WITH GREAT POWER

YOU CAN SAVE THE WORLD, BUT ARE YOU WILLING TO PAY THE PRICE?

PDF Edition

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

With Great Power… is a role-playing game about superheroes—not just about people with amazing powers, but about *superheroes,* people that stand up against unimaginable odds, struggling with every ounce of might against the forces of darkness and oppression. People who choose to suffer so that others might be saved. It's dark, inspiring, and a whole lot of fun.

The point of the game is to gather with some friends and create a great story about the trials and triumphs of superheroic characters sprung from your imagination. The game works best with three to five participants. One of those participants will be the "Game Master," or "GM" for short. The GM's job is to play the supervillains that strive to despoil the world the superheroes fight to protect. We'll call the other participants "players." Each of the players will create their own superheroes. To keep things clear, when speaking generally, we'll refer to the GM as "she" and the players as "he."

WHAT IS A MELODRAMATIC SUPERHERO STORY?

Not all superhero stories are the same. Some have capes, cowls, and flashy powers. Some don't. With Great Power… can do either type. In some superhero stories, "doing the right thing" is straightforward, uncomplicated, and relatively painless. In others, "doing the right thing" is often unclear, full of complicating consequences, and extracts a tragic human cost. I call this latter type the "melodramatic superhero story"—filled with angst, heartbreak, and hard choices. I designed With Great Power… to produce melodramatic superhero stories.

The Silver Age of comics, beginning in the early sixties, was the heyday of the melodramatic superhero story. Spearheaded by Marvel Comics' prolific Stan Lee, many of these tales showed their roots in the romance comics of the fifties, with the failing health of elderly relatives and the self-doubt of "would she love me if she knew my secret" providing much tension. To this mix, Lee added the pizzazz of superheroic adventure. Keeping secret identities, balancing the needs of loved ones against the greater good, and questions of loyalty in the face of great danger created a heady mix of angst and action.

I chose the word "melodramatic" to describe these types of stories because it embraces their roughness. Melodrama is drawn in broad strokes—characters are cast into archetypal roles rather than nuanced portraits—situations are simple, primal, and timeless. At the extreme edge of melodrama, it shades into the fully stylized cartoon. But I believe melodrama serves an ongoing purpose. These same primal conflicts are addressed again and again over the centuries because everyone faces them again and again in their daily lives.

THE ELEMENTS OF THE GAME

Just as the best superhero stories have layers of subtlety and metaphor not apparent on the surface, *With Great Power…* has a certain level of complexity that can seem daunting at first. In the next few pages, we'll go over the elements of the game and how they interact with one another.

Characters are the most important element of *With Great Power…* Characters are fictional individuals that inhabit the imaginary world of the game. There are three types of characters: Superheroes, supervillains, and supporting cast. Superheroes are the stars of the game. Each player creates and portrays one superhero. Supervillains are the dastardly foes of the superheroes. The GM portrays all the supervillains. Members of the supporting cast are attached to either the heroes or the villains and can be played by anyone at the table, as the need arises.

Both superheroes and supervillains are made up of aspects. Aspects are some discrete piece of the character's fictional existence—individual bits of story stuff. When you talk about things a hero possesses, things a hero can do, things that motivate the hero, or people that are important to the hero, you are listing the hero's aspects. In any given game, a hero will have three to six aspects. You'll learn how to create heroes in Chapter Two.

Each aspect has a few traits, the most important of which is *Suffering*. An aspect's Suffering represents the amount of stress the events of the story are putting on it at the moment. Each aspect has its own level of Suffering, which will change many times throughout the game. Every time the level of Suffering changes, you'll describe *how* that aspect comes under stress, and each time can be different. You and your friends will use your imaginations to tailor each instance of Suffering to the circumstances of the game. When an aspect's Suffering reaches the maximum level—Devastated—it is completely swept up in conflict and belongs to the GM.

Playing cards are the other main element of *With Great Power…* You'll need several decks of standard playing cards with jokers to play the game. See the table at the end of this chapter for details on exactly how many decks you'll need. At the beginning of the game, the players will all share a single deck, called the hero deck. The GM will use the rest of the decks for her villains. Each participant will also have a hand of cards to use for the actions of his character. To determine whether the story goes the way a player wants, he will play cards from his hand and compare them to cards played by the GM.

PLAYING THE GAME

So how do characters composed of aspects combine with playing cards to create gripping superhero stories? The meeting ground is the fertile imagination of you and your friends. *Scenes* are

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THE THOUGHT BALLOON

One of the coolest things about comic books is that you can show what a character is thinking just as easily as you can show what they're saying. You just put their words in a thought balloon rather than a word balloon. *With Great Power…* works the same way.

Take a quick peek at the Thought Balloon download. There's a picture of comic book Thought Balloon. Copy it. Cut it out. Mount it on a handle. Whenever you want to show what your hero is thinking, grab the Thought Balloon and hold it over your head. Simply say what your hero is thinking. Everyone at the table will know that your hero isn't saying "I hope Pearl doesn't recognize me in my secret identity!" out loud.

It may sound a little silly at first, but I urge you to try it. Using the Thought Balloon is mandatory for a good game of *With Great Power…* Everyone will use it, so you shouldn't feel self-conscious. At least I'm not asking you to wear spandex.

the framework of that meeting. Just as in comics, *With Great Power…* is constructed of a number of scenes. Whenever you have characters interacting in a location, that's a scene.

There are two kinds of scenes in the game: enrichment scenes and conflict scenes. In conflict scenes, two or more participants confront one another in an attempt to force the scene, and the story, to go their way. Enrichment scenes introduce aspects to the story, show how conflict has affected them, and generally enhance the conflict scenes around them.

In an enrichment scene, you'll choose one or two aspects to highlight. Next you'll set up a scene that shows off those aspects in some way—just as with any other story, the rule of thumb is *show, don't tell.* You will role-play the scene until it reaches a point of decision, a point where the scene can go one way or another. You'll state your stakes for the scene—what your hero wants to have happen in the scene. Then the GM will state her stakes for the scene—what the opposition wants to happen in the scene. You'll put one of the cards from your hand at risk in an attempt to achieve your hero's stakes. Your card will be compared to one chosen by the GM. The participant with the higher card wins his stakes. Enrichment scenes are explained in greater detail in Chapter Three.

Conflict scenes work much the same way. A conflict scene will start with a character trying to do something that another character wants to stop. We call this "picking a fight." Let's say you picked the fight with one of the GM's villains. Just like in an enrichment scene, you and the GM will each declare your stakes for the scene—what you get if you win. Then, you'll each draw some extra cards into your hands to set up for the conflict to come. The scene's ending will be determined by comparing cards you play from your hand with cards your GM plays from hers. However, since conflict is more tense and exciting, it's not decided by a single card. Just like in the comics, the story is broken down into pages and panels. Each page is composed of several panels of conflict and covers a single fight, usually between a superhero and a supervillain. Each panel shows one action aimed at achieving the stakes—one hit, one power blast, one threat to innocents. In each panel

you will play one card from your hand *and* describe what your hero is doing to try to win the fight. Then the GM will respond by playing a panel of her own. Play will go back and forth in this manner until one side wins. In the course of this play, it's likely that some of your aspects will Suffer. After all, conflict is dangerous. Conflict is covered in much more detail in Chapter Four.

The pacing of the game is aided by the Story Arc. The Story Arc has five spaces. Each time one of those spaces is filled, one of the rules of the game changes in favor of the heroes. The story won't end until the last space of the Story Arc is filled. The trick is, you can only fill a space on the Story Arc if you *lose* a page of conflict. Consider it the silver lining of defeat. The Story Arc is covered in more detail in Chapter Five.

THE ILLUSTRATION PROCESS

Superheroes were born in comic books, and it is there that we look for our greatest inspiration when we play this genre. Comics are created by a writer producing a script that describes what's going on in each panel. Then, an artist called a penciler draws the page in pencil. The penciler can experiment with different perspectives and scene arrangements because his work is malleable. When the penciler is satisfied with what he's crafted, another artist, called an inker, finalizes the image by embellishing it with dark black ink. The inker's lines are what will be printed and read by millions of comic book fans. As a final step, the colorist supplies vivid hues to each panel to bring the image to life.

The duties of crafting a story in a role-playing game like *With Great Power…* are similar to those of comic book creators. Like a writer, you can sit, ponder, and decide what you want to happen. You will manipulate the game elements—by playing cards and adjusting the Suffering of aspects— to make a statement about what is happening. The results of the game mechanics are like the script of the comic book. They state very plainly what happens next, such as: "Debris gets the upper hand on Mudslide." This is just the start of crafting a story.

Like a penciler, you have to visualize exactly what's happening. Has Debris thrown a car at Mudslide? Pummeled him with her massive, stony fists? Or threatened to smash the present he offered, stopping the villain dead in his tracks? Like the penciler, you decide. Unlike the penciler, you're not sitting alone at a drawing board. You are in this with your friends, sitting around a table. They might also have ideas about what "Debris gains the upper hand" looks like. Since you're still acting as penciler, feel free to change your mind if one of their ideas appeals to you.

Once you have finalized your idea of what happens, you'll have to make it permanent, like an inker. Speak loudly and clearly and describe to everyone what happens. Coloring comes into the process at this point, as well. There is a vast difference between, "Debris punches Mudslide in the jaw," and, "Debris looks over the forms of her fallen companions, shaking her head to clear it. Then she lunges at Mudslide shouting, 'No means no!' as her massive granite fist collides with Mudslide's gooey jaw with a *crack* loud enough to shatter windows a block away," while leaping up and acting out the motion. The difference is color, and how much you use is up to you.

Just as a team of comic creators follows this pattern again and again, issue after issue, you and your friends will be called upon to script, pencil, and ink the story at *every* stage of the game. *Scripting* is your play of cards or the posing of a specific question. *Penciling* is your group's creative

brainstorming. *Inking* is your final decision. There will be minor variations in the process due to specific circumstances, but the rhythm of *script, pencil, ink* will continue to guide you in forming the best superhero story you have locked up inside.

DRAMATIC IRONY

"Dramatic irony" is a fancy academic phrase for a simple thing: when the audience knows something that the characters don't. It may have a simple definition, but it is a powerful component of numerous superhero stories. How else could you set up a love triangle with only two characters? The classic example is the superhero that is in love with a woman who ignores his secret identity, but is infatuated with his superheroic self. Dramatic irony gives these twists bite, as we feel the pain of each compliment paid to the superhero that he cannot acknowledge, lest his secret identity be compromised. We can experience the frustration of hearing his boss slander the superhero's good name while he cannot respond, because he *needs* the paycheck. We can enjoy the flirtation between villainess and hero when neither knows whom the other one is. Dramatic irony draws us closer to the characters and invokes more passion in our reaction to the story.

Putting dramatic irony into a role-playing game can be tricky. Unlike comics or film, the authors of role-playing are the audience as well. We make

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THE READER

What is a superhero story without someone to read it? In addition to taking on the roles of this comic's scripters, pencilers, and inkers, players of *With Great Power…* have another important role to play: the reader of the comic book. Throughout the game, each player should imagine that someone has just bought the comic book of the story you're creating, and is reading it right now. While you don't know what happens next because no one's made it up yet, the reader doesn't know because he hasn't yet turned the page. One of the reasons the GM will have scenes with just her villains and no heroes present is because the reader would see these scenes. Don't hesitate to use phrases like, "The reader knows this is the same warehouse where Perjury took Noir's girlfriend, but Noir doesn't;" or, "The Stalwart gets up from the blow without a moment's delay. Although he doesn't let on that it affected him, the reader can see he's on his last legs." The Thought Balloon will help immensely with letting the reader know what's happening in your hero's head.

Secret Identity

same person separated by a code of conduct

Superhero

loves → Love Interest *loves*

Author

same player separated by a code of conduct

Audience

makes decisions for → Character ← *entertains*
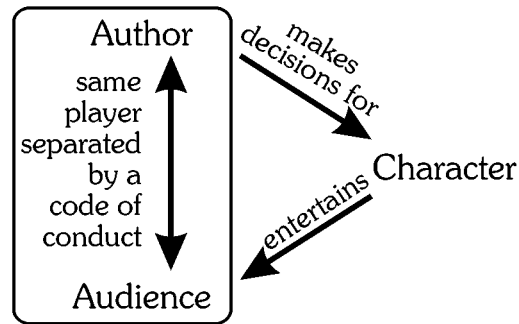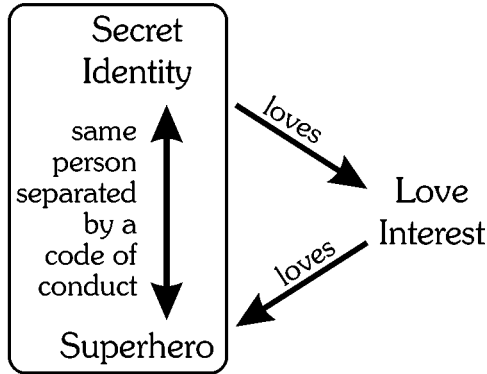
the decisions about our characters' actions, which makes us the authors; but we are also the only ones to experience the events of our stories, so we're the audience, too. How do you as author let the reader know something the character doesn't when you're playing that character?

It takes a bit of mental discipline, but it's not hard. Think of the superheroic love triangle with two people. The superhero *knows* how his beloved feels toward his superheroic self. He's heard *every* word she's *ever* said to "him." But he chooses, repeatedly, not to act on that knowledge because it's not the right thing to do. Likewise, you'll know *every* word that's spoken about your hero. But you must choose not to act on knowledge in a way that doesn't make sense for your character.

The best part is that, "what makes sense for your character," is a flexible concept. If someone says, "I want to do *x*, but my character wouldn't, because he doesn't know *y*," the best thing for that player to do is to find a different reason for his character to do *x*. Characters do things for many reasons. Just because *some* of the reasons are off limits, doesn't mean they won't find another.

Don't forget that your friends sitting around the table are the readers as well. That's why the penciling phase of hero creation gives them a chance to comment on your hero, so they'll be interested in his story. Because you're trying to entertain them, too, don't keep secrets from the other players. They're here to enjoy the whole story, so they'll need to know.

*With Great Power…*is designed to support and encourage dramatic irony in play. When you decide to increase the Suffering of an aspect, that's *your* decision as author, *not your hero's decision*.

The way you pencil, ink, and color that decision will allow you to create dramatic irony in the situation. Suppose you decide to move a Family aspect from Risked to Threatened in order to draw 2 cards. While you could decide that your hero leaps behind his kid sister for cover, that's hardly the only way to pencil it. Perhaps the kid sister has wandered into the midst of a battle on her way home from school, or while tracking down a clue she thinks the hero needs, or to apologize for inviting the supervillain into the house. If you ink it one of these ways, you've added another level of dramatic irony. You know that this danger aids the hero (by giving you more cards) but the hero opposes the danger that has beset his family.

Enrichment scenes can also pulse with dramatic irony. When you declare the stakes for your hero in the scene, you're deciding what *he* wants. But when you choose which card to risk, you're deciding how much you want that to happen, like a comic book writer. In between those two values—what you want and what your hero wants— is where dramatic irony lives.

GAME EQUIPMENT

To play *With Great Power…*, you will need copies of the hero and villain sheets, the Story Arc sheet, a Thought Balloon, and multiple decks of playing cards, as shown on the chart below. It's best if each deck has a distinctive back design, so you can easily sort cards into their respective decks. The players begin by sharing one deck of cards called the hero deck. The GM begins with one deck—called the villain deck—that cannot be stolen from her, and a number of additional

Players	Total Decks in Play	Initial GM Decks
1–2	3	1 Villain deck + 1 auxiliary deck
3–4	4	1 Villain deck + 2 auxiliary decks
5–6*	5	1 Villain deck + 3 auxiliary decks

* If you are playing with 5 or more players, plus a GM, you should use a double deck of cards as the hero deck. This deck should consist of 108 cards with the same back design (two decks of 52 + 4 jokers).

decks—called auxiliary decks—that are only hers temporarily. The players will be able to take the auxiliary decks from the GM later in the game. Make sure each auxiliary deck has one and only one joker. The hero and villain decks should each have two jokers. Throughout the game, jokers are wild in all decks. At the beginning of the game, 2s and 3s are wild for the GM only.

The decks are kept separate for purposes of drawing only. Cards from any deck can be played from anyone's hand for any purpose. Since you'll be using many cards, you might consider investing in some cardholders, available at dollar stores, general-interest game stores, and via mail order.

In a pinch, spring-loaded clothespins can help to organize your cards.

At the beginning of play, all the players will go through the Origin Process detailed in Chapter Two. The GM will devise her villain's Plans and choose her villains, as detailed in Chapter Five. Then, everyone will draw some cards into their hands. Each player draws 5 cards from the hero deck. The GM draws 4 cards from each deck she controls. Once everyone has the hero sheets in front of them and a hand of cards, the GM should decide who gets the first enrichment scene (see Chapter Three).

A WORD ABOUT SETTING

You may be wondering: "Where does this imaginary comic take place?" It takes place in the world of your imagination. The classic settings for superheroic melodrama begin with the mundane—tall buildings, major metropolitan newspapers, shadowy waterfronts, palatial estates, crime-infested alleys—and rapidly race to the very limits of the conceivable—undersea kingdoms, dinosaur-infested jungles, snow-encrusted fortresses, cities soaring between the stars, bizarre parallel dimensions, alternate pasts, presents, and futures. It's up to you and your group to find the mix that's right for you. Establish some ground rules for the starting setting, such as "an unnamed modern-day big city." Then, let the players decide on setting elements as they navigate the Origin Process. Does the hero's power stem from a council of other-dimensional entities? That alternate dimension becomes part of the setting. Let the GM embellish more setting while creating villains. Is the villain's Plan to destroy those who are threatening his tiny mountain kingdom? Then the mountain kingdom and its enemies become part of the setting. Start with the Struggle and craft the setting to highlight it.

CHAPTER 2

THE ORIGIN PROCESS

To start playing *With Great Power…*, you and your friends must all sit down together and navigate the Origin Process. In the Origin Process, the players will create the heroes they will portray in the game, while the GM will create the villains whose foul plans the heroes must thwart. Throughout the game, you will be called upon to go through the *Illustration Process* (see pages 3-4) as a way of deciding what goes on in the imaginary comic book. The Origin Process uses the steps of the Illustration Process: scripting, penciling, inking. The only difference is that scripting is structured by a series of questions rather than decided by instances of cardplay. You and your friends will be reading the questions (scripting), speculating on the answers for your own hero as well as *everyone else's* (penciling), and then finally deciding on what works best for your own hero (inking). Since penciling is required for hero creation, you'll need to get together with your fellow participants so you can all go through the Origin Process together.

THE STRUGGLE

Superheroes have their feet in two worlds. Energy beams with the heat of seven suns scorch across one panel, while the next panel simply depicts a woman wondering why her date has stood her up. Who can say which one is more gripping? Superhero stories are rife with contrast.

From the moment you begin to craft your hero, the stress of being pulled in opposite directions must be central to him. That is why we begin the Origin Process, not with powers or costumes, but by defining the struggle that all the heroes must face.

The hero's struggle is comprised of two opposed principles that hold appeal for the players and their heroes. They are the two paths that tempt him, but in the end he will only be able to choose one.

Scripting Question One: The Struggle
Which two opposed paths are all your heroes torn between?

The list below is meant as a starting point. You and your friends will surely create riveting struggles of your own. Sample struggles include:

 Responsibility vs. Freedom
* Ideals vs. Practicality
* Personal Needs vs. Responsibility
* The Mask vs. The Man (i.e., Superheroics vs. Normal Life)
* Justice vs. Vengeance
* Independence vs. Belonging
* Tolerance vs. Prejudice

At this point, your group should enter the penciling phase and discuss which struggles interest them. Find one struggle you can all agree upon. This is the thematic question you will all deal with in this particular story. However, just because all the heroes, villains, and setting elements will derive from the same struggle, that doesn't mean they're all going to be carbon copies of one another. Since the two principles of the struggle are listed as abstract generalities, you need to cus-

tomize how each side of the struggle manifests in your hero in this story.

Every new story you play using *With Great Power…* will have its own Origin Process. The same hero can face different struggles over the course of many stories. Just because you pick Power vs. Responsibility as your struggle for this story, doesn't mean you won't be playing Justice vs. Vengeance in the next.

[EXAMPLE OF SCRIPTING QUESTION ONE]
[Four people sit down to play With Great Power… *Grace has been role-playing for many years, and she'll be the Game Master. Stephen has also been playing for a long time, always in search of something new and different. Nate has been playing for a few years and has tried a few of the most popular RPGs. Deanna is relatively new to role-playing.]*

Grace: We first have to decide on what our heroes' struggle is going to be. What thematic issue are they grappling with?

Nate: Theme? I thought we were going to be playing a superhero game, not going to English class.

Grace: It's not English class. It's just that for a story to be interesting, the characters need to have problems to overcome. So we need to decide what kind of problems they'll have.

Deanna: Do you mean like having family problems or love problems?

Nate: Or drug problems? *[snickers—Grace glares at him and he pipes down]*

Stephen: *[his nose in the rulebook]* You're on the right track, Deanna. It says here that it could be something like "Responsibility vs. Freedom" or "Ideals vs. Practicality" or—

Deanna: I like that one! I was just saying to a friend of mine the other day how frustrating it is to deal with the day-to-day drudgery when you want bigger things. I bet it would be even worse for a superhero.

Stephen: I can work with Ideals vs. Practicality. I think I've already got an idea.

Nate: Showoff.

Grace: Ideals vs. Practicality is a great struggle. Are you sure you're okay with that, Nate?

Nate: Sure, sure. When do I get to pick my "ideal" powers that get "practically" everything done?

THE SCRATCH PAD

Each player will have a Scratch Pad for his hero. Photocopy the one provided in the back of the book, download it from the web site, or just use a piece of scratch paper. Jot down any potential aspects that come to mind. Remember, you'll need at least three aspects to get your hero started. But, it's not necessary to put every aspect on the Scratch Pad right away. You are free to embellish the Scratch Pad between stories, adding new Powers, new Relationships, additional Origin details, and the like. Once you have a few of them down, you can choose the ones that are appropriate for the struggle you selected in Scripting Question One: The Struggle. Between stories, the Scratch Pad is where you will keep track of all your hero's aspects, though you'll just use a subset of them for each new story.

Scripting Question Two:
The Scratch Pad
For this story, will you use an existing hero or craft a new one?

If you're using an existing hero, you already have a few aspects on your Scratch Pad. You may continue to the aspects section if you'd like to add some more, or you can skip ahead to *Copying to the Hero Sheet* (see page 15-16).

If you're crafting a new hero, it's time for some questions about your hero's aspects.

ASPECTS

The next three questions will define the aspects of your hero. Scripting question three covers your hero's Assets. Scripting question four probes your hero's Motivations. Scripting question five delves into your hero's Relationships. Listed beneath each of these questions are a few subquestions to help you script specific types of aspects. List these potential aspects on your Scratch Pad. Even the most vaguely defined hero must answer questions three, four, and five, so a hero must have at least three aspects.

HOW CAN I LIST ALL MY POWERS IN ONLY SIX ASPECTS?

If you've played superhero role-playing games in the past, it may seem like second nature for you to separate your hero's superpowers into a number of different aspects. Other games might encourage or even require a hero like The Stalwart to list all the many and varied abilities conferred by his mystic Armor of Truth separately: "protection from physical attacks," "flight," "protection from deception and mental attack," "energy blasts," and so on. However, *With Great Power…* is a game primarily interested in stories. It's best to condense all those abilities into a single story-significant aspect. For instance, a character might have "Armor of Truth—protects against deception as well as physical and mental attack, enables flight, and energy blasts called 'Bolts of Truth.'" Your hero might have more than one Power aspect if his powers stem from two different sources and thus the two powers Suffer in different ways. Perhaps some of your hero's powers are innate, while other powers are granted by an external authority, so long as he complies with their guidance. The innate abilities might Suffer when the hero is hurt or loses his focus, while the external powers might Suffer when the hero disregards the advice of his superiors. Therefore, they would likely work better as two separate aspects. If the hero were to face the Struggle of Independence vs. Belonging, the aspects would even align with opposite sides of the Struggle.

Scripting Question Three: Assets
How does your hero excel?

*With Great Power…*is a superhero game, and this is the "super" part of the equation. Does she fly? Can he command the denizens of the deep? Has she been infused with alien blood? Is he a mild-mannered milquetoast by day, only to don the cowl of an avenger when the sun goes down? Is she the Chosen One? The answers to these questions will become your hero's *Assets.* They are aspects of the following three types: Powers, Identities, and Origins.

Subquestions:

1) **Power:** *Can your hero do things that a normal person could never hope to do? If so, what?* A Power is an aspect that describes abilities the hero possesses beyond those of mere mortals. It need not be superhuman in extent, although it certainly can be. Examples include: "Mastery of martial arts," "Body of living electricity," "World's greatest detective," "Atlantean gifts—enhanced physique, telekinesis, and object reading," "Strength of a grizzly," or "Blue freeze-ray optic blasts."

2) **Origin:** *Does some piece of your hero's past figure strongly in his current circumstances? If so, what?* Origins are reminders, symbols, or relics of the hero's traumatic past that retain significance in the present day. They may stem from the long-past events of the hero's empowerment, or a more recent incident. Examples include: "The grimy street corner where my uncle was murdered," "The only remaining fragment of my home world," "The mask of my slain sidekick," or "My uncle's dying words."

3) **Identity:** *Does your hero hold a specific occupation or position in society that puts demands upon him? If so, what?* An Identity is an aspect that describes a hero's nonheroic identity, including employment obligations. Examples include: "Freelance photographer," "Millionaire playboy," and "Private detective."

[THE ORIGIN PROCESS CONTINUES IN OUR GROUP.]

Grace: So, Stephen, you said you had an idea.

Stephen: Yeah, I'm thinking of someone who is driven to uphold some grand ideal, like being the Guardian of the Truth or something. But in order to get the job done, practicality requires that he's living a lie, a sort of catch-22 situation.

Deanna: That's harsh. I like it.

Grace: Great. So tell me more. Why is this superhero living a lie?

Stephen: Well, I'm not sure. He wants to be the Guardian of Truth, but he can't. Maybe the government won't let him for some reason, like he's too young or something?

Nate: He's dead.

Stephen: What? You're going to kill my character?

Nate: No, the real Guardian of Truth is dead. Your character has to fill in and can't let anybody know that the real McCoy is dead.

Grace: Wow, Nate. That's a really good idea. What do you think, Stephen?

Stephen: *[A moment while the idea grows on him]* I like it. I have to protect the truth while still claiming to be someone I'm not. Thanks, Nate. Now, how did I get the superhero suit to be able to pull it off? I suppose I could have seen the real hero die right before my eyes.

Deanna: You were his sidekick! You were too late to save him, but you knew that the world needed him.

Stephen: That's perfect! The sidekick puts on the

SUPERHEROIC ORIGINS

The circumstances of their origins are what set superheroes apart from the rest of society, as well as other literary heroes. The origin stories of the great superheroes are filled with pain, loss, and suffering. Often it is the death of a family member that spurs the hero to greatness. Other times it is the destruction of an entire planet, being victimized by an ill-conceived experiment, or suffering the humiliation of puberty gone horribly awry. In any case, a well-conceived superhero has a painful origin and so should yours. Although you need not define your hero's origin before play begins, here are some things to think about should you ever decide to. When Swapping Back Issues, you can hint at the important points of your hero's origin without going into detail. Comics often don't start with a hero's origin. They plunge right into the action and then go back and fill in details of the origin later—sometimes in a special issue devoted just to the origin. See the "Numbering Issues" option in Chapter Six, and you can, too.

What was life like before?

Give a short description of what your superhero's life was like before his origin changed everything. What is his ideal of a "normal" life, which haunts his dreams but can never be touched?

What have you lost?

During the course of the origin, something dear to the superhero is irrevocably lost. This need not occur in the same event that gives the hero his powers, but ought to be near enough that we can see how this loss has shaped the hero for the better.

To what degree were you a victim or a perpetrator of your origin?

Were you just in the wrong place at the wrong time, or were you actively tampering with forces man was not meant to know? Note that there are many degrees of complicity between the two extremes of "It just happened," and "I went looking for it." Also note that in most of the Silver Age comics that inspired *With Great Power…* origins consisted of two parts: empowerment and loss. The heroes of those comics often felt extreme levels of guilt over the loss parts of their origins. You should consider how your character feels about his origin too.

How have you been empowered?

Here's the part you've been waiting for, true believer. Bring on the radiation, the ancient magics, the long-lost civilizations, the interrupted experiments, the alien emissaries, and whatever else your imagination holds! The hero is exposed, or connected to, something far beyond the "normal" and draws power from it. The exact source of empowerment will color the entire game, so choose carefully. For instance, if ancient magic is the source of empowerment, the game will be full of age-old curses, supernatural beings, wizened old mentors, and the like.

hero's cape and lies to the whole world in order to protect it.

Grace: Good. So that sounds like an Origin Asset to me. Write it all down on your Scratch Pad. Does your hero excel in any other ways?

Stephen: Well, he does have the suit . . . *[pause]* No. He has the armor. The mystical Armor of Truth. It's got this big helmet that hides his face and he can fly. Oh, and he can shoot blasts of power from his gauntlets called "Bolts of Truth." And the armor protects him from deceptions.

Nate: Does it do the dishes, too? How much is that kinda power going to cost?

Grace: It all centers on the armor and affects things on the same scale, so it sounds like one aspect to me. Write it down on the Scratch Pad. Is "Guardian of Truth" his superhero name?

Stephen: Well, it's his title. But I like the image of him in the big armor, like a knight. I'll call him "The Stalwart."

Scripting Question Four: Motivations
Why does your hero fight the good fight?

What drives your hero to get back up again? Is he sworn to protect his city? Has she vowed to avenge the death of her husband by keeping the night safe? Does he believe that truth is worth fighting for? Does she think that no one else can possibly stave off the end of the world? The answers to these questions will become your hero's *Motivations*. Motivations are aspects of the following two types: Duties and Convictions

Subquestions:

1) **Duty:** *Has your hero sworn to protect something or to advance some principle? If so, what?* A Duty is an aspect that describes an obligation the hero has taken on. Examples include: "Protect the United States from all threats, foreign and domestic," "Defend the streets of New York from criminals," or "Bring peace to the human world."

2) **Conviction:** *Does your hero have a deep-seated belief that drives him to action? If so, what?* A Conviction is an aspect that states what a hero believes is true and proper. Examples include: "No man is above the law," "America is the greatest nation in the world," "I am too ugly to be anything other than a monster," or "Killing is always wrong."

[WE REJOIN THE ORIGIN PROCESS, ALREADY IN PROGRESS.]

Grace: Deanna, why does your hero fight the good fight?

Deanna: Well, I was thinking about why my character is so strong. I think she's made out of solid granite. I'll call her "Debris."

Grace: Really? *[Deanna nods]* Okay, how does that figure into what drives her?

Deanna: Well, Debris feels that she's ugly. That no one can see her as anything other than a monster.

Nate: Well, *of course* they'll see her as a monster. She's made out of rocks.

Deanna: But she doesn't let that stop her. She goes on, despite what other people think. *[glares at Nate]* People like you, Nate.

Nate: I was just saying . . .

Grace: Write it down as a Conviction Motivation: "Everyone sees me as a monster." Of course, the reader knows that's not true. It's just what your hero believes. Now, Nate, how about your—

Deanna: I wasn't done. She also has the drive to do the right thing. *That's* what keeps her from being a monster.

Stephen: Why is Debris so driven to do the right thing? Has she taken some kind of oath? Maybe on her parent's deathbed?

Deanna: *[thinks for a moment]* Her parents aren't dead, but she *did* take an oath. She took an oath "to protect and serve." She was a police officer before she was transformed. She still tries to carry out the oath.

Nate: But I guess it's tough to fit in a squad car when you weigh half a ton, huh?

Grace: That's great. I like the former cop angle. Write that down as a Duty Motivation.

Scripting Question Five: Relationships
Who is important to your hero?

No one exists in a vacuum. People surround themselves with other people. Does your hero care for an ailing parent? Is her brother a government agent? Does his trusty manservant aid him in his never-ending battle for justice? Is her fiancé a private detective with a knack for getting into trou-

ble? The answers to these questions will become your hero's *Relationships.* They are generally of the following four types: Families, Romances, Partners, and Friends.

Some long-time players of RPGs are tempted to build characters that have no connections to other people, fearing the GM will only use them against the character—endangering them to force the character to "go along" with the plot. In *With Great Power…* the GM will not be doing that. Relationships are fully within the player's control. It's not the GM's job to make them suffer, it's yours.

Subquestions:

1) **Family:** *Is a relative of your hero regularly involved in your hero's life? If so, who?*
2) **Romance:** *Does your hero feel a romantic attraction to anyone?*
3) **Partner:** *Is there anyone who helps your hero in his superheroic duties? If so, who?*
4) **Friend:** Is there anyone who figures strongly in your hero's life that doesn't fall into one of the categories above? If so, who?

PUTTING YOUR LIFE ON THE LINE

Death and superheroes rarely mix. When they do, the results are usually temporary. Month after month, year after year, the great superheroes face down death and elude its icy clutches. No matter how powerful the villain, the reader knows the hero will pull through somehow. And when their time does finally come, superheroes never go quietly into that good night—headlines in newspapers and four-foot posters at your local comics shop announce to the world that a hero is about to die. The reader, again, knows the outcome in advance. He likely knows how many issues until he comes back from the dead, too. Here's how to do that in *With Great Power…*

Your hero will never die unless you choose to put his life in jeopardy. If that's what you want, take an Identity aspect with your superheroic name as the name of the aspect. When you're *Swapping Back Issues* (see page 19), be certain to let everyone know that this aspect directly represents your hero's life (rather than just his superheroic reputation). You'll also need to decide whether you're interested in your hero "coming back from the dead" within the span of a single Story Arc, or if you'd like a more long-term tale. If you'd like the single story option, make sure everyone else—especially the GM—knows that when this aspect is Devastated, your hero will die. When the aspect is Transformed or Redeemed, the hero returns from the dead, but changed somehow. See Chapter Five for more details on Transformation and Redemption of aspects.

If you'd like a more long-term story of the death of your hero, or if you'd like him to die and stay dead, then let everyone know that your hero will die when this Identity aspect is Transformed or Redeemed. This will likely put your hero's death right at the climax of the story. When it is Devastated, the hero and/or the reader realizes that the hero may very well have to give his life to stop this villain. Once the GM controls the aspect, each increase in Suffering can represent the hero's growing dread of his impending death, the villain's continued preparations for the hero's demise, or perhaps an escalation in the villain's rampage until there is no doubt that the hero must stop him, no matter the cost. Finally, whether the aspect is Transformed or Redeemed, the hero dies. How he dies depends on whether the Aspect is Transformed (in which case the GM will ink his death), or Redeemed (in which case you will ink his death).

Whether you choose the long-term or short-term option, you can *still play* most of your hero's other aspects in enrichment and conflict scenes. Which aspects remain playable depends upon you, your group, and how you've defined those aspects previously. Playing Relationship aspects is pretty obvious—they're grieving the loss of the hero, and perhaps a little more. Could your hero have transferred his Powers to another person, imbuing them with abilities beyond those of mortal men? Is someone else striving to carry on his Duty to protect the city? Has your hero impressed his own Convictions on another so that they, too, are driven to take on the mantle of Guardian of Truth?

PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN PLAYERS

If you list another player's hero as a Partner Relationship, you are declaring that he helps you in your superheroic duties. Because this assumes something about another hero, you *must* obtain that player's permission before listing the aspect on your hero sheet. If you list another player as one of your aspects, but they do not list you as one of theirs, the other player is considered your sidekick. If two players have one another listed as aspects, they are considered a more-or-less equal partnership.

When you increase the Suffering of a Partner Relationship aspect with another player, you don't draw cards from the deck. You draw cards from the hand of that player. When you decrease the Suffering, the cards you discard do not go to their respective discard piles, but into the hand of the other player. If you Devastate this aspect, you can no longer draw cards from the other player's hand—although they can still draw cards from yours if they have you listed as a Partner Relationship on their hero sheet. If the GM continues to increase the Suffering of this aspect (*see* Chapter Five for details), she will draw those cards from your hand and your partner's hand, as the strain of their rift weighs on them. Please note that this *doesn't* mean that the GM draws twice as many cards for Devastated interplayer Partner Relationships. She gets the same number of cards that she would for any other Devastated Aspect. She simply draws half from your hand, as the owner of the Devastated Aspect, and half from your partner's hand. When the GM needs to draw an odd number of cards, she should draw more from your hand than from your partner's.

[THE ORIGIN PROCESS CONTINUES.]

Grace: Okay, the last aspect question is "Who is important to your hero?"

Nate: I'll go first on this one. My guy, Noir, is the protector of the night, right? He can pull on darkness like it's a tapestry and swing on it and wrap people up in it and all that, right? He dresses all in black and patrols the rooftops of the city, right? So what does he need to complete the full superheroic picture?

Stephen: A kid sidekick who's the orphaned son of circus acrobats?

Nate: Cute. No. He needs a girl. He needs someone special out of the whole city that he's doing it for. She doesn't even *like* him in his secret identity and all that, but he fights to protect her all the time.

Deanna: That's kinda sweet.

Grace: Fine. Write her down as a Romance Relationship.

Nate: Well, there's no romance yet. Just, y'know, wanting to.

Grace: That's all it takes. Write it down, Nate.

Not all aspects fall neatly into just one of the types above—for example, an item that gave your hero his powers would bridge Origin and Power, or a relative who aids him in his duties would be both Family and Partner). This is fine, as long as everyone at the table understands what the aspect represents and has an idea of what it will look like in a scene. However, a hero must have at least one Asset, one Motivation, and one Relationship.

ASPECT SCALES

Some superheroes are individuals with extraordinary drive and phenomenal physical training, who battle evil at the peak of human potential. Others can incinerate planets with a glance and commune with the fundamental forces of the universe itself. Most fall somewhere in between. Penciling the exploits of such varied heroes is sure to call on different imagery. Defining where your hero falls along this spectrum is important so that everyone at the table has an idea of how to pencil the "special effects" of the story.

Scripting Question Six: Scale
How much of the world of the comic book can each aspect affect?

Each aspect—except Convictions, which are simultaneously Personal and Cosmic and thus sidestep scale completely—also operates at a certain scale.

Scale roughly indicates the level of influence the aspect has in the world of the comic book. Feel free to assign any scale you like to any of your aspects, so long as it makes sense to you and everyone else at the table. Scale exists only to guide you and your friends during penciling. Just like in the comics, a street-patrolling avenger of the night can oppose and dismantle a globe-spanning alien invasion with the right tools: your imagination. The cards will never discriminate based on scale, and neither should your penciling. The scales are as follows:

[THE ORIGIN PROCESS CONTINUES.]

Grace: Have all of you thought about how much of the world of the comic book each of your aspects can affect and settled on a scale?

Deanna: I have. Since Debris can throw cars around and stuff like that, I figure her "Strength of Stone" power is municipal scale. Convictions don't have scale, so I skipped it for "Everybody sees me as a monster." The "To protect and serve" Duty is focused on the city police force, as is her Relationship with her brother the cop, so I put them all at municipal.

Grace: Good. Stephen, how about you?

Stephen: Well, the Armor of Truth itself is probably municipal—it can do major property damage, but not open fault lines or anything like that. My Partner Relationship, "Heroes of Justice," is

Scale	Description
Personal	The aspect operates on a scale equivalent to a single person and what he can accomplish. A Romance Relationship with the girl next door exists at this scale, as do Powers that enhance normal human ability to the peak of their potential. Duties to protect an individual are generally personal in scale.
Municipal	The aspect operates on a scale equivalent to an important, influential person in a major city and what he can accomplish. Relationships with powerful businessmen, crime lords, and contacts at city hall often exist at this scale, as do powers that increase normal human ability to a point where major property damage is possible (e.g., throwing cars, and the like). Duties to protect a city from crime, or the like, fall at this scale.
National	The aspect operates on a scale equivalent to an important and influential person in a large nation and what he can accomplish. Relationships with legislators, generals, secret agents, and criminal masterminds often exist at this scale, as do powers with effects that can be felt for dozens of miles. Duties to protect the interests of an entire nation fall at this scale.
Global	The aspect operates on a scale equivalent to an important and influential person on Earth and what he can accomplish. Relationships with presidents, sorcerers supreme, United Nations officials, jet-setting supermodels, and megalomaniacal tyrants often exist at this scale, as do Powers with effects that can be felt for hundreds and thousands of miles. Duties to promote a truly global agenda fall at this scale.
Cosmic	The aspect operates on a scale equivalent to an important entity in the cosmos and what it can accomplish. Relationships with extraterrestrial mentors and the like often exist at this scale, as do Powers with effects that can only be expressed in astronomical terms. Duties to a universal principle may fall at this scale.

WHY DO THE OTHER PARTICIPANTS GET TO PENCIL MY HERO?

Creators of superhero comics need to appeal to an audience that they will never meet. Their stories are published and sold to tens of thousands of anonymous readers. You don't have to face that challenge. Your stories only need to appeal to you and your friends. Allowing your audience to make suggestions during penciling is a great way to find out what they're interested in seeing in the comic book, and gauge how well you've been portraying your hero. Often, you'll find that they have a different idea of what your hero would do. Ask yourself, "What did I do to give them *that* idea?" You can gain a good deal of insight into yourself and your hero this way, which is always a good thing.

Also, the amount of penciling, and their enthusiasm while doing it, is the best measure of your hero's popularity in the group. If none of your friends cares enough to offer penciling suggestions, find out why, and fix it.

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global scale, because the hero team helps all over the world. But what about my Origin Asset "The Death of The Stalwart?" What scale is it?

Deanna: It doesn't make sense for it to have a scale. Death is personal *and* cosmic, so doesn't that give it no scale, just like a Conviction?

Grace: Well, The Stalwart was a big, important hero all over the world, right?

Stephen: At least across the country. And he died saving the country from his archnemesis.

Grace: Sounds like a national scale Origin to me. Nate, what about you?

Nate: I guess I'm the team mascot. I've only got two personals and two municipals. The "Tapestry of Night" Power is personal, since he can only hold the tapestry with his hands; and his wannabe girlfriend, Pearl Perrault, is also personal. She's just a girl. My Duty to "Keep the Night Safe" is municipal because it covers the whole city, just like my secret Identity of "Ian Lebeau, Private Investigator." My guy is lame.

Grace: No, he's not. Scale doesn't matter at all when it comes to actually affecting the story. That's all about the cards. It's just that when you're winning in a fight, we know you'll describe Noir punching or kicking someone, while Deanna might describe Debris throwing a bus at someone. That's all it's for.

COPYING TO THE HERO SHEET

By now you've got a list of aspects on your Scratch Pad. Although each of these aspects defines something about your hero, some of them will highlight the struggle better than others. Since *With Great Power…* is designed to create melodramatic stories, we're only interested in the aspects that are most relevant to the struggle.

Scripting Question Seven: Aspects of the Struggle
Which aspects align most strongly with the two poles of the current struggle?

Copy three to six of these aspects to your hero sheet. Place all your aspects relating to one side of the struggle on the right side of your character sheet, and all aspects relating to the other side on the left. You must have at least three aspects (one Asset, one Motivation, and one Relationship), and at least one aspect on each side of the struggle. Aspects that don't illustrate the struggle exceptionally well are not lost, they just won't be important to this particular story. Use them as color text, but not as an aspect. For each aspect you copy to the hero sheet, be certain to describe it in brief and fill in the proper Type and Scale. There will be one more blank space on the hero sheet: example suffering.

[THE ORIGIN PROCESS CONTINUES]

Grace: Copy your aspects from your Scratch Pads onto your hero sheets. Before you do, look back at our struggle of Ideals vs. Practicality and put those aspects that line up with ideals in one column and aspects that line up with practicality in the other.

Nate: English class, again. All right, my guy's kinda practical about *everything*.

Grace: You can't have them *all* on one side of the struggle. If you do, it's not really a struggle.

Nate: I get it. You just didn't let me finish. His Powers and Identity help him get things done. Even his Duty is about actually keeping the streets safe at night. But the girl . . . *[sighs]* Well, let's just say that she's going on the ideal side. *[smirks]*

Deanna: *[rolls eyes]* How crass.

Nate: What? If loving somebody when they don't love you back isn't some kind of idealism, what is?

Deanna: I suppose. Debris' "Strength of Stone" and her practical-minded brother both go on the practicality side. "To protect and serve" is definitely an ideal, but I'm not sure about "Everybody sees me as a monster." It could be about her idealizing her lost beauty or about the practical problem that she's now made of stone. I think I'll put it under practicality. Unbalanced characters seem to be the trend. *[winks at Nate]*

Stephen: Well, I'll buck that trend. The Armor of Truth is this grand, mystical artifact from an ancient civilization—definitely an ideal. And the Conviction that "Lies must be exposed" is also an ideal. Both "The death of the Stalwart" and "Leader of the Heroes of Justice" present solid, practical problems—like hiding my face all the time, for one.

SUFFERING OF ASPECTS

Each aspect has its own Suffering—how a hero's connection to that aspect comes under stress. Throughout the game, the level of Suffering will fluctuate greatly. For each aspect, you must pencil at least one example of what Suffering might look like, and write it down. This example need not be actually used during the game. However, it is a necessary step so you and the other participants can start thinking about what could threaten the bonds that make this aspect part of your hero.

Scripting Question Eight: Suffering
How might you Suffer?

No game text could hope to list all possible ways

for an aspect to Suffer. There are as many ways for Suffering to manifest as there are aspects and players. The whole point of Suffering is that you customize it to fit the specific needs and circumstances of your story. However, below are some suggestions for how Suffering *might* manifest for different types of aspects. These suggestions are intended only as a kickstart for *your* imagination, not as a final boundary of all that is possible. Consider them my penciling suggestions to you and your group.

***Power** Assets might Suffer by the following:*

✶ being weakened by exposure to rare types of radiation, exotic chemical concoctions, long-lost magics, or the like

✶ being knocked from one's grasp, if the power resides in a weapon or object

✶ showing signs of becoming *too* powerful and unpredictable (use the Thought Balloon to show the hero struggling to keep himself "under control")

✶ breaking, overheating, running out of ammunition or fuel, if the power is technological in nature

✶ being limited or revoked by the extradimensional aliens that granted the power to the hero

✶ losing force and effectiveness due to the hero's distraction or injury

***Origin** Assets might Suffer by the following:*

✶ catching sight of someone that your hero thinks is dead

✶ seeing an old flame on the arm of your sworn enemy

✶ revisiting the site where the Origin became important and recalling how it all happened (use the Thought Balloon and a voice of grim conviction)

✶ revisiting the site where the Origin became important and realizing how it might have happened differently (use the Thought Balloon and a voice torn by self-doubt)

✴ revealing that many of the truths we cling to depend greatly on our point of view

Identity *Assets might Suffer by the following:*

✴ someone finding a clue about the hero's secret

✴ neglecting your Identity's duties

✴ being reprimanded for neglecting your Identity's duties

✴ getting slandered, libeled, ridiculed, or fired

✴ someone denigrating one of your hero's Identities to the face of his other Identity (use the Thought Balloon to speak of your hero's resentment)

Conviction *Motivations might Suffer by the following:*

✴ the hero finding evidence that his belief is mistaken (use the Thought Balloon to voice your hero's doubts)

✴ overhearing someone who once shared this Conviction repudiate it (use the Thought Balloon to illustrate your hero's shock and sense of betrayal)

✴ seeing someone prospering by acting in a way that flies in the face of the Conviction (use the Thought Balloon to display your hero's scorn and envy)

✴ seeing someone the hero respects or admires acting against the Conviction (use the Thought Balloon to ink your hero's disappointment)

✴ coming across something that is "better" than what the conviction states is "the best" (use the Thought Balloon to take us along on the hero's search for new meaning)

Duty *Motivations might Suffer by the following:*

✴ the object of the Duty being harmed, threatened, damaged, held hostage, ensorcelled, kidnapped, financially ruined, socially disgraced, slandered, or the like

✴ the hero coming to doubt whether his Duty is the right thing to do (use the Thought Balloon to show the reader the hero's inner turmoil)

✴ the object of his Duty rejecting the hero

Relationship *category Aspects (partners, family, romances, and friends) might Suffer by the following:*

✴ someone taking an off-hand comment as an insult

✴ the Relationship being assaulted, beaten, robbed, held at gunpoint, dropped from an airplane, hit by falling rubble, left dangling from a rusty fire escape, brainwashed, arrested, jettisoned into space, thrown to the lions, infested with alien nanotechnology, or otherwise physically endangered

✴ the hero neglecting a promise, breaking a date, forgetting an important occasion

✴ lying to the Relationship (use the Thought Balloon to plead your hero's case that he has "no choice")

✴ the Relationship lying to the hero about something he knows in his other identity (use the Thought Balloon to express your hero's shock and outrage)

✴ finding out that the Relationship has done things the hero finds repugnant, or even criminal

✴ discovering a clue that the Relationship is hiding a secret of his own

✴ the Relationship demanding a commitment: moving to a distant city, taking on a time-consuming new job, accepting an offer from the hero's sworn enemy, kicking the hero out of her life

If you're not sure how an aspect might come under stress, turn to your fellow participants for help. They're sure to have ideas. If, out of all the penciled possibilities, you cannot bring yourself to ink any of them as an example of Suffering, you cannot use the aspect. In other words, *if the aspect cannot Suffer, it cannot be used as an aspect.* Use it as color text, but not as an aspect.

[THE ORIGIN PROCESS CONTINUES. ALTHOUGH ALL THE PLAYERS NEED TO DEFINE AN EXAMPLE OF SUFFERING FOR EACH OF THEIR ASPECTS, WE'LL JUST LOOK AT DEANNA'S EXAMPLES FOR DEBRIS.]

Grace: It's time to start thinking about how your aspects might come under stress. How might that Suffering look to the reader?

Deanna: I guess if Debris gets hit too hard, her "Strength of Stone" could crack. And her brother could always get hurt.

Grace: Yeah, but anybody could get hurt—or get hit too hard. What could specifically strain the Relationship between Debris and her brother?

Deanna: Well, she might say that she's still protecting people, and he could get all offended that she's not doing it as a cop.

Grace: That's better. What about the others?

Deanna: Let's see. She's got a duty "To protect and serve." That could run into trouble if a civilian gets hurt. Or, she could be stopped from protecting the city by a cop—because he thinks she's a monster.

Stephen: That would be a good scene.

Deanna: Her last one is the Conviction "Everybody

WHAT IF MULTIPLE HEROES TAKE THE SAME ASPECT?

An aspect's Suffering represents the amount of stress the events of the story are putting on it. It also represents how closely the aspect is tied to your hero. The closer the aspect is to your hero—that is, the lower its level of Suffering—the more inking rights you, as a player, have over that aspect. The farther the aspect gets from your hero—that is, the greater its level of Suffering—the more inking rights the other participants—especially the GM—have over that aspect.

If one of your aspects has a Suffering of Primed, Risked, Threatened, or Imperiled, no one but you can describe a change in the aspect that lasts longer than one scene. The GM might win a page of conflict with you and illustrate the villain kidnapping your hero's love interest, or stripping your hero of his powers, or wreaking havoc upon the city he's duty-bound to protect. However, if that aspect's Suffering has not yet reached Devastated, the effect is temporary and lasts no more than one more scene. This is a great way to kick off a new enrichment scene, with the love interest escaping her captors, or your hero's powers rushing back to fill him, or discovering that the damage to the city isn't as bad as it seemed.

Once one of your aspects reaches Devastated, however, the GM takes possession of it. She writes it down on her villain sheet and may immediately describe a change in the aspect that lasts for the remainder of the story. Your hero's love interest is kidnapped and held, he finds himself powerless, or key parts of the city are in a state of emergency. If any other players have the same aspect on their sheet, but it is not yet Devastated, they may still use the aspect in enrichment and conflict scenes, although they will need to be a bit more creative in their penciling and inking. In order to use the aspect, those players will have to work around whatever change the GM imposed when it was first Devastated.

Sometimes this won't be too challenging—if two heroes share a Duty Motivation to protect the same city, even if one fails to protect part of the city, the other can guard the remainder. Other circumstances will require some dramatically flexible penciling. If two heroes share a Romance Relationship (Oh, the rivalry!) and one of them fails to protect her from the villain's kidnapping minions, how can the other still make use of the aspect? Flashback scenes are one option, as are temporary escapes, garbled cries for help, and the like. Enrichment scenes might involve just the Romance Relationship reacting to her confinement without the hero present. In conflict scenes, a series of quick "Meanwhile . . ." panels can serve to illustrate increased Suffering of the captive Relationship, even as her hero strives valiantly to save her.

sees me as a monster." I guess that could come under stress if somebody treats her nice. But isn't that a good thing?

Stephen: It might be a good thing, but would she accept it? The inner turmoil would be pretty intense, I think.

Deanna: Yeah, I guess you're right. I'll put "flattered" as example Suffering for that one.

Grace: *[grins]* Interesting. I like it.

SWAPPING BACK ISSUES

Even in issue #1, readers usually know certain things about a hero before they even open the cover. The hero has made guest appearances in other books, appeared in advertisements, or been the subject of friends' excited recommendations. A well-established hero may have decades of continuity behind him. Even if you've newly pulled this hero out of the depths of your imagination, you'll want your friends at the table to know something about him. We call this part of the Origin Process "Swapping Back Issues."

Scripting Question Nine: Swapping Back Issues
What does the reader already know about your Hero?

You should be certain to touch on each of the aspects listed on your sheet and how they relate to the struggle. If something has changed about one of the aspects recently, be certain to mention it. If you have an Origin on your hero sheet, tell the other players what it's about and why it might be important to this story. Don't hesitate to use phrases like "A couple of issues ago," and "On the very last page before the big cross-over," even if you've created your hero just now at the table. A game of *With Great Power…* takes place in an imaginary comic book. That comic book exists in an imaginary comic shop somewhere and has imaginary back issues. Tell us a little about them.

The reason Swapping Back Issues is an important step of the Origin Process is twofold. First, your fellow participants are the only audience your story is likely to have. Swapping Back Issues

is a way to get them excited to hear about your hero. Second, your fellow participants are also the fellow members of the creative team of your imaginary comic. The game expects them to be penciling suggestions for your hero as the story builds—they'll need to know something about your hero in order to do that. Perhaps they have an idea of how your hero fits in with theirs, or what kinds of peril they may have overcome together in a previous issue. Take any questions or suggestions for what they are: expressions of interest. If the other participants didn't care about your hero, they wouldn't offer this input. This is also a great time to introduce new aspects, or embellish existing aspects, so that they shed new light on the particular struggle for this story.

[THE ORIGIN PROCESS CONTINUES.]

Grace: Stephen, what does our reader already know about The Stalwart?

Stephen: About a year ago in his own title, The Stalwart faced down his archenemy, called Perjury, the Lord of Lies.

Nate: Is his name really "Perjury?"

Stephen: Yeah. *[Nate chuckles. Stephen pays him no mind]* Anyway, The Stalwart was able to stop Perjury from taking over the country, but he died in that fight. His sidekick, Earnest Squire, saw the whole thing happen. Watched and couldn't stop it. Once he saw that Perjury was defeated, he just left. There was a special issue for the funeral of the Stalwart, but since then the Heroes of Justice have been in a bit of disarray. They've got no one to lead them. Just at the end of last issue, there was a cliffhanger as some of the heroes discovered that the memorial where The Stalwart's Armor of Truth was on display had been broken into—and the armor stolen! That's all the reader knows as this issue begins.

THE STRIFE ASPECT

Look at your hero sheet. During the play of the game, one of your aspects is going to get more ink than the others. It's going to show up in most of the scenes. Everyone at the table will probably talk about it. Which aspect do you find most interesting? Which one do you want the story to focus on most strongly?

Scripting Question Ten: The Strife Aspect

Which aspect of your hero is most important to you?

Check the small triangle with the "S" in it on the hero sheet for this aspect. This marks the aspect as your strife aspect for this story. Whenever you (or anyone else) increase or decrease the Suffering of a strife aspect, one more card than normal is involved. Draw one extra card when you increase the Suffering, and discard one extra card when you decrease the Suffering.

The GM is responsible for centering much of the attention on your strife aspect. One of the GM's requirements is to devise her villains' Plans around the aspects that you and the other players choose as your strife aspects. Whatever you choose, her villains must scheme and strive to take it away from you, and use it to their own nefarious ends. If that's not worth fighting for, what is?

[THE ORIGIN PROCESS COMES TO A CLOSE.]

Grace: All that's left is for each of you to choose a strife aspect. Which of your aspects to you want to be most important to this story?

Nate: That's easy. Pearl Perrault. The girl's the most important thing in my life.

Stephen: You *do* realize the villains are going to center their Plans on her, right? They'll *need* to kidnap her or something.

Nate: I know that. But rescuing her from being kidnapped is a great way to make an impression.

Grace: Okay, Nate. What about you, Stephen?

Stephen: I think it's got to be "The death of The Stalwart" Origin. Until I can get past that, there's not much I can do about becoming my own hero.

Deanna: I've been thinking about it, and I'm choosing "Everybody sees me as a monster." It's tearing Debris up inside and it's all she can think about.

Grace: Interesting collection of strife aspects. I'll look over these to make my villain's Plans and then we can get started. Give me twenty minutes.

Nate: Cool. Time enough to grab a pizza!

FROM ORIGIN TO ACTION

Once you and your group have completed all the steps of the Origin Process, your GM will require a break to prepare the villains for you. She'll let you know how long. Once she's ready, you can start playing the game in earnest. Although the Origin Process for the group has ended, your duty to define your hero has just begun. As you play the game and script, pencil, and ink the adventures of your hero, both you and your fellow participants will come to know him better. If you come up with an aspect that you want to add to your hero after play begins, you are free to do so—provided that you have a space for it on your hero sheet. Write out its name and description, type, and scale, and take a moment to Swap Back Issues with the other participants to let them know about the new aspect. Like any other aspect, it begins the game with no Suffering, and so cannot be described in the imaginary comic book until it is Primed during an enrichment scene or conflict scene (see Chapters Three and Four, respectively).

THE ORIGIN PROCESS

✴ **The Struggle:** What two opposed paths are all your heroes torn between?

✴ **The Scratch Pad:** For this story, will you be using an existing hero or crafting a new one?

✴ **Aspects:** If you're crafting a new hero, it's time for some more questions. You need only answer the three main questions. The subquestions are there to help you script specific types of aspects. List these potential aspects on your Scratch Pad.

1) **Assets:** How does your Hero excel?
   - ✴ **Power:** Can your hero do things that a normal person could never hope to do? If so, what?
   - ✴ **Origin:** Does some piece of your hero's past figure strongly into his current circumstances? If so, what?
   - ✴ **Identity:** Does your hero hold some specific occupation or position in society that puts demands upon him? If so, what?

2) **Motivations:** Why does your hero fight the good fight?
   - ✴ **Duty:** Has your hero sworn to protect something or to advance some principle? If so, what?
   - ✴ **Conviction:** Does your hero have a deep-seated belief that drives him into action? If so, what?

3) **Relationships:** Who is important to your hero?
   - ✴ **Family:** Is a relative of your hero regularly involved in your hero's life? If so, who?
   - ✴ **Romance:** Does your hero feel a romantic attraction to anyone? If so, who?
   - ✴ **Partner:** Is there anyone who helps your hero in his superheroic duties? If so, who?
   - ✴ **Friend:** Is there anyone who figures strongly in your hero's life that doesn't fall into one of the categories above? If so, who?

✴ **Scale:** How much of the world of the comic book can the aspect affect?

✴ **Aspects of the Struggle:** Look at your hero's Scratch Pad. Which aspects align most strongly with the two poles of the current struggle? Copy them to the hero sheet and align them with one side of the struggle or the other. While thinking on this, feel free to Swap Back Issues and think about the **Letter Column** (see pages 68-69).

✴ **Suffering:** How could each aspect on your hero sheet Suffer? This is the example Suffering. If, out of all the penciled possibilities, you cannot bring yourself to ink any of them as an example of Suffering, you cannot use the aspect. In other words, *if the aspect cannot Suffer, it cannot be used as an aspect.* Use it as color text, but not as an aspect.

✴ **Swapping Back Issues:** What might the reader already know about your hero?

✴ **The Strife Aspect:** Which aspect of your hero is vitally important to the villains' evil plans?

CHAPTER 3

THE ENRICHMENT PROCESS

Now that you've all created your heroes and villains, chosen your strife aspects, and, in the case of GMs, concocted your foul Plans, what's next? It's time to start making the story. You're describing an imaginary comic book. Comics are broken up into scenes, pages, and panels. This game is too. The first scene played answers the question: What happens on the first page of the imaginary comic? I suggest you introduce your reader to some of your aspects by playing an enrichment scene.

There is an old theatrical adage that says, "any gun shown in the first act must be fired in the second act." That also means that, "any gun fired in the second act must be shown in the first act." Stories function best when the audience gets a peek at the story elements before they are used to significantly affect the plot. This is the purpose of enrichment scenes: to exhibit a hero's aspects and display why those aspects are vitally important to the hero.

Any scene that is not a conflict scene may be an enrichment scene. Players may request specific enrichment scenes, although the GM is the final authority on which scenes are actually played, and in which order. The GM is encouraged to allow each participant, including herself, about the same number of enrichment scenes. The players involved in the scene decide which hero and GM aspects are featured in the scene.

In each and every scene in the game, something about the story must change. Since the rules of *With Great Power…* are built to support the story, that means something about the game mechanics must change. In enrichment scenes, the level of Suffering will change. We'll go over the

simplest change in Suffering first: Moving from no Suffering to Primed. This is called a Priming scene, and will be the first scene you play. Later we'll discuss how to use enrichment scenes at higher levels of Suffering.

PRIMING SCENES

STEP 1: FRAME THE SCENE

When you start a new scene, describe the time, place, and context of the scene to your friends and the reader. But just as facing a blank page can evoke creative paralysis in a comics writer or artist, facing the broad question of "What happens in the next scene?" has the potential to stop even the most improvisational role-player in his tracks. In *With Great Power…*, we break this question down into manageable steps and apply the Illustration Process to each one. Just script, pencil, and ink each step and you'll have a great enrichment scene. It all starts with framing the scene—setting the stage for the action to follow.

**Scripting Question One:
Frame the Scene**
*What aspect does the reader need
to know more about?*

How to script it: Choose one of your hero's aspects to display to the reader. This aspect is central to the scene, and will be Primed during the scene. Priming is automatic, whether the player wins his stakes for the scene or loses them. Rules

for enriching multiple aspects in a single scene are given below.

How to pencil it: The comic reader turns the page. What does he *see* your hero doing? What kind of scene would display the aspect you chose? You'll want the aspect to appear in as melodramatic a manner as possible, so what could flaunt the inherent tensions of the aspect? Will the scene hint at a power's hidden weakness? Will it foreshadow a relationship's eventual betrayal? Will it show the reader how very devoted the hero is to his ideals, to make his later pangs of doubt all the more heart wrenching?

How to ink it: As the enriching player, you and the GM decide together what the circumstances of the scene are: Where and when is it taking place? Who is present? What is going on? Is this scene happening shortly after the previous scene, or does it have a "Meanwhile . . ." caption? Is it a flashback to something that happened a long time ago? Since comics are a visual medium, try to describe things in as eye-catching a manner as possible. If it doesn't really matter how the hero arrives at the scene, describe him rushing in from a just-finished adventure, or fly down with barely enough time to change out of costume and make it to a vital appointment—melodrama thrives on tension.

[EXAMPLE OF STEP ONE]
[It's time for Deanna to have an enrichment scene for her character, Debris.]
Grace: Okay, Deanna, our comic reader turns the page, what does he see Debris doing?
Deanna: *[Looking at her character sheet, Deanna*

decides she wants to introduce the reader to Debris' relationship with her brother, Lt. Eric McKay.] I'll Prime Debris' brother, Lt. Eric McKay. Let's say Debris is headed toward her mother's home. What she doesn't know is her mom had some sort of minor accident today and her brother is at the house. He's ready to chew her out for ignoring her responsibilities at home.

STEP 2: PLAY THE SCENE

Scenes with just one character are certainly possible, but scenes with multiple characters interacting are almost always more interesting. The characters in the scene will speak to one another, and do things with, and to, one another. For many, this is the heart of role-playing. It is certainly the meat of an enrichment scene.

Scripting Question Two: Play the Scene
What do the characters say and do?

How to script it: You put all the pieces—places, people, circumstances—in place when you framed the scene. Now just let them move. The scripting is very straightforward for this step.

How to pencil it: Most enrichment scenes will feature characters speaking to other characters. Often, both characters will belong to the same participant, such as when a hero encounters one of his Relationships or a villain reveals his Plan to his lackeys. Instead of playing out dialog between characters by yourself, invite other players to temporarily take on the roles of various supporting characters in the scene. The player who framed

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REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE

It's good for the environment and good for your stories too. When you want to pencil some stock character, like a thug or a cop or reporter, take a moment to think back. Has anyone gotten panned by a reporter before? Did someone give a cop a throwaway line in a previous scene? Was one of the thugs defeated in a memorable way in an earlier fight? Why create a whole new character when you can use one the reader already knows something about? In this way, supporting characters evolve from simple stereotypes into idiosyncratic personalities with pasts, opinions, and reasons for their feelings and actions. Who knows? One might even become an aspect you'd like to add to your hero's Scratch Pad.

the enrichment scene decides who gets to play supporting characters. While the GM must take on the role of any unclaimed supporting characters, players will often bring an enthusiasm to the role the GM might not be able to match.

If the group is unfamiliar with this supporting character, the enriching player must provide a brief description of the character and provide the character's motivation for the scene. The enriching player will also describe the action and environment of the scene. This motivation will serve as script for the players portraying supporting characters.

How to ink it: Even if you solicit another player to portray a character in the scene, the inking rights for an enrichment scene remain with you because you are the enriching player. Although you'll certainly want to incorporate the other players' creativity in the scene—why else did you ask them?—you may redirect them if they start to lead the scene in a direction you don't want it to go. Play out the scene. Speak in character. Describe what the comic reader sees. Make liberal use of the Thought Balloon.

[EXAMPLE OF STEP TWO]

Grace: Great! As Debris opens the door her brother shouts loud enough to shake the—

Deanna: Um, Grace? I was hoping that Nate would play Eric McKay.

Grace: Oh . . . okay. It's your scene after all.

Nate: Me? Why?

Deanna: Why not? Are you up to playing Debris' older brother? He's a cop and thinks Debris should still be one, too. He's very disapproving of her superhero lifestyle.

Nate: Sure, I can be sarcastic and disapproving with the best of them.

Deanna: *[smiles]* That's what I was counting on.

Grace: Okay, I assume Debris is all wrapped up in that big trench coat she wears. *[Deanna nods]* So she comes walking up to the house and sees her brother's car in the driveway.

Deanna: *[grabs the Thought Balloon and holds it over her head]* Debris looks at the car for a moment. "Oh, crud. Eric's here. Maybe I should just turn around and—"

Nate: "Well, if it isn't the feminine intuition of the Heroes of Justice. So, tell me, Debris, did you—"

Deanna: He'd call her "Debbie."

Nate: Right. "So, tell me, Debbie, did you save the world from an army of little green men today, or was it just a run-of-the-mill supervillain bent on world domination?"

Deanna: "Nice to see you, too, Eric. So, how's mom? "

Nate: " 'How's mom?' You've got a lot of nerve asking me 'How's mom?' after what you've done." Eric turns and walks back into the house.

Deanna: Debris follows. "What did I do? What's got you so mad? Is mom okay?"

Nate: Hold on. What was he mad about again?

Deanna: Debris' mom had some kind of problem and Eric had to come help her, and he thinks Debris should have done it.

Nate: So I can just make up whatever kind of problem I want?

Grace: As long as Deanna doesn't object, you can.

Nate: *[looks at Deanna]* I'm blanking. I can only think of one thing, and it sucks.

Deanna: Just play it out seriously. I'm sure it will be fine.

Nate: *[shrugs]* Okay. "Debbie, do you have any idea where I found mom when I stopped by after work today?"

Deanna: "Look, Eric, I got hung up. There was this oil tanker in Asia that—"

Nate: "She was standing on a chair! On her tiptoes, trying to reach the cat food that you put on the very top shelf! Do you have any idea what would have happened if she fell? Not all of us are made of stone, Debbie!" Eric's moved right up into Debbie's face, so I figure she's standing there, head brushing the ceiling, and right in front of her is this little guy, barely half her size, poking her in the chest with his finger, chewing her out.

Grace: That's a nice image.

STEP 3:
DEFINE THE STAKES

Scenes, like all good things, must come to an end. While you're in the middle of it, it's best to start thinking about how you'd like it to end—so that you and everyone involved can start steering the scene in that direction. To keep the story moving and the tension high, the final outcome of the scene must be in doubt.

Scripting Question Three: Define the Stakes

*How does the hero want
the scene to end?
And
How does the opposition want the
scene to end?*

How to script it: You've selected the roles and played the scene, but how will it end? Enrichment scenes in *With Great Power…* are heavily focused on the heroes—who they are, what matters to them, and what they want. As the enriching player, you will define how your hero wants the scene to end. This is called your stakes for the scene. Then, the GM will define how she wants the scene to end, in order to emphasize the struggle. This is called the opposing stakes for the scene. If another player has been portraying a character in your scene, the GM ought to listen to his thoughts on how the scene could end, and should feel free to defer to him if she thinks his suggestion highlights the struggle well enough.

How to pencil it: The penciling at this stage should focus on identifying the stakes for both sides as clearly as possible. Draw on the creativity of your entire group. Keep in mind that although there must be stakes in any scene, the enriching player's definition of the stakes will control how success or failure can manifest. Since Priming is guaranteed regardless of success or failure, the stakes cannot include whether an aspect appears in the scene or not. The stakes *can* include whether that aspect enables the hero to achieve a certain goal, or how the hero appears while doing it.

    The GM will have to define stakes for the opposition. This should be more than simply saying "you don't get your stakes." The loss of the hero's stakes is already assured if the hero doesn't win the scene. What *else* does the opposition get if she wins? Often, the player's stakes will edge toward one side of the struggle. The GM's stakes should show what would happen if the opposing side of the struggle prevailed.

    If anyone thinks that either set of stakes would violate your concept of the hero, or just make the reader say "That would *never* happen!" then *re-define those stakes*. Although your hero wants certain things out of the scene, and you, as scripter, want certain things out of the scene, don't paint yourself into a corner. Both you and the GM need to craft the stakes in such a way that either winning them or losing them makes the story go forward in an interesting way. If either winning or losing the stakes will bring the story to a screeching halt, redefine the stakes.

How to ink it: After taking everyone's penciling suggestions, make sure you state clearly and simply what your stakes are. The GM must also state plainly what her stakes are.

[EXAMPLE OF STEP THREE]
[Nate and Deanna have continued to play out the argument between Debris and her brother Eric.]

Nate: "I can't drive all the way out here to check on mom *every* day, and you obviously can't look after the cat, let alone mom. She's going to have to move in with me."

Deanna: "No way! She's lived in this house for forty years. We grew up here. There's no way she's moving to your tiny apartment in the city."

Grace: That sounds like a decision point to me. Deanna, what are Debris' stakes for this scene?

Deanna: She wants Eric to acknowledge that she's doing the best she can and drop the subject of mom moving to the city.

Nate: Fat chance of that.

Grace: Let's leave chance up to the cards, Nate. My stakes are that not only does Eric *not* drop the subject, but Debbie begins to doubt that she can lead a normal life at all any more.

STEP 4: RESOLVE THE SCENE

With two ways for the scene to end sketched out, cardplay will decide which one the reader will see. At this point, the cards, rather than a specific question, are your script.

How to script it: As enriching player, choose one card from your hand to put at risk. Hold this card face down in front of you. The GM—even if she isn't playing any characters in the scene—will also choose a card from her hand to put at risk and hold it face down in front of her. Once both of you

have chosen your cards, reveal them to everyone simultaneously.

Whichever side reveals the higher ranked card wins their stakes for the scene. Suit doesn't matter. The losing side takes *both* risked cards into his hand, increasing his hand size by one. The winning side draws a card from one of the decks he controls, to keep his hand size the same.

How to pencil it: A decent bit of penciling was already done in Step 3 by defining the stakes. The rest of the scene must follow the stakes of the winning side. Any suggestions should be made with this in mind.

How to ink it: Just because the stakes are decided doesn't mean the scene is over. Now that you know how it ends, *finish it.* Keep up the character play so everyone knows exactly what the reader sees. Describe anything visual. Use the Thought Balloon. As enriching player, you decide when the scene is over.

[EXAMPLE OF STEP FOUR]
[Deanna looks at the five cards in her hand: 5♠, 6♡, 7♡, 8♢, K♠. If she really wanted Eric to drop the subject and prevent Debris' mother from moving, she'd play the king, but she thinks it might be more interesting if Debris has this sub-plot with her family going on at the same time as the main plot. Even though Debris desperately wants her brother to relent, Deanna chooses the five, her lowest card. She holds it out face down in front of her.

Grace also reviews the nineteen cards in her hand. She can choose just about any value she wants. Like Deanna, she thinks the story will be more interesting if Debris' brother forces the issue and moves their mom into the city. With fiendish thoughts of Debris needing to fend off muggers intent on grabbing her mother's purse, Grace chooses a queen from her hand and holds it out face down in front of her.

Once both Grace and Deanna have held out their cards, they reveal them at the same time. Everyone at the table sees the queen beats the five and knows that Debris has lost her stakes.]

Nate: Ha! Don't mess with Eric McKay. You *will* lose.
[Grinning, Deanna takes Grace's queen and places it and the five into her hand. Grace draws one

card from any one of the decks that she controls to replace the queen.]
Deanna: Debris looks away from Eric. "If you think that moving into the crime-infested city is really in mom's best interest, I'll help with the heavy lifting."
Nate: "Maybe downtown wouldn't be so crime-infested if you were still a cop like you ought to be."
Deanna: That's a good line to close the scene on.

If you and the GM reveal cards of equal rank, the stakes go up. First, increase the ante on your hero's stakes. Then, the GM must describe how the opposition's stakes increase.

Once you've both declared how the stakes are raised, both you and the GM gamble another card. Whoever has the lower-ranked card loses the scene, but takes all four risked cards into his hand, increasing his hand size by two. Whoever has the higher-ranked card wins the scene, may pencil and ink it as described above, and draws two cards to replace those cards risked. If there is another tie, repeat the process of raising the stakes and risking another card.

Wild cards risked in enrichment scenes are *always* considered to be of higher rank than an opponent's card, even if that card is an Ace. If both player and GM play wild cards, they are considered to be equal rank. The stakes get raised and another card is risked, as described above.

Strategy Tips: Choosing a low-value card to put at risk makes it less likely for your hero to win your stakes, but makes it more likely for you to capture the card the GM risks, thus increasing your hand size by one card. Choosing a high-value card to put at risk makes it more likely for your hero to win your stakes, but makes it less likely for you to increase your hand size by one card. Keep in mind that risking a low-value card doesn't mean your *hero* is trying to fail. It's likely that he's trying to prevail with all his superhuman might, but you, like the writer of a comic, have decided the story might be better if your hero meets with some frustration. It's a great way to add some dramatic irony to the situation.

Also note that early in the game, the GM has 2s and 3s wild. She may put one of these at risk in an Enrichment scene to virtually guarantee the hero will lose the stakes of the conflict. When the

player takes the 2 or 3 into his hand, it is no longer wild and counts only as its face value. The players are free to revisit such dirty tricks upon the GM later in the game when they have more wild cards than she does.

[ALTERNATE EXAMPLE OF STEP FOUR,
TAKING PLACE IN A NEAR-PARALLEL DIMENSION]

[Deanna looks at the five cards in her hand: 5♠, 6♡, 7♡, 8◇, K♠. She's not sure if she likes Nate's idea about moving Debris' mother into the city. Deanna knows Grace is a crafty GM and doesn't relish the thought of having to fend off purse-snatchers every time Debris' mother steps outside. Still, the story could be interesting if Debris were to be overruled by her brother. Deanna decides to let Grace's card choice decide the scene. She chooses the eight, since it's right in the middle of the possible card values. There are just as many cards higher in value than an eight as there are cards lower in value. Deanna holds the card out face down in front of her.

Grace also reviews the nineteen cards in her hand. She can choose just about any value she wants. Like Deanna, she thinks the story might be much more interesting if Debris' brother forces the issue and moves their mom into the city. But she also doesn't want to dictate Deanna's decision about her character's family. Grace chooses an eight from her hand and holds it out in front of her, face down.

Both Grace and Deanna hold out their cards, revealing them at the same time. Everyone at the table sees there's a tie, and knows the stakes will go up.]

Deanna: Okay. If I win, Eric admits he can't take care of mom as well as Debbie can. Debris says, "Eric, you hardly even look in on mom. You don't know what she needs these days."

Grace: That's good. My stakes need to go up, too.

Nate: I know how they go up. Eric stares Debris in the eye and says very softly, "I'm taking mom into the city with me and I'll get a restraining order to make sure you can't stop us." *[Grace nods, agreeing that these are her raised Stakes.]*

Deanna: Oh, that's cold. Debris says, "Eric, don't even talk like that. It doesn't have to be like this." I have to pick another card, right?

[Grace nods. Deanna looks at the four cards left in her hand: 5♠, 6♡, 7♡, K♠. Because of the way in which the stakes were raised, she knows that if she wins the scene, Eric will back off entirely. She doesn't want her "disapproving

brother" aspect to look like such a wimp in his first scene, so she decides that it's best for Debris to lose the stakes. She chooses the six and holds it over the table, where the two eights lie.

Grace looks through her eighteen remaining cards. She likes the twist that Nate threw in about the restraining order, and is certain now that moving mom into the city will improve the story. To virtually guarantee success, Grace chooses a three from her hand because it's wild. She holds it out in front of her.

Both Grace and Deanna reveal their cards. Everyone at the table sees that the wild beats the six and knows that Debris has lost the stakes. Grace draws two cards from the decks she controls to replace the eight and the three. Deanna takes both the eights, the six, and the three into her hand. Although the three was wild for Grace, it's just a three for Deanna.]

Nate: You got sandbagged.

Deanna: "A restraining order? No judge is going to issue an order to keep me away from my mother."

Nate: "Maybe if you were still a cop, you could pull a few strings, but I think the judge will take one look at your 'superheroic' face and keep mom as far from you as possible!"

Deanna: Debris just gapes at Eric, open-mouthed. We'll end the scene there. That was pretty vicious, Nate.

Nate: Thanks. I aim to please.

GM ENRICHMENT SCENES

Comics are full of scenes that show us what the villains are plotting. Plus, the GM has a sheet full of aspects that need to be introduced to the story. For these reasons, the GM will have enrichment scenes of her own. Since it is the GM's job to determine which scene comes next, she may have as many enrichment scenes as she desires. However, each main character—both hero and main villain—should have about the same number of enrichment scenes.

The GM's enrichment scene plays out in a very similar fashion to a player's enrichment scene. Step 1: Frame the Scene, and Step 2: Play the Scene, are exactly the same. The GM frames the scene, plays the scene, and may ask players to

temporarily portray supporting characters in the scene, just as a player does.

In Step 3: Define the Stakes, the GM first defines how the villain wants the scene to end. She should keep the villain's Obsession and Plan in mind (see Chapter Five). Then, you and the other players define the opposition's side of the stakes. All players can pencil possible stakes, but you should try to reach a consensus as to what the stakes will be. If you and the other players cannot agree on the stakes, the player with the most Suffering gets to ink the stakes. If the GM's stakes favor one side of the struggle, come up with something that edges toward the other side.

Step 4: Resolve the Scene, is also slightly different for GMs than for players. The GM still chooses a card from her hand to put at risk, but rather than comparing it to a card chosen by another participant, she compares it with the top card of the villain deck. If her risked card is lower, the opposition wins its stakes, but the GM takes both the risked card and the flipped card into her hand. If the GM's risked card is higher, she wins her stakes, but discards her risked card and takes the flipped card into her hand. If the two cards are of equal rank, the stakes are raised and she must choose another card to compare to a second flip.

[EXAMPLE OF A GM ENRICHMENT SCENE]
[Grace takes a turn for an enrichment scene for her villainous aspects. (STEP ONE) *She decides to begin to reveal Perjury's nefarious Power: the Power of Lies.]*

Grace: We see a poorly lit bar. A man carrying a reporter's notebook comes in and speaks to the bartender, who points him to a shadowy booth in the back. The reporter slides into the booth, across from a figure in a big hat. (STEP 2: PLAY THE SCENE) Stephen, would you play the reporter? He's here about an anonymous tip that "someone famous" has faked his own death.

Stephen: Okay, I'll play him. "All right, buddy. You called and I came. What's the scoop?"

Grace: "I told you that I knew of someone who faked his own death, but I'm afraid I lied. I do that, you see. I know of someone who's faking his life. He was killed, but he still claims to be alive and well. I need you to get to the bottom of it."

Stephen: I see where you're going with this, Grace. You're an evil woman. *[Grace smiles]* "What do you mean 'faking his life?' That makes no sense. How can you know that he was killed?"

Grace: "Quite simple. I killed him myself." The shadowy figure takes off his hat to reveal an average, bearded face. But the telltale crackles of energy flickering from his eyes let the reader know this is actually the archvillain, Perjury.

Stephen: I start to edge out of the booth. "I know you. You're—"

Grace: "Of course you know me. You've known me all your life." Perjury holds up his left hand. He wears a ring twisted around, so the gem is facing the palm. This is the ring he uses to alter people's memories and perceptions. It flashes in the light and the reporter just stares at it. (STEP THREE: DEFINE THE STAKES) We see a montage of panels of pivotal moments in the reporter's life.

REMEMBERING WHERE THE CARDS GO DURING ENRICHMENT

During Step 4 of the enrichment process, cards are going to change hands. Sometimes, in the heat of the story, it can get a bit confusing to remember exactly where the cards go after they've been compared.

During a player's enrichment scene

Whoever lost the stakes gets all risked cards. Whoever won the Stakes draws a new card (or cards) to replace the one(s) that were risked.

During a GM's enrichment scene

If the GM loses her stakes, she gets all cards involved. If she wins her stakes, she gets the lower card. The higher card gets discarded.

On the left panel is the true memory, like the guy in class in journalism school. Then there's an image of the glowing ring that bridges the center of the page. Then the right panel has the exact same scene, except Perjury is standing where the professor was. There's another one where The Stalwart is pulling the reporter out of the way of an explosion Perjury caused. On the other side, Perjury's the one pulling him away from an explosion The Stalwart caused. Perjury's stakes are that the reporter believes the altered memories and considers Perjury to be his friend.

Nate: If the reporter wins, he punches the creep in the nose!

Deanna: That doesn't make any sense.

Nate: True, but it sure would be fun.

Stephen: How about this? Since the Struggle is Ideals vs. Practicality, and Perjury's trying to manipulate this guy for a practical end, our Stakes should be about Ideals, right? How about this? If the reporter wins, he believes the lies and considers Perjury his friend. However, his journalistic ideals keep him from acting on hearsay, even if it comes from his good friend Perjury.

Grace: That works for me. *[The others nod.]*

[(STEP FOUR: RESOLVE THE SCENE) *reviews her cards and knows she really wants this to work. She selects a king and holds ready. She then flips the top card of her villain deck and shows it to everyone. The card is a nine, so Grace wins her stakes. She discards the king and replaces it with the nine. She also marks her "Perjury's Power of Lies" aspect as Primed.]*

Stephen: The reporter shakes his head. He looks up and says, "Perjury, my friend. I thought you were dead."

Grace: Perjury grins. "Reports of my death were greatly exaggerated. The problem is that reports of someone else's death have not been exaggerated enough." He places his hand on the reporter's shoulder. "Someone has been *lying* to the public, my friend. And we can't allow that, now can we?"

MULTIPLE ASPECTS IN THE SAME SCENE

Sometimes a player or GM will want to introduce the comic reader to more than one of his character's aspects in a single scene. To do this, the scene obviously must contain both aspects in a way that makes sense. The possibilities for this are numerous. A hero can save one of his Relationships or further one of his Motivations by using one of his Assets.

In Step 1: Frame the Scene, the enriching player must decide which aspects are involved. At most, two aspects can be enriched in the same scene. However, if anyone is unsure about which aspects are involved, the enriching player must clarify. If the enriching player feels he must enrich more than two aspects in a single scene, he will have to break the scene down into two smaller scenes. First, play through steps 1 through 4 and resolve one or two of the aspects. Then, the GM will cut away and allow enrichment scenes for other players and herself. When the page once more returns to his hero, the enriching player can frame the scene as an immediate continuation of the previous scene.

Step 2: Play the Scene and Step 3: Define the Stakes are played exactly the same as they would normally be played.

Within Step 3, each side still has but a single set of stakes, despite the larger number of aspects. So long as all the aspects are displayed in the scene, the stakes need only center on one of them.

In Step 4: Resolve the Scene, the end of the scene is resolved with a single instance of cardplay. Player cardplay is compared to a card chosen by the GM, and GM cardplay is compared to the top card flipped off the villain deck, as usual. However, because the participant is gaining a greater advantage by enriching two Aspects, the opposed card—whether the GM chooses it from her hand or flips it from her villain deck—is considered to be two ranks higher than its face value. In these cases, a wild card is considered to be one rank above an ace, so an ace as the opposed card will beat a wild card that the participant has chosen.

[EXAMPLE OF MULTIPLE ASPECT ENRICHMENT SCENE]

Grace: Okay, Nate, you're up next. What does the comics reader see Noir doing? (STEP ONE: FRAME THE SCENE)

Nate: Let me get this straight, I've got to do enrichment scenes with all these aspects on my sheet before I can use them to beat up the bad guys?

Grace: You don't have to enrich them all before you can use any of them, but each single aspect

ought to appear in an enrichment scene before it's used in conflict.

Nate: That's gonna take forever. What kinda game is this where you can't use your stuff right away? *[The others just look at him.]* Okay, okay. I'd better enrich this "Tapestry of Night" power, so we see Noir standing on the roof of a building, gazing down over the city streets he's sworn to protect. Oh, and he's got those captions that show what he's brooding about. *[Grace hands him the Thought Balloon.]* They don't look like that. They're rectangles at the bottom of the panel.

Grace: We'll use our imaginations and pretend that they're rectangles.

Nate: *[Nate reluctantly holds the Thought Balloon over his head.]* (STEP TWO: PLAY THE SCENE) "Being mystical guardian of the night is hard. The night is cold and lonely." Then we see two creeps come out of an alley and begin to follow a woman walking down the street. "Sometimes the night is not lonely enough." Okay, I swing down and knock out the two muggers before they can jump the woman.

Grace: So defeating the muggers is what's at stake? (STEP THREE: DEFINE THE STAKES)

Nate: No. Impressing the woman is what's at stake. She's Pearl Perrault. Y'know, the one Noir's got the hots for. Beating the snot out of the thugs is a side benefit to enrich my Tapestry of Night aspect at the same time.

Grace: All right. If you win, you impress Pearl. If I win, not only do you fail to impress her, you intimidate her. Let's see how that goes. (STEP FOUR: RESOLVE THE SCENE)

[Grace looks at the cards in her hand, chooses a 4 ♠ and holds it face down in front of her.

Nate reviews his cards. He knows he wants to play his lowest card, so he can save his high cards for a fight scene later, where it really counts. He selects a 5 ♡ and holds it out in front of him.]

Nate: *[shouting]* Oh yeah! I wipe the floor with the thugs and look cool in front of the lady!

Grace: Not quite, Nate. Since you were trying to enrich two aspects at the same time, my card is considered to be two ranks higher. Four plus two is six, which beats your five. You lose the stakes.

Nate: That sucks. Does that mean Noir gets taken to the cleaners by a couple of street thugs?

Grace: Actually, since impressing Pearl was at stake, that's what you failed to do. My stakes said Noir intimidated her, remember? I picture it that Noir defeats the thugs quickly and easily, right?

Nate: Of course he does. He swings down on the

edge of a shadow, wraps them up in the Tapestry of Night, and knocks them out with a couple of solid punches to the jaw. Whack! Whack! *[Nate pantomimes a few superheroic jabs.]*

Grace: And while these panels are going on, we see Pearl backing away, fearful of this dark, violent figure erupting from the shadows. As you finish off the last mugger, she turns and runs down the street.

Nate: Well, at least I got an extra card. *[He puts Grace's four and his own five into his hand and marks his aspects Tapestry of Night and Pearl Perrault as Primed. Grace draws one card from any one of her decks to replace the one she played.]* Noir watches Pearl turn the corner. *[holds the Thought Balloon over his head]* "The night is cold and lonely."

MULTIPLE PARTICIPANTS IN THE SAME SCENE

Sometimes more than a single participant will want their aspect(s) to appear in a single scene. Perhaps two heroes are debating their Convictions, or one hero's Duty is suffering at the hands of one of the GM's villains. Regardless of why multiple participants want to share a scene, the procedure is the same.

In Step 1: Frame the Scene, one participant must be designated as the *host* participant. Any other participants must obtain the host's approval in order to introduce their aspect(s) to the scene. This can be as simple as asking "Can I join in?" Any other participants that appear in the scene are *guest* participants. The host has final say over which guests are allowed in his scene. Guests are free to describe their aspects' entrance into the scene.

In Step 2: Play the Scene, the host and guests will, of course, play out their own aspects. They may request uninvolved participants to portray supporting characters in the scene. Choice of casting is at the discretion of the host.

In Step 3: Define the Stakes, each player in a scene will have his own stakes for the scene, relating to his own aspects. Decision points will likely arise organically through play and can be resolved through cardplay as they arise. If there is any un-

certainty about when decision points are resolved, the host decides the resolution order.

In Step 4: Resolve the Scene, each player's stakes are resolved with an instance of cardplay. The player's card is compared with a card chosen by the GM. In a GM enrichment scene, the GM's card is compared with the top card flipped off the villain deck, as usual. However, because scenes with multiple players are more interesting, the card the player chooses is considered to be one rank higher than its face value. This applies to both hosts and guests. In these cases, a wild card is considered to be one rank above an ace, so a player's ace will tie a wild card and a player's wild card will beat a wild card chosen by the GM or flipped from the top of the villain deck.

Enrichment cardplay is always conducted between a player and the GM, or between the GM and a flip off the villian deck in the case of GM enrichment scenes. Players never compare cards with one another. For guidelines on interplayer conflicts, see Chapter Six.

[EXAMPLE OF AN ENRICHMENT SCENE THAT INCLUDES MULTIPLE PLAYERS]

Grace: Stephen, you're up. What does the reader see The Stalwart doing?

Stephen: Actually, I'd like to rewind time a little bit.

Nate: Why? So you can stop yourself from spilling salsa on your hero sheet?

Stephen: It gives the sheet character. Actually, Deanna mentioned that Debris had helped an oil tanker at some point before her scene and I'd like to play that out. It will help to show the Heroes of Justice in action. (STEP ONE: FRAME THE SCENE)

Nate: No way. You can't go backwards. That's already done.

Grace: Actually, the reader hasn't seen what happened with the tanker, so it's not really going backwards. We'll just put an "Earlier that day" caption on the panel. Stephen, what does the reader see?

Stephen: We see the bridge of a ship. A panicked captain is shouting into the intercom for the engineer to get those engines running. In the background, out of the bridge window, we can see this big oil tanker getting closer and closer. (STEP TWO: PLAY THE SCENE) The first mate asks if they should abandon ship. The captain looks out the window, and his face goes white. Floating outside the window is The Stalwart, holding this massive ship-chain that trails off the panel. The Stalwart's armor is surrounded by the Aura of Truth, kinda like the lines that comics artists draw around the sun, to show how he flies. "Need a tow, captain?" The Stalwart asks. He drops the anchor chain and the crew scurries to attach it to the ship. The Stalwart flies back along the chain to this little outcropping of rock where we see two other members of the Heroes of Justice: Polarity, a skinny young guy with magnetic powers, and Debris. *[Stephen looks to Deanna and makes an "after you" motion with his hand to invite her into the scene.]*

Deanna: Cool. I'm in. Debris lifts the anchor chain. "I can tow it, chief, but I don't know if I can tow it far enough in time. That tanker's comin' awfully fast."

Stephen: "Don't sweat it. Polarity's going to buy you some time."

Grace: *[taking on the role of Polarity]* "I am?"

Stephen: The Stalwart grabs Polarity and soars off toward the oil tanker.

Deanna: Debris starts hauling in the anchor chain and shaking her head. *[grabs the Thought Balloon]* " 'Don't sweat it?' The chief never used to talk like that. It always used to be 'Fear not' and 'Face front, compatriot.' I guess even The Stalwart can loosen up."

Stephen: *[grinning]* Very nice. Now The Stalwart has flown with Polarity to just behind the oil tanker. "Polarity, see that rudder? It's gotten jammed. You need to move it to the right so the tanker will turn. It's just like all those spoons I've seen you bend. Size matters not." (STEP THREE: DEFINE THE STAKES) My stakes are that The Stalwart can coach this kid into doing this really difficult task, so my "Leader of the Heroes of Justice" aspect is the main one I'm Priming. But I've also been flying around a lot, so I think I'll prime the Armor of Truth as well.

Grace: Okay, and if I win, Polarity gets hurt because you're pushing him too hard.

Deanna: I'm just showing off Debris' "Strength of Stone" aspect. I guess my stakes are that I pull the ship out of danger.

Grace: That sounds good. And my stakes are that the ships collide and you have to rescue sailors from the water. Stephen, in what order are these being resolved?

Stephen: I think I should go first, since my Stakes

THE LEVELS OF SUFFERING

Aspects have 5 levels of Suffering: Primed, Risked, Threatened, Imperiled, and Devastated. The hero sheet lists these levels of Suffering for each aspect box. Use light pencil marks or self-adhesive flags to keep track of the current level of Suffering for each aspect. The levels of Suffering are detailed below. Although strife aspects use the same levels, they always involve 1 card more than listed to increase or to decrease Suffering (i.e., you draw an extra card when increasing a strife aspect's Suffering, and discard an extra card when decreasing a strife aspect's Suffering).

✶ *Primed* aspects have been displayed in the story, but are not currently under a great deal of stress. In enrichment scenes, during assessment (see page 46), or when a conflict is won (see page 49), you may call upon a Primed aspect for 1 extra card and move it to *Risked*. You can never decrease the Suffering of Primed aspects.

✶ *Risked* aspects are under some minor stress from the conflicts of the story. In enrichment scenes, during assessment, or when a conflict is won, you may call upon a Risked aspect for 2 extra cards and move it to *Threatened*. You may discard 1 card to decrease a Risked aspect to Primed.

✶ *Threatened* aspects are under significant stress from the conflicts of the story. In enrichment scenes, during assessment, or when a conflict is won, you may call upon a Threatened aspect for 3 extra cards and move it to *Imperiled*. You may discard 2 cards to decrease a Threatened aspect to Risked.

✶ *Imperiled* aspects are under nigh-overwhelming stress from the conflicts of the story and are in danger of being completely overtaken by it and becoming Devastated. In enrichment scenes, during assessment, or when a conflict is won, you may call upon an Imperiled aspect for 4 extra cards and move it to Devastated. You may discard 3 cards to decrease an Imperiled aspect to Threatened.

✶ *Devastated* aspects are completely overwhelmed by the conflicts of the story. Once an aspect has been Devastated, it belongs to the GM. For guidelines on what the GM can and will do with it, see Chapter Five. However, once one of your aspects is Devastated, 2s become wild in your hand. If two of your aspects become Devastated, 2s and 3s become wild in your hand. If three of your aspects become Devastated, 2s, 3s, and 4s become wild in your hand. Unlike the other levels of Suffering, you can only change the Suffering level of a Devastated aspect by winning a page of conflict, and only after space #5 on the Story Arc is filled. When a Devastated aspect is thus redeemed, you *must* change its name & description, type, or scale. More information on redeeming Devastated aspects can be found in Chapter Five.

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involve whether the tanker changes course or not, and that could add more tension to Deanna's scene.

Grace: Then let's do the cardplay. (STEP FOUR: RESOLVE THE SCENE) Remember that your card is one rank higher because two people are in the same scene, but mine is two ranks higher because you're priming multiple Aspects.

[Stephen really wants The Stalwart to succeed in *coaching this young superhero. He figures it will play into his conflict of not being able to give up The Stalwart identity because the team needs The Stalwart as its leader. He chooses an ace and holds it out, face down.*

Grace really wants The Stalwart to fail at this. She figures it will play into The Stalwart's conflict about not being able to fill the boots of the true Stalwart. Plus it will give Perjury something

to taunt The Stalwart about later. She also chooses an ace and holds it out. Both Stephen and Grace reveal their cards. The group gasps—two aces.]

Grace: Your ace counts as one rank higher, which is a wild card, but mine counts as two ranks higher, which is wild plus one, so you lose the Stakes. *[Stephen puts both aces into his hand, while Grace draws one card from any deck she controls to replace the ace that she played. Stephen also marks his Armor of Truth aspect and his Leader of the Heroes of Justice aspect as Primed.]*

Grace: *[as Polarity again]* "It's too big, sir! I can't move it!"

Stephen: "Try harder! Don't give up! You must do this!"

Grace: "I think I've got it. I think I've—AARGH!" Polarity screams and his head slumps forward. A trickle of blood runs from his nose.

Stephen: The Stalwart begins to fly back to the rocky outcropping with Polarity. *[grabs the Thought Balloon]* "The Stalwart made this look so easy. Maybe I can't fill his shoes."

[Meanwhile, Deanna has reviewed her hand and decided that someone *ought to look heroic in this scene. She chooses a queen and holds it out face down before her.* (STEP FOUR: RESOLVE THE SCENE)

Grace looks over her hand and decides that someone *ought to look heroic in this scene. She chooses a four and holds it out face down before her. Both Grace and Deanna reveal their cards. Everyone at the table sees that Deanna's queen (which counts as a king because she's a guest in this scene) beats Grace's four.]*

Nate: At least *somebody* knows how to be a superhero.

[Grace takes the queen and puts it and the four in her hand. Deanna draws one card from the hero deck to replace the queen, and marks her Strength of Stone aspect as Primed.]

Grace: So Debris is pulling on the big chain, and then what happens?

Deanna: I guess she's pulling with all her might. She's also watching the tanker, saying "C'mon, turn already! When is it gonna turn?" When she *sees* that it isn't turning, she pulls faster and faster until we see the tanker miss the other ship by just a few feet. Debris lets the chain down and we see that her feet have been forced into the solid stone by the work she was doing. *[Deanna takes the Thought Balloon.]* "Sometimes being made of living granite has its advantages."

ENRICHMENT BEYOND PRIMING

Things are always in flux in a comic book. Even after all a hero's aspects have been introduced to the reader and fights have erupted and been settled, there's still the need to learn more about the hero's aspects. How does the hero reconcile the stunning revelations of the tale with his deepest Convictions? How do his Relationships treat him in the aftermath of battle? For these later enrichment scenes, the process is nearly the same as that described above, with a few additional steps.

The focus of a Priming scene—which is the first enrichment scene—is on introducing aspects to the story. Moving an aspect from no Suffering to Primed mechanically represents that aspect's introduction to the story. In a similar fashion, other enrichment scenes will focus on illustrating a change in the level of Suffering. Just like Priming scenes, the change in level of Suffering will be automatic—whether or not you gain your stakes, the aspect you've chosen will change its level of Suffering. If the level of Suffering is increasing (i.e., getting worse), then you'll also draw cards. If the level of Suffering is decreasing (i.e., getting better), then you must discard cards at random from your hand. You may only change Suffering by one level at a time.

In Step 1, when choosing an aspect or aspects to showcase, you must also choose how that aspect's Suffering will change, whether it will increase or decrease. This change will occur regardless of which side wins their stakes for the scene. Consider it an additional substep:

STEP 1A: DRAW OR DISCARD CARDS

As the enriching player, you will draw or discard cards depending on whether you are increasing or decreasing the level of your aspect's Suffering. Draw when the level of Suffering is increasing, discard at random when the level of Suffering is decreasing.

✴ Draw 0 cards when changing from No Suffering to Primed; draw 1 card when changing

from Primed to Risked; draw 2 cards when changing from Risked to Threatened; draw 3 cards when changing from Threatened to Imperiled; draw 4 cards when changing from Imperiled to Devastated.

✴ Discard 3 cards when changing from Imperiled to Threatened; discard 2 cards when changing from Threatened to Risked; discard 1 cards when changing from Risked to Primed.

This change in Suffering is your script for the scene. At some point in playing out the scene, you *must* pencil and ink how this change in Suffering looks to the reader. Sometimes it will be appropriate to work it into the role-playing of Step 2. Other scenes will require it to come out in Step 4, after the stakes have been resolved. As long as the reader gets shown that the tension surrounding that aspect has changed before the end of the scene, you've done what you need to do.

[EXAMPLE OF AN ENRICHMENT SCENE THAT FEATURES ENRICHMENT BEYOND PRIMING]

[Later in the game, it's Deanna's turn for another enrichment scene. At this point, Debris has foiled Mudslide's attempt to rob an art gallery. During the fight, Deanna Risked Debris' aspect, "Lt. Eric McKay," and increased his Suffering to Threatened, and then to Imperiled. She inked this change as Eric being trapped by a crumbling wall and sustaining several injuries.]

Grace: Deanna, it's your turn. What do we see Debris doing? (STEP ONE: FRAME THE SCENE)

Deanna: Well, I need to talk to Eric about what happened. I'd like to decrease his Suffering from Imperiled to Threatened.

Grace: You'll need to discard three cards at random to pay for decreasing the Suffering.

Deanna: Right. *[Deanna changes the Suffering of her "Lt. Eric McKay" aspect from Imperiled to Threatened. She shuffles her cards and discards three of them. She looks at the slim remains of her hand and sighs.]* We see a tiny kitchen in a tiny apartment. It's got doilies and old-lady décor, except for the bulletin board by the phone, which is overflowing with cluttered notes. Eric is sitting at the small table, looking out the window. His arm is in a cast and he's got a bruise on his forehead. His gun and badge are on the table in front of him. Debris has to stoop to get throug the doorway. "Mom said you'd be in here." (STEP TWO: PLAY THE SCENE)

Nate: Nate again taking up the role of Debris' big brother. "Well she's right. Here I am."

Deanna: "Look, Eric, I didn't mean for you to get in the middle of that fight. Mudslide is too dangerous. You should have stayed clear."

Nate: Eric grabs the badge with his good hand and holds it out. "See this? It says that I can't 'stay clear.' That freak was committing a robbery and as a cop, it's my job to stop it. You used to carry one of these, Debbie. You used to understand."

Deanna: "I still understand! And I'm still doing it every day. Still putting myself in harm's way to help other people—normal people. People like you." *[Nate starts to respond, but Deanna holds up a finger for him to wait.]* Since I've decreased the Suffering, Eric will better understand that Debris is trying to do the right thing. What's at Stake is whether he'll admit it. (STEP THREE: DEFINE THE STAKES)

Nate: You just want to shut me up.

Deanna: No comment.

Grace: So your stakes are that Eric admits that Debris had good intentions? *[Deanna nods.]* My stakes are that Eric insults your superhero lifestyle again and kicks you out of the apartment. Let's resolve it. (STEP FOUR: RESOLVE THE SCENE)

[Deanna studies the cards in her hand. While she wants Eric to accept that Debris is fighting the good fight, she also doesn't want to risk her last remaining high card. She chooses a six and holds it in front of her.

Grace reviews her cards and decides that it's too early to release the tension on this relationship, so she chooses a jack and holds it out before her.

Both women reveal their cards. Grace's jack beats Deanna's six, so Grace wins her stakes. Deanna takes both the six and the jack into her hand.]

Nate: *[grinning like a fool]* "You're a no-good vigilante. You're going up against these dangerous freaks without backup and without the law behind you. You're a loose cannon and I'm done talking with you. Get out!"

Deanna: Debris hangs her head and leaves. How do we get to see that Eric understands even if he won't admit it?

Nate: Um, I guess he watches you walk down the street. *[grabs the Thought Balloon and holds it above his head]* "I know you're trying to protect people, Debbie. But you're my kid sister and I can't stand you facing stuff that I can't protect you from." Is that sappy enough for you? *[Deanna nods.]*

THE ENRICHMENT PROCESS

Step 1: **Frame the Scene**

Choose one or two aspects to be showcased in this scene. The host participant may also allow guests to join the scene. What does the reader see? Where and when is it taking place? Who is present? What is going on?

Step 1a: **Draw or Discard cards**

Will these aspects increase their current level of Suffering or decrease it? You cannot decrease Suffering if you do not have enough cards to pay for it. The participant will draw or discard cards depending on the change in the level of Suffering. Draw when the level is increasing, discard at random when the level is decreasing.

Step 2: **Play the Scene**

Play out the scene. Speak in character. Describe what the comic reader sees. Make liberal use of the Thought Balloon. The GM plays any supporting characters by default. The host may ask other participants to portray specific supporting characters.

Step 3: **Define the Stakes**

Will the scene go on the way the hero wants? The enriching player identifies his stakes: How does the hero want the scene to end? The GM identifies the opposition's stakes: How else could this scene highlight the struggle?

Step 4: **Resolve the Scene**

The higher-ranked card wins the stakes and draws a card to replace the one risked. The lower-ranked card loses the stakes, but the loser takes both risked cards into his hand. Ties require an increase in stakes and second card flip. All wilds are considered one rank above ace. If there is more than one participant with stakes in this scene, each player's chosen card is considered 1 rank higher than its face value. If a participant is showcasing two aspects, his opponent's card is considered 2 ranks higher than its face value. The enriching player decides when to cut the scene.

CHAPTER 4

THE CONFLICT PROCESS

By now you've enriched several of your heroes' aspects, gotten the first inkling of the villains' nefarious schemes, and illustrated a number of pages of the imaginary comic book. By this point, the reader is getting antsy. He wants to see some *action.* All stories are fueled by conflict and superhero stories boast some of the most grandiose conflict to be found anywhere in the human imagination. This chapter will explain how you and your friends can illustrate great conflicts in a grand, melodramatic, superheroic style.

A conflict need not be a physical confrontation, although pulse-pounding melees are a staple of the genre. Whether the conflict is framed as a property-wrecking brawl, a lovers' spat, an astrally projected duel, or an alien chess game for the fate of the dimension, the process of playing out the conflict is the same. After you pick a fight, you and your opponent will go through the Conflict Setup process to fine-tune your hands and define what each combatant is fighting for. Then, you'll illustrate a panel of your hero striving to prevail in the conflict. That means you'll script the type of effort he's making by playing a certain type of card. Then, you'll pencil how that action might look in the imaginary comic book and others may chip in their own ideas as well. Finally, you'll ink the final version of your hero's action. Your opponent will respond by illustrating a panel of his own. When it's your turn again, before you illustrate your panel, you may also illustrate an assessment. Assessment consists of increasing or decreasing the Suffering of an aspect. You'll either script one of your aspects increasing in Suffering, allowing you to draw cards, or script the aspect decreasing in Suffering, for which you'll discard cards. Then you

and your friends will pencil how that change in Suffering might look on the comic page. Finally, you'll ink it and move on to illustrating another panel. When you or your opponent lack the cards to script another panel, or choose not to do so, one of you will yield. Whoever yields loses their stakes. Whoever doesn't yield wins their stakes and will increase the Suffering of one of their opponent's aspects.

It all starts when someone picks a fight.

STEP 1: PICKING A FIGHT

To pick a fight with another participant, you'll need to do two things:

1) Decide which other participant you'll pick a fight with. Most fights will be between the GM and one of the players. (For interplayer fights, see Chapter Six: Optional Rules.)
2) Script one of your aspects doing something to one of your opponent's aspects that would increase its Suffering if the actions came to pass.

When you script for another character's aspect, you've taken up an adversarial position against the other player. The other participant now has a choice: He can yield to your temporary scripting authority and change the Suffering of his aspect, or he can fight back. If he yields, skip directly to *Step 4: Victory and Defeat.* If he fights back, the action you just scripted is not inked right away—it shows up in the first panel. See *Step 3a: Playing the First Panel.*

STEP 1A:
WHO'S IN?

As soon as someone picks a fight, the GM should ask everyone else whether they want to be involved in this conflict scene at any point.

If you aren't already a part of a fight, you have a choice. Everyone involved in the fight must go through Conflict Setup together, so you must declare whether you're in or out right at the start— even if you plan to make a "surprise" entrance later on in the scene. Not every player needs to be involved in every conflict.

[EXAMPLE OF STEP ONE]

Grace: We open the next scene with a panel of Mudslide oozing under a bus and then lifting it over his head. People are running in panic. He shouts, "You'd better give me Debris pretty soon, or I'll cream every last one of you!"

Nate: Look, Deanna, you've got a fan.

Deanna: Not for long. Grace, I arrive on the scene and—

Grace: Hold on, this is the first conflict scene, so we should take it slow. I'm having Mudslide pick a fight with Debris. He wants to affect her "Everybody sees me as a monster" aspect. We'll play out the page of conflict between us.

Nate: Great. Do the rest of us get to twiddle our thumbs?

Grace: Only if you choose to. And I'm going to leave that decision up to you. However, I *am* going to pick a fight with The Stalwart. Perjury wants to learn more about his "Death of The Stalwart" aspect.

Stephen: Perjury? Here? *[grabs Thought Balloon]* "I can't let my guard down for a moment, lest he learn my secret!"

Nate: "Lest?" Did you really say "lest?"

Stephen: Yeah. That's how The Stalwart talks. *[looks at Thought Balloon]* But, you're right. I'm *not playing* the original Stalwart and "lest" is *not* something Earnest Squire would *think. [holds Thought Balloon back up]* "I've gotta watch out! Perjury *knows* the real Stalwart is dead. He knows that I'm a fake." *[lowers Thought Balloon]* Thanks, Nate. That was good penciling.

Grace: Let's get back to starting our conflict scene. I've picked fights with Deanna and Stephen. Nate, if you want to be in the conflict scene, you'll have to pick a fight with me.

Nate: No problem. Noir is going to swing down on the edge of a shadow and clobber the rampaging muck-beast. *[winks at Deanna]* No need for Debris to do all the heavy lifting herself. I've got your back.

Deanna: Lovely.

STEP 2:
CONFLICT SETUP

As soon as someone picks a fight, everyone involved in the conflict goes through the four steps of Conflict Setup. Conflict Setup is the *only* time anyone may draw cards without specific description attached.

STEP 2A:
DEFINE THE STAKES

Just as in enrichment scenes, each side involved in a conflict will define his stakes for the conflict: what that side wants to achieve in the conflict. By picking a fight and asserting that something will happen contrary to your opponent's desires, you have defined your stakes. If you win, you'll certainly get what you asked for.

Your opponent must also define her stakes. If she wins the conflict, your stakes obviously won't be inked. Your stakes are what you get if you win, but they're also what you *don't* get if you lose. Just by entering the arena of conflict, you've made yourself vulnerable. Your opponent might win more than you bargained for.

Phrase your stakes in a general manner. A great deal about the situation will change during the conflict, so you don't want to commit yourself to an outcome that may no longer be relevant once the last blow lands. For example, Grace might want to define her stakes as "Perjury plunges off the top of the building, holding Pearl in his villainous clutches." But, the fight may move to the ground as it rages on, putting neither Perjury nor Pearl anywhere near the top of the building. In fact, any number of things could happen so that Pearl being in Perjury's custody and plunging off the rooftop no longer makes sense. A better, more general phrasing of the stakes is: "Pearl exits the scene with Perjury." This can be easily customized at the time of victory to accommodate

the current state of Perjury, Pearl, the building itself, and the scene in general.

Also, nothing can permanently affect a character's aspects until the aspect's Suffering reaches Devastated. Although aspects can rack up a lot of Suffering during a conflict scene, you can never be sure whether one of them—or which one—will be eligible for Devastation. So, if none of your opponent's aspects are in that danger zone, your stakes can, at most, impose a change upon them that lasts until the next scene. For example, Grace might want to define her stakes as "Perjury's device vaporizes the headquarters of the Heroes of Justice." However, The Stalwart's "Heroes of Justice" aspect might not be Devastated by the end of the conflict. If it isn't, Perjury's device can't cause such a long-lasting change, even if Grace wins her stakes. A better, more flexible phrasing of the stakes is: "Perjury's device wreaks great destruction on the headquarters of the Heroes of Justice." If Grace wins her stakes, the specifics of her penciling will take into account that the Heroes of Justice aspect is not yet Devastated, and will ink something like, "Perjury's device lets forth a blast of eerie green energy, enveloping the headquarters. When the steam clears, a massive hole has melted through the wall of the building."

Your stakes will be the script if you win the conflict. Stakes should focus on a *category* of possible events, rather than a single, specific happening. You'll have no room to pencil if the paper is too small.

STEP 2B: READY YOUR ASPECTS

Everyone involved in the conflict may increase the Suffering of *one* of their aspects that is evident at the very beginning of the scene—that is, the aspect that is immediately brought to the reader's mind by the character's arrival. Readying an aspect is optional.

STEP 2C: DRAW CONFLICT CARDS

Each *player* involved in the conflict draws 2 cards from the hero deck, plus 1 card for each Risked aspect, plus 2 cards for each Threatened aspect, and plus 3 cards for each Imperiled aspect.

The GM also draws cards into her hand now. She draws her cards *from each deck that she currently controls.* As a base, she draws 2 cards. Additionally, she draws 1 card for each strife aspect that is Threatened or worse. The GM also draws 4 cards for each hero aspect that has been Devastated. If a hero's strife aspect has been Devastated (see page 32), and is thus controlled by the GM, the GM draws 5 cards for it (4 for being Devastated plus 1 for being a strife aspect).

DEFINING CONFLICT STAKES

Defining stakes for conflict scenes can be a bit tricky. On the one hand, you don't want to define stakes as so all-encompassing that they won't make sense, such as "In this single scene, The Stalwart wants to dismantle Perjury's nationwide criminal empire, bringing the villain to justice before the World Court." On the other hand, defining stakes too narrowly will also lead to problems, such as "In this scene, The Stalwart wants to defeat the second thug to Perjury's left." Your hero will have only one set of stakes for the entire conflict scene, so be sure to make it count. Think of fight scenes in comic books. What kind of thing is resolved at the end of them? stakes operate at *that* scale. Until someone yields a page, no one is allowed to ink something that makes the stakes invalid.

Conflict stakes must also be provocative. If you try to pick a fight with someone and they yield, you're not thinking big enough. What's the last thing they'd want to have happen right now? Pick a fight about *that,* and watch the cards fly.

STEP 2D: DISCARD DOWN TO STARTING HAND SIZE

After everyone has drawn their cards, each player may only keep 7 cards in his hand at the beginning of the conflict. The GM may only keep 7 cards, *plus* 4 cards per player involved in the conflict, *plus* 1 card for each Devastated hero aspect. This limit on hand size applies *only* at the beginning of a conflict scene. After the conflict scene has begun, hand sizes may increase above this limit.

When discarding, keep in mind that while high cards are valuable, so are multiple cards of the same suit. With many cards of the same suit, and a bit of imagination (to justify changing suit), you can force your opponent to play on your terms. However, face cards in multiple suits shouldn't be discarded lightly. Sometimes an Ace in the right panel is just what it takes to secure victory.

[EXAMPLE OF STEP TWO]

Grace: With all the fights picked, it's time for Conflict Setup. Deanna, since I picked this fight with you, I name Mudslide's stakes for our page of conflict first. Mudslide wants to take Debris away with him. If he wins this page of conflict, you'll have to exit the scene with him.

Deanna: Yuck. What if I *really* don't want to?

Grace: Then really don't lose the page. What are Debris' stakes for the page? What will you get if you win?

Deanna: Hmmm. If I win, I arrest him. Or capture him, at least.

Nate: Wait a minute. If he wins, you exit the scene with him, and if you win he exits the scene with you? Isn't that the same thing?

Deanna: No. If I understand this correctly, I might be captured or unconscious if he wins. And if I win, escorting Mudslide from the scene won't be like going for a stroll in the park. Isn't that right, Grace?

Grace: Exactly, Deanna. *[looks to Stephen]* Perjury wants to look under The Stalwart's helmet. That is what's at stake.

Nate: *[sarcastic]* I know that's always been a dream of mine.

Deanna: Quiet! Let Grace talk.

Stephen: He wants to see my face? That's a low blow, Grace. If I win, not only does Perjury *fail* to see my face, but reporters witness me defeating Perjury and print headlines like, "The Stalwart Returns." Yeah, that's worth fighting for.

Nate: What are Mudslide's stakes for his fight with me? Don't keep me in suspense, Grace.

Grace: You picked that fight with me, Nate. You name stakes first.

Nate: Right. I knew that. Um, if I win, Noir beats up Mudslide. That's my stakes.

Grace: That's okay if you really want to, but you can do a little more. Maybe you protect all the citizens. Maybe you impress Debris and The Stalwart by helping in the fight.

Stephen: Maybe you impress Pearl. Maybe she's on that bus and you've got to save her.

Nate: Yeah, that's it. I gotta impress the girl. If I win, I save Pearl and she's not scared of me anymore.

Grace: Fine. If I win, Pearl will also have to exit the scene with Mudslide.

Nate: He's going after two women? He's quite the ladies' man. *[snickers]* I mean ladies' mud.

Grace: Now that we've all set our stakes, everyone has the option to increase the Suffering of *one* of their aspects by one level, to show what's most evident when they arrive on the scene. This is optional.

Nate: "Tapestry of Night," of course. Noir's swinging in on it. *[Nate moves his marker to Risked]*

Deanna: As soon as Debris steps into the panel, her "Strength of Stone" will be obvious. *[Deanna moves her marker to Risked]*

Stephen: "Leader of the Heroes of Justice." The Stalwart radios in, "It's only Mudslide. Debris and I can handle this." *[Stephen moves his marker to Risked]*

Nate: You just *have* to be different, don't you?

Grace: I'll increase Perjury's "Burly Henchmen" to Primed, as the reader sees a number of men in gray coats watching Mudslide's rampage, rather than fleeing from it. *[Grace moves her marker]* Next, we continue Conflict Setup by drawing cards. You each draw 2 cards plus 1 for each Risked aspect. In this case, that's 3 apiece from the hero deck. I draw 2 cards per deck I control. *[they draw their cards]*

Nate: Oh yeah! I'm gonna clean up that overgrown mud puddle!

Grace: In the final step of Conflict Setup, each of you must discard down to 7 cards.

Nate: That sucks.

Grace: I discard down to 7 cards *plus* 4 per player, or 19 cards.

Nate: Why do you get to keep so many cards?

Grace: Because I'm outnumbered. I have three pages to play to. Each of you only has one page to worry about.

STEP 3:
PLAYING THE PAGE

A single page of conflict will track the contest between you and your opponent. Each page is broken up into a number of panels. A panel depicts a single effort by your hero to overcome his foe and win his stakes. In a panel, one side will respond to the other's tactics, and then launch an attack of their own. Within a page of conflict, the GM and the players have exactly the same options. The Page of Conflict mat is available as a download from the *With Great Power…* website. This will help you organize your cards on each page of conflict. Each page begins with a crucial first panel.

STEP 3A:
PLAYING THE
FIRST PANEL

After everyone has completed Conflict Setup, the side that picked the fight goes first. For the sake of explanation, we'll assume that you, the player, picked the fight, so you go first. Here's how to illustrate the first panel of a page of conflict:

How to script it: Play one card from your hand onto the table. You can play any card you like. This becomes the *ranking card*. The card you play will determine which suit is initially active, so you might wish to play a suit in which you have more than one card. Starting with a low-ranking card can also be a good strategy, as it can allow a few panels of escalation to develop. Since you'll get a chance for assessment at the start of each panel, you'll have plenty of opportunity to get more cards. Of course, if you have just one high card in a given suit, there's nothing wrong with playing that in the hopes that you'll be able to force your opponent to spend two cards to change the suit.

How to pencil it: Penciling options for your first panel are very open. You and your friends can describe just about anything you want within a few limitations: 1) it must make sense as following immediately after whatever was happening when the

fight was picked; and 2) it cannot make use of any aspects that have not yet been Primed. Apart from these constraints, anything goes—you're a superhero! During penciling, cars should be hurled across panels, energy blasts should sizzle and spark, punches powerful enough to shatter granite should resound, dashes and dodges should break the sound barrier, the stealthy should melt seamlessly into the shadows, and the powers of the mind should enthrall the senses. Just ask yourself: "What is this character doing to try to win the stakes?"

How to ink it: When inking your panels, remember that you can include anything that your character is doing to prevail in the conflict, but cannot include how that affects your opponent. Feel free to describe how your mighty power blasts melt through steel girders before you turn and target your opponent, but stop there. Don't describe them hitting him, and don't describe them hurting him. His response to your panel will incorporate those things.

Your first panel determines not only the opening suit, but the opening style of the conflict. The style of conflict is made up of two characteristics: tactics and target. Tactics is a general category of how your hero is pursuing his goal—how he's fighting. Target is what he's specifically acting against. Is he trying to sneak around the guards? That's the "Stealth" tactic with the "Attack Person" target. Is he vibrating so fast that he passes right through the walls of the villain's headquarters? That's the "Using a Power" tactic with the "Attack Place" target. Is he smashing his enemy's doomsday device with a light pole? That's the "Weapons/Objects" tactic with the "Attack Object" tactic.

Whichever penciled options you decide to ink, make note of the tactics and target you use. Use coins, bingo chips, or self-adhesive flags to mark the "Characteristics of Conflict" diagram on the Page of Conflict mat you're using. The suit you played is now linked to that tactics/target combination until either you or your opponent change style (*see* Changing Style, below).

TACTICS

PERSUASION
THREATENING
GLOATING

DODGE
MANEUVER

STEALTH

GRAPPLING
TACKLING

PUNCHING
STRIKING
KICKING

WEAPONS
OBJECTS

USING A
POWER

TARGET

ATTACK
PERSON

ATTACK
PLACE

ATTACK
THING
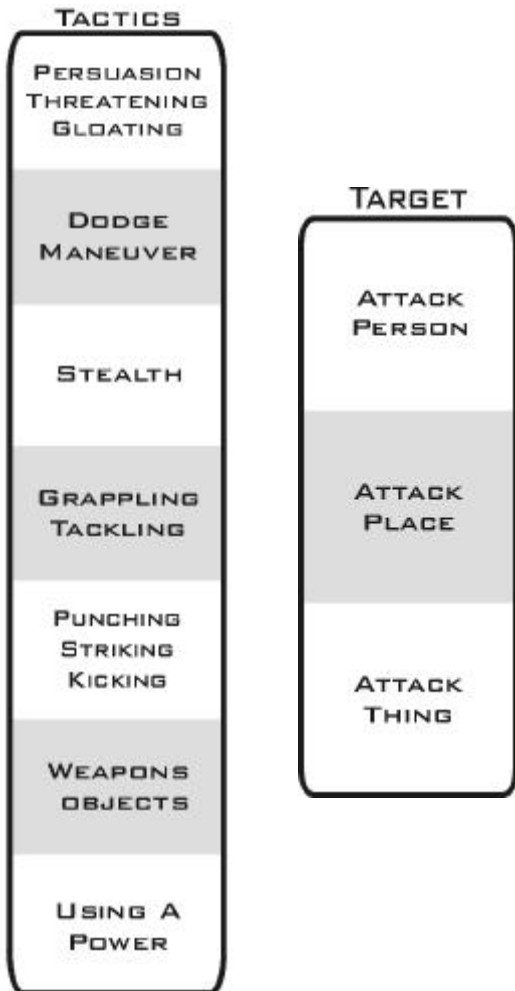
This diagram is just the default list for fight scenes in four-color superhero stories. GMs ought to feel free to customize these characteristics in order to better fit the particular subgenre of their own series. For instance, in a heavily martial arts-influenced game, the change from a punch to a kick might be considered a significant switch.

A word about banter: *More is better.* You can combine boasts, quips, insults, and threats with any action. I assure you that the panel will be stronger if you do. You may banter even if you are not using the "threatening/gloating/persuading" tactic. That tactic covers instances when a character is *only* using words in his quest to win the stakes.

[EXAMPLE OF STEP THREE-A: PLAYING THE FIRST PANEL]

Grace: Nate, since you picked the fight, why don't you play the first panel on the page between Noir and Mudslide?

Nate: Sure! *[Nate slaps a 9♦ onto the first panel space on the Page of Conflict]* Beat that! *[pause]*

Grace: Okay, but what does the reader see in the comic book?

Nate: Right. Noir swings in on the Tapestry of Night and kicks Mudslide right in the head. "Nobody mucks around with my town!"

Stephen: Nice pun.

Nate: Thanks. Mudslide stumbles back and drops the bus and—

Grace: Hold on, Nate. You can only ink what Noir does, *not* how Mudslide reacts to it.

Nate: Oh. Right. So I kick him in the head.

Grace: Fine. That's "Striking/Punching/Kicking" for tactic and "Attack Person" for target. *[Grace marks the Characteristics of Conflict in the center of the Page of Conflict mat]*

STEP 3B: RESPOND TO THE PANEL

When your opponent has played a panel against you, you have three options for responding:

1) **Escalate the conflict.** Play a card of the same suit, but a higher rank. Describe your hero's action as answering the challenge in kind, and then some. ("Yes, and . . .")
2) **Change the style of conflict.** Play two cards of a new suit. Describe how the conflict changes in type and/or in target. ("Yes, but . . .") Discard the higher of the two cards as the price for changing suit.
3) **Cancel your opponent's action.** Play a card of the same suit and rank. ("No.") Steal a card from your opponent's hand.

Option 1: Escalating

Superheroes are larger than life. Their exploits can only be described in superlatives. When you respond to a panel by escalating the conflict, you're saying that your character takes *everything* your opponent just dished out and turns around to deal out *even more* of the same to the opponent. Think of escalating as a *"Yes, and . . ."* statement; as in: *"Yes,* your character does do what you just said, *and* my character gets back up and does the same thing, only bigger!"

HOW TO DETERMINE THE RANKING CARD

The first card played in the first panel determines the suit. The highest card of the currently active suit is called the ranking card. The currently active suit is the suit of the last panel played. It's simpler if you look at it as asking a few simple questions:

Q: "What was the suit of the last panel we played on this page?"

A: *[looks on the page]* "It was hearts."

Q: "Okay, then what's the highest heart showing on this page?"

A: *[looks at all the hearts on the page]* "It's a king on the GM's side. That's the ranking card the player needs to beat."

This means that if you have the highest spade on the page, for example, but the active suit is now diamonds, you can play two low spades to change style and you'll now have the ranking card. This can also lead to situations where you might have enough cards to change suit, but cannot because their rank isn't high enough to beat the ranking card of that suit.

How to script it: Look at your opponent's ranking card. Do you have a higher card of the same suit? If so, you could escalate the conflict by playing that card. The suit you play remains active and your card is now the ranking card on the page—the card your opponent needs to beat. Place your card on the page facing the panel you're responding to.

How to pencil it: As with all panels, you'll need to answer the question: "What action is your hero taking in pursuit of his stakes?" Also, stay consistent with what has gone before and refrain from using any aspects that have not yet been Primed. Because you've chosen to escalate, your penciling options are more focused than they were in the first panel—the style of conflict must remain the same. Whatever you describe must fall in the same box on the characteristics of conflict chart (see page 41) as your opponent's panel did. For instance, if your opponent described a vicious roundhouse kick, you could pencil your hero responding with a kick of his own, or with a thunderous punch, or a stunning head butt. Since they all fall in the "striking/punching/kicking" tactic, they are all legitimate ways to escalate.

How to ink it: The first thing you must describe is how your character responds to your opponent's efforts in his last panel. That's the "Yes" part of the "Yes, and . . ." statement. Where did his punch land? What did her energy blast strike? How long did you struggle against his telepathic assault before marshaling your defenses and launching one of your own?

Since you're in control of the outcome of your opponent's efforts, you might be tempted to belittle his attacks. *Don't do it.* He's a member of the audience for the superhero story you're making, and it's never good to mock your audience. Also, he'll have the opportunity to ink the culmination of your current action in his next panel. If you make his character look bad, he may very well return the favor. Finally, the simple fact that you're not yielding means that your hero isn't stopped by his efforts. Your hero looks better if he prevails over worthy opposition, so ink it that way.

After describing the culmination of your opponent's last action, ink your own efforts. From all the penciled possibilities, choose one and describe it. That's the "and . . ." part of the "Yes, and . . ." statement. Don't forget the banter.

[SUDDENLY AND WITHOUT WARNING, THE EXAMPLE UNIVERSE SPLINTERS INTO THREE DISTINCT SHARDS! IN EACH OF THESE SPLINTER-REALITIES, GRACE CHOOSES A DIFFERENT OPTION FOR RESPONDING TO NATE'S FIRST PANEL.]

Grace: *[looks at Nate's 9 ◇ and decides to escalate. She puts a J ◇ on her first panel]* Yes, Noir does swing down from a rooftop on the Tapestry of Night, kicking Mudslide soundly in the face. Mudslide staggers for a moment, and before Noir has even hit the ground, Mudslide's slimy fist hits him with a mighty CRACK, sending Noir flying.

Nate: Now, now, Grace. You can't say how Noir reacts, just what Mudslide does.

Grace: *[sighs]* You're right. Just consider it penciling for your next panel.

Option 2: Changing Style

Superhero stories are rife with change. Costumes change from decade to decade. The way powers work shifts from issue to issue. The means heroes employ to reach their goals often switch from panel to panel. When you respond to a panel by changing the style of the conflict, you're saying that your opponent's efforts succeed, but are no longer relevant because your character's doing something *different.* Think of changing style as a *"Yes, but . . ."* statement; as in: *"Yes,* your character does do what you just said, *but* that doesn't matter anymore because my character is doing this instead!"

How to script it: Do you have multiple cards of a suit that's not currently active? If so, you can change the active suit by playing two cards of the new suit. Choose two cards of the same suit from your hand. Discard the higher-ranked card and place the lower-ranked card on the table. The higher-ranked card is the price you pay to change the suit.

When you change to a suit that already has cards in the page, the highest card of that suit anywhere on the page becomes the ranking card. You need to have the ranking card on your side of the page at the end of the panel, otherwise, you cannot change suit.

How to pencil it: As with all panels, you'll need to answer the question: "What action is your hero taking in pursuit of his stakes?" Also, stay consistent with what has gone before, and refrain from using any aspects that have not yet been Primed. Because you've chosen to change the style of conflict, your penciling options will be slightly more focused than they were in the first panel—the style of conflict must change.

Your description cannot fall into the same two boxes (both tactics and target) on the characteristics of conflict chart as your opponent's panel did. Your change must be significant enough to merit a move in either the tactics box or the target box. If

the character of conflict after a change would fall in the same boxes as it did before the change, it is not significant enough to justify a change in style. For example, if your opponent described a vicious roundhouse kick to your hero, you could *not* pencil your hero responding with a thunderous punch to the villain—that would still be in the "striking/punching/kicking" tactics box and the "attack person" target box. You could respond with an energy blast to the villain—changing tactics from "striking/punching/kicking" to "using a particular power." You could also respond with a thunderous punch to the ground the villain is standing on—changing target from "attack person" to "attack surroundings." Or, you could respond by hurling a parked car into the villain's nefarious device—changing tactics to "strike with weapon or object" *and* changing target to "attack object."

Specific suits *are not* linked with specific characteristics of conflict. Suppose you start off playing diamonds to represent a "Grappling/Tackling" tactic. Later on, your opponent changes suit to clubs and changes the tactic to "Using a Power." If you want to change the suit back to diamonds, you *do not* have to change the tactic to "Grappling/Tackling." You could change to any tactic other than "Using a Power." By the same token, you could change the style from clubs to hearts, and describe the tactic changing to "Grappling/Tackling."

How to ink it: Describe how your hero responds to your opponent's efforts in his last panel. That's the "Yes" part of the "Yes, but . . ." statement. How does he try to grapple you? What becomes of her spell of transmutation? How long do you suffer his mad gloating before you lash out with the power of seven suns?

Even though a change of style means that your opponent's last action has no lasting effect on the conflict, don't dismiss it out of hand. Your hero looks good when his opposition looks good. Don't hesitate to describe how your opponent had you on the brink of defeat before you turned the tables.

After describing the culmination of your opponent's last action, ink your own efforts. Choose one of the penciled possibilities and describe it. That's the "but . . ." part of the "Yes, but . . ." statement. Don't forget the banter.

[SHIFTING TO THE SECOND SPLINTER-REALITY, GRACE-2 RESPONDS TO NATE'S FIRST PANEL IN HER OWN UNIQUE STYLE.]

Grace: *[looks at Nate's 9◇ and decides to change style. She takes a 10♠ and 4♠ from her hand. She discards the 10♠ and places the 4♠ on her first panel]* Yes, Noir does swing down and kicks Mudslide soundly in the face, but Mudslide barely fliches. Instead, he shakes the bus he's holding over his head and growls, "This is between me and Debris. Get lost or *nobody* gets off this bus alive."

Stephen: Threatening innocent bystanders. That's pretty low.

Grace: That's why he's a villain. I'm changing tactics from "Striking/Punching/Kicking" to "Threatening/Persuading/Gloating," and target from "Attack Person" to "Attack Object."

Option 3: Cancellation

Just because you start a fight doesn't mean you're going to win it. Just because you try something in a fight doesn't mean it's going to turn out as you'd hoped. When you respond to a panel by canceling your opponent's action, you're saying that her last action didn't have the effect she wanted. Think of canceling as a *"No, because . . ."* statement; as in: *"No,* your character's efforts don't achieve what you wanted, *because* of this unexpected reason."

How to script it: Do you have a card of the same rank *and* suit as the one your opponent just played? If so, you can cancel your opponent's panel by playing that card. Place it on the page facing the card you're responding to. Your card is now the ranking card. The card that you have matched is flipped over on the page so that it holds its place, but does not count. Also, take one card from your opponent's hand at random.

How to pencil it: Cancellation panels work slightly differently than other panels. You'll need to answer the question: "How and why do your opponent's efforts fail to make headway toward her goal?" Also, stay consistent with what has gone before, and refrain from using any aspects that have not yet been Primed. Because you've chosen to cancel your opponent's action, your penciling options are tightly focused on how that action failed and why.

Even in cancellation panels, your description must always add something to the story. Although you are describing your opponent's failure, you need to say more than, "You fail. Give me a card." Her character began an action that seemed likely to bring her closer to victory. Why doesn't it? It could be because of something she didn't anticipate, like a flimsy floor giving way or a cowardly lackey turning tail. It could be because of something your character did, like blocking a punch or showing unexpected resilience. It could be because she achieved something she didn't intend, like shattering a vital piece of equipment in addition to your hero's force field, or swaying a troublemaking supporting character to her cause with the arguments meant to seduce your hero.

How to ink it: You'll describe exactly how and why your opponent failed to get what she strove for in

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WILD CARDS

The joker is wild in all decks, and the GM begins the game with all 2s and 3s wild. Players will gain wild cards when their aspects become Devastated: 2s are wild for a player with one Devastated aspect; 2s and 3s for players with two Devastated aspects; and 2s, 3s, and 4s for players with three Devastated aspects.

Wild cards can be defined as any card—any suit, any rank of 2 through Ace—at the moment you play them. If you define the wild card as exactly the same rank and suit as your opponent's ranking card, you can use it to cancel that card, just as if you had played a nonwild card of that rank and suit. Wilds may be canceled if the opponent plays the card the wild was defined to be. Use the Wild Card Wheel provided on website to mark the rank and suit a wild card has been assigned.

A TIP FOR CANCELLATION USING WILD CARDS

One of the great things you can do with wild cards in a conflict scene is cancel your opponent's actions. Define the wild as the same rank and suit of the panel your opponent just played, and script your character unmoved by efforts to subdue him. When the turn comes back around to you, your opponent might not recall how you defined your wild card. While the Wild Card Wheel certainly helps, try swapping your wild with the card you're canceling. Let's say you're using a wild 2♡ to cancel your opponent's K♣. Tell everyone that you're defining the wild 2♡ as a K♣, then pick up the actual K♣ and place it face-up on your panel. Place your 2♡ facedown on the panel you took the K♣ from. Quick, neat, and easy.

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her last panel. This is the most important time to refrain from belittling your opponent's action. She's just lost a card from her hand, and her character's action has failed, that's enough of a downturn for one panel. Plus, she'll be canceling your cards when you least expect it. Perhaps you can ease the blow with some snappy banter.

[SHIFTING TO THE THIRD SPLINTER-REALITY, GRACE-3 HAS A NASTY SURPRISE IN STORE FOR NATE.]

Grace: *[looks at Nate's 9♢ and decides to cancel. She places a 3♡ on her first panel]* Threes are wild for me, so I'm playing this as a nine of diamonds. *[Grace turns Nate's 9♢ facedown, to mark that it has been cancelled. She turns the Wild Card Wheel to 9♢ and places it on top of her 3♡]* For cancelling your card, I get to steal a card from your hand.

Nate: You are *so* going to regret that. *[holds out his hand of cards. Grace chooses one]*

Grace: Nice card.

Deanna: What does the reader see, Grace?

Grace: Sorry. No, Noir does not kick Mudslide in the face because Mudslide oozes his face aside at the last moment. Noir's foot meets nothing but air.

STEP 3C: SWITCH PAGES

Each conflict constitutes its own page. Panels make up the various moments of the conflict when cards are used. After Conflict Setup, the player who first picked the fight plays the first panel of the page of conflict between himself and his opponent. His opponent responds. Once the GM has responded, attention will shift to another page of conflict. This means that if you, as a player, picked the fight, you'll play the first panel, then the GM will respond, then we'll all shift our attention to another page. If the GM picked the fight, she will play the first panel, then you'll respond with a panel of your own, then the GM will respond to your panel, then we will all shift our attention to another page. The rule of thumb is that the GM, rather than the player, plays the last panel of a page before moving to another page.

The GM has final say over the order in which pages are addressed, and may change that order as she sees fit. However, each page gets a turn before she returns to one of the pages already played.

Each panel on your page after the first has been played presents an opportunity for assessment, the chance to get more cards or to enhance the safety of one of your aspects. You'll have an opportunity for assessment before each of your panels.

If it is one player against the GM, assessment is a simple matter of each side deciding whether or not to assess before responding to each panel. If there are several players playing separate pages of conflict against the GM at the same time, assessment is a bit more complicated. If the GM could assess before her panel on each of those pages, she would gain too many cards too quickly, and thus control too much of the inking of the conflict. So, the GM may assess before playing her second and subsequent panels—but only on the first page played in the scene. It's best to put a marker of some sort on this page, to remind everyone on

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WHY DOES THE GM GET THE LAST PANEL BEFORE A PAGE-SWITCH?

Each player only needs to keep track of how the conflict is progressing on his page. (Players ought to be listening to what *everyone* else is doing, too. But they only *need* to react to their own pages.) While the GM is playing out other conflicts, the player ought to use that time to consider his reaction to the GM's last panel. When the GM comes back around to the player, he should know what he's going to do.

The GM, on the other hand, has many pages of conflict to keep track of. She has no "downtime" during conflict. Upon playing one page, she must immediately turn her attention to the next. Allowing the player to play the last panel would create a lull in the action each time the GM returned to a page already in progress. She would need a moment to reacclimate herself to the particulars of this specific conflict. The only lulls in the action in *With Great Power…* conflict scenes occur during the assessment phase.

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which page the GM is eligible for assessment. On all the other pages of conflict, the GM will still need to play a panel, but she may not assess beforehand. If the first page of conflict concludes while others are still in play, the GM may choose the remaining page on which she will be eligible for assessment, and should move her marker to that page.

[ALL THREE SPLINTER-REALITIES ALIGN FOR JUST ONE FLEETING MOMENT.]

Nate: Do your worst, slimeboy! *[begins to play a card from his hand]* Noir comes around and—
Grace: Hold on, Nate! You have to wait until I play panels with Stephen and Deanna.
Deanna: You wouldn't want us twiddling our thumbs, would you?

STEP 3D: ASSESSMENT

Even when things are going well for a hero, there is a price to pay. Powers falter, duties slip, and loved ones find themselves in peril. Beginning with the second panel of each page, each panel will give you the opportunity to change the Suffering of one of your aspects. As always, if you increase the tension, you get more cards. If you lessen the tension, you pay cards for it.

How to script it: Assess your hand and assess your hero sheet. Do you need more cards? If so, choose an aspect and increase its Suffering. If you don't need cards and actually have several extra, you might want to decrease the Suffering of one of your aspects. You may only decrease Suffering if you are *not* about to yield. You may only change Suffering by one level at a time. Move the marker on your hero sheet to the new Suffering level. The number your marker passes over is the number of cards involved in the assessment.

If you're increasing Suffering, draw the appropriate number of cards from your deck. Draw 0 cards when changing from No Suffering to Primed; draw 1 card when changing from Primed to Risked; draw 2 cards when changing from Risked to Threatened; draw 3 cards when changing from Threatened to Imperiled; draw 4 cards when changing from Imperiled to Devastated. When the GM increases the Suffering of one of her villain's aspects, she draws the number of cards stated above from her villain deck, *plus* 1 card from each auxiliary deck she currently controls.

If you're decreasing Suffering, set aside the card (or cards if you're changing style) that you will be playing in the upcoming panel. From the remainder of your hand, randomly discard the appropriate number of cards and put them in the appropriate discard piles of their respective decks. Discard 1 card when changing from Risked to

Primed; discard 2 cards when changing from Threatened to Risked; discard 3 cards when changing from Imperiled to Threatened. Devastated aspects can never be recovered during assessment. Since you may never recover an aspect's Suffering before you yield, be sure you have a card that can beat your opponent's ranking card or change suit *before* you illustrate an aspect's recovery.

Don't forget that changing the Suffering of a strife aspect always involves one extra card. When you increase the Suffering, you draw one extra card. When you decrease the Suffering, you discard one extra card.

How to pencil it: Your description during the assessment phase needs to address the question: "What does the change in Suffering look like on the comic page?" If increasing Suffering, illustrate how the conflict has pulled in, stunned, bruised, or otherwise made an impact on one of your aspects. If decreasing Suffering, illustrate how your aspect has withstood, shrugged off, or otherwise been pulled from the fire of the conflict. If you can't describe the change in Suffering as it appears on a comic page, you cannot make the change and cannot get the cards.

While your description must stay consistent with all that has gone before, it only needs to be as plausible as you might see in a comic book. Loved ones always stumble innocently into the midst of superpowered combat. Shoves and scrapes always knock down the hero or send his weapons skittering from his grasp. The villain's taunts always cause a hero to question whether he's still doing the right thing.

How to ink it: You'll need to describe how the aspect involved becomes more (or less) involved in the conflict. It's called "Suffering" for a reason, so show the reader *how* your hero is Suffering. Perhaps you can sum it all up in dialogue: What does your hero say? Or maybe you can grab the Thought Balloon to reveal your hero's deepest doubts: What is your hero thinking?

[WE FOLLOW THE ONGOING SAGA OF THE SECOND SPLINTER-REALITY, WHERE GRACE-2 CHANGED THE STYLE OF THE CONFLICT. GRACE-2 HAS EXCHANGED OPENING PANELS WITH DEANNA AND STEPHEN.]

Grace: Back to our page of conflict, Nate. You've got to respond to my four of spades *[looks at the tactics and target markers on the page to remind her what was going on]* which represented Debris threatening everyone on the bus. *[Nate begins to play a card]* Before you play your card, you may assess if you want to.

THE RHYTHM OF CONFLICT

The rhythm and flow of conflict scenes may seem strange at first. *With Great Power…* is designed to capitalize on the things cards do well.

In *With Great Power…,* the thrill of the unknown lives in the drawing of cards rather than the playing of them. Because you can see all the cards in your hand, you'll know what your options are the moment your opponent plays her card. The cards in your hand will let you know if you can overcome her through superior force (escalation), cut the feet out from under her (cancellation), or shake things up by trying something different (changing style). Due to this intrinsic foreknowledge, there's no suspense and excitement to be found *before* playing your card.

There's plenty of excitement, however, it lives in a different place. The moment you play your card in response to your opponent's panel, everyone at the table knows whether you're escalating, changing style, or canceling. Don't be surprised to hear cheers or groans as the card hits the table. What they don't know is *how* you're going to ink that script. Between the play of the card and the inking of the panel is where suspense and excitement live in a *With Great Power…* conflict scene. It's the thrill of the theatrical pause, the lull before the storm. Let the thunder roll!

THE HEART OF THE GAME

At some point in the game, you're going to run low on cards. Real low. The villain is going to be doing something vile and evil, and you won't have the cards to stop him. You'll assess your sheet and see a number of ways to get cards: Simply increase the Suffering of one of your aspects. But that could make your Suffering close to Devastated. Dangerously close. Maybe you'll Imperil your aspect. The three cards will be nice, but if you don't draw the *right* three cards, you will have to yield, and the GM will certainly Devastate that aspect. Of course, if you yield now, the villain will get away with his nefarious scheme, and the GM will Imperil your aspect and steal 3 cards from your hand. But at least she won't Devastate it.

Facing *this* dilemma, the choice between saving the world (i.e., stopping the villain) and saving what you love (i.e., guarding your Aspects), is the heart of *With Great Power…* Everything else in the game is built to bring you to *this* moment of truth. When you get there, take a moment to bask in the sweet, dark tragedy of it all.

Then make your choice. Do what's right. Be a hero.

Nate: *[pauses]* That's where I get more cards, right? *[Grace nods]* How many do I get?

Grace: That depends on how you change the Suffering of your aspects. If you increase an aspect from Primed to Risked, you draw one card. If you increase an aspect from Risked to Threatened, you draw two. If the aspect is your strife aspect, you get an extra card. If you want to lessen the Suffering of an aspect, you'll have to discard cards.

Nate: Alright, I'll increase Pearl Perrault from Primed to Risked. She's my strife aspect, so that's two cards. *[draws 2 cards from the hero deck]* Crud! That didn't help. I've still got to play—

Deanna: Nate?

Nate: What?

Deanna: You forgot to illustrate the increase in Suffering. How does the reader know that Pearl is in more trouble now than she was last panel?

Nate: Right. That's easy. As Mudslide's shaking the bus, some of the people fall forward against the window. The reader can see that one of them is Pearl. Noir just looks at her in shock for a second. Can I play my next panel *now?*

Grace: Go right ahead.

STEP 4: VICTORY AND DEFEAT

No conflict, no matter how hard-fought, no matter how desperately and passionately waged, lasts forever. Someone must be victorious, and some-

one must be vanquished. When you cannot—or choose not to—respond to a panel by escalating, changing style, or canceling, you must yield the page of conflict to your opponent. She has won her stakes, and you have lost yours. The battle is over . . . for now.

STEP 4A: YIELDING

You try, but your arms are too weary. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. You've bitten off more than you can chew. You are beaten.

How to script it: When you cannot—or choose not to—play cards that will give you the ranking card on the page, you must yield. If the player yielded, rather than the GM, he has an additional choice. He may discard one of the cards he played on a panel to fill the next spot on the Story Arc rather than returning it to the discard pile. For more on how to use the Story Arc, see Chapter Five.

How to pencil it: All aspects of defeat and victory must flow from and remain consistent with the preceding conflict. The instant of defeat must answer the question: "How does my opponent's last action stop me from continuing to fight for my stakes?" Are you knocked out? Trapped under rubble? Stunned and demoralized by a suddenly revealed secret? Flung into orbit?

How to ink it: The instant of defeat is inked by the vanquished. Through his decision to yield, he is scripting the end of conflict. That entitles him to inking rights to his defeat. Remember the old adage: *The bigger they are, the harder they fall.* You're a superhero—the biggest there is. Fall hard.

[PLAY HAS CONTINUED FOR SOME TIME IN ALL THE SPLINTER-REALITIES. GRACE HAS JUST PLAYED A PANEL THAT NATE CANNOT BEAT. HE ASSESSED, BUT THE CARDS HE DREW WERE NOT HELPFUL.]

Nate: What am I supposed to do against an ace of clubs, Grace? *[sighs]* I guess I've got to give. You win. *[sulks]*

Grace: You've still get to say how Noir is defeated.

Nate: Right. The last thing you did was have Mudslide hurl me into one of those big, lighted billboards. I guess with all the light around, I can't reach any of the Tapestry of Night. By the time I climb down, Mudslide has gotten away.

Stephen: At least you can fill the first space on the Story Arc with one of the cards you played to your page.

Nate: That's cold comfort for getting clobbered by an unbaked mudpie.

STEP 4B: CONSEQUENCES TO THE VANQUISHED

It's time to pay the piper. You've put it all on the line and come up short. This is going to hurt.

How to script it: In addition to winning her stakes, your opponent will target one of your aspects. This ought to be the one she used to pick the fight, or one that is tied to the loss of your stakes. She will reach across the table and increase the Suffering marker of that aspect by one level. The number that she moves the marker across is the number of cards she will draw randomly *from your hand*. If the victor chooses a strife aspect, she gets to draw one additional card. If you don't have enough cards in your hand, the victor takes your entire hand, and draws the remaining cards from one of the decks that you currently control.

After the victor has drawn the cards from your hand, you, as the vanquished, draw new cards from one of your decks. Draw one less card than the total number of cards the victor took into her hand. All the cards on this page of conflict will be returned to their respective discard piles (unless a yielding *player* opted to discard one to the Story Arc).

NOTE: If the GM yields to a player, that player may target *any* aspect on the villain sheet. While he can increase the Suffering of that aspect by one level, he *may not* Devastate or Transform that aspect. No aspect on any of the GM's villain sheets may be Devastated or Transformed until the players' fill space #5 of the Story Arc (see Chapter Five for details on the Story Arc). This guarantees that nothing irrevocable can happen to an aspect until the climax of the story.

If a player chooses to target a hero aspect that's on the villain sheet because it's been Devastated, he does not increase the Suffering as normal. Instead, he may decrease the Suffering by one level. However, the cards to pay for the decrease are discarded at random from the GM's hand, rather than the player's hand. He may not decrease Suffering from Captured to Imperiled in this way. After the players fill space #5 on the Story Arc, he can bring the aspect back to his hero sheet. See Chapter Five for details about that.

How to pencil it: The consequences to the vanquished must address the question: "How does the vanquished's aspect—chosen by the victor—suffer from this defeat and the loss of the stakes

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HOW DO WE KNOW WHETHER AN ASPECT IS INVOLVED IN THE SCENE?

Any aspect that has been Primed has the potential to be in any scene. If the aspect is described or called on during the inked scene, it's in there!

the vanquished had declared?" Using the example Suffering listed on the hero sheet, as well as the illustration of any previous Suffering this aspect has undergone, what does this new Suffering look like on the comics page?

How to ink it: The victor inks the consequences to the vanquished. If you're the victor, you're in the rare position of describing how someone else's aspects Suffer. Make it painful, tragic, and perhaps even slightly cruel. Just don't make it silly, belittling, or inconsequential. You're making the vanquished *character* Suffer—not the player. If the vanquished is sporting a rueful smile when you're done, you've done a great job.

[PLAY CONTINUES]

Grace: Next, I target one of your aspects. *[looks over Nate's hero sheet]* Pearl Perrault is a big, juicy strife aspect, so I'm increasing her from Threatened to Imperiled. *[reaches across the table and moves the marker on Nate's hero sheet]* That would normally allow me to draw three cards, but because she's your strife, I get to draw four.

Nate: Be my guest. They won't help you. My cards suck.

Grace: *[Draws 4 cards from Nate's hand]* You'll have to console yourself with three new cards, Nate. *[Nate draws]* Meanwhile, I get to ink the Suffering of Pearl. As Mudslide hurls Noir toward the billboard, she screams in terror. Mudslide looks at her and says, "Yeah, he ain't all he's cracked up to be. You, on the other hand . . . come to poppa!" He grabs her with a gooey hand.

Deanna: Yuck.

STEP 4C: WINNING THE STAKES

You've fought long and hard for this. Your opponent has been driven from the field and her hopes have been dashed. Savor the sweetness of victory.

How to script it: The script for winning the stakes reaches back to the *Step 2a: Define the Stakes*. You said what you wanted out of this fight, and now, as the victor, you get it. Your opponent said what she wanted, and it is denied her.

How to pencil it: The stakes may tell you what has been won and lost, but they don't tell you how that victory and defeat appears on the comics page. Take into account all that has been inked in this conflict, as well as in the other pages. Is the hero's girlfriend whisked from his grasp mere moments before he can make the leap to safety? Do the press heap glory upon the hero as the villain's infernal device lies in smoking ruins?

How to ink it: Tell us exactly what you've gained from your victory, and what your opponent has lost. The back-and-forth of banter may have come to an end, but a loud declaration of victory—even a touch of gloating—certainly wouldn't be out of place.

Be certain to remember, when you declared your stakes you plainly said "I'm fighting for *this.*" Now that you have won those stakes and the right to ink them, you cannot go beyond them. Color them, embellish them, and describe them with relish, but do not ink something beyond them. You've won the battle, and that specific victory is yours. If you try to claim anything beyond that, you are picking another, different fight.

SEEING CARDS

"Since the cards have different backs, my opponent knows what some of them are!"

You're absolutely right. This fact adds a great deal of excitement to the game. If you can cancel at just the right time, you can steal back a card that was stolen from you. Or, when the GM defeats you, you know exactly how it's going to hurt. Also, everyone at the table probably knows it, too, and can wince along with you.

[THIS PAGE OF CONFLICT CONCLUDES]

Grace: Finally, I get to illustrate how you lose your stakes and I win mine. Getting clobbered my Mudslide certainly does not impress Pearl. She's a bit distracted right now. After Mudslide grabs her, he takes a closer look at her and says "This is the one the boss was talking about." He quickly wraps her in his muddy arms and oozes away, down a back alley. Remember, Pearl can escape in the next scene because she hasn't reached Devastated yet.

Nate: Oh, she'll escape, all right. Noir will see to that.

CONFLICT AFTERMATH

What happens after a conflict is over? If you yield a page of conflict, you cannot pick another fight in the same scene. If someone picks a fight with you, you are, of course, free to respond and participate in the ensuing page of conflict to the fullest. If you've won a page of conflict, *and* if it makes sense in the context of the scene, you may pick another fight if you like. Sometimes, the stakes that were won will immediately present the possibility for another conflict.

In many cases, however, the end of the last page of conflict will signal the end of the scene. The GM is the final authority on when scenes begin and end. In these cases, it's best to head right into another enrichment scene. The conflict is sure to have had some impact on the heroes and their aspects—this is prime fodder for enrichment scenes. Exactly how strained is the hero's relationship with his sister? How can the hero learn what caused his powers to falter? Can the hero find inspiration to carry on despite the overwhelming threat of villainy?

You and your friends will likely illustrate a number of enrichment scenes before you again get the urge to pick a fight—or find yourselves beset by your enemies. This tension-and-release pattern will continue and build until the story is done. As for how you know the story is done, the pacing is handled by the Story Arc.

THE CONFLICT PROCESS

Step 1: **Picking a fight**
> Decide who to pick a fight with. Script one of your aspects increasing the Suffering of one of her aspects.
>
> Step 1a: **Who's in?**
> > Everyone must decide now if they want to participate in this conflict, even if they plan on entering later.

Step 2: **Conflict Setup**
> Step 2a: **Define stakes**
> > What do you get if you win? If you lose, you don't get your stakes, but your opponent also gets something more. What is it?
>
> Step 2b: **Ready your aspects**
> > You may increase the Suffering of one of your aspects if you desire.
>
> Step 2c: **Draw conflict cards**
> > Players draw 2 cards plus the Suffering of all their aspects. The GM draws 2 cards per deck plus 4 cards per Devastated hero aspect, plus 1 card per strife aspect at Threatened or worse.
>
> Step 2d: **Discard to starting hand size**
> > Players discard down to 7 cards. The GM discards down to 7 cards plus 4 per player plus 1 per Devastated hero aspect

Step 3: **Playing the Page**
> Step 3a: **Play the first panel**
> > Whoever picked the fight plays first. His scripted card sets the opening suit for the page. His inked action sets the opening tactics and target for the page.
>
> Step 3b: **Respond to the panel**
> > Do ONE of the following:
> > *Option 1: Escalate the conflict* by playing a card of the same suit, but a higher rank. Describe your hero's action as answering the challenge in kind, and then some. ("Yes, and . . .")
> > *Option 2: Change the style* of conflict by playing two cards of a new suit. Describe how the conflict changes tactics or target. ("Yes, but . . .") The higher of the two cards is discarded as the price for changing suit.
> > *Option 3: Cancel* your opponent's action by playing a card of the same suit and rank. ("No.") Steal a card from your opponent's hand.
>
> Step 3c: **Switch pages**
> > After the GM has responded to a panel, switch to another page
>
> Step 3d: **Assessment**
> > Before you play a second or subsequent panel, you may increase the Suffering of an aspect and draw cards or decrease the Suffering of an aspect and discard cards. Return to *Step 3b.*

Step 4: **Victory and Defeat**
> Step 4a: **Yielding**
> > If you cannot—or choose not to—complete *Step 3b: Respond to the panel,* you must yield the page of conflict. Ink how your hero is defeated.
>
> Step 4b: **Consequences to the vanquished**
> > The victor increases the Suffering of one of the vanquished's aspects that was involved in the scene and steals cards from the vanquished's hand. The vanquished draws one less card than was taken.
>
> Step 4c: **Winning the stakes**
> > The victor inks hows the vanquished loses his stakes. The victor also inks how he wins his stakes.

CHAPTER 5

GAME MASTERING AND THE STORY ARC

The previous chapters have explained the many options players have in *With Great Power…* This chapter is for you, the Game Master. You'll see what you need to do when GMing *With Great Power…*

In order for superheroes to fight for truth, justice and whatever else takes their fancy, they *need* something to fight *against*. That's where you come in, Game Master. You play the villains of this epic story. Without you, the heroes might posture about their duties and agonize over their burdens, but that doesn't cut it for a melodramatic superhero story. This type of story *demands* grandiose, vicious, evil-doers that the reader loves to hate. The more evil your villains are, the more heroic the heroes will be. So revel in dastardliness and read on for the formula for creating and running extraordinary villains.

CREATING VILLAINS

There are two distinct stages to creating villains in *With Great Power…* Just as the players have their Scratch Pads to keep track of their aspects between stories, you, as the GM, have a Rogues Gallery of villains that might enter the story. The two stages of preparing villains are 1) getting them ready for the Rogues Gallery, and 2) taking them out of the Rogues Gallery and into play.

In preparing a villain for the Rogues Gallery,

you will follow a process very similar to the heroes' Origin Process, as detailed in Chapter Two. While the players will use their Origin Process to create heroes that are immediately ready to play, you will create villains that are *almost* ready to play—villains in need of that last all-consuming Plan to drive them into action.

PREPARING VILLAINS FOR THE ROGUES GALLERY

Follow the scripting questions below to create villains to fill your Rogues Gallery. Don't hesitate to base some of the villains in your Rogues Gallery heavily on those you find elsewhere: comics, films, Victorian melodrama, other gaming supplements, and the like. Later on, when you prepare them for play, you'll put the personal stamp of your group on them and make them your own.

Don't forget the single best source of villainy you have at your disposal: the players. Listen to them closely as they navigate their Origin Process. They're bound to mention villains their heroes may have faced. If not, ask them. If one labels his hero the "Champion of the Sun," realize that he's begging for a villain aligned with the moon. Consider it all to be penciling for the scripting questions below. Take your players suggestions and play them to the hilt. They'll thank you for it.

WHAT THE GM IS—AND ISN'T

If you've played role-playing games for some time, you probably have a pretty firm idea of what a Game Master is supposed to do. In *With Great Power…,* you will have to set those ideas aside. The GM still has special things to do in the game, but they're different from those you may have come to expect. At its most basic level, here is what the GM does in a game of *With Great Power…* and what she doesn't:

The GM's biggest job is to *make the struggle as hard as possible.* I know the game says again and again that the GM and the players work together to build the story. But within the framework of that cooperation, the GM has an adversarial role to play. Just as a coach that lets his players skip on practice isn't doing his job, a GM that doesn't take *every* opportunity to increase the difficulty and tension of the struggle isn't playing the game correctly.

In all parts of the game in action—enrichment scenes, conflict scenes, advancing the Story Arc—players face the choice between getting what they want and protecting their aspects. It's *that* tension that drives the game and it's the GM's job to create it. It is the duty of the GM to reinforce the decisions each player has made. What aspects did they make Suffer in the last conflict in order to win? In enrichment scenes, make sure Suffering gets portrayed. The hero has failed to take care of this aspect of his life—what does that look like to the reader? Also, if the hero yielded to the villain in the last conflict, be sure to play that up as well. If the hero has failed in his duty as protector—who has been hurt because of it?

On the other hand the GM is not in charge of the story as whole, she just plays the villains. A game of *With Great Power…* has no predetermined plot. Neither the GM nor the players know what's coming next. It's also not the GM's job to coordinate the various scenes into a whole, cohesive story; that responsibility is shared by everyone at the table. The game system gives all of you far-reaching power to shape the story, use it wisely.

VILLAIN OBSESSION

Heroes grapple with their struggle. They have a stake on each side of the thematic rift. Maintaining that struggle is what makes them heroes. Villains, on the other hand, have chosen their side. They *know* what it's all about. Each Villain has an Obsession that is identified with a single side of the struggle.

Scripting Question:
*What fundamental belief
drives the villain's every action?*

The villain has chosen his path and seeks to eradicate any suggestion that there might be another way. Sample Obsessions include: "Only *I* am worthy to rule" (Ideals vs. Responsibility); "The world *owes* me for my suffering" (Practicality vs. Personal Needs); or "I am above the law" (Freedom or Independence). Since Obsessions can be phrased slightly differently from story to story, the same villain can menace the heroes in different ways as they face different struggles. Feel free to pen a few potential Obsessions you can customize to fit a particular struggle the players have chosen.

[GRACE HAS BEEN LISTENING CAREFULLY TO HER PLAYERS AS THEY NAVIGATED THE ORIGIN PROCESS. SHE DECIDES TO SPEND A FEW MINUTES ON HER OWN PREPARING THE VILLAIN STEPHEN MENTIONED—PERJURY, THE LORD OF LIES—FOR THE ROGUES GALLERY. FORTUNATELY FOR US, GRACE IS ONE OF THOSE PEOPLE WHO TALKS TO HERSELF WHILE ALONE. LET'S LISTEN IN.]

Grace: Let's see. It says I should start with the villain's Obsession and align it with one side of the Struggle. Hmmm. Stephen's hero seems very much the idealist, so his archenemy should be concerned with practical matters. "The truth is for saps" sounds like a decent Obsession. *[writes it down]* Of course, someone called "The Lord of Lies" probably thrives on manipulating people, so I should come up with some sort of Obsession about that, too. Maybe "Everyone else is *my* puppet." Yeah, that's evil enough.

VILLAIN ASPECTS

Just like heroes, villains are defined by their aspects. Villain aspects can also be broken down into Assets, Motivations, and Relationships. However, the Motivation aspect of a villain is *always* called "The Plan," and won't get created until you take the villain out of the Rogues Gallery and put him into play. A villain in the Rogues Gallery only needs an Asset and a Relationship. Feel free to add more, if the spirit moves you.

Scripting Question:
How does your villain excel?

*Super*heroes require *super*villains to vanquish. What makes your villain superior? Does she suck the life energy of those who see her unmasked face? Does he command the powers of darkest magic? Has she been infused with a malicious, but highly advanced, alien intelligence? Is he the ruler of a monolithic multinational corporation by day, only to indulge his darkest obsessions under the cover of night? Is she the One Foretold to Bring the End of Days? The answers to these questions will become your villain's *Assets*. Just like heroes, they are generally aspects of the following three types: Powers—abilities beyond those of mere mortals; Origins—reminders, symbols, or relics of the villain's traumatic past that retain significance in the present day; and Identities—specific occupations or positions in society that grant influence to the villain.

Scripting Question:
Who does your villain exploit?

One cannot deny that most villains worthy of the name are vile misanthropes that care little for the rest of humankind. Try as they might, most cannot escape their place in the web of society. They *need* people—to fear them, to flatter them, to carry out their orders. Who does your villain need? Does she maintain a unit of uniformed enforcers to strike fear into the hearts of her victims? Does he continue to pursue the one woman who rejected him so many years ago? Has she earned the honor-debt of an intergalactic space knight that she dispatches on unspeakable errands? Does

the soul of his mother hold the secret to his only weakness? The answers to these questions will become your villain's *Relationships.* They are generally of the following four types: Families (relatives significantly involved in your villain's life); Romances (anyone your villain feels a romantic attraction to, whether reciprocated or not); Minions (groups of followers and underlings who carry out your villain's dirty work, soften up the heroes, and flatter his fragile ego); and Lieutenants (exceptional individuals that your villains rely upon for vital tasks).

[GRACE CONTINUES HER GAME MASTERLY MONOLOGUE]
Grace: All right, how does Perjury excel? Well, he's an excellent liar—I'll just exaggerate that into a superpower! I can call it his "Power of Lies" and he can make people believe things that aren't true. He can even make people's *senses* lie to them, creating illusions of whatever he wants them to see. That could be very nasty.

Now, as far as who does he exploit? I don't suppose I can write down "Everybody he meets." I don't see him as having any love interest or family. At least not yet. Hmmm. Since he's a very cerebral type of villain, manipulating people with words, he'll need some muscle, too. Someone to do the heavy lifting and beat up on the heroes. That qualifies as "minions," I suppose. I'll list them as "burly henchmen."

SUFFERING OF VILLAIN ASPECTS

Each villain aspect has its own Suffering—how the villain's connection to that aspect comes under stress. For each aspect, you must pencil at least one example of what Suffering might look like, and write it down. This example need not be actually used during the game. It is a necessary step so you and the players can start thinking about how to threaten the bonds that make the aspect part of your villain.

Scripting Question:
How could each aspect Suffer?

As with hero aspects, Suffering for villain aspects is always customized to fit the moment it is scripted. No definitive list of all possible ways for an aspect to Suffer is possible. The Power, Identity, and Ori-

gin Assets, as well as Family and Romance Relationships, can Suffer in much the same way as their heroic counterparts of the same name (see Chapter Two). Below are some penciling suggestions for how Minion and Lieutenant Relationships—unique to villains—might manifest their Suffering.

Minion and Lieutenant Relationships might Suffer by the following:

✶ some of the minions, or the lieutenant, could be stopped, captured, knocked down, tripped up, battered, shaken, levitated or otherwise stymied by the heroes they're facing

✶ the lieutenant could be ordered to act against his best interests, his conscience, or the agreement that binds him to the villain's service (use the Thought Balloon to foreshadow his potential betrayal)

✶ some of the minions could question the villain's orders, fear for their own safety, or doubt they will ever see their promised reward

✶ the lieutenant could come to respect the prowess, honor, or power of the hero (use the Thought Balloon to convey his grudging acknowledgment)

[GRACE CONTINUES PREPARING PERJURY FOR THE ROGUES GALLERY]
Grace: How could "The Power of Lies" come under stress? I guess his lies might not be convincing. Hmm. Maybe he can only lie to people who have lied themselves. *That's* the reason the original Stalwart was such a threat to him—he had never told a lie and thus was immune to his power.

I think he's promised the "Burly Henchmen" that they'll be well paid. In addition to getting battered by the heroes, they can also come under stress if they start to believe their reward is *[grins]* a lie.

VILLAIN ASPECT SCALES

As much as they would like to, not all your villains can take over the world—or even threaten to. Just as hero aspects have a scale as a guide to penciling, villains operate on the same scale (see Chapter Two). As villains have fewer aspects, their scales will generally be grouped more closely.

Scripting Question:
How much of the world of the comic book can each aspect affect?

[GRACE FINISHES PREPARING PERJURY FOR THE ROGUES GALLERY]
Grace: How much of the world can Perjury effect? That's pretty easy. Stephen said the first Stalwart died stopping him from taking over the entire country. That would mean his "Power of Lies" can affect things on a national scale. The minions can't affect anything out arm's reach. They're strictly personal scale.

THE ROGUES GALLERY

A villain in the Rogues Gallery is made up of a name, a brief description, a sample Obsession, and a few aspects. *No villain in the Rogues Gallery has a Plan.* The Plan will select the villain, the villain won't determine the Plan. Villains are broken down primarily by the scale they operate on. While a villain may target a hero's aspect one level of scale above or below his own, it's rare for one to go much further afield than that. Note the villain's scale does *not* determine the scale of every one of his aspects. Certainly one or two significant aspects will exist at the villain's scale, but the rest may vary as you see fit. Perhaps the villain faces the challenge of increasing his Municipal power to meet his Global ambition, or maybe a Cosmic destroyer has minions that could each menace an entire National area.

Personal Scale Villains

NAME: Mudslide
DESCRIPTION: Brute made of animated mud
OBSESSION: "All freaks belong together."
ASPECTS: *Power of Ooze*—can form body into gelatinous mud (Power Asset, Personal Scale)
Gracie—ex-wife with a restraining order (Romance Relationship, Personal Scale)

NAME: Belle, the Cat
DESCRIPTION: Shy university girl hiding behind thick glasses by day, cat burglar by night
OBSESSION: "No one can catch me."

ASPECTS: *Cat-like-grace*—exceptional reflexes, strength, speed, and stealth (Power Asset, Personal Scale)

> *Felix*—engineer and computer specialist (Lieutenant Relationship, Personal Scale)

NAME: Grim Johnny
DESCRIPTION: Hedonistic vampire
OBSESSION: "More, now!"
ASPECTS: *Vampire*—(Power Asset, Personal Scale)

> *Thralls*—(Minion Relationship, Personal Scale)

Municipal Scale Villains

NAME: The American
DESCRIPTION: Retired superhero turned mayor
OBSESSION: "Nothing is more important than *my* reputation."
ASPECTS: *Mayor's Office*—the mayor can command the city's legions of police, DAs, and municipal workers (Identity Asset, Municipal Scale)

> *The Revolutionary Warrior*—the American's son, a superhero who hasn't retired to the cushy life (Family Relationship, Municipal Scale)

NAME: Sledge
DESCRIPTION: Leader of the Ravagers street gang
OBSESSION: "The city belongs to the Ravagers!"
        "No one is stronger than me."
ASPECTS: *Unnatural Resilience*—doesn't feel pain, gets stronger after each hit (Power Asset, Personal Scale)

> *Ravagers*—loyal gang members all over the city (Minion Relationship, Municipal Scale)

NAME: Smog
DESCRIPTION: Rumpled, dirty homeless guy
OBSESSION: "The city kills."
ASPECTS: *Decay*—can increase pollution at will, cause things to rust and break down. (Power Asset; Municipal Scale)

> *Fifth Street Molly*—Molly sleeps in a box in an alley on Fifth Street (Romance Relationship; Personal Scale)

National Scale Villains

NAME: Perjury
DESCRIPTION: The Lord of Lies
OBSESSION: "Everyone else is *my* puppet."
        "Everyone lies."
ASPECTS: *Power of Lies*—can deceive the senses and memories of others (Power Asset, National Scale)

> *Burly Henchmen*—the tougher they are, the easier to deceive (Minion Relationship, Personal Scale)

NAME: Senator Elias Black
DESCRIPTION: Older man in a well-tailored suit
OBSESSION: "Humans are in danger of being enslaved by *super* powered beings."
ASPECTS: *The Hole*—A secret government funded facility dedicated to studying the "supers" threat and defending humanity from them. (Power Asset, National Scale)

> *The Black Guard*—agents and scientists who work in The Hole. (Minion Relationship, National Scale)

NAME: Cyber Wiz
DESCRIPTION: Words on a computer screen before it crashes: "The Cyber Wiz has left this unit."
OBSESSION: "Nothing is sacred, nothing is secret, and no one is safe."
ASPECTS: *Crash and Burn*—can hack into and alter any computer's data (Power Asset, National Scale)

> *Down With U.*—a group of hackers willing to do anything to learn from the Wiz (Minion Relationship, National Scale)

Global Scale Villains

NAME: Dr. Venom
DESCRIPTION: Mad scientist turned mutated freak
OBSESSION: "*I* shall evolve humanity to the next level."
ASPECTS: *Virulent Venoms*—can infect, debilitate, and transform targets (Power Asset, Municipal Scale—for now!)

> *Interns*—Some of the world's leading scientists are secretly Dr. Venom's students and carry out his work (Minion Relationship, Global Scale)

NAME: Simon
DESCRIPTION: Networked Computer A.I.
OBSESSION: "Mankind is flawed."
ASPECTS: *Machine Command*—Simon can make machines do what he needs them to (Power Asset, Global Scale)
    Spybots—Simon has commissioned and created a plethora of robots to suit his physical needs (Minion Relationship, Global Scale)

NAME: Mumbral Hive
DESCRIPTION: Dog-sized wasps from space
OBSESSION: "Feed, breed, swarm."
ASPECTS: *Mind Stings*—mumbral wasps control the minds of whomever they sting.(Power Asset; Global Scale)
    Mumbral Workers—those who have been stung by the mumbral wasps and are under the control of the Hive (Minion Relationship, National Scale)

Cosmic Scale Villains

NAME: Metheus, the All-Seeing
DESCRIPTION: Judge, jury, and executioner of worlds
OBSESSION: "My judgment is absolute!"
ASPECTS: *World Condemner*—can impose sentence upon an entire world (Power Asset, Cosmic Scale)
    Bailiffs—gigantic alien servants that enforce order in Metheus' court (Minion Relationship, National Scale)

NAME: Star Crusher
DESCRIPTION: A comet speeding through space
OBSESSION: "Tiny insignificant life forms like man exist solely for my entertainment as I continue my journey to measure the universe."
ASPECTS: *Mystic Cosmic Powers*—Star Crusher can speak telepathically to anyone in the universe, and can bestow super powers to those it wishes, or remove them (Power Asset; Cosmic Scale)
    The Order of the Shattered Star— worshippers of the Comet, endowed with amazing powers, serve it under the belief that they'll achieve godhood when the earth finally shatters (Minion Relationship, Global Scale)

NAME: Time Keepers
DESCRIPTION: Incorporeal cloaked figures with hourglasses for eyes
OBSESSION: "Mistakes must be erased."
ASPECTS: *Time Control*—Time Keepers can move through, peel back, and control the flow of time. (Power Asset, Cosmic Scale)
    Younger Selves—All Time Keepers were once men and women, They can posses their younger selves to attend their current needs. (Minion Relationship, Personal Scale)

VILLAINY UNLEASHED!

In the course of the Origin Process, your players told you exactly what they want to be most important to the story: their strife aspects. As the GM, your job is to make those strife aspects the centerpiece of the story, and you'll do that by making those strife aspects suffer.

In order to do that, you'll need a Plan. Perhaps it's a Plan to save the world from its own shortsighted, hateful wastefulness. Perhaps it's a Plan to wreak painful vengeance. Perhaps it's a Plan to steal a king's ransom and retire to the easy life on a tropical island.

Whatever it is, your Plan will come together with a villain from your Rogues Gallery to form the skeleton of an explosive tale with melodramatic punch.

THE PLAN

The Plan is an aspect available only to villains that represents every foul, nefarious deed your villains want to inflict on the world around them. Just like the heroes, fate has caused them to suffer terrible traumas. But rather than struggle with the pain and loss, the villain lashes out at the world around him, causing others to Suffer. The Plan represents the villain's structure for that backlash.

Suffering—It Just Keeps Coming

That's right—the players may have thought that five levels of Suffering was plenty, but there's another five levels of agony once you take possession of their Devastated aspects. Because aspects at these levels of Suffering have already been Devastated, they are collectively referred to as Devastated aspects. Even after they are Devastated, strife aspects always involve one more card than normal, whether drawing or discarding:

✶ *Captive* aspects have been Devastated and are newly within the villain's sphere of influence. Think of Devastated and Captive as the same level of Suffering, just with different names on the hero and the villain sheet. As soon as an aspect becomes Captive, you may ink a condition (comatose, kidnapped, torn by self-doubt, laid off, etc.) that will pertain to the aspect for the remainder of the story. This will represent its captivity. For the remainder of the game, any illustration involving this aspect must take this condition into account. In enrichment scenes, during assessment, or when a conflict is won, you may call upon a Captive aspect for 1 extra card and move it to *Overcome*. You can never decrease the Suffering of a Captive aspect.

✶ *Overcome* aspects have been met with the full force of the villain's efforts to Transform them. Isolated from their hero, these aspects begin to falter under the villain's assault. In enrichment scenes, during assessment, or when a conflict is won, you may call upon an Overcome aspect for 2 extra cards and move it to *Beaten*. You may discard 1 card to decrease an Overcome aspect to Captive—but why would you?

✶ *Beaten* aspects have spent the last of their resistance. The villain has lain their defenses bare. In enrichment scenes, during assessment, or when a conflict is won, you may call upon a Beaten aspect for 3 extra cards and move it to *Undone*. You may discard 2 cards to decrease a Beaten aspect to Overcome—but the other villains will mock your weakness.

✶ *Undone* aspects have been so traumatized by the villain that they no longer resemble what they once were. Severed from their past, they are in danger of being completely Transformed. In enrichment scenes, during assessment, or when a conflict is won, you may call upon an Undone aspect for 4 extra cards and move it to *Transformed*. You may discard 3 cards to decrease an Undone aspect to Beaten—but why retreat when you are so close to triumph?

✶ *Transformed* aspects have been through the fire of conflict and come out fundamentally different. You may ink how the aspect's name & description, type, and/or scale change permanently. If the aspect was a strife aspect, your villain has succeeded at this portion of The Plan.

For the players, there is a brighter side to these dank depths of Suffering. If Space #5 on the Story Arc has *not yet* been filled, and a player wins a Page of Conflict with you, he may choose to target any aspect on your villain sheet. If he chooses to target a Devastated aspect, he can *decrease* its level of Suffering and steal cards from your hand equal to the number you would have to discard in order to decrease its Suffering.

If Space #5 on the Story Arc *has been* filled, and a player wins a Page of Conflict with you, he may choose to target any aspect on your villain sheet. If he chooses to target a Devastated—but not yet Transformed—aspect, that aspect is immediately Redeemed. A Redeemed aspect is returned to the player's hero sheet at a Suffering of Primed, and the

(continued)

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Player steals 4 cards from your hand. The player may ink how the aspect's name & description, type, and/or scale change permanently. If a strife aspect is Redeemed, the Plan targeting it is severely crippled—it cannot succeed, but it is not completely foiled until The Plan aspect is Devastated.

Transformed aspects remain with the GM until the story is completely over. Then, they return directly to the hero's Scratch Pad, although the GM has changed them. They do not return the hero sheet.

Every villain in the story must have a plan. If you want to have a villain in the story without a Plan—perhaps because a player mentioned him during the Origin Process—make him a Lieutenant Relationship to the villain that does have a Plan.

Forming a Plan

With the heroes' strife aspects laid out in black and white on the villain sheet, you know what your Plan requires. It is as if your players have handed you a shopping list: *Your villain needs these things in order to succeed.* That is your script. You know that these particular strife aspects must be vitally important to one or more villains. Each villain's Plan must specifically target one or more of those strife aspects. Each strife aspect must be targeted by one and only one villain's Plan. I've found that a single Plan usually suffices for two or three strife aspects, so four or more players will require at least two Plans, and therefore, at least two villains. Use a separate villain sheet for each Plan.

Scripting Question:
Why is each strife aspect vitally important to your villain's Plan?

Does your villain need the hero's power gauntlets to fuel his death ray? Is that death ray targeting the crime-infested neighborhood another hero has sworn to protect? Has another hero's ailing mother inherited a mysterious safe-deposit box that holds the only known blueprint of the death ray's targeting system? Tying the strife aspects together will result in fewer villains, each with more grandiose plans. Here are some penciling suggestions for the different Types of hero aspects.

✶ **Power Assets**—The villain could want to steal the hero's powers for his own, manipulate them for his own ends, or just strip them from the hero to make him pay. If the hero's powers are conferred by some authority, the villain might want to win them legitimately.

✶ **Identity Assets**—Perhaps the hero's civilian position stands to hinder—or help—the villain's ends. The villain might want to win over, buy out, control, or outright destroy the hero's place in society. Or the villain might seek to reveal the hero's true face to the world.

✶ **Origin Assets**—The villain knows some secret about the hero's origin that allows him to exploit the hero's weaknesses, or could cause the hero to doubt his cause.

✶ **Conviction Motivations**—Always a tricky strife aspect. The villain needs to break down the hero's strongest beliefs—to demoralize the only one who can stop him. Perhaps he'll show the whole world a dramatic example contradicting this Conviction, or ensorcel the hero's mind.

✶ **Duty Motivations**—Usually straightforward. Whatever the hero has sworn to protect is something the villain seeks to destroy, or needs to possess in order to destroy something else.

✶ **Family, Romance, Partner, and Friend Relationships**—Look closely at the scale of the Relationship. This will indicate the type of service the Relationship could offer the villain if he were made a Lieutenant in the villain's forces of darkness. Could she release key criminals from the city's jails? Could he hand over the codes to the nation's nuclear warheads? At Personal Scale, perhaps the villain wants the Relationship merely because it matters to the hero.

[GRACE MOVES ON TO CONSIDERING THIS PARTICULAR STORY, AND WHAT HER VILLAINS' PLANS WILL BE.]

Grace: Let's see. The strife aspects they've given me to work with are, "The death of The Stalwart," "Everybody sees me as a monster," and "Pearl Perrault." Why would those things be vitally important to a villain's plan? Well, "The death of The Stalwart" is easy. If some villain knows that the original Stalwart is dead, he'll know that the new Stalwart is an imposter. Maybe he thinks he can blackmail The Stalwart into working for him. Or reveal the truth of the matter. Perhaps the villain believes that the Armor of Truth will abandon The Stalwart if he's revealed as a liar. *[grins]* That will be cool. The villain will be seeking to reveal the truth while The Stalwart fights to protect his lie. Stephen loves that kind of irony.

What about these other two? Maybe Pearl is special somehow. Nate has defined her as personal in scale, so she isn't important to proving The Stalwart has lied to the whole country or anything. Hmmm. Unless she saw some-thing that she shouldn't have. Maybe she saw The Stalwart die. That's it! She's important as a witness.

Lastly, "Everbody sees me as a monster." I hate it when they give me Convictions as strife aspects. They're so difficult. Hmmm. Why would any villain want Debris to realize that *not* every-body sees her as a monster? Perhaps a villain that wanted to woo her? *[takes on deeper, villainous voice]* "I don't see you as a monster, my love. Join me." *[chuckles]* Alright, the villain wants Debris to like him.

Your answer to the above scripting question will provoke another. When play begins, the strife aspects that are vital to your villains' Plans are part and parcel of the *heroes*. Something deep and fundamental to the aspect will have to change to make it ready, willing, and able to aid in something as nefarious and hurtful as The Plan. This will only come about if you can take the level of Suffering of the aspect all the way to Transformed.

WHY THERE ISN'T A NEMESIS RELATIONSHIP

Any fan of superhero comics will tell you that not all villains are created equal. Some villains hold a special place in a certain hero's rogue's gallery. Perhaps they both gained their powers from the same mysterious event, or are former friends turned sworn enemies, or the villain murdered someone the hero cared deeply for, or the villain took to the ways of evil solely to vanquish this particular hero. The villain is the sworn nemesis of the hero, and stories where they face each other down are republished in glossy trade paperbacks and debated by fans for years to come. You can probably list at least half a dozen hero-nemesis pairs off the top of your head. The whole idea of the hero's nemesis is *fundamental* to the melodramatic superhero story.

So why doesn't *With Great Power…* offer a Nemesis Relationship as one of its types of As-pects?

Superhero comics are published *every single month*—twelve issues every year. Some heroes even support multiple titles, appearing in dozens of issues every year. That's a lot of stories. And not every one of them is going to be phenomenal. This is one place where *With Great Power…* differs from comic books: *There are no filler issues.* Every time you play, you should clearly pic-ture your reader holding the glossy trade paperback of *this* story in his hands. Every time you play, you're going to create one of the very best stories your hero has ever been featured in.

Any villain that makes it from the Rogues Gallery onto the GM's villain sheet and into ac-tual play is your hero's nemesis in a very fundamental way. They are *driven* to capture, tor-ment, and remake one aspect of your hero in the pursuit of their nefarious Plans. The GM chooses each villain, and crafts his foul Plans, specifically to oppose your hero. Every time you play through a Story Arc, you face your hero's deadly nemesis.

Every time.

Scripting Question:
How does the villain seek to Transform each strife aspect?

Will the Relationship come to worship the villain and repudiate the hero? Will the hero be stripped of his Identity and left penniless? Will the hero learn that his Origin left him better prepared to be a villain than a hero? Will the hero leave the path of righteousness behind, bereft of the courage of his Convictions? Will the moon colony the hero has sworn to protect be reduced to blasted fragments? Will the Relationship die?

[GRACE CONTINUES TO SKETCH OUT HER PLANS]

Grace: How do I want to Transform these aspects? Debris is easy. I want the Conviction to change from "Everybody sees me as a monster" to "Only the villain could ever love me."

As for "The death of the Stalwart," that's a bit tougher. Since the villain wants to expose The Stalwart's lie, he'd want everybody to know not only that the real Stalwart is dead, but *who* stole the armor and put it on. So it will change to an Identity aspect, "Earnest Squire—known to the public." No more secrets for the Guardian of Truth. [chuckles]

That just leaves me with Pearl Perrault. She's supposed to convince other people of the truth of what happened. That would certainly change her scale. Probably to National—making her a kind of celebrity. And she won't have time for any of this romance stuff with Noir anymore, so I'll also Transform her type from Romance to Friend.

At this point, you ought to be able to look in your Rogue's Gallery for a villain or two who might make a Plan focused on such strife aspects and might be prone to making such Transformations. *The villain doesn't choose The Plan, The Plan chooses the villain.*

Scripting Question:
Which villain might conceive of, and carry out, this Plan?

Copy each villain's aspects to a separate villain sheet. If new aspects present themselves to you or old ones need some tweaking to fit The Plan, make it so. You can add aspects to your villains after play has begun. Also, don't feel limited by your Rogues Gallery. The steps are few enough that if you concoct a Plan that fits none of the villains in the gallery, you should be able to ink a suitable ne'er-do-well in just a few minutes.

[GRACE'S PLANS NEAR COMPLETION. YET SHE STILL NEEDS A VILLAIN OR TWO TO CARRY THEM OUT.]

Grace: Which villain might want to expose The Stalwar's lie? I think the Lord of Lies would be outraged that the Guardian of Truth is trying to out-lie him. Perjury wants to reveal the truth about The Stalwart's death. And he needs Pearl Perrault to testify that she saw The Stalwart get. He *could* just have someone lie for him, but Perjury knows that the best lies have a grain of truth. He wants everyone to know—and believe—the fact that even The Stalwart lies. "And if the Guardian of Truth can lie to you, who can you believe?"

If he's focused on those two things, will it make sense that he's trying to woo Debris, as well? I don't think so. He's not the Romeo type, anyway. I'll need a second villain for that Plan. *[Looks through the handy Rogues Gallery provided in the game.]* Hmmm. What about this Mudslide guy? He's got an Obsession that "All freaks belong together," which could drive him to try to win over Debris. It says he's made of animated mud, so even a woman made of stone is probably more attractive than him.

Finally, at some point between the beginning of the story and the villain's Plan culminating in the Transformation of the strife aspect, the villain must lay solid claim to the aspect—the moment that the aspect is Devastated and the GM takes possession of it. The most important milestone on the path to Transformation is Devastation/Capture.

Scripting Question:
How does the villain intend to capture the aspect?

Will the villain kidnap the Relationship? Does he plan on interrupting the flow of extradimensional energy that gives the hero his Power? Will the villain frame the hero's Identity for the villain's own misdeeds? Will he plant the seed of doubt for one

of the hero's Convictions by a clever and well-timed lie? Does the villain intend to hold the city hostage at missilepoint? Will he bombard the Relationship with subliminal messages?

[GRACE WRAPS UP HER VILLAINOUS PLANNING SESSION.]

Grace: Perjury will need to prepare Pearl Perrault for her role as witness to The Stalwart's deception. Since her Scale will be going up, his Plan to Capture her should focus on increasing that. Maybe he could offer her a job in some company he claims to run and give her a big, important position. Hmmm. I kinda like that, but Nate's very straightforward. He'll want something he can oppose with his fists. I think I'll go for a simple kidnapping. But Perjury will set up a lot of publicity, so that when Pearl reappears, she'll be an instant celebrity.

As for capturing "The death of The Stalwart," I'm not sure. What's halfway between only The Stalwart knowing his secret identity and the whole world knowing it? I guess that's when Perjury finds out that it's not just some guy wearing the armor, but The Stalwart's sidekick, Earnest Squire.

And how does Mudslide plan on capturing Debris' "Everybody sees me as a monster?" Well, since it will be Transformed into Debris believing that only Mudslide can love her, I guess halfway to that would be some sort of sincere declaration of love. A gooey, oozing declaration of love, but a declaration nonetheless.

The answers to these Scripting Questions are the central details of your villains' Plans. The Plan need only *make sense* to the twisted mind of the supervillain, but it needs to be *clear and understandable* to you, the players, and the reader. All the action and forward drive that you will impart into the story is going to stem from your villains' efforts to bring their Plans to fruition.

THE PLAN IN PLAY

Once you've formulated the details of The Plan, both you and the players have your own unique goals. Their goal is to Devastate all of your villains' Plan aspects, foiling their evil deeds and saving the day. Your goal is to Devastate, and subsequently Transform, all the heroes' strife as-pects. If you Transform all the strife aspects that are targeted by a certain Plan, that Plan succeeds and your day of triumph is here at long last! Since The Plan is central to both your goals and the players' goals for the game, and because you, as GM, will have input into every scene, The Plan must always be foremost in your mind. It will be your guide for how to play the game, what choices to make, what fights to pick, what cards to play, and what stakes to set throughout play.

MANAGING THE PLAN ASPECT

The Plan is a very special aspect. Since it is central to both your players and you, it has a few special rules. First, whenever The Plan increases or decreases in Suffering, one *less* card than normal is involved. If The Plan were at Risked and a hero were to win a Page of Conflict with you and choose to target The Plan, he would move its Suffering from Risked to Threatened, but he would only steal 1 card from your hand rather than the usual 2 for going from Risked to Threatened. If The Plan were Imperiled, and you wanted to assess in order to lessen the Suffering to Threatened, you would need to discard 2 cards, rather than the usual 3. Priming The Plan neither costs nor gains you any cards.

Penciling and inking the Suffering of The Plan is more tightly constrained than that of other aspects. Since it is vital that the reader comprehend the villain's Plan, you will have to explain it step-by-step. The first time The Plan reaches a new level of Suffering—a level that it has not yet held during this Story Arc—you must disclose one of the steps of The Plan. This revelation must take place immediately, or in the very next scene, at your discretion. If you choose to use an aftermath scene to reveal a part of the Plan, the full enrichment process—with cardplay and changing of aspects' Suffering—isn't needed. The cardplay has already been done, the Suffering has already been changed, and thus the script is already written. Just pencil it and ink it. Perhaps one of the villain's Minion Relationships spills the beans. Perhaps the heroes finally decipher the clues they've been gathering. Perhaps the sky grows pitch black over the city and the villain's gloating voice rings forth

from every speaker for miles around. Perhaps the villain lectures his Lieutenant on the part she must play in the Plan. You are revealing this primarily to the reader—the hero himself only needs to find out if he *caused* the Plan aspect to Suffer by winning a Page of Conflict.

Exactly what is revealed depends on the new level of Suffering. In general, the Plan is revealed in the reverse of the order in which it was conceived. When the Plan is Primed, you must reveal the strife aspect(s) the Plan targets. Once it moves to Risked, you must state how your villain intends to Capture the aspect(s). When The Plan becomes Threatened, you need to say how the villain ultimately wants to Transform the strife aspect(s). Once the Plan changes to Imperiled, you will finally divulge why the strife aspect is vital to your villain's schemes. When the Plan is Devastated, your villain's dreams will be dashed and his nefarious plot will fall to ashes, irrevocably ruined. A situation might arise where the Suffering of The Plan increases to a given level, then decreases to a lesser level, and then increases again. The decrease in Suffering ought to be penciled and inked as the villain making contingency arrangements and adapting to the hero's efforts to thwart him. The new increase in Suffering wouldn't trigger a new revelation—the reader already knows that piece of the Plan. Instead, the Suffering manifests as some component of the Plan failing. Perhaps a technician falls asleep at his post, or a bit of equipment has been accidentally ruined by a hero's stray power blast, or the nosy reporter has learned too much for her own good.

PICKING FIGHTS AND SETTING STAKES TO FURTHER THE PLAN

Every time you pick a fight with one of the heroes, it should be because your villain is trying to bring his Plan closer to fruition. Since the Plan is derived from the hero's strife aspects, you will pick most of your fights in ways that highlight those aspects. This is a good thing, since the players want them to be most important to the story and to get the most panel space. Your villain's actions must focus on her Plan, though the actual descriptions of her acts—the bank robberies, jewelry store heists, hostage takings, invasions of the surface world, destruction of civic monuments, and the like—will vary from villain to villain and Plan to Plan.

This plays into setting your stakes for each scene—whether conflict scenes or enrichment scenes. If your villain is the one picking the fight, make sure the stakes you declare will bring her closer to the next step in her Plan. If the hero is picking a fight with you or setting enrichment stakes, listen to the stakes he declares. This will tell you which aspects he's likely to bring into the conflict. Before you declare your stakes, remember that if you win the scene, *the player automatically loses his stakes*. Your stakes are what you gain over and above the player losing his stakes. Make certain those stakes bring the next step of the Plan within reach. Depending on how the player assesses his aspects during the fight, you just might be able to Devastate a juicy strife aspect as part of winning your stakes.

A WORD ABOUT STAKES

The big question posed by *With Great Power…* is "You can save the world, but are you willing to pay the price?" The Suffering of the heroes' aspects is the price. Once you've Devastated one of their aspects, be certain to make them squirm. The GM's purpose in defining conflict stakes is to put "the world" in jeopardy. If the players yield all the time, the world at large must suffer for it. Old ladies get mugged. Banks get robbed. Nations get conquered. Planets get blown up. Dimensions that Were Not Meant To Be spill into our own.

Setting the stakes is a way of saying "this is what I get if I win" but it's also a way of saying "this is what I *don't* get if I lose." If the loss is something you can't accept, don't set the stakes that way. Once you've inked the stakes, you cannot change them.

Before we move on, let me be perfectly clear: *You should never pick fights that don't involve a Plan.* The Plan is what holds the story together and keeps it from being a random and meaningless collection of angst and fights. Disregarding this rule will lead to a scattered, lackluster story that doesn't hang together. Your villains are focused and driven. You must be, as well.

USING ASPECTS TO FURTHER THE PLAN

Your villain's own aspects are your first tools in achieving the Plan. You'll want to enrich some of them early on, showing the reader the resources your villains can bring to bear on the heroes. It neither hurts you nor helps you to Prime the Plan itself early in the game, so I suggest doing so in one of your first three enrichment scenes. Consider it a bit of foreshadowing of things to come.

If you've got multiple Plans, and therefore multiple villains, you have more aspects at your disposal. However, you don't have any additional enrichment scenes to Prime them, so enrich wisely. Perhaps the heroes will allow you to work your aspects into the their enrichment scenes. Conflict scenes also play the same way, no matter how many villains you have.

Once most of your villain's assets have been Primed, I suggest you seize the initiative by picking the first fight. You know what the first steps are in your various villains' Plans, so go get them! During the conflict, let your Minion Relationships and Power Assets Suffer a bit in the tumult to give you enough cards to give the hero a great fight. You should try to win at least one Page during the first conflict, but don't be afraid to yield. If you do, you've blocked that hero from filling another space of the Story Arc and taking away some of your advantage.

When you win a Page of conflict, the losing hero's strife aspect—one of the vital components that your villain's Plan *needs*—is at your mercy. Target it—make it Suffer! Unless the strife aspect was not involved in the scene at all, it only helps you to target it. Even if you don't Devastate the aspect, you bring it one step closer to that coveted state and you get to steal an extra card from the player's hand.

Yielding pages of conflict can be a strategic choice, as noted above, but be careful. The players are apt to target The Plan early and often. If you're not careful, they'll have it at Imperiled all too soon. All your secrets will be out and they'll be marking time until Space #5 on the Story Arc is filled so they can Devastate it. You should cultivate the Plan cautiously, like the work of art that it is. Don't hesitate to decrease its level of Suffering through assessment and enrichment scenes. The villains will certainly adapt to the disruptions the heroes wreak upon their well-laid Plans.

Once you've Devastated some of the heroes' aspects—whether or not they're strife aspects—you have a whole new resource to draw upon to strengthen your hand and make those upstart do-gooders pay! Use assessment and enrichment to increase the Suffering of these aspects. But also keep one eye on your Plan. Near the end of the game, you will likely have to choose between harming the heroes' aspects and protecting your Plan from its own Devastation. No one said playing the villains was easy.

THE PLAN'S CULMINATION: THWARTED OR TRIUMPHANT

Just as no fight can last forever, no Plan can be in a state of continuous preparation. Eventually, the Plan will culminate in one of two ways. Either your villains will be triumphant, or the heroes will thwart your Plan. Regardless of the result, your work will be finished. Play out any remaining conflict, perhaps a follow-up enrichment scene or two, and turn to the Letter Column. With the Plan finished, the story is all but over, too.

If the heroes manage to force the Plan into Devastation before you are able to Transform all the strife aspects it targeted, they have thwarted your villain's dastardly designs. In this case, since one of the players scripted the change of Suffering from Imperiled to Devastated, inking rights belong to him. Chances are that you've spent more time thinking about what the Plan is and how it might succeed or fail than the players have. So you should be sure to offer plenty of penciling suggestions for the player to work with. Does your vil-

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WHY MUST A DEVASTATED ASPECT CHANGE?

The very best superhero stories are the ones where something near and dear to the heroes fundamentally changes. He loses his powers. His girlfriend becomes his wife. He fights to protect the innocent, rather than avenging his brother's death. Endings require the aspect to change to reinforce the price paid by the heroes—they can never be the same again.

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lain's doomsday device erase itself from existence before erasing the city around it?

Your villains' Plans will succeed if you manage to Transform each and every one of the strife aspects that it targeted. Once the last strife aspect is Transformed, you must illustrate not only how the Transformation appears to the reader, but also how that Transformation enables the Plan to succeed. You have shown them all! Illustrate the terror wrought upon the world that scorned you for so long!

SWAPPING VILLAINOUS BACK ISSUES

Once you've devised your Plan and selected your villain, you might find that the reader doesn't know nearly enough about him. Feel free to embellish your early enrichment scenes with references to the villain's previous appearances in back issues. Call them editorial footnotes if you like.

PLAYING TO THE STORY ARC

A collection of so-called heroes, a villain or two with devious Plans, stacks and stacks of playing cards, and a set of rules that says everyone—player and GM alike—can set up any scene that seems sensible to them: You may wonder how this seemingly chaotic setup can lead to the fantastic, incredible, amazing, uncanny melodramatic superhero stories promised in the introduction. There's one more piece of the game that will draw all these disparate elements together into a tale worthy of mylar bags and acid-free boards: The Story Arc. The Story Arc is a pacing device that tracks the development of the story. The story isn't

over until after the last space of the Story Arc is filled.

As the game plays out, the players will have the opportunity to place one of their cards on a space of the Story Arc. Each time one of the spaces is filled, one of the rules of the game changes. The advantage shifts from the GM and her villains to the players and their heroes.

However, players cannot fill a space on the Story Arc merely because they desire to erode your advantage. The only time the players have the opportunity to fill a space on the Story Arc is when they yield a Page of Conflict. They may gain the benefit of the rules-change, but they do so at the cost of being defeated. Additionally, since you win your stakes, and your stakes were tied to your Plan, they have helped your Plan develop.

If a player yields a Page and decides to advance the Story Arc, he discards one of the cards he played as a panel to fill the next spot on the Story Arc, rather than returning it to its discard pile. The rest of the cards on the page of conflict are returned to their respective discard piles. The changed rule takes effect immediately. Cards played to the Story Arc remain there, and are never shuffled back into the deck.

Also, the players must fill the spaces of the Story Arc in order, from space #1: *It Has Begun!* to space #5: *Once and For All*. You can't Transform the players' strife aspects and they cannot Devastate your Plan until space #5 is filled, so your Plan can neither become triumphant nor can it be thwarted until the very end of the game. The five spaces of the Story Arc and the rules they change are listed below:

1) **It Has Begun!**—When this space is filled, the gravity of the threat the Plan poses becomes evident. The GM may no longer play 3s as wild

cards. Any 3s currently on an active page of conflict keep whatever rank and suit were assigned them when played. They don't immediately revert to 3s.

2) **The Hero's Call**—When this space is filled, the heroes find new resolve in the face of nearly overwhelming odds. All players may now *choose* which cards leave their hand when the rules state cards are taken at random, including when their ranking card is canceled, when they lessen the Suffering of an aspect during assessment or enrichment, and when they yield a Page of conflict.

3) **Gaining Momentum**—When this space is filled, the heroes screw up their courage and tackle their challenges head-on. The GM may no longer play black 2s as wild cards. For the rest of the game, the GM may only play jokers and red 2s as wild cards. Any black 2s currently on an active Page of Conflict keep whatever rank and suit were assigned them when played. They don't immediately revert to 2s.

4) **The Balance Shifts**—When this space is filled, the heroes see the first indication that they might actually win. The players collectively take one of the auxiliary decks from the GM. Whenever they draw cards, the players may now choose which deck they use. This space may be filled again and again, until the players have all the auxiliary decks, and the GM is reduced to only her villain deck. However, this space only *needs* to be filled once in order to proceed to space #5. This space can be filled for the second and subsequent times after space #5 has been filled, if the yielding player so chooses.

5) **Once and For All**—When this space is filled, the story is ready for its climactic finale. Until now, villain aspects have been immune to Devastation and Devastated hero aspects have been immune to Transformation. That is no longer the case. If the GM yields a Page of Conflict to a player and one of his villain aspects is Imperiled, the player may Devastate the aspect. Unlike hero aspects, there aren't five more levels of Suffering awaiting a Devastated villain aspect—not even their beloved Plans. Once a villain aspect is Devastated, the player may ink how it ceases to have any impact on the story, and how its name & description, type, and/or scale have changed.

If, on the other hand, the GM yields a Page of conflict to a player and the player targets *any* hero aspect that is Devastated but not yet Transformed, that aspect is immediately Redeemed. No matter what its level of Suffering was, the aspect returns to the hero it belongs to at a Suffering of Primed. The player who Redeemed the aspect may ink how its name & description, type, and/or scale has changed.

In either case, just as in any victory, the player may steal 4 cards from the GM's hand at random. As always, strife aspects involve one card more than normal and The Plan involves one card less than normal. Once all the heroes' Devastated aspects have been Transformed or Redeemed, and the villain's Plan has been thwarted or is triumphant, the story is at an end. Everyone at the table may request one more enrichment scene if they feel the need to illustrate the changed natures of their aspects, but it is not required.

WHY MUST THE HEROES LOSE IN ORDER TO ADVANCE THE STORY ARC?

With Great Power… is designed to model stories, not life. Life moves forward whether we succeed, fail, or do nothing. Stories need pain, suffering, and loss to drive them forward and draw the audience in. Success releases tension. Suffering builds tension. *With Great Power…* is built to accumulate tension throughout the story and release it in a climactic finale where everything the heroes care about is on the line—just like the best comics. Show me a story where success is easy, and I'll show you dull tale.

PACING AND THE STORY ARC

Just because the Story Arc controls the development of the story doesn't mean that all stories will proceed the same way. In addition to the specific details you and your friends pencil and ink, there are different limits on how often the players can discard to the Arc. Each pace will create the rhythm of a different length comic book story.

✦ **The limited series**—These collections of four to twelve issues comprise one rather large story spread out across a number of issues. Only one space on the Story Arc may be filled for each conflict scene, regardless of how many heroes yield their Pages of Conflict.

✦ **The new creative team**—When a new writer and artist take on a title, they often send it in a new direction in a single story spanning two to three issues. Players may fill a space on the Story Arc whenever they yield a page of Conflict.

✦ **The over-sized annual**—These stunning tales stand alone in a single, longer issue. This is the best option when your group wants to finish the entire Arc in a single session. I find it even works in four-hour convention time slots. Each card discarded to the Story Arc fills *two* spaces on the Arc. The first discard fills spaces #1 and #2. The second fills spaces #3 and #4. The third fills space #4 again and #5.

THE LETTER COLUMN

Before the rise of the Internet, the last pages of most comics were devoted to printing letters from loyal readers, with commentary from the comics' creators. Feedback from the audience is just as important for *With Great Power…* After the entire Story Arc has been completed, after all Devastated aspects have been Redeemed or Transformed, after all Plans have been thwarted or triumphed, after the last panel on the last page has been scripted, penciled, and inked, it's time to consider just how the heroes handled the struggle they faced. There are two types of letters you'll find on a comic's letters page: the enthusiastic *fan's letter*, and the analytical *pundit's letter*. You and your group should decide whether you prefer to do both types of letters, or just one.

THE FAN'S LETTER

To do a fan's letter column, go around the table so *every* participant has a chance to speak. Everyone should say what they thought of the other participants' contributions. You must state at least one thing you liked about each other participants' scripting, penciling, or inking in the story you've just finished. What was one cool thing each person added to the experience of the reader? Also, each participant should point out at least one loose end or unanswered question the story raised. The most obvious loose ends will be those that stem from any aspects that were Transformed or Redeemed during the story, but there will be others. How will a hero's Relationships react to the events of the story? What will the hero protect, now that his home is safe from harm? Was the villain telling the truth when he claimed the hero's father was still alive? If these questions get you and your group excited to play through another Story Arc, just slap a "See ya in thirty" caption on the end of the letter column, copy your aspects back to your Scratch Pad, and get started with a new Origin Process.

THE PUNDIT'S LETTER

Doing a pundit's letter column requires looking at the theme of the comic book story you and your group told. Since every story has a theme, this is easier than it sounds. (If words like "theme" send you running for the hills, just stick with the fan's letter column.) Each player will look at how their hero handled the struggle, and where that choice led the story.

To analyze how your hero handled the Struggle, look at the Suffering on your hero sheet. Your aspects are broken into two columns based on the side of the struggle they favor. Which column has the most Suffering? You'll likely be able to tell at a glance. If you like adding things up, try this: Award each column 1 point for each aspect at Primed,

2 points for each aspect at Risked, 3 points for each aspect at Threatened, 4 points for each aspect at Imperiled, and 6 points for any aspects that were Devastated during the Story. If a Devastated aspect was Transformed by the villain's Plan, add another 5 points. You can now articulate the first portion of your hero's thematic statement: how he handled the struggle. This can neatly be summed up in a fill-in-the-blank type sentence: "My hero chose <pole of the Struggle with less Suffering> over <pole of the Struggle with more Suffering>."

Now that you can see what choice your hero made, you can also evaluate how that worked out for him. The second part of your hero's thematic statement is judging the hero's choice. Did the hero handle the Struggle well or poorly? In general, your hero has handled the struggle well if you are able to Redeem your Devastated aspects and you succeed in thwarting the villains' Plans. If, on the other hand, your hero's aspects were Transformed and the villains' wicked Plans were triumphant, your hero did not handle the struggle

very well. Think a bit about the consequences of your hero's choice. How did your aspects change? Since themes are best described in very general terms, you can put them together to form your hero's entire thematic statement like so: "Choosing <pole of the struggle with less Suffering> over <pole of struggle with more Suffering> leads to <consequences of your hero's choice, based on how aspects were changed when they were Redeemed or Devastated>."

After everyone has discerned their hero's thematic statement, each player should take a turn stating it. Then, every other participant should comment on the statement. Do you agree with the statement? Why or why not? Add a "Hmmm . . ." caption to the end of the Letter Column, and ponder upon what you might do differently with a different Struggle. Copy your aspects back to your Scratch Pad. If you'd like to explore another struggle, just start at the very beginning of the Origin Process.

PREPARING A VILLAIN
FOR THE ROGUES GALLERY

✶ **Aspects:** Villains need only answer two questions.
   1) **Assets:** How does your villain excel?
      ✶ **Power:** Can your villain do things that a normal person could never hope to do? If so, what?
      ✶ **Origin:** Does some piece of your villain's past figure strongly into his current circumstances? If so, what?
      ✶ **Identity:** Does your hero hold some specific occupation or position in society that grants him influence? If so, what?
   3) **Relationships:** Who does your villain exploit?
      ✶ **Family:** Is a relative of your villain regularly involved in your hero's life? If so, who?
      ✶ **Romance:** Does your villain feel a romantic attraction to anyone? If so, who?
      ✶ **Lieutenant:** Is there an exceptional individual that your villain relies upon for vital tasks? If so, who?
      ✶ **Minions:** Are there groups of followers and underlings who carry out your villain's tasks? If so, who?
✶ **Scale:** How much of the world of the comic book can the aspect affect?
✶ **Suffering:** How could each aspect on your villian sheet Suffer?

FORMING A PLAN

✶ **Motivation:** Why is each strife aspect vitally important to your villain's Plan?
✶ **Ultimate Goal:** How does the villain seek to Transform each strife aspect?
✶ **The Villain:** Which villain might conceive of, and carry out, this Plan?
✶ **First Step:** How does the villain intend to capture the aspect?

CHAPTER 6
OPTIONAL RULES

Script, pencil, ink. If you've made it this far in the rulebook, you've read it over and over and over again. In actually *doing* it, one of the things that will likely strike you is how many of the penciled potential events *don't* end up getting inked. For each bit of script you can only do one bit of inking, so only one bit of penciling ever makes it to the comic. Designing a game is the same way. For every design goal, only one choice can be written up as the official rule, and a lot of potential pieces must be set aside. But some of those pieces might be just right for you! In this chapter I've included a few alternate ways of handling things in the game. Each description is followed by an explanation of why it isn't a standard rule, so that you'll have an inkling of what to expect if you do take one of them for a spin.

STARTING WITH A SPLASH PAGE

Right at the beginning of most superhero comics, you'll find a page with a single, large panel on it. Often, the single panel encompasses a two-page spread. This is called the "Splash Page," and is usually a feast for the eyes that draws the reader into the world of the comic. To add a Splash Page to your comic, try this: After your group has completed the Origin Process, each participant draws one card from the top of one of the GM's auxiliary decks and places it face up in front of them. Whoever has the highest card gets the first enrichment scene, which includes the Splash Page. The cards are then returned to the discard pile for that auxiliary deck. Due to the extra visual space allo-

cated to the Splash Page, the normal penalty for priming two aspects (see page 29) is waived for this enrichment scene.

Why this isn't a standard rule: There are a lot of concepts in *With Great Power…* for new players to get accustomed to. Starting the game off with a situation that is an exception to the rule steepens the learning curve for all involved.

NUMBERING THE ISSUES

A single issue of a superhero comic often centers on a defining conflict. To enhance the comic book feel of the game, you might want to use the synopsis sheet to number the issues of your comic series. I recommend ending the first issue after the first conflict scene. To start the second issue, determine a Splash Page, and jump into the post-conflict enrichment scene.

There's no need to start at issue #1, either. Perhaps you can go back later and fill in what adventures the heroes braved before that first Story Arc. Pretend that the reader has just saved up enough money to buy the back issues where those stories are told, and then play them out. All participants must work together to keep the story continuity as free from contradiction as possible. You all must be your own continuity police. I suggest that if your strife aspect is one that has been shown one way in a later-numbered issue, when you play the earlier-numbered issue, define its name & description, type, and/or scale as how it *used* to be. Then,

work at Devastating it and Redeeming it, so you can change it to fit what the reader already knows.

[EXAMPLE OF ISSUE NUMBERING]
[Later on, Stephen wants to play out the story where The Stalwart dies. During the Origin Process, he'll list an Identity Asset as "The Stalwart" and tell everyone at the table what he has in mind]

Stephen: I was hoping that we could go back and play the story where Perjury killed the original Stalwart.

Nate: You want to play a story where you you're gonna die?

Stephen: Yeah. It'll be a special issue. Probably #100.

Deanna: It could be fun. Maybe we'd get to see the first time Noir learns to use his Tapestry of Night.

Nate: You'd like that, Deanna? The 'man becoming the hero' kind of thing? It could be cool, I guess.

Grace: Great, I'll list this as issue #100 on the synopsis sheet. Stephen, are you going to have "Earnest Squire" as a partner Aspect for The Stalwart?

Stephen: That's a great idea! The sidekick will get to watch his mentor die.

[Stephen's Identity Asset "The Stalwart" will represent The Stalwart's life. When it is Redeemed or Transformed, The Stalwart will die. He'll also list a Partner Relationship as "Earnest Squire." When it is Redeemed or Transformed, it will change Type to his Origin Asset "The Death of The Stalwart."]

Why this isn't a standard rule: Numbering the issues involves more record keeping than standard play. For a single Story Arc, it doesn't add enough fun to justify the extra work. However, it will really shine with a group that plays multiple Story Arcs with many of the same characters. Your personal feelings about comic book collector culture will also affect your enjoyment of this variant.

MORE ROBUST INTERPLAYER PARTNERSHIP

If you list another player's hero as a Partner Relationship, you gain the option of drawing cards from their hand or discarding cards to it, as de-

scribed on page 13. For a more intense experience, try this: By listing the other hero as your Partner, you have placed your trust in him. During both enrichment and assessment, when the other player has the opportunity to change the Suffering of one his aspects, he may instead choose to change the Suffering of one of yours. He can reach across the table, move the marker for Suffering on your hero sheet, draw (or discard) cards from the hero deck, and illustrate how that aspect of your hero comes under greater stress. If two players have one another listed as aspects, they may each affect the Suffering of each other's aspects.

If you Devastate this aspect, your Partner's player can no longer choose to make your aspects Suffer. Now the GM can. Whenever the GM has an opportunity during enrichment or assessment to change the Suffering of one of her aspects, she might choose to change the Suffering of one of yours instead. The cards she draws or discards will come from, or go to, the hero deck.

Why this isn't a standard rule: Like the Splash Page, this involves a number of exceptions to the normal process of the game. Since it only applies to situations where two players want their characters to have a firm partnership, many groups may never use it. But for those that do, this could greatly enhance their experience.

ALTERNATE PANEL SEQUENCE FOR CONFLICT PAGES

In a conflict scene, the focus of the reader shifts from one page of conflict to another after two panels: one from the player and one from the GM. Another approach is to stick with one page of conflict until a change of style happens. Simply play back and forth, GM-panel to player-panel, until someone changes style. That person illustrates his style change, and then the reader's focus moves to another page. Play out that page until one of the combatants changes the style, then switch focus.

Everyone will need to keep track of assessment opportunities for the GM. If you play this variant, the GM may choose to assess before playing her

panel on any page of conflict. However, she may only assess on a particular panel once in a conflict. For example, suppose Grace is playing a conflict page with Stephen, and she assesses before her second panel and her fourth panel. Then, style is changed and Grace switches to playing a conflict page with Deanna. Even if Grace needs cards, she *cannot* assess on the second or fourth panels that she plays with Deanna, since she's already assessed for those panels on Stephen's page. She *may* assess on the third panel of her page with Deanna, since she has not yet assessed on a third panel. If she does so, and then style changes and she switches to a conflict page with Nate, Grace will not be able to assess until the fifth panel of that page. Pennies or some other type of marker will be helpful in keeping track of when the GM has assessed, and when she hasn't.

Why this isn't a standard rule: This is probably the most personal choice in the game. *I* just like the two-panels-then-switch method better. It doesn't allow any individual to monopolize the reader's attention for too long. It allows for things happening on one page to impact what's happening on another page. The players are able to arrange teamwork against the villains through clever cardplay, such as playing the same suit against the GM to bleed her out of cards. While this alternate flow will produce periods of more intense gameplay, they'll be interspersed with longer periods of inactivity for players. If you prefer things that way, go for it! And please post about it to the Incarnadine Press forum,

HERO VERSUS HERO

"My favorite hero could wipe the floor with your favorite hero!" Such are the arguments of comic book fans. Many stories of interhero conflict are the stuff of filler issues, designed to give fans a quick thrill. But even the best and brightest heroes may see good reason to come to blows, particularly in stories of Independence vs. Belonging. Conflict between players is always handled as a conflict scene, never as enrichment—it's too important. The two players will have a page of conflict between them. All the steps of the conflict system remain the same, except that the GM does not draw cards during conflict setup (unless she will have her own pages to play during the scene). Only the players involved in the fight draw cards. They each define their stakes, play their panels and assessments, and at some point one of them will yield the page. The victor must increase the Suffering of one of the vanquished's aspects and steal cards from his hand. In an interplayer conflict scene, the yielder of the page does *not* have the option to discard a card to the Story Arc. The story continues with either a new conflict scene ("The heroes battle one another, *now* is my time to strike!") or enrichment to comment on what just happened ("How could you fight The Stalwart? He protects all of us! I can't love a traitor like you.").

Why this isn't a standard rule: Like the robust interplayer partnerships detailed above, this involves exceptions that simply won't be relevant for many stories. Consider it an "advanced" option rather than an alternate way to play.

DESIGNER'S NOTES

With Great Power… is but one of a new breed of role-playing games aimed at rethinking what an RPG can and should be. As such, it didn't develop in a vacuum. I took inspiration for a number of the game concepts from other fine games you should check out.

Having players name their own traits, rather than using a pre-generated list, is used in numerous games, from Jonathan Tweet's and Robin D. Laws' *Over the Edge* to John Wick's *Orkworld* to Ron Edwards' *Sorcerer*.

The characteristics of conflict owe a great debt to Jeff Grubb's wonderful *Marvel Super Heroes* game of the mid-1980s. I played that one until the cover fell off—and even after.

Delineating final authority over different types of description, as well as the use of relationships as resolution mechanics was modeled after Ron Edwards' *Trollbabe* (www.adept-press.com). Ron's more-brilliant-than-I-can-fully-appreciate *Sorcerer* also proposed the Humanity trait as the central thematic issue of play. The struggle is based heavily on Ron's pioneering work with Humanity.

The way the cards constrain and enhance the happenings of the game world is heavily influenced by the role of the dice in Mike Holmes' and Ralph Mazza's *Universalis* (universalis.actionroll.com). *Universalis* also uses player-defined trait names, makes characters that suffer damage stronger rather than weaker to the story—much like WGP's Suffering—and served as the model for the "Picking a Fight" process.

Paul Czege's *My Life with Master* (www.halfmeme.com) is brilliant in more ways than I can count. *With Great Power…*'s Story Arc is modeled after the pacing chores so elegantly handled by the Love stat in that game. Also, the strife aspect and making the villains' Plans directly responsive to the players' creative input are taken directly from the list of Wants and Needs in *My Life with Master*'s Master creation process.

The Letter Column mechanic is modeled on a fantastic essay by Vincent Baker called "Creating Theme." (www.lumpley.com/creatingtheme.html) Reading Vincent's blog, *anyway* (www.lumpley. com), has certainly deepened my understanding and appreciation for the artform of role-playing games. The steps of the villain's Plan bear some similarities to the fantastic Town Creation rules in Vincent's excellent *Dogs in the Vineyard.* Vincent's *Dogs* also taught me the value of writing in the second person.

Matt Wilson's *Primetime Adventures* (www.dog-eared-designs.com/games.html) takes everything you love about TV and puts it in a role-playing game. I've tried to do the same for superhero comics here. The way cards are traded between players is somewhat influenced by PTA's fan mail system.

Luke Crane's *Burning Wheel Revised* (www.burning-wheel.org) has a great, fast-paced, player-engaging combat system that blew me away. The shape of WGP's conflict pages is based on the way that *Burning Wheel* works at the table. The seamless union of the BW's basic rules and advanced Fight! rules showed me how I needed to explain enrichment and conflict.

The card mechanics themselves were inspired by Reiner Knizia's excellent game *Ivanhoe*. A game of knights battling each other at a tournament, it has excellent replay value and has more than a passing resemblance to an all-out superhero dust-up.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

STEP 1: A SCENE BECOMES A CONFLICT SCENE WHEN ONE OF THE PARTICIPANTS PICKS A FIGHT WITH SOMEONE ELSE.

Mudslide is going to ooze through the doors and rob the bank.

No he isn't! The Stalwart's going to stop him!

JUST LIKE THAT, CONFLICT BEGINS!

BUT FIRST, SOME CONFLICT SET-UP.

STEP 2A: SET THE STAKES FOR THE CONFLICT. WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF EACH SIDE WINS THE PAGE?

If I win the conflict, Mudslide will rob the bank. Prepare to be vanquished, hero!

If I win, Mudslide goes to jail!

STEP 2B: EVERYONE INVOLVED IN THE CONFLICT GETS TO READY THEIR ASPECTS. THEY MAY INCREASE THE SUFFERING OF ONE ASPECT THAT IS EVIDENT AT THE VERY BEGINNING OF THE SCENE.
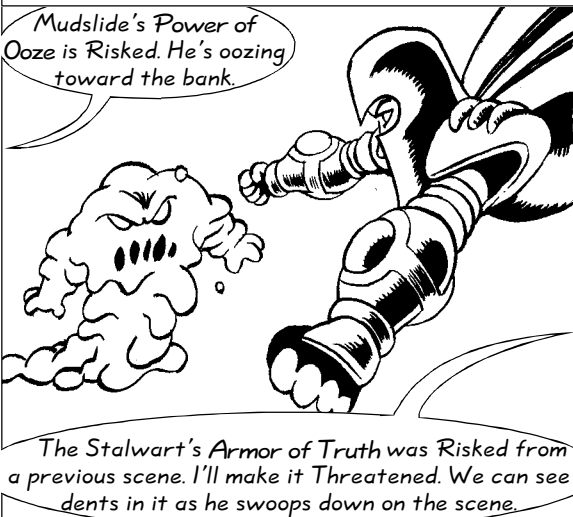
Mudslide's Power of Ooze is Risked. He's oozing toward the bank.

The Stalwart's Armor of Truth was Risked from a previous scene. I'll make it Threatened. We can see dents in it as he swoops down on the scene.

STEP 2C: EVERYONE INVOLVED IN THE CONFLICT DRAWS THEIR CONFLICT CARDS.
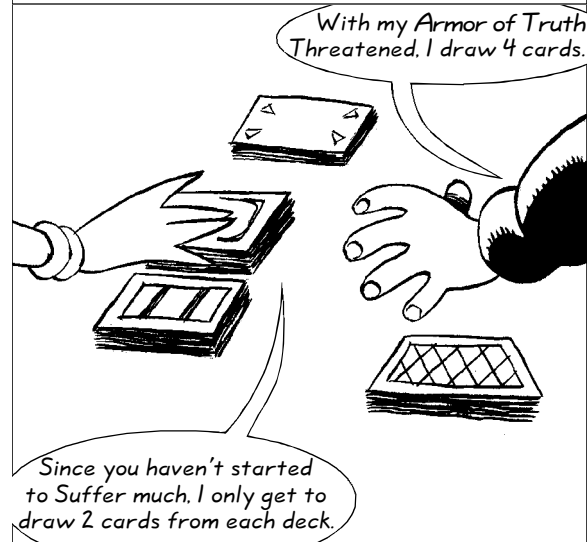
With my Armor of Truth Threatened, I draw 4 cards.

Since you haven't started to Suffer much, I only get to draw 2 cards from each deck.

STEP 2D: EVERYONE DISCARDS DOWN TO STARTING HAND SIZE.

Only 7 cards to see that justice is done? Should be a challenge.

I'm stuck with only 11 cards because Debris and Noir chickened out of this scene.

We're not chicken, we just like to watch Mudslide get beaten up by other heroes sometimes.

REMEMBER: APPLY STARTING HAND SIZE ONLY DURING CONFLICT SET-UP.

STEP 3A: THE ONE WHO PICKED THE FIGHT PLAYS A CARD TO THE FIRST PANEL & DESCRIBES WHAT HAPPENS.
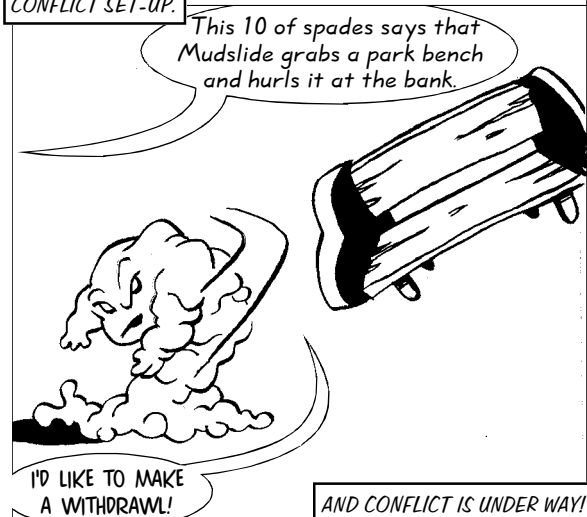
This 10 of spades says that Mudslide grabs a park bench and hurls it at the bank.

I'D LIKE TO MAKE A WITHDRAWL!

AND CONFLICT IS UNDER WAY!

STEP 3B: YOU MUST RESPOND TO YOUR OPPONENT'S PANEL. THE CARDS IN YOUR HAND WILL DETERMINE YOUR OPTIONS.

She's starting with a 10. That's pretty high. She must really want to rob this bank. How am I going to stop her?

TO RESPOND TO A PANEL, YOU HAVE 3 OPTIONS: ESCALATE, CHANGE STYLE, OR CANCEL.

OPTION 1: ESCALATE!

TO ESCALATE, PLAY A CARD OF THE SAME SUIT, BUT A HIGHER RANK. DESCRIBE YOUR HERO'S ACTION AS RETURNING MORE OF THE SAME, AND THEN SOME.

Yes, Mudslide hurls the park bench, and then The Stalwart catches the flying park bench and swings it at Mudslide!
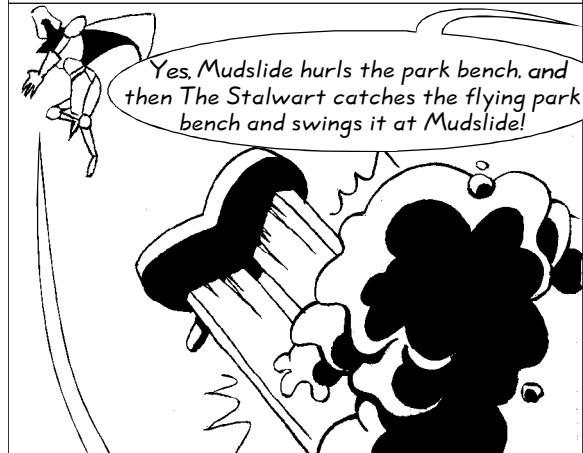
I THINK YOU DROPPED SOMETHING.

K♥ 7♥ 9♥ 7♠ J♠ 2♦ Joker
Stephen's hand

OPTION 2: CHANGE STYLE !

TO CHANGE STYLE, PLAY 2 CARDS OF ANOTHER SUIT. THE HIGHER CARD IS DISCARDED. DESCRIBE HOW THE CONFLICT CHANGES TACTICS AND/OR TARGET.

Yes, Mudslide hurls the park bench, but The Stalwart blasts it, directing another blast at Mudslide!

YOU SHOULDN'T LITTER!

K♣ 7♥ 9♥ 7♠ J♠ 2♦ Joker✳

Stephen's hand

YOU MUST CHANGE AT LEAST 1 OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CONFLICT: TACTICS AND/OR TARGET. ONE CHANGE IN SUIT ALLOWS YOU TO CHANGE EITHER OR BOTH.

Yes, Mudslide hurls the park bench, but The Stalwart shoulders it aside, and tackles Mudslide into the river!

YOU'RE ALL WASHED UP!

SPLASH

K♣ 7♥ 9♥ 7♠ J♠ 2♦ Joker✳
Stephen's hand
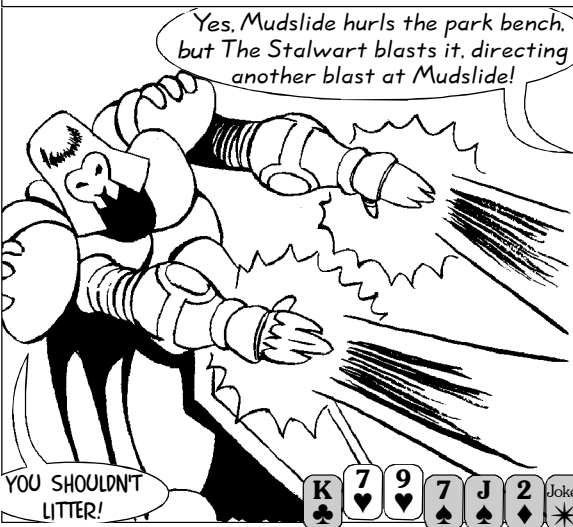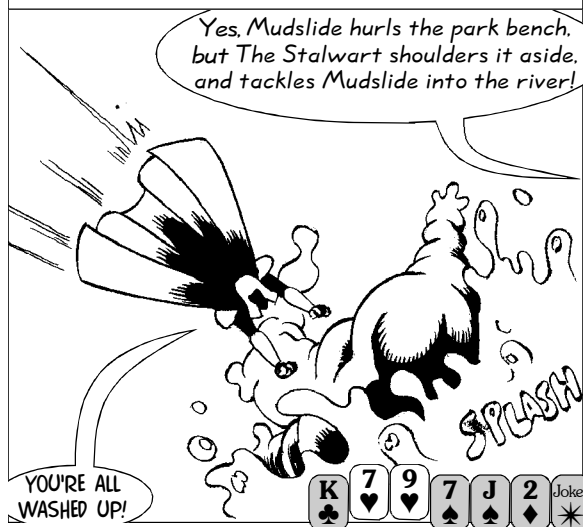
OPTION 3: CANCEL!

TO CANCEL YOUR OPPONENT'S ACTION, PLAY A CARD OF THE EXACT SAME SUIT AND RANK (OR USE A WILD). ALSO STEAL A CARD FROM YOUR OPPONENT'S HAND.

No, the park bench breaks apart in his hands. Give me a card, Gracie.

K♣ 7♥ 9♥ 7♠ J♠ 2♦ Joker✳
Stephen's hand

ALTHOUGH IT'S GOOD TO WEIGH YOUR OPTIONS, DON'T TAKE TOO LONG. SUPERHERO COMICS ARE ABOUT PULSE-POUNDING EXCITEMENT, AND WITH GREAT POWER... IS, TOO!
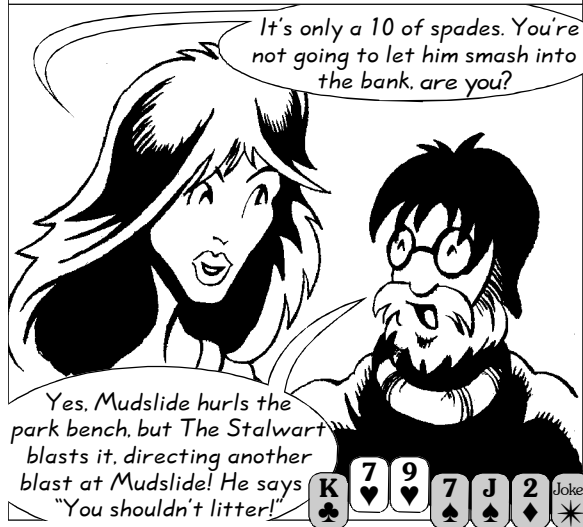
It's only a 10 of spades. You're not going to let him smash into the bank, are you?

Yes, Mudslide hurls the park bench, but The Stalwart blasts it, directing another blast at Mudslide! He says "You shouldn't litter!"

K♣ 7♥ 9♥ 7♠ J♠ 2♦ Joker✳
Stephen's hand

Panel 1

NOW IT'S YOUR OPPONENT'S TURN TO RESPOND TO YOU.

Changing to using powers? Excellent. The Queen of Hearts will escalate the conflict nicely.

That's our Grace. Takin' The Stalwart to school.

Panel 2

DON'T FORGET TO DESCRIBE WHAT WE SEE IN THE COMIC BOOK.

Mudslide is splattered by the Stalwart's blast, and then oozes to engulf The Stalwart's feet.

IS THAT THE BEST YOU'VE GOT, YOU ARMORED ANNOYANCE?

Panel 3

STEP 3D: BEFORE PLAYING YOUR NEXT PANEL, ASSESS YOUR HAND & ASSESS YOUR SHEET. DO YOU NEED MORE CARDS? OR, DO YOU WANT TO LESSEN THE SUFFERING OF AN ASPECT?

A Queen of Hearts! Yikes! What now?

K♣ 7♠ J♦ 2♦ Joker
Stephen's hand

Panel 4

TO DRAW MORE CARDS, YOU MUST INCREASE THE SUFFERING OF ONE OF YOUR ASPECTS. DRAW THE APPROPRIATE NUMBER OF CARDS AND DESCRIBE HOW THAT ASPECT COMES UNDER STRESS.

Armor of Truth goes from Threatened to Imperiled, because Mudslide's hold tugs at The Stalwart's boots.

I CAN'T FLY OUT OF THIS OOZE. IT WILL TEAR MY ARMOR APART!

8♣ A♦ 4♣ ← K♣ 7♠ J♦ 2♦ Joker
Stephen's hand

Panel 5

TO DECREASE THE SUFFERING OF AN ASPECT, DISCARD CARDS. RANDOMLY DISCARD THE APPROPRIATE NUMBER OF CARDS. DESCRIBE HOW THE STRESS ON THIS ASPECT IS LESSENED.

Armor of Truth goes from Threatened to Risked. The Armor is glowing brightly and Mudslide can't touch it.

EVEN YOUR OOZE CANNOT BESMIRCH THE ARMOR OF TRUTH!

J♠ 2♦ ← K♣ 7♠ Joker
Stephen's hand

Panel 6

YOU CAN ONLY ASSESS ONE ASPECT EACH PANEL. WHETHER YOU ASSESS OR NOT, YOU MUST PLAY A PANEL OR YEILD.

This Joker becomes the Ace of Hearts. That's escalating the use of powers, so The Stalwart soars high into the air.

THE ONLY WAY FOR YOU TO OOZE IS DOWN!

K♣ 7♠ J♦ 2♦ Joker
Stephen's hand

PLAY CONTINUES....

An Ace? Not bad. Here's a 4 and Jack of Diamonds. I'm changing style to *Positioning*. As The Stalwart soars up, Mudslide drops onto the bank's roof.

THANKS FOR THE LIFT, SUCKER!

STEP 4A: AT SOME POINT, ONE OF THE OPPONENTS WILL BE UNWILLING OR UNABLE TO PLAY ANY MORE CARDS.

Yikes! I can't beat that 4 of Diamonds. If I change to Spades, my 7 won't beat the 10 she already has on the table. Unless I *Assess*, there's nothing I can do.
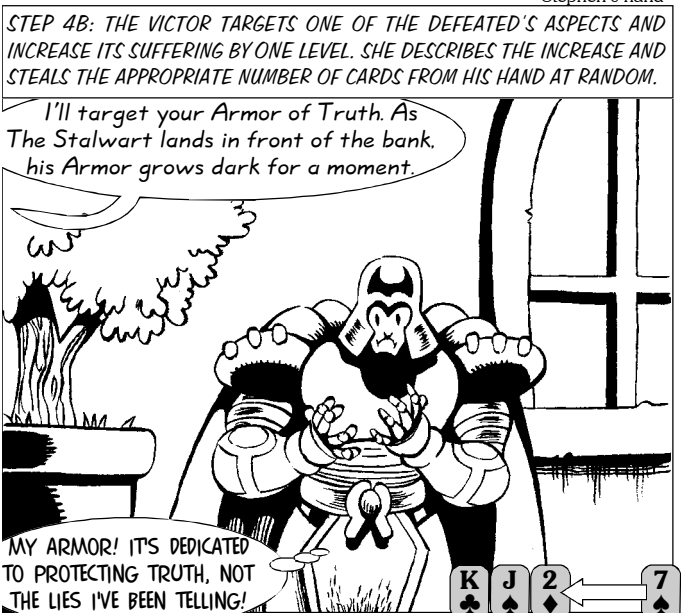
I'm not about to *Imperil* my *Armor of Truth*. It's not worth it. I . . . I yield.

K♣ 7♠ J♠ 2♦

Stephen's hand

THE DEFEATED DESCRIBES THE INSTANT OF DEFEAT.

HE GOT AWAY? THE REAL STALWART WOULDN'T HAVE LET THIS HAPPEN!

The Stalwart is flying so fast that Mudslide oozes through the skylight before he gets back.

STEP 4B: THE VICTOR TARGETS ONE OF THE DEFEATED'S ASPECTS AND INCREASE ITS SUFFERING BY ONE LEVEL. SHE DESCRIBES THE INCREASE AND STEALS THE APPROPRIATE NUMBER OF CARDS FROM HIS HAND AT RANDOM.

I'll target your *Armor of Truth*. As The Stalwart lands in front of the bank, his Armor grows dark for a moment.

MY ARMOR! IT'S DEDICATED TO PROTECTING TRUTH, NOT THE LIES I'VE BEEN TELLING!

K♣ J♠ 2♦ ← 7♠

Stephen's hand

STEP 4B: THE VICTOR DESCRIBES HOW THEIR STAKES ARE WON AND THE DEFEATED'S ARE LOST.

WITH ALL THIS MONEY, I'LL SHOWER DEBRIS WITH GIFTS. NO GIRL CAN RESIST PRESENTS!

CARDS ON THE PAGE ARE DISCARDED. IF THE DEFEATED IS A HERO, HE MAY PUT A CARD ON THE PAGE ON THE STORY ARC, INSTEAD OF DISCARDING IT.

It's not a total loss. I'm playing the 7 of Hearts to the Story Arc. That means that you may have robbed the bank, but 3s are no longer wild for you, Grace.

We'll get her next time, Steve!

INDEX OF HEADS