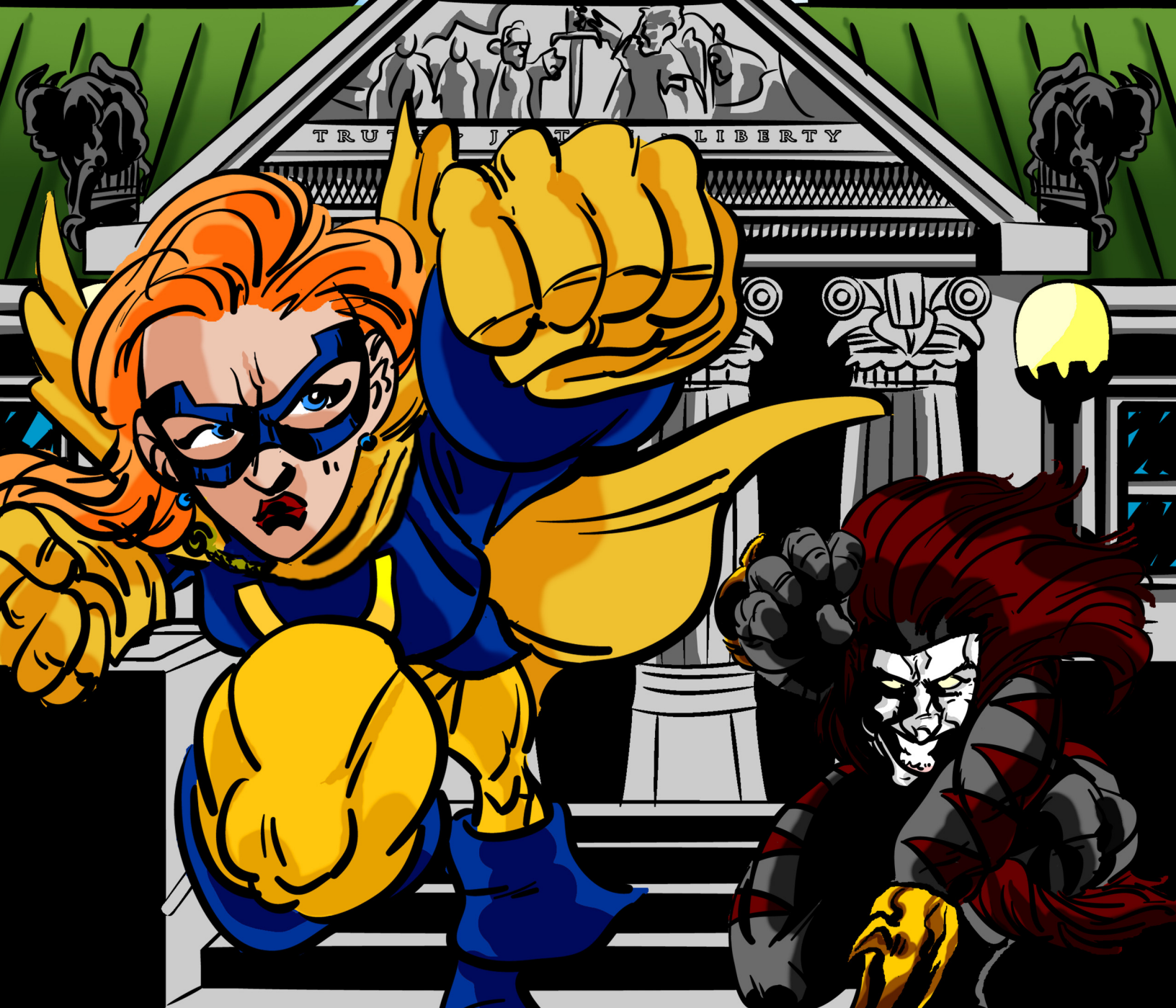




**ASM**  
ATOMIC SOCK  
MONKEY

# TRUTH & JUSTICE



# TRUTH & JUSTICE

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[2<sup>nd</sup> PRINTING]

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## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *Truth & Justice*.

I've always loved superhero comics, cartoons, movies and gaming. To me, they celebrate valor and "mad, beautiful ideas" in adventurous, stylish, and *fun* ways. What's not to love?

However, I think that the story-based aspects of the genre are often overlooked when translating amazing superhero action to gaming; the wargame-based inheritance of RPGs sometimes interferes with the vital characteristics of superhero stories. These characteristics include: the ability of dedicated, highly-trained but unpowered heroes to work successfully alongside or against individuals with superpowers; the heroism in transcending limitations and overcoming obstacles; the importance of a hero's motivations, personal ties, and behavior alongside their more-than-human talents; and the sense of freewheeling imagination and improvisation that suffuses the source material. *Truth & Justice (T&J)* is my stab at encouraging gaming that supports and enhances those qualities.

I hope you enjoy reading and playing *T&J* as much as I enjoyed writing it.

## ABOUT THE PDQ SYSTEM

The rules in this book build upon the *Prose Descriptive Qualities (PDQ) System*, suitably modified for superheroic play. *PDQ Core* is available as a free download from the following URLs:

<http://www.atomicsockmonkey.com/freebies/di/pdq-core.pdf>

[http://www.rpgnow.com/product\\_info.php?products\\_id=4175&](http://www.rpgnow.com/product_info.php?products_id=4175&)

<http://e23.sjgames.com/item.html?id=ASM-000>

*PDQ* has been designed for evocative simplicity, speed, and flexibility in play. It currently serves as the core game mechanics for *Dead Inside: the Roleplaying Game of Loss & Redemption (DI)*; *Monkey, Ninja, Pirate, Robot: the Roleplaying Game (MNPR:RPG)*; and *Truth & Justice (T&J)*.

## ABOUT ATOMIC SOCK MONKEY PRESS

<http://www.atomicsockmonkey.com/>

*Atomic Sock Monkey Press* is dedicated to high-quality, off-kilter, imaginative fun. Currently, that means tabletop games of both the "beer & pretzels" and roleplaying game (RPG) varieties. In the future, we may expand into other areas; but for now, Atomic Sock Monkey Press is concentrating on games.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chad Underkoffler is an editor for a telecommunications standards body by day and a freelance game writer by night. He's been gaming since 1981, to the confusion of his family. His column "Campaign in a Box" appears in Pyramid Online at <http://www.sjgames.com/pyramid> (*Chapter 7, Second-String Supers*, first appeared as a CiaB column); he has written material for *Gamma World* (Sword & Sorcery), *GURPS* (Steve Jackson Games), and *Unknown Armies* (Atlas Games); and he is the author and publisher of *Dead Inside: the Roleplaying Game of Loss & Redemption* and *Monkey, Ninja, Pirate, Robot: the RPG*. Chad currently lives in Alexandria, VA, with his wife Beth and their two black cats.



# CHAPTER 1: THE SUPERHERO GENRE

A man in crazy pajamas atop a skyscraper rains laser death down on the streets. He's laughing as he does it.

Below, fires bloom for the news cameras. Reporters duck debris as they yammer on about demands and manifestoes and terror. Meanwhile, in the background, the screams of scorched innocents melt into the wail of sirens.

It makes me angry. My cheeks burn with it – or that just might be from the wind.

The madman grows closer and closer, impossibly fast. His eyes widen as he lifts his weapon in my direction. He won't make it in time.

My hands tighten into fists as I brace for impact.

I have a set of crazy pajamas of my own.

*Truth & Justice (T&J)* allows you to play superhuman characters gifted with extraordinary talents and abilities. These mighty beings possess staggering power and can perform tremendous deeds. Yet – beyond the flash and dazzle – they are still human, with the potential to do great good, great evil, or both.

If you want to read more on *T&J's* take on the supers genre, stick with this chapter. If you're ready and eager to start reading the *T&J* rules, turn to *Chapter 2*.

## T&J PHILOSOPHY

The world is full of lies and injustice, and the day-to-day fight against them is a heroic struggle we all face. We have our personal victories and setbacks, and soldier on as best we can. But when the lies and injustices of the real world get too big for an average person to check, and truth and justice seem to fade away in the face of spin or special agendas, sometimes turning to tales of mighty and noble heroes thwarting villains can recharge the batteries.

*T&J* and other superhero games dramatize and romanticize the conflicts between lies and truth,

injustice and justice, harm and help, leavening the mix with wonder, mystery, costumes, and explosions. Who doesn't relish the idea of possessing the power and grit to point at something obviously wrong and say, "I'm going to stop that," and then doing it? Superhero stories allow us to imagine kicking back at fate, setting things right, making the world a better place. They allow us to explore dreams of courage with little personal risk. They are inspiring, pure, hopeful.

**Superman:** I'm here to fight for truth, and justice, and the American way.

**Lois Lane:** You're gonna end up fighting every elected official in this country!

– *Superman*

## LIES VS. TRUTH

Why do people lie? Usually, to gain something or to protect themselves. While people can say something untrue without realizing they're doing so, this is just a mistake – a lie is deliberate. The lies one tells to oneself are often the most dangerous, starting with "I know I am absolutely, 100% right, despite the facts."

Lying is corrosive. It breaks down fact into opinion, distorts perspective, and breeds injustice. Even the little white lies in social conversation can leave a bad taste in one's mouth. Whether it is a child blaming a sibling for breaking a lamp, a company prevaricating over the pollution their factory is spilling into the environment, or the assertions of a madman that some other ethnic group "isn't really human," lies cloud or twist the facts. Otherwise rational people who come into the conversation late and accept lies

# TRUTH & JUSTICE

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at face value without question can inadvertently perform the most heinous acts.

Truth is the sword that cuts through the miasma of lies. Truth is the beacon that lights the path of justice.

Truth can be hard and unforgiving, but truth is solid: a good foundation for building. It may hurt, but that hurt is nothing compared to the suffering of those who are snarled in lies; consider a short, sharp blow side-by-side with slow strangulation. Heroes prefer the truth, for good or for ill, because they take responsibility for their actions and believe in the rightness of their cause; if their truths turn out to be wrong, they admit it and work to repair any damage they've done.

## INJUSTICE VS. JUSTICE

Injustice is that which is unfair, especially unfairness that causes harm or violates another's rights. It is inequality, the belief that some people are better than or deserve more consideration than others. It unbalances the playing field, avalanching into institutional wrongs or biases that perpetually hold others back.

Justice conforms to truth. Justice looks at a situation, and determines what is equitable. Justice is higher than what is simply legal, appealing to a moral right.

But justice is *not* simply revenge. Justice is impartial, unbiased, fair; revenge seeks to punish, to cause suffering, to stop the criminal from ever performing a similar act again. Often, avengers misjudge the amount of force necessary here, and spark an ever-increasing spiral of violence as the target or their associates attempt to get revenge for the harm they perceive the target received. Justice has limits.

Mercy is one of the limits on justice. It is the ability to show compassion, clemency, or lenience to a criminal deserving of such. It is what blunts the force of overwhelming punishment, and – hopefully – the spiral of revenge. Shakespeare said that "the quality of mercy is not strained"; this means that mercy should be given freely, for one day we may be before justice ourselves, and would greatly desire it.

"A hero is no braver than an ordinary man, but he is braver five minutes longer."

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

## HEROISM

A *hero* is a man or woman (sometimes called a *heroine*) who is the protagonist of a story. A hero possesses abilities in greater measure than the typical person, be they skills, talents, renown, drives, insights, or superpowers. These capabilities allow the performance of amazing or noble acts. Common heroic deeds include rescuing people, protecting innocents, creating beneficial things for society, thwarting evildoers, and slaying monsters.

Some of the most common aspects of heroism shown in comics are:

- ♦ **Courage & Honor.** The purest form of heroic action in comic books and related media are those "in defense of noble ideals," "saving the entire world," or "against overwhelming odds." In these cases, the superhero is at great risk to survive, much less prevail. This is where the rubber hits the road. Heroic actions in this vein are the big climactic types that occur at the end of a multi-issue or multi-episode story arc, and may have significant repercussions on a hero's characterization.
- ♦ **Expertise & Drive.** This is the classic "a battle of wits – or punches – with a matched foe"; examples include chasing down a serial killer, going *mano a mano* with a supervillain, or redirecting a horde of killer robots. These sorts of events put the hero in some risk, but the odds are usually – at worst – equal. These heroic actions are the meat and potatoes of superhero adventures.
- ♦ **Kindness & Charity.** This is the typical "retrieve a cat from a tree" or "rescue citizens from a burning building," where the hero acts for those who cannot. For some heroes, this may be a risky task, and thus related to the acts of courage and honor noted above. However, some heroes are really not in any danger or take little personal risk, particularly

if they can fly or are fireproof. From some perspectives, an action taken without risk is not heroic, but in these cases, the exercise of charity can be – to the beneficiaries. They don't care that getting Fluffy out of the top of the oak tree is easy for Ultrawoman, or that American Ranger can walk through fire unharmed, they appreciate that they've been given help when it was desperately needed.

It's about, as Alan Moore put it, "mad and beautiful ideas"; the sense of wonder, the feeling of marvellous secret things just beyond our field of vision, and the revelations and splendours and dangers and bastards tied up in it all...

– Warren Ellis, "*Planetary Proposal*"

### MAD, BEAUTIFUL IDEAS

Superhero stories are jam-packed with "mad, beautiful ideas": concepts that grab hold of the imagination and energize the sense of wonder. Demigods meeting Atlantean royalty at the UN. Teenagers wielding the power of the sun. Magic as unconscious manipulation of environmental nanotech left in the atmosphere by alien space brothers. Telepathic apes plotting against their furless genetic cousins. Radioactive space meteors blessing or cursing the curious with great power. Giant robots fighting dinosaurs in Sheboygan. Swinging from building to building as a viable method of urban transportation. Buried pyramids that are gigantic computers. The speed of light as more a guideline than a rule.

Forget everything you know about realistic physics and remember the way you thought matter and force interacted when you were eight years old. Weight and size are directly related (what's density?); a boulder the size of a car weighs about what a car does. Using strength when moving is more effective than leverage and solid footing. Athletic folks can jump farther and higher than Olympic medalists. Lots of things explode when damaged. If something looks cool or sounds neat, it probably works – no matter how crazy or unrealistic it is. If the audience has sufficiently suspended their disbelief, these concepts can be breathtaking.





However, if your suspension is unprepared (or unwilling), they can come off as, well, *goofy*. Why would a gal who can fly wear bright, primary color long johns? How can a guy pick up a battleship without it collapsing under its own weight? Why would either of them fight crime, anyway? I was willing to give you the magic lasso, but an invisible jet? Come on!

Despite their seeming inherent silliness, these mad, beautiful ideas are part of the furniture of superhero stories and games. To complain about them (overmuch, anyway) is like grousing about all the horses and ghost towns in a Western: pointless. If you're not willing to grant at least some of these bits of a superheroic setting, maybe you shouldn't be subjecting yourself to it. You either go with the flow, or you don't. That said, there's no need for every single superhero motif to appear in a story or setting, and taking a hard look at some of their underlying sources and likely consequences can lead to new and different ideas that catch one's interest. (See also below, *Comic Book Tropes*, p. 9.)

Dreamqueen recovered from the gas pellets faster than I thought she would. She must have been drawing oneiro-energy from a couple of sleepers stashed away somewhere in the balcony of the theater. Damn.

As I shooed the hostages out the stage door, she popped out of the shadows and smashed me with a Nightmare Punch. The force of her blow sent me flying back through a half-dozen flats. I managed to grab a curtain rope before I splattered against the backstage wall.

Momentum carried me in a short arc up to the lighting catwalk. I dropped heavily onto the walkway. It was a struggle to stay conscious, to clear my head, to assure that my weapons were still functional. Only I, with neither superpowers nor magic, stood between the Sorceress of Sleep and the sanity of the entire city. Only I could bring her to justice.

Her glowing eyes pierced the darkness, locking onto mine. Deadly dream-stuff formed around her hands, building up enough charge to twist flesh and metal into pretzels. Her cruel mouth gleamed red as blood. She said my name in her poisoned-honey voice: "Manticore. Darling."

I fished a screamer out of my utility belt, armed it, threw it. With luck, it would wake up the sleepers who gave the villainess her extra power. But she had to be distracted, so she wouldn't blast it into pieces before it did its work.

Leaping into space, I fired my swingline, aiming my boots right at her raven-haired head.

## SCALE

In superhero stories, it is important to realize that occurrences and effects are often on two different scales: the *normal* and the *super*.

*Normal-scale* is what you usually see around you: feathers and tanks and newspapers and kittycats and seven-storey buildings and algebra problems – ordinary stuff. Normal folks have varying amounts of ease or difficulty in dealing with these issues. *Super-scale* is the extraordinary stuff: giant atomic monsters and death meteors and kung-fu chi punches and erupting volcanoes and super-strong bank robbers and telepaths and hyperspace equations and unicorns and masterminds demanding one billion dollars or they'll unleash their nanotech plague on Washington. The super-scale always trumps the normal-scale – the weakest super-strong guy will be able to beat the strongest normal-scale guy at arm wrestling (or singing, forensics, piloting, etc.).

Look at old *Action Comics* issues: Superman is "invulnerable." That means that he just plain doesn't get hurt from anything ordinary: a normal guy punching him, bad guys spraying him with machinegun fire or napalm, falling off of buildings, the heartbreak of psoriasis, and so forth. However, extraordinary circumstances – like being hit in the head with a meteor, getting zapped with a million volts of electricity, being targeted by fifteen howitzers, or being blindsided by a giant robot – muss him up a little, even if they don't really hurt him permanently. And being punched by another super-strong individual hurts him as much as a normal punch would hurt a normal man. Intuitively, invulnerability is relative to super-strength: these powers counter each other. They're on the same scale.

Nevertheless, just because something is on the normal scale doesn't mean that it can't be a threat. Canny normal-scale opponents will take advantage of a superhuman's normal-scale aspects. Even if Invincible Girl can't be physically hurt, she can be emotionally hurt by someone threatening her boyfriend. Lord Fey might be able to create incredible illusions with his magic, but his flesh blisters if you touch him with iron. Teams of thugs can swarm a tougher opponent and use leverage and force of numbers to immobilize them.

# TRUTH & JUSTICE

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This ability to avoid the majority of the pitfalls of normal-scale effects often even holds true for superhero characters who don't have powers (unless it's a specific story point). Green Arrow can get up from a fall that should have realistically left him a pavement smear. Tony Stark somehow manages to usually get away from mundane business concerns to put on his power armor. When driving the Batmobile, traffic jams aren't a problem most of the time.

For this reason, *T&J* assumes that all effects or consequences are on one or the other of these scales; how this works in specific situations (mundane abilities, superpowers, combat) will be addressed throughout the remainder of the book (see *Chapter 2, Basic Damage*, p. 22, for a quick overview). The question of how to determine the limits of each scale, and how characters – especially player characters – operate on each is related to the question of *Style* (see below). The two important things to remember about Scale are: 1) that normal-scale is ordinary; and 2) super-scale is extraordinary.

Washington, DC.

Everyone said the Jade Turtle was beautiful, a wonderful representation of T'ang Dynasty sculpture. I guess that made it inevitable that during its showing at the Met, Catastrophe would visit.

Baltimore, MD.

I was liaising with General Dickinson at the Pentagon when I got the call. I excused myself a little hastily, but, you know. Duty calls.

Havre De Grace, MD.

The wind caresses my face. My legs piston my feet against the earth. The world is a frozen blur.

Wilmington, DE.

I don't know what Catastrophe has against pretty things. Statues, paintings, concept cars, architecture, celebrities, doesn't matter: if something sets her off, she finds the closest pretty thing and breaks it.

Philadelphia, PA.

She's an attractive girl herself, if you go in for that sort of willowy brunette type. Too young for me, too skinny for me, and then there's that whole being a criminal sociopath thing.

Trenton, NJ.

Maybe she feels like she's in competition with the artwork, or something. I don't know, and frankly, I'm not sure I care. Ultrawoman normally tangles with her.

Woodbridge, NJ.

It's funny. They call me in on this, six minutes ago, because I have the best chance of getting there before something tragic happens. It's not like New York City doesn't have any superheroes.

New York City, NY.

As I approach the city, I slow enough to minimize property damage. Across the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge, up 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, Hamilton, Brooklyn Bridge, Bowery, Broadway, Fifth Avenue, MoMA.

A security guard sprawls on the floor, his weapon in pieces. She's verbally abusing a museum lecturer. Grad student age, cute, redhead. I'm not sure if that's lucky or unlucky. I take the Jade Turtle, put it somewhere safe, and get back just in time for my "prop wash" to hit the gallery and the security alarms to go off. She spins around and gets a load of me standing in front of the flashing (empty) case. "Stop right there, Catastrophe!"

I love my job.

## STYLE

NOTE - This section of the chapter delves into somewhat dense analytical material that explores the supers genre and gives a foundation in the ground rules of different supers game styles. If you want to come back to it later, you can skip ahead to p. 22.

*Style* is the level of consequences the setting reacts with when the characters do something; in short, it determines the cost for actions. Style is how "forgiving" reality is of stylish, daredevil actions. In a superhero setting, the relationship of effects to causes is different than that in the real world; this is where Style connects to Scale (see above). For example, if a character leaps through a storefront window, is he cut to pieces, a little nicked up, or basically unharmed?

One way to describe style is to refer back to the "ages" of comic books – the Golden Age, the Silver Age, the Bronze/Modern/"whatever the mid-Seventies to today is" Age, and so forth. These ages cover periods of publication as well as issues of history, tone, outlook, and subject matter. This is somewhat unfortunate, because each of those individual elements of an age can be picked out and utilized for a story published last week. An example

here would be Kurt Busiek's *Astro City*, often referred to as a "Neo-Silver Age" series (that is, its style is heavily influenced by, and somewhat mimics that of, comics published in the Silver Age, which was roughly mid-1950 to early 1970).

Another useful way to look at superhero styles is to adapt the scheme laid out by literary critic Northrop Frye, in his book *Anatomy of Criticism*, for discussing the different modes of fiction. The scheme breaks fiction down into modes of *myth*, *romance*, *mimetic* (*high* and *low*), and *irony* (don't worry, definitions and details for these modes will be given below). While both the purely mythic and the purely ironic modes are too *directed* to really work well in a collaborative RPG (too much stuff has to happen to reinforce the underlying mode), mixtures of the two are quite common in superhero stories.

*T&J* uses a combination of these two methods to boil the genre down into four basic styles that can be interesting and valuable for superhero gaming.

### GRIM 'N GRITTY

Life is hard and unforgiving, and it often seems like Someone Upstairs is just messing with you for cheap laughs. Bad stuff happens to good people all the time, because that's the way it is. Fall out a second story window, and you'll break your neck and die.

Grim 'n Gritty combines the flavor of Bronze/Modern Age comics with the ironic and mimetic modes.

Bronze/Modern Age comics (roughly mid-1970s to today) have several story characteristics that make them different from the Golden and Silver Ages of comics. These include the pervasiveness of troubled heroes and anti-heroes as protagonists; increased psychological depth and characterization; the resurgence of horror and suspense as elements of superhero stories; the formal development of retroactive continuity, or retcons (see *Retcons*, p. 12); increased literary complexity (typified by works such as *Sandman*, *Watchmen*, and *The Dark Knight Returns*); and, lastly, the narrative impact of franchising and "event publishing" (an example of this is in DC Comics' *Death of Superman* arc: the character could not truly be killed, because he is a valuable piece of continuing intellectual property for the company, and the event crossed over into numerous other books and influenced their storylines). Normally, not

all of these characteristics will show up in a single Grim 'n Gritty style campaign at once.

In Frye's scheme, Grim 'n Gritty is a mixture of irony and the mimetic (especially the low mimetic). In *irony*, the hero is less than the average man – less capability, less brains, less drive – and is trapped by his environment and society. In the *low mimetic mode*, heroes are realistic people on the street like you or me; in the *high mimetic mode*, heroes are superior to other people, but not the environment or society – heroes are princes, generals, prophets, leaders of men.

Ironic superhumans usually are either comedic (like Ambush Bug) or are totally debauched caricatures (like Rebel Studio's Faust). At the depths of the "grim 'n gritty" style of the late Eighties, many "superheroes" often came off as nothing more than moody adolescents armed with big guns, which they used without any discrimination. These characters usually acted – and were specifically written to act – much, much worse than the average guy with superpowers. Furthermore, in irony, Murphy's Law trumps Newton's Laws: far too often to be coincidence, the absolute *worst* thing that could possibly happen usually does. (Intriguingly, Frye tells us that irony, pushed to extremes, returns to the mode of myth.)

Mimetic superhumans share all of the weaknesses and drives and situations that the rest of us do. They can be great at their one superpowered thing, and fail in everything else, but they soldier on as best they can. In the Sixties, Marvel Comics built their reputation on these sorts of characters, especially ones that fluctuated somewhere between the two mimetic modes. Spider-Man is the poster-boy for low mimetic superheroes – he's up, he's down, he's an average Joe that can climb walls. Captain America is an exemplar of the high mimetic superhero – he's the best of the best, a nearly perfect human specimen, but he's not superhuman. In both mimetic modes, the world is as we see it around us, and is bounded more-or-less by the probabilities of reality as we understand and experience them.

In Grim 'n Gritty style games, lies and injustice are stronger than truth and justice; heroism is wringing the small victories you can, working for a brighter tomorrow.

## *CINEMATIC*

Life is hard but fair: if you put the effort in, you can get ahead. Bad stuff happens to good people sometimes, either due to the luck of the draw or getting caught in someone's machinations. Fall out a second story window, and you might break your arm or leg or get the wind knocked out of you.

The Cinematic style is a mix of romantic and (especially high) mimetic modes, and is related to the Golden Age of comics.

The Golden Age covered a period from 1938 to the mid-1950s. The superhero stories of that time were heavily influenced by pulp magazines and their protagonists, especially the "hero pulps" like Doc Savage, the Shadow, and the Spider. Their content focused on adventure and detective fiction, and were slam-bang, sensational melodrama.

*Melodrama* implies a world of moral absolutes, stock characters, and formulaic plots. These elements are thrilling, with plenty of action, combat, confrontations, detective work, athletic feats, explosions, weird threats, and so forth. Yet melodrama often lacks realism: everything is black and white, no shades of gray; characters have one-dimensional personalities and motives; and most of the plots are extremely basic – villain threatens, hero responds, day is saved. If you can get into the mindset, it's a very satisfying thrill-ride; many Hollywood action movies today contain these elements (though, arguably, with slightly more characterization).

Melodrama connects well with Frye's romantic and high mimetic modes. In *romance*, the hero is a human, albeit an extraordinary one, and is mostly superior to the human environment and society. While the laws of nature can be different than those of the real world, they are self-consistent. The high mimetic mode focuses on the actions, personalities, and environments of real people, just *powerful* real people.

Most Cinematic style stories balance these two modes: despite their special abilities and wider scope of action, superhumans are still, at their core, human beings in a recognizably human world. Clark Kent's Kansas upbringing balances his Kryptonian heritage, and despite all the amazing things that Bruce Wayne

has learned to do, he still wakes up in cold sweats from nightmares.

In Cinematic games, lies and injustice are equally matched with truth and justice; heroism is fighting the good fight, which could be easily lost if the hero falters.

## *FOUR COLOR*

Life is fair and forgiving: if you keep your nose clean, you can avoid the worst bits. Bad stuff happens to good people rarely, usually from somebody going out of their way to mess with them. Fall out a second story window, and you'll sprain your arm or leg, at worst.

The Four Color style, like the Cinematic style, draws heavily on romance, but instead of being mixed with the mimetic mode, it's combined with the mythic; the Silver Age of comics is the biggest example here.

The Silver Age is usually considered to be between the mid-1950s and the early 1970s. The stories of this period were of greater complexity than those of the Golden Age, in both plot and character. Science fiction and science fact became a big influence on origins and storylines. Heroes became more human and troubled. Character development and personal conflicts (internal and external) became much more important, though their execution was still unrefined: early examples of these conflicts usually revolved around the need to hide a hero's Secret Identity ("Lois, what *is* your problem?"), while later examples encompassed the hero's own doubts and relationships, inside and outside of costume ("If JJJ doesn't buy that picture of Spider-man, I'll have to hock Aunt May's clock!").

Lastly, two things in the real world had a narrative impact on the style of this time. The first was a generation of new artists, many formally trained and educated, who brought new techniques and perspectives into comic book publishing. Heroes started to look more realistic – or surrealistic – and the art often indirectly (or directly, in the Marvel





style of writing comics) influenced their stories. The second thing was the adoption of the Comics Code by the publishers of the time, to protect the delicate minds of young children and prevent them from growing up to become juvenile delinquents.

The Code prohibited a large proportion of the violence, sexuality, corruption, and gore found in comics, cutting the legs out from under the horror and crime comics of the time, and further shifting the spirit of comic books away from their pulp roots. This created an artificial world, where good must always triumph over evil and no authority figure could ever be shown in a negative light. This sort of absolutism increased the level of melodrama (see above) in comics, but barred many mimetic depictions of the environment. Unable to focus on the social realities, comics turned inward, looking for psychological realities that could be portrayed under this regime: in a word, myth.

In Frye's *mythic* mode, a hero is not just better than, but different from, other men and their society; and the laws of nature are capricious. Heroes are godlike, unfettered by purely human frailties or conventions, though either can influence their actions. Mythic superheroes aren't just *myth-based* heroes, like Marvel's Thor; comics in that style treat the superhuman as something greater than human, unbounded by human laws and experience. Alan Moore's Doctor Manhattan (from *Watchmen*), Miracleman, and Swamp Thing fit these categories – as do the characterizations in Grant Morrison's run on *JLA*.

In Four Color games, lies and injustice are weaker than truth and justice; heroism is repelling the assaults of villainy on all that is good and right.

### *ANIMATED*

Life is exciting and melodramatic: fate doles out great rewards and great failures, for purely dramatic reasons. Bad stuff – and good stuff – happens to people, provided it makes a good story. Fall out of a second story window, and (depending upon how big a player in the current story you are) you could die, break a limb, get a scrape, or be essentially unharmed.

As a medium for superhero stories, animation been around since the 1941 Fleischer Superman cartoons

and became a mainstay of the genre with the rise of television. New heroes like Space Ghost, Birdman, the Mighty My-Tor, and the Galaxy Trio joined their comic book brethren on the screen. In the 1970s and 1980s, many American superhero cartoons suffered almost crippling outside influences; in the 70s, the stories were affected by television standards and practices that were even more stringent than the Comics Code; in the 80s, in addition to the undercutting of action bequeathed by the previous decade, the stories nearly became nothing more than commercials for licensed toys. However, as superhero- and science fiction-influenced animation from other countries – especially Japan (with cartoons like *Speed Racer*, *Science Ninja Team Gatchaman/Battle of the Planets/G-Force*, and *Akira*) – started to be shown in the States, their popularity influenced the way American superhero shows were constructed. Over the last dozen years, animated superhero stories have been developing in leaps and bounds, leading to stand-out examples of the medium such as *Batman: the Animated Series* (and its sequels) and *The Incredibles*.

While animation is a medium, the medium *has* affected the message, especially the manner in which it is told. "Limited detail for maximum motion" is the mantra here; verbal and visual shorthands are used to keep things fast and action-packed – the quick sketch, bold stroke, or snappy phrase that sums up so much, but leaves plenty for the mind to fill in on its own. The *Animated* style draws on all of the other styles, mixing the comic book Ages, keeping the best stuff – the action-adventure of the Golden Age, the personal development and conflicts of the Silver Age, the literary and psychological complexities and reintroduction of suspense of the Bronze/Modern Age – and jettisons the rest. In Frye's scheme, the *Animated* style is 91% pure romance (with the panache knob turned up to eleven), with the mythic, mimetic, and ironic modes each contributing 3% of flavor.

In *Animated* games, lies and injustice are well-matched with truth and justice; heroism is putting your neck on the line against powerful villainy – luckily, the heroic heart has an edge that cannot be blunted.

Refusing to put their hero in a completely contemporary world. . . Bruce and Eric fashioned a Gotham City that was stylish but dangerous. It could be identified as twentieth-century America, but it was impossible to pinpoint it to an exact decade. Batman would often be shown working at his super-sophisticated Batcomputer, but televisions would only broadcast in black and white. Likewise, Batman might fly the futuristic Batwing, but Bruce Wayne would drive a Cord. Tommy guns, VCRs, lasers, and zeppelins all happily coexist in Batman's technologically unified world. Bruce and Eric did not want the series to visually date itself, as many cartoons do when they try to hard to ground themselves in contemporary culture. Instead, they looked back over sixty years, took what had endured, and made it their own.

– from *Batman Animated*

### COMIC BOOK TROPES

Superhero stories, as a genre, have evolved a number of common motifs. These populate the background of superhero stories, and can seem a little odd when looked at dispassionately. However, they are often beloved elements of the superhero experience, and should be considered and addressed in superhero games. Use of them wholesale gives a comic-book flavor to a game setting. Re-examination of these tropes can generate interesting settings and stories, as shown in numerous excellent comics.

**Alternate Earths.** The superhero genre loves the ideas of alternate Earths. Whether it's a mirror-mirror reversal (heroes into villains, villains into heroes), alternative history (Nazis won WWII), shifted timeframes (50 years into the future), or genre-bending elseworlds (supers in the Wild West), hopping dimensions is a hoot. The point of these sorts of exercises is to dramatically shift perspectives, and to look into causes and effects. Say that on *Earth A*, Ultrawoman marries her sweetheart and doesn't tell him of her superheroic identity; the *Earth B* Ultrawoman may have married the guy and come out of the spandex closet; the *Earth C* Ultrawoman told her beau, but they never got hitched; the *Earth D* Ultrawoman is a criminal, and killed her boyfriend when he discovered her secret and everybody already knows who she is; etc. The "official stance" of *T&J* is that time and dimensional travel works, paradoxes happen, and they're either repairable or split off new realities.

**Capes.** Revisionist superhero stories aside, there's an excellent reason for some superhumans to wear capes: they're *darned cool*. Capes are all about style – and Style (see above) is just the place for player and GMs to start at when they're thinking about including capes (and costumes) in *T&J* campaigns. Also, at a rough estimate, over the history of superhero stories, a character's cape is explicitly an aid to the character almost twice as often as it is a hindrance – by serving as armor, makeshift hang glider, decoy, weapon, etc. (See also below, *Uniforms*.)

**Change & the Status Quo.** Most mainstream superheroes are *reactive*, using their superhuman powers to fight superpowered threats, track down criminals who have already struck, minimize and repair the damage from an occurring or imminent natural disaster. Rarely do superheroes *actively* try to make the world a better place. There's an excellent reason for this: they'd probably be able to do so, and cause wide-ranging changes, both subtle and ostentatious.

A handful of supers could do things that could quickly change the world – cause natural disasters, stop natural disasters, interfere with international diplomacy, throw all the MX missiles into the Sun, go into the past and save Abraham Lincoln (or tell Nixon to stop taping meetings). But as the comic book world got better, it would become less and less like what we think of as our world – alterations to laws, daily life, technology, insurance premiums, etc. A superhero GM needs to ask himself three questions:

- 1) Have there been changes?
- 2) What were they?
- 3) How does that alter the setting?

Many stories delve into this issue of superhuman activity – *Miracleman*, *Squadron Supreme* (and its updated version in current publication, *Supreme Power*), *Watchmen*, and *the Authority*, to name just four – and try to extrapolate the sort of world created by the presence of superheroes. Unfortunately, these attempts generally do not end well, either due to the classic dichotomic struggles (control and freedom, civilization and barbarism, security and liberty, stagnation and growth, law and lawlessness, etc.), or

to the inherent *human* weaknesses of superhumans (greed, lust, pride, cruelty, hypocrisy, etc.).

See *Chapter 4, Cutting-Edge & Super-Technologies*, p. 42, for a discussion on how super-science and super-technology can change a setting.

**Crime & the Law.** Normal-scale crime is hard enough to stop; super-human crimes are exponentially harder to deal with. Even if city police departments have super-SWAT squads, it's rare that they can take down a villain without heroic help. Come to think of it, is possession of a superpower considered to be the same as possession of a concealed weapon? Is evidence collected telepathically admissible in court? Is Mind Control a justifiable defense, or are victims considered accessories to any crimes committed in such a state? Are permits or licenses required to legally use powers, and who would administrate a licensing body? Can a masked superhero with a secret identity testify in court, or does this violate a defendant's right to face his accuser? Could criminal sentences for supervillains be commuted through some form of public service (see below, *Massive Property Damage*)? Can superheroes be sued? Is there any way to keep a superpowered criminal imprisoned for any length of time? The simplest solution for all of these sorts of questions is to do what most superhuman stories do: handwave the situation unless it's a plot point for the current adventure.

**Crossovers.** In superhero stories, crossovers – also known as "guest-starring" or "team-ups" – are either a story consequence (if Zipzoom goes to Drakesville, he'll probably run into the Dragon Knight), a minor marketing gimmick (the Dragon Knight sells big, so let's slap him into Zipzoom's next adventure!), or a major marketing gimmick (everybody meets everybody in this twelve-issue maxi-series that influences all of their individual series). In a superhero game, the PCs are probably a team of their own, so crossovers would normally happen only if they entered an NPC hero's turf, or there was some massive world-wide threat where several teams needed to join forces. (See also below, *Hoo'd Win?* and *Teams*.)

**Deathtraps.** Like capes, deathtraps are all about Style, but from the dark side of the psyche. Villains set up deathtraps for two main reasons: sadism and

egotism. They like seeing the heroes suffer, and they like showing off. Additionally, deathtraps are a great way for heroes to display how cool or creative they are. It's a win-win situation from a gaming perspective. Depending upon the campaign style, a deathtrap can be all Rube Goldberg (most likely, Animated) or just being handcuffed to a briefcase full of plastique (probably Grim 'n Gritty).

**Dying.** When a character dies in a mainstream superhero comic book, this is often not a permanent thing. Heroes, supporting cast members, and villains can come back from the dead (sometimes bearing new knowledge or powers). Usually, the only folks who remain deceased are those who have an important off-panel presence, like being part of a hero or villain's origin (see below). That being said, there are still plenty of comics where the Grim Reaper is still a threat. The permanence of death is an important issue in superhero gaming – one which GMs and PCs should be clear on. (See also *Killing*.)

**Hoo'd Win?** A thing that happens more often than not in comic books is the old saw of "when two heroes first meet, they fight before teaming up to go after the bad guy." And then there are all the discussions that comic book fans have like "If Batman and Captain America got into a fight, who'd win?" or "Who's stronger: the Hulk or Superman?" (Personally, I'm a fan of the resolution in John Byrne's *Batman/Captain America* – Bats has the edge in smarts and Cap has the edge in endurance.) Indeed, over the past decade, there's nearly been a comics cottage industry in answering these sorts of questions – see *DC vs. Marvel* or *JLA/Avengers*. (See also above, *Crossovers*.)

**Killing.** Traditionally (except in the Grim 'n Gritty style), superheroes don't kill, or allow people to die due to their lack of action. They'll make every attempt to save the lives of anyone and everyone, including psychopathic supervillains. For their part, villains usually don't kill heroes if they're unconscious – they want to see them suffer, after all. In *T&J*, killing an opponent is a deliberate act that must be taken when the victim is helpless (see also above, *Deathtraps* and *Dying*, as well as *Chapter 5, Out for Blood*, p. 62.)

**Legends & Mythology.** Sometimes, heroes or races found in myth and legend get recycled into

superheroes (Marvel's Thor, DC's Captain Marvel, various Atlanteans and Amazons, Knights of the Round Table, etc.). Matt Wagner's multiple *Mage* series get excellent mileage out of this idea; to a lesser extent so did Willingham's *Elementals*. Legendary or mythic heroes are prefabricated potential PCs, with powers, allies, enemies, and histories already defined. If a player goes a bit further afield when looking for ideas than the typical Asgardians, Olympians, and Atlanteans (or even selects lesser-known figures from those groups), the resulting character can be really original. So, go for it: raid the *Kalevala*, the epic of Sundiata Kieta, or the pantheon of Hawaiian gods!

**Massive Property Damage.** You get some super-strong dudes tossing cars around, things are gonna get broken. Are supers liable for damages caused in battle? Does insurance cover such damage? Who fixes it, and how long does it take? Marvel Comics had a great miniseries on this topic called *Damage Control*, and Kurt Busiek's *Astro City*, volume 2, issue 1, "Welcome to Astro City," had a great and different take on it. (See also *Chapter 5, Knocked Around and Collateral Damage*, p. 62.)

**The Media.** How much celebrity do superhumans have in the world? Is it of a different nature than that of politicians, entertainers, or professional athletes? Does the media hush up reports of superpowers because "that's crazy talk"? Or do superhumans handle their media presence through PR firms? When Doctor Ivyl threatens to blow up City Hall, do reporters swarm the scene in the hopes of catching their favorite heroes on film?

**Monologues.** Much like deathtraps, villains ramble on in these long ranting speeches mostly to show off or hurt their (usually captive) audience. They may also be trying to persuade the audience to follow a particular plan of action. Heroes aren't exempt from monologuing, though generally they use the tactic to intimidate a foe or whip up the support of the audience; some few do orate out of self-aggrandizement.

**Moral Code.** Superheroes often follow a strict code that includes the willingness – without expectation of reward – to risk one's own life, liberty, and welfare in the service of what they believe is good and right. This code may have been created by the hero based



on a deep motivation, a sense of responsibility or guilt, or a need for justice or revenge, and usually includes concepts like "protect innocents," "keep your word," and "do not kill." One of the things that makes a superhero heroic is the fact that they stick to their code even in the most extreme cases; most are even willing to die for it. Classically, superheroes are not hypocrites; given time, angst, and/or mayhem, they can polarize shades of gray down to black or white.

**Origin Stories.** All major superhero and supervillain characters have an origin story that explains how or why they gained their skills and powers, and why they've chosen to use them for good or evil. Origin stories are often fleshed out over time, and sometimes involve retcons (see below). Members of a team (see below) might share a joint origin. In any case, the origin story is what shifts the super character out of the common mass of humanity and into that of superhumanity. (See also *Chapter 3, Origin and Motivation*).

**Outcast Defenders.** Starting in the Silver Age, a different type of superhero showed up: the outcast defender. "Hated and feared by the world they protect. . ." and such. Outcast heroes provide opportunities for questions of heroism, ethics, and morality in the face of prejudice and distrust. It's a lot easier to save the world when they're cheering in the streets; how hard is it to defend someone who hates you?

**The Public.** What does the man or woman on the street think about superhumans? Does he write them off as "spandex freaks"? Does she view them as terrible dangers to be avoided? Does a religious citizen see them as incarnate angels, here to save us, or as demons to damn us? Ultimately, the average guy and gal usually doesn't care about superhumans unless their lives have been touched by them. Perhaps they were saved from Red Robot's bomb at the amusement park by Ultrawoman, or were inspired to go into bomb disposal just from hearing about the rescue. Or the construction site where they worked got wrecked in a super-battle. Maybe a cousin turned out to have X-Ray Vision, and now they react to superhumans based on that. What if John Doe thinks Dr. Widget is simply dreamy?

**Radiation Accident.** The traditional way to gain superpowers (or increase the power of existing ones)

is to have a "radiation" accident. Depending upon the setting, style, and period of a superhero campaign, "radiation" could become "magical" or "nanotechnological" or "electrical" (see also *Chapter 3, T&J Improvement*, p. 33).

**Religion.** What does the Pope have to say about flying men? What about the Dalai Lama? Your local imam or rabbi? That televangelist on TV? What about superhumans who themselves ascribe to a particular faith? Will cults spring up around superhumans? "For Jor-El so loved the Earth, he sent them his only begotten son. . ."

**Retcons.** A retcon – short for "retroactive continuity" – is when previously established details of a story are altered in the service of a current story. This alteration can be for purposes of additional exposition ("Doctor Widget is Ultrawoman's cousin!") or to add a new twist or perspective on a detail that drastically changes the interpretation of a past story ("Doctor Ivyl has had you hooked up to this VR rig since 'the Case of the Corrupted Calendar!"). Retconning is used to explain inconsistencies in plot or characterization in long-running serial format stories, to mine past tales for modern stories, or to shift the perspective or agenda of a corpus of work. In superhero gaming, it is a tool that can be used for any of these purposes. (See also *Chapter 6, Retcon It!*, p. 76, for some ideas on *T&J* rules for this concept.)

**Rogues Galleries.** Superheroes collect sets of enemies that they fight regularly; these groups of villains are called the hero's rogues gallery. In superhero gaming, a good set of recurring foes (as they escape, break prison, or "return from the dead") can lend an excellent comic book feel to a campaign. (See also below, *Supporting Casts*, and *Chapter 6, Villain Jazz*, p. 77.)

**Secret Identities.** Secret Identities exist so that superheroes can go home, eat some dinner, go on dates, get some sleep, make some money, and so forth – in a word, privacy. Additionally, heroes are rarely inconvenienced by the duties and responsibilities of their day-job, unless such is specifically a Story Hook. Some heroes get away with having no secret identity, but that tends to make them a celebrity, and there's nothing worse than paparazzi (see above, *the Media*) hanging around outside the Liberty Cave. In a realistic world, a blue

suit and some hornrims ain't gonna fool nobody, and people are going to take a look under the mask when the hero gets KO'd (villain or not). Again, as with Crime and the Law (see above), sometimes it is best just to rationalize the oversights and get on with the game – though interesting situations can occur if a game wants to dabble with what's required to avoid the forensic geeks at CSI and internet-networks "super-fans."

**Sidekicks.** Comics: reader identification with the sidekick. Real world: child endangerment. And realistically, how much help can a kid in short pants and a domino mask be when beating up on gangsters? Luckily, most superhero stories aren't particularly realistic. Gaming brings in another issue, however – sidekicks are almost always weaker than their hero-buddy (for some ideas on dealing with this in *T&J*, see *Chapter 4, Sidekick*, p. 47).

**Strange Visitors.** Are there stranded aliens in Topeka, "hidden" civilizations with seats in the UN, other-dimensional commuters working at 7-11, werewolves roaming Soho alleys, and elves living in Manhattan? If so, who knows about it – and who do *they* tell? Does everybody know? Is there racism or xenophobia against superhumans (in a realistic world, almost certainly)? Have these strange visitors had any effect on past history or current politics? Why or why not?

**Supernormals.** Supernormals are those heroes and villains who are supremely skilled, so much so that they can collaborate and compete with superpowered individuals. Perhaps they also have a super-power weapon or device that assists them in this endeavor, or maybe it's just decades of training and obsessive dedication that sees them through. In any case, supernormal characters are seen as being on an equal footing with superhumans in a way that normal humans are not. (See also *Chapter 4, Intense Training*, p. 37.)

**Super World vs. the Real World.** Honestly, they aren't the same thing, and trying to force one to be the other is just going to leave a mark. That being said, the most important aspect of this relationship is that characters should react like real people as much as possible, given the setting they live in. This means that in a world where Secret Identities are kosher, they overlook the small stuff like "Boy, he kind of

looks like that other guy when he takes his glasses off" and only start asking inconvenient questions when they see the big, obvious stuff like "Why is there a cape hanging out from under his sportscoat?" (See also *Mad, Beautiful Ideas*, p. 3.)

**Supporting Casts.** An important aspect of the superhero genre is a collection of supporting cast members: family and friends, love interests, police commissioners, crusading reporters, various informants, and helpful assistants. Some may know the hero only in costumed identity, some may know the hero only in secret identity, some may know the hero in both identities but be unaware of his or her double-life, and some may be in the know. Supporting Casts aid and sustain the hero in all they do, and often serve as the basis for subplots or full-blown plots. (See *Rogues Galleries* and *Sidekicks*, above.)

**Teams.** Some superhero teams have common origins – or even the same origin – and usually operate as a group (the Fantastic Four), while others are assemblies of separate heroes with unique origins who usually operate individually (the Justice League). However, an interesting concept would be to treat the PC group explicitly as a "team-up" book. That is, they are the headliners in their own title, the big cheese hero of their own city, yet need to come together for really big threats. The really intriguing bit would be the determination of which series a particular gaming session happens in: the team-up book, a crossover in Character A's title, or a guest-starring shot in Character B's series. After all, heroes are usually extremely impressive in their own titles; perhaps a PC gets some form of bonus or benefit if the adventure is "happening in *their* comic." (See *Crossovers* and *Origin Stories*, above, as well as *Chapter 6, Title Character*, p. 76, for some ideas on *T&J* rules for this concept.)

**Time Travel.** See *Alternate Earths* above, and *Chapter 4, Time Control*, p. 53.

**Uniform.** Superheroes and supervillains need distinctive looks; it's a mainstay of the genre. However, their uniforms could range from nothing special (*street clothes, or no uniform*), a fastidious habit or style in their clothing choices (*iconized uniform*), up through full-blown comic book long-johns (*costume*).

*Street clothes* means characters wear whatever they own that isn't already in the laundry basket.

*Iconized uniform* indicates that the characters opt for consistency in a particular color, cut, or material (everything in purple and green satin!), while others stick to practicality (cargo pants, combat boots, knit sweater, trenchcoat, sunglasses), and still others incorporate a motif like a recurring symbol (a Jack o'Lantern motorcycle helmet, a stylized dove, lots of square metal studs, a t-shirt with the alchemical symbol for Mercury) or an outrageous selection of accessories (sword cane, Sam Browne belt of stakes, a suit covered in thorns, etc.). People wearing iconized clothing are not necessarily outside the bounds of "normal" acceptability, but they may be extremely striking and memorable. Think Neo and Morpheus in *The Matrix*, Mr. Glass in *Unbreakable*, Kevin Matchstick in *Mage: the Hero Defined*, or the leather jumpsuits in the *X-Men* movies (on the high-end).

*Costume* means that super-outfits are capes and spandex and body armor and utility belts – the works. Costumes are your standard, mainstream comic book garb. They draw serious attention from everybody – a guy on the Metro in a blue bodysuit and mask is not something you can ignore, nor is a huge guy dressed like Dracula in a darkened alley. Think Batman, Spiderman, Dr. Strange, and so forth.

The overall Style of the campaign usually influences the type of uniforms worn; as one moves along the spectrum away from the realistic, street clothes give way to costumes. While there's nothing stopping a GM from running a Grim 'n Gritty game with costumes (or a Four Color game in street clothes), some players may be expecting a certain "aesthetic agreement" between Style and uniform. In most mainstream settings, iconized uniforms and costumes are resistant to the effects of a character's powers, while street clothes are not.

**Vigilantism.** Are superpowered do-gooders simply expanding the scope of the classic "citizen's arrest," or are they actually descending into vigilantism? Can a superhero be deputized by their local police force? Who bears the brunt of wrongful arrests and unfortunate accidents? What gives a so-called "superhero" the right to set themselves up as judge and jury (and sometimes, executioner)?

**Warfare.** Are superhumans a major part of national military forces? If so, what effect do they have on the battlefield? Unless a superhuman is *extremely* powerful, and unopposed by commensurate force, the answer might be: not much. (Philip Wylie's classic novel *Gladiator* – one of the inspirations for Superman – delves into just this issue.) On the other hand, a superhuman special operative could do a lot of damage to key targets.

Everybody else was out the day I found the crashed spaceship in the backyard. It looked like a chrome shop-vac. The red blobby guys crawling all over it were hamster-sized.

One of them spoke to me, in my head. Telepathically, I guess. They needed lead for their engine.

I ran back to the house, panting and wheezing, and had to take a puff from my asthma inhaler. I gathered up a lunch sack full of lead shot, fishing line sinkers, even an old minotaur miniature I never got around to painting. Then I ran back to the ship, and handed over the goods.

I had to take another puff after that.

The blobby guy thanked me, and two of the others carried the bag into the ship. Then, he looked at me – how, I don't know, he didn't have any eyes – and said something about "nanomagical symbiotes" and "increasing the order of the neuro-corporal field" and shook my hand – well, my finger. It tingled where he touched me.

He waddled up the little ramp into his little ship, stopped at the door, and said one word to me: "Gesundheit." Then the door closed, and the ship went vroom!

Ever since that day, I haven't needed my inhaler. Or my glasses. And my acne went away.

And last week, my little sister fell off her bike and gashed her knee pretty bad. When I held her leg to look at it, I felt something shift in my hands, and then her wound was sealing up like a movie special effect.

Awesome.

Confronted with the realization that his Cold War assumptions have been a lie, Green Lantern begins to understand that law and order are less important than truth and justice.

– Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation*



## CHAPTER 2: T&J RULES OVERVIEW

This chapter gives the basics of the *T&J* rules, so that players have a general understanding of how the system works before creating characters. Further details and refinements will be offered in later chapters.

The core design concept of *PDQ*-based games is of prose, descriptive, do-it-yourself, wide-ranging *abilities* that summarize a range of attributes, advantages, merits, flaws, skills, relationships, or incapacities. Abilities are a measure of story-effectiveness rather than reality simulation, and are intended to be ranked and compared against one another.

The *PDQ Master Chart* (see below) is the foundation of this scheme. When attempting a task, players roll 2d6, plus the Modifier – or MOD – from the Rank of the ability they are using to determine whether or not they succeed.

### PDQ MASTER CHART

LEVEL	AS QUALITY RANK	MODIFIER TO 2D6 ROLL	AS DIFFICULTY RANK	TARGET NUMBER
<i>Poor</i>	Notably Inept.	-2	A trivial task.	5
<i>Average</i>	Typical human capability.	0	Straightforward task.	7
<i>Good</i>	Better than usual; most professionals or talented newcomers.	+2	Complex task, requiring attention to detail.	9
<i>Expert</i>	Noted/famed professional; talent with skill to back it up.	+4	Intricate task, difficult and requiring sharp concentration, hard for a typical untrained person (Average).	11
<i>Master</i>	Acclaimed genius: talent with substantial skill behind it.	+6	Extremely difficult task, hard for most professionals in the field (Good).	13

NOTE - An expanded table – the *T&J Intensity Chart* – appears on p. 34, which discusses the Intensity and scope of superpowers. Both charts are available as a handout found at the end of this book and at the Atomic Sock Monkey Press website.

### QUALITIES

*Qualities* describe a character’s noteworthy talents, skills, relationships, resources, and flaws. The player selects a word or phrase to sum up what they want the character to be able to do, and the GM will then agree to or veto the Quality. A Quality represents a broad skill, field of knowledge, unique perspective, personality trait, or social connection: if a particular Quality is relevant *at all* to an action or topic, the character may apply it when attempting that action or understanding that topic. This is called the *penumbra* (or “shadow”) of the Quality. Therefore, a player shouldn’t pick Qualities that are too narrow or

its penumbra will be too narrow; too broad, and identifying the sorts of things that should fall under the penumbra becomes pointless. Proper word choice is key. The parameters for what’s “too broad” or “too narrow” are up to the individual GM.

Consider a character who has the Quality of “Teacher.” For some *T&J* games, that will be perfectly fine; for others, too broad. The GM might ask the player to refine the Quality, to give a better idea of the sorts of things that will fall under its penumbra. So: “Teacher” could become “College History Prof,” “High School Chemistry Teacher,” or “Grade School Teacher.” While all would cover the basic concept of education, each individual choice



## QUALITY EXAMPLES

**Personality:** Thoughtful, Empathic, Obsessive, Spoilsport, Friendly, Prankster, Perceptive.

**Physical:** Gunplay, Kung Fu, Roguishly Handsome, Weightlifting, Ballroom Dance, Perseverance.

**Mental:** Oriental Philosophy, Fine Food and Drink, Sports Trivia, Speed-reading, Strategy & Tactics, Computer Programming.

**Social:** Relationship with local Wu-Shen Monks, Friends on the Force, Football Team Booster Club, Conversationalist, Intimidating Guy, Charmingly Effusive, Loves Bobbi Sue.

**Professional:** Teacher, Martial Artist, Spy, Professional Athlete, Freelance Writer, Bounty Hunter, Mad Scientist.

NOTE - If stuck for ideas for Qualities, please see *Chapter 11, Random-Roll Inspiration*, p. 116.

brings different skills under the penumbra – not just the specific field of interest, but also knowledge related to it. For example, the College History Prof would have more experience with (academic) politics, the High School Chemistry Teacher would know more about adolescent fads, and the Grade School Teacher would be better at dealing with kids on a sugar high.

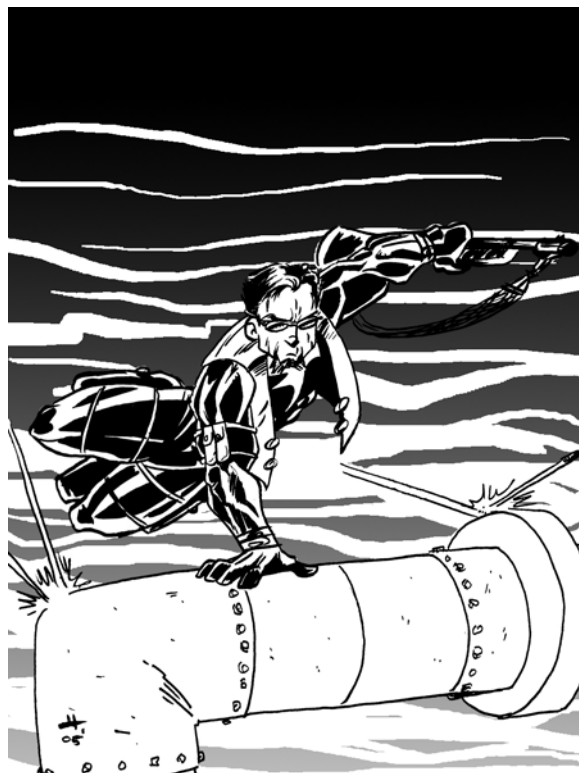
Take another example: “Gunplay.” This Quality would be useful not just in shooting at things, but also in cleaning and repairing all sorts of guns, discovering the location of nearby gun dealers and shooting ranges, knowing the history of firearms, and so forth. If the player had instead selected a Quality of “.44 Magnum,” the Quality would only be useful in shooting or knowing about that individual model of gun, and (maybe) other pistols.

Qualities are often drawn from six general areas:

- ◆ **Personality.** Over-arching traits; answers the questions of “what is this character *like*?” and “how does the character think about or approach things?” Personality Qualities also remind the player of how he or she plans to play the character.
- ◆ **Physical.** Having to do with the body, athleticism, or natural talents.
- ◆ **Mental.** Areas of study, intellectual acuity, education.

- ◆ **Social.** Groups the character is a member of or associates with, skills in dealing with people.
- ◆ **Professional.** Knowledge and skills picked up on the job.
- ◆ **Resources.** While a character is assumed to have access to most normal-scale (see *Chapter 1, Scale*, p. 4), mundane gear related to their other Qualities, certain rare types of specialized equipment known as *Gadgets* (see p. 41) or *Vehicles* (see p 53) – can be considered a separate Quality. In some *T&J* settings, devices like utility belts, high-performance vehicles, swing-line devices, jetpacks, etc., will be considered normal-scale Gadgets; in others, they will not.

**IMPORTANT NOTE –** If a PC wants to be particularly better at some Quality that might normally fall under the penumbra of another Quality (for example, taking “Cop” and “Pistol” separately), it’s perfectly okay to do so, provided that the player realizes that in exchange for the benefit of being able to use both Qualities at the same time when they shoot a handgun, this character generation choice *limits* the breadth of what the character can do.



## QUALITY RANKS

Qualities have Ranks that indicate increasing levels of proficiency (see also the *PDQ Master Chart*). From lowest to highest, the Ranks are:

- ◆ **Poor** [-2];
- ◆ **Average** [0];
- ◆ **Good** [+2];
- ◆ **Expert** [+4]; and
- ◆ **Master** [+6].

The numbers in square brackets following the Rank of the Quality show the Rank's *Modifier* (or MOD) – how much is added to or subtracted from a 2d6 dice roll for resolving a task (see below).

Characters have some things going for them (*Strengths*), which have positive Modifiers, and at least one thing working against them (*Weakness*), which has a negative Modifier.

**IMPORTANT NOTE – At everything else, characters are neither noteworthy nor inept – that is, they're Average [0]. They can attempt a roll for any task, knowledge, or skill that is not specifically secret, abstruse, technical, or esoteric with a 2d6 roll. That is, while any character can attempt to land a jumbo jet if the pilots are sick, it's doubtful they'll be able to successfully shut down a nuclear reactor.**

A *Strength* is an inherent positive aspect (benefit, skill, talent, attribute, relationship) of a character. Come up with a word or a pithy phrase to sum up the Strength. Examples include Handsome Man, Kung-Fu Fighting, Observant, Credit Rating, Race-car Driver, Find Bargains, a Friend in the Precinct, True Love, and Run Away! Strengths can be any Rank greater than Average [0].

A *Weakness* is an inherent negative aspect of the character, stemming from ignorance, flawed understanding, physical or mental incapability, a recurring duty, or some other vulnerability. A word of advice: pick something that will be fun or entertaining (for you the player, not necessarily you the character) to flub at! Come up with a word or a pithy phrase to sum up the Weakness. Examples here include Glass Jaw, Bad Credit Rating, Slow As Molasses, Bed-ridden Grandmother, Unlucky in Love, and Wallflower. Weaknesses are always Poor [-2] Rank.

Depending how the Quality is considered when creating the character, any Quality could be either a Strength or a Weakness. For example, suppose a character has "Spoiled Brat" as a Quality. If it's ranked Average or above, it's a Strength: the character always gets his own way, can wield undue influence by threatening to sic their Mommy or Daddy on others, might possess lots of cash or equipment, and people may fawn over them, making life easy. But if the character has "Spoiled Brat (Poor)," this is a Weakness: the character has led a pampered and sheltered life, rubs people the wrong way, and expects everyone to bend over backward to fulfill his most minor needs. Or ponder "True Love for Pat": if the character's pure devotion to their lover Pat helps them succeed in dire situations, it's a Strength; if the character's obsession with Pat interferes regularly with daily life or adventuring, it's a Weakness.

An important note relevant to superhero gaming: as a player, you should only take a Weakness for your character that you will enjoy playing, and that you want to come up in play. For example, taking a Quality like "Secret Identity" (or "Vigilante") as a Weakness indicates to the GM that the player *wishes* to have situations come up in which people try to figure out the hero's real name (or question the hero's motives, methods, or the lawfulness of his actions).

NOTE - Some players may wish to consider taking "Secret Identity" as a type of Vulnerability rather than a Weakness (see *Chapter 4*, p. 37).

During character generation, players have several packages to choose from, each with a different number of Qualities and Ranks. They may choose between having more Qualities at a lower level of competency, or having fewer Qualities at a higher level of competency.

Examples: Here are two simple characters and their Qualities:

**Joe Thug.** Good [+2] Brawler, Good [+2] Criminal, Poor [-2] Ugly.

**Mike the Cop.** Good [+2] Policeman, Good [+2] Outdoorsman, Poor [-2] Singer.

Never fear: if after play begins, a particular Quality sees no use and doesn't really add to the characterization of a PC, the player and the GM can work together change it to something that fits better.

## DIFFICULTY RANKS

*Difficulty Ranks* are like *Quality Ranks* for things, tasks, and situations, and show how challenging a thing, task, or situation is. A wall that needs to be climbed, a lock that must be picked, a swaying rope bridge that must be crossed, a trap which must be disarmed, and so forth. The GM looks at the *Master Chart* (see above), and determines the Difficulty Rank of the task. Some Difficulty Ranks will be figured out in advance, but the simplicity of the *PDQ Master Chart* helps make it easy to determine complexity on the fly.

Difficulty Ranks show increasing levels of intricacy (see also the *PDQ Master Chart*). From lowest to highest, the Ranks are:

- ◆ **Poor** [5];
- ◆ **Average** [7];
- ◆ **Good** [9];
- ◆ **Expert** [11]; and
- ◆ **Master** [13].

The numbers in square brackets following the Difficulty Rank show its *Target Number* (or TN) – the number a character must roll on 2d6 (plus any Modifiers) to succeed or conquer the task.

NOTE - Some GMs may wish to include Difficulty Ranks of *Improbable* [19] and *Impossible* [25+] for *really* challenging tasks that only the "best of the best" (under optimum conditions) and the super-gifted have a chance of succeeding at. However, this is purely optional.

## BASIC TIME, RANGE, AND MOVEMENT

For most things on the normal-scale (see *Chapter 1, Scale*, p. 4), the following information is adequate when running a *T&J* game. When talking about Powers and other things on the super-scale, please refer to the *T&J Intensity Chart* on p. 34.

### **BASIC TIME**

For most purposes, time measurements are as normal: seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, etc. However, the terms used in *T&J* for identifying the passage of "game time" are: Scenes, Turns, actions, and reactions.

*Scenes* are however long it takes for a distinct action or set of actions (combat, library research, defusing a bomb, a business meeting, traveling across town, etc.)

to happen. Scenes can be long or short, and can collapse or extend time as necessary.

A *Turn* means "the set of all characters' next actions and reactions." Each character takes an individual *action*: that's when they make their move, say their piece, throw a punch, etc. Other characters *react* during a character's action – saying something back or performing a defense, usually – but reactions can only be *in response* to the actions of the character whose turn it currently is. They cannot initiate moves of their own until their action. The Turn is over when each character's action and any resulting reactions have been resolved.

How the Scenes and Turns of game time relate to the seconds, minutes, hours, etc. of real time is variable.

### **BASIC RANGE**

For most purposes, GMs can be really flexible with distance in a *T&J* game. Ranges are either *Near* (can punch it), *Middling* (can run up and punch it), *Far* (can throw or shoot at it), or *Too Far* (out of range). If one really wants to connect numbers to this, *Near* would be any distance up to a yard, *Middling* would be between 1 and 3 yards, *Far* would be between 3 and 60 yards, and *Too Far* is anything over 60 yards. If one wants to connect Difficulty Ranks to these Ranges, *Near* is equivalent to *Average* [7], *Middling* is equivalent to *Good* [9], and so forth.

### **BASIC MOVEMENT**

While *T&J* tends to leave normal-scale movement rates for characters abstract and up to the discretion of the GM (like by requiring a character to make a roll using a speed or movement *Quality* vs. a reasonable Difficulty Rank), some folks like having a concrete movement rate. So here it is: characters have a movement rate equal to 4 yards plus the sum of all involved *Quality* Modifiers per Turn. Half of this (i.e., the sum of their *Qualities* being used) is taken on their action, and the other half is taken during their reactions.

Example: This means that a *Good* [+2] *Jogger* would have a movement rate of 6 yards per Turn – base 4, plus 2; they can move up to 3 yards on their action and 3 yards on their reactions.

A skier with *Good* [+2] *Fast!* and *Expert* [+4] *Skiing* on a downhill run would have a movement rate of 10 yards per Turn – base 4, plus (2+4); they

can move up to 5 yards on their action and 5 yards on their reactions.

## POWERS

*Powers* are the superhuman abilities that a character possesses. A character may use them as often as they wish. Like with *Qualities*, whatever a player can think up and that the GM agrees to can be a *Power*. *Powers* are Ranked similarly to *Qualities*, have penumbras (a character with *Fire Blast* can easily light his cigarette), and their *Modifiers* add to a 2d6 roll when the character attempts to use the *Power* to do something (blast an enemy, lift a tank, outrun an explosion, etc.). Unlike *Qualities* (see above), characters *must* have a *Power* listed on their character sheet to attempt to use it. The scope of a *Power's* effect – duration, range, speed, etc. – is known as its *Intensity* and is shown on the *T&J Intensity Chart* on p. 34.

Example: Optikon has an Expert [+4] *Laser Eyes Power*. To blast one of Dr. Vrobotnik's evil vrobots, he rolls 2d6+4.

## QUALITIES, POWERS, AND SCALES

A simple rule of thumb is that *Qualities* are normal-scale and *Powers* are super-scale.

## STUNTS

The dynamic and imaginative use of characters' abilities permits them to achieve useful effects called *Stunts*. Only *Powers* (any Rank) and *Master* [+6] *Qualities* can serve as the *base ability* for a *Stunt*. *Stunts* either lie outside of an ability's normal penumbra, but can be justified to the GM by the player within the context of the character's abilities (*Spin-off Stunts*), or express a specific focus or "special move" (*Signature Stunts*). So long as the GM agrees that a *Stunt* fits within or logically extends the idiom of a *Power*, it is possible. *Spin-off Stunts* can be attempted at any time during play, though it is suggested that any that a character uses regularly should be noted on their character sheet. *Signature Stunts* require the agreement of the GM ahead of time, and should be written down on the character sheet.

The effective Rank of a *Stunt* is figured from its base ability; and some *Stunts* may require the expenditure of *Hero Points* (see below) to perform, given their complexity or the *Intensity* desired for the *Stunt*. *Chapter 4, Superhuman Stunts* (p. 53) goes into detail on how to figure out effective *Stunt Ranks* and *Hero Point* costs, but the simple rule of thumb is that most *Stunts* have an effective Rank two steps below that of their base ability with no *Hero Point* cost (e.g., an Expert [+4] *Power* means that a character can do Average [0] Rank *Stunts*). To achieve higher *Stunt Ranks*, and thus *Intensities*, *Hero Points* must be spent.

When using a *Spin-off Stunt*, the character rolls 2d6, plus the *Stunt's* effective *Modifier* only; a *Signature Stunt* uses 2d6, plus the *Stunt's* effective *Modifier* and the *Modifier* of the base ability. A *Spin-off Stunt* can be turned into a *Signature Stunt* through spending a point of *MAX* (see below).

Examples: Optikon wishes to use his Expert [+4] *Laser Eyes* to eavesdrop on a conversation in a hotel room by bouncing a beam off the room's window; there are covert listening devices that work this way in the real world. The GM agrees that this is a viable *Spin-off Stunt*, and tells Optikon he can roll with an effective Rank of Average [0] – that is, 2d6 – to listen in. If Optikon wants to improve his effective Rank, he can spend *Hero Points* to do so.

*Crouching Dragon* (Master [+6] *Kung Fu*) is fighting a tough alien warrior. He wants to hit it *hard*, and figures that his *Signature Stunt* called "Burning Talon Rake" – already written down on his character sheet – is the way to do it. Since the GM has already signed off on this *Signature Stunt*, the hero declares that he's using his special move and rolls 2d6, plus 6 (for *Kung Fu*), plus 2 (for *Burning Talon Rake*) – or 2d6+8 – to punch the alien. If *Crouching Tiger* wants to boost his punch even further, he can spend *Hero Points* to do so.

## HERO POINTS

*Hero Points* are a quantification of the heroic energy, fortune, indomitable will, and plucky attitude that makes a character larger-than-life. Most normal people rarely access these hidden, potent reserves within themselves to exceed their normal boundaries; heroes do so regularly. By spending *Hero Points*,

characters can shift the odds in their favor, get up when a normal person would be down for the count, temporarily surpass their limitations, and persevere through adversity.

Simply, the more heroic a character *acts*, the more Hero Points accrued. PCs also gain Hero Points for following their *Motivations* (see *Chapter 3, Motivation*, p. 26), agreeing to let the GM hose them with a *Revoltin' Development* (see *Chapter 3, All About Hero Points*, p. 30), or being affected by a *Vulnerability* (see *Chapter 4*, p. 37) they possess. Hero Points can be used to increase the Intensity of Stunts, recover from combat injuries, alter the odds in the hero's favor, and so forth.

The more *often* a character acts heroically, the larger the maximum amount of Hero Points he can hold at one time – called *MAX* – becomes. *MAX* is also used to help characters get better with their Qualities and Powers (see *Chapter 3, Improvement*, p. 33), and to turn (or "cement") Spin-off Stunts into Signature Stunts.



## TASK RESOLUTION

When a character tries to do something, the GM will determine if the task is a *simple situation*, a *complicated situation*, or a *conflict situation*. Let's take each in turn.

### SIMPLE SITUATIONS

In *simple situations*, the task is clear-cut, there are no outstanding issues interfering with the attempted action, there is plenty of time to attempt the task, or randomness would bog down the game. In a simple situation, the GM looks at the *PDQ Master Chart* (see above, p. 15), and determines the Difficulty Rank of the task. Then, the GM compares that Difficulty Rank to the character's most appropriate ability (Quality or Power) Rank. If the character's ability is higher than the Difficulty Rank, the character succeeds. Otherwise, the task becomes a *complicated situation* (see below).

Examples: While investigating a report of strange noises at an abandoned house, Mike the Cop (see above, p. 17) needs to climb a tree to look into a window. He convinces the GM that he should be able to use his Good [+2] Outdoorsman Quality. Mike automatically succeeds in scaling Poor [5] and Average [7] Difficulty trees; for him, these are simple situations. If a tree is Good [9] Difficulty, it becomes a complicated situation.

If Joe Thug wanted to climb a tree, he has no applicable Quality, and so would have to use his "default" Quality Rank of Average [0]. This means he can only automatically succeed in climbing Poor [5] Difficulty trees – all others are complicated situations for him.

### COMPLICATED SITUATIONS

Dice rolls are made in *complicated situations*: where comparisons of Rank are inconclusive, or when randomness is desired. Complicated situations are when Quality and Difficulty Ranks are tied, or when ability Rank is lower than Difficulty Rank. To attempt a complicated situation, the PC rolls two regular six-sided dice (2d6), and adds the Modifier for their ability Rank. To succeed, the PC must match or beat the Target Number of the task's Difficulty Rank. If the PC fails, they may or may not get hurt or discouraged in the attempt (see below, *Basic Damage*, p. 22, and also *Chapter 5, Environmental Damage*, p. 61), and may or may not be able to try the task again, as the GM dictates.

Examples: The tree that Mike needs to climb is, unfortunately, Good [9] Difficulty. Comparing this to Mike's Good [+2] Outdoorsman Quality makes this a complicated situation. Mike rolls 2d6+2 and must match or beat the tree's Target Number of 9. He rolls a 3 and a 5, plus 2, for a total of 10. Mike climbs the tree successfully.

Somewhere else, Joe is trying to climb a Good [9] Difficulty tree himself. Since he doesn't have any applicable Quality, this is definitely a complicated situation for him. Joe rolls 2d6 and must match or beat the tree's Target Number of 9. He rolls a 3 and a 5, for a total of 8. Joe fails to climb the tree, but the GM decides he didn't fall far enough to get hurt.

When a character's Qualities are set against the Qualities of other characters, this isn't just complicated, it's a *conflict situation* (see below).



## CONFLICT SITUATIONS

NOTE - This is just a basic overview of conflict situations. There are several details of conflict that require closer attention; these fine points are addressed in *Chapter 5*.

*Conflict situations* involve active resistance to a character's attempts to perform a task: trying to punch a guy in the face, out-thinking a chess player, seducing a hottie, running a race, or convincing a cop that you weren't really speeding. Conflict situations in *T&J* include more than just the immediate success or failure of an attempted action; here, conflict includes the back and forth of an active contest, out-maneuvering the competition, and wearing down an opponent's resistance. Examples of conflict situations include combat, seduction, haggling, debating, and so forth. (Note that some gaming groups won't necessarily want to use the conflict situation mechanics to resolve social interactions, and may want to rely on pure roleplaying or a combination of roleplaying and rules instead; but the methodology exists if a group wishes to use it.)

In abstract conflict situations that would be dull to play out in turns or need to be resolved quickly (racing to dodge under a closing garage door, picking a lock, playing chess), the characters involved compare the results of 2d6 plus Modifier rolls; the

highest successful result wins. The loser of the conflict takes temporary Ranks of damage (see below, *Basic Damage*, p. 22), which may be physical injury or mental confusion, equal to the difference between the higher roll and the lower roll. If the rolls are tied, each participant takes some damage. Repeat as many times as necessary to determine overall victory.

For detailed conflicts that would be fun to play out in turns (combat, car chases, poker games), only the *defender* takes damage if he loses the conflict roll -- see *Chapter 5, Super-Conflict*, for further details.

The determination of "what would be dull" and "what would be fun" is, of course, totally up to the individual GM, and can change on an *ad hoc* basis.

Example 1: Joe and Mike (off-duty, in civvies) are both in a bar, and get into a fight. Here are their Qualities again:

*Joe Thug.* Good [+2] Brawler, Good [+2] Criminal, Poor [-2] Ugly.

*Mike the Cop.* Good [+2] Policeman, Good [+2] Outdoorsman, Poor [-2] Singer.

Joe takes a poke at Mike. He rolls 2d6, plus the Modifier for Brawler, for his attack action. Mike reacts defensively, rolling 2d6, plus the Modifier for Policeman.

Joe rolls a 4 and a 5, plus 2, for a total of 11. Mike rolls two 3s, plus 2, for a total of 8. Mike would take 11 - 8, or 3, Damage Ranks.

Example 2: Joe and Mike are playing chess; neither has any Quality that could contribute to playing the game. Joe rolls 2d6, while Mike rolls 2d6. Joe gets a total of 4 while Mike gets a total of 6. Joe takes 2 Failure Ranks, and Mike is closer to winning the match.

## UPSHIFTS & DOWNSHIFTS

### *UPSHIFTS (AKA BEING BADASS)*

This is how PCs get more bang for their buck through good, entertaining roleplaying. If the player describes his character's attempt to perform an action in a graphic, flavorful, and amusing way, the GM can give them an *Upshift*. An Upshift means that for that particular action, the PC rolls as if their Quality or Power were one level higher (essentially giving an additional +2 to their roll). So, rather than "I hit the sailor" (or "I haggle"), the player says something like "I grab the sailor's shirt with one hand and pull him closer to punch him in the face with my other fist!" (or says, in character, "May the fleas from a thousand camels infest the beds of your children if you try to rob me in this way!"). If the PC had a Good [+2]

Brawling (or Bargaining) Quality, this would change his roll in attempting to hit the sailor (or haggle with the merchant) from 2d6+2 to 2d6+4, as if he were Expert [+4] Rank.

NOTE - Each Upshift above Master Rank adds *an extra die* to the character's roll (i.e., instead of rolling 2d6+6+2, the character rolls 3d6+6 for 1 Upshift, 4d6+6 for 2 Upshifts, and so forth).

## DOWNSHIFTS

While *functionally* the same thing as a temporary Weakness (a -2 to a 2d6 plus Modifiers roll), the reasons behind having a Weakness or incurring Downshifts are different.

For example, Joe has a *Weakness* of Poor [-2] Ugly. If he tries to charm the woman sitting on the barstool next to his, he'll roll 2d6-2. That's just par for the course, his Weakness affecting in that particular situation.

A *Downshift* means that for the action in question, the PC rolls as if his ability were one Rank lower (essentially giving him a -2 to his roll). Downshifts can come from a number of sources determined by the GM.

While judicious use of Downshifts to reflect a sudden or unexpected change in the complexity of a situation can work very well, GMs should resist the temptation to *overuse* Downshifts as situational modifiers. *T&J* games tend to run more smoothly if the GM simply sets the Difficulty Rank (and thus, Target Number) of a task appropriately. For example, if the PCs are attempting to climb an Average [7] Difficulty wall and it begins to rain, a Downshift to relevant abilities makes sense. However, if it's already raining when they begin their attempt, simply make the wall Good [9] difficulty from the get-go.

NOTE - Abilities Downshifted below Poor Rank mean automatic failure in the use of that ability.

## SHIFT ACCUMULATION

In *T&J*, all Upshifts, Downshifts, and bonus dice are cumulative. That means that if a character in a fight is Being Badass and using Hero Points simultaneously, he might have 2 Upshifts (or a Modifier of +4) on the attack and damage. This means if the starting Quality was of Average [0] Rank (2d6), it would temporarily become Expert Rank (2d6+4); if the Quality was Good [+2], the roll would be 2d6+6, and if the Quality was

Expert [+4], the roll would be 3d6+6, because one of the Upshifts would move the Rank above Master and translate into an extra die to roll.

Alternatively, consider a character who is climbing a wall while Being Badass, but it starts to rain. The Upshift of Being Badass is countered by the Downshift for the sudden storm. He will roll at his "unshifted" ability level to scale the wall.

## BEING LAMEASS

*Being Lameass* is – in some ways – the opposite of Being Badass. After all, the point of roleplaying is to have a good time, and contrary, uncharacteristic, or disruptive roleplaying can ruin everybody else's fun. If a player is reading, refusing to pay attention, watching TV, pedantically rules-lawyering, utterly ignoring the characterization of their PC, being pointlessly abusive or distracting to other players, or – saints preserve us! – *sleeping* at the gaming table, they are working against the overall good time. In these cases, the GM *could* give the offending PC a Downshift based on the *player's* behavior. . . but what's the point? If the player's not interested enough in the game to even pay attention, penalizing his character will probably have little effect on his behavior around the gaming table.

Try to discover the cause of the player's Being Lameass. Maybe it's something about the focus or subject matter of the campaign, a difference of roleplaying style, or even an unrelated personal issue that's bugging the player. The answer to Being Lameass is to discuss the situation outside of the game – either by taking a break or talking between sessions – and try to work through it like grown-ups. A little bit of open communication can do wonders for these sorts of issues.

## BASIC DAMAGE

*Damage* (be it physical, mental, emotional, or social) is the loss of capability. As a character takes damage, he is less likely to be able to perform at peak efficiency. This is shown by a temporary Downshift applied to the character's listed abilities called either a *Failure Rank* or a *Damage Rank*, depending upon the nature of the conflict. The player selects which of his Qualities or Powers takes the damage/Downshift(s), and can spread out the damage across several abilities at once. Whichever ability of the character that the player decides takes the first hit of damage in a conflict generates a Story Hook (see below).

In mental, social, and some physical conflicts, this loss of capability is usually temporary, and is represented by Failure Ranks. Examples include a chess match, witty repartee, or running a race. Failure Ranks are almost always completely recovered at the end of a Scene.



In many physical conflicts, loss of capability is more enduring, and is represented by Damage Ranks. Examples here include not just combat, but also *environmental damage* taken by running through fire, falling off a roof, or starting to drown. Some or all Damage Ranks are recovered at the end of a Scene.

Example: Joe hit Mike for 3 Damage Ranks above. Mike takes one of the Ranks on his Outdoorsman Quality, temporarily dropping it from Good [+2] to Average [0]. This generates a Story Hook for the GM (see below).

There are still 2 Damage Ranks to account for. Mike drops his Policeman from Good [+2] to Average [0].

One Rank of damage to go, and Mike's in a situation. He cannot drop his Poor [-2] Singing a Rank because this would mean he "zeroed out" (see below) and lost the overall conflict. He must drop either Policeman or Outdoorsman from Average [0] to Poor [-2]; he chooses Outdoorsman.

Joe got Mike pretty good with that right to the jaw!

## SUPER-SCALE DAMAGE

Against living targets, most Qualities and Powers do normal-scale damage, but some do *super-scale damage*. Super-scale damage indicates that on a successful hit, a number of *extra Ranks of damage* equal to the Target Number of the Power used is added to the normal-scale damage. Nearly all Powers can do super-scale damage to non-character normal-scale targets like mailboxes, trucks, trees, buildings, etc. So, while Laser Woman cannot instantly fry Frogboy in one shot, she can blow up police cars all the livelong day. (The major exception to this rule is the *Super-Strength* Power; see p. 51.)

Example: To show the difference between normal-scale damage and super-scale damage, let's use the exact same situation as above, only this time, let's pretend that Joe has Average [0] Super-Strength. Joe hit Mike successfully for 3 Damage Ranks, so to this 3 is added the TN of Average [0] Super-Strength, or 7 additional Damage Ranks, for a total of 10 Damage Ranks to Mike! This will zero our policeman friend out in a single blow, but Mike still needs to select which Quality takes the first hit for Story Hook purposes.

## THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT ABSTRACTION

Basically, in any *T&J* conflict situation, some of a character's Qualities and Powers can be thought of as useful for either "attack," "defense," or "absorption." The player has to make choices about what to sacrifice for their character's well-being and effectiveness. It's resource management at a basic level. The player must make a decision on which abilities will be most useful for the remainder of the conflict scene.

As an example, say a character has Good [+2] Rank in *Kung Fu*, *Debating*, and *Accountant* Qualities, and a Good [+2] Rank in the *Laser Vision* Power.

In combat (a physical conflict), the character will probably opt to keep *Kung Fu* and *Laser Vision* at Good [+2] as long as possible, and apply Damage Ranks to *Debating* and *Accountant*. In an argument (a social conflict), the character will want to keep *Debating* high for as long as possible, and take Failure Ranks on *Kung Fu* and *Laser Vision* first. If being audited by the IRS (could be a mental, a social, or even a professional conflict, depending on how the GM spins the situation), the character would protect *Accountant*, try to keep *Debating* at Good [+2] as long as he could, and sacrifice *Kung Fu* and *Laser Vision*.

Additionally (and importantly!), a player's selection of which Qualities or Powers takes the *first hit* of in conflict gives the GM a powerful tool for generating *Story Hooks* (see p. 24) for future Scenes and sessions.

The abstraction of how Failure or Damage Ranks are applied isn't meant to be a one-to-one relation ("Hey, why does getting punched in the face lower *Accountant*?"), but amusing justifications can be made up anyway ("Well, your black eye makes it hard to see your spreadsheets..."), which could become fully-fledged *Story Hooks*. Though the player decides upon which ability the damage affects, either the player or the GM can come up with a rationale.

## ZEROING OUT

Superhuman conflicts take a lot of time, since superhumans have both Qualities and Powers to absorb Damage Ranks, as well as Hero Points to burn to obviate or reduce the effects of being hurt. Still, characters eventually hit bottom in one of their Qualities or Powers and "zero out." This means they lose the conflict they're in, or are at least uninvolved with the rest of the Scene.

In *T&J* games, just because a character zeroes out doesn't mean they die (see *Chapter 5, Out for Blood?*, p. 62). An Opponent has to specifically choose to kill a fallen foe. In a *T&J* game, zeroing out is often just

the prelude to a character being shoved into a villain's deathtrap!

Examples: Let's say that Joe hits Mike again for 2 more Damage Ranks. Mike takes one of the Ranks on his Policeman Quality, temporarily dropping it from Average [0] to Poor [-2]. All of his Qualities are now at Poor [-2], and he still has to take another Rank of Damage somewhere. He takes it on Policeman, which generates another Story Hook for the GM (see below).

### RECOVERING FROM DAMAGE

This is explained in detail in *Chapter 5* on p. 62, but – in general – Ranks temporarily Downshifted by damage are recovered in the time between the Scenes of the game.

### STORY HOOKS

Several elements of *T&J* help the players and GM come up with *Story Hooks*: exciting or interesting subplots, complications, and events for their characters.

In conflict situations, whichever ability the player selects to take the first hit of damage generates a Story Hook. Some GMs may also wish to use the ability that the PC chooses when *zeroing out* of a conflict (that is, when any one of the character's Qualities or Powers drops below Poor [-2] Rank) as a source of these sorts of Story Hooks, too.

When the ability is announced, the GM should make a note of what it is, and come up with something interesting about that trait – this “something interesting” can be good, bad, or indifferent, but it should add a little texture to the PC's day. The GM can simply make quiet notes, or say something like “Meanwhile, across town, one of Professor F8's henchmen is talking to your receptionist about setting up a Roth IRA. . .”

**OPTIONAL RULE** - If there are only one or two players when a Story Hook pops up, the group can *Scheherazade* the situation. To *Scheherazade*, the Story Hook is roleplayed out immediately as a flashback, flashback-forward, or “cut-scene” with the GM and players temporarily taking over any involved NPCs. These characters interact until they hit a point of crisis, then the action returns to the original conflict.

Imagine that, under the *T&J* rules, the reason Arachnid-Girl always has a crappy home life is that she consistently uses her “secret identity” Qualities (True Love for Gary Shane; Supported by Uncle Ray; and Photojournalist) to absorb the first hit when she's taking on the Ochre Orc or Nurse Squid.

Additionally, a character's Weakness (see above, p. 17) or his Background, Origin, and Motivation (see *Chapter 3*) or Limitations or Vulnerabilities (see *Chapter 4*) can spark Story Hooks.





## CHAPTER 3: CHARACTERS

Where have all the good men gone,  
And where are all the gods?  
Where's the street-wise Hercules  
To fight the rising odds?  
- Bonnie Tyler, "Holding Out for a Hero"

*Truth & Justice (T&J)* allows you to play superhuman characters gifted with extraordinary talents and abilities. These mighty beings possess staggering power and can perform tremendous deeds. Yet – beyond the flash and dazzle – they are still human, with the potential to do great good, great evil, or both.

### CHARACTER GENERATION: BUILD A HERO

A *T&J* character is made up of several elements:

1. Name
2. Background
3. Qualities
4. Origin
5. Powers
6. Hero Point Pool
7. Codename
8. Uniform
9. Miscellany

You don't have to decide these elements in any particular order, though each could provide ideas for the others. For example, *Background* can provide a foundation for determining a character's *Qualities*, *Qualities* might serve as a base for *Powers* and *Stunts*, *Codename* may influence both *Qualities* and *Uniform*, and so forth. (Specific campaign settings may add additional elements or requirements on this basic structure, of course.)

We'll create two example characters step-by-step in boxed text to illustrate the process. Let's begin.

#### NAME

Select a name for your character (or, if you prefer to think of it in another way, for your character's "secret identity"). Note that a good name can help inspire interesting elements for a character's *Background* or *Qualities* – like ethnicity, illustrious ancestors, childhood nicknames (and associated traumas), or even other character traits.

#### EXAMPLE CHARACTER 1: JACK PERETTI

Jack Peretti sounds like an energetic name, doesn't it? A little bouncy, a little South Side Little Italy, a little Golden Gloves action, eh? Also, according to Google Language Tools, "peretti" means "rubber syringes" in Italian. Howzabout that?

#### EXAMPLE CHARACTER 2: RICK CAAN

I really like the brutal intensity James Caan brought to the character of Sonny in *The Godfather*. That's about it.

#### BACKGROUND

A character's *Background* explains things like what the character has done with his life, where he was born, what his family is like, where he's been, and who he met along the way. What does he do for a living? Does he have more acquaintances than friends and more enemies than both? Does he have any hobbies? What are his hopes, dreams, and fears?

You don't need to condense this part into a single word or phrase like you will with *Qualities*. Spend as many or as few words on describing the character's experiences as you feel comfortable with. Whether a single sentence or four pages, it's all fine.

Tied to the *Background* is the selection of the character's *Qualities* and his *Motivation*.

# TRUTH & JUSTICE

**Background Rules.** A good Background provides the GM with continuing Story Hooks (see *Chapter 2*, p. 24) for the character.

## EXAMPLE CHARACTER 1: JACK PERETTI

Jack grew up in Little Italy, then the suburbs. He worked hard and played hard. A solid B student in High School, he wrestled, played football, lifted weights, and performed as part of the Drama Club. His well-rounded extracurriculars and patriotism helped him get an Army ROTC scholarship to the state university, where he majored in American History. After college, he entered the military, and became a U.S. Army Ranger.

## EXAMPLE CHARACTER 2: RICK CAAN

As a young child, Rick's district attorney mother was killed by dirty cops in the pay of a Mob defendant; the murder was ruled an accident by the court of inquest. But Rick knew the truth – unknown to the triggermen and the Mafia, he had witnessed the whole thing. He swore to hunt down all who evade justice, and has dedicated his life to honing himself as a weapon to make them all face the music.

"With great power comes great responsibility."

– Ben Parker, *Spider-Man*

## MOTIVATION

A character's *Motivation* is what moves him to act, an internal spur in situations that demand immediate response. A Motivation shouldn't be too broad (protect everyone) or too narrow (protect old, deaf Sicilian women), but a nicely-targeted circumstance (protect the elderly; heal the sick; educate the ignorant; defend women; rescue the innocent; shield bystanders; etc.). Normally for heroic PC types in *T&J*, Motivations should be noble, but there's no reason that they can't be somewhat self-interested (make money using my powers; look good for the public; find true love) – or outright *nasty*, for villainous sorts (destroy my archenemy; steal jewelry; rule the world).

**Motivation Rules.** Whenever a situation triggers a character's Motivation, he has a choice to either:

- ◆ Spend a Hero Point to *not* immediately react; or

- ◆ Spring into action and collect 1d6 Hero Points immediately (if GM agrees, see below).

If the player feels that his character's Motivation has been triggered, he should tell the GM. If the GM agrees the situation warrants it, the character immediately gains 1d6 Hero Points. If the GM disagrees, the character unfortunately doesn't get the points. . . but doesn't lose any, either. Additionally, Motivations provide GMs with Story Hooks for future adventures.

## EXAMPLE CHARACTER 1: JACK PERETTI

Jack's Motivation is "protecting people under his command."

## EXAMPLE CHARACTER 2: RICK CAAN

Rick's Motivation is finding – or creating – "justice for the wronged."

## QUALITIES

Qualities are discussed in *Chapter 2*, starting on p. 15. To briefly recap: a *Quality* is a word or phrase representing broad non-super skill or field of knowledge. *T&J* characters must choose between having more Qualities at a lower level of competency, or having fewer Qualities at a higher level of competency.

Choose between the following packages:

- A. 5 Good [+2] Strengths and 1 Poor [-2] Weakness.
- B. 1 Expert [+4] Strength, 3 Good [+2] Strengths, and 1 Poor [-2] Weakness.
- C. 2 Expert [+4] Strengths, 1 Good [+2] Strength, and 1 Poor [-2] Weakness.
- D. 1 Master [+6] Strength, 2 Good [+2] Strengths, and 1 Poor [-2] Weakness.
- E. 1 Master [+6] Strength, 1 Expert [+4] Strength, and 1 Poor [-2] Weakness.

**Quality Rules.** See *Chapter 2* and *Chapter 5*.

NOTE - If the idea of set packages is hard for players to puzzle out, another way to explain the scheme above is to say that characters have a total of 10 Modifier points to be split up between Strength Qualities, using even numbers. Characters must also take a Weakness Quality, which is has a -2 Modifier.

NOTE - If stuck for ideas for Qualities, please see *Chapter 11, Random-Roll Inspiration*, p. 116.

## EXAMPLE CHARACTER 1: JACK PERETTI

Jack goes with package C. He is an Expert [+4] Army Ranger and rather (Expert [+4]) Athletic. He is also Good [+2] at American History. On the downside, he's a bit too Obedient (Poor [-2]) with regard to his superiors, and must roll at a penalty to act against a direct order from them.

## EXAMPLE CHARACTER 2: RICK CAAN

Rick decides on package B. He is an Expert [+4] Tiger Claw Wushu practitioner, a Good [+2] Detective, a Good [+2] Gymnast, possesses Good [+2] Wealth, and has a Poor [-2] Obsession (Cannot Countenance Injustice) – to control himself when he's a witness to an act of injustice, he must roll at a penalty or automatically become involved.

"Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. . . He is the hero, he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honor, by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it. He must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world."

– Raymond Chandler, "The Simple Art of Murder"

## ORIGIN

How did the character get his powers? *Origin* tells the tale, however long, short, plain, or mysterious it is. Here are some quick suggestions:

- ◆ Heirloom ("My granddad gave his Ghost Revolver to me on his deathbed" or "Invisibility runs in the family")
- ◆ Made It Myself ("I built the prototype for the Star Armor out of silly putty and soup cans!")
- ◆ Mutant ("I was born this way, to unsuspecting parents. . .")
- ◆ Mysterious Stranger ("The cloaked man taught me a magic word!")
- ◆ "Radiation" Accident ("The nanotech bonded to my skin and now I can fly!")
- ◆ Secret Experiment ("Drink the damn serum, Private, or you'll be cleaning latrines until Doomsday!")

- ◆ Serendipity ("As I fought my way free of the seaweed, my fingers grabbed the wristwatch. Then, time seemed to stop. . .")
- ◆ Weird-Ass Way ("Bigfoot gave it to me for saving his Alien love-child!")

**Origin Rules.** Like Backgrounds, Origin provides the GM adventure ideas and Story Hooks.

## EXAMPLE CHARACTER 1: JACK PERETTI

Jack's platoon parachuted into a mad scientist's lair to liberate a weapon prototype stolen from DARPA. The evil scientists captured them and subjected the soldiers to weird science experiments. Jack was the only one to survive. Under Weird Science Torture, he gained superpowers, retrieved the weapon, and blew up the base.

## EXAMPLE CHARACTER 2: RICK CAAN

Rick began a regime of intense training while very young, honing himself into a weapon of justice. Insurance money and inheriting his mother's estate (paid at his majority) permitted him to roam the world, seeking useful skills for his mission.

## POWERS

*Powers* are the superhuman abilities that a character possesses; they are discussed extensively in *Chapter 4*.

If a player wishes to create an *unpowered hero* that can still compete with superhumans, please see the *Intense Training* "power": it allows the trading of Power Ranks for additional Quality Ranks (see *Chapter 4*, p. 37).

Choose between the following packages of Powers:

- F. 6 Average [0] Rank Powers.
- G. 1 Good [+2] Rank Power and 4 Average [0] Rank Powers.
- H. 3 Good [+2] Rank Powers.
- I. 2 Good [+2] Rank Powers and 2 Average [0] Rank Powers.
- J. 1 Expert [+4] Rank Power and 2 Average [0] Rank Powers.
- K. 1 Expert [+4] Rank Power and 1 Good [+2] Rank Power.
- L. 1 Master [+6] Power.

NOTE - If the idea of set options is hard for players to puzzle out, another way to explain the scheme above is to say that characters have a total of 6 Modifier points to be split up between Powers, using even numbers, and Average [0] Powers count as 1 point.

NOTE - If stuck for ideas for Powers, please see *Chapter 11, Random-Roll Inspiration*, p. 116.

**OPTIONAL RULE - A character can trade in one Average [0] Rank power for two Poor [-2] Rank powers, with the GM's permission. However, Poor [-2] Ranked Powers are often more trouble than they're worth; see *Chapter 4, What Does a Poor [-2] Ranked Power Mean?*, p. 35.**

Powers Rules. See *Chapter 4*.

## WEAKNESS IS STRENGTH?

"Can I take a weakness or limit my powers in some way to become more powerful?"

Not exactly.

In most comic books, a weakness or some restriction on a power doesn't *make* a superhuman more powerful; instead, it *offers* opportunities for adversaries to threaten, control, harm, challenge, or bind powerful characters. These obstacles also encourage the superhuman to *do cooler stuff* in order to get around it; they are narrative opportunities to be exploited.

In *T&J*, this is represented by such obstacles and opportunities giving the character more Hero Points if the situation or event comes up during a session. *T&J* characters are rewarded *in play* – not at character generation – for making these potential obstacles possible. So, Fire Girl doesn't get a benefit up-front for being Vulnerable to Ice, but only when she gets zapped with a Freeze Ray, or tied up in an igloo, or when she tries to kiss Freezerator through his icy forcefield.

See also *Limitations*, p. 36, *Vulnerability*, p. 37, and **OPTIONAL RULE: *Shifty Business***, p. 55.



## EXAMPLE CHARACTER 1: JACK PERETTI

Jack selects option I. His Powers are Good [+2] Super-Strength, Good [+2] Adaptation, Average [0] Super-Armor, and Average [0] Invulnerability. *Adaptation* is Jack's ability to adjust quickly to any environment – underwater, poison gas, hard vacuum, etc. – or situation – lack of food, water, or sleep; constant noise; complete darkness; etc. If he can successfully make a roll against the Target Number of the Intensity of a dangerous environment, he no longer suffers problems from that environment or situation. Once out of a dangerous environment or situation, his adaptations quickly fade away. Additionally, the layering of Super-Armor and Invulnerability, even at just the Average Rank for each, makes him a *really* tough customer.

## EXAMPLE CHARACTER 2: RICK CAAN

Rick picks option F, and takes the Intense Training "power" (see *Chapter 4*, p. 37) for each of his slots. This generates 24 points (12 Ranks) to apply to Qualities. He boosts Tiger Claw Wushu (2 points) and Gymnast (4 points) to Master [+6]. He raises Detective and Wealth to Expert [+4] (2 points each), and buys four new Qualities: Expert [+4] Armored Costume (4 points), Expert [+4] Gadget: Scorpion Gauntlets (4 points), Expert [+4] Scary Bastard (4 points), and Good [+2] Gadget: Utility Belt (2 points). Total, 24 points.

Rick's Gadgets are *cutting-edge technology* (see *Chapter 4*, p. 42): *Utility Belt* possesses a host of common or handy tools; a successful roll against a GM-determined TN allows him to pull out any small, reasonable item from it; *Scorpion Gauntlets* are forearm guards that can shoot out thin and strong cables that Rick can use as swing-lines or whips. *Scary Bastard* is a personality/social Quality used for intimidation of the unjust (or, really, anybody).

## STUNTS

*Stunts* are discussed briefly in *Chapter 2*, on p. 19, and in greater detail in *Chapter 4*, on p. 53. Only Powers and Master [+6] Qualities can be used as the base ability for *Stunts*

Normally, *Stunts* are attempted during play. However, because *Stunts* are extremely free-form and dynamic, it's not a bad idea for the players and GM to come up with a few routine applications, effective Ranks and Target Numbers, and (if necessary) Hero Point costs for easy reference, especially if the character has a very broad Power like Telekinesis or Weather Control. Signature *Stunts* (the special, advanced techniques some superhumans can do) benefit most from this sort of thinking ahead; it is suggested that characters should probably only

have one (or possibly two) Signature Stunts per ability at the start of play.

**Stunts Rules.** See *Chapter 4*, p. 34.

## EXAMPLE CHARACTER 1: JACK PERETTI

During a discussion with his GM and fellow players, Jack's player came up with a Spin-off Stunt based on one of his powers that might come up fairly often in play. *Shockwave* is when he slams his fists or feet on the ground with Super-Strength to knock a foe over or off-balance; the GM determines that its Stunt Rank gives the Difficulty Rank a targeted combatant must beat to keep his footing on the quivering surface. The base ability of *Shockwave* would be Super-Strength, which Jack has at Good [+2] Power Rank, this makes the Stunt's effective Rank Poor [-2], unless Jack wants to spend Hero Points when he tries it. This Stunt is written on his character sheet as "Shockwave (Super-Strength Spin-off, Poor [-2], opponent must beat a Poor [5] Difficulty Rank to keep his footing)."

## EXAMPLE CHARACTER 2: RICK CAAN

In discussing his Wushu and Gymnast Qualities with the GM, Rick mentions that he'd like to have some cool wuxia moves like a muscle-lock to temporarily paralyze opponents and a really powerful attack, and the comic book abilities to travel around town using his swing-line and incredible acrobatic dodges. The GM thinks that two of these Stunts (paralysis and swing-line travel) are a bit more over-the-top for his game, and may not exactly fit under the Qualities' penumbras; thus, they'd have to be Spin-off Stunts. The other two (powerful attack and incredible dodge) sound more like Signature Stunts, since they're supposed to be extra-effective.

Rick agrees, and lists the following Stunts: *Acrobatic Dodge* (Gymnast Signature, Expert [+4], 1 HP, adds to defensive rolls when used); *Scorpion's Sting* (Wushu Spin-off, Good [+2], temporarily paralyzes foes who must beat a Good [9] Target Number to un-paralyze); *Swing-line Travel* (Gymnast Spin-off, Good [+2], 4 yards per Turn movement); and *Tiger Claw* (Wushu Signature, Expert [+4], 1 HP, adds to attack rolls when used). The effective Ranks of all of these Stunts can be improved with the expenditure of Hero Points.

## HERO POINT POOL

The *Hero Point Pool* shows two things:

1. **Current Points.** How many Hero Points (see below) the character has at the moment; and
2. **MAX Points.** How many Hero Points the character can possibly hold.

Hero Point Pools are noted as two numbers separated by a slash (say, 5/10); the first number (5) is the Current number of Hero Points the character has, while the second number (10) is the Maximum number of Hero Points (MAX) that the character can have at one time.

**Hero Point Pool Rules.** Superhero characters start with a Hero Point Pool of 5/10. To see what Hero Points and MAX are good for, see below.

## EXAMPLE CHARACTER 1: JACK PERETTI

Jack's Hero Point Pool is 5/10.

## EXAMPLE CHARACTER 2: RICK CAAN

Rick's Hero Point Pool is 5/10.

## CODENAME

A character's *Codename* should reflect something about their Background, Qualities, Origin, or Powers. It can be ironic, iconic, thematic. It doesn't *have* to be public or bandied-about, but a short, punchy handle is part of the fun of a superhero game.

## EXAMPLE CHARACTER 1: JACK PERETTI

Jack's Codename is *American Ranger*, based on his patriotism and his military training.

## EXAMPLE CHARACTER 2: RICK CAAN

Rick's Codename is *Manticore*, a scary, mythological man-monster.

## UNIFORM

A *T&J* character usually needs a distinctive look; this is called his *Uniform* (see *Chapter 1*, p. 13, for more discussion of this topic). The GM should tell the players what the usual type of Uniform style is common in the campaign.

**Uniform Rules.** Really wacky Uniforms may draw "civilian" interest. They can hide – or express – the character's identity. They can also be the basis of Story Hooks for the GM.



## EXAMPLE CHARACTER 1: JACK PERETTI

Jack's Uniform has been designed by military psyops specialists, drawing on decades of propaganda research. Hunter green fatigue pants, same color jersey with large, faintly glowing white star in a white pentagon (star can be dimmed for stealth), black jump boots, gloves, web-belts and gear, a stylish cowl that disguises his true features, and his Ranger beret. For dress occasions, he wears Class As and cowl. He looks like a cross between Captain America and Snake-Eyes, in green.

## EXAMPLE CHARACTER 2: RICK CAAN

Rick's costume is composed of a white Guy Fawkes-ish mask; a red hood/mantle suggestive of a lion's mane; a black bodysuit with red stripes (Armor); black boots, belt, and gloves; and metal Scorpion Gauntlets (Gadget).

## MISCELLANY

And that's about it for generating a *T&J* character. Players should feel free to describe the character's physical appearance, even if it's a quick thumbnail like "young Harrison Ford, only Indian" or "tall, blonde, and stacked." Backgrounds can be fleshed out further, names of friends and enemies filled in, detailed character histories, a list of turn-ons and turn-offs, whatever floats your boat. But the character's got everything now that's necessary for you to start playing.



## EXAMPLE CHARACTER 1: JACK PERETTI (AKA AMERICAN RANGER)

**Background:** Jack grew up in Little Italy, then the suburbs. He worked hard and played hard. A solid B student in High School, he wrestled, played football, lifted weights, and performed as part of the Drama Club. His well-rounded extracurriculars and patriotism helped him get an Army ROTC scholarship to the state university, where he majored in American History. After college, he entered the military, and became a U.S. Army Ranger.

**Motivation:** Protecting people under his command.

**Qualities:** Expert [+4] Army Ranger, Expert [+4] Athletic, Good [+2] American History, and Poor [-2] Obedient to Superiors.

**Origin:** Strange experiments by evil mad scientist.

**Powers:** Good [+2] Super-Strength, Good [+2] Adaptation, Average [0] Invulnerability, and Average [0] Super-Armor.

**Stunts:** Shockwave (Super-Strength Spin-off, Poor [-2], opponent must beat a Poor [5] Difficulty Rank to keep his footing).

**Hero Point Pool:** 5/10

**Codename:** American Ranger

**Uniform:** Hunter green fatigue pants, same color jersey with large, faintly glowing white star in a white pentagon (star can be dimmed for stealth), black jump boots, gloves, web-belts and gear, a stylish cowl that disguises his true features, and his Ranger beret.

**Miscellany:** Jack looks like a young, black-haired, swarthy Brian Dennehy. *Adaptation* is Jack's ability to adjust quickly to any environment (underwater, poison gas, hard vacuum, etc.) or situation (lack of food, water, or sleep; constant noise; complete darkness; etc.). If he can successfully make a roll against the Target Number of the Intensity of a dangerous environment, he no longer suffers problems from that environment or situation. Once out of a dangerous environment or situation, his adaptations quickly fade away. *Shockwave* is when he slams his fists or feet on the ground with Super-Strength to knock a foe over or off-balance; the GM determines that its Stunt Rank gives the Difficulty Rank a targeted combatant must beat to keep his footing on the quivering surface.

## ALL ABOUT HERO POINTS

### GAINING HERO POINTS

Hero Points (also *HP*, especially in character write-ups) are gained in six main ways:

1. Following Motivation.
2. Performing Heroic Actions.
3. Accepting a Revoltin' Development.
4. Being Affected by a Limitation or Vulnerability.
5. Showing Esprit de Corps.
6. By converting a MAX point into a Hero Point.

## EXAMPLE CHARACTER 2: RICK CAAN (AKA MANTICORE)

**Background:** As a young child, Rick's district attorney mother was killed by dirty cops in the pay of a Mob defendant; the murder was ruled an accident by the court of inquest. But Rick knew the truth – unknown to the triggermen and the Mafia, he had witnessed the whole thing. He swore to hunt down all who evade justice, and has dedicated his life to honing himself as a weapon to make them all face the music.

**Motivation:** Finding – or creating – "justice for the wronged."

**Qualities:** Master [+6] Tiger Claw Wushu, Master [+6] Gymnast, Expert [+4] Detective, Expert [+4] Wealth, Expert [+4] Armored Costume, Expert [+4] Gadget: Scorpion Gauntlets, Expert [+4] Scary Bastard, Good [+2] Gadget: Utility Belt, and Poor [-2] Obsession (Cannot Countenance Injustice).

**Origin:** Lifetime dedicated to training.

**Powers:** None (three Good [+2] Powers all taken as Intense training; 18 points for Qualities).

**Stunts:** *Acrobatic Dodge* (Gymnast Signature, Expert [+4], 1 Hero Point, adds to defensive rolls when used); *Scorpion's Sting* (Wushu Spin-off, Good [+2], temporarily paralyzes foes who must beat a Good [9] Target Number to un-paralyze); *Swing-line Travel* (Gymnast Spin-off, Good [+2], 4 yards per Turn movement); and *Tiger Claw* (Wushu Signature, Expert [+4], 1 Hero Point, adds to attack rolls when used).

**Hero Point Pool:** 5/10

**Codename:** Manticore

**Uniform:** Rick's costume is composed of a white Guy Fawkes-ish mask; a red hood/mantle suggestive of a lion's mane; a black bodysuit with red stripes (Armor); black boots, belt, and gloves; and metal Scorpion Gauntlets (Gadget).

**Miscellany:** 5'8"; 150#; brown hair; blue eyes; olive skin. Driven and intense. *Obsession (Cannot Countenance Injustice)* means that to control himself when he's a witness to an act of injustice, Rick must roll against a GM-determined TN (at a penalty!) or automatically become involved. Rick's Gadgets are cutting-edge technology. *Utility Belt* means that with a successful roll against a GM-determined TN, it contains any small, reasonable tool. *Scorpion Gauntlets* are forearm guards that can shoot out thin and strong cables used for swing-lines or whips. *Scary Bastard* is used for intimidation.

If a character's Hero Point Pool is full (that is, at maximum), the character has one Turn in which to spend those points before the excess points simply evaporate.

### FOLLOWING MOTIVATION

When a character leaps full-bore into a situation that touches on his main hot-button issue for being, this garners him 1d6 Hero Points. See above, *Motivation*, p. 26, for more discussion.

### HEROIC ACTIONS

Each of the actions below is worth one or more Hero Points, depending upon the Intensity, specificity, and number of people affected by the situation.



- ◆ Protect the innocent or weak from those seeking to harm or take advantage of them.
- ◆ Stop/prevent a crime.
- ◆ Rescue someone from danger.
- ◆ Inspire hope in someone.
- ◆ Reveal an important truth to someone.
- ◆ Bring justice to a situation.
- ◆ Show notable charity, kindness, or mercy towards someone.
- ◆ Exercise restraint in situations where force isn't warranted or wise.
- ◆ Act with great integrity, loyalty, or modesty.
- ◆ Make a sacrifice for another.
- ◆ Take a significant risk.
- ◆ Display courage under fire.

GMs may award Hero Points immediately after the heroic action, or wait until the end of the current Scene, at their option.

### REVOLTIN' DEVELOPMENTS

If the GM hoses a character (via Mind Control, knockout gas, or otherwise springs an unavoidable trap) for plot purposes, the character instantly gains

2d6 Hero Points, to ease the pain. (See also *Chapter 6, Mapmaking and Railroading*, p. 79.)

## **AFFECTED BY A LIMITATION OR VULNERABILITY**

A character affected by a *Limitation* (see p. 36) or *Vulnerability* (see p. 37) will gain Hero Points when the Limitation or Vulnerability comes into play.

## **ESPRIT DE CORPS**

The GM can reward any player's character if the player adds to the spirit of the game by showing camaraderie with teammates; impressing the GM or other players by doing something cool, fun, or comic booky; advancing the main plot of the adventure; advancing another character's subplot; saying something funny that amuses everybody. Each instance of *Esprit de Corps* that makes the gaming experience more enjoyable can be rewarded with a Hero Point.

## **USING HERO POINTS**

Below are some of the methods in which Hero Points can be used:

**Detect & Discover.** Dictate a new fact about the situation at hand ("What most people don't know is that the Prankster attended this grade school as a child!" or "I know the last time I was in this bar, there was a backdoor leading out into an alley"); *1 Hero Point per minor detail, 2 Hero Points per significant detail, or 4 Hero Points per major detail; subject to GM veto.*

**Energize Stunts.** Activate a Signature Stunt or increase the effective Rank of a Stunt; *variable cost* (see *Chapter 4*, p. 53).

**Haymaker.** After a successful attack, add an Upshift to Damage; *1 Hero Point per Upshift.*

**I Know a Guy.** Remember a contact with possible useful information on current situation; *2 Hero Points and a Scene to get the info; subject to GM veto.*

**Luck Be a Lady.** "As I fall off of the zeppelin to certain doom, I luckily manage to grab onto a guy line hanging from the gondola. . ."; *2 Hero Points per plausible coincidence, or 4 Hero Points per implausible coincidence.*

**Make It Count.** Gain an additional 1d6 on next roll; *3 Hero Points per die.*

**Offense for Defense, Defense for Offense.** Using primarily offensive abilities for defensive reactions,

or primarily defensive abilities for offensive actions; *variable cost* (see *Chapter 5*, p. 59).

**Pull Yourself Together.** Regain 1d6 lost Failure Ranks; *1 Hero Point and one action or reaction.*

**Push a Quality or Power.** Gain an Upshift to Rank for next roll; *2 Hero Points per Upshift.*

**Resist Motivation.** Through willpower and self-control, *not* automatically reacting to one's Motivation (useful when infiltrating or going undercover); *1 Hero Point.*

**Second Wind.** Regain 1d6 lost Damage Ranks; *2 Hero Points and one Turn per die of recovery.*

**Use a Trophy.** Retrieve and use an applicable Trophy (see *Chapter 6, MacGuffins, Plot Devices, & Trophies*, p. 69) from a previous adventure. *1 or 2 Hero Points, at GM's discretion.*

Hero Points can be used as many times as desired, as long as the character has points left to burn. If a character wishes to spend 4 HP for two Upshifts to an action, or to regain 4 Failure Ranks, or dictate 4 minor details about a Scene, that's fine.

Feel free to come up with new uses for Hero Points!

## **HOW MAX GROWS**

Every time a character earns Hero Points, the GM should make a little tick next to the character's name in their notes. When a character's number of ticks equals their MAX, MAX grows by one point and the tickmarks are reset to zero. For example, say a character with a MAX of 9 has earned 8 Hero Points so far. The next time he gets a Hero Point, his MAX becomes 10, and the GM starts tallying up a new set of ticks.

There are two ways for a GM to accrue these MAX ticks: fast and slow. *Fast ticking* means that every single HP gained is counted towards MAX increase, and *slow ticking* means that only distinct HP awards are counted. For example, say that over the course of an adventure, a character prevents a crime (1 HP), suffers a Revoltin' Development (2d6 HP, which ended up being 4 HP), and has their Motivation triggered (1d6 HP, which ended up being 5 HP). Under fast ticking, this character would have 10 MAX ticks; under slow ticking, this character would have 3 MAX ticks. The speed of ticking – and thus

the rate of increase of MAX – influences character *Improvement* (see below).

GMs may inform players of MAX increases immediately or wait until the end of the current Scene or session, as they choose.

## HOW MAX IS USED

MAX is sacrificed in dire straits for Hero Points by *Digging Down Deep*, in training to *Cement Signature Stunts*, and used for the permanent *Improvement* of the Ranks of abilities (and to purchase new ones).

However, if a PC's MAX ever drops to zero, he *becomes an NPC* or *dies*, according to the player's preference. Either can be quite thrilling, in the right circumstances.

### DIGGING DOWN DEEP

If a character is in Trouble with a capital T and needs more Hero Points *now*, he may "dig down deep" and summon up some heroic energy at the cost of reducing the MAX of his Hero Point Pool. Unfortunately, the trade-in value sucks – one to one. For example, say a character with a MAX of 10 needs to dig deep for just a little more oomph! He can reduce his MAX to 9 and gain a single Hero Point.

### CEMENT SIGNATURE STUNTS

After the first session of play, a character can spend one point of MAX to convert a Spin-off Stunt into a Signature Stunt.

### T&J IMPROVEMENT

Over time, characters gain skill, experience, and even new Powers; this is called *Improvement*.

### TO INCREASE A QUALITY RANK

Spending 4 MAX permits a character to raise one Quality one Rank, to a maximum of Master [+6]. To raise Good [+2] Housekeeping to Master [+6] Housekeeping would require 8 MAX (4 MAX to go from Good to Expert and 4 more to go for Expert to Master).

### TO INCREASE A POWER RANK

Spending 8 MAX *during a relevant Scene in a T&J game* (GM's veto applies) permits a character to raise one Power one Rank, to a maximum of Master [+6]. Therefore, to raise Good [+2] Flight to Master [+6]

Flight would require 16 MAX (8 MAX for Good to Expert; 8 MAX for Expert to Master) and for a relevant or evocative Scene to be going on that could justify this increase of ability.

### TO PURCHASE A NEW QUALITY

Spending 4 MAX *and creating a related Story Hook for the GM* (GM's veto applies) permits a character to gain one new Quality at Good [+2] Rank. If a character wished to learn Accounting, he would have to spend the points of MAX and provide the GM with a relevant seed for a future plot, subplot, or adventure that is tied to Accounting ("hey, maybe one of the guys in my class is the son of Captain Omega...").

### TO PURCHASE A NEW POWER

Spending 8 MAX *and creating a related Story Hook for the GM during a relevant Scene in a T&J game* (GM's veto applies) permits a character to gain one new Power at Average [0] Rank. If a character wished to develop Super-Speed, he would have to spend the points of MAX, provide the GM with a relevant seed for a future plot, subplot, or adventure that is tied to gaining the new Power, while a relevant or evocative Scene happens to be going on. ("Okay, I want Super-Speed. Since we're fighting the Sacred Ghosts right now at CERN, maybe I accidentally fall into the cyclotron, which gets switched on. This gives me Super-Speed, but a beam of energy gets deflected out of the machine and zaps across the ocean to supercharge one of Doctor Defenestrator's experiments!").

## VILLAIN POINTS?

Bad guys' mojo is called – appropriately – Villain Points rather than Hero Points. They use them in much the same way, but especially for things like impossible escapes, setting up Revoltin' Developments (see above), overwhelming off-panel sneak attacks, summoning more minions, "really" being a robot double when captured, etc.

Villains should rarely be given Villain Points during an adventure, only after adventures. Partly this is so that GMs aren't rewarding themselves. They start with a bunch and whittle them down while Heroes are building their own points up; this is one reason the good guys usually win. Any Villain Points gained from following Motivations or being affected by Vulnerabilities should be saved for the next adventure they appear in. (This also neatly explains why bad guys are masters at jail-breaking; somehow, their Villain Point Pool refreshed, and then it's freedom, baby!)



# CHAPTER 4: SUPERPOWERS

"Faster than a speeding bullet.  
 More powerful than a locomotive.  
 Able to leap tall buildings in a single bound.  
 Look! Up in the sky.  
 It's a bird. It's a plane. It's Superman!"  
 - *Adventures of Superman* opening narration



This chapter discusses how to make the Qualities, Powers, and Stunts that typically play a part in superhero stories and games work under the *T&J* game system. It is *vital*ly important for all participants in the group to be on the same page about the scope, capabilities, limitations, and scalability of abilities like these (see below). These are the sorts of questions players and GMs have to thrash out to a commonly-understood level before play starts.

## T&J INTENSITY CHART

POWER RANK & MODIFIER	DIFFICULTY RANK & TARGET NUMBER	TIME* (DURATION**)	RANGE*	SPEED*	AREA	WEIGHT	FORCE	ENERGY	MONEY
Poor [-2]	Poor [5]	1 action/reaction (5 minutes)	Touch (12 in.)	Running (20 mph)	Closet (1 sq. yard)	Heavy person (250 lbs.)	Knockout Punch	Candle	\$1
Average [0]	Average [7]	1 Turn (30 minutes)	Near (10 yards)	Racecar (150 mph)	Room (25 sq. yards)	Motorcycle (500 lbs.)	Full-tilt Body check	Campfire	\$100
Good [+2]	Good [9]	1 Scene (1 hour)	Middling (100 yards)	Jet (500 mph)	Football field (6,400 sq. yards)	Car (1.5 tons)	Baseball bat	Bonfire	\$10,000
Expert [+4]	Expert [11]	2 Scenes (6 hours)	Far (1,000 yds.)	Supersonic (2,200 mph; Mach 3)	Square mile (3 mil. sq. yds.)	Tank (75 tons)	Ram w/ car	Forest fire	\$1 million
Master [+6]	Master [13]	4 Scenes (24 hours)	Too Far (5 miles)	Hypersonic (7,700 mph; Mach 10)	U.S. Township (112 mil. sq. yds.)	Battleship (50,000 tons)	Cannonball	Volcano	\$1 billion

\* Expanded from the basic concepts on Time, Range, and Movement found in *Chapter 2*, p. 18.

\*\* *Duration* is for longer measures of Time that do not adequately fit within the (re)action/Turn/Scene structure – endurance flying, vacuum support, maintaining a non-combat power, etc. Making an Power effect permanent (petrification, disintegrations, etc.) is up to the GM's Veto.

## INTENSITY

While every potential Power is different, and its capabilities and limitations judged according to its idiom, some general benchmarks for *Intensity* can be handy for players and GMs to visualize how effective a power is at different Ranks. These rankings are dramatic, not mathematic; they mimic the effectiveness of a Power in the context of a superhero story. The *T&J Intensity Chart* can be used as guidelines for the scope of Powers, or ignored – whichever works best in the campaign at that moment.

Sometimes, GMs may need to come up with a new column for the *T&J Intensity Chart*.

**Example:** Say the GM needs to know how many people can be affected by a Power at once. This new column might be called "Targets Affected." The GM should come up with generic benchmarks, eyeballing it, comparing scope with the other columns. A decent comparison with what's already on the chart might be something like: Poor [-2] is 1 person, Average [0] is a dozen people, Good [+2] is a roomful of victims, Expert [+4] is a stadium or auditorium full of people, and Master [+6] is an entire city. For other GMs, these numbers may be too low, or too high. Go with what feels right for your campaign's Style.

## SUPERHUMAN ABILITIES

### DO-IT-YOURSELF AESTHETIC

In *T&J*, players and GMs have a lot of latitude when coming up with superhuman abilities for characters. There's nothing to say that *Giant Humanoid Cockroach*, *Fiery Blast*, *Power-Armor*, *Control Water*, *Stretchy*, *Jet-Pack*, or *Super-Strength* aren't perfectly valid. Any Power the player can conceive of and the GM accepts is permitted. Most sorts of Powers are pretty straightforward – they have a specific set of expectations and possible results – and can easily be extrapolated from the *PDQ Master Chart* and the *T&J Intensity Chart*. Using a bit of common sense with the charts, the relative factors (complexity, scope, intensity, range, duration, etc.) of Fire Balls, Ice Beams, Lightning Bolts, Paralysis Rays, Stretching,

### WHAT DOES A POOR [-2] RANKED POWER MEAN?

A superhuman character with Poor [-2] Super-Strength would be somewhat stronger than a normal human with Master [+6] Strength. However, the fact that the superhuman's Rank is Poor [-2] means that he has trouble dealing with his Super-Strength: he'll rip doorknobs off of doors, injure people when he tries to shake hands, crush small or delicate objects, etc. But what if you want a character who is clumsy, but can lift a tank (Expert [+4] Rank Intensity)?

Given the way the *T&J* system works (the association between the effectiveness, skill, or number of uses per Scene for the ability, as well as the overall Intensity of the ability, which is often represented by the Rank Modifier), characters that are *very* mighty yet still unskilled with their Powers cannot be summed up in this way. There are two main ways to map this under the rules, however:

- 1) If the lack of capability is endemic to all of the character's abilities, this lack should be the character's Weakness: a Poor [-2] Clumsy Quality.
- 2) If the lack of capability only affects the Power, it should be taken as a Limitation (see p. 36) on that Power: Expert [+4] Super-Strength (Limitation: Clumsy in using it; roll vs. Poor [-2] for success in nimble or precise tasks).

Players who choose the **OPTIONAL RULE** under Powers (see *Chapter 3*) of trading in an Average [0] Power for two Poor [-2] ones should be aware of this when creating their characters.

Telekinesis, Regeneration, Flight, Super-Perceptions, and so forth can be determined.

**Example:** Say a character has two Powers: Expert [+4] Fire Bolt and Good [+2] Flight. This means that the character rolls 2d6+4 when using their Fire Bolt to do something (attack, defend against Water Jets, melt an iceberg, etc.) and rolls 2d6+2 when doing something interesting with Flight (competing in a race, doing complicated aerobatics, using Flight to help lift something heavy, etc.). Looking at the *T&J Intensity Chart*, we can get a rough idea of what these Powers mean – an Expert [+4] Fire Bolt has a Range of about 1,000 yards and is as hot as a forest fire, and Good [+2] Flight is about as fast as a jet, 500 mph.

## DIY AESTHETIC RULES-OF-THUMB

What if a player makes up a new Power not listed in the chapter? The GM will need to come up with some numbers to quantify the effects of a Power. Here's some really quite simple methods used later in this chapter:

- ◆ *In figuring effects such as the number of extra actions, durations, or targets*, it's recommended to treat Average [0] Rank as being worth "minimum 1" for reckoning purposes; some GMs will want to extend the courtesy to Poor [-2] Ranked Powers as well.
- ◆ *If very small numbers are needed*, base effects on the Power's Modifier (however, this may generate numbers that are too small to be worthwhile).
- ◆ *If small numbers are needed*, base effects off of the Power's Target Number or twice the Power's Modifier (still relatively conservative numbers, but good for low-powered games).
- ◆ *If medium-sized numbers are needed*, base effects off of double the Power's Target Number.
- ◆ *If larger numbers are needed*, adapt one of the existing columns from – or create a new column for – the *T&J Intensity Chart*.
- ◆ *If relevant*, include the TN-bonus to damage for super-scale abilities working against normal-scale, unliving targets (see *Chapter 2, Super-scale Damage*, p. 23).
- ◆ *If relevant*, use the Power's Modifier to grant a number of Upshifts or Downshifts per Scene.
- ◆ *If relevant*, permit the character to treat conflict situations involving the Power as complicated situations (see *Chapter 5, A Question of Scale*, p. 60).

## POWERS JAZZ

### LIMITATIONS

As noted in *Weakness is Strength?* (textbox, p. 28), restricting a Power during character generation doesn't give any sort of "boost" to Ranks or anything like that. However, these constraints can give a slight bonus during play.

A *Limitation* is a "hole" in a Power's penumbra; it blocks off potential uses of the Power, making it less useful. Taking a Limitation on a Power is the player painting "Please kick me" on the character's forehead for the GM to read; in essence, it's the most minor form of *Revoltin' Development* (see p. 31). A character can affect any or all of his Powers with a single Limitation each.

The first time the character is directly presented with his Limitation during a game session, he gains a Hero Point. If the character is indirectly presented with the Limitation, he only gains a Hero Point if there's some roleplaying involved (see below, *Example 2*). If he then figures out a way around it (solution subject to GM veto), he gains another Hero Point the first time he uses that method. (If the character's player is feeling uncreative and really wants to get around the Limitation, the character can spend 2 Hero Points to have the GM describe how the character surpasses the Limitation; this, of course, leaves the character down a Hero Point, but them's the breaks!)

The scope of the Limitation affecting the power makes no difference, because in superhero stories, the character will eventually be confronted with it anyway. The only reasons to take a Limitation in *T&J* are: 1) for the fun of it; 2) to give the GM Story Hooks; and 3) to pick up a few extra Hero Points for roleplaying creative thought.

Example 1: Barnswallow has the Power of Sonic Blast, which has the Limitation: Doesn't affect anything colored green. Surprised in an automotive repair garage, Captain Chartreuse has slapped some jade handcuffs on her wrists, chaining her to a ticking bomb. She gains a Hero Point for suffering this green indignity.

Barnswallow goes over to the nearest waste oil container, wrenches off the top, and dunks her handcuffed wrist into the gunk. It comes up a yucky brown; she blasts the handcuff off and earns another Hero Point.

Example 2: Barnswallow has another Power, Flight, with the Limitation: Altitude ceiling of 6'. If faced with Captain Chartreuse floating near a second story window of a building, Barnswallow is out of luck – she can't fly that high due to her Limitation. Unless the supervillain is actively and directly attacking her, she shouldn't really get a Hero Point for her Limitation, unless she angsts a bit over it in-character. "Alas! Only I can stop the



fiend in time! But – he's way above my altitude! What can I do? Must. . . think. . ." Hero Point, right there.

Trying to surpass the Limitation, Barnswallow's player asks the GM if the altitude *must* be figured from the ground – why not a building's wall? She can still only be 6' or less away from a surface, but this would give her a chance to reach the bad guy.

The GM might accept this, and give Barnswallow a Hero Point for the solution. Or he may suggest that this sort of thing is better considered a Stunt. Or he may even deny this justification outright.

## VULNERABILITIES

One "power" that a character might select is actually an Achilles heel – a flaw. Why would this be considered a Power? By having an explicit, identifiable *Vulnerability*, the character makes it easier for foes to harm him; but this is rewarded by luck smiling more favorably on the character – that is, more Hero Points.

Vulnerabilities can be physical (Centaurite causes injury to Centaurans), mental (strong magnetic fields confuse Robotron 7), social (threatening Peggy Sue causes Bug-Boy emotional trauma), professional (every time the Rescuer approaches within 100' of a SpeedyMed franchise, they sue him on the basis of his restraining order), and so on.

If a Vulnerability comes into play, the character:

1. Loses his next action.
2. Takes Damage Ranks equal to the Modifier (minimum 1) of their Vulnerability *per Turn* (for physical Vulnerabilities) or *per Scene* (from mental, social, or other such Vulnerabilities) from the source of the Vulnerability. This damage is taken even through defensive powers like Super-Armor or Invulnerability (though Qualities like Armor, Iron Will, or Higher Purpose might momentarily help; see *Chapter 5*, p. 61).
3. Gains 1d6+Modifier (minimum 1) Hero Points instantly. (Note that this Hero Point Gain happens only once per Scene the Vulnerability is employed.)

See also the nearby textbox, *Limitations vs. Vulnerabilities*.

## LIMITATIONS VS. VULNERABILITIES

Limitations annoy or restrict; Vulnerabilities hurt or impair.

Limitations provide 1 Hero Point when they have an effect, and 1 Hero Point if surpassed; Vulnerabilities cause the sufferer to lose their next action, take Damage Ranks equal to the Vulnerability Modifier, and provides 1d6+MOD Hero Points.

Limitations are directly tied to Powers; Vulnerabilities are separate "abilities" in and of themselves, though they may be related to Powers.

## INTENSE TRAINING

This "power" is intended to help generate PCs that are highly-skilled, but have few Powers. Intense Training transforms Powers into "points" using a base of +2 plus twice the sacrificed Power's Modifier. (Average [0] counts as 1 for this purpose; Poor [-2] Powers *cannot* be used for Intense Training.) These points can be used to improve existing Qualities – including personalities, relationships, equipment, and so forth – or purchase new ones at a cost of 2 points per Rank. That is, giving up an Average [0] Rank Power via Intense Training generates +4 points, which can be used to raise existing Quality Ranks in several ways, like:

- ◆ Boosting a Good [+2] Quality to Master [+6] Rank;
- ◆ Increasing two Good [+2] Qualities into two Expert [+4] Ranks; or
- ◆ Taking new Qualities (one new Expert [+4] Quality or two new Good [+2] Qualities).

For an example of how Intense Training works in practice, see the write-up of Manticore in *Chapter 3*.

## QUASI-POWERS

With proper justification, some GMs may permit their players to buy one or two super-abilities in the form of Qualities rather than Powers. This is especially appropriate when considering Powers that can be mimicked by cutting-edge technologies, Gadgets, or Vehicles. These *Quasi-Powers* are on the normal-scale rather than the super-scale, and are much weaker than the Power version of the ability. Quasi-Powers use the Basic Time, Range, and Speed from *Chapter 2* instead of the *T&J Intensity Chart*, do

not get the super-scale damage bonus against non-living normal-scale targets, and *must* take a mandatory Limitation. Limited numbers of use per Scene or session, limited operational endurance, extra steps to prepare or control the ability, or expensive components that are consumed to activate the Quasi-Power are all appropriate. The classic example here is Flight, which could be a jetpack (Limitation: Requires refueling after 2 Scenes) or a glider cape (Limitation: Unpowered flight only).

Spider-man, Spider-man,  
Does whatever a spider can.  
Spins a web, any size,  
Catches thieves just like flies.  
Look out! Here comes the Spider-man!  
- *Spider-man* theme song

### META-POWERS

A *Meta-Power* is a Power with an extremely broad or idiosyncratic penumbra, pulling numerous seemingly unrelated Powers under its aegis, which is permitted by prior art in superhero or other adventure stories. The GM must explicitly decide whether to permit any Meta-Powers in a *T&J* game.

For example, let us consider the Weather Control Power. Flying during a tornado, calling down lightning while a thunderstorm is going on, or intensifying the freezing rain falling onto a roadway all fit under the Weather Control umbrella, as Stunts, if nothing else. However, numerous comic book characters with Weather Control use it to fly on the winds anytime, shoot lightning bolts from their hands, or create ice slicks from thin air. That's kind of outside the penumbra of "control the local weather conditions," if the Power were interpreted strictly.

Now, a GM could ask that the PC buy all of those Powers separately. But that doesn't seem quite fair – the way it works in comic books is to just have Weather Control. Obviously, something is different about it: it's a Meta-Power. (Indeed, GMs *should* suggest to players during character generation when

their selected set of Powers works better as a single Meta-Power.)

Another example: let's say that there's a sapient race on Alpha Centauri 3. One of these Centaurans has come to Earth, and found that the stronger magnetic fields around this planet interacts with his alien biology and grants him the Powers of Invulnerability, Super-Strength, Flight, Magnetic Vision, and Magnetic Telekinesis. That's a whole lot of Powers! Sure, the GM could make him take them all separately. As an alternative, however, the GM could agree that "Centauran" is a viable Meta-Power.

A Meta-Power permits numerous, disparate, predefined Powers to be taken as Stunts of the Meta-Power rather than separate Powers. "But wait!" other players may cry, "why does your one Power let you do like six extra Powers? How is that fair?" Because there are three catches to Meta-Powers:

1. The GM must accept the Meta-Power ("Sure, Centaurans can do all that").
2. The GM writes up the Meta-Power, including any *Limitations* (p. 36) or *Vulnerabilities* (p. 37) he sees fit to include in the package ("Centauran Magnetic Vision is blocked by wood"). The more potent the Meta-Power, the more potent any Limitations or Vulnerabilities should be for it.
3. The GM can then use the written-up Meta-Power for an NPC at any time ("A Centauran criminal has escaped the Mesmeric Zone and is now hiding out on Earth!").

Some examples of Meta-Powers seen in comics include Atlantean, some types of Battlesuit or Power-Armor, (Something) Elemental, Sorcery, Telekinesis, and Vampire. Heroes that change into a heroic form could also be seen as having a Meta-Power with two Limitations – "must say magic word (or whatever) to transform" and "can only use Powers in transformed body."

### LIST OF SUPER-ABILITIES

In this section is a list of abilities – both Qualities and Powers – often seen in superhero comics. While it expands on the information in *Chapter 2* on Qualities and Powers, it is not exhaustive – there's plenty of opportunities for players and GMs to fill in and

adapt for their own campaigns. Feel free to use, alter, or erase these write-ups as you see fit.

Powers appear in **REGULAR TEXT HEADINGS** and Qualities appear in ***ITALIC, UNDERLINED HEADINGS*** for easy reference.

## **ADAPTATION**

*Adaptation* is the Power to adjust quickly to any ongoing *environment* (underwater, poison gas, hard vacuum, etc.) or *situation* (lack of food, water, or sleep; constant noise; complete darkness; etc.). This Power does not directly counter damage taken in conflict (but it's possible that Stunts based off of it could). If the character can successfully make a roll against the intensity of a dangerous environment or situation (Target Number determined by the GM), he no longer suffers problems (Damage Ranks, Failure Ranks, suffocation, the bends, etc.) from it. Once out of the dangerous environment or situation, adaptations melt away, returning the character to his base state.

Example: Evolve-Lad (Expert [+4] Adaptation) falls into an active volcano's caldera. Looking at the Intensity Chart, a volcano has Master [13] Energy Intensity. Evolve-Lad must roll a 13 or better on a 2d6+4 to perfectly adapt to the molten lava. He rolls a 3 and a 4, plus 4 for a total of 11. Evolve-Lad takes 2 Damage Ranks from his imperfect adaptation. He can try again on his next action.

## **ARMOR**

Armor is a Quality that allows a character to ignore or resist normal-scale damage. Flak Jackets, Uniforms, or tough skin can all be forms of Armor. The character adds his MOD to his reaction rolls (to dodge, parry, block, evade, etc.) against relevant attacks, but he can choose to sacrifice a Rank of this protection in order to ignore Failure or Damage Ranks. When a character with Armor takes damage, he can voluntarily Downshift the Rank of his Armor, permitting him to ignore all Damage Ranks from one attack. The player chooses if and when to use this ability. However, once a Quality reaches Poor [-2] Rank (through Downshifting to ignore or resist or from taking Failure or Damage Ranks), it can no longer be used in this fashion. Indeed, attempting to use an Armor Quality at Poor [-2] Rank is actually a Weakness in combat!

With regard to super-scale damage, if Armor is used to ignore a number of Damage Ranks equal or greater than its Rank's Target Number, it is automatically Downshifted all the way to Poor [-2].

Example 1: Mike the Cop (Good [+2] Policeman) is wearing a Flak Jacket (Good [+2] Armor) when he gets into a gunfight with some bank robbers. One of them shoots at him, with a roll of 10. Mike dodges; he can use both his Policeman and Armor Qualities, giving him a 2d6+4. He rolls a 1 and a 2, plus 4, for a total of 7 – meaning he'll take 3 Damage Ranks. He decides to sacrifice a Rank of his Armor: it is now Average [0]. It will not provide further advantage on his defensive rolls, but he can Downshift it one more time to avoid a big hit. At least he didn't take those 3 Damage Ranks!

Example 2: Mike has a new Flak Jacket (Good [+2] Armor) on when an Expert [+4] Super-Strong criminal punches him, with a roll of 12. Mike rolls his 2d6+4 and gets an 11. The super-criminal hits him for 1 Damage Rank, plus 11 from his Super-Strength (see below), for a total of 12 Damage Ranks. Mike must sacrifice a Rank to avoid getting pulped! Because 12 Damage Ranks is bigger than his Flak Jacket's TN of 9, it's automatically trashed.

NOTE - Although Armor is usually seen as purely a physical defense, variants could also exist for mental ("Iron Will"), social ("True Love for Peggy Sue"), professional ("Ethical"), and other types of conflict. See also *Super-Armor*, p. 48, and *Chapter 5, "Armor-like" Abilities in Conflict*, p. 61.

## **BATTLESUIT**

A *Battlesuit* is a cutting-edge tech suit that may include weapons, armor, transportation systems, sensory apparatus, and equipment. It is essentially a Gadget that "contains" a few other Qualities built into it. A Battlesuit is a form of Armor (see above) that also has a number of "slots" for Qualities (or *Quasi-Powers*, see above) equal to the Battlesuit's Rank Modifier (minimum 1); Qualities in the slots have an effective Rank two steps less than the Battlesuit Rank.

Example: Mike the Cop is checking out the three Battlesuits the Department recently purchased for the Super-SWAT team. All are Expert [+4] Battlesuits, but each has had their slots optimized for a different purpose:

*Patrol Suit:* Expert [+4] Armor, Average [0] Heli-pack (Flight Quasi-Power; Limitation: Downshift to all physical actions due to bulkiness of system),

Average [0] Nightvision, Average [0] Parabolic Hearing, and Average [0] Radar Gun.

*Bomb Disposal Suit:* Expert [+4] Armor, Average [0] Retractable Waldoes (with drills, cameras, pliers, etc.), Average [0] Gyroscopic Stabilization, Average [0] Chemical Sensor, and Average [0] Compressed Water Cannon.

*Superhuman Capture and Restraint Suit:* Expert [+4] Armor, Average [0] Air Supply, Average [0] Tear Gas Grenade Launcher, Average [0] Sonic Pain Inducer (Bolt Quasi-Power; Limitation: 1 shot per scene), Average [0] Entangling Net.

The things to remember are that Battlesuits are cutting-edge technology, and thus operate on the normal-scale; they can only grant Qualities – or, at best, Quasi-Powers. They require the Quality of Battlesuit Pilot to operate. For suits that include superpowers, see *Power-Armor* below.

## BEAM (OF SOMETHING)

Also called a (*Something*) Ray. A Beam of Something (Sound, Laser, Gravity, etc.) is a ranged attack, and uses the Range column on the *T&J Intensity Chart*. Beams often do super-scale damage to normal-scale unliving objects, and thus add their Power Rank TN to damage on a successful attack. To apply super-scale damage to living targets, a Hero Point must be

spent. Beams imply the ability generates a "thread" of energy, which can be used to "cut" or "constantly push" a target. Beams can be blocked, reflected, or dodged, but not parried. Compare this to *Bolt* (below).

## BLAST (OF SOMETHING)

See *Bolt*.

## BODY OF (SOMETHING)

Also called (*Something*) Form. The character transforms into or sheathes his body within Something (Fire, Ice, Fog, Insects, etc.), offering protection at the Power's Rank (Modifier adds to defensive reactions). Unlike Armor or Super-Armor, this protection cannot be voluntarily Downshifted to avoid damage; Armor or Super-Armor should be purchased separately. Body of Something permits thematic attack, defense, and movement Stunts, as well as anything that fits the idiom of the Something (i.e., a character with Body of Light could pass through transparent objects as if he had Phasing). See also *Shapeshifting* and *Transformation*.



## **BOLT (OF SOMETHING)**

Also called a (*Something*) *Blast*. A Bolt of Something (Lightning, Force, Energy, etc.) is a ranged attack, and uses the Range column on the *T&J Intensity Chart*. Bolts often do super-scale damage to normal-scale unliving objects, and thus add their Power Rank TN to damage on a successful attack. To apply super-scale damage to living targets, a Hero Point must be spent. Bolts imply the ability launches discrete "projectiles" of energy, which can be used to "explode on" or "punch" a target. Bolts can be blocked, parried, or dodged, but not reflected. Compare this to *Beam* (above).

## **CONTROL (SOMETHING)**

Also called (*Something*) *Control*, this ability allows the character to communicate with and command Something (Animals, Plants, Shadows, Fire, etc.). The character's Power Modifier aids attempts to successfully control Something, MOD or TN might give the maximum number or instances of Somethings that can be controlled at once (or, alternatively, use the "Targets Affected" scheme developed in the Example under *Intensity* above), the Range column of the *T&J Intensity Chart* can give guidelines on the effective Range of this talent, and so forth. See also (*Something*) *Powers* and *Time Control*.

## **DUPLICATION**

The ability to create copies of oneself or other things. A canny character with Duplication can take great advantage of *Using Multiple Qualities* (see *Chapter 5*, p. 59). Some suggestions for GMs and players in dealing with this ability include:

- ◆ The Rank of the Duplication Power indicates the Duration of existence for these copies.
- ◆ The Target Number of the Difficult Rank of the Duplication Power gives the maximum number of duplicates a character can generate at one time.
- ◆ Duplicates probably do not possess the Duplication Power themselves.

## **FLIGHT**

The ability to fly. Flyers use the Speed column on the *T&J Intensity Chart* to determine maximum airspeed. Most flyers cannot fly above 14,000 feet because the air gets too thin to breathe unless they also have Adaptation, Armor, Invulnerability, Super-Armor, or

some other protective ability or gear. To achieve orbit, a character with Flight also needs Super-Speed of Average [0] Rank or better.

## **FTL TRAVEL**

For Faster-than-Light (FTL) movement, consider using the Powers of Teleportation or Time Travel; otherwise, the effective "miles per hour" of this ability is dependent on the GM's fiat, with the understanding that higher Ranks of FTL Travel are "faster" or "better" or "safer" than lower Ranks.

## **GADGETS**

The character *possesses* cutting-edge technology devices known as Gadgets (see textbox, *Cutting-Edge & Super-Technologies*, for the distinction between the two). Gadgets can be taken as Qualities or Quasi-Powers; for Powers, see *Super-Gadgets* below. Gadgets can be lost or broken, and probably require "fuel" or "energy" to function. (GMs should also see *Chapter 6, MacGuffins, Plot Devices, & Trophies*, p. 69.) Some example Gadgets can be found in the Manticore write-up in *Chapter 3* (p. 31). Anyone can use a Gadget, with greater or lesser amounts of skill. Also, Gadgets can be *Quasi-Powers* (see above).

Gadgets are not "off-the-shelf" technology. If a character wants a cell phone, he doesn't have to purchase it during character generation as a Gadget. However, a cell phone with cutting-edge features far beyond the standard (e.g., DNA sequencing) would be a Gadget, and a cell phone that granted actual Powers (e.g., Mind-scanning) would be a Super-Gadget. If a character wants access to numerous Gadgets, the GM should suggest that the player use one of his Qualities to represent something like "Has a Gadgeteer buddy" – there's a potential kidnapping Story Hook right there.

## **GADGETEERING**

The Quality of fiddling with machines to repair, modify, or rebuild them, as well as *creating* the cutting-edge technology (see textbox) devices known as Gadgets. In creating Gadgets, a Gadgeteer puts Qualities into tangible form, and can push the boundaries of what is possible in science and engineering. If a similar technology or machine already exists – or could exist – in the real world, a Gadgeteer can make it better, faster, smaller, shinier, more reliable, etc. (To jump over the boundaries of

## CUTTING-EDGE & SUPER-TECHNOLOGIES

*Cutting-edge technologies* are improvements and extrapolations on current technologies; they are normal-scale and associated with Qualities (Gadgets, Gadgeteering, and Quasi-Powers). Cutting-edge tech can be generally used by anybody, and can eventually – given sufficient time, money, and R&D – be back-engineered by mundane scientists and engineers, and can then be mass-produced.

*Super-technologies* are fantastic technologies that may never be possible; they are super-scale and associated with Powers (Super-Gadgets and Super-Gadgeteering). Super-tech can only be used by an owner or designated pilot/user, Gadgeteers, Super-Gadgeteers, and Super-Intellects. Mundane scientists and engineers will not even be able to understand the processes involved in operating it, much less duplicating it. They will never be reverse-engineered by normal-scale technicians, and thus will never be mass-produced.

For example, take the idea of camera cell phones. A Gadgeteer could invent full streaming-video cell phones, or camera cell phones the size of a dime, but only a Super-Gadgeteer could rig a cell phone so that it broadcasts on a "telepathic wave" instead of radio, takes detailed enough images of a subject for later synthetic replication, or permits teleportation over the public telephone network.

## THE EFFECT OF CUTTING-EDGE & SUPER-TECHNOLOGIES ON THE WORLD

Since super-technology only works for a small number of people and cannot be back-engineered, this curtails the effects it has on normal-scale technology. So, even though the Super-Gadgeteer hero Doctor Widget can build a Super-Strength glove, it's not going to change the world.

However, cutting-edge technology works for everybody, once they learn how to operate it. If the Gadgeteer refines the scientific and engineering issues involved in its construction, or a dedicated team of specialists works out all the details, an industrial concern could build such a device. The effects of even a simple Gadget – say, Gadgeteer Guy Vermack's Jetpack – on normal-scale technology will be considerable. Not merely when used as intended, but also after specialists rip apart the subsystems and tweak them for other, unrelated applications: the efficiency of the energy collection and storage elements of the solar cell used in the Jetpack would certainly change the face of the planet. GMs and players should have fun with coming up with new applications and spin-off technologies if they want to make this sort of thing part of their campaign. Be warned, since Gadgets are a quantum leap forward beyond current technologies, those who wish to fully exploit such cutting-edge technologies will have to do a lot of infrastructure and R&D work to eventually make it pay off ("building the tools to build the tools").

science and engineering, a character should take Super-Gadgeteering; see below.)

To build a Gadget, the Gadgeteer pays a *base cost* of 1 Hero Point, plus Hero Points equal to the Modifier of Quality's Rank; 1 Hero Point per alteration (smaller, bigger, stronger, faster, safer, longer running time, greater storage capacity, etc.); and any additional Hero Point or in-game costs (money, materials, time) that the GM determines.

Gadgeteering can be considered a *Meta-Power* (see above).

Example: Guy Vermack, Good [+2] Gadgeteer, wishes to construct a Jetpack Gadget. Jet packs do exist in reality, despite being rather impractical. It would need a greater endurance, more effective fuel system, extra safety features, and be a little smaller to get that classic Rocketeer effect. For an Average [0] Rank Gadget, the Hero would then have to pay 5 Hero Points (base cost of 1, plus 0 for Average Rank, plus 4 for alterations), plus any requirements the GM has in terms of capital outlay or labor.

NOTE - In some settings, Gadgeteer can be a Stunt off of the Super-Gadgeteer or Super-Intellect Powers.

If desired, a Gadgeteer can start a *T&J* campaign with up to four Gadgets that would have cost no more than 6 Hero Points each, if he were building them new. See also below, *Super-Gadgeteering*.

## HEALING

The character has the ability to heal others. Healing restores a total of up to their Power's Modifier in Damage Ranks (minimum 1 for Average [0] Rank) to a single target at Near range (see *Chapter 2*, p. 18) per action. For targets at Middling range, the character can heal up to the Modifier of one Rank lower than their Power; at Far range, two Ranks lower. Targets at Too Far range cannot be healed. If the effective Rank of Healing is lower than Average [0], no healing occurs.

Example: In the middle of a gangland crossfire, Nightingale Angel (Good [+2] Healing) can heal up to 2 Damage Ranks per action to someone within reach, or 1 Damage Rank to someone a few paces away. Further than that, her Healing ability will not work. However, if she had Healing at Expert [+4], she could restore up to 4 Damage Ranks per action to someone Near, 2 Damage Ranks to someone at a Middling distance, and 1

Damage Rank to someone who was Far off. If she had Master [+6] Healing, it would end up at 6 Damage Ranks for Near, 4 Damage Ranks for Middling, 2 Damage Ranks for Far, and she still couldn't heal someone who was Too Far away.

If a character wishes to heal themselves, see *Regeneration* below, or *Using Hero Points* (Chapter 3, p. 32).

## IMMORTALITY

The ability of being exempt from death. Simply, the character cannot die. The Rank of the Power may reflect the speed of how quickly the character "gets better," a specific number of "extra lives" (based on either Modifier or Target Number), or nothing other than "cannot be killed"—depending upon what definition of "immortal" the player and GM agree upon.

## INTENSE TRAINING

See above, *Intense Training*, p. 37.

## INVISIBILITY

The ability to vanish from sight and be unseen. Invisibility treats the Power's Modifier as the number of Downshifts (minimum 1) opponents take when trying to attack the invisible character, and the number of Upshifts he gains when trying to hit opponents. The Target Number of the Invisibility Rank can also be used if someone's trying to detect the invisible character.

Example: Phade is using her Good [+2] Invisibility to sneak into a villain's compound. For a henchman to detect her, he'd have to match or beat a TN of 9. If the henchman is alerted to her presence, he takes 2 Downshifts to any attacks he makes against her, while she has 2 Upshifts when attacking him.

## INVULNERABILITY

Incapable of being wounded, injured, or harmed by normal-scale damage. It is distinct from *Armor* and *Super-Armor*.

In *T&J*, Invulnerability means that ordinary normal-scale physical trauma simply has *zero effect* on the character: Invulnerable characters *do not take any* Damage Ranks in normal-scale physical conflicts. However, extraordinary normal-scale physical trauma (inflicted by howitzers, lightning strikes, falls from orbit, etc.) will affect them by being translated into Failure Ranks; characters can add their

Invulnerability Rank Modifier to defense rolls involving these truly massive amounts of force.

Characters who are Invulnerable still take Failure Ranks in non-physical and indirect physical conflicts, which can reflect being tripped, entangled, knocked off their feet, taunted, tricked, blinded, distracted, befuddled, etc.

On the super-scale, Invulnerability merely adds to defense rolls against physical threats; it essentially sets the possessor on the super-scale, meaning that the extra Ranks of damage from Super-Strength do not affect him or her. Invulnerability is not considered an "Armor-like" ability (see p. 61); it cannot be Downshifted like Armor or Super-Armor to nullify damage from an attack.

At the end of a conflict Scene, all Failure Ranks will be eliminated for the Invulnerable character.

Example 1: Captain Indestructible (Expert [+4] Invulnerability) gets caught by surprise and a thug empties his revolver at the hero. The Captain yawns and takes no damage.

Example 2: Captain Indestructible gets hit by a meteor pulled out of space by Magnetic Master's space-magnet. Since this is potentially massive (albeit normal-scale) damage, the GM rolls 2d6 for the meteor and gets a 12; the Captain rolls 2d6+4 and gets an 8. He takes 4 Failure Ranks as the meteor knocks him a little silly.

Example 3: Captain Indestructible faces off against Manticore, in a classic mistaken identity situation. Manticore, knowing that the Captain is Invulnerable, opts for throws, judo flips, holds, and trip attacks against him, as well as playing mindgames with intimidation and taunts ("I know your secret identity, Captain!"). Even though he may not ever "hurt" Captain Indestructible, Manticore might still win the conflict (see *Chapter 2, Zeroing Out*, p. 23).

Example 4: Captain Indestructible attempts to stop Hyperboy (Expert [+4] Super-Strength) from running amuck. Hyperboy takes a poke at the Captain; he rolls 2d6+4 and gets a 13. The Captain rolls 2d6+4 and gets an 11; he takes 2 Damage Ranks. (If Hyperboy's attack had been against a normal-scale target, it would have done 13 Damage Ranks; see below, *Super-Strength*).



## ARMOR VS. INVULNERABILITY

*Armor* and *Super-Armor* block a certain amount damage on either scale, *Invulnerability* ignores the majority of normal-scale damage (but leaves the character open to super-scale damage). They are not versions of the same power – they're different powers entirely.

To make a truly tough character, layer *Super-Armor* and *Invulnerability*. This would grant greater benefit in defense rolls (from combining two defensive powers), total resistance to 99% of all normal-scale damage, the ability to ignore some superhuman damage, and the potential to Downshift *Super-Armor* to ignore *all* damage in a Turn.

Another option might be to permit a character possessing one of these Powers to take the other as a Power Stunt, if the GM agrees. However, it's highly recommended that GMs should look closely at this situation and levy whatever restrictions (minimum Rank, extra Hero Point cost, detailed description, etc.) they deem necessary to keep everything fair.

## LIMITATION

See above, *Limitations*, p. 36.

## LUCK CONTROL

The ability to alter one's own (or even another character's) fortune for better or worse. Luck Control permits a number of probability changes per Scene equal to MOD. A probability change can be represented mechanically by an Upshift or a Downshift, or narratively by a serendipitous or calamitous effect, with minimum of one use for Average [0] Luck Control.

Example: Red Rabbit has Good [+2] Luck Control, and has been trapped by Doctor Ivyl in a prison cell. He invokes Good Luck as a serendipitous event to find a wire hanger under the bed, which he uses with his Lockpicking Quality to pop open the door. When one of Ivyl's henchmen comes to investigate the creaking sound of the opening door, Red Rabbit invokes Bad Luck on the henchman as a Downshift on the minion's Gunplay Quality. The henchman's shots go wide, and Red Rabbit easily knocks him out. The hero cannot manipulate fortune until the next Scene.

## META-POWER

See above, *Meta-Powers*, p. 38.

## MIND CONTROL

The ability to manipulate other beings mentally. The scale of the target of the Mind Controlling attempt is important: within the genre, most normal-scale NPC

victims have limited resistance to mental domination. Treating Mind Control against these targets as a complicated situation is probably acceptable (see also *Chapter 5, A Question of Scale*, p. 60).

However, against PCs of either scale, asserting Mind Control should *always* be a conflict situation, and the PC target is able to use Hero Points to defend against or throw off the effects of Mind Control. Use the Duration column of the *T&J Intensity Chart* to show the duration that a Mind Controller has control over NPCs, while using the Power Rank Modifier as equal to the number of distinct *actions* the character can command a PC target to perform.

## MINIONS

The character has a number of henchmen or assistants to carry out his orders. This ability can be taken as a Quality or a Power. If taken as a Quality, the TN of the Power Rank gives the total number of Minions the character possesses; if taken as a Power, the TN of the Power Rank gives the number of "named lieutenants" owing loyalty to the character, plus a large number (GM's option) of faceless drones.

However, in either case, the GM will design and play these Minions as NPCs. When the character gives an order to his Minions to carry out, the GM will determine a Difficulty Rank for the command. The character then rolls 2d6, plus the Modifier of his Rank, to determine how well the Minions follow the edict (GMs should read *Chapter 6, General NPC Advice*, p. 72, for more details). See also *Sidekick* and *Super-Sidekick*, and *Vulnerability*.

## PHASING

The ability to pass through solid matter. A key point: players and GMs will need to determine if anything – energy powers, force fields, psychic powers, Sorcery – can affect a character while Phasing; this can be a campaign-wide decision ("strong magnetic fields make it harder to Phase") or the character can take a specific Limitation ("I cannot Phase through anything colored blue").

The two biggest "abuses" with a Phasing Power generally center around combat. The first is the "flicker-effect" where the character starts solid, takes a swing at a foe, connects, Phases out during the opponent's attack, and then Phases back in to strike again. Some GMs will see this as a perfectly valid Power Stunt, while others may find it annoying; the

best solution is to set the Difficulty Rank of such a Stunt at an appropriate level.

The second possible abuse involves the question of what happens when an object held by a Phased out character is dropped: does it Phase back in, or does it remain Phased forever?

In the former case, a character can then do "Phase-sniping" where he sits back, Phased-out, untouchable, all the while throwing rocks (power beams, knives, etc.) at enemies. One way to counter this would be to have a "refraction index" between the two states, as if one were looking down through water; striking a solid object from out of Phase would then become more difficult.

In the latter case, a character can grab an enemy, Phase out, release the enemy, and Phase back in. The enemy is then permanently Phased, a ghost. A decent restriction here is that whenever a character with the Phasing Power changes Phase, everything he's taken with him on that trip changes Phase too.

Lastly, can a character partially or totally Phase back into a solid object? What happens then? Sounds like a powerful attack, but one that is limited to Touch Range that has the potential to do the *attacker* damage as well.

The Rank of Phasing is most important for figuring the maximum weight of things that the character can Phase with (on the *T&J Intensity Chart*) and for rolls to Phase through "dense" or "difficult" use Phasing in conflict situations.

Example: The Funky Phantasm has Good [+2] Phasing, in a setting where strong magnetic fields impair the ability to pass through objects. He can Phase up to 500 pounds of material along with him, and rolls 2d6+2 when trying to overcome the resistance of magnetic fields, or to "flicker" in physical combat as a defensive reaction..

## POWER-ARMOR

*Power-Armor* is a super-tech suit that includes weapons, armor, transportation systems, sensory apparatus, and equipment. It is essentially a Super-Gadget (see below) or Meta-Power (see above, p. 38) that gives access to other Qualities or Powers. Power-Armor is a form of Super-Armor (see below) that permits the wearer to perform Stunts that fall under the penumbra of how its intended function is described. A character with Power-Armor should

probably note three or four routine Spin-off Stunts for the device.

Also, if a character has other Powers, they can be described as being "part of" the Power-Armor in the context of the game setting, even though they are actually separate Powers in the context of the *T&J* rules. If this option is chosen, *any* pilot of that suit of Power-Armor will get those extra Powers (and the original character can't use them without the suit).

Example: The Rescuer used package J during character generation, which gives one Expert [+4] and two Average [0] Powers. His Expert [+4] Power is a suit of Power-Armor that was intended to be used by EMTs and firefighters. The suit can perform Stunts related to this function like Super-Strength, Extinguish Fire, Healing, Life Support, Sealed Environment, etc., all at Average [0] Rank.

For the Average [0] Powers in package J, the Rescuer takes Precognition and Flight. Depending upon how his player decides, these two Powers could be "part of" the Power-Armor, or abilities unique to his character, the pilot of the suit.

Power-Armor is super-technology, on the super-scale, and allows Stunts that fits its idiom. They require the Quality of Battlesuit Pilot to operate. For suits that are limited to Qualities and cutting-edge tech only, see *Battlesuit* above.

## POWER NEUTRALIZATION

The ability to dampen or restrict the use of other Powers (and their Stunts); it has no effect on Qualities (or their Stunts). The character must make a successful attack that does at least one Damage or Failure Rank to the victim. After that, to successfully use one of their own Powers or Stunts, victims must roll higher than the Target Number of the Neutralizer's Rank. Rolls lower than the Target Number have no effect; rolls of *exactly* the Target Number overloads the Neutralization, Downshifting it one Rank. Duration for the dampening effect is per the Time column of the *T&J Intensity Chart*, p. 34.

Example: Effect Zero has Good [+2] Power Neutralization, and successfully tags Phade. For Phade to use her Invisibility, she must roll higher than a 9 for it to activate.

## POWER THEFT

The ability of temporarily stealing Power Ranks from other characters. On a successful Power Theft attack,

instead of taking Damage or Failure Ranks, the targeted Power Rank of the victim is Downshifted. Meanwhile, the attacker gains the Power Ranks; a character can steal a maximum number of Ranks equal to their Modifier (minimum 1) from any one target per Scene. One Rank of a stolen Power temporarily grants Poor [-2] Rank in that Power to the thief; more Ranks stolen Upshifts that Rank. A stolen Power can never have a greater Rank than the starting Power Rank of the target *unless* the thief already possesses the same Power.

The GM must determine the effect of having a Power zeroed by Power Theft. Is it limited to dropping the victim to a minimum of Poor [-2] Rank? Can a Power be totally stolen? If so, does that zero the victim, knocking him out of the Scene, or does it just make the Power unavailable to him? Furthermore, do stolen Powers return on their own, or must they be released by the thief? Can Powers be stolen permanently?

The *T&J* "official stance" on these issues is that Power Ranks *may* be totally stolen from a target; total theft does *not* cause the victim to zero out of a conflict (this specific exception permits them to fight on if their Powers are forcibly stolen); stolen Ranks return at the end of a Scene; and Power Ranks can only be stolen permanently if the target is *murdered* at the end of conflict *and* only if the stealing character has the necessary MAX to pay for the new Powers (a lower Rank version of the Power can be bought).

**Example:** Hijacker (Expert [+4] Power Theft) attempts to steal Snow Owl's Good [+2] Flight Power:

Hijacker makes a successful Power Theft attack, and does 1 "Damage Rank." This Downshifts Snow Owl's Flight to Average [0] and gives Hijacker Poor [-2] Flight. If Hijacker already had Average [0] Flight as one of his Powers, this theft would give him a Rank of Good [+2].

Hijacker makes a successful Power Theft attack, and does 5 "Damage Ranks." However, since his Rank is Expert, he can only steal a maximum of 4 Ranks of a Power. However, this is enough to zero Snow Owl's Flight (Good, Average, Poor, none) and give Hijacker Good [+2] Flight (Poor, Average, Good; last point of effect is "lost" because the stolen Power Rank cannot exceed the target's starting Rank). If Hijacker already had

Average [0] Flight as one of his Powers, this theft would give him a Rank of Expert [+4].

See also below, *Quality Theft*.

## PRECOGNITION

The ability to see into the future. "Passive" use of Precognition is free (and GM-controlled), but actively calling upon it requires a complicated situation roll, with GM determining relevant Target Numbers for the difficulty of the information sought. Precognition is also often limited in that repeated use of the Power "muddies the waters" of the future, leading to escalation of Difficulty Rank. A possible Stunt for Precogs is "Combat Sense," which allows the character to anticipate an opponent's moves, granting a number of Upshifts equal to the Power Rank Modifier *per Scene* in conflict situations.



## QUALITY THEFT

The ability to temporarily steal Quality Ranks from other characters. On a successful Quality Theft attack, instead of taking Damage or Failure Ranks, the targeted Quality Rank of the victim is Downshifted. Meanwhile, the attacker gains the Quality Ranks; a character can steal a maximum number of Ranks equal to their Modifier (minimum 1) from any one target per Scene. One Rank of a stolen Quality temporarily grants Poor [-2] Rank in that Quality to the thief; more Ranks stolen Upshifts that Rank. Unlike stealing Powers (see above, *Power Theft*), a Quality Thief can exceed the target's starting Quality Rank, with a maximum Rank of Master [+6]!

The GM must determine the effect of having a Quality zeroed by Quality Theft. Is it limited to

dropping the victim to a minimum of Poor [-2] Rank? Can a Quality be totally stolen? If so, does that zero the victim, knocking him out of the Scene, or does it just make the Quality unavailable to him? Furthermore, do stolen Qualities return on their own, or must they be released by the thief? Can Qualities be stolen permanently?

The *T&J* "official stance" is that Quality Ranks *may* be totally stolen from a target; total theft does *not* force the victim to zero out of a conflict (they can fight on); stolen Ranks return at the end of a Scene; and Quality Ranks can only be stolen permanently if the target is *murdered* at the end of conflict *and* only if the stealing character has the necessary MAX to pay for the new Qualities.

**Example:** Hijacker (Expert [+4] Quality Theft) attempts to steal Mike the Cop's Good [+2] Policeman Quality:

Hijacker makes a successful Quality Theft attack, and does 1 "Damage Rank." This Downshifts Mike's Policeman to Average [0] and gives Hijacker Poor [-2] Policeman. If Hijacker already had Good [+2] Policeman as one of his Qualities, this theft would give him a Rank of Expert [+4].

Hijacker makes a successful Quality Theft attack, and does 5 "Damage Ranks." However, since his Rank is Expert, he can only steal a maximum of 4 Ranks of a Quality. However, this is enough to zero Mike's Policeman Quality (Good, Average, Poor, none) and give Hijacker Expert [+6] Policeman (Poor, Average, Good, Expert). If Hijacker already had Good [+2] Policeman as one of his Qualities, this theft would give him a Rank of Master [+6].

## **QUASI-POWER**

See above, *Quasi-Powers*, p. 37.

## **RAY (OF SOMETHING)**

See *Beam (of Something)*, p. 40.

## **REGENERATION**

The character heals quickly. Regeneration restores a total of up to MOD Damage Ranks per Turn; however, the character cannot make any offensive actions during that Turn. (He can take defensive reactions or move).

**Example:** Sergeant Starfish has Expert [+4] Regeneration. During a fight with Reflex, takes a nasty kick to the ribs. He dodges the next punch, and eschews attacking the mercenary on his

action, in order to regenerate up to 4 Damage Ranks.

If a character wishes to heal others, see *Healing* above; alternative methods of self-healing are also found in *Using Hero Points* (Chapter 3, p. 32).

## **SHAPESHIFTING**

The ability to change into the form of another being or thing; animals and elements are traditional. (This Power is used on oneself; to change other targets, use *Transformation*.) The character gains a temporary Quality, Quasi-Power, or Power reflecting the form shifted into, at the same Rank as his Shapeshifting Power. That is, if a Good [+2] Shapeshifter turns into a bear, he temporarily exchanges Good [+2] Shapeshifting for Good [+2] Bear. The character gains all of the typical capabilities of the shape (gills, fire-breathing, winged flight, etc.) as appropriate, permitting thematic attack, defense, and movement Stunts, as well as anything that fits the idiom of the Shape. Look at *Body of (Something)* and *Duplication* above, and *Sizeshifting* and *Transformation* below, for some basic approaches to dealing with different aspects of changing one's body. *T&J* ideas on running animals can be found in *Chapter 6*, on p. 74.

Players and GMs can feel free to require Limitations on the Shapeshifting Power if they choose, such as restricting it to only one other shape or one class of shape (birds, males, plants, etc.), a restriction on repeating a shape more than once in the same day, a time limit before human memories begin to be lost, all shapes share the same distinctive (an unnatural) color, and so forth. "Partial Shapeshifting" (just claws, eagle eyes, viper's heat sense, etc.) is also a useful idea for Stunts based on this Power.

## **SIDEKICK**

The character has a normal-scale assistant (human, animal, or robot) to help him in his adventuring; in essence, it gives a player two characters to design and play. However, at any time, the GM can invoke a *Revoltin' Development* (see *Chapter 3*, p. 31) to take control of the Sidekick. A Sidekick has a number of points equal to the TN of the Quality Rank minus 1 for the player to purchase Qualities with (if a player takes a high Rank in Sidekick, he could end up an assistant more powerful than he is!); the Sidekick must also take one Poor [-2] Weakness. See also

above, *Minion*, below, *Super-Sidekick*, and *Vulnerability*, p. 37.

**Example:** Snow Owl has a Good [+2] Sidekick: his little sister Katie, who when the need arises, dons her costume and becomes *Owlette, the Teen Huntress!* The TN of Good is 9, minus 1, for a total of 8 points for Katie/Owlette's Qualities. She ends up with Good [+2] Armored Costume, Good [+2] Computer Nerd, Good [+2] Scrappy, and Good [+2] Gadget: Taser Glove; her Weakness is Poor [-2] Teenage Angst.

## SIZESHIFTING

The ability to grow very large and/or to shrink very small.

- ◆ **Growth.** Characters who get bigger get stronger and tougher. Any action they take while using this Power that would benefit from increased size, reach, or strength – resisting damage, lifting a truck, catching a falling person – permits him to add a number of Upshifts equal to his Power's Modifier (minimum 1) to the roll.

While big things are easier to hit, the increased toughness of a Growing character usually more than balances this out. But there may be some cases where large size will be a detriment: sneaking around, avoiding traps, crossing creaky bridges, and so forth. In these cases, either *opponents* or task *Difficulty Ranks* gain the Upshifts against the big character, or he takes Downshifts.

- ◆ **Shrinking.** Characters who get smaller get harder to see and harder to hit. Any action they take while using this Power that would benefit from decreased size or weight – sneaking around, falling long distances, breaking and entering, dodging attacks – permits him to add a number of Upshifts equal to his Power's Modifier (minimum 1) to the roll.

While small things are harder to hit, they tend to get knocked around a bit more when a foe actually does connect. In some cases where small size is a handicap (breaking free of a normal-sized opponent's grasp, lifting heavy things, attracting attention, resisting heavy winds, etc.), either *opponents* or task *Difficulty Ranks* gain the Upshifts against the small character, or he takes Downshifts.

## (SOMETHING) POWERS

If the character has "the powers of" something (scorpions, steel, poetry, dolphins, shadows, etc.), this is often best handled as a *Meta-Power* (see p. 38); see also *Control (Something)* above.

## SORCERY

The ability to do magic. In many comic books, some characters with Sorcery tend to do only a limited selection of spells that are basically Powers (eldritch blasts, sorcerous shields, dimensional portals, levitation, etc.), while others can essentially do absolutely *anything*, provided it possess a magical patina. A very simple way to implement Sorcery is to make it a *Meta-Power* (see p. 38) and permit any Power to be taken as a Stunt if it can be justified as fitting the idiom of the type of magic the character uses.

NOTE - Magic is often seen as something that can short-circuit normal defenses like Invulnerability and Super-Armor; the GM must decide if this is true for Sorcery in the campaign.

Compare a character with Fire Powers versus a character with Fire Magic. Both can fling fireballs and gout jets of flame. But the Sorcerer has a better chance than the non-magical Fire Powers character of being able to convince the GM that an unusual Stunt – walking into one fire and walking out of another across town – fits within the limits of Sorcery.

There are, of course, downsides to Sorcery. Often, magic spells require something extra to activate, unlike energizing Powers. These extra rituals are essentially Limitations (see p. 36), and could include incantations, the use of esoteric ingredients, pacts with strange inter-dimensional beings, burnt offerings, heartfelt prayers, blood sacrifice, long research in the library over forgotten tomes of lore, purity of mind and body, memorization and meditation, and so forth. If something stops or interrupts a Sorcerer's ritual even for a moment, the summoned magic tends to go awry, in the most fickle and unlucky way possible. So, while Sorcery can have great rewards, it also entails great risks.

## SUPER-ARMOR

Super-Armor is a Power that permits the character to resist substantial amounts of damage. It is distinct from Invulnerability (see above). A character with Super-Armor gets three main benefits:

1. The Modifier of the Power is added to all defensive reactions.
2. Can ignore some harm from attacks:
  - ◆ *On the normal-scale*, Damage Ranks equal to or lower than the Target Number are ignored.
  - ◆ *On the super-scale*, Damage Ranks equal to or lower than the Modifier are ignored.If an attack does more damage than can be ignored, it all gets through.
3. Luckily, Super-Armor can be voluntarily Downshifted like Armor to avoid all damage done by an attack.

Example: The Stormy Knight has Good [+2] Super-Armor, and adds that +2 to his defensive reaction rolls. If he's hit by a normal-scale attack for 5 Damage Ranks, he takes no damage (5 is less than Good's Target Number of 9); if he's hit for 10 Damage Ranks, he takes all 10. If he's hit by a super-scale attack for 5 Damage Ranks, he takes all of it (5 is more than Good's Modifier of 2). However, he may sacrifice a rank, Downshifting his Super-Armor to Average [0], to ignore all that damage.

See also above, *Armor*, p. 39, *Power-Armor*, p. 45, and *Chapter 5, "Armor-like" Abilities in Conflict*, p. 61.

## OBJECT-BASED POWERS

Normally, if a superhuman's *raison d'être* is bound up with a special item (cosmic rod, power ring, magic sword), there are three possible ways to stat it up:

1. As separate Powers that all have the same Limitation of "Requires magical or technological whatsis."
2. As a single Meta-Power with the Limitation of "Requires magical or technological whatsis", which is *in addition to* the required Limitation or Vulnerability for a Meta-Power.
3. As a Super-Gadget.

Whichever solution works best for player and GM is fine.

## SUPER-GADGETS

The character possesses super-technology devices known as Super-Gadgets (see *Cutting-Edge & Super-Technologies*, textbox, p. 42). While Super-Gadgets can be lost or broken, they are generally repairable or get back into a character's hands, either during an adventure or after it's over; they only sometimes require "fuel" or "energy" to function. (GMs should

also see *Chapter 6, MacGuffins, Plot Devices, & Trophies*, p. 69.) Only certain people can use a Super-Gadget: the owner or pilot, the creator, a Gadgeteer, a Super-Gadgeteer, or a Super-Intellect. The Super-Gadget Power can also be used for magical items or psionic foci.

## SUPER-GADGETEERING

The Power of constructing super-technology devices (see *Cutting-Edge & Super-Technologies*, textbox, p. 42) known as Super-Gadgets (see above); Super-Gadgeteers can also modify and repair normal and cutting-edge technologies. In creating Super-Gadgets, a Super-Gadgeteer puts Powers into tangible form, going far outside the envelope of what is possible in science and engineering for things like psionic shields, mind-transference helmets, petrification rays, hyperspace drives, etc. The scope of Super-Gadgeteering encompasses normal-scale Gadgeteering; a Super-Gadgeteer character does not have to take Gadgeteering as one of his Qualities (though an interesting character idea would be for a character who takes a "Cannot Gadgeteer" Limitation on Super-Gadgeteering, meaning he can only create wacky, super-technology devices and can't fix his toaster).

To create Gadgets (see above, p. 41), use the rules found under Gadgeteering (also p. 41).

To build a Super-Gadget, the Gadgeteer pays a *base cost* of 2 Hero Points, *plus* a Hero Point cost equal to what it would cost if the Super-Gadget were a Stunt off of Super-Gadgeteering, *plus* Hero Points equal to *twice* the Modifier (remember that Average [0] Rank counts as 1) of the desired Super-Gadget's Rank, as well as any additional Hero Point or in-game costs (money, materials, time) that the GM determines.

Example: Ms. Gizmatic, Good [+2] Super-Gadgeteer, wishes to construct a gauntlet that allows her to lift things and punch people as if she had Super-Strength. For an Average [0] Rank Super-Strength Super-Gadget, she would then have to pay 5 Hero Points (base cost of 2, plus 1 for an Average Rank Stunt off of Super-Gadgeteer, plus 2 for twice Average's Modifier of [0], which counts as 1), plus any requirements the GM has in terms of capital outlay or labor.

If desired, a Super-Gadgeteer can start a *T&J* campaign with two Super-Gadgets, four Gadgets

(that would have a Hero Point cost of 6 each if he were building it new), or one Super-Gadget and two Gadgets. See also above, *Gadgeteering*.

## SUPER-INTELLIGENCE

Mental capability far beyond normal human maximum. Super-Intellects gain a number of Upshifts equal to their Rank Modifier per Scene that can be used on mental tasks or conflicts *only*.

Since a Super-Intelligent character is by definition smarter than any of the players or GM, one fair (and fun) way to play this type of character is that anyone around the table can help the Super-Intellect's player in coming up with plans and knowledge. A different way to do it would be to permit the Super-Intelligent character to instantly create MOD number of "contingency plans" on the fly per session. ("I suspected you'd use your Freeze Ray, Dr. Malevolent, that's why I prepared by wearing Antarctic-grade thermal gear.") This could be seen as a version of *Detect & Discover* (see *Chapter 3*, p. 32) that doesn't cost the character Hero Points.

While a Super-Intelligent character can use their vast amount of brains to come up with cutting-edge advances on extant theories and technologies as Gadgeteers do, they don't necessarily have the technical skills to bring them into being. *Building* true super-technology is the province of Super-Gadgeteers (see textbox, *Cutting-Edge & Super-Technologies*).

NOTE - In some settings, Gadgeteering is a Stunt of Super-Intellect.

## SUPER-QUALITY

While dancing close to the edge of silliness, a *Super-Quality* can be a perfectly viable Power. Super-Qualities would be literally more-than-human ability in a mundane skill or area of knowledge. But how would it work in a game?

First, the player and the GM must decide if the Super-Quality is or is not better summed up as a version of another Power. If it isn't, consult the *DIY Aesthetic Rule-of-Thumb* section above (on p. 36), and start coming up with concepts on how the ability will work. Once both parties are happy with the Super-Quality, *write its description down*, to forestall extensive, pointless debates later: if there's text to refer to, there's a basis for discussion; if there's no common ground to refer to, arguing would be worse

than useless, and possibly *Being Lameass* (see p. 22) on both parties' parts. When a write-up is agreed upon, characters can take it as a Power.

Example: Consider a "Super-Archery" Power. Here's an example of a viable write-up for that Power:

**Super-Archery.** This ability permits the character to do super-scale damage to targets that are non-living and normal scale, treat conflicts with normal-scale opponents as complicated situations when using Super-Archery (see also *Chapter 5, A Question of Scale*, p. 60), and grants Upshifts equal to Modifier for doing difficult "trick shots."

## SUPER-SENSES

Hyper-acute or otherwise supernatural perceptions. Incredible versions of the normal human senses are fairly straightforward: their Modifier aids attempts to successfully perceive things at high Difficulty Ranks, and – for some – the Range column of the *T&J Intensity Chart* can give guidelines on the effective distances their ability functions at.

However, there are plenty of types of Super-Senses – like Penetrating Vision, Truth Sense, Danger Sense, Tracking Sense, etc. – that need a little extra thought. Utilizing the *DIY Aesthetic Rules-of-Thumb* (p. 36) is the best strategy. Perhaps Penetrating Vision can see through a number of inches equal to TN or a number of feet equal to MOD; Truth Sense is probably a limited variant of *Telepathy* (see below), and Danger Sense is almost certainly a variant of *Precognition* (see above); Tracking Sense could permit the tracking of a number of different targets equal to MOD at up to *T&J Intensity Chart* Range, and so forth.

## SUPER-SIDEKICK

The character has a superhuman assistant (human, animal, or robot) to help him in his adventuring; in essence, it gives a player two characters to design and play. However, at any time, the GM can invoke a *Revoltin' Development* (see *Chapter 3*, p. 31) to take control of the Super-Sidekick. A Super-Sidekick has a number of points equal to the TN of the Power Rank minus 1 for the player to purchase Qualities with, and a number of points equal to the Modifier to purchase Powers – Average [0] Rank Powers count as 1 point. (If a player takes a high Rank in Super-Sidekick, he could end up with an assistant more powerful than he is!). Also, the Super-Sidekick must take one Poor [-2] Weakness.

Example: Gwen Darling has a Good [+2] Super-Sidekick: a robot named PTR-1 that follows her every command. . . most of the time. The TN of Good is 9, minus 1, for a total of 8 points for PTR-1's Qualities; the MOD of Good is 2, for 2 points of Powers. Its write-up looks like this:

**PTR-1, Super-Sidekick Robot**

**Qualities:** Expert [+4] Flight (Quasi-Power; Limitation: Needs "fuel dust" every 4 Scenes), Good [+2] Armor, Good [+2] Fighting, and Poor [-2] Takes Everything Literally.

**Powers:** Good [+2] Super-Strength.

See also *Minion* and *Sidekick*, above, and *Vulnerability*, p. 37.

## SUPER-SPEED

The ability grants speed and reaction times far beyond normal; the character operates on the super-scale on these terms. Super-Speedsters get extra actions per Turn equal to their MOD (minimum 1); this means that a character with Good [+2] Super-Speed has three actions each Turn. Combine this with these elements from *Chapter 5* like *Using Multiple Abilities* (p. 59); *Using Abilities Against Multiple Targets* (p. 59); and the potential to treat conflict situations involving Powers as complicated situations (*A Question of Scale*, p. 60).

Example: Victor Vector (Expert [+4] Super-Speed) is taking on a score of Average [0] Thugs. Victor has 5 actions per Turn. Since he's a super-scale character versus normal-scale foes, he can defeat a thug with a single complicated situation roll – provided he beats their Difficulty Rank of 7. He will be rolling a 2d6+4.

Victor could attack one at a time, and have a good chance of taking out 5 thugs every Turn, one for each of his actions. Four Turns later, all of the thugs would be at his mercy.

Or, he could split his attacks between multiple targets – a bit riskier, but with a big payoff. Say he attacks 2 thugs at a time. This takes Victor's Rank of Expert [+4] down to an effective Rank of Good [+2] against each of the pair. Still, beating a 7 on a 2d6+2 is good odds. He could take out up to 10 thugs a Turn, two for each of his actions. Two Turns later, all of the thugs could be at his mercy.

Or, he could split his attacks even further. Say he attacks 4 thugs at a time, with an effective Rank of Poor [-2]. If he's very lucky, Victor could KO all of the thugs in a single Turn!



## SUPER-STRENGTH

The character has muscle-power far beyond that of even the strongest normal humans; the character operates on the super-scale on these terms. Super-Strong characters add the TN of their Power Rank to damage upon successful attacks; if they wish to punch an enemy without pulping them, they can "pull their punch" and not apply the TN bonus. In some cases, Super-Strong characters can treat physical conflict situations as complicated situations (see *Chapter 5, A Question of Scale*, p. 60). The Weight column on the *T&J Intensity Chart* provides a guideline for how much a Super-Strong character can lift.

NOTE - Important issues of realism come up regarding Super-Strength. Realistically, the punch of a character that can lift a battleship would turn a normal human's head to paste. A building lifted by one corner would crumble under the stresses of its own weight. Lifting a heavy object would drive a Super-Strong character's feet deep into the ground. But within the majority of the genre of comics, normal-scale characters get slapped around by those with Super-Strength and live to tell the tale, houses get hefted, and heroes don't get buried to their ankles in the ground when lifting a tank. If a GM wants to start dragging in realistic physics here, he should really warn his players first. (See also *Chapter 1, Style*, p. 5, and *Mad, Beautiful Ideas*, p. 3, as well as *Chapter 2, The Key to Understanding Conflict Abstraction*, p. 23.)



## SUPER-VEHICLE

*Super-Vehicle* is a Power, and represents a super-scale, super-tech mode of transportation. It's somewhere between a *Super-Gadget* and a *Super-Sidekick*. While Super-Gadgets can be lost or broken, they are generally repairable or get back into a character's hands before the end of (or after) an adventure; they only sometimes require "fuel" or "energy" to function. Once per session, the GM has the right to invoke a Revoltin' Development (see *Chapter 3*, p. 31) to do something bad to the Super-Vehicle. A Super-Vehicle has a basic Quality Rank equal to the Rank of the Power slot the character uses for it, for whatever type of vehicle it is (Luxury Car, Speed Boat, Minivan, Light Plane, Vespa Scooter, etc.), plus a number of points equal to twice the MOD of the Power Rank (minimum 1) for the player to purchase extra Qualities for it, and a number of points equal to the Modifier to purchase Powers with – Average [0] Rank Powers count as 1 point. See also *Vehicle*, and *Chapter 6, Vehicles*, p. 71.

**Example:** Phade needs a way to get around town, so she uses one of her Average [0] Power slots to whip up something appropriate. The Invisible Motorcycle starts as an Average [0] Motorcycle, with 2 points to buy Qualities and 1 point to buy Powers. Phade decides that she wants Good [+2] Silent for the Quality and Average [0] Invisibility for the Power. Voila (or not)!



## TELEPATHY

The ability to read minds and communicate silently. The character's *Telepathy* Power Modifier aids attempts to successfully read thoughts (GM sets the Difficulty Ranks for particular thoughts based on importance and such, of course), and the Range column of the *T&J Intensity Chart* can give guidelines on the effective Range of this talent.

Like *Mind Control* (see above), normal-scale NPCs are rarely able to ward off attempts for a Telepath to read their minds (see *Chapter 5, A Question of Scale*, p. 60), while PCs of either scale at least have a fighting chance. Use the *Mind Control* advice above as a guide: Telepathy should usually be a complicated situation against NPC minds, with weak-minded NPCs or trivial mind-reading being simple situations, and strong-willed NPCs or deep telepathic probes being conflict situations.

In settings where Telepathy is known to exist, canny villains will adjust for it. Perhaps they only provided limited information to their Minions and associates, so that a mind-reading hero cannot learn their entire scheme with a single roll. Maybe the comic-book trope of "the villain's monologue" is really a verbal smokescreen: if the villain is seemingly telling a hero his plan outright, why would the hero feel the need to telepathically verify it? Lastly, memory is tricky: perhaps a Minion wasn't really paying attention to their glorious leader's speech during the last staff meeting, instead letting his mind wander around topics like "geez, this snake-uniform itches," "gosh, the leader is awesome," or "I wonder if Specialist Sue will dance with me at the Minion Mixer?"

## TELEPORTATION

The ability to travel or appear somewhere else – or cause other targets to travel or appear – without moving through the intervening space. Teleporters use the Range column on the *T&J Intensity Chart*; the number of targets able to be affected is equal to Modifier (minimum 1). Some GMs may wish to tweak these numbers to better fit their campaigns, of course.

Some of the discussion above on *Phasing* can be just as useful for Teleportation, since a number of issues with these Powers are similar. Especially worthy of thought are the questions of what interferes with Teleportation, can a "flicker" or "blink" effect be used

in conflict, and what happens when something Teleports into a solid object. Ultimately, Teleportation lives and dies on Difficulty Ranks and Intensity, and Upshifts and Downshifts for appropriate situations can cover most outstanding concerns. An important thing specific to consider, however, is about Teleporting into an unknown and unobserved area: this should almost always be hard – perhaps it causes an Upshift to Difficulty Rank, or a Downshift on Power Rank, or the loss of a Turn, or something in that vein.

## TIME CONTROL

The ability to speed or slow time; it may also include traveling to the future or past. Time Control Powers are generally used for a set menu of tricks – getting extra actions by slowing time around the character or speeding up their personal timeflow, "freezing" an enemy by stopping time, attacking foes and objects by accelerating (or reversing) time's effect on them, pulling past or future versions of oneself to the present to aid efforts, etc. Players and GMs can use *Duplication* and *Super-Speed* (see above) as a guide for many of these issues.

Traveling in time is a more complicated affair, and one that is more in the bailiwick of GM fiat. Entire books have been written about time travel, the Observer effect, plastic time, quantum/parallel/branching universes, and paradoxes, etc. Frankly, hammering out the potentials and limitations of such jaunts between player and GM is key. To restate the "official stance" on time-travel in *T&J* (see *Chapter 1, Comic Book Tropes, Alternate Earths*, p. 9), time travel works, paradoxes happen, and they're either repairable or split off new realities. If necessary, GMs should construct a new column for the *T&J Intensity Chart* specifically for the "temporal range" of Time Control Powers in his setting.

## TRANSFORMATION

The ability to change the nature or composition of something or someone into that of another thing. This Power is used on other targets; to change oneself, use *Shapeshifting* or *Body of (Something)*. Judging these sorts of transmutations is probably best handled by Difficulty Ranks and Target Numbers, with Upshifts to the difficulty related to changes in state (solid, liquid, gas), changes in

kingdom (animal, vegetable, mineral), changes in size (see above, *Sizeshifting*), and changes in intricacy (simple, complex, convoluted). The permanency of such changes must also be addressed, but typically, length of the effect is figured from Duration column on the *T&J Intensity Chart*.

## VEHICLE

*Vehicle* is a Quality, representing a cutting-edge technology, normal-scale mode of transportation. It's somewhere between a *Gadget* and a *Sidekick*. Vehicles can be lost or broken, and probably require "fuel" or "energy" to function. Once per session, the GM has the right to invoke a *Revoltin' Development* (see *Chapter 3*, p. 31) to do something bad to the Vehicle. A Vehicle has a basic Quality Rank equal to the Rank of the Power slot the character uses for it, for whatever type of vehicle it is (Luxury Car, Speed Boat, Minivan, Light Plane, Vespa Scooter, etc.), plus a number of points equal to twice the Modifier of the Quality Rank (minimum 1) for the player to purchase extra Qualities for it. See also *Super-Vehicle*, and *Chapter 6, Vehicles*, p. 71.

Example: The Flaming Skull has a new ride: the *Skullmobile!* The *Skullmobile* is a Good [+2] Sports Car; the Flaming Skull has 4 points to purchase extra Qualities. He puts them into Good [+2] Fast and Good [+2] Armor – meaning that when he needs to outrun the cops, he'll be rolling 2d6+2+2 (+2 from Sports Car, +2 from Fast), or 2d6+4, and when he's patrolling Murder Alley, he'll have a little protection from gang-banger bullets.

## VULNERABILITY

See above, *Vulnerabilities*, p. 37.

## SUPERHUMAN STUNTS

This section expands on the information on Stunts found in *Chapter 2*. Stunts are the creative applications, tricks, and stratagems that superhuman characters use when their more straightforward abilities won't solve a situation. When lives are in danger, or the world lies in the balance, heroes must push themselves beyond their limits.

NOTE - Spending Hero Points to increase the Intensity of an ability via Upshifts is *not* considered a Stunt – it's just being superheroic. However, the effective Rank of Stunts *can* be figured from an Upshifted base ability (see textbox, *Stunting in Play*, p. 56).



Comic books are full of superheroes and supervillains using their powers in new and unexpected ways. Obviously, if Phade comes up with a new and successful way to use her Phasing Power every issue, performing Stunts must not be all that difficult. *T&J* encourages experimentation with its Stunt system.

Given that the penumbra concept of *T&J* for Qualities and Powers (see p. 15) is rather wide, Stunts represent inventive attempts to get around or outside of the generous boundaries of these abilities. Only Powers and Master [+6] Qualities can serve as a *base ability* for "Stunting."

The two types of Stunts are *Spin-off Stunts* and *Signature Stunts*.

## SPIN-OFF STUNTS

*Spin-off Stunts* lie outside of an ability's normal penumbra, either in function (what it does) or form (how it does it). So long as the conceived application is related to the base ability in *either* function *or* form, it can be a Spin-off Stunt. Thus, using an attack Power for information purposes (different function),

### EXAMPLE CHARACTER 3: CHRISTOPHER HYERDAHL (AKA SNOW OWL)

**Background:** Chris is just a regular guy: above average student in high school, went to college for a business degree, graduated without distinction. After working in a number of entry-level and supervisory positions in a handful of industries, he opened up his own camping and sporting goods store. Chris likes to hang out with his friends, especially if camping and outdoor activities are involved. He's devoted to his little sister, Katie.

**Motivation:** Helping people who are forgotten or overlooked.

**Qualities:** Expert [+4] Businessman, Good [+2] Conversationalist, Good [+2] Outdoorsman, Good [+2] Sidekick: Kid Sister Katie, and Poor [-2] Impulsive.

**Origin:** While skiing one winter, Chris tripped and struck his head. Hidden under a snowdrift, he remained unconscious in subzero temperatures overnight, but woke up unharmed – but not unchanged. Now, he has superpowers and memories that don't fit reality as he knows it. He remembers "previous incarnations," events that didn't happen, and intimately knows the details of people who have been long dead. He's decided to put on a costume and do the superhero thing – and see if he can make his new need to aid the underdog pay off.

**Powers:** Good [+2] Freeze Beam, Average [0] Flight, Average [0] Memories of Previous Incarnations, Average [0] Super-Senses: Darkvision, and Average [0] Super-Stealth.

**Stunts:** *Frost Manacles* (Freeze Beam Spin-off; Good [+2]; 2 HP; beat a TN of 9 to break free); *Icy Fist* (Freeze Beam Shifty Business; 1 HP; Average [0] to hit and Expert [+4] damage).

**Hero Point Pool:** 5/10

**Codename:** Snow Owl

**Uniform:** *Costume.* White bodysuit; black belt; "fuzzy" white gloves and boots with black accents; white cowl cape with mask and accent scalloping, and a "bird-feather" hem.

**Miscellany:** 6'1", 185 lbs.; blond hair and mustache; blue eyes.

*Memories of Previous Incarnations* permits Snow Owl to access memories of other individuals who have had "the power of the ice owl"; these memories are generally confused and vague, but usual provide decent information. *Super-Senses: Darkvision* allows Snow Owl to see in total darkness. *Super-Stealth* is Snow Owl's ability to sneak up (or away from) on people unseen and unheard, so long as they aren't already looking at him; treat this as a limited form of Invisibility. *Frost Manacles* temporarily holds the target bound or entangled in one place – usually feet to a floor, arm to a wall – by a quick coating of ice upon the target. For *Icy Fist*, see *Shifty Business*, p. 55.

Christopher's kid sister Katie sometimes dresses up in a costume of her own as his Sidekick, Owlette:

#### **Katie Hyerdahl (aka Owlette, the Teen Huntress)**

**Qualities:** Good [+2] Armored Costume, Good [+2] Computer Nerd, Good [+2] Scrappy, Good [+2] Gadget: Taser Glove, and Poor [-2] Teenage Angst.

a control Power for attack purposes (different function), a Power defined as affecting one Something to affect a different Something (different form), altering a Bolt to a Beam (different form), and so forth, are all acceptable Spin-off Stunts.

Using Telepathy to fry someone's brains, Super-Speed to run on water or up walls, or Weather Control to fly via "cyclonic winds" are all examples of Spin-off Stunts.

The effective Rank of a Spin-off Stunt is figured from the base ability using the *Stunt Cost Chart* (p. 56). When using a Spin-off Stunt in play, the character rolls 2d6, plus the Stunt's effective Rank Modifier. While a Spin-off Stunt does not require Hero Point expenditure to operate (unless its effective Rank would be less than Poor [-2] Rank), spending Hero Points can make a Spin-off Stunt more formidable.

## SIGNATURE STUNTS

*Signature Stunts* are "special moves" or maneuvers that a character has as part of their bag of tricks. They are the result of training with the ability, extraordinary focus, and personality. The mysterious strikes of martial artists, magic spells of wizards, secret techniques of mad scientists, the special "named attacks" of anime warriors, or the patented moves of pro-wrestlers all are forms of Signature Stunt.

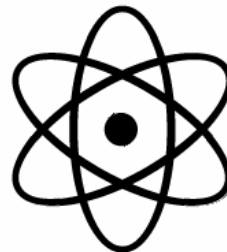
Signature Stunts *usually* lie within an ability's normal penumbra, in function and form – it's just an advanced, powerful, focused usage of the ability. However, if a character consistently uses the same Spin-off Stunt over and over *in play*, that particular move can be redefined specifically as part of the character's penumbra, and thus can become a Signature Stunt. At least three uses in play and spending one MAX to cement the Stunt (see *Chapter 3*, p. 33) is enough to justify taking it as a Signature Stunt.

Using Telepathy to mind-link with teammates, Super-Speed to unleash a jackhammer-like flurry of punches, or Weather Control to launch projectiles with gale force winds are all techniques that can be made more effective if they are Signature Stunts.

The effective Rank of a Signature Stunt is figured from the base ability using the *Stunt Cost Chart* (see p.

56). When using a Signature Stunt in play, the character rolls 2d6, plus the Stunt's effective Rank Modifier *and* the Modifier of the base ability. Signature Stunts *require* an expenditure of at least 1 Hero Point to operate; spending additional Hero Points can make a Signature Stunt even more astounding.

NOTE - This means that 1 Hero Point Signature Stunts are most cost-effective for abilities with a starting Rank of Expert [+4] or better.



### OPTIONAL RULE: SHIFTY BUSINESS

Players and GMs who like playing around with game systems may want to use this Optional Rule.

If a character wants to pump up the bass while turning down the treble (for example, boosting the Damage of an attack while reducing the Range, increasing the Area while decreasing the Range, and suchlike), this is essentially a Stunt involving simultaneous Upshifts and Downshifts. Any *Shifty Business* must have the GM's approval and costs 1 Hero Point per "Shifty," and may require the "splitting" up of aspects of power use that are typically covered by a single Rank. Let's walk through an example.

Snow Owl has Freeze Beam at Good [+2] Rank. He wants to hit a bad guy really, really hard and do a lot of damage with it. He asks the GM if he can be Shifty with Range and Damage; the GM assents, and says that the hero will be rolling against whatever the "Range Rank" ends up being. Snow Owl Downshifts the range of Freeze Beam to Average [0] and Upshifts the damage to Expert [+4] for 1 Hero Point; he'll be rolling using 2d6 to hit his foe, but on a successful hit, the attack adds the MOD from Expert [+4] for damage-determination. If he chose to spend 2 Hero Points, he could drop the Range to Poor [-2] (that'd be touch) to do Master [+6] damage... but he'd have to attack his foe in hand-to-hand, rolling a 2d6-2.

Is it worth it?

(Note that using Shifty Business is an interesting way to come up with Signature Stunts.)

## STUNT COSTS

The effective Rank of a Stunt is figured from its base ability; and some Stunts may require the expenditure of Hero Points to perform, given their complexity or the Intensity desired for the Stunt.

The chart below shows the Hero Point cost of Stunts at different effective Ranks, as calculated from the base ability Rank. Players and GMs should consult the *PDQ Master Chart* (see *Chapter 2*, p. 15) as well as the *T&J Intensity Chart* (see above, p. 34) when figuring out what Rank is needed for a Stunt to perform a specific task.

*STUNT COST CHART*

EFFECTIVE RANK (FROM BASE ABILITY)	HERO POINT COST
2 Downshifts	Zero
1 Downshift	1
At Rank	2
1 Upshift	4
2 Upshifts	8
3 Upshifts	16
... etc.	x 2

NOTE - *Be warned:* Stunting off of an Average [0] Rank – or lower – Power is really expensive for little benefit.

## STUNTING IN PLAY

For example, Snow Owl has Freeze Beam, a ray that does "cold energy" damage, at Good [+2] Rank. While fighting a pair of burglars, he decides to use it to create some sort of ice-based entanglement to bind one of them.

This is a change of function (attack to binding), and would be a Spin-off Stunt. For no Hero Points, he can create "Frost Manacles" with an effective Rank of Poor [-2], which would trap enemies. To break free, the victim would have to roll successfully against the Stunt's TN of 5 – that's not particularly difficult, even for normal people. Also, it would be difficult for him to successfully hit with it, since he's rolling at a Poor [-2] Rank, or 2d6-2.

However, if Snow Owl spends 1 Hero Point, the Stunt Rank would be Average [0], with a TN of 7 and a roll of 2d6. Better still would be a Stunt Rank of Good [+2], with a TN of 9, a roll of 2d6+2, and a Hero Point cost of 2. He can go for higher Ranks (and Hero Point expenditures) whenever he chooses.

After a few sessions of using Frost Manacles, Snow Owl could make it a Signature Stunt by spending a point of MAX, but with Freeze Beam at Good [+2], there would be little benefit from being able to add the Modifiers of the base ability (+2) and the Stunt (0) together. However, if Snow Owl raised his Freeze Beam to Expert [+4] Rank, getting Frost Manacles as a Signature Stunt would be a better deal. As a Spin-off Stunt, Snow Owl would be using Frost Manacles at an effective Rank of Good [+2] (rolling 2d6+2) for a cost of 1 Hero Point; as a Signature Stunt, he'd be rolling against 2d6+4+2 to successfully hit an enemy with them for the same HP cost.

Take another example, this time comparing Stunt Rank to Difficulty Rank: Victor Vector, a speedster (Expert [+4] Super-Speed) needs to get an antidote to the hospital, and the only way he'll be able to do it in time is by running directly across Lake Ontario. The GM informs Victor's player that in this setting, running across water would not fall under the penumbra of Super-Speed, and would thus need to be a Spin-off Stunt. (Another GM might rule that water-running is completely within the penumbra of Super-Speed in her setting; Victor would then simply roll against Super-Speed.)

Victor's player asks the GM what the Difficulty Rank is to run across water. The GM decides that it sounds like Good [9]. If Victor feels like gambling, he could try it without spending Hero Points, giving him an effective Rank of Average [0], which means he'd be rolling a 2d6. If he wanted to play it a bit safer, he could spend 1 Hero Point on the Stunt, giving him an effective Rank of Good [+2] and rolling 2d6+2 – better odds. Or he could spend 2 Hero Points for Expert [+4] Rank, and the GM might decide Victor doesn't need to roll at all, since Victor's effective Stunt Rank exceeds the Difficulty Rank of the situation.

Even if the GM in this case decides that running across water is still a complicated situation (which he may, especially if running a Grim 'n Gritty Style campaign), Victor will be rolling 2d6+4 versus a 9. Or Victor can spend 4 Hero Points for Master effective [+6] Rank, which will have only the slimmest chance of failure in the attempt.



## CHAPTER 5: SUPER-CONFLICT

It's clobberin' time!

- Ben Grimm, aka the Thing, *Fantastic Four*

Conflict situations (see *Chapter 2*, p. 21) are the core of most adventure fiction and gaming. The superhero genre is no exception! Indeed, superheroes are the *poster-children* for resolution through conflict.

This chapter takes a closer look at important elements of conflict situations, both in the source material, and under the *T&J* game system.

### TYPES OF CONFLICT

There are several types of conflict situation that can arise, which can be associated with the different sorts of *T&J* abilities. *Physical conflicts* include combat and non-fighting contests of strength or skill. *Mental conflicts* could represent puzzles, analyzing clues, argumentative debate, and battles of wit. *Emotional conflicts* can involve psychological issues internal or external. *Social conflicts* are connected to relationships with other people, groups, and society at large. *Professional conflicts* involve business dealings and corporate skullduggery. *Superhuman conflicts* involve the use of more-than-human powers, skills, or devices.



### CONFLICT OUTLINE

Conflict situations follow a straightforward outline (each is described in greater detail below):

1. Initiative
2. The Moment of Truth
3. The Damage Done

Repeat as necessary to resolve the situation.

#### INITIATIVE

*Initiative* determines who acts first in a conflict. Most of the time, the flow of the situation indicates who acts first, but in some cases, this order may need to be determined. Here's how to do it:

- A. Characters who surprise opponents automatically gain initiative *and* one free action where the opponent or opponents cannot react.
- B. Usually, characters who declare "I'm attacking!" first have initiative (if multiple characters declare simultaneously, well, that's a tie). However, if any of their targets have any level of Super-Speed, Precognition, Danger Sense, any sort of superhuman reactions or related Powers, or a Master [+6] level in a fighting Quality, go to the next step.
- C. In cases where characters are evenly matched, equally surprised, or the target has some sort of edge, roll 1d6, plus the Modifiers of any relevant abilities for the situation (Driving for an automobile race, Brawling for a bar-fight, Quick-Witted for a debate, etc.). Highest roll goes first, followed by next highest, and so forth.

NOTE - This scheme holds true for multiple characters on two (or more) sides as well.

Once Initiative is determined, conflict resolution can proceed. Characters with a higher Initiative may “hold their actions” for as long as they want, but after the last character has done something, characters holding actions need to take them or lose them. After everyone involved in the conflict situation has taken an action (or chosen not to), a new Turn starts (see p. 18), and the characters can act again, in the same order. Lather, rinse, repeat.

**Example:** Aleph is at his favorite fast-food restaurant when his enemy Beta walks in.

- A. *Aleph is unaware that Beta is there:* Beta has surprise, which gets her initiative for the conflict Scene and a free action.
- B. *If Aleph had noticed Beta walking in and Beta still attacked first:* Beta would have initiative for the conflict Scene.
- C. *If Aleph and Beta are unaware of each other and bump into each other in line:* They each roll 1d6. Aleph rolls a 5, Beta rolls a 3 – Aleph has initiative.

## STEALING INITIATIVE

Initiative can be “stolen” during a conflict. By moving, causing a distraction, striking a pose, or mysteriously vanishing and reappearing, the character lacking initiative can “restart” the sequence – at worst, forcing a re-roll of initiative; at best, gaining surprise or a free action. The GM decides whether a character's action is enough to steal initiative.

**Example:** In a building site, Bob Brick has initiative, and punches Green Grasshopper through some drywall. Instead of immediately returning to the fray through the hole, Green Grasshopper leaps to the rafters, then down upon his foe – and unexpected move which may catch Bob by surprise (the GM determines if initiative shifts or restarts in this way).

## MOMENT OF TRUTH

The attacker explains what his attempted action is, and the defender explains how he'd try to counter that action.

**NOTE** - A defensive reaction is simply how the defender wishes to *counter* the attacker's action; it is not a free attack. If Bob Brick throws a car at Telekinetic Kid, the Kid can deflect or grab the car, but he cannot throw it back at Bob – that has to wait for the Kid's action. If you choose not to decide (i.e., “stand there and hope he

misses”), you still have made a choice – and get to roll 2d6 (no modifiers).

The attacker rolls 2d6 for his relevant ability (or abilities, see below) and adds the appropriate Modifier for Rank; the defender does the same. The character with the higher total wins.

If the attacker is successful, *damage* (see below) is applied to the defender; if the attacker fails, no damage is done. A tie is just that – nobody wins, nobody loses. . . but they both muss each other up a little, taking 1 Failure Rank each.

**Example:** Aleph is going to kick at Beta's head; Beta decides to block with a kick of her own.

- A. *Aleph wins the roll:* Alpha successfully attacks, Beta takes damage.
- B. *Beta wins the roll:* Beta successfully defends, Beta takes no damage.
- C. *Aleph and Beta roll a tie:* Aleph and Beta both take damage.

## USING DIFFERENT TYPES OF CONFLICT

While many fictional or gaming struggles focus on a single type of conflict, often different types of conflict get thrown into the mix in superhero stories and games. In *T&J*, there is a good reason for a dark avenger to pause and cast a dramatic shadow, a trickster hero to taunt and goad his enemies, a superhuman to allow his lightning bolt to crackle around his fist for a moment before firing, or a villain to threaten an innocent bystander: all can be used during a conflict Scene to help whittle down an opponent or opponents. This is valuable when facing superhuman foes, especially those who are too tough to beat in hand-to-hand (see also, *A Question of Scale*, p. 60).

Smart combatants pick their attacks to get around the defenses of their opponents. An invulnerable foe might be mentally-dense as well, and susceptible to trickery. A speedy enemy can be tripped. An opponent with fire Powers could be dissuaded from burning up a car if he thinks it's full of the ransom money he demanded. A laser cannon held to the head of a mastermind's beloved Persian cat might give him pause.

Different types of attack do different types of damage depending upon the action taken (see below, *Damage Done*).



## USING MULTIPLE ABILITIES

If the GM agrees that more than one ability – that is, multiple Qualities, Powers, or even Stunts – can be brought to bear on a task, the character simply combines the Modifiers for all of the relevant abilities when rolling.

**IMPORTANT NOTE** - The potential to use multiple abilities to perform a task is not limited to conflict situations; *simple and complicated situations* can benefit from it as well.

Example 1: Green Grasshopper really wants to hit Bob Brick. He wants to use both his Good [+2] Karate Quality alongside his Expert [+4] Super-Jumping Power to wallop the super-thug. The GM assents, so Green Grasshopper will be rolling 2d6+2+4, or 2d6+6 in his attack on Bob.

Example 2: While questioning a criminal, Tigergirl unsheathes her claws and lightly draws them across the crook's cheek. This would allow her to add her Good [+2] Claws Power to her Good [+2] Interrogate Quality. She'll be rolling 2d6+2+2, or 2d6+4, to find out what she wants to know from him.

Furthermore, combining multiple abilities works if *multiple characters* wish to team-up to perform a task. If several characters are joining forces, only one of them needs to roll; usually, that's the character with the highest Initiative, but GMs can determine this as appropriate.

Example 1: Electroman (Master [+6] Electric Judo) and Dynalad (Expert [+4] Spinning Power Fu) wish to punch Doctor Ivyl simultaneously, because the Bad Doctor is hepped up on some sort of performance-enhancing Super-Gadget pharmaceutical. Electroman will be rolling for both of them, at 2d6+6+4, or 2d6+10!

Example 2: Against a towering Deathbot, Comrade Cobalt (Good [+2] Super-Strength) and the Hedgehog (Expert [+4] Mithril Quills) combine forces. Cobalt wishes to throw the Hedgehog at the Deathbot using his metal muscles, adding that force to the Spiny Wonder's super-sharp quills. The GM could have either Cobalt or the Hedgehog roll for success, or could have each of them roll 1d6 plus their Modifier, or whatever.

## USING ABILITIES AGAINST MULTIPLE TARGETS

If character wants to take on multiple targets simultaneously in a single action, he can split his attentions (and relevant ability Ranks) between them.

Of course, this dividing of attention leads to a commensurate decrease in effective skill – that is, a Downshift. For each additional target selected, apply a Downshift to the Quality Rank.

Example: Three alien Xenobugs are attacking a schoolbus! Fireball (Good [+2] Flame Bolt) is the only hero on the scene at the moment. He could shoot a fire-blast at two of the Xenobugs simultaneously at an effective Average [0] Rank for both shots, or he could try to attack all three at once with an effective Poor [-2] Rank.

## USING OFFENSIVE POWERS FOR DEFENSIVE REACTIONS

Given a decent justification, there's no reason that an offensive Power (like Laser Bolt) cannot be used as part of a character's defensive reaction in conflict ("I vaporize the bullets with some Laser Bolts!"). Indeed, for some characters, this is entirely apropos – think of an ice-based character's Freeze Beam and a fire-based character's Flame Jet canceling each other out.

However, the GM has final veto over whether or not such a usage is possible, and can feel free to charge the character a Hero Point (if he thinks the use of that Power in that way is sketchy). If the character pays Hero Points to use a power in this fashion during a Scene, he need not spend any further points to do so for the rest of the Scene.

## USING DEFENSIVE POWERS FOR OFFENSIVE ACTIONS

Likewise, given a *clever* justification, there's no reason why a defensive power (like Super-Armor) cannot be used as part of a character's attack action ("I bash the thug with my super-shield!"). Again, the GM has final veto over whether or not such a usage is possible, but in this case *should* charge the character *at least one Hero Point (or even two)* for this offensive use of a defensive ability. Depending upon the circumstances of the Scene and at his discretion, the GM may either permit further use of the Power in this method for the rest of the Scene without additional cost, or charge the character Hero Points for *every* instance of this sort of use.



## A QUESTION OF SCALE

Qualities are assumed to be on the normal-scale, and Powers are on the super-scale. Some Powers do super-scale damage to living targets; this means that if they successfully hit the target, a number of extra Ranks of damage equal to the Target Number of the Power used is added to the normal-scale damage. Nearly all Powers can do super-scale damage to normal-scale objects (mailboxes, cars, trees, buildings, etc.), provided they're not characters.

Mundane thugs are probably not going to threaten a superhuman character much; a Super-Strong character who lands a punch on a regular joe is going to easily clean the normal dude's clock. For this reason, for some situations (usually involving Master [+6] Rank Qualities, Super-Strength, Super-Speed, or Minions), treating the conflict situation as a complicated situation is *recommended*. If the super-scale character beats the Difficulty Rank of the normal-scale character's relevant Quality, he wins. From the normal-scale character's perspective, however, he's still participating in a conflict situation, with all its give and take.

However, to reflect the ability of normal-scale PCs (that is, unpowered but highly-trained humans) to take on superhumans and fight fairly, this redefining of a conflict situation into a complicated situation is best used only on a PC's behalf, or purely between NPCs. That is:

- \* *A powered NPC takes on unpowered NPCs:* Complicated situation.
- \* *An unpowered PC takes on a powered NPC:* Usually a conflict situation.
- \* *An unpowered PC takes on an unpowered NPC:* Usually a conflict situation, unless the PC has Master [+6] Rank and the NPC has Average [0] or worse Rank in the relevant ability.
- \* *A powered PC takes on an unpowered NPC:* Sometimes can be a complicated situation (depending upon abilities and characters involved; GM's call).

Nevertheless, just because a character is superhuman doesn't mean that humans can't be a threat. Teams of thugs can swarm a tougher opponent, and take advantage of the *Using Multiple Abilities* (see maintext) rules. A normal-scale opponent could aim for causing Failure Ranks rather than Damage Ranks by threatening an innocent, goading the superhuman into making mistakes, judo-flipping or tripping the superhuman, scaring the superhuman silly, etc. Canny normal-scale opponents will take advantage of a superhuman's Weaknesses and Vulnerabilities (if known). A smart normal-scale foe will definitely try to arrange as many Downshifts for the superhuman and as many Upshifts for himself as possible.



## DAMAGE DONE

*Damage* is the general term for the loss of wherewithal to continue a conflict. During a conflict situation, the participants lose resources, until one or another cannot continue. In *T&J*, this holds true across all types of conflicts; all damage is represented by a temporary Downshift applied to the character's listed abilities. These temporary Downshifts are either Damage Ranks or Failure Ranks (see also *Chapter 2*, p. 22).

Most things that do physical injury to a character (accidents, long falls, combat, etc.) cause him to accrue Damage Ranks. However, martial arts attacks aimed at delaying, tripping, entangling, grappling, pushing, pulling, flipping, throwing, tiring, etc., an opponent could be seen as Failure Ranks.

Most of the other types of conflicts cause Failure Ranks. In mental contests, people get confused or exhaust their arguments. In social conflicts, threats to loved ones can sap the will to fight on, or a person's resistance to seduction can be worn down. In business conflicts, a character's stratagems can be outmaneuvered or their assets can be liquidated, and so on.

# TRUTH & JUSTICE

A character can suffer both Damage Ranks and Failure Ranks in the course of a conflict situation. They are functionally the same thing *during* a conflict, but are regained by the character at different rates *afterward* (see below, *Recovering from Damage*).

## DISHING IT OUT

As noted under *Moment of Truth*, if an attack is successful, the difference between the attacking and defending rolls determines how much damage (Damage Ranks or Failure Ranks) is done to the defender. If the roll results are tied, *both* characters take a single Downshift.

Example: The Shrike (rolled 11 on her attack) has successfully punched Ms. Sparkle (rolled 6 on her defense reaction) in the face. Ms. Sparkle takes 5 Damage Ranks.

NOTE - *Environmental damage* – like that taken from falling, jumping through a fire, drowning, exhaustion from all night hacking, or from other complicated situations – works by comparing the Target Number of the task against the total of the character's failed roll. The difference between roll and Target Number is the Ranks of damage taken.

## TAKING IT ON THE CHIN

On the positive side, the player of the defending PC decides *where* to apply the damage (see the *Chapter 2* textbox, *The Key to Understanding Conflict Abstraction*, p. 23). It may only be applied to those abilities listed on the character's sheet (that is, not any one of the character's infinite number of "default" Average Qualities). Superhumans have a benefit here in that they have many more extra Ranks of Powers (or, in the case of Intense Training, Ranks of Qualities) to absorb damage. As noted in *Chapter 2* (p. 24), the ability that takes the first hit in conflict generates a *Story Hook*, a complication for the character's life. Preferably, the player describes the nature or rationale behind the lost Ranks; if unable or unwilling, the GM can provide description (indeed, some styles of play leave this resolution completely up to the GM).

When any one of a character's abilities drops below Poor Rank, the character is out of the Scene. *Zeroing out* like this could mean the character has totally flubbed the seduction attempt, been knocked unconscious in combat, or run out of test-taking time and must put down his #2 pencil. If possible, the player describes how and why the PC is out of the

Scene; if unable or unwilling, the GM can depict the loss of the conflict. If the Scene continues after the character falls (say, if there are other heroes yet fighting on), the GM lets the player know if/when they can return to the Scene (see below, *Recovering from Damage*).

## "ARMOR-LIKE" ABILITIES IN CONFLICT

In addition to being able to add an ability's Modifier to defensive reaction rolls (for dodging, parrying, blocking, evading, etc.), some abilities act like Armor (see *Chapter 4*, p. 39) in particular types of conflict. In each Scene (not per Turn or reaction; see boxed text, *Time in Conflict*), a character can choose to Downshift the "Armor-like" ability *once*; by sacrificing a Rank, the character can ignore *all* Failure or Damage Ranks from one action. An ability must be of Good [+2] Rank or better to be used in this way. The true Armor and Super-Armor abilities are more flexible, they can be Downshifted multiple times in a single Scene.

Ranks sacrificed in this way are recovered at the end of the Scene the same way as other Ranks (see below).

Examples: Iron Will Quality could be treated like Armor if a mind controlling villain is attempting to puppeteer them, True Love for Gary Shane Quality is "Armor-like" if someone is trying to seduce the character, Thrifty Quality could aid resistance if someone is trying to pry a donation out of the character, or Super-Agility Power could be used if the character is successfully body-checked off of the roof of a skyscraper.

## WEAKNESSES IN CONFLICT

If the character has a Weakness related to the type of conflict (for example, Glass Jaw in a hand-to-hand combat, Math is Hard! in an arithmetic test, or Can't Say No to a Pretty Face in a seduction attempt), he will have to take *two extra* Damage Ranks the *first* time – and only the first time – he gets tagged in the relevant situation. (That's why it's a Weakness; if they have an offsetting Strength that allows them to ignore or resist as above, they can use that to ameliorate the badness.) Any Story Hook generated from the influence of a Weakness should be more intense than a typical Story Hook.

NOTE - Qualities or Powers reduced to Poor [-2] Rank during a conflict situation by Failure or Damage Ranks are not Weaknesses; Weaknesses are character flaws decided upon at character generation. There's a

difference between a Weakness of Poor [-2] Unathletic (the character's never been that into sports) versus someone in a race who is normally a Good [+2] Athlete but has been temporarily reduced to Poor [-2] Rank by accumulating Failure Ranks (he's out of breath and feeling the burn).

## ***KNOCKED AROUND AND COLLATERAL DAMAGE***

While the player of a character describes the actions and reactions their characters take in conflict, decides where on their listed abilities to take Damage or Failure Ranks, it's the GM's job to help connect the player's choices here to the setting of the campaign, to the responses of NPCs, and to help weave all of them into a narrative of the story of the comic book issue or cartoon episode that is unfolding during the game.

The effects of superhuman conflict are the pre-eminent places where the players and GM can inject a lot of comic book flavor into this ongoing story. In superhero stories, people are always getting knocked back several yards, punched through walls, tackled off of half-constructed buildings, slammed hip deep into mud, smashed into cars, and so forth. Things explode violently, volcanoes erupt, mansions crumble, massive property damage happens (see *Chapter 1, Comic Book Tropes*, p. 11). Players and GMs should use these images and motifs when coming up with the effect of Damage Ranks and Failure Ranks on their characters and the nearby environment.

Example: "The Damage Rank I took to my Jogging Quality means that after Bob Brick threw me at the car, I went through the windshield feet first" or "The Damage Rank I took to my Jogging Quality means I twisted my ankle because Doctor Ivyl's Blaster tore up the sidewalk" or "the Failure Rank I took on Laser Beam is because my hand temporarily got trapped under a fallen telephone pole, and is a little numb, throwing off my aim."

A good rule of thumb is that any attack that does more than 3 Ranks of damage causes "knockback" where the character goes sprawling or trips or bounces off of a wall. Normally, this does no extra Damage, but can be amusing or provide characters for ideas in interacting with the location of the conflict, or – even better – provide opportunities to directly affect the environment with an ability, which can help characters in conflict (see below, *Lamp-posts & Lamborghinis*.)

## ***OUT FOR BLOOD?***

For physical conflicts, the default assumption in *T&J* is that characters can *only* be killed once they are unconscious or otherwise helpless. This requires no roll, check, or action, simply a statement on the attacker's next action that the he wishes to kill the victim. And only the most thuggish of supervillains (or the darkest of heroes) will opt to do this – many have codes of honor or rampant egotism that refutes killing a helpless foe.

(GMs should feel free to change this rule if they desire. Perhaps characters pick whether they are doing "bruising" damage or "killing" damage at the beginning of a conflict situation.)

And remember: especially in superhero stories, death isn't always permanent for a major character. Often, it's just an Origin for a new and improved character.

## ***RECOVERING FROM DAMAGE***

Once a Scene ends, the injured character will begin to recover lost Ranks. How many he gets back depends upon whether he was in *momentary danger* or is still in *continuing danger*.

### **MOMENTARY DANGER**

If nothing else is going on, and the character is otherwise safe, relaxed, and lacking any time constraints (like having a supervillain breaking down the door or a bomb timer countdown), the character was in *momentary danger*. At the end of the Scene, *all* Damage Ranks and Failure Ranks are removed, restoring abilities to their appropriate levels.

### **CONTINUING DANGER**

If the overarching situation that the conflict happened in is risky, stressful, or under deadline (a race to get an organ transplant to the hospital, chasing down a faulty warbot, assaulting a villain's secret volcano base), the character is in *continuing danger*. At the end of the conflict Scene, characters recover all lost Failure Ranks, but only 2d6 lost Damage Ranks of abilities. The player selects which ability Ranks are restored. However, the character will not recover any more Ranks until the end of the next Scene, GM tells them to roll again, a Quality or Power comes into play, or the character spends Hero Points to heal (see p. 32).

NOTE - A Strength like "Quick Healer" should allow the character to gain back the standard 2d6 roll, plus their

Modifier. A Weakness like "Slow Healer" would mean that the character rolls 2d6-2 (the Modifier for Poor), with a minimum of zero Ranks regained.

## CONFLICT JAZZ

Here are some methods to get even more of your tactical or strategic ya-yas out. Any character can choose to use them in the course of their conflicts.

### CONFLICT STRATEGIES

Characters have two additional strategies that they can use in conflicts, depending upon if they want to specifically concentrate on attack or defense. One can only be used by an attacker and the other only by a defender. If a PC wishes to use either of these strategies, they must announce it at the beginning of the Turn. They cannot be used on the same Turn.

### FLIP OUT

The attacker flips out against the target, making strong attacks (physical, mental, or social) without much heed to defense. A *Flip-Out* grants an Upshift for the attack (and any subsequent damage) and a Downshift on all defensive reactions and other non-conflict-related actions until his next action.

### PLAY IT CAGEY

The defender plays it cagey, opting for safety by not taking any chances, holding back in the conflict. *Playing It Cagey* grants an Upshift for all defensive reactions and a Downshift on all the character's non-conflict-related actions for the Turn; unfortunately, Playing It Cagey means that the character's *next* attack action will also suffer from this Downshift.

### LAMP-POSTS & LAMBORGHINIS

On the normal-scale, *T&J* assumes the use of appropriate tools alongside a Quality – a spreadsheet program with Accounting, a pistol with Gunplay, a little black dress with Seduction, etc.

On the super-scale, however, there's a grand tradition of Super-Strong supers grabbing pieces of the scenery to whomp on each other with. This is usually seen from within a superhero context as a reasonable thing to try. To encourage this massive property damage and related amusing descriptions, here's a simple method to map this comic book trope in *T&J*: using a "tool" like a car, lamppost, or manhole cover grants one Upshift to the character's next attack. Most "tools" used in this fashion cannot

handle more than one or two exchanges of attack action and defensive reaction before being destroyed.

Example: Bob Brick (Average [0] Super-Strength) rips a lamp-post out of the ground, and starts beating on American Ranger. Bob is using the reach and sweep of the lamp-post to better connect with his foe. He rolls with an Upshift when trying to hit the hero. He rolls 2d6+2 and gets a 9; American Ranger gets an 8. Bob hits the hero for 1 Damage Rank; if he had not used the lamp-post, he would have missed with his attack.

## SUPER-CONFLICT EXAMPLE

Here's an extensive example of super-conflict, involving *Joe Thug* (see p. 17), *Bob Brick* (see below), and *Snow Owl* (see p. 54). The relevant portions of each character's write-up appear below.

NOTE - A version of this super-conflict example appeared in the Spring 2005 issue of *Daedalus* at:

< <http://www.chimera.info/daedalus/articles/spring2005/truthandjustice.html> >.

The version below is significantly different than that earlier one, since the issue appeared during the *T&J* playtest, and elements of the system changed. Also please note that the GM is explaining the rules in *extreme* detail, because Snow Owl's player is new to the game.

### SNOW OWL

**Qualities:** Expert [+4] Businessman, Good [+2] Conversationalist, Good [+2] Outdoorsman, Good [+2] Sidekick: Kid Sister Katie, and Poor [-2] Impulsive.

**Powers:** Good [+2] Freeze Beam, Average [0] Flight, Average [0] Memories of Previous Incarnations, Average [0] Super-Senses: Darkvision, and Average [0] Super-Stealth.

**Stunts:** *Frost Manacles* (Freeze Beam Spin-off; Good [+2]; 2 HP; beat a TN of 9 to break free); *Icy Fist* (Freeze Beam Shifty Business; 1 HP; Average [0] to hit and Expert [+4] damage).

**Hero Point Pool:** 5/10

### JOE THUG

**Qualities:** Good [+2] Brawler, Good [+2] Criminal, Poor [-2] Ugly.

### BOB BRICK

**Qualities:** Good [+2] Athletics, Average [0] Criminal.

**Powers:** Good [+2] Stoneskin (Super-Armor), Average [0] Super-Strength.

**GAMEMASTER (GM):** While flying your nightly patrol, you see (courtesy of your Darkvision) two people on the roof of the Museum of Expensive Antiquities, apparently trying to open a door.

**SNOW OWL (SO):** What do they look like?

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**GM:** The smaller one is dressed all in black, with a ski-mask on. The larger one seems just to be wearing black pants – and from his shirtless condition and stony, red skin, you recognize him as Bob Brick, a minor supervillain.

**SO:** They must be trying to break in – I'll stop them!

**GM:** How?

**SO:** Well, I'll swoop down silently and start busting heads before they know what hit them.

**GM:** Which one first?

**SO:** Brick.

**GM:** Okay, you've got your Super-Stealth going for you, but they're criminals performing an illegal act, so I'm sure they're probably keeping a lookout for any interference. If neither of them manages to beat the Target Number of your Super-Stealth, I'll give you surprise. If one of them twigs, you'll have initiative for the Scene, but you don't get a free Turn to wail on them like you would if you had surprise, okay?

**SO:** Sure, sounds fair.

**GM:** The TN of Average Super-Stealth is 7. The little guy gets a (rolls) 6, and Brick gets a (rolls) – damn – 10. Brick sees you hurtling down on them at the last minute and yells "Look out!" to his partner. Now what?

**SO:** I'll fly down and punch him.

**GM:** Are you going to land and then punch him, or punch him on the fly?

**SO:** I'll do the second one. I increase my flight speed, my cape sweeps out like a owl's wings on the hunt. I grit my teeth and wind up for a hard right to his jaw!

**GM:** Very cool. Take an Upshift on your attack for that great description! Brick will try to jump out of your way as his defensive reaction. Roll!

**SO:** (rolls) A 4 and a 6 plus 2 for the Upshift gets me a 12.

**GM:** Pretty good! (rolls) A 2 and a 3 plus 2 for Athletics and 2 for Stoneskin gets Brick a 9 – 12 minus 9 would be 3 Damage Ranks, normally. However, Brick's Stoneskin is a form of Super-Armor. It totally blocks normal-scale Damage Ranks lower than its current TN – that'd be 9. So nothing gets through.

**SO:** Crap! What if I Freeze Beamed him? Don't I get to add my TN to damage?

**GM:** Only to non-living targets.

**SO:** I see. Damn, that was a good roll, too! (grumbles under breath for a second) Hey! Since I used my Flight

Power as part of the attack, does that count as a super-scale attack?

**GM:** (thinks) Hmm. Interesting. I could go either way on that. (thinks a bit more) Listen, let's not bog down the session in debate. I'll just say "no" for now, but we should talk about it after the session, okay?

**SO:** All right. (hmpf)

**GM:** You swoop in and sock the criminal with a hard right across the jaw, but it barely seems to faze him. "That tickled!" he quips. Your hand stings a little.

**SO:** "Caught you red-handed, Brick!" I say.

**GM:** (laughs) That's mighty funny. Give yourself a Hero Point for that. (GM makes a tick mark against Snow Owl's MAX; when enough are collected, the size of his MAX will increase.)

**SO:** Awesome. (scribbles on sheet; his 5 HP become 6 HP) I think I'm gonna need it.

**GM:** Now it's his little buddy's action. Joe Thug tries to punch you right in the breadbasket. What do you do?

**SO:** Can I use Flight to dodge backwards?

**GM:** Sure. It's only Average Rank, so you're not getting any big benefit from it.

**SO:** It'd look cool.

**GM:** True! Roll. (rolls) 2 and 2 plus 2 for Brawling is 6 for Joe's attack.

**SO:** (rolls) 4 and 3 is 7.

**GM:** You zip back far enough that Joe's punch never connects. Now it's Brick's action. He's gonna swing at your face, to return your little face slap. What's your reaction?

**SO:** Fly away again.

**GM:** Let's roll. (rolls) 3 and 4 plus 2 for Super-Strength is a 9.

**SO:** (rolls) Two 3's, plus 2 is an 8. He gets me.

**GM:** You take 1 Damage Rank for the roll, plus 7 Ranks from his Super-Strength, for a total of 8.

**SO:** Damn! (studying his sheet) I'll drop Businessman from Expert to Good to Average to Poor, that's 3. Conversationalist from Good to Average to Poor, that's 2. Outdoorsman from Good to Average to Poor, 2 more. And Sidekick from Good to Average for the last one. Geez.

**GM:** Brick's Super-Strength punch slams into your face. You reap the benefit of being superhuman; that hit probably would have knocked Joe there into next week. You see stars and dollar signs.

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Okay, that's the first hit in combat, which will give a Story Hook for later. Let's see: Businessman, Businessman - Got it! "Meanwhile, across town, at City Mall, the lights in the store next to yours flick on." (GM scribbles notes about one of Snow Owl's neighbor retailers burning the midnight oil for mysterious purposes; if the GM had gotten stuck for an idea, he could have just made a note saying "Snow Owl's Story Book = Businessman" to think about later.)

Okay, new Turn; you go first.

**SO:** I'm going to hit Brick with Frozen Manacles and slow him up, so I don't have to deal with two opponents at once. I thought taking on the tougher guy was smarter, but I can't concentrate on him with Joe whittling away at me at the same time.

**GM:** You sure? He does have Super-Strength, and he'll probably be able to break the Manacles just by stretching his arms.

**SO:** Good point. I'll freeze Joe's wrists to the access door, so I can work on Brick.

**GM:** Okay, you're spending 2 Hero Points and rolling Frozen Manacles.

**SO:** I'm planning to use this often.

**GM:** Do it a couple times over the next couple sessions and spend a MAX point, and you can justify taking it as a Signature Stunt. That way it'll be more effective than a regular Spin-off Stunt.

**SO:** Okay, sounds good. (rolls) 3 and 5 plus 2 is 10. (drops his 6 HP to 4 HP)

**GM:** (rolls) Joe gets a 2 and a 4, and I'll let him use his Brawling here to twist out of the way. . .

**SO:** Can he do that? I mean, my Frozen Manacles is a sort of jet of ice, ranged attack thing that solidifies on contact.

**GM:** I figure a dodge is kosher; people throw stuff at each other during a brawl. Bottles, paving stones, trash cans.

**SO:** Well, alright.

**GM:** So, 2 and 4 and a 2 is 8, and he's frozen to the door. Brick's action. He rips an HVAC unit from the roof and wings it at you. (considers giving Brick an Upshift for the improvised weapon, but decides against doing so in order to give the Owl a fighting chance)

**SO:** I'll do the flying dodge thing.

**GM:** Roll for defense. (rolls) 2 and 4 plus 2 for Brick's Athletics and 2 for his Super-Strength is 10.

**SO:** (rolls) 6 and 4 is 10. It's a tie!

**GM:** That means you both take a Damage Rank. Uh. . . The HVAC unit slams into the wall behind you and just explodes, sending a shower of sharp metal pieces everywhere, at high velocity. A bunch of screws graze your hip, and one big piece spangs hard off of Brick's chest. What are you taking the damage to?

**SO:** I'll drop my Memories of Past Incarnations from Average to Poor. I don't think I'll have time to commune with the Ice Owl Spirit in the middle of *this* fight.

**GM:** Brick utterly ignores the 1 Damage Rank. Next Turn.

**SO:** He's really tough. I'd use Icy Fist with some extra HP behind it, but that has to hit first, and I'm not sure how that'll work through his Stoneskin. He's too tough.

**GM:** Well, physically, at least. Instead of going for physical Damage Ranks, you should try to give Brick some mental or social Failure Ranks. Think of Spidey fighting the Rhino.

**SO:** (looks at sheet) I shouldn't have dropped Conversationalist. I could have taunted him with that. Hey, if I put an ice-slick down so he loses his footing, would that be Failure Ranks?

**GM:** Sure! That'd be a new Spin-off Stunt. With your Freeze Beam of Good, you can do a Poor slippery slick (TN of 5) for free, an Average one (TN of 7) for 1 Hero Point, a Good one (TN of 9) for 2 Hero Points, and so on.

**SO:** I'll do it at Good.

**GM:** Spend 2 HP and roll at Good.

**SO:** (drops his 4 HP to 2 HP) A 5 and a 6 plus 2 is 13!

**GM:** Brick tries to jump out of the way; he rolls a 2 and a 4 and a 2 for Athletics -I won't give him the MOD for Stoneskin because you're not aiming directly at him - for a total of 8. That's 5 Failure Ranks, and Super-Armor does not protect. (looks at Brick's sheet) He'll drop Good Athlete to Poor, that's 2. Average Criminal to Poor for 1. Average Super-Strength to Poor for another 1. And he'll drop Good Stoneskin to Average for the last. He's slipping and sliding all over the roof! (Brick is two Ranks away from losing the conflict.)

**SO:** Awesome!

**GM:** Smart thinking. Joe attempts to break free from the Frozen Manacles. 2d6 vs. the Manacles' TN of 9. (rolls) 3 and 4 is 7; Joe's still stuck.

For his part, Brick will try to get off of the slick area. It's a TN of 9, he's rolling 2d6, minus 2 because of his Downshifted Athletics. A 5 and a 6 less 2 is 9, and he manages to get off of the icy spot.

**SO:** Darn it!

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**GM:** New Turn, your action.

**SO:** Well, if I'm understanding the combat system here, that softened him up, right?

**GM:** More or less. He still has Average Stoneskin.

**SO:** I'm going to try Icy Fist this guy right in the face, since it does more damage if I hit. (spends 1 HP, dropping from 2 to 1, then rolls) A 6 and a 2 gives me 8.

**GM:** Brick's gonna stand there and take it, if he tried to dodge, the minus from his Athletics would hurt him. He rolls a 1 and a 3, for 4. That's 4 damage, which is below the TN of his currently Average Stoneskin of 7. No effect.

**SO:** Wait a second – I take no bonus on the chance to hit with Icy Fist in return for more damage if I do!

**GM:** Oh, yeah, you're right. I forgot. What was that, again?

**SO:** (looks at his character sheet) On a successful hit, I do Expert damage.

**GM:** So let's add 4 to that damage, it becomes 8. Okay, that beats his Stoneskin's TN, which means he'd take all 8 Ranks. Cold, bluish energy crackles around your fist as you deal Bob Brick a mighty uppercut!

**SO:** Yeah!

**GM:** Not so fast, bucko! Since his Stoneskin is still at Average, he can voluntarily Downshift it to Poor to ignore all damage. So that's what he's gonna do.

**SO:** (curses under his breath)

**GM:** Hey, the bright side is that he can't do that again. Also, he's swaying on his feet pretty badly. (All of Brick's abilities are at Poor Rank.)

Joe's still trying to get unstuck from the door you froze him to. (rolls) 1 and 3 is 4; still stuck.

Brick's gonna take another poke at you. He rolls two 4s, minus 2 for Poor Super-Strength, for 6.

**SO:** Shouldn't he have another minus 2 for Poor Athletics?

**GM:** I just used that when was dodging or throwing stuff at you. I'm not counting hand-to-hand fighting as part of Athletics.

**SO:** Okay. (rolls) A 2 and a 3, for 5. Crap.

**GM:** That's 1 Damage Rank, plus 5 for Brick's current Super-Strength of Poor, or 6 Damage Ranks.

**SO:** I'll drop Average Sidekick to Poor, that's 1. Average Darkvision to Poor, that's 1. Average Super-Stealth to Poor, that's 1. Average Flight to Poor, that's 1. And

Good Freeze Beam to Average to Poor, that's 2. I take one more hit, and I'm out.

**GM:** New Turn, your action. Now what? You're both nearly dead on your feet.

**SO:** I should do the ice slick again.

**GM:** With your Freeze Beam at Poor, that's gonna take 2 Hero Points to do at all.

**SO:** I only have the 1 HP left. Can I Freeze Beam him to knock him back onto the existing ice slick? Not to do any damage, just to push him onto it so he can get himself another Failure Rank?

**GM:** Sounds like a decent idea. Brick's just gonna stand there and hope you miss, because if he does anything – try to resist it with Stoneskin or dodge it with Athletics, he's worse off. Go ahead and roll.

**SO:** 3 and 6 minus 2 is 7.

**GM:** 3 and 3 is 6. You hit for one Failure Rank, which is enough knock him back. What happens?

**SO:** Huh?

**GM:** You knocked him onto the ice slick. What happens then? Tell me.

**SO:** Uh, well, Brick slips and slides all over the melting ice slick. He waves his big, stony arms around trying to catch his balance. Then he trips and falls down again.

**GM:** Excellent. In fact, he knocks himself silly. He's unconscious.

**SO:** Yeah! Damn, that was close. Is the other guy still there?

**GM:** (rolls 5 and 6 for 11) Nope. Looks like Joe got away.

**SO:** Only for now. And I got the big one. I call Owlette and tell her to contact the cops while I catch my breath.

**GM:** That'll end this Scene. Give yourself 2 Hero Points for capturing a dangerous super-criminal.

**SO:** Thanks.

**GM:** If you're done patrolling for the night, you get all of your lost Damage Ranks back. If you want to chase after Joe, roll 2d6 for lost Ranks and we'll take it from there. . .







## CHAPTER 6: GAMEMASTERING

### A HIGH-TRUST RPG

The most important part of *T&J* is that it's *high-trust*. Players have to be convinced that the GM isn't going to try and screw them over, and GMs have to believe that the players will have some faith in the game, setting, campaign tone, gaming group, and his or her fairness. One way that this trust can be built is by having the GM and players cooperate in generating characters, as well as some of the details of the setting.

## T&J CAMPAIGN DESIGN

### BASIC SETTING CONCEPTS

Before sitting down with players to come up with their characters, it's a good idea for GMs to have at least some basic setting concepts in mind. "This is a setting with supervillains, but no superheroes," "This is an alien world that based their culture off of comic books," or "This is a pulp-supers campaign taking place in the Thirties" – plus a jotted list of notes on Style and Tropes – are all a GM needs to start the discussion with players. He may have more or less than this down on paper (or may be using a setting right "out of the box" like those in *Chapters 7, 8, and 9*), but the keyword at this stage is "be flexible": no plan survives contact with players, and that's not necessarily a bad thing.

#### BASIC SETTING CHECKLIST

- ◆ Style (Grim 'n Gritty, Cinematic, Four Color, or Animated)
- ◆ Period (When and Where)
- ◆ Additional Genre Inclusions (Western, Swashbuckler, Space, etc.)
- ◆ Rules Changes from *T&J*
- ◆ Comic book tropes to emphasize (see *Chapter 1*)
- ◆ Comic book tropes to avoid (see *Chapter 1*)

In communicating with players, the GM can discover where their interest lies, what sort of characters

they'll want to play, what sorts of foes and challenges they'd like to meet, what sort of adventures they'd like to have. There's no need to fully-develop a setting until the potential PCs are underway – that way, the GM can tailor the setting to both the players and their characters, revising where necessary.

### HELPING PLAYERS CREATE CHARACTERS

It is imperative for the GM to be involved in character generation of PCs. He can answer questions about the rules, offer suggestions or refinements to player ideas, throw out bits of provisional setting to connect to a PC's Background, or swipe ideas from the players' Backgrounds to weave into the setting. It's helpful for both sides of the gaming table.

Some GMs enjoy having all the players generating characters at the same time; others prefer more private, one-on-one interactions with individual players. The former way is really handy when building a team of heroes, so that every character has a role, common Origins get thrashed out, and pre-existing relationships or connections can be created. The latter way is better for games that will have the characters meeting for the first time, or if they have secrets that the other characters and players shouldn't know. While some players are excellent at keeping player and character knowledge separate, others are less skillful at it. Many groups follow a middle path, talking out general ideas in a group, then working out the specific ideas in private.

This debate is a perennial gaming topic, and isn't going to be decided here; the best way is to simply know your players.

#### HELPING WITH POWERS

Since the GM will be adjudicating the use of Powers in the campaign, it's always a good idea to understand what players want their characters to be able to do, and help the players refine and modify their Power choices to match their expectations.



Furthermore, the GM will be intimately privy to which optional rules, system tweaks, and setting information will be used from this book.

If a player wants a Power that's too narrow (e.g., *Talk to Fish*), the GM may suggest that such a concentrated ability may not be useful enough to keep the player interested; if the Power is too broad (*Make a Wish*), the GM could say that it needs a bit more focus or a Limitation. If a player neglects to pick any fighting-related Powers in a game that will be mostly beating up bad guys, the GM should point this out. Likewise, in a more nuanced game, if every Power a player takes is just for ass-kicking, the GM needs to tell the player that they might not be able to spend a lot of time in the spotlight. If players are just stuck for ideas, suggest a few rolls on the tables in *Chapter 11*.

Minor superpowers may work better as Stunts rather than Powers – for example, *Talk to Fish* could be a Stunt off of *Aquatic*, which would have a lot more general applicability. Constraining broader superpowers with entertaining limitations can be more fun in play – for example, say that *Make a Wish* requires the possession of a magical lamp Super-Gadget (that can be stolen) and a Limitation of "must give verbal orders to the djinni" (which can be stopped or perverted in numerous amusing ways).

The GM should always suggest a Meta-Power (see *Chapter 4*, p. 38) if he sees a simple organizing principle for a player's desired Powers for his PC. He should also always take any player-designed Meta-Powers and make up an NPC with the same Power.

## HELPING WITH STUNTS

With luck, players will explore the neat applications of their abilities with lots of Stunts in play. The creativity of the player is the only limitation. However, some players have a hard time coming up with neat stuff when starting at zero. This is an area where the GM can encourage the player to think outside the box, and suggest any nifty ideas that come to mind.

When deciding if a Stunt is possible, there are three ways for a GM to answer:

1. Yes.
2. Yes, but. . .
3. No, but. . .

*Yes* means the Stunt will work just as the player intends. *Yes, but. . .* points out flaws and other issues that will crop up when the Stunt is attempted. *No, but. . .* says that the Stunt can't be attempted, but the GM **must** offer a method, suggestion, or hint for the player that seems more appropriate.

One important rules consideration for *T&J* GMs to keep in mind: effective Stunting off of Good [+2] or lower Ranked Powers is expensive in Hero Points. If a player is of a particularly creative mindset, he might be doing a lot of Stunts, so GMs should suggest that the player take an Expert [+4] Rank or better Meta-Power, enabling plenty of Average [0] Stunts. On the other hand, if a player prefers to stick with a basic set of straightforward Powers that he won't be Stunting, the GM should suggest the best ways to take advantage of the Power options in character generation.

## SETTING CREATION

Once the PCs have been created, the GM can take up the work of full-blown setting creation. One of the best ways to start this process is to take the PCs' Backgrounds and judiciously select bits to emphasize in the overall setting. Looking for common causes and effects can be handy, as can playing a little "connect-the-dots." If *Conflagration's* Background says that he comes from the Midwest, and *Aviatrix's* Origin happened in Omaha, maybe there's a connection there. Perhaps the man who killed *Snow Owl's* last incarnation is the criminal grandfather of *Violet Avenger*. Maybe *Doctor Vicious* "arranged" the Origins of all the characters.

Another step is to divide what's *public* (known to everyone) and what's *secret* (not widely known, probably even to PCs). GMs might even include a middle category of *semi-secret* stuff, known to PCs but not to everyone at large.

After that, the *comic book tropes* should be considered (see *Chapter 1*), some recurring NPCs generated (the police commissioner, supervillains, a selection of minions, etc.), and locations planned (described and mapped), specifically the ones that would likely come up in the first few game sessions – see below, *Scenery, Props, & NPCs*.

Lastly, an adventure or two should be designed: an introductory session is usually useful. See *Designing Adventures*, p. 74, for ideas.

## SCENERY, PROPS, & NPCs

**Basic Technique:** Describe things by paying attention to what all five senses could tell PCs about the location or the character encountered.

### GENERAL LOCATION ADVICE

A few quick, punchy sense impressions are all that's really necessary to set the scene for many players. "The basement room is about the size of a handball court, and lit by a yellowing 60 watt light bulb on a cord. It's dank and smelly, as if a sewer pipe had burst in here a couple months ago and they never quite got the stench out. Some stains down the cinderblock walls attest to this possibility."

Full architectural drawings of every building a GM plans to use in a campaign are probably unnecessary. However, maps and floor plans are handy things to have around, if only to serve as reminders for descriptions. As a GM, you can use rulers and graph paper (and make one "PC" map and another "GM" map with all the secrets on it) or a crayon and the back of a placemat – whatever it takes to help a GM and his players visualize the area.

### HEADQUARTERS (HQs)

Many superhumans and supernormals have a sanctum sanctorum, a hidden base, a secret cave, or other form of *Headquarters* (HQ) in which to plot, plan, prepare for, and recover from their fantastic adventures. Examples include the Batcave, the Fortress of Solitude (either Superman's or Doc Savage's version), the JLA Watchtower, Avengers Mansion, and the upper floors of the Baxter Building.

These special command centers can act as a form of limited character in that they may possess Qualities – like a Good [+2] Security System, Good [+2] Trophy Room, Average [0] Secret Escape Tunnel, or even Poor [-2] Back Door Won't Lock. Reading across the *PDQ Master Chart* (see p. 15), the GM can use these Qualities to generate Difficulty Ranks (and Target Numbers) for their in-game effects: for example, besting a Good [+2] Security System would be Good [9] Difficulty Rank task. Some Qualities may also come in handy in other ways: an HQ with a Good

[+2] Danger Room could provide plenty of in-game "screen time" with which to refine abilities (see *Chapter 3, Improvement*, p. 33) or an Expert [+4] Sickbay could add its Modifier to Ranks recovered when characters use it to heal from damage when in Continuing Danger.

GMs can add interest to the PC group's HQ by allowing the players to help select the HQ's Qualities. Each player assigns two Good [+2] Qualities to the HQ; these can be combined with other players' choices to Upshift the Rank – for example, if two PCs pick "Security System," the HQ would have an Expert [+4] one. The GM then selects an additional Good [+2] Quality – *and* maybe even a Poor [-2] Weakness! – for the HQ.

With GM permission, PCs can build new Qualities – or even Powers – into an HQ by spending earned Hero Points as if for Improvement.

### GENERAL PROPS ADVICE

In *T&J*, most uses of a Quality are assumed to include the use of any usual tools. Instruments that are the usual gear of a character (power rings, cosmic rods, battle-armor, etc.) are *part of the character*, and should be purchased as either Gadgets, Super-Gadgets, or Powers with suitable Limitations. But then there are the really unusual tools that adventures revolve around: the secret plans, the weather control satellite, the robot dinosaur, the dimensional gates, etc. – in a word, the *Props*.

### MACGUFFINS, PLOT DEVICES, & TROPHIES

Coined by director Alfred Hitchcock, a *MacGuffin* is the common term for a thing in a story that exists to motivate characters to chase it, capture it, *not* use it, or destroy it. Marcellus Wallace's briefcase in *Pulp Fiction*, the Ultimate Nullifier from *The Fantastic Four*, the Maltese Falcon, the mysterious box in *Kiss Me Deadly* are examples. MacGuffins are plot attractors, which snag Story Hooks like there's no tomorrow (see *Chapter 2*, p. 24, and below, *Collecting Story Hooks*, p. 79).

Then there are *Plot Devices*. Unlike MacGuffins, which cause havoc simply by existing, a Plot Device actually does something impressive. The One Ring in *The Lord of the Rings*, the magical field of poppies in *the Wizard of Oz*, or Lex Luthor's green kryptonite ring in *Superman*. Plot Devices often have amazing,

nigh-irresistible capabilities, and are also magnets for Story Hooks.

If PCs gain control of a MacGuffin or Plot Device, they can use its abilities without restraint in the current adventure. However, after that, it becomes a *Trophy*. If the PCs have a *Trophy Room* in their HQ, they can store any Trophies they get on adventures, and – with a Hero Point expenditure (see *Chapter 3*, p. 32) – can go back and use the Trophy in subsequent adventures. A Trophy Room can hold a number of Trophies equal to the Target Number of the Trophy Room Rank. Trophies do not necessarily have to be defined before use – that way, a *character* can say, "I use Dr. Photon's Inviso-Cape from the Trophy Room!" even if the *players* never ran through a session involving Dr. Photon. Additionally, while their magnetic power over Story Hooks as Trophies is much weaker than when they were MacGuffins or Plot Devices, they can still attract adventure: villains busting in to reclaim their potent gear, stealing the equipment of their criminal rivals to complete their latest nefarious scheme, or "rescuing" a deactivated or imprisoned team-member.



However, if players continually "raid the Trophy Room" (especially for the same Trophy), it would probably be wise for the GM to either ask a player to take the Trophy as one of their Powers, or arrange an adventure or event that takes it out of the PCs' hands.

Below are some example write-ups for MacGuffins, Plot Devices, and Trophies:

**Apocalypse Ants.** Contained within a triple-layer glass globe, these devilish nanomachines combine into "units" with the size and general shape of army ants. Each Ant-unit contains the appropriate numbers and types of nanobot to completely destroy an Earthlike world. . . eventually. They can eat through an inch of steel in seconds, replicating all the while. They're extremely durable, and – en masse – exceedingly strong. If communicated with at the right frequency and in the correct language/code, they can perform simple tasks in relative safety.

Luckily, they're dumb as hell, and cannot eat glass – everything else is fair game. Their comm-systems can be jammed by flooding the area with microwaves. Unfortunately, "the right frequency" to command the Ants changes regularly as they attempt to unjam their comm-systems. Furthermore, the complete code-language is unknown, only a few commands have been learned. For this reason, the Apocalypse Ants are too dangerous to use indiscriminately.

**The Big Shoe.** This titanic shoe is made of a *completely* invulnerable material – it ignores *all* damage on the normal-scale and the super-scale. Furthermore, it appears to be opaque to all sensory wavelengths. It is unknown what this material is or where it came from (and lots of people would like to know). Worn by the giant android A-KILL-X during its attack on Washington, DC (in order to protect the android's single weak spot), the Big Shoe was removed through heroic trickery. It now graces the Trophy Room of one of the super-groups that fought off A-KILL-X's attack.

**Lunar Laser.** Your basic doomsday device: a huge laser cannon, two stories tall, with a built-in fusion reactor. The beam can vaporize anything it hits in line of sight at up to a quarter of an Astronomical Unit away. The cannon was removed from the Moon after its Mad Scientist creator fell into its reactor core. The weapon can fire twice, then takes several days to recharge.

**Meta-Detector.** Looking like an MRI machine on crack, this device can be used by a skilled operator to find superhumans and analyze Powers at a distance. It can also be used to home in on specific meta-wavelengths (i.e., superpowers). Unfortunately, the machine is difficult to use, requires careful adjustment for best results, and tends to blow out its vacuum tubes (yes, vacuum tubes) if used for too long in one session.

**Power Neutralizer Igloo.** A contraption that looks like nothing more than an igloo constructed of greenish Lucite. This prototype "supervillain holding cell" would have made its inventor a billion dollars from municipalities and research labs – if it wasn't super-technology and impossible to mass-produce (see *Chapter 2, Gadgeteering*, p. 41). It is invulnerable to normal-scale damage, can hold a superhuman powerless indefinitely, and never overloads (see *Chapter 4, Power-Neutralization*, p. 45). It can be operated by any Gadgeteer, Super-Intellect, or Super-Gadgeteer, but only can be repaired by a character with Super-Gadgeteering at Expert [+4] Rank or better.

**The Sorcerer's Staff.** This potent device was left on this plane by a powerful, heroic, dimension-traveling mage named Raken-Zur. "Keep this safe, here, in this place, until I pass this way again," he told the guardians, and vanished. Only characters with Sorcery can use the Staff at all, and then in only a limited fashion (the Staff's powers are limited by the Sorcery Rank of the wielder). The Staff can generate an utterly impenetrable force field for a short period of time, will grant precognitive visions for a span of days equal to the character's Sorcery MOD to any mage that touches it, and will provide Flight (at Sorcery Rank) to the wielder. Unfortunately, removing the Sorcerer's Staff from wherever "here, in this place" happened to be when Raken-Zur left is a mistake: the Staff summons an extraplanar entity to collect and return it. If the first entity is dispatched, two entities show up after an hour. Then three. Then four. Then five. And so on, until the Staff is put back into the original place.

## VEHICLES

Essentially, Vehicles in *T&J* act as a limited type of character, and as such, are streamlined for story-purposes rather than reality simulation. All vehicles

have a basic (*Vehicle*) *Quality* describing what type of conveyance they are – like Car, Boat, Plane, Helicopter, Motorcycle, Space Shuttle, etc. – at Average [0] Rank; the penumbra for this (*Vehicle*) *Quality* covers things like basic handling, speed, cargo space, fuel efficiency, and sturdiness.

Characters can take Vehicle (see p. 53) as a *Quality* or Super-Vehicle (see p. 52) as a *Power*. If a character has the Vehicle *Quality* or Super-Vehicle *Power*, they have a certain number of extra points to purchase additional abilities for the vehicle. Vehicles have twice their MOD in points to purchase extra *Qualities*; Super-Vehicles have twice their MOD points to purchase extra *Qualities* and MOD points to purchase extra *Powers* (minimum 1).

Alternatively, the GM can give a group of characters access to a common *Team Vehicle*, much as they have access to a common HQ (see above). *Team Vehicles* get one Good [+2] *Quality* and one Average [0] *Power* per player; they can combine their assignments with other players' choices to Upshift the Rank of a single ability – for example, if two PCs pick "FTL Drive" *Power*, the *Team Vehicle* would have a Good [+2] FTL Drive. Lastly, once per session, the GM has the right to invoke a *Revoltin' Development* (see *Chapter 3*, p. 31) to do something bad to the vehicle.

Some possible vehicle abilities include:

- ◆ **Armor-Plated.** Works like the Super-Armor *Power* (see p. 48) for the vehicle and its passengers.
- ◆ **Big.** The vehicle is bigger than the usual of its type.
- ◆ **Cargo Space.** How much additional stuff it can carry, in cubic yards equal to the Rank's TN.
- ◆ **Economy.** Increased fuel efficiency.
- ◆ **Fast.** Adds to vehicle's speed for races and contests; it is faster than other vehicles of its type.
- ◆ **High-Performance.** How nimble it is, and adds the Rank's Modifier to piloting rolls for acrobatics and crash-landings and such.
- ◆ **Passenger Space.** How many characters it can carry, with a number of seats equal to the Rank's TN.
- ◆ **Spaceworthy.** The vehicle has life-support and other systems sufficient to leave the atmosphere.
- ◆ **Stealth.** Observers must roll vs. Rank's TN to detect vehicle.

- ◆ **Submersible.** The vehicle has life-support and other systems sufficient to travel underwater.
- ◆ **Tough.** Works like the Armor Quality (see p. 39) for the vehicle and its passengers.
- ◆ **Weaponry (basic).** Provides one or more normal-scale weapon Qualities.
- ◆ **Weaponry (advanced).** Provides one or more super-scale weapon Powers.

This list is not exhaustive; as with character abilities, anything can be a Vehicle Quality or Power.

Treating Vehicles as characters means that a Vehicle adds its applicable Modifier to the pilot's roll when the pilot tries to do something tricky with it (see *Using Multiple Abilities*, p. 59). To go fast, for example, a Good [+2] Sailor in a speedboat (Average [0] Boat, Good [+2] Fast) rolls against a 2d6+2+2, or 2d6+4.

Vehicles gain Failure and Damage Ranks in conflict just as characters do. However, when Damage or Failure Ranks are taken in vehicular situations, the pilot (or relevant crew member) dictates if the Downshifts are applied to the *vehicle* or to the *character himself*. For example, say a pilot in fighter A shoots bomber B's gun turret. Bomber B's gunner can split up the damage between *his* Qualities and *plane B's* Plane Quality – or any specific Quality that bomber B has – as he sees fit.

Looking at this system, one can see that a character could go head-to-head with a Vehicle and defeat it in conflict. A powerful superhuman could shrug off cannon-fire and smash pickup trucks; a super-normal can take out a villain's roadster with a well-thrown Catarang. In *T&J*, this sort of thing is a *feature*, not a bug.

Below are some example write-ups for vehicles that erstwhile characters could run into in their adventures (feel free to slap extra weapon or armor abilities on these conveyances, if appropriate):

- ◆ **Car (economy).** Average [0] Car; Good [+2] Fuel-efficiency.
- ◆ **Car (luxury).** Average [0] Car; Good [+2] Rich, Corinthian leather interior.
- ◆ **Car (upper-end sports).** Average [0] Car; Good [+2] High-Performance, Good [+2] Fast.
- ◆ **Motorcycle.** Average [0] Motorcycle; Good [+2] Handling, Good [+2] Go Where Cars Can't.

- ◆ **Plane (prop).** Average [0] Plane; Poor [-2] Noisy.
- ◆ **Plane (jet).** Average [0] Plane; Good [+2] High Performance, Good [+2] Fast.
- ◆ **Saucer (alien, short-range).** Average [0] Spacecraft; Master [+6] High-Performance, Good [+2] Fast, Good [+2] Spaceworthy, Poor [-2] Alien Control Panel.
- ◆ **Speedboat.** Average [0] Boat; Expert [+4] Fast.
- ◆ **Tank.** Average [0] Tank; Expert [+4] Cannon Quality, Average [0] Machine Guns, Average [0] Super-Armor, Poor [-2] Requires Additional Crew.

## GENERAL NPC ADVICE

A quick description, at the same level of detail as the one for the basement room mentioned above under *General Location Advice* works well for NPCs, too. "A short, chubby figure crouches in the shadows, and even in the faint illumination cast by your flashlights, it gleams wetly. Its huge, protruding eyes reflect green in the dim light, and in a croaking voice, the alien says, 'Help me.' What do you do?"

Remember, in *T&J*, everybody can do just about anything at Average Rank; you only need to concentrate on where they're better or worse than average. A character without any Qualities is utterly without distinction, has no penumbras of knowledge, talent, skills, or relationships, and *zero* capacity to absorb damage. They'd be one-hit victims, extras in the background, more or less dramatically unimportant.

In *T&J*, everyone should be a precious and unique snowflake – even if he or she is a very small snowflake. You don't have to make up full character sheets for every Tom, Dick, and Harriet the PCs will meet. Just list a single Quality or two that would be important for the NPC when they interact with the PCs. If the NPC is an encyclopedia salesman, he might have only Good [+2] Salesman and a name.

Examples: A typical bystander is probably just an Average [0] Citizen. A beat cop probably doesn't need any more than an Average [0] or Good [+2] Policeman Quality; while detectives might rate an extra Good [+2] Detective in addition to that. A typical petty criminal may only have an Average [0] or Good [+2] in Criminal; tough guys like Mafia enforcers might add a Good [+2] in Tough or Gunplay. A soldier could have an Average [0] or Good [+2] Soldier Quality. And so forth.

However, there are some specific NPC types in *T&J* games that require a little more discussion.

## SPECIFIC NPC TYPES

**Minions.** The henchmen of villains, the rank and file of criminal organizations, the swarms of robots that are sent to dispatch the enemies of their masters – in a word: cannon-fodder. Generally, Minions make up for what they lack in Quality by what they bring in Quantity. A typical minion should have fewer Qualities than a standard character: at most, one or two Goods, one or two Averages [0], and at least one Poor ("Fanatically Devoted to Leader" is popular). To make things easier when GMing, it's also a handy idea to use the same write-up for all Minions.

Minions are also perfect NPC type to apply the rules in *Chapter 5* (see p. 60) for converting conflict situations into complicated ones for PCs. See also *Chapter 4*, p. 44, for taking Minions as a Quality; see Jolly Roger's write-up (p. 80) and *Chapter 8* for examples of Minions.

**Sidekicks and Super Sidekicks.** Subcharacters of a player's main character. See *Chapter 4*, p. 47 and p. 50.

**PC-Grade NPCs.** Characters that are generally equivalent to player characters – the villains of a hero's rogues gallery, or superheroes from other cities (or worlds). They can stand toe-to-toe with the average PC. No mystery there: they're built using the same character generation process as PCs. See the end of this chapter and *Chapters 7, 8, and 9* for some example PC-Grade heroes and villains. GMs should feel free to fiddle with any of them, altering hero to villain or vice-versa, tweaking Backgrounds and Motivations, and increasing or decreasing abilities to customize them for their particular campaigns.

**Veterans.** Some characters are somewhat better than the average starting PC, usually due to greater experience. Heroes and villains with a long history, or those who are able to take on a handful of foes all by their lonesome, are best modeled as Veterans. GMs should use the same basic character generation process as for PCs, but feel free to give them 4 additional MOD points of Qualities and 2 additional MOD points of Powers, broken out into Ranks as the GM desires. These extra points can boost the standard options given in *Chapter 3*, or can be used to open up new "slots" for Qualities and Powers (one

point would Average [0], two would be Good [+2], etc.).

**World-Class.** Some NPCs are the big boys and girls of the setting, the ones that make the earth quake and give even the most stalwart hero pause. Archvillains and rampaging monsters fit into this category. World-Class characters are built like Veterans, only they get 8 extra MOD points of Qualities and 4 extra MOD points of Powers (or more), broken out into Ranks as the GM desires. (There should only be one or two World-Class *heroes* in a setting, so as not to steal the PCs' thunder; but three or four World-Class *villains* make challenging foes for a whole PC group.)

## MORE EXPERIENCED PCs?

Can the *Specific NPC Types* rules suggestions be used to generate older, wiser PCs?

The "official stance" on this for *T&J* is "no" – these rules are intended to provide credible NPC mentors and archfoes for PCs and PC groups.

However, once you've purchased this game, you can do what you wish. If it adds to your fun, go for it. However, if you do adopt these adaptations for PCs, have *all* the PCs share in the bounty.

## SUPERHUMAN COMMUNITIES

Like any community, a collection of superhumans will have plenty of connections with each other. Friendships, romances, rivalries, enemies, common hangouts, their own slang. GMs should spend some time considering the interactions between the heroes and villains in their settings. Is Phade friendly with the Vixen, due to a long-ago adventure? Is Guy Vermack jealous of Doctor Widget's super-technology? Is Drakesville the place "to be seen" as a superhero? Has Storm Knight ever tangled with Jolly Roger, or has he ever had a beer with the Rescuer? If supervillains call normal people "pathetic ground-huggers" or "the monkeymass" or "the Johnny Paychecks," what does each word-choice indicate?

The web of associations between superhumans changes the setting from flat descriptions on a page to a vibrant tapestry of a world. Do not neglect it!

## ROGUES GALLERIES

As superheroes wage battle with supervillains, they will begin to accrue a set of foes that consistently

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return. These enemies are called the hero's *Rogues Gallery*, and are seen as significant threats (see *Chapter 1*, p. 12). Just like with more law-abiding superhuman communities, a Rogues Gallery has its amities and enmities. However, it is important that the one thing they all have as a foundation is their opposition to the particular hero or heroes – and common ground sometimes leads to common cause. When the Jester, the Puffin, the Puzzler, and Vixen all team-up together against the Flaming Skull and Cranium (the Boy Brainiac), you *know* you're in for a crazy ride.

## ANIMALS

Essentially, animals in *T&J* act as types of characters. As such, they are streamlined for story-purposes rather than reality simulation. All animals have a Good [+2] (*Animal*) *Quality* that is used for the animal's basic abilities; its penumbra covers perception, survival, fleeing, fighting, and all other inherent capabilities that particular animal possesses.

The powers of Shapeshifting (p. 47) and Transformation (see p. 53) often involve animals. Also, characters can take animals as Minions or Sidekicks (see p. 47) or as a Super-Sidekick (see p. 50). In the latter cases, the extra points can be used to purchase additional abilities for the Animal. For extreme animals (whales, dinosaurs, war-lions), extra abilities probably should be purchased.

Some possible extra animal abilities include:

- ◆ **Armored.** Works like the Armor Quality (see p. 39) to reflect a tough shell, thick hide, or protective scales.
- ◆ **Big.** The animal is larger than an adult human.
- ◆ **Fast.** The animal is generally fast, or faster than others of its type.
- ◆ **Hunter.** The animal is skilled in hunting, tracking, and stealth.
- ◆ **Small.** The animal is smaller than a human child.
- ◆ **Strong.** The animal is generally strong, or stronger than others of its type.
- ◆ **War-Trained.** The animal has been taught to fight human combatants.

Below are some example write-ups for Animals that characters could run into (or change into) during their adventures:

- ◆ **Crocodile.** Good [+2] Crocodile, Good [+2] Armored Hide.
- ◆ **Dinosaur (generic B-movie).** Good [+2] Dinosaur, Master [+6] Big, Good [+2] Scaly Hide, Good [+2] Strong.
- ◆ **Dragon.** Good [+2] Dragon, Expert [+4] Armor, Expert [+4] Big, Good [+2] Flight, Good [+2] Breath Weapon.
- ◆ **Elephant.** Good [+2] Elephant, Good [+2] Prehensile Trunk, Expert [+4] Big, Good [+2] Thick Hide.
- ◆ **Griffin.** Good [+2] Griffin, Good [+2] Flight, Good [+2] Talons/Claws.
- ◆ **Horse.** Good [+2] Horse, Good [+2] Fast, Good [+2] Strong.
- ◆ **Lion.** Good [+2] Lion, Good [+2] Bite, Good [+2] Sprint.
- ◆ **Mouse.** Good [+2] Mouse, Good [+2] Small.
- ◆ **Octopus (giant).** Good [+2] Octopus, Good [+2] Big, Good [+2] Tentacles, Average [0] Ink Cloud.
- ◆ **Shark.** Good [+2] Shark, Expert [+4] Bite, Good [+2] Swim.
- ◆ **Tiger.** Good [+2] Tiger, Good [+2] Bite, Good [+2] Hunter.
- ◆ **Unicorn.** Good [+2] Unicorn, Expert [+4] Fast, Good [+2] Strong, Good [+2] Magic Horn.
- ◆ **Wolf.** Good [+2] Wolf, Good [+2] Fast, Good [+2] Bite, Good [+2] Smart.
- ◆ **Xenobug (alien giant insect).** Good [+2] Insect, Good [+2] Big, Good [+2] Chitin Armor, and either Good [+2] Venom *or* Good [+2] Claws *or* Good [+2] Flight.

## DESIGNING ADVENTURES

Almost all game books have advice on how to design adventures, and this one is no different. However, the discussion below will attempt to boil it down for supers genre RPGs.

### OBSTACLES & OPPORTUNITIES

Good adventures – and many Scenes within those adventures – should encourage PC characterization

and interplay through action. Once the GM and the player have a basic handle on the nature and personality of a character, the GM should arrange situations where this nature and personality can be expressed through tasks and dialogue.

*Obstacles* are those things that get in a character's way: villains, rivals, mysteries, traps, locks, walls, lawyers, innocents plunging to their deaths, that sort of thing. *Opportunities* are situations that (with some effort) could pay off down the road: schmoozing with the mayor, showing off for the crowd, doing charity work, helping out another hero, attending public events, bonding with the teammates, and so on. A basic Scene needs either an Obstacle or an Opportunity; a more complex Scene may have two of either; really intricate Scenes should include several of both types.

Obstacles and Opportunities provide ways for characters to display their, well, *character*. The way Megagirl reacts to a giant robot attacking San Rafael is going to be different from how Inspector Specter does; the method in which Inspector Specter chases down the serial killer Springhill Jane will be certainly different from how Megagirl does the same thing; and their manner of communicating through dialogue will be different.

## THE SPLASH PAGE

Also known as the *Teaser*, this is an image or situation that sets the scene. It starts the adventure off with a bang. It might be a brooding image of the hero gargoyling over the rainy city, a happy team picnicking in civilian clothes, an old man walking out of a bar and falling down dead with a knife in his back, a scientist type saying something ominous, or any shocking event that must be backed-up from and then explained. The Splash Page sets the mood and tone for the adventure – and may or may not even involve the PCs immediately.

## CLUE & DISCOVERY

*Clue and Discovery* is the typical cat-and-mouse method of comic book or cartoon super-criminals. Their escapades often follow this rough outline:

1. Villain does (or prepares to do) something.
2. Hero finds out about #1 (before or after the fact).

3. Hero does research, sets alarms, maps patrol routes, etc.
4. Villain does something else; this time Hero is alerted, and races to the scene.
5. Hero-Villain confrontation.
6. Villain escapes (with or without his target), but has left a clue of some sort in word or deed.
7. Either:
  - ♦ Repeat steps #3 through #6 (at least once, but sometimes multiple times); or
  - ♦ Villain captures Hero and puts him in a deathtrap.
8. Whereupon Hero finally susses out the problem, lays just the right trap for the villain, the stars come right, digs down deep inside to triumph, whatever, and. . .
9. . . . the Villain is captured (or escapes by the skin of his teeth).

Lather, rinse, repeat.

The way I look at it, comic book superhero stories are pretty simple. There's one guy who's got one set of powers and he's got to fight another guy who's got another set of powers, or else he's got to deal with a natural disaster or something. But instead of seeing that as a limitation, I looked at it as if you're a blues musician and you've just got three chords: C, G, and D. That's it. But if you add two minor chords, you've got every Beatles song. So you go in there and you start to really improvise, add in those minor chords. . . what I have to do is disguise that enough so the readers don't realize that they've been reading the same story all their life. That's where the creativity comes in.

– Grant Morrison interview, *Writers on Comics Scriptwriting*

## SITUATION & RESPONSE

*Situation and Response* is another interesting adventure pattern, where something bad is happening or threatening to happen, and the heroes have to stop it. Meteors crashing towards Earth, alien invasion fleets, natural disasters, apocalypses, that sort of thing. Always good for an adventure heavy on the planning and resources-utilization.



## THE TWO-PAGE SPREAD

Every adventure should have at least one incredibly visual, exciting, action-oriented "set piece." Something to catch the eye and memory; something to make the players come back for more. We call this *the Two-Page Spread*. While most RPGs use combat in this role, there are plenty of other action tasks that can also fill this requirement. A few examples would be a pulse-pounding race along the rooftops, an escape from plummeting airplane, infiltration of a villain's stronghold, escapes, convincing the alien overlord that invading Earth is a pretty stupid idea, discovering that the team's faithful butler is secretly one of their archvillains – it's all good.

## ISSUES, EPISODES, & CLIFFHANGERS

For the biggest bang in today's hurly-burly world, adventures should be planned to be contained within a single issue of a comic book or television episode (read: sessions), with the occasional two-parter, week-long mini-series, or twelve issue maxi-series. That way, each session is a distinct event. Use the *Clue & Discovery* advice above for rough idea on how to structure adventures, but only practice and knowledge of the gaming group will help GMs refine their plotting and timing skills.

If an adventure needs to stretch over more than one session, leave some or all of the PCs in a dangerous situation – a *cliffhanger*. This can increase interest to come back and see what happens next. Cliffhangers can also be used in the middle of a single adventure session, preceding a short break or intermission, to ratchet up the suspense.

## RETCON IT!

Another way to add interest or generate adventure ideas is to revisit what has gone before and put a new interpretation or spin on it, fill in missing gaps, or even just observe it from a different perspective: "Doctor Devilish got his powers from the same meteor that gave me *my* powers?" This is *retconning* (see *Chapter 1*, p. 12).

Flashbacks and short "origin-retellings" are great for this sort of thing. When used with a deft hand, retconning can add to the depth and texture of a setting. When used clumsily, it can be utter crap, and drag down things that were formerly fun or interesting. Be warned!

## MEANWHILE. . .

*Meanwhile. . .* (also called *Cut-Scenes*) is a great method to pause the action for characters, while showing other events of interest – like Story Hooks or unfolding plot points – that are going on. If the PC group has split up, it's a vital technique, especially if the active PCs are left in a small cliffhanger when the cut-over to the inactive PCs happens.

## TITLE CHARACTER

A cute conceit that some groups might want to explore is that of the *Title Character*. A simple way to sum it up is with a reference to the comic book trope of *Hoo'd Win?* (see *Chapter 1*, p. 11). If Ultrawoman and Hyperman get into a fight, who wins? Well, it depends greatly on which comic book or cartoon show the fight happens upon. Usually, the headliner will win in these cases (even if it appears that he loses – he gains vital info, delays the opponent, or somesuch).

Adopting this conceit could mean that each session of a campaign "happens" in a different PC's "title." The headliner for the session might get a free Upshift or the ability to dictate a single plot, setting, or NPC point during the session. In the next session, it takes place in the next PC's series, and that PC gains the freebie. And so forth.



## VILLAIN JAZZ

Things to keep in mind when running supervillains:

**Most villains are of equal power to the heroes, or weaker.** Otherwise, they wouldn't need to escape: they'd just beat the tar out of any do-gooders that stand in their way. An interesting thing here is that in superhero stories, villains scale to their opponents.

If Manticore takes on King Viper and his Snakemen in his own title of *Manticore the Manhunter*, he can regularly beat the reptile overlord. However, if King Viper takes on the Justice Alliance – Manticore and five of his superhero friends – in the team-up comic *Justice Alliance Adventures*, the villainous snake becomes a more dangerous adversary. No one hero can beat him, even though Manticore cleaned his clock just last month all by his lonesome. Villains scale to match their heroic adversaries du jour, and this is just part of the genre.

**Deathtraps.** When you spend a lot of time fixating on a hero who thwarts you regularly, you tend to dream up ridiculously baroque ways to humble, torture, or kill them. Plus, it passes the time.

**Monologuing.** Those fools at the University may never have listened to the villain, but by God in Heaven, someone will (preferably when stuck helplessly in a Deathtrap). When a villain starts monologuing, that's a dramatic Scene break, permitting heroes to recover their wind and summon up the reserves to return to the fray, summon reinforcements, or escape.

**Getaways.** When they're losing a conflict, villains generally run away before the bitter end. They tend to escape through two main methods: 1) *diversions* (tricks, traps, threaten or endanger innocents); and 2) *temporary outperformance* (physical or mental). The sudden, unheralded appearance of escape pods, backpack helicopters, smoke bombs, secret passages, self-destruct systems, or other Plan Bs are all implementations of these mechanics in action.

**Escape-proof prisons.** . . Aren't. (See *Villain Points*, p. 33.)

**Hideouts.** Villains seem to sink substantial resources into many small hideouts scattered around their area of operation. This way, if something goes wrong, they can rest, recuperate, and re-equip. They also spend a remarkable amount of time looking for

locations for their next escapade that fits their motif and motives – abandoned or isolated properties are a big plus.

**Opinions of hero(es).** Remember, villains spend a lot of time interacting with their hero or heroes. How does the villain consider the hero? Is he or she seen as an equal foe, an annoying insect, an obstacle to be overcome, a misguided fool, a potential romantic partner, what?

**No body.** . . Not dead. (See *Villain Points*, p. 33.)

**Sniping is rare.** While pulling a trick on a hero to weaken him for the eventual conflict is typical, or a warning shot can be fired nearby to draw the hero out, sniping from hiding with overwhelming firepower generally isn't done. No matter how much sense it would make realistically.

**Rogues Gallery Rivalries.** How does the villain look at his or her fellows in the local Rogues Gallery? Are they seen as equals, allies, usurpers, mutual enemies, catspaws to be used, a dating pool, a koffee klatch, a bunch of folks to play poker with? Remember, they might spend a lot of time side-by-side in cells at the penitentiary or the asylum. How do they all get along? (The *Batman: the Animated Series* episode – "Almost Got 'im" – shows a little of this, where several Bat-villains are playing poker and trading stories about the Dark Knight.)

## RUNNING THE GAME

Being the GM for an RPG is tough work: you've got to set the Scene, portray the NPCs, adjudicate the rules (especially those involving Powers and Power Stunts), create situations to be resolved, help shape the story of the game with the players, and encourage them to role-play for their entertainment and everybody else's. It's a rough – but rewarding – gig.

GMs are *fun-enablers* for their players, providing a backdrop for the PCs to go and adventure. They should suggest, encourage, and challenge players in ways such that their PCs are as cool and as interesting as possible. This means that GMs should:

- ◆ Point out when the player is misinterpreting, misunderstanding, or honestly doesn't know a particular *T&J* rule.

- ◆ Make suggestions to the player on how a PC's chosen action could be more effective under the rules or their character write-up. (Within limits, of course: it's the player's character to play, after all.)
- ◆ Draw out more information from the players about their characters' personalities, histories, or actions.
- ◆ Encourage the players to try things that are out of the ordinary (like trying to communicate with the alien robot army attacking Earth, or combining Powers in unexpected ways).
- ◆ Build on what the players give them – weaving abilities, personalities, Backgrounds, Origins, actions taken in past sessions by characters, hints dropped by players in conversation – to create interesting sessions for them.

## USING YOUR SENSES

In a *T&J* game, the main tools to use for good GMing like this are your *Common Sense*, *Game Sense*, and *Comics Sense*:

**Common Sense:** Evaluate characters, abilities, scenery, and situations in terms of “Is this reasonable or fair, given the situation?” Depending upon these elements, what is “reasonable” or “fair” may change drastically, however. For example, while some families have a basic security system in their house (reasonable), that system probably does not include lethal weaponry. On the other hand, the home of a paranoid might very well have a sophisticated security system with man-traps and semi-lethal defenses.

**Game Sense.** Evaluate characters, Powers, scenery, and situations in terms of “Should I make the PC(s) roll for this?” Depending upon what your players' characters are up to, and the style in which you run your game (see *Style*, p. 5), this can vary wildly. Surprisingly, more often than not, the answer is *no*. A randomizer – like a dice roll – should only be used if the situation is really and truly an *important risk*. For example, take a cop pursuing a crook in a rooftop chase. The crook jumps a narrow gap onto the next roof. In a gritty game, the dangerous nature of such acrobatic shenanigans may be considered both

important and a risk; thus, the GM should call for some sort of roll. However, if the game is highly-cinematic, the cop probably needs no roll to follow his target across a generic gap: he's an action hero, and that sort of thing is *de rigueur*. Know when to apply rules and when to abstract them for the comfort of your players.

Additionally, *T&J* abstracts most of the “fiddly bits” anyway. Instead of laboring to come up with a particular way to map an effect into game rules, just pick what seems best and run with it. Use Modifiers for a small range of effects (-2 to +6) and Target Numbers for a wider range (5 to 13), the Power Intensities when comparing things to realistic benchmarks, and apply Upshifts or Downshifts in extreme situations – now you're good to go.

**Comics Sense.** Evaluate characters, Powers, Stunts, scenery, and situations in terms of “Would this thing work, if this game were a comic book I was reading?” In many ways, having good Comics Sense allows you to chuck the rules and fly by the seat of your pants – this is especially important when the players come up with something cool to do with their powers that fits their idiom and iconography. For example, say that a PC wants to use his Telekinesis as an area effect, to “feel” his way through a dark room. Would that work in a comic book with a telekinetic hero? Probably, so the PC can probably attempt it as a Spin-off Stunt. Comics Sense means being able to judge imaginative applications of superhuman ideas *honestly* as regards the *genre*.

## DETERMINING DIFFICULTY RANKS

One of the important jobs of the GM is setting Difficulty Ranks for tasks. One thing to take into serious consideration when doing this how the overall campaign Style (see *Chapter 1*, p. 5) affects how hard it is to do things – what might be easy in one Style may be impossible in another.

**Example:** Dr. Ivyl has set up some bigass Doomsday Device that relies on the water system of the City. The PCs need to convince the Mayor to shut the waterworks down temporarily.

In *Grim 'n Gritty* Style, this could be an Expert [11] Difficulty – and may require Upshifts gained from compromising photos or other blackmail or deal-cutting; this may entail several Scenes worth of work.

In *Cinematic* Style, this is probably a Good [9] task, and definitely a Scene to itself, where the PCs must convince the Mayor to pull the switch.

In *Four-Color* Style, convincing the Mayor might be just an Average [7] task, and not even a Scene – it could be an action taken within another Scene, or simply happen "off-panel."

In *Animated* Style, it will probably be a Good [9] task, but can be a Scene, action, or off-panel as drama, group tastes, and running time of session dictates.

## MAPMAKING AND RAILROADING

GMing, as a skill, usually involves both mapmaking and railroading. *Mapmaking* is when the GM lays out potential clues, NPCs, places, plots, MacGuffins, events, and so forth for the PCs to wander across as they will. *Railroading* is when a GM feeds specific clues, NPCs, places, etc., to the players so they can only follow a single specified path.

Used with moderation and common sense, both aspects contribute to the RPG experience; at extremes, either can seriously detract from the fun. Mapmaking lays an entire world at the PCs' feet. . . but if the player or characters are currently lacking initiative or clarity, they might just wander around without following any adventure hooks. Some railroading – like a call from the commissioner, a supervillain's escape, the introduction of a powerful NPC, or "you're all overcome with knockout gas" so as to get the heroes into the deathtrap – can be helpful to help hook PCs to experience a specific set-piece or get them moving. (But GMs must let know the players that such things are possible; see also *Revoltin' Developments*, p. 31, as one method of easing the sting.) However, if overused, PCs may feel impotent, powerless to make their story their own, passengers on the adventure.

All that being said, it's probably best to err on the side of mapmaking with confident, experienced players, and on the side of (mild) railroading when dealing with tentative, inexperienced players.

## COLLECTING STORY HOOKS

When coming up with adventure sessions or Scenes, a good GM should remember to always check his "Story Hook" traps to see if anything will get caught.

Here's a short list of things that GMs should review when searching for Story Hooks:

- ◆ Backgrounds
- ◆ First Hit in Conflict
- ◆ HQs
- ◆ Limitations
- ◆ MacGuffins & Plot Devices
- ◆ Minions
- ◆ Motivations
- ◆ Origins
- ◆ Rogues Galleries
- ◆ Secret Identities
- ◆ Sidekicks & Super-Sidekicks
- ◆ Supporting Casts
- ◆ Vehicles & Super-Vehicles
- ◆ Vulnerabilities
- ◆ Weaknesses
- ◆ Zeroing Hit in Conflict

## EXAMPLE NPCs

See also *American Ranger* (p. 30), *Manticore* (p. 31), and *Snow Owl* (p. 54), as well as the NPCs mentioned in *Chapters 7, 8, and 9*. All are created as PC-Grade types. See also the free downloadable supplement *Dial 5 for Superhumans*, available on the Atomic Sock Monkey Press website at <<http://www.atomicsockmonkey.com>>.

## CATASTROPHE

**Name:** Veronica Marks

**Background:** One would think that Veronica Marks, debutante and heir to the Marks Couture fortune, would appreciate the finer things in life. Well, she does – if only because they tinkle so prettily when she shatters them. This poor little rich girl was born with a silver spoon in her mouth, but it quickly tarnished. She spends her days in Paris, Milan, New York, gossiping and causing drama wherever she goes. No one knows that she's secretly the super-villain known as Catastrophe.

**Motivation:** Ruin things (especially if beautiful, expensive, or representative of hard work).

**Qualities:** Expert [+4] Wealth, Good [+2] Jet Setter, Good [+2] Beauty, Good [+2] Pop Culture, Poor [-2] Secret (Supervillain).

**Origin:** Gained her powers after destroying her ex-fiancé's chemistry lab in a fit of pique.

**Powers:** Expert [+4] Weaken, Average [0] Cause Opportune Malfunction, Average [0] Teleport.

**Stunts:** *Shake 'n Quake* (Weaken Signature; Good [+2], 1 VP; localized earthquake in 100 yard radius) and *Rain of Debris*

(Teleport Signature; Poor [-2], 1 VP; collects and drops selected materials on target).

**Villain Point Pool:** 5/10

**Uniform:** Usually wears a "high fashion" red hooded jersey with white cursive C; red domino mask; long black evening gloves; black boots, and black Capri pants.

**Miscellany:** 5'6"; 100 lbs.; bobbed black hair; green eyes; pale skin. "Sociopathy for the fun of it."



## DOCTOR WIDGET

**Name:** Ellen Widgeon

**Background:** Ellie Widgeon always had a knack with technology: she'd always win the county Science Fairs back in Topeka. Then, when she turned 13, something switched on in her head, and suddenly she was building machines that did stuff she couldn't rationally explain. She ran with it, and eventually turned to superheroing (as "Ms. Gizmatic") through high school and college. When she got her second doctorate, she went public with her secret identity, but is still best known as "Doctor Widget." (She's a skilled materials scientist and engineer.)

**Motivation:** Figuring out how a thing works.

**Qualities:** Expert [+4] Scientist, Good [+2] Dancer, Good [+2] Gambler, Good [+2] Wealth, Poor [-2] Chubby.

**Origin:** Powers activated when she entered puberty.

**Powers:** Expert [+4] Super-Gadgeteer, Good [+2] Regeneration.

**Stunts:** Doctor Widget has three main pieces of equipment that she uses all the time: her *Jetpack* (Average [0] Flight Gadget),

her *Omni-wrench* (Good [+2] Toolkit Gadget), and her *Thunderglove* (Average [0] Super-Strength Super-Gadget).

**Hero Point Pool:** 5/10

**Uniform:** Powder-blue bodysuit of sturdy yet comfortable cotton, often accessorized by a heavy leather tool belt, goggles, and a white lab coat.

**Miscellany:** 5'1", 200 lbs.; short, dark red hair, white skin, blue eyes. Round face; cute. Good sense of humor.

## JOLLY ROGER

**Name:** Michael Roger Rackham

**Background:** As a kid, Mike Rackham loved pirates and swashbuckling movies. He identified (too much) with the dashing, romantic outlaws he saw on the screen. Despite his petty theft and penchant for getting into trouble, he led a charmed life. That is, until age 16, when he got caught boosting a car. Sent to juvie, his Powers (and his Gadgeteering) manifested after a brutal beating from other delinquents. He went a little nutty, keelhauled the bastards, and made his dramatic escape. He's lived a life of super-piracy ever since. . . and gathered others to his black flag.

**Motivation:** Steal things, and look good or be flashy while doing it.

**Qualities:** Good [+2] Gadgeteer, Good [+2] Leader, Good [+2] Minions: the Sea Dogs (see below), Good [+2] Swashbuckler, Good [+2] Thief, Poor [-2] Twisted Sense of Honor.

**Origin:** Powers manifested as a result of trauma; see *Background*.

**Powers:** Expert [+4] Luck Control, Good [+2] Super-Vehicle: *Plunder* (see below).

**Stunts:** Jolly Roger has three main Gadgets: his *Pirate Costume* (Average [0] Armor Gadget), his *Cosmic Cutlass* (Good [+2] "energized" Sword Gadget), and his *Laser Pistol* (Average [0] Laser Gadget).

**Villain Point Pool:** 5/10

**Uniform:** Pirate captain outfit, long coat, cravat, skull-mask, hat.

**Miscellany:** 6', 185 lbs; American of British and Spanish descent. (See p. 95.) Despite being a supervillain, Jolly Roger has "fought the good fight" on more than one occasion, due to his twisted sense of honor. He's also been captured many times, only to escape or be broken free by his Sea Dogs.

**Sea Dogs:** The nine Sea Dogs all have the following Qualities: Good [+2] (Criminal or Crew Specialty), Good [+2] Fighting, Average [0] Airship Operations, Average [0] Pirate, Poor [-2] Obedient to Jolly Roger. The only Sea Dogs currently known by name are Jolly Roger's First Mate, Mistress Mischief (Good [+2] Smart) and Mr. Hamish (Good [+2] Helmsman).

**Plunder:** Average [0] Zeppelin, Good [+2] Fast, Average [0] Armor, Average [0] Cannon, Average [0] Self-Repair, Average [0] Invisibility Field.

## REFLEX

**Name:** Unknown

**Background:** Little is known about the mercenary-assassin known as Reflex. He appeared several years ago, killing his way through Africa, the Balkans, and the Middle East. He is known to have "history" with Zipzoom (see below).

**Motivation:** All about the Benjamins: money, plain and simple.

**Qualities:** Expert [+4] Gunman, Good [+2] Mercenary, Good [+2] Contacts in Criminal Underworld, Good [+2] Contacts in the Espionage World, Poor [-2] Expensive Tastes.

**Origin:** Unknown.

**Powers:** Good [+2] Danger Sense, Good [+2] Magic Bullets (Limitation: No automatic super-scale damage for Magic Bullet attacks; must be specifically imbued), Good [+2] Super-Agility.

**Stunts:** *Combat Sense* (Danger Sense Spin-off; Average [0]; 1 VP; grants one Upshift per conflict Scene), *Homing Bullet* (Magic Bullets Signature; Average [0]; 1 VP; bullet "continues attacking" until character beats its TN of 7 on a dodge), *Entangling Bullet* (Magic Bullets Signature; Good [+2]; 2 VP; does no damage, but on a successful hit, the bullet expands into sticky goo that holds the target until he breaks free vs. a TN of 9 + margin of victory), and *Super-Bullet* (Magic Bullets Signature; Good [+2]; 2 VP; does super-scale damage).

**Villain Point Pool:** 5/10

**Uniform:** Black leather bodysuit, dark green vest and straps and belts and stuff. Lots of weapons (guns, knives, shuriken, grenades, etc.). Oval sunglasses. (See p. 16.)

**Miscellany:** 5'10", 185 lbs; spiky black hair and goatee; nationality indeterminate. *Danger Sense* is Precognition, limited to personal danger to Reflex. *Magic Bullets* is a Meta-Power permitting Reflex to imbue up to two bullets at a time with a one-use Power (or one bullet with two one-use Powers), in order to shoot around corners, through walls, cause explosions, and so forth. *Super-Agility* gives Reflex super-scale reaction times (as per Super-Speed) and dexterity.

NOTE - When using a gun, Reflex rolls against his Expert [+4] Gunman Quality, Good [+2] Mercenary Quality, and Good [+2] Super-Agility Power, or 2d6+8. If using a random Magic Bullet (no VP spent on the Spin-off Stunt), this becomes 2d6+10. If using Entangling Bullet, it's 2d6+12. If using Super-Bullet, it's also 2d6+12, and furthermore does super-scale damage (that is, an additional 9 Damage Ranks).

## ULTRAWOMAN

**Name:** Christine Post

**Background:** A kindergarten teacher who loves kids (even when they're at their most annoying). Christine is fairly athletic, and especially enjoys swimming. A dab hand at watercolor painting, she also has a general interest in the fine arts. Only her father knows of her superheroic identity.

**Motivation:** Protect children.

**Qualities:** Expert [+4] Teacher, Good [+2] Artist, Good [+2] Charisma, Good [+2] Swimmer, Poor [-2] Taste in Men.

**Origin:** During her college years, Christine's superpowers simply appeared.

**Powers:** Good [+2] Super-Strength, Good [+2] Invulnerability, Average [0] Flight, Average [0] Precognition.

**Stunts:** *Clearsight* (Precognition Spin-off; Poor [-2], 1 HP; see through objects).

**Hero Point Pool:** 5/10

**Uniform:** Yellow military tunic with side buttons and stylized blue U symbol; yellow pants; blue gloves, boots, and cape.

**Miscellany:** 5'11"; 140 lbs.; medium length strawberry-blond hair; brown eyes; lightly tanned skin. (See cover, p. 3, and p. 99.)

## ZIPZOOM

**Name:** "Peter MacGregor" (that's what he's calling himself)

**Background:** Not much is known about the past of the hero known as Zipzoom. He apparently was a soldier once, but it's unclear if it was for the United States or Canada. Something happened, and he gained superpowers. He apparently secretly used them in the service of his government for several years until striking off on his own. He has "history" with Reflex (see above).

**Motivation:** Help those attempting to rise above their limitations (internal or external).

**Qualities:** Expert [+4] Soldier, Good [+2] Karate, Good [+2] Mechanic, Good [+2] World-Traveler, Poor [-2] Haunted by Past Actions.

**Origin:** "You have insufficient clearance for this file."

**Powers:** Expert [+4] Super-Speed, Good [+2] Sound Control.

**Stunts:** *Run on Water* (Super-Speed Spin-off; Average [0]; 0 HP), *Run up Walls* (Super-Speed Spin-off; Average [0]; 0 HP), *Run Silent* (Sound Control Signature; Average [0]; 1 HP), *Sonic Punch* (Sound Control Signature; Good [+2]; 2 HP), and *Velocity-shield* (Super-Speed Spin-off; Average [0] Armor, only while moving; 0 HP).

**Hero Point Pool:** 5/10

**Uniform:** Black spandex shirt, silver spandex bike shorts, black gloves and shoes, and dark oval sunglasses. (See p. 51.)

**Miscellany:** 5'8", 180 lbs.; bald, blonde goatee, tanned, relatively buff; nationality indeterminate. Laconic. Loves to tinker with classic automobiles.



## CHAPTER 7: *SECOND-STRING SUPERS*

**Style:** Animated

**Theme(s):** Filling Some Big Shoes; Rising to Meet Challenges; Claiming Own Identity.

The Dragon Knight crouched on a gargoyle, surveying his city, as he spoke to his friend on the nearby rooftop. "I hate this, Galsworthy. Abandoning her. I'm supposed to protect her from harm."

The mage looked up from the dossier he was reading. "You *will* be protecting her, DK. You're not abandoning her, just. . . expanding the perimeter." Galsworthy's eyes flicked back towards the file in his hands. "This one has potential."

The Dragon Knight scratched his chin with mail-covered fingers. "But no real experience." He sighed. "I have to leave her in the hands of retirees, tyros, and second-raters. Present company excepted, of course."

Galsworthy waved the comment away. "We both know I can't dedicate the time to doing what you do, given my" – the words turned venomous – "Grand Destiny."

"Speaking of that, I've been wondering: any one of those look likely to be your future student?"

Shuffling the files in his hands, Galsworthy shrugged. "Reply hazy, try again. Provided you can help the Justice Alliance keep the front lines as far away from Earth as possible for as long as possible, there is a chance one of these potential heroes may become my pupil. A slim chance."

The Dragon Knight looked back out to the skyline. "That'll have to do."

The mighty hero Dragon Knight has joined the Justice Alliance and will be concentrating on more distant (read: interstellar) problems. Who will protect the citizens of Drakesville during his absence? Why, the PCs, of course: a team of less-powerful substitutes who may, together, be able to meet the challenge.

### PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE

#### SUPERS IN HISTORY

Aside from the heroes of myth, and scattered rumors throughout history, the first verifiable superhumans were recorded only after WWI. In the years between the World Wars, the amazing exploits of these new "superheroes" and "supervillains" began to fill the papers, radio broadcasts, and newsreels. Their deeds – noble and dastardly, on the battlefield and the home front – have made the world as it is today.

#### SUPERS TODAY

The earliest superhumans' powers were usually limited to a single power far beyond human capabilities or a small related set of powers only mildly beyond human capabilities. Over the passage of decades, however, superhumans have become more super: the strongest super of the WWII era could probably lift a tank, while the strongest super today can probably lift a battleship.

Furthermore, there were far fewer superhumans then compared to now: only ten verified superhumans existed in 1945, compared to two hundred today.

Superhumans are seen as a cross between natural disasters, miracles, volunteer activists, and celebrities. A small handful have traded on their fame or notoriety to make a buck, of course. They have their supporters and detractors. But for the most part, they're just there.

#### SUPER-TECH & THE KLEIN EFFECT

The Klein Effect – discovered in 1959 – states that the capability of a super-technology device is inversely-related to the number of similar devices in operation. However, sometimes this is proportional (if you make duplicates of Captain Armor's powersuit, all



such suits built to that specification become weaker. No more than a dozen will work at all, usually, and sometimes this is all-or-nothing (only one of Captain Armor's powersuits can operate at a time).

Research continues. Meanwhile, super-inventors can make an excellent living as craftsmen turning out "limited runs" of useful devices like power-neutralizers, unbreakable restraints, and superpower analyzers for local industry, research facilities, and law enforcement. Of course, a different design needs to be worked out for each type of item; all have to be handcrafted by the super-inventor himself; and the larger the run, the weaker each item in the set becomes.

### ALIENS & YOU

Aliens exist. At least once every three years or so, some alien warrior (or an entire extraterrestrial crew) touches down and causes trouble. Generally, the superhumans drive them off. By all accounts, interstellar travel and communication isn't easy, so while the people of Earth know for a fact extraterrestrial life exists, they don't know much about these life forms, usually haven't been able to find out more, and haven't been able to take steps to stop these strange visitors from showing up. Most folks just shrug their shoulders and say, "So what?" – but a powerful minority has become quite xenophobic.



## DRAKESVILLE, DRAKESVILLE, IT'S A HELLUVA TOWN. . .

### GENERAL INFO

Drakesville is a vaguely-located East Coast city. Once a powerful industrial center, the weakening dollar and foreign competition twenty years ago caused it to slide into decay and crime. Now, boosted by cutting-edge communications industries (and the efforts of its small population of civic-minded supers, most notably the Dragon Knight), Drakesville is beginning to climb out of its two decade slump.

As protector of the city from threats without and within, the Dragon Knight enjoys not merely the support of the Drakesville police department, but also mild idolization from the citizenry (though he does have his strident critics).

### NEIGHBORHOODS (& THEIR CRIMES)

**Bankhouse:** This is the banking and financial sector of town, home to the First National Bank, the Drakesville Stock Market, and the headquarters of a few rising telecom corporations. (Usually white-collar crimes like insider trading, corporate espionage, and computer/telecom hacking; blue-collar crimes involve rare muggings and bank robberies.)

**Bayside:** This is the artists' colony of Drakesville: the theater district, the small galleries, the jazz clubs, plenty of alternative lifestyles – everything you need for a funky little neighborhood. Cool, man. (Muggings, burglaries, drugs, prostitution, and hate crimes.)

**Center City:** This neighborhood is a mix of older single-family homes (mostly successful supervisors of Stillmill – see below – and returning GIs after WWII) and mom-and-pop businesses. While many of the latter are now boarded up, new proprietors and franchisers are moving in to these abandoned storefronts and reviving the area. (Low-end burglaries, robberies, domestic abuse, muggings.)

**Fairmarket:** The renowned shopping district of Drakesville, this is where you go for the haute couture, the snazzy furnishings, and the overpriced jewelry. The Diamond Exchange is located here, as is the City Arena sports multiplex – home of the Drakesville athletic teams: the Ducks (football), Dukes (baseball), the Dragons (basketball), and the Dogs (soccer).

**Governor's Point:** The heart of the local government is located on Governor's Point: City Hall, Police Headquarters, the DMV, and the city and federal circuit courts. Additionally, the neighborhood is also home to numerous high-art museums, concert halls, and parks. (Espionage, bribery, graft, corruption.)

**The Jetty:** A commercial structure of vast proportions that juts into the Bay. Built by Herbert Enterprises, the Jetty is a prototype arcology. Within



its geodesic walls are apartments, restaurants, and a gigantic shopping mall (open to the public). Rent on the square footage within is quite expensive, however. A vast field of solar panels on the roof of the structure and an experimental "tide-wheel" below help supplement the Jetty's power needs; there is an entire level dedicated to hydroponic farming research, and two levels of "industrial park" for manufacturing and research. It is a safe, secure, clean neighborhood, cared for by the watchful eyes of Herbert Enterprises. (Officially, there is no crime on the Jetty; unofficially, the private security force does run a tight ship, with only minor shoplifting and purse-snatching happening. But rumors persist that the biggest crimes are being covered up by their corporate masters. . .).

**North End:** Longtime neighborhood of the factory workers of Stillmill. Around the turn of the Twentieth Century, the North End received a vast influx of immigrants from all over Europe; around 1980, it received another injection of immigrants from Asia. In between the two periods, this neighborhood was known as "Murdertown"; when the industry of Stillmill withered, crime bloomed. While safer today, many visitors to the area are nervous and paranoid. . . perhaps rightly so. (Drugs, gang warfare, prostitution, violent crimes, car-jackings, domestic abuse, robberies, riots, etc.)

**Old Wharf:** When the factories of Stillmill stopped working, the Old Wharf neighborhood began to collapse into corruption and disuse. The shipping companies, import/export, seedy dive bars, and warehouses – both in-use and abandoned – almost all have a connection to the criminal underworld. However, as the heart of industry begins to pump once more, the life blood of commerce is beginning to weakly trickle again. (Violent crimes, gang warfare, water accidents, and smuggling.)

**South End:** The ritzy suburb of town for over one hundred and fifty years, the houses of South End are huge and expensive. They – and their moneyed inhabitants – are a sitting target for a certain class of criminal. Additionally, where vast wealth congregates, many dark impulses become palatable. . . so long as no one finds out. (Burglary, kidnapping, murder, various types of abuse and assault, drug use, and so forth.)

**Stillmill:** The manufacturing center of Drakesville, the industrial plants and assembly lines of Stillmill (corruption of "steel mill") turned out not only refined materials but also finished goods. When the markets dried up, many plants were shut down and their machinery left to rust. A number of old factories have been purchased by foreign investors, while others have been repurposed and renovated as shopping centers, offices, apartment units, and so forth. And a few new companies have taken over old plants, and started the mills rolling again. (Theft, sabotage, industrial accidents, espionage.)

**Stock Isle:** This island is the site of Drakesville's maximum security facility for criminals – the Joshua Crippen Prison (also called "the Crypts"). As one of the few institutions in the region capable of long-term superhuman restraint, it often accepts super-prisoners from other jurisdictions. Because of this substantial population of superhumans in one place, it also boasts one of the state's most thorough superhuman observation and testing facilities (real research is done on the mainland, however), as well as top-notch psychiatric wards. (Jailbreaks, guard corruption, illicit experimentation, etc.)

## SECRET INFORMATION

### DO YOU BELIEVE IN MAGIC?

Super-powers just seem to work, somehow. Some folks call it psionics, others call it parapsysics, still others just call it magic, but superpowers tend to come from a mystical source(s). About the only real step forward in superpower research has been the initial formulation of the Klein Effect (see above), and that's because the researchers had physical components – super-technology devices – to play with.

### SUPERS IN HISTORY: REDUX

To an observer from a parallel dimension, this universe's timeline is exceptionally odd. The existence of superhumans has had remarkably little effect on the main threads of how "it actually turned out": the Bomb was dropped; disasters have happened; leaders have been assassinated. While some minor perturbations have happened – a few lives saved here or lost there – for the most part, the

day-to-day events of this universe match "real history."

Part of this has to do with the numbers of superhumans: probably less than 300 known and unknown world-wide, of varying power levels. Also, the magical nature of superpowers (see above) may mean that the negative effects of super-villainy are countered by the positive effects of super-heroism, and vice-versa. Furthermore, the Klein Effect (see above) limits the widespread effects of super-technology.

Indeed, the strongest consequences superhumans have had on the world mostly involve fashion and style, a few esoteric fields of pure scientific research, and exceptionally subtle social effects (one example could be a polarization of the public's view of the effectiveness of the police: some people think they're totally incompetent and need the supers to pick up after them, others lionize them as Davids facing supervillain Goliaths).

### ALIENS: THE TRUTH, OUT THERE

Mars wants mana! Whatever it is in the air or water or land or collective unconscious of Earth's inhabitants that gives rise to superpowers, a number of extraterrestrial races want it, bad. That's why all those tinpot alien warlords make raids in the Sol System every couple years, despite the difficulties of interstellar travel.

Indeed, the greatest threat to Earth would be if the different alien races joined together in an extra-solar military alliance to steal our precious mystical fluids. Which, coincidentally enough, they have. Luckily, the Justice Alliance has had good interstellar intel, and has swelled their ranks with Earth's best and brightest to draw the line as far away from Earth as possible. This is why the Second-String Heroes have been called up, whether they know it or not.

### PC OPPORTUNITIES

PCs in this setting are other masked adventurer types that the Dragon Knight has recruited to keep Drakesville safe while he focuses on his work with the Justice Alliance. Players should consider the guidelines below when coming up with their characters.

### WHO?

Who is your character? This is the basic question of character generation, of course. Some interesting options can be spun off from the central conceit of the campaign. PCs could be grown-up kid sidekicks, heroes inspired by the Dragon Knight, heroes who inspired or mentored the Dragon Knight, reformed villains, or the children/inheritors of the Dragon Knight's superpowered friends and enemies.

This most often influences *Background* in character creation.

### WHAT?

What sort of hero is the character? This question goes further than simply deciding if a PC is a Blaster or a Brick, though that is a part of this step. Remember that the PCs are less powerful than the Dragon Knight by definition in this setting. What role have they taken in his previous adventures?

One interesting way to reflect this is to have experience and superpowers inversely proportional to one another. That is, if a character has a lot of powers (or even just a single very strong one), then they might not have had much of a superhero career prior to the start of the campaign. If a character has tremendous experience, then they shouldn't have many (or even any) Powers, trading them in for *Intense Training* (see p. 37). Thus, a superhero with minor powers (or a single moderate one) probably has a moderate amount of experience.

This can really work well to help "balance" normal-scale heroes with the super-scaled ones: the action-adventure types have the experience, knowledge, contacts, and respect, while the superhumans have the sheer oomph! to get things done. This means that a decent super team could be constructed of an aging (but still scrappy) pulp hero, a minor-league heroine with a decent adventuring career, and a kid with major league talent but no real track record.

This element should affect *Background* and *Qualities* – and possibly *Origin* – in character generation.

### WHEN?

Directly related to What? are two When?s: 1) when did the PC first start super-heroing?; and 2) when did the PC first meet the Dragon Knight? During

character creation, this aspect should probably influence *Background* and *Origin*.

## WHERE?

PCs should pick one of the districts of Drakesville (see above) to be their "turf." While the big boys like the Dragon Knight protect entire cities, lesser heroes patrol a single neighborhood. While they won't know the other parts of town like they do their own area, hopefully one of their team-mates will. Thus, it's probably not a great idea to have multiple PCs hail from the same neighborhood, but this can still work and provide opportunities for "like the back of my hand"/"fish out of water" scenes. Definitely an important part of *Miscellany*; may affect *Background*, *Motivation*, *Qualities*, and *Origin*.

Also, in the introductory adventure for this setting (see below, *Pilot Episode*, p. 90), the PC group will be given a secret base of operations, with the following Qualities all at Good [+2] Rank: Hidden Location, Computer Casefiles, and Communication Links to Police Department. The players may then customize the base as per the rules under *HQs* on p. 69.



## WHY?

Each player should work with the GM (and possibly the other players) to determine exactly why the Dragon Knight asked the PC to help pick up his slack. What is the connection between the characters? This question will be tied up closely with *Who?* and *When?*, with a side-order of *What?*, and maybe even some *Where?* for dessert. An important part of *Background*, *Miscellany*, and possibly *Powers*.

## MAJOR NPCs

### THE DRAGON KNIGHT

**Name:** Abner Jones

**Background:** Abner Jones, an archeology professor at Drakesville University, is well regarded by his peers, his department head, and his students. He's always had a taste for the more occult and arcane artifacts of human civilization, and is a noted specialist in the field.

**Motivation:** Defend his city (Drakesville) from attack.

**Qualities:** Expert [+4] Archeologist, Expert [+4] Brawler, Expert [+4] Occultist, Good [+2] Athlete, Good [+2] Respect of Drakesville Citizenry, Good [+2] Police Contacts, Poor [-2] Arrogant.

**Origin:** On a dig on a remote island in the North Atlantic, Abner discovered a suit of mystical armor.

**Powers:** Expert [+4] Mystic Flame Breath, Good [+2] Invulnerability, Good [+2] Metal Wings, Good [+2] Super-Armor, Good [+2] Super-Strength.

**Stunts:** *Cleanse Poison* (Mystic Flame Breath Spin-off; Average [0]; used to remove toxins or drugs from victim), *Fire Cage* (Mystic Flame Breath Signature; Expert [+4]; 2 HP; creates a TN 13 enclosure of magic fire), and *Wing-Slice* (Metal Wings Signature; Good [+2]; 2 HP; a powerful cutting attack).

**Hero Point Pool:** 5/10

**Uniform:** A suit of black, slightly iridescent armor in no recognizable ancient style.

**Miscellany:** 5'10", 170 lbs.; brown hair, blue eyes, olive skin. The Dragon Knight has helped defend and strengthen Drakesville for the last eight years, and the people of the city respect him. *Metal Wings* permit Flight and can be used as weapons. *Mystic Flame Breath* is a Meta-Power, permitting several mystical Spin-off Stunts.

NOTE - The Dragon Knight is a World-Class character (see p. 73), and this write-up reflects that fact.

## RATBURGLAR

**Name:** Julius Alameda

**Background:** Born in North End during its "Murder-town" days, Julius – like so many of his friends – turned to crime. Pick on because of his lack of height, he became tough, hard, arrogant, out to prove the world wrong about him. He grew up to be a relatively successful burglar, specializing in stealing the rarest and most well-protected treasures (both for himself and as a contractor for others), until one job went awry. . .

**Motivation:** Discover more about "the Rat God."

**Qualities:** Master [+6] Burglar, Good [+2] Cunning, Good [+2] Wealth, Poor [-2] Napoleon Complex.

**Origin:** Bitten by one of the mystical Giant Rats of Sumatra when burgling an eccentric South Ender's menagerie, Alameda became a wererat. This has made him even better at being a sneaky little bastard.

**Powers:** Master [+6] Wererat.

**Stunts:** (all at Good [+2] Rank; no VP cost, but must mentally "turn on" for the Scene) *Collapsible Skeleton*, *Partial Shapeshift while Human* (Claws, Teeth, or Tail), *Prehensile Tail*, *Rat Communication & Control*, *Regeneration*, *Resist Poison & Disease*, *Super-Agility*, *Super-Gnawing*, *Super-Senses*, *Super-Strength*.

**Villain Point Pool:** 5/10

**Uniform:** Usually in his 4 foot "ratman" shape when on the job, but even so he wears a black leather outfit, web belt full of tools, a black cap, and a mask. (Yes, a mask. Over his ratty face. What?).

**Miscellany:** 4'10", 135 lbs; black hair, brown eyes, olive skin. *Wererat* is a Shapeshifting Meta-Power, which covers a wide-range of lycanthropy-based abilities (see Stunts); Ratburglar has 3 main shapes – rat, ratman, and human. Silver is the overall Limitation for Wererat – wounds from silver weapons aren't affected by Regeneration, and silver bonds can hold Ratburglar despite his Super-Strength. Though his most recent stomping grounds were in California, he's come back to Drakesville after learning that the Dragon Knight's flown the coop. He's also been having a series of odd dreams involving "the Rat God."

## THE ORANGE OGRE

**Name:** Isaac Leonard

**Background:** As a professional wrestler, Isaac "the Ogre" Leonard took one too many folding chairs across the skull that fateful night. Something in his concussed brain reacted powerfully, causing him to grow permanently huge (he's now 7' 2" tall and weighs over 400 pounds) and orange. Furthermore, his mind has been affected: "kayfabe" (the fake or showbiz reality of pro wrestling) has bled into reality and meshed with superhumanity.

**Motivation:** Beat the Dragon Knight in a fair fight.

**Qualities:** Expert [+4] Wrestler, Good [+2] Gambler, Good [+2] Party Animal, Good [+2] Shocking Appearance, Poor [-2] Delusional.

**Origin:** Physical trauma sparked his mutation and superpower expression.

**Powers:** Good [+2] Invulnerability, Expert [+4] Super-Strength.

**Stunts:** *Super-Leap* (Super-Strength Signature; Good [+2]; 1 VP).

**Villain Point Pool:** 5/10

**Uniform:** Blue wrestling singlet, brown buckled boots, big and gaudy "championship" belt. (See p. 57.)

**Miscellany:** 7'2"; 400+ lbs.; orange hair, orange skin, orange eyes.

*Delusional* reflects Leonard's conviction that he's been assigned to be a heel: whenever he's in public and in costume, he acts like a super-villain. Out of costume, he's actually a likeable and agreeable guy, gentle and docile, even when incarcerated in the Crypts. . . until he goes to "work" – which generally happens every 30 to 90 days. Interestingly, Leonard believes that if he ever beats the Dragon Knight in a fair fight, the "head office" will let him undergo a "face turn" and become a good guy. Unfortunately, he's never been able to beat the hero fairly. (However, one time the Dragon Knight took a dive and caused Leonard's personality to immediately shift to face. . . until he discovered the deception and suffered another heel turn.)

## DOKTOR VROBOTNIK

**Name:** Doctor Arthur Vrobo

**Background:** Arthur Vrobo, one of the world's greatest scientists, worked for Herbert Enterprises for many years. Indeed, a substantial amount of the technology behind the Jetty (see above) is based on his designs. He is the sort of intellect that offhandedly whips up a telepathically-controlled robot to help him with an unrelated experiment. Vrobo merrily worked in the company's laboratories during the day, and at night repaired to a private workshop for his own projects. Indeed, the contract he had with Zeb Herbert was very clear that Vrobo would always and forever retain the rights and patents to his personal work: 9 out of 10 lawyers would swear that the agreement was ironclad.



Well, "ironclad" only if the party of the first part and the party of the second part both stick to the terms of the contract. Unfortunately, Vrobo discovered that the party of the second part – Herbert – was a bit looser in his interpretations of the agreement, to the point of having the scientist's private lab and residence within the Jetty extensively bugged. Just as Vrobo ripped a camera out of his wall, his paranoia crystallizing into anger, a tremendous explosion rocked the Jetty! Shards of flying debris cut his face and throat deeply, and knocked the scientist out. Luckily, the Jetty's emergency response squad got him to the internal hospital in time to save his life – but not his voice: the damage to Vrobo's larynx was too extensive to repair.

After a horrifically-misunderstood visiting hour meeting with Herbert, Vrobo became convinced that Herbert had always fully intended to steal his work and bump him off. Terrified at being in his enemy's power, the scientist fled the hospital that night. But as he was no fool, Vrobo stopped by his ruined quarters and broke into company labs for equipment and gear. Doktor Vrobotik now wages a war against Herbert Enterprises using his remarkable mind, seeking to wipe it, its works, and its founder from the face of the Earth. Woe to any who get in his way!

**Motivation:** Destroy Zeb Herbert and Herbert Enterprises.

**Qualities:** Expert [+4] Engineer, Expert [+4] Scientist, Good [+2] Minions: Vrobots (see below).

**Origin:** While his Super-Gadgeteering expressed itself in a low-key fashion during his youth, the explosion kicked it into high gear.

**Powers:** Good [+2] Super-Gadgeteer, Good [+2] Cyber-Throat, Good [+2] Super-Sidekick: (Vrobot of the Week; see below).

**Stunts:** *Rocket Pistol* (Good [+2] Super-Gadget) – his two free Gadgets are left undefined, to be determined in play – and *Sonic Blast* (Cyber-Throat Signature; Good [+2]; 2 VP).

**Villain Point Pool:** 5/10

**Uniform:** Cyber-Throat, black knit sweater, black pants with green piping, greenish-gray labcoat.

**Miscellany:** 6'2", 180 lbs.; bald, black bushy eyebrows, brown eyes, fair skin. Vrobo's *Cyber-Throat* allows him to Control Electronic Machines with the sound of his voice (Limitation); it can also emit a *Sonic Blast*. However, currently, Vrobo cannot make it sound like anything other than a bad voice synthesizer; he is working on developing sound and mimicry-based Stunts and Powers for it. If the Cyber-Throat is removed, he gains the Weakness of Poor [-2] Mute.

**Vrobots:** The nine Vrobots all have the following Qualities: Good [+2] Armor, Good [+2] Strong, Average [0] Disguise, and Average [0] Integral Pistol.

**Super-Sidekick: (Vrobot of the Week).** Every time he shows up, Doktor Vrobotnik has a new Super-Robot for the heroes to pummel. Basic type has Expert [+4] Armor, Good [+2] Strong, Good [+2] Laser Gun (normal-scale), and any one Good [+2] Power.

## SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

NOTE - Each of these NPCs is given a short-form write-up in the interests of space and GM customization.

**Captain Kaye Artaud:** Captain Artaud is in charge of the Drakesville Police Department's Superhuman Crimes Division. She forged a decent working relationship with the Dragon Knight, though there were strong elements of rivalry: she believes that her SCD officers could've handled at least three-quarters of the problems that the hero did. She'll be insulted by the presence of any Second-Stringers that the Dragon Knight recruits, and will be wary in dealing with them until they prove themselves. . . and if they cross the line, she'll have no compunctions about bringing them in.

**Galsworthy the Great:** A fortune-telling con-man who was granted true sorcerous might during "the Djinni Event," Galsworthy has in recent years been part of the Dragon Knight's resources when dealing with magical situations. Unknown to anyone but the Dragon Knight and Galsworthy, the former grifter is destined to be the mentor of Earth's next "Absolute Adept" – guardian of the world against all Unspeakable Horrors From Beyond Space. Therefore, out of a strict sense of self-preservation, Galsworthy has begun studying all forms of magic like a madman, in order to be the best damn teacher he can be.

**Powers:** Galsworthy is an Expert [+4] Con-Man and Expert [+4] Mage, a Good [+2] Occultist, and possesses an Average [0] Physique. Additionally, he possesses a Grand Destiny (Poor [-2]), which more often than not puts him in dangerous – or just plain weird – situations somehow related to his future charge. He resents this, but no matter what he does or how he resists, the day is coming when he will have to pass on his knowledge.

**Zebediah Herbert:** Skinny, dapper, insanelly wealthy – Zeb Herbert is the toast of the town. His company, Herbert Enterprises, is the largest employer and corporate taxpayer in Drakesville, and he himself is a major philanthropist, donating to hundreds of charities city-, nation-, and world-wide. He's also a cold-hearted snake in the boardroom: utterly ruthless, he seeks to maximize his long-term personal power through any means necessary. Surprisingly, what is good for Zeb Herbert tends to be good for some of the people in Drakesville. . . or at least those that "count" (i.e., the rich). Those that his machinations harm must wait for his philanthropic largesse.

NOTE - Whether Zeb is a "super-villain in a power tie" or not is left up to the individual GM.

**Professor Hypnos:** Minor super-villain, incarcerated in the Crypts after a foolish attempt to gather a harem of Drakesville's top supermodels. With his counselor's help, Hypnos is well on his way to being rehabilitated, and has big plans for starting an expensive "self-help salon" (weight

loss, smoking cessation, assertiveness training, memory retrieval) when he gets out on parole.

*Powers:* Professor Marvin Hypnos is an Expert [+4] at Hypnotic Mind Control, though his commands usually wear off within a week (the more extreme his commands, the shorter the duration). He is also an Average [0] Telepath, but no one else knows this. Hypnos believes that if the superhuman specialists detect his power, he will never be let out on parole; call this a Poor [-2] Secret.

**The Philatelist:** Gwendolyn Price terrorized Drakesville for weeks as the mysterious Philatelist with her stamp- and mail-based puzzles, before being captured by the Dragon Knight. Mostly interested in stealing rare stamp and postal paraphernalia, she's a loony-tunes thief, given to pre-bragging about her crimes. Currently at large.

*Powers:* The Philatelist has one of the weirdest superpowers ever recorded: Expert [+4] "Stamp & Mail Schticks" (Limitation: Must consume stamps to energize Power; rare or valuable stamps give massive Upshifts). She can literally do anything if it is related to stamps, stamp-collecting, or the mail system. She's pulled rocket launchers out of mailboxes, mailed herself out of prison in a #10 business envelope, caused all the stamps in 100 yards to burst into flame, and so forth. Her biggest weakness is her Poor [-2] Need to Challenge Heroes through Puzzles & Riddles.

**Red X:** This mercenary is a super-speedster, and a dangerous foe. He is a thug for hire, usually working for another supervillain, and he don't come cheap. While not a particularly brilliant foe, he is exceptionally organized and practical.

*Powers:* Red X possesses Super-Speed at Good [+2] Rank normally, but can push himself to Expert [+4] or Master [+6] levels for brief periods. Exerting himself like this involves a price: he must spend time utterly motionless afterwards – an equal period for Expert boosting, and double the amount for Master boosting. Needless to say, Red X tries to stay under his speed limit, unless he is in danger or the money is too damn good to refuse. He is also Expert [+4] in Karate, and has Good [+2] Super-Armor.

**The Justice Alliance:** The Earth's premiere super-team. Made up of a dozen of the globe's mightiest heroes, they protect the world against the most powerful arch-villains, whether they be from this planet or beyond. Members include Hyperwoman; Fu Dawg; Justice Jackaroo; Belisarius, the Absolute Adept; Croatoan; and now, the Dragon Knight. All are *World-Class* heroes (see p. 73); GMs should feel free to stat these characters up as they desire, or modify the example NPCs found elsewhere in this book (Ultrawoman for Hyperwoman, Manticore for Fu Dawg, American Ranger for Justice Jackaroo, and so on).

Kaye Artaud watched her Superhuman Crimes Division officers escort the power-cuffed supervillain into the Chrome Maria. She heard footsteps coming up behind her. She turned to find a young woman in business casual dress, carrying a mini-recorder, a steno pad, and a press pass.

"Captain Artaud? I'm Penelope Black from the Drakesville Courier."

Artaud waved at the scene before them. "We've captured the Cockroach Prince, who's suspected in the Herbert Museum Heist. That's all you get. You want more, you talk to Lieutenant Stevens, the communications officer, okay, Ms. Black?"

"Actually, you can call me 'Penny.'" She smiled. "We had an appointment for earlier this afternoon?"

The policewoman blinked. "For what?"

The reporter brushed an errant strand of hair behind her ear. "The Sunday supplement piece on the SCD, and – well – you."

Artaud flushed. "Oh, I'm so sorry. All this came up rather quickly, and my team had to scramble."

"Oh, as a long time resident of this city, I understand how supervillains can muck schedules up." Black grinned as she said this.

"Let's start over." Artaud stuck out her hand towards the reporter. "Kaye Artaud."

Black reached her own hand forward. "Penny Black." They shook.

As their hands separated, Artaud looked down at her palm. Something was stuck there. Something a bit blurry. Fuzzy. Square. A stamp.

Her eyes whipped up – while her numbing hands scabbled for her weapon – to see the malevolent look on the face of the reporter. "Penny Black? You're *the Philatelist!*" she croaked, as her vision swam.

"I understand how supervillains can muck schedules up, indeed, Captain. Nighty-night."

## POSSIBLE SSS EPISODES

Some ideas for single-session adventures or "episodes" are provided below; the overall campaign can be further constructed as a television season (or entire series) as the players and GM see fit. The Pilot Episode should come first, of course, bringing the PCs together and starting the show off with a bang. Episodes A, B, and C should happen early in the campaign and focus on the theme of Filling the Really Big Shoes of the Dragon Knight, though they can happen in any order. Episodes X, Y, and Z should happen late in the campaign, and focus on the theme of the PCs Claiming their Own Identity. The remaining episodes are

modular, and can be fit into the early, middle, or late bits of the campaign. No Final Episode is provided, as some groups may wish to run a "seasonal" campaign versus a "complete series" campaign. However, promotion to the first-string heroes of the Justice Alliance and the intergalactic conflict works well as a campaign finale. (See *Chapter 5* for more details on adventure plotting.)

Each Episode below contains the *Villain of the Week*, a short *Synopsis* of the plot's major points, some *Neat Ideas* to insert or not, and *Possible Outcomes*; however, actual construction of each adventure is left up to the individual GM.

## ***PILOT EPISODE: "COME TOGETHER"***

**Villain of the Week:** None.

**Synopsis:** The Dragon Knight assembles the PCs to guard Drakesville in his absence. He presents them with the foundations of a secret headquarters (see above, *Where?*), and has arranged meetings with Galsworthy the Great and Captain Artaud, but is called away on Justice Alliance priority alert before he can introduce the PCs to his allies. Then, a disaster strikes – a building fire, a hostage situation, an earthquake, a bomb threat, or a gigantic traffic accident – and the PCs must leap into the fray.

**Neat Ideas:** The Dragon Knight never explains the intergalactic situation. PCs may already have ties to Supporting Cast allies or enemies.

**Possible Outcomes:** The PCs miss their meeting with one of the Dragon Knight's allies, possibly antagonizing him or her. The media focuses on the PCs dealing with the disaster, and comparing their efforts (negatively) to the Dragon Knight's. The PCs' new secret HQ gets trashed in the chaos.

## **OPTION: VILLAINOUS ORIGIN**

An interesting subplot might be to bring together the events of the *Pilot Episode* and Doktor Vrobotnik's Origin (see p. 87) by having whatever disaster that happens occur at the Jetty in the pilot adventure. Perhaps the PCs save the Doctor from death, or accidentally cause the explosion that changes him.

Over a few episodes, Vrobo can heal and go crazy, and then the GM can hit the PCs with *Episode C*. Vrobotnik can be set-up as the group's first villain of *their own*, rather than a hand-me-down from the Dragon Knight.

## ***EPISODE A: "I SMELL A RAT. . ."***

**Villain of the Week:** Ratburglar.

**Synopsis:** Ratburglar is in town to collect the two ruby Eyes of the Rat-God, which will increase his powers dramatically!

**Neat Ideas:** Robbing a museum for an Eye. Robbing an occult library for the energizing spell. One of the Eyes is not known as such, but under a different name: "the Heart of Fire." A supercharged Ratburglar, creating giant servitors composed entirely of squirming rats – or mutating normal rats into

ratmen like him. Or maybe the Rat-God himself is brought to Earth to wreak havoc.

**Possible Outcomes:** A more powerful Ratburglar or a Ratburglar angry at the PCs, either at large or incarcerated. A new pair of magical artifacts – the Eyes – out there for anyone to use. Refugee ratmen roaming the sewers.

## ***EPISODE B: "SQUARED CIRCLE"***

**Villain of the Week:** the Orange Ogre.

**Synopsis:** The Ogre challenges the toughest PC hero to a throw-down; if the hero refuses, the heel smashes up the city.

**Neat Ideas:** A decree from the Mayor (or Captain Artaud) orders the PCs against any such official "match," but demands that they catch the Ogre. Gambling dens run odds on the fight. Perhaps some of the citizenry want to see the PCs go down, for trying to take the Dragon Knight's place as the city's protector. The adulation or disparagement of the media.

**Possible Outcomes:** Possible minor face-turn for the Ogre. Massive property damage. A change in the way the city views the PCs. Ogre incarcerated.

## ***EPISODE C: "I, VROBOT!"***

**Villain of the Week:** Doktor Vrobotik.

**Synopsis:** The Mad Doktor is collecting high-tech to build a Giant Super-Vrobot (GSV). Once completed, he stomps from Stillmill to Fairmarket – to destroy the Jetty!

**Neat Ideas:** The expertise or history of a PC is vital in figuring out or stopping the menace. Damage caused by the GSV permits several criminals from holding facilities nears the courthouse or the police dock to escape before being transferred to the Crypts. Zeb Herbert demanding that the PCs stop the GSV without damaging it, so Herbert Enterprises can study it!

**Possible Outcomes:** Massive property damage. The support or antagonism of Zeb Herbert. Escaped criminals. Incarcerated or escaped Doktor. New super-tech on the market, auctioned off to the highest bidder!

## ***EPISODE X: "ATTACK OF THE CYBER-RATS"***

**Villain of the Week:** Ratburglar and Doktor Vrobotik.

**Synopsis:** Micro-miniaturized technology being stolen from top labs by Ratburglar, whose escapes are being covered by vrobots! The villains have teamed up to create a tiny cyborg-rat army which they will use to take over the Jetty from the inside, and hold Zeb Herbert for a substantial ransom.

**Neat Ideas:** Sneaking into the Jetty past both the Jetty defenses and the cyber-rat invader patrols. Swarms of laser-mounted, chrome-armored rodents.

**Possible Outcomes:** Minor property damage. The support or antagonism of Zeb Herbert. Renegade cyber-rats roaming the streets and sewers.

## *EPISODE Y: "ORANGE YOU GLAD I'M HERE?"*

**Villain of the Week:** Ratburglar and the Orange Ogre.

**Synopsis:** The Orange Ogre stops the Ratburglar in the middle of a crime! Now what?

**Neat Ideas:** Actual face-turn for the Ogre; media accolades for the new hero on the block. Fake face-turn, as part of a plot cooked up by the pair.

**Possible Outcomes:** Both of the villains in prison, both escaped, or one of each.

## *EPISODE Z: "A DRACONIC OPPONENT"*

**Villain of the Week:** Dragon Knight? (The Orange Ogre and Doktor Vrobotik.)

**Synopsis:** The Dragon Knight is smashing up downtown. . . until the Orange Ogre appears to stop him! What's going on?

**Neat Ideas:** Vrobotic duplicate of the hero made by the Mad Doktor as a sparring partner for the Ogre, nothing more. Maybe part of a plan by someone else to face-turn the Ogre for once and for all (Herbert? Why?). Or maybe it's a devious plot by the Mad Doktor, using the Dragon Knight vrobot to sic the Ogre on specific Herbert Enterprises holdings.

**Possible Outcomes:** Massive property damage. A possible face Ogre at the end, or an even darker heel. Bad publicity for the Dragon Knight; good publicity for the heroes – if they can stop the vrobot.

## *EPISODE: "GLASS, DARKLY"*

**Villain of the Week:** Evil mirror-versions of the Heroes.

**Synopsis:** Galsworthy the Great comes into possession of the Mirror Rorrim, which promptly makes evil duplicates of the PCs. The PCs must defeat themselves and help Galsworthy figure out how to turn the damned thing off.

**Neat Ideas:** Many people see the fights between the heroes and their villainous mirror-versions and could catch clues to their identities and weaknesses. Good names being dragged through the mud. Secret, dark desires acted upon. Mystery whether PC is being mind-controlled, or is a mirror-duplicate. Transportation into the "Mirror Zone" – where the heroes are villains and the villains are heroes.

**Possible Outcomes:** Escaped evil-versions of heroes left out there.

## *EPISODE: "RETURN TO SENDER"*

**Villain of the Week:** The Philatelist.

**Synopsis:** After somehow getting the drop on the heroes, the crazy criminal uses a magical stamp to mail them to a fictional otherworld (Oz, Wonderland, the Shire, Discworld, Toontown, etc.). The PCs must figure out a way to co-opt the power of the

magical stamp to navigate the Postal Dimensions and return home.

**Neat Ideas:** Use of the powers found in otherworlds to control the stamp may be necessary to get a fresh pick-up, or maybe simply writing a new address on the envelope will work (but it should take at least 2 tries or worlds to get home).

**Possible Outcomes:** The Philatelist escapes or gets thrown back in the booby hatch. Super-tech, magical artifacts, or intriguing information might be brought back from the otherworlds.

## *EPISODE: "BEHIND THE LINES"*

**Villain of the Week:** Aliens (with special guest star: the Dragon Knight!)

**Synopsis:** One of the alien saucers breaks through the Justice Alliance's defenses and heads for Drakesville. The Dragon Knight returns to quietly locate and capture the invaders from space alone.

**Neat Ideas:** The Dragon Knight being really close-lipped before spilling the beans about the intergalactic war. Friction between the old hero and the new heroes. Stealthy operations. The Dragon Knight has a war-wound, making him less effective. Keeping the media distracted.

**Possible Outcomes:** Alien-tech! Blowing the secret of aliens wanting to invade us and subsequent chaos. The Dragon Knight could die from his injuries! (A definite finale!)

## *RUNNING SECOND-STRING SUPERS*

**Animated Style.** Review the information in *Chapter 1*. Remember: "Limited detail for maximum motion."

**Popular Opinion.** A big part of hitting the Themes mentioned at the top of this chapter will have to do with how the citizens of Drakesville react to what the PCs do. They will be minor celebrities, of a sort (at least while they're in costume), and everyone will have an opinion on them. Comparisons with the Dragon Knight are inevitable.

**Episodic Nature.** This campaign structure really works well with an episode/issue structure. Try to have main plots resolve in a single session, while encouraging subplots to stretch over several. It'll be compelling, bring people back for more, and easy to fit into the playing group's individual busy schedules.





## CHAPTER 8: *SUPERCORPS*

**Style:** Cinematic

**Theme(s):** Mercenary/Consultant Superhumans; Big Multinational Corporations; "20 minutes into the future."

Apathy. Greed. Corruption. Power. Hope. Courage. Honor.  
Justice.

– Opening credit interstitial titles, *Batman Beyond*

The hotline buzzed. Jill looked at the display before clicking on her headset. "Widget & Zoom, LLP. How can we help you today, Mr. Mayor?"

As she listened, her fingers danced over her keyboard. "I see. Yes, I believe that a Sacred Ghost threat against City Hall does fall under our contract with you for urban security. Hmmm."

She sketched a line across her monitor with one crimson fingernail. "I see that your office hasn't yet paid our invoice for the bodyguard detail during the Governor's Ball. However, you are still within the 90 days permitted for payment, so our team will be dispatched momentarily, at the contracted rate. Thank you, and have a pleasant day!"

### PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE

These are the things that most well-informed people in the world of SuperCorps know:

**Superhumans first appeared in the 1980s**, and slowly increased in numbers over the next 25 years. Today, there are roughly 300 superhumans worldwide, distributed more or less equally on each of the inhabited continents. (Interestingly, this means that Australia has a substantial number of per capita supers.) Of those, about a fifth are altruistic *superheroes*, a fifth are selfish *supervillains*, and the rest legally work for another entity (university, multinational corporation, consultancy firm, the government/military, etc.) and are called either *superconsultants* or *meta-specialists*.

There are around 150 *supernormals* – normal humans who, thanks to exceptional training, can compete on a relatively equal footing with superhumans – worldwide, distributed more in favor of First World countries. Again, around one-fifth are superheroes; one-fifth are supervillains, and the rest are superconsultants. Some national militaries have small *power-armor* cadres; these *super-troopers* (usually) count as supernormals.

**Super-Law.** As yet, the world's legal systems haven't perfectly adapted to the existence of superhumans. Generally, Powers are considered "deadly weapons" if used in committing a crime. Telepathic invasion is a form of assault, but Precognition is not counted as "insider trading" or fraud. While there have been many attempts to create Powers licensure or registration, these efforts have been consistently blocked.

**Super-Celebrity.** The relative rarity of superhumans means that most people never see them unless something very bad happens in their hometown; even then, they might not even notice a superhuman when passing one on the street, since only a few of superhumans wear distinctive costumes (most opt for Iconized but normal clothing). Some conspiracy theorists even doubt their existence, chalking the whole thing up to multicorp (see below) PR, Hollywood special effects, and futuristic technology.

While some media outlets cater to hero-watchers, multicorps prefer to push mundane celebrities that they have a financial interest in, downplaying super-reportage – unless they have a photogenic meta-specialist on the payroll. Still, a superhero saving the city or a supervillain threatening the UN is always going to command headlines.

**Multi-national corporations (or *multicorps*)** are much more powerful here than in our world. Multicorps are usually huge, dabbling in markets worldwide, with offices, factories, and concerns in many different countries. Most have revenues that exceed the Gross National Product of some First World countries. Each has a *head office*, where the big muckety-mucks make the global decisions; smaller muckety-mucks run the regional or continental divisions. Anti-trust laws have been relaxed, so corporations can gain strangleholds on whole markets. Branding is everywhere. It's a darwinistic world of spinoffs, divestitures, subsidiaries, mergers, shell corporations, consolidations – a constant churn of money and power.

Multicorps dominate this setting far more than corporations do in our own universe. Multicorps form vertical monopolies – owning everything from the farms that grow the soybeans to the processing plants that change the potatoes into Tofu Treats and package the snack in colorful plastic, to the transportation companies that ship the crates of product, to the supermarkets that sell all six flavors of Tofu Treats – to control whole business processes from beginning to end. They form horizontal monopolies, with single multicorps dominating entire categories of products; one multicorp may produce absolutely all of the widely-available brands of soda. Several smaller firms from unrelated industries may merge into a single multicorp conglomerate. Several multicorps may come together as allies in a cartel to limit competition, fix prices, and control supply.

Multicorps are becoming something like small cities, with their own legal systems (based on a corporate handbook and code of conduct), security forces (dressed in company livery), sovereign rights within their office buildings, and so forth. Most multicorps run planned townships for their employees (the "company town" taken to extremes), many have discreet offices or factories outside of these townships, and a handful even have small space stations in orbit. Multicorps spend their time doing business, waging corporate war, and manipulating politics – and not necessarily in that order. A few lucky multicorps have superhumans or supernormals on the payroll, but most of the time,

they're forced to contract with independent supers for their services.

On the whole, unemployment is down. . . but so is job satisfaction. Employees consume a wide variety of products (food, drink, entertainment) created by their multicorp or its approved subsidiaries or corporate allies, and avoid the products of corporate enemies. "Company men" call it *corporate patriotism*, but critics call it *corporate jingoism*.

Most people are caught between these competing loyalties (not to mention loyalties between friends, families, non-work organizations, and personal ethics). Do I miss Junior's soccer game to attend the boss's son's track meet? How do I handle my relationship with my college roommate who now works for a corporate enemy? If my division head tells me to violate a city ordinance, do I do it? Each day is rife with potential conflict(s) of interest. If employees are found disloyal to their multicorp, they risk everything from demotion to being fired for *corporate treason* – and a corporate traitor has a really hard time getting a new job.

**Governments** have been somewhat sidelined due to the rise to power of the multicorps. In theory, they are still the law of the land. In practice, they're heavily beholden to multicorp interests. The majority of governmental activity in the world of SuperCorps is in the public interest – national defense, worker relations, public safety, and environmental concerns. The conflict between national loyalty and corporate loyalty is a growing concern, as is the pernicious influence of the multicorps on the workings of politics.



**The world is "twenty minutes into the future."** Some of the cutting-edge technologies (see *Chapter 2, Gadgeteering*) from the minds and hands of superhumans have begun spreading out into general use. Cell phones and computers are smaller and more powerful, technology integration (especially home and personal networks) are starting to really develop, materials are slightly stronger and lighter, medical techniques are quicker and better, a large number of cars on the road are hybrids or pure electrics (with some top-of-the-line hover cars coming off of the assembly line), solar power is more efficient, and so forth. The technology and society of the SuperCorps world is much like our own, only shinier and more user-friendly.

**Shangri-La, Atlantis, Mars, Fairyland?** So far as the public knows, there are no hidden or lost civilizations, alien invaders, or extra-dimensional entities on Earth. There's no evidence for any of them, even though some superhumans and conspiracy theorists make claims. The majority of people don't buy into these ideas.

**Some superhumans find employment as superconsultants.** Often, a handful of like-minded individuals form small consulting corporations, or *superconsultancies*. These superconsultancies are contracted by multacorps for various specialized tasks, which can include surveying, research, corporate training, hazardous material transport, courier service, corporate espionage, corporate warfare, marketing needs, search and recovery, bodyguard services, salvage operations, and so forth. Depending upon the skills of their members and the needs of their clients, they can usually set their own price for a contract.

Superconsultancies are often structured along the lines of a law firm, as a Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) or Limited Liability Corporation (LLC) – think of *LA Law* or *Ally McBeal*. *Partners* invest in and profit off of the firm, seek out new clients and manage existing ones, administer the firm, do fieldwork as they choose, and are project leads for teams of senior associates and associates. *Senior associates* do assigned fieldwork for the firm and its clients under the direction of partners, seek out their own clients, and mentor younger associates. *Associates* do fieldwork for the company and its clients as assigned, under the

direction of a senior associate or a partner. *Administrative staff* support all of the above as secretaries, mechanics, IT specialists, public relations, etc. Some superconsultancies enforce a standard uniform, others do not; some urge their superhuman members to do *pro bono* work as altruistic superheroes, others do not.

While many superconsultants have only one public identity, a superconsultancy can legally – with the permission of the employee – hold the identity of their superhuman employees confidential, as a "trade secret." In any case, most superconsultants are usually referred to by codename, and may collect a reputation in the business world regarding their personality, normal fee, and quality of work.

Mr. White gestured, and the EWR Elite guards left him alone in the interrogation room with the thief, pinioned and chained on the table.

The malefactor wore black, as burglars often did. White thought he could just barely detect the off-black threads of hyperweave in the fabric. That would explain the guards' reports of his shrugging off of blaster fire. A bluish symbol – some sort of bird – spread its wings over the criminal's heart.

No one he knew. He grinned to himself. Any thief that contracted for Eschenbach-White-Rhodon's shadier dealings knew better than to turn against the multicorp.

"Listen, my friend," White said. "Let us be as civilized as possible. Tell me who you are working for."

"I work for myself," said the thief, fear audible in his voice.

"That's unfortunate. The corporation takes rather a dim view of independents. If you happened to be an operative of another concern, well, that's another matter. Again: are you?"

"When are you going to call the cops?"

Ah, machismo. Or is it a thief's honor? "You are laboring under a misapprehension, my friend. This corporate installation is effectively a sovereign land, separate from the laws of the fair city it stands in. As my name is one of the three upon the sign outside this skyscraper, this means, in short, that I am the law here. . . and I am of a definite Hammurabian bent. Eye for an eye, and such."

He extracted a vibro-saw from his briefcase. "I will ask you once more, but before I do, let me make something clear. If you are working alone, you have hurt us alone, and bear the consequences alone. If you are but the agent of another multicorp, they bear the majority of the fault. Indeed, most standard mercenary contracts explicitly wave the loyalty clause when torture is involved."

White flicked the switch, and the sawblade began to whine dangerously. He walked to the table and held the vibro-saw over the burglar's wrist. "Now, are you *quite* sure you were working independently?"

## BEING A SUPERHERO

Some few, noble souls who find themselves in possession of superhuman powers (or supernormal skills) altruistically dedicate themselves to truth and justice, in a world that often seems lacking in those qualities. Being a superhero in the SuperCorps setting often means standing against deranged supervillains, natural disasters, powerful multacorps, ineffectual governments, and – sometimes – public opinion. Most superheroes keep their identities secret and wear a costume, work alone, and perform their super-deeds on a part-time basis.

## BEING A SUPERCONSULTANT

Most superhumans and supernormals in the SuperCorps setting have, unsurprisingly, decided to use their powers to the best of their ability – and make a buck in the process. Being a superconsultant means that the character is working for someone or some organization. Luckily, they have the freedom to pick and choose who they'll work for and for how long. Still, operating as a superconsultant opens you up to legal issues that other superhumans may never have to deal with. Some superconsultants keep their identities secret, others go public. Some wear costumes, others stick to iconic outfits, a few wear multicorp livery, and some just wear street clothes. They tend to either work purely freelance or as part of a superconsultancy, though some have joined multacorps permanently. They do their super-deeds from 9-to-5 (or on schedules determined by their clients).

## BEING A SUPERVILLAIN

A handful of superhumans are just in it for the money, the mayhem, the manipulation, or the mass-murder. They are, in a word, supervillains. Whether robbing a bank, blowing up an orphanage, or attempting world domination, they display all the worst qualities of humanity, magnified through a lens of great power. Being a supervillain in the SuperCorps setting indicates tremendous ego, since the potentials for gainful and extremely rewarding employment are everywhere. Most people consider them deranged – and a number are completely insane. Superheroes, governments, most multacorps (openly, at least), the media, the public, and other

supervillains stand against them. Still, pain, fear, and control are a rush to these sorts, and some folks just enjoy being the bad guy. Most supervillains keep their identities secret for as long as possible and wear a costume; after capture by the authorities, their identities are public. Supervillains tend to recruit Minions, and pursue their criminal activities on an opportunistic basis.

In the midst of the booming of its grappling cannons, the pirate airship *Plunder* dropped its invisibility field.

"We are grappled onto City Hall, Cap'n!" the Sea Dog helmsman reported.

Jolly Roger stood up, his cape swirling dramatically, his laughter booming along the deck. "Well done, Mr. Hamish! All hands: prepare to board! Cutlasses and laser-muskets at the ready! And remember: no harm must come to our target, the landlubberly Mayor Jenkins, or I'll have your guts for garters! Mistress Mischief, bring me my jet-pack!"



## SECRET INFORMATION

These are the things that most people in the world of SuperCorps *don't* know:

**Multicorp Sovereignty.** For all intents and purposes, multicolors are small, distributed nations. Their wealth and influence is such that outside governmental forces often have no reach into their corporate halls. Many politicians world-wide have been compromised by corporate interests. Some conspiracy theorists claim that over one-third have been utterly bought and paid for by a multicorps, one-third attempt to balance their responsibilities to their campaign contributors and their constituents with their multicorp marching orders, and one-third are essentially free of direct influence, or bound in a web of counterbalanced obligations to several multicolors. (Indeed, the competition of rival multicolors prevents any one corporation or consortium from taking over major countries entirely; however, there are banana republics that are solely under multicorp control.)

Through their control of the lawmakers, and their ability to outspend any justified legal entanglement, multicolors can do nearly anything they please. However. . .

**The Red Tape Resistance.** One of the greatest groups of opponents multicolors face is a nation's civil servants. These unsung, unappointed paper-pushers use copious bureaucratic hoodoo to slow and interfere with corporate rapacity. Following the letter or spirit of the laws in question as convenient, digging up old and as-yet still in force ordinances, scrupulously watching for any regulatory misstep, these civil service heroes fight their losing battle against big business.

**Shangri-La, Atlantis, Mars, Fairyland!** As noted above, the public has no firm evidence that hidden or lost civilizations or that extra-terrestrial or extra-dimensional life exists. But there are hints that such things may very well be real after all. While the origins of the superhumans and supernormals in this core rulebook are all related to super-technology, magic, "mutation," extensive training, or utter mystery, nothing says that the PCs of a gaming group cannot have origins or adventures in such places. (Later *T&J* supplements may very well

introduce specific implementations of these locales; one of them will be a hidden city of magic-using monkeys.)

**"White-Cape" Crime.** While not much bandied about, superhuman employees and superconsultants often turn against their corporate masters. Some do it for money, some for revenge, others for a noble cause. The most minor of these infractions is breaking one's contract – and this can lead to being tagged as a corporate traitor, making future work hard to come by. If a superhuman steals his employer's information or equipment (especially super-technology), engages in corporate espionage or sabotage, uses his knowledge for insider trading, accepts bribes (from outside the company), or embezzles funds, the multicorps tend not to look kindly upon that. And, given many multicorp activities, they probably won't try to pull the character into court for any but the most mundane of these charges – they'll just try to kill him.

## NOTABLE NPCs

These are some of the super-denizens of the *SuperCorps* setting; NPCs marked with an asterisk (\*) may appear in *T&J* supplements, and are therefore left as brief thumbnails here. GMs should feel free to stat them up as they see fit.

**American Ranger:** Super for the U.S. government and leader of the Power Platoon. Possibly the first superhuman in this setting. Use the stats from *Chapter 3*, p. 31, but alter them using the rules for Veteran characters from *Chapter 6, Specific NPC Types*, p. 73, to reflect his long career.

**Catastrophe:** See *Chapter 6*, p. 79.

**Doctor Widget:** See *Chapter 6*, p. 80, with the following changes: she is married to Zipzoom, is pregnant with their child, and one of the founding partners of Widget & Zoom, LLP. (See below, *Intro Scenario: Staff Meeting*, p. 101.)

**Dragon Knight.** See *Chapter 7*, p. 86, with the following changes: the armor is super-tech rather than mystical in origin, its wearer is a Chinese super-trooper instead of an American archeologist, and Dragon Knight is the leader of the Chinese version of the USA's Power Platoon.

**\*Fantom:** Mysterious, uncatchable leader of the Sacred Ghosts terrorist group; has phasing technology with which he arms his minions.

**Jolly Roger:** See *Chapter 6*, p. 80. Freelance supervillain, and seems to dislike the *Odonata Securities* multicorp.

\***Laser Ray Lassiter.** Light-based corporate super working for the *CommSix* multicorp.

**Manticore, the Manhunter:** See *Chapter 3*, p. 31.

\***The Neutronic Man.** Shrinking corporate super working for the *Koando Microtech* multicorp.

**Reflex:** See *Chapter 6*, p. 81. He has worked extensively for the *EWR* and *SR Weiss* multicolorps in this setting.

**Snow Owl:** Flying ice master; freelance super-consultant (see *Chapter 4*, p. 54).

\***Sundiata.** Super-Strong, with Invulnerability and Super-Armor, this altruistic superhero protects Western Africa. He has surprisingly good relations with several multicolorps. He is one of the more powerful superhumans on the planet, and should be created using the rules for Veteran characters from *Chapter 6, Specific NPC Types*, p. 73. He has been romantically linked to Ultrawoman (see below).

\***Turtlezilla:** Gigantic, rampaging mutated turtle; human-level or higher intellect; atomic laser eyes.

**Ultrawoman:** The top gun of the setting; a true altruistic superheroine. Use the stats from *Chapter 6*, p. 81, but alter them using the rules for World-Class characters from *Chapter 6, Specific NPC Types*, p. 73, to reflect her pre-eminent status. She has been romantically linked with Sundiata (see above).

\***White Monkey.** Mysterious vigilante waging a one-man (or, maybe, "one-woman") war against the *SR Weiss* multicorp in India.

**Zipzoom:** See *Chapter 6*, p. 81, with the following changes: he is married to Doctor Widget, and one of the founding partners of Widget & Zoom, LLP. (See below, *Intro Scenario: Staff Meeting*, p. 101.)

Ultrawoman sped like an arrow through the late afternoon skies, searching the forest below.

There! Exactly as her precognitive vision had foretold: a wisp of smoke. She swooped in for a landing, alighting in front of the fire of the small campsite. She walked over to the nylon pup tent, and cleared her throat.

"Who's there?" A middle-aged man's head popped out through the flap. Behind his glasses, his eyes widened as he realized who his visitor was. "Oh... It's you!"

"Dr. Emil Lagenstrasse?" she asked. "The world-renowned neurologist?"

The man blinked twice, then nodded. "That's me. How did you know? Why are you here?"

"You need to come with me, Doctor. Now. A little boy's life is at stake."

## NOTABLE ORGANIZATIONS

These are some of the powerhouse groups of the SuperCorps setting:

### ESCHENBACH-WHITE-RHODON, INC.

In the dog-eat-dog world of multicolorps, *Eschenbach-White-Rhodon, Inc.* (EWR) is a wolf. It has its snout in all sorts of pies, princes and politicians at its beck and call, and a complete lack of scruples. Very rich, very powerful, very well organized, and known to be one of the few non-super-consultancy corporations to have at least one superhuman on the payroll (Mr. Eschenbach, founder; has fire powers). While primarily known for industrial robotics and other manufacturing concerns, EWR is a true conglomerate – it either openly or covertly owns and controls: the EWR Network (cable, broadcast, print), Sonikobishi Components (recording labels, entertainment artists, electronic devices), the Texas Fried Turkey chain of fast-food restaurants, Parzifal Toys, Immaculata Motors, and Rose Films Studios.

A typical branch office of EWR is under the iron fist of a senior partner Vice-President, with several junior partners, associates, and minions at his command. An EWR branch often takes up an entire skyscraper, usually designed along arcology lines – the building is the company town.

EWR Minions come in three types: *Typicals*, who either provide basic security services or lab assistance; *Specialists*, who lead teams of *Typicals*; and *Elites*, who are combat-oriented stormtroopers.

#### EWR MINIONS

**QUALITIES:** *Typical:* Good [+2] Security Guard or Good [+2] Technician, and Poor [-2] Scared of Crossing Company; *Specialist:* Good [+2] Security Guard, Good [+2] (Specific Area of Specialization), and Poor [-2] Company Man; *Elite:* Expert [+4] Soldier, Good [+2] Armor, and Poor [-2] Bully.

**SIDEARMS (normal-scale):** *Typical:* Good [+2] Stun Pistol; *Specialist:* Good [+2] Stun Pistol; *Elite:* Good [+2] Blaster Pistol.

**LIVERY:** Black jumpsuits with silver piping and logo; Minion ranks in silver braid on sleeves (rings) and shoulders (letters).

### LIONHEART INDUSTRIES

*Lionheart Industries* is a well-regarded multicorp that specializes in aerospace and medical technologies. It doesn't have many subsidiaries. Instead, it's gone for a vertical structure. While only middling wealthy as

multicorps go, it is *the* major player in space transportation. Lionheart owns companies that produce jet and rocket fuels, design and build aerospace engines and vehicle frames, air and space combat weaponry, pilot training schools, specialized hospitals, medical nanotech, livable orbital environments, and space science and manufacturing. Lionheart built its reputation on stealth jets for national militaries and on the first successful civilian space station (Lionheart One, in Low Earth Orbit).

Currently, this multicorp is a bit shaky after the mysterious accidental and untimely death of founding genius and CEO Brant Richards in an unscheduled visit to his new facility, Lionheart Five (located in Lagrange point L5). Employee morale is in the toilet since the demise of the beloved and youthful Richards. Two members of the Executive Board – composed of the Vice Presidents of subsidiary companies – are fighting out who gets to be top dog in the wake of this tragedy. John Brut (Pride Aerodyne) is the top contender to take over the reins, but faces stiff competition from Cleo Mahfouz (NanoDoc, Inc.).

A typical subsidiary of Lionheart is run by a Vice-President, who was usually the founder or CEO of the company before Richards took them over. Lionheart tends to use existing subsidiary offices and factories; replace or co-opt existing Human Resources, IT, and Executive staff into the central Lionheart structure; and standardize salaries and benefits across all subsidiaries. In this way, Lionheart rarely makes any substantive changes to companies it acquires. Unfortunately, this practice has led to a somewhat lackluster sense of loyalty among employees in these days of corporate patriotism, balanced by a relative freedom from the nastier aspects and strictures of multicorp life. This collegiality was a strength under Richards, but without him, the overall structure is starting to fray.

Lionheart Minions are either security *Guards* or scientific *Technicians*.

### **LIONHEART MINIONS (GUARD & TECHNICIAN)**

**QUALITIES:** Good [+2] Security Guard or Good [+2] Technician, and Poor [-2] Morale.

**LIVERY:** Gold coveralls with black lion crest.

## POWER PLATOON

The U.S. government maintains a small military unit called *Power Platoon*. This super-force responds to superhuman attacks against the American citizenry, aids in disaster recovery, defends against super-terrorism, and performs high-intensity strikes against foreign targets. Power Platoon cannot be called in against American citizens on American soil *unless* the individual(s) are deemed to be participating in terrorist activities. (And "supervillain = terrorist" is a pretty easy link to make.)

Led by American Ranger (see above), the force is composed of around forty soldiers – 4 superhumans and 36 supernormal *super-troopers* – plus American Ranger. The division between the sexes is roughly 70% male and 30% female, but currently, three of the four other superhumans in the unit happen to be women. The Power Platoon has two *squads* of 20 "metalheads" each (*Red* and *Blue*); each squad possesses 4 fire teams of 5 soldiers (*Alpha*, *Beta*, *Gamma*, and *Delta*). These different subgroups compete against one another for superhuman-response training purposes. The rivalry between Blue Alpha and Red Gamma is particularly well-known among aficionados. They are under the direct command of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs; their budget and administration is handled by the U.S. Special Operations Command (with some budget contributions from DARPA, the Army, the Air Force, and the Department of Homeland Security). Blue Squad is based at Fort Indiantown Gap, PA; Red Squad is headquartered at Fort Huachuca, AZ.

Any member of the regular military who displays or manifests superpowers while in service is eligible for transfer to Power Platoon. Potential super-troopers are recruited from the *crème de la crème* of the special forces of each branch, and undergo even more grueling training in order to "earn their buckets" – i.e., power-armor. (The Super-Trooper Quality thus includes military special ops capabilities under its penumbra – see *Chapter 2*, p. 15 – as well as providing additional training related to superhuman combat and information.)

The power-armor itself is composed completely of cutting-edge technology rather than super-technology and is effectively a Quasi-Power (see



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Chapter 4, p. 37) version of the standard Power-Armor Power. So, while it is possible to mass-produce them, they have a massive Limitation: complexity. The fabrication, maintenance, operation, and repair of a "bucket" is hideously expensive – every single man-sized suit is equivalent to the cost of a stealth bomber. Additionally, the unit is usually down a quarter of its strength at all times due to injured metalheads or equipment in need of repair.

### POWER PLATOON TROOPER

**QUALITIES:** Expert [+4] Super-trooper, and Poor [-2] Under Orders.

**QUASI-POWERS:** Good [+2] Invulnerability; Good [+2] Super-Jump; Average [0] Super-Strength; Average [0] Life Support. (Limitation: Cannot be used by someone without training; expensive to operate; Damage Ranks taken will not "heal" between Scenes without repairs at base.)

**LIVERY:** Olive-drab power-armor (and, in combat situations, each Trooper carries a Gauss Carbine weapon, used as part of the Super-trooper Quality).





## SACRED GHOSTS

The *Sacred Ghosts* are more than just a terrorist group, they are an apocalyptic religious cult. The enigmatic Fantom is their Deity-on-Earth, the agent and avatar of the Majestic Ancestor Spirits. The creed of their faith is simple: the peoples of Earth have turned away from the Holy Path blazed by their illustrious forbearers. For most, only in death will they reunite with the Majestic Ancestor Spirits, and awaken to their teachings. Unfortunately, the trauma of birth erases this wisdom, and the necessities of life distract from personal understanding, leading to all the problems of the world. The Fantom and his followers have been blessed with knowledge from beyond the grave, showing them the truth, and granting them power. All others must be shown this truth, one way or another.

To an unenlightened outsider, the beliefs of the Sacred Ghosts seems to partake of elements of Shinto, the Paiute Ghost Dance faith, Objectivism, and Theosophy, all twisted to evil ends. They believe that all human endeavor postdating the era of the Majestic Ancestors is flawed and wicked. Their teachings paradoxically encourage empowerment through liberation from human mores, laws, and restraints, yet demand unswerving obedience to the Deity-On-Earth. They are charged to destroy the works of man, for their reward will be in the Spirit Heaven, where they will hold command over all those they have "led to the truth."

The Sacred Ghosts maintain a covert network of outreach and recruitment programs, disguised through layers and layers of shell companies. They run soup kitchens, New Age shops, pseudo-Masonic occult fellowships, several small spiritualist presses, a Gospel music record label, an environmental activism group, several gun clubs and militia movements, suicide hotlines, tent churches, a carnival, a home-schooling counseling service, and several "junior businessmen" groups. They seek the disaffected and the down-and-out to turn to their pernicious beliefs, playing on the targets' particular interests and issues. Then, they brainwash the target using standard cult recruitment methods: limiting the scope of discussions, "switching" the meaning of words to create agreement, confusing doctrine, alternating between rejection and validation, peer

pressure, isolation from friends and family, protein-poor diets, repetitive and laborious tasks, sleep deprivation, confessional outbursts, a standard manner of dress and deportment, etc.

Those few victims possessing the right combination of physical prowess and utter fanaticism are promoted up through the layers to the actual core organization, to become the elite minions of the Fantom himself – the "holy dead-in-life" operatives known as Sacred Ghosts. New recruits to the core organization are trained in the ways of terror and personal combat, and given their holy vestments – a white jumpsuit packed with phasing technology and explosives. After that, they live and die by the Fantom's command.

NOTE - Apparently, the Ghost Suits are a form of Super-Gadget or Power-Armor created specifically for the individual Sacred Ghost by the Fantom himself.

### *SACRED GHOST TERRORIST*

**QUALITIES:** Good [+2] Terrorist, Good [+2] Karate, and Poor [-2] Fanatically Loyal to the Fantom.

**POWERS:** Ghost Suit (Average [0] Phasing, Poor [-2] Walk on Air, and one-time Expert [+4] Super-Explosion, *which affects wearer too!*).

**LIVERY:** Pure-white jumpsuit (covers face), with blue goggles, gloves, and boots (all Sacred Ghosts carry conventional pistols, knives, and grenades, used as part of the Terrorist Quality)

## RUNNING SUPERCORPS

**Impossible Tasks.** If someone could do it themselves, they wouldn't have to hire superhumans to do it. Superconsultancies and multicorp super-employees are often called upon to do the impossible on a regular basis. That's just part of the job. One interesting way to game this is for the GM to pose a problem for which he has considered no solution, letting the PCs come up with ways to attack it. The GM then reacts to the PCs' actions, for good and for ill. However, GMs should be cautioned not to shut down every idea the PCs come up with – that isn't fun. Instead, introducing a complication is more interesting. If the PCs cut a new river tributary to water a city, possible complications could be the discovery of an archeological treasure, or the collapse of a related ecosystem downstream of the cut, or the development of a new ecosystem along the cut. All could be very interesting to explore.

**Corporate Resources.** If characters work for a multicorp (or a large superconsultancy), in theory, money is no object. In practice, however, they are dependent upon the state of funds in their departmental budget. Still, company cars, hover-cars, jets, and basic equipment should be easily available.

Additionally, some organizations – especially superconsultancies – may be built as HQs (see p. 69), which could give characters access to in-depth information not generally known, as well as Trophies (see p. 69) and Team Vehicles (see p. 71).

**Hired Guns & Subcontractors.** Sometimes, you just need a teleporter, a telepath, a Gamma Wave Neutralization Device, or someone who can survive oceanic pressures. But no character on your team has the relevant Power. What do you do? Hire a specialist. Some superhumans working for multicorps have the ability to "moonlight" for brief periods written into their contracts; most don't, since the multicorps love non-compete clauses. Still, it's worth a shot, especially with one's corporate allies. Expect some conference room (or backdoor) wheeling and dealing. . . especially if the hired gun is technically violating their contract.

**Personal Days, Temps, & Interns.** The SuperCorps setting has a great, built-in method for handling those times when a player can't make a session: they take a personal day. The character called in sick, or had to go to the DMV, or attend a wedding or something. And for those times when someone wants to sit in on a session, they can play a hired gun (see above) or an intern temporarily assigned to the project (read: adventure).

**Salary Issues.** Since superhumans and superconsultants are so rare in this setting, such characters should not have a wealth-related Weakness – the money usually exists to secure their talents. But what's to stop them from simply buying their way out of a situation? Well, nothing – it's their money. Note, however, that unless a character has Wealth as one of their Qualities, they're unused to being big spenders, and only get the normal Average [0] roll to utilize all those greenbacks. If you don't know where to spend the dough, what good can you really do?

**Corporate Ethics.** Most organizations will have a code of conduct for its employees to follow. They can serve as interesting Weaknesses for characters, or – if violated – ways for NPCs to threaten the character with corporate disloyalty. Corporate conduct is usually summed up in a sentence or two; it can be anything from "never surrender" to "the safety of innocents come before the job" to "the job comes first." Usually, the corporate code of conduct also determines the percentage breakdown of pro bono work that should be done, if any.

**Secret Identities.** Many organizations have set up specific procedures to protect a character's secret identity, if they choose to maintain one. These procedures generally deal with things like bonding, assertion of secret identity as a trade secret, double-blind HR entries, legal injunctions, non-disclosure agreements, triple-encryption personnel files, and other corporate-babble. The upshot is that a character's secret is *generally* safe with their employer. This doesn't preclude the possibility of a rival multicorp stealing the locked database or abusing their knowledge of the character's secret, but to keep paranoia in the game down to a dull roar, this safety should just be considered a trope of the setting.

## INTRO SCENARIO: STAFF MEETING

**WANTED** – Meta-talented or highly skilled individuals sought by **WIDGET & ZOOM, LLP**, to grow its superconsulting practice. The W&Z super-consultant will collect appropriate data, structure and analyze information, and develop response plans to high-risk situations. Successful super-consultants will have a track record of successful adventurous activities and a commitment to high-quality performance in the public interest. Typical consulting projects include extreme environment surveying, research and development of cutting-edge and super-technologies, hazardous material transport, search and recovery operations, and others.

**Minimum Requirements:** Exceptional mundane proficiencies or superhuman abilities. Keen problem-solving and analytical skills. Must work well in teams; strong interpersonal skills desired. Absolutely *must* function at peak ability in dangerous environments.

*PLEASE*, if you do not meet these minimum requirements, do not apply. Your resume will not be considered.

## WIDGET & ZOOM, LLP

*Widget & Zoom* is a small superconsultancy specializing in super-technology research, courier, and materiel recovery projects. It was formed over six months ago by married superheroes Doctor Widget and Zipzoom upon their semi-retirement from altruistic superhero work (due to Doc's pregnancy).

W&Z is located in a small, older office building (4 floors) in the City. The **roof** has a small landing pad, hover-van hangar, and observation deck. The **fourth floor** is composed of the conference room, the executive kitchenette, the R&D Lab (opens to roof), and the senior partner offices. The **third floor** has employee and visitor dorm rooms, a rec room, and a small first aid station. The **second floor** has associate offices, secretarial pool, office supplies closet, IT department, and a small library. The **first floor** consists of the reception area, client meeting rooms, and lunchroom. The **basement** is for underground parking (street access). There is one **sub-basement** level composed of the Training Room, Control Room, and Locker-room. There are restrooms, elevator access, and stair access on every floor; however, the security system permits only employees to go anywhere but the first floor. Security, maintenance, HVAC, and janitorial services are handled by a small number of non-sapient robots constructed by Doc.

W&Z is financially supported by a combination of patent licensure and consulting fees; in six months, they've proven to be an up and coming superconsultancy. Associates make \$500,000 per year, plus bonuses; Senior Associates make \$1 million dollars per year, plus bonuses; and partners share in overall corporate profits, thus making an undisclosed amount of money. The benefits packages – including health/dental/vision, life insurance, AD&D (accidental death and dismemberment), and 401K – are very solid. The company pays travel costs and per diems for fieldwork, but limited hazard pay. W&Z can provide most off-the-shelf equipment (if given sufficient time to acquire it) and some specialized gear; it also has two high-altitude hover-vans and a couple of land and sea vehicles for company use.

PCs will start as Associates, which requires no Quality Rank to be taken during character generation. If a PC wishes to start as a Senior Associate, they must take that as one of their Qualities (improving this Quality to Master level, good performance, and time with the company is how to reach partner status).

As an **HQ**, the Widget & Zoom building has the following Qualities: Good [+2] *Gadget Lab*, Good [+2] *Company Vehicles*, Good [+2] *Security Systems*, Average [0] *Trophy Room* (Trophies undefined; character must give a description of past project in addition to Hero Point expenditure to use).

## FIRST STAFF MEETING: AGENDA

The staff meeting takes place in the fourth floor conference room, with its panoramic view of the City. Doctor Widget sits at the head of the conference table, with Zipzoom on her right and Susan Harrington on her left. The Senior Associates are all scattered about the table in no particular order, and Gary White is wandering around with printouts, coffee, water, and other stuff like that.

NOTE - GMs may wish to reproduce copies of the *Staff Meeting: Agenda* handout for the players.

### A. DOCTOR WIDGET'S REMARKS

#### 1. WELCOME.

**Description:** Doctor Widget is a late 40's female, short, chubby, cute, and vastly pregnant. She wears a white labcoat over a sensible blue tunic and stretch pants; on one hand is her famous Thunderglove, and on the other is a gold wedding band. She is capable and has a dark-yet-whimsical sense of humor.

"It's good to see new faces around this table. I'm Doctor Widget, your boss. W&Z has been growing by leaps and bounds over the past few months, and we have plenty of work to go around. That's why you're here. Let's grow together."

#### 2. SALARY & BENEFITS REVIEW

"Let me quickly remind all of you of the way salaries are handled here at W&Z. New Associates get \$500 K a year, Senior Associates a cool \$1 million. Partners share in company profits. The benefits package is as good, if not better, than that offered at many multacorps. Staff housing is available here for anyone who wants it – room and board is a benefit we offer; you also have access to state of the art lab and computer facilities. Any questions?"

#### 3. AUTONOMY & CODE OF CONDUCT

"One of the other benefits that you have here at W&Z is that you, even as Associates, will have much more autonomy than you would working for a typical multicorn. You will have a voice in decisions on which projects – both paid and pro bono – to pursue, consulted on changes in the physical plant, and offered the choice to do specialized research solely for this partnership.

"However, this autonomy comes with a price: our code of conduct. Gary is handing out our partnership's handbook now."

**Description:** Gary White, an early 20's male, skinny, medium height, brown hair and sideburns. He wears khakis and a plain black t-shirt. He's effervescent, and pleased as punch to be of service. He's handing out slim, digest-sized books.

"For all the verbiage in those books, it's pretty basic: we don't break the law (without approval from a senior partner), we do what's right, and the safety of innocents *always* comes before the job. Additionally, you are required to do at least one week – that's 40 hours – of pro bono work per year. That means on the clock, but you won't be billing the client."

#### 4. TEAMWORK

"Susan, if you would? Thank you."

**Description:** Susan Harrington, a mid-50s female, medium height and weight, white hair. She wears a gray suit-dress, white shirt, red-rimmed glasses, and gray pumps. She is serious and businesslike, and passing out quarter-sized electronic devices.

"It is vitally important that we here at W&Z think of ourselves as a team. Trust is a primary issue. We will be doing dangerous and wonderful things, we need to watch each others' backs. We're planning a team-building getaway sometime soon; attendance will be required. Susan is handing out your communicators; they have full audiovisual and data transmission and reception, link into our GPS system, and shouldn't need to have their batteries changed for about a decade. The unit may look slightly familiar, it's an improved version of the latest CommSix cell phone, which I designed. This version uses technology that's hard to reproduce, or we'd be in the telecom manufacturing business right now. These units can be fitted for watchband, belt buckle, earring, whatever you want, talk to Susan and see what we have in stock.

"All of you have trusted the partnership with your identities; as you know, we are bonded, and that information is triple-encrypted, on a standalone system. But the question is do you trust your co-workers with your identity and history? How much do you wish to tell? It's up to you. Just know that you wouldn't be in this room if the Senior Partners didn't trust you."

#### B. INTRODUCTIONS

"Let's go around the room. We'll tell each other our codenames, major powers and skills, as much about our origins and histories as we feel comfortable with, and end with what we do for fun. Remember, tell us what you wish us to know, and we'll respect that. I'll go first."

**GM NOTE:** After Doctor Widget and Zipzoom go, feel free to pick a PC to go next. Then another NPC. Then another PC. And so on.

#### ELLEN WIDGEON, AKA DOCTOR WIDGET

"I'm what you call a Super-Gadgeteer; I make stuff. I'm also good at science and engineering – I was born this way. Did the superhero thing for awhile as some of you may remember, then met Peter. We got married. As you can see, I can't really fly around town in my condition, so we formed this company. When I'm not great with child, I'm a pretty good dancer."

#### PETER MCGREGOR, AKA ZIPZOOM

**Description:** Zipzoom is in his late 30s, medium-short in height, relatively buff, bald, tanned, and goateed. He speaks with an odd drawl, slow but abrupt. . . somewhat rude, in fact. (But it's just his way.)

"You can call me Mr. McGregor or Zipzoom. I'm fairly fast and tough. Pretty good in a scrap, too. My secret origin is just that: *secret*. Same goes for my history, other than what El mentioned. I like to tinker with classic cars, and have a '57 Thunderbird in the north corner of the parking level. Do *not* mess with it. You don't cross me and mine, and we'll get along like peas in a pod."

#### SUSAN HARRINGTON, OFFICE MANAGER

"I'm the executive assistant for the partners, as well as the head of HR and the office manager. All you need to know about me is that I have over a century of experience at each of those jobs due to a time-warp episode. Any problems with office matters, let me know. I knit on my lunch hour."

#### THEODORE PAPADOPULOS, AKA OCTOPOPOLIS

**Description:** Ted Papadopoulos is a mid-30s male, fat, medium height, with curly black hair and square wire-rim glasses. He wears a rumpled tan business suit with a beige waistcoat. While he seems to be constantly harried and often gets flustered almost to the point of stuttering, he's really quite capable and rather sweet.

"I'm a Senior Associate. My identity is public, more or less. Just call me 'Ted,' or 'Octo,' whatever. I can turn into this octopus force-field thing. I had a (GM

*NOTE: physically make air-quotes*) 'troubled' youth, but my first real run-in with the law straightened me out. My origin is way too complicated to get into here; let's just say it was 'all of the above.' My hobby is losing money to Doctor Widget on Poker night."

**Qualities:** Expert [+4] Smart, Good [+2] Ex-Juvenile Delinquent, Good [+2] Quietly Capable, Good [+2] Senior Associate, Poor [-2] Needs Glasses.

**Powers:** Average [0] Aquatic, Average [0] Chameleon, Average [0] Ink Cloud, Average [0] Stretchy, Average [0] Super-Armor, Average [0] Tentacles.

**Power Stunts:** Swinging, Clinging, Jet-Swimming.

## WILLIAM FERROL, AKA TEFLON

**Description:** William Ferrol is a handsome, early-30s man. Tall, impressive build, impeccably groomed, sharp suit, nice shoes, perfect hair, baby blue eyes. While charming, something seems a bit plastic about him.

"I'm a Senior Associate as well as the firm's general counsel. However, as far as the public knows, Teflon and William Ferrol are two different guys, and I'd prefer we keep it that way. I'm somewhat Invulnerable, have some Super-Strength, and can do some other slick tricks. (heh heh) Origin? Best as I can tell: rays. Meteor rays. You know how it is, right? Anyway, I like to play golf and go dancing."

**Qualities:** Expert [+4] Attorney, Expert [+4] Charming, Good [+2] Business Contacts, Average [0], Senior Associate, Poor [-2] Hedonist.

**Primary Powers:** Good [+2] Invulnerability, Good [+2] Friction Control, Good [+2] Super-Strength.

**Power Stunts:** Hotfoot, Slickness

## SEQUOIA JONES, AKA SEQUOIA

**Description:** Sequoia Jones is a cute, early-20s Native American woman. She's short, with tanned skin and long black hair with a blue stripe. She wears a conservative blue pantsuit with some Oriental-themed jewelry accents. She's young, slightly geeky, with a good sense of humor.

"My codename is the same as my real name: Sequoia. An amazing amount of creativity there, right? My identity is fully public. I'm good with languages. Really good. I can make languages sit up and bark. Fricatives or plosives, glyphs or letters, you name it, I can play it. I can also increase my size a bit, and please, no 'Apache Chief' cracks – I'm Cherokee. Honestly don't know where my powers came from; woke up one day, and there they were. I play Classical Flute with a chamber music group on the weekends. Oh, I'm a Senior Associate."

**Qualities:** Good [+2] Activist, Good [+2] Linguist, Good [+2] Academic, Good [+2] Flute, Good [+2] Senior Associate, Poor [-2] Workaholic

**Powers:** Good [+2] Universal Translator, Good [+2] Sizingifting, Good [+2] "Unknown Power"

**Stunts:** Speak to Animals, Troubleshoot Machines

## GARY WHITE, ADMIN ASSISTANT.

"I'm the AA for all the associates. I'm good at typing and filing, I guess. I do a little light maintenance on the robots, if needed. I like to go out and party with my friends, usually clubbing or camping."

### C. PICK 2 PROJECTS

(Dr. Widget speaking again) "I mentioned 'autonomy' a bit earlier. Well, here's where I put my money where my mouth is. We have nine new projects to select from. Which should it be? Pick any two. Whichever two projects get the most votes, we'll take on immediately. The others may either have to wait or be turned down."

1. **City University.** City University wants us to track down Turtlezilla and place a scientific package on his shell. Tag and release.

2. **Lockbox.** The City wants to contract with us for supervillain transfers to the secure Lockbox facility.

3. **CommSix #1.** The CommSix Corporation has lost a telecom satellite; it was pulled from orbit and splashed down in the Pacific. Search and Recovery mission.

4. **Koando Microtech.** Koando Microtech wants us to consult on HAZMAT containment for their new laboratory.

5. **SR Weiss.** SR Weiss wants to put us on retainer for superhuman security situations.

6. **Morrison Biotechnology.** Morrison Biotechnology has a nanotech lab under complete lockdown in Texas. They want us to study the situation, discover what's going on inside, and advise them what to do.

7. **Odonata Securities.** Odonata Securities has apparently stolen a Koando Microtech prototype gadget. Liberation mission.

8. **CommSix #2.** CommSix wants us to secretly destroy a Morrison industrial compound in New York. However, no one can die in this attack – property damage only.

9. **Power Platoon.** The U.S. Military wants to put us on retainer for Power Platoon extraction missions.

"Everyone, please select two of these projects. Susan, keep a tally. When we get the results, we'll assign one of the Senior Associates as Project Leads to each, and you Associates will report to them."

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## D. OPEN FLOOR:

### 1. DO YOU HAVE ANY CONCERNS OR QUESTIONS?

Doc will take time to answer any questions the new Associates have, within reason.

### 2. DOES ANYONE HAVE LEADS ON NEW PROJECTS?

Ted mentions that Strang Aquatech has been feeling him out about something, but nothing solid yet. William mentions that a new contract proposal should be coming from Lionheart Industries in the next week or so.

### 3. DOES ANYONE HAVE LEADS ON NEW PRO BONO WORK?

Zipzoom talks about making high-speed medical supply drops in Africa, in association with the International Red Cross, due to a resurgence of New Zealand Flu.

Sequoia mentions her desire to spend some time studying Linear A for translation purposes in the coming month, and wants to see if it's ethical to use this endeavor as public relations for the firm. Doc invites general debate among the new hires; William will serve as the corporate decision-maker on the deal (he's tentatively against it, but could be convinced with a good cost-benefit breakdown).

## E. ROBO-TESTING:

"We're working on some security robots for Koando Microtech, basically ironing out bugs in their design. Working within their technology needs is a bit of a hassle for me; given my druthers, I'd rheostat the Siemens Bridge and cross-wire the. . . Never mind.

"The upshot here is that I need you to try and break them. I've prepped the latest batch in our sub-basement training room. I need you guys to go down there and beat on them. While their weapons are set to heavy stun, be careful, okay? Alright, see you at the debrief."

## II. ROBOT SMASHING!

Using the Training Room Map (see below), have the PCs fight a bunch of robots. If you wish to hide sections of the map, placing sticky notes over areas that are not visible works fairly well. The room is 25 feet wide, 30 feet long, and 40 feet high. **Black walls** reach to the ceiling and are composed of Master [13]

material; **gray walls** reach 20' high and are composed of Expert [11] material.

There should be one or two Red robots per PC, two Yellows (plus an additional Yellow for every PC that can fly), and one Blue per six other robots. Robots start from either corner A or corner B.

### MARK I ROBOT (RED)

**Qualities:** Good [+2] Robot, Good [+2] Armor, Good [+2] Blaster.

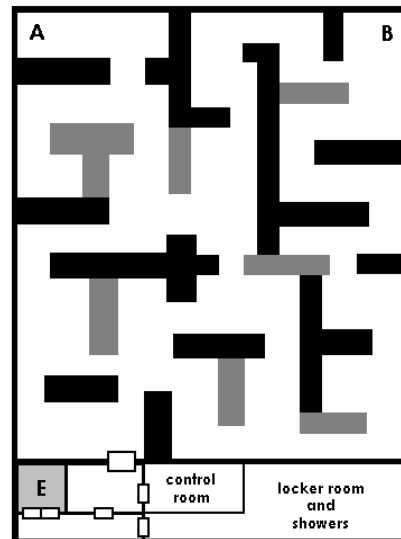
### MARK II ROBOT (YELLOW)

**Qualities:** Good [+2] Robot, Good [+2] Flight (Limitation: 1d6+2 Turn flight endurance), Good [+2] Blaster.

### MARK III ROBOT (BLUE)

**Qualities:** Good [+2] Robot, Good [+2] Blaster.

**Power:** Good [+2] Super-Armor.



## III. DEBRIEFING

Doctor Widget, Zipzoom, and at least one Senior Associate will discuss the PCs performance against the robots with them. They will first ask the team's impressions of the exercise: what went right, what went wrong, and what could be better. Then, they'll each offer a single observation or piece of advice, like "You looked like you were holding back, there" or "Maybe you and she should try combining your Powers" or "Why not try using your Power to do X instead of Y?" Then the PCs will be told to hit the showers, grab something to eat, get a good night's sleep, and be ready to start their first project in the morning.



## CHAPTER 9: *FANFARE FOR THE AMPLIFIED MAN*

**Style:** Grim 'n Gritty

**Theme(s):** With Great Power, Comes What?

My ring sings secret songs to me.  
It tells me I can fly.  
In dreams I soar through puffy clouds,  
Trackless 'cross the sky.  
But my eyes are clear and open now,  
My mind is wide awake.  
I speed above quilt-like fields,  
And a churchly birthday cake.  
My ring sings secret songs to me,  
And shines its burning glow  
Across the hearts once closed to hope  
To help them bloom and grow.

In *Fanfare for the Amplified Man*, players take the role of characters who are on some level heroes: gifted doctors, brave firefighters, selfless volunteers, dedicated EMTs, ultra-competent super-moms or super-dads, crusading lawyers, long-suffering beat cops, and so forth. Lastly, the characters have also each done at least one greatly heroic thing recently.

Mysteriously, the characters have each come into possession of a strange piece of jewelry. This item – the Amplifier or "Amp" – has granted them superhuman abilities. They, of all the people on the Earth, have been armed with staggering power. They can change the world.

Now what?

According to the Talmud, there are 36 righteous men in the world, for whose sake the world escapes destruction: the *Tzaddikim*, the hidden saints. They hide their powers, unrecognized by the community, usually following a humble vocation, denying any special nature. They can be anyone. However, at times of great peril, they appear dramatically, using their special powers to save lives, protect the innocent, and defeat evildoers.

### A DREAM OF NEXUS

You are floating in a blue sky filled with puffy clouds and twinkling stars. There is no ground anywhere in sight. You are not falling or flying, just drifting on a wind. It's a comfortable temperature.

You drift over to one of the clouds in the center of the sky. It has a flat top. Some stars are drifting towards the same cloud. Wait: not stars, but *star-people*. That's when you realize that you are glowing, too, with a faint light. Hey, it's your favorite color!

You land upon the cloud, which is about the size of a tennis court. It is solid to your feet. The other star-people land around the perimeter, neither too close nor too far.

Something is hovering at chest-height in the middle of the flattened surface. It is a multitude of colors all at once – sort of like an opaque soap bubble.

A melodious voice comes from the bubble; its words seem to sing in your ears. "You have each been chosen. Chosen to be Amplified. Amplified, your power increased. Increased, because of what you have done."

A single color passes over the face of the bubble: it matches the color of one of the other star-people. Then, the bubble grows transparent, and a scene plays within. You see the star-person doing something – something brave and wonderful and *right*.

The bubble dims, and changes color to match another star-person. Another scene of courage and hope.

The bubble dims, and this time, the color matches your own. You see yourself inside, replaying that one, best excellent thing you've done.

When all the star-peoples' stories have been shown, the bubble goes opaque, and speaks again. "I am Nexus. Nexus is the repository. Repository of knowledge and power. Power you have been given."

Images flood your mind, of yourself doing magical things.

The dream begins to fade. You are waking. The bubble speaks one last time, saying, "The Power is with you to do with as you will."

You are awake.

## PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE

As far as the characters know, the world is exactly what the players see outside their windows, 2005. There are no (openly) superhuman people out there. It seems to be the real world as we know it, with all the crap that we see on CNN or read in the paper.



## SECRET INFORMATION

**Amplified.** Several people – the PCs – have gained superpowers, through receiving Amps in the form of common pieces of jewelry (rings, bracelets, watches, earrings, brooches, amulets, etc.). They don't know where the jewelry came from; they just appeared, and each of the characters felt an urge to put the jewelry on.

**Then What Happened?** As soon as they put on the Amp, they felt. . . *better*. More relaxed. More in control. More hopeful. Cheered them right up, if they were sad. The general feeling of well-being lasted until they went to sleep that night.

**What Happened Then?** They had a dream – *A Dream of Nexus* (see boxed text; the GM should read it to the players).

**And When They Woke Up?** The Amp was still there, and did everything they had dreamed it would.

**Now What?** Well, it's really up to the PCs now, isn't it?

## THE AMPLIFIER

The Amplifier grants several abilities to the wearer – or, more properly – *wielder*:

- ◆ Permits accrual and spending of Hero Points while worn.

- ◆ Grants Powers. If the Amp is separated from the wielder, the wielder can *still* use his or her Powers at 2 Downshifts (but cannot use Hero Points).
- ◆ Grants ability to communicate in any language currently used by more than 1 million people; this includes sign languages.
- ◆ Grants Good [+2] Telepathic Communication with other Amp-wielders and the Nexus; this also permits Amp-wielders to recognize one another upon sight with a successful roll versus an Average [7] Difficulty Rank.
- ◆ Cannot be taken from the wielder against their will while conscious; is a difficult task (Expert [11]) to do so if they are unconscious.
- ◆ "Evaporates" upon the death of the wielder.

## WHAT IS THE NEXUS?

Well, it's damned mysterious, for one thing. Other than that. . . even the Amp wielders don't know much. From what was said in *A Dream of Nexus*, only four facts can be teased out:

**Repository of Knowledge.** Nexus knows things: things that happened, things that are happening, things that may happen. Sometimes, this knowledge can be accessed by an Amp-wielder, sometimes it cannot, and sometimes knowledge is bestowed without asking. This connection to Nexus' knowledge may explain how wielders recognize other wielders on sight and communicate telepathically. Sometimes, Nexus tells wielders that an important event is about to happen, and they should do *something* – but Nexus never indicates what that something should be.

**Repository of Power.** Nexus energizes the Amps, which enhance the wielder. It is unclear if more power can be drawn, or if power can be sent back.

**Selector of Wielders.** Nexus selects new Amp-wielders when old ones die.

**Not Human.** Nexus isn't exactly a person – it's pretty definitely a thing.



## NO, SERIOUSLY: WHAT IS THE NEXUS?

**IMPORTANT NOTE** - The textbox is for GM's eyes only. Players reading this are only hurting their own sense of mystery.

Here are some options for what the Nexus *really* is:

**Alien Technology:** The Nexus is performing a test upon the human species for alien masters. They are trying to determine what happens if humans are given immense power with no external restrictions. This is a great way to pull in the *Lensman*, *Babylon 5*, *Star Trek*, or *Green Lantern* vibe, including its discussion on the nature and potential of humanity.

**Planetary Spirit:** The Nexus is the planetary spirit or "guardian angel" of Earth. It empowers wielders to protect the web of life upon it. Going with this concept encourages some of the concepts brought up in *the Authority*, *Planetary*, and the folk tales of the Tzaddikim or the Nine Righteous Men.

**Mass-Mind:** The Nexus is the focus of the unified mental gestalt of humanity. The PCs are the first sparks in the collective unconscious tinder. They are the next stage of humanity, in many ways, and issues from transhuman science fiction, *Unbreakable*, and the *Uncanny X-Men* lend themselves to exploration.

**Cosmic Subroutine:** In the computer simulation that is the universe, the Nexus is a subroutine that hands out power-ups and cheat codes. Surpassing limitations and fighting for freedom are the most worthy of pursuits. *The Matrix* and its sequels are the most visible exemplars here, of course.



## FANFARE. . . MODIFICATIONS TO CHARACTER GENERATION

The *Fanfare. . .* setting requires a few tweaks to the standard *T&J* character generation process, detailed below.

**Motivation.** The character should be motivated by a "positive" urge (create, protect, educate) rather than a "negative" urge or emotion (greed, anger, fear).

**Qualities.** The following Qualities are disallowed in this setting: *Battlesuit*, *Gadgets*, *Gadgeteering*, *Minions*, *Sidekick*, and *Vehicle*.

**Origin.** The character's Origin is the heroic action he or she performed at some point in their past.

**Powers.** *First:* the following Powers are disallowed in this setting: *Intense Training*, *Power-Armor*, *Super-Sidekick*, *Super-Vehicle*; *Super-Gadgeteering* may be taken, but the character does *not* start with any "free" Gadgets or Super-Gadgets.

*Second:* All Powers *must* take a Limitation.

*Third:* At least one Power that the character takes should reflect some aspect of their Background, Qualities, or Origin. For example, a character who grew up on a farm might have Animal or Plant Powers; a character who is an EMT may have the Healing Power, or a character who saved a baby from a burning house may have the Fire Control Power.

**Stunts.** Characters should not start with any Stunts in *Fanfare. . .*

**Codename.** Codenames could be the iconic "shorthand" used to identify characters to the Nexus and other Amp-wielders. If not, players should realize that if they don't pick a Codename for their character, the media (read: the GM) probably will.

**Amplifier Appearance.** What does the PC's Amp look like? It *must* be a piece of jewelry: a ring, a bracelet, a necklace, an earring, etc. It can be unadorned or crazily baroque. It can have a big glowing gem on it, be glittering chrome, look like polished wood. Whatever feels right.

## EXAMPLE CHARACTER: BILL FISK

**Background:** Bill Fisk is 45 years old, a 26-year trucker (and Teamster shop steward) for a large moving and storage company. He is amicably divorced; his ex-wife lives with their two children in San Diego. The ex is a dental hygienist, the children are both girls, age 11 and 15.

**Motivation:** Stop things that "ain't right."

**Qualities:** Expert [+4] Trucker, Good [+2] Dad, Good [+2] Union Representative, Good [+2] Played a Little Football in High School, Poor [-2] Bites Off More than He Can Chew.

**Origin:** While driving on a late-night run, Bill observed a group of six men attempting to isolate a pair of young women in a darkened truck stop parking lot, possibly to rob them – or worse. By shouting and throwing rocks, Bill managed to distract the men's attention long enough for the women to escape. The men didn't like that. Greatly outnumbered, he was almost fatally bludgeoned by the would-be attackers. He lay unconscious on the frozen asphalt, and had a Dream of Nexus.

**Powers:** Expert [+4] Invulnerability (*Limitation:* All normal-scale Damage Ranks taken – not just the extraordinary sorts, as is typical for Invulnerability – are transformed into Failure Ranks) and Good [+2] Pacification (*Limitation:* Touch range only).

**Hero Point Pool:** 5/10

**Uniform:** Washington Nationals ball cap, pulled low over eyes; blue t-shirt under a red plaid flannel shirt, blue jeans, work boots.

**Amplifier Appearance:** Two rings; plain bands made of an unfamiliar, greyish-blue metal.

**Miscellany:** 6'1", 280 lbs.; balding, brown hair, blue eyes, fair skin. *Pacification* is Bill's ability to drain hostile and aggressive emotions out of a person temporarily, leaving them calm, collected, and rational. If the target's aggressive behavior is the result of psychological stressors, this could lead to a minor breakdown for the subject, as their anxieties finally catch up to them without the "escape valve" of hostility.

talents *somehow*. However, this is not necessarily a common style of play in RPGs. While some gamers may be familiar with it, other may never have seen – or even conceived of – it as a viable method of roleplaying.

One way to encourage players to try and conceptualize this flavor of play is to, ironically, draw a comparison to board games. After all, one doesn't leave the little race-car on Go in *Monopoly* until something happens to it, right? No, the race-car's player picks up the dice, rolls, lands on Vermont Avenue, and decides whether or not to buy it or keep moving. The players need to jump in that race-car and hit the gas to really bring *Fanfare* . . . to life.

One big benefit of player-driven games is that the game cannot be "broken" if the players do something "unexpected." Since the GM is only reacting to their actions, there's no looming plot to worry about. It's rather freeing, actually. PCs heal the dying CEO? Great. PCs rob Fort Knox? Good on ya. PCs stop the terrorists? Super. PCs kill the Generalissimo who's been their ally for months? Fine.

The GM just has to figure out *what happens next*.

## RUNNING *FANFARE* . . .

### INTENSELY PLAYER-DRIVEN

Preferably, in a player-driven campaign, the GM doesn't set the agenda for what happens, he leaves that up to the players. The GM doesn't act, but instead *reacts* to player actions. The player says "what if?" and the GM says "probably this." Sure, every so often (especially at the beginning), the GM should throw out a seed or a concept or a question to be answered – but then step back, and let the players take the helm.

The *Fanfare* . . . setting works best if the PCs try to make changes in the world, if they pursue their Motivations and goals, confront their fears, use their



## WHAT IF THE PLAYERS DON'T WANT TO DRIVE?

If presented with too many choices ("you can do anything!"), some people do nothing. If the lure of making big changes in the world doesn't appeal to players, the GM can run a more traditional sort of game.

Sometimes the carrot doesn't work, and you need the stick. A selection of sticks:

**Accidents & Natural Disasters.** Feel free to roll on the *Origin* table in *Chapter 11* for inspiration for such things.

**Media Missions.** Pick up a local newspaper. See what's going on. Pick some event or issue to make the centerpiece of a session – maybe someone asks the character to help in a purely mundane way. But, if the character can do so much more to resolve the issue using Powers, should he?

**Nexus Missions.** The old "Do X or stop Y, or something horrible will happen" mode familiar from stories like *Back to the Future*, *The Dead Zone*, *Quantum Leap*, or *Voyagers*.

## WHAT ABOUT RELUCTANT HEROES?

That's pure angst right there, ready to be mainlined. So long as the *player* is having fun with the *character* angsty out all over the place, and it doesn't interfere with the enjoyment of the *other players*, go nuts.

## WHAT CAN THE PCs DO?

Whatever they want. And it will be difficult to stop them, because they have super-freaking-powers.

That being said, various pursuits are probable, possible, or improbable. Here's how it breaks down:

**Activism.** *Probable.* A single superhuman in the right place can do a lot for a chosen cause. Whether it's environmentalism or free trade, firearms education or gun control, clean water or nuclear power, whatever the message, a superhuman can make it ring loudly.

**Crimefighting.** *Improbable.* Unless the character lives in a crime-ridden area or has a personal connection to criminal activity, finding misdeeds in progress is a tough gig. Even if the character invests the time and money into getting a police scanner and learning response codes, who's to say they'll be close enough to influence events? Also, in a Grim 'n Gritty setting, there's little chance that vigilante activities will be

overlooked or glossed. In a realistic setting, a character could be looking at charges and lawsuits.

**Fame & Fortune.** *Probable.* No brainer. If a verifiable superhuman appeared, he or she would be an overnight celebrity. Endorsement offers, t-shirts, personal and television appearances, the inevitable book and movie deals – Powers would equal instant fame. Of course, fame draws paparazzi like spilled sugar attracts ants; some players may not want the eyes of the world constantly watching them.

**Military & Political Change.** *Possible.* Given the right set of Powers, a single superhuman could carry out small-scale military operations fairly easily. Such a person would be a military and political asset if working with a recognized government, or a dangerous terrorist if working alone or with an unrecognized leadership. Either way, this will put the superhuman right in the rifle sights.

**Social Change.** *Possible.* Drawing on all of the other above elements, a superhuman could be a potent agent of social or cultural change, simply by virtue of their visibility and talents.

## EVIL AMP-WIELDERS?

The official stance of this setting is "no, there are no evil Amp-wielders currently": the PCs are the only superhumans on Earth. While they can be selfish or even outright "evil," they were chosen to receive an Amp due to an act of heroism.

However, GMs should feel free to have "Dark Amp-Wielders" running around, chosen due to their acts of villainy. If so, there should be the exact same number of these sorts as there are PCs. Dark Amp-wielders will not be on the "Light Amp" telepathic frequency; instead, they'll have access to a "Dark Nexus" and each other. Amp-wielders, Light or Dark, can recognize one on the opposite side at a Good [9] Difficulty Rank. Doubtless Dark Amp-wielders will try to use their Powers for their own gain and goals, and in probably a more violent or cruel manner than the "Light Amp" PCs.

## WHAT IF PCs TURN SELFISH OR "EVIL"?

This is most likely to only be an issue in the *Planetary Spirit* and *Mass-mind* options for Nexus (see above); if a PC becomes "unworthy," the Amp could melt away and be given to a new wielder, or could "go Dark" instead. In the *Cosmic Subroutine* option, they can do whatever they wish with the power and Nexus will not interfere. In the *Alien Technology* option, it's the whole purpose of the test: "Does power corrupt humans?"

## OVERT OR COVERT SUPERS?

It's really up to the PCs whether they want to be noisy or quiet about their abilities. Do they fear being dissected in a lab? Do they need to be celebrities to achieve their mission? Will having an entourage make it difficult to track down the serial killer?

How long will it take for superhumans to be "outed"? Well, depends on *who the superhuman is* (public figure/celebrity vs. John/Jane Doe), *what sort of disguise* – if any – the superhuman wears (mask or no mask), *what they do*, *how often they do it*, *how many people witness it*, *what evidence is left behind*, and *who reports it* (*Boondocks Daily* vs. *Nightline*). The time could range from one second to several months, with six months, tops, as a rough estimate for outing superhuman character who takes reasonable precautions in their Powers-use. After all, there will be rewards, tip lines, feelings of good citizenship, and the fame resulting from breaking the story, all of which can tempt anyone who knows *anything* (or just thinks they know something) about the superhuman to spill their guts on national television.

Being overt and being covert both have advantages and disadvantages; it's up to the players to argue and determine what they want to do.

## AMP-WIELDERS IN TIGHTS?

Maybe, if they want. They'll probably get laughed at a bit. A realistic world will have issues with taking folks in spandex seriously. It will seem contrived.

However, a costume will make a superhuman more noticeable, while also slightly obscuring their actual identity (with masks and tights and capes and the glow of fame). While it won't be a huge hurdle to jump, a flashy outfit and cowl might make it more-likely that the superhuman won't be recognized when he or she hits the supermarket. Also, since people have been primed by superhero comics, cartoons, and movies for more than half a century, there's a lot of preconceptions (for good and for ill) that a costumed superhuman can hitch their star to.

"Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

– Lord Acton

"Power corrupts. Absolute power is kind of neat."

– John Lehman

## WHAT DOES THE WORLD DO IN RESPONSE?

Whatever the PCs do will have ramifications, sending ripple effects far and wide. Any change that the characters make in the world will be retained and elaborated on, separating it from the "real world" we see in the papers every day. This is a good thing.

If a PC Super-Gadgeteer comes up with a battlesuit, NPC industries will be knocking at the front door looking to license the patent. If Washington, DC, gets destroyed in a superhuman battle, it's not gonna just pop back into existence next session; rebuilding will go on for years. If a PC cures cancer, that'll be a huge deal. If the PCs' destroy a factory producing toxic waste, people are gonna remember that for good and ill. If the President loses an arm in the ruckus, without outside help, it won't grow back . . . but he might get a cyber-arm based on battlesuit spin-off technologies.

Various groups in the real world will follow some basic responses to actual superhumans, like attempting to *recruit* the superhuman to their cause (or otherwise *co-opting* his or her endorsement); *adulation*, where the superhuman is a powerful and fascinating celebrity; *lionization*, where the superhuman is praised effusively for what they do (often out of all proportion to their actions); *blame* or *hatred*, the reverse of lionization, where all the world's ills are laid at the superhuman's feet; *rejection*, where the superhuman is treated as a freak and a monster; *capture/containment*, where the superhuman is seen as too dangerous to be allowed to interfere with the group, and must be controlled in some way; and *elimination*, where the superhuman must be destroyed, because it cannot be controlled. Different groups will have different thresholds of how far they'll go in the pursuit of these responses, of course.

Here follow some specific ideas for the responses of particular types of groups:

**"Black Ops" Organization.** Seriously, in the real world, it's doubtful that any government, intelligence, or military group has a clandestine force with the proper manpower, equipment, information, or resources to recruit, co-opt, capture/contain, or eliminate a superhuman. At least, not at the point when the superhuman first shows up. (That may be an interesting concept to play around with: that there was no real need for an *X-Files*-y conspiracy until the superhumans appeared. . .)

**The Corporate World.** A real-live superhuman is a money-making opportunity. Sponsorship or endorsements of products would come fast and furious, as well as the cash to be made from publishing or producing a mass-media version of the superhuman's life story. Research and development into back-engineering the superhuman's Powers would also be an area of corporate interest, but probably a secondary one, until more information appears.

**The Criminal Underworld.** Unless organized criminals' operations are interfered with by a superhuman, they probably won't care about them. Not unless they can gain a superhuman asset of their own, to use in various activities.

**The Government.** Important point to remember: bureaucracies are not nimble. Unless the superhuman is a public danger or a direct threat to national security, it will take several months for anything substantial to happen on the government front. Sure, an investigative committee may be formed quickly, or a branch of the government tasked with finding out more about the being, collecting information, analyzing the regulatory issues, and such, but it will take some time to get up to high gear. Government officials of various levels will, however, no doubt talk a lot about superhumans and the government's responses to them, if they think the public cares.

In the United States, if a superhuman displays any criminal activity, the FBI will probably get involved. If the superhuman isn't a citizen, the CIA and the NSA will look into them. If a superhuman causes a major disaster, FEMA could be charged with arranging response protocols. If the superhuman appears to be a threat to the public (safety, security, or health) or the working of the government, the CDC, NIH, and Homeland Security will definitely be involved.

**Intelligence Agencies.** Straight-up recruitment, capture, or elimination, with recruitment *by far* the most likely choice. The Powers that a superhuman operative could bring to the table for intelligence gathering makes them very appealing. See also above, "*Black Ops*" Organizations.

**King Mob.** The Public is fickle and fractured. The cheers of Monday can easily turn into the jeers of Tuesday and then into the fears of Wednesday. Some people will love the supers, others will hate and fear them, many won't care, most will be somewhere in between these extremes, and may shift opinions in a heartbeat.

**Law Enforcement.** If a superhuman commits a crime, the police will be looking for him or her; please note that vigilantism is a crime. Getting deputized is highly unlikely outside of the smallest communities.

**The Media.** The mainstream media will probably ignore any reports of superhumans until they have taped evidence

that looks damned convincing, or several reputable eyewitness accounts. Then, a media circus will start: normal programming pre-empted, so-called experts called in, rooting out of witnesses, tip hotlines, rewards for information or home-movie videotapes, the works. Different media companies will go to war for the right to be the first to interview the superhuman. Smaller publishers, freelance journalists, and bloggers will report all they can, and more. Tabloid journals will have a field day, often making stuff up just for kicks.

**The Military.** Military forces will assess the combat potentials of any superhuman, and will liaise with the government in terms of national security. They may attempt recruitment or co-opting of superhumans for armed forces purposes. Otherwise, they'll simply start having someone in the structure start planning ways to take out superhuman threats.

**Religious Leaders.** Most leaders of large established religions will probably call for prayer and reflection when a reputable superhuman appears. It may be part of the Divine Plan, after all – too soon to say.

Expect a five to ten year delay in any comment from the Vatican. Extremely popular or noisy religious leaders – especially American televangelists – will probably claim that the superhumans are angelically- or demonically-gifted (depending upon the actions of the superhuman and the particular bent of the leader), and use them as promises, threats, or object lessons in their sermons.

**The Scientific Establishment.** The first response is skepticism bordering on denial. As evidence mounts, tentative interest in actual research and study will begin, but the more strident end of the skeptical spectrum will heighten in pitch to blatant repudiation. If several solid scientific studies are done, with – and this is *key* – replicable super-effects in other laboratories – the floodgates will open for exploring superhumanity. Without replicable experiments (i.e., the particular superhuman has to be involved in the research, or the tests don't work), there will always be a nugget of scientists who do not accept the existence of superhumans. However, science will pursue the source, limits, and effects of superpowers until they discover all that they can. Then they'll develop ideas off of what they've learned, and go back and do it again.

The goal of life is not to possess power but to radiate it.  
– Henry Miller





## CHAPTER 10: BIBLIOGRAPHY

In addition to the obvious influence of the Atomic Sock Monkey Press games of *Dead Inside* and *Monkey, Ninja, Pirate, Robot: the RPG*, *T&J* has been influenced by a number of works in various media. Here follow noteworthy sources for superhero and superpowered entertainment that contributed to this game. The different icons indicate the media the source appears in:

-  Books
-  Comics
-  Games
-  Movies & TV

📺 **The 4400 (2004)**. (USA Network) An interesting television series about average people abducted by aliens and returned with mysterious powers. Could be useful for *T&J* campaigns in the *Fanfare*. . . setting found in *Chapter 9*.

📖 ***Adventure!*, by Andrew Bates, Bruce Baugh, et al.** (White Wolf) RPG focusing on the hero pulp era; plenty of good stuff, including the great Dramatic Editing rules. If you like Storyteller games, Doc Savage, and the Shadow, you'll dig this; if you're not a fan of White Wolf's system, not so much.

🦇 ***Animal Man* [Grant Morrison run]**. (DC Comics) Morrison takes a third-stringer and brings him alive, stopping meanwhile to discuss the form and function of comics "in the gutters" (as it were). Superhero as family man; superhero as adventurer; superhero getting screwed and doing the best he can. *Highly recommended*.

🦇 ***The Authority* [Warren Ellis run]**. (DC/Wildstorm) Warren Ellis does widescreen fight comics. Stylish, interesting, brutal. . . but the series seems to raise a lot of points then ignore them.

🎬 ***Batman* (1989), and sequels**. (Warner Bros.) While I'm a huge fan of the Batman character, and I like big chunks of the movies (I like Michael Keaton's Bruce Wayne, his Batman less-so; liked Val Kilmer's mix of identities; the "Neon Gang" fight in *Batman Forever* is about the only watchable part of that flick; some of Clooney's Bruce Wayne and Schwarzenegger's Mr. Freeze are neat), these are unfortunately balanced by lots of dumb (precious little detective work in the first movie; the Penguin as a mutant; Batsuit nipples; Carrey's Riddler and Jones' pointless Two-Face; Thurman's craptastic Poison Ivy and Silverstone's "whatever" Batgirl; etc.). Watch the films for the look and the style: everybody else did.

🎬 ***Batman: the Animated Series***. (Warner Bros.) The Dark Deco remixing of one of the most recognized characters world-wide. Does everything right. *Highly recommended*.

🎬 ***Batman Begins* (2005)**. Awesome. Just freaking awesome. Essentially, Miller's *Batman: Year One* gets the same treatment at Christopher Nolan's hands that *The Lord of the Rings* got at Peter Jackson's. The best damn Batman origin story ever, and a contender for the best superhero movie ever. *Highly recommended*.

🎬 ***Batman Beyond***. (Warner Bros.) Now, as a Batfan from way back, when I first heard of this series, I thought it'd be total crap. Somebody other than Bruce Wayne as Batman? Puh-leeze. This is

one of the times I've been wrong. *Batman Beyond* is a wonderful, semi-futuristic take on Batman, drawing deeply on the mythos and existing characters, and great fun. Bits of it certainly influenced the *SuperCorps* setting in *Chapter 8*. Especially check out the movie *The Return of the Joker* – it's sharp and frightening and oh so stylish. *Highly recommended*.

🎬 ***Batman: the Movie* (1966)**. The big-screen version of TV's wacky show starring Adam West, Burt Ward, Cesar Romero, Burgess Meredith, Frank Gorshin, and Lee Meriwether. Silly, but super-fun. A personal favorite. *Recommended*.

🎬 ***The Batman/Superman Movie* ["World's Finest"]**. (Warner Bros.) Yet another Animated style movie, this one deals with a team-up between the Dark Knight and the Man of Tomorrow. The first confrontation between Batman and Superman is a great example of how supernormals can interact with superhumans in conflict. And it's damn fun to watch. *Highly recommended*.

📖 ***Capes*, by Anthony Lower-Basch**. Read during the final days of the *T&J* edit, this game has plenty of great ideas, great graphics for illustrating rules, an intriguing trade-off concept for superheroes' power usage, and the stoke-of-genius Click and Lock system for character generation. However, the game's GM-less and "no set character" playstyle may not appeal to some gamers.

📖 ***Castle Falkenstein: High Adventure in the Steam Age*, by Michael Pondsmith**. (R. Talsorian Games) A huge system-influence on *PDQ*, and a damn fine game of fantasy steampunk Victorian/Edwardian adventure to boot.

📖 ***The Code* and *the Code 2*, by Jared Sorensen**. See < <http://memento-mori.com/games/code/> > and < <http://memento-mori.com/games/code/code2.html> > Jared's free takes on superhero gaming. If *T&J* isn't your bag, you may want to check out these games.

📖 ***Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, by Bradford W. Wright**. An excellent cultural study and history of comic books, from 1939 to the early 1990s, with a brief chapter discussing superheroes post 9-11. Plenty of good basic information on the ups and downs of the comic book, including a substantial amount on how they connect to American cultural movements.

🦇 ***The Dark Knight Returns***. (DC Comics) Frank Miller gives us an aging Batman in a world that's darkened since his glory days. Wonderful characterizations throughout. Along with *Watchmen*, sparked a regrettable "grim and gritty" movement that focused on the flash more than the guts of the story. And if you want to see a noir-esque, street-level Masked Manhunter, you can't go wrong with *Batman: Year One*. *Highly recommended*.

📖 ***darkpages*, by Jared Sorensen**. This game was in development at the same time that *T&J* was, appearing with it in the Spring 2005 issue of *Daedalus* < <http://www.chimera.info/daedalus/articles/spring2005/truthandjustice.html> >. I had the honor of reading early drafts of the manuscript, and I'm

sure that bits of it influenced how I dealt with some issues in this game.

☛ *Dr. Blink, Superhero Shrink*, by John Kovalic and Christopher Jones. (Dork Storm Press) Humorous comic about a psychologist who specializes in supra-human psychoses. Fun! Wonderfully drawn, too!

☛ *Doom Patrol* [Grant Morrison run]. (DC Comics; Vertigo) The re-envisioning the World's Strangest Heroes by a skilled madman. Morrison's DP takes on the foes that the usual superheroes have no clue how to deal with; jam-packed full of Borgesian and Burroughs-esque weirdness, alchemy, conspiracies, nutty bug-people, and transvestite streets. Pick up the first trade paperback, *Crawling from the Wreckage*, so they'll collect the rest of the run. *Highly recommended.*

☛ *Elementals* [Willingham run]. (Comico) How do you get superpowers? Die, preferably in a really odd way. Willingham's magic-themed superhero series was much fun, well-written, bloody, and odd. The first team the Elementals take on – the Destroyers – headlined in the old *V&V* adventure, *Death Duel with the Destroyers*, too. Plus, a vampire named Captain Cadaver and one of the coolest origins for the main supervillain ever. *Highly recommended.*

☐ *FATE: Fantastic Adventures in Tabletop Entertainment*, by Fred Hicks and Rob Donoghue. (Evil Hat Productions) Wonderful, free, FUDGE-based system from a pair of great guys. While developed independently from (and in parallel to) the *PDQ System*, I did read *FATE* during the development of *T&J*. I'm sure that there was some cross-pollination, most probably around Hero Point aspects.

☛ *Firestarter*, by Stephen King. Charlie McGee – and her dad – have superpowers. Here's a horror-themed work of psychic talents; folks interested in more "realistic" supers in the real world might want to check it out.

☛ *Gladiator*, by Philip Wylie. One of the inspirations for Superman, Wylie's Hugo Danner is super-strong and super-tough... and finds out what that means in dealing with other people. Fascinating.

☛ *Global Frequency*. (DC/Wildstorm) A semi-realistic take on an organization peopled entirely by supernormals (in one way or another). I mean, you can look at it that way. Part spy-story, part-rescue story, highly episodic, twelve issue miniseries – *GF* can be hit or miss, but the hits are worth it.

☛ *Green Lantern/Green Arrow*. (DC Comics) He's a space policeman with the most powerful weapon in the universe, and his buddy is a guy who shoots pointy sticks at people: they fight crime (and racism, and ethical questions, and drug addiction). Seminal work in the late Silver Age of comics. Being collected now; well worth the price. *Highly recommended.*

☐ *Hearts and Souls*, by Tim Kirk. This game was in development at the same time that this one was, and has some interesting things to say about heroic motivation; reading the manuscript probably influenced *T&J*'s Motivation mechanics.

☛ *How to Read Superhero Comics and Why*, by Geoff Klock. Fantastic work of literary criticism, informed by Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*, focusing on the superhero works of Ellis, Miller, Moore, and Morrison. If the brief discussion of Northrop Frye in *Chapter 1* interested you, this book is recommended; if it bored you, you can skip this book.

☛ *The Incredibles*. (Disney/Pixar) Simply, the best superhero movie yet made. *Highly recommended.*

☛ *Invincible*, by Robert Kirkman. (Image) Your average all-American teenager develops superpowers; it makes sense, because he's the son of the most powerful superhuman on the planet. *Highly recommended.*

☛ *Jumper*, by Steven Gould. Wonderful science fiction novel about a teenager who discovers he can teleport. Useful for *Fanfare*. . . settings, especially.

☛ *The Justice League of America* [aka *JLA*; Grant Morrison run]. (DC Comics) Just go and buy the first four or so volumes of the trade paperbacks. Morrison got the JLA in a way nobody else ever did. *Highly recommended.*

☛ *Justice League (beginning in 2001) cartoons*. (Warner Bros.) Animated style cartoons about the superstar superhero team of the DC Universe. To my everlasting shame, I have yet to see any *Justice League Unlimited*, the adventures of the expanded version of the team. *Recommended.*

☛ *Kurt Busiek's Astro City*. (DC/Wildstorm/Homage) Where lots of books claim to do "superpeople in the real world," *Astro City* deals with "real people in a superworld." That's simply the best way to summarize this series. Touching, heartwarming/heart wrenching stories, in a world full of brightly-colored costumes, aliens, robots, and extradimensional beings. *Highly recommended.*

☛ *Mage: the Hero Discovered and Mage: the Hero Defined*. (Comico and Image) So, while the first series deals more with legends, the second series starts playing around more with myths – and includes the modern myth of superheroes. Check out the T-shirt symbols worn by the heroes, and compare them to comic book icons. Matchstick as Captain Marvel – very apt: he is not the power, the power works through him. Kirby's Nemean lion head. Joe's flash of lightning. Brilliant. *Highly recommended.*

☐ *Marvel Super Heroes Advanced Set*, by Jeff Grubb, Steve Winter, et al. (TSR) Pound-for-pound, the best superhero RPG ever. The synergy of system, setting, writing, art, and killer IP make this an unbeatable combo. My only complaint is that I'm more of a DC fan, and the DC-based RPGs never did much for me. . . Still, it was dead simple to stat up my favorite characters from the competition in this easy to learn and use system. Huge influence on *T&J* – Universal Chart, Column Shifts, Karma Points: all good stuff. (The *Marvel Super Heroes Adventure Game*, using card-based rules derived from Wizards of the Coast's *SAGA* system, is also worth checking out.) *Highly recommended.*

☛ *The Matrix (and sequels)*. (Warner Bros.) If you don't think these are superhero movies, you really need to watch at least the first one again. I personally enjoy the second one, but not the third; and this fact may color the rest of the comments in this section for some readers. *Caveat lector!*

☛ *Miracleman (aka Marvelman)*, by Alan Moore. (Eclipse) Moore achieved what Ellis tried to do with *The Authority*: a small group of superhumans change the world. Fascinating storytelling, well worth tracking down. With luck, this will be reprinted soon in the wake of convoluted legal issues around the IP.

☐ *Nobilis*, by R. Sean Borgstrom. (Hogshead Games/Guardians of Order) Beautiful, intriguing, and a bit too opaque and baroque, *Nobilis* is a fascinating read. The physical book itself is a piece of art. Some of the diceless, resource-management elements of this game influenced how I constructed *PDQ*, and it inarguably deals

with the issues and challenges of superpowered, mythic characters.

🐞 **Noble Causes**, by Jay Faerber. (Image) Superhero soap opera. Has its ups and downs in quality, but well worth the ride.

☐ **Over the Edge: The Role-Playing Game of Surreal Danger**, by Jonathan Tweet with Robin D. Laws. (Atlas Games) Rules-light system (another *PDQ* influence), wacky setting. Great reading by itself, and a powerfully-packed idea mine.

🐞 **Planetary**, by Warren Ellis. (DC/Wildstorm) Neo-pulp "Archeologists of the Unknown" dedicated to digging up the buried superheroic history of their world. Probably Ellis' best work ever, hands down. As of this writing, the series will supposedly be wrapping up soon, and my suspicion is that it will rock pretty damn hard, because the rest of the series has rocked consistently. *Highly recommended.*

🐞 **The Power Company**. (DC Comics) Another Busiek entry in the Biblio – this one, dealing with a company of superheroes arranged along the lines of a law firm; this was a big influence on *Chapter 8, SuperCorps*. Fascinating idea to explore, but never really seemed to catch fire. Ended abruptly, in my opinion. Like Busiek's Thunderbolts, a series of tremendous potential that almost-but-not-quite lived up to the hype. . . I suspect due to the big comic company's need to hit "the reset button" to protect their IP.

🐞 **P.S. 238**, by Aaron Williams. (Henchman Publishing/Dork Storm Press) A public school full of "meta-prodigy children." Not exactly Hogwarts, but twice as nifty!

☐ **RISUS**, by S. John Ross. (Cumberland Games) A nice hyper-light game system with elements that influenced *PDQ*.

☐ **Simply Superhuman!**, by Bob Portnell and Guy McLimore. (Microtactix; currently unpublished) This is a great genre book for the PlainLabel RPG system, for which I have had the honor of writing an as-yet-unpublished worldbook. I believe that *T&J*'s Intense Training "power" was influenced by elements of this work, and I'm sure there's a couple other influences. With luck, it'll see print soon.

🎬 **Spider-Man** and **Spider-Man 2**. (Sony) Until *The Incredibles* came out, these were the best super-hero cinema out there. Still extremely worthwhile watching. I'd give a slight edge to the sequel, as the origin's already been handled and the kinks have been worked out. Plus, hey, Fred Molina. Everything's better with Fred.

🐞 **Starman**. (DC Comics) James Robinson takes the son(s) of a JSA legend, and crafts a real, heart-pounding story of a regular guy becoming a hero. Remarkably real, though hip-deep in a superhero world. It's all in trade paperback now. *Highly recommended.*

🎬 **Superman (beginning in 1941) cartoons**. (Max Fleischer) Wonderful – albeit somewhat dated – cartoons about the Man of Steel. Major inspiration for the Animated style now current for DC Comics-based cartoons.

🎬 **Superman (1978), and sequels**. (Warner Bros.) You will believe a man can fly after watching the first movie. You will enjoy Kryptonian villainy in the second movie. You will shrug at everything in the third movie except the toothsome Annette O'Toole as Lana Lang. They didn't make a fourth one. No, they didn't. No, that was a dream. (I like Batman better anyway.)

☐ **Storyboard**, by Matthew C. Gaston and Rich Taylor. (Magus Creative Games) Like *RISUS*, another interesting hyper-light

system that influenced the construction of *PDQ*. This is a "nano-press" book, so good luck finding a copy. With luck, the second edition will be available in wider release.

🐞 **Ultra: Seven Days**, by the Luna Brothers. (Image) Fantastic trade paperback on the relationship between personal lives, super-lives, celebrity, and love. Discovered after *T&J*'s first round of playtesting; while the Luna Brother's *Ultra* and this game's *Ultrawoman* sort of have a name and some powers in common, it's parallel development, and they're very different characters. (But the coincidence is annoying.) *Highly recommended.*

🎬 **Unbreakable**. (Touchstone) Remixed superheroing, with overtones of horror. I keep watching and rewatching this movie. Some days, I think it's perfect; other days, I beat myself upside my head imagining sequels. A superhuman in a grim world, and what that means. *Highly recommended.*

☐ **Unknown Armies: A Roleplaying Game of Power and Consequences, Second Edition**, by Greg Stolze & John Tynes. (Atlas Games) One of my favorite RPGs, possibly my top favorite (narrowly beating out *MSHAS* and *GURPS*), at least until I started working on my own games. Stylish, smart, and above all, human. I have used the core system in the past to run fantasy and pulp games; a big *PDQ* influence.

🐞 **V for Vendetta**. (DC Comics) More (Alan) Moore. Supernormal/mildly superhuman rebel attacks the power centers of a fascist Britain. Challenging. Disturbing. Worth it. Along with *Watchmen* (and the previously unmentioned *Swamp Thing*, *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, *Promethea*, *Tom Strong*, et cetera), all of Moore's superheroic oeuvre is damned good stuff. *Highly recommended.*

🎬 **The Venture Brothers**. (Noodlesoup Productions/Astrobase Go!/Cartoon Network) Jonny Quest on crack, plus superheroes and related media, in a blender. Hysterical, with some really nifty ideas. The Guild of Calamitous Intent (and their bylaws) and the hapless Monarch are probably my favorite bits.

☐ **Villains & Vigilantes**, by Jeff Dee and Jack Herman. (Fantasy Games Unlimited) Enticed by ads in *Dragon Magazine*, this is the first RPG book I bought for myself. The calculator-heavy system is clunky as hell, the random superpower generation system is hysterical, and the combat system is *AD&D*-esque. Still – there's the differing defense values for opposed powers, a wonderful section on law and the Superhero's Code, and scads of niftiness. *Recommended*, but only to people with an interest in the history and development of RPGs.

🐞 **Watchmen**. (DC Comics) Alan Moore. One of the most multi-layered and intriguing comics that this genius produced. Everything tied together. Everything means something. Everything touches something else. It's regrettable that *Watchmen* – along with Miller's *Dark Knight Returns* – kickstarted a "grim and gritty" movement that – in the hands of lesser talents – kind of got out of control. But with regard to *Watchmen*, you can read it and read it and still get new stuff out of it every time. *Highly recommended.*

🎬 **X-Men and X-Men United**. (20th Century Fox) Until the *Spider-Man* movies came out, these flicks were some of the best superhero cinema out there (despite a few lamentable points of line-reading) since 1978's *Superman* and 1989's *Batman*. Still worth watching; it's a toss-up for me on which is better. Alas, no Fred Molina.





## CHAPTER 11: RANDOM-ROLL INSPIRATION & HANDOUTS

These charts are to be used to gather inspiration for character abilities. There are tables below for *Personality*, *Occupation*, *Hobby*, *Origin*, *Powers*, and *(Something) Powers*.

### PERSONALITY (ROLL 2 DICE)

DIE 1	DIE 2	PERSONALITY
1	1	Trustworthy
1	2	Mischievous
1	3	Obsessive
1	4	Loyal
1	5	Show-off
1	6	Anxious
2	1	Helpful
2	2	Cautious
2	3	Creative
2	4	Friendly
2	5	Spendthrift
2	6	Bouncy/Optimistic
3	1	Courteous
3	2	Depressed/Gloomy/Pessimist
3	3	Workaholic
3	4	Kind
3	5	Rebellious
3	6	Calm
4	1	Obedient
4	2	Harsh
4	3	Contemplative
4	4	Cheerful
4	5	Rude
4	6	Empathic
5	1	Thrifty
5	2	Surly
5	3	Perceptive
5	4	Brave
5	5	Contrary/Skeptical
5	6	Curious
6	1	Clean
6	2	Cynical
6	3	Dorky/Nerdy
6	4	Reverent
6	5	Flirty
6	6	Cool

### OCCUPATION (ROLL 2 DICE)

DIE 1	DIE 2	OCCUPATION
1	1	Independently Wealthy
1	2	Blue-collar Laborer <i>or</i> White-collar Administrative staff
1	3	White-collar Manager/Blue-collar Foreman
1	4	Athlete
1	5	Doctor/Surgeon/Dentist
1	6	Lawyer
2	1	Clergy
2	2	Teacher/Professor/Academic/Librarian
2	3	Accountant/Broker
2	4	Computer Specialist
2	5	Police Officer
2	6	Medical or Scientific Technician
3	1	Mechanic
3	2	Service/Hospitality Industry
3	3	Firefighter
3	4	Architect
3	5	Journalist/Writer
3	6	College Student/High School Student
4	1	Artist (sculptor, painter, photographer, etc.)
4	2	Farmer
4	3	Emergency Medical Technician (EMT)
4	4	Musician/Entertainer
4	5	Criminal
4	6	White-collar Executive
5	1	Self-Employed/Contractor
5	2	Salesman
5	3	Activist/Politician
5	4	Electrician
5	5	Security Guard
5	6	Scientist
6	1	Cab Driver/Bus Driver
6	2	Plumber
6	3	City Worker
6	4	Pilot
6	5	Engineer
6	6	Military

# TRUTH & JUSTICE

## HOBBY (ROLL 2 DICE)

DIE 1	DIE 2	OCCUPATION
1	1	Role-playing Gamer
1	2	Musician/Garage Band
1	3	Rock-Climbing
1	4	Birdwatching
1	5	Martial Arts
1	6	Fine Food and Wines
2	1	Comic Book Collector
2	2	Opera/Classical Music
2	3	Hiking
2	4	Gardening
2	5	Coin Collecting
2	6	Boating/Sailing
3	1	Computer Gamer
3	2	Dancing/Clubbing
3	3	Automotive Hobbyist
3	4	Swimming
3	5	Acting
3	6	Historical Period
4	1	Science Fiction Fan
4	2	Photography
4	3	Jogging
4	4	Skiing
4	5	Hunting
4	6	Carpentry
5	1	Fantasy Fan
5	2	Cooking
5	3	Stamp Collecting
5	4	Skating/Rollerblading
5	5	Writing/Poetry
5	6	Pottery
6	1	Fishing
6	2	Painting/Drawing
6	3	Sculpture/Metalwork
6	4	Knitting/Sewing
6	5	Raising Pets
6	6	Meditation



## ORIGIN (ROLL 2 DICE)

DIE 1	DIE 2	SPARK
1-2	1	Earthquake/Flooding
1-2	2	Interfere in a Violent Crime
1-2	3	Building or Forest Fire
1-2	4	Act of Generosity
1-2	5	Tornado/Hurricane
1-2	6	Act of Courage or Daring
3-4	1	Vehicle Crash
3-4	2	Volcano
3-4	3	Corporate Whistleblowing
3-4	4	Act of Mercy
3-4	5	Death or Near-Death Experience
3-4	6	Landslide/Mudslide/Avalanche
5-6	1	Famine
5-6	2	Act of Integrity
5-6	3	War/Armed Conflict
5-6	4	Blizzard
5-6	5	Pestilence/Disease
5-6	6	Act of Hope



# TRUTH & JUSTICE

## POWERS (ROLL 2 DICE)

DIE 1	DIE 2	PRIMARY POWERS
1	1	Armor
1	2	Precognition
1	3	Transformation
1	4	Energy Blast
1	5	Super-Agility
1	6	Phasing
2	1	Immortality
2	2	Rubbery Form
2	3	Force-Fields
2	4	(Something) Powers (see table below)
2	5	Invisibility
2	6	Flight
3	1	Super-Weaponry
3	2	Invulnerability
3	3	Shapeshifting
3	4	Super-Leap/Super-Tunnel
3	5	Gadgeteering
3	6	Super-Intellect
4	1	Regeneration
4	2	Sizeshifting
4	3	(Something) Control* (see table below)
4	4	Telepathy
4	5	Super-Strength
4	6	Healing
5	1	Aquatic Powers
5	2	Super-Speed
5	3	Time Travel
5	4	Sorcery
5	5	Super-Senses
5	6	Duplication
6	1	Teleportation
6	2	Entangling Attack
6	3	Space Travel
6	4	Transmutation
6	5	Extra Limbs
6	6	Adaptation

\* (Something) Control means the character has "mental command" over the (Something).

## (SOMETHING) POWERS\* (ROLL 2 DICE)

DIE 1	DIE 2	THEME POWERS
1	1	Insect/Arachnid
1	2	Shadow
1	3	Air/Weather
1	4	Canine
1	5	Luck
1	6	Earth/Stone
2	1	Magnetism
2	2	Angel
2	3	Feline
2	4	Ice
2	5	Metal
2	6	Ghost
3	1	Ursine
3	2	Pirate
3	3	Gravity
3	4	Fish
3	5	Plant
3	6	Werewolf
4	1	Hunter
4	2	Monkey
4	3	All Animals
4	4	Knight
4	5	Fire
4	6	Amphibian
5	1	Robot
5	2	Light
5	3	Water
5	4	Rodent
5	5	Vampire
5	6	Reptile
6	1	Cowboy
6	2	Wood
6	3	Mammal
6	4	Ninja
6	5	Time
6	6	Sound

\* (Something) Powers means the character has "the powers of" the (Something).

The pages following are handouts and worksheets that can be duplicated for personal use. They include a *Charts & Reference* sheet, the *Character Generation Worksheet*, a *Character Sheet*, a *GM Sheet*, and the *Widget & Zoom Staff Meeting Agenda* used in *Chapter 8*.



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## CHARTS & REFERENCE

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### PDQ MASTER CHART

LEVEL	AS QUALITY RANK	MODIFIER TO 2D6 ROLL	AS DIFFICULTY RANK	TARGET NUMBER
<i>Poor</i>	Notably Inept.	<b>-2</b>	A trivial task.	<b>5</b>
<i>Average</i>	Typical human capability.	<b>0</b>	Straightforward task.	<b>7</b>
<i>Good</i>	Better than usual; most professionals or talented newcomers.	<b>+2</b>	Complex task, requiring attention to detail.	<b>9</b>
<i>Expert</i>	Noted/famed professional; talent with skill to back it up.	<b>+4</b>	Intricate task, difficult and requiring sharp concentration, hard for a typical untrained person (Average).	<b>11</b>
<i>Master</i>	Acclaimed genius: talent with substantial skill behind it.	<b>+6</b>	Extremely difficult task, hard for most professionals in the field (Good).	<b>13</b>

### T&J INTENSITY CHART

POWER RANK & MODIFIER	DIFFICULTY RANK & TARGET NUMBER	TIME* (DURATION**)	RANGE*	SPEED*	AREA	WEIGHT	FORCE	ENERGY	MONEY
<b>Poor [-2]</b>	<b>Poor [5]</b>	1 action/reaction (5 minutes)	Touch (12 in.)	Running (20 mph)	Closet (1 sq. yard)	Heavy person (250 lbs.)	Knockout Punch	Candle	\$1
<b>Average [0]</b>	<b>Average [7]</b>	1 Turn (30 minutes)	Near (10 yards)	Racecar (150 mph)	Room (25 sq. yards)	Motorcycle (500 lbs.)	Full-tilt Body check	Campfire	\$100
<b>Good [+2]</b>	<b>Good [9]</b>	1 Scene (1 hour)	Middling (100 yards)	Jet (500 mph)	Football field (6,400 sq. yards)	Car (1.5 tons)	Baseball bat	Bonfire	\$10,000
<b>Expert [+4]</b>	<b>Expert [11]</b>	2 Scenes (6 hours)	Far (1,000 yds.)	Supersonic (2,200 mph; Mach 3)	Square mile (3 mil. sq. yds.)	Tank (75 tons)	Ram w/ car	Forest fire	\$1 million
<b>Master [+6]</b>	<b>Master [13]</b>	4 Scenes (24 hours)	Too Far (5 miles)	Hypersonic (7,700 mph; Mach 10)	US Township (112 mil. sq. yds.)	Battleship (50,000 tons)	Cannonball	Volcano	\$1 billion

\* Expanded from the basic concepts on Time, Range, and Movement found in *Chapter 2*, p. 18.

\*\* *Duration* is for longer measures of Time that do not adequately fit within the (re)action/Turn/Scene structure -- endurance flying, vacuum support, maintaining a non-combat power, etc. Making an Power effect permanent (petrification, disintegrations, etc.) is up to the GM's Veto.

### STUNT COST CHART

EFFECTIVE RANK (FROM BASE ABILITY)	HERO POINT COST
2 Downshifts	Zero
1 Downshift	1
At Rank	2
1 Upshift	4
2 Upshifts	8
3 Upshifts	16
...etc.	x 2

### GAINING HERO POINTS

- Following *Motivation* (1d6 HP).
- Performing *Heroic Actions* (1 or more HP).
- Accepting a *Revoltin' Development* (2d6 HP).
- Affected by a *Limitation* (1 HP effect; 1 HP surpassed) or *Vulnerability* (lose next action; Damage Ranks = MOD; 1d6+MOD HP).
- Esprit de Corps* (1 or more).

### USING HERO POINTS

- ◆ **Detect & Discover.** Dictate a new fact about the situation at hand; 1 *Hero Point* per minor detail, 2 *Hero Points* per significant detail, or 4 *Hero Points* per major detail; **subject to GM Veto.**
- ◆ **Energize Stunts.** Increase the effective Rank of a Stunt. *Variable cost.*
- ◆ **Haymaker.** After a successful attack, add an Upshift to Damage; 1 *Hero Point* per Upshift.
- ◆ **I Know a Guy.** Remember a contact with possible useful information on current situation; 2 *Hero Points* and a *Scene* to get the info; **subject to GM Veto.**
- ◆ **Luck Be a Lady.** "As I fall off of the zeppelin to certain doom, I luckily manage to grab onto a guy line hanging from the gondola. . ."; 2 *Hero Points* per plausible coincidence, or 4 *Hero Points* per implausible coincidence.
- ◆ **Make It Count.** Gain an additional 1d6 on next roll; 3 *Hero Points* per die.
- ◆ **Pull Yourself Together.** Regain 1d6 lost Failure Ranks; 1 *Hero Point* and one action or reaction.
- ◆ **Push a Quality or Power.** Gain an Upshift to Rank for next roll; 2 *Hero Points* per Upshift.
- ◆ **Second Wind.** Regain 1d6 lost Damage Ranks; 2 *Hero Points* and one Turn per die of recovery.
- ◆ **Use a Trophy.** Retrieve and use an applicable Trophy (see *Chapter 6, MacGuffins, Plot Devices, & Trophies*, p. 69) from a previous adventure. 1 or 2 *Hero Points*, at GM's discretion.

### USING MAX FOR IMPROVEMENT

- ◆ To Increase a *Quality Rank*: 4 MAX per *Quality Rank*.
- ◆ To Increase a *Power Rank*: 8 MAX during a relevant *Scene* per *Power Rank*.
- ◆ To Purchase a *New Quality*: 4 MAX and related *Story Hook* for new Good [+2] *Quality*.
- ◆ To Purchase a *New Power*: 8 MAX and related *Story Hook* during a relevant *Scene* for new Average [0] *Power*.



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**CHARACTER  
GENERATION  
WORKSHEET**  
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0	Player's Name:	
1	Select a <i>Name/Secret Identity</i> for your character:	
2	Briefly describe your character's <i>Background</i> (family, history, hometown, education, occupation, hobbies, etc.):	
3	Select a <i>Motivation</i> (what moves the character to action?):	
4	Select the character's <i>Qualities</i> . Either: 5 Good [+2] Strengths and 1 Poor [-2] Weakness. 1 Expert [+4] Strength, 3 Good [+2] Strengths, and 1 Poor [-2] Weakness. 2 Expert [+4] Strengths, 1 Good [+2] Strength, and 1 Poor [-2] Weakness. 1 Master [+6] Strength, 2 Good [+2] Strengths, and 1 Poor [-2] Weakness. 1 Master [+6] Strength, 1 Expert [+4] Strength, and 1 Poor [-2] Weakness.	
5	Briefly describe the character's <i>Origin</i> (how or why did the character gain Powers)?	
6	Select the character's <i>Powers</i> . Either: 6 Average [0] Rank Powers. 1 Good [+2] Rank Power and 4 Average [0] Rank Powers. 3 Good [+2] Rank Powers. 2 Good [+2] Rank Powers and 2 Average [0] Rank Powers. 1 Expert [+4] Rank Power and 2 Average [0] Rank Powers. 1 Expert [+4] Rank Power and 1 Good [+2] Rank Power. 1 Master [+6] Power.	
7	Pick one or two <i>Signature Stunts</i> for chosen abilities; also consider <i>Spin-off Stunts</i> :	
8	<i>Hero Point Pool/MAX</i> :	5/10
9	Select a superheroic <i>Codename</i> for the character:	
10	Briefly Describe the character's <i>Uniform</i> :	
11	<i>Miscellany</i> -- anything else you want to remember about this character (height, weight, hair color, eye color, skin color, favorite movie, etc.)?	



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# CHARACTER SHEET

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<b>Character Name</b>		<b>Player Name</b>	
<b>Background</b>		<b>Motivation</b>	

<b>Codename</b>		<b>Hero Point Pool</b>	<hr/>	<hr/>
			<i>current</i>	<i>MAX</i>
<b>Origin</b>		<b>Uniform</b>		

QUALITIES	MASTER [+6]	EXPERT [+4]	GOOD [+2]	AVERAGE [0]	POOR [-2]	GONE
QUALITY	Failure <input type="radio"/> Damage	Failure <input type="radio"/> Damage	Failure <input type="radio"/> Damage	Failure <input type="radio"/> Damage	Failure <input type="radio"/> Damage	
QUALITY	Failure <input type="radio"/> Damage	Failure <input type="radio"/> Damage	Failure <input type="radio"/> Damage	Failure <input type="radio"/> Damage	Failure <input type="radio"/> Damage	
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POWERS	MASTER [+6]	EXPERT [+4]	GOOD [+2]	AVERAGE [0]	POOR [-2]	GONE
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STUNTS	Base Ability	Stunt Type	Stunt Rank	HP Cost	Stunt Notes
STUNT	ABILITY	Spin-off Signature			
STUNT	ABILITY	Spin-off Signature			
STUNT	ABILITY	Spin-off Signature			
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STUNT	ABILITY	Spin-off Signature			
STUNT	ABILITY	Spin-off Signature			

<b>Miscellany</b>	
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## STAFF MEETING AGENDA

### ***A. Doctor Widget's Remarks***

1. Welcome!
2. Salary & Benefits Review.
3. Autonomy & Code of Conduct
4. Teamwork

### ***B. Introductions***

### ***C. Pick 2 Projects:***

1. CommSix #1
2. Lockbox
3. City University
4. Koando Microtech
5. SR Weiss
6. Morrison Biotechnology
7. Odonata Securities
8. CommSix #2
9. Power Platoon

### ***D. Open Floor***

### ***E. Robo-Testing***

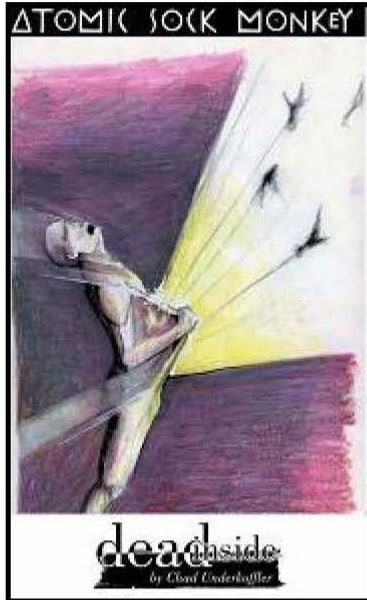
Adjourn to Sub-basement.



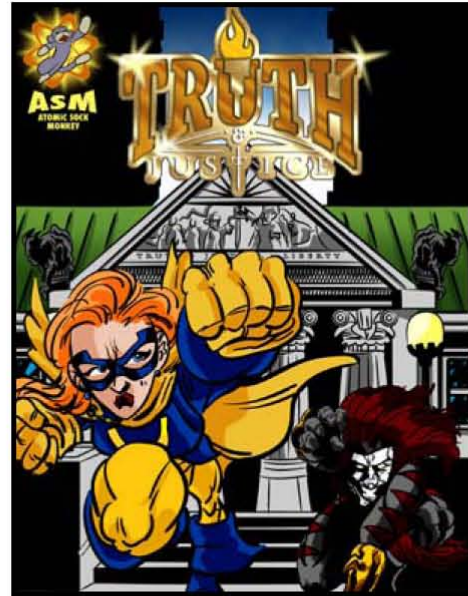


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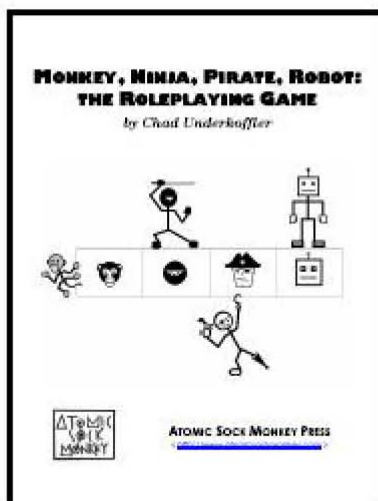
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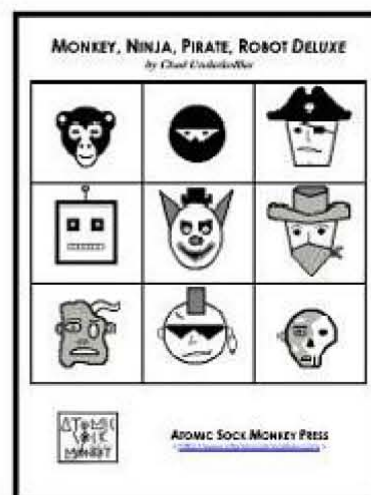
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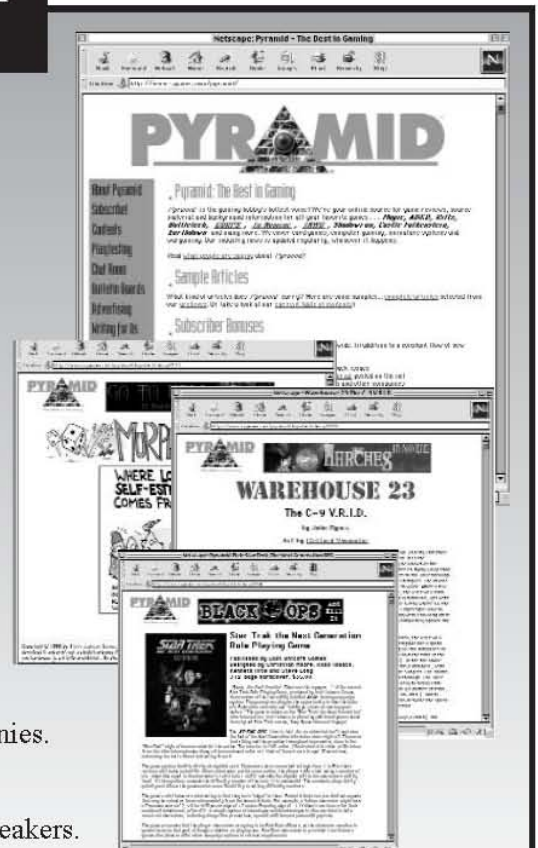
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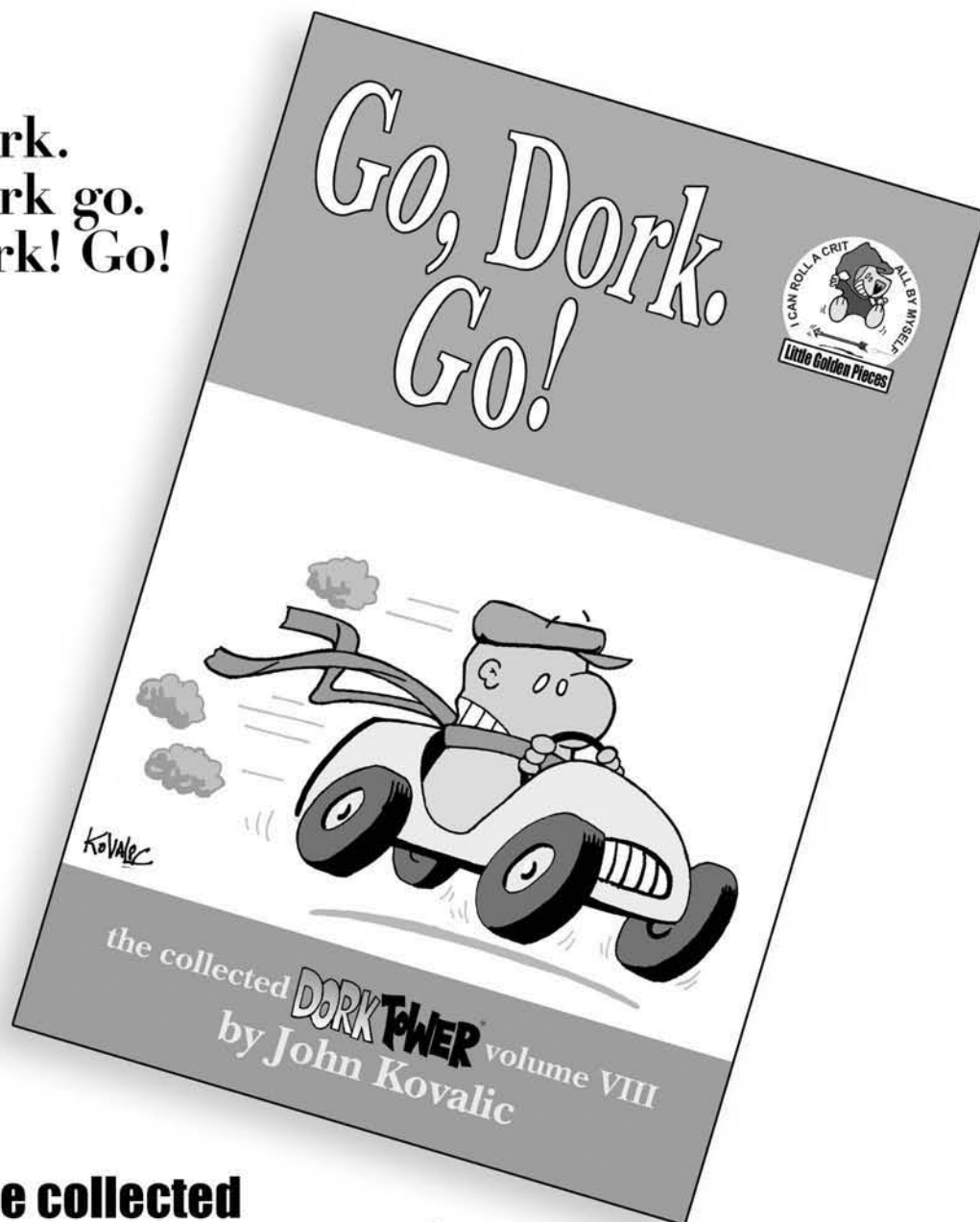
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# nemesis

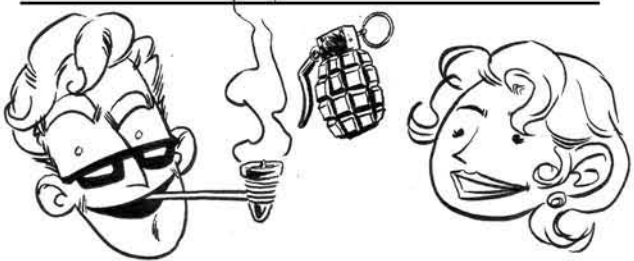
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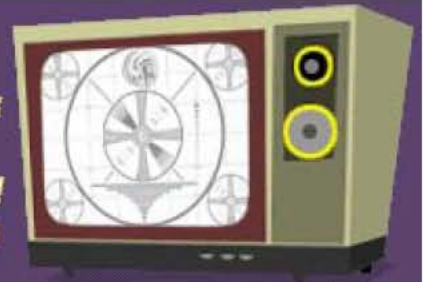
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A man in crazy pajamas atop a skyscraper rains laser death down on the streets. He's laughing as he does it.

Below, fires bloom for the news cameras. Reporters duck debris as they yammer on about demands and manifestoes and terror. Meanwhile, in the background, the screams of scorched innocents melt into the wail of sirens.

It makes me angry. My cheeks burn with it -- or that just might be from the wind.

The madman grows closer and closer, impossibly fast. His eyes widen as he lifts his weapon in my direction. He won't make it in time.

My hands tighten into fists as I brace for impact.

I have a set of crazy pajamas of my own.

Superhero stories celebrate heroism and "mad, beautiful ideas" in adventurous, stylish, and fun ways; *Truth & Justice (T&J)* is the new superhero RPG from Atomic Sock Monkey Press dedicated to just that. Fast, fun, and streamlined, *T&J* contains:

- ◆ **An exploration of superhero tropes.** How to approach them to help get what you want out of superhero roleplaying, whether you're a player or a GM, and advice for using them inside a game.
- ◆ **A complete game system.** The Prose Descriptive Qualities (PDQ) System from *Dead Inside* and *Monkey, Ninja, Pirate, Robot: the RPG* has been refined for *T&J*, streamlined and chromed-up for superheroic flexibility, simplicity, and speed. Different levels of task resolution, suitable for any type of situation, let you detail the encounters that really matter.
- ◆ **Three sample settings.** Become the champions of Drakesville when its signature hero gets promoted to the majors in *Second-String Supers*. Navigate the twisty path between altruism and greed in the futuristic world of *SuperCorps*. Discover who you truly are and change the world in *Fanfare for the Amplified Man*. Each setting comes with adventure seeds and introductory scenarios.

Are you ready for some truth & justice? Grab your cape, cowl, and utility belt and go!

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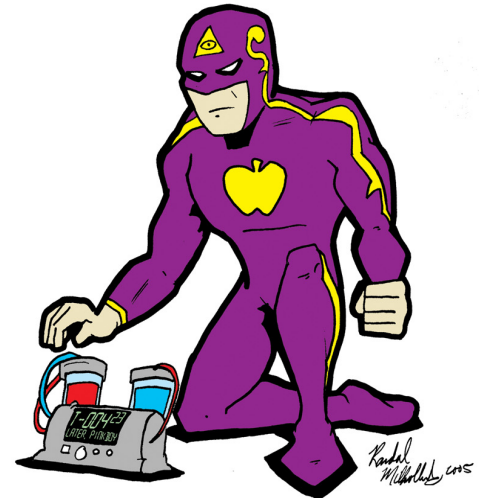
TRUTH  
&  
JUSTICE

## THE MASKED FNORD

**Identity:** Greg Wilson-Thornley

**Motivation:** In a moment of dire need, Greg consulted his pineal gland and gained powers far beyond those of mortal men. Now he uses his understanding of the Sacred Chao to fight the forces of Grayface wherever they appear!

**Powers:** Good [+2] Invisibility, Good [+2] Super-Hypnotism, Average [0] Chaos Blast, and Average [0] Synchronicity.



Superhero stories celebrate heroism and "mad, beautiful ideas" in adventurous, stylish, and entertaining ways.

*Truth & Justice* is the new fast, fun, and streamlined superhero RPG from Atomic Sock Monkey Press dedicated to just that.



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