CHAMPIONS NOW

Ron Edwards

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From Champions the Super Role-Playing Game,

by George MacDonald and Steve Peterson

The storyline or plot of the game should be very flexible and responsive to the decisions of the players. No two adventures will be the same, because of the different directions that the characters can take. The Game Master should be willing to integrate the player's ideas and responses into the game. Ideally, a role playing game involves continuous feedback between the players and the Game Master.

1st Edition (1981)

CHAMPIONS is not a game for the weak at heart. It takes guts, intelligence, and imagination to succeed. It will be worth it.

3rd Edition (1985)

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Welcome to a superhero comics role-playing game. There are many, but this one is uniquely yours. Its original version was inspired by newsstand comics which were wide-open for weird and headstrong creators, so appropriately, it was the first role-playing game to hand you and a few friends the creative studio, in full.

The instruments in the studio can't do anything by themselves. As a group, this will be your own superhero comic experience. No one can tell you what a hero is. No one can tell you what makes a superhero comic silly or not silly, cool or not cool, retro or contemporary, appropriate or inappropriate, safe or edgy, relevant or not relevant – or which of each paired terms you should favor. You don't have to conform to an existing franchise's commitments or to a fanbase's expectations.

Here are the tools. Here are the instruments. Let's see what you make with them!

DIAMONDS IN THE GARBAGE

Face it: superhero comics are junk. They were born in black market paper racketeering, to dispose of the excess as literal "pulp," in stapled reprints of newspaper adventure strips, even cheaper than the throwaway paperbacks and soft porn mags. Their bulk concealed boxcar transport of bootlegged booze, illegal birth-control kits, and stolen goods. They were meant to disappear into the unaccountable newsstands, losing money in the tax books while spreading vig in the shadows. Even at purchase they smelled of already-rotten newsprint and the cheap ink which rubbed off at second contact.

Who cared what was printed on the pulp? Desperate, dissolute, or naïve creators could be hired and swindled for a bit more content to launder more paper. They scribbled crazy, stupid stuff copied and mixed-up from all sorts of pop culture of the time. Thuggery, vigilantism, radio-theater drama, science fiction, fetish, and idealism collided. There was a super-strong man in circus tights delivering a suspiciously socialist brand of two-fisted justice, a pistol-packing avenger in a Halloween costume battling organized crime or at least extirpating some of it, and a boy whose magic word launched a fantasy and science fiction universe of adventure. They were soon joined by many others, including a mythic princess showing as much skin as possible who fronted for her creators' polyamory and sex-positive BDSM. (1)

Hardly anyone would call this "art" for generations, and those who did disavowed the costumed superheroes. But that was a mistake, because they had something special. Down there in their underground, trashy media, they were afforded surprising freedom. Even when their images were scrubbed clean and made patriotic in newspaper strips, radio, movies, and television, their subversive, indulgent, insightful, and audacious features kept sneaking forth in the newsstands.

A golden-skinned hero best understood as Hippie Space Jesus explained it perfectly, when he was trapped in a psycho-verse called "The Land of the Way It Is," confronted with piles of garbage built by insane clowns. He finds amazing, priceless gems buried in there. (2)

... the most beautiful substance known of throughout the galaxy! What's it doing in this garbage heap?

Oh, **that stuff!** We just can't seem to get it out of our refuse! **Someone** keeps putting it in there while we're **not looking!**

How could the diamonds keep appearing, and how were they discovered and valued by feckless youth, year after year? No creator was rewarded for being good at it, and no reader was rewarded for appreciating it. Maybe it was how you bought them without permission or oversight, the way they constantly arrived, and how you individually chose which to get, how you ultimately enjoyed them by yourself, free from supervision. Or maybe it was a way to receive adult voices without institutional framing or demands, simply as shared creativity and thought. The superheroes offered fantasy, yet commented upon the world we knew, and they connected far-flung people socially, yet without expectations.

But that's all better now, right? Superheroes have arrived! They are cool! We have movies, toys, games... but that's not true. Superheroes had movies, toys, and games ever since their beginning. The question wasn't whether they'd go mainstream. It was whether the superheroes' weird, uncontrollable power uniquely in the comics would survive.

And that battle is over. For three or four decades, as the owners grappled for profitable buy-outs and presence in other media, the comics were kept going to maintain IP, with their content ignored or pilloried. In this context, occasional idealistic, alienated creators could share their thing with their young soulmates en masse each generation. For three or four decades more, as the corporatism gelled and its lowering gaze turned more attentively toward the little pamphlets, creators dodged subordination here and there, but less and less. As of the 1990s, the paper no longer smelled bad, and that was the beginning of the end.

By the 2010's, the ultimate villain Doctor Franchise has won. The comics are engineered adjuncts for other media, a clever way for customers to pay for the advertising, like buying t-shirts with logos on them. Although a movie can be a good movie and a TV/Netflix show can be a good show, their superheroes are solid commercial fare, with no garbage and no diamonds. They are comfortably dramatic, broadly enjoyable, intelligently reminiscent or deconstructive - and nothing more. They have suffered the inescapable death of legitimacy. The strong man cannot break these chains. The detective vigilante cannot thwart this trap. The amazon princess cannot slip from the ropes and bind her captor, to his secret delight. The ultimate hero's magic word may be spoken but its meaning is silenced.

Then again, the underground never dies. Webcomics have taken up the role, and the superheroes in them are full of energy and authentic content. Good old table-top role-playing remains exactly in the same shadowy, no-account position to other media that it always had, just as comics had previously. At this moment, in pop culture's most dispersed, uncontrollable, and creatively dynamic art form, perhaps our very own superheroes are needed more than ever. (3)

THIS GAME, YOUR GAME

You play it with a few friends, typically three or four, although the rules are robust for just one player and one game master, and for up to as many as nine or ten players if you don't mind more ensemble-style, rambling play. It's not a one-shot, convention-scenario type experience. Long-term play is incredibly strong, and even a few sessions pay off big too.

It begins with brief statements to customize your shared comics title, then proceeds into players' own inspirations for heroes, and then into the game master developing a landscape of supporting cast and antagonists, working mainly from the hero sheets.

The immediate instruments for play itself are few: just the hero and villain sheets. Nearly everything else in play is either common knowledge, perhaps with some paper references, or auxiliary to a sheet, like a map of some location that's important to a hero or targeted by a villain. Oh, and dice, lots of them, all six-sided. You will be rolling big handfuls sometimes.

Here's what the rules about roles look like:

- Aside from heroes' contributions, backstory content is the game master's job.
- Situations in play are nailed down in frames, or transitional panels if you will, by the game master, but also determined by players through their heroes' actions.
- Conflicts and crises are sometimes prepared, but may always emerge through played events.
- Mechanical outcomes are rock solid: there are no special points to adjust rolls, no take-backs, no re-rolls, and no fudging.
- Several mechanics have considerable plot impact, especially concerning dramatic interactions and luck.
- Minor details of locations and circumstances are open to casual additions by anyone.
- Colorful details of situations and outcomes may be included by anyone.
- Ongoing development of the heroes and a great deal about their circumstances are the players' job.

Play is full of supporting cast and antagonists who have strong feelings and poor impulse control, in a world that's full of the real contrasts and pressures that we all know. A session typically features intersections or juxtaposition of what everybody is doing, without much need to stage or shoehorn anything into position, because *something's* going to blow!

Outcomes of these situations are operatic and violent: conflicting goals and ideals, desperate and dangerous combat, discharges of weaponry, trade-offs among heartfelt priorities, every conceivable version of explosion, proclamations of all sorts, the breaking and re-shaping of relationships tried to their limits, the destruction of unfortunate architecture, heartrending disclosures, and occasionally the sundering of time and space. Never mind going over the top. There is no top.

Or sometimes, with the same intensity and operating by the same rules, things turn out gentle, authentic, kind, uplifting, heartwarming, insightful and - if you're not too cynical - beautiful enough to make you cry buckets and be glad you're alive. Hard to believe, but it happens.

The system drives toward conclusions. Fights are won or lost, goals are met or failed, people and locations are affected, political and social power arrangements shift. A session's events means things have happened, and the next one begins with a new landscape of active persons in motion and potential crises to be resolved.

The heroes change too. Players have a lot of heft to improve and alter their heroes' capabilities and the complications that define their dramatic lives. In time, these changes drive session preparation as much as anything the game master has in mind.

Heraclitus of Ephesus tells us, *No one can step into the same river twice; for one thing, it's not the same river, and for another, you're not the same person.* What's happening all around the heroes has changed since last time, and the hero you bring to play has changed too.

WHAT IS THIS VERSION?

Here's my concept of the history of games published as versions of Champions.

First-generation Champions is comprised of the first three editions (1981, 1982, 1984/85), which are recognizable as a single design project by the same authors and their publishing company. It's notable for a few things:

- It includes no setting at all, and no canonical characters or fictional history to use.
- It relies solely upon the users' own enthusiasm, knowledge, and standards for what comics heroes, villains, and stories are like.
- Its rules must be customized by concepts and descriptions provided by the users, or else they won't work.

During this time, the company produced several other games (e.g. *Super Agents, Danger International, Justice Inc,* and at the end of this phase, *Fantasy Hero*) and arrived at the idea of a Hero System which would unite them. However, as yet, it was just an idea and this version of Champions, despite being the founding title, is "not like the others" in several key ways.

In the late 1980s, the Hero System was designed, and its current games were redesigned to fit into it. Champions presents a special case, as its imprint was leased by Iron Crown Enterprises and the Hero System version, or 4th edition (1989), was designed by a different creative team from the original authors. It was published almost simultaneously with the first textual Hero System (1990), recognizably its own thing as second-generation Champions. It includes a general shift toward a canonical setting and its philosophy of design and play conforms more to the original *Danger International* or *Star Hero*, as well as the recently published *GURPS* (Steve Jackson Games), than to the first-generation version. The unique features of the original design were minimized or abandoned.

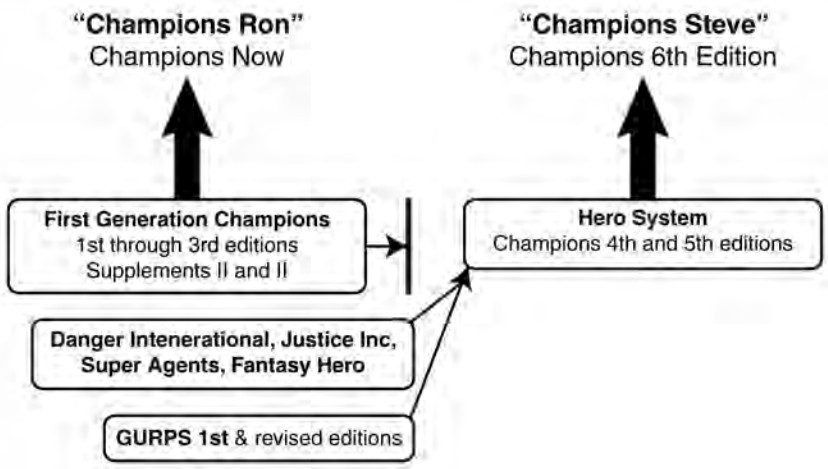
As with most of pop culture, things got a little complicated in the 1990s. You can learn more about the R. Talsorian publishing phase including Fuzion and the brief Cybergames phase at the Hero Games website.

Then in 2001, Hero Games was acquired by DOJ Inc, with Steve Long as the lead designer, to re-launch the Hero System including Champions 5th edition. These titles are the capstone of the second generation, collating and refining the developments and diversification of the system's past decade, including Steve's Dark Champions among many others. They went on to develop the canonical setting in detail, including a license to Cryptic Studios in 2009 for the MMORPG *Champions Online.*

In 2010, DOJ Inc also published Steve Long's powerful *Champions 6th edition*, which is very much its own thing, like a springboard from the previous versions at a different angle. I like to think of it as "Champions Steve."

Champions Now is similar: a springboard with its own direction, but furthermore, from a different starting point at the first-generation only. The exact titles include Champions 1st, 2nd, and 3rd editions, selected parts of the supplements *Champions II* and *Champions III*, and Aaron Allston's campaign supplement *Strike Force.*

These ancient and forgotten texts carry considerable wisdom and power which I have tried to forge anew. We played them, changed things, played more, changed things, and just kept going. Between you and me, I thought I'd hit a stopping-point beyond which I couldn't or wouldn't go, and wind up with not much more than a nostalgic best-practices guide for this historical phase of the game. To my surprise, there came a traumatic moment of breaking a concept-barrier, after which I could actually design my own Champions after all.



THE WHAT NOW?

The "Now" captures the features of first-generation *Champions* that I'd like to bring forward. Here's my best shot at stating them outright.

Playing this game is only, and ever, about creating a comics title of your own. It's not planning it, it's not promising it, it's not dreaming about it, it's not pitching it, it's not promoting or marketing it. This is it – do it now, as awesome or schlocky as it may be. As with the great superhero comics, it will probably be a mix.

It doesn't have a fictional or textual setting, no 'Verse. You're working off "Earth Now," meaning, the world as you know it and how you think it works, used as the backdrop for super-powered conflicts. Anything about it can be tweaked and truly bizarre made-up nonsense can be popped wherever it might be needed, but you also stay authentic about those real-world things you care about most, the politics and locations and values and people that fuel the conflicts of today.

The immediate problems and emergencies of play arise from the heroes and villains – their goals, their problems, their relationships, and their efforts. They include a rich supporting cast full of opinions and actions. You can be ready with what everyone is doing at the start of the session; but a few events into it, you have to play what they're up to now, prior expectations be damned.

The rules of play proceed by two overriding principles: first, that the fictional qualities of all those powers and super-stuff feed into the mechanics in striking ways; second, that complicated and dangerous situations can swing one way or the other quite drastically. You can't predict how a fight or crisis will turn out, not in every way, and often not at all.

There's no planned epic; arcs emerge organically. Situations shake out into resolutions, relationships break up and re-form, and heroes undergo crises, transformations, and conclusions. By playing, you ride the wave-front of fiction in action, and the path you've traveled turns out to be comics authorship.

The heroes themselves change in unexpected ways, so that you find that you didn't build who he or she "is" back at the start of play, only what he or she seemed like at the beginning. Who are they really, and what have they become? You discover your hero through play - and by this point it's too late. He or she is already becoming even more than that.

I hope you can see it. *Now* what will happen?

REFERENCES

This book refers to many comics superheroes, more or less anonymously to avoid distraction from the game. But it's not supposed to be clever or a guessing game either, so all the names and specific references are given at the end of each chapter.

(1) Superman was created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, first appearing in issue #1 of *Action Comics* (1938), submitted to Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson's company National Allied Publications, but published or stolen, depending on who you talk to, by Independent News. Batman was nominally created by Bob Kane, possibly more so by Bill Finger, first appearing in issue #27 of *Detective Comics* (1939), published by the intermittent company Detective Comics Inc, just as it was acquired by Independent News. Wonder Woman was created by William Moulton Marston and Harry G. Peter, first appearing in *All-Star Comics* #8 (1941), published by All-American Comics, which was financed by Independent News, soon reconfigured into National Comics, and absorbed in a complex merger into National Periodical Publications in the mid-1940s.

Captain Marvel was created by Bill Parker and C. C. Beck, first appearing in issue #2 of *Whiz Comics*(1940), published by Fawcett Publications. Superman, originally street-political and a bit thuggish, would be reconceived and revised throughout the 1940s to resemble his more friendly and cosmic rival.

(2) Adam Warlock, at the time authored and illustrated by Jim Starlin, confronted The Land of the Way It Is in *Strange Tales* #181 (1975), published by Cadence Industries under the Marvel Comics Group imprint.

(3) Superhero webcomics include *Magellan, Strong Female Protagonist, Grrl Power, Spinnerette, Supervillainous, Most, Ms Rocket, Pulse, Inhibit,* and *Switch,* among many others.

Table-top superhero role-playing games:

Date	Stand Alone	V&V/Dee	HERO	GURPS/Jackson (included due to influence and platform)	Licensed
1977	Superhero 2044 (2x)			TFT: Melee*	
1978				TFT: Wizard*	
1979		Villains & Vigilantes			
1980	Supergame			The Fantasy Trip*	
1981	Official Superhero Adventure Game		Champions		
1982	Golden Heroes/ Super Villains V&V revised Champions 2nd/Champions II				
1983	Superworld/Super Squadron				
1984	Heroes Unlimited		Champions III		Marvel Super Heroes
1985	Challengers		Champions 3rd		DC Heroes
1986				GURPS	
1987	Enforcers (2x)/ Heroes Unlimited revised	GURPS 2nd			Marvel Super Heroes Adv.
1988			Strike Force	GURPS 3rd	
1989			Champions 4th/Hero System	GURPS: Supers/ Super Scum/Wild Cards	
					DC Heroes 2nd
1990				GURPS: Supers 2nd	
1991	Guardians				
1992					
1993	Underground		Dark Champions		DC Heroes 3rd/ Superbabes/Heroes & Heroines
1994					Street Fighter
1995					
1996			Champions: The New Millenium		
1997	Heroic Do-Gooders & Dastardly Deed-Doers/Trinity/ Stuperpowers!				
1998	Blood of Heroes/ Heroes Unlimited 2nd				Marvel Super Heroes Adventures
1999	Brave New World/ Aberrant				DC Universe
2000					
2001	Nemesis/Godsend Agenda				

Table-top superhero role-playing games:

Date	Stand Alone	V&V/Dee	HERO	GURPS/Jackson (included due to influence and platform)	Licensed
2002	Mutants & Masterminds/Silver Age Sentinels (2x)/ Godlike		Champions 5th		
2003	Inou Tsukai				Marvel Universe
2004	Trinity D20			GURPS 4th	The Authority Role-Playing Game
2005	With Great Power.../ Capes/Truth & Justice/BASH!/ Living Legends				
2006	Wild Talents				Big Bang Comics
2007				GURPS: Supers 3rd	
2008					
2009					
2010	Icons/Inou Tsukai 2nd/Supers!	V&V 2.1/V&V 2nd	Champions 6th		M&M: DC Adventures
2011					
2012	Capes, Cowls & Villains Foul		Champions Complete		Marvel Heroic
2013	Triumphant!/ Prowlers & Paragons				
2014	Masks/Supers! Revised				
2015	Sentinels of Echo City/Superhuman/ Metagene/With Great Power... revised/Worlds in Peril				
2016	Phase Four				
2017	Wearing the Cape	Mighty Protectors (V&V 3.0)			
2018	Capers				

I would like to mention that the terms “Superman DC” and “DC Superman” were imprints, not a company, acquiring commercial status as DC Comics in 1977 as a small division of Warner Communications, which had absorbed NPP during its own merger-birth in the late 1960s. The terms “Marvel Comics” and “Marvel Comics Group” were similarly never a company, acquiring commercial status when Cadence Industries was purchased by New World Pictures in 1986, as an internal division of New World Entertainment.

Comic Book Publication History

Date	DC	Marvel	Others
	This sequence maintains ownership by Harry Donenfeld and Jack Leibowitz, including the single sale and merger into Warner (* asterisk).	This sequence includes shell companies and confusing practices; some names are omitted. It changes owners many times (* asterisks). Entries in italics were licensing companies that became owners.	Many of these are affected by or intertwined with DC and Marvel; some names are omitted. Entries in italics were soon absorbed into the DC column.
1925			1929 Dell Comics
1930			1934 National Allied Publications/1935 More Fun Comics #1
1935	Independent News/1938 Action Comics #1/1939 Acquires NAP, AAC, & QC	Goodman Publications (imprints: Timely, Atlas, Marvel, others)/1939 Marvel Comics #1	1936 The Phantom (newspaper) 1937 Detective Comics #1/1937 NAP includes Detective Comics Inc/1938 All-American Comics (includes All-Star Comics)/1939 Fawcett Comics, Quality Comics

Comic Book Publication History

1940			1940 The Spirit
1945	National Comics merger Acquires NAP & AAC National Periodical Publications includes NC	1947 Magazine Management	1945 Charlton Comics/1946 Archie Comics/1947 Entertaining Comcs (EC)
1950	Approx. 1951 consistently uses “Superman DC” imprint		
1955	1956 acquires Quality properties		
1960	1960 NPP acquires Superman Inc/1961 NPP issues public stock 1961	Fantastic Four #1 / Approx. 1963 consistently uses “Marvel Comics” imprint	1960 Warren Publications
1965	* 1966 Kinney Service Inc/1968 Warner merger	* 1968 Perfect Film & Chemical Corporation	1965 Tower Comics/1968 witzend
1970	1972 licenses Captain Marvel	1970 Cadence Industries (name change)	1972 Seaboard Periodicals (Atlas/Seagate)
1975	1977 DC Comics named within Warner		1977 Eclipse Enterprises, Heavy Metal Magazine (U.S.)
1980			1981 Capital Comics, Pacific Comics/1982 Comico, Warrior Comics (U.K.)/1983 First Comics
1985	1986 acquires Charlton properties/1989 Warner-Time-Life merger	* 1986 New World Entertainment/* 1988 Compact Video (Andrews Group)	1986 Dark Horse Comics, Malibu Comics, Innovation Publishing/1989 Voyager Communications (Valiant Comics)
1990	1991 acquires Fawcett properties	1991 issues public stock/1992 Toy Biz	1992 Image Comics (6 studios)
1995		1996 Marvel Studios/* 1998 Marvel Entertainment (includes TB & MS)	1996 Homage Comics
2000	2001 Time-Warner + AOL merger		
2005		* 2009 Disney	
2010			
2015	2018 AT&T merger = WarnerMedia		

CHAPTER 2
BASICS

Game mechanics are about procedures and results, with everyone empowered to use their instruments in pursuit of them. The main instruments for everyone, game master and players alike, are their hero sheets. They are most like musical instruments in that they provide specific opportunities and features; but the human holding them determines what they do in the moment, and playing together shows us how they interact with one another.

There's no consensus, no negotiation, no scene contruction conferencing, no "how about" workshopping, no story points, no adjustment of rolls, no massaging of outcomes – you do it to do it, and you get what you get.

THE SHEET

Every group, or table, is creating its own unique comics title, beginning with framing statements. To understand someone's hero sheet, you must know the statements they used to create it. This example is taken from a game based on these:

- A superhero stands for something and means it.
- You got family in my politics! You got politics in my family!
- It was set in Hartford, Connecticut, at the suggestion of a player who'd grown up there.

Your game doesn't have to be more politically charged than you collectively want it to be, but superhero comics have always leaned that way. This playtest's statements follow that leaning, and the heroes show it. (1)

This hero was made for this game: **RUBY RAY**. She's conceived from these ideas:

- *The person: rejects mainstream lifestyles, rebel soul; very close family and friends, abstracted toward everyone else; Dark Web DJ, underground reputation and income*
- *The powers: zooms around as a bright red laser beam, almost "zaps" from place to place, public appearances and heroic actions, legitimized by facing a dangerous supervillain*
- *The problems: marginalized, disaffected, unfairly criminalized, in danger from both "sides" of the law*

The sheet begins with her Situations because these, more than anything else, provide the material for how the player and game master describe what she's doing and what's happening around her during play.

Situations

Public Identity
Psych: Stands up for marginalized person's selfhood (often)
Psych: Brash (sometimes)
Psych: Fun-loving (sometimes)
Vulnerable: 2x Knockout from red-colored attacks or hazards
Dependent non-player character: Bri, her brother (secret identity)
Hunted: Killer Coil (individual, super-powered, ruinous)
Hunted: Federal Communications Commission (organization, manipulative)

Ruby Ray's difficult circumstances should be pretty clear. She's a principled outlaw hero, so she has enemies at both ends: the establishment FCC, a real-world organization well known for its secure hold on entertainment, media content, and economics, and a dangerous criminal supervillain. These are made tougher because she's "out" to the world in all ways, in terms of her real name and general availability.

That openness carries some more weight given that her "super weakness" is not easy to hide; and that her brother and ally, Bri, has his own reasons to keep the relationship and his activism entirely secret. A Dependent Non-Player Character (NPC) is defined by the phrase, "their problems are your problems," so Ruby Ray helps with that secrecy.

That leaves the three psychological Situations. How are they used? Most casually, they give everyone playing a good indicator of what impressions Ruby Ray makes on other people, and how often. They do not include the words "always" or "cannot" – they provide a good baseline for her inclinations, but it's the player's choice how Ruby Ray acts toward or against them at any given moment. They are windows of vulnerability for Ego-based powers, but they can also be sources of bonus dice when they're spontaneously invoked.

How are these Situation things used, exactly? Extensively, because there is no pre-conceived story to find or follow. Instead, the game master and players have jobs to do.

- Game master jobs: play the Hunted and Dependent NPC Situations proactively; introduce people and hazards which are relevant to the Psychological issues; describe or request details regarding how the Identity is addressed by strangers or handled by the character; be ready for Vulnerabilities and other limiting factors to be invoked by events.
- Players' jobs: put the Psychological issues into action, whether to indulge or resist them; be proactive regarding the Dependent NPCs' Situations; address concerns about Identity; and cope with the Hunted Situations as best you can.

Although the two jobs concern different fictional entities, they're more similar than they're different, because both *introduce actions* and events. It's not about players waiting for the game master to do something to them. As far as where play happens and what anyone is doing there, the players "GM" the game master as much as he or she "GMs" them, just because they say what their heroes are doing.

Characteristics	Endurance cost
Strength 2d6/- +6d6 Strength only when flying/Presence 3d6	2/+6
Body 14/- Recovery 14, Stunned 14, Knockout 28, Endurance 42/Speed 4/Defense 10	
Dexterity 13/Intelligence 12/Ego 11	

Two of the Characteristics, Strength and Presence, work similarly. An ordinary person has a score of 2d6 for each, and each additional die roughly doubles its magnitude.

The Strength Chart in *Chapter 9: This is the World We Live In* shows how strong Strength is. When Ruby Ray isn't flying, she's no stronger than an ordinary person. When she's flying, she's incredibly strong, able to bring a medium-sized truck along, to smash through a solid wall, or to meet and possibly stop an oncoming small plane. However, that's not a maximum. Anyone can push harder to go above their listed value at the risk of hurting themselves.

When she's exerting Strength against some opposition or trying to break or hold something, you roll the score with dice: 8d6 for Strength if she's flying, or 2d6 if she's not. This is a magnitude roll, or "damage" if you like. You don't have to roll to hit just to exert force.

For example, Killer Coil has grabbed her with those robotic tentacle-coils, and Ruby Ray tries to tear out of there by flying. Here, I'll roll eight dice: 1, 3, 4, 4, 4, 5, 6, 6.

You read them in a coded way called the Core result.

- For each 6, count two points
- For each 1 count zero points
- For anything else, count one point.

For Strength, the Core indicates the genuine damage that it does, or how much it opposes whatever countervailing force she's up against. In this case, the result is 0 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 2 + 2 = 9.

When you're striking someone, you read the same dice another way, simultaneously: you add the showing values for a grand sum. This is the Knockout, in this case, 33. Since our particular case is a contest of grab vs. escape, we only care about the Core, which is contested by a similar roll made by Killer Coil. The Knockout result is only used for fisticuffs and blast'em powers damage.

YOSHI

All this exertion doesn't come from nothing. You pay for it with Endurance, at the same rate of 1 per 1d6 of Strength. In rolling to break the grab, successful or not, Ruby Ray spends 8 points of Endurance; in fact, more than that, because it costs Endurance to fly too. She can also "push" her Strength and Powers past the listed limits, which burns up Endurance a lot faster.

Ruby Ray is noticeably more "present" in a social or communications situation than most people. Presence affects play differently from physical features and powers: it's a free action, you only count the Core value, and it costs no Endurance. It's subject to a lot of immediate modifiers, so Ruby Ray could be looking at a pretty wide range of possible total dice to roll. Presence Attacks are wonderfully easy and effective, but they require intelligent timing or you'll be looking at a measly one or two dice.

To evaluate its effectiveness, compare the Core rolled on the dice with the Core rolled by the target's Presence, and consult the Presence effects in *Chapter 10: Fightin' Words.* For example, Ruby Ray is trying to awe a crowd of panicked people into proceeding around the corner in an orderly fashion, rather than rushing about frantically. She'd roll her base Presence for 3d6, but modified for -3d6 for going against the targets' prevailing mood. That's terrible, so I make sure she's using a power (+1d6), saying something very sensible and dramatic (+2d6), and it also so happens that this is happening at a benefit concert that features a huge picture of her and a light-show, so that's an appropriate setting (+2d6), for a final total of 5d6.

I roll 2, 3, 5, 6, 6, for a Core of 7. That's a lot better than the targets' Presence result of 2 (they're ordinary people, collectively rolling 2 dice) According to the listed effects, that's enough to break up their current activity and to get them to consider what she says. She hasn't hit the total that would command instant or uniform compliance, but it's good enough to keep them from turning into a danger to themselves.

The Dexterity, Intelligence, and Ego characteristics are used differently: not for magnitude, but for success or failure. You roll 3d6 and add the rolled values, and if you hit the listed number or less, she succeeds.

The sheet includes no mundane skills, social status, or wealth. Does that mean Ruby Ray is incapable in those things? Not at all. She's a skilled DJ, knowledgeable musicologist, successful promoter, and effective navigator and user of the Dark Web, as well as anything else that seems related. She has all the resources, contacts, and knowledge that go with it, as well as with anything to do with her own personal background. All of those things are bonafide skills that Ruby Ray may use during play, and they don't have to be detailed beforehand. To use them in ordinary situations doesn't require dice rolls. But if the outcome is consequential or dangerous, then resolve them as Dexterity, Intelligence, or Ego rolls as seems appropriate for the moment.

For Intelligence, Ruby Ray might be compiling obscure music for an online protest. Another use for Intelligence rolls is perception, when she might notice that her web activity is being monitored. For Ego, she might be steeling herself to fly through a corridor lined with glowing red fluorescence.

The rules include several formal Skills, though very few compared with most role-playing games. These are super or comic-booky versions of whole skill-sets, applied well beyond how they'd credibly work in most fiction. You might even think of them as powers hand-waved into skill descriptions.

Some of them are resolved with Dexterity or Intelligence rolls, like Detective Work, Security Systems, Stealth, and Computer Programming. Others provide advantages in certain circumstances, such as bonuses or specialized maneuvers. Still others modify whole situations, such as Luck. Both of Ruby Ray's listed skills are the second sort.

Skills
Acrobatics
Skill level: +1 with Move Attack

Acrobatics provides a defensive bonus given a minimum amount of movement, and the Skill Level is a customizable bonus, in this case applied to attacks that are based on movement. Neither requires a roll to be put into action.

It's good to customize any of these listed skills, so that one person's Martial Arts is known to be Tiger-Claw Kung Fu, and another's is Capoeira. In Ruby Ray's case, the Acrobatics is not so much circus or performance art, as her awareness and orientation concerning angles of flight or of incoming threats. These descriptions fuel more visualization and useful applications in action.

Powers	Endurance cost
Elemental Control: Red Laser Transformation	
Laser Zap: Flight 20 hexes/linear only, cannot go less than half-speed	4
Hard Glow: Force Field 16	8
Light Up: Flash 4d6/only at end of flight path, no range	8

Every power is named, and that's a big deal. In play, they will have properties and effects based on that name and its implications. Sometimes a named power will include more than one power from the rules, i.e., you name the power you want and make it work by combining powers.

The effects use Core results as with the Strength and Presence dice, or they interact with those types of results in some way. For instance, the Light Up attack uses the textual power Flash, which requires a combat roll to hit, and if it does, it's then rolled with 4d6 and counts the Core result to see how long the effect lasts. Her Hard Glow, on the other hand, is based on the textual power Force Field, thus soaks damage that hits her, reducing both Knockout and Body damage by 16 points.

They also require spending Endurance. The Light Up requires 2 per 1d6, and the Laser Zap is based on distance, at 1 Endurance per 5 hexes. (A "hex," by the way, is a person-sized area in three dimensions.)

That Elemental Control thing is a Power Framework, which holds related applications. A framework is optional and there are three kinds. Its relevance here is that the powers in it aren't traded off or managed in some way; Ruby Ray can use any of them in any combination based on the actions she's taking.

These hero sheets are more than just lists. It's good to read them like a Wall of Crazy in a moody detective movie, as if each item had strings pinned to one or more other items. For Ruby Ray, the most important connections lead to and from her Laser Zap (Flight). The obvious ones are that when she's using it, she's very strong, and she gets a bonus on her Combat Value when she's fighting by flying past and into people or things. More subtly, since she can only fly in a straight line and can't drop below half speed, her Acrobatics allow her to turn hard corners during a given movement action. Clearly Ruby Ray is very oriented toward high-speed, powerful actions, which is why she's especially good at clotheslining opponents or barreling into them, with her Skill Level.

Every hero is most understandable and playable when you see those "pinned strings" across pieces of the sheet. Any number of heroes might happen to include Strength, Flight, and Flash, but they are not Ruby Ray and she is not them, in concrete and consequential ways during play.

SPACE AND TIME

A person running around gets up to 6 hexes for a given effort at movement. When Ruby Ray flies, or rather, light-zaps herself along a fixed path, the textual power Flight allows up to 20 hexes, which in her case can't be reduced below 10 hexes. How far and fast is that?

The hex unit is equivalent to one ordinary human's personal space, roughly just above a person's height, surrounded by arm's reach. If you must quantify, it's "about two meters," in quotes because it's intentionally vague at the boundaries, or in American English, "over six feet."

If you want, you can use a hex grid for organizing complex situations like fights, but you don't have to; the unit is quite intuitive and works well for theater of the mind play when referencing typical architecture and areas.

Sometimes standard measures are easier to use, so there's a conversion chart in Chapter 11: Fighting Words. At 20 hexes/move with Speed 4, Ruby Ray's maximum un-pushed flying speed is about 60 mph/96 kph, and out of combat, it's double that for the same Endurance cost. However, once you get into significant travel, these rules don't scale up, and other rules apply.

In a complicated situation when a bunch of characters are moving around and (probably) trying to hit or zap one another, actions are organized by Speed and either Dexterity or Ego. Here's the Speed Chart:

Speed Chart

		Segment					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
Speed	6	•	•	•	•	•	•
	5	•	•		•	•	•
	4	•		•		•	•
	3		•		•		•
	2			•		•	
	1				•		

Play proceeds through the segments 1-6, then wraps and repeats with no break of any kind. Your Speed sets which segments are available for you to act; e.g., with a Speed of 4, Ruby Ray "goes" on 1, 3, 5, and 6. These are called her Phases.

For characters who go on the same Phase, they proceed in order of their Dexterity or Ego values, depending on what sort of action they're taking.

Ordering the action isn't entirely robotic or predictable. You can wiggle your character's Phases "off sequence" a little, and dialogue is utterly free, delivered whenever you like. And remember Presence? Presence Attacks are considered dialogue for purposes of timing, so they can strike at will.

FIGHTING

So! It's one of your Phases and your turn to go, and you want to hit someone or zap them with a power. To hit them, use Dexterity or Ego depending on the action, and roll 3d6. However, this one is a little more complex than the usual Dexterity or Ego roll.

- It's subject to modifiers based on how much you've moved and what you're doing, so the adjusted, instantaneous value gets a name of its own, Combat Value.
- The difference between the attacker's and defender's Combat Value is applied to 11, and the result is the number you must roll equal or under in order to hit.

For example, Ruby Ray is zooming past someone and striking in passing. Her Dexterity is 12, but this maneuver is -2, and she's using her Skill Level for +1, so her Combat Value is 11. Her agile and maneuvering opponent's value has ended up at 13, so she has to roll 3d6 with a target equal to or under (11-13) + 11, or 9. Which isn't great.

It'll work much better when she times her attack to follow up immediately on her pal Grimfire, who's grabbed the opponent with his Hellish Fury Blaze aura going and thrown him or her into the side of that cement mixer over there. She'll get a +1 for a surprise hit, and if all that mayhem has momentarily stunned the opponent, then his or her Combat Value drops to 6, in which case Ruby Ray is rolling equal to or under (11-6) + 11, or 16.

Even better! She can target the cement mixer instead, which is easy to hit, and in motion she's strong enough to crack it and pour cement goop all over the opponent.

(A little pro tip from the comics: even the noblest heroes typically fight pretty dirty.)

A successful hit does damage or otherwise exerts some effect depending on the powers involved. For straight-up damage such as Ruby Ray might deliver with that fly-past attack, it's treated as a Strength roll, delivering its two values as described earlier. We'll use the same roll.

- The sum total, 33, is Knockout damage, and whatever gets past defenses will appropriately reduce the target's Knockout score. If it goes to zero, the character is unconscious.
- The Body total, 9, is Core damage, and after defenses, similarly reduces the target's Body score. If it goes to zero, the character is dying.

In both cases, the target's total Defense soaks up the incoming amounts. If someone had a total Defense of 20 against that attack, then they would subtract 13 Knockout and 0 Body. Body isn't overly threatened by most punches and

powers, but some attacks and hazards feature end-runs around defenses that can be dangerous.

The system is appropriately generous in that you get one "stand up and keep going" after hitting 0 for either Knockout or Body, such that your unconscious or dying status was more like a warning. And even being taken to 0 Body after that is only comic-book dying – actually being killed isn't required by the mechanics.

Keep an eye on that Stunned value, too, because if the Knockout damage that gets through exceeds that amount, then the character is Stunned until the end of their next phase, and quite vulnerable. (I referenced this effect with Grimfire's attack, above.)

Using Strength or powers costs Endurance, usually 1 point per 1d6, but sometimes more. Keep in mind that missing a target still costs you the Endurance.

Ruby Ray is a spend-high, get-it-done type of character, so she can't fight stupid with powers blazing Phase after Phase, trusting only to her soak defenses for protection. If she Laser Zaps past someone for a clothesline hit, that's 20 hexes (4) + 8d6 Strength (8) and if she has her Hard Glow on (8), that's 20 Endurance. If she has to push her Strength or powers at some point too, that will rip up Endurance even faster.

You can keep acting at Endurance 0, but at that point you're burning Knockout instead, which might also be getting racked by attacks on you, obviously. Even small amounts of Knockout from those attacks make it that much easier for your own heroics to take yourself right out.

That leads us to the remaining value on the sheet, Recovery, which is how much Knockout and Endurance you can restore by taking a Phase off. It's a bit risky because your Combat Value drops low, which is why "Cover me!" and ducking behind site barriers aren't merely window dressing.

It's better to fight smart. Set up surprise hits, save maximal blows for an opponent at a disadvantage, learn how to use powers flexibly and reactively, and take phases for Recovery as safely as possible. And don't forget those perfect Presence moments!

SUMMARY OF DICE MECHANICS

What is used	What to roll	Reading the result	
Effects	Strength/Presence/ Powers	Multiple d6	Core/For Strength or Blast, also sum the total values for Knockout
Resolution	Dexterity/Intelligence/ Ego/Utility Skills	3d6	Sum of values/Success: Characteristic or less
Attacks	Dexterity or Ego	3d6	Success: 11 + attacking combat value – defensive combat value, or less

DETAILS AND ODDBALLS

Superhero comics include conventions that certain rules encourage, based on visual effects, character concepts, and our enjoyment of what's happening.

- Thinking of comics panels rather than a single screen permits very effective play, especially for simultaneous events, and turns the Speed Chart into an artistic device rather than a metronome.
- A related concept is the gutter, the narrow blank space between panels, which permits time and motion effects to "wiggle" as needed.
- Word balloons, thought balloons, and captions aren't desperation devices at all! They permit considerable context, opinions, necessary minor explanations, and above all, critical emotional connections, and in terms of play/action timing, are wonderfully free.
- Visual sound effects fit very well into table-top dialogue, describing big chubby letters and punctuation almost as if they were actually there.

Playtesting has shown that these things are more than just "style," because they contribute to everyone knowing what's going on, jumping in to describe what's happening, and helping to move things forward.

Fighting gets its own menu of comics content. In addition to the familiar damage from a successful hit, many attacks include Knockback, the nonsensical jet-propelled displacement that's so much fun to draw. If you get knocked into something, that'll do damage too, so it's an effective tactical consideration, as is affecting and disrupting opponent's preferred positions and movements.

Play is also open to opportunity bonuses, typically a +1 to a roll or an extra die for effect, on the loosest of criteria: simply that whatever was just said seems fun and spot-on for the moment. It can be style or content, or in character or out of character. You can think of this as genre reinforcement if you want, or social acknowledgment, or anything, really – it doesn't even need a name.

Some heroes also feature a mechanic called Luck or Unluck, and some even have both. It throws one more wild card of effect into play, which cannot override direct dice-based outcomes, but certainly twists them into new forms.

Finally, all of the mechanics are considered to be expressions of the fictional naming and descriptions of everything, to the extent of the character as a whole. Therefore the mechanics are not treated as fixed and maximal descriptions of what a power or anything else about the character can do, but only as what they can reliably do "inside" the broader applications. This feature is so important and central to play that it gets its own chapter.

REFERENCES

(1) Captain America provides several political snapshots, none of which are neutral. The World War 2 stories in *Captain America Comics* are unequivocally anti-Nazi, but that doesn't mean the hero is just a true-blue boy scout. His slam-bang superheroics are contrasted with being constantly picked-on as a lowly, apparently incompetent private. This side-eyed view of the brass is similar to many enlisted-men's cartoons like William Mauldin's *Willie and Joe* cartoons in *Stars and Stripes, Sad Sack* by George Baker in *Yank, the Army Weekly,* and the postwar newspaper strip *Beetle Bailey* by Mort Walker.

The Fifties stories are straightforwardly McCarthyite, in which he battles extreme racist stereotypes who spread communism right here in the U.S.A. with mind-control devices. These appeared briefly in *Young Men/Men's Adventures,* and *Captain America* (1953), by an unknown writer, Bill Everett, Carl Burgos, and John Romita Sr. among others, published by Goodman Publications using the Atlas Comics imprint.

As written by Stan Lee during the 1960s, published by Magazine Management using the Marvel Comics imprint, he is very decent but also alienated, delivering little or no "my country this and that" patriotic speeches even when up against the anti-American Hydra. The 1950s portrayal is negated by the narrative of his being frozen before the war ended. He never speaks in favor of American intervention in Vietnam. In this case absence is not neutrality; this portrayal repudiated the flag-waving John Birch Society, a fierce public topic at the time.

During the Decent Interval phase of the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal, Cap faces a long list of domestic crises in *Captain America and the Falcon* #153-176, including:

- Battling the racist, right-wing 1950s Cap, retconned to be a different person (in fairness, not all the prior Captain Americas were Steve Rogers).
- Discovering that the President of the United States is the leader of the heinously corrupt Secret Empire; when Cap confronts him in the Oval Office, he shoots himself in the head. The president's face isn't quite shown but it's only a caption away from explicitly being Richard Nixon.
- Defying the National Security Council and refusing to work for the espionage and security establishment, thus renouncing being Captain America, at the time intended to be permanent.

All of these were by Steve Englehart and Sal Buscema, published by Cadence Industries using the Marvel Comics Group imprint.

During the early 1980s when AIDS finally become public knowledge, gay subculture and homosexuality in general endured a new wave of dismissal and contempt, especially from the Reagan administration and public policy in general. It intensified the demonization made public by such figures as Pat Robertson and, worse, mainstreamed it, making the mass deaths into a nation-wide acceptable joke. By contrast, Captain America unequivocally supported his gay friend Arnie Roth in the first open, naturalistic treatment of the issue in superhero comics and, as happened more than once at Marvel, in defiance of the company policy. Arnie was fully introduced in *Captain America* #270 (1982), by J. M. DeMattheis and Mike Zeck, publisher credits as above. Arnie and his lover Michael became ongoing supporting cast members, including the chilling "Things Fall Apart" story in #296 (1984; pencilled by Paul Neary), probably influenced by Martin Sherman's controversial play *Bent* (1979).

CHAPTER 3
YOUR GAME
FRAIM

The experience which results from play is your superhero comic title. It doesn't have to be consistent with or imitate any other. The rules won't tell you what a "hero" is. There is no editor directing how the story is planned. There is no genre guide to conform to. There is no franchise to support. As far as you and your friends are concerned, this is the superhero comic you most want to be into right now, and that is all it needs to be.

- **Medium** is the stuff you make art or entertainment with, or transmit it through, like "film" for movies (back when they were on film), or "newsstand pamphlets" for comics or more generally "words and pictures on paper," or "instruments" or perhaps even just "harmonic sounds" for music.
- **Idiom** is a topic or general set of familiar things to see or listen to or imagine, which is developed by artists or entertainers; it can be expressed in lots of ways, like a distinctive style or look, or a specific topic like, well, superheroes.
- A given medium may be used for many idioms.
- A new idiom typically emerges in a single medium but can be expressed in others and jumps over to them soon.
- New idioms appear all the time and old ones are always being revisited.
- Works in the same idiom can differ in their meanings and their audiences.
- **Genre** is what fans and critics come to expect and demand of a given medium-idiom combination.

The range of appearance, content, emotions it's supposed to evoke, and attitudes are necessarily much narrower.

When the art or entertainment is big business, funders and managers enforce the narrowed content.

Some of the audience fancy themselves to be cultural owners of the topic.

Here in the medium of role-playing, this group is now in command of the superhero idiom, and everyone else's genre expectations aren't your problem!

This group, this time, and this game may draw what it will from the vast sprawl of source material and can invent what it needs to modify it. How much of each doesn't matter, because even the most literal homage is still yours. It's your choice.

ORGANIZING PLAY

Most of this chapter speaks directly to the person who's bringing other people together to play.

Get with some people who love the stuff you love, or whom you think might. If that means fewer people, that's OK. Just two or three players will work fine, with another acting as game master. The game also responds well to expanding the group size later, after a foundation is laid by a few motivated participants, and it works extremely well for a large group.

The people you invite need to know a couple of mechanical details right away.

- Their heroes will be constructed using points, all at about the same amount. The total value for a hero does not correspond to categories like "super-powered" vs. "trained normal" vs. "agent." Their heroes can be conceived in any way and still have the same number of points.
- The point total and the rules for using it are faithful to the comics in terms of how heroes – especially the most famous ones – were initially introduced. They were surprisingly less "super" than you might think, without most of their perceived signature abilities or concepts, and very light on explanation or justifications.

A session of play is a lot like a single issue: the way superhero comics have mostly been sold and read. A hero changes through play, which is a good reason to plan for more than one session. Also, the buy-in and preparation are rich enough that a single session is hardly enough to appreciate what can be done with the material. Things often come together in just a few sessions, so consider a short-form but multi-session game experience.

You may be tempted to promote and plan the game as a very long-term, epic series. However, in practice, if you plan for a long-playing epic, then it often stalls out or seems sufficient at an issue or two. But if you dive into an issue or two for their own sake, then you discover you're riding the wave-front of an epic. So, in planning, say what you want, but also stay flexible.

SETTING AND CONCEPT

The people with you are bound to ask, "What's it about," thinking that's an easy question because the book must already lay down what a hero is and the art style and so on. Since this book does no such thing, the task now is how you and they are going to answer it instead, without one of those tedious what-if how-about conversations.

The comics that inspired this game didn't have a setting. Instead, they were set "right now right here," without much reflection or justification. Look around – and imagine some superheroes there too. And that's all. As time went by, yes, the comics eventually made a setting, not so much by the creators trying specifically, but more through the observations and efforts of fans.

The game follows that model. You'll get a setting, if you play and keep going. But you need a powerful start too, using these rules – and, by the way, the playtesters were adamant that I needed to stress, right here in the text, that these are really rules. Not suggestions, not guidelines. Rules.

Okay! When you get people together, have the following two statements at the ready, no more and no less.

- **One** solid bit of content about superpowers, heroes, or villains
- This part might be back-story, or purely visual, or just atmospheric.
- **One** solid bit of fictional style and specific types of problems
- Include the location of play (ideally, somewhere that someone in the group knows really well)
- This part says nothing about powers or superhero/villain material. It's really tempting, but resist.

This isn't a pitch. It's not negotiated, discussed, debated, or explained. If you chose phrases that are fun – that you like to see or want to see in comics – that's enough.

Two other things may help with initial group orientation, presented in the same up-front, non-consensus way. One is to provide one or two example comics pages with a distinctive art style, and say, "it looks like this." Another is to establish a super-naming convention that all such characters use. These follow the same logic as the two statements, providing an aesthetic anchoring point without complicated justifications, to see what people make of it.

You've seen this in the earlier chapters, with the game set in Hartford. To repeat its two statements:

- A superhero stands for something and means it
- You got family in my politics! You got politics in my family!

Cold Soldiers, featured in the comics pages as well, is based on these:

- Powers require effort, pain, practice, sacrifice, dedication
- Military life and careers, in Portland, Oregon

MetalTürk as well:

- Powers are based on and themed as metals, as in, the elements.
- Cosmic hope and justice, in Istanbul, Turkey

Another played game that will show up in these pages is Legacy

- Powers are bright, fun, and hopeful
- The past is always present, on the Left Coast [Big Sur to Vancouver]

Other examples, some of them already played, some of them planned.

- Techno-wondrous discovery
- Fraught personal drama, in Seattle, Washington
- Powers are dark, ancient, and secret

► The damned die hard, in Los Angeles, California

► Powers are silly

► Reality itself is at stake, in (and way out of) Washington, D.C.

► Sooner or later, your powers will kill you

► Black ops and espionage, in southern Sweden

► The fine line between villain and hero is sometimes no line at all

► Small town, big secrets, in and around Davenport, Iowa

► Super-powered people are high-end celebrities

► Larger-than-life action, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin

► Powers are ideals and emotions

► Grim street crime meets grim street justice, in St. Petersburg, Russia

► Powers are proprietary IP, enforced

► Young adults trying to work, in San Antonio, Texas

There's no reason why you would like or want to use any of these. Use whatever you wish instead, based on your own imagination and excitement about superhero comics, including those which have existed and those which you're positive should exist!

Do that right now. You can't use this book unless you do.

Most of this chapter addresses the game master directly, but here are some thoughts for the players.

- Don't try to guess or inquire after what the game master wants or plans, "can I," "is it OK if," that kind of thing. They need what you want, so please yourself.
- Don't get distracted by discussing where powers come from or how they work. What do you like, want, or enjoy seeing on a page?
- Don't debate what superheroes would or should do. Start with the statements, but from there, whatever ethical or legal profile you want your hero to have, that's what they'll have.

I'll say it super bluntly: bring it. No one else gets to say who your hero is, what they can do, or what is going to be important to them. There's no paragraph in the book which describes a required morality. You can't even turn to the genre, as superhero comics' content ranges all over the map for these exact things. You'll own that, with whatever it entails for people wanting or not wanting to play with you. Deal yourself and them a hand that you really want to play.

THE GIFT

The two statements are the first step. The next arrives when the players make up heroes inspired by them, using the rules in the next couple of chapters. The process is a bit involved and is best done independently, not by committee, because the statements and location provide enough anchor for unity. It's part of the point to see the diverse interpretations which result from them.

To go back to the game master's point of view: for you, a kind of door opens from the material all over their hero sheets. The process may be interactive, especially if you are teaching the point-based rules as they go, including questions like "could I be hunted by some kind of alien," or "how about" exchanges when someone seems stuck. But overall you're now in a position of receiving a bag of gifts.

You'll get necessary setting features like what sectors of ordinary society are involved, bringing in their historical context and specific places in the location; and more than a few organizations, both inside and outside the law. You'll also see the starting range for the setting's fantastic content, e.g., are there aliens and what might they be doing, whether magic is afoot or, if you want to use the term, how "realistic" this seems.

You'll get a solid view of the heroes' range in lifestyles, including their economic and social positions (or lack thereof in some cases), their signature antagonists, and especially, a big supporting cast. Plenty of other people or groups are also implied by all of these, available for your invention and development.

You'll also see the initial array or concepts of what super powers are and do. This array serves the same purpose as a "let's define powers" discussion as a first step, but constructed as it is, and placed when it is, works much better. You may find that the group is one of those tossed-salad mash-ups or, more often than one might think, you may find a surprising common motif or concept that wasn't there before.

Finally, you get some idea of the upcoming game's moral tone, partly through the heroes' specific features like Psychological Situations and the kind of adversaries they formally oppose, and partly through a more general view of the kind of lives they lead and what views or standards they imply.

That's not to say you can't extend what you see in any of these things, or add something, or dial something down. You can and will. But let's get this comic started first.

The Hartford game

Let's take it to Connecticut and Ruby Ray, who so far in these rules has been floating in isolation, which is totally not what the game is about. Who else's sheets are here with her, and what do they have going on? You can see these sheets in the appendix.

- Anybug is Manfred Owen Barfield IV, who goes by "Mo," about 26, born to privilege and determined to redress its wrongs. He's super-nice, idealistic to a fault, and his bug-powers' slight silliness distract from the fact that he's the up-close heavy hitter of the bunch.
- The Which is Isabela García, younger than the others, from a business-successful and establishmentarian family. She's the most conflicted and secretive, which ties directly to her open-ended probability-sorceress powers, which radiate pop philosophy and trouble in all directions. More so than the others, she is partly defined in contrast with a primary adversary, the multi-personage, authoritarian entity called Domain.
- Grimfire is Yuri "Rob" Velikov, Russian-born patriotic American, with scary occult-looking powers. He's an older guy whose known superhero history includes a "clean up the streets" vigilante streak, but with the suggestion that he's reconsidering his positions, including recently going public with his identity.

- And to recap, Ruby Ray herself is Natalie Freeman, a black woman in her early 20s, entirely open and out in her actions, wielding uncompromising and straightforward laser-rays to fight the powers that be.

Looking at all of them, what emerges? Well, their powers are unapologetic comic-book kookiness conceived from all around the map, like pseudo-super physics, hellishness (whatever that is), and that characteristically-comics interface between psychic and cosmic. No unity there, to the contrary, since a couple suggest there's more behind them than meets the eye.

Group consistency instead forms around the motivation and activism phrasing in these statements, which opens up real-world problems as the linchpin for play. The sheets provide the FCC and the Family Research Council as Hunted Situations, and Hartford itself is a charged environment for policy debates. In that context it's understandable that the heroes would display some tension about such subjects as accommodation, inclusion, acceptance, assimilation, defiance, and do not form a smug consensus over what "alternative" or "progressive" even means. Their collective effort toward society at large is a work in progress, no pun intended, and it raises the important question: is it better to be inside or outside?

I love this kind of thing. It gets my brain going, about known-and-named forms of activism, with great potential for hard-hitting teamwork, subject to agreement and vulnerable to disagreement. And I didn't have to make it up myself and hope the others might be interested! Instead, this dynamic potential emerged from the characters themselves. If they'd all been much more alike in outlook, that'd be a different kind of group with necessarily different problems and adversaries.

TEAM & TITLE

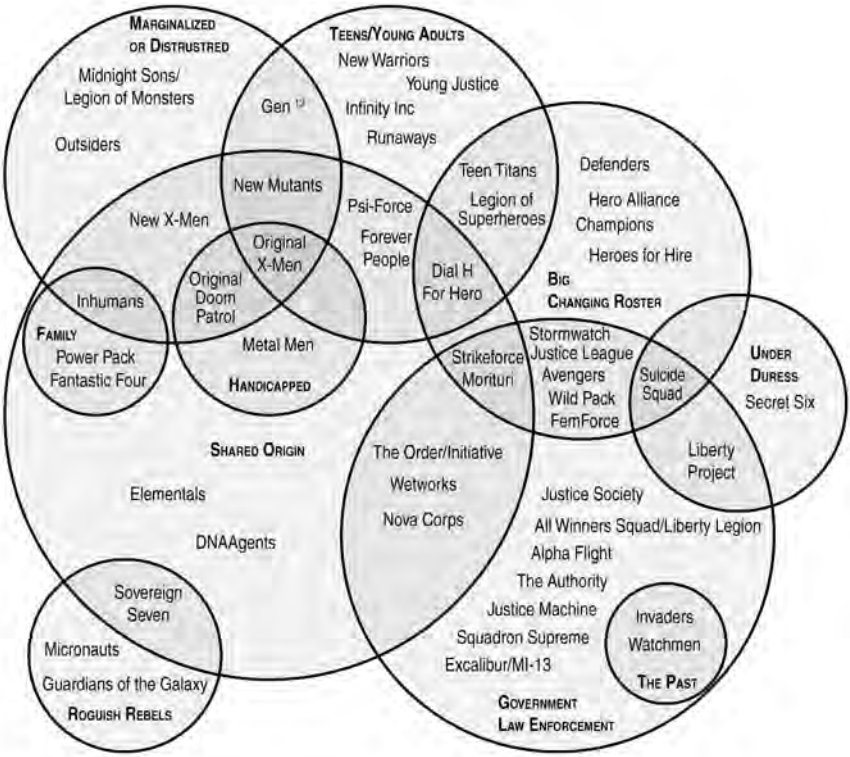
So, why are we all together? Fortunately, this is easy, because no matter what, this is a superhero-team comics title, and so *being* together isn't a question. You don't need to justify playing a super-team; instead, you cobble together a super-team, see what it looks like, and justify anything you like. No need to struggle through several sessions of "How We Met." Because even if you do, it's pro forma, and not actually a problem to be solved.

In the superhero comics, the default is not to bother asking or answering the question at all. The original, iconic superhero-team was a brazen IP ploy to keep characters in print. The heroes were extracted from different publishing origins, stuck into a headquarters, and given a patriotic name. A rival company did the same, but it didn't last, whereas the first shifted through a reboot and title change. The rival company responded soon, and one of their famous super-teams followed the same model again.

These vague justifications weren't a problem. They were even a future blessing in disguise. Whenever either group featured stories beyond single-issue filler, they always concerned the implied contradictions. The first would wonder how aliens, foreigners, and anonymous vigilantes would or could work for or with a specific government, and the second would feature drastic emotional shake-ups about their roster and purpose. Fully half of all superhero team titles represent imitators, expys, reimaginings, reversals, and deconstructions of exactly these groups and each one's respective no-justification starting concept. For example, one fan-favorite, members-heavy super-team was self-referential in its concept, being itself the in-fiction future fan group of the first team. (1)

Therefore extensive justification isn't required. For your game, you've already got the location and the conceptual overlap provided by the statements, as well as the emergent unifiers and adversaries from the heroes, which is a lot more than those very famous iconic teams had! (Comics super-teams did eventually feature more unifying concepts, but these were always straightforward and easily relatable.)

Here is my entirely unscientific Venn diagram madness to summarize eight decades of superhero team titles. It doesn't include teams without titles, and only refers to comics, not films or TV; certain reboots are also not included for simplicity's sake.



This structure is purely historical and hardly sacred. Someone might publish a superhero comic tomorrow that would force it to be entirely redrawn. You're under no obligation to fit your game into it. But it does open a window into which concepts have arisen to define groups, entirely apart from nominal "universe," target audience, or exact concepts of super-powers.

The comics present these options most clearly:

- Whether the heroes' powers have a common identity or cause
- Whether the heroes identify with an empowered social group (government, law enforcement)

Then there's a whole constellation of other things, which despite their arrangement in the historical diagram, could easily be mixed and matched in any way:

- Family with all of its ties and antipathies, immediate and extended, including close friends
- Marginalized or distrusted by the society we know and recognize
- Teens/young adults, finding themselves, maturing, bringing fresh perspectives
- Rebel band, which usually includes a substantial science fiction or extranormal context
- Handicapped, whether real-world or in slightly science-fiction or fantastic terms, strongly emphasizing powers as disabilities or compensations
- Under duress, which subdivides into different arrangements of legal vs. illegal control over undeserving vs. deserving (or sort-of deserving) persons
- The past, meaning that current situations are heavily informed by events long ago, and may include playing flashbacks or literal time travel

That's a lot of analysis, but how does it turn into something practical for play? It's time for executive action: you, the game master, should pick anything you think fits for these heroes, and go with it. You already have a lot to go by and it's probably more intuitively obvious than you expect. Translating those variables into less abstract form results in a list something like this:

- We are a voluntary team or squad trusted by and at least partly established by an institution.
- We are a team or squad, forced into it against our will.
- We share a common ideal or organization, and value our group's purpose as a united front.
- We share personal history with a common injustice and have united in self-protection.
- We share a common age or similar demographic feature, and we understand one another better than anyone else does.

- We're very separate but like-minded people who group up occasionally help one another's individual concerns.
- We already share a literal family or extended family connection, and our powers magnify and complicate it

There's no rule for how arbitrary this has to be, somewhere along the line from "It looks to me as if these powers could have the same origin, what do you think?" to "You have the same origin, this is what it is, take it and like it." That's a matter of preference and best application for this particular group, and sometimes it's a player who says "I want us to be a family!" and everyone goes with it. More important is what everyone makes of it, going forward, like their sense of mission, the most immediate crisis, the degree of organization, the nature of the adversaries... all of which are surprisingly intuitive and do very well as a collective player response. (2)

Again, never mind planning tedious machinations to make this group come together in play. You can begin either well after the hero team is established and no one processes it any more, or right when it's been decided and the heroes are all ready to try it out.

The Hartford game and others

Taking it as given that they are a superhero team, without worrying about whether they're not, I can point to the most obvious, least complicated way to group them up without second-guessing or over-tightening it.

Ruby Ray, Grimfire, Anybug, and The Which in Hartford are a great example. The diversity in their outlooks allows for a lighter touch in group concept, not tighter, leaving that "inside or outside" question open for play. I decreed or suggested (or somewhere in the middle) to the players that "like-minded individuals who stay in touch, grouping up when they want," is good enough for us. The players responded by appreciatively referencing a famous super-team who exemplifies this idea, and we were all set. (3)

The players even took it a bit further on their own, noting that Anybug and Ruby Ray evidently agree strongly about non-anonymity. Grimfire's player has already said that he's recently unmasked and thinks it makes sense for him to have just joined the group on that basis. That's plenty!

In this case, no one came up with a group name, and so the group tables that question, trusting to further play to drop a great name in their laps sooner or later. And a couple of sessions in, it absolutely does, naming the group and the comic's title THE DEFIANTS.

Whereas another game, set in Saint Louis, Missouri, generated a much more unified picture, but not right out of the statements; instead, from the players' similar urges in the moment. (Disclosure: this playtest came before I finalized the "two statements" method so I'm retconning these based on the materials I gave them.)

- Powers are all about pragmatic combat
- Real world, real problems, in St. Louis, Missouri

I'll never know if this was a true coincidence, and I'm pretty sure it was, but it so happened that each player brought a hero who was from the future, specifically from a high-tech future war of some kind. ARC was deliberately escaping to the past, our present, which he regarded as a utopia, and Agent One had a mission to the past, again, our present day, but his programmed instructions had malfunctioned. I suggested that this begged for each of them to be from opposite sides of the same future war, now isolated from it. Considering their respective scary time-based Hunted Situations, called the Timekeeper and Mother Necessity, play itself quickly produced our comics title: AWOL.

All this timey-wimey SF threatened to overwhelm the statements a little, but since it's comics, a certain carelessness toward utter sense can be a source of fun. One player added to the mix by conceiving of the two working closely with the St. Louis police, which accented the other coincidental player-produced fact that neither hero was white and neither was familiar with specific ethnic conflicts in the present-day.

Finally, a third example shows the most "secure" or least guess-ish outcome, from this starting point:

- Powers are bright, fun, and hopeful
- The past is always present, on the Left Coast [part of the western margin of North America, from Big Sur to Vancouver]

Given the statements, obviously all three heroes, Power*Star, Advance, and Komodo Dragon, dragged in a ton of complicated family and powers-related past events, which gave us its title right away, LEGACY. But they also independently brought in elements of strange energy technology, which fit very well into the location and its real-world culture and gave rise to a different shared origin concept, in terms of powers' definition.

Where it goes

The heroes and the team will change: their powers will grow and transform, they will re-assess their identities and their place in society, they may scatter or come to live together in a base, and some may even leave and be replaced by other heroes. Their adversaries will disappear and re-appear, or form new goals, perhaps even to become teammates. New foes and problems will emerge.

All comics super-teams have changed as they went along, riddled with drama-heavy shifts in priorities, internal relationships, and membership. Sometimes it's drastic. One of the major groups underwent a radical conceptual shift during its second year, when all the founding members resigned, leaving one person to mentor the tricky addition of three former supervillains. Another team chose to die together rather than submit to villainous blackmail threatening the lives of innocents. (4)

Therefore the choices you make at this early stage can be relaxed and enjoyable, rather than stressed in terms of future play. Whatever the heroes are like and whatever the team happens to be like at this starting moment is your launch point, not a static contract signed in blood. Where you start matters only insofar as you get going.

REFERENCES

(1) The original superhero team in American comics was the Justice Society of America, first appearing in *All Star Comics* #3 (1940-41), by Sheldon Mayer, Gardner F. Fox, and Everett E. Hibbard, published by National Allied Publications. The methods by which the heroes were included in a single publication were paralegal at best. The All Winners Squad was very similar, appearing in *All Winners Comics* #19 and #21 (1946), by Bill Finger and multiple artists, published by Martin Goodman in one or another shell-game company, using its Timely Comics imprint.

The JSA was rebooted with more recent versions of some heroes as well as others and renamed as the Justice League of America, first appearing in *The Brave and the Bold #28* (1960), by Julius Schwartz, Gardner F. Fox, and Mike Sekowsky, published by National Comics using the Superman DC imprint.

The Avengers was structurally similar, beginning with *The Avengers #1* (1963), by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, published by Magazine Management using the Marvel Comics imprint. Its members had individually appeared during the previous five years, and soon included Captain America who had first appeared under another Goodman-owned imprint in 1941.

The self-referential and eventually largest superhero team was the Legion of Superheroes, first appearing in *Adventure Comics #247* (1958), by Otto Binder and Al Plastino, published by National Comics using the Superman DC imprint. As the Legion was defined in the comics as superhero fans in the far future, it was later promoted with the concept that real-life readers could become official members.

(2) The first teams to use non-government unifying concepts were the Fantastic Four (1961, not yet called "Marvel Comics"), Metal Men (Superman DC imprint, 1962), the Doom Patrol (Superman DC imprint, 1963), and the X-Men (Marvel Comics imprint, 1963).

(3) The superhero team defined by voluntary, piecemeal association was the Defenders, first appearing in *Marvel Feature #1* (1971), by Roy Thomas and Ross Andru, published by Cadence Industries using the Marvel Comics Group imprint. This definition soon came to be almost the most solid unifier in superhero teams, rather than the least, given how often its members explained it to other characters.

(4) In *The Avengers #16* (1965), by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, the Wasp, Giant-Man, Iron Man, and Thor resigned (the Hulk had done so earlier). Captain America, who had joined in #4, oversaw the inclusion of Hawkeye (a former Iron Man villain or at least foe), Quicksilver, and the Scarlet Witch (both former members of the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants in *The Uncanny X-Men*).

When the title *Doom Patrol* was canceled, its final story in #121 (1968) featured the founding members of the team trapped on an island, threatened with a deadly bomb unless they would submit to the villains destroying a village. They refused, saving the village and dying in the blast. The final page is perhaps interpretable as defiant toward their own editors as well as toward the villains. Regardless of later re-imaginings and uses of the characters, the story is internally final and fatal for all four heroes.

CHAPTER 4
SPECIAL EFFECTS

BARE ESSENTIALS

Most of the rules in this book are about numbers and timing; they're mechanics. But when it comes to the fiction, the "what is it" of these moments, the mechanics are buck naked.

All the mechanics are governed by a single fundamental rule: that all play, everything in it, whatever anyone says about anything, must be specified in fictional terms. On the hero sheet, as well as in play, you have to say what it is before you can apply mechanics to see how well and how much it works. These what-it-is are called special effects: "nova blast," "mystic mastery," "spider-y things."

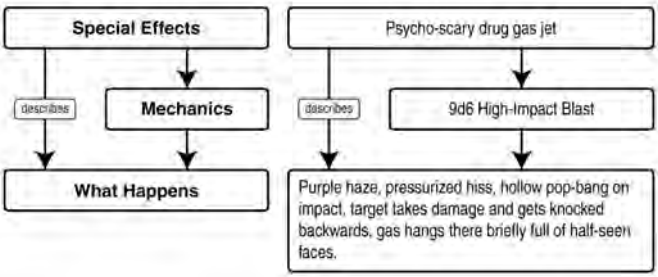
That's why the names for the powers mechanics are so neutral. One person's Concealment may be a brooding pool of shadow, but another's could be the least-dark thing imaginable, like filling the air with mystic glitter. It helps to look at the cause in one direction only: because you generate a brooding pool of shadow, you can use the game-mechanic called Concealment.

This isn't semantics – it's really a thing, that the special effects "are" what is happening in the imagined events, and the mechanics are used to create its impact, rather than defining it.

WITH TEETH

Here's a hero to illustrate, named Miasma, whose powers are based on scary hallucinatory vapors, such that she's practically part of them. Attacks' impact affects her less, she can intensify this effect to move through solid objects and for attacks to pass right through her, and she can expand the mists into a fog of distorted faces or focus it into a jet-blast.

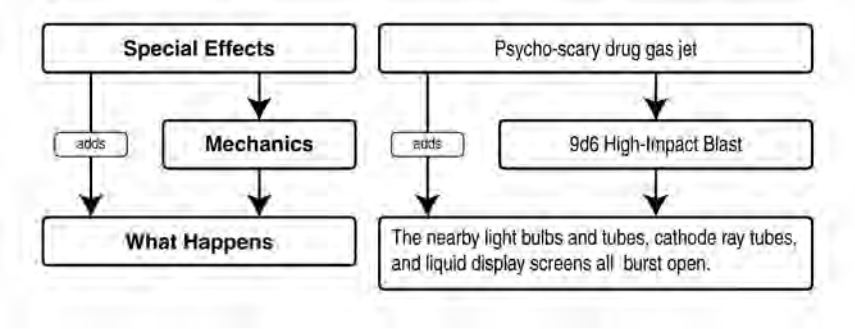
How does this conceptual specification get applied in play? The easiest, most familiar use for the **special effects** is just "skin:" we *describe and visualize* that she's shooting loopy-looking drug gas and not, for example, ice or butterflies, then you use the mechanics listed on your sheet, and that's it.



However, the descriptions are more than just skin. A lot more. The special effects have rules of their own. They can be applied to situations in play as if they were mechanics, as solid and effective as the specific numbers described in the textual rules. These consequences may aid or hinder the acting hero, depending on the circumstances. The gas jet, for instance, might hit harder, it might do half effects, it might not work, it might shut down the thing or foe it's hitting entirely, or it might do some wild thing that no one intended or knew could happen.

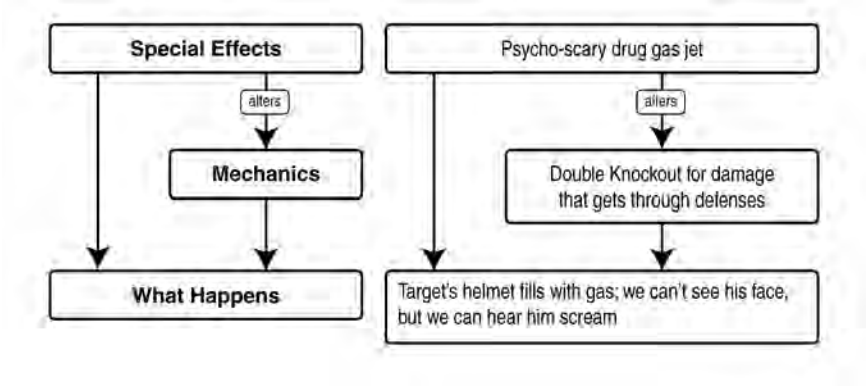
This procedure has no point total, no pre-arranged parameters, no number-of-use limits, no "metagame mechanic," nothing in rules terms beyond a standing permission to do it. The decision formally lies with the game master, but in practice, suggestions for such things pop up from anyone more or less regularly.

It works in three ways. The first is for the special effects to include concrete consequences alongside the mechanics-based outcome. Let's say that you direct that psycho-scary drug gas jet attack in a cool laboratory situation, with tubes and fluids and energies all over the place.



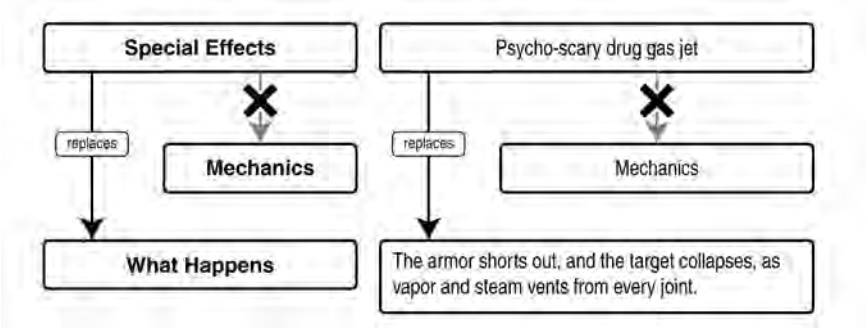
This technique is often obvious: hit someone with a fire-blast in a paper warehouse, and no one will blink when the narration includes everything catching on fire. The less obvious point is that such effects are completely optional and decided upon in the moment, not as fixed effects, and they're not expected to be consistent. They don't have to happen. It's strictly a matter of fun and significant consequences when they occur to you, meaning to anyone.

The second way is for the special effects to alter how the mechanics are applied in a particular instance. For example, if that attack were directed toward someone in techno-armor with a face-plate, the gas might be deemed extra effective as long as any of it manages to get in there.



Again, applying the rule in the hero's favor is not guaranteed. I was thinking of armor with some environmental containment, but not so complete as to provide its own internal atmosphere. Armor with that capacity might have the opposite effect against a gas jet attack, ignoring the damage and only applying the impact (Knockback) of the attack.

The third way takes this effect to the extreme, in which the special effects *override* the mechanics, typically making a power totally effective or ineffective.



In this game, you don't say, "just special effects," meaning no effect beyond the skin. Here, the special effects *do* things. The mechanics never fully tell you what happens in the fiction; the mechanics are only there so the special effects have something to work with.

AT THE TABLE

"Naked" also means vulnerable. If you're using special effects with teeth in the mechanics, play is now vulnerable to negotiation about whether or not a special effect is going to have a unique impact on the mechanics. It's risky, but that's how it is for anyone creating a comic, especially in terms of finishing this issue right now.

Comics creators are generally unconcerned with fans' notions of what a power is or can do, and much more concerned with how they see the hero in the conflicts immediately at hand. Powers get conceptually squishy because:

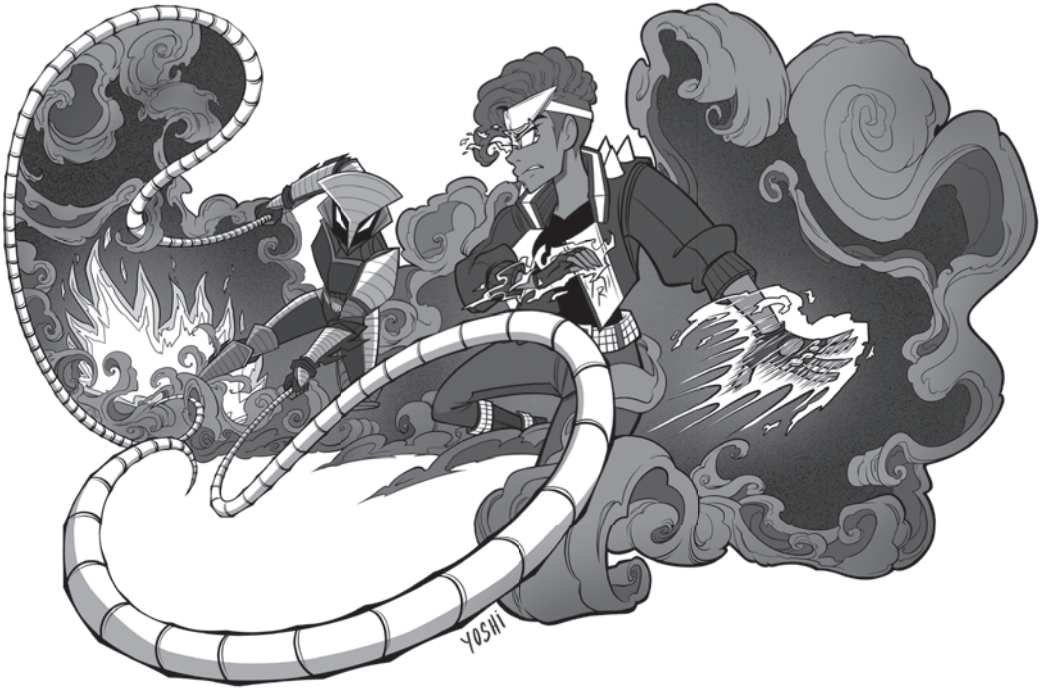
- Prior standards or claims always take second place to whatever is most cool right now.
- Every creator has his or her own notions about the powers, often not carefully thought-out, about what's right or most fun to draw.
- Overwork, deadlines, and other stresses can turn what would be a playful stretch of a concept into an incredible exaggeration. The boundary is never clear until afterwards.

The group in play is like that creator. You don't have to apply teeth to the special effects. But you can. The atmosphere and rules-use can be a bit like free jazz: loose, occasionally pushing the envelope, always reaching for the best, tolerant of missteps. Liberating. Comics sometimes rise to great heights this way, and sometimes fall on their face. The game works the same way. (1)

Therefore be consistent, but not with the powers as such. Instead, be consistent in how they're socially and creatively handled. Here's a recommended sequence.

- Describe powers' incidental effects all the time and play incidental bystanders' reactions and exclamations. Better yet, ask everyone to describe them, early and often.
- When everyone is used to what the mechanics do by default and already enjoys seeing powers' unique fictional effects, then putting teeth in them once in a while is easy.
- Put in the teeth only rarely, when powers really clash directly, or when the immediate situation just begs for it, like the warehouse full of paper.
- Given the choice, favor the heroes: apply generous, helpful interpretations of their special effects more often than otherwise. The players made up these powers, so what better reward than seeing them proved to be the "right" ones for the job? Also, they become willing to accept the same for their opponents, once in a while.
- Stay a little flexible. If someone displays unmistakable signs of buzzkill due to a special effect's consequences, dial it down.
- Accept suggestions for special effects, especially those which seem spontaneous and enthusiastic. When you don't, instead of shutting it down, say, "maybe next time," and indeed do it next time.

These practices lead to play in which someone grins or groans when the special effects' teeth show up; but either way, says "Of course!"



MODIFIERS

Ruby Ray and the other hero examples in the Appendix include Modifiers for many of their Powers. When you organize a hero's mechanics with points, Advantages use more points and Limitations use less. But what are they? It's still about the special effects.

- **Advantage:** Grimfire has the Weaken Power, against Presence, Modified to be a Strike attached to his punch. This means being hit by him is worse than just the damage; he is so fell and scary that it demoralizes you.
- **Limitation:** Ruby Ray's Flight is Constrained, specifically that it won't work if she goes under half speed. This effect emphasizes that it's a laser zap, not a hover float.
- **Advantage + Limitation:** when Anybug takes on his Stink Bug form, he can bonk you hard with the Blast Power, which is modified to be Reactive, responding to being hit. It is also Conditional, along with everything else in his transformations, to be fully effective only if he keeps his power pack on, which is itself on a Focus Limitation, meaning pretty easily grabbed or broken.

Using Modifiers doesn't give your power the special effect you want, because you already have it, by definition. Using Modifiers says, let's not rely on in-the-moment inspiration to modify the mechanics, instead, let's bake it in using points so it'll become mechanics. You include Modifiers when you like a given nuance of your power's special effect so much that you want to see it in action all the time.

Consider a hero whose powers are defined as powered armor. Let's say in addition to the literal armor, he flies, projects beams of some kind, and relies on a battery.

- Version 1 has no Modifiers at all, so that he's built the same as anyone whose powers are intrinsic to their body.
- Version 2 has Modifiers here and there, to make specific features of the armor always work in particular ways as mechanics.
- Version 3 builds the whole set of armor under unified Modifiers and perhaps subsets for specific parts.

The most famous armored hero from the comics provides further insight due to the varying plot-importance of such features. During his first decade, he was in effect a disabled hero due to the focus on his heart condition and the high-energy demands of his armor. After these were written down a little, then his problems arose more from his alcoholism and his uncertain control over the armor. Therefore its variations by creator aren't only in the explicit designs, colors, and invented features, but in its plot-affecting properties, including how vulnerable some piece of it may be, how quickly its batteries run out or recharge, and how dependent he is on it or how responsible in its use. (2)

In these rules, there isn't a single way to build a hero like this one, because you don't have to say, "In order to have armor at all, I must take this or that Modifier." It's already armor because you said so, and therefore it won't work if he's not wearing it, its battery can run low on energy, and it has lots of properties based on its materials and engineering. These were the powers' special effects from the start and will always be the special effects no matter how many Modifiers it has or doesn't have. The only Modifiers you need are those you want to cause consistent, dramatic consequences in play.

STORY POWER

That's quite a handful of concepts: wide-open non-listed special effects, opportunistic mechanical consequences, developing a group look-and-feel for when they apply, and Modifiers as options rather than requirements. Clearly each individual group will arrive at its own spin on enjoying the full use of special effects in play, and no single crystal-clear example is possible.

What are they for? I can give you one thing they're not for, and one thing they are.

- Special effects are not there for one person to make the story go where they want. They aren't a plot hammer or fiat.
- Special effects are there to honor the potential for the imagined powers to affect what's happening, because of what they are, for good or ill.

The way to maintain the difference is to describe and use special effects based on what's already obvious in play at the moment, without inventing new reasons for this or that power to have some privilege or deficit. It's very effective: you'll stay authentic for your own enjoyment, rather than manipulative about the situational outcome. Everyone in play appreciates it and they soon join in.

The result is vivid, unforgettable, and, for the group as a whole, entirely your own.

REFERENCES

(1) Two little square-thingies are egregious examples of do-anything McGuffins, but also, against expectations, have fueled compelling stories. The Cosmic Cube first appeared in *Tales of Suspense #79* (1966), by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, published by Magazine Management, using the Marvel Comics Imprint. Mother Box first appeared in *The Forever People #1* (1971), by Jack Kirby, published by Warner Communications using the DC Comics imprint.

(2) Iron Man first appeared in *Tales of Suspense #39* (1963), by Stan Lee, Larry Lieber, and Don Heck, published by Magazine Management. The significant shift from health-based to resource-based problems occurred in *Iron Man #85* (1976), by Len Wein, Roger Slifer, and Herb Trimpe, published by Cadence Industries using its Marvel Comics Group imprint. The similar shift to problems of addiction occurred in the "Demon in a Bottle" storyline, *Iron Man* #120-128 (1979), by David Michelinie, Bob Layton, and John Romita Jr, from the same publisher.

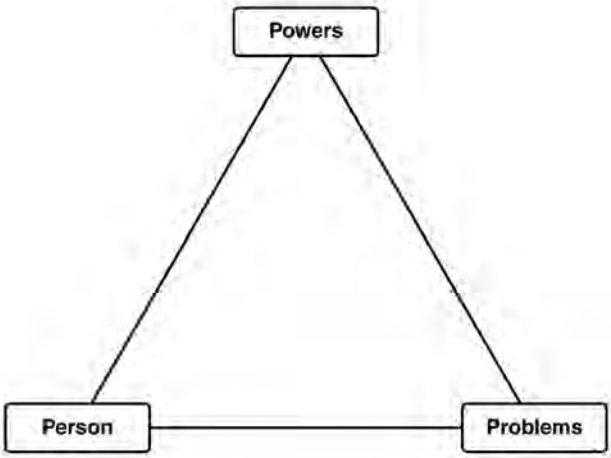
CHAPTER 5
HERO MAKING

This is it! You've seen the two statements for your game, and you don't have to guess what they mean; the game master is waiting to find that out from you.

The pressure is lower than it might look. What you do now barely begins your hero, like one of those one-page promotional illustrations that gets people excited about the upcoming debut. You even get some wiggle room to re-adjust after seeing how play goes.

THREE CORNERS

To begin the process of hero creation, fill in your notions at each corner of a triangle: the person, the problems, and the powers (actually powers, characteristics, and skills). Scribble a detail in one, skip to another, and skip back, in no particular order – you'll find that each one informs both of the others as the creative process moves along.



The **person** has an ethnic, national, and economic background, age, gender, somewhere to live, and some current or working identity in those terms. He or she necessarily participates in or displays some subculture, employment, important personal quality, or lifestyle too. Ordinary standards of attractiveness fall into this category as well, as they are usually an amalgam of literal appearance and social variables. You don't have to say much, but say something. Brief phrases here capture whole shelves of skills, knowledge, acquaintances, and resources.

When it comes to this real-world stuff, be honest and interested. This isn't to please an audience, but to please yourself. Powers can be cool, problems can be sympathetic, but this person is someone you like.

The **problems** arise directly from your hero's identity, standing, priorities, activities, and situations, super-powered or otherwise. They're also the meat and potatoes of actually being a hero, so you want them to hit hard. He or she may wail piteously about it, but not you. You're doing this on purpose.

Think about:

- The hero's social position, based on ordinary human circumstances as well as on anything to do with powers and super-stuff, and certainly as related to appearance or reputation
- Any direct difficulties from the powers themselves, whether they cause problems or open up vulnerabilities to other effects
- Physical and emotional disabilities, which are often tied directly to specific powers in a hundred possible ways
- Strong opinions and deeply-felt positions, about things that might crop up a lot, or that might prompt unthinking reactions
- - These don't have to be weird or unreasonable in content, and might even be admirable
- Relationships of all kinds, especially family, romance, and work, but also related to super-stuff, as with personal enemies and too-interested entities.
- - Relationships don't have to be problems and might be associated with one or both of the other corners instead, but when they are, they really are
- Then there's plain bad luck. There's a lot of truth in the notion that no one wants to be the hero of a story – it kind of sucks, a lot of the time.

Plenty of this can and will happen without points. But if there's one sector of hero making that stands above the rest, it's which problems you'll choose to be represented mechanically from those you've brainstormed here.

For **powers,** don't look at the lists and points in the next chapter. Instead, scribble in the special effects: what the powers look like, in action, against what sort of opponents, in what sort of situation, and accomplishing what. Don't explain anything. This is about the visuals, like an artist's concept sketching, especially if you think of the hero doing something rather than floating there.

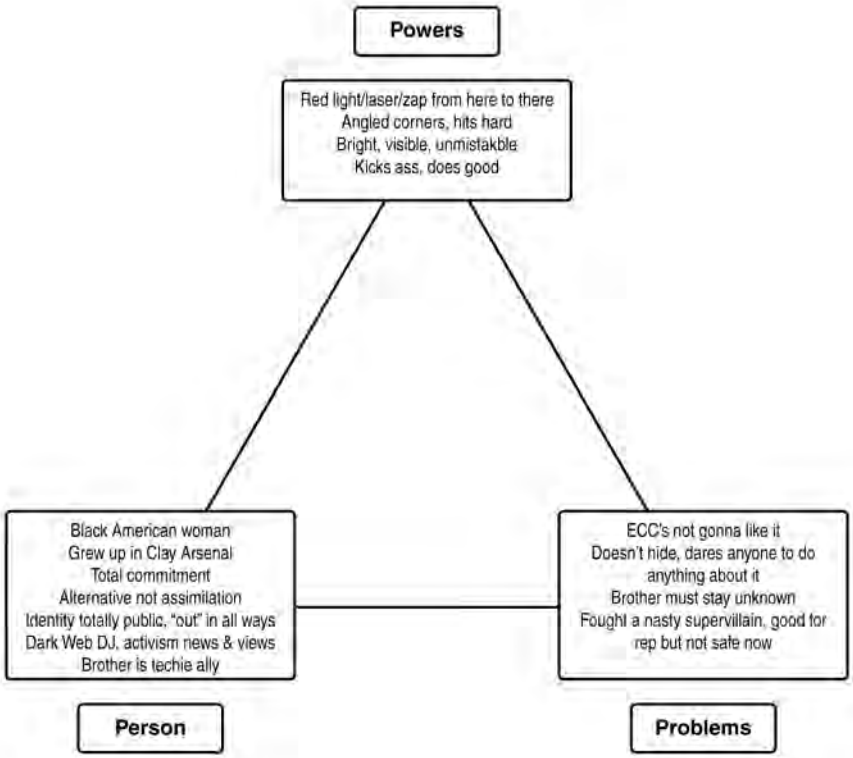
It may be hard to believe, but you really are free to name whatever powers you like: tap into the space-time continuum, control any microbe, channel a god or a whole pantheon, turn into your favorite creature (or all of them). The mechanics express their scope and impact, but for what the power is, that's all you.

Here are the three corners for Ruby Ray. I start with the two big statements for our game, which is set in Hartford, Connecticut.

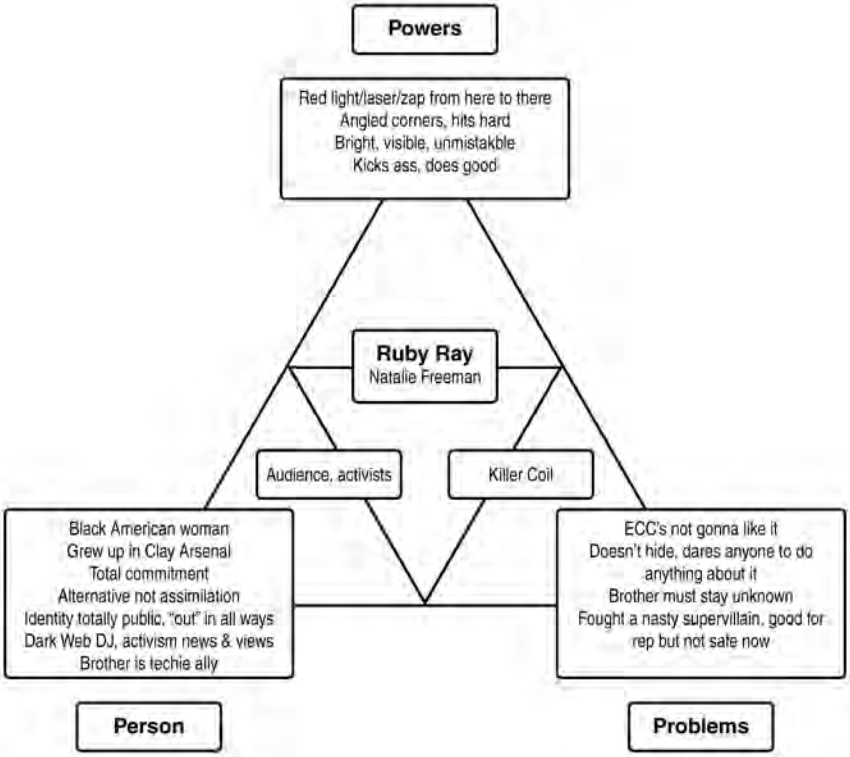
- A superhero stands for something and means it.
- You got family in my politics! You got politics in my family!

For the person corner, I know where I'm coming from right away. That whole "politics" phrasing and, I admit, the location get up my nose, specifically about feel-good smug activism that never really does anything. So my hero will be someone who completely disavows compromise and establishment power, a total doer. OK, I'm already filling in every corner, especially her ("her," I suddenly realize) powers: one hundred percent bright and obvious, not too subtle, as classic super-physics hero as you can get.

That's how the triangle works – without hardly trying, whatever you put into one corner feeds into the others, and "someone" starts to appear in the "middle." The powers create problems, the person chooses what to do with the powers, the problems make the choices matter, and a vision begins to form of the hero in action, with things about to happen to them.



Without even trying, all this pops the name Ruby Ray into my head, and now it feels like someone I'm discovering rather than inventing. Certain things that draw from all three corners now feel obvious, and if I could draw, I'd sketch her in the middle. Instead, since I'm getting enough sense of the people who are associated with her, I write them there, including her own name and also a cool adversary name.



UNCONVENTIONAL NOTIONS

You are now the master of idiom, not the slave of genre. Consider shaking off some genre habits from comics fandom and role-playing conventions.

Originality is over-rated. Copy like hell, rip off anything and everything – shoot, nab your favorite mask design and color it some other color. The best and most famous superheroes all began as rip-off salads, because original powers and appearance never made a character good. What did that is what someone did with it, their way, all the way. (1)

Origin stories are over-rated even worse. Yes, a few of them are very good, but not many, and a lot of those become significant well after the hero's first appearance. You may be tempted to write up a complicated text piece about the origin of the character's powers. I can't stop you, having succumbed to temptation myself, but try to make it about *why our story starts here*, rather than maundering about little Sally who dreamed of flying.

Comics adaptations have worsened the origin problem by bloating a six-page flashback piece of a longer story into whole movies and seasons of episodes, creating the impression that superheroes have nothing better to do than get originated. That, and going on forever about "Oh no, what's happened to me? I'm staring at my hands! What are these strange powers? Whatever shall I do?" Bah. Make up a hero who's figured that stuff out, even if it was just a few moments before play begins. (2)

Names are also no reason to stress. There seems to be no such thing as a "dumb" superhero name in comics. Effectively, if you write and draw a great hero, the name becomes great, no matter how lame it looked originally, and the converse is true as well, with a clever or arguably iconic name belly-flopping due to presenting a crap hero. A simple iconic noun seems to have been acceptable throughout comics history. Certain conventions were observed at various points, like nearly universal endings with "-man" or similar terms in the 1940s and preserved for some time; "doer" names throughout the 1960s and 1970s, as in "what do they do;" animal names that proliferated in the 1970s even for heroes with none of the corresponding animal's features; the near-perfect correspondence with music celebrity or band names during the 1980s; or non-hyphenated noun-noun compounds, whether from the dictionary or never before seen by human eyes, as in the 1990s.

For people names, the original convention was stricter, originating in the pseudonyms used by authors and actors whose names were deemed too ethnic to be marketable, and applied to the characters as well. They are so neutral as to have an Uncanny Valley quality, as they are typically built from two given (first) names with vague English origins, or a given name of that sort with a Germanic surname connoting strength or otherwise threatening. The 1960s strongly shifted to naturalistic ethnic names and corresponding identities for the heroes, and comics naming has featured a blend of the old and new conventions since. (3)

You can relax notions of superhero types. Not only does the group not need "one of these, one of these, and two of those," but you don't need to be any kind of "these." Again, the best heroes from the source materials tromp all over such distinctions. Do what you want from the two statements, categories be damned.

Similarly, there are plenty of tactical games for mission success and combat survivorship, and this isn't one of them. Never mind making well-rounded utility packages, neatly constructed in four quadrants of offense, defense, movement, and perception. And forget about armoring up into invulnerability either. Believe it: your hero is going to get hit and, sometimes, to hit the dirt.

What about weird heroes? Aliens, androids, visiting demon nieces … all fantastic, when combined with recognizable material throughout the corners, so the hero's unusual exaggerations and deficits highlight all the same real-people problems real-people have. Those effects might be seen in his or her or

its acquaintances. For example, you might go all the way into deliberately blank space, whether it's amnesia or "just created yesterday" or too alien and alienated to know what anything is. If you ground that with a rich supporting cast, then the person corner is as full as ever, and it works great.

ALL ABOUT POINTS

You get a few game mechanics without using points. If you stopped here, your hero would be one hex in size, have six hexes of running, two hexes of swimming, Strength 2d6, Presence 2d6, Body 10, Speed 1, Defense 10, and Dexterity, Intelligence, Ego, and Perception rolls of 11 points each.

You don't use points for most things concerning the hero's personal, social, or economic identity. Whatever you want, say so, and it's free. That includes any and all wealth and skills that pertain to work and play, where they're from, or what job they may have, or what they want from life.

The points can illustrate or nail down these things in specific ways. For your hero to be a "famous actor," you only have to say so, but using points to increase Presence gives mechanical weight to his or her actor's charisma and steadiness under pressure.

You can do the following in any order, and wherever you start, you'll skip around them as you go along.

- Which Situations are evidently demanded by the concept so far.
- What your Characteristics will look like, especially if one or more are super-powered.
- Which Skills you'll have.
- Whether you'll use a Power Framework, and if so, which one.
- How strong your powers are, mechanically, and how they might be modified.

Mathematically, these are related like this:

100 + total Situations points = Characteristics points + Skills points + Powers points

You get 100 points for free, then add as many points as your Situations provide. You'll use all of them; don't bank any points for a starting hero.

How many for the total? The recommended value for a beginning hero is 200. If the group wants to start higher, they can, but everyone should use the same value and the game is not built to start over 220.

The next chapter lists points for all these things, but crucially, some of them can be reduced by various details called Limitations. That leads to a much more important quantity than merely the obvious point total: the Ratio. It's calculated for a whole hero like this:

[The point total calculated without Limitations / The point total] x 100

For the first part, leave everything else the same, all the mechanics you'll see in the examples and next chapter, the Frameworks, Advantages, everything.

Here's the rule: a hero's ratio may not exceed 119. Limiting features of the concept which would lead to a higher ratio must be left to non-point Special Effects.

NUTS AND BOLTS

The **Situations** don't "balance" the hero's good stuff with some equivalent amount of bad stuff. Situations are, themselves, good, and the equals sign in the equation serves only as a useful cognitive device to make you stretch a little on whichever side needs it.

The Situations are categorized:

- Identity
- Vulnerability
- Susceptibility
- Side Effects
- Enrage
- Psychological
- Physical
- Dependent NPC
- Hunted
- Unusual Looks
- Unluck

You may have several in one category in most cases, but the combined values within it cannot exceed 50. The Exception is Unluck, which is capped at 15 points, and believe me, that's plenty.

It's all right to be hazy on some of your Situations' details, but give each one a name.

It so happens that the Hartford game was set at 200 points for all the heroes at the start. Ruby Ray's Situations pretty much write themselves, landing on the designated total almost as if by magic.

Situations	Points
Public Identity: Natalie Freeman	10
Psych: Stands up for marginalized person's selfhood (often)	15
Psych: Brash (rarely)	5
Psych: Fun-loving (rarely)	5
Vulnerable: 2x Knockout from red-colored attacks or hazards	15
Dependent non-player character: Bri, her brother (secret identity)	15
Hunted: Killer Coil (individual, super-powered, ruinous)	20
Hunted: FCC (organization, manipulative)	15
Total points = 100 free + 100 = 200	

To clarify a little bit of the processing, I focused on her identity, opinions, relationships, and social situation. I could have added more onto the cartoon physics of her powers, perhaps making her Susceptible to the color red, and I'd probably go that way if we were working with a higher point total. I was determined not to tap into any "out of control" tropes for Ruby Ray, so Enrage and Side Effects were right out.

The characters embedded in there will need a little development using points of their own, but that's not important to this total, which is 200 points to use for Characteristics, Skills, and powers.

Here's a useful point to know from the outset: the Psychological Situations aren't locked-down thespian commitments. They matter, or rather, using them as Situations means you want to see them in play, but they do not dictate your hero's precise behavior in a moment of crisis. They aren't phrased as "always" or "will not."

Therefore although Ruby Ray doesn't *like* compromises about marginalized people's selfhood (rights, e.g.) and may well take laser-zapping stuff-breaking action about it, that doesn't mean she's a robot who parrots the same line and flies off the handle every single time it's at issue.

The **Characteristics** are Strength, Dexterity, Body, Intelligence, Ego, Presence, Speed, and Defense. These provide the basis for most skills and physical feats, combat capability, and some specialized applications like Presence Attacks.

You build them up from a base value with points, at varying amounts.

Characteristic	Base value	Points	Details
Strength	2d6	5/+1d6	
Presence	2d6	5/+1d6	
Defense	10	1/+1 ordinary/5/+1 resistant	Ordinary Defense 15 is 5 points/Resistant Defense 5 is 20 points

You can use 4 points to upgrade a base point to be resistant

There are two ways to go with Defense.

- Bulk it up here with some or all the points being resistant. This works for intrinsically tough bodies, automatic defensive features of certain powers concepts, or for armor.
- Leave this value at baseline or maybe a little more, and get one or more powers that increase it instead.

Body establishes the hero's physical frame.

Characteristic	Base value	Points	Example
Body	10	10/+1	Body 12 is 20 points

You don't increase ordinary movement like running or swimming with Points. If you want to go faster than the listed values, then you push with extra Endurance, as described in Chapter 11: Fighting Words.

It sets the values for Recovery, Stunned, Endurance, and Knockout, which may not be directly increased with points. They aren't bought; you just get'em based on Body.

Characteristic	Derivation
Recovery	Body x 1
Stunned	Body x 1
Knockout	Body x 2
Endurance	Body x 3

Speed is your number of actions relative to everyone else.

Characteristic	Base value	Points	Example
Speed	1	10/+1	Speed 4 is 30 points

- Speed 2 is a bit slow for a hero but not absurdly so; it's still twice as fast as an ordinary person. 3-4 may be thought of as standard for comics heroes, and 5+ is surreally active and reactive.
- Don't be greedy for speedy! It's very easy to overrun your energy reserves that way.

Dexterity, Intelligence, and Ego work entirely differently: their values are target values for resolution rolls using 3d6.

Characteristic	Base value	Points	Secondary values
Dexterity	11	10/+1	
Intelligence	11	10/+1	Intelligence sets the base (free) target number for perception
Ego	11	10/+1	

Ruby Ray's Characteristics focus on energy, impact, and speed.

Characteristics	Points
Strength 2d6	0
+6d6 Strength only when flying	20
Presence 3d6	5
Body 14	40
Recovery 14, Stunned 14, Knockout 28, Endurance 42	
Speed 4	30
Defense 10	0
Dexterity 12	10
Intelligence 11	0
Ego 11	0

See that additional Strength? It should be 30 points, but it's qualified by a key phrase called a Limitation. You can read about the details in the next chapter, but for now, recognize that sometimes things may use less points.

You don't need points for the hero's naturalistic skill-set, including resources, contacts, and property. As mentioned in Chapter 2: Basics, Ruby Ray has an impressive array of such abilities and connections, and so will any other hero.

The listed **Skills** are best conceived as super-skills, situated far into the concept of popular or fantastic adventure. They deliver over-the-top applications and effects that a real skilled person, even an expert, cannot do – for lack of a better word, they are "comic-booky."

They differ in groups based on certain point structures:

- Utility: Climbing, Computer Programming, Detective Work, Security Systems, Stealth
- Maneuver: Acrobatics, Martial Arts (Attacks, Moves, Find Weakness)
- Situational: Skill Levels, Luck

The Utility Skills' emphasis on sneakiness isn't Ruby Ray's thing, so she focuses on the other types to work closely with her Powers and the Characteristics they rely on.

Awareness	Force Field	Shrinking
Blast	Force Wall	Specialized Defense
Concealment	Growth	Stretch
Density Increase	Images	Surfaces
Desolid	Instant Change	Telekinesis
Drain	Invisibility	Telepathy
Entangle	Life Support	Teleportation
Extra Limb	Mind Control	Tunnel
Flash	Missile Deflection	Weaken
Flight	Regeneration	

The points for the formal Powers can be organized simply and their specifics left to Special Effects during play, or they may turn into a bit of a design mini-project. You can arrange powers' relations to one another, set their values, define Characteristics as Powers and mess with them accordingly, integrate Powers with Skills, and more. You can also arrange their relations with one another with Power Frameworks and significantly change their specific rules-effects with Modifiers, either Advantages or Limitations.

You don't have to use a Power Framework, but if you do, choose one: Elemental Control, Multiform, or Variable Power Pool. It's a good option if your hero's powers show off some special effect so consistently that you'd say, "fire powers," or "commands magnetic forces," or "son of a star (like an actual sun-type star)," or even something oddball like "master of the color blue."

Advantages

Adaptive Effects	Group Effect	Reactive
Affects Desolid	High Impact	Separate
Area Effect	Invisible Effects	Sever
Aura	Lethal	Strike
Destructive	No Endurance Cost	Usable at Range
Ego-based	Persistent	Usable on/for Others
Expanded Scope	Piercing	

Limitations

Activation	Costs Endurance	Linked
Always On	Focus	No Knockback
Burnout	Increased Endurance	No Range
Conditional	Involuntary	Shutdown
Skill-based	Tricky	

For Ruby Ray's Powers, it's about raw visuals, inspired by some comics characters but turned into her very own signature person-glow zap form, full of punishing impact and lighting up the place.

Powers	Points
Elemental Control: Red Laser Transformation	20
Laser Zap: Flight 20 hexes	
- Constrained: linear only, Constrained: cannot go less than half-speed	10
Hard Glow: Force Field 16	20
Light Up: Flash 4d6	
- Constrained: only at end of flight path, No Range 10	

Her powers show a lot in just a few lines and will help you understand the next chapter's applications.

- Every one of them has an in-fiction name which, again, carries a wide range of momentary applications or consequences that have nothing to do with points. Many Powers' interior mechanics need to be specified by consulting your concept for it, with the name as the primary reference.
- They're organized into a Power Framework, an Elemental Control, because they are collectively just one fictional power being used in a variety of ways.
- -Without the Elemental Control, they'd be 40 points each. However, this Framework reduces the points for whatever's in it, so each one is 20 points instead. Each one is rated at a value which happens to be based on 40 points. Force Field, for example, gets you 2 Defense per 5 points.
- Two of the slots also have Limitations like her extra Strength did, cutting down the already-reduced points in half in both cases.

The Elemental Control is the least constraining Framework, so she can vary the amount of Defense her Hard Glow provides, for example. The two Limitations nail down exactly how I'd like her Special Effects to apply reliably, focusing her powered actions into the high-speed high-impact imagery I've associated with her from the beginning.

Here's a point about the Special Effects. Ruby Ray glows bright red; it's implicit in the name "Red Laser Transformation" and it's explicit in "Hard Glow." I don't need to spend points so she can glow, I can describe it how I like during play, and I can use it in minor, or even significant, ways.

AT A GLANCE

Take a once-over moment for your worksheet. First, review your total points: 100 + Situations = Characteristics + Skills + Powers = 200 to 240, or the specific value in that range that was set for this group.

Given the structure of the Situations, their total will be a multiple of 5. If the Characteristics + Skills + Powers side is not, then add the few you need to bring it up. The easiest place for that is Defense.

You might have to go back into design if the totals are really different. If you like the Situations right where they are, but you find that they provide more points than you've built into the characteristics, skills, and powers, then bonus! Go get more stuff there to make up the difference.

Conversely, maybe you've built the other side of the equals sign to a certain amount, and you're wondering how to fill up the Situations to match, thinking maybe all those hassles will ruin your hero. That's a good thing too, because, typically, when you provide a new angle with one more strong Situation, or beef up a couple you have already, you provide the clincher that makes the hero active and full of life.

The more important final glance before play is qualitative: whether you have found, or think you can find, your hero's heart. I like Ruby Ray. She takes no shit from anyone, herself included, and she's put herself on the line for a lot of others who probably don't like her very much. She's not a smug do-gooder, but a genuine rebel and radical, smart enough to concentrate on the meaning of what she does, not just hitting things. But if things need hitting, she'll do that too.

This is a good time to consider her supporting cast as well, especially to think more about her brother Bri and her adversary Killer Coil.

Transfer the information from your worksheet to the shiny use-in-play sheet. The game master has to do some more work; but you are ready.

REFERENCES

(1) Ruby Ray is influenced by Captain Marvel (Monica Rambeau), first appearing in *The Amazing Spider-Man Annual #16* (1982), by Roger Stern and John Romita Jr., published by Cadence Industries using the Marvel Comics Group imprint; by Jetstream, first appearing in *The New Mutants #16* (1984), by Chris Claremont and Sal Buscema, by the same publisher; and also by The Ray, whose first version appeared in *Smash Comics #14* (1940), by Lou Fine, published by Quality Comics (purchased by National Periodical Publications in 1956).

(2) Superman's extraterrestrial origin as originally presented was a single panel, quickly dismissed as a justification for his strength as he engaged in immediately earthly goals and adventures. Familiar elements and some which were abandoned were introduced piecemeal, but the origin was not developed into the familiar science fiction saga until 1958 under Mort Weisinger's editorship. Batman's origin was presented more quickly after the hero's debut, about six months, but again, not as the opening story (*Detective Comics #39*). Many origins were throwaway or *pro forma*, sometimes framed as an extreme contrast, like Steve Rogers being a "weakling" before becoming Captain America, or Barry Allen being a "slow" person before becoming the second version of the Flash.

Some heroes' origins were more relevant at the outset and often featured as the hero's first story, as with Hawkman in *Flash Comics #1* (1940), by Gardner F. Fox and Dennis Neville, published by All-American Publications, absorbed by National Comics in 1944. This approach was repeated and explored from many angles by most heroes co-created by Stan Lee, especially Doctor Strange, Spider-Man, Iron Man, the Hulk, and Daredevil, but not all of them. Ant-Man and the Wasp, Thor, and the Fantastic Four all had pro forma origins to move past immediately.

(3) Hollywood history is full of names like Kirk Douglas (Issur Danielovitch) and Cary Grant (Archibald Alec Leach), and so are the pulp authors and heroes. In comics, two-first-names include Clark Kent, Bruce Wayne, Steve Rogers, Reed Richards, Peter Parker, Donald Blake, and more. The pulps also established the tough names, especially "Doc" Clark Savage Jr., who set the model for many like Ben Grimm, Johnny Storm, and Tony Stark.

Stan Lee introduced ethnic naturalism to some heroes' personal names, including Henry Pym, Janet Van Dyne, Matthew Murdock, and Warren Worthington II. For super names, he favored the "cool noun" approach, e.g. Magneto, Abomination, but recommended the "doer" approach if you get stuck. When Gerry Conway was stuck on the name for his expy of Mack Bolan's Executioner, Lee asked him, "What does he do," Conway answered, "He punishes people," and so it was.

CHAPTER 6
STRUCTURAL MECHANICS

Here is the big encyclopedia of mechanics for the game. Later chapters develop how they're used, but these are all the tools and pieces.

SITUATIONS

In play, the Situations are the hero's story-framing devices, both externally and internally.

Your hero's point total is 100 + the points provided by Situations. For a starting hero, the permitted range for the total is 200-240 points, and a specific number may be set for the group. You may receive up to 50 from each type, with the exception of Unluck which is maxed out at 15 points.

Identity

Identity	Your hero's identity matters a lot to many people, including significantly powerful sectors of society. Without an Identity-based Situation, your hero's personal information may or may not be well-known, but it isn't interesting or important to anyone either.	
Secret Identity	People want to know who you are, and there are reasons you don't want them to	15 points
Public Identity	You are a public and easily-located figure, and it's important to people	10 points

Unusual Looks

Unusual Looks	People react negatively to your hero's presence or mention, whether for appearance or reputation. It must be a specific hostile emotion or aversive response, so a hero can have more than one sort of Unusual Look. The reaction is checked once upon any NPC interacting with the hero or considering them in conversation or reflection. If the Situation is not triggered, their reaction is rational considering the information they have. Unusual Looks may or may not include physical appearance; it may be defined as something less tangible, like a smeared reputation or creepy aura. Unusual Looks affects Presence Attacks negatively, never positively.
Roll 8-	5 points
Roll 11-	10 points
Roll 14-	15 points (maximum per Unusual Look)

Vulnerability

Vulnerability	Your hero takes double points of effect from an attack, before defenses are applied. It applies to all forms of effect, e.g., both Body and Knockout damage from an attack which does both.
One specified Power	15 points
All Powers associated with a special effect	25 points

Dependence

Dependence	Your hero requires a substance or environment, either constantly or at regular intervals no greater than 12 hours. In a situation using the Speed Chart, 3d6 Destructive Knockout damage applies per Phase, with no defense. In other situations, the hero is debilitated, as if Drained for 3d6 Destructive effect, regarding any use of Strength or Dexterity. For more severe consequences, see Side Effects.
Ordinary	10 points
Uncommon or weird	20 points

Susceptibility

Susceptibility	Your hero takes 3d6 Destructive Knockout damage from contact with or close proximity to a harmless substance, with no defense applied.
Uncommon or weird	10 points
Ordinary	20 points
Includes Core damage to Body	+5 points

Side Effects

Side Effects	Choose one or more attack powers. This automatically damages or affects your hero at no Endurance cost and no defense upon specific circumstances. They may be defined as a specific action by the hero, a specific action by someone else (anyone who does it, not a specific person), or a specific condition or situation the hero is likely to encounter.
Active Points (maximum 50)	= in points

Physical

Physical	Your hero has a disability that affects ordinary empowerment or interaction. It may concern anatomical function or other aspects of health, communication, or cognitive function, although not to the point of removing personal understanding or responsibility.	
Frequency	Occasional	5 points
	All the time	10 points
Severity	Significantly limiting; may be compensated with appropriate devices or practices	5 points
	Severely limiting; it may be managed but cannot be compensated to ordinary levels of function	10 points

Psychological

Psychological	Your hero holds a well-defined, deeply-felt position or opinion. Its justification, morality, or rationality are not rated in points.	
Provocation	Happens sometimes	5 points
	Happens a lot	15 points
Response	Stated opinion, visible expression	0 points
	Irrational	5 points
	Meltdown, defined as collapse, flight, or otherwise non-functional response	10 points

Enrage

Enrage	Your hero may exhibit a violent, retributive response when provoked in a specific way or under specific conditions, to attack whatever they perceive to be the cause. It must be their primary attack at full power, toward the provocation. Defensive maneuvers or strategic movement are not possible while triggered. Recovery is a 0-Phase action at the start of every Phase, requiring a successful Ego roll; a successful recovery is complete and the hero regains full control over his or her actions.	
Provocation	Uncommon or weird	0 points
	Ordinary or likely	5 points
Response	Roll 11-	10 points
	Roll 14-	15 points

Hunted

Hunted	Someone is dedicated toward your hero in a way he or she definitely does not desire. You decide how much you know about them. They are not affected by the Hero's Presence.	
Who	One person	0 points
	Small group	5 points
	Large organization	10 points
Resources	Ordinary	0 points
	Extensive and/or unusual	5 points
	Includes superpowers	10 points
Intention	Manipulative	5 points
	Ruinous or murderous	10 points

Dependent Non-Player Character

Dependent Non-Player Character	Your hero is invested in the Situations of another person, for reasons or emotions as you define. A DNPC may not have a DNPC, and their Hunted, if any, may not be the same as the hero's Hunted.	
	They are not affected by the hero's Presence	
Situations	5 to 50 points	= Situation value for hero

Unluck

Unluck	When something goes well for your hero, roll all the Unluck dice and apply the Core value as described for the relevant situation.
1d6	5 points/15 points maximum
	Unluck effects may be prefaced with "due to bad luck," and they range from 0 to 6.
	0: Fortunately, no effect
	1: Your attention is divided or you're badly positioned
	2: Tables turn: they spot you, or danger unfairly targets you instead of others
	3: One of your Situations becomes relevant for no reason
	4: As #1 and risks to others appear or are increased
	5: As #2 and it applies to an ally as well
	6: As #3 and applies to all the heroes in the situation

CHARACTERISTICS

Without using any points, a hero has all the characteristics at their base values, as well as 6 hexes of running, 2 hexes of jumping, and 2 hexes of swimming.

Characteristics may be modified or included in Frameworks, affecting their points.

Characteristic	Base	value	Points	Details
Strength	2d6	5/+1d6		
Presence	2d6	5/+1d6		
Defense	10	1/+1 ordinary/5/+1 resistant	You can use 4 points to "upgrade" a base point to be resistant	

Characteristic	Base value	Points	Example
Body	10	10/+1	Body 12 is 20 points
Speed	1	10/+1	Speed 4 is 30 points

Characteristic	Derivation
Recovery	Body x 1
Stunned	Body x 1
Knockout	Body x 2
Endurance	Body x 3

Characteristic	Base value	Points	Secondary values
Dexterity	11	10/+1	
Intelligence	11	10/+1	Intelligence sets the target number for perception rolls
Ego	11	10/+1	

SKILLS

These capabilities are coded as "trained" in the fiction, but they operate well beyond the familiar and professional scope we know from life.

Skills cannot be Modified or included in Power Frameworks.

Utility Skills

These skills provide capabilities and are resolved by Characteristic rolls. They may be used rapidly in stressful circumstances or over time with care and resources, with no difference in target numbers but differing in their appropriate described actions and narrated effects.

5 points

	Resolution	Description
Climbing	Dexterity	The hero has no fear of heights and may move and perform some actions on walls, ledges, and similar places, as well as stay up there in circumstances other people find uncomfortable. It does not defy gravity and is not stealthy.
Computer Programming	Intelligence	The hero alters or negates the function of computer hardware or software, including programming new tasks. It may be used to damage a system or to protect it against damage. It may be used in tandem with Security Systems and Detective Work for combined effects, or provide useful context for the other Skills, but cannot replace the specific effects of any other Skill.
Detective Work	Intelligence	The hero deduces facts, past events, connections, motivations, and relationships which are otherwise secret, obscure, or forgotten. It may be applied either as technical analysis or as a flash of intuition, but requires a dedicated attempt in either case; it cannot be performed by accident. A successful roll does not permit the player to invent information, but requires the game master either provide backstory information or to invent some that will be of use.
Disguise	Intelligence	The hero conceals his or her personal identity from observers of any kind during ordinary observation or interaction. The hero may be seen as entirely anonymous by filling a social role appropriate to the circumstances, or they may impersonate someone specific, if they have enough information or resources to employ toward this end.

Utility Skills

Security Systems	Intelligence	The hero bypasses technological and organizational means to prevent entry or movement within a controlled area, as well as neutralizing or avoiding mechanized surveillance. Its targets include locks, alarms, cameras, and beam detection. It does not include personal stealth but finds windows in procedures. It may be used to benefit others as well as oneself.
Stealth	Dexterity	The hero evades ordinary perception in circumstances when one's presence would be noticed by living beings or would be recalled by a casual observer. It includes non-technological hiding, timing, and silence, but not disguises. It is limited to oneself and does not provide the same benefit to others.

Maneuver Skills

These skills provide more options.	
10 points	Description
Acrobatics	+2 DCV with a minimum of 2 hexes movement/Permits Dexterity roll to reduce Knockback effects/May be combined with a ½ Phase Action Defensive Maneuver
Martial Attacks	Martial Punch and Martial Kick
Martial Moves	Martial Dodge, Martial Block, Martial Throw, and And Out
Martial Arts: Find Weakness	Designated for single, specific attack Requires successful use of the attack, which does no damage Subject to range modifier/Adds 1 die of effect per successful roll against a target
	Cumulative
Mental Discipline	Ego Evade, Mindscape, Id Rush, Mind Bar, Mind Stab, Self Mastery

Situational Skills

These skills provide bonuses and alter situations.	
5 points/increment	
Description	
Skill Levels	+1 to a single Maneuver, Power-based attack, Skill roll, or Power-based perception roll. A Skill level provides a permanent increase to a Skill or perception roll. As a Maneuver or Power-based attack, it is applied as a 0-phase action. It is assigned either to attack or defense, and may be shifted otherwise as a 0-phase action.

Situational Skills

Luck 1d6	When something goes badly for your hero, roll all the Luck dice and apply the Core value as described for the relevant situation. You may not exceed 15 points of Luck.
	Luck effects may be prefaced with "due to sheer luck," and they range from 0 to 6.
	0: Unfortunately, no effect
	1: You're in a good position considering the situation
	2: You perceive the situation's dangers or consequences better
	3: You are absurdly able to take advantage of the situation
	4: as with #1 as well as a useful insight or realization
	5: as with #2 and it applies to an ally as well (for no reason)
	6: as with #3 and dangers to others or to relevant things are briefly reduced

POWERS

Although we call these "powers" for convenience, they aren't. They're rules to punch the powers' special effects into play. A hero's power may be composed of one or more of them, and many of them require internal tuning. For example, if the description includes the word "or," you must choose an option and exclude the others. If you want multiple options, you must use points for separate additions to your worksheet. The same applies for descriptions that include a bulleted list with additional options at different point values.

So far we've talked about Character Points, or just Points, which now must be specified slightly as **Power Points.** Power Points are what you use for the effectiveness of a power based on the values in this list. They set the scope of effect, Endurance cost, range and area, the number of effect dice, additions to other values like Characteristics, duration, protection, and more, depending on the specific power.

The eventual Character Points you use for the power may be different from the Power Points due to Modifiers and Frameworks, but that value always determines the quantitative effect.

Awareness

This power heightens senses or transforms ordinary senses into new forms, allowing for greater scope for perception. The default form orients the hero regarding his or her immediate surroundings, so that they have no "side" or "behind" for purposes of combat. It compensates for ordinary darkness or similar deprivation, although it does not reveal details that light is specifically needed for. It also compensates for missing or impaired senses under ordinary conditions, although it does not replace their specific deficits. See Chapter 12: Dynamic Mechanics for its interaction with the Stealth Skill or the Concealment and Invisibility Powers. This power may have the Expanded Scope Advantage.

Power Points	Minimum: 20
Additions	Utilizes a medium different from ordinary senses: +5 Power Points
Ignores Flash and Concealment: +10 Power Points/Analyze, permits identifying specific individuals or effects, permits applicable Skill use to investigate further: +10 Power Points/ Perceives abstractions: "danger" or metaphysical phenomena: +10 Power Points	
Endurance	No Endurance cost

Blast

This power attacks at range, resolved with an attack roll. The target is harmed by Knockout and Body damage and is also subject to Knockback.

Power Points	5/+1d6
Modifiers	Range: 5 hexes * Power Points/Distance: -1 per 3 hexes
Endurance	1 Endurance per 5 Power Points of effect

Concealment

This power impairs ordinary sight, hearing, and smell within or through an area, reducing attack and perception rolls by -3 and adjusting range modifiers to -1/ hex. The hero is affected by it to a minor extent determined by Special Effects. The hero may use the effect to disperse or reverse an effect similar to its own. This power may not include the Area Advantage.

Power Points	10/+1 hex radius
Additions	Completely prevents the affected senses' perception: +5 Power Points
Affects all perception, physical and otherwise: +10 Power Points	
Modifiers	Range: 5 hexes * Power Points/Distance: -1 per 3 hexes
Endurance	1 Endurance per 5 Power Points of effect

Density Increase

The hero becomes more dense and heavier without significantly altering shape. Its use is easily perceived.

Power Points	10/+[2x mass, +2 Stunned, 1 unit of Special Defense: Knockback, and either +5 Defense or +1 Resistant Defense]
Endurance	1 Endurance per 5 Power Points of effect; must be spent for each Phase the Power is used

Desolid

The hero moves through solid objects by becoming insubstantial. While desolid, the hero does not take Knockback, cannot be perceived by hearing, sonar, radar, or other "pingback" senses or detection methods, and emits no scent. He or she cannot affect physical objects or attack anything or anyone that is not itself Desolid. This power includes protection against many physical hazards but does not provide life support or protection from Presence Attacks. It is rated in 10-point units. One substance or condition is impenetrable.

Power Points	10/+[2 Body of substance that can be passed through, 5 hexes Flight while moving through solid objects for additional 1 Endurance per 2 hexes, 2 Resistant Defense]
Endurance	1 Endurance per 5 Power Points of effect; must be spent for each Phase the Power is used

Drain

This power attacks with no range, resolved with an attack roll. It decreases Endurance according to the rolled total, similar to Knockout. No other feature may be Drained.

Power Points	5/+1d6/10/+1d6 if Endurance is transferred
Endurance	No Endurance cost

Entangle

This power attacks at range, resolved with an attack roll. The target is restrained in movement (running, swimming, climbing) to 0 hexes and also in ordinary motions, preventing physical attacks and reducing Dexterity-based combat value to 6 for purposes of defense. Certain attacks may be possible at Combat Value 6, depending on the situation's special effects. Ego-based combat is unaffected.

The Entangle effect operates as a physical object. The Body of the effect is equal to the Core result and its Defense is equal to 1 per 10 Power Points. It may be contested by Strength, movement, or the Blast Power. The attempt requires a full-Phase action, although if a single attempt removes all the remaining Body, then it becomes a ½ Phase Action.

Multiple Entangles on the same target are treated as a single effect with Defense equal to the single highest Defense of the separate Entangles and with Body equal to the single highest Body of the separate Entangles +1 per additional Entangle. If the Area Advantage is included, the affected area is considered "sticky" to those caught within it or entering it, using the Entangle mechanics.

In the context of combat, it persists until it is broken, and in the long-term its duration is determined by the special effects. This Power may not include the Persistent Advantage.

Entangles do not provide protection for the target. It may or may not take damage from attacks directed at the target depending on special effects. The Entangle may be targeted, in which case the hex is attacked, and the target only takes damage if the roll is missed.

Points	5/+1d6 for 1d6 (Core) Body and 0 Defense/10/+1d6 for 1d6 (Core) Body and 1 Defense
Modifiers	Range: 5 hexes * Power Points/Distance: -1 per 3 hexes
Endurance	1 Endurance per 5 Power Points of effect; no further Endurance is required past the initial cost

Extra Limb

The hero has an additional arm, leg, tail, tentacle, or whatever, capable of ordinary human limb functions. It may be permanently present and visible, or it may "pop out" when desired, depending on its special effects. Each extra limb provides +1 to attack rolls in hand-to-hand fighting. This Power may not include the Persistent Advantage.

Power Points	10/+1 limb
Endurance	No Endurance cost, except for Strength cost when the limb is used

Flash

This power attacks at range, resolved by an attack roll. It affects the target's sight, reducing his or her combat value and perception rolls to 6. It also disorients the target, so that they cannot be sure which direction is which. The latter effect may be corrected with an appropriate Skill or an Ego roll. Flash may also be defined to affect other physical senses, but it may only affect one unless its points are increased using the option below. The effect lasts 1 segment per Core result. This Power may not include the Persistent Advantage.

Power Points	10/+1d6
Additions	Affects all perception: +10 Power Points
Modifiers	Range: 5 hexes * Power Points/Distance: -1 per 3 hexes
Endurance	Endurance cost: 1 Endurance per 5 Power Points of effect

Flight

The hero flies. Special Effects determine the details beyond the basic move mechanics, including environments in which it is impossible, whether hovering is possible, and potential problems for sudden stops or turns. In flight the hero takes an additional d6 of Knockback. This power may have the Expanded Scope Advantage.

Flight may be redefined as a different mode of travel, in each case treating gravity, friction, and momentum very casually, more like "flight" than the nominal special effect would indicate.

- ► Gliding: level or downward most of the time
- ► Super-leaping: cannot change direction, must arc and land
- ► Super-running: surfaces only
- ► Super-swimming: in or at the surface of water
- ► Swinging: requires Acrobatics in use, requires surfaces, limited to arcs

For "walking on air" or other super-powered versions of ordinary movement, see Surfaces.

Power Points	10/+5 hexes per Phase
Endurance	1 per 5 hexes moved or fraction thereof

Force Field

The hero's Defense is increased with resistant points. This power is restricted to the hero's immediate person and does not create an external shield or wall. Special effects matter greatly, as it may represent low density or even amazing agility; the implied surface barrier is merely one option. The strength of the Force Field is not altered by attacks, regardless of whether they exceed the defense.

Power Points	5/+2 Resistant Defense
Endurance	1 per 5 Power Points; must be spent each Phase the Power is used

Force Wall

The hero creates a barrier which is placed at range, separate from the user's body. To create a full globe or similar enclosure around a person requires 8 units (six sides + top + bottom), or 7 if you leave the floor open.

It operates as a wall to everyone including the hero who created it and must be breached to get an attack through from either side. Unless the Body of Blast, Tunneling, or a Strength-based attack exceeds its Defense, no damage gets through and the Defense is unchanged. If it's breached, that section of Force Wall is destroyed and the Knockout and remaining Body get through. What happens then depends on whether the attack was specifically upon the barrier or directed toward someone or something, which would be resolved by the attack roll. It will impede a Desolid person if it has the Affects Desolid Advantage.

The hero may create a "window" either to attack through or to let someone through as a ½ Phase action, and the window may be closed with a 0 Phase Action.

The hero may vary the effect's size relative to the strength (Defense), but the Endurance cost corresponds to whichever is higher. The hero may move the barrier at running speed, up to 6 hexes, as a ½ Phase action at additional Endurance cost as per running. Breaches in a larger Force Wall may be repaired or the existing hexes may be re-shaped by spending the relevant amount of Endurance. It does not require further Endurance to be maintained and may be discontinued as a 0-Phase action.

This power may not include the Persistent Advantage or Usable on/for Others Advantage.

Power Points	5/+[1 Resistant Defense for 1 side of 1 hex]
Modifiers	Range: 5 hexes * Power Points/Distance: -1 per 3 hexes
Endurance	1 per 5 Power Points

Growth

The hero increases in size, maintaining proportions or mostly so. The values on the table are approximate, such that the listed number of hexes is where height or reach extends, not their precise values. Their standing area or occupancy expands disproportionately but not entirely realistically, given the drawing conventions of giant characters in comics.

Levels of Growth	Height in hexes	Reach in hexes	Area
none	Under 1 hex	adjacent	½ hex
1	1 hex*	adjacent	½ hex
2	1+	1+	½ hex
3	2	2	1
4	2+	2+	1
5	3	3	1½
6	4	4	2
7	5	5	1½
8	6	6	3
9	8	8	4
10	10	10	5

* at 1 level of Growth, the hero fills the hex so is at least two full meters tall and could be a little taller

The hero's reach is extended accordingly, permitting close-range attacks beyond adjacent levels to his standing area. A hero with a higher Growth level than an opponent gains the added Knockback effect of a lengthy striking instrument and may direct a blow downward, so that the ground or floor strikes back. The hero can exert +1d6 Strength even over the Growth-augmented Strength upon structures at his or her scale, due to leverage, and may receive generous special effects considerations regarding blocking, interposing, and similar actions.

The hero may use an increase from ordinary size to augment an attack, adding 1d6 damage for each Growth level and gaining a surprise bonus even if the target knows they can do it.

Although attacks upon him or her may seem easier, the freakish effect of size with mobility counteracts the effect of a larger target, so ordinary range modifiers apply. All physics and anatomy that aren't fun are hand-waved, including the cube-square ratio and problems with balance. Body damage to the extra points from Growth do not persist upon returning to normal size.

Growth or its reversal requires Endurance for the appropriate shift at each instance of use, but it doesn't have to be continually spent to stay at any one size.

Power Points	10/+[2x mass, +1d6 Strength, +1 Body (not derived characteristics), +1d6 Presence, +2 hexes Running, 1 level of Knockback Defense]
Endurance	1 Endurance per 5 Power Points of effect; see above for required use

Images

This power attacks at range using Ego for attack value, causing the target to perceive phenomena of the hero's choice. The images or impressions or whatever can be placed anywhere in the target's perceptual range, even if that exceeds the hero's. Images has many blatant and subtle applications which are discussed in Chapter 12: Dynamic Mechanics.

Value rolled	Person or object	Environment	Perception
1-2	Fleeting impression	None	One sense
3-6	Static	None	One sense
7-10	Moving, talking	Weird embellishments	All senses
11-14	Interacting	Dramatic changes	Knockout damage
15+		Subtle changes	Knockout and Body damage

Power Points	5/+1d6
Modifiers	Range = perception; no distance modifier
Endurance	1 Endurance per 5 Power Points of effect

Instant Change

The hero changes appearance dramatically as a 0-Phase action, or out of the combat timing sequence, instantly, without the ordinary actions of doing so and without certain realistic considerations except insofar as you'd like to have them. This power does not organize or specify other abilities, and its nuances for different concepts are presented in Chapter 12.

► Clothes

- Into a specific outfit and back again: 5 Power Points
- Into any outfit: 10 Power Points

► Form

- Into one specific physically different person: 10 Power Points
- Into a variety of persons or forms, either pre-specified or improvised: 10 Power Points

Power Points	As determined by application above
Endurance	No Endurance cost

Invisibility

The hero cannot be seen beyond 1 hex and is difficult to see at close range. When adjacent to someone else, that person may spot them as a 0-Phase action with a perception roll, at least enough to know that someone is there, with specific information as determined by special effects. Success means the person may target the hero with an attacking value of 6. However, if the hero attacks someone at close range, the Invisibility has no effect until and unless he or she moves farther away. If circumstances arise such that someone attacks them at range based on guessing where they are, the attacker first states the targeted area in enough detail for the game master to determine whether the hero is or is not there. If they are, then the attacking value is reduced to 6 and is subject to range modifiers.

Power Points	Minimum: 20
Additions	Includes all ordinary senses +5 Power Points/Includes Awareness: +10 Power Points/Remove close-range perception and targeting perception (attacking negation cannot be removed): +10 Power Points
Endurance	1 per 5 Power Points; must be spent for each Phase the Power is used

Life Support

The hero is protected from dangerous environments or does not need resources to survive in them. The effect may apply to any environment, subject only to special effects, and with one specified exception. Alternately, the effect may be customized to one of the following environment or by combining more than one:

- Under water or similar conditions: 5 Power Points
- Vs. gases breathed or absorbed: 5 Power Points
- Vs. radiation: 5 Power Points
- Vs. vacuum and high pressure: 10 Power Points

Power Points	30/Complete/Or customized as above
Additions	No required biological functions: +5 Power Points
Endurance	No Endurance cost

Mind Control

This power attacks with Ego at range to force, influence, control the actions of another person. The effect is immediate and the target loses no time, taking his or her next action as indicated by the Speed chart. The hero must communicate their commands successfully. This requires no special perception or action unless conditions are making communication tough for everyone, but as long as it uses ordinary communication, others can witness and comprehend the command and evident control.

Core rolled	Viable commands	Psychological Situations
1-2	None, but they know what you want	N/A
3-6	What they are inclined to do anyway	Often, ordinary response
7-10	What they wouldn't mind doing	Often, irrational response
11-14	What they're normally against doing	Rarely, irrational response
15+	What they're violently opposed to doing	Contradicting

The control stays on with no further Endurance cost, but commands past the first are dropped one level in effect. This reduction can be avoided by paying Endurance. A target who receives no orders is inactive or performs any common-sense activity to maintain his or her own position or safety; as long as the effect is 10 or higher, they cannot perform other volitional acts. Nuances of the power are described in Chapter 12: Dynamic Mechanics.

Power Points	5/+1d6
Modifiers	Range = perception; no distance modifier
Endurance	1 Endurance per 5 Power Points of effect

Missile Deflection

This power functions similarly to a Maneuver, permitting a Dexterity roll to deflect the damage of Dexterity-based ranged attacks which the hero can perceive coming. It is performed as a free action once between Phase Actions and does not require canceling the upcoming Phase. It protects only the hero unless the Usable for Others Advantage is included.

The attacks it may deflect include thrown objects less than 1 hex in size, gunfire, Blast, and other attacks as determined by special effects. It does not protect against Ego-based powers, Flash, Entangle, or attacks with the Area advantage, although special effects may modify these restrictions, e.g., if the attack is delivered by a bullet-like projectile.

Power Points	Minimum: 20
Additions	Each additional use between Phase actions: +10 Power Points
Endurance	No Endurance cost

Negation

This power attacks at range to stop or suppress one Powers-based hazard or a maintained or Persistent Power. The targeted Power's special effects must be vulnerable to the special effect of the Negation; otherwise it is unaffected. To affect Ego-based Powers, it must have the relevant Advantage.

The Negation roll's Core value decreases the current effect 1d6 or the equivalent, such as 1 Body for Entangle or 1 segment for Flash. If directed at a Multiform or Variable Power Pool, the pool is directly affected, altering the ceiling values of all its applications.

The targeted Power continues to operate at its reduced value as long as the Negation is maintained, which costs its user full Endurance as if it were not Negated. If the Negation stops, then the Power resumes at full value. However, if at any point the Core of the Negation reduces the Power's effect to 0, then one hex of the hazard is eliminated, or the Power is turned off or stopped.

Negation's effect may be increased by attacking again, which requires both the Endurance to maintain it and for the new, "stacked" effect.

Power Points	10/+1d6
Modifiers	Range: 5 hexes * Power Points/Distance: -1 per 3 hexes
Endurance	Endurance cost: 1 Endurance per 5 Power Points of effect

Regeneration

The hero regains additional Body per Recovery action as shown by the total dice results. The hero recovers Destroyed Body per Recovery action equal to the rolled Core results.

Power Points	10/+1d6
Endurance	No Endurance cost

Shrinking

The hero decreases in size, becoming more difficult to perceive and gaining many opportunities that are left to immediate situations of play. If the hero is Stunned or knocked out, they return to normal size by default but this may be subject to special effects interpretations. The hero's own movement rates may be maintained at the lower levels, but are subject to adjustments in comparison with larger characters if necessary. Their perception of the environment does not shift scale under 8 levels, at which point they are effectively operating in different "worlds." Similarly, below level 8, the hero's own movement and ranged attack Powers may or may not be subject to size modification depending on special effects, but at level 8 they shift to inhumanly small scales of effect. Feel free to hand-wave any physics that aren't fun, including audibility and surface adhesion.

Levels of Shrinking	Size	Visibility	Movement
none	Normative adult	No effect	No effect
1	Little person, pre-teen child	Significant modifiers	Minor modifiers in comparison
2	Medium-size dog, toddler		
3	Doll, action figure, most tools or toys	Effective Concealment	
4-5	Most desk-top objects, books, utensils		Adjusted to scale
6-7	Pocket-size, loose change	Effective Invisibility	
8	Too tiny to recognize, insect		
9	Speck	Luck only	Insignificant to ordinary scale
10	Out of scope of ordinary experience	Impossible	
11+	Increasing weirdness		

The hero may use a return to ordinary size to augment an attack, adding 1d6 damage for each un-shrinking level and gaining a surprise bonus even if the target knows they can do it.

Shrinking or its reversal requires Endurance for the appropriate shift at each instance of use, but it doesn't have to be continually spent to stay at any one size.

Power Points	10/+[½ size, 1/8 mass, ½" Running, + 3 hexes Knockback]
Endurance	1 per 5 Power Points of effect; see above for required use

Specialized Defense

This power defends against a specialized attack as Defense, with no required action. Multiple units of each may be used.

- Versus Ego based attacks: Negates the highest-value die of effect
- Versus Find Weakness: Negates highest-value die of an attack enhanced by Find Weakness
- Versus Flash: Reduces the duration of Flash by 1 Segment
- Versus Drain and Weaken: Negates the highest-value die of Drain attack
- Versus Knockback: vs. ordinary Knockback, -1d6 hexes (read the value showing on the dice); vs. High Impact, negates the advantage and the ordinary Knockback rules are applied

Power Points	5/+1 removed d6
Endurance	No Endurance cost

Stretching

The hero extends his or her body, or some part of it, to punch, lift, carry, grab, throw, or, if perception permits, to manipulate or do skilled work. Running is also increased by the reach, if the power is used to enhance it. The special effects matter greatly, applied to action/reaction, grabs and Entangles, shape distortions or the distribution of the stretching across one's body, and the effects on points of perception. The implications for skill use and powers combinations are legion, including getting through unusual spaces and integrating shape change with size change.

Power Points	5/+1 hex additional reach
Additions	
Endurance	1 Endurance per 5 Power Points; re-stretching or shaping a stretched body costs additional Endurance; no cost for maintaining a given length or shape, or for returning to ordinary shape

Surfaces

The hero's Running operates unusually on surfaces, and he or she does not become disoriented by unusual positioning. Surfaces does not alter or otherwise provide special effects for the hero's rate of movement. It must be defined as one of the following:

- Clinging is only nominally related to Climbing despite usually being visually similar, as it works on almost any surface without considerations of available protrusions or even aspects of gravity if the hero is touching a surface. Under circumstances that may remove the hero from the surface, the Clinging may be used to resist in the form of Strength.
- The Air-walking version permits the hero to travel along horizontal surfaces as if he or she was touching them, but at any altitude he or she cares to walk to.
- The Escher version does not "stick" to surfaces but instead treats "up" as the hero desires; it costs Endurance to maintain.

Power Points	Clinging: 5/+1d6 Strength/Air-walking: 10/Escher: 25
Endurance	No Endurance cost per for Clinging or Air-Walking beyond that of movement or Strength exerted/Escher costs 5 Endurance to maintain per Phase

Telekinesis

The hero lifts, carries, holds down, grabs, and throws physical objects from a distance. He or she must be able to perceive them. Unwilling targets must be successfully attacked using Ego. Telekinesis cannot be used as transport or suspension for oneself. It cannot be used to squeeze for damage or to contest an Entangle or grab. The interaction is not subject to action/reaction physics, and the hero cannot feel through the contact or extend it into unperceived areas. By itself it does not have surfaces or borders and cannot grasp fluids or energy. More complex versions and other nuances are presented in Chapter 12.

Power Points	10/+2d6 Strength
Additions	Fine work permitting Characteristic or Skill rolls: +10 points
Modifiers	Range: 5 hexes * Power Points/Distance modifier of -1 per 3 hexes
Endurance	1 per 1d6 Strength

Telepathy

The hero sends or receives thoughts across distances. The default interpretation is equivalent to talking and listening, like a mobile telephone call, subject to special effects. No roll is required to begin such a conversation with someone whom the hero can perceive, and who is willing, or to maintain it if perception is lost. Visual contact, or an equivalent, and an Ego-based attack roll are required to establish such a link with an unwilling subject, and also to continue such contact per Phase. Additional people can be added with 1 more point of Endurance spent on maintenance if they are willing, and with attack rolls and appropriate Endurance expenditure if they are not.

Value rolled	Accuracy	Psychological Effects
1-2	Send a single thought	None
3-6	Read or send surface thoughts, frequent Psychological Situations, recent Presence Attacks	None
7-10	Read or send hidden thoughts, rare Psychological Situations, Secret Identity	None
11-14	Read or send memories	Alter the wording of relevant Psychological Situations
15+	Read or send into unconscious and values-based thinking, alter memories	Add a new Psychological Situation equivalent to 15 points

Telepathy does not track the other person's location or provide access to their senses. More intrusive or stressful uses of the power are described in Chapter 12: Dynamic Mechanics.

Power Points	5/+1d6
Modifiers	Range = perception; no distance modifier
Endurance	1 Endurance per 5 Power Points; must be spent for each Phase the Power is used

Teleportation

The hero moves from place to place without traveling in between them, instantaneously. It counts as a move action for all timing and distance mechanics. The default is that they need to perceive where they're going in order to use the Power, but this and many other details are subject to widely-varying interaction with other Powers and Modifiers, as described in Chapter 12: Dynamic Mechanics. This power may have the Expanded Scope Advantage. The hero may maintain a single memorized location where he or she may teleport regardless of perception, as long as it is within noncombat range. It may be re-assigned as a ½ Phase action when the hero desires, but only at that location.

Power Points	Minimum: 20/10 hexes
Additions	Per 5 hexes additional distance, with additional Endurance cost: +5 Power Points/Per 2x mass, permitting transporting others or big objects: +5 Power Points/Per additional memorized location: +5 Power Points
Usable as a close-range attack to teleport a target: +30 Power Points	
Endurance	Endurance cost: 1 Endurance per 5 hexes moved

Tunnel

The hero moves through solid objects by opening them. The Power can either leave a tunnel behind or close it up as it goes along, or either as desired, as determined by the special effects. It cannot be used to attack living things. If the user changes directions while moving through the object, he or she must succeed with an Intelligence roll in order to arrive at the desired destination, unless an appropriate version of Awareness is employed.

Power Points	10/+[1 hex per Phase, vs. Defense 3]
Additions	5/+[2x mass, permitting transporting others or big objects]
Endurance	1 Endurance per hex traveled

Weaken

This power attacks with no range, resolved with an attack roll. It decreases one Characteristic according to the Core of effect rolled. Strength or Presence are reduced by removing dice equal to the rolled Core; Speed, Dexterity, Intelligence, or Ego are reduced by subtracting the rolled Core. No other feature may be Weakened.

Power Points	10/+1d6
Endurance	1 Endurance per 5 Power Points of effect

Frameworks

A Framework organizes several powers into a unique, related point structure. They permit Power Points to be shared across Powers or sets of Powers, altering the Character Points which account for them in building the hero.

Each type is a different spin on the same concepts:

- The Pool, a designated amount of Active Points that may be customized into specific powers
- Slots, representing named and quantified powers
- The Control, a point value associated with the shifts or distribution of the powers in use.

You can't put one Framework inside another, and no powers can share or split slots across more than one Framework. Skills cannot be included in Frameworks. A hero may have more than one Framework but not more than one of each type. Also, having **No Framework** is valid. These heroes are very straightforward, as what you see is what you get, and each item is Modified independently. They typically have some high Characteristics and some specialized form of alertness. They always have one or more interesting Skills as well as carefully-tuned Skill Levels.

Historically, these heroes are defined less by their powers than by their cultural and psychological situations, with stark iconography. Their Situations are distinctive, so mutually supporting, and so intense that they make the character's super-name and appearance iconic.

The **Variable Power Pool** has a Pool and a Control, but no Slots, so it allows the hero to use every Power. The player constructs new powers as notes, even on the fly during play, so that, at any given time, the hero has some in a current array.

- The Active Cost of any single power in the array may not exceed the value of the Pool, and the Character Points of the entire array may not exceed the value of the Pool.
- The array of powers may be changed outside of combat, in relative calm.
- For 5 additional Points, you may invent a Control Skill which begins at 11- and which may be used to alter the array of powers as a ½ Phase action during combat or other stressful situations.

This must be a new skill, not listed in the rules; give it a name appropriate to its special effects.

You're stuck with the powers in the array until you get a chance to change them in the ways described above.

- The Points represented by the Pool cannot be modified and will always be bought outright.
- The Points for the Control are half the Pool, but may be modified.

A Variable Power Pool typically maximizes either flexibility or modularity. The flexible version works well for "mastery," as in "master of" some relatively abstract or dramatic force, as well as for heroes whose powers' effects are extremely conditional, not only taking on features of the environment or other immediate experiences, or dependent on things or situations, but altering what they actually do as well. The modular version treats the Framework as a bag of tricks with never-ending effects, often of the one-after-another variety. This works well for weaponry with varying ammunition, or for inventing things for limited use until you invent another one, or for spells based on memorization and rituals.

The **Elemental Control** has Slots and a Control, but no Pool, so it is free from the conditional or temporary features of the other two Frameworks. It works well for heroes who have what they have and do what they do in an energetic, distinctive, and consistent way.

- Assign a value to a Control.
- List all the Slots you want in the Elemental Control.
- A Slot contains one or more Powers (Characteristics may not be included)
- Powers in the Slots must require Endurance (Powers that apply Strength are eligible, e.g. Stretching, Extra Limb, Telekinesis; Strength is also eligible, but no other Characteristics)
- Powers in the same Slot must be used together, and when used at lower power, must vary proportionately.
- Each Slot's total Active Points must be at least twice the Control.
- The Control "covers" its own value for each slot; therefore, each Slot only requires Points over and above the Control value.

The Slots are not constrained by a maximum value, but rather by a minimum, and the Slots are not "firewalled;" the hero may use the Powers freely across them relative to one another, with Endurance costs setting the only hard limit.

The **Multiform** has Slots and a Pool, but no Control. It works well for heroes whose powers can be split into modular options, so that they use either one combination of them or another.

- A slot's Active Point total may not exceed the pool's Power Points total.
- The total Active Points of the slots in use cannot exceed the Active Points of the pool
- Each slot is one-fifth the Active Points of its contents

The pool may be as big as you like within the confines of the total character points. (Yes, your entire hero may be expressed as varying slots within one huge Multiform!) Conversely, the Multiform may be one small aspect of your character, like a modular weapon.

A slot is capped at the pool's total, including Advantages. It can contain any number of powers in that total. Its Active Point total must be a multiple of 5.

The slots are used as toggles, so that the pool's Active Points total is shaped into separate, full-use applications. The number of slots that can be employed at once depends on how many Active Points each represents, so slots whose combined internal totals do not exceed the pool may be used simultaneously.

- If all your slots are maximal size, then you have a whole-pool trade-off among separate versions.
- Conversely, if many or all of your slots are under-sized, then you have a mix-and-match combo menu.

You may use one or some powers in a slot and not others, as long as they are not tied together locally, and you may use the powers in a slot at less capacity than their total Active Points. In either case, however, the full Active Points are still committed insofar as slot use is concerned.

If and when you're using enough slots to account for your pool, then the other slots are locked out of use or consideration of any kind. You can't use half a slot and half of another one; if you want two slots to be able to trade off among halves like that, then get four small ones. Also, the slots are firewalled away from one another, so you can't have two attacks tied to each other across slots, or link things in one slot to things in another, for example.

Changing slots is a ½ Phase action, always.

Modifiers

A Modifier alters the function of a power or a Framework, reflected in increased or decreased Points based on advantageous or limiting effects. You do not have to use a Modifier in order to conceive and play a Power in a certain way, ever – the feature you want is defined by special effects, which are always relevant during play, if variably so. Modifiers make particular special effects constant if you want them to be. But once established, they aren't detachable at will. To have different modified versions of Blast, for instance, you'll need to get each Blast.

MODIFIERS: ADVANTAGES

An advantaged Power is increased in points, yielding a new term:

Active Points = Power Points x (1 + sum of Advantage ratings)

For example, that 9d6 vaporous Gas Jet from Chapter 4: Special Effects has the High Impact Advantage, with the value of ½. Therefore its Power Points are 45, which is multiplied by 1½ for an Active Points total of 67.5. It is now established that the jet will knock its target around, according to the rules for that Advantage, rather than occasionally doing so.

Adaptive Effects

The Power's special effects are derived from immediate circumstances. They aren't customized to taste, but instead must respond to external input of some kind.

- If the power has its own special effects which are modified or stacked upon (½)
- If the power requires the external input in order to work at all (¼)

This is a key advantage for many powers concepts, including reflecting attacks (in combination with the Reactive Advantage) or taking on the properties of or manipulating local materials or elements.

Affects Desolid (½)

The Power ignores defenses or the general properties of the Desolid power. There is no reversed "Desolid character affects solid target" advantage.

Area Effect

The Power targets a hex rather than a person, and the effect extends into hexes adjacent to it. The target hex has a defending value of 6. All individuals in the affected area roll defense separately against the same attack roll which hit the hex, and they may not use reactive defense maneuvers (but they may use defensive Powers).

- Explosion: drop 1d6 of effect with each hex outwards from the target hex in three dimensions (½)
- Single-hex (½)
- Sphere or cone with radius 1 hex per 10 Power Points in the attack (¾)
- Add ¼ to Advantage value if targets may be selectively chosen inside the affected area

Aura (½)

The Power (Blast, Entangle, Flash, Telepathy, Mind Control, or Drain) has no range and is not used as an attack action. It operates against someone else's grab, touch, or contact-based attack as a free action, with no attack roll. It operates similarly when accompanying the hero's Grab maneuver. It must be activated and Endurance is spent to maintain it (similar to Force Field). Aura damage is voluntary, i.e., the hero can keep it from hurting others at will. If you want it to be less voluntary, take the Tricky Limitation. It provides no defense and does not add to Punch or Kick damage.

Destructive (½)

Damage delivered by the Power is not restored by recovery actions and is recovered only via special effect or the Regeneration power.

Ego-based (½)

The attack value for the Power uses Ego, or the protective power's Defense stops Ego-based effects in addition to its listed effects. The Power may be targeted anywhere the hero can perceive and is not subject to range modifiers. There is no "reverse" version of this Advantage.

Expanded Scope

This Advantage significantly alters the function of Flight, Teleport, or Awareness to operate at an entirely different scale. For Flight or Teleport, the Power is used as a full move regardless of the distance traveled within the designated scale. If necessary to compare with others' actions, regional or planetary travel requires a full turn (six segments), and the larger or weirder scales' duration of travel is determined by special effects. It may be used in a fight only to leave the situation entirely or to return or arrive there. For Awareness, the Power permits perception to orient one's own position in the entirety of the designated scale. With the Analyze option, it may also be used to understand phenomena and to locate individuals or objects within it. If the target of such an attempt is known to the hero either personally or through the operation of a relevant Skill like Detective Work, then the perception roll is unmodified; otherwise it must operate at value of 9. A Power with Expanded Scope may only have one scale, and no scale includes any of the others. To operate at multiple scales, the Power must be taken more than once.

- Regional (¼)
- Planetary (½)
- Space/Interstellar (1)
- Dimensional (1)
- Psychic (1)

Group Effect (1)

Instead of targeting individuals or areas, the Power targets everyone of a specific category, and no one else, in the range of the user's perception. Targeted individuals roll individually for defense. "Category" is defined by the acting person's viewpoint, cannot be an adjustable or momentary condition or behavior, and must have a clear, relevant exclusion boundary. It may be boring, e.g., observed features with no particular controversy in definition, or it may express compartmentalizations, prejudices, or delusions. A power with this Advantage may be given context by extreme Psychological Situations which establish or rely upon such categories, in which case encountering targets who do not fit the categorization will result in irrational or meltdown responses.

High Impact (½)

This Advantage applies to Blast. The Knockback delivered equals the rolled Body damage.

Invisible Effects (1)

The Power's special effects are not perceived through ordinary senses. It still has special effects which may be perceived by appropriate Awareness, and there must be one condition or Power which reveals its use to ordinary perception.

Lethal (½)

The attacking Power which would otherwise do no Body damage (Entangle, Telepathy, Mind Control, Flash, Drain) applies Body damage as rolled in addition to its other effects. It is reduced by the appropriate Special Defense, or by resistant Defense for Entangle, not by Defense.

No Endurance Cost (1)

Straightforwardly, the Power requires no energetic support from the hero. It may not be Pushed. It cannot be applied to part of a single Power; however, certain Frameworks or Limitations which separate Powers into different forms may permit them to be parsed in this way.

Persistent (1)

The Power (Density Increase, Desolid, Force Field, Growth, Invisibility, Shrinking, Surfaces) requires no additional Endurance to be maintained per Phase. The Power still requires its initial Endurance cost to be used, and maintaining it, or turning it off, is still a 0-Phase action. If the Power is turned off or stopped in some way, it does not re-activate automatically and must be begun again using Endurance.

Piercing (½)

Body damage from Blast ignores non-resistant defenses.

Reactive (½)

The attack Power is attached to a defensive Maneuver or to the Missile Deflection Power. The power is used as a free action when triggered by an attack and must be directed toward the attacker unless it has the Usable vs. Others Advantage. It may be used regardless of whether the triggering attack hits. The defensive Maneuver or Missile Deflection operates normally but the power itself adds no defense

Separate (¼)

The Power, Strength, or Multiform slot moves and acts independently from the hero's body; it can be attacked without affecting him or her. It has Dexterity and Ego as the hero for purposes of attack and defense. It has Body 1 per 5 Power Points and Defense is determined by rolling 1d6 per 5 Power Points and counting Body. It has Endurance equal to 3x its Body and cannot recover; the hero may donate Endurance to it which will not recover until the Power is discontinued. It disappears when it runs out of Endurance, or the hero may turn it off before then as a 0-Phase action.

Its default action is a simple task, including the basic attack and defense maneuvers, with little or no flexibility or comprehension. Directing it to change tasks is a ½ Phase action. The hero knows and understands what the Separated Power is doing as long as it is within his or her perception.

- If the Separated Power acts autonomously according to what the hero would do given its perceived situation, so is effectively another "you," increase the Advantage rating to ½
- Per additional "copy:" ¼ Advantage rating each – built exactly as the first, no deviation.

The precise psychological interplay between the hero and his or her Separated Power is adjusted by the options taken and by accompanying Modifiers, but is ultimately defined by special effects, including whether the Separated entity's experiences are known to or internalized by the hero when the Power stops.

Severe (½)

The Knockout damage delivered by Blast ignores Defense. It is reduced or stopped by one (and only one) of the following:

- ► Resistant Defense, which reduces it by value
- ► One textual power (e.g. Force Field), which negates its effect entirely
- ► One special effect, which negates its effect entirely

Strike

The attack Power (Blast, Drain, Entangle, Flash, Images, Mind Control, Telepathy, or Weaken) is attached to an attack Maneuver (Punch, Kick, Martial Punch, Martial Kick, or either Move attack). The attack has no range. Additional Modifiers to the attack Power apply only to its effects.

Regarding Blast, there is little point to assigning Strike instead of more Strength in one construction or another. However, if one or more other Modifiers is included, then many possible applications flow from there, as discussed in Chapter 12: Dynamic Mechanics.

- ► Replaces Maneuver damage with power damage (¼)
- ► Adds power damage to Maneuver damage (¾)

Usable at Range (½)

Straightforwardly, the Power is used at range, with a maximum distance of 5x Power Points in hexes. If it is a targeted attack, it is subject to the standard range modifier of -1/3 hexes. In conjunction with Usable on/for Others, this Advantage significantly expands the conceptual breadth of the whole powers list.

Usable on/for Others

The Power is used toward a person other than the hero, at close range, under the hero's control and Endurance cost. It either replaces or accompanies use for oneself as determined by special effects.

The basic version is usable for Life Support, Force Field, Invisibility, Regeneration, or Special Defense on or for another person. The extreme version is usable for any Power, conceived as conferring control over the Power and its Endurance cost to the receiver as long as the hero provides it in the first place, which requires a 0-Phase action to maintain. This Advantage significantly expands the application of the Usable at Range Advantage.

- ► Protective (the listed Powers): ½
- ► Confer: 1

MODIFIERS: LIMITATIONS

The Active Points of a limited Power or Characteristic is reduced to arrive at its Character Points, as follows:

Points = Active Points ÷ (1 + sum of Limitation ratings)

Regardless of all textual wording, a Limitation is intended to result in observed inconvenience, risk, or difficulty for the hero during play. If it consistently does not, then the hero's construction must be redesigned without the Limitation.

Activation

The Power might not work when the hero tries to use it, as determined by a roll immediately before the effect would occur. Failure to activate costs the full Endurance. The Power's timing is not affected.

- 3d6: 14-/(½)
- 3d6: 11-/(1)

Always On (¼)

The Power cannot be turned off with results that pose ongoing problems for the hero. It is always at maximum effect for its Active Points and cannot be Pushed. If the power costs Endurance, it must have the No Endurance advantage.

Burnout

The Power might stop working after the hero uses it, as determined by a roll immediately afterward. A roll of 11 or less on 3d6 indicates failure of the power. Restoration requires some specific activity appropriate to the special effects.

- Mild: restored by a recovery action (¼)
- Serious: restored out of combat (½)

Conditional

The Power or Characteristic works poorly or not at all under some condition or qualities of its target, or conversely, it will not work fully or at all unless some condition is met. The condition must be possible but not universally present in the context of play, cannot defined by opinions, and cannot be controlled by the hero or his or her usual associates.

- Reduced effect (½)
- All or nothing (1)

Constrained (½)

The Power's effect may be used only within a subset of the mechanics listed in the Power's description or only in a single circumstance of the hero's other Powers' use. The Power does not work outside the constraint.

Examples include but are not limited to:

- Constrained to high effect, at half or more of the Power's capability
- Constrained to follow the use of a specific attacking Power by the hero
- Constrained to operate in a graded fashion, adding one unit at a time

The effect is to narrow the Power's options for use that a hero would otherwise be able to vary. It does not apply to Powers with no varying options, and it does not include either environmental, external conditions.

Costs Endurance (½)

Straightforwardly, the Power costs 1 Endurance per 5 Power Points. Maintaining it, or turning it on or off, is still a 0-Phase action. It may not have the Always On Advantage.

Focus

The Power or Characteristic is remarkably vulnerable to being grabbed, broken, interfered with, or otherwise made unavailable by another person. Typically, but not necessarily, it includes the special effect of relying on an object or device. A Focus has Defense equal to 1 per 5 Power Points and Body either equal to that value or designated to be unbreakable (although that does not stop it being made useless or unavailable). A broken Focus can always be repaired or replaced eventually. An Obvious Focus is easily be identified as the source of the power when it's used; an Inobvious Focus may be identified with a perception or relevant Skill roll, subject to range modifiers. If Focus modifies a Characteristic, then the entire Characteristic is made unavailable or dysfunctional by interfering with the Focus. Other nuances are presented in Chapter 7: Villain Making.

- Inobvious (½)
- Obvious (1)

Increased Endurance (1)

The Power or Strength costs double Endurance, with a minimum cost of 5.

Involuntary

The power is potentially activated by a specific event or environment which is not under the character's control or that of his or her associates on a roll of 11 or less on 3d6. The triggering effect must be likely in the context of play and uncontrolled by the hero or his or her usual associates. It may not have the Always On Advantage.

- In addition to voluntary use (¼)
- No voluntary use (1)
- Triggering is not affected by Activation; the power will go off

Linked (½)

The non-attack power is usable only when another non-attack power is active. The other power must cost Endurance, and the Linked Power's Active Points cannot exceed that of the other Power.

No Knockback (¼)

Straightforwardly, Blast delivers no Knockback effect.

No Range (½)

Straightforwardly, the Power may not be targeted away from the hero. If its effect covers more than one hex, the hero must be centered in it. It does not apply to attacks (see the Aura and Strike Advantages). It applies to Concealment, Force Wall, Illusions, and Telepathy.

Shutdown

The hero becomes inactive while using or maintaining the Power. Aside from competently using the Power itself, he or she cannot move and combat values drop to 6.

- Use can passively perceive things, interact, and slowly perform minor actions (½)
- User is almost comatose, minimally aware, and helpless (1)

Skill-based (¼)

The Power functions only in the context of a successful roll for a Utility Skill. It is useful to think of the special effects as artistic devices that dramatize the mastery over that Skill. The requirement does not replace or alter any rules of timing, energy, or range of either the Power or the Skill.

Tricky

The Power requires a Characteristic roll to focus on the hero's desired target or outcome. A failed roll means the effect is directed toward another target or goal of the game master's choice.

- At first use in a situation (¼)
- With each use in a situation (¾)

MODIFIERS, MEET FRAMEWORKS

Modifiers affect the contents of Frameworks at two very different locations in the mathematical structure. Advantages are intrinsic to the Active Points of a given Power, and Limitations modify the designated part of a Framework that holds the Power.

For the Variable Power Pool, the Pool itself cannot be modified, so its Character Points are always the same as its Power Points. The Control can be Modified with these specialized options only. They do not affect the internal Point totals for Powers, and each may be taken only once.

- Advantage: The array may be altered as a 0-Phase action. This Modifier is incompatible with the option to use a Control Skill. (1)
- Limitation: The current array of powers can only be changed with special circumstances: e.g., touching a target, environmental circumstance, a substance or location, extra time and effort. This Modifier is incompatible with the option to use a Control Skill. (½)
- Limitation: Every Power constructed from the Pool must include the same specified Limitation(s) and the resulting mathematical effect on its Points. Regardless of the number of Limitations or their ratings, this is always applied to the Control at ¼.

A power created from the Variable Power Pool may include any Advantages, retaining the constraint that its Active Points cannot exceed the pool's value. It may also include any Limitations. Since Limitations reduce the Points, doing so permits more powers to be available at once, including more than one at maximum Active Points. The governing constraints to these Modifiers are the special effects of the Framework itself.

Consider The Which's construction in the Appendix. Her Variable Power Pool is variously phrased as This or That, Either/Or, or Equal and Opposite. The Pool is 40 Points, so the Control Value has 20 Active Points. This is Limited at ¼ because every Power made with the Pool must have the Tricky Limitation. She also has the Control Skill option, named Free Will, which is 5 Points.

The Point breakdown is therefore:

- Pool: 40 Active Points = 40 Points
- Control Value: 20 Active Points with a ¼ Limitation = 16 Points
- Free Will Skill: 5 Points
- = 61 Points

In using the Variable Power Pool to make powers, their sum in Power Points cannot exceed 40, nor their sum in Points. However, they must have the Tricky Limitation, and they may be given any other Limitation as desired, so their Points may well be far below their Active Points. For example, an array of Powers using her Variable Power Pool might include:

- Force Field with 14 Defense, which is 35 Active points; with Tricky at first use and Burnout (serious form), it's at 20 Points, leaving 20 free.
- 6d6 Severe Blast (stopped entirely by Special Defense: Ego), which is 40 Active Points; with Tricky at first use and Increased Endurance, it's at 17.

That array at 37 Points fits within her Variable Power Pool, providing her with two fearsome if energy-exensive effects.

The Which also has relevant Situations relevant to her Powers: Side Effects, occurring at each use of the Variable Power Pool, and her Psychological Situations, providing context to the whole construction.

Elemental Control is the most complex Framework. You may conceive of each Slot constructed with its Powers and Advantages first at whatever level is desired, and then the Control Value is retroactively set at half the smallest one. Then each Slot is relieved of the "covered" amount of the Control Value. Each Slot is then subject to both the overall Framework's Limitation, if any, and to its own local Limitation, if any. The Control Value is only subject to the former.

Consider Ruby Ray's construction as outlined in Chapter 5. Her Elemental Control is defined as Red Laser Transformation, with a Control Value of 20 Power Points. Therefore each Slot must include at least 40 Active Points. It so happens that each is exactly that: the Laser Zap with 20 hexes of Flight, the Hard Glow with Force Field 16, and the Light Up with Flash 4d6.

Therefore the Point construction before Limitations looks like this:

► Control Value: 20 Power Points

► Laser Zap: 40 – 20 = 20

► Hard Glow: 40 – 20 = 20

► Light Up: 40 – 20 = 20

Two of the Powers are Limited as well, but not the overall Framework. Their final Points are as follows:

► Laser Zap: 20 with two Limitations rated at ½ each = 20 ÷ (1 + ½ + ½) = 10

► Light Up: 20 with two Limitations rated at ½ each = 20 ÷ (1 + ½ + ½) = 10

The full Framework's total Points are therefore:

► Control Value: 20

► Laser Zap: 10

► Hard Glow: 20

► Light Up: 10

► = 60 Points

Her Powers are significantly constrained in terms of which can be used relative to the others, but that effect is a function of their individual Limitations, not the Elemental Control.

Consider also Grimfire's Elemental Control, provided in the Appendix, defined as Hellish Fury. His Control Value is 15 Points, thus each Slot must include at least 30 Active Points. This is exactly the case for the Nimbus and Embrace, but the Fires of Wrath is 20 Power Points with a ¾ Advantage, therefore 20 x (1 + ¾) = 35.

Therefore the Point construction before Limitations looks like this:

- Control Value: 15 Power Points
- Nimbus: 30 – 15 = 15
- Fires of Wrath: 35 – 15 = 20
- Embrace: 30 – 15 = 15

The Embrace is Limited with a rating of 1, with final Points:

- Embrace: 15 with one Limitation rated at 1 = 15 ÷ (1 + 1) = 7.5 which rounds to 7

The full Framework's total Points are therefore:

- Control Value: 15
- Nimbus: 15
- Fires of Wrath: 20
- Embrace: 7
- = 57 Points

His Elemental Control is structurally similar to Ruby Ray's, but his Powers are not so tightly inter-connected in use. They are instead tied distinctly to his Skills and Situations.

Multiform is much simpler. The entire Framework may be given any Limitation, affecting the Points of the pool as well as each of the slots. A slot's Points cannot be reduced with Limitations by itself; if that slot's power or powers conceivably require its own special limited effect, it is treated as a special effect.

Consider Anybug's Multiform as presented in the Appendix, defined as his Bug Simulator. The Pool is 40 Power Points, and each Slot has the maximum value of 40 Power Points, and therefore each is rated at 8 Points. This means that in his case only one Slot is usable at a time. The whole Framework is subject to the Conditional Limitation rated at ½, so the Points break down as follows:

- Pool: 40 Points at a ½ Limitation, thus 40 ÷ (1+ ½) = 26.667, rounded to 27
- Each Slot: 8 Points at a ½ Limitation, thus 8 ÷ (1+ ½) = 5.333, rounded to 5 (thus 15 Points for 3 Slots)
- = 42

CHAPTER 7
VILLAIN MAKING

The cover of this book features a villain front-and-center. Playing them is my single greatest joy in the game, and flipping the whole thing around for the players to be the villains would be by no means impossible - and certainly "allowed."

Anyway, back to reality; let's proceed with villains as non-player characters. They're not generic. No less than the heroes, they are expressions of the two statements and the location – perhaps more!

The hero sheets provide the source, from their constellation of supporting cast and organizations and implied history, with the Hunted Situations as the most "primed" or personally-invested members. These are sometimes made collaboratively. A player may conceive of an adversary in as much detail as the hero, or they may indicate a Hunted as a blank spot they'd like the game master to fill in, or the game master can say, "I have this great villain idea, would you like it for your Hunted."

Once built, however, the villains are the game master's motor, indispensable and, above all, running. In play heroes may be proactive or to remain reactive as the players choose. But the villain is always on Go.

BAD GUYS – ALMOST

So: definition time anyone? Unfortunately, "villain" is a convenience term. If anything, it's someone who opposes or comes into conflict with a hero, to any degree. From there we can draw circles and arrows about antihero, antivillain, villain protagonist, hero antagonist, white vs. grey, grey vs. black, grey vs. gray, and who knows what else. Fortunately that's not our problem.

For practical use, consider these differing concepts:

- A story role in the creator's eyes: the antagonist, with opposing views and goals
- A combat opponent from a plot perspective: the adversary to fight
- A legal designation in the fiction: the criminal, psycho, terrorist, or similar status
- A visceral response from ourselves: a menace, a moral wrong, a "bad guy"

In the superhero comics, all of these have shifted and settled, then shifted and settled again.

Superhero comics initially crossbred the weird gangster criminals from the vigilante pulp stories and newspaper strips with playful science fiction for varying degrees of psycho or clever or goofy. The heroes were vaguely cast as fantastic "police" defending decent folks alongside the law. As decades passed, the stories included more and more family and psychological drama, contemporary politics

and culture-clashes, and a pop spin on mythology. By the 1970s, heroes might battle a direct menace or stop a crook or two, but they mainly struggled in the grip of problems and forces that could not be so easily solved, and a fair number of the villains held an understandable point of view.

Step by step, the "bank robber" concept disappeared in favor of questions like "What does a villain 'break' anyway: morals or laws? Is the society the hero lives in something to protect, or is it the source of the ills they confront? How bad is bad, really?" Evil found new forms, some of them as influential upstanding citizens, and others who were figuratively or even literally versions of the heroes themselves.

So the comics can't serve as a simple guide; they're too specific to the moments they were published. Your own group playing Champions Now must develop its own spectrum of villainy from everyone's appreciation in play.

JUST THE SAME – ALMOST

Villains are not built to win nor to lose, but to matter. Your game's setting as an experience acquires its qualities from them. It's a place where people like that could emerge, persevere, and are always very much about to do something.

When you're the game master, think of the initial hero and villain sheets on a table. Some of the villains are already or nearly complete; others are merely a mysterious name in a Hunted Situation; and others are half-conceived as notes with some scribbled numbers. In terms of powers, concepts, conflicts, and interactions, this is, for better or worse, the starting "family" of play. In terms of the visuals and engaging humanity of superhero comics, they are its look-and-feel.

To bring them into usable sheet-and-numbers form, here are a couple of avenues to pursue. You can distort the opening statements, interpreting one or the other to an extreme. Typically, this becomes a study of extremes:

- Their interpretation or expression of the statements is either overly simple or overly complex, so the person is at least a bit unhinged.
- Their powers are more limited, or canalized, than those of the heroes.
- They slam hard into either very sympathetic or very unsympathetic, to opera level and beyond.

You can do "not so different," or "just over the line," for a villain who is not crazy or grossly wrong out of the gate, but has reached different conclusions from one or more of the heroes. This build concept focuses on similarity:

- Begin by making a very sensible and non-problematic hero, as if you were a player working with the same statements and location.

- Then consult your inner standard for "what makes a hero," and bump him or her barely off of it, working with the features of a hero sheet which aren't represented by points.
- Twist one Psychological Situation very hard into fanaticism or certainty; also consider relating Powers or other features to it through Limitations.

Finally, there is Otherness, relating to the statements entirely differently, challenging their existence. This is sometimes a bad idea and should perhaps be preserved for later play; after all, you can't really challenge something unless it's been validated. But if you do it:

- Jump up the scale or scope of the villain's attention, to render the statements irrelevant, at least as far as the heroes' general take on them is concerned.
- Find some other issues or venue that the statements aren't able to handle, for the villain's area of concern.

You might look at the villain using the three corners, which can be a little strange in a good way. Even absences in the person corner work fine, as something like "I was never born," or "unfeeling construct," may take on identity through negation. However, if such things carry no resonance or chance for reversal, then you're not talking about a villain at all, but a hazard, which is described in Chapter 10: This is the World We Live In.

Here I am, looking at Ruby Ray's character sheet, with the name "Killer Coil" as a Hunted Situation. Who's that? The player tells me that's the widely-feared villain whom Ruby Ray stopped from doing something awful, that she was kind of lucky to manage it, and that the villain took it very personally. That's it. Real name, personality, goals, powers, criminal or outlaw or what? That's up to you, says the player.

So I'm thinking, what kind of adversary would not let go of a personal clash with Ruby Ray, and probably vice versa? I decide to distort the statements and answer, someone who stands for nothing, the precise antithesis of the kind of hero Ruby Ray is. A mercenary at the most moral level, meaning none. The statement says, "A hero stands for something!" but she says, "Well, I'm no hero," and owns it. (1)

I start free-associating using the three corners and soon come up with...

- Person: Nicole Carr, utter mercenary, self-made, affluent
- Powers: Killer Coil, cybernetic switch-off for morality (so she can do any job), robot wrist/forearm tentacles, tech assassin
- Problems: Disabled with a severe systemic disorder; totally regarded as criminal; "won half the battle by losing the other half"

In personal, antagonist terms this is working well. As a disabled person, Nicole would potentially receive acknowledgment and advocacy from Ruby Ray, but her own solution to her problems has put them on profoundly opposite sides.

Nicole doesn't want anyone's advocacy and, when on assignment, has insulated herself from moral considerations. Thus she's turned out to be rather monstrous; but I note to myself that when she's not on a paid job, she does have reasonably ordinary morality and functions successfully as a person. Which is even more frightening, actually, but at least it means she's not a psycho all the time.

NUMBERS

Point for point, villains should outmatch heroes. Consider violent confrontations for a moment. Heroes won't do well if they wade in swinging and blasting, trusting to the mutual statistical grind of damage dice vs. their defenses. That doesn't mean the villains can fight blindly either. They have Endurance to manage, and all those maneuvers and positioning effects to consider too. But when it comes to the numerical edge, they have it, not the heroes.

They should also feature higher ratios. The players' heroes are capped at 119, but villains' ratios can be taken up to 129. Another way to look at it is, if a villain has a ratio in the range of the heroes, give him or her even more points. This matches the comics villains' tendency to wield more raw power in more extravagant, sometimes less practical ways.

The extreme case study for this idea is the Focus Limitation. An object or item wielded by a hero or villain doesn't have to be a Focus. But if it is, its "plot protection" of being part of that person, as a story-entity, pro- or antagonist, is severely lessened. It not only can be taken away or broken, it pretty much will be.

For a hero, this Limitation is best suited to parts of a given power, or to a single or a couple of characteristics; given all the spotlight they get, heroes need to be playable with or without their takeable/breakable stuff. None of the items wielded or worn by your favorite comics heroes matches the rules-limitations of a focus. Various consequences of them being objects are easily played as special effects, like not having them immediately on hand once in a while. Better Limitations for such things are Burnout and colorful Conditional concepts that punch home the special effects; Focus should apply at most to some specific application of a power, rather than the whole fictional item.

But for a villain, whose story-role is more about confrontations, you're free to go "all in," e.g., reducing an entire Framework's Character Points, permitting its effects to be notably higher than a hero's would be. The powers in that Framework will hit hard and do mighty things, shockingly or overwhelmingly so... unless the heroes can get their hands on that damn Focus!

Limitations may be chosen to heighten the inherent downsides of each Power Framework, trading more difficult management or contradictory potential for magnitude.

- Elemental Control relies on Endurance use, often for multiple powers at once, placing this limited resource at risk.
- Multiform carries the inconvenience of using or being in one slot when one would prefer another.
- Variable Power Pool seems nigh-unstoppable until one focuses on the Limitations and special effects of the Control and, if present, the Control Skill.

Pro villain tip: it's fun to pull a reversal with yet other powers or qualities, which unleash who-knows-what awfulness only without the Focus or other Limitation. Especially if the villain hates and fears that awfulness.

Villains' Situations are a special place. For one thing, given the higher point totals, there's more of them, conceivably up to 160 points. For another, they may be extravagantly emotional or unhinged, including more irrational, with meltdown components, or having disturbing triggers for Enrage. Contradictory Psychological Situations are especially good, resulting in a snake-pit set of values and viewpoints churned by inner conflicts into extreme responses. Such a villain might be so physically formidable that going for a psychological meltdown is the only sensible option.

Now for the numbers! Ruby Ray has 200, so Killer Coil will have more; at the creative outset, I'm thinking 220 or 225.

As usual, I don't build each of these categories separately or in sequence, but all at once, so you can't really see the process on paper, but the result looks like this.

KILLER COIL

The central concept for her is that every time she shows up, she's on a different job and is therefore holding completely different values and purposes in her head. Literally slotted or programmed in, mechanically. She feels no responsibility for former jobs at all. It's chilling on its own, but it's also potentially complicated, because those jobs did happen, and who knows what consequences all those different actions may add up to.

My first thought was for her wrist-tentacles to be stretchy body parts, but since her mental powers and concept are cybernetic, it's more elegant and also easy to draw upon a couple of favorite comics villains who mechanical coils for dangerous infighting.

Situations	Specifications	Points
Dependent: cybernetic mental clearance	Daily; 3d6	15
Physical: Requires assisted living	Some of the time; limiting	10
Secret Identity: Nicole Carr		15

Situations	Specifications	Points
Psych: Modular mission-defined values	Often; irrational	20
Psych: Consummate professional	Often	15
Psych: Limits of programming when values conflict	Sometimes; meltdown	15
Hunted: New England states law enforcement	Organization, extensive, ruinous	20
Dependent NPC: Roan Felder, allegedly philanthropist media conglomerate zillionaire	Public identity 10/Idealistic sometimes 5	15

That puts her at 100 + 125 = 225 points, which is just right for a nemesis villain whom the player has already stated is supposed to be tougher than the hero.

Whatever shall we do with these 225 points?

Characteristics	Effect	Points
Strength 4d6	4d6	10
Presence 3d6	3d6	5
Body 12		20
Speed 3		20
Defense 12	Total Defense = 18	2
Resistant Defense 6 *obvious focus [1: armor]*		15
Dexterity 13		20
Intelligence 13 *obvious focus [2: cranial module]*	11 without focus	10
Ego 11	0	
Skills		
Security Systems	13 with focus, otherwise 11	5
Martial Arts Attacks	10	
Martial Arts Maneuvers	10	
Martial Arts Find Weakness	10	
Powers		
Awareness, *tied to Security Systems, Shutdown*	Mission investigation, regional, high-tech, analyze	23
Awareness (orientation) *inobvious focus [3: visor]*	This is a different Focus from the one for her characteristics	13
Telescoping Coils: Stretching 3 hexes	Her wrist-coils are technological, but not a Focus in rules terms	15
Wrist Coils: Extra limbs x2		20
Painful Technique: 1d6 Flash Strike (adds to Martial Punch)		17

The total is 225 points, with a ratio of 119.6.

Killer Coil is strong enough to heft and throw a motorcycle without pushing, and fierce combinations arise from her high Dexterity, the martial arts, multiple stretchy limbs, and situational awareness. She can fight multiple opponents from any direction at varying distances, or gain immediate bonuses by exploiting unusual angles for surprise. If it came down to pure hand-to-hand power, she's not as strong as Ruby Ray, but Martial Throw is the big equalizer, given that Ruby Ray has to be flying to use super-strength.

Her build includes the Focus Limitation, but not all-in-one – some of her techno powers aren't a Focus at all, and the others are spread across three different devices. So a single "grab it" isn't going to shut her down. As a side point, she offers a good example of a strong build without using a Power Framework.

But mind the more situational variables. Her Intelligence, Security Systems, and the two Awareness powers intersect so that she enters situations knowing what is going on and where her target is, at the time and place of her choosing. Killer Coil is one of those villains who conduct operations, so when in their element, doing what they want to do, they are tremendously well-situated. They set things up for a lot of soft or incidental details to go in their favor.

But those are the villains by choice. Contrast them with the world's eternal losers, often quite horrid in appearance or in the downsides of their powers. You almost have to admire them for persevering at all. For Anybug's Situations, the player wanted a Dependent NPC who was a former villain. Having produced the perfect icy professional in Killer Coil, artistic balance suggests going the other way, all the way.

Toward that end, I was thinking about a famous superhero, conceived as an inoffensive individual who shifts into a super-strong, freakish form driven by fury, sometimes sociopathic and sometimes developmentally delayed, depending on the writer. I thought, the only reason this guy is still a "hero" is because coincidence keeps ensuring that the buildings he destroys never crush a bus full of kindergartners or that his well-known fits of violence toward other heroes never go too far. (2)

What if the next guy like that isn't so lucky? I came up with ...

YOSHI

DEVOUR

Anybug's grandfather, thus Manfred Owen Barfield II, is listed as required by the Situations rules. However, that does not stop me from providing a villain sheet who happens to be the same person. Decades ago, Devour was one of the most feared uncontrolled and uncontrollable super-menaces, and also the most pathetic, as his transformations were entirely involuntary and savagely cannibalistic. He was never apprehended; unknown to anyone, his condition was diminished and effectively canceled by the onset of mild dementia.

Situations	Specifications	Points
Secret Identity: Manfred Owen Barfield II	Anybug's grandfather	15
Dependence: human flesh	Eww! (since he doesn't get it, he's often feeble and debilitated)	10
Physical Limitation: Memory loss, mild to moderate dementia	He has forgotten that he is Devour	10
Psychological: Loves and admires Miles	Often	15
Psych: Desperately seeking cure	Sometimes (when he remembers); meltdown	15
Psych: Infuriated when people don't listen	Sometimes; irrational	10
Enrage, triggered when attacked	Common, 14 or less	20
Unusual Looks: odd, offputting, or when transformed, horrifyingly fanged and distorted	11-	10
Hunted: U.S. Defense Threat Reduction Agency	Organization, extensive, manipulative	20
Unluck	2d6	10

That's 100 + 125 = 225 points, just like Killer Coil. The player specifies that no one knows grandpa's secret history, and that he hasn't transformed for decades.

This guy is totally screwed! I feel bad for him already.

Characteristics	Effect	Points
Strength 2d6	See summary of additions	0
Presence 2d6		0
Body 14		40
Speed 4 conditional on using Multiform	Otherwise 1	20
Defense 14	See summary of additions	4
Dexterity 12		10
Intelligence 11		0
Ego 11		0
Skills		
Stealth	12 or less (Dexterity)	5
Powers		
Instant Change *fully involuntary*	Change into monstrous form	5
Life Support	Vs. gases, vacuum	10
Awareness	Unusual sense: empathy	25
Special Defense: Ego	X1	5
Regeneration 1d6 burnout, severe		7
2d6 Blast Strike (Punch), Severe	Adds to damage	22
Multiform: Monster 60 conditional on Situations (see chart)	48	
Density Increase x1 0 Endurance + Growth x2	Slot is 40 points	6
Density Increase x1 0 Endurance + Growth x3	Slot is 50 points	8
Density Increase x1 0 Endurance + Growth x4	Slot is 60 points	10

That makes 225 points, with a ratio of 116.0.

Multiforms can be complex in play, so here's a summary of Devour's "progression" through his powers.

Condition	Powers	Total values
Instant Change triggered by Psychological Situation "infuriated"	Density Increase x1 + Growth x2/4 Endurance/Phase	8x mass, 1+ hex height (3m or about 9 feet)
		Defense 19
		Stunned 16
		Special Defense Knockback x3
		Strength 4d6
		Presence 4d6
		Body 16
		10 hexes Running
Triggered by response to Unusual Looks in monstrous form	Density Increase x1 + Growth x3/6 Endurance/Phase	16x mass, 2 hexes height (4m or ~13 feet)
		Defense 19
		Stunned 16
		Special Defense Knockback x4
		Strength 5d6
		Presence 5d6
		Body 17
		12 hexes Running
Triggered by Enraged	Density Increase x1 + Growth x4/8 Endurance/Phase	32x mass, 2+ hexes height (5m or ~16 feet)
		Defense 19
		Stunned 16
		Special Defense Knockback x5
		Strength 6d6
		Presence 6d6
		Body 18
		14 hexes Running

I'm creeped out now. This poor old guy just tries to orient himself, but hovers on the edge of realizing he's a horrible cannibal berserker, and if he does remember and tries to work on a cure, he's one bad interaction away from bulking up into a giant, fanged, rampaging monstrosity. And the empathy lets him know when he's being humored or ignored.

Similar to Killer Coil, he represents a distortion of the statements, in his case, the second one about "family," rather than the first about "standing for something," in hers.

GREAT BIG VILLAINS

How do you get these monstrous yahoos? You could pile on points, a handful of dice higher on every attack, 10 or 15 points higher on every defense, a wider range of specialized defenses, and basically, "more." In practice that doesn't work very well, turning confrontations into a tedious statistical exercise centered around calculating few Knockout points at a time.

Consider instead at least a couple of the following design features.

- An admittedly over-powered defense. You can get to them, but not that way.
- Significant social context and capabilities, not expressed in points, in some worldly sphere.
- An unfairly advantageous special effect for some or all powers, resulting in basic conceptual superiority over the heroes.
- About something. A great big villain is based on a great big idea.

Beginning from there with more points than a starting hero (but not much more) is a remarkably powerful technique. I have not yet seen such a villain look weak or fail to shock the heroes. If you're interested in minions, bases, servitors, doomsday devices, lava traps, ships or other impressive vehicles, or similar things, they are described in Chapter 10: This is the World We Live In and Chapter 11: Fighting Words.

Just as in the comics, you can't guarantee a forceful villain identity with an initial build, but you can set the stage for it across several villains, and see what happens. For the Defiants, I'm developing a fairly horrific, violent villain cast, but so far insufficiently ideological for a group of activist heroes. In thinking about a "biggie," I try for more subtle and directed ruthlessness and outright evil.

DOMAIN

This is a group or hive entity that forms from many people, representing the complacent privileged social position which regards itself as "just average;" I think of it as a kind of evil psychic Elks Lodge. Furthermore, there are always a couple of minds in overall control, those who represent or influence the most people (hard to tell which). Hobie and Ginny have used their leadership or, as they see it, "most average" position for maximum individual gain, but bad as they are, any other two would be just as bad or worse.

I imagine one of these hood-and-cloak floating foes, but in the hood are two faces, weirdly divided or superimposed, and all these other, indistinct faces surround it like bubbles or backdrop, a whole horde of them.

Situations	Specifications	Points
Secret Identity	Virginia Goode	15
Secret Identity	Hobie Bartmann	15
Psych: Entitled establishmentarian	Often; irrational	20
Psych: Odd consensus mind	Often	15
Homophobic	Rarely; irrational	10
Enrage: explicitly ideologically defied	11 or less	10
Side Effect: if mind control is broken	3d6 Entangle + 1d6 Blast	35
Hunted: The Which	Super, ruinous	20

That's 100 + 140 = 240 points, a nice heft compared with the heroes beginning at 200 points.

It snaps together for me nicely. In this case, it would be lazy to go full-on horror, like sacrificing people in their meetings and so on. No. This is banal power. Domain wants things to go just as they are, enjoying the benefit of forcing problematic lives on others, then smugly blaming the others for any problems. It enforces and exploits the way things are and the powers that be.

I feel better already. Killer Coil and Devour are rather tragic monsters with understandable problems; systemic disorders and dementia are no joke and should not be villainized. However, Domain is a true force for oppression and discrimination, by choice and entitled self-blindness, and infuriatingly pleased with itself about it.

Characteristics	Effect	Points
Strength 2d6		0
Presence 4d6		10
Body 10		0
Speed 2		10
Defense 26	Total defense = 32	16
Resistant Defense 6		30
Dexterity 11		0
Intelligence 12		10
Ego 14		30
Skills		
Mental Discipline		10
Powers		
Above It All: Flight 5 hexes linked to Aura		8
2d6 Knockback resistance linked to Aura		8
Elemental Control 45 points: Make My Reality; Reduced effect in private: non-public spaces or without audiences		36
Hegemony: Mind Control 12d6 Separate x2 Limitation as above		36
The Bubble: High Impact 5d6 Blast Aura 0 Endurance Limitation as above		36

The numbers match at 100 + 140 = 240, with a ratio of 118.75. (3)

LOVE TO HATE THEM, HATE TO LOVE THEM

In the comics, villains tend to decay over time, often very quickly. If you read one of those big collected volumes, you can actually see the moment when their story, or role as an active participant, disappears in favor of "Back again! Oh no!" for yet another rogues' gallery appearance to preserve IP. They're not villains any more, they're punching bags, used for filler.

That's a sad fate! Its only prevention rests with both game master and players. To the game master: these villains are what you want in a comic, specifically this comic, so at least while you're directly playing them, be on their side. Show it with word balloons: say their point of view, and have them act on it.

For most of them, I find genuine sympathy in doing so. The villains as much as the heroes are situated in the recognizable concerns of the location and the whole context of play; or even more so. They may be mistaken or crazy, but they aren't stupid. They want things, they care about things, and in some way those things make sense. Their wrongness can be understood.

Some are beyond my sympathy. But that works too. If they want or represent something that I, personally, truly despise, then I can still find their voice and articulate that position to every last vile justification or rationalization it has. If a villain concept goes all the way into evil, then speak the evil out loud.

LA SOCCORSA

I suppose it's time to introduce you to the woman on the cover. When artist Erica Rossi and I talked about a villain as the central figure, we agreed that the stereotyped gloating psycho or moldy old rule-the-world nonsense wasn't very interesting. I crossed my fingers and asked her what she thought of someone who drew the line at the bombing of Libya. Perhaps who lifted a whole Mediterranean island out of the sea, claimed sovereignty of it, and also jurisdiction over all refugee movements and locations throughout Italy, Greece, Cyprus, Turkey, Libya, and Syria, with a promise to one day follow up with Palestine, Egypt, and Lebanon.

Erica's eyes narrowed. The character instantly became female. She was an Italian physician, acting in the combat theater, overwhelmed by atrocities, constant injuries, roving gangs funded by external governments, uprooted lives, international indifference, vindictiveness, and disease. She dared the powers who'd permitted and abetted this disaster to stop her, and she had everything it would take to back that up.

I ran with that. Let's get out of the U.S., I said; out of New York, especially the Hollywood version. Let's get really Mediterranean with the heroes, and furthermore, let's go full Jack Kirby, with a good dose of modern techno-versions of ancient myth, including weird headgear. And of course, she was sketching the whole time.

And here we've arrived at my favorite sort of villain: the well-intentioned extremist.

Situations	Specifications	Points
Public Identity	Antonia della Rossi	10
Unusual Looks: aura of suffering, ailment, and fear	11 or less	10
Psychological: Arrogant	Common	15
Psychological: Selfless	Common; irrational	20
Psychological: Loves hero Zulfiqar	Sometimes; irrational	10
Enrage: law-abiding rhetoric	8 or less	10
Hunted: NATO	Large group, extensive, includes superheroes, ruinous	30
Hunted: Verethragna, Zoroastrian god of war	Single individual, super, ruinous	20
Dependent NPC: Lonni Daniels, hostage U.S. Journalist	Psych: American patriot (sometimes, irrational), 10; Physical: badly injured, 10	20
Vulnerability: Drain	2x effect before defenses	15

That's 100 + 160 = 260 points, about as high as I'm willing to go for anyone without increasing points through play.

The cover art includes a little drama too, as the patient at the lower left is the superhero confronting her, in the center at the top right. That's the love content in the Situations, all grand opera and sweeping gestures.

Characteristics	Effect	Points
Strength 3d6		5
Presence 3d6		5
Body 10		0
+4 Body, limited to +1 per received attack		20
Speed 3		20
Defense 22 (5 resistant) resistance on Activation 14 or less		25
Dexterity 12		10
Intelligence 12		10
Ego 12		10
Skills		
Security Systems		5
Martial Moves		10
Powers		
Special Defense: Ego x2 obvious focus		5
Elemental Control: The World's Pain, 30 Points:		30
See the Pain: Images 5d6; Area		24
Effect, tricky		30
Feel the Pain: Entangle 5d6		30
Feel it More: Lethal Flash 3d6		25
The Truth: Awareness w/Analyze (suffering); usable by others, regional; costs Endurance, obvious focus: helmet		10
What I See: Telepathy 5d6; Affects Group (oppressors); send only; obvious focus: helmet		15
Succor: Regeneration 6d6; usable on others; obvious focus		

That's 260 points, with a ratio of 128.7.

Villains also begin with 5 to 40 points for bases and vehicles, as presented in Chapter 10: This is the World We Live In. The amount is arbitrarily determined by whatever the game master think the villain ought to have. La Soccorsa gets 40.

Base		
Lipari Island, suspended above the ocean		
Distinctive		5
Monolithic		10
Facilities		
Medical		5
Regeneration 1d6 Usable on others		20
Staff		5
Mass living space		5
Public Identity	Situation; reduces base points	[10]

SEE THEM GROW

At first build, a villain is provisional. You can be sure about how they're introduced and what they think they're doing, but not what will happen or what they'll eventually be like. All iconic, beloved, feared, and respected villains in the comics began as just another foe-schmoe among others, sometimes even second-raters or throwaways. Sometimes they didn't "get better" until after their abandonment, having been subsequently picked up by later creators.

Even the great-and-powerful villains weren't that big at first. They had to grow into place. One fellow began with just a metal mask and a time machine, and his first story was average at best. But through several years of re-appearances and added ideas, he became a walking refutation of the super-team whose name titled the comic, almost to the point where he could have become the title character himself. (4)

- Super-science inter-dimensional exploration? So what? I do that too; and I zing it up with forbidden magic!
- Your leader is a genius? Bah! I went to college with that guy, and he's a dick.
- You own a building downtown? How impressive. I have a country with a military and a seat at the UN.
- You're apolitical? I'm an expy of Josep Tito.
- You're All-American White Joe Cold War? See above, and I'm born to a widely-despised minority.
- You're a bickering but loving family? I have no family. They were killed by fascists, and I'm pissed off about it.
- You show your faces to the world, no masks? This mask is my face.

There is a reason the first 100 issues of that title are called, without irony, superhero comics' Great American Novel, and this guy is probably it. Without him, they couldn't be them.

What villains "work" like this or don't ultimately depends on the players. What makes the difference is always some moment of interaction with a hero, in some human context, when they suddenly understand one another. It might be an unexpected mix of action and dialogue during a super-fight, or it might even be very normal or casual. This understanding produces raw emotion, specific to these two people, from hostile loathing to reluctant admiration or even to hot attraction.

Things change after that. The villain was about to rob the bank or take over the government or stop time in its tracks, or whatever, and they probably will still try. But now they care very, very greatly about this hero's involvement, and vice versa. The feelings can be positive, negative, or a mix, but they are fully personal. From now on, it's only partly about the bank, the government, the world, et cetera. It's not a fight scene any more, but a new phase of an ongoing relationship.

This phenomenon can't be imposed or faked and, once in effect, it can't be denied. With it, even a not-very-threatening villain is a genuine nemesis; without it, twice the points are just two times a zero. You can't anticipate who will get there, and for which hero. You can never tell who's going to capture the group's collective admiration, fury, or dread.

The important thing is that some will, and to be ready.

REFERENCES

(1) Constrictor is the tentacled villain who most influences Killer Coil visually. Constrictor first appeared in *The Incredible Hulk #212* (1977), created by Len Wein and John Romita Sr., illustrated by Sal Buscema, published by Cadence Industries using the Marvel Comics Group imprint. Doctor Octopus is inevitably invoked as well, as the king of this motif; Doctor Octopus first appeared in *The Amazing Spider-Man #3* (1963), by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko, published by Magazine Management using the Marvel Comics imprint.

(2) The influences on Devour combine the anger-escalation and transformative features of the Hulk with the descent into murderous hunger that characterizes Morbius the Living Vampire. Both characters have been presented sympathetically more often than not, as their struggles to find a "cure" conflict with the sometimes necessary utility of their dangerous powers. The Hulk first appeared in *The Incredible Hulk #1* (1962), by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, published by Magazine Management using the Marvel Comics imprint. Morbius first appeared in *The Amazing Spiderman #101* (1971), by Roy Thomas and Gil Kane, published by Cadence Industries using the Marvel Comics Group imprint.

(3) The frightening super-villain's "no-sell" defense has many examples, but standouts include Kang the Conqueror's force field and the Kingpin's mass and fighting competence. Kang first appeared in *The Avengers #8* (1964), by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby; the Kingpin first appeared in *The Amazing Spider-Man #50* (1967), by Stan Lee and John Romita Sr.; both were published by Magazine Management using the Marvel Comics imprint.

(4) Doctor Victor von Doom holds or at least shares top billing as the premier supervillain of mainstream comics, often having captured the love of creators and readers above the nominal heroes. He first appeared in *The Fantastic Four #5* (1962), by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, published by Magazine Management using the Marvel Comics imprint. His key developments occurred in *The Fantastic Four Annual #2* (1964), by the same creators and publisher; in *Marvel Super Heroes #20* (1969), by Roy Thomas and Larry Lieber, published by The Perfect Film and Chemical Corporation using the Marvel Comics imprint; and in *Astonishing Tales #2-6* (1970-71), by Roy Thomas and Wally Wood, by the same publisher. Further developments and interpretations include but are not limited to *Supervillain Team-Up #7* (1976), by Steve Englehart and Herb Trimpe; and *The Fantastic Four #236-278* (1981-1985) by John Byrne; both were published by Cadence Industries using the Marvel Comics Group imprint.

Doom's evolving correspondence to Josep Broz (Tito) may or may not have been intentional by the creators, but it is undeniable: the fictional Latveria is situated precisely in the region of former Yugoslavia that was Tito's base, Yugoslavia was notably the single East European socialist nation to reject the Warsaw Pact ("communist bloc" in U.S. terms) as well as NATO or association with the United States, and Tito's ruling policies and support for the Non-Aligned Movement were confusing to Americans, both easily demonized and provoking thought.

CHAPTER 8
THE NOW
YOU SUCK
DOWN WITH SUPERS
SEND THE CAPES TO THE CLEANERS
THE ICE NDLE IT!
SUPER HEROES ARE SUPER ZEROES!
GO BACK TO YOUR OWN PLANET!
SUPER WAR NO MORE!

Whose story is this, and what is "the story" anyway? I wish I could shrug and say, "like in the comics," but the grim truth is that superhero comics make great stories except when they don't. Which isn't much help.

But there is this. Before the mid-1960s, many superhero comics stories were isolated one-offs without much forward drive, consequence, or character development. By the mid-1980s, they were mostly forward-planned, editorially-controlled, franchise-driven publicity campaigns for toys and movies. The superhero comics in between were uniquely different from either model, and they inspired the original Champions. What we can learn or do based on them?

- Whatever happens has consequence and fuels development
- Play moves into an unknown future rather than according to a planned structure

For this to work in role-playing, each session of play is "the first day of the rest of your game," fanning outward to an unspecified and unknown number of possible outcomes, rather than inward to a planned event. You need a thing which represents, not an itinerary or schedule for isolated actions, but an across-content leading edge of what just happened and what is or could be about to happen.

THE METHOD

Here I'm speaking to the game master. Starting before, during, or just after the first session, build a cast list outline based on each hero: his or her name, relevant identity terms, persons they know or who are otherwise relevant to them, locations, institutions and group and groups of all sorts. Include reminders of whatever personality, goals, and details seem obvious to you, for anything in there, with brainstormed inspirations or modifications as well as the known things.

Sketchy is perfectly all right; just one or two points of detail per thing is plenty. Add a few items if you must. I can't think of one time I've played without pulling in an original villain or two whom I'd made by the time I got to working on this part.

With each session or couple of sessions of play, add and alter copiously, but do not replace the document. Instead, layer it onto the previous one; and, yes, they will pile up! I used to do this with stapled sheets of messy photocopies, and now I do it with digital files and printouts, with new filenames for each save. That's the Now: the newest file, or the front page, or the top of the stack.

My format uses lots of subheadings and bullet points, but yours should be whatever works for you. Some people like Venn or similar diagrams better, or spreadsheets, or a Wall of Crazy with a bulletin board, and some even like to

pepper it with creative details like newspaper articles about what just happened. What matters is that it is a list rather than a prose story or essay: that you can read it with little concentration, that it's casually accessible, that it can be easily added to or noted upon, and, as time passes, that you can look back through its older incarnations.

As you make or alter each new version, it transforms from a location and list into the physical and social ecology of immediate, about-to-play play. It is full of previous outcomes' consequences and also of "wants to" and "about to," and is therefore dynamic. In motion. Due to that and only that feature, this thing is now a setting without pulling in the baggage of world-building. Or, stated more positively, within a very few sessions you will discover that you've powerfully accomplished world-building. The noun of a "world" is being created through the repeated outcomes of verbs.

As far as settings and world-building go, this is also where everyone playing contributes to the game's collective naturalism and its science fiction or otherwise fantastic contents, moving along from the ideas that went into and proceed from the Now.

WHAT GOES IN THERE

You already have the hero sheets for every little rules detail, so this document (or whatever) is for all the qualitative content: names, places, events, concepts – whatever has happened or could conceivably be on the way to happening. It's also a kind of research archive, as you add or enrich a few things for satisfying use. This is completely subjective, judging what you see using the world as you know it, and ladling in the extravagant comics content as you like.

The location is one focus for attention, as a little bit of research goes a long way. If you're not the person most familiar with it, ask the person who is a few questions; and, guaranteed, some remarkable and actionable material will appear! Playtesting taught me a bunch of stuff.

- The New England Knowledge Corridor running through Hartford, and the saga of family power and money that underlies mainstream reform in Connecticut, Vermont, and Massachusetts
- The physical properties of the metallic element tungsten, including its cool name in Swedish, wolfram
- The section of İstiklal Street in Istanbul which features unadorned mannequins, like, hordes of them, displayed in shop windows, on balconies, and in front of stores, for several blocks
- The key role of the Deacons for Defense in the U.S. civil rights movement

- The history and architecture of the Space Needle, which has certainly already seen its share of disasters in comics, but there's always room for more
- The bizarre organization and jurisdiction chart for the Kansas City police department, considering the two cities by that name which comprise the state boundary between Kansas and Missouri
- Speculative and not-so-speculative technology for Mars habitats
- The power of the Family Research Council and the Heritage Foundation
- Operation Wetback in 1954
- Project Gnome, which I'll let you look up and wonder why this didn't make it into a comic book by now

Work from your own interests. Mine (apparently) skew toward politics and science, and I admit to adding a fair dose of psychedelica onto whatever I dig up, but yours might include crime drama, mysticism, pop psychology, or classical myth, to name a few which have also featured widely in superhero comics. Such information instantly reveals or suggests organizations and institutions - and those, in turn, are like free gift emporium in providing persons of influence and strongly-felt goals, whether real or fictional.

One's mind understandably turns toward super-powering such persons. Villains may serve or oppose organizations, and the question of other, NPC heroes arises as well, also in a variety of relations to institutions and situations. At that point no rules guidelines are possible. Whom you may invent (or expy) and what they may be doing, in your Now, is so specific that all I can say is: do it and find out.

One option is to create an NPC hero who operates as a member of the players' heroes' group, sometimes called a GMPC. I've played a lot of these, done without, and very reluctantly I would favor not using them, if I had to choose permanently one way or the other. The risks are real: creating the role-playing equivalent of a Canon Sue, whom everyone is supposed to like or favor despite deserving no such thing; implying and eventually falling into the play-practice of "oracle," i.e., consistently providing insights or knowing what the group should do next; becoming a lightning rod for player dissatisfactions if any should arise; and worse. Then again, certain instances have been very successful for me and for others, so I leave the option open and hope for the best.

For, while I love the villains and non-player heroes, it's easy to forget that for them less is more. Whereas for the ordinary people in and among all those organizations and social situations, the best practice is the opposite: more is more. Not just in numbers, but in the game master's commitment to them as thinking, active beings. Supporting cast make play come alive. (As discussed in Chapter 9: What's Happening). List the ones you know from the sheets, then invent some more based on the heroes' lifestyles, relationships, work, and families. Then, during play, discover and invent even more!

These people are highly consequential, because most of a character concept isn't represented by points. The most powerful executive officer of the nation where the heroes live may be a "normal" in points terms, but that doesn't make him or her less able to affect the characters' lives, or necessarily bad at that job. It's good to have a big collection of names handy as a sideboard during play. I don't know why, but picking these names almost at random curiously results in one of them being perfect for someone you suddenly need it for.

See if any existing Dependent NPCs make sense as members of one or more groups or organizations in the Now, and also if any of them make sense as non-quantified supporting cast across more than one hero. Don't forget that their own Situations create content for the Now just like a hero's does, especially since by definition those Situations are up-front in the designated heroes' lives. This helps to get Dependent NPCs ready to play as people with good brains and understandable commitments, who are not ditzy, clueless, emotionally helpless, abrasive, or bereft of common sense. They don't have to be arbitrary, unwanted hooks to pull heroes into things, but are instead active participants in situations, fun for the game master to play, valued and even half-and-half played by the hero players, and worth voices of their own.

The Defiants

Looking over the heroes in the Hartford game, not yet named as a group, but organized into a kind of unity via a Now arrangement, I could see something jump out immediately: gay pride, and every possible angle on assimilating versus rebelling. It even helps, rather than hinders, that one hero is straight and one either nonconforming or agender, rather than all four being "comfortably" categorized or unified.

We didn't play very many sessions with these heroes, so I'll only reference the limited Now we used in terms of Hartford's long-running activist history, which at times seems like an establishment of its own, and its fraught ethnic conflicts despite its position in the popular symbolism of American freedom. Here I want to showcase the supporting cast that emerged from the heroes' sheets.

Anybug, Manfred Owen Barfield IV

No question about it: "Mo" is privileged and wealthy, with an extended and established family, slated to be its "name" face member in a Roman-numeral succession, on schedule. Being out gay and a publicly-identified superhero throws a wrench into all this, but he has reversed it into an advantage, at least for the moment making his family take it and like it. Obviously that implies at least a few of them who are inclined to do neither.

The Public Identity Situation implies a strongly-invested public, which in his case goes directly to his orientation as well as being slated for power. He's the hero who led me to start investigating the recent history of Connecticut, the first state to legalize gay marriage, the impressive if somewhat self-righteous history centered on the Hartford Green, and the complex power structure of centrist liberalism called the Knowledge Corridor that I mentioned earlier and its associated institutions.

As if all that weren't enough, the real wrench shows up with his grandfather, Manfred Owen Barfield II, who is none other than the long-disappeared terrifying berserk monster supervillain called Devour. Who seems now to be a mildly disoriented, pretty nice old guy who totally approves of his odd grandson's activist bravery. I asked, does Mo know his grandfather's past? No, said the player, no one does. Which means it's high time to develop Devour's long violent history with institutions like the military and certainly a bevy of prior or older superheroes.

Grimfire, Yuri "Rob" Velikov

This guy required a little player explanation, as Russian-born but very Americanized, to the point of being a tough-guy vigilante with edgy politics back in the 1990s. His fiery, occult-looking powers made him a target for evangelical Christian outrage, especially since he exposed a corrupt branch of the Eagle Forum. Many people from back then are now in positions of national power and inclined to take their common history personally.

He's specifically just made his identity public, and although this isn't problematic, i.e., it is not designated as a Situation. Still, people he knows are going to have feelings about it. Uniquely among the heroes, he has no designated Dependent NPC Situations; but no one knows nobody, so there must be somebody. In addition to people within the Hunted Situation, I'm thinking of plenty of people with direct experience of his history, maybe someone he saved through a ruthless action, media who criticized him, and given his loneliness, alienated family or friends.

The Which, Isabela García

Isabela's Situations are full of family, explicit in the Dependent NPC, her twin sister Tina, and developed by her player in the person corner, regarding her relatively high-income, well-assimilated Mexican-American family with middle-conservative politics. This is tied easily to her closeted gay orientation and her commitment to a Secret Identity (unlike the other heroes). It might also go with the tricky duality and mystery of her powers, and perhaps even a certain identity confusion with Tina, although not to the degree that it becomes a Situation of its own.

Her Hunted Situation, Domain, was initially conceived simply as a powers-contrast, control in opposition to uncertainty. But given this context it snaps into place as you saw in Chapter 7: Making Villains. Domain is a collective conformist identity, an amalgam of "the middle," which is perfectly tolerant as long as you want to be normal. It also demands the application for one of my least favorite motifs, Mind Control, in dreadful realization that it would make perfect sense, and The Which's parents are certainly involved. That's why this villain is potentially the big one in that game, so strongly connected to the location and points of crisis.

Ruby Ray, Natalie Freeman

You know Natalie pretty well by now, so I'll quickly mention that her Dark Web music and advocacy activities are considered criminal by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), a real-world governmental (but "independent") organization known for its fixed views and considerable reach. "Note to self," I said to myself, "Let's find out more about these bozos," and proceeded to scare myself silly.

In family terms, Ruby looks like the Which's opposite, at least insofar as fully up-front and public disclosure of herself and anything else is concerned, said loud and proud via her radio/web shows. A Public Identity of this kind is a big deal, as just about anyone knows who she is and has an opinion about it, and no few of them take action thereby. However, she's more like the Which than it seems, flipped around, as her brother Bri is her working partner (or co-conspirator if you like). He certainly needs some thought and effort put into his actions and views.

You've seen her Hunted Situation as well, with Killer Coil, but I stress that this context of the Now provided the platform for the creative build you saw in Chapter 7: Making Villains.

Looking over these summaries, I should clarify something: I could not have stated them this fully at the outset of play, and I do not recommend trying. In retrospect, everything written above was "there," but a good half of it clearly existed at a more intuitive level, because it only gained specific words and stated views as we found them ourselves during the first session.

Now I'll switch to another superhero team to draw upon extensive play material for a more complete example.

Legacy

I briefly mentioned this hero group in Chapter 3: Your Game. We played it for enough sessions to see the Now really blossom and boom, and I kept a good running record as we went. To remind you of our opening statements:

- Powers are bright, fun, and hopeful
- The past is always present, on the Left Coast [Big Sur to Vancouver]

The starting heroes were Power*Star and Advance, soon joined by a third, Komodo Dragon.

It offers some practical insights about the Now as a technique. You'll see a lot of emergence from the coincidence that the starting players independently focused on alternate technology for their heroes' powers, making it a central, even unifying feature of our game. Also, since its statements explicitly brought in history, that shows up here even more than it usually does in my games.

The following material is ripped straight from my Now for our first session of play. The text in italics was red in the original, to remind myself that the content isn't known to the heroes.

Power*Star, Mike Mandella

30 years old, former restaurant entrepreneur, lives in Seattle

Powers

- The Power*Cave headquarters under Capitol Hill – Mike doesn't know how it works, uses the dusty obsolete manuals
- Massive Tesla tap coils
- Higgs-Boson space: tap receivers in the suit
- Teleport disks throughout northwest
- Known: Seattle, Portland, Vancouver
- **One is at the prison where Dr. Darkstar is**

Family

- Hippie parents and general culture of upbringing
- Hence the misspelled surname
- His brother Aaron, idealistic author, **pressuring him to donate the money**
- His ex and Aaron's wife, Michelle
- Conflicted, still loves him mainly on memories, but believes more in Aaron; determined not to ask for or accept money
- Runs the restaurant he left behind

- Former Power*Star, Mike's grandfather
  - Dr. Charles Edison (1890-1969) – "estranged from the family"
  - Founded The Fund for American Studies (thus renamed in 1987)
  - The money was sequestered for twenty years, then entered confused litigation that was re-defined and resolved recently – could not go to anyone but a single person, but no person was designated, and so ultimately it went to Mike
- Darius Darkstar – so many mysteries and potential here
  - Invented the Edison-Tesla tech used by the original Power*Star, implied all the way back in 1920s
  - Been in prison for a long, long time, from Power*Star's heyday
  - The Black List – the list he's given to Mike to investigate or stop
- The Dark Cohort – broken off from Darkstar
  - No member has ever been caught
  - Searching for the new Power*Star – no joke, intend to put him down immediately

The public

- Monica Stewart – nosy journalist
  - Knows a lot more about the original Power*Star history than Mike does

Advance, Vikhrov "Vince" Vasilivich

60 years old, energy researcher and consultant, lives in Humboldt

Powers

- Mysteriously shut off in the early-mid-1990s; just as mysteriously have reappeared
- Inadvertently revealed to everyone during an outdoor concert, which was attacked by a supervillain, Mirror Mirror
- Totally public and totally unprepared for modern notoriety

Family

- His wife Denise, researcher and entrepreneur partner –
  - Newly discovered he's the former Advance, along with the rest of the world, **supportive**
- Advanced Futures energy company
  - Gavin Holmann, dedicated business partner
  - Helen Jacobs – politician, resourceful, manipulative, gunning for Advance Futures' tech, either to co-opt it for her party or to shut it down

- The Continuum – interdimensional entity
  - Taps into the past to send 80s villains at him
  - Doctor Bang, Gemfire

Concepts

- The power structure of northwest coast energy
- Families, histories
- Projects, local economies
- Vancouver's green commitment
- Conflicting/cooperative state and international policy
- U.S. vs. Canada; California vs. Oregon vs. Washington; city vs. county jurisdiction over the financing of power

Heroes' powers

- The dimensionality and time-skipping occurrence of Advance's powers
- The Continuum
- Tesla/Higgs space
- The Power*Cave and the disks

Super-history

- 1920s-1960s original Power*Star, he was the first superhero
- Darius Darkstar as his nemesis, in prison since what, 1960 or something
- 1970s Dark Cohort
- 1980s Advance's illustrious career before his powers vanished in the mid-1990s
- Continuum gets its "minions" from this period
- Mid-1990s Mike is born
- Family drama about the grandfather's inheritance begins during his teens, sometime around 2010

All this was just at the beginning! We were soon joined by a fourth participant with this fellow, who shows up in my Now like this:

Komodo Dragon, Jake Drake

21 years old, student and vlogger entrepeneur, lives in San Francisco

Powers

- Meditative focus; "reptilian brain" psychobabble
- What on earth are they really?

Family

- Elaine Liu, mom
  - Venture capitalist, obsessed with social standing
- "Tony Liu," deceased grandfather, former Komodo Dragon during the 1950s in Indonesia
- KomodoLife LLC
  - Vlog: his exploits, reflections, opinions
  - Team Komodo: YouTube lifestyler fanbase – demanding and interfering
- **Chase Galván, media director and lover – constantly overbooked**
- **The Basilisk**
  - Competitor online vlogger, adversary, alt-right ideologue
  - Anonymous
  - **Certain remunerative codependence has evolved between them**
- Project Beyond, U.S. government
  - Exotic energy strategizing
  - Revived investigation into Komodo powers now that Jake is active

Little of this content was my direct doing. The material came right from the hero sheets, albeit filtered through my first bits of research and my own investment in the location. It had become something of its own, but not a 'Verse. It's not a gazetteer-style mapped setting with known horizons, brilliantly conceived backstory, and inevitable climactic conclusions. Instead, we had a nascent, highly specific setting in action, ready to grow, and more so, to do it right Now.

EMERGENT PROPERTIES

There are things even in the very first Now that you don't see coming, indeed, that no one can.

For the Legacy game, Alan, Power*Star's player, had spitballed the name "Charles" as an intermediate ancestor between his hero and Thomas Edison, and was surprised as anyone when Charles Edison, Thomas' son, turned out to be a historical person. I hadn't heard of him and assumed Alan had chosen him deliberately, so I'd put some effort into learning about him and conceived of the content and timing of the original Power*Star's career based on what I'd found.

That content and timing influenced us all, including such things as Alan enjoying an extremely retro appearance for his hero, reminiscent of 1920s pulp rather than 1950s comics, and quite a bit of political context for the imprisoned nemesis, Doctor Darius Darkstar. That in turn provided a framework into which the other starting hero's history, including the initial appearance and mysterious disappearance of his powers, could be timed.

The interplay of input, interpretation, and connection was impossible to plan or control. It looks planned, even quite clever. I'd be proud of it on our behalf, except that this is normal, something everyone can do, as long as they share a certain aesthetic, contribute things playfully but with genuine interest, and remain ready to accept and adjust.

It's also good example of where superhero comics of the relevant era overlaps with role-playing.

One of the most well-known and beloved superheroes in the world first appeared in a short piece in the last issue of a canceled anthology title, featuring a uniquely detailed costume with a curious mix of arachnid powers and gadgets. (1)

Who "created" him? Before you answer, consider these:

- The 1940s comics superhero, the Spider Queen, who crawled stealthily upon inside and outside walls and used web-shooting devices on her wrists
- Another 1940s comics vigilante, the Tarantula, who fought crime using acrobatics and a "web gun."
- A Halloween costume displayed in New York store windows in the late 1950s, including not only the characteristic webbed patten and full-face mask, but even a name strikingly similar to the as-yet uninvented hero
- Preliminary artwork by two, not one, of the primary artists at this particular company
- A writer and an artist who had already honed a mutualistic technique for a decade of horror and monster stories together, in which each altered and adjusted to what the other was providing

Comics fandom writhes and wrestles about "who did it" and no one will ever win the argument, because so often in this art form, the auteur theory disintegrates when applied. And here's another one, from the end of the relevant era of comics rather than its beginning:

- A defunct company's hero characters from the 1960s had been purchased by an ambitious company during the 1980s
- A comics creator from a foreign land, rejected by his company of choice, had gained fame with one of this company's B-level titles
- Assigned these characters for a limited series, his proposal was audacious enough for the editors to only permit it using expys (stand-ins, "official imitations," or no-serial-numbers IP revisions)
- The work was freed from the need for continuity with other company heroes and from expected constraints of this company's typical thematic outcomes
- The artist was included at the author's request, as they'd worked together in the foreign land, and his distinctive designs and layout deeply informed the nature of the script and ultimately the plot
- Partly due to the shift in "who" the heroes were, many, even most of the details and at least one major plot point were last-minute improvisations, for the series as a whole and for each individual issue (2)

Even the one superhero comic which most famously showcased clockwork determinism as its story content was not itself made that way. They received, retooled, thought of new things, and, sequentially, used what they'd just done as an opportunity to add or alter more.

Greatness for these titles, especially for specific heroes' personality, development, and fate, jumped unexpectedly out of a convergence of legal adaptation, semi-legal copying, synthesizing, toss-it-in, "editorial opportunity" (i.e., relaxed control), and the personalities who contributed to it. It happened consistently during the writing-forward, relatively unmanaged context of that period in superhero comics, for which these two titles are pretty good representatives of its beginning and end. The skills, or if you prefer, creative genius, are found in knowing what to do with the stew you get (or are in), not in pushing a magic mental button to produce it as planned on demand.

That ties really well to role-playing based on multiple player input for situations of crisis and drama, which shines when it takes that same lesson to heart: not a directed, controlled glide along step-by-step confrontations toward a presupposed climax. Instead, the guiding principle is clear: play doesn't follow plots, it takes up the craziness of what's at hand, and makes them.

In your game, ride the wave of Now.

REFERENCES

(1) Contributors to the concept of Spider-Man include or may include:

- The Spider Queen first appeared in *The Eagle #2* (1941), by "Elsa Lesau" (Louis and Arturo Cazanueve), published by Fox Features Syndicate.
- The Tarantula first appeared in *Star Spangled Comics #1* (1941), by Mort Weisinger and Harold Wilson Sharp, published by Independent News using its DC imprint (soon revised to "Superman DC").
- Joe Simon and Jack Kirby provide differing accounts of their development of someone called either the Silver Spider or Spider-Man during the 1950s.
- A Halloween costume produced and marketed by Ben Cooper beginning in 1954 undeniably displays distinctive features of the eventual comics costume, as well as the name "Spider Man."
- The Fly first appeared in *Adventures of the Fly #1* (1959), by Joe Simon, published by Archie Comics Publications using the Red Circle Comics imprint.
- Stan Lee describes pitching the Spider-Man concept to Martin Goodman in 1962 and arranging its publication in the final issue of the canceled title *Amazing Adult Fantasy*.
- Jack Kirby provided pencils for an initial Spider-Man story that was not used.
- Steve Ditko designed the costume.
- Steve Ditko pencilled and often inked the comics, beginning with *Amazing Adult Fantasy #15* and then *The Amazing Spider-Man #1* going forward.
- Lee scripted the comics but the credits are carefully parsed regarding plotting either by him or by Ditko throughout their collaboration on the title.

(2) *Watchmen #1-12* (1986-1987), by Alan Moore and David Gibbons, was published by Warner Communications through its DC Comics division. The circumstances of the title's conception and production are well-documented. One almost unbelievable example of confluence is that the Galle crater on Mars does look like a smiley face from straight overhead. It was photographed by Viking Orbiter 1 in 1976 just after the almost identical image became an international fad (on Earth), as if both were waiting for Moore to re-invent the hero Peacemaker as the Comedian with the smiley-face motif and the hero Captain Atom as Doctor Manhattan who is obsessed with Mars. Granted, no one knows which detail came first as a creative process. The point is that it's always a stew.

CHAPTER 9
WHAT'S HAPPENING

How about play itself? We all know that the next session will include super-powered crisis and action, probably including heroes and villains hitting one another, as well as emotional developments and confrontations. But how is this done?

It's not done by keeping one powerful hand on the controls for what can and will happen at all times.

Let's turn a critical eye to the difference between preparation and play. The game master has the job to set fictional facts before play: things like a location that a villain seeks to destroy, that this particular villain happens to be the most active adversary this time, or that this event coincides with a tricky local political decision and a contested election. During play, as well, the game master serves as the arbiter for where most things are and what people besides the players' heroes try to do.

But the authority stops there, specifically:

- When players say heroes' decisions and actions
- Before planning or anticipating outcomes during play

The game master's tasks make play possible. But what happens during and because of play isn't under the game master's control. That's tough for some to contemplate. Maybe not you; but a lot of people associate authority over prepared facts with authority over a pre-conceived series of events and, in the end, a final pre-planned confrontation. For them, doing the one without the other is cutting their skill-set in half.

This cut-in-half authority serves superhero role-playing very well, with the content nailed down but the events' outcomes wide open for discovery. Here's how to do it.

CRISIS AND CONFLICT

The what in the chapter title is easy: an absurdly large injection of adversity and adversaries. It's found in the Now, in the most obvious and urgent actions about to happen. They're dramatic, so indicate those parts dramatically; in my files, for example, you can see the bolded material in each step for "do this next!"

Villains are the obvious choice, the pesky boogers. They simply can't settle down. Most of them are always a moment away from launching into action based on their own Situations alone, even without prior events of play to motivate them further. Whoever it is, consider their current motivations, goals, and connections with everything else. Whether they're coolly strategizing, or lashing out at last.

Consider all the groups and institutions as well, busy as always, with their current power players setting and carrying out policy, changing the world, throwing around their resources, influences, messaging, and ops; basically showing you what real villainy is. And they're so damn blatant about it.

That's the "what," now for the how. These people and entities from the Now must already be in action at the start of the session. It's not something to "get to," or to maneuver people into somehow arriving there; you have to own it and say, this is what the Now has brought us, period.

Once you're committed to it, here's a useful dial to contemplate: coming in hot or playing it cool.

Coming in hot is assertive situation-framing. For a game master, it includes:

- Prepared locations and saying "you are here."
- Imminent or even already-happening crisis, in your face, no need to go looking for it.
- The arrival of information right now, and this is what it says.
- Other people act on their goals, with immediate effects.

Whereas playing it cool is based more on these:

- Asking "It's first thing in the morning, where are you?" or any other variant on "what do you do?"
- Other people interact with the heroes and provide opinions.
- Various known things are updated through ordinary means, like checking one's emails or going to work and seeing what's new.
- The known and observed features of the world shift a little based on what the Now has brought it, but not urgently so, or not yet.
- When the interactions and circumstances provoke someone enough, they turn up the action hot as the gates of hell.

Neither is better play. They operate as a dial.

A DAY IN THE LIFE

The hot and cool concept starts right away, depending on whether you tell a player, "you are here," or ask, "where are you, where do you go." Either way works to showcase the heroes' lifestyles: where they live, how they live, what they brush their teeth with, whether they wear pajamas or not, if they're worried about the rent, whether they go to work in a designated workplace, and if so, how they get there... all that stuff.

The extensive cast and population is easily introduced by continuing to play, beginning with anyone whom the hero would deal with on this particular morning or whenever, showcasing their personalities, priorities, and expectations, and see what the hero does and says. We're talking about colleagues, bosses, family, romantic partners, friends, and whoever they may meet.

- Incidental persons based on the immediate location; e.g., if we're in a coffee shop, there's a barrista. Such people are surprisingly capable of jumping up and demanding identities in play and, when they do, should be welcomed and named.
- Necessary participants in the heroes' lives, based on what we know from the three corners. Think of them as the orbiting faces in one of those "hero solar system" graphics, with special emphasis for anyone included in the Situations.
- Dependent NPCs are a special case of supporting cast, partly because their problems are the hero's problems too, as established by the hero's own choice and values. Therefore they are uniquely emotional and interactive.

Playing this way includes cutting back and forth among the heroes, with no need to drag out or "finish" anything. Thinking like comics panels works perfectly to keep anyone from having to sit and wait, as the spotlight shifts about for a montage effect of brief portraits and personal moments. The interactions and the cuts create a tapestry displaying the heroes' relationships, social identity, relevant institutions, and locations.

It's full of potential for action. In "Days of Our Lives" fashion, any of these situations may yield differences of view, open disagreements, and conflicts. This may sound terrible, but in a lot of ways, these interactions in the heroes' ordinary lives are sometimes like combat. Even loving, friendly people can disagree, let alone the simmering hostilities and challenges of some families and workplaces. In the comics, a conversation can be illustrated using the same layout and composition techniques as a fight. You can do the same in play. In that case, it's time to roll dice!

These rolls typically call upon Intelligence or its application as perception, especially regarding minor or brewing conflicts among people or concerning such things as status and employment. Think of how much we actual people work at "nuance" in ordinary conversations, and use these rolls to bring it into the open or to note that it's festering for later.

Another important roll is how you influence someone, using Presence. Given good rolls, even a cranky person will take what you want seriously and perhaps with some sympathy; and a great roll can get you what you want, the way you want it. Think about it – that's no small thing!

Play comes alive when these situations' outcomes are at the mercy of these rolls. When a hero's life is full of important things to notice, succeeding or failing to do so matters. When people have strong opinions or expectations, then whole emotional landscapes depend however well or badly you do with a Presence roll toward them.

That brings up the Dependent NPCs again, because, like Hunted Situations, they are immune to the Presence mechanic. It's not that they don't listen to you, it's that they're not overawed or dominated. It's the perfect opportunity to provide contrasting or supportive points of view and for the hero to put their actions on the line rather than spouting pretty claims.

THE LEARNING CURVES

One learning curve is obvious for everyone in playing this game, as with any role-playing game. It takes a session or two to know the cogs and levers well, to grab'em for resolutions, to see how those points you wrangled matter, and to feel the savage burn of Endurance under pressure.

Meanwhile, there's another curve that's special for Champions and to each group playing it, to learn who says what for situational framing: where we are, who's there, and what's happening.

It works very well for the game master to play the first session quite hot.

- Choose Statement-rich adversaries and crises for the Now
- State opening circumstances based on Situations
- Ask strong questions about locations, descriptions, activities
- Cut hard and brisk; meet a relevant non-player character or two and move on
- Achieve nice solid short portraits for everyone
- Drop the Now on'em at its most dangerous and immediate point

But after that, it's time to cool down and to use the Now more responsively. It's still there, but it's developing rather than dropping in through the skylight. When the players feel in their heroes' skins, playing them doing things, the game master can feel the same way regarding the villains and everyone else. When these are the case, then each event of play can proceed directly out of what just happened.

Imagine that the Now provides us with an off-kilter academic who's just completed the chemical formula that can make him a cold-fusion mutated jellyfish man. Instead of him having flipped his lid just before the session begins, see whether he snaps based on the events of play or not, and if so, against whom. It's less "safe" if what you want is a reliable fight scene at the halfway-mark of your play time, but it honors the social and emotional environment of the heroes, and it makes far more use of what role-playing has to offer.

Also, it's not all-or-nothing. You can keep something hot when that seems most sensible. You can try it different ways, like playing all the personal-life stuff cool and the villains' actions hot, or vice versa. Even better, everyone can play with the dial a little, as players discover how situations depend on what the heroes do and how actively they utilize the locations of play. Therefore this curve results in a unique interactive style for each group.

Shifting like this may be a little tough, because playing super-hot for everything works, so you're easing off on a method which may have become a comfort zone. But the payoff is worth it in expanding play and validating the heroes, ultimately impacting the Now in all sorts of ways, even the parts they don't know about. If you like the idea of the Now "feeling real," especially that the game master is subject to it just like the players and isn't a puppet master, this is the way to get it.

WHERE THE ACTION IS

Any and all action requires location. If you're coming in hot with violence, then having some locations already prepared is a must, but that's just a subset of the real task, to have plenty of them on tap for use in the region of play, planned or not.

Therefore everyone playing should slowly develop a pretty good geographic understanding of that region, usually a city. This is why Chapter 3: Your Game includes someone who knows the area well, so if it's not you, ask them things, before and during play. That person is especially useful in analogizing something that's known to a more-or-less fictional location in the region.

This isn't a game sourcebook thing. Direct resources are plentiful and easy to find, including neighborhood maps, historical summaries, and economic indicators. By far the most useful physical tool is a real-world visitor map, specifically, the schematic ones you get from public transit, a university, or a high-use area like a famous building or an amusement park. They're usually in three-dimensions and otherwise designed for spatial understanding. They are good for more than just locating play at that specific place – adapting a big-city aquarium map into an alien spacecraft, or a park map into a dream-landscape, or anything of the sort, is remarkably easy and applicable in play.

How is location-information integrated with the events of play? Certainly, naturalistic play appears hard to reconcile with mandated confrontations. And equally certainly, two well-known attempted solutions are terrible:

- Forcing the confrontation as a fixed set-piece by overriding all actions or knowledge which might alter the plan.
- Various fake-action methods, including hinting broadly so it "looks like" they do it, or laying track in front of whatever they do so they end up there.

We're not doing those. This is high-action melodrama, which means a ton of coincidence, but hard framing by the game master, for all play all the time, with player-directed action as window dressing, isn't going to work. This is also about heroes who matter. And for the heroes to matter, players have to matter. The heroes' decisions and actions significantly affect the circumstances of play all the time, not just during fights.

Let's take a look at the hardest and least likely situation: when no hero in play has Luck or Unluck, Detective Work or similar Skills, and no Awareness or similar Powers. In this case, the heroes' deductions and perceptions would be confined to their ordinary professional and lifestyle venues. Their rolls would be mostly reactive, and successes would yield the bare minimum of what coincidence can provide, in terms of being able to deal with what the Now is presenting.

YOSHI

In this case, the adversity will arrive mainly how its perpetrators want it to, when and where they want, and all the rolls can do is alert and prepare the heroes a little better for it. It doesn't have to be nearby and they will most likely be engaged in other difficult or important things at the time. Playing this way includes a lot of "uh oh" realizations punctuated by hard cuts to "oh no" as the crisis hits.

Players are free to prefer this "default" activity level, without the Skills and Powers dedicated to situational framing. It means they like being ordinary-people heroes whose lives get gate-crashed. If so, then the game master should honor that choice by playing pretty hot.

SMART AND LUCKY

Here are the more player-active ways for heroes to be involved in the rapidly-arriving adversity of the Now. They get right past all those issues of "Oh no, what's happening?" and "Oh no, however shall we get there?" and, since at least one hero is bound to have one of them, it's good to understand how they work.

"Smart" is about knowing things, not just noticing them; and "lucky" is about being places in relevant ways, for better or for worse. Each one is very distinctive for a hero and how he or she relates to the fiction as a whole.

Briefly, before getting into the nuts and bolts, this is how heroes force their adversaries to be reactive, and to change up how and where confrontations emerge. When the heroes' actions drill directly into how the conflict is met, or better, what the conflict even is, then the players will seize the day faster than most game masters are prepared to believe. So that's a big deal – it's the huge shift from plot hooks to plot drivers.

Being actively smart, referring here to the hero as such, means they're generally "ahead of the game" regarding problems and confusions. It is mechanically expressed through Skills, first and foremost Detective Work, perhaps backed up with Disguise, Stealth or Security Systems. Powers play into it as well, via many applications of Awareness especially when coordinated with variants of Telepathy and several other powers as described in Chapter 12: Dynamic Mechanics.

Crucially, these Skills and Powers are not invoked or assumed by the game master. This is dedicated player activity, via statements about what the hero is doing, whether routinely or following up on something specific. Such statements necessarily also call in personal sacrifice or risk. There is no such thing as a neutral "miss" for any of the associated rolls.

This activity could be a single solid question and answer, acting as a turning point of events in the session. Or, if the adverse situation is subtle, it may begin a duel of secrecy, deduction, misdirection, and senses carried out through many events, ultimately resolved as who gets the drop on whom, and where.

The mechanics' outcomes, if successful, permit the hero to be well-situated and well-informed before the badness hits, and to organize a shared response if they're inclined to. It opens up adjustments to the location of the confrontation, and, effectively, is how you earn your "just in time."

One subset deserves special attention: some fashion in which the hero is super-smart, due to their special effects like a computer implant, a scary brain mutation, an exotic species feature, obsessive and possibly disturbing psychology, or an extra degree of square-jawed know-how.

Here's an example from a designated super-brain, cunning fellow in arguably the most beloved super-team in comics. Our heroes have been captured and imprisoned by a powerful government military force. We're at the top left of the next page in this issue, and a couple of the characters have found a moment for some dialogue. Here it comes – the first thing said by that Designated Very Smart Hero: *The execution is scheduled for the day after tomorrow.*(1)

See what they did there? It's not that he "found out" something that we, the readers, were already aware of. Instead, we find out right here, and it becomes the whole frame for what can and cannot occur, because he already knows. As a functional plot feature, it sets up the time the heroes "now" have to put their gadget and escape plan into action, which is about to be shown throughout the next panels.

This is a special feature in fiction, as if the hero were a co-author, able to frame time and circumstances for all the others, even his or her adversaries. Pulling it off in role-playing has been a creative challenge throughout the hobby's history and has been solved in many different ways.

For this game, there's no dedicated mechanic for it; it's all based on the same Skills and Powers mentioned before. What the special effects permit, however, is what you get from it, which is more time. It's not content. You couldn't say, for instance, "the execution", without there already having been an execution established. But a successful roll right there mean you get to say "the day after tomorrow," which means – functionally – plenty of extra panels to play in first. It's the only way you get that.

Feeling lucky, by contrast, is about places, not time. Luck and Unluck "bounce" the hero a little concerning physical position and opportunities. They may be rolled when things get hot, putting the hero smack in the middle of things through no virtue or fault of their own, affecting what the hero wanted to do and presenting risks to things they care about.

Rolled value	Luck	Unluck
0	Unfortunately no effect	Fortunately no effect
1	You're there, as if the problem had landed there just for you	You're there, but with divided attention, not well-positioned
2	You're right in place to see and respond to the problem, as if you'd planned it	Tables turn, they spot you, or danger targets you
3	Absurd position and opportunity to respond with an advantage	Absurd inclusion of unrelated Situation
4	As 1 plus you get an insight or useful observation	As 1 plus there are added risks to others (even if they have to be invented)
5	As 2 and applies to an ally (no reason)	As 2 and applies to an ally (no reason! Damn it!)
6	As 3 and dangers to other people or things are reduced, for the moment	As 3 and applies to all the heroes (oh now, come on)

READY STEADY

The next chapters drive into play at the table, so here's a review for their context.

- Preparation is solid and definite for certain things, specifically the fierce presence of some part of the Now.
- Heroes' lifestyles, personal priorities, and point-of-view experiences provide the backdrop and most consistently-visited situations of play.
- Group play includes hard frequent cuts across heroes, giving everyone a good spotlight and establishing simultaneity.
- Situations develop and change due to what happens, using and responding to decisions, actions, and rolled outcomes.
- Locations are modified by easy additions and even heightened focus on things just because they're interesting.
- Adversity comes in hot at least a little, and possibly a great deal. It doesn't have to be maneuvered into or nudged in order to happen.
- There is no planning for or fudging outcomes, at any time.

Your group's version of play develops all of these beyond mere "style," almost to the level of game design. You'll have your own collective accepted range for hot and cool, and specifically for what. You'll collectively arrive at a functioning mix of formal and informal ways to play locations and their details. The players will tune their own proactivity and use of relevant Powers and Skills into a highly distinctive method for "what happens," to the point of nigh collaborative game mastering so far as situational framing is concerned.

To illustrate a great benefit of customizing and creating your own Champions Now this way, consider one of the famous writer-artist collaboration in the comics. The hero team in question revived a fallow title with a hodgepodge of pre-existing and new characters,. The writer focused on the social crisis of the heroes, who were distrusted and sometimes demonized by the general public, and who often put their lives at stake on that public's behalf, so now you know whom I'm talking about.

One of the artists with a long influential run on the title was an effective co-author, and one of the comics' features during that time was its difficult compromise between them. Briefly, the artist liked the action and bad-assery, especially for his favorite characters, whom he beefed up considerably in effectiveness. But the writer liked the dialogue-heavy relationship drama and social musings, especially in naturalistic settings in ordinary clothes. Each was candid in complaining about the other: "they sit around, out of costume, in jeans and t-shirts, and just talk;" and "to me, the fights are bullshit." (2)

The point being that violent melodrama can be tough to arrange, because either the fights or the talking can become pro forma, or filler. This comic turned out to benefit largely because neither creator budged, resulting in better and more mutual justifications for both than many. But all too many titles founder either in irrelevant fights or irrelevant blither, and are read in partial fast-forward mode, similar to a certain other genre which I'll leave at that.

However, in table-top play, that reinforcing quality between talking-situations and violent fights is much easier and more about mutual creative enjoyment. We are contributing, paying attention, and running with the consequences, from anyone to everyone according to each person's role. So the developments proceed and the confrontations emerge based on just those things, making much more sense and with a generally mutualistic spirit.

Solid preparation plus open outcome, full of readiness but with no control. It works.

REFERENCES

(1) Brainiac 5 of the Legion of Superheroes provides the gold standard for super-smarts which effectively define whole situations by figuring them out ahead of telling the reader anything. This particular example is from *Adventure Comics #345* (1966), by Edmond Hamilton and Curt Swan, published by National Comics using its Superman DC imprint. Batman's surreal detective savvy provides a close second, with honorable mention going to Spider-Man's eponymous "sense," which more or less tells him where the plot is.

(2) Chris Claremont and John Byrne collaborated on *The Uncanny X-Men #108-143* (1977-1981), published by Cadence Industries using the Marvel Comics Group imprint. Nominally they were respectively writer and artist, but Claremont was also an experienced layout artist and Byrne was also an experienced writer. Their creative tension and their respective interactions with Jim Shooter as editor-in-chief are legendary in comics fandom, due to the results on the title's plot and the characterizations and fates of several heroes. The quotes here are referenced in Sean Howe's *Marvel Comics: The Untold Story.*

CHAPTER 10
THIS IS THE WORLD WE LIVE IN

The default setting for superhero comics is easy: ours. Not only that, but ours as it goes along, adding fantastic elements to the past and present without much regard for logic or consistency. If the Egyptian gods were real for purposes of a cool hero or villain to appear, well then, they were. If alien warrior species from the Sirian system is real because it's fun to draw them invading, well then, they are. Contrary to any sense, such things have no effect on history that brought modern life into being; or, if they did, only to make it get into the state that we actually know. Nor, going forward, do they affect who gets elected president for the comic's nation of origin, nor anything particularly about life, culture, or the economy there, all of which simply follow along the course of real events.

Just as with newsstand and spinner-rack comics publishing, for every new issue or, rather, for every session of play, the Now is our Now. "Our" world can have anything in it as serves the fun of the super action, but it never diverges from "our" course of reality.

You might prefer a more logically consistent or more original setting if that's your thing. Sometimes it's mine too. As of this writing, my current Champions Now game is set in modern Istanbul, in the thick of shifting real-world alliances. We rely on real-world maps, the personal knowledge of the players, and news reports, treated as a wave-front of continuing setting input as we play week by week. But my next one is going to be set in a future Mars habitat, because as of this writing, the 165 designs submitted to NASA just became available online and beg for in-game use. In such situations, play must rely instead on prepared, invented information.

Either way, these are the tools that make a given location work for the action of play. But how does the setting work, mechanically? I pick up the tractor and throw it at him! How does this spaceship work? Does this blast of proton rays hurt?

THE THINGS THERE

Where you are, and how you got there, was discussed in Chapter 9: What's happening. Once you're there, it's time to get concrete, because specific locations' physicality is central to superhero comics.

The rule is, whether you're using a map or not, if you're somewhere where this particular thing is strongly implied to be, then it's there. Office corridor? Water cooler. Busy highway? Lampposts and, incidentally, cars. Military airport hangar? Oh goodness. "Is there a jet fighter here?" "Yes, why did you bother to ask?"

More is better, because the things scattered around the action get swept up in it. Why, they may be lifted, thrown, toppled, and shattered – and, if you are very lucky, they'll explode!

In the following lists, the Strength listed is for lifting the thing or toppling it. Throwing requires at least 1d6 higher, for range in hexes equal to the difference as the default. Double the distance for anything designed for throwing, and halve it for anything notably awkward, unbalanced, or jointed (including an unwilling person). Endurance is spent for both lifting and throwing, separately.

As a starting references, here are some things from around the neighborhood. The listed Defense and Body indicate demolishing them into shards and rubble. To pull off or uproot the ones that are attached or rooted, ignore Defense.

	Defense	Body	Strength to lift, if detached
Fire hydrant	8	5	3d6
Public mail box	6	5	3d6
Street sign	4	3	
Lamppost, telephone pole	5	8	4d6
Medium tree	5	8	5d6
Big tree	5	11	9d6

Some things aren't lifted or broken entirely, but in pieces. The listed Defense and Body in this case refers to about a hex. Additional hexes' values are the same, but a greater area must be affected in some way to apply more widely.

	Defense	Body	Strength to lift, if detached	Notes
House wall	4	3	n/a	Also roofs, doors, furniture, stairs, et cetera
Plate glass pane	1	1	n/a	
Reinforced glass	3	1		
Brick wall	5	3	n/a	
Concrete wall	6	5	n/a	
Rock wall or surface	5	13		
Concrete/asphalt road surface	6	5	n/a	To shatter or tear up about 1 hex
Metal fire door	7	5	4d6	Use same values to tear off/out
Safe door	10	9		
Vault door	16	9		
Lobby/industrial I	5	6	3d6	For underlying structure; furnishings are crap at Defense 2, Body 1

Sometimes a thing is too big to contemplate lifting or destroying. In addition to knocking holes in it or tearing things off, you may also consider toppling them – you don't break every piece into rubble, but you ruin it as a structure. Doing this requires a little investigation, using an appropriate Awareness, Find Weakness; or preferably both. If you can damage the right piece, using the list above or corresponding values, then the thing's structural integrity is compromised and you are now, congratulations, in the midst of the hazard you just made!

Certain things convert nicely into usable, throwable weapons once you've busted them up or torn them loose.

	Defense	Body	Strength to lift
Lumber/broken wood	3	4	2d6
Concrete chunk	6	5	3d6
Stone chunk	4	11	4d6
Steel girder	9	6	5d6

Preparing or improvising objects is best done by extrapolating from the other tables, but the following lists will work for solid, simple things, such as sheets, blocks, and shaped or cast fittings.

Substance	Defense
Sheet metal	4
Chain, heavy tube	5
Metal beam or bar	6
Armor plating	13
Plastic castings	2
Heavy fiberglass	4
Plywood	3
Heavy wood	5

Mass	Body
1.6 kg	1
6.4 kg	3
25 kg	5
100 kg	7
400 kg	9
1.6 metric ton	11
6.4 metric tons	13
25 metric tons	15

For masses of natural stuff, the listed values apply per hex, if you're trying to destroy or break through it. If you're buried in them, use the Hazard rules.

	Defense	Body
Dirt	0	16
Rock	5	12
Snow	8	6
Ice	6	10

Motor-driven equipment or vehicles include the complication of being disabled rather than demolished into scraps, when they receive half the listed Body damage; for delicate machinery or electronics, just 1 Body past the Defense value will do it.

What happens to multi-part objects depends on the details of what happened, e.g., you ripped the hull right off the boat, but the radio in the cabin is fine. Also, some are dangerous when they're compromised badly enough and convert into hazards when they or their relevant piece is broken.

Gas-powered motor vehicles include fuel tanks, which may explode into a notable hazard if compromised. Real-world observation tells us this does not happen in any way similar to cinema, and since there is no freaking way to write a compromise rule that makes everyone happy, I leave the triggering circumstances and dice rolls for that up to you.

	Defense	Body	Strength to lift
Family or police car	4	9	6d6
Motorcycle, mini	4	5	4d6
SWAT or military transport	7	10	7d6
One-man tractor	5	6	5d6
Truck, full-size bus	4	10	7d6
Forklift	5	7	7d6
Crane, backhoe	5	9	9d6
Motorboat	3	8	5d6
Helicopter	3	9	7d6
Jet fighter	4	11	9d6
Tank	10	14	11d6
Passenger jet	4	15	13d6

Industrial machinery is similar but more durable. These values are for single-operator size, one or two hexes. For bigger, factory versions, use the same Body and Defense values, just increase the area and the required Strength.

	Defense	Body	Strength to lift	Notes
Light	5	4	2d6	Lawn mower, outboard motor
Medium	7	6	3d6	Pool/pond pump, bandsaw apparatus
Heavy	8	9	4d6	Small cement mixer, hydraulic car lift

And would we be without alien, future, other-dimensional, and magical devices? Not in the right comics, that's where! As with motor-driven devices, they're disabled at half Body. For reasons best known to the alien engineers, they also turn into hazards when they take any Body damage.

	Defense	Body	Strength to lift	Notes
Precision energy processor, portal	5	3	3d6	"Don't touch that, earthling!"
Control console	4	4	4d6	"Or that!"
Cthonic machinery	8	8	6d6	This thing is probably producing a hazard field already
People pod/tank	7	3	4d6	They shield these things pretty well
Hovercraft	5	9	9d6	Generic four-seater; adjust for alien-ness

PEOPLE

Character Points address the diversity and capabilities of super-powered heros and villains. They are not fine-grained enough for the diversity among other characters. Therefore all the system mechanics for regular people are the same, or nearly so.

- Strength 2d6
- Presence 2d6
- Speed 1, Body 10
- Defense 0 (that's really zero, not a typo)
- Dexterity 11, Intelligence 11, Ego 11

Outside of super-powered stressful situations, these people's differences are played as special effects. Their skills, wealth, social position, attractiveness, power, ordinary opinions, relationships, and all related matters are considered as bad or good as makes sense for each individual. That especially applies to their lifestyle and professional competence in the ordinary course of events, which may be quite excellent and are not resolved with dice.

Continuing, interactive people, or supporting cast, may seem to you to require a bit more. It's best to do so after their actual interest and importance is established or confirmed in play, rather than front-loaded in their original

appearance. If so, and if you think some person's competence is notable in non-ordinary circumstances, these parameters are sufficient, and usually not more than one or two of them.

- 1-2 more Intelligence or Ego
- One Skill
- 1-3 more d6 of Presence

You may assign Situations to them as seem applicable, since these mechanics often add power to play. However, they have no quantitative effect, i.e., they do not "buy" Points for other things.

The point values of the game start at 200 and grade up from there; everyone else is not rated in Points and should not even be considered "below" 200. It may seem to you as if this ignores a whole category of "trained agent" or "soldier" or "alien warrior," but this is not the case – when such individuals or groups swing into action, ignore the concept of individual builds and use the Hazard rules as you see fit for the danger and capabilities they represent.

The people who are explicit or implied in Dependent Non-Player Character and Hunted Situations are built exactly as described above with these exceptions:

- Dependent NPCs definitely have Situations, whose total Points are calculated into the hero's build.
- If a Hunted is defined as super-powered, the relevant characters are fully built as villains.
- No one explicit or implied in either of these Situations may be affected by that hero's Presence.

HAZARDS

Heroes are often confronted by big-ticket situational hazards, including familiar crises like buildings on fire, natural disasters, technological catastrophes, or weird conditions like dimensional rifts or magical vortices. Inimical environments count too, including straightforwardly dangerous situations like an active construction site, or more deadly surroundings like ordinary water or vacuum. Extreme situations concerning crowds of people also qualify, when they are too diffuse or dispersed to be addressed as a group, and too many to fight in the hope of stopping anything. Devices or weapons which guard or attack may qualify, insofar as they make an extensive area dangerous and can't be targeted as objects. (1)

These hazards can't be fought in the sense of combat; the question concerns surviving them, passing through or escaping them, and perhaps stopping them. Combat-specific hazards, which is to say, foes and devices you can hit, are discussed in Chapter 11: Fighting Words.

Hazards can be the main problem or situation the heroes face, even prepared much as one prepares a villain. However, superhero action is rife with emergent hazards, so applying the rules on the fly is a basic game mastering requirement.

Hazards vary according to concept:

- What region is affected
- How the danger affects the region in terms of motion: whether it simply persists in that spot, or sweeps over it while going somewhere else, or spreads, or whatever
- Whether the danger is time-limited in any way, ranging from over in an instant to eternally present; for anything that lasts more than a single Phase, it has an effective Speed 2.
- Whether the source of the hazard is breakable, and if so, it has Defense and Body as the materials warrant.

A hazard's damage or effects are built as one or more Powers, using 60 Active Points, with an appropriate Area Effect that doesn't affect its Point total. It doesn't attack; the effects always work on whoever's in the affected area. Use the powers list with abandon: if you fall into the wet concrete, it's an Entangle; if you stick your head into the turbine at the power plant, it's a Lethal Aura; I could go on all day and you can too, once you get the hang of it.

A hazard's effect encounters defenses. It is quantitatively reduced by whatever Powers or Characteristics apply through the ordinary use of the rules, and it is also countered absolutely by some specific defense or some action, the latter typically requiring a dice roll.

Finally, a hazard includes some way to solve it. Sometimes that means nullifying the hazard entirely, putting a stop to it, and sometimes the best you can do is escape, pass through, or get enough time to accomplish something. In addition to whatever is listed, obvious special effects apply and people may also hit upon some other way that makes perfect sense, which is all right too.

Hazard	Effects	Defense	How to stop or traverse
Collapsing structure	5d6 Piercing Blast/4d6 Entangle	Force Wall	Force Wall
Interior of a burning building	3d6 Flash/3d6 Severe Persistent Blast	Life Support (gases)	Acrobatics/Telekinesis
Submerged in water	8d6 Lethal Entangle	Life Support (water)	Swimming
Submerged in mud	5d6 Lethal Blast/6d6 Entangle	Life Support (water)	Swimming Desolid
Compromised power plant	6d6 Severe Blast	Force Field	Computer Programming
Superheated steam	4d6 Severe Piercing Blast/4d6	Flash	Life Support (extreme environment) Force Wall
Blast furnace	9d6 Severe Piercing Blast	Life Support (extreme environment)	Force Wall
Molten metal	6d6 Severe Piercing Blast/3d6 Entangle	Life Support (extreme environment)	Force Field
Radiation leak	3d6 Severe Persistent Blast	Life Support (radiation)	Computer Programming/ Security Systems
Caustic or corrosive chemicals	3d6 Piercing Persistent Blast	Life Support (extreme environments)	Desolid
Explosive decompression	4d6 High Impact Blast/3d6 Severe Blast	Density Increase	Movement power 10 hexes per hex
Rocks fall	12d6 Blast followed by 6d6 Entangle	Missile Deflection	Desolid/ Telekinesis
Panicked, dispersed, dangerous crowd	4d6 Entangle/2d6 Flash	Stealth/Climbing/ Desolid	Flight/Acrobatics/Desolid
Explosion: dynamite	8d6 Explosion High Impact Blast	Density Increase or Special Defense: Knockback	Force Wall
Explosion: C-4	6d6 Explosion High Impact Blast/4d6 Piercing Blast	Density Increase or Special Defense: Knockback	Security Systems
Explosion: petroleum-based fuel	4d6 Severe Piercing Blast/4d6 Flash	Resistant Defense	High Impact Blast
Lightning bolt	6d6 Severe Destructive Blast	Force Field	Force Wall
High-tension electrical line or wire	9d6 Blast Aura	Force Field	Security Systems
Drifting rifts in time and space	Teleport Expanded Scope	Mental Discipline	Awareness Expanded Scope
Swarming tormented spirits	5d6 Flash/6d6 Images	Special Defense: Ego	Ego roll

Some hazards' damage is a little more complicated.

- Cumulative effects: if the damage is Persistent, and you stay (or are trapped) in the affected area, then new attacks come in on top of it, so you might be taking multiple strikes of the same attack, each one persisting.
- Secondary and often nastier attacks are activated by the first getting through, e.g., Flash following Blast, for instance, if you get a face full of chemical spray.

Some attacks don't damage you but just lock you down, with Force Wall, Entangle, or both. However, one of these might then be followed with secondary damage, or an Entangle might itself be Lethal.

Some hazards are engineered specifically against heroes, in a guardian or programmed situation, or even a specially-designed trap, with Powers that operate directly against their limitations. However, these work best as part of an adversary's intelligent goal. The stereotypical "deathtrap" was a cliché before I was born and has persisted in comics mainly as a self-referential joke. These rules allow you to build one if you want to. (2)

Some locations offer a more subtle hazard, in that they aren't exploding or trying to burn or dissolve or suffocate anyone, but they are more difficult to move in, offering more casual risk.

Hazard	Effects	Defense
Weird broken surfaces and scary angles	Movement of all kinds reduced to 3 hexes per Phase	Clinging operates normally (no roll required)/Acrobatics or situational/Awareness permit Dexterity roll per Phase to move normally
Unstable or fragile surfaces	Landing at speed from Flight or a variant results in 6d6 Entangle	Acrobatics permits Dexterity roll
Unpredictable jets or gouts of dangerous stuff	6d6 Severe High Impact Blast	Acrobatics
Slippery surfaces	8d6 High Impact for purposes of Knockback, as the first stage of falling damage	Superleap

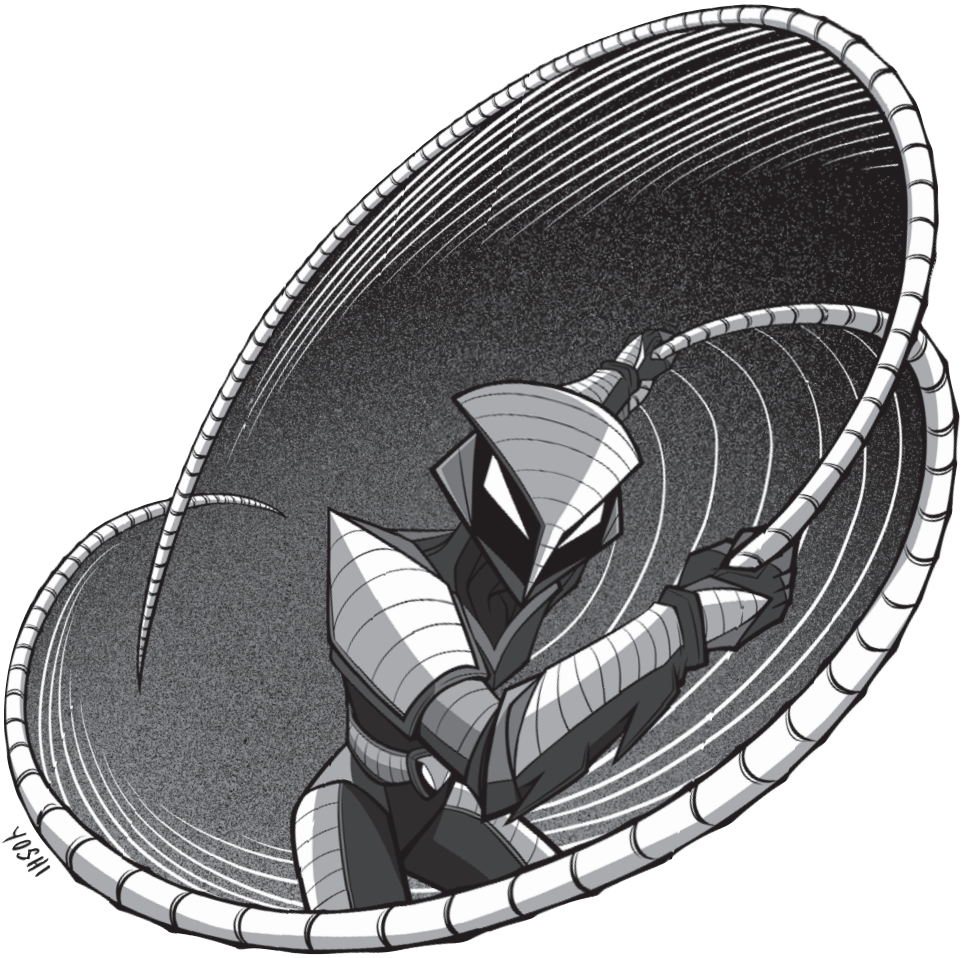
Hazards may emerge in the moment, such as the impact from or between vehicles. In this situation, each vehicle involved is treated as a Move attack.

- Move By: base damage is ½ Body of the item in d6, plus the velocity in hexes divided by 5 in d6
- Move Through: base damage is the Body of the item in d6, plus the velocity in hexes divided by 2 in d6

The vehicle takes the damage itself as well as delivering it; which, as you can imagine, turns a head-on collision into a Grade A disaster!

Heroes have been known to match their might against a careening vehicle. The safest way is to pull backwards on it, in which case Strength and velocity may be matched in terms of rolling Body for a relatively easy resolution. However, if you jump in front of it for direct impact vs. might confrontation, then roll the Strength exerted by the hero against the damage delivered by the vehicle. If the Strength delivers equal or greater Body, then the vehicle is stopped. The hero still takes the damage, and the player decide whether the vehicle does or doesn't, treating the hero's roll as another vehicle's head-on impact.

People inside a colliding vehicle have no such option and take damage upon impact, as a Blast with d6 equal to the Body damage that penetrates the vehicle's defenses. However, the details of a given vehicle and a given situation may require customizing a more complex hazard on the spot.



Falling is one of the great emergent hazards, and not even a flying hero is immune to it, if he or she is Stunned while aloft, for example.

Segment	Velocity (hexes per segment)	Distance fallen in hexes
1	5	5
2	10	15
3	15	30
4	20	50
5	25	75
6	30	105
Thereafter	30	+30 per Segment

Specially-dense or heavy things or people fall faster, at +1 hex per level of Density Increase, i.e., doubled weight, to a maximum of 30 hexes per segment, or terminal velocity.

Impact hits with 1d6 per hexes of velocity, making that "terminal" all too literal. To avoid it one may counter the falling velocity with a movement Power, like Flight obviously, but also Superleap in the riskier context of actually landing. In either case, the hexes of movement are subtracted from falling velocity: if they exceed the velocity, then the fall is broken and the hero is now moving under his or her own Power; if they do not, then the velocity is slowed by the difference and can be maintained at that value as long as the movement Power is feasibly still employed against it, as the hero continues to fall.

In the lucky event that the location offers some projections on the way down, the hero may grab at them to arrest the fall, with a Dexterity roll. If it succeeds, then the Defense + Body of whatever it is subtract from the velocity in hexes. As objects go, repeat offenders include flagpoles (Defense 2, Body 4), awnings (Defense 3, Body 1), and branches (Defense 3, Body 4).

If that's enough to bring it to zero, then the hero is hanging there from the thing. The thing also receives damage as 1d6 per hex of arrested velocity, which may break it – therefore, if the velocity exactly equals that value, the fall is stopped, but the thing breaks. More elegantly, a hero with Acrobatics may attempt a Dexterity roll to use such a projection to move to a controlled landing.

Trying to save a person by catching them at the point of impact is ridiculous; but that doesn't stop it from happening in the comics! It's a feat of both Dexterity and Strength, rolling the former to make the maneuver in the first place, and the latter to match against the velocity of the fall. If the Body rolled by Strength equals or exceeds the Body of the velocity dice, then all is well; if it doesn't, then the damage of the difference applies to falling and catching persons alike.

COOL DIGS AND HOT WHEELS

No matter how expensive or high-tech, most places and vehicles aren't rated or built in Points. Roughly speaking, the things that fit well into the "person" corner for each hero may be considered part of their lives, whether owned by them or part of their jobs or anything similar. If the hero's lifestyle or circumstances change dramatically, then the places associated with them shift accordingly, again, without Points involved.

You may, however, turn Points to the purpose of enhancing or inventing locations and vehicles, making them part of a hero's sheet just like anything else on it is. In terms of the three corners, this is the only way you can associate locations and vehicles with your hero identity and actions, as opposed to the person corner, and they may certainly surpass realistic limitations in terms of tech, coolness, and capacity.

- Heroes use their Points from their total amount.
- Villains begin play with a grant of 5-40 Points.

Cool as it may be to have such a place or vehicle of one's own, it's downright awesome to have one that's built across more than one sheet, with two or more heroes contributing Points. Such things may amass considerable emotional investment and development in their features, and go very far to establish and maintain a distinctive group identity.

For 5 points, you may designate a place or vehicle the hero would reasonably have due to his or her person corner or establish a new one at about the same size, approximate value, and general features. These Points effectively make the item permanent, in fictional terms. If it's damaged or even destroyed, you can get it back or get something equivalent as soon as conceivable. They also count toward the Powers and other features described below.

Its Point total may be increased with Situations, which apply in play to any and all heroes who make use of the thing, not just the ones who provided the Points.

Situation	Points	Details
Public Identity	10	It is the topic of ongoing government, media, and cultural attention, including visits which bypass concealment or secrecy
Unluck 1-3d6	5 per d6	Unlike the hero version of the Situation, this is due to a specific feature or ongoing circumstance

No other Situations may contribute to its Points. Even if a supporting cast person lives at the location or invented the vehicle, he or she is not a Dependent Non-Player Character for it, nor does a villain or organization who wants to destroy or control the base count as a Hunted. If you want individuals with these roles or goals in play, then they are either included as part of Unluck's definition or they belong in a hero's Situations.

You can put more Points into it, and very probably should.

All Powers and Advantages are eligible. They require no Point-based staffing or maintenance, and they have no formal Endurance or Limitations, however, they are subject to aggressive interpretations of their limitations, requirements, vulnerabilities, and energy requirements as special effects.

The following may remind you of some well-known examples from the comics.

Feature	Powers	Variants
Hidden	Concealment, Invisibility	Hard to locate it within an obscured region/Some part or area inside it is obscured
Surveillance	Awareness	Of things inside it, Situational/Of the surroundings, Expanded Scope for the region/Of further targets, increased Expanded Scope
Hardening	Force Wall	Durability for structures Barrier to prevent access
Specialized protection	Special Defense, Life Support	For itself, vs. exterior and interior attacks/For persons within it, vs. exterior attacks
Strange interior	Flash (orientation)	Teleport vs. others (disrupts movement)/Random/Controlled or directed
Mobility	Flight, Teleport, Swimming; Expanded Scope	Getting to it and back from it/ Traveling around in it
Weaponized	Any attack	On contact (Aura)/Ranged/ Specialized for impact (Strike)

Living and working spaces are common features, either for a base as a literal home or a vehicle as group transport.

Feature	Rules	Points
People's space	Living quarters for everyone who contributed Points; includes sanitary, sleeping, and dining	5
	Passenger accommodations for everyone who contributed Points	5
	Common or dormitory-style quarters; includes common dining and sanitary	5
	Offices and specialized professional space	5
	Public space for reception, interaction, events	5

For facilities, the listed Points establish the space and basic functions. For them to do anything special, you'll also need some Powers.

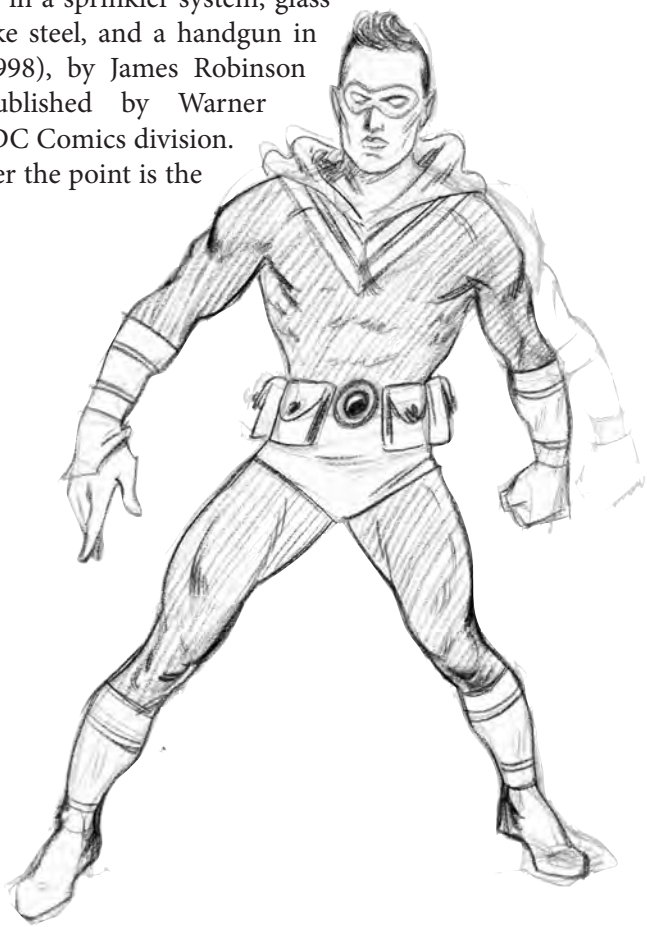
Functions	Variants	Points
Exercise and training	Strength, flexibility, fighting practice	5
	"Danger rooms" for practice vs. automated, responsive attacks	10
Medical	5	
Security	Information	5
	Physical protection	5
Labs		5
Libraries or databanks		5
Recreation		5
Imprisonment	per unit	5

These features require maintenance personnel unless the Autonomous feature is included.

REFERENCES

(1) Dimensions may certainly be a hazard unto themselves, especially for stranding people. Kryptonians have long punished criminals, and occasionally Superman, by banishing them to the Phantom Zone, where they can drift ghost-like and observe, but cannot interact with, our universe. (Fortunately, it's not very secure!) Similarly, the Negative Zone is so alien and forbidding that Tony Stark at one point builds a prison for wayward superheroes there. The former first appeared in *Adventure Comics #283* (1961) by Robert Bernstein and George Papp, published by National Comics using its Superman DC imprint. The latter first appeared in *Fantastic Four #51* (1966), by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, published by Magazine Management using its Marvel Comics imprint.

(2) Sometimes the deathtrap joke is more funny than others. The third Mist, a particularly deadly and disturbed foe of Starman, managed to kill the second Amazing Man, Crimson Fox, and Blue Devil using a series of cleverly fatal traps that included holy water in a sprinkler system, glass walls painted to look like steel, and a handgun in *Starman Vol. 2 #38* (1998), by James Robinson and Dusty Abell, published by Warner Communications in its DC Comics division. It's good to know whether the point is the "death" or the "trap."



CHAPTER 11
FIGHTING WORDS

These rules and their outcomes are to be used with verve, toward the decisive finishing of fights. And let the results fall where they may! If everyone plays their heroes as best they might, and you'll find that these points of decision and thought pay off. Abandon the habit of softening blows or handing over victories. Don't manage "where the story goes." That pernicious nonsense has no place here.

ORDERING

This chapter is about the fight once you really know you're in it. It is unequivocally in progress, after whatever single-action moments which may have signaled its onset. It's on – and it's going on.

The sequencing unit is called a segment, and we consider six of them at a time. You refer to a segment by number as if it were a location, as in, "on 2," "on 5," et cetera.

You don't get to go every segment. That's what Speed is for – the number of segments you get, which are ordered like so:

	Segment	1	2	3	4	5	6
Speed	6	✳	✳	✳	✳	✳	✳
	5	✳	✳		✳	✳	✳
	4	✳		✳		✳	✳
	3		✳		✳		✳
	2			✳		✳	
	1				✳		

A segment you're active on is called a Phase, or rather "your Phase." Find your Speed and read across, and the dots are your Phases. Lots of things occur until the start or end of "your next Phase," so it's important vocabulary.

Within a Phase, actions proceed based on Dexterity or Ego, depending on what the character happens to be doing. It's pretty easy once you're in it – "All right, that's the end of Segment 2, we're on Segment 3," and everyone whose Phases include 3 takes action from highest relevant score (Dexterity or Ego) to lowest. Then we all go to Segment 4 to see who's got a Phase there.

For tied Dexterity and Ego values among heroes, the players decide who goes first. When villains or other NPCs are tied, they go in the order the game master decides. When villains and heroes are tied, villains go first.

Obviously, you need to know how much you can do on your Phase, which is one and only one of these:

- Stay where you are and do any full-Phase action
- Stay where you are and do any half-Phase or full-Phase action
- If the first half-Phase action isn't an attack, you can do another one, attack or otherwise
- If it's an attack, you're done
- Move over half your movement allowance (a full move, up to your maximum)
- Move up to half your movement allowance and do a half-Phase action
- Do a half-Phase action that isn't an attack and then move up to half your movement allowance
- Do a 0-Phase action, timed in the Phase according to the particular type; you can do more than one, but only one of each type
- Any Free actions you like; these are liberated from the Speed Chart and may be thrown in during your Phase or during anyone else's, whenever you want

Full-Phase Actions

- Full Move (any distance from half Move to full)
- Move-By or Move-Through (any distance up to full Move)
- Fully defensive avoidance: Dodge, Martial Dodge
- Recover from being Stunned
- Voluntary Recovery (no Phase actions permitted; free actions are permitted)
- Use most skills; exceptions are indicated below

Half-Phase Actions

- ½ Move (any distance up to half Move)
- Basic Maneuvers: Punch, Kick, Grab
- Break free (Strength or Ego)
- Martial Maneuvers: Martial Punch, Martial Kick, Throw, Martial Block
- Actively seek something with a perception roll
- Shifting slots within a Multiform, only at the beginning of a Phase
- Shifting the Variable Power Pool array using a Control Skill, only at the beginning of a Phase

0 Phase Actions

- Turning a power on or off, at any point during a Phase
- Using the Climbing or Acrobatics skill to move, or the Stealth skill with any other actions
- Pushing a power or characteristic as an add-on to an action, during its use
- Making an Ego roll associated with an action, e.g., pushing extra, during its use
- Sensing something without trying, as called for by circumstances, only at the beginning of a Phase

Free actions

- Speaking ("Monologue")
- Presence Attack
- Missile Deflection

REACTIVITY

You're not supposed to wait obediently for your formal go-moments in the Speed Chart. Doing that creates a potential stop-motion, freeze-frame effect which isn't really what the system's for. It's more dynamic if you use the Chart merely as a chassis for anticipatory and reactive options.

You can **hold actions**, meaning, not acting when your designated moment arrives. To hold, you must state what you anticipate doing, to give everyone an idea of what your hero is looking at and how they're acting, although you're not entirely locked into whatever you say and can shift to doing something else instead. Any combination of ordinarily-permitted actions is allowed when you do act.

You cannot hold a ½ Phase action by itself, i.e., doing a ½ Phase action and holding "the rest." To hold an action, you have to give it all up at its default arrival, even if all you do with it later is a ½ Phase action.

You can hold until later within the same Phase, in which case you can either "step in" just after someone else goes, or pre-empt someone whose action is about to come up. If your pre-emption is an attack, you must succeed with either a Dexterity roll or Ego roll in order to get in first. You may also hold past the end of the Phase, which isn't really all that different. If your actual next Phase arrives, however, then the hold ends and the potential action is lost.

Holding actions is necessary for two of the most important team-tactics in the system, assisting and coordinating attacks.

Reactive actions concern being attacked. Your hero is not standing there like a post on a target range, so his or her relevant characteristic is already factored into the standard attack roll. A few specialized maneuvers and powers allow for rolls in response to an attack, including Martial Block and Missile Deflection.

You also have the more drastic option to cancel your next entire Phase's worth of action to defend better than you currently would be able. You may perform a defensive combat maneuver (Dodge, Martial Dodge, Martial Block, Martial Throw, Missile Deflection, or an attack power with the Reactive Advantage) or turn on a defensive power (Force Field, Force Wall, Desolid, Shrinking, or a similar power). In doing so, you can move up to two hexes, getting the bonus from Acrobatics if you have it, but you can't use a movement power.

If it's during one of your Phases before your place in "line" has arrived, then you lose the Phase you're in. If it's after your action during a Phase, or during a segment that isn't your Phase, then the following Phase you'd act in, whatever it might be, is lost.

POSITIONING

Super-combat is pure choreography, and knowing who's where, whether they're in motion and how much, can be an art of its own.

The rules terms imply using a hex map for most situations of play, in which a hex represents two meters of fictional space. However, in practice you don't need an actual physical sheet with hexes marked on it. The listed distances are approximate and intuitive: a hex is "personal space," a sphere just a bit taller than a person, or a bit more than full arms-width, which is the same thing. For movement within this space, by default a hero has 6 hexes of Running, 2 hexes of Jump, and 2 hexes of Swimming; but most will obviously have more extensive capabilities based on characteristics and powers.

As mentioned above, the Speed Chart does not represent a metronome for fixed-in-fiction time. If it did, then continuous movement from Phase to Phase would become quite strange, e.g., is the character moving while he or she cannot otherwise "go?" If not, what does that even look like?

Instead, these mechanics embrace comics-panel logic and treat the Phases as "what we see," e.g. when the attack or movement lands, letting the in-between fall into the gutters of the panels. Whatever time-slash-physics wiggle you may need goes into those and thus doesn't bother our heads. That's been perfectly functional throughout the history of comics, and it's functional here.

You'll need to attend to high-momentum moves sometimes, e.g. shaving off a hex of movement for turning corners during maximum Flight or Running, or slight time-lapses for especially far Superleap and Knockback so that they finish

at the end of a Phase. Flight may also see some adjustment based on its three dimensions, as it hardly ever goes completely flat or completely vertical.

The listed hexes-traveled for a power doesn't describe actual distance-over-time outside the scale of one Phase, so traditional speedometer descriptions of velocity usually aren't relevant. However, when they are, e.g., you're trying to catch or get ahead of a vehicle in motion, Speed must be factored in.

	Speed					
hexes	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	6 kph	12 kph	18 kph	24 kph	30 kph	36 kph
10	12 kph	24 kph	36 kph	48 kph	60 kph	72 kph
15	18 kph	36 kph	54 kph	72 kph	90 kph	108 kph
20	24 kph	48 kph	72 kph	96 kph	120 kph	144 kph
25	30 kph	60 kph	90 kph	120 kph	150 kph	180 kph
30	36 kph	72 kph	108 kph	144 kph	180 kph	216 kph

Or in U.S./UK units,

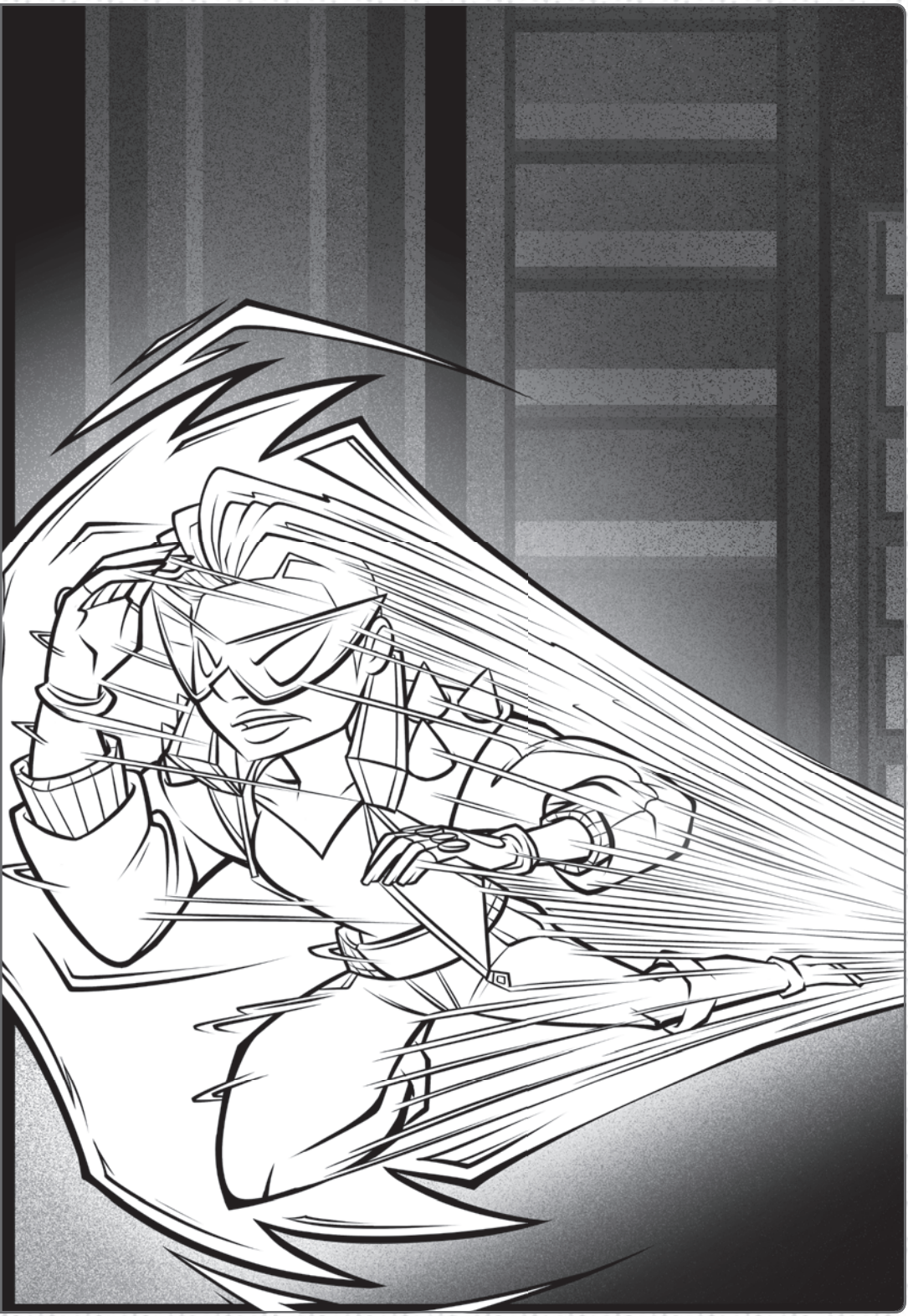
	Speed					
hexes	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	3.75 mph	7.5 mph	11.25 mph	15 mph	18.75 mph	22.5 mph
10	7.5 mph	15 mph	22.5 mph	30 mph	37.5 mph	45 mph
15	11.25 mph	22.5 mph	33.75 mph	45 mph	56.25 mph	67.5 mph
20	15 mph	30 mph	45 mph	60 mph	75 mph	90 mph
25	18.75 mph	37.5 mph	56.25mph	75 mph	93.75 mph	112.5 mph
30	22.5 mph	45 mph	67.5 mph	90 mph	112.5 mph	135 mph

However, movement velocity is much, much different outside of combat and these values don't apply.

ORIENTING

In a combat situation, everyone's understanding of the physical situation should be interpreted generously by default, to the unrealistic degree of a bird's-eye view. A given hero will know where everyone in their perceptual field is, what they can and can't attack, who might be targeting them, and they won't get disoriented about who's moving which way or doing what.

However, if the location is confusing or has features that don't allow analogizing, the default switches, so that a given hero is disoriented about directions and uncertain about what everyone else is doing. It's treated as a hazard specific to them, applying the power Concealment, customized as needed for the situational details.



To orient oneself, whether about the location or regarding an opponent, a hero makes a perception roll, using Intelligence. A different "however" occurs when someone gets sneaky, using some combination of Stealth, Security Systems, Climbing, Invisibility, Concealment, and movement Powers that may apply, varying in who is and isn't deceived. Chapter 12: Dynamic Mechanics provides the nuances.

HITTING AND NOT HITTING

Roll 3d6 to target anyone or anything successfully, comparing a characteristic of the attacker to that of the defender to arrive at the right target number.

The characteristic is Dexterity for physical attacks and by Ego for ego-based attacks; in this context, the one you use is called the Combat Value (sometimes abbreviated to CV). To hit someone, add your Combat Value to 11, subtract theirs of the same type, and that's the target number for rolling 3d6. Equal to that value or below hits.

Example: Grimfire punches Killer Coil. His Dexterity is 12 and hers is 13. 11 + 12 – 13 = 10, so the player must roll 10 or less on 3d6 to hit.

Example: Anybug uses his Stink Bug Spray on Domain. His Dexterity is 14 and Domain's is 11. 11 + 14 – 11 = 14, so the player must roll 14 or less on 3d6 to hit.

Example: Domain uses Hegemony (Mind Control) on The Which. Domain's Ego is 14 and hers is 12. 11 + 14 – 12 = 13, so the game master must roll 13 or less on 3d6 to hit.

Different groups talk through this roll differently. If I'm the game master, I like the player to say their Dexterity or Ego out loud, then roll the dice and tell me what they got. I'll do the little "+11 – target's value" in my head and tell them if they hit or not. Other people like to rearrange the spoken algebra their own way; it really doesn't matter.

The characteristics used in the roll to hit are almost always adjusted by fast-and-momentary tactics and circumstances, determined mostly by whatever maneuver describes the stated action best.

Hitting a stationary thing or a hex-sized space at close range requires no roll; doing so at a distance uses the same roll as above, for which the target is considered to have a relevant value of 6.

But before listing those tactics and circumstances, note this well: the game master also throws in a +1 or an extra die of effect whenever someone announces something fun and exciting. There's no limited resource, so don't negotiate about it or plead for it – this is another one of those loosey-goosey special effects concepts, with no standards beyond who is playing and what is happening.

Fighting Maneuvers

Offensive	Defensive	Damage/notes	
Punch (any close physical attack)	+0	+0	1x damage
Grab	-1	-2	May be followed by squeeze or throw
Dodge	+0	+3	No attack

Interesting Maneuvers

	Offensive	Defensive	Damage/notes
Area effect attack	Range modifier -1/6 hexes	+0	Target area defensive value 6; attack roll is then compared to individual defensive values
Coordinated attack	-2	-2	Requires simultaneity; Knockout damage is cumulative; Knockbacks are added together
Assist	+0	-1	Requires simultaneity; provides offensive value for another attacker's use
Find Weakness	+0	+0	Increases attack effectiveness by 1d6 per successful use against a given target
Move-By	-2	-2	+d6 damage / 5 hexes moved
Move-Through	-4	-4	+d6 damage / 2 hexes moved

Martial Maneuvers

	Offensive	Defensive	Damage/notes
Martial Punch	+0	+1	+3d6 damage
Martial Kick	-2	+1	+6d6 damage
Martial Block	+0	+2	No abort for reactive use
Martial Dodge	+0	+5	No attack
Martial Throw	+ velocity/5	+0	+1d6 damage / 5 hexes moved; prone
And Out	+0	+0	½ Move following attack

Ego Maneuvers

	Offensive	Defensive	Damage/notes
			All modifiers apply for Ego-based attack and defense only
Ego Evade	+0	+3	Defensive action.
Mindscape	+2	+2	Accompanies an attack and may be maintained thereafter. As long as it is maintained, only Ego Maneuvers and Powers may be used.
Id Rush	+3	-3	Accompanies an attack. Requires an Ego roll to resist irrational action based on one or more Psychological Situations regardless of value
Mind Bar	+0	+1	Defensive action. No roll is required; the bonus applies so long as it is maintained. Locks down an attacking mental power and prevents it from being used. Maintaining the bar is a ½ Phase action. Escaping the bar is a full Phase action and requires no roll.
Mind Stab	+0	+0	Target must already be Mind-Barred; no attack roll required. Inflicts 1d6 Knockout per 1d6 points Endurance spent.
Self Mastery	+0	+0	Attack using Ego to shift level of Ego-based power affecting you downward by one level. It is not necessary to perceive the target.

Range for Dexterity-based distance attacks

	Modifier
0-3 hexes	+0
Each additional 3 hexes	-1

This and that

	Effects
Move before attacking	-1 offensive
Acrobatics	+2 defensive, move at least 2 hexes
Skill levels	+ to relevant value as assigned by player
Surprise moves	+1 to +3 offensive bonus
Prone	-3 defensive for adjacent attacks; + 3 defensive for distance attacks
Flashed or Entangled	Defensive value drops to 6

This is the complete list, so you don't have to cross-reference it with anything. The net effects are extremely dramatic, but since they're all cumulative, it's a lot to process until you get used to your hero's typical use of them. A bunch of little counters to shove around for plus and minus can help.

Example: When Grimfire punches Killer Coil, it so happens that she used the Martial Kick maneuver in her last Phase, so her defensive combat value is +1, therefore 14 instead of 13. Therefore the player's target number on 3d6 is 11 + 12 – 14 = 9 or less.

Example: When Anybug Stink Bug Sprays Domain, it so happens that he is about 8 meters away (about 25 feet), or 4 hexes. Range modifiers work in units of -1 per 3 full hexes, so his combat value is -1, at 13 instead of 14. Therefore the player's target number on 3d6 is 11 + 13 – 11 = 13 or less.

Example: When Domain uses Hegemony on The Which with the Id Rush Maneuver, for a +3 attacking combat value of 17. Therefore the game master's target number on 3d6 is 11 + 17 – 12 = 16 or less.

DOWN, OUT, AND OVER

Successful attacks are assessed for damage and other effects like Knockback based on the powers being used. Don't forget that missed attacks may well hit something and are often an important event in a fight.

Getting knocked around

Strength-based impacts and the Blast power typically produce a secondary damage effect called Knockback, which is that wonderful, jet-propelled-looking long-distance sprawl that is so much fun to draw.

In addition to the ordinary damage dice, roll 1d6.

- 1 means no Knockback
- 2-5 means that many hexes of Knockback
- 6 means that the hexes of Knockback equal the Core rolled for the attack

The High Impact advantage is like always rolling a 6, so the attack's damage always equals the Core rolled. Special Defense: Knockback cancels it back to the ordinary rules. Hitting with a bat-like object gets you extra Knockback hexes per length of the object in hexes.

If you are flying or otherwise not standing on anything, or if you are currently Stunned, then roll an additional die and add the results to the first. If you are not knocked into anything, you are considering to be falling at the end of the knockback path. For every two hexes you are knocked back, take 1d6 damage

as a separate attack if you aren't sent into anything. If you are, then roll and take damage as if for the initial attack, again. A person who is knocked back ends up prone, unless they can do something about it using Strength or Acrobatics.

Given a solid surface to brace against, including the ground or floor, you may roll Strength to resist Knockback as a reactive action, spending the required Endurance. The Core rolled counteracts the hexes of Knockback one for one, with the added benefit of not being knocked prone.

Acrobatics permits a Dexterity roll to avoid being knocked prone or, if you are flying, to remain airborne at the end of the path. Neither applies if you've been knocked back into some object.

Getting Stunned

Losing Knockout points is a foregone conclusion, and in small doses it has no immediate effect. However, if, after defenses, you take Knockout damage from a single hit that equals or exceeds your Stunned value, you're stunned.

- Your defensive values for combat rolls drop to 6.
- All active Powers that cost Endurance turn off.
- You may only perform free actions during your next Phase and you cannot move at the scale of hexes. This Phase is called "recovery from being Stunned," but you do not recover Body, Knockout, or Endurance.

Getting knocked out

Predictably, if your Knockout is taken down to 0, you're knocked out. Your Endurance drops to 0 as well, and you are considered an inanimate object for all purposes of movement and targeting. You can Recover in your next Phase, to be at your Recovery value for both Knockout and Endurance. But you can only do that once in a fight. Get knocked out again, and you're an insensate hulk until such a time as the game master says otherwise.

Getting hurt

The other kind of injury you take comes off Body, which is potentially real tissue-trauma injury. As long as Body remains above 0, there are no mandated effects of injury, but players have been known to assign their characters penalties or reduced function of some kind, just because they like to.

Body damage does recover, at 1 point per recovery action. By default, the perceived injury isn't as bad as it seemed at first, or is simply treated unrealistically in terms of permanent harm. If Body is taken to 0, it operates similarly to Knockout: the character may recover, but if Body is reduced to 0 a second time, they are rendered helpless. Furthermore, they are nominally dying.

A dying character's Endurance drops to 0 and their Knockout to 1, unless it was at 0. This condition is not automatically fatal, but the character cannot do anything but talk, and then only if they have positive Knockout.

- Dying is elective for a hero, occurring only at the player's choice.
- If you want justification, consider that anyone who stays with the hero can keep him or her alive, even absurdly so, like a dog or a toddler; or that thinking "must – hold – on!" may be considered a relevant action
- Adverse circumstances afterward may prevent a dying character from becoming functional again until they receive specific care or some condition based on the injury's special effects, at the game master's judgment.
- A dying non-player character may be declared dead by the player whose hero delivered the relevant attack.
- A dying non-player-character who came to that state by another non-player-character or some environmental effect lives or dies as the game master says.

Getting negated

Characteristics may be reduced by Weaken and Powers may be suppressed by Negate, or if it's nasty and Destructive, ruined by it.

- Strength taken to 0 dice may still be used at that value, relying on Pushing.
- Presence taken to 0 dice may still be used at that value, relying on situational modifiers.
- Dexterity may be used normally at 6 or above, below which the target is unable to direct his or her physical actions. Using Ego-based or otherwise non-physical actions depends on the circumstances, especially for their field of perception.
- Intelligence and Ego may be used normally at 6 or above, below which the target becomes confused or demotivated.
- The target must make the relevant Characteristic roll at the current value as a 0-phase action in order to direct any and all actions of any kind; failure means he or she cannot act or performs some nonsensical, non-advantageous action.
- Actions using the relevant characteristic use the current value, including 0.
- A Power whose effect is exceeded by Negate is switched off; if it is Destroyed in the process, it cannot be used at all until the recovery condition is met.

Absent relevant special effects or the Destructive Advantage, reduced features are restored by recovery actions.

- Strength and Presence regain 1d6 per Recovery, or 1d6 equal to the value rolled if Regeneration is used.

- Powers regain one unit of effect per Recovery, usually expressed as dice.
- Dexterity, Intelligence, and Ego regain 1 point per Recovery.

If any of these is taken to 0 a second time during a confrontation, an appropriate incapacitating effect occurs, equivalent to the effects for Body and Knockout.

Getting tired

In combat everyone burns Endurance like mad. You have to do it just to move and fight at all, or when you try to break free of things using Strength or Ego. Even missed attacks spend the stuff!

Ongoing powers which require Endurance only cost you on your Phases, not on the segments in between. (That's the comics panels logic coming in again.)

Then there's Pushing, which you can do with any action that requires Endurance.

- Pay d6 Endurance per 5 Active Points of increased effect
- Pay d6 Endurance per the Strength's or power's 5 Active Points for one of the following effects
- Area Effect (single-hex or explosion, no selective targeting)
- Piercing
- High Impact
- Severe (damage is reduced by resistant Defense)

To Push a further consecutive action, make an Ego roll. If you fail, you cannot Push this time, but merely hit the listed value on your sheet (and spend its Endurance cost). you're free to start a new Push next time, assuming you're still upright.

When Endurance hits 0, you can use Knockout instead, taking 1d6 Knockout damage for each equivalent of 2 Endurance spent. This either rolls over during an action if Endurance runs out in the middle of it, or is used to power an action from scratch if Endurance is already at 0. And always remember: Endurance is a precious commodity, to be tracked, protected, and husbanded with great care. Spending it has real, in-game consequences, and losses due to Drain are thus justly feared.

Reviewing recovery

Super-fights are a race against your own reserves, villains included. If combatants make it past the first full-powered furious assaults, they're sucking wind and fearing a solid hit. Knowing how to recover, and what, and how much, is a key factor in play.

The simplest recovery is when you're Stunned. It's involuntary and requires a full Phase. You regain no points of any kind, but when it's over, you're not Stunned any more.

The other kind is voluntary and again requires a full Phase, permitting only free actions. All of the following effects are applied.

- If Endurance and Knockout are not at full values, both regain points equal to Recovery, up to each full value
- If Strength and/or Presence are reduced by Weaken, both follow the same rule, with 1d6 restored per Recovery
- If Powers are reduced fully by Negate, they all follow the same rule, regaining a unit of effect per Recovery if the Negate is not maintained
- If Body, Dexterity, Intelligence, Ego, or Speed are damaged or reduced, they all regain 1 point

The above values also apply when Knockout or Body reaches 0 for the first time during a fight, occurring during the hero's next Phase. These values recover up from 0. If either is taken to 0 again during this fight, then the hero is unconscious or dying and will remain so throughout the fight.

The Regeneration power allows 1d6 more Body, Dexterity, Intelligence, Ego, and Speed to be regained through recovery per 10 Power Points. It does not prevent the unconscious or dying results, but it does ensure that "dying" status is entirely nominal as far as fictional causes are concerned.

The Destructive Advantage prevents the effects of the attack from being restored by recovery, although Regeneration permits restoration of Body and the other relevant scores equal to the Core value rolled. If Destructive damage takes a hero to 0 Knockout or Body, it is treated as the second time, so the hero is thoroughly unconscious or dying.

Example: Anybug has been busy in a fight, so is at Knockout 11, Endurance 20, and Body 10. He takes a Phase to recover. His Recovery 13, so Knockout and Endurance are brought up to 24 and 33 respectively, and Body is brought up to 11.

At some point thereafter, he receives 15 points of Knockout from a single blow, bringing him to 9 Knockout and Stunning him. His next Phase is automatically a recovery from being Stunned, but it does not change his current values for anything.

Interaction and influence

This is comics, so the words on a page don't care how long it takes to read them. The system does this too, not just because a paragraph and a half spoken as the hero flips in mid-air is funny, but because fights are more than competitive choreography, they are confrontations.

Speaking (called "monologue," but it includes dialogue), including Presence Attacks, uses no mechanical time at all. And unlike 0 Phase actions, which must be performed according to the Speed chart and the various modifying rules, it can be done at any time. You can do it in tandem with any action. You can even do it when you're recovering.

When communication is involved, whoever you want to perceive what you're saying will do so, unless obvious circumstances absolutely dictate otherwise. Any relevant information you perceive or find out can be delivered, no matter who is punching whom or currently clawing their way out from under a ton of debris. And you can provide all the information, without needing a stopwatch at the table.

Take a look at Presence, sometimes tagged as the most significant mechanic in the system, with good reason. It is directed against a specific target or targets who can perceive the hero, affecting them and to a lesser extent everyone who can perceive the hero.

To make a Presence Attack, you roll your Presence dice outright; there's no to-hit roll. It must represent a strong emotion or resolve. It may or may not include a command, depending on what is said, if anything. The modifiers matter greatly, as circumstances may yield surprising combinations for them. They are very definitely cumulative.

- -1d6 you're in combat
- -1d6 you're at a current disadvantage, including during a Recovery action
- -1d6 you are unknown to the target or have a reputation that works against what you're saying
- -1d6 for any degree of Unusual Looks or combination of them
- -2d6 for repeating the same or similar Presence Attack against a given target (cumulative)
- -3d6 for directly contradicting the prevailing mood of the target(s)
- +1d6 you're exhibiting a power
- +1d6 you're doing something violent
- +2d6 as above, but very
- +3d6 as above, but very very
- +1d6 good soliloquy (you're making sense)
- +2d6 as above, but excellent (well-suited to the target's values and Psychological Situations)
- +3d6 as above, but incredible
- +1d6 setting is appropriate
- +2d6 setting is very appropriate

Some of these are obviously more suited to telling people something specific, and others to just wowing them into inaction, but look at how important that soliloquy and setting are. You're penalized a lot when trying to talk down or intimidate someone who's punching you and hates your guts, but if you say the right thing at the right time, you just might make your point.

- "Don't do it, Death-Skull! She's – your daughter!"
- "Gasp! You swore you'd never tell!"
- "My … daughter? But they told me you were dead!"
- And the whole fight changes.

It's possible to end up with no dice and therefore no effective Presence Attack. Aside from this unhappy case, once you know the total dice, roll them and count the Core. Roll the defender's Presence as well; it is all right to roll once collectively for crowds or groups without specific known individuals in them. The defending rolls use unmodified Presence only.

Subtract the defender's result from the attacker's and use the following table.

Difference in Core	Effects
Less than 0	No effect
0 or 1	Impressed; opponents may act before the affected person this Phase if applicable
2-3	Very impressed; they will consider the content of the Attack seriously and will lose any held action or lose their upcoming ½ Phase action
4-5	Awed and inclined to comply, however briefly; they will lose any held action and their next Phase, and drop DCV to 6 until the beginning of the one after that
6+	Cowed; they may surrender, run away, or faint; if they do not, their defending value drops to 6 for the rest of the fight

Everyone who perceives the Presence Attack is affected, but those it's not specifically directed against are reduced in effect by one step. Yes, your own allies may be a little gobsmacked when you do the things you need for big dice bonuses, and you may find yourself going before Mr. Speedy for once.

Example: Grimfire punches one of the kidnappers off of some elevated point inside the burning church. With the young child held safe in one arm and his Nimbus flickering out to its full Innocence extent, he tells the others, "This place is mine now. Choose: the police outside, or me, in here!"

Let me count the ways: -1d6 for being in the midst of combat, -1d6 for his Unusual Looks (they might be too scared to think straight), +1d6 for exhibiting a Power, +2d6 for a violent action (the guy was really punched and fell hard), +2d6 for the soliloquy (that was pretty good, I think), and +2d6 for the very appropriate setting. That's +5d6 to his base Presence of 4d6, for 9 dice total.

One consideration is the mood of the target: in this case, these opponents' scheme had already gone awry and they were not invested in any kind of endgame-showdown with Grimfire. Against fanatics who were seeking exactly that, he would have lost 3 more dice for the Presence Attack.

There is a single, specific zone of immunity: the Dependent NPCs and Hunteds are immune to the Presence of the hero whose sheet they're on.

Presence effects ripple throughout all the other mechanics in nigh-infinite forms. Sacrificing Endurance may be the guts of a super confrontation, but Presence is its heart.

HAZARDS YOU CAN FIGHT

At the smaller scale of immediate combat, hazards are less like environments and more like opponents, so they are a little more customized and easier to fight directly.

The basics remain the same: a hazard is located in an area defined by one or more hexes, it has Speed 2, and its effects are expressed by powers with default 60 Active Points which do not need to roll to hit, as organized with the Hazard rubric. The big difference is that instead of a diffuse effect throughout that area, the hazard is actually a thing, so it can be targeted and fought as such, it can move with a default running speed of 6 hexes, and the area that it affects doesn't have to be the hexes it's in, or the same size.

It can be fought by delivering ordinary damage to its physical location, removing its size by one hex. Its combat value is 6 and its Defense and Body apply to each hex. One of the aggravating features of this type of hazard is that its effectiveness is not at all reduced accordingly; it continues to be its annoying or even deadly self until it's all gone. Therefore if it occupies several or many hexes, it can take a lot of time or a concerted effort by several allies to get rid of, and all the while it can still produce its full effect.

One common combat hazard is made of people, in this case a concerted small group, like a squad or little mob rather than the diffuse effect of a large crowd. If they have ranged weapons, the effect acts as a cone or adjacent area, but they also have an Entangle effect if you get in there with them, with may be fought directly with Strength or avoided with Acrobatics. Perhaps their most important feature is that you can't ignore them, as they will run about doing things the heroes don't want, like killing hostages or setting off devices.

Also, they are subject to Presence Attacks, with a score of 2d6 for defensive purposes. This may seem small but the -1d6 for combat and -3d6 for prevailing mood apply at all times, and if they are associated with a hero's Hunted Situation, or are conceivably a Dependent NPC, then they enjoy the standard immunity to that hero's Presence.

Luck in a Fight

Luck is rolled in combat when things are going badly for the hero's goals: something or someone they want to protect is in more danger than before, someone on their side has been taken out of the fight to any extent; an opponent appears positioned to achieve their overall goal; or the social or more general context of the fight has turned against the heroes. Unluck applies for all the opposite circumstances.

In combat, their effects apply to logistic and momentary details rather than to the general, situational, or potentially plot-shaping effects they have in less hectic circumstances. They bring in physical and other circumstances that are unexpectedly more helpful or unhelpful, but which are easily understood to be already present, rather than things happening from out of the blue. If you're into realism, then Unluck is the perfect opportunity to dial down the "comic-book" for a moment, to the hero's dismay.

Core rolled	Effects
0	No effect
1	Some object or structure provides useful vantage or protection, your current position is more advantageous than it seemed, an ally is well-placed for cooperating with something, someone's covert participation in the situation is now evident
2	Some object or event is helpful to your powers' special effects, useful information suddenly becomes evident, an opportunity for surprise arises, an opponent encounters unexpected difficulty
3	Someone you needed to protect is taking care of themselves, someone you wanted to stop loses a clear path to their goal, the thing you wanted to get is now coincidentally in your possession
4	As 1 but applies to everyone in the situation whom you like and would want to help
5	As 2 but applies to everyone in the situation whom you like and would want to help
6	As 3 but applies to everyone in the situation whom you like and would want to help

Unluck is rolled when things are going well for the hero: they appear positioned to achieve their overall goal; their intended messaging is working; or one or more opponents have been taken out of the fight to any extent

Core rolled	Effects
0	No effect
1	A difficult surface or inconvenient object, impairs movement, an equipment malfunction or frequency interference loses a little time, a distracting detail or event loses perception of an intended target
2	A power goes awry or its special effects are blunted by something or other, necessary communication is impaired, something you secured goes missing, a new event divides your attention
3	A significant change occurs to the physical or social context for the confrontation, an opponent gains a significant advantage for their next action, your overall goal becomes more complicated or less available
4	As 1 but applies to everyone in the situation whom you like and would want to help
5	As 2 but applies to everyone in the situation whom you like and would want to help
6	As 3 but applies to everyone in the situation whom you like and would want to help

In the multiple-action, high-dialogue context of playing combat situations, the Luck/Unluck results need to be kept quick, so it's most pragmatic for the game master to deliver them as rapid punctuations of what's going on.

CHAPTER 12
DYNAMIC MECHANICS

There is, indeed, a learning curve with Champions. The mechanics are robust from the start, so they won't screw anyone over just because they're new at them. But they're also built to sink your teeth into, specific to your heroes and villains. All these Point-quantified things are inter-connected devices which move, and whose driving engine is you.

FIGHTING SMART

What is any given fight about? "What are we fighting for?"

Or better yet, "What are they fighting for, or to do, or to get?" Only the most simplistic comics featured a villain who's committing crimes and a hero who jumps in, fights them toe to toe, and stops them because the villain goes down first. These were isolated filler stories. Superhero comics in all ages of the medium usually posed more interesting social circumstances, more difficult conditions of knowledge and its absence, and above all, more uniquely motivated villains. Villains don't fight in order to win fights. They have goals to strive for and problems to solve.

Furthermore, the mechanics are built so that no one can "just" beat anyone else. The treacherous dice, the energy requirements, and the shifting contingencies of combat make the outcome more iffy as a fight continues, rather than less. If someone hasn't decked the other person quickly, and if both opponents are in it to the last one standing, then it's time to think – or lose.

Fighting smart relies on Speed and teamwork, which are all about timing, but also on Presence and the terrible twins, Luck/Unluck, which don't care about timing at all.

With just one run through a fight situation, you can easily see that the Speed Characteristic's main job is the promptness of someone's reactions. It's more psychological than physiological, and more than one favorite speedster from the comics is better described with maximal movement, accuracy, and impact mechanics rather than maximal Speed.

If you do have high Speed and use it just to do more actions, you'll be blowing a lot more Endurance, to the point of falling straight into a trap. It's better used to manage actions, rather than simply piling up a lot of them on a known schedule. Consider losing a Phase due to being Stunned or to take a Recovery action. Having an extra Phase or two operates like a soak for these, with the added benefit that most people will be losing most or the rest of the six-Segment turn when they take what you just took, and you're still coming in next at about the time they'd be if they hadn't been Stunned or recovering.

Every superhero group has its own meaning of "team" in fight situations. With a nod back to Chapter 2, even the noblest superheroes are super dirty fighters, and the question is how organized they want to be in setting up and ganging up on their opponents. They vary from hardly any to highly-practiced 'tac squad, but there's always just a bit of teamwork.

Teamwork relies mainly on timing. The simplest version is taking advantage of Speed windows or moments of vulnerability while Stunned or Flashed. With held actions, though, heroes can strike in concert.

- The Coordinated Attack Maneuver provides exact simultaneity given one or more heroes holding actions; the attacks which succeed total their Knockout before defenses apply.
- The Assist Maneuver permits one hero to use the attacking Characteristic and bonuses of another who is directing his or her actions, again, given that one or both has held an action in order to perform simultaneously. More than one speedy, evasive hero has met an unpleasant fate from the ox-like bruiser who let his or her strike be mentally guided by an observant, Ego-based, hyper-aware partner.
- Heroes may arrive at useful, often entertaining combinations of their unique abilities, some of which have even gained names of their own in comics.

Sudden or well-placed attacks get surprise bonuses, but such things are hard to assign unless they use concrete features of the surroundings, accurately exploit the target's priorities, or arrive when they are paying attention to something else. If you have a useful attack and want to be sure it lands, your friends can distract or impede the vision of a powerful opponent they have little chance to take down, setting them up for you.

In order to keep that same thing from happening to them, members of especially cooperative hero teams tend to talk a lot about what they see and what they think is going on. It does seem a bit odd, as if the place were full of brightly-clad athletes acting as their own sports announcers, but the habit is practical, for a group "eyes on" effect to keep anyone from getting bushwhacked.

All this positioning and timing may seem like a deterministic chess match, but then along come the great disruptors of anything so straightforward as space/time: Presence and Luck.

Presence Attacks during combat are mostly for entrances, as their effectiveness drops sharply in the thick of things. Personal staging is harder to arrange, the targets' intentions are typically not cooperative, and repetition is penalized. The significant exception concerns valuable content or context about the fight, for the extra dice for monologues. Here's where prior events and current relationships matter most, as even the most ruthless villain may care about the fate of one or more heroes or be influenced by the relationship to a third party shared with one of them.

What really makes the difference for Presence is its independence from the Speed Chart and even from anything resembling plausible time. The Presence Attack is the low-Speed combatant's revenge: anyone can Presence Attack anybody, whenever, and a good roll disrupts the target's timing, forcing hesitations and lost actions. It's a big wrench thrown right into the chessmaster's careful arrangement of Phases and Maneuvers.

As a best practice, heroes should not use Presence Attacks on each other unless it's fun, like slowing down Enrages or helping to battle Mind Control. If they arise in an ethical dispute, players may be reassured to recall that Presence is not itself Mind Control and that although "consider deeply" may take them aback for now, it does not mean "submit" or "agree."

Not even Presence qualifies for the biggest monkey wrench award, however. Fear Luck and Unluck alike! They laugh at mere bonuses or other statistical adjustments, as they change the whole contexts in which rolls are made in the first place.

I don't even know where to start. Big things fall over. People run around in wrong directions. Inanimate objects inexplicably arrive in unlikely spots. Devices stop working, or perhaps worse, begin. Someone says exactly the right or wrong thing. What you grab isn't what you thought. All these and more happen to us, real people, in our daily lives, so imagine the equivalent for a super-powered crisis. And there's not a Characteristic, Skill, or Power that can prevent it.

With either or both of them firing off, possibly on both sides of a confrontation, a straightforward fight becomes a mad scramble over who can adapt faster to whatever just happened.

STRONG STUFF

There is no such thing as *"the Brick."* Ten super-strong heroes should each have his or her own interesting profile of special effects, Characteristics, Powers, and Modifiers to showcase how Strength is done in addition to merely having Strength. (1)

Special effects play up and define Strength just as they would for a fire-bolt or a pool of demonic shadow. For example, think of someone using the Block Maneuver against a punch that's strong enough to shatter a concrete wall. Since special effects can be hardened into mechanics, any of these (or anything like them) could be used to reflect the might on display:

- Half the Knockout damage gets through anyway; defenses apply
- Require an Endurance expenditure in order to defend
- Apply Knockback as if the strike had been successful

If you want builds instead of momentary special effects, the mechanics are just sitting there waiting. Although one must reluctantly admit that the famous superlatives – unstoppable, immovable, invulnerable – will never literally be the case, you can get pretty close.

Higher Strength may be made Conditional for Situations; Susceptibility, Vulnerability, and Dependence may damage a hero, but there's nothing like heaving up an otherwise impossibly-heavy object while you're reeling from that very damage. And you can't unsee it: Enrage begs for Strength and associated Powers that only work under its influence or following recovery from it. Finally, small-ish Powers can be attached to punches as Strikes that add their effects, for extra pain and disorientation. A Severe little Blast with Strike and No Endurance Cost sets up the "too strong to block safely" effect formally if you want. (2)

Consider defense as well, with the special effect of just flexing real hard, possibly with the Costs Endurance Limitation for extra drama and pushing potential. Such things might be Special Defense: Knockback tied to a Dodge or Block, or Force Field which only works against Knockback, and of course, Special Defense: Ego. More actively, one's physical might can be extended for others' benefit, like a Force Wall with No Range, defined merely as looming into the attack: "Get behind me!" thud thud thud.

How about tactics? The basic rule is easy: hitting things, throwing things, and crushing things all do damage based on the Strength you were using. Things were made to be broken, after all, and you don't have to wait for a game master to fill in what. Pushing for Piercing gives Strength terribly destructive force against them, and a Perception roll can show you the structural details of a building or similar object, so that destroying one hex can set up a collapse.

But there's more to it, because more than anything else in the system, Strength moves things around. You can throw anything! If it's one level below you on the Strength chart, you can shove or heave it a couple of hexes, and if it's two levels below, you can really wing it somewhere, a number of hexes equal to the Strength dice you're using. Pushing, obviously, bumps you higher on the chart.

A couple of technical points on throwing: an aerodynamic object can target a person or something like that, but a non-aerodynamic object targets hexes appropriate to its size. A willing person is aerodynamic; an unwilling one is not. Also, at least one of the objects has to take damage upon impact, and it's up to the thrower to say which, or both.

And who said Knockback can't be given a direction? "I'm hitting them that way!" Remember that business about targeting vulnerable points of structures? It's even better if you punch someone into the super- duper scary, enormous device and bury them in its so-expensive, now-useless pieces. The converse is nasty too: if you have a size advantage from Growth or combine your punch with a leaping attack, you can pound someone straight down and the ground will hit back.

When Strength is pitted against Strength, or against its equivalent in movement (1d6 per 5 hexes), matters are resolved with Body rolls. The moment of impact or tug-of-war can be tough on something in the middle though!

MOVE IT

Simply getting from here to there, because you want to go and have the hexes, are the movement powers' least important or interesting feature. Playing them well starts with considering what each movement power feels like for each hero.

Take flight, for instance. The comics are always very clear about it: some fliers seem to be swimming, some are soaring, some are jet-propelled, some walk normally except for not needing the ground, others float, others use wings similar to birds, glide using devices or clothing, and still others are riding a fantastic version of a familiar high-velocity object or vehicle. Some leave a trail of effect, some make an accompanying sound. No one "just" flies, and their respective properties are used to their minor advantage and disadvantage all the time.

The same applies for all movement powers, for instance, whether your Teleport involves subjective movement through weird intervening space, and so on through the list. They should all be played generously, for example, high-velocity or nominally less-controlled flight definitions are more maneuverable or adjustable than they could really be. Also, in ordinary situations, heroes do not run into lampposts and they can swerve at angles under 90 without trouble. They can do plenty of things without penalties or complications, including most 0-Phase or half-Phase actions, by dropping a hex of their total movement based on Endurance spending, or as much as called for if it involves shifting vertically. Move attacks are included in this concept, as they carry their own modifiers.

However, there is no moving-power concept which allows a hero to go where they will, however they will, oriented as they will, free to do anything they want along the way, free from any action/reaction, guaranteed of a safe stop or turn. Since fighting or hazardous situations quickly shift out of the ideal, daring actions on the go push the limits of the movement's special effects. Many hazards explicitly impose this danger, as do attempting sharper turns and sudden changes in altitude. Dexterity rolls may get you through, but if you're surprised, and if you don't have Acrobatics, then the roll is dropped to 6, modified only by relevant Skill Levels if you have any.

Every hero's super-movement, then, has its own little nuances waiting for whatever can go wrong: because it will! Everything previously hand-waved about momentum, turn radius, and, you know, gravity kicks in, depending on the situation and the movement itself. Absent obvious adverse side-effects of the powers in action, convert your current hexes of movement into Knockback in the most plausible and least desirable direction. Apply all the modifiers for Knockback, especially to Flight.

The same principles apply to orienting among obstacles. Most of the time, in the absence of a designated hazard, heroes stay oriented and don't blunder into lampposts by default. But this default can be disrupted by a long list of events: getting hit by a surprise move, getting Stunned, getting Knocked Back or thrown somewhere, particularly into and through something, receiving contradictory information. Unexpectedly encountering changed circumstances will do it too, for instance, after recovering from being Flashed or perceiving your way through Concealment.

The governing mechanic is the Perception roll, based on Intelligence and relevant Skill Levels, as a 0-Phase action. Think of that quick lane-check speeding heroes do in the comics, often accompanied by a thought balloon to keep the reader oriented, and also of how the next panel might be their push to do what they're trying to do, or an unfortunate collision because they took their eyes off the road.

Staying oriented maintains the movement action as intended and also allows you to turn a moving reactive defense into active tactics. Think of it as suddenly getting two free hexes, so go two hexes in a direction or to a location you want, Acrobatically if possible. The latter not only provides a bonus to your defensive value but significantly expands your options for the landing spot.

A failed roll, however, converts your immediate location into a standard hazard, customized as in Chapter 11. And no, you don't get a new Dexterity roll or reactive defense. Failing the perception was the whole screwdriver and you're screwed.

The one-stop solution for this general problem is the Awareness Power, to provide broader and better sensing of one's immediate situation, greatly increasing the safety range for not even needing to roll to orient. However, even that Power encounters limits in terms of exact senses and their special effects, e.g., its vulnerability to overload.

Teleporting is supposed to be fun, so it's overdoing things to require perception checks before and after, every time. It's best to treat it the same as running around, only with weirder possible consequences in more difficult situations. Teleporting heroes are well-advised to include the above-mentioned Awareness, even if it's Limited to apply only to that movement.

Sooner or later, special effects and stressful circumstances will lead someone to try teleporting "blind," without being able to perceive the destination. The easiest solution is simply to decree that without a perceived destination, the Power cannot work. However, that's no fun; so if the acting player accepts some risk and states the intended distance and intended direction/location, go for it. If the attempt was triggered by the Involuntary Limitation, operating irrationally, or due to a Psychological Situation, then set the range at maximum plus a Push. If someone is unfortunate enough to occupy a solid space, presumably the effect isn't good, according to whatever hazard is best suited to the current special effects.

Things get really funky with Expanded Scope in both Awareness and Teleport, as the hero becomes a global, interstellar, dimensional, temporal, or psychic journeyer. Although that's obviously cool for the situations and stories of play, failing to orient properly becomes considerably more dire. The consequences for others who may be involved, when they lack these abilities, should be left to the imagination. (4)

Moving others can be as good as moving oneself; a purpose for which the attacking form of Teleport is remarkably nasty! It can be highly characteristic and thematic given the choice of Modifiers, such as the "castling" or "switch places" version. Applications with other Powers may be refined quite tightly, as with the hero who used fine-work Telekinesis, Skill Levels with Grab, and attacking Teleport Limited to small items only. It's a bad day for the heavily-armed opponents who see the hero smile, open his hand, and drop the pins from the grenades they're wearing on their vests.

Tunneling is obviously intimately connected with terrain, and its concept range is very wide. Its special effects may be defined to remove substances automatically, not at all, or opportunistically, and it works on any solid barrier or substrate and not just the ground. So it doesn't have to be literal burrowing at all. For example a "desolid field" so that you can turn the immediate surroundings intangible, or an energy discharge tied to a Piercing Strike which delivers awesome destruction to the area your target's in, as well as upon them.

There's moving through and around terrain, and then there's moving it around. Tunneling in its more aggressive forms is an obvious way to tear up the joint, not only making holes but doing something with the leftovers. Adding Force Wall allows you to re-shape the whole place as you please. Force Wall by itself cannot provide support, like a floor or bridge, but combining it with Telekinesis can, either directly or by adding existing structures or substances into the mix of making holes or new barriers. Combining these powers with Entangle and Concealment yields so many applications, depending on nuances of linking or relative values, that they almost comprise their own subset of the rules.

THE WAY OF FISTS AND FEET

The Martial Arts maneuvers are only a little more effective on their own. The real opportunity is to create your own combat strategy with "martial arts" as a lens to see the same rules everyone else is using, but in a different way.

High Speed fits right in, in a sneaky way that rarely does any more actions than anyone else. A held action may be fired off at the end of the Segment just before the Phase for the next scheduled action, then that action may be held. You're fighting one Segment into the future and they're always one step behind, and you can even deliver a rapid-fire one-two when you choose. It also means you can

abort the held action for a necessary reactive defensive move without losing the upcoming scheduled one.

The Maneuvers are savage in this context. The Attacks don't cost Endurance for their extra dice, bypassing that particular downside of Speed. Martial Block and And Out provide defense and movement at moments that other people don't have.

Messing with others' Speed Charts is possible too. Even minimal success with a Presence Attack robs opponents of their expected positions in the order, and Find Weakness allows for potentially Stunning blows, forcing lost Phases and opening up repeated strikes. Find Weakness may not seem like much, just one piddly die more, but it can be used multiple times against a single target as long as you keep succeeding. And the effect doesn't go away! That opponent remains vulnerable to that attack for the rest of the fight.

That's why confrontations between martial artists often begin with the combatants staring oddly at each other: they're using Find Weakness and a Presence Attack in a duel of forced hesitation and held actions, to gain the advantage for a devastating strike.

The other benefit is getting to name a fighting style as a special effect, which permits dipping into the Powers – in effect, "just fighting" but with a superhero's worth of smackdown attached to your favorite Maneuvers.

Strike can be attached to any attack maneuver – want your Throw to immobilize someone? That's an Entangle. A disorienting blow? That's a Flash. Choke hold? No problem, attach Severe Blast to the follow-up squeeze on a Grab, which requires no attack roll. A big one can even be Conditional, to apply only to a second consecutive strike on a given target. It works just as well for defense, so that not even a hit hits, sometimes. Consider Force Field plus substantial Special Defense: Knockback tied to blocking or dodging, or even Desolid with the right Conditional Limitation.

Nevermind the "Glass Ninja" concept either. Consider instead that taking a beating can be its own superpower. Considerable extra Body and Powers may have be Conditional upon recovering from being Stunned. Or what if such benefits are Conditional upon recovering from Enraged, making you more focused and effective, albeit not particularly reasonable? That sounds more like the great pop culture martial artists to me.

The fighting style may certainly include all manner of mystic, psychic, or mental resources which ignore the simplistic brains-brawn divide. Mental Discipline and Special Defense: Ego are a nasty surprise for the Psychic Psycho who encounters your California-Zen-Tao training, and the Invulnerable Indestructo will be equally unhappy with your Ego-based Drain Strength Strike.

And those are just individual Powers! You should be dreaming up a whole Framework about right now.

SNEAKIER THAN THOU

I can think of nothing more tedious in role-playing than hashing out mechanics for "we sneak past the guards." Leave that stuff to the so-called agents. For heroes, stealth is about combat tactics, not avoidance: appearing and disappearing in the moment, one with the shadows, striking at will, and mastering the whole situation by controlling who perceives what. To address these circumstances, the various rolls to hide and perceive operate in a strict hierarchy.

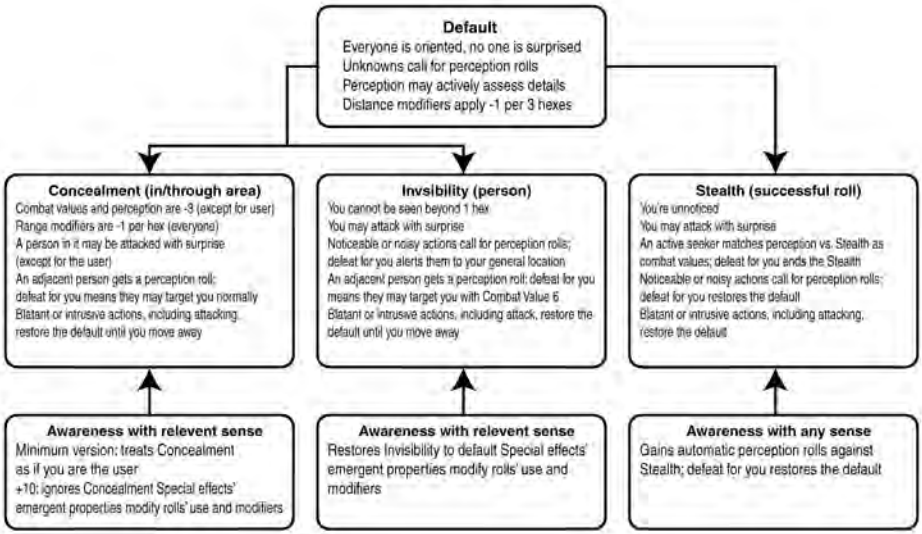
The default is that everyone can see or reasonably sense what's going on in their ordinary field without trying, and that typically a Perception roll is only called for when someone tries to discern something difficult. You don't have to roll to notice that some guy flew in and is trying to hit you.

The simplest outcome is whether the sneaky character can attack with a surprise ambush, when and if the other parties have no idea that you're even there, or have tried to find you and failed. It's nastier than the usual surprise bonus: the target's defensive value drops to 6, no reactive defense is possible, and he or she takes double Knockout damage before defenses, or an equivalent increase for other attacks.

A more complex case arises when one character stalks another to trade off attacks with hiding, or even more so, when both combatants are doing it in a relatively confusing or complex environment. The whole diagram may be called into play across many Phases, turning the fight into a ruthless dance of timing, recovery, Skill and perception rolls, distance management, set-up, and ambush.

When someone "loses" the duel of perception in this situation, they are not gobsmacked as if they'd been ambushed out of nowhere. The attacker gains the maximal surprise bonus of +3, and the defender may use reactive defenses.

Keep in mind the difference between the two sneaky Powers: Invisibility affects persons (more generally, living things) whereas Concealment affects areas. Therefore the Area Advantage provides personal Invisibility to people in an area, but does not affect the area or objects in it.



GOING MENTAL

The question about mental-psychological powers is whether they're an additional venue for glowing power-on-power combat, or a whole realm of insidious and disturbing conflict. The first is nicely suited to applying the Ego-Based Advantage freely and also providing Expanded Scope to Awareness and Teleport into freaky dream or supernatural dimensions. This approach veers into pop mystic and psychedelic territory, a fine place to go. The second is wonderfully exacerbated by the Invisible Special Effects Advantage, irrational Psychological Situations, misconceptions, disinformation, and perhaps the Mystery Powers concept presented in Chapter 15. This approach brings forward psychology, personality, motives, memories, reactions, trauma, and related matters.

In construction terms, Ego-based powers' Modifiers interplay well with Psychological Situations, as indicated by some of the rules. A group may like to systematize these further by matching the parameters for Psychological Situations to each level of each Ego-based power.

The further you go with such ideas, players' agency via their characters will shift its boundaries into new places. This is fine as long as it's a shift to understandable procedures, not a sprawl into disempowered play. The best practice, whatever else is done, is to maintain full player authority over how the character feels about the Ego-based powers experience afterwards, and to spend some play time for the character to express it.

Just as a high Strength value doesn't provide comics super-strength all by itself, no single Ego-based Power provides mental and emotional mastery. To play like the mental heavy-hitters in comics, you'll have to combine two or more of them into single attacks.

Images risks being overlooked. Compared with tossing a Chrysler (or toppling the Chrysler Building), showing pretty pictures to a single target doesn't seem like much of a power. The first counter to that is that the minimal effect means that the target genuinely perceives whatever the image is, and the target doesn't realize they're being affected.

Overcoming that deception is hard. Some external stimulus must be involved, whether it's someone trying to "wake" you, another sense receiving a powerful countering impression, or something that contradicts the illusion affecting you dramatically; like, say, being hit by something else or stepping off a cliff! In the absence of utterly contradictory input, the target must experience something of this kind and succeed with a perception roll using an unaffected sense. Even realizing the images are false doesn't make them stop, although once you do you can choose to ignore them and disciplined heroes can shift the effect down with the Self Mastery maneuver.

Continuing Images requires continuing to spend Endurance. But you can also reduce or increase the effect, rolling the appropriate number of effect dice, with no required new attack roll, so the continuing Endurance cost is based on that effect.

Images' applications vary immensely. One spin is to not to deceive at all, but rather to depict or communicate something. This may still be its own form of attack, using confusion and distraction, especially if the content is coordinated with a Presence Attack. Perhaps it's not even an attack, but a useful way to let one's allies know important visual information, such as directions, someone's appearance, or their Psychological Situations, perhaps backstopped with Detective Work or Telepathy.

When believing the images are real is the point, then a high effect is the key. But consider combining it with some other Power which itself carries the Separate Advantage; after all, a complex image becomes a lot more convincing if part of it just punched you in the face. Furthermore, since the biggest risk to Images is contradictory impressions, Concealment of whatever the Images are not is a very effective partner Power.

Higher levels of effect may alter the target's concept of their whole environment. It's easier to change the perceived environment a lot, i.e., "the surface of Mars," "trapped in infernal flames," than to do it subtly, like "everyone around you has a clockwork key protruding from the backs of their necks." When the altered environment includes the absence of specific people in it, yourself for instance, then Concealment or Invisibility can backstop it if the illusions don't make it to the needed effect. If you're looking for disorientation and physical helplessness, then Entangle, Flash, and even Severe Blast damage are fine participants too.

Any of these applications may be expanded to affect multiple targets with an Area Effect, which, if deceptive, is effectively backstopped with Concealment over the same area and following up with precise uses of Telekinesis. The affected area does not have to be filled with images, i.e., they don't have to be continuous within it, but the entire area which contains any of them is considered a single area in terms of how many hexes are affected.

By itself, Images won't alter the target's feelings or beliefs about the situation, nor will it access their existing emotions or memories for the visual content. These and similar effects require adding Telepathy. If the desired effect includes a specific directive, then you need Mind Control too.

Mind Control is arguably the laziest, most unsatisfying plot device in superhero comics, but it is occasionally redeemed when everyone understands that the literal power's sole purpose is to be broken. It isn't being controlled that matters, but what follows after: the wreckage, reflection, recovery of oneself, and discovery of others' views. (3)

The rules are tuned to reinforce the "made to be broken" principle. First, the Power by itself is more limited than it looks, as it can only enforce an explicit order which precedes or accompanies the attack roll. For the orders to be willed rather than communicated normally, you need minimal Telepathy, and effects like "forget" or "believe" require much stronger Telepathy. To make the target see or otherwise perceive what isn't the case, which can go a long way toward meeting the requirements for specific levels of effect, you need Images.

Unfortunately for the target, each attack roll constitutes the only substantial moment of potential refusal. Psychological Situations that accord with the Ego-based power were already taken into account regarding the level of effect, so they don't reinforce it or counteract it. The only effective resistance mechanic is Mental Discipline to reduce its effect.

When acting under its influence, the target may perform any actions consistent with the command, e.g., making tactical choices in combat when directed to fight. The character knows he or she is mind-controlled and although they can't do anything else that requires a Phase action, they may take free actions. Commands like "act normal" or "stay silent" can shut those down, or other Ego-based powers can strike deeper to reinforce submission.

A separate Mind Control attack is required for every command, therefore carrying its own Endurance cost as well. Although the Power is not technically maintained, it may be continued through consecutive attacks in order to arrive at some desired action by the target. Those who anticipate extensive rather than momentary control should take the Persistent Advantage.

Puppetering levels of control are possible, but they not accounted for by any single Power, requiring a customized mix of Mind Control, the Persistent Advantage, Telepathy, and Images at the very least, and likely Awareness with Expanded Scope. The complex build and high numbers of required Points reflect the comics convention that people with this ability are pure specialists in its use, and as with many complex systems, it is riddled with ways to go awry.

Telekinesis reinforces other Ego powers' effects with tangible movement or impact. It may provide significant auxiliary effects, such as providing Images with physical manifestations, or restricting the movement and therefore maintaining the perceptual range of targets for Telepathy and Mind Control. Plenty of other concepts for mental prowess do well to include it.

The default application isn't sensory, but it can be made so by including Awareness, for an extended sensory self which can actually do things, without going so far as the Separate Advantage.

Telepathy is a catch-all term for very different goals of thought-based communication. The only thing they have in common is that contact may be maintained at any distance at 1 Endurance per Phase given a willing participant, otherwise repeating the initial Endurance expenditure per Phase. The most

benign form is as described in Chapter 6, which nothing more than a mental phone call. Going by comics conventions, language and alien-ness present little or no barrier to communication. But if that sort of thing matters in the concept of your game, treat it as a special effect which manifests as Special Defense: Ego.

More hostile applications include finding something out, which can be made far more effective and interesting by including Mind Control and Images. Such play results in complex interactions among Psychological Situations, secrets, memories, and reactions. Managing content for these effects can be tricky, as the attacking telepath can't say "Ah ha, you knew the secret code, even though you didn't know you knew, and I just found it," but on the other hand, the target can't say, "Sorry, I suppressed that info into my subconscious, you didn't dig deep enough." Treat thoughts effectively as solid objects and the mind as a room with varying degrees of put-away and in-the-open, and stay as simplistic as possible regarding "where something is," without weaseling.

Then there's altering the target's memories or personality, which is obviously a really villainous thing to do, although the odd comics hero has been known to do it "just this once." Even with a solid roll for the Telepathy, you need to include Images to provide a memory that won't fall apart when questioned. Implanting convictions doesn't include directives unless Mind Control is included.

The **Mental Discipline** Skill unlocks the Ego Maneuvers, most of which do not require using Ego-based Powers and are quite a boon to the hero who does not specialize in them, particularly if they are strong-willed. Using them does not make you oblivious to anything and ordinary defenses and defense options apply unless some special effect causes trouble for them.

Adding the Usable On/For Others Advantage to the **Special Defense: Ego** power is a significant addition to play. If someone is already being affected by an Ego-based power, you can throw Ego Defense on them to reduce the effect. For a group blanket-protection effect, you'll need Ranged and Area Effect too. Suppress is also useful in this fashion, but unlike Special Defense: Ego, it cannot be used against any Ego-based Power as such, but only against any/all Powers which conform to a particular special effect.

A hero specializing in Ego-based powers is not obliged to apply the Advantage of the same name for other Powers, because physical vs. psychic concepts don't have to line up precisely with Dexterity-based vs. Ego-based mechanics. Special effects are what you say they are, so it's fine to include powers that attack using Dexterity in your stable of "psychic powers." The benefit of the Advantage is found in limited defenses: plenty of adversaries may have high Dexterity, Skill Levels for fighting, and Defense, but not so many with commensurate values regarding Ego. A solid Blast or Entangle attacking from that "angle" of the mechanics can deliver a real surprise. Therefore, for the same Active Points, you can choose between more dice for the Dexterity-based version or foes' potential vulnerability for the Ego-based one.

Another technique is to tie Ego-based Powers to Skills, especially Detective Work and Computer Programming, such as Telepathy for ferreting out secret information, perhaps combined with Images to arrive at important visual information, like a specific face.

Awareness with Expanded Scope takes these effects to a frightening level, especially for Skills. It uses perception by default, and it may stay that way and be used in tandem with an Ego-based Power, or be tied to the same Skill as an Ego-based Power. It permits Ego-based Powers to work into or across the perceived range, which themselves may be refined in terms of the hero's specialized knowledge and insights based on features that are not expressed in Points. This fits just right with Detective Work, for the find-anyone-for-I-am-the-night type of hero. Less subtly, it can also strike at people directly through their minds from afar.

Making the Awareness power directly Ego-based produces special properties that arguably qualify the character as a true mental master, as the presence and activity of minds becomes the perceived feature, not limited to or defined by the physical senses as Awareness ordinarily is.

A common application is to hunt for a single mind, seeking its location in either physical space or, conceivably, whatever spaces or equivalents are represented by the scope of Awareness, but unhindered by the physical or metaphysical difficulties of the area, or such evasions as Stealth, Concealment, or Invisibility. Once you have the successful Ego roll that serves as the perception into the appropriate region or realm, hunting for the mind requires an attack roll for Telepathy. If the Telepathy attack roll succeeds, then the target is known to be present if that was an issue. If the target isn't there, then if the same roll succeeds as a basic Ego check, the hero discovers as much.

Given a success, the target may be located given the degree of effect. If the target is familiar to the searcher, the necessary effect is minimal. A data-match based on knowledge gained in some concrete way, e.g., Detective Work, requires the second level of effect, and to find someone defined along the line of "the person planning to murder the mayor tonight," the third level of Telepathy must be achieved. These values are all shifted one level higher in effect if the region or realm is crowded with other minds.

The Power may be maintained and the effect rolled again, requiring Endurance, in order to achieve a higher effect, perhaps with Pushing, to zero in on the location. An intermediate level of effect, i.e., not enough for an exact location but better than merely knowing that they are present, reduces the degree of scope, i.e., "accounts for" most of the region or realm. For geographic locations, even if the precise location is not discerned, this degree of success may permit more mundane searching now that the area concerned has been narrowed down.

Such mind scanning is a fairly minimal application of the Advantage. It all goes mad, in the good way, when you have a movement power at the same degree of Expanded Scope, to combine "knowing and going." The hero becomes an explorer, traveler, and even denizen of the freakier, more psychic dimensions, connected dreamscapes, or even whole realms defined by metaphysical concepts, where "cosmic," "philosophical," and "mystic" special effects are the same thing. When you apply the potential communications and control effects of Powers across this level of perception and movement, it's literally a game-changing capability.

WEAPONRY

The system features no rules subset for the technological range of ways to injure people. You can be a weapon-wielding hero simply as a special effect for Powers. Missile Deflection, Strike, and Blast are the most obvious, as well as your pick of Area, defenses Usable for Others, and whatever else. A bit of added Flash as a Strike is particularly appropriate. But they are no different, as Powers, from any other special effect.

The good side of the special effect, i.e., holding this particular weapon, is that it's cool-looking and demonstrates something remarkable and fun about the hero because they made it, or have the right to it, or can use it at all. That's about it.

The bad side is that the thing can be damaged, lost, left behind, or taken away. Granted, the whole point of special effects is that their impact is opportunistic and inconsistent, so be comforted by the plot proviso that your khukuri or widget or ray-gun will be replaced, recovered, or otherwise returned to your use; especially if you put some effort into it. Also, such events won't happen to you any more frequently than anyone else's Powers' special effects giving them the business once in a while.

Beware the Focus Limitation! It is not for heroes, at least not in the simplistic sense that "My thing is an object, so it must be a Focus." It's not synonymous with "the power comes from an object," instead, it means the power will be broken, interfered with, or taken away. Not "can," but will, and what's more, with merely an ordinary attack. The signature weapons wielded by the comics heroes do not correspond with the rules for Focus at all; I can't think of a single one. As discussed in Chapter 7: Villain Making, Focus is usually a villain thing, especially when it applies to a whole object rather than to some aspect of a complex power. (5)

The other weapons to appear in play are typically directed at your hero. Hazards of this sort, say, an automated device, a military vehicle, or a squad of soldiers, may of course be any Power, but the most straightforward is Blast, with the fortunate quality of being vulnerable to ordinary attacks. Designated as a weapon or not, they are as dangerous as they are defined to be, based on Powers and Points.

Such a thing is also likely to appear as part of a foe's Powers, constructed in the ordinary fashion. It might be just like the one a hero will have, so in mechanics terms, that usually means the Powers are unmodified or modified with some weaknesses of being that particular weapon or device. For certain kinds of villains, however, putting all or nearly all the oomph into a Focus is practically standard, perhaps reinforced with some unhealthy mindset or relationship with it, expressed as Psychological Situations with irrational and meltdown components. Given the generous higher range for a villain's Ratio, this kind of thing represents an extravagant mismatch between the outrageous things the device is certain to do and the all-or-nothing quality of trying to grab or damage it.

Now for the gray area: the pick-it-up situations, when the minion's ray-gun or the agent's Desert Eagle .50 AE clatters over there, and you dive-and-roll, coming to a crouch with it raised up to fire. What happens? It seems hardly fair to say otherwise, so you go right ahead and turn that hazard, constructed as written, upon whomever you want. Altering its function might be impossible or require a specialized Skill like Computer Programming.

May I keep it? You may, if you use Points to construct a new Power with the special effect of owning and using this thing (see Chapter 15: You Must Change). Depending on what you do with the Points, it may function much as it did at first appearance or, somehow, be re-imagined differently, with the original vanishing into the common comics memory hole. If you don't commit the Points to it, however, at the end of the fight or immediate situation, it goes away. Explain or depict that however you want; but the rule is that it happens.

The foregoing would be all that's necessary for the topic, except that guns have a fraught history in comics. What they are differs drastically from time to time and title to title, ranging from little more than props that bad guys wave around for some reason to terrifying slay-devices which are faster and more deadly than anything else, including most super-powers, sometimes in the hands of anyone. So here are a few extra words about the bang-bang. (6)

These rules include nothing magic about "a gun!!" that transcends the ordinary meaning of Points. If you want "guns are deadly" in terms of real-world plausibility, then you already have it. Ordinary people have Defense 0, so they are at lethal risk from any ordinary attack which threatens 10 Body damage. More dice or even a single Advantage out of several available turn that risk into near certainty.

If you want a gun, or guns in general, to outweigh most super-powers, then the necessary Points increase accordingly: at least 60 Power Points in Blast, probably more, Modified with Severe, Piercing, and Destructive, supported by significant punch in Speed, Find Weakness, and special effects. The teeth-clenched squinting insta-killer observed among certain comics favorites is walking around with an extraordinary and, I might add, disproportionate Point total.

Regardless of whatever lethality you want to associate with guns, other relevant Modifiers for them and similar things include No Endurance and Burnout, to dramatize ammunition which might run out. That way, you get all the unexpected click-click and ducking around to reload that you're looking for without counting anything. If you want to pull the realism cord, then No Knockback can be included, but I've noticed that even the fervent proponents of realism still want bullets to knock people all around the place.

ALL SHAPES AND SIZES

The hero's appearance is a special effect, including fundamental notions as species, planet or dimension of origin, god (old or new), living vs. construct, or really anything about "type" of entity at all. The vague and generic human chassis for the rules is nothing more than the same convention in most science fiction and fantasy. So if your hero has a cluster of seven eyes and no other facial features, or is a meter tall as well as a nice shade of lavender, no rules need to reflect any of that unless you want them to.

These kinds of special effects can be hardened by turning any Power effect into an ongoing aspect of appearance and ordinary function. Common options include Always On and 0 Endurance, and Extra Limb and tweaks of Awareness fit in as well. Unusual Looks, however, is entirely optional, as comics are full of funny-looking aliens or whatever whom no one seems to mind, as well as others who are just barely off human-model but receive constant horrified or disapproving responses.

Then there are heroes who vary their shape and form, calling on a different profile of builds and concepts. The simpler kind of mutable heroes retain their Powers and other aspects as their shape and appearance is altered, sometimes drastically; they may look weird but are still "themselves." Size is the obvious example, with different concepts of giant-ness and itsy-bitsy-ness expressed mainly through different kinds of energy management. Another version is the "rubber body" concept, which appears in very different ways in the comics, reflected here in different point-totals for some combination of Stretching, Density Increase, Superleap, and, for those who like rebound attacks, Reactive Blast with High Impact. It may also get surreal with such things as Gliding, Growth, and Force Wall.

One superhero woman combined nearly all these concepts with the full range of size change from speck to airplane-seizing giantess plus stretching about. Instead of cartoony overkill, she was, in my eyes, at the top of the list of most admirable, thoughtful, and bad-ass heroes in comics. (7)

Another change isn't as drastic physically, but rather socially: altering one's appearance to another identity, typically to deceive, in "master of disguise" or "man of many faces" style. The Disguise Skill is the anchor for Images and Instant Change, as well as Invisibility tied to Stealth for finding unlikely moments or opportunities for being unnoticed. Other Power tweaks may emphasize disguising either away from one's own identity ("not me") or toward someone else's specific identity ("them").

If such a character has Unusual Looks, they can be nominally hidden as a special effect, but that doesn't stop them from getting their ordinary roll, which if tripped, includes spotting them in the first place as well as the typical response.

If a hero is even more changeable, based on actually transforming rather than re-shaping or looking different, then it may still be expressed as a special effect of Instant Change with no other Powers involved, if the different forms don't differ in their capabilities.

Before looking at constructions for when they do, Instant Change deserves some attention of its own. Its simplest form is to change clothes, but it may also apply changing one's entire appearance, whether to "my superhero self" or in service to the master-disguised concept described above. Most drastically, it can mean becoming a different person, creature, or even thing. Perhaps surprisingly, it's the same number of Points, appropriate to its use, regardless of how many forms or options are involved, so it could be a single "other me" or dozens, or even customizable ones.

A radical version involves changing into inanimate objects. If the point is actually to masquerade as the object, that's a version of the Disguise-centered construction above, and if its operating properties are important, that includes Powers with Adaptive Special Effects. If the transformation is so thorough as to become that object itself, then the mild form of Shutdown applies. Even more bizarrely, consider Usable on Others in its aggressive form in order to turn people into toasters or frogs, which include such things as Entangle or Shrinking, respectively, with added powerful Ego-based combinations for "You're a frog."

When the different form or forms include different profiles of Powers or Characteristics, then the Multiform Power Framework works best to organize them.

With this type of hero concept, the Multiform is usually pretty big. You can even allot the maximum possible Points into a Multiform and its Slots for entirely different versions of the hero. Do this by first assigning Points outside the Framework for any baseline they all share, which must include any Skills, regardless of whether the latter are conceived to be specific to a given form. All the other Character Points now become the Multiform's Pool and Slots. If any Limitation applies to the whole thing, figure out the math first so you know how many Active Points are available.

The versions may actually be different individuals, like a literal "alter ego," or maybe you're a portal for different dimensional warriors. To associate them with different personalities, organize several Psychological Situations accordingly. If you want to be uncertain about which one you get or become, make the Instant Change Tricky. And if you want to make one or more of them act unpredictably relative to the others, that's Tricky as well, for the Framework as a whole.

Then there's the opposite, to make more individual versions of yourself, which, in the comics, usually turns out to be not much of a power. If you're going for the mob dogpile attack, then it works better as a Blast or Entangle with the Area Advantage, with all those grimacing versions of yourself as a special effect. If you do use a Multiform, then the Point structure does not allow you to get multiple and simultaneous full-power heroes for one hero's Points. Instead it relies on the Separate Advantage with the option to provide the separated entity the independent range of action. You only need Multiform if the selves differ from one another in Powers or Characteristics. Variants in the comics include fully independent separate minds, full contact and integration via a single mind, and carefully-tuned intermediate concepts. (8)

REFERENCES

(1) Ben Grimm, or the Thing, demonstrates strength as a function of emotional ties and determination, and applying it tactically, rather than simply out-hitting weaker opponents. He first appeared in *Fantastic Four #1* (1961), by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, published by Magazine Management using its Marvel Comics imprint.

(2) Repeated heroes have demonstrated that being unequivocally strong enough to beat anyone or do anything is sooner or later dialed back for stories to be interesting. The standout example began with *Superman #233* (1971), by Dennis O'Neil and Curt Swan, published by Warner Communications using its DC Superman imprint, including drastically reducing the hero's powers and removing vari-colored kryptonite as a central plot device. A similar effect occurred for the Hulk beginning with The *Incredible Hulk #331* (1987), by Peter David and Todd McFarlane, published by New World Entertainment using its Marvel Comics Group imprint. After this point the Hulk's strength took second place to his cunning, and focused on suppressed fury rather than going berserk.

(3) Most mind control in comics is binary: either it can't be broken by its victim, or it can and is, upon sufficient effort. The most striking contrast, in which mind control relies upon and releases unconscious urges, is found in Mastermind's control of Jean Grey, in her persona of the Black Queen and the creation of Dark Phoenix, in *The Uncanny X-Men #129-135* (1980), by Chris Claremont and John Byrne, published by Cadence Industries using its Marvel Comics Group imprint.

This interpretation characterizes many instances of mind control authored by Claremont.

(4) Doctor Strange is one of many similarly-themed and named heroes, but his comics most emphasized mystic, psychic, and psychedelic realms, beginning with *Strange Tale*s #110 (1963), by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko, especially while Ditko was credited for the plots, published by Magazine Management using its Marvel Comics imprint. This was also the central feature in *Marvel Premiere #3-14* and *Doctor Strange* #1-2 and #4-18 (1973-1976), by Steve Englehart, Frank Brunner (*Marvel Premiere*), and Gene Colan (*Doctor Strange*), published by Cadence Industries using its Marvel Comics Group imprint.

(5) The list of "not a Focus" widgets includes but isn't limited to Green Lantern's ring, Wonder Woman's lasso, Batman's utility belt, Captain America's shield, the Punisher's guns, Green Arrow's or Hawkeye's bow, Spider-Man's web-shooters, Iron Man's armor, Thor's hammer, Daredevil's billy club, and more. The converse is demonstrated by the many armored villains who are reliably busted up, switched off, overloaded, or de-shelled as soon as the hero figures out how.

(6) Guns' history in American superhero comics is inverted from its usual presentation: to have them is the default, not the exception, varying only in how often you shoot people. Early almost-comics pulp fiction and newspaper strips were all gun-heavy, including The Shadow and The Phantom, later with The Spider, and they never stopped, e.g. The Executioner, all of which include many imitations and have steadily provided content mined by radio, film, and TV. The first decade of the allegedly sweet-and-bright-eyed, so-called Golden Age of Comics was littered with corpses left by heroes, brought to a terrifying head with The Spectre. Special mention goes to the Captain Marvel movies – a festival of super-powered homicide – and to the take-no-prisoners women superheroes Fantomah, the Spider Queen, Black Fury/Miss Fury, Lady Satan, the Black Cat, the Black Widow, Liberty Belle, Ms. Victory, Miss Masque, the Phantom Lady, the Spider Widow, and the Woman in Red. The question isn't why superheroes starting shooting people in the 1980s, but why they stopped for a while.

The historical points explain why, with a twist.

- In 1940, Batman shot a foe and hanged another from the Batplane. As part of Independent News' policy of upscaling its image out of bootlegging and porn, the owners instituted an in-house code stipulating that heroes would not kill, that they would uphold the law, that authorities would be portrayed sympathetically, that black magic or horror elements could not be shown, and many similar rules. The superheroes they acquired, and especially their new organization into the Justice Society of America, took on a distinctive glossy, benign quality.

- In response to public pressure specifically on comics beginning about 1948, National Periodical Publications (now the name of Donenfeld's and Liebowitz's owning company) and Archie Comics instituted the Comics Code Authority, using the same code in 1954. Effectively, all newsstand comics had to "be" NPP in this regard, which is to say, about the same edge as you would find in "Goofus and Gallant" in *Highlights*, or they would not be distributed.
- In 1971, due in part to events in *The Amazing Spider-Man*, most of the Comics Code Authority stipulations were relaxed. Newsstand comics erupted with all manner of gunplay, surreal horror, and corrupt establishment figures, as well as a zoo of monster protagonists, essentially returning to normal.

Here's the thing: Batman missed his timing. In 1968, in the radically-changed editorial environment at DC Comics as NPP shifted to new ownership, ambitious writers Dennis O'Neil, Archie Goodwin, Frank Robbins, and Steve Englehart, working with skilled artists Neal Adams, and Bob Brown, restored the Batman (as they insisted on calling him) to his pulp roots ... except that the Code still held, and they had no reason to know that it would be downgraded so soon. They had to reconcile the lurking, ruthless, obsessive vigilante with Officer Friendly. Batman's weird psychology ever since stems from the resulting uneasy compromise.

This artifact, which could not have formed at any other point in comics history, persisted and underwent further examination with almost every hero written or overseen by O'Neil afterwards, especially his editorship of *Moon Knight* and *Daredevil*. It formed a new category between the default options, i.e., heroes who shot people vs. those who were strong or weird enough not to have to. Therefore guns for superheroes hold immense significance to comics fans far outweighing their role in other media.

The appearance of another character just after that shift shows what might have been. Creators at Marvel had been subverting the Code all along anyway and seemed ready for the new opportunity. Gerry Conway, among other grimness, introduced The Punisher in *The Amazing Spider-Man #128* (1972), opening the door for firearms to proliferate across many new characters. Furthermore, since he was portrayed as unhinged as well as intelligent, the concept was harsher and edgier than the character's tough-talking but heroic depiction in the mid-1980s and afterwards.

(7) Although stretching heroes have been around since Plastic Man (*Police Comics #1*, 1941, published by Quality Comics), the most intense versions are the women. My reference is to Elasti-Girl who defied every convention of female protagonists in the 1960s. The powers concept was taken up a level in *Doom Patrol #115-116* (1967), by Arnold Drake and Bruno Premiani, when her similarly stretchy enemy, Madame Rouge, was driven mad by competing mental demands, split into two, and fought herself (themselves?) with disturbing snakey stretches of any body section for several pages. A similar villain with a slightly more animal motif, Shapeshifter, first appeared in *Elementals #1* (1984), by Bill Willingham, published by Comico. The latest heroic representative is Kamala Khan, Ms. Marvel, first appearing in *Captain Marvel #14* (2013), by Kelly Sue DeConnick, Scott Hepburn, and Gerardo Sandoval, published by the Walt Disney Company in its Marvel Entertainment division.

(8) The typical copy-crowd hero or villain is Flashback, first appearing in *Alpha Flight #1* (1983), by John Byrne, published by Cadence Industries using the Marvel Comics Group imprint. In issue #28 (1985), his disgruntled teammate Diamond Lil tells him, accurately, "All those tomorrow men of yours are good for is instant crowd scenes."

Triplicate Girl, as she was originally named, presents a whole textbook for duplicating heroes' possible fates and multiple deaths, being whittled down to one (Una) and ultimately "expanding" to nearly infinite (Duplicate Girl). She first appeared in *Action Comics #276* (1961), by Jerry Siegel and Jim Mooney, published by National Periodical Publications using its Superman DC imprint. Each duplicate is independent until their memorie are combined upon re-combining. This is contrasted with the Engineer, or Angie Spica, who maintains a single mind throughout a considerable number of duplicates, who first appeared in *The Authority #1* (1991), by Warren Ellis and Bryan Hitch, published by Aegis Entertainment using its Wildstorm Comics imprint. The Mutiple Man, or Jamie Madrox, is similar to Duplicate Girl. He first appeared in *Giant-Size Fantastic Four #4* (1975), by Len Wein, Chris Claremont, and John Buscema, published by Cadence Industries using its Marvel Comics Group imprint; with special mention as well to his appearances in *X-Factor* (1991-1993) by Peter David and Larry Stroman, published by Compact Video using its Marvel Comics Group imprint. Harem, or Daphne DeShantis, produces independently-acting duplicates who share their memories and new skills at recombination, but who also experience sensations and other effects while separate. She first appeared in the webcomic *Grrl Power #59* (2011), by David Barrack.

CHAPTER 13
THE NEXT NOW

This is a driving-forward game, and it creates a driving-forward narrative. But how? Ongoing play has to go somewhere, right?

The answer is "yes," significantly in the absence of a nanny, a guiding hand, or anticipatory outline of an epic arc. If the group uses this chapter's tools and cares about what they're doing, then together you will create one-off gems and complex sagas that stand up with anything in the comics without signposts or rails.

The method is Chapter 8: The Now all over again, but this time with consequences from the previous sessions of play.

THE SPINNER RACKS

Let's glance at the physical superhero comics as they were experienced by the authors of the original Champions. The comics were cheap stapled 36-page pamphlets with at most 22 pages of story or sometimes anthologies. There were very few dedicated comic book stores. You mostly bought them from the wire racks, whether standing spinners or wall-mounted, where the new ones got stuffed in front of the old. Precise distribution was spotty; the store owner or regional manager didn't care which titles were even present, let alone which issues were coming in. You had to haunt several locations if you cared about "the next issue."

On the customer side, no one thought of collecting comics at the point of purchase. Mylar, backing boards, and longboxes were unknown; you found back-issues in unsorted open bins in magazine stores or barber shops, and anyone's "collection" was kept in cardboard shirt boxes or shopping bags.

Tired of the nostalgia yet? Good, because it's not nostalgia. That whole situation sucked, and I personally ruined *Silver Surfer #4* by Scotch taping all my comics together by title. But it did have one virtue as a very effective, useful model for role-playing.

- Your game is a comics title and needs a name.
- Sessions are issues of a newsstand comic book, so they get titles and numbers.

This is more than a fun gimmick. It helps play immensely, because session transition is completely adjustable in content. Just as with the comics, the first page of the next session (i.e., issue) might be a full-page repeat of the last panel of the previous one, a significant shift in location and time, or anything in-between. It's not like a classic TV episode or movie which must follow an immediate arc structure.

Therefore the group may relax the habit, if present, to deliver a climactic confrontation at two-thirds through the scheduled play time, or to fill that designated time up to the closing minute, or anything similar. If things close out

"early," then it wasn't early at all, it's merely when it happened, and play may either close accordingly or be permitted some breathing room for new stated actions. If things have progressed into more complications or actions that are easily handled after plenty of real-time play, then the issue is free to close without cutting out the action, as it's fine to open with its continuation next session.

It's good for the attitude too. Each issue, or session, matters as its own unit of "waiting for it and enjoying it." It needs to be, basically, a fun thing all by itself. Even the outstanding emergent graphic novels of that time were not planned in detail in advance or promoted as a single endeavor, and they were not received and read as a single chunk. A session doesn't have to feature a scheduled climactic fight at the halfway point; but it does have to shine that spotlight around, to see what's changed for the heroes since the last time, and to watch it change a little more *right now*.

THE WAVE-FRONT

Play began with a landscape of heroes and other people who were about to be seen for the first time and whose goals and actions were generally independent of one another. But even as soon as two sessions in, and certainly after about four, things have happened! The game's potentially dynamic situation has swiftly become its own actually dynamic social ecology, with its distinctive history and population of active persons.

Therefore your job is to keep modifying the Now, continually.

- Add characters who've appeared in play, and invent new ones who seem reasonable to include next time.
- Update the circumstances of all persons and locations, including any changed or unusual conditions and any relevant aspects of lifestyles, resources, and attitudes.
- Consider the opinions and responses of every person to the latest developments in play, as well as to real-world events and issues for this location.
- Do not hold steady! Everyone is up to something, whether they appeared in play or not, because if they didn't, they could well have gone places and done things.
- Add "stuff," meaning new ideas and problems, drawing on anything you know about the real world, and anything fantastic you want to use to exaggerate it.
- For things that have been sitting there too long and received no reference points in play at all, heat them up for the next session or just cut'em out entirely.

It's all about consequences: what happened, what's changed. Good practices include:

- Focus on the good the heroes have done or tried to do. It's not fun to reverse it all on them, "see, you screwed up here, here, and here."
- Spread out from the immediate effects, to see what other people think and do, not just those immediately involved.
- Keep utterly new material to a minimum, focusing first on known persons and those who, if previously unknown, exist within known contexts.

As a minor but significant detail, I highlight or use a different color font for things the heroes simply don't know, and obviously, that changes each session.

Soon, the mischievous brain "sees" questions and connections among things which were not originally conceived or recorded that way, many of which are good or "that's so obvious!" enough to become setting and conflict points, worthy of development and play.

In play

The mutual creativity encouraged by the steps described in Chapter 3: Your Game is intended to develop further into a whole-play technique, not as committee discussion, but through the actions and attitudes of the heroes. If the players ever thought they were supposed to be taking their cues for that from your vision, they aren't doing it any more.

Players often get active between sessions, either as dialogue or written material. Expect in-character introspective musings, sketches or image montages, research into historical, scientific, and metaphysical content, and dedicated reading of past comics; all resulting in passionate opinions.

When that happens the heroes provide much more of the motion, as the players respond intuitively to the current Now with force through the lens of their heroes' goals and actions. They can set quite a bit of the table as their heroes go here or go there, talk to this person or to look for that thing, and to decide significant things like whether to resign from their government status, revise their entire relationship to society, take up residence on the Moon, change their names and outfits, or anything personal, like getting married or divorced or changing anything else. They aren't going to wait passively for the next "scenario." During play they aren't going to wait for cues to tell them where to go and what to investigate. When the players drive the action through statements in play, the game master may find that playing it cool is the hottest choice after all.

Remember coming in hot vs. playing it cool? At this point, given the game master's own excitement about the Now and his or her sense of identification with the villains and other people, what to do becomes so obvious that it's hardly a conscious decision any more.

One historical player development was called bluebooking, meaning writing fiction or dialogues as a form of play, i.e., what the heroes are conceived to do and think. It became popular enough among early Champions players for them to attend play sessions which were partially or entirely devoted to writing and sharing them. Physical bluebooks themselves have fluttered into the dustbin of the past, but the technique is very much alive. However, it's quite binary: if the players are into it, there's no stopping them; but if they aren't, there's no way to make them. So the best practice is simply to see if it happens and, if so, to incorporate it into play, but not to expect or assign it. (1)

All this is to the good, even to the great. Chapter 8: The Now describes the "fanning out" of possible consequences in play: which way is it pointing? That was in the context of a single session; now it's in the context of session to session, and ultimately, it becomes the entirety of play.

LEGACY

Remember that alt-tech Left Coast game in Chapter 8: The Now? Here's what its Now looked like after four sessions. The energy thing became so important that I pulled it out into a "character" level category of its own, and you may be sure that although I researched and printed plenty of schematics, physics, and technobabble, the players were way ahead of me.

The boldfaced sections indicate things in this iteration of the Now which I considered coming in most hot in the upcoming session.

Energy concepts

The power structure of northwest coast energy

- Shepherds Flat Wind Farm in north-central Oregon, second largest in the world, completed 2012
- Vancouver's Renewable City Strategy in 2015
- The Geysers in the Mayacamas Mountains (California), supercharged in 1999, Santa Rosa Geysers Recharge Project in 2003
- Damaged by the Basilisk
- Seattle City Light: half the city area's electricity; 88% of it is hydro, driven by facilities on Skagit River and Pend Oreille River; 2001 directive to reduce purchases for energy sources

The Skagit facility also damaged by the Basilisk

- GridFWD conferences

The dimensionality and occurrence of Advance's powers

- Advanced Futures

The particle accelerator tube is ready to work again

- The Continuum
- Tesla/Higgs space
- The teleport disk network
- The Power*Cave
- Newly-discovered cosmic battery nexus point at the base of the Space Needle
- Draconic or whatever the Komodo powers are
- **Connected to whatever just got activated (sent!) at the Space Needle**
- Project Beyond, which has lost no time in getting government jurisdiction over the Space Needle

Power*Star, Mike Mandella

- 30 years old, former restaurant entrepreneur, lives in Seattle

Powers

- The Power*Cave headquarters under Capitol Hill
- Massive Tesla tap coils
- Higgs-Boson space: tap receivers in the suit

This turns out to be public space! Hello tourists

- Teleport disks throughout northwest

Known: Seattle, Portland, Vancouver, Humboldt

Newly-discovered at Washington State Penitentiary – it only activated when Power*Star was present

Family

- His brother Aaron, idealistic futurist author
  - Upset with him because of the inheritance, thinks he's not doing anything worthwhile with it; seriously disgusted with the money's source in the first place
- His ex and Aaron's wife, Michelle
  - Conflicted, still loves him mainly on memories, but believes more in Aaron; determined not to ask for or accept money
- The Asteroid II – Italian restaurant in Ballard neighborhood

Former Power*Star

- Dr. Charles Edison (1890-1969) – he was a crypto-fascist Cold Warrior, free market ideologue
- **"Estranged" from the family how? Possibly related to Mike and Aaron's hippie upbringing**
- Founded The Fund for American Studies (thus renamed in 1987)
- The money was sequestered for twenty years, then entered confused litigation that was re-defined and resolved recently – could not go to anyone but a single person, but no person was designated, and so ultimately it went to Mike

Darius Darkstar

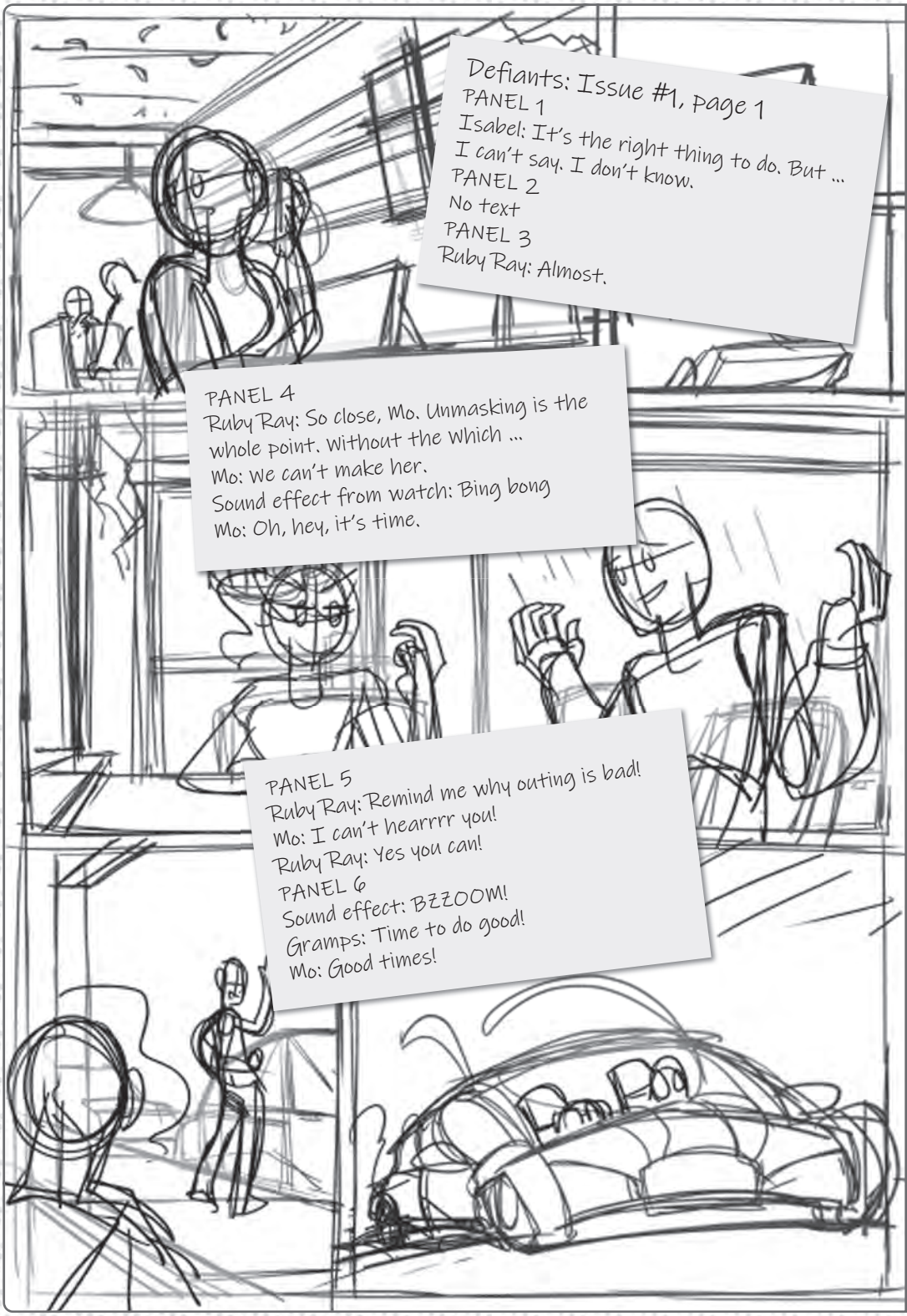
- Invented the Edison-Tesla tech used by the original Power*Star, implied all the way back in 1920s; apparently was his technie-genius buddy assistant for quite a while
- Been in Washington State Penitentiary for a long, long time, from Power*Star's heyday, despite having the power and the tech to get out if he wanted
- **The Black List** – they're all actually bad, sprinkled on either side of the nominal law line; **Darius pressures Mike to act on this**

The Dark Cohort – founded in the late 1960s, broken off from Darkstar, or rather, unjustified in invoking his name

- Current roster: Obsidian (formerly JoAnn Severin), Circle (Celeste Seitz), The Edge, Raptor, Eyefire (Jean "Andre" St. Andre), Roachkill (Frank Ketcham)
- No member has ever been caught; at least twenty have apparently retired successfully, including the founders **Psy-Chick and the Boomslang.**
- Searching for the new Power*Star – no joke, intend to put him down immediately
- Thwarted by Advance and Power*Star in their attempt to swipe the cosmic energies stored via the Space Needle; working on a new plan vs. Project Beyond

The public

- Monica Stewart – nosy journalist
  - Under the impression that this is the original Power*Star, at least for now; after all, it's the original Advance
  - Knows a lot more about the original Power*Star history than Mike does
  - Investigating him via Advance (she's no fool)


Defiants: Issue #1, page 1
PANEL 1
Isabel: It's the right thing to do. But ...
I can't say. I don't know.
PANEL 2
No text
PANEL 3
Ruby Ray: Almost.
PANEL 4
Ruby Ray: So close, Mo. Unmasking is the whole point. Without the which ...
Mo: We can't make her.
Sound effect from watch: Bing bong
Mo: Oh, hey, it's time.
PANEL 5
Ruby Ray: Remind me why outing is bad!
Mo: I can't hearrrr you!
Ruby Ray: Yes you can!
PANEL 6
Sound effect: BZZOOM!
Gramps: Time to do good!
Mo: Good times!

Advance, Vikhrov "Vince" Vasilivich

- 60 years old, energy researcher and consultant, lives in Humboldt

Powers

- Mysteriously shut off in the early-mid-1990s; just as mysteriously have reappeared
- Makes the most sense if it's related to the PowerStar power-up
- Might need some "back in the day" heroes to acknowledge, without getting too distracted

Family

- His wife Denise, researcher and entrepreneur partner
  - Determined to research why his power went on/off, and to develop the energy sources and application
  - Goes out hiking, and she's got Public Identity
  - **And she's riddled with side-effects of Advance's powers all these years**

Advanced Futures energy company

- Gavin Holmann, dedicated business partner
  - Determined to get the messaging right now that Advance is revealed to have been one of the prime movers all along
- Janelle James, no fooling around consultant – she has the full cooperation of Todd, the former Mirror Mirror
- Helen Jacobs – politician, resourceful, manipulative
  - All about sequestering the company's potential within the existing network of families, policies, and profits
  - Investigating him via PowerStar (no fool either)
- The Continuum – interdimensional entity, ineffable at least for now
  - Apparently determined to destroy Advance Tech's research
- **Reasons and purposes unknown**
- The attack makes replicating the recent results impossible
- Taps into the past to send 80s villains at him
- Doctor Bang (Mark, young professor), Gemfire (Marga, Berlin hipster), so far...
- **More to draw upon: the Slickster, Voidoid, Dust Devil, Radd**

Komodo Dragon, Jake Drake

- 21 years old, student and vlogger entrepreneur, lives in San Francisco

Powers

- Meditative focus
- "Reptilian brain" psychobabble
- Draconic symbology may or may not mean anything
- There is no psychic or magic stuff in this game, it's all funky physics... but in this comic, that does have its spiritual side

Family

- Elaine Liu, mom
  - Venture capitalist, obsessed with social standing
- "Tony Liu," deceased grandfather, former Komodo Dragon during the 1950s in Indonesia
  - Fought with communist resistance vs. Suharto, immigrated to States in 1961 and retired superheroing
  - **Cooperated with the precursor of Project Beyond**
- KomodoLife LLC
  - Vlog: exploits, reflections, opinions
  - Team Komodo: YouTube lifestyler fanbase – demanding and interfering
- Chase Galván, media director and lover – constantly overbooked
- Merchandising, seminars, audience-building
- Worried about moral compromise

The Basilisk

- Host identities/bodies (typically fatal)
- Last known: Shelly Van Houtte
- New host is unknown; **many candidates**
- Competitor online vlogger, adversary, alt-right ideologue
- Chase is trying to escape from the mutual-condemnation cycle which only fuels the adversarial base
- **Now extended into significant power-players which every political person on the Left Coast must defy or truckle to**
- Previous "crimes" were almost completely meaningless; makes all "his" money via the promotion

► Recently hit the California grid at the Geysers – upping that game considerably

► Project Beyond, U.S. government

- Exotic energy strategizing
- **Quite happy to help Advanced Futures**
- Now controlling the Space Needle
- Revived investigation into Komodo powers now that Jake is active
- Going slowly; they're uncertain regarding his successful self-marketing – makes it hard to bag him
- Totally hands-off regarding Power*Star and Darius Darkstar, due to highly-classified past events

Is all play expected to be so topical and political? Yes and no. "No," because any such content comes from everyone playing, so it could conceivably not happen. However, it's "yes" in practice, sometimes as explicitly as my play-experience tends to be, sometimes understated or indirect instead. This comes with the territory. Superhero comics have always reflected upon the world they were written and drawn in, and they cannot help at least showcasing things we really think and feel about it. The best practice is not to force it or stifle it, but to seek authenticity in anything brought into play, and to discover that your work is what it is because we are who we are.

THE POWERFUL PAST

I probably don't have to tell anyone reading this how wonderful it is to develop your game-slash-comic's fictional past piece by piece, and how it gains immensely from players doing it too. Most of them probably already started it before you did, with their first hero sheet. It's a known, genuine turning point for the game, when you review and summarize what you know, and begin to present it in play as the consequential past. Everyone gets inspired to draw upon it, to investigate it, and to discover conflicts that arise from it.

Superhero comics often developed interesting backstories by pulling in the content of recently-acquired property or from long-gone comics to become the retrofitted fictional past. In role-playing, without a body of work to draw upon this way, the corresponding invention has to be at both ends. It's necessarily messy just as in the comics, but without the older texts to play with, it can turn into flat splatter. (2)

One effective solution is illustrated in a comics title whose creators found themselves in that very position. They solved it through focusing on a single object, a group photograph. This convention is widely used in books and movies for good reason, because it instantly focuses attention on the same questions: Who were these people? Who corresponds to someone we've met? What has

Defiants: Issue #1, page 2
PANEL 1
Ruby Ray: ... for ballot measure 115: that no responsible adult may be discriminated against in any way due to sexual and romantic preference!
PANEL 2
No text
If there's room to see what's on the sign someone's holding up, it says YAY RAY.
PANEL 3 (MIDDLE)
Ruby Ray: More heroes are here!
Anybug (thinking): C'mon, which, the time is now ...

PANEL 4
No text
PANEL 5
Grimfire: "Hero" or not ...
PANEL 6
Grimfire: My name is Rob Velikov.
PANEL 7
Grimfire: And Grimfire says "yes" to 115!

Panel 7: this is the only panel I suggest reconsidering slightly – maybe just focus on the hand holding the burning mask. Seems pretty iconic, and stays with the close-up in the previous panel.

happened? A similar device, photograph or not, goes very far to provide common ground and concepts for inventing-slash-discovering the consequential past. (3)

By the time Legacy game's Now had reached this point, I'd worked up a simple history that had either been established through character creation or discovered through play.

Super-history

1920s	Power*Star				
1930s	Dr. Darkstar				
1940s					
1950s					
1960s	Dr. Darkstar defeated				Komodo Dragon (Indonesia)
	Power*Star's last appearance				
1970s	Dark Cohort (original)				
1980s		|	Advance's heyday	Dr. Bang, Gemfire, the Slickster, Voidoid, Dust Devil, Radd ...	
1990s		ongoing			
2000s		changing roster			
		|			
2010s	Power*Star "reappears"	Dark Cohort (today)	Advance's powers reactivate	The Continuum	Komodo Dragon (San Francisco)

It may not look very complicated, but most of the developing Now presented above reflects the questions that arose when I compiled it. It holds the danger to "go for baroque" and build more elaborate backstories than anyone in your group could reasonably care about, including time travel for extra points in irrelevant cleverness. That's happened in the comics plenty of times, with special mention to hooking together three time-spanning villains or supporting characters into a grand cosmic saga of who was who, when, at which point relative to this or that other event, what any of them wanted at any point, what any of them knew at any point, and in what order they fought our heroes. It's been rebooted and retconned repeatedly and still doesn't make sense, and more unfortunately, it always lacked emotional charge. (4)

I'm all too familiar with it from my own games, when the exercise in logistics becomes its own end. It led me in many cases to start programming the outcomes of play, forcing players to conform to situations and decisions, always resulting in decreased enjoyment.

So beware of building the past as an end in itself; keep it connected to in-play events and consequences rather than becoming your personal solo construct.

BREADTH AND DEPTH

Lots of the game's situations change at the personal level, where the heroes can see it: lifestyles and roles change, people come and go, whole organizations can interfere or get dismantled. Play also proceeds, perhaps inevitably, into higher-scale changes. These can be "up," meaning more power and consequences for things we already do and know about; "in," meaning driving deep into motivations and perhaps psychic or memory-based content; and "out," meaning the wider venues of space, time, and other realms. Getting into these, even all three at once, is more-or-less what super-team comics do, so your game is probably going this way before too long.

How it happens is largely emergent rather than planned. References and hints may have been thrown in for a bit of casual drama, but they take on a life of their own if and when players act upon them. Then the content gains persons and history of its own, and new connections may well form across different things in the Now, looking for all the world as if they'd been planned by a genius.

Acting upon such inspirations eventually requires invention. Who are the powers that be, why do they exist, what do they want, and why are our heroes important to them? And since no one wants to be a pawn, when do the heroes take the step of becoming such powers, or at least to demand that their voices and views matter?

The risk here is similar to those for developing the fictional past: you can get self-involved and over-committed to some grand tapestry, diminishing actual play events by comparison and reducing the heroes' agency in the here-and-now. It also includes the grave danger of meaningless escalation in scope and abstraction, as more than one play group has found that defending the very fabric of time and space isn't anywhere near as much fun as when they stopped the guy from blowing up the gas station.

Done with heart, however, the payoff is superbly super. A great deal of modern comics' mythos is derived from exactly this sort of thing in the 1960s and 1970s comics. (5)

- The appearance of a being who existed on such a scale that whole planets were meals to him, yet the fate of Earth depended on the empathy among two lonely men and a blind woman.
- The onset of a new age of high-tech heroes worthy of myth, including counter-cultural ideals pitted against the most nihilistic, vicious rule possible.
- The opening and closure of a time-loop which determined the potential transformation of a young messiah's anarchic ideals into a galaxy-spanning authoritarian church, or conversely, the destruction of everything as a gift to Death.

Play suits this creative jumble very nicely, if the group remains committed to the original two statements and attends mainly to developing relationships among persons they care about. Then, expanding and adding locations and powers-that-be confirms play rather than distracts from it, even to remarkable degrees of complexity and intensity.

I like to distinguish these effects as Cosmos, as opposed to Universe. Universe is an editorial requirement, a catalog of things to obey, and as happened into the comics, degenerates into a struggle for control among contributors. Whereas a Cosmos grows from what the creators value and want to develop, enjoyably and unpretentiously shown as having "always been there" even as it is invented piece by piece, adapting and deepening the content in the living document of the Now. (6)

In the comics, the Universe is legalistic, in constant angry dispute, and ultimately creatively sterile. Whereas the Cosmos gave us joy in the making and remains the wellspring of the stories which are re-told and rebooted today. Consider which of them you'd rather do.

REFERENCES

(1) This techique for building setting through play was showcased by pioneering Champions author Aaron Allston in his seminal work *Strike Force: A Campaign Sourcebook for Champions* (1988), published by Hero Games. The resulting setting was later expanded upon by Michael Surbrook in *Aaron Allston's Strike Force* (2016), published by High Rock Press.

(2) When the new Marvel Comics imprint demonstrated surprising sales power and a vocal fandom, Stan Lee began mining properties that Goodman Publications laid claim to. The method ranges between literally adopting the old titles' content as "the past" and extracting features or names into newly-created heroes.

- Namor the Sub-Mariner had first appeared in *Marvel Comics* #1 (1939), by Bill Everett, published by "Timely Comics" or whatever one wants to call the impenetrable murk of Martin Goodman's publishing concerns at that time. These earlier stories were effectively treated as "true" relative to the current fiction when Namor was introduced into the story of The Fantastic Four. Captain America's earlier stories were treated the same way when he was introduced into The Avengers, including a justification for what he had been doing in the meantime.
- By contrast, the original Human Torch, an android, first appeared in the same issue cited above, by Carl Burgos, but although a hero presented by Lee and Jack Kirby in The Fantastic Four adopted that name, appearance, and powers, there was no fictional connection. (And their Namor apparently had forgotten all about his frequent semi-ally/semi-foe back in 1940.)

- The earliest hero to use the name Wonder Man first appeared in *Wonder Comics #1* (1939), by "Willis" (Will Eisner), published by Fox Feature Syndicate. He was the first imitator of Superman and promptly the first to be scuttled by lawfare. (Fawcett Publications' Master Man met a similar fate shortly thereafter.)
- The earliest hero to use the name the Vision first appeared in *Marvel Mystery Comics #13* (1940), by Joe Simon and Jack Kirby, published by Timely Comics (Martin Goodman) in 1940. He wasn't an android.
- The name Wonder Man was later used several times under the DC imprint, but also for a somewhat sympathetic Marvel villain who appeared and was killed in The *Avengers #9* (1964), by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, published by Magazine Management (Goodman Publications) using its Marvel Comics imprint. No lawfare ensued this time.
- Roy Thomas invented a more extensive fictional "past" during the late 1960s using similar methods, often with bizarre retconning and recombining. For example (among many others):
- The android Vision as designed by Roy Thomas and John Buscema first appeared in *The Avengers #57* (1968), published by Magazine Management (Goodman Publications) using its Marvel Comics imprint. In publishing terms he preserved the IP for the name and general appearance of the Timely hero, with no fictional connection between them.
- The dead Wonder Man's brain-waves were retconned to have been recorded when he died and utilized to construct the mind of the new Vision. as described in *The Avengers* #58.
- For extra confusion, Rick Jones projects a simulacrum of the original Vision along with other heroes of that era in *The Avengers #97* (1972), by Roy Thomas and John Buscema, so apparently he "existed" too in the context of the fiction.
- Thomas considered the new Vision to have been rebuilt from the body of the Timely-published Human Torch, directly establishing that hero to have "existed" relative to the current fiction. This concept entered the comic in stages, eventually completed in *The Avengers #134-135* (1972), by Steve Englehart, Sal Buscema, and George Tuska.

Defiants: Issue #1, page 3
PANEL 1
Anybug: Wh-what?
PANEL 2
Domain (two word balloons): This is the Domain! Devour is mine!
PANEL 3
Domain (maybe four separate word balloons, running diagonally from the top left of the panel):
As
Is
The
Which
Isabel: No! I'm the Which, not her!
Page notes: my thought for Anybug is to stay simple and reactive, basically just OMG. The page already has a lot of action for Devour and a lot of information for Domain.

(3) The group photograph device was employed in *Watchmen #1-12* (1986-1987), by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, published by Warner Communications using its DC Comics imprint. Warner had acquired heroes from the now-closed Charlton Comics and folded them into or alongside existing DC titles much as they had done with Captain Marvel licensed from Fawcett. However, this limited series was mandated to use derived, renamed versions instead. Therefore the photograph served its ordinary function to focus attention on "who were they then, what has happened since then," but it also established that this past belonged to this story without reference to anything that might have occurred in the older comics, and was freed to be made up, while retaining a visual anchor.

(4) Kang the Conqueror first appeared in *The Avengers #8* (1964), by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, published by Magazine Management (Goodman Publications), using its Marvel Comics imprint. He was combined with Rama-Tut and Immortus, villains with approximately the same publication date, throughout *The Avengers #129*, *Avengers Giant-Size #2-3*, and #141-143 (1974-1976), by Steve Englehart, Sal Buscema, Dave Cockrum, and George Pérez, published by Cadence Industries using its Marvel Comics Group imprint. That was only the beginning; at last count Kang's multiple-timestream saga includes three more super-personae and one ordinary human identity.

(5) The Galactus trilogy appeared in *Fantastic Four #48-50* (1966), by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, published by Magazine Management (Goodman Publications) using its Marvel Comics imprint. The New Gods appeared in the titles *New Gods, The Forever People, Mister Miracle, and The Fourth World* (1971-1973), by Jack Kirby, published by Warner Communications using its DC Comics imprint. The saga of Adam Warlock, as well as Captain Marvel, the Magus, and Thanos, reached its initial fruition in *Strange Tales* #171-181, *Warlock* #9-15, *The Avengers Annual #7*, and *Marvel Two-in-One Annual #2* (1975-1977), by Jim Starlin, published by Cadence Industries using its Marvel Comics Group imprint.

(6) "Universe" as an editorial policy, as opposed to voluntary continuity, began with the assistant editorship of Mark Gruenwald, made explicit in *The Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe* (1983-1984), edited by Gruenwald, and *Secret* Wars (1984-1985), by Jim Shooter, Mike Zeck, and Bob Layton, published by Cadence Industries using its Marvel Comics Group imprint. The parallel process occurred for DC with the editorship of Paul Levitz, made explicit in *The Crisis of Infinite Earths* (1985-1986), by Marv Wolfman and George Pérez, and Who's Who in the *DC Universe* (1985-1987), edited by Len Wein, Marv Wolfman, and Robert Greenberger, published by Warner Communications using its DC Comics imprint. The directive, strategic method for managing multiple-title crossovers is called the Levitz Paradigm, including the canonical example of *The Death of Superman* (1992-1993), edited by Mike Carlin.

CHAPTER 14
WHO ARE YOU

The game does not tell you what a hero is. You might already know and just do it, you might be arriving at a conclusion about it throughout play, you might be going all grey with it and moreso as you go, or you might, for some reason best known to yourself, be deconstructing it. It doesn't have to be a topic of interest if you don't want it to be; and, if you do, you can set up the kind of question you want.

"You" in this case is the collective for everyone playing, so the answers or approach present a collage or accord from your own events of play. Everything in this chapter originates in your views and needs at the table.

WHO YOU KNOW

For each player, your hero has a social role and identity in the situations of play. This is rich stuff, as the world is full of people and casual interactions are boundless. The details and nuances can always develop and be examined from different angles. The more people who observe or interact with the hero and offer their opinions as incidental dialogue with them or with others, the better. Most of them probably remain incidental, but the few that "pop" in play, unplanned, become iconic.

You're playing a superhero. Consider people who know the hero pretty well vs. those who don't, and consider when he or she is overtly engaging in "the hero thing" vs. doing anything else. What do people do and say? What does he or she do and say? What happens? There is a subtle but strong connection between the fictional populace's perception of the hero and how we, the real-world audience, relate to him or her. They aren't the same things, but they affect one another. Playing with an eye toward the connection always pays off.

As if that weren't enough, anyone associated with the hero enough to recur in play is not just furniture, but a relationship, with his or her own perspective and desires. The Dependent NPC and Hunted Situations obviously specify those into particular problems and threats, respectively. Every one of them will have opinions of the hero, which is different from one-dimensional plot roles like "gotta rescue them again" or "oh look here comes my nemesis." These interactions shape the hero's immediate life even when they're not emergencies.

Then there's the opposite of such personally-invested interactions: the law, and more generally, the network of powerful people and institutions for whom the law is a tool, a protective cover, or a weapon. How does each given hero relate to these people and institutions in the first place, as originally conceived, what do they do, and how does a hero deal with that?

That is a wide open question for this game and these heroes. Considering the law as a specific legal and physical set of actors and activities, and the larger/scarier society as a system of influence and power, one question is whether a given hero wields any of that in the first place. Although the term "crime fighter" abounds in comics, the history of actually doing so is spotty, and by the 1970s was practically absent in any sense of crime as we know it. Similarly, the notion of superheroes as a government-associated but essentially independent global task force is abundant in years and titles, but it's specific to one group, its direct offshoots, and a constellation of imitators, deconstructions, and parodies.

There's no way to codify society + law for the game rules, because it speaks to entirely personal views, including how everyone chooses to interpret the statements, as well as to multiple actions and decisions during play. It doesn't have to be a problem, conundrum, or even a topic. You could hand-wave it, as after all what's good enough for most comics publishing is good enough for you, to say "we're the superheroes" and assume relatively positive working relationships with state authorities and law enforcement systems, which remain generally stable throughout play.

But it's possible, even likely, that the Now-oriented techniques will bring more substance, shaped as your decisions determine. One of our playtest games produced a law-enforcement example, informed by a player's personal and family history, in which the heroes were part of the police force and aided the captain in bringing much-needed reform to it. Another found the heroes acting essentially as private citizens, for whom the state governments and law-enforcement agencies were both occasional allies and potential problems, especially since both included multiple actors. Furthermore, at least two featured heroes who by most establishment and legal standards were criminals, "villains" if you will, willing to put their reputations and even lives into the public sphere in defiance of agencies and practices they deemed worth defying.

Here's some hard-won advice: it's a really bad idea for the game master to wield the in-game, fictional law enforcement establishment as a reward and punishment device toward the heroes and by extension toward their players, as if they produced "good" or "bad" behavior, and as if the game master stood in loco parentis toward the actual people they're playing with. The social and legal consequences of what the heroes do certainly become part of play, but this is something you all discover and want, not imposed by one upon the others.

WHAT YOU SHOW

The identity-based Situations are a playground for stresses between self and society. If you don't have one, that doesn't mean your hero has no identity or role among other people, it means that he or she is not troubled about it and takes no special means to manage it. But even that status requires a little context, i.e., if there's no problem, then why not, and the answer still plays straight into the actions and opinions of the people around the hero.

Let's take Secret Identity all by itself. It's best conceived not as "no one knows," but instead, "I'm not telling unless I have to." Therefore it's not forbidden for some others to know or even for someone to find out. It's about the hero's own behavior and what "have to" means for them.

In that light, threatening to expose the secret to all and sundry isn't an effective or enjoyable use of the Situation for the game master. Arguably, it's even contrary to the letter of the rules: this might be a little too meta, but after all, the one way never to blow the hero's Secret Identity is to keep it listed on the sheet! Instead, in thinking about the Now, the game master should focus on the hero's self-imposed reasons for maintaining a partial or complete lie as a way of life, and their consequences. (1)

Public Identity is a lot more than merely the absence of a secret one. It refers to being a public figure, whose doings are scrutinized and considered fair game for all media and popular culture. The hero can be located unless they really try hard not to be, and many organizations or authorities consider themselves connected to them. The obvious application of this Situation is frequent or even constant inconvenience, especially with the general populace. The cell phone basically becomes the devil incarnate: people want selfies with you in the most ridiculous circumstances, and weirdos call you using that number they're not supposed to have, with their ever more Rule 34 suggestions. But there's more: you're dealing with mass expectation of who you are, which people don't even realize is a projection, with a mass negative reaction lurking behind it if and when your actual self fails to conform to it. When you're not lying, you're vulnerable as hell to others' lies about you, especially when they're doing it to themselves.

You can certainly have both kinds. One of the best radical heroes was an escaped convict living under an alias, meaning a significant Secret Identity, but that alias was also his professional, widely-advertised for-hire handle, hence he had a Public one too. Another slightly-odd vigilante hero maintained three separate Secret Identities, each with its own lifestyle and supporting cast. (2)

Here's an important point as well: how bent is this notion of "identity" anyway, in the hero's own mind? Masks are serious ritual and psychological business, in real life and in all cultures. If you want to tap into the power of that concept even a little, take one or more of the identity-based Situations and tie its circumstances

to a Psychological Limitation, whether just for a little extra electricity when suiting up, or to turn your hero's head into a real snakepit. It shouldn't surprise you that later writers of that vigilante hero turned the triple-identity into a psychological disorder so that none of the three knew about the others.

WHAT YOU DO

Look long and hard through this book, and you'll find no criteria for being a good person, being a hero, contributing to society, or knowing whom to combat. Significantly, there's no morality in the point-improvement mechanics: no reward for doing good, no punishment for doing bad.

You won't find directives to guide you either. No rule says your hero must be this kind of hero, whether ethically sound, law-abiding, or nice. If he or she is that kind of hero, that's your choice alone, no qualifications, full stop.

The rules for "what my guy does" are very hard and fixed for play, using this table.

Actions	Player says	Game master suggests, for player approval	Game master says
Difficult decision or control			
Respond as desired, or improvised Ego roll	Improvised Ego roll		
Whether a Psychological Situation applies			Say yes or no
Psychological Situation without specific response	Respond as desired, or improvised Ego roll	Improvised Ego roll	
Psychological Situation with irrational or meltdown response	Respond as desired, or cede to game master	Respond as desired if you have permission	
Enraged Situation		Whether events provoke the roll, and who or what is attacked	

The dividing lines are very clear. The game master states whether a Psychological Situation or Enrage Situation is now in play. However, he or she has directive power over the hero only when the Enrage Situation is involved. If the roll indicates the Enrage is provoked, the game master also says who or what the hero attacks. But that's it. In all other cases, the player holds the authority over what the hero does.

One neat version of that authority is to call for your own Ego roll, out of the blue, to see what his or her hero does. It's typically in some situation that seems to call for self-mastery, defined as you like: to do something or not to do it, or to overcome a Physical Situation or immediate constraint if that seems possible.

Playtesting featured a moment when the hero, who was considered (and possibly was) dead for three years, saw his little son being brought by social services to the same charity shelter where he, the hero, was living. I asked whether the hero would rush to the boy, and the player decided to roll his Ego for it. He chose to define success as mastering his emotions to stay hidden.

The player may include the game master either for a suggested improvised Ego roll or for suggested possible responses. He or she may even voluntarily "give up" the hero to the game master for a moment regarding an irrational or meltdown response to a Psychological Situation, but does not have to.

In play, these decisions are easy and intuitive, but here are the principles underneath them.

Psychological Situations which do not include irrational or meltdown responses represent the hero's opinions which he or she is not shy about but also manages pretty well. They might be ideals, personal positions, or habits; slightly more fixed things like beliefs, blind spots, or rituals; or even troubled but under-control memories, fears, or fixations.

These Situations' actual content, i.e., how normal or common or acceptable they are or aren't, isn't rated in points. The points are only about when the hero gets reminded or provoked by them: sometimes (5) or a lot (15). Sane vs. whacked, admirable vs. vile, kind vs. mean, whatever – fill in as you wish, the points don't care.

Depth, intensity, and sincerity are not rated in points either. There's a well-known superhero who is determined to stop criminal actions to the point of mania, often at a physical or psychological cost to himself, but is equally determined never to use lethal force. He sets the high-water mark for the most sincere + troubled hero in superhero comics... but if this feature were written up with these rules, none of his Psychological Limitations would be at maximal points. He is reliably intense, even melodramatic when faced with difficult choices about killing, but is not irrational or prone to melt down.

No Psychological Situation is absolute, and this kind, with no special intense response, may certainly be played to its opposite in some stressful situation, especially when you're already played it as written a fair amount. Such decisions are arguably what you took the Situation points for, especially during the soul-searching, reflective aftermath. That's why Psychological Situations are only described by their content, never as "always" or "won't."

Psychological Situations which include the irrational response maintain the player's authority regarding what the hero does. Playing this way means taking on the hero's worst self or at least not thinking straight at the moment, i.e., not upholding the usual sense of advocacy one feels for the hero. In practice, when this happens or beckons, players often enjoy "handing over" the hero to the game master briefly, but again, doing that is fully voluntary.

If you're interested in playing a slightly out-of-control hero, consider structuring the Psychological Situations across more than one. For example, here are two heroes, each with the same two Psychological Situations in terms of content but expressed differently in points:

- Psychological: patriotic (often) + Psychological: maverick (sometimes, irrational). This person responds patriotically to everyday life: flies a flag, thanks you for your service, tells people that freedom isn't free and to get out and vote. They are also primed-and-ready to do things "not by the book," perhaps even in defiance of patriotism, but it doesn't happen often and may surprise people who don't know them well.
- Psychological: patriotic (sometimes, irrational) + Psychological: maverick (often). This person is a rebel, habitually doing things without authority or "not by the book," or feeling driven to do so often by ordinary experiences in life. They also surprise others when they suddenly display or reveal their patriotism, usually kept private, but backed by considerable emotion and impulse when it does appear.

Combinations like these make it easier to establish the hero's "ground state" and to tap into the irrational response mode of play more intuitively regarding why they get triggered and how they might act.

WHAT HAVE I DONE

If you're playing a hero who flies out of control, you'll be faced with things they've done that weren't too nice, even which you may not have stated. One moment, you're playing the superhero you know, built and working the way you want, doing what you want, changing over time how you want. The next moment, this small bank of mechanics rips that hero out of your hands as they literally rebel against you as their player.

Again, including these mechanics for your hero at all is totally at your option. If you don't include meltdown for Pyschological Situations; and if you make any irrational ones rare and maintain control over the hero's actions; and if you don't take an Enrage, then it's not even an issue. But if you do... get ready for a wilder ride.

The option is included for a reason: somewhere, deep in the murky pulp and fetish origins of superhero comics, lies frustration, confusion, despair, and rage. I call it the "Scream," as quoted from one of these comics' moments of greatness. A lot of the time it's just bathos, tantrums, and sudden violence to inject drama or to fill some pages, but here and there, it's real enough to make an existential philosopher flinch. Sometimes it's the unceasing injustice of ordinary life, sometimes it's seen in the psychology of an alien being or as the sympathetic madness in a villain's eyes, and sometimes it's in the hero's mirror. (3)

How do you play this without being a melodramatic idiot? Comics creators have struggled with that forever, and their failures and successes show us the way.

- It's all right to disagree strongly with someone, even aggressively. It's stupid to escalate after making your point.
- It's all right to react strongly on the basis of insufficient knowledge. It's stupid to keep reacting the same way when someone shouts the full knowledge at you.
- It's all right to misunderstand or misinterpret what someone else is doing, and to act swiftly and surely to stop them. It's stupid to insist after they say or show what they want to do.

The point is clear: all those breakdowns and acting-outs, all those misunderstandings and miscommunications, and all those revelations and shocked reactions can be enjoyable spectacles, not sudden cement blocks. They work best when the moment passes, and the intense or misguided response does not persist. In that case, the portrayals and relationships are revealed, strengthened, or changed.

What about the rules? Irrational responses or meltdowns within Psychological Situations, as well as Enrage, begin with provocation. Something sets them off, as specified or at least described with some parameters. Here's the rubric for who says what:

- Either the game master or the player may state that the provocation is sufficient, and neither can be vetoed. There is no roll involved.
- The player chooses whether to say what the hero does or to cede that authority to the game master; again, in either case, no veto applies.
- After a Phase of action or its noncombat equivalent (saying or doing "something"), the player decides whether the hero recovers or not; if not, the above options continue to apply.

The scary part is turning over the reins for what your hero does in that window, with no veto power. Irrational indeed!

Whoever says what the hero does needs to know: what does irrational mean? Certainly, whatever the acting hero does is definitely not to his or her social benefit. It may or may not mean violent, and if it does, it doesn't have to be an attack. And it's a response, so it doesn't mean absurd, like doing something irrelevant or loopy. Ultimately, the social definition is the bedrock: something that defies what third-party observers, perhaps not well-informed ones, and perhaps over-idealized, would think is the appropriate response. It doesn't take much to dismay such an audience – raising one's voice or stating something non-conformist or making an unwanted observation are certainly enough, and grading up from there is fine too.

What does meltdown mean? It's pretty extreme: fleeing or attempting to, collapsing, withdrawing in the clinical sense, becoming unresponsive. Definitely not to fight or to take any purposeful action. The hero is not turned over to someone else for play so much as he or she briefly becomes unplayable. It's not a casual choice for a hero's Situations, amounting almost to giving up or failing outright, so consider defining its cause in a sympathetic, humanizing way.

Although it makes sense to relate or contrast the trigger for Enrage with one or more Psychological Situations, the phrasing cannot be identical across the Situations, as they work differently. Enrage is triggered by a roll rather than a mandate or option, and its response is strictly limited to attack full-force. Its target is also unequivocally out of the player's hands: even when it's obvious who's getting it in the face, the game master makes that call.

An Enraged hero is trouble, unable to do anything except keep attacking. Fortunately the triggering target remains the target as long as the hero can perceive them. However, if it becomes unavailable, the hero will attack something, most likely the nearest and probably inoffensive inanimate object. In the unlikely event no such object is available, including the ground, then the nearest living target is fair game.

The hero gets the chance to recover as a 0-Phase action at the start of each Phase, and may also roll to recover in response to interactions along the lines of "stop, it's all right, your mother's gone now." Or maybe a nice hug.

With all this irrationality and mad-attacking going on, the real trouble is what you might have done. Even if the hero mastered themselves in time to prevent the worst, that very act of control was obvious and likely vocal. Damage to persons and property and social proprieties aside, if no one has an opinion about what happened in the throes of these mechanics, then you didn't do it right. Consequences are called for.

These concepts apply especially well to Mind Control as a plot component. There's no point in taking agency away from a player, saying "you did this," and then forcing them to accept responsibility for it. These easy principles solve everything, though:

- The player decides whether this instance of control overrides the hero's will completely, which is the default concept for the Power, or instead taps into feelings or desires the hero would otherwise repress.
- The mechanics of Mind Control are designed to be broken, so exactly this is done, or failed, deserves attention.
- Focus on the affected hero's point of view afterwards, during which the player says what the hero's reactions and next actions are.

These work together to make getting mind-controlled about the hero instead of negating or devaluing the hero.

A Matter of Life and Death

Does a hero kill?!! You get to say. Defining heroes as "do not kill" is much more infrequent in superhero comics than one might think, throughout their history. (4)

The game mechanics are designed to make it either really hard or really easy to die, placing the responsibility upon the people rather than the dice. I'll just run down some thoughts and comparisons and leave you to it, because saying anything else front-loads a comics concept and takes away your creative ownership.

One way is to set it aside, for almost entirely no-killing play. Fatalities would appear rarely if at all, as notable possibilities or events, rather than a constant feature or fact. Such play doesn't have to be silly or overly light, nor do the heroes have to be goody two-shoes, or conversely, to be constantly holding back. In fact, part of the point is removing the need for them to be either, because the issue is diminished in the first place and play concentrates on other things.

Another option is the most open-ended, to acknowledge killing as something people do, but not as a constant thing, only one problem among many. This or that situation may bring up killing as an issue, killing is an ethical problem, the world is full of problems, and ethics are hard, so let's see where events take us. The heroes would make their way possibly with some element of self-discovery or self-challenge, for those who include killing-oriented Psychological Situations leaning in either direction.

The third option is again to acknowledge killing as a choice, but one which the heroes and most everyone else have already made: to do it. "Life is cheap and death is free," as the song goes. Play doesn't have to devolve into a dumb slaughterfest, as it can draw from plenty of idioms in which killing is familiar or even normalized. Two of the best superhero comics are all about it, one of them featuring convicted villains who do black-ops for the U.S. government and think little of racking up a body-count. The other features a faceless detective seeking meaning in a corrupt city, who does not directly kill people but does leave a trail of reactive murders and suicides in his wake.

Finally, the edgiest way is to make killing the explicit topic for the "losing control" mechanics described above, so it becomes a traumatic, possible central phenomenon. Since the Psychological Situations and Enrages all have their own content and triggers, the range across heroes and villains can present many degrees of insanity and responsibility. Psycho-crime and monster-victim stories go this way, along with heroes with dubious legal status and who may themselves kill without complete control or consider doing so to be forbidden fruit.

So much for the ideas. How is this done in practice, with actual people? The problem is that just mandating some standard isn't enough. Fortunately, the two statements orient people remarkably well. If you're writing them for an upcoming game, and you care a lot about this killing-or-not stuff, one way or the other, you can get a lot of framing content in there, as you can see across my examples in Chapter 3. When the players bring their personal spins or angles of attack to the statements, you get exactly what you wanted: heroes who fit with and bring insight to the issues.

However, as always, real play outweighs preparatory hopes. That's why, if you're a game master who cares about what killing looks like, you must attend to the villains and the details of the Now. What the players will make of it is up to them, but your part matters too.

The Legacy game is pretty straightforward this way, as the first statement says that powers are "bright, fun, and hopeful." It says "powers," not "heroes," so I went with that especially when I created the The Continuum, who nabbed villains from the Eighties to interfere with Advance's technological experiments. I even had to rewrite the feared Dark Cohort as they were too vile and vicious at the first try, to strive for extra coolness instead. Most of the outright damage in the game involved structures and generalized danger rather than gruesome individual mayhem.

By contrast, the Hartford game turned out to learn more toward the fourth option than I initially imagined: Domain, Killer Coil, and Devour are all deranged and notably lethal. In retrospect it seems strange. Why would I lean that way when none of the heroes was obviously bent toward killing-oriented trauma?

The answer lies in that first statement that I'd written: A superhero stands for something and means it. That calls for adversaries who put people's lives on the line, in two cases because they themselves stand for something (bad). That means a hero's stand is not merely posturing; it has consequences that matter terribly, requiring activism to become action. I was cruel enough to land the most idealistic hero with the most lethal foe, and most difficult to blame in simple moral terms.

I typically don't steer toward that fourth option for my superhero role-playing, but this time we arrived at it honestly and played it through. You may be interested to know that The Which fed Domain's current host to Devour (eww!).

INDOMITABLE SPIRIT

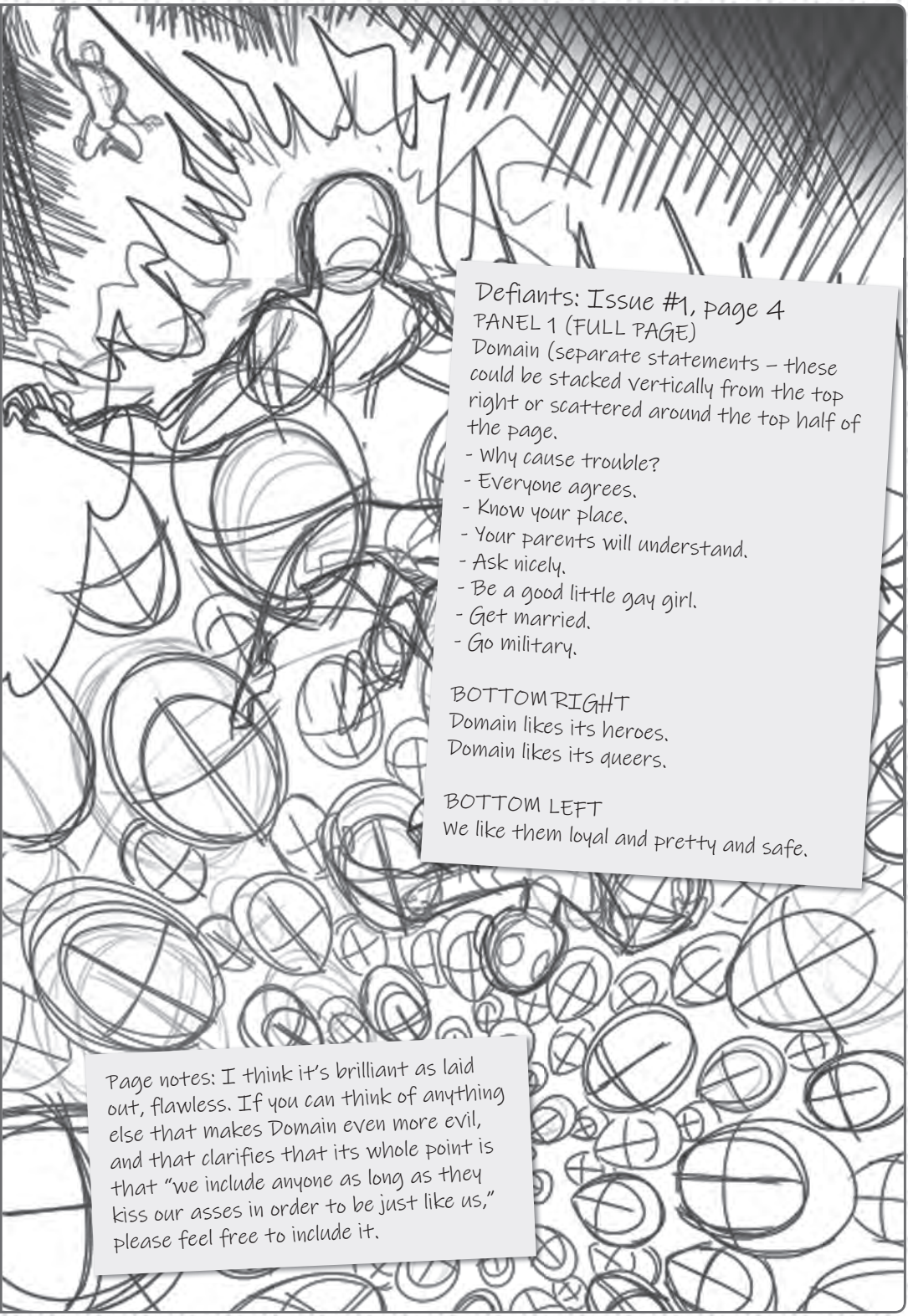
This is probably the single most important characterization in the game, and yet the shortest section in the rules, because it is entirely emergent. Willpower isn't found in an isolated attribute or mechanic. Instead, multiple rules interact to generate each separate instance of a hero's will as put into action. It's not something you have, but what you do once all the parts are moving.

The Ego roll seems like the first candidate, but it is not actually required much by the mechanics. It isn't the reference for any of the roll-based Skills. It doesn't affect another person's views or emotions; that's what Presence does. It formally applies only to specialized powers and maneuvers and to recovery from Enrage. However, its voluntary manifestation is a great example of emergent role-played willpower rather than mandated.

In the very first session of the Legacy playtest game, the hero Advance was hit hard by his own Side Effects and could not recover his powers, as the other hero was battered by Dr. Bang and a techno-cosmic project went dangerously awry. Advance, as his frail and aged "real" identity, set himself to the instrument panel, hoping to solve the situation through mad science rather than combat powers... and the observant game master pointed out the Physical Situation: Arthritis, on his sheet. The player gritted his teeth: "I'll try!" It seemed a good place for an Ego roll, which for Advance stood at the baseline score of 11 or less.

The player accepted my suggestion, and as it happened, he made that roll, and the following Computer Programming roll as well (whose target was rather higher). Advance was a massive-growing, glowing, rejuvenated, temporal-anomalous superhero, but he could never have stood out using those powers as he did in this situation, as a sixty-year-old man overcoming the pain in his hands.

Enrage counts too, as it is certainly not always a bad thing to lose it and fully unload on someone or something which is unequivocally horrid. Its hidden benefit against mental domination certainly plays into that possibility as well.



Defiants: Issue #1, page 4

PANEL 1 (FULL PAGE)

Domain (separate statements – these could be stacked vertically from the top right or scattered around the top half of the page.

- Why cause trouble?
- Everyone agrees.
- Know your place.
- Your parents will understand.
- Ask nicely.
- Be a good little gay girl.
- Get married.
- Go military.

BOTTOM RIGHT

Domain likes its heroes.
Domain likes its queers.

BOTTOM LEFT

We like them loyal and pretty and safe.

Page notes: I think it's brilliant as laid out, flawless. If you can think of anything else that makes Domain even more evil, and that clarifies that its whole point is that "we include anyone as long as they kiss our asses in order to be just like us," please feel free to include it.

Then there is the concept of Endurance as effort, which includes Strength against grabs, Entangles, or relevant hazards, as well as the raw impact of powers. The concept of willpower gains considerable teeth with Pushing and Pushing further. Doing so bumps up the risk for the rest of a situation so much that one simply must care about this action more than any that may come later. (5)

That's powerful all by itself, but in combination with specific tactics or reactive moments, it's amazing. Consider your hero being attacked by a Blast packing considerable Knockback. Combine two things: sacrifice your next Phase using Dodge, which for purposes of the example does not save you from being hit; and that being the case, resist the Knockback with your Strength. The Maneuver includes the option to move two hexes, which in this case isn't about literally dodging but goes toward the attacker from wherever the reduced Knockback put you. See what you're doing? You're wading into the attack, willing to keep eating it just to get forward. Now... push.

Presence is an obvious heavy hitter too, in some applications, when you're literally attacking with what you want to get or to express, and since it isn't constrained by the Speed Chart and can accompany any and every other action in play. Don't overlook its use in defense as well, which can be played emotionally and represents more directly than any other mechanic the resistant power of a character's will.

Finally, you can define and modify powers so that they reinforce or rely upon one or more of these mechanics. One might even conceive of a hero whose powers do that exclusively, as with a famous superhero whose current state of anger serves as the context and specifics of his super-strength, admittedly, varying greatly by writer and series.

The actions and events of play are typically impressive for any of the above mechanics. When two or more apply simultaneously, play moves into the most spectacular moments of character and plots that comics have produced.

There is a key sequence in the story of one of the world's most popular superheroes in which he is trapped beneath a fallen water tank weighing several tons. He cannot lift it; it's a fair question whether he can even shift it enough to get out, even under the best circumstances, and it so happens that he is exhausted and injured. The substance he needs to save his dying elderly relative is nearby. You would think he'd invoke his love for her and her deceased husband to get out, and he does try... but it's not enough. Then, through a chilling series of visualized faces and thoughts, he lets go of his original, childish devotion to them. He tries again, this time alone, not because he needs this person, but has chosen to help her and will not stop. (6)

This teen hero's origin story has been re-told many times, and they always focus too much on its beginning. It's not the initial short story that earns him the "man" that ends his name. It's this one, three years later.

Such situations and scenes can't be front-loaded or delivered into play like a gift-wrapped package from game master to player. But when both of them stay engaged and alert, the opportunities appear surprisingly often.

One last point about the villains. Villains in the comics sometimes go on and on about how much they and the heroes are really not so different. Most of the time, it's just bombast or self-delusion; we know the heroes are at least trying to be better people, and that makes all the difference. But when it comes to the content of this chapter and the rules it reflects upon, this once, the villains saying that are absolutely right.

REFERENCES

(1) Secret identities have an ancient pedigree in myth and adventure fiction. The immediate precursors to superhero comics include The Scarlet Pimpernel and Zorro, especially with both having appeared in cinema, via very similar use for The Shadow and other vigilantes in pulp fiction and for the somewhat more ethical Phantom in newspaper strips. By the advent of superhero comics, it was treated as a convention and often as a joke, rather than a naturalistic or justifiable element. Jerry Siegel even tried to develop Superman as revealing his identity but was overridden by his editor. The first superhero for whom it was presented as a psychological or logistic problem was the Flash, beginning in *Showcase #4* (1956), by Robert Kanigher and Carmine Infantino, published by National Periodical Publications using its DC imprint. The first for whom it was treated as non-ironic drama was Spider-Man, beginning in *Amazing Adult Fantasy #15* (1963), published by Magazine Management (Goodman Publications) using its Marvel Comics Imprint.

(2) The escaped convict known only as "Lucas," using the very public, indeed commercial business identity of Luke Cage, debuted in *Luke Cage, Hero For Hire #1* (1972), by Archie Goodwin, George Tuska, and Billy Graham, published by Cadence Industries using their Marvel Comics Group imprint. Moon Knight first appeared in *Werewolf by Night #32* (1975), by Doug Moench and Don Perlin, by the same publisher. He was reconceived with three secret identities (Marc Spector aka Steven Grant aka Jake Lockley) over several years including Moench's long run on Moon Knight with Bill Sienkewicz. The stress among them became a defining character feature in #10 of that title, and it was reconceived further as an amnesiac personality disorder in *Moon Knight: Fist of Khonshu* #1-6 (1985) by Alan Zelenetz and Chris Warner, by the same publisher.

(3) Beginning in the mid-1960s, superheroes became argumentative and hypersensitive, perhaps making up for two decades of enforced chumminess. They constantly quarreled among themselves, reacted impulsively to situations or suggestions, and at least half the time threw a punch or weapon or energy-blast at one another. A typical example occurs when Wolverine mouths off at Cyclops and calls him gutless, Cyclops backhands him, knocking him ass over teakettle, Wolverine threatens murder, and Storm threatens Wolverine, forcing him to back down, as depicted in *The Uncanny X-Men #97* (1977), by Chris Claremont and Dave Cockrum, published by Cadence Industries using their Marvel Comics Group imprint. By contrast, the next issue opens with some of the nicest, most naturalistic warmth among comics heroes then or since.

(4) To pick three heroes often cited as high benchmarks for "heroes do not kill," the original Batman carried a sidearm, tossed a guy into acid and said he deserved it, broke a man's neck with a kick complete with sound effect, threw a goon off a roof with a confirmed kill on the next page, and gunned down at least one foe (the latter in *Detective Comics #32*, 1939, by Gardner F. Fox and Bob Kane); the original Superman tore the wings off a no-goodnik's airplane so it would crash in a fiery explosion (*Action Comics #22*, by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, 1940; plus a whole lot of murder attempts on the Ultra-Humanite before that); and Spider-Man's actions at the death of the Green Goblin are at best negligent homicide and quite likely some degree of manslaughter (*The Amazing Spider-Man #122*, 1973, by Gerry Conway and Gil Kane), not to mention beating a would-be rapist almost to death before the horrified victim stops him (*The Amazing Spider-Man #154*, 1976, by Len Wein and Sal Buscema). Wolverine wasn't the outlier that he's made out to be.

(5) Willpower is the core of superheroic comics. The first reboot of Green Lantern, as Hal Jordan, showcased it as the hero's primary asset and, especially, primary vulnerability, far more so than the ring's more obvious color-coded limitation. It's first referenced as poetic description, and it stepped to the forefront in *Green Lantern #15* (1962), by John Broome and Gil Kane, published by National Comics using its Superman DC imprint. Sometimes it's played quite hard, as in *The Avengers #104* (1972), by Roy Thomas and Rich Buckler, published by Cadence Industries using its Marvel Comics Group imprint. A Sentinel pursuing Quicksilver at high speed correctly states that he cannot escape, as its adaptive powers permit it to maneuver as well as he can; Quicksilver responds by running full-tilt into a mountain, breaking half his bones on impact, so that the Sentinel, with far greater mass, cannot stop and obliterates itself.

(6) Spider-Man's iconic maturation sequence appears in *The Amazing Spider-Man #33* (1966), by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko, published by Magazine Management (Goodman Publications) using the Marvel Comics imprint.

CHAPTER 15
YOU MUST CHANGE

Playing this game is change. It's a hero sheet's way of making another hero sheet. (1)

Some superhero history has not featured interesting change. Plenty of it has been non-continuous, treating each adventure as a rebooted episode. Sometimes we've seen fake or illusory change, claiming transformations to promote sales, only to settle back to the familiar version eventually.

However, looked at another way, change is constant almost by accident. It's a lot like sculpture, as heroes' powers and appearance are enhanced and refashioned without much explanation or with the implication that it's always been like this. The creators may get better at their skills or hone their notion of what the hero is like, perhaps an artist arrives at the facial features that become the standard for the hero, or perhaps an adaptation in other media introduces details or ideas which the comics adopt going forward. (2)

Finally, sometimes, during a given creative team's time with a title, heroes have sometimes displayed genuinely dramatic and understandable development, including their powers, outlooks, relationships, past history, social circumstances, and even fates. The rate of such change varies from extremely steady to outright catastrophic.

These rules relentlessly fuel the latter two types of change. The heroes and villains in your game develop as a wave-front, a highly-textured call-and-response across every other person and event.

THEY KEEP ON COMING

More character points roll steadily onto the player-characters' sheets after every session. Each player gets the same amount, by these criteria as judged by the game master.

- If things seemed only mildly adverse, or the session was short by the group's standards, then each player gets 2.
- If it was a solid session with some confrontations worth talking about, then each player gets 4.

They add up fast. Two points that just landed on your sheet may seem like a little drib or drab, but before you know it, you're looking at double digits. These points are exactly the same as those used during character creation, so once they're on your sheet, you can use them the same ways between sessions, increasing your character's total points. As long as you attend to the rules and stay within the ratio limits, add to and modify your sheet however you like.

Staying on top of it or thinking about what to do can be daunting, and some discussion can help. Some people don't need it, because they consider every point every session, and either spend it right away or have earmarked it for a specific

purpose whose Points they've already calculated. However, others might hesitate because they are uncertain about the possibilities or the build mechanics, and some might forget all about it.

Therefore, at 10-12 points gained, someone should check in to make sure everyone even knows they have more points available and that they are free to use them. A sort of "hero creation II" session is useful then, to clarify the options and to review the rules. Whoever is most familiar with the mechanics may check the math, including the ratios. However, no one has personal veto power over anyone else's choices about how to use the points.

WHERE ARE YOU GOING, WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN

Just as with hero creation, knowing what to do with your new points depends on what you've already done without them. Many, many things may change for a character based on the events of play with no points involved: legal status, wealth, location, social status, most skills, general lifestyle, and more. That goes double for relationships of all kind, which grow, change, end, and begin.

None of that uses any points; but it's far from intangible. It funnels into the all-important question of *who your hero has become* and *what he or she wants now*, to set the context for what the incoming points may do.

The easiest concept is to get better: stronger, faster, more skilled, making the existing numbers higher, and similarly, adding new powers because they "grow" or you are training them up. Alternately, during or after the first few sessions of play, you might adjust or wiggle the character's values to meet your concept, now that you've seen the powers and everything in action. They may fit your ideas better in a slightly different build, and the additional points allow room to free up the wiggling.

As sessions go by and the points flow in, you will see more interesting ways to use them. It's evident and easy to modify and arrange powers based on how their special effects have been manifested in play so far, like an Advantage or a new power to tie in. You might start with a nice simple Blast which happened to be explosive and blinding at some point in play, and then, deciding you liked those very things very much, formalize them by giving it the Explosive Advantage and tying a die or two of Flash to it. Or, working with the same concept, you might start a new power on more Limitations than you would ordinarily prefer, and then continue to spend points to remove or reduce them, as the power "matures" into its more reliable or preferred form.

A more extreme version is to begin or rearrange a whole Framework. If you began with a single signature power and have been adding related applications of the same special effect, you can turn all of them into an Elemental Control. Or perhaps you began with a Multiform that describes a modular device, and you've added so many diverse slots that the whole thing makes more sense if it's rewritten as a Variable Power Pool. In each case, instead of tweaking the current structure, write it anew and see if its old points plus any new ones, if you have them, are sufficient.

Sometimes a player will have accumulated quite a lot of unspent points, either by inclination or by underestimating their arrival rate. It's not mandatory, but at least consider visiting a drastic transformation upon your hero, necessarily including a dramatic increase in effectiveness. In this case you'd rewrite anything you want across the whole sheet, constrained only by your creative urges. Such things can be overdone; but the right one at the right time can be legendary. (3)

You might even cede some control for the sake of unknown dramatic hanky-panky, by letting the game master spend your points on who knows what, at some rate you don't even know. In this case, he or she can trigger the new powers in play, focusing on special effects without being too clear about the exact rules being used, and you can try using them on the basis of those special effects, without really knowing what they are in rules terms. This can go on, as the whatever-it-is grows in points, until such a time as you choose to bring it fully into the light and the game master shows you what those points have been doing.

FICTION SCHMICTION

Be literal if you want, letting the points "buy" fiction as if it were an assembly. If something is played as a momentary special effect or mentioned as possible during play, and you eventually have enough points to buy it, then you do. And now you have it.

But you can also play games with concepts and time. It's perfectly all right to make the change on your sheet with no build-up whatsoever, then show it off during later play, along the lines of "I've been practicing this, time to try it," although we've seen no such thing until now.

Go further if you want, to hand-wave the fiction-side changes without bothering about "how it happened" and never mind whether this is a literal change in the hero. It can be very satisfying to think of quantitative increases on the sheet as revealing more about the character as he or she is, as if the effect in question had always been there, but happens not to have been fully expressed in the fiction until now. You might think of it as the artist simply getting better at drawing explosions, so of course the hero's explosions do more damage than they used to. (4)

That concept applies especially well to skill-tied powers, either improving them or adding them in the first place as far as the sheet is concerned, but not distinguishing during play between how they worked before vs. how they work now. You might begin with just a Stealth skill, then add Invisibility tied to it, then do it again for Teleport. Wow, that fellow is really sneaky, and it's still "just a skill they have," fictionally. (5)

It also applies when shifting a bank of powers to a Variable Power Pool, which in comics terms means the creators are now creatively flexed and brazen enough to depict a wider, even extravagant range of effects for a power. There's no need to consider this to be a change in the hero or the power itself, merely in how good you are at showing it off.

Given this freedom from in-play setup and justification, one does need some grounding. It's reliably found in two things: first, whether the new way to play is exciting to you; and second, whether you're staying true to the two statements which govern the aesthetics of this group's game. Stay with those and the hero you discover through play will transcend anything you might have conceived without it.

SITUATIONS

Theoretically, you can also spend points to reduce or get rid of Situations, again 1:1. I suppose if a player wants to have a lower point total for Situations and is willing to spend character points to get it, he or she can. In practice, however, this makes hardly any sense, because those points have a use elsewhere and because Situations are not actually bad. The character would not be himself or herself without most of them.

All that said, given multi-session intervals and a lot of events, it's reasonable to rearrange and alter Situations based on what's happened in play, maintaining their point total. Perhaps that reconciliation with the villain hunting you is convincing, satisfying, and final, in which case, cross the name right out of the Situations list. Perhaps we've seen enough of that Vulnerability and you think seeing the hero not succumb to it next time would be more fun.

This might apply in the negative as well, if a number of sessions have shown that this particular Hunted or that Psychological Situation (or anything, these are just examples) aren't as much fun to play as we'd hoped, or aren't making sense enough to have been played at all.

It's good to go slowly with altering or removing Situations, because a given one typically doesn't show up in every session, and you should at least see a fair range of what it can do for play before shifting things around. This goes double for Psychological ones because they can be expressed differently across different

circumstances. You should see it in action several times and develop it a little in play for a while before considering a quantitative change. Consider adjusting their points rather than changing their content outright, for example, making a viewpoint more rational but more often expressed to reflect a maturing or healthier attitude – or conceivably, the reverse, if that's the way things are going.

You have to find something to do with the points of Situations that have been freed up, by taking new ones or increasing existing ones. The only thing that has to stay the same is the total. You might even rearrange the whole list a little, upping this thing over here or reducing that one over there.

Much more so than for powers, change Situations based on events of play rather than inventing entirely new material. Look for a foe who'd be happy to become a new Hunted based on that memorable fight a while ago, or for an intense viewpoint that has developed in play and merits formalizing.

However, the same story-logic that applies to powers works for Situations too, in that sometimes a new feature on the sheet hasn't been acquired by the character but, instead, they always had it... and now it's just becoming more relevant to whatever is happening next.

RUBY RAY, ONGOING

Let's think about how the Defiants game might have gone in play, and see how some points might be spent for Ruby Ray based on events. I'm drawing a bit from what did happen, but also extrapolating to 30 more points, approximately ten sessions.

In "dimension A," things have gone pretty well for her and for the team as a whole. Their strong shared goals have also led to enriched or strengthened resolutions across family and politics for everyone. Her radio and web efforts have developed their unified message that alternative or dissenting lifestyles do not have to "buy" legitimacy, and she's backstopped a whole movement that supports prison reform, oversight of police actions, and protection for the homeless. The heroes have all contributed points to a shared base, which is super-cool in being partly in cyberspace. For her more personally, maybe she's given the FCC as good as she's got and built her radio and web presence into a formidable social force and backstop for the super-team.

Complications

Public Identity	10
Psych: Stands up for marginalized person's selfhood (often)	15
Psych: Fun-loving (often)	15
Vulnerable: 2x Knockout from red-colored attacks or hazards	15
DNPC: Bri (Secret Identity, 15)	15
Hunted: Killer Coil (individual, super-powered, manipulative)	15
Hunted: FCC (organization, manipulative)	15
Points gained from play	30
Total points = 100 + 100 + 30 = 230	

Characteristics

Strength 2d6	
Presence 4d6	10
+6d6 Strength only when flying	20
Body 14, Speed 4, Defense 10	70
Recovery 14	
Stunned 28	
Knockout 42	
Endurance 56	
Dexterity 12, Intelligence 11, Ego 11	10

Skills

Acrobatics	10
Skill levels: +2 with Coordinated attacks	10

Powers

Contribution to hero-team base: Dark Web presence	4
Elemental Control: Red Laser Transformation	25
Flight 25 hexes, linear only, cannot go less than half-speed	12
Force Field +14 resistant, usable on others	27
Flash 5d6, only at end of flight path, no range	12
Illusions 10d6, tricky	20
Total points = 230	
Ratio = 118.7	

Here, we're looking at an inspiring, uplifting hero. She includes a boost to the whole Elemental Control, therefore more dice and other effects, and conceivably bigger lettering for sound effects and brighter colors. Her protective field now extends to people she's next to or carries in flight, she can induce glowing visions, and she's shifted her Skills to specialize in coordinated attacks, which along with the base contribution represent an investment in the shared identity of the super-team.

I've reflected that in her Situations as well, by suggesting she's habitually fun rather than occasionally, maintaining the whimsical color-vulnerability, and shifting Killer Coil in a small but significant way, suggesting frenemy interactions or at least something more nuanced.

But things might have gone a little edgier. Over in "dimension B," the establishment has managed itself well against the heroes, and Ruby Ray has suffered defeat in combat at least once. The team hasn't gelled as a collective action group, but remains an alliance of separate individuals. Their triumphs are real and their vision is unbowed, but they're half-and-half considered villains at this point, favoring unequivocal results over approval ratings. A choice like that has put the bite on the conflicts between family and politics for all of them.

Complications

Public Identity	10
Psych: Stands up for marginalized person's selfhood (often)	15
Psych: Brash (sometimes)	5
Psych: Anti-authoritarian (often)	15
DNPC: Bri (Hunted by Homeland Security (organization, extensive, ruinous)	20
Hunted: Killer Coil (individual, super-powered, ruinous)	20
Hunted: FCC (organization, manipulative)	15
Points gained from play	30
Total points = 100 + 100 + 30 = 230	

Characteristics

Strength 2d6, Presence 3d6	5
+6d6 Strength only when flying	20
Body 14, Speed 4, Defense 10	70
Recovery 14	
Stunned 28	
Knockout 42	
Endurance 56	
Dexterity 12, Intelligence 11, Ego 11	10

Skills	
Acrobatics	10
Skill level: +1 with Move attacks	5

Powers	
Special Defense: Find Weakness	5
Life Support (gases, vacuum)	15
Elemental Control: Red Laser Transformation	20
Flight 20 hexes, linear only, cannot go less than half-speed	10
Force Field +16 resistant	20
Overload: Severe Reactive Blast/Dodge 6d6, no knockback	30
Weaken Speed 4d6, conditional: direct external illumination, all or nothing	10
Total points = 230	
Ratio = 117.4	

This way, she's a more hard-hitting, ruthless hero. Her Elemental Control remains at the starting magnitude but is diversified into an arsenal, and clearly she had a bad experience with someone's Find Weakness. She doesn't seem to mind causing significant havoc and woe betide anyone who grabs her now.

The Situations show it too. She's done with that "oh no the color red" cartoony stuff. The fun, breezy personality is gone. Evidently Bri has been outed and is considered a terrorist and by extension, so is she.

CONSIDERATIONS

How high can the points go? Pretty high. The game doesn't scale indefinitely, but the system is robust for heroes who've built up beyond twice their starting points. So several dozen sessions is no stretch at all, in terms of points, dice, and how to play.

How low do we start? Pretty low, which corresponds to most comics heroes in terms of their first appearances, but there's more to it than merely mimicking the source material. Those heroes became great through use, not through their wondrous initial capabilities. It's better to start with enough to work with and to discover what the hero "is" by doing it.

Consider one character built on a lot of points from the start, say 300, and another – perhaps the same concept – built within the rules' starting range, whose accumulated and utilized points through play sum to 300. Typically the first one can hit harder and withstand more damage, and the second one is less beefy but can do more things.

It's not just "more," though; it's content that you cannot get any other way. The changes in the played character represent what you cared about in play, each time. The less-explicit connections across all sorts of things on the sheet are grounded now, they matter, and can be easily acted upon in play by you and by anyone who went through the character's history with you. When a hero sheet becomes a living document like this, and play honors the sheet, that's how you get the immersion that everyone likes to talk about.

What about differing point totals among the heroes? Unless every character is present at every session, or unless the group introduces compensating increases, they may well do so. It is typically not a problem. Play balance is a real thing, but it's not about heroes' power, it's about player respect and hero spotlight. When those are maintained just as they would be anyway, super-teams whose members vary across as much as 75 points are often more fun rather than less.

That's why the ratios are more important than the totals, again, perhaps counter-intuitively. It might look as if two heroes with 225 points but drastically different ratios are "equal" because "the Points are the same." But they aren't, not at the social level. Limitations command attention and spotlight time during play, so one with the distinctly higher ratio is going to get more.

Obviously a hero's ratio increases and decreases throughout their history, which is fine as long as they stay within the limit. As you spend and construct points, see if you can keep yours from consistently outstripping those of the other players' characters, in the interest of respect and fun for all involved.

VILLAIN POINTS

Why yes, villains' point totals improve too. The method is a little different due to their irregular participation.

After a villain appears in play, give them 6 to 10 points. Use the points for anything that seems obvious they'd have due to the events, or because it would help realize the character's concept better after having seen them in action this time. This step isn't so important in terms of power upgrade, but it matters because it grounds the villain in the history of play just like the heroes.

Update their status in the Now. Consider where they are, who knows about it or has something to do with it, what happened to them, who might be offering something to them, and what they might do about any of those things. Alter their Situations to match this status.

When you're thinking about a villain appearing in upcoming play, review their build and their current point total. There's no rubric for how much they "should" have relative to the heroes, because point totals aren't combat ratings and this isn't a skirmish/boss-fight game anyway. So you can do any of these:

- Leave them as is, even if it's lower than the heroes' current values.
- Upgrade them to a little higher than the heroes at the moment, perhaps 10 points more, with a higher ratio.
- Rewrite them entirely, at whatever point total appeals to you

Any of those will work as long as you keep your eye on two things. The first is general for this group's game, the always-and-forever combination of the two statements, which are straightforward enough to apply and yet nigh-infinite in their options and connections. Situate the villain and his or her actions among those. Second, and more specific, any emotional or revelatory interaction with heroes which has supercharged the villain to seek or confront something they care about greatly, and might succeed in doing.

What might happen with Killer Coil? For simplicity's sake, I'll go with the edgier "dimension B" above, so that I can focus on increasing her threat factor rather than a complex web of nuances. Let's increase her total by 30 points, just as with Ruby Ray, making her total 255, and since she's a villain, a higher permissible ratio.

Where might she be in the Now? Perhaps she's exploited the heroes' troubled legal status and established a working relationship with the more ruthless actors in the national security apparatus, like Homeland Security and the Office of Intelligence Analysis (U.S. Treasury), to the extent that she has legal grounding in acting against the heroes. That has generated a split among agencies regarding her (see the specification in her Hunted Situation). Perhaps she and her partner have also expanded their operation into a staffed organization at two levels: an overt and legitimized charity organization which hides a nasty anti-activist espionage network. I can even imagine her slotting different morality modules into her head depending on which one she's managing at the moment.

Complications	Specifications	Points
Dependent: regular mental clearance	Daily; 3d6	15
Physical: Requires assisted living	Some of the time; limiting	10
Secret Identity: Nicole Carr		15
Psych: Modular mission-defined values	Often; irrational	20
Psych: Consummate professional	Often	15
Psych: Limits of programming when values conflict	Sometimes; meltdown	15
Hunted: U.S. Secret Service and the Washington State Police	Organization, extensive, ruinous	20
DNPC: Roan Felder (public identity 10, sometimes idealistic 5)	15	
Total points = 100 + 125 + 30 = 255		

Characteristics

Effect		Points
Strength 4d6		10
Presence 3d6		5
Body 12		20
Speed 3		20
+1 Speed obvious focus		5
Defense 11	Total Defense = 17	1
Resistant Defense 6 obvious focus	15	
Dexterity 13	20	
Intelligence 13 obvious focus	10	
Ego 11	0	

Skills

Security Systems	13 with focus, otherwise 11	5
Martial Arts Attacks		10
Martial Arts Maneuvers		10
Martial Arts Find Weakness		10

Powers

Awareness, tied to Security Systems, Shutdown	mission investigation, regional, high-tech, analyze	23
Awareness (orientation) inobvious focus		
Invisbility, Skill-based (Security Systems)		13
Elemental Control		16
Stretching 4 hexes	10 points	10
Extra limbs x2		10
1d6 Flash Strike/Martial Punch (adds)		10
+4d6 Strength, only with Grab		25
		7
Total points = 255		
Ratio = 122.0		

The sheet mostly concerns hand-to-hand combat additions, working toward her existing strengths rather than expanding anything. However, considered in the context of any unique emotional connection or understanding she and Ruby Ray may have had, Killer Coil is clearly no mere piece in an interchangeable "rogues' gallery." She isn't going to show up blithering about "revenge for the defeat I suffered at your hands last time," a jobber who arrives in order to lose. Instead, she's become a real nemesis. The heroes need to get out there and make sure she isn't about to get what she wants, because you can bet she's working on it right now. (6)

ARCS AND ENDINGS

Play has no mandated ending, but in practice it does end. That can be a good thing, even a great one. The key is to focus on whatever hero arcs are already happening.

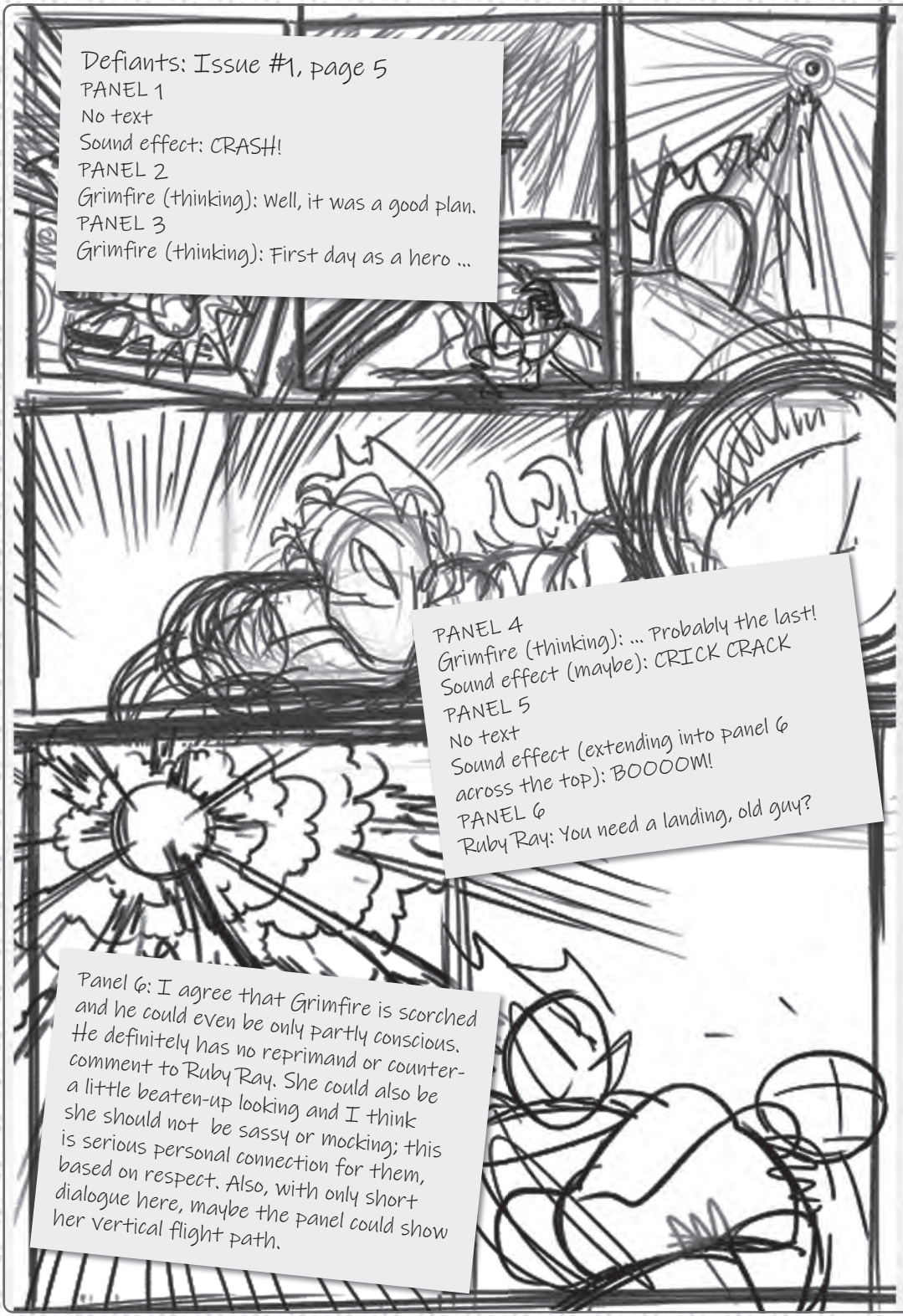
What is that? It's not the ordinary "Now what?" of new problems being raised and resolved, in a next-adventure next-issue cycle. It's what a hero goes through and becomes as a throughline, usually a pretty typical human drama: growing up, finding a purpose, arriving at a stable relationship with individuals or institutions, getting a message across, healing long-standing trauma, resolving a key mystery, or, equally valid if more grim, decisive failure at any of those.

Think of each hero in your game as a spin on the statements and of their spin stabilizing into an answer of sorts, or at least a reply. But that makes it sound intellectual and planned, when in fact it happens without such processing, and is enjoyed straightforwardly play. Analyzing or knowing what it's "about" is something you do afterwards, if at all.

No one's under pressure to force grand opera onto themselves. One hero's arc may be milder or about less intense things than another's, and unlike spotlight time in play, there's no need for arcs to match or keep up. The players' inclinations determine all of these; that's what "playing my character" really means.

It may happen that the non-point and point-based aspects of the hero come together to provide an ending that may feel much better than continuing to play them. The gentlest form is when they have become so resolved and solid-feeling that they make more sense in the background of further play. The hero is now more like the title's anchor rather than an intriguing question mark, and he or she can serve as a reliable source of characterization, resources, and general sense of pride in the history of play.

More literal hero endings appear in the form of departure from the situations of play, or dying, meaning that the player chooses "true death" when the hero is at dying status in rules terms. Both of these are relatively crude but are satisfying when they're authentic, acted upon in the moment. (7)



Defiants: Issue #1, page 5
PANEL 1
No text
Sound effect: CRASH!
PANEL 2
Grimfire (thinking): Well, it was a good plan.
PANEL 3
Grimfire (thinking): First day as a hero ...

PANEL 4
Grimfire (thinking): ... Probably the last!
Sound effect (maybe): CRICK CRACK
PANEL 5
No text
Sound effect (extending into panel 6 across the top): BOOOOM!
PANEL 6
Ruby Ray: You need a landing, old guy?

Panel 6: I agree that Grimfire is scorched and he could even be only partly conscious. He definitely has no reprimand or counter-comment to Ruby Ray. She could also be a little beaten-up looking and I think she should not be sassy or mocking; this is serious personal connection for them, based on respect. Also, with only short dialogue here, maybe the panel could show her vertical flight path.

Hero endings aren't automatically the ending of play, but the ending of play can arrive positively from hero arcs' resolution within it. A distinctive arc closure or a sufficient number of them might even show you that you just went through it.

Consider the alternative: when some external, not very arc-ish problem is designated, say by the game master, as the climax or ending for play. It's usually presented in terms of a bigger-than-usual threat, following the grand showdown or final boss concept. This typically doesn't work out in terms of fun, even if the logistic manipulations to set it up and carry it out go all the way through. Those manipulations always feel distinctly forced and the grandness of the threat typically falls flat. Manipulations to prep and tune it so that the players are magically resolving their arcs in line with this big conflict's cresting process are even worse.

A great big blowout fight or climactic confrontation to end play isn't out of the question, but it doesn't come from a controlled landing at the end of a planned flight-path. Instead, it's just another context to experience a sense of closure about the two statements, as far as these heroes are concerned, and again, it's best recognized afterward as fulfilling this role.

An alternate and perhaps surprising version doesn't end in the fiction or story at all. Instead, the arc resolutions generate a sense that this comic title has hit a smooth sailing groove and maybe it should be left there with pride. I can only describe it as the feeling that somewhere, out there, the comic title is in good hands and continuing with more great stories, whose creators show admiration and thanks to all of you.

REFERENCES

(1) The chapter title is taken from Captain Marvel's confrontation with Eternity in *Captain Marvel #29* (1973), by Jim Starlin, published by Cadence Industries using its Marvel Comics Group imprint.

(2) The single most obvious change to a hero implemented by adaptation to other media is Superman's power of flight. As originally conceived and portrayed, he did not fly and the comic included no mention of such a thing, but the radio show *The Adventures of Superman* (beginning 1940) portrayed him to be flying and introduced the associated catchphrases ("Up, up, and away!" "Look! Up in the sky..." et cetera). The show also introduced the talk of "truth, justice, and the American way" in 1940 and kryptonite in 1943.

(3) Iconic transformations are not rare in comics, but they are rarely permanent. Perhaps the most celebrated is Jean Grey, or Marvel Girl, becoming Phoenix in *The Uncanny X-Men #101* (1976), by Chris Claremont and Dave Cockrum, published by Cadence Industries using its Marvel Comics Group imprint.

(4) Superman also provides an appropriate example for how basic and how low-powered most beginning heroes are in comics. The sequence of his early powers "acquisition" goes like this:

- In the first Action Comics stories written by Siegel, he can leap about, lift cars, support trestle bridges, and break chains.
- Step by step during the first two years, he withstands small arms fire, inhales and exhales mighty gusts, can see through things with X-Rays, and has super-hearing.
- He does not fly until the early 1940s, show vulnerability to kryptonite (in the comics) until the late 1940s, or have heat vision until the late 1940s.
- He does not have freezing breath until the late 1950s or show vulnerability to magic until the mid-1960s.

(5) Super-stealthy heroes are always disappearing between the panels, equivalent to the cut-away technique in film and TV, but the repeat offender award must go to Batman, especially in casual conversation. It probably began with *Swamp Thing #7* (1973), by Len Wein and Berni Wrightson, published by Warner Communications using the DC Comics imprint. This effect became standard for him during the late 1980s.

(6) Supervillain jobbers are legion. The ur-example must be the Unicorn, first appearing in *Tales of Suspense #56* (1963), by Stan Lee and Don Heck, published by Magazine Management (Goodman Publications) using the Marvel Comics imprint. Through the decades, he presents a dizzying display of filler stories, an unusual example of each visual redesign being worse than the last, writers' attempts to kill or otherwise nullify him, and confusing reconceptions, for which maintenance of IP is the only sane explanation.

(7) *Doom Patrol* was canceled in 1968. Typically, a canceled series' content is merely discontinued or abandoned. However, in this case, the creators ended the team's story in the final issue (#121) on an appropriately high note of defiance, as they sacrificed their lives to save a small fishing village in Maine.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the memory of K. C. Ryan and Michael O'Connell, including the legendary Forte game and the Amateur Press Alliance The Clobberin' Times, but most especially their boundless imagination, enthusiasm, good will, and indomitable spirit.

Great memories and thanks to fellow denizens of the 'Times: Tim Watts, Jim McClain, Aaron Storck, Bennett Bellot, Kaye Bellot, Jeff Baumgardener, Will Geiger, Aaron S. Thompson, Derek Garrison, Greg Johnson, Scott Burnham (in memory), Martin Maenza, and Joel B. Levy.

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I am grateful to Jason Walters and Hero Games for this opportunity, and here's a whoop-whoop fist circle with my buddy Steve S. Long!

The big list of playtesters and participants in discussions sprawled into the multiverse, but the most directly connected to the game as it develped are Mark Delsing, Jay Brown, Rod Anderson, Ross Hunter, Santiago Verón, Alan Barclay, Frank Ferraro, Jason Walters, Rick Loritsch, Jim Crocker, Robbie Boerth, Pawel Solowczuk, Aybars Yürdün, Tobe Morgan, Erica Rossi, Sarah Yoshi, Robert Baldwin, Abby Baldwin, James Schmitz, Gordon R. Landis, Keith Andreano, David Wood, Sean Holland, Peter Lindstrom, John Desmarais, M Platinum, Aldo Regalado, Chris Goodwin, Alan Bradley, Joel Davis, John Powell, Terry Gant, Alice Peng, Brandon Powers, and Jerry D. Grayson. Special mention goes to late-stage readers Craig Lewis, Peter A. Lindstrom, Jonathan D. Woolley, and Aldo Reginaldo.

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Special thanks for help with my inquiries to the Comics Historians Group on Facebook, to Ken Quattro's Comics Detective blog, to A. David Lewis' Sacred & Sequential website, to Sean Howe, and to comics professionals whose names are kept private.

APPENDIX
THE DEFIANTS

OVERVIEW

This is a group of dedicated super-powered activists, operating in one of the significant political power-centers of the United States. They do not consider themselves guardians of the law or even of order; they seek change, and they are done with "the system" as the only means for doing so. Such groups have often been caricatured as fanatics or idiots in the comics, but here, they make it work and they make it stick.

One reason it works is that they know they aren't always going to agree, and they respect one another enough to adapt, at least most of the time. The edge cases provoke a lot of drama.

Another reason is that they understand messaging and use Ruby Ray's and Anybug's social skills to promote the context and purpose of their actions. They've managed to evade or counter establishment efforts to paint them as empty-headed rabble-rousers – so far.

Ruby Ray, Natalie Freeman

The build

Situations	Points
Public Identity	10
Psych: Stands up for marginalized person's selfhood (often)	15
Psych: Brash (sometimes)	5
Psych: Fun-loving (sometimes)	5
Vulnerable: 2x Knockout from red-colored attacks or hazards	25
Dependent non-player character: Bri, her brother (Secret identity, 15)	15
Hunted: Killer Coil (individual, super-powered, ruinous)	10 + 10 = 20
Hunted: FCC (organization, manipulative)	10 + 5 = 15
Total Points = 100 + 100 = 200	

Characteristics	
Strength 2d6	0
+6d6 Strength; 30 Active Points	30 ÷ 1½ = 20
Conditional: when flying (½ Limitation)	
Presence 3d6	5
Body 14	40
Recovery 14, Stunned 14, Knockout 28, Endurance 42	
Speed 4	30
Defense 10	0
Dexterity 13	20
Intelligence 12	10
Ego 11	0
Skills	
Acrobatics	10
Skill Level +1 with Move Attack	5
Powers	
Elemental Control: Red Laser Transformation 20 points	20
Laser Zap: Flight 20 hexes; 40 Active Points	40 – 20 = 20
Conditional: linear only, Conditional: cannot go less than half-speed (½ + ½ Limitations)	20÷2 = 10
Hard Glow: Force Field 16; 40 Active Points	40 – 20 = 20
Light Up: Flash 4d6; 40 Active Points	40 – 20 = 20
Conditional: only at end of flight path, No Range (½ + ½ Limitations)	20÷2 = 10
Total Points = 200	
Ratio = 115.0	

Examine the Elemental Control to see how it's modified. The overall Framework has no modifications. Each slot has the minimum number of Active Points (twice the Control = 40). Each slot's Points are already partly acounted for by the Control, yielding, in each case, 20. That amount is what's affected by the Limitations.

Ruby Ray's ratio is calculated by ignoring the Limitations (in italics), which eliminates any calculation with a dividing sign. In that case, the total Points would be 230. 230 ÷ 200, multiplied by 100 for easy reading = 115.0.

In use

Situations

Public Identity
Psych: Stands up for marginalized person's selfhood (often)
Psych: Brash (sometimes)
Psych: Fun-loving (sometimes)
Vulnerable: 2x Knockout from red-colored attacks or hazards
Dependent non-player character: Bri, her brother (Secret identity)
Hunted: Killer Coil (individual, super-powered, ruinous)
Hunted: FCC (organization, manipulative)

Characteristics

Strength 2d6
+6d6 Strength
when flying
Endurance 2 for ordinary Strength, 8 for total Strength
Presence 3d6
Body 14
Recovery 14, Stunned 14
Knockout 28, Endurance 42
Speed 4
Phases 1 / 3 / 5 / 6
Defense 10
With Force Field, Defense 26 of which 16 is resistant
Dexterity 13
Intelligence 12
Ego 11
Acrobatics
Skill Level +1 with Move Attack
Elemental Control: Red Laser Transformation
Laser Zap: Flight 20 hexes linear only, cannot go less than half-speed
Endurance cost: 1 per 5 hexes
Hard Glow: Force Field 16
Endurance cost: 8
Light Up: Flash 4d6 only at end of flight path, no range
Endurance cost: 8

Pro tips for playing Ruby Ray

Socially and generally:

- Consider her external dangers arriving in two different ways. The FCC is a relatively small organization in terms of active efforts outside its routine policies, and it wants to co-opt her rather than simply shutting her down hard; whereas Killer Coil is a single individual, albeit super-powered, with a personal and deadly grudge. Also, considering Killer Coil's sheet in Chapter 7: Villain Making, if she is "on task," then her grudge vs. Ruby Ray may conflict with her programmed mission.
- Concentrate on Dark Web activism, organizing events, and outreach to grassroots community efforts; accordingly, work with Bri to use active measures against the FCC and against any net-based prying into the team.
- Make the most of that underground celebrity identity: arrive with purpose, hit hard where it counts, get your point across.
- Negotiate openly with teammates about what the Defiants are for, to focus on effective action rather than stunts and to avoid being co-opted by apparently sympathetic establishment players.

In combat or hazardous situations:

- Perceive as much as possible about the physical layout of the situation, to anticipate and maximize linear flight.
- Keep moving, and end Move actions as far out of opponents' field of perception as possible, in order to attack them from the side or from behind, especially when they're engaged with an ally.
- Act as if you have Speed 3, holding an action to use Force Field for reactive defense instead of keeping it on all the time; otherwise only use it in tandem with a Move attack.
- Your Strength in motion is one of the team's most valuable hidden resources, so be ready to use it for maximum effect when it's needed.
- Consider move-based timing carefully. Since you're limited to fast flight only, you cannot fly up to someone and hit them with an ordinary punch in the same Phase, but must use Move attacks. However, grabbing something (say, a car) in one Phase, then in the next, flying at half speed to an optimum position and throwing it, is viable – and by using a held action, you can do this in rapid succession.
- Use Presence Attacks as often as possible, maximizing them with Powers and monologues, especially toward groups in order to protect people and to promote the Defiants' messaging.

Anybug, Manfred Owen Barfield IV

The build

Situations	Points
Unusual Looks 11- (unfortunately repulsive bug forms)	10
Public Identity	10
Psychological: Thinks everyone knows entomology (often)	15
Psychological: Idealistic, "everyone will get along if they just listen to each other" (sometimes, irrational)	5 + 5 = 10
Psychological: Very brave (sometimes, irrational)	5 + 5 = 10
Dependent NPC. aged grandfather, Manfred Owen Barfield II, (Aged/infirm, limiting, all the time, 15; Secret Identity: Devour, 15; Disoriented, sometimes, 5)	15 + 15 + 5 = 35
Unlucky 2d6	10
Total points = 100 + 100 = 200	

Characteristics

Strength 2d6	0
Presence 2d6	0
Body 10	0
Recovery 10, Stunned 10, Knockout 20, Endurance 30	
+3 Body	
Conditional: Inobvious Focus, power pack (½ Limitation)	30 ÷ 1½ = 20
Recovery 13, Stunned 13, Knockout 26, Endurance 39	20
Speed 3	6
Defense 16	24
6 resistant (16 total)	
Dexterity 14	30
Intelligence 12	10
Ego 11	0

Skills

Climbing	5
Computer Programming	5
Lucky 2d6	10

Powers	
Superleap 10 hexes	20
Multiform 40 points: Bug Simulator	
Conditional: ½ effect without power pack (¼ Limitation)	40 ÷ 1¼ = 32
Assassin Bug Bonk: 6d6 Reactive Blast; 30 Power Points	
40 Active Points in slot	
Conditional: ½ effect without power pack (¼ Limitation)	8 ÷ 1¼ = 6
Stink Bug Spray: 4d6 Flash; 40 Power Points	
40 Active Points in slot	
Conditional: ½ effect without power pack (¼ Limitation)	8 ÷ 1¼ = 6
Bedbug Slurp: 8d6 Drain; 40 Power Points	
40 Active Points in slot	
Conditional: ½ effect without power pack (¼ Limitation)	8 ÷ 1¼ = 6
Total points = 200	
Ratio = 112.0	

The Multiform is set up with each slot at maximum Active Points, so only one slot may be used at a time. If, for example, each slot were set at 20 Active Points rather than 40, then any two of them could be used ("on") together. Modifying a Multiform with Limitations is much simpler than an Elemental Control: you simply apply the Limitation to the whole thing, Pool and Slots alike.

Anybug's ratio is calculated by ignoring the Limitations (in italics), which eliminates any calculation with a dividing sign. In that case, the total Points would be 224. 224 ÷ 200, multiplied by 100 for easy reading = 112.0.

In use

Situations
Unusual Looks 11- (unfortunately repulsive bug forms)
Public Identity
Psychological: Thinks everyone knows entomology (often)
Psychological: Idealistic, "everyone will get along if they just listen to each other" (sometimes, irrational)
Psychological: Very brave (sometimes, irrational)
Dependent NPC. aged grandfather, Manfred Owen Barfield II, (Aged/infirm, limiting, all the time, 15; Secret Identity: Devour, 15; Disoriented, sometimes, 5)
Unlucky 2d6

Characteristics

Strength 2d6

Endurance cost: 2

Presence 2d6

Body 10

Recovery 10, Stunned 10

Knockout 20, Endurance 30

+3 Body *inobvious focus: power pack*

Recovery 13, Stunned 13

Knockout 26, Endurance 39

Speed 3

Phases 2 / 4 / 6

Defense 16

6 resistant (16 total)

Dexterity 14

Intelligence 12

Ego 11

Skills

Climbing 14-

Computer Programming 12-

Lucky 2d6

Powers

Superleap 10 hexes

Endurance cost: 1 per hex

Multiform: Bug Simulator *½ effect without power pack*

Assassin Bug Bonk: 6d6 Reactive Blast

½ effect without power pack

Endurance cost: 6

Stink Bug Spray: 4d6 Flash

½ effect without power pack

Endurance cost: 8

Bedbug Slurp: 8d6 Drain

½ effect without power pack

Endurance cost: 0

Pro tips for playing Anybug

Socially and in general

- This is the team organizer, having provided the initial outreach and planning, but also an idealist who values consensus.
- Bluntly: you are a lily-white East Coast Ivy Leaguer, and not a wannabe either. Nor are you a wannabe radical, being perfectly OK with leveraging that privilege against your own class and making people like it. That is as authentic as anyone in the Defiants but probably gets you little credit.
- You prefer "Mo." You wear its similarity to a slur as a badge of ... well, of defiance.
- Unusual Looks and Public Identity require some perspective: you don't look like a bug out of your gear, but you're so public that people can't help thinking of you that way.
- Look on the bright side, look for a way to a better solution, and never give up. You could walk away from it all and enjoy your 0.01% perks ... but you won't.
- Luck and Unluck together are the devil's playground. They don't cancel out, but instead, you're in luck when the chips are down and in for the business when they're up (I guess chips can be "up" as well as down), likely resulting in a "Perils of Pauline" sequence throughout a session.
- Your Situations contain a significant time-bomb in the form of your grandfather, which you don't know about, so play up the incomplete-information drama as much as you like until the inevitable arrives.

In combat or hazardous situations

- Be brave: get in there and make it count.
- Careful – although you're bug-like, you're not acrobatic and you can't cling to just any surface. As with all the Defiants you're vastly more effective in coordination with others, not just wading in to fight your corner.
- The technological basis for your Powers is not vulnerable to being grabbed or broken as a basic move in the fight, but the power pack is, so make sure not to mention it out loud.
- Think ahead. It takes a ½ Phase to switch Multiform slots, so you can't do it reactively.
- Your default slot is the Bedbug Slurp, as it doesn't cost Endurance, so you can repeatedly jump onto people, Drain them, and jump off, perhaps sacrificing a Phase for a reactive Dodge. The Bonk and Spray are surprises for hand-to-hand fighting if you have to stand your ground.
- There's more to you than your Powers and actions; those Luck and Unluck rolls turn combat into a topsy-turvy mess, so that victory may well go to the quick-thinking team rather than the super-damaging attack squad.

Grimfire, Yuri "Rob" Velikov

The build

Situations

Unusual Looks 11- (demonic-looking, scary)	10
Unusual Looks 8- (reputation as lawless, thoughtless vigilante)	5
Psychological: Despises hypocrisy (often)	15
Psychological: Struggles with despair (often)	15
Psychological: Lonely (sometimes, irrational)	5 + 5 = 10
Side Effects, when using telepathy: Images 6d6	30
Hunted: The Eagle Forum (organization, ruinous)	20
Total points = 100 + 105 = 205	

Characteristics

Strength 6d6	20
Presence 4d6	10
Body 12	40
Recovery 12, Stunned 12, Knockout 24, Endurance 36	
Speed 3	20
Defense 14	4
Dexterity 12	10
Intelligence 12	10
Ego 11	0

Skills

Detective Work	5
Martial Moves	10
Find Weakness	10

Powers

Telepathy 4d6	20 ÷ 2 = 10
Skill-based with Detective Work (¼ Limitation), Burnout, mild (¼ Limitation), No Range (½ Limitation)	
Elemental Control: Hellish Fury 15	15
Force Field Defense 8, Usable for others; 30 Active Points	30 – 15 = 15
Strike (adds to punch): 2d6 Weaken Presence; 35 Active Points	35- 15 = 20
Missile Deflection 2x b/t Phases	30 – 15 = 15
Costs Endurance (½ Limitation), 2x Endurance (1 Limitation)	15 ÷ 2½ = 6
Total points = 205	
Ratio = 109.5	

Grimfire's ratio is calculated by ignoring the Limitations (in italics), which eliminates any calculation with a dividing sign. In that case, the total Points would be 219. 219 ÷ 200, multiplied by 100 for easy reading = 109.5.

The build illustrates a useful point: that rounding can land you with 1-4 points between multiples of 5. In that case, you can rebuild the content to resolve it, which can be irritating or mess up your concept, or you can add the difference to Defense, which is intentionally kept to 1 Point per Defense point for this purpose. You're permitted to get to 5 Points higher than the "limit" in doing so, as reflected the total Points for Situations.

That's why Grimfire has 5 more Points than the other heroes: his 15 Points for the Missile Deflection slot are cut down by Limitations to land at 6, for a total of 201. I could have further limited the power to bring it to 5 points, but that would entail an additional ½-value Limitation further, and the current Endurance cost alone seems arduous enough. So 4 more points went into Defense to level him off at a multiple of 5, and I increased his Situations to match it.

Given this option, nothing stops you from just building to 205 (i.e., 5 points higher) in the first place, if you really have a thing about "getting the most" or "keeping up." But you can't double-dip by going for 205, then discovering you have some rounding that puts you above it, and then leveling that total off with more points in Defense for 210. That's when you do have to suck it up and go back to the build.

In use

Situations

Unusual Looks 11- (demonic-looking, scary)
Unusual Looks 8- (reputation as lawless, thoughtless vigilante)
Psychological: Despises hypocrisy (often)
Psychological: Struggles with despair (often)
Psychological: Lonely (sometimes, irrational)
Side Effects, when using telepathy: Images 6d6
Hunted: The Eagle Forum (organization, ruinous)

Characteristics

Strength 6d6

Endurance cost: 6

Presence 4d6

Body 12

Recovery 12, Stunned 12

Knockout 24, Endurance 36

Speed 3

Phases 2 / 4 / 6

Defense 13

With Force Field, total Defense is 21, of which 8 is resistant

Dexterity 12

Intelligence 12

Ego 11

Skills

Detective Work 12-

Martial Moves

Dodge, Martial Block, Martial Throw, And Out

Find Weakness 11-

Powers

Telepathy 4d6

Skill-based with Detective Work (¼ Limitation), Burnout, mild (¼ Limitation), No Range (½ Limitation)

Elemental Control: Hellish Fury

Force Field Defense 8, Usable for others

Endurance cost: 4

Strike (adds to punch): 2d6 Weaken Presence

Endurance cost 7

Missile Deflection 11-, 2x b/t Phases

2x Endurance (1 Limitation)

Endurance cost: 12

Pro tips for playing Grimfire

Socially and in general

- He's a little complex for a character example, as his background drew upon the player's own context and is tied to the interactions between the United States and the former states of the Soviet Union during the 1990s. But let's see.
- This is all about the birth of hope. You're older, you were committed to a way of life and a way to be an American hero, but are now shifting gears.
- In this, and despite all the hellish flame and threatening demeanor, you are perhaps the biggest idealist of the team. How that matches with your older, perhaps out-of-date standards for political issues is grist for the mill of play.
- Taking off the mask: this is reflected in having neither Public nor Secret Identity, meaning that people know who you are, but you don't mind and it hasn't made your personal life a focus of media attention. It's important to your teammates, however, as an indicator of your commitment.
- You've got some history and background, with at least some justification for Intelligence rolls concerning organizations and super-powered individuals with pasts of their own, and then Detective Work to investigate those cues thoroughly.

In combat or hazardous situations

- Examine the interplay of Detective Work, Telepathy, and Side Effects. If you're talking to someone to discover what they know (your teammates say "interrogating" like it's a bad thing), you can use Telepathy on them at close range; however, it triggers Images, mainly of what they know but aren't saying, but often distorted to accentuate your Psychological Situations for loneliness and despair. You don't melt down and snivel over it, but this is a traumatic act.
- Take the time to set up a finishing punch, using the defensive Martial Moves and Force Field to draw fire without being hit too badly, while using Find Weakness as many times on the same target as possible. With a little teamwork this can set up even the most sturdy opponent for a takedown.
- Even without this long-term tactic, the hand-to-hand combination of personal protection with the Force Field and punishing Punch is fearsome – no one wants to get hit for a 2d6 drop in Presence, and doing it to someone lands him quite a good bonus for Presence Attacks against others, even in combat.
- It's sort of a signature move to shelter a person in danger from gunfire or falling debris at close range by extending the Force Field. You can use it on yourself, on someone else you're touching, or both, but in the latter case, you pay Endurance for both (8). This gets pricey if the high-energy Missile Deflection comes into it too – Grimfire is built to suffer a little for his efforts to protect others.

The Which, Isabela García

The build

Situations

Secret Identity	10
Side Effect, when Think Twice fails: 2d6 Entangle	20
Psychological Limitation: Complex morality, understands both sides (often)	15
Psychological Limitation: Brutally honest to others (sometimes)	5
Psychological Limitation: Secretive to/about self (sometimes, irrational)	10
Dependent NPC: twin sister Tina (Unlucky 2d6, 10; Hunted: Domain, 20)	10 + 20 = 30
Dependent NPC: parents (Psychological: Homophobic, sometimes, 5)	5
Total points = 100 + 100 = 200	

Characteristics

Strength 3d6	5
Presence 4d6	10
Body 12	20
Recovery 12, Stunned 12, Knockout 24, Endurance 36	
Speed 3	20
Defense 10	0
Dexterity 12	10
Intelligence 12	10
Ego 12	10

Skills

Stealth	5
Think Twice (VPP Control Skill)	5
Skill Level: +1 to Think Twice	5
Lucky 3d6	15

Powers	
Invisibility, 20 Active Points	
Skill-based, with Stealth (¼ Limitation)	20 ÷ 1¼ = 16
Teleport 10 hexes, 20 Active Points	
Linked to Invisibility (½ Limitation)	20 ÷ 1½ = 13
Variable Power Pool: This/That, 40 Points	40
VPP Control, 20 Power Points	
Control Limitation: Tricky (¼ Limitation)	20 ÷ 1¼ = 16
Total points = 200	
Ratio = 109.0	

The Variable Power Pool cannot be modified; its Points are its Points no matter what. The Control carries the blanket Tricky Limitation, which is rated at ½, but as applied to the Control is only ¼. This would be the case even if a dozen Limitations were piled on there.

For Powers constructed using the Pool, however, the Tricky Limitation is treated normally, as a ½ Limitation reducing the Points. If you select other Limitations for them as well, then you might have quite a few full-powered (i.e. 40 Active Points) effects running simultaneously.

The Which's ratio is calculated by ignoring the Limitations (in italics), which eliminates any calculation with a dividing sign. In that case, the total Points would be 218. 218 ÷ 200, multiplied by 100 for easy reading = 109.0.

In use

Situations
Secret Identity
Side Effect, when Think Twice fails: 2d6 Entangle
Psychological Limitation: Complex morality, understands both sides (often)
Psychological Limitation: Brutally honest to others (sometimes)
Psychological Limitation: Secretive to/about self (sometimes, irrational)
Dependent NPC: twin sister Tina (Unlucky 2d6; Hunted: Domain)
Dependent NPC: parents (Psychological: Homophobic, sometimes)

Characteristics

Strength 3d6

Endurance cost: 3

Presence 4d6

Body 12

Recovery 12, Stunned 12

Knockout 24, Endurance 36

Speed 3

Phases 2 / 4 / 6

Defense 13

Potentially augmented by Powers from VPP

Dexterity 12

Intelligence 12

Ego 12

Skills

Stealth 12-

Think Twice 13- (includes Skill Level)

Skill Level: +1 to Think Twice

Lucky 3d6

Powers

Invisibility to ordinary sight

Skill-based, with Stealth

Endurance cost: 4

Teleport 10 hexes

Linked to Invisibility

Endurance cost: 4

Variable Power Pool: This/That, 40 Points

Pool, 40 Points

VPP Control

Tricky 12-

Pro tips for playing The Which

Socially and generally

- You try to maintain an ordinary life in a complex family with high expectations, partly in support of your more openly activist twin sister.
- Your relationship with Tina is central: she openly does what you do secretly, enduring the family pressure, and a great deal of what you do is dedicated to nailing her efforts to the wall. This has resulted in Domain mistakenly thinking that she is The Which, not you.
- You're a thinker: "Is this really right? Is that really wrong?" perhaps to the aggravation of your more focused teammates. But without you, they could easily steer too far, and by now, they know it.
- Your powers are tactically and philosophically demanding, as well as attracting powerful entities' attention. Furthermore, they go hand-in-hand with your attitude, that things really can go this way or that way, and we bear the burden of responsibility for each choice.
- You're the only Defiant who has not unmasked, directly contradicting one of the team's explicit goals. You may eventually decide "which" way to go: full secrecy or full truth, which would violate a Psychological Situation in either case, unless you can find another way through.

In combat or hazardous situations

- The fundamental tactic is to stay hidden and invisible, using customized versions of Awareness or Telepathy to gather as much information as possible, and to coordinate among your teammates. Then switch to an optimized attack, preferably from full surprise. However ...
- You are about as wild-card a character as one may find, not only wielding a substantial Variable Power Pool, but also coping with its unpredictable targeting due to being Tricky and the paralyzing effects of losing control.
- Those effects are compounded further with substantial Luck, so that when the probability-alternatives screw up the worst, things often turn out for the best. With you and Anybug on the field, it's like a reality warp for everyone.

The Variable Power Pool is for the bold, especially if it includes a Control Skill. You may or even must create new arrays of Powers on the fly, including a bevy of Modifications for each, with constraints both on each Power's Active Points and on the total Points they comprise. It not only takes practice, but requires the mind-set that enjoys habitually rewriting a subset of hero creation in-play.

Thank You To Our Backers

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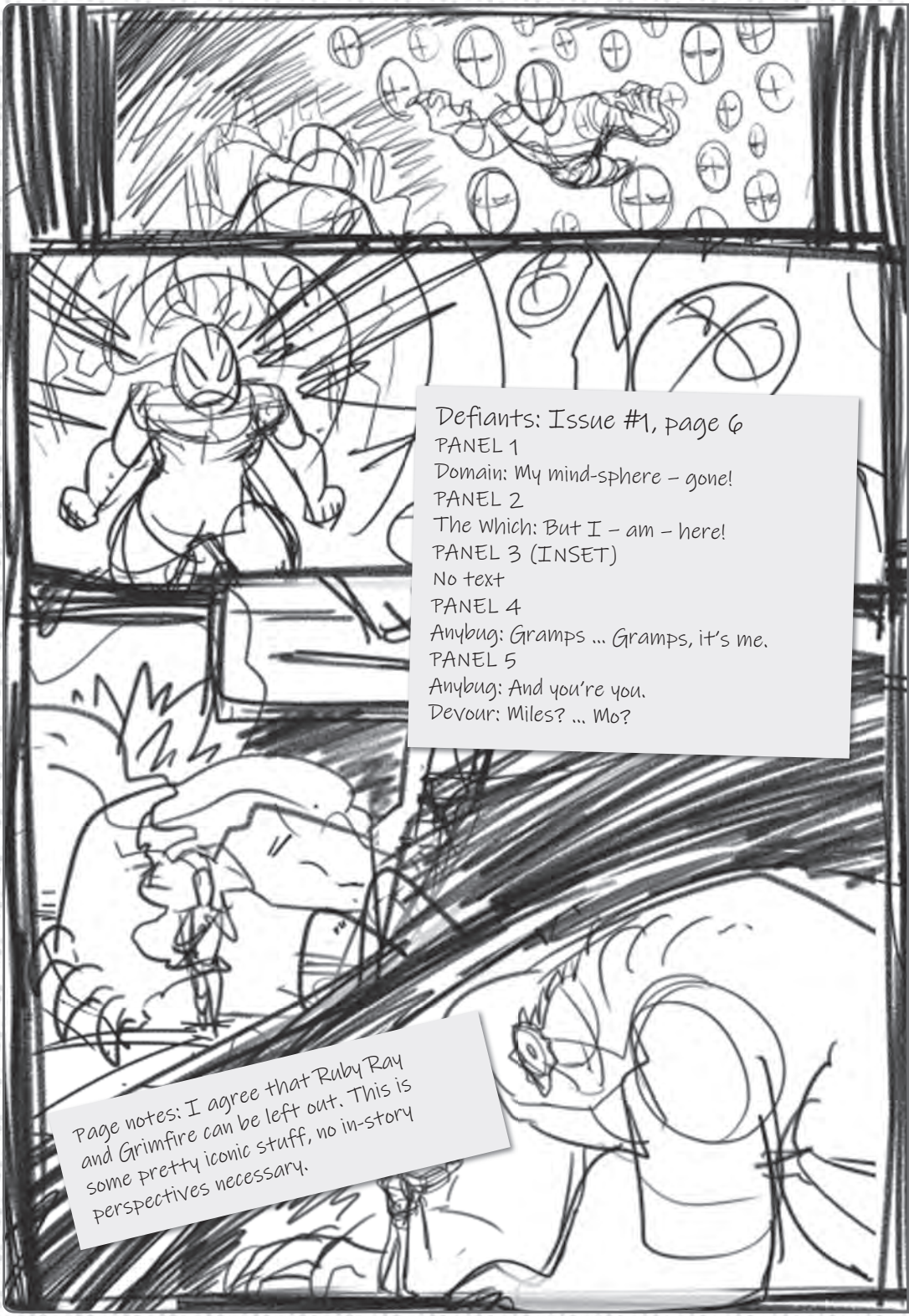

Defiants: Issue #1, page 6
PANEL 1
Domain: My mind-sphere – gone!
PANEL 2
The Which: But I – am – here!
PANEL 3 (INSET)
No text
PANEL 4
Anybug: Gramps ... Gramps, it's me.
PANEL 5
Anybug: And you're you.
Devour: Miles? ... Mo?

Page notes: I agree that Ruby Ray and Grimfire can be left out. This is some pretty iconic stuff, no in-story perspectives necessary.

Comic Title

Point Total

Character Name

Hero Name

Situations

Utilities

Recovery Value

Stunned Value

Knockout

Endurance

Body

Dice | End
Strength

Dice
Presence

Dexterity

Intelligence

Ego

Total | Resistant | Other
Defense

Luck | Unluck
Luck

1 1 1 1 1 1
Phases

Skills

Maneuvers		
Punch	+0/+0	
Grab	-1/-2	
Dodge	NA/+3	
Coordinate	-2/-2	
Assist	+0/-1	
Move Attack: By	-2/-2	
Move Attack: Through	-4/-4	

Powers

Name | Powers | Effect | Range/Area | End

Modifiers | Slot

Name | Powers | Effect | Range/Area | End

Modifiers | Slot

Name | Powers | Effect | Range/Area | End

Modifiers | Slot

Name | Powers | Effect | Range/Area | End

Modifiers | Slot

Name | Powers | Effect | Range/Area | End

Modifiers | Slot

Name | Powers | Effect | Range/Area | End

Modifiers | Slot

Character Name | Hero Name

Personal Concept

Power Concept

Problem Concept

Situations

Situation	Total Points

Characteristics

Characteristic (Limitations)	Base Value	Points Per Value	New Value	Limitation Value	Total Points
Strength					
Presence					
Body					
Speed					
Defense					
Dexterity					
Intelligence					
Ego					

Skills

Skill	Points Per Value	Total Points	Skill	Points Per Value	Total Points

Powers

Power	Points Per Value	Limitation Value	Total Points

Point Totals

Total NP	Spent NP	Situations TP	+	Characteristics TP	+	Skills TP	+	Powers TP	=	Total Character Points

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