to wreak havoc. Having no experience in dealing with the "Demon-Men" (as all superhumans—good and bad—are called), Prey-World almost fell into ruin, only to be saved by Strike Force once they discovered what was going on. Curiously, while there are no superhumans native to Prey-World, super powers do work there, and some supers settled on Prey-World once everything was said and done. These supers then formed superhero teams and continued to fight crime and protect the defenseless, just as they did on Earth-AU.

SCOFF'S REALM

This pocket universe was created by the "demon" Scoff as his home. It sits near where chaos-dominated reality dissolves into true chaos, as Scoff loves places which sit on the border of chaotic and lawful influences. Most of Scoff's realm is made up of thin atmosphere, arrayed in ever-changing clouds of various colors and moved by the winds. The winds emanate from the dimension's sun, a bright yellow glow in the sky that is not a true star. While thin, the atmosphere is breathable, made up mostly of nitrogen and oxygen, and of a pressure sufficient to sustain most forms of life known to Terrans. Curiously, despite being at the center of this atmosphere, the sun does not burn these gases (or its own, for that matter). The sun orbits an Earth-sized world known as Momon, which sits at the center of this small dimension.

Momon is inhabited by humans and exists at about a 14th Century level of technology. Magic works on this world and it is ruled by a mageocracy. In the sky above Momon is Scoff's estate: a mountain severed from Momon's surface and made mobile. On this mountain dwell Scoff, his servants, his consorts, and his children (about 300 people all told). Scoff's mountain is riddled with caverns, many of which have been shaped by magic or stone workers. At the top of the mountain is a grove and a temple-like building; this is actually a restful observatory from which Scoff can watch the multicolored sky—including the region called the Ribbon, a rent that leads into proximate dimensions.

Due to Scoff's nature as a creature of chaos, inhabitants of his mountain home who come from another plane of existence may find they can see no one else but Scoff and any other inhabitants from the same plane. Thus Scoff's home seems to be eerily and echoingly empty. In addition, many of Scoff's possessions exist for some inhabitants and not for others.

There are seven levels to Scoff's home. Starting from the top of the mountain they are:

- **The Observatory:** Where Scoff and members of his family can observe the sky in solitude.
- **The Labyrinth:** This magical network of tunnels is designed to trap invaders. Scoff and his family can pass through with ease.
- **Scoff's Quarters:** This includes his immense bedchamber. It also include the Reconstruction Chamber where Scoff engages in one of his hobbies: assembling living beings out of disintegrated components. Whenever a mighty release of energies destroys a large number of beings, residual traces of individuals remain, and Scoff often collects these traces and assembles them into living beings. Another part of his quarters is the Crystal Chamber, where he sits and broods or meditates, often for hours.
- **Pride Quarters:** Scoff's family dwells here. This level also contains the Contemplation Chamber and the library.
- **Official Chambers:** This level contains everything a Demon Lord of Chaos might need, such as a Throne Chamber, Antechamber, chambers for consultants and warriors, and a civic plaza.
- **Servant Quarters:** Where Scoff's various servants and slaves reside.
- **Stables:** This level includes stables for an assortment of beasts, a staging area for his warriors, and the Grand Caverns.

THE WORLD OF SAVOIR-FERRET

This is an alternate Earth created by an unknown French magician in 1785. While the world of Savoir-Ferret has evolved on its own since the death of the sorcerer who created it, its development seems to parallel that of the world of Strike Force. As you might guess from the name, the world of Savoir-Ferret is one where the inhabitants are sentient animals of all sorts—and no humans.

Just about every member of the animal kingdom (excluding arthropods) exists on this world as a sentient race. These races wear clothes and use tools, and behave much like modern human do, although their animal natures often dictate some of their personality elements. Thus, cats are sophisticated and hedonistic, dogs are very physical (sometimes aggressive, sometimes cowardly, occasionally goofy), rabbits are cute (and sometimes not very bright), wolves are dangerous and sneaky, turtles are slow of speech and movement, owls are wise, and so forth. However, birds do not fly.

The inhabitants of this world usually stand around four and a half feet in height; really big species (such as rhinos and giraffes) tend to be much taller, up to seven or eight feet tall. Aquatic sentient animals have their own communities and usually do not mingle with surface-worlders—with the exception of dolphins.

The denizens of this world live together much as humans do on Strike Force's Earth. There tends to be less racial discrimination than the "real" world, even though representatives of all the species frequently adhere strongly to their racial stereotypes. Intermarriage between species happens, though

rarely—most animals are content to keep to their own. Interspecies couples produce children only when the two species are similar. A rhinoceros and a snake will not have children together, while a cat and a skunk could. The child will belong to one species or the other; it will not be a blending of species unless such a thing would be possible in the real world (i.e., the child of a dog and a wolf might have characteristics of both parents; the offspring of a bat and a rat would be one or the other, but not both). Interspecies couples could have children of both species; fraternal twins could be different species.

Savoir-Ferret's world resembles Strike Force's in many, many ways. It is broken up into nationalities resembling those of Strike Force's (pre-WWIII) Earth. For instance, in America, politics are the same. Buildings are much the same. Animal-people drive cars to work, watch TV, go out to restaurants, and so forth. But there are differences as well. All denizens of this world speak the same language (functionally English), but those from different lands speak it with different accents (thus a Spaniard speaks with a Spanish accent, a German with a Germanic one, and so on). Characters from the Strike Force (or another) Earth will probably undergo a translation effect when they visit, so that their primary languages are changed into Animal-Worldese. Any and all person, place, and industry names which are familiar to us (the readers) are slightly changed, reflecting the animal nature of this world. For example, New York becomes Gnu York (and it was originally New Hamsterdam). The USA is the United Species of America. England is still England, but it is part of the United Wild Kingdom. Canada is Canidae, and so on. However amusing visitors may find these names, the inhabitants of this world don't see them as parodies or puns.

There are superheroes (and villains) active in the world of Savoir-Ferret. However, they're fairly low-powered. Most top out at 8 Damage Classes and 80 Active Points in their largest attack powers. Their combined PD and ED will be around 16-20, and few individuals have super powers like flight or heat vision. For the most part, these superheroes are costumed normals and swashbucklers fighting their enemies with just-slightly-superanimal abilities.

- **Savoir-Ferret:** The premier hero of his world, Savoir-Ferret operates out of Gnu York, battling foes with his sword, his wit, and his swashbuckling sense of style. Hyperactive in combat, he enjoys mocking and taunting foes (often getting them to defeat themselves), as well as flirting with beautiful women. His girlfriend, Fauna White, is less than pleased with that last part.
- **Eel de France:** Savoir-Ferret's sidekick is an electric eel who can use his powers to emit shocks and recharge dead batteries. He is smitten with Savoir-Ferret's status as a hero (as well as Fauna White) and does whatever his mentor tells him. At the same time he's very naive and has no tactical sense at all.
- **TASK (Teenaged Asian Sex Kittens):** A trio of young female cats with ninja training, the members of TASK (Bijiko, Kuraiko, and Torako) are members of the pop-rock band Furrtive Glances by day and crime-fighting vigilantes by night.
- **The Skunk Rocker:** This coldblooded killer enjoys money, wealth, and power. He hates Savoir-Ferret and the members of TASK.
- **Crow-Magnon:** Formally a brilliant scientist, Crow-Magnon made the mistake of testing an experimental super-soldier formula on himself. While it gave him immense strength, it also reduced his intelligence to a fraction of what it once was.

OTHER DIMENSIONS

Amid the notes for Strike Force, I found mention of numerous other worlds Aaron had created:

- **Alternate Earths:** Earth-1984 (a dystopia), Earth-Good Guys, Earth-Kor Hunter (A magical realm under the control of an evil sorcerer.), Earth-Red Archer (A magical realm under the control of an evil sorcerer. Both this Earth and Earth-Kor Hunter closely parallel each other.), Earth-Stalker (A very mundane world where superheroes only exist in comic books and other fiction.), Oz (As in Frank Baum's the The Wonderful Wizard of Oz. Ruled by Glinda the Good Witch, who tolerates very little other magic in her realm.).
- **Mythospheres:** these planes contains people, civilizations, and other elements created through a cycle of legends and folktales told by mortal men. They are high in magic, may have very different physical laws, and are strongly tied to their Earth of origin. Some Mythospheres include Arthurian Myth (a.k.a. "Avalon"), Egyptian Myth, Greek Myth (a.k.a. "Olympus"), Hell, Japanese Myth, Norse Myth (a.k.a. "Asgard"), and Sumerian Myth.
- **Minor Dimensions:** these are usually the realms of extra-dimensional beings and demons. They include: Barsoom (a fictional version of Mars), Evadar the Binder's Plane, Gathelit the Dispatcher's Plane, Mokor the Collector's home plane (see page 64 for more on Mokor), and Salkariah's Plane (mother of the Black Enchantress).

ALTERNATE DIMENSIONS

Earth-AU is connected to numerous other worlds and there's no reason your campaign can't be as well. Many of Aaron's worlds fit classic comic book tropes, with the world of Savoir-Ferret being the animal pun world, Earth-Kaiser the world where World War II never ended, Nice World being the world run by magic, and so on. Other classic alternate dimensions include "Backwards World," where all of the main campaign's heroes are villains and villains are heroes; "Horror World," where supernatural beings rule the world (either openly or not); the world where the Axis won World War II (or the United States lost the Revolution or the Civil War); or Fantasy World, where the Industrial Revolution never happened, kings and knights control the law, and dragons rule the skies.

In almost all cases the alternate dimensions serve a useful purpose—usually they allow the GM to present a specific situation or scenario that wouldn't work in the regular campaign.

STRIKE FORCE TESTIMONIAL

It is truly a great honor to work on this book. You see, much of my own career can be traced back to the original **Strike Force**. *My appreciation of game design and the art of gamemastering was built on a foundation that includes that 1988 sourcebook penned by Aaron Allston. When I read about* **Strike Force**, *I was learning what it takes to be a truly memorable storyteller.*

Ever since, I've considered myself an Aaron Allston fan. I've read almost everything he wrote. I attended seminars where he spoke about writing. I got his autograph on many of gaming books. I aspired to be like him.

Every one of Aaron's novels showed me new ways to excite the imagination. I spoke with Aaron infrequently at gaming conventions, and he never failed to be polite, friendly, and make time to give a young aspiring writer/game designer a few moments to chat. It wasn't until 2014 that I got to spend some time actually getting to know him more as a person. What I found that he was not just a nice guy—he was an inspiration.

2014 was the first year for Austin's own gaming convention, Chupacabracon. Aaron and I were both gaming guests for that year's con, and we ended spending a lot of time together in the green room, chatting. We must have talked for hours on various subjects--in fact, we discussed Aaron's plans to update **Strike Force**! *We were both panelists (with Ernie Cline) for a panel on worldbuilding. On top of all, that Aaron ran a special session of a game he was developing for myself and one other attendee.*

I later learned that I was one of the last players to ever be in a game Aaron Allston ran. That's a sobering thought, especially for a man of his prodigious talent. When the opportunity arose to become involved with this new edition of **Strike Force**, *I knew I couldn't turn it down. I wanted to continue Aaron's work and contribute to the man's legacy.*

Aaron Allston was an excellent author, a talented game designer, and a trusted friend. He will never be forgotten, and I hope Strike Force continues to be a springboard for other game designers and game masters of a new generation.

—Ross Watson

STRIKE FORCE AND THE SHADOW WARRIORS

In this section, we'll look at the major heroes from the Strike Force and Shadow Warriors teams. The heroes of Strike Force come first, then those of the Shadow Warriors. The last section details notable independent heroes as well as any disbanded super teams (such as the teen heroes of Avant Guard).

PRESENTATION NOTES:

1) All characters are built on a 400-point base.

2) Due to the incompleteness of Aaron's files, not all characters have a complete background.

3) At some point many of the players in the Strike Force campaign rebuilt their characters at their starting power levels using **HERO System 5th Edition** rules. Using these builds I have presented "then" and "now" versions of certain characters.

4) Characters with character sheets are listed by total number of session appearances, ***not*** alphabetically.

STRIKE FORCE

Strike Force was formed in late 1981, after the events of the first play session (which occurred in-universe on August 21, 1981). In late spring of 1982, the team split due to ideological differences, becoming Strike Force and the Shadow Warriors. Strike Force then split several more times, forming Strike Force DC in 1990, Strike Force New York in 1993, and Strike Force Hawaii in 1995. As for the Shadow Warriors, they remained rather consistent until 1995, when Lorelei stepped down as field leader of the Shadow Warriors and helped create the Shadow Knights, a more covert version of the Shadow Warriors.

Strike Force Orbital

As the name implies, Strike Force Orbital is based out of an space station in Earth orbit. It is also the main Strike Force team, mostly consisting of characters who have been part of the campaign the longest.

LIGHTRUNE (START OF THE CAMPAIGN)

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
45	STR	35	18-	Lift 12.8 tons; 9d6 HTH Damage [4]
20	DEX	20	13-	
23	CON	13	14-	
18	INT	8	13-	PER Roll 13-
13	EGO	3	12-	
15	PRE	5	12-	PRE Attack: 3d6
7	OCV	20		
7	DCV	20		
4	OMCV	3		
4	DMCV	3		
4	SPD	20		*Phases:* 3, 6, 9, 12
20	PD	18		*Total:* 20 PD (20 rPD)
20	ED	18		*Total:* 20 ED (20 rED)
14	REC	10		
46	END	6		
10	BODY	0		
45	STUN	13		**Total Characteristic Cost: 214**

Movement:	Running:	12m
	Flight:	30m
	Leaping:	18m
	Swimming:	4m
	Teleportation:	30m

Cost	Powers	END
30	*Mystic Light:* Multipower, 30-point reserve	
2f	1) *Blade Of Light:* HKA 1d6+1 (3 ½d6 w/STR), Armor Piercing (+¼)	2
3f	2) *Mystic Flight:* Flight 30m	3
3f	3) *Form Of Light:* Teleportation 30m	3
3f	4) *Mystic Healing:* Healing Simplified Healing 3d6	3
1f	5) *Mystic Senses:* Radar (Radio Group)	
1f	6) *Mystic Senses:* Increased Arc Of Perception (360 Degrees) with Radio Group	
	Martial Arts: Boxing	

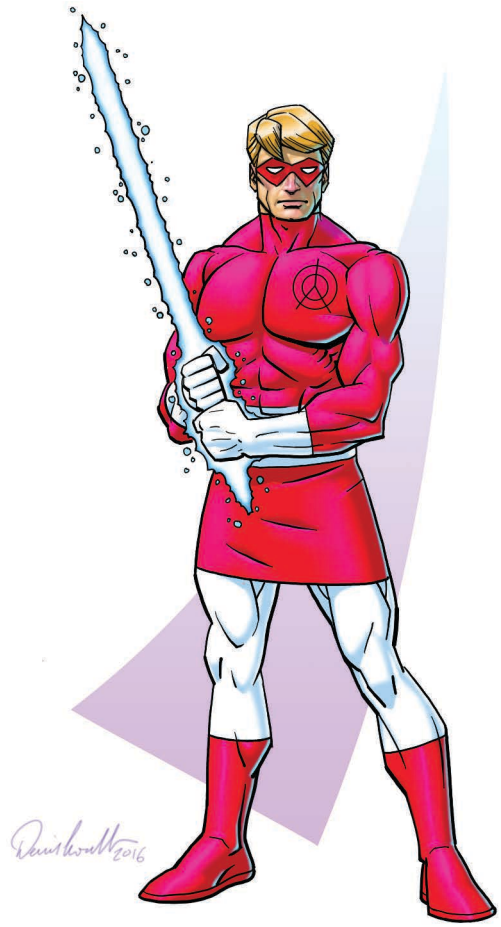
Maneuver		OCV	DCV	Notes
4	Block	+2	+2	Block, Abort
3	Clinch	-1	-1	Grab Two Limbs, 55 STR for holding on
5	Hook	-2	+1	13d6 Strike
3	Jab	+2	+1	9d6 Strike

20	*Invulnerable:* Resistant (+½) for 20 PD/20 ED	
7	*Strong Legs:* Leaping +14m (18m forward, 9m upward)	1
40	*Invulnerable:* Life Support: Total (including Longevity: Immortality)	
	Talents	
6	Striking Appearance +2/+2d6	
	Skills	
3	Combat Driving 13-	
3	Language: Welsh (completely fluent)	
3	PS: Composer 12-	
2	PS: Musician 11-	
3	PS: Photographer 12-	

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 146
Total Cost: 359

Background/History: Ken Robertson was the only child of Pulitzer Prize-winning New York newspaperman Al (Alistair) Robertson and his wife Gail Loomis Robertson. He grew up in New Rochelle, New York, in a real "go-getter" household. Al was a former Olympian, having competed in pistol in 1960, 1964, and 1968. Gail was a homemaker who referred to herself as a "domestic guerrilla"— she was also a Girl Scout leader, community organizer, war protester, feminist letter-writer, and guest editorialist. Raised in that environment, Ken was encouraged to develop each of his skills and aptitudes, to pursue each of his opportunities He inherited athletic impulses from his father and artistic leanings from his mother's family. In high school and college, he boxed and studied photography and music (particularly piano and composition).

In July of 1981, when he was 22, Ken's father financed a backpacking tour of Wales as a college graduation gift; Ken's mother's family was originally from Wales. Ken was accompanied by his cousin Brian Loomis, orphaned son of his mother's sister. Brian and Ken had known one another all through childhood and had attended college together, and Brian, a cheerful star football player, got along very well with Ken. However, the backpacking tour was to spell disaster for them. Because they traveled on foot, without leaving an itinerary anyone could follow, and often traveled along ill-used roads, they attracted the attention of a malevolent magical society.



LIGHTRUNE (START OF THE CAMPAIGN-CONTINUED)

400	**Matching Complications (75)**
10	DNPC: Carol Graves Frequently (Normal; Useful Noncombat Position or Skills)
10	Distinctive Features: Style (Boxing) (Not Concealable; Noticed and Recognizable; Detectable By Large Group)
15	Hunted: Assorted Undead (Infrequently, As Pow; NCI; Harshly Punish)
10	Hunted: Blowtorch (Infrequently, As Pow; Harshly Punish)
10	Physical Complication: Spontaneously Glows in Times of Stress (Infrequently; Slightly Impairing)
20	Psychological Complication: Code Versus Killing (Very Common; Strong)
15	Psychological Complication: Doesn't Understand High Technology (Common; Strong)
15	Psychological Complication: Hatred Of Evil Magic (Common; Strong)
20	Psychological Complication: Likes To Fight (Very Common; Strong)
15	Social Complication: Secret ID (Kenneth Robertson) (Frequently, Major)
10	Vulnerability: 2 x STUN Darkness-Based Attacks (Uncommon)
30	Vulnerability: 2 x STUN Electrical-Based Attacks (Very Common)

Total Complications Points: 75
Experience Points: 0

LIGHTRUNE (END OF THE CAMPAIGN)

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
55	STR	45	20-	Lift 51.2 tons; 11d6 HTH Damage [5]
23	DEX	26	14-	
23	CON	13	14-	
18	INT	8	13-	PER Roll 13-/18-
14	EGO	4	12-	
20	PRE	10	13-	PRE Attack: 4d6
8	OCV	25		
8	DCV	25		
5	OMCV	6		
5	DMCV	6		
5	SPD	30		*Phases:* 3, 5, 8, 10, 12
28	PD	26		*Total:* 28 PD (28 rPD)
24	ED	22		*Total:* 24 ED (24 rED)
16	REC	12		
46	END	6		
12	BODY	2		
52	STUN	16		**Total Characteristic Cost: 282**

Movement:	Running:	12m
	Flight:	40m
	Leaping:	22m
	Swimming:	4m
	Teleportation:	30m

Cost	Powers	END
90	*Mystic Light:* Multipower, 90-point reserve	
4f	1) *Blade Of Light:* HKA 2d6 (4 ½d6 w/STR), Armor Piercing (+¼)	4
4f	2) *Mystic Flight:* Flight 40m, x4 Noncombat	4
3f	3) *Form Of Light:* Teleportation 30m	3
6f	4) *Mystic Healing:* Healing Simplified Healing 6d6	6
1f	5) *Mystic Senses:* Radar (Radio Group)	
1f	6) *Mystic Senses:* +5 PER with Radio Group	
1f	7) *Mystic Senses:* Increased Arc Of Perception (360 Degrees) with Radio Group	

Cost	Powers END
75	*Magic Powers:* Variable Power Pool (Magic Pool), 60 Pool + 30 Control Cost, Limited Special Effects (Extradimentional Movement, Growth, Healing, Light, Magical Analysis/Dispel, and Transformation Powers; +0)

Martial Arts: *Boxing*

	Maneuver	OCV	DCV	Notes
4	Block	+2	+2	Block, Abort
3	Clinch	-1	-1	Grab Two Limbs, 65 STR for holding on
5	Hook	-2	+1	15d6 Strike
3	Jab	+2	+1	11d6 Strike

7	*Invulnerable:* Hardened (+¼) for 28 PD	
26	*Invulnerable:* Resistant (+½) for 28 PD/24 ED	
9	*Strong Legs:* Leaping +18m (22m forward, 11m upward)	1
40	*Invulnerable:* Life Support: Total (including Longevity: Immortality)	
32	Regeneration (2 BODY per Turn)	
19	Shape Shift (Sight Group, limited group of shapes (humanoids)), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½)	
4	*Instant Change:* Cosmetic Transform 1d6 (clothing being worn into superhero costume, heals back another application of this power), Improved Results Group (any clothing; +¼), Trigger (changing clothing is a Zero Phase Action, Trigger automatically and immediately resets; +¾); Limited Target (the clothes currently worn by the character; -½)	1

LIGHTRUNE (END OF THE CAMPAIGN-CONTINUED)

3 *Turn Glass Into Gems:* Major Transform ½d6 (transform glass into gems, healed back by another application of this power); Limited Target (glass; -½) 1

Perks
5 Money: Well Off

Talents
6 Striking Appearance +2/+2d6

Skills
16 +2 with HTH Combat
3 Combat Driving 14-
3 KS: Magic 12-
3 KS: Undead 13-
3 Language: Welsh (completely fluent)
13 Power: Magic Skill 18-
3 PS: Composer 12-
3 PS: Gem Fabricator 13-
3 PS: Gemologist 12-
2 PS: Musician 11-
5 PS: Photographer 15-

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 409
Total Cost: 690

400 Matching Complications (75)
10 Distinctive Features: Style (Boxing) (Not Concealable; Noticed and Recognizable; Detectable By Large Group)
15 Hunted: Assorted Undead (Infrequently, As Pow; NCI; Harshly Punish)
20 Hunted: Cult of the Beast (Infrequently, Mo Pow; NCI; Harshly Punish)
20 Psychological Complication: Code Versus Killing (Very Common; Strong)
5 Psychological Complication: Hatred Of Evil Magic (Uncommon; Moderate)
20 Psychological Complication: Likes To Fight (Very Common; Strong)
20 Psychological Complication: Loves WillowWitch (Very Common; Strong)
15 Social Complication: Secret ID (Kenneth Robertson) (Frequently, Major)
5 Vulnerability: 1 ½ x STUN Darkness-Based Attacks (Uncommon)
15 Vulnerability: 1 ½ x STUN Electrical-Based Attacks (Very Common)

Total Complications Points: 75
Experience Points: 290

The organization called the Cult of the Beast was not intrinsically evil (see page 43); it was merely mercenary and self-serving. But some of its semi-autonomous branches (or "cells") were definitely evil, and one of them was the necromantic research cell, headed by BBC comedian Dennis Stewart. Stewart had redeveloped an ancient spell that animated the dead using the life-force of minor demonic beings from another plane. This resulted in a sort of imperishable super-zombie and he thought the two backpacking Americans would be perfect subjects. Thus, he had them kidnapped.

At the outdoor ritual where they were to be sacrificed, Stewart was in the process of casting the spell that would painlessly deprive Ken and Brian of their lives when the scene was discovered by a superhero sorcerer named Chance. Chance, who bore the title of Watchlord (see page 52), was charged with the duty of limiting dimensional intrusions into the Earth, and Stewart's demon-summoning spell had alerted him to this ceremony.

Before Chance could stop him, Stewart was able to cast his life-robbing spell. Ken and Brian collapsed, dead. Chance used spells of his own to try to revive them or at least preserve them, and then he and Stewart (and Stewart's aides) fought a spectacular

wizard's duel. Because they were in the center of the action, the bodies of Ken and Brian were hit by "spillover fire" from the spells of both wizards.

In the end, a big chunk of Welsh countryside was torn up. Dennis Stewart was dead. Ken Robertson revived spontaneously but found nothing but a scorched crater where Brian's body had been—it had been destroyed by battle damage. Chance helped Ken with the authorities' inquiries and arranged for the disposition—and unlawful cremation—of Dennis Stewart's body. And that was that.

Except... once back in the States, Ken began noticing odd things happening. He would sometimes spontaneously glow. A sharp knife dropped point-first onto his bare foot didn't penetrate it. He contacted Chance, who was based out of New York City, and the sorcerous hero determined that Ken was undergoing a transformation. His epidermis was now energy rather than physical matter, a force field that was identical in appearance to skin. He could choose not to breathe. He could project light. He could, with a little practice, even lift off from the ground and fly.

Go-getter Ken needed little encouragement to train in his new powers or to seek out the competitive world of superheroes. A lifelong admirer of supers, he created his own costume. He chose a name based on a vision he'd had as he lay dying, just a glowing, light-based symbol; he put the symbol on the breast and right glove of his costume and called himself Lightrune. He began flying out over the streets of New York, seeking evildoers to pound. One of his first victims was a mercenary supervillain named Blowtorch, whom Lightrune caught in the midst of an armored car robbery. Lightrune defeated Blowtorch, earning that villain's enmity for several years.

ShadowWalker (see page 157) witnessed the end of the first Lightrune/Blowtorch fight. Months later, when investigating something he suspected might require more raw power than he possessed, ShadowWalker asked Lightrune to step in and offer some muscle. This investigation resulted in the formation of Strike Force.

Lightrune (often just called Rune) quickly became the team's brick, or super-strongman. In the early days, he was often responsible for the team's transportation as well, grabbing up as many people as he could carry or who could hang onto him and flying the whole group wherever they needed to be. (At one point, he built a metal framework with seats, seat belts, and handles; team members would sit in the frame and he would carry it. This unpopular device was called the Rune Buggy and lasted only until the team acquired Nightwing.)

As his transformation continued, he became stronger and tougher, eventually losing altogether the need to breathe. He also contributed to the expansion of Strike Force's roster by bringing in new supers such as Ichi-ban and Nightmist.

During all this time, he began making his living as a photographer, sometimes playing musical gigs on the side. He met someone who shared two of his interests: United Nations Security Force (UNSec) agent Carol Graves, who was part of an elite anti-supervillain response team and also a photographer herself. The two soon became romantically involved.

In 1982, Strike Force encountered a school of super-sorcerors, the Circle, which was engaged in an investigation of vampires infiltrating New York's police department. The teams, cooperating, solved the problem and eliminated the vampire plot. Lightrune also met WillowWitch, a beautiful sorceress with whom he shared some points in common: she was of Welsh extraction and had had difficulties with the Cult of the Beast (her own father and mother had individually been cell leaders). But he didn't risk his relationship with Carol by pursuing WillowWitch; he kept her at arm's length. Soon, however, Ichi-ban joined the Circle for more magical training, and Lightrune, feeling he needed some as well, also joined... so he was keeping WillowWitch at arm's length on an almost daily, rather than irregular, basis.

In early 1983, when Phosphene disappeared, Lightrune was elected the third leader of Strike Force. On the advice of efficiency analyst Aubrey Langhorn, he hired agents for the Strike Force Main Mission Team, a corps of trained specialists who could handle crowd control and some anti-super actions; Carol Graves quit UNSec and joined the MMT. He reorganized things and made Strike Force a more effective operation, but never enjoyed managerial duties; late in the year, he handed the leadership position off to teammate Kinestra.

Ken's work as a musician never attracted much notice, but he achieved considerable success as a commercial photographer. His perceptions of light and color, slightly alien by human standards, and his unusual compositions made him much sought-after, especially in the fashion world. He also picked up a reputation as a prima donna, caused by the fact that he would occasionally grow exasperated with the way a shoot was progressing, hand off his camera to an assistant, and leave for several hours or even days.

(This was, of course, an inevitable consequence of having to respond to emergency Strike Force summonses.) But that reputation simply added to his luster as a New York "personality."

It gradually became evident that Ken was becoming less and less human, in a physical sense. He never lost his emotional and cultural connection with humans, but he stopped aging, and magical analysis confirmed that he could never sire children in a normal fashion. These factors weighed heavily on the mind of the fully human Carol Graves. The two of them gradually drifted apart, and by early 1985 they called it quits as a couple. They remained friends afterwards. Lightrune soon after began asking WillowWitch out on dates, and they quickly became a romantic item.

Lightrune was not as badly harmed by World War III as many people. His parents survived. His apartment, on Manhattan's Upper East Side, was destroyed, as was WillowWitch's Greenwich Village apartment; they lived at their respective team base headquarters for some time, then moved in together in a home in the Hamptons (an enclave of the wealthy on upper Long Island), which they continue to occupy today.

In the years since the war, Lightrune has worked hard to maintain his connection with his friends, though he and his lady, unaging sorcerers, are probably destined someday to depart the known world of humans and travel the more esoteric magical realms.

In 1995, Lightrune and Strike Force Orbital clashed with a monstrous supervillain named Mayhem and a necromancer named Grave-Robber, the current leader of the Cult of the Beast's necromantic research cell. To his shock, Lightrune discovered that Grave-Robber was his cousin Brian Loomis. Like Lightrune, Grave-Robber had revived from the spell that had cost his life. Like Lightrune, he was a living/unliving being with great powers. Unlike Lightrune, he had lost most of his humanity. Lightrune now prepares for further clashes with his cousin and onetime friend.

Personality/Motivation: Lightrune is best described as light-hearted and mercurial. Though he does take things seriously, he doesn't generally let others see this. In addition, he is sometimes eerily distant and introspective. This is less a consequence of his transformation than of his artistic inclinations; he easily becomes absorbed in the composition of something he sees. As Ken Robertson, he demonstrates more ego than he actually feels, simply to keep up the impression that he is a talented prima donna in the photographic field.

Lightrune has a respect for and love of life that makes him tremendously opposed to killing. However, this attitude does not serve to protect the undead he faces. If he is certain that an opponent is both irredeemable and already dead, he will not hesitate to use his most lethal attacks. On top of this, he loves to fight, and this sometimes proves a problem, as he would rather throw himself into a good scrap than do strategic planning; he is also very reluctant to give up a good fight, even when the team desperately needs to retire the field.

Overall, Rune is a good-hearted man who makes friends easily. Among the closest of them are Phosphene, Lorelei, and Luster. WillowWitch is the love of his life. He has researched spells that will allow the two of them to conceive children together, but neither of them is ready for this step yet.

Quote: *"Line up, you guys, I only have two fists."*

Powers/Tactics: Lightrune, though he does not care to admit it to others or himself, is the only known example of a very distinctive type of undead. He *did* die when sacrificed in 1981, and was resurrected as something that was not human. Over the years, his physical body was replaced by a body of energy structured in exactly the same form his physical body had taken.

The changes gave him tremendous strength and a gradually-increasing resistance to damage. Though he breathed and ate in the months after his transformation, he gradually ceased needing to do so (though he still must breathe to talk). His body developed the ability to repair damage quickly. His inherent light-based magic allows him to stimulate living things to heal. He can glow, either to illuminate his surroundings or to send out radar-type emissions and "see" his surroundings. He can teleport—instantly converting himself to pure energy and reassembling himself into a physical body not far away—but cannot teleport other people. He can fly, which involves his personal "glow" superheating a centimeter or so from certain points on his body (usually his heels, knees, and shoulder blades, giving him a sufficient number of control and thrust surfaces), burning atmosphere and causing propulsion in very small, localized regions. He can also project concentrated light in the form of a blade. He is no swordsman, and tends to use this very destructive power for shearing through obstacles or confronting very dangerous enemies who have proved immune to all other attacks. His laser sword

is eerily silent except when it strikes something; then, the objects struck make whatever noise is appropriate to something suddenly superheated to several hundred degrees.

When studying with the Circle and subsequently on his own, he has learned more pure forms of sorcery. These are flavored by the Japanese-magic rituals common to the Circle's studies and the Welsh-magic rituals he has studied on his own, so his spells tend to have a distinctive flavor—persons with knowledge of earthly sorcerers can usually recognize his magical efforts.

In addition to being the team's first high-strength fighter, Lightrune quickly learned to serve an essential role in Strike Force combats: he became the sponge for the enemy's high-powered attacks. Rather than just dive into combats, he would initially hang back to see what the most powerful (or, in the case of opponents of unknown abilities, most powerful-looking) enemy would do, and would often try to dive in the path of damage that might otherwise hit his teammates. It is for this reason that news archival photos and footage often shows him being blasted through walls, hammered into the earth, engulfed in fire, or otherwise abused. (Usually, the same footage, a few frames later, shows him getting up, ready to reenter the fray.)

In combat, he uses his great strength and boxing skills to good effect, but he doesn't fight like a bruiser. He is especially fond of performing Half-Move teleports and assaulting an enemy from an unexpected direction, or using his teleport skill to flick from enemy to enemy, causing consternation in the enemy ranks.

Rune has another critical role in the team: healer. His magical powers of healing have saved lives among innocents and his teammates on numerous occasions, starting back in 1981, when an attack by Shiva on the mind-controlled La Panthere nearly cost her life.

Since the arrival of Man Mountain Thunder and Copperhead in Strike Force, Lightrune has had to worry less about being the sole "team brick." He works well with the other team strongmen.

Campaign Use: Lightrune can be consulted by PCs needing information on various types of undead, the Cult of the Beast, assorted magical rituals, or an introduction to the Circle. They could also meet him in his secret identity, that of Ken Robertson, photographer (especially if any PCs have secret identities as fashion models and the like).

If you wish to use Lightrune as a villain, then assume this version had less strength of character than Lightrune the hero; his transformation *did* leech much of his humanity away. This Lightrune enjoys fighting and showing off, but believes that only supers matter—normals don't count, so such matters as endangerment of innocents don't factor into his thinking. He looks identical to the Strike Force Lightrune except that his costume is a darker, bloodier red.

Appearance: Ken is a tall, broad-chested man in extraordinary physical condition. (He kept up an intensive exercise regimen all through his mortal life and through the years of his transformation, and his "normal" body is now locked into a very buff configuration.) He has very blond hair cut short, and deep blue eyes. His features are both handsome and accessible.

His Lightrune costume starts with a glaring red long-sleeved tunic that falls to mid-thigh. He wears boots and a broad mask in an identical red. His leggings, broad belt, and forearm-length gloves are white, and his eyes are hidden by semi-transparent white panels on the underside of the mask. On the right side of his chest is a symbol, the one that he saw as he lay dying on that field in Wales: three lines radiating from a central point, superimposed over a white ring. The same symbol, but substituting a red circle for the white ring, is on the back of his left glove.

Background/History: Phosphene is a member of the Blood, a race of mutants which originated on Earth thousands of years ago, but which have long lived in another dimension and all but forgotten about Earth. Phosphene's family came to Earth in 1927; Phosphenes's father, a charismatic sociopath with a tendency to use his flame powers on entire towns, settled briefly in New York City, fathered Phosphene with a love-smitten cashier, and then moved on.

Phosphene, born Richard McLean, grew to manhood in New York City, not knowing about his special heritage. He supported himself and his ailing mother through a variety of criminal activities. His Blood ancestry gave him remarkable strength and speed, boons to his criminal occupation. His mother died when he was 20, and by that time he was a bodyguard for one of the city's criminal syndicate leaders.

At a test of the syndicate's new particle-beam weapon, Richard was injured when the weapon broke free of its housing and sprayed the area, setting the facility afire. Richard awoke in the hospital in police custody. To avoid prosecution for his many crimes, he agreed to turn state's evidence. The strong-arm syndicate boys caught him, and eliminated him by

PHOSPHENE (START OF THE CAMPAIGN)

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
20	STR	10	13-	Lift 400 kg; 4d6 HTH Damage [2]
20	DEX	20	13-	
23	CON	13	14-	
15	INT	5	12-	PER Roll 14-
10	EGO	0	11-	
15	PRE	5	12-	PRE Attack: 3d6
7	OCV	20		
7	DCV	20		
3	OMCV	0		
3	DMCV	0		
6	SPD	40		*Phases:* 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12
12	PD	10		*Total:* 12 PD (12 rPD)
12	ED	10		*Total:* 12 ED (12 rED)
10	REC	6		
48	END	6		
10	BODY	0		
32	STUN	6		**Total Characteristic Cost: 171**

Movement:		
	Running:	12m
	Flight:	32m
	Leaping:	8m
	Swimming:	4m
	Teleportation:	30m

PHOSPHENE (START OF THE CAMPAIGN-CONTINUED)

Cost	Powers	END
70	*Blood Powers:* Multipower, 70-point reserve	
2f	1) *Blood Levitation:* Flight 32m; Gliding (-1)	
7v	2) *Blood Teleportation:* Teleportation 30m, x2 Increased Mass	3
1f	3) *"N-Ray" Vision:* Penetrative with Sight Group (blocked by shielding defined as Mental Defense)	
1v	4) *Instant Change:* Cosmetic Transform 1d6 (clothing being worn into superhero costume, heals back another application of this power), Trigger (changing clothing is a Zero Phase Action, Trigger automatically and immediately resets; +¾); Limited Target (the clothes currently worn by the character; -½))	1

Martial Arts: *Aikido and Karate*

	Maneuver	OCV	DCV	Notes
4	Block	+2	+2	Block, Abort
4	Dodge	--	+5	Dodge, Affects All Attacks, Abort
4	Punch/Snap Kick	+0	+2	6d6 Strike
5	Side/Spin Kick	-2	+1	8d6 Strike
3	Throw	+0	+1	4d6 +v/10, Target Falls

8	*Armored Costume:* Resistant (+½) for 12 PD/12 ED; OIF (-½)	
2	*Strong Legs:* Leaping +4m (8m forward, 4m upward)	1
6	*Sharp Senses:* +2 PER with all Sense Groups	

Skills

3	Acrobatics 13-
1	CK: New York City 8-
3	Deduction 12-
3	PS: Writer 12-
3	Security Systems 12-
3	Sleight Of Hand 13-
3	Stealth 13-
3	Streetwise 12-

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 140
Total Cost: 310

400	**Matching Complications (75)**
30	Enraged: Berserk Death Of Innocents (Uncommon), go 14-, recover 11-
15	Hunted: The Affrighter (Frequently, As Pow; Harshly Punish)
25	Hunted: The Reapers (Frequently, Mo Pow; NCI; Harshly Punish)
20	Psychological Complication: Code Versus Killing (Common; Total)
5	Psychological Complication: Fear of Losing Fights (Uncommon; Moderate)
10	Psychological Complication: Loves To Embarrass His Enemies (Common; Moderate)
15	Psychological Complication: Overconfidence (Common; Strong)
5	Psychological Complication: Suspicious Of Women (Uncommon; Moderate)
15	Social Complication: Secret ID (Matt Quarry) Frequently, Major
5	Unluck: 1d6
30	Vulnerability: 2 x STUN from Energy Killing Attacks (Very Common)

Total Complications Points: 75
Experience Points: 0

hurling him from a window—or so they thought. But the beam had awakened Richard's latent Blood powers, and he glided to safety, surprised but unhurt.

Soon after, he used his knowledge of criminal techniques to change his identity. He became Matt Quarry, mystery writer, and also took the identity of Phosphene, chief superhero enemy of his former employers.

In August of 1981, Phosphene's aid was solicited by ShadowWalker, and he joined what was to become the core of Strike Force. He eventually discovered that his syndicate enemies were actually part of Carousel, and later that Carousel was part of the Reapers syndicate; this lead him to become a fierce enemy of the Reapers while they existed. In the course of his career, he met and fell in love with La Panthere; he became leader of Strike Force when ShadowWalker left the team; he met most of his Blood relatives on Earth, good and evil; he was brainwashed by Azor (ruler of the world of the Blood) into becoming the villain Phantasm but was cured by his Blood relatives; and he eventually married La Panthere.

Personality/Motivation: Phosphene ("Phos-Boss") is an uneasy blend of responsible leadership and chaotic impulses. He is good at leading Strike Force but often wishes for a less responsible role, and bears the irrational conviction that he can outthink any villain. He is dedicated to the preservation of all human life (including villains). Misogynistic from his early days with the mob, he has learned to trust and care for some women—but only those who have earned his respect. His best friends are La Panthere and Lightrune. He is on good terms with all his Blood relatives except Affrighter, whom he has fought on numerous occasions. He despises Shiva for his attack on La Panthere.

Powers/Tactics: Phosphene's powers center around his Blood powers and are augmented by a variety of skills, most of which were learned during his criminal career. Since becoming Phosphene, he has added a variety of gadgets—an armored costume, subvocal-activated mask radio, a psi-shield in his mask, and a small gadget pool for various applications.

His powers make him versatile but not particularly powerful. In combat, Phosphene tends to hang back, directing his teammates' actions, using his teleportation to rescue innocents and allies and to baffle his opponents; he seldom engages an enemy with his martial arts abilities.

His *Teleportation Merger* consists of teleporting next to a target so that his fingertips are actually within the target; his *Instant Change* consists of teleporting out of his clothes while keeping his costume on.

PHOSPHENE (END OF THE CAMPAIGN)

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
20	STR	10	13-	Lift 400 kg; 4d6 HTH Damage [2]
26	DEX	32	14-	
23	CON	13	14-	
15	INT	5	12-	PER Roll 14-
13	EGO	3	12-	
18	PRE	8	13-	PRE Attack: 3 ½d6
7	OCV	20		
7	DCV	20		
4	OMCV	3		
4	DMCV	3		
8	SPD	60		*Phases:* 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12
20	PD	18		*Total:* 20 PD (20 rPD)
20	ED	18		*Total:* 20 ED (20 rED)
10	REC	6		
54	END	7		
10	BODY	0		
32	STUN	6		**Total Characteristic Cost: 232**

Movement:		
	Running:	12m
	Flight:	32m
	Leaping:	8m
	Swimming:	4m
	Teleportation:	30m

PHOSPHENE (END OF THE CAMPAIGN-CONTINUED)

Cost	Powers	END
100	*Blood Psychic Powers:* Multipower, 100-point reserve	
5v	1) *Teleportation Merger:* HKA 2d6 (3d6 w/STR), Armor Piercing (+¼); Must Have Teleported Next To Target That Phase (-½)	4
2f	2) *Blood Levitation:* Flight 32m; Gliding (-1)	
13v	3) *Blood Teleportation:* Teleportation 30m, x16 Noncombat, x8 Increased Mass **plus** Teleportation: Floating Fixed Location (1 Locations)	6
11v	4) *Teleport Between Worlds:* Extra-Dimensional Movement (Any Dimension, Any Location corresponding to current physical location), x8 Increased Weight	6
1f	5) *"N-Ray" Vision:* Penetrative with Sight Group (blocked by shielding defined as Mental Defense)	
1f	6) *Instant Change:* Cosmetic Transform 1d6 (clothing being worn into superhero costume, heals back another application of this power), Trigger (changing clothing is a Zero Phase Action, Trigger automatically and immediately resets; +¾); Limited Target (the clothes currently worn by the character; -½))	1

Martial Arts: *Aikido and Karate*

	Maneuver	OCV	DCV	Notes
4	Block	+2	+2	Block, Abort
4	Dodge	--	+5	Dodge, Affects All Attacks, Abort
3	Hold	-1	-1	Grab Two Limbs, 35 STR for holding on
4	Knifehand	-2	+0	HKA 2d6 +1
4	Punch/Snap Kick	+0	+2	7d6 Strike
5	Redirect	+1	+3	Block, Abort
5	Side/Spin Kick	-2	+1	9d6 Strike
5	Strike	+1	+3	5d6 Strike
5	Strike	+1	+3	5d6 Strike
3	Throw	+0	+1	5d6 +v/10, Target Falls
4	+1 HTH Damage Classes (already added in)			

Costume; all slots OIF (-½), No REC While Using Costume-Based Power (-½)

10	1) *Armored Costume:* Resistant for 20 PD/20 ED; Common Limitations described above (-1)	
1	2) LS (Safe in High Pressure; Safe in Low Pressure/Vacuum); Common Limitations described above (-1)	
1	3) LS (Safe in High Radiation); Common Limitations described above (-1)	

Mask; all slots IIF (-¼)

10	1) Radio: HRRP (Radio Group); IIF (-¼)	
3	2) LS (Safe in Intense Cold; Safe in Intense Heat); IIF (-¼)	
10	3) *Psionic Shielding:* Mental Defense (13 points total); IIF (-¼)	
19	*Equipment Pool:* Variable Power Pool, 15 Pool + 15 Control Cost, Can Only Be Changed In A Laboratory (-½); Focus (all powers bought through VPP must have at least -¼ worth of this Limitation; -¼)	
2	*Strong Legs:* Leaping +4m (8m forward, 4m upward)	1
6	*Sharp Senses:* +2 PER with all Sense Groups	
3	*Sharp Senses:* +3 PER with with N-Ray Vision	

Skills

10	+2 with Martial Arts
10	+5 with Teleportation Accuracy
3	Acrobatics 14-
3	Breakfall 14-
3	Bureaucratics 13-
9	Deduction 15-
1	KS: Aikido 8-
1	KS: Karate 8-
3	KS: National Politics 12-
3	KS: Neighboring Universes 12-

As Phosphene was never *entirely* cured of his Phantasm persona, he sometimes draws upon it when things are desperate. This normally means he suddenly shifts into his Phantasm costume and then starts teleporting about trying to shake things up by doing unpredictable and chaotic things. This includes:

- Teleporting onto the shoulders of a villain and covering the villain's head with either his (Phantasm's) or the villain's cape (all while cackling madly).
- Teleport next to an attractive villainess and draw her into a deep kiss.
- Teleport about randomly while mocking and insulting his foes (looking to draw as much attention and fire as possible, while dodging incoming attacks).

In short, Phantasm will pull off insane stunts designed to distract or momentarily incapacitate foes, allowing the rest of Strike Force to regroup and reverse the tide of battle. These stunts are not usually damaging in and of themselves, but Phantasm has been known to teleport a villain, and himself, into situations where they *could* both suffer significant damage.

When Phosphene becomes Phantasm, command of Strike Force falls to the next in line (usually Luster) as you *don't* want Phantasm trying to run things. In addition, Phosphene does not like to change to Phantasm because once there he has little regard for his own safety, and he knows that La Panthere doesn't like the idea of getting himself killed. So he reserves it for last-ditch efforts.

Campaign Use: Phosphene is an energetic, outspoken team leader, one well-known to other hero team leaders; he is a staunch friend to the more heroic of his Blood relatives. As Matt Quarry, he is a successful mystery novelist and a good amateur sleuth.

If you wish to use Phosphene as a villain, then Richard would have returned to the mob, beaten his former boss, and then taken the man's place as the cell leader of the Reapers in New York. His Complications concerning killing would be replaced by ones such as Greed and Cynicism, and he'd be Hunted by the New York police. Alternatively, he might never have stopped being Phantasm, and now commits crimes and robberies for the fun of it all. Give him Psychological Complications such as "Chaotic and Unpredictable"; he is Hunted by the New York police and Reapers (or other criminal organizations).

Appearance: Phosphene stands 6'1" and weighs a muscular 185 pounds. While he ages slower than normal humans due to his Blood heritage, Phosphene's physical age reflects his emotional state; for example, he actually grew younger after recovering from a near-nervous breakdown. His hair is black and graying at the temples, while his eyes are brown. As Phosphene he wears a matte black body stocking, covering him head to foot (with mask slits for eyes and mouth), and gloss black boots, gloves, and belt.

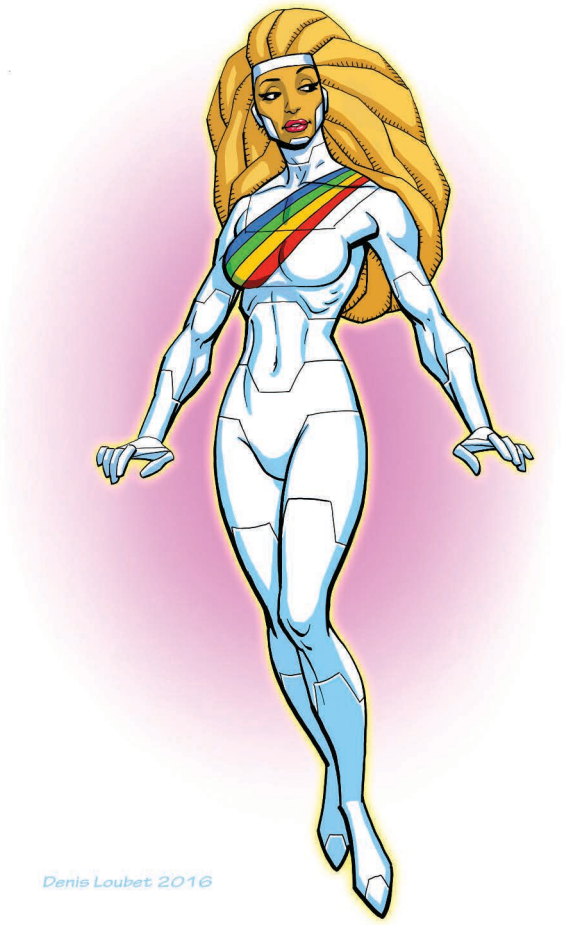
PHOSPHENE (END OF THE CAMPAIGN-CONTINUED)

3	Oratory 13-
4	PS: Writer (Mystery) 13-
3	SS: Psychology 12-
9	Security Systems 15-
3	Sleight Of Hand 14-
3	Stealth 14-
3	Tactics 12-

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 319
Total Cost: 550

400	**Matching Complications (75)**
30	Enraged: Death Of Innocents (Very Common), go 14-, recover 11-
25	Hunted: Blood Enemies (Frequently, Mo Pow; NCI; Harshly Punish)
20	Psychological Complication: Code Versus Killing (Very Common; Strong)
15	Psychological Complication: Fear of Losing Fights (Common; Strong)
20	Psychological Complication: Hatred Of Killing Attacks (Very Common; Strong)
20	Psychological Complication: Overconfidence (Very Common; Strong)
15	Social Complication: Secret ID (Matt Quarry) (Frequently, Major)

Total Complications Points: 75
Experience Points: 150



Background/History: Tanith is the firstborn child of Overlord (by Prism). She grew up in the Lair, Overlord's New York State underground base. She was jealous and resentful that Overlord paid no attention to his daughters but trained and took much interest in Power Lord, his oafish eldest son. To gain her father's attention, Tanith left the Lair and persuaded Strike Force to train her, thinking that cooperation with her father's enemies would infuriate Overlord. Whether it did or not, the death of Power Lord overshadowed her departure.

Lightrune and (eventually) La Panthere took Luster under their wings, training her and launching her career as a fashion model. Eventually she began to care for her teammates; she developed a heroic outlook and lost much of her feelings of superiority, while coming to understand the viewpoint of Strike Force's heroes.

Personality/Motivation: Initially, Tanith shared much of her father's former arrogance and coldness. However, the changes in her father went through and the affection she earned and learned from the members of Strike Force forced her to reevaluate her opinions. Her friends in Strike Force include Stunner (whom she respects for his scientific work), Lightrune, La Panthere, and Man Mountain Thunder (whom she respects for his philosophy and because he always has tremendous patience when dealing with her).

LUSTER

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
30+15	STR	20+10*	15- (18-)	Lift 1600 kg (12.8tons); 6d6 (9d6) HTH Damage [3 (4)]
23	DEX	26	14-	
25	CON	15	14-	
20	INT	10	13-	PER Roll 13-
15	EGO	5	12-	
15	PRE	5	12-	PRE Attack: 3d6
8	OCV	25		
8	DCV	25		
5	OMCV	6		
5	DMCV	6		
5	SPD	30		*Phases:* 3, 5, 8, 10, 12
6	PD	4		*Total:* 36 PD (30 rPD)
6	ED	4		*Total:* 36 ED (30 rED)
11	REC	7		
50	END	6		
12	BODY	2		
40	STUN	10		**Total Characteristic Cost: 216**

**: OIF (-½)*

Movement:	Running:	12m
	Flight:	30m
	Leaping:	30m
	Swimming:	4m

LUSTER (CONTINUED)

Cost	Powers	END
113	*Spectral Energy Projection:* Multipower, 141-point reserve, all slots OIAID (-¼)	
6v	1) *Lasers Applied To Golden Balls:* Blast 12d6, Area Of Effect (24m Radius Explosion; +½); Activates 14- (-¼), 8 Charges (-½), Costs Endurance (-½), IAF (-½), OIAID (-¼)	9
9v	2) *Red:* Sight Group Flash 8d6, Area Of Effect (10m Radius; +¾); Activates 14- (-¼),, OIAID (-¼)	7
8v	3) *Violet:* RKA 4d6; Activates 14- (-¼), OIAID (-¼)	6
8v	4) *Green:* Resistant Protection (20 PD/20 ED); Costs Half Endurance (-¼), OIAID (-¼)	3
4v	5) *White:* Invisibility to Sight Group , No Fringe; Activates 14- (-¼), OIAID (-¼)	3
3f	6) *Blue:* Detect Light 25- (Sight Group), Discriminatory, Increased Arc Of Perception (360 Degrees); OIAID (-¼)	
1f	7) *Yellowish Glow To Eyes:* Penetrative with Sight Group, Not Into Lightless Areas (+0); OIAID (-¼)	
	Power Suit; all Powers OIF (-½)	
20	1) *Armored Shell:* Resistant Protection (10 PD/10 ED); OIF (-½)	
20	2) Flight 30m; OIF (-½)	3
10	3) Radar (Radio Group); OIF (-½)	
13	4) LS (Safe in High Pressure; Safe in High Radiation; Safe in Intense Cold; Safe in Intense Heat; Safe in Low Pressure/Vacuum; Self-Contained Breathing); OIF (-½)	
23	*Gadget Pool:* Variable Power Pool, 21 Pool + 10 Control Cost, Can Only Be Changed In A Laboratory (-½); Focus (all powers bought through VPP must have at least -1 worth of this Limitation; -1)	
9	*Psychic Shields:* Mental Defense (9 points total)	
13	*Powerful Legs:* Leaping +26m (30m forward, 15m upward)	1
32	*Heals Quickly:* Regeneration (2 BODY per Turn)	
3	*Instant Change:* Cosmetic Transform 1d6 (clothing being worn into superhero costume, heals back another application of this power), Trigger (changing clothing is a Zero Phase Action, Trigger automatically and immediately resets; +¾); Limited Target (the clothes currently worn by the character; -½))1	

Martial Arts: *Savate*

	Maneuver	OCV	DCV	Notes
4	Block	+2	+2	Block, Abort
5	*Chassé* (Side Kick)	-2	+1	10d6 (13d6) Strike
4	*Coup de Pied Bas* (Low Kick)	+0	+2	8d6 (11d6) Strike
5	Direct (Jab/Cross)	+1	+3	6d6 (9d6) Strike

Perks

10	Money: Wealthy
20	*Alpha Base:* Vehicles & Bases

Talents

4	Speed Reading (x10)
6	Striking Appearance +2/+2d6

Skills

9	Computer Programming 16-
2	CuK: American Culture 11-
7	Inventor 15-
2	Language: Katari (fluent conversation)
1	Language: German (basic conversation)
2	Language: Norwegian (fluent conversation)
3	Paramedics 13-
3	Systems Operation 13-
1	WF: Vehicle Weapons (Tenshi)
3	Scientist
1	1) SS: Biochemistry 11-
1	2) SS: Biology 11-
2	3) SS: Computer Engineer 13-
2	4) SS: Cybernetics 13-
2	5) SS: Electron Microscopy 13-

LUSTER (CONTINUED)

4	6) SS: Electronic Engineering 15-
1	7) SS: Gemology 11-
1	8) SS: Genetics 11-
2	9) SS: Mathematics 13-
1	10) SS: Medicine 11-
1	11) SS: Neurology 11-
1	12) SS: Psychology 11-
1	13) SS: Sociology 11-
1	14) SS: Spectroscopy 11-
6	15) SS: Teleporation Technology 16-
3	Scholar
1	1) KS: Bushido Code 8-
1	2) KS: Christian Theology 11-
1	3) KS: Eastern Theology 11-
1	4) KS: Metaphysics 11-
1	5) KS: Savate 8-

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 421
Total Cost: 637

400	**Matching Complications (75)**
10	Distinctive Features: Beauty/Pheromones (Easily Concealed; Always Noticed and Causes Major Reaction; Detectable By Commonly-Used Senses)
10	Distinctive Features: Style (Savate) (Not Concealable; Noticed and Recognizable; Detectable By Large Group)
20	Enraged: Loved One Injured/Killed (Uncommon), go 14-, recover 11-
10	Hunted: (GM's choice) (Infrequently, As Pow; Harshly Punish)
20	Hunted: (GM's choice) (Infrequently, Mo Pow; NCI; Harshly Punish)
10	Negative Reputation: Overlord's Daughter, Frequently
5	Psychological Complication: Believes She Is Better Than Others (Uncommon; Moderate)
15	Psychological Complication: Irrational Hatred Of Failure (Common; Strong)
20	Psychological Complication: Need For Recognition (Very Common; Strong)
15	Social Complication: Secret ID (Tanith Oesterhaus) Frequently, Major
25	Susceptibility: Darkness versus Sight Group (drains Multipower) 3d6 Drain per Phase (Uncommon)
5	Unluck: 1d6
20	Vulnerability: 2 x Effect From Drains (Common)
10	Vulnerability: 2 x STUN From Darkness-Based Attacks (Uncommon)

Total Complications Points: 75
Experience Points: 239

Powers/Tactics: Luster has mutant spectral energy projection powers similar to her mother's. They are backed up by technical skills she learned in the Lair and the martial arts she's learned from Strike Force. In combat, she uses her RKA and Flash from range or utilizes her Gadget Pool, depending on the exact nature of the opposition.

Luster is also fairly knowledgeable about a broad range of scientific disciplines. She invented (and patented) the first three-dimensional television, and spent time studying neurology and working on light-based cyber-linking after meeting her "twin" on Earth-Kaiser.

Campaign Use: Luster represents a problem for a superhero team: Do they drive her out because of her arrogance, perhaps pushing her toward a life of crime like her father, or try to befriend her and turn her efforts to the side of good?

The villain version of Luster earned her father's affection and stayed with him.

Appearance: Luster is tall, taking after her father, and stands 5'11". She was a svelte 130 pounds, with a mix of Katari and Terran features. Her mane-like hair is golden blonde, her eyes are black, and she has a tawny tint to her skin.

Background/History: Millennia ago, the star-faring Shivall race established a genetic sciences colony on Earth. The colony succeeded in creating a race of winged humans (the Winged Folk, see page 62), but ended up stranded on Earth when the Shivall empire collapsed. Afterwards, the Winged Folk settled on a floating island, traveling about the world and developing a nomadic culture similar to that of Native Americans, and even merged with a Sioux tribe on one occasion.

Currently, the Winged Folk have placed their island over Victoria Island in Canada but still remain fairly reclusive from the rest of the world. That said, certain members of the race have ventured into the outer world. One of these is Kestrel, a psionic mutant. She grew fascinated by the outer world, and her hatred of injustice prompted her to join Strike Force. She now spends her time fighting evil and learning about the outer-worlders. Unfortunately, she also interested the biological experts of the Reapers and VIPER—and for some time was sought by them.

Personality/Motivation: Kestrel is a wide-eyed observer of the outer world. Her greatest motivations are her innate curiosity and her hatred of injustice—but she is as likely to turn her anger on the authorities when she perceives them as unjust. Within Strike Force she long served as the Voice of

KESTREL

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
18	STR	8	13-	Lift 303.1 kg; 3 ½d6 HTH Damage [2]
20	DEX	20	13-	
18	CON	8	13-	
18	INT	8	13-	PER Roll 13-
20	EGO	10	13-	
18	PRE	8	13-	PRE Attack: 3 ½d6
7	OCV	20		
7	DCV	20		
7	OMCV	12		
7	DMCV	12		
5	SPD	30		*Phases:* 3, 5, 8, 10, 12
11+8	PD	9		*Total:* 19 PD (8 rPD)
10+8	ED	8		*Total:* 18 ED (8 rED)
8	REC	4		
36	END	4		
12	BODY	2		
30	STUN	5	**Total Characteristic Cost: 188**	

Movement:		
	Running:	12m
	Flight:	26m
	Leaping:	4m
	Swimming:	4m

KESTREL (CONTINUED)

Cost	Powers	END
40	*Wings:* Multipower, 60-point reserve, all slots Restrainable (-½)	
2f	1) *Winged Flight:* Flight 26m; Restrainable (-½)	3
2f	2) *Fixed Wing Gliding:* Flight 40m; Gliding (-1), Restrainable (-½)	
85	*Psionic Powers:* Multipower, 85-point reserve	
15v	1) *Psionic Assault:* Mental Blast 6d6, Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼)	3
7f	2) *Psionic Control:* Mind Control 12d6, Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼)	3
14v	3) *Psionic Search:* Mind Scan 12d6, +5 OMCV	7
12v	4) *Psionic Mind Reading:* Telepathy 8d6, Invisible Power Effects (Invisible to Mental Group; +¼), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼)	2
4f	5) *Psionic Ghosting:* Desolidification	4
2f	6) *Psionic Cloaking:* Invisibility to Sight Group	2
18	*Steel Claw-Gloves:* HKA 2d6 (3d6 w/STR), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼); OAF (-1)	1
4	*High-Speed Claw Damage I:* Armor Piercing (+¼) for up HKA 3d6; OAF (-1), Only At 20m Of Flight Or Greater (-1)	1
4	*High-Speed Claw Damage II:* HKA +½d6 (2½d6 total/3½d6 w/STR), Armor Piercing (+¼); Only At 30m Of Flight Or Better (-1 ¼), OAF (-1)	1
2	*High-Speed Claw Damage III:* HKA +1 point (3d6 total/4d6 w/STR), Armor Piercing (+¼); Only At 40m Of Flight Or Better (-1 ½), OAF (-1)	1
19	*Armored Costume:* Resistant Protection (8 PD/8 ED); IIF (-¼)	
9	*Psionic Shields:* Mental Defense (9 points total)	
3	*Sharp-Eyed:* +2 versus Range Modifier for Sight Group	
	Talents	
3	Striking Appearance +1/+1d6	
	Skills	
6	+1 with all Mental Powers	
2	+2 with Ego Attack	
4	+2 with Flight	
3	Language: English (completely fluent; Winged Folk is native)	
2	Language: Spanish (fluent conversation)	
4	SS: Parapsychology 14-	
4	SS: Psychology 14-	

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 271
Total Cost: 458

400	**Matching Complications (75)**
15	Distinctive Features: Native American (Sioux) Coloration And Features, Wings (Not Concealable; Noticed and Recognizable; Detectable By Commonly-Used Senses)
20	Hunted: (GM's Choice) (Infrequently, Mo Pow; NCI; Harshly Punish)
20	Hunted: (GM's Choice) (Infrequently, Mo Pow; NCI; Harshly Punish)
10	Physical Complication: Needs Specialized Medical Care (Infrequently; Slightly Impairing)
15	Physical Complication: Wings Are Clumsy In Tight Situations (Infrequently; Greatly Impairing)
20	Psychological Complication: Hatred of Injustice (Very Common; Strong)
15	Social Complication: Public ID (Kestrel) Frequently, Major
5	Unluck: 1d6
5	Vulnerability: 1 ½ x STUN from Water-Based Attacks (Uncommon)
20	Vulnerability: 2 x STUN from Fire-Based Attacks (Common)

Total Complications Points: 75
Experience Points: 58

Conscience: since she was unfamiliar with Earth culture, she asked many tough questions about things most humans took for granted. Although she is now far more familiar with surface culture, she still serves as a proponent for justice and fairness.

Powers/Tactics: Kestrel's wings are the source of her flight abilities. She is also a mutant, possessing a suite of psionic powers. On top of this she also wears the claw weapons of her people, which give her a lethal slashing attack—an attack that becomes far more effective at high speeds.

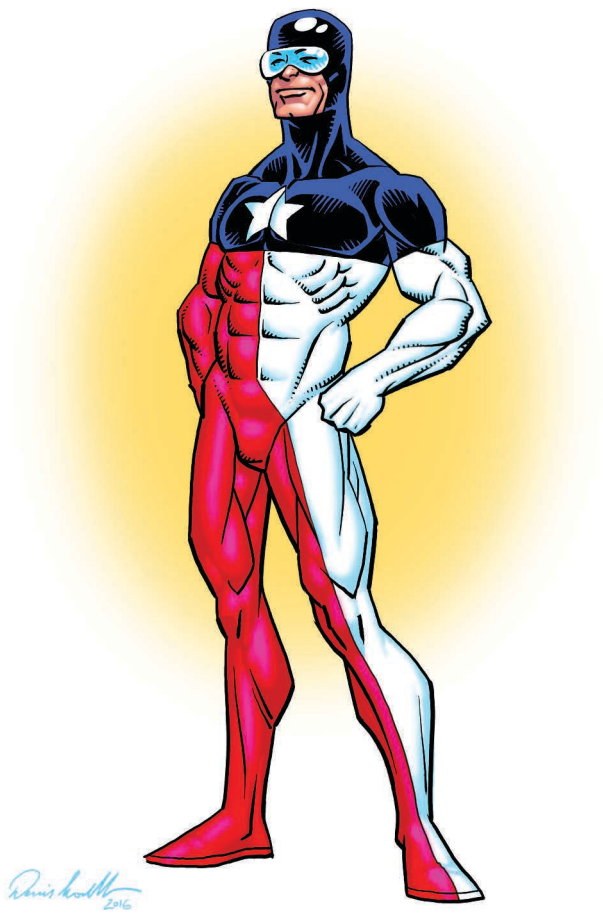
In combat Kestrel specializes in ranged attacks and aerial rescues.

Campaign Use: Kestrel serves as an excellent ambassador from the surface world to the floating island of the Winged Folk. Player Characters who need to contact the Winged Folk can contact her first.

If you wish to use Kestrel as a villain, then assume she decided that all governments were uniformly unjust and now commits "victimless" crimes designed to harm governments but not individuals.

Appearance: Kestrel is quite tall, standing 6 feet in height and weighing 130 pounds. Her hair is auburn and copper and her eyes brown. Her skin has a coppery Native American coloration while her wings have cinnamon-colored feathers. She wears no regular costume, her outfits range from classical white robes to fringed Native Amercan outfits to striking clothes she sees in New York shops. She also wears the steel claw-glove weapons of the Winged Folk.

PLASMA RANGER



PLASMA RANGER

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
15+25	STR	5+17*	12- (22-)	Lift 200 kg (6,400 kg); 3d6 (6d6) HTH Damage [1/3]
20	DEX	20	13-	
15+13	CON	5+9*	12- (15-)	
13	INT	3	12-	PER Roll 14-
13	EGO	3	12-	
25	PRE	15	14-	PRE Attack: 5d6
7	OCV	20		
7	DCV	20		
4	OMCV	3		
4	DMCV	3		
6	SPD	40		*Phases:* 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12
3+13	PD	1+9*		*Total:* 27 PD (11 rPD)
3+13	ED	1+9*		*Total:* 28 ED (12 rED)
6	REC	2		
30	END	2		
10	BODY	0		
26+14	STUN	3+5*		**Total Characteristic Cost: 195**

**: OIF (-½)*

PLASMA RANGER (CONTINUED)

Movement:	Running:	12m
	Flight:	26m
	Leaping:	4m
	Swimming:	4m

Cost	Powers	END
19	*Plasma Power Supply:* Endurance Reserve (80 END, 11 REC); OIF (-½)	
	Basic Plasma Suit Power Framework; all slots OIF (-½)	
58	1) *Plasma Blast:* Blast 5d6, Area Of Effect (2m Radius; +¼), Autofire (2 shots; +1 ¼), No Range Modifier (+½), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +½); OIF (-½)	3
24	2) *Force Field:* Resistant Protection (11 PD/12 ED); OIF (-½)	
34	3) Flight 26m, x16 Noncombat, Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼); OIF (-½)	2
	Boosted Plasma Suit Power Framework; all slots Not Usable If Nova Blast Burns Out (-1), OIF (-½)	
10	1) *Man Amplification:* +25 STR (total 65 STR); Common Limitations described above (-1 ½)	2
5	2) *Man Amplification:* +12 CON (total 40 CON); Common Limitations described above (-1 ½)	
35	3) *Plasma Blast:* Blast 5d6 (total of 10d6), Area Of Effect (2m Radius; +¼), Autofire (2 shots; +1 ¼), No Range Modifier (+½), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +½); Common Limitations described above (-1 ½)	3
14	4) *Force Field:* Resistant Protection (12 PD/11 ED [total 23 PD/23 ED]); Common Limitations described above (-1 ½)	
20	5) Flight 24m (total 50m), x16 Noncombat, Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼); Common Limitations described above (-1 ½)	2
39	*Nova Blast:* Blast 5d6, (total of 15d6), Area Of Effect (2m Radius; +¼), Autofire (2 shots; +1 ¼), No Range Modifier (+½), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +½); 8 Charges (-½), OIF (-½), Requires Roll 14-, Burnout (-¼) [8]	
40	*Basic Plasma Blast Add-Ons:* Multipower, 60-point reserve, all slots OIF (-½)	
3f	1) *Wide Flash:* Sight Group Flash 3d6, Area Of Effect (4m Radius; +¼), Autofire (2 shots; +1 ¼), No Range Modifier (+½); OIF (-½)	4
4f	2) *Wide Flash:* Sight Group Flash 4d6, Area Of Effect (2m Radius; +¼), Autofire (2 shots; +1 ¼), No Range Modifier (+½); OIF (-½)	6
20	*Boosted Plasma Blast Add-Ons:* Multipower, 60-point reserve, all slots Not Usable If Nova Blast Burns Out (-1), OIF (-½), OIF (-½)	
2f	1) *Wide Flash:* Sight Group Flash 3d6, Area Of Effect (4m Radius; +¼), Autofire (2 shots; +1 ¼), No Range Modifier (+½),; Not Usable If Nova Blast Burns Out (-1), OIF (-½)	4
2f	2) *Wide Flash:* Sight Group Flash 4d6, Area Of Effect (2m Radius; +¼), Autofire (2 shots; +1 ¼), No Range Modifier (+½),; Not Usable If Nova Blast Burns Out (-1), OIF (-½)	6
	Plasma Suit Systems; all slots OIF (-½)	
7	1) *Polarized Lenses:* Sight Group Flash Defense (10 points); OIF (-½)	
17	2) LS (Eating: Character does not eat; Safe in High Pressure; Safe in High Radiation; Safe in Intense Cold; Safe in Intense Heat; Safe in Low Pressure/Vacuum; Self-Contained Breathing; Sleeping: Character does not sleep); OIF (-½)	
3	3) +2 PER with all Sense Groups; Requires 11- Activation Roll If Nova Blast Burns Out (-½), OIF (-½)	
8	4) *Radio:* HRRP (Radio Group); OIF (-½)	
7	5) *Meson Vision:* Penetrative with Sight Group (not through magnetic 'force fields' and Barriers); Requires 11- Activation Roll If Nova Blast Burns Out (-½), OIF (-½)	
6	6) +8 versus Range Modifier for Sight Group; Requires 11- Activation Roll If Nova Blast Burns Out (-½), OIF (-½)	
	Space Thruster; all slots OIF (-½)	
23	1) *Space Thruster:* FTL Travel (11 Light Years/day); OIF (-½)	
29	2) *Escape Velocity:* Flight 22m, MegaScale (1m = 1 km; +1); OIF (-½)	4
	Rune Buggy II; all slots OIF (-½)	
3	1) *Pop-Out Handles From Plasma Suit:* Extra Limbs (12); OIF (-½)	
1	2) LS (Safe Environment: High Speed Flight), Area Of Effect (2m Surface; +¼); OIF (-½)	

PLASMA RANGER (CONTINUED)

Martial Arts: *Hardball*

	Maneuver	OCV	DCV	Notes
4	Breakout	+0	+0	30 (55) STR versus Grabs
4	Stand Off	+0	+2	5d6 (10d6) Strike
4	Stop It	+2	+2	Block, Abort
1	Use Art with Fist-Loads			

32 *Gadget Pool:* Variable Power Pool (gadgets), 24 Base + 24 Control Cost, Can Only Change In Certain Circumstances (-½)

Perks

20 *Doctor Ann Amos Sterling:* Follower built on 100-point Base
20 *Reveille, Onboard AI:* Follower 100-point Base

Talents

3 Striking Appearance +1/+1d6

Skills

15 +3 with Plasma Containment Suit

3 Acrobatics 13-
3 Breakfall 13-
3 Criminology 12-
3 Deduction 12-
3 Electronics 12-
3 Inventor 12-
1 KS: Hardball Style 8-
1 KS: Human Anatomy 8-
2 KS: Law Enforcement World 11-
2 KS: Political Science 11-
2 KS: Strike Force 11-
3 Language: Russian (completely fluent)
3 Language: Ukrainian (completely fluent)
2 PS: Plasma Technician 11-
3 Paramedics 12-
2 SS: Criminal Psychology 11-
3 Tactics 12-

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 578
Total Cost: 773

400 Matching Complications (75)

10 Hunted: Drill-Bit (Infrequently, As Pow; Harshly Punish)
15 Hunted: GM's Choice (Infrequently, Mo Pow; Harshly Punish)
15 Physical Complication: Absent-Minded (Frequently; Slightly Impairing)
25 Psychological Complication: Code Versus Killing (Very Common; Total)
20 Psychological Complication: Seeks Justice (Common; Total)
15 Social Complication: Secret ID (Michael Sterling) (Frequently, Major)
5 Susceptibility: Water Immersion And Water-Based Attacks, 1d6 damage Instantly (Uncommon)
10 Vulnerability: 1 ½ x STUN from Falling Damage Or Knockback (Common)
30 Vulnerability: 2 x STUN from Magic-Based Attacks (Very Common)

Total Complications Points: 75
Experience Points: 373

Background/History: In an alternate Earth similar to the Strike Force Earth, Michael Sterling, a Texan policeman, met and fell in love with Ann Amos, a university teachers' assistant. Later, he discovered she was actually Anya Andreyev, a Russian inventor in the federal witness relocation program; the developer of the Soviet "Tokamak" plasma suit program, she was continuing her work in a new identity in the United States. When her prototype suit was ready, Michael, wearing the suit, flew her to the USSR, where they infiltrated the plasma suit facility and destroyed all her developmental notes on the project. After that, both were hunted by the KGB for their actions against the USSR.

Michael helped found and acted as leader for the Good Guys, a Texan hero team, and in that capacity he met and befriended Phosphene and Ichi-ban of Strike Force on some of their cross-dimensional adventures.

The Good Guys were a powerful team, but subject to ruinous personality clashes which tore the team apart, constantly bringing team members in conflict with one another. Additionally, the KGB activities against Michael and Ann were becoming too frequent; it would only be a matter of time before they were caught and returned to the Soviet Union.

So, during a visit by Phosphene and Ichi-ban to the Good Guys' world, Plasma Ranger asked if they could help him and Ann—by taking them to the Strike Force world. Phosphene and Ichi-ban agreed. Abandoning their families and former lives—as well as their former enemies Michael and Ann fled to the Strike Force Earth.

With Strike Force's help, Michael created new identities for Ann and himself. He took a private detective position with the Nora Page Detective Agency while Ann applied for federal grants for her plasma-physics work. As Plasma Ranger, Michael formally joined Strike Force.

During Strike Force's adventures in the Chaos Zone, Plasma Ranger met the Strike Force Earth equivalent of Tokamak—not an analog of Anya Andreyev, but still a female Soviet scientist who invented the plasma suit on this world. As it turns out, the Michael Sterling of the Strike Force Earth, a villain, learned of her plasma physics suit and convinced VIPER to help him steal it, killing all of Tokamak's co-workers in the process. Now, as Death Ranger, this Strike Force Earth villain hunts Tokamak; in turn Plasma Ranger is determined to hunt down the murderous dog who has blackened his family name on this world.

Personality/Motivation: Here is the key to Plasma Ranger's personality: he's a cop removed from his community. He is as insular as any career cop, but is also separated from the folk he would ordinarily be insular with, and Strike Force has not made up the lack (at least initially). Emotionally, he expects other members of Strike Force to be cops like him and can be angry and belligerent when they aren't. Thus, Plasma Ranger can be said to have a very "law and order" personality; he does things by the book and is an honorable fighter. He is a born leader but not a compulsive one; especially in light of the disastrous collapse of the Good Guys, he's more than willing to work under Phosphene's leadership. He is devoted to Ann and is becoming a competent fusion tech under her tutelage. Of his Strike Force Earth acquaintances, he feels closest to his old friend Phosphene.

Powers/Tactics: Most of Plas' powers derive from the plasma fields generated by his power suit. His *Plasma Blast* is notable for the accuracy of its targeting system and for the brightness of the blast (it's a Blast with a dependent Flash); his other superpowers are relatively typical for those provided by a power-enhancement suit. Plas is also a skilled investigator and electronics tech, and is well-schooled in the world political situation.

In combat, he is the team's long-range combat specialist; the *No Range Modifier* advantage on his *Plasma Blast* makes him a formidable long-range opponent.

Campaign Use: Plasma Ranger is mirrored and shadowed through the multiverse more than most superheroes he knows; he is an avatar of some sort and variations of him (and Ann) can be met all across the multiverse. He is also the father of future Strike Force Earth hero Dr. Futurian.

You can easily use Plasma Ranger as a villain by making him a murderous Michael Sterling who killed to steal the Tokamak Suit. Now, as Death Ranger, he is one of VIPER's favorite strongmen and a menace to any hero whose technologies he wishes to steal.

Appearance: Michael Sterling stands 6' in height and weighs a muscular 185 pounds. His thinning hair is brown and his eyes are blue. As Plasma Ranger he wears a costume that is a stylized Texas flag.

Background/History: In 1942, the family of Ben (Iwao) and Amelia (Emiko) Yamakawa, like many other Japanese-Americans, were sent to an internment camp in Utah. This is where their son was born in 1943. They named him Hisato, forgoing a "Western" name out of their resentment for the way the United States was treating them.

As Hisato grew he picked up the nickname Hito. He was a large, healthy boy and a pride to his parents, though they feared that growing up in what amounted to a prison, for the crime of being of Japanese descent, might scar him for life. Fortunately, the war ended in 1945 and they and their two-year-old son were able to return to Hawaii in early 1946. Their life there was a struggle—their former property now in the possession of whites—but through hard work and skillful money-handling they were able to build a new, prosperous life.

Hisato grew up unusually strong and large, and as a teenager began to study sumo wrestling, the national sport of Japan. Smart and aggressive, he was able to become a proficient wrestler, and then a real contender for titles both in Hawaii and Japan, even while studying to be an acupuncturist. He grew in size and skill... and, inevitably, ego.

In 1964, at the height of his prowess, he entered a match with Kanada Yodo, a Japanese former national champion and the most powerful sumo wrestler he had yet faced. Their contest was unusually long,

MAN MOUNTAIN THUNDER

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
40+10	STR	30	17- (19-)	Lift 6400 kg (25.6 tons); 8d6 (10d6) HTH Damage [2/3]
20	DEX	20	13-	
33	CON	23	16-	
13	INT	3	12-	PER Roll 12-
15	EGO	5	12-	
23	PRE	13	14-	PRE Attack: 4 ½d6
7	OCV	20		
8	DCV	25		
5	OMCV	6		
5	DMCV	6		
5	SPD	30		*Phases:* 3, 5, 8, 10, 12
28+2	PD	26		*Total:* 28 (30) PD (30 rPD)
28+2	ED	26		*Total:* 28 (30) ED (30 rED)
15	REC	11		
50	END	6		
15	BODY	5		
52	STUN	16		**Total Characteristic Cost: 271**

MAN MOUNTAIN THUNDER (CONTINUED)

Movement:	Running:	12m
	Leaping:	16m
	Swimming:	4m

Cost	Powers	END
10	*Tireless:* Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼) applied to STR	2
6	*Powerful Legs:* Leaping +12m (16m forward, 8m upward)	1
13	Detect Ch'i 12- (no Sense Group), Discriminatory, Range	
3	*Instant Change:* Cosmetic Transform 1d6 (clothing being worn into superhero costume, heals back another application of this power), Trigger (changing clothing is a Zero Phase Action, Trigger automatically and immediately resets; +¾); Limited Target (the clothes currently worn by the character; -½))	1
11	*Magical Power Pool:* Variable Power Pool, 10 Pool + 5 Control Cost; OAF (medal focus; -1)	
	Man Mountain Thunder Powers; all slots OIAID (-¼)	
6	1) *Hard To Hurt:* Hardened (+¼) for 28 PD; OIAID (-¼)	
12	2) *Hard To Hurt:* Resistant (+½) for 15 PD/ 15 ED; OIAID (-¼)	
8	3) Density Increase (400 kg mass, +10 STR, +2 PD/ED, -4m KB), Persistent (+¼), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); Always On (-½), OIAID (-¼)	
6	4) *Psionic Shields:* Mental Defense (8 points total); OIAID (-¼)	
4	6) *Kudzu Vines:* Extra Limbs (8); OIAID (-¼)	
2	7) LS (Safe in Intense Heat); OIAID (-¼)	
1	8) *Kudzu Vines:* Stretching 4m; Increased Endurance Cost (x4 END; -1 ½), Limited Body Parts (kudzu vines only; -¼), OIAID (-¼)	
22	*Man Mountain Thunder Power:* Multipower, 28-point reserve, all slots OIAID (-¼)	
1f	1) +20 STR; Increased Endurance Cost (x3 END; -1), Only For Pushes (-1 ½), OIAID (-¼)	6
1f	2) *Even Harder To Hurt:* Resistant (+½) for 15 PD/15 ED (total 30 PD/30ED); Costs Endurance (-½), Extra Time (Full Phase, Only to Activate, -¼), OIAID (-¼),	
1f	3) *Immobile:* Knockback Resistance -10m; Extra Time (Full Phase, Only to Activate, -¼), OIAID (-¼)	0
2f	4) Telekinesis (18 STR); OIAID (-¼)	3
1f	5) Leaping +20m (36m total); OIAID (-¼)	1

Martial Arts: *Daragak and Sumo Wrestling*

	Maneuver	OCV	DCV	Notes
4	Escape	+0	+0	65 (75) STR versus Grabs
4	*Gena*	+2	+2	Block, Abort
3	Grab	-1	-1	Grab Two Limbs, 60 (70) STR for holding on
3	Grappling Throw	+0	+2	12d6 (14d6) Strike; Target Falls; Must Follow Grab
5	*Kena*	-2	+1	14d6 (16d6 Strike)
4	*Rena*/Slap	+2	+0	12d6 (14d6) Strike
4	Shove	+0	+0	65 (75) STR Shove
8	+2 HTH Damage Classes (already added in)			
1	Use Art with Polearms, Spears			

Man Mountain Thunder Kudzu Gifts; all slots Trigger (when owner goes unconscious, activates as an Action that takes no time, resets after Man Mountain Thunder recharges leaf; +¼); 1 Continuing Charge lasting 1 Turn (Must Be Recharged By Man Mountain Thunder; -1 ¾), Costs Man Mountain Thunder Experience Points To Give Out (-2), OAF (kudzu leaf; -1)

3 1) *Leaf Given To Luster:* +20 END **plus** +20 STUN, Trigger (+¼); Common Limitations described above (-4 ¾)

3 2) *Leaf Given To Shiva:* +20 END **plus** +20 STUN, Trigger (+¼); Common Limitations described above (-4 ¾)

Perks

1 Fringe Benefit: License to practice a profession (Physician)
1 Fringe Benefit: Passport (Man Mountain Thunder)
1 Fringe Benefit: Passport (Yama Hito)

Talents

3 Ambidexterity (no Off Hand penalty)

MAN MOUNTAIN THUNDER (CONTINUED)

	Skills
16	+2 with HTH Combat
12	+4 with Grab, Move-Through, Slap
6	+2 with all modes of Movement
1	CK: Detroit 8-
3	KS: Asian Religions 12-
1	KS: Daragak 8-
3	KS: Hydroponics 12-
2	KS: Martial Artists of the World 11-
3	KS: Martial Arts of the World 12-
3	Language: English (completely fluent; Japanese native)
1	Language: German (basic conversation)
2	PS: Acupuncturist/Chinese Healer 11-
3	PS: Gardener 12-
3	PS: Sumo Wrestler 12-
3	PS: Zero-G Operations 13-
5	SS: Chinese Healing 14-

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 225
Total Cost: 496

400	**Matching Complications (75)**
15	Distinctive Features: Sumo Build (Not Concealable; Noticed and Recognizable; Detectable By Commonly-Used Senses)
20	Enraged: Dishonorable Martial Artists (Uncommon), go 14-, recover 11-
15	Enraged: Religious Oppression (Very Common), go 8-, recover 14-
15	Hunted: Martial Arts Villains (Infrequently, As Pow; NCI; Harshly Punish)
10	Hunted: Volcanic Kami Mentor (Frequently, Mo Pow; Watching)
20	Hunted: Vulcan and the Lords of Fire (Infrequently, Mo Pow; NCI; Harshly Punish)
10	Hunted: Yakuza (Infrequently, As Pow; NCI; Limited Geographical Area; Harshly Punish)
10	Negative Reputation: Enforcer Of Honor, Very Frequently (Known Only To Martial Artists)
10	Physical Complication: Large And Bulky (Infrequently; Slightly Impairing)
15	Psychological Complication: Lectures Villains (Very Common; Moderate)
20	Psychological Complication: Never Surrenders (Very Common; Strong)
20	Psychological Complication: Overconfident (Very Common; Strong)
10	Psychological Complication: Protective of Religious Folk (Uncommon; Strong)
5	Vulnerability: 1 ½ x STUN Cold-based Attacks (Uncommon)
15	Vulnerability: 1 ½ x STUN Magic-based Attacks (Very Common)

Total Complications Points: 75
Experience Points: 96

the more experienced Yodo an even match for the younger, stronger Hisato. Tiring and frustrated, Hisato managed to get a good grip on the older man and levered him powerfully to the mat. He heard a crack as his opponent hit and felt a powerful sense of satisfaction that he had not merely won, but had taught the "stubborn old man" a lesson as well.

Then he realized that Yodo was dead, his neck broken.

No charges of wrongdoing were leveled against Hisato, but he knew that his pride and ego had something to do with the man's death. He was devastated. He abandoned the sport, abandoned his family, and began wandering in search of enlightenment. He spoke with wiser men than he. He entered an order of Buddhist monks and sought solace in the religious life.

But he never found anything but more guilt. In 1968, four years after the accident, nothing had changed for Hisato except that he finally concluded that he would never find absolution, that he would never be able to make amends for Yodo's death. So he resolved to kill himself. He climbed to the summit of the volcano at Komagatake, near Hakodate on eastern Hokkaido, and threw himself in.

Shintoists believe that all places are inhabited by *kami*, or living spirits. Whether or not that's true, Komagatake certainly was. Its *kami* was a powerful being, strong in magic, and interested in the affairs of living beings. It saved Hisato, transforming him so that he could survive the volcano's great heat. It also raged at him, furious at his failure to try to make amends for the deed that had changed his life. The *kami* told Hisato to go forth and make amends, and to kill himself only when his heart was at peace. In possession of new powers—and the ability to transform between his strange super-form and his original form—Hisato set out to do just that.

Still certain that he had shamed his family beyond any possible forgiveness, he abandoned his true name and adopted a cut-down version of it, Yama Hito. He returned to his studies of Asian healing techniques. He also took a superhero identity, naming himself Yamaarashi ("mountain storm") in Japanese, or Man Mountain Thunder in English, and began traveling across the nations of the North Pacific, righting wrongs where he found them, seeking enlightenment when he could recognize it.

By the mid-1980s, Hito's exploits had made him a hero in the eyes of Japanese all across the Pacific Rim. By this time his parents had both died and Hito himself had managed to achieve a certain level of personal peace, though he was still not certain he deserved to have a place among the living. He continued to travel, fight, and (increasingly) sternly lecture criminals on the error of their ways.

In 1987, after World War III, Hito traveled to North America, to meet with Strike Force, helping them track down the murderous ninja Darkwind, a member of the Star Knights (who were based out of Washington, DC). Together, Strike Force and Man Mountain Thunder captured Darkwind, broke his mental conditioning—then spent some time convincing him not to kill himself out of remorse. Afterwards, they exposed the villainous Star Knights battling them in a well-publicized combat in the downtown of the District of Columbia.

After all the dust had settled, Phosphene invited Man Mountain Thunder into Strike Force. He accepted, interested in the novelty of working with a team full-time, and enjoyed the experience.

In the years since, Thunder (as he is often called) has acted as a team brick, lecturer of bad guys, conscience for the team, exponent of Asian wisdom, and (often) protector of young lady team members. He took Luster under his wing almost immediately. Later, in 1991, when Overlord and Strike Force went time-traveling and rescued teen heroine SnowFalcon from her death in 1981, and SnowFalcon's traditionalist father rejected her because of her modernism and disobedience, Man Mountain Thunder took her under his wing as well, effectively becoming her foster father. Recently, he has become engaged to Kami (see page 123) and the two of them have acquired a small volcanic island. Located in the Hawaiian chain, the island, formerly barren, is being transformed into a garden paradise via Thunder's and Kami's powers.

Thunder, a lifelong student of multiple martial arts (not just sumo wrestling) is now learning *daragak*, the Katari martial art known on Earth only by Overlord.

Personality/Motivation: Man Mountain Thunder is a mass of contradictions—perhaps expressed more appropriately as a study in duality.

He's as humorous as a drunken monk, with a self-deprecating sense of humor, but when circumstances warrant he becomes fatherly and even stern. He habitually lectures evildoers about the wrongness of their lives and their deeds—other members of Strike Force Orbital have been known to stay around just long enough to be sure that captured villains are well-tied, then sneak off so as not to have to endure another lecture.

Thunder believes strongly in many traditions of Japan and other parts of the world, but only so far as they benefit individuals and the world. He performs the ancient Japanese tea ceremony and keeps rock gardens in the most traditional fashion, for they are peaceful activities beneficial to all... but when his informal charge SnowFalcon defied her parents and refused to give up her superheroine career and act as an obedient daughter, Thunder supported her decision, not at all a traditional move.

Appearance: Man Mountain Thunder stands 6'2", with a with a heavy, well-muscled build. He has leafy green hair made from kudzu vines and black eyes. His voice is deep and rolling, heavily flavored with a Japanese accent. His costume seems to simply consist of a sumo wrestler's *mawashi* (a combination belt/loincloth).

Description: Born in 1965, Rosa Turmanin (a.k.a. "Madame Rosa") was initially a spiritualist, a medium who gained true mystic powers after a brush with death. She joined Strike Force in 1990, taking the name Macabre. As her name implies, she can call upon and "command" spirits (or, at least ask their cooperation) and has even gained a companion in the form of Frederick Rutherford, a.k.a. "Ghost Fred."

Macabre stands 5'7" and has brown hair and black eyes.

MACABRE

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
12	STR	2	11-	Lift 132 kg; 2d6 HTH Damage [1]
23	DEX	26	14-	
12	CON	2	11-	
16	INT	6	12-	PER Roll 12-
18	EGO	8	13-	
20	PRE	10	13-	PRE Attack: 4d6
8	OCV	25		
8	DCV	25		
6	OMCV	9		
6	DMCV	9		
5	SPD	30		*Phases:* 3, 5, 8, 10, 12
2	PD	0		*Total:* 28 PD (26 rPD)
2	ED	0		*Total:* 27 ED (25 rED)
4	REC	0		
24	END	1		
10	BODY	0		
22	STUN	1		**Total Characteristic Cost: 154**

Movement:	Running:	12m
	Flight:	30m
	Leaping:	4m
	Swimming:	4m

MACABRE (CONTINUED)

Cost	Powers	END
58	*Spirit Powers:* Multipower, 73-point reserve, all slots Requires Spirit Cooperation (-¼)	
12v	1) Telekinesis (26 STR), Fine Manipulation, Affects Desolidified (+½); Requires Spirit Cooperation (-¼)	7
10v	2) *Force Field:* Resistant Protection (20 PD/20 ED); Requires Spirit Cooperation (-¼)	
5v	3) Flight 30m; Requires Spirit Cooperation (-¼)	3
3v	4) Shape Shift (Sight Group, any shape); Requires Spirit Cooperation (-¼)	2
56	*Mind Powers:* Multipower, 70-point reserve, all slots Extra Time (Delayed Phase, -¼)	
2f	1) Mind Control 8d6, Telepathic (+¼); Effect Limited to EG0 +10 (-1), Extra Time (Delayed Phase, -¼)	5
2f	2) *Hypnosis:* Mind Control 14d6; Extra Time (1 Turn (Post-Segment 12), -1 ¼), Eye Contact Required (throughout; -1)	7
1f	3) Precognitive Clairsentience (Sight, Hearing And Smell/Taste Groups); Concentration (0 DCV throughout; -1), Extra Time (1 Turn (Post-Segment 12), -1 ¼), OAF (-1), Impressions and Still Flashes Only (-1), Requires A PS: Fortune-Teller Roll (-¼)	6
2f	4) Invisibility to Sight Group , Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); Extra Time (Delayed Phase, -¼)	
9	*Browning Hi Power:* RKA 1d6+1; Beam (-¼), 2 clips of 14 Charges (-0), OAF (-1) [14]	
1	*Browning Hi Power:* +1 versus Range Modifier; OAF (-1)	
8	*Knives:* HKA 1d6 (1d6+1 w/STR), Range Based On STR (+¼); OAF (-1), Lockout (unable to use HKA until thrown knife is recovered; -½)	2
10	*Knives:* Two more Knives (total of 3)	
12	*Armored Costume:* Resistant Protection (6 PD/5 ED); OIF (-½)	
20	Telepathy 7d6; Activates 14- (-¼), Ghosts and Teammates Only (-½)	3
22	Detect Psychic Energy 12- (Unusual Group), Discriminatory, Increased Arc Of Perception (360 Degrees), Range, Sense	
5	Detect Spirits 12- (Unusual Group), Sense	
10	Luck 2d6	
	Perks	
35	Follower: Frederick Rutherford (a ghost) (175-point base)	
	Talents	
30	Danger Sense (immediate vicinity, any danger) 12-	
3	Striking Appearance +1/+1d6	
	Skills	
8	+1 with Ranged Combat	
5	KS: Nazi History and Philosophy 14-	
5	KS: Psychic-Related History 14-	
5	KS: Romany History and Philosophy 14-	
2	Language: English (Romany is native) (fluent conversation)	
3	Language: German (completely fluent)	
2	Language: Russian (fluent conversation)	
3	Language: Ukrainian (completely fluent)	
5	PS: Fortune-Teller 14-	
5	PS: Medium 14-	
3	Sleight Of Hand 14-	
3	Stealth 14-	
2	WF: Handguns, Thrown Knives, Axes, and Darts	

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 368
Total Cost: 521

MACABRE (CONTINUED)

400	**Matching Complications (75)**
10	Distinctive Features: Gypsy (Easily Concealed; Always Noticed and Causes Major Reaction; Detectable By Commonly-Used Senses)
5	Distinctive Features: Recognized by Mystic Senses (Concealable; Noticed and Recognizable; Detectable By Uncommonly-Used Senses)
10	Hunted: Spirits (Infrequently, As Pow; Harshly Punish)
20	Psychological Complication: Code versus Killing (Very Common; Strong)
20	Psychological Complication: Overly Dramatic (Very Common; Strong)
20	Psychological Complication: Superstitious (Very Common; Strong)
15	Social Complication: Secret Identity (Madame Rosa Turmanin) (Frequently, Major)
10	Unluck: 2d6
10	Vulnerability: 2 x Effect Spirit Attacks (Uncommon)
10	Vulnerability: 2 x STUN Spirit Attacks (Uncommon)

Total Complications Points: 75
Experience Points: 121

LA PANTHERE

Background/History: Catherine is the daughter of French general Auguste Beauchamp, a military hero of World War II; Beauchamp was a leader of the Free French and saw much action in North Africa during the war. Auguste married late in life, and his wife was middle-aged when she bore Catherine, their only child.

It is an oversimplification to say that Auguste wanted a boy and so Catherine became a tomboy to please him. In fact, Catherine's upbringing was largely due to Auguste feeling that he and his wife were simply not going to live long once Catherine reached adulthood. Thus, he drove Catherine to achieve at school and arranged for her to be taught how to fight; she spent years learning the art of savate. Auguste's concern for her safety led Catherine to develop an interest in the field of security, though by college age she didn't know what part of that field would be her profession.

On a fateful night during her second year in college she was with friends, exchange students, at a club that catered largely to tourists. Terrorists seized control of the club, herding the patrons into a back room. Their avowed intent was to destroy the establishment, as a blow against American interference overseas, but the speed with which they set up their explosives, followed by inexplicable waiting, seemed very odd to Catherine.

Then Bright Eagle struck. The French-German superhero, member of the worldwide martial arts society called Counterstrike, had had numerous run-ins with terrorists in recent months and was swift to respond to this new assault. What Bright Eagle did not know, however, was that this terrorist action was actually a trap for him. While Bright Eagle dominated the main room of the club, wreaking havoc on the terrorists sent against him and preventing them from setting off the false explosives, the rest of the terrorist crew readied the weapons that had been designed to bring Bright Eagle down.

LA PANTHERE

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
30	STR	20	15-	Lift 1600 kg; 6d6 HTH Damage [3]
20	DEX	20	13-	
33	CON	23	16-	
15	INT	5	12-	PER Roll 12-
13	EGO	3	12-	
18	PRE	8	13-	PRE Attack: 3 ½d6
7	OCV	20		
7	DCV	20		
4	OMCV	3		
4	DMCV	3		
5	SPD	30		*Phases:* 3, 5, 8, 10, 12
20	PD	18		*Total:* 28 PD (8 rPD)
20	ED	18		*Total:* 28 ED (8 rED)
13	REC	9		
66	END	10		
11	BODY	1		
44	STUN	12		**Total Characteristic Cost: 223**

Movement: Running: 12m
Leaping: 32m
Swimming: 4m

Cost	Powers				END
	Martial Arts: *Savate*				
	Maneuver	**OCV**	**DCV**	**Notes**	
4	Block	+2	+2	Block, Abort	
5	Chassé (Side Kick)	-2	+1	12d6 Strike	
4	Counterstrike	+2	+2	10d6 Strike, Must Follow Block	
4	Coup de Pied Bas (Low Kick)	+0	+2	10d6 Strike	
4	Crochet (Hook)	+2	+0	10d6 Strike	
5	Direct (Jab/Cross)	+1	+3	8d6 Strike	
4	Disarm	-1	+1	Disarm; 50 STR to Disarm	
3	Footsweep	+2	-1	9d6 Strike, Target Falls	
8	+2 HTH Damage Classes (already added in)				
2	Use Art with Blades and Clubs				
30	*Bracers:* HKA 2d6 (4d6 w/STR), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); OIF (-½)				
16	*Armored Costume:* Resistant Protection (8 PD/8 ED); OIF (-½)				
6	*Protective Implant:* Mental Defense (18 points total); Only Versus Mind Control (-2)				
5	*Protective Implant:* Power Defense (15 points); Only Versus Powers Affecting EGO (-2)				
14	*Cat-Like Leaping:* Leaping +28m (32m forward, 16m upward)				1
7	*Bracers:* Clinging (normal STR); OIF (-½)				
5	*Cat-like Vision:* IR Perception (Sight Group)				
	Perks				
20	Vehicle: Sports Car with disguise features (100-point base)				
	Talents				
4	Double Jointed				
3	Lightsleep				
6	Striking Appearance +2/+2d6				

Catherine saw what was happening and acted; she pushed one of her captors down and leaped through the door into the main room, calling a warning out to Bright Eagle. Then one of the terrorists, following her through the door, shot her in the back with a pistol. Catherine was lucky, The shot was a graze, ricocheting off her scapula and caused no serious damage. She didn't know that at the time, though. What she did know was that someone had shot her in the back, and when she turned to look at the shooter, all she saw was cold-blooded inhumanity in his eyes. Before he could fire again, she kicked him, a perfect savate maneuver that cracked his skull. Then more terrorists began piling out the door, their trap prematurely sprung.

Fired up by anger, adrenaline, and fear that she might be mortally wounded, she lashed out at the men coming through the door, seriously injuring three of them before anyone could get off a shot at her or Bright Eagle. Then the costumed hero blasted past her and took the fight back to the terrorists, defeating them all in a matter of moments.

In the aftermath, as she went through treatment at the hands of a doctor at the scene, she realized just what parts of the security field interested her most: Bright Eagle's. In a costume, his true identity concealed, he could storm cretins like the one who had shot her in the back, stopping crime without being hung up on legal niceties.

Bright Eagle stopped by the stretcher where she lay and complimented her on her fighting skills. *"If there's anything I can do for you in return,"* he said, *"you have but to ask."*

"There is," she told him.

"What is it?"

"Take me on as your partner and teach me to do what you do."

"Certainly not," he said.

And that should have been that. After some time in the hospital and in front of media microphones and cameras, Catherine went back to her education. She also designed a costume for herself—little more than a black full-body leotard with an oval cutout for her eyes and a pair of broad metal bracelets with cutting/climbing claws attached. She became *La Panthere* (The Panther), a martial artist heroine for Paris, France.

Eventually, Catherine came to the United States, applied for American citizenship and joined a superhero team, the Lightbearers. Unfortunately, while on a mission the Lightbearers discovered a base belonging to the arch-villain Overlord. Overestimating their own

LA PANTHERE (CONTINUED)

	Skills
30	+6 with Savate
4	+2 with Coup de Pied Chasse
7	Acrobatics 15-
7	Breakfall 15-
3	Combat Driving 13-
3	Combat Piloting 13-
5	Defense Maneuver I-II
2	KS: Savate 11-
4	Language: English (Idiomatic; French is native)
3	Lockpicking 13-
4	PS: Literary Agent 13-
4	PS: Security Analyst 13-
3	Security Systems 12-
5	Stealth 14-
4	TF: Common Motorized Ground Vehicles, Personal Use Spacecraft, Strike Force Flatbeds and Skimmers

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 248
Total Cost: 470

400	**Matching Complications (75)**
5	Psychological Complication: Agitated When Reminded of Brainwashing (Uncommon; Moderate)
20	Psychological Complication: Code Versus Killing (Very Common; Strong)
15	Social Complication: Secret Identity (Catherine Beauchamp Quarry) (Frequently, Major)

Total Complications Points: 75
Experience Points: 70

power and capabilities, they attacked. Overlord and his minions scattered them to the winds; one Lightbearer died and La Panthere was captured and implanted with one of Overlord's mind-control devices.

Overlord, a biomedical experimenter, was intrigued with her cat motif and decided to give her a series of feline powers. In the months she was under his control, he boosted her strength from human normal to a superhuman level, as well as giving her a remarkable leaping capability and the ability to see in the dark. She became his favorite mind-controlled bodyguard.

Then, in the second clash between Overlord and Strike Force, she fought and nearly defeated Phosphene, who managed to overcome her but was impressed with her style and prowess. And it was Shiva's attempt to finish off the unconscious La Panthere that caused the still ongoing enmity between Phosphene and Shiva.

Strike Force captured La Panthere and removed her mind-control implant; then Phosphene arranged for the mystic supers of the Circle to restore her damaged sanity. In the course of her recovery, he was in constant attendance on her; he fell in love with her and she with him.

Sometime later, when Phosphene disappeared during his attempt to reach the Blood homeworld, La Panthere joined Strike Force and drew on its resources try to find him. She learned the business of the literary agent in order to represent his works while he was gone, and stayed with the team after he was found (as Phantasm) and restored to his true memories.

Phosphene and La Panthere married soon after the destruction of the Bloodletter. She continues to act as a part-time literary agent and full-time heroine.

Personality/Motivation: Catherine is very idealistic about helping the world through the defeat of criminals and, like her husband, is dedicated to the preservation of life. Like her feline namesake, she is somewhat hedonistic, likes to stalk and ambush her enemies, and has a wild streak to her nature.

On the down side, as a result of her time spent under Overlord's influence, she is still afraid of him and doesn't like to discuss her time with him (although she did eventually reconcile with him… somewhat). Additionally, the damage done to her psyche has left permanent scars: her EGO will never achieve any high level; she's not particularly self-confident and prefers teamwork to solo adventuring. Her best friends are Phosphene and her old teammate Dryad of the Lightbearers; she has become good friends with Luster, in spite of Luster's family background.

Powers/Tactics: La Panthere has been trained in the martial art of savate and possesses a variety of abilities useful to her career as a stealth-based investigative heroine. The powers she received from Overlord include augmented strength, enhanced leaping, and the ability to see into the infrared. Though Overlord originally used artificial hormones to effect these changes, he also introduced viral gene replacement factors into her system causing the changes to become permanent.

She also uses a number of gadgets, including: a lightly armored suit, bracers with fold-out cutting and climbing claws (developed by the Shadow Warriors' Man-o-War from his own designs [see page 149]), a high-tech implant designed to keep her from ever suffering mental domination as she did at Overlord's hands, and a vehicle that can be easily disguised**.**

La Panthere's powers are mostly support-based; on missions, she acts as a backup security expert. In combat, she's a front-line fighter, preferring to scrap with opponents who don't have obviously lethal attacks.

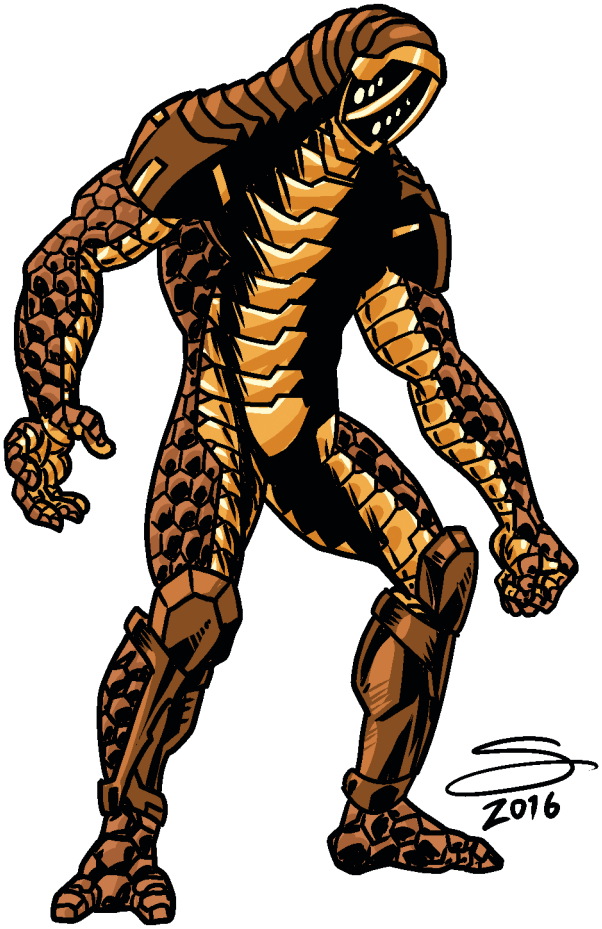
Campaign Use: Any PC who wishes to speak with Phosphene will probably run into La Panthere first, especially if the PCs are trying to contact his secret identity of Matt Quarry. Up-and-coming heroes who wish to learn savate or any number of useful security-related skills could talk to La Panthere about training.

If you wish to use La Panthere as a villain, then assume she was never rescued by Strike Force and remains under Overlord's control, with thorough brainwashing having taken the place of the temporary mind-control implant. Replace her "Code versus Killing" with "Devoted to Overlord" and eliminate the Complication involving reminders of her being brainwashed.

Appearance: Due to retarded aging (courtesy of Overlord), La Panthere looks younger than she actually is (at age 31 she still looked around 25). She stands 5'7" tall, but weighs a well-toned 130 pounds. Her hair is a very dark brown (nearly black), and her eyes are brown as well. She wears a costume consisting of a tunic with black sleeves, gray torso, and a broad gray cuffed collar; black pants; gray mask and boots; and gold metal bracers with fold-out cutting and climbing claws. As Catherine, she speaks American-accented English, but as La Panthere she sports a strong French accent as part of her disguise.

COPPERHEAD

Description: Born in 1969, Ben Anderson stands 6'3", with brown hair and blue eyes. Initially a graduate student specializing in biology, Anderson now has his PhD and is a fully accredited doctor of biological sciences. He became a superhero by joining Strike Force in 1992, fighting crime in a hazardous environment power suit under the name of Copperhead. He helped found Strike Force Orbital in 1993, and currently serves with that arm of the organization.



COPPERHEAD

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
13+42	STR	3+28*	12- (20-)	Lift 151.6 kg (51.2tons); 2 ½d6 (11d6) [1 (5)]
11+10	DEX	2+13*	11- (13-)	
13+10	CON	3+7*	12- (14-)	
18	INT	8	13-	PER Roll 13-
13	EGO	3	12-	
11+4	PRE	1+3*	11- (12-)	PRE Attack: 2d6 (3d6)
4+3	OCV	5+10*		
4+3	DCV	5+10*		
4	OMCV	3		
4	DMCV	3		
3+2	SPD	10+13*		*Phases:* 4, 8, 12/3, 5, 8, 10, 12
5+18	PD	3+12*		*Total:* 38 PD (15 rPD)
5+7	ED	3+5*		*Total:* 27 ED (15 rED)
6+10	REC	2+10*		
26+20	END	2+3*		
12	BODY	2		
26+34	STUN	3+11*		**Total Characteristic Cost: 186**

**: OIF (-½)*

Movement:	Running:	12m (24m)
	Leaping:	4m (32m)
	Swimming:	4m

COPPERHEAD (CONTINUED)

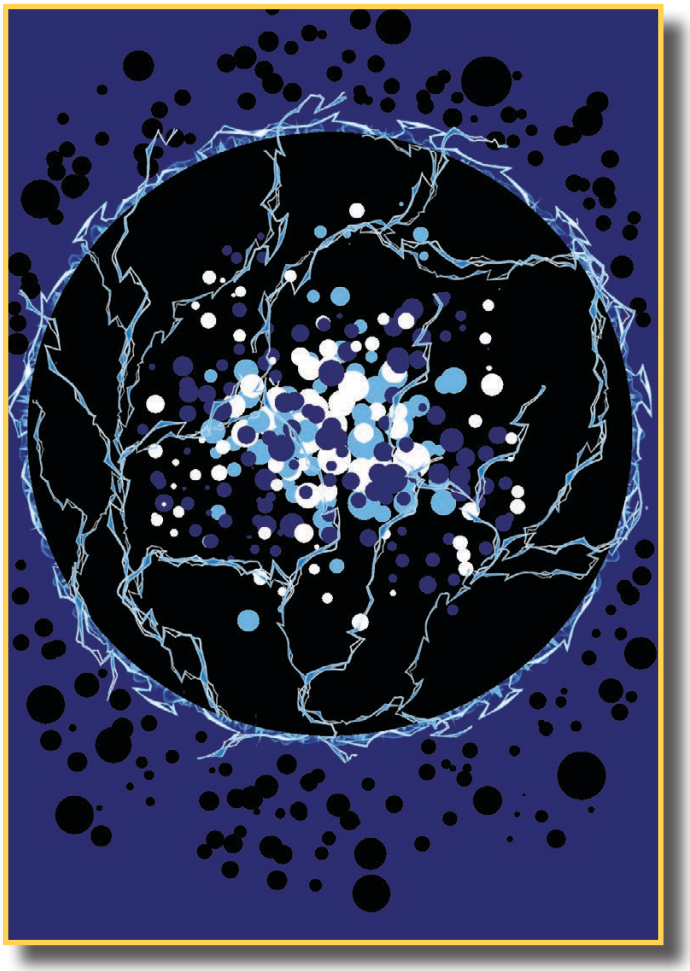
Cost	Powers	END
	Copperhead Suit; all slots OIF (powered armor; -½)	
30	1) *Armored* Shell: Resistant Protection (15 PD/15 ED); OIF (powered armor; -½)	
8	2) *Augmented Strength:* Running +12m (24m total); OIF (powered armor; -½)	1
9	3) *Augmented Strength:* Leaping +28m (32m forward, 16m upward); OIF (powered armor; -½)	1
7	4) Clinging (normal STR); OIF (powered armor; -½)	
25	5) Spatial Awareness (Unusual Group), Discriminatory; OIF (powered armor; -½)	
3	6) Extra Limb (1); OIF (powered armor; -½)	
11	7) Invisibility to Sight Group ; OIF (powered armor; -½), Bright Fringe (-¼)	2
11	8) LS (Safe in High Pressure; Safe in Intense Cold; Safe in Intense Heat; Safe in Low Pressure/ Vacuum; Self-Contained Breathing); OIF (powered armor; -½)	
32	10) Regeneration (2 BODY per Turn), Usable Simultaneously (up to 2 people at once; +½); OIF (powered armor; -½)	
4	11) Stretching 6m; OIF (powered armor; -½)	1
	Talents	
3	Striking Appearance +1/+1d6	
	Skills	
4	+2 with Punch	
3	Breakfall 11- (13-)	
1	CK: New York City 8-	
2	Computer Programming 10-	
2	KS: New York City Rhythm & Blues Music Scene 11-	
2	KS: Wrestling 11-	
1	Language: Latin (basic conversation)	
1	Language: Musical Notation (literate)	
2	Language: Spanish (fluent conversation)	
5	PS: Musician (Fretted & Fretless Bass Guitar, Double Bass) 14-	
3	SS: Biochemistry 13-	
3	SS: Bioengineering 13-	
2	SS: Cybernetics 11-	
3	SS: Microbiology 13-	
2	Systems Operation 10-	
1	TF: Skiing (snow)	

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 303
Total Cost: 363

400	**Matching Complications (75)**
5	DNPC: Professor Erik Haraldson Infrequently (Normal; Useful Noncombat Position or Skills)
20	Hunted: GM's Choice (Frequently, Mo Pow; Harshly Punish)
20	Psychological Complication: Code Versus Killing (Common; Total)
15	Social Complication: Secret Identity (Ben Anderson) Frequently, Major
20	Vulnerability: 2 x STUN Electrically-based Attacks (Common)
20	Vulnerability: 2 x STUN to Chemically-based Attacks (Common)

Total Complications Points: 75
Experience Points: 0

Description: Void used to be a NASA janitor who had the misfortune to suffer a mutagenic accident in 1981. It left him surrounded by a black nimbus and the ability to manipulate himself at the subatomic level. He was part of the DreadKnights (who were based out of Dallas, Texas) for over 10 years (1981-1993), then joined Strike Force and helped found Strike Force Orbital in 1993; he currently serves with that arm of the organization.



VOID

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
5	STR	-5	10-	Lift 50 kg; 1d6 HTH Damage [1]
18	DEX	16	13-	
18	CON	8	13-	
18	INT	8	13-	PER Roll 13-
10	EGO	0	11-	
10	PRE	0	11-	PRE Attack: 2d6
6	OCV	15		
6	DCV	15		
3	OMCV	0		
3	DMCV	0		
4	SPD	20		*Phases:* 3, 6, 9, 12
20	PD	18		*Total:* 35 PD (15 rPD)
20	ED	18		*Total:* 35 ED (15 rED)
6	REC	2		
36	END	4		
10	BODY	0		
24	STUN	2		**Total Characteristic Cost: 121**

Movement:	Running:	12m
	Flight:	40m
	Leaping:	4m
	Swimming:	4m

VOID (CONTINUED)

Cost	Powers	END
	Subatomic Manipulation; all slots Unified Power (-¼)	
35	1) Blast 10d6, Area Of Effect (20m Cone; +¾); 8 Charges (-½), Gestures (-¼), No Range (-½), Unified Power (-¼) [8]	
13	2) Darkness to Sight and Smell/Taste Groups 2m radius, Persistent (+¼), Personal Immunity (+¼), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); Always On (-½), No Range (-½), Unified Power (-¼)	
24	3) FTL Travel (3 Light Years/day); Unified Power (-¼)	
48	4) Flight 40m, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); Unified Power (-¼)	
32	5) LS (Full, including Longevity Immortality); Unified Power (-¼)	
11	*Psionic Shields:* Mental Defense (17 points total); OIF (-½)	
45	Resistant Protection (15 PD/15 ED), Hardened (x2; +½); OIF (-½)	
	Perks	
2	Contact: NASA (ex-boss) 11-	
	Skills	
3	Computer Programming 13-	
3	Cryptography 13-	
3	Security Systems 13-	
3	Systems Operation 13-	

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 223
Total Cost: 344

400	**Matching Complications (75)**
20	Distinctive Features: Dark Ball With Occasional Sparks (Not Concealable; Always Noticed and Causes Major Reaction; Detectable By Commonly-Used Senses)
15	Hunted: GM's Choice (Frequently, Mo Pow; NCI; Watching)
20	Hunted: GM's Choice (Infrequently, Mo Pow; NCI; Harshly Punish)
15	Psychological Complication: Code Versus Killing (Common; Strong)
15	Psychological Complication: Overconfident (Common; Strong)
10	Psychological Complication: Sucker For A Sob Story (Uncommon; Strong)
15	Social Complication: Public Identity (Harry Baines) (Frequently, Major)
25	Susceptibility: Electricity, 1d6 damage per Phase (Very Common)
5	Unluck: 1d6

Total Complications Points: 75
Experience Points: 0

Strike Force District of Columbia

Strike Force DC was formed in 1990, after Strike Force fought the Star Knights and left the District without major superhero presence. The team is fairly small and is lead by Psi-Devil, who took the reins after founding leader Vixen retired and replacement leader rampage went to Strike Force New York.

Blue Thunder: Formerly a stereotypical 98-pound weakling, Blue Thunder underwent a transformative process that turned him into a strapping 6'5" one-man army. He worked with the NSA for five years, before joining Strike Force DC in 1990.

Dreamer: A native of Newark, New Jersey, Linda Guerrera was "gifted" with mutant powers of transformation and analysis as a result of Jensik Medical Institute chemical dumping. Possessing enormous medical knowledge, she's a a well-respected doctor and heroine of the NoIDs. Formerly a member of the Futurian League, she joined Strike Force DC in 1993.

Inmar: Formerly a member of the Wanderers, a group of Earth humans who were unwillingly taken out into space, Montgomery "Lucky" Lofton was genetically-reengineered to have electrical and flight powers. This, along with his medical training has made him a useful member of the team. He was with the Wanderers from 1981-1991 and joined Strike Force DC in 1993.

Psi-Devil: A mentalist who wears a red devil costume, she was a member of the Star Knights (along with Rampage) from 1988-1990 before defecting to Strike Force. She joined Strike Force DC in 1990 and became the team's leader in 1993.

Skyrocket: Active since 1985, Skyrocket defended DC with his flight and energy projection powers during World War III. He joined Strike Force DC in 1990.

Strike Force New York

Strike Force New York was founded in 1993, after the formation of Strike Force Orbital. The members of Strike Force NY are the ones with less field experience. As they gain such experience, it's quite possible they may make the jump to the Orbital facility.

STUNNER

Background/History: After a childhood accident (a near-fatal fall from a roof), Bob Grady became withdrawn and studious, a determined student but not much of a mixer. He threw himself into his studies, and two subjects quickly emerged as his favorites: electrical engineering (later including stasis-field physics) and track and field, which would eventually lead to martial arts training. Eventually Grady became an educator, and among his more talented pupils was David Simons (a.k.a. Bolo [see page 132]). But he never stopped tinkering and inventing on the side, and struck pay-dirt when he learned to slow down the conscious responses of living creatures by means of an electrical beam. In effect, his Stun-Gun would slow humans and animals, a potential boon to law enforcement officers chasing criminals or prison operators holding convicts—especially super-powered ones.

Having developed his technology to the point that he could actually fire a stun-ray from a hand-held weapon, he decided personally to field-test the device. Taking a leave of absence from his university, he designed an armored costume and embarked on a crime-fighting career as Stunner—less out of a desire to save the world than to test his technological innovations.

Stunner participated in one adventure with Strike Force, was soundly beaten by a villain, and returned, humiliated, to solo adventuring. But after discovering the villain Halfjack involved in robbing a bank and singly defeating that criminal, Stunner felt sufficiently vindicated to return to Strike Force and apply for formal membership. After a period as probationary member, he was admitted to full membership. He soon attracted the attention of Strike Force's Reaper enemies, who tried to strip him of his technological information for as long as they existed.

In the course of his association with Strike Force, Stunner has emerged as the team's preeminent gadgeteer. He has worked alone and with the team's other scientifically inclined members (such as ShadowWalker, Vixen, and Luster) to create gadgets, restraint devices, vehicles, and robots. He has continued his leave of absence from the university, making his living by patenting devices derived from his inventions. Now, with the Governor gone (see page 24), he anticipates making a fortune through the marketing of his discoveries, and could well be correct.

HALFJACK

You can find Halfjack in the Champions 4E supplement *Classic Enemies.*

STUNNER

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
15	STR	5	12-	Lift 200 kg; 3d6 HTH Damage [1]
26	DEX	32	14-	
20	CON	10	13-	
15	INT	5	12-	PER Roll 12-
15	EGO	5	12-	
10	PRE	0	11-	PRE Attack: 2d6
9	OCV	30		
9	DCV	30		
5	OMCV	6		
5	DMCV	6		
5	SPD	30		*Phases:* 3, 5, 8, 10, 12
20	PD	18		*Total:* 20 PD (0 rPD)
20	ED	18		*Total:* 20 ED (0 rED)
7	REC	3		
40	END	4		
10	BODY	0		
40	STUN	10		**Total Characteristic Cost: 212**

Movement:	Running:	32m
	Leaping:	4m
	Swimming:	4m

Cost	Powers	END
114	*Gadget Pool:* Variable Power Pool, 100 Base + 50 Control Cost, Can Only Be Can Only Be Changed In A Laboratory (-½); Focus (all powers bought through VPP must have at least -¼ worth of this Limitation; -¼)	

Martial Arts: *Savate*

	Maneuver	OCV	DCV	Notes
4	Block	+2	+2	Block, Abort
4	Coup de Pied Bas (Low Kick)	+0	+2	7d6 Strike
5	Coup de Pied Chassé (Side Kick)	-2	+1	9d6 Strike
4	Crochet (Hook)	+2	+0	7d6 Strike
4	Disarm	-1	+1	Disarm; 35 STR to Disarm
8	+2 HTH Damage Classes (already added in)			
1	Use Art with Cane			

14	*Armored Costume:* Resistant (+½) for 20 PD/20 ED; OIF (-½)	
20	*Extremely Swift:* Running +20m (32m total)	2

Perks

5	Money: Well Off
3	Points given to Strike Force HQ, Including Electronics Lab

Skills

20	+2 with All Attacks
20	+4 with Savate
5	Computer Programming 13-
3	Electronics 12-
7	Inventor 14-
2	KS: Savate 11-
3	Mechanics 12-
3	Systems Operation 12-

Personality/Motivation: Stunner is an archetypal gadgeteer—absorbed in his work, with barely anything resembling a social life. If asked about electrical engineering and the like, he will start talking until physically stopped. Thus, his closest friendships are with Luster (who understands his mania for science) and with Bolo of the Shadow Warriors.

His personality has some holdovers from the childhood accident which almost claimed his life. He's still afraid of heights and becomes panicky if anything happens to the Strike Force planes while he's in them. And enough physical damage sends him into flashbacks to the moments after his disastrous fall, when he lay broken and dying, and tends to drive him into a berserk panic. Because he works in a laboratory and has never become comfortable dealing with people, his physical presence is rather low for a costumed super.

Powers/Tactics: Stunner has below-normal strength for a man of his size who exercises regularly, but his other physical attributes—his running speed, reaction time, and dexterity—are extraordinary. These, coupled with his unusual susceptibility to radioactive emissions, make Strike Force doctors believe that he is a mutant—but one whose benevolent mutations are sufficiently low-level that he doesn't show up as a mutant to mutant scanners.

Most of his time goes into the creation of devices, especially those which are useful in crime fighting. His favorite is still the Stun-Gun, a 3D6 Speed Drain. Stunner now utilizes other gadgets for specific missions. In combat he decides which foes his current gadget will probably affect most severely and concentrates on them—usually at range.

Campaign Use: Player Characters could come to Stunner to ask him about how to build an electrical device of some sort, see about getting him to build a Stun Gun for them, or even could be former students.

As a villain Stunner's history closely follows that of the hero Stunner's, but when he left the university, it was to profit from his inventions through crime. He now makes his living from creating gadgets for supervillain clients—plus the occasional robbery on his own. Replace his Hunteds with a New York superhero team and the police. He can be the Hunter of any gadget-oriented hero—or one who is vulnerable to gadgets.

Appearance: Stunner is quite tall, standing 6'3" and weighing a lean 180 pounds. He has black hair and blue eyes. His costume consists of a brown bodystocking which leaves his eyes and lower face open; it features stylized arrows on the chest, forearms and shins. He also wears accoutrements necessary to whatever gadget he is carrying: a belt and holster for his Stun Gun, for instance.

STUNNER (CONTINUED)

3	Scientist
3	1) SS: Electrical Engineering 13-
3	2) SS: Neurology 13-
3	3) SS: Physics 13-

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 261
Total Cost: 473

400	**Matching Complications**
10	Distinctive Features: Style (Savate) (Not Concealable; Noticed and Recognizable; Detectable By Large Group)
35	Enraged: Berserk If Takes Over ½ BODY (Uncommon), go 14-, recover 8-
20	Hunted: The Reapers (Infrequently, Mo Pow; NCI; Harshly Punish)
5	Hunted: Wrecker (Infrequently, As Pow; Mildly Punish)
10	Psychological Complication: Fear of Heights (Common; Moderate)
15	Psychological Complication: Good-Guy Code of Conduct (Common; Strong)
15	Social Complication: Public ID (Dr. Robert Grady) Frequently, Major
15	Susceptibility: Radiation 2d6 damage per Turn (Uncommon)

Total Complications Points: 75
Experience Points: 73

Other Members of Strike Force New York Include:

Helix: Formerly a native of Kollata (Calcutta) in India, Sita Suryaprakash was mutagenically altered by the Union Carbide chemical accident. This gave her the power to alter the biochemical flow of her targets. She helped found Strike Force NY in 1993.

Jack Straw: This super-strong NoID super is actually a robotic creation of the Producer. He was awakened prematurely during World War III, becoming a local hero to the nascent NoID society. He bears a strong resemblance to the cartoon character "Rocket Bob," who was popular in the 30s and 40s. He was a member of the Futurian League from 1992-1993 before helping found Strike Force NY in 1993.

Jeremiah Hollocmbe: Hailing from Appalachia, Jeremiah is a bard and medicine man. He also has an assortment of magical powers and uses a variety of musical instruments. He doesn't bother to conceal his identity and helped found Strike Force NY in 1993.

Megabyte: A mutant with the power to analyze and transfer electronic data. Along with the super Vambrace he co-founded Maverick Philanthropies, which markets music from world of Savoir-Ferret, technology from Earth-Kaiser, and similar products. He was part of Avant Guard from 1987-1993 while attending the Salem Academy, helping found Strike Force NY in 1993.

Ore: Ore was originally a Dallas Texas electrical engineer (by the name of "Dan") who became fused with a rocky earth elemental. He helped found Strike Force NY in 1993.

Rampage: A super-strong mutant from Georgia, Rampage was recruited from West Point into the Star Knights in 1988. He remained with that group until events caused him and Psi-Devil to defect to Strike Force in 1990. He was part of Strike Force DC from 1990-1993 (and even led the team for a while), before leaving to help found Strike Force NY in 1993.

Spark: Possessing electrical powers, Spark attended the Salem Academy from 1988-1992, before helping found Strike Force NY in 1993.

Sprint: One of several supers to bear the name, Sprint is a super-speedster and practitioner of Wing Chun Kung Fu. She was part of Avant Guard from 1987-1993 while attending the Salem Academy, helping found Strike Force NY in 1993.

Wraith: Wraith was a youth from the Queens borough of New York who was kidnapped by the Jensik Medical Institute. He also was the only survivor of his test group, developing powers of strength, flight, insubstantiality, which worked well with his Tae Kwon Do skills. He was captured and placed into suspended animation in December of 1994 by Land's Knight, spending a year and three months that way until found and revived by Strike Force in March of 1996. He initially joined Strike Force NY in 1993, then rejoined them after his rescue.

Strike Force Hawaii

Formed in 1995, Strike Force HI is the team's newest expansion. The group is an eclectic one, with a preponderance of members who have spent years in suspended animation or otherwise have lost years of time (Balder, Challenger, Jack Lightning, Picaro), numerous members with dance skills (Challenger, Kami, Picaro), and numerous members with extensive makeup and disguise experience (Challenger, Jack Lightning, Lenore).

Most applicants have trained in systematized hand-to-hand combat styles, but they represent an odd mixture of mostly non-Asian martial arts styles, including : Boxing (Balder, Jack Lightning), freestyle Wrestling (Challenger), Naginata-jutsu (Kami), Lua (reconstructed) (Kayo), Combato (Plasma), Taijutsu (SnowFalcon), and even such skills as American football (Big Pig), eclectic hand-to-hand training (Shade), and an unusual facility with the bullwhip (Picaro).

Balder: Another member of the Wanderers, Balder is a genetically-reengineered superhero with light-based powers and great technical expertise. He was the first leader of the Wanderers, and was with them from 1981-1991. He then helped found Strike Force HI in 1995.

Big Pig: A former NFL defensive lineman for 14 seasons, Big Pig acquired his powers just after 1975 eruption of Kilauea, possibly from the goddess Pele herself. He is a sorcerer and an expert in native Hawaiian healing techniques such as lomilomi. A fund-raiser for numerous Hawaiian charities chiefly aimed at underprivileged children, he wears the Nike footwear symbol on his costume for their patronage of these charities. He helped found Strike Force HI in 1995.

Challenger: Hina Maehata had the misfortune to be pressed into service as an unwilling supervillain named Quartz, wearing a stone-colored suit of powered armor as part of the Stone-Suits, then as one named Pele as a member of the Lords of Fire. When Strike Force defeated the Lords of Fire, she helped found Strike Force HI and serves as the team's leader. She possess superhuman strength and extensive wrestling skills.

Jack Lightning: Jack has had a long and troubled history. He was a magical speedster with lightning powers during World War II. Then, his powers were suppressed by a magician in 1945. He regained them in 1967, but then had them suppressed again (along with his memories) leading to years spent as a hobo, then Hollywood gaffer, then a make-up artist. He was restored to normal in 1995 by the Shadow Warriors, helping found Strike Force HI later that same year.

Kami: Originally a minor divinity from the mountain of Kirishima-yama (located in Kagoshima prefecture in Japan), Kami was trapped in human form in 1985 by the Japanese sorcerer Kappa. She was then forced to serve with the Japanese criminal group Yooso until freed by Man Mountain Thunder in 1993. For a time she lived in a Zero-G garden built by Thunder, until helping found Strike Force HI in 1995.

Kayo: Oliver Kailikea is a hard-fighting kid with an aptitude for getting in trouble. He is also a physically normal martial artist who practices lua and carries an expandable fighting staff. He was with the Salem Academy from 1990-1994, then helped found Strike Force HI in 1995.

Lenore: This is the same Lenore Page for whom Plasma Ranger worked. Her mere presence causes bad luck to foes (she attributes this to her "guardian angel"). She was formerly an eccentric private detective; her powers increased with the death of the "Guardian of Law" (see page 27). She helped found Strike Force HI in 1995.

Picaro: Suffering a fate similar to Challenger, Antonio de Leon was pressed into service as Gravestone and wore one of the Stone-Suits of powered armor. He then became Xocotl as part of the Lords of Fire. Possessing superhuman strength and wielding a whip, he helped found Strike Force HI after being freed from the Lords of Fire by Strike Force Orbital.

Plasma: Possessing flame-projection powers, Plasma is the son of Tyrkan and the half-brother to Phosphene (and thus, a Blood). He was with the Star Knights from 1988-1990, but retired when the team was disbanded. After the death of the "Guardian of Law" his powers gained in power and stabilized. He then helped found Strike Force HI.

Rampart: A self-made multimillionaire with a great appreciation for the Coast Guard, Michael Staahl created an anthropomorphic robot, Rampart, to fly around in and assist in Coast Guard rescues and interventions. He briefly joined Strike Force Orbital in 1995-1996 to fill in for the vacationing Phosphene, then joined Strike Force HI in 1996.

Shade: David Dongal was chemically altered to have the power of making himself intangible, at which point he could possess the bodies of others. As Shade, he was a member of Strike Force from 1987-1991, then joined Interpol as a investigative agent from 1991-1995, then left Interpol to help found Strike Force HI.

SnowFalcon: Mary Takamura is the granddaughter of World War II Hero Golden Talon. She developed a force field harness that allowed her to fly, and joined the Lightbearers in 1981. She was apparently killed when the Lightbearers fought Overlord, but actually rescued by Strike Force when they went back in time, returning with her to 1991. She now has a scientific career developing her force field technology, including the development of virtual aircraft composed of computer-shaped force fields. In 1995, she helped found Strike Force HI.

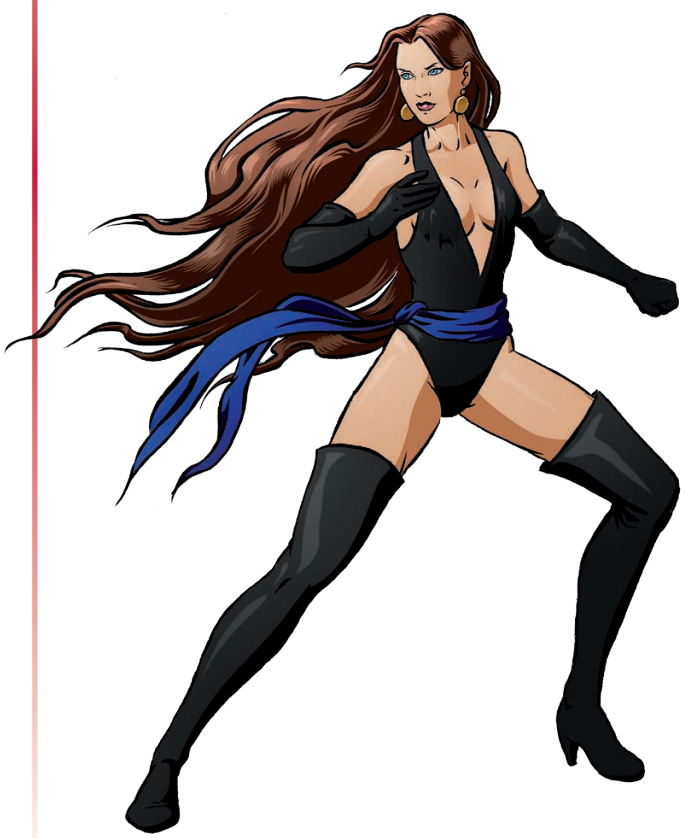
True-Blue: A superhero from World War II, True-Blue has mixed Aztec, Welsh, and "unknown" genetic ancestry. He also can say the word "Beatha" to gain super-strength and other powers. He fought the Axis during the 1940s and opposed McCarthy in the early 1950s. Vanished in 1953 and rescued from suspended animation in 1995 by Strike Force. After recovering, he joined Strike Force HI.

THE SHADOW WARRIORS

The Shadow Warriors began when Strike Force split in 1982 following arguments between Phosphene and Shiva over the use of lethal force. Initially, Shiva led the team, but after he faked his death to throw off enemies, Lorelei took over. For the most part, the team has been very covert, although with the advent of World War III in 1987, the team became more public, dealing openly with the governments in the District of Columbia and New York State. It remains to be seen whether the team will return to its secretive ways.

In 1995, when the Shadow Warriors split, forming the Shadow Knights, Lorelei retired as field leader, preferring to remain behind the scenes.

LORELEI



Background/History: Lorelei, the leader of the Shadow Warriors, was born Jeannine Andre Dell to two survivors of the Families wars—Jarret Dell (son of Alasder Dell, for more on him and the Families, see page 22) and Jeanne-Marie Adelier. The two lived in seclusion in a small Vermont town, hiding from Alasder and the Reapers. When Jeannine was 12, Jarret left home, planting false trails to lead the Reapers away from his family.

Even as a young child, Jeannine was an extraordinary beauty. When she turned 15, her genetically-tailored powers of attraction began to blossom. Her mother, unable to cope with them, took her daughter to New York in search of help. There, totally by accident, she stumbled across Strike Force right after their first encounter with Overlord. Mistaking them for the better-known Crusaders (one of New York's premier superhero teams), she asked them to train Jeannine. When the bemused heroes accepted, she left to rejoin Jarret in Jamaica—and lead Reapers agents right to the couple. Jarret was captured and Jeanne-Marie was killed.

Interestingly, the nascent heroes stayed together as Strike Force only because of the gorgeous innocent placed in their care. They trained her, gave her the code-name of Lorelei, provided her with a place to live (their first HQ), gave her a new identity (as model Shante Ann Brown, daughter of Strike Force super Samiel's alter ego, Constance Brown), and in doing all this they became the superhero team Strike Force.

During all of this, Lorelei became a skilled fighter and tactician. When Strike Force split in two, she stayed with the Shadow Warriors, becoming their leader when Shiva faked his death. She continues to lead the team to this day, acting more behind the scenes however, managing the affairs of both the Shadow Warriors and the Shadow Knights.

Soon after joining Strike Force, Lorelei met and became fixated on Commodore of the Blood. However, he spurned her advances until she turned 18, at which point he returned her affections and soon after the two were married. As Geoffrey and Shante Ann Carstairs, they now live on a small island in Long Island's yachting district.

THE ORGANIZATION

Founded in the early 18th Century, the Organization started out as the Fraternal Order of the Stone Sentinel, a secret cooperation designed to increase the fortunes and political power of its members. By the modern era, the Organization has evolved into a secret conspiracy devoted to keeping the world in balance. They are based in Switzerland, and have interacted with Lorelei, ShadowWalker, and Shiva in some fashion or another.

LORELEI (START OF THE CAMPAIGN)

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
10	STR	0	11-	Lift 100 kg; 2d6 HTH Damage [1]
15	DEX	10	12-	
15	CON	5	12-	
15	INT	5	12-	PER Roll 12-
20	EGO	10	13-	
15	PRE	5	12-	PRE Attack: 3d6
5	OCV	10		
5	DCV	10		
7	OMCV	12		
7	DMCV	12		
4	SPD	20		*Phases:* 3, 6, 9, 12
9	PD	7		*Total:* 9 PD (0 rPD)
9	ED	7		*Total:* 9 ED (0 rED)
5	REC	1		
30	END	2		
15	BODY	5		
28	STUN	4		**Total Characteristic Cost: 125**

Movement:	Running:	12m
	Leaping:	4m
	Swimming:	4m

Cost	**Powers**	**END**
	Low-Level Attraction Powers; all slots To Instill Lust Only (-1), Men Only (-1), Always On (-½), Unified Power (-¼)	
8	1) *I'm More Beautiful Than You Can Imagine I:* Mental Illusions 2d6, Constant (+½), Invisible Power Effects (Invisible to Mental Group; +¼), Persistent (+¼),Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); Always On (-½), Only Affects Men (-½), Self Only (-1), Unified Power (-¼)	
8	2) *You're Attracted To Me I:* Mind Control 2d6, Constant (+½), Invisible Power Effects (Invisible to Mental Group; +¼), Persistent (+¼),Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); Always On (-½), Only Affects Men (-½), Reduced By Range (-¼), Set Effect (you find me attractive; -½), Unified Power (-¼)	
	High-Level Attraction Powers; all slots Men Only (-1), Unified Power (-¼)	
22	1) *Psychic/Pheromone Assault:* Mental Blast 3d6, Invisible Power Effects (Invisible to Mental Group; +¼), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼); Only Affects Men (-½), Requires A Roll (14- roll; -¼), Unified Power (-¼)	2
14	2) *I'm More Beautiful Than You Can Imagine II:* Mental Illusions 6d6, Invisible Power Effects (Invisible to Mental Group; +¼), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼); No Effect On Targets With EGO 20+ (-½), Only Affects Men (-½), Self Only (-1), Unified Power (-¼)	2
16	3) *You're Attracted To Me II:* Mind Control 6d6, Invisible Power Effects (Invisible to Mental Group; +¼), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼); Activates 14- (-¼), No Effect On Targets With EGO 20+ (-½), Only Affects Men (-½), Reduced By Range (-¼), Self Only (-1), Unified Power (-¼)	2
22	4) *Psychic Search:* Mind Scan 6d6, Invisible Power Effects (Invisible to Mental Group; +¼), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼); Only Affects Men (-½), Stops Working If Mentalist Is Knocked Out (-¼), Unified Power (-¼)	2

Martial Arts: *Mixed Martial Arts*

	Maneuver	**OCV**	**DCV**	**Notes**
4	Boxing Block	+2	+2	Block, Abort
4	Dodge	--	+5	Dodge, Affects All Attacks, Abort
5	Karate Side/Spin Kick	-2	+1	6d6 Strike
4	Low Blow	-1	+1	2d6 NND

Talents

15	Danger Sense (self only, in combat) 12-
24	Striking Appearance +8/+8d6

LORELEI (START OF THE CAMPAIGN-CONTINUED)

	Skills
3	Acrobatics 12-
3	Breakfall 12-
3	Language: French (completely fluent)

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 155
Total Cost: 280

400	**Matching Complications (75)**
25	Distinctive Features: Great Beauty (Not Concealable; Extreme Reaction; Detectable By Commonly-Used Senses)
20	Hunted: Affrighter (Frequently, Mo Pow; Harshly Punish)
30	Hunted: Reapers (Very Frequently, Mo Pow; NCI; Harshly Punish)
25	Physical Complication: Power Activates When Frightened (All the Time; Slightly Impairing)
20	Psychological Complication: Loves Commodore (Very Common; Strong)
10	Psychological Complication: Squeamish About Gore (Uncommon; Strong)

Total Complications Points: 75
Experience Points: 0

Since then, Lorelei has has rescued her father from the Reapers, discovered she has an older brother (Hamilton Arreth, an emotionless, brilliant thinker, her senior by 25 years, and an operative for the Organization), and as Shante, has become the most widely sought-after model in America. From her relationship with Commodore, she has picked up the Blood Recognition Factor. She also founded Salem Academy, a school for young supers.

Currently, Lorelei has four children (two sets of twins), but her extended family (via Blood recognition and other factors) is much larger, and includes such individuals as Fenris X (se page 143).

Personality/Motivation: Lorelei is very outgoing, demonstrative, generous, and caring, and would be very vulnerable were it not for her exceptional willpower. She is also one of the most hideously, terrifyingly *nice* people on Earth-AU. People of all genders and orientations are drawn to her, have a very easy time talking to her, quickly befriend her, and so on. In addition, people who would otherwise be threatened by her beauty and become very hostile find themselves unable to hate her. On the other hand, Lorelei can be quite ruthless in order to protect her family and loved ones from harm. Her favorite people are Commodore, all her Blood in-laws except Affrighter and Pathfinder; her current team members, plus Charade and Man-o-War; Phosphene, La Panthere and Lightrune of Strike Force; and her father.

Powers/Tactics: Lorelei's powers are derived from assorted mutations, which were precisely designed to allow her to continue her genetic line. In short, she is a paragon of femininity and fertility. Her *Low-Level Attraction Powers* work constantly and are inadvertently used on whomever Lorelei's concentrating on; the Mind Control includes a simple attraction, while the Mental Illusions makes her look more like the viewer's concept of his dream girl. Her *High-Level Attraction Powers* enhance her base powers, allow her to project a knockout blast of pheromones, and allow her to look for targets that would allow her to continue her genetic line. The rest of Lorelei's Powers and Skills come from a variety of sources: college, work, and her time spent training with Strike Force and the Shadow Warriors.

In combat, Lorelei tends to hang back, directing her teammates, and using her mental powers to baffle and subvert her enemies, especially those with low EGO scores or those who are obviously already attracted to her.

Campaign Use: Starting Lorelei makes the perfect young heroine in need of training and protection—both from the Reapers and from a world that would exploit her. Lorelei towards the campaign's end can serve as a mentor to up-and-coming young heroines.

If you so desire, Lorelei, as a young and impressionable heroine, could just as easily have fallen in love with a super other than Commodore—say, Overlord. Alternatively, she could have been captured at a young age by Alasder Dell and the Reapers

LORELEI (END OF THE CAMPAIGN)

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
10	STR	0	11-	Lift 100 kg; 2d6 HTH Damage [1]
20	DEX	20	13-	
15	CON	5	12-	
15	INT	5	12-	PER Roll 12-
30	EGO	20	15-	
25	PRE	15	14-	PRE Attack: 5d6
7	OCV	20		
7	DCV	20		
10	OMCV	21		
10	DMCV	21		
5	SPD	30		*Phases:* 3, 5, 8, 10, 12
10	PD	8		*Total:* 10 PD (0 rPD)
11	ED	9		*Total:* 11 ED (0 rED)
10	REC	6		
30	END	2		
15	BODY	5		
33	STUN	7		**Total Characteristic Cost: 214**

Movement: Running: 12m
Leaping: 4m
Swimming: 4m

Cost	Powers	END
	Low-Level Attraction Powers; all slots To Instill Lust Only (-1), Men Only (-1), Always On (-½), Unified Power (-¼)	
8	1) *I'm More Beautiful Than You Can Imagine I:* Mental Illusions 2d6, Constant (+½), Invisible Power Effects (Invisible to Mental Group; +¼), Persistent (+¼),Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); Always On (-½), Only Affects Men (-½), Self Only (-1), Unified Power (-¼)	
8	2) *You're Attracted To Me I:* Mind Control 2d6, Constant (+½), Invisible Power Effects (Invisible to Mental Group; +¼), Persistent (+¼),Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); Always On (-½), Only Affects Men (-½), Reduced By Range (-¼), Set Effect (you find me attractive; -½), Unified Power (-¼)	
	High-Level Attraction Powers; all slots Men Only (-1), Unified Power (-¼)	
45	1) *Psychic/Pheromone Assault:* Mental Blast 6d6, Invisible Power Effects (Invisible to Mental Group; +¼), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼); Only Affects Men (-½), Requires A Roll (14- roll; -¼), Unified Power (-¼)	3
28	2) *I'm More Beautiful Than You Can Imagine II:* Mental Illusions 12d6, Invisible Power Effects (Invisible to Mental Group; +¼), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼); No Effect On Targets With EGO 20+ (-½), Only Affects Men (-½), Self Only (-1), Unified Power (-¼)	3
33	3) *You're Attracted To Me II:* Mind Control 12d6, Invisible Power Effects (Invisible to Mental Group; +¼), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼); Activates 14- (-¼), No Effect On Targets With EGO 20+ (-½), Only Affects Men (-½), Reduced By Range (-¼), Self Only (-1), Unified Power (-¼)	3
45	4) *Psychic Search:* Mind Scan 12d6, Invisible Power Effects (Invisible to Mental Group; +¼), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼); Only Affects Men (-½), Stops Working If Mentalist Is Knocked Out (-¼), Unified Power (-¼)	3
91	*Equipment Pool:* Variable Power Pool (Gadget Pool), 80 Pool + 40 Control Cost, Can Only Be Changed In A Laboratory (-½); Focus (all powers bought through VPP must have at least -¼ worth of this Limitation; -¼)	

Martial Arts: *Mixed Martial Arts*

	Maneuver	OCV	DCV	Notes
4	Boxing Block	+2	+2	Block, Abort
4	Dodge	--	+5	Dodge, Affects All Attacks, Abort
4	Escape	+0	+0	25 STR vs. Grabs
4	Fencing Disarm	-1	+1	Disarm; 20 STR to Disarm
5	Karate Side/Spin Kick	-2	+1	6d6 Strike
4	Low Blow	-1	+1	2d6 NND
3	Paek-tu Takedown	+1	+1	2d6 Strike; Target Falls

LORELEI (END OF THE CAMPAIGN-CONTINUED)

20 *Psychic Shields:* Mental Defense (20 points total)
10 *Mental Link To Commodore:* Mind Link, One Specific Mind, Unlimited range in this dimension

Perks
10 Money: Wealthy

Talents
15 Danger Sense (self only, in combat) 12-
36 Striking Appearance +12/+12d6

Skills
40 +5 with HTH Combat

3 Acrobatics 13-
3 Breakfall 13-
3 Bureaucratics 14-
3 Charm 14-
5 Combat Piloting 14-
3 Deduction 12-
3 Electronics 12-
3 High Society 14-
3 Language: French (completely fluent)
2 PS: Belly Dancer 11-
5 PS: Model 16-
3 Paramedics 12-
5 SS: Pharmacology 14-
3 Systems Operation 12-
2 TF: Large Planes, Skiing (snow), Small Planes
2 WF: Blades, Handguns

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 465
Total Cost: 678

400 Matching Complications (75)
25 Distinctive Features: Great Beauty (Not Concealable; Extreme Reaction; Detectable By Commonly-Used Senses)
20 Hunted: Blanco (Infrequently, Mo Pow; NCI; Harshly Punish)
25 Physical Complication: Power Activates When Frightened (All the Time; Slightly Impairing)
20 Psychological Complication: Loves Commodore (Very Common; Strong)
10 Psychological Complication: Squeamish About Gore (Uncommon; Strong)
20 Psychological Complication: Very Protective Of Family, Including Adopted Family Members (Very Common; Strong)

Total Complications Points: 75
Experience Points: 278

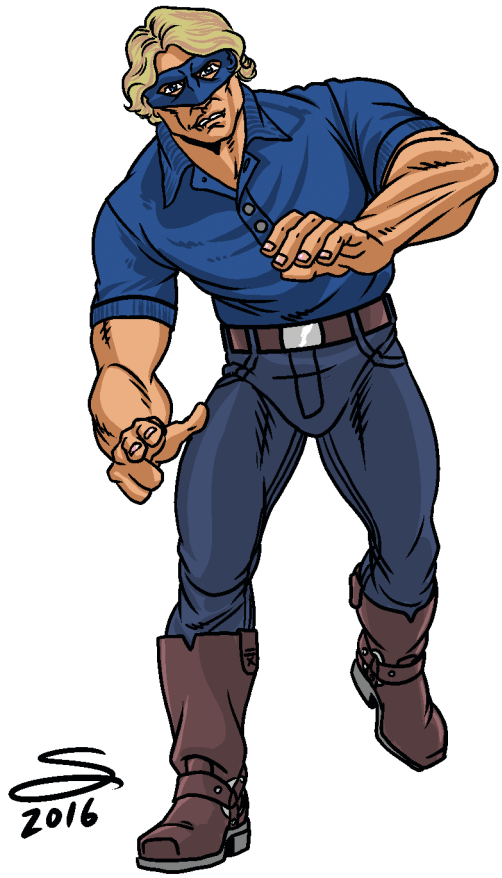
and been convinced that her grandfather really is a great man; in this case she would use her powers to further his ends. Either way, her limitations are much the same; just substitute the appropriate loved one for Commodore and make appropriate changes to her Hunteds.

Appearance: Lorelei stands 5'8" and weighs 120 pounds. She is olive skinned, with lustrous brown hair and sapphire blue eyes. Her costume consists of a gray leotard with no arms or legs and deep V-neck, gray shoulder-length gloves and matching thigh-high boots. A royal-blue sash is worn at her waist, along with a gold necklace and earrings (one of which used to be her radio link to Commodore before the psychic link developed).

Background/History: Growing up, Dan Freeman was the All-American Boy, a blond-haired, blue-eyed, high-school athlete. In college he was a running back and quickly began breaking the school's yardage records for rushing. Many observers thought that with his abilities, his record, and his clean-cut image and personality he'd be a cinch to win the Heisman Trophy and then go on to a brilliant NFL career.

However, in his senior year of college, his slowly-emerging psychic powers grew very strong and very evident. He realized that many of his football accomplishments were based on his illusory abilities; he'd unconsciously been convincing tacklers that he was a foot to one side of his actual location. Though he hadn't known it, he'd been using his powers to cheat at the game he loved so much.

Feeling disgraced, he quit football forever, never explaining why, which startled fans and college scouts across the nation. After graduation, he began studies at a small college in Salem, Massachusetts, a college with an excellent parapsychology department. There, he learned more about his mutant powers of illusion and detection, and there his teleportation power emerged. He took degrees in Parapsychology and Biochemistry, specializing in the study of biochemical abnormalities which occur in individuals who possess high levels of psi power.



PSYCHER

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
30	STR	20	15-	Lift 1600 kg; 6d6 HTH Damage [3]
20	DEX	20	13-	
18	CON	8	13-	
20	INT	10	13-	PER Roll 13-/14-
23	EGO	13	14-	
15	PRE	5	12-	PRE Attack: 3d6
7	OCV	20		
7	DCV	20		
8	OMCV	15		
8	DMCV	15		
5	SPD	30		*Phases:* 3, 5, 8, 10, 12
13	PD	11		*Total:* 23 PD (10 rPD)
10	ED	8		*Total:* 16 ED (6 rED)
14	REC	10		
60	END	8		
10	BODY	0		
45	STUN	13		**Total Characteristic Cost: 226**

Movement:	Running:	12m
	Leaping:	12m
	Swimming:	4m
	Teleportation:	60m

PSYCHER (CONTINUED)

Cost	Powers	END
	Psi Powers; all slots Unified Power (-¼)	
48	1) *Psi Images:* Mental Illusions 12d6; Unified Power (-¼)	6
48	2) *Psi Scanning:* Mind Scan 12d6; Unified Power (-¼)	6
64	3) *Psi Shifting:* Teleportation 60m, x16 Noncombat, x2 Increased Mass; Unified Power (-¼)	8
30	*"X"-Ray Vision:* Spatial Awareness (Mental Group), Partially Penetrative; Unified Power (-¼)	

Martial Arts: *Aikido, American Football, and Karate*

	Maneuver	OCV	DCV	Notes
4	Aikido Dodge	--	+5	Dodge, Affects All Attacks, Abort
3	Aikido Takedown	+1	+1	8d6 Strike; Target Falls
3	Aikido Throw	+0	+1	8d6 +v/10, Target Falls
4	Aikido Escape	+0	+0	55 STR vs. Grabs
4	Football Block	+0	+0	55 STR to Shove
3	Football Flying Tackle	+0	-1	8d6 +v/10 Strike; You Fall, Target Falls; FMove
4	Karate Block	+2	+2	Block, Abort
4	Karate Punch/Snap Kick	+0	+2	10d6 Strike
5	Karate Side/Spin Kick	-2	+1	12d6 Strike
8	+2 HTH Damage Classes (already added in)			
1	Use Art with Staffs			

14	*Force Field:* Resistant Protection (10 PD/6 ED), Uncontrolled (+½); OAF (-1), Costs Endurance (-½)	4
4	*Powerful Leaper:* Leaping +8m (12m forward, 6m upward)	1
9	Endurance Reserve (16 END, 8 REC), Uncontrolled (+½); OAF (-1), Variable Limitations (requires -½ worth of Limitations; -¼)	
1	*Sharp Eyed:* +1 PER with Normal Sight	

Talents

12	Striking Appearance +4/+4d6

Skills

3	Breakfall 13-
3	Combat Driving 13-
2	SS: Biochemistry 11-
3	SS: Parapsychology 13-
2	SS: CCD Studies 11-
0	TF: Skiing (snow)
3	Scholar
1	1) KS: Aikido 11-
1	2) KS: American Football 11-
1	3) KS: Karate 11-

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 293
Total Cost: 518

400	**Matching Complications (75)**
10	DNPC: Father Infrequently (Normal)
10	DNPC: Mother Infrequently (Normal)
10	Distinctive Features: Style (Aikido and Karate) (Not Concealable; Noticed and Recognizable; Detectable By Large Group)
35	Enraged: Berserk If Others Within Line Of Sight Berserk/Enraged (Uncommon), go 14-, recover 8-
20	Hunted: CCD Infrequently (Mo Pow; NCI; Harshly Punish)
15	Social Complication: Secret ID (Dan Freeman) (Frequently, Major)
20	Susceptibility: To Ingested Alcohol, 3d6 damage per Turn (Uncommon)
30	Vulnerability: 2 x STUN from Physical Killing Attacks (Very Common)

Total Complications Points: 75
Experience: 118

Eventually, he also learned that one of the parapsychology department's field units was waging a covert war against the Chthonian Demons, primordial monsters determined to conquer or destroy the Earth. Eager to redeem himself with his powers, he joined this struggle, traveling the world and fighting the Chthonian Demons wherever he found them.

One of his missions, an investigation against the demonic creature called the Mockery, led him to join forces with Strike Force. This was the first time he donned the mask and name of Psycher. Once they'd defeated the Mockery, he decided he liked superheroing: it was, to him, a vacation from his horribly stressful and eerie regular occupation. He continued working part-time with the Massachusetts university, and "vacationing" with Strike Force.

When Strike Force split in two, Psycher joined the Shadow Warriors; he preferred the more covert techniques of the smaller team; moreover, he was romantically interested in Lorelei. He was gravely disappointed when she married Commodore, but he stayed with the team anyway.

Personality/Motivation: Psycher is a strong-jawed hero, very noble, an advocate of fair play, and the team spirit—the ultimate football hero. For all this, though, he is quiet and reserved, and—except for his aborted interest in Lorelei—has formed no special friendships.

For a long time, Psycher despised firearms of any sort, considering them unfair and unheroic. As seldom as Bolo ever uses the Golden Gun, Psycher still would dress him down whenever it happened, resulting in Bolo preferring to not use the Golden Gun within Psycher's sight. However, these days he seems to have put that dislike behind him.

Powers/Tactics: Psycher's powers are mutant psionic abilities; his Mental Illusions, Mind Scan, and Teleportation are all straightforward. His "X-Ray" vision allows him distinguish between areas which are open enough for him to teleport into and those which aren't, so he teleports safely but never knows what he'll be facing. Psycher is also an expert hand-to-hand combatant, trained in a variety of styles, and possesses several useful skills.

There is one unfortunate side effect to Psycher's powers: if someone within his line of sight goes Berserk or Enraged, he becomes Enraged as well. His teammates infrequently have to knock him down and sit on him while he recovers from one of these bizarre fits. He is also allergic to alcohol.

In combat, he'll either hang back with Lorelei and use his Mental Illusions on vulnerable enemies, or will use his teleportation and martial arts abilities for surprise attacks and rescues.

Campaign Use: As Psycher is the Shadow Warrior's team expert on parapsychology and demonic doings, he could be consulted by PCs in need of such knowledge and advice.

If you want to use Psycher as a villain, you can have him discover his emerging powers in college—and like using them on the field. He then takes the Heisman Trophy and goes on to have a record-smashing NFL career— but that hasn't been enough.

Exposure to the good life has given him an unquenchable taste for money and other luxuries, and even his inflated football contract and promotion deals aren't enough to keep him in flush with cash. So he has taken on the Psycher identity to stage bank robberies, usually operating solo or with bands of agents.

To turn Psycher into a villain, eliminate his parapsychology-related skills and Hunted; replace them with Hunted by Police, Psychological Complication: Greedy, KS: Criminal Underworld 11-, PS: Football 17-, and Streetwise.

Appearance: Psycher stands an even six feet in height and weighs a well-muscled 210 pounds. He is blond with blue eyes. His "costume" consists of blue jeans and a blue short-sleeved collared shirt, brown leather square-toed boots and belt, and blue blindfold-style mask. He is the most informal of the Shadow Warriors in terms of costume.

Background/History: David Simons, a brilliant physics and cybernetics college student (a student of Professor Robert Grady; see Stunner on page 120) began developing amazing new cyberlink-based games and power armor systems for deep sea research work. These technologies were so advanced, in fact, that VIPER tried to hijack his game hardware when it was on display at a major computer show.

Using his prototype oceanographic power armor costume, David destroyed the sample games and humiliated the VIPER strike team, earning the agency's dislike for his armored identity. Soon after, David Simons began an internship with a legitimate techno-cartel. VIPER gave up trying to get at his inventions but still pursues BOLO for revenge.

David refined his BOLO (Bionic Oceanographic Life-Support and Operations) suit into something more fitting for his struggle against VIPER. On one of his operations, he ran into Strike Force. They aided him with his problems and he aided them with theirs; he ultimately joined the team. His technologies and deeds then attracted the attention of the Reapers cartel as well.

BOLO (START OF THE CAMPAIGN)

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
15+30	STR	5+17*	12- (18-)	Lift 200 kg (12.8 tons); 3d6 (9d6) HTH Damage [1 (4)]
10+10	DEX	11*	11- (13-)	
10+15	CON	8*	11- (14-)	
32	INT	22	15-	PER Roll 15-/19-
10	EGO	0	11-	
10	PRE	0	11-	PRE Attack: 2d6
3+4	OCV	11*		
3+4	DCV	11*		
3	OMCV	0		
3	DMCV	0		
3+3	SPD	10+17*		*Phases:* 4, 8, 12 (2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12)
3+6	PD	1+3*		*Total:* 27 PD (18 rPD)
2+3	ED	2*		*Total:* 23 ED (18 rED)
5+9	REC	1+5*		
20+30	END	3*		
10	BODY	0		
23+23	STUN	2+6*		**Total Characteristic Cost: 135**

**: OIF (-½), Unusually Big/Cumbersome (-¼)*

Movement:		
	Running:	12m
	Flight:	40m
	Leaping:	4m (10m)
	Swimming:	4m

BOLO (START OF THE CAMPAIGN-CONTINUED)

Cost	Powers	END
	Powered Armor; all Slots OIF (-½), Unusually Big/Cumbersome (-¼)	
31	1) *Armored Shell:* Resistant Protection (18 PD/18 ED); OIF (-½), Unusually Big/Cumbersome (-¼)	
23	2) *Magnetic Repulsers:* Flight 40m; OIF (-½), Unusually Big/Cumbersome (-¼)	4
2	3) *Augmented Strength:* Leaping +6m (10m forward, 5m upward); OIF (-1/2), Unusually Big/Cumbersome (-1/4)	1
11	4) *Optical Ring:* Increased Arc Of Perception (360 Degrees) with Sight Group and Hearing Group; OIF (-½), Unusually Big/Cumbersome (-¼)	
4	5) +4 PER with Sight Group; OIF (-½), Unusually Big/Cumbersome (-¼)	
3	6) +4 versus Range Modifier for Sight Group; OIF (-½), Unusually Big/Cumbersome (-¼)	
8	7) Active Sonar (Hearing Group); OIF (-½), Unusually Big/Cumbersome (-¼)	
7	8) HRRP (Radio Group); OIF (-½), Unusually Big/Cumbersome (-¼)	
3	9) IR Perception (Sight Group); OIF (-½), Unusually Big/Cumbersome (-¼)	
3	10) UV Perception (Sight Group); OIF (-½), Unusually Big/Cumbersome (-¼)	
11	11) LS (Safe in High Pressure; Safe in High Radiation; Safe in Intense Cold; Safe in Intense Heat; Safe in Low Pressure/Vacuum; Self-Contained Breathing); OIF (-½), Unusually Big/Cumbersome (-¼)	
27	12) *Chemical Injections:* Regeneration (3 BODY per Turn); OIF (-½), Unusually Big/Cumbersome (-¼)	
27	*The Golden Gun:* Blast 15d6; OAF (-1), 6 Charges (-¾) [6]	

Martial Arts: *Aikido*

	Maneuver	OCV	DCV	Notes
4	Dodge	--	+5	Dodge, Affects All Attacks, Abort
3	Hold	-1	-1	Grab Two Limbs, 25 (55) STR for holding on
5	Strike	+1	+3	3d6 (9d6) Strike
3	Throw	+0	+1	3d6 (9d6) +v/10, Target Falls

Talents

15 Danger Sense (self only, in combat) 15-
3 Striking Appearance +1/+1d6

Skills

3 Computer Programming 15-
3 Electronics 15-
3 Inventor 15-
4 SS: Cybernetics 13-
3 Systems Operation 15-

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 209
Total Cost: 344

400 Matching Complications (75)

10 DNPC: Shelvastra Very Frequently (Slightly Less Powerful than the PC; Useful Noncombat Position or Skills)
10 Distinctive Features: Inhuman Robot (Easily Concealed; Always Noticed and Causes Major Reaction (fear); Detectable By Commonly-Used Senses)
20 Hunted: Overlord (Infrequently; Mo Pow; NCI; Harshly Punish)
15 Psychological Complication: Irrational After Any Death (Uncommon; Total)
25 Psychological Complication: Overreacts to Cruelty (Very Common; Total)
20 Psychological Complication: Reluctant to Use Full Force (Very Common; Strong)
15 Social Complication: Secret ID (David Simons) (Frequently, Major)
5 Unluck: 1d6
30 Vulnerability: 2 x STUN Physical Killing Attacks (Very Common)
10 Vulnerability: 2 x STUN from Magnetic Attacks (Uncommon)

Total Complications Points: 75
Experience Points: 0

In a conflict with Overlord, the master villain dressed a drugged civilian in an unarmored Overlord costume and released him as a distraction; Bolo shot and inadvertently killed the man he thought was Overlord. Bolo redeemed himself by singly defeating Overlord (flying into him at .5 Mach) and later helping support the dead man's family, but ever since has been very, very cautious in the use of his powers during fights.

When Strike Force split in two, Bolo stayed with the Shadow Warriors. He has since graduated college and gone on to full-time work in the cybernetics field. Soon after, on a visit to the interdimensional watering-stop of Narian (in the Chaos Zone), David met Shelvastra, a marooned scout pilot of the Chaos Zone's Karvic Empire. Fascinated with the bold young woman—and no less so by the mathematics-based FTL drive of her spaceship—he invited Shell back to Earth, and she accepted. Since then, he and she have become romantically involved, linked by a common fascination with physics and gadgetry and love of adventure.

Today, with the Governor gone (see page 24), David stands to earn a lot of money from his inventions, especially his fully interactive cybernetic video games and micro-compact life support technologies.

Personality/Motivation: David is a techno-junkie, a man whose greatest love is the development and refinement of high technology. However, he does enjoy adventuring and villain-bashing, and is strongly committed to saving lives and wrecking crime cartels. He loves Shell, but is still uncomfortable with the idea of serious commitments to her. His best friends include Shell, Lorelei, and Stunner of Strike Force.

His 2x STUN from Physical Killing Attacks is an emotional reaction: he's still shocked when people try to kill him.

Powers/Tactics: Bolo's powers derive from his BOLO suit, which gives him enhanced strength and other physical attributes, heavy armor, a wide array of sensors, and a punishing energy particle-beam weapon. (He must make an EGO roll to use this weapon above 10D6 on humans, and gets +1D6 for every 1 by which he makes his roll, up to +10; facing notorious villains famous for their resistance to damage, he gets bonuses of +6 to +10 on his roll.)

Additionally, David Simons has several technical skills and is accomplished with Aikido—has, in fact, defeated one power-armor opponent with Aikido alone, and uses his Martial Throw as a surprise attack.

BOLO (END OF THE CAMPAIGN)

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
15+40	STR	5+23*	12-(20-)	Lift 200 kg (51.2 tons); 3d6 (11d6) HTH Damage [1 (5)]
13+7	DEX	6+8*	12- (13-)	
10+20	CON	11*	11- (15-)	
32	INT	22	15-	PER Roll 15-/19-
10	EGO	0	11-	
10	PRE	0	11-	PRE Attack: 2d6
4+3	OCV	5+8*		
4+3	DCV	5+8*		
3	OMCV	0		
3	DMCV	0		
4+2	SPD	20+11*		*Phases:* 3, 6, 9, 12/2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12
3	PD	1+4*		*Total:* 36 PD (25 rPD)
2	ED	1*		*Total:* 29 ED (25 rED)
5+12	REC	1+7*		
20+40	END	4*		
10	BODY	0		
23+30	STUN	2+8*		**Total Characteristic Cost: 160**

**OIF (-½), Extra Time (Full Phase, Only to Activate, -¼)*

Movement:		
	Running:	12m
	Flight:	40m
	Leaping:	4m (20m)
	Swimming:	4m

BOLO (END OF THE CAMPAIGN-CONTINUED)

Cost	Powers	END
	Powered Armor Systems; all Slots OIF (-½)	
44	1) *The Golden Gun:* Blast 20d6; 6 Charges (-¾), OIF (-½) [6]	
7	2) *Psionic Shields:* Mental Defense (13 points total); OIF (-½), Extra Time (Full Phase, Only to Activate, -¼)	
44	3) *Armored Shell:* Resistant Protection (25 PD/25 ED/1 Mental Defense); OIF (-½), Extra Time (Full Phase, Only to Activate, -¼)	
7	4) *Anti-Ghost Force Field:* Resistant Protection (5 PD/5 ED), Affects Desolidified (+½); Only Versus Desolid Targets (-1 ½), OIF (-½), Extra Time (Full Phase, Only to Activate, -¼)	
27	5) *Magnetic Repulsers:* Flight 40m; OIF (-½)	4
5	6) *Suit* Servos: Leaping +16m (20m forward, 10m upward); OIF (-1/2)	1
19	7) Sight Group Images, -7 to PER Rolls, Area Of Effect (2m Radius; +¼); No Range (-½), OIF (-½)	
15	11) Invisibility to Sight, Hearing and Radio Groups ; 2 Continuing Charges lasting 5 Minutes each (-½), OIF (-½) [2 cc]	
5	12) +4 PER with Sight Group; OIF (-½)	
4	13) +4 versus Range Modifier for Sight Group; OIF (-½)	
10	14) Active Sonar (Hearing Group); OIF (-½)	
7	15) Radio Perception/Transmission (Radio Group); OIF (-½)	
3	16) IR Perception (Sight Group); OIF (-½)	
3	17) UV Perception (Sight Group); OIF (-½)	
10	18) *Optical Ring:* Increased Arc Of Perception (360 Degrees) with Sight Group and Active Sonar; OIF (-½)	
2	19) Mental Awareness; Mental Attack Notification Only (-1), OIF (-½), Extra Time (Full Phase, Only to Activate, -¼)	
17	20) LS (Eating: Character does not eat; Immunity: All terrestrial diseases; Safe in High Pressure; Safe in High Radiation; Safe in Intense Cold; Safe in Intense Heat; Safe in Low Pressure/Vacuum; Self-Contained Breathing; Sleeping: Character does not sleep); OIF (-½), Extra Time (Full Phase, Only to Activate, -¼)	
21	21) *Chemical Injections:* Regeneration (2 BODY per Turn); OIF (-½)	

Martial Arts: *Aikido*

	Maneuver	OCV	DCV	Notes
4	Dodge	--	+5	Dodge, Affects All Attacks, Abort
3	Hold	-1	-1	Grab Two Limbs, 25 (65) STR for holding on
5	Strike	+1	+3	3d6 (11d6) Strike
3	Throw	+0	+1	3d6 (11d6) +v/10, Target Falls

Talents

10	Danger Sense (self only, in combat); OIF (powered armor; -½) 15-
3	Striking Appearance +1/+1d6

Skills

12	+4 with Golden Gun
3	Computer Programming 15-
3	Electronics 15-
3	Inventor 15-
3	Mimicry 15-
3	Navigation 15-
3	Security Systems 15-
3	Systems Operation 15-
3	Scientist
2	1) SS: Biochemistry 15-
3	2) SS: Cybernetics 13-
2	3) SS: Nanoengineering 15-
2	4) SS: Neurochemistry 15-
2	5) SS: Subatomic Physics 15-

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 325
Total Cost: 485

In a team situation, David is the "techno-freak younger brother" to the other members of the Shadow Warriors. In combat, he is the team brick, mixing it up in hand-to-hand combat with powerful enemies, using his Golden Gun mostly on monstrous foes or inanimate objects.

Because of its intricate electronics, the BOLO suit is more easily damaged by magnetic attacks than other sorts of damage.

Campaign Use: Bolo is an excellent point of contact for superhero PCs who need advice on cybernetics, computer and video games, and life support solutions for hazardous environments. He could also serve as a mentor is a fledgling powered armor PC, helping the PC with improvements and adjustments to the character's suit.

If you wish, you could use Bolo as a villain. In this case, his cybernetic games were indeed stolen—but by the US Department of Defense, not by VIPER. He destroyed the devices as described, but became a foe of, and Hunted by, the United States government.

Appearance: The BOLO suit is nearly 7' tall, its surface a gleaming gold. A single slit circles the helmet at eye level; this is the fiber-optic camera eye series which serves as his 360-degree vision. The suit is alien, robotic, and frightening—hence the Distinctive Features.

David's voice, transmitted through the BOLO suit, emerges as a robotic drone, and it is commonly believed that Bolo is actually a sentient robot; it is not known that he is a power-armor hero.

THE STRIKE FORCE SKETCHBOOK

One of the fascinating discoveries I made while examining Aaron's digital archives as a PDF "sketchbook" containing an assortment of drawings from the first 80 play sessions of Strike Force. Among the interesting tidbits are: a drawing of Lady Power tossing Phosphene down a hallway; a sketch of BOLO without his helmet (that I'm willing to bet looks like a young Denis Loubet); a drawing of Overlord without his helmet, something Strike Force wouldn't see until the 30th play session; a drawing of Lorelei as a pirate (a poster photographed by Lightrune); a drawing of Spectra, heroine of the planet Dekare; a note that Alasder Dell didn't appear until session 63; another note indicating that Prism, mother of Luster, first appeared in blue-booking around session 73; and that ShadowWalker started seeing Shari Taylor around session 74.

The other drawings in the archive are just as fascinating. There's a drawing of BOLO's new armored form that looks rather alien. Gone is the heavy, robotic look seen in the first Strike Force sourcebook. Instead we get a humanoid shape with what looks like a single "eye" and sets of banding visible under the oddly-shaped outer… shell? Oh, and there's also some "unmasked" drawings of other superhero teams and a smug headshot of Scoff.

BOLO (END OF THE CAMPAIGN-CONTINUED)

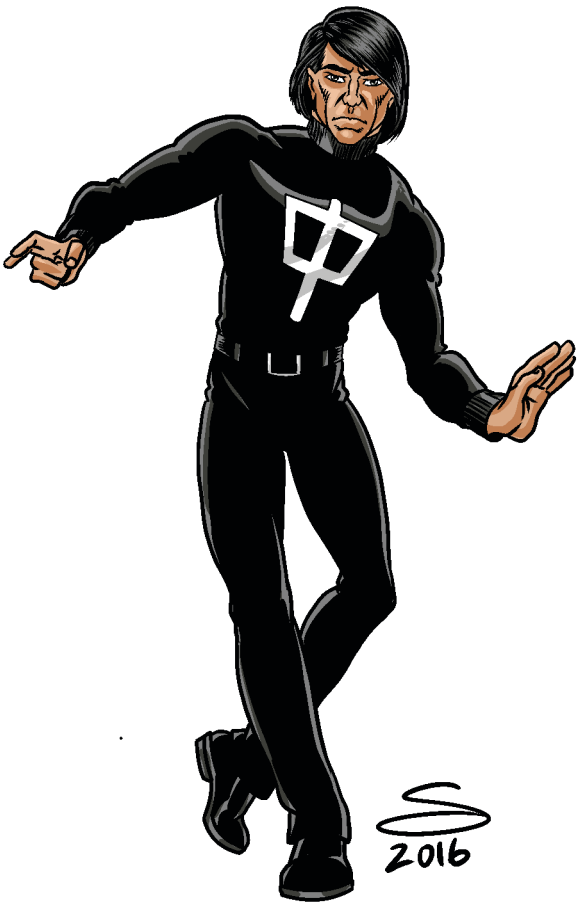
400	**Matching Complications (75)**
20	Distinctive Features: Big Golden Robot (Not Concealable; Always Noticed and Causes Major Reaction; Detectable By Commonly-Used Senses)
15	DNPC: Shell, Very Frequently (Normal; Useful Noncombat Position or Skills)
20	Enraged: Overreacts to Cruelty (Common), go 11-, recover 11-
20	Hunted: Brand (Infrequently; Mo Pow; NCI; Harshly Punish)
15	Psychological Complication: Avoids Extreme Force (Common; Strong)
15	Psychological Complication: Overreacts to Death (Common; Strong)
15	Social Complication: Secret ID (David Simons) (Frequently, Major)
30	Vulnerability: 2 x STUN Physical Killing Attacks (Very Common)
10	Vulnerability: 2 x STUN from Magnetic Attacks (Uncommon)

Total Complications Points: 75
Experience Points: 85

Background/History: Ed Trillaine has led a strange and tragic life. His parents were kidnapped when he was a child—stolen by slavers of the Shivall (see page 64). All he knows is that a UFO took them away, and the authorities never believed that. As a result, he grew up troubled, the most surly and aggressive resident of the Painesville, Ohio orphanage, and was constantly in trouble with the law for fighting. However, he found his true calling when he ran away from home and was taken in at the Loc Phu Binh Academy for Boys in New York City. The Academy, a combination of a Boy's Town and martial arts dojo was run by a strange Asian man. There, he began learning about honor, self-discipline, and the martial arts.

Ed saw action with American special operation units in Vietnam. His unusual skill in combat prompted his superiors to send him, covertly, to Paek-tu, a mountain on the border of China and North Korea. There, from the aged master of the mountain, he learned the Paek-tu "Total Attack" martial art.

Aside from Ed, the master had another pupil, a Vietnamese man named Loc Ban Tor—Ed's opposite number in every way. Loc Ban Tor, though a naturally brilliant hand-to-hand fighter, was undisciplined and treacherous; during a practice match, he became enraged and tried to kill Ed, seriously injuring him, and was sent away from Paek-tu in disgrace.



SHIVA

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
20	STR	10	13-	Lift 400 kg; 4d6 HTH Damage [4]
28	DEX	36	15-	
23	CON	13	14-	
13	INT	3	12-	PER Roll 12-/14-
11	EGO	1	11-	
15	PRE	5	12-	PRE Attack: 3d6
9	OCV	30		
9	DCV	30		
4	OMCV	3		
4	DMCV	3		
5	SPD	30		*Phases:* 3, 5, 8, 10, 12
18	PD	7		*Total:* 18 PD (9 rPD)
15	ED	4		*Total:* 15 ED (9 rED)
9	REC	5		
46	END	6		
15	BODY	5		
37	STUN	9		**Total Characteristic Cost: 199**

Movement:	Running:	14m
	Leaping:	4m
	Swimming:	4m

SHIVA (CONTINUED)

Cost	Powers	END
25	*Super Reflexes:* STR has Armor Piercing (+¼), Area Of Effect (personal Surface—Damage Shield; +¼), Selective (+¼), Invisible Power Effects (Invisible to Sight Group; +½)	2

Martial Arts: *Chang-Pai-Shan, Commando Training, Paek-Tu, Taijutsu*

- Chang-Pai-Shan Maneuver, @ - Commando Training Maneuver, * - Paek-Tu Maneuver, $ - Taijutsu Maneuver

	Maneuver	OCV	DCV	Notes
4	Block (@*$)	+2	+2	Block, Abort
4	Dodge (#*$)	--	+5	Dodge, Affects All Attacks, Abort
4	Fast Strike (*)	+2	+0	6d6 Strike
5	Floater Punch (#)	-2	-2	HKA 2 ½d6, Strike, Take Full Damage
5	Grappling Strike (#)	-2	-2	8d6, Strike, Grab
3	Nerve Strike Grab (#)	-2	-2	2d6 NND, Grab (No STR allowed)
5	Sacrifice Strike (*)	+1	-2	8d6 Strike
5	Takeaway (#)	-2	-2	Grab Weapon; +20 STR To Take Weapon Away
3	Takedown (*)	+1	+1	4d6 Strike; Target Falls
1	Use Art with Clubs			

31	*Counterpunches:* Multipower, 70-point reserve, Damage Limited By Maneuvers (-¼), Must Be Aware Of Target (-¼), Not While Stunned (-¼), Requires A Successful To-Hit Roll (-½)	
4f	1) HA +4d6, Armor Piercing (+¼), Area Of Effect (personal Surface—Damage Shield; +¼), Selective (+¼), Invisible Power Effects (Invisible to Sight Group; +½), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); Hand-To-Hand Attack (-¼)	
4f	2) HKA 1d6+1 (1 ½d6 w/STR), Armor Piercing (+¼), Area Of Effect (personal Surface—Damage Shield; +¼), Selective (+¼), Invisible Power Effects (Invisible to Sight Group; +½), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); Hand-To-Hand Attack (-¼)	
23	*Shuriken:* Multipower, 37-point reserve, 12 Recoverable Charges (+¼); all slots OAF (-1)	
2f	1) *Handful of Shuriken:* RKA 1 ½d6, Autofire (5 shots; +½); OAF (-1)	4
1f	2) *Single Shuriken:* RKA 2d6; OAF (-1)	3
1f	3) *Thrown Shuriken:* Deflection; Can't Deflect For Others Without Seeing The Attack Begin (-½), OAF (-1), Shuriken damage must exceed attack damage to deflect; -½),	2
2	*Swift:* Running +2m (14m total)	1
4	*Sharp Eyed:* +2 PER with Sight Group	
2	*Enhanced Vision:* UV Perception (Sight Group); Costs Endurance (-½), Increased Endurance Cost (x2 END; -½)	2

Perks

2	Fringe Benefit: Master of Chang-Pai-Shan Martial Arts Style
2	Fringe Benefit: Master of Paek-Tu Martial Arts Style

Talents

18	*Super Reflexes:* Combat Luck (9 PD/9 ED)
42	Danger Sense (self only, any danger, Discriminatory, Function as a Sense, Targeting Sense) 12-

Skills

20	+4 Martial Arts
10	+5 with Deflection
8	+1 with Ranged Combat
3	Acrobatics 15-
3	Analyze: Fighting Style 12-
3	Breakfall 15-
3	Climbing 15-
3	Combat Driving 15-
3	Combat Piloting 15-
3	Deduction 12-

After his training was complete, Ed returned to the Army. Once his hitch was up, he was hired by the CIA as a field operative, and given the codename Shiva. Shiva had a lengthy and shining career, specializing in cleaning up after operations botched by other units.

In the early 80s, he met Strike Force during their second case and felt a protective interest in Lorelei. He decided to train her to survive in the superhero world, and joined the team. But during that mission (another fight against Overlord), he offhandedly tried to finish La Panthere (see page 114) after Phosphene (see page 91) had defeated her, and Phosphene has despised him ever since.

When Strike Force split into two teams, Shiva became leader of the Shadow Warriors. But he learned that Loc Ban Tor had come to America to hunt him, so he faked a death for the Shiva identity, taking on a new identity (who went by the name of Sai), which threw Loc Ban Tor off for a few years. In addition, the CIA ordered Ed to kill a Naval Intelligence officer who had illegally left the United States to join a secretive Swiss agency—the Organization (see page 124 for more information). Ed had no problems with the order, but discovered (before he'd made the hit) that the target was Lorelei's brother, Hamilton Arreth. In disgust, he resigned, and the CIA has hired Loc Ban Tor to kill him.

In due time, Ed retired the Sai identity, defeated Loc Ban Tor in a lethal duel, and returned to the Shadow Warriors as Shiva. He also took a student, a Japanese woman who goes by the codename "Kawaii" and recently has had to face his own possible mortality (it seems his strict diet and training is slowly destroying his body).

Personality/Motivation: Shiva long believed that the best way to fight crime or accomplish a goal was to eliminate whomever stood in his way—permanently. He understood that most of his teammates considered this to be murder and tried to refrain from taking life while working around them. He didn't always remember to, however. He also presented himself as the "tough-as-nails ex-soldier to whom life means nothing"—or so he liked his teammates to think. But, he has a soft spot in his heart for Lorelei, and the near-miss when he almost murdered her brother caused him to reevaluate his previous career and rethink his philosophy about killing.

For most of his career, Shiva's closest relationships have been with his teacher, the master of Paek-tu; and with Lorelei, whom he regards as a little sister. He also has had a long business relationship with the costumed super known as Sliver, who taught him detective skills and who acted as his field agent on occasion; now that she is with Lightning Strike (the super team of the Federation of Atlantia—see page 34) she no longer works in the field with him.

SHIVA (CONTINUED)

3	Disguise 12-
2	KS: Chang-Pai-Shan 11-
1	KS: Commando Training 8-
2	KS: Martial World 11-
3	KS: Paek-tu 12-
2	KS: Taijutsu 11-
5	Language: Korean (imitate dialects)
2	PS: Bodyguard 11-
3	PS: Sensei 12-
3	Stealth 15-
0	TF: Skating (iceskating or rollerskating)
3	WF: Common Martial Arts Melee Weapons, Shotguns

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 291
Total Cost: 489

400	**Matching Complications (75)**
5	DNPC: Kawaii Frequently (Slightly Less Powerful than the PC; Useful Noncombat Position or Skills)
15	Psychological Complication: 'Former' Casual Killer (Common; Strong)
15	Social Complication: Secret ID (Edsel Trillaine) Frequently, Major
5	Susceptibility: from missing Floater Punch 1d6 damage (1 point KA) Instant (Uncommon)
20	Vulnerability: 2 x STUN from Gases and Poisons (Common)

Total Complication Points: 75
Experience Points: 89

SLIVER

Sliver appears in the adventure "School Holiday," which appeared in *Space Gamer* issue 51.

Powers/Tactics: Shiva is an accomplished martial artist, possessing mastery of not only Paek-tu, but also of Chang-Pai-Shan, the supposed source of all other Asian martial arts. On top of this, his fanatical training has given him truly superhuman reflexes and the ability to use these reflexes to deliver devastating counterstrikes. Shiva has abandoned most of the weapons of his Sai persona, keeping only the shuriken. Finally, he also has many skills of a more mundane nature which are useful to both a government field operative and a costumed superhero.

When involved in combat, Shiva serves as the Shadow Warrior's hand-to-hand specialist. He is a nasty combatant against low or medium-powered opponents and a distraction for high-powered foes. His mastery of Chang-Pai-Shan makes him a frightening foe, but the techniques are hard to pull off (hence the OCV minus) and missing with a Floater Punch causes him physical pain and damage.

Campaign Use: As a master of Chang-Pai-Shan and Paek-tu, Shiva could be approached by PCs who wish to learn these esoteric fighting styles.

If you wish to use Shiva as a villain, then he's the ultimate extension of Shiva's lethal impulses; after the war, he was first a government operative and then a full-time assassin for the CIA, then a freelance assassin specializing in hits on supers and targets protected by supers. In this role, he met and became reconciled to Loc Ban Tor, who is now his partner.

Appearance: Shiva stands an even six feet in height and weighs a lean 165 pounds. He has black hair and hazel eyes, but often disguises himself with Korean features. When he operated under the name Sai, he wore a white version of a *shinobi shōzoku,* the stereotypical costume of a ninja. As Sai he also carried an assortment of weapons, including a katana, bow, paired sai, and a pouch of shuriken. As Shiva he wears a far simpler costume, with no mask, a black long-sleeved shirt, and black trousers. On his shirt he has a highly-stylized trident (a symbol of Shiva) in white.

STRIKE FORCE MARTIAL ARTS

Aaron (along with Earl S. Cooley III) developed a lot of fictional martial arts for Earth-AU.

Shiva is a master of two: Chang-Pai-Shan and Paek-tu. The former is an ancient Korean style and is supposed to be the origin of all other martial arts on Earth. At the moment, the only person who really knows this style is Shiva, and only because he was able to rescue the style's fighting manuals following the destruction of World War III. The latter is another Korean style and is a "total attack" form of fighting, emphasizing offense and dealing damage over defense.

Overlord himself is a practitioner of Daragak, the fighting form of the Katari people. A student of Daragak starts with a spear, then goes on to learn barehanded and other two-handed weapon techniques. Interestingly, Daragak doesn't actually mean anything and instead is formed from the Katari letters de-re-ge-ke. When written out, each letter symbolizes a philosophical point behind the Daragak style.

Individual heroes and villains also developed their own fighting styles. Bright Eagle, a European hero (who eventually turned villain) developed an aerial style known as "Dogfighting." It used a lot of movement-based techniques. The villain Goblin (who eventually become a hero) had a style called "Goblin-Tossing" that concentrated on grappling, throwing, and shoving foes.

Hardball is a fighting style developed during World War II by the hero O.K. Joe. It is a mix of 1930s-era boxing, street fighting, gymnastics, and dance, with each part integrated as O.K. Joe learned them. The style emphasizes physical conditioning and uses the fighter's fists, elbows, knees, and feet to inflict blows. The style's techniques tend to be compact and direct, due to its origins in boxing and street fights.

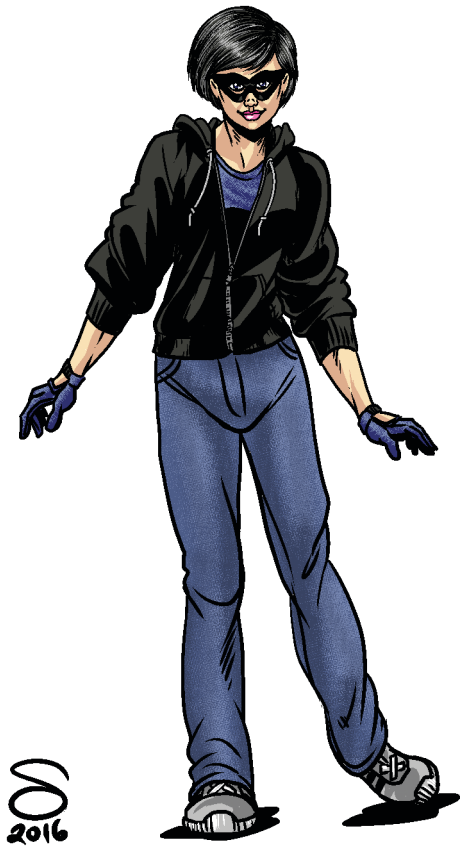
Other aliens aside from the Katari have their own forms of fighting. Mention is made of the Agaram people and a showy fighting style they developed for gladiatorial combat displays. In addition, the K'Pok people have a fighting style specifically developed to be used in powered armor and regularly taught to their special forces warriors. The Shivall teach a form of kickboxing to their elite ground troops while the crab-like Koualix have a grappling art known as Tidal Force.

Even the world of Savoir-Ferret contains unique fighting styles. Felines use "Katrate," while canines practice "Ruff-and-Tumble." And along with all of the other Shaolin animal styles, there's also "Shaolin Rabbit."

Description: Jackie Osbourne's parents are comfortably well off, and they gave her the best they could afford while she was growing up. They always assumed that she'd grow up to be like them, however… If anyone in the family knew she was a mutant, they might find it easier to explain how different she is from her upper-middle-class family. But none of them, Jackie included, are aware of it.

Her parents know that she's in her mid twenties, and stands 5'3», with a wiry build, short dark hair, blue eyes and creamy pale complexion. Oh, and she's bright and likes to get into mischief. They suspect that she is no longer in college (which is true—she got bored). They are completely unaware of what she does for amusement.

Besides hanging around with her friends, who nicknamed her Flea for her habit of bouncing around from one thing to another without stopping, she likes a challenge best; she finds breaking and entering exhilarating, especially if she can play a trick on a stuffed-shirt while doing it. She climbs easily, and can hang on to almost anything—unnaturally well, although no one has ever pointed that out to her. She enjoys outwitting security systems, just because she can. She is so pleased with her own cleverness that on some occasions that she has risked capture by remaining a few extra moments to set up a practical joke. Some



FLEA

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
25	STR	15	14-	Lift 800 kg; 5d6 HTH Damage [2]
23	DEX	26	14-	
20	CON	10	13-	
23	INT	13	14-	PER Roll 14-
18	EGO	8	13-	
15	PRE	5	12-	PRE Attack: 3d6
8	OCV	25		
8	DCV	25		
6	OMCV	9		
6	DMCV	9		
6	SPD	40		*Phases:* 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12
20	PD	18		*Total:* 20 PD (10 rPD)
15	ED	13		*Total:* 15 ED (10 rED)
9	REC	5		
40	END	4		
10	BODY	0		
40	STUN	10		**Total Characteristic Cost: 235**

Movement:	Running:	18m
	Leaping:	20m
	Swimming:	4m

FLEA (CONTINUED)

Cost	Powers				END
	Martial Arts: *Aikido*				
	Maneuver	**OCV**	**DCV**	**Notes**	
4	Dodge	--	+5	Dodge, Affects All Attacks, Abort	
4	Escape	+0	+0	65 STR vs. Grabs	
3	Hold	-1	-1	Grab Two Limbs, 60 STR for holding on	
5	Strike	+1	+3	10d6 Strike	
3	Throw	+0	+1	10d6 +v/10, Target Falls	
20	+5 HTH Damage Classes (already added in)				
5	*Flash Grenade:* Sight Group Flash 3d6, Area Of Effect (6m Radius Explosion; +¼); 1 Charge (-2), OAF (-1) [1]				
10	*Hard To Hurt:* Resistant for 10 PD/10 ED				
6	*Swift:* Running +6m (18m total)				1
8	*Leaps Like A Flea:* Leaping +16m (20m forward, 10m upward)				1
10	Clinging (normal STR)				
	Talents				
3	Lightsleep				
6	Striking Appearance +2/+2d6				
	Skills				
10	+1 with All Attacks				
3	+1 versus Range Modifier with All Ranged Attacks				
5	Acrobatics 15-				
5	Breakfall 15-				
5	Climbing 15-				
3	Combat Piloting 14-				
3	Computer Programming 14-				
3	Concealment 14-				
3	Disguise 14-				
3	Electronics 14-				
2	KS: Aikido 11-				
1	Language: German (basic conversation)				
1	Language: Japanese (basic conversation)				
3	Lockpicking 14-				
3	Mimicry 14-				
5	Security Systems 15-				
5	Stealth 15-				
2	TF: Skating (iceskating), Skiing (snow)				
2	WF: Small Arms				

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 154
Total Cost: 389

people naturally take exception to this, and there are a few high-powered businessmen who would cheerfully throttle her if they knew who she was and could catch her. She's been spotted once or twice during her escapades—a few people do know about her, including the police. But she's never hurt anyone with her pranks, and can't stand people who do that sort of thing for fun.

Her mother worries about her, of course, and has once or twice "just dropped by" to see how she's doing… She's not trying to pry or meddle, really she isn't. But she'd be delighted to see her wayward daughter start settling down a little.

Flea joined the Shadow Warriors in 1991 (probably about the time she quit college) and has worked with them ever since.

FLEA (CONTINUED)

400	**Matching Complications (75)**
10	DNPC: Mother Infrequently (Normal)
10	Distinctive Features: Style (Aikido) (Not Concealable; Noticed and Recognizable; Detectable By Large Group)
15	Hunted: New York Police (Infrequently, Mo Pow; Harshly Punish)
20	Hunted: Nightmare Jack (Frequently, Mo Pow; Harshly Punish)
5	Negative Reputation: Prankster and Troublemaker, Infrequently
15	Psychological Complication: Fear of Restraint or Confinement (Uncommon; Total)
10	Psychological Complication: Hatred of Wanton Cruelty (Uncommon; Strong)
15	Psychological Complication: Overconfident (Very Common; Moderate)
10	Psychological Complication: Prankster (Common; Moderate)
15	Social Complication: Secret Identity (Jacqueline 'Jackie' Osbourne) (Frequently, Major)
15	Vulnerability: 1 ½ x BODY Chemical-based Attacks (Very Common)
15	Vulnerability: 1 ½ x STUN Chemical-based Attacks (Very Common)

Total Complications Points: 75
Experience Points: 0

FENRIS X

Description: Built by Blanco, as part of the Animal Kingdom, Fenris X is a genetic chimera. He was made with DNA from the Blood, humanity, wolves, and other animals. As his name indicates, he is from the Tenth Series of Animal Kingdom creations (he's also the only survivor of his series). In human form he's a towering 6'9", in "werewolf" form he's an even bigger 7'6", with black and gray hair and brown eyes. His human form looks eerily like a "surfer dude" character from a popular video game. In this form he tends to wear spandex muscle shirts, cut-off shorts, and sandals.

Fenris X was rescued by the Shadow Warriors in 1990, when they found him running rampant in one of Blanco's labs. Fenris X felt Lorelei smelt 'good' and seemed familiar. It was later found out this was due to Fenris X having some of Commodore's DNA included in his make-up, resulting in his being adopted into Lorelei and Commodore's family in 1994. He has taken the Blood name of "Fenris, Who Wars from the Shadows." His standard question before most fights is *"Scare or bite?"*

The Shadow Warriors initially kept Fenris X because they found him too naive and far too dangerous to let him out on his own. They also didn't want Blanco kidnapping him back. So they parked him on a sofa in the team's break room and taught him how to play video games until they figured out what to do with him.

Fenris X acquired the Dragunov after a fight with Tai Nosferatu, who made good his escape, but had to abandon the weapon. Fenris saw how nervous the gun made folks, so he claimed it, and started to learn to use it (being trained by Sickle).

Friday 13 is Fenris X's mate (see page 151).

FENRIS X

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
25	STR	15	14-	Lift 800 kg; 5d6 HTH Damage [2]
23	DEX	26	14-	
21	CON	11	13-	
13	INT	3	12-	PER Roll 12-
15	EGO	5	12-	
25	PRE	15	14-	PRE Attack: 5d6
8	OCV	25		
8	DCV	25		
5	OMCV	6		
5	DMCV	6		
5	SPD	30		*Phases:* 3, 5, 8, 10, 12
19	PD	13		*Total:* 19 PD (4 rPD)
18	ED	12		*Total:* 18 ED (4 rED)
9	REC	5		
42	END	5		
14	BODY	4		
38	STUN	9		**Total Characteristic Cost: 215**

Movement:	Running	22m
	Leaping:	10m
	Swimming:	4m

Cost	Powers	END
	"Werewolf" Form; all Powers OIAID (-¼)	
21	1) *Fierce Appearance:* Aid PRE 8d6; Only to Aid Self (-1), OIAID (-¼)	5
23	2) *Sonic Howl:* Blast 4d6, NND (defense is ear-plugs or sonic insulation; +1); Only Affects Living Targets (-½), OIAID (-¼)	4
15	3) *Sonic Howl:* Blast 3d6, Area Of Effect (personal Surface—Damage Shield; +¼), NND (defense is Mental Defense or EGO of 20+; +½); Only Affects Living Targets (-½), OIAID (-¼)	3
20	4) *Claws:* HKA 2 ½d6 (4d6+1 w/STR); Increased Endurance Cost (x2 END; -½), Reduced Penetration (-¼), OIAID (-¼)	8
17	5) *Talking To Animal Men:* Hearing Group Images, +10 to PER Rolls; Animal Men Only (-½), Concentration (½ DCV; -¼), OIAID (-¼)	3
18	6) *Blend With Shadows:* Invisibility to Sight and Hearing Groups , Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼); Requires A Stealth Roll (-½), OIAID (-¼)	1
38	7) *Hard To Hurt:* Regeneration (4 BODY per 5 Minutes); OIAID (-¼)	
26	*Snayperskaya Vintovka Dragunova (Dragunov Sniper Rifle):* RKA 2d6+1, +1 Increased STUN Multiplier (+¼), 8 clips of 12 Charges (+¼); OAF (-1), [12]	
1	*PSO-1 Telescopic Sight:* +1 OCV; Extra Time (Full Phase, -½), OAF (-1)	0
5	*PSO-1 Telescopic Sight:* +10 OCV; Extra Time (1 Turn, Only to Activate, -¾), OAF (-1), OCV Bonus Lost When Target Is Changed (-1),	0
1	*PSO-1 Telescopic Sight:* +2 versus Range Modifiers; OAF (-1), Extra Time (Full Phase, -½)	0
2	*PSO-1 Telescopic Sight:* IR Perception (Sight Group); Extra Time (1 Turn, Only to Activate, -¾), OAF (-1),	0
2	*PSO-1 Telescopic Sight:* +4 versus Range Modifier for Sight Group; Extra Time (Full Phase, -½), OAF (-1)	0
5	*PSO-1 Telescopic Sight: Range Finder:* Detect Range 22- (Sight Group); Extra Time (1 Turn, -1 ¼), OAF (-1)	0

FENRIS X (CONTINUED)

Cost	Powers	END
8	*Psionic Shields:* Mental Defense (8 points total)	
12	*Tough Skin:* Resistant Protection (4 PD/4 ED)	
3	*Powerful Leaper:* Leaping +6m (10m forward, 5m upward)	1
10	*Swift:* Running +10m (22m/34m total)	1
2	*Augmented Running:* Running +12m (22m/34m total); Increased Endurance Cost (x8 END; -3 ½), OIAID (-¼)	8
5	*Augmented Sense Of Smell:* Discriminatory with Normal Smell	
5	*Augmented Sense Of Smell:* Tracking with Normal Smell	
3	*Augmented Hearing:* Ultrasonic Perception (Hearing Group)	
15	Mind Link, Any Willing Target	
	Talents	
2	Eidetic Memory; Scents Only (-1)	
2	Striking Appearance +1/+1d6; Not in Hero ID (-½)	
	Skills	
3	Breakfall 14-	
3	Climbing 14-	
1	Combat Piloting 8-	
3	Computer Programming 12-	
1	KS: Animal-Men (Animal Kingdom) 8-	
1	KS: Reapers Organization 8-	
1	Language: American Sign Language (basic conversation)	
1	Language: German (basic conversation)	
1	Language: Morse Code (basic conversation)	
1	PS: Video Game Play-tester 8-	
3	Shadowing 12-	
7	Stealth 16-	
3	Survival 12-	
3	Tracking 12-	
1	TF: Grav Vehicles/Hovercraft, Two-Wheeled Motorized Ground Vehicles	

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 295
Total Cost: 509

400	**Matching Complications (75)**
10	DNPC: Friday 13, Very Frequently (Slightly Less Powerful than the PC; Useful Noncombat Position or Skills)
15	Distinctive Features: Terrifying Werewolf-Like Creature; (Concealable; Always Noticed and Causes Major Reaction; Detectable By Commonly-Used Senses)
30	Enraged: In Presence of Old Keepers (Common), go 14-, recover 8-
20	Enraged: Pack Member Knocked Out (Common), go 11-, recover 11-
20	Hunted: NAPI (Reapers Legacy Group) (Frequently, As Pow; NCI; Harshly Punish)
20	Hunted: New World Order (Reapers Legacy Group) (Frequently, As Pow; NCI; Harshly Punish)
10	Negative Reputation: Man-Eating Werewolf, Infrequently (Extreme)
15	Physical Complication: Cannot Talk (Frequently; Slightly Impairing)
15	Physical Complication: Unfamiliar with Human Culture (Frequently; Slightly Impairing)
20	Psychological Complication: Pack Loyalty (Very Common; Strong)
10	Psychological Complication: Protective of Handicapped (Uncommon; Strong)
10	Vulnerability: 1 ½ x STUN from Fire-based Attacks (Common)
20	Vulnerability: 2 x STUN from Chemical-Based Attacks (Common)

Total Complications Points: 75
Experience Points: 109

Description: Born in 1976, Rebar became one of the many NoIDs following the events of World War III. As with the other NoIDs, he has abandoned his previous identity, going only by the name of Rebar. He also relocated to Atlantic City, New Jersey, a growing community of NoIDs. A mutant with power over cold, he is also a minor sorcerer, and fights foes with a six-foot staff sheathed in metal (his tetsubo). He joined the Shadow Warriors in 1991 and as of 1995 is the team's leader.

Rebar stands 5'6" with blond hair and blue eyes.

REBAR

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
15	STR	5	12-	Lift 200 kg; 3d6 HTH Damage [1]
18	DEX	16	13-	
23	CON	13	14-	
14	INT	4	12-	PER Roll 12-
14	EGO	4	12-	
15	PRE	5	12-	PRE Attack: 3d6
6	OCV	15		
6	DCV	15		
5	OMCV	6		
5	DMCV	6		
5	SPD	30		*Phases:* 3, 5, 8, 10, 12
12	PD	10		*Total:* 24 PD (12 rPD)
12	ED	10		*Total:* 24 ED (12 rED)
8	REC	4		
46	END	6		
12	BODY	2		
40	STUN	10		**Total Characteristic Cost: 161**

Movement:	Running:	20m
	Leaping:	4m
	Swimming:	4m

REBAR (CONTINUED)

Cost	Powers	END
	Cold Powers, all slots Unified Power (-¼)	
40	1) *Cold Blast:* Blast 10d6; Unified Power (-¼)	5
33	2) *Ice Bonds:* Entangle 5d6, 5 PD/5 ED; No Effect On Hot Or Fiery Targets (-¼), Unified Power (-¼)	5
8	3) Major Transform 1d6 (object to object in suspended animation, healed by thawing out); Unified Power (-¼)	1
22	4) *Ice Wall:* Barrier 5 PD/5 ED, 0 BODY (up to 10m long, 2m tall, and ½m thick); Unified Power (-¼)	3
17	5) *Ice Armor:* Resistant Protection (10 PD/10 ED); Costs Endurance (-½), Unified Power (-¼)	3
17	6) *Lower Temperature:* Change Environment (-4 Temperature Level Adjustment), Area Of Effect (16m Radius; +¾); Unified Power (-¼)	2

Martial Arts: *Dirty Infighting*

	Maneuver	OCV	DCV	Notes
4	Disarm	-1	+1	Disarm; 25 STR to Disarm
5	Jab	+1	+3	3d6 Strike
4	Kidney Blow	-2	+0	HKA 1 ½d6
4	Low Blow	-1	+1	2d6 NND
4	Punch/Backhand	+0	+2	5d6 Strike
3	Throw	+0	+1	3d6 +v/10, Target Falls
1	Use Art with Tetsubo			

22	*Tetsubo:* Hand-To-Hand Attack +6d6, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); OAF (-1), Hand-To-Hand Attack (-¼) **plus** +2m Reach	
4	*Leathers:* Resistant Protection (2 PD/2 ED); OIF (-½)	
8	*Swift:* Running +8m (20m total)	1
10	*Magic Sense:* Detect Magic 12- (Unusual Group), Discriminatory, Range; Extra Time (Full Phase, -½)	
2	LS (Safe in Intense Cold)	

Talents

3 Striking Appearance +1/+1d6

Skills

15 +3 with Dirty Infighting
10 +2 with Cold Powers

2 AK: NoID Territories 11-
3 Analyze: Magic Style 12-
3 Breakfall 13-
3 Combat Driving 13-
3 KS: Elemental Magic 12-
3 Lockpicking 13-
3 PS: Bouncer 12-
5 Power: Magic Skills 13-
3 Stealth 13-
3 Streetwise 12-
0 TF: Two-Wheeled Motorized Ground Vehicles

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 268
Total Cost: 428

400	**Matching Complications (75)**
5	DNPC: Adelae Infrequently (Slightly Less Powerful than the PC)
5	Distinctive Features: Ear Pierced With Safety Pins; White Hair With Light Blue Streaks (Easily Concealed; Noticed and Recognizable; Detectable By Commonly-Used Senses)
10	Hunted: NoID Gang (Infrequently, Mo Pow; Limited Geographical Area (Queens); Harshly Punish)
15	Hunted: GM's Choice (Infrequently, Mo Pow; Harshly Punish)
5	Negative Reputation: NoID Superhero, Infrequently
5	Psychological Complication: Dislike Of Warm Temperatures and Open Flame (Uncommon; Moderate)
15	Psychological Complication: In Love With Adelae (Common; Strong)

REBAR (CONTINUED)

10	Psychological Complication: Likes To Fight (Common; Moderate)
15	Psychological Complication: Overconfidence (Very Common; Moderate)
15	Psychological Complication: Protects People In Danger (Common; Strong)
10	Psychological Complication: Short-Tempered (Common; Moderate)
10	Psychological Complication: Vengeful (Uncommon; Strong)
5	Rivalry: Romantic, with Apparition
10	Vulnerability: 1 ½ x STUN Fire-based Attacks (Common)

Total Complications Points: 75
Experience Points: 28

Other members of the Shadow Warriors:

Benjamin Cupp: Formerly a NYC millionaire with crippling case of agoraphobia, Benjamin worked as a detective who operated only over the telephone. In 1981 he was turned into a vampire by Grave-Robber and offered a place in Grave Robber's necromantic cell. Benjamin refused and was hunted down and staked. He was accidentally resurrected by Strike Force Orbital in 1995 and was recruited by the Shadow Warriors soon after.

Medea: A daughter of Scoff, by way of Drusilla, Medea presents herself as a demoness of fear and mischief let loose in the modern world. She is also a capable singer and has been involved with the Shadow Warriors since 1995.

Quicksilver: A mutant with superhuman strength and light-amplification powers, Quicksilver is also queen of the roller derby. She has been with the Shadow Warriors since 1990.

Shadow Knights

The Shadow Knights formed in late 1995. They are meant to be a more covert arm of the Shadow Warriors, returning the methods (and visibility) of the team's older days. The 'Knights are based out of the Bahamas, unlike the 'Warriors, who operate out of Long Island.

GMPCS

Aaron ran a number of GMPCs during the Strike Force campaign. The most prominent was Lightrune, but there were a number of other characters who regularly appeared in game sessions—such as Man-o-War. Which leads to the question of *"when is it appropriate to have a GMPC?"*

Answering this question isn't easy, as every play group is different, as is every GM. Some GMs want to see the PCs sink or swim on their own, while others want to be part of the action. Aaron created Lightrune to counterbalance all of the dark-clad defenders of the night he was initially handed, which leads to the best point about creating and using GMPCs: does the team have desperately-needed yet unfilled niche?

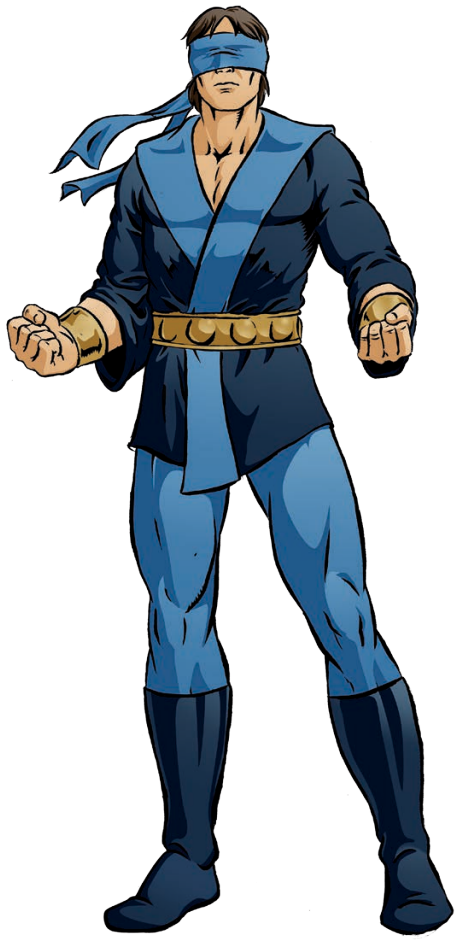
Personally, I'm not a fan of the GMPC as I feel it can detract from the player's actions. However, if played right and built to ensure they don't outshine anyone else, GMPCs can be useful and provide needed powers, skills, and knowledge the rest of the PCs may not have. GMPCs are also good mouthpieces for the GM, allowing campaign info to be passed on in a somewhat natural manner. Just make sure your players are okay with such a character, don't force it on them.

MAN-O-WAR

Description: Born in 1954 in Detroit, Michigan, Patrick Keller's family moved to New York City in 1967. His parents were killed a few years later, during a New York bombing incident at the height of 1970's terrorism. Patrick, unsure what to do with himself after his parents death, spent time studying dance and martial arts before taking inspiration from the local superhero community and becoming a costumed super himself, taking the name Man-o-War.

Possessing a natural understanding of lines of force, as well as exceptional agility and reflexes, he was active with first Strike Force and then the Shadow Warriors, finally retiring in 1986 as age, injuries, and mileage took a toll on his body. However, after the defeat of the Governor enabled Overlord to fully produce his anti-aging treatments, Man-o-War underwent Dirkson therapy, regaining the physical capabilities of his youth. He then rejoined the Shadow Warriors in 1994, much to the dismay of his wife, Gabriela, who thought she'd had him safely back from crime fighting and is very unhappy that Man-o-War has chosen to return to his costumed way of life.

As Man-o-War, Patrick wears a black tunic and boots, with blue leggings and a mask resembling a blindfold. He also has gold bracers on his arms and a gold belt. He stand's 5'11" tall, weighs a trim 175 lbs, and has brown hair and blue eyes. He also moves with obvious grace.



MAN-O-WAR

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
20	STR	10	13-	Lift 400 kg; 4d6 HTH Damage [2]
30	DEX	40	15-	
28	CON	18	15-	
20	INT	10	13-	PER Roll 13-
18	EGO	8	13-	
14	PRE	4	12-	PRE Attack: 2 ½d6
10	OCV	35		
10	DCV	35		
6	OMCV	9		
6	DMCV	9		
6	SPD	40		*Phases:* 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12
13	PD	11		*Total:* 13 PD (0 rPD)
13	ED	11		*Total:* 13 ED (0 rED)
10	REC	6		
56	END	8		
17	BODY	7		
41	STUN	11		**Total Characteristic Cost: 271**

Movement:		
	Running:	20m
	Leaping:	8m
	Swimming:	4m
	Swinging:	18m

MAN-O-WAR (CONTINUED)

Cost	Powers	END
20	*Bracers:* Multipower, 30-point reserve, all slots OIF (-½)	
2f	1) *Wire Wrapping:* Entangle 2d6, 2 PD/2 ED; OIF (-½), 64 Charges (+½) [64]	
2f	2) *Wire Extrusion:* HKA 1d6+1 (2d6+1 w/STR), Armor Piercing (+¼); OIF (-½)	2
1f	3) *Radio:* HRRP (Radio Group); OIF (-½)	
2f	4) *Passive Sonar:* Spatial Awareness (Radio Group); OIF (-½)	

Martial Art: *Lines and Angles*

	Maneuver	OCV	DCV	Notes
4	Block	+2	+2	Block, Abort
4	Disarm	-1	+1	Disarm; 40 STR to Disarm
4	Dodge	—	+5	Dodge, Affects All Attacks, Abort
5	Kick	-2	+1	10d6 Strike
4	Punch	+0	+2	8d6 Strike

8 +2 HTH Damage Classes (already added in)
2 Use Art with Karate Weapons and Staffs

4	*Stasis-Cloth Costume:* Resistant (+½) for 7 PD/7 ED; OIF (-½)	
10	Deflection; Only Works Against Bullets, Thrown Weapons, And So On (-½), OIF (Bracers Or Other Deflecting Objects; -½)	2
9	*Psionic Shields:* Mental Defense (9 points total)	
2	*Strong Legs:* Leaping +4m (8m forward, 4m upward)	1
8	*Swift Of Foot:* Running +8m (20m total)	1
6	*Wire Swingline:* Swinging 18m; OIF (Bracers; -½)	1

Talents

6 Striking Appearance +2/+2d6

Skills

3 Acrobatics 15-
3 Breakfall 15-
3 Combat Driving 15-
3 Language: Russian (completely fluent)
3 Language: Spanish (completely fluent)
3 PS: Billiards/Pool Player 15-
3 PS: Choreographer 13-
3 PS: Dancer (Classical Ballet, Modern, Tap) 15-
4 PS: Instructor 13-
3 Stealth 15-
1 TF: Skiing (snow), Two-Wheeled Motorized Ground Vehicles

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 136
Total Cost: 406

400 Matching Complications (75)

30 Enraged: When Innocents Hurt (Common), go 14-, recover 8-
15 Physical Complication: Suffers From Sea-Sickness Easily (Infrequently; Greatly Impairing)
20 Psychological Complication: Abandons Mission Goals to Save Innocents (Very Common; Strong)
20 Psychological Complication: Overprotective of Teammates (Very Common; Strong)
15 Social Complication: Secret Identity (Patrick Lee Keller) (Frequently, Major)
20 Susceptibility: Fire, 1d6 damage per Phase (Common)
5 Unluck: 1d6

Total Complications Points: 75
Experience Points: 6

Other Members of the Shadow Knights Include:

Friday 13: A genetic chimera similar to Fenris X, Friday 13 is another creation of Blanco and a former member of the Animal Kingdom. She is the first (and only) member of Blanco's Series 13 creations. In human form she's 5'3" with white-blonde hair and brown eyes, and goes by the name of Tracy Friday. As with Fenris, she can also assume an animalistic form.

Created in 1992, she served as Blanco's agent (and a skilled detective) from 1992-1994, became Fenris X's mate in 1994, and joined the Shadow Knights in 1995.

Goblin: Active since 1965, Goblin gained his powers by freeing the being known as Imp. However, Imp stole his identity, resulting in Goblin being charged with a number of Imp's crimes. He was part of the Hell-Raisers from 1982-1995 (thanks to Imp) and then joined the Shadow Knights in 1995 after being freed from Imp's control.

Lump: Eddie "Lumpy" Zeigler is a mutant whose powers allow him to absorb kinetic force. He joined the Shadow Knights in 1995.

Sickle: This East German super was captured by Overlord in 1980, then rescued by her government in 1981. Despite East German efforts to deprogram her, she was still secretly loyal to Overlord until he removed all programming in 1986. Afterwards, she struggled as a freelance security specialist until her career was ruined by Kick-Ass in 1995; she joined the Shadow Knights later that year.

Tandem: The brother of Shawna Ferris (a psychic staff member of the Salem Academy), James Ferris can produce telekinetic phantom forms of himself which allow him to fight at range. He was a member of the Salem Academy from 1986-1993 and joined the Shadow Knights in 1995.

Wrecker: Formerly a supervillain with density control powers, Wrecker was part of the Enforcers from 1985-1995, before joining the Shadow Knights.

Retired and Reservist Supers

This section lists all of the supers who at one time or another were members of either Strike Force or the Shadow Warriors (or, in the case of Avant Guard, associated with them).

Avant Guard

At its inception, the Avant Guard was a teen-super group based out of Newark and sponsored by Shawna Ferris. Later, some of the team members joined the Salem Academy and operated the team from Salem Center, New York. In 1993, when several of them graduated from Salem Academy, the team disbanded.

Atalanta: A mutate who owes her powers to Jensik Medical Institute waste dumping, Atalanta is an excellent athlete, who hurls heavy "golden apples" in combat. After Avant Guard disbanded, she moved to Denver.

Black Guard: A leather-jacketed street tough, Black Guard became an independent hero after leaving the Salem Academy.

Cyber: Noted for wearing a suit of powered armor, working with an assortment of gadgets, and being a dedicated irritant. As with Black Guard, he became an independent hero after leaving the Salem Academy.

Megabyte: See page 122.

Sprint: See page 122.

Everyone Else

A handful of heroes have struck out on their own. These individuals have a strong connection to Strike Force and are important to the team regardless of their affiliation (or lack thereof). This section includes a pair of major characters: the magician Ichi-Ban and the ninja ShadowWalker.

Background/History: Toshiro Kogami grew up an orphan in the streets of Osaka, Japan, in the 1960s. He had no idea where he'd come from and still isn't sure how he survived his early years. While still a child, Toshiro met a strange man by the name of Matagashiman, who allowed Toshiro to sleep in a back room of his home in return for performing chores. Toshiro also assumed the false last name Kogami so that he could pretend that he'd once belonged to a family.

As he grew up, Toshiro ran with a rough crowd, mostly kids aspiring membership into the yakuza. He often fought with with a boy named Kyoji and once stumbled across an illegal slave auction, rescuing a girl named Ryoko from being sold. He also found out that Matagashiman, far from being just an eccentric, was a wizard, heir to a long tradition of Japanese sorcery. Matagashiman began to teach Toshiro his art, finding his student to be very adept at sorcery, with an immense potential for magic.

In 1981, when Toshiro and Ryoko were both 19, they married and emigrated to the U.S. Both enrolled in college, he to study cooking, she to study psychology. Toshiro, practicing his magic, met the mystic hero Lightrune, who invited him to come meet the new team that would soon be called Strike Force. Toshiro took the code-name Ichi-ban ("Number One"), dressed in dramatic red silk robes, and joined the team at his earliest opportunity.

ICHI-BAN

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
15	STR	5	12-	Lift 200 kg; 3d6 HTH Damage [1]
26	DEX	32	14-	
15	CON	5	12-	
23	INT	13	14-	PER Roll 14-/16-
18	EGO	8	13-	
18	PRE	8	13-	PRE Attack: 3 ½d6
9	OCV	30		
9	DCV	30		
6	OMCV	9		
6	DMCV	9		
7	SPD	50		Phases: 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12
13	PD	11		Total: 13 PD (0 rPD)
10	ED	8		Total: 10 ED (0 rED)
7	REC	3		
30	END	2		
13	BODY	3		
29	STUN	5		**Total Characteristic Cost: 231**

Movement:	Running:	12m
	Leaping:	4m
	Swimming:	4m

ICHI-BAN (CONTINUED)

Cost	Powers	END
112	*Always In Balance Magic:* Variable Power Pool (Magic Pool), 80 Pool + 80 Control Cost, Magic Must Always Be In Balance (-¼)	
22	*Musashi Honor Sword:* Multipower, 50-point reserve, all slots OAF (-1), Real Weapon (-¼)	
2f	1) *Blade:* HKA 1 ½d6 (2d6+1 w/STR), Range Based On STR (+¼), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); OAF (-1), Real Weapon (thus, weapon does a max of 3d6K; -¼)	
2f	2) *Sheathed Blade:* HA +5d6, Range Based On STR (+¼), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); OAF (-1), Hand-To-Hand Attack (-¼), Real Weapon (thus, weapon does a max of 10d6N; -¼)	
1f	3) +1 OCV with Musashi Honor Sword; OAF (-1), Real Weapon (-¼)	
1f	4) +1m Reach; OAF (-1), Real Weapon (-¼)	

Martial Arts: *Aikido*

	Maneuver	OCV	DCV	Notes
4	Dodge	--	+5	Dodge, Affects All Attacks, Abort
4	Escape	+0	+0	50 STR vs. Grabs
3	Hold	-1	-1	Grab Two Limbs, 45 STR for holding on
5	Strike	+1	+3	7d6 Strike
3	Throw	+0	+1	7d6 +v/10, Target Falls
16	+4 HTH Damage Classes (already added in)			
1	Use Art with Blades			

22	*Detect Magic:* Detect Magic 16- (Unusual Group), Discriminatory, Analyze, Range, Sense	
2	+2 PER with Detect Magic	
10	Mental Awareness, Discriminatory	
10	Mind Link , One Specific Mind (Ryoko), Psychic Bond	
4	*Create Symbolic Objects:* Cosmetic Transform 3d6 (object into symbolic object, heals back via another application of this power); No Range (-½), Limited Target (trinkets and toys; -½)	1

Perks

50	The Dojo (250-point Base)

Talents

3	Striking Appearance +1/+1d6

Skills

10	+2 with Aikido
5	+1 Spell-casting
2	AK: America 11-
2	AK: Japan 11-
2	AK: Musashi Family Estate 11-
2	AK: Nearby and Important Planes 11-
2	AK: New York 11-
2	AK: Osaka Neighborhood 11-
2	AK: The Dreamworlds 11-
3	Breakfall 14-
5	Computer Programming 15-
7	Deduction 16-
3	Fast Draw: Blades 14-
3	Language: English (completely fluent; Japanese is native)
21	Power: Magic Skill 23-
2	PS: Cook 11-
3	PS: Finder of Lost Persons 14-
6	SS: Magic 17-
3	Stealth 14-
3	Streetwise 13-
3	Scholar

ICHI-BAN (CONTINUED)

1	1) KS: Aikido 11-
2	2) KS: Earth Mythology and Folklore 14-
2	3) KS: Japanese Myth and Folklore 14-
1	4) KS: Mathematics/Philosophy: Dimensionality 11-
1	5) KS: Mathematics: Spatial Geometry 11-
1	6) KS: Pop Culture 11-
1	7) KS: Psychology: Symbolism 11-
2	8) KS: Psychology: The Collective Unconscious 14-
1	9) KS: Psychology: Perception 11-
3	10) KS: World Computer Net 13-

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 384
Total Cost: 614

400	**Matching Complications (75)**
5	DNPC: Cindy Darcy Infrequently (Slightly Less Powerful than the PC)
5	Distinctive Features: A Bit Too Perfect, A Bit Too Variable (Easily Concealed; Noticed and Recognizable; Detectable By Commonly-Used Senses)
20	Hunted: Cult of the Beast (Infrequently, Mo Pow; NCI; Harshly Punish)
5	Hunted: Republic of New York (Infrequently, Mo Pow; Limited Geographical Area; PC has a Public ID; Watching)
10	Negative Reputation: Murderer Of Power Lord, Thus Ending His Strike Force Career, Frequently
10	Physical Complication: Cannot In Any Way Upset Or Fail To Conform To The Natural Order Of the Current Dimension (Infrequently; Slightly Impairing)
10	Psychological Complication: Do-Gooder, Gives What He Has (Common; Strong)
15	Psychological Complication: Must Keep Word (Common; Strong)
15	Psychological Complication: Overprotective of People Around Him (Common; Strong)
10	Psychological Complication: Personal Code of Honor (his Bushido) (Uncommon; Strong)
0	Psychological Complication: Vendetta Versus Those Who Harm Family (Uncommon; Total)
15	Social Complication: Public Identity (Shiokawa Toshiro) (Frequently, Major)
20	Susceptibility: Anyone Wishing Him Ill (Must Have Strong Emotions or 20+ EGO) 1d6 damage per Phase (Common)
10	Vulnerability: 2 x Effect Attacks From Overconfident or EGO 20+ People (Uncommon)

Total Complications Points: 75
Experience Points: 214

Not long after, Matagashiman told him that there was nothing more Ichi-ban could learn from him, and that the younger wizard must find a new master. Matagashiman disappeared soon after and has not been seen since.

Ichi-ban adventured with Strike Force for four years. In addition to his team adventures, he often accompanied Phosphene to an alternate earth, the one code-named "Earth-Good Guys" after one of its most famous hero-teams. It was on that world that Phosphene met the hero Plasma Ranger, who was one day to join Strike Force, and where Ichi-ban met the demon-haunted heroine Hex, who asked him to look after her cousin, Cindy Darcy.

In 1982, Strike Force met the Circle on a mission in which the mystic school's members were hunting a clutch of vampires in New York. Soon after, Lightrune and Ichi-ban joined the Circle.

By 1985, Ryoko was a staff psychologist with the expanded Strike Force organization. That year, she was kidnapped by a band of supervillains assembled by Overlord's son Power Lord on his first (and only) villainous mission. Something snapped in Ichi-ban. After Ryoko and the other prisoners were rescued, Ichi-ban utilized all his magical abilities, sneaked into the supervillain prison where Power Lord was being held pending arraignment, and poisoned him to death, escaping without notice.

It was the perfect crime, which is what spoiled it for Ichi-ban. When the investigators could find no clue to the perpetrator, they turned to superhero associates. One detected the faint trace of magic at the murder scene, recognizing the distinctive magical emissions of Japanese traditions and thus, suspecting Ichi-ban. These finding were then given to the police and Strike Force.

MAGIC ALWAYS IN BALANCE

All effects Ichi-ban produces from his VPP are transformations of some kind, and must be balanced in two ways:

1) There must be a balance in what is gained and what is lost, and—

2) Each transformation must be "balanced" by a parallel transformation in some symbolic equivalent.

Example One: Ichi-ban can give himself flight by morphing his arms into wings, trading hands for flight. To do this he also changes the wings on some image or icon of a winged creature to arms. The image or icon becomes, in effect, a focus. If it is broken or even taken out of Ichi's control, the spell would end.

Example Two: In order to throw a lighting bolt, Ichi could pull out and activate a Taser to establish the idea/fact of a powerful electric discharge from the negative pole of the taser to the positive. He would then transfer that idea/fact to the space between his hand and his target, at a power level commensurate to the number of Character Points he put into it.

Note that in these symbolic balancings, scale is not an issue. So, if someone were to take the Taser away from Ichi-ban, he would have to spend a Half-Phase Action to reallocate the points for the same spell (Requires another taser). That's why it's only a -¼ Limitation. Ichi-ban uses his Minor Transform to generate iconic objects, usually starting with a stone from the game Go. He carries a small bag of them.

Confronted with his crime, Ichi-ban confessed. He said that his personal code of honor, modeled on that of the samurai, had compelled him to extract revenge for the crime committed against his wife. He apologized to the team for embarrassing them—and for involving them, since he'd used team resources to establish Power Lord's exact location. He then surrendered into the hands of the authorities.

He was tried for murder the next year. His attorney, a famous superhero trial lawyer, had him plead not guilty by reason of temporary insanity, a plea Ichi-ban didn't agree with (he felt he was sane at the time of the murder) but to which he acquiesced. But the canny attorney put Ichi-ban on the stand. Under questioning, the attorney demonstrated that the act of murder didn't meet Ichi-ban's own criteria for revenge under his samurai code; only a challenge and duel would have been appropriate. Ichi-ban was flabbergasted to discover that he had, in fact, been completely irrational at the time of the murder.

The jury agreed and found him not guilty by reason of temporary insanity. He was released... but agents of the U.S. government, on hand for the end of the trial, demonstrated that his naturalization had involved some irregularities and invalidated it. They ordered his immediate return to Japan. Immediately after, Ichi-ban was attacked by Lady Power, mother of Power Lord, who had sold her eternal services to Scoff in return for the power to kill Ichi-ban. Her attacks destroyed his magical power, but she'd already wasted some of her powers in an orgy of destruction on the night she acquired her new abilities and was unable to kill Ichi-ban. Following her failure, she was whisked away to Scoff's plane.

Now powerless, Ichi-ban returned to Osaka with Ryoko. He briefly toyed with an offer from the Japanese secret service, but declined and set about finding a new path in his life. He turned to utter pacifism. When not seeking some way to restore his powers, he made a rather poor living as an aikido instructor. Meanwhile, Ryoko found growing success as a corporate psychologist specializing in the intersection of Japanese and American culture; she kept the household income stable.

When World War III struck, Toshiro organized his apartment building into a mutual defense collective. His adopted daughter Cindy Darcy took direction better in times of crisis than in times of peace, and he taught her many things about survival in bad times; with her animalistic powers, she kept the family and many other households of the building supplied with food.

While coping with the disasters of World War III, Toshiro decided that his complete devotion to pacifism was also a mistake. He'd simply overcompensated for his mania of a few years ago. Balance was what he needed, a reasonable and rational balance between violence and pacifism, strength and tenderness, life and death.

The family survived the war and then the post-war chaos and reorganization. Ryoko, who had outlived the corporation that employed her, became a counselor of people traumatized by war. Toshiro developed skills to help him track down missing survivors of the war, and became a fully-licensed private investigator.

By 1992, Toshiro was receiving training in certain aspects of mysticism from a member of the Black Robes, the same ancient organization that had trained the superhero ShadowWalker. A wizard studying with them, an Australian aborigine named Pompey Uluru, determined that the spell inhibiting

Ichi-ban's powers constantly changed in nature and form, like a self-mutating virus. In essence, it was part of Lady Power's life-force, and since her life-force was bound up with that of the immortal Scoff, the spell would not end until Ichi-ban died.

They settled on a desperate plan. In the Dreamworlds, in a corner belonging to the revenge fantasies of Lady Power, they removed Toshiro's very spirit from his body, hiding it and affixing it temporarily within the mind of Lady Power. Then they stopped defending Toshiro's body... which was promptly destroyed by the vengeful-spell of Lady Power. Deprived of a need to exist, the spell ceased to exist. Pompey Uluru helped fashion Toshiro a new body from the very stuff of the Dreamworlds. Toshiro departed Lady Power's mind, where he'd acquired a keen sense of the pain he'd caused her with his murder of Power Lord, and returned to a body that possessed the power he'd lost long ago.

They returned to Earth-AU and Ichi-ban set about retraining himself in magic. He developed an entirely different philosophy to his spells, one that involved constant checks and balances. For example, if he cast a spell that temporarily deprived someone of sight, it would have to temporarily *grant* sight to someone else. If he cast a spell that teleported someone to him, he'd have to teleport something of near-equal mass to that someone's former location.

In 1993, Ichi-ban surprised himself by realizing that he was now the senior active sorcerer in Japan as all the others were dead or missing. He decided that it was time for him to assume the responsibility of his position, so he tracked down the one surviving member of the 1940-era Circle and convinced the man to join him in re-forming the organization. He persuaded the Impossibility, a psychic pseudo-wizard of Earth-Kaiser, to join him as an instructor, and came to a resolution with Kappa of the Yooso, convincing his former enemy to teach and lecture with the Circle.

Today, Ichi-ban adventures occasionally, but spends more of his time finding students for his Circle and training them. He does not discriminate against non-Japanese, but most of his students are from Japan.

Personality/Motivation: Ichi-ban is, and always has been, an interesting mix of conflicting personality elements. Meeting him, one is usually struck by his youth. His manner is generally that of an enthusiastic young adult, though he's now in his mid-30s. This is due to how Ichi-ban perceives time. To him, the past, present, future, and dreams are all alternate realities, all of which are accessible to him. He lives in the human time scale, by choice, because that is where he's most comfortable. Partly because of this, he makes no distinction between old friends and new friends. Close is close.

Interestingly, Ichi-ban is headed for a crisis when somebody close to him dies. He really does have the option of continuing a relationship with them, either into their next life, in an alternate reality, or by warping the past. All of which will probably result in terrible consequences. He realizes this and hopes he will have the strength not to do anything weird.

Ichi-ban feels closest to his immediate family (including Cindy, even if he often doesn't understand her), to former teammates Phosphene, Lightrune, and Lorelei, and to Circle associates Shirasu-san, Mirror, and the Impossibility.

Powers/Tactics: Ichi-Ban possesses powerful magical skill, and as noted, can cast almost any spell as long as he can "balance" the effects. He is also a skilled practitioner of aikido and a scholar. In combat he's a powerful and versatile ally, capable of whipping up some sort of response to almost any situation.

Campaign Use: As the founder of the new Circle, Ichi-ban can be a source of information on many things magical, especially of they are of Asian origin.

If you wish to use Ichi-ban as a villain, his origin can be much the same, but now he's convinced that he's above the law. He fights to restore Japan to imperial glory—with himself as shogun, pulling the Emperor's strings.

Appearance: Ichi-ban stands 5'7" and weighs a lean 145 pounds. His eyes and hair are brown. As Ichi-ban he wears Japanese robes in red with mystic symbols embroidered on them, to this he adds a high-peaked, round-topped piece of headgear in red.

SHADOWWALKER

Background/History: When Andrew was just a child, an acquaintance of his parents, Master Chang, an Asian man of dignified bearing, persuaded them that the boy should be taught Chang's physical and spiritual regimen of self-growth. Unknown to Andrew or his parents, Chang was a member of the Black Robes, an Eastern society dedicated to the preservation of the Pattern, a metaphysical representation of the natural flow of the universe. Chang had recognized in Andrew a potential warrior for the Pattern.

Throughout his formative years, Andrew was trained in a variety of philosophies, meditative techniques, and martial arts. Then Chang had to return to his homeland to perform some task—and never reappeared in the West. His disappearance is still a mystery.

After college, Andrew was approached by the Organization (see page 124). This appealed to Andrew's awakening perception of the Pattern, and he became their operative. Additionally, he fell in love with the daughter of the Old Man (the Organization's director), and she with him.

SHADOWWALKER

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
20	STR	10	13-	Lift 400 kg; 4d6 HTH Damage [1]
23	DEX	26	14-	
23	CON	13	14-	
18	INT	8	13-	PER Roll 13-
14	EGO	4	12-	
20	PRE	10	13-	PRE Attack: 4d6
8	OCV	25		
8	DCV	25		
5	OMCV	6		
5	DMCV	6		
5	SPD	30		*Phases:* 3, 5, 8, 10, 12
13	PD	11		*Total:* 22 PD (9 rPD)
13	ED	11		*Total:* 22 ED (9 rED)
10	REC	6		
36	END	4		
12	BODY	2		
41	STUN	11		**Total Characteristic Cost: 207**

Movement:	Running:	22m
	Leaping:	8m
	Swimming:	4m

SHADOWWALKER (CONTINUED)

Cost	Powers	END
10	Armor Piercing (+¼), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼) applied to STR	
22	*Sword And Scabbard:* Multipower, 45-point reserve, all slots OAF (-1)	
2f	1) *Sword:* HKA 2d6 (3d6 w/STR), Armor Piercing (+¼), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼); OAF (-1)	2
2f	2) *Scabbard:* HA +6d6, Armor Piercing (+¼), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼); OAF (-1), Hand-To-Hand Attack (-¼)	2
1f	3) *Blinding Powder:* Sight Group Flash 8d6; 1 Charge (-2), OAF (-1) [1]	
1f	4) *Blocking Techniques:* Deflection; OAF (-1), No Range (-½)	2
	Martial Arts: *Aikido and Karate*	

	Maneuver	OCV	DCV	Notes
4	Block	+2	+2	Block, Abort
4	Dodge	--	+5	Dodge, Affects All Attacks, Abort
4	Escape	+0	+0	35 STR vs. Grabs
4	Punch/Snap Kick	+0	+2	6d6 Strike
5	Side/Spin Kick	-2	+1	8d6 Strike
3	Takedown	+1	+1	4d6 Strike; Target Falls
3	Throw	+0	+1	4d6 +v/10, Target Falls
3	Use Art with Blades, Karate Weapons, and Staffs			

8	*Psionic Shields:* Mental Defense (8 points total)	
23	*Armored Costume:* Resistant Protection (9 PD/9 ED), Hardened (+¼); OIF (-½)	
2	*Powerful Leaper:* Leaping +4m (8m forward, 4m upward)	1
10	*Swift:* Running +10m (22m total)	1
11	*Recognize The Pattern:* Detect Pattern Effects 14- (Unusual Group), Discriminatory, Sense	
5	*Enhanced Vision:* UV Perception (Sight Group)	
	Perks	
5	*Harley-Davidson Motorcycle:* Vehicle (25-point Base)	
	Talents	
3	Striking Appearance +1/+1d6	
	Skills	
20	+2 with All Attacks	
20	+2 with all Non-Combat Skills	
3	Acrobatics 14-	
3	Breakfall 14-	
3	Combat Piloting 14-	
3	Computer Programming 13-	
3	Criminology 13-	
3	Deduction 13-	
3	Electronics 13-	
1	KS: Aikido 8-	
2	KS: Communications Technology 11-	
1	KS: International Affairs 8-	
1	KS: Karate 8-	
3	Mechanics 13-	
2	PS: Engineer 11-	
3	Security Systems 13-	
3	Stealth 14-	
3	Streetwise 13-	
3	Tactics 13-	
5	TF: Common Motorized Ground Vehicles, Helicopters, Large Planes, Small Planes, Two-Wheeled Motorized Ground Vehicles	

SHADOWWALKER (CONTINUED)

3 Linguist
1 1) Language: Arabic (Modern) (fluent conversation)
1 2) Language: French (fluent conversation)
1 3) Language: German (fluent conversation)
1 4) Language: Italian (fluent conversation)
2 5) Language: Japanese (completely fluent)
1 6) Language: Russian (fluent conversation)
3 Scientist
1 1) SS: Artificial Intelligence/Expert Systems 11-
1 2) SS: Computer Engineering 11-
1 3) SS: Electrical Engineering 11-
1 4) SS: Robotics 11-

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 239
Total Cost: 447

400 Matching Complications (75)
5 Distinctive Features: Anti-Social Mannerisms (Easily Concealed; Noticed and Recognizable; Detectable By Commonly-Used Senses)
15 Enraged: Berserk Torture-Oriented Scenes (Uncommon), go 8-, recover 14-
20 Hunted: Enemies of the Black Robes (Frequently, As Pow; NCI; Harshly Punish)
20 Hunted: Scoff (Frequently, Mo Pow; NCI; Mildly Punish)
15 Hunted: The Organization (Frequently, Mo Pow; NCI; Watching)
5 Psychological Complication: Hatred Of Reminders Of Former Mental Problems (Uncommon; Moderate)
15 Social Complication: Secret ID (Andrew Steele) (Frequently, Major)

Total Complications Points: 75
Experience Points: 47

After a mission into East Germany, Andrew and his fiancee were kidnapped by enemy agents and tortured for information. She died; he cracked under the strain but managed to escape. Lonely, cynical, and embittered at 21, he left the Organization. He became a mercenary soldier, creating the ShadowWalker identity to protect his American citizenship. He didn't know that the Old Man blamed him for his daughter's death, and for years ShadowWalker was hunted by mercenaries and assassins secretly hired by his former employer.

Eventually, he gave up his mercenary life, returned to the U.S., and was employed as a field technician by a major scientific corporation. During this time, he stumbled across secret transmissions, later revealed to be between Overlord and the Reapers; investigating them as ShadowWalker, he asked for and received help from other superheroes (Phosphene, Swashbuckler, and Lightrune). This team was soon to become Strike Force.

ShadowWalker served as Strike Force's first leader, and during this time discovered that it was the Old Man who was tormenting him. When he demonstrated the Old Man's insanity to the Organization officers, the Old Man's son, brother of the woman ShadowWalker once loved, replaced his father as the Organization director.

But in Strike Force, the combination of the team's inexperience, ShadowWalker's personality, and the bitterness between Phosphene and Shiva made the situation tense. When Strike Force split into two teams, ShadowWalker left both of them and joined the Crusaders. Years later, having become more calm and philosophical, he returned to the new, more professional Strike Force.

Today, ShadowWalker adventures and teaches some classes at Salem Academy. He has recently begun pursuing his romantic interest in *HeroTalk* publisher Shari Taylor. His efforts to keep the Pattern in balance have attracted the attention of Scoff, a multidimensional being who chooses to imbalance the Pattern at every opportunity.

Personality/Motivation: ShadowWalker, once consistently biting and unpleasant, has become more relaxed and less abrasive with time, although his temper still has an edge. His primary motivation now is the preservation of the Pattern, but he believes in teams like Strike Force and is a willing warrior against crime. He has gradually recovered from his fiancee's death, to the point that he has become romantically interested in Shari Taylor. He feels a slight resentment that Phosphene has been able to accomplish more with Strike Force than he ever did, but he recognizes that their circumstances were different. He still tends to lose control in situations that remind him of the torture that claimed the life of his first love.

Powers/Tactics: ShadowWalker's abilities derive from his training in fighting techniques along with many other skills refined over the years. He can also detect variations and imbalances in the Pattern (a force that flows through all living beings and keeps the universe in tune). His *Blinding Powder* is fired blowgun-style from his scabbard.

For the most part, ShadowWalker is an expert in stealth, security, and information-gathering. In combat, he can engage and delay higher-powered opponents but generally cannot defeat them; he normally calls for help when facing especially powerful enemies.

Campaign Use: Player Characters may encounter ShadowWalker in his Secret ID, as CEO of Steele Robotics, a major supplier of computer equipment and cybernetics to the USTO. Those who are attuned to the Pattern may seek him out for training.

The villainous version ShadowWalker stayed bitter after his escape from his captors, becoming a mercenary and then a supervillain for hire. He never developed his affinity for the Pattern and can be the enemy of any martial arts hero.

Appearance: ShadowWalker is quite tall, standing 6'3" and weighing a lean 175 pounds. He has brown hair and gray eyes. His costume is a black ninja-like outfit, with a lighter tunic worn over it. His katana is kept sheathed across his back.

INDEPENDENT HEROES

There are a lot of independent heroes on Earth-AU. Many of them are former PCs. For example, when Strike Force split up, both ShadowWalker and Swashbuckler left the team. ShadowWalker left because his player had joined the Navy, while Swashbuckler's player got married and moved out of state. So, what should GMs do in cases this like?

The first thing is to ask what the player wants to do with the character. Do they want to character to join another team (ShadowWalker, for example, joined an NPC hero team). Retire? Or simply go it alone? Once you know that, you can figure out the character's new role in the campaign.

Another thing to consider is player availability. Not all heroes left Strike Force due to the player leaving. Some were simply moved aside in favor of another character. Denis Loubet, for example, not only played BOLO and Phosphene, but also PCs by the name of Blackwolf (in the Twilight Falls campaign) and Ore. And Luray Richmond not only created Lorelei and Luster, but Shawna Ferris, Fire, Robin Harrows, Jasmin, Medea, Sprint, Touché, and Vixen (made for the Canadian game ShadowWalker's player was running before he left). So, if the story called for it, these two could always run these PCs during a game session, setting the character aside once again after the session was over.

Blue-booking also helps. If the player is not in the area anymore, but wants to be part of the game, then one could conduct blue-booked adventures by e-mail. Or, you could consult the player on possible character actions and keep that in mind as the story advances in your campaign. If you use Aaron's questionnaires, you could keep the player in the overall loop by sending them one every season. In addition, if the player fully intend to return to the area and pick up playing the character, you can keep the character current to overall plot and setting status.

Finally, if you're like Aaron, you can run the character yourself, moving them about the setting, having them join a team, fall in love, battle villains (all on paper or in your head), and even gain experience. Just make sure the character remains in the background and serves to provide plot hooks to the players. Much like a GMPC, a independent hero should be there to help the game and the PCs, not overshadow them.

Other Independent Characters Include:

Centurion: Wearer of the Centurion armor and a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Centurion was the leader of the Guardians of the North from 1982-1983 and a member of Strike Force from 1983-1984.

Charade: Also known as Kinestra, Charade was a telekinetic mutant masquerading as an apparent sorceress while operating in New York in the early 1980s. She was part of the Reapers (as a trainee) from 1980-1982, joined Strike Force as Kinestra from 1982-1983 (and served as team leader for a time), then, as Charade became a member of the Shadow Warriors in 1984, before becoming a student of the Circle and finally joining the Salem Academy as director.

D'arc: A French mutant with electrical powers, D'Arc operated with the French supehero team l'Escadrille in 1983, was part of Strike Force from 1984-1987, was also part of the Salem Academy staff from 1985-1993, before returning to Europe to lead the New Szeklers from 1993 on.

Defender: A scientist who created a suit of powered armor, Defender left Earth with the Dekare in 1982 after helping defeat the Phyherka. He reached the planet Dekare, and become a superhero there before finally returning to Earth in 1988. He was with Strike Force from 1981-1982, and has been part of the Salem Academy since 1988.

Domino: An inventor tossed into an accelerated alternate dimension in 1957, Domino returned to Earth in the 1980s with heightened agility and speed. He was with the Shadow Warriors from 1988-1991, before moving to Earth-Kaiser as that environment was more comfortable to him, being more like the World War II-era Earth he grew up in.

Kawaii: A cute Japanese girl (hence her name), Kawaii has fairly standard suite of psychic powers, along with ch'i powers and martial arts training. She's been a student of Shiva's, studying Paek-Tu, since 1990.

KAWAII

Kawaii was created by Scott Jamison. You can find her on page 37 of **Enemies: Villainy Unbound**.

Napalm: A mutant with powers of fear and flame-projection, Napalm helped found Strike Force in 1981, and was killed later that same year by minions of the Mockery.

Red Archer: Also known as Rhys Strongbow, Red Archer was a mystical archer from another reality. He adventured with Strike Force for a couple of years, then was imprisoned in the Amphitrite Stone after Tempis was released from it (see page 48). He escaped in 1985 and returned to his own dimension with the Green Knight.

Samiel: A member of the Ranisian race, Samiel normally stands 6'9", but can shapeshift into other forms. She fought with a disintegrator whip. Captured by Mokar the Collector, she escaped in 1981. She was part of Strike Force from 1981-1982, then again from 1987-1991, and has been a reserve member of Strike Force Orbital since 1993. For a time she acted as Lorelei's foster mother.

Stormhawk: Inventor of a suit of powered armor, Stormhawk also trained in Paek-Tu with Shiva. He was with the Shadow Warriors from 1988-1993, then helped found the Mad Scientists in 1995.

Swashbuckler: This flamboyant swordsman has patrolled the streets of New York City since 1981. He helped found Strike Force in 1981 and stayed with them for a year. His mutant powers allow him to very successfully conceal the fact that he is blind.

Titan: Born in roughly 1500 BCE, Titan, also known as Tempis, was a member of the Shadow Warriors from 1982-1986. He then became villainous and associated with the Cthulhu Cycle Deities in 1986 and with the witches of Nice World in 1988. A self-professed priest of the goddess Gaea, Titan/Tempis was a sorcerer with growth and earth-related powers.

Vixen: This tiny (4'6") Canadian mutant with tunneling abilities was part of Strike Force from 1983-1990, then led Strike Force DC from 1990-1991, after which she retired. She also developed the glaucazine antigeria treatments to retard aging.

Wild Card: This sorcery-using hero was a member of Strike Force in 1983, then retired to New Orleans to study sorcery full-time. He returned to active duty during World War III, while Strike Force was in the Chaos Zone, but was killed in 1988 during the firebombing of Manhattan.

STRIKE FORCE TESTIMONIALS

Like everyone who's reading this, I suspect, I love superheroes. I bought the first edition of **Champions** *when I was 13. It was August 3rd, 1983. I know because I still have the receipt. Those were the fledgling years of RPGS so the now-common idea of building any kind of hero you wanted blew our minds. It wasn't long before I spent my allowance on every supplement I could get my hands on.*

I wouldn't know it at the time but **The Circle and METE** *would be the first Aaron Allston book to push me beyond the rules and number-crunching I was used to. Aaron's characters and campaign concepts encouraged me to run stories that paralleled the comics I loved so much instead of simply duplicating them. It's a subtle distinction, I know. Aaron somehow managed to take the eminently familiar and turn it just enough for you to look at it with new eyes.*

A few years later, "The Blood" would turn all that to 11. One part X-Men Mutants, one part Secret Society, one part Alien Threat, villains and heroes and the morally-gray mixed into one beautifully twisted family tree. I'd never read anything like it.

Not many people remember the day they learned the word "apotheosis".

Though his writing inspired hundreds, perhaps thousands, of hours of high school fun (there's not much to do in my home town), the biggest influence Aaron had on my life was the year **Strike Force** *released. It was 1988. I'd just graduated high school and moved 2,000 miles from small-town Kentucky to Big City Southern California. As many geeks do, I walked into the local comic and hobby store hoping to find a friend in this strange and overly-shiny land. The guy behind the counter seemed nice so I offered to run his friends in a game a Champions.*

They didn't know me or what I could do, and I only had my handful of friends from Kentucky to compare my GM'ing skills to. Was I good? Was I bad? How high were these guys' expectations of a GM? Honestly, I was nervous. Combining the new techniques I'd learned in **Strike Force** *with a storyline centered around The Blood, Circle, and METE, Aaron's work helped to inspire my largest, longest, and most memorable Champions campaign. More importantly, those gamers have been some of my dearest friends for nearly 30 years.*

I never got a chance to say Thank You to Aaron, so I'm doing it here. Thank you, sir, for your kindness, imagination, skills, generosity, and the inspiration you gave me. Taking the time to share your world with me helped to change my own world for the better.

-Rich Howard

I always loved the Champions setting and system, not that I got to play it much due to the crazy production schedules we had at FASA, but I loved reading as much as I could of it. Aaron's **Strike Force** *was a real departure from RPG publications of the era as it both offered a ton of great game content but importantly spoke directly to the game master about the art of game mastering.*

The book was not only a campaign supplement but also a chronology of his running of campaign which provided valuable insights into the kinds of challenges that GMs face. It covered things not really discussed before such as how to read your players and tweak the game to satisfy each of them, how to adjust when some players didn't show up for a session or players swapped out, and what happens when your group gets too big (a huge complement to the GM but also a pain to deal with). These were the kinds of things that GMs of every RPG were, and are, facing and Aaron's **Strike Force** *was a great resource from a unique combination of a talented GM and a wonderful writer.*

Aaron and I never got to work directly together but I have always had a huge respect for the contributions he made to role playing and to genre fiction.

-Jordan Weisman

STRIKE FORCE

STRIKE FORCE VILLAINS

You can't be a hero without villains—or at least enemies to combat. In this section, we'll showcase some of the major villains and NPCs of the Strike Force campaign—from the evil to the mercenary to the sympathetic to the silly. Some of the major villains who have caused the most trouble across the years for Strike Force include:

Overlord: He is the ultra-powerful world-conquerer, the villain who fights the heroes because they're in the way between him and his ultimate goal. Though Overlord's threat now appears to be ended, many of his children and former followers have now entered the super-arena; some as villains, some as heroes, some straddling the line.

VILLAINS

The characters presented here only scratch the surface of Earth-AU's supervillains. As one might expect from a game that ran as long as Strike Force did, there were dozens upon dozens of villainous foes for the PCs to deal with. Some used magic, some were mutants, some used technology. Some were even legacy villains, taking up the mantle of previous costumed criminals.

The Producer: This madman is the creator of monsters made to be unleashed on the world; he's a genuine crazy who has no comprehension that the world is anything but a movie. Though he's not evil, he has little understanding of the world and his creations do a lot of harm.

The Reapers: This is a wide-spread international crime cartel—created by an ancestor of two heroes from the Shadow Warriors. Long familiar with the actions of superheroes, the Reapers were a constant menace to Strike Force and the Shadow Warriors.

OVERLORD

Overlord started out as the campaign's master villain. The heroes fought him in their first play session and then encountered him again and again. A self-appointed world conqueror, for a time he was one of Strike Force's greatest enemies. However, the death of his son Power Lord, the removal of the Governor, and the general passage of time changed his views. These days, he's retired from villainy, and instead devotes his energies to developing anti-aging medical treatments and genetic engineering techniques, and interacting peacefully with Strike Force. But in your campaign he can still be an active archvillain.

Background/History: The man most of Earth knows as Overlord was born Tanar t'Darthesin on the planet of Katar. His mother was Anna Dirkson, a human woman captured from Earth by Katari slavers and sold to Danar, the governor of Katar. By virtue of her indomitable personality, Anna won her freedom, then worked to improve the situation of Terran slaves and ex-slaves, becoming a heroine to the Terrans and their descendants on Katar.

OVERLORD

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
60	STR	50	21-	Lift 102.4 tons; 12d6 HTH Damage [6]
30	DEX	40	15-	
40	CON	30	17-	
30	INT	20	15-	PER Roll 15-
30	EGO	20	15-	
30	PRE	20	15-	PRE Attack: 6d6
10	OCV	35		
10	DCV	35		
10	OMCV	21		
10	DMCV	21		
6	SPD	40		*Phases:* 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12
20	PD	18		*Total:* 53 PD (33 rPD)
20	ED	18		*Total:* 50 ED (30 rED)
20	REC	16		
80	END	12		
20	BODY	10		
70	STUN	25		**Total Characteristic Cost: 431**

Movement:	Running:	12m
	Flight:	50m
	Leaping:	24m
	Swimming:	4m
	Teleportation:	30m

OVERLORD (CONTINUED)

Cost	Powers	END
	Primary Powered Armor Systems; all slots OIF (-½)	
64	1) *Powered Armor:* Resistant Protection (33 PD/30 ED); OIF (-½)	
7	2) *Polarized Lenses:* Sight Group Flash Defense (10 points); OIF (-½)	
41	3) *Teleportation (Getaway Gadget):* Teleportation 20m, x32,768 Noncombat, Trigger (after six seconds of unconsciousness, activating Trigger takes no time, Trigger requires a Turn or more to reset; +¼); 1 Recoverable Charge (-1 ¼), OIF (-½) [1 rc]	
8	4) *Internal Radio:* High Range Radio Perception (Radio Group); OIF (-½)	
7	5) *Enhanced Vision Receptors:* Increased Arc Of Perception (360-Degree) with Sight Group; OIF (-½)	
3	6) *Vision Magnification:* Microscopic (x10) with Sight Group; OIF (-½)	
4	7) *Telescopic Vision Receptors:* +4 versus Range Modifier for Sight Group; OIF (-½)	
3	8) *Low-Light Vision Receptors:* Ultraviolet Perception (Sight Group); OIF (-½)	
13	9) *Environmental Systems:* Life Support (Safe in High Pressure; Safe in High Radiation; Safe in Intense Cold; Safe in Intense Heat; Safe in Low Pressure/Vacuum; Self-Contained Breathing); OIF (-½)	
2	10) *Instant Change:* Cosmetic Transform 1d6 (any clothing to powered armor 'costume'; reverses at will), Trigger (changing clothing is a Zero Phase Action, Trigger immediately and automatically resets; +¾); Limited Target (the clothes currently worn by the character; -½), OIF (-½)	1
107	*Secondary Powered Armor Systems:* Multipower, 160-point reserve, all slots OIF (-½)	
17v	1) Energy Blast 15d6, Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼), Armor Piercing (+½); OIF (-½)	5
2f	2) Sight Group Flash 6d6; OIF (-½)	3
8v	3) Flight 50m, Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼); OIF (-½)	2
9v	4) Teleportation 30m, Improved Noncombat Movement (x64), x4 Increased Mass; OIF (-½)	6
4f	5) Desolidification, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); OIF (-½)	
281	RKA 15d6, Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼)	11
12	*Psychic Shields:* Mental Defense (12 points total)	
10	*Powerful Leaper:* Leaping +20m (24m forward, 12m upward)	1
12	Regeneration (2 BODY per 6 Hours)	

Martial Arts: *Daragak*

	Maneuver	OCV	DCV	Notes
4	Demo	--	+5	Dodge, Affects All Attacks, Abort
4	Dena	+0	+2	14d6 Strike
3	Deru (Block/Strike)	-4	+0	12d6
4	Gemo	+1	+0	Bind, 70 STR
4	Gena	+2	+2	Block, Abort
4	Kemo	+2	-2	12d6 +v/5; FMove
5	Kena	-2	+1	16d6 Strike
3	Remo	+2	-1	13d6 Strike, Target Falls
4	Rena	+2	+0	14d6 Strike
4	Use Art With Bare Hands, Polearms, Spears, Staffs, Two-Handed Weapons			

Perks

20	Personal Base/Lab: 100-point Base
5	Fringe Benefit: Diplomatic Immunity
1	Fringe Benefit: Licensed Physician
2	Fringe Benefit: Local Police Powers (for New York)
5	Fringe Benefit: Member of the Aristocracy/Higher Nobility (Katari)
1	Fringe Benefit: Passport
15	Money: Filthy Rich

Talents

15	Combat Sense 15-
6	Striking Appearance +2/+2d6

OVERLORD (CONTINUED)

	Skills
50	+5 with All Combat
3	Charm 15-
3	Computer Programming 15-
5	Defense Maneuver I-II
11	Demolitions 19-
11	Electronics 19-
3	Forensic Medicine 15-
5	Inventor 16-
3	KS: Daragak 12-
3	PS: Physician 15-
3	PS: Surgeon 15-
3	Paramedic 15-
3	Persuasion 15-
3	Security Systems 15-
3	Systems Operation 15-
6	TF: Common Motorized Ground Vehicles, Riding Animals, Science Fiction & Space Vehicles
3	Tactics 15-
8	WF: Common Melee Weapons, Small Arms, General Purpose/Heavy Machine Guns, Grenade Launchers, Shoulder-Fired Weapons, Staffs
3	Linguist
1	1) Language: Arabic (Fluent Conversation)
1	2) Language: Cantonese (Fluent Conversation)
3	3) Language: English (Idiomatic, native accent)
1	4) Language: Japanese (Fluent Conversation)
2	5) Language: K'Pok (Completely Fluent, w/Accent)
1	6) Language: Katari (Native Language, Imitate dialects)
2	7) Language: Mandarin (Completely Fluent, w/Accent)
3	8) Language: Norwegian (Idiomatic, native accent)
2	9) Language: Russian (Completely Fluent, w/Accent)
2	10) Language: Shivall (Completely Fluent, w/Accent)
2	11) Language: Spanish (Completely Fluent, w/Accent)
3	Scientist
3	1) SS: Antigeria Medicine 16-
3	2) SS: Bacteriology 13-
2	3) SS: Behavior Modification 15-
4	4) SS: Biochemistry 17-
3	5) SS: Biology 13-
1	6) SS: Biophysics 11-
3	7) SS: Cybernetics 13-
5	8) SS: Genetic Engineering 18-
4	9) SS: Genetics 14-
4	10) SS: Medicine 14-
3	11) SS: Microbiology 13-
4	12) SS: Molecular Biology 14-
2	13) SS: Nanotechnology 12-
4	14) SS: Psychology 14-
3	15) SS: Teleport Technology 13-
2	16) SS: Virology 15-

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 925
Total Cost: 1,356

OVERLORD (CONTINUED)

400	**Matching Complications (75)**
10	Distinctive Features: Pheromonal Attraction (Concealable, Noticed and Recognizable, Detectable By Commonly-Used Senses)
5	Hunted: Lady Power (Infrequently, Less Powerful, NCI, Mildly Punish)
5	Hunted: Haywire (Infrequently, Less Powerful, Harshly Punish)
15	Negative Reputation: Brainwashing Ex-Villain (Very Frequently)
10	Psychological Complication: Keeps His Word (Uncommon, Strong)
20	Psychological Complication: Regrets Criminal Past (Common, Total)
15	Psychological Complication: Scientific Curiosity (Very Common, Moderate)
15	Psychological Complication: Won't Admit Pain Or Problems (Very Common, Moderate)
15	Social Complication: Public ID (Thomas Dirkson) (Frequently, Major)
10	Vulnerability: 1 ½ x STUN from Chemical Attacks (Common)
5	Vulnerability: 1 ½ x Effect from Light-Based Images (Uncommon)

Total Complications Points: 75
Experience Points: 956

Anna's son (by Danar) was Tanar. He was a kutu (the Katari equivalent of a nerd)—physically weak because of his Terran heritage, unhappy, studious, and inventive. He resented his mother's popularity and grace, his father's strength and charisma, his own weakness and unattractiveness to Katari women. He swore to make himself the most powerful Katari warrior ever, a master of women, and a leader of nations.

By the time he reached manhood, Tanar was a biomedical genius, developing genetic treatments which would eventually make him stronger than any Katari. In the meantime, he designed a suit of powered armor and departed Katar for his mother's world, where he planned to begin his conquests. On Earth, he finalized his genetic modification program and applied it to himself, but it would be many years before the mutagenic changes would be done, so he continued wearing his power suit.

During this time, while studying the Earth and making his plans, Tanar met a young light-controlling super named Prism (a.k.a. Chloe Christenson), who fell in love with him. Tanar took her back to his underground Lair as his Free Companion, delighted to have someone so devoted to him. Later, during one of his first fights with the superhero team known as the Crusaders, another woman—by the name of Joanna Glenleven—offered to be his companion if only he'd make her wealthy and powerful. Tanar agreed and took her back to his Lair as well. This began a decades-long conflict between Prism and Lady Power.

Over the years Overlord collected other beautiful women: some were Free Companions, others were superheroines he'd captured and implanted with mind-control devices (such as La Panthere on page 112). Living up to his oath to be a master of women, he acquired a virtual harem of super-powered females.

OVERLORD'S FAMILY

Overlord started his supervillain career in 1968, at the age of 18. Soon after setting out he started to accumulate Free Companions and sired several children off of them (as well as other women). A brief listing of Overlord's Free Companions and children is as follows:

Prism: Mutant with light-based energy powers. She left an abusive home environment and had a brief villain career in 1968. She joined Overlord in 1968 and has stayed with him ever since. Mother of Luster.

Lady Power: See page 181. She is the mother of Power Lord.

Fire Hawk: Son of Overlord via genetic sampling of a Comanche superheroine. Raised by Prism and currently ruler of the Federation of Atlantia (see sidebar on page 34).

Luster: Daughter of Overlord by Prism. See page 96.

Power Lord: Son of Overlord by Lady Power. Not very bright, greedy, and cruel. Killed by Ichi-ban after he attacked Strike Force Mansion and threatened Ichi-ban's wife.

Janna Oesterhaus: Daughter of Overlord by an unknown mother. Raised by Prism.

Now the most powerful Katari who ever lived, Overlord decided it was time to be a leader of nations. However, his first conquest scheme, the capture of Chile, was thwarted by the Crusaders, as superhero team from New York City. In fact, the Crusaders stopped many of his plans, although a similar attempt by the novice superhero team the Lightbearers ended in disaster. Two members (La Panthere and Ranger) were captured, while a third (SnowFalcon) was killed. Soon after, he tangled with yet another new superhero team, the nascent members of Strike Force, and was driven off. Soon, Strike Force became a constant foe, even capturing him on one occasion. The authorities mistakenly thought Overlord was of normal strength without his suit, but by now his genetic augmentations had made him super-strong, so he simply walked out of his cell.

Meanwhile, having become fantastically wealthy because of inventions he'd patented, Overlord bought the island of Samana Cay in the Caribbean, intending to use it as his new power base; he abandoned the old Lair.

About this time, Overlord's oldest child, his daughter Tanith (by Prism) left the Lair, seeking training in the outer world and hoping to gain her father's attention, which he seldom gave to his daughters. She would go so far as to join Strike Force as the super Luster (see page 96). At about the same time, his son Morgan (by Lady Power) desired to make his own mark as a conquerer. Overlord opposed the move but eventually gave in to Lady Power's entreaties, giving Morgan (who called himself Power Lord) the old underground Lair and a team of hired supers. Power Lord then launched his first and only plan: he captured Strike Force Mansion while the heroes were out, gassing the Main Mission Team and civilian employees, teleporting them back to the Lair, then lying in wait for Strike Force to return. But Ichi-ban's wife Ryoko managed to send out a distress signal; Strike Force returned, aware of his intrusion, and captured him.

Ichi-ban, emotionally unstrung because Power Lord had dared to kidnap and threaten his wife, vowed revenge on the young villain. He used his mystic powers to sneak into the superprison where Power Lord was held, killing him with a lethal dose of potassium cyanide (for more information on Ichi-ban see page 152).

Power Lord's death shocked Overlord out of the many preconceptions he had about his career and intentions. Depressed, blaming himself for his son's death, he lost his interest in conquest and domination. Incensed by her son's death, Lady Power left him, claiming the right to exact revenge on Ichi-ban; Overlord acquiesced to this request and did not pursue Ichi-ban himself. He then freed his mind-controlled companions, altering their memories so they recalled their stays with Overlord as passionate affairs—so they would not be emotionally injured by their time spent with him (unlike La Panthere who still hated him). All of his Free Companions but Prism left him. Depressed, abandoning his plans for conquest, he retired.

Eventually, Overlord's pride and restless nature got the best of him, and he began work again—this time in the field of technology and medicine. He refined his genetic experiments, developing antigeria treatments (see page 56 for more on this), and distributing his volumes of notes to those scientists capable of utilizing them. In addition, he also reconciled with Tanith and Strike Force, helped discover the existence of the Governor, assisted Strike Force during World War III, met his counterpart on Earth-Kaiser, taught Man Mountain Thunder the art of Daragak, and discovered a new future for himself, if not as a fully-fledged superhero, then certainly as someone many people, both human and Katari, can look up to.

Personality/Motivation: For most of his life, Overlord overcompensated for his feelings of inferiority. Once an unattractive weakling, he forced himself to become powerful, forced enemies to obey him, forced women to love him, forced his will on the world. But when Morgan was murdered, he finally realized how empty the pursuit of his goals had left him.

These days, much of Overlord's arrogance has left him. While he's nowhere near humble, he's willing to acknowledge the accomplishments and capabilities of others. He also has reconciled with his daughter Tanith and begun a more mature relationship with Prism. He's even made overtures to La Panthere in an effort to apologize for his deeds.

Despite his accomplishments in medicine, Overlord is still haunted and uncomfortable with some of his past deeds. He's too honorable to simply forget them but also too proud (and inexperienced in humility) to know how to atone for them. However, he has managed to make up for one past mistake by accompanying Strike Force on a trip back to 1981 in an effort to rescue SnowFalcon. By swapping her for a life-like construct, he managed to keep her from being killed during the Lightbringer's disastrous attack on his base.

Powers/Tactics: In some ways literally a self-made man, Overlord's genetic treatments have granted him enormous physical strength and vitality. On top of that, he has a genius intellect, an indomitable will, and an extensive suite of scientific knowledge and skills. On top of that, there's his mighty suit of powered armor. It combines protective benefits with an wide assortment of sensors, built-in weapons systems, and an assortment of esoteric functions designed to allow Overlord to deal with a wide variety of foes and situations.

Overlord's Katari heritage leaves him vulnerable to poison and gas attacks, and to light illusions: he has trouble distinguishing between holograms and actual objects.

Campaign Use: You have two options for using Overlord in your campaign. The first would be to follow his story as seen here. Thus, he becomes a source of scientific knowledge—for example, he has created genetic treatments which can triple the potential lifespan of recipients (all members of his family have received it) and now sells this and other antigeria treatments for very high fees. He is also a frequent collaborator with geneticists around the world, and can even be persuaded to help defend the Earth from alien invaders.

The other option is to keep him as a villain. Perhaps his son Morgan was never murdered—or this version of Overlord was far less affected by the murder then the "canon" one was. This Overlord still plans conquest and world domination, still captures and controls supers, is still very much the arch-villain. If this is the case, give him a large base, assorted vehicles, agents, mercenary supers, and anything else you think he might need to threaten your heroes and the world.

Appearance: Overlord is a large man, standing 6'4" and weighing a solid 260 pounds. Despite being in his mid-40s he appears to only be around 30 or so. His hair is tawny gold, his eyes black, while his complexion is Scandanavian. When operating as Overlord he wears a suit of high-tech circuit-imbedded stasis cloth, which retracts into his belt when not in use. The suit is metal-flake green, with golden gloves, trunks, boots, and twin diamond-shapes across his face. A red crystalline eye-slit spans the front of his helmet.

OVERLORD

I find Overlord to be a fascinating character, mainly because of his development. Initially, he a world-conquerer in the mold of Doctor Doom and Lex Luthor, but as time passed, he evolved from a one-trick pony into a character with depth and understanding. He lost his son to hubris, one of his Free Companions to rage, and one of the key components to his own frustrations with the discovery of the Governor. This allowed Aaron to give him a plausible reason to take a step back, reflect on his life and his actions, and realize that perhaps there was more than one way to become great. Instead of taking it, he could try earning it. And, in the end, he started on the long path to redemption.

SCOFF

One of the most influential beings found in the Strike Force universe is Scoff. When he bothers to describe himself, he says he's a Demon-Lord of Chaos. Like much of what he says, this is part truth, part gross oversimplification, and part lie. What is known about him is as follows:

- He is a powerful, chaotic, magical being, ageless, whose usual physical form is principally human but also includes traits usually associated with animals (fur, horns, and wings);
- He collects powerful servants, most of whom he magically transforms, and some of whom are bound to him by ties of magical compulsion that remind modern Terrans uncomfortably of slavery;
- He meddles in the affairs of mortals in the Strike Force universe and other dimensions, but seems to have genuine affection for humans; and
- He has changed the Strike Force universe, making it both more chaotic and more magical (and thus, more to his liking).

Yet, though his actions and appearance suggest that he's a demon, he's not a part of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic belief system—he's not referred to in any ancient texts (or any texts written before 1890), and has no specific animosity to any Terran religion (though he views most with amused disdain). And though he has imposed changes on the plane of reality where Earth-AU resides, and those changes are largely chaotic in nature, he does not advocate the extremes of chaotic existence.

Scoff lives in some distant reach of the multiverse where the ultimate frontiers of chaos are within sight... but he himself likes just a touch of order to give things a distinct and reliable character. He is very fond of Earth-AU, but does not confine his activities to this plane; he is aware of alternate planes of existence and manifests himself on many parallel Earths.

To the superheroes of Earth-AU, he is part enemy and part ally, a being whose presence is usually welcomed and whose plans are usually opposed.

Background/History: The way Scoff tells the story, he comes from a point in the universe where chaos reigns supreme and where ideas and conception become flesh. As such, he is a conceptual being representing such ideas as individuality, non-conformity, free-thinking, and rejection of social conventions—he scoffs at the ideas and assumptions underlying most civilizations and faiths, hence his name. Naturally, his true name is not "Scoff." In fact, he has no true name, so far as anyone has been able to determine; he goes by whatever term most closely matches ""to scoff" or "the scoffer" in whatever language is prevalent.

Beings created in the plane of Scoff's birth can die. When they do, the concept defining them reemerges in the place and a new being can formulate itself around the concept. Scoff's brother, Mockery, died in 1982, with his body and last remaining self-awareness being destroyed a few years later, so it is very likely that a new Mockery has been born in this plane.

Scoff and Mockery were born at the same time, of the same magical materials and physical elements, and based on similar precepts, a long time ago. But Mockery's concept was of harsh dismissal of ideas and virtues, of the use of wit and analysis to harm and corrupt. Since both had a particular affinity for humans, usually making their courts or corps of servants from representatives of that race, it seems likely that they were created no earlier than the arrival of Cro-Magnon man, which averages some 35,000 years ago in most dimensions where they appear.

SCOFF

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
10+75	STR	0	11-(26-)	Lift 100 kg (3.3 ktons); 2d6 (17d6) HTH Damage [1/8]
20	DEX	20	13-	
38	CON	28	17-	
23	INT	13	14-	PER Roll 14-
30	EGO	20	15-	
33	PRE	23	16-	PRE Attack: 6 ½d6
7	OCV	20		
7	DCV	20		
10	OMCV	21		
10	DMCV	21		
6	SPD	40		*Phases:* 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12
17	PD	15		*Total:* 41 PD (24 rPD)
10	ED	8		*Total:* 34 ED (24 rED)
28	REC	24		
80	END	12		
20	BODY	10		
85	STUN	33		**Total Characteristic Cost: 328**

Movement:		
	Running:	12m
	Flight:	48m
	Leaping:	54m
	Swimming:	4m
	Teleportation:	20m

Cost	Powers	END
87	*Magically Augmented Strength:* +75 STR, Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼), Affects Desolidified (+½); Only On Highly-Magical Worlds (-½)	5
38	*Claws:* HKA 3d6 (3 ½d6/8 ½d6 w/STR), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); Only On Highly-Magical Worlds (-½), Reduced Penetration (-¼)	
48	*Magically-Augmented Invulnerability:* Resistant Protection (24 PD/24 ED); Only On Highly-Magical Worlds (-½)	
120	*Magically-Augmented Invulnerability:* Energy, Physical, and Mental Damage Reduction, Resistant, 75%; Only On Highly-Magical Worlds (-½)	
30	*Magically-Augmented Invulnerability:* Mental Defense (30 points total), Hardened (x2; +½); Only On Highly-Magical Worlds (-½)	
30	*Magically-Augmented Invulnerability:* Power Defense (30 points), Hardened (x2; +½); Only On Highly-Magical Worlds (-½)	
32	*Wings:* Flight 48m; Restrainable (-½)	5
17	*Powerful Leaper:* Leaping +50m (54m forward, 27m upward); Leaping Limited To Current STR (2m per every 5 STR; -½)	2
40	*Demonic Form:* Life Support: Total (including Longevity: Immortality)	
20	*Chaotic Luck:* Luck 4d6	
50	*Mental Link To Servitors:* Mind Link , Specific Group of Minds, No LOS Needed, Number of Minds (x16), Unlimited range in this dimension and can reach into other dimensions	
157	*Self-Modification:* Multipower, 157-point reserve	
21v	1) *High-Magic Worlds:* Growth (at full power Scoff is +45 STR, +15 CON, +15 PRE, +9 PD, +9 ED, +9 BODY, +18 STUN, +7m Reach, +36m Running, -18m KB, +6 to other's OCV to hit character, +6 to other's PER Rolls to perceive character, 16m tall, 8m wide, and weighs 50,000 kg, and his hands and feet qualify was 1m Radius Areas Of Effect), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), Persistent (+¼); Only On Highly-Magical Worlds (-½)	
8v	2) *Zero-Magic Worlds:* Shrinking (0.0625 m tall [about 2.5 inches tall], 0.0031 kg mass, -10 PER Rolls to perceive character, +10 DCV, takes +30m KB), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), Persistent (+¼); Only Non-Magical Worlds (-¼)	
13v	3) *Assume Any Form:* Shape Shift (Sight, Hearing, Smell/Taste and Touch Groups, any shape), Imitation, Difficult To Dispel (x4 Active Points; +½), Invisible Power Effects (Invisible to Magical Detects; +¼), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½),Persistent (+¼); Only On Highly-Magical Worlds (-½)	

SCOFF (CONTINUED)

Cost	Powers	END
133	*Transdimensional Manipulation:* Multipower, 200-point reserve, all slots Only On Highly-Magical Worlds (-½)	
7v	1) *Gift Of Power:* Aid 7d6, Variable Effect (any one Characteristic at a time; +½), Delayed Return Rate (points fade at the rate of 5 per Minute; +1), Transdimensional (Any Dimension; +1); 4 Charges (-1), Costs Endurance (-½), Servitors Only (-1 ½)	15
17v	2) *Undo The Workings Of Magic:* Dispel 13d6, Variable Effect (any one Magical power at a time; +½), Area Of Effect (8m Radius; +½), Selective (+¼), Transdimensional (Any Dimension; +1); Only On Highly-Magical Worlds (-½)	13
1f	3) *Change Dreams:* Mental Illusions 2d6, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), Transdimensional (Single Dimension; the Dreamlands; +½); Target Must Be Asleep (-2), Target Knows It's A Real Communication [from Scoff] (-½)	
27v	4) *Find Sleeping Minds:* Mind Scan 12d6, +20 OMCV, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), Transdimensional (Single Dimension; the Dreamlands; +½); Only On Highly-Magical Worlds (-½)	
11v	5) *Thought Projection:* Telepathy 8d6, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), Transdimensional (Any Dimension; +1); Communication Only (-¼), Only On Highly-Magical Worlds (-½)	
3f	6) *Transdimensional Phasing:* Desolidification (affected by magical powers and attacks); Only On Highly-Magical Worlds (-½)	4
9v	7) *Move Between Dimensions At Will:* Extra-Dimensional Movement (Any Dimension, Any Location), x16 Increased Weight; Only On Highly-Magical Worlds (-½)	6
13v	8) *Goes Where He Wills:* Teleportation 20m, x16 Increased Mass, x64 Noncombat, 20 Fixed Locations, 2 Floating Locations; Only On Highly-Magical Worlds (-½)	6
12v	9) *Look Into Other Dimensions:* Clairsentience (Sight And Hearing Groups), x512 Range (230 km), Perceive into any dimension; Only On Highly-Magical Worlds (-½)	9
3f	10) *Find Despair And Suffering:* Detect Ultimate Anguish 37- (no Sense Group), Perceive into any dimension; Only On Highly-Magical Worlds (-½)	
42	*Transformation:* Severe Transform 3d6 (target into whatever form Scoff wills, heals back via another application of this power), Armor Piercing (x2; +½),Difficult To Dispel (x256 Active Points; +2), Increased Maximum Range (3,600 m; +¾); 16 Charges (-0), Costs Endurance (-½), Increased Endurance Cost (x2 END; -½), Only Works On Consenting/Comprehending Individuals or Those Having Abandoned Three Precepts (-2), Side Effects (automatically causes Scoff pain [1d6 STUN and 5 END], recovers at REC per Hour; -½),	38
240	*Transformation Energy:* Endurance Reserve (960 END, 0 REC)	
72	*Disintegrated Beings Re-Creation Powers:* Multipower, 180-point reserve, all slots OAF Bulky (-1 ½)	
1f	1) *Capture Spirits:* Mind Control 12d6; Only Versus Ghosts And Spirits (-2), OAF Bulky (-1 ½), Set Effect (Single Command: Be Still; -½)	6
4f	2) *Spirit Shield:* Power Defense (20 points), Hardened (x2; +½), Ranged (+½), No Range Modifier (+½), Indirect (Source Point is the same for every use, path can change with every use; +¾), Usable As Attack (+1 ¼); OAF Bulky (-1 ½)	
1f	3) *Create New Spirit:* Summon 463-Point Ghost (see page 282 of Hero System Bestiary); OAF Bulky (-1 ½)	1
2f	4) *Transform Disintegrated Energies to Undamaged Body:* Severe Transform 4d6 (collected disintegrated energies into an new undamaged body, "healed" back via any attack that would destroy the body); Extra Time (Full Phase, -½), OAF Bulky (-1 ½)	6
2f	5) *Bring The Dead To Life:* Severe Transform 4d6 (dead body into living body, "healed" back via any attack that would kill the living body); OAF Bulky (-1 ½)	6
2f	6) *Preserve The Dead:* Change Environment (Preserve Body And Keep It Fresh For Five Years), Area Of Effect (1,000m Radius; +2 ¼), Indirect (Source Point is the same for every use, path can change with every use; +¾),No Range Modifier (+½), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), Persistent (+¼); OAF Bulky (-1 ½)	
23	*Re-Creation Reserve:* Endurance Reserve (90 END, 0 REC)	
	Perks	
120	*Scoff's Mountain:* Base Built On 600 Points	
100	*Scoff's Pride And Servants:* 16 Followers Built On 400-point Base (or some combination there of)	
10	Fringe Benefit: Head of State	
15	Money: Filthy Rich	
	Talents	
3	Lightsleep	
12	Striking Appearance +4/+4d6	
25	Universal Translator 19-	

Both Scoff and Mockery left their place of genesis long ago and, having left it, could never return—the very act of leaving was sufficiently transformative that they could not go back. Though always able to find one another across the multiverse, they spent ages apart, each pursuing his own goals. Gradually they drifted apart conceptually—Scoff, able to turn his ironic eye on himself, never took himself too seriously, while Mockery headed with determination down a path of cruelty and the infliction of pain. At some point, thousands of years ago, they decided they did not care for one another. In subsequent eras, whenever they encountered one another, they either avoided contact or fought.

Scoff has interacted with Earth-AU since the Victorian Era. He finds Earth-AU enjoyable, as he appreciates the chaotic and random nature of a superhuman-heavy universe. While he's not a fan of (and in fact often opposes) those champions of Law, Order, and the Pattern (such as ShadowWalker, found on page 152), he's not utterly inimical to them either. He did bind Lady Power to his service, but seeks to cure her of her mental issues, not exploit them. Strike Force has even called upon him for advice and information, when the situation warrants.

Personality/Motivation: Scoff is many things, but chiefly can be counted on to be hedonistic, implacable, and imperturbable. He loves luxuries and has a great appreciation for Earth-AU culture, Oscar Wilde and G.B. Shaw especially. He is also a great admirer of beauty (both physical and conceptual) and fine art (in many forms).

While proud, Scoff does has a sense of humor, albeit a mocking one. Fortunately, he's not too proud to be able to make fun of himself.

SCOFF (CONTINUED)

	Skills
40	+4 with All Attacks
3	Acting 16-
3	Charm 16-
3	Conversation 16-
3	High Society 16-
3	Oratory 16-
3	Persuasion 16-
3	Stealth 13-
3	Tactics 14-
3	Trading 16-
3	Scholar
1	1) KS: 19th-Century English Literature 11-
2	2) KS: Champions of Law/Chaos 14-
2	3) KS: Earth(s) 14-
2	4) KS: The Multiverse 14-
2	5) KS: The Reassembly of Disintegrated Beings 14-

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 1701
Total Cost: 2028

	Matching Complications (75)
10	Distinctive Features: Furry, Ram-Horned Demon (Easily Concealed; Always Noticed and Causes Major Reaction; Detectable By Commonly-Used Senses)
5	Hunted: Champions Of Law (Infrequently, Less Pow; NCI; Limited Geographical Area; Harshly Punish)
5	Psychological Complication: Animal Traits (Uncommon; Moderate)
15	Psychological Complication: Fairy Godfather (Common; Strong)
15	Psychological Complication: Lustful (Common; Strong)
15	Psychological Complication: Manipulative (Very Common; Moderate)
15	Psychological Complication: Prankster (Very Common; Moderate)
20	Psychological Complication: Promotes Chaos (Very Common; Strong)
0	Susceptibility: Zero-Magic Worlds 3d6 damage per Hour (Uncommon)
10	Vulnerability: 2 x STUN from Law-Based Magical Attacks (Uncommon)

Total Complications Points: 75
Experience Points: 1628

As part of his animalistic nature, Scoff keeps a "pride" of male and female companions. He uses the members of his pride (many of whom are quite powerful) to conduct missions for him throughout the multiverse. Some are entirely free-willed, and are referred to as his Free Agents; others have lesser or greater mental compulsions binding them to his goals, and are referred to as Bound Servants. In either case, Scoff normally transforms the members of his pride into something greater than their original form. Resistant to harm, disease, aging, and the ability to change into their original form is part of this transformation. In addition, Bound Servants are normally only bound for a set time period (usually around 200 years) at which point they are normally free to do as they please.

Although Scoff is a hedonistic "demon" of chaos, he does have a certain code of ethics. He goes to considerable efforts not to destroy the happiness of others, his reasoning being that happiness is something so great that not even he can bring it into being; therefore it is not to be destroyed lightly. Thus, he will happily sleep with a married woman, if he believes it will do her no harm. But, to his way of thinking, it is a far greater wrong to seduce a former prostitute now married to a jealous man than it is to seduce an unattached young virgin.

It is a telling aspect of Scoff's personality that one of his hobbies is to reconstruct individuals who have been disintegrated or vaporized. He rebuilt the Black Enchantress this way, and also constructed a man and woman from the remains of people destroyed in the atomic bombing of Hiroshima.

Powers/Tactics: Scoff is a living being made up of matter and energy, with physical characteristics similar to humans and other mammals, but he does not belong to the animal kingdom. He is a magical creature unrelated by biology to any known species. However, he can potentially father children with a female of just about any species. Despite his animalistic form, humans (and other beings) tend to find Scoff attractive to look to, pleasant to speak to, and very persuasive to listen to.

Due to his nature, Scoff is very, very, powerful on those planes with a high-degree of magical energy. On those planes with little to no magical energy, he appears as a tiny figure, just a few inches high, virtually powerless, but hard to hurt and incapable of doing much in the way of physical harm. If he so wills it, Scoff can enter into a target's dreams, to speak with, seduce, and/or torment as he sees fit. He also uses dreams to to prejudice a target's allies against them and to give helpful information to the target's enemies. And, if needed, he will send his servants, such as Lady Power, to attack them directly.

SCOFF'S PRIDE

Scoff's animal nature is lion-like. Thus, he maintains a "pride" consisting of himself and a variable number of females, as well as assorted male followers. A partial list of his pride is as follows:

Adon the Impious: Scoff's son by Faralda. Possesses powers relating to teleportation and the ability to suppress the use of magic in his vicinity.

Andrew Ratcherson: A Free Agent, Ratcherson can manipulate a person's biological systems.

Drusilla: One of Scoff's Bound Servants (for 200 years) and the mother of Medea. Hails from the Olympus mythosphere, came to Scoff to seek freedom from a lycanthropic curse.

Faralda: A Free Agent and mother of Adon and Vinda. She is Scoff's chronicler and historian, as well as an artist.

Griss the One: A Free Agent and a warrior. Hails from Scoff's realm.

Lady Power: One of Scoff's Bound Servants (for as long as Scoff feels is necessary). See page 181.

Lawgiver: An unwillingly Bound Servant (forever if Scoff has anything to say about it) who was formerly an Earth-AU murderous superhero who believed utterly in the code of "an eye for an eye."

Medea: A child and Scoff's daughter by Drusilla.

Nightrix: A Free Agent (untransformed in any way by Scoff) with a wide assortment of psychic powers. Responsible for delivering Lawgiver to Scoff.

Patricia de la Torre: A Free Agent of Scoff's who was transformed in order to cure her of unwanted magical energies.

Petridarbalys: A Bound Servant (who can become a Free Agent when he wishes) and a powerful magician.

Lady Sarah Thelmond: A Free Agent and Scoff's first friend and lover from Earth-AU. Formerly a British noblewoman from the late 19th Century.

Sizzler: A Bound Servant (for 200 years) and Denier's former lover. When Denier stole her demonic heritage (in order to power himself), it left her in a coma. Scoff rescued her.

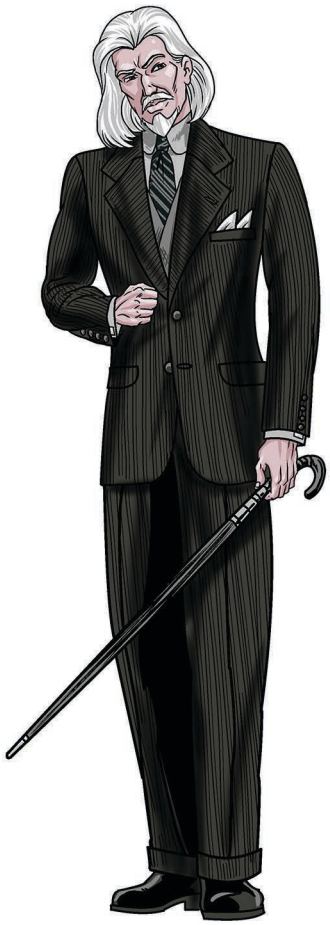
Vinda: Scoff's daughter by Faralda and his Master of Warriors.

Campaign Use: There are several ways to use Scoff in your game. He could simply act as an agent of chaos, sending members of his Pride to bedevil those heroes who follow the concepts of Balance, Law, or the Pattern. He tirelessly tries to subvert these heroes to his cause, eventually resorting to force or trickery to imprison them in his realm.

You can also use Scoff simply as an instigator of chaos. He still opposes Law and Order, but does so in a more subtle fashion. Instead of physical opposition, he tries to encourage the spread of magical knowledge and sorcerous skill. A magically-rich world is more unpredictable than one ruled purely by science, and is thus more to Scoff's liking. In this case, while Scoff is someone the PCs can approach and deal with, his help is always to be questioned, as it will invariably assist his plans.

Appearance: In his true form, Scoff stands 6'8" and weighs a well-muscled 300 pounds. While humanoid, he has a tawny lion's mane and fine fur on his body. There is thick concentrations of extra fur on his lower legs, chest, and wrists. His eyes have gold irises with cat-like pupils. On his head are large gold-colored curling ram's horns, while fur-covered bat wings sprout from his shoulder blades. He normally wears a scarlet kilt, a ruby necklace, and ruby rings.

ALASDER DELL



ALASDER DELL

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
13	STR	3	12-	Lift 151.6 kg; 2 ½d6 HTH Damage [1]
18	DEX	16	13-	
18	CON	8	13-	
23	INT	13	14-	PER Roll 14-
30	EGO	20	15-	
30	PRE	20	15-	PRE Attack: 6d6
6	OCV	15		
6	DCV	15		
10	OMCV	21		
10	DMCV	21		
4+4	SPD	20		*Phases:* 3, 6, 9, 12/2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12
8	PD	6		*Total:* 8 PD (0 rPD)
8	ED	6		*Total:* 8 ED (0 rED)
7	REC	3		
50	END	6		
15	BODY	5		
31	STUN	6		**Total Characteristic Cost: 275**

Movement:	Running:	12m
	Leaping:	4m
	Swimming:	4m

ALASDER DELL (CONTINUED)

Cost	Powers	END
200	*Biochemical Analysis And Alteration:* Multipower, 200-point reserve	
9f	1) *Instill Confusion:* Drain INT 4d6, Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼), Delayed Return Rate (points return at the rate of 5 per Minute; +1)	4
18f	2) *Instill Weakness:* Drain END 8d6, Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼), Delayed Return Rate (points return at the rate of 5 per Minute; +1)	8
20f	3) *Instill Mental Paralysis:* Entangle 8d6, 8 PD/8 ED, ACV (uses OMCV against DMCV; +¼), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼), Takes No Damage From Attacks (see 6E1 page 217); +¾), Works Against EGO, Not STR (+¼)	9
15f	4) *Instill Unconsciousness:* Mental Blast 12d6, Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼)	6
4f	5) *Gene Analysis:* Detect Genetic Patterns 24- (no Sense Group), Discriminatory, Analyze, Range, Sense	
27	*Augmented Reaction Time:* +4 SPD; Only To Use Multipower (-½)	
73	*Recovers Quickly From Unconsciousness:* Aid STUN 14d6 (standard effect: 42 points), Trigger (if reduced to 0 STUN or less; Aid is an Action that takes No Time; Trigger requires a Turn or more to reset; +¼), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); Only to Aid Self (-1)	
60	*Self-Augmentation To Resist Harm:* Physical and Energy Damage Reduction, Resistant, 50%	
20	*Psionic Shields:* Mental Defense (20 points total)	
1	*Reduced Aging:* LS (Longevity: 200 Years)	
15	Luck 3d6	
48	*Self-Augmentation To Recover From Harm:* Regeneration (3 BODY per Turn)	
	Perks	
5	Fringe Benefit: Head of the Reapers	
15	Money: Filthy Rich	
	Talents	
6	Striking Appearance +2/+2d6	
	Skills	
30	+6 with Biochemical Analysis And Alteration Multipower	
3	Bureaucratics 15-	
3	Charm 15-	
3	Conversation 15-	
3	High Society 15-	
3	KS: The Business World 14-	
3	KS: The Criminal Underworld 14-	
3	KS: The Superhuman World 14-	
3	Oratory 15-	
3	Persuasion 15-	
3	Streetwise 15-	
2	TF: Common Motorized Ground Vehicles	
3	Trading 15-	
2	WF: Small Arms	

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 604
Total Cost: 807

400	**Matching Complications (75)**	
20	Hunted: Shadow Warriors (Frequently, Mo Pow; Harshly Punish)	
20	Hunted: Strike Force (Frequently, Mo Pow; Harshly Punish)	
20	Psychological Complication: Conceited And Selfish (Very Common; Strong)	
15	Psychological Complication: Cruel And Heartless (Common; Strong)	
20	Psychological Complication: Desires To Rule (Very Common; Strong)	
15	Psychological Complication: Only Pretends To Be A Gentlemen (Very Common; Moderate)	
20	Vulnerability: 2 x BODY from Gases and Poisons (Common)	
20	Vulnerability: 2 x STUN from Gases and Poisons (Common)	

Total Complications Points: 75
Experience Points: 407

The leader of the Families, Alasder Dell is also the man behind Carousel, Cobra, North American Parapsychological, and the rest of the Reapers.

Background/History: In centuries past, a number of unusual Western European families—families whose members lived long lives and among whom strange mutations often surfaced—began to band together for mutual protection from the suspicion and wrath of shorter-lived humans. They founded their own communities, secretly pooled political and economic resources, and kept their longevity a secret to the rest of the world. They were called the Families. The largest of these clans were the Dells and Wildmans of England, the Arreths of Scotland, and the Adeliers and LeDucs of France.

Alasder, heir to the Dell clan, was born with a strange mutation: purely by intuition, he could divine information about a person's gene patterns, including potential lifespan and possibility of powers. He could also, by thought alone, affect the metabolism and biochemistry of others, causing weakness, quick unconsciousness, and other effects in them. Ruthless and ambitious, he assumed leadership of the Dell clan and began steps to bring the Families in line—in order to form the greatest, most ambitious criminal organization of all time.

The rest of the Families resisted, and a secret war was waged between the Families in the 20 years before World War I. When this war was done, the Families were broken—their fortunes ruined, their members scattered to the winds. Alasder Dell was in charge of what was left—but his plan was set back many decades because of the war. His own son and heir, Jarret, had opposed and left him, disappearing from sight.

Dell's criminal empire, which he called the Reapers (a play on the phrase of "reaping what one sows" and imagery of the Grim Reaper) grew steadily during the Great War and through the '20s and '30s. He used his legitimate shipping concern, Carousel Imports of Glasgow, as a cover for these operations. By the onset of World War II, the Reapers had branches across the world but were still secret enough to be unknown to the authorities and to the more conventional criminal cartels such as the Mafia families.

Dell suffered a setback during World War II. His son Jarret persuaded the authorities to investigate Carousel, and they discovered he'd been selling British defense secrets to the Axis powers. Dell faked his death, pretending to jump from towering cliffs into the sea. Carousel Imports was shut down, never to reopen, but Dell continued to use the name Carousel for his enforcers, then his super-agents.

With the appearance of superheroes in the world, Dell acquired his own supervillains, a team he called Cobra ("fast and poisonous" was his admiring description). The membership of Cobra has changed over the years, but it has always been a powerful tool for the Reapers.

Dell also began a division studying psychic powers for their possible roles in crime. This division, North American Parapsychological (NAP), was thought to be a legitimate research facility; but the results of its studies in psi science went straight to Dell, and the super-powered psis it encountered were recruited to the Reapers' cause.

Reapers investigators continued to track down the descendants of the scattered Families; one such was Meredith Butler (a.k.a. Charade of the Shadow Warriors). Her parents were secretly murdered, and she was brought to North American Parapsychological for study, where she was taught a philosophy of mutant superiority and devotion to NAP causes. But she eventually caught on and escaped, calling Strike Force for help, and exposing NAP as a Reapers front. This was a serious blow to the Reapers and earned Strike Force permanent opposition from the Reapers. In addition, Commodore (of the Blood) was hired by Cobra before he realized it was part of a criminal empire; since then, and especially because of his wife Lorelei (see page 125), he has been an enemy to the Reapers.

Alasder Dell eventually tracked down and recaptured his son Jarret; Jarret's wife was accidentally killed. Dell learned that he had a granddaughter, Jeannine, but it was years before he discovered she was also Lorelei of the Shadow Warriors. (He never learned she was also the model Shante.) Dell captured Lorelei on one occasion, but she was rescued by the Shadow Warriors, her husband, Commodore, and his merry buccaneers. Soon after, Lorelei and her team rescued Jarret as well.

Personality/Motivation: Alasder Dell likes to present himself as an Old World gentleman. He keeps himself immaculately neat and clean, dresses well, and extends courtesy and charm to everyone he deals with. However, under this facade is the soul of a reptile. A reptile that thinks nothing of using drugs and brainwashing techniques to destroy others, impoverish them, and ruin their lives; he revels in their suffering. In addition, he plays on his relatives' family sentiments for aid while having none himself.

Powers/Tactics: Alasder Dell possesses mutant powers of gene analysis, allowing him to determine a target's genetic potential. He can also temporarily change a victim's biochemistry with a variety of interesting results, such as exhaustion, confusion, or outright unconsciousness. He can affect his own body as well, reducing the amount of damage he sustains, and recovering very fast when rendered unconscious. Note that Alasder can only act physically on Phases 3, 6, 9, and 12, but can use his multipower slots on any of his Phases.

On top of all this, Alasder is a cunning criminal leader and a progressive thinker; he uses up-to-date gadgetry for his Carousel and Reaper agents.

Campaign Use: Alasder Dell is the archetypal criminal-empire leader: he's clever, sophisticated, and inventive. He is the one who's so very charming as his minions strap the heroes onto a deathtrap; he's the one who appears to perish in the explosion at his secret base or at the hands of a failed experiment, only to reappear episodes later.

Appearance: Alasder Dell stands 5'11" and weighs a lean 150 pounds. His features are genial and very English, with abundant white hair, neat beard, and mustache. He wears dated-looking formal-wear that would look more at home in the 1930s than today.

DENIER

Background/History: Once upon a time, it might have been easy to sell one's soul to the nether powers. Since those days, the demonic forces seem to have become choosier, preferring only to deal with those who acquire enough knowledge to contact them in their own planes.

One such person was Jason Haller. Born in 1940, Haller, as a child, was struck down with polio and grew up angry at the world. The son of a rich man, Haller knew his family would support him, so he became a perpetual student, spending years at one college before moving on to a new one. He had no goal or direction, but he certainly had an education.

In the late '60s, in an esoteric New England college, Haller gained access to a private collection of volumes in the anthropology library. The books, donated by a noted scholar of the occult, contained fragments of spells, hints about the real nature of mystical sites, and clues about the real world of the supernatural. After years of study, Haller knew enough to contact the denizens of the demonic planes.

He did so and sold himself to those powers. He got good terms, too. He received a powerful demonic body with which he could rend his enemies. He could change from that into the human body he should have had, if polio had not taken it from him

DENIER

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
45	STR	35	18-	Lift 12.8 tons; 9d6 HTH Damage [0]
30	DEX	40	15-	
28	CON	18	15-	
20	INT	10	13-	PER Roll 13-
20	EGO	10	13-	
20	PRE	10	13-	PRE Attack: 4d6
10	OCV	35		
10	DCV	35		
7	OMCV	12		
7	DMCV	12		
5	SPD	30		*Phases:* 3, 5, 8, 10, 12
19	PD	17		*Total:* 19 PD (19 rPD)
19	ED	17		Total: 19 ED (19 rED)
15	REC	11		
56	END	8		
18	BODY	8		
55	STUN	18		**Total Characteristic Cost: 325**

Movement:	Running:	12m
	Flight:	60m
	Leaping:	18m
	Swimming:	4m

as a boy. And he never had to make the long march to permanent servitude in some hell, if he could persuade one poor innocent per year to sell his own soul and go in Haller's place.

Haller, in his demon form, took the code-name "the Denier"—a nickname for Satan himself, the Great Denier. He dropped his Jason Haller identity forever, leaving behind only an empty wheelchair and a mystery for his family.

Personality/Motivation: The Denier is a nasty, selfish, decadent, chauvinistic, abusive, dominating monster. He divides his time more or less equally between 1) crimes of destruction and theft; 2) the seduction and corruption (in his new human identity of Jason Lazarus) of innocents, especially naive young women; and 3) the pursuit of all the diversions and entertainments, especially delights of the flesh, that were denied to him in his previous life.

On top of that, Denier sees himself as The Great Corruptor, the natural ruler of all Earth's nastier villains. In at least one possible Strike Force future, he succeeded in bringing all of Earth under his control, creating a literal hell on Earth in which everything and everyone was his to torment as he wished.

DENIER (CONTINUED)

Cost	Powers	END
22	*Effortless Strength:* Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½) applied to STR	
24	*Powerful Fists:* Hand-to-Hand Attack +4d6, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); Hand-To-Hand Attack (-¼)	
30	*Claws:* HKA 2d6 (5d6 w/STR)	3
18	*Demonic Form:* Resistant (+½) for 19 PD/19 ED	
5	*Supernatural Sight:* Sight Group Flash Defense (5 points)	
10	*Supernatural Form:* Power Defense (10 points)	
50	*Travel To The Hellish Dimensions:* Extra-Dimensional Movement (Related Group of Dimensions, Any Location), x8 Increased Weight	5
40	*Wings:* Flight 60m; Restrainable (-½)	6
7	*Powerful Leaper:* Leaping +14m (18m forward, 9m upward)	1
40	*Demonic Form:* Life Support: Total (including Longevity: Immortality)	
44	*Become Any Humanoid He Wishes:* Shapeshift (Sight, Hearing, Smell/Taste and Touch Groups, limited group of shapes), Persistent (+¼), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½)	
	Perks	
45	Hell-Raisers Agents (32 Followers built on 100-point base)	
50	Mockery's Mini-Plane (250-point Vehicle)	
10	Money: Wealthy	
	Skills	
7	Charm 15-	
3	KS: Northeastern Universities 13-	
4	KS: The Supernatural World 14-	

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 410
Total Cost: 734

It is telling that his tail is always in motion, even when he isn't: lashing, moving around, stroking females with undue familiarity, and so on. His favorite pre-battle quote: "If you worship some petty god... say goodbye to him now." sums up his attitude fairly well.

Powers/Tactics: Denier has a physically powerful body. He's strong, very fast, hard to hurt, and can fly using bat-like wings. He is a front-line fighter and will jump into the middle of any fray as soon as it starts, leaving others to coordinate the fighting.

Campaign Use: The Denier is a chaotic master villain. He likes staging big, showy robberies, attacks on and humiliations of super crimefighters and religious figures, and so forth. But he doesn't execute long, involved, clever master plans: he's just not that subtle. He is also a corruptor of youth; heroes might stumble across the trail of heartbreak and suicide he leaves in his wake as he takes in youths, seduces them over to his view of evil power, and persuades them to sell themselves to demonic forces.

If needed, the Denier's demonic patron was the Mockery, the evil brother of Scoff. The Mockery was destroyed by Strike Force, but Denier took over the Mockery's pocket universe and made it his own. At one point, Denier was bested by Lorelei in combat, and while he doesn't hunt her, he despises her and will single her out for attack whenever they meet.

Appearance: Denier stands 6'4" in height and weighs a well-muscled 280 pounds. His hair is black, while his eyes are blood red. He has dusky red skin, huge batwings that sprout from his back, spiraling ram's horns on his head, a demonic-looking pointed tail, and thick hair on his lower legs. His hands and feet are both clawed.

Denier wears a broad black leather belt with panels of black suede hanging from it in front and behind; he wears no other garments or ornamentation.

THE HELL-RAISERS

While Denier is many things, a fool is not one of them. Early in his career he realized conquest went a lot smoother if you had others helping you. With that in mind, Denier formed the Hell-Raisers. A short sampling of members include:

Bellona: Denier's cousin, she has magical mind-control powers given to her by Denier. Has also worked with Affrighter, of the Blood.

Briareus: Four-armed immensely strong muscleman built by the Producer (see page 184).

Dark Seraph: The classic Champions villain.

Drill-Bit: The daughter of Man-Drill, she's utterly insane, using her father's sonic-based power suit to commit crimes.

Flare: The classic Champions heroine, she worked for Denier only briefly.

Goblin: An expert on the occult and sorcery, he can also shrink himself to tiny size.

Man-Drill: Creator of a sonic-based power suit. Just as insane as his daughter.

Mind Master: A insane mentalist who thinks he's the advance scout for an alien invasion.

Scanner: His telepathy lets him find almost anyone.

Sizzler: The descendant of demons and sorcerers, she possesses great fire powers. She's also Denier's lover.

Tai (Nosferatu): A vampire assassin.

Titan: Technology geek and creator of the Titan robot suit.

Traitor: A dishonored martial artist who turned to villainy.

Briareus, Drill-Bit, Mind Master, Scanner, Sizzler, Tai (Nosferatu) all appear in ***School of Hard Knocks***, from Steve Jackson Games.

Dark Seraph can be found in the Champions 4e supplement ***Classic Enemies***.

DENIER (CONTINUED)

400	**Matching Complications (75)**
15	Distinctive Features: Demonic Being (Easily Concealed; Extreme Reaction; Detectable By Commonly-Used Senses)
15	Hunted: (Campaign City) Police Department (Frequently, Less Powerful, NCI, Harshly Punish)
15	Hunted: Strike Force (Infrequently, More Powerful, Harshly Punish)
10	Psychological Complication: Fond Of Sizzler (Common; Moderate)
10	Psychological Complication: Hates Handicapped People (Uncommon; Strong)
15	Psychological Complication: Loves To Corrupt The Innocent (Common; Strong)
15	Psychological Complication: Vengeful (Common; Strong)
15	Social Complication: Secret Identity (Jason Lazarus) (Frequently, Major)
5	Unluck: 1d6
10	Vulnerability: 2 x STUN from Mental Blasts (Uncommon)
10	Vulnerability: 2 x Effect from Mind Scan (Uncommon)

Total Complications Points: 75
Experience Points: 334

LADY POWER

Present at the first Strike Force adventure, Lady Power been a constant thorn in the heroes' sides ever since.

Background/History: Formerly a petty crook, Lady Power encountered Overlord early in his career, when she was still simply Megan Joanna Glenleven, and he was just formalizing his plans for world domination. Swearing to be his faithful companion in return for power and money, Overlord took Megan back to his Lair, and gave her the power she wished for. His treatments made her superhumanly strong and nearly invulnerable; in turn, she bore him a son, Morgan.

Lady Power brought Morgan up to be her pawn in her constant machinations for power. She vied constantly with Prism for Overlord's affections and attentions, and felt Morgan (a.k.a. Power Lord) would be the perfect vehicle to prove her superiority. To this end, she pressured Power Lord, who like his mother was greedy and twisted (and not the smartest of individuals to boot) to follow in his father's footsteps and take up the mantle of supervillainy.

LADY POWER

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
60	STR	50	21-	Lift 102.4 tons; 12d6 HTH Damage [6]
20	DEX	20	13-	
28	CON	18	15-	
10	INT	0	11-	PER Roll 11-
20	EGO	10	13-	
23	PRE	13	14-	PRE Attack: 4 ½d6
7	OCV	20		
7	DCV	20		
7	OMCV	12		
7	DMCV	12		
5	SPD	30		*Phases:* 3, 5, 8, 10, 12
20	PD	18		*Total:* 49 PD (29 rPD)
15	ED	13		*Total:* 44 ED (29 rED)
18	REC	14		
56	END	8		
10	BODY	0		
54	STUN	17		**Total Characteristic Cost: 275**

Movement:		
	Running:	12m
	Flight:	40m
	Leaping:	24m
	Swimming:	4m
	Teleportation:	20m

LADY POWER (CONTINUED)

Cost	Powers	END
	Scoff-Granted Powers; all slots Unified Power (-¼)	
64	1) *Flame Blast:* Blast 16d6; Unified Power (-¼)	8
60	2) *Drain Magic I:* Drain Magic 3d6, Any One Magic Power At A Time (+½), Invisible Power Effects (Fully Invisible; +1); Unified Power (-¼)	7
71	3) *Drain Magic II:* Drain Magic 2d6, All Magic Powers Simultaneously (+4), Area Of Effect (personal Surface—Damage Shield; +¼), Constant (+½), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); No Range (-½), Unified Power (-¼)	
48	4) *Force Field:* Resistant Protection (20 PD/20 ED); Unified Power (-¼)	
36	5) *Multi-Planar Travel:* Extra-Dimensional Movement (Any Dimension, Any Location), x16 Increased Weight, Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼); May Travel Only With Scoff's Permission (-1), Unified Power (-¼)	3
66	6) *Unaided Flight:* Flight 40m, x16 Noncombat, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); Unified Power (-¼)	
40	7) *Be There When Scoff Needs Her:* Teleportation 20m, x16 Increased Mass, MegaScale (1m = 100,000 km; +2 ¼); Only To/From Scoff Summoning Sites (-2), Unified Power (-¼)	13
18	8) *Mutable Form:* Shape Shift (Sight Group, max of four shapes), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼), Persistent (+¼), Usable Simultaneously (up to 2 people at once; +½); Unified Power (-¼)	1
21	9) *Mutable Form:* Shrinking (0.25 m tall, 0.1953 kg mass, -6 PER Rolls to perceive character, +6 DCV, takes +18m KB), Persistent (+¼), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); Linked (Mutable Form; -¼), Unified Power (-¼)	
21	10) *Detect Scoff Invitees:* Detect Scoff Invitee 14- (no Sense Group), Discriminatory, Increased Arc Of Perception (360 Degrees), Sense, Telescopic +16; Unified Power (-¼)	
34	*Hard To Hurt:* Resistant Protection (9 PD/9 ED), Hardened (+¼)	
10	*Powerful Leaper:* Leaping +20m (24m forward, 12m upward)	1
	Talents	
6	Striking Appearance +2/+2d6	
22	Universal Translator 13-	
	Skills	
30	+3 with All Attacks	
3	Persuasion 14-	
4	PS: Priestess Of Scoff 13-	
3	Stealth 13-	

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 558
Total Cost: 832

400	**Matching Complications (75)**	
15	Distinctive Features: Demonic and Fiery Form (Concealable; Always Noticed and Causes Major Reaction; Detectable By Commonly-Used Senses)	
15	Psychological Complication: Avaricious (Very Common; Moderate)	
15	Psychological Complication: Chaotic (Very Common; Moderate)	
15	Psychological Complication: Loves And Obeys Scoff (Very Common; Moderate)	
20	Psychological Complication: Obsessed With Her Son Morgan (Common; Total)	
15	Social Complication: Public Identity (Megan Joanna Glenleven) (Frequently, Major)	

Total Complications Points: 75
Experience Points: 432

However, Power Lord was far from ready for such a step, and his first mission—an attack on Strike Force headquarters—ended with him in prison. Then, to make matters even worse, Ichi-ban, a mystically powered member of Strike Force, managed to murder Power Lord in his cell.

The event pretty much unhinged Lady Power. When Overlord declined to pursue Ichi-ban (and the rest if Strike Force), Lady Power took it on herself to seek revenge. She left Overlord and managed to call upon the extra-dimensional being known as Scoff. She offered herself as his servant, if only he gave her the power to find and destroy Ichi-ban.

It was at this point her personal madness and villainy tripped her up. Scoff had appeared in his normal form—complete with bat-like wings and horns—and had yet to identify himself by name, allowing Lady Power to believe that he was some devilish being out of Judeo-Christian beliefs. Thus, when he began to layout his terms for her service, he started to say, *"And you shall serve me—"* At this point, Lady Power interrupted, completing the sentence with: *"I know. Throughout all eternity."*

Scoff then gave everything Lady Power had asked for, but blithely left her comment stand as part of her terms of service, instead of substituting his usual two-century length time period. While he doesn't intend to keep Lady Power as a servant through eternity, he has no intention of releasing her from her oaths of service until he is satisfied that she is no longer a danger to herself or those Scoff cares about... whether that takes a mere fifty years, two centuries, six centuries, or longer.

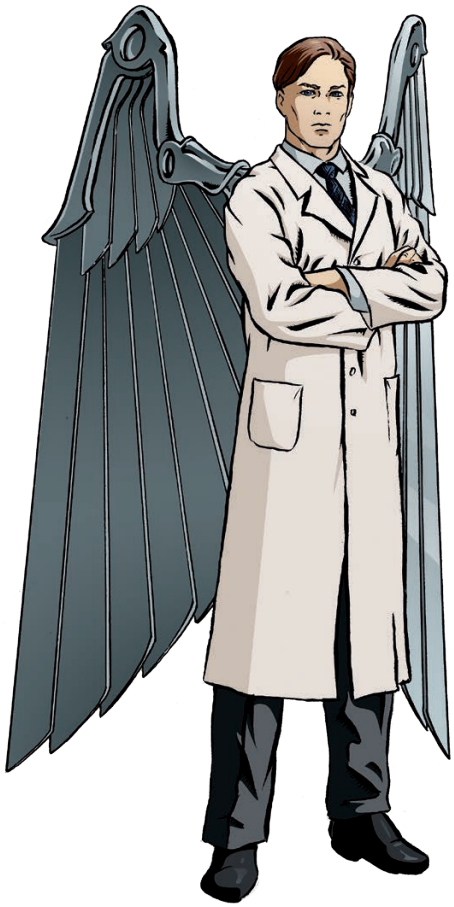
Personality/Motivation: There are a number of adjectives one could use to describe Lady Power, but for the most part she's bitter, greedy, and wicked. She desires power, be it personal (in both physical prowess and the ability to control others) or material (in the form of wealth and luxuries). On top of that, she hates Ichi-ban with a passion and almost certainly will never forgive him for the death of Power Lord. She also despises Luster, mainly because she is Prism's daughter but also because of her involvement in Strike Force.

Interestingly, her time with Scoff has caused Lady Power to look back on her life. She has begun to question her contributions to Power Lord's upbringing and how she drove him to be petty and evil. That said, she's still plotting to bear a new son, presumably to bring him up "properly" this time. She's thought about using Overlord as the father (perhaps via time travel), or traveling to Earth-Kaiser and seducing the Warlord.

Powers/Tactics: Initially, Lady Power possessed immense physical strength and a general immunity to most harm. Now that she's been transformed by Scoff, she has a whole suite of "demonic" powers to call upon. She tends to use these to bedevil and harass magical heroes. She will shape-shift into an innocuous form, drain their magical powers away, then attack. As she's extremely hard to hurt when all of her defenses are active, she won't flee a fight all that quickly, unless heavily outnumbered or outmatched.

Campaign Use: Lady Power can be used in a number of ways. For example, if you use the villain option for Overlord, she could still be with him (although you'd want to remove all of her Scoff-Granted Powers. As written, she's an agent of Scoff, sent to do his bidding (although she may go above and beyond his orders as she sees fit). You could also use her as an independent villain and could even keep her Scoff-Granted Powers by swapping "Scoff" for some other mystic power from your campaign.

Appearance: Lady Power stands 5'10" and weighs a slender 140 pounds. Her hair is blonde and her eyes are brown. There are small demonic-looking horns on her brow. Her costume consists of dark red boots and bodystocking that leaves her face bare. She also wears gold gloves, gold leggings, and a gold sash at the waist. When she was with Overlord, the colors matched his power suit—green and gold.



Driven mad by the Governor's interference, the Producer has since made a name for himself as a masterful creator of artificial life forms.

Background/History: The Producer was born Zachariah Albritton in 1888, growing up to be a brilliant doctor and biochemist. In the 1930s, he stumbled on the secrets of artificial life and created several android heroes during the 1940s and 1950s (such as Jack Straw, mentioned on page 21).

However, because of the Governor's interference with scientific development (see page 12), Albritton could never convince the scientific community of his deeds and his genius. He was mocked and ridiculed, until, in the late 1950s, his mind snapped. No longer able to deal with the humiliation, he committed suicide by guillotine. But one of his creations, the robotic hero Radiance, realized Albritton's genius couldn't be allowed to be lost. Using an experimental device of Albritton's, Radiance captured the man's memory and brain patterns. The robot then labored for a decade or so, using Albritton's own techniques to create an imperishable body.

Amazingly, the operation was a success; the data that constituted the memory and personality of Dr. Albritton survived the transition into his android body. The only problem was that once restored to life, Albritton was still crazy. He no longer wished to batter his head against the ivory towers of the

THE PRODUCER

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
30	STR	20	15-	Lift 1600 kg; 6d6 HTH Damage [3]
18	DEX	16	13-	
23	CON	13	14-	
33	INT	23	16-	PER Roll 16-
18	EGO	8	13-	
18	PRE	8	13-	PRE Attack: 3 ½d6
6	OCV	15		
6	DCV	15		
6	OMCV	9		
6	DMCV	9		
6	SPD	40		*Phases:* 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12
6	PD	4		*Total:* 21 PD (15 rPD)
4	ED	2		*Total:* 13 ED (9 rED)
11	REC	7		
46	END	6		
18	BODY	8		
45	STUN	13		**Total Characteristic Cost: 215**

Movement:	Running:	12m
	Flight:	40m
	Leaping:	12m
	Swimming:	4m

THE PRODUCER (CONTINUED)

Cost	Powers	END
9	*Psionic Shields:* Mental Defense (9 points total)	
45	*Reinforced Android Body:* Resistant Protection (15 PD/9 ED), Hardened (+¼)	
27	*Foldable Wings:* Flight 40m; Restrainable (-½)	4
4	*Android Legs:* Leaping +8m (12m forward, 6m upward)	
29	*Android Body:* LS (Immunity to all terrestrial poisons and diseases; Safe in High Pressure, High Radiation, Intense Cold and Heat, Low Pressure/Vacuum; Self-Contained Breathing)	
48	*Self-Repair Systems:* Regeneration (3 BODY per Turn)	
	Perks	
100	Bases in Cannes, Hollywood, New York City, Tokyo: Five Bases Built On 100 Points Each	
35	*Dan:* one Follower built on a 175-point base	
60	*Army Of Androids And Robots:* roughly 32 more Followers built on a 175-point base (or more, as you see fit)	
15	Money: Filthy Rich	
	Talents	
3	Absolute Range Sense	
3	Absolute Time Sense	
3	Ambidexterity (no Off Hand penalty)	
3	Bump Of Direction	
3	Lightning Calculator	
	Skills	
3	Computer Programming 16-	
3	Electronics 16-	
3	Inventor 16-	
4	KS: Public Figures and Movie Stars/Characters 17-	
5	KS: The Superhero World 14-	
3	Mechanics 16-	
3	PS: Medical Doctor 16-	
3	Paramedics 16-	
3	Systems Operation 16-	
4	TF: Common Motorized Ground Vehicles, Science Fiction & Space Vehicles	
3	Scientist	
3	1) SS: Artificial Life 17-	
2	2) SS: Biochemistry 16-	
2	3) SS: Biology 16-	
2	4) SS: Medicine 16-	

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 434
Total Cost: 648

400	**Matching Complications (75)**	
15	Hunted: Strike Force (Infrequently, Mo Pow; Harshly Punish)	
20	Psychological Complication: Doesn't Understand The Consequences Of His Creations—Thinks Everything Is Just A Movie (Very Common; Strong)	
15	Psychological Complication: Enamored Of Cinema (Common; Strong)	

Total Complications Points: 75
Experience Points: 248

scientific community. He wished only to live a happy, colorful, musical life, like that seen in the movies. And with that, the movies became his obsession. He began using his genius to create android duplicates of people (and monsters) he saw in the movies and on the television—the more ridiculous, the better. Having created something lovely, he would release it into the world. And if the creation was dangerous, superheroes inevitably had to deal with it.

The Producer, as Albritton soon called himself, plagued Strike Force (and the rest of the world) with giant Japanese lizards, 1930s through 50s movie monsters, hulking Italian swordsmen from sword-and-sandal fantasy films, alien invaders, and much more. At the same time, he also helped the team; during the TkTk Horde invasion, he created an authentic network news studio (populated with famous anchorpersons) and faked the broadcast which convinced the TkTk that their technology offer was being rejected.

For a long time, the Producer supported his operations by creating special-purpose and super-powered androids for various crime cartels. His work was good, and he earned incredible fees. However, following World War III, he decided he wanted to get away from Earth and create his own paradise—by colonizing the exoplanet he named "Paradise." He remains there still, having created an extensive society of androids to keep him company.

Personality/Motivation: First and foremost, the Producer is crazy, but not evil. His biggest problem is that he simply doesn't remember that his actions and creations can hurt people. He doesn't seem to understand this the world around him is not a movie, and that once the director calls "cut" the victims don't just get back up and go about their lives.

The Producer is a huge fan of the movies and public figures; so heroes finding his bases often find android duplicates of important persons about. Such as: the Princess of Wales as his social secretary; roundtable political discussions between Plato, Marx, Teddy Roosevelt, and Kublai Khan; and new movies being filmed with a wish-list of actors who lived at different times, many of them now dead.

Once he moved to Paradise, the Producer seemed to regain some of his sanity (not all of it, just some of it). At the very least he became a bit more approachable, and helped several members of Strike Force either repair and improve their android bodies or gain totally new ones.

Powers/Tactics: As an android himself, the Producer has a tough, resilient body but aside from his enhanced strength has no real attack powers. With his sciences, however, he can create anything he wishes to, up to super-beings which only whole superhero teams can handle. If he needs to perform a specific task, he can create a specially-designed android to do it. His androids range from very simple things with accelerated aging and no intelligence (some are water-soluble), to practically undetectable lifeforms, fully living and inter-fertile with normal human beings.

Campaign Use: The Producer is a good opportunity for a comedy adventure. The adventure goes something like this: the Producer sees a wonderful new science fiction, disaster, fantasy, or horror movie, discovers something that interests him, recreates it in his lab, and unleashes it on the city, having a camera-crew follow the action while the hapless heroes try to fix things. The Producer himself is never seen (he uses the android Dan, his messenger); if he is actually captured, you can have him transfer his consciousness to another android body in another base. The Producer can also be the origin of a superhero's power. Pity the poor hero who discovers that he's not a mutant after all, but a recently-constructed android with false memories and no past….

The values given for the Producer's Bases and Followers are really just suggestions. He should have whatever type of Base and/or Followers (which can include 400-point base supers) you wish. In the original version of Strike Force, Aaron noted that "… the Producer has two 1,000-point agents. One week they can be can be 1,000-point monsters, the next week they can be hordes of 100-pointers."

Appearance: The Producer looks amazingly average, standing just over six feet in height, and weighing a lean and lanky 150 pounds. His appears to be around 40 or so, with brown hair and blue eyes. He normally wears ordinary street clothes and a lab smock. His shirts and smocks have slits in the back so that he may extend his wings (normally worn flat against his back) when he wishes to fly.

Dan: Dan is the Producer's favorite messenger, as crazy as the Producer himself. He is the one who delivers the news of the Producer's latest experiment to the heroes (though he doesn't always do so in time for the heroes to forestall disaster). He is also the one the heroes find in the Producer's headquarters, the one who delivers the Producer's products to buyers, and so on.

The Producer keeps Dan's personality and memories in a storage device, creating a new Dan body for every errand; these bodies often self-destruct in bizarre fashions when their missions are accomplished.

Dan is overly dramatic (sometimes melodramatic) and theatrical in his mannerisms and presentation of news, products, and speeches. He normally dresses in a top hat and tails, but may wear a different outfit depending on the location (such as a shirt open to navel and gold spoon on a chain around his neck while in Hollywood).

Dan stands 6'3" and weighs a skinny 140 pounds. His eyes and hair are black.

Typical Producer Creations Include:

Cute Cartoon Critters: Appear in masses of never less than ten at a time. They are cute, harmless, fun little monsters, who go on rampages through shopping malls, lecturing children on good citizenship while running amok through toy-sections and candy-stores. Capable of turning invisible and teleporting.

Giant Japanese Lizard: The Producer usually releases this near some major residential area. Not cute, not harmless. Of giant size, it's hard to hurt, breathes fire, and tends to disintegrate or shrink to a harmless 2" in height when exposed to some common substance or treatment (such as ink, radiation, oil & vinegar dressing, water, and so on).

Ghost-Chasers: These are cute but not-so-harmless high-tech super-agents who charge around combatting imaginary spooks, hitting on beautiful women, and participating in strange dialogue. Have armored jumpsuits and blaster weapons capable of hitting intangible targets.

Gladiators: These are fun-loving fighters who run amok, harmlessly bashing on one another while tearing through bars, coliseums, costume parties, red-light districts, taverns, and so on. Their mouths move in Italian but English comes out. Strong, fast, powerful, armed with swords, armored in Roman-style cuirass and a shield.

Zombies: Pseudo-undead creatures who show up en masse, invade pizza parlors and other restaurants, ordering the most disgusting-looking foods on the menu from the terrified restaurant operators, and then rampage through downtown eating their meals. (Don't hurt anyone directly but cause numerous accidents.) Dissolve when captured.

...and others, similarly disturbed, as they occur to you.

DAN

10	STR	15	DEX	18	CON	20	INT	15	EGO
15	PRE	5	OCV	5	DCV	5	OMCV	5	DMCV
4	SPD	8	PD	8	ED	6	REC	36	END
8	BODY	22	STUN						

Abilities: Running +8m (20m total); Conversation 14-; other Powers and Skills as The Producer sees fit.

175 **Matching Complications (50):**
Psychological Complication: Loyal To The Producer (Very Common, Total);
Psychological Complication: Overly Theatrical In Manners And Presentation (Very Common, Moderate).

STRIKE FORCE TESTIMONIALS

I first met Aaron Allston in the pages of The Space Gamer *magazine. When I met him face-to-face at a convention in Texas we hit it off pretty well and he shared with me the history of his Champions campaign, which had the distinctive concept that everything in the comics was true, including the dates of first appearance. This leaves the modern super heroing to the new Champions characters because the old guys, even the Silver Agers, are getting long in the tooth. This shows up in* **Strike Force***, but the descriptions had to have all the appropriate serial numbers filed off to avoid unpleasant visits from the Marvel and DC lawyers.*

I immediately adopted this approach for my ongoing campaign and variations on it for other campaigns with both **Champions** *and other games like* **Mutants and Masterminds**. *The history of what I modestly call the Perrin-verse can be found on my website.*

Aaron was an innovator with games and fiction. Everything he touched provided new ideas for games and some of his fiction creations were gobsmackers even without the gaming utility. One of his first novels dealt with a young artist whose portraits came to life and raised interesting questions on just what was meant by "life," some of the questions have ramifications untouched in the novel. I was always sorry there was not a sequel to further dive into whether the artist just imbued the pictures with animation, or they were truly life.

Aaron died entirely too soon. There was so much more just waiting to be expressed. We all still miss him.

—Steve Perrin

I came to Aaron Allston's classic Champions supplement, **Strike Force***, late in my gaming life. (In truth, I had read his enchanting hero pulp/fantasy pastiche novel* **Doc Sidhe** *long before I found a copy of* **Strike Force**.*) However, no matter how late to the party I was, when I finally had a copy in my hands, it changed my life... And I don't think that's overselling its effect.*

As You Know (or Soon Will Know), Bob: **Strike Force** *essentially details Allston's long-running tabletop superhero campaign. He details things like PC and NPC stats and write-ups, locations, house rules, and potential plots, just like every other game supplement out there to that point. That's when things take a turn for the Awesome.*

Allston talks to the reader as a peer GM, which is fairly heady at the time. No real handing down advice from a mountaintop, but as just another dude running a campaign. He talks a bunch about what I've come to call "running the table": managing the conversation and actions of several real-life people sitting around a table, engaging their imaginations collaboratively—it's a field ripe with the potential for hurt feelings and acting out like an ass. Some of his house rules (like "bluebooking") stem directly from protecting his players from embarrassment, as well as adding a layer of storytelling "behind the curtain" such that players could portray their characters without out-of-character knowledge. He also discusses what happens when players move away or want to change up the character they're playing, when the overall desires of the players (including the GM) for what sort of game they're playing are at odds, and what happens when the group is too big or too small.

He also delves into what improv actors call "reincorporation"—folding back in developments, events, and desires that happened in play. At the most basic level, he showed how PCs and NPCs "spent their points" of a period of time, but he also picks up dropped plot threads or happenings, and reweaves those stray strings back into the current events of what was happening that day or night at the table.

Lastly, Allston does this in an easy, conversational (but still deeply experienced) manner. It's like talking to an older (but not much older), wiser (but not much wiser) buddy about what worked and didn't work in his last campaign.

Strike Force *is gold, and gold tripped over unexpectedly. I know that I had been gaming and GMing for a couple decades before reading it, and seeing his outline of What Happened in His Game helped me find the words and patterns of things I myself had been doing the whole time in a vacuum. Allston planted a flag and established a reference point for having conversations about what actually happens around a tabletop RPG session and group, and in a way that has always (and still!) often gotten short shrift outside of GM-only reference material, usually a chapter in a book or less.*

So, preliminaries over, here's the payoff on my statement above on how **Strike Force** *changed my life: After the release of* **Truth & Justice** *in 2005, I ran a fairytale campaign for a couple of friends. It was a really good campaign; one of the best I've ever run. One of my players started urging me to publish the campaign.* "I'd hate to have the campaign and setting never see the light of day," *he said. I wasn't sure that there was enough for an entire book, other than the very short sketch of a setting that I'd sent out as a game prospectus. The players both suggested I look at a lot of Actual Play reports online, as well as an old Champions supplement called* **Strike Force** *as a template for what might work. Seemed like it was worth checking out, so I did.*

Maybe I could produce a slim book providing a description of how our campaign came together: how ideas were incorporated into the game, how adventures were developed, and how characters and plots formed. The book would have information on a setting, yes, but unlike most RPG books (but very much like **Strike Force***!), it could have "behind the GM's screen" type notes on how I assembled the system and setting elements, how the player characters (PCs) interpreted and altered them, and what the players thought of all this!*

In 2006, I published **The Zorcerer of Zo**. *It was a labor of love, that has continued to reward me ever since. In-and-of itself, it was a successful gaming product: people liked it. As part of my work and portfolio (writing and publishing), it was the first time I felt really satisfied and proud of the finished work. As part of my professional life, it opened doors and made connections (long-running friendships, even!) with other industry peers. And, publishing ZoZ the RPG eventually led to my first non-gaming publication in January 2014: a collection of fairy tales—mostly by me but with tales from others to both thicken and richen the volume—***Tales of Zo***.*

In all honesty and seriousness, 2013 was a terrible year for me, and getting **Tales of Zo** *published just in time for 2014 probably kept me alive. I could finally say I was a published fiction author, and that was an important life-goal I had never yet achieved. In the looming, threatening darkness of my life then, ToZ was a flickering candle that kept me breathing, walking around, and somewhat sane (well... whatevs; you know what I mean—"sane" for me). Flatly, ToZ wouldn't exist without* **Strike Force**. *Transitively, and with only a touch of hyperbole, I wouldn't exist today without* **Strike Force**.

I never got to meet Aaron in real-life. There was a close call at an Origins or a Gen Con, probably 2010; if I recall correctly, Steve Kenson was going to introduce me to Aaron, but plans and timing fell through as they often due in the joyful chaos of a convention where you're pushing a new product. I regretted that for many years, but it only stings a little today. I was blessed by Aaron Allston's words and work, and that continues today. That man not only gave me a fish, he taught me to fish, and for that, I will be forever grateful.

—Chad Underkoffler

It wasn't long after we published **Champions** *in 1981 that Hero Games got a call from Aaron Allston, who was then editor of* The Space Gamer *at Steve Jackson Games. He told us that the game had more or less taken over their gaming sessions and they were enjoying it immensely. We were flattered that the folks at SJG loved our game, and we found ourselves in regular communication with Aaron (who quickly became known as "not a Champions guru!" after a few incidents he had with his gaming group).*

Eventually, we ended up working with Aaron on multiple projects, such as **Autoduel Champions**, *the crossover between Car Wars and Champions. When I discovered that Aaron loved the pulps and the pulp era as much or more than I did, we began planning Justice Inc. with fellow pulp addict Michael Stackpole (a regular contributor at Flying Buffalo Games). As it turns out, two of the three Justice Inc. authors have gone on to become New York Times best-selling authors. I hope it's only a matter of time before I join that illustrious company.*

Aaron's contributions to Hero Games were many, but the crowning achievement (aside from my personal love for his Justice Inc. campaign supplement **Lands of Mystery***) has to be* **Strike Force**. *So many people told us that this book changed not just their own game play, but their entire view of roleplaying – what it could be, and perhaps what it should be. Aaron's vast creative powers were shown through* **Strike Force**, *and it still stands as one of the great works of all roleplaying games, not just for Champions.*

I'm proud to have published **Strike Force**, *and the other great products Aaron created for us. It's wonderful to see* **Strike Force** *return, and with a vast amount of additional material. I hope it brings even more enlightenment and joy to a new generation of roleplayers.*

Aaron was a good friend, even though we didn't get to see each other often. He lives on in the many creative works he left for us, from his exceptional roleplaying books for multiple games to his engaging science fiction and fantasy stories. I still keep his phone number in my contacts list, because somewhere in my heart I think maybe, just maybe, if I try that number someday I will hear that laconic voice once again: "Allston." Until then, my friend, we will celebrate your memory through this greatest of your works: **Strike Force**.

—Steve Peterson

I remember when I first met Aaron Allston. This was back in 1991, at the Origins Game Fair.

I was working on **Western Hero**, *the first big tabletop roleplaying game book I'd ever written on my own, cover to cover. It was a supplement for the HERO System for games set in the Old West. (My expertise in that genre later led to me helping Shane Hensley bring* **Deadlands** *into the world.) Rob Bell—now a member of the Virginia House of Delegates—was the first editor on the book, until Monte Cook—now in charge of Monte Cook Games—took over in 1990.*

Back in those days, Origins moved around from year to year, and 1991 found us at the convention center in downtown Baltimore, the city where the show had been founded in 1975. I walked into the attached hotel's lobby and immediately got drawn into a group of game designers kicking back and catching up before the show began. That crew included long-time Hero Games luminaries like Steve Peterson, George MacDonald, Bruce Harlick, Ray Greer, and Mike Stackpole, along with Monte.

And, of course, Aaron.

Iron Crown Enterprises published the Champions and HERO System books at that time, taking over those responsibilities from the Hero Games team. Despite absorption into the larger whole, the original Heroes stuck together like a family that had moved to another country together, and in many ways, they never lost that cohesion.

When I sat down and said hello to the crew, they brought me in like I was the cousin they hadn't seen in ages. I'd known some of them for a few years, but now I was officially part of the team. They couldn't have been more welcoming, and Aaron played a huge part in that.

Every time I ran into Aaron in later years, it always felt like catching up with a favorite cousin you hadn't seen in far too long. He was always full of good cheer, curious about the world and what I was doing in it, and full of brilliant observations and—as the older cousin—sharp advice.

If you know Aaron—whether from his books or, if you were so fortunate, in person—you know how damn funny he was. Always quick with a quip or a wry remark, he could get me chuckling right alongside him in a matter of moments, no matter how rotten or crazy my day.

I treasured that about him far more than his games or books: his ripe sense of humor that constantly burst forth fresh fun. Of course, those written words are now all we have left of him, other than our memories, which are always too faulty, too biased, and too human. **Strike Force** *was one of his seminal works—something that bears his fingerprints on every pages—and it's fitting we return to it now and use it to remember him and his genius as well as we can.*

—Matt Forbeck

THE STRIKE FORCE METHOD

My name is Ross Watson, and I almost never imagined I would be here, writing the introduction to the Game Mastering chapter of **Aaron Allston's Strike Force**. This is a demanding task—Aaron's initial Strike Force chapter on running a campaign back in 1988 profoundly affected me as a Game Master. Now, I'm adapting Aaron's own words for a new generation of gamers.

This section of the book is an all-star team-up effort by some very talented designers (and Game Masters in their own right); myself, Sean Patrick Fannon, and Steve Kenson. All of us are deeply inspired by Aaron's work, and I've incorporated much of Aaron's own words into the manuscript as well. Together, we've built upon Aaron's legacy to bring you "the Strike Force Method."

This is the term we use for Aaron Allston's approach to running a successful long-term campaign. You'll find advice that fits just about any genre, any game, and nearly any group dynamic. Even if you find only a tenth of the advice in this section useful for your game, that's due to the lessons learned by Aaron over 22+ years of running games in his Strike Force campaign.

STARTING OUT: EXPECTATIONS AND GROUND RULES

"Across the years of playing, my players and I have run into a lot of interesting situations and difficult problems. Sometimes we've figured out how to solve them; sometimes we've figured out how to spot them ahead of time; sometimes we haven't been able to do a thing about them.

So let's discuss some of those situations, then talk about ways for you to apply the solutions when using Strike Force in your own campaign."

—Aaron Allston

One thing that Aaron taught me from the original Strike Force is the importance of discussing expectations for an RPG campaign. This not only means the Game Master's expectations for the players, but also what the players expect to get out of the campaign. As Aaron himself points out (see page 220), different players want different things out of the game!

When starting out an RPG campaign, especially one that you'd like to carry on for a while, it is important for the Game Master to get the word out to his players about his expectations. A simple way to accomplish this is to simply circulate an e-mail or other campaign document outlining a few of the main themes or tropes you'd like to explore in the campaign. Getting your players to understand and buy in to your expectations from the start is a great way to begin your campaign.

For example, with Strike Force, Aaron established a set of "ground rules" that illustrated the tropes and themes that he expected would come up during the campaign. His approach was to focus on player character behaviors, and illustrate some acceptable and unacceptable examples. Below, you'll find Aaron's own words on the subject:

The Ground Rules

In the course of the campaign, the players and GM will have to decide on its "ground rules"—the codes of behavior the GM expects from the PCs and the opportunities the PCs expect of the GM. You see real problems in a campaign where the GM provides no guidance as to what the ground rules are, and the PCs find that their own codes of behavior clash with one another and the GM. You also see problems when the GM wants to establish a particular ground rule, and the players don't agree with it.

Following are some of the areas for which ground rules need to be established:

Lethality

In your campaign, is the violence of the Comics Code Authority Variety (mostly Normal Damage attacks, very few Killing Attacks, very few deaths), of the Graphic Novel Variety (an even mix of Normal Damage and Killing Damage attacks, moderate to high death tolls among nameless villain agents and soldiers, moderate death tolls among named villains, occasional death among PCs), or the No Kid Gloves Variety (lots of Killing Attacks, high-powered Normal Attacks, indiscriminate slaughter of all types of characters)? The GM should ask each player what he expects the violence level of the campaign to be, then decide what that level will be and announce it to the players so that there are no mistaken impressions. The Strike Force campaign hovers between the Comics Code and Graphic Novel levels, leaning toward the latter.

Relations with the Authorities

The hero-team can either be Allied with the Authorities (act as special law enforcement authorities), Indifferent to the Authorities (cooperating with the law sometimes, having to elude it other times, usually operating from secret bases), or Hunted by the Authorities (hero-team regarded as criminals and avidly pursued by the law). If the players actively dislike one of these choices, the GM should not choose it as the basis for his campaign. Strike Force falls in the category of Allied With the Authorities; the Shadow Warriors are Indifferent to the Authorities.

Trustworthiness

In some campaigns, characters start off with an irrational distrust of one another. Though they all risk their lives in the same cause, they keep their identities secret from one another and treat one another with suspicion. If you like this, then such behavior is fine. If not, then both the players and GM must work to correct it. It's helpful if NPC heroes, including members of the PCs' team, are more trusting; if an NPC team member doesn't conceal his Secret ID from his allies, then the PCs will probably respond in kind. Also, there's the question of the trustworthiness of the authorities and villains. If the heroes are tricked and betrayed by the legal authorities every time they encounter them, the heroes will be paranoid and suspicious, and rightfully so. If, on the other hand, the authorities are always trustworthy, they will be relied on more heavily. Most campaigns have a mix of law enforcement trustworthiness; some authorities are good guys and some are bad guys. With villains, you can either choose for the bad guys to be consistently treacherous or have many who are treacherous and some who are honorable.

If the GM ever wants to have heroes cooperate with villains in dire circumstances, he'd better establish early on that some villains keep their promises; otherwise, the PCs will be too suspicious ever to cooperate with them, even if it costs their lives or leads to the destruction of the world. The Strike Force campaign features an even mix of authority trustworthiness (they learn to trust certain specific persons in government, and to distrust others) and has featured several villains with whom the heroes can cooperate and many with whom they can't.

Negotiations

On a related topic, we have the problem of Negotiations. Let's say a villain grabs a DNPC and declares, "Either I get away or Nell Darling dies." Will the heroes negotiate? In some campaigns, they won't. They attack. Often, the GM, not wishing to see Nell die, lets them be successful—which only encourages the characters not to negotiate in the future.

Conversely, in some campaigns, the heroes allow themselves to be walked on—they'll give the villain their foci, a getaway vehicle, the keys to the HQ, and a bag full of money if only the villain will let Nell go. In your own campaign, you can decide how these things will be resolved. If you're playing a high-action campaign which places little value on life, don't worry about negotiations. But if you're playing a more traditional campaign, then some negotiations should be necessary. At that point, if the players refuse to negotiate, that's their choice—but they should suffer the consequences, such as being responsible for the deaths of innocents. If the players give up too much, they should gain reputations as easy marks. To strike a balance, the characters should learn to negotiate where necessary to prevent the loss of life—and the GM has to show them how.

Captures

Here's a peculiarity of many role-playing campaigns: Some players would rather their characters die than ever be captured—even though the character has no such Psychological Complication. Why? Because players hate to lose—and being captured is certainly losing, even if temporarily. To counter this problem, the GM should tell his players that this is a superhero campaign and that some captures are inevitable. Then, later, he should perform the occasional capture—not too frequently, to avoid making the capture a hated plot element. Some of these captures should be of the "We didn't have a chance" variety—where the villain had a trap with powers targeted to each character's weakness, for instance. When captured, the heroes either (1) get a chance to break out of prison or (2) get put into deathtraps which they must escape.

Using the Strike Force Method

It stands as an update for those who enjoyed the original Strike Force supplement and want to know what has become of the characters described there.

It serves as a campaign world for game masters who want one—those who don't want to create a world from the ground up, those who want a detailed alternate universe for their existing characters to visit, etc.

It serves as an example for campaign-building; a game master can see what we addressed in the years spent building the Strike Force universe, can gauge what we did right and what we did wrong, as a sort of template for creating a new campaign, whether or not he or she uses any specific item from the Strike Force campaign.

It acts as a resource for game masters who want to use its components rather than its entirety. A GM can extract characters, headquarters, vehicles, and story concepts from these pages and introduce them piecemeal into his or her own campaign.

Other Methods of Establishing Expectations

Another way to talk to your players about your expectations (and theirs!) for the upcoming campaign is to schedule a social event where you can discuss it face-to-face (this is sometimes called "Session Zero"). This can be as simple as going out to dinner or arranging for your first gaming session to be a round-table discussion. Ensure that every player gets a chance to be heard, and double-check before everyone heads home that they understand what you'd like to do in the upcoming game.

You can also try a cooperative method of generating the campaign's main themes, tropes, and even elements like settings or villains! This approach is well-represented by games such as **The Dresden Files**, where the group cooperatively creates the setting with the Game Master. Perhaps your players have a particular enemy they'd like to encounter, a group they'd like to challenge, or some mentors they would like their characters to learn from.

In any of these discussions, candor is important. It is not helpful for you or for the players to simply say "whatever you want is fine." If you're having trouble getting any specific feedback, ask your players to rank an idea on a scale of 1-10, or to organize things in order of most favorite to least favorite. There are really no wrong answers, and getting to know what drives your players is a powerful tool for a Game Master to fully engage those players into the campaign and weave their expectations into a story that all of you have collectively built.

Communication: More than "Roll to Hit"

By Sean Patrick Fannon

It all seems so simple and obvious at first glance—of course you have to communicate in order to have an effective roleplaying campaign. Roleplaying requires interacting, both in and out of character, with other human beings. You have to tell the Game Master what your character is doing. You have to express to other players what your character is saying. Words must be exchanged in some way, or there simply is no game.

Why do we even need to talk about this?

Because if all you are doing is showing up, saying "I rolled a 12 to hit," and reporting how much damage you generate, you're missing the vast majority of what this experience should be for you and for everyone else at the table. You may as well be playing anything but an RPG if you're not investing a much greater level of personal engagement in the thing.

For a great many of us who were used to the basics of gaming, the original **Strike Force** opened up great vistas of new ideas and new thinking about the subject. Aaron asked us to examine the much greater opportunities a full campaign offers—opportunities for storytelling, for emotional connectivity, and for long-term engagement with something that could mean a lifetime of great memories and shared enjoyment with others.

What follows is not a treatise about just sitting down to play an RPG. Anyone can grab a character, some dice, and a few friends and get a game on. That's a great thing about this hobby, and many prefer a highly casual, catch-as-catch-can approach to roleplaying games. If you are interested in ensuring a truly involved and immersive long-term campaign experience, however, the road map in this section should help you achieve something far greater than the sum of its parts.

Note that the following is written from the perspective of you, the reader, being either a player or the Game Master in whatever campaign is planned. The information applies amply to either role.

Shall We Play a Game?

The best campaigns—the ones that make lasting impressions on all participants, possibly for a lifetime—involve a great deal of communication and interaction well before the first dice are rolled and the first scenes are described. Establishing the foundation of success requires a lot of planning and discussion among all potential participants, much as any long-term project demands of the group engaged in it.

If this sounds a bit like work... it is. A bit of involved effort at the outset of a campaign in the planning stages has clear rewards, and the more involvement a player invests, the greater those rewards are. The thing is, this work is play; the entire point of such involvement is establishing the imaginary truths of this fictional experience, which is exactly what the roleplaying activity is, at heart.

You're going to play pretend. You might as well start enjoying the opportunity to exercise your imagination right at the outset, alongside everyone else playing with you. The moment you decide to join a campaign, you have the chance to start living in that imaginary world right then, and you may as well share the fun beyond the instances where you sit down and dig out the dice.

What Are We Playing?

The very first conversation begins when someone decides there should be a game. More often than not, one of the folks in your social group offers to step up and be the Game Master. Alternately, you may find yourself joining a group in the earliest formation stages; a classic scenario is the person who puts a notice up at a local game store, or perhaps in a Meetup or similar scheduling site online, looking for players. In most cases, however, an established gathering of friends and associates coalesces with the desire to get a regular RPG session going, and the first discussions are at hand.

The easy part is agreeing there should be a game. What comes next sets the stage for the potential success or failure of the campaign, based on how much effort the players and GM exert at the outset. There are two general ways this can go, depending on what the would-be Game Master has in mind when they bring up the desire to run:

"So I've got this idea for a campaign I want to run." By far the most common situation, as most folks are motivated to delve into a particular game system, setting, or story when they are willing to take on the challenges of being a Game Master.

"I'm willing to run; what do you guys want to play?" Less common, but it does come up when the group, overall, really wants to play something and one of them decides to "step up" and put something together.

Before anyone starts talking about characters and story, the conversation should begin with establishing common ground on what the game is. If the ground is relatively familiar—a known game system everyone has experience with; an established setting you're all returning to—this part of the conversation will likely be a relatively short one. Still, there are details that everyone should be collectively clear on, no matter how well-trod this ground is.

There are many more potential problems when the campaign in the works is in a brand new setting, or the game to be played is a new set of rules for most or all of the participants. Without ample discussion at the start, everyone's going to be floundering and fumbling about, unsure about what's going on or how to accomplish anything. Most of the initial experience will be about working out how to play, and how to connect to the setting, with little actual immersion or sense of accomplishment.

A far better approach is to have a much more involved conversation with the GM and the other players about the game early on, before anyone's even decided what characters they wish to play. Such a conversation should include the following subjects:

What rules are we using? An obvious first step (though some may prefer to establish setting first, then figure out which rules best suit), a conversation about what rules to use is vital for reasons that bear a deeper consideration beyond the surface. The game rules are the language each participant uses to interface with the campaign. As much as many players may insist *"the rules don't really matter,"* this assertion is a disservice to everyone involved and can lead to real disaster for a campaign if allowed to stand. How a character in the game accomplishes certain kinds of tasks can (and should) impact the emotional experience the player has with that task. For example, if the campaign is one where interfacing with computer networks is meant to be a key component to overcoming challenges, the rules should reflect a robust and satisfying resolution system for such things that provides the players an exciting

sense of accomplishment. If the rules don't address such things in a way that will be fun and involving, the players and GM should examine whether or not they're the right rules for the campaign they want to start. Just because everyone knows a particular set of rules particularly well doesn't necessarily mean they are the right rules for the new campaign. Some time spent with this question will pay off high dividends.

What edition or version of the rules are we using? The state of the art changes for anything more than a few years old, and RPGs have been around since the 1970s. The most venerable game system in the world is now in its 5th edition, and many other established games have one or more new iterations under their belt. Though "edition wars" are hardly fun for anyone, a considerate and thoughtful discourse on which version the group is happiest with bears some time and effort. The latest and greatest may be appealing for a lot of folks, but if the GM isn't an early adopter and is more comfortable with a previous version, it may be best to not push them into changes that will hamper their comfort level. On the other hand, Game Masters shouldn't be too quick to push new rules onto their group until everyone's had a chance to truly explore them and get comfortable; it could be devastating (or at least consternating) to a campaign to dive into a brand new version of a game, only to discover no one's happy with the differences.

What changes to the rules is the GM planning? Just about everyone has their own house rules for a game, ways they want things to run that are just different than what's been published. Making sure everyone knows up front what changes to expect is not just polite, it could be vital to ensuring certain players aren't caught uncomfortably off guard with a total swerve on how something works. If a player plans their entire character around magic working in a particular way, only to discover the GM is using a completely different method for determining what spells are known, this violation of expectation will sour the entire campaign experience from that point forward.

What's the setting? This is that other obvious starting point for new campaign discussions. Very often, setting and rules go hand-in-hand... but not always, especially these days. There are plenty of game systems available that readily lend themselves to playing in any conceivable setting, whether one from beloved or popular media, or one of original crafting by a world-building Game Master. Other, designed-for-gaming settings are often presented for multiple game engines, and pretty much any setting can easily be reconceived for a different set of mechanics than those originally intended. Just as the rules establish the common language the players and GM will use to express their experiences in game, the setting establishes the stage upon which they will all perform these expressions.

What part of this setting are we going to focus on? Imaginary worlds are gargantuan places with nigh-infinite potential. Merely throwing the door open and saying "anything from here" is more likely to create analysis paralysis than encourage creativity and excitement. By narrowing the focus a bit, you can create a much more cohesive beginning experience for all the players. After all, if you were planning a Star Wars RPG campaign, you'd not expect your players to have a clue what to do if you merely say the words "Star Wars." What era are you playing within? What part of the galaxy is the campaign starting in? Similarly, "we're going to play in a Forgotten Realms campaign" doesn't tell your players anywhere near enough; they're going to want to know if they're dealing with Waterdeep, Cormyr, or Mulhorand, and they're also going to want to know when things are happening (to establish, among other things, which gods are alive or dead). A Game Master may already have much of this worked out, but they may also be open to players' desires here, which can make for a more collaborative experience right from the start.

Is this meant to be just a few sessions, or a long-term campaign? By definition, an RPG campaign is any number of connected game sessions, featuring the same characters in an ongoing story. This doesn't address how short or long a campaign may be, and such a discussion is best had before anyone starts working out any details about their characters. If players know, going in, that the GM is only planning a three-to-four session story arc, they will likely plan their character builds for maximum effectiveness over the short term. On the other hand, knowing a Game Master plans to have the campaign go on for a good long time, players will be more inclined towards a slower build, leaving lots of room for character growth in different directions. Similarly, planned campaign length will go a long way towards influencing how much time and effort players are willing to invest in things like back stories and other personal details. They will also tend to spend more time thinking about the stories they want to tell with their characters if they know they are going to have time and space in which to tell them.

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

Establishing the basics of the game is the beginning, but further communication promises much greater results for those willing to take the additional time. If you, as a player, bail out at this stage, it means you simply plan on showing up with a character and figuring out what's going on as the game gets started. Unfortunately, this also means you have no impact on the beginning story, nor does your character have much of a place in things at the outset. They're just a blip on the screen at game start, a means by which you can react to what the GM presents in the opening scenes, without any investiture in what came before that first day the rest of the group meets the character.

Better by far to share in whatever else the Game Master is willing to discuss and present as part of the upcoming campaign. As with pretty much all things, knowledge is power (or, as a famous cartoon repeatedly tried to teach us, *"knowing is half the battle"*). GMs will each have different thresholds of sharing they are comfortable with, but most will genuinely want their players to know quite a bit about the various elements planned for the campaign. More importantly, they will appreciate players having their own ideas to share about campaign elements, especially in terms of how their characters best tie into what's planned.

There are some key areas a Game Master needs to examine as they set up a campaign, and the more of this they share with their players, the better prepared everyone is to contribute to what is to come:

Themes: As with any fiction—literature, plays, movies, television, comics, etc.—the exploration of one or more themes should be central to the plotting and execution of the fiction. While it's possible to dive into a roleplaying campaign with little-to-no consideration for such matters, you very likely wind up with a far more scattered, untidy mess of adventures and scenarios. You also miss some real opportunities for a greater meaning and poignancy to the ongoing experience, as well as some powerful foundation points upon which to really build a greater, long-lasting shared story. These themes don't have to be heavy-handed, nor must they be overly complex or brain-busting. Classic concepts—good vs. evil; law vs. chaos; the triumph of the individual over tyranny; the ascension of humanity in the face of adversity—suffice to create a sense of greater purpose and meaning to the campaign's future. Not only is the Game Master better served by establishing these themes as part of their campaign structure early on, but sharing these ideas with the players establishes the greater expectations of story experience for all involved. Armed with such knowledge, players are better equipped not only to create their characters, but also to consider how they will approach the campaign in terms of how their character is impacted by such themes.

Plots: No Game Master wants to give away too much of the plot to the players, just as a writer tries to avoid tipping their hand to the reader before the right turn of page comes up. Still, for planning a campaign, things are a bit different than for other forms of fiction. The players are co-plotters in every sense of the word; the GM won't be writing the script for everything they say and do, instead leaving such things wholly in the hands of each player to do for their own protagonist. As co-creators of the shared fiction, then, it behooves the Game Master to ensure players are well aware of the kinds of plots they may anticipate in their storied future. Planning for internecine conspiracy-driven intrigue is a bit different than planning for unsubtle, smash-and-grab action scenarios, and the intended focus of the plots the GM has in mind will necessarily inform many decisions by the players. As with all matters of campaign communication, this is also an incredibly important part of establishing expectations for the players.

Conflicts: Story is driven by conflict, and RPG storytelling is almost always heavily driven by action and adventure driven conflict. When the Game Master and the players have a chance to discuss what kinds of conflicts are meant to be at the heart of the campaign, this greatly helps everyone plan for and have a strong anticipation of the stories ahead. This isn't merely about establishing who the Bad Guys are, either (though this is extremely helpful and can have a grand effect on the enthusiasm of the players, especially if they know they're going to enjoy knocking heads with certain antagonists). Game Masters can create a heightened sense of immersion and connectivity when the various lines of conflict—between factions, between key power players, and even between various allies and protagonist elements—are established for all to know early on. That doesn't mean new conflicts and new ideas are unwelcome; dynamic change and growth for a campaign demands such changes over time. However, it's very helpful for all participants in a campaign to have a sense of what kind of opposition and discord will define not only where their characters came from, but where they are likely to be headed at the outset.

Core Activity: Also known as "The Adventuring Paradigm," this may be the single most helpful piece of information to establish right at the beginning of a campaign. In essence, this is the answer to the question any player might reasonably ask—what are we doing in this campaign? For example, in the newest presentation of the classic Rifts® setting by Pinnacle Entertainment Group, we created something called the Tomorrow Legion. This is an organization that recruits powerful and capable people who are willing to use their gifts and talents to oppose the more tyrannical elements of North America while trying to build a better future for people. The core activity establishes a reason for the characters to gather together, and gives them direction and purpose beyond "wander around, see what's out there, maybe kill some folks and take their stuff" (the classic Murder Hobo paradigm of ancient dungeon-crawl gaming). While random wandering and random monsters may suffice for some folks, at least for a short while, it's the Adventuring Paradigm that better establishes the foundation for building characters and explaining why they get together and do anything.

WHO'S PLAYING WHAT?

Once you've gone through the above aspects and worked out as much of those details as possible, now comes the appropriate time to start working out what each player is going to create for a character in the campaign. Most players are used to this being a shared conversation, a discourse in which everyone is in on what each others' plans are. Except in some rare instances, it's pretty vital that players and the Game Master work these things out together, lest there be a lot of conflicts and dashed expectations.

One way GMs can really make a serious mistake is to take too hands-off an approach to this process. *"Just create whatever you want"* is very often a recipe for disaster for campaigns. Just because you can do anything in an RPG doesn't mean you should. Successful roleplaying campaigns are a special kind of alchemical mix; put the right reagents and elements together, and you get serious magic that endures mightily for a very long time. Just throwing anything and everything in, without consideration for how things won't work together, is a fairly certain recipe for explosive disaster and a crashed campaign.

Honestly, limits and regulations can be very enhancing to creativity (rather than tyrannically restrictive, as some might fear). *"How do I make my idea work within these parameters?"* can be the kind of question that really drives a player to fantastic ideations. More importantly, the GM has a much easier time setting up scenarios and story lines when they can establish the kinds of characters they will be dealing with right from the start.

For example, imagine a superhero campaign where the Game Master has plans for a government-sponsored team that represents the highest ideals of truth, justice, and all that. They plan a campaign around the themes of public image vs. the challenges of doing what must be done. What happens when one player, without any consultation or instruction, creates a murder-death-kill vigilante; another player creates Captain Goofy-Marmoset Dude; and yet a third creates a twelve-year-old with bubblegum powers. The government would never recruit any of these characters for the kind of team indicated, which just creates all kinds of a mess for the campaign and the GM.

As with other aspects of campaign communication, there are some useful bullet points to consider as part of the discussion:

Roles: Although computer RPG players will tend to think of these in far more tactical terms, roles in the tabletop sense apply to both what a character can contribute to physical conflicts as well as other challenge situations. The essence of the conversation here is two-fold. On the one hand, the group has a vested interest in making sure a needed role is fulfilled for purposes of what the campaign is about and what the characters may be asked to do. For example, if the Game Master makes it clear that there will be plenty of situations where negotiation and diplomacy are called for, someone in the group will want to make sure they're playing a "Face" type character. The other side of the discussion involves making sure that players feel their characters are special and important within the group's dynamic. In the same example, if one player goes out of their way to make their character an effective Face, yet someone else makes a solid combat character who is just as good at social interactions, you can end up with some bad feelings and clashing expectations.

Specializations: Depending on the game mechanics and other aspects of character creation, a greater level of granularity may allow for heroes to have a wider array of specialized abilities. These may be less about the broader concept of a role, instead getting into those other things a given character might bring to the mix occasionally. Once again, a group conversation about this allows for folks to work

out who will focus on what. This not only presents a chance for players to ensure their characters are special where they want it to count, it also prevents unnecessary overlap (allowing certain characters to be more focused where players wish them to be). Just as characters in adventure movies, television shows, and other media tend to have a mix of both complimentary and highly specialized abilities to contribute to the team effort, good planning in a campaign's run up to execution ensures players can have that same satisfactory structure.

Connections: In more recent years, the idea of interconnectivity between characters prior to a campaign's beginnings has taken hold. The original Strike Force campaign certainly delved into this very early on, a precursor that many did not grasp outside of superhero gaming. Now many core game engines actually work this idea intentionally into the character creation process, which is a powerful tool for creating cohesiveness between player characters and cementing their reasons for being and working together. Whether the game mechanics specifically get into creating narrative connections between player characters or not, the pre-campaign communication process certainly allows for this valuable opportunity to craft shared stories and strong roleplaying foundations well before the first die is rolled at the table. Note that not all of these connections have to be "warm and fuzzy;" there's plenty of room to create rivalries, tense past relationships, and other dynamics. Another aspect of this process is how players can work out with Game Masters whatever kinds of relationships and connections their characters have with individuals and factions within the setting.

PRACTICAL MATTERS

The creative discussions are key to the process to be sure, but planning a roleplaying campaign is also an exercise in logistics. There are a lot of both large and small matters to work out, and the Devil really can be found in the details when you start looking at these things. More than one great campaign-to-be died on the vine due to a collision of disparate elements slamming the door on the game.

When the discussion of the game ensues, it's best to sit down with everyone having access to their calendars and talking through the following:

When are we playing? Very often, this is the hardest thing to work out, especially for adult gamers with the various time constraints life tends to throw into the road. A successful campaign requires fairly regular sessions in order to establish and maintain momentum; a certain rhythm is established when the right mix of players and game happen, and that rhythm can sustain a campaign for many months, and even years, if it's treated preciously and maintained with effort. Unfortunately, other time constraints can work to constantly fray the fabric of a campaign, eventually tearing it apart if you're not careful. This is why figuring out the right days and times at the start is so vital. Once you have to start shifting schedules, or canceling sessions on a regular basis due to too many players missing, you can usually see the end of the game well before its time.

Where are we playing? A good, comfortable, reliable location is also essential for a healthy campaign. You need a space folks can get to easily, one that accommodates everyone easily, especially your GM and whatever they need to have on hand to run. The location needs to have as few distractions as possible, as well. A frank conversation will be more useful than simply acquiescing to one player's insistence their kitchen table should suffice (simply because they'd rather not have to drive somewhere else to play).

When are folks going to have schedule conflicts? There's no way around schedule conflicts, but at least you can plan ahead for many of them. As stated, adults have all kinds of claims on their times, many of which can be foreseen with a good solid, honest look at the calendar. Those with kids will be able to plan for things like sports, extracurricular activities, and special events. Vacations are another thing that needs to come up in conversation as early as possible. Pretty much everyone has stuff going on during the holidays, so it's probably a good idea to go ahead and talk about that and plan around the schedule crunches they will cause.

What about food? People gotta eat, and games tend to last long enough that at least one meal needs to happen as part of the gathering. You can let these meals take over in unexpected, problematic ways, or you can incorporate them into your planning. Many groups prefer to treat the whole gaming experience as a regular-yet-special social gathering, making the food break a featured part of the event. Others prefer to diminish this aspect; everyone is expected to "fend for themselves," bringing whatever to feed themselves, possible snacks to share. Of course, there's the usual pizza option. Whatever your group decides, they need to plan for it and decide how eating figures into the regular scheduling.

WHAT DO I WANT OUT OF THIS?

Up to now, the focus of this section has been on the broader concepts of what the game is, what general expectations will be from the players and the Game Master, and who's going to play what kind of character. Now we get into more philosophical and even esoteric ideas that are no less important for a healthy, vital campaign and your personal enjoyment thereof.

Once again, if it feels like there's a lot of work recommended going into this, you're not wrong. Imagine how much communication and effort goes into putting on a play, or pulling a TV series together. Getting a team of people together for a softball league or managing social events for a club involve a lot of folks working out details and making certain everyone's responsibilities and expectations are understood and met. RPG campaigns are meant to be fun, above all else, but they are also long-term commitments that should involve a concerted effort on all parts to maximize the potential of that time investment.

Time is the most precious commodity we posses, after all, so it's not unreasonable to take careful stock of what your hopes and expectations for time spent on the impending campaign are. You should also be prepared to have a conversation with the Game Master and other players about those hopes and expectations. This has immense potential to be not only informative, but fun; everyone having an input into such a conversation means the campaign will more readily reflect the cooperative creative efforts of the group. The GM will certainly benefit from knowing what their players are looking for in the game, and what kinds of experiences they anticipate with enthusiasm. This is a recipe for success for those Game Masters open to such discussions and willing to incorporate what they receive from their players.

At the same time, such a conversation may reveal some serious flaws for you. If you discover that the Game Master is planning a particularly dark and grim overall experience—and the rest of the players are all fine with this—you may find yourself less than enthusiastic, as you were hoping for more of a light, pulpy action adventure kind of game. It is far, far better to discover these conflicts of expectations right up front, rather than after the first session or later down the road. It may mean you decide this isn't going to be a good campaign for you to play in, which is perfectly fine. Life is much too short—and time much too precious—to spend on an activity from which you are gaining very little joy.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL PITFALLS?

Another topic for conversation early is the examination of any elements you feel may cause a problem for you. Folks tend to be conflict averse, and most gamers will try to be welcoming of everyone else's ideas and desires. However, there can be a lot of damage done if you keep your mouth shut about something that you know is going to really bother you when it comes up in game play. If you don't bring it up early, you're doing yourself and the rest of the group a great disservice, allowing a potential mine to lay out in the path, waiting to be tripped in a way that blows up the entire campaign in a spectacularly awful way.

There are a few potential topics that fall under this header. Take a good look and consider whether or not you need to bring one or more of them up:

Character Conflict: This is a very serious discussion that every gaming group should have before the campaign begins. To what degree intra-party conflict is desired, or even allowed, has the potential to dramatically impact the emotional well-being of various participants. For some players, "PvP" is a perfectly acceptable (possibly even preferred) element of gaming, but many others will avidly avoid gaming that welcomes such conflict. Be clear on your own feelings about this, and make sure everyone else involved is, too.

Player Conflict: Though most groups are friends as well as fellow gamers, there are times when a new campaign draws together a collection of folks who don't normally spend a lot of time together. Game Masters should certainly work to avoid bringing folks together who have difficulties getting along; however, it may be that a GM has no idea you and another player do not care for each other's company. There are a few ways to handle this, though no easy ones. Usually, a frank and respectful conversation is in order—either between one of the players and the Game Master, or possibly between the two (or more) folks who have difficulties. Either everyone decides it can be worked out, or someone makes the respectful choice and steps out. In the best of such circumstances, the conflicting folks finally talk things out in a way that alleviates their difficulties.

Triggering Situations: As an art form, roleplaying is yet another medium through which the entire human condition may be expressed. For many players, this means all boundaries must be eliminated, allowing stories to go to very evocative, deeply personal places. Dark and torturous ideas may come out as a part of the play. If everyone at the table is equally comfortable with this approach, that's fine... but

that's rarely the case. Game Masters absolutely have a vital responsibility to broach the subject of what is and isn't acceptable within the bounds of the game play. This covers everything from the realms of sex and violence, of course, but the floor should also be opened for folks to point out other topics that will bring them discomfort or outright pain to deal with. Someone may, for example, be very uncomfortable with controversial story arcs that deal with real-world religions, while another player may feel that current real-world political issues are something they just don't want to deal with in their fantasy world.

Rules Disagreements: Rules are a part of just about every game, and rare is the group that has either universal agreement and understanding where those rules are concerned, or everyone but the Game Master is so disconnected from the game engine aspect that zero conflict occurs. Game Masters are best served when they endeavor to establish a policy for rules conversations and disagreements well before the game every has its first session. Players, too, should be willing to discuss their expectations about such matters, as well, with a willingness to accept whatever the final mutual agreement is. Inevitably, someone will step outside of this arrangement; having the discussion and understanding established prior to the game empowers everyone else to kindly, but firmly remind them how this should go.

The Game is Afoot

The group has gathered, made their preparations, created characters, and now the first sessions are upon you. Communication continues to be the most important tool you have to ensure you're having a great time and a great campaign. In general, of course, just talking about the game among the Game Master and players will have a fun and rewarding impact, but there are some specific areas you should consider focusing upon for best results.

Back Stories and Beginning Gambits

Just as the first words you read in a novel often determine how deeply you will become invested in the narrative, the first moments of the first campaign session will have a lasting impact upon the entire experience. The groundwork you lay, not only prior to the campaign's beginning, but in those first few hours of play, will provide the alchemical mixture that results in a mediocre potion, or an elixir of the rarest and most wondrous magic.

For most campaigns (not all; there are some special games where "you know nothing before this moment" is the premise), the game actually begins when you start working out the details of your character and their background. Character creation is best when it's considered a part of the game—and a fun part, at that. Players should endeavor, when possible, to involve not only the Game Master in every step, but the other players should be included to as great a degree as makes sense. One of the more intriguing and effective developments in recent game design is the incorporation of group elements into character creation. Some games endeavor to actually apply game engine elements that directly tie characters to one another, while others simply encourage mutual back stories and connections to provide stronger reasons for this particular group of protagonists to band together for common cause.

Another useful approach to the earliest stages of a campaign is to commit to more than simply reacting to whatever the GM places in front of the group in that first session. If you've all had a chance to work out the foundations together, and you know what the core conflicts are going to be, all the easier for you and your fellow players to establish some initial plans and schemes that have a chance to unfold right at that first gathering at the table. These "Beginning Gambits" can be powerful connecting devices for the various characters, as well as an enormously useful tool for the GM to use in constructing scenarios that truly engage all of you.

The worst thing you can do, however, is to drop such things in the lap of the Game Master the day of the game. Surprises work great when the GM puts something in front of the players they had no way of expecting; this is not anywhere near as true when it comes from the opposite direction. Better by far to work out these kinds of plots and story arcs well ahead of the first session, get them into the hands of the Game Master to ponder and weave into the greater story, and watch what unfolds.

Seasoning to Taste

Television series go through this process all the time. The first few episodes launch, and the show runners and the rest of the crew start taking in the feedback and deciding what needs to be changed to make the show better. They call this "retooling," and in the age of instant feedback via social media, it's a more interactive process than ever before. Many shows are vastly improved when the writers, directors, actors, and producers are willing to retool a few things before too much investment is made, or too many viewers are lost.

Roleplaying campaigns have enjoyed this directly interactive advantage for far longer. For those groups willing to look beyond the golfer mentality of "play it where it lies," a lot of good can come from taking a moment after the first game session or so and looking at what works and what could use some changes. In some cases, the actual continuity may need a bit of shifting for everyone to be happier—*"Yeah, I made that encounter entirely too difficult. Sorry for killing almost everyone. Let's go with the idea that it was a terrible dream Vivian experienced, and start next session a bit fresh."* In most other cases, you can probably stick with the essential truths of the game, but still make adjustments that will greatly improve the future sessions.

Most often, these changes will be in the characters themselves. It's generally a good idea to make certain that a character works well for the player; this is their primary vehicle for interfacing with the story and everyone in it, and if they don't enjoy their character, they won't enjoy the game, period. If, for example, it's pretty clear that they invested far too much into a set of skills or abilities that will have little-to-no meaningful impact on the game (you all expected a lot more ship-to-ship combat, but it turns out the game is primarily going to be planet-side, so having more than half of Albert's skill points put into shipboard combat is really burning him), the Game Master should absolutely allow a rebuild that puts those points into something more meaningful and useful. Other situations may involve simply discovering a character is too weak in an area the player did not intend to be weak in, or a flaw in understanding the rules left a character too easily mangled in even the simplest encounters.

Another realm where retooling is a good idea is where the rules themselves are concerned. A Game Master may decide things are far too difficult, due to an optional rule (or even a house rule) they've employed. On the opposite end of the spectrum, players may feel everything is much too easy, because a rule isn't being used, or is relaxed in a way that turns out to be a bad idea. It's very important that any key rules changes be discussed before the start of the session they begin to impact; a significant shift in play experience is the kind of things that players rightfully should be warned about.

At the Table

Naturally, you're all talking to one another at the game table throughout the session; that's pretty much how a roleplaying game proceeds. However, communicating effectively is another matter, especially when you've got long-term goals and creative ideas you want to make sure enter the mix. At the same time, making sure you aren't interfering with, or even outright disabling someone else's communication is another very important consideration for how you play or run the game.

Reverse Course or Crash and Burn?

Sometimes, it just doesn't work. Shows get canceled. Movies bomb at the box office. Novels just don't get good reviews.

RPG campaigns just die.

When it's clear that one or more players are not having a good time, or if the game master is having serious difficulty mustering the energy and enthusiasm to prepare and run the game, it's time for one of the more difficult, yet more important conversations to occur. The choice is on the group—keep going, or set the campaign aside and try something else?

There's no easy answer to this, but the most important thing about such an activity is how much fun folks are having with it. If the GM isn't engaged, the campaign is an exercise in stubbornness on their part if it keeps going, and the players will ultimately be able to tell. If only a single player is not having a great time, it's time for them to either change characters or, perhaps, drop out of the game while the others continue.

If, however, most of the participants are not enjoying themselves, it's okay for the group to decide the campaign should come to an end. Better to make a quick and clean cut that can heal rapidly than to allow a wound to fester. There's always the next campaign idea to try out...

The following are some thoughts for everyone to consider to improve in-session communication and game play:

Immersive Descriptions: As a Game Master, one of the most important things you can do to really draw your players into the scene is taking the time to establish some important sensory cues about the area of action. Mostly this will fall to visual descriptions, but other senses may be engaged effectively to create further immersion into the scene. When you know where a scene is happening ahead of time, you should probably jot down a short paragraph or some bullet points that you can share up front. This helps draw everyone in, both in terms of embodying their character as well as experiencing the scene. As players ask questions about what else is going on, you may find yourself embellishing your original ideas, which is fantastic; just make sure to jot a note down about that addition in case it matters later. Opening scenes with a core description is a powerful tool for signaling *"OK, this is happening, time to connect in character to what's going on."*

Courteous Roleplaying: It's great when players get so into their character they are lost in that entity's head space and completely focused on what they should be saying or doing. However, this can be a detriment when the player loses sight of the other players' and the GM's input into the conversation. As you take your moment to interject a bit of dialogue or a description of your character's actions, please be mindful of the other participants. Find a natural pause space, and open the way for others to interject. This is a talent that improvisational comedy troupes practice intensely, and actors of all kinds are aware of this necessity. While most RPG players aren't necessarily professional actors, to some degree, they are amateur actors. Showing courtesy in your roleplaying ensures you're one of the good players, and enhances the fun for others. It's also very important to give the Game Master "right of way" when you're trundling along; there will be moments when they are trying desperately to get a word in edgewise, and you could end up messing the scene up pretty badly if you don't let them.

Inviting Player Input: As mentioned earlier in this article, the advent of more cooperative game play between Game Masters and players is probably one of the most important and enhancing developments in RPG design philosophy. Aaron taught us the value of this very early on, and it's heartening to see his thinking become so pervasive in both mainstream and independent game crafting. Traditionally, a lot of player input into the game and story tends to happen between sessions, but a great technique that dramatically engages some players is to invite them to describe a part of the scene or action. For example, as a character enters a combat scene for the first time (maybe they were in another room when things got started, and they're showing up a couple of rounds later than everyone else), a GM could ask *"How do you enter the scene, and what's happening as you do?"* The player could then respond *"I am upstairs, and I come out a side hallway and see three thugs trying to sneak into the foyer from the kitchen, so I grab a chandelier, cut the main cable, and ride the thing down on top of them saying 'Hey, why'd you start the party without me?'"* The GM may not have planned for the three thugs or the chandelier (or even that there was an upstairs to the place), but if it doesn't otherwise negatively impact the scenario, they should consider letting all of this happen and enhance the story.

Side Talk: It's so easy to get off the rails during a roleplaying session. Gamers are generally social folks, and they love getting together with each other and talking about all the things that are of interest to them. As our hobby gets older, so do the participants, and as adults, we have so many things going on in our lives to catch each other up on. It's generally a good idea to get as much of this out of the way before game time starts as possible, though the time constraints of life usually mean the Game Master would like to get started as soon as possible to ensure there's time to get the session done before bed time, etc.. Additionally, there are the inevitable moments when something happens in the game that triggers a thought or joke or a favorite movie scene, and thus a side talk tangent is born. Every group will have its own social chemistry and dynamic at work to moderate this, but it's a very good idea to go in knowing how much of this you want to collectively tolerate. In the greater scheme, it's all about having fun, but since you are there to tell a collective story together via roleplaying, working toward a focus on in-game interaction will greatly enhance the campaign for everyone. In other words, do try to keep the side talk to a minimum if you want to maximize the campaign enjoyment.

Cross-Talk: Another communication issue at the table is cross-talking, which is related heavily to the concept of courteous roleplaying above. In this specific case, it's a matter of where folks are sitting more than anything. Two or more characters may get into a conversation about something, while two or more other characters are in a completely different scene and are otherwise not involved in that discourse.

They may, in fact, be engaged in a completely different situation or discussion. As voices start crashing into each other, you've got a cacophony on your hands that will make effective roleplaying all but impossible. There are two solid ways to handle this—either have everyone temporarily change seats so they are next to the folks their characters are interacting with, or have the different groups take turns working through their scenes together. The latter has a lot of advantages, in that it avoids splitting the GM's focus between two or more groups, and it allows the players to act as an audience for each scene they aren't involved in.

Taking Notes: A lot of information is shared during a roleplaying game, and almost all of it is done orally. It's all-too-easy to lose that information if someone isn't keeping track of it. This is exacerbated by the necessarily improvisational nature of the Game Master role; frequently, the GM is asked to come up with characters, dates, locations, and other details on the fly, and while they are endeavoring to keep everyone actively engaged, they don't have time to get all that recorded for later recollection. Players do themselves and everyone else a great service when they take effective notes during play to track these details.

Beyond the Table

A lot of players treat RPG campaigns as something they fit into their lives once a week, or once every two weeks, or monthly, etc.. They want to show up, play, and that's it until next time. Honestly, this is a seriously missed opportunity. It may be necessary, based on how else their lives are going, but even a modicum of between-session effort will spell the difference between a "pretty fun game" and "the greatest roleplaying campaign I've ever played in."

Of course, you shouldn't treat this as homework or a drudgery; if you do, then activities between game sessions really isn't going to net you anything useful or special. If, however, you see it as an opportunity to stay engaged with your character and the ongoing story, you'll reap some serious rewards... and so will the Game Master and the other players.

For the Game Master, this is a serious question of time commitments for you, make no mistake. You've got all the game preparation and related tasks to running the game that lay upon you between each game session; taking on the responsibility of interacting with the players between those sessions means more effort. If you are markedly engaged with your campaign and the story, this will be less work and more creative expression extended beyond the game time. That's the ideal, and the key to successfully having a great long-term campaign.

The pervasiveness of the Internet changes the landscape for managing such activities dramatically. Sites like Obsidian Portal are designed quite specifically to help GMs manage campaigns in this fashion, including facilitating between-session game play, communication, and player contributions. For many others, nothing more than a private Facebook group or Google Plus community suffices.

Players will have different levels of participation; this is OK. Engagement tends to be its own reward, and those players who put more into game play beyond the table will tend to get more out of it. Some of the categories you may explore with between-session play include:

Business: Some players enjoy feeling their characters have activities outside of the adventuring paradigm related to business and commerce in some way. A merchant, a corporate CEO, or an entrepreneur out to make new things happen, these characters will spend a lot of time building up their business and resources.

Creating: Perhaps a character is an alchemist, or an inventor, or a scientist intent on making the world a better place. Their goals could be to craft a single item of in-game usefulness, or changing the state-of-the-art in a particular area of technological development. Some players may simply want to enjoy the sense they've created some art in the world, improving the human condition in some way.

Contacts: Social and professional networking can be a major driving force for some characters, and there's no doubt that knowing the right person in the right situation may mean the difference between success and failure in a future endeavor. Players may want to spend time on making contacts and developing connections with various characters in the setting.

Exploration: Discovering and understanding the unknown is a compelling activity all its own, and while it may not be the focus for the group as a whole, it may certainly drive one or more individual characters in that group. Players may appreciate a chance to engage in some search-and-discovery activities between game sessions. These activities can and should result in important story elements in the campaign.

Investigations: Many games involved investigation of some kind, and there are characters for whom this is a major focus of their design and development. If the group isn't as focused on such activities overall, the Game Master can certainly reward the investigation-focused players with enough attention and activity between game sessions. This can also help game sessions move more efficiently when the characters come to the table with valuable information discovered since the last gathering.

Making the World Better: The best of us strive to make our world a better place in every way we can. One of the compelling aspects of gaming is the chance to be something more, or at least different, in a fictional world, and it can be abundantly rewarding to feel like your character is empowered to improve the world they live in somehow. Allowing players some between-session activity that simply makes them feel better is a powerful reward.

Personal Matters: There's no denying the "soap opera" aspects of roleplaying, especially in campaigns that go on for significant durations. Characters develop meaningful relationships with many other entities in the setting, and these relationships have the same multitude of conditions and dynamics as those in real life. Many players are deeply invested in the relationships their characters have in these settings, making this one of the more sought-after activities they'll seek to engage in beyond the table.

Study and Training: For some players, it's all about making their character better at something. Game Masters need to decide just how much character improvements—and what kind of improvement—is fair and reasonable for non-session efforts. Generally speaking, it tends to be a better idea to allow for non-combat improvements, especially in areas that broaden a character's abilities rather than intensifying their main areas of focus. In many game systems, it's perfectly reasonable to allow for some secondary skills or abilities to develop via training and research "montages" between games, especially when they ultimately lead to the group being able to handle upcoming scenarios and investigations.

Secret Schemes: This is a tricky area for a lot of groups. There are players who enjoy "doing their own thing," and while often this may simply be something cool for them that they'll enjoy sharing with the rest of the group later, that's not always the case. Some players find enjoyment from activities that, if discovered, will put them at great odds with the characters of their fellow players. Hopefully, you've had this discussion well before the campaign started (see above) and, therefore, have established whether this is cool or not. If so, Game Masters allowing such activities will be busy managing these plots between games.

When It All Goes Wrong

"You son of a–!" Dice are thrown across the room, players are storming out of the house. This is the nightmare scenario for every Game Master and every gaming group. Despite the best efforts of everyone to communicate effectively, something happens that one or more players simply weren't ready for, or they could not accept or handle.

The game goes boom.

Whether or not this is a temporary lapse or a total disaster depends a great deal on the communication that happens right at that moment, and in the minutes, hours, and days to follow. Necessarily, the GM should be the mediator and moderating voice in this, but that's not always possible, especially if the conflict is between the GM and one or more of the players. Someone will have to step in and create the conditions for the campaign participants to work things out, however, or it's certain that the campaign is at an end.

In some situations, the conversation can happen in the moments after the inciting incident. A lot of times, however, the feelings are too raw and bleeding to enable any kind of effective communication. Those circumstances call for taking a serious break—from the game, and from each other. Perhaps it's time to clean up and have everyone take their leave. Afterwards, an email or a group gathering outside of the game session norm is the right move. It may be that only those engaged in the conflict should meet and discuss matters. Each situation is different, and the sensitivities of each person need to be considered for this to work out at all.

The most important thing to remember here is that, 99 times out of 100, no one intended to hurt or upset anyone else. You have to stand on this premise if you're going to have any chance of mediating the matter. If you can't start there, it's probably time to look at a new campaign, or at least taking an extended break away from this one.

The Long Haul

The goal of all this advice (and, frankly, all the advice in this entire book) is to start up and maintain a campaign that lasts well past just a few sessions. It's the effort put into that maintenance that will determine the long-term success of the campaign, and just as it's the key to the beginnings of such an endeavor, communication is the vital ingredient to continued enjoyment for everyone.

PLAYERS COME AND GO

There's generally no way to avoid it; players leave campaigns for any number of reasons. Some decide it's just not as much fun for them as it is for everyone else. Some have a life event that changes their circumstances (a baby is born; a job schedule dramatically alters; they need to move far away; etc.). Whatever the reason, the Game Master and players need to talk about how best to incorporate this loss to the group.

On the other hand, there are times when a new player comes along and there's a desire to add them to the group and the story. This, too, necessitates some communication about the best way to accomplish that for maximum benefit.

In either case, maintaining a sense of continuity and verisimilitude with the ongoing story is pretty important. Just hand-waving the matter is most often very unsatisfying, and it's frankly a lost opportunity. With the loss of a player, figuring out something special that deals with their character leaving the campaign can be a powerful part of the story. Perhaps the character dies or disappears in some spectacular or emotionally affecting way, or maybe they remain a part of the story, but take a background role (which, by use of the Internet and between-session play options, is more easily accomplished these days than ever before, if the GM and the departing player wish to make a go of it).

The entrance of a new player into an ongoing campaign can be an intimidating and difficult thing for that person, or it can be an opportunity to let them make a real splash and a great first impression. GMs should be willing to work out, as part of their first scenario, and interesting entrance into the story that creates excitement and gives them a chance to connect with the other players and the campaign as a whole. Maybe their character shows up with some vital information that the others have been searching for, or they arrive just in time to save another character's life, or perhaps they're the one surrounded by enemies, and the rest of the heroes arrive to help them out.

CHARACTERS COME AND GO

Characters die. Characters become less interesting to their players. Characters advance to such levels they become unplayably powerful. Whatever the reason, there are situations that mandate a need for a character to stop being an active part of a campaign, and it's time for the player to create a new one.

All of the same kinds of discussions that happen at the start of a campaign apply here where character creation is concerned, but a lot more focus on how that new character will fit into what's already established is warranted. Hopefully, the player is driven to incorporate some major aspect of the story already told, and the Game Master is open to incorporating this new opportunity into the greater tapestry of the campaign.

Note that many of the same considerations mentioned above for dealing with adding a new player to a campaign apply just as strongly to helping an existing player bring in a new character.

DIVERSIONS AND DYNASTIES

There are some instances where everyone is inclined to make new characters, and while this can almost feel like starting a new campaign, it can also be a wonderful way to create a more dynastic feel to the existing campaign. Perhaps the original group steps into the background as sponsors and mentors, making the new characters the "next generation of heroes" for the setting. Alternately, the campaign can take a sort of spin off approach; the new characters start up their adventures and stories, but sometimes the group can dust off the older characters and do something legendary and epic with them, as well.

Another interesting thing for everyone to talk about is how to incorporate alternate story arcs, variant experiences, and the like into a more complex web of campaign arcs that all tie together in a grander scheme. For example, in a superhero game, everyone may have their A-team characters, who represent the major superheroes they've been playing for a while, the folks who generally save the world and deal with the biggest events. At the same time, the players also have their B-team heroes, the folks they send into the streets to handle slightly grittier and more human-level criminal activity.

Once in a while, they can break out their super-agent team, the folks who have great tech and some very minor powers, focused on espionage and counter-terrorism plots.

When a campaign goes on long enough, these kinds of variant setups are great ways to keep everything fresh, and players and GMs should feel free to bring up such ideas at any time.

THE HIATUS

Game Masters can burn out. Players can become excited about a new game that was just released. One or more of the participants in a campaign may really need to take a break for awhile, and while they aren't leaving the group per se, they need a month or so to deal with something else.

Whatever the reason, there are those times when it may be necessary to declare a hiatus for the campaign. It's vital that everyone take some time to really talk about this, or else it can easily turn into a *"Well, I guess that campaign is dead now"* situation. By talking it through and, hopefully, establishing a date of return for the campaign, the group will be able to ensure their campaign does go on after the allotted time. For those willing (including the GM), perhaps some of the between-session techniques can be utilized to keep at least part of the campaign alive during the interim.

Keeping the conversation about the campaign going during a hiatus is a fairly surefire way to keep it alive; letting everyone walk away from it, with no clear plan or effort to bring it back, almost assuredly brings on the End.

THE END

It happens. Despite the best intentions of everyone involved, a campaign can die. The hiatus situation described above is a fairly common way for games to simply stop. Losing a Game Master to a dramatic life event is another possible scenario for ending a campaign, unless someone else can step up to take it over. Social dynamic implosions are another culprit.

In these situations, there may be nothing for it but to simply accept the game is over and look to the next campaign opportunity. It's frustrating and unsatisfying, but it does happen.

Better by far, however, is for a Game Master and players to see the potential for an end ahead, and to plan for that ending. Like a great television series that gets just enough episodes to come to a meaningful

conclusion, so too can a campaign have a great ending when the GM and players get a chance to plan for it, and to execute the thing right up to that last game session. Such events are the stuff of gaming legends, and the greatest campaigns many have experienced get those great endings that everyone talked about and invested their best efforts into.

The Final Word About Communication

It's all about establishing expectations. Seriously, there is nothing more important to take away from this entire section than that statement. Game Masters need to establish their expectations for the game and for the players before, during, and right up to the end of a campaign. So, too, the players should keep a continuing dialogue with each other and the GM about their own expectations. When this happens, you're doing everything you can to ensure a long and successful RPG campaign for yourself and everyone else.

THE DEVELOPING CAMPAIGN

Aaron deeply enjoyed creating long-term stories with his players. Many of his campaigns featured story arcs that took the characters through not only some great action scenes, but also took them through a transformative experience. The characters grew, they developed, and they changed over time due to the events of the campaign. As Aaron himself said, "Let's say that you've just recently purchased Champions, gotten players together, and designed characters and a campaign background. Now what?"

Now what, indeed. For many players, roleplaying games have a broad spectrum of fun—ranging from the enjoyment of tactically defeating a challenge, experiencing the rush of victory over a hated foe, or delving into the nuanced layers of their character's motivations and backstory. All of these things can be part of a good campaign, and Aaron liked to start with what he called "the Character Story."

The Character Story

"One thing that each Champions GM needs to learn to do is to spot, carefully nurture and eventually play out the 'Character Story.'

Each player character has a Story above and beyond the ordinary adventures encountered during the course of the campaign. This Character Story usually involves the resolution of the most important desires of the character."

—Aaron Allston

What Aaron's really talking about here is player agency; the experience of a player feeling that her choices are meaningful. He's also talking about focusing the campaign's major arcs around the characters themselves, rather than trying to focus on a non-player character's story. For many players, the most important factor in how much they enjoy the role-playing experience comes down to the role that they take on of the character in the story… and paramount in that is the feeling that what you do as that character matters.

Here's how Aaron described the "Character Story" with regard to Strike Force:

Among the Strike Force characters you'll be reading about, these were a couple of the Character Stories encountered during the run of the campaign.

Phosphene: *Discovery of and Acceptance by Family. Raised by a single parent and knowing of no other relatives, Phos started his career cynical and alone. Learning that he had a family, the enigmatic Blood, he discovered that he had a tremendous need to become one of them. Eventually, he met all his surviving relatives and earned the affection of most of them. Now married and a family man himself, his personal story is resolved.*

Lorelei: *Growth Into Womanhood. In the course of her years of playing, Lorelei grew from a 15-year-old innocent into a mature woman and team leader; the most important elements of this transition (other than the years involved) were her romance with Commodore and her eventual rescue of and reunion with her father.*

Take a look at your own character—or at all the PCs, if you're the GM—and try to root out the Character Story of each one. Sometimes it'll be easy. If a big, nasty Hunted figures into the character's background—including the development of his powers and the stimuli which made the character decide to be a hero—then the final defeat of the Hunted is likely to be the Character Story. Alternatively, bringing about the circumstances which will allow a hero to buy down or buy off his greatest psychological limitation (such as Luster's desperate need for acceptance and recognition by her father Overlord) could be the character's Story.

In short, try to figure out what element of the character's background, relations, or psychology make him interesting but will eventually make him (and his player) frustrated and unhappy if not ultimately resolved. That's the Character Story. Once you've figured out what it is, over the months and years, through subplots and adventures, you should bring this Story to a climax and resolution.

Don't be fooled into thinking that the resolution of a character's main Story will result in the character getting bored and retiring from the campaign. In all likelihood, by now he's become firmly entrenched in the superhero world and will continue adventuring, probably as a much saner person. Completion of a character's Story can, however, allow a player to retire his hero gracefully before he grows weary of playing him. The decision to start a new PC can breathe new life into a campaign, keeping things fresh and exciting.

Not all characters will present the GM with a Story to develop. Some never do. Occasionally, the GM has to invent the Story tailored to the character. This, too, is fine. Of course, no campaign lasts long enough for every Character Story to be discovered and exploited; the GM who cannot figure out one character's Story can always move on to another character.

To add on to Aaron's statements here, I believe that it is important to include as many players as possible. For example, I have participated in some campaigns where "the character story" was overwhelmingly focused on the Game Master's significant other, and that was not nearly as engaging as campaigns where each player had one or more opportunities to have their character's story take center stage over time. In short, try to ensure that each player character has a chance for a story of their own, and try not to focus too often on the same character's story many times in a row. In the end, it is important to note that focusing on the character's story is a surefire way to get most players deeply engaged with your campaign!

THE CHARACTER SHEET IS A WINDOW

Another important lesson from Aaron's Game Mastering style is the way he would look at a character sheet as a window into the player's mind. When the player creates a character, they have an idea in their head about who that character is, what the character can do, and what kinds of stories and scenes that the player is excited about exploring with the character. A good Game Master keeps an eye on these character sheets and incorporates elements from them into the campaign. If the character is exceptionally good at something, for example, that typically means the player is interested in stories that feature his character as one of the best when it comes to that particular skill or ability. If the character has a notable flaw, it is likewise important to bring out that flaw in stories about the character. This is not to say every character story needs to feature a flaw or a skill; it can also be about the character's particular race, gender, or anything else that the player feels is important about the character. One way to discover this is to ask the player to describe the character in a single sentence. Listen to which words the player uses; those are often cues as to what the player feels is most important about the character to him!

Depending on the game, character sheets can present varying amounts of information. I'm certain that Aaron would approve if a Game Master chose to create custom questionnaires to provide additional information about the character's goals, enemies, friends, and fears. It can be very useful to keep a record of these important facts about each character in the campaign close at hand during the game. If at any time, you're stumped on a way to get a player engaged in the scene or motivate the character, that list of what is important about the character can provide many clues, hints, and ideas for inspiring what happens next.

Simulating the Comics (Genre Emulation)

Next up is a section where Aaron describes emulating a particular genre. Aaron was a pioneer in this area, breaking a trail for the pulp genre—in particular through **Lands of Mystery**, published in 1985.

Often, the GM will find that his players are doing things that just don't resemble the comics in some way that's important to him. Just as often, the GM will address the problem by telling the players, "Hey, let's do it this way..." or by slapping the characters with diminished Experience. These methods don't usually work.

The most efficient method I've found of instituting changes is by directly confronting the characters with the results of their errant behavior. For instance, if they fail to develop team tactics, they get beaten by teams who employ such tactics. If they are needlessly violent, they get to see first-hand the results of their killing—such as the accidental murder of other players' DNPCs.

If you show off an NPC or NPC team as being superior because they do something the PCs don't, it's likely the PCs will adopt the tactics, methods, or ethics in question—so as not to be second-rate.

Aaron is correct here in that punitive measures rarely guide roleplay where you want it to go. What Aaron is getting into here is the topic of Genre Emulation; identifying the themes and tropes that you want to explore that define the genre for you and your group. Getting genre emulation into your game is typically best done in a cooperative manner—speak to your players about the themes and tropes of the genre that you want to feature in the game, and ensure the players have an opportunity to give you feedback.

If you, as the Game Master, feel that actions taken by players are veering off from the genre you set out to emulate, the best tool in your toolbox is communication. Aaron's solutions are good, but they work better (in my opinion) as a way to explain how the character learns and grows rather than some kind of punishment. If the player's actions are not quite right for that genre, talk it over and find a way that makes sense for the character to adapt and keep the fun going for everyone.

However, confronting players with the consequences of their choices (as long as those consequences are not overly punishing!) can result in some very memorable role-playing.

TRANSLATING DIFFICULT TROPES FROM THE COMICS

One thing Aaron became very cognizant of during the Strike Force campaign is that the tropes of comic books don't always translate well to roleplaying games. Aaron always strove to translate his favorite themes from comics effectively into superhero RPGs. Some of the lessons he learned along the way are presented below in his own words:

Separating Heroes for Long Periods: *In the comics, you see the heroes fall into traps which separate them and make them work alone for long periods of time. In the game, it doesn't work so well. Other players grow bored when only one character is being played. Sometimes it's necessary to do this, but the GM should not separate the heroes unless it really is essential to the story's progress.*

Doing Time: *Whenever PCs are captured, the players want to game out every second of their imprisonment, to facilitate a speedy escape (regardless of your plot-related purposes for capturing them). If you say, for instance, "After your capture last issue, you were put to work in the salt-mines of Deneb. Now, six weeks later ..." you'll hear a shout of fury, followed by "Wait a minute! On Day 1, 1 do this. On Day 2, 1 do that. On Day 3..." If you plan to do a story where the heroes are imprisoned until they've learned enough about their surroundings to escape, be prepared to have to deal with every one of their ideas until they're satisfied that a brute-force, no-brains escape is impossible.*

Rescued by NPCs: *In the comic-books, the hero who isn't a series regular is almost as interesting to the reader as the hero who is. But in the game, this translates as Series Regular = Player Character, Guest Star = NPC. And PCs don't like being rescued by NPCs. Try to avoid this whenever possible.*

All I have to add to the Doing Time section is that the "superheroes escape the villain's trap" is a very strong trope in comic books. This means that players, in my experience, are almost always going to want to try it out! This includes breaking out of prisons. In fact, some of my favorite memories of superhero RPGs include some very clever and creative prison breaks by the heroes! However, I do acknowledge that Aaron is correct that sometimes the story is better served by the heroes being taken out of play for a while through the villain's machinations. If that is something important for your campaign, I would recommend first talking to the group and explaining that the capture and imprisonment is important and needs to happen for story purposes; second, I would try to set up the imprisonment in-game so that the characters are in a position where escape isn't possible. For example, the characters may have been unconscious the entire time!

One of the most interesting examples of this trope involved a superhero team taking on an ancient creature of nightmares. Manifesting itself in the modern era as a supervillain, the creature captured the heroes and imprisoned them—resulting in a spectacular escape, of course. The thing is, the heroes then discovered that they had only "escaped" in their minds. In truth, all the heroes were asleep—the prison and the escape were just a dream! Naturally, taking a similar approach (through virtual reality or another method) could result in passing plenty of time in the real world during the heroes' "dreaming" imprisonment.

Here are some other comic book simulation issues that may or may not be important for your superhero-themed campaign:

ONE POWER OR MULTIPLE POWERS

One thing to discuss with your group early on in discussing a superhero campaign are how to handle superpowers. A band of mutants at a special school for the gifted usually have only one superpower, although some of those singular powers have numerous applications. At the other end of the scale, an alien superhuman raised by friendly folk in Kansas may have numerous, discrete superpowers with only a vague unifying theme. Some players may enjoy the challenge

of creatively interpreting a single superpower in a variety of situations. Other players might prefer collecting numerous different superpowers into one being. There's no one right way to approach this!

If your group prefers to take a broader stance (this is often the default for most comic book-inspired RPG campaigns), then there's nothing much to discuss. Some Game Masters might want to put down some general guidelines or boundaries (how many powers are too much?), but for the most part, it's an open field. Strike Force took a similar approach to this, since many of the characters in the Earth-AU universe have multiple powers.

Going from the other side means that players should probably discuss characters with each other to ensure a minimum of duplicated powers or concepts. Characters using the single-power paradigm are often more about coming up with unusual ways to use that single power, meaning that the Game Master should be prepared to deal with more "power stunts" in play. Especially creative uses of the character's power should be rewarded, and most likely the character will end up several different applications of his power on his character sheet (often expressed as different "powers" in the rule set, but bound together with a very tight concept as all being part of the same overall super-ability).

CREATIVITY OF CONCEPTS

Many long-running comic book universes have very established themes and styles of superheroes. Many of these universes include the concept of "legacy" heroes, where one hero is the inspiration (or often, a close relative) for another, younger hero to take their place. Similarly, there may be certain power sources (such as ancient wizards who spell out the hero's powers to form a magic word), traditions (each member of a certain family has gained powers from the same alien spaceship), or even a species (such as those who have mutated to gain powers and have been lumped into the same "racial" category by the rest of the world).

However, you may be looking for more creative and unusual superheroes for your campaign. Perhaps you're interested in a more diverse range of cultural inspirations, or maybe you're interested in building a team of characters from lesser-known pantheons of gods. It is also possible to simply let your players' creativity run wild, freely combining inspirations from a very broad range of concepts! If it is important to your campaign that the players focus on one particular direction for their character concepts, this is something to establish early on, depending on the flavor of the campaign world you're interested in setting up for the game.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A HEROIC MOTIVATION

The Strike Force method is designed for, and works best with, superheroic roleplay that focuses on classic comic book tropes. One of the most important of those is that the characters are super-HEROES. There is something inside each character that simply won't let them stand by and do nothing when innocents are threatened.

How each character expresses heroism can be very different. What is vital to a campaign, however, is a hook for each character that the Game Master can use to get them involved in the action. When creating a character for campaign using the Strike Force Method, the players should spend some time coming up with a compelling reason why their character has chosen to put on a costume and fight crime. This can range from a burning desire for justice to a need for revenge against those who wronged the character or their family. It can represent a code of behavior, such as the chivalric traditions of knighthood or the bushido code of the samurai. It can even be something instinctual to that character, something he was born with or aspires to be out of an example provided by others.

Whatever the origin, the character's motivation should clearly understood by the Game Master. These motivations are important storytelling tools, both to advance the character's individual story and to get the character engaged with the larger story arcs of the campaign. It is important to note that the comic book themes that inspired Strike Force all have a strong motivation for the superheroes to take action when danger calls, rather than sitting at home, doing nothing.

INSPIRATIONS

The Strike Force universe is heavily influenced by major comic book story lines, themes, and tropes from the last forty years, especially the 80's. Aaron often cited a certain "graphic novel" feel to his setting that was inspired by the landmark graphic novels of that period. Thus, the "Strike Force Method" of building a campaign should include some thought to any existing comic books, story lines, or events that particularly inspire you to create stories for your players.

Ideally, you should select comic book stories and events that your players are familiar with. The reason for this is, the more people who can engage with the themes and tropes you're aiming for, the more engagement your group will have with those elements in the campaign. Superhero films and television series also fall under this category, as do certain superheroic animated features or anime. With the prevalence of the internet, it shouldn't be hard to find some examples of these stories you can link your players to through an email or a home showing using a streaming service, for example.

DIFFERENT POWER LEVELS

Many prominent superhero teams in comic books have extremely powerful characters serving in the same group as a much lower powered hero. A super-detective who is otherwise a normal man might be on the same team as an alien with a dozen different super-abilities. A super-soldier might fight alongside an actual living deity from an ancient pantheon. This is something the Game Master should keep in mind for his campaign—how do you handle characters who work alongside each other of very different power levels?

Some RPGs, such as **Champions**, use a pool of character points—this allows those characters lacking the raw power of other superheroes to instead spend their points on a broad array of skills or other abilities. This usually means that characters with more powerful abilities are focused in only a few areas, where the lower powered characters can tackle just about any task. I would recommend that the Game Master work with the players of the low powered characters to ensure that they have a particular ability or area of interest that no one else can do. There should never be a question of *"why is **this** guy on the team?"* (Unless, of course, your campaign is going for a particularly humorous tone!)

Incorporating characters of wildly different power levels in the same campaign can be a challenge. The Game Master needs to make sure that all characters have a chance to shine, and the limitations of the low powered characters shouldn't make the players feel meaningless. Ensure to include encounters that offer something for the low powered characters as well as the rest; this can range from discovering the villains' specific weakness to dealing with hordes of lesser servants or minions.

Comic Book Conventions

Aaron looked at several predominant themes in comic books and reasoned how they could—or should—apply to his Strike Force campaign. Listed below are several of these themes and Aaron's advice on how to implement them into your game. In Aaron's own words:

Lethality: *We talked about Lethality in the discussion of Ground Rules. Here, I wanted to discuss how to make things less lethal in a campaign. It's no problem for the GM to increase the level of violence in a campaign; if the villains get uglier, the heroes will, too. But if you want to decrease the level of lethal violence in a campaign, you'll find that it takes some work. The best way is to confront characters with the consequences of their killing.*

When death is too prevalent, you need to confront the heroes with the grief-stricken relatives of their victims, Don't just do this at the battle-site; the heroes can be on patrol, in a press conference, at an awards ceremony where they're being honored for crime-fighting, or in any other circumstance where the wailing of grieving survivors will embarrass them—and where the passersby and press are likely to turn hostile, too.

Don't forget the value of the Scornful NPC Hero. Is there an NPC hero admired by your player characters? If this hero becomes cool or scornful because of the heroes' violence, the heroes may get the message. The same applies to DNPCs and sidekicks.

It the violence continues, you need to have it backfire on the characters. For instance, if the heroes start out every attack by using their nastiest, ugliest attacks on the villains, have one villain kidnap a DNPC and dress him up in his own costume. The mind-controlled DNPC makes the villains usual speech; the heroes murder him and are then faced with the consequences of their violent actions (Editor's note: Overlord once pulled this on Bolo!).

An important note: In many campaigns, it doesn't mean anything to the heroes that the authorities are suddenly hunting them for murder. Usually, the players just assume that the authorities can now be counted among the ranks of the villains. The lesson has to be personal for it to stick.

One last thing: When characters buy high-powered killing attacks, you might suggest alternate powers which are just as efficient for defeating villains but don't kill—for example, Killing Attacks and BODY Drains which only work on foci. If you have a 5D6 Armor Piercing Killing Attack that only effects inorganic substances, then the power-armor villain is going to find his power suit blown from his body and can be defeated without the heroes killing him outright.

Aging: *If you run a campaign for several years, you're going to have to deal with the topic of characters aging. There are several ways to deal with the subject; three are presented here.*

Method One: One Year = One Year. The simplest way to deal with the characters' aging is to have them age one year for every year you play. Trouble is, if you win only intermittently or run several campaigns of which the superhero campaign is only one, your players will find their characters aging faster than they like. It's especially disturbing for the player of a teenaged hero who discovers that his character is now in his mid-20s without having gamed out enough of his growing years.

Method Two: One Year = Three Years. Here, you divorce your campaign from the calendar. For every three real years you play, your characters go through one of their years and age one of their years—but the current real world year is also the current game-world year. This leads to all sorts of problems when you're trying to coordinate real-world history with campaign history, but is still a viable method.

Method Three: Retarded Aging. Here, you follow the one year = one year pattern, but you make all sorts of retarded aging techniques available to your characters. In this way, the players who want their characters to age normally will be satisfied, and those who want their characters to age very slowly will be happy as well. Methods of retarded aging include: Antigeria; medicine and genetic experimentation; campaign mutants having greatly lengthened lifespans; magicians being able to sustain themselves across the centuries; etc.

As you'll see from various references within the text, the Strike Force campaign uses the third method.

PLANNED LONGEVITY OF HEROES

When you're planning a long-term campaign in the vein of Strike Force, one thing to consider is how the longevity of the game world affects your heroes.

Legacy Heroes: Heroes that have been active for some time often acquire a stable of enemies, friends, and possibly sidekicks. Another common trope is for heroes to inspire others to follow in their footsteps. This can be a family affair, with the son or daughter taking over for the parent. It can also be a total stranger picking up the mantle for a hero who is no longer able to fight crime due to illness, age, or injury.

Retirement: Some heroes eventually hang up the mask. These characters can be wonderful NPCs and mentors, offering advice from their long experience as a crimefighter. A PC hero can also look at retirement if their story allows for it. This can be a great opportunity to bring in a new character while still honoring the old.

Heroic Sacrifice/Death: If your campaign stretches over several years of game time, it is possible that some heroes may fall in the line of duty. Whenever a superhero dies, this can add some gravitas to a particular conflict or cause. It can also be a rallying cry for others to pick up the hero's torch and continue the fight, or to lend a villain an even more sinister attitude. The players may even appreciate seeing statues in the hero's honor or mentions of the hero's death in a museum or other memorial in the campaign setting.

Keeping It Fresh: Running the Long-Term Campaign

If your campaign runs for several years, the players and Game Master will have to figure out how to keep the adventures fresh and exciting. It's sad for a campaign to perish because it's gone stale; here are some ideas which can help keep that from happening. In Aaron's own words:

New Players and Characters

The most inevitable campaign change that helps keep it fresh involves the introduction of new players and characters. New players coming into the campaign add enthusiasm and energy. And, eventually, all players want to try out one or more new characters within the campaign, retiring their old characters or just putting them on ice. These new characters and their new stories, hunteds, and powers also add vitality to a campaign.

New Character Directions: *You can also spruce up old and shaggy characters by developing new directions and interests for them to pursue. Some new character directions can include:*

Adding To/Changing the Character Goal: *If a PC's motivation or goal has been resolved or has become a bore, it's time to change it. An example in Strike Force is that of ShadowWalker; originally a straight martial-arts hero, he was played for years in that fashion. Later, his player conceived of ShadowWalker being a protector of the Pattern and opposing more threatening mystic foes who endanger the natural order. This completely altered the character's orientation and feel, subtly changing the variety of adventures he undertakes; see his character description for details.*

NPCs Revamp: *Another way to pump new energy into a character is to change the character's relationships with the NPCs in his life. When the character's Hunter suddenly dies, retires, or becomes his friend (or romantic interest), and the hero gains a new Hunter; when the hero's girlfriend decides that they should be married, or breaks up with him in order to pursue her own life, or discovers his Secret ID, or suddenly turns out to be the daughter of his Hunted and a super to boot; when the hero's scientist ally decides that he, too, needs to have a power suit and fly around fighting crime; then we see new energy in a character.*

The Total Character Rework: *Finally, if a character is just too boring to continue playing, you might think about reworking him completely. Talk about this with your GM. What if a radiation or magical accident strips him of the powers he now possesses and gives him a whole new set of abilities? A power-armor hero could lose his suit but become a magical adept; the radiation-spawned brick could lose his powers, regain his human form, and become a martial artist. This character is as interesting as a new one—but still has all his experience and an extensive background to boot.*

New Campaign Directions

A more radical change is to alter the very nature of the campaign.

The GM can do this (but should only do this if the players are enthusiastic or, at the least, don't mind) by changing the characters' relationship with the world, or by changing the world itself. Some sample changes:

Fugitives: *The heroes, previously law-abiding and well respected, could become fugitives hunted by the law and other heroes. Conversely, fugitive heroes could be cleared by the law or accepted by the general population. This will change the whole tone of the campaign.*

Holocaust: *The GM could blow up the world—have a nuclear holocaust, have the world enter a magical dimension where technology won't work, have a plague ravage the planet, or have it conquered by space aliens. The PCs then have to work both to control the depredations of supervillains taking advantage of the confusion, and to recover and rebuild their battered home.*

There are many other methods; if your campaign is in the doldrums, a little creative thought will give you numerous ways to put new energy into the campaign.

Pacing the Campaign

It's also possible for the GM and players to wear themselves out by playing intensive, emotional stories and miniseries all the time.

Our experience was that the Strike Force campaign works best when a long, intensive mini-series is followed by numerous short, fun adventures; this doesn't wear out the GM so fast. You can also go on hiatus whenever you're low on energy or ideas, picking the campaign up again when your creative batteries are recharged.

Evolving the Campaign

The Strike Force campaign went steady for over 22 years. One of the reasons for this campaign's longevity is how Aaron kept evolving the campaign over time. Strike Force started out very different than it ended up. Originally, the heroes were fighting local street crime. Over the years, Strike Force graduated to facing greater foes and larger responsibilities. After two decades, the team had begun rescuing entire alternate dimensions and dealing with galactic ramifications of their actions. Thus, Aaron evolved his campaign in three distinct ways to keep things fresh and interesting: he changed the scope, the setting flavor, and the tone.

Scope: Aaron growing the team's impact on the setting over the years. The original focus of the heroes was far more on local problems in the beginning. Things began to change with the introduction of Overlord and (especially) the Blood. Eventually, Strike Force became the setting's premiere superteam, handling threats to the entire world (and even greater dangers!). You can also change the scope of your campaign by looking at where the characters started, and finding a way to introduce more responsibility or engage them in a larger conflict—such as one between nations, planets, or even galactic empires. There's no need to jump right into the escalation, however—you can build slowly towards taking your campaign to a broader stage. Also, don't forget that it can be refreshing to change things up from time to time, so it can be just as important to consider the small, personal stories for a long-running campaign that is dealing with vast issues.

Setting Flavor: While the concept of scope can be a component, the concept of "setting flavor" encompasses many variables, including specific themes and tropes, and more intangible concepts like "feel" and "imagery." Setting flavor can be established by the words you choose to describe things, the images you use to establish what the setting looks like, and even the way you bring across the setting to the players. Do you whisper? Do you stand up and use energetic body language?

For Strike Force, Aaron chose to evolve setting flavor during the campaign primarily by visiting alternate dimensions. A time-honored comic book trope, this was a great way to change things up for the Strike Force players and keep the game from getting stale. Time travel is another great comic book trope that addresses the same issue. Visiting WWII or the Wild West is practically a rule for comic book stories, and both are excellent ways to make the setting flavor feel more compelling and interesting.

Traveling through time or to different dimensions doesn't need to be the entire campaign, however. Aaron tried to use them as a way to "take a break" from many other ongoing story lines in Earth-AU, for instance. Naturally, if the players get particularly involved in one of these "side treks," by all means, expand the story to accommodate your group's interests!

Tone: Some of the alternate worlds visited by Strike Force have a marked distinct tone from core Earth-AU. Nice World, for example, has a very different tone, as does the rather humorous world of Savoir-Ferret. Events in the Strike Force timeline changed the tone of core Earth-AU as well, most directly with the introduction of WWIII. Other events in the Strike Force setting were initiated by players, such as the conflict over methods of crimefighting early in Strike Force's history or the killing of Powerlord.

This is another way to spice up a long-running campaign; consider changing the tone from time to time. If your characters are involved in heavy, interpersonal drama—consider a very light and humorous adventure for a while! If things have been going very well for the heroes for a long time, think about

introducing a darker tone to lend gravitas—particularly if you're introducing some broader-scope threats (such as WWIII!). If your game has largely been about chasing villains around the globe, consider a murder-mystery style investigation, perhaps at a haunted house! There are many different ways to implement this approach for your group, but the advice is sound. Variety is the spice of life!

Evolving the Villains

A long-term campaign should encompass changes to the villains as well as the heroes. While the threats that the superheroes face can certainly change over the course of a campaign, using recurring villains or villainous groups can help build a sense of continuity and immersion. You don't need to spend a major amount of time deciding what the villains are doing while the heroes are off saving the world again, but it doesn't hurt to jot down a few notes here and there to keep things interesting.

In the Champions RPG, the relationship between a hero and a villain who opposes him is often expressed as a "Hunted" Complication, meaning that the villains are typically hunting for the hero to defeat or humble them. Aaron's writing on the subject says while some hunters stay shiny, imperishable, and unchanged through the course of a campaign, many do not. I would add that it is important to remember that the focus of the game should stay on the player characters. Thus, the method I would normally recommend for evolving a villain is to have them respond or react to the player character's choices!

To keep things interesting for both the Game Master and the players, Aaron advocates "aging" or evolving the villains in the following ways.

Combination

If several villains are after the same superhero or hero team, it is a classic comic book trope for those villains to band together into their own team. This can also include villainous agencies or groups. They could either form a temporary alliance, or Aaron suggests that the story could reveal that all of these different groups are actually working for the same master organization.

Resolution and Replacement

The Hunted could be resolved if the villains retire, are stripped of powers, die, or are otherwise taken out of the story. Similarly, if the villains' motivation for hunting the hero is removed or becomes obsolete, the villains' relationship with the hero is ripe for change. Does the villain see the error of his ways and become an ally? Or does the villain simply change his focus to another scheme, perhaps renewing his acquaintance with the hero upon another encounter? However you wish to handle it, there are always more villains out there to threaten the heroes, albeit in different ways! Don't hesitate to replace a threat that vanishes with a new, fresher one as the campaign grows.

Spinoff or Evolution

A new villain can arise who is directly related to or derived from an old villain. This could be a legacy character—either the son or daughter of an established villain—or someone inspired by that villain's actions and personality. As an example, Luster was originally Hunted by Overlord. The villain's motivation was to return Luster to his lair. Over time, however, this changed as Luster became Hunted by Power Lord, her hated half-brother. After Ichi-ban killed Power Lord, she gained the interest of a new villain: Gold, a member of Overlord's Steel Brigade.

Overlord himself is an excellent example of an evolving villain. He started out as one of Strike Force's most prominent and dangerous foes. However, over time, he changed his motivation and eventually became a trusted ally. The actions of Overlord continued to echo through the campaign (such as Luster's new Hunted, Gold), but he himself was very different at the end of the campaign than from where he began.

Seasons and Story Arcs

Aaron usually ran his games on two nights a week; Tuesdays and Saturdays. Typically, in the course of a year, he would run three different campaigns on the weekend, each consisting of a roughly four-month "season." The Tuesday games consisted of roughly six-month seasons. (For more ideas on how to pace your campaign, see page 214)

The Saturday games were considered the main campaigns with more advanced story lines, while the Tuesday games accommodated more experimental campaigns that occupied a specific niche or only occurred occasionally. Also, Aaron did not adhere to these schedules slavishly. For example, individual seasons of Age of Heroes and Strike Force ran for as long as a year at a time rather than the regular four months. Aaron notes that this regular cycling of campaigns kept interest high amongst his players and is one of the major reasons why the Strike Force campaign has endured since 1981.

It is important to note here that many seasons encompassed one main story arc with several minor ones also included. The main story arc often featured some sense of closure at the end of the season. This method helped the players feel that their actions had meaning. To end the season without any sense of closure undermines the benefits of taking a break in the first place! The closure need not be entirely significant, but the players can often end up distracted and unsatisfied if they feel that their contributions during the season had little or no impact.

ALTERNATING CAMPAIGNS

The Saturday campaigns usually consisted of:

Strike Force: Modern-day superheroes on Earth-AU.

Age of Heroes: Mythological Greek fantasy in its own universe.

Eldorado Society: Pulp-era action on Earth-AU.

The Tuesday campaigns usually consisted of:

Shadows: Dystopian future low-powered superheroes in its own (paranoid) universe.

Twilight Falls: A soap-opera superhero campaign set on Earth-AU.

Zorandar: Lost Worlds romance adventure with links to Earth-AU.

Ninja Hero: Martial arts adventures set in world without superheroes.

Astro-Rangers and Robo-Warriors: Anime-style campaigns.

At the Movies: Unrelated movie-style one-shot adventures.

The Character Goals Sheet

Aaron used what he called a "What I Want to Do" sheet to keep track of his player's goals throughout a campaign. These questionnaires are perfect to work with a rotating or alternating campaign structure. Even if you simply play one, long-term campaign, these sheets can be extremely useful whenever your group finishes a particular story arc.

USING THE CHARACTER GOALS SHEET

These questionnaires are best handed out at semi-regular intervals to the players in your campaign. The purpose of the character goals sheet is threefold:

Between Breaks: The character goals sheet gives the player a chance to think about what they want their character to do once the campaign resumes. This is good because it helps avoid *"What happened last time?"* syndrome, keeps the player engaged and excited about what happens next in the campaign. At the same time, it helps the Game Master remember important plot points.

Communication: One of the best things about the character goals sheet is that it fosters communication between the player and the Game Master about expectations. The Game Master gets a good idea of what kinds of stories interest the player most, while the player gets a chance to explain where he'd like the story to go with his character in the upcoming season. Also, these sheets can help manage expectations on both sides or identify misunderstandings that can be cleared up before the game resumes.

Plots and Subplots: One of Aaron's many talents was his scrupulous record-keeping. If you use these character goals sheets to track the progress of player characters throughout a campaign, they can be a great tool to inspire new ideas when the game picks back up again for a new season. Even the best Game Master can forget about a dangling plot thread in a campaign lasting years—but a quick review of the character goals sheets can make for a great reminder!

KEEPING TRACK

The use of the character goals sheet can easily be adapted to forums, email, or other electronic campaign tools. I personally recommend sending the files out via email or a service such as Dropbox/Google Docs/etc. Keeping the files electronically makes them easier to search and easy to access even from remote via a smartphone or tablet.

HOW TO RUIN YOUR CAMPAIGN

For everything you can do to improve and sustain your campaign, there are many more you can do to ruin it. Since we have seen a lot of campaigns ruined, we have collected, for your interest and entertainment, the top ten sure-fire ways that you, as GM, can utterly destroy your campaign.

(1) Never Let Your Player Characters Be Best At Anything. *Player characters like to be considered experts in their fields, and it's your job to make sure they understand that they're really not. Always have an NPC around who's better at the PCs' skills and professions. Also, if you have both a PC and an NPC available to perform a task, make sure the NPC gets to do it. Always work to make sure that your PCs are impressed with your NPCs; the NPCs should always be doing spectacular things for the PCs to see. When your heroes are overwhelmed by enemies, have your NPCs save them, every time. And don't forget the experience factor: As your heroes get more experienced, make sure that the common grunt enemy gets tougher, too; VIPER agents shouldn't be any easier for the heroes to defeat just because the heroes now have twice as much power as when they began play.*

(2) Make Sure the Plot and NPCs Are More Important Than the PCs. *On a related matter, make sure that the plot and the NPCs you worked so hard to create aren't seriously disturbed by the actions of the PCs. Given the chance, your players will come up with plans and tactics that are directly backwards from what you thought they'd do; don't hesitate to force them back into the plotline as you conceived it. And remember—if the player characters weren't around, then your NPCs could go on this adventure and perform it just as well ... probably better.*

(3) Force Your PCs Into Roles Their Players Hate. *Players shouldn't be dictating to you the roles they want their characters to take. If a hero wants to be shiny and respected, frame him for murder and make everyone hate him. If a hero wants to be happy, kill his lover or family or something. And don't forget about deliberately crippling and scarring the heroes for plot effect.*

(4) Introduce Genre Conventions Your Players Hate. *Here's a question: Whose campaign is this, anyway? If you want to do a tragedy or a romance, even though your players hate these themes, go right ahead. If you'd like for the heroes to spend their careers as fugitives from the law, go ahead, regardless of what the players think. If, by chance, you actually tell the players your plans ahead of time, and they say they don't like the idea, reassure them that you won't do it—but then sneak it up on them anyway. By the time they notice, they'll be so much in love with the way you do things that they won't mind, really.*

(5) Overcomplicate! *This is fun. Create massively complex plots with clues flying like clouds of bats. Then make the players feel like idiots when they can't figure things out. In association with Rules #1 and #2 above, be sure to have an NPC thinker on hand to figure everything out when they're too dumb to. Another way to keep things complicated: Invite too many players! After all, if six players is the perfect group, then 12 is twice as perfect.*

(6) Always Obey Die Rolls; Never Surrender the Scene. *If, at the climax of a mini-series, a PC has come up with a brilliant way to defeat the villain, and all the other characters have pitched in, and everyone's tired and ready to finish this spectacular story and go home, and the situation is just like the climax of a superior comic book-and if, after all this, our hero botches his roll, he's failed. The fight keeps going, until the heroes win or lose for real. On a related topic, during these fights, make sure that unconscious villains get all their recoveries. Nothing keeps a combat going longer than villains continually waking up. (Wimpier GMs will keep an eye on how the flow of battle is going, and as soon as the heroes get a significantly upper hand, the unconscious villains will stop recovering and just be unconscious—but that's not your way.)*

(7) Drone. *When Game Mastering, use narration rather than acting out the interaction and dialogue between PCs and NPCs. Narrate the adventure's climax. Describe things at a staggering level of detail, down to the number of buttons on the NPCs' costumes, for instance. Also, always stay as calm as possible; don't ever get agitated and theatrical. Keep telling yourself: It's only a game.*

(8) Get To Know Your Players—And Step On* Their *Psychological Limitations. *Find out what your players want out of a campaign—and by denying them the things they most want, show them just who's in charge. If a player is a Builder, make sure his elaborate plans fail. If a player is a Romantic, give him no NPCs for relationships—or, even*

better, have all his NPC associates die just as the relationship is getting interesting (this is high drama!). If a player is a Combat Monster, make sure all of his encounters are thinking encounters. Don't forget the players' lesser irritations: if, for instance, the players truly dislike a recurrent villain, have him show up all the time. If they have a dislike of their Vulnerabilities and Secret IDs being known, then start the campaign with the master villains already knowing them all. And so on.

(9) Use Characters As Leverage On Their Players. *Try making this announcement: "If you're not here on time, I start tearing up character sheets." You'll like it.*

(10) Ignore Complaints. *Finally, some of your players may tell you that they're not enjoying themselves but that they would if you just changed a few things. Well, don't.*

More seriously—if you, as GM, are doing any of these things, you might want to rethink them. They do cause real problems and do lasting, often disastrous damage to campaigns.

WHY THIS LIST IS AWESOME

I've found Aaron's irreverent list of "how to RUIN your campaign" extremely useful during my gaming career. Much of the things he points out with this list are fairly obvious—yet I have witnessed many, many groups falling victim to the behavior Aaron points out! In fact, I have been responsible for making some of these mistakes myself over the years.

One reason why I found this list so compelling is that it always struck me as a way for Aaron to pass on some hard-earned lessons of his own. I'm not saying Aaron committed each of these top 10 "ruiners," but I would not be surprised to discover that he had wandered down the wrong path from time to time. I suspect this list grew out of those experiences. Thus, this particular top 10 is Aaron's way of helping other gamers avoid some of the pitfalls he'd already encountered while blazing a trail for the rest of us.

Even now, as I celebrate over 30 years of being a game master and player in hundreds of different games, I find myself spotting things on this list to keep an eye out for in my own travels. For instance, number 6 (Always Obey Die Rolls; Never Surrender the Scene) has bitten me on the behind several times over the years! It never hurts to get a refresher, either… and there have certainly been several times that I wish I could simply hand certain game masters this list and point out a particular number or two; *"**This!** Stop doing **this**!"*

I can only hope you find it half as useful as I have. I hope that it guides you avoid ruin as you build an awesome and memorable campaign!

PLAYERS

The Strike Force Method is, perhaps unsurprisingly, deeply focused on involving the players. Aaron considered his players one of his greatest resources, and I happen to have a similar opinion. This section of Strike Force covers how to integrate new players into your campaign, identifying that different players are looking for different things from the game, and the broad categories of player types.

Adding a New Player: *It's good to have new players come into a campaign; new players mean new blood and energy in a campaign. But there's a particular danger associated with New Players, especially when a new player is mainlined right into the campaign. He then becomes an important part of it immediately—but doesn't have a good grasp on the campaign's background and ground rules.*

What happens? Sometimes the new character's indifference to the "ground rules" hurts the regular PCs' reputations; sometimes—even worse—the new character will get one or more of the series regulars killed. The player's defense is always the same: "Hey, it's only a game, just put together another character."

When a new player comes into a campaign, unless the GM is already familiar with the player's style and attitudes, he may wish to lend the new player an NPC, one who is known to the player characters. You can, in fact, use the heroes in this source book, especially the 0-EXP versions, for this purpose.

The result? The new player gets to play several episodes with a character who is known to the existing PCs; also, he'll have these episodes to learn how the series regulars play their game. If the player fits in, he can create his own character. If he doesn't, the GM can head off any actions that might do permanent harm to another character or the campaign by saying, "Sorry, but Star Mangler just wouldn't do that. Try something else."

Listening to your Players: *Always listen to your players' discussion of the ongoing adventure. They'll constantly be analyzing, theorizing, and commenting on the adventure. Often, their discussion will give you even better ideas than those you've been implementing.*

Also, pay attention to the recurring phrase, "It might be neat if …" The player who is saying this, whether he realizes it or not, is expressing a desire about a future story line or character development. Usually it's easy to accommodate him, and gives him a more personal interest in that specific plotline.

THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF PLAYERS

"Lots of different types of people play role-playing games; each has different aims and requires different treatment in order to be happy in a campaign environment. While this diversity is good for the campaign, it forces the GM to work harder to discover what everyone wants."

—Aaron Allston

Amongst the many eye-opening things I learned from the 1988 Strike Force was Aaron's assertion that different players wanted different things from the game. This was a revelatory idea, especially in 1988, long before other designers had really begun to investigate the concept. Aaron went on to describe different "types" of players and the things that motivate them. In the decades since I first read about these different player types, I've often scrutinized gaming groups that I'd been a part of to see which players fit into which categories.

Types of Champions Players

The following list constitutes most of the different types of players who've been involved in Strike Force. I don't pretend it is comprehensive, but you'll probably see yourself and most of your fellow players in there somewhere. Many players have the traits of two or more of these stereotypes.

THE BUILDER

This player wants his character to have an impact on the world—to build institutions, to clean up a city, to change things. If your campaign is absolutely static (if player characters cannot introduce new technologies, make the campaign setting a better place to live, or substantively change anything through their efforts), the Builder just won't be happy; he must have some lasting successes, or he will end up frustrated.

THE BUDDY

This player is involved in the campaign primarily because his friends are. He'd probably rather be at a movie or watching a ballgame, but so long as everyone else is playing he'll go along for the ride. He usually won't be deeply involved or interested in the campaign, and wouldn't cry if it eventually closed down. The GM has two options dealing with the player. First, he can ignore the player—the Buddy's not contributing much to the campaign, after all. This might be GM's only option, especially if the player really has no interest in roleplaying. A more rewarding course is to draw the player (sometimes against his better judgment) into the campaign. Lurking inside almost every Buddy is another type of player trying to get out. If you can find what the Buddy enjoys and give this to him, he will likely become much more interested in your campaign, and might even become a campaign stalwart.

THE COMBAT MONSTER

This player wants his character to fight, fight, fight. This doesn't mean that the campaign must consist of only combat, but if every episode doesn't have some sort of battle, or if the character is prevented from participating in these conflicts, the player will not be happy.

THE GENRE FIEND

This player's motto is "No, do it right!" He's an expert in the genre which is being played, and if the GM misses a convention or opportunity, the Genre Fiend is certain to let him know about it. The GM's task here is to understand the genre and ascertain what sort of encounters, situations, and themes that the Fiend is expecting to play, and then provide them whenever possible.

THE COPIER

This player likes to run the game-world equivalent of characters he's seen elsewhere—in movies, books, TV, or the comics. The problem is, he also expects the hero to be as efficient or as universally respected as the original hero. The GM has to work hard to understand the Copier's goals for his character; if the GM feels these goals can't be met, he needs to tell the player as soon as possible. A variant type of Copier is the player who creates one character and runs the same character, or variant forms of him, in every campaign in which he plays.

THE MAD SLASHER

This player spends a long, hard week at the office or at school, and when he gets to the gaming table all he wants to do is kill. When a villain confronts the hero, the Mad Slasher kills him. When a cop gives the hero

lip, the Mad Slasher kills him. When the villain is shielding himself with the body of a DNPC, the Mad Slasher blasts right through the DNPC to get at the villain. The Mad Slasher says, "I put up with garbage in real life; in my games, I get to do anything I want to anyone I want." Obviously, the problem here is that the Mad Slasher only belongs in a campaign where everyone is a Mad Slasher. If all your players want their characters to be maniacal killers, you have no problem. If some of them are roleplayers, the GM is going to have to get rid of the Mad Slasher.

THE MAD THINKER

This player loves outwitting the villain. If a problem can best be solved by punching a bad guy in the snoot, the Mad Thinker will still spend his time figuring out how to outthink his foe. This player has good and bad points. The best point: He's thinking, hungrily evaluating each situation, offering interesting solutions to problems which require analytical deduction. Bad points: The GM has to work hard to keep up (the GM is thinking for a vast number of NPCs, while the Mad Thinker is thinking only for his one character), and the Mad Thinker sometimes slows progress to a crawl while he figures out how to outwit the villain. So long as every episode has an intellectual problem to resolve, the Mad Thinker should stay satisfied.

THE PLUMBER

This player likes to create a character with a finely-detailed and intricate personality, and then spend his gaming career plumbing this character to its depths. The GM needs to provide the Plumber with a variety of different situations, including moral quandaries and emotional scenes, to react to; if he does not, the Plumber will not be happy.

THE PRO FROM DOVER

This player creates characters who must be the best at what they do. If the hero is a brick, he must be the strongest in the world. If the hero is a scientist, he must be the master of his field—have the highest skill roll in the world in that science, and also have the universal acclaim of experts in the field. The GM needs to provide the Pro with occasional opportunities to display his prominence, and must be careful not to allow new PCs to overlap the Pro's area of interest.

THE ROMANTIC

This player is most interested in the personal relationships of his characters. If the Romantic's character does not become involved with another PC, the GM must make sure that the PC is supplied with NPCs to meet, get to know, and develop relationships with—not just romances, but professional relationships, familial relationships, etc. If the Romantic can't develop relationships, the Romantic won't be happy.

THE RULES EXPLOITER

In general, this player mostly wants to create characters with skills or powers which bend and exploit the existing rules. These players are constantly redesigning their characters for higher point-value efficiency, and, unless they also have other campaign interests, they're probably not all that involved in role-playing. Often, the GM will not be able to satisfy the Rules Exploiter's gaming needs.

THE SHOWOFF

This player needs to be on stage at all times, keeping the spotlight on himself. His characters may be well-designed and inventive, or could be unimaginative and ordinary; only the amount of attention he receives and the number of faces staring at him are important. The GM will have difficulties with the Showoff; he must either let this player dominate the campaign, or must make sure that all players get equal time until the Showoff grows out of this phase or leaves the campaign.

THE TRAGEDIAN

This player likes literary tragedy and wants to play out something similar with his characters. The GM must be prepared to give this player what he wants: The Tragedian's character must be betrayed, lose loved ones, make mistakes which result in catastrophe, and alienate those he cares about. This should not take place all at once, of course—the tragedy must be sustained across the campaign. While he's somewhat masochistic, the Tragedian does create interesting characters and backgrounds and is a sure outlet for a GM's more cruel impulses.

By listening carefully to his players' descriptions of what they want with their characters, the GM should be able to identify their play-styles and provide satisfying subplots and role-playing opportunities for them.

MORE PLAYER TYPES

Here are two more player types that we've identified:

The Special Snowflake

A variant of the Showoff, this player has a driving need for his character to be creative and unique above all other concerns. This can result in characters who bend or break existing campaign themes, the ground rules, or even the mechanics of the game itself. What is most important to this type of player is that their character must be something special and different from everyone else's. The game master should try and work with the player to find a creative outlet for the character's quirks and foibles that still fit into the campaign as a whole. This may not always be possible and can result in a character that simply doesn't fit in with the rest of the group.

The Loonie

Also known as "The Clown," this player doesn't seem to care about the game, the story, or the characters. All he wants is to have fun, be it cracking jokes about the villians, making fun of everyone's actions, or reciting an endless series of pop culture references. The GM will need to take the Loonie aside and and try to curb this behavior before it utterly disrupts the game itself.

BLUE-BOOKING & MULTI-MEDIA GAMING

By Steve Kenson

Aaron Allston's "blue-booking" technique nearly destroyed my longest-running superhero campaign—and it was glorious. But I'm getting ahead of myself. First, you may be asking yourself *"What the devil is blue-booking?"*

Tabletop roleplaying games have always had a need for private and semi-private exchanges of information and interplay between the players, and between the players and the Game Master. Typically, this sort of thing took the form of written notes passed between players and the GM, so other players would not necessarily know what they contained. These naturally became known as "paranoia notes" to many gamers, since they were a clear sign that something was up. Game groups would even compensate for this by occasionally passing blank or nonsense notes so the group couldn't tell which were the really significant ones, much like Game Masters calling for the occasional Perception roll or the like for no real reason.

Aaron's **Strike Force** campaign took the concept of the "paranoia note" one step further: Players used personal notebooks to write down private "off-camera" scenes and conversations. Since they typically wrote in blue paper-bound composition notebooks—the type used for school essay tests—the practice became known as "blue-booking." It opened up a whole new stage for interaction and creativity for Aaron's players, as well as a means for their characters to have personal conversations and experiences, while at the same time keeping all of those notes together in a neat, sequential package, rather than a collection of torn scraps of paper.

Like other elements of Aaron's Game Mastering playbook, blue-booking came as a revelation to me as a then-teenaged GM. I had been running a Marvel Super-Heroes campaign throughout much of high school for my gaming group, although I borrowed heavily from virtually every superhero RPG on the market at the time for source material, including **Champions**, of course. I immediately began implementing blue-booking at the game table as a way of expanding the "behind the scenes" elements of the campaign.

It worked—and how. Players started using their blue-books for the traditional "note-passing" things: communicating information known only to their characters. It allowed me a channel to pass along

clues and other details, which the players could convey (or not) to each other in their characters' own words. Then it provided space for in-character asides and bits of character interaction and development that a group of teenaged boys might have felt awkward playing out around the game table. Eventually, we began to devote the occasional entire game session to blue-booking, which must have been quite a sight: All of us, huddled around the dining room table, quietly scribbling in notebooks and passing them to each other, like some sort of "analog LAN party" (keep in mind that this was truly in the Dark Ages of the Internet, when none of us had even dial-up access to speak of).

It was around then that the scheming started.

One of the players, whose character was a wealthy business magnate in his secret identity, began making a series of unscrupulous investments—aimed at ruining a business enterprise he considered criminal, but through less-than-legal means. It was the kind of throwaway line GMs live for so, of course, I picked it up and ran with it.

That's when the player of a dark-detective hero (a restored-to-life Nightwraith, from Aaron's **The Circle and M.E.T.E.** sourcebook, in fact) picked up clues from people affected by the financial collateral damage of these illegal business deals. He began investigating, doggedly following leads. The other player's character became aware of someone looking into what he thought was a done deal, and began trying to cover it up—and the race was on. The two characters were locked in a struggle for several sessions of blue-booking, with me as the intermediary, without either of them initially aware another player was even involved.

When it all came out at a team-meeting it was stunning. Epic. "Trial of Yellowjacket" (from Marvel's ***The Avengers***) level drama, as one hero accused another on the team of illegal activity and the accused sought to defend himself and his actions. It was followed by a blow-out fight when super-mercenaries chose that moment to attack the distracted heroes and kidnap the accused character, working on behalf of one of the financial victims who had set off the investigation in the first place, now more interested in revenge than justice.

Things carried over into the accused character's player being away for the summer, and carrying on the "blue-book" conversation via postal mail. Overall, this turned out to be a good thing, because the dramatic confrontation over the game table became a bit too heated, and some feelings got bruised. Players not involved in the initial set-to between the two players and their characters felt ambushed and more than a bit awkward, and the whole thing nearly made some want to quit the game altogether. It took a cooling-off period and some intervening conversations, games, and—yes—further blue-booking to resolve things. The lesson was that blue-booking is a potent medium for roleplaying, but one that (like all roleplaying experiences) needs careful management, and that differs from face-to-face roleplaying in some important ways.

Benefits of Blue-Booking

Blue-booking has many benefits which can enhance and add to a campaign. Consider the following in terms of using blue-booking to the fullest in your own games.

LOWERING INHIBITIONS

First and foremost, blue-booking offers a different medium for players (and the GM) to express themselves. Roleplaying scenes and situations that might be uncomfortable or awkward around the gaming table and play out in greater detail, and with stronger emotion and character interaction, in written form. This benefits players who are shy or introverted, as well as those who are not natural improvisational actors, but may be excellent storytellers, given the right opportunity. The written word also allows for the opportunity to compose your thoughts, while at the same time encouraging brevity, unless players write as quickly as they can talk. Blue-booking can also be a helpful "safety net" for players who simply feel uncomfortable expressing strong emotion or dealing with certain issues in the open at the game table.

In particular, blue-booking is great for exactly the sort of "private moments" it is aimed toward, including personal interactions between characters and scenes of drama, sorrow, romance—yes, even sex, if everyone is comfortable with that (see Blue-Book Ground Rules for more on this). When introduced into my then gaming group of teenaged boys, it was a godsend in terms of handling roleplaying scenes that were awkward and giggle-inducing at the game table. Blue-booking allowed the player characters to have richer personal and inner lives without cringe-inducing game play, and I think the experience helped to open players up to the possibilities such that more personal drama could be introduced at the game table.

INDIVIDUAL FOCUS

Blue-booking offers more opportunities for exploration of individual scenes, interactions, and focus on characters' personal lives without requiring the other players to sit around and watch while those scenes play out. Ideally, they are either writing in their own blue-books, or the blue-book interaction takes place away from the game table (via email, for example) such that it doesn't take up any game time. This focus allows for more in-depth subplots involving individual characters, which the Game Master can then weave back into the story at the table as the opportunities present themselves.

AVOIDING "PARROT SYNDROME."

Since the Game Master functions as the "senses" of the characters in the story, describing to the players everything their characters experience, there are often situations of one character noticing or experiencing something and then having to tell the other characters about it in their own words, "parroting" back what the Game Master previously said in front of everyone. (Aaron's group used the expression "pushing the recap button" for this.) Passing along some information via blue-booking helps to avoid this syndrome, so when characters reveal things they've discovered, the players are hearing it for the first time, the same as their characters. This also allows the player relating the information to put their own spin on it, or even distort or withhold information (which can be both a good and a bad thing, as discussed under Pitfalls, following).

SECRETS AND SURPRISES

It can be difficult for characters to keep secrets, either to themselves or between each other, at the game table where all of the players can hear everything everyone says. Players often have to compartmentalize things they know versus what their characters know, and this is a useful skill, but it can sometimes be fun for individual players to communicate secretly with the GM and each other. It both adds an element of depth and mystery to the game and allows players to truly be surprised by things that also surprise their characters. For example, in one game, I played a latent telepath. The GM used blue-booking with the players to set up a scene where, at a pre-arranged signal, all of the players vocalized their characters' thoughts out loud so my character could "hear" them, then stopped. It was a great *"what was that?"* moment! I also caught a few hints at some of the other characters' secrets and personalities.

RECORD-KEEPING

Ideally, the format used for blue-booking should be fairly permanent, whether hand-written in a notebook that can be saved for later reference, or typed in an electronic document, which can be saved, backed-up, and even printed out for storage. This provides a permanent record of events in the campaign from the perspective of each of the characters. Want to know what happened during a particular "off-camera" interaction? Just look it up and read about it! To maximize the effectiveness of this benefit, ground rules should be set on how to record pertinent information in blue-books (see Blue-Book Ground Rules, following).

FLASHBACKS

In fact, blue-book record-keeping allows for the opportunity for later "flash-back" scenes in your game where a portion of a character's blue-book is opened up to the rest of the players, either having the player read the selection, summarizing it in-character, or allowing the other players to read it, perhaps outside of regular game time. For example, if you break an adventure right after a major revelation about a hero's past, and the hero's player says, "I'll fill everyone in about what happened" during the intervening time as the heroes are on their way to confront the looming threat from the past, the other players can simply read an excerpt from that hero's blue-book during the time between games to bring them up to speed on the situation. The next game opens with the hero saying, "...and that's what happened," followed by the other heroes' reactions, and you're off and running.

Pitfalls of Blue-Booking

In spite of all of its usefulness, blue-booking is not without its potential pitfalls and concerns. The following are major things that can crop up with blue-booking in a game, and some ways to address them, if and when they do.

DISTRACTION

As Aaron himself pointed out, blue-booking can be extremely addictive for some types of players. Indeed, I've known players who prefer blue-booking—what amounts to "play-by-post" or "play-by-email"—to face-to-face roleplaying altogether! There are two areas where this distraction occurs: during regular play and outside of it.

Unless all of the players at the table are engaged in blue-booking (see Time and Place, under Blue-Book Ground Rules), then any blue-book communications should be kept fairly short and to the point. If two or more players have to have an "off-stage" blue-book conversation or scene, they should withdraw to do so while the Game Master keeps things running for the rest of the players. Even then, such activity should be kept reasonably brief, so as not to hold up the flow of the game.

Likewise, players should be discouraged from spending too much time at the time perusing or re-reading their blue-books, unless they need to look up some particular detail, or are reading for a flashback. The focus should be on the here-and-now at the game table. There's plenty of time to read over blue-book material later—it's one of the reasons why it's written down!

Away from the game table, some players will devote more time to maintaining and writing in their blue-books than others, which is fine. Generally, so long as the players in question are having fun, there's no problem. The issue arises when excessive out-of-game blue-booking demands the Game Master's constant attention, since the GM must at least read over and approve written material for it to be entered into the "official" record of the campaign. If this results in the GM having to read the equivalent of a half-dozen short stories, and prep for the next game session, that can be a problem! More so when out-of-game blue-booking requires a lot of back-and-forth conversation and responses from the GM (or GM-controlled NPCs).

Part of the solution to this is to allow players to write the "script" for the NPCs in their side-stories, with the GM approving them or making small edits as needed later. Otherwise, the Game Master simply needs to apply time management and ask prolific players to reduce their output to a manageable amount. Players who produce a lot of blue-book material may unknowingly be expressing an interest in Game Mastering themselves, and should be encouraged to do so, or their creative energies harnessed to expand upon some other corner of the setting, as Aaron did with his players, dividing up parts of "Strike Force Earth" and putting them in the hands of other GMs.

IMBALANCED INTERACTION

Because blue-booking appeals more to some players than others, the amount different players will take advantage of the opportunities offered by blue-booking also varies. Some players write lengthy solo short stories about their characters, with detailed interactions, while other players only use their blue-books for short note-passing when they absolutely have to, and nothing else. Additionally, just as with in-person improvisational roleplaying, some players are better writers than others. Their blue-book entries will sing with the polish of professional prose, whereas other players' blue-books are just crabbed notes with the quality of dashed-off text messages.

As with other sorts of in-game interaction, it is up to the Game Master to take these factors into account, both encouraging players who enjoy blue-booking to express themselves through it (especially if it is their primary mode of in-game expression) while at the same thing helping players who want to be better blue-bookers to improve their skills. The GM also needs to not force players who aren't interested in blue-booking to participate in it any more than necessary. This may even involve occasional "mixed" game sessions where some players are blue-booking and others are engaging in face-to-face play with the GM and each other.

INFORMATION HOARDING

Blue-books allow players the opportunity to share information their characters acquire with the other players, avoiding having to parrot the GM, but they also allow players the opportunity to withhold information from the rest of the group, if they so choose. One of my initially bewildering challenges with blue-booking was proudly presenting the players with different pieces of a puzzle, only to discover several of them unwilling to tell the other players what they were—or that they even had some of the pieces! Some players enjoy having a few secrets to keep to themselves, or hold out for just the right moment to disclose some useful piece of information, either because they prefer to hold on to it, or they like to make a dramatic reveal.

As with other problems that crop up with GM-player expectations, the first course of action is to check in with the player. For players who like to collect and keep secrets, find opportunities to give them some in their blue-books that they don't need to share, and make it clearer when they have a vital piece of information they should be sharing. If a player enjoys a dramatic reveal, feel free to fo-

cus the spotlight on them for a bit and turn up the theme music—give them their moment, and they'll do what's needed for the story. If all else fails, and a player hoards information, find ways to get the important stuff out there through other channels and don't give that player information that has to be shared, especially via blue-book.

SCHEMING

Secrecy and behind-the-scenes channels of communication can lead to scheming and plotting amongst the players, as well as paranoia related to the same, whether or not there's any actual scheming or plotting going on! After all, they called paper-passing in tabletop gaming "paranoia notes" long before blue-booking even came along, and with good reason. Players can start wondering what everyone else is up to in those blue-book entries, especially if there are any hints whatsoever that they involve their characters.

As with many other aspects of roleplaying, so long as scheming and secrecy are confined to the characters and not the players, things should ultimately work out. The best roleplayers can play out scenes where their characters hate each other so much they come to blows (as some characters did in Aaron's Strike Force campaigns), while the players are still the best of friends enjoying creating a dramatic scene together. The same is true of blue-booking: If the characters engage in some skullduggery, but the players are all good with it, there's no problem.

Issues arise when either the players are not okay with what's going on behind the scenes, or else the characters' interactions are negatively impacting the game. For example, it's one thing for a team of heroes to split over a disagreement (again, something that happened in Aaron's own campaign, with Strike Force and the Shadow Warriors) but another for there to be no team cohesion whatsoever because none of the characters in the game can trust each other. Similarly, if scheming or plotting leads to hurt feelings on the part of the players, it's wise for the GM to intervene and mediate, working things out away from the game table, and setting clear boundaries for future blue-booking (see Boundaries under Blue-Book Ground Rules).

LINE-CROSSING

The relative anonymity of blue-booking, like writing in a private journal, can sometimes lower inhibitions a bit too much, leading to problematic character behavior or interactions. Usually, this involves things that cross the personal boundaries of the Game Master or other players, or those of the genre itself. Examples of the former may include overly graphic descriptions, immoral or criminal acts, or things a GM or player finds emotionally triggering, including topics like trauma, suicide, and rape, to name a few. The latter usually involves straying outside the agreed-upon bounds of the genre, whether four-color comic or more of a graphic novel format: It can be quite a shock to introduce something like severe childhood abuse into the background of a character in an otherwise light-hearted four color setting, for example, unless the topic is very carefully handled (and perhaps not even then).

Similarly, blue-books have the potential to become "slam-books" for passive-aggressive expressions of frustration or pettiness towards other people, especially the other players. Even entries meant to be shared with a limited audience can make their readers uncomfortable and complicit in this behavior, so it is best for the GM to quietly call it to the players' attention and ask that it stop.

UNBOXING

Sometimes the potential emotional impact of a blue-book entry or exchange isn't known until it is "unboxed," that is, taken out of the original context involving the player, the GM, and any other players originally privy to the entry. This includes things like flashbacks and sharing scenes where players read from their blue-books or allow other players to read them by way of sharing information. Another player may well feel ambushed by unexpected content from a blue-book, which is usually why players should be cautioned that what happens in blue-books rarely stays in them for very long. Blue-books are not personal diaries or journals, and generally shouldn't be used as such. If a player feels an entry is too personal to ever be shared, that's a matter to take up with the Game Master, but such things should be rare. Blue-books are just another medium for roleplaying and storytelling and, like a tree falling in the forest, they need to be witnessed for them to have any real impact. By the same token, if a player feels uncomfortable with the revelation of material from another player's blue-book, that player has a right to say so and the group should respect and try to accommodate the player's discomfort for the benefit of the group and the game as a whole.

Blue-Book Ground Rules

Blue-booking is at its most effective when the entire group is on the same page, both figuratively and often literally in terms of exactly how (and even where and when) blue-booking gets done. You'll find it useful to set guidelines and ground rules in advance for blue-booking in your own games. To do so, consider the following:

MEDIA

Aaron implemented blue-booking in the days before prevalent cell phones—much less smartphones, tablets, and ubiquitous wifi. While the practice originally used blue-covered composition books and other sorts of paper notebooks, there are now many more potential channels for sharing information privately around the game table, and in-between games, and different multimedia platforms through which to share it.

The Game Master should decide what media are appropriate for blue-book content and conversations, keeping in mind the concepts of organization, permanency, and formatting (see the following) that make blue-books so useful. For example, while e-mail or text messaging is a convenient medium, it may not be best suited to blue-booking because of its format and its organization, unless players intend to cut-and-paste and format such communications into a regular blue-book file at a later time. Even then, that can lead to entries getting lost, misplaced, or otherwise not included.

If the group is going to use electronic media for blue-booking, online sharing of word processing documents works well. The game group can use services like Dropbox, Google Docs, or similar collaborative online tools to set up blue-books as documents, providing the GM access to all of them, while the players have access to their own particular blue-books as needed. Collaborative conversations between player characters can even take place in a third shared document, with both players copying and pasting the text into their blue-books when the scene is complete, so they each have a copy. As with all electronic media, make sure there are back-ups in place to avoid data loss! Such electronic blue-books can also be periodically downloaded and even printed out for record-keeping purposes.

INITIATING

Generally, the player who initiates the blue-book conversation or scene begins by writing some brief scene-setting text in their own blue-book, then passing it to the GM or other player to respond, such as:

Lightrune asks Luster to step into the conference room for a moment.

If the Game Master initiates the blue-book conversation, they should ask for the involved player's blue-book and begin it there. So if an NPC approaches Phosphene for an off-camera encounter, the GM asks for Phosphene's blue-book to begin the scene.

FORMATTING

How should blue-book entries be formatted? Typically, each entry should be dated, either with the actual date when it was written, the date and time in the context of the game when it occurred, or both. This makes it easy to reference later on. The author may also want to tag the entry with where the scene occurred for quick-reference, and any other vital details, such as:

November 4, 2015, late afternoon, outside of Shadow Warriors headquarters prior to a team meeting

For back-and-forth dialog, The writers may want to use dialog call-outs like in a script to show who is speaking, such as:

LIGHTRUNE: Can I have word with you…?

LUSTER: Of course. What is it?

...and so forth. Call-outs might be abbreviated after their initial use (to save time and space) or players might do things like color code a back-and-forth conversation, with one player writing in one color ink, the other in another, so it is clear (apart from just handwriting) which character is speaking or narrating.

Other blue-book entries might be written in extended prose, like short-stories, particularly if they are written solely by one author (usually the character's player) and submitted to the GM for review. These can contain more of the usual descriptive passages and traditionally formatted dialog, using quotation marks.

Game Masters should make players aware of any other formatting for blue-books in advance, including using particular electronic or software tools to organize blue-book entries, such as key-words or search tags.

TIME AND PLACE

When and where should players use their blue-books, and to what extent? This depends on what suits the group as a whole and may require some adjustment for the Game Master, but here are some initial ground rules to consider:

During play at the game-table, players should primarily use their blue-books solely for brief passing of notes and information that is kept private between or among their characters. The GM may choose to jot a note in a player's blue-book to provide some bit of information known only to that character, or a player could use a blue-book note to convey a private plan or message to another player.

Players may engage in an extended side-conversation via blue-book during game play, but should check-in with the GM before doing so, since it can impact the flow of the game. A simple "We're going into the next room to talk, can we take this to blue-books?" is usually sufficient, with the GM either agreeing and focusing the action at the table on the rest of the characters, or asking the players to abstain or shorthand their conversation until a more convenient time.

Non-essential blue-book encounters can be handled outside of the regular game-time, either in face-to-face meetings between just the involved players or over email, chat, or the like, with the conversation added to the record and presented to the GM for review.

Lastly, the group can schedule certain game sessions, or portions of game sessions, to be given over entirely to blue-booking. This can range from starting a game session with "Do we have any blue-book business for this session? If so, let's take 30 minutes or so for it" to spending a few hours where the group can play out a variety of different blue-book scenes.

BOUNDARIES

Set clear boundaries for the players as to what is and is not appropriate in their blue-books, just as at the game table. Two particular boundaries concern content and player agency.

In the first case, decide about the maturity level of content in blue-books. Should it be PG? PG-13? R? Or even no-holds-barred? It depends on what the group is comfortable with and the tone of the campaign, but keep in mind that the contents of a blue-book are not necessarily private and may be disclosed at some point. Players should be clear if a scene makes them uncomfortable and the GM should be firm in putting a stop to those scenes.

An important boundary and ground-rule for blue-booking is that you do not control any character that is does not belong to you, just the same as at the game table. In particular this means no describing actions or dialog on the part of other players' characters without their permission, or assuming actions on their part. The Game Master may be all right with players making some assumptions regarding NPCs, especially their characters' Dependents, but even then the GM has the right to veto any actions or dialog that do not suit those characters.

The group can also set other boundaries as suits their play-style and tastes, from "no descriptions of gore" to "no explicit descriptions of violence" in blue-books. Players should respect and abide by these boundaries once they have been decided upon and, if they want to change them, should bring the matter to the GM to bring to the group for discussion.

GAME MASTER APPROVAL

Just as at the game-table, the Game Master is the final arbiter of material in blue-books, and may edit, modify, or adjust them as needed for the overall good of the campaign and the enjoyment of the players. Players often have some leeway in terms of describing scenes, characters, and events in their blue-books, but they should be prepared for the GM to introduce changes as needed, often without the ability to explain them, particularly as relates to future events or other potential spoilers. This is particularly true for extended player-written narratives—essentially short-stories included in their blue-books. A player might decide to include a character where the GM has other plans, for example, or might introduce a bit of dialog as background color that violates an established fact known to the GM, but not the players.

GENRE ENFORCEMENT

Lastly, just as it is the GM's job to enforce the genre at the game table, the same is true of blue-booking. Players should be mindful of the type and style of campaign when writing scenes in their blue-books, and the Game Master has the authority and the responsibility to ensure that material fits into the genre of the campaign. For a Gothic occult Victorian setting, blue-books should read more like penny dreadfuls and diary excerpts like those in Stoker's Dracula, whereas in a four color superhero setting, they should reflect the kind of soap opera melodrama found in the comic books. In either case, curse words or graphic details would not be appropriate, for examples.

The Impact of Strike Force

If there had been online crowd funding back in the 1980s, especially with the advantage of hindsight, one of the smartest things the RPG hobby could have done was launch and support a fund to pay Aaron Allston to professionally teach a whole new generation of Game Masters, storytellers, and game designers. It would have been my post-primary education in a heartbeat, I can tell you that. I say so because, in many ways, that's exactly what Aaron did. Reading many of his books was like attending master-classes in Game Mastering: from **Strike Force** to **Lands of Adventure** to his much under-appreciated **Dungeon Master's Cookbook**, Aaron had an amazing knack for distilling his knowledge and skill as a tabletop GM and making it accessible to his readers, giving them the benefit of his experiences, both good and bad.

In many genres, there are artists who are popular and those who are influential. While Aaron's work was certainly popular, it cannot be calculated just how influential it was to whole generations of people creating things in the gaming industry in the decades since. Certainly, for the creators contributing to this book alone, Aaron taught us a great deal. **Strike Force** was one of the first behind the screen views of someone else's campaign I can recall reading about, and certainly the most extensive at the time. Sure, there were glimpses at Ed Greenwood's home Forgotten Realms campaign in the pages of *Dragon Magazine*, and mentions of other campaigns in Champions supplements, but Aaron really gave us a guided tour of his world: what happened and why, what worked and didn't, and how real world events deftly influenced in-game narrative as players came and went in his game, and as their characters evolved and changed based on both their game-play and the pressures of schedules and real life.

Although the lessons of **Strike Force** are manifold, one that particularly stood out to me was Aaron's categorization of different types of players, from the Combat Monster to the Pro from Dover and others, based on his own experience. It was one of the first instances where I can recall Game Master advice that focused on figuring out how your players preferred to play the game and looking to cater to those preferences.

In the often adversarial world of players and GMs, it was a potent and useful reminder that tabletop role-playing games are a collaborative creative effort, one that should be focused on everyone having a good time, even when their characters are going through some of the most awful trials and challenges (*"Suffer, you zealot!"* as Aaron might have told them.)

That focus on making the game and the campaign the best it could be for everyone has stayed with me and inspired me, as both a designer and a Game Master, since reading about the progress of Aaron's Strike Force campaign. I truly hope this latest edition of this work can serve in place of that professional school for Game Masters and inspire a whole new generation of GMs and designers. I think Aaron would have liked that.

Blue-Booking and Shadows Angelus

There's very little I can add to Steve's brilliant coverage of the topic, but I would like to share with you the impact of blue-booking on my own campaign. In Shadows Angelus, we structured our game much like a television series season, consisting of 26 episodes. Each episode typically encompassed one session, and we covered roughly eight major story arcs along the way. This meant that I tried to set up the story arcs to have some amount of downtime in game in between each one, allowing the characters to absorb what had happened. An unintended consequence of this is that my players began telling stories about their characters and what was going on during the downtime.

We kept track of these blue-booking stories through email, and eventually, a website created by Michael Surbrook. When all was said and done, we discovered that the campaign had spawned well over 8,000 individual e-mails and roughly 90 stories! That's almost three stories per individual gaming session, and I had a total cast of seven players. That's an amazing amount of engagement and excitement about the game, even when everyone was not at the table! The example of Shadows Angelus is truly a phenomenal one, and unlikely to be repeated, but it does demonstrate the power of the blue-booking technique when you have the right group.

GAME MASTERING ADVICE FROM AARON ALLSTON

Over the years, particularly through computer networks, I've been asked to give advice on a number of problems facing Champions Game Masters. Following is a condensation of these questions and my answers.

I'm about to start running a campaign. The player characters are from all different backgrounds. How do I get them together?

My approach is to take each character as he's created and note down his psych comps—see just what there is to be exploited. Then, I have to generate a story introduction that keys off those Psychological Complications (at least for the players who are likely to need that kind of motivation). Hopefully, by the time the first adventure or story line is concluded, there will be ties of friendship or at least mutual interest between the PCs, making it easier to bring them together for subsequent stories. If there's not, I repeat those same steps. Eventually it works.

I've had considerable luck integrating players with loner mentalities into existing campaigns. Not 100% luck, by any means, but good luck.

Such players tend to fall into one of two categories: Players who are really impressed with some character or character image from fiction, and players who just want to do whatever it is they want to do, regardless of the setup of the campaign.

With players who are fascinated by a character type, you have some leverage on them that will bring them back into party interaction. Most of these icon characters, for instance, have military or police backgrounds, and may be embittered by events that lead to their leaving the service/force.

When the PC starts wandering off to do his own thing, you can often use his background against him—"Wait a second. You're disappearing into the gloom without a word to your friends, leaving the team's flank unprotected and the team leader out of touch with what his men are doing. Just how sound is that, tactically? And just what does that do to your buddies here if the enemy attacks on that flank while you're gone?" *Often, if you can present them with opportunities for staying with (or at least continuing to interact with) the other PCs, based on their lone-tough-guy backgrounds, they'll return enthusiastically to group interaction.*

Now, when you have a player who just doesn't like to cooperate, or (even worse) just wants the spotlight on him all the time, well, take out your knife collection and I'll help you polish them...

One of the player characters is a loner. He won't work with the others and is always running off to do his own thing. What do I do?

If a player deliberately causes trouble in perversely refusing to work with the other PCs, in spite of the driving mechanisms of the story and the wishes of all present, I give him every opportunity to join up. Then, when the other heroes ride out of town on the first leg of their story, I ask him what he's up to. It's usually one of the following things:

(1) He's going to follow the heroes and help them from secret (or at least spy on them). That's fine; I'll be able to drag him in soon enough. End of problem for the time being.

(2) He's going to go off somewhere and pursue his personal story. Well, this fellow just wants the spotlight on himself, and he believes he's been clever enough to shunt the other PCs out of his story for awhile. I let him mount up and ride off—and then the camera shifts away from him until the end of time. If I think the player is salvageable, I'll quickly give him opportunity to generate another PC—at 25 to 50 points lower than the normal PCs, and with the understanding that this is just a temporary character for him to use. That's the truth. If he shapes up, he can later introduce a third at standard party levels. If he doesn't, then he's as temporary as his character is. So it goes.

The player characters keep splitting up into smaller groups.

Split party situations are a real pain. I avoid them whenever possible. When it's not possible, I try to keep each sub-group's scene short and jumpy, which helps keep the watchers from getting bored. It doesn't always work, but it has a pretty good success rating. Try fast scene-swapping and stay away from parties which split for great, huge lengths of time—such as adventuring groups which split off and go in opposite directions. Also, think about blue-booking me of the splinter groups when circumstances permit.

And when all that is said and done, get used to the fact that nothing, short of very bad and restrictive GMing, can 100% reliably keep the PCs together. Inevitably, they will split up.

One of the players in my campaign has told me he wants to resume playing his original character, who retired. The original character sheet is long lost. He proposes to rewrite the character to the original experience level but not to change his personality, motivation, etc. I have bad feelings about this, for no good reason I can articulate.

I've been in this position several times, with one clear difference: I never had a bad feeling about the proposal. For the most part, I've found that when a player has returned to an abandoned character after a few years, and redesigns the character to conform to current rules, the player reinterprets and gets to know the character in new and interesting ways. The character also tends to be welcomed by the other characters. My usual tactic is to calculate an approximate value for the experience the character earned and to let the character have that, plus a complete redesign—usually quite necessary either because of a character sheet having disappeared or because of rules changes.

So I think the crucial part is this: You need to figure out why you have bad feelings about this proposal. Is it because the character would be getting a head start on other new characters? Obviously, that's not quite correct, if the player spent years with this character in your campaign previously. Is it because you feel the character ran out her story all those years ago and has nothing to offer? It's certainly possible; talk to the player and find out what might arise from the reinterpretation. Is it because you never liked the character in the first place? Tell the player so—at least tell her that the character really wouldn't fit into the new campaign. Is it that you intensely dislike not having the original character sheet to make sure the player isn't getting away with something? Start by re-creating the original character as closely as you can, both you and the player working up individual versions; then iron out the differences in committee and use that as the template from which to build the new version.

I've gone through this process four times that I can remember and never had it come out badly.

I have a couple of characters who are much more powerful than the others, and the campaign revolves around them. Everyone else is complaining.

I know that problem. The basic guideline for handling unbalanced characters, both those "too weak" and those "too strong," boils down to these four steps:

(1) KNOW EACH CHARACTER'S ROLE. Know where his specialties are, what he likes doing, and what his personal goals are.

(2) EACH ADVENTURE, THROW A SCENE TO EACH CHARACTER. Provide at least one scene or problem, each adventure, keyed to each character.

(3) AVOID EXCLUSIVE SITUATIONS. Thought-test each scene you've imagined for the upcoming adventure, and ask yourself, about EACH PC, "What is this character likely to do here? Does he have anything to do at all?" This is of particular importance in combat situations, and of crucial importance in climactic scenes and battles.

(4) AVOID REPETITION. The temptation is to provide the same situation to the same character time after time. Phaedo is a combat monster; face him with a big critter. Matthew

the Magnificent is a magician; put him in Cell #3 and give him a drink. It's important to vary these situations so that the characters can use other, related abilities. Phaedo is a warrior; he knows tactics; faced with an enemy force, he can calculate how they're going to attack and prepare for it. Matthew is a magician; faced with an inexplicable situation, he can calculate how it might have been faked with misdirection and prestidigitation.

Ross here. I'm stepping in to add a bit more to this answer. You see, Aaron had several notes on the subject. I'm paraphrasing from those notes:

While it is possible to involve extremely powerful characters in a group with others who are not nearly as strong, it requires a lot of work. This often occurs in combat situations, where the strongest enemies gravitate towards the extremely powerful player character, but Aaron cautions that you should supply plenty of bad guys for all. With individual opponents, it is tougher to design a combat where no one feels useless or left out. Aaron suggests incorporating a type of defense on the villain, in these cases, where everyone who hits the villain can still get a little damage through rather than swinging away uselessly.

Aaron takes some time to discuss character with powers that can make investigations or plots revolving around secrets very difficult. He mentions shapeshifting (where one character can take on an identical form to others) allowing for easy eavesdropping on the villains' plans. Similarly, the ability to see through solid objects (Phosphene has this ability, for example) gives the players quite a bit of information that makes it tough to conceal what's going on elsewhere, such as sneaky ninjas or mind controlled teammates! According to Aaron, these powers can certainly "spoil the plot!"

What Aaron is getting at here is that certain character types, whether they have access to gaining information or are simply stronger in combat than the rest of the group, require extra attention and effort from the Game Master. With this in mind, Aaron does not advocate dropping all restraints and allowing "anything goes" in your campaign. Aaron himself learned a great deal about keeping Strike Force on an even keel by introducing some restrictions aimed at enforcing a certain level of balance.

The player characters in my campaign are killers.

Aaron's notes here suggest four different approaches to this issue. First, Aaron prescribes communication—a course I highly agree with! Discuss the problem first, and see if the players can understand your point of view. It could turn out that there's simply a misunderstanding about the campaign's particular tone. Second, Aaron says that you may wish to consider creating a special campaign where the players can, in fact, be killers. There are many graphic novels and mature comics that feature characters who are casual killers of the villains that they face. Occasionally, it can be fun to take on the role of the villain rather than the hero, so you could consider opening up a short story arc where the players take on the role of supervillains instead! Third, Aaron suggests discovering a superhero that the players or the characters admire. Introduce that character into the campaign and provide that hero's perspective on the player character's actions. Perhaps the hero objects or has a moral opposition to going too far in the pursuit of justice. Lastly, Aaron says that is any of the above options simply don't work for you and your group, you may need to look for different players.

I have a player who's great at role-playing but can't seem to learn the rules well enough to do combat mechanics fast; he's so slow that it bogs the adventure down.

I've gotten around the problem of waiting on players to tell me whether they have hit or not by doing that calculation myself. I know the target's DCV; I ask the player his OCV/OECV if there's any likelihood of it being different from what's on the combat sheet; and in the time it takes me to say "roll to hit" I can usually calculate what number they need to roll equal to or less than in order to hit. Saves me a lot of time.

But the other side of that coin, as you pointed out, is the time it takes 'em to add up BODY and STUN. I've never found out a way to speed that process up with players who just don't learn the system...

From Aaron's notes, here are some of his additional thoughts—Aaron points out that some players simply don't learn ANY roleplaying game system, regardless of the system's complexity (or lack thereof). There are some players out there who are highly skilled at building a character's sense of personality and development, but who just cannot seem to grasp the mechanics of the game. In these cases, it is often possible to persuade another player to help on a regular basis. Many of Aaron's campaigns had a similar situation where a regular player's significant other was not familiar with the game rules, but eventually became a regular player themselves. Generally, Aaron found that many longtime players are willing to assist players who are having mechanical difficulties!

How do I establish and maintain the narrative of my campaign in action/combat encounters?

First, a note for the readers: this is a question I (Ross) have added from my own experience as a Game Master. Sometimes, it can seem like combat actually gets in the way of building a narrative during an RPG campaign. I have learned three major and two minor techniques for addressing this issue. The major techniques are listed below:

Make the confrontation meaningful: Not every fight needs to mirror Luke Skywalker's climactic encounter with Darth Vader. That being said, you can inject some meaning into almost any kind of fight if there's something at stake for one or more of the characters. If I'm ever stuck trying to think of something meaningful to implement into an encounter, I always look at the player character sheets first. Often, there's some kind of clue or inspiration to be found about what the player finds significant about his character on the sheet itself (see page 209 for more on this subject). Also, Aaron's "What I want to do" sheets are excellent notes for this same reason.

Promote Opportunities to be Creative in the Fight: Basically, learn to say "yes, but…" or "yes, and…" to your players when they come up with something creative to do during the encounter. This can range from using the environment ("I knock down the iron chandelier so that it entraps the villain!") to engaging in action around the fight, such as rescuing civilians in danger. Remember that the character story (see page 208) is just as important as any other narrative in the campaign, and any action or combat encounter can be a chance to advance that character's story through their choices.

Add an Escalation Point: An interesting Game Mastering technique that I've gotten a lot of mileage from is to introduce a moment during the fight that distinctly changes that encounter's flavor. This can be a shift in the encounter's tone, moving from humorous and light to deadly serious, or the reverse. It can also be a large change in the stakes of the encounter, such as a lava flow from an active volcano bursting onto the battlefield. Anytime you change the energy of the encounter, you've got a chance to give the players a fresh perspective on the action and get them thinking about engaging with the encounter differently.

In addition, here are a couple of minor ways to add some story into your combats:

Use Banter: Many combats in RPGs can be simply an exercise in rolling dice. Make sure to have your villains talk to the heroes, and this can change! It is also a strong comic book trope for the heroes to taunt the villains and vice versa. Using banter is another great opportunity to explore some bits of the story; the villain might monologue about his origin, let slip a hint about his evil plan, or describe a clue to his own motivation. Use banter to engage with the player characters, and have the villains' words reflect their reaction to the character's actions; this will help the players feel like their decisions are meaningful!

Critical Hits and Misses: Another minor way you can add some interesting story to an encounter is to allow the players some narrative control over the scene. It can be very tempting as a Game Master to jump in and describe the outcome of a particularly skillful—or unfortunate—action. Instead, whenever a critical hit or critical miss comes up in play, offer the player a chance to explain what happened!

Using Strike Force in Your Campaign

"This sourcebook isn't all campaign advice; let's talk some about different ways to use the Strike Force characters in your own campaign."
—Aaron Allston

This section describes some options to use the existing Strike Force characters in your campaign. In addition, Aaron outlines some of the specific campaign rules that he used for this famous long-running superhero RPG campaign. There's also a section discussing some of Strike Force's team tactics, and house rules used in the campaign for the Champions RPG system.

Campaign World Super-team

First, you can have Strike Force and the Shadow Warriors be NPC superhero teams on your campaign world. In this capacity, they can be super-groups with whom your own supers occasionally interact—professional associates, crossover encounters, etc.

Alternatively, if you're just beginning your campaign, these heroes could be the Old Guard to your player characters' New Guard. In other words, these Strike Force heroes are old, experienced heroes from your campaign world ... but are retiring, or pursuing other goals, or just interested in adding a junior team. Their replacements, or that junior team, are your PCs; this gives your PCs more campaign history to draw on, more NPCs to interact with, and more resources (the Strike Force headquarters, agents, etc.) to utilize.

Alternate-World NPC Super-team

Second, you can have Strike Force and the Shadow Warriors be superheroes on their own, parallel-dimension Earth, and have your heroes meet them in a cross-dimensional adventure.

Individual Heroes

Third, you can presume that some or all of the Strike Force and Shadow Warriors heroes appeared on your own campaign world—but never joined up into teams. They're individual heroes who can be encountered by your PCs, especially in their fields of specialization—stasis physics for Stunner, the Blood for Phosphene, genetics for Vixen, etc.

Player Characters

Fourth, some players may actually want to use the Strike Force or Shadow Warriors characters as player characters—though this can't be common, there's no reason not to. If this is to be an ongoing campaign, the characters should start with the 0-experience versions and earn their own experience, spending it in the directions they choose; they should also start out without the headquarters, super-agents, and other trappings of fame unless an experienced NPC is sponsoring them.

Additionally, you can use these heroes, especially the 0-experience versions, as "handout heroes." When you have new or one-time players sitting in on an adventure, or regular players whose characters are out of commission for one reason or another and you'd prefer them to play an existing NPC, you can hand them the Strike Force and Shadow Warriors heroes to choose from.

Individual Villains

Fifth, you can have these heroes appear individually on your own world—but with some or all of them as villains. All heroes in this book have villain options; utilize those instead of the hero backgrounds listed for them. Naturally, everyone in the "Villains and Neutrals" section can be used as villains.

Villain Team

Sixth, you can have Strike Force and the Shadow Warriors appear as villain teams. Each character is based on his Villain Option. The teams would be arranged as follows (these descriptions won't make much sense to you until you've read the character backgrounds, but don't let it worry you.):

Strike Force is led by Phantasm, the madcap version of Phosphene. After a couple of years of superheroing, Phosphene had a nervous breakdown, became a lunatic villain, and decided to form his own supervillain team.

He convinced the magic-hating Lightrune that the team would be encountering all sorts of magical heroes for him to defeat. La Panthere, who had fallen out of Overlord's favor joined the team as Phantasm's paramour; but, unknown to her, Overlord's hold over her has not been relinquished, and she could end up turning against Phantasm, should Strike Force ever oppose Overlord.

Stunner was recruited when Phantasm helped him defeat Halfjack and promised him lavish research funds if only he'd create gadgets for the team. ShadowWalker, a hard-bitten mercenary, was hired for his tactical abilities and stealth skills. Samiel and her partner, Kestrel, driven to fugitive status by their government hunters, were sheltered by the team and decided to join it.

As part of a (probably temporary) cooperative effort between Strike Force and Overlord, Luster is training with Strike Force. Skyrocket, a hero caught and brainwashed by Overlord, accompanies Luster as servant and bodyguard, and also acts as one of the team's high-flying energy projectors; the other is Death Ranger, the alternate version of Plasma Ranger, who had a falling-out with his VIPER mentors and joined the fledgling supervillain team.

Phantasm rescued Shade when the alienated super was being pursued by UNTIL. Shade found Strike Force to be the only group of people who ever accepted him. The villain versions of Napalm, Defender, Ichi-ban, Vixen, D'Arc, and Nightwing can also be with the team, but Lightrune and Ichi-ban cannot exist in the same villain-team.

Like the good-guy Strike Force, the villain team owns and operates a large, secluded mansion as its HQ, but the mansion is not an obvious super-base; its agents appear to be ordinary security officers, and no high-tech vehicles launch from the base grounds.

The villain Shadow Warriors were founded when the teenaged Lorelei decided to collect a set of handsome paranormals to protect her from her grandfather Alasder Dell and to bring her all the good things in life—clothes, money, cars, jewels, etc. She recruited the powerful Bolo, the fantastically attractive Psycher, and the unhinged but talented Man-o-War, all of whom she could keep wrapped around her little finger, and the enigmatic Sai, whose interest in her was protective but more than paternal.

Charade and Shelvastra were never part of this team. Lorelei wouldn't like the feminine competition. This team has the underground junkyard base, just as described for the hero-team, but without civilian employees.

TEAM PRIORITIES AND TACTICS

There are no regulations requiring that there be a team member at the base all the time, but members must keep their communicators with them at all times.

Team members actually conduct patrols and investigations independently for the most part, asking help from one another when they feel they need it. Only when the team is engaged in an active case does Phosphene begin to assign specific patrols and members to specific investigations.

In general, the team members do individual crime-fighting until they come across a situation which seems to require the attention of the whole team; at this time, the whole team turns its attention to the problem and utilizes the full force of its investigative and combat ability until the situation is resolved.

Code-Words

Code-words used by both Strike Force and the Shadow Warriors include:

Code-Word	Meaning
Air-Lift	Emergency Evacuation: Fliers, grab everyone you can and get out of here!
Blue-Dot	I'm about to use a Flash attack
High Guard	Take a high aerial position for reconnaissance or sniping duty.
Medic	We need medical attention here.
Mustard	I'm about to use a gas attack; They're using gas on us.
Napalm	Use an explosive attack.
Nuke Him	The kid gloves are off—use your nastiest attack.
Peeping Tom	Scan the target with all your sensors.
Pigeon	The opponent is a weakling: Restrain yourself.
Pop-Tart	Evacuate civilians from the area.
Ripoff	Steal accessible foci.
Shield	Someone bulletproof, stand in front of me!

Maneuvers

Specialized combat maneuvers used by both Strike Force and the Shadow Warriors include:

***Blind Swing**: A brick not engaged with a villain begins a pushed Haymaker. A teleporter sneaks up on the villain and teleports him right into the path of the swinging fist at the precise moment the Haymaker is supposed to land.*

***Delta Vee:** A teleporter with martial arts waits until a fast-flying villain is passing near a hard surface. The teleporter 'ports into his path and uses a Martial Throw to slam him into the surface.*

***Express Train:** Used only on exceptionally tough non-flying villains. A teleporter and a flier grab the enemy. The teleporter 'ports a goodly distance straight up, usually 180 meters or more. The flyer begins flying straight down, adding dive speed to his normal velocity. Just before they hit, the teleporter 'ports himself and the flier up about a quarter of a mile. The victim hits the ground at about twice terminal velocity (45-60D6 normal damage, depending on circumstances and speed).*

***Jackhammer:** At a signal from the team leader, everyone (who can afford to) ignores his current opponent and uses a ranged attack on the victim selected by the team leader.*

***Sandwich:** Two flying bricks converge on the same target from opposite sides at the same time; if target is powerful but low-DCV, then skill levels go into coordinating the attack.*

***Tangler:** Used on high-DCV opponents. A hero with a Variable Power Pool puts his points into an area-effect Entangle. At the signal, he moves into the enemy's hex and entangles the whole hex, himself included. Everybody with a Delay blasts the victim, who is momentarily at DCV 0 (even if he could ordinarily shrug right out of the Entanglement).*

Strike Force Campaign Notes

The following section is a collection of Aaron's notes about the creation of the Strike Force universe. Other Game Masters eventually began using the Strike Force setting, sharing stories amongst each other through crossovers. Aaron recounts here how he diverged his Strike Force campaign from the influence of the comic book stories of the time and what he learned from managing such a beloved setting amongst multiple gaming groups.

The Origin of Earth-AU

The Strike Force campaign began play in August of 1981. It was preceded by a series of solo play-test sessions during which I taught myself to play Champions; soon after, the campaign itself began. To make the world-setting richer and more consistent, soon after the campaign began I wrote up an extensive world history for Earth-AU, working in heroes, villains, and events from many comic book and pulp series and adding sizable amounts of original material.

Creating Continuity

At the end of each game I told the players more about their campaign world.

To my surprise, not long afterwards, several players decided that they, too, would run Champions campaigns... and they wanted to use the same game-world. I'd always thought that when my players chose to run their own campaigns, they'd set up parallel worlds and we'd do occasional interdimensional crossover adventures. Their wish to set up campaigns in the same world took me by surprise. After due consideration and discussion, though, we decided to give it a try.

We divided up the world geographically, each player deciding which area most appealed to him as background for a campaign. I took the U.S. East Coast. Allen Sikes took Canada and Europe. (He later gave them up, respectively, to Earl Cooley and Kerry Gaber.) Denis Loubet took the U.S. West Coast. Luray Richmond took the U.S. Southwest. Earl Cooley picked up the U.S. Midwest, and later Canada and Hawaii. Sometime after, Kerry Gaber later took Europe and New Orleans. Susan Poelma became the GM of a Seattle-based campaign.

Other, later campaigns were set in outer space or in Earth-AU's past, where we didn't worry about geographical boundaries.

This all brought up questions of precedence and coordination. For instance, could one GM blow up the world? Could he send a city-smashing monster into the territory of another GM?

Our consensus was that any events that would affect other GMs' territories needed to be discussed with those other GMs beforehand—a tricky question, as the other GMs tended to be the campaign's players as well. The result of that was that few adventures spilled out of any one GM's territory. However, we didn't feel it necessary to pre-consult with other GMs when characters would be visiting another GM's territory in a peaceful fashion. When there was a dispute between setting-altering wishes of GMs, my opinions tended to be accepted as final decisions, mainly because I'd created the setting.

Shared-Continuum Problems

Naturally, not all the cooperation in the world can entirely prevent problems.

The first real problem we ran into involved my campaign history. When I originally wrote it, it was for background purposes and assumed that I'd be the only GM running in it. Some of the events I put into the history were for amusement's sake, or to satisfy my sense of the bizarre, justice, or believability—such as having the nosy newspaper-reporter girlfriend of a famous superhero from the comics being killed early in her career because of her non-survival traits.

But once other GMs began running in the same world, some of them began running into established history they didn't like. For example, Earl Cooley, created a character for Kerry Gaber's European campaign; this hero, Torgun, was a son of the mythological god Thor. Shortly afterwards, he discovered that I had long before decided that Ragnarok, the Norse final battle of the gods, had taken place around 1000 A.D. and Thor had been dead for nearly a thousand years. Eventually, we worked out the problem and determined the status of post-Ragnarok Asgard today, and the circumstances that led to Torgun's birth became the genesis of a new campaign, Twilight Falls... but the whole thing was still a problem.

Another problem involved the contrast of old, established campaigns with newer campaigns. In Earl's Hawaiian "Gold Shield" campaign, the players, who did not participate in other Earth-AU campaigns, felt unappreciated and useless. Their characters, created for a world with a sixty-year history of superheroics and a large cast of active superheroes, and later saved from villains by preexisting superheroes, felt that their characters were no more important to the world than professional golfers. The players ended up with an irrational desire to assassinate a longstanding NPC, just to prove to themselves that they could affect matters in the world—not because they felt he should die. There was no happy resolution for this problem, and the campaign fell apart.

In 1987, I planned to launch Earth-AU into World War III and radically alter the world. I'd raze civilization. The supers would save as much as possible and then contribute to the shape of the future. Then I'd fast-march, force-grow the setting into a much higher-tech setting than most modern-day mainstream comic books.

At the time, I offered to spin Strike Force off into an alternate continuum to spare the other GMs the confusion of all this... and the other active GMs refused. This was a nice vote of confidence from the GMs, but it did mean that the effects of World War III had to be substantially coordinated between campaigns.

The war itself took only a couple of game-months to conclude. As soon as the crucial events were done, as the earth effectively lay in ruins, the first thing I did was to begin writing a timeline of the year or two after the war—the critical period of chaos, epidemic, and early rebuilding. I sent the first, rough copy of this to the other active Earth-AU GMs and invited them to contribute timeline material pertaining to their areas of the world. Kerry Gaber and Luray Richmond sent in detailed chronologies covering (respectively) Europe and the American South and Southwest, and the other GMs at least had an idea of what was happening and when.

Then, each individual GM decided on how to integrate his setting with the worldwide changes. Kerry Gaber decided to jump his campaigns from just prior to the war to just afterwards, so that he wouldn't repeat the fight-the-invaders-from-the-skies situations which the players had already had their fill of from Strike Force. Luray Richmond and Susan Poelma decided to run several more episodes pre-WWIII, and then skip on to a post-WWIII period. Earl Cooley set up his Gold Shield

campaign to start in 1986, about a year and a half before the start of the war, to give the characters plenty of time to establish themselves before confronting the war-related changes to the world.

That was the last major logistical problem we had in Earth-AU, but not for any reason of improved coordination. After these events, the Earth-AU campaigns not run by me began to close down. Not all of them cratered like "Gold Shield;" the majority ended because their GMs moved away, had children and ceased gaming, or just lost interest in running games.

Crossovers

Early in the history of Strike Force, we started experimenting with crossovers—adventures in which characters from one campaign encountered (usually) cooperated with characters from another.

One of the first was a two-part adventure om which half of Luray's DreadKnights came to New York and met half of Strike Force (I ran that half), and then members of Strike Force returned to Dallas to help those Texan heroes (Luray ran that one). By-Tor of Earl's Chicago-based New Champions campaign guested in Strike Force. Vixen and Stitch, heroes from Allen Sikes' Canada, switched permanently to Strike Force and DreadKnights, respectively. The "Warstars" adventure was a wild crossover with heroes thrown together from many different groups and sent to avert specific crises.

Ultimately, two non-campaign "campaigns," titled Heroes and Heroes of Europe, were created. They rather like the old Brave and the Bold comic book, as an overhead title for team-up adventures, without a permanent cast. Heroes of Europe eventually developed a more regular cast, while Heroes continued as a team-up title.

All of these worked well enough initially, but we inevitably ran into some problems. Naturally, each GM had different campaign philosophies and styles, ground rules and atmosphere; when a GM can't count on all the heroes in his own campaign having identical mores, he certainly can't expect them in crossovers.

For instance, here's one problem we didn't anticipate, from the "Warstars" episode. In that adventure, Eric Bunker's character Polaris, an alien brick, while repelling alien spacecraft, accidentally killed a number of innocents. His psychological profile dictated that he must then kill himself. But Lepidoptera, Jan Malone's pacifist alien insectoid, could not allow a sapient being to kill itself, and used her Mind Control powers to restrain him. In the end, Polaris was able to kill himself, much to Lepidoptera's dismay. At least on a temporary basis, this caused some hard feelings.

We also got into cross-dimensional crossovers, the type I'd originally expected would be our regular variety of crossover.

Various Strike Force heroes made occasional appearances in Jeff Jacobson's Orwellian 1984 campaign. Phosphene and Ichi-ban spent a lot of time adventuring in David Rogers' Good Guys campaign, and the Good Guys leader, Plasma Ranger, eventually accompanied them back to make his permanent home on Earth-AU. Denis Loubet's Blackwolf made occasional appearances in a Dallas campaign, while my own Man-o-War, Lightrune, and Stalker appeared in some of the original Hero Games campaigns during my trips to DunDraCon.

Today, crossovers are an occasional event; I try to run one crossover adventure per Strike Force game-year, usually involving Strike Force cooperating with one of the other GMs' teams... especially teams from campaigns no longer being run.

Publications

One of the first things we did to establish communication between the GMs was to set up "GMs' Communiques." Every so often, when one of us had a question or a proposal that might affect the others, he'd write it up, make one photocopy for each GM, and distribute them. The Communiques included rules questions, discussions, coordinations on major events, and "I grab" columns (where one GM would declare proprietary interest in some NPC from another source, so that if he planned to monkey substantially with the character, the others would know not to use that NPC without inquiring about the changes).

These Communiques were useful. They kept us more or less coordinated, though we still weren't really a crossover- laden campaign world; we were still a set of independent campaigns set on the same world.

The GM Communiques did present a problem, though: They excluded the non-GM players, who were still interested in questions of history and NPCs. So we didn't abandoned the GM Communiques, but I added another

type of print communications. This was Masked Marauders, a digest-sized, fanzine-style periodical.

Masked Marauders consisted of campaign news, write ups of campaign adventures, interviews with some of the Earth-AU heroes, art, and whatever else we decided to throw in. But Masked Marauders was a lot of trouble for me to produce. It was (in my pre-computer days) typed up on an IBM electric, manually cut and pasted into a magazine format, photo-copied two-sided, and manually assembled and stapled. After four issues, I got weary of it and gave up.

Still, we'd gotten used to having written chronicles of our adventures. Eventually, I decided on a publication to replace Masked Marauders. This was the Earth-AU Campaign Chronicles, which would consist primarily of episode-by-episode chronicles of all the Earth-AU campaigns. Other ingredients of the Chronicles were any articles, art, or other contributions people wanted to make.

Though it seemed like a more ambitious project than Masked Marauders, it turned out to be less work, especially now that I was computerized. It was less heavily formatted: The chronicles were printed out in standard 8 1/2" by 11" paper and then photocopied and three-hole- punched on the left. Art, when included, was placed on separate pages and captioned rather than being integrated with the text. Instead of a bimonthly or quarterly schedule, I followed what ended up being a biannual release schedule.

The first chronicles release was in May 1985, timed to coincide with the marriage and departure of one of my players, Jan Malone; she received Copy #1. Since then, we've updated the chronicles on an occasional. Today, the Chronicles consist of the following types of material:

(1) Adventure chronicles of campaigns set in Earth-AU

(2) Adventure chronicles of non-Earth-AU campaigns run by me

(3) Adventure chronicles of non-Earth-AU campaigns run by any of my players (in which others of my players participate; thus a campaign run by one of my players in which none of my other players participates is not usually included)

(4) Master Lists, compendiums briefly describing the significant characters in each campaign

(5) Interviews with characters, typically composed by GMs as if articles written for the press of Earth-AU

(6) Other articles

(7) Artwork

The original format for the Chronicles, as mentioned, was photocopied paper. After a few years of that, they changed to computer file releases in ASCII format. More recently, I've changed that again to computer file releases in Adobe Acrobat .PDF format.

So, more than ten years after the first Chronicles release, we have a convenient, growing, permanent record of all our adventures. This gives each GM a big resource to use in conducting crossovers and utilizing NPCs common to another GM's campaigns. With all the facts on file, it's easier for players to remember details of specific adventures ("I don't remember—have you ever met Rick Blake before?" "Yes, and in the following adventures...") With all those plots on file, it's easy for a GM to be inspired to sequel adventures, or to swipe plot ideas or loose threads from one another.

Earth-AU Campaigns

In the next column is a chart showing several campaigns. These are the Earth-AU campaigns which have been run to date. More than twenty-five campaigns which have been active at one time or another.

Two of these only became Earth-AU campaigns retroactively, through revisionist history. The New West was originally set in a near-future world full of vehicular homicide. UNTIL Agents was originally set in a non-supers world it shared with no other campaign. But once the WWIII revisions began to be made, players came to me with the suggestion that these two campaigns be edited into Earth-AU history. So the UNTIL Agents became super-agents of Earth-AU (and guest-starred immediately in the ferocious Brain-Spiders adventure). The New West setting of the early 21st century became the lawless west of WWIII.

The list below doesn't include "pilots" that never became "series." There were a couple of those, including Team Ronin, a **Danger International** *agents campaign; COG (Covert Actions Group), a superhero campaign; "Midtown," a Crime-Fighter police characters campaign; none of them went regular. All of the ones listed below have run at least a few episodes.*

Campaign	Game-Master
AEGIS	Kerry Gaber
Arsenal of Democracy (1940s)	Mark Bennett
Avant Guard	Aaron Allston
Canada	Allen Sikes
Delta Squad	Kerry Gaber
DreadKnights	Luray Richmond
The Eldorado Society (1930s)	Aaron Allston
The European Theatre	Allen Sikes
Gold Shield	Earl Cooley
Guardians of the North	Earl Cooley
Heroes	Varies
Heroes of Europe	Kerry Gaber
The New Champions	Earl Cooley
The New West	Aaron Allston
The Old West (1870s)	Kerry Gaber
Pirates! (1680s)	Luray Richmond
Shadow Warriors	Aaron Allston
Spacefarers	Earl Cooley
StarGuard International	Earl Cooley
Starknights	Kerry Gaber
Strike Force	Aaron Allston
Twilight Falls	Aaron Allston
UltraForce	Susan Poelma
UNTIL Agents	Aaron Allston
War Action Heroes (1940s)	Earl Cooley
Westguard	Denis Loubet
Zorandar (1920s)	Aaron Allston
Non-AU Campaigns	
Age of Heroes	Aaron Allston
Astro-Rangers	Aaron Allston
At the Movies	Aaron Allston
Chi-Town Adventures	Allen Sikes
Ganymede	Denis Loubet
Ninja Hero	Aaron Allston
Pelleth	Luray Richmond
Phoenix	Aaron Allston
Robo-Warriors	Aaron Allston
Shadows	Aaron Allston

Managing Crossovers

Not every campaign we run is appropriate to a crossover with another campaign.

If two campaigns are set on Earth-AU in the present day, then crossovers are entirely appropriate. When those campaigns are very different in tone or mood, the GM does his best to make the situation work out.

If two campaigns are set on Earth-AU at different time periods, crossovers may and may not be appropriate. It would, for instance, be inappropriate to have the heroes of Strike Force go back in time to the pirate heroes of the 1680s—unless, beforehand, they decided that they would take extraordinary care in not revealing their superhuman natures and details of the pirates' future history.

If two campaigns are set on different worlds but in the same sort of genre, crossovers are usually appropriate. For examples, heroes from Earth-AU have visited the heroes of David Rogers' "Good Guys" campaign (source of the supplement **Red Doom***) and of Jeff Jacobson's "1984" campaign, neither of which had any close ties to Earth-AU, but both of which were Champions superhero campaigns.*

If campaigns are set in completely different milieux, crossovers are probably not appropriate. For instance, I'll never send heroes from the "Strike Force" and "Age of Heroes" campaigns into each other's worlds.

To do so, in my opinion, would fatally poison the players' willing suspension of disbelief in the "Age of Heroes" setting.

However, even in this last instance, the possibility of analogue characters suggests faint ties between disparate campaigns. Earl Cooley's character from the "Ninja Hero" campaign turns out to be the son of an analogue of my character from the "Eldorado Society" campaign; Earl postulates that on this non-Earth-AU world, an analogue of Tarquinius O'Malley (see the Eldorado Society chapter when published) had the same adventures as the "real" O'Malley, and one of his episodes in China involved siring a Eurasian son who, in the 1980s and 1990s, was a famous martial artist and Hong Kong kung fu film star.

EXAMPLE STRIKE FORCE CAMPAIGN: TWILIGHT FALLS

We have included here a section, written by Aaron, describing one of his campaigns set on Earth-AU. Titled "Twilight Falls," this campaign focuses on superheroes and interpersonal relationships in a single city. Aaron describes Twilight Falls as a Soap Opera campaign, meaning that the drama of the characters interacting with each other and various NPCs takes center stage. Twilight Falls is an interesting look at how Aaron designed a campaign and communicated to his players about their expectations for the game. It is also an unusual and compelling way to present a superhero narrative using the Strike Force setting.

Character Creation

You can create a new character for this campaign, use a character that has appeared elsewhere in Earth-AU, or adapt a character created for another world-setting. In the latter case, the character would have to be redesigned as a 0-experience character; this will the the Earth-AU analogue of the character you have played in a different campaign.

PLAYER CHARACTER REQUIREMENTS

Player characters in this campaign must:

- Have a salable skill of use to large corporations;
- Be willing to relocate to a medium-large Midwestern city;
- Have a Secret ID he/she is very interested in maintaining and protecting, and which is not shared by the majority of the NPCs associated with him;

Play Style

Earlier, I said that this would be a "soap opera style" campaign. Let's discuss what that means.

Storylines Will Be "Braided." *In one play-session, a plot might end, but several other plots and subplots will be still be unresolved.*

Secret Identities Are Very Important. *Half or more of each episode will take place out of costume, and the characters will have relationships with one another that have nothing to do with their costumed identities. Characters might be cutthroat competitors in their Secret IDs and costumed partners after hours. And the process of getting out of a public situation in the Secret ID to go running off in costumed ID will pose a frequent problem.*

Secret Identities Are Secret. *No one can figure out another's Secret ID through simple guesswork or elimination of options. (It's not enough to notice that a Jamaican executive has been hired by the company and that a Jamaican villain has recently debuted in town. That might lead to vague suspicions, but only through research and spying can someone determine another's Secret ID.)*

The Campaign Is Cinematic. *Individual characters will have lots of individual scenes. All these scenes, including the most secretive, will be played out in front of the other players. Their characters will not know what goes on in these solo situations, but the players also constitute the campaign's audience.*

Soap Opera Themes Predominate. *Such themes include: passionate affairs, coincidence, amnesia, secret twins, bogus deaths, business rivalries, bizarre waking dreams and fantasies, fertility problems, infidelity, elaborate criminal frame ups, and mistaken identities.*

Player Characters Get Messed With. *Many romances end badly. Cutthroat business practices are the norm. Characters get framed a lot. They get blamed even more. They get pregnant when they don't expect to or can't when they want to. Family members get sick. And that's just a fraction of what happens in the normal-human soaps; think of all the options available to a gleefully evil GM in a superhero world! However, players will have a certain amount of influence over how and how much their characters are messed with; each player may choose the degree to which his character is smashed flat by fate, and what types of troubles the character experiences.*

Genre Rules

Here are some of the rules you can expect to encounter in this campaign:

The Campaign Is Community-Oriented. *Where the Strike Force campaigns are planetary and even interplanetary in nature, "Twilight Falls" will revolve almost entirely around the city of Twilight Falls.*

Odd Genre Rules Are In Effect. *Soap operas are home to many strange little rules and conventions many of the players will not be familiar with. Here are a few, just to give you a preview:*

- (1) Characters switch occupations more often than they change cars, and it's the rare farmboy who doesn't discover that he's a natural both as a male model and a bar owner within the course of a year. For this reason, it's not a bad idea for characters to keep a couple of points set aside at all times for an instant purchase of an 11- Professional Skill.
- (2) In soap operas, even the janitors have names like Lance Brockman and Danielle Lancaster.
- (3) Real-world actors have medical problems and career shifts, resulting in occasional re-casting, so it's no big deal if one of the players changes his mind about the actor chosen to portray his character; the role can be recast midseason.
- (4) Exotic diseases concentrate in soap opera towns, which is why they're so rare in the rest of the world.
- (5) While in the real world every action has an opposite and equal reaction, in a soap opera world every action has a number of opposite and worse reactions; for example, just the joyous act of getting married results in jilted parties swearing revenge, problems resulting from forgotten previous marriages or the fact that the officiating priest is actually a con man pressed into service by an enemy, etc.
- (6) Constant revision of personal histories is permissible and encouraged. Of course, for every backstory change the player makes, the GM makes four or five.
- (7) Character rotation is a possibility. Once the first few plot lines are cleared up, players may wish to rotate their characters out and bring other characters in. This is perfectly permissible.
- (8) This Is Not Camp. In spite of the lack of realism bound up in many soap opera conventions, this is not a high camp campaign. If you find yourself smirking through your dialogue, it's probably best to back off on the unrealism knob a bit.

Character Creation and Adaptation

Standard, established Champions characters can be introduced in this campaign without need of adaptation. They do not have to be altered to conform to the soap-opera traditions observed by this campaign.

However, each character will suffer certain Complications and restrictions related to these soap opera traditions and to the role his player chooses for him in the campaign. These hindrances do not bring the character any points, but can be added or dropped without difficulty.

Required Skills, Perks, Talents, Powers

As mentioned earlier, each character must have a skill, preferably a Professional Skill, that would be of use to a large corporation. Since large corporations tend to have numerous divisions and allied companies, most Skills tend to be of use to them at one time or another.

Required Complication: Social Complication (Secret ID)

As mentioned earlier, all characters in this campaign must have a Secret ID, and must be willing to go to great lengths to preserve it. We're not speaking here of murdering to protect the ID, but of tactics such as lying to loved ones and setting up elaborate schemes to "prove" that the super ID and secret ID are in the same place at the same time.

Required Complication: Role-Based Psychological Complication

In addition, every player must choose a Role for his character. The Role defines the type of subplots the character will most commonly experience in the campaign; for example, the Tycoon/Shark will have many business-oriented subplots, while the Truth-Seeker will be presented with many mysteries.

The Role also comes with a Psychological Complication the character must play while he possesses the role. This Psych Lim does not bring the character any actual Character Points. On the other hand, the character can easily switch to other Roles and associated Psych Comps during the campaign, and will not have to struggle to make up missing points at some later date if he leaves the Twilight Falls campaign to join another campaign.

The Roles and what they require of the character appear later.

Required Complication: Quirks

Every player must come up with five Quirks that help define his character.

A Quirk is a 1-pt Psychological Complication. It is very minor, and does little more than establish personality and set up some circumstances where the character will be ill at ease or make mistakes. The concept, created by Allen Varney for **GURPS***, is accomplished in Champions by taking a 5-pt Psych Comp: "Quirks (uncommon)," then defining what those quirks are.*

As with the Role disadvantage, the character doesn't actually receive points for Quirks unless he wants to have them outside the soap-opera milieu.

In Twilight Falls, each of the five Quirks belongs to a certain category.

- #1: A relatively common type of person the character reacts negatively to. (Examples: Blondes; people with Wealth; people involved in news or broadcasting; fatherly men; ex-cons; etc.)
- #2: A hobby interest that can divert the character. The character does not have to have a corresponding KS if he doesn't want it. (Examples: TV football, fly-fishing, origami.)
- #3: A not-too-uncommon circumstance or setting that makes the character nervous and uncomfortable. (Examples: Bars, driving, left alone with a member of the opposite sex, amusement parks.)
- #4: A small personal failing the character thinks is perfectly reasonable. (Examples: Won't do chores, annoyingly health-conscious, drums constantly.)
- #5: Player choice.

The typical list looks like this:
Quirk 1 (People Disliked)
Quirk 2 (Favorite Hobby)
Quirk 3 (Nervous While...)
Quirk 4 (Personal Failing)
Quirk 5 (Player Choice)

OPTIONAL COMPLICATIONS

(These are simply examples of soap-appropriate Comps. Existing characters don't have to exchange old ones for this sort if they don't want to.)

Psych Comp: Buried Memories (variable value): *Long ago, something happened to the character that he/she cannot remember. From time to time, the memories surface to give the character grief. The player, with the GM's cooperation, can determine how often they arise and how powerful they are. (Strong memories can distract or upset the character at critical times, while Total memories plunge the character into flashbacks he cannot distinguish from reality.)*

Eventually, the truth behind Buried Memories emerges in a campaign, at which time the player will have to buy off the Disadvantage or change it into a related one.

Social Comp: Dark Secret (uncommon): *This is a lower-level version of the Social Comp enjoyed by the character with the role of "Hero(ine) With a Dark Past." Lesser Dark Secrets crop up less often and are not the principal defining elements of the character.*

Psych Comp: Ideal Mate (common, strong): *The character is particularly vulnerable to lovers who look or sound a particular way, and will fall in love at the drop of a hat with people who match that description. This can be especially troublesome when two or more people matching that description show up in the campaign at the same time.*

Psych Comp: Loves <Name> (very common, strong): *This common psych lim also means that its owner must (eventually) forgive the named character for anything—or buy the Psych Lim off. The owner cannot trade it in for another psych lim and retain the points; it's all or nothing.*

Phys Comp: Sleepwalks (uncommon, total): *The character sleepwalks, leading him into danger and causing him to reveal clues about his secrets.*

Unluck: Timing: *For every 2 dice of this sort of Unluck, the character receives 5 points (thus it's like Unluck with a -1 Limitation). The character has incredibly bad timing. Whenever he says something damning or incriminating, hugs someone his lover is jealous of, or does just about anything that can be misinterpreted, he rolls his Unluck; if a 1 comes up, someone observed the exchange.*

Unluck: Gal Things: *For every 2 dice of this sort of Unluck, the character receives 5 points (thus it's like Unluck with a -1 Limitation). It's the Disadvantage of stereotypical cinema females and results in such situations as falling down when fleeing a pursuer.*

Unluck: Guy Things: *For every 2 dice of this sort of Unluck, the character receives 5 points (thus it's like Unluck with a -1 Limitation). It's the Disadvantage of stereotypical cinema macho males; it results in such things as having to suffer pissing contests with other macho guys at very inconvenient times.*

The Player Character Information Sheet

The following section describes Aaron's advice to players filling out the character information sheet for Twilight Falls. You can find an example of this sheet on page 246.

Information On Parents, Information On Siblings, Information On Close Friends and Other Relatives: *In these sections, please provide as detailed a set of information as you can on the NPCs in the character's life. Of particular use: Whether or not the PC can account for every year in the life of the NPC; whether the NPC is still alive or not (and, if not, the circumstances under which he/she died); the precise nature of the relationship between PC and NPC.*

Character History: *Nothing unusual here: The history of the player character before the start of this campaign. Year-dates are very helpful, as are the character's origin, events that brought on the character's Psych Comp, etc.*

It's okay to invent many NPCs for the character's backstory, including one-time friends, the character's First Great Love, teachers who were important to the character's development, and so on.

Ideal Mate: *Here, please describe the character's impression of what his/her ideal mate would be like; how dedicated the character is to this ideal (it could be a naive sort of idealism, or an obsessive drive that leads the character into lots of relationships and problems); and whether anyone has hitherto met the criteria and been believed to be the Ideal Mate (and what happened to that character).*

AGONY INDEX

Here, the player gets to provide some input on just how badly Fate meddles with his character; circle the type of agony you are most interested in having your character suffer.

Normal Suffering Only: *The character goes through the ordinary trials and tribulations of a soap opera character, with a life that is an even mix of good and bad.*

Go Ahead And Punish Me: *This character tends to go through more bad times than good, providing more interesting role-playing opportunities and painful life complications than the standard character receives.*

I'm A Super-Masochist!: *This character's life is a constant struggle against the forces of betrayal, malevolent coincidence, and bad luck; the character will routinely have several sub-plots and pressures acting on him/her at the same time, and most will be painful ones. This choice really is license for an evil-minded GM to inflict pain on the character; DNPCs will die, diseases will prove untreatable, lovers will betray or perish, etc.*

Role

The player can also help determine the way his character works in the campaign by choosing the character's Role. Each Role influences the types of sub-plots the character will be involved with.

Each Role requires that the character be played as though he possesses a Psychological Complication pertaining to it. For instance, the Tycoon will be ruthless in business; the Lady-killer/Maneater will be a sexual predator. Each of these Role-based Psychological Complications is a Very Common, Strong Complication. The character doesn't receive the points the Complication would be worth.

In the course of the campaign, a character could abandon one Role and take on another. A member of a Supercouple could lose his lover for all time and decide to throw himself into his work, becoming a Dedicated Scientist; he could later develop a scientific process that could make him rich, and he could discover that he needs that money to save the life of a relative, meaning that he shifts over to a Tycoon role; he could later reform and commit himself to decency, becoming a Heartthrob.

The roles available to player characters include:

Sweetheart/Heartthrob: *This character is good most of the time, and suffers because others tend to exploit him/her, because he/she tends to get involved with the wrong type of lover all the time, becomes the target of con men and sexual predators, etc. Females are sweethearts, males are heartthrobs. The character must be played as though he/she has the psych comp "Exploitable Decency (very common, strong)."*

Hero(ine) With a Dark Past: *This character did something bad a long time ago and life won't let the character forget the mistake. People pop up who remember the character's mistake; some blackmail him, some sabotage his life out of revenge. The character will go to great lengths to keep the mistake*

concealed. The character must be played as though he/she has the social comp "Conceals Dark Secret (very common, strong)."

Supercouple Guy/Gal: *This character is one member of a romantic couple. The couple is destined to be together but fated to be torn apart a lot — by mistakes, circumstances, frames, rivals, etc. The character must be played as though he/she has the psych comp "Loves (name of lover) (very common, strong)."*

Tycoon/Shark: *This character is constantly engaging in corporate struggles with business rivals; he/she has the business ethics of a reptile. A Tycoon is one who currently runs a business (requires purchase of the Wealth advantage), while a Shark is an up and comer (doesn't). The character must be played as though he/she has the psych comp "Puts Business Advancement Above All Else (very common, strong)."*

Avenger: *This character was wronged at some time in the past and now seeks to make things right. The character may seek to put a bad guy in jail, to win a lost lover back from the person who won stole the lover, to reacquire power over a corporation stolen from him/her, etc. The character must be played as though he/she has the psych comp "Seeks Vengeance For (offense) (very common, strong)."*

Dedicated Doctor/Scientist: *Invaluable in a campaign, this character neglects his/her mate because of devotion to his/her calling and sometimes sets ethical considerations aside in the interest of science or medicine. The character must be played as though he/she has the psych comp "Puts Science Above All Else (very common, strong)."*

Truth-Seeker: *This character can't stand for the truth to remain concealed, particularly when it's the truth behind a crime or offense; typical character types include cops, reporters, detectives, and other busybodies. The character must be played as though he/she has the psych comp "Obsessively Unravels Mysteries (very common, strong)."*

Ladykiller/Maneater: *This character gauges success by conquering and then either abandoning or using up members of his/her gender of choice. The character must be played as though he/she has the psych comp "Sexual Predator (very common, strong)."*

Kid: *This character is suffering the usual problems associated with adolescence and puberty — with the knob cranked up to 11, this being a melodrama. The character faces raging hormones, first love, rebellious tendencies a mile wide, knee jerk responses to innocuous comments by others, and more. The character must be played as though he/she has the psych comp "Teen Hormones and Angst (very common, strong)."*

Zany: *This character is not always comedy relief, despite the title. This character always manages to charge for the most unlikely tactic or scheme. To win back a lost lover, the character might try to convince her that he has been targeted for assassination by the Sri Lankan Secret Police and can only survive if she escapes with him. To gain control of the recently-lost family business, the heroine might agree to marry the wealthy sheik under the assumption that she can persuade him that she's too vulgarly American for him so nothing will happen on their wedding night and he'll cast her aside. The important thing to remember is that the Zany comes up with the most complicated and unlikely solution to any problem, and, while he/she can be talked out of the ones that require cooperation from other people, he/she creates enough such plans that no one can stop him from embarking on them all. And they always eventually backfire. The character must be played as though he/she has the psych comp "Chooses Most Unlikely Solution To Any Problem (very common, strong)."*

Each player chooses one role for his character, subject to GM approval. (If too many people choose the same roles, the GM may wish to ask some of them to change.)

Goal

If your character has a personal goal you wish to explore, please describe it.

PLAYER CHARACTER INFORMATION SHEET—TWILIGHT FALLS

Player: _____

Character: _____

Information On Parents:

_____

_____

Information On Siblings:

_____

_____

Information On Close Friends and Other Relatives:

_____

_____

Character History:

_____

_____

Ideal Mate:

_____

Agony Index (Circle One):

- Normal Suffering Only
- Go Ahead And Punish Me
- I'm A Super-Masochist!

Role (Circle One):

- Sweetheart/Heartthrob
- Hero(ine) With a Dark Past
- Supercouple Guy/Gal
- Tycoon/Shark
- Avenger
- Dedicated Doctor/Scientist
- Truth-Seeker
- Ladykiller/Maneater
- Kid
- Zany

Goal:

_____

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_____

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This is a special, heartfelt, "Thank You!" to all the backers of the kickstarter for Aaron Allston's Strike Force. Without your help, we could not have made this book possible. You are all heroes!

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STRIKE FORCE TESTIMONIALS

I first met Aaron Allston in, I think, 1994 or '95. By then I'd become such a prolific writer for Hero Games that Ray Greer once introduced me to a group of his friends as "the Aaron Allston of the Nineties," which to this day is one of the highest compliments I've ever received. I'm proud to say that Aaron and I soon became friends and had many—but far too few—fascinating conversations over the years.

The first work of Aaron's that I remember being consciously aware of his authorship was, of course, **Strike Force**. *By suggesting to me new ways of thinking about and running Champions games, that book did for me what it did for so many other gamers: expanded my horizons, ambitions, and skills as a Game Master. It was the first book I remember that really discussed these issues and offered cogent advice about them. Its contents have become so standard a part of gamers' thinking that gamers who now read it for the first time can't understand what all the fuss is about—they know all this stuff already! What they fail to grasp is that without Aaron, the art and science of GMing would lag far behind where it currently stands.*

But even more than **Strike Force**, *the book of Aaron's that really influenced me was his amazing* **Ninja Hero**. *By presenting a distinct genre for HERO System play, and showing how to use the HERO System's game elements to construct cool abilities and powers appropriate for that genre, it was like a revelatory bombshell going off in my imagination. As I've written elsewhere, it was the model I followed for my first book,* **Dark Champions**. *More importantly, it influenced the way the HERO System developed. Nearly every rules-oriented book for the HERO System (including both the 5th and 6th edition core rulebooks) since 1993 has been written by me. Since my thinking was so strongly inspired by* **Ninja Hero**, *it (and Aaron's general approach to genre simulation) have directly or indirectly affected the nature and presentation of the HERO System right up to the present day. And for that I and thousands of other gamers owe Aaron a deep debt.*

Beyond that, though, Aaron was one of the kindest, friendliest people I've ever met. He gave unstintingly of his time and advice to help fellow writers (including me) and lived his life in a way more people should: treating everyone fairly and amicably; showing ill will towards few (if any); contributing intelligently and positively to the world. So Aaron, my friend, wherever your self now resides, I hope the campaigns continue and that all your rolls are criticals.

—Steve Long

Several years ago, I did a podcast with Steve Kenson. I don't do many podcasts–frankly my presentation skills suck and my memory is so poor that I don't make for a very interesting guest. But what does the (arguably) premier superhero RPG game designer like Steve talk about when he gets together with an old warhorse like me? We talked about our favorite systems, of course, but as the conversation drifted, we were pixie-led down a path that inevitably culminated in talking about the supplements of Aaron Allston. As you look through this book, you'll understand why.

Aaron was our Kirby, our King. If he didn't invent splatbooks, he sure as heck perfected them. A new Aaron Allston supplement was a thrill, like the coming of a long-awaited blockbuster movie; it opened new vistas and produced a thunderstorm of creative ideas. It's a mark of how unjust the universe can be that he's no longer with us. And it's a mark of how wonderful the universe can be that we had him at all.

Nobody understood how games and genre intersect quite like Aaron. Aaron, who, in the most sound, straightforward workman-like prose, was the first author who really captured the dynamic of the game table, identifying player types not by broad terms like "power gamer" or "role-player", but by identifying what motivations brought the player to (and kept the gamer at) the table. He never lost sight of the fact that the primary job of an RPG is to let players enjoy themselves, but within the confines of the genre. Strike Force goes to some odd places, but it fundamentally remains a superhero game. We play superhero RPGs so we can feel like we're heroes in a comic book. It's easy to get become so involved in the game mechanics and rules that you miss the genre, warping a game into a homogenous dice-rolling or storytelling exercise, so all games feel the same.

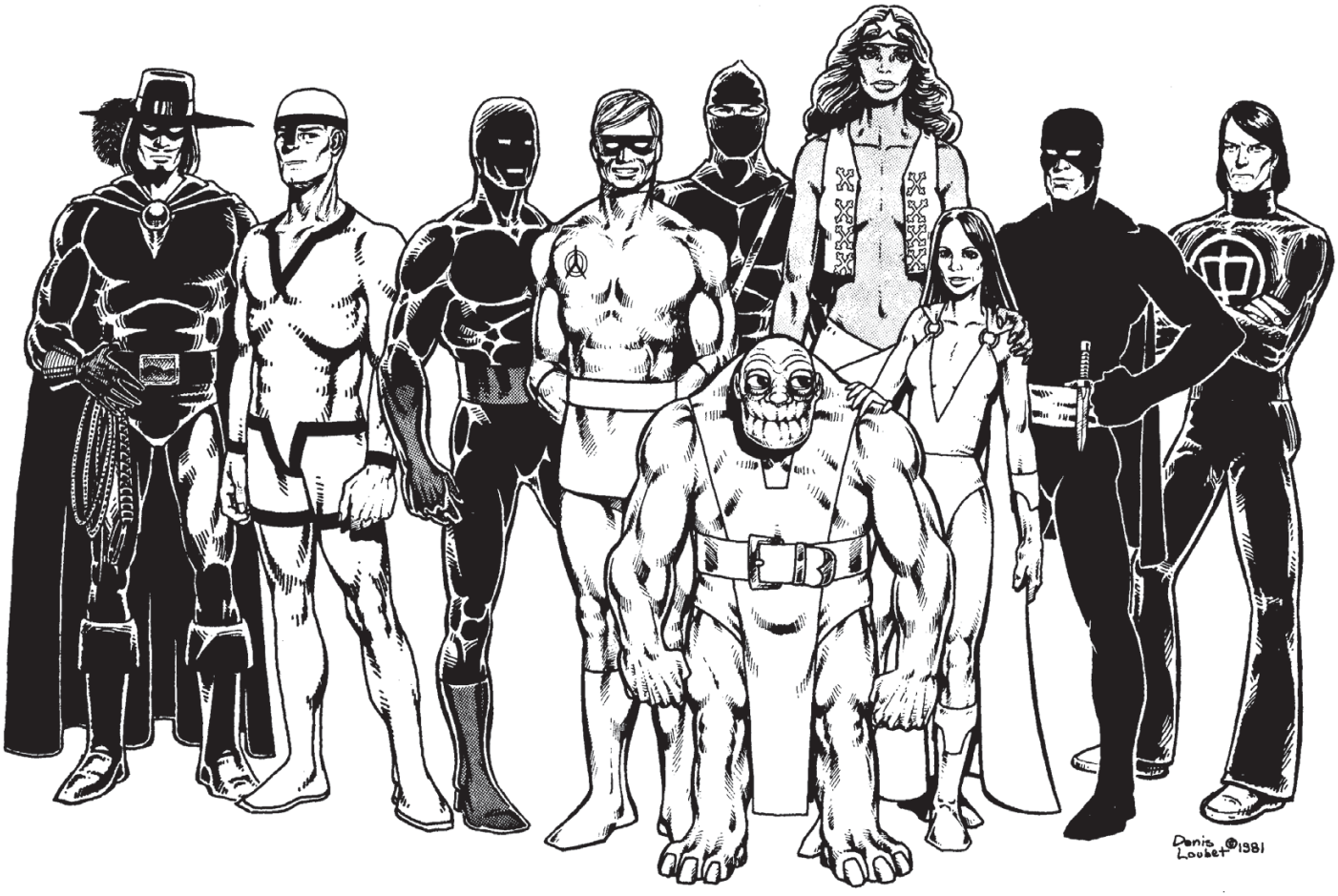
It's also easy for an author to get so wrapped up in the process of their creation that they lose sight of the fact that they're writing for an audience of gamers, not readers, forgetting that gamers have a tendency to break an author's pretty things. Not so with Aaron, whose works merged game, story, and genre with spectacular élan.

Aaron was also the consummate Texas gentleman, but his ego never seemed to match the stereotype. He was always friendly, available as often as it was practical for a good conversation, and he had no problems mentoring people. Hearing Aaron talk about gaming made you excited about gaming. I am sure there are many others here who can speak of the glories of his character and his gaming table with infinitely greater precision, and I'm expected to be moved by many stories here. One thing I must acknowledge: Aaron was responsible for me finding work in the computer game field. He gave me ten of the best years of my life. So thank you, Mr. Allston. I miss you.

—Scott Bennie

STRIKE FORCE

EXCERPTS FROM DENIS LOUBET'S STRIKE FORCE SKETCHBOOK



STRIKE FORCE SUPERSTARS

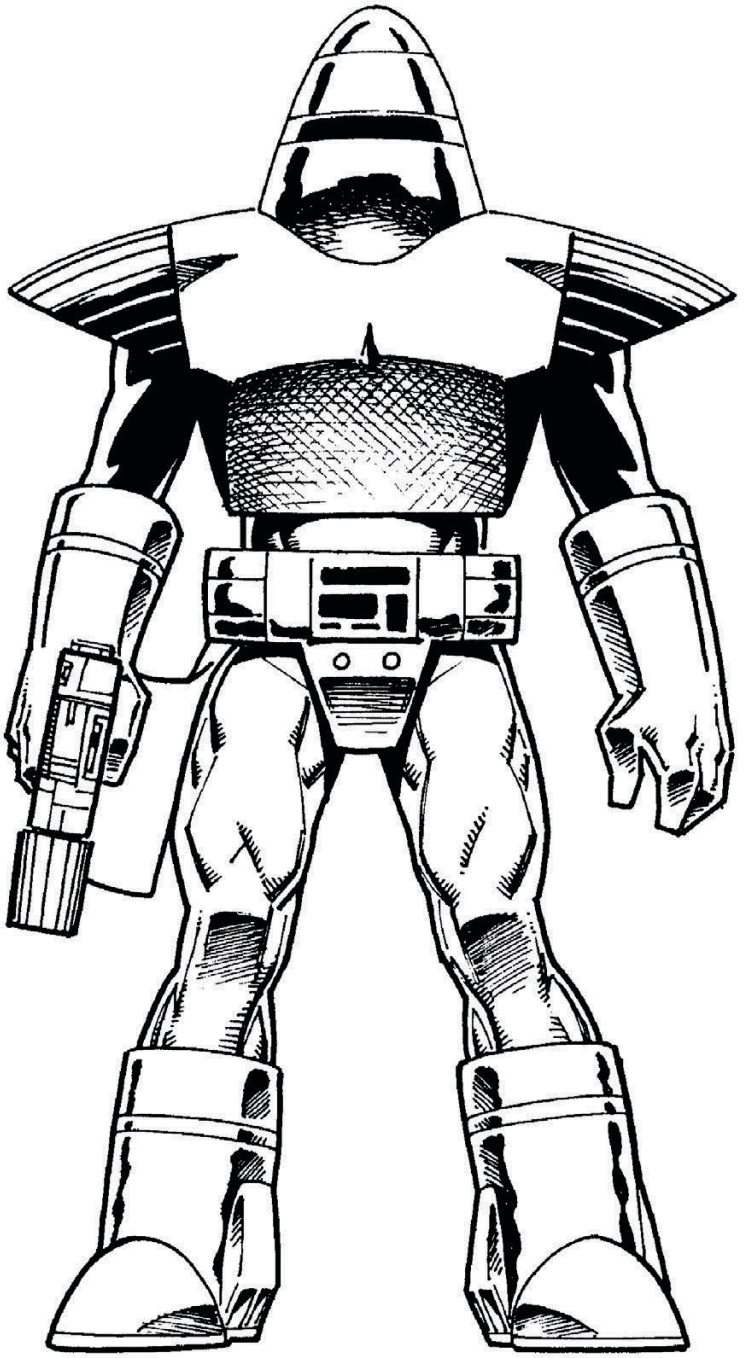
Above: The heroes of Strike Force!

Left The unmasked face of Phosphene.

HEROES AND VILLAINS

Above: The team of Avant Guard.

Right: The unmasked face of Overlord.



VISIONS OF BOLO

The superhero Bolo has gone through many different versions over the years; here are three distinct styles by his player, Denis Loubet!

FACES OF VILLAINY

Above: The demonic Denier and his followers.

Right: The villainous Scoff!

THIS PROJECT DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF AARON DALE ALLSTON

1960-2014

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A superhero setting like no other. A role-playing game campaign book that includes techniques and lessons from over 22 years of play. A tribute to one of the greatest creators in the RPG industry, created using Champions Complete.

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Whether you're a newcomer or an old hand, a gamemaster or a player, Strike Force has something for you:

- A tribute to one of the great game designers and gamemasters, Aaron Allston
- A complete history of a truly multiversal superhero setting
- A look at the universe of Strike Force, known as Earth-AU
- More than 30 characters, detailing the heroes and villains of Strike Force
- A campaigning section with advice for all stages of a campaign
- Techniques for running your own unforgettable superhero RPG campaign, including advice from Steve Kenson and Sean Patrick Fannon

Bring your heroes together, stand for justice, and enter the world of Strike Force!

Strike Force felt like it allowed me to peek inside both Aaron's campaign and his gamemaster mind. It was well-worth the read, both for entertainment value and for educational value in the RPG space—it is one of the best RPG supplements ever, and it deserves to be restored for a new generation.

—Chris Avellone

Before actual play reports were a feature of the hobby, before the Internet's bits flowed into every home like running water, there was Aaron Allston's Strike Force, and MAN did it blow my tiny high-school-aged mind when it landed on my table in 1988.

—Fred Hicks

BITS AND MORTAR

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