

HENSHIN!

A *Sentai* RPG

by Tim Batiuk
& Sam Kusek



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ISBN 978-0-578-62534-8

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Find more resources at [henshingame.com!](http://henshingame.com)

Acknowledgments

This book would not be possible without the following folks:

Our playtesters: Matt Levine, Stephanie Hocutt, Mark De Vera, Noah Jay-Bonn, Clint Finley, Leon Andersen, Arthur Lender, Matt Thogerson, Ben Jamin, Kyle Townsend, Ian Campbell, Will Coon, Tim Carroll, Kate Morris, Robin Tafoya, Amanda Arias, Joe Compton, Michael X Riojas, Chris Kindred, Sam Johns, Ian McGinty, Samantha Knapp, Eryk Donovan, John Sitton, Simon Dixon, Mattison Unger, James Forigone, Keith Chapman, Ash Davis, Vincent Lance, Jay Jensen, Ryan Numrich, and Phil Linz.

To the podcasts that have either had us on or played our game: Ready Set Geek!, Tabletops and Tangents, Kronos Speakeasy, and The More You Nerd.

To the *Henshin!* artists: Evan Palmer, Emmett Helen, Wook Jin Clark, Casey Nowak, Nicole Goux, Zachary Sterling, Jorge Corona, and Diigii Daguna for bringing our weird ideas to life.

To tabletop games and talented designers that inspired us: *Final Girl*, *Dungeon World*, *Golden Sky Stories*, Vincent Baker, and Avery Alder.

Special thanks to Jose Meza for getting us into Power Morphicon 2018.

To Chris Cantada, for his support and willingness to share out our silly project.

To Ranger Liz for the shoutouts and support.

To Comicazi for being the first shop to carry our book.

To Kevin Beever, for printing our first run of ashcans.

To Matt Thogerson for our actual play photos.

To Chris Butcher for pushing us to go for broke with this project.

To Filip Sablik for amazing advice early on.

To Steph Gerk for proofreading the book and Kickstarter plans and overall encouragement.

To David Dissanyake for his thorough readthrough of this book and for continuing to put us in touch with people who matter.

To Sam Marx for basically being Cave of Monsters' third member. Thanks for stickering books, driving to ECCC, and generally being a huge advocate of the game. We love you.

To Haim Saban & for bringing *sentai* to America. Without you, we wouldn't have caught this bug.

To Shotaro Ishinomori for creating the genre. You don't get enough credit.

To our friends and family for sharing, supporting, and giving us the space to do this weird, wild thing. Thanks for recognizing that this is special.

Dedications

To Sam, for managing the project and the people (including myself) in order to bring out the very best version of everything and everyone.

To Adam, for being cool with our dining room table being used for countless gaming sessions, and for your dedication and support.

—Tim

To Tim, for saying yes to this idea and for sticking with it and with me for this long. I can't imagine a better creative partner.

To six-year-old Sam, making up his own Power Ranger stories while his uncle illustrates those weird ideas. Stay weird, big guy... it pays off.

—Sam

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Playing Henshin!

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PLAYING HENSHIN!

Toby: Hey everyone, thanks for coming together to play *Henshin!* It's a story game about playing characters who use transformative powers to deal with monsters and personal problems. It borrows from the *sentai* genre of Japanese superheroes with lots of special effects, like the U.S. adaptation *Power Rangers*.

Gary: Or *Kamen Rider*?

Toby: Exactly! So tonight we're going to play an episode. Normally the first session would start with deciding what type of team, or Squad, everyone is playing, but we'll use a pre-written scenario called "Fantasy Tabletop Squad" to get started right away.

Rashida: So...like elves and warriors and dragons?

Toby: Yup. So, each of you all will play a character, which means choosing one of these Color playbooks I printed beforehand. And I'll play the Narrator, responding to your characters with the world and acting a bit like the director.

(Rashida, Gary, and Blair take turns reading out the flavor text for each Color. After some discussion, Rashida settles on Red, Gary on Green, and Blair on Blue. Toby's name is bold and italic from here on as a reminder that they are the Narrator.)

Toby: Nice Squad you got here! So, on the lefthand side you'll see some choices to make about your character, and below that you can write some more notes about your character or the rest of the Squad..

(Toby uses the scenario to discuss the power source, these oversized polyhedral dice, and talks about what a suit looks like after transformation. The players use the suit design details from the scenario to build up a fantasy aesthetic for each Color.)

Blair: Alright, so what about the rest of this Color worksheet?

Toby: Well, the right part gives some ideas on how the character may be played, called Tasks. So if you need direction on what to do during play, check those Tasks.

Blair: Cool. So, for Blue my first one is "Calculate possible courses of action", so I'll think about that.

Gary: And mine has “Explore vulnerability & coming of age”. Green is definitely the youngest character, so this is perfect.

Rashida: “Charge ahead recklessly if no one is depending on you.” Welp, that’s the kind of leader Red will be.

Toby: Until people depend on you! Okay, so last is the middle portion, Turns. This is the most important part—what your character may do. You can do whatever is fictionally appropriate, of course, though when you do something that is a Turn listed here, it will trigger these tokens to come into play. [Puts a pile of tokens in the center of the table.]

Blair: Ooh, nice. Do we start with any?

Toby: Nah, so you can look at the Light Turns or Special Turn on your Color Playbook early on as a way to gain one. Lastly, you don’t need to read out a Turn explicitly when you do the thing, so if your action seems obvious, just go ahead and give or take a Token as stated.

Rashida: Okay, let’s do this!

Toby: Charge ahead recklessly, right? Real quick, grab a notecard and write your character name, Color, and pronoun while folks give an introduction. Using the playbook, tell us your character’s name, looks, Connection, and read out that Special Turn so we remember it.

(Everyone introduces their character. Red is a spitfire tomboy named Maple. Gary is an excitable latchkey kid named Graham. And Blue is a serious and sensible gamer named Cyan.)

Toby: Cool. So, in this episode everyone will get their dice transformer, probably during a fantasy gaming session. But first, let’s see a spotlight scene of each Color, like where you’re doing the thing you do best, um, something before the school day ends. Rashida, you look ready to go.

Rashida: Yup. So there’s a baseball field with kids in their uniforms, and we see this red-haired girl with dirt on her face standing on the pitcher’s mound. And her eyes narrow as this pretty blond-haired batter steps up to the plate. (This was the Connection that Rashida chose, “sworn rival”.)

Toby: Yeah, that’s Brenda, and there’s not a speck of dirt on her

pristine outfit. Raising the bat, she calls out to you, “Wow, Maple, just cause it’s called a dugout, doesn’t mean you dig it out with those crusty fingernails of yours.” And all her cool friends are laughing.

Gary: Oh, the out-of-my-league crush I talked about for Graham’s connection? It’s totally Brenda.

Rashida: She went there. You see my brow furrow, my pitching arm release, and...I aim right for her face. [Grabs a token.]

Blair: Ouch.

Toby: Yeah, we don’t see it make contact, but we see Brenda fall down and the shocked reaction from everyone watching.

Rashida: That was “Let your temper cloud your judgment”, one of my Light Turns, by the way.

Toby: Totally. We see Brenda’s friends yelling at you, and the coach sends you to the office, and then let’s spotlight another Color.

(Gary goes next, setting up a scene where Graham tries and fails to comfort Brenda outside the nurse’s office. Then Blair takes us after school with Cyan running errands by bike and dealing with his older jock brother. Finally, we open on the three characters around a table in Cyan’s attic playing an adventure called “Scourge of the Necromaster”, when suddenly the action picks up.)

Toby: ...And when the dice hit the table, they eerily stand on edge and the pages of the adventure booklet start flipping. Cyan, the d4 in front of you looks bigger, and same with the d12 in front of Graham and the d20 in front of Maple. Then there’s a flash of light...and a hairy, clawed hand reaches out of the booklet...and slashes right at you, Graham.

Graham: Agh! I jump back out of the way.

Toby: [Consulting the Regular Turn, “React by taking temporary cover.”] Sure, there’s a flimsy card table, and you watch it bend as a chair is flung at it. Cyan and Maple, you see this doglike creature rise out of the game, and it’s wearing, like, a black leather vest and it has two long tendrils coming out of its back.

Cyan: Okay, I’m flipping through the manual, since there has to be

some explanation for this... [Pushes his glasses up the bridge of his nose]

Maple: Cyan, I can take this!

Toby: And the beast snarls at you, Maple. "Eh, just some kids? Surely you're no match for...Displacer Boss!" And he leaps at you, claws out.

Maple: Dang, that's too much. I'm probably up against the wall.

Toby: Sure, and that's "Failing to react...", so take a token as the Displacer Boss SLAMS you against the half-open attic window. His breath reeks and there's a long fall behind you. Hey, Graham, how are you doing?

Graham: I think I'm balled up, hiding, like a little kid. [Takes a token for "Fail to react and cower."] Hey Cyan, (whimpering) what can hit that thing?! And I look at that giant die...

Cyan: Jeez, Maple! Uh, there must be a way to—

Maple: I SAID I can take this! And I grab my d20 and...transform.

(Rashida spends a token for that Heavy move and describes the transformation sequence we see for the first time. Rashida does the signature hand movement, and her character is now suited up.)

Cyan: Whoa. Right, I just watch her in awe. I let her do something strong to support me, so was that my Special Move?

Toby: Hm, sure! Which says your next Heavy move is free. So...

Cyan: I'm adjusting my glasses. Lessee, um, where's the on/off switch on this die... (Using the Heavy move "Transform when danger appears")

Toby: Cool, tell us how you transform, and Graham, you do have that one token...

Graham: I watch how Cyan does this, then I stand up confidently and hold out my d12 to transform, too.

(All three Colors are transformed, and Maple is in a tight spot but her player still has another token from that baseball scene earlier.)

Toby: Maple, you see the tide turn as everyone suits up, and the

Displacer Boss smiles wickedly. "A challenger appears!" His teeth are gleaming.

Maple: I raise my swords up between the two of us, and I cross them in an arc of light, and BLAST this mutt across the room. "Use your weapon to drive off an opponent." [Slams down the token.]

Toby: Nice, the D-Boss is out cold. Cyan and Graham, you see someone unfamiliar with hair that has all these writhing eyeballs, wearing heels and silk gloves, and she's hovering above the book. She eyes you both, looking just slightly amused. "Hmm, level one heroes sound...promising. My pet and I will be back...and so will the Necromaster when I help him return!" She cackles as she tries to make off with the adventure manual!

Cyan: Hey, my mom will kill me if I lose that!

Graham: Yeah, and it's not yours, lady...

Maple: Alright team—let's roll out!

Δ

Game Overview

Henshin! is not designed to simulate an existing ***sentai*** series or provide technical, tactical, granular mechanics around battles or power-ups. It focuses on the story in

***Sentai*:** The Japanese genre about cohesive teams of color-coded superheroes who transform to fight monsters. Part of the *tokusatsu* entertainment industry.

Story game! *Henshin!* relies heavily on collaboration, social interaction, and a bit of improv. If you've never played a party game where you tell stories with friends, this is a great place to start!

There are relatively few objects on the table when playing *Henshin!*, since it is diceless and instead uses ***tokens***. So instead of the element of chance that dice may provide (can I beat their roll with a better roll?), players make appropriate character choices that involve giving or taking tokens. Making conscious character decisions that matter also feeds into the social element of the game, as players find themselves saying "yes and..." in the improvisational sense as they go with the group's flow of what makes a good story. This may be different than other tabletop role-playing games

Tokens: Any collection of small, physical items that can be exchanged during play. About five tokens per player is recommended.

that pit players in an adversarial position against the person running the game as they try to 'win' and beat the odds. *Henshin!* is about character growth and story arcs, so it is less about finding the 'right' solution to win and more about

telling an engaging story with friends.

Simply put, it's fun to create stories with others about young heroes with transformative powers who fight monsters and deal with personal issues. Think of your stories like an episode of TV! It can be filled with intense explosive action or be low budget, stripped down and tense, and can include characters with weird hang-ups, tragic backstories, goofy crushes, and surprising redemption arcs. While *Henshin!* is a game to be played, of course, there will be

Story game: A collaborative game that usually involves role-playing and does not require a board or game pieces. The goal is to act out a developing story with other players.

CHOOSING A COLOR

moments when the table resembles a writer's room or a troupe of improv actors.

What Do I Need to Play?

If you are planning to play a hero in *Henshin!*, it will be helpful to read through this section, "Playing *Henshin!*". If you are instead planning to play the role of Narrator, you will also benefit from reading the following section "Narrating *Henshin!*". Lastly, if you are looking for fun *Henshin!* resources, whether as a player or Narrator, the "*Henshin!* Modules" section and appendix following that will provide tons of ideas to bring to the table.

As you review the book, take note of a Color that catches your eye and any ideas about a story setting that you find interesting.

Color: A unique hero represented by a Color in a playbook. Most players play a Color and describe the thoughts and actions of this character during play.

Narrator: One player whose role is to play all characters besides the Colors, provide detail for scenes, and drive the story in a satisfying episode arc.

Squad: The entire team of Colors in play at the table.

Consider if you would rather play as a hero called a **Color**, in which you narrate your one character's actions throughout an episode or more, or as the **Narrator**, who describes the setting and all other characters, in essence directing the episode to be cohesive and enjoyable. One Narrator and three to five Colors will be needed to play! The team of Colors is collectively called a **Squad**.

Next, contact a few friends and pitch them on *Henshin!*, including a setting you are interested in (or even a ready-to-go **Module** found in this book). If you will be

the Narrator, take some notes as you review the "Narrating *Henshin!*" section and collaborate with the others to set expectations about what everyone would like to play.

Finally, set aside about three hours to play! Print off the worksheets available at henshingame.com, grab notecards and markers, and collect a handful of small objects to use as tokens (or visit the *Henshin!* website to shop for custom printed tokens). Those playing Colors will create their

Module: A pre-made setting for *Henshin!* that includes characters and story notes.

characters at the table and the Narrator will set up the story. Have fun playing, whether it's a standalone pilot episode or the beginning of a larger season!

Choosing a Color

In *Henshin!*, each main character handled by a player is called a Color, representing an archetypal hero found in *sentai*. When selecting a Color to play, start by reviewing the italicized flavor text at the beginning of each playbook, and then peruse the list of **Tasks** of any Colors you're interested in. If you're hooked by something you read, then that's likely a good choice for you to play!

Task: A central aim of a character represented by a Color's playbook. Every Color has five Tasks to choose from as a focus for an episode.

the table with your group to create characters (which could happen before play if your Narrator is fine with that), start by circling a name, one of each of the three looks, and a Connection. The name and looks help us imagine and describe the Color in play, and the **Connection** flags the Narrator to create a character that your Color has an attachment with. Who knows, perhaps Red's "sworn rival" Connection will be the same person as Blue's "unlikely crush"!

As you settle on a Color Playbook, you'll notice that most of the worksheet is dedicated to Turns. **Turns** engage the mechanics of the game with tokens, and they comprise what your character is

Connection: A character (usually played by the Narrator) with an interesting, defined relationship to one or more Colors.

Turn: An action explicitly or implicitly stated by a player that is fictionally appropriate for their Color. Not all actions are Turns, since Turns serve to signal a mechanic from the playbook for certain actions.

most known for doing. Some Turns earn you tokens, some cost you tokens, and some don't involve tokens at all but instead provide you with a possible action when you've run out of ideas. Maybe you read the Turn out loud verbatim during play, or maybe you just

describe what the character is doing and it happens to coincide with a Turn already on the sheet. Either way, the mechanics in *Henshin!* get put to work!

At this point, your Color 'planning' is complete, as the rest will be teased out by answering the Narrator's questions and acting as the Color during play. Keep in mind that storytelling is a collaborative process, so leave some comfortable gaps in your character concept to be filled in by your teammates and the unexpected plot points during an episode.

The Core Colors that show up most often in *Henshin!* are Red, Blue, Black, Green, Yellow and Pink. The Special Colors, Gold and Silver, are rare and they are discussed in further detail shortly. Lastly, the Unique Colors serve very specific roles in *Henshin!*, and they include White, Purple, and Orange.

- △ Play **Red** if you enjoy being a confident leader, even if you don't really know what you're doing.
- △ Play **Blue** if you approach problems from an intellectual lens, maybe at the expense of more practical solutions.
- △ Play **Black** if you tackle problems with muscle and a cool head, maybe at the expense of more thoughtful approaches.
- △ Play **Green** if you're fine being less experienced and mature than others, though trying your best in the meantime.
- △ Play **Yellow** if you connect people together socially, maybe taking on a bit more obligations than necessary.
- △ Play **Pink** if you want to hug out problems, even if you have to take on people's emotional burdens, too.
- △ Play **Gold** if you're an outsider who is an absolute prodigy, so much so that it's difficult to fit in.
- △ Play **Silver** if you task yourself with guiding others, so much so that you rarely let others support you.
- △ Play **White** if you have already trudged through the trials of being a hero, scars and all.
- △ Play **Purple** if you have ulterior motives for supporting the team, perhaps even an allegiance to their enemies.
- △ Play **Orange** if you're an unsuspecting, relatable community member who discovers powers for just a short time.

Notes on Special Colors

In the *sentai* tradition, 'special' colors are typically rolled out mid- or

late series. At this point, the other members of the team have already had a spotlight or two, helping establish relationships within the group. The arrival of a new (and *metallic*) color threatens these dynamics! By working out issues with the late arriver, the team becomes more powerful and often acquires access to new skills or weapons.

In a season of *Henshin!*, Gold or Silver may be introduced several episodes in, perhaps in the form of a player retiring their Color, by introducing a new player to the group, or by bringing in a guest player for just a couple sessions. The Special Colors are a bit of a big deal, so these approaches help them share the spotlight with the rest of the team.

However, it's perfectly reasonable to run a one-shot with a Special Color present! To do that, ensure they are outnumbered by the usual stable of Colors, such as two or three Core Colors with only one Special Color. The Narrator should establish this one-shot as being set 'mid-season' fictionally, as in the team (probably barring the Special Color) has already worked with each other. They can pitch the Special Color as a newcomer, possibly the secret identity of someone in the community or as an arrival from elsewhere.

To help establish relationships in a one-off, incorporate the **Special Turn** into character introductions. The Narrator can ask each of the Core Colors to read out the Special Turn found on their playbook, and then ask which other regular Color has triggered that Turn in the past, working together to build the fiction. For example, we may find out the circumstances in which Red took on solving one of Green's problems, or when Black accepted the support of the far weaker Blue. This establishes dynamics that the Special Color can then test.

Beyond that, Gold and Silver's Turns help ensure that they will be awesome at the table! Because a Special Color is likely to be on the scene for a limited time, ensure that they make a splash and challenge the status quo of the Squad at large.

Special Turn: A unique Turn on each Color playbook that can be triggered only by interaction with another player.

Notes on Unique Colors

Each of these three Unique Colors have very specific conditions for bringing them to the table, meaning that they will show up less

frequently than other playbooks. While the other Colors represent broad tropes found frequently in *sentai*, the Unique Colors are less common yet still cemented in the genre.

The **White Playbook** is available only as an 'upgrade' from another Color, meaning that someone has chosen to retire an existing character in favor of 'leveling up' to White. This Color already has a backstory as a hero, so the previous experience as seen in play (and the circumstances for that character changing colors) help fill in that gap. For example, the Red hero may have fulfilled a satisfying arc, triggering a Raise and causing the player to decide that Red should be retired. The character goes missing, perhaps presumed dead, and then returns next episode to play now using the White playbook with new powers and story angles to explore.

The **Purple Playbook** is available only for a player who wishes to disrupt group cohesion by actively exploring motives contrary to the team. This is not to be taken lightly! Other players will know that Purple lacks some trustworthiness, even if their characters do not know yet, and so it should be fun to introduce this potential conflict. Perhaps Purple secretly owes allegiance to their teammate's enemy; however, they aid the Squad in efforts to bring down the adversary because they actually want to steal this enemy's power for themselves! When the moment of truth arrives, perhaps Purple's motives may have changed due to the team's influence, or perhaps the team finds out the truth about Purple first. Make sure to work with the other players in spirit even if your character is working against the Squad!

Lastly, the **Orange Playbook** is available specifically for a single session of play, and is encouraged for a temporary player who can only join for that one session. They fill the role of a 'guest spot'! Orange serves to make the biggest impact in the shortest time, and probably draws from a bit of comedy or unexpected circumstances to make this time memorable. If a friend can only make it to one night of *Henshin!*, try introducing them to the Orange guest star!

Special Turns in Play

We just came back from 'commercial break', and the players are setting up some short spotlight scenes as they reflect on the action so far. The player with the Yellow playbook, is reviewing their playbook for direction...

Yellow's Player: So, you see me in my bedroom hunched over this wooden desk, writing in my journal. And you can hear me reading out loud as I write. I had thought Corbett was just way too cool to even talk to me, let alone help me out. But then during that fight with the Inciner-gator, I would have been toast if Corbett hadn't risked his life to protect me!

Narrator: Aw...

Yellow's Player: Hey, so I'd forgotten about my Special Turn...does this make it happen?

Narrator: Let's see, the trigger for yours is, "When you acknowledge someone's admission of friendship with you..."

Yellow's Player: Ah. Damn. So someone has to tell me we're friends first.

Corbett's Player: Hey, I got this. I fire off a text your way.

Narrator: Bzz, bzz...

Yellow's Player: I put down my pen and check my phone. And...?

Corbett's Player: 'Yo. Don't be such a meat shield next time. I'll be that for you. —Corbett'

Yellow's Player: Oh, that's all the admission I'll ever get from him. I text back, 'Glad to hear there will be a next time, BUDDY.'

Everyone: Awwww...

Narrator: And there's your Special Turn. [sniff] Remember that Yellow's next Heavy turn doesn't cost a token!

Color Playbook Introduction

The eleven Color playbooks available in *Henshin!* are included as a resource for learning more about the possible heroes and their mechanics. These playbooks are also available as free digital downloads at henshingame.com. These worksheets can be printed single-sided and folded into thirds for convenient use at the table.

Nearly all of the mechanics that a player interfaces with at the table can be found on their playbook! If you plan to play as a Color, also take a look at the digital worksheet for that playbook found on the *Henshin!* website. If you plan to play as a Narrator, you can print or distribute all (or only some) of these Color playbooks for players to use at the table.

Once you have a playbook of your own on paper or digitally—make it your own! Circle choices, scribble notes, doodle mechs, whatever you see fit. This is your living 'character sheet' for episodes to come.

Squad Turns

In addition to the unique, playbook-specific Turns found in the following Color overviews, every Color also shares a set of **Squad Turns** that are included on the downloadable playbook worksheets.

The only thing unique about these Turns are that they must be triggered by *all* of the Colors in play at the table!

Details like the Squad's Principle, Unique Attack, and Ultimate Form are found on the Squad worksheet for custom settings or on the Module playbook for pre-made settings. More information can be found in the "Narrating *Henshin!*" section.

The three Squad Turns found on the downloadable playbook for every Color are the following:

- △ When the Squad confronts danger to follow their Principle, Colors present gain a token.
- △ When the Squad is all suited up, their weapons may combine into an Ultimate Attack.
- △ When the Squad is suited up with mechs summoned, they may call on their Ultimate Form.

Squad Turn: A set of Turns that can only be used when all Colors in the episode meet the conditions.

Raises

During an episode of *Henshin!*, players are encouraged to focus on a specific Task or two from their Color's playbook. This helps guide the character's growth in a satisfying way that reinforces the tropes of that Color. At the end of an episode, players vote on which character best achieved their Task during play! That character receives a **Raise**, which offers some choices for growth moving forward.

Raises represent character advancement of some form, and the Raise chosen should feel fictionally appropriate. Because a Task has been fully realized, it may not feel quite as relevant for that character anymore, as they have grown past that focus.

Hence, a Task signals some sort of concrete change.

Every Color has a unique Raise included on the playbook overviews that follow. In addition, every Color also has the same two Raises below that are listed on the downloadable playbook worksheets.

- Δ Your suit, weapon, or mech become undeniably better.
Describe how. Start each episode with a token from now on.
- Δ Retire your character. Swap powers with someone, lose your powers, step down, or disappear. Describe what happens.

This first Raise is decidedly mechanical, representing an increase in power through the advantage of now starting episodes with a token. If new technology for their suit, an advanced weapon, or an unlocked secret of the mechs came up in play, this could be an appropriate fit for the Color taking this Raise. Or, perhaps this did not come up during the game, but it still feels like a fictionally important detail that builds the story so far. In that case, perhaps the upgrade is cryptically announced before the episode closes, with more details to come during the upcoming episode.

The second Raise serves as an end to the character's arc, represented by retiring the Color to take on a new Color as the same character. If several Tasks have already been thoroughly explored, the Squad may have seen a satisfying conclusion to this Color's story and be ready for a new one for that character. The character wouldn't fundamentally change, but instead inherit a new playbook!

Raise: A mechanic representing a character upgrade that is available at the end of each episode.

Or the Color may be in a position to bestow their powers upon another character, again signalling the end to their story. Or the Color may disappear altogether, perhaps under mysterious or tragic circumstances. Lastly, a character may simply retire this Color's suit only to adopt a new Color's traits and abilities, demonstrating a change in the role they will play within the Squad. Any available Color could be chosen for this Raise, and the White playbook is *only* available through this mechanic.

Finally, the unique Color-specific Raise that is also found on the following overviews represent more fictional rather than mechanical growth. Each absolutely proves that the Color has broken the mold of their tropes in some notable way. It encourages the player to add this layer of complexity to future play, and also reinforces that the rest of the Squad recognizes this advancement moving forward.

Postgame Credits

(Toby, playing the Narrator, has asked the players to frame a short 'vignette' of where the audience sees their character after the big fight at the end of the episode.)

Gary: So you see Graham walking home from school by himself, and not like frantically running errands like before, but striding all confidently with his head high. He's riding on that feeling of being so useful to the team during that fight.

Toby: How do we see that?

Gary: He's casually throwing his dice transformer in the air and catching it as he walks. And then he sees that out-of-his league crush—

Rashida: Brenda.

Gary: —Yup, walking with her friends. She catches his eye, and we see Graham do a little finger gun at her, then catch his transformer.

Toby: Awesome. How about...Cyan?

Blair: We see Cyan sitting on the floor of his attic, like, from a top-down view, and spread out everywhere are pages from that "Scourge of the Necromaster" adventure manual, and drawings on grid paper, too. And he looks pensive, like he's studying what he has learned from this episode. That's it.

Rashida: Oh, let me tack on Maple's then. There's a knock on Cyan's door, and we see Maple standing at the doorstep with her baseball bat over her shoulder. Cyan's older brother opens the door, and Maple asks, 'Can Cyan come out and play?' with, like, a mischievous grin.

Toby: Awesome, it cements Cyan as part of the crew and sets up the audience for the next episode. Speaking of, let's finish this with voting on a Raise!

(Each player reads out the Task for their Color that was their big focus for the episode.)

Toby: And let's go around the table, each player just saying who they think really showed us that Task.

Gary: I'll start. I vote for Rashida because her Red character was just

barreling into every situation headfirst, like, really consistently.

Rashida: Thanks. I actually vote for you, Gary, because you were okay with Graham being a total pipsqueak but then he actually did come into his own by the end.

Blair: Same, it felt like Graham worked out a little story arc just like you set up, Gary.

Gary: Good deal! Okay, so from the list of Raises, I take... 'You have, without a doubt, matured and come into your own. Others will appreciate the strange things that make you tick.' I think you won't see Graham questioning himself as much and just owns being the weird one.

Blair: Hey, just curious, what would a Raise like 'Your suit, weapon, or mech become undeniably better' look like? Just as far as the story?

Toby: Well, it'd probably work into story elements we already have, and could be wrapped into a post-credits scene. So, say Cyan was voted for a Raise and you took that...

Blair: Oh, you see me scribbling calculations on a dungeon map, and suddenly these new symbols light up on my dice transformer...

Rashida: ...And we leave that as a cliffhanger for next episode?

Toby: Yeah, leave the audience wanting more! Well, everyone kicked butt today, and the story definitely has legs for another episode. Until then!

RED

You have the qualities to lead, even if it you're not yet ready for that. Whether the others decide to listen to a hot-headed rookie like yourself, well, that's up to them.

Choose a Name

Adam, Akane, Flynn, Garnet, Jasper, Maple, Rowan, a commanding name

Choose Looks

Tender face, naïve face, eager face, defiant face, cocky face

Calm eyes, fiery eyes, devoted eyes, impulsive eyes, courageous eyes

Active wear, flattering wear, dependable wear, casual wear, flashy wear



Choose a Connection

Sworn rival, estranged parent, vulnerable sibling, budding love interest, venerable fighting master

Tasks

During play, work toward how to:

- Δ Charge ahead recklessly if no one is depending on you.
- Δ Rise to the occasion when it's the right thing to do.
- Δ Express wonder, even if it borders on naïveté.
- Δ Eagerly shine the spotlight on your teammates, too.
- Δ Explore self-realization & eventual leadership.

Special Turn

When you take on solving someone else's problem, they gain a token.

Heavy Turns

Spend a token to:

- Δ Use your weapon to drive off an opponent.
- Δ Face down danger without hesitation.
- Δ Transform when danger appears.
- Δ Summon your mech when danger escalates.
- Δ Ask someone, "Who is really behind this?"

Regular Turns

You may always:

- Δ Take action, leaving yourself vulnerable.
- Δ React by taking temporary cover.
- Δ Display impressive fighting technique.
- Δ Try to prove yourself to another.
- Δ Speak up for someone weaker.



Light Turns

Gain a token when you:

- Δ Head into danger without your Squad.
- Δ Fail to react and suffer the consequences.
- Δ Let your temper cloud your judgment.
- Δ Talk smack to someone more powerful than you.
- Δ Ask someone, "Why do people follow me?"

Raises

When told, you may choose:

- Δ You become, without a doubt, a true leader. No one will question it from here on. Describe why.

BLUE

You're straight-laced, sensible, and ambitious. You may be a classic overachiever, but in the end, others do rely on your quick thinking.

Choose a Name

Azura, Carolina, Cyan, Hinto, Iris, Jay, Royal, a thoughtful name

Choose Looks

Serious face, cold face, plain face, unassuming face, wise face

Quiet eyes, bright eyes, focused eyes, stern eyes, calculating eyes

Formal wear, sensible wear, uniformed wear, careless wear, retro wear



Choose a Connection

Accomplished sibling, overworked parent, jealous rival, unlikely crush, a creation you built

Tasks

During play, work toward how to:

- Δ Calculate possible courses of action.
- Δ Play it by the book...most of the time.
- Δ Find the right time for sensibility and for deadpan humor.
- Δ Prove that brain trumps brawn.
- Δ Explore fallibility & prodigy.

Special Turn

When you accept the support of someone stronger, your next Heavy move does not cost a token.

Heavy Turns

Spend a token to:

- Δ Devise the proper tool for the job.
- Δ Remain absolutely calm under pressure.
- Δ Transform when danger appears.
- Δ Summon your mech when danger escalates.
- Δ Ask someone, "How will I get you to do the sensible thing?"



Regular Turns

You may always:

- Δ Take action, leaving yourself vulnerable.
- Δ React by taking temporary cover.
- Δ Display precise fighting technique.
- Δ Try to pinpoint an adversary's weakness.
- Δ Point out the obvious to another.

Light Turns

Gain a token when you:

- Δ Ruin something perfectly.
- Δ Fail to react effectively.
- Δ Become demoralized by a setback.
- Δ Construct something dangerous.
- Δ Ask someone, "What do others really think of me?"

Raises

When told, you may choose:

- Δ You are, without a doubt, a capable fighter. No one will consider you weak when you rely on your brain. Describe why.

BLACK

You're cool and laid-back. You always wear the right clothes, listen to the right music, and know just the right thing to say.

Choose a Name

Clara, Corbett, Dolan, Huyen, Kass, Melanie, Raven, a potent name

Choose Looks

Eager face, stubborn face, guarded face, loyal face, tough face

Intense eyes, devoted eyes, warm eyes, vigilant eyes, wild eyes

Comfortable wear, trendsetting wear, loud wear, athletic wear, everyday wear



Choose a Connection

Unskilled peer, military parent, unrequited crush, unfortunate boss, obliged family friend

Tasks

During play, work toward how to:

- Δ Show your strength.
- Δ Defend those you care about at any cost.
- Δ Oblige yourself to others, even if you will let them down.
- Δ Prove that brawn trumps brains.
- Δ Explore duty & martyrdom.

Special Turn

When you accept the support of someone weaker, your next Heavy move does not cost a token.

Heavy Turns

Spend a token to:

- Δ Clear the way of adversaries during a brawl.
- Δ Shake off a beating like it's nothing.
- Δ Transform when danger appears.
- Δ Summon your mech when danger escalates.
- Δ Ask someone, "What will I need to sacrifice in order to see this through?"

Regular Turns

You may always:

- Δ Take action, leaving yourself vulnerable.
- Δ React by taking temporary cover.
- Δ Display reckless fighting technique.
- Δ Try to protect someone in need.
- Δ Remind someone of the real task at hand.



Light Turns

Gain a token when you:

- Δ Take the brunt of someone else's burden.
- Δ Fail to react and overexert yourself.
- Δ Interfere with a reliable course of action.
- Δ Frighten another with an impressive feat.
- Δ Ask someone, "Whom have I failed to protect?"

Raises

When told, you may choose:

- Δ You are, without a doubt, smarter than you look (in your own way). No one will sell you short when you solve problems forcefully.

GREEN

You could become the best, someday, but you're not there yet. Others put up with your eccentricities and jokes in the meantime.

Choose a Name

Graham, Iva, Jade, Kadir, Lorn, Lu-Chu, Zarqa, an unusual name

Choose Looks

Aloof face, distant face, excitable face, offbeat face, youthful face

Curious eyes, playful eyes, solitary eyes, sparkling eyes, uncommon eyes

Asymmetrical wear, baggy wear, crafty wear, uncommon wear, whimsical wear



Choose a Connection

Straightlaced relative, out-of-your-league crush, odd pet, dangerous creditor, sympathetic adversary

Tasks

During play, work toward how to:

- Δ Show that one size doesn't fit all.
- Δ Throw inexperience or ineptitude at a problem and see what sticks.
- Δ Approach the right thing to do from the wrong way to do it.
- Δ Unveil a profound talent when others don't expect it.
- Δ Explore vulnerability & coming of age.

Special Turn

When you take an opportunity to prove what you've learned to someone else, they receive a token.

Heavy Turns

Spend a token to:

- Δ Stumble upon an unlikely, perfect hit.
- Δ Gather hidden endurance to take a blow.
- Δ Transform when danger appears.
- Δ Summon your mech when danger escalates.
- Δ Ask someone, "What is an unorthodox solution?"



Regular Turns

You may always:

- Δ Take action, leaving yourself vulnerable.
- Δ React by taking temporary cover.
- Δ Display eccentric fighting technique.
- Δ Try to bring people together with a wisecrack.
- Δ Act as a decoy.

Light Turns

Gain a token when you:

- Δ Endanger someone instead of accomplishing something.
- Δ Fail to react and cower.
- Δ Pull a prank gone wrong.
- Δ Act childish when someone expects better.
- Δ Ask someone, "What don't I understand about the world yet?"

Raises

When told, you may choose:

- Δ You have, without a doubt, matured and come into your own. Others will appreciate the strange things that make you tick. Describe why.

YELLOW

You're able to support others while retaining that creative individualist streak. Others find you trusting and sociable—so long as you're willing to open up.

Choose a Name

Aurelia, Amber, Boyd, Huang, Saffron, Taji, Xanthe, a likeable name

Choose Looks

Approachable face, tenacious face, good-natured face, shrewd face, lively face

Focused eyes, sincere eyes, knowing eyes, familiar eyes, enthusiastic eyes

Versatile wear, stylish wear, sophisticated wear, flattering wear, professional wear

Choose a Connection

Suspicious volunteer coordinator, hapless cousin, doting parents, misfit crush, friend-turned-celebrity

Tasks

During play, work toward how to:

- △ Talk out an issue, especially when everyone else is fighting.
- △ Diffuse tense situations with insight or humor.
- △ Observe who is doing what and with whom.
- △ Prove that your role is anything but subordinate.
- △ Explore individuality & insecurity.



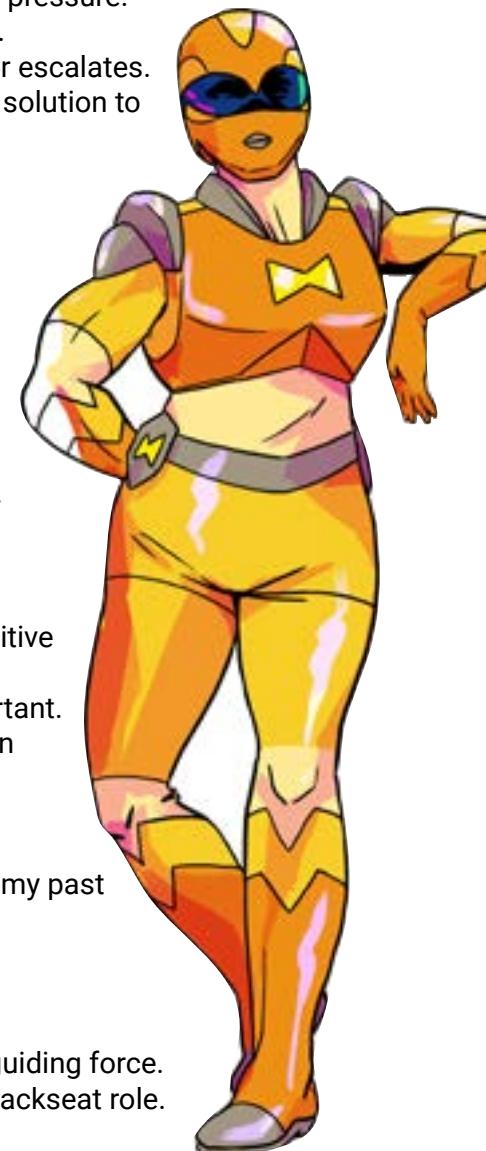
Special Turn

When you acknowledges someone's admission of friendship with you, their next Heavy move does not cost a token.

Heavy Turns

Spend a token to:

- △ Address an immediate problem with a level head.
- △ Remain totally dependable under pressure.
- △ Transform when danger appears.
- △ Summon your mech when danger escalates.
- △ Ask someone, "What's a creative solution to work this out?"



Regular Turns

You may always:

- △ Take action, leaving yourself vulnerable.
- △ React by taking temporary cover.
- △ Display agile fighting technique.
- △ Try to boost another Color's morale.
- △ Reveal a hidden talent or passion.

Light Turns

Gain a token when you:

- △ Doubt yourself when taking definitive action.
- △ Fail to react and ignore the important.
- △ Do what's best for someone when they wouldn't agree.
- △ Overcommit yourself to another cause.
- △ Ask someone, "What was one of my past mistakes?"

Raises

When told, you may choose:

- △ You are, without a doubt, a vital guiding force. No one will think you deserve a backseat role. Describe why.

PINK

You're a bit unorthodox, able to both fire off a witty retort and give someone a shoulder to cry on. Others admit that you are the heart of the team.

Choose a Name

Braden, Coral, Jared, Hong, Li-Wei, Rosa, Vartan, a gentle name

Choose Looks

Cheery face, pouty face, radiant face, sensitive face, tireless face

Spirited eyes, shining eyes, penetrating eyes, dreamy eyes, watchful eyes

Sporty wear, couture wear, innovative wear, essential wear, bold wear

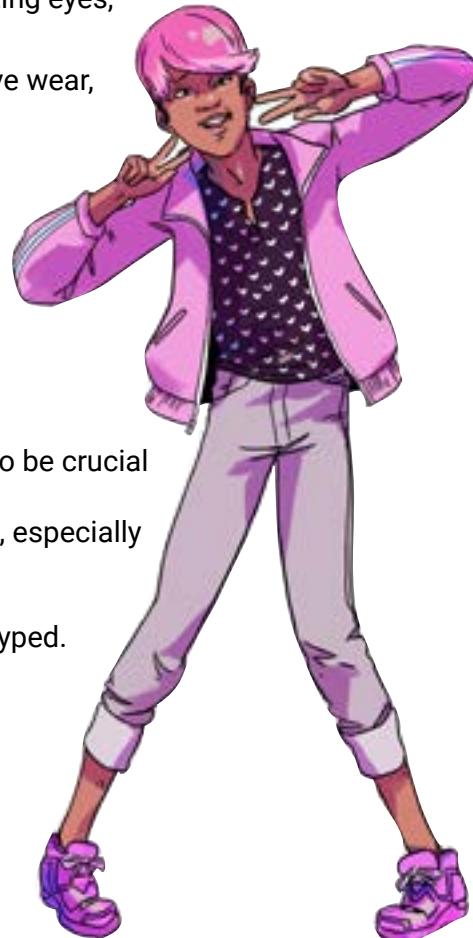
Choose a Connection

Overly proud parent, clueless best friend, first crush, unlikely Color, tragically uncool peer

Tasks

During play, work toward how to:

- Δ Demonstrate warmth and care to be crucial strengths.
- Δ Understand someone's problem, especially if there's nothing to gain.
- Δ Balance emotional burdens.
- Δ Defy expectations when stereotyped.
- Δ Explore themes of empathy & cynicism.



Special Turn

When you take time to confide in someone, they receive a token.

Heavy Turns

Spend a token to:

- Δ Strike at the heart of the problem.
- Δ Remain positively cheery under pressure.
- Δ Transform when danger appears.
- Δ Summon your mech when danger escalates.
- Δ Ask someone, "What secret pain do you carry?"

Regular Turns

You may always:

- Δ Take action, leaving yourself vulnerable.
- Δ React by taking temporary cover.
- Δ Display innovative fighting technique.
- Δ Try to rally the Squad when they are in disagreement.
- Δ Just be there for someone.



Light Turns

Gain a token when you:

- Δ Exhaust yourself when taking definitive action.
- Δ Fail to react and get cast aside.
- Δ Demand that someone pay attention to you right this moment.
- Δ Show a soft spot for the wrong person or at the wrong time.
- Δ Ask someone, "Why doesn't someone take me seriously?"

Raises

When told, you may choose:

- Δ You are, without a doubt, the anchor first and the heart second. No one will think you're a pushover. Describe why.

GOLD

A prodigy from another place or time, Gold could take on the world, Squad or no Squad, if they so chose.

Choose a Name

Arianna, Jin-Ho, Kin, Oeric, Mai, something legendary

Choose Looks

Mysterious face, radiant face, remarkable face, outlandish face, brilliant face

Lost eyes, gleaming eyes, mystical eyes, honest eyes, sorrowful eyes

Old-fashioned wear, impeccable wear, polished wear, exotic wear, one-of-a-kind wear



Choose a Connection

Ancestor or descendant, storied mentor, twin sibling, mystical creature, royal ally

Tasks

During play, work toward how to:

- Δ Display the shining pinnacle of your abilities for all to see.
- Δ March to the beat of your own drum.
- Δ Don't get too comfortable here.
- Δ Hold yourself to a higher standard than others.
- Δ Explore exclusivity & isolation.

Special Turn

When you cast the spotlight on another while the stakes are high, your next Heavy move does not cost a token.

Heavy Turns

Spend a token to:

- Δ Reveal a never-before-seen power.
- Δ Take a devastating blow without flinching.
- Δ Transform when danger appears.
- Δ Summon your mech when danger escalates.
- Δ Ask someone, "What secret about you do I already know?"

Regular Turns

You may always:

- Δ Take action, leaving yourself vulnerable.
- Δ React by taking temporary cover.
- Δ Display dazzling fighting technique.
- Δ Try to be a one-person army.
- Δ Model the utmost finesse and expertise.



Light Turns

Gain a token when you:

- Δ Perform brilliantly to an unnecessary magnitude.
- Δ Disappear in the face of danger.
- Δ Remind someone that they aren't good enough yet.
- Δ Let a secret/side mission take precedent.
- Δ Ask someone, "What prevents me from belonging?"

Raises

When told, you may choose:

- Δ You are, without a doubt, at home among your allies. No one will ask you to leave. Describe why.

SILVER

A worthy mentor and guardian, Silver may let down their guard enough to find a place among the Squad.

Choose a Name

Eirian, Lock, Rajat, Sterlyn, Yin, something everlasting

Choose Looks

Authoritative face, grim face, refined face, disciplined face, uncanny face

Anguished eyes, redeeming eyes, steely eyes, awakened eyes, hopeful eyes

Timeless wear, royal wear, heroic wear, tattered wear, salvaged wear

Choose a Connection

Fused entity, childhood friend, twin sibling, loyal ward, powerful demon

Tasks

During play, work toward how to:

- Δ Carry out an important message.
- Δ Take someone under your wing.
- Δ Spend time devising tactical feats.
- Δ Question your usefulness if no one needs anything from you.
- Δ Explore saviorhood & authority.



Special Turn

When someone demonstrates what you have taught them, your next Heavy move does not cost a token.

Heavy Turns

Spend a token to:

- Δ Teach someone a formidable skill.
- Δ Emerge from the ashes.
- Δ Transform when danger appears.
- Δ Summon your mech when danger escalates.
- Δ Ask someone, "What do you need redeemed?"

Regular Turns

You may always:

- Δ Take action, leaving yourself vulnerable.
- Δ React by taking temporary cover.
- Δ Display superordinary fighting technique.
- Δ Arrive unexpectedly and at the last possible moment.
- Δ Cryptically warn your allies.



Light Turns

Gain a token when you:

- Δ Hurt someone who believes in you.
- Δ Take the blow meant for another.
- Δ Impress your morality on someone who doesn't need it.
- Δ Self-exile when shaken.
- Δ Ask someone, "What do I need to sacrifice?"

Raises

When told, you may choose:

- Δ You have, without a doubt, shaken off old bonds in favor of reliance on your allies. No one needs more proof. Describe why.

WHITE

A veteran of the Squad, White has fought hard to earn power and responsibility—but what have they lost along the way?

Choose a Name

Airi, Alban, Bai, Bianca, Jenny, Gwen, Whitaker, a respected name

Choose Looks

Compelling face, haggard face, scarred face, proud face, trustworthy face

Clouded eyes, dignified eyes, imposing eyes, piercing eyes, vacant eyes

Dazzling wear, decorated wear, resplendent wear, stately wear, tactical wear

Choose a Connection

Former disciple, long-lost lover, influential contact, double-crossing associate, mighty entity

Tasks

During play, work toward how to:

- △ Define the highest order of being a hero.
- △ Draw from a well of experience to guide the Squad.
- △ Grapple with relevant personal trauma.
- △ Prevent the Squad from making a horrible mistake.
- △ Explore self-care & fragility.



Special Turn

When someone reminds you of your difficult past, your next Heavy Turn does not cost a token.

Heavy Turns

Spend a token to:

- △ Alter your weapon to eliminate a threat.
- △ Absorb incoming damage in the form of a scar.
- △ Transform when danger appears.
- △ Summon your mech when danger escalates.
- △ Ask someone, “What haunts you from your past?”

Regular Turns

You may always:

- △ Take action, leaving yourself vulnerable.
- △ React by taking temporary cover.
- △ Display instinctual fighting technique.
- △ Find something useful within an upsetting memory.
- △ Try to teach heroism to someone who needs it.



Light Turns

Gain a token when you:

- △ Define what it means to be a hero.
- △ Stand by, powerless in the face of a threat.
- △ Relive memories of a difficult event.
- △ Embark on a dangerous solo mission.
- △ Ask someone, “What do you keep fighting for?”

Raises

When told, you may choose:

- △ You have, without a doubt, overcome the pain of your past. No one will be distraught by that haunted look in your eyes. Describe why.

PURPLE

While Purple can win the trust of their Squad, hidden motives may put their supposed comrades in real danger...

Choose a Name

Amethyst, Calfuray, Jola, Porfirio, Viola, Yolanda, Zedong, a suspicious name

Choose Looks

Conniving face, jittery face, perplexing face, shifty face, uneasy face

Crafty eyes, enigmatic eyes, furtive eyes, wavering eyes, wily eyes

Concealed wear, edgy wear, flamboyant wear, irregular wear, roguish wear

Choose a Connection

Despicable family member, double-crossed associate, vengeful syndicate member, trusting partner, wicked employer

Tasks

During play, work toward how to:

- Δ Gain access to other Colors' secrets and abilities.
- Δ Prove yourself to be too useful to ignore.
- Δ Compare your personal motives against those of the Squad.
- Δ Double-cross someone who cares about you.
- Δ Explore betrayal & redemption.



Special Turn

When someone displays unwavering trust in you, both players gain a token.

Heavy Turns

Spend a token to:

- Δ Perform a surprisingly heroic feat.
- Δ Protect a so-called friend.
- Δ Transform when danger appears.
- Δ Summon your mech when danger escalates.
- Δ Ask someone, "What's the point of being good all the time?"

Regular Turns

You may always:

- Δ Take action, leaving yourself vulnerable.
- Δ React by taking temporary cover.
- Δ Display dastardly fighting technique.
- Δ Cheat to solve a small problem.
- Δ Pretend to care about another Color.



Light Turns

Gain a token when you:

- Δ Endanger the Squad.
- Δ Make an ally take the blow.
- Δ Describe why your values are better than everyone else's.
- Δ Use someone's secret against them.
- Δ Ask someone, "What would it take for you to betray someone?"

Raises

When told, you may choose:

- Δ You have, without a doubt, proven you will support the Squad even though the motives for doing so remain your own. No one will ask if you're secretly evil. Describe why.

ORANGE

Orange is the last person anyone expected to become a hero—and yet, so long as they can transform into one, why not join the Squad while it lasts?

Choose a Name

Autumn, Blaine, Electra, Flannery, Hari, Russell, Sienna, an unorthodox name

Choose Looks

Dimpled face, homely face, humble face, ordinary face, recognizable face

Cozy eyes, familiar eyes, nearsighted eyes, relatable eyes, vacuous eyes

Bohemian wear, oddball wear, peasant wear, threadbare wear, unembellished wear

Choose a Connection

Color who is an immediate family member, Color whose secret you want to uncover, Color who is your sworn rival, Color at the center of your wacky scheme, Color who you desperately want to protect

Tasks

During play, work toward how to:

- △ Defy expectations of who can be a hero.
- △ Make the greatest impact in the shortest time.
- △ Involve the community or setting in a new way.
- △ Depart in a manner that defies expectations.
- △ Explore humor & the momentary spotlight.



Special Turn

When a Color treats you like you're an important member of the Squad, they gain a token.

Heavy Turns

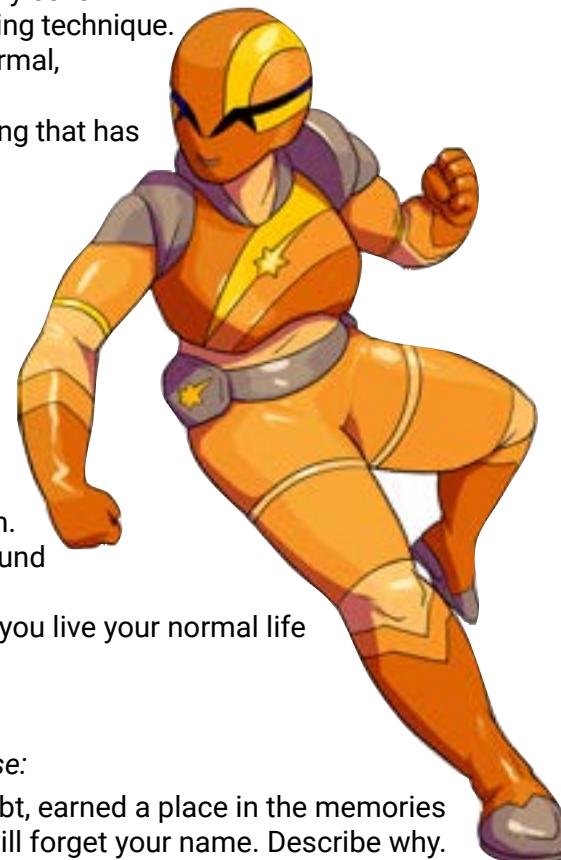
Spend a token to:

- △ Improvise a near-perfect weapon.
- △ Shake off a blow without a scratch.
- △ Transform when danger appears.
- △ Summon your mech when danger escalates.
- △ Ask someone, "Why did I get chosen for this?"

Regular Turns

You may always:

- △ Take action, leaving yourself vulnerable.
- △ React by taking temporary cover.
- △ Display improvised fighting technique.
- △ Remind the Squad of normal, everyday fun.
- △ Uncover part of the setting that has never been explored.



Light Turns

Gain a token when you:

- △ Absolutely whiff it when everybody's watching.
- △ Fail to react and faceplant hard.
- △ Tell a long-winded story about how you once solved a similar problem.
- △ Forget all of your newfound responsibilities.
- △ Ask someone, "How do you live your normal life in the face of danger?"

Raises

When told, you may choose:

- △ You have, without a doubt, earned a place in the memories of the Squad. Nobody will forget your name. Describe why.

Sample Colors

When players build their Color alongside each other, they flesh out a number of details such as what they look like, who they are connected to, their quirks and flaws, as well as suit, weapon, and Mech details. As a unique character starts to take form, these protagonists become nuanced, fun people that the players start to root for. Their choices make more impact and the stakes are just a bit higher.

Below are possible examples of characters created from the Color playbooks, in this case young adults who are connected through the same high school. Feel free to borrow these ideas for your own character, or use these as a jumping off point for your own take on a Color! Much of the details included are not necessary to play *Henshin!*, but instead provide flavor that make these characters more engaging and relatable. A player is less likely to make thoughtful, anticipated decisions if they have an idea of what makes that character tick!

Red: Madeleine

Age: 17
Zodiac sign: Sagittarius
Favorite song: The Arctic Monkeys - "A Certain Romance"
Favorite food: Trail mix (she makes it herself)
Most likely to: Win a championship game for a team she isn't even playing on
Least likely to: Keep quiet when she sees someone being bullied

Maddie has never met a problem she doesn't like (or know how to tackle...sometimes literally). Hardworking, determined and loyal, Maddie shoulders a lot, as the school's star QB and in her amateur boxing career. And even though she can let her temper get the better of her sometimes (especially when her fan club gets too close), you can always count on her to have your back!



Blue: Hakim

Age: 18
Zodiac sign: Aquarius
Favorite song: Final Fantasy (Owen Pallett) "This Is The Dream Of Win And Regine"
Favorite food: Tonkotsu ramen
Most likely to: Follow the rules...most of the time
Least likely to: Have a suboptimal plan of attack



Black: Victoria

Age: 17
Zodiac sign: Taurus
Favorite song: Rent "Seasons of Love" (NOBODY knows this)
Favorite food: Pot roast with canned olives
Most likely to: Punch a hole through a problem and somehow fix it
Least likely to: Ask someone to do something, no matter how reasonable

V tells people about 0.01% of her life story (most people think her name is actually Veronica). She's too reserved to give anyone much attention, and yet she would not forget the tiniest favor she owes someone and will absolutely make good on it. She built her motorcycle from parts and works on it after school. V's biggest secrets include being offered a full-ride ballet scholarship and being obsessed with pretty bad mystery novels. The sunglasses stay on.



SAMPLE COLORS

Green: Kenny

Age: 16
Zodiac sign: Libra
Favorite song: Dinosaur Jr - "Just Like Heaven"
Favorite food: Gazpacho with grilled garlic bread
Most likely to: Overly invest in a new weird hobby every week
Least likely to: Not get caught pulling a prank



Kenny has never really done things the 'right' way and, as a result, his life is a weird mess of contradictions. He had to drop band, rugby, & theater due to straight D grades, yet he still finds time to hold down three to four odd jobs around town. He'll make time to talk to you about your latest problem for hours on end, but he will absolutely remember your birthday two weeks too late. He's got some figuring out to do...and he's gonna do it with a smile on his face and a weird joke to boot.

Yellow: Amaryllis

Age: 17
Zodiac sign: Leo
Favorite song: Beyoncé - "Formation"
Favorite food: Pizza (extra jalapeños)
Most likely to: Get 10K likes on a social media post for a good cause
Least likely to: Go home from a party without making twenty new friends

Amaryllis just is. Everybody sort of wants to be her (or be with her), and she will play matchmaker by instinct. Her presence is commanding and she maintains eye contact during every conversation. So far, Amaryllis has started a non-profit and she leads the school's color guard. Every parent asks her to visit more often. No one knows how she juggles this, and honestly she barely seems to have time to open up about herself...but she'll always just **be** Amaryllis.

**SAMPLE COLORS****Pink: Frankie**

Age: 16
Zodiac sign: Pisces
Favorite song: Adam Ant - "Goody Two Shoes"
Favorite food: Oven-roasted salmon with pickled radish slaw
Most likely to: Throw a surprise party for the smallest occasion
Least likely to: Be able to sit still for, like, two seconds

Whether you know it or not, Frankie is your new best friend. They'll make you laugh by slingling slang they just invented, hoping it'll catch on. They'll cry with you, even if they aren't sad. Like a very hugable disco ball or human Pixy Stix, they can be found (invited or not) at any social gathering, spreading bright cheery energy all around. No one knows their natural hair color, so, like, why even ask?

**Gold: Klaus**

Age: 17–19?
Zodiac sign: Cancer
Favorite song: Mahler's "Symphony No. 9"
Favorite food: Laotian street food like paeng pet
Most likely to: Wake up looking like that
Least likely to: Get too comfortable here



Klaus's parents probably have Roman numerals in their names. He transferred from an academy he describes as "prestigious", so he excels at classes and clubs at this new school. Klaus does have a trust fund...yet he is comfortable discussing privilege. He calls himself "woke" (but that's not how that works). Otherwise, he's a normal transfer student...he just makes his own tea blends based on classic novels and is the stunning pinnacle of success at everything he tries, like any other normal person.

Silver: Selene

Age: 20
Zodiac sign: Gemini
Favorite song: Steely Dan - "King of the World"
Favorite food: A falafel sandwich from her favorite street vendor in Dubai
Most likely to: Casually teach you how to steal a car
Least likely to: Be on time for anything (birthdays, doctor's appointments, funerals)

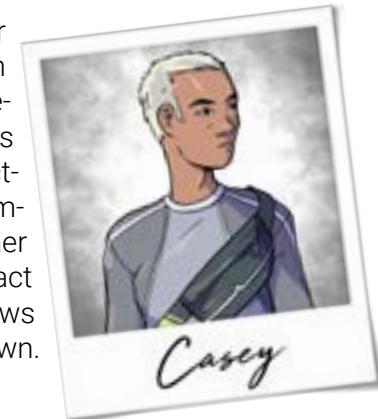


Selene is from a little bit of everywhere, you know? No one can place her accent but, wow, is it gorgeous. But don't let yourself get serenaded away...she is as strange as they come. You can often find her casually leaving a party after spouting out some cryptic statement with a sly smile to drive it home. Rumors say she even recites omens in her sleep. Regardless, Selene means business and is willing to show you her ways...if you can handle it, that is.

White: Casey

Age: 23
Zodiac sign: Virgo
Favorite song: Katy Perry - "Firework"
Favorite food: Shrimp fresh spring rolls
Most likely to: Plan the strength training regimen you never asked for
Least likely to: Take the easy road

Casey is a no-nonsense badass. Former track and field star, he returned to high school as an assistant coach. Casey rarely talks about the injury that halted his promising Olympic career, instead directing his attention to coaching up-and-coming athletes like Maddie. He calls former teachers by their first name (they still act uncomfortable about that) and he knows the secret menu at every local dive in town. Public speaking terrifies Casey.

**Purple: Yolanda**

Age: 18
Zodiac sign: Aries
Favorite song: David Bowie - "Rebel Rebel"
Favorite food: Grilled eggplant
Most likely to: Know what you'll say before you say it
Least likely to: Look you straight in the eye

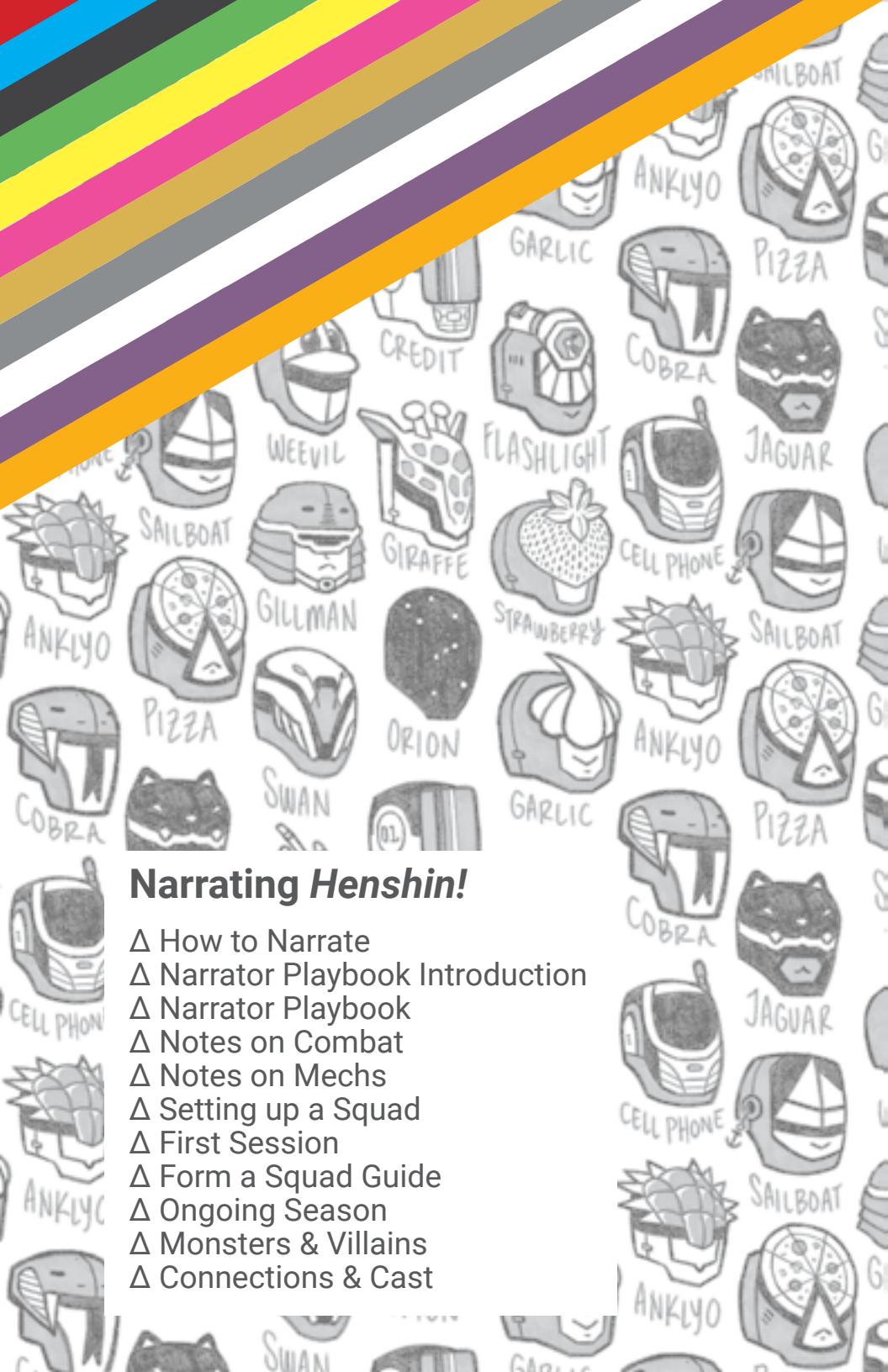
Yolanda transferred from that school two towns over, the one that mysteriously burned down. Yolanda just sorta shows up at classes she didn't sign up for, school clubs she never joined, or parties where no one invited her. But with a sly smile, instant inside joke, and a flippant goodbye, you'd never question why she was there. Yolanda is academic like Hakim, wins weird trivia nights alongside Kenny, and even rides a motorcycle that V is low-key envious of... but what exactly *is* the deal with Yolanda?

**Orange: Marigold**

Age: 16
Zodiac sign: Scorpio
Favorite song: We Were Promised Jetpacks - "Keeping Warm"
Favorite food: Mango sherbet
Most likely to: Smile when no one's watching
Least likely to: Get too big-headed about being lil' ol' Marigold

Marigold is Maddie and Kenny's friend since elementary school. They are homeschooled so that there's more time to focus on playing tuba in pursuit of a prestigious music scholarship. Their home life gives off a hippie vibe complete with handmade clothes, quinoa, and community skillshare workshops. Marigold is just positively cheery, clumsy, and lovable. It is difficult to seriously imagine Marigold of all people transforming into a cool superhero.

**SAMPLE COLORS**



Narrating Henshin!

- △ How to Narrate
- △ Narrator Playbook Introduction
- △ Narrator Playbook
- △ Notes on Combat
- △ Notes on Mechs
- △ Setting up a Squad
- △ First Session
- △ Form a Squad Guide
- △ Ongoing Season
- △ Monsters & Villains
- △ Connections & Cast



NARRATING HENSHIN!

It's a couple hours into a play session, near the end of an episode, and the players have transformed their Colors, summoned their Mechs, and the Mechs have combined into their Ultimate 'mythical beast' Form to take on the giant ifrit monster. The Narrator, Li Wei, is checking his watch...

Beto: So, the fire monster is still laying in that crater? I shout to the others in our giant mech, 'Let's take this ifrit back to the Underworld!'

Li Wei: Are you trying to...kill it?

Beto: No! Because we know now that the monster is actually that pipsqueak Greg who was transformed into a legendary beast, but we don't want to hurt him.

Jen: Suuure... [cracks knuckles]

Erin: Come on, come on. Yeah, we're thinking non-violent.

Li Wei: [Looking over notes] Okay...got it. So I want to get to a story climax here, but we have loose threads to wrap up. You pin down the evil fire genie ifrit, and Beto, your character sees...a familiar envelope...covered in mud in the crater. You picking up on that?

Beto: Oh...yeah! I grab it and read it out loud. I know it's some sort of confession from Greg that already came up earlier. It explains why he made that wish with the ifrit and got himself transformed.

Erin: See? What a sympathetic nerd.

Li Wei: Yup, throw down a token for that Heavy turn you just did, 'Strike at the heart of a problem'. Okay, we're almost there, so let's get in one more Turn for this fight. [Looking around the table, Jen has a stack of tokens and is playing Red.] Jen, once you hear the truth from the letter about Greg being bullied and all that, what do you do?

Jen: Uh, well, I'm best at punching, but...oh! [Throws down a token] I ask, 'Who is really behind this?'

Li Wei: And you all hear, like, sobbing, and you see Greg trapped in the belly of this demon, with what looks like some corrupted transformer next to him in the monster's heart. He stops crying, and Jen, it looks like he makes eye contact with Red somehow.

Beto: Whoa! Poor jerk.

Li Wei: With that, you see Greg no longer lets the ifrit be in control. Let's actually cut away from this scene since the threat is gone, and in our final one, I want to see what you all did with that weird transformer...

Erin: Hey, I think I have a scene to roll with that. Want to spend time with Greg?

Beto: Yeah, we need a heart-to-heart when I'm back in civilian wear.

Jen: I'll tag along for that...reluctantly. I don't think I've forgiven Greg.

Li Wei: Okay! Final scenes, everyone, and check your Tasks one last time in case there's something you're meaning to hit. Erin, take a moment to think about what we're looking at when we cut to your scene. In the meantime, Beto and Jen, we see Greg back at the library after hours in the Greek Mythology section, back where this all started. How do we see you two arrive on the scene?

Δ

How to Narrate

During an episode of *Henshin!*, each player with a Color is consulting their Tasks for some goals to hit, using Turns as appropriate to help reach those Tasks, and collaborating with the table to incorporate consistent and satisfying aesthetics along the way. As a player, you know you've done well if you worked together to create a fun episodic story as a group that engaged some mechanics found on the playbooks. Maybe this success will be further validated by the player being voted to receive a Raise that session!

But for the one player tasked to act as the Narrator, what are their responsibilities during play, and how do they know if they have done well?

The role of the Narrator is broadly modeled after that of a director, continuing the consistent language around television production. The Narrator doesn't necessarily call all of the shots or force the action, as they are dependent on the talent of their actors, the Colors, to make the episode shine. However, the Narrator can set up, guide, and redirect them to make sure this talent translates into satisfying content for an unseen audience.

Fortunately, the Narrator has a list of Tasks and Turns on their own playbook, just like the other players consult for their Color. The Narrator Playbook will be discussed in detail in this section so that this 'cheat sheet' can be fully understood and utilized during play.

While that covers Narrator responsibilities, there is still that question of how a Narrator knows they are fulfilling their role. As way of introducing this section, let's look at three markers of success for a Narrator during an episode.

Taking Turns in Scenes

When the Narrator begins an episode, they should consider scenes that are "spotlights" to direct attention to a Color or the Squad. These can be set up entirely by a player, or the Narrator can prompt them. For example, a player can set up a scene by responding to the Narrator asking:

What do we see your Color doing that tells us what they're all about?

However, if a player needs direction, the Narrator may prompt them with additional concrete details.

So, the community blood drive is assembled in the school parking lot, and students who don't have after-school activities are lining up to donate. Yellow, what role are you playing in the drive and how are we seeing you manage those responsibilities?

The Narrator should not be afraid to keep the camera moving by framing scenes that are short and to the point! Ask if viewers see anything else before a scene closes and suggest that unresolved conflicts get revisited later.

The Narrator should encourage players to trigger a Turn from their Color sheet during a scene, either by prompting them to react to something or interpreting how they act as a Turn. Sometimes this may require a clarification.

Black's Player: So, when I land on this unfamiliar planet, the first thing I do is hide and try to observe what's going on.

Narrator: Is there a Turn you're trying to hit here?

Black's Player: ...You know what? That's not what I would do. I just charge right into the conflict while the others make a plan. That's the Light Turn, "Interfere with a reliable course of action." [Player takes a token.] You see me just barreling forward with my fists flailing!

Narrator: Oh, got it! You stumble right into a rocky clearing where you see your Blue teammate being led off in glowing chains by a group of beetle-looking monsters...who turn around in surprise when they see you arrive!

Other times, the player may announce the Turn explicitly or it is just obvious that the Turn was triggered.

Narrator: So the monster rears around to face you, Red, and it snarls when it sees your transformer on the ground in front of you. Its tentacles whip out in a flash and it's coming right at you. How do you respond?

Red's Player: [Grabbing one of their tokens] I got this. You see my eyes narrow, and I just somersault forward between its legs while grabbing the transformer. "Face down danger without hesitation." Heavy Turn, baby!

When a player takes a Turn, the Narrator considers their own **Narrator Turns** as a response. For example, after the Black player's Light Turn above, the Narrator uses their own Heavy Turn 'Incapacitate someone' as Black walks right into a trap. After the Red Player's Heavy Turn, the Narrator still responds with 'Alter the landscape' as the creaky wooden floor begins to give out. Or the Narrator plays a Turn for a monster they created.

Narrator Turn: A set of Turns that can only be used by the Narrator as a response to player Turns or when appropriate.

This mechanic is called a "Turn" because turns encourage everyone to hand over play to the next person as a response, each taking their turn. A player's Turn is responded to by the Narrator's Turn, who then may shift the focus to another player who will play a Turn. This keeps the action moving and draws the curtain on conflicts at their most interesting point.

What's to stop a player from 'hoarding' tokens by repeatedly taking Light Turns? First, there's not a mechanical advantage to doing so. Second, it would stifle the character from a storytelling point of view. And third, the player would lack the ability to make bold, decisive choices using Heavy Turns that also play to the Color's tasks. If the free-flowing currency of tokens seems a bit backed up at the table, consider reminding players that tokens work best when they are actually being used!

Managing the Episode

Midway through an episode, the Narrator should find that all players have taken and spent tokens as a result of their Turns and a monster has been announced, even if only offscreen. Now, check in as a group about a particular Task a player is working toward or a Turn someone wants to use. This flags content that the table can help make happen in interesting and challenging ways.

Narrator: Alright, as we come back from this quick break, note that we're about halfway through our episode so it's a good time to review your Color's Tasks. Sound good?

Green's Player: You know, before I was focusing on "Approach the right thing to do from the wrong way to do it", but I'm not really being the trickster misfit I was imagining.

Narrator: Sure, that tracks. Want to change the Task you're aiming for?

Green's Player: Yeah...I'm trying my best even though I have no clue what I'm doing. Hm! "Show that one size doesn't fit all" it is.

During the remaining episode, the Narrator addresses the conflicts on the table (including the monster) and helps players hit interesting Turns that haven't seen play, especially transformations, weapons, and mechs. As soon as the action is dying down during the final moments, the Narrator shifts focus to a round of final spotlight scenes before cutting to credits. Remember, this may be the last time viewers see this character in the episode!

Once play is over, players reflect and unpack as they review a relevant Task they worked toward. Without too formal of a process, everyone decides as a group on one Color that did so in an especially engaging way, and that player can select a Raise. Sometimes the chosen Raise is consistent with what the Color did during the episode, meaning the Raise already took effect, or perhaps the effect of the Raise is instead revealed in a special post-credits scene. Or, if the group will be playing again, this Raise can be set up at the start of the next episode!

Being a Fan of the Players

As a collaborative, story-driven game, *Henshin!* will never pit its Colors against the Narrator in an adversarial way. Instead, players should surprise and challenge each other through the emergent fiction that takes its twists and turns. Throughout play, the Narrator should always be a fan of the players.

Being a fan is different than letting players drive every decision or take the 'easy route' during an episode. For example, a Narrator can be a fan of a character's long-term story arc by introducing unexpected challenges along the way to push them toward that character growth.

Narrator: Okay, so the jack-o'-lantern monster is cornered in your father's shop, and just as there's an opening for you to attack, in walks your unsuspecting dad. What do you do?

Black's Player: Oh, I impulsively go in for the quick attack against the pumpkin! I'd better show that I'm a force to be reckoned with now that I'm suited up. Regular 'Display reckless fighting technique' Turn.

Narrator: Your Frankenstein's monster-themed powers will make this pretty electrifying, just so you know...

Black's Player: It's alive!!!

Narrator: [Consulting Black's Task, "Oblige yourself to others, even if you will let them down"] Alright! Sparks fly, and with the show of power you see that pumpkin scrambling to head out the window in a hurry. And your father...well, a stray lightning bolt hits him straight to the chest—

Black's Player: Huh?!

Narrator: —And he's passed out like a ton of bricks. We'll come back to that in a moment, and just keep in mind your dad is someone you've obliged yourself to protect. Everyone else, what do you do?

The Narrator can push the players and story in new, ambitious directions that are meant to play to their strengths. That is being a fan of the players! The Narrator's playbook is full of Turns and Tasks to reinforce these priorities during play.

Narrator Playbook Introduction

Just like each player consults a Color playbook to better learn their role and use during play, the Narrator playbook serves the same purposes. A full digital worksheet is available as a download at henshingame.com alongside other *Henshin!* resources. The printable worksheet also includes additional notes on first session reminders and creating a monster.

The Narrator playbook serves as a bit of a mirror to the Color playbooks, echoing the same mechanical language and providing a setup or response to player actions. For example, if a player takes a Light Turn and the Narrator struggles for a response, the Narrator could consult their own Heavy Turns to fire back with. Or, while players review their Color's Tasks during the episode as a reminder, the Narrator can also review their own Tasks to make sure nothing gets forgotten.

NARRATOR

Before Play

- Δ If an established Color will not be present, ask, "Will we see this Color, and what might they be doing?"
- Δ If it feels right, ask, "Will a Color have a spotlight this episode?" If so, instruct that player to read aloud their Tasks.
- Δ Review the Squad's Principle, powers, and civilian life. Consider how to push on them.
- Δ Imagine a new location in the community.
- Δ Imagine a new or evolved monster.

During Play

- Δ Spotlight the Colors alone and together.
- Δ Frame tight scenes that drive the episode.
- Δ Play your Turns to highlight the Color's weaknesses and showcase their strengths.
- Δ Use your monster's Turns, too.
- Δ Wrap up the conflict with a promise of more.

After Play

- Δ Request character vignettes before cutting to credits.
- Δ Ask players to review Tasks and vote on who grinded up against these the most. That character takes a Raise at the fictionally appropriate moment.
- Δ Plan how a Connection could become developed or resolved.
- Δ Plan which new Colors could be introduced soon.
- Δ Make notes about everything!

Special Turn

As fiction dictates, the Narrator may write a new player Turn for some or all Colors on a notecard and then remove it when appropriate.

Heavy Turns

After a player's Light Turn, you may:

- Δ Incapacitate someone.
- Δ Pull back on someone's power for now.
- Δ Withdraw badness now, with or without their objective.
- Δ Give someone a reason for vengeance.
- Δ Enact the last step in a devious plan.

Regular Turns

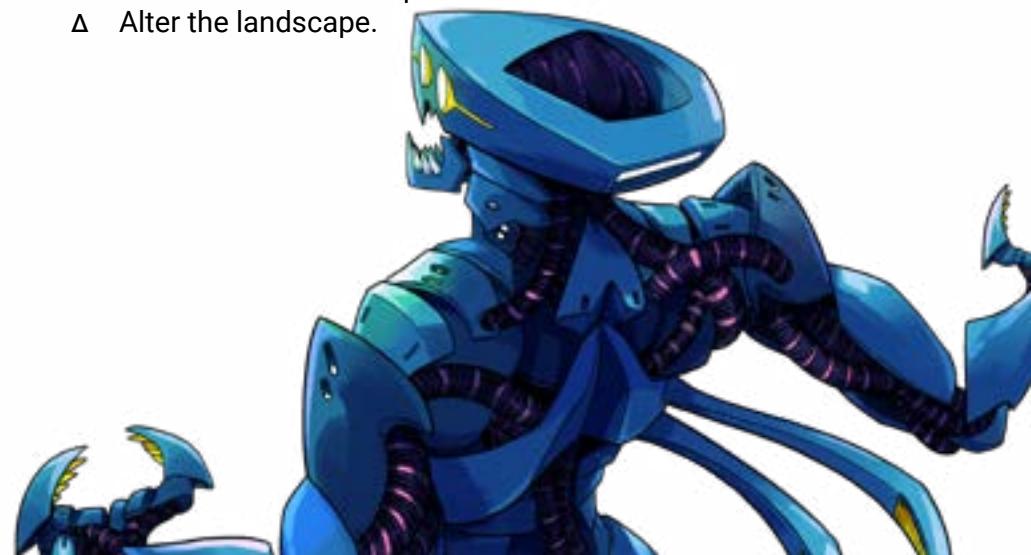
When the time is right, you may always

- Δ Separate someone temporarily.
- Δ Announce badness on the scene.
- Δ Direct unwanted attention toward the Colors.
- Δ Use someone's power against them.
- Δ Put someone else in a compromising situation.

Light Turns

After a player's Heavy Turn, you may still:

- Δ Reveal a threat or monster off-screen.
- Δ Remind Colors of civilian responsibilities.
- Δ Offer an opportunity with a choice or cost.
- Δ Put someone on the spot.
- Δ Alter the landscape.



Using a Narrator's Special Turn

It's the middle of a monster fight, and the Gold Jin-Ho is about to take the brunt of the battle's consequences...

Narrator: Okay, so Twin Beaks is pointing her jeweled scepter square at Jin-Ho, and you're the only thing distracting her while your Squad gets those civilians to safety...

Gold's Player: Yup. Okay. Jin-Ho wants to look like some awesome sacrificial lamb here. I yell out, 'What are you, chicken?'

Narrator: Oh, she stifles a furious ba-gawk!, then you see these two beams of light strike you from the scepter. It feels like someone slices you in half...but strangely, you feel just fine after a second. BUT, everyone else on the scene, Jin-Ho is just...gone!

Gold's Player: Hey, was that my Light Turn, 'Disappear in the face of danger'?

Narrator: *[Writing on a notecard]* Definitely, grab the token. So... you have an extra Special Turn that I'm placing on the table. It'll stick around until I take it back. *[Slides the notecard forward]*

Gold's Player: *[Reading the card]* 'When you betray someone who trusts you and totally forget it afterward, take a Token.' Whoa, like some split personality?!

Narrator: Yeah, maybe Twin Beak's powers had something to do with that...anyway, we all know the Turn exists even if the characters don't know what is happening yet. Let's cut to a scene back at the base!

Narrator Special Turns

While the Turns on the Narrator playbook represent a broad spectrum of mechanical actions to use during play, sometimes a specific mechanic needs to be temporarily introduced. This should be responsive to the story, as in a mechanic that makes sense in the fiction, and may possibly be planned ahead of time.

Swapping personalities, breaking a transformer, altering a weapon or mech's powers—all could introduce a new Special Turn created by the Narrator on the fly. This Turn is then available and visible to the player(s) affected so that they can be aware when it triggers, buying in the players to this new action rather than it being a 'behind the scenes' effect. Because this Turn is actionable for players, it must be written out (on a notecard is suggested) and placed on the table.

When the fiction has changed so that the Narrator Special Turn is no longer in effect, like un-swapping personalities, fixing a transformer, or restoring weapon or mech powers, the Narrator can simply retrieve that notecard so that their Special Turn is no longer in play.

Narrator Heavy Turns

Especially when a player just initiated a Light Turn, though sometimes there will just be a perfect opportunity on its own, Narrator Heavy Turns take control of the story in a way that the Colors just have to respond to.

Incapacitate someone.

If danger is on the scene and someone creates the right opening, incapacitating a Color or friendly character is always an option. This can mean getting knocked out cold, being physically restrained, or maybe straight up disappearing mysteriously. Someone is out of play for a bit, which shifts the focus onto what others are going to do about it.

Pull back on someone's power for now.

Something powerful is now working at a diminished capacity—a suit, weapon, mech, ability, mystical artifact. The cause may not be known at the moment, or it's entirely obvious what needs to be done, but most importantly that power is not to be relied on in

this crucial moment. For the time being, this someone will need to find another way to address the problem at hand.

Withdraw badness now, with or without their objective.

'Badness' is intentionally open-ended here! It probably refers to a monster or minion on the scene, but it could also be a plague unleashed on the community, or even the Big Bad's holographic presence in the heros' base.

But Heavy Turns are meant to be impactful—why does withdrawing badness (with objective in hand or not) have significance? Simply put, it lets badness leaves *on its own terms* and reminds the audience that it can, and will, show up again when it wants to.

Give someone a reason for vengeance.

Did a Color just make a personal affront to a monster? Did a Connection or community member just get slighted? Is someone, somewhere, now out for revenge? They are, and the Colors now know who or why.

Enact the last step in a devious plan.

Whether the plan was announced or known to others, somehow the very last step has fallen into place. The Squad should be acutely aware of these machinations now, and they will soon have to deal with the master plan's results in its full, insidious glory.

Narrator Regular Turns

At any time, these Narrator Regular Turns introduce a complication that may not necessarily prompt an immediate response from the Colors, but will snowball into greater consequences if left ignored.

Separate someone temporarily.

At any time, it's perfectly reasonable to separate the Colors from each other or from civilians they are with at the moment. It introduces tension that maybe doesn't need to be dealt with at this moment, yet it may add complications as the conflict grows.

Announce badness on the scene.

It's here! The open-ended badness, monster, or other threat that it is, can simply be announced to arrive when appropriate. They tend to leave as unexpectedly as they arrive, so there's no reason to hold back this Regular Turn when the mood is right.

Direct unwanted attention toward the Colors.

Whereas someone was not paying attention to the Colors' actions before, they certainly are now. And now that they're aware, they are likely preparing for whatever the Colors will do next!

Use someone's power against them.

Each of the Colors, and even the monsters, are chock full of interesting and effective powers at their disposal. What happens when a power suddenly doesn't work as expected, perhaps with dangerous, unintended consequences? This temporary setback may not be an immediate threat, but it will introduce complications that the Squad will have to deal with in some way!

Put someone else in a compromising situation.

While the Colors are capable heroes who can shake off most blows, this Regular Turn is a reminder to involve our wonderfully fragile civilian members of the community, especially Connections. When a monster wreaks havoc on the city, what happens to the everyday folks without fancy suits or weapons at their disposal?

Narrator Light Turns

While things are going the way of the Squad, especially evidenced by their pulling out the perfect Heavy Turn of their own, these Narrator Light Turns offer appropriate responses that still set up future fun to come.

Reveal a threat or monster off-screen.

Badness exists, certainly, even if it's not on the scene with the Squad or in their community at the moment. Perhaps their presence echoes in the current setting, like giant monster-shaped footprints in the city park, or perhaps it's simply voiced by the Narrator of what the audience sees the monster plotting far, far away from the Squad.

Remind Colors of civilian responsibilities.

The capable heroes can take on threats that come hurdling at their awesome mechs and superhuman suits—but did they study for that geometry exam, or pick up their grandma's medication, or show up on time for that volunteer gig? This is a not-so-subtle reminder that there is life beyond the monster that plans to level the city.

Offer an opportunity with a choice or cost.

Throw something opportune at a Color or the Squad—ideally, something too good to pass up. The only catch? There's a price tag attached. That amulet of power to upgrade the weapons to defeat the latest baddie is riiight over there. Sure, there's a yawning chasm of fire with a rickety bridge in between this and the Squad, but the opportunity, well, it sure is available!

Put someone on the spot.

Simply put, the spotlight was elsewhere, maybe on the whole Squad, the unfolding action, or what one specific person was doing. Shift the focus to someone else so that everyone has eyes on them. Others are waiting on this person now. What do they do next?

Alter the landscape.

While the Squad focuses on themselves and their weapons and the monsters they battle, the landscape that surrounds them is still responsive and may change in unexpected ways. That video arcade where they were planning a showdown? It closed early and the door is padlocked. The space station base orbiting around Earth? Sensors show that oxygen levels are decreasing. The industrial district that mechs have been stomping around through? That power station looks ready to short-circuit and plunge the neighborhood into darkness.

Notes on Combat

At its heart, *Henshin!* is a story game, not a combat simulator. The storytelling medium of *tokusatsu* on television and film inspired the game, and *Henshin!*'s mechanics serve to drive satisfying personal arcs and conflicts. And yet, when a fight breaks out in the game (and it will happen quite often), players may look to some alternate set of rules to dictate how combat works—after all, had they been engaging with social mechanics earlier, they would now use battle mechanics, right?

Or is combat as story-driven as the rest of gameplay?

More Than A War Game

The presumption that fighting should be handled differently than other interactions is not totally unwarranted for the tabletop role-playing game genre. The roots of tabletop gaming are essentially war simulations, extensions of chess-like board games that instead involved semi-realistic fighting units. When these made the leap to players instead acting out specialized characters, the stage was set for more personal stories to become part of gameplay. And yet even contemporary role-playing games still use military language like 'campaign' to describe long-term play.

While these battle simulations can definitely be a fun game, does the story they tell accurately represent a conflict we would watch in *sentaï*? We rarely expect a protagonist to unexpectedly drop dead mid-episode because they happened to run out of some arbitrary measurement called 'hit points'. And if Red has the highest attack value and Black has the strongest armor rating, and Pink gets a bonus for...cuteness, then players are motivated to metagame the most effective Squad to win the most battles. Again, this can be a fun approach to gaming, but doesn't match the expectations of *Henshin!*'s core aim and mechanics.

Basically, special combat rules in *Henshin!* would encourage a game-within-a-game, when instead the motivation is to use combat as a tool to continue driving fun story and action.

Think Cinematic

The imaginary special effects crew pulls out all the stops for a *Henshin!* fight scene, which also means this combat tends to run short. That's great. Make the battles short, impactful, and set the stage for later.

When the Narrator helps set up a scene with physical conflict, they should always be guided by what is at stake. This could include hitting a Color's Task ("I'm going to prove that brain beats brawn!"), involving a Connection ("Something's going to happen to my hapless cousin!"), threatening an external story element ("Don't let her get away with that transformer!"), or, simply, needing to help out the Squad. When the stakes are high, every one of those could be involved.

Not only do the Colors and their companions have personal investment in the conflict, but hopefully the foes involved do, too. From the Big Bad to the General to the lowly Foot Soldiers, they should clearly telegraph their motivation for resorting to fighting. And if the antagonists have some fun defining features, they quickly become characters that the players love to hate and look forward to seeing reappear later.

If the stakes are not quite clear in a combat, the Narrator can always pull back to curtain a bit to help drive momentum, as seen below.

Narrator: You realize that the shouting at the quad isn't from the pep rally anymore, but these bluish squid-like creatures flying into people's faces!

Yellow's Player: Hey, that's no school spirit! I have friends in school government who would get attacked, so I take charge and run over.

Blue's Player: I'm hanging back, trying to figure out what's happening here. Why would these Cephalo-pows take on a crowded school event for no reason?

Narrator: Er, while you're deep in thought, we cut to Mermessa's sky fortress, where she's looking in her reflecting pool at the scene in the quad. "Perfect, make a big scene, my contemptible calamari. No one will even notice when the real prize gets taken away..." That just happens off-screen.

Blue's Player: Alright, I have an idea! I start heading over to the clock-tower where I've stowed away some tools. I shout back to the Squad, 'You need to stay alive for precisely three minutes until this is ready!'

Lastly, cinematic combat should draw to a close before the fighting gets drawn out. If every player has played a Turn or two and

no major story threads are left dangling, the Narrator should then find a quick, satisfying way to wrap up the fight. Not every battle is to the death, after all—maybe the foe gets away, or presents the heroes with a difficult decision, or becomes captured, or makes a sympathetic appeal. All of these options are fun because they set up the potential for more interesting story elements down the road.

Combat Spotlights

While the draw of combat is fast-paced action among a diverse cast in a dynamic environment, managing all of these imaginary elements can be particularly difficult in the theater of the mind. In fact, it rarely hurts to sketch a brief map and throw down some tokens just to orient characters around a space (though the moment players lock themselves in analysis paralysis by trying to navigate the landscape, crumble up that map and point to the Color's Turns). So any way to manage equal participation from everyone at the table is appreciated when the action is at a fever pitch.

Rather than expecting Turns and player interactions to flow naturally, the Narrator can lock in some shared spotlight management by simply prompting players in order around the table. Sometimes players not in the immediate action are on a slightly different timeline than the player preceding them, which is okay, and sometimes a player is unexpectedly reacting to what the previous player just did, throwing plans out the window!

When the Narrator goes around the table, it's helpful to provide a short prompt to set up each player. This can involve reminding the player to work toward a Turn if it naturally fits the action, since it's especially satisfying to see tokens fly during combat. Or the simplest prompt is, "What do we see you doing now?" The Narrator responds appropriately to each player's response, keeping the action dynamic and changing.

This fixed spotlight management is convenient for pacing combat, since once the Narrator has gone around the table twice, the battle is probably ready to wrap up. Remember, short, impactful, and setting the stage for later!

Turns to Drive Action

Beyond setting up a scene with stakes and managing the spotlight, the Narrator has another tool to help escalate and resolve action: their own Turns. More so than usual, the Narrator Turns and **Monster Turns** are an especially effective way to respond to players during

Monster Turn: A set of Turns that can only be used by the Narrator when that monster is on the scene.

combat, especially when players trigger Turns of their own.

Returning to the example from earlier, let's look at how these turns can keep combat flowing.

Narrator: Okay, so Yellow, you're heading into the quad where the Cephalo-pows are wreaking havoc with the students, Blue, you're off to the clocktower to hatch a very quick plan, and Black, you see this creature with a giant fish head, lantern on top, swinging some hooks behind the cheer squad. Yellow, you're up first!

Yellow's Player: I can't run into the crowd like this—I need my suit and weapon. *[Does the hand signals and throws down a token for the Heavy Turn, "Transform when danger appears"]*

Narrator: Awesome! We've seen that transformation before and it still looks awesome. *[Consulting the Narrator's Light Turn, "Remind Colors of civilian responsibilities"]* Yellow, you see the student body turn toward transformed you and cheer, then you see a half-dozen flying squids heading right at your bumbling school prez cousin. Blue, what do we see you doing in the clocktower?

Blue's Player: I'm pretty sure this event is some sort of trap, so I'm setting up some sniper projectile from the clocktower since it has a full view of the quad.

Narrator: So, like, a gun?!

Blue's Player: No, I'm building something with a net that I stashed here earlier...

Narrator: Great, let's circle back to see your creation when it's ready, since it looks like you're working toward that Heavy Turn of devising a tool. Alright, Black, this Angerfish monster seems ready to catch the unsuspecting cheer squad, so what's up?

Black's Player: I don't waste time saving those nerds in broad daylight. I just charge right in to the crowd, barreling right toward them.

Narrator: You're kinda outnumbered and outpowered, but you just jump in hook-first?

Black's Player: Yup...here, "Take the brunt of someone's burden."

[Grabs a token for the Light Turn]

Narrator: Love it. Okay, pulling out the Monster's Heavy Turn in response, "Ensnare someone by hook or by crook," we see this giant fish hook just pierce through your chest, Black. But there's no physical injury, you can just tell you are devilishly tethered to Angerfish.

Black's Player: Unf...but I looked good....doing it...

Narrator: So Yellow, you can see Black's sacrifice for the cheer squad and your cousin is still about to get tentacle-smacked...what do you do?

Meeting a Color's Heavy Turn with a Narrator or Monster Light Turn, Light with Heavy, and Regular with Regular (or whenever the situation feels right), there are mechanics in place to keep the action building during a tense combat scene. Hitting one Turn after another isn't necessary for great combat, but players do tend to hold on to tokens to spend using their coolest abilities when the stakes are high.

Notes on Mechs

While **Mechs** are not reserved exclusively for combat, we're still most likely to see them summoned during a fight. That doesn't mean a Color couldn't have a vignette scene where they try to commune with their sentient mech, or use their Heavy Turn to try to repair a busted Mech between fights. But when Mechs are summoned during combat, how do players use their Color's Turns while piloting a giant robot?

When all is said and done, the focus of *Henshin!* is on the characters portraying Colors, not their awesome robots. The Mech would just be a semi-magical hunk of metal without the only person who can pilot them, after all, and their story is never going to be as compelling as our heroes. So the presence of a Mech during conflict should not take away the spotlight from the Color, including their Tasks and Turns.

As the pilot of their respective Mech, the Color takes actions just as they normally would as is appropriate to the fiction, including the player triggering Turns. Not every Turn may be relevant to the

Mech: A giant robot that is piloted by a Color.

situation and the stakes, but they will continue to reinforce that the Color is defined by some tropes and will use those to work toward that all-important Task.

Narrator: Okay, so from behind the controls of the White Mega-Yeti, you see that the phaser cannon has been charging all along while others were distracted with the battle. It's aimed to take out your base from miles away, and it's glowing like it can't hold any more power!

White's Player: It's too late! You hear me over the radio, 'I didn't think this would happen so soon...but thank you!' And we leap over to the cannon to just stand in the way of the beam.

Narrator: Oh! [Checking White's Turns] Is this...

White's Player: 'Absorb incoming damage in the form of a scar', yup.

Narrator: And we see a brilliant orb of light just growing and building around the cannon and White's Mech...and then everything turns white, and in the afterimage you see a silhouette of the Mega-Yeti with just this massive crater in the chest, then everything goes quiet.

White's Player: Remember...me...

Narrator: We're not done with you yet, but think about the permanent scar that we see later, either on you or the Mech. Alright, moving on to the rest of the Squad...

Using examples from other playbooks, Green's 'stumble upon an unlikely, perfect hit' could be its mech piercing the exact chink in the giant monster's armor to find its weak spot. Pink's 'display innovative fighting technique' could involve their mech using power lines as a jump rope only to tangle up their opponent for a moment. Or Purple's surprisingly heartfelt inquiry, 'Ask someone, "What's the point of being good all the time?"' could be sent over radio from one mech to another during the heat of battle.

The focus remains on the Colors, and while their Mechs may lack never-before-seen unique Turns and secret powers, the Mechs share the spotlight for only a short, cool battle or two before returning to their resting place. Taking into account the imaginary special effects budget of a *Henshin!* episode, the giant robots will look awesome for a short time only, budgetary restraints and all,

probably for a pivotal combat scene toward the end of the episode. Like any other combat, make it impactful and keep it from dragging along before setting up the next scene. Like their suit or weapon, the Mech is an attractive and engaging means to an end, and ultimately we just want to see what the Color is going to do next.

Setting Up a Squad

Aliyah: Hey everyone! So since this is our first game of *Henshin!* together and we're not using a premade Module, we're going to start from scratch to build, like, a vibe for the team. I'll be Narrating!

Percy: Oh, the game calls that a Squad! That's the team?

Yosef: Hashtag team goals?

Rosa: It's Squad. Here's the worksheet for forming it.

Aliyah: Yeah, that's our guide! We'll follow the steps sorta procedurally, but also brainstorm as a group. The goal is to collaborate so that we all have input—

Percy: Can it be like movie genre themed, where each color is a—

Aliyah: —but to not get bogged down in committee work, either. So you all have a voice in a helpful way. Since I'll be the Narrator in play, I'll help guide this but will stay out of idea creation.

Rosa: Got it. So we all understand the Agenda, right?

Yosef: Uh..."set a special effects budget and use every cent?" I have...
[loose change rattling on the table]

Rosa: It's probably a state of mind. Like, if we all want sweet, detailed suits and weapons to be a focus...

Aliyah: ...then we'll emphasize that, yeah. Or if the location is a priority, we flesh that out.

Percy: Oh, like we're making a TV show! Can I be the gaffer? What's a gaffer?

Yosef: Got it, let's look at "Squad Concept".

Aliyah: I got this. Okay, so each of you grab two notecards from the table, and on each notecard, write some short simple concept you'd like to define the team. Like "movie genres", for example.

Yosef: But not pitch a whole thought-out series concept?

Aliyah: Right, short and sweet.

Yosef: Oh...

[Rosa, Yosef, and Percy write their concepts, then the six notecards are facedown in a pile on the table]

Aliyah: Nice work, everyone! So I shuffled this pile and I'm going to read them out loud anonymously. Then you all will vote on the ones you think would work out!

Percy: One vote each?

Rosa: Actually, the guide says vote for each one that pops. So we can vote as much as we want.

Aliyah: Yup! Okay, so listen up: "Systems of the human body...basketball team positions (?)...biology...prehistoric creatures (besides dinosaurs)...space opera...mutations"

Yosef: Wow, we're weird. Also, body stuff sort of shows up more than once.

Aliyah: I think each of these could be developed into its own cool concept, but after voting, we're going to narrow these down to just two that we mash together. Also, I was expecting to see 'movie genres'...?

Percy: [shrugs]

[Aliyah reads each notecard again, this time tallying votes for each.]

Aliyah: So even though Percy voted for every concept, there are two clear winners: Systems of the human body and mutations.

Rosa: Oh, like some science-y body horror type thing?

Yosef: And each character we play represents systems of the body, like muscular, skeletal, digestive...

Percy: And when they combine, they form one giant fully-fleshed out human!

Aliyah: Oh, that's actually real cool and weird. Okay. So we're excited and we have a concept. Working title...'Bio-Mutants'. [Takes notes on the Form a Squad worksheet]

Rosa: Don't change it. So the guide says we need a "power source"... the options listed don't fit, but the last says "something tangible".

Yosef: Like...a microscope? Scalpel? Test tube?

Aliyah: That's cool, maybe you each have a test tube on our belt that you all drink to trigger our powers?

Percy: And each has a different color-coded liquid?

Aliyah: Right, color-coded test tubes works. Okay, so some other character you won't play knows all about these tubes, maybe even gives it to the characters. We call it the Custodian.

Percy: The science lab janitor, yes.

Rosa: No...I mean, maybe, but no. Some sort of science expert...

Yosef: Called The Chemist?

Rosa: Oh, and maybe they've tried out past experiments on themselves with...interesting results.

Percy: Mutations!

Aliyah: Ha, okay, let's put in a pin in the Chemist and we'll see her later. Next up is 'Adversaries'...

[The group comes up with a Big Bad mutant obsessed with molding humanity in their image, a shapeshifting General who masquerades as a city official, and Foot Soldiers called Beakers who are living lab equipment that cause havoc. They discuss the weapons and mechs, which aren't their biggest priority, and develop a transformation hand signal that looks like mixing and swigging their test tubes. The group decides the Squad will fight for the principle of Beauty, placing value in one's spirit instead of getting hung up over physical mutations, and start drawing out a map of the setting as they define locations in their city that houses the science lab.]

Aliyah: Bio-Mutants is ready to go! Now, everyone chooses a Color playbook and then we'll do introductions before we start our episode...

First Session

Every Narrator will experience their first session in the director's seat, and may repeatedly experience setting up the first session for a new group of players! While the first episode is not mechanically different than any other, there may be more needs to address on the part of the players as they introduce their Colors with growing familiarity. Not only does a solid first episode help the players feel confident in their storytelling abilities, but it sets them up to be excited to play even more!

The Narrator playbook contains a list of steps to kick off the first session of Henshin:

- △ Colorfully depict *sentai* and the Colors.
- △ Choose a Module or form a new Squad.
- △ Ask players to read aloud all Color flavor text before then choosing one.
- △ Once Colors are filled out, ask players to read their Special Turn and one or two interesting Tasks. And ask many questions during introductions.
- △ Explain Turns and remind players to work toward earning their first token.

Some larger principles are helpful to keep in mind throughout the first session, not just to get it started, which are included below.

Getting to the Action

Before sitting down to play *Henshin!*, pitch each other on interesting concepts for setting and aesthetics. Don't worry if it's simple or obvious! You'll develop interesting twists once you're starting play. While you could spend an entire session forming a Squad from scratch, arriving with a distinct concept or two (or using an included Module) helps get the group playing sooner.

When everyone sits down to form a Squad, the Narrator manages the "Form a Squad" worksheet (found in the digital downloads) to guide everyone along the process. The Narrator consults the Agenda, asks questions, and takes lots of notes. Keep this moving and if players are stumped on an element, suggest to revisit it during play.

Once the table is at the “Introductions” section of the worksheet, the Narrator should pass out the printed Color worksheets. Try folding these in thirds with the artwork facing out, encouraging players to choose based off mostly the brief Color description. This cuts down on player deliberation so that Colors are chosen and then introduced! For a first session, it may be helpful to limit the selection of playbooks to the Core Colors (Red, Blue, Black, Green, Yellow, and Pink).

While the players are introducing their Colors, it’s fair game for the Narrator to follow up with some pointed questions. Not only can this clarify what the character is all about to the table, but this may provide some helpful hooks for the Narrator to follow up on later. Types of questions include:

- Δ What is your Connection’s take on you?
- Δ Which Task do you want to focus on starting out?
- Δ What does your character think about [other Color at the table]?

Take notes! The Narrator can start thinking about opening scene ideas, or pitch the players on framing up their own individual ‘spotlight’ of something the character would likely be doing. As the Narrator starts developing some directions the story may go, keep circling back to that Task for each Color that was called out before play. And if an additional character in the community is needed in a scene, always try to include those Connections that become fleshed out by these Narrator questions.

When concrete locations come up during this time, it may be helpful to jot those onto a blank sheet of paper that serves as a ‘map’. This should be loose and evolving, mostly consisting of location names, some drawings to represent these or other features, and a relative proximity of some locations to others. This map is less of a rulebook (well, it would take 25 minutes to get from your home to the coffee shop, unless you take the freeway...) and more of a cheat sheet (so I decide to meet up at, uh...oh, the coffee shop! and I pick up ice cream here on the way so you see me eating that).

As introductions come to a close before the first episode, the Narrator likely has their own notes about the Colors so far, a rough map sketched out for the table, and a Squad or Module worksheet for everyone with some shared aesthetics and priorities. Players will have their own Color playbooks with some notes about

their own and other characters, plus a tented notecard with the character’s name, Color, and the character’s preferred pronouns for ease of use.

This setup will pave the way for a smoother first session! Before future episodes in the season, this level of preparation will not be needed. Introductions are not a priority unless a new Color is in play, and fewer questions will likely be asked by the Narrator. But for the first session, players may not even be comfortable talking about their Color in detail or imagining a day in their life, so a bit of prep before play will greatly aid those opening scenes.

First Session Play Priorities

So long as the group is collaborating with each other to build on Tasks and the shared setting during play, the first episode will likely run itself! However, the first episode also acts a bit like a pilot, so it may benefit from hitting certain satisfying notes so as to set up the future season.

One thing to consider, either as group conversation or in the Narrator’s planning, is what relationship the Colors already have to each other and their powers. Have the Colors already met each other, or will they meet for the first time? Do they know that these transformations exist, and have they done so before? Is the Big Bad already an established threat in the setting, or will we be seeing them for the first time?

Regardless of whether the characters are introduced to these aspects for the first time or not, the imaginary audience will still be introduced to these elements for the first time, so some sort of introductions will be in order. With that in mind, some notes to hit during the first episode include the following, roughly in this order:

- Δ **Individual Color spotlight scenes.** These are ideally framed by the player and should be very short slice-of-life vignettes all about that character.
- Δ **A group scene with the entire Squad.** This gives the Narrator an opportunity to watch social dynamics bounce off the Colors.
- Δ **Introduction to the transformers.** Whether it’s new to the Colors or to only the audience, the power (known or unknown) of these transformers should be explicitly announced.
- Δ **Introduction of a monster.** This could be a Big Bad or General or a new monster who will be featured only this episode.

- Δ **Introduction of the suits.** Obviously, the Colors should transform during an episode, and since this will be the first time we see transformations happen, a bit more detail can be given to the special effects of that sequence.

If those notes are hit during the first episode, it will likely be a solid introduction to what this season will be all about. It could end on a cliffhanger in which there is no resolution to the monster or the Color's new powers, like a two-part pilot with high stakes clearly set for the next episode, or it could have a tidy resolution of defeating a monster, framing spotlight scenes with the Colors again, and including an ominous threat from the Big Bad for the season to come.

Sometimes the first session is a pilot for a season to come, and sometimes it is a standalone single episode for a story that won't be revisited again. For the latter, this introduction to a series pitch can be so engaging that the players will still find themselves deciding on the actor or actress who would play their Color, choosing a soundtrack for credits, even drawing fanart from this single episode long after play.

FORM A SQUAD

Agenda

- Δ Set a special effects budget and use every cent.
- Δ Determine unique aesthetics from the Squad Concepts.
- Δ Embrace diverse Colors, personalities, and roles.
- Δ Guide tension between a Color's civilian and hero life, including with each other.
- Δ Start with the simple and obvious, then expand on that during play.

Squad Concept

- Δ **Everyone:** Each write 2 simple concepts onto separate notecards.
- Δ **Narrator:** Shuffle and read aloud all notecards.
- Δ **Everyone:** Vote for each concept that pops. The most voted becomes the first Squad Concept.
- Δ **Narrator:** Shuffle the next 3 most popular notecards. Select one randomly as the second Squad Concept.
- Δ **Everyone:** Discuss how these are synthesized.

Power Source

- Δ The power source is a: *coin, crystal, buckler, electronic device, something tangible*
- Δ The Custodian of this power is a: *wise mentor, eternal alien, former Color, sentient robot, someone knowledgeable*

Monsters & Villains

- Δ The Big Bad desires the power source for: *absolute control, vast wealth, undeserved freedom, age-old revenge, something unyielding*
- Δ Their General is kept on hand because they are: *crafty, capable, blameworthy, fawning, something useful*
- Δ Their Foot Soldiers are the first line of offense because they are: *pesky, predictable, unruly, maddening, something inconsequential*

Weapons & Mechs

- Δ When the weapons combine, their Ultimate Weapon is (choose a couple): *piercing, slashing, scoped, blunt, hi-tech, antique, something impressive*
- Δ When the mechs combine, their Ultimate Form is (choose a few): *gigantic, terrifying, winged, limber, shielded, blade-wielding, blaster-shooting, something awesome*

Transformation

Create the signature hand motion that players use whenever Colors transform.

Principle

The Squad currently fights for: *Beauty, Compassion, Courage, Fairness, Helpfulness, Honesty, Justice, Peace, Responsibility, Service, Unity*

Civilian Life

- Δ The Colors share some obligation through: *school, work, an elite order, a promise, something demanding*
- Δ The setting is named: *Woodfield, Highland Park, Black Hawk, Port Evans, Sylvan Beach, Proto Station, Air Shinobi Academy, City of Zula, somewhere worth defending*
- Δ The Colors share a base that is: *a laboratory, a storage room, a land lost in time, a command center, somewhere unnoticed*
- Δ A location in the community that the Colors share is: *a coffee shop, ancient nearby woods, a classroom, a dojo, somewhere familiar*
- Δ List the Connections made by the Colors and ask questions.

Introductions

Going around the table, each player introduces their Color with:

- Δ Name
- Δ Looks
- Δ Connection
- Δ Suit, Weapon, Mech, Attacks
- Δ Special Turn

Ongoing Season

With the first episode finished and a promise of more to come, the focus shifts from the arc of a single episode to the larger arcs of a season. This is your chance for the story to breathe!

Keeping with the terminology of *sentai* on television, a season of *Henshin!* is likely going to consist of about a dozen or so episodes. When that season comes to a natural conclusion, the same series could always boot up a new season, perhaps changing the Big Bad and some Colors or civilians, or an entirely new series could be started using the Form a Squad worksheet or a pre-made Module setting.

When thinking ahead to the flow of a season, there are several larger story beats that will likely get explored. These may include:

- Δ Exploring multiple Tasks for each Color
- Δ Establishing Color abilities or personality through Raises
- Δ Retiring a character in order to take on a new Color playbook
- Δ Introducing a Special Color
- Δ A grand reveal from the Custodian or Big Bad
- Δ Storming the base of the Big Bad for a showdown

Episodes will likely take on a familiar flow, with the Narrator taking notes before and after sessions to follow up on new monsters and setting locations, Color spotlights, Connection entanglements, and the Squad's principle. However, not every episode needs to follow the same formula of characters addressing a personal problem, a monster is introduced, the monster also threatens this personal problem, and then the Squad is able to resolve these issues together.

For example, consider opening a episode mid-battle, perhaps even with Mechs involved! The fallout and consequences of this conflict could propel the story in new directions, such as focusing on how to repair and bond with the Mechs, or cleaning up the civilian mess after a monster has wrecked havoc on the community.

If all of the Colors have had a sufficient spotlight in episodes, consider choosing to spotlight an antagonist, such as the General. Perhaps they see the process of how the General tries and fails to organize monsters as a threat for a comedic treatment, or perhaps

they see the General in a sympathetic light as it struggles with commands from the Big Bad. Humanizing the monsters in some fashion helps the Squad root for the enemies they want to see go down, and sometimes focus less on eliminating threats and more on ways to solve a more nuanced menace.

Or, talk with the players about consciously setting up a light, fun 'filler' episode. If everyone is bought in, then there's no problem to put the big threat on hold for just one episode! Introduce a brand new setting, like a beach, festival, or hot springs. Bring in a fun, wacky monster or revisit one from a past episode. Try out a weird power or ability, like something causing the Squad to all switch personalities or a monster changing the community's entire water supply to truth serum. Why not? This could offer a chance for the players to breathe, especially if some heavy plot elements have been in the foreground.

Narrator: Hey everyone! I wanted to pitch you all on changing gears a bit for our session today. We've been focusing a lot on the reveal that the Big Bad is Red's mother and the threat of the Cosmic Battalion preparing for an all-out attack. What about something lighter with a change of scenery, just to explore our character dynamics and give the Squad a reprieve?

Red's Player: Oh, that actually sounds nice. When was the last time we all, like, hung out?

Yellow's Player: There was that time we were piloting mechs through the supernova and we had a moment after the engines died...okay, you're right. It's been awhile.

Narrator: Great! So those mountains about an hour out of town, there's these natural hot springs there and this really sleepy resort.

Purple's Player: Could I...treat everyone to this? Maybe secretly? Like I have an ulterior motive for removing the Squad from where the action is, though I also sort of want to hang out with them.

Red's Player: Honestly, this could be a chance to try to figure out what Purple is all about...

Narrator: Got it! So, we're going to open driving up a steep mountain road to the entrance of Elk Butte Hot Springs. Think mossy wood, open-air springs with a view, lots of fog and birdsong. Each of your

tickets arrived anonymously by mail. Who could those tickets have come from? Take a look at your Tasks, and then let's set up a short scene in the car...

Eventually, plot threads are going to wrap up and the threats will become resolved. Wrap up with a strong finale! As the action dies down, put extra emphasis on Color vignettes at the end of the episode as the audience may see these characters for the final time. The players should be very comfortable taking the lead on framing these by now, and really, they have put in the hard work this season and it's their time to shine.

Monsters and Villains

Portraying imaginative monsters in *Henshin!* may just be the most fun part of being the Narrator. The monsters present serious threats, causing Colors to respond with their weapons and abilities, but they also are weird, memorable, funny, gross, and sometimes a little lovable. The Narrator gets to inhabit this role for the short term the monster is on the scene, especially since many stick around for only one episode.

Monsters can be created ahead of time, such as determining the Big Bad and General during Squad creation or from a Module, or scribbling notes on this week's monster right before play. Monsters can also be created on the fly, as there's a pretty quick procedure to setting up this character.

Creating a Monster

Monsters in *sentai* tend to be inspired by commonplace or well-known ideas, sometimes multiple ones mashed up in unexpected ways. To get this ball rolling, the first step is to find examples of recognizable items from more than one category of the following: **creature, machine, everyday object, weapon, vice**. Not every combination will vibe, but the creative juices will get flowing! For readily available examples, check out the Monster Table found in the appendix. As an example, let's choose Hermit Crab, Net, and Greed.

Next, take a moment to explore some aspects of each of these examples. These allow you to choose some characteristics of each that will gel with the final monster. If you are open to collaborating with players before the episode, you could pitch

the players on offering these characteristics to introduce some unexpected ideas. Using our example, we'll land on the aspects of hermit crabs seeking new objects to use as a shell, weighted nets being an effective way to capture someone, and greed could be represented by endlessly collecting junk. So, perhaps we have a net-wielding hermit crab out to collect their next home by any means possible! Now that we have an idea for our newly-named Skirmish Crab, what do they do during play?

Like the Colors and the Narrator, monsters get a set of Turns all to their own. The Narrator can put these Turns into play only when the monster is on the scene, and these Turns are unique to the monster's odd nature.

First off, consider something normal that we would see the monster doing as a Regular Turn. This doesn't need to be particularly effective or impressive, but should instead sum up what the monster is all about. For Skirmish Crab, a suitable Regular Turn would be "Track down a new home." This could mean trying to steal something in the community, or even a powerful weapon from the Squad, to use as its shell!

Next, we turn our focus to the particularly dangerous or effective thing that the monster can pull off in the form of a Heavy Turn. This should be particularly potent, as it may get used only once or twice. Our crustacean example could have the Heavy Turn "Ensnare something until they're done with it." So if they occupy a home, they won't let go until something better comes along.

There's one more Heavy Turn that every monster has: "Multiply height, then let's fight!". True to much of the *sentai* genre, monsters have the ability to grow as large as a building when the time is right, such as after gathering enough power or being transformed by the Big Bad. Once grown, the only option for taking

Steps to Build a Monster

List an example from at least two categories: *creature, machine, everyday object, weapon, vice*.

Then, ask players to **describe aspects** of each example. Use these to synthesize a new, unique monster.

Write a Regular Turn describing what it does reliably.

Write a Heavy Turn describing how it is effective or dangerous. Then add the **additional Turn**, "Multiply height, then let's fight!"

Write a Light Turn describing when it reveals a flaw or fails to act.

on this monster is for the Squad to summon their Mechs.

Finally, every monster also needs a Light Turn, which describes when the creature either fails to act effectively or reveals some flaw. When the Colors take on the monster with an appropriate Heavy Turn of their own, this Light Turn from the monster may be the appropriate response. For Skirmish Crab, “Become enthralled by greener pastures” can sum up pitfalls of their greedy quest.

Every monster should be a unique combination of relatable elements with Heavy, Regular, and Light Turns. When created before the episode, this monster write-up becomes a convenient reference for the Narrator. Just like the players will look to their Color playbook for the perfect Turn to pull out during a tense situation, the Narrator can do the same thing for their monster!

This section includes original monsters created by *Henshin!* fans. These can be used as inspiration for your own creations, or they can be easily imported into many settings!



Ground-Flounder

This dried-out, fearsome flatfish leaves a trail of salt in its path...and terror in its wake!

Heavy Turn

- △ Wield a serrated broadsword pulled from its dorsal fin
- △ Multiply height, then let's fight!

Regular Turn

- △ Slither absolutely flat across any surface

Light Turn

- △ Rush to a water source to hydrate for awhile

Concept by Michael Wight

Scrapegoat

The rockstar goat lives to stage rowdy concerts and will definitely trash the hotel room afterward...



Heavy Turn

- △ Deafen crowds with a killer performance
- △ Multiply height, then let's fight!

Regular Turn

- △ Try to headbutt anything without rhythm

Light Turn

- △ Climb a tree to practice guitar chops

Concept by John Robinson



Glass Weaver

They collect the spirit of their prey to absorb into its heart made of glass...

Heavy Turn

- △ Trap a person's spirit when the victim stares into their reflection
- △ Multiply height, then let's fight!

Regular Turn

- △ Shoot shimmery webs to make surfaces impossibly smooth

Light Turn

- △ Spend too long spinning tangled webs

Concept by Logan Strickland



Spectermaid

A departed servant turned demon, she will change the linens...then send you to an early checkout!

Heavy Turn

- △ Lash out using a writhing, living sash
- △ Multiply height, then let's fight!

Regular Turn

- △ Use hand fans to waft a hypnotizing cherry blossom scent

Light Turn

- △ Incessantly tidy the surroundings

Concept by Robert Baumann Jr

Faxcula

This analog vampire feeds off outdated technology to grow in power, so hide your landline phones!



Heavy Turn

- △ Take the form of a massive, paper bat
- △ Multiply height, then let's fight!

Regular Turn

- △ Feed off nearby electronics to manipulate or disconnect them

Light Turn

- △ Become confused by relatively recent technology

Concept by Kieren Dale

Villains in Play

The antagonists described in this section make up the bulk of threats against the Squad (except for social obligations and homework, of course). However, some different tiers of villains have been explored so far: the Big Bad, their General, the Foot Soldiers, and a rotating monster of the episode.

The monster of the episode is often conceived and destroyed within the span of one play session. While they don't necessarily build on a larger plot that runs throughout the season, they challenge the Squad in new and unexpected ways with a regular cadence. It's always a good idea to start any play session with a monster already on the roster!

Least threatening but more persistent than this monster are the Foot Soldiers, a small army of weak creatures that usually serve to annoy, slow down, or distract the Squad. If a Color is outnumbered and not transformed, they may struggle to take on a crew of Foot Soldiers! This can force the heroes to transform, at which point the Foot Soldiers can be taken out with just a bit of show. However, the Foot Soldiers can still accomplish a bit—terrorize civilians, steal something small, keep the Squad busy, and so on.

The General is far more wily and more powerful, usually pulling the strings from a safe distance in the background. While they still take orders from the more powerful Big Bad, the General may have their own motives and means to carry these out. They are a formidable foe, but ultimately no match in power for the entire Squad at their finest. So they send out monsters in their stead, craft machinations behind the scene, and perhaps gather dirt on the Colors to use at an opportune moment.

Finally, the Big Bad represents the all-powerful antagonist who squarely stands in the way of the Squad's Principle. Whatever their master plan may be, the Squad could ultimately prevent it from happening, or perhaps using the Squad is the key to success. While it's tempting to make the Big Bad an omnipotent force of evil, there's value in revealing a backstory that explains their motivation and connection to the Squad or their powers. The Big Bad may lurk in the background of many episodes, but when they are confronted with a Color, don't be afraid to show their full force!

Every episode of *Henshin!* will showcase a monster or some other type of villain, so make sure it is one the Narrator is excited to play!

Connections and Cast

As the Narrator directs the general episode flow, plays their Turns accordingly while being a fan of the players, and inhabits the spirit of monsters, they also play a bit role of any civilians in the setting as needed. These civilians are not the spotlight of the episode, obviously, but in the way that monsters serve to challenge the Squad with external threats, the civilians challenge the Squad with their real-life human needs and commitments. The Colors are heroes who can transform into superheroes of sorts, which means they probably spend most of their day un-transformed as members of the community. Remind the Colors of their day-to-day responsibilities with engaging, needy, relatable humans!

Connections

Every Color has a stated Connection as soon as the character is introduced. The heroes simply can't exist in the setting without some relationship to another. Most (but not all) of these Connections are human, but regardless of their nature, they serve to humanize the Color in some way. Each member of the Squad has their own commitments, entanglements, and secrets, and Connections tend to viscerally remind them of this. The Narrator can then play Connections to pull on those strings when needed!

While the nature of the relationship is stated on the Color playbook, this Connection is not necessarily named or placed explicitly in the setting right away. The Narrator should ask some interesting questions and provide details as needed, fleshing out this Connection so that it is a named character that the table can draw from during play. Often, different Connections from different playbooks will actually be the same character who just has a different relationship with each Color, so the Narrator can help put that together!

Pink's Player: Time for my introduction! So the name is Coral, and I have...a radiant face, dreamy eyes, and sporty wear. Think hopeless optimism contained in a magenta track suit.

Narrator: Awesome! Make sure to jot down Coral's name and pronouns on that notecard. So, tell us about that Connection...

Pink's Player: Clueless best friend. Like, they probably just go along

with whatever weird hijinks Coral gets involved in.

Narrator: Got it! Hey, Yellow's hapless cousin that we heard about just a minute ago...

Pink's Player: Oh, I think she's that best friend!

Yellow's Player: So I'm probably used to Coral coming over to get my cuz wrapped up in some predicament.

While Connections represent an easy opportunity to push and pull Colors in interesting directions, they shouldn't be reduced to just a carrot and a stick. Give them depth and personality! These Connections sometimes do others a favor, show vulnerability, or reveal a close memory they share with the Color. This prevents players from ever dreading when their Connection appears on the scene.

At the very least, each Connection should make some small appearance in an episode. However, five Colors with five separate Connections could be tough to manage! In this case, make a point to involve more than one of them in each episode, and rotate these as needed. If the Narrator is spotlighting a Color for an episode, that's a good opportunity to involve their Connection! And if a player is ever struggling to frame a short scene of their own, then the Connection may provide an easy hook for their vignette.

Custodian

One special member of the cast that is built into any *Henshin!* series is the Custodian, a character who has protected the powers used by the Colors. Prior to the Squad discovering their transformers, some person or entity had to have some knowledge of this power, even if only as a guess or theory.

The Custodian could have a mystical connection to the power, perhaps having long guarded their ancient energy for centuries. Or they could have a more practical, utilitarian relationship with this power, such as being the scientist that developed the technology behind the transformers. Or they are more everyday, such as a talented mechanic or nerd in town who happens to stumble across these powers and can keep a secret.

The easiest (and perhaps laziest) use of the Custodian is to set up a call to action for the Squad and only that. "Squad, I'm picking up evil activity in this sector...go take care of it!" The Custodian will

likely be more knowledgeable about the Squad's powers, possibly even about the Big Bad and their cohorts, so likely they will send the Colors on a mission at some point. But this shouldn't be overly relied on, as this makes the Custodian as one-dimensional as the needy Connection who only appears to get kidnapped.

Like the Colors, the Custodian has a backstory and their own motives. How did the Custodian learn about these powers? What is their relationship with the evil forces pitted against the Squad? How would they like to see the powers actually be used? And can they impart enough to the Squad to keep these heroes from failing their duty?

While the Custodian does not need to be a central part of every episode, they do have an active part in maintaining the Squad's powers, even if it's only in the background. Perhaps they provide repairs on the transformers, or have the ability to upgrade suits, weapons, or Mechs. Or they have a magical bond with the Squad's base, or just keep an eye on it while the Squad is out in the world. Or they are an active member of the community and find interesting, new ways to stay involved in the Squad's use of their powers.

Civilian Cast

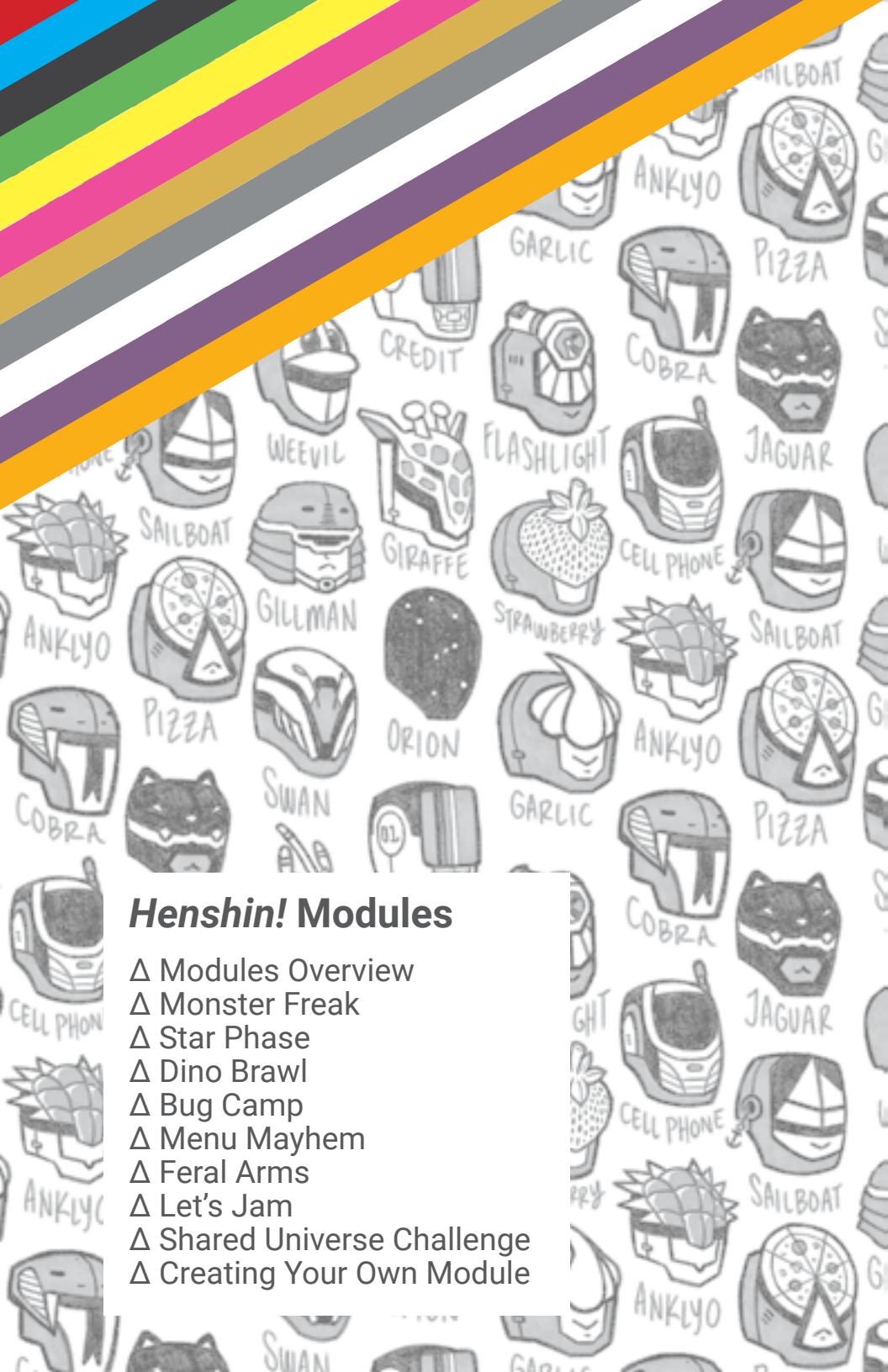
The villains, Connections, and Custodian are built in to the characters and their setting by default. However, other characters will populate the community at some point! Perhaps the city major needs to award medals at a ceremony, or the high school homeroom teacher shows up often enough to deserve having a name. They are simply one more hat for the Narrator to wear!

However, avoid spending too much time on those outside of what is developed from the cast already discussed. These extraneous cast members don't really serve a mechanical or story-forward purpose in *Henshin!*, and in our imaginary television show they would rarely be named in the intro credits. The Narrator need only write down their name, role, and some easy quirk or mannerism to remind people who this person is. That way, the players will remember "Petey" Whittacker the guidance counselor who waves his hands while talking the next time he shows up three episodes later.

Sometimes, one of these cast members shows up frequently enough with enough relevance to the story that they get roped in to the featured cast. At this point, you can't go back! Maybe ol Petey

has become something of a father figure for Red after giving him college advice, and then was an innocent bystander kidnapped by the General and then saw the Squad transform in plain sight. Well, Red could list them as an additional Connection (maybe another Connection needs to get the boot?) and perhaps the Custodian calls on them to support with some problem in the community.

A Narrator has their hands full with lots of tasks to manage, so don't worry too much about these nonessential characters. If the Narrator isn't excited to play this person, then their focus is probably best spent elsewhere!



Henshin! Modules

- △ Modules Overview
- △ Monster Freak
- △ Star Phase
- △ Dino Brawl
- △ Bug Camp
- △ Menu Mayhem
- △ Feral Arms
- △ Let's Jam
- △ Shared Universe Challenge
- △ Creating Your Own Module



HENSHIN! **MODULES**

The group has collectively created their own original Module based on the aesthetic of movie genres and they have filled out a Module worksheet under the direction of the Narrator, Nadia. Partway into their first session, the adventure-themed Red, musical-themed Pink, and drama-themed Blue first encounter the series Big Bad, the egotistical director known as the Auteur...

Nadia: So the Auteur fell for your ploy to meet at some location you all decide, Film Squad. You hear the impatience in his voice over the old-timey radio he used to contact you all. Blue, this was your idea... what's the location?

Brody: The lights dim. My eyes narrow. A hush falls. We will meet at... uh, where's the map?

Ramona: So here's what we sketched of Studio Zeo, and it's using these 'Community Locations' from the Module worksheet.

Brody: Ah, yes. We meet at...the soundstage.

Patrick: Music to my ears! The acoustics will be ♫ doooooope ♫.

Ramona: Alright, operation: 'Send in the Clowns'. Let's take stock of supplies, and you see me sling this giant rucksack filled with tactical goggles, invisible ink pens, just standard adventure gear...

Nadia: *[Reading over the 'First Session Hooks' that she jotted down during Module creation]* So, we cut to the Studio Zeo soundstage. Think big airplane hangar, white walls and studio equipment everywhere. It's soundproofed, so it's not until you arrive that you hear... Ryan, Ramona's needy little brother!

Ramona: What?! I start sprinting over!

Nadia: You see him reading lines with some unknown female lead on the soundstage, and there's a sound crew that immediately glares at you and hushes you.

Ramona: Hushes?! ME?!?!

Brody: The plot thickens. I coolly glance around, looking for the Auteur. Just a Regular "Point out the obvious to another" Turn here.

Nadia: And you see the director chair with "AUTEUR" spelled on the back with no one seated.

Brody: Hey, I think that...can I get some dramatic lighting here? Ahem. I think that...this is a trap!

Patrick: Oh, so the Auteur thinks we can be distracted by recording his stupid indie flick instead of meeting us? Ramona, go get your brother and I'll distract the crew!

Nadia: [Crossing off the plot hook, 'The Auteur stages a pretentious indie film with a Connection'] So Red, you're in the middle of the set with your brother engrossed in reading dialogue, then Blue, you're keeping an eye out for the missing director, and Pink, you're going to...

Patrick: Do what I do best, "Demand that someone pay attention to you right this moment." At the top of my lungs, I start belting out 'Don't Rain on My Parade', sound levels be DAMNED! [Takes a token for the Light Turn]

Nadia: The rest of you see that the sound crew...are actually Teamster henchmen in disguise! Blue, you see them crowd around Pink during the performance. Meanwhile, Red, your baby bro finally breaks the spell by stopping his dialogue...but when you get a look at his mysterious co-star on the stage with him, you realize this leading lady is more monster than starlet...what do you do?!

Δ

Modules Overview

At its core, *Henshin!* is a storytelling game with mechanics, characters, and guidelines for successful play...but where is the setting? *Henshin!* is essentially setting-agnostic, meaning that the game as explained so far can take place in any region, time period, and directorial style. That allows for an amazing amount of freedom, but this openness can be intimidating for the new, the understandably uninspired, or the pressed-for-time players.

Enter Modules! Each Module contained in this book is a pre-made setting for *Henshin!* that contains a pitch, aesthetic, setting, cast, and story hooks. While the group around the table still needs to sign off on the Module, there's virtually no legwork involved in getting the game running using this resource! Just pick a Module, create and introduce the Colors, then the first scene can be set.

Each of the seven Modules introduces a unique, original setting appropriate for a single episode session or an entire season of sessions. Every Module was illustrated by a different artist to showcase the style of each setting. No element of the Module is absolutely crucial for *Henshin!* success, so if players love a particular Module but want to change up the Big Bad, the rest of the elements will still play nicely.

But what if you enjoy these Module concepts but can't choose one to play? Fear not! A player group can play one or several sessions from most of the Modules using a roadmap that connects all settings in a shared universe! This Shared Universe Challenge allows the group to keep cohesive elements like recurring characters throughout play while maximizing how many settings they can enjoy across long-term play.

Finally, players who want to try hand at Module creation have a resource for developing this setting, including a digital Module worksheet available for download at henshingame.com. No setting is off-limits and the setup process will ensure that all necessary details are determined before the new module is pitched to others.

MONSTER FREAK



The Premise

Bell Hill, a town renowned for ghastly folktales and classic monster movies filmed on location, is home to a scary secret discovered by a group of young citizens. When they find out that the long-gone monsters were real and were protecting the town from a far greater evil, these teens are bestowed with the monsters' powers and a duty: *Protect the people of Bell Hill!*

Designer Notes

This Module borrows from classic movie monsters, especially those featured in Universal Studios films from the 1920s to 1950s. The aesthetic is distinct and anchored in popular imagination, which helps get “Monster Freak” to the table. Also, *sentai* heavily features monsters as the antagonists, much like in these classic films, except we often sympathize with these horrific creatures when we see the transformations they underwent to become that scarier self.

What if when the teens in “Monster Squad” transformed into masked heroes, they also took on these monstrous forms, and the civilians then had to reconsider who the true monsters really are?

Color Aesthetics

Dracula

Mysterious, elegant, and cunning, the vampire lurks in the shadows...

Suit detail: Shadow cloak

Weapon: Dual daggers

Mech: Mega bat

Named attack: "Brooding Wings!"

Frankenstein's Monster

Enormous, hideous, and sensitive, the monster knows it has no place in society...

Suit detail: Patchwork stitching

Weapon: Electric bolt

Mech: Colossal monster

Named attack: "I Am...Alive!"

Mummy

Decaying, estranged, and forlorn, the corpse seeks to act out an ancient curse...

Suit detail: Loose wrappings as fringe

Weapon: Flaming ankh

Mech: Nile crocodile

Named attack: "Scroll of Thoth!"

Werewolf

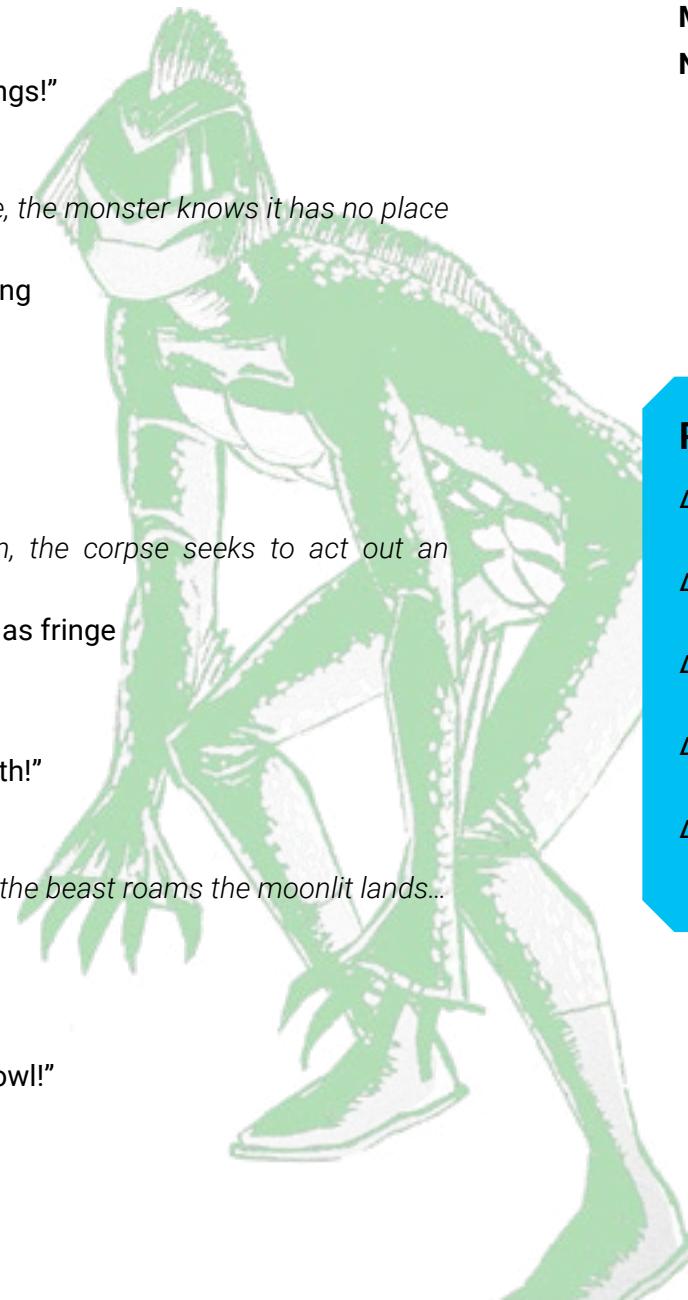
Primal, unstable, and yet human, the beast roams the moonlit lands...

Suit detail: Fur stole

Weapon: Lupus bite

Mech: Dire wolf

Named attack: "Full Moon Howl!"



Gill Person

Strange, amphibious, and somehow familiar, the missing link rises from the water...

Suit detail: Gills on helmet

Weapon: Neptune's trident

Mech: Sea horse

Named attack: "Missing Link!"

Potential Connections

- △ **Terrence**, the obsessive neighbor working out new conspiracy theories
- △ **Franklin Matthews**, the bombastic friend found hanging at the arcade
- △ **Ryan Soto**, the pragmatic video store clerk watching the latest low-budget flicks
- △ **Sammy M**, the sleepy horror movie fanatic quoting any gory scene or hack director
- △ **Geek Say What**, the eccentric trio of hosts at the AM paranormal radio talk show

Community & Cast

Setting: Bell Hill, a sleepy town that was once the filming location of old monster movies

Base: The abandoned Bela Theatre, a once-ornate movie house that is home to the Phantom

Community locations: Movie memorabilia tourist trap, cobblestone streets of Old Town district, historic cemetery, crumbling castle on the edge of town, labyrinthine underground caverns



Squad obligation: A promise to carry on the classic monsters' legacy

Squad principle: Duty to protect the civilians of Bell Hill



Custodian of power: The Phantom, a classic monster who lost their powers and now lives alone in the abandoned theater

Big Bad: Hostess of the Dark, a glamorous monster (who appears as a human) who is bent on terrorizing citizens and hosts her own late-night horror show on cable access television

General: Tomb Warden, the acerbic ghoul who reanimates monsters from their resting places and dallies in dreadful puns

Foot soldiers: Ygors, loyal hunched-over minions that arise and return from the dirt



Power source: Ancient rings, gaudy accessories that could be confused for stage jewelry

Signature hand motion: Fingers curled like claws, hands reach forward then arms cross



Weapons combine into something piercing and antique

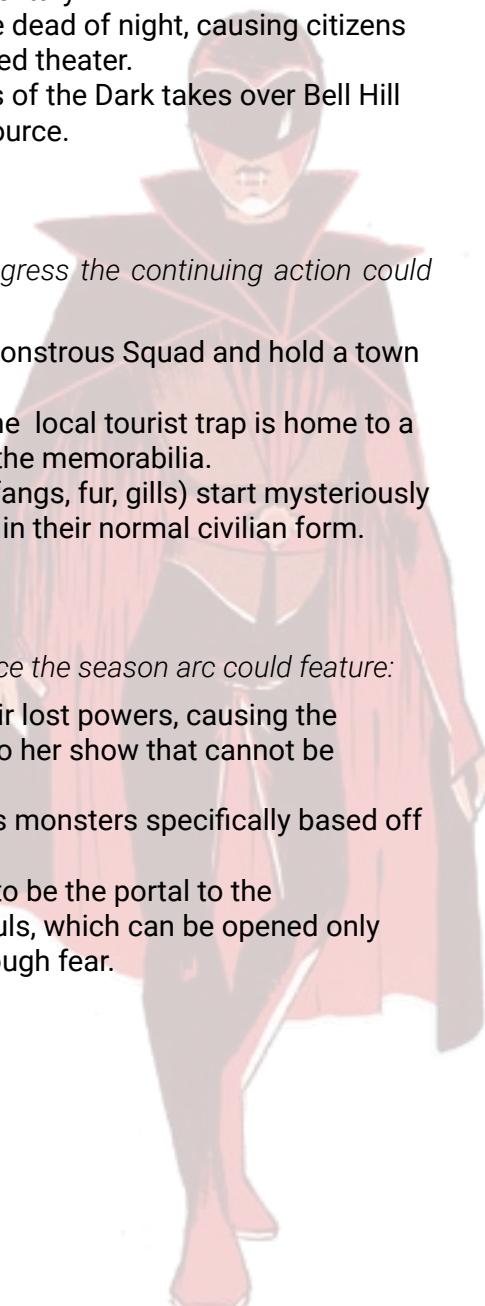
Mechs combine into an Ultimate Form that is gigantic, terrifying, and winged



First Session Hooks

An opening scene to draw the Colors into the action could include:

- Δ An out-of-town amateur film crew arrives in Bell Hill to dig up local legends for their documentary.
- Δ A mass haunting erupts in the dead of night, causing citizens to take refuge in the abandoned theater.
- Δ A pirate broadcast of Hostess of the Dark takes over Bell Hill airwaves from an unknown source.



Further Scene Ideas

When appropriate, a scene to progress the continuing action could include:

- Δ Civilians are terrified by the monstrous Squad and hold a town hall meeting in response.
- Δ The Hostess discovers that the local tourist trap is home to a powerful relic hidden among the memorabilia.
- Δ Monstrous transformations (fangs, fur, gills) start mysteriously appearing on the Colors even in their normal civilian form.

Ongoing Season Arcs

Finally, future episodes that advance the season arc could feature:

- Δ The Phantom rediscovers their lost powers, causing the Hostess to extend an 'invite' to her show that cannot be refused.
- Δ The Tomb Warden reanimates monsters specifically based off each Color's deepest fears.
- Δ The Hostess reveals Bell Hill to be the portal to the Underworld, the realm of ghouls, which can be opened only when its citizens produce enough fear.

STAR PHASE



The Premise

Song Kang, ruthless leader of an intergalactic crime syndicate, has traveled to this solar system to steal the Five Agents, mighty powers of balance and natural cycles. As a last measure, the Geomancer, protector of the Agents, gathered them from their resting places on nearby planets and gave these powers to college students on Earth.

These young heroes will have to pull an all-nighter to preserve the fight for order in our solar system!

Designer Notes

This Module is a nod to classic *sentai* tropes, borrowing elements of constellations, planets, and the Chinese five-element philosophy *Wuxing*. While the heroes are very much rooted to their home base with shared college and extracurricular commitments, this action propels them into the larger solar system with the promise of space travel.

Think of “Star Phase” as the beginning of a *sentai* space opera, where home is all too familiar but the stars beckon toward a much larger journey!

Color Aesthetics

Wood

Strong and flexible like bamboo, Wood looks to grow and make their surroundings flourish...

Suit detail: Constellation Sagittarius

Weapon: Yew longbow

Mech: Komodo dragon

Named attack: "Determination of Jupiter!"

Fire

Dynamic and restless like a flame, Fire looks to prosper and spread their warmth...

Suit detail: Constellation Aries

Weapon: Blazing gloves

Mech: Rising phoenix

Named attack: "Intensity of Mars!"

Earth

Stable and rooted like soil, Earth looks to bring people together and plan for tomorrow...

Suit detail: Constellation Virgo

Weapon: Lapis lance

Mech: Terracotta warrior

Named attack: "Honesty of Saturn!"

Metal

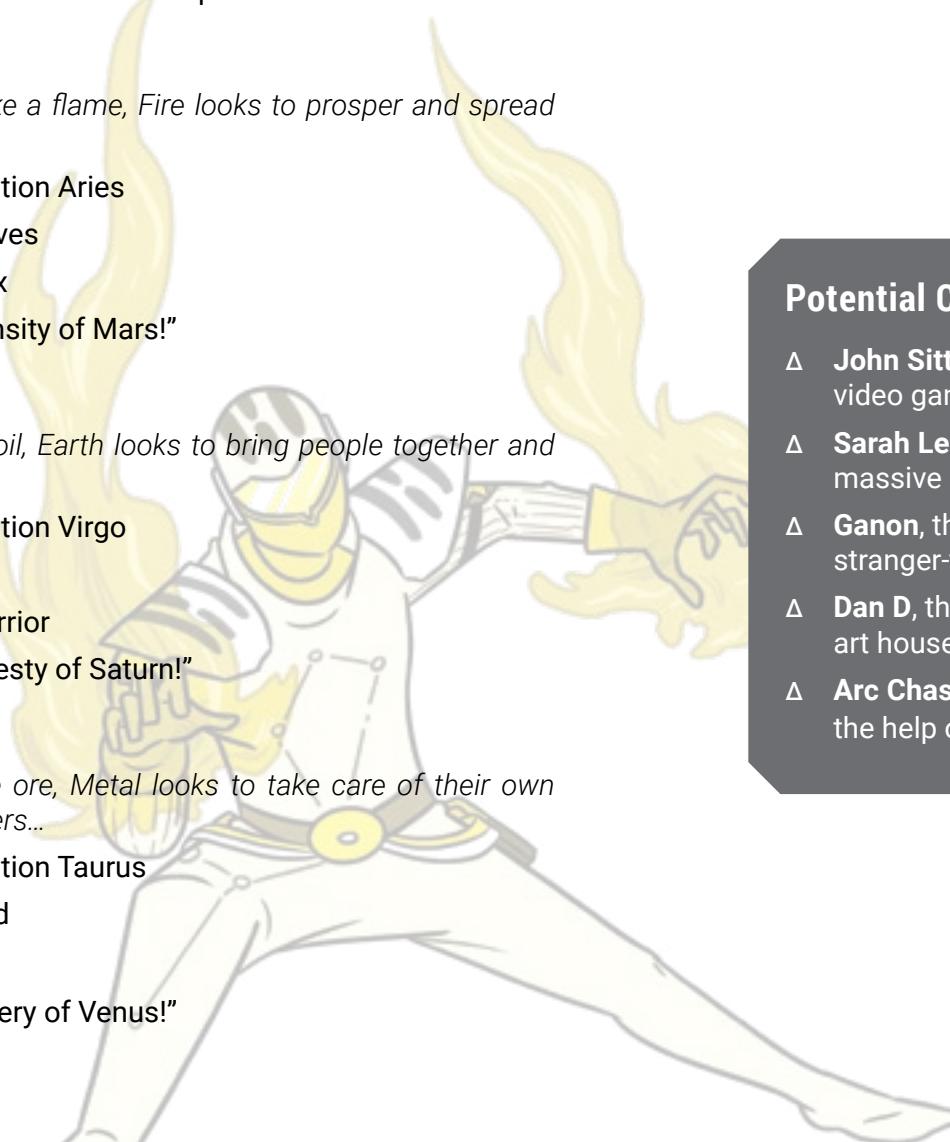
Rigid and persistent like ore, Metal looks to take care of their own issues and organize others...

Suit detail: Constellation Taurus

Weapon: Silver sword

Mech: Nine-tail fox

Named attack: "Bravery of Venus!"



Water

Still yet fluid like a droplet, Water looks to calmly address problems until it builds up great force...

Suit detail: Constellation Pisces

Weapon: Dowsing pendulum

Mech: Giant tortoise

Named attack: "Ingenuity of Mercury!"

Potential Connections

- △ **John Sitton**, the laid-back roommate glued to all the video games
- △ **Sarah Le Fay**, the mysterious barista always reading a massive book
- △ **Ganon**, the silly self-published author writing about the stranger-than-reality happenings around town
- △ **Dan D**, the impulsive theatergoer well-versed in the local art house scene
- △ **Arc Chase**, the protective friend ready to stargaze with the help of a high-powered telescope

Community & Cast

Setting: Sylvan Beach, a bustling city and home to Kepler University

Base: The Observatory, a lookout for the stars above Earth's atmosphere and strangely accessible through a dusty classroom closet

Community locations: The campus coffee shop, lively co-ed university housing, ancient nearby woods, the Astronomy Department offices, a reflexology clinic downtown



Squad obligation: An elite order passed down from the Geomancer to protect the Five Agents

Squad principle: Balance in preserving the natural order from the Five Agents



Custodian of power: The Geomancer, a venerable and once-impressive sage who crash-landed on Earth centuries ago, now on the lookout for the approaching Song Kang...

Big Bad: Song Kang, ruthless Leader of the Song Outlaws who seeks vast power at the expense of the worlds that depend on them

General: Oxhead, stalwart taskmaster who is duty-bound to capture any who oppose using a pitchfork and chains

Foot soldiers: Mogwai, unruly gremlins who arrive in the form of falling rain and cause havoc



Power source: Star-shaped amulets, glowing bright with millennia-old stardust

Signature hand motion: Fingers tracing the five points of a star



Weapons combine into something slashing and mystical

Mechs combine into an Ultimate Form that is multi-armed, limber, and blaster-shooting



First Session Hooks

An opening scene to draw the Colors into the action could include:

- △ A natural disturbance from the forest rocks the community and unleashes monsters, causing the Geomancer to call forth the Colors.
- △ A campus tour group is besieged by Mogwai, resulting in panic across the college.
- △ Textbooks speak of a mysterious figure known as the Geomancer, providing clues for the heroes to stumble into the hidden Observatory.

Further Scene Ideas

When appropriate, a scene to progress the continuing action could include:

- △ Natural elements refuse to behave as they should when the Colors lose sense of order in their own lives while balancing obligations.
- △ Oxhead captures his hard-won bounty, the Geomancer, and makes a dire demand upon the Colors during college mid-terms.
- △ As school and work obligations interfere with fending off the Song Outlaws, each Color takes on exaggerated traits of their Agent as they start clashing against each other.

Ongoing Season Arcs

Finally, future episodes that advance the season arc could feature:

- △ Lacking the power of the Five Agents, Song Kang begins to create monsters from other planets' moons, proving to be a new cosmic threat to the Colors.
- △ A new Color that represents Void arrives on Earth, bringing up questions of others who live beyond the stars.
- △ The Colors leave their home planet to storm the syndicate headquarters of Song Kang on a faraway starship.



DINO BRAWL



The Premise

In the crumbling borough of Midtown, after-school programs are cut and the restless teens take to something strange: organized combat! The mysterious Vile Vise starts taking over gyms across the city, and ordinary citizens who emerge the victor from fights hosted there begin gaining startling new alien powers.

However, ancient powers laid to rest in the dinosaurs await victors who can turn this tide of combat. One group of youths turn down the promise of glory and instead gain supernatural abilities from their newly-won title belts to take on Vise's league of combatants—by transforming into the masked Dino Brawlers!

Designer Notes

At face value, Dino Brawl is influenced by the best and worst of 1990s Saturday morning cartoons. Masked anthropomorphic fighters scouring the city for justice, gyms that evoke both Wrestlemania and Pokémon, and even a pizza place!

But beyond that, the Module aimed to challenge this concept—if the greatest power bestowed to heroes is combat prowess, and the Big Bad's plan is to organize ultimate combat, can the path to justice be paved with more fighting? What costs are acceptable in this battlefield, and is there another way to foil the most powerful fighter? Hopefully these questions come up, and if not, these dino warriors will still look awesome brawling on the streets.

Color Aesthetics

Dreadnoughtus

The largest terrestrial creature to have ever walked the planet, its immense force can turn the sway of nearly any battle...

Suit detail: Elongated helmet spoiler

Weapon: Retractable whip

Mech: Gargantuan Dreadnoughtus

Named attack: "Towering Impact!"

Ankylosaurus

With an armored back, spiked head and side, plus a swinging club of a tail, this tank can weather the worst combat...

Suit detail: Spiked shoulderpads

Weapon: Morning star

Mech: Indestructible Ankylosaurus

Named attack: "Piercing blow!"

Compsognathus

Tiny, scrappy, and just-so-slightly feathered, this mini-raptor can deliver a lithe roundhouse kick to unsuspecting opponents...

Suit detail: Feathered helmet cap

Weapon: Foot-mounted blaster

Mech: Bantam Compsognathus

Named attack: "Stealth strike!"

Therizinosaurus

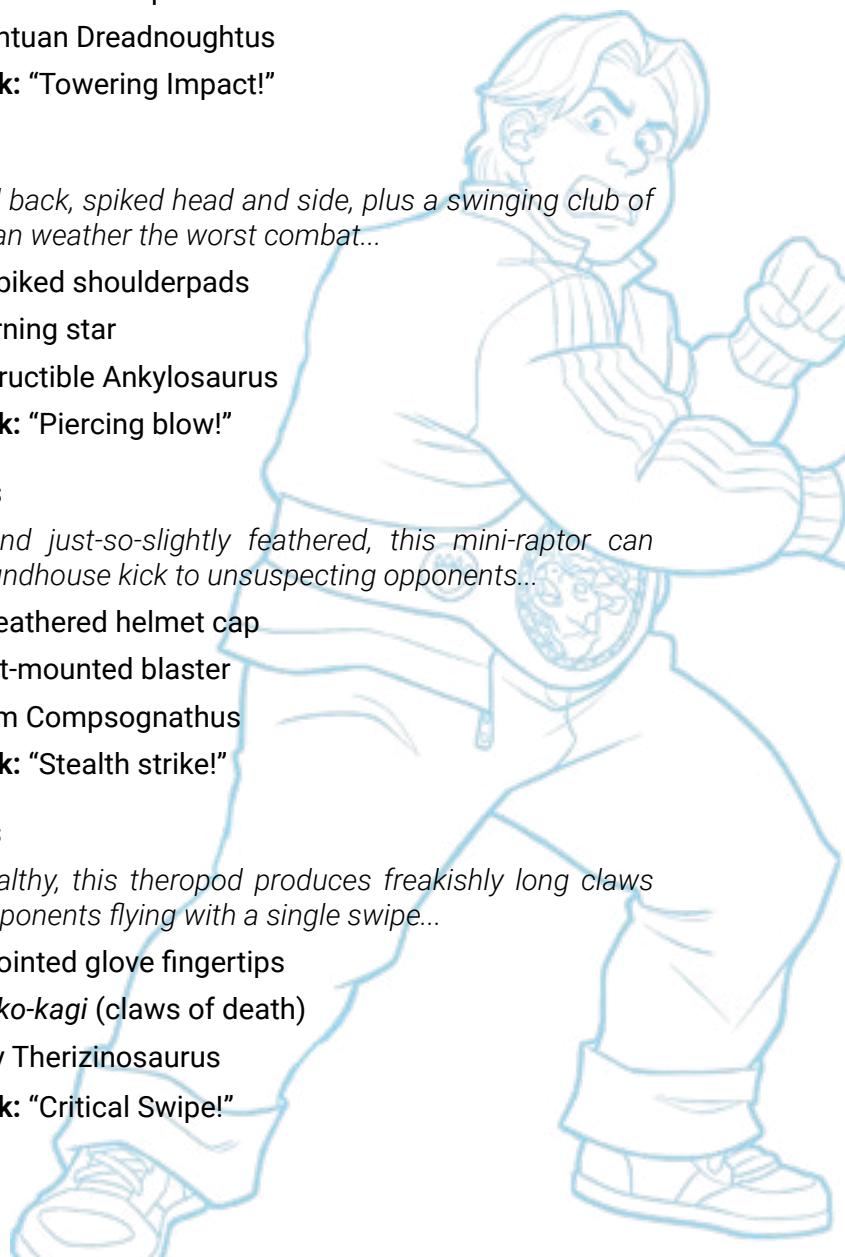
Strange and stealthy, this theropod produces freakishly long claws that can send opponents flying with a single swipe...

Suit detail: Pointed glove fingertips

Weapon: *Tekko-kagi* (claws of death)

Mech: Deadly Therizinosaurus

Named attack: "Critical Swipe!"



Yi Qi

A feathered, long-fingered creature with batlike wings, this aerial combatant will launch from great heights and glide into dangerous fray...

Suit detail: Collapsible wings

Weapon: Double claw sickles

Mech: Soaring Yi Qi

Named attack: "Swift Descent!"

Potential Connections

- △ **Ed Hosea**, the scatter-brained promo person at the wrestling arena
- △ **Arturo**, the jovial Shodan black belt practicing the perfect karate chop
- △ **Patrick Smeltzer**, the resolute superhero fan who learns all his fighting moves from TV shows
- △ **The Fandom Menace**, the eccentric diner-goer regaling customers with stories of alleged crime-fighting days
- △ **James MacDougal**, the fun TV devotee who watches every broadcasted wrestling match

Community & Cast

Setting: Midtown, an urban borough that's seen better days

Base: Greasy Cut, a divey pizza parlor that doubles as a rock venue at night

Community locations: The crumbling Midtown Youth Center, the once-famous Silver's Gym, the dinosaur exhibit in the Central Museum of Natural History, the vast Fir Park that becomes dangerous after sunset, the familiar brownstone neighborhoods of Erstwood



Squad obligation: Defend those who can't fight

Squad principle: Strength



Custodian of power: Manic Trixie, washed-up punk star and former wrestling coach, often found watching amateur boxing at Silver's Gym and sometimes performing the midnight set at the Greasy Cut

Big Bad: Vile Vise, a behemoth always wearing their signature mask and oversized 'vise grip' gloves. Seemingly familiar with Earth's traditions, Vile seeks to train a stable of fighting juggernauts to take on the planet...and beyond

General: The Agent, a mysterious reptilian creature responsible for establishing the bloodthirsty Galactic Wrestling League

Foot soldiers: Jobbers, comically proportioned amateur fighters that make up for talent with sheer energy



Power source: Title belts

Signature hand motion: Bring fists together to 'clasp' belt, then rotate hands and fan out fingers to show buckle engaged



Weapons combine into something clawed, spiked, and toothed

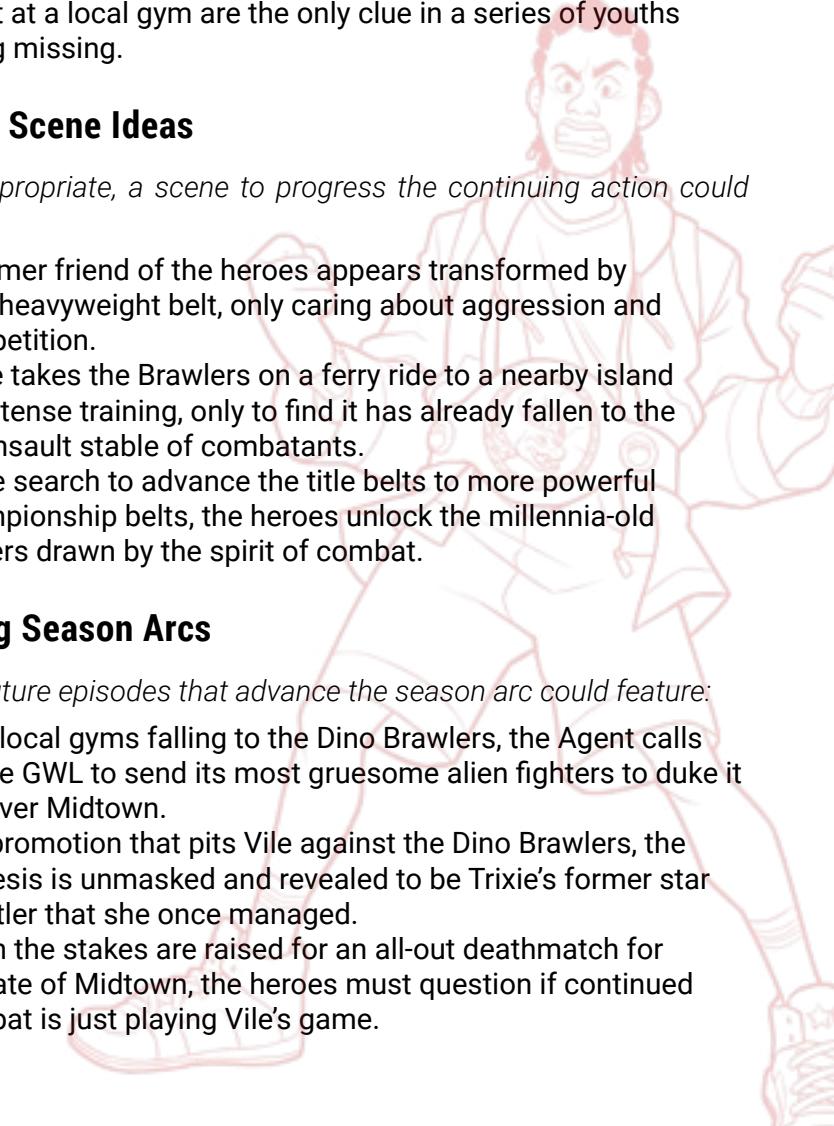
Mechs combine into an Ultimate Form that is hulking, tailed, and ferocious



First Session Hooks

An opening scene to draw the Colors into the action could include:

- △ A gang of fighters from the nearby Facebusters gym attempt to 'take over' Silver's, prompting the heroes into defending home turf and becoming Dino Brawlers.
- △ A group of Jobbers instigate a brawl in the parking lot behind Greasy Cut between two other youths, and the heroes must either be onlookers or take action.
- △ Fliers across town for a mysterious Doomsday Throwdown event at a local gym are the only clue in a series of youths going missing.



Further Scene Ideas

When appropriate, a scene to progress the continuing action could include:

- △ A former friend of the heroes appears transformed by their heavyweight belt, only caring about aggression and competition.
- △ Trixie takes the Brawlers on a ferry ride to a nearby island for intense training, only to find it has already fallen to the Moonsault stable of combatants.
- △ In the search to advance the title belts to more powerful championship belts, the heroes unlock the millennia-old powers drawn by the spirit of combat.

Ongoing Season Arcs

Finally, future episodes that advance the season arc could feature:

- △ With local gyms falling to the Dino Brawlers, the Agent calls on the GWL to send its most gruesome alien fighters to duke it out over Midtown.
- △ In a promotion that pits Vile against the Dino Brawlers, the nemesis is unmasked and revealed to be Trixie's former star wrestler that she once managed.
- △ When the stakes are raised for an all-out deathmatch for the fate of Midtown, the heroes must question if continued combat is just playing Vile's game.

BUG CAMP



The Premise

A Cryptid is described by the Oxford English Dictionary as “an animal whose existence or survival to the present day is disputed or unsubstantiated,” but you know them better as your next-door neighbor!

You and fellow campers have been trusted with an extra activity this year at Camp White Pine: Protect the Cryptids from the corrupt Gentleman Germ and his nasty cohorts as they plow down the forest to uncover Cryptid secrets!

Designer Notes

Bug Camp’s aesthetic is a simultaneous love letter to the ‘monster of the week’ structure found in supernatural mystery TV shows and the preservation messages of early 90s environmentalist TV shows. The camp setting with insects felt like the right balance for those two inspirations, providing a controlled natural space for young heroes to grow and change through the course of their adventure.

Color Aesthetics

Bullet Ant

Small with a powerful punch, their extremely potent sting is known around the world...

Suit detail: Two protruding pincers

Weapon: Gauntlet glove

Mech: Savage Ant

Named attack: "Stinging Shot!"

Whirligig Beetle

Gliding on the surface of water, they dive under the surface and spring into action when threatened...

Suit detail: Multisegmented eyes on helmet

Weapon: Pair of tonfa

Mech: Gregarious Beetle

Named attack: "Rapid Flurry!"

Walking Stick-Bug

Expertly camouflaged in nature, this long insect will take predators by surprise...

Suit detail: Sharp antennae & faceplate spines

Weapon: Wooden rifle

Mech: Expeditious Ghost Insect

Named attack: "Agile Barrage!"

Acorn Weevil

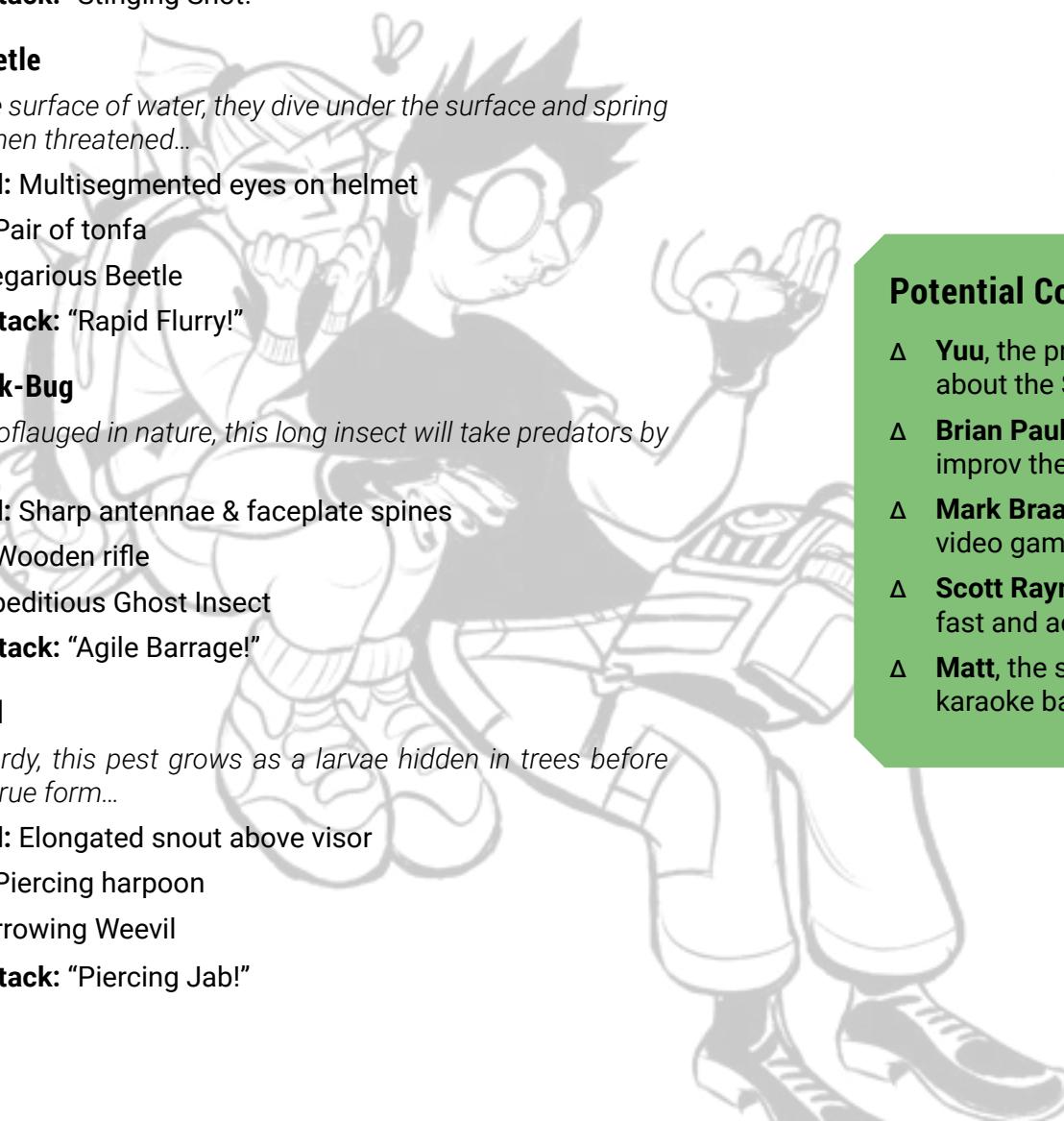
Small and hardy, this pest grows as a larvae hidden in trees before revealing its true form...

Suit detail: Elongated snout above visor

Weapon: Piercing harpoon

Mech: Burrowing Weevil

Named attack: "Piercing Jab!"



Robber Fly

Powerful and bristly assassin of the air, they wait in ambush for their next meal...

Suit detail: Triple-segmented crest

Weapon: Expandable baton

Mech: Pouncing Assassin Fly

Named attack: "Paralyzing Pummel!"

Potential Connections

- △ **Yuu**, the practical author secretly penning fan fiction about the Squad's exploits
- △ **Brian Paul**, the trusting bunkmate always performing an improv theater bit
- △ **Mark Braasch**, the quick-witted buddy with a handheld video game console in hand
- △ **Scott Rayner**, the reliable confidant making camp friends fast and actually being a stand-up kid
- △ **Matt**, the sensitive proprietor running the town's dingy karaoke bar

Community & Cast

Setting: Camp White Pine, a bucolic summer camp in the lush forests of Cascadia

Base: The Bungalow, a tree house high above camp and home to Sasquatch

Community locations: The raucous camp mess hall, mysterious Cryptid Village, old-growth conifer forest, placid swimming hole, town's dingy karaoke bar called "My Shot"



Squad obligation: Safeguard the Cryptid's secret way of life

Squad principle: Preservation



Custodian of power: Sasquatch, the disguised, hirsute cook at the mess hall with a lust for life and a mean baked ziti who is known as 'Sassy'

Big Bad: Gentleman Germ, wealthy CEO of GERMx bound to a life-sustaining suit after a toxic accident and in ruthless search of Cryptids for their supposed curative properties

General: Camo Léon, slippery half-Cryptid espionage expert who will stop at nothing to catch their prey

Foot soldiers: Goop Troopers, gaseous humanoids bursting from thrown cannisters



Power source: Handheld compass, clamshell device with more than mere magnetic power

Signature hand motion: Flip open compass, then place over eyes like glasses in an upward motion



Weapons combine into something poisonous and barbed

Mechs combine into an Ultimate Form that is brightly-colored, spiny, and autonomous.



First Session Hooks

An opening scene to draw the Colors into the action could include:

- △ Lanterns, flashlights, candles—any illumination is stolen! While counselors struggle with the generator, frightened campmates turn to you to shed light on this mystery.
- △ When a bunkmate goes missing, campers suspect that the strange mess hall cook, Sassy, is hiding a secret.
- △ On the edge of camp bordering a GERMx factory, a rare giant beetle is in the crosshairs of a strange scaly hunter named Camo Léon.

Further Scene Ideas

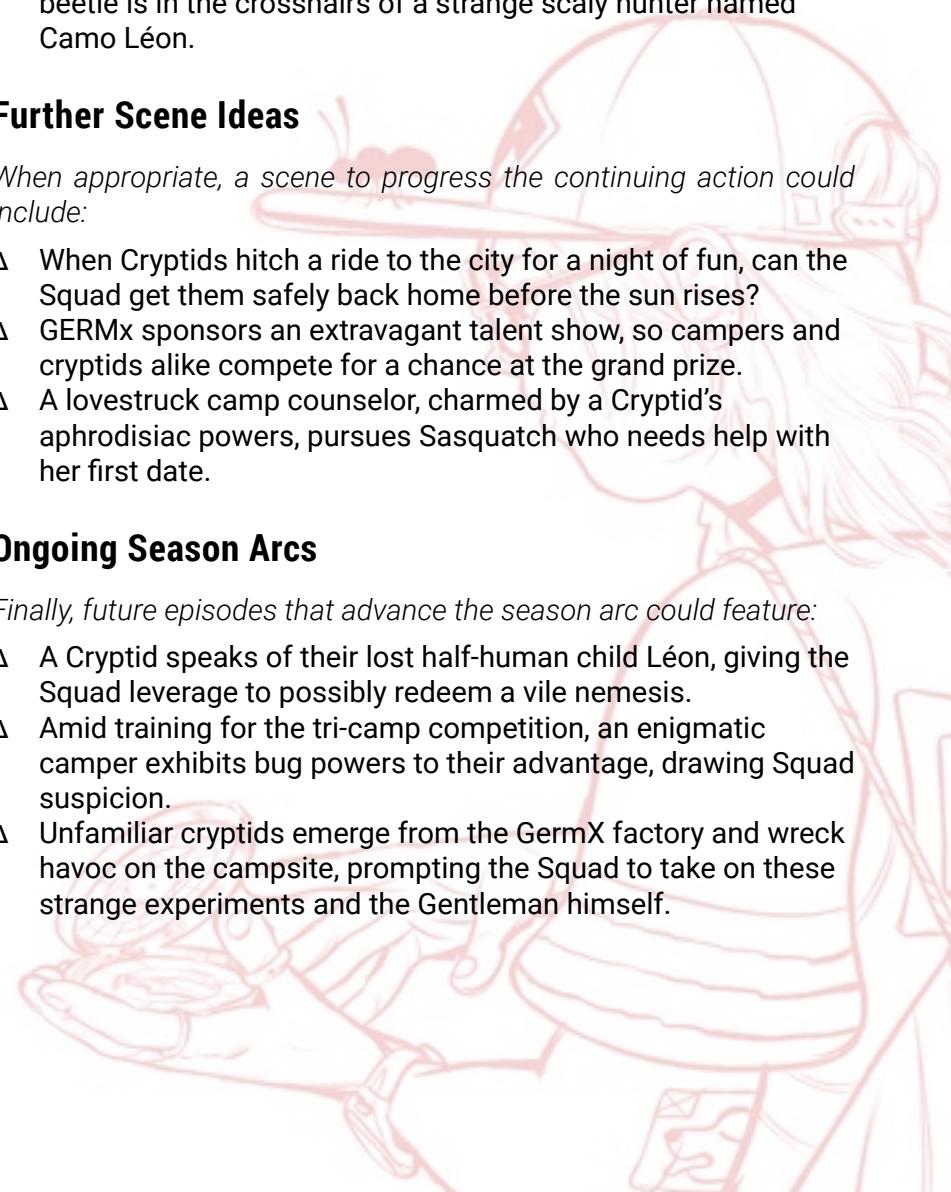
When appropriate, a scene to progress the continuing action could include:

- △ When Cryptids hitch a ride to the city for a night of fun, can the Squad get them safely back home before the sun rises?
- △ GERMx sponsors an extravagant talent show, so campers and cryptids alike compete for a chance at the grand prize.
- △ A lovestruck camp counselor, charmed by a Cryptid's aphrodisiac powers, pursues Sasquatch who needs help with her first date.

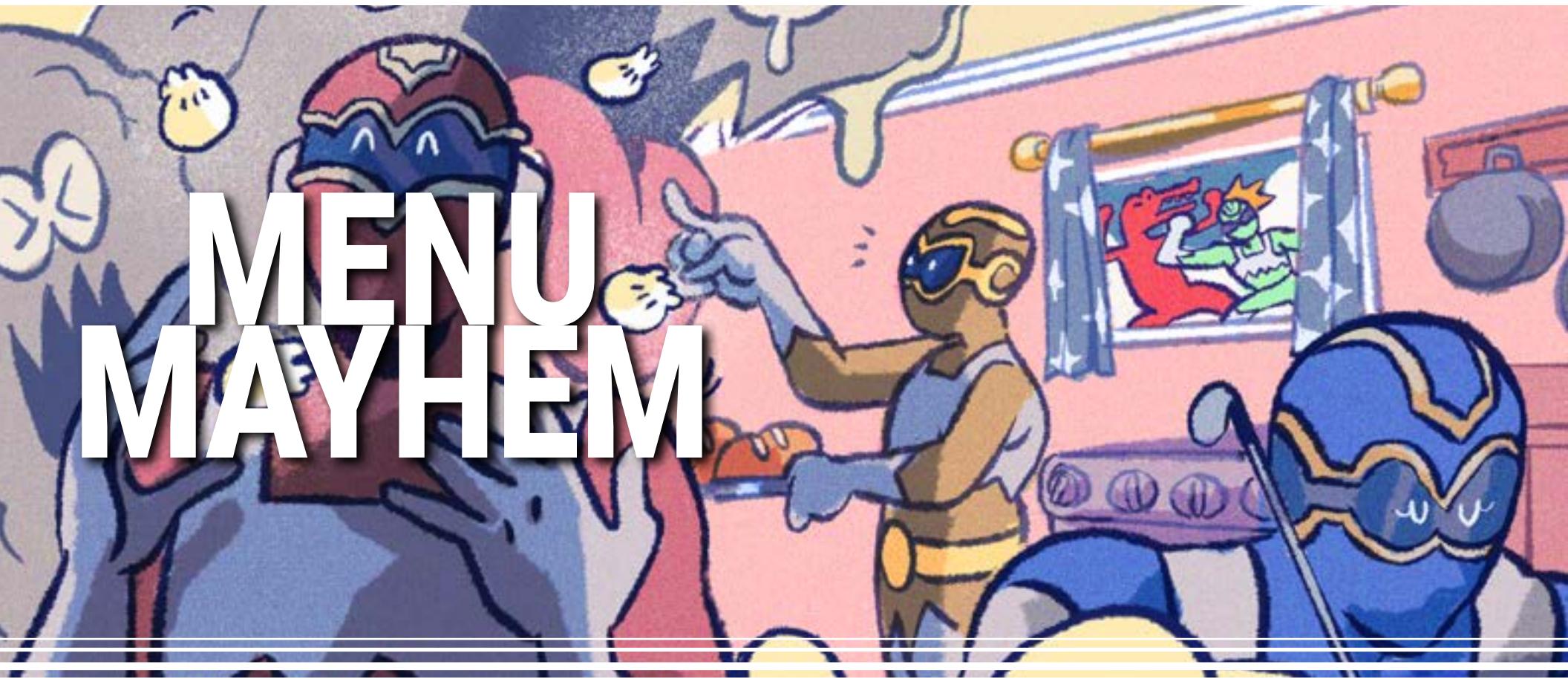
Ongoing Season Arcs

Finally, future episodes that advance the season arc could feature:

- △ A Cryptid speaks of their lost half-human child Léon, giving the Squad leverage to possibly redeem a vile nemesis.
- △ Amid training for the tri-camp competition, an enigmatic camper exhibits bug powers to their advantage, drawing Squad suspicion.
- △ Unfamiliar cryptids emerge from the GermX factory and wreck havoc on the campsite, prompting the Squad to take on these strange experiments and the Gentleman himself.



MENU MAYHEM



The Premise

Across Earth, food started biting back! The United Nations responded by creating the Paranormal Culinary Disaster division, tasking a Food Squad of masked heroes to quell this combative cuisine. Citizens across the world know these color-coded champions, though their true identities remain secret, as the Squad deploys from their space station base to address the latest edible emergency.

But what is the true source of Paranormal Culinary Disasters? Why do they keep linking back to the disgraced United Nations ambassador Frau Dijon? And what is revealed to be the UN's true motives once the Squad starts cooking up their own plans rather than merely following orders?

Designer Notes

This Module was an exciting collaboration with *Henshin!* fan Jack Rippy to try out new setting concepts. We carved out the first Module with the Squad as a task force created by an organization, went global with the scope of inspiration and locales, and finally included our favorite topic: food! Jack's notes include the following:

"Menu Mayhem" is a Module that puts common *tokusatsu* tropes of the 80s in a blender with some tasty colors (and shades of gray) to make a story fit for consumption by all. If there is one thing that food does, it is that it transcends boundaries and helps bring friends, family, and even total strangers closer together regardless of outside factors. This Module captures that feeling while also reflecting moral ambiguity found outside the kitchen.

Color Aesthetics

Pickle

Acerbic and biting, this Squad member's sharp tongue hides the more bubbly nature that is actually bottled up...

Suit detail: Mason jar lid shoulder pad

Weapon: Hatchet with a crinkle-cut edge

Mech: Sweet & Sour Firetruck

Named attack: "Sour Striker!"

Dumpling

Agreeable and wholesome, this Squad member's well-rounded nature invites others to bask in their warmth...

Suit detail: Press mold shoulder pad

Weapon: Steam cannon

Mech: Succulent Scout Car

Named attack: "Savory Skirmish!"

Kabob

With a down-to-earth attitude and coarse language, this Squad member's brackish personality is a necessary addition to any gathering...

Suit detail: Skewker shoulder pad

Weapon: Heat-generating charcoal shield

Mech: Grilled Flame Tank

Named attack: "Salty Slam!"

Pastry

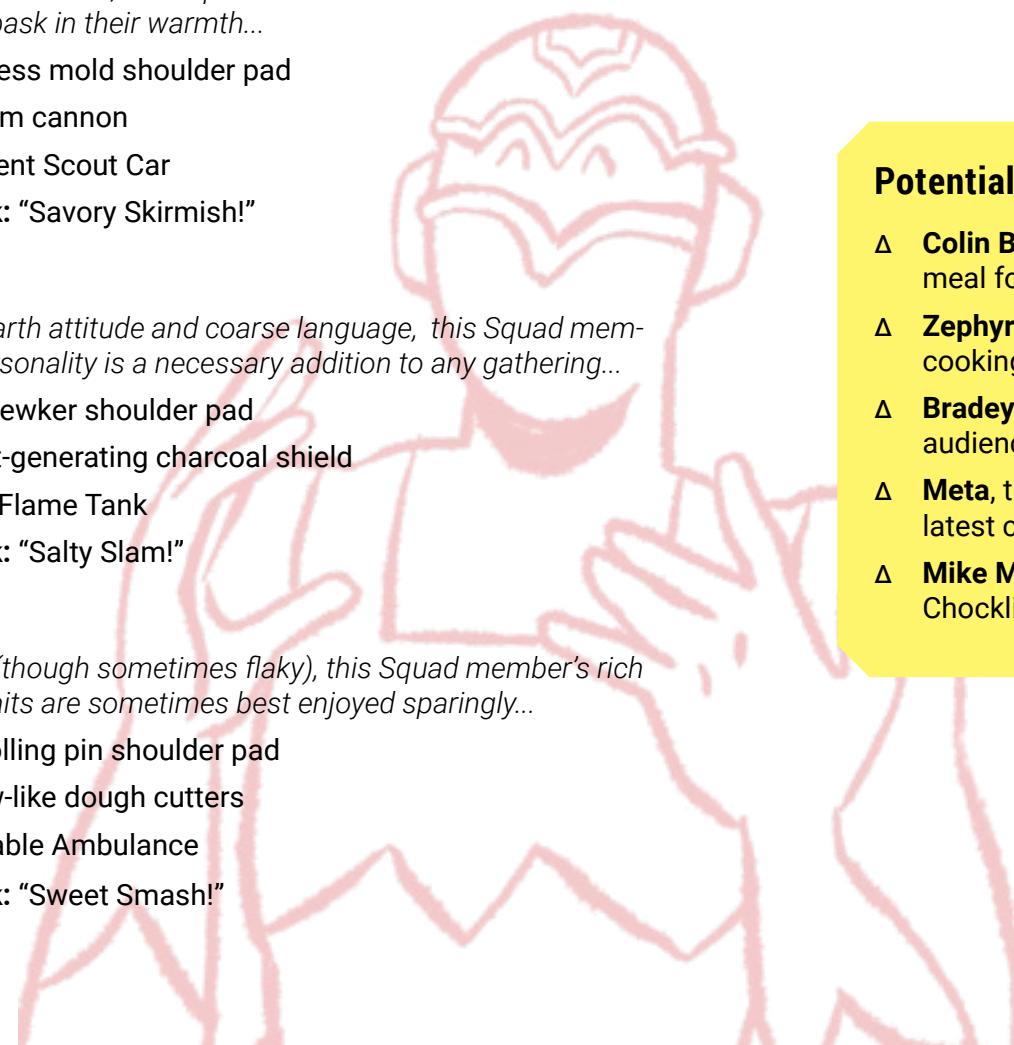
Utterly delightful (though sometimes flaky), this Squad member's rich and delectable traits are sometimes best enjoyed sparingly...

Suit detail: Rolling pin shoulder pad

Weapon: Claw-like dough cutters

Mech: Delectable Ambulance

Named attack: "Sweet Smash!"



MENU MAYHEM

Soup

Soul-satisfying and nourishing, this Squad member humbly offers a sharp dose of medicine should others care to stomach the taste...

Suit detail: Enameled cast-iron shoulder pad

Weapon: Ladle-shaped lance

Mech: Nourishing Hovercraft

Named attack: "Bitter Breaker!"

Potential Connections

- △ **Colin Becker**, the loyal amateur chef who can prepare a meal for one or one hundred
- △ **Zephyr Sora**, the funny esports gamer competing in the cooking-themed video game division
- △ **Bradey Sooter**, the social party planner scanning the audience to ensure everyone has the best time
- △ **Meta**, the impartial food critic watching over the Squad's latest culinary creations
- △ **Mike Martone**, the sweet-toothed manager at Pop's Chocklit Shoppe who can source strange ingredients

Community & Cast

Setting: Countries across Earth, 20XX

Base: S.T.E.W (Sustainable Terminal for Ecological Wellbeing), a space station orbiting the planet

Community locations: The Master Kitchen, Pop's Chocklit Shoppe, German beer festival, United Nations Briefing Room, any local farmer's market



Squad obligation: Fight off and investigate Paranormal Culinary Disasters

Squad principle: Balanced meals



Custodian of power: S.R.V.R, an affable android who lives on S.T.E.W and reports to its maker, the United Nations

Big Bad: Frau Dijon, the purported founder of the Paranormal Culinary Disaster division of the UN who retreated to the shadows after a covered-up international disgrace

General: Patrick Melt, a mild-mannered scientist who developed a sadistic streak after being transformed into part-human, part-hamburger

Foot soldiers: Skater Tots, golden-brown cylindrical menaces that coast around on cooking oil



Power source: Spice Jars

Signature hand motion: Shake out some spice into a hand and throw it over the shoulder



Weapons combine into something robust, crispy, and seared

Mechs combine into an Ultimate Form that is full-bodied, succulent, and charred



First Session Hooks

An opening scene to draw the Colors into the action could include:

- △ When sandwiches start biting back simultaneously across NYC, Philadelphia, and San Francisco, the Squad finds themselves in a pickle to handle these multiple threats.
- △ SRVR organizes a homespun cooking competition for the Colors in the STEW kitchen, spoiled only by the ingredients taking on the aggressive nature of their chefs.
- △ An international institute conserving heritage seeds is bombarded by Devilish Food Cakes who seek to obliterate this garden diversity.

Further Scene Ideas

When appropriate, a scene to progress the continuing action could include:

- △ The Squad rescues a former colleague of Frau Dijon who reveals the questionable formation of the UN's Paranormal Culinary Disasters division.
- △ SRVR is compromised by revealing too much information about the UN's true intentions, resulting in a newly rebooted SRVR replacement.
- △ A sentient food monster shows less-than-hateful morality by only providing for its own food family, and yet is considered a threat by those in power.

Ongoing Season Arcs

Finally, future episodes that advance the season arc could feature:

- △ A new Color not affiliated with anyone arrives on the scene with a hidden identity, noble intentions, and a mysterious familiar connection to Frau Dijon.
- △ When the Squad proves less than reliable to support the UN's aims, Dr. Melt synthesizes the mindlessly obedient Junk Food Crew to take their place.
- △ After quelling a culinary disaster in East Asia, the Squad discovers that the foreign intervention directly benefits shadowy figures in the UN...could they have been behind the debacle in the first place?

FERAL ARMS



The Premise

The world as you knew it no longer exists.

Your once-home, Copa Bay, along with most of the world, has been destroyed by an ancient race known as Hedorah and pollution now runs rampant. Skies are grayed over with soot and waters are contaminated beyond treatment; your previously vibrant, fertile city is now just a playground for these slimy cretins.

You never gave up hope, though, and something out there recognized it! Selected by ancient animal spirits, you and your compatriots now defend the world from within your new home: the floating animal sanctuary known as Eu-Kar.

Designer Notes

This Module throws at the Squad an unpredictable environment: this nontraditional terrain that is a product of conflict. Rather than the Colors being everyday characters thrown into a supernatural situation, the setting itself is at times alarming and bleak, and it is our heroes who have to ignite hope despite devastation. When humanity has nearly been lost, can the Squad use their powers to create something people can call home?

Feral Arms was inspired by Wild Force, the Power Ranger series that pitted nature against mutations and machines, and Dorohedoro, a manga series about finding memories and surviving in a weird, brutal world.

Color Aesthetics

Giraffe

This long-necked ruminant has subsisted on only the highest growing foliage that is less corrupted by noxious gasses below...

Suit detail: Two little protuberances on the helmet

Weapon: Three-section staff

Mech: Noble Giraffe

Named attack: "Towering Blow!"

Kangaroo

This brawling marsupial has knocked out any on land that threaten their way of life at any cost...

Suit detail: Pointed ears on the helmet

Weapon: Boxing gloves

Mech: Fierce Kangaroo

Named attack: "One-Two Punch!"

Peacock

Some deemed this peafowl the only beauty remaining in the wastelands, making effort to ensure its survival...

Suit detail: Feathered fan on the backside of the helmet

Weapon: Twin metallic fans

Mech: Graceful Peacock

Named attack: "Shimmering Smash-Up!"

Stingray

One of the few remaining sealife, it has escaped hunting by staying camouflaged along the ocean floor...

Suit detail: Protruding fins and small rear tail on the helmet

Weapon: Hand crossbow

Mech: Swift Stingray

Named attack: "Barbed Blast!"

Armadillo

Burrowed in the earth when poisons first seeped through soil, it survives now through careful defense and claws...

Suit detail: Protective casing on the top of the helmet

Weapon: Giant yoyo

Mech: Vigorous Armadillo

Named attack: "Armored Wallop!"

Potential Connections

- △ **Seff Brisco**, the ambitious community organizer bringing people together
- △ **Julio**, the dashing friend who is already plotting the next heist or caper
- △ **Fork**, the naive storyteller always daydreaming about a better world
- △ **Lyxander**, the wise elder pondering over the big questions in life
- △ **K McCarthy Jr**, the rollerskating youth often gossiping about the latest happenings

Community & Cast

Setting: Copa Bay, a small seaside community once known for its calm waters and boat building

Base: Eu-Kar, the mystical sanctuary that is ruled by animal spirits and appeared floating far above the world's inhabitants in their greatest hour of need

Community locations: Eu-Kar's Temple of Beasts, an abandoned shopping mall, an oasis where the animal spirits convene, heavily polluted and trashed docks, ominous factories that appear overnight



Squad obligation: Protect the last surviving group of humans

Squad principle: Natural order



Custodian of power: The Caretaker, a mustachioed, elderly turtle-man who waits out the contamination by buying time through combat and deception

Big Bad: Xillen, "Lord of Chaos, Garbage, and Muck", who seeks to spoil every green and thriving corner of the planet

General: Sir Shantui, a living bulldozer and demolitions expert with knowledge of military warfare from a forgotten past

Foot soldiers: Pig-Pens, dusty devils that appear out of whirlwind in order to irritate, confuse, and soil their surroundings



Power source: Ceremonial knives

Signature hand motion: Left arm performs an uppercut while the right hand passes over it



Weapons combine into something barraging and natural

Mechs combine into an Ultimate Form that is colorful, hulking and sword-wielding



First Session Hooks

An opening scene to draw the Colors into the action could include:

- △ When a surprise Hedorah raid arrives from the seas, humanity looks to the faraway sanctuary of Eu-Kar with more questions than answers.
- △ A mile-long sludge creeps over the waters of Copa Bay, causing ordinary citizens to take up arms and seek direct solutions.
- △ Seemingly overnight, an ominous factory appears on the edge of town, causing unease among Copa Bay's inhabitants.

Further Scene Ideas

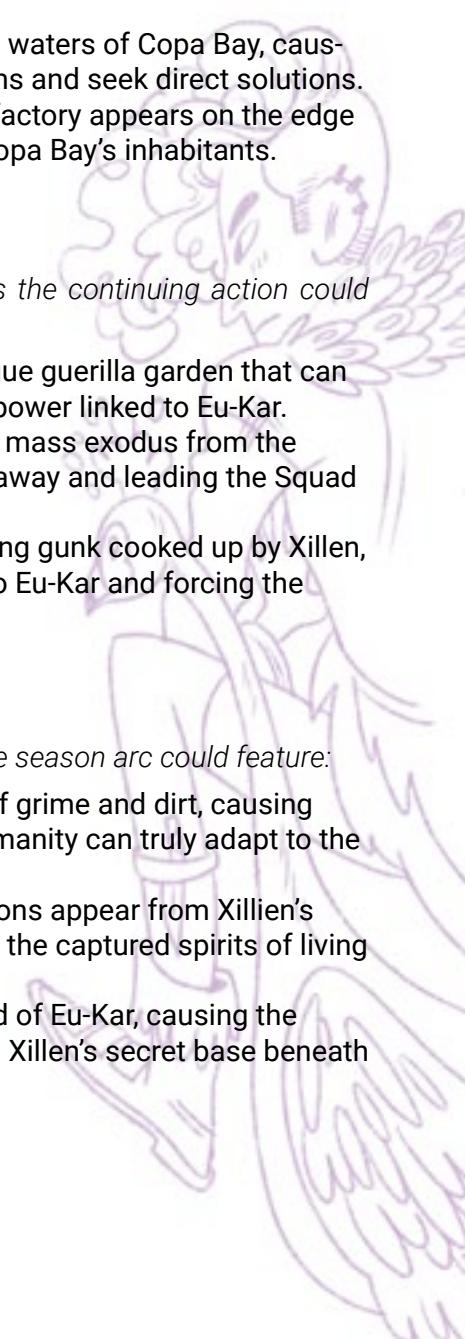
When appropriate, a scene to progress the continuing action could include:

- △ Sir Shantui sets his sights on a rogue guerilla garden that can nearly feed the town, believing its power linked to Eu-Kar.
- △ The surrounding creatures begin a mass exodus from the landscape, drawing the Caretaker away and leading the Squad into a dirty trap.
- △ The mechs are infected by an oozing gunk cooked up by Xillen, sending their animal spirits back to Eu-Kar and forcing the Squad to find solutions.

Ongoing Season Arcs

Finally, future episodes that advance the season arc could feature:

- △ A new Color appears formed out of grime and dirt, causing the Squad to question whether humanity can truly adapt to the world of Hedorah.
- △ Mindless, diesel-spewing automatons appear from Xillen's factories, revealed to be born from the captured spirits of living creatures.
- △ Rot and blight takes over the island of Eu-Kar, causing the Squad to lead an all-out assault on Xillen's secret base beneath Copa Bay.



LET'S JAM



The Premise

Chosen for their musical passion and prowess, five youngsters are chosen to defend the music of Earth...if only this was on the final exam!

Jamminger is an original concept created by Ivan Saffold that caught fire online in the spring of 2018. Since Jamminger is a completely original idea, we highlighted the unique sound-based team (not something you see in *sentai* often) with a *Henshin!* exclusive Module to celebrate creativity within the American Tokusatsu community. Because the Jamminger series is ongoing, liberties were taken with the story elements, so no prior knowledge is needed to play this Module and that play will surely go in its own unique direction!

Designer Notes

One design challenge taking on this Module was the fact that the Jamminger characters canonically have supernatural abilities tied to their powers. When these abilities stated under Color Aesthetics come into play, consider these a normal Regular Turn such as the “Display ____ fighting technique” turn that is done for mostly fictional impact to set the scene for future impactful decisions. Describe what it looks like (it should look real cool!) and while these won’t dramatically turn the tide of the story, they distinguish the characters like they are portrayed in the Jamminger series.

Color Aesthetics

Luis (Red)

A hot headed, talented young musician who's trying to find some direction in his life

Civilian power: Create force fields and extend them by holding his breath

Weapon: Guitar axe

Mech: Rock & Roll Alligator

Named attack: "Thunderous Riff!"

Paul (Blue)

A perfectionist who is a bit vain and may push others away if they are deemed to be less driven

Civilian power: Temporarily heal himself and others

Weapon: Trumpet cannon

Mech: Honky-Tonk Goose

Named attack: "Bass Blast!"

Lindsey (Green)

The self-described mother of the group who tries to keep everyone together, even at the cost of her own happiness

Civilian power: Enhanced strength

Weapon: Harp arrow

Mech: Harmonious Koala

Named attack: "Symphonic Arrow!"

Freddie (Yellow)

A former football star who got injured, he remains the fun one and is always cracking a joke

Civilian power: Super speed

Weapon: Drumstick tonfa

Mech: Crashin' Ape

Named attack: "Cosmic Beat!"

Katy (Pink)

The multitalented musician who is looking for direction to apply her many skills

Civilian power: Scream at high decibels

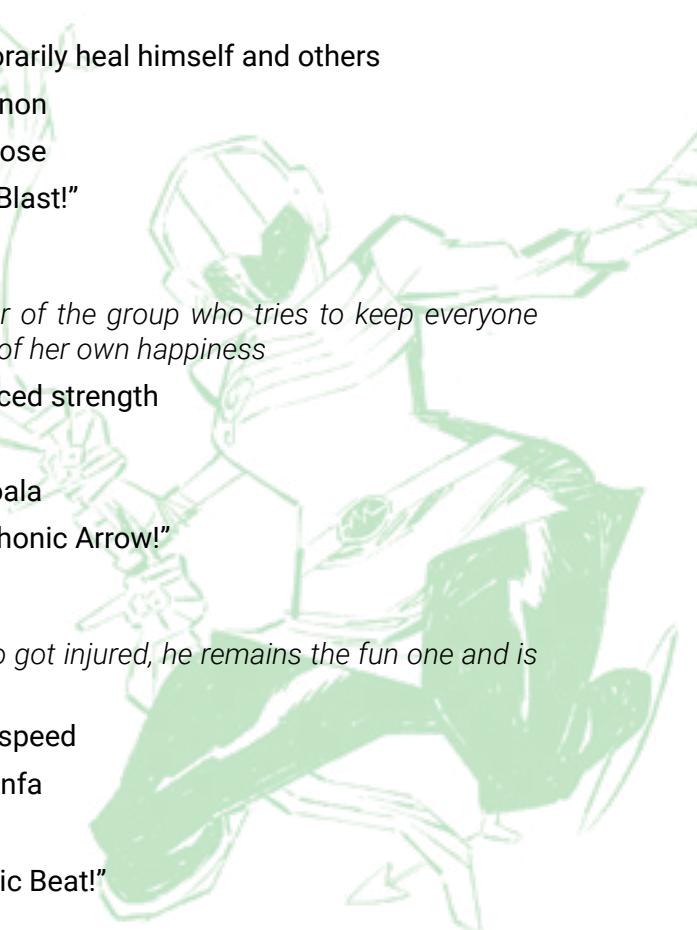
Weapon: Flute saber

Mech: Jazzy Dragonfly

Named attack: "Harmonic Slash!"

Potential Connections

- △ **The Hawk**, an affable classmate with a board game in hand
- △ **Old Man Mike**, the grumpy neighbor yelling at the teens who are up to no good
- △ **Mig Cero**, the perceptive electric guitarist who has generally read the manga before the anime was released
- △ **Christopher Thayer**, the loyal friend recommending the perfect book for the situation
- △ **Sidney Hinkes**, the tone-deaf shopkeep at Bojangles music shop who is just happy to see customers stop by



Community & Cast

Setting: San Antonio Bay

Base: Bojangles, the local music shop

Community locations: A cafe in the town center called The Beat, Stephen Tyler Memorial High School, San Antonio Riverbanks, Center for the Performing Arts, Texas University Music Conservatory



Squad obligation: Save the music of Earth from those that threaten it

Squad principle: Finding your way



Custodian of power: Maestro, an enigmatic music shop owner who seems to more than he lets on

Big Bad: Master Decibel, whose grand plan is to wipe out all music throughout the universe

General: The Master's daughters, Synestra and Symphona

Foot soldiers: Deadnotes, impish creatures who cast a wave of silence wherever they go



Power source: Jamminizers

Signature hand motion: Air play their chosen instrument to a favorite song



Weapons combine into something technological, chilling and loud

Mechs combine into an Ultimate Form that is sturdy, squat and destructive



First Session Hooks

An opening scene to draw the Colors into the action could include:

- Δ Rivalry between Colors distracts the group from a threat during high school graduation.
- Δ The colors all independently end up at the weekly open mic night at Bojangles, when suddenly all instruments disappear.
- Δ Everyone is talking about new pirate radio station with two suspicious DJs, Synestra and Symphona.

Further Scene Ideas

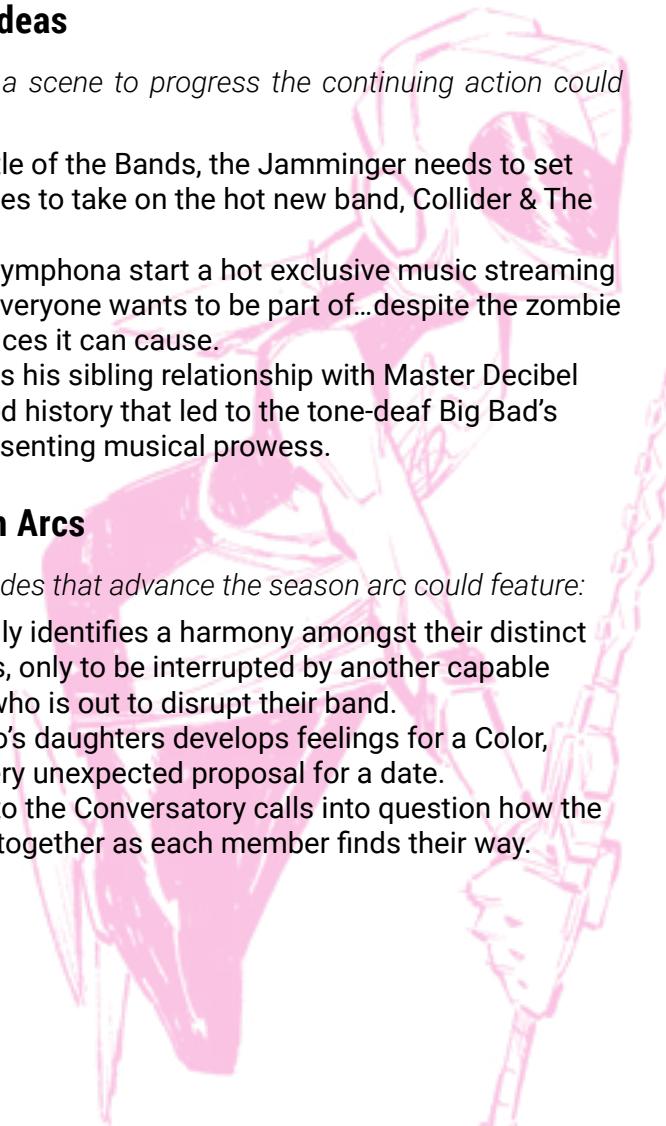
When appropriate, a scene to progress the continuing action could include:

- Δ During the Battle of the Bands, the Jamminger needs to set aside differences to take on the hot new band, Collider & The Boyz.
- Δ Synestra and Symphona start a hot exclusive music streaming platform that everyone wants to be part of...despite the zombie like consequences it can cause.
- Δ Maestro reveals his sibling relationship with Master Decibel and their shared history that led to the tone-deaf Big Bad's descent into resenting musical prowess.

Ongoing Season Arcs

Finally, future episodes that advance the season arc could feature:

- Δ The group finally identifies a harmony amongst their distinct musical talents, only to be interrupted by another capable Special Color who is out to disrupt their band.
- Δ One of Maestro's daughters develops feelings for a Color, prompting a very unexpected proposal for a date.
- Δ A scholarship to the Conservatory calls into question how the band can stay together as each member finds their way.



Shared Universe Challenge

In creating such a wide variety of Modules that highlight settings rarely found in *sentai*, we had also hoped to somehow connect all of these threads into something larger. How does one connect a love letter to Universal Monsters to jumping into a post-apocalyptic setting and then explore cryptid lore?

So we developed the Shared Universe Challenge, a timeline with which to approach these Modules that allows for a group of players to tell cohesive stories throughout many settings. This can push the group outside of their comfort zone into new aesthetics and locales, providing for some payoff as ideas resurface in Modules played later. After all, *sentai* fans often feel the joy of a previous hero showing up in a later season!

Having explored all of the *Henshin!* Modules, what follows is a breakdown of how to approach the Shared Universe Challenge. The one Module not included in this challenge is Let's Jam, as this setting borrows from the already established Jamminger lore that is best left in its own alternate universe. The Shared Universe Challenge will carry players through most Modules, and when the group wants to take a break from this storyline, then Let's Jam can be a session on the side!

Players are likely to explore one to a handful of episodes for each Module, giving each story time to breathe without drawing out an entire extended series. Because one series will wrap up when one Module ends and another begins, these should lay the groundwork of the new story with perhaps some loose threads left to come up another time. Maybe only one episode of Monster Freak is followed by a half-dozen of Star Phase because the story just takes that direction, followed by maybe just two episodes of Bug Camp. Feel out the flow at the table!

The Narrator's directorial role is put to the test as they look for opportunities to weave a larger narrative, such as establishing that a new character is actually the descendent of a character earlier on in the timeline! They also keep their finger on the pulse of the storyline, encouraging a resolution of one Module when the timing feels right. Lastly, the Narrator always keeps an eye at the threat at large in each Module, as the way in which the Big Bad is or isn't set up to be resolved may affect the outcome of the storyline!

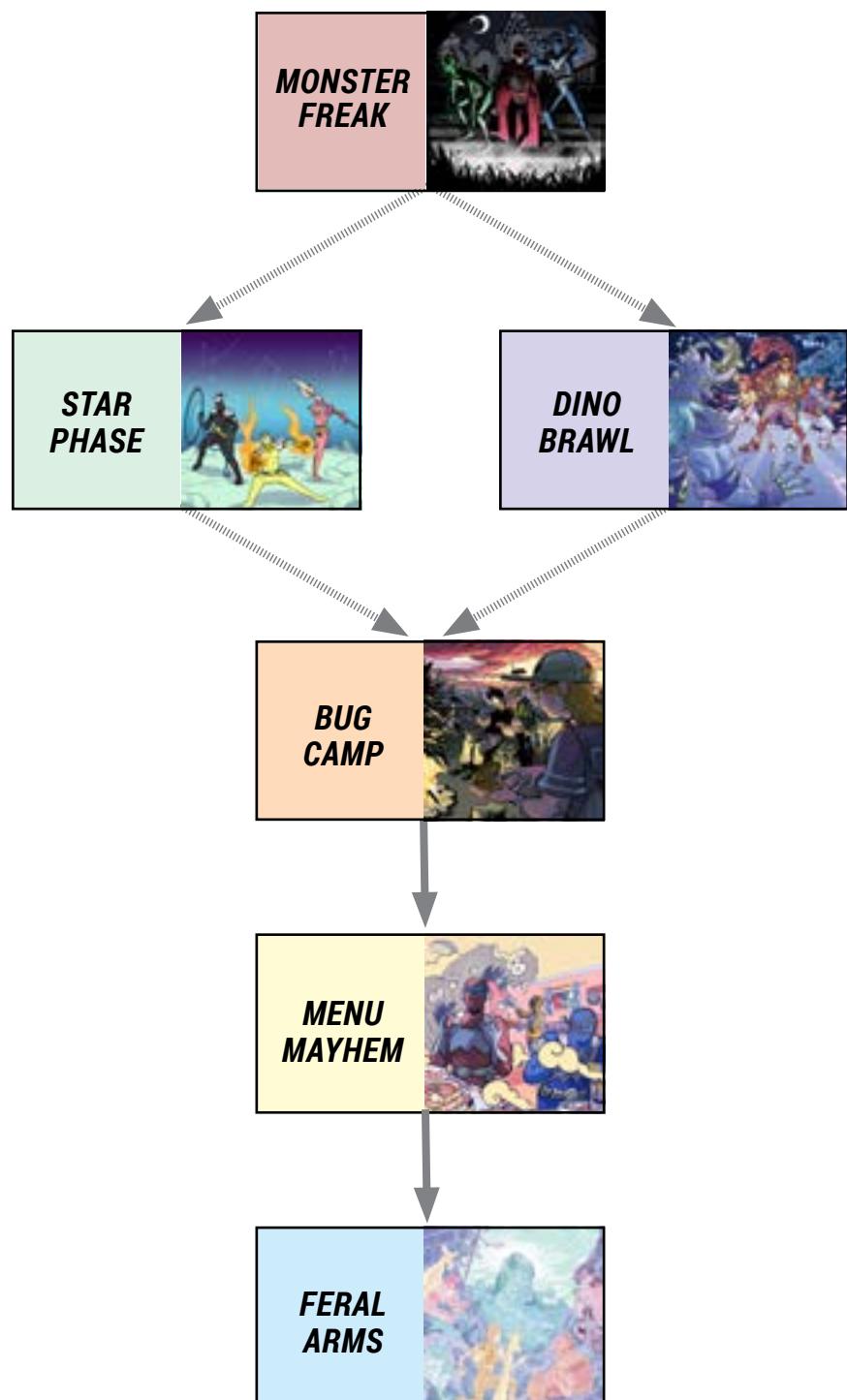
The following worksheet lays out the timeline of events from the first Module that always starts out the Challenge. From there,

the story may branch to a different Module based on what feels like an appropriate or interesting direction from what has been developed. This is subjective and up to the table! More so than a single cohesive storyline, this allows the table to creatively challenge and diversify their storytelling from beginning to end of the Challenge.

- 1 It always begins with **Monster Freak!** Set in the 1980s somewhere in the northeastern United States, this Module theatrically sets up threats using classic motifs that originate from an underground hell. It's fun, flexible, and sets up danger to come!
- 2A The next option is **Star Phase**, set during the 1990s in the Bay Area. While the threat looms from the stars, this Module also explores heroes managing work and life balance. There's room for Colors to mature into adults and possibly explore far outside the bounds of this planet!
- 2B The other option is **Dino Brawl**, also set during the 1990s but in a major midwestern city. This action-focused Module also sees danger coming from other galaxies, but instead examines how everyday citizens are infected by the fighting spirit created by that danger. This Module is lighter, a bit kitschy, and involves lots of combat!
- 3 Regardless of the previous Module, all paths point to **Bug Camp** during the early 2000s in the wilderness of the Pacific Northwest. This Module joins the new young heroes with exploration of a cryptid community that widens the scope of what has been seen on this planet. Importantly, it sets up a threat of potential environmental devastation in the form of razing forests and harnessing cryptid powers.
- 4 Following that is **Menu Mayhem**, a slightly stranger dystopian future set in the vague 20XX across multiple countries on Earth. Here we see threats manifest as part of the food system and government authorities. The environmental imbalance introduced in Bug Camp teeters on the edge, and what results could be catastrophic.
- 5 Finally, **Feral Arms** is set far into the future in what was

likely the Southwestern United States. This Module subverts tropes explored in the prior Modules—the threat has already taken over, and the civilians are the tiny force poised to strike back. Since the location and time lapsed is vague, this Module is the best opportunity to introduce descendants and loose threads from previous series to come together in a satisfying climax.

At the end of the Shared Universe Challenge, anywhere from a dozen to several dozen episodes may have elapsed! Surely there will have been birth and loss, unexpected favorite characters and memorable Big Bads, and a giant story spanning decades (or even centuries!).



Make Your Own Module

After reading the *Henshin!* Modules included in this book, there may be an idea of your own to explore as a setting. The idea may be a little rough with some blanks to fill in, and it would be helpful to have a basic format for making sure all the necessary details are there. If that's the case, then you have arrived at the right section!

Creating a custom Module is explained here as a step-by-step process, with explanations and guidance around each core component of the Module. An actual worksheet for writing out ideas is included in the digital downloads available at henshingame.com.

Step One: The Premise

There is no setting or aesthetic that is truly off the table for a game like *Henshin!*, meaning there may be an almost overwhelmingly limitless realm of possibilities for the Module. This is great! But since storytelling games are a collaborative medium, the needs of additional people must be considered and may pare down the wealth of ideas. After all, the players will be making choices and introducing new story elements in this living, breathing setting, so that world needs to be an enjoyable starting place for these players.

Below are three simple questions to ask of your setting idea, followed by qualifying questions to be used if it was difficult to simply answer the first.

- Δ **Is it accessible?** Is this something a new player could pick up and understand without knowledge of the source material? Are there enough real-world references or relatable ideas that players can resonate with?
- Δ **Is it simple?** Does the general concept allow the players to imagine several episodes and story arcs unfolding over play? Is the world open and flexible enough to allow for different possibilities? Are the powers and the threats crystal clear?
- Δ **Is it fun?** Do the ideas make you laugh or do they excite you? Is this something you could see translating well to a TV show or movie? Do you get a strong visual in your head of the action?

These ideas may not cancel out a possible Module idea altogether, but instead refine that idea to work better at the table. Even if a Module idea is chosen and continues to develop during

this process, it may be worth revisiting this list to address those three basic questions.

These questions have been a part of the *Henshin!* Modules published in this text. For example, *Feral Arms* was originally going to be set on a perpetual train moving across the landscape. This was fun, as it's a unique take that episodically moves characters from place to place each episode, and it's relatable since most everyone can imagine being on a train as reference. However, one of the most exciting parts of *Feral Arms* was the dangerous landscape that has been twisted by the threats at hand, which played into the themes we wanted to explore. In order to hit those themes while keeping things simple, we decided that it made more sense to instead focus on a grounded community trying to survive and fight back against a changing landscape. The train was ditched because it made things overly complex, and the Module improved because of that!

Step Two: The Details

With an idea for the Module decided, what follows is completing necessary details for the aesthetics, community, cast, and story threads. These can be completed in any order, and are explored below in the order in which they appear on the digital Module worksheet.

There is one important element of Module creation that is not actually published in the Module text: a central theme or two that the Module addresses. While the premise tells you what the setting is about, the theme is what the premise says about our characters, or maybe even life in general. For example, themes to explore in *Dino Brawl* are justice and pacifism, as it's a reminder that story threads should ask players how best to respond to violent acts as well as the extent to which combat is necessary. The players are never hit over the head with that theme, but it did provoke some interesting angles to challenge the fighting-themed Module.

Themes tend to be broad ideas that are universally relatable, like courage, survival, prejudice, or coming of age. The theme or themes chosen are an invisible throughline to the Module details chosen, something like a blueprint of the setting that the players don't directly come into contact with.

Color Aesthetics

While each Color will become a unique character set apart from the other heroes, a tenet of *sentai* is that there is still a unifying aesthetic for the team. If it's a pirate-themed Module, the five oceans of the world could be a unifying aesthetic that helps tie together the look of each Color. This way, when the Squad suits up and works in unison, we imagine a clearly defined team rather than a hodgepodge of different ideas.

These aesthetics are detailed for each potential player at the table, usually choosing five examples to accommodate the maximum players included. And if you create five but only have three players, the other two options are perfect for a Special Color introduced later in the season or as a new Color for a player to choose after retiring their current Color.

Aesthetic example: Depending on the Module, this could be an animal, element, or any number of unifying design ideas that work in the setting. Examples of aesthetics can be found in the appendix of this book.

Suit detail: Identify one visually prominent detail about suit that is in line with the aesthetic. This could be horns on the helmet or a certain pattern across the chest. Remember, the design of the suits on a Squad should be generally consistent, like players on a team, so this one detail should be what makes this hero stand out!

Weapon: This is the item that the hero can use during combat while suited up. Each weapon in the Squad should be unique so as to make describing combat more interesting. Start with the aesthetic example established, and then drill down more about the weapon: Is the range hand-to-hand, nearby, or far away? Does it need to be powered or reloaded? Is it more suited for attacking or defending?

Mech: Every example also includes the giant robot that can be summoned as part of the hero's powers. This is also in line aesthetically, and if the aesthetic was an animal or an object, then the Mech may just be a giant version of that! Whatever is chosen as the Mech's form, it is helpful to add a descriptor to that form, such as 'fierce' or 'vigorous'. This specific name given to the Mech reinforces that it is the only one of its kind in the world.

Named attack: It's fun to establish a signature move and catchphrase

that the hero could use during combat. This doesn't necessarily determine details about the character, but instead serves as a resource for their player as a line to call out during play. Have fun with this!

Community & Cast

Now that details are established about the look and feel of the heroes, the Module's attention turns to the rest of the world they inhabit. All of these are necessary starting points, and naturally these may change and grow overtime. The five community locations included may feature prominently in some early episodes, but a few locations may not be seen again while several new ones are naturally developed during play. Or perhaps the Big Bad gets switched mid-season when the General takes over during a successful coux, and the ousted former antagonist becomes a sympathetic villain!

Setting: This is the specific location and time period that the action centers around in this Module. If it's a place or time that not everyone is familiar with, a short description of the setting may help!

Base: This serves as a safehouse of sorts for the Squad and may be disguised within their community. It could be a secret base that the Colors discover for themselves, or it could be a repurposed location out of the public eye. If the base is not a secret or heavily guarded, it could then fall into the wrong hands, after all.

Community locations: In addition to the base, imagine five more concrete spots across the setting in which the Squad may find themselves. Consider a tiny bit of interesting description with some locations so that if a player decided to set a scene there they would already have a start to describing the location.

Squad obligation: Ultimately, the group of Colors are drawn together for some cause or task. This shouldn't be easily resolved in one episode, and probably represents the ultimate mission that the Module would explore across the season.

Squad principle: While the obligation describes *what* the Squad will do, the principle captures *how* they should go about doing it. This principle describes the best use of the powers granted to the Squad and is probably reinforced by the Custodian. Note that this plays in mechanically, also! If the entire Squad confronts danger in a way that

follows this principle, every player gains a token according to the Squad Turns. So if the principle is justice but the Squad instead goes on a baseless revenge mission, this mechanic would not trigger.

Custodian of power: This character has some innate connection with the powers used by the Squad, and likely acts as some sort of caretaker for these powers (or for those using the powers). They may be knowledgeable, otherwordly, or ancient enough to be the exact creature suited for watching over the Squad and their powers.

Big Bad: This primary antagonist drives the conflict of the season and should be a powerful force to be reckoned with. Even if they aren't featured prominently in every episode, it is clear that this character is behind the larger threats that put the Squad and community in danger. Does their power come from working covertly in the shadows, or immense strength, or alien technology? Make sure this is a memorable character that players will love to hate!

General: This is one additional named antagonist that players are more likely to encounter with boots on the ground. Because they don't need to be an absolute menace like the Big Bad, find some quirk or strange detail that makes this character especially fun to interject into scenes when appropriate.

Foot Soldiers: Finally, these antagonists are the unnamed mass of low-grade baddies that can be sent out to cause havoc for the heroes. Rarely will these represent a direct threat, so focus on the other qualities that make them particularly troublesome.

Power source: Moving away from concrete characters in the setting, this is an opportunity to spell out exactly what physical representation of the Squad's power is used for their transformation. This item could be a conduit for power that lives elsewhere, or it could be manufactured to be its own source of power. Think about how this would be carried and used by heroes during play, especially in their civilian attire! It should probably be somewhat unsuspecting to the untrained eye, and it should definitely tie in thematically to the Module at large.

Signature hand motion: When a Color transforms, the player is asked to perform some sort of gesture at the table to represent the theatrics of transformations we see in sentai. It shouldn't be overly complicated and should echo something related to the aesthetic or

premise in the Module.

Weapons combine into something: Write out two or three adjectives that describe the Ultimate Weapon formed by the Squad. The specifics of that weapon can be worked out in play given the actual weapons being combined, but these descriptors at least help align the visual with some common ideas.

Mechs combine into something: Again, two or three adjectives will provide a conceptual framework for how the Ultimate Form of the Squad's mechs. These words could echo some idea of the aesthetic behind the mechs in the first place.

First Session Hooks

With the details of the setting established, these hooks provide the setup for some simple, driving scenes that introduce the Colors to action in their very first episode. Think about opportunities to bring the Colors all together and involve their powers or a villain. Most importantly, think about situations that the Colors simply can't ignore! After all, the hook just provides the setup, but how the players actually react is up to them. So long as it drives action, it will help snowball potential story threads and conflict for the rest of the episode.

Write out three first session hooks, and they could each be ideas that could play out in the same first episode, or even different ideas for totally different approaches to an episode! With this element of choice available, the Narrator can get a feel for the action set up by the Colors at the table to choose one hook that appropriately drives play.

Further Scene Ideas

These additional scenes introduce other locations, character, or plot elements that help build up the story by driving conflict and enriching the setting. Like the first session hooks, these story seeds are a useful resource in the Narrator's back pocket to set up when appropriate for the fiction. Not every scene idea will necessarily be explored in one play of a Module, but any could be a viable option.

Three further scene ideas are needed, and again these should introduce situations in which the Colors must respond to something. This isn't to say that they are forced to act a certain way;

instead, the source of conflict should be interesting and relevant with stakes that matter so that the players care to be involved.

Ongoing Season Arcs

Finally, these story ideas look past the initial episodes of a season to where the conflict where naturally crescendo. The Big Bad usually figures prominently in here, as they naturally drive that peril. Other aspects of the setting to explore are the Squad's base or powers being threatened, the Custodian's backstory factoring into the plot, or a Special Color being introduced.

Three ongoing season arcs are needed, and while this does not seem like much given the scope of the series, think of these more as a jumping off point. Most of the story arcs in play will come up naturally as they emerge from the fiction, as it's most interesting and meaningful when it arises from the players' actions. The players are the ones nocking the arrows and sending them hurdling into the series premise. The Narrator, acting as the director, has these ongoing season arcs as a potential target for these arrows to land so that plot points are hit that reinforce the theme and premise of the Module.

Step Three: The Pitch!

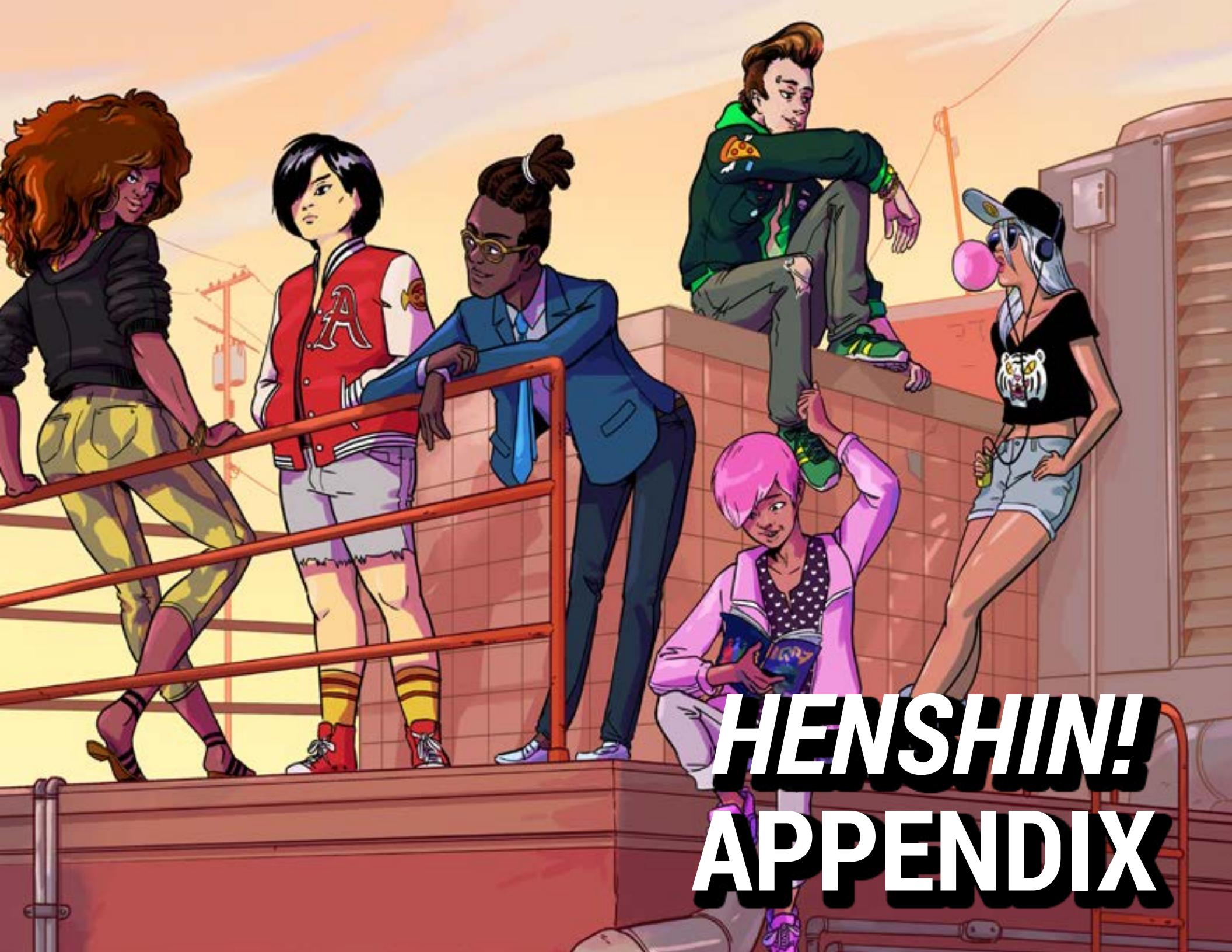
At this point, the Module is completed! However, the best ideas don't gain traction unless others engage, especially when the idea is for a Module that must be played by a group of players. Therefore, the Module needs some sort of pitch to be easily understood by the potential players.

At this point, the person developing the Module probably has some high-level knowledge about the setting, and maybe even some strong urges about where the story should go. However, is that useful to pitch to someone hearing the idea for the first time? Instead of providing that info dump, it's encouraged to write up a one- or two-paragraph pitch for the Module, such as what's found at the start of each Module in this book.

The pitch should then be short, memorable, and introduce compelling ideas that don't necessarily have a clear path toward resolution. After all, the players will be less excited about what a Module already decidedly is, and more so about what the Module could be. It should provide just enough information to get the

wheels turning for those who want to play! This pitch can be pasted into an email to the players as you all compare calendars to find that first session date, or it could be read out loud alongside other Modules at the start of the session as players make a choice.

Finally, while the pitch encapsulates the greater Module ideas into something pithy and digestible, the smallest amount of artwork can similarly convey a lot of aesthetic and nuance effectively. Not everyone will feel confident about their artistic talents (or calling on those with that confidence and time), so this could also be a series of images found online instead of an original piece. Looking in this book at the amazing pieces produced for the *Henshin!* Modules by talented artists, it's clear that a strong visual can sometimes be the most compelling part of an otherwise deep and involved Module premise.



HENSHIN! **APPENDIX**

Squad Aesthetic Table

Using the power of...	We fight for...	In the setting of...
Medicinal herbs	Preservation	A runaway train
Strains of bacteria	Attachment	A spooky small town
Solar systems	Lasting change	A rainforest
Planets	Overcoming fear	A virtual reality
Elements	Focus	A space station
Cars	Awareness	Today, here and now
Film genres	Artistic integrity	Arthurian Britain
Historical authors	Protecting Earth	A ninja village
Types of birds	Friendship	College
Mythical beasts	Confidence	High school
Types of minerals	Finding a new home	Juvenile detention
Geometric shapes	Individuality	Space prison
Dinosaurs	Positivity	Sleepaway camp
Video games	Sustainability	An ocean liner
The five senses	The future	A desert wasteland
Cooking techniques	Protecting humanity	1940s Hollywood
Types of trees	Getting back home	A crime-ridden city
Trains	Survival	A secret society
Gemstones	Fulfillment	Police training
Water cycle phases	Upholding ideals	A remote island
Types of dragons	Vengeance	Kung fu academy
Classic RPG classes	Truth	1920s Harlem

Monster Table

Resembles a...	That is driven by...	And attacks with...
Vacuum cleaner	Envy	Hidden mouth
Rice cooker	Tooth decay	Ancient blade
Bass guitar	Lust	Lance
8-track tape	Rage	Lantern
Mosquito	Insatiable hunger	Magic mirror
Crocodile	Greed	Bazooka
Spider	Stealing spotlights	Mouse trap
Pencil	Absorbing intellect	Microwave oven
Refrigerator	Stealing faces	Slingshot
Stop sign	Disruptive music	Talons
Baseball glove	Collecting victims	Portable cannon
Turtle	Formal dueling	Flowing baton
Raft	Eating pollution	Dual pistols
Tent	Stealing resources	Cleaving axe
Octopus	Childlike curiosity	Crystal ball
Lion	Exploding things	Laser-shooting eyes
Comic books	Transforming others	Pocket dimension
Padlock	A strange backstory	Bow and arrows
Motorcycle	Desire to please	Stink bomb
Sphinx	A warrior's code	Brainwashing beam
Eyeball	Insulting others	Morningstar
Purse	Eating children	Lot of snakes

Notable Henshin! Monsters

Smash Moth

Catchphrase: "All that glitters..." (dramatic flourish) "...is gold!"

Description: A fuzzy humanoid with bulbous eyes and silken wings, the notable feature of Smash Moth is actually their characteristic boxing gloves. These oversized, tough vinyl mittens may come soaring at their foe from great heights, since Smash Moth effortlessly glides through the night time air. Outside of combat, conversation may fall a little short with this lepidopterous creature, since they come off pretty vapid and bro-y. But a mere candle's flame will take Smash Moth off your hands for awhile, to which he'll proclaim "this shit is lit".

Heavy Turn: Deliver a mighty wallop from above

Light Turn: Become transfixed on a convenient light source

Δ

Gem-In-Eyes

Catchphrase: "Two-faced just means twice as good looking!"

Description: This swift and quick-witted giant magpie is a tough villain to shake. Gem-In-Eyes will effortlessly blend into their surroundings, imitate someone you thought you knew, and glibly talk their way out of most situations. Yet their most dangerous power lies in the twin jewels gleaming in each of their peepholes... once initiated, one gem will blind its victim with dazzling light while the other captures a near-perfect imitation of them! Gem-In-Eyes will gladly use this newfound doppelgangery to sow havoc, though with all of this subterfuge and drama, this monster will often become its own worst enemy.

Heavy Turn: Convincingly imitate someone they have encountered before

Light Turn: Get caught up in dueling internal monologues

Δ

ThugKin

Catchphrase: "I'll give ya pumpkin to talk about..."

Description: Have you ever seen the Wizard of Oz and found yourself thinking, "I wish that Scarecrow was krumping"? We give you ThugKin! Sporting a sinister jack-o'-lantern atop an ever shambling body of straw, ThugKin is known primarily for his harsh slashing dance moves and even harsher attitude. Always with poison on his tongue, ThugKin is always looking for a chance to add insult to the injuries he creates. However, his temper can get the best of him, for when he is really riled up, his head will overheat and pop off!

Heavy Turn: Stun someone into silence with a sick burn

Light Turn: Lose one's head, literally, in an argument

Δ

Cassetrophe

Catchphrase: "Your hope of winning...has left the building!"

Description: Obsessed with bringing back the 1980s era of glam rock and hair metal, Cassetrophe is every bad leather-clad rockstar. Known primarily for pushing their mixtape that has the power to distort and break any technology nearby, Cassetrophe blasts their ill-wrought serenades just about anywhere; in night clubs, public transit and even in the grocery store! This alone makes Cassetrophe quite the tour de force...that is, if they can stay focused on the task at hand! Cassetrophe never lets their fans down and never ever turns down a request.

Heavy Turn: Break a hero's weapon with a brutal sound attack

Light Turn: Pause and start crooning a new tune, by request or not...

Δ

Notes on Sentai & Storytelling

By Brandon Sichling

Brandon is a game designer, writer, filmmaker, and professor at Northeastern University. You can find them at brandonlsichling.com or at your local gaming store. Just check behind the DM screen.

"What do I do?"

"What do you want to do?"

"I can do, like, anything?"

"Anything you...like. Yes."

"But what should I do?"

The first job of teaching game design is guiding students as interested players, broadening how they think about play and the kinds of experiences they want to craft. The difficulty is that we like which already exists. Taste is a gravity well, dictating the kinds of games we play (first-person shooters, puzzle games, Eurostyle board games) and how we think about play (story-forward, freeform, tactical). My students tend to play a lot of goal-oriented games, which frame play as the process of winning (or beating someone else). That kind of game usually has a character for players to inhabit while they do only what they're supposed to until the game is over. Games like those can be really useful in talking about design, but they don't create any opportunities to think about an audience. *Henshin!*, being the kind of RPG it is, supports players in thinking about what's interesting for other people, not "right" for themselves.

That kind of play helps the Game Master and each of the players practice design by setting up and guiding each other through character-driven action sequences. Whether or not games are good for storytelling (they are) isn't so much my concern here as how games create interesting choices for players. Games about winning reward winning all the time, even if those victories come at a cost, but good storytelling is about characters working with their shortcomings and setbacks. Henshin has players do that in a team of teenagers with giant robots, balancing their needs and goals with their allies' through their customized character.

"I wanna kill the minion with a cool jump kick."

"You don't have any tokens."

"What?"

"That's a heavy turn. It costs a token."

"So I have to fail to get a token..? Ohhhhhh..."

That a-ha moment is golden, when you can see the student bring information together and synthesize knowledge. There's a strategic component here, because while players need to misstep to get tokens, which they need to do something cool or summon their robots, but students see so clearly how that plays into the story (the "ludonarrative," as we say in the biz). One game I ran for my students opened on the Colors hanging out in a pizza parlor where one of them worked. I asked them who was there, besides the other Colors, that they cared about.

"My crush is there, grabbing a slice."

I asked some detail questions ("What do you like about them? Are you friends? What's a moment you've shared?") and then my student made a fool of themselves while serving the pizza. Right after that, when a fight broke out, they had an extra token to do something cool in front of their crush, which set up that classic beat of the masked hero wishing they could tell their love interest who they really are. At the end of the session, as the team wound down after fighting off a hipster monster made of analog cameras, I had the crush flirt back with the player. It was a nice, satisfying ending to the episode, even if nothing actually changed.

Since *sentai* is episodic, it gets to explore characters over long, emotionally intricate, and operatic arcs. Luckily, each episode delivers by blowing up a monster. Granted, the stakes don't feel too high because we know the heroes will win, but it feels so good to see because they earn it together. That's no less true in Henshin. A lot is made of projection and catharsis, especially in superhero cinema. The thinking goes that masks allow us to project ourselves onto characters. I wonder if it isn't more a case of integration. If we look to Noh or Kabuki, a better explanation might be that a mask simplifies a character, distilling them to a single trait these big, melodramatic forms tend to explore. Theatre has always thrived on iconography to let the audience know what kind of person a character is. We see the red one and know they're angry and adventurous; the blue one is smart; the yellow one is sincere. If nothing else, color coding helps you keep the 47 Ronin straight.

"Not all our moves are the same?"

"Right."

"Who has the heavy gun then?"

"Does your motif have heavy guns?"

"No, we're kitchen appliances."

"Well then."

Costumes let audiences know how characters will resolve plot (the puncher, the tactician, etc.) and how they'll throw their emotions at each other. Students see pretty quickly that the heavy moves that make their Color cool is also their weak point: Green is creative, but also struggles to relate. You see something similar with Italian commedia dell'arte, plays that drop stock characters into different plots. Audiences enjoy knowing how the servant trickster Harlequin will interact with the greedy Pantone or the beautiful Columbina. Dell'arte costumes, which also have masks, let the audience know who the character is in themselves and the story. It's revelatory for students, and a good reminder for me, to see that team composition can be more than "tank, healer, skill monkey" because that's how you win fights. I have a lot of fun exploring what happens when Henshin's rules facilitate parties of "aggressive, standoffish, flighty" because that's how you struggle to come together. To win fights. It's a real, emotional experience dealing with your Color's personality trait along with everyone else's because you have all of those traits sometimes.

"I'll take the brunt of this attack."

"The InstaMonster laser-flashes your blender mech, sending you skittering across the parking lot. Take a token."

"Black! You didn't have to do that."

"Heh. I'm glad to: we can all spend a token to take our Ultimate Mech Form, the Fridge."

Then again, failing is a great way to do something amazing, like using a huge ice dispenser to destroy a ginormous camera monster. Doing something interesting, and not what you should, is the best way I know of staying interested in designing games and saving Earth.

Backer Thanks

Completing this book was in no small way thanks to the many crowdfunding backers who had enough faith in this project to help fund the way. Even though it's the flashy heroes of *sentai* that steal the scene, their work would be nothing without the many talented people who occupy the credits. So, let's roll credits.

A huge *Henshin!* thank you to:

A, Aaron, Aaron Cornelius, Aaron Dunn, Aaron Erskine, Aaron Griffin, Aaron Pabon, Aaron Rennex, AB Silvera, ACGalaga, Adam Greig, Adam Thibault, AdamUltraberg, Adrian Aw-Young, Aitor De Francisco Castro, Al Saeid, Alan Quach, Alan Wilkinson, Alec Espinola, Alejandro Soler, Aleph Craven, Alex Chase, Alex Cortez, Alex Hesson, Alex Iptok Melluso, Alex Miller-Clendon, Alex Norris, Alexander Clowes, Alexander S. Thompson, Alexander Vieux, Alexis Ortiz, Alexis Sara, Alfonso Jaramillo, Alfred, Alice Tobin, Alvin Lim Chin Hon, Amanda, Andoni Ibarra, Andre Keller, Andrensath, Andrew, Andrew Betts, Andrew Burgoon, Andrew Doucet, Andrew Greaux, Andrew Hatwell, Andrew Hovanec, Andrew James, Andrew O'Hanlon, Andrew Walters, Anntonia Jackson, Anthony Higginson, Anthony Noel, Anton Hovanec, Aritz, Arthur Lender, Artie Street, ArtJDM, Arturo Soriano, Ashbright, Asher, Atomic ATX, Austin Barth, Austin Tellez, AVRGForum, Ayleron, B-Noble, Becky Scott Fairley, Ben Fried-Lee, Ben Hale, Ben Kennedy, Ben McDermott, Benjamin little, Benjamin Welke, Bennett Hobson, Benton, Bill Garrett, Bionichute, Blazer5400, Blueberrybea, Bob Howard, Bobafeth, Bodri Takonyweaver, Bradey Sooter - BS•Comics, Braedyn Blain, Brandon Metcalf, Brandon Nguyen, Brandon F, Brayden Martens, Breanne Long, Brendan Hencher, Brendon Neeland, Brennan Dawson, Brent Naylor, Brett Robbins, Brian, Brian, Brian Farley, Brian Leung, Brian Paul, Brian Weisberg, Brian Zaricor, Brock Hough, Bryan Niedojadlo, Bryant, Buddy Goodboy, Bunnehwyld, Cactuscat, CaitSith, Caleb Goellner, Caleb Rutherford, Calvin, Calvin Sartin Jr, Cameron Hattrick, Captain Marvelous, Carl, Carl Brian Mattsson, Carlos Figueroa, Carlos P, Carmana, Carmen Askerneese, Cassandra Lease, Cat99, CdiGanon, Chad Duncan, Chameleonknight, Chandler, Charles, Charles Boucher, Charles Watley, Charles Xie, Chase Frank, Chirag Asnani, Chris, Chris Becker, Chris Bell, Chris Connell, Chris

Kowalski, Chris Sarapung, Chris Tapley, Chris Thayer, Chris Williams, Christian Weiss, Christopher Chen, Christopher Hughes, Christopher Lavery, Christopher P Stilson, Christopher Vogler, Cisco, CJ, CJ Johnson, Clay Gardner, Clayton Lee, Clément Leblie, CMudd, Cody, Cody Marbach, Colin Becker, Collin Couey, Colton Baker, Compass, Connor Keane, Contesse, Cory Waters, Coty Owens, Couchman, Crimson_Coqui, Crystal, CrystalRose M Fales, Curt Meyer, Cybuns, Dacanay Estill, Dacar Arunsone, Dakota Pryor, Dan Cozzi, Dan Kovel, Dan Soard, Daniel, Daniel Baldwin, Daniel Bengtsson, Daniel C. Allen Jr, Daniel Johnson, Daniel Markovic, Danielle Mendus, Danielle Mosby, Dann McNerney, Dave Hill, Dave J Story, Dave Van Domelen, DaveG - Phoenix Rising Mendicant Paragon, David, David, David Brown, David Dittman, David Erwin, David Hensley, David Jasper, David L Mayberry, David Martin, David Scasny, David Walker, David Ward, DBGreece, DCLawrence_UK, Declan Feeney, Decottignies, Dennis Dufour, Derek Burrow, Derek Scott, Derik Allen French, Derrick Affolder, Dexter Bennett, DKeith2011, Doc Tran, Dockraken, Dominik Pintera, Donald Gaither, Donnie Hanby, Doyce Testerman, DreamSword, Drew Burris, Drew Jackson, Drew Wendorf, DT, Duncan Frost, Duo Grunfox, Dustin Hook, Dustin Muise, Dustin Turner, Earl Rufus, Earthbound, Edmund Michael Kera, Eduardo Cabrera, Ehow, Eli, Elliott Freeman, Eric, Eric Bailey, Eric Curtis, Eric Drennon, Eric Myers, Erica Schmitt, Erik Hansen, Erik Jensen, Erik M Lang, Eryk Donovan, Ethan Childers, Ethan Deneault, Evan, Evan Burris, Evan Eakett, Evan Hicks, Evan Saft, Evaristo Badiali, Ewen Cluney, Ezekiel Zhong-Han Azib, FAKKU, Fatima Perez, Featherweather, Fergus Davidson, Fieryone, Florent Pouply Cadio, Fofo, Forrest JS Schreick, FortressLad, François Lalande, Freddy Teo, Gabriel Gonzalez, Gabriel Manalo, Gabriel Pasco, Gallant Knight Games, Garrett Geary, Garrett Goluszka, Gary Oak Courtney, Gean31, Gerry Havey, Gigas, Giovanni Valentino, Giulio Capriotti, Gmasku, Gonzalo Araos, Gordon, Gordon Stephen, Gourdcaptain, Grant Chen, Grant Conselyea, Grave Nightcross, Gregory Holmes, Grigri, Guest 1746855646, Guest 51646787, Guest 685772515, Guest 732222267, Guido D'Aleo, Guillermo Cáceres Reverte, Hamish Steele, Hans Chun, Harley, Harrison Horton, Hasan Mahmood, Heather L. Haskett, Hendriks Steve, Henrique De Vasconcelos Correia, Henstio, Heres_An_Adam, Hua Jui Tseng, Hunter Scott Hanson, Ian McFarlin, Ian O'Neil, Isabel Cylinder, J.T. O'Connor, Jack Donald, Jack Zimmer, Jacky Leung, Jacob Fair, Jacob Feldman, Jacob Gunner, Jacob Mason, Jacob Pawson, Jacob Shelley, James, James Cherry-McDonough, James Earl Hilty III, James Fergie, James

Fletcher, James Forgione, James J. W., James Jordan McAfee, James Lynes, James MacDougall, James smedley, James Trotter, James Whitbrook, James Wiken, James Williams, Jason, Jason, Jason Conners, Jason E. Petrea, Jason Glowa, Jason Henderson, Jason Hendricks, Jason Hunt, Jason McGee, Jason Yee, Jay Philips, Jeff T., Jeremy Mattocks, Jesse, Jesse Borkowski, Jessica, Jessica Serafim, JesterBug, Jewan Jupiter, Jim Gibbons, Jim Trainor, João Pedro Cavalcante, Joe Lukowski, Joe Lunsford, Joel Bradshaw, John D Kennedy, John Doyle, John J. Berting, John Lusky, John Ostermiller, John Robinson, John Sitton, John Templeton, John Vang, John Ward, Johnathan Nguyen, Jon Dorfman, Jon Hygom Gislason, Jon Mei, Jonathan Guzman, Jonathan Hoops, Jonathan Howe, Jonathan Ly Davis, Jordan, Jordan Bennett, Jordan Lowrey, Jordan Springer, Jorge Castellon Jr., Joseph Lunder, Joseph Powell, Josh Dodson, Josh Frisch, Josh H., Josh Morris, Josh Murphy, Josh Sitton, Josh Zuccalo, Joshua Adam Villarreal, Joshua Crowe, Joshua Elmore, Joshua Graves, Joshua L Hurlock, Joshua Salyer, Joshua Silberfein, Joshua Trope, Juan Lugo, Julian Hernandez, Julian Simental, Julian Williams, Juniper Shores, Justen Hunter, Justin, Justin Crawford, Justin Guercia, Justin Jacobs, Justin Mitchell, Justin Perkins, Justin Vona, Justin Yoder, Justo Diaz, Kafzeil, Kallum Keefe Weyman, KameBruh, Karen Guerrero, Karl Foster, Karl Maurer, Karsing, Katrani, KazaNeko, Kebs, Keith Baldwin, Keith Chapman, Keith Cole, Keith James, Kelin, Kelsey Griffiths, Kelsie Dykstra, Kenneth Walker, Kevin Brolly, Kevin House, Kevin Jackson, Kevin Jiang, Kevin McCarthy, Kevin Tyner, Kiboski, Kieran Keilthy, Kieren Dale, Kim Fletcher, King Nano, Kodi Hopkins, Koltreg, Konbini-kun, Kris Leeke, Kristen Mullan, Kristianne Ayagan, Kristine MacLeod, Kskt, Kyle A Banks, Kyle Ayres, Kyle Groom, Kyle Hood, Kyle Kiefer, Kyle Penland, Kyle Sweeney, Kyrapyon, Lakan Shoker, Lan Pitts, Lauren Shey, Legotron123, Leslie, Levi D., Levonsong, Lily Gioia, Lionel Ng, Lisa Padol, LoakaMossi, Logan Strickland, lonelydistance, Louis Bamberger, Louisrex364, Luis Villarreal, Łukasz Smurzyński, Luke Hemming, Luke Labishak, Luke Warner, Lydean Kenzall, M, Mackenzie, Mandy Blankenship, Marc Seidel, Marcel Hauptmann, Marcus, Mario K Sasso, Mark, Mark, Mark Bolaton, Mark Braasch, Mark Parker, Mark Solino, Marshall Miller, Marshawn Griffin, Martin Glassborow, Marvelous Miss K, Mary Jo Chrabasz, Mathew Geraint Williams, Matisse, Matt, Matt Dolphy Clark, Matt Frank, Matt Frazita, Matt Harrold, Matt Penn, Matt Wester, Matteo Romanella, Matthew, Matthew, Matthew Beckham, Matthew Blakley, Matthew Finney, Matthew Hartley, Matthew

Hernandez, Matthew House, Matthew Karpuk, Matthew Schuff, Matthew Suker, Matthew Thomson, Max Carlaftes, Max Mcfelia, MC_Duende, Megan, Melanie Nazelrod, Mendel, Michael Ambridge, Michael Bernier, Michael Braun, Michael Chan, Michael Coles, Michael Flowers, Michael Gilstrap, Michael Miele, Michael Pietrelli, Michael Renner, Michael Scales, Michael Wight, Michele Gelli, Michikeen, Mig, Mike Basinger, Mike Fatum, Mike Martone, Mike Pallas, Mike W.J. Campbell, Mike Williams, Minky, MissingFile, Misty S., MrBoxOfTricks, Myles Griffin, N DeVita, Nardreene, Nathan Hicks, Nathan Z., Navarre, NecroNuke9, Neon Citizen Teal, Neoscream, Nicholas Arroyo, Nicholas Bootsman, Nicholas Elizondo, Nicholas Forrest Burtner, Nicholas Poonamallee, Nicholas Potter, Nick Guasp, Nicola Brunoni, Nicolaj 'Chico' Klitbo, Nicolas Desjardins, Niku Woods, Noah Jay-Bonn, Nocker, Nosolorol, Omphalos, Oscar Thomas, Owen Thaxton, P-P-P-P-Powerbook, Pairatime, Patrice Mermoud, Patrick, Patrick "Kuntos" Sapp, Patrick Knowles, Patrick OShea, Patrick Slavin, Paul A Foster, Paul Evans, Paul Pietsch, Paula Gaetos, Pedro Araujo Bernils Fonseca, Pete Petrusha (Imagining Games), Peter Mazzeo, Peter Molina, Philip Hindley, Philippe Bernier, Phillip Bailey, Phillip Houx, Post Apocalyptic Gamer (Maxadon96), Qualzarine, R Moorhead, Rachel Hestilow, Raymond Chen, Rebecca B, Rebecca Whitehead, Redworthy, Reggie Miles, Rem Zelaya, Riccardo Siligato, Richard, Richard, Richard Fieldhouse, Riley Hopkins, Rob Smith, Rob Soucy, Robbie Trexbor Jones, Robert, Robert, Robert Baumann Jr, Robert Christian, Robert Corr, Robert David Hyde, Robert Dodson, Robert Edgar Falkner, Robert Gallagher, Robert Galonski, Robert Graham, Robert Hedley, Robert John Ruthven, Robert Kim, Robert Mccarter, Robert Robertson, Robert Wetherall, Roberto Martin del campo Moreno, Robin Gonzales, Roger Young, Roi Gary, Ron, Ron Beck, Ronald Dietz, Ross Gavin, Ross Salerno, Rotem Cohen, Roxy Speakman, Ruby Saint Dennis, RuinRuler, Ryan Blackmore, Ryan Cadenhead, Ryan Cicak, Ryan Dziuba, Ryan Kohlbrecher, Ryan Linegar, Ryan Numrich, Ryan Oldani, Ryan Soto, Ryan Sundberg, Safeer Syed, Sakditat Kwanchaitanya, Salla, Salomon Ayala, Salvatore Bellomo, Sam "Samaritan" Fokker, Sam Dunham, Sam Fleeman, Sam Gorelick, Sam Ingle, Sam Marx, Sam Steel, Sarah, Sarah, Sarah Lanaway, Sarahlovesham, Schubacca, Scott Bryant, Scott Diederich, Scott Harris, Scott Jester, Scott Quirk, Sean, Sean Masella-Babin, Sean McCormack, Sean Robertson, Sebastian Cuellar, Sebastian Peter, Sephirot1300, Seth Daniel Brisco, Seth Schroeder, Shane C., Shane Hanley, Shane Hosea, Sidney Hinkes, Simon Cope,

Sp1ne-Sh0t, Spencer, SpiderHal, Stephanie Gerk, Stephen McDonald, Steven, Steven Lanzarotta, Steven Pope, Steven Riner, Steven Shotwell, Steven Warble, Stewart Burwood, Stewart Horne, SugarSkull, Svp, Taiga Brenerman, Tana Kumar Thayalan, Taylor Murray, Testudownist, The Creative Fund by BackerKit, The Golux, TheMasterO, Thom Wright, Thomas, Thomas Minser, Thomas P., Thomas Tipton, Tiago Marinho, Tim Aldridge, Tim Gauger, Tim Hodge, Tim Hutchings, Tim Sinclair, Timothy Furry, Timothy Harrison, Timothy Schemmel, TJ Thomsen, Tom Pouncey, Tommy Adams, Tony Hsieh, Tory Cristancho, Travis Arnold, Travis Hymas, Travis James Robinson, Travis Perkins, Trevor, Trey Boyle, Trip Space-Parasite, Tristan van Os, Troy Fullwood, Troy Gale, Tuan Vo, Tyler Crumrine, Tyler Diaz, Tyler Gurdak, Tyler Riegle, Tyler Smith, Tyler Trounce, Tyler Waldman, UberBen, Valerie Cummins, Van Fujishige, Vcom7418, VerdeD4, Victor Diaz, Victor Lopez III, Victoria Deuel, Vincent Fazio, Vulpophile, Vundal, Wagman, Warren, WelcomeCoffin, Wesley Reichle, Wilfredo Hernandez Jr, Will Roberts, Will Sims, William Fahrer, William Jor-El Hamilton, William Sims, Xavier, Xavier Bull, xxwhiteblazexx, XylirMoon, Yee Morgan, Zachariah Nash, Zachary Hoagland, Zachary K. Harrell, Zachary Repsher, Zachary Way, Zak Guder, Zakary Kuntze, Zeljka, Zephyr Sora, Zok

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