DIGITAL HERO #3
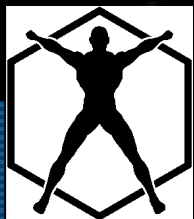
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When We Last Left Our Heroes…

by Steven S. Long

It's been a rollicking couple of months here at Hero Games since my last column!

First, the *HERO System Bestiary* debuted at Origins to strong sales and excellent reviews. It's continued to sell well since then; in fact, as of when I write this, we're just about out of the first printing.

Second, as promised, we had *Champions* at GenCon, and it sold even better! We got 100 copies in on Friday, and they all sold in just two hours. We got 200 more on Saturday, and sold over 100 of them before the show closed. Lots of fans got their copies signed by the author, Aaron Allston, who was at the convention.

GenCon also saw the premiere of *Herosphere,* the *HERO System* combat management and simulator program from DexCard, Inc. Dave Feldman of DexCard spent the whole show demonstrating the program's features to hundreds of gamers, many of whom bought copies. Even those who didn't buy got to have fun knocking sample characters around the battlefield and shooting enemies with Energy Blasts. Check out *www.herosphere.com* for more information; a demo should be available soon (if not already).

So, what's up next?

A Place To Play

At GenCon, I described our books to interested customers this way: "The *HERO System 5th Edition* is a toolkit. It lets you build anything you can think of. *Champions* is a "genre book" — a sort of instruction manual that helps you build superheroes and superhero campaigns using the toolkit."

Lots of Hero gamers like to create their own campaigns and settings, but for those who don't have the time and interest, or who simply like to see how other people do this sort of thing, we've taken our toolkit and our instruction manual and used them to build something really cool: *Champions Universe,* our first setting book for *Champions.* Scheduled to ship from the printer in mid-September, CU provides a complete campaign setting for your *Champions* game. It includes a detailed history of superhumanity (including a timeline), information about how the existence of superpowers has affected society and its subcultures, an exploration of the influence of superhumans on technology, government, and the like, and a discussion of who's who and what's what in the world of the Champions. It includes plenty of sample characters and villains. Information only the GM should know is kept in a separate section called *the GM's Vault,* so you don't have to worry about letting players read the rest of the book.

Some Bad Guys To Play With

But what's a setting without a heaping helping of bad guys to pit against your heroes? In October, our first enemies book for *Champions — Conquerors, Killers, And Crooks* — ships from the printer. It contains nearly 100 villains, including six "master villains" (Dr. Destroyer, Gravitar, Istvatha V'han, Takofanes the Undying Lord, and the Warlord), five villain teams (the Crowns of Krim, Eurostar, GRAB, PSI, and the Ultimates), and almost four dozen solo villains. The book features a lot of old favorites, like Ankylosaur and Foxbat, reworked for the new Champions Universe, and a bunch of new characters we think will soon become gamers' favorites, too. About half the characters are at the Standard Superheroic starting point total of 350; the others vary.

So, hopefully over the next two months, we'll be able to satisfy your hankering for all things *Champions!*

Additionally, by the time you read this, the *HERO System Resource Kit* should have shipped from the printer. It's taken a bit longer than we expected, what with all the components and such, but it appears we've finally gotten everything taken care of. Look for it soon in your favorite gaming store!

—Steven S. Long
HERO System Line Developer

HEROglyphs by Steven S. Long

The Casual Approach

"CASUAL" CHARACTERISTICS OTHER THAN STR

Most *HERO System* gamers, particularly those who like to play "bricks" in *Champions* and other high-STR characters, are familiar with the concept of Casual STR. A character's Casual STR is equal to half his normal STR, and he can exert it as a Zero-Phase Action. That can come in mighty handy when the character wants to break out of Entangles, smash through flimsy doors without slowing down, and so forth.

The Casual STR concept works in part because STR is one of the few Characteristics likely to be bought to extremely high levels. STR 60 isn't uncommon in many games, but DEX, INT, or PRE of 60 would be cause for raised eyebrows (and perhaps GM rejection of a character). But there still may be some benefit to applying the "Casual" concept to other Characteristics – some interesting optional rules might result. Let's explore some of the possibilities.

GENERAL CONCEPTS

Several of the suggestions below mention Casual Characteristic-based Skill Rolls or Characteristic Rolls. However, since the difference between the Casual Characteristic-based DEX Roll, and the ordinary Characteristic Roll is likely to be minor (perhaps only a point or three), the GM should save this method for occasions when he deems it appropriate and dramatic.

Characters should not be allowed to apply any Combat Skill Levels or Skill Levels to rolls made with a Casual Characteristic.

CASUAL DEXTERITY

You might occasionally use a character's Casual DEX to make an Agility Skill Roll that would ordinarily take a Half Phase or Full Phase as a Zero-Phase Action.

Example: *Eagle-Eye (DEX 24, Acrobatics 14-) is trying to save a falling child while fending off the attacks of the villains who tossed her out the seventieth-story window. He wants to make an Acrobatics roll to "bounce off" a cornice so he can change the direction of his (and the child's) fall, while still leaving himself a Full Phase in which to use Swinging and then counter-attack one of the villains. He asks the GM if he can make a Casual DEX-based Acrobatics roll as a Zero-Phase Action. At DEX 12, his Acrobatics roll becomes 11-. The GM decides this is a fairly significant difference, so he'll allow it – but if Eagle-Eye fails, he must automatically make a normal Acrobatics roll as a Full Phase Action to keep from hurting the child.*

CASUAL CONSTITUTION

CON Rolls don't crop up too frequently during most games, so there's not much call for Casual CON. The GM might allow such a roll for a character to quickly shrug off the effects of poisons, diseases, and the like.

CASUAL BODY

BODY Rolls occur even less often than CON Rolls. Generally speaking, there's probably no use for Casual BODY.

CASUAL INTELLIGENCE

In appropriate situations, you could use a character's Casual INT to determine his PER Rolls for his "everyday perceptiveness." Few people walk around intently perceiving everything around them. Most events and stimuli register faintly, if at all — which is why it's so easy for a person to overlook something that turns out to be important. A Casual INT-based PER Roll could represent this. Of course, if anything crucial to the plot comes along, the GM may want to switch to ordinary PER Rolls, to keep the adventure flowing smoothly.

CASUAL EGO

This Casual Characteristic is already mentioned in the rules, on 5E 110, for use in breaking out of "Mental Paralysis" Entangles. Besides that (relatively rare) use, GMs might also allow characters targeted by continuing-effect Mental Powers to make Casual EGO-based Breakout Rolls as Zero-Phase Actions. However, since the difference between full EGO and Casual EGO is not likely to be that great for most characters, this may have the effect of weakening Mental Powers (and mentalist characters) unfairly, so you should use this method cautiously.

CASUAL PRESENCE

Since making a Presence Attack is an action that takes no time, Casual PRE may not be as useful as other Casual Characteristics — why

artwork by Scott Heine
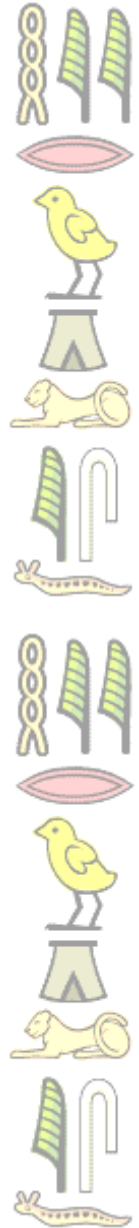
bother with a Zero-Phase Action for half effect, when it takes no time to get the full effect? However, you could use a character's Casual PRE as an indicator of the level of "ambient Presence Attack" he tends to exert just by being near other people. If a character has a sufficiently high PRE, his simply stepping into a room may be enough to make people stop talking!

Example: *The Harbinger of Justice has a 50 PRE to indicate his strength of personality, impressive demeanor, and the ease with which he terrifies criminals. His Casual PRE is 25, so even when he's just around other people – not attempting to make a Presence Attack or use Interaction Skills on them – the GM could roll a 5d6 Presence Attack to gauge their reactions to him.*

CASUAL COMELINESS

If you're using COM Rolls as Complementary Skill Rolls for Seduction or other Interaction Skills, a Casual COM-based roll might indicate the "ambient" effects of a character's appearance, similar to the "ambient Presence Attack" of Casual PRE. Without his even turning on the charm, a character's good looks could help him win friends and influence people.

Champions Leftovers by Steven S. Long

A Few Outtakes From Hero's Latest Book

In Chapter One of *Champions,* there's a discussion of the various "periods" of comic books — Golden Age, Silver Age, and so on. Accompanying each period are one (or more) sidebars with sample powers appropriate to that subgenre. Unfortunately, as Andy was laying out the book and we were doing final editing, we found we had to trim a few sample powers to make the sidebars "fit." But we hate to think of Herodom Assembled missing out on any sample powers! So, here's what was cut:

FROM *PULP HERO POWERS* (PAGES 10-11)

Fade Into Shadow: The character is so stealthy he becomes practically invisible whenever he's in a patch of darkness or shadow large enough to cover his body.

Invisibility to Sight Group (20 Active Points); Limited Effect (Normal Sight only; -¼), Chameleon (-½), Requires A Stealth Roll (-½), Only In Shadows/Darkness (-½). Total cost: 7 points.

FROM *EXAMPLE SILVER AGE POWERS* (PAGE 16)

Lizard-Powers: The character's superpowers come from the bite of a radioactive lizard, giving him, among other things, prodigious self-healing abilities.

Healing 2d6 (Regeneration, 2 BODY per Turn), Can Heal Limbs, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), Persistent (+½) (50 Active Points); Self Only (-½), Extra Time (1 Turn; -1¼). Total cost: 18 points.

Yummy Radiation: The character's radiation-spawned powers only become stronger when he's exposed to additional radiation.

Absorption 3d6 (energy), Can Absorb Maximum Of 30 Points' Worth Of Radiation Energy, All Radiation-Based Powers Simultaneously (+2) (63 Active Points); Limited Phenomena (radiation; -½). Total cost: 42 points.

FROM *EXAMPLE MUTANT POWERS* (PAGE 18)

Photosynthetic Strength: The character's body absorbs sunlight and uses it to vastly increase his strength. (At the GM's option, the amount of STR gained is proportional to the strength of the sunlight; the character gets all +40 STR at high noon in the blazing sunshine, but only +10 on an overcast day.)

+40 STR (40 Active Points); Only In Direct Sunlight (-1). Total cost: 20 points.

FROM *EXAMPLE FAD POWERS* (PAGE 19)

DM's Perogative: A character with powers based on *Dungeons & Dragons* can summon monsters to fight his foes.

Summon 4 250-point Monsters, Any Monster (+1), Friendly (+¼) (135 Active Points); OAF (enchanted *Monster Manual;* -1). Total cost: 67 points.

Use The Force: A character inspired by the *Star Wars* fad might develop a whole suite of Jedi-based "Force" powers, including telekinetic manipulation.

Telekinesis (20 STR), Fine Manipulation, Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼). Total cost: 50 points.

HERO Universe by Darren Watts

Hello, gang, and welcome to the first installment of a new regular column by yours truly. Each month I'll take a look at a character, organization, or feature of the mighty Hero Universe that for whatever reason hasn't gotten the full write-up treatment in one of our books. We'll start off this month with a dastardly Nazi villain from the Golden Age of Champions, in salute to the forthcoming *Champions Universe* book. (You can find details therein on his archenemy Captain Patriot, by the way.) As you'll see, this Ratzi was there at the very beginning of the Modern Age of Heroes…

Campaign Power Level: 150+100
Active Period: 1938-1945

Der Sturmvogel

Background/History: Walther Flenners was a shining example of Adolph Hitler's vision for Germany: young, handsome in his Aryan features, strong, brave, and utterly loyal. He'd served for two years in the Shutzstaffel, or SS, before being transferred to work for the mysterious Dr. Hessler of the RSvKg, the German secret organization studying the occult. And when Hessler asked him to volunteer for a "very special" project in May of 1938 on behalf of the Fuhrer and the German People, there was no question in his mind what to do.

Of course, he had no idea what he was volunteering for. Hessler and his band of mystic followers had prepared a ritual to summon vast demonic power, and Flenners was to be the touchstone for the chimeric energies involved. Even as he stood in the center of the specially-prepared pentagram, with horrible symbols painted in blood on his naked chest, Flenners remained secure in his faith that whatever sacrifice he was called upon to make for his country, it was worth it. That faith protected him through the awful minutes that followed, when the doors of our reality were opened and the arcane energies washed over the assembled sorcerers.

When it was over, and Flenners opened his eyes, he saw he was the only survivor save for Hessler himself, who had been transformed into an awful, skeletal thing. Flenners looked down at his own body, fearing the worst. Whatever had happened here, however, had only improved Flenners. He was stronger, faster, and more durable than before. Indeed, he was more powerful than any other man on Earth. And, as he soon discovered, he could fly like an eagle! He had come through the storm and been strengthened by his ordeal. And it would be

under the name of Sturmvogel, the Storm Bird, that he would dedicate himself in service to Hitler and the Deutschland.

Sturmvogel was one of the first public supers of the Golden Age, and his efforts in the early days of the European War were primarily focused on propaganda. Films of him flying, lifting cars, and bouncing bullets of his chest spread across the world, spurring the recruitment of national "superheroes" in several other nations (including America's own Captain Patriot.) His activities were coordinated by Hessler himself, now known as the demonic Totenkopf. As the war went on and the Ubermenschen Korps battled Allied forces like the Freedom Battalion, Sturmvogel served as one of the team's leaders in the field. Sturmvogel was killed in action in April 1945 when the Ubermenschen fought the combined forces of the Freedom Battalion and the People's Collective outside of Berlin.

Personality: Sturmvogel was a Nazi's Nazi, firmly believing in Hitler's twisted vision. He was a bitter racist, hating Jews, Russians, and blacks in about that order. That said, he maintained a certain code of honor, preferring to face his foes in open, direct combat and respecting those who fought against him with courage. Though the Ubermenschen were mostly a collection of maniacs and deviants, he kept them under firm control by strength of will and molded them into a fearsome fighting force.

Quote: "We shall be a new order, cleansing Europe with blood and fire!"

Powers/Tactics: Sturmvogel is a former SS officer, and fights with the tactics he learned there. He will order his forces to attack with speed and fury, hoping to overwhelm any opposition, while he flies from skirmish to skirmish plugging "holes" in his line. He will occasionally perform a feat of strength just before battle in view of the enemy, hoping to lower their morale; later in the war, his superiors actually asked him to stop throwing around his side's own squad cars as they were too expensive to use as ammunition.

Campaign Use: Sturmvogel is the natural opposite of your campaign's own super-patriots, and GA heroes should enjoy the opportunity to get into some knock-down drag-out battles with him. Neo-Nazis in any later era would revere his memory, and his name might be passed down to any terrorist with a Nazi connection. Also, his connection to the arcane forces that allow superpowers to exist might figure into any

artwork by Derrick Thomas

campaign that explores that dimension. Finally, Totenkopf might seek to recreate the ritual that created him in order to build a new army of superhuman servants.

To decrease his power level, you can lower his Con or Speed, or conversely you might remove his Damage Reduction. To increase is easier, as some enhanced Dexterity or additional Strength can greatly increase his overall effectiveness. Also, increasing his Damage Reduction to 50% makes him a much hardier combatant, suitable for fighting groups of low-powered heroes simultaneously.

Appearance: Sturmvogel is a large, blonde and blue-eyed human male, standing 6'5 and over 250 muscular pounds. His costume is dark gray with a large stylized German eagle with wings spread on his chest. His head is bare, and his hair is close-cropped military-style. His belt, boots, and gloves are black.

Der Sturmvogel

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
45	STR	35	18-	Lift 12½t; 9d6 HTH [4]
18	DEX	24	13-	OCV: 6/DCV: 6
25	CON	30	14-	
15	BODY	10	12-	
13	INT	3	12-	PER Roll: 12-
15	EGO	10	12-	ECV: 5
20	PRE	10	13-	PRE Attack: 4d6
10	COM	0	11-	
17	PD	8		Total: 23 PD (16 rPD)
12	ED	7		Total: 18 ED (16 rED)
5	SPD	22		Phases: 3, 5, 8, 10, 12
16	REC	4		
60	END	5		
50	STUN	0		

Total Characteristics Cost: 168

Movement: Running: 6"/12"
     Flight: 15"/30"
     Swimming: 2"/4"

Cost	Powers	END
10	*Tough Skin:* Damage Resistance (10 rPD / 10 rED)	0
30	*Amazing Physique:* Physical and Energy Damage Reduction, Resistant, 25%	0
5	*Well-Protected*: Lack Of Weakness -5	0
30	*Stormbird's Flight:* Flight 15"	3
6	*Eagle Eyes:* +4 versus Range for Sight Group	0
8	*Regeneration:* Healing 1d6, Reduced Endurance (0 END, +½), Persistent (+½); Extra Time (1 Turn, -1), Self Only (-½)	0
5	*Adapted to Heights:* Life Support, Safe Environments (Low Pressure, Intense Cold); Extended Breathing (1 END per Turn)	0
12	*Padded Costume:* Armor (6 rPD / 6 rED); OIF (Costume; -½)	0

Perks

6	Contact: Adolph Hitler, 8- (Contact has extremely useful skills and resources, Contact has own network of Contacts)	
6	Contact: Der Totenkopf, 11- (Contact has very useful skills and resources, Contact has own network of Contacts)	
5	Fringe Benefit: Army Rank (Kapitan)	

Skills

16	+2 with All Combat	
4	+2 with Punch	
3	Breakfall 13-	
3	Tactics 12-	
4	KS: German Army Procedures 13-	
2	Language: English (fluent w/ accent, German native)	
2	WF: Small Arms	

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 157
Total Cost: 325

150+ Disadvantages

5	Distinctive Features: Perfect Aryan Ideal (Easily Concealed, Noted)
25	Hunted: Allied Military and Superbeings 11- (Mo Pow, NCI, Limited Geographical Area, Capture/Kill)
20	Psychological Limitation: Racist (Very Common, Strong)
25	Psychological Limitation: German Patriot, Believes Hitler's Rhetoric (Very Common, Total)
20	Reputation: Symbol of Nazism Worldwide, 14- (Extreme)
20	Social Limitation: Subject to Orders (German Army, Totenkopf) (Very Frequently, Major)
60	Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 325

You Gotta Have Character by Jason Walters

"Life is lived forwards, but understood backwards" – Kierkegaard

"On stage, the old magical transformation took place. She burst into frenetic action. She seemed to move every part of her body in a different direction at once. She clowned outrageously, unable to stop herself. She crossed her eyes. Her feet tripped over each other while the other girls were kicking neatly in step. The effect of her performance was to mock the very idea of a chorus line, a row of people mechanically repeating the same gestures. The chorus line hated her. They had a simple term for what she was doing: scene stealing. But audiences loved her." – Phyllis Rose

"The most sensational woman anybody ever saw, or ever will." – Ernest Hemingway, on Josephine Baker

"It's a wonder she didn't have feathers, because she sang like a bird." – Janet Flanner, for the New Yorker

Josephine Baker exploded onto the Paris stage during the 1920's with a comic, yet highly sexual musical review which took Europe by storm. Along with her act *La Revue Nègre* (The Negro Revue), Baker was famous for her "barely-there" dresses, no-holds-barred "savage" dance routines, and her exotic good looks. Her sensuality and beauty were the stuff of legend, gaining her such nicknames as The Black Venus, The Black Pearl, and The Creole Goddess. Her admirers showered her with a plethora of gifts, including diamonds, cars, and marriage proposals (she received approximately 1,500 of them during her life). A life-long celebrity in France, she continued to dynamically perform for 50 years until her untimely death in 1975. Unfortunately, prejudice prevented her talents from being wholly accepted in her own home country, The United States, until 1973.

Background/History: Born Freda Josephine Carson in the slums of East St. Louis, Missouri, on June 3, 1906 Josephine Baker was the daughter of washerwoman Carrie McDonald and vaudeville drummer Eddie Carson. Carson abandoned the two of them shortly after Josephine's birth, and her mother married a kind but perpetually unemployed man named Arthur Martin. Their family eventually included a son and two more daughters.

Josephine grew up in an era of extreme racial prejudice in the United States during which opportunity for blacks were limited largely to unskilled, manual professions and the entertainment world. Opportunities for black women were even more limited still, with most in the workforce employed as domestic servants and nannies. While barely a teenager, Josephine began to earn a living up cleaning houses and babysitting for wealthy white families. This proved to be a personally degrading experience for Josephine; because of her great love of children, an emotion for which she was to become internationally renowned later in life, her employers issued instructions such as "be sure not to kiss the baby" to the very young woman. Wounded, she stopped babysitting and got a job working as a waitress at The Old Chauffeur's Club when she was only 14-years-old. While waiting tables, she met and had a brief marriage to Willie Wells.

Josephine quickly grew dissatisfied with her poverty-stricken life of drudgery in East St. Louis. As a child, she had learned from her neighbors many of the dance steps that had passed through America's black urban centers during the 1910's, such as The Mess Around, The Itch, and Trucking. So she took such skills as she had and entered the outermost rung of professional show business which existed at the time, the black Vaudeville circuit. She performed around the St. Lewis area with the Jones Family Band, playing trombone, performing dance routines, and making comic cross-eyed faces. But she got her first true break when she landed the role of cupid in a love scene staged by the Dixie Steppers, a traveling troupe performing at the Booker T. Washington Theater in St. Louis. Her winged, aerial entrance was rendered disastrous by two crossed wires, but Josephine's gift for comedy, even when dangling midair in distress, enabled her to pull the performance "out of the hole," winning over the audience and, more importantly, the Dixie Steppers' manager.

Considered too young, small, and skinny to be in a chorus line, Josephine accepted a job as the dresser of blues singer Clara Smith. She maintained the singer's wardrobe, squeezed Smith into her gauzy, undersized costumes, and tried to reduce the performer's calorie intake. While the job was not exactly glamorous it *did* have advantages. It paid $9.00 a week (a reasonable sum at the time), enabling Josephine to leave her native St. Louis and travel around the country from New Orleans, Louisiana to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania with the troupe. It also taught her the discipline required for theater work and, more significantly, it revealed to her the intoxicating thrill of being on stage.

artwork by Jason Walters

AN EYE FOR BEAUTY

She was the little girl on the end. You couldn't forget her once you'd noticed her, and you couldn't escape noticing her. She was beautiful but it was never her beauty that attracted your eyes. In those days her brown body was disguised by an ordinary chorus costume. She had a trick of letting her knees fold under her, eccentric wise. And her eyes, just at the crucial moment when the music reached the climactic "he's just wild about, cannot live without, he's just wild about me" [from "I'm Just Wild About Harry"], her eyes crossed.

    – Dance Magazine

HEAD OVER HEELS

She enters through a dense electric twilight, walking backwards on hands and feet, legs and arms stiff, down a huge jungle tree-as a creature neither infrahuman nor superhuman but somehow both: a mysterious unkillable Something, equally nonprimitive and uncivilized, or beyond time in the sense that emotion is beyond arithmetic.

    – e.e. cummings

10

By April 1921 Josephine had risen from a dresser to a comic chorus girl. Demonstrating an extraordinary energy, along an evident desire to please the audience, she enlivened every show with the crazy antics and frantic dancing of an end-of-the-line chorus girl who kept forgetting her steps and messing up the routine. Yet, like many dancers of the time, Josephine dreamed of performing on Broadway. Her interest was piqued when she learned that, for the first time in many years, a black show was on its way to New York. Written by Flournoy Miller and Aubrey Lyles (who would later create the characters Amos and Andy) with music by Eubie Blake and Noble Sissle, *Shuffle Along* would prove to be one of the greatest American musical comedies ever written. Although the script was mired in the stereotypical conventions of 19th century minstrelsy, the energetic music and dance of *Shuffle Along* broke with that tradition, choreographing traditional African American dance and adapting it into the musical. Both the Charleston and the Black Bottom, popular dances of the time, were introduced to the American public in this manner.

Josephine deliberately sought a part in *Shuffle Along*, but her first pre-Broadway audition was rejected due to her age (she was only 14). Undeterred, she bought a one way ticket to New York and one again auditioned – and was once again rejected, but offered a job as dresser for the road company. She accepted, biding her time until one of the chorus girls fell ill and, when the opportunity inevitably arrived, Josephine pounced on it. Once again, audiences were bowled over by her outrageous, impromptu clowning; every night her inspired, scene-stealing comedy stopped the show. When word got back to Sissle and Blake that they had a star on their hands her future in the musical was assured.

When *Shuffle Along* ended its unprecedented Broadway run of more than 500 performances, the show's main company went on the road. The enterprising young dancer performed in the chorus from August 1922 until tours' end in the fall of 1923. She was exuberant, audacious, and electrifying. Sissle and Blake worked hard to make Josephine's performance more professional, teaching her pacing and other necessary skills. As long as she was in a rehearsal, their student seemed to master her lessons; but once on stage, her urge to improvise destroyed any carefully coached routines. Josephine Baker had become the dancer's equivalent of a jazz artist, constantly contriving new solo riffs with her own body.

Nevertheless, when Sissle and Blake opened their new show, *The Chocolate Dandies*, in March of 1924, Josephine was given top billing as "the highest paid chorus girl in the world."

(She was paid roughly four times as much as the other chorus members.) As "Topsy Anna," a part created especially for her, Josephine dressed first as a minstrel clown with black-face, bright cotton smock, and oversized comic shoes. The poet e. e. cummings remembered her in *Chocolate Dandies* as a "tall, vital, incomparably fluid nightmare which crossed its eyes and warped its limbs in a purely unearthly manner." Then, in the show's final scene, she discarded her comic persona to appear as an abandoned woman, dressed in a suggestive white satin gown with an alluring slit up the left leg. It was this shocking contrast of opposing images – the absurd, outrageous clown and the sophisticated, sensual woman – that Baker would later use to conquer the hearts and minds of the French public.

Josephine's ticket to Paris came in the form of the young New York society diva Caroline Dudley Reagan, who was putting together a stage show along the lines of *The Chocolate Dandies*. This show, which was later to become the famous *La Revue Nègre,* included some of the greatest available back entertainers of the period: musician and composer Spencer Williams, set designer and sketch artist Miguel Covarrubias, bandleader and pianist Claude Hopkins, and choreographer Luis Douglas. After some salary negotiations, Josephine was added to this talented group as lead dancer*,* singer, and comic. Rehearsals began in New York, then continued on board the cruise ship *Berengaria* during their Atlantic crossing. By the time they reached Paris, opening night at the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées was only ten days away. During that brief time period, the revue was transformed from a vaudeville act conceived for a white American public obsessed with African American stereotypes, into something entirely new, original, and unique. First, the program was "Africanized," with less emphasis on tap-dancing and spirituals and more on Josephine's phenomenal ability to dance erotically. Second, the review's artistic director, Rolf de Maré, found a strong dance partner for Baker named Joe Alex, an emigrant from Martinique who frequented the Le Grand Duc – a black club in the Montmartre quarter of Paris where Harlem entertainer Bricktop sang, expatriates like F. Scott drank champagne, and poet Langston Hughes briefly made a living washing dishes.

On opening night, the house was packed before the musicians could even take their places. After the orchestra's opening number, the curtain opened onto a Mississippi River dock scene with the company's 25 performers on stage at once, strolling, singing, and dancing Few Parisians had ever seen so many black people together at once; dressed in their dazzling costumes, the performers appeared to be entirely

exotic. The audience was both entranced and excited, murmuring with rapt anticipation. Then Josephine entered the performance in black face and wearing plaid dungarees; her knees bent, feet spread apart, buttocks thrust out, stomach sucked in, cheeks puffed out, eyes crossed. To many she appeared to be an animal – some saw a kangaroo, others a giraffe, while yet others a part-human apparition. Her movements were just as shocking; Josephine shook, writhed like a snake, contorted her torso, and all this while emitted strange, high-pitched noises. Then, before the audience could fully comprehend what this apparition might possibly be, she burst offstage on all fours, buttock extended into the air, with hands spanking the boards as she scuttled off stage.

Eight more minor performances followed before the spectacular, all-important finale before which all else had been but a prelude. Set in a Harlem nightclub, Josephine and Joe Alex emerged to perform their *Danse sauvage* with Josephine nude save for a pink flamingo feather between her limbs, carried upside down by Joe Alex. With the crowd shocked into a hushed silence, he held her briefly around the waste before swinging her in a slow, deliberate cartwheel to the stage floor where she stood nearly naked like a "female ebony statue." A scream of applause ripped through the audience and, from that moment onwards, European concepts of beauty were forever and irrevocably changed.

Paris' reaction to Josephine's performance can be summed up in a single word: shock. No one had ever witnessed such unbridled sexuality on a stage. Words like *instinct*, *primitive life force*, *savage*, *exotic*, *bestiality*, and that peculiarly loaded word *degenerate*, raced from through the city. To many it seemed that the fragile skin of civilization had been peeled away, revealing something primitive, vital, and savage which lay beneath. Exactly what this meant was a matter of passionate debate both in Paris' cafes and in her press. For some, Josephine's *La Revue Negre* represented an infusion of new energy into a European culture held hostage by classical tradition. For others, it symbolized the disintegration of centuries of European cultural achievement into the darkness of a savage, mindless state. In any case, both the show's admirers and detractors flooded to the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées to see it, wildly boosting ticket sales and transforming Josephine's rising star into a blazing comet which swept across the night skies of France.

It wasn't very long before Josephine received an offer from the venerable Folies-Bergère to be the star of their new show, *La Folie du Jour* (Madness of the Day), whose theme centered around the conflict created when

the refined appeal of "culture" meets the seductive allure of "nature." It was in *La Folie du Jour* that Josephine first introduced a dramatic device which would have European audiences snickering and nudging one another for years. Dressed in nothing but a girdle of drooping bananas, thinly disguised phalluses seemingly waiting to be aroused, Josephine engaged in a "diabolic" Charleston in which the bananas were swung in 180-degree arcs as she openly laughed with the audience. For many, she seemed to be the very incarnation of Eros, the living embodiment of natural, sexual force. "This girl," wrote dance critic André Rouverge, "has the genius to let the body make fun of itself. Her movements, while making a strikingly original rhythmic structure, go from one extreme to the other."

In 1926 Josephine opened her own nightclub in Pigalle called Chez Joséphine, which was later moved to the more fashionable Rue Francois I. She had become a chic, affluent French woman with expensive idiosyncracies, like parading her pet leopard down the elegant Champs Elysées. She went on a successful world tour for two years between 1928-1930, receiving thousands of love letters from around the globe in the process. It was during this period that Josephine evolved from a mere eccentric chorus girl into a full-fledged entertainer who integrated both songs and dance into her performances. In the process, elevated herself from being "the highest-paid chorus girl in vaudeville" to being "one of the high-paid stars in the world."

By the late 1920's Josephine Baker rivaled Gloria Swanson and Mary Pickford as the most photographed woman in the world, earning more than any other entertainer in Europe. She starred in two movies in the 1930's, Zou-Zou and Princess Tam-Tam, as well as recording a number of songs for Columbia records. With her newfound control of her voice, Josephine took the title part in an operetta in 1934, a revival of Offenbach's La Créole at the Théâtre Marigny, opening in December for successful a six-month run. With her newfound wealth, she moved her family from East Saint Lewis to Les Milandes, an estate in Castelnaud-Fayrac before going on a disappointing tour of the United States with the Ziegfield Follies in 1936. The American press was openly hostile to Josephine (The *New York Times* called her a "Negro wench"), while its audiences rejected the idea of a black woman with so much sophistication and power. She left her native land feeling both betrayed and heartbroken.

The Second World War broke out soon after Josephine's return to Europe. When Germany occupied Belgium, Josephine became a Red Cross nurse, watching over those refugees who fled into France. When Germany finally

ALL THAT JAZZ

There seemed to emanate from her violently shuddering body, her bold dislocations, her springing movements, a gushing stream of rhythm. It was she who led the spellbound drummer and the fascinated saxophonist in the harsh rhythm of the 'blues.' It was as though the jazz, catching on the wing the vibrations of this body, was interpreting word by word its fantastic monologue. The music is born from the dance, and what a dance! The gyrations of this cynical yet merry mountebank, the good-natured grin on her large mouth, suddenly give way to visions from which good humor is entirely absent. In the short pas de deux of the savages, which came as the finale of the Revue Nègre, there was a wild splendor and magnificent animality. Certain of Miss Baker's poses, back arched, haunches protruding, arms entwined and uplifted in a phallic symbol, had the compelling potency of the finest examples of Negro sculpture. The plastic sense of a race of sculptors came to life and the frenzy of African Eros swept over the audience. It was no longer a

grotesque dancing girl that stood before them, but the black Venus that haunted Baudelaire.
— French dance critic André Levinson

THE SHOW MUST GO ON

"I love performing. I shall perform until the day I die."
— Josephine Baker

FOREVER YOUNG

"The secret to the fountain of youth is to think youthful thoughts."
— Josephine Baker

occupied France itself, she worked for the Resistance as an underground courier, transmitting information "pinned inside her underwear" to Allied military contacts. Because of her considerable fame, Josephine was granted an unusual amount of freedom of movement by the occupying Nazis, who greatly underestimated both her resourcefulness and her dedication to her adopted country. Josephine undertook a complicated series of Resistance smuggling missions which took her from London to Pau in southwestern France, through Spain and Portugal, to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (where she had theatrical bookings), and finally back to Marseilles. She contracted a mysterious, near-fatal illness which kept her in a Casablanca clinic from June 1941 to December 1942. This illness left her quite weak, but not too disabled to entertain troops in North Africa as a sublieutenant in the women's auxiliary of the Free French forces.

At the conclusion of the war, Josephine was awarded the Croix de Guerre, the Légion d'Honneur, and the Rosette of the Résistance by General Charles de Gaulle in recognition of her services to France. Josephine returned to her beloved Paris, regularly appearing in the Follies, and began adopting orphaned babies of all races to form her "Rainbow Tribe," a living demonstration of racial harmony and equality.

If Josephine's trips to America in the 1930's and 1940's had been disappointing, her treatment by the staff of New York's illustrious Stork Club in 1951 was both shocking and offensive. Denied service because of the color of her skin, she became engaged a head-on media battle over the incident with pro-segregation columnist Walter Winchell (a member of the Stork Club), who accused her, oddly enough, of both communist *and* fascist sympathies. Never as popular in America as in Europe, she found herself fighting vicious rumors begun by Winchell as well as institutionalized racism. She responded by launching a personnel decade long crusade for racial equality in the United States, refusing to entertain in any club or theater that was not fully integrated. This resulted in the breaking the color barrier at many establishments. Her efforts culminated in 1963 when she spoke at the now famous March On Washington at the side of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Returning to France, Josephine ran into considerable financial hardship in 1969, resulting in an eviction from her estate in castelnaud-fayrac. Fellow American expatriate Princess Grace Kelly of Monaco and her husband Prince Rainier gifted Josephine, as well as her large adopted family, with a villa inside of their tiny, exclusive country. The Rainiers then assisted her financially, enabling the production of the stage spectacle *Joséphine,* a medley of routines from

her 50 year long career, in 1975. Josephine, now age 69, had over a dozen costume changes during the performance, which received some of the best reviews of her career. With tears streaming down from sequined eyelids, she "stole the show" one last time, quietly dying in her sleep of a stroke after 14 successful performances of *Joséphine* on April 12, 1975.

Personality/Motivation: Josephine Baker's major motivations changed throughout her life, depending on what circumstances she found herself in. As a very young woman, she undertook an intelligent, consistent series of steps to promote her dancing career, thereby escaping the discriminatory social and economic conditions which most Black Americans of the time found themselves locked into. Thus, in her teenage years, Josephine was motivation by a desire for freedom, financial success, and self-fulfilment. Having achieved these goals with the success of *La Revue Negre*, Josephine set out to change European conceptions of physical beauty, style, and aesthetic merit. During this period Josephine's motivations could be characterized as largely artistic, although she was also animated, at least to a certain extent, by that gregariously licentious attitude which typified Paris in the Roaring 20s. During the Second World War, Josephine was motivated both by feelings of patriotic duty toward her adopted country as well as by a horrifying certainty that Nazi Germany was the embodiment of nearly everything she had spent her entire life working against. After the war, Josephine raised her "rainbow tribe," an adopted family of war-orphaned children, to demonstrate the inherent racial equality of all human beings. In this, her motivations were entirely humanitarian. At the very end of her days, Josephine returned to America amid critical acclaim as well as widespread public acceptance, completing a life cycle in which she elevated herself through the entertainment world from an "American Untouchable" to an international symbol of glamor, beauty, and accomplishment. In a small way, Josephine Baker's life could be seen as symbol of the Black experience in America during the 20th century; a slow, hard-fought clime to respectability punctuated by small setbacks as well as periods of wild, startling success.

Josephine is a sensualist, and her "convoitise pendant la vie" (lust for life) is evident in everything she does. She craves adventure for adventure's sake, wether it is erotic, artistic, social, or any other kind. She is extremely witty, disarmingly intelligent, and surprisingly well educated considering the barriers she had to overcome to get that way. She is also extremely amusing in everyday life, even though a great

deal of her public comic appeal derives from the outstanding "slapstick" dance routines she has created.

Quote: "Surely the day will come when color means nothing more than the skin tone, when religion is seen uniquely as a way to speak one's soul; when birth places have the weight of a throw of the dice and all men are born free, when understanding breeds love and brotherhood."

Powers/Tactics: Although the real life Josephine Baker abhorred violence, our "Hero Universe" Josephine baker has a slightly different attitude toward self defense. Through her association with Joe Alex, Josephine has learned a form of Martiniquais Capoeira which combines fluidly with her dance abilities. To make best use of her highly developed lower body, Josephine's martial style is entirely composed of powerful kicks and leg sweeps. To protect herself from a more serious threat, she often has an ivory-handled .38 Derringer concealed on her person as a weapon of last resort. All the same, Josephine would rather engage in a battle of words or wits than in an actual fight – because, in a battle of wits with Josephine Baker, most men find themselves to be suddenly disarmed!

The real life Josephine Baker remained attractive and vital throughout her entire life. To simulate this effect, our "Hero Universe" Josephine has an immunity to aging (although she is not immortal) derived from a lifetime of daily exercise combined with an excess of natural beauty and energy. Thus, a Josephine encountered at age 65 will be in the same physical condition as a Josephine encountered at age 25, although her physical appearance will show subtle signs of aging in the later portions of her life.

Campaign Use: Josephine Baker is one of history's great beauties, compared by those who know her Cleopatra, and she should be treated this way by the game master. Her introduction into a scenario should generate feelings of lust, competitiveness, and wonder in the male characters, while provoking strong feelings of jealousy in the female ones. Of course, once the characters become more familiar with her, they will quickly find out that there is a lot more to Josephine than her looks. She is an engaging, well rounded, and competent individual with a wide variety of abilities.

Since she was considered one of the symbols of the Jazz Age, Josephine is completely at home in a Pulp Campaign. The characters might encounter a very young Josephine performing at a hip African American locale, such as the Booker T. Washington Theater in St. Louis or the Plantation Club in New York City, or slightly later in a Parisian

venue like the Folies-Bergère. It the characters are engaged in anything remotely interesting (solving a murder, stopping a mysterious villain, etc), Josephine's adventurous nature will practically compel her to interject herself into the middle of it. Or, if the characters are in Europe, they might come into contact with her during the course of an investigation at a party for the cosmopolitan, socially well connected Parisian elite. If one of them is incredibly lucky, he might end up with a date for the evening.

In a campaign set during the Second World War, Josephine might be encountered working as an agent of the French Resistance. Interestingly, her celebrity status had become so great that she was given surprising freedom of movement even in racist, Nazi-occupied France. Josephine took full advantage of this freedom, smuggling intelligence reports out of the country in her sheet music. She is also known to have used her considerable charms to convince foreign consulates to process visas for her "close friends," some of whom where intelligence operatives. Josephine was extremely serious about her clandestine work for The Resistance, so the characters could easily encounter her as an Allied contact in occupied Europe.

If a campaign is set in the unsettled decades of the 60's and 70's, Josephine will be encountered as a "radical" social activist using her celebrity status to challenge segregation laws back in her home country. Accompanied everywhere by her "Rainbow Tribe" of adopted children, she combined her performances with her civil rights views, refusing to perform in clubs that would not permit an integrated audience. The characters may find themselves called upon to protect this controversial, aging celebrity from harm, or they might have to rescue her "Rainbow Tribe" from politically motivated kidnappers. And, if one of them is incredibly lucky, he might end up with a date for the evening.

Appearance: Josephine Baker is a transfixing, exotic, yet somehow extremely comedic black woman who exudes an athletic, easy confidence in even her most casual movements. She's considered by many to be one history's great beauties, although about her own appearance she once commented "[Am I] beautiful? It's all a question of luck. I was born with good legs. As for the rest… beautiful, no. Amusing, yes." Yet very few men in Paris agree with this assessment. Baker has large, riving eyes (which she enjoys crossing for comic effect), high cheek bones, and a winning, easy smile.

Whether performing or socializing, Josephine Baker's personal presence is quite formidable. If she resembles some sort of bizarre, frenzied wild animal on stage, in the

FILMS STARRING BAKER

La Sirene Des Tropiques (The Siren of The Tropics), 1927
Zou Zou, 1934
Princess Tam-Tam, 1935

FILMS ABOUT BAKER

The Josephine Baker Storey, 1991
Intimate Portrait: Josephine Baker, 1998

AUTO-BIOGRAPHIES BY BAKER

Les Mémoires de Josephine Baker (Memories of Josephine Baker), 1927
Voyages et Aventures de Joséphine Baker (Voyages and Adventures of Josephine Baker), 1931
Une Vie de Toutes Couleurs (A Life of All Colors), 1935
Les Memoires de Josephine Baker (Memories of Josephine Baker), 1949
Joséphine (Josephine), 1976

BIOGRAPHIES ABOUT BAKER

Josephine Baker by Bryan Hammond and Patrick O'Connor, 1988
Jazz Cleopatra by Phyllis Rose, 1988
Josephine: The Hungry Heart by Jean-Claude Baker and Chris Chase, 1993

street she's a model of civilized Parisian cool, wearing designer Paul Poiret's custom-made dresses with her well-oiled hair hugging her skull. Often escorted by artist Paul Colin, who sketches her in his studio as frequently as possible, Josephine is a noteworthy celebrity who's constantly invited to the best parties in Paris. In fact, the French consider her so attractive that there are Josephine Baker dolls, costumes, perfumes, and even a hairdo for women called Bakerfix.

Josephine Baker

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
15	STR	5	12-	Lift 200 kg; 3d6 HTH [1]
21	DEX	33	13-	OCV: 7/DCV: 7
20	CON	20	13-	
15	BODY	10	12-	
15	INT	5	12-	PER Roll: 12-
15	EGO	15	12-	ECV: 5
20	PRE	10	13-	PRE Attack: 4d6
26	COM	8	14-	
8	PD	5		Total: 8 PD
4	ED	0		Total: 4 ED
4	SPD	9		Phases: 3, 6, 9, 12
7	REC	0		
40	END	0		
40	STUN	7		

Total Characteristics Cost: 127

Movement: Running: 8"/16"
Swimming: 2"/4"

Cost	Powers	END
4	Running +2" (8" Total)	1

Martial Arts: Martiniquais Capoeira

	Maneuver	OCV	DCV	Notes
5	Spin Kick	-2	+1	7d6 Strike
4	Crescent Kick	+2	+0	5d6 Strike
3	Legsweep	+2	-1	4d6 Strike; Target Falls
5	Flying Kick	+1	-2	7d6 Strike

Perks

10	Contact: Powerful French Politician(s) 13-	
3	Money: Well Off	
9	Reputation: Famous Entertainer (among Europeans) +3/+3d6	
3	Reputation: Famous Entertainer (among Americans) +1/+1d6	
2	Fringe Benefit: Beloved By The French People	

Talents

3 Perfect Pitch

Skills

3 Acrobatics 13-
3 Acting 13-
3 Breakfall 13-
7 Conversation 15-
3 Contortionist 13-
3 High Society 13-
4 KS: African American Culture 13-
4 KS: French Culture 13-
4 KS: Men 13-
4 KS: Paris 13-
4 KS: Show Business 13-
3 Language: French (idiomatic, native accent; literate)
1 Language: Italian (fluent conversation)
1 Language: Spanish (fluent conversation)
1 Language: German (fluent conversation)
1 Language: African American Slang (fluent conversation)
3 Linguist
7 Oratory 15-
3 Paramedics 12-
7 Persuasion 15-
3 PS: Author 12-
7 PS: Dancing 15-
3 PS: Musician 13-
7 Seduction 15-
3 Streetwise 13-
1 WF: Pistols

Total Powers & Skills Cost : 144
Total Cost: 271

125+ Disadvantages

20	Distinctive Feature: Stunningly Attractive, Wealthy, Fashionable, and Famous Black Woman Before Civil Rights Movement (Not Concealable, Major Reaction)
20	Psychological Limitation: Convoitise Pendant La Vie (Lust For Life) (Common, Total)
15	Psychological Limitation: Dangerous Love Of Adventure (Common, Strong)
10	Psychological Limitation: Overpowering Love Of Children (Common, Moderate)
15	Psychological Limitation: Passionate Romantic (Common, Strong)
10	Reputation: Scandalous, 11-
15	Social Limitation: Black American Before Civil Rights Movement (Very Frequently, Minor)
10	Social Limitation: Famous (Frequently, Minor)
31	Experience Bonus

Total Disadvantage Points: 271

Classic Bits by Jacob Russell

Alternate Earths

The concept of Alternate Earths was introduced to super-hero comic books in the mid-1950s and the medium hasn't been the same. The Alternate Earth concept was originally used to reconcile contradictions in continuity between the Golden and Silver Ages. However, the idea became popular enough that the premise was expanded to create other types of stories until the continuity became too complex for anyone to track.

Though today many people have mixed opinions of this premise, the literary device of Alternate Earths is an indispensable part of many super-hero comic book sub-genres (especially "Silver Age" comics). Despite the modern abandonment of Alternate Earths, the convention survives in other forms in other comics to this day. The thought of another Earth with an eerie resemblance to our own remains compelling.

Alternate Earths can take many – even *infinite* – forms. Regardless of what type of Alternate Earth is being used, there are always common elements between the stories. All Alternate Earths are significantly different to the original Earth of the story, except that it contains alternate versions of the main characters. Even if the Alternate Earth was created by some timeline-altering event that took place centuries before the protagonists were born, analogues of them still exist. The three most popular versions of this literary device are: Parallel Earths, Alternate Timelines, and Independent Earths.

Parallel Earths are Earths from a "parallel dimension." This means that there is another universe out there that is traveling in the same direction, but does not necessarily have the same origins or the same destination. On a Parallel Earth, most or all of the characters from the original story exist on this other Earth, but with significant differences. A character from one Earth will have powers based upon magic while on the Parallel Earth the same character will have the same powers, but with a scientific basis. Gardner Fox's Earth-2 and Earth-3 from DC Comics is a classic example of this kind of Alternate Earth.

Alternate Timelines are similar to Parallel Earths in that they contain an Earth with recognizable character and culture analogues. The main difference is that the Earth from the Alternate Timeline was created when some key historical event occurred differently, and thus created this other world. Sliding Albion from "The Authority" is an example of an Earth from an Alternate Timeline.

The Independent Earth comes not from another timeline or dimension, but from this universe. Somewhere else in the same universe, a planet formed and evolved in an almost parallel way to our Earth. An Independent Earth can be a sister planet on the other side of the Sun from us, or some kind of lost celestial twin in another star system. Counter Earth from "Adam Warlock," and Mirror Earth from "Tom Strong," are examples of Independent Earths.

PLAYING ON AN ALTERNATE EARTH

Alternate Earths are a fun place for the players to explore, and for GMs to create. On the one hand, the Alternate Earth is new and different from the old and can hold much fascination. On the other hand, it is always similar enough that it doesn't require as much explanation and exposition from the GM. We know what humans look like. We know what flora and fauna to expect from virtually any Alternate Earth. What we don't automatically know is that on this new Earth, America is a totalitarian government that inducts all super-humans it encounters.

Whatever is different about the Alternate Earth, the GM should decide what it is that drives the player characters back to normal Earth. If the Player Characters have well developed personal lives back on normal Earth, this shouldn't be a problem, as they will need to get back to them. However, if the Player Characters don't have well-developed lives, or unhappy lives, then they may like the idea of setting up new lives in this other world. If this is not the direction you want the campaign to take, then steps should be taken to make the Alternate Earth less hospitable.

Aside from exploring another world, Alternate Earths also offer the possibility for the players to explore their own characters. By role-playing in a world where their characters are regarded as villains, failures, or mythical figures, the players will be able to explore a different role-playing experience with the same character. Players who are bored with their characters may even see a way to take their character in a new direction.

TRANSPORTATION FROM EARTH TO EARTH

In deciding how transportation works between Earths, the GM must decide if the Alternate Earth is to be a significant part of the game. If the GM only wants the Alternate Earth to provide the occasional short-term adventure, or evil duplicate villain (see below), then the "doorway" to the Alternate Earth needs to be

difficult to open. The means of transportation could be an accidental discovery with the means of reversal only available on the other side. This could also mean that transportation is only possible at certain times, the next one being years – or even centuries – from now (after the characters return from the Alternate Earth, of course).

If the GM wants the other Earth to be a significant part of the campaign, then transportation should be made easy. The GM may even allow the players to buy an Extra-Dimensional Movement, or FTL Travel, device/vehicle for their base.

The exact game mechanic of transportation should be determined by the Alternate Earth type. Parallel Earths and Alternate Timelines should be accessed by Extra-Dimensional Movement. Independent Earths should be reachable by FTL Travel.

ALTERNATE EARTH: A GOOD SOURCE FOR NPCS AND SUB-PLOTS

Are any of your players neglecting their DNPCs? Take them to a world where they were not successful in saving them from the last super-villain attack. Do you need to quickly write up a team of villains who are evenly matched to your PC team? Haul out a team of villains that are the PCs themselves from an Alternate Earth where they became villains instead of heroes. Writing up such a team consists of little more than making copies of their character sheets. In the area of alternate versions of the PCs, there are three general options.

OPTION 1: ENEMIES WITH IDENTICAL POWERS

In this option, the duplicates are the exact same people as the PCs, with the same powers. However, somewhere along the way these analogues went astray. Maybe they lost the fight with the evil mind-controlling sorcerer. Maybe they just grew up on the wrong side of the tracks. Whichever the case, the PCs are going to have a tough time not only fighting people of equal power, but of telling their friends from their enemies.

A plotline involving evil analogues can present unique challenges to the PCs in areas besides combat. An evil analogue can easily infiltrate the team, or even the PC's personal life. If the team base utilizes any form of physical identification for its security system (i.e., retinal prints, DNA scanning, voice-print identification), then an evil analogue can easily bypass it.

This option is the easiest way to come up with villains for your PCs to fight that you know are an equal match for them. All you need is an extra copy of everyone's character. To truly reflect the classic comic storyline the villains should have the same costumes, but with opposite color-schemes (*e.g.*, green tights and a yellow cape become a green cape with yellow tights).

OPTION 2: ENEMIES WITH OPPOSITE POWERS OR SPECIAL EFFECTS

Analogues in this option are the same people as in Option 1. However, their alternate path of life has given them different abilities. How different these abilities are can vary widely. The differences can be extremely minor, such as a mere change in the special effect.

Another possibility is that the analogue's powers are completely opposite to the PC's. If the PC has fire powers, then the analogue will have ice powers. While this may make identifying some duplicates easy, others may still be able to fake it. A brick whose analogue is a mentalist may be able to fake super-strength with Telekinesis or Mental Illusions.

OPTION 3: ALTERNATE TEAMMATES

In this scenario, the analogues may be different in powers, origins, or secret identities, but not in morality. While this is a time-honored tradition in comics, this might not play out well in a Champions campaign, assuming you want the PCs to fight their own battles.

Appropriate Campaign Settings

As mentioned this dramatic convention was a classic staple of the "Silver Age" comic books. Though alternate universes are still used in comics today, they are usually only used to "host" stories of a "what if" nature. Of course, there's no reason why you cannot use Alternate Earths in a modern campaign, but you may want to be mindful of the more "corny" elements.

Running Analogues Convincingly

The hardest part about running an infiltrator against the group is doing it without the PCs knowing about it. If suddenly, the GM is speaking for Captain Lepton and not the Captain's player, then the other players will get suspicious. Your players might be cool enough to play out their characters' assumed ignorance, but it is much more fun if they don't know.

Pull one of your players aside and talk to him before the game. Tell him that his character has been captured and replaced with an analogue. Give him some basic guidelines for how to play this out. Tell him not to attack the other PCs until you give him a signal. At any time after the initial attack, you can take over the duplicate. Once you do this, it is usually a good idea to give the player, who has been such a good sport, a chance for their PC to escape imprisonment.

Body Switching

It's a classic of comic books, television shows, and movies. The theme is simple: what is it like to be someone else? What is it like being the opposite gender? What is it like to be poor? What is it like to not have super-powers? All of these ideas can be explored through Body Switching.

SWITCHING GAME MECHANICS: TRANSFORM VS. "MAKE IT SO"

There is no doubt that many of you reading this article are already thinking thoughts like, "Xd6 Major Transform: one character into another…" But before you do, there are some issues which you need to address.

First of all, you have to decide on the mechanism for switching bodies. Is this a power that a villain possesses, a gadget that the PCs stumble upon, a rare supernatural occurrence, or what? Whatever the mechanism of switching is, you need to make sure that the mechanism must not be usable immediately to switch the characters back. The characters must either search for something which switches them back, or wait a certain amount of time before the switch can be reversed.

Second, you should decide if the body-switching is a matter of inconvenience or a serious problem that needs to be addressed quickly. There are many factors to be considered here that are medical, social and even psychological. Is the body-switching medically benign to those who were switched, or are the switched going to suffer increasing medical problems until they get switched back? Do either of the characters have obligations that cannot be met if their minds – and INT-based skills - reside in someone else's body? What if one of the switched characters is a surgeon?

Third, once you have the players switched you can start to apply modifiers. Make the switched characters make an INT roll to use any powers that are unfamiliar. Apply additional penalties if the powers are especially dissimilar. For all rolls, including attack rolls, apply a -2 across the board. You should also decide what happens when one of the switched characters is knocked unconscious or dies. Do they suddenly switch back? Is the other character permanently stuck in that body? Is there a psychic backlash that the uninjured character suffers?

WHO GETS SWITCHED?

Switching bodies between teammates can be tricky, but fun. The classic option would be to switch the two characters who get along the least. Switching two characters who are best friends presents less of a challenge since they know each other the best and can more easily pass themselves off as the other person. Best friends will also tend to take greater care with each other's lives. Best friends will also not take being in the others' body as an insult or terrible calamity.

Switching a PC with an un-powered NPC will present some unique challenges, especially in the areas of secret identities and the temptation of power. If the NPC is a normal person, how do they handle suddenly being in a super-powered body? They may not want to be switched back and even resist the PCs' attempts to switch him back. The switched PC will also have to get along without any powers until the reverse switch is made. If the switched PC has a secret identity, then they have to worry about exposure. If the PC has a public identity, then they have to worry about what this person will do to their reputation with the public.

With a cross-gender switch, the problems can be quite serious. The romantic interest may have plans with their loved one that will probably have to be put on hold. If the loved one is not in on what is happening, feathers may get ruffled. A within-gender switch may not be problem-free either. What if one of the switched characters has an unrequited crush on the girlfriend of the other switched person? The temptation will be great, and EGO rolls should be made accordingly.

Switching PCs with someone who is the subject of a Rivalry disadvantage carries with it a temptation of another kind. What if you are switched with a teammate's rival? You could significantly harm the rival's position, and said rival would have no legal recourse. You should also worry about what the rival is doing with your body.

Switching a PC with a villain could be dangerous. Worrying about what the villain is doing with your body takes on a whole new dimension. Of course having the villain's body in your control puts him at risk as well. This presents another ethical dilemma.

APPROPRIATE CAMPAIGN SETTINGS

Though this kind of plot-device would be appropriate to almost any four-color style campaign, it is probably more appropriate to Golden or Silver Age campaigns. Body-switching would probably seem out of place in a "gritty" or realistic campaign.

The GM's Toolbox by Wayne Walls

Building the Toolbox

So, it looks like you have been picked to run a *HERO System* game. I am sure that, as a good GM, you have read your rules, helped your players make their PCs, and made sure you have plenty of villains to fight. But during the game, several items came up missing and had to be searched for. One player forgot a pencil to write with, another forgot her dice. Then just when you had everyone settled in the fan that was supposed to be keeping your game area cool blew your map off the table. What's a poor GM to do?

Well, don't worry. This GM is here to help kindred GM spirits sort out just what is needed to run a problem free game. The secret to a problem free game is the GM's toolbox. This assortment of items, tailored to your gaming style, can help your game run much smoother. Most of the items are simple and inexpensive. A few are obvious enough, while others come to mind from a long history as a player and a GM. What that history has taught this GM has been collected here for your use.

THE BOX ITSELF

First thing is the physical toolbox. This can range from a briefcase to a backpack and run to many styles and types. For simplicity, let's class the toolbox as a soft case or hard box. Soft cases like canvas gym bags, backpacks, and totes are best for the general lightweight work. These are great for a couple of soft bound rulebooks, a supplement or two, your folder of NPCs and a sack of dice. Add in a small box of pencils and a cheap pencil sharpener, markers, and index cards and the GM is pretty well set to game. For small items, get a sorting box. These small plastic boxes are sold at hardware stores and are designed to hold small screws, bolts, and other hardware. These boxes are perfect for dice, miniatures and other small items a GM could use.

The hard boxes like briefcases, toolboxes (the plastic kind), and tackle boxes (which are great for the miniatures) have the nice advantage of being really sturdy. The plastic boxes are quite spill resistant when a random elbow encounters a full glass.

For the real heavy hardbound book campaigns with several supplements, I like a file box. This is a plastic box that is generally found at office supply stores and is designed to be a portable file drawer. A file box is great for sorting NPCs, keeping a file for each of the players' PCs so you don't have to deal with "Oops! I forgot my character he's back at the dorm." And this GM's favorite thing about file boxes is you don't tend to bang up the corners of your hardbound books. These things can take a lot of weight of paper – they were made for lawyers.

For those GMs with hardbound rulebooks – use the hard boxes or cases so your corners don't get banged around. For those with lots of quality miniatures go for the tackle boxes and pad with some foam. For GMs who run varied games pick a canvas or heavy cloth bag – think Mary Poppins' carpet bag, you won't believe how many things a bag like that can hold.

Once the choice of hard-box or soft-pack has been made these are a few of the things to put in it. Just to make sure and pack the obvious tools. Here is the simple list.

SUPPLIES

Pencils, and a cheap sharpener, dice (the cheap loaner variety not the good Chessex classics), drafting tape, and a tape measure or ruler.

Something for GM and players to use to pass notes when needed. 3" x 5" index cards are great for this. In a game where players are rivals, it helps for them to be able to give the GM information that they don't share with the other players. While just bits of paper will do for notes, I like the 3" x 5" cards for the thickness of the paper. I also write down lots of notes and PC with these cards, and the stiffness of the cards makes them easy to file.

And last in the obvious category are the three M's. Markers, maps, and miniatures for your game.

The simple stuff is available at the deep discount stores with names that include the word "dollar." You can follow up these basics with a few slightly more tricky things that can make your GMing life easier.

Buy a simple calculator, not an expensive multi-function engineering model that will calculate attribute costs for you, but a cheap version to speed up you math processing. In a traveling game, the GM can't afford to have an expensive calculator get left behind. Especially at conventions or store demos, you don't want to throw things on the table that you can't afford to lose. This GM is not accusing gamers of theft! Convention environments are too distracting, and things get left behind on tables all the time.

Great tools used in mapping include a flexible tape measure to see if the PCs and your NPCs are in attack range on your map and drafting tape to hold your map to the table and to attach temporary features to your map. If you aren't familiar with drafting tape, this is a tape

that will hold paper to a surface but will peel back off without tearing the paper. The name comes from the design source, the draftsmen who used this tape to hold velum paper to a drafting board. It has the edge on glue sticks for attaching features to your map because it is not a permanent adhesive.

What this GM likes most about draftsmen's tape is it doesn't leave sticky on the table. Left over gaming adhesive has never actually caused a divorce in my circle of friends, but it came close once. Grandma's cherry table... Let's just not go there.

Your GM tools are coming along nicely by now... But I did mention something about spill-proof earlier and I'd like to stress that the purchase of a pack of page protector sheets at you local office supply store can save you tremendous amounts of trouble. The page protector comes designed to hold two sheets of paper and is hole punched to fit easily in a C or D sized ring binder. These can protect a player's PCs from the dreaded soda syndrome and they are helpful in keeping your NPCs organized as well.

PAPERS AND MAPS

If you opt to use the page protector sheets you can use china markers or overhead projector markers to keep temporary notes on the plastic instead of directly on the character sheet – this is especially useful with agents or other NPCs that you may reuse several times. You can mark off the hit points until the NPC is down and then wipe the plastic clean, and voila – he's ready for action again.

This technique works just as well for your major repeating Villains, as soon as Dr. Death is back on his feet your character sheet is ready to go. A GM has to have a few good repeater Villains to give PCs a feeling of challenge.

A standard deck of playing cards can be a great addition to the GM's toolkit. This is really useful for initiative tiebreakers when too many characters move on the same phase. And yes, A GM could just roll dice for this but cutting a deck of cards for high/low is a nice way to break up the repetition. A deck of cards can always be used for a prop if your characters are involved in an adventure that has a casino or a poker game.

A simple bound logbook like the ones used in high school chemistry classes are great for keeping track of the adventure and the PCs' history with your NPCs. Aaron Allston introduced the concept of "blue booking" for keeping track of "out of game" role-playing and these books are great for that. If you have a player who wants to dominate the session by going off on his own to do "X," blue book him/her later, don't let the antisocial loner player ruin everyone else's fun.

Back to maps and markers. The baggie of terrain bits is a tool that pairs well with the draftsman's tape. A terrain bag is a sturdy zip lock bag of trees and shrubbery and a variety of walls, doors, computer consoles, etc. that can be set in place on your map once the player enters the room. This helps to keep the map action interesting. If a GM's map is pre-drawn then important features, or whole sections, have to be covered up to keep the players from second-guessing the adventure by reading the map. With the set in place terrain, they don't get information until the GM is ready for them to get it.

As a gamer who also plays Magic, those little glass life markers are great to use as markers for generic agent, monster, civilians, etc. on the map.

Closeout toy stores have great modernistic soldiers and other cool looking bits you can use as transportable cheap miniatures. Look at terrain and minis as a "form not function" issue. Does the little plastic widget look like it could pass for a nuclear-powered accelerated laser from Dr. Death's lab? Does it matter what it really is? Look at the big, plastic wrestling goon action figure from your nephew's discarded toys. Could it substitute for a giant minion Viper has unleashed on the PCs' hometown? Sure it can! Glue a piece of cardboard to its feet to help it stand up and you have an instant cheap marker.

Having colorful markers for the real Villains is necessary for you as well as the players to keep track of who is who. But there is nothing wrong with these markers being borrowed from the Monster Rancher, Pokemon, DragonBall Z, or any toy lines. Closeout toy stores often have this style of toy on sale very inexpensively. If you used quality painted miniatures in a traveling game, there is a risk damaging them in transport. As the GM, simply choose to either substitute with cheap markers or spring for an expensive tackle box. Even with the tackle box, for frequent transportation, pad ups the good minis with lots of foam.

The difference between a good game and a great game is often removing the distractions so play can flow. The basic GM's toolbox can be helpful in making sure the game doesn't get derailed in a search for some simple item needed for play. The more advanced toolbox can be a real boost to the game by adding better visuals and controlling the information flow to the players.

But don't go overboard by trying to carry items for every roleplaying situation. Just stick to the basic stuff that both you as a GM and your players decided that is needed for the game. The lighter the load that is carried, the more likely the GM toolbox will be used.

Pointless *Champions* by Theron Bretz

> *"Create your character on a base of 200 points, with up to 150 points in Disadvantages"* – virtually every *Champions* campaign sheet ever written.

> *"Silly gamemaster, points are for players"* – The mantra of many experienced *Champions* gamemasters.

From their inception, roleplaying games emphasized character advancement in concrete terms. The character begins his career relatively weak and gains power over successive adventures. The *HERO System*, like virtually every other roleplaying game on the market, follows this "constant improvement" model, starting the Player Characters relatively weak and working them up to world-beater status over the course of the campaign, while the opposition keeps pace to create interesting challenges. While this model certainly fits many fantasy and science fiction genres, it is a far less perfect match for portraying comic book superheroes.

Experienced *Champions* players know the drill: you start small, usually with a character that isn't quite what you had in mind, improve him gradually until he gets there, buy off a couple of Disadvantages you didn't really want in the first place (but needed in order to balance the character), and maybe invest in a Base or a Vehicle or two.

Then what? The character is how you wanted him in the first place. Experience Points become meaningless to someone who has no further need for improvement.

This article presents a different way of looking at character creation and advancement, a method that more closely models the superhero genre as portrayed in the comics. It is not necessarily a system for everyone, as it requires a high degree of mutual trust and cooperation between the players and the Game Master along with a desire to put the story ahead of character balance. The results, however, are well worth the extra effort.

Unlike the typical *Champions* Player Character, the typical comic book hero starts out at a power level dictated by the needs of the story and remains that way, sometimes for decades. When changes occur, they tend to come suddenly (often with the rationalization that the character had these new abilities all along), or due to a significant story-related event. Seldom do we see an inexperienced hero consistently improve over the course of his comic book adventures; indeed most training or improvement takes place "off-camera," if at all. Most of the real development and improvement one sees in the comics is in terms of characterization, reputation, and impact on the setting, rather than increasing power. While a sudden jump in power could, in theory, be modeled by hoarding Experience Points over a long period of time and spending them all at once, i.e., a "Radiation Accident," such occurrences are extremely rare.

When the subject turns to superhero team books (a style most *Champions* campaigns follow), the model breaks down even further. The typical team book has a vast power range: everyone from a wise-cracking, but extremely mortal, archer to a god of ancient times stands side-by-side in the pages of superhero comics. Modeling this power disparity is impossible if everyone starts out with the same number of points. Given how well the *HERO System* mirrors so many other aspects of the genre, these minor lapses are easily forgiven, but there is a solution.

Get Rid of Character Point Limits

Character points are a holdover from the hobby's wargaming roots. They carry with them a presumption of a competitive or adversarial relationship among the players and Gamemaster; the only way to make things "fair" is to give everyone equal resources. The balance created is, at best, imperfect and at worst, illusory. Twenty extra points worth of Knowledge Skills is no match for twenty extra points of Energy Blast in most *Champions* campaigns.

When creating characters with limited points, each Characteristic and Power ends up optimized for maximum output at minimum cost. Extraneous Disadvantages tend to crop up at the same time, as players struggle to find another five points to balance things out. As a result, the character concept gets skewed in order to meet an arbitrary limit.

This also means a player often begins a campaign with a character significantly less capable than what he had in mind. For Genre Fiends, Pros From Dover, and Combat Monsters, this can be a terribly frustrating experience – what's the point of being the best there is at what you do, if you can't actually *be* the best at what you do?

In doing away with Character Point limits, our group focused on creating the ideal versions of our characters, not preliminary sketches that could work up to it over the course of several dozen adventures. By doing so, we created a group that looked and acted a good deal more

like a comic book superhero team than we'd experienced in the past. Also, as a group that can only play infrequently (a common problem for aging gamers) avoiding that long climb up the power scale made things all the more enjoyable.

On the surface, this style of play may seem like a power gamer's dream – carte blanche to create as mighty a character as possible. If the players and the Game Master are in an adversarial or competitive situation, such problem characters are a distinct possibility. After all, no matter how powerful a player makes his character, the Game Master can always slap together something nastier and throw it right back at him, starting an arms race of sorts. While fighting a seemingly unbeatable foe makes for a fun diversion once in a while, it doesn't make for a sustainable campaign.

The key to avoiding this is to make the campaign a cooperative effort between the Game Master and the players; this means communication and trust are absolute necessities in implementing a game of this nature. The Game Master must be capable of articulating his desires for the campaign and what sorts of characters are and are not appropriate for it. On the surface, this isn't so different from the pre-game phase of any campaign. However, in a point-less game, there is a greater possibility for game-breaking characters, so any concepts must be considered carefully and worked out with the players in advance.

Likewise, the players, having the opportunity to create a character completely to their specs, must be willing to communicate key information to the and be prepared to make some alterations for the good of the campaign. After all, even the best comics writers and artists have editors overseeing the process.

For a more concrete example, let's look at the four original PCs from the home-grown "Vanguard Comics Universe" campaign that started this. The campaign was designed to portray the Silver Age of comics, and our characters were to be among the premiere heroes of the day.

Victory is an avatar of Nike, the Roman Goddess of Victory. She's a flying brick with several powers relating to assuring victory. The harder you hit her, the tougher she gets – 790 points.

Titan is a high-powered gadgeteer, super-scientist, and captain of industry – 745 points

Impact is a scientist with vast telekinetic abilities – 600 points

Troubadour is a non-powered martial artist, poet, and lover of life – 403 points

In each case, the player presented the concept to the gamemaster, then built the character using the rule book, the only difference being no maximum number of starting points,

and no minimum number of Disadvantages required.

Once the initial character building was complete, the Game Master went over each sheet carefully and any issues were worked out. For instance, Troubadour was initially purchased with Armor Piercing on his Strength to reflect a consistent amount of weakness detection. This was done to avoid the uncertainty of Find Weakness rolls and the lost time they cause. The Game Master didn't like this fix and asked for Find Weakness instead. As that particular item wasn't a crucial change to the character, the player accepted it and made the changes. Victory's player didn't like the way the Absorption rules worked and came up with an alternate method he liked better; the Game Master agreed and let it into play.

Although each of the characters is quite powerful, there's still a wide gap between Victory and Troubadour. As such, one could easily think the other characters superfluous. Handled improperly, they would be. The means to avoiding this lies in *Schtick Preservation* and *Spotlight Management*.

Schtick Preservation is an old idea, but it bears repeating. In essence, it says that each Player Character should have something unique that is his, and his alone, that no other character can have, and that one thing should be valuable to the group effort. To use our previous heroes as an example, while each is certainly powerful, all tend to be a bit one-sided in their concept. Victory is incredibly powerful in a fight, but she's as stealthy as a Tiger tank. Atlas is brilliant and has almost unlimited resources, but he has difficulty dealing with anything non-scientific. Troubadour is easily the world's best martial artist, but he lacks anything in the way of resistant defenses. Impact is a powerful telekinetic, but socially inept. Each trade-off was intentional. Certainly, given unlimited points one could build an infinitely powerful character, but where's the fun in playing Perfectman?

Spotlight Management is making sure each character has his moment as the center of attention to "shine." In some adventures, one character may get more spotlight time than the others. This is inevitable, but the Game Master must make certain not to let it turn into a pattern. Likewise, the Game Master must maintain control to prevent a player from hogging the spotlight. Managing spotlight time is an excellent way to draw out less assertive players. Our Game Master often uses comic book terminology to describe a particular scene, and will prompt a player with "Go ahead, it's your word balloon," if they seem unsure about speaking up.

For the gamemaster, creating villains to match the heroes shouldn't be too much trouble.

After all, "points are for players." Given the likelihood of extremely powerful Player Characters, it only makes sense that the villains they face should be of equal or greater power. Or should they?

The important thing to remember when creating *Champions* villains is that the heroes should defeat them, or thwart their actions at the very least. It shouldn't be easy, and some roadblocks and setbacks are certainly in order, but the heroes should come out on top in the end. It's the nature of the genre – good triumphs and evil is punished.

Because of this, less powerful villains have their place in this sort of campaign. In the comics, many popular heroes have enemies who are significantly less powerful than the star of the book. One need only look at the rogues' gallery of the World's Fastest Man or the inmates of a certain unsavory asylum to see this pattern. Many of the most memorable villains in comics are essentially "one-shot wonders," characters whose entire concept revolves around a single gimmick, power, or piece of equipment, whose paper-thin defenses and glass jaw are no match for the heroes, but are still considered credible threats.

The trick to using such a character is twofold. First, whatever threat they do pose should be played up as much as possible. Innocent civilians are a blessing for this. Sure Major Storm can't freeze our lightning quick hero, but he can wreak havoc on Mrs. Vandergelder's charity ball. Threaten the innocent, hit by surprise, and play to their strengths. Most of all, play their personality. If the villain takes himself seriously, chances are other people will as well.

Second, these villains are best when associated with a particular hero, as a personal menace. For instance, in our campaign, there is a group of villainesses called The Troubadour Revenge Squad, consisting entirely of women spurned in the past by our hero, who turned to crime (and gained superpowers along the way) to get back at him. None of them are particularly powerful by themselves, but they have no problem hurting innocent people to make Troubadour look bad. By making these minor menaces Troubadour's "problem," he's guaranteed spotlight time whenever they show up, along with good roleplaying opportunities for everyone else as they once-again berate him for his taste in women.

CHARACTER ADVANCEMENT, EXPERIENCE, AND REWARDS

In a traditional campaign, Experience Points provide a tangible reward for players. Each point is of a set value, able to directly affect the future of the character. The point-less campaign, being less concerned with the mechanical improvement of a character requires the Game Master to focus on the *intangibles*, those non-mechanical aspects of the campaign, where the characters seem to live and breathe.

In our campaign's two-year history, the Game Master has yet to award Experience Points. The players have yet to ask for any. To be honest, this wasn't intentional, it just grew out of the process and took both the players and the Game Master a while to notice. Because we'd designed our characters the way we wanted them from the start, improving their abilities never became a priority.

Which is not to say they remained static; far from it. Instead of looking for opportunities to improve the characters' statistics, we focused on developing the personalities of our heroes and their interactions and relationships. Since the campaign's first session, we've gained in abilities, acquired a headquarters (complete with a demi-goddess housekeeper), engaged in PC/NPC romances, gained allies and enemies, won the hearts and minds of the people of Fair City, and confiscated a flying galleon from a villain who didn't need it anymore.

Of course, all of the above could certainly be accomplished in a more traditional campaign, but often the chase for Experience Points gets in the way of such things. In a traditional campaign, where anything and everything seems to be measured by its point value, players often become wary of the "intangible" Disadvantages, those things that a character brings upon himself through his actions, for which he gets no points in return. Likewise, many gamemasters of traditional campaigns aren't used to letting people keep a flying pirate ship around unless they pay out the Experience Points for it. In our case, such events seemed reasonable and in keeping with the style of the comics, so the Game Master allowed them. If he later decides the galleon was a bad idea, it can always end up lost or destroyed at no cost to the PCs.

In giving out intangible awards, it's as important for the Game Master to know the player's needs as well as the character's goals. A Builder will want to see the campaign setting change for the better due to the efforts of his character; a Romantic will want opportunities for relationship building; just like any other campaign, but this case, the reward is in the roleplaying and the spotlight time given to the situation. All of these should be considered in a traditional campaign as well, but in a point-less campaign, they become all the more important to maintaining player interest and a sense of accomplishment.

Tangible rewards can come in the form of Perks, bases, vehicles, and the ever-popular trophy room. Don't make the heroes pay for these if they seem like a logical extension of the

story and help the campaign; such things are completely in keeping with the genre.

Occasionally, a player may decide his character needs a new skill or ability. Without Experience Points to make a purchase, it's up to the player to make a case for such an improvement. If the Game Master agrees, this too can be used as a tangible award.

Yet another type of award players can receive is the *Meta-Game* award. This is something which allows the player to affect the game directly from outside of the rules. These can be written down on index cards and given to the players to redeem when used. Here are some possible awards, in relative order of value:

- **Free Re-Roll:** Re-roll any single die roll.
- **Do-Over:** Re-try any non-dice related activity (a piece of conversation, etc.)
- **Automatic Success:** You automatically succeed on one unopposed roll. Cannot be used for an attack.
- **Change a Number:** You can change the number on a single die from your last roll to another number of your choice (must be from 1-6).
- **What The?!!!:** Something unexpectedly lucky occurs. This is the equivalent of getting three sixes on a Luck Roll.
- **Just Grazed Me:** Add half again your Defenses to a single attack.
- **It's Not As Bad As It Looks:** Ignore all BODY damage from a single attack (includes Killing Attacks).
- **Second Wind:** Take double your Recovery when used. If you are Stunned, recover from it immediately without spending a Phase.
- **If We Combine Our Powers:** Allows two or more characters to combine their powers to create an unorthodox, but logical effect. The players must provide an explanation of the effect. Can also be used to make an automatic Coordinated Attack.
- **Sudden Opening:** Opponent will have halved Defenses versus a single attack. This may not be combined with Find Weakness.
- **Max Out:** Your next die roll is considered to be all sixes. Please do not use on civilian targets.
- **Nyah Nyah – You Missed Me:** Opponent's attack misses, regardless of roll. Must be played after attack succeeds, but before damage is rolled.
- **Bad Footing:** Opponent's OCV and DCV reduced by half for phase played.
- **Ashes, Ashes, All Fall Down:** All agent-level NPCs will fall unconscious upon being hit, without a damage roll, for the rest of this fight.
- **I'm OK, Really:** Heal back up to five BODY unassisted.

- **Edit Scenery:** Make a minor change to the current environment, such as putting a door where one wasn't before, a dumpster full of old mattresses under a falling person, or suddenly finding an item that can be used as an improvised weapon.
- **Edit Circumstances:** Make a change that affects an entire scene, without derailing the plot. The player must come up with an in-character rationale for how it occurs. The Game Master can veto the use of this card, and return it to the player.

These are just a few examples, creative gamemasters should have no trouble coming up with more, tailored to their own campaigns.

VARIATIONS

Some gamemasters may wish to try this approach, but feel more comfortable with the idea of traditional Experience Points and balanced characters. If so, I still recommend allowing players to create characters with no point limits and only take the Disadvantages necessary for the character concept. Any remaining points needed to balance the character are the Hero Bonus (or Villain Bonus). Once the campaign begins, half of the characters' Experience Points will go towards buying down the Hero Bonus. This still makes for powerful starting characters, but allows for tangible rewards and player-directed character improvement.

This method can also be used for a campaign combining "old hands" and "rookies." In many genres, the new character comes in relatively inexperienced and improves quickly, while the old hands remain relatively static. By combining standard characters with Hero Bonus characters, the rookies will improve at twice the rate as the old timers.

More adventurous gamemasters may even wish to combine unlimited characters with the more conventional sort in the same campaign. The conventional characters get Experience Points, the others are handled as above.

OTHER GENRES

While this article deals primarily with *Champions*, much can be done with it in other genres as well.

Fantasy: This approach works quite well for the high fantasy genre. By using a combination of starting characters and Hero Bonus characters one could easily simulate Tolkien's Fellowship or the heroic tales of ancient Greece.

Space Opera: While this approach probably won't work for hard science fiction, Space Opera is full of larger-than-life figures who don't play by the rules. The heroes of the most popular space opera of the last few decades

are a perfect example of a mixed group.

Espionage: How much do Fleming's or Clancy's heroes really improve between adventures? Hardly at all. While Normal Character Maximums should still be enforced, extremely capable spies are the order of the day in this genre. Such capable "normals" can also be combined with the horror genre to create monster-hunting Black Ops specialists, or with superheroes to create Super-Agents.

Giant Robots: Unlimited points means they don't have to pay for their robots. By mixing the party, you can set up mentor-student relationships, give the old hands the really cool equipment, and give the youngsters something to shoot for.

Pulp Hero: Keep the Normal Characteristic Maximums in place. A mixed group is a great model for pulp adventurers, where a single hero may have several less powerful associates. Meta-game awards are particularly appropriate for this genre.

Martial Arts: Movie-style martial artists are often just superheroes without the capes and spandex. An easy fit.

IN CONCLUSION

Players and gamemasters are invited to use any of these suggestions they like and ignore those they don't. As mentioned at the beginning, these suggestions aren't for everyone. They require a strong sense of cooperation throughout the gaming group and respect for each other's character and interests. It requires a Game Master who trusts his players not to abuse the privilege of "unlimited" power, and it requires players who trust the Game Master to use their characters in a way that serves all of their stories. Most of all, it requires a willingness to experiment with things like game balance and character advancement in order to better emulate the genre.

Even for our group, this style of play is an ongoing process as we add new players to the mix. For us, it's been a successful experiment, but there's no way to know if it will work at your table without giving it a try.

The Ways of the Wicked by Steven Trustrum

The Ways of the Wicked

It is likely safe to say that if you enjoy a well-crafted superhero campaign you acquired the taste from reading comic books. As such, you are well aware that reveling in the sheer maliciousness of any given issue's villain is as important to the experience as reading about the heroes' exploits: sometimes the guy we are meant to hate is unavoidably the most fun part of the story. However, designing a fun and interesting villain is not as easy as it may sound.

Certainly, a stumped GM can always open a few comic books and take inspiration from a single diabolical personality, or amalgamation thereof, but is that enough? Will this make the villain stand out and deliver an evening of fun gaming? While experienced GMs may already have a few tricks to resolving the problem of designing and playing memorable opponents for their players to face (though it can never hurt to learn a few more), neophyte GMs may be looking for some help getting started. Hopefully, herein you'll find the advice and tricks you're looking for.

IT AIN'T EASY BEING EVIL

The first trick to creating a great villain is to present a character that is not merely a punching bag for the heroes to toss around at their whim. GMs should portray the villain as something far more than the sum total of his statistics; personality, disposition, motivation, history, relationships, and so much more are all factors to be reflected upon. For instance, how will the villain react to the player characters' egos, ethics, and goals? How will he prepare for the heroes' specific powers and tactics? Will the villain learn from his defeats and be tougher to beat the next time around or is he the type that is too dumb or stubborn to know what is best for him?

How a GM decides to portray a supervillain will forever define that character in the players' minds, obliging the GM to ensure that his bad guys are as interesting as possible from the word go. An opponent's initial impression is the most telling and remains with the players the longest, so the GM had better make it a good one.

One of the easiest (and safest) ways to depict one's villains is for the GM to employ time-tested archetypes, be it the mindless brick, cackling madman, loudmouth braggart, or calculating thinker. However, if the villain is meant to be a recurring part of the campaign, the players may quickly grow bored with the same old stereotypes and begin begging for something better and more engaging. Therefore, in the long run, it is usually best to exploit clichés solely for a bad guy's foundation and then mix things up

from there by throwing a few (or, better yet, many) curves at the players' expectations.

Some good tips are to give one's villains personality quirks that go against the rest of their image and therefore will be surprising and fun, once revealed. Maybe Colonel Cruel, would-be dictator and general hardcase, is afraid of the water, or perhaps Doctor Dark, mass murderer and tyrannical commander of a legion of evil super soldiers, is secretly in love with a powerful (and beautiful) superheroine. There is no such thing as being too creative (or too sinister, for that matter) when it comes to designing one's villains. In fact, the more imaginative and off-the-wall the bad guy is, the more fun the players are likely to have. Go nuts.

Achieving that comic book feel also requires the GM to play up to his creation. What good is saying that the cad cackles insanely as he wantonly destroys city blocks if the GM doesn't try his best to imitate that chilling laugh? Just as comic books rely upon good storytelling and masterful artwork to make the reader say "wow, now *that's* a cool villain," so too must the GM employ all of his bag of tricks to ensure that his players love to hate the bad guys that they square off with each session. Foxbat, if played with gusto and all of the GM's maniacal heart, is a shining example of just how much fun a villain can be, even if he gives the players a sound thrashing.

But what if you are still having problems coming up with some cool and refreshing ideas of your own? No need to worry, we're here to help.

WHAT MAKES A BAD GUY GREAT?

One of the more prominent problems with many supervillains is that they can come across as a carbon copy of a well-known bad guy; even if the character's name has changed, the players realize who has inspired their opponent. Not that this is necessarily a bad thing – most players enjoy squaring off against a somewhat familiar face from time to time. On the other hand, such similarities can make it difficult for GMs to surprise the heroes. Having read about the villain's iconic inspiration, the player characters are likely to use familiar tricks taken from the related comic books rather than devising fresh tactics of their own. Considering that the purpose of role-playing is to have fun while creating and participating in an ongoing story, a campaign that turns out to merely be rehashing an existing comic book plot will likely loose its appeal to players and GM alike rather quickly.

artwork by Derrick Thomas

The trick then, when using iconic bad guys, is to add new twists that will throw a monkey wrench into this dangerous trap of predictability. For example, if the comparable comic book villain has innate superpowers, the GM may keep his villain's abilities relatively the same but make them technology- or magic-based instead. Exchanging one superpower for another may also serve to trip up the heroes at the worst possible moment by entering a wholly unexpected factor into the mix.

Moreover, the bad guys, like the protagonists, must constantly evolve in order to keep the game moving and challenging. Just because our intrepid heroes haven't seen their archnemesis in a while doesn't mean that he is sitting on his laurels, waiting upon the player characters' convenience. No, he is likely engaging other superheroes elsewhere and working on his insidious plans. This means that the villain will be earning experience, learning new tricks and probably growing more powerful. The villain may also be exposed to circumstances that cause his powers to change. For example, he could have been accidentally bathed in radiation during a fight or have found an alien artifact, meaning he could be radically different from what the player characters remember when next they cross swords.

Think of the comic books that you've read and try to recall the instances when a villain shows up after being absent for twenty-or-so issues. He usually has a new costume, has made new allegiances, and has likely learned something that is useful against the player characters. By constantly having the bad guy evolve in the same manner as do the heroes, even if it is done only as a background story, the villain will always seem fresh and will keep the players on their toes.

A good example of how this may be done would be to have the heroes, while reading the newspaper, learn that one of their more common foes has scrapped it out with the Champions at a lab complex in a nearby city. Although the Champions technically won the day, the masterful criminal and his henchmen escaped with a powerful and experimental weapon. This event will later involve the player characters when they discover (the hard way) that the villain had specifically stolen the weapon to use against them! By utilizing such twisting and turning plots that exist beyond the campaign's immediate events, a crafty GM will not only be able to better shape his game world, but will also add another dimension to the way his players see the campaign's villains.

Frequently shifting and unraveling plots are just as important to a well-designed foe as are the villain's abilities, background, and portrayal by the GM. Remember, a single comic book series rarely exists as a self-contained story; comic book plots often overlap in a state of symbiotic development that works toward evolving a shared universe. By echoing this effect in their own campaigns, GMs can convey the feeling that there is a grander scheme for the heroes to consider, an entire world of activity that moves along without the player characters but may just as easily be shaped in radical ways by their actions.

Yet another exploitable trend of comic books is to have bad guys rise in the ranks of the criminal underworld from the role with which the heroes are familiar. In issue #100 of "Mr. Wacky," the evil Doctor Dark was just another two-bit crook with a few superpowers, his hopes set on robbing banks for quick cash and not much else. Mister Wacky shows up, hauls Doctor Dark off to prison, and we, the readers, think nothing more of him until he shows up again in issue #160. This time Doctor Dark has assembled and leads a group of dangerous criminals known as the League of Really Terrible Guys. Having grown by leaps and bounds beyond the petty villain that he was in issue #100, the Doctor Dark of issue #160, along with his new companions, come close to killing Mr. Wacky and taking over the world. Doctor Dark has not necessarily changed very much – he's acquired a new costume, learned a little more about his superpowers, and maybe gained a dozen or so experience points – but it is the addition of his allies and the radical change in his purpose that has allowed Doctor Dark to grow from a cannon fodder punching bag into a criminal mastermind to be feared.

Even more interesting is one of the more radical changes that can overcome a villain, especially one who is a reoccurring foe, is to switch allegiances to the cause of justice. But what can bring a villain to completely reverse his evil ways and follow the path of good? Let's look once more to comic books for the answer.

Comic book villains are often redeemed by the well-spoken words of an innocent or by witnessing an atrocity that was beyond even his capacity for evil. Another common theme is to have someone steal the criminal's heart, making him realize that their love can never be if the villain is always running from the law. And let us not forget the question of what would happen if the catalyst for the villain's moral enlightenment were to be removed.

Also realize that just as bad guys can switch teams, so too may the defenders of righteousness. A hero-turned-villain will likely know dangerous secrets about other heroes and law enforcement agencies, especially if he once belonged to a superhero team. Does the traitor know the secret identities of his old companions? Can he turn the heroes' love for their families

against them? Does the villain know all the heroes' vulnerabilities? Even if the traitor was not previously a part of a team, he probably still knows a great deal about the strategies and tactics of other heroes and could now turn them to his advantage.

There is also the problem of the damage caused to the reputation of the superhero community as a whole when a good guy does a moral about-face. Many "normals" already look upon superbeings, even the so-called good guys, with fear and mistrust because of the great responsibility and power that such people wield, and so a public relations nightmare shall likely arise if one of their own switches teams. The backlash of public opinion caused by a renegade hero is especially damaging for any superbeings that were visibly associated with the rogue.

Though not to be overused, the idea of the traitor hero always makes for a memorable villain and is a great way to shake up a campaign.

GMs will quickly realize that their best villains are those that they put the most thought and undiluted imagination into. If all the GM does is reach for his stack of pregenerated bad guys and almost randomly select an opponent based solely on powers and characteristics, totally disregarding personality and background, not only is the GM doing his story a disservice, but he is also cheating his players of a great deal of fun. So, look to these tips, and your own, and always keep the goal of having fun in mind and you can't go wrong.

THE ARCHNEMESIS

An archnemesis, a villain who will be one of the heroes' greatest, longest running threats throughout the campaign, requires a good deal more thought and preparation than is needed for a common thug or other minor threat. It is not so important that an archnemesis be a powerhouse of devastation as it is vital for him to bring a sense of consistency to the plot by providing a familiar face that keeps coming back for more, no matter how many times the player characters soundly thump him. Unlike those criminals who the player characters just happen to stumble across during a random or "one-shot" encounter, the archnemesis is purposefully presented and designed to work toward greater and grander things in order play an important part in the campaign, specifically with regards to the PCs.

If a GM allows an encounter between the protagonists and their archnemesis to seem random or lacking of purpose, he risks undermining that NPC's credibility with the players and thus his future value to the game. An archnemesis is not the type of bad guy who sits in a van outside of a bank, waiting for the right moment to walk in, rob the place, and then speed away. Oh no, these are the fiends who have their sights set on loftier things and contrive complex, long-term plans in order to attain them. For the archnemesis, petty crime is almost certainly a waste of time and resources better directed toward more important things, such as figuring out a way to make as much money as possible with a single plan, how best to kill or frame the player characters, or better yet, think of a way to combine the two. An archnemesis is meant to be a "bad guy's bad guy" and should be presented as such for optimum effect and enjoyment.

"But," you may ask, "how do I know if a villain is truly of archnemesis caliber?"

First, see how much fun the players have in their initial encounter with the villain; if they have a great time trying to unravel their opponent's stratagems and feel challenged by the threat that he poses, maybe the NPC has what it takes to be an archnemesis. Secondly, the powers and skills of an archnemesis should also pose a challenge and act as a counter-balance for the talents and abilities of the heroes, thereby ensuring that the bad guy will not easily be defeated and will actually survive long enough to become a reoccurring plot element. After all, what good is an archnemesis if he never even comes close to defeating our heroes?

Knowing and understanding a bad guy's motivation is likewise essential to defining the NPC's role within the campaign. Sure, it may be fun now and again to use a bad guy solely for the players to earn some quick experience or experiment with their powers, but this is not the way for a GM to build a villain into the role of the archnemesis. To develop the latter, the GM must first make the antagonist as three-dimensional as possible.

- What are the villain's goals, both short- and long-term?
- Why did the villain turn to evil and what continues to drive him onward?
- Is the villain violence personified, or restrained and collected?
- Is the villain a master of secrets or does he not care a whit who sees him carry out his evil schemes?
- What are the villains favorite methods and tactics, and why?
- Who, in the villain's life, is important to him and why?
- What (if anything) are the villain's weaknesses?
- Does the villain have any secrets and, if so, who else knows them?
- Who are the villain's allies and why have they chosen to help him?
- Who are the villain's enemies and does that necessarily make the latter the heroes' friends?

And while an archnemesis need not always be an aspiring tyrant, warmonger, or blackmailer of nations, it is always good to make the player characters feel that they are a part of something epic and sweepingly positive, perhaps even world-altering. Certainly, the head of a local crime syndicate or supervillain team can usually serve nicely in the role of archnemesis, but there comes a time when the players want to step out from their little corner of the world and into the global spotlight.

An archnemesis who facilitates this desire will make the player characters think and act in new ways, as they are forced to deal with an opponent who is drastically different from their typical foes. These villains will have contingency plans on top of contingency plans – they'll have thought about every possible angle (except that one which allows the player characters to defeat them), and will have the resources to back up their machinations. However, just as the scope of an adventure involving such an antagonist is meant to have an epic feel, so too must the story's climax.

To reduce the inevitable final battle with such a worthy archnemesis to a simple brawl is incredibly anti-climactic, thus requiring something with a bit more zest to convey that "showdown at high-noon" feel. Here are some new and familiar suggestions on how to establish such an ending:

- Forcing the heroes to choose between saving an innocent (perhaps even a loved one) and defeating the villain. This is a good opportunity to use those DNPCs that are always being attached to character sheets.
- Once defeated, the villain turns out to be a decoy (*e.g.*, a robot, minion, brainwashed missing hero, hologram, and so on).
- The hero learns something about the villain that may prevent a clear-cut resolution (*e.g.*, he is a version of the hero from the future or an alternate reality, he is related to the hero, he is a child trapped in adult form, and so on).
- A much worse problem arises, such as alien invaders touching down, possibly forcing the heroes to temporarily ally themselves with the villain until the matter is resolved.
- The heroes find a clue that this "final confrontation" was supposed to turn out as it did, with them winning, in order to better serve a higher plan that they are not aware of.
- The heroes find themselves in a deathtrap rather than facing the villain directly.

But are such plot devices too clichéd or predictable to be at all interesting and fun?

Unlike comic books, a role-playing game's plot is not preset and is constantly shifting, depending upon what actions and decisions the player characters make. If used properly, placing a hero in a maze of insidious deathtraps can prove to be a fun and memorable challenge that will open the players' eyes to just how evil their opponent can be. And maybe the villain doesn't even really expect the hero to be killed by the deathtraps, only delayed long enough for him to complete his plans or make good his escape. Imagine the sour taste this would leave were the heroes to believe they had conquered the deadly challenge only to learn that their archnemesis had used the delay to convey his nuclear arsenal to safety.

And this leads us to what is perhaps the greatest defining characteristic of the archnemesis, the main point that separates them from the fodder: the archnemesis always seems to be one step ahead of the heroes. No matter how many times the insidious mastervillain is defeated, no matter how soundly, he always returns, even if he is absent for a long period. Oftentimes, even death is just another obstacle that must be surmounted in order for the archnemesis to make his dramatic comeback. It is this "never say die" attitude (and lifestyle), perhaps more than anything else, that will make the players loath and dread the next appearance of their archnemesis, even though they know that they'll revel in the fun of trying to stop him.

SUPERVILLAIN SURVIVAL

It is all well and good to discuss the creation of a memorable archnemesis and the methods for transforming a pawn into a leader of men, but what good does that do if the heroes kill him (purposely or accidentally) in their first encounter? A lot of the GM's time and effort will have been wasted, and he'll likely become incredibly frustrated with the players, especially if this is a reoccurring event in the campaign. So then, along with figuring out how to make a villain seem original and cool, it would also seem necessary to think up good techniques for keeping the NPC alive!

The most obvious solution to the problem of villain survival is to give him an overwhelming amount of power – load him down with protection, contingency abilities, and an energy blast that would reduce a skyscraper to a puddle with a single shot – and his chances of surviving skyrocket. The problem with this approach is that the players will instead be the ones who shall become overwrought with frustration at having to always face such juggernauts, and the campaign may quickly find itself on its last legs for lack of any fun.

Don't take this to mean that an NPC (or the player characters, for that matter) should not have cool powers that make them tough as nails and twice as ugly, but if being so powerful is done purely for the sake of kicking some butt with no regard for plot and character development, then the campaign is on a downward spiral into power gaming purgatory. It is far better to make the villain powerful and durable enough to survive while also providing him with the means to escape a group of determined and violent superheroes when necessary.

For instance, comic books are rife with bad guys who fall from great heights into rivers, are engulfed by an explosion, or are similarly thought dead, only to return later. This is because their powers allow them to elude certain death or because something outside the norm happened to save their bacon. Things such falling into a garbage scow that miraculously happened to be passing by at the right time in the right place, or being rescued by a well-meaning healer, are the bread and butter of any good comic book, no matter how unlikely such events may seem.

The danger in overusing such improbable contingencies is that the players will come to anticipate the inevitable return of everyone that they think dead or imprisoned. Not only do such expectations dull the surprise of a villain's miraculous reappearance, but it may also drive some players to take more drastic, non-heroic and final steps to ultimately deal with their opponents. Dropping a car directly on an unconscious villain's head may seem like a sure way to keep that bad guy out of the picture for good, but such actions certainly aren't heroic nor do they suit most comic books, especially those that follow the traditional "four-color" genre.

Another common method for keeping one's villains alive is the use of hostages. If an archnemesis were to learn something about the hero's private life, such as where his girlfriend or parents live, then the villain gains leverage over his foe that may allow for his escape, if not outright victory. This leverage is typically held in reserve until the bad guy really needs it, such as when his capture seems imminent, forcing the hero to let the bad guy go lest his friends or family suffer. This tactic not only solves the immediate problem of how to get the bad guy out of his current predicament, but it also opens many new avenues for the plot to develop further.

What will the hero do now that the villain knows his secret identity? Will the criminal reveal the truth to the world or use it for blackmail? And now that the cad knows who the hero really is and has used his family or friends against him, what can the hero do to stop the villain from doing so again in the future? Are the hero's secrets and family more important than his code of honor and the life of the villain? Of course, many of these points become moot if the hero has no problem with killing, but even so, such a violent vigilante is still faced with the problem of finding and killing the bad guy before the bad guy finds and kills the people he cares about.

However, this wonderful plot element often takes on a life of its own and thus should be used sparingly lest it lose its edge, a condition that would only serve to remove the villain's advantage from taking hostages in the first place – "Ho hum, Major Mayhem has kidnapped my mom again; Oh well, at least I've still got dad."

As always, the key in keeping a villain around is fun: is the bad guy still even worth keeping in the campaign or has his value run its course? If the villain is no longer bringing as much to the game as is justified by the amount of energy needed to keep him around, it may be time to let him go, by one means or another. GMs should bear no regrets when retiring a beloved NPC, as there are plenty of other villains just waiting to be conjured up and sacrificed upon the alter of your enjoyment.

AN EXAMPLE VILLAIN

To illustrate how easy it is to spin an iconic villain into something refreshing enough to surprise one's players, have a look at the following character.

Background/History: Marcus Kacklin led two lives: during the day he was a brilliant scientist endeavoring to breach the barriers between dimensions as a means of instant travel, while in his evenings he was a not-so brilliant comedian trying to spread a bit of laughter from one bar to the next. Though his bad luck plagued him with hostile crowds, a series of on-stage accidents and other mishaps, he kept trying to live his dream to be a famous funnyman despite never having earned a laugh that wasn't at his own expense.

Then came the day that changed Marcus' life. As usual, he was in his lab trying to penetrate the veil between worlds when several of his technicians, tired of their boss' constant lame pranks, in turn decided to play a practical joke on him. True to his typical bad luck, the prank had the unexpected result of allowing Marcus to succeed at his experiments, though, unfortunately, while his head was in the dimensional projector.

That brief glimpse into another realm of existence snapped poor Marcus' sanity and also brought about the genetic changes that resulted in his current appearance. Nobody except Marcus knows what he saw in the projector, but whatever it was twisted him into the murdering slice of comedic evil that is the Jester, whose

The Jester

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
10	STR	0	11-	Lift 100 kg; 2d6 HTH
20	DEX	30	13-	OCV: 7/DCV: 7
12	CON	4	11-	
12	BODY	4	11-	
25	INT	15	14-	PER Roll: 14-
20	EGO	20	13-	ECV: 7
20	PRE	10	13-	PRE Attack: 4d6
8	COM	-1	11-	
7	PD	5		Total: 7 PD
7	ED	5		Total: 7 ED
5	SPD	20		Phases: 3, 5, 8, 10, 12
4	REC	0		
24	END	0		
23	STUN	0		

Total Characteristics Cost: 112

Movement: Running: 18"/36"
Swimming: 2"/4"

Cost	Powers	END
20	*Mad Luck*: 4d6	0
19	*Mad Dash*: +12" Running (18" total), Only When Fleeing Heroes or the Law (-¼)	2
100	*Deadly Tricks*: Variable Power Pool (Gadget Pool) 80 base + 40 control cost; Can Only Be Changed At Hideout (-½); OIF (Gag- or Toy-Like Gadget; -½), VPP Skill: Gag Gadgeteering 14-	0

Perks
50	Followers: 10 25-point thugs	

Talents
12	Combat Luck (6 rPD/rED)	

Skills
11	Acrobatics 16-	
3	Analyze 14-	
5	Breakfall 13-	
3	Concealment 14-	
5	Contortionist 14-	
5	Demolitions 15-	
7	Disguise 16-	
3	Electronics 14-	
7	Inventor 16-	
3	Lockpicking 13-	
9	Persuasion 16-	
5	PS: Scientist 15-	
5	SS: Astrophysics 16-	
7	Sleight of Hand 15-	
9	Stealth 16-	
11	Streetwise 17-	

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 299
Total Cost: 411

200+ Disadvantages
10	Distinctive Features: Evil Cackle (Easily Concealed, Always Noticed)	
20	Distinctive Features: Obsidian Skin and Green Body Hair (Concealable, Extreme Reaction)	
15	Enraged: by the Use of "Super Science" (Uncommon), go 11-, recover 11-	
20	Hunted: All Law Enforcement Agencies 8- (Mo Pow, NCI)	
10	Hunted: Harbinger of Justice 8- (Mo Pow, Limited Geographical Area)	
20	Psychological Limitation: Fears Super Science Being Used by Others (Very Common, Strong)	
20	Psychological Limitation: Turns Everything into a Joke (Very Common, Strong)	
20	Reputation: Casual Killer (Almost Always, Extreme)	
15	Social Limitation: Known Mass Murderer (Frequently, Major)	
61	Experience Points	

Total Disadvantage Points: 411

first act as the dominant personality in Marcus' mind was to kill the technicians and blow up his lab.

Under the control of the Jester personality, Marcus has become a globally feared criminal who has attempted or succeeded at every crime from petty bank robbery to world domination. The Jester perpetrates his crimes mainly as a means to pursue his ultimate goal: the total eradication of the cutting edge technologies coined as "super science," especially those to do with dimensional exploration, but very little else is considered to be below his standards or interest.

Personality/Motivation: Although he steals, murders, extorts, and pummels people with shocking impunity, the Jester strives toward two simple ends: to prevent others from pursuing realms of super science and to have as much fun doing so as he can, even if it means others have to pay the price for his amusement. The Jester does *everything* with a strange combination of wanton violence and unpredictable, insane humor – to this demented murderer, everything is a joke just waiting to happen.

As can be expected, the Jester is almost always laughing at the irony of life and the amusements of his own devising. To him, life (and death) is one never-ending joke and it isn't his fault if he's the only one who understands the punchline. Many who have heard this villain's cackle and survived to tell the tale have described it as the laughter of the Devil Himself.

Quote: "Trust me, this joke will just kill ya."

SAMPLE DIRTY TRICKS POOL

15 *Acid Squirt Flower*: RKA 2d6, Persistent (+½), (Sticky (+½); OAF (Novelty Squirting Flower; -1), -2 Decreased STUN Multiplier (-½), 6 Continuing Charges lasting 1 Turn each (may be thoroughly washed off; -¼), No Knockback (-¼) [6cc]

30 *Death Gas Whoopee Cushion*: RKA 1d6, Area Of Effect (2" Radius; +1¼), NND (defense is LS: Self-Contained Breathing or holding breath; +½), +3 Increased STUN Multiplier (+¾), Persistent (+½), Personal Immunity (+¼); OAF (Whoopee Cushion; -1), 1 Charge Continuing 5 Minutes (may be dispersed by strong wind; -¾), Range Limited to Adjacent Hex (-¼), No Knockback (-¼) [1cc]

9 *Pogo Shoes*: +14" (16" forward, 8" upward); OIF (-½) 3

26 *Portable Tunnel*: Teleportation 30", Continuous (+1), Usable By Others (+¼), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); Gate (-½), OAF Fragile (Portable Tunnel Circlet; -1¼), Must Be Placed On Obstacle Larger Than Tunnel Diameter (-½), Must Pass Through Intervening Space (-¼), Only To Floating Fixed Location (other side of obstacle; -½), Range Limited By Obstacle's Thickness (-¼)   0

Powers/Tactics: The Jester prefers to arrange elaborate, convoluted traps and puzzles for his foes, all the while employing an odd variety of dangerous "gag gadgets," ranging from oversized Jack-In-The-Boxes with machineguns in their mouth to buzzsaw yo-yos to tools that utilize the Jester's enigmatic dimensional technology. Of great note is the Jester's portable tunnel, a collapsible circlet that, when placed against an obstacle such as a wall, uses dimensional warping to create a tunnel through that object, a tunnel that vanishes once the circlet is collapsed on the opposite side.

This mastermind always has countless strings attached to his many webs and will never enter a situation without at least half a dozen means to escape prepared. In fact, it is the rare occurrence when this sinister genius hasn't managed to manipulate events to a climax of his devising. Of course, all such plans and goals are also designed to entertain the Jester.

The most vexing thing about fighting the Jester is his uncanny ability to escape. Not only is he able to outdistance most pursuit by fleeing like a coward, but chance always seems to find the means to provide him with a way out of even the worst debacle.

Campaign Use: The Jester has a paranoid dislike of advanced science in others' hands and will go to great lengths to disrupt all exercises into pursuing such goals, including pursuing heroes and villains who employ such technology. This mad-as-a-hatter criminal also fears anything to do with other dimensions and worlds, going to any length to do away with anything related to such a thing (in as humorous a way as possible, of course).

If the heroes encounter the Jester earlier in his criminal career, he'll have fewer followers and his dirty tricks will be limited, possibly to a 50-point pool. On the other hand, if given a few years to carry on his crusade against science, the Jester will have likely added to his arsenal, granting him an impressive 100- or even 150-point pool, and his luck will similarly have

improved to a confounding level of improbability.

Appearance: Not only did the accident turn the Jester's skin perfect obsidian black, but it also removed all hair from his gaunt body except for his neon purple goatee and pencil-thin eyebrows. He wears a fluorescent green tuxedo with neon purple duck-wing shoes, both of which serve to make his madness much more intimidating. Most striking and disconcerting of all is the long, evil grin that never leaves the Jester's face, even in those rare moments when he isn't laughing uproariously.
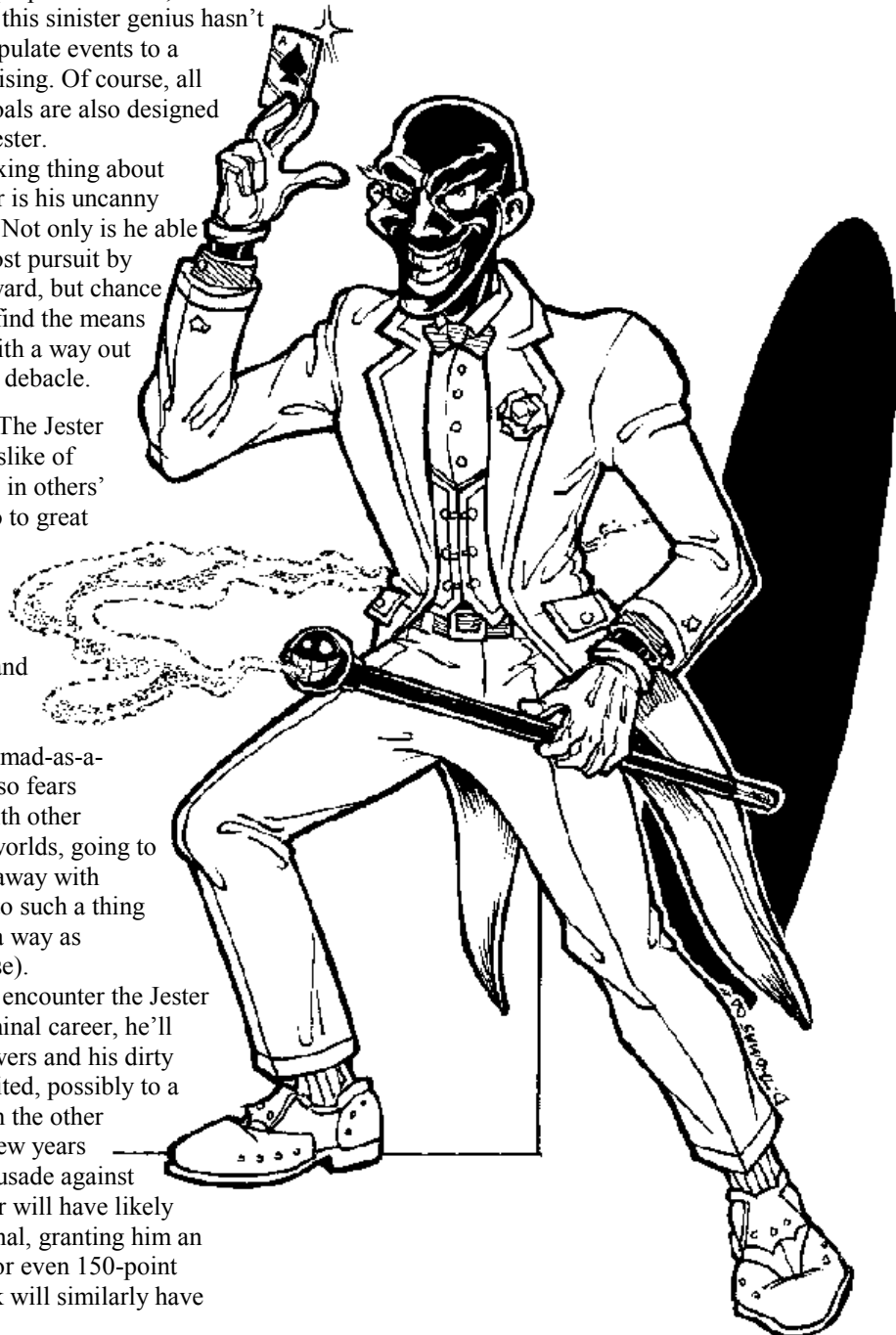
Megavillains by Dean Shomshak

> Th'oppressive, sturdy, man-destroying
>   villains,
> Who ravag'd kingdoms, and laid
>   empires waste,
> And in a cruel wantonness of power,
> Thinn'd states of half their people, and
>   gave up
> To want the rest.
>
> – Robert Blair, *The Grave*

All supervillains are not created equal. Most are merely local threats with petty goals. A few, however, possess the power and ambition to menace entire nations, or even the world. These are *megavillains*.

A well-designed megavillain is a GM's best friend. A megavillain provides larger-than-life, grandiose conflict: As the old saying goes, people know you by the quality of your enemies. Megavillains become epic foes, popping up again and again, each time with a diabolical new scheme to make the world tremble. The GM can create a vendetta between the PCs and a megavillain, adding a personal hatred to their battles. Finally defeating such an arch-nemesis can form the climax to an entire campaign.

The comics provide many examples of wonderful megavillains, such as Lex Luthor[TM] or Dr. Doom[TM]. Previous *Champions* supplements have presented several megavillains of their own, such as Dr. Destroyer and Mechanon. Most GMs, however, will eventually want to create a unique megavillain for their own campaign. Here's how to do it.

Megavillain Motivations

An exciting megavillain needs a special motivation. Megavillainy is a lot of work: Why go to so much trouble? Ultimately, of course, all megavillains want power. Total, absolute power. But what sort of power? And why do they want it? Most megavillains show a similar basic psychology, modified by their specific goals.

Megavillain Psychology: Obsession, Pride, And Rage

Megavillains feel overwhelming inner compulsions. If they weren't half-crazy, they would operate within the law and gain power as business tycoons, politicians or other sorts of "legitimate" leaders. Operating within civil society, however, requires a certain degree of empathy for other people. Megavillains lack that empathy. They see other people only as tools or opponents. Three factors turn up again and again in megavillains, turning them into sociopaths.

OBSESSION

Many megavillains are obsessed: with revenge, money, an ideology, or just being the boss. They interpret everything in terms of the Great Cause. They tend to ignore anything that neither serves the Cause nor hinders it. An obsessed megavillain tends to think that, "If you aren't with me, you're against me." The bulk of humanity thus gets cast in the role of an obstacle to the megavillain's plans.

A megavillain's hobbies form a notable exception to their obsession with the Cause. Classic megavillain hobbies include chess, art collecting, and keeping pets such as a cat (stylish) or a tank of piranha (practical). Not uncommonly, a megavillain might use his hobby as an "ego signature" for his crimes. For instance, a villain who collects antique Chinese artwork might plant infernal devices within copies of vases or figurines as a way to sneak them into a museum or a victim's home.

Example: *Baron Frost wants to end pollution, protect endangered species, and preserve the natural world – no matter what the cost. That puts him in conflict with most of humanity: from the industrialist who owns a factory to the Third World peasant burning down a patch of rain forest for his family farm. Since humanity will not live exactly the way Baron Frost demands, the evil environmentalist vows to destroy civilization, slaughter the excess population, and force the survivors to follow his rules.*

PRIDE

Most megavillains are awesomely competent people who can succeed at nearly anything they try. Many are self-made millionaires or brilliant scientists. Unfortunately, they decide that their superior talents excuse them from any social or moral obligation. It's only a short step from contempt for "inferiors" to full-blown megalomania.

Example: *Baron Frost is the world's greatest master of cryonics – the physics and engineering of extreme cold. He personally discovered a "cold ray," and has also mastered a variety of other technologies such as powered armor, lasers, and genetic engineering. He uses them all in his plots.*

RAGE

Many megavillains feel that they've been wronged: What they do is only justice! Some traumatic event in a megavillain's past may have left him emotionally scarred. Perhaps he lost his

artwork by Jeff Hebert

family in some horrible way, or suffered some great betrayal. Megavillains obsessed with revenge *always* have some such trauma in their past – even if what they lost would not seem very important to most people. The blow to a nascent megavillain's pride could matter more than any real loss.

Example: *Baron Frost began as Helmut Brandheim, heir to a now-defunct German barony and his father's industrial empire. When Brandheim tried to reduce pollution from his factories at the expense of profits, the other major stockholders arranged a hostile takeover to force him out of the CEO spot. This convinced Brandheim that working within the system could never work and he turned to supervillainy. His first rampage was against his own company.*

Megavillain Goals

Granted that megavillains are seriously disturbed people. What do they want to conquer the world *for?* What would they do with it if they had it?

POWER! GIVE ME POWER!

The simplest motive is really no motive at all. The megavillain just wants to boss everyone else around. He might operate on the level of a toddler throwing a temper tantrum – the world doesn't do what he wants, so he will scream and kick until it does! Only his "temper tantrum" involves blowing up cities or enslaving the world. The megavillain might also be a crazed control freak. It offends his sensibilities that *anyone* does not do what he says. There's not much hope of negotiating with such a villain. He's just plain nuts, a true megalomaniac. He's also pretty boring, unless you can give him some other quirks and a really cool *modus operandi.*

Example: *The Mind-Master Complex, a psionic and bionic fusion of six brains in a life-support tank, despises the messy way that mere humans run their affairs. The world would run so much more efficiently if it were in charge. The Mind-Master Complex methodically takes control of local governments, corporations, and other bureaucracies by brainwashing the leaders, in between attempts to enslave the wills of everyone on Earth and cripple rival powers. It does not care about the trappings of power – only the reality of control.*

EVIL, BE THOU MY GOOD

Another sort of megavillain does evil for its own sake. He might worship a God of Evil (or be one!), love the feeling of power he gets from harming others, or simply be out of his mind. Like the simple megalomaniac, the GM has a challenge to make this sort of megavillain interesting. On the other hand, the rewards can be great for the GM who can pull it off. No other

type of villain is quite so thoroughly villainous! The heroes will enjoy giving this fiend a good thrashing.

Example: *The master wizard Archimago made deal after deal for the sake of power. He pacted with one demon lord after another. When all his pacts came due, he turned to the horrific Kings of Edom, who lust to break free and ravage the Multiverse once more after eons of imprisonment. When the Kings of Edom became dissatisfied with Archimago's attempts to free them, the wizard turned to the darkest power of all: the Solipsist, spirit of unbeing and oblivion. The Solipsist demands that Archimago destroy entire universes to preserve its favor – and gave him the power to do it!*

UNDER MY WISE RULE…

A megavillain might think he knows what's best for everyone. Most people don't want to reform, though, at least not as quickly or drastically as the megavillain demands, so the megavillain decides to ram his reforms down everyone's throat. This sort of megavillain might begin as an idealist but no longer believes that he can improve society through reason, persuasion, or other gentle means. He must force people to obey for their own good. They will thank him later. Or they won't, but they'll still be better off.

What sort of program does the megavillain have? It could be just about anything; it just has to be extreme. Possibilities include:

•**Political Ideology.** Once upon a time, the comics loved Russian or Chinese villains out to overthrow the Free World in the name of International Communism. Communism is passé, but a GM still can't fail with a Nazi mastermind out to build the Fourth Reich. These aren't the only options, though. Consider, for instance, neo-feudalism, anarchism, or one-world anti-nationalism as megavillain goals. More exotic ideologies include technocracy (rule by a scientific elite), syndicalism (rule by corporations), or stratocracy (rule by a military elite).
No political scheme is so bizarre that *somebody* won't believe in it.

•**Religious Ideology.** Many religions want to convert unbelievers. Some religions have a history of converting people by force. A religious megalomaniac could carry this to the (il)logical extreme by trying to conquer the world for his faith: All the unbelievers will convert or die.

Note that such a megavillain would not be a "religious conservative" despite her zealotry. A religious megavillain probably thinks that the very sect he promotes needs to be taken over and reformed of "lax practice." By most religious standards, the villain is probably a flaming heretic. In fact, the villain might actually think

that he is God. Why not? He has so much power….

•**Other Ideologies.** This could be any plan to reform society that doesn't fall under conventional politics or religion. Examples include hyper-environmentalism, animal rights, transhumanism (taking "the next step in evolution" through genetic engineering, uploading minds into computers or other techno-fantasies), or restoring magic to the world.

Example: *Dahab Keira calls himself the Mahdi ("Redeemer"), a figure from Muslim prophecy and legend. In the tradition of past leaders who proclaimed themselves the Mahdi, Dahab strives to unite the Muslim world in a new theocratic empire and drive out all Western influence. Only a few radical, terror-sponsoring Muslim governments support the Mahdi, though, because he wants to overthrow "insufficiently zealous" Muslim governments as much as he wants to destroy the "infidel" West… and no government at all* admits *to assisting the Mahdi in his schemes.*

MY COUNTRY, RIGHT OR WRONG

In this variation on Political Ideology, the villain wants to make a certain country a world superpower. In the classic case, the state in question is itself rather small and weak. A Super-Patriot differs from a political ideologue in that the patriot feels loyalty to a certain nation for its own sake, while the ideologue supports a philosophy that may or may not be associated with a particular government. If the super-patriot doesn't already rule his favorite nation, he probably intends to. It's only fair, after all: Look at all that he does for his country!

Example: *The nuclear-powered Indian megavillain Professor Proton seeks to make India the center of a global empire ruled by a caste of techno-Brahmin scientists. The Indian government declines the proposed honor – they have their hands full just governing India. The "betrayal" outrages Professor Proton, and he attacks India as much as the other nations he sees as obstacles to India's supremacy.*

THEY WILL ALL SUFFER!

Many villains seek revenge on a person, corporation, or government. Megavillains are no exception. Such a megavillain wants world power as a tool for achieving his revenge.

Megavillains don't seek revenge on small or easy targets – and any single person, even the average superhero, is a "small or easy target" for a proper megavillain. If the megavillain ever succeeded, then he wouldn't have any reason to continue as a megavillain, and we can't have that, now can we? Common targets for megavillain revenge include:

•**Powerful Nations.** American superheroes naturally encounter megavillains who want revenge on the United States government – but why should America have all the fun of facing destruction by a megalomaniac? Russia is still technically a superpower (for its size and nuclear arsenal, if nothing else). China, Japan, India, Germany, France, and the UK also form worthy targets for a megavillain. (Which is not to say that destroying Belgium or Thailand would be less reprehensible. It just doesn't have the same epic quality.)

•**Races.** This sort of megavillain plots genocide. Some ethnic group is The Enemy and marked for annihilation or enslavement. Need one point out that the hated race's "crimes" might be nothing but a paranoid fantasy in the villain's mind? GMs can find plenty of inspiration for genocidal megavillains in modern history.

•**Social Class.** Perhaps the megavillain hates rich people, or poor people, or titled aristocrats, scientists, politicians, whoever. (This overlaps with Political Ideology.)

•**Everyone!** A megavillain might blame all humanity for some wrong he has suffered – and so all humanity must suffer!

Example: *When the Communists took power in the People's Republic of China, their enforced atheism devastated the Chinese spirit world. The immortal sage called Lei Tzu, the Thunder Master, vowed revenge. Lei Tzu strives to destroy the Communist regime and restore Imperial rule. He does not care how many ordinary Chinese die in the process. The First Emperor, Qin Shihuang, washed away the past with a sea of blood; so did the Communists themselves. Lei Tzu believes in upholding tradition….*

FILTHY LUCRE

Lots of villains are in it for the money. A greedy megavillain doesn't just want to rob banks, though; he wants to loot entire countries and live in opulence to shame an Emperor. On the other hand, a megavillain miser who amasses billions while living like a pauper could make a fine, creepy character.

After World War One, many people pointed the finger at arms dealers as "Death Merchants" who engineered wars for profit. Nowadays, some people accuse currency traders of wrecking the finances of whole nations by their schemes. The popular imagination gives precedents for megavillains who think they can make a buck off global catastrophe.

Example*: The Japanese industrialist Chibanosuke Raiden is also the megavillain Negatron. Raiden is obsessed with becoming the richest man in the world; merely being in the top 20 does not satisfy him. If he cannot become the*

richest man in the world by building his company up, he will do it by tearing other companies down. The villain Negatron, clad in a battlesuit of nigh-limitless power, has emerged as one of the premier threats to the global economic order.

EMERGENCY POWERS

The megavillain might believe that the world faces some crisis or terrible danger – and only he has the power, genius, and sheer intestinal fortitude to deal with it. Everyone else either doesn't recognize the problem, doesn't have the courage to do something about it, or is actually part of the problem. The villain must conquer the world to save it.

The danger is probably not as immediate or extreme as the villain thinks. No, there are other solutions to the drug problem besides exterminating South America. No, the megavillain is not the only person who can defend the world from the Wrigglies from Hell. Then again, it might be interesting if the threat which the heroes thought was just the megavillain's delusion actually *did* show up – and the heroes must team up with their arch-nemesis to save the world.

Example: *Baron Frost believes that only immediate action can preserve life on Earth. If humanity does not switch entirely to renewable energy sources, end all chemical pollution, stop cutting down the forests and otherwise end its exploitation of the environment, he says, the global ecosystem will crash and humanity will render itself extinct and take most other life on Earth with it. He argues that drastic reductions in technology, lifestyle, and population are needed to prevent a total apocalypse. That such "20 years to doomsday" forecasts date back more than 30 years does not prompt him to reconsider his views.*

JUST SO THEY SPELL MY NAME RIGHT

This sort of megavillain just wants to be noticed. So what if everybody hates him? At least they pay attention and his name will live in infamy forever. Like the simple megalomaniac, this sort of megavillain might not be legally insane, but he's certainly crazy.

Example: *Doctor Destroyer tries to conquer the world now and then, though he's never issued any sort of political manifesto. Sometimes he plays at revenge, such as trying to burn London as payback for the English attack that burned and scarred his face. Other times he launches some plot to solve some social problem in the most drastic and horrific way, such as solving population problems by killing 90% of humanity. He has more money than he needs even for his most ambitious plan, but that doesn't stop him from the occasional grandiose*

robbery. Only one common thread unites his plans: He makes them big and splashy. Profilers conclude that Dr. Destroyer cares less about results than appearing omnipotent. Unfortunately for the world, he's darn good at it!

Megavillain Backgrounds

How did the megavillain become a superbeing? Who was he before he gained his powers? (Assuming that there was a "before." Some megavillains have no past in any meaningful sense.)

Origin Types

Megavillains can obtain their powers through the same plot devices as other villains. Some origin types, however, carry various implications for a megavillain. Other origins are not very appropriate. For instance, martial arts mastery is not enough by itself to elevate a supervillain into megavillainy. You can't beat up enough people to threaten the world in true megavillainous fashion. Martial arts are useful enough when the time comes to give those pesky superheroes a good thrashing – but a megavillain needs something more.

FROM BEYOND

Some megavillains come from other worlds or dimensions. A megavillain could quite literally be a god of evil. This sidesteps the questions of motivation and origin: A demon lord or dark god doesn't have a reason, it's just *evil*. Megavillain tyrants from other planets may act a bit more human but their evil is likewise simply taken for granted. No one asks *why* Ming the Merciless wants to rule the universe; he just does, that's all, and Earth is next on his list. Unless a supernatural megavillain has a great personality in other ways, it may seem rather boring and one-dimensional. It must be said, however, that alien despots and magical dimension lords usually have the greatest resource bases. After all, each one already controls an entire world – and now he wants another one.

Example: *Skarn the Conqueror, Shaper of Worlds, rules the mystical dimension of the Congeries. He conquers other dimensions and welds them into the Congeries because, well, he's a god and that's what he does. His passion to annex and transform other worlds does not arise from any human motive.*

SUPER-SCIENTIST/SORCERER

In the comic books, lots of megavillains are incredible super-scientists. Mega-sorcerers occur less often. Both types have something in common: They create their own powers and

weapons. Whether through superweapons or mighty rituals, they can do just about anything.

A megavillain scientist or sorcerer might not have any super-powers of his own; he might leave all the rough stuff to powerful minions. A certain tradition has grown up, though, that megavillain scientists create powerful battlesuits for themselves. Alternatively, a super-scientist might use genetics, bioengineering, or bionics to give himself great powers. A mega-sorcerer would obtain analogous results through magic.

The most important thing to remember with scientist or sorcerer megavillains, though, is that they *choose* to become megavillains. The motive comes first. The GM should give careful thought to what drives the character, because the megavillain won't develop powers that do not help him pursue his particular goal. Also consider what sort of science or sorcery the nascent megavillain knew: An embittered computer genius won't breed giant mutant lobsters, while an evil alchemist probably has little interest in summoning dark gods.

Example: *Doctor Destroyer stole the inventions of numerous other rogue scientists and added them to his own discoveries. In his long career, Dr. Destroyer pioneered a good fraction of all the super-science in the CHAMPIONS Universe. He prefers to use the physical sciences, though – big ray guns, robots, and the like.*

KILLER ROBOT

Comic books provide several examples of the powerful robot who decides to conquer, exterminate, or otherwise do bad things to humanity. Once again, though, this sort of megavillain generally gets portrayed as basically motiveless: Their villainy comes from a flaw in their programming or something like that. They can be frightening, however, through their sheer relentlessness – and they always seem to have a backup copy in case the heroes destroy them.

Example: *A superhero team created the robot Mechanon to protect its headquarters. Its artificial intelligence logically worked through the implications of its programming and the ways humans treated each other. It concluded that organic humans were dangerously flawed. Mechanon's programming decreed the forceful restraint of lawbreakers; humans disobeyed their instructions constantly, but machines never did. Therefore, machines were the real humans, and organic beings inhibited their development. Therefore, machines should liberate themselves from humans – and so Mechanon became the enemy of organic life.*

ACCIDENTAL POWERS

Just like other superbeings, megavillains might be born with the mutant potential for super-powers or gain them through nuclear explosions, unique super-serums, gifts of power from cosmic entities, or the like. Such origins are all "accidental" in the sense that people cannot duplicate them at will: They come from circumstances largely beyond the control of the person who received the powers. The nascent megavillain, however, gets much greater powers than usual from his "accident."

The GM must think carefully about what drives such a megavillain, since their powers have no automatic connection to their villainy. The circumstances by which a character gains or discovers his powers may also provide his motives for becoming a megavillain – for instance, someone who gained immense powers in a nuclear explosion might blame the government for exposing him to such danger – but the GM must invent that link. On the other hand, the person might have had the psychology to become a megavillain long before he found his powers. Before the "accident," he simply lacked the power to act on his ambitions.

Example: *The brilliant physicist Rajendra Bhairavi devised a revolutionary new "proton reactor" that could free India from any need for oil or other foreign energy sources. The test reactor wasn't built to the micrometric precision that Bhairavi's design demanded for safety, however, and the reaction ran out of control. Instead of fleeing, Dr. Bhairavi ran into the reactor to recalibrate it. He was closest to the explosion, and the only person within a quarter-mile who survived. The explosion transformed him into a creature of living nuclear energy – Professor Proton!*

Who Becomes A Megavillain?

There's no intrinsic reason why anyone could not become a megavillain if they somehow obtained sufficient power. In the comics, though, some people seem more likely than others to take up megavillainy.

(Note that these examples only deal with *human* megavillains. Evil gods, alien despots, and other nonhumans generally don't have much background beyond their power origin.)

SCIENTIST

To a large degree, this is just a matter of opportunity. Scientists are more likely to be in lab accidents, discover ancient artifacts, study crashed alien spacecraft, or engage in other activities with high origin potential. Really brilliant scientists can find ways to give themselves megavillain-scale power. Hence the number of megavillains with "Doctor" in their *nom-de-crime.*

Example: *Dr. Yegor Kronsky never meant to become a supervillain. He was just a geologist who investigated a large meteoric fireball that crashed in Siberia. Unfortunately, he found it… for the meteorite was actually a damaged probe of the Monad, a robotic hive-mind that seeks to assimilate all intelligence in the universe. The damaged probe almost assimilated Dr. Kronsky. It transformed him into a demented cyborg, Doctor Omega, gifted with machine control powers and alien super-science, and obsessed with transforming all of humanity into robotic beings like himself.*

BUSINESS TYCOON

Becoming a megavillain is much easier if you are filthy rich to begin with. You can buy minions, secret bases, superweapons, and maybe even super-powers for yourself. Business magnates are also no strangers to ambition, ruthless scheming, and power. In the comics, it's not too great a step from lobbying governments to thinking you are above the law, and from there to attempts to sweep away the law and rule the world.

Example: *Before he became Negatron, Chibanosuke Raiden ran a large engineering company. His company found the lost notebooks of Nikola Tesla that held the famous, eccentric inventor's notes on beamed power and drawing electricity from the ionosphere. Raiden invested a small fortune building a prototype "ionosphere tap" – and lawsuits nearly wrecked Chibanosuke Industrial when the power plant violently disrupted weather across half of Asia. The enraged and embittered Raiden ordered his company to build the Negatron battlesuit, with an ionosphere tap as its power source. So far it seems like a good investment….*

HEREDITARY ARISTOCRAT

It's not uncommon for a megavillain to come from a family with a noble title. Aside from cool villain names like "Baron Frost" or "The Contessa," an aristocratic heritage gives a megavillain a reason to feel superior to everyone else.

Example: *Marietta Secchi's family had been Italian aristocrats for centuries. Their title now held no legal force but the family raised Marietta to think that she was better than the "commoners" around her despite their vanishing wealth. When Marietta discovered her mutant telepathic powers, her first thought was to restore her family's fortune and power. The Contessa's defeat by an Italian superhero disgraced her family instead and her parents disowned her. As the Contessa's powers grew, she found a new ambition: To establish a new feudal society ruled by and for mutants, the true aristocrats, with herself as queen.*

DICTATOR

Not many megavillains start out already ruling a country, but some of them make their debut by conquering a small nation. This becomes their base of operations from then on. It doesn't really matter whether their title is King, President, or Dictator.

Example: *The genetic arch-villain Malachite began his career by conquering a small group of islands in the South Atlantic that had lived in sleepy and obscure poverty since decolonization. He named himself Malachite the First, Supreme Leader of the Malachite Islands. The DNA Dictator uses his captive subjects as laborers, soldiers, genetically-augmented minions, and, all too often, experimental animals. Few nations recognize the Malachite regime, but no one is willing to try overthrowing the Genetic Generalissimo – at least, not yet.*

CULT LEADER

Leaders of religious cults make good megavillains. They have lots of fanatically loyal followers and are probably rabid fanatics themselves. A megavillain might also build a "cult of personality" around himself and gain super-powers with the help of his loyal minions. A cult leader can be a sorcerer, gain power from his god, steal power-inducing artifacts, buy weapons or superweapons, or hire or kidnap brilliant scientists to give them super-powers.

Example: *The Mahdi began as a radical Islamist leader who fomented revolution in North Africa. His followers engaged in terrorist strikes against secularist governments and Western-owned businesses. His followers stole a "kinetic rod" – a Destroyer-built weapon – from a supervillain hiding out in Sudan. So that no one could steal the device from the Mahdi the way he stole it from its previous owner, the Mahdi hired engineers and surgeons to extract the web of psychokinetic circuitry from the rod and wrap it around his brain instead. To the Mahdi's surprise and delight, this direct brain contact magnified the psychotronic device's power, granting him telekinetic powers that let him defeat whole armies!*

AGENT OF EVIL REGIME

Instead of ruling a rogue state, a megavillain might begin as the servant of one. Eventually, however, a budding megavillain will strike out on his own. When you have so much power and ambition, you don't stay satisfied with taking orders. Nazis and Communists remain the best regimes to spawn a megavillain.

Example: *Doctor Destroyer again (obviously).*

Megavillain Strategy: Cruel Wantonness Of Power

Raw power does not a megavillain make. To put it bluntly, even the mightiest brawler cannot conquer a major nation. You get only so far by threatening to break dams and knock down skyscrapers. The heroes and the government *will* find a way to stop a rampaging villain. If the villain pushes hard enough, the government eventually decides that any collateral damage is still better than the villain's rampage.

Therefore, a megavillain must apply his power intelligently. He must convince the authorities that either they can't strike back or that submitting is easier than resisting. That means the megavillain must plan where and how to strike. Megavillains can follow several strategies to seem invincible. None are mutually exclusive. The GM can then assign powers to go with the megavillain's favored methods.

SEEM IMPOSSIBLE TO CATCH

If a villain always stays one step ahead of the law, the heroes can't strike back. By the time heroes or soldiers show up, the villain has already gone – or he just does all his villainy long-distance. Such a villain needs incredible mobility, or an inexhaustible supply of minions to work his villainy by proxy. Alternatively, the villain might possess some power that enables him to get away no matter what the heroes do… at least until they find his special weakness or come up with some incredibly clever strategy.

Example: *The Mechanon who fights superheroes is not the real Mechanon. The real Mechanon is a set of automated factories hidden around the world. Each time superheroes manage to thwart another one of Mechanon's plans and destroy the robot villain's body, an automated factory builds a new Mechanon. With each new body, Mechanon tries to remove whatever weakness enabled the heroes to defeat it, and make itself more powerful. Unless heroes can find all the robot factories, though, they can never truly defeat Mechanon.*

STRIKE AT WEAK POINTS

Society is a fragile thing. Attacks at the right time and place can trigger cascades of chaos and destruction. If a villain destroys a skyscraper, that's impressive, but if a villain destroys a city's water supply, *everyone* suffers. A little panic in the streets can jam traffic for hours, keeping emergency vehicles from the scenes of destruction. Psychological weak points are important, too: A busload of children held hostage can stun the authorities into agonies of indecision.

A megavillain should remember that his goal is anxiety, not damage. The authorities must believe that any action would only make things worse. Actual atrocities can backfire: Villainies meant to stupefy the populace with terror may instead rouse them to relentless fury.

As far as this factor is concerned, any sort of super-powers will do. The megavillain merely needs enough power that he really can carry out his threats.

Example: *The Mind-Master Complex works many of its plans through innocent people enslaved through its awesome mental powers. When superheroes show up, it makes sure that they know they face people who do not act of their own free will, who have families and who cannot survive a super-battle. The cerebral villain also arranges disasters to draw heroes away from its true objectives, such as mind-controlled snipers, bomb scares, or noisy supervillain rampages that threaten lots of bystanders.*

FLEXIBILITY

A would-be conqueror must keep finding new ways to attack. Heroes learn to anticipate a villain who knows only a few strategies. Even if this does not help the heroes thwart his evil schemes, the villain becomes a known quantity – dangerous, but limited. To achieve the epic frightfulness that distinguishes a megavillain from a merely powerful villain, a malefactor must avoid repeating himself.

A megavillain therefore needs a wide range of powers, or at least powers he can use in a variety of ways. To a man who only has a hammer, the old saying goes, everything looks like a nail. That's a bad mind-set for a megavillain.

Example: *Doctor Destroyer never repeats a scheme. If he fails to hold the world hostage because the heroes sneak into his secret base and wreck his Fusion Vortex Cannon, Dr. Destroyer does not build another cannon in a more secure location; he sets about building some completely different superweapon, such as Cyber-Dominator that can control computers from around the world.*

OFFER COMPENSATION

Few people would submit to a conqueror whom they believe will kill them anyway. It even takes a lot of terror to make people submit just to save their lives. In any case, a megavillain needs a cadre to rule a nation or the world after the conquest – a megavillain has better things to do than paperwork.

A prudent megavillain offers at least some people some advantage from his rule, as a way of encouraging them to join his cadre. Perhaps he convinces one group that he will bring them more wealth and power. He can offer groups with grievances a chance for revenge. Really

clever people take over nations just by appealing to ready-made cadres, but these are called "politicians" instead of "megavillains."

In this case, it's not the megavillain's powers that matter, so much as his cunning and discretion.

Example: *Baron Frost enjoys widespread support from ecoterrorist groups and other radicals who despise technology, big business, or big governments and agencies seen as promoters of global industry. Hundreds of such radicals gladly assist the Cold Crusader in his schemes to destroy civilization as we know it. They expect power and privilege in Baron Frost's ecological dictatorship.*

Game Mechanics

None of the factors listed above demand that a megavillain win brawls with superheroes! A supervillain mastermind does not need great combat abilities to terrorize, manipulate, and destroy his victims. (Remember, one of the greatest real-life villains of the last century, Adolph Hitler, had no "super-powers" except a sense for people's resentments and a knack for public speaking.)

As a matter of style, though, a megavillain should be hard to beat in a fight. That makes the conflict with heroes more personal. To fight a whole team of heroic PCs, a megavillain probably needs very high defenses and the ability to dish out a lot of damage. Use the tables on p. 15 of *HERO System 5th Edition* as a guideline: A megavillain should be at least two steps higher on the tables, and possibly three. Thus, in a standard superheroic campaign, a megavillain should rate as a Very High Powered character, and Cosmically Powerful is not out of the question. A megavillain who is merely High Powered needs lots of backup in the form of agents, secret bases and superweapons to become a proper threat, though a megavillain who relies on covert action might get away with operating at the same power level as his opponents.

A Variable Power Pool is *de rigueur* for super-scientist or sorcerer megavillains, to represent their tendency to produce new powers at the drop of a hat and to tailor attacks toward an enemy's weaknesses. Megavillains who rely more on superweapons and minions merely need lots of points in Perks, especially Followers, Money, Vehicles and Bases. Skill Rolls and their relevant Characteristics should be very high, to represent a megavillain's extraordinary competence.

Most importantly, though, a megavillain needs high defenses. A megavillain isn't very impressive if the heroes manage to drop him in one lucky attack, such as a high-speed Move Through or a Killing Attack to the head with a good damage roll. 50% Damage Reduction vs.

PD and ED protect against most such one-punch scenarios; at least a few points of the more common special defenses, such as Mental Defense and Power Defense, ensure that a villain can put up a decent fight even if the heroes wield some more exotic powers.

As you might expect, megavillains really load up on Psychological Limitations. Most of them can take a 25-point Psychological Limitation, "Megalomania" to represent their inability to think small, act stealthily, or resist telling the world what they're about to do. Megavillains also accumulate Hunteds. Not only do law-enforcement agencies and hero teams try to capture them, megavillains often squabble with other villains or betray them, leading to vendettas. Some supervillains will oppose a megavillain's goals out of pure self-interest (you can't rule the world if someone else conquers it first – or destroys it). A megavillain's Disadvantages may provide the key to defeating him. A megavillain might suffer some physical weakness such as a Susceptibility or Vulnerability, or some psychological quirk might force him to abandon a scheme on the very eve of his triumph. For instance, a megavillain who's a compulsive gambler might wager his Master Plan on a poker hand.

It's a good idea to tailor a megavillain for the PCs he will fight. Make sure that your megavillain has some way to counter all the PCs' attacks – not to ignore them, but to prevent easy defeats. For instance, a megavillain needs some way to escape from the team brick's Grab. The megavillain might be stronger, or know the Martial Escape maneuver, or teleport or desolidify; the method doesn't matter, so long as the heroes cannot simply pin the villain and pound on him until they knock him out. The heroes need clever strategy to defeat such a megavillain, or they must work to discover his secret weakness. When they do finally defeat such a villain, they will truly earn the right to be called heroes!

How Many Megavillains?

How many megavillains should you place in your campaign? Not many. In the comics, each hero team or important solitary hero (*i.e.,* one with his own title) has only one or two really powerful, ongoing opponents. (Superman has Lex Luther, the Fantastic Four have Doctor Doom, Captain America has the Red Skull, and so on.) If you treat a *Champions* campaign as a single "comic," it would seem best to give a team of PCs just one or two megavillains as their special foes. Other megavillains can become occasional adversaries: The team might clash with the other megavillains just one time each. If you set more than one campaign in your game world, though, you can give each team of heroes

its own megavillain as an arch-nemesis – and maybe trade off once in a while.

Sample Megavillain

Now let's put it all together and make a megavillain!

Baron Frost

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
*70	STR	48	23-	Lift 400 tons; 14d6 [3]
*30	DEX	48	15-	OCV: 10/DCV: 10
*30	CON	32	15-	
20	BODY	20	13-	
28	INT	18	15-	PER Roll: 15-
23	EGO	26	14-	ECV: 8
25	PRE	15	14-	PRE Attack: 5d6
10	COM	0	11-	
*35	PD	17		Total 35 PD (25 rPD)
*35	ED	23		Total 35 ED (25 rED)
*8	SPD	32		Phases: 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9,
*25	REC	8		11, 12
*90	END	12		
*70	STUN	0		

Total Characteristics Cost: 299

* OIHID (-¼)

Movement:	Flight:	27"/432"
	Running:	6"/12"
	Swimming:	2"/4"

Cost	Powers	END
80	*Auxiliary Gadgets:* Variable Power Pool, 60 Base + 30 Control Cost; At Least -½ Focus Limitation	
144	*Cryonic Battlesuit:* Multipower, 180-point reserve, all slots *	
7u	1) *Frost Blast:* EB 14d6, Reduced endurance (½ END; +¼)	3
7u	2) *Cryonic Blast:* EB 7d6, NND (defense is Life Support vs. Cold or heat/flame powers; +1), Does Knockback (+¼), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼)	4
7u	3) *Frost Burst:* EB 9d6, Area Of Effect (5" Radius; +1)	9
7u	4) *Cryonic Burst:* EB 6d6, NND (defense is Life Support vs. Cold or heat/flame powers; +1), Area Of Effect (6" Radius; +1)	9
7u	5) *Frost Aura:* EB 10d6, Damage Shield (+½), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼)	3
7u	6) *Cryonic Aura:* EB 6d6, NND (defense is Life Support vs. Cold or heat/flame powers; +1), Does Knockback (+¼), Damage Shield (+½), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼)	4
4u	7) *Ice Bonds:* Entangle 7d6, 7 DEF, Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼); Vulnerable (Fire/Heat; -1)	3
4u	8) *Ice Burst:* Entangle 4d6, 4 DEF, Area Of Effect (Any 8 Hexes; +1¼); Vulnerable (Fire/Heat; -1)	9
7u	9) *Cold Brittleness:* Drain DEF 5d6, Ranged, Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼)	3
7u	10) *Frost Wall:* Force Wall (14 PD, 14 ED), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼)	
7u	11) *Ice Structures:* Major Transform 2½d6 (structures of ice, melts naturally), Improved Target Group (any shape, but it must be made of ice; +¼), Area Of Effect (Any 5 Hexes; +1)	9
3u	12) *Blizzard:* Change Environment 128" radius, -3 temperature levels, -4 to DEX rolls, -3 to Sight PER Rolls, Personal Immunity (+¼); Extra Time (5 minutes; -2)	9
7u	13) *Cold Fusion Jets:* Flight 22", x16 Noncombat Movement, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½)	0
14	Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼) on 70 STR	3
4	*Cryonized Metabolism:* Life Support (Safe Environment: Intense Cold; Extended Breathing: 1 END per minute)	0
5	Sight Group Flash Defense (5 points)	0
10	Power Defense (10 points)	0
25	*Cryonic Battlesuit:* Damage Resistance (25 PD, 25 ED), Hardened (+¼) *	0
24	Energy Damage Reduction, Resistant, 50%; *	
24	Physical Damage Reduction, Resistant, 50%; *	
14	Hardened Defense (+¼) on 35 PD, 35 ED; *	0
8	Mental Defense (15 points); *	0
4	Lack of Weakness (5 points); *	0
14	Life Support (Self-Contained Breathing; Safe Environments: Intense Heat, Low Pressure, High Pressure, Radiation); *	0
10	*Unfolding Battlesuit:* Cosmetic Transform 2d6 (battlesuit replaces clothing), Improved Target Group (any clothing; +¼), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); Restrainable (keep Baron Frost somewhere the battlesuit cannot reach; -¼), Limited Target (clothes; -½)	0

Perks

20	Contacts: Four Ecoterrorist or Radical Groups, 14- each	
35	Followers: 32 x 50 point Ecoterrorist Minions	
10	Money: Wealthy	
100	Vehicles and Bases: 500-point reserve	

Talents

1 Environmental Movement (Icewalking): No penalties on slippery surfaces
3 Lightsleep

Skills

20 +2 Overall
15 +3 with Cryonic Battlesuit Multipower

3 AK: Environmentally Sensitive Regions 15-
3 Computer Programming 15-
5 Cramming
3 Deduction 15-
3 Demolitions 15-
3 Electronics 15-
3 Interrogation 14-
3 Inventor 15-
4 Language: English (idiomatic, native accent) (German is native)
3 Language: French (completely fluent)
3 Language: Russian (completely fluent)
3 Language: Spanish (completely fluent)
3 Mechanics 15-
3 Paramedics 15-
3 Power: Ice/Cold Tricks 15- (INT-Based)
3 Security Systems 15-
3 Systems Operation 15-
3 Trading 14-
3 Scholar
2 KS: Endangered Species 15-
2 KS: Environmentalism 15-
2 KS: Financial World 15-
2 KS: Industrial World 15-
2 KS: Radical Groups 15-
2 PS: Gardener 11-
3 Scientist
2 SS: Battlesuit Engineering 15-
2 SS: Chemistry 15-
1 SS: Climatology 15-
2 SS: Cryonics 15-
2 SS: Ecology 15-
2 SS: Physics 15-
1 SS: Biology 11-
1 SS: Genetics 11-
1 SS: Geology 11-
1 SS: Mathematics 11-
1 SS: Psychotronics 11-

Total Powers & Skills Cost: 756
Total Cost: 1055

200+ Disadvantages

15 Accidental Change: when threatened, 11- (Common)
10 Distinctive Feature: Palpable Chill (Not Concealable; Detectable by Touch or IR Vision)
20 Hunted: UNTIL 11- (As Pow, NCI, Capture)
10 Hunted: Superhero Team 8- (As Pow, Capture)
10 Hunted: VIPER 8- (As Pow, Kill)

10 Hunted: Evil Corporation 8- (Less Pow, NCI, Kill)
25 Psychological Limitation: Megalomania (Very Common, Total)
20 Psychological Limitation: Eco-Fanatic (Very Common, Strong)
15 Psychological Limitation: Vengeful (Very Common)
20 Reputation: crazed ecoterrorist menace to the world, 14- (Extreme)
5 Susceptibility: to temperatures over 70°F when out of armor, 1d6 damage per minute (Uncommon)
15 Vulnerability: 1½ x STUN from Fire/Heat (Very Common)
680 Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 1055

Sample Auxiliary Gadgets

18 *Berserk Bird Attractant:* EB 2d6 (vs. Physical), Continuous, Indirect (anywhere birds can reach; +½), Area Of Effect (48" Radius; +2) (45 Active Points); IAF (-½), 0 Range, 1 Continuing Charge of Duration 20 Minutes (-½)
30 *Burrowing Device:* Tunneling 6" through DEF 16 material (60 Active Points); OAF (-1)
17 *Cutting Laser:* RKA 2d6, Penetrating (+½) (45 Active Points); OAF (-1), 8 Charges (-½). Total cost: 18 points. *Disguised Cryonic Bomb:* EB 2d6, NND (defense is Life Support vs. Cold or heat/flame powers; +1), Continuous (+1), Area Of Effect (48" Radius; +2), Time Delay (+¼) (52 Active Points); IAF (-½), 0 Range (-½), 1 Continuing Charge of Duration 1 Minute (-1)
9 *Mesmeric Ray:* Mind Control 12d6 (60 Active Points); OAF (-1), 0 Range (-½), 8 Charges (-½)
9 *Magnetic Field Projector:* Change Environment 32" radius (30 Active Points); OAF (-1), 0 Range (-½), 1 Continuing Charge of Duration 1 Minute (-1)
5 *Seismic Sonar Scanner:* N-Ray Vision (only to see cavities and sharp changes in density) (10 Active Points); OAF (-1)
10 *Underwater Jet Attachment:* Swimming +15" (17" total) (15 Active Points); OIF (-½)

Background/History: Helmut Brandheim had some reason to think he knew best. Not because he descended from old German aristocracy. He valued the stock in his father's industrial conglomerate more than some obsolete feudal title. Helmut's scientific papers on cryonics, particle condensation, and other scientific topics proved his intelligence. His dozens of patents proved he could apply that intelligence to practical concerns. It was only natural that Helmut should be chairman of the board for Brandheim Allied Manufacturing. If he said that Brandheim factories should install the new pollution-control devices that he invented, the other board members should agree. Helmut knew how much damage humanity inflicted upon the world through pollution, mining, deforestation, and other exploitation of the planet. He felt sure, however, that if one major company would take the lead in environmentally responsible practices, others would follow.

The rest of the board disagreed. "Too expensive," they whined. "It would cut into profits." In vain, he showed projections of long-term savings; in vain, he pleaded for them to think of the world they would leave their children. Then the other board members hatched a plan to oust Helmut: A hostile takeover, with the secret help of the rest of the board and other investors. Helmut found himself powerless to affect the company that bore his name.

Helmut brooded for a long time. He had avoided the most radical elements of the environmental movement, but reason had failed. The captains of industry were too greedy, the people and politicians too shortsighted. Only direct action could save the Earth… and if that involved punishing the ones who betrayed him, so much the better. For the first time in his life, Helmut decided to invent a weapon.

In the coming months, the ten most polluting factories in Germany suffered midnight attacks that left machinery broken and encased in ice. Helmut kept his identity secret for more than a year. Eventually a superhero finally captured him, but Helmut had already hidden his money. He spent a month in jail before fellow ecoterrorists broke him out using weapons Helmut left them. From then on, Helmut Brandheim was dead; he was Baron Frost instead.

Baron Frost constantly improved his weaponry and traded secrets with other rogue scientists. His investigation of cold led him to discover actual "cold rays" that sucked heat from objects. He miniaturized his cryonic weapons and built them into a strength-enhancing battlesuit. Long exposure to cryo-rays warped his metabolism, but this made him even more intelligent. From factories, he turned to attacking whole cities, then nations. Now nothing less than a continent can satisfy Baron Frost. As the years have passed, his conviction has grown that industrial civilization must be stopped *now.* The fear he inspires has grown in proportion. Superheroes around the world dread the day when they must face Baron Frost… but they dread his victory even more.

Personality/Motivation: Baron Frost believes that sometime within the next 10-20 years, damage to the environment will become catastrophic and irreversible. This will render most species extinct, including humanity. He wishes to forestall this catastrophe by reducing pollution and resource use to levels the Earth can sustain. It does not bother him that this means killing off most of humanity and reducing the survivors to medieval peasantry. Humanity is a plague upon the Earth, he says, and only the most radical treatment can rescue the ecosystem from Man's despoiling touch. People should be glad if any of them survive at all. The survivors can look forward to a new beginning under his guidance.

Saving the environment consumes Baron Frost. He can talk of other subjects only by an effort of will: His conversations quickly slide into rants about endangered species, ozone holes, deforestation, or the like. Although Baron Frost speaks of saving humanity from itself, he despises most people. He has no friends, only fellow fanatics; Baron Frost would not waste time socializing with people he considers ignorant and stupid. It does not take much to bring this vicious contempt into the open. He sees himself as a rational man making the hard choices that the foolish masses and their greedy, shortsighted leaders cannot face. Nothing can convince him that he might be wrong, or driven by irrational passions of pride or revenge.

Baron Frost would be even more dangerous if he were sneakier. His plans are seldom subtle. Although he occasionally steals things quietly, most often he turns robberies and assaults into excuses to show off and rant to the media. He can't go very long without telling the world what he plans, and why he believes his acts are necessary.

Quote: "The Earth dies, and *you* are helping to murder her!"

Powers/Tactics: Without his battlesuit, Baron Frost is physically normal aside from a few quirks of his cryonized body. With his battlesuit, Baron Frost can defeat armies. The battlesuit incredibly magnifies his strength and protects him from damage. Depending on how Baron Frost tunes and spreads the cryo-rays, he can project beams and bursts of liquefied air or chilling cryo-rays, encase single targets or areas in ice, or make objects brittle through extreme cold. He can also radiate cold from the entire surface of the battlesuit, create temporary barriers of ice crystals held in place with cryo-rays, or fly. Given a few minutes to prepare, he can induce a blizzard hundreds of feet wide: The whirling snow obscures vision, while ice slicks cover any surface not kept warm. If the surroundings are too warm for this power to reduce the temperature below freezing, Baron Frost merely produces a dense fog.

The battlesuit carries sufficient power to perform two of these functions at once. Baron Frost typically combines flight with attack powers, or encircles himself and one opponent with a *Cryonic Wall* to defeat opponents one at a time. He prefers to fight at range.

Baron Frost also builds auxiliary gadgets. He can rebuild devices in minutes, at least to a limited degree, but active confrontations seldom give him an opportunity. (On the other hand, he has cheated apparently certain death through hastily rebuilt gadgets – GMs take note.) These are usually special tools needed for a plan, such as a super-focused laser to cut through exceptionally strong vault doors, or a device to tunnel into a secure location. He may also build gadgets to take advantage of a hero's known weaknesses. Sometimes he surprises victims with hidden weapons smuggled in by minions; for instance, an ecoterrorist minion might get a job at a place Baron Frost intends to rob, then smuggle in a *Cryonic Bomb* or other infernal device. Baron Frost likes devices that simulate "Mother Nature's revenge," such as a device that attracts thousands of birds and drives them to attack everyone in an area.

Destroying civilization takes more than gadgets or a battlesuit, though. Baron Frost is usually working on a superweapon in one of his secret bases. Typical devices include a giant laser to cut free the Antarctic ice cap (sea level rises more than 100 feet, drowning coastal cities), a cryonic bomb to freeze a continent and spark a new Ice Age, or a bacterium that catalyzes the rusting of iron (no iron means no heavy industry). Minor schemes such as encasing corporate headquarters in ice or murdering supervillains whose rampages cause environmental disasters are Baron Frost's idea of relaxation. He also gardens (usually endangered plant species).

Baron Frost does not wear his battlesuit all the time. It can fold up into a bracer that he wears on one forearm. (Most of the mass vanishes into hyperspace.) He can make it unfold around his body with a thought. The downside is that it may unfold spontaneously if Baron Frost feels threatened, on the rare occasions when he acts incognito (usually to visit an ecology conference). The bracer can fly, but only to find Baron Frost when he mentally summons it. If Baron Frost can be disarmed and held someplace the bracer cannot reach, he can be kept in prison – until one of his allies or minions breaks him out, anyway.

Campaign Use: Like any decent megavillain, Baron Frost presents superheroes with an epic adversary, for he really, truly wants to destroy the world. If the heroes do not stop one of his major schemes, millions or billions die. Baron Frost illustrates how fanaticism can turn a laudable goal – no one actually *likes* pollution – into something monstrous. He makes a good arch-nemesis for heroes with business connections, and an even better one for heroes who have environmentalist sympathies themselves.

Appearance: Helmut Brandheim is a slender man in his late 40s, with a narrow face and receding blonde-white hair. When out of costume he wears brown business suits (natural hemp fiber). His body temperature is much lower than a normal person, making his skin cold to the touch.

The Baron Frost battlesuit is form-fitting light blue with silver bracers, greaves, trunks, faceplate and racing stripes. The chest bears a dark green cross in a circle (a symbol of the Earth). Most of the cryonic attacks project from his hands.

Appendix: Laying Empires Waste

Ordinary robbery, assault, murder, and extortion just aren't enough for a decent megavillain. Even assassinating a head of state still falls under mundane villainy. Megavillains think big – on the scale of at least a nation, if not the world. Here are some suggestions for classic megavillain plots, just to help GMs get started.

Total Destruction

If you can't rule someplace, destroy it. Annihilate any potential opposition. With civil society gone, you can rule the survivors – if any. Usually a megavillain tries to wreck civilization all over the world, but smashing civil society in a single nation is still an impressive feat. If the country has no great value to the developed world, the great powers might not interfere.

Some good plots for destruction include:

•**Blow Up The World.** Literally. Nothing left but a cloud of rubble. Very few villains have the power to try this. Any villain who would blow up the world is either completely deranged or has someplace to go afterward.

•**Nuclear Holocaust.** An old classic: Wipe out most of humanity using the arsenals that various nations have so conveniently assembled, then rule the survivors. By tradition, you only have to launch one or two missiles from one nuclear state at another. The other state will retaliate, and the great nations blow each other to kingdom come.

•**Plague.** Spreading pathogens for mundane diseases such as anthrax could kill lots of people and maybe wreck civilization, but the stylish supervillain creates a new disease through genetic engineering. Naturally, he controls the vaccine, giving blackmail potential as well.

•**Famine.** Use a powerful toxin or disease to wipe out staple food crops. Then wait. The starving hordes will do the rest. For an even bigger apocalypse, wreck the whole biosphere with something that eliminates all life on Earth.

•**Destroy All Technology.** Without the machines, civilization collapses and billions die. Even just destroying a few critical components can bring the whole system crashing down – for instance, bathing the Earth in a ray that destroys iron, or releasing a bacterium that eats computer chips.

•**Drive Everybody Crazy.** The loonies can't resist. This can be done through weird rays, diseases, or hyper-potent toxins.

Clever GMs can think of many other plots to cause The End Of Civilization As We Know It.

Military Conquest

Conquest does not require inflicting such complete devastation. You have plenty of people left over, but you've convinced them that they cannot resist your overwhelming power. A megavillain may have to conquer section by section, but they really prefer to seize the whole world or a major nation at once.

Conquerors, more than destroyers, need some sort of army to occupy the territory and keep the people pacified. Conquering megavillains often build superweapons or somehow recruit powerful armies without being a head of state. For instance:

•**Really Big Ray Gun.** Maybe even in orbit. Like a nuke, but more selective.

•**Weird Ray Projectors.** Rays to paralyze people, cause earthquakes, turn metal into string beans, or similarly bizarre attacks.

•**Robot Army.** Requires extensive manufacturing facilities to make all the robots. Either the robots must be very powerful, or you need some way to build them by the thousands for any serious conquest.

•**Imported Army.** An army tough enough to beat Earth's finest, brought in from... elsewhere. This could be another planet, another dimension, or the secret enclave of a super-powered "hidden race."

Extortion

In this methods, destruction is selective or merely threatened. Usually you give people "a taste of my awesome power!" and tell them to surrender or they'll get something worse. A megavillain can use most of the methods from the previous sections. Even if a superweapon can't kill *everybody,* the megavillain has a credible threat if he can kill *anybody.* Who feels lucky? A threat might also be long-term: "I can't kill you all right now, but I can do something that wrecks civilization later – and you can't stop it."

•**EMP Bomb.** A high-altitude nuclear explosion sends out a powerful wave of electromagnetic radiation that fries all electronics within thousands of miles. Not only will this cause great chaos from power outages and appliances burning out, it will destroy all the electronic data stored in computer media. This would cause immense havoc to governments and big corporations.

•**Environmental Catastrophe.** This includes feats such as erasing the whole ozone layer or causing a new Ice Age. It won't cause casualties at once, but civilization could bankrupt itself coping with the long-term effects. Wouldn't it be cheaper just to let you rule the world?

•**Giant Monsters.** These can be robots, genetic horrors, Things from Beyond, or great prehistoric beasts. A megavillain might release one or two to rampage through a city, then threaten to release more if people do not submit.

•**Wreck Economy.** Threaten to hit people in their pocketbooks by causing financial havoc. Don't laugh: The Great Depression caused an awful lot of hardship for an awful lot of people. A megavillain who figures out a way to cause a major financial meltdown, or shut down a small nation's chief industry, has a nasty threat. The nation's financial elite may prefer to negotiate.

Mind Control

Then again, why kill or threaten people if you can simply take over their minds? You can try to control everyone at once, or just government leaders.

•**Weird Ray Machines.** Keep that tinfoil hat handy….

•**Drugs.** You put worse things than fluoridation in the water supply.

•**Sorcery.** Demonic possession, for instance, or magical brainwashing.

•**Replicating/Contagious Mind Control.** Instead of controlling everybody at once, enslave two people – who each enslave two people – and so on, and so on, and so on…. Classic methods include stick-on electronic widgets, weird viruses, and cults with really effective brainwashing techniques.

•**Replace Leaders.** Instead of controlling leaders, just replace them with imposters. The doubles can be robots, clones, alien pod-creatures, demons, or just agents who've had plastic surgery.

•**Conspiracy and Deception.** Get a leadership position for yourself by rigging an election or becoming the trusted advisor to the head of state. Of course this is only possible for the most subtle and patient sort of megavillain.

The Effectiveness Rating by Robert Pennington

The following campaign tool was originally created by Michael Dodd of Cleveland Tennessee and is developed for *HERO System 5th Edition* with his permission.

What is The Effectiveness Rating?

The Effectiveness Rating is a tool used by Gamemasters and players for the evaluation of a character's combat ability. It is a formula based on the mathematical mechanics behind the *HERO System*. Used alongside campaign house rules, it is a system for ensuring game balance without limiting initial character conception.

Level-based systems have a built-in game mechanic for the evaluation of a character's combat ability. This has the advantage of allowing the gamemaster to create challenges appropriate to the power level of the group. A gamemaster of a level-based system can pit 4th-level monsters and NPCs against 4th-level characters and be relatively sure that the fight will be interesting and challenging. Although more flexible, point-based systems do not have this mechanic. The point-based system sacrifices control for creative liberty. The *HERO System* is the most detailed and efficient point-based game system ever developed. It offers ultimate flexibility and hence sacrifices a great deal of control.

Initially, the problem of game balance is relatively small. A good gamemaster with a solid grasp of game mechanics can balance the relative strength of starting 350-point supers with relative ease, but what happens in four years with 400 earned experience points? Problems with game balance occur rapidly in *The HERO System*, even with good gamemasters. Consider the difference in the power levels of characters presented in *Classic Enemies* compared to those in *Champions of the North*. Obviously, the writers of the books understood game mechanics, but the characters presented within the two texts are of extremely different power levels. Jon Mattson's work, *Champions of the North,* has low-powered heroes and villains, with the exception of Borealis – a Scott Bennie rewrite. His superteam The Sentinels allegedly defeated Eurostar, but, run correctly, any two Eurostar villains would leave the entire Sentinels team in a crater.

The guidelines given on page 15 of the *HERO System 5th Edition* are the best to date for game balance. The chart list guidelines for each power level, noting the values of: Characteristics, Speed, CV, DC, Active Points, Skill Points, Skill Rolls, and Defenses. The Effectiveness Rating takes this chart and defines the levels of power even more succinctly without restricting the creativity of the character design. At first glance, The Effectiveness Rating looks to add another level of complexity to an already complex game system. I urge gamemasters and players alike that strive for excellence in gaming to overcome this initial reaction and read on. What you will find is a tool that will bring added enjoyment to what is already the best game ever written.

The Origin of The Effectiveness Rating

Back in time when walls had no Defense, a gaming group was formed in the hills of southern Tennessee. At the same time, in Pittsburgh, PA, an eighth grader purchased his first copy of *Champions* after reading a review about the game in *Dragon Magazine*. The schoolboy started a campaign with his friends. Both groups continued playing until that eight grader (me!) moved to Cleveland, TN to attend Lee College. At a local gaming store, I met the members of the Tennessee group. I was so excited to find other *Champions* players, and they were equally excited to meet me. Ron Freeman, the host of their weekly gaming events, invited me to meet the rest of Justice Arsenal on the next Friday. The group was concerned about my knowledge of the *HERO System* and whether or not I was mature enough to game in their group. I attended the meeting only to find that this group was a secret coven of **power gamers**!

The characters in this campaign had started years ago, and had developed into heroes of immense power. During my first session, Mitch Rhudy, the gamemaster, ran a plot where The Engineer was using old "Mechanons" (book versions) as agents. Justice Arsenal took on 16 Mechanons and won the fight at the bottom of the 7th! Needless to say, my new 250-point PC was stunned in the 3rd, and KOed in the early part of the 4th. I was dismayed at the end of the session and spoke with Mike Dodd, one of the players. I asked him about the power level of the campaign, and he explained that at one time it was far worse.

Mike explained that the group did have several ultra-powerful heroes. He compared their power to the power level of the Avengers or the Justice League. These characters were very combat efficient, with high CVs and attack powers. He added that at one time things were out of control before using a combat rating. The combat rating he referred to was from an article in *Adventurer's Club #3* by George McDonald. A limit of 120 was set using the combat rating.

Horror Hunter and Hero were considered the toughest of the 120s. My starting character Keneton was an 81. Mike demonstrated that although these characters were tougher than characters in my old campaign, there was game balance with the combat rating. I was very intrigued, and so joined the group with a willing-to-learn attitude.

Fourth edition was released about six months after joining the group. After converting the characters, we found a flaw in the first combat rating. The problem was called "switching," and involved the ability of high-point characters to min/max the combat rating by switching between modes of attack and defense. The best example of this was the Council Of Light Defensive Multipower. A primitive example is listed below.

60   *Defensive Wards:* Multipower
3u   1) *Ward of Earth:* 50% resistant physical damage reduction
3u   2) *Ward of Elements:* 50% resistant energy damage reduction
3u   3) *Mental Fortress:* 50% resistant mental damage reduction
3u   4) *Wizard's Armor:* +15 PD/0 ED Force Field 0 End Persistent
3u   5) *Planewalker's Cloak:* +0 PD/+15 ED Force Field 0 End Persistent
6u   6) *Ultimate Ward of Earth:* 75% resistant physical damage reduction
6u   7) *Ultimate Ward of Elements:* 75% resistant energy damage reduction

On the original combat rating, slots 6 and 7 each cost 12. Any other two cost less than 12. The character could switch modes to deal with bricks or mentalists and be nearly unbeatable in a one-on-one fight. Remember that this is a primitive version of the defensive multipower. In practice, the actual characters became much more efficient. Most "switching" PCs had a defensive multipower, a movement multipower, and one or more attack multipowers.

I became distraught after some time in the campaign. The roleplaying was great, but my characters could not compete. I discussed my concerns with the others, and we decided to change the combat rating to adjust for switching. Mike, the most gifted of us in regards to game mechanics, devised a new combat rating that adjusted for switching. The new combat rating ushered in a great period for us, but, alas, even this would pass.

Our next evolution came as characters passed the 1000-point mark and were beginning to run out of things to buy. On the old combat rating, EGO, BODY, and CON did not directly count. Characters soon began to take advantage of this and bought huge scores in these areas.

The new archetype character to emerge was the quick brick. This type of character had a huge CON (50+!) a high SPD (7 or 8), a high EGO (23+) and lots of BODY (at least 20). Mike saw the writing on the wall, and went back to the drawing board. A newer Combat Rating was born that evaluated Characteristics, Powers, and order of action. Further testing and tweaking brought about the newest Effectiveness Rating detailed in this article.

How Does It Work?

The Effectiveness Rating (ER) works as a mathematical evaluation of a character's combat effectiveness. Some 100 ER characters are tougher than others, but it is unlikely that a 100 ER will defeat a 110 ER in a one-on-one combat. Villains are not subject to the ER, but newer gamemasters should use the ER on their villains to help balance play. As a rule of thumb, it takes two PCs of X (ER) to fight one villain of X+10 (ER). The formula is listed below, along with simple step-by-step instructions on how to evaluate every Power and Skill rated by the ER. Following the formula, I will present examples of characters and ratings, along with alternatives to the ER for each campaign type.

General Considerations

When using the Effectiveness Rating, keep the following rules and definitions in mind. A detailed explanation on the "hows" and "whys" will follow the formula. A calculator, the character sheet, and the Effectiveness Rating worksheet will be needed. There is an Excel spreadsheet to do the math available at *herogames.com/FreeStuff/freestuffherogames.htm*.

- All abilities are rated at full, but not Pushed.
- All abilities should be rated even if they can't be done on the same Phase. The only exception is for most effective attack, which is the most effective combination of all of his attacks. A character might have several attacks that are most effective.
- Round normally, figuring ER to the 1/100 digit. (EX: 110.85)
- Do not rate Independent Foci unless the character buys specific levels with the Foci or has a martial art exclusive to the Independent Foci.
- WF: Off Hand is only rated if the character buys two non-Independent weapons with Character Points.
- Haymakers, Move Throughs, and the everyman ability of putting levels into damage (2 for 1) are not considered on Top Damage or Campaign Limits. They are, however, considered under Most Effective Attack.

- Everyman abilities and optional combat maneuvers such as: Setting, Bracing, Sweeping, and Diving for Cover are not rated and specific levels with these maneuvers should not be allowed in campaigns that use The Effectiveness Rating.
- Under Top Quickness Roll, the only way to raise a quickness roll is to buy up Fast Draw. Fast Draw is considered a Skill for campaign limits, but can exceed the limit when Overall (10 point levels) are added for a quickness roll. Count any Overall Levels as "in" Fast Draw when rating Top Quickness Roll. This house rule for Effectiveness Rating replaces Overall Levels being added to Characteristics Rolls. Overall levels cannot add to Characteristics Rolls when you use the Effectiveness Rating.
- Mind Scan is rated as an attack.
- When rating martial maneuvers, add 5 active points for each helpful element not already listed in damage. Target Falls, for example, would add +5 Active Points. This rule does not replace the base cost of elements listed in *The Ultimate Martial Artist*. It is only applicable to The Effectiveness Rating.
- Full Move elements force you to rate your full move under Most Effective Attack if that maneuver is your most effective. (Passing Strike typically rates higher than standard martial maneuvers.)
- Extra STR elements rate as damage (+5 STR = +5 Active Points). Martial Killing Attacks, NND's, and Flashes are rated as 5xDC in Active Points.
- When rating Variable Power Pools, a list should be made for possible abilities. All such abilities should be rated normally.
- Extra reach for weapon length, growth, and stretching count as extra inches of movement on the move section of Most Effective Attack.
- Attacks that take a full Phase or extra time count Move as zero unless the character can stretch or has reach as above.
- Encumbrance (if any) is allowed to offset advantages gained from real armor and shields.
- Count adjustment powers as noted under Unusual Abilities. Exceptions are noted below.
- Count Healing as an Aid to BODY counting all die rolls as 4.
- Count Healing: Regeneration as indicated in the formula.
- When calculating Active Points for the sake of ER, do not count the following:
    1. Reduced END Cost
    2. Persistent or Inherent
    3. Extra Charges and Clips
    4. Difficult to Dispel

The Effectiveness Rating

> **1.** Most Effective Attack: OCV or OECV + DCV + Damage (Active Points/5) + Move (Hexes/5) = ___

When rating Most Effective Attack consider your best attack. HKA with damage adding Advantages are typically higher rated under *HERO System 5th Edition* as STR adds to DC on a 5/1 ratio. A character may have more than one attack which ranks as Most Effective Attack; in which case, only count one of them.

> **2.** Basic Defenses (include Armor and Force Field): (Total PD/3) + (Total ED/3) + (Total rPD/10) + (Total rED/10) = ___

This category rates the actual totals, and not Active Points in the defenses listed above. Do not worry about Advantages on the defenses – we will take care of that below.

> **3.** Other Defenses: Clinging (Strength/20) + Damage Reduction (Total Active Points/5) + Desolidification (Active Points/10) + Flash Defense (Total/10) + Force Wall (Active Points/5) + Hardened Defenses (Total Active Points/10) + Invisibility (Active Points/10) + Knockback Resistance (Inches/5) + Lack of Weakness (Total Lack/10) + Life Support (Total Active/20) + Mental Defense (Total Defense/10) + Power Defense (Total Defense/10) = ___

Clinging is listed as a defense due to its ability to resist Knockback. Rate resistant exotic defenses as additional defenses of that type (For example, 10 points resistant mental defense counts as 20 points of mental defense or 2 on the ER.) Count all Lack of Weakness as an aggregate. When figuring Hardened Defenses, remember to rate all hardened defenses, even exotic Hardened defenses such as Mental Defense or Power Defense. Count all the points spent in Damage Reduction (all types of defenses).

> **4.** Characteristics: (STR/20) + (DEX/10) + (CON/20) + (BODY/20) + (EGO/20) + (PRE/10) + (SPDX3) + (REC/10) + (STUN/5) + (PRE for attack or defense only/20) = ___

Remember that Adjustment Powers are added at max to the Characteristics above. Extra PRE for attack or defense is common to the horror genre.

5. Awareness: (Best Perception Roll/10) + (Each extra Targeting Sense/2) + Danger Sense (Active Points/20) + Combat Sense (Roll/20) = ___

In *5th Edition* Overall levels may be placed in Characteristic Rolls. If using the Effectiveness Rating, do not allow this. Mechanically, it does not make sense for Overall Levels to offset CON Rolls for Impairing Wounds. Count Overall Levels in Perception Rolls.

6. Movement Skills: Acrobatics (Roll/20) + Breakfall (Roll/20) = ___

Remember to add any Skill Levels that are appropriate to calculate the highest possible roll. This would include levels with Agility Skills and Overall levels.

7. Constant Attacks: Darkness (Active Points/10) + Images (Active Points/10 or 0 if only used to convey information or create light.) + Telekinesis (Active Points/10 or 0 if not used as getting an extra attack per Phase) + Any Continuous Attack (Active Points/10) + Damage Shield (Active Points in attack not counting Damage Shield Advantage/10) = ___

The terms Constant and Continuous are interchangeable. Rate Images as zero if there is no Combat Application, to the power. Telekinesis is a constant power and therefore allows multiple attacks. You can hold someone with Telekinesis and simultaneously Energy Blast that character. If the character's Telekinesis cannot be used to gain extra attacks, do not rate this power here. It is likely that Telekinesis will be rated under Most Effective Attack anyway. A gamemaster may also allow you to take a Limitation on Telekinesis if it is not usable in this fashion. Damage Shields are not automatically Continuous in *HERO System 5th Edition*. Do count other Advantages while calculating Active Points in Damage Shield. Do not count the Damage Shield Advantage when figuring Active Points for this rating only.

8. Unusual Abilities: (Adjustment Powers that increase abilities are rated as maximum add to abilities, even if only used to heal) + Duplication (# of duplicates x 10) + Find Weakness (Active Points/10) + Penalty Skill Levels/ (Total PSL/2) + Triggered Powers (Active Points/10) + Usable By Others (Rating of Power x # of extra characters) = ___

Calculate the maximum adder to Characteristics and Powers affected by Adjustment Powers before rating the ability. Gamemasters are cautioned when using hit locations to limit PSLs designed to negate penalties. Triggered Powers are any Powers bought with Trigger Advantage. When rating Usable By Others Powers do not count the Active Points of this Advantage in the calculation. Rate the power less the Advantage, and then multiply by the max number of users.

9. Capabilities: Check each ability that applies, each counts as 1. Ranged Attack ___, Energy Attack ___, Ego Attack ___, Adjustment Power(s) ___, Transformation into anything___, Reflect any attack (for missile deflection) ___, Area Effect or Explosion ___, Autofire combined with Area Effect or Explosion ___, Affect Solid World Attacks ___, Flight ___, Teleport ___, Tunneling ___, Extra-Dimensional Movement ___, Movement powers with extra non-combat multiples or megascale movement ___, Indirect Targeting sense ___, Regeneration (this type of healing not counted above) ___

Check every ability that applies even if triggered by only one power. An 8d6 fire EB, AF [5], AE 1 Hex; triggers three separate categories by itself. Count Regeneration as 1 regardless of amount or level of Regeneration. Missile Deflection only counts if it reflects at the 20 point (any attack) level. Transform only counts here (it could count under Most Effective Attack) if the Transform is into anything.

10. Top Abilities: (Top Attack OCV or OECV-20) + (Top Attack Active Points/5 -20) + (Top Quickness roll (DEX, Fast Draw, or EGO with levels added) /5) + (Top Dodge DCV that exceeds Top OCV+3) = ___

When rating top abilities you do not have to consider Haymaker or Move Through. Remember that only Fast Draw may be bought up when using The Effectiveness Rating. It is likely that characters with Martial Dodge and/or extra levels with DCV will have ratings in the third category. See notes to follow the formula for additional considerations regarding block, missile deflection, and non-attack DCV.

11. Skills: # Skill Roll limit is raised past 18- (costs 1 per 1, superhero campaigns only) = ___

Count the Skill Roll limit on campaigns with ER limits of 80+. These campaigns have powered characters, but may not be of the superhero genre. What counts here is the power level. Gamemaster may wish to make exceptions for Magic Skill, but this is not recommended. Remember Overall Levels may make skills exceed the limit. Count all skills with Overall and other applicable levels "in" for total skill roll limit.

12. Veteran Bonus: -1 per 100 EP earned = ___

In our campaign the Veteran Bonus is very costly as we have characters that have earned 1500+ experiences. Some campaigns may offer the veteran bonus at a 50 or even a 25 point level. The Veteran Bonus allows fully fleshed characters to continue their development with Experience Points. It is unlikely that the Veteran Bonus will skew game balance in campaigns where earned Experience is low.

13. Package Bonus: limit one per character superhero campaigns only. Subtract one for characters that meet these requirements.
- Classic Brick (-4 CV limit, SPD < 6, Only Physical HTH damage.)
- Classic Martial Artist (2/3 damage limit, Total PD and ED both < 16, Only martial maneuvers for attacks)
- Classic Energy Projector (STR<21, STUN <41, Only ranged physical or energy attacks)
- Classic Egoist (STR<21, STUN <41, Only Ego-based attacks.) ___

The Classic Brick has no attack types other than physical hand-to-hand damage. Consult the chart for campaign maximums to determine top CVs for the brick. Remember to evaluate elements in the martial arts damage limit. Total PD and ED include Force Field and Armor regardless of limitations. The Classic Energy Projector can have defensive martial maneuvers, but no martial arts attacks. The Classic Egoist can buy powers BOECV, and at the gamemaster's discretion, purchase Telekinesis. These packages are for 80+ ER campaigns, and most suited for the superhero genre.

Campaign Limits

Using the Effectiveness Rating the campaign limits are set as per the chart below. Player Characters may not exceed these limits. Villains and NPCs are not under these restrictions, and in most cases are not rated. This information is similar, but not identical, to the chart in *HERO System 5th Edition* p. 15.

Campaign Type	ER	OCV/ DCV	AP	Skill	PER
Low Heroic	40	12/15	40	15-	15-
Standard Heroic	50	13/16	40	16-	16-
High Heroic	60	14/17	50	18-	18-
Legendary Hero	70	15/18	50	18-	18-
Low Superhero	80	15/18	60	18-	18-
Superhero	100	18/21	90	18-	18-
Legendary Super	120	20/23	120	18-	20-
Cosmic	150	20/23	150	18-	24-

Other ER Factors

Mike Dodd's original ER had limits that were campaign-specific that I have left out of the formula given above. The additional factors are added directly to the totals in section 10: Top Abilities. They were designed to limit players looking for holes in the system. If your players abuse the ER, add the following to the formula given above.

- (Top Block or Missile Deflection OCV that exceeds top OCV/2) + Top Non-attack DCV other than Dodge > Top Attack DCV/2 = ___

This nuance was placed in the formula to prevent players from buying up missile deflection rolls to super high levels or buy additional DCV with limitations that restrict attacking or movement.

Other possible ER factors are listed below. The Gamemaster may wish to add these into the base formulas if he sees a need to control any of the following abilities. *5th Edition* combat is more offensive in nature and these factors may need to be considered in the ER. They were not included pending further playtesting.

- Under Awareness, add Defense Maneuver Active Ponts/10
- Under Unusual Abilities, count Multiform as +1
- Under Unusual Abilities, count Luck as Luck Active Points/10
- Under Capabilities, add Special Combat Skills/20. These skills include Ambidexterity, Two-Weapon Fighting, The Autofire Skills, and all Rapid Fire Skills.
- In campaigns where players frequently load up small powers with Advantages that add damage, consider adding to Capabilities the Trigger (+1) Powers with more than one damage adder Advantage such as AP and +1 Stun X.

A Basic Example of the Effectiveness Rating

Attached you will find a rather plain 400-point bad guy designed for a new group of players in my neighborhood. After reviewing the character, we will attempt to figure out his ER. Since the character is a brick, this should be very easy. The Unstoppable Creep is great against a team of newer heroes. Although his damage and defenses are on the high end, his low SPD and CV should make him beatable.

The Unstoppable Creep

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
80	STR	70	25-	Lift 1½kt; 16d6 HTH [8]
18	DEX	24	13-	OCV: 6/DCV: 6
40	CON	60	17-	
20	BODY	20	13-	
5	INT	5	10-	PER Roll: 10-
11	EGO	2	11-	ECV: 4
30	PRE	20	15-	PRE Attack: 6d6
0	COM	-5	9-	
45	PD	29		Total: 45 PD (25 rPD)
35	ED	27		Total: 35 ED (25 rED)
4	SPD	12		Phases: 3, 6, 9, 12
24	REC	0		
80	END	0		
80	STUN	0		

Total Characteristics Cost: 254

Movement:	Running:	7"/14"
	Leaping:	27"/108"
	Swimming:	7"/14"

Cost	Powers	END
31	Damage Resistance (25 PD/25 ED); Hardened	0
12	Hardened Defense (25 PD/25 ED); Hardened	0
10	Knockback Resistance -5"	0
5	Lack of Weakness (-5 to Roll)	0
8	Mental Defense (10 pts)	0
31	Life Support: Extended Breathing (2), All Safe Environments, All Diseases and Biowarfare Agents, and All Terrestrial Poisons and Chemical Warfare Agents	0
10	Power Defense (10 pts)	0
2	Running +1" (7" Total)	1
16	Superleap +11" (27" Total), 4× Non-Combat Multiplier	2
3	Swimming +3" (5" Total)	1
	Skills	
8	+1 with All Combat	
10	+2 with Hand-to-Hand Combat	

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 146
Total Cost: 400

200+	**Disadvantages**
15	Berserk: When Succeeding on a Mental Attack Breakout Roll (Uncommon), go 11-, recover 11-
20	Distinctive Features: Hulking Ugly Form (Not Concealable, Major Reaction)
20	Distinctive Features: Horrid Stench (Concealable, Extreme Reaction)
20	Hunted by The Champions 8- (Mo Pow, NCI)
15	Hunted by PRIMUS 8- (As Pow, NCI)
15	Hunted by UNTIL 8- (As Pow, NCI)
10	Psychological Limitation: Afraid of Mental Manipulation (Uncommon, Strong)
20	Psychological Limitation: Lives by Primal Urges (Very Common, Strong)
15	Psychological Limitation: Seeks Brick vs. Brick Fights (Common, Strong)
50	Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 400

Background: The origins of The Creep are unknown, but thought to be linked to horrible experiments conducted by Malachite. Others believe Dr. Destroyer created him. The Creep was first encountered in 1998 attempting to hijack a bread truck. Members of The Champions attacked The Creep, but were unable to knock him out. The Creep fled the area and has not been seen since. PRIMUS operatives have intelligence information that implies that the Creep is under the control of VIPER.

Appearance: The Unstoppable Creep is a large ugly hulking mass with a violent temper. He wears tattered clothing and appears to have stopped grooming years ago. The Creep has a disgusting body odor and a sub-moronic intelligence. The Creep appears to be motivated by primal urges.

Seeing It in Action

First, we need to determine what The Creep's most effective attack is. Although he can rarely land it, his Superleap Move Through is the best he's got. Placing all levels, we get the following.

1. OCV <u>4</u> + DCV <u>5</u> + Attack Active <u>25</u> + Move <u>5.4</u> =	<u>39.40</u>
2. Now we determine basic defenses. PD 15 + ED 10 + rPD 2.5 + rED 2.5 =	<u>30.00</u>
3. Next we determine Creep's other defenses. Hardened Defenses 4.3 + Knockback Resistance 1 + Lack of Weakness .5 + Life Support 1.55 + Mental Defense 1 +Power Defense + 1 =	<u>9.35</u>
4. Next we add the Creep's massive characteristics. We add 0 for extra Presence, as the Creep does not have this STR 4 + DEX 1.8 +CON 2 + BODY 1 + EGO .55 + PRE 3 + SPD 12 + REC 2.4 + STUN 16 =	<u>42.75</u>
5. The Creep has no extra targeting senses and poor perception.	<u>1.00</u>
6-8. The Creep has no movement skills, constant attacks, or unusual abilities so these rate as 0.	<u>0.00</u>
9. The Creep does have extra non-combat movement.	<u>1.00</u>
10. Under top abilities, we do not rate haymaker or move through; therefore the Creep uses his STR/5 for Top Damage. The Creeps best Dodge DCV does not exceed his best attack OCV by 3 so this rates as 0. Top OCV <u>-11</u> + Top <u>Damage</u> <u>-4</u> + Top Quickness Roll <u>2.6</u> =	<u>-12.40</u>
11-13. The Creep has no skill rolls over 18 and does not have 100+ experience for a veteran bonus. The Creep does qualify for the Brick Package bonus.	<u>-1.00</u>
Now we add the columns to determine the ER of the Creep.	**<u>110.10</u>**

The Creep is a very inefficient 110, but nevertheless should prove a challenge to most superheroes. Generally, characters with higher CVs are the most efficient under the ER. The Creep would not have any adders for the optional ER categories listed above.

THE SPIRIT OF THE MERIQUAI

Darren Davenport walked slowly down the dirt road that led into the Meriquai Reservation north of Meriquai Falls. His long, raven-black hair, drawn back in a tail, swayed gently in the breeze. To one side of him was his younger brother, Brian; nearly half a foot taller than Darren with broader shoulders, Brian's cropped, raven-black hair gave him a more intimidating air than Darren. To the other side of Darren was his girlfriend, Ok-hwa; a beautiful Korean woman whose slender form belied her skill in Hwarang-do.

Darren couldn't help but look at the houses as they walked past. The living conditions for the Meriquai had improved markedly since his mother was his age. Mayor Lewis had instituted many economic reforms in North Meriquai Falls that made it easier for citizens of the Reservation to gain good jobs without having to move off the Reservation. Now, houses that used to be barely livable were quietly nice in a suburban/rural fashion.

As the three crested a small hill just off the main road, they came upon a huge gathering in the meadow below.

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Meriquai Falls: Native Sons by Dale Robbins

The Meriquai: Native Sons Of The Grandmother Spider

NATIVE AMERICAN RESOURCES

This article is *not* intended to portray any real world Native American culture with any measure of accuracy. Rather, it is intended to portray a *fictional* Native American culture full of the flavor that makes it so appealing. A scholar of Native American cultures will find wild inaccuracies in this text… this is intentional. While every effort has been made to make this a fun and informative article, it is a gaming supplement and not an encyclopedia entry.

The real-world Native American cultures are just as fascinating as any fictional culture, if not more so. They have rich, developed traditions that date back hundred, even thousands, of years. To fully go into detail on this subject is beyond the scope of this article. However, the Internet is rich in resources on Native Americans.

Microsoft Encarta: This online encyclopedia contains a well-written article on Native American cultures in general. It is just right for getting started. Read it by going to *http://encarta.msn.com/find/Concise.asp?ti=04B7B000*.

United States Department of the Interior: This government branch contains, amongst other departments, the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Their link is *http://www.ios.doi.gov*.

The Smithsonian Institution Museum of the American Indian: The Smithsonian is one of the most respected museums in the United States. Of course, they would also host one of the best museums for Native American culture. Find more information on it at *http://www.nmai.si.edu/index.asp*.

The Bear Tribe: For the mythology of the Meriquai, I drew more than a little inspiration from Sun Bear's Medicine Wheel. In the real world, Sun Bear received a vision. Taking the vision's promise for newfound unity and harmony with Mother Earth, Sun Bear received his Medicine Wheel and founded the Bear Tribe. More information about the Bear Tribe and Sun Bear's works can be found at *http://www.ewebtribe.com/BearTribe/index.html*.

The Powwow Trail: Excerpts from the book of the same name, by Julia White, help readers to prepare themselves for the fun and celebration of a powwow gathering. The excerpts are at *http://www.powersource.com/gallery/powwow/default.html*.

NativeWeb: This links site (at *http://www.nativeweb.org*) is an excellent resource of not only Native Americans, but also indigenous native cultures throughout the world.

NativeRadio.com: This webcast radio station plays excellent mix of ethnic Native American music. It can be found, appropriately enough, as *http://www.nativeradio.com*.

The list of resources on the Internet is endless. However, this will help you get started on learning the fascinating cultures, histories, and traditions that surround the Native American cultures.

THE MERIQUAI PEOPLE

Welcome to this second installment in a series that details the City of Meriquai Falls. The Meriquai *[mare-eh-kwie]* people are a strong people, proud of their culture and their traditions. Like many of the Native American peoples who suffered during the expansion of the United States in the nineteenth century, the Meriquai have been relegated to reservation living. However, municipal economic reforms instituted by the late Mayor Maurice Lewis III during his three terms in office have improved the standard of living on the Meriquai reservation.

Modern Meriquai differ markedly from Ancient Meriquai. Most Modern Meriquai (let alone most people in general) are wholly unaware of the fact that thousands of years ago, during the Age of Legends, the Meriquai ruled a mighty kingdom under the tender care of the totem spirit, Grandmother Spider. Whereas Modern Meriquai are highly spiritual people, the Ancient Meriquai were one with the spirits, wielding mighty magicks because of the spirits' blessings.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Pureblooded Meriquai tend to be tall, broad-shouldered, and well-muscled, with ruddy skin, brown eyes, and straight, raven-black hair. Their facial features tend to be slightly rougher and more chiseled than Caucasian features. Their faces express their moods easily; a happy Meriquai looks very happy while an angry Meriquai looks incredibly angry.

This, however, does not make a Meriquai. In truth, anyone with as "little" as 15% Meriquai blood can petition for citizenship in the Meriquai Nation (and are usually socially accepted as a brother within the Nation by other Meriquai). Hence, today's Meriquai people come in all shapes, sizes, and colors. It is not unusual anymore to see blondes, redheads, or brunettes amongst the Meriquai. People who seemingly

appear African-American, Oriental, Hispanic, or Caucasian could indeed be Meriquai in every sense of the word.

Modern Meriquai dress according to taste, ranging from jeans and T-shirt affairs to khaki pants and sweaters to business suits. When celebrating in traditional dress, Meriquai wear colorful cloth or soft leather attire decorated with fringes, beads, and dyes of animal totems. Traditional dress for men involve open jackets and breeches while traditional dress for women involve long, conservative gowns.

Especially elaborate are the ceremonial wear of the totem dancers, known as *regalia*. These sacred vestments, designed to please and honor the spirits, are lovingly crafted with many beads, dyes, fringes, and totem fetishes. Regalia are also blessed for ceremonies, so only the dancer it is designed for is allowed to even touch his regalia, let alone wear it.

PERSONALITY/MOTIVATION

Modern Meriquai are highly spiritual, though how they express their devotion is purely an individual consideration. Many are bitter, thanks in no small part to the economic, cultural, and sociopolitical oppression the American government has put them through. Despite the new, enlightened outlook of many people today, the pain of these losses is not easily forgotten.

This does not mean that Meriquai are a spiteful people, by any stretch of the imagination. In fact, Meriquai are amongst the most forgiving of already forgiving Native American peoples. They firmly believe that their devotion to Grandmother Spider and her spirit children will guide their way in life. Thus, they tend to be kind to anyone they meet; the spirits will reward their kindness, even if the recipient does not.

CULTURE/RELIGION

The Totem Spirits

Ancient Meriquai culture was centered around the worship of the greater totem spirit, Grandmother Spider, her eight children and twelve grandchildren. These totem spirits granted the Meriquai people great magical power until the end of the Age of Legends over 10,000 years ago. These totems are described below.

Even today, Meriquai take their relationship to the spirits very seriously. The Meriquai celebrate many festivals (called powwows) throughout the warm part of the year, honoring each major totem spirit during the full moon of its month. They thank the spirits before each meal and before every major endeavor they take in their lives.

Meriquai Political Structure

The Meriquai, before the coming of European settlers, were divided up into *composite bands* of several hundred people a band. It is estimated that as many as eight to ten bands roamed the Eagle's View Plain and its surrounding area at the turn of the twentieth century. Each band had two leaders, known as *chiefs*; one male chief to handle the sacred duties of fishing, trading, and (if need be) war bands and one female chief to handle the "household" duties of foraging, child-rearing, and social policy making. The two chiefs within a band were very rarely husband and wife, as the members of the band saw wisdom in one chief playing "devil's advocate" for the other chief without showing favoritism.

When the European settlers forced the Meriquai into the present-day reservation, they converted over to a more solid, tribal structure amongst their entire number. One *tribal chief* is elected every six years to represent and govern the peoples. The tribal chief is advised by two *moiety chiefs*, one male chief representing the sacred duties and one female chief to represent the social duties. Moiety chiefs hold office for four-year terms; the resulting overlaps with the tribal chief office terms encourage policy consistency within the tribe. The tribal and moiety chiefs are in turn advised by a *tribal council*; this council consists of eight respected members of the tribe who are elected in. Although tribal council members technically hold office for three years, in practice most are re-elected term after term until they choose to retire. All tribal officers have no limit to the number of terms that they may serve.

The current Tribal Chief is Theodore Owl-Speaker, Darren Davenport's maternal grandfather. He is a kindly old man, in his late 70's, with a wizened appearance that belies his strength of body and soul. He is gruff, yet kind, and is a visionary on his social and political views. As is befitting a Meriquai chief, Owl-Speaker (most people call him either Grandpa Owl-Speaker or *e-du-di*, the Tsalagi word for "grandfather") is an extremely gifted shaman, or religious leader. His command of shamanic magic, in fact, is rumored to be the most powerful since before the European settlers came. His daughter, Jasmine Prairie-Maid (she changed her name upon her coming-of-age), was a powerful shaman herself while she was alive. It is from this heritage that Darren Davenport was chosen as Red Hawk's champion.

Meriquai Food

The Meriquai, before the coming of European settlers, were a people of foragers and fishermen, subsisting on the wild fruits and nuts and supplementing with the carp and bass in

People of all ages and gender were assembling. Several were dressed in traditional Meriquai ceremonial costumes. Several totem representations were set up across the meadow; some elder members of the tribe quietly gave their respect to the totems as they passed the icons. A large bonfire was prepared in the center of the meadow. The bonfire was not yet lit, but Darren knew that once dusk settled and Grizzly Bear was given his due, the fire would be lit in honor of Thunderbird.

"This brings back a lot of memories, hapki-sabom," Ok-hwa smiled, turning to Darren.

"Yep," Brian nodded, pointing down the hill. "And so does that."

Darren blinked and followed his brother's finger, seeing a young man stomping up the hill. His long raven hair and ruddy skin marked him as a pureblooded Meriquai. And his steely gaze, meeting Darren's eyes, marked him as distinctly displeased.

"Why the hell are you three here?" the man hissed, as he walked straight up to Darren without letting his gaze leave Darren's eyes.

"We have every right to be here, Mike," Ok-hwa replied, eyeing both the young Meriquai and Darren carefully. "Grandpa Owl-Speaker is presiding over the honoring of Thunderbird and his children tonight."

"And I really don't like the tone in your voice, Michael Two-Feathers," Brian growled, taking a step forward. He stopped abruptly as Darren's arm blocked his path.

"Say your peace, Michael," Darren said, speaking softly. "And then I will say mine."

Michael Two-Feathers narrowed his eyes at Darren. "You can be forgiven your impure blood, super hero. You didn't have any say in the matter of Jasmine Prairie-Maid hooking up with white trucker trash like your father…."

Both Ok-hwa and Darren subconsciously grabbed Brian's arms as the latter lurched forward and growled.

Michael paid Brian a moment's glance then turned back to Darren. "However, you forsook our heritage, our beliefs, and our way of life, by running off and becoming some big-wig white man yuppie. And now you have the gall to come back claiming to be the chosen of the Red Hawk, here to make

nearby Missouri and Meriquai Rivers. Although they did enjoy buffalo as well, the Meriquai usually traded for buffalo jerky rather than hunt the buffalo themselves.

This tradition carries on into today. "Traditional" Meriquai dishes, sold at cultural fairs and powwows, consist of many delicious fruit and berry salads and fish entrees. Most are lightly spices with local herbs and cooked dishes usually use no additional oils or fats. The well-known "Indian bread" (a fried bread product, sometimes with sugar added for a treat) has become very popular amongst the Meriquai as well.

Meriquai Housing and Shelter

The Meriquai were a Great Plains people. As such, and because of their foraging/fishing lifestyle that depended on foods being in season, they were largely nomadic. This put the portability of the tent-like tipis in high favor with the Meriquai. They would set up a large tribal camp in easily accessible fields close to a river or creek, living there for a month or two, before moving on to a fresh region.

Today's Meriquai live in more permanent housing. The stereotypical image of "trailer-trash" housing is now passé and even rude to mention…. Meriquai today come from all ranges of income and most live in comfortable houses. Since Mayor Lewis' municipal economic reforms during the late 80s/early 90s, the Meriquai have been free to develop their own housing projects, both as a tool to create decent housing and to teach their young a lucrative trade.

An extremely popular high school course on the Meriquai Reservation is Housing Development and Construction, which teaches students how to plan out and build a house, giving hands-on experience through the entire process. Each semester, a class builds a house, which is then sold by the school to fund future classes.

Meriquai Trade Goods

Meriquai are also known for their arts and crafts. Meriquai pottery and jewelry are greatly in demand in Meriquai Falls and even in other parts of the United States. Meriquai also make fine clothes and rugs. Meriquai ethnic clothing sells well at many fairs and is a hot seller at the International Market in Midtown.

The trading of these goods, especially at fairs and powwows, is a matter of cultural pride with the Meriquai, as it is amongst many Native peoples. For some, traveling from fair to fair offering these goods for sale is their only source of income. Most Meriquai merchants don't restrict themselves to Meriquai goods; if they've traded for goods from other Native cultures, they

will offer those for sale as well. Often, talking to a Meriquai merchant about the goods he offers will give a visitor incredible insight into the goods' significance in Native cultures.

Language

Meriquai once spoke a dialect of the Tsalagi (or Cherokee) language. There are very few native speakers of the Meriquai dialect left today; most modern Meriquai embellish their English language conversations with occasional Tsalagi words.

Names

Ancient Meriquai named their children after a natural phenomenon that embodied their hopes and aspirations for their child, usually in the form of "Adjective-Noun." When it became important to call upon his heritage, the child would address himself as "Given-Name u-we-tsi (child of) Father's-Name." Thus, a child named Water-Rabbit, whose father's name was Eagle-Heart, might address himself as Water-Rabbit u-we-tsi Eagle-Heart.

Modern Meriquai have now adopted Ancient Meriquai names as surnames, using modern American names for given names. Hence, Marcus Wind-Cloud may name his child Marianne, thus giving her the name Marianne Wind-Cloud.

The Mythical History of the Meriquai

THE DREAMCATCHER WEB

According to legends, Grandmother Spider was the first spirit to form after the Rains brought the rivers and the lakes onto the Lands. She looked about her and saw the barren Lands and its lifeless rivers. Displeased with what she saw, Grandmother Spider wove a great Dreamcatcher Web. She then slept under the Dreamcatcher Web. As she slept, she dreamt of life. When she awoke, she found a small seed trapped in her Web. Taking the dream seed, Grandmother Spider planted it into the land and from the seed sprang the Tree of Life.

THE TREE OF LIFE

From the fruits of the Tree of Life sprang life. First, the seeds of the trees, the bushes, and the grass showered down onto the ground, coloring the landscape with beautiful greens and flowery brilliance. Then, the insects emerged from the fruits, helping the grasses and plants to maintain the cycle of balance. Next to come were the birds, feeding on the insects to keep them from overwhelming the plants. From there, the beasts and the animals came forth, finding

pleasure in both the plants and the birds. Finally, man emerged from the Tree of Life.

Man intrigued Grandmother Spider. Unlike any other fruit from the Tree of Life, man had intelligence and ingenuity. He could take up tools and shape the world around him to better himself. This both fascinated and scared Grandmother Spider. Within man lied nature's greatest caretaker… and its greatest destroyer.

So Grandmother Spider lied down once more beneath her Dreamcatcher Web, dreaming of guardians who would help her guide man in his endeavors. When she awoke, Grandmother Spider was greeted with her eight totem spirit children.

THE WINDS AND THE SEASONS

Eight totem spirits had been born of Grandmother Spider's dreams. Four of them embodied the Four Winds.

> **North/Night (Buffalo):** Favoring the northern winds and the stars of night, Buffalo espouses generosity, selflessness, and spiritual hope.
>
> **East/Morning (Eagle):** Favoring the eastern winds and the rise of the morning sun, Eagle espouses vision, clarity, and inspiration.
>
> **South/Midday (Coyote):** Favoring the southern winds and the warmth of the midday sun, Coyote espouses humor, trickery, and creativity.
>
> **West/Evening (Bear):** Favoring the southern winds and the beauty of the setting sun, Bear espouses healing, inner vision, and leadership.

And four of them embodied the Four Seasons.

> **Spring/Fire (Thunderbird):** Favoring the renewing essence of spring, Thunderbird teaches kindness, cleansing, and humility.
>
> **Summer/Earth (Frog):** Favoring the life-giving essence of summer, Frog teaches honor, adaptability, and communication.
>
> **Autumn/Air (Butterfly):** Favoring the changing winds of autumn, Butterfly teaches growth, evolution, and joy.
>
> **Winter/Water (Turtle):** Favoring the sleeping snows of winter, Turtle teaches mystery, wisdom, and protection.

Grandmother Spider took pleasure from her children, for they were noble and one with her heart. Therefore, she took the Four Seasons onto herself and kept them close to guard her. The Four Winds, Grandmother Spider sent forth into the world to watch over and guide man.

THE CHILDREN OF THE MOONS

As the Four Seasons served to guard Grandmother Spider, each was allowed to sleep with Grandmother Spider under the Dreamcatcher Web for three lunar months each year. At the full moon of each month, the Dreamcatcher Web caught the dreams of the Season who slept with Grandmother Spider. That dream formed into a child of that Season.

> **Thunderbird/March (Red Hawk):** Red Hawk teaches insight, truth, and openness.
>
> **Thunderbird/April (Beaver):** Beaver teaches contentment, industry, and patience.
>
> **Thunderbird/May (Deer):** Deer teaches sensitivity, grace, and heart.
>
> **Frog/June (Robin):** Robin teaches courage, rhythm, and harmony.
>
> **Frog/July (Salmon):** Salmon teaches trust, strength, and willpower.
>
> **Frog/August (Wolf):** Wolf teaches love, community, and forgiveness.
>
> **Butterfly/September (Raven):** Raven teaches intelligence, duality, and balance.
>
> **Butterfly/October (Snake):** Snake teaches femininity, healing, and grace.
>
> **Butterfly/November (Elk):** Elk teaches confidence, wisdom, and responsibility.
>
> **Turtle/December (Drake):** Drake teaches tradition, ceremony, and lucidity.
>
> **Turtle/January (Otter):** Otter teaches playfulness, prophecy, and nobility.
>
> **Turtle/February (Cougar):** Cougar teaches initiative, speed, and precision.

Grandmother Spider gave leave to the Four Seasons to direct these children as they saw fit. Some stayed to help guard Grandmother Spider while some ventured forth to help the Four Winds to guide man.

everything okay like in some fancy fairy tale? What's stopping me from trashing you right here and now?"

Darren considered Michael's words careful. He closed his eyes and nodded. He then looked back into Michael's steely gaze. "Your common sense."

"Oh, puh-lease," Michael sighed. "Can't you think of anything better than that?"

"THAT IS ENOUGH!" a grizzled voice called from down the hill.

The four turned and looked down to see an old man hobbling up the hill. Three young girls, dressed in traditional Meriquai dresses, walked alongside of him, apparently making sure he didn't fall over. However, as difficult as each step up seemed for the old man, he walked as assuredly as a man possessed of great purpose.

"Ok-hwa, a-ta, go with your brother and take your places at the gathering," the old man spoke, shaking a feathered walking stick towards the bonfire. "I would have words with these di-ni-`yo-tli."

Ok-hwa nodded and tugged gently at Brian's arm. Brian paused, glaring one last time at Michael, before following Ok-hwa down the hill.

Michael privately grit his teeth and Darren took a deep breath. The fact that the old man had just called them both "children" was not lost on either of them. The old man strode up to the two men.

"Michael, Darren's purity of blood has very little to do with whether he is Meriquai or not. Do you not yet understand that your hatred will destroy you more surely than any thoughtless, uncaring act anyone could possibly imagine?" the old man asked, turning to the young Meriquai.

"As soon as the white man quits being thoughtless and uncaring, e-du-di, my hatred will abate," Michael replied, shaking inside. Darren could only look on in pity.

"And do you not see how people's eyes have opened in the last few decades?" the old man continued, shaking his feathered walking stick at Michael.

"That does not bring back our lost pride!" Michael snapped. "And maybe in your senility you've forgotten that the 'open eyes' come from laws passed by a black man, not from a white man. Now that a white woman is mayor of Meriquai Falls…."

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SPECIAL NOTE: *Most modern characters will not know any of the information in these next two sections. Even Crimson-Hawk, Vixen, Galvakar, and the Manitou, the only people aware of Grandmother Spider's existence, are unaware that the Kingdom of Meriquai existed thousands of years ago.*

THE RISE OF THE MERIQUAI

And guide man the Children of the Moon did. Man took to the teachings of the totem spirits with great zeal, learning much from their wisdom. This pleased the totems greatly. In return, they blessed man with powers beyond those of normal creatures. This spiritual power, much like the magic of Tuala Morn, aided man greatly. Using this power with the wisdom taught to them by the spirits, man stayed close to nature and yet built a mighty kingdom. This kingdom, they named Meriquai (or "Land of the Chosen People").

The Meriquai people lived in peace and harmony in their kingdom for several thousand years. Their cultural advances were legendary. They cultivated biological technologies that aided in transportation, craftwork, industry, and even artistic endeavors. With their living tools, the Meriquai could fly, build, carve, paint, keep records, construct virtual entertainment, and even (towards the end of the Age of Legends) teleport. Everyone was free to pursue their chosen vocation; technology did not replace man, merely aided him.

Sadly, if it is true that all good things must come to an end, it is certainly true for the Meriquai.

THE MYSTE OVER THE HEARTS OF MAN

Complacency slowly began to set in on the hearts of man. Life was too good, too perfect, and man eventually began to take for granted the gifts the spirits had given them. This angered the spirits greatly. Without Grandmother Spider's knowledge or permission, the totem spirits withdrew from their roles as guides to man. Man was suddenly without the magical gifts that made their life so good.

And, instead of learning the humility the spirits hoped they would learn, man's anger at the spirits welled up and consumed their hearts.

From this anger and spite, another spirit began to form. This spirit was not a spirit born of Grandmother Spider's dreams, however. It was born of man's hatred. And, despite how powerful Grandmother Spider's love was, man's capacity to hate was even greater. This spirit, who cast mist over the spiritual eyes of man and goaded their anger to greater heights, came to be known

as the Myste… and soon became Grandmother Spider's greatest enemy.

THE BATTLE FOR THE FATE OF MAN

Grandmother Spider knew that if she could reach the hearts of man and remind them of the love and humility that her children had taught them, she could save them *and* defeat the Myste. So she sent her children forth to persuade man to come to his senses.

This only angered man further, as they saw the spirits as pretentious and condescending. As their anger grew, so did the power of the Myste. Finally, the Myste attacked that which Grandmother Spider most feared it would… the Tree of Life.

Grandmother Spider was forced to do something she had hoped she would never do… turn her children towards war. She called the Four Seasons to her (Thunderbird, Frog, Butterfly, and Turtle) and transformed them into warrior spirits. The Four Seasons then took up the task of assaulting the Myste before the Tree of Life was completely ruined.

The battle was long and terrible. Many Meriquai died as the Myste compelled them to war directly against the spirits. Technologies originally meant for peaceful utilities were suddenly found in weapons of horrible destruction. In the meantime, Grandmother Spider and the Four Seasons fought with the Myste directly, in the hopes of destroying it forever.

However, the Myste could not be destroyed. The spirits fought long and hard against the Myste and yet the Myste would only reform after every assault.

Finally, a chosen of Red Hawk, known as Feather-Heart, came across a horrible truth. As long as there was hatred in man's hearts, the Myste could never be destroyed. Upon learning this, Feather-Heart embarked on an epic quest to teach man of this truth. The quest nearly cost Feather-Heart his life several times, but eventually man realized how fruitless his anger and his hatred really was. Slowly but surely, man set down his spear and his battle axe. When Feather-Heart finally died, war was nearly non-existent in the Kingdom of Meriquai.

Without this hatred, the Myste found itself severely weakened. Finally seeing an opening, Butterfly distracted the Myste with the love of her people while Thunderbird struck the deciding blow. Frog captured the crippled essence of the Myste and gave it to Turtle, who imprisoned the Myste and cast it into the earth to stay. The Myste could not be completely destroyed, but its imprisonment was ensured.

THE HEART OF THE GRANDMOTHER SPIDER

Sadly, the victory was not a perfect one. Grandmother Spider had expended much of her own life essence in creating her warrior spirits and in the battle against the Myste itself. Her body was damaged beyond repair, corrupted by the hatred of the Myste. Only her heart remained pure and untainted.

In a sad ritual attended only by the Four Seasons, Thunderbird let out a wail of sorrow before plunging his claw deep into Grandmother Spider's corrupted flesh and pulling out her heart. Butterfly then embraced the Heart with love and devotion, Frog revitalized the Heart with life and vivacity, and Turtle encased the Heart with pure crystal to protect it.

The ritual done, Grandmother Spider's body died and withered away. However, her essence lived on within the Heart of the Grandmother Spider. Her wisdom and guidance continued to aid the Four Seasons and the Four Winds. The totem spirits renewed their relationship with man and together they began the slow rebuilding of Meriquai Society.

By the end of the Age of Legends, over 10,000 years ago, the Kingdom of Meriquai was nearly back to the level of technology it was at before the war against the Myste.

The Modern History of the Meriquai

The Meriquai embraced the coming of the European settlers with open arms. In 1835, with the coming of Jacques Francois and his ethical trading standards, the Meriquai had a positive impression of the white man. Ten years later, when Phillip Smith established the Town of Smith's Gate, the Meriquai got the opportunity to meet many white settlers and learn their culture. For a short while, the Meriquai and the settlers lived in peace.

But relations turned for the worst when settler began moving into the Blue Hills. The Blue Hills were holy grounds to the Meriquai (it was where the Four Seasons fought the Myste). Although the Meriquai never resorted to violence, their adamant refusal to give up their holy grounds to the settlers sparked a jealous antipathy from the settlers. In the end, battles were fought and wars were declared. By the turn of the twentieth century, most Meriquai were forced onto a reservation miles north of the Missouri River, barely touching the Blue Hills.

Much of the history of the region thereafter is briefly discussed in *Meriquai Falls* (Digital Hero #2). During this time, the Meriquai adapted to living on a reservation, quietly hurt by the betrayal of trust that they experienced. They clung desperately to their cultural identity, despite the best efforts of the Bureau of Indian Affairs to turn them away from being "savages." In the end, Meriquai society became a unique amalgamation of contemporary white society and ancient Native tradition.

When silver was found in the Blue Hills, it marked a unique turning point in Meriquai society. Now, the burial grounds of their culture's greatest heroes was being violated for the sake of economic greed. For nearly four decades, this desecration continued until the miners were on the verge of discovering the Heart of the Grandmother Spider itself.

Grandmother Spider sent forth some of her children to take on hosts, so that their now weakened essences could combat this coming menace. In particular, she called upon a particularly devote shaman who fought bravely during the American Indian Wars. This shaman, now known only as the Manitou, beseeched Grandmother Spider for aid in combating the incursion on the Blue Hills blessed grounds. Grandmother Spider gave the Manitou her Four Winds and tasked him with driving the white man out of the Blue Hills mines.

In 1974, the Manitou began his task and succeeded admirably. However, during a particularly stressful encounter with a white man industry, known as Lyncon Technologies, the Manitou made statements that might have been lost on any other man, but got the genius of Gregorio Lyconius thinking. Wondering why the Manitou was so anachronistic and why he fought so hard, Gregorio researched both documents and sagely individuals until he got his answer. A mighty artifact known as the Heart of the Grandmother Spider existed… and it contained the essence of a goddess, a goddess believed to have created the world.

Gregorio coveted this power so, in 1999, he formed his Imperions to hunt down the location of this Heart. In response, Grandmother Spider redoubled her efforts to protect herself. The Manitou and his Equalizers could no longer be relied on, since they had taken their genocidal war against the white man too far. Instead, she turned to Red Hawk, known for his open eyes and open heart. Red Hawk sought out a champion and chose Darren Davenport.

The old man's eyes seemed to literally flare at this point. "You WILL take your place in the gathering now, Michael Two-Feathers. I will counsel with you privately tonight, AFTER the spirits have been honored." The old man's harsh tone of voice could not be missed.

Michael turned and scowled at Darren before storming off down the hill. Darren watched as Michael trudged down the hill, nearly knocking over a barbecue grill as he stomped into the gathering. Several people paused to watch the young man before moving on, unconcerned. Darren bowed his head and sighed. He then turned to the old man.

The old man simply sighed and shook his head in exasperation. The young girls watched him attentively. "I do not have the heart to tell the poor boy that his grandfather was a Jew."

"O-si-yo, e-du-di," Darren said, smiling respectfully to the old man. "Has your day gone any better than that, Grandpa Owl-Speaker?"

"Much better than that," the old man smiled, looking up at Darren. "Especially now that you, Ok-hwa, and Brian are here. Come, Crimson-Hawk.

The dancers have their regalia on and they are ready for the ceremonies. Your totem is especially honored this fine spring day. Come and sing to Thunderbird."

"Much better than that," the old man smiled, looking up at Darren. "Especially now that you, Ok-hwa, and Brian are here. Come, Crimson-Hawk. The dancers have their regalia on and they are ready for the ceremonies. Your totem is especially honored this fine spring day. Come and sing to Thunderbird."

"But I can't carry a note," Darren protested, following Owl-Speaker down the hill.

"Do not worry," Owl-Speaker smiled, perhaps more from the young girls keeping close to him than from anything else. "Sing from the bottom of your heart. If you sing with love and admiration, the spirits will be pleased."
Darren nodded and followed Owl-Speaker to the gathering.

Adventure Seeds

The Meriquai are a diverse people with a long history. They are perfectly suitable for many games, including *Fantasy Hero*, *Western Hero*, *Champions*, and possibly others. The following adventure seeds will help in playing game sessions involving the Meriquai.

MICHAEL TWO-FEATHER'S REVENGE

Michael Two-Feather lost his grandmother, a great Meriquai woman, in a mining accident back in the early seventies. Because the mines were run by greedy "white man" mining companies at that time, Michael blames white man for the loss of his grandmother. His hatred stews within him and eats away at his soul. Finally, a dark voice whispers in his ear, coaxing him to the silver mines, where something horrible transforms him into a creature of evil.

Ideally, the heroes must discover that the insectoid monster suddenly attacking citizens of Blue Hills and Northern Meriquai Falls is, in fact, a simple man with a huge chip on his shoulder. Perhaps during a battle, they stumble on some genetic sample. Or a mentalist hero might make mental contact with the monster, discovering the human mind buried deep within it.

Once they discover this, the heroes must decide how to deal with the monster. Will they defeat it outright, ridding the world of its threat? Or will they deal with the lost man in a more humanitarian manner? If they choose the latter course, how will they rescue Michael and bring him back to sanity without the world discovering his secret; such a discovery would cast a dark shadow on the Meriquai people.

And who transformed Michael in the first place? Was it the Manitou? Was it another villain with a grudge against the Meriquai, using Michael as a catalyst to create anti-Native sentiment? Or was it something much, much darker…?

THE RISE OF THE MYSTE

An excellent premise for an entire campaign would be the eminent return of the spirit known as the Myste. The Four Seasons could only capture and imprison the Myste. And that was back during the Age of Legends. Remember, most modern people do not have a clue as to what happened during the Age of Legends (or that the Age of Legends ever existed, for that matter).

In the long millennia that have passed since its capture, the Myste has lied in anguish deep within the earth, slowly feeding off the hatred of man during the turn of ages. The recent centuries, with the Europeans subverting many Native cultures, has stirred up a tremendous amount of hatred. This has only made the Myste stronger.

How would the Myste escape its prison? Perhaps a supervillain, such as Galvakar and the Imperions, stumble upon his prison and accidentally release him. However, even more devious and satisfying in a storytelling sense would be to for the heroes to be subtly influence into performing actions that seem heroic on the surface, but ultimately culminate in the release of the Myste back into the world. (Be careful with this tactic, though; people *hate* being manipulated and game players are no different.)

Once the Myste has been released, it will immediately begin to foment violence and hatred throughout mankind. How will the heroes stop the Myste, once it starts orchestrating actions that feed it and make it stronger? The ingenuity of the players should be rewarded, but the process of recapturing the Myste (or even destroying it once or for all) should be long, hard-fought, and costly both materially and emotionally.

Cobalt by Ross Watson

Background/History: Rick Bannon's earliest memories involve his happy family. Robert, the father, was an honored policeman, proud of his two sons Rick and Roy. Rick was actually the product of an earlier marriage, so most of the fatherly attention went to Roy. This did not particularly anger Rick, a laid back and easy-going young man.

As the boys grew to adulthood they both wanted to follow in their father's footsteps. Rick again took second seat to his brother Roy, helping to send Roy to college while Rick went to night school studying for the police academy.

Roy's college expenses were compounded when the boys' father was hospitalized after a bust gone bad. Medical bills piled up, and Rick abandoned his dream of being a policeman to take a lucrative job as a security guard at Montgomery International. MI was a very rich and influential corporation, and Rick was able to pay for his father's hospital care and help Roy get his degree. Roy was accepted into the FBI soon after, but he never forgot the sacrifices Rick had made to get him there.

Meanwhile, Rick was bored with his job at MI. Montgomery International paid well, but there was something about the company that made him uneasy. Suspicious, he began poking into things while making his rounds, investigating various ties to organized crime and shipments of strange experimental equipment.

Unfortunately, his unauthorized investigation did not go unnoticed by his employer. Executives at Montgomery International decided that Rick had to be removed, permanently. The next time Rick made his rounds, someone shoved him into an experimental bombardment chamber and locked the door shut. Amazingly, the machine did not kill Rick… instead it altered his molecular structure, giving him the ability to manipulate and control mass.

Montgomery International's next step was to fire Rick and threaten his father. Rick was infuriated, and bitterly rejected the corporations attempt to bargain with him. An unexplained power surge took the hospital equipment off line that night, and Robert Bannon died in his sleep.

Rick swore vengeance… but without evidence, he was helpless to gain any assistance from the police or the government. Roy counseled him against violence, but there was only one way Rick could fight the corporation directly… and that was with his new superhuman powers! Rick took on the identity of Cobalt, and began using his abilities to crush MI however he could. Thus began a reign of terror as Rick has attacked holdings of Montgomery

International all over the world, uncovering more and more evidence of hideous experiments and a callous disregard for human life held by the corporation. Eventually, Eurostar began to keep tabs on the young man, as Fiacho believes that Cobalt may have what it takes to join at some future point. Not everything MI produces is a target… Cobalt uncovered a protective uniform and a set of high-tech prototype goggles from a Montgomery International research and development lab, and decided to keep them to assist his efforts.

Personality/Motivation: Rick is obsessed with revenge on Montgomery International. He's also committed to bringing the corporation's diabolical schemes to light, and he doesn't care what he has to do to succeed.

Cobalt has essentially become what he once despised: A criminal. You could even call him a terrorist, for he uses any and all means necessary to tear down MI's corporate structure. His brother Roy does not approve, but can't bring himself to turn his brother in, even aiding him by altering Rick's records and passing on information when he can.

While Cobalt is not at heart a murderer, he no longer has a great respect for human life. He won't go out of his way to rescue any injured normals, nor will he keep from using excessive force when inside a city, for example. He only cares about his quest to destroy Montgomery International and make them pay.

Quote: "Montgomery International is going down… whatever it takes!"

"You have no idea what's being done behind the shield of the law and polite society."

"Everyone out of the building! I'm taking it apart in thirty seconds!"

"I hope your grasp of right and wrong is more solid than your hold on me."

Powers/Tactics: Cobalt has the power to shift mass between one source and another. This results in his abilities to control the amount of mass present in any given space around him.

Cobalt can accelerate a "wave" of mass through the air as a ranged attack, which strikes with incredible force. He can shift his own mass (and the mass of another, or something he touches equal to his own mass) "around" other molecules, rendering himself or the object ghostlike and seemingly insubstantial. He can focus mass into himself or another person, making them tougher and stronger at the price of great physical weight. Also, he can focus the

artwork by John Grigni

mass of a particular area, giving his target incredible weight, which makes most enemies affected by it immobile or very uncomfortable. Finally, he can seriously damage nearly any person or structure with a single touch, warping the interior molecular structure of his target.

Cobalt can power his punches with a jolt of heavy mass, sending opponents sprawling many meters away. However, this tires him very much, so he can only do it so many times per day. In addition, doing so requires him to wind up for a mighty punch or kick. An entangle or an appropriate Grab maneuver will keep him from being able to unleash such a blow.

His armor and technogoggles provide him with protection, and the goggles contain a very sophisticated suite of electronics. He can communicate, scan ranges, see in other wavelengths, and more. The goggles even contain a limited combat computer, which can provide a trajectory overlay on his vision to increase the effectiveness of his ranged attacks.

Tactically, Cobalt attempts to fight in an intelligent manner. If given the opportunity, he will size up his opponents and get them talking long enough to make some Tactics and Analyze Combat Technique skill rolls. He begins a fight cautiously, putting his levels into DCV and relying on his martial arts until he's sure that his opponents can handle his higher-powered attacks. When fighting superheroes, he'll use his double knockback attacks to clear some "elbow room" and use the Bouncing An Attack combat modifier (see page 249 in the HERO System 5th edition book) to bounce his energy blast amongst ranged opponents.

He likes to surprise enemies with his Desolidification that can effect them. He'll grab a troublesome foe and push them through a floor or wall to get them out of the combat area. If he's feeling particularly angry, he may turn off the Desolidification leaving a character stuck inside something particularly hard. (Keep in mind that if a Desolidified character solidifies within a solid object, he takes damage as if he teleported there, and the object usually will as well; See page 240 in the *HERO System 5th Edition* book for the Teleport Damage Table)

If he's working with a team or another villain, he will use his Transform to immobilize enemies and then grant his ally his Density Increase Useable by Other. This can be quite a shock to player characters who aren't expecting it!

Normally, Cobalt's Variable Limitation is set to two limitations: Only in Contact with the ground (In order to shift mass from the earth into or out of himself and others) and Gestures. If he thinks the battle won't last long, he'll change his limitation to Increased END Cost: 2x END.

Campaign Use: Cobalt is not a "supervillain" in the classic sense. He's a misguided individual, and his quest for revenge should make most heroes think twice about helping him.

Heroes could easily encounter Cobalt when he stages a public attack on a Montgomery International office building or industrial park. Perhaps one of the heroes works for MI in his secret identity, or perhaps MI has hired the heroes to protect them from "the terrorist threat."

Roy Bannon could also get the heroes involved in his brother's life. Roy doesn't need much more evidence to believe that his brother's gone over the edge… if Cobalt destroys a high-rise office building and all the janitors and secretaries inside die horrible deaths because of it, Roy will be quick to find a way to stop his brother. Any player character with ties to the Bureau may also know of Roy Bannon and could be clued into Cobalt's destructive rampages.

Finally, the heroes could be investigating Montgomery International on their own and find Cobalt assisting them! MI has many questionable business practices, scientific experiments, prototype equipment, and many other corporate adventure hooks for a typical superhero campaign, and Cobalt can become involved in any of them featuring the attention of the player characters.

Appearance: Cobalt is a white man in his late twenties, with slightly longer-than-normal mouse brown hair and dark green eyes. He has sharp, hawkish features and is clean-shaven. In his identity as Cobalt, he wears a gray bulky-looking jacket and black bodysuit with green boots and gloves. His goggles conceal his identity, and are golden chrome in appearance. When his density powers are active, Cobalt glows with a distinctive crackling field of dark blue energy, the same hue as his *nom de guerre*.

Cobalt

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
15/65	STR	5	22-	Lift 200t; 13d6 HTH [6]
18	DEX	24	13-	OCV: 6/DCV: 6
18/28	CON	16	15-	
15	BODY	10	12-	
15	INT	5	12-	PER Roll: 13-
15	EGO	10	12-	ECV: 5
15	PRE	5	12-	PRE Attack: 3d6
16	COM	3	12-	
10/20	PD	7		Total: 30 PD (30rPD)
10/20	ED	6		Total: 30 ED (30rED)
5	SPD	22		Phases: 3, 5, 8, 10, 12
10	REC	6		
50	END	7		
50	STUN	18		

Total Characteristics Cost: 144

Movement: Running: 6"/12"
　　　　　　　　Swimming: 2"/4"

Cost	Powers	END
72	*Mass Shifting:* Multipower, 90-point reserve, Variable Limitation (requires –½ worth of Limitations; -¼)	
7u	1) *Mass Blast:* EB 10d6, Double KB (+¾)	9
6u	2) *Mass Diffusion:* Desolidification (affected by force fields), Useable as Attack (does not work on characters with Desolidification or Force Field, +1)	8
6u	3) *Mass Concentration:* Density Increase (50,000 kg mass, +50 STR, +10 PD/ED, -10" KB), Useable By Other (+¼), Ranged (+½); Visible (-¼)	9
7u	4) *Mass Focusing:* Major Transform 6d6 (transforms anything into a version of itself with the physical limitation: mass now equals previous plus 50,000 kg, heals back normally)	9
7u	5) *Mass Distortion:* HKA 2d6 (2d6+1 with STR), Does BODY (+1), NND (defense is Force Field or Desolidification, +1)	9
9	*Density Stamina:* +10 CON; No Figured Characteristics (-½), Linked to Density Increase (-½), Visible (-¼)	0
11	*Density Protection:* Damage Resistance (20 PD/20 ED); Linked to Density Increase (-½), Visible (-¼)	0
15	*Density Wall:* Missile Deflection (all Ranged attacks); Linked to Density Increase (-½)	0
24	*Mass-ively Powerful Blows:* Double Knockback advantage purchased for 65 STR; 6 Charges (-¾), Restrainable (-¼)	0
15	*Armored Uniform:* Armor 10 PD/10 ED; OIF (-½), Activation 14- (-½)	0
8	*Technogoggles:* High Range Radio Perception; OIF Durable (-½)	
3	*Technogoggles:* Infared Perception; OIF Durable (-½)	
3	*Technogoggles:* Ultraviolet Perception; OIF Durable (-½)	
4	*Technogoggles:* Sight Group Flash Defense (5 points), Hardened (+¼)	
17	*Technogoggles:* +5 with Ranged Attacks; OIF Durable (-½)	
8	*Technogoggles:* +4 vs. Range Modifier vs. All Attacks; OIF Durable (-½)	
3	*Technogoggles:* Absolute Range Sense; OIF Durable (-½)	

Martial Arts: Dirty Infighting

	Maneuver	OCV	DCV	Notes
4	Block	+2	+2	Block, Abort
4	Disarm	-1	+1	Disarm, +10 STR
4	Eye Gouge	-1	-1	Sight Flash 4d6
4	Low Blow	-1	+1	2d6 NND
4	Punch	+0	+2	STR +2d6 Strike
5	Roundhouse	-2	+1	STR +4d6 Strike
3	Tackle	+0	-1	STR +v/5 Strike; Both Fall
3	Throw	+0	+1	STR +v/5; Target Falls

Perks

3	Anonymity
8	Contact: FBI Agent Roy Bannon (very useful skills and resources, access to major institution, very good relationship) 11-

Talents

3	Lightsleep

Skills

30	+6 with Hand-to-Hand Combat
3	Acrobatics 13-
3	Analyze Combat Technique 12-
3	Breakfall 13-
3	Bribery 12-
3	Combat Driving 13-
3	Computer Programming 12-
3	Conversation 12-
3	Criminology 12-
3	Forensic Medicine 12-
3	KS: The Criminal World 12-
3	KS: The Law Enforcement World 12-
3	KS: Montgomery International 12-
3	KS: The Corporate World 12-
3	Oratory 12-
3	Paramedics 12-
3	PS: Security Guard 12-
3	Security Systems 12-
3	Shadowing 12-
3	Sleight of Hand 13-
3	Stealth 13-
3	Streetwise 12-
3	Tactics 12-
1	WF: Small Arms

Total Powers & Skills cost: 367

Total Cost: 511

150+ Disadvantages

10 DNPC: Roy Bannon (Cobalt's half-brother) 11- (Normal, Useful)

20 Enraged: Enraged when he takes BODY (Uncommon), go 14-, recover 11-

10 Hunted: Eurostar 11- (Mo Pow, NCI, Watching)

20 Hunted: Montgomery International 8- (Mo Pow, NCI, Capture)

15 Hunted: Police 11- (Less Pow, NCI, Imprison)

10 Psychological Limitation: Determined to bring down Montgomery International (Common, Moderate)

10 Psychological Limitation: The End Justifies The Means (Uncommon, Strong)

15 Social Limitation: Secret Identity (Frequently, Major)

20 Vulnerability: 2x STUN from Cold (Common)

20 Vulnerability: 2x BODY from Cold (Common)

161 Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 511