

UNMASKED

BY DENNIS DETWILLER

BEYOND THE MASK:
CONVERTING UNMASKED FOR
NUMENERA AND THE STRANGE



 CYPHER
SYSTEM™

 NUMENERA™

 THE STRANGE™

BEYOND THE MASK: CONVERTING UNMASKED FOR NUMENERA AND THE STRANGE

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In *Unmasked*, the player characters are teenagers that are somehow different. One day in 1986, they can see the secret meaning hidden in everyday things. They are driven to fashion a mask and wear it. When the mask is worn, the PC becomes a powerful being with amazing abilities normally only seen in the pages of comic books, and this being has a personality, drive, and goals all its own. *Unmasked* uses the same Cypher System that underlies The Strange and Numenera. Although all three settings have mechanical differences, they share an identical, core resolution mechanic: all game difficulties are rated from 1 to 10; characters use Effort, skills, and assets to reduce that difficulty; and a d20 is rolled to determine success or failure.

As with other Cypher System games, each character is composed of three parts: a descriptor, a type, and a focus. Those three parts can be assembled into a simple sentence describing them. *Unmasked* is unique in that it offers two base forms for each player character—the *teen-form* and the *mask-form*.

The teen-form is a normal, average teenager from 1986, but when they wear a special mask, they transform into their mask-form, which is *anything the player can imagine*. As such, almost all descriptors and foci from other Cypher System games can work for *Unmasked* mask-forms. Mask-forms can appear to be aliens, wizards escaped from the pages of a fantasy novel, or even



impossible creatures like two-dimensional, intelligent versions of the color red.

This means that only the settings themselves are different. The rules—including cyphers, creatures, and artifacts—all work in other settings. But the amazing, open-ended possibilities of Numenera, The Strange, and *Unmasked* allow them to be freely mixed together without much difficulty.

WHAT IS NUMENERA?

Numenera is a science-fantasy game set a billion years in the future, where technology is so advanced that it seems like magic. Eight great civilizations have come and gone, leaving their bizarre relics scattered about the planet. Now, somehow, humans have returned. They're making a new world for themselves amid the ruins of what's come before; they're creating the Ninth World.

Throughout this supplement, you'll see page references to various items accompanied by one of four symbols. In each, you can find additional details about the item, place, creature, or concept. It isn't necessary to look up the referenced items; they are merely provided for those who want additional information on the topic.

These are page references to:



Cypher System Rulebook



Numenera corebook



The Strange corebook



Unmasked



WHAT IS THE STRANGE?

The Strange is a science-fiction game that postulates the existence of otherworldly realms where many Earth fictions—novels, comics, movies, myths, and even RPGs—become real. So you can travel to Sherlock Holmes' London, then to a place where rebels try to save the galaxy from an evil empire, or to a place where Lovecraftian horrors lurk at your doorstep. As your characters adapt to each new world each time, their equipment and abilities change to keep up with their new world, which keeps things interesting!

UNMASKED AND NUMENERA

How does the world of *Unmasked* intersect with *Numenera*? There are as many ways to make this intersection interesting as there are stars in the sky. Some ideas are outlined below.

THE MASK-FORMS OF NUMENERA

It's easy to imagine a mask-form that claims to be a clever **Jack** from the Ninth World, hailing from the wilds of a billion years in the future. That this mask-form might have access to foci, powers, **cyphers**, and technology from that time period works just fine (so much so that it seems like a really fun idea to play). Of course, these mask-forms would be limited just like normal mask-forms, and their powers, forms, and cyphers would vanish when the teen's mask is not worn.

But are they *really* from the future? A central question in *Unmasked* is “what are the mask-forms, really?” Are they what they say they are, or are they the power of the human mind reshaping reality? Are they demons or spirits? Powers from beyond? The answer to this mystery, of course, remains up to the GM to decide (and for the PCs to explore!).

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 **Cyphers, page 310**



THEY COME FROM A BILLION YEARS FROM NOW

Another tack is to say that the mask-forms actually *are* from the world of Numenera, a billion years distant from the year 1986. The mask-forms and their powers actually manifest through their eighties teen-forms due to some power, machine, or technology of the distant future. After all, time- and dimension-travel in Numenera are certainly possible (heck, it's almost mundane in the Ninth World), and manifesting one being in place of another is not unheard of either.

What, then, is the mission of these refugees from a billion years in the future? Have they come to this year by accident? To reshape some distant future event? To cause some great social change to occur? This is the biggest question. Mechanically, it's simple: powers, foci, cyphers, and more can jump across to *Unmasked* with little or no difficulty (of course, such things are restricted to when the teen wears their mask).

VISITORS FROM THE PAST

If you want to use *Unmasked* characters in a Numenera campaign, consider the supposed origin of the mask-form. If the mask-form is a cyborg, alien, or time-traveler, those are perfectly valid characters who could appear in a Numenera campaign. Even if the mask-form is firmly grounded in Earth 1986—like an American secret agent or a comic-book superhero—such a character could have been in suspended animation, on a spaceship caught in a time-dilation effect, catapulted to the Ninth World in some mad-science experiment, or trapped in an extradimensional prison where time passes at an infinitely slower pace.

The teen-form of these characters might be a contemporary teen of the Ninth World, have a psychic connection to a teen from the distant past (one who still lives in Earth 1986), or might not have a teen-form anymore (i.e. they exist permanently in their mask-form). After all, weirder characters live in the Ninth World, and nobody bats an eye about it.



EARTH 1986 RECURSION ATTRIBUTES

Level: 6

Laws: Mad Science, Magic, Psionics

Playable Races: Human

Foci: As presented in *Unmasked*, the *Cypher System Rulebook*, and, if available, *Expanded Worlds*

Skills: As presented in *Unmasked* and the *Cypher System Rulebook*

Connection to Strange: If someone travels far enough outside the home town of the *Unmasked* setting, they'll eventually find themselves reentering the same area from the other side, because as a recursion, the town is "closed." Escaping via a train or plane might deliver the characters back to the town, or they might end up in an unstable, generic "big city" that persists for one game session before forcing them back to their home town. Some weak spots in the recursion's borders, particularly where NPC mask-forms live, may allow creatures within to escape into the dark energy network.

Connection to Earth: Sometimes translation or inapposite gates appear in the form of arriving buses, trains, or airplanes, allowing creatures to enter the recursion but not leave it. Some NPC mask-forms might be able to summon or create these portal-vehicles or actual gates, drawing on allies or other resources from another recursion.

Size: 500 square miles (1,290 square km)

Spark: 5%

Trait: Heroic. Characters gain an asset on rolls that involve tasks directly protecting the safety of another while endangering their own life.



UNMASKED AND THE STRANGE

Unmasked fits easily into The Strange as a recursion, but the possibilities only begin there. Let's look at some ideas.

THE STRANGE HAUNT THE EARTH

Perhaps the world of *Unmasked* is the *real Earth* of The Strange: the center of reality from which a million shadows of fictional worlds issue, expand, and change. Perhaps only now are residents of these fictional recursions folding back upon Earth and entering our world through the mask-forms.

Realizing the world you were born in and called your home is nothing but a comic-book, movie, or story from the *real Earth* can be somewhat disheartening. What will the mask-forms that enjoy momentary reprieves into the "real world" do with that information? Will they seek to escape permanently into Earth 1986? Or will they do their best to bring it all down, ruining the multiverse out of spite?

JUST ANOTHER MOVIE

Or...the world of 1986 in *Unmasked* might be just another recursion in the universe of The Strange—a fictional world generated by human imagination—and the mask-forms that manifest there might be anything: natives of that recursion, invaders from *another* recursion, or even the minds of humans from the real Earth poking through when the teens wear their masks. Anything is possible. On the real Earth, *the Estate* might immediately classify mask-forms as dangerous entities who should be carefully monitored and not allowed to travel to other recursions. Agents who *translate* to Earth 1986 might acquire mask-forms, but the unknown source of a mask-form's power might get the agent put on a watch list, in case their loyalty to the real Earth becomes compromised.

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Skills, page 20



The Estate, page 148

Translation, page 125

