

DIGITAL HERO

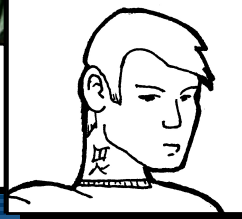
#27

FEB 2005



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DIGITAL HERO

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Issue #27 (February 2005)



When Last We Left Our Heroes...

by Steven S. Long

Last month I talked about *Hudson City*, our latest setting book, this one for the Dark Champions line. It's time to step one genre over into Fantasy to discuss another setting book: *The Valdorian Age*.

VA describes the world of the time after the Turakian Age, when magic has ebbed a little and a man's strength and swordplay are often more important than the spells he knows. In literary terms, it's a Swords And Sorcery setting rather than a High Fantasy one like *The Turakian Age* (or most other worlds created for roleplaying games, for that matter). I don't think there's anything quite like it on the market today. If you like stories about Conan, Elric, or Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser, this is a setting you'll really enjoy.

VA describes a world of mighty-thewed warriors with flashing blades, cities full of skilled thieves and corrupt officials, eerie wizards using complex rituals to summon foul beings from other worlds to serve their whims, ancient races from before the ken of men lurking in the dark and forgotten places of the world... and of course lost and crumbling cities, filled with both treasure and unimagined perils! Perhaps most importantly, it's a world where magic isn't as common and powerful as in most Fantasy settings, and where few people are noble-hearted and true. But it's also a place where one skilled man, armed with nothing but a sharp sword and his own unbeatable determination, can make a real difference... and perhaps go from being a simple sellsword to lord, or even king, in a few scant months or years.

Allen wrote this book, and his love of the Swords And Sorcery genre really shines through on every page. I think he's done an excellent job of adapting the themes, tropes, archetypes, and "feel" of S&S while still keeping things "gameable."

Chapter One describes the heart of the world of Il-Ryveras: *Elweir*, the vast, sprawling, stinking city that sits at the confluence of the Serpentine and Worm Rivers. Filled with adventures enough to last a lifetime, it's the primary focus of most Valdorian Age campaigns... or at least their starting point.

Chapter Two, *The Known World*, goes beyond Elweir to describe the other realms and cities of Il-Ryveras: the kingdom of Abyzina; the barbarian lands of the Crumble; the mighty empire of Valdoria; the pirate-filled archipelago of Naraat; and many more. But much of Il-Ryveras remains unexplored and unknown to men, giving your heroes the chance to carve new kingdoms for themselves out of the wilderness, if they're so inclined.

Chapter Three, *Swordsmen And Sorcerers: Character Creation In The Valdorian Age*, consists of several sections. First it covers character creation basics: starting Primary Characteristics for Valdorian Age characters, character archetypes, Package Deals specific to the world of Il-Ryveras, and a general review of Skills, Talents, and the like (including special rules for Normal Skill Maxima). Second, it describes the many forms of the *Fighting Tricks* Skill, a key Skill for many characters, and what heroes can do with it. Third, there's a section of special rules and options for Valdorian Age combat. This section also covers weapons, armor, and other equipment.

Last but not least, Chapter Three describes *sorcery*, the strange magic of the Valdorian world. In a Valdorian Age campaign, spellcasters have to conjure demons, spirits, elementals, and divine beings and persuade them to do what the sorcerer wishes. And if the summoning fails... which is all too unlikely... the sorcerer accumulates *Favors* owed to supernatural beings. And sooner or later, *something* is going to call those Favors in, which usually makes life rather unpleasant for the sorcerer. It's a wonderfully evocative magic system that fits the S&S nature of the setting to a T.

Chapters Four and Five are for the GM only; players shouldn't read them without the GM's permission. Chapter Four includes general advice for GMing the Valdorian Age, including suggested campaign types (with plot seeds for each) and *The GM's Vault*, which has all the secret and/or correct information related to what you've already read in Chapters One and Two. It also discusses the whys and wherefores of the rules changes established for *Valdorian Age* games, so that GMs who want to alter things can understand what's going on and make appropriate decisions. Lastly it describes what happens during the rest of the Valdorian Age, in case the GM prefers another timeframe for his Valdorian campaign. Chapter Five rounds out the GMing section of the book with character sheets for the beings sorcerers summon to work their magic and for some key Elweirnian NPCs your heroes might encounter.

So strap on your broadsword and keep a close eye on your coinpurse – adventure and danger await you in *The Valdorian Age!*

— Steven S. Long
HERO System Line Developer



HEROglyphs by Steven S. Long

Heavy, Man

Creating an “Alter Mass” Power

In last month’s *HEROglyphs* (“Let’s Get Small... Err, Big”), I created an *Alter Size* Power that combined Growth and Shrinking into one unified, consistent whole. This month, I’m going to try the same thing with Density Increase and Desolidification to create an *Alter Mass* Power.

Creating Alter Mass requires some changes in the way Desolidification works. Under the current *HERO System* rules (and the Fourth Edition rules, for that matter), Desolidification is an absolute, with no gradations: 40 Character Points provides a character with the ability to become completely intangible. But ’twas not always thus. In earlier editions, characters bought Desolidification on a sliding scale – the more points spent, the greater the BODY of objects a character could walk through. The *Alter Mass* Power requires a return to that method of doing things, as described in the accompanying table.

The *Alter Mass* Power created here is a Body-Affecting Power. It’s Constant, Self Only, and costs END. It costs 5 Character Points per “level” of mass alteration. The standard rules for Density Increase apply unless otherwise noted, as do the standard rules for Desolidification when the character reaches 40 points’ worth of reduced mass.

A character who buys Alter Mass must decide whether he can become heavier (Density Increase) or less dense (“Density Decrease”) when he buys the Power, and can’t change this thereafter. For a +1 Advantage, *True Mass Alteration*, he can become heavier or less dense as he chooses (though he can’t become both heavier and less dense at the same time, of course).

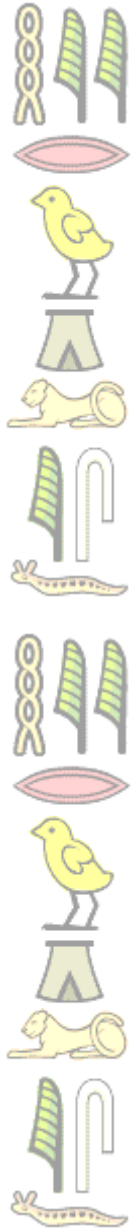
RULES FOR LESSER DENSITY

As noted in the table, every 5 points spent on buying the “less dense” form of Alter Mass allows a character to move through up to 1 BODY worth of physical objects (walls, primarily) per Full Phase Action (during which he can move up to his full inches of movement, but cannot attack in any way, even with a Move By/Through, unless the GM specifically permits him to). He cannot move through denser objects (*i.e.*, those with greater BODY) at all. A character who’s spent 40 points on lesser density can increase the number of BODY he can move through for a cost of +3 Character Points for every +1 BODY. Characters who’ve spent less than 40 points on lesser density cannot do this.

At the GM’s option, a character can move through denser objects at a slower pace. With this option, for each Full Phase Action spent to move through objects, the character moves through X BODY of objects, thus requiring multiple Full Phase Actions to move through objects with greater than X BODY. For example, if a character has spent 20 points on being less dense (meaning he can move through 4 BODY objects as a Full Phase Action), he could move through an 8 BODY wall by taking two Full Phase Actions. (In either case, these rules assume the object is small/thin enough that the character’s Full Move would be enough to move him through it; if it’s larger/thicker than that, he’ll have to spend multiple Full Phase Actions moving through it.)

For 5-35 Character Points’ worth of lesser density, a character becomes harder to hurt (since he’s not fully tangible) and easier to Knock Back (this only increases the Knockback distance, not the damage done by Knockback). A character who’s spent 40 points (or more) on lesser density can, by using 40 or more points’ worth of the power, become completely intangible, at which point the rules for Desolidification apply. While fully intangible, he does not gain any extra PD or ED, or take extra Knockback from attacks – at that point, most attacks can’t affect him at all.

A character with 40 or more points of “Density Decrease” can choose to use less than full power so that he gains some extra defense for being only partially tangible. However, he cannot use any “extra BODY movable through” he’s purchased – he’s limited to the amount of BODY indicated on the table. The amount of BODY movable through can only be increased for true intangibility.



ALTER MASS TABLE

Points	Mass	STR	KB	PD	ED	BODY Movable Through
75	1,600,001 – 32,000,000 kg	+75	-15”	+15	+15	—
70	800,001 – 1,600,000 kg	+70	-14”	+14	+14	—
65	400,001 - 800,000 kg	+65	-13”	+13	+13	—
60	200,001 - 400,000 kg	+60	-12”	+12	+12	—
55	100,001 - 200,000 kg	+55	-11”	+11	+11	—
50	50,001 - 100,000 kg	+50	-10”	+10	+10	—
45	25,001 - 50,000 kg	+45	-9”	+9	+9	—
40	12,501 - 25,000 kg	+40	-8”	+8	+8	—
35	6,401 - 12,500 kg	+35	-7”	+7	+7	—
30	3,201 - 6,400 kg	+30	-6”	+6	+6	—
25	1,601 - 3,200 kg	+25	-5”	+5	+5	—
20	801 - 1,600 kg	+20	-4”	+4	+4	—
15	401 - 800 kg	+15	-3”	+3	+3	—
10	201 - 400 kg	+10	-2”	+2	+2	—
5	101 - 200 kg	+5	-1”	+1	+1	—
0	100 kg	+0	-0	+0	+0	—
5	51 - 99 kg	—	+1”	+1	+1	1 BODY
10	26 - 50 kg	—	+2”	+2	+2	2 BODY
15	12.6 - 25 kg	—	+3”	+3	+3	3 BODY
20	6.5 - 12.5 kg	—	+4”	+4	+4	4 BODY
25	3.3 - 6.4 kg	—	+5”	+5	+5	5 BODY
30	1.7 - 3.2 kg	—	+6”	+6	+6	6 BODY
35	0.8 - 1.6 kg	—	+7”	+7	+7	7 BODY
40	Intangibility‡	—	—	—	—	8 BODY*

...and so forth, in either direction

‡ At this point, the character becomes completely intangible, and the rules for Desolidification apply (*i.e.*, he cannot be affected by physical attacks, cannot affect the physical world, and so forth), except as noted otherwise in the text. He cannot move through objects of 9 BODY or higher, despite the fact that he’s fully intangible. Characters who buy 40 or more Character Points’ worth of the “Density Decrease” form of Alter Mass can increase the BODY of objects they can move through per Full Phase Action for a cost of +1 BODY for every +3 Character Points.

FURTHER TINKERING

As you can see, the *Alter Mass* Power doesn’t have quite the consistency of last month’s Alter Size. While there are some similarities between greater-than-normal mass and less-than-normal mass, there are also significant differences: becoming more dense increases the character’s STR (though becoming less dense doesn’t weaken him); and becoming less dense provides a restricted form of intangibility (until true intangibility is reached at 40 points’ worth of Alter Mass) that isn’t paralleled by any aspect of “Density Increase.” You might want to consider making the “Density Decrease” aspect of the Power reduce a character’s STR by 5 points per level, but that may make it far too unattractive a Power for that purpose, and certainly wouldn’t be consistent with the standard rules for Desolidification.



You Gotta Have Character

by Jason Walters

“Life is lived forwards, but understood backwards.” — Kierkegaard

The two Washoe County Sheriffs looked uncomfortable in their sleeveless jumpsuits as the hot desert sun beat mercilessly down upon them. The fact that they were festooned from head to toe with a dizzying array of crime fighting devices probably didn't help. Pistols, stun guns, mace, PDAs, radios, handcuffs, and ammunition pouches dangled from their bodies like black plastic ornaments hanging from a paramilitary Christmas tree. Officer Bloom was busily manipulating a tiny tape measure along the ground muttering comments into a small tape recorder.

“Suspect wears size eight combat boots....”

Although it was only ten in the morning, the temperature had already begun its inexorable daily climb from its relaxed evening seventy degrees towards an angry afternoon hundred. The local police weren't too happy that I had dragged them out to my isolated homestead in the Black Rock Desert; but they were infuriated that it had been robbed. Felonies were uncommon in rural Northern Nevada, not to mention generally fatal, so even fairly small crimes got taken pretty seriously by law enforcement. Small, of course, is a matter of personal opinion when it comes to crime. The wife had been particularly incensed by the break in to the ranch house. She'd spent endless hours the night before bent over her foot-spun grinding wheel sharpening and endless succession of Bowie knives, Arkansas Toothpicks, and cuirasses until the sun poked its ugly head over the mountaintops.

“So,” I ventured, “do you think it was him? The Bandit?”

Bloom and his partner looked at one another knowingly. It was a practiced effect; I'd seen them do it before. But the police enjoyed their little dramatic flourishes as much as anybody else, and the not-so-subtle knowing glance between hard bitten friends was pretty much a Black Rock Desert tradition.

“Could be,” he answered cautiously, “It fits his M.O.”

I nodded slowly.

“That's short for Modus Operandi.” he added helpfully, “It's Latin.”

I couldn't blame Bloom for thinking that I was none too bright. First of all, I had long hair; not a real popular fashion choice in rural Nevada. Secondly, I had built a ramshackle homestead in one of the most godforsaken, hostile places in the entire Western United States. Of course, it is also one of the most beautiful places in the West, but most of the people who made their homes out there simply assumed that I was crazy, stoned, or stupid. I guess one out of three isn't too bad.

“The wife and I had been planning to take a three day hiking trip up into The Banjo.” I pointed up into the mountains directly behind Midian Ranch. “We'll be armed but I'm not really keen on running into that maniac if I can avoid it. Do you think we should skip it?”

“Naw,” he replied thoughtfully, “best guess is he's long gone toward the Oregon boarder. Land 'round here's too hard to live on. But just to be safe, if you bump into a guy with pale blue eyes and large, horse teeth up there... act first.”

I shivered. It wasn't every day that the police encouraged you to kill somebody. They must have wanted the Ballarat Bandit something bad. They were wrong too; you could live comfortably for years off rabbits, deer, and pronghorn antelope up in The Banjo, or any of the other, larger mountain ranges like the Granite, Jackson, or Oblivion, if you were tough and motivated enough to do it. With a little foresight, you could be invisible as hell while doing it too. And from what I had gathered from snippets of conversation between friends out in the desert, our mystery burglar was all kinds of motivated, tough, and forward-thinking.

“I've heard he killed a couple of cops down near Death Valley. Is that true?” Tina hadn't said much until then. She was so ticked off that I was surprised that the pupils of her eyes hadn't turned into little skulls like some kind of cartoon character.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Several days before the weekend of July 18th of last year, the Ballarat Bandit robbed Midian Ranch, the isolated desert home of your humble author. After breaking into the ranch's lower buildings, he carefully placed three broken locks back together in such a way that the appeared to be whole. Then he broke into the ranch house by delicately jimmying open the front door with a small pry bar. It wasn't until several weeks later that my wife Tina (yes, clever reader, *that* Tina) noticed that some of her night vision equipment was missing. Nothing else appears to have been disturbed or taken.

The Bandit had been so careful in his work that we only found the marks on the doorway *after* realizing that her Generation I nightvision monacle had been taken.



**COMMENTS
ABOUT THE
BALLARAT
BANDIT**

“He was good. That is what everybody agrees on. He was goal-oriented and nothing was going to stand in the way of him doing what he wanted.”

— Nye County
Deputy Ken
Guthridge

“I think the guy was crazy.”

— Rancher Donald
Jackson

“I believe the guy had some sort of paramilitary training. He had too many survival skills for the average Joe who leaves the city and says, ‘I am going to live in the country.’”

— Detective Jeff
Hollowell

“How he eluded us, we may never know. You stick a normal person out where he was at that time of year, he is going to have trouble. But this guy was like the Energizer Bunny.”

— Lt. Mike Dolfin

“What was his driving motivation? What was he looking for? Who was he? We still don’t know.”

— Sheriff DeMeo

“Jason, if you see some guy with bright blue eyes and big horse teeth, either run or shoot him.”

— Rancher Donna
Potter

The Ballarat Bandit



Bloom gave his partner another one of those trademark Black Rock Desert Knowing Looks™.

“Let’s just say that if you have to act, and you act first, there’s a lobster and steak dinner waiting for you courtesy of the Washoe County Police Department.”

After they left, Tina and I packed up for our hike. She strapped her new Walther P-22 onto her hip and slung her collapsible AR-7 into the specially designed compartment in her backpack, while I slipped my trusty Walther P-99 into its combat holster, then strapped my 12-gauge Mossberg Persuader onto my back. Without issuing our dog Snap a sidearm we couldn’t possibly have been more prepared. Still, I couldn’t get over my unease as we picked our way uphill towards the bizarre ventricle aspen gully forests, hidden pastures, and tumbling crystal springs that dotted the face of The Banjo like colorful ribbons tied onto a pretty child’s head.

I couldn’t get over the feeling we were being watched.

So physically fit that he could walk up to 30 miles in a day, cross over a 9,000-foot mountain to evade the police, and travel across entire deserts with no sustenance other than water, they mysterious survivalist and rural burglar known only by the moniker of “The Ballarat Bandit” evaded the authorities for almost a year by sticking exclusively to some of the roughest terrain in the United States. During that time, they hunted him without success from helicopter and horseback, with SWAT teams and search dogs, in the bitter cold and blistering heat. Yet four months after taking his own life with a .22 rifle rather than be captured, the identity of The Bandit remains a total mystery to law enforcement. For although he seemed to have possessed the specialized knowledge of a Green Beret or Navy Seal, there is no military or criminal record of his identity. His sudden appearance, moderately bizarre crime spree, and subsequent suicide had made him a legend amongst the desert inhabitants of Nevada just as his total anonymity has made him a mystery to law enforcement.

Background/History: The first known sighting of the figure who would become known as the Ballarat Bandit occurred in August of 2003 when visitors to Death Valley National Park reported seeing a suspicious man with a dog walking in the desert near the Panamint Mountain Range. When park rangers investigated, they found the dog, but not the man, so they filed a report and forgot about it until January of 2004, when dozens of local burglaries were reported to police. Small privately owned mines, accessible only by foot or all-terrain vehicles, dot the hills surrounding the park. Locals work these private claims on weekends, and most of them maintain small cabins that they keep stocked with canned food and dry goods. The thief who targeted these isolated cabins stole food, ATVs (all-terrain vehicles), gasoline, winter clothing, and containers to hold water.

Since 30 of these burglaries occurred near the Old West ghost town of Ballarat, authorities nicknamed the thief the “Ballarat Bandit.” He wasn’t the first odd character attracted to this desolate area. Walter “Scotty” Scott built a large European-style castle Grapevine Canyon in the 1920s. In the late 1960s, the infamous Manson family camped at the nearby Briggs Mine. But there were several things that made authorities extraordinarily nervous about this larcenous newcomer to the desert. In late January, four off-duty police officers camping in the area spoke with the bandit as he passed by on an ATV. The man struck the officers as odd, so they followed him to his campsite. From a safe distance, they snapped the only known photograph taken of the bandit before his death. It shows him seated beside the stolen ATV loaded with a rifle and other supplies. The officers forwarded their concerns, as well as their photograph, to a local police agency in California. The agency studied the photo, recognized a familiar landmark, and was able to pinpoint the location of the camp. A SWAT team was dispatched from Inyo County by helicopter while rangers from the National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management (or BLM) closed in on the remote campsite. The rangers drew within 50 feet of the suspect before he launched into a five-mile run into the mountains over hilly, rugged terrain. The rugged rangers, whose regular exercise regimen includes jogging and backpacking through desert mountains, couldn’t keep up with the fleet-footed Bandit.

BALLARAT BANDIT PLOT SEEDS

Manhunt: For some unknown reason the authorities want the mysterious outlaw known as the Ballarat Bandit dead, and they're none too picky about who does the killing. The PCs have been contacted, contracted, paid, and deputized by a high ranking Nevada state official to track down and eliminate the mysterious survivalist with extreme prejudice. Can the PCs fulfill their contract? More importantly, when they find out what the state officials *real* motivations are... will they want to?

Alien Manhunt: The sudden, mysterious appearance of the Ballarat Bandit is easily explained – he's an alien. After escaping from his prison in Area 51, the Bandit began stealing to keep himself alive as he desperately scours the desert in a hidden spaceship. The Air Force, the FBI, Nevada police, and mysterious men in 1950s-style black suits are in frenzied hot pursuit as the Bandit wanders into an isolated roadside diner where the PCs are having a quiet dinner....

Area 51 Break In: The wide and varied burglaries of isolated

The Ballarat Bandit

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
15	STR	5	12-	Lift 200 kg, 3d6 HTH [1]
18	DEX	24	13-	OCV: 6/DCV: 6
23	CON	26	14-	
18	BODY	16	13-	
14	INT	4	12-	PER Roll: 12-
17	EGO	14	12-	ECV: 6
13	PRE	3	12-	PRE Attack: 2½d6
10	COM	0	11-	
8	PD	5		Total: 8 PD (0 rPD)
8	ED	3		Total: 8 ED (0 rED)
4	SPD	12		Phases: 3, 6, 9, 12
8	REC	0		
55	END	5		
43	STUN	5		

Total Characteristic Cost: 122

Movement: Running: 10"/20"
Leaping: 3"/6"
Swimming: 4"/8"

Cost	Powers	END
8	<i>Hardy:</i> Running +4" (10" Total)	2
2	<i>Hardy:</i> Swimming +2" (4" Total)	1

Skills

- 10 +2 with Ranged Combat
- 5 +1 with Hand-to-Hand Combat
- 6 Penalty Skill Levels: +2 vs. Range Modifiers with All Attacks
- 5 AK: Nevada/California Desert 14-
- 3 Climbing 13-
- 3 Combat Driving 13-
- 3 Concealment 12-
- 3 Contortionist 13-
- 2 Forgery (Identity Cards) 12-

- 3 Lockpicking 13-
- 1 Mechanics 8-
- 2 Navigation (Land) 12-
- 5 PS: Survivalist 14-
- 3 Shadowing 12-
- 3 Stealth 13-
- 12 Survival (Arctic/Subarctic Forests, Arctic/Subarctic Plains, Desert, Mountain, Temperate/Subtropical Forests, Temperate/Subtropical Plains) 14-
- 3 TF: Common Motorized Ground Vehicles, Equines, Two-Wheeled Motorized Ground Vehicles
- 3 Tactics 12-
- 3 Tracking 12-
- 10 WF: Assault Rifles/LMGs, Blades, Bows, Crossbows, Early Percussion Firearms, Garrote, Handguns, Homemade Weapons, Polearms and Spears, Rifles, Shotguns, Staffs, Submachine Guns, Thrown Knives, Axes, and Darts

Total Powers & Skills Cost: 88

Equipment Allowance: 40

Total Cost: 260

200+ Disadvantages

- 10 Distinctive Features: Bright Blue Eyes, Large Teeth, Very Tan (Concealable)
- 25 Hunted: All Nevada Law Enforcement Officers 11- (Mo Pow, NCI)
- 10 Psychological Limitation: Avoids Other Human Beings (Uncommon, Strong)
- 15 Reputation: Dangerous Outlaw 11- (Extreme)

Total Disadvantage Points: 260

<u>Equipment</u>	<u>Ammo</u>	<u>OCV</u>	<u>RMod</u>	<u>Damage</u>	<u>STUNx</u>	<u>xShots</u>	<u>Extra Clips</u>
AK-47	7.62x39mmR	+1	+1	2d6	1d6	30	3
Colt Python	.357 M	+1	+0	1½d6	1d6-1	6	4
Glock 21	.45 ACP	+1	+0	2d6	1d6	13	2
M - 1 Garand	.30-06	+0	+1	2d6+1	1d6	8	2
Mossberg "Persuader"	12gauge	+0	+0	2½d6	1d6	8	4
<u>Knife</u>	<u>OCV</u>	<u>Damage</u>					
Arkansas Toothpick	+0	1d6+1					
Buck Knife	+0	1d6-1					
Machete	+0	1d6					
<u>Other Equipment</u>							
Crowbar							
Flashlight							
Four Wheel Drive Vehicle, Stolen							
Level II Kevlar Vest (DEF 6, 14-)							
Lockpicks							
Nightvision Goggles, Generation II							
Telescopic Sight (9x, can be used on any rifle)							

Having lost track of the Bandit, authorities began to scour the countryside in search of his isolated campsites. What they found startled them. Many of these campsites were near military installations such as the Tonopah Test Range, the Naval Air Weapons Station at China Lake, California, and the government's secret installation along Groom Dry Lake, popularly known as Area 51. One of the campsites contained topographical maps and federal government maps intended for use by pilots. All of them held stockpiles of rifles and ammunition, were placed strategically in reference to one another, and were typically constructed so that there was only one way in and one way out. The FBI, alarmed at the possibility that the Bandit might be a terrorist or spy with extensive paramilitary training, correspondingly joined the manhunt.

Now fully aware that law enforcement officials were determined to find him, the Bandit quickly left Death Valley in a stolen four-wheel-drive Subaru jeep. Seth Dee, a geologist from Oregon, had left the car overnight on a desolate stretch of road while he hiked into a nearby mountain range. The hapless scientist had left his wallet, credit cards, and a spare set of keys in the vehicle. Months later, after the authorities had returned the car to him, Dee found a crumpled piece of paper stuffed inside the vehicle's owner's manual. On it, a skilled hand had precisely duplicated Dee's name, over and over again. Dee believes the Bandit planned to steal his identity. "It was full of my signature. He had it down, and there is no question he could have used it," the geologist said. "It was pretty haunting to see that." For several days after the jeep was stolen, authorities tracked the Bandit by monitoring his use of Dee's credit cards. He headed north to Tonopah before turning southeast to Alamo. Then the Bandit vanished once again.

About a week later, on March 8, the Nye County Sheriff's Office got a call from Donald Jackson, a rancher who lives in an isolated area near Warm Springs, some 50 miles east of Tonopah. A distraught Jackson informed authorities that his ranch had been burglarized while he was away for three days. The thief stole gasoline, frozen food, a tractor battery, and a small red wagon belonging to his 4-year-old daughter. Since his home is extremely remote, Jackson was baffled to see wagon tracks leading away from his property. Obviously, the thief had left on foot dragging the cart behind him. He conveyed his disbelief to his father-in-law, Joe Fallini, who lives nearby. Fallini responded that he had seen wagon tracks on a dirt road leading into the rolling hills north of Highway 6. "I said, 'No way. That is 10 miles away. That can't be,'" Jackson recalled. "Then, we went up there and I

saw it (the tracks) and said, 'Son of a bitch. That guy went all that way with that wagon.'" Jackson and Fallini followed the tracks for several miles along the dirt road. Finally, they decided it would be wiser to cease their pursuit and contact the authorities. Two Nye County deputies found Dee's stolen Subaru and the Bandit's campsite about eight miles up the dirt road, hidden in an isolated valley. In the car, the deputies discovered twelve stolen rifles, two pistols, and boxes of ammunition. Apparently he had tried unsuccessfully to jumpstart the disabled Subaru using the pilfered tractor battery. (*Author's Note: Tractor batteries, like old Volkswagen Bug batteries, are 6-volt. Modern automobile batteries are 12-volt. Believe me, you cannot jumpstart one with the other. I've tried.*)

They didn't find the Bandit, however.

Certain that their quarry was on foot in difficult country, the police decided to seize the moment and capture him. At dawn the next morning Nye County Sheriff's deputies and a state game warden were deployed on the ground, while a Las Vegas police helicopter crew searched for him from the air. Assisted by search dogs, deputies soon found a set of footprints that took them northeast between two 9,000-foot peaks. The regular intervals between the footprints indicated the Bandit never stopped to rest while ascending the snow-covered mountain range. At the time, temperatures in that area were in the 20s at night and the 40s during the day.

The bandit resurfaced less than a week later when he tried to hotwire a pickup belonging to the owner of the Black Rock gas station. The station owner scared him off before calling the Nye County Sheriff's Office. Black Rock is located about 60 miles east of the hideout where deputies discovered the disabled Subaru. The sheriff believes that the Bandit traveled that distance on foot with no sustenance other than water.

"Who goes that hard to avoid a slap on the wrist from law enforcement for some burglaries?" Sheriff Guthridge commented. "He was wearing Reeboks. This would have been a good commercial for that shoe."

Upon receiving the call, Nye County deputies hoped to launch a comprehensive search near Black Rock, but both the Las Vegas police and the FBI were unable to send a helicopter crew. The next day the Bandit struck again. A two-wheel-drive Toyota was reported stolen from an oil company in Eagle Springs, about 15 miles east of Black Rock. Over the next three days, an FBI helicopter equipped with sophisticated nightvision equipment, a police department plane, and a team of law enforcement officers and a police canine unit searched a maze of canyons and valleys across northern Nye County. On March 12 (the second day of the

cabins by the Bandit have just been a long series of practice runs. His real target has always been the mysterious military base on Groom Dry Lake known as Area 51, where the Bandit expected to discover secrets beyond the imaginings of mortal men. He was half right. Now on the run with his mind scrambled by visions of that which Man Was Not Meant To Know and a mysterious device in his possession, in his hour of need the Ballarat Bandit calls in a favor from some old friends: the PCs!

Kidnapped: Sometimes old enemies can be closer and more beloved than old friends. Back during the cold war, one of the PCs worked for the CIA as a field operative. His most deadly opponent was a young Russian agent known only as Factor B, a master of stealth, survival, and marksmanship. When the Soviet Union fell into chaos, Factor B made peace with his old enemies, then vanished into the rural American west, swearing off politics forever.

Now, a decade later, political enemies within the former KGB have tracked Factor B to the isolated Death Valley ranch where he lives. After murdering his

American wife, kidnapping his six year old daughter, and leaving him for dead, they have headed north toward the Canadian border. But Factor B (also known as the Ballarat Bandit) isn't dead. After placing a mysterious call for help to his former adversary (the PC), he sets off north in pursuit of his daughter's abductors. Can the PCs intervene before these highly trained and deadly former spies have a showdown in the innocent, sleepy Nevada town of Empire?

search), Las Vegas attorney Steve Morris reported a burglary at his 70-acre cattle ranch, located inside at a remote location northeast of Tonopah. The Bandit managed to slip through a window pane that was just 10 inches by 14 inches. Once inside he stole spices, cooking oils, canned food, and a brand-new shotgun. He also stole a four-wheel-drive Ford pickup, leaving behind the stolen Toyota. In his usual polite, organized manner, the Bandit disrupted Morris' home as little as possible, leaving his extensive liqueur cabinet almost entirely untouched and going so far as to make his own bed before leaving.

The Nye County search continued over the next few days but the Bandit was gone, driving north in the stolen pickup. On April 2, some passersby stopped to help him pull the Ford out of the mud north of Reno. He then vanished into the vast, rugged wilderness of northernmost western Nevada near the borders of California and Oregon for the next three months, appearing very occasionally to converse with ranchers running cattle in various inaccessible areas. On June 21st, a cowboy spotted the Bandit camping in one of the remotest corners of the region. He alerted BLM rangers, who along with sheriffs' deputies located the camp two days later; there was no sign of the Bandit. They did, however, find the stolen Ford pickup stuck in the mud nearby. The Bandit had shot it full of holes out of frustration.

A month later Washoe County deputies began to receive a rash of burglary reports from ranchers who owned isolated homes throughout the area. (*Author's Note: including me, dammit!*)

"We decided we had to stay on top of this guy," Commented Sergeant Russ Pedersen of the Washoe County Sheriff's Department. "He had been down south for a long time, and we didn't want him up here that long."

Two weeks later while searching for the Bandit on horseback, Pedersen and other officers found a neatly butchered cow near New Year Lake, about 150 miles north of Reno. On July 25th, almost one year after the first sighting of the Ballarat Bandit, a park ranger spotted the Bandit walking south holding a gas can on Highway 127 between Death Valley and Baker. The excited officer called for other officers to converge on the area. Numerous units representing the Park Service, the BLM, the Sheriff's Department, and the FBI responded. A helicopter crew spotted the Bandit hiding beneath a tarp in the desert not far from the road. As his pursuers closed in, he ran up a rocky hillside in an attempt to escape, but to no avail – the Bandit was surrounded. When police ordered him to surrender, he shot himself in the head with a .22-caliber rifle, instantly killing himself.

Yet the mystery of the Ballarat Bandit did not die when he fired a bullet into his brain. To a man, the police were convinced his capture would end the mystery of his identity, that his fingerprints would match those of a notorious fugitive or maybe an ex-Green Beret. But, to this day, the Ballarat Bandit's body sleeps in the Las Vegas morgue, a corpse with no name.

Personality/Motivation: "You could write this guy up as the survivalist James Bond of Nye County," Nye County Deputy Ken Guthridge once commented dryly, "or you could write him up as a homeless guy who stole food and didn't want to get caught." The exact motivations of the Ballarat Bandit are unknown. "We don't want to speculate on what he is doing because it's anybody's guess," commented Agent Todd Palmer, spokesman for the FBI in Las Vegas. "Until the facts are gathered it's hard to determine what his intent is." Still, Law enforcement sources all agree that he is goal-oriented, resourceful, and practical. Sightings of him near such military installations as the Tonopah Test Range, the China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station, and the secret facility along the edge of Groom Dry Lake popularly known as Area 51 have certainly attracted the attention of the police, while topographical pilot's maps discovered during the search of one of his hidden campsites attracted the attention of the FBI. Yet his exact reasons for scouting out these remote locations remain unknown.

What is known is that the Ballarat Bandit has a propensity for theft. He specializes in burglarizing uninhabited buildings in remote areas so that he can be left alone to spend hours deciding exactly what he intends to steal. He favors practical items such as guns, ammunition, batteries, canned foods, nightvision equipment, and spices (to cook game with). Meticulous at all times, he is careful to steal matching lids for every pot or pan he absconds with. He often takes several trips from his target to his isolated campsites, sometimes using stolen ATVs to complete the theft.

It is also speculated that the Bandit wears gloves at all times as his prints have never been successfully lifted from any item known to have been in his possession. Although the exact reason for this odd behavior has never been fully established, authorities hypothesize that he must have been fingerprinted before, either while serving in the military or following an earlier arrest. What is certain is that the Bandit goes to great lengths to avoid contact with others, always camping in the most remote and inaccessible places possible to minimize any chances of an encounter. When encountered he behaves in an odd but non-threatening manner.

DIGITAL HERO #27

Quote: “So, you tracked me down. All the way out here. You must be very brave... or very stupid. It’s not safe out here.”

Powers/Tactics: The Ballarat Bandit is an expert survivalist and backwoodsman with a constitution that constantly pushes the limit of what is humanly possible (*CON 23, Survival 14-*, and *PS: Survivalist 14-*). With his superhuman endurance (*END 55*) he can run faster, hike further, and climb higher than any well-trained vigorous man whose abilities are below those of an Olympic athlete. Mostly the Bandit uses these exceptional natural gifts to avoid others, especially law enforcement.

As mentioned above, although an expert with over 16 types of ranged and hand-to-hand weapons, the Bandit prefers to avoid conflict by avoiding human contact altogether. He uses his extensive knowledge of Nevada and California’s wildest country (*AK: Nevada/California Desert 14-*) to select suitably isolated campsites from which to launch his foraging raids and mysterious reconnaissance missions. To these ends, he uses his considerable *Shadowing*, *Stealth*, and *Tactics* skills. But if the Bandit is forced into a combat situation, he can and will employ the rifles, handguns, and shotguns of his pilfered arsenal to devastating effect using his Combat Skill Levels and Penalty Skill Levels. Under extreme duress, he may also defend himself using one of his hunting knives.

First and foremost, the Bandit is a burglar and thief with a purpose. When he locates a suitably isolated homestead or cabin to rob, he sets up an observation point from which he can view the location for several days. Once he is certain that nobody is around, he then uses his *Contortionist 13-* or *Lockpicking 13-* break in as unobtrusively as possible. After raiding the house for useful items, he makes a series of trips with his stolen goods to multiple independently established campsites. This is one reason why the authorities strongly suspect that the Bandit has a military background; he establishes secondary camps as fallback positions where he can hide, should the authorities discovered the first campsite. “He bounces from camp to camp, and that’s what makes it hard to catch him,” Detective Jeff Hollowell of the Inyo County Sheriff’s Office once said. “The terrain is so rough he can be 100 feet from us and we wouldn’t know.”

Campaign Use: The Bandit is designed as a *Dark Champions* NPC for use in those odd adventures where characters from that genre leave the grim streets of urban America to commune with nature... at its most deadly. To this end, he can be used as a friend, a foe, or simply as part of the scenery or background in a campaign that takes place in Death Valley or rural Nevada. As the Bandit’s basic nature is to avoid well armed, dangerous looking groups of people, the GM would have to create some plausible reason for the PCs to encounter him (see *Plot Seeds*). If properly approached, the Bandit, with his extensive knowledge of the rural American southwest, could make a valuable ally to any group operating in that area. Conversely, if angered he could make an implacable, deadly foe who tracks the PCs unceasingly, sniping at them mercilessly from a distance.

Appearance: The Ballarat Bandit is a very tan Caucasian male between the ages of 35 and 45. He stands 5’7” tall, weighs 160 pounds, and has striking pale blue eyes. Although he wears his curly brown hair in a ponytail that cascades down past his shoulders, the Bandit is careful about his appearance. He is always clean-shaven and has abnormally large white teeth that he keeps very clean. An amateur tattoo on his left shoulder includes the word “Harley.”

The Bandit usually wears desert patterned camouflage clothing, green or tan baseball caps, and plain olive drab or brown hunting jackets. He seems to favor Reebok sneakers over hiking boots as footwear, perhaps because of his propensity for walking up to 60 miles on foot at a time. He often carries a sidearm on his left hip, a large knife of some sort on right, and a scoped rifle slung over his shoulder.

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Washoe County Sheriff’s Office



Leftover Hero by Allen Thomas

An Outtake From *The Valdorian Age*

Editor's Note: When Allen wrote *The Valdorian Age*, he included some bits and pieces that, for one reason or another, I had to cut from the manuscript. Here's one: a soul-sucking sword, like the type referenced on page 170 of the book. I haven't in any way edited or reviewed this material, though, so it may conflict with the contents of TVA in minor ways.

Soul-Sucking Sword

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
15	STR	7	12-	Lift 200kg; 3d6 HTH [1]
18	DEX	30	13-	OCV: 6/DCV: 6
15	CON	14	12-	
15	BODY	14	12-	
20	INT	12	13-	PER Roll: 13-
20	EGO	24	13-	ECV: 7
30	PRE	32	15-	PRE Attack: 5d6
8	COM	0	10-	
24	PD	124		Total: 24 PD (24 rPD)
24	ED	124		Total: 24 ED (24 rED)
4	SPD	12		Phases: 3, 6, 9, 12
6	REC	0		
0	END	-15		
—	STUN	—		

Total Characteristics Cost: 378

Movement:

Running:	0"/0"
Leaping:	0"/0"
Swimming:	0"/0"
Flight:	2"/4"

Cost	Powers	END
150	<i>Unstoppable, Soul-Sucking Blade:</i> HKA 4d6 (4½d6 with STR), Armor Piercing (+½), Penetrating (+½), Reduced Endurance (0 END, +½)	0
113	<i>Feed On Victim's Soul:</i> Multipower, 227-point Reserve, Linked (to Unstoppable, Soul-Sucking Blade, -½), Only Works If HKA Does Body (-½)	—
6u	1) <i>Feed The Blade:</i> Drain EGO and BODY 6d6, Two Characteristics Simultaneously (+½), Reduced Endurance (0 END, +½); Linked (to Unstoppable, Soul-Sucking Blade, -½), Only Works If HKA Does Body (-½)	0
11u	2) <i>Feed The Wielder:</i> Transfer 6d6 (Target's EGO and BODY to Wielder's STUN and END Proportionately), Can Add Maximum Of 72 Points, Two Characteristics Simultaneously (+½), Transfer to Other (+½), Reduced Endurance (0 END, +½); Linked (to	

	Unstoppable, Soul-Sucking Blade, -½), Only Works If HKA Does Body (-½)	0
7	<i>Untiring:</i> Reduced Endurance (0 END, +½) for 15 STR	0
22	<i>Sustain The Wielder:</i> Endurance Reserve (100 END, 10 REC), Usable By Other (Wielder Only, +¼); Limited Recovery (Only in Turn when <i>Feed The Blade</i> Successful, -¼)	0
16	<i>When Satiated or Being Willful:</i> Multiform (Change into 30-point Indestructible Sword [HKA 4d6, OAF Unbreakable (-1)], Instant Change, Reduced Endurance (0 END, +½)	0
6	<i>Levitation:</i> Flight 2", Reduced Endurance (0 END, +½)	0
32	<i>Sense Souls:</i> Detect Souls 13- (No Sense Group), Discriminatory, Ranged, Sense, Targeting	0
15	<i>Unbreakable Soul-Sucking Sword:</i> Does Not Bleed	0
10	<i>Unbreakable Soul-Sucking Sword:</i> No Hit Locations	0
45	<i>Unbreakable Soul-Sucking Sword:</i> Takes No STUN	0
50	<i>Unbreakable Soul-Sucking Sword:</i> Full Life Support (including Longevity: Immortality)	0
12	<i>Cannot Run:</i> Running -6" (0" total)	0
2	<i>Cannot Swim:</i> Swimming -2" (0" total)	0

Skills

8	+4 OCV with Unstoppable, Soul-Sucking Blade
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Total Powers & Skills Cost: 505

Total Cost: 883

75+ Disadvantages

20	<i>Accidental Change:</i> Always Revert to Indestructible Sword Form When Drains or Transfers 800 Points Worth of EGO in Single Combat (Uncommon)
20	<i>Distinctive Features:</i> Big Black Soul-Sucking Sword (Concealable, Extreme Fear)
25	<i>Physical Limitation:</i> Sword (No Body) (All the Time, Fully)
20	<i>Psychological Limitation:</i> Must Consume Souls (Common, Total)
20	<i>Reputation:</i> Eats Souls, 14- (Extreme)
703	<i>Experience Points</i>

Total Disadvantage Points: 883/5 = 177

DIGITAL HERO #27

Description: With a blade made from some black metal and inscribed with silvery runes, this six-foot-long sword is possessed by a demon able to suck souls from whomever it hits. In combat it is the sword that does the attacking – although sometimes it allows the wielder to choose the targets – and issuing a dirgelike keening noise, it merely drags its wielder along with as it chops into opponent after opponent sucking souls. The victim of this blade knows what is happening to his soul, but only has time to utter a final curse on the wielder before having his soul consigned to oblivion. The sword can either Drain the soul, keeping the energy all for its gluttonous self, or Transfer a portion of the vitality to its wielder. When it has maxed the points it can add via Transfer, it uses the Drain. Furthermore it can allow its wielder to draw upon its Endurance Reserve to keep up his strength even outside of combat – but the Endurance Reserve only recovers in a Turn when it's eaten a soul. After it has consumed 800 points of EGO – a hundred average souls – its satiated and becomes a normal, albeit sharp, blade and the wielder can finally retake control of the blade. The sword can attack on its own power... but much prefers to drag the wielder along after it, because it takes pleasure in the wielder's horror as person after person dies. If the wielder is being stubborn, the sword punishes him by remaining in its mundane sword form.



Miniature HERO: Terrain

by Bill Keyes

Using Miniatures in a Superhero RPG, Part Three

“The bank alarm is clanging loudly. Distantly, you hear sirens approaching, but you know the cops will never get here in time. Just then, the bank’s door bursts off its hinges and Armadillo stomps out. ‘So long, suckers!’ he laughs, then turns and spots you. He seems surprised to see you here. Actions?”

“What’s the scene on the street look like?”

“You’re standing on the sidewalk in front of Rosie’s Diner. There are a few cars parked next to Rosie’s, which sits on the corner across from First National Bank. Across the street, there’s an auto parts shop, and across from that is a messenger service. Traffic is starting to pick up prior to the lunch-hour rush. There were a few civilians on the sidewalk, but they’re all running away from the bank.”

“Great! Bantamweight was never one for subtlety, so he’ll pick up a nearby car and hurl it at Armadillo.”

“There aren’t any cars parked next to you.”

“But you just said there’s a few cars parked next to Rosie’s!”

“They’re around the corner from where you’re standing, in a small parking area.”

“Sigh. Well, I guess I’ll run across the street and punch him, then.”

ADVANCED BATTLEFIELD TECHNIQUES: USING TERRAIN

What’s a great way to set a vivid scene that’s easy for everyone at the gaming table to envision and at the same time liven up your combats? How do you explain a complex scenario so your players can fully immerse themselves in the game and not forget all the rich details you’ve added? What’s the perfect method of avoiding arguments about which character is standing near what piece of landscape?

Whether you use miniatures, paperboard counters, or even dice or coins to represent your heroes, villains, and bystanders, you’ll breath new life into your game when you add a few pieces of terrain to the battlefield! Combats become even more dramatic when your group can visualize not only the positions of their characters and the villains, but also local

features like buildings, trees, fire hydrants, and vehicles. You don’t want to turn your Champions campaign into a wargame, but some simple pieces of terrain make your game really come alive.

Finding good looking terrain is not that hard, and if you’re on a budget, creating your own (or finding some that won’t damage your wallet) is pretty easy, too. There are a lot of companies that make gaming terrain these days, but don’t worry – you don’t need to spend a lot of money to give your players a great looking (as well as a fun to play) battle!

FROM THE GROUND UP

The first thing you’ll need is someplace to stage your battles. If you play on a table, that’s perfect; otherwise, you’ll need a wide, flat surface that’s large enough to hold a mega-superhero battle. Vinyl battlemats are just the thing for HERO gamers. Using water-soluble overhead-projection pens (do **not** use dry erase markers, grease pencils, or permanent markers, trust me!), you can draw on the vinyl and wipe it off with damp paper towels when the adventure is done. Chessex (www.chessex.com/mats/Battlemats_&Megamats.htm) and Crystal Caste (www.crystalcaste.com) make battlemats with 1” and 1.5” hexes (the larger hexes are ideal for HeroClix figures, while the smaller hexes are better for standard 25-30mm miniatures).

A little bit more expensive (and harder to find) are “Skirmish Boards” from DeeMer Games. One-inch hexes are printed on the 20”x20” clear acrylic boards. You can write on them with dry-erase markers, and lay them over colored felt, maps, or sheets of paper with your battle map drawn on them. DeeMer is no longer in business, but you may still be able to find the boards at your local hobby shop, or on eBay.

If you don’t want or need a battlemat, check your local office supply store for an erasable whiteboard. They come in various sizes and shapes, and like the vinyl mats, you can draw all over them (using a dry erase marker) and then erase your marks later.

Another option is to use large sheets of newsprint, available from any office supply store. They are sold in pads of 50-100 sheets (enough for a lot of battles!), and can measure as large as 18”x24”. Crayons and colored pencils work well on newsprint. Be careful if you draw on these with markers, since the ink will bleed through. If you’re using pens, it’s best to lay down 2-3 sheets at a time, unless you don’t mind getting ink on your furniture.

Photography by Bill Keyes

DIGITAL HERO #27

Battlemats, whiteboards, newsprint – you can draw on these surfaces to your heart’s content, showing your players where buildings, cars, trees, fences, mailboxes, and fire hydrants are. When something on the battlefield changes (Captain Invulnerable throws a car at Armadillo, for instance), it’s easy to erase or cross out and redraw portions of the map. No more wondering where your character stands in relation to that parked bus, or the nearest window, or the best piece of cover.



GRAB faces off against an UNTIL squad: Vinyl battlemat, whiteboard, newsprint

If none of these are to your taste, use large pieces of felt (available by the yard at any fabric store). Black or dark gray make good city streets; green works well for fields or forests, and drab tan looks great for deserts. Felt is a good choice because it doesn’t take up much space – you can roll or fold it up between games and stuff it under a bed or in a closet for storage, and because its color helps convey the atmosphere of the battle site.

Measuring distances is easy on battlemats, as they conveniently provide perfectly measured hexes. To measure distances on your felt, whiteboard, or newsprint, invest in a 12” ruler, a small tape measure, or best yet, flexible vinyl measuring tape of the type found in nearly any sewing kit and available at any fabric store (usually for less than \$2).

Making It 3D

Now that there’s no longer a question about the layout of the battle scene, it’s time to make your combat more interesting to look at and to play. It’s one thing to know the green circle on the board is a tree – it’s entirely a new experience to see a tiny tree right there on the map! The same goes with cars, buildings, bystanders, and even the results of superpower use.

CARS

First, what could be more a part of superheroic battle than cars? Whether a hero is hurling them at his foes, hiding behind them desperately taking a Recovery, or engaging in a high-speed chase through the heaviest traffic, cars are as much a part of the genre as capes and spandex.

The most common toy cars you’ll find are 1:64 scale (Hot Wheels and Matchbox). I’ve found Matchbox and Hot Wheels cars work just fine for most battles, and they have the triple advantages of being inexpensive (usually around \$1 per car), coming in a lot of varieties (if you can imagine it, they probably have a car for it), and being ubiquitous (they are easy to find no matter where you live). If you’re not too worried about scale, Hot Wheels and Matchbox cars are perfect.

28mm figures (“Heroic 25mm” scale, the scale of HeroClix and SuperFigs miniatures) look pretty good next to 1:43 scale cars. If the size of the vehicle is important, if you want it to look just right on the battlefield, Toys ‘r’ Us sells 1:43 cars under the *Fast Lanes*, *Maisto*, and *Kid Connection* brand names. *Ertl* also makes cars in a similar scale that can be found at Toys ‘r’ Us, KB Toys, and Wal-Mart. They come in packages of 8-10, and usually cost around \$10-12 for a pack. They seem to be a seasonal seller – sometimes the store has tons of ’em, sometimes you can’t find them for months. *Corgi*, *Tonka*, *Solido*, and *Majorette* also make 1:43 scale cars. You can find most of these on E-bay.



A random traffic stop nets this cop more than he bargained for! Plastic police car from Wal-Mart and a Fastlanes car.

For just a few bucks, you can buy no-name plastic police cars and fire engines from most toy stores and department stores. The scale is almost right for 28mm figures (slightly larger), so size-wise they are a good match. They come in big plastic bags along with a bunch of firefighters or policemen plus a few random pieces of terrain, and are inexpensive enough that they won’t put a dent in anyone’s pocketbook. I couldn’t find a use for the firefighters and police (they’re much too large to use as figures), so I gave them to my nephews – they loved ’em!

Do you need tanks or jets for your game? Buy inexpensive no-name plastic tanks and jeeps from your local toy store – you can get enough tanks to outfit a battalion for just a few dollars (and at the same time, you’ll supply your kids with plenty of plastic soldiers). As for jets, you may find a lot of use from the GI Joe line of vehicles. Most of the GI Joe planes are large enough to look very impressive next to your 28mm figures without seeming monstrously huge and out of scale. They are usually designed for a single 4.5” figure, which means you can fit a whole team of superhero miniatures in one! Also, look for the aircraft and spacecraft toys that almost all science-fiction movies tend to inspire – X-Men and X2, Independence Day, Starship Troopers, Justice League, and many others have aircraft that work great. If you wait until after the movie has come and gone, you can often find them in the clearance aisle.

TREES

Trees are easy to find and can liven up a battlefield enormously. Check your local hobby or train store for HO- or O-scale pre-flocked trees. They usually come in packs of 4, and the scale is just right for your miniatures.

If you want to spend a little more time, most train stores also sell “do it yourself” tree kits, which consist of a bunch of plastic or metal tree trunks and enough flock to cover them all in

foliage. These kits are usually less expensive than the pre-finished trees, but you’ll also need to buy glue.

Another option, for people on a budget, is to look in your local “Everything’s a Dollar” store. Check the Christmas section – they frequently have boxes of decorative trees in the right scale. Of course, you’ll have to live with the fact that every tree in your campaign is a snow-covered fir, but these trees won’t hit your checkbook too hard.

For gamer/gardeners: the roots of small trees and bushes can be used for trees. Wash them carefully and thoroughly, then let them dry for about a week. After they’re dry, spray them with matte primer (black, white, or gray, as your preference takes you), and paint them. Flock them with foliage as with the “do it yourself” tree kits. You can use tree limbs instead of the roots, but they don’t look quite right since they tend not to have enough small branches. These types of “natural” trees have one major drawback: they are very brittle and fragile. You have to store them very carefully, or you’ll be finding tiny pieces of trees all over your gaming room.

Regardless of where you get your trees, I suggest gluing them to metal washers. They don’t weigh much and are quite top-heavy, so they’ll fall all over your battleground unless you weight them down.



Bluejay soars away from a damaged tank: Plastic tank from Toys ‘r’ Us, cotton balls, and a plastic pizza “table” to represent flight.

BUILDINGS

How can you hold a superhero battle in the middle of downtown if you don't have plenty of buildings to smash? There are a lot of companies that make nice looking, sturdy, playable buildings that will liven up any superhero battlefield. Armorcast's (www.armorcast.com) "Modular Stucco" line looks great and doesn't take much effort to assemble. Better yet, the buildings (as the name implies) are modular, so you can stack them on top of one another – imagine miniature skyscrapers that actually touch the sky! Armorcast also makes a wide variety of ruined buildings (perfect for that "after the battle" look or a fight in the ruined part of the city). All Armorcast buildings come unpainted, so you can make them any color or design you like.



Sapphire bravely faces Grond on the streets of Millennium City! Armorcast Modular Stucco building.

Ainsty (www.ainsty.co.uk) makes some lovely urban terrain, ranging from shop fronts to underground car parks to the interior of warehouses to the tops of buildings. These are also unpainted and require some assembly, but look great on any battlefield. The best part is their buildings don't come with roofs, so your battles can range from the interior to the exterior without having to worry about moving buildings around in order to see your figures.

Dwarven Forge (www.jefcon.com/cgi-bin/df/TLStore.cgi) is famous for their line of dungeon dressings – tunnels, caves, passageways, and miscellaneous bits like torches, fountains, and treasure. Less widely known, they also make sci-fi buildings, spaceship interiors, and hallways – any one of which could find use in a Star Hero or Galactic Champion game.

Hirst Arts (www.hirstarts.com)

"Castlemolds" rubber molds allow you to cast your own blocks (in plaster or resin) from which to construct any type of building you can imagine. You can find instructions for all sorts of buildings on their website. While these look great, they take a lot of work. I highly recommend them if you're a budding craftsman looking for a project! If you've got money to spend, there are several places online that sell pre-built Castlemolds terrain.

If you're holding battles in a small town rather than the middle of the city, use O-scale model train buildings, which are roughly the right size for most superhero miniatures (O27-scale is an even closer match, if you can find it). Check your local train store or E-bay (www.ebay.com) to find them. O-scale railroad accessories also make great streetlights, mailboxes, road signs, and other miscellaneous stuff.

Of course, the problem with all of these is that while they look great, they can be expensive. Filling up an entire city block with skyscrapers will put a dent in anyone's budget. So what alternatives are available?

For the gamer on a budget, I recommend a few simple things. Like many of my fellow nerds, I have a box full of Legos™ from my childhood. It's easy to quickly put together buildings with just a few of these ubiquitous interlocking plastic blocks. You can even use the Lego people as innocent bystanders, if you're so inclined. If all you want to do is lay down a floor plan to show your players where walls, doors, windows, and other important features are, you don't even have to build the entire building – two or three rows of blocks will give everyone a good picture of the setting. If your players can ignore the fact that the buildings are red, blue, yellow, green, and white, so much the better! You can also use kid's wooden blocks or Jenga™ blocks for much the same effect.

Microtactix (www.microtactix.com) creates "Dirt Cheap Cityscapes," PDF downloads you can print on any color printer and then attach to boxes or other solid surfaces. These downloads are inexpensive and look great, and they don't take much work to assemble.

If all these options are still too much, I'll go into how to put together your own homemade buildings – using just a few simple household items – in my next article.

Miscellaneous Stuff

What's a superhero battle without miscellaneous junk for the heroes and villains to toss around? Things like trash bins, mailboxes, fire hydrants, and streetlights are found everywhere in the real world. Why not put a few of them out on your battlefield just to liven things up?

One often overlooked place to find scenery is at your local crafts store (like Michael's or Hobby Lobby). Look in the dollhouse section and you'll find small, useful things like barrels and small boxes, which can be used as dumpsters, trashcans, and packing crates. I've found wooden candlesticks that, when painted like marble, look exactly like Roman columns (a battle at the Mall in Washington, DC anyone?). A doll's serving tray makes a great dark altar for DEMON. Small wooden toys or chess pieces can be used for the Black Harlequin's villainous deathtraps. Look around, use your imagination, and you're bound to find things that will find plenty of use in your games! These little bits of flavor generally come unpainted, and they are very inexpensive.



UNTIL agents search a dirty alleyway:
Various bits and pieces from dollhouses,
Armorcast, and Ainsty.

HeroClix by Wizkids

(www.wizkidsgames.com/heroclix) sell Indoor and Outdoor Adventure packs, which come with a double-sided map and four common objects (either a soda machine, computer, bookshelf, and desk, or a mailbox, dumpster, lamppost, and crate). Like all HeroClix figures, these come pre-painted.

As mentioned previously, O-scale train accessories make great miscellaneous battlefield clutter – streetlamps, park benches, mailboxes, and so forth. Also, if you've ever wanted to hold a huge battle in the middle of a train yard, O-scale and HO-scale trains work very well. You may be able to find trains at Goodwill or Salvation Army second-hand stores. Most of the companies listed in the "Buildings" section above also make things like dumpsters, crates, computer consoles, and piles of trash.

Aquarium accessories make great rock piles, mountainsides, and even ancient ruins. They can be a little bit pricey, but I've managed to find Egyptian ruins, Aztec ziggurats, Greek temples, and medieval castles – all in roughly the right scale. Check yard sales and the Penny Saver newspaper; lots of people buy an aquarium and don't have time to keep it up, so they sell the pieces, cheap.



Egyptian hero Fist of Allah before the mythical Sphinx: Aquarium accessory from Wet 'n' Wild.

To represent lakes, rivers, or swimming pools, used colored paper or felt. Cut it into irregular oblong shapes and lay it down on the battlefield – players instinctively know that the dark blue oval is a lake. Use red or orange felt to represent pools of lava, black felt for tar pits, neon green or purple for toxic or radioactive spills.

If your heroes get sent backwards in time, plastic dinosaurs make great foes. You can find them everywhere, and they are usually pretty close to the right scale. Most toy stores also sell bags of jungle animals, in case you want your heroes to stop a rampaging bull elephant or an escaped man-eating tiger.

Special Effects

There is a great, inexpensive way to make combat flow better while at the same time livening up the look of a battlefield: Pre-measured Area Of Effect attacks.

Say the Atomic Fireball loves using his *Wheel of Fire 3*” Radius Area Of Effect Energy Blast whenever he’s facing agents. Instead of measuring the area and trying to determine exactly how many agents are burned to a crisp every time he attacks, measure the radius with a compass on a piece of heavy paper or cardstock, then cut it out. Now whenever the Atomic Fireball wants to roast some VIPERs, Simply place the template over the hex he’s targeting. You’ll be able to tell at a glance exactly how many snakes are headed for the hospital!

If you’d like to get creative, find an image of your Special Effect (fire, water, lightning, whatever!) on the Internet (keeping in mind all applicable copyright laws) and print it out on a piece of paper, large enough to fill the Area Of Effect. Laminate the template for extra durability. You can use this method for nearly any type of Area Of Effect or Explosion attack – Lines, Cones, Darkness, Change Environment, whatever your players can think of!

Another benefit of templates: drawing line of sight between targets. If Shady Lady has a field of Darkness covering half the battlefield, can the DEMON Morbane see around it to target her with a spell? It’s no longer a question – just eyeball the figures or use a straightedge to determine his sight line.

How to represent flying characters soaring above the battlefield? One simple way: the next time you order a pizza, save those small plastic 3- or 4-legged protectors (my gaming group calls them “tables”) pizza parlors put in the boxes to keep the food from getting smashed. When Sky-Queen takes to the air, place her figure on the plastic table. Use a grease pencil to mark how high she is on the edge; wipe it off and re-mark it when she changes her altitude. If this makes your flying figures too top-heavy, weight down the plastic table by gluing the legs to a large steel washer.

To represent the incidental effects of superhero combat, use cotton balls or wads of tissue to viscerally show smoke and fire. Confetti or shredded paper can stand in for the piles of rubble that all superhero battles seem to generate. Use small rocks from your driveway (wash them first!) for ruined buildings.

“As soon as Ogre steps out of the bank, Bantamweight is going to grab this nearby Coupe de Ville and throw it at the villain!”

“Ogre’s eyes grow wide and he dives for cover. The car narrowly misses him and crashes into the bank wall.”

“I guess the bank is going to have to bill me for that. While Ogre is getting back to his feet, Bantamweight is going to pull one of these streetlights out of the ground, take a couple of test swings with it like it’s a Louisville Slugger, and ask the poor sap if he feels like playing a little hardball?”

“He’s mad now. He howls with rage: ‘No puny human can stop Ogre!’ He picks up the wrecked police car next to him, hoists it over his head like a club, and charges. You’ve got a half action held; what do you do?”

“Oh yeah, this is good. I’m gonna knock him out of the park!”

Liven up your battles with the use of a few simple pieces of terrain. They’ll not only show your players exactly where everything on the battlefield is located and what the scene looks like, but they’ll provide a very tangible, visual link between the game and the comic book world that you are emulating. You’ll eliminate confusion and arguments about where the police parked their cars, how far away from the building the villains are standing, and how wide the highway is.

Best of all, you can do all these things without paying an arm and a leg. Good terrain is easy to find and a snap to put together, and in my next article, I’ll show you how to get a table full of scenery for just a few bucks.



The Nightwatch

by Matthew Gaul

A small yet popular genre of comics is what I like to call the “Monster Hero” comics. In Monster Hero comics the monster is actually the hero, simply enough. They fight their natural tendencies to prey on humans and use their monstrous powers for good. The best example of these comics would be the incredibly talented Dan Brereton’s *Nocturnals*. There are others though including *Madman*, Marvel’s *Werewolf by Night*, *Blade*, and, the *Man-Thing*, DC’s *Swamp Thing*, *Eerie Comics* of the ’70s, and so on. On television, there was *Angel* and *Forever Knight* – both shows where vampires fought their urge to feed on humans, and instead helped them.

This article introduces the Monster Hero as a subgenre of *Dark Champions*. But first, we have to define the Monster Hero subgenre.

Monster Hero Elements

The following conventions tend to define the Monster Hero subgenre:

Monster Subculture: Like goths, ravers, and gamers; monsters, vampires, and demons have their own subculture. They have their own jargon and fashion. They hang out on the fringes of society where there is safety in numbers. The Monster Subculture sets up neutral ground where creatures that would be shunned, feared, or hunted by normal society can get together and make deals or just relax. The PCs navigate this culture trying to weed out the truly evil and letting the others go about their business. Often instead of a Secret Identity, the fact that the character exists is a secret. This is bought as Social Limitation: *Secret Existence* (Very Frequently, Severe, Not Limiting in Some Cultures). The characters are still accepted in their own subculture (that’s why they must take the Not Limiting in Some Cultures modifier. Not every character in the campaign must take this. Some Monster Heroes explain their differences as some sort of deformity or mutation and are able to function in the normal world leading a double life. These characters may take the normal Secret Identity.

Normals are Clueless: Normal human society is not aware of the Monster Subculture. These creatures tend to prey on the homeless and outcasts of society. People that the general public will not miss or even know are missing.

Work Well as a Team: Monster Heroes actually work well as a team. Since often they feel themselves as shunned or outcast from normal human society and also since they are the few among the Monster “society” that don’t hunt and kill humans, it’s natural for them to group together.

Killing Monsters is Okay: In the Monster Hero campaign, characters surprisingly often have a code against killing with a catch.... They have no problem killing monsters or demons that kill or hunt humans. This is bought as Psychological Limitation: *Code Against Killing Humans* (Common, Total). If the hero finds himself killing a normal human, even one that is hunting him, or a criminal, he feels he has failed. Normal criminals are left to the normal police. This character will use less lethal methods to detour cops and monster hunters that mistakenly hunt him, but have no problem blowing away a demon that feeds on little kids.

Unreliable Powers: Though Monster Heroes are powerful, their powers aren’t always reliable. A shapeshifter might only be able to change shape under a full moon or when enraged, precognitive visions are always vague, and so on.

Monster Hero Campaigns

Monster Heroes ride the borderline between Heroic and Superheroic. Characters can be created as Very Powerful Heroic characters, with 125 Base Points and 125 Character Points from Disadvantages or as Low-Powered Superheroic characters, with 150 Base Points plus 100 Character points from Disadvantages. Monster Heroes normally should not have to use the Normal Characteristic Guidelines and should get Disadvantage points for using them.

For my Nightwatch setting, a hybrid was used to simulate this subgenre. The characters get 125 Base Points and 125 Character Points from Disadvantages, but are allowed to buy superpowers up to 50 Active Points. They did not use the Normal Characteristic Guidelines (though many of their characteristics fell within these guidelines) and they did receive the Disadvantage points for it where appropriate. They may have up to 40 Character Points from any Disadvantage category, and may have up to 60 Character Points from the Psychological Limitations and Distinctive Features categories. (Monster Heroes tend to have more problems than normal heroes.) They get their normal equipment for “free” without using Character Points for it (though the GM may use the Resource Points rules on page 150 of the *Dark Champions* book to keep players from abusing this rule if using these guidelines). If the character has a mystical item, or some piece of equipment that’s unique or unusually powerful, they have to pay Character Points for it.

The Nightwatch

The Nightwatch is a group of Monster Heroes that operate out of Hudson City. They were formed by their leader The Scribbler about 2 years ago. With his precognitive abilities, he realized that a great evil would be rising up from the center of Chinatown. He quickly went about gathering people that could help him stop what was coming. Together the group stopped the small cult from summoning a demon. They have remained a group ever since. They don't have a big super base. They meet in the back of a bookstore whenever The Scribbler senses something bad is about to happen.

The Scribbler

Background/History: Matt Walker had always been interested in writing. At the age of eight, he picked calligraphy as a hobby. He loved studying the different ways a letter could be drawn. As he got older, he started studying the characters of other languages – Chinese kanji, Norse runes, Egyptian pictographs, etc. – he studied them all.

In high school he started drawing. He always had a sketchbook with him. That's where he picked up the nickname The Scribbler. Sometimes while drawing, he would become so involved with it that he went into a trancelike state. When he would come out of the it, he would find a picture that he wasn't really planning on drawing. One time when this happened the drawing turned out to be of the high school science building on fire. Latter that afternoon a blaze erupted in the chemistry classroom. Matt realized that he could tell the future. Only, he couldn't control when the trances came or what type of information it would give him. He also noticed that the images he drew were almost always tragic events. He started looking for ways of preventing these things from happening. He turned back to his first love letters. He found that certain characters drawn the correct way had power. Power he used to protect himself and to help others. He discovered runes of warding and had them tattooed on his body to form a sort of mystical armor.

Then came the day he had a vision so big and terrible that he had no way of stopping it himself. It was of a huge demon rising up in the middle of Chinatown and slaughtering hundreds of innocent people. He confided the situation to the Danni Delilah, the owner of an occult bookstore he frequented. She said that she might know someone who could help, and introduced him to private investigator Tim Chow. Soon they gathered a small group of people, each with special abilities.

The group gathered was Matt, Danni "Dead Girl" Delilah, the bookstore owner with the ability to talk to the dead, Tim "The Monk" Chow, the private investigator who had unusually simian features, Sal "Salamander" Cagnetti, an ex-mobster with limited fire manipulation abilities trying to redeem himself for his past deeds, and Eugene "Grizzly" Samson, a paramedic that had to ability to shape-shift into a bear. They stopped the cultist from summoning the demon. Along the way, they picked up two more members. Danni, with the help of Matt, was able to reanimate the spirit of a 16th Century samurai that they call Mu and in order to navigate the twisted back alleys and building of Chinatown, they enlisted the help of a Spriggan (a fey with an extensive knowledge of engineering and architecture).

The group realized that they can do some good together. They decided to stay together, and took the name of The Nightwatch.

Personality/Motivation: The Scribbler is a quiet, soft-spoken person. He is also driven to help anyone he can with his powers. He tries to avoid violence whenever necessary. If he can defuse a situation before it happens, he will do that first. Failing that, he will direct The Nightwatch to take down the threat as quickly as possible.

Quote: "I knew this was going to be a bad day."

Powers/Tactics: The Scribbler prefers to stay out of combat, staying behind the more combat oriented members of the team. He usually carries a gun with him though just incase.

Campaign Use: The Scribbler is primarily an example of a Monster Hero campaign character. With his abilities to sense danger, The Nightwatch could pop up almost anywhere. The Scribbler could enlist the help of the PCs if he senses a danger too big for The Nightwatch to handle alone.

Appearance: He is a plain looking Caucasian man in his early 20s. He has black hair and brown eyes. He normally wears comfortable clothes and makes no attempt to hide his identity. His body is covered almost entirely in tattoos, except for his face and hands.

The Scribbler



DIGITAL HERO #27

The Scribbler

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
10	STR	0	11-	Lift 100kg; 2d6 HTH [1]
18	DEX	24	13-	OCV: 6/DCV: 8
15	CON	10	12-	
10	BODY	0	11-	
23	INT	13	14-	PER Roll: 14-
15	EGO	10	12-	ECV: 5
15	PRE	5	12-	PRE Attack: 3d6
10	COM	0	11-	
5	PD	3		Total: 15 PD (10 rPD)
5	ED	2		Total: 15 ED (10 rED)
4	SPD	12		Phases: 3, 6, 9, 12
6	REC	2		
30	END	0		
30	STUN	7		

Total Characteristics Cost: 88

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

Cost	Powers	END
28	<i>Rune Magic</i> : Multipower, 50-point reserve; All Slots OIF (Writing Instrument of Opportunity, -1/2), Gestures (-1/4)	-
3u	1) <i>Sigil of Healing</i> : Healing BODY 5d6; OIF (Writing Instrument of Opportunity, -1/2), Gestures (-1/4)	5
2u	3) <i>Kanji of Banishment</i> : Dispel Summon 16d6; No Range (-1/2), OIF (Writing Instrument of Opportunity, -1/2), Gestures (-1/4)	5
3u	4) <i>Explosive Rune</i> : EB 6d6, Explosion (+1/2); OIF (Writing Instrument of Opportunity, -1/2), Gestures (-1/4)	4
3u	5) <i>Symbol of Cleansing</i> : Change Environment: Sanctify as Holy Ground 32" Radius, Long-Lasting: Permanent; OIF (Writing Instrument of Opportunity, -1/2), Gestures (-1/4)	5
40	<i>Runes of Warding</i> : Force Field (10 PD/10 ED), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +1/2), Invisible to Sight Group (+1/2)	0
7	<i>Runes of Warding</i> : Mental Defense (10 points)	0
10	<i>Runes of Warding</i> : Power Defense (10 points)	0
15	<i>Scribbling</i> : Precognitive Clairsentience (Sight Group), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +1/2); Limited Power (Only Visions of Danger, -0), No Conscious Control (-2), Vague and Unclear (-1/2), OIF (Drawing Surface and Writing Instrument, -1/2)	0

Skills

10	+2 with DCV (figured in)
3	Stealth 13-
3	Tactics 14-
3	Teamwork 13-
3	Linguist
2	1) Language: Ancient Babylonian (Fluent)
2	2) Language: Ancient Egyptian (Fluent)
2	3) Language: Hebrew (Fluent)
2	4) Language: Latin (Fluent)
2	5) Language: Mandarin (Fluent)
2	6) Language: Norse Runes (Fluent)
2	7) Language: Sanskrit (Fluent)
3	Scholar
3	1) KS: Ancient Alphabets, Scripts, and Runes 15-
2	2) KS: Art 14-
2	3) KS: Art History 14-
2	4) KS: Calligraphy 14-
1	5) KS: Demonology 11-
1	6) KS: Hudson City Mystic Underground 11-
1	7) KS: Occult 11-

Total Powers & Skills Cost: 162

Total Cost: 250

125+ Disadvantages

10	Distinctive Features: Tattoos Covering Entire Body (Concealable)
15	Hunted: Demonic Cult 11- (As Pow)
25	Hunted: Mystical Underworld Elements 11- (Mo Pow, NCI)
20	Normal Characteristic Maxima
20	Psychological Limitation: Code Against Killing Humans (Common, Total)
10	Psychological Limitation: Easily Distracted by New Art and Languages (Uncommon, Strong)
20	Psychological Limitation: Feels Responsible to Stop His Visions from Coming True (Common, Total)
5	Unluck: 1d6

Total Disadvantage Points: 250

Monk

Background/History: Tim Chow was always the class clown. He was always getting in trouble with his teachers, but that made him all the more popular with the other students. Unfortunately, as he reached high school he was getting into trouble outside of school also. A few months in juvenile detention for theft changed his attitude. He completed high school and afterward decided to join the police force.

As his first assignment, Tim was placed in Chinatown because of his Asian ancestry. There he had more than his fair share of gunfights and discovered his talent for handguns. He also noticed he started getting a little more hairy than normal. His features started changing. He finally decided to go see a doctor when he noticed he was growing a tail. The doctor checked him out and said there was nothing wrong with him physically. He didn't even register as a mutant. The doctor suggested that perhaps the changes were more mystical in origin than scientific. After some research, Tim found an old Chinatown doctor known as Dr. Chu. The doctor took one look at him and told him, "obviously you are a descendant of the Monkey King." The doctor went on to explain the history of the monkey king, a character from Chinese legend. At first, Tim thought Dr. Chu was crazy. Then Tim thought that he was going crazy. As time went by and the monkey features became more pronounced, it made more sense. He accepted his new body and found that his coworkers accepted him as well. He gained the nickname Monk which was short for monkey.

Tim became a sort of folk hero among the people of Chinatown. He did well over the years, moving up to Detective. The problem was he did a little too well. A certain Yakuza boss decided that Detective Chow had cut too far into his profits by busting a large cocaine shipment. The order was sent down to have Tim Chow taken out. The boss soon found out that Monk was hard to kill. So instead, he had him disgraced. With the help of a dirty IA agent, he was framed and thrown off the police force for accepting bribes.

Tim was crushed that the force would let him go so easily. In time, he realized that the people of Chinatown still believed in him and still needed his help. He became a private investigator, and set up Monk Investigations. He often did work for free or in exchange for whatever his clients could afford. He interfered with the Yakuza whenever possible. He met Matt Walker and helped form The Nightwatch because they were interested helping people too.

Personality/Motivation: Tim is still the "class clown." Despite what happens to him, he always has a smile and a wisecrack for any occasion. His main motivation is helping people, especially victims of Yakuza crime. He hopes to one day clear his name and possibly rejoin the police, but for now he feels he's doing some good where he is.

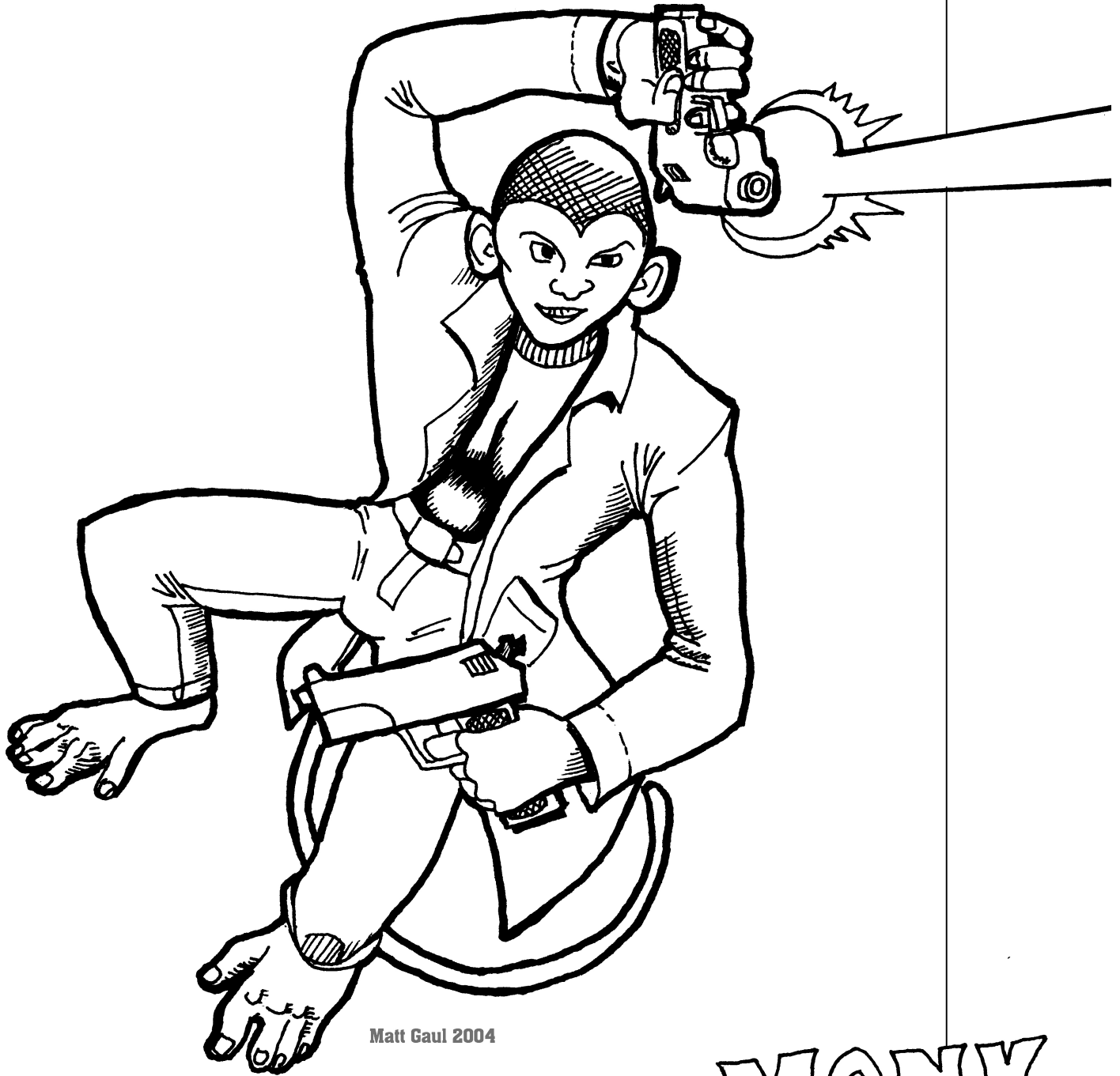
Quote:

Powers/Tactics: Monk will charge into combat with both guns blazing. He will use unconventional actions like pole vaulting off an enemy's shoulder, or hanging from the roof by his feet to distract his opponents. The Monk is a handgun expert and he knows it. This can sometimes make him overconfident, getting him and tackle opponents that are bigger than he can handle. To quote the movie *Hard Boiled*, "Give him one gun, he thinks he's Superman; give him two guns, he thinks he God!"

Campaign Use: As a member of The Nightwatch, he's the best in combat. Outside of combat, he's also a great investigator. The GM might use Monk as a contact for the PCs if they need help with a case in Chinatown.

Appearance: Tim Chow is an Asian male of average height with a slim build. He has monkey-like features, which include short fur over most of his body and even a tail. The toes on his feet are longer than normal which allows him to grasp with them almost as well as with his hands. He usually goes barefooted or wears sandals. He almost always wears a trench coat, jeans, and a sweater or t-shirt.

Monk



Matt Gaul 2004

MONK

Monk

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
15	STR	5	12-	Lift 200kg; 3d6 HTH [1]
23	DEX	39	14-	OCV: 8/DCV: 8
15	CON	10	12-	
12	BODY	4	11-	
18	INT	8	13-	PER Roll: 13-
10	EGO	0	11-	ECV: 3
20	PRE	10	13-	PRE Attack: 4d6
20	COM	5	13-	
6	PD	3		Total: 15 PD (9 rPD)
6	ED	3		Total: 15 ED (9 rED)
5	SPD	17		Phases: 3, 5, 8, 10, 12
10	REC	8		
30	END	0		
28	STUN	0		

Total Characteristics Cost: 122

Movement: Running: 8"/14"
 Leaping: 10"/20"
 Swimming: 2"/4"

Cost	Powers	END
5	<i>Tail and 2 Feet:</i> Extra Limbs (3)	0
10	Clinging	0

Martial Arts: Monkey Style Kung Fu

Maneuver	OCV	DCV	Notes
4 Block	+2	+2	Block, Abort
4 Dodge	—	+5	Dodge, Abort
4 Escape	+0	+0	35 STR vs. Grabs
5 Kick	-2	+1	8d6 Strike
3 Legsweep	+2	-1	5d6, Target Falls
3 Throw	+0	+1	4d6+v/5, Target Falls

4 +1 Damage Class

Perks

3 Fringe Benefits: Concealed Weapon Permit, License to Practice a Profession (Private Investigator)

Talents

5 Lightning Reflexes: +3 DEX to Act First with All Actions
 18 Combat Luck (9 PD/9 ED)

Skills

- 5 Accurate Sprayfire
- 5 Rapid Attack (Ranged)
- 5 Rapid Autofire
- 10 Two-Weapon Fighting (Ranged)
- 3 Acrobatics 14-
- 3 Breakfall 14-
- 3 Combat Driving 14-
- 3 Conversation 13-
- 3 Criminology 13-
- 3 Disguise 13-
- 3 Security Systems 13-
- 3 Seduction 13-
- 3 Shadowing 13-
- 3 Streetwise 13-
- 3 PS: Private Investigator 13-
- 2 WF: Small Arms

Total Powers & Skills Cost: 128

Total Cost: 250

125+ Disadvantages

- 15 Distinctive Features: Monkey-Like Features (Concealable, Major)
- 10 Distinctive Features: Style/Kung Fu (Concealable)
- 15 Hunted: Police 11- (Mo Pow, NCI, Watching)
- 25 Hunted: Yukuza 11- (Mo Pow, NCI)
- 20 Psychological Limitation: Overconfident (Very Common, Strong)
- 20 Psychological Limitation: Protective of Innocents (Very Common, Strong)
- 20 Psychological Limitation: Showoff (Very Common, Strong)

Total Disadvantage Points: 250



Surprise!

 by Parker Emerson

When the GM Goes Boo! — Surprising/Scaring Your Players

Most groups can be placed somewhere on a serious/casual spectrum of play style. Some are diligent about keeping the joking to an absolute minimum, whereas others allow constant goofing around and real-world references. In either play style, an experienced GM can easily bring adventure and excitement to the table – even goofy players get excited by new monsters or new worlds. But the GM of a serious group doesn't have to work as hard when it comes to surprising his players. It is much easier to set a mood, and as such break it (breaking a mood being the main intent of surprise) when players are attentive and in character. For the GM of a group with a casual play style, it can be much harder to get the jump on the players. This article explains a few ways to surprise players and give them a shock, even when one of them has cheesy poofs shoved up his nose.

The Diamond in the Rough

One of the most effective ways of surprising players is to mix things together. If you announce the presence of something really important in the middle of some basic description, characters who are only half paying attention will suddenly realize with a giant “What?!?” that they should have been listening. Imagine you're a player and the GM says the following:

“As you open the door, you see inside a room about ten paces by five paces, the walls are dusty and some of the wooden beams are rotten. There are cobwebs on the ceiling, and the torchlight is low. In one corner is an open chest with what looks like rugs inside. In another corner is a rabid wolf, foaming at the mouth, and across from the door is a coat rack, with some faded leather jackets hanging from it.”

After a few empty rooms, encountering a rabid wolf (or monster of appropriate difficulty for the characters) will generally catch the group off guard if the monster isn't announced. Do this once or twice an evening, and you'll ensure your players keep listening even while they're scrounging for the last Mountain Dew.

Surprised Combat

In combat, when new combatants arrive, the players must make a Perception Roll to notice them. As the GM, it's your prerogative to perform these rolls in private. In order to keep things from the players, you're free to roll the dice “behind the screen.” And occasionally, you're allowed to fake these rolls. What GM

hasn't turned a critical hit into a normal hit, or even a miss when the party's down? And what GM hasn't padded the STUN and BODY of a lead villain when the players are waltzing through him? Well, occasionally, and by this I mean very rarely, automatically fail all the players' Perception Rolls while they're in combat. Although the characters may think they're only facing a few low-level opponents, if you suddenly announce an attack roll from an NPC they weren't aware of, you can turn the tables on the players very quickly.

“Well, Bill, your phase rifle hits one of the two Terran Officers squarely in the chest, but his armor seems to absorb much of the hit. He staggers back, and then returns the favor with a quick shot from his blaster pistol. And the Assassination Droid shoots you squarely in the back.”

“Wait, what Assassination Droid?!?”

Fake Skipping Ahead

Another ploy to surprise your players is to pretend to forget where in the adventure they are, or more specifically, what information you have given away. If the characters reach the entrance to an abandoned tower right before you announce a bathroom break, then upon your return, sit down and ask how far you've progressed. “So, you guys were about to enter the vampire king's tower, right?” When done in a nonchalant manner, I have found that if you act like you *thought* they knew the information, it can be one of the most effective attention-getters. And best of all, the slip-up doesn't even need to be accurate – the “vampire king's tower” could be a wizard's tower, a bandit's hideout, or a truly abandoned tower. Not only will the players be caught off guard, but they will probably be on a heightened alert, and more attentive to your game, if at least for a few minutes. (And not more attentive due to a militant GM, but rather, to a crafty GM.) And don't worry about lying to your players – you're the GM: that's your job. The only concern is ensuring an appropriate power-level for your slip-up. In the above example, the “unarmed-goblin-all-by-himself's tower” lacks the appropriate level of fear, while “Apollo the Sun God's personal vacation getaway” sounds too threatening to be true. Ideally, halfway through the adventure the PCs will be lead to believe they have accidentally stumbled across the grand finale, and will focus on the game accordingly. And like all the ideas in this article, this method should only be used once in a great while, and sometimes, you should actually leak true information – at the top of the battlements, the players *should* battle a vampire.

Lack of Acknowledgment

A common piece of advice doled out by GM primers is the idea that occasionally, it is wise to give a run-of-the-mill opponent unusual extra powers. An orc who happens to have 20 points in martial arts. A VIPER guard who happens to have flight powers. An Imperial Navy officer who is also a Delta-Grade psychic. However, inevitably, these buffed-up opponents are also indicated as being different. The orc-lord sits in a throne room, and the VIPER guard and the officer have special markings on their suits, or are treated with extra deference.

If you take this a step further, don't indicate that high-level characters are any different; just place the NPCs at inconspicuous points in the adventure. If the PCs have been told to hunt down a certain elven bandit, have them encounter the bandit on the road shortly after, accompanied by some henchmen, and dressed just like the henchmen. The PCs will enter the encounter feeling superior, since this is the beginning of the adventure, and will be a little disoriented when one of the bandits happens to demonstrate a remarkable mastery of sword-fighting and acrobatics. By the time they realize that *this* is the elven bandit they were just told to find, it will be too late to make the requisite preparations, such as preemptive spells or potions or traps. Even a player absorbed in picking the pineapple off his pizza takes notice when some lowly thug fails to be defeated by a few well-placed fireballs. If you ignore the trappings of power, so will the players. I have found that this surprise doesn't work very well with attentive groups, but will work wonderfully with distracted players.

Rob Your Players Blind

Focused players are on the lookout for their GM to trick them, and learn to expect the unexpected. But casual players frequently get comfortable in their play style because they have confidence in their characters' abilities. They know they can do something because they've always done it; they know something works because it's always worked. As such, in a relaxed group, one of the GM's best friends is the denial of expectations, and this applies to the characters just as it applies to the NPCs. In the above example, the players' expectations were thwarted when they discovered that the normal bandit was the bandit lord. What would happen if a player discovered that his magical sword was, in fact, not so magical?

There are two ways to do this – rob your players before, and rob your players after. Robbing them before takes more work, but it is harder for the PCs to contest your actions. For the 'before' method, give them a reward, such as

a weapon or an item, that works better than the write-up. While the write-up may indicate a simple sword, the character hits more often than the dice rolls would indicate. After an evening or two with the sword (and this works much better if the characters don't have immediate access to the tools/spells needed to identify their rewards), suddenly stop fudging the results in their favor. The character may find that they're missing more often than expected in the middle of a major battle. (Obviously, this idea only works if the table uses attack rolls and skill rolls in a manner such that the players don't know what DCV they need to hit.) What the player originally attributed to magic will soon be viewed as a streak of good luck.

Robbing them after requires significantly less work (and can be done on the fly if you find your players are getting a little too comfortable), but in exchange the GM needs to demonstrate a certain level of finesse, lest the players figure out that the GM is messing with them (which rarely ends well). Suddenly, the characters' equipment stops working. "As you ride across the river, you find yourself crushed under the weight of your armor. I guess the enchantment that kept your platemail weightless only works in the nation of its forging." "Your sword doesn't appear to be damaging the orcs. I guess it doesn't work against orcs." (Obviously, the informational commentary should be much more subtle, or nonexistent.) Players take notice when their stuff stops putting out.

This technique gets harder to pull off in campaigns where the power source of equipment becomes more codified. Star Hero campaigns are built on science, and players demand a better explanation than "I guess your blaster doesn't work in this star sector." GMs can allow players to find prototypes, but that requires more foresight. Alien technology that the characters have difficulty analyzing and understanding can also work well. This method also runs into trouble in superheroic campaigns, since the characters pay for everything. If the character's rocket-suit doesn't work in the mountains, the character will know about it, since if there is a -¼ Limitation like that, the player's going to be curious why his character didn't get the discount. (This can be resolved for gadgeteer characters by making them take all their powers with the Limitation "Prototype," at whatever level they want, and then later replacing it with an equal level Limitation, such as "Doesn't work in the mountains.")

Use this surprise only sparingly, as of all the ways to get the jump on your players, this one is the most likely to create resentment if it isn't presented well.

Conclusion

Ultimately, all the ideas in this article are built upon a single assumption. In a play-style in which you have your players undivided attention (virtually) all the time, surprise is simple a matter of good adventure design. But in a less intense group, your best bet is to remember that the players' minds need about five seconds to catch up with what you're saying. Something that would be incorporated as matter of fact by serious players will spook more casual players.

And remember: surprise is at its basest a matter of delay and denial of expectations. Serious players require a build-up of expectations, and then a reversal. Casual players, on the other hand, can be surprised simply by toying with their basic assumptions about how the game works on a fundamental level.

It has been said a thousand times before, but bears repeating: one of your main jobs as a GM is to facilitate the group having fun. The ideas described in this article are meant to aid you in keeping your players on their toes, not to help you "win" against them. Use them wisely, for the forces of good gaming!



**TSUNAMI
RELIEF**

It may seem crass to publish an adventure in which supervillains attempt to destroy hundreds of thousands of lives with a tsunami, so soon after the real world tragedy in Asia. And maybe it is. But since this adventure gives your players a chance to prevent such a catastrophe and save numerous lives, somewhat mitigating the tragic natural disaster that really happened, and perhaps offering a sense of hope and redemption.

**EDITOR'S
NOTE**

The background given for Abraxas is not the standard for superpowers in the Champions Universe.

**Tsunami** by Michael Satran

50,000 years ago, an intergalactic war raged between two powerful alien races, the Collective, a basically human, socialist democracy that used organic technology, and the HI'brassians, a slowly reproducing race of humanoid sperm whales that lived for millions of years. The Collective attempted to create a flanking action against their HI'brassian enemies, an action to which the HI'brassians responded as their race was accustomed. They landed on the nearest habitable planet to the galactic front, and evolved the local life forms to have paranormal abilities. Surprisingly enough, evolving the apes of Earth produced a species remarkably physically similar to the Collective, and this gave the HI'brassians an unforeseen edge in their war.

The war raged on Earth for twenty thousand years, and after a betrayal by their evolved soldiers, most of the HI'brassians were destroyed, and those who were too powerful to kill imprisoned deep within the earth, using their own technology. Civilizations rose and fell, until, in 1991, almost 50,000 years after the flanking action began, a powerful release of energy freed the most powerful of the HI'brassians, Abraxas, from his technological prison, and once again, he began to contemplate the conquest of the Universe....

Slowly, Abraxas began to formulate a plan. If he could manipulate humans into accepting his genetic alterations, he could slowly create a paranormal army that he could control, thus enabling him to conquer the world, and then the universe.

His first few attempts, without access to all the technology of his race, met with dismal failure. He created a group of superhumans as an experiment, and the experiment completely failed. He would have to start again, and apparently, with a larger batch of genetic material. His problem was getting such a large batch in an efficient fashion. He began to approach humans who might need his aid, whose companies were failing or who might perceive him as someone who could get them the things that they needed. Finally, in the heroes' campaign city, he found Oceanus Industries, a company that needed an infusion of capital and some technological breakthroughs. Through a complicated deal, he granted David Rupert Cameron, the CEO of this corporation, incredible magnetic powers transforming him into Polestar, Master of Magnetism.

Other minions followed the creation of Polestar central to his sinister plan: A plan that would cause the destruction of a pitiful city of landwalkers, and give him the ability to carry out his dreams of universal domination. For in this city

was at least one team of paranormals, and at least a million ordinary humans, all of whom would be processed after his plan was complete....

Notes for the GM

Abraxas intends to wipe out the heroes' campaign city with a massive tidal wave, and does not actually appear in this scenario himself, though his character sheet is included at the end of the adventure. The means by which he intends to accomplish this is through a magnetic amplifier, rigged up on top of the city's tallest building, which will amplify Polestar's powers such that he will be able to call the tidal wave and crush the city, killing almost everyone within. Contained within the water will be a time-release flesh eating organism that will reduce the inhabitants to a protoplasmic DNA soup, in order for him to engineer a new race to inhabit the earth.

However, first he needs to get rid of the city's heroes, and to this end, since he is immortal, he has effectively waited for the right opportunity. That time is now.

Subplots and Intrigue

In a long-running campaign, the GM should take pains to introduce Polestar and his minions to the players prior to the start of this scenario. Several short introductory scenarios are listed here, prior to the start of the adventure for which this is titled. The GM should also make it clear that Polestar is the boss! Abraxas, should the PCs encounter him, should come as a complete surprise to our beleaguered heroes. Several sample subplots follow.

Testing, One, Two, Three!

In this scenario, a local army base asks the PCs to help them test a new military robot. The military robot contains a magnetic amplifier that gives it nearly limitless energy. Military brass appropriate to the occasion should be present at the test, which will be conducted on a proving ground some ten miles from the base, a flat plain where nothing will be harmed except a great deal of sand. There are dunes everywhere, making the area a hide and seek playground, which also, if your United States Military happens to be controlled by the Forces of Evil, gives them a chance to scout our heroes and find out what they can do, in a subplot completely unrelated to this adventure.

The robot, named "Magno-One," starts out at one end of the proving ground, and the PCs

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start at the other. There are many ways to run this scenario, each of which has its own set of unique plot consequences. For the GM's convenience, three of these ways are listed below.

1) A straight fight. The PCs have the opportunity to engage Magno-One in combat, and battle him on the sandy battlefield of the US Army's choosing. Sand Dunes present obstacles, and the fight is complicated by stray energy bolts throwing clouds of dust into the air.

2) Magno-One breaks its programming and heads for the nearest city, believing that this is no longer a test and it must carry out its military programming by targeting key communications centers and destroying them. This option is particularly desirable if your military is controlled by the Forces of Evil, above.

3) Magno-One is taken over by Mechanon or some other evil computer entity, and flies for the military base in an attempt to destroy it. This can result in some pretty chaotic situations, requiring the PCs to track down the robot and destroy it, especially if it escapes a couple times first.

When the robot is defeated, and the PCs are suitably weakened, Polestar and his minions attack the PCs from surprise. This should be nasty, brutal, and short, with the PCs overwhelmed by Polestar and crew's superior firepower, teamwork, tactics, and dirty pool. The villains should mash the PCs into the dirt, gloating gleefully as they head off into the distance with the magnetic amplifier, thanking the PCs for "Doing the hard work for them." This should hopefully inspire some curiosity, but the PCs should have a tough time finding Polestar and his cronies right away. Polestar's intentions are to remove the magnetic amplifier from Magno-One and discover what makes it tick, using the magnetic amplifier for his own sinister purposes, detailed later in this adventure.

Splice is Twice as Nice

Polestar and his minions try to steal a flesh-rotting bacterial organism from a local bioengineering facility. This scenario is easy to get the PCs into. If there is a DNPC who works in this field, obviously, that should be the facility where the flesh-eating organism is being held. Alternatively, a PC could be passing the facility as the alarm sirens go off, or the facility could call the PCs for help. Local law enforcement would only call the PCs if they are on good terms with them.

At the time that the PCs arrive, Polestar and the others are removing the bacteria from its

casement, and are located in the freezer area. Polestar and the others will fight a running battle to retreat, concentrating their attacks on immobilizing fast moving PCs and heading swiftly away. They will destroy property, especially volatile property, in an attempt to distract the heroes with threatened innocents. If truly pressed, Polestar will threaten to release the bacteria into the atmosphere, assuring the PCs that while they might survive, the city most certainly will not. Only true heroic brilliance or backing down will retrieve the organism now.

The head doctor at the bioengineering facility is Dr. Janice Wilkins, who formerly worked for Oceanus Industries, a local sea research facility. All of her research is based on the research of David Rupert Cameron, who is secretly Polestar. Questioning Doctor Wilkins reveals that the flesh-eating bacteria had been created accidentally during cancer research. Clever PCs who read Dr. Wilkins' mind might discover that all of this is covered with telepathic adjustments, but who has caused them and why is impossible to discover. (Note: Dr. Wilkins has been brainwashed by Abraxas, though this should not be discovered in the course of this adventure.)

Use the Oceanus Industries map for this encounter. The fact that the two buildings are arranged in exactly the same fashion should be a clue for smart PCs later that something might have been up with Janice Wilkins after all.

Replace the Seawater Tank with a sealed organism containment unit, but leave the DEF and BODY scores the same.

Replace the Specimen Tanks with biomass freezer storage units, which have a 16 DEF and 12 BODY.

Eliminate the secret passage. Replace the Seawater Processing Tanks and Pipe with a large set of cooling units that connect to the organism containment unit and the biomass storage units via overhead piping. These cooling units provide a 5d6 NND (versus LS: Immunity to Cold) if they are violated in a line of hexes outward if pierced. Polestar and the others are, of course, aware of this fact, another clue.

The Biogenetics facility is surrounded by a standard 2 DEF, 2 BODY fence, surrounding a small parking lot. The building has a small suite of offices, one hazardous materials laboratory, and one medical laboratory.

The hazardous materials laboratory has DEF 12, BODY 12, but the rest of the building has standard 5 DEF, 4 BODY walls.

Feel free to overstock this laboratory with hazardous materials and dangerous biological organisms. You never know what a canister or tube might contain....

TEAM TACTICS FOR THE MINIONS OF ABRAXAS

Brass Ring:

Kraken grabs a group of opponents and smashes them into each other as the others spread a coordinated attack into that single hex.

Candy Cane:

Siren Mind Controls a hero to come forward and kiss her, provoking a coordinated attack by several of the other members. Siren will be happy, of course, to deliver her attack by touch.

Crack the Whip:

Kraken winds up for a haymaker, and Polestar hurls the target directly into it.

Lockdown:

Heroes are targeted with Entangle attacks separately. This is devastating in combination with Brass Ring. Be careful.

Pinball Wizard:

Polestar grabs a non-flying target and hurls him skyward. A series of coordinated attacks then knock the character into the toughest available object.

Ray of Sunshine:

S.H.A.R.C. drops a Flash Attack on a group of unshielded people,

then Kraken grabs them, slamming them all into each other.

Tailspin:
Madam Manta grabs a target and hurls him about like a tenpin, while the others take potshots at the helpless character.

Trick of the Light: S.H.A.R.C. drops a Flash Attack on a single target, and Siren uses her Mind Control to force the target to move rather than remain in place, forcing the heroes to rescue him.

Vault of Iron:
Polestar picks up a large metal object and traps someone in it, while the others concentrate a coordinated attack on a different opponent.

Attack on Oceanus Industries

Sometime shortly after the assault on the biogenetics research facility, Polestar will mount an attack on Oceanus Industries Properties along with his minions, claiming to be seeking revenge against them. He will sink their research vessels, attack their charitable donators, and rail against them, screaming for revenge.

Run as many or as few of these attacks as you want with the PCs present, though make sure that if innocents are endangered that they get a chance to save them. Polestar is doing this because he believes that the PCs might suspect his secret identity. The easiest way to convince them that he is *not* Polestar, therefore, is to have Polestar mount attacks against his own property, with his minions in tow. This also allows him to collect insurance money for the attacks against his own corporation, and use that money to fund his evil schemes.

Should the PCs decide they want to interview David Rupert Cameron, remember that he is Polestar, and that he will be evasive and not cooperative. Since he hasn't formulated any of the plans that will occur in the next series of events yet, adjust the interviewing information in the next section accordingly.

Ghosts in the Ocean

Over the course of the next few weeks, run a completely different adventure. Whatever takes place, make sure the PCs hear the following announcement on the news sometime during those weeks.

"I'm Karen Porter, for KCTV News. A recent development in the harbor of our fair city has the local boating population up in arms. The recent clot of seaweed that has floated into the bay apparently has some sort of guest that travels with it. George Kramer is on the scene at the marina, over to you, George.

George Kramer is a middle-aged man in a two-button suit and an ill matched necktie, holding a microphone. His glasses appear to have been pushed up on his nose recently, as he turns to the camera and speaks.

"I'm George Kramer for KCTV, and the latest news is the appearance of a ghost which sinks ships, much as the Flying Dutchman did in days of old. I'm standing here now with Robert Crandall, the Captain of the sunken tugboat. Robert, what did you see out there?"

"It was... it was the weirdest thing...." Robert Crandall speaks, his voice tinged with terror. "We moved out at about 3 AM, to bring in the San Andreo Star, a small oil tanker, and then... she came out of the darkness, bringing that seaweed with her...." His voice chokes up a bit. "She was all pale blue and cold, like she came right out of the ocean, and half-woman,

half fish...." He shakes his head in disturbance. "Then the boat just yawed and pitched, and we were all tossed into the water, the boat eaten by the seaweed. Just... just gone...." He shakes his head. "Just gone...."

George Kramer turns to the camera and speaks. "That's pretty strange, Karen. It looks as though our city has a Flying Dutchman of its own."

Karen Porter smiles and says gently to the camera. "Thank you, George. In other news, the USS Indianapolis, the United States' newest nuclear submarine, is going to be launched from Campaign City. The Indianapolis will be launched in three days, getting a brief refit before the launching ceremony, where I'll be on hand to interview Captain Paul Donaldson personally."

The news then continues into a commercial for Nar-Cola.

PCs should rightfully suspect that Polestar and his minions are behind this sinister plan. Suspect enough to keep an eye on the USS Indianapolis, and especially that grand launching ceremony.

Polestar's Plan

Polestar is behind the giant mass of seaweed. Polestar intends to begin a new world order for Abraxas by supplying the evil alien with enough DNA for years of experimentation. He intends to do this by burying the city under a massive tidal wave, flooding the city with the mysterious seaweed that will slowly dissolve the flesh of everyone within once the water recedes. To this end, he intends to steal the USS Indianapolis and detonate its entire cargo of atomic warheads underwater, to create a massive wall of water that will drown the city. Using the technology from the stolen robot, Magno-One, he will build himself a magnetic amplifier and assemble it on top of the tallest building in town, using that power to increase the size and force of the wave. Since all of Polestar's minions can either fly or function underwater, he does not fear the raw destructive force of the attack at all. All he needs to do is activate the bombs from the center of the magnetic amplifier, high above the devastation....

Barking Up the Wrong Tree

If the heroes decide that another villain or team of villains from your campaign is responsible, allow them to investigate that team of villains instead. If the villains are evenly matched with the heroes, allow a battle or two between the heroes and these villains to take place before the villains reveal that they are not responsible for this plot. This works particularly well if the heroes already have a grudge with the villains who might be motivated to cause such devastation.

Investigating the Strange Occurrences

Local Marine Biologists, such as Dr. Simon Snead (SS: Marine Biology 14-, Works for Oceanus Industries.) may be contacted to help the PCs if they do not have the skills necessary to investigate this themselves. Of course, if Polestar discovers that Snead has talked to the PCs, they may be forced to prevent the kidnapping and/or assassination of Dr. Snead later in the adventure.

1) Getting a sample of the seaweed is fairly easy, though analyzing that sample is fairly hard on any sort of raw DNA analysis level in a short period of time.

2) The seaweed produces an electrochemical reaction when exposed to substances such as metal, wood, and plastic, dissolving them. It continues to produce such a reaction until it is killed or destroyed, but there is far too much of it to produce any sort of lasting effect, and it grows quickly. It could be an alien life form, a mutation, or genetically engineered. (Note: This could produce several red herring plots. Feel free to draw out the scenario or encourage an accidental encounter if your game world's time frame allows for them. If the seaweed grows more slowly and is difficult to destroy, this could allow the menace to grow further and expand the PCs' focus.)

3) The seaweed secretes a preservative chemical that is deadly to fish but harmless to humans. It is an organic variant of formaldehyde. This stuff smells awful when removed from the water. It is also acidic when removed from water, doing damage (RKA 1d6, Continuous, Penetrating, Uncontrolled) to people who touch it when separated from the water. Washing the character or putting them underwater ends the effect. This can easily be avoided with the proper sample gathering equipment. Should anyone be unlucky enough to die from this effect, analysis of what is left of them will reveal that the DNA is still intact, should they have an ability that allows them to detect this.

4) The seaweed all floats anywhere from half a mile to fifteen miles out to sea, depending on tidal pull and how much menace the GM wants to ascribe to the seaweed.

5) It would take an extremely high-tech Marine Biology lab to create the seaweed. Very few places on the planet should have the capability to do so. This should lead the PCs to Oceanus Industries, who deal largely in shipping and Marine Biology research, and who are the subject of Polestar's attacks.

Destroying the seaweed is extremely difficult, but not impossible. It requires a broad base bombardment with high intensity darkons. This will require five days of research, or as fits your campaign world. The PCs should not have that much time unless their team scientist foregoes sleep and takes some penalties on his rolls. There are several ways to achieve the effect of destroying the seaweed. If the PCs have a darkness projector, they can find a way to amplify his powers, or use a super speedster to project darkons over a large area at once. Destroying all the seaweed should take about three days once the PCs develop a means of doing so. If the PCs don't have a darkness projector, they may try to find another hero or villain who is, or who can build one. A villain would be more interesting, but also less likely to help. Other solutions are also possible.

Investigating Polestar

Polestar has a rap sheet about as long as a snake with stretching powers. He works with a superpowered telekinetic named Kraken, who has short-range telekinetic abilities and is very strong. Their other cohorts include Madam Manta, a fish woman with a manta stinger, Siren, a mentalist with the ability to breathe underwater, and S.H.A.R.C., a man in an underwater battlesuit stolen from the U.S. Navy. S.H.A.R.C. is the one with the least known capabilities, as the Navy has not been terribly forthcoming, but it does stand for Submarine Housed Attack and Reconnaissance Craft.

This information can be discovered through police, fighting the villains (if you somehow got a total hero team killed during the first part of the adventure), contacting other supergroups, and government sources, if any of the PCs have these sorts of contacts.

PCs may know a portion of this information already. After all, villains tend to talk, and their previous beatings at the hands of this particular group of supercriminals may have been particularly severe.

Investigating Ghosts

There are no ghosts. Siren and Madam Manta have been posing as ghosts. PCs can ask sailors if they know anyone who has seen the ghosts. The sailors will be cooperative, though they will think the heroes are raving lunatics. Create NPC sailors as necessary. Two sample testimonies follow:

“It was a ghost... with green skin.... It came up out of the water and it sang to Mickey. I saw it.... We begged him not to jump, we begged, but Mickey walked into the sea... (Choked Sob), and we couldn’t stop him....”

“It was... it was a mermaid. It had a fishlike tail.... There was this pain in my arm, and when I woke up, there were long bloody slashes ’cross it. Must have been a really big manta ray or something....”

The two supervillains are trying to scare shipping away from the Underwater Grotto, which is the staging area for Polestar’s plan. It will be very difficult to find the grotto unless someone leaves a trail there, however, clever PCs, if they can mark the sites of all of the attacks, can plot a search radius of about two miles for the main concentration of attacks.

Oceanus Industries

Eventually, the PCs’ research should carry them to Oceanus Industries, and Polestar’s highly oblivious secretary. Getting an appointment with David Rupert Cameron is hard, but not impossible. Could the heroes please come back tomorrow?

Here is what the heroes can learn from speaking with Cameron (Polestar):

Cameron is deliberately evasive. He gives the PCs no real answers about what he will do, and asks a lot of questions about what the heroes will do to stop the attacks, especially since he appears to be a poor, helpless victim.

He will be friendly and cordial, unless shot, in which case he does not defend himself unless mortally threatened and calls for the police. Nothing like putting the heroes in jail so they can’t stop his plan....

If the PCs attempt to read Cameron’s mind, they will find that he is extremely strong-willed and has mental blocks placed in his brain by Abraxas. If the PCs learn his plan, they may attempt to stop it. Should the PCs manage to pry some facts out of him, his strong will may clue the PCs in that he is not telling them everything, and they may wish to investigate further.

Breaking In

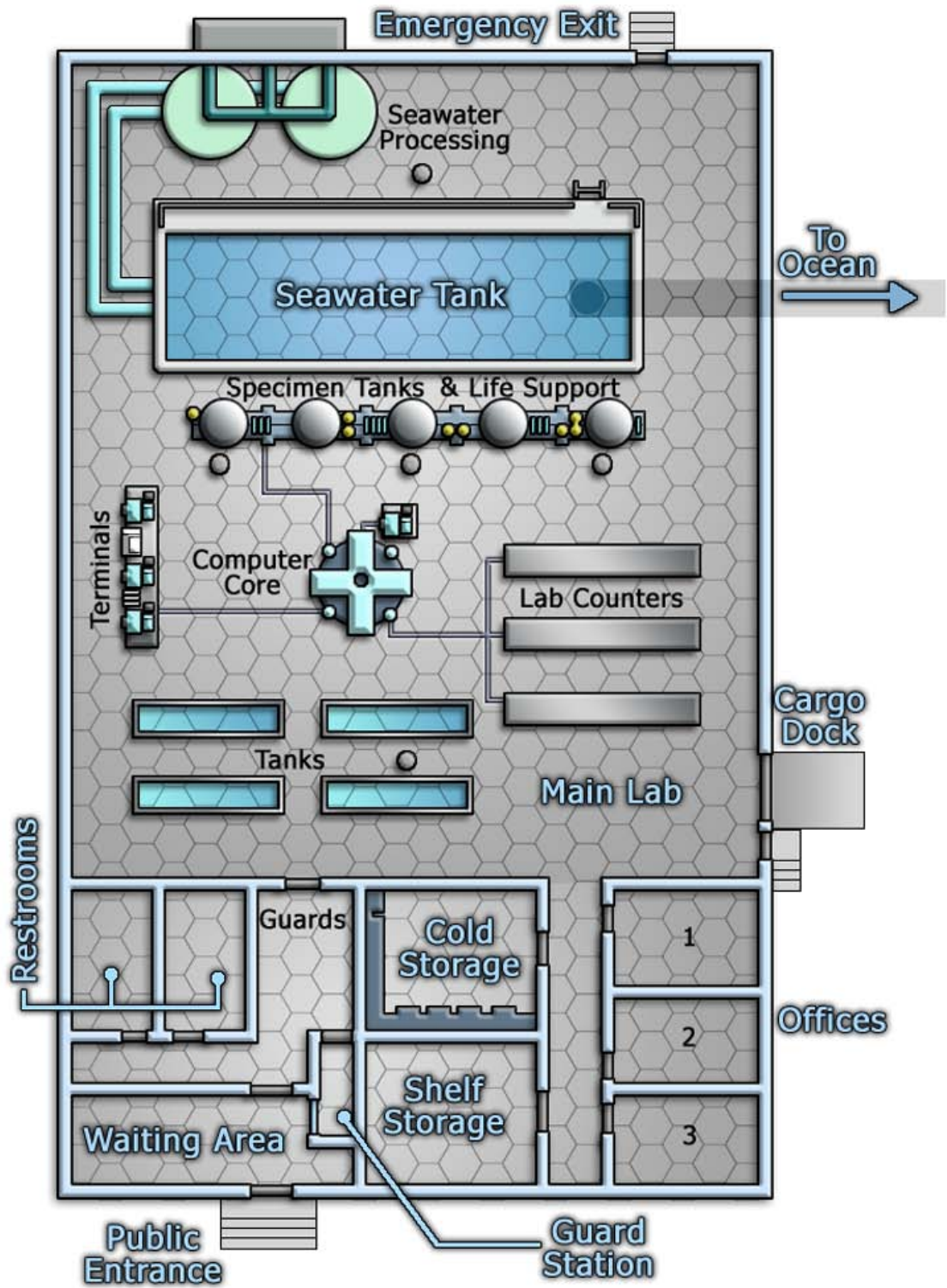
If the PCs call the police and ask for a warrant, they won’t get it. Cameron is apparently a beleaguered businessman, and the police don’t want to be accused of harassment or false arrest. Mental Defense is not grounds for reasonable suspicion, especially since unauthorized telepathic contact is a violation of someone’s rights in the first place.

If the PCs check Cameron’s office, they can discover two important facts. The first is that nothing is scheduled for his appointment calendar three days after the submarine launch. (For maximum effect, choose a day three days before July 4th or Memorial Day, when lots of people are out of doors and police are otherwise occupied.) Even after that day, his appointment book is blank. The appointment calendar is on his desk.

In a hidden safe, concealed under the desk, which the desk moves aside to reveal, is a hidden transmitter. The transmitter contains a console and a thumbprint activator. This allows Cameron to send messages to Abraxas and the other villains. If anyone else places his thumb on the print reader, it explodes doing damage (energy RKA 3d6, Explosion), centered on the safe, to everyone in the office. This also alerts Abraxas and Polestar through a transmission that someone has discovered the transmitter. Examination of the console and thumbprint activator reveals them to be composed of unusual materials in a seashell-type layered ceramic. Protracted examination of these objects, assuming they survive the PCs’ curiosity, reveals that this device was not produced by any earthly method. Clearly, something fishy is going on here.

In the seawater tank, assuming the PCs manage to find their way down there, is a large tube that pipes out to the ocean. Halfway down the tube is a hidden coded security lock, which, if opened and/or disarmed, reveals a secret Marine Biology laboratory, with technology that no earthly lab can match.

Map of Oceanus Industries



Map of Oceanus Industries

Polestar has reconstructed his marine biology facility to better serve the plans of Abraxas, but has done so in secret, limiting the amount of alien technology here. All security cameras are standard earth devices, and are assumed to be in the corners of each room throughout the complex. It is surrounded by a standard 2 DEF, 2 BODY fence, and rests on a cliff several miles out of town from the campaign city.

Main Lab: The main lab, unlike the office facilities in front of it, has 10 DEF and 15 BODY walls and floor.

The Main Lab is dominated by a central computer core, which is only useful for esoteric applications involving Marine Biology, and therefore is not designed in this adventure. The core has 7 DEF and 4 BODY, and is hooked up to the specimen tanks, lab counters, and a row of computer terminals. Breaking into the computer core yields no new information, but can tell the PCs interesting things about the spawning habits of salmon. The tanks are currently filled with salmon in various stages of life

Specimen Tanks are made of metal with thick glass portholes and weigh fifteen tons apiece; each has 12 DEF and 7 BODY. The Lab Counters are ordinary tables with reinforcements on the table supports, for a total of 4 DEF, 4 BODY. The Computer Terminals are set into a heavily reinforced table, but are themselves fragile. The computers are only 2 DEF, 3 BODY, but the table is 7 DEF, 5 BODY.

Offices: David Cameron (Polestar) owns office number one, which also contains the hidden safe mentioned above. The offices have standard 5 DEF, 4 BODY walls.

Storage Facilities: The Cold Storage and Shelf Storage facilities are located directly across from the offices, with the cooling machinery between them. Since Polestar knows about this, he will set up a triggering device to freeze heroes with a vulnerability to cold should he get a chance to do so. Consider this a 4d6 NND versus LS: Immunity to Cold, Area Of Effect Line, if the cooling machinery is punctured. These areas have 8 DEF, 6 BODY walls.

Waiting Area: This is a small waiting area with a corner sofa and a flat table with some magazines on it, including a copy of the latest issue of *Hero Worship*, with “Religious Right” on the cover. (He’s got televangelist magazines, he *must* be a bad guy!) There is a small guard station with a single security guard stationed there. He is a Normal who knows nothing of Abraxas or Polestar’s plans. Beyond this is a small service area with men’s and women’s

bathrooms and two security guards in front of a door that leads to the main facility. These two security guards are also Normals. The security booth has 8 DEF, 6 BODY walls and plexiglass, but the bathrooms are standard 5 DEF, 4 BODY walls. The small security system with security cameras positioned around the building is controlled from here.

Cargo Dock Door: This is a thick metal rolldown door with 10 DEF and 3 BODY.

Emergency Exit Door: This is a 2 DEF, 2 BODY, Breakaway Glass metal framed door. Since Marine Biology usually does not involve dangerous biohazards, there are no additional safety features other than an alarm and a security camera in this location.

Seawater Tank and Processing Pipes: This huge seawater tank, dominated by a large rail on the seaward side, dominates the rear of the laboratory. Two huge seawater processors are linked at the bottom, forming a pipe that feeds them. The seawater processors themselves are made of thick reinforced concrete (12 DEF, 15 BODY), and the metal pipe has 12 DEF and 8 BODY. The tank itself has 15 DEF but only 10 BODY. In the tank is a drain which leads to the ocean, down through the side of the cliff. Halfway down this drain (approximately 1 hex in diameter) is the secret culvert and laboratory, a small 5” by 5” room where Polestar conducts experiments in Marine Biology on a more advanced level. Herein is the chemical formula for the engineering of the seaweed, and numerous maps of the local sea floor. There are several locations marked on the map. Clever PCs might notice that they are all locations where the Seaweed has drifted, and ships have sunk. One location, right in the center of these, has no such event. This is the location of the Secret Grotto. Should the PCs discover the grotto before the attack on the Submarine, adjust the plotline to fit.

Attack on the Submarine

In this encounter, the PCs attend the submarine launch, contending with Polestar and his lackeys trying to steal it. Crush the PCs utterly, using every dirty trick in the book. When the PCs arrive, if they arrive in secret IDs, they will get to watch Melanie Riggs interview Captain Paul Donaldson. Roleplay the interview as much as possible, in order to build tension and suspense. PCs who arrive in costume will be interview targets for Melanie. Interview them. Let them get a little comfortable before Polestar and his minions steal the submarine.

The Mayor is also here, along with dozens of reporters and military personnel, as well as the City Council. Feel free to threaten the lives of these NPCs as necessary to keep the heroes busy.

Polestar's plan of attack looks like this:

1) Polestar will fly down out of the sky and attack the most prominent city official he can, hurling the helpless politician as far as he can to draw one of the heroes off.

2) Madam Manta will leap into the fray from surprise under the dock, throwing her levels into defense and harming hero after hero until they drop.

3) S.H.A.R.C. will support Polestar with blasting attacks. He will coordinate with others, attempting to prove that he is a better leader than Polestar.

4) Siren will attempt to Mind Control Captain Donaldson and get him to drive the submarine to where she wants it. Siren is indifferent to Kraken's plan, and will use sonic attacks anyway if he is in the Area Of Effect.

5) Kraken will leap up from the ocean and attack the dock pylons, dumping everyone into the water, where the villains will have the advantage and many innocent people will be hurt, thus mitigating the threat of electrical and sonic projectors in this environment. Pylons are DCV 0, and Kraken should be able to hit most, if not all of them, in a single action phase.

More than likely, with the innocents squirming in the water and drowning, the villains will escape with the submarine and take it to the secret grotto, to proceed with the next phase of the plan. Should the heroes prevent the theft, and/or capture the villains, the villains will more than likely seek an alternative method of obtaining atomic warheads to power the tidal wave later on, or should that prove impossible, to seek revenge against the heroes.

Map of the Docks Area

Parking Lot: This is a wide parking lot near the ocean where people can park their cars. If the battle spills over into the parking lot, there are many cars here for heroes and villains to throw around.

The Submarine: This is a standard US Nuclear Submarine from *The Ultimate Vehicle Sourcebook*. The primary threat of this adventure comes from it, so use every dirty trick to make sure the villains escape with the submarine. The mayor and Captain Donaldson start next to the submarine when everything breaks out, and it will take Captain Donaldson only a single move action to get into the submarine and shut the conning tower. Once the submarine is underway, the villains will fight a retreating action until it gets underwater.

Feel free to place here any other reporters, DNPCs, or other NPCs the heroes have a particular attachment to on the docks or sidewalk here. Also feel free to add additional boats. While the other berths are drawn as empty, they could just as easily contain boats with people on them for Polestar or Kraken to hurl skyward.

Tracking the Villains

If the villains succeed, there are several methods to track the submarine to the secret grotto, where it is currently located.

1) *Triangulation:* The heroes can plot out the sites of the attacks and locate a radius where the greatest concentration of attacks lies. This will narrow the search area and make finding the secret grotto easier.

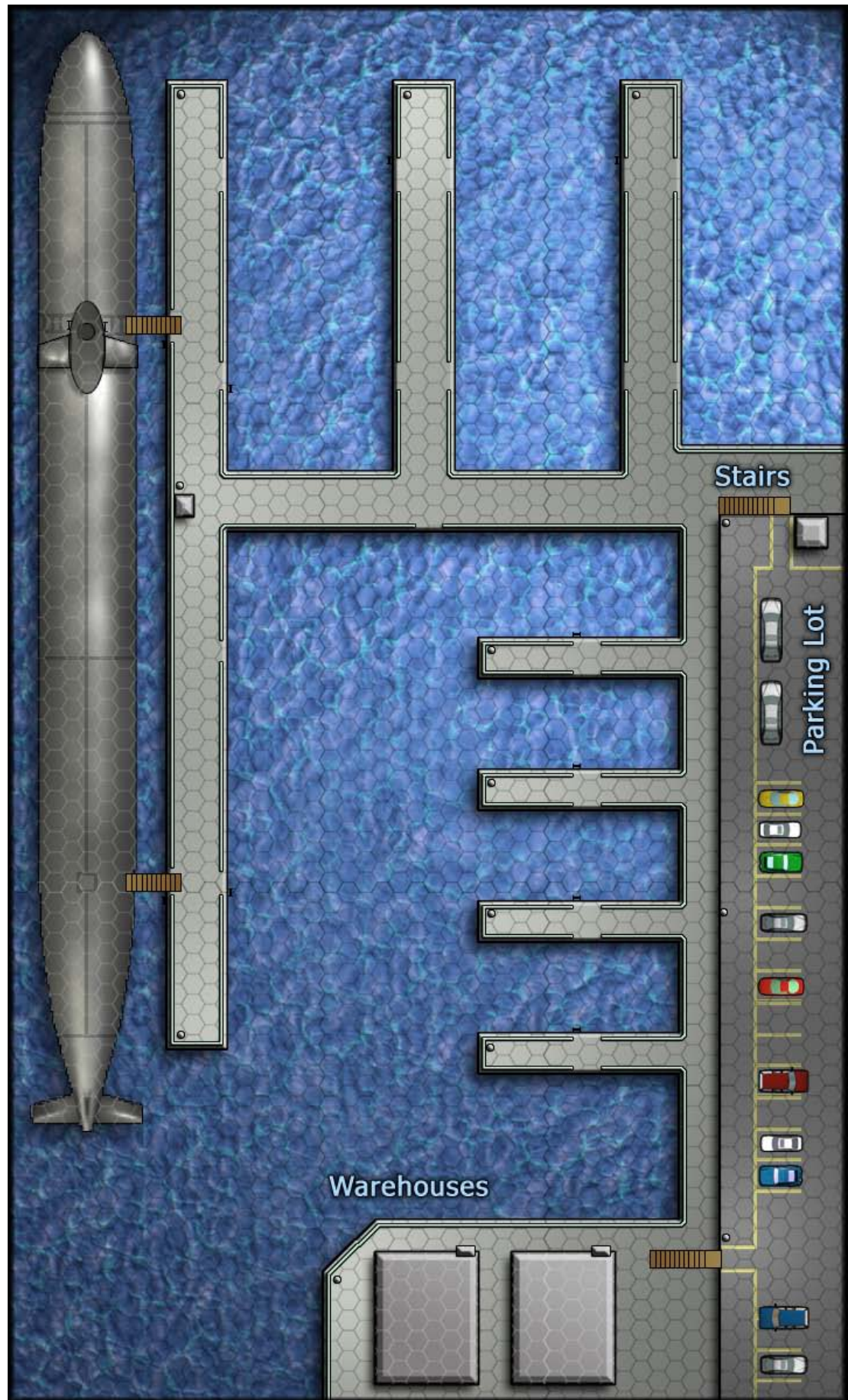
2) *Radiation:* A Geiger counter will be helpful in tracing the radiation trail from the submarine to the grotto, though it will grow progressively more difficult the thicker the seaweed gets.

3) *Mind Scanning:* The PCs can scan the ocean for the minds of the crew of the USS Indianapolis. Remember that the ocean is a very large area filled with dozens of minds.

4) *Sonar and Sounding Equipment:* The PCs can take such equipment out into the seaweed, or use such powers themselves to locate the underground grotto. A submarine is very large, and has a distinctive shape designed to fool sonar, but clever technical PCs should be able to find a way around that.

Navigating the seaweed should be extremely difficult and murky, costing the heroes a great deal of time and effort while the villains arm the bombs and prepare the trap. Use the discovery of the grotto to build tension so that the heroes can roleplay their attempts to do so.

Map of the Docks Area



The Secret Grotto

Part of Polestar's plan is reconstructing the staging area for creating of the tidal wave into a deadly trap designed to destroy the heroes. By the time the heroes arrive, the base will have been vacated by the villains. Captured military personnel also remain here, however – they are part of the trap. The nuclear weapons from the submarine are buried underground here, and connected to a remote timer in Polestar's possession. There is a deadman switch on these weapons. Attempting to disarm them detonates them, and it is operated with a magnetic trigger. This should give the PCs the clue they need to stop Polestar from detonating the bombs, which cannot be done from here. Allow a PC with Demolitions, should the PCs think to dig up the atomic weapons, to make a roll to discover this fact with no penalties (with Security Systems complementary). Captain Donaldson, from the makeshift cells, will shout to the heroes, "There's no time! They knew you were coming! It's a trap!"

The room is large and open, with a large cell off to one side, which may or may not be filled with Navy personnel, depending on the way the battle at the docks went. There is a large docking bay for a submarine, a pool filled with water (which leads to open sea outside the grotto), and large amounts of technical equipment used for electromagnetics and marine biology. A large vat of the unusual seaweed rests in one corner of the room.

The grotto is geologically unstable, which is part of Polestar's plan. He intends to detonate the nuclear weapons underground, collapsing the earth and creating a whirlwind vortex of water, which will be forced outward by the ring of atomic explosions. When the subterranean explosions end, the result will be a horrible tidal wave that will crash into the campaign city and destroy it. Polestar and his minions will be atop the highest building in the city with a magnetic amplifier, designed to pull the tidal wave forward at terrifying speed. Fortunately, Polestar needs to build up power, giving the heroes a chance to escape the trap here.

The trap here is twofold. First, the charges implanted in the ceiling explode, collapsing the roof on top of the heroes. Second, two Magno-One robots emerge from a hidden compartment above the shaped charges, and begin attacking the heroes ruthlessly. These robots are similar to the magnetically amplified robot the PCs fought earlier, only they appear to be glossier and made of some sort of strange seashell-like material. (Abraxas built these robots after the villains captured the original, seeing it as an effective shock troop unit.) The collapsed roof makes the submarine impossible to remove

from the cavern and does 12d6 normal energy damage to all characters not imprisoned in the cells beyond. It will also make rescuing the innocents in the cavern difficult, giving Polestar time to amplify his powers (and insuring a dramatically appropriate resolution). Characters must beat a STR Roll by 5, a DEX Roll by 8, or Contortionist Roll by 2 to free themselves from the rocks. Flight adds to STR for this purpose.

Once the fight is over, hopefully, the heroes have won. PCs should be allowed to come up with a reasonable method of rescuing the naval personnel from the cavern, and proceed to the final battle with Polestar.

The Secret Pool: This is concealed from the outside by a large mass of kelp, brought here by Siren and Madam Manta. There are no airlocks, but an opposed Concealment Roll against a 14- will reveal the pool and allow the characters to enter. The pool comes up into a large circular chamber, with a full complement of nuclear warheads embedded into the ground.

Cells: The cells are constructed with primitive portcullises and crude iron bars, put together by Polestar and Kraken with a great deal of haste. Inside the cells will be all the members of the submarine crew, plus anyone else you wish to place captured here. (Captured DNPCs from previous encounters with the villains, possibly psychically tampered with by Siren or genetically modified by Abraxas... "When my girlfriend undergoes stress, she becomes my greatest nemesis...")

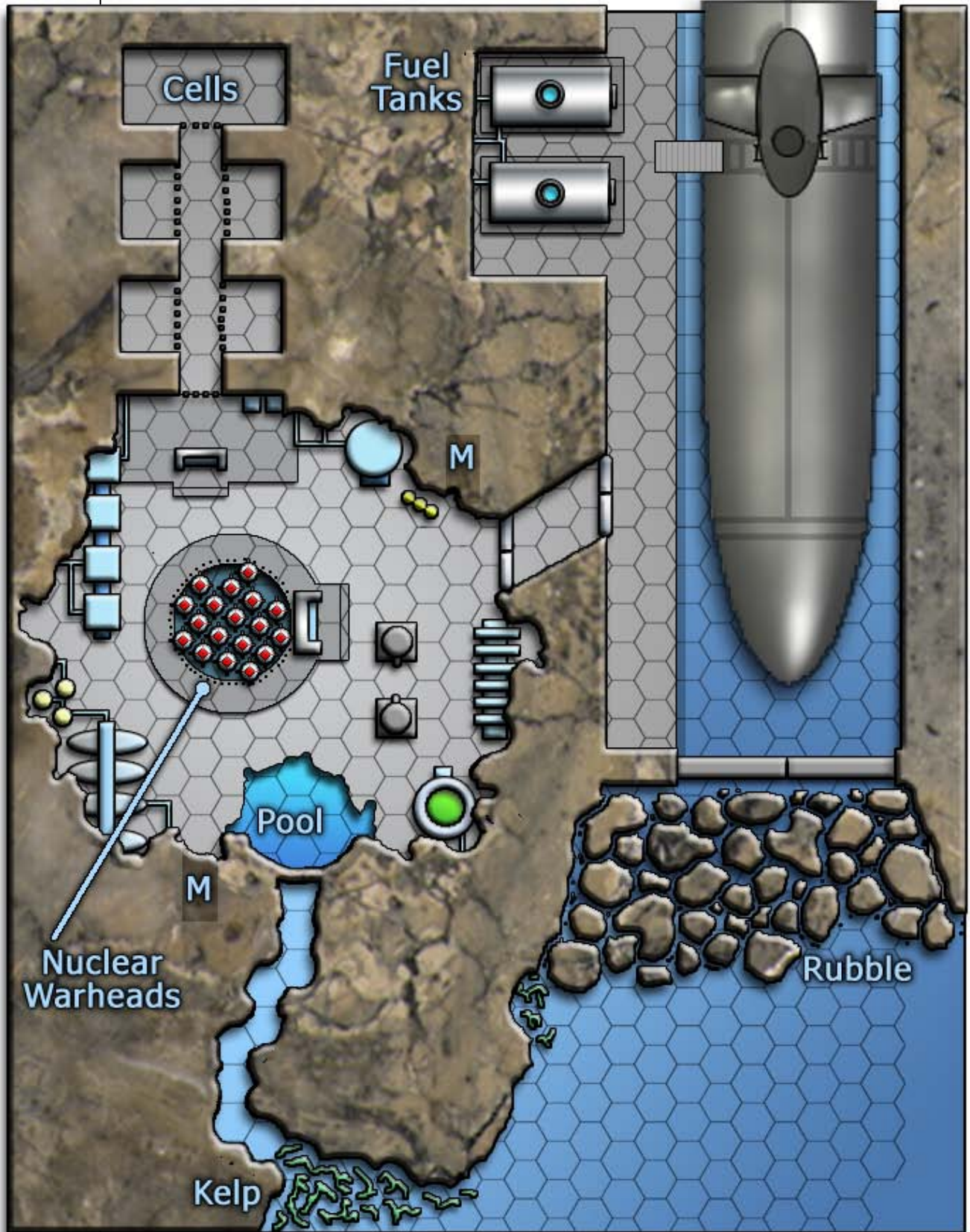
Submarine Bay: This is where the submarine, without its atomic payload, is stored. The direct entrance to the cavern has been blocked by rubble, now that it is no longer necessary to use it. Directly along one side of the bay are two unusual "fuel tanks" composed of a weird seashell-like substance. These tanks are 15 DEF, 5 BODY, and contain an unusual bluish-white pasty gel that smells fleshy and odd. This is the (non-explosive) fuel for the ships that Abraxas uses. It is a substance very similar to human fat cells. Destruction of the tanks will make a messy splat, but very little else. The PCs may clear the rubble to get into this area, but this will be very slow and give the villains more time to prepare their scheme.

Important clues that can be found here are:

1) Complete details of Polestar's intentions, contained in a small computer buried beneath the rubble. It explains that the nuclear detonator is connected to a deadman switch on Polestar's person. Appropriate skills to discover this fact include Demolitions, Nuclear Physics, Computer Programming, and Electronics.

The Secret Grotto

Submarine Bay



M = Hidden "Magno-One" Robot

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2) There are also notes on the building of a magnetic amplifier, with waves that affect the progress of the tides and draw water towards the source of the magnetism. However, a large metallic object is necessary, as the amount of water drawn is directly proportional to the height of the object. Allow the PCs a Deduction Roll to figure out that Polestar is probably atop the tallest building in town if they can't figure it out for themselves.

When the PCs figure out that the villains are probably atop the building at that very moment, move to the final section.

The Tallest Building in Town

Polestar intends to press the magnetic detonator and drown the campaign city, while people go casually about their business and evacuation is largely impossible. He will speed up his plans if the PCs catch him prematurely.

Polestar's minions will be at the four compass points around the circular, hoop shaped device, in which Polestar floats like a giant lodestone in the center of a compass, at the very center of the building, probably mounted atop the elevator apparatus. There is no cover this high up, and winds are fierce. In Polestar's hand is a small metal box with no visible instrumentation. While in the device, Polestar may dodge and attack at full DCV, but may not move. He is granted 10" of Knockback Resistance, but a coordinated attack by heroes could knock him from the device and vastly weaken the power of the tidal wave. This should be a last resort, however. When the heroes arrive, Polestar will gloat to them, and tell them that they should not attack, or he will detonate the bombs and destroy the city. Destroying the detonator will activate the bombs.

Ways to Stop Polestar from Destroying the City

1) Destroy the device and the detonator simultaneously. This is extremely difficult, but possible. The detonator is being held by Polestar, and if the detonator is fired upon, he will dodge, making his DCV 15 and the DCV of the deadman switch a gruesome 17. The detonator has 8 DEF and 1 BODY. The device has 15 DEF and 15 BODY. It is very tough indeed.

2) Tip the magnetic amplifier over. This will redirect the force of the tidal wave downward, into the massive hole created by the explosion of twenty atomic warheads. A lot of the ocean will fill up the hole, and create a lot of environmental damage, but the city will be saved.

3) Adjust the polarity of the device. If done properly, and stealthily, this will reverse the polarity of the detonation impulse. The bombs will simply go inert and sit there, and Polestar will scream in rage and attack the heroes. The villains will try to stop a PC who attempts this if they can spot him.

4) Get the detonator and rub it against Polestar several times in the same direction. Magnetizing the detonator creates the same effect as adjusting the polarity of the device.

5) Use telekinesis to hold the detonator in place so that it does not explode. Entangling Polestar to hold the detonator in place also works for this purpose. A clever PC can then grab the detonator away from Polestar while his DCV is momentarily a 0 instead of that massive 17.

6) Other creative methods are possible. Be fair and let the PCs be heroic. They've been beaten up a lot.

If the device goes off, the Campaign City is destroyed and innumerable lives are lost. If it looks as though the device will explode, the GM may have Abraxas decide that he does not want to destroy this city after all and make Polestar's plan fail, though this is not particularly satisfying as the PCs did not actually stop the explosion.

If the heroes win, and Polestar can still escape, he grabs the others telekinetically and flies off with them, swearing grim and terrible revenge against the heroes. Whether or not the villains are captured, the PCs are hailed as heroes for saving the city, regardless of any transgressions they may have committed in this little particular escapade. They are added to the next big holiday parade, and within three days, each hero is sought out by a government agent who awards the hero a Congressional Medal of Honor. If a hero is Watched by the government, he'll be given a pardon for his previous offenses instead. The government will only go so far.

If Polestar and the others escape, they will return to plague the heroes another time. If captured, they will be led off, swearing revenge, to a Stronghold van.

In a dark cavern, deep beneath the Marianas Trench, the huge black hand of Abraxas waits, planning and brooding, for another day....

MAGNO-ONE PLOT SEEDS

Hostile

Takeover: A technologically-oriented villain captures Magno-One, and rewrites its programming to do his bidding. Can the heroes figure out which villain it is and how to stop him?

Army Daze:

Magno-One seeks out its military/industrial creators in an attempt to discover its true purpose. Unfortunately, it lacks the sophisticated self-awareness programs of higher-level robots and tries to destroy the facility while trying to communicate

Magno-Viper!:

VIPER gets hold of Magno-One and tries to mass produce it while maintaining the original for their new Magno-Viper army! Can the heroes rescue Magno-One? What will it do if it is freed?

Magno-One

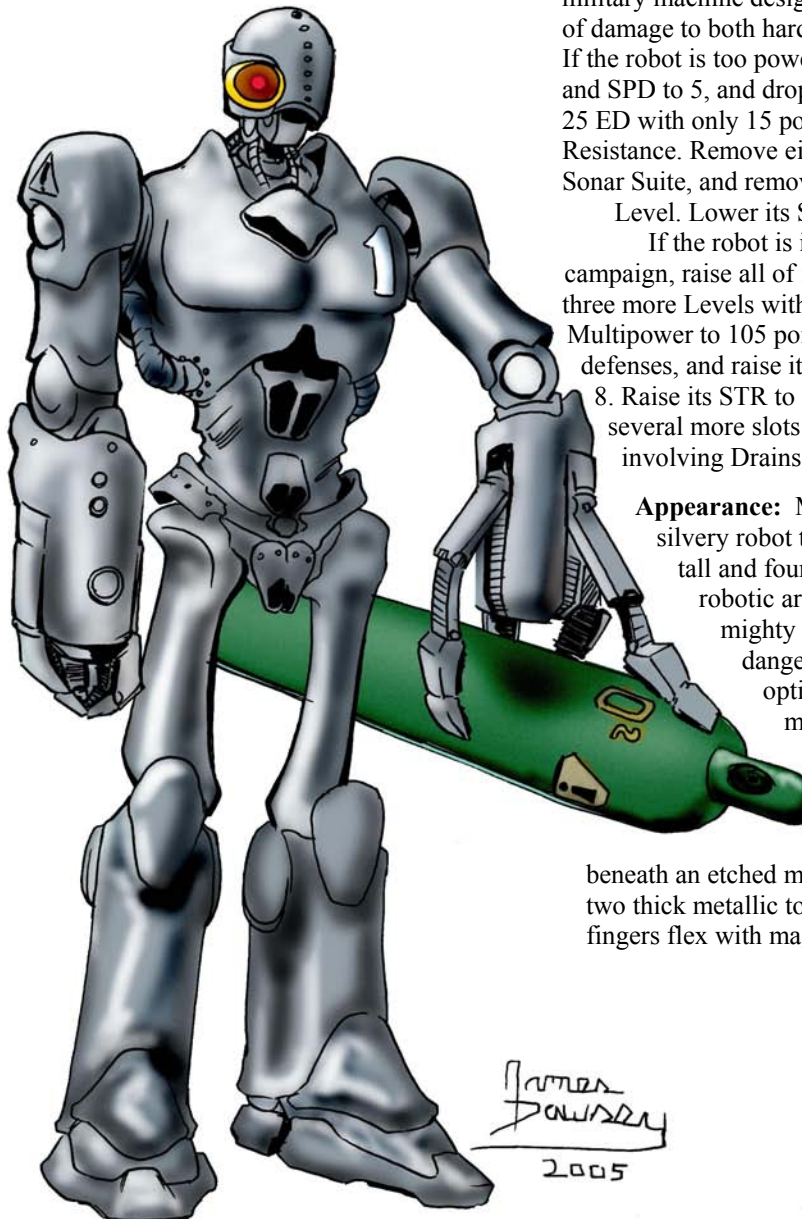
Background/History: Magno-One is a military robot created by the United States Government for strategic military applications and engagements.

Personality/Motivation: The robot is only motivated to perform its programming, though its advanced computer systems make it similar to humans in the way it reacts to situations (It uses STUN and END instead of being built as an Automaton). This can change at the GM's discretion.

It has little motivation and no personality, though if a GM wishes to give the robot motivations and a personality, he should choose something appropriate to his campaign.

Options Include:

1) A military officer with his own secret agenda activates the robot and gives it a mission contrary to the orders of his superiors.



2) The Robot wishes to destroy all humans, and sets out on its own plan to do so.

3) The Robot wishes to study human responses to direct military engagement, and begins engaging Normals and police officers in combat. The PCs must stop the robot before it hurts too many people.

The robot learns from its experiences, tending to never repeat the same mistake.

Quote: None, Magno-One can't speak.

Powers/Tactics: The robot tends to stay at range and use its superior movement to its advantage, flying from one end of the battlefield to the other, destroying objects, taking cover, and operating in accordance with military battle manuals for small military units. If a PC is ex-military, rereading these manuals might give him a temporary edge over the robot (a small bonus to Tactics and OCV, etc.).

Campaign Use: The robot is a powerful military machine designed to cause a great deal of damage to both hard and soft military targets. If the robot is too powerful, lower its DEX to 23 and SPD to 5, and drop its defenses to 20 PD and 25 ED with only 15 points of Damage Resistance. Remove either the Radar Suite or the Sonar Suite, and remove one Combat Skill Level. Lower its STR to 50.

If the robot is in a high-powered campaign, raise all of its defenses by 10, add three more Levels with All Combat, and raise its Multipower to 105 points. Harden all of its defenses, and raise its DEX to 29 and SPD to 8. Raise its STR to a whopping 75. Add several more slots to its multipower involving Drains, Transfers, and AVLDS.

Appearance: Magno-One is a large, silvery robot that stands about six feet tall and four feet wide, its powerful robotic arms and legs concealing a mighty flight system and several dangerous weapons systems. Its optic systems are gold, and its metal frame is etched into the shape of a heavily muscled man, though the face is a glimmering skull beneath an etched mask of metal. Its feet form two thick metallic toes, and its delicate, lithe fingers flex with magnetic power.

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Magno-One

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
55	STR	45	20-	25 Tons, 12d6 HTH [6]
26	DEX	48	14-	OCV: 9/DCV: 9
33	CON	46	16-	
15	BODY	10	12-	
20	INT	10	13-	PER Roll: 17-
10	EGO	0	11-	ECV: 3
20	PRE	10	13-	PRE Attack: 4d6
10	COM	0	11-	
25	PD	14		Total: 25 PD (20 rPD)
30	ED	23		Total: 30 PD (20 rED)
6	SPD	24		Phases: 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12
20	REC	4		
66	END	0		
60	STUN	0		

Total Characteristics Cost: 234

Movement:

Running:	6"/12"
Leaping:	11"/22"
Swimming:	25"/200"
Flight:	25"/200"

Cost	Powers	END
75	<i>Magnetic Powers:</i> Multipower, 75-point Reserve	—
7u	1) <i>Magnetic Blast:</i> 12d6 EB, Reduced Endurance (½ END, +¼)	3
4u	2) <i>Tractor Beam:</i> Telekinesis (50 STR), Forward and Backwards Only (-1)	7
5u	3) <i>Magnetic Burst Rockets:</i> RKA 3d6+1, Explosion (+½), 8 Charges (-½)[8]	
20	<i>Impenetrax Skin:</i> Damage Resistance (20 PD/20 ED)	0
15	<i>Backup Systems:</i> Mental Defense (17 points)	0
10	<i>Radioactive Shielding:</i> Power Defense (10 points)	0
12	<i>Glare Shields:</i> Sight Flash Defense (12 points)	0
90	<i>Magnetic Flight System:</i> Flight 25", 8x NCM, Reduced Endurance (½ END, +¼), Usable Underwater (+¼)	2
25	<i>Radar Suite:</i> Radar, 360°	0
32	<i>Passive Sonar Suite:</i> Spatial Awareness, 360°	0
5	<i>Optic Suite:</i> Nightvision	0
5	<i>Optic Suite:</i> Infrared Perception	0
5	<i>Optic Suite:</i> Ultraviolet Perception	0
12	<i>Radio Suite:</i> High Range Radio Perception	0
12	<i>Scanners:</i> +4 to all PER Rolls	0
15	<i>Robot:</i> +30 PRE, Defensive Only (-1)	0
50	<i>Robot:</i> Full Life Support, Including Immortality	0

Talents

3	Absolute Range Sense
9	Ambidexterity (Total)
18	Combat Sense 16-
4	Double Jointed
5	Eidetic Memory
22	Universal Translator 15-

Skills

10	+1 Overall Level
16	+2 with All Combat
3	Acrobatics 14-
3	Analyze Combat Technique 13-
3	Breakfall 14-
3	Climbing 14-
9	Computer Programming 16-
3	Concealment 13-
3	Contortionist 14-
3	Cryptography 13-
3	Deduction 13-
10	Defense Maneuver IV
3	Demolitions 13-
3	Electronics 13-
3	Fast Draw 14-
3	Navigation (Land, Marine) 13-
3	Security Systems 13-
3	Stealth 14-
3	Tactics 13-

Total Powers & Skills Cost: 550

Total Cost: 784

200+ Disadvantages

15	Enraged: when over Half of Body Taken (Go 11-, Rec 11-, Uncommon)
20	Hunted: United States Military 14- (Mo Pow, NCI, Watched)
20	Hunted: Foreign Technology Dealers and Governments 8- (Mo Pow, NCI)
15	Physical Limitation: Cannot Speak (Frequently, Greatly)
20	Psychological Limitation: Must Complete Mission Objective (Common, Strong)
10	Vulnerability: 1½x STUN and BODY from Gravitic Attacks (Uncommon)
484	Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 784

POLESTAR PLOT SEEDS

Compass Pointless: Polestar attempts to drain off a portion of the Earth's magnetic field to make himself even more powerful. As he enacts his scheme, slowly, the compasses of the world cease pointing north. Can the heroes find him and stop his plan before he becomes the most powerful man in the world?

Experimental Blues: Seeking a new subject for his experiments, Polestar selects one of the PCs! Can the heroes save their fellow, or will Polestar turn the hero into something completely different?

Any Advanced Enough Technology...: Polestar backs up a local stage magician down on his luck! Can the heroes find out Polestar is doing it? And is it just a ruse, or does Polestar really have a soft spot for the poor bum?

Polestar, the Magnetic King

Background/History: Doctor David Cameron's corporation was going under. His experimental undersea research couldn't get any funding, and his theories were being exposed to greater scientific scrutiny. His small research facility, once state of the art, was running into technical problems with upgrading to the newest forms of technology.

As his small research corporation started to go broke, he began to push the limits of the safety regulations, and people began to flee his company, Oceanus Industries. With a skeleton crew, he took a trip out to the Marianas Trench, in an attempt to go deeper than anyone else had before, to save his company's reputation and his finances. But something went horribly wrong.

As the bathysphere descended into the darkness of the ocean, something began calling to David Cameron, deep in the lizard portion of his brain, untouched by conscious mind for centuries, and he would not abort the test. As his cohorts within the sphere began crying to abort the experiment, he took the sphere deeper, deeper than it was supposed to go, and then a bright, shining light engulfed the bathysphere, and all was quiet.

In the depths of the ocean lay the spaceship of Abraxas, cold and silent. It was Abraxas who had reached out to Cameron; Abraxas who had called him; Abraxas who saw a use for the failing scientist. Abraxas reached deep into the human's genetic code, and manipulated Cameron's DNA, granting him control over the forces of magnetism, even as some of his monstrous undersea creations massacred his crew and sank his boat. Using telepathic manipulation, he brainwashed Cameron over a period of several weeks, programming him to serve the powerful alien, and giving him technical secrets necessary to rebuild his company, and place it at the forefront of oceanographic research.

David Rupert Cameron washed ashore six months later, his corporation on the verge of collapse, his finances in ruins. Using the secrets he gained from Abraxas, he built a secret lab beneath his own corporation, designed to aid his own research, and serve his new master. Slowly, he began working on a plan to aid his master's conquest of the Earth, and eventually the entire galaxy. As his corporation continued to gain prominence, he began to use his powers as Polestar to obtain things that he could not obtain legally, and lured several members of his own corporation into being manipulated and controlled by Abraxas, the same way he had been when he sank so deeply into the ocean.

Personality/Motivation: Polestar is a loyal servant of Abraxas, and all of his goals, including his accumulation of wealth, point towards that end. He believes that in the end he will be rewarded when his master rules the earth, though he has been given instructions never to mention Abraxas as his leader.

He is cold, calculating, and ruthless, though his desire to study heroes rather than beat them down sometimes gets the better of him. In battle, he will show no mercy, selecting the weakest targets first and ordering his teammates to crush them, saving the tougher heroes for coordinated attacks later on. He despises being humiliated, and will focus on such opponents exclusively until they are defeated.

Quote: "Did you really think that you could defeat one who controls one of the fundamental forces of the universe? Now, see the folly of your impetuous and foolish challenge!"

Powers/Tactics: When Polestar is in full control of his mental faculties and not assaulting those who have humiliated him, he works with his teammates to coordinate attacks on opponents. One of his favorite strategies is to have Kraken grab as many people as he can and squeeze them, while he blasts them with his forcewave attack. A fuller set of team tactics for Polestar, Kraken, Siren, Madam Manta, and S.H.A.R.C is listed after the character sheets.

Polestar also will often delay heroes by using attacks such as entangle and telekinesis to their greatest effect by threatening innocents, pinning down a physically weak hero, or grabbing Normals and hurling them into the air, forcing heroes to rescue them.

Campaign Use: In a low-powered campaign, reduce Polestar's DEX to 23 and SPD to 5, bring his Damage Reduction down to 25%, and move his Multipower down to 60 Active Points instead of 70. Drop 5 points of Flash Defense, and remove the Power Defense and Lack of Weakness. Eliminate one Combat and one Overall Skill Level.

In a high-powered campaign, add one Combat Skill Level, raise his Multipower to 105 points, raise his Force Field by 10 PD and ED, and increase his Flight Speed to 25". Raise Power Defense and Lack of Weakness to 10 points each. Remove his gravity Vulnerability, and add several more slots to his Multipower involving ranged Drains and Transfers. Raise his SPD to 7 and DEX to 29. Add Rapid Attack (Ranged). Increase his CON to 43, his END to 100, and his REC to 25.

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Appearance: Polestar wears a black and white shaded form-fitting costume made of a weird latex-like substance created by Abraxas. His mask is black, with a $\frac{3}{4}$ face mask, exposing his sharp mustache and long, narrow goatee. The main torso piece is more black than white, the

gloves and boots are white, and the pants and leggings are loose fitting and black. The white gauntlets end in flared metal bands around his wrists. (If you are an evil GM, you may wish to have him pretend that these are foci – “My bands! Nooo! Can’t control it! ...SUCKER!” *ZOT*)

Polestar, the Magnetic King



Polestar, the Magnetic King

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
30	STR	20	15-	1.6 tons, 6d6 HTH [3]
24	DEX	42	14-	OCV: 8/DCV: 8
33	CON	46	16-	
15	BODY	10	12-	
18	INT	8	13-	PER Roll: 13-
20	EGO	20	13-	ECV: 7
25	PRE	15	14-	PRE Attack: 5d6
14	COM	2	11-	
10	PD	4		Total: 20 PD (10 rPD)
10	ED	3		Total: 20 PD (10 rED)
6	SPD	26		Phases: 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12
16	REC	6		
100	END	17		
60	STUN	13		

Total Characteristics Cost: 232

Movement:

Running:	6"/12"
Leaping:	6"/12"
Swimming:	20"/320"
Flight:	20"/320"

Cost	Powers	END
70	<i>Magnetic Control:</i> Multipower, 70-point Powers	-
4u	1) <i>Magnetic Forcewaves:</i> EB 4d6, Area Of Effect (10" Cone, +1), Autofire (+½), Penetrating (+½), Reduced Endurance (½ End, +¼); No Range (-½)	2
7u	2) <i>Magnetic Bolt:</i> EB 14d6	7
7u	3) <i>Magnetic Shear:</i> EB 9d6, Armor Piercing (+½)	7
7u	4) <i>Magnetic Disruption:</i> EB 7d6, NND (Defense is Force Field, +1)	7
7u	5) <i>Magnetic Bottle:</i> 9 DEF, 5d6 Entangle	7
7u	6) <i>Magnetic Manipulation:</i> 40 STR TK, Fine Manipulation	7
17	<i>Magnetic Control:</i> Elemental Control, 34-point Powers	-
18	1) <i>Magnetic Shield:</i> Force Field (10 PD/10 ED), Reduced Endurance (0 END, +½), Hardened (+¼)	0
53	2) <i>Magnetic Movement:</i> 20" Flight, 16x NCM, Usable Underwater (+¼)	4
60	<i>Magnetic Absorption Field:</i> 50% Physical and Energy Damage Reduction, Resistant	0
5	<i>Magnetic Distortion:</i> Lack of Weakness (5 points)	0
5	<i>Magnetic Resistance:</i> Power Defense (5 points)	0
15	<i>Magnetic Redirection:</i> Sight Flash Defense (15 points)	0
19	Life Support: Self Contained, Safe in Vacuum/Pressure, Radiation, Heat/Cold	0

Perks

- 1 Passport
- 10 Wealth

Talents

- 4 Environmental Movement: Intense Magnetic Fields

Skills

- 20 +2 Overall
- 16 +2 with All Combat
- 3 Acting 14-
- 3 Breakfall 14-
- 3 Bureaucratics 14-
- 3 Computer Programming 13-
- 3 Conversation 14-
- 3 Electronics 13-
- 3 High Society 14-
- 3 Persuasion 14-
- 3 Power 13-
- 3 Scientist
- 2 SS: Biology 13-
- 2 SS: Biophysics 13-
- 2 SS: Geology 13-
- 2 SS: Marine Biology 13-
- 2 SS: Nuclear Physics 13-
- 2 SS: Physics 13-
- 3 Security Systems 13-
- 3 Systems Operation 13-
- 3 Teamwork 14-

Total Powers & Skills Cost: 403

Total Cost: 635

200+ Disadvantages

- 10 Distinctive Feature: Registers on Mutant Scanners (Concealable, Major, Unusual Senses)
- 10 Enraged: when Humiliated (Go 11-, Rec 14-, Uncommon)
- 15 Hunted: Hero Team 8- (Mo Pow, Harsh)
- 20 Hunted: UNTIL 8- (Mo Pow, NCI, Harsh, Imprison)
- 20 Psychological Limitation: Loyal to Abraxas (Common, Total)
- 15 Psychological Limitation: Megalomania (Common, Strong)
- 15 Psychological Limitation: Scientific Curiosity (Common, Strong)
- 15 Social Limitation: Secret ID (David Rupert Cameron)
- 10 Vulnerability: 1½x STUN and BODY from Gravitic Attacks (Uncommon)
- 305 Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 635

Kraken

Background: Norman Bestermann was always on the seedy side of the fishing boat. Born into a poor family, he often helped people smuggle illegal aliens ashore, secretly taking out his father's fishing boat in the dead of night. Even after his father died, and the fishing boat became his, he was poor, desperate for his next payment from the overseas criminals who helped him to meet his rent and upkeep his boat between catches.

Bestermann was always looking for the biggest fish story, the one that would put him over the top and into a class where he would be able to sell the boat and cash out. And finally, he got his chance. A large giant squid had appeared offshore, and he was hired by local UNTIL Agents, with backup, to go looking for it.

The UNTIL Agents and Bestermann found more than they bargained for, and Abraxas claimed Bestermann for his own, finding in him the spark of a mind who held a certain low cunning that he found valuable. Abraxas changed Norman into the being known as Kraken, a powerful short-range telekinetic, with telekinetic energies playing through his body, resistant to most forms of harm while being incredibly tough, resistant, and strong.

The disappearance of Norman and the agents was logged within the UNTIL files of missing persons. Several days later, Bestermann washed ashore, with no memory of what had happened, despite repeated interrogation from the UNTIL agents. After several weeks of grilling, Norman Bestermann sold his boat, invested in a small craft, and sailed out into the ocean, retaining only a small post office box after paying off his bills. No one ever saw him again.

Now Kraken swims the seas only for Abraxas, serving his master in relentless silence under the sea. He draws pleasure from his new powers, and enjoys working with the other supervillains who are secretly controlled – the whispers of Abraxas purring in their minds. Kraken linked Abraxas' whispers with the hissing of the ocean, and he vowed to save the oceans from those who would hurt their purity. Unfortunately, this includes submarines, fishing boats, and toxic superbeings alike.

Personality/Motivation: Kraken is not much for planning his own schemes, preferring to do Polestar's dirty work, except as far as the environment is concerned, where he will sometimes sink vessels or attack toxic dump sites near the ocean. Companies that repeatedly dump poisons into the seas will be targeted with actual assaults, with more force than a superhero team.

Quote: "There is no force on Earth that can withstand the crushing power of the oceans... except me."

Powers/Tactics: Kraken likes to use his powers constructively... well... destructively in creative ways. He loves to hold his enemies helpless while his teammates batter and smash them, and he frequently Sweep Attacks vehicles and buildings to endanger innocents while his teammates accomplish other objectives. He is a one-man engine of destruction, especially if he can catch a pair of heroes unawares who lack the physical strength necessary to escape his mighty grip. A team player, he frequently waits to be set up for teamwork maneuvers and will happily take damage for badly injured comrades.

Campaign Use: In a weaker campaign, reduce Kraken's STR to 50 and DEX to 18. Lower his Stretching to 6" and make all of it deal no damage. Reduce his Flight and Swimming to 15" base apiece, and remove his Power Defense

In a more powerful campaign, raise Kraken's STR to 80 and increase the Stretching to 12" with no limitation. Raise his Power Defense to 20 points, and add 15 points of Mental Defense. Add 5" to his Flight and Swimming, and add two Combat Skill Levels. Raise his EGO to 20.

Appearance: Kraken wears a simple full bodysuit in black and purple with a ¾ mask. He is clean shaven, with tentacle motifs along the golden gauntlets and black highlighted boots. His body ripples with muscles on a powerful frame, the telekinetic limbs usually sprouting from his torso.

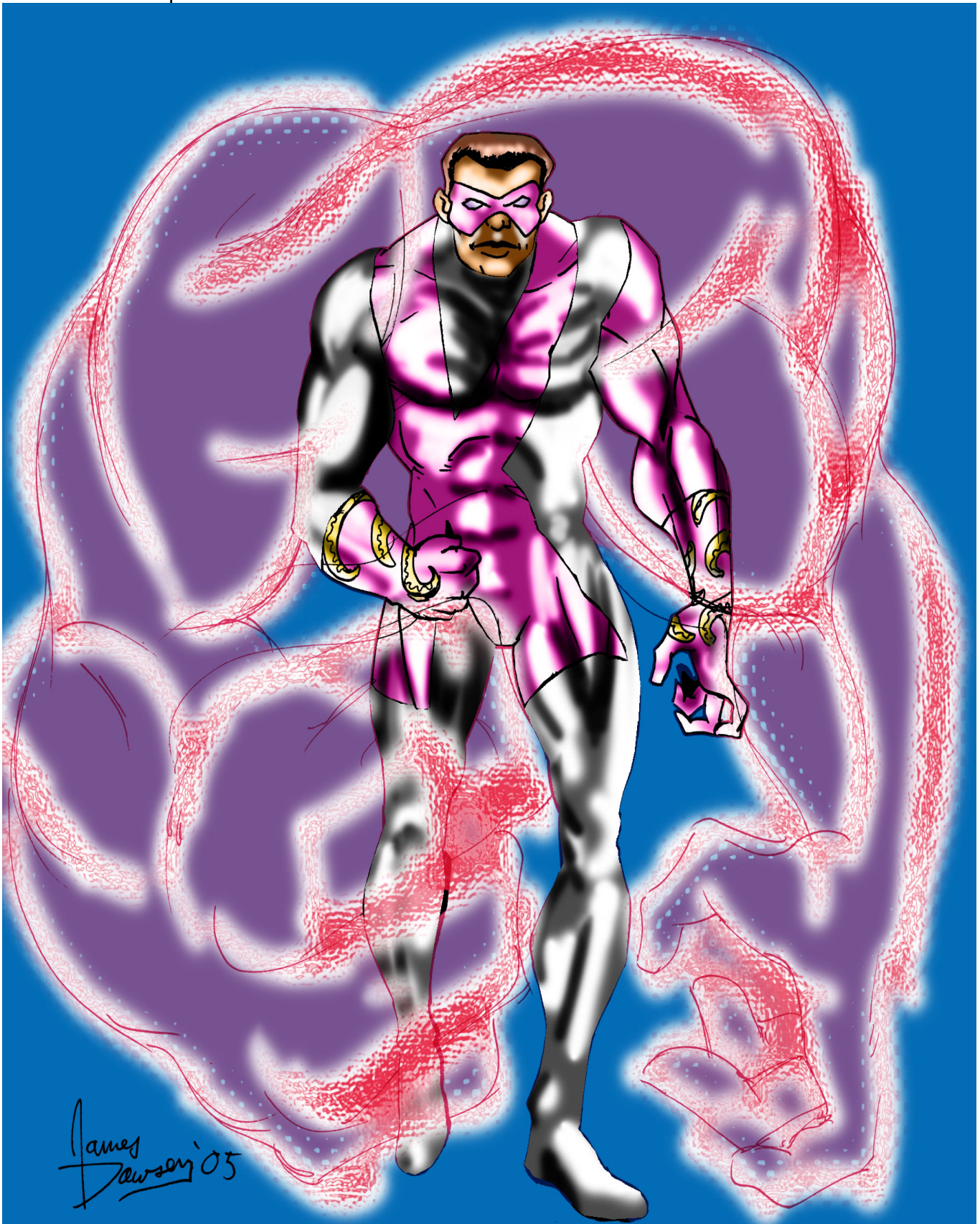
KRAKEN PLOT SEEDS

A Quiet Day Fishing: A PC goes fishing on a boat with some of his DNPCs. But Kraken decides to sink the boat for environmental reasons. Can the hero protect his secret identity while on a 15-foot by 25-foot personal ship?

The Last Boat Out: Kraken tries to sink a ship illegally dumping toxic materials into the ocean, but there is a hidden cargo of illegal aliens on board. Can the heroes save the environment and the people hidden deep in the boat?

Fish Stories: Mysterious rumors of a secret sea monster turn out to be Kraken instead. Will his comrades back him up? Or does Kraken have a different plan in mind?

Kraken



DIGITAL HERO #27

Kraken

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
60	STR	50	21-	100 Tons, 12d6 HTH [6]
21	DEX	33	13-	OCV: 7/DCV: 7
30	CON	40	15-	
15	BODY	10	12-	
13	INT	3	12-	PER Roll: 12-
10	EGO	0	11-	ECV: 3
25	PRE	15	14-	PRE Attack: 5d6
10	COM	0	11-	
30	PD	18		Total: 30 PD (30 rPD)
30	ED	24		Total: 30 ED (30 rED)
5	SPD	19		Phases: 3, 5, 8, 10, 12
19	REC	2		
60	END	0		
60	STUN	0		

Total Characteristics Cost: 214

Movement:

Running:	6"/12"
Leaping:	12"/24"
Swimming:	22"/176"
Flight:	20"/40"

Cost	Powers	END
20	<i>Telekinetically Generated Limbs:</i> Elemental Control, 40-point Powers	–
30	1) <i>Telekinetic Tentacles:</i> Stretching 9", Reduced Endurance (½ END, +¼) Last 3" Deals No Damage (-¼) (Total Stretch Damage 14d6)	2
25	2) <i>Telekinetic Aquadynamics:</i> Swimming +20" (22" Total), 8x NCM, Reduced Endurance (0 END, +½)	0
20	3) <i>Telekinetic Flight:</i> 20" Flight	4
45	<i>Genetically Engineered to Survive:</i> Full Life Support	0
30	<i>Genetic Resistance:</i> Damage Resistance (30 PD/30 ED)	0
32	<i>Telekinetic Awareness:</i> Spatial Awareness, 360°	0
10	<i>Genetic Resistance:</i> Power Defense (10 points)	0
5	<i>Extra Limbs:</i> Up to 10 Telekinetic Extra Limbs	0

Skills

15	+3 with Hand-to-Hand Combat
3	AK: Local Waters 12-
3	AK: The Sea 12-
3	Animal Handler (Seagoing Creatures) 12-
3	Breakfall 13-
3	Bribery 14-
3	Concealment 12-
3	Cryptography 12-
3	Defense Maneuver I
3	Gambling (Dice and Card Games) 12-
3	Interrogation 14-
3	KS: Boats 12-
2	Language: Spanish (Conversation)
2	Language: Vietnamese (Conversation)
3	Mechanics 12-
2	Navigation (Marine) 12-
3	PS: Fisherman 12-
9	Power 15-
5	Rapid Attack (Hand-to-Hand)
3	Stealth 13-
2	Survival (Ocean) 12-
5	Teamwork 14-
2	TF: Large and Small Motorized Boats

Total Powers & Skills Cost: 304

Total Cost: 518

200+ Disadvantages

15	Enraged: when Struck by Fusion Beams (Uncommon, Go 11-, Rec 11-)
10	Hunted: Pisces 8- (As Pow)
20	Hunted: UNTIL 8- (Mo Pow, NCI)
20	Hunted: US Navy 8- (Mo Pow, NCI)
15	Psychological Limitation: Environmentalist (Common, Strong)
15	Psychological Limitation: Likes to Fight (Common, Strong)
20	Psychological Limitation: Loyal to Abraxas (Common, Total)
15	Social Limitation: Secret ID (Norman Bestermann, Fisherman)
30	Vulnerability: 1½x STUN and BODY from Fire Attacks (Very Common)
158	Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 518

SIREN PLOT SEEDS

Dreams of Home: Siren views her mother from a distance, and kidnaps her mother without really knowing why. Can the heroes save Siren's mother? Can they get Siren to recognize her? What does it mean to go home? And what does it mean when you can't?

Fish Stories II: Kraken and Siren go on a rampage against a Japanese whaling firm; sinking boats and terrorizing executives. Can the heroes stop them? Should they side with the whaling firm or with the villains?

Rage of Gods: A real siren shows up near the campaign city and begins luring men to their deaths, threatening to continue until Siren is brought before Mount Olympus to be judged. Is this the truth, or is this the sinister plan of some other villain...?



50

Siren

Background: Valoria Camacho was a beautiful young Hispanic girl from the barrio, always getting involved in environmental causes. She loved the sea. It brought her peace from the gang battles and gunfire that woke her as a child, and all she knew was that she had to get out of her 'hood and into something better.

Valoria loved to go out with her papa as a child and look at the sea, on his little fishing boat, but all that changed when she had to go to school, and she began to drift apart from him. Eventually, her father had to sell the boat, and shortly thereafter, he died, leaving his family with little.

She started as a good student, always applying herself, but her grades were never particularly good. She slowly drifted into a more social crowd as time went on, but she always wanted to make something of herself, and so she decided at the tender age of fifteen, to join Greenpeace, a decision that her *mamacita* definitely did not agree with. Valoria was desperate for a scholarship, desperate for anything that would get her out of the barrio, so she took a chance and snuck away with some of the older members to stand in the way of a ship that was dumping toxic chemicals.

The ship couldn't stop in time. There were strange smells everywhere and screaming in the water; the air seemed to burn and the ship above them howled and tilted; a vast wave spread out as it tilted and began to sink into the depths of the ocean. Before Valoria crashed beneath the waves, spread out awkwardly in the depths of the chemical spill, she thought of her *mamacita*.

A hand reached out for her – thick, black, and gigantic; the meaty rubbery grip pulling her in, drawing her in, and she opened her eyes, staring out at the oceans from deep under the sea. She was green and ethereal, the mirrored face of a siren of legend staring back at her, and somehow she knew that her throat and her mind had changed, that she was someone different. Though she once walked on land, the god named Abraxas had changed her so that she could live in the sea.

Siren never thought of her *mamacita* anymore....

Personality/Motivation: Siren loves the ocean, and it is all that she loves. If Abraxas is successful in his plans, she will be able to be underwater forever. Her concern for the environment is all that drives her – Abraxas is the key to a purer, cleaner world without toxic spills or dumping.

She no longer cares about her old neighborhood or her family. Abraxas has removed those concerns from her mind. She has suffered a lot of mental tampering, and tends to

frequently repeat herself, though her lilting voice and ethereal tone means she really doesn't have to.

She has also become slightly delusional, sometimes believing that she has actually become a siren of legend, and when these delusions strike home, she swims out into the ocean to lure men to their deaths.

Quote: "It is the sea that calls to you, servants of the land. Listen to it, for it rustles in your hearts, and beckons you at my call."

Powers/Tactics: Siren tends to hang back from combat, and use her Mind Control to lure heroes towards other members of the group who are particularly effective against them when she is forced to fight on land. She prefers luring physically weak heroes towards Kraken or S.H.A.R.C. and any heroes with a high DCV into the water, where her natural abilities become far more effective.

In the ocean, most of Siren's powers become Area Of Effect Cone attacks due to the nature of the use of sound underwater, and she becomes far more powerful than her point total might initially indicate. While she cannot Mind Control people beneath the waves effectively (unless the command is very simple and can be communicated with hand gestures), she does become exceptionally deadly to anyone or anything within mouthshot.

Siren is also a team player, working with the others to defeat the opposition.

Campaign Use: In a weaker campaign, lower Siren's Multipower to 50 Active Points, replace her Spatial Awareness with Radar, and remove one of her Combat Skill Levels and her underwater Combat Level. Drop her EGO to 18, SPD to 4, STR to 20, and DEX to 21.

In a more powerful campaign, raise Siren's DEX to 26, but leave her SPD the same. Raise her CON to 30 and her END to 80. Give her two Penalty Skill Levels versus Range Modifiers and another Combat Skill Level. Raise her EGO to 23, and add more sonic and mental powers to her new 100-point Multipower. Reduce the END cost on all powers to half, running most of them at 80 Active Points.

Appearance: Siren is a beautiful, ethereally voiced woman with green hair and somewhat elfin features; a disturbingly beautiful vision of death. She usually wears a one-piece bathing suit which shimmers with little sparkles of seashells as she swims through the watery depths. A smile always crosses her face, unless she encounters polluters or others who threaten Abraxas' perfect world.

Siren



Siren

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
25	STR	15	14-	Lift 800 kg, 5d6 HTH [2]
23	DEX	39	14-	OCV: 8/DCV: 8
23	CON	26	14-	
15	BODY	10	12-	
10	INT	0	11-	PER Roll: 11-/14-
20	EGO	20	13-	ECV: 7
20	PRE	10	13-	PRE Attack: 4d6
28	COM	9	15-	
10	PD	5		Total: 25 PD (15rPD)
5	ED	0		Total: 20 ED (15rED)
5	SPD	17		Phases: 3, 5, 8, 10, 12
10	REC	0		
60	END	7		
40	STUN	0		

Total Characteristics Cost: 158

Movement: Running: 6"/12"
 Leaping: 5"/10"
 Swimming: 15"/120"
 Flight: 15"/120"

Cost	Powers	END
62	<i>Sonic Powers:</i> Multipower, 62-point Reserve	
6u	1) <i>Sonic Shriek:</i> EB 5d6, NND (Hard Ear Coverings or Sonic Powers, +1), Reduced Endurance (0 END, +1/2)	6
6u	2) <i>Subsonic Whispers:</i> Mind Control 12d6	6
6u	3) <i>Sonic Wave:</i> EB 10d6, Personal Immunity (+1/4)	6
6u	4) <i>Sonic Lance:</i> RKA 2d6, Armor Piercing (+1/2), Personal Immunity (+1/4), Reduced Endurance (1/2 END, +1/4)	2
22	<i>Sonic Control:</i> Elemental Control, 44-point Powers	
38	1) <i>Sonic Rippling:</i> Flight 15", 8x NCM, Usable Underwater (+1/4), Reduced Endurance (1/2 END, +1/4)	2
23	2) <i>Sonic Screen:</i> Force Field (15 PD/15 ED), Reduced Endurance (0 END, +1/2)	0
11	<i>Deep Sea Life:</i> Life Support (Self Contained Breathing, Safe in High Pressure)	0
38	<i>Passive Sonar:</i> Spatial Awareness, 360°, +3 to Roll	0
11	<i>Subsonic Shield:</i> Mental Defense (15 points)	0

Skills

10	+2 with Multipower
5	+1 with All Combat; Only when Underwater (-1/2)
6	+2 versus Range Penalties
3	Animal Handler (Fish) 13-
3	Breakfall 14-
3	Conversation 13-
3	Defense Maneuver I
4	Language: Spanish (Native)
3	Language: Hl'brassian (Fluent)
7	Lipreading 13-
7	Mimicry 13-
6	Navigation (Marine) 13-
3	Paramedics 11-
3	Persuasion 13-
3	Seduction 13-
3	Teamwork 14-
7	Ventriloquism 13-

Total Powers and Skills Cost: 308

Total Cost: 466

200+ Disadvantages

20	Distinctive Features: Beautiful Green Hair and Ethereal Features, Unearthly Voice (Not Concealable, Major Reaction)
15	Enraged: when Sea Life Harmed Unnecessarily (Uncommon, Go 14-, Recover 14-)
10	Hunted: Pisces 8- (As Pow)
20	Hunted: UNTIL 8- (Mo Pow, NCI)
20	Hunted: US Navy 8- (Mo Pow, NCI)
20	Psychological Limitation: Loyal to Abraxas (Common, Total)
15	Psychological Limitation: Sea Life is Better than Land Life (Common, Strong)
10	Psychological Limitation: Vain About Looks (Common, Moderate)
10	Reputation: Sea Ghost 11-
15	Social Limitation: Secret Identity (Valoria Camacho)
111	Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 466

Madam Manta

Background: Cherise Abernathy was the sort of girl who had everything. She had money, position, and all the right boyfriends who had never met. The life of an heiress was so terribly demanding. All she had to do was go to college, hire someone to drive her parents' boat about like mad, and fly to visit her various boyfriends when she got lonely. Life was simple, and she had money.

Then, overnight, everything changed. Cherise was kidnapped by VIPER and her parents were ordered to pay an outrageous ransom that even they could barely afford. When the transfer of funds went sour, and three teams of UNTIL agents were on their trail, rather than surrender to the highly superior force, the five VIPER agents involved in the operation decided to take her hostage openly, and demand that UNTIL retreat.

Cherise screamed and struggled in the grip of the VIPER leader, and there was a loud, terrible sound as the boat bucked. There was a funny sensation in her stomach, and her eyes turned glassy, and she sank to the floor of the boat, just before it tilted, dumping her into the ocean. Cherise tried to swim – she was a good swimmer – but she could feel her blood leaking out of her.

Cherise Abernathy couldn't feel her legs at all....

The sniper rifle bullet had blasted through her cleanly, and severed the spinal cortex at the juncture of her pelvis. She couldn't swim. All she could do was sink and die. UNTIL had killed her. In the last moments of what she thought was the end, all she could feel was a terrible burning rage as the firefight continued above her, desperately reaching out for someone, anyone, who could save her. Then her life turned dark and cold.

Cherise awoke on a strange seashell table, and she could feel her legs again. Her rage had multiplied in her sleep, and she wanted to kill. Her hands were an eerie blackish color, her back ached, and her mind was filled with knowledge, the knowledge of a fighting art so ancient that it had never been practiced by humans. She was alive, and she reached out for her tail... and screamed.

She was no longer beautiful as she once was, lithe and pretty and blonde. Now she was a creature, a monster from old movies. Abraxas had saved her, and she knew this, but in order for her to live, Cherise had to go away.

Only Madam Manta remained, to make UNTIL suffer, to bring about Abraxas' new order, to subjugate those who had brought about what had made her into what she saw in the mirror. VIPER was not to blame. When the

world changed, and humanity obeyed Abraxas, they would serve her too. And all her boyfriends would know exactly who she was, and it didn't matter whether she was lonely or not....

Personality/Motivation: Whereas Siren loves the ocean and everything in it, Madam Manta has fallen firmly under the sway of Abraxas for what she thinks are her own reasons. In truth, Cherise is just as telepathically manipulated and dominated as the rest of the true minions of Abraxas, and her bloodlust at being injured comes from her own psionically amplified rage at being shot, directed outward, only a thousand times more furious.

Madam Manta works with the others as long as possible, but UNTIL agents, beautiful females who don't look like fish, and bloody injuries to her person inspire her to brutal fits of sadistic rage. She loves to inflict the same kinds of injuries she suffered on others, and leave them horribly disfigured and broken.

Quote: "My, don't you look pretty. Don't worry. I'm sure we'll be able to change that soon."

Powers/Tactics: When Madam Manta is not too busy pursuing her personal vendettas in combat, she prefers to set people up for the attacks of others, either by grabbing them with her tail, and then using her DEX drain on them, or holding them there for someone like Polestar or Kraken to smash with an overpowering attack. She has been genetically implanted with the ancient martial art taught by the HI'brassians to their engineered bodyguards, arts that were later modified by the rebellious human race into forms that are unrecognizable today.

She enjoys battling Speedsters (tripping them with her tail is one of her favorite thrills), especially when they are moving at exceptionally high speeds.

Campaign Use: In lower-powered campaigns, reduce Madam Manta's Multipower to 45 Active Points, and remove the Reduced END Cost. Lower her PD and ED to 15. Remove 2 Damage Classes, her Swimming Noncombat Multipliers, and reduce her DEX to 23 and SPD to 5. Remove 2 Combat Skill Levels of your choice.

In higher-powered campaigns, raise Madam Manta's DEX to 32 and her SPD to 8. Add 4 Damage Classes, two Combat Skill Levels, raise her PD to 25, her ED to 33, and her Multipower to 90 Active Points. Increase the movement distance on her Swimming to 25", and add three or four new martial arts maneuvers. Add more adjustment power slots to her Multipower, and possibly the Armor Piercing Advantage on them if you are feeling particularly cruel.

MADAM MANTA PLOT SEEDS

Perfect World:

It's the Tenth Annual Finishing School for Girls reunion, and your PC either went to the same finishing school as Madam Manta or knows someone who did and is escorting them. It's all out mayhem as Madam Manta (and possibly her fellow villains) wreaks havoc with her former classmates.

Devil and the Deep Blue Sea:

UNTIL calls the PCs for help when one of their undersea research stations stops reporting in. Rumor has it that Madam Manta was spotted in the area, and they need the PCs to investigate it. Why this particular research station? And is it Madam Manta at all?

Love and

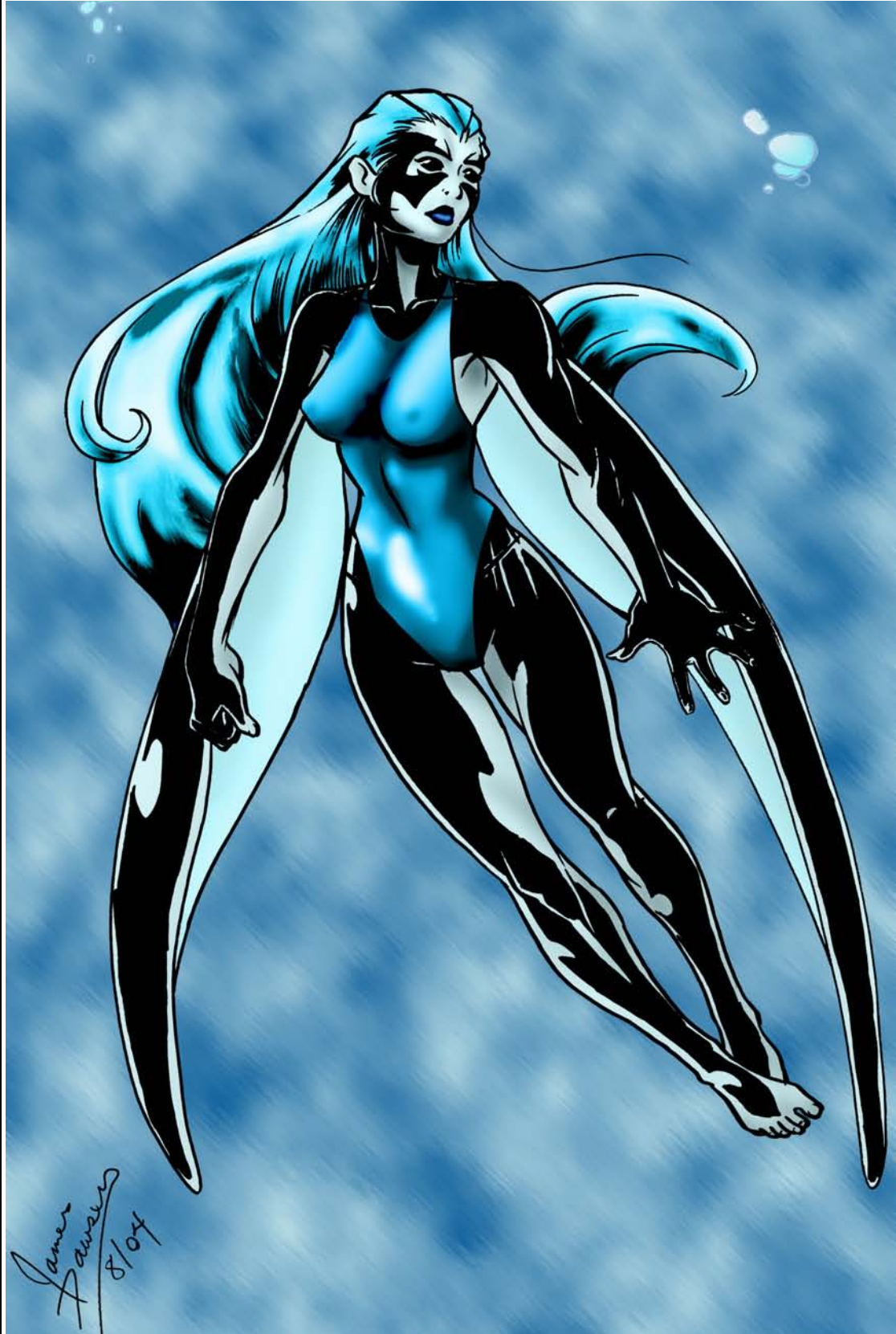
UNTIL: Madam Manta falls in love with one of UNTIL's Finest, despite the odds of actually doing so, but he keeps shooting at her, and she feels betrayed! Can the PCs save the UNTIL agent from Madam Manta's rage? Can they save Madam

Manta from herself?

Appearance: Madam Manta is a cross between a manta ray and a human woman, with a sensual figure, fins, and a muscular manta- like tail with a sharp stinger at the end. She typically wears one piece leotard bathing suits, although she has

been spotted once wearing a bikini somewhere in the islands south of Malaysia. Shortly thereafter, the tourboat began to take on water, and sank to the bottom....

Madam Manta



DIGITAL HERO #27

Madam Manta

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
20	STR	10	13-	Lift 400 kg, 4d6 HTH [2]
26	DEX	48	14-	OCV: 9/DCV: 9
23	CON	26	14-	
10	BODY	0	11-	
13	INT	3	12-	PER Roll: 12-
10	EGO	0	11-	ECV: 3
20	PRE	10	13-	PRE Attack: 4d6
20	COM	5	13-	
20	PD	16		Total: 20 PD (15rPD)
26	ED	21		Total: 26 ED (15rED)
6	SPD	24		Phases: 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12
12	REC	6		
50	END	2		
40	STUN	8		

Total Characteristics Cost: 179

Movement: Running: 9"/18"
Leaping: 4"/8"
Swimming: 17"/136"

Cost	Powers	END
62	<i>Energy Tail:</i> Multipower, 62-point Reserve	
4u	1) <i>Poison Stinger:</i> EB 5d6, NND (Force Field, +1), Reduced Endurance (0 END, +½); No Range (-½)	0
6u	2) <i>Energy Tail Spike:</i> HKA 2½d6, Reduced Endurance (0 END, +½)	0
6u	3) <i>Lingering Toxin:</i> Drain DEX 4d6, Return 5 points per 5 minutes (+½)	6
5	<i>Tail:</i> Extra Limb	0
32	<i>Energy Tail:</i> Absorption 2d6 into Multipower, Any Energy Special Effect (+2), +4 Maximum	0
20	<i>Energy Tail Redirection:</i> Missile Deflection (All Ranged Attacks)	0
19	<i>Genetically Engineered:</i> Life Support (Self Contained Breathing, Safe in Vacuum, High Pressure, Radiation, Heat, Cold)	0
15	<i>Pressure Resistant Skin:</i> Damage Resistance (15 PD/15 ED)	0
37	<i>Fins and Tail:</i> Swimming +15", 8x NCM, Reduced Endurance (0 END, +½)	0
6	<i>Healthy Legs:</i> Running +3" (9" Total)	1

Martial Arts: Gsh'all Narakh

Maneuver	OCV	DCV	Notes
4 Block	+2	+2	Block, Abort
5 Counter	+2	+2	10d6 After Block
4 Crush	+0	+0	12d6 After Grab
5 Def. Strike	+1	+3	8d6 Strike
4 Dodge	—	+5	Dodge, Abort
4 Fast Strike	+2	+0	10d6 Strike
3 Grab	-1	-1	50 STR to Hold
5 Takeaway	+0	+0	50 STR vs. Weapon
4 Throw	+0	+1	+v/5, Target Falls

16	+4 Damage Classes
1	Use Art with Tail

Talents

9	Ambidexterity (Full)
17	Combat Sense 14-
2	Environmental Movement: Water

Skills

16	+2 with All Combat
10	+2 with Hand-to-Hand Combat
4	+2 with Missile Deflection
3	Acrobatics 14-
3	AK: The Oceans 12-
3	AK: Sea Grottoes 12-
3	AK: Shipping Lanes 12-
3	Breakfall 14-
3	Climbing 14-
3	Concealment 12-
3	Contortionist 14-
10	Defense Maneuver IV
3	Fast Draw (Tail) 15-
4	Language: HI'brassian (Native)
4	Language: Japanese (Native)
4	Language: Russian (Native)
2	Navigation (Marine) 12-
3	Power Skill 14- (CON-Based)
5	Rapid Attack (Hand-to-Hand)
3	Shadowing 12-
3	Sleight of Hand (Tail) 14-
3	Stealth 14-
2	Survival (Aquatic) 12-
3	Teamwork 14-

Total Powers and Skills Cost: 398

Total Cost: 577

200+ Disadvantages

20	Distinctive Feature: Manta Ray-like Woman, Causes Shock and Terror (Not Concealable, Major Reaction)
15	Enraged: when BODY Damage Taken (Common, Go 8-, Rec 11-)
20	Hunted: UNTIL 8- (Mo Pow, NCI)
20	Hunted: US Navy 8- (Mo Pow, NCI)
15	Psychological Limitation: Jealous of Non-Monstrous Women (Common, Strong)
20	Psychological Limitation: Loyal to Abraxas (Common, Total)
15	Psychological Limitation: Sadistic (Common, Strong)
15	Social Limitation: Public Identity (Madam Manta, Scourge of the Waves)
5	Vulnerability: 1½x BODY from Radiation Attacks (Uncommon)
232	Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 577

S.H.A.R.C. PLOT SEEDS*S.H.A.R.C. II:*

Jake hears that the military is going to build a more advanced version of the suit to defeat him, so he sets out to sabotage it before it gets off the ground! Can the heroes find S.H.A.R.C. and defeat him before he destroys the project? And if the project succeeds, can they stop him from stealing the new suit and becoming even more powerful? What if the new suit is just like the old suit, and slowly takes over its wearer?

Countdown to Zero: An underwater bathysphere is trapped under the sea, and the inhabitants are running out of air. When the heroes arrive, S.H.A.R.C. is preparing to destroy the bathysphere. Can the PCs save the people and defeat the aquatic villain in his home environment?

Family

Planning: One of Jake's relatives gets into trouble, and the heroes find out that he has been hiding S.H.A.R.C. from the authorities from time to time.

**S.H.A.R.C.**

Background: Jake Mandelson was a Navy Mechanic, and a good one. He passed through basic training and went into an Engineering MOS, though he never lost his love of strategy and tactics. Jake's family was always supportive of him, although he was a little obsessive as a child with his love of machines, and his time in the Navy changed his concentration, focusing him on the weapons and technology of Naval Warfare.

He focused a little too much.

As Jake continued his work, he began volunteering for projects, in the hope of working with the most advanced technology the Navy had to offer. His volunteering had attracted the attention of his superiors, who finally offered him a chance to work on one of their most top-secret projects... The S.H.A.R.C. project.

It stood for Submarine Housed Attack and Reconnaissance Craft, a single man in a single suit of armor, capable of battling superheroes and underwater transports alone. Jake saw it and fell in love. His superiors considered his obsession with it as a good thing, and slowly, Jake began to take care of the new prototype.

Jake was always careful, and careful enough not to tell anyone what he was doing, when he secretly disabled the security systems and tried on the helmet, the electrical accident that caused a temporary blackout in his own brain went unnoticed. He just wanted to try the suit on.

A week after that, Jake could feel the suit. It occupied his every waking thought; he repaired it, tinkered with it, worked on improving it, made sure it was in tiptop condition and battle ready. The field tests were coming, and Jake knew he didn't have much time. He no longer answered letters from his family. He no longer cared about anything. He would have the suit, and he would be complete, and nothing, especially not the fools who had placed him on the project, would stand in his way. It would be so easy to kill them....

The night before the field tests came, Jake disabled the security system in the housing unit and entered the suit, sliding into its sleek metallic confines. He placed the helmet on his head as the alarms began to go off, and he breathed the sweet recycled air of the metallic confines, as the helmet whispered to him, the microtubes entering the back of his spinal column, making him the suit, the suit him.

It took him two minutes and forty three seconds to kill everyone in the complex and escape with the weapon, destroying all copies of the blueprint except the one saved in the memory of the helmet's combat computer. Not bad for a noncom, Jake mused.

His noncombat days were short lived, as the Navy struggled to track him down, but Jake knew all their tracking schemes and methods and how to foil them. He fled into the depths, knowing that their submarines and depth charges could not find him. But something else did....

The shellship floated in the murky depths, having found the target that it sought. Without a sound or a word, a hatch suddenly opened wide, and Jake found himself caught in a tractor beam, pulled inside by the power of Abraxas. Jake was terrified, but quickly found himself dominated by the powerful telepath, his mind subsumed into the service of the alien monster. Abraxas learned much from Jake, and allowed him to keep the armor after several upgrades to the primitive technology, as long as he used it in his service.

Jake agreed. Now Jake is known as S.H.A.R.C., one of the minions of Abraxas. The Navy and UNTIL hunt him for the murder of seventy three people. His family believes him lost, and knows that they will likely never see him again. He only cares that he has the suit. But it is the suit that has him....

Personality/Motivation: Jake is motivated to keep the suit, and nothing will stand in his way of doing that, save the orders of Abraxas, who he sees as his superior, thanks to the mental manipulations of the ancient alien. He sometimes, in less lucid moments, believes that he *is* the suit, speaking in a plural form.

He hates the US Navy for trying to keep the suit from him, and UNTIL for trying to track him down. However, he enjoys using the suit to destroy and eliminate those very enemies, especially by dragging them underwater, where he usually holds the advantage over his opponents. He craves leadership over his fellow supervillains, so that he can prove to the others that his tactics and military knowledge are superior, but Polestar's raw power usually keeps him at bay.

Quote: "Did you really think that you could hurt us? Now feel our power, and know our strength...."

Powers/Tactics: Mandelson has no powers outside the armored suit. He prefers to stay at range, setting up opponents for Kraken and Polestar, operating in a support role. Due to his military training, he always tries to set up coordinated attacks with the other members, running interference for some of the group's heavier hitters, Kraken and Polestar.

He particularly enjoys the advantage of the air, though against superior flying opponents he will quickly seek the advantage of cover and bait a hero by using full power attacks against helpless Normals.

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S.H.A.R.C.

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
20/55	STR	10	13-/20-	Lift 50 Tons, 4d6/11d6 HTH [2/5]
18/23	DEX	24	13-/14-	OCV: 6/8/DCV: 6/8
20	CON	20	13-	
15	BODY	10	12-	
13	INT	3	12-	PER Roll: 12-
15	EGO	10	12-	ECV: 5
20	PRE	10	13-	PRE Attack: 4d6
14	COM	2	12-	
8	PD	4		Total: 28 PD (20 rPD)
8	ED	4		Total: 28 ED (20 rED)
4/5	SPD	12		Phases: 3, 6, 9, 12/
10	REC	4		3, 5, 8, 10, 12
40	END	0		
45	STUN	10		

Total Characteristics Cost: 123

Movement: Running: 6"/12"
Leaping: 11"/22"
Swimming: 15"/120"
Flying: 15"/120"

Cost Powers END

13	<i>Fusion Power Plant:</i> Endurance Reserve (100 END/10 REC) [§] ; OIF (-1/2)	0
50	<i>Weapons Systems:</i> Multipower, 75-point Reserve; OIF (-1/2)	
5u	1) <i>Power Core Tap:</i> EB 12d6, Reduced Endurance (1/2 END, +1/4)	3
4u	2) <i>Harpoon Launcher:</i> RKA 2 1/2d6, Armor Piercing; 16 Charges (+0)	[16]
4u	3) <i>Electro-Net:</i> Entangle 3d6, Takes No Damage from Attacks (+1/2); 4 Charges (-1) plus EB 2d6, NND (+1), Continuous (+1) (Cut Wire)	[4],2
3u	4) <i>Torpedo Rockets:</i> RKA 3d6, Penetrating (+1/2); 8 Charges (-1/2)	[8]
4u	5) <i>Plasmatic Burst:</i> Sight Group and Normal Hearing Flash 5d6, Area Of Effect (5" Radius, +1), Reduced Endurance Cost (1/2 END, +1/4)	3
5u	6) <i>Photonic Beam:</i> Sight Group Flash 12d6, Reduced Endurance (1/2 END, +1/4)	3
17	<i>Hydraulic Servos:</i> +35 STR, OIF (-1/2), No Figured Characteristics (-1/2)	3
7	<i>Combat Computer:</i> +5 DEX, OIF (-1/2), No Figured Characteristics (-1/2)	0
7	<i>Reaction Enhancer Node:</i> +1 SPD, OIF (-1/2)	0
50	<i>Hydrodynamic Suit Shell:</i> Armor (20 PD/20 ED), Hardened (+1/4); OIF (-1/2)	0
33	<i>Hydrodynamic Pressure Shield:</i> Full Life Support; OIF (-1/2)	0

8	<i>Optic Shields:</i> Sight Group Flash Defense (12 points); OIF (-1/2)	0
40	<i>Hydrodynamic Fusion Propulsion:</i> Flight, 15", Usable Underwater (+1/4), 8x NCM, Reduced Endurance (1/2 END, +1/4); OIF (-1/2)	1
8	<i>Helmet Radio:</i> High Range Radio Receive/Transmit; OIF (-1/2)	0
24	<i>Passive Sonar Grid:</i> Spatial Awareness, 360°; OIF (-1/2)	0
12	<i>Extended Sonar Range Yield:</i> +6 to PER Roll Range Modifiers; OIF (-1/2)	0
3	<i>Infrared Sensing Unit:</i> Infrared Vision; OIF (-1/2)	0
3	<i>Ultraviolet Sensing Unit:</i> UV Vision; OIF (-1/2)	0
3	<i>Heads Up Nightvision Display:</i> Nightvision; OIF (-1/2)	0

Skills

16	+2 with All Combat
3	+1 with Weapons Systems
3	Acrobatics 13-/14-
3	Breakfall 13-/14-
3	Bugging 12-
3	Combat Driving 13-/14-
3	Combat Piloting 13-/14-
3	Computer Programming 12-
3	Concealment 12-
3	Cryptography 12-
5	Defense Maneuver II
5	Demolitions 13-
3	Electronics 12-
3	Fast Draw 13-/14-
3	Interrogation 13-
3	KS: Boats 12-
3	KS: Ocean Combat 12-
3	KS: Military Protocol 12-
3	KS: S.H.A.R.C. Armor 12-
3	KS: U.S. Navy 12-
3	Language: Japanese (Fluent)
3	Language: Mandarin (Fluent)
3	Language: Russian (Fluent)
3	Language: Spanish (Fluent)
3	Lipreading 12-
3	Lockpicking 12-
5	Mechanics 13-
2	Navigation (Marine) 12-
3	Paramedics 12-
3	Power Skill 12- (INT-Based)
3	Security Systems 12-
3	Shadowing 12-
3	Stealth 13-/14-
5	Systems Operation 13-
5	Tactics 13-
3	Teamwork 13-/14-

Total Powers & Skills Cost: 421

Total Cost: 544

Can the heroes convince Jake's family member that S.H.A.R.C. is just using him before he commits another crime spree?

[§] all powers work from END Reserve

200+ Disadvantages

- 20 Hunted: UNTIL 8- (Mo Pow, NCI)
- 20 Hunted: U.S. Navy 8- (Mo Pow, NCI)
- 15 Psychological Limitation: Casual Killer (Common, Strong)
- 15 Psychological Limitation: Hatred of U.S. Navy (Common, Strong)
- 15 Psychological Limitation: Overconfident (Common, Strong)
- 10 Reputation: Traitor to United States of America, 11-
- 10 Rivalry: Professional, for Leadership of Group, Polestar is in Superior Position
- 10 Social Limitation: Public ID (Navy Mechanic Jake Mandelson) (Everyone Knows Who Character Is, Finding Character is Difficult)
- 229 Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 544



Campaign Use: In a less powerful campaign, reduce the Multipower to 60 Active Points, many of the more esoteric military training skills, reduce the Armor to 15/15 and remove the Hardening. Remove the 360° function of the Spatial Awareness, and eliminate his Noncombat Multipliers.

In a more powerful campaign, grant the suit 50% Physical and Energy Damage Reduction with a layer of hydroshock gel under the main armor, and raise the Multipower to 90 Active Points. Add several more underwater weapons, including a CO₂ injection gun (RKA NND). Add an electrical damage shield, which is devastating underwater, and a +6 bonus to his PER rolls. Increase the number of enhanced senses in the sensor suite, and raise the END Reserve to 200 END and 20 REC. Raise his DEX to 26 and SPD to 7. Harden the Armor a second time.

Appearance: Outside the armor, Jake looks like a gaunt man in a crew cut, with sharp angular, squared off features and a hooked nose, and a well trained, athletic build.

However, he rarely takes off the armor, except the helmet when he eats.

When he wears the armor, he is sleek and metallic, his shoulders covered with weapon housings, the entire armor designed in an aerodynamic silhouette. The helmet is shaped in a vaguely sharklike manner, the armor designers' idea of a joke, and the armor has fins along the arms and legs to allow the armor to function more effectively underwater. The suit itself is painted in midnight purple, blue, and green shades, in a camouflage pattern.

Abraxas

Background: One hundred thousand years ago, the Shell Lord Ch'oralzis died, and Abraxas, Lord of the Fifth Planet of the Sea of H'thonn was raised to the exalted position of Nh'ron'Thlor, Emperor of the Ten Thousand. Abraxas was a Hl'brassian, a race of extremely advanced humanoid sperm whales who lived on a high gravity water world with very limited land. Their society was perfect, in Abraxas' eyes, and he would bring unity and enlightenment to the Galaxy.

The Hl'brassians left their world in shellships, in small groups of five to ten, requiring servants of shorter-lived races to attend their needs, as their birth rate was very low. As they arrived on new planets, they enslaved new races, bringing them under the domain of Hl'brassia, reasoning that an enlightened slavery was better than unenlightened liberty. Their slaves had a tendency to die, and subjugating the natives was often a slow and difficult process. But the Hl'brassians always won. The Hl'brassians used their telepathic powers to dominate and control their slaves, and slowly, their empire grew, a world at a time, a century at a time. But after 49,000 years, all that was about to change.

The Hl'brassians eventually encountered a race of bipedal landwalking mammals known as The Collective. The Collective (A socialist/communist society) also sought out new planets for cultivation, growth, and expansion. The Collective's philosophy of "one for the good of all" directly conflicted with the Hl'brassian philosophy of "all races exist to serve the Hl'brassian ideal."

And so it was that Abraxas took his people to war with the landwalkers.

It was war unending, a brutal conflict where the Hl'brassians hurled thousands of mentally dominated slaves and genetically engineered constructs against the Collective and their mighty Star Army. But while the Hl'brassians could rarely be killed themselves, they found that they could only evenly match the Collective, as the Collective's superior numbers and unique superbeings sometimes outmatched the mighty strength, power, and superior scientific skills of the Hl'brassians.

With neither side able to get a clear advantage over the other, and neither side truly able to spy upon the other, Abraxas resolved to turn the situation in favor of his people, at the very edge of the Collective's new flanking action. Taking his High Geneticer, his High Mindshaper, his High Battlelord, and his High Engineer, the five highest ranking of the Ten Thousand took their mighty fleets of slaveships and descended on a small planet, third from the

star, in the outward arm of what would one day be called Mutter's Spiral.

The Hl'brassians came to Earth 50,000 years ago.

Abraxas and his elite began their work, taking the native evolving life forms, which were highly similar to the Collective, and began molding them into superbeings similar to the superbeings who opposed him in The Collective. The first humans were all superpowered, but there were many failures before the process was perfected.

The new war of infiltration and counterstrikes against The Collective began, launched from the planet that would one day be called Earth. As the slave evolution program evolved, Abraxas began to give the evolved slaves military commands. As he controlled the evolved Collective-like beings, so, too, he used the same system to allow his Collective-like generals to control their troops, building them helmets that would allow them to dominate and implant orders into the brains of their slave subordinates.

The mindwave battlehelmets would prove his undoing. After 20,000 years of conflict, a mighty general arose among his slaves, a general who was immune to the controlling effects of the Helmet. General Atlan swore that his people would be free, and that nothing would stand in the way of that goal. He began to use his helmet to unlock the Hl'brassian mental domination, and slowly, the humans rebelled against their supposedly invincible masters.

The Collective pressed the attack, even as Atlan cut a deal with them to leave his planet free of their influence, a deal to which they readily agreed after 21,000 years of war, and Atlan and his troops, battered and wounded, constructed a plan of desperation against their former masters. The Collective would attack the Hl'brassian base of operations on the fifth planet and then withdraw, while Atlan and his elite guardsmen would attack the fourth planet, which had been converted into a giant superweapon, take over the firing control, and fire it at the fifth planet. The weapon, designed to defend the Hl'brassians against Collective attacks on their hatchery, was capable of destroying entire battlefleets, or even a planet.

The plan was successful. The planet that would one day be known as Mars fired, and the fifth planet was obliterated, smashed to rubble and flinders, slowly settling into a ring of shattered earth and stone. Abraxas and his council escaped to Earth, but Atlan and the others pursued, engaging in the final phase of the plan. Tapping into the power of the genome that allowed them to be controlled by the Hl'brassians, the Atlanteans, as they now called themselves, built a machine to tap directly into

ABRAXAS PLOT SEEDS

Whalesong:

Large groups of whales of different types converge above the Marianas Trench. Is this unusual occurrence part of the plans of Abraxas?

Love in the Time of Hl'brassia:

Abraxas works to free his High Geneticer, Calatia, from the depths of suspended animation. Can the characters battle his minions and keep one of the greatest geneticists in the universe from being freed? What will they do if she gets out?

Man-Mutation Madness: Abraxas discovers that VIPER's Man-Mutation project is using secretly unearthed Hl'brassian components, and sends his minions to attack VIPER bases all over the world! Can the heroes stop Abraxas? Do they even want to? What will happen when Abraxas retrieves his technology? Will VIPER counterstrike Abraxas?

the power of the human spirit, and win the war for their planet, even as the destruction of the fifth planet wreaked havoc with the ecology.

The machine tapped into their genome, and a massive telepathic wave rocketed out across the Earth, trapping the HI'brassians in a psychic state of suspended animation. Slowly, one by one, the HI'brassians were imprisoned in the deepest regions of the world, buried under tons of rock. Abraxas himself was hidden in a canister deep beneath the sea, frozen in a sea of telepathic dreams, in an area that would one day be known as the Marianas Trench.

The machine burned out the superpowers of the majority of humanity, leaving only a tiny fraction of the genepool with abilities, a fraction that grew smaller with every generation. General Atlan founded the nation of Atlantis, and grew to become a great leader, as other ancient nations rose and fell upon the Earth. His story was lost to the sands of history.

The Collective pressed the attack, and slowly, one by one, the HI'brassians were wiped out, except their leaders, trapped in hidden canisters beneath the surface of the Earth, now only stories to frighten unwary children. Eventually, they, too, faded into history.

Slowly, the power of the suspended animation began to break down, as more and more humans reappeared with superpowers and unique abilities. In 1997, Abraxas opened his eyes, deep within the Marianas Trench, and saw a world unlike anything he had ever seen. His slaves had all deserted him, and he could not sense his subjects.

The landwalkers would pay. The most enlightened race in the Galaxy would rise again! Nothing could stop them as long as he ruled. He was as inevitable and inexorable as the sea.

Personality/Motivation: Abraxas wishes to restore the HI'brassians to their rightful place in the cosmos and conquer the entire Milky Way Galaxy. He despises humanity, and treats them as rebellious slaves, as one might treat an alarm clock or other form of household appliance. His philosophies are largely alien, and he does not see himself as a villain, as others might. He is still putting down the same rebellion that began 30,000 years ago, and has no intention of viewing the advancement of humanity as anything other than a brief flicker of setback in the HI'brassian Empire over which he has had the misfortune to preside.

He does not grow angry, but he engages in schemes on a planetary scale, because that is how he thinks. Virtually everything that happens that is negative is a temporary setback. His race is very long-lived and has a slow reproductive rate, so he must resubjugate humanity before moving on to the rest of the Galaxy.

Abraxas dislikes all races that primarily live on land, referring to them as landwalkers, which in his culture is a terrible insult.

Quote: “Your attempts to bind me, landwalker, shall not succeed. The futility of your short-lived race shall shortly be apparent, and you will be crushed as ants in the ocean of time.”

Powers/Tactics: Abraxas is a powerful telepath and brilliant scientist, and has the strength and imperviousness endemic to a race of long-lived beings that can survive the pressures of being deep under the sea. He tends to study his opponents. Given time, he builds devices which will specifically target their weaknesses. He prefers to do this to telepaths, as virtually everyone else is susceptible to his mental powers and abilities. If he discovers creatures outside the usual classes of minds that he can affect, he will build devices specifically to eliminate those creatures or entities. Robots are simply devices that can be reengineered. Abraxas uses mostly organic technologies, which are grown rather than built, though he is learning the values of designing inorganic devices as well.

Abraxas can also use his gadget pool to build weapons of epic scale with the Megascale Advantage. Use this ability sparingly. All of Abraxas' technology is telepathically resonant. His gadgets are assembled with his mind (0 Phase to change), and this gives him the ability to design powerful clairsentient devices, allowing him to target people with his powers virtually anywhere in the world. Use this ability sparingly also.

Abraxas is also not above genetically engineering followers specifically to deal with people who have thwarted him in the past. Please note that all of his followers are supervillains, and that they should never all be encountered in the same place at the same time. The mere mention of Abraxas should give your heroes pause; they shouldn't have to fight 472 superbeings at once. As time goes on, if the players continue to thwart him, he may have more unusual creatures, devices, and abilities than are listed here.

Campaign Use: In a lower powered campaign, remove many of the more esoteric sciences, reduce the telepathic Multipower to 75 Active Points and eliminate the Reduced Endurance cost on many of the powers and special abilities. Remove 1 Combat Skill Level and 2 Overall Skill Levels. Reduce the gadget pool to 75 Active Points.

In higher powered campaigns, the sky's the limit. Throw anything on the character sheet that might be justified in order to make him one of the deadliest villains in the world. Raise his DEX to 26 and SPD to 8, and add three more Combat

DIGITAL HERO #27

Skill Levels. Raise his STR to 120, and his CON to 80. Raise his EGO to 40. Give the character 75% Resistant Damage Reductions instead of 50%. Raise his primary Multipower by at least 50 Active Points, and consider a whopping 200-point Multipower. Add another 15 points of Mental Defense, and Harden all of it. Add a secondary Multipower of linked transformations that alter the target's mind while he telepathically controls him (instant, rather than slow, brainwashing). Increase his gadget pool to 135 Active Points, and raise his INT to 40. Give him 30 points of Hardened Power Defense.

Additionally, Abraxas is a justification for any villain that you wish to bring into the game that does not fit into your game world's theme

otherwise. Since he can create virtually any superbeing imaginable, he's an easy rewrite for any villain you want to use but can't think of a way to bring into your world.

Appearance: Abraxas is a 6'6" tall eggplant-colored humanoid sperm whale, wearing a thick golden belt of some unusual metal. He carries several devices on him at all times. His hands are wide and broad, and his body ripples with thick, heavy muscles. His back is punctuated by a thick, flat wide tail that swishes and sways for balance when he walks. Like something out of H.P. Lovecraft, he occasionally makes small trilling noises that sound like whalesong.

Abraxas



WARNING

While this villain is the architect of the chaos involved in this adventure, he does not personally appear in the course of the events above. Abraxas is the subject of an entire epic campaign, and his powers and abilities should remain largely hidden from your players until the time is right. He is also exceptionally powerful. An inexperienced team should never, ever face this villain, unless they enjoy getting their faces pounded into the dirt. He is as strong as Grond, incredibly intelligent, possesses the wisdom of the ages, telepathic powers, and some of the most powerful technologies in the galaxy. To your players, he should be mysterious and nearly unbeatable.



Abraxas

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
90	STR	80	27-	6400 tons, 18d6 HTH [9]
23	DEX	39	14-	OCV: 8/DCV: 8
50	CON	80	19-	
25	BODY	30	14-	
23	INT	13	14-	PER Roll: 14-
30	EGO	40	15-	ECV: 10
35	PRE	25	16-	PRE Attack: 7d6
6	COM	-2	10-	

30 PD 12 Total: 30 PD (20rPD)
 25 ED 15 Total: 25 ED (20rED)
 6 SPD 27 Phases: 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12
 30 REC 4
 100 END 0
 100 STUN 5

Total Characteristics Cost: 368

Movement: Running: 6"/12"
 Leaping: 28"/56"
 Swimming: 17"/272"

Cost	Powers	END
112	<i>Telepsionic Force of Will:</i> Multipower, 112 Points	
11u	1) <i>Telepsionic Dominance:</i> Mind Control 16d6 (Human and Alien Minds), Reduced Endurance (½ END, +¼)	4
11u	2) <i>Telepsionic Hunter Assault:</i> Ego Attack 4d6 (Human and Alien Minds), Indirect (+¾), Reduced Endurance (0 END, +½)	0
11u	3) <i>Telepsionic Burst:</i> Ego Attack 8d6 (Human and Alien Minds), Reduced Endurance (½ END, +¼)	4
11u	4) <i>Telepsionic Intrusion:</i> Telepathy 16d6 (Human and Alien Minds), Reduced Endurance (½ END, +¼)	4
11u	5) <i>Telepsionic Interposition:</i> Mental Illusion 16d6 (Human and Alien Minds), Reduced Endurance (0 END, +½)	5
11u	6) <i>Telepsionic Brain Dampening:</i> Ego Drain 4d6, Ranged (+½), Area Of Effect Radius (4" Radius, +1), Reduced Endurance (½ END, +¼)	5
11u	7) <i>Telepsionic Force Wave:</i> Energy RKA 6d6, Reduced Endurance (½ END, +¼)	4
175	<i>Gadget Pool:</i> VPP, 105-point Reserve, 0 Phase to Change (+1); OIF (-½)	0
30	<i>Resistance to the Depths:</i> 50% Physical Damage Reduction, Resistant	0
30	<i>Eternal Skin:</i> 50% Energy Damage Reduction, Resistant	0
25	<i>Pressurized Hide:</i> Damage Resistance (20 PD/20 ED), Hardened (+¼)	0

10	<i>Pressurized Hide:</i> Hardened PD and ED (20 PD/20 ED)	0
10	<i>High Gravity Body:</i> Lack of Weakness (for Normal and Killing Attacks) -5	0
14	<i>Psychic Shields:</i> Mental Defense (20 POINTS)	0
19	<i>Genetic Shielding:</i> Power Defense (15 points), Hardened (+¼)	0
15	<i>Nictitating Membranes:</i> Sight Group Flash Defense (15 points)	0
20	<i>Dense Mass:</i> Knockback Resistance 10"	0
45	<i>Racial Health:</i> Full Life Support	0
5	<i>Ancient Lifespan:</i> Immunity to Aging	0
15	<i>Powerful Legs:</i> Leaping +10" (28" Total), Accurate (+½)	2
45	<i>Whale-like Body:</i> Swimming +15" (17" Total), 16x NCM, Reduced Endurance (0 END, +½)	0
5	<i>Whale Tail:</i> Extra Limb	0

Perks

200	Base: in the Marianas Trench (1000 points)
135	Followers: 600-point Supervillains (8)
130	Followers: 500-point Supervillains (64)
125	Followers: 450-point Supervillains (128)
120	Followers: 400-point Supervillains (256)
75	Vehicles: 300-point vehicles (8)
105	Vehicles: 500-point Mobile Command Centers (2)
15	Wealth: Effectively Infinite Resources

Talents

3	Absolute Range Sense
18	Combat Sense 17-
20	Cramming x4
5	Eidetic Memory
4	Environmental Movement: Underwater
3	Lightning Calculator
3	Lightsleep
6	Speed Reading x10
23	Universal Translator 17-

Skills

50	+5 Overall Levels
24	+3 with All Combat
3	AK: Earth 14-
3	AK: The Galaxy 14-
3	AK: The Marianas Trench 14-
3	AK: The Oceans 14-
3	AK: The Solar System 14-
3	Analyze Genetic Structure 14-
3	Analyze Spaceship Formations 14-
3	Analyze Superpowers 14-
3	Analyze Technology 14-
3	Animal Handler (Aquatic, Human) 16-
3	Breakfall 14-
3	Bugging 14-
3	Climbing 14-
3	Combat Piloting 14-

DIGITAL HERO #27

- 7 Computer Programming 16-
- 3 Concealment 14-
- 7 Conversation 18-
- 3 Criminology 14-
- 3 Cryptography 14-
- 3 Deduction 14-
- 10 Defense Maneuver IV
- 3 Demolitions 14-
- 3 Electronics 14-
- 25 Gadgeteering, 25-
- 3 High Society 16-
- 3 Interrogation 16-
- 3 Inventor 14-
- 3 Lipreading 14-
- 3 Mechanics 14-
- 3 Mimicry 14-
- 3 Navigation (Marine and Space) 14-
- 3 Oratory 16-
- 3 Paramedics 14-
- 7 Persuasion 18-
- 13 Power Skill 20- (EGO-Based)
- 3 PS: Emperor 14-
- 3 PS: Scientist 14-
- 5 Rapid Attack (Hand-to-Hand)
- 5 Rapid Attack (Ranged)
- 5 Security Systems 15-
- 14 Survival (All Environments) 14-
- 5 Systems Operation 15-
- 5 Tactics 15-
- 5 Teamwork 15-
- 3 Ventriloquism 14-
- 21 Weaponsmith (All Categories) 20-
- 3 Scholar
 - 2 1) KS: Alien Cultures 14-
 - 2 2) KS: Alien Races 14-
 - 2 3) KS: The Collective 14-
 - 2 4) KS: Energy Types 14-
 - 2 5) KS: Political Maneuvering 14-
 - 2 6) KS: Spaceships 14-
 - 2 7) KS: Superbeings 14-
 - 2 8) KS: Technology 14-
- 3 Scientist
 - 2 1) SS: Accounting 14-
 - 2 2) SS: Anthropology 14-
 - 2 3) SS: Archaeology 14-
 - 2 4) SS: Astronomy 14-
 - 2 5) SS: Bacteriology 14-
 - 2 6) SS: Biochemistry 14-
 - 8 7) SS: Paranormal Biochemistry 20-
 - 2 8) SS: Biology 14-
 - 8 9) SS: Paranormal Biology 20-
 - 2 10) SS: Botany 14-
 - 8 11) SS: Paranormal Botany 20-
 - 2 12) SS: Chemistry 14-
 - 2 13) SS: Ecology 14-
 - 2 14) SS: Exobiology 14-
 - 8 15) SS: Paranormal Exobiology 20-
 - 2 16) SS: Genetics 14-
 - 8 17) SS: Paranormal Genetics 20-
 - 2 18) SS: Geology 14-

- 2 19) SS: Hydrology 14-
- 2 20) SS: Inorganic Chemistry 14-
- 2 21) SS: Marine Biology 14-
- 8 22) SS: Paranormal Marine Biology 20-
- 2 23) SS: Mathematics 14-
- 2 24) SS: Medicine 14-
- 2 25) SS: Metallurgy 14-
- 2 26) SS: Microbiology 14-
- 8 27) SS: Paranormal Microbiology 20-
- 2 28) SS: Molecular Biology 14-
- 8 29) SS: Paranormal Molecular Biology 20-
- 2 30) SS: Nuclear Physics 14-
- 2 31) SS: Organic Chemistry 14-
- 8 32) SS: Paranormal Organic Chemistry 20-
- 2 33) SS: Pharmacology 14-
- 2 34) SS: Physics 14-
- 2 35) SS: Psychology 14-
- 2 36) SS: Robotics 14-
- 2 37) SS: Sociology 14-
- 2 38) SS: Statistics 14-
- 2 39) SS: Subatomic Physics 14-
- 6 40) SS: Surgery 18-
- 2 41) SS: Veterinary Medicine 14-
- 2 42) SS: Zoology 14-

Total Powers & Skills Cost: 2109

Total Cost: 2477

200+ Disadvantages

- 20 Distinctive Feature: Humanoid Sperm Whale (Not Concealable, Major Reaction)
- 15 Hunted: UNTIL 8- (As Pow, NCI)
- 5 Hunted: Superhero Team 8- (Less Pow)
- 15 Psychological Limitation: Considers Humanity to be Rebellious Slaves (Common, Strong)
- 15 Psychological Limitation: Overconfidence (Common, Strong)
- 20 Psychological Limitation: Megalomania (Common, Total)
- 2187 Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 2477



LAST ISSUE'S
PUZZLE KEY

Here is the solution for the crossword puzzle from *Digital Hero* #26.



Champions Crossword

by Dave Mattingly

A Hasty Retreat

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8		9	10	11
12					13					14		
15					16					17		
			18					19	20			
21	22	23				24	25					
26					27	28			29		30	31
32				33					34			
35						36				37		
			38		39				40	41		
42	43						44	45				
46					47	48				49	50	51
52					53					54		
55					56					57		

ACROSS

1. Droid salvager
5. March danger
9. Foreign student requirement (abbr.)
12. Trusted with (2 words)
13. Lamb pita
14. Keanu role
15. Make one's bed partner uncomfortable? (2 words)
17. Defense against lasers
18. Johnson joker
19. Gladden
21. King nee Blank
24. Parsley serving
26. Gold south of the border
27. One-bullet Barney
29. Clan war
32. Avoid damage (4 words)
35. Smirking Mona
36. Approximately (2 words)
37. Deli standard (abbr.)
38. Peter Gallagher series (2 words)
40. Hebrew letter
42. Gap
44. Augury
46. Nucleus
47. Commercial perspective?
52. Beastie boy license?
53. Mad
54. Rocker Billy
55. Scotty's denial
56. Harp
57. Wrestle like The Rock

DOWN

1. 1990 Romantic comedy from Zimbabwe
2. California Santa
3. Stir-fry pan
4. A mouthful for Tyson? (2 words)
5. "Lovin' is What ____" – Sublime (2 words)
6. Avoids damage (3 words)
7. Previously
8. Achier
9. How Fiacho takes insults (2 words)
10. Edgar Rice Burroughs birth mo. (abbr.)
11. Big vein
16. Subterfuge or magic
20. Selection method (abbr.)
21. What naughty kids get for Christmas
22. Urbi et ____
23. Where the Radley family has dinner?
25. Pod inhabitants
28. And me (2 words)
30. Unattractive fruit
31. What naughty kids get at school (abbr.)
33. Cheers
34. Twelve
39. Outlook output
41. Caper
42. Notable Bruce Campbell feature
43. Hawaiian dance
45. Created
48. Stephen Wright's humor style
49. Fuss
50. *Reality Storm* crossover company (abbr.)
51. Moose

