

DIGITAL HERO

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DIGITAL HERO

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Issue #24 (October 2004)



When Last We Left Our Heroes...

by Steven S. Long

Time to return to the wondrous worlds of mysticism!

A couple months ago we released *The Mystic World* and *The Fantasy Hero Grimoire II*. Now we're continuing our "Year of the Mystic" with two more books for *Champions*: an enemies book, *Arcane Adversaries*; and an organization book, *DEMON: Servants Of Darkness*.

ARCANE ADVERSARIES

"AA" is a follow-up to *The Mystic World*. The manuscript Dean Shomshak sent in for TMW was so large that we couldn't afford to publish it as one book. I left the master villains in TMW and split the rest off to form AA. It contains over fifty villains conceived and designed along mystic lines, organized into two chapters.

Chapter One, *Mystic Villain Organizations*, details some of the main groups of evil mystics active in the Champions Universe: the Circle of the Scarlet Moon; the Devil's Advocates; the Kings of Edom; the Sylvestri clan, and the Vandaleur family. Each has from three to six villains written up, with notes about other members, group tactics and plots, and more. Some of them, particularly the Sylvestri and Vandaleur families, make great background elements for PCs – fighting crime is a tough enough job for a super-mage, but it's even harder when his family is on the opposite side!

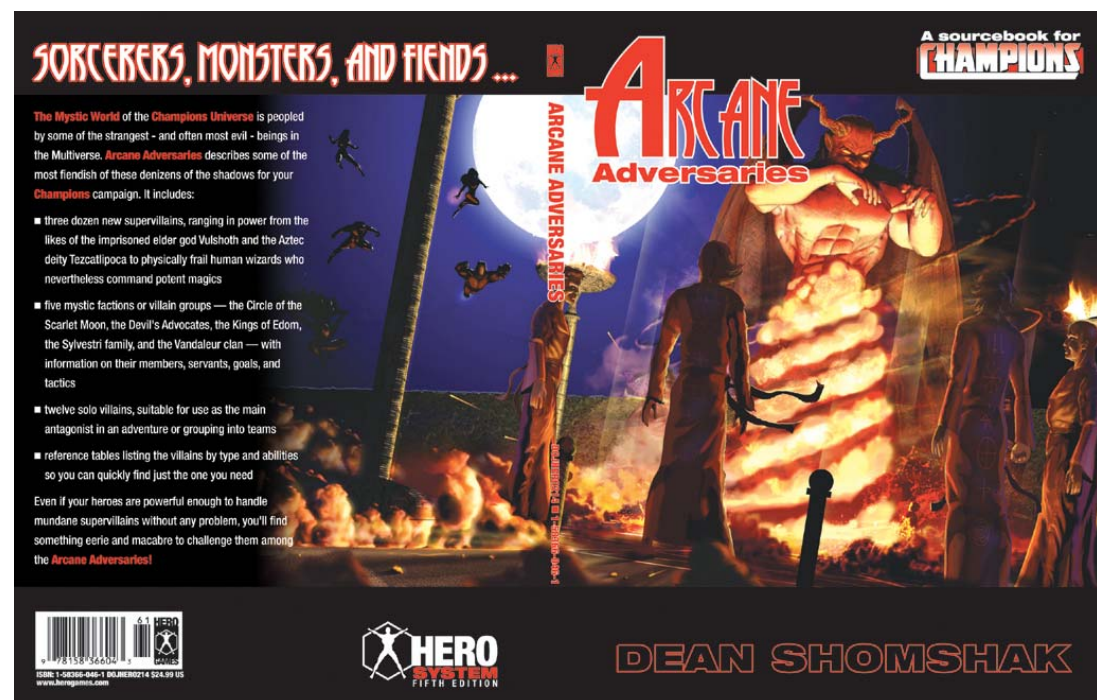
Chapter Two *Mystic Solo Villains*, rounds out the book with a dozen solo villains, ranging in power from relatively low-level, one-dimensional threats to the powerful Aztec god Tezcatlipoca. So far as your heroes know, these villains have no particular affiliation... but in the Mystic World, matters are often not as they seem.

As with all of Hero's enemies books, *Arcane Adversaries* is presented as a resource for you to use as you see fit, not a take-it-or-leave-it straitjacket. The GM can easily rearrange teams, make team villains into solos (and recruit solo villains into teams), and increase or decrease a villain's power level to suit his campaign. And as always, each villain has at least three plot seeds to get the GM's fiendish mind working on new adventures!

DEMON: SERVANTS OF DARKNESS

Next up is *DEMON*, written by our own Allen Thomas. I think he's done an absolutely fantastic job on this book – in fact, I think it's probably the best organization book ever written for *Champions* or the *HERO System* in any of their incarnations. It just oozes fiendish coolness and wicked plot ideas. If Tim Powers were hired to write a traditional superhero comic book, this is the villain organization he'd've created.

The thing that makes *DEMON* so intriguing is the multiple layers of fiendishness. The face it presents to the world – that of a Satanic cult



devoted to conquering Earth, or at least to spreading as much evil as possible – is bad enough. But the organization has a secret, far more sinister purpose known only to its most powerful members, the Morbane sorcerer-priests and the leaders of the Inner Circle. And the truth is there's more going on that even *they* don't know about!

Chapter One, *Res Demonica*, chronicles the history of DEMON. With its seeds lying in the turn of the 20th Century, DEMON has plagued the world for over a hundred years... but its true plan is just a few years short of fruition. This chapter alone is likely to provide the GM with at least a dozen campaign and adventure ideas.

Chapter Two, *The Nature Of The Demon*, discusses the basic organization, goals, and resources of DEMON, as well as its worldview and approach to matters occult. While it seems like a simple Satanic cult, DEMON is in fact far more... and far worse.

Chapter Three, *The Doings Of The Wicked Ones*, describes DEMON's leadership. It includes not only the terrifying Inner Circle and their servants (the five Rites of the Maleficia), but the organization's true leader and his bodyguards, the Inverted Trinity.

Chapter Four, *Mephistophelean Evil*, looks at the main members of DEMON: the Brothers, the Initiates, and the powerful Morbanes who lead Demonhames. It includes information about DEMON's recruitment network and procedures, personality archetypes for each level of membership, and templates of powers and spells by membership category. It also describes the Demon-Bound, members of DEMON granted superhuman powers through demon-binding

rituals. By mixing and matching the various templates and Package Deals provided, the GM can create dozens of supervillains quickly and easily, and can vary his Morbanes so that the PCs don't know from one encounter to the next what sort of powerful opposition they'll encounter.

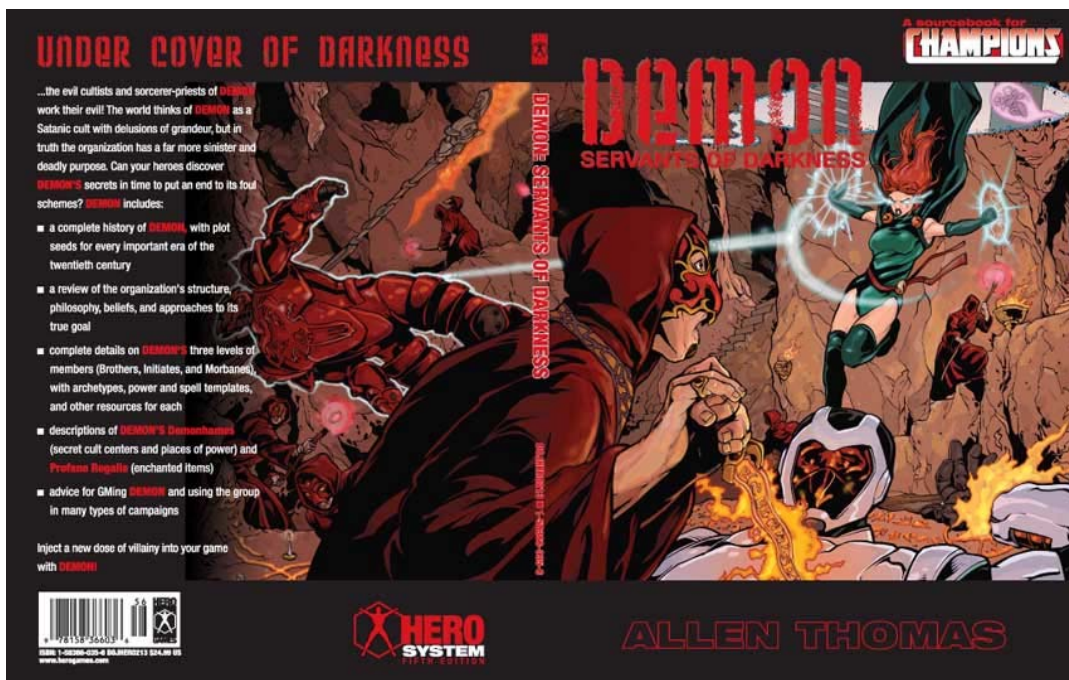
Chapter Five, *The Abode Of The Demon*, discusses *Demonhames* – DEMON's bases and places of power throughout the world. After reviewing common features of hames, it provides two detailed examples: the Redbrook Demonhame in New York City; and Studio Lot 0 in Los Angeles. As usual, we've got some awesome Keith Curtis maps for these places, so you can drop 'em right into your game without difficulty.

Chapter Six, *Infernal Devices And Malevolent Magics*, reviews the Profane Regalia – the enchanted items commonly used by DEMON members. If you need to beef up your local Demonhame's forces before a confrontation with superheroes, this chapter has the weapons and other resources you'll need.

Chapter Seven, *A Gamemaster's Demonic Designs*, discusses how to GM DEMON. It includes notes about making DEMON a more-or-less immediate threat, the anatomy of a black magic-based adventure, how the organization relates to other beings and groups in the Champions Universe, and how you can fit DEMON into other genres and settings.

Just when you thought it was safe to go trick-or-treating....

— Steven S. Long
HERO System Line Developer





HEROglyphs by Steven S. Long

Movin' Out!

Some Options for Movement Powers

I've had a few ideas here and there about Movement Powers recently, so I thought I'd combine them into one column – call it a “Movement Powers grab-bag.” Some of them have been inspired by questions I've received on the Hero message boards, so special thanks to the fans out there who've given me something to think about. ;)

METERS INSTEAD OF HEXES

To create greater “granularity” and precision for movement within the game, consider changing Movement Powers from being defined by hexes to being defined by meters. Thus, instead of buying Flight 15” or Running 9”, a character would buy Flight 30m and Running 18m. Here's what the various Movement Powers cost using this system:

<u>Power</u>	<u>Cost Per 1 Meter Of Movement</u>
Extra-Dim. Movement	N/A
FTL Travel	N/A
Gliding	½ Character Point
Flight	1 Character Point
Leaping	½ Character Point
Running	1 Character Point
Swimming	½ Character Point
Swinging	½ Character Point
Teleportation	1 Character Point
Tunneling	1 Character Point per 1m Tunneling through 1 DEF material; increase the character's velocity for +1 Character Point per each +1m; increase the DEF Tunneled through for +3 Character Points per each +1 DEF

If you switched to this system, you might also consider changing other Powers to work on a meters basis instead of via hexes. For example, maybe Darkness to Sight Group would cost +5 Character Points for each +1 meter radius; Area Of Effect (Radius) gives a power a radius of 2 meters per 10 Active Points for a +1 Advantage. Change Environment, Images, and Explosion could all use meters as well.

FIXED LOCATIONS

Under the standard rules, characters cannot buy Fixed or Floating Fixed Locations for any Movement Power other than Teleportation. However, the GM might want to consider allowing this in some circumstances. For instance, characters might want to buy a Location for:

Leaping (particularly MegaLeaping) to ensure they can always hit the Location without having to make an Attack Roll to land in the correct “hex.”

MegaRunning or MegaFlight, so they can run/fly to the exact spot they want and stop right there.

Extra-Dimensional Movement powers that allow travel to multiple locations within one or more dimensions, to ensure they can always reach a particular location in a particular dimension without any worries or effort.

LINKED POWERS

Characters sometimes want to Link a power to a Movement Power. Usually this is a Defense Power or the like, but sometimes they want it to be an attack, such as an Explosion (a “sonic boom” they create when they move) or an HKA (defined as “running past someone and slashing him with my claws/sword/whatever”). In this case, the character can define the Linked attack as occurring wherever he wants to along his movement path, provided the GM doesn't object – but he has to choose where it occurs when he buys the power, and can't alter it thereafter. Some possibilities include at the beginning of his movement path, at the end of his movement path, and in the middle of his movement path. If he wants the power to take effect all along the path of his movement (such as a sword slash, where he can attack everyone he runs past), he should buy that attack as an Area Of Effect (Line) with a length equal to his maximum Combat Movement.

A character can use a Power that's Linked to a Movement Power when he makes a Half Move, but pursuant to the standard proportionality rules governing Linked (*HERO System 5th Edition*, page 196), can only use it at half effect.

ALTERABLE MODES OF MOVEMENT

There's a +¼ Advantage for Flight called *Usable Underwater* that effectively allows Flight to function like Swimming. With the GM's permission, a character can take that same Advantage, renamed *Usable As [Second Mode Of Movement]*, for any other Movement Power. In that case the character has the same number of inches in the secondary mode of movement as he does with the primary mode of movement, regardless of their relative Character Point costs, whether one adds to the character's base movement and the other doesn't, or the like. (In the case of Movement Powers not measured in inches, such as FTL Travel, use the Character Points spent on the base primary Movement Power to determine the speed or effect in the secondary mode of movement.) Changing from one mode of movement to another is a Zero-Phase Action, but a character can only do it once per Phase.

The GM can forbid any particular use of this Advantage that seems unbalancing or inappropriate. The GM can also allow a character to buy this Advantage multiple times for the same Movement Power, allowing it to function as three, four, or more modes of movement.

Here are some examples:

Broad Wings: The character has large wings. Normally he uses them to fly, but when he's tired he can simply glide.

Flight 15", Usable As Gliding (+¼) (37 Active Points); Restrainable (-½). Total cost: 25 points.

Ice Slides: The character can create narrow sheets of ice in front of himself on which he can "skate" at high speeds. Normally he just uses the slides to move along the ground, but if he starts above ground level, he can slide downward, provided he has a nearby solid surface (the ground itself, the side of a building, a large tree, or the like) to which he can anchor the slide. As the character "skates" downward, he can occasionally create a small "mogul" to give himself a little bit more altitude. Unfortunately, this power leaves large chunks of ice lying around after the character passes through the area, which may pose various hazards until they melt.

Running +9", Usable As Gliding (+¼) (25 Active Points [includes the cost of putting the Advantage on the character's base Running]); Physical Manifestation (-¼), Side Effects (leaves big chunks of ice around the environment; -0). Total cost: 20 points.

Spaceflight: The character can fly both in atmospheres at standard speeds, and in the icy depths of space at faster than the speed of light.

Flight 15", Usable As FTL Travel (up to 1,000 LY/year; +¼). Total cost: 37 points.

CHANGING MOVEMENT SKILL LEVELS

In some campaigns, GMs may find that Movement Skill Levels (*HERO System 5th Edition*, page 242) are too useful. They not only improve a character's Turn Mode, they can also sometimes improve his DCV while he's moving, help him to accelerate and decelerate, and so on. That's a lot of utility for 2 Character Points per Level! If this is causing problems in the campaign, the GM should increase the price of "MSLs" – at least to 3 Character Points per Level, and possibly 5, for Levels that only apply to one type of movement, and at least to 5 Character Points for Levels that apply to all modes of movement.

Alternately, the GM could change the cost of Movement Skill Levels for a single Movement Power based on the Power they apply to, since they're more useful for some Movement Powers than others. Here's a list of suggested costs:

Power	Cost Per Movement Skill Level
Extra-Dim. Movement	N/A
FTL Travel	N/A
Gliding	3 Character Points
Flight	3 Character Points
Leaping	2 Character Points
Running	2 Character Points
Swimming	2 Character Points
Swinging	2 Character Points
Teleportation	2 Character Points
Tunneling	1 Character Point



THE MANY FACES OF CALAMITY JANE

The real Calamity Jane was a true pioneer in the arena of women's rights, violating nearly every rule that was supposed to govern the behavior of women at the time (which, oddly, was fine with her male friends, but annoyed other women greatly). Yet until recently Hollywood chose to ignore the real person behind the legend in favor of bending the myth of Calamity Jane into something traditional. Doris Day, Yvonne De Carlo, Jane Russell, Jean Arthur, and Ellen Barkin all portrayed cute, perky, and blonde Calamity Janes whose primary ambition was to be rescued from their lives of pseudo-maleness. Only recently in the performances of Jane Alexander in the 1984 production of *Calamity Jane* and Robin Weigert in HBO's *Deadwood* has the character been given any depth... or even been allowed to be brunette.

You Gotta Have Character by Jason Walters

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

"It was a bit awkward at first but I soon got to be perfectly at home in men's clothes."

— Calamity Jane

"After the 1871 Indian campaigns I returned to Fort Sanders, Wyoming. I remained there until spring of 1872, playing cards and drinking with the other scouts. Eventually Buffalo Bill and I were ordered to assist the army during the Muscle Shell Indian outbreak; a none-too-merry event that I'm certain we would both rather forget. In that conflict Generals Custer, Miles, Terry, and Crook all became engaged in a violent war with the Blackfoot Indian Nation. This campaign, which accomplished little save the reckless slaughter of men both red and white, lasted until fall of 1873. Yet it was during this ill-fated campaign that I Martha Jane Canary was first christened Calamity Jane.

"It was on the muddy, blood-soaked banks of the Goose Creek where the town of Sheridan is now located that this inadvertent verbal baptism transpired. Captain Egan was in command of the nearby post, which was little more than a crude stockade of roughly hewn logs protecting a clutch of miserable wool tents. We were ordered out to quell an uprising of the local heathenry, angry savages who had developed the charming habit of skinning passing cattle ranchers alive. We were out for several hellish days during which we had numerous, indecisive skirmishes with our enemy. These consisted primarily of ambushes, traps, sniping, charges, and counter charges during which six of our soldiers were killed and several severely wounded. When Captain Egan had finally had enough of this tedious, dangerous work he ordered us to return to the Post.

"Unfortunately our opponents were not so eager to break off the fight; we were ambushed about a mile and a half from our destination on the shores of the creek by a large group of braves. During the initial assault Captain Egan was almost immediately shot in his saddle. I was riding in advance and, upon hearing the firing, turned to see the Captain tumbling to the ground. Turning my horse quickly about, I galloped back with all haste across the shallow brook's bed to his side and got there in time to catch him as he was falling. I lifted him onto my horse in front of me and, riding like the devil himself was stabbing at my heels, succeeded in getting him safely to the stockade where he was tended to by the company's surgeon. All of the other men save him and myself were lost in this bloodthirsty raid, wilting like dandelions in the desert sun as a hail of bullets cut them all down. It was a tragedy of the sort that became all too common during that war. Under such grim circumstances men develop strange ideas about humor and joviality. When Captain Egan, who had suffered the sort of wound that a man should never have to endure, awakened from his stupor to gaze upon his ghoulis wound he laughingly said, 'I name you Calamity Jane, the heroine of the plains.' I have borne that name up to the present time.

Calamity Jane was a frontier woman of some considerable renown, a legendary figure whose exploits both real and imagined became the subject of innumerable dime novels during the early 20th Century. Raised in the rugged mining camps of the Montana and Utah territories to be as tough as any man of the time, she was a legendary horsewoman, a crack shot, a scout for Custer, a notorious boozier, and a foul-mouthed brawler of epic proportions. Although much of her life has been shrouded in tall tales, conjecture, and legend, she remains a fine example of the courageous and free-spirited frontier people who settled the Old West.

Calamity Jane



Calamity Jane

18 STR 8 13- Lift 300 kg; 3½d6 [2]
 18 DEX 24 13- OCV: 6/DCV: 6
 15 CON 10 12-
 15 BODY 10 12-
 13 INT 3 12- PER Roll: 12-
 12 EGO 4 11- ECV: 4
 17 PRE 7 12- PRE Attack: 3d6
 12 COM 1 11-

8 PD 4 Total: 11 PD (3 rPD)
 6 ED 3 Total: 9 ED (3 rED)
 4 SPD 12 Phases: 3, 6, 9, 12
 8 REC 2
 35 END 3
 40 STUN 8

Total Characteristics Cost: 99

Movement: Running: 6"/12"
 Leaping: 3½"/7"
 Swimming: 2"/4"

Cost Powers END

13 *Brawler:* HA +4d6 (7½d6 with STR);
 HA Lim (-½) 2

Perks

2 Reputation: Hell-Raising Frontier
 Woman (medium-sized group) 11-,
 +2/+2d6

Talents

6 Combat Luck (3 PD/3 ED)

Skills

7 *Calamity Prowess:* +2 Overall; Only
 when Character is the Last Man Standing
 or the Only One who Can Save the Day
 (-2)
 8 *Pistolero:* +4 vs. Range Modifier with
 Handguns
 3 +1 with Rifles
 6 +2 with Handguns

3 Acrobatics 13-
 4 Animal Handler (Bovines, Canines,
 Equines) 12-
 3 Breakfall 13-
 3 Bribery 12-
 3 Climbing 13-
 3 Fast Draw 13-
 5 Gambling (Card Games, Dice Games,
 Horse Racing) 12-
 3 Riding 13-
 3 Streetwise 12-
 5 Survival (Arctic/Subarctic Forests, Desert,
 Mountain) 12-
 1 TF: Carts & Carriages, Equines
 3 Tracking 12-
 3 Trading 12-
 3 Traveler
 2 1) AK: Deadwood 12-
 2 2) AK: Nevada 12-
 2 3) AK: The Dakotas 12-
 2 4) AK: The West 12-
 3 WF: Blades, Handguns, Rifles, Shotguns

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 101**Total Cost: 200****100+ Disadvantages**

20 Distinctive Features: Six-Foot Tall-
 Heavily Armed Woman Dressed Like a
 Man (Not Concealable, Major Reaction)
 20 Enraged: when Her Friends are Harmed
 (Common, Go 11-, Rec 11-)
 5 Money: Poor
 15 Psychological Limitation: Combative
 (Common, Strong)
 15 Psychological Limitation: Violent
 (Common, Strong)
 15 Reputation: Dangerous, Brawling
 Woman Gunfighter, 11- (Extreme)
 10 Social Limitation: Woman in a Man's
 World (Frequently, Minor)

Total Disadvantage Points: 150

Background/History: Calamity Jane was born Martha Jane Canary on May first of 1852 in Princeton Missouri, the oldest of six children. She was an aggressive, adventuresome child with a fondness for the outdoor activities such as riding, shooting, and hunting. At a fairly early age she became an expert rider who assisted her father in the breaking of wild horses for use on their family farm.

When Martha Jane was 13, pressures leading to the outbreak of the Civil War convinced her father to uproot his family and move to Virginia City, Montana. Though this journey was a brutal trek that took five months to complete she seems to have enjoyed herself immensely, spending the greater portion of the trip hunting alongside of the mountain men who acted as their wagon train's guides. She also helped the party's men lower their wagons over ledges with ropes, navigate fast moving rivers, and scout bogs filled with quicksand. By the time the Canary family reached their destination their oldest daughter had toughened into an expert outdoorsman, a remarkably good shot, and a fearless rider.

Martha Jane's mother died at Black Foot in 1866, a tragedy which seemed to sap the strength from her father who passed away two years later. Shortly afterwards, an Indian uprising scattered the Canary children to the four winds, with Jane finding work as a "bullwhacker" and cowboy. Standing six feet in height by the age of eighteen and possessed of considerable strength for a member of the fairer sex, Martha Jane signed on as a scout with General Custer's unit at Fort Russell, Wyoming. Alongside her friend and sometime lover Buffalo Bill she spent her formative years trying to keep hapless soldiers from falling off cliffs or otherwise getting themselves killed by Blackfoot Indians. "She had unlimited nerve and entered into the work with enthusiasm," he later commented, "doing good service on a number of occasions. Though she did not do a man's share of the heavy work, she has gone places where old frontiersmen were unwilling to trust themselves, and her courage and good-fellowship made her popular with every man in the command."

In 1871 a massive Indian revolt broke out near what is now the town of Sheridan, Wyoming. Martha Jane and Wild Bill were dispatched along with units commanded by generals Custer, Miles, Terry, and Crook to put down the rebellion that had already claimed the lives of numerous natives, settlers, ranchers, and miners. It was during this campaign that Martha picked up her unique moniker. She was guiding a unit back to their fort when they fell into a sudden ambush that quickly wounded her commanding officer, Captain Egan. Charging into the middle of combat under a hail of gunfire

she managed to pull the wounded man onto her saddle before sprinting for the relative safety of the stockade walls. The two of them were the only survivors of what quickly became a massacre, leading Egan (who must have been something of a wag) to nickname the brave horsewoman "Calamity Jane" in commemoration of the terrible event. The name stuck.

In 1874 Calamity Jane was ordered to Fort Russell near the current site of Custer City. The Sioux Indians had rebelled there in response to a veritable invasion of gold miners into the Black Hills, which not only lay within their territory but was also regarded as sacred land by the warlike tribe. During this military campaign she worked as a courier, bearing messages from general to general often over a distance of some 90 miles through bog, river, and rain. After she contracted a severe illness from the cold, General Crook had to forcibly confine her to his hospital out of fear she would kill herself in his service. After she recovered Calamity Jane was discharged from the army. She quickly hooked up with James Butler Hickok, better known to history as legendary gunfighter Wild Bill Hickok, becoming part of his close circle of friends along with prospector Charlie Utter and Captain Jack Crawford. Together they all emigrated to the now infamous boomtown of Deadwood that lay just at the foot of the gold-rich Black Hills.

While Charlie mined for gold in the hills and Wild Bill drank himself blind in the Bell Union Saloon, Jane got herself a job acting as a pony express rider carrying the mail between Deadwood and Custer. It was considered to be the most dangerous mail route in the Dakota Territories; 50 miles of some of the most rugged, bandit-infested trails in the Black Hills. Several pony express riders assigned to the run had been recently robbed of their packages, mail, and money. Yet as Jane's reputation as a rider and quick shot were well established, she was bothered very little by the local outlaws, many of whom were her drinking companions in any case (in her own words, "the toll gatherers looked on me as being a good fellow"). She would complete the round trip in two days at a total distance of roughly 100 miles; a considerable feat of horsemanship.

Then in August of 1876, Wild Bill, who was sitting at a gambling table in his favorite saloon, was shot through the back of the head by the notorious desperado Jack McCall. Upon hearing word of her friend's death Calamity Jane went berserk. She began tearing up the town of Deadwood in search of McCall, finally cornering him in Shurdy's Butcher Shop where, unarmed save for a hastily snatched meat cleaver, she battered and disarmed him. Although he escaped her, soon afterwards McCall was once again

caught by Jane at Fagan's Ranch on Horse Creek. She transported him to Yankton where under her watchful eye he was quickly tried, sentenced, and hung.

Following Wild Bill's death, Jane's circle of friends seemed to scatter, leaving her once again alone. She hung around the mining camps near Deadwood, drinking, fighting, and gambling with casual friends until, seemingly tired of human company, she vanished into the hills for several months. In the spring of 1877 Jane reappeared, riding seemingly out of nowhere to save a stagecoach under attack by the Sioux some 12 miles outside of Deadwood. With the coach's horses out of control, driver John Slaughter lay slumped in his seat, slain by a bullet through his back when Jane's horse bolted from the salt brush. Leaping from the back of her horse into Slaughter's seat she deftly pushed his corpse over the side, followed by all of the baggage save for the mail. She then drove to the Deadwood station as fast as she could with a dozen Sioux braves in hot pursuit, saving the carriage's six passengers.

After bravely nursing dozens of Deadwood's citizens back to health during a winter smallpox outbreak, in the fall of 1877 Calamity Jane left to look for adventure in other parts of the West. She signed on as a scout for the 7th Cavalry, assisting them in the founding and construction of the towns of Fort Meade and Sturgis. In 1878 she left to put in a year of prospecting in Rapid City before spending a couple of years driving teams of oxen from Fort Pierce to Sturgis. She then spent a couple of years ranching and keeping a roadside inn ("where a weary traveler could be accommodated with food, drink, or trouble if he looked for it") before wanderlust once again seized her, taking her to California, Arizona, and Texas. In El Paso she met and married a Mr. Clinton Burke. Together they had a baby girl, but Calamity Jane couldn't seem to shake off her wanderlust. Perpetually restless, she dragged her small family to Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, and Oregon before her husband decided that he had traveled just about enough. He returned to Texas with their daughter, leaving Calamity Jane alone in the rugged hills of her youth.

On October 9th of 1895 a 43-year old Calamity Jane rode quietly into Deadwood for a drink some 17 years after she had left. She was completely unaware of her own notoriety; the spontaneous public celebration which broke out upon her arrival left her astonished. Surprisingly, many of her old friends were still alive and the town's newer citizens were all eager to meet the celebrated frontierswoman for the very first time. Jane enjoyed a brief career as a celebrity, touring briefly with Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show (before getting canned for being rowdy and

drunken). She even composed a brief but charming autobiography entitled *Calamity Jane: In Her Own Words*, which proved to be a hot seller in 1898.

In the end, though, years of hard living caught up with Calamity Jane. Now in her early 50s, she looked like a woman in her 70s. She still drank hard, chewed tobacco, and swore, but the fire had gone out of her. Martha "Calamity Jane" Canary Burke died penniless in 1903. At the end she had been living in a small room in the Calloway Hotel in Terry, South Dakota. She requested to be buried in Deadwood next to Wild Bill Hickok on Mt. Moriah overlooking the city. Her funeral was one of the largest ever held for a woman in Deadwood. Her coffin was closed by a man that she had nursed back to health when he was a boy during the smallpox epidemic.

Personality/Motivation: Calamity Jane was raised almost exclusively by frontier men with very little civilizing feminine input.

Correspondingly she's a ripsnorter, a hellraiser, a drinker, a blasphemer, a fornicator, and, when she absolutely has to be, a killer as well. In other words she is pretty much one of the guys, a point she attempts to drive home on every occasion. She works when she has to, generally selecting the most dangerous jobs available as a way of proving herself to those around her. She has a well-earned reputation for exceptional, possibly even suicidal bravery.

When Calamity Jane isn't working, she's playing... hard. She practically lives in a honky-tonk known as Al Swearengen's Gem, where the bartenders know her line when she bellies up, "Give me a shot of booze and slop it over the brim!" She has an extremely short temper, too, especially when she's been drinking. Jane is never shy about brandishing her deadly pair of Colt .45s at the slightest insult, although she's all smiles if the offending miscreant buys her a drink. Around the town of Deadwood she is well liked and popular, recognized everywhere she goes by her swagger and distinctive clothing. Wherever she slaps open a pair of batwing saloon doors the same shout always rings out: "Here comes Calamity Jane!" This is as much a warning as anything else as Jane is fond of trick shooting down chandeliers, whether anybody is sitting under them or not.

Although later in life alcoholism wreaked havoc on her personality, driving her into a deep chronic depression, the younger Calamity Jane upon whom this write-up is based is loyal, dashing, and charismatic... in a rustic, foul-mouthed sort of way. She has a deeply buried tender side to her as well. Jane was one of the few citizens of Deadwood to stay behind and tend to the infected during a smallpox outbreak which sent most of the town's citizens fleeing

into the brush in terror, an act of kindness which many felt was far braver than facing gunfire. “When she nursed children,” commented the town doctor, “oh, she’d swear to beat the hell out of them, but it was a tender kind of cussin’.”

Quote: “As a scout I performed a great many dangerous missions, during which I found myself in many close places. Yet I always succeeded in getting away safely. By the time my soldiering career finished I was considered the most reckless and daring rider, as well as one of the best shots, in the western country.”

Powers/Tactics: Calamity Jane is an admirably capable paramilitary fighter and frontier woman: tough, practical, experienced, and fearless. Her riding, tracking, hunting, and general outdoorsman abilities (Animal Handler 12-, Riding 13-, Survival 12-, and Tracking 12-) are as good or better than that of any man in the territories. Her acrobatic abilities (Acrobatics 13-, Breakfall 13-, and Climbing 13-) are probably superior to that of most men in the Dakotas. She is also perfectly at home in the crude urban centers of the Old West, gambling and carousing in a manner almost identical to her male counterparts save for her occasional trips “off into the brush” with young men (Jane dresses like a man but her tastes are strictly traditional) when “the itch” comes upon her (Bribery 12-, Gambling 12-, Streetwise 12-, and Trading 12-).

Although Calamity Jane is a powerful and capable hand-to-hand brawler (she can punch or kick for 7½d6), she is much more at home using knives, pistols, rifles, and shotguns to dispatch violence outward from her person. In addition to Combat Skill Levels, her Pistolero, Fast Draw, and Combat Luck abilities serve to make her a gunfighter able to stand boot-to-boot with all but the fastest “shootists” around. A walking arsenal, Calamity Jane will always have the following on her person or close at hand: a buck knife, two .45LC single action revolvers, a two-shot 38 derringer hidden in her belt, a 12-gauge double-barreled “coach” shotgun, and a .45LC lever action rifle. If for some reason she is caught unarmed (such as during Wild Bill’s murder) she will improvise with typically violent gusto.

Calamity Jane has a final special combat ability directly related to her name. During *extremely* desperate circumstances in which she is the only combatant from her side left standing or she is the only one could realistically save the day, Calamity gets an extra two “overall” levels to her actions.

Campaign Use: Calamity Jane isn’t so much a person as a broad type of person, a fantastic example of the American “frontier character” popularized in story, song, and legend. She was

so well known during her time that the original Western writer Bret Harte is said to have based his famous character Cherokee Sal on Jane. She was by no means the first or only pistol-packing mama in the Old West. There was the voluptuous Belle Starr who went everywhere in “a swagger with a six-gun on either ample hip.” There were bootleggers turned cattle rustlers like Cattle Annie McDougall and Little Britches Jennie Metcalf. Yet it is Calamity with her larger-than-life deeds whose name has best endured, partly due to some judicious marketing of her own image late in her life.

A GM will find Calamity Jane useful in two capacities. Firstly, she is an absolutely fantastic NPC background character for any *Western Hero* campaign, especially one that take place in that most legendary of Old West towns, Deadwood. The historical Jane was considered colorful by the townspeople of her day so there is no reason she shouldn’t provide color for an enterprising GM’s campaign. Secondly, while many players (especially those in *Fantasy Hero* games) enjoy creating tougher-than-nails, tall-as-a-man women characters who like to “hang with the guys,” Calamity Jane actually was one of those women. Players could use her as an inspiration to create a dashing female “frontier character” of their very own.

Appearance: Calamity Jane is nearly six feet tall, “thickset” with masculine features. She has long brown hair which is kept tightly wound in a bun underneath her hat. She prefers to wear men’s clothing, generally the sort of rugged gear common to cowboys and frontiersmen of her time: denim pants, work shirts, leather vests, and chaps. When she is out in the brush for long periods of time she wears fringed buckskins with knee-high moccasins. Although she has been known to wear a Union private’s hat, Calamity more commonly wears a wide brimmed prospector’s hat of the type quite common in the Black Hills area.

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IT'S PROBABLY OBVIOUS, BUT...

The original background of this scenario was meant to be an analog of the Rwanda Civil War. In keeping with the tradition of comic books, the names of the nation and the factions involved in the conflict have been changed; it's now a fictitious nation with non-real world geography that can be fitted (very roughly) onto a map of Africa.

Scenarios which use real world international settings can be very topical and may seem absurd over time as political situations change. It'll be easier to run a scenario in Kinyasa in a few years than in Rwanda, provided that the situation gets resolved. In the case of the Rwanda conflict, the sooner it becomes absurd, the better.

OTHER POSSIBLE LOCATIONS

This scenario, alas, is not inconceivable for Africa again at the time of this writing, with war in Sierra Leone and the Ivory Coast, and an out-of-control conflict in central Africa involving many of the same players as the original Rwanda crisis. The Balkans, Kashmir, and East Timor are also hot spots (the former possibly involving nuclear weapons).



"And There Was Blood Everywhere!"

by Scott Bennie

Pity the living.

They came in a long, haggard line of human misery: young women weeping for lost children, old men hobbling on improvised canes – one of them was an unloaded rifle, another a broken guitar. Possessions were bundled in makeshift sacks. No one was without scars. Hope had been replaced by desperation, and desperation by a weary inhuman numbness. They were the army of the defeated, despoiled, and desecrated scions of humanity, their losses worn on their lined faces. They may have been handsome or happy faces once, but such emotions had been long lost, like the memory of a taste of an old favorite food, they had passed into an intangible realm that was not quite forgotten, but incapable of making a lasting impression in memory.

And who was here to observe them? Who was there to give them solace, let alone tend to their physical needs? A handful of altruists, people whose bravery was beyond question, able to endure the sight of such suffering and remain usefully unmoved. All the rest of the world viewed them as curiosities, subjects for cocktail parties and computer chatrooms, abstract objects of pity, editorial remarks, and conversation fillers. Such was their use in the modern world. Poor wretched souls, barely alive on a continent that had been all but forgotten by their fellows, their souls broken, their bodies a testament to the brutalities of which the human spirit was capable.

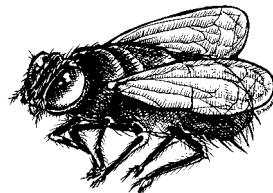
— *Kinyasa Review*

"*And There Was Blood Everywhere!*" is a *Champions* scenario for a group of characters built on 350-450 points, with 20-30 defenses and 50-70 Active Point attacks. This scenario deals with themes of mysticism, brutality, torture, and fantastic horror. It is recommended for gaming groups who are capable of dealing with mature themes.

This adventure gives a lot of options for the GM and attempts to encourage the GM to be flexible and creative. As a result, it will be necessary for the GM to carefully read through this adventure before it is played, and to determine some of the staging for himself.

The scenario involves a battle in a war-torn land against a mystical threat. There are six sections to the scenario:

1. *The Background*
2. *Getting the PCs There*
3. *Geography of the Damned*
4. *Minor Encounters*
5. *The Main Event*
6. *Consequences, Consequences*



The Background

The (fictional) nation of Kinyasa, located in East Central Africa, had been a Portuguese dominated colony for nearly two centuries. The nation was inhabited by two tribes, the Inatu, and the Besi. The Portuguese chose the Inatu tribe, a minority tribe of tall warriors, to be their proxy. The Inatu's main rivals, the Besi, were not as tall (or to the colonial mindset, as handsome), and were therefore racially inferior to the Inatu, even though they comprised over 80% of the population of Kinyasa. The Inatu enjoyed their dominance over the Besi.

In 1973, Kinyasa gained its independence from Portugal. The Inatu attempted to maintain their dominant position, but things soon broke down. However in the halcyon days of the end of colonialism, people were inclined to be generous. A compromise was reached between Inatu and Besi, and a multi-party democracy ruled in Kinyasa, which lasted for nearly twenty-five years – until now.

Three months ago, the President of Kinyasa, a respected Besi, was assassinated. This was the only spark that was needed to reignite old hatreds. Since then, chaos has reigned in Kinyasa. The Besi were responsible for most of the initial massacres, although Inatu retaliation, using the army and some superhuman militia, has been equally brutal. At present, the Inatu have used their technological superiority to gain the upper hand, and have driven most of the Besi from their villages. Some Besi have taken refuge in neighboring nations; others have made crude refugee camps, plagued by disease and starvation.

Aggravating the situation are the cult militias, a crude blend of Christian rhetoric, African animism, and outright thuggery. Cult militias such as the locally based Army of the Ten Commandments have attacked missionaries and United Nations workers, murdered tens of thousands of people, kidnapped many thousands more, pillaged the countryside, and generally made a hellish situation even worse.

The international community has discussed finding a solution to the crisis, but so far it's been mostly talk and a few relief missions. International rescue organizations have done better, although a few workers paid for their altruistic goals with their lives.

Two days ago, the situation changed. A small smudge appeared on satellite photos; a two kilometer area in southwest Kinyasa that was neither a cloud nor any known phenomena. It has completely engulfed one of the major refugee camps in the area. Since it appeared, all communications from that region have ceased, and no one knows for certain what's happening there. The US government was interested enough

to send an AWAC plane into the area, but it vanished without a trace.

Naturally, there are a number of individuals who are interested in what is going on in the area.

What's Going On

Magic. The bloodshed of the civil war has released old spirits (in the West, they would be called demons), who have fed on the hatred and the violence. It has created a vast region of flies which has dimmed the land (to the point where even satellite photos cannot get a clear view of what is going on).

The center of magical activity is an Inatu refugee camp in southwest Kinyasa. There was a major massacre there, and the dark spirits are feeding. A huge Column of Misery is now the master of this land; a filthy and terrifying thing composed of a swarm of billions of blood-swollen flies, a thing that takes the hatred it feeds upon and is spreading it as a plague even greater than its source. The walking dead surround it, animated by swarms of magical, telekinetic flies.

The Column has fed on the refugee camp and is ready to travel. Unless it is stopped, much of central and southern Africa (and perhaps beyond) will become a wasteland.

Getting the PCs Involved

The scenario generally assumes that the PCs are respected superheroes capable of quick globe-trotting actions (at least, they're the easiest sort of heroes to bring into the scenario).

Nonetheless, there are several ways to get these heroes involved in the crisis:

- 1) The Red Cross. The Red Cross recruits the heroes to investigate the disaster area. The Red Cross will want the PCs to scout the location and escort a relief team into the area. The Red Cross may also have made an agreement with a photographer from a major news organization to come along (or a news photographer could sneak along).
- 2) The Government. Any major government, particularly in a world where magic and aliens are known to exist, will view this sort of anomaly with suspicion, and will want to dispatch some superheroes into the area to investigate it and see if it poses a threat. The PCs will be ordered to investigate the area, determine if something there is a potential worldwide threat, and deal with it.
- 3) A Rich Patron. Some billionaire's daughter decided to become a relief worker and just happened to be in the area when the darkness appeared. The billionaire hasn't been able to contact her and will pay a great deal of money to determine her safety (and

OPTIONAL ENCOUNTERS

Some encounters may or may not easily fit into the scenario, but would make for an entertaining run; other encounters may be spurred by player action.

OH, THE PRICE OF A PULITZER!

Most Likely

Location: Prior to arrival in Kinyasa

A famous journalist, perhaps one that the PCs know (a DNPC or someone that the PCs have a grudge against) learns about the PCs' mission and decides to secretly tag along with them during the trip. This will be easier if the PCs take public transportation to Kinyasa; a PC could find the journalist attempting to stow away on their aircraft either in the States or as they transfer to a smaller craft at a major African airport.

The journalist will be defiant in the face of superior numbers, but will try to get the heroes' sympathy. The journalist could claim that his brother or sister is a missing aid worker in Kinyasa (this may or may not be true) and that the only way to find out what happened to the relative is to come with them.

If the PCs refuse to help the journalist, the journalist will find some other way to get

to Kinyasa and will probably end up in the scenario somehow by its conclusion.

If the PCs agree to help the journalist, the journalist will try to be helpful. This is, of course, a double-edged sword. The journalist could be useful as a translator and guide, but is also another body to protect in combat.

Unless the journalist is superhuman, the character should avoid the final confrontation with the Column and the Cloud of Flies. There are some things that aren't worth a Pulitzer, and a two kilometer diameter cloud of blood-sucking flies is one of them.

MERCENARY MAYHEM

Most Likely

Location: Lake Amazu Refugee Camp

Some famous mercenary super-villains, enemies of at least one of the PCs, decided to take out a contract on one of the Besi leaders. The leader is dead, but the contract also calls for the death of every member of their family. That family is located at the Lake Amazu refugee camp. The mercenaries and their employer don't care if a lot of refugees die in the process. They'll attack the camp,

rescue her from trouble, since the billionaire is not particularly happy that she's there in the first place).

- 4) A Mystical Watchdog. The darkness is magical and highly evil in nature, and presents a mystic threat to life in the region. The patron mystic decides that the PCs are the best ones to investigate it, and contacts them to deal with it. (This does give away part of the plot, and is only recommended if the PCs would normally expect magic in these circumstances.)
- 5) An Old Friend of a PC is in Trouble. This method is particularly favorable to PCs who have less than favorable reputations; someone whom one of the PCs have a strong emotional attachment just happens to be in the area and the PC abruptly loses contact with him or her.
One variation on this is the "plea for help" scenario. An old friend of the PCs is serving as a peacekeeper (or perhaps the head of the local peacekeepers) and is fed up with international apathy. Due to disasters that have occurred in other areas of the world, NATO/The United Nations and the international community are deliberately shunning the Kinyasa crisis and letting it happen. The old friend can't take it any more, doesn't care about proper procedure; he just wants someone to do *something*.
(This actually happened to General Romeo Dallaire, a distinguished Canadian officer who was the head of the United Nations Peacekeeping forces in Rwanda and who warned about the possibility of massacres well in advance of the actual event, only to have to watch the atrocities after his warnings were repeatedly ignored. Dallaire later left peacekeeping duty and reportedly suffered a mental breakdown).
- 6) The Old Enemy of a PC. The PC learns that an old enemy happened to be present here (perhaps a mercenary or gun-runner, or perhaps a sorcerer) when the trouble started. The PCs may wonder whether the enemy is connected with the phenomena and send the team to investigate (in the case of the sorcerer, the enemy could well be the person who summoned the Column of Misery).
- 7) The Press. Some members of the press are going to the war zone, and ask the PCs to escort them in a dangerous situation.

There are two likely routes that foreign visitors would use to get into Kinyasa. Zaire has the best air facilities of any nearby country; a team could fly into Kinshasa (Zaire's capital), then proceed by charter plane (or personal flight) to the Zaire-Kinyasa border. The most likely route would be across Ryanda Pass, although PCs could also fly over the mountains and avoid the Inatu fortifications there.

The Area

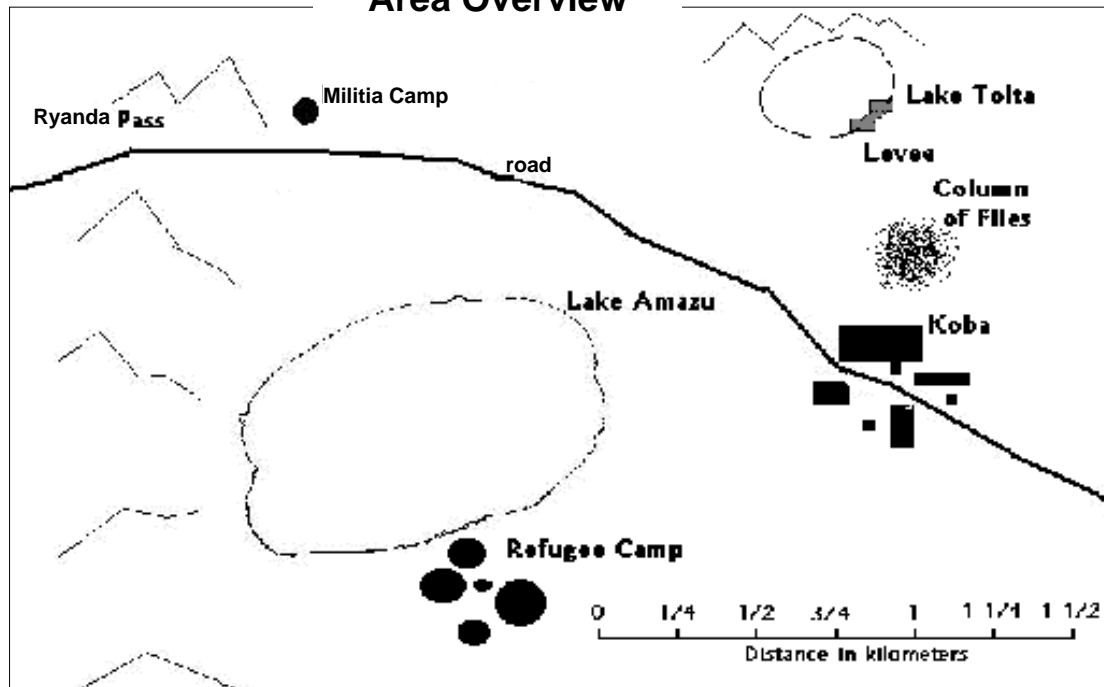
GEOGRAPHY OF THE DAMNED

Kinyasa is a mountainous region of central Africa, located mostly on plateau. If incorporated into the real world, consider it an autonomous region between Rwanda and Burundi along Zaire's eastern border. The area in this scenario is on a high plateau, surrounded by mountains.

Ryanda Pass is on the Kinyasa-Zaire border. The pass was used initially by Besi refugees to flee into Zaire, but Inatu militia have set up a small encampment entirely in Kinyasa, and is fenced by hills and mountains on its western shores, making it a poor escape route for refugees. The refugee camp is comprised of about 11,000 Besi. The Besi know about the massacre at the Lake Tolta refugee camp five days ago, but do not know about the flies; there are rumors that several people who lost loved ones in the massacre went back to the camp and never returned. The smudge of the flies is visible in the distance from Amazu, but most people believe it's smoke, in spite of the lack of a burning smell. The camp is in the process of scattering and fleeing in the safest direction; a few intend to try for the road into Zaire, but most intend to head south.

Now the camp is home to about 400 Inatu; the Besi have been killed or driven off their land and the victorious Inatu have claimed the land as theirs. Inatu dead have been buried with honor, while the Besi dead were thrown into Lake Tolta. Lake Tolta (much smaller than Amazu) is the final local feature. Some sections overflowed in recent rains before the massacre, and a large section is fenced in by a small levee on the southeastern shore. Lake Tolta is also the site of a Besi refugee camp, one that was massacred five days ago by the Inatu militia stationed near Ryanda. The dead were not buried. Shortly after the massacre, the cloud appeared (see Under a Storm Black Sky).

Area Overview



probably at some inconvenient time (such as the early morning before dawn).

This isn't particularly a good analog to the real world situation (mercenaries were not particularly employed in the Rwanda conflict); this encounter is simply a good way to bring Hunteds and/or old enemies into the fracas.

FIGHTING A MASSACRE

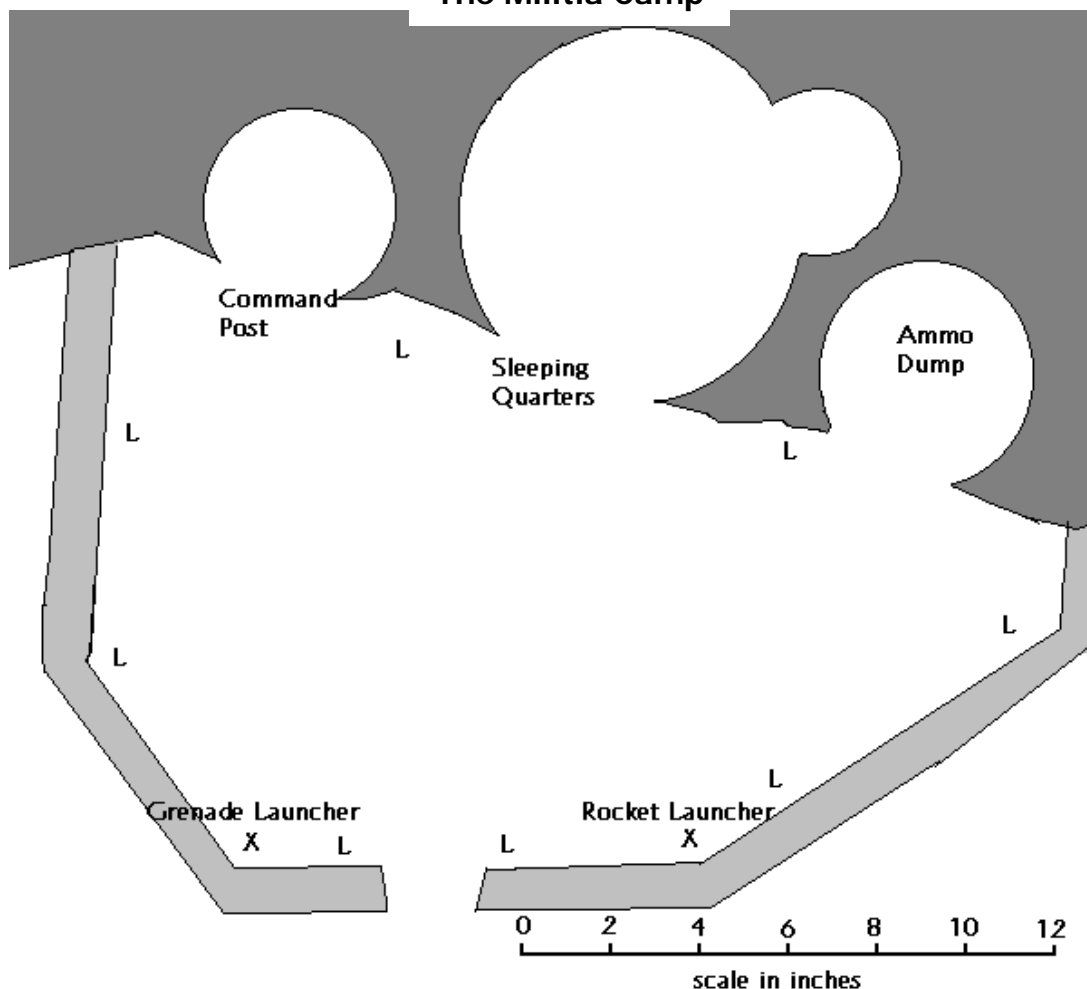
Most Likely

Location: Ryanda Pass, along the road

As the PCs approach, they spot gun-toting Inatu soldiers in the distance, surrounding and killing families of Besi refugees. There are about fifty people in the refugee group, including women, children, the elderly, and the infirm, and they're trying to scatter. The problem is simple: stop the massacre.

It's not hard for superhumans to defeat the Inatu; doing it at long range (say 50' to 100') may be more of a problem. If the PCs talk with the Kinyasans, the Inatu will claim that several of the Besi they were attacking were involved in massacres and were themselves responsible for the deaths of Inatu women and children.

The Militia Camp



A telepathic examination of some of the surviving males will reveal that some of the people that the Inatu were attacking do indeed have a lot of blood on their hands, and no intention to stop the bloodletting.

ANNEXATION

Most Likely

Location:

Kinyasa's Capital

There's always the possibility that particularly powerful and ambitious heroes may feel that the situation in Kinyasa is so morally wrong that the best thing they could do is take over the mess and attempt to run the country themselves and end the suffering.

This is a *bad* idea. It is not an impossible idea, but it is one that the PCs may come to regret. First, the PCs will have to make their way to the capital, and when they demonstrate their intentions, the Inatu who currently control the government will throw everything they have at them. Second, the international community does not look kindly to the takeover of foreign countries. The PCs may end up being hunted by international heroes who are looking to fight superhuman imperialism, or by supervillains who think that taking over a country is a splendid idea, but the PCs are

THE MILITIA CAMP

There are also two superhumans in the camp: a young Inatu man, known to locals (Inatu) as Perfect Ntare (The Besi have more gruesome names for him), and a mercenary who calls himself Mortar. These militia members belong to the paramilitary organization that calls itself the Army of the Ten Commandments (but whose actions are about as far from Judeo-Christian principles as they get). The camp is a mobile base for a band of thirty young Inatu fighters here; consider them to be DEX 11 SPD 3 Normals armed with rifles (RKA 2d6+1, +1 STUN Multiplier, 5-shot Autofire, 4 Clips of 16 Charges; No Knockback **plus** Night Scopes).

The Militia Camp is displayed on a map. They are located on a small escarpment with a clear view of the road, approximately thirty meters above it. There is a small path up an extremely steep slope, accessible by a single all terrain vehicle (ATV). Sticks and rocks and other impediments have been placed on top of the slope to provide a bit of cover (this is the shaded area around the compound on the map). Lookouts/snipers have been placed at the "L" positions and are stationed at regular intervals. The Inatu have set up a sniping position approximately 60' from the road; including a grenade launcher (RKA 2½d6, Explosion, +1 Stun Multiplier, 30 charges, +4 RMod (rangerfinder)), and a rocket launcher to use against vehicles (RKA 5d6, 12 Charges, +2 RMod).

There are three caves: a command post cave, a barracks (mostly used for sleeping), and an ammo dump. Each cave contains communications equipment (and a line to the outside so they can broadcast and receive freely), and two people on station in each cave at all times. The militia will also send a five-team patrol south of the road to attempt to waylay people who attempt to bypass the road. The ammo dump contains a *lot* of explosives: enough to do a 16d6 EB explosion attack; with a successful Demolitions roll, add+1d6 per -2 that the roll is made by, to a maximum of 24d6.

The life of a militia camp member tends to be dirty, with a lot of waiting around, punctuated by sporadic moments of violence. The militia gang is composed of hard men, or people who are willing to be led by hard men (such as Perfect Ntare).

Important Encounters

While a scenario should run in accordance with the players' wishes (if they want to avoid encounters with refugees, let them) there are a number of scenes that are appropriate to this sort of scenario, and should be worked into the adventure if at all possible. The order of these encounters is not necessarily important to the adventure.

HELPING THE REFUGEES

Most Likely Locations: Lake Amazu Refugee Camp, Along the Road

There are a lot of people out there who need help. Cholera is widespread, and because of the contamination of corpses in Lake Tolta and Lake Amazu, there is no safe drinking water. The PCs will have to help dig a well for the refugees and try to help cure the sick and perform other humanitarian duties with their powers (erecting shelters, reuniting children with their lost parents).

Some refugees that have approached the cloud of flies may come back in fear and terror, muttering madly about "flies" and "blood." This can serve as foreshadowing for the climactic encounter, particularly if the PCs decide to use telepathy on the victims. The telepathic memories of these refugees are not pretty and the GM should make sure that the telepath understands this vividly, perhaps with a 1d6 Stun loss per phase that the memories are being read as the telepath attempts to deal with the pain.

CHECKPOINT: HARASSMENT

Most Likely Location: Along the road near the Kinyasa border, or the village of Koba.

The PCs will have to pass an Inatu checkpoint. The Inatu will not be happy to see foreigners on a mission in their country. If the PCs pass through these checkpoints, the Inatu guards will verbally harass them, and demand that they remain in custody for questioning. The Inatu will claim that they suffered greatly from the Besi genocidal attacks, and are pursuing justice for their people; if the PCs decide to argue the point, they also want to make sure foreigners don't "accidentally" assist war criminals. They will describe the massacres and the deaths of family members, children being forced into homes which were then set on fire, and other Besi practices in graphic detail.

If the PCs comply with the detention request, they will be held for as long as possible. If they are escorting the Red Cross, the humanitarian organization will bail them out after six hours of detention. They will be held in a tent, under armed guard (probably two guards maximum).

If the PCs are not with the Red Cross and decide to comply, they'll be sent by truck or truck convoy to Koba, under as heavy a guard as the Inatu can give them. In Koba, they'll be thrown into a prison, along with several Besi who are being held by the Inatu for war crimes (i.e. they are accused of being involved in the massacre. The Besi will deny involvement, point out the Inatu as colonial collaborators, and accuse them of stealing, murder, and tyranny). It will take weeks before the necessary channels manage to influence the Inatu sufficiently to release them, and by that time, the cloud will have moved to menace the Lake Amazu refugee camp.

If the PCs do not comply with the detention request, there may be trouble. Mental powers or a Presence Attack might be used to persuade their would-be captors to let them go without causing an incident. Otherwise they'll have to fight their way out. It should be an easy fight, but... the Inatu do have radio contact with each other and they may be alerted to the PC attack. The Inatu will band together as many of their best troops (including superhumans such as Perfect Ntare and Mortar; the GM may add others to the roster to balance the mix as he sees fit) and try to hunt down and attack the PCs.

If the PCs are with the Red Cross and chose to defy the checkpoint, this will give the Inatu an excuse to harass or attack the Red Cross in Kinyasa. This is a very bad thing; if the campaign is not a dark campaign, the PCs should receive some sort of experience point penalty for putting the Red Cross in danger.

The Inatu fighters do know that something is odd with the cloud over the Tolta refugee camp, but don't quite understand what's going on. They're beginning to get frightened, and their leaders have started talking about gathering their forces and evacuating the area.

When dealing with Inatu and Besi fighters, roleplay the depth of hatred and the feeling of righteousness felt by both sides. They are both incredibly determined to kill the other side, and believe that they are completely justified in hatred and their deeds. The heroes should get the impression that good intentions, brute force, or acts of heroism will not provide a quick fix for the problems of Kinyasa.

Under a Storm Black Sky

The central menace of the scenario is the hatred between the factions, but its personification is the huge cloud of flies that hovers over the Lake Tolta refugee camp.

From orbit, the cloud looks like a thick grey smudge. This is what appears in satellite photos.

The cloud is visible from the ground at a distance of 20 km. Between 5 to 20 km, it looks like a dark cloud looming on the horizon.

From 1 to 5 km, the scale of the cloud begins to become more apparent. Some motion can be seen of the flies, as the cloud seems to blur and highlights shift rapidly. At 1 km, the buzzing can be heard as a noise on the horizon.

Between 0 and 1 km., the cloud's composition will become readily apparent. In addition, the noise of billions of flies in a gargantuan swarm will rapidly increase in volume, until it sounds like an unbelievably loud engine at the edge of the cloud.

As soon as the PCs arrive at the edge of the cloud, they will realize it is slowly moving. It is now heading for the Lake Amazu refugee camp, where it will arrive in three hours.

Fly zombies, grotesque creations of the Column, patrol the edges of the cloud. When the PCs penetrate the cloud (be it with their bodies, or an energy blast or rock to test the waters, two fly zombies per PC will emerge from the cloud and lurch toward them, trying to kill them. If the PCs haven't entered the cloud at this point, the cloud (and the central Column) will start to move toward them. It is possible that at this point, the PCs will realize that the flies are controlling the zombies and can be dealt with by area effect or spread attacks.

When the PCs enter the cloud, they will find themselves buffeted by billions of biting flies. This is almost as bad as entering a two kilometer swarm of wasps! PCs that are not covered from head-to-toe in armor (or other resistant defenses) will not be physically capable of withstanding these bites (they'll take 1 point of BODY NND every twelve seconds that they're inside the cloud; lack of blood, qualifies of course, as an immunity).

Visibility within the cloud is poor at best. Movement within the cloud is normal, but most creatures won't be as determined as a normal superhero.

Seventy meters from the center, the cloud of flies gets so thick that it nearly counts as darkness. The noise of the swarm makes it almost impossible to hear a thing. All visual, audio, and radar perception rolls are made at a -5 penalty. Spatial awareness becomes useless. Patrols of six fly zombies will rise up and attempt to stop the PCs before they can reach the center.

the wrong people for the job.

If the PCs find themselves trying to set up democratic elections, they're likely to attract a few opportunistic Besi (who will attempt to distance themselves as quickly as possible from the foreigners) and agitate the Inatu, who will believe that once the Besi come to power, they'll use their numerical advantage to oppress them.

The PCs might find some Besi leaders who'd be willing to be their front men in putting together a more stable and peaceful Kinyasa. At this point in the conflict, many Besi leaders would use the heroes to bring them to power, then look for a way to dump them as soon as it's convenient.

Anything is possible, and it might be feasible to secretly support and protect a leader who's looking for compromise and consolidation, or even to mentally control one of the more charismatic leaders and make him a telepathic puppet (something that will *not* play well internationally if discovered). But PCs expecting to find an easy route to a lasting peace in Kinyasa should find failure and misery.

At the center of the cloud is the Column, an amalgamation of flies, blood, corpses, and refuse that somehow manages to maintain a malign consciousness. Its only goal is to feed. It views any intruders as a threat to be expelled or destroyed. It is essentially Desolidified to pinpoint attacks (Area Of Effect attacks are required to affect it) and uses its telekinesis to hold everyone and let them be eaten to death by flies. Vehicles are crushed and battered until they break. If PCs aren't eaten by flies, they'll also be crushed with the Column's telekinesis.

There are several environmental factors they could use against the Column. As mentioned earlier, there is a levee near the camp (about 50") from the column. Luring the Column in front of the Lake Tolta levee and breaking the levee will give a 3d6 NND flow in a 3" wide stream, +1 DC per -2 that any Demolitions roll on the dam was made by. This will last twelve seconds, and do damage every two segments.

Because the Column requires the use of flies in its attacks, the Column cannot attack an underwater target. It is possible for the PCs to submerge themselves in Lake Tolta and attack the Column with perfect cover (although the Column may eventually get smart enough to use its telekinesis and throw buildings or other wreckage at underwater attackers).

The militia camp near Ryanda Pass has a large supply of explosives. PCs may find them useful in this situation. The PCs may attempt to set a timer and estimate the Column's course (Perception at -5 to correctly judge position, plus a Demolitions roll). It is possible to leave the explosives at the foot of the creature and fly away without having to take penalties on the Perception roll, but there is a risk of getting caught in the explosion.

The Column is immune to radar, making it impossible to target with conventional missiles. Fuel-to-air explosives or napalm strikes might be called in by industrious PCs, but in all likelihood, they'll burn away a swath of flies on top of the cloud and leave the next layer untouched.

If the PCs choose to call in a nuclear strike against the cloud, they will have to be extraordinarily persuasive; the public relations damage caused by nuking a foreign country would be incalculable, and could possibly destroy their host nation's reputation. Even if the host nation agrees, they would wish to evacuate as many of the refugee areas as possible, which will, ironically, give the Column a chance to start moving and threaten the Lake Amazu refugee camp.

If the PCs succeed in destroying the Column, all of the flies in the cloud will be killed. The ground will be littered in a sward of dead flies, a meter deep, in a two kilometer radius. The sudden silence may prove almost as unnerving as the scene.

Aftermath

If the PCs deal with the threat of the flies and complete any secondary objectives (find missing persons, capture an old adversary, etc.) then they'll have successfully completed the scenario. They can return home to deal with their old problems – and any nightmares that result in dealing with this abomination.

The origin of the Column is something of a mystery, and need not solely be associated with Africa. It could thrive any place where human hatred has defeated reason, and mankind becomes a pestilence unto itself. It's possible that similar Columns, driven by a mysterious force, could reappear in future scenarios.

The Column of Misery

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
*100	STR	-10	9-	Lift 25 kg; 0d6 HTH [0]
0	DEX	-30	9-	OCV: 0/DCV: 0
60	CON	100	21-	
*80	BODY	100	21-	
8	INT	-2	11-	PER Roll: 11-
13	EGO	6	12-	ECV: 4
60	PRE	50	21-	PRE Attack: 12d6
0	COM	-5	9-	
10	PD	10		Total: 10 PD (0 rPD)
12	ED	0		Total: 12 ED (0 rED)
3	SPD	20		Phases: 4, 8, 12
20	REC	16		
120	END	0		
*120	STUN	10		* Growth Figured In

Total Characteristics Cost: 265

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

Cost	Powers	END
150	<i>Giant Form:</i> Growth (+100 STR, +20 BODY, +20 STUN, -20" KB, 1 kiloton, -12 DCV, +12 PER Rolls to perceive character, 128m tall, 64m wide), Inherent (+1/4), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +1/2), Persistent (+1/2) (Already Figured In); Always On (-1/2)	0
317	<i>Millions of Flies Working Together:</i> Telekinesis (60 STR), Fine Manipulation, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +1/2), Area Of Effect (35" Radius; +1), Selective (+1/4), Affects Physical World (+2); No Range (-1/2)	0
17	<i>Millions of Biting Flies:</i> EB 1d6, NND (Sealed Armor, Force Field, Lack of Blood, +1), Does BODY (+1), Continuous (+1), Affects Physical World (+2), Area Of Effect (Radius, +1), Megascall (1" = 1 km, +1/4), Reduced Endurance (0 END, +1/2), Persistent (+1/2), Personal Immunity (+1/4), Gradual Effect (1 Turn, -1/4), No Range (-1/2), Always On (-1/2)	0
52	<i>Create Fly Zombie:</i> Major Transform 1d6 (Corpse into Fly Zombie), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +1/2), Affects Physical World (+2)	0
60	<i>Colony Form:</i> Desolidification (Affected by Area Of Effect Attacks), Inherent (+1/4), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +1/2), Persistent (+1/2); Always On (-1/2)	0
10	<i>Unnatural:</i> Life Support: Immune to All Terrestrial Diseases and Biowarfare Agents	0
5	<i>Undying:</i> Longevity: Immortality	0
60	<i>Colony Form:</i> Physical Damage Reduction, Resistant, 75%	0

60	<i>Colony Form:</i> Energy Damage Reduction, Resistant, 75%	0
20	<i>Impenetrable Colony Creature Mind:</i> Mental Defense (23 points Total)	0
20	<i>Porous Colony Form:</i> Lack Of Weakness (-20) for Normal Defense	0
34	<i>"I Can't Get A Radar Lock!":</i> Invisibility to Radio Group and Spatial Awareness, Inherent (+1/4), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +1/2), Persistent (+1/2)	0
142	<i>"So Dense... So Loud... There Must be Billions of Flies in the Center!":</i> Change Environment 35" Radius, -5 to Normal Sight, and Normal Hearing and Radar PER Rolls, Inherent (+1/4), Personal Immunity (+1/4), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +1/2), Persistent (+1/2), Affects Physical World (+2); No Range (-1/2), Always On (-1/2)	0
39	<i>Detect Warm-Blooded Creatures:</i> Detect a Class of Things 20- (Smell/Taste Group), Discriminatory, 360°, Targeting, Tracking	0

Total Powers & Skills Cost: 986

Total Cost: 1251

200+ Disadvantages

25	<i>Distinctive Features:</i> Monstrous Colony of Flies (Not Concealable; Extreme)
15	<i>Psychological Limitation:</i> Bloodlust (Common, Strong)
15	<i>Psychological Limitation:</i> Drawn to Misery and Despair (Common, Strong)
20	<i>Physical Limitation:</i> Cannot Communicate (All the Time, Greatly)
30	<i>Susceptibility:</i> when Knocked Unconscious, 3d6 damage per Segment (Uncommon)
5	<i>Vulnerability:</i> 1½x STUN from Cold Attacks (Uncommon)
941	Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 1251

Description: There is magic in the world, and much of that magic is tied to feelings of misery and suffering, suffering which can give birth to abominations. The Column of Misery is one such abomination, a carrion creature suckled on the milk of human cruelty. It is an ancient evil of which no legend speaks, for no people has ever survived its coming.

The Column is composed of a swarm of flies – billions and billions of flies. It's a two kilometer sphere of flies, controlled by a gigantic column of blood, flies, corpses, and debris that form a roughly solid mass at the center. It is a carrion colony creature. Its purpose in life is to find areas of large unburied dead and

transforming them into fly zombies under its control. For some inexplicable reason, it seems to find this pleasurable. It has no interest in anything else, and other attempts to force its thoughts away from feeding (such as attempts to communicate or attacks) are viewed as an annoyance. This creature's mind is alien and malignant.

Campaign Notes: The Column is a monster in the classic horror sense. It should not be possible for heroes to defeat it with an open display of force; it's a puzzlebox creature and players should have to use their brains to defeat it.

The Column is treated as invisible to radar (i.e. a missile strike against it is not an effective option). As a colony creature, it is considered Desolidified; a non-area effect attack will either pass through it or be harmlessly absorbed by it. An Energy Blast that is spread will affect it in the same manner as an Area Of Effect attack.

The Change Environment field near its center is a representation of the incredible mass of flies within the field. It becomes difficult to see, and the noise of billions of flies sounds like an inhuman engine to anyone within a ½ kilometer of the sphere.

The Column of Misery



Fly Zombie

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
40	STR	30	17-	Lift 6400 kg; 8d6 HTH
11	DEX	3	11-	OCV: 4/DCV: 4
0	CON	-20	9-	
10	BODY	0	11-	
10	INT	0	11-	PER Roll: 11-
0	EGO	0	9-	ECV: 0
30	PRE	20	15-	PRE Attack: 6d6
0	COM	-5	9-	
9	PD	18		Total: 9 PD (0 rPD)
9	ED	27		Total: 9 ED (0 rED)
3	SPD	9		Phases: 4, 8, 12
0	REC	-16		
0	END	0		
—	STUN	0		

Total Characteristics Cost: 66

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

Cost Powers

- 60 *Undead:* Automaton (Takes No STUN)
 34 *Detect Warm-Blooded Creatures:* Detect a Class of Things 15- (Smell/Taste Group), Discriminatory, 360°, Targeting, Tracking
 6 *Tireless:* Reduced Endurance (0 END, +½) on Running
 20 *Tireless:* Reduced Endurance (0 END, +½) on Strength

**Martial Arts: Driven
by Hate of Life**

Mnvr OCV DCV Notes

- 4 Choke -2 +0 1 Limb,
Hold 2d6 NND

Talents

- 16 Berserk Fury (*Fantasy Hero*)

Skills

- 35 +7 with Hand-to-Hand Combat
2 +1 with Choke Hold

Total Powers & Skills Cost: 209

Total Cost: 275

200+ Disadvantages

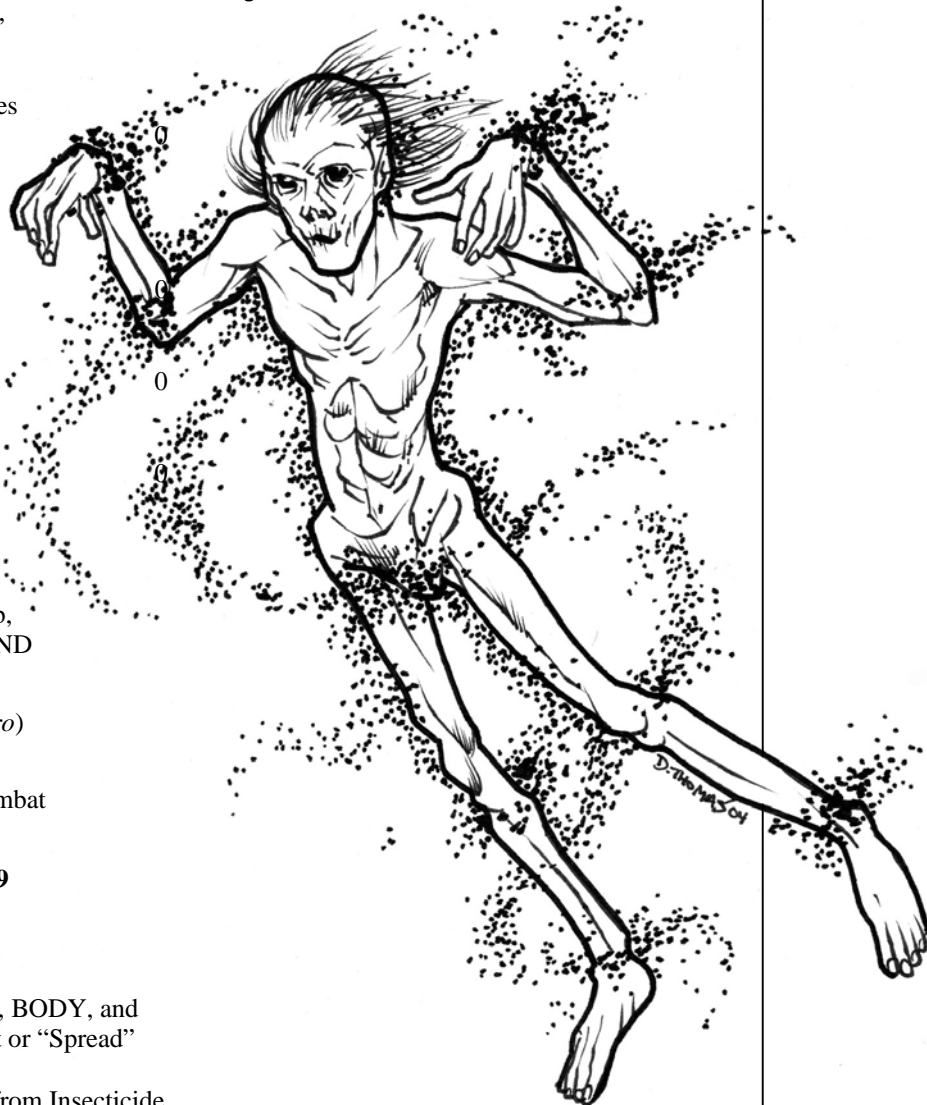
- 15 Vulnerability: 1½x STUN, BODY, and Effect from Area Of Effect or "Spread" Attacks (Uncommon)
 10 Vulnerability: 2x BODY from Insecticide (Uncommon)
 50 Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 275

Description: Fly zombies are corpses animated by a swarm of several hundred large telekinetic flies. They have lifeless features (when the corpse is fresh enough to resemble a living person) and are moved by telekinetic jerks, giving them a marionette-like movement. In spite of their apparent limpness, fly zombies can swing and grab with inhuman strength. They are incapable of speech.

Campaign Notes: Fly zombies have no will of their own; they are directed by the hatred of the Column and the flies which are animating them. They want to kill living humans so they can be turned into fly zombies themselves. The zombies are vulnerable to attacks that can be spread over an area and kill the flies that animate the host.

Fly Zombie



The Perfect Ntare

Background/History: Some local heroes are made, not born. Ntare Sembagare was not a born hero; he's viewed as such by his fellows in the militia, but that was never really his choice. Neither was the murder or the butchery, although he had a greater say in that matter and chose to be led down his current path.

Ntare was born in Sinashu, a village in western Kinyasa. Ntare was always a star athlete (a particularly good distance runner) and a hard worker. He was also an Inatu, and had the height of his people, along with a good build (even though he tended to hold his limbs in a dangling manner, and kept smiling like an idiot most of the time).

When Ntare was 12, he encountered mercenary soldiers belonging to a guerilla group known as the Army of the Ten Commandments. Some observers have grimly noted that they probably earned the name because no one in Africa breaks them more often (especially the commandment "thou shalt not kill" – they're responsible for over 16,000 deaths, including many Christian missionaries). On a return trip to their village, the ATC stole all the food, all of the farming tools, and then forced Ntare to kill his parents as a loyalty test. Shaken but unwilling to defy his commanders, Ntare killed his family in one of the most brutal methods of execution possible.

Ntare continued living the life of a guerilla fighter for years afterward. At 17, he (like so many African guerillas for whom rape is a way of life) became HIV-positive. But before the disease could ravage him as it had done to so many of his comrades, Ntare changed. Perhaps it was a mutant reaction to stolen HIV drugs – or perhaps because some dark power had chosen him to find new ways to spread misery and despair, but Ntare became superhuman. Muscles strengthened to give him levels of strength found only in folk tales. His reaction times, perception, and accuracy with a gun also became superhuman. And he was no longer HIV-positive. He was a beautiful shining tower of an African man, and in the Army of the Ten Commandments he became known as Perfect Ntare. His friends made sure he lived up to the name.

Emboldened by his power, a small splinter group of the ATC known as the First Commandment gathered around Ntare.

The Inatu have been gaining the upper hand in the civil war, thanks in part to the Perfect Ntare's ability to kill people. The Ntare initially served with government troops, but got talked by his friends into going "independent," killing any Besi who attempted to cross Ryanda Pass into Zaire. The Perfect Ntare is now a member of a rather

vicious little militia gang, one that's tolerated (for now) by what passes for local authority.

Personality/Motivation: The Perfect Ntare is a vain and weak-willed young man, easily impressed by friends, and easily conned into doing things that his conscience says should not be done. He is driven by an insecurity that is astonishing, given his powers; Ntare needs to be fed a diet of constant compliments and friendly remarks, or he'll sulk and become useless.

The Perfect Ntare has a reputation as a ruthless killer among the Besi, and a brave hero among the Inatu. Neither is true, though the former is more deserved than the latter, given his weapons and what he's done with them. Ntare's conscience is strong enough that he really doesn't want to kill non-Besi, and has managed to talk his way out of performing any executions against foreigners. His friends have been pumping him up for a fight against foreign supers (given the reputation of American supers worldwide), and he'd probably welcome a fight against a foreign super (he has killed Besi supers on two occasions).

Quote: (broken English) "You... Stay away from friends... or I kill you..."

Powers/Tactics: The Perfect Ntare is an excellent physical specimen with superhuman agility and toughness. He has no particular superpowers, except perhaps for extraordinary natural instincts with firearms.

The Perfect Ntare prefers ambush tactics and mass assaults to one-on-one competition. Ntare's role is to charge the enemy hardpoint (although he prefers to engage supers after they've been softened up with mortar fire) and break the enemies. He'll often do Presence Attacks, although usually with the Very Violent Action bonuses. If there is anyone with military experience in an operation, Ntare will always defer to their commands, except in situations where his friends spend a lot of time persuading him to "disobey orders."

Appearance: The Perfect Ntare is a (black) African male, 6'5" and weighing close to 230 pounds. He is built tall, not thick, but still has an impressive build. He has short curly brown hair, brown eyes, and a broken nose. He usually wears brown khaki pants, a green fatigue shirt (loosely buttoned on top) and has appropriate weapons to perform his mission. His voice is tenor, but he keeps silent. With his friends, he'll often joke and wear a goofy grin, but in combat, he is stone-faced.



The Perfect Ntare

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
30	STR	20	15-	Lift 1600 kg; 6d6 [3]
26	DEX	48	14-	OCV: 9/DCV: 9
30	CON	40	15-	
20	BODY	20	13-	
18	INT	8	13-	PER Roll: 13-
14	EGO	8	12-	ECV: 5
13	PRE	3	12-	PRE Attack: 2½d6
12	COM	1	11-	
16	PD	10		Total: 25 PD (9 rPD)
16	ED	10		Total: 25 ED (9 rED)
5	SPD	14		Phases: 3, 5, 8, 10, 12
12	REC	0		
60	END	0		
50	STUN	0		

Total Characteristic Cost: 182

Movement: Running: 23"/46"
 Leaping: 6"/12"
 Swimming: 2"/4"

Cost	Powers	END
33	<i>Automatic Rifle:</i> RKA 2½d6, Autofire (2 shots; +¼), 64 clips of 32 Charges (+1); OAF (-1), Activation Roll 15-, Jammed (-¾)	[32]
34	<i>Natural Toughness:</i> Armor (9 PD/9 ED), Hardened (+¼)	0
5	Lack Of Weakness (-5) for Normal Defense	0
5	LS: Water-Breathing (Expanded Breathing)	0
7	<i>Regenerative Capacity:</i> Healing 1 BODY, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), Persistent (+½); Self Only (-½), Extra Time (Regeneration-Only) 1 Turn (Post-Segment 12) (-1 ¼)	0
5	IR Perception (Sight Group)	0
42	Running +17" (23" Total), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼)	1
20	Immunity to all Terrestrial Diseases and Poisons	0

Martial Arts: Basic Self-Defense**Maneuver OCV DCV Notes**

4	Block	+2	+2	Block, Abort
4	Disarm	-1	+1	Disarm; 65 STR to Disarm
4	Dodge	--	+5	Dodge, Affects All Attacks, Abort
4	Escape	+0	+0	70 STR vs. Grabs
20	+5 Damage Classes (Already Figured In)			

Skills

24	+3 with All Combat
9	+3 with Firearms
12	Penalty Skill Levels: +6 vs. Range Modifier with Firearms
3	Acrobatics 14-
3	Breakfall 14-
3	Concealment 13-
3	Interrogation 12-
1	Language: English (Basic, Kinyarwanda is Native)
2	Language: French (Conversation)
3	Paramedics 13-
3	Shadowing 13-
3	Stealth 14-
3	Survival 13-
3	Tactics 13-
4	WF: Flamethrowers, General Purpose/ Heavy Machine Guns, Grenade Launchers, Shoulder-Fired Weapons

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 266**Total Cost: 448****200+ Disadvantages**

15	Hunted: Besi Superhumans 8- (As Pow, Public ID, Harshly Punish)
15	Psychological Limitation: Insecure, Backs Down from Direct Confrontation (Very Common, Moderate)
10	Psychological Limitation: Secretly Wants a Peaceful Life, but is Too Afraid to Show It (Common, Moderate)
10	Reputation: Vicious Anti-Besi Fighter, 8- (Extreme)
20	Social Limitation: Public ID (Frequently, Severe)
5	Unluck: 1d6
5	Vulnerability: 1½x STUN from Mental Powers (Uncommon)
5	Vulnerability: 1½x Effect from Persuasion- or Compulsion-Based PRE Attacks (Uncommon)
163	Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 448

Mortar

Background/History: Hank Muldoon was an average kid in Middle America, an average kid with more energy than he could handle and a limited attention span. This didn't meet with his parents' approval, and they gave him large doses of Ritalin in an attempt to moderate his moods.

This calmed Hank down for awhile, but it also had an unforeseen effect. Hank was a mutant, and the Ritalin he was forced to take was being compensated for by his metabolism. The parents continued drugging their child until he couldn't take it anymore, and when he was 13, he finally snapped. The Muldoons were proud gunowners, but took appropriate precautions with their weapons and their children. When Hank went nuts, these precautions saved his mother's life, but not his father's.

There was a police stakeout of the home, which the out-of-control Hank set on fire (partly out of grief and guilt), rather than get shot like a dog by the cops. Alas, Hank's mutant powers allowed him to survive the fire, and he was treated for third degree burns and sent to juvenile lock-up.

Hank was released when he was 18. The experience left him a cold and hard young man, but also one who was determined to do the things he liked to do (play with weapons and kill people) without getting thrown back in prison. Hank's next step was to go into the army.

Hank and the army weren't a bad fit at first, in spite of his nickname of "Burn Boy" (his old burns didn't particularly interfere with his ability to perform his duties). Basic training was hell, but he actually made friends. Some of his friends had political and social views that were definitely not in the mainstream, and this was fine with Hank. He was not a mainstream kind of guy.

The army also found out, through genetic testing, that he was a mutant. They took him away from his buddies and put him into a mutant training facility. This was a mistake. He could relate to his friends, but not to doctors and psychiatrists or the other members of the technical staff. The other mutants had some real bad attitude problems (Hank's hyperactivity can be very annoying), and the doctors attempted to control them with drugs. Hank asked to be transferred back to his old unit, but the brass refused. Hank never liked brass very much.

Eventually, Hank once again overloaded on depressants, and exploded. The other mutants joined him, and they made a break. One of the mutants was a teleporter, a really good teleporter. He got them to Central America in a few seconds.

The mutants talked about forming a team of superhuman mercenaries, but Hank still didn't

care for some of their attitudes, and he left them almost immediately. At this point, the crisis in Kinyasa came up. Hank decided this would give him a chance to kill people indiscriminately, and he volunteered as a mercenary. He did think that the Inatu had the moral high ground (not that it mattered) and the better military, so he chose that side.

Life in Kinyasa has not been kind to the "Burnt Man" (as some of the locals call him); he can barely speak a language that anyone knows, he's almost always hungry, and he's spent a lot of time sitting on his butt in a cave. But there is a certain primitivism to the life that he enjoys, and he thinks of the people that he's with as his buddies, and no one's tried to drug him and tell him to settle down. So far, he's been content.

Personality/Motivation: Hank's personality is a contradiction. His friends think he's the best guy in the world, although one who needs to calm down. Everyone else thinks he's at best, an overbearing hyperactive loudmouth, and at worst, a complete psychotic.

Hank is at his happiest when he's in a firefight, when he gets the adrenaline rush from combat. He actually prefers an element of danger to a massacre (a problem with the fights in Kinyasa), and he's thought about going back to the States and becoming a supervillain. He's not at all interested in comfort or material goods, but does like good friends and comrades. Hank has no regard for human life, believing that the world is a game of "survival of the fittest." Hank's politics runs towards libertarianism (bent to justify some of his criminal deeds) and a belief in government conspiracy theories. Hank is sometimes overwhelmed by the adrenaline rush of combat, and can occasionally be a danger to himself and his comrades.

Quote: "Shut up? Shut *this* up!"

Powers/Tactics: Hank's mutant abilities are linked to his desire for combat, and his love of weapons. In addition to superhuman reflexes and toughness, Hank creates large shells that he can throw with a force that greatly exceeds his (formidable) natural strength. He has one unusual weakness – Hank's powers require him to be within 200 km of a weapons cache to activate his powers.

Hank has a good sense of tactics, but usually stays with his plan for about five seconds in a fight before he gets overwhelmed by the urge to go wild and experience an adrenaline rush, when he rushes out and attacks. The longer a fight goes, the more likely Hank is to become careless with his powers.

Hank has a strong physical reaction against anything that forces him to calm down (be it telepathy or drugs).

Mortar

Appearance: Hank is a tall blond brown-eyed Caucasian, 6'1" and 180 lbs, in his early 20s. He has an athletic build, but he is also badly burned on his face and on much of the left side of his body. He wears military fatigues (US Army issue) and a black half-mask that obscures most of his facial scarring. His voice is a constant enthusiastic chatter, often quite loud; unless Hank is deliberately trying to stay silent, it's hard not to notice him.



DIGITAL HERO #24

Mortar

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
20	STR	10	13-	Lift 400 kg; 4d6 [2]
23	DEX	39	14-	OCV: 8/DCV: 8
33	CON	46	16-	
14	BODY	8	12-	
18	INT	8	13-	PER Roll: 13-
14	EGO	8	12-	ECV: 5
20	PRE	10	13-	PRE Attack: 4d6
4	COM	-3	10-	
17	PD	13		Total: 23 PD (6 rPD)
17	ED	10		Total: 23 ED (6 rED)
5	SPD	17		Phases: 3, 5, 8, 10, 12
11	REC	0		
66	END	0		
41	STUN	0		

Total Characteristic Cost: 166

Movement: Running: 11"/22"
Leaping: 4"/8"
Swimming: 2"/4"

Cost	Powers	END
86	<i>Summon Explosive Shell:</i> RKA 3 ½d6, Indirect (Same origin, always fired away from attacker; +¼), Armor Piercing (+½), Explosion (+½), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); Activation Roll 14- (-½), Ordinance Must Actually Exist within a 200 km Radius (-¼)	0
18	<i>Toughness:</i> Armor (6 PD/6 ED)	0
30	<i>Resistance to Conventional Weapons:</i> Energy Damage Reduction, Resistant, 50%; Only Protects Against Traditional Military Weapons (-1) plus Physical Damage Reduction, Resistant, 50%; Only Protects Against Traditional Military Weapons (-1)	0
10	<i>Steady on His Feet:</i> Knockback Resistance -5"	0
10	<i>Swift:</i> Running +5" (11" Total)	1
5	Infrared Perception (Sight Group)	0

Skills

16	+2 with All Combat
12	Penalty Skill Levels: +4 vs. Range Modifier with All Attacks
3	Acrobatics 14-
3	Breakfall 14-
3	Bureaucratics 13-
3	Climbing 14-
3	Combat Piloting 14-
3	Concealment 13-
3	Language: French (Fluent)
3	Navigation 13-
3	Shadowing 13-
3	Stealth 14-
3	Streetwise 13-
3	Survival 13-
3	Tactics 13-
3	Teamwork 14-
3	Tracking 13-
4	WF: Emplaced Weapons, Small Arms

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 236

Total Cost: 402

200+ Disadvantages

15	Distinctive Features: Burns on Half of His Body (Concealable, Major Reaction)
15	Enraged: When Wounded (Uncommon, Go 8-, Recover 14-, Berserk)
10	Hunted: Enemies of Current Employer 8- (As Pow, Harshly Punish)
15	Psychological Limitation: Addicted to Combat (Common, Strong)
10	Psychological Limitation: Hyperactive (Common, Moderate)
20	Social Limitation: Public Identity (Frequently, Severe)
10	Susceptibility: 2d6 from Depressants (Uncommon)
15	Susceptibility: 3d6 from Mental Commands to Calm Down (Uncommon)
92	Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 402



Bully Martial Arts by W. Ross Watson

In schoolyards all across the world, bullies ply their trade, intimidating and extorting lunch money from youngsters in every grade. There are no set “teachers” of this style... one normally learns how by being a crony of another bully and putting up with the abuse long enough to learn how to dish it out. There is no set “uniform” either, although many bullies cultivate a tough image by wearing torn clothing or rock ‘n’ roll emblems.

Optional Rules:

The *Gimme Yer Lunch Money!* maneuver automatically targets the stomach, but gains no benefits or penalties for doing so. The *Indian Burn* and the *Why Ya Hittin’ Yerself?* maneuvers automatically target one arm, but they gain no benefits or penalties for doing so. The *Noogies* maneuver automatically targets the head, but gains no benefits or penalties for doing so.

Special Abilities:

Don’t Be A Hero: Many bullies rely upon intimidation to operate and to keep their cohorts in line. Some bullies take this even further, being able to put someone in his place with merely a look. This can be simulated by purchasing Mind Control, with the Limitations Uses PRE Instead of EGO (-¼), Only One Command (“Stand Still/ Shut Up” -1), and Requires Eye Contact (-½).

BULLY FU MANEUVERS

Gimme Yer Lunch Money!: This maneuver is a kind of punch, delivered to the stomach accompanied by the maneuver’s name typically sneered by the Bully Fu artist. This maneuver is often used as the “violent action” to assist a Presence Attack.

Indian Burn: This maneuver follows a Grab of one limb (usually an arm). Next, the Bully Fu artist abrades the limb by twisting his hands back and forth quickly, leaving a painful burn upon the skin. Hardened coverings on a target’s arms make this attack ineffective.

Noogies: This maneuver involves grabbing the head by wrapping one arm around the neck, then applying one’s knuckles in a vigorous rubbing motion over the scalp of the grabbed target. A helmet or hard covering on one’s head renders this attack ineffective (the grab is still active, however).

Why Ya Hittin’ Yerself?: Often, the Bully-Fu artist will state the name of this maneuver as he is using it, by grabbing an arm and repeatedly striking the target with his own limb.

Wedgie: This maneuver has no effect on a target who does not wear underwear or has hardened covering over any access to underwear (For example, a character wearing a battle armor suit would be immune).

BULLY FU MANEUVERS

Maneuver	Phs	Pts	OCV	DCV	Damage/Effect	
Gimme Yer Lunch Money!	½	3	+1	+0	STR +2d6 Strike	
Where are <i>You</i> Going?	½	3	-1	-1	Grab Two Limbs, +10 STR for Holding On	
Indian Burn	½	4	+0	+0	STR +4d6 Abrasion, Must Follow Grab	
Noogies	½	4	-2	+0	Grab One Limb, 2d6 NND	
Why Ya Hittin’ Yerself?	½	4	+1	+0	Grab One Limb, STR +1d6 Strike	
Shove	½	4	+0	+0	+15 STR to Shove	
Wedgie	½	4	-1	+1	2d6 NND	
Ranged Maneuver	Phs	Pts	OCV	DCV	Rng	Damage/Effect
Rock Throw	½	4	+0	+0	+2	Strike, +2 DC

Skills:

Acting
Analyze “Toughness”
AK: Local Block or Playground
Streetwise

Notes: Bully Fu is sometimes used with a “stick” weapon element, typically a one- to two-foot long length of wood.

Billy Kapowski

Background/History: The Kapowski family has never been overly prosperous. Jack Kapowski is a blue-collar worker who has risen to lower management in a nearby coal mine. A former marine, Jack expects a lot out of his son Billy.

Billy's sister, Karen, has many advantages. For one, she's older... around fourteen. For another, she's popular and pretty... the head cheerleader at the Sunnyside Junior High School.

Billy is not fitting in as well, however. Unlike his sister, Billy has never been popular... and no one has ever called him "cute." The areas in which he excels are not as innocent as Kelly's either....

Ever since he found out that he was substantially bigger and stronger than most of his peers, Billy began a reign of terror in his neighborhood. Most folks in Sunnyside Hills blame Billy's father for the son's behavior. Jack Kapowski, it is well known, was dishonorably discharged from the Marines for drinking on duty and brawling with superior officers. It's also clear that Jack approves of Billy's macho posturing and possibly even encourages it. However, Jack positively dotes on Billy's sister, Karen.

So far, Billy's prestige as the biggest, toughest kid around hasn't found anyone brave enough, smart enough, or tough enough to stand up to him... yet.

Personality/Motivation: Billy is quite possibly the most classic example of a bully ever born. He has little use for girls except as objects to tease when he is bored, but any boy who is not one of his cronies Billy singles out for abuse.

Billy is also strongly influenced by his father. Since Karen is his father's favorite, he takes it upon himself to keep an eye out for her when he can, and has actually intimidated a few of the junior high school students away from attempting to become her boyfriend.

Jack Kapowski is also a bigot in addition to his other dubious qualities. This attitude has had a strong effect on Billy, who taunts and beats up minority students in his grade school more often and more enthusiastically as a result.

If Billy has one weakness, it's animals. Billy loves animals, especially puppies, and his few friendships have been formed because of a mutual interest in different breeds of dogs. Billy hopes one day to grow up into a dog-sled racer.

Quotes: "All right, weenie. Gimme yer lunch money, and nobody gets hurt."

"What are you, some kind of momma's boy? Is the baby gonna cry?"

"Go away. dork. You want your glasses broken?"

Powers/Tactics: Billy Kapowski is an impressive physical specimen... for a ten-year old boy. He's remarkably tough and strong for his age, and when he grows up he has the potential to become a gifted athlete.

Billy also has learned a trick or two from his years as Sunnyside Hill's resident bully. He's an accomplished fighter, able to hold his own, although to be fair he's never really fought anyone at or above his own level of skill.

Finally, Billy has a very impressive stare when he wants to make a point. If he can make eye contact with a target, there's a good chance he can "stare him down." Even adults are not immune to this petrifying effect. Whether this is some kind of latent superpower or simply a very well-developed expression of menace is yet to be determined.

It should be noted that Billy's demolitions skill represents his facility with firecrackers, especially noisemakers and the large "M-80" style explosives.

Billy's skill Analyze "Toughness" functions identically to the Analyze Combat Technique skill, except that it only helps him analyze characters who have no "definite" martial arts style. This category includes any character without a real martial arts style and any variation on Dirty Infighting or Commando Training. Against a Karate black belt, however, Billy's skill would be no help to him. He's just a kid, after all!

Campaign Use: If Billy Kapowski is Hunting you, it means he wants to beat you up... usually. It could also mean you're on his "lunch money collection" list, or it could mean he's seen you flirting with his sister... and doesn't approve. Likewise, if a character belongs to a minority group, such as being Jewish or Islamic, Billy will take time out of his busy grade school day to try and give that character a few bruises.

To make Billy more powerful, raise his Mind Control to 12d6, add 7 points of STR, and give him a few more levels in hand-to-hand combat. To scale Billy down a bit, you can take his Mind Control down by several dice, or remove it altogether. Billy can also be "powered down" by taking away his bully fu martial arts or lowering his characteristics to that of a normal ten-year old boy.

Appearance: Billy Kapowski is a pugnacious, solidly built ten-year old boy. He prefers to wear a denim jacket with the sleeves torn off and usually has a slingshot stuck in his back pocket. Scuffed and dirty is the normal condition of his clothing, and his face seems to have a permanent sneer stuck upon it. While not unattractive, his rough features, red hair, and brown eyes will never be considered handsome, or even cute.

PLOT SEEDS

Billy would make an excellent foil for any child character or DNPC. He also can add a bit of “local color” if any of the characters in the campaign hail from the Sunnyside Hills neighborhood.

Billy can also enter the campaign if one or more teen heroes become involved with his sister Karen. Karen’s quite attractive and popular, so it’s easy for her to make a hero’s life easier or more difficult. Billy, of course, is part of the package.

Billy Kapowski

DIGITAL HERO #24

Billy Kapowski

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
8	STR	-1	11-	75 kg; 1½d6 HTH [1]
12	DEX	6	11-	OCV: 4/DCV: 4
10	CON	4	11-	
8	BODY	-4	11-	
10	INT	0	11-	PER Roll: 11-
8	EGO	-4	11-	ECV: 3
8	PRE	-2	11-	PRE Attack: 2d6
10	COM	0	11-	
4/8	PD	3		Total: 8 PD (0rPD)
3	ED	1		Total: 3 ED (0rED)
2	SPD	8		Phases: 6, 12
4	REC	0		
30	END	5		
17	STUN	0		

Total Characteristics Cost: 16

Movement: Running: 6"/12"
Leaping: 1½"/3"
Swimming: 2"/4"

Cost	Powers	END
14	<i>Don't Be A Hero:</i> Mind Control 8d6; Set Effect: Stand Still and Shut Up (-1), Requires Eye Contact (-½), Uses PRE instead of EGO (-¼)	4
3	<i>Tough:</i> +4 PD; Must Be Aware of Attack (-½)	0

Martial Arts: Bully Fu

Maneuver OCV DCV Notes

3	Gimme Yer Lunch Money!	+1	+0	3 ½d6 Strike
3	Where are You Going?	-1	-1	Grab Two Limbs, 18 STR for holding on
4	Indian Burn	+0	+0	5½d6 Abrasion, Must Follow Grab
4	Noogies	-2	+0	Grab One Limb, 2d6 NND
4	Why Ya Hittin' Yerself?	+1	+0	Grab One Limb, 2 ½d6 Strike
4	Shove	+0	+0	23 STR to Shove
4	Wedgie	-1	+1	2d6 NND

Maneuver OCV DCV Rng Notes

4	Rock Throw	+0	+0	+2 Weapon +2 DC
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Skills

5	+1 with Hand-to-Hand Combat
3	Acting 11-
3	AK: Bulldog Elementary School 11-
3	AK: Bulldog Elementary School Playground 11-
3	AK: Sunnyside Hills Neighborhood 11-
3	Analyze "Toughness" 11-
3	Demolitions 11-
3	Streetwise 11-

Total Powers & Skills cost: 73

Total Cost: 89

25+ Disadvantages

15	Age: 10
10	DNPC: Karen Kapowski (Billy's Popular Cheerleader Sister) 8- (Incompetent)
15	Psychological Limitation: Enjoys Picking on the Weak (Common, Strong)
15	Reputation: Schoolyard Bully, 11-
9	Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 89



**POSSIBLE
BATTLE
COMMANDS**

Overture: Make a grand entrance, Presence Attacks, and showy displays.

Fat Lady or The Fat

Lady Just Sang:

It's over, let's get out of here – Often used in retreat.

Uscita Maestro:

Focus your attentions on the opposing team's leader or tactical head and take him out.

Standing Ovation:

Just the opposite – knock your opponents down or immobilize them so that other members of The Choir might have a better chance of hitting them.

The Choir by Denver Mason

Duet looked across the table at the Stronghold guard, then glanced back at the suit sitting next to her. She then looked over at yet another guard behind him. She made a point of visibly eyeing the guns, looked down at the high tech shackles still on her wrists, then smiled, “You must think...” in her best John Wayne impersonation, “that I’m a real... dangerous... person.”

The suit didn’t laugh. The guards didn’t even smile.

“Tough crowd,” she muttered to herself.

“Can the comedy, Michelle,” The federal representative a.k.a. “Mr. Suit” said. He opened the briefcase at his side and pulled out some files, “We’re here to get some facts. You’ve been most uncooperative.”

She gave a lazy toss of her head, “Hey, I told you guys curtains were the way to go, add a touch of color. You can’t say I’ve not tried.”

“I’m talking about your friends, The Choir,” Mr. Suit said calmly. “So far, you’ve refused to even plea bargain. Michelle, we know you’re not the worst of them. It’s the leader we want, most of all.”

Duet wished they’d use her villainess name. You work hard to build a reputation, rob some places, spread a little terror, you’d think they’d get the hint that you were *trying* to stand out. She didn’t respond to his comment.

“Tell me, without jokes, about Virtuoso and The Choir,” Mr. Suit demanded.

Duet calmly clasped her shackled hands, and delicately crossed her legs, seeming all business at last. She stopped smiling, and looked at Mr. Suit, “I’ll be honest, and very serious then. No games, and no jokes.”

Mr. Suit was too well trained to say “finally” out loud, but she could tell he was thinking it. He leaned forward.

She leaned forward a bit as well, and whispered, “Bite. Me.” Then leaned back.

Mr. Suit scowled, “Another time, Michelle.” To the guards he barked, “Take her back to the holding cell.”

The guards did just that, careful of any sudden move she might make. Guard 1 was quietly professional, but Guard 2 must have been new on the job, he couldn’t help talking, “I don’t get it. What is it about this Virtuoso guy that inspires such loyalty?”

Duet walked into her cell, and when it closed, she turned and answered Guard 2, even though he was talking to his buddy, “Because no one wants to be the discordant note when the band is really wailing.” Then she fell back on her cot and closed her eyes. “Mr. Suit could learn a lot from Virtuoso about the power of respect.”

The Choir

Membership: Bridge, Caterwaul, Crescendo, Dirge, Duet, Songbird, Soprano, Virtuoso

Background/History: The Choir has been around for but a short time compared to some supervillain teams, but it is gaining notoriety quickly. Actually, the rookie nature of the team is something of a deception. Before they began public crimes, the majority of the team was already united by the man who dubbed himself Virtuoso.

It was Michelle the duplicator who was first discovered when she attempted to mug Harrison Rayburn, totally unaware of who he was. Offering her a greater destiny than mere thuggery, Virtuoso would soon forge her into the villainess Duet. Thanks to her street smarts and his resources, a recruiting drive was started and Virtuoso began to personally seek out and offer membership to those he found both useful and worthy. The mutant Adriana Tabacchi a.k.a.

Soprano had come to America of her own volition, but found the life of a supervillainess harder and less glamorous than she first imagined. Fortunately for her, the invitation to join The Choir offered both comfort and the training she’d need to get her still nascent powers under control. Tyrone Greene was another mutant, one misdiagnosed as merely hearing impaired when instead his might was fueled by the very sounds about him. He soon was brought into the fold, rechristened Crescendo. Realizing that many superheroes had an edge in mysticism, The Choir extended an offer to the chanting necromancer known as Dirge. The mystic accepted for his own reasons.

The villain Tomcat needed no invitation to realize he had made too many enemies to thrive by himself. He helped himself to a visit with Virtuoso, and was allowed to join as long as he agreed to a name change. Thus Caterwaul was

artwork by Kerry Connell

born. Already experienced, he needed little training, and The Choir began to test themselves. After many successes, they hit a snag on an attempted theft of harmonic research, one that might have ended much of the team in jail had Virtuoso not convinced Professor Youngblood to devote his harmonic research to their cause and later become Bridge. The team seemed complete, but later, Songbird would be forged from the flesh of a woman now stripped of her past.

The Choir's infamy has been growing, and what they lack in the raw power of some groups, they more than make up for in teamwork, style, and ambition. More than one hero has attempted to thwart them (among them the first Stalker), and paid the price. While they'd find the term "mercenaries" insulting, The Choir has worked for others in the past if the job interested Virtuoso. Indeed, ARGENT has employed their services more than once, paying The Choir in some additional high-tech favors and resources. Chiefly though, their "performances" are under the artistic vision of their leader. Thus they most often commit crimes related (however loosely) to music, art, and theatre. As this has included everything from the theft of priceless paintings to the cold-blooded murder of certain music critics, most authorities are unwilling to simply dismiss them despite these "quirky jobs."

Group Relations: Virtuoso's charisma and leadership (as well as his more subtle manipulations) hold The Choir together. He takes pride in his team, and makes sure each member has pride in his own contributions as well. By making each one feel like they're invaluable, he has earned their loyalty... for the most part. While Duet, Bridge, Crescendo, and even Soprano are completely behind him, Dirge has his own agenda, and Caterwaul is pretty skilled at manipulation as well – most don't realize just how willing he'd be to sell out The Choir to save his own skin. Songbird sees Virtuoso as her "father," but should she ever find out the truth and be freed, there's little doubt she might become his bitterest enemy.

Among themselves, the dynamics are less certain. Duet's flippant attitude and rough and tumble ways have annoyed Soprano more than once, and Duet in turn finds the singer's "stuck up attitude" deserving of mockery. Were it not for their leader and their own sense of professionalism, they might have come to blows. Both have striven for the attention of Virtuoso, which doesn't help their interaction. Despite their better judgments, most ladies on the team have been charmed by Caterwaul at one time or another. Crescendo is respected by his teammates, but there is an undercurrent of pity for his condition that grates on him sometimes. Dirge gives everyone on the team the creeps, and

they each react to that in their own way, mostly by avoiding him. Bridge is considered by some on the team as too softhearted, but he's saved them so many times with a getaway that that is forgiven. Songbird doesn't know the truth about herself, and the others therefore see her more as a puppet than an equal; the exception being Bridge, who finds her fascinating scientifically, even as, having a daughter himself, he shows her kindness. Chiefly though, The Choir takes pride in working harmoniously.

External relations with other groups and organizations are not so tight-knit. Not only has the team caught PRIMUS' unwelcome attention, one superhero in particular, Stalker, seeks to bring each and every one of them to justice. Whether he'll trust his allies, MC-8, enough to ask their aid for his war on The Choir remains to be seen, but it could be great trouble for Virtuoso and crew if he does.

As mentioned above, ARGENT has both hired and assisted The Choir more than once, and keeps a closer eye on Virtuoso's activities than the mastermind is aware. It is their hope to slowly build a dependency in The Choir on ARGENT's services and technology so they may make demands in return (such as a peek at Bridge's own armor). No fool though, Virtuoso strives to keep the organization at arm's length and keep the group sufficient within itself for the most part. If he knew ARGENT's schemes in full though, or the fact that Songbird could have been even better, he might sever ties with them immediately.

Nor has Virtuoso's drive to become the greatest leader of a supervillain team impressed those he would see as rivals. Fiacho and Eurostar want little to do with the upstart American and his crew, and if The Choir ever comes to Europe they may find they've made a terrible mistake. The Ultimates, while less powerful, are in the States, and thus actually encountered. Binder and Virtuoso took an instant dislike to each other, and the teams seem to echo the sentiments. While it's not broken into a battle (yet), either team would gladly complicate the others' jobs if given half a chance.

Tactics: While inexperienced by some standards (Virtuoso is the only one who is built on more than 350 points), The Choir's membership works well together once a performance starts. Each one has been intensively trained not just in his own powers, but in coordinating attacks with his teammates and working together. Fully aware of the idiosyncrasies of the individual members, Virtuoso has attempted to turn any weaknesses into strengths, or at the least has already accounted for them before the proverbial curtains go up and the show goes on.

CHOIR PLOT SEEDS

Virtuoso assures the rest of The Choir that no member shall be left behind (besides, why risk Duet letting secrets slip?) and plots a jailbreak. When several "low risk" superhumans are transported to a lesser facility from Stronghold due to overcrowding, Duet is among them. Virtuoso sees his chance and, learning what route it will take, plans to have The Choir free not just Duet, but the other prisoners as well. If the heroes can learn about it beforehand, they have a chance to prevent it. If not, they must play clean up.

Stalker captures yet another Choir member. Enraged, The Choir begins a massive hunt for the MC-8 member making him their number one concern. To make matters worse, Virtuoso puts a price on the masked man's head to attract various mercenaries and hitmen. The PCs stumble onto an injured and weary vigilante too proud to ask even his friends for help, let alone a bunch of strangers.

The Choir and the Ultimates attempt to rob the same art gallery at the same time. After a brief scuffle, Virtuoso throws down the

gauntlet before Binder. Whichever team can defeat and capture the most heroes in 48 hours will be proclaimed the better. Binder replies, “You’re on!” The PCs (as well as various NPC heroes) may wonder just what they did to tick these groups off when they come at them with everything they’ve got.

In battle, The Choir follows the general outline of their predetermined plan while trying to keep things fluid enough to adjust for the unexpected which inevitably occurs. They are very big on Presence Attacks, sometimes even going so far as to attack in two waves: The showier members crashing in, attempting to overawe whoever they can, while the second wave slips in afterwards, hopefully unnoticed. If Virtuoso has a choice, there is almost always one member in reserve, usually Bridge, who is ready to affect a getaway. The Choir is very goal-oriented, as long as that goal is reached with style. Once they achieve that goal, they move quickly.

The Choir relies on Virtuoso’s resources for bases, and the current one the team uses is a theatre that still appears to be “under construction” and sealed off. It has as yet few things to offer them beyond space, comforts, and acoustics, but Virtuoso is working on that.

Campaign Use: The Choir is an attempt to mix thematic villainy with a very dangerous group of villains. One can easily alter the feel or “age” of The Choir in one direction or another, either making them less lethal and even more focused on theme to the point of having them leave superheroes in Silver Age death traps and leaving odd musical clues, or making them more ruthless en masse, and more Iron Age in their strategies with the musical theme as merely a front. A balance is suggested, but not required.

As mentioned earlier, they are meant to be a tactically efficient group that works well together, so a GM may want to take a little prep time to plan ahead for them, or even construct a few code words (with musical themes) to use as Battle Commands. A group of PCs who don’t use teamwork of their own may find themselves at a disadvantage facing The Choir despite (possibly) superior power levels. Fortunately for any PCs who are defeated, The Choir isn’t as lethal as they could be, for Virtuoso sees wanton killing for its own sake as garish. This should give the PCs time to lick their wounds and prepare strategies of their own the next time The Choir performs.

The Choir hunts as a group only at Virtuoso’s direction, but individual members would have their own reasons for stalking heroes. The danger level is severely downed in that case, for as their “Standard” Power level suggests (all members save Virtuoso are built on 350 points) the sum is greater than its parts. En masse, their preferred method of hunting is actually to arrange an ambush for the one who’s proven to be so much trouble. If hunting an entire team, they prefer to divide and conquer.

If The Choir is too weak for you, there are two ways to go. One is to add more members, likely capping it off at twelve. Virtuoso prefers tools that are reliable to powerful wildcards, and of course, any new members, whatever their powers or abilities, will be expected to have a name and style that suits the musical theme – however much of a stretch. The other option is to simply boost the existing members up as recommended in their individual write-ups.

Remember that each one of The Choir is an individual with his own life. Virtuoso takes this into account, he has to; but he can’t prepare for everything. The players may find their heroes rubbing shoulders with The Choir members in mutual secret identities in their day-to-day lives. For example, it is entirely possible that a PC whose alter ego is that of a gifted musician may find Harrison Rayburn as a patron.

The Choir should evolve even when the PCs aren’t focused on them. If a GM is using the storyline from *Stalker in Digital Hero #13*, then at least one of The Choir (Duet) has been captured. In some ways this is a real test of Virtuoso’s leadership. His action or inaction on this may cost him not just team efficiency, but could either dim the loyalty of his followers or make them all the more devoted. While she is gone, tactics will have to be changed, and the roster possibly restocked.

Bridge

Background/History: Bruce Youngblood couldn't believe what was written on the paper before him. He glared up at his so called "superior" and tried to keep his rising anger in check. Dr. Pickly sat there smugly waiting.

"You want me to sign *what*?" Bruce demanded.

Dr. Pickly gloated, "I would think it would be obvious, Mr. Youngblood..." Bruce noticed his own professorship was being ignored by the arrogant bastard, "If you wish to collect your remaining pay and compensation, you will sign your acceptance of your termination and responsibility for your... misconduct."

That tore it; Bruce exploded "Misconduct? You lying sack of... *I* was the one who made the breakthrough on Project: Transit! I was the one who figured out the whole key was isolating the special harmonics using the Kelvarite. You stole my notes, erased my files, and when I tried to go over your head about it, you pulled every string you could to..."

For a moment, the doctor shrank back, then hissing, he interrupted, "So 'you' say, Bruce. I say otherwise. Now, if you want to have any money to keep that brat of yours on anything better than Kibble, I recommend you do the smart thing and sign! Or do I need to call security?"

Ironically enough, that's when a security guard was blown through the door.

"Well done, as ever, Soprano. Let's get what we came for." A commanding voice resounded and Professor Youngblood gazed in wonder at the sight of a group of costumed criminals entering the lab.

"We have a problem boss." One woman, standing near what could have been her twin announced, "I think PRIMUS just trashed our ride. There are more agents out there than you can shake a stick at."

The leader sighed, "Thank you, Duet. One should never underestimate the power of the bourgeois to frustrate their betters." Then the man turned to the two scientists in the room, "I am Virtuoso, and this is The Choir. I understand there is harmonic research done here? I require it."

Dr. Pickly had all but wet himself, but managed to gasp out, "You can't! Project Transit is going to make me a fortune! I—"

Virtuoso sighed, "How crass." He then turned to Bruce, "And you, good sir?"

Bruce bitterly replied, "Frankly, I'd rather give it to you than this vulture. He stole it from me, seems only fair someone else steal it from him. Good luck making it work... unless you have an advanced degree in dimensional

harmonics." Then came the revelation, "It could get you past those agents."

Picky whined, "What are you doing, Youngblood?"

Virtuoso smiled, "Tell me something, Maestro Youngblood, does anyone but this lout know you're here?"

"No..." Bruce responded. He should be scared, but he felt he had nothing left to lose, "Why?"

"Make three wishes..." Virtuoso stated with humor, even as the PRIMUS agents outside were fortifying.

"I want my technology back in *my* hands. I wish this jerk would get what was coming to him, and I want to provide for my daughter.... What game are you playing with me?" Bruce almost snapped.

Virtuoso nodded to Soprano, who turned and hitting a piercing note, caused Dr. Pickly's body to rip open.

"One wish granted." The leader of The Choir stated calmly, "*If* you can get your genie out of the bottle, you'll get the others."

Bruce Youngblood got to work, and when the PRIMUS agents finally rushed the building, The Choir was long gone.

Personality/Motivation: Professor Bruce Youngblood is a passionate man, passionate about his family, about science, and about repaying his debts. He is not a violent man himself, but he has grown to accept violence in others. Thanks to Virtuoso's manipulations, he's come to realize that he is elite. In a world full of pretentious morons, Bruce is a genius with both drive and talent. His idealism turned to cynicism by the corruption of the legal world, he's become very good at rationalizing the illegal activities of The Choir.

Sadly, it's some of Bruce's more admirable traits and dreams that bind him most tightly to The Choir now. He's able to provide for his daughter better than he ever dreamed, she gets the best of everything and he dotes on her. He's loyal to Virtuoso (and oddly, Virtuoso *does* consider him a friend – ultimately a tool, but a friend) and helps him in his plans out of gratitude. Bridge's goals are fairly simple beyond that. He hopes to continue improving his technology and advancing his knowledge of science.

Quote: "You heard Virtuoso, the fat lady sang! Let's go!"

Powers/Tactics: Bridge (as Bruce was dubbed by Virtuoso) has used the considerable funding he's been granted by his patron and team leader to incorporate his Transit technology into a suit of powered armor. He uses this to great effect, though his chief task is holding the team together

BRIDGE PLOT SEEDS

Bridge's daughter is a bright girl, and perhaps shouldn't touch the things daddy has in his work places. Teresa discovers one of her father's devices, a bulky helmet that is meant to have an automatic failsafe to keep it from materializing into solid objects. Startled at first when she accidentally triggers it, the girl is soon popping all over the city. Virtuoso is appalled; this could blow the identity of one of their most valued members. Bruce is terrified, the helmet is not ready to be used so often, and eventually the failsafe will short out, and he will tear the town apart trying to stop her before it does. Her life depends on it. The chase for the young lady vanishing is on.

Bridge discovers an elaborate means of teleporting entire buildings, but it involves constructing some high tech monoliths around the buildings in question. Virtuoso now has the means of stealing national monuments, and eagerly puts Bridge to work.

Bridge makes a breakthrough he never expected – he finds a means to access alternate dimensions, and eagerly begins exploring. However,

when he opens a door he can not close, he doesn't want to risk the lives of his teammates, so instead requests help from the PCs. One of V'han's generals is certain this is some sort of covert strike attempt and wishes to respond accordingly.

and acting as walking "getaway vehicle" for the team. Bridge's options also extend into the offensive. His Aportive Pulse can be set to either teleport a target to a location and position of his choosing or disorient through multiports until a target falls unconscious. He's also taken some stolen blaster technology and incorporated it... with a twist. He can transit the energy beam to any location even as it fires, allowing him to strike foes at angles they'd not expect. Of course, the armor itself offers intensive protection. In addition, polarized lenses and sound dampening gear in the helmet prevent attacks meant to overload senses.

In combat, Bridge follows Virtuoso's plans as tightly as he can. He's often held in reserve so The Choir will be able to retreat, but his armor's capabilities are handy in other ways. His "Bridge" gateway has been used (in conjunction with his teammates) as a means of clearing a room before even entering it. As there are dangers to teleporting blindly, Bridge tries to get as much foreknowledge of a location as he can.

On an ironic note (pun intended) since the Transit technology is based on harmonics, it literally does chime softly as it operates. If a GM allows, and if it fits the "age" of the campaign, this could be used by resourceful PC science whizzes on the team to track or even tag along after Bridge.

Campaign Use: As stated elsewhere, Bridge is the "getaway" man for The Choir. This is sure to make him hated by the PCs trying to bring the team to justice, but the fact that he has this in a focus means it's a precarious status at best. In his way, Bridge may be The Choir's second most indispensable member. Beyond that, however, he's also a character with a life beyond being a villain. He is a good father, and any heroes who somehow discover his identity may come to realize that there will be a lonely and potentially bitter daughter left behind if they capture him. Of course, they must, but it does add an element of the human factor into the equation.

It's unlikely that Bridge would hunt anyone on his own accord. Someone really has to tick him off for him to lose it like that. However, a superhero with technology, especially teleportation-related technology, might pique his interest enough that he'd try to steal it so he could later incorporate it in his suit. Also, should any hero *ever* be seen as threatening his daughter, it will awaken a ruthless side in him that will make Dirge seem almost compassionate by comparison.

Souping Bridge up is easily rationalized, and even encouraged. Options that come to mind are life support for breathing, enhanced senses, and little knickknacks such as lightning calculator built in the armor. It should be noted that Bridge currently has no Armor Piercing slots for his teleportation, nor can he yet adjust for velocity or blind teleport without danger. A GM could just add those in as well, but it's recommended that that come later as Bridge has time to research and develop his theories. Dimensional physics is hardly a completely explored science, even in the Champions Universe. If he's too powerful, try toning down his Offensive array to say 60 or even 50 Active Points.

Appearance: Bridge's powered armor has a multi-plated yet high-tech look; the underlying frame being a solid black, with the plates being ivory white to contrast. The polarized lenses conceal his eyes, but the lower half of his face is exposed so not to impede communication. Once combat begins, an additional shield drops over this however.

Out of costume, Bruce Youngblood is a thoughtful man of Sioux descent and a little over 30 years of age. He stands about 5'9" (the costume adds an inch or two) and keeps his dark hair short. He is nearsighted, and wears gold rimmed glasses (naturally, the costume's lenses are corrective as well as polarized.)



Bridge

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
15+25‡	STR	17	12-(17-)	200kg(6400kg); 4d6(8d6)HTH[2(4)]
15+10‡	DEX	30	12-(14-)	OCV: 5(8)/
15+15‡	CON	25	12-(15-)	DCV: 5(8)
11	BODY	2	12-	
20	INT	10	13-	PER Roll: 13-
13	EGO	6	12-	ECV: 4
20	PRE	10	13-	PRE Attack: 4d6
10	COM	0	11-	
5	PD	2		18 PD (13 rPD)
5	ED	2		18 ED (13 rED)
3+2§	SPD	18		3, 5, 8, 10, 12
8	REC	4		§ OIF (-½)
30	END	0		‡ OIF and No Figured
35	STUN	8		Characteristics (-1)

Total Characteristics Points: 134

Movement:	Running:	6"/12"
	Leaping:	3"(5")/6"(10")
	Swimming:	2"/4"
	Teleport:	30"/60"

Cost	Powers	END
12	<i>Power Source:</i> Endurance Reserve (80 END, 10 REC); OIF (-½)	0
50	<i>Transit Armor Offensive Array:</i> Multipower, 75-point reserve; all OIF (-½)	—
5u	1) <i>Aportive Pulse I:</i> Teleportation 12", Position Shift, Usable As Attack (Defense is Teleportation, Extra-Dimensional Movement, or Force Wall, +1), Ranged (+½)	7
4u	2) <i>Aportive Pulse II:</i> Energy Blast 6d6, NND (Defense is Teleportation, Extra-Dimensional Movement, or Force Wall, +1)	6
5u	3) <i>Reroute Blaster:</i> Energy Blast 8d6, Fully Indirect (+¾)	7
43	<i>Transit Armor Travel Array:</i> Multipower, 65-point reserve, all OIF (-½)	—
4u	1) <i>Basic Teleportation:</i> Teleportation 30", Position Shift	7
4u	2) <i>Courier Teleportation:</i> Teleportation 20", Position Shift, 8x Mass	6
4u	3) <i>Long Range Teleportation:</i> Teleportation 20", MegaScale (1" = 10 km, +½)	6
3u	4) <i>Bridge Transit:</i> Teleportation 5", 4x Mass, Area Of Effect (1 Hex, +½), Continuous (+1), MegaScale (1"=10 km, +½), Usable By Others (+¼), Gate (-½)	7
7	<i>Pre-Programmed Exit Sites:</i> Two Floating and One Fixed Location, OIF (-½)	0

- 26 *Reinforced Armor:* Armor (13 PD/13 ED), OIF (-½)
- 5 *Polarized Lenses:* Sight Group Flash Defense (8 points), OIF (-½)
- 7 *Sound Dampeners:* Hearing Group Flash Defense (10 points), OIF (-½)

Skills

- 10 +1 Overall
- 3 Computer Programming 13-
- 3 Electronics 13-
- 3 Mechanics 13-
- 3 Power: Teleport Technology 13-
- 3 Scientist
- 6 1) SS: Dimensional Engineering 17-
- 3 2) SS: Physics 14-
- 3 Teamwork 12-(14-)

Total Powers & Skills Cost: 216

Total Cost: 350

200+ Disadvantages

- 10 DNPC: Teresa Youngblood (Daughter), 8- (Normal), Unaware of Secret ID
- 15 Hunted: Stalker 11- (As Pow, Painful Capture)
- 5 Physical Limitation: Nearsighted (Infrequently, Slightly)
- 15 Psychological Limitation: Protective of/Loves His Daughter (Common, Strong)
- 15 Psychological Limitation: Loyal and Grateful to Virtuoso (Common, Strong)
- 10 Psychological Limitation: Scientific Curiosity (Common, Moderate)
- 5 Reputation: Member of The Choir, 8-
- 15 Social Limitation: Secret ID (Bruce Youngblood) (Frequently, Major)
- 60 Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 350

Caterwaul

Background/History: The sex had been great. Matt had been trying to bag this new age chick for a week now. His mind made a mental notch in his memory, as he tried to slip out of her bed as quietly as he could. Love 'em and leave 'em – that was his motto. Been there, done her.

That's when she stirred. Her smile quickly turned into a frown as she saw him pulling his pants on, "You're leaving?"

Ah, what the hell, Matt figured, might as well make it quick, "Yup. Don't get me wrong; you were fantastic, but I'm not ready for a relationship yet." He slipped his shirt on and moved further away from the bed. He hoped she wasn't a yeller... he hated yellers.

Instead she drew the sheet around herself and stood up, "You said you *loved* me."

"And you believed me." Matt tsked, "You new age babes will believe anything it seems. Think of it this way, I'm doing you a favor. Maybe you learned a lesson about buying everything a guy sells you."

"The only one getting a lesson here is you." She hissed, and clawed at his head quickly yanking some of the hairs from it.

"Ow!" He pushed her, knocking her against her apartment window. "What the hell?"

The woman seethed with fury, "Since you enjoy tomcatting around so much, let's give you a form more suited to your nature...." Then her eyes glowed.

What happened next was a blur for Matt. The lady (what *was* her name again?) rambled on about letting his siren songs be maddening to nature itself, and used weird words like Bast and others he didn't even begin to understand. As she did so, incredible pain shot through his body. Matt glanced down at his hands and saw his nails growing more pronounced. His tongue brushed against the increasingly sharp teeth in his mouth. Cripes! She was turning him into a cat!

In a fit of panic, he shoved her away as hard as he could – right through the window. In a rain of glass and a hearty thud on the concrete two stories down, the witch's life (and the spell she was casting) ended. Despite the darkness, Matt's new eyes could see the unnatural way she had landed.

By the time the police were on the scene, the man who had been Matthew Thompson was gone.

That was the beginning of the criminal career of the supervillain Tomcat. After all, he sure as hell wasn't going to work for a living. Tomcat grew to know and *like* his catlike nature. One night, however, he'd bit off more than he could chew. After really ticking off Witchcraft (he had driven Sunshine into a frenzy), the entire Champions team went after him. Only a quick

run to the Millennium City Zoo and a lot of luck kept him from getting captured.

When he heard word on the street that a new villain team was forming, Tomcat crashed the interviews and introduced himself. Despite his lack of vocal musical talent, he was allowed to join with one proviso – now he goes by the name of Caterwaul.

Personality/Motivation: Caterwaul takes all the worst traits of man and cat, and combines them. He's lecherous, egotistical, lazy, and most especially selfish. He sees no reason why the world shouldn't hand him everything he wants on a silver platter; and if it could be arranged, couldn't the hands carrying that tray belong to a hot blonde? This isn't to say his near-transformation into a cat taught him nothing. Now he keeps lying even after he's gotten what he wants just to be on the safe side.

In his off time, Caterwaul continues to seduce any woman he's even remotely attracted to. While the crimes of The Choir now keep him financially comfortable, he still gets a kick out of having some hottie pay the tab. When "on the job," he's a better team player than most would suspect. He realizes that by looking out for the others, he's looking out for his own meal ticket and protection. He lays his charm on as thick as he dares on the rest of The Choir, with varying success.

Quote: "You think I want to live this life of crime? I'm being forced to... no, don't bother. I got myself into this, I'll get myself out of it."

Powers/Tactics: The unfinished spell ended up giving Matthew the best of feline grace and power. Extremely agile and quick reflexes are but a part of it. His senses are finely attuned and well-suited to nocturnal crimes. Ironically, his delicate hearing makes him especially vulnerable to the sonic attacks of some of his own teammates. His sharpened nails can extend fully into razor sharp claws which he uses freely. The cat/man hybrid mindset Caterwaul endures is something of a protection as well. Attacking mentalists will find it hard to influence him unless they can affect both men and beasts. Caterwaul's oddest ability is what inspired his namesake. By taking the time to tilt his head back and yowl, those creatures in range attack whoever is physically closest to them, unless it is Caterwaul himself¹.

While Caterwaul doesn't go out of his way to kill his opponents, he wouldn't shed a tear if it happened... unless it spoiled his fun. More than once, the instinct to "play with his prey" has worked against him in finishing an opponent off.

CATERWAUL PLOT SEEDS

One of the PCs' female NPC friends seems to be walking on air of late. She is the latest victim of Caterwaul's manipulations and he has her completely fooled into thinking he is merely misunderstood, needs her help, and yes, he "really does love her." The PC may find out that whoever this friend's new love is, he's no good for her and asking favors from her that are increasingly unethical. If she's not brought to her senses and shown the truth about Caterwaul, she could lose her job, or even be put in jail while the lascivious catman moves on to his next victim.

Bridge discovers a way to increase Caterwaul's animal-enraging abilities so they spread for miles. Caterwaul is intrigued, so agrees to steal the components needed. If no one stops him, the PCs may have to deal with an entire city's animal population attacking everything in sight. If Virtuoso sees blackmailing the entire city with such power in his team as beside the point, and wouldn't cash in, Caterwaul still would.

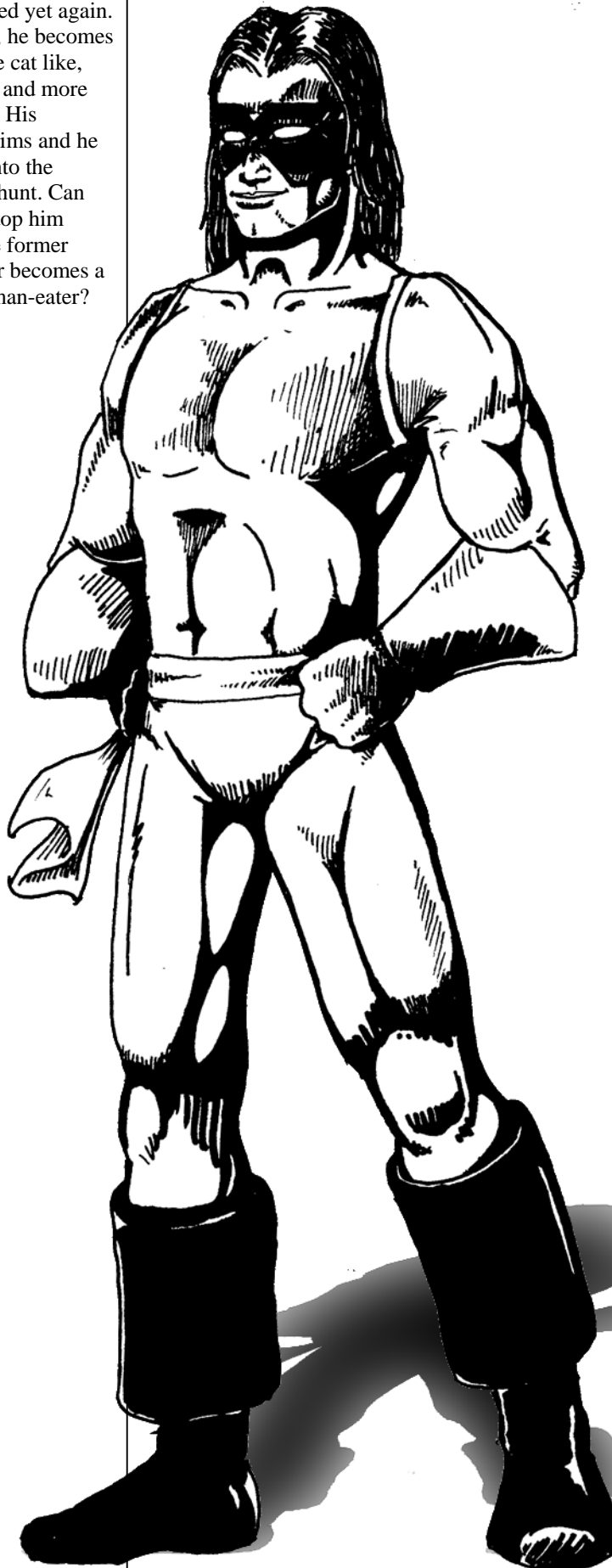
In a battle (perhaps with Witchcraft) something mystical goes terribly wrong



¹ This is an odd use of Personal Immunity, that some GMs may wish to alter

and Caterwaul is transformed yet again. This time, he becomes even more cat like, but larger and more ferocious. His intellect dims and he escapes into the streets to hunt. Can the PCs stop him before the former lady-killer becomes a real live man-eater?

Caterwaul



In battle, Caterwaul alternates between brutally direct slashing, and devious attempts to fool, infuriate, and distract. Caterwaul sometimes pretends to be slower than he is to lull his foe into overconfidence. Then he can bring his claws to bear with surprising speed.

That's one of his least treacherous maneuvers. He's also been known to play the hapless victim or reluctant criminal. More than once he's fooled a hero into lowering her guard, only to make her regret it. Out of combat, it's even worse. Caterwaul always tries to keep at least one besmitten woman in the law enforcement or judicial areas. One never knows when he might need her.

Campaign Use: If you want to make Caterwaul more powerful, you could expand his ability to influence animals (true control instead of just enraging them, larger area, or more dice), or perhaps make his claws Armor Piercing. To power him down, try removing his Lightning Reflexes and/or Mental Defense. Since his powers hail from a half-finished mystic curse, almost any magical incident can be used to justify a "radiation accident" for him.

As a hunter, Caterwaul is likely to be more spiteful than lethal. He'll try to do it in a style that will sate his hedonism as well as demoralizes his foe. For example, he might attempt to seduce any comely female DNPCs and then use what he learns from them against the hero. Should some hero ever become such a threat as to make Caterwaul fear for his very life and freedom (not easy to do, but possible) he might instead grow ruthlessly serious.

Ultimately, Caterwaul could be the downfall of The Choir. Currently, it's in his best interest to be a team player. If he sees that its ship is sinking, there is nothing to prevent him from deserting it or even selling it out. After all, he's been solo before, and the name Tomcat can always be picked up again.

Appearance: If anything, Matt's semi-transformation has only improved his looks; albeit in an exotic way. He keeps his dark hair long (the better to hide his pointed ear tips when he must), and his green almond shaped eyes are most alluring to the ladies when they aren't behind a pair of shades. His 5'11" build is reminiscent of a gymnast or dancer. In or out of costume he moves with incredible grace, and a bit of a swagger. When not on the job, he prefers clothes he can go clubbing in.

Caterwaul's costume consists of a gray bodysuit that covers his torso and legs. Accompanying this are black boots, gloves, and a sash-like belt. He also has a black half mask. He doesn't wear the costume to protect a secret identity – he just thinks it looks good on him.

Caterwaul

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
20	STR	10	13-	Lift 400 kg; 4d6 HTH [2]
26	DEX	48	14-	OCV: 9/DCV: 9
23	CON	26	14-	
15	BODY	10	12-	
13	INT	3	12-	PER Roll: 15-
11	EGO	2	11-	ECV: 4
20	PRE	10	13-	PRE Attack: 4d6
20	COM	5	13-	
12	PD	8		Total: 18 PD (6 rPD)
8	ED	3		Total: 14 ED (6 rED)
6	SPD	24		Phases: 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12
10	REC	2		
46	END	0		
45	STUN	8		

Total Characteristics Points: 159

Movement: Running: 12"/24"
 Leaping: 12"/24"
 Swimming: 2"/4"

Cost	Powers	END
26	<i>Cat's Claws:</i> HKA 1d6 (2d6 with STR), +1 Increased STUN Multiplier (+1/4), Reduced Endurance (0 END, +1/2)	0
42	<i>Call to Go Wild:</i> Mind Control 7d6 (Animal Class of Minds), Area Of Effect (15" Radius, +1/2), Personal Immunity (+1/4), Reduced Endurance (1/2 END, +1/4), Extra Time (Full Phase, -1/2), No Range (-1/2), Set Effect (Attack Anyone Near You, -1/2)	5
6	<i>Hybrid Mind:</i> Mental Defense (10 points Total), Does Not Work if Mentalist Can Affect Both Animal and Human Class of Minds (-1/4)	0
12	<i>Feline Speed:</i> Running +6" (12" Total)	2
8	<i>Feline Muscles:</i> Leaping +8" (12" Total)	2
5	<i>Cat's Eyes:</i> Nightvision	0
9	<i>Heightened Senses:</i> +3 PER with All Sense Groups	0
3	<i>Keen Ears:</i> Ultrasonic Perception (Hearing Group)	0

Perks

5	<i>Latest victim(s) of Seduction:</i> Contact: varies, Often in Law Enforcement or Legal Areas	0
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Talents

12	<i>Catlike Grace:</i> Combat Luck (x2)	
3	<i>Catnaps:</i> Lightsleep	
4	<i>Quick Claws:</i> +4 Lightning Reflexes with Claws	

Skills

8	+1 with All Combat	
4	+2 OCV with Claws	
3	Acrobatics 14-	
2	Acting 11-	
7	Breakfall 16-	
2	CK: Millennium City 11-	
5	Climbing 15-	
5	Defense Maneuver II	
2	KS: The Superhuman World 11-	
1	KS: Music 8-	
3	Persuasion 13-	
5	Seduction 14-	
3	Stealth 14-	
3	Streetwise 13-	
3	Teamwork 14-	

Total Powers & Skills Cost: 191**Total Cost: 350****200+ Disadvantages**

5	Distinctive Features: Catlike Traits – Eyes, Pointed Ear Tips, etc. (Easily Concealed)	
15	Hunted: Stalker 11- (As Pow, Painful Capture)	
10	Hunted: Witchcraft 8- (As Pow, Capture)	
15	Psychological Limitation: Catlike Instincts (Common, Strong)	
15	Psychological Limitation: Deceitful and Amoral (Common, Strong)	
5	Reputation: Member of The Choir, 8-	
10	Vulnerability: 1 1/2x STUN from Sonics (Uncommon)	
75	Experience Points	

Total Disadvantage Points: 350

CRESCENDO PLOT SEEDS

Crescendo learns of a scientist who is working on “preventative medicine” for latent mutancy in infants. Outraged by what he sees as an assault on the future of his own kind, Crescendo decides to make an example of this fellow. However, he’s not the only one involved; the IHA is also in the wings giving the doctor their full support.

Crescendo’s powers appear stronger overnight, soon he’s able to drink in sound from miles around, not only is he causing chaos through the city as no one else can hear anything, he becomes the strongest man on the planet. The most likely reason is some new technology or treatment made by Bridge or ARGENT. The PCs have to find it and destroy it, or the city maybe held hostage to silence.

One of the PCs discovers a means (either mystically or scientifically) to restore Crescendo’s hearing. Even if they don’t think of themselves, if they talk to the press about it, Crescendo will “hear” about it via internet rumor and attempt to steal it. For that matter, it might just be a rumor with no truth to it, but

Crescendo

Background/History: Tyrone Greene put his hand against the box. He could feel the vibration shaking the device; it tickled his fingertips and danced along his palm. The silence remained though, oppressive, heavy. Tyrone twisted the dial up, still nothing. There was a tap on his shoulder, he turned back and looked over his shoulder to see his father wincing in annoyance. His mouth moved, and Tyrone tried to make out the words by reading the lips.

He was pretty sure his father was yelling “Turn that ####\$ thing down *please!*”

Sullenly, the fifteen-year old turned the device off. Everyone in the manor had heard the music; everyone but him. His father left the room after encouraging him with silent mouth to read his book on sign language again.

An hour later, Tyrone put the music back on. Maybe, just maybe, if he believed enough, tried enough, he’d be able to *make* his ears hear it. Again the dial twisted upwards, and again the silence persisted.

“####\$ it!” Tyrone screamed, and even his own voice was denied him. He backhanded the CD player and it flew across the room shattering into a hundred pieces. Tyrone gaped, he hadn’t meant to hit it that hard.

“If L’institut Thoth found out I was doing this...,” the man yanked at his necktie with one hand as he handed over the files with the other. His career could be ruined, but the money, and the threats, had both been very influential in having him take this risk.

Virtuoso looked at the nervous Dr. Tavish reassuringly, “Calm yourself, Doctor. No one knows we’re here. What do you have for me today?” He glanced through the papers.

“You wanted to study superhumans, their powers? This is a collection of some with unusual mutations. Mind you, most of them won’t be of use to you, they’re hindered as well as helped by their abilities, but you did want to know about any with sound-related powers or conditions?”

“Yes, very much so.” The mastermind’s fingers flipped through the pages, then stopped on one subject. “Tyrone Greene is a mutant?” It was not often that he was surprised.

“Yes, Tyrone has been getting checkups for years. His very hearing is impaired by the efficiency of his own power. He absorbs sound, and through some method we can’t understand, he can convert it to raw physical power.” Then Tavish realized something, “You know Tyrone Greene?”

“I know of his parents.” Virtuoso smoothed over the understatement. The Greenes were a respected family in some circles that he associated from time to time, though they’d been

reclusive since their son had gone deaf. Still, their trust would be easy to garner. “Thank you, Doctor. There will be a bonus in this for you,” he assured as he dismissed the man.

“Duet.” He spoke to the bored woman behind him, “Learn what you can about this young man’s activities when he’s away from his parents. I had heard rumors Tyrone had been engaging in petty theft out of frustration, and that his parents had been paying to keep his record clean, now that I know what he can do, I want him among us.”

Duet was taken aback, “Um, sure boss, but there are strong guys who are more experienced that aren’t...”

He cut her off with a wave of the hand, “Hearing impaired? My dear Duet, I want him precisely because he *is* deaf.”

“Okay, I’ll bite, why do you want him because he’s deaf?”

“Beethoven was deaf.” Her leader stated, as if that explained everything, “Now, go and make sure the rumors are right...”

They were. Virtuoso used his secret identity to befriend Tyrone, even as he had some files at the institute buried. When the... unfortunate car accident occurred to his parents and their driver; the young man (now old enough to live on his own anyways) was left adrift. Who else would he turn to?

Personality/Motivation: Crescendo is an intelligent young man whose power is both his blessing and his curse. He has bought – hook, line, and sinker – Virtuoso’s beliefs in their innate superiority over the cattle of common humanity. Tyrone is actually quite proud of being a mutant. He’s turned his former self-loathing into a source of self identification. As his power and expertise in using it have grown, so too has his confidence. Perhaps overly so; occasionally he bites off more than he can chew, though at least he isn’t the thrillseeker Duet is.

That all said, Crescendo still harbors a secret desire to hear again. If he were ever offered a surefire way to do so, he’d take it even, perhaps, at the cost of his powers. Virtuoso is trying to find a way to help Crescendo have the best of both worlds, but he’s unaware how deep Tyrone’s feelings on the matter are. In the meantime, Crescendo wants to increase his power and skill, using it to be the toughest brick around. He wants to be able to outfight and outthink any other “strongman type” in a battle. If he meets a brick who is tougher *and* who applies his strength more creatively, he’s likely to end up hating the guy.

Quote: (In ASL) “I can take him, Virtuoso. Give me five minutes, and I’ll beat out a symphony on his carcass.”

Powers/Tactics: The louder it gets, the stronger Crescendo becomes. This might seem amusing until one remembers that many of Crescendo's teammates are very loud indeed.* He can even be hit with sonic energies directly (which also energizes him somewhat), so at the most extreme levels, he can rival some of the strongest beings on the planet.

Virtuoso has insisted that Crescendo not merely settle for raw force, and Crescendo has come to be very versatile indeed. He can tear up materials and wrap them around a foe to hold him fast, or give a hard but controlled tap to an enemy's skull to knock him out. He tends to use these tactics against downed martial artists or mere norms respectively. Against multiple foes about him, or those just too darn agile to strike, Crescendo will give a powerful stomp in an attempt to bowl them over. Crescendo does not always succeed in applying such moves, but he hopes to one day do it effortlessly.

As for his handicap, technology has been incorporated to deal with that. A shaded glass band circles Crescendo's entire head. While anyone can tell it offers some protection from bright lights, it's not so obvious that a complex series of micro lenses within it allows Crescendo to see even targets behind him. This allows him to use lip-reading somewhat, but masks and such still neutralize that and frustrate him because they mean he may not even hear the orders being given. Fortunately, Virtuoso has incorporated simple hand gestures as well as code-words to keep him in sync with the rest of the group. Crescendo has also developed a good grasp of tactics himself... so much so that between missions, Virtuoso will take his counsel on how best to proceed.

Campaign Use: Crescendo is an example of a young man overcoming his impairment with tenacity, creativity, and pride. It would be downright admirable, if only he were on the right side. Those good qualities in the face of adversity don't change the fact he's still a criminal who thinks he's better than 80% of the people out there and that this entitles him to do

pretty much whatever he wants. PCs might yet be able to teach him some humility and "save him" from a life of crime, but he would have to want to be saved first. Not to be neglected is Crescendo's mutant pride (in fact, should The Choir ever be broken up, he might fall in with a group of Mutant Supremacists), so if a GM wishes to introduce mutant-oriented plotlines into his campaign, Crescendo could play a part.

Crescendo's biggest hook is his quest to hear again. It could be another weakness in The Choir. If Crescendo was somehow de-powered by a "cure," The Choir would lose a formidable weapon. Crescendo might even end up turning to a PC if they could help him, and while loyal to Virtuoso, if anything would cause him to betray The Choir, that would be it. Detective work might also uncover that the "accident" which killed Tyrone's parents was no accident. How will Tyrone handle that if he's told?

Crescendo could become a hunter out of pride or an attempt to outdo a PC brick. While it's unlikely any PC is truly anti-mutant, if Crescendo *thinks* they are, he might decide to hunt him just to teach the guy a lesson.

If Crescendo is too powerful, turn his increment increases of ten to fives, or reduce his base STR to 40. You might also decide to remove a slot from his Multipower. If you want to boost him up, try increasing his SPD to a 5 and/or buying off the required roll for his Multipower. Concept-wise, Crescendo will be seeking a way to hear, so buying off his deafness disadvantage also fits the character.

Appearance: Crescendo is a tall young black man. His costume is a skintight outfit of black, gray, and white. His gloves and boots are also black, and he wears a circlet of shaded material over his eyes. While not as wide as other bricks, he does seem to broaden at the shoulders slightly when sound "muscles him up."

Out of costume, Tyrone dresses in expensive clothes that are in fashion. He keeps his hair trimmed close, and occasionally wears a bit of jewelry.

Crescendo is getting desperate.

* **GM Note:** In fact, it is for this reason that his *Ambient Sound Absorption* is about ¼ less than the Limitations given for the Energy Conversion power in the *USPD* that inspired it. Loud noises are a lot more common around him.

Crescendo



Crescendo

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
50	STR	40	13-	25 tons; 10d6 HTH [5]
18	DEX	24	12-	OCV: 6/DCV: 6
30	CON	40	15-	
15	BODY	10	12-	
15	INT	5	12-	PER Roll: 12-
16	EGO	12	12-	ECV: 5
20	PRE	10	13-	PRE Attack: 4d6
14	COM	2	12-	
25	PD	15		Total: 25 PD (20 rPD)
20	ED	6		Total: 20 ED (20 rED)
4	SPD	12		Phases: 4, 6, 10, 12
16	REC	0		
60	END	0		
55	STUN	0		

Total Characteristics Points: 176

Movement: Running: 6"/12"
 Leaping: 10"/20"
 Swimming: 2"/4"

Cost	Powers	END
47	<i>The Artistry of Might:</i> Multipower, 70-point Reserve, Requires a Strength Artistry Roll (-1/2)	—
2u	1) <i>That's a Wrap:</i> Entangle 6d6, up to 6 DEF; OIF (Appropriate Materials of Opportunity, -1/2), No Range (-1/2), Extra Time (at Least a Full Phase Depending on Material Availability, -1/2), Defense Depends on Material Used (-1/2), Side Effect (May Cause Considerable Damage to the Environment, -0)	6
3u	2) <i>Skull Percussion:</i> Energy Blast 6d6, NND (Defense is Lack Of Weakness on Defenses Covering the Head, or Any Innate rPD Protecting the Head, +1) Reduced Endurance (1/2 END, +1/4); No Range (-1/2), Side Effects (if Character Fails Roll, Opponent Takes Character's Full STR Damage, -1/4)	3
4u	3) <i>Lord of the Stomp:</i> Energy Blast 8d6, Explosion (+1/2), Hole in the Middle (+1/4), No Range (-1/2)	7
9	<i>Ambient Sound Absorption I:</i> STR +10, Reduced Endurance (0 END, +1/2); No Figured Characteristics (-1/2), Only When in the Presence of Strong Sounds (His Own Screaming, a Busy City Street, etc., -1/4)	0
8	<i>Ambient Sound Absorption II:</i> STR +10, Reduced Endurance (0 END, +1/2); No Figured Characteristics (-1/2), Only When in the Presence of Intense Sounds (Rock Concert, Many Sonic Powers at Work, etc., -1/2)	0
7	<i>Ambient Sound Absorption III:</i> STR +10, Reduced Endurance (0 END, +1/2); No Figured Characteristics (-1/2), Only	

	When in the Presence of Overwhelming Sounds (Rocket Launch, etc., -3/4)	0
20	<i>Drinking from the River:</i> Absorption 4d6 (Energy), split between STR and END evenly, Delayed Return Rate (5 per Minute, +1/4); Limited Phenomena (Sonics Only, -1/4)	0
12	<i>Bring on the Noise:</i> Armor (16 rED), Linked to Absorption (-1/2), Only up to Amount Rolled by Absorption (-1/2)	0
20	<i>Natural Resilience:</i> Damage Resistance (20 PD/20 ED)	0
4	<i>Full Peripheral Eye Band:</i> Increased Arc of Perception for Normal Sight, 360°; IIF (Eye Band, -1/4)	0
3	<i>Shaded Lens:</i> Sight Group Flash Defense (5 points); OIF (Eye Band, -1/2)	0

Perks

2 *Inheritance:* Well Off: \$200,00 per year

Skills

10	+2 with Hand-to-Hand
3	Breakfall 13-
2	CK: Millennium City 11-
3	KS: Music 13-
3	Language: American Sign Language (Fluent)
3	Lipreading 13-
2	SS: Physics 11-
3	Strength Artistry (Power) 19-
3	Tactics 13-
3	Teamwork 13-

Total Powers & Skills Cost: 174**Total Cost: 350****200+ Disadvantages**

10	Distinctive Features: Mutant (Not Concealable, Unusual Senses)
15	Hunted: Stalker 11- (As Pow, Painful Capture)
15	Physical Limitation: Deaf (All the Time, Slight [thanks to equipment])
15	Psychological Limitation: Overconfidence (Very Common, Moderate)
15	Psychological Limitation: Feels Superior to the "Mundanes" (Very Common, Moderate)
15	Psychological Limitation: Would Do Anything to Hear for Real (Uncommon, Total)
5	Reputation: Member of The Choir, 8-
15	Social Limitation: Secret ID (Tyrone Greene) (Frequently, Major)
45	Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 350

DIRGE PLOT SEEDS

Dirge discovers that Stalker has protection from the other side, and attempts to ensnare the soul of the late Anthony Thomas Palante in order to interrogate it. The PCs find Dirge committing odd robberies completely on his own and any mystics among them will realize it is for some sort of binding ritual. Can they save the soul of the first Stalker?

In a fierce battle with The Choir, one of the PCs is hit with truly lethal force, and lies dying. To everyone's surprise, Dirge uses his power to heal and save the PC, keeping him from the brink of death. After the "rescue," Dirge vanishes. The only sign of the magic used is an odd symbol now inscribed on the flesh over the hero's heart. What exactly this means is for Dirge to know, and the nervous PC to find out.

Dirge hears news of an exciting archeological find in Oklahoma. A collection of tablets has been found that predate the earliest known tribes. Dirge becomes convinced that the tablets may hold some secret to defeating Takofanes, perhaps even part of The Archlich's True Name. He is willing

Dirge

Background/History: "I'm cut!" Caterwaul complained, gripping at his left shoulder with his right hand. "What sort of heroes use weapons like that, I ask you?"

Dirge stared at his teammate, his gaunt pale face made no apparent change of expression, "Apparently the sort that hunts you." Dirge's deep rasp was as emotionless as his face. Dirge doubted very much the wound was lethal. Caterwaul's lifesong was still strong and vibrant despite the brief endangerment that set the catman's heart to a hurry.

"Not unlike *Flight of the Bumblebee*." The necromancer said aloud to himself.

"Baking powder?" Caterwaul arched a brow, "I don't know what you're talking about, but a little patching up here please."

"Of course," Dirge turned, not to his 'patient' but to the box of animals he kept for just such an emergency. Gripping the quivering rodent, he began to sing the *Intonations of Infernal Inversions*, before snapping its neck. The creature died instantly, and its lifeforce played a small lamentable little note, before feeding the greater song that was Caterwaul's energies. The wound was gone.

"Thanks, Dirge." Caterwaul backflipped away to make sure the old arm was up to snuff.

But Dirge did not hear him. His mind was on another sound: that snap.

Snap!

The young man hid his face as his best friend's neck was broken by the zombie. It didn't matter that the zombie had been their music teacher. It was empty now. Zachary didn't know how or why, but it was like the music from his teacher had been taken, and replaced with another tune, a dirge that refused to end. Then his friend rose, a walking dead man; again that dirge had replaced what once was.

"Dirge," Virtuoso's voice called him, "Is all well?" Dirge did not bother to look back at his leader. He didn't need to. He could hear Virtuoso's own soul song. It was an ambitious masterpiece driven by hidden notes of desperation.

"Yes," he replied.

"Good. Do not forget, we'll be meeting to discuss the strategy for our latest performance in an hour."

"I won't forget," Dirge assured him. Perhaps Virtuoso nodded as he walked away, perhaps not. All Dirge knew was that the song was retreating.

Alone again, he muttered to himself, "I never forget."

"The world shalt ne'er forget the ascension and return of the Lord of the Dragon Crown," the ...thing on the writhing throne stated calmly. "The time of Takofanes hath come again.... Prepare the sacrifices."

Zachary was laid out along with the others; those who'd been allowed to live, for now. His naked form was fastened down as part of the great ritual to be. The gruesome archlich began to intone words that had not been uttered for untold millennia.

And yet, he knew them. They were the same words he heard in the horrid dirge that filled everything. He didn't know how to stop the words, but perhaps... if he sang them?

Dirge found himself humming, and stopped. He put away his tools and goods before walking along to join the others in the meeting. It had not begun yet, so idle banter flitted about him like the chatter of birds.

"...what are you complaining about? We got away...."

"...if I ever get my claws on that hero..."

"...did you hear Stalker has allies now?"

"...doesn't matter, nothing can save him."

The Archlich's gaze of green hued flames cast about at the song come up from the pit. Had he lips to curl into a smile, he would have, "So... one hath talent, but clearly no training. Amusing."

Zachary kept singing, he could feel the song becoming his, buoying him. If he could just hold all the notes, maybe he could survive.

There was a negligent gesture from Takofanes, less energy expended than most would use shooing a fly, and Zachary screamed. He could feel his own music rising out of his still living body, and about to be replaced.

"Nothing can save thee, boy." The skeletal creature tsked as it toyed with the essence and pain of his rebellious victim, "Nothing can, save power that ye shall never have enou of."

There was a crash, and an explosion... colorful figures had arrived. Zachary could not recall what they looked like, but oh, how defiantly their lifesongs raged.

"Get the prisoners out of here!" One voice declared.

And he was swept away...his body escaped, but his soul song lost in the void.

Dirge listened to the team plans attentively, of course. He had to do his part. He had come to The Choir for a reason. They needed a mystic, and he needed to grow. It would be a slow, gradual climb before he would be strong enough to make his challenge; to pit his song against the dreadful words of the Dragon Crowned Lord.

One day, he swore to himself, I will have "enou."

Personality/Motivation: Dirge is outwardly cold, uncaring, and empty. He comes across as extremely dry and morbid. Inwardly, he's cold, uncaring, and empty. Not every villain is pretending after all. Despite his emptiness, he does have drive and dreams. One might say his inability to feel normal passions has created a new need in him.

As his background states, Dirge wants power. He is patient, and willing to wait for it. In a sense, he's just passing his time using The Choir as both a way to build up his mystic muscle, and as a shield should danger come his way. His ultimate dream is to gain enough power to challenge Takofanes (and even then, he might prefer to find puppets for that task) and usurp the Archlich's mystic might and place. The thought of reclaiming his soul is something he tries not to dwell on. On some level, it frightens him.

Quote: "Your lifesong is strong... you should be proud of it. I promise to remember it long after it's stilled. Rejoice in that."

Powers/Tactics: Dirge is a potent necromancer with a musical bent to his powers. He influences the flow of life and death energies with the mournful chants and songs from which he takes his name. Those who hear his songs may find themselves withering slowly, or torn asunder abruptly. Some of his notes can even pierce the essence of ethereal beings. Dirge can heal the wounded, though it requires at least a token sacrifice. While it is in his power to create an undead servant from a corpse, he rarely uses this power, feeling he must get stronger in it first. He has always had a knack, a latent talent that came in the form of hearing the "soul songs" of those about him.

Unfortunately for Dirge, if silenced, he is nearly helpless, even his ability to Nether Walk fails him. This makes him rather reliant on his teammates when facing certain foes. Many of his attacks are lethal, but Dirge prefers not to kill human beings casually. Like Virtuoso, he considers himself something of an artist, a master of his craft. To simply snuff a life is

wasteful when it could be used to power rituals, or at least study the condition of life and soul songs. In battle, he prefers to match up against opposing mystics. How else is he supposed to prepare for his last greatest battle?

Campaign Use: Dirge is an example of a lesser evil. He's a murderer, he's callous, and he craves power no matter who else it hurts; but he's still nothing compared to the evil he seeks to usurp. Should your heroes find out his ultimate goal after having met Takofanes, they may find themselves hoping beyond hope he can pull it off.

The problem with that, of course, is twofold. The path to such power may call for a lot of deaths to feed it. If Dirge thought somehow destroying a city would defeat Takofanes, he would do it without hesitation. Should he somehow (unlikely) ever succeed, he would eventually be no better than Takofanes himself.

Dirge is likely to run into PCs while assisting The Choir. On his own, he's most likely to clash with mystic-oriented PCs. They may foil his robbery of some occult book or object, or merely find themselves being used as a way for Dirge to "test himself." Eventually, Dirge hopes to free himself of his need for vocal spells.

If Dirge is too powerful, try reducing the dice of damage he does, or perhaps change his RKA into an EB, and his Drain BODY into a Drain BODY/STUN split. If you wish to pump him up, you could have the incantations become nothing more than a special effect that he doesn't really need, or augment/replace his Multipower with a necromantic Variable Power Pool.

Appearance: An unnatural interest in death and darker magicks has not had a healthy affect on Dirge's looks. He is pale; some even confuse him for an albino at first. He is unkempt and smells faintly of blood, sulfur, and formaldehyde. Dirge's hollow black eyes are hidden under his cowl hood. His costume is of Virtuoso's choosing, not his own, with a flowing gray cloak over a black body suit.

to try any means to obtain them, but knows doing so with magic may attract Takofanes' attention. He must convince The Choir, or better yet, extort or trick a superhero team, into stealing it for him.

Dirge



Dirge

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
10	STR	0	11-	Lift 100 kg; 2d6 HTH [1]
21	DEX	33	13-	OCV: 7/DCV: 7
23	CON	26	14-	
10	BODY	0	11-	
18	INT	8	13-	PER Roll: 13-
21	EGO	22	13-	ECV: 7
25	PRE	15	14-	PRE Attack: 5d6
8	COM	-1	11-	
8	PD	6		Total: 15 PD (7 rPD)
8	ED	3		Total: 15 ED (7 rED)
5	SPD	19		Phases: 3, 5, 8, 10, 12
7	REC	2		
48	END	1		
30	STUN	3		

Total Characteristics Points: 137

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

Cost	Powers	END
64	<i>The Songs of Death:</i> Multipower, 80-point Reserve; Incantations (-1/4)	—
5u	1) <i>Chant of Dissolution:</i> Drain BODY 3d6, Continuous (+1), Ranged (+1/2); Incantations (Throughout, -1/2)	8
6u	2) <i>The Stinging Notes of the Inevitable:</i> RKA 3d6, Affects Desolid (+1/2), Reduced Endurance (1/2 END, +1/4); Incantations (-1/4)	3
3u	3) <i>In-tonations of Infernal Inversions:</i> Simplified Healing 4d6, Can Heal Limbs; Incantations (-1/4), Requires Animal Sacrifice or Bloodletting (-1/4)	5
6u	4) <i>Torments of the Damned:</i> Ego Attack 5d6, Reduced Endurance (0 END, +1/2); Incantations (-1/4)	0
4u	5) <i>Song of Awakening:</i> Summon 1 Undead of Up to 175 points, Expanded Class (Any Simple Undead – Skeletons, Zombies, etc., +1/4), Slavishly Devoted (+1), Incantations (-1/4), Summoned Being Must “Inhabit” Locale (Spell Requires Appropriate Number and Type of Corpses in the Vicinity, -1/2), Arrives Under Own Power (-1/2)	8
24	<i>Nether Walk:</i> Teleportation 15", Incantations (-1/4)	3
37	<i>To Hear the Silent Songs:</i> Detect Souls, Spirits, and Spiritual Energies 13- (Hearing Sense Group), Discriminatory, Sense, Range, Targeting	0
21	<i>Emplaced Spells of Protection:</i> Armor (7 PD/7ED)	0

Talents

4 Simulate Death

Skills

6 +2 with *The Songs of Death*

3 Analyze Mystic Potency 13-
 2 AK: Oklahoma 11-
 2 PS: Singing 11-
 3 Power (Necromantic Song) 13-
 3 Scholar
 3 KS: Arcane and Occult Lore 14-
 3 KS: Demonology 14-
 2 KS: Music 13-
 2 KS: The Mystic World 13-
 4 KS: Necromancy 15-
 3 Stealth 13-
 3 Teamwork 13-

Total Powers & Skills Cost: 213

Total Cost: 350

200+ Disadvantages

10 Distinctive Feature: Mystic Aura (Not Concealable, Unusual Senses)
 10 Distinctive Feature: Signs of Soullessness; Upsets Animals, No Reflection (Concealable)
 20 Hunted: Trismegistus Council 8- (Mo Pow, NCI, Capture)
 15 Hunted: Stalker 11- (As Pow, Painful Capture)
 15 Psychological Limitation: Seeks to Gain Mystic Power (Common, Strong)
 20 Psychological Limitation: Soulless, Feels No Empathy/Compassion (Very Common, Strong)
 5 Reputation: Member of The Choir, 8-
 55 Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 350

DUET PLOT SEEDS

The Choir is planning something big – *very* big; hundreds of lives are in danger. Unfortunately, clues are scarce or nonexistent and time is running out. Duet is the only one handy who knows how Virtuoso thinks, and the authorities agree to release her if she helps them. However, they don't trust her to hold to her word, so the PCs are called in to assist. Will Duet make a break for it, or honestly help out since, who knows, this plan might endanger her too, since she's now on the outside with the public?

Duet decides to investigate her own origins a bit more thoroughly. Maybe if she could get more of that gunk, she could boost her power level? It's not so simple, though. Companies that leave toxic material about are rather reluctant to have people prying into their affairs. If the PCs try to help the corporation in question capture the intruder, they may end up being listed along with her as "knowing too much."

While on patrol, the PCs stumble onto a vicious firefight between VIPER agents and a group of supervillains

Duet

Background/History: For what must have been the second time that week, Duet was hauled before "Mr. Suit" and questioned, "We meet again, oh, he-of-the-too-tight-neck wear," she greeted him.

"It's Agent Randolph. Now, Michelle, you won't give us any information on The Choir, despite the fact they're leaving you to rot?"

"You catch on quick...." she dimpled at him.

Agent Randolph repressed a sigh, then "Fine, why not tell us about yourself then."

Well, *this* was a new tact; intrigued, she sat down, not that the guards were giving her a choice, "Moi? What do you want to know about little old me? You have my real name now, probably done more background checks than Ashcroft on coke."

He cleared his throat, and continued, "Well, how did you get your powers?"

She smirked, "Well, I was bitten by a radioactive copying machine, and then I learned with great power comes great opportunity...."

Randolph slammed the table, "Can the B.S.! You don't want to talk about your boss, fine, but work with me a little... as annoying as you think our visits are, it can get much worse, I assure you."

Duet sighed, "Spoilsport. Fine. I'll tell you... it kind of went down like this...."

Michelle Stevens ran, her cheek was still stinging from the blow. It was raining, cold and hard; and Michelle was glad of it. Rain hid tears, hid weakness. She was so tired of being weak. So she ran, as fast as her thirteen-year-old legs could carry her. When she tired of running, she started to hitch rides.

The money she'd taken with her ran out sooner than she thought it would, and within a month, the rain was turning into snow, and she just wanted to be warm again. Warmth was promised by some men, at a price. One look into the vacant eyes of one of the "working girls" made up her mind. She discovered pimps didn't like the "no" word, but after she squeezed through the hole in a factory's fence, he stopped chasing her.

She didn't know what was in the barrels she slept nearby that night. Michelle only knew that whatever was in them made her feel warm. It became her regular hiding place in the city, and when the city got too tough, or the police tried to bring her in (first to take her back to her mother, then later to stop her shoplifting), she fled back to it. She became hard, she became quick... and she got sick.

It's what happens when you sleep all winter near barrels full of who-knows-what. She honestly thought she'd die when the fever

dreams came. Then one morning, she woke up, and felt one hundred percent better.

"Thank God!" Michelle groaned.

There was a grunt of agreement nearby. Michelle rolled over, and found that she was beside herself with amazement... literally. The two Michelles gaped at each other, and in unison muttered, "What the #\$\$%?"

After the initial confusion, it was the beginning of a beautiful friendship. Michelle finally had someone she could trust – herself. The long stay near whatever radiation those containers were leaking had given her the ability to clone herself. Suddenly she had someone who could help her shoplift, snatch food, and pick pockets on a scale she'd never dreamed before. She even paid a certain pimp a visit a year later, to teach him the new definition of "tag team."

Women in the leg-breaking business are rare. She considered hiring out, but most of the would-be employers either wanted her to put out on the side, or treated her like a freak. Michelle most often had to work alone – well, as alone as she ever got. She kept picking pockets, but her newfound confidence meant she alternated between that, muggings, and even a few carjacks. She was her own woman, she was making a living; she was in a rut maybe, but she was content with it.

Then one night she tried to waylay a guy coming out of some orchestra showing. There was something about the guy; he was well dressed, posh, and utterly confident. She had to resent that. He was just begging to be brought down a peg or two. As he passed by, she tried to filch his wallet, only to have his hand grab her wrist.

"My dear lady," he said as calmly and coldly as he squeezed, "You are attractive, and I have an appreciation for beauty. That is the *only* reason I am not breaking your arm."

"Do tell? Let me double your pleasure then." She smirked, and suddenly her duplicate materialized. Most people were too shocked to do anything the first time they saw her use her power. Her other self swung for his family jewels, and ended up hitting the original Michelle in the back as he twisted nimbly. It would seem this guy was not most people. The following fight was one for the books. He moved like a dancer and hit like a hammer. The two Michelles ignored their mutual pain, and fought like twin tigresses in the rough-and-tumble manner she'd learned on the streets. It was with some satisfaction she noted he was actually getting winded. Then she saw his foot come into her personal horizon, and everything went black.

She woke up seconds later, and heard a slap sound next to her. A leather wallet had landed next to her.

“Raw, unrefined, but with talent and a gift... and you use it for this?” he sighed, “Such a waste.”

She glared, “Wonderful, spare me the ‘straighten up and fly right’ routine buddy. I—.”

“Fly right? Hardly; my disappointment is you swim in this small pond when you could do, be, and *have* so much more.” He straightened his tie, “I’ll make you an offer, since I’m looking for talent like yours anyways. What you wanted so badly is beside you. You can pick it up and leave, rejoining the very ordinary world that you do ‘okay’ in. Or, you can follow me, and I can show you a much larger stage to play on. Your choice... find your potential, seek out the greatness I see within you... or stay here, and...” he looked at the wallet disdainfully before returning his gaze to her, “settle.”

Hours later a bum nearly fainted when he found a wallet containing over a thousand dollars in cash that someone had just abandoned.

Duet repressed a smile and kept her utterly straight face as she watched the little vein in Agent Randolph’s forehead throb, she finished her grand story of being the last of her race, “...and now I’m an American icon.”

Randolph snapped to the guards, “Take her back to the cell before I forget what the law will or won’t let me do to her!”

Personality/Motivation: Duet is a rough diamond who has quite proudly resisted efforts to smooth her. She *still* prefers Rock ‘n’ Roll to Classical or Opera. She often seems to get away with more than some others of the team with Virtuoso, perhaps because she was his first recruit. Her loyalty to him is easy to explain, if you know her. Duet craves respect – respect from others, and respect for herself. Virtuoso helped give her that. Even more than Caterwaul, Duet is flippant and fun-loving. She’s a rough-and-tumble girl who is both streetwise and likable. Some mistake the playfulness of her nature to mean she’s not as “bad” a villain as the rest of her team – Big Mistake.

If you are starting her out in Stronghold, then Duet’s main motivation is to find a way out. She’s sure The Choir will try to break her out, but she’d rather do it herself if she can. If she’s still among the liberated, her goals are cash, rep, and a good time; not always in that order.

Quote: (Talking to herself) “Love what you did with your hair.” “Oh, thank you... and I adooooe the way you’re slapping that hero silly...”

Powers/Tactics: Whatever was in those barrels seems to have mutated Duet so that she can create an exact double of herself (Bridge is still baffled just how she manages to duplicate the gear she carries/wears as well). A byproduct of

this seems to be accelerated cellular replacement that causes her to heal quickly. There is also a strong mental connection between the two, which allows them not only to communicate, but to share each other’s pain. Hitting one will hurt the other (STUN-wise, anyways) but the pain will also be diffused for both. It is indeed a mixed blessing for her.

While a potent hand-to-hand combatant, Duet is not formally trained in any martial art. Rather her techniques were honed in the streets of Chicago, and the only fighting philosophy she has is a belief in pragmatic results. She tries to adjust her techniques to her foe, usually while making idle conversation either with him or with her duplicate. This is really meant as more of a distraction than anything, since internally the twin forms are conveying ideas and information on the fight through their link.

Duet will tag team a single opponent if she can. One of her will throw a target down, while the other holds her phase, then takes advantage of that moment when the victim is prone. Sometimes she will take risks and go for something fancy, just for the fun of it. Such unwanted improvisation makes Virtuoso cringe, but it pays off often enough that he lets it slide.

Campaign Use: While the background story shows Duet currently being held in Stronghold, it certainly doesn’t have to be that way in your campaign. You can say she was never captured, or just got out again (or better yet, use her as an excuse to have The Choir try to perform a jailbreak). She has a devil-may-care ‘tude that might endear her to some PCs, and really annoy others. She’s a bit less urbane and far more urban than most of The Choir, which means she’s not above pulling some old-fashioned crimes just for the kick of it. One could also go deeper into her background for story ideas. Clearly, some company was a bit sloppy with mutagens.

To make Duet more powerful, try giving her a ranged weapon. While Virtuoso sneers at mere guns (and his prejudices direct the group), she might be able to sway him into letting her use some sort of sonic beam weapon eventually. You could also buy up her DEX so she can keep up with the faster members.

If you need to tone her powers down, reduce (or remove entirely) the Damage Reduction; this will certainly cause her to be taken out of any combat that much quicker. You could also remove the Ranged advantage from her Duplication. This will cut down on her versatility.

Appearance: Duet wears a skintight protective costume of red with a black V sort of design along the torso. On that black field is a gold Roman Numeral II design. Her boots (also black) are flat and sturdy. There is no mask to the

composed of Duet and other villains who *should* be in Stronghold, and by latest accounts... *are!* If the heroes side with them against VIPER, Duet will wink and hint at some sort of “weekend furlough” program. Is the government really using Stronghold prisoners on missions, or is this some sort of con job by escapees?

costume, since she figures she has a known criminal record anyways. Michelle is a tall athletic woman standing a full six feet in height. She tends to keep her blond hair pulled back into a ponytail for ease of combat. She has green eyes that sparkle with mischief.

Outside of costume, she tends to dress in tight jeans and midribs (if the weather permits) along with a leather jacket. Virtuoso has tried to cure her of wearing T-shirts with rude or profane slogans on them, to no effect.



DIGITAL HERO #24

Duet

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
20	STR	10	13-	Lift 400 kg; 4d6 HTH [2]
20	DEX	30	13-	OCV: 7/DCV: 7
20	CON	40	13-	
11	BODY	2	12-	
13	INT	3	12-	PER Roll: 12-
12	EGO	4	11-	ECV: 4
17	PRE	7	13-	PRE Attack: 3d6
14	COM	2	12-	
10	PD	6		Total: 15 PD (5 rPD)
10	ED	6		Total: 15 ED (5 rED)
5	SPD	20		Phases: 3, 5, 8, 10, 12
10	REC	4		
40	END	0		
31	STUN	0		

Total Characteristics Points: 134

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

Cost	Powers	END
70	<i>Duet Effect:</i> Duplication (one 350-point Duplicate), Ranged (+½), Feedback (STUN Damage Only, -½)	0
5	<i>Very into Herself:</i> Mind Link with Her Other Self, Psychic Bond, Both Must Have Mind Link (-1)	0
17	<i>Sisters Share I:</i> Physical Damage Reduction, Resistant, 50%, Linked to Duplication (-¼), STUN Only (-½)	0
17	<i>Sisters Share II:</i> Energy Damage Reduction, Resistant, 50%, Linked to Duplication (-¼), STUN Only (-½)	0
11	<i>Cellular Replication:</i> Healing 2d6 (Regeneration; 2 BODY per Hour), Reduced Endurance (0 END, +½), Persistent (+½), Self Only (-½), Extra Time + Increased Time Increment (2 BODY per Hour, -2¼)	0
10	<i>Protective Costume:</i> Armor (5 PD/5 ED), OIF (-½)	
4	<i>Fast on Her Feet:</i> Running +2" (8" Total)	1
8	<i>Tandem Expertise:</i> +2 with All Combat, Usable Only Within 5" of Other Self (-1)	0

Martial Arts: Dirty Infighting

Maneuver	OCV	DCV	Notes
4 Disarm	-1	+1	40 STR Disarm
4 Kidney Blow	-2	+0	1d6 HKA
4 Low Blow	-1	+1	3d6 NND
4 Punch	+0	+2	8d6 Strike
5 Roundhouse	-2	+1	10d6 Strike
3 Throw	+0	+1	6d6+v/5, Target Falls
8	+2 Damage Classes (already added in)		

Talents

15 Combat Sense 12-

Skills

6 +2 with Dirty Infighting
3 Acrobatics 13-
3 Breakfall 13-
2 CK: Chicago 11-
2 CK: Millennium City 11-
2 KS: Music 11-
3 Sleight of Hand 13-
3 Streetwise 12-
3 Teamwork 13-

Total Powers & Skills Cost: 216

Total Cost: 350

200+ Disadvantages

15 Hunted: Stalker 11- (As Pow, Painful Capture)
20 Psychological Limitation: Overconfident Thrillseeker (Very Common, Strong)
15 Psychological Limitation: Craves Respect and a Piece of the Pie (Very Common, Mod)
5 Reputation: Member of The Choir, 8-
70 Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 350

SONGBIRD PLOT SEEDS

Songbird loves her “father,” but does not feel truly a part of The Choir. Her appearance cuts her off from humanity, and at times she is lonely beyond words. Seeking comfort in the open sky, her keen senses one day pick up a flying PC also out and about. Staying a certain distance away, she continues to observe him. If he seems to love the gift of flight as much as she, she’ll begin to wonder what else they have in common. In short, she may become romantically attracted. Will the PC even notice her holding back when they fight? And will he try to help her, or simply exploit it?

In the middle of combat, when hit by a mental attack (or electricity if no mentalists are on the PC team) Songbird is overcome by a rush of images from her old true life. It is not enough to free her from her false persona, but it does jar and confuse her. Indeed, she may run off in terror and try to figure it all out. This is something Virtuoso can’t allow to happen – she knows too much now. “Daddy” will insist on his little girl coming home... dead or alive.

A series of high-tech robberies occurs,

Songbird

Background/History: “You came to the right people. ARGENT cybernetics division is far ahead of other departments, if I do say so myself,” The agent rambled. The ARGENT scientists were good, Virtuoso admitted to himself, but at times they seemed to come across more like businessmen than true artists. Alas, what he had desired was not Bridge’s forte.

“I’m sure. She is redesigned to my specifications?” Virtuoso asked as they continued down the hallway.

“Of course the hardest part was the memory wipe and reprogram, actually, but that’ll hold. The cybernetics themselves are so ingrained in her system that removing them would kill her. As you asked, she’ll never be the same woman again.” The agent put a hand over a panel, and the door slid open. “I’m sorry we couldn’t arrange a more... musical theme. The ‘shriek’ we supplied her with is weak in comparison with Soprano, but she hits like a jackhammer and will make a great scout. That’s what you needed, right?”

“Among other things,” Virtuoso concealed his displeasure at the failure to make a stronger sonic array; then again, the cybernetics in the faceplate would be tricky work. It was too late to change her name, since the reprogramming was at last complete. He only hoped it didn’t damage the symmetry of the team.

They entered, and Virtuoso could not help but admire her. She lay on the bed still asleep. Her face and much of her form resembled the airbrushed female robots found on science fiction websites. Great metal wings spilled over the sides like a chrome angel. She was beautiful, yet the humanity ripped from her also made her disturbing. She evoked a response, even more than one at a time. By many definitions, she was indeed art.

“Beautiful.” He voiced his thoughts.

“Thank you,” said the scientist, “given how attractive you wanted her, we were a little surprised by the memories you had us load into her.”

Virtuoso’s only response was a *look* that told the scientist to pursue no further. “Let’s begin this.”

The ARGENT agent nodded and activated the systems.

“Songbird,” Virtuoso whispered. “Wake up darling.”

Glass eyes that glowed a flickering crimson lit as she awoke. She could feel the numbness of the metal; the combination of weight and power. She tried to remember what had happened. Who was this man? Who was she? It was...

“You were in an accident, Songbird. I’m sorry; this was all we could do to save your life.” Virtuoso allowed his apparent grief to leak through. If this didn’t work, they’d have to kill her, and ARGENT was notoriously fussy about refund policies.

Suddenly, Songbird (yes that was her name now) remembered the accident. She couldn’t remember much else, but she recalled how nobly Virtuoso and the rest of The Choir had tried to save her. She reached out with her metallic hand, and stroked Virtuoso’s face.

“It’s okay. I’ll be okay... father.” She assured him. She didn’t want him upset; she loved her father very much.

Songbird was soon given a room at the base with the others. It was Bridge who was the most intrigued. While she was sorting out her room, putting up false knickknacks that she remembered as hers, but never had been, Bridge approached Virtuoso about it.

“Who was she... really?” The armored teammate had his own daughter to worry about; perhaps this ruse had struck a nerve.

The leader of The Choir shrugged in response, “Someone who got in my way one too many times. It got a bit irritating, yet one can’t deny that fate might have been leading her to me anyways. Who am I,” Virtuoso said with uncharacteristic modesty, “to deny that? As for her, she should have known that if you get too close to The Choir too often, you may end up singing along.”

Personality/Motivation: Some daughters are made, not born. Songbird is the doting daughter that adores her “father” with all her heart. There is nothing she wouldn’t do for him, except perhaps kill someone she sees as innocent. Those who fight The Choir do not qualify in her mind as innocents (though she’s still reluctant). After all, they tried to hurt the most wonderful man in the world. Her nigh robotic condition keeps her from interacting with humanity, so she must trust The Choir to let her know what most people are “really” like. She does not hate her condition, though she has regrets. She has grown to love flying, and even relish combat. The feeling of power is intoxicating in its way.

She just doesn’t like killing.

She has few drives beyond serving her father, even her hobbies are based around what he likes. She listens to music hoping to have this to share with him, and is even learning how to play the violin since her cybernetic throat is ill suited to singing. A part of her longs for romance, but as she realizes she’s a freak to most of the world, she has resigned herself that this is never to be.

Quote: “Don’t you touch him!”

Powers/Tactics: The misnamed Songbird is more of a raptor than a nightingale. Her own sonic blast is weak compared to some others, but it’s a good weapon to fall back on when she wishes to keep her distance in combat or a foe seems especially resistant to physical damage. Given how her extra dense fists powered by her strength are quite formidable, someone would have to be quite physically resistant indeed to casually shrug off any punch of hers. Similar material is laced through her body, above and below the surface, making her quite durable herself.

While the enhanced senses are very useful, and her reflexes are phenomenal, it is flying that is her favorite ability. She can soar with great agility, and will use this to advantage against clumsier fliers battling her. She’s also not above using those wings for a surprise strike when on land.

Her tactics are rather simple. She sees it as her duty to make sure Virtuoso remains unharmed. Indeed, she has more than once taken a blast meant for him. Other than that, she follows what ever plan has been laid out... usually. Sometimes she gets so desperate to prove herself to her father and The Choir that she will act rashly. It’s not overconfidence, just being too eager to please.

Campaign Use: By now, you’ve probably guessed that Songbird’s original identity has been left a mystery so a GM may tailor the character more easily to his own campaign. If a GM wishes to “make it personal” between the PCs and The Choir, this is an excellent time to dust off a neglected or no longer useful female NPC and cast her in the role of the victim/villain. One could even do it to a DNPC, but given the nature of the transformation (so integrated it doesn’t even have Restrained as a limitation), it would have long term consequences that might displease your player.

Virtuoso himself has many reasons for doing such a thing to someone. It could be anything from destroying a rival or a rival’s loved one, to responding badly to a critic. A reporter could have gotten too close to the truth, and just arranging an accident and leaving it at that was cliché in his eyes. For that matter, it might merely have been the muse descending, and he acted on it. Who says the artistic temperament needs rationale we mere mortals can understand?

Appearance: Songbird does indeed look like she stepped off the cover of a sci-fi magazine. Her face plate and wings resemble airbrushed chrome, with the hands and feet of a darker metal. She is beautiful to behold, but also very unnerving. She adorns herself in whatever outfit her father suggests, though her personal preference is actually a black sweatsuit with the back torn out for her wings.

and the figure on the security cameras is Songbird! She’s shown possessing superior technical and martial knowledge that she normally does not. She doesn’t remember doing any of this, and would deny it if asked. What’s going on? Did ARGENT leave more programming in her than Virtuoso paid for?

Songbird



DIGITAL HERO #24

Songbird

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
40	STR	30	15-	6400 kg; 8d6 HTH [4]
25	DEX	45	14-	OCV: 8/DCV: 8
24	CON	28	14-	
13	BODY	6	12-	
14	INT	4	12-	PER Roll: 12-
10	EGO	0	11-	ECV: 3
20	PRE	10	13-	PRE Attack: 4d6
16	COM	3	12-	
10	PD	2		Total: 25 PD (15 rPD)
8	ED	3		Total: 23 ED (15 rED)
6	SPD	25		Phases: 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12
13	REC	0		
48	END	0		
45	STUN	0		

Total Characteristics Points: 156

Movement: Running: 6"/12"
Leaping: 8"/16"
Swimming: 2"/4"
Flying: 20"/40"

Cost	Powers	END
30	<i>Talon Hard Hands:</i> Armor Piercing on STR (Up to 12d6 Damage) (+1/2)	3
40	<i>"Bird Cry":</i> EB 8d6	4
27	<i>Cybernetic Wings I:</i> Flight 20", Restrained (-1/2)	4
4	<i>Cybernetic Wings II:</i> Extra Limbs (2), Limited Manipulation (-1/4)	0
45	<i>Armored Body:</i> Armor (15 PD/15 ED)	0
15	<i>Bird's-Eye View:</i> Telescopic Sight +10	0
5	<i>IR Eyes:</i> Infrared Perception (Sight)	0

Skills

10	+2 with Hand-to-Hand Combat
4	+2 with Flight
3	KS: Music 13-
2	PS: Violinist 11-
3	Shadowing 12-
3	Stealth 14-
3	Teamwork 14-

Total Powers & Skills Cost: 194

Total Cost: 350

200+ Disadvantages

20	Distinctive Features: Avian Style Cyborg (Not Concealable, Major Reaction)
15	Hunted: Stalker 11- (As Pow, Painful Capture)
25	Psychological Limitation: Desperate to Please her "Father" (Very Common, Total)
15	Psychological Limitation: Will Not Kill Innocents (Common, Strong)
5	Reputation: Member of The Choir, 8-
70	Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 350

SOPRANO PLOT SEEDS

Adriana gives a performance in her secret identity that one of the PCs is attending (perhaps dragged along by an NPC friend if they hate opera). The performance is enthusiastically received by most of the audience, but the next morning a critic lambastes her singing as “technically flawless, emotionally frigid.” Unknown to him, his days are numbered, unless of course, the PCs can save him from one very temperamental artist. Should a PC deduce her identity and be so bold as to spout it out, Soprano’s choice of targets will most certainly shift.

Soprano fears nothing more than the loss of her voice and the control thereof. How horrible, then, when she discovers she can no longer keep her every utterance from lashing out with force even greater than before? Refusing the methods of restraint The Choir offers (which would silence her utterly while a better solution could be sought) she goes on a rampage. If she must suffer, so must the world. Is this uncontrolled power boost a natural progression of her abilities, or is there another cause?



Soprano

Background/History: Adriana Tabacchi flung her head back haughtily as she was asked to do the piece again. She was a beauty, and her voice! The Maestro was in awe of that voice, but she was too angry, too proud, and far too young to play the ‘donna in such a fashion. He motioned again for her to begin once more.

Adriana silently fumed. She was the next great voice in opera, all the world should know it, yet the old fart kept her locked away from the public eye for the “grand unveiling” that was supposed to occur a year from now. A year?!? It was intolerable. He wanted more, *Very well, Maestro*, she thought, *I shall give you all that I have*.

Back straight, a flash of throat, and the music came. She reached deeper into herself than she ever had before. Sometimes it hurt, in ways no other singer spoke of. Now she took that pain, and the rage she felt at the old man, and unleashed it upon him. The *Bel Canto* seemed to please him, the enraptured look on his weathered face soothed her somewhat, but no, he wanted it all. She reached deeper still.

Abruptly, the Maestro choked something out, but she could not hear what he was saying above her own voice. He gripped the side of his head. Was he screaming? Adriana found the thought... exciting somehow. She pressed the music down on him, continuously. He tried to cover his ears, but clearly, her voice was too strong.

Then a crimson flood began to escape his fingers. Now Adriana was the one enraptured. Her voice, his pain, it was the most exquisite duet she had ever been a part of. She found she liked it.

Alas, her Maestro disappointed her yet again. All too soon, his lifeless body fell to the floor, the last of his blood pooling from his freed ears. How very intriguing. Obviously, even she had not realized how talented she truly was.

She bowed before leaving the stage.

It had not been as easy as she thought. Tickets to America, the grand stage of the supervillain, were simple. However, already the money was running low. She was not accustomed to the sheer effort it took to commit such crimes. Besides, many of them seemed base. Her powers were still growing, and she could not always control them. The death of strangers meant nothing, but a loss of control over her voice was humiliating. Now, her latest crime had not gone well, and she was paying the price for it.

The masked figures were gaining on her – damn them anyways. She turned and let her voice cry out, knocking them back, but still they came. She felt a momentary surge of panic claim her when out of the shadows came yet another

figure. This one moved like a dancer, taking one of her foes down. Not letting this chance go to waste, she sang again, blowing the second pursuer out the window. Perhaps he’d catch himself, perhaps he’d die. She hoped the latter.

Her rescuer began to clap his hands, “Bravisimo.” There was no scorn in his voice, and his eyes held only admiration. She lowered her lashes with false modesty.

“Talent such as yours, dear angel, is wasted on such unimaginative crimes.” His voice was powerful, but in a different way, “Come with me, hear me out, and decide for yourself if you wish to perform *my* works?”

She considered it, and then let him take her hand.

Personality/Motivation: Adriana, or Soprano as she’s now known, is a petty, vain woman, who loves herself more than she ever loved her art. She has also developed a taste for killing those that displease her – in a painful fashion. Unfortunately for the world, her mutant nature has allowed her to indulge in that taste. Virtuoso has tried to restrain her from casual killing (with mixed success), more because of his own sense of style than any respect for life. She still attends the opera, and even performs in her secret identity, however nothing quite compares to the blatant use of her power as the masses flee in terror.

Beyond her cruelty and vanity, Adriana’s only motivations are comfort and enjoying the lifestyle she feels she is entitled to. She dislikes petty theft, preferring the big scores, but is not above taking fine jewels from victims should they possess them. Soprano has slept with both Virtuoso (who was at first almost professionally resistant) and later Caterwaul, but she now believes the latter was a mistake, for she doesn’t like being one among many. He’s been warned that if he should be too free with her name, she’ll destroy him as painfully as possible. No fool, he’s kept mum.

Quote: “I give my all for my art; you however, will be giving your life.”

Powers/Tactics: Once unable to fully control her power, Soprano has done a complete turnaround and has such precise control over her voice that she can use her mutant talent to myriad effects. With very little effort she can create devastating blasts of pure sonic energy from her voice. She can modulate her attacks, keying them to a foe’s defenses so better to destroy him. Other sopranos may be able to break glass, but she can break steel. Soprano can even disorient those about her by emitting notes that throw off nearby people’s equilibrium. Her favorite attack is her *Bel Canto di Morte*, and she can grow petulant when facing a foe immune to it.

At Virtuoso's insistence (and after more than a few close calls), Soprano has learned more than merely offensive techniques. Her voice is so powerful and superior to the typical humans that she can put her powers to two or more uses at once (indeed, she sounds a bit like a one woman chorus in battle). She can ride her own songs to the very heights, or use them to deflect attacks aside. While not as resistant to sound as some other sonic villains, she's still somewhat defended against it (her Flash Defense).

In battle, Soprano often takes point or lead. Her vanity would have it no other way, and Virtuoso takes this into account. Her grandstanding would be more of a liability if she was not so effective while doing it. She adores Presence Attacks, despite the danger of having her audience grow jaded. Should some hero engage her in hand-to-hand combat and hurt her significantly, she will reluctantly use her *Overwhelming Performance* to knock him away. Of course, once deafened, they're temporarily immune to her favored way to kill; hence the reluctance.

Campaign Use: Soprano is in no way a "sympathetic villain," and any GM wanting to cast her as such has his work cut out for him. While versatile, she's also one of the more straightforward of The Choir, and since her powers are sonic in nature, she's probably what the PCs will expect if they hear of the team. She is hardly the master villain type, but she is a good candidate for "most hated" by your heroes.

The good news (for GMs) is that she'll hunt a hero at the drop of a hat. PCs who are singers in their secret identity, or have sonic or music-related powers themselves will be seen as rivals to be eliminated. Any hero who wounds her pride will earn her wrath and then some. She might even go after a heroine who is better looking than her. While she thinks herself sophisticated, if she hunts a hero on her own, she's likely going to go at it with all the grace of a bull in a china shop. She might endanger a few innocents to amuse herself and cause the hero to make hard choices, but that's as creative as she'll get about it. Patience has never been one of her virtues, not that she has many.

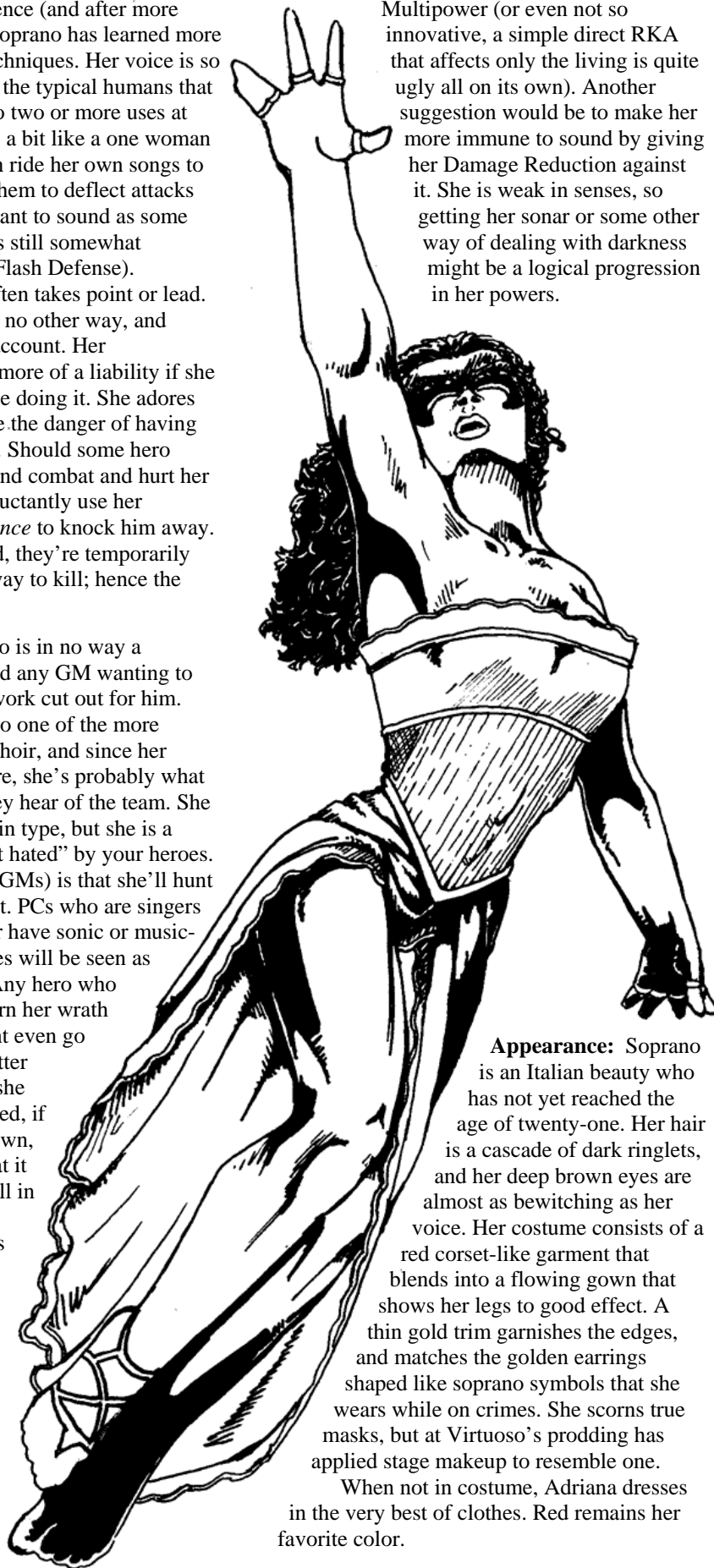
If you wish her to be more powerful, consider some new and innovative slots in her

Multipower (or even not so innovative, a simple direct RKA that affects only the living is quite ugly all on its own). Another suggestion would be to make her more immune to sound by giving her Damage Reduction against it. She is weak in senses, so getting her sonar or some other way of dealing with darkness might be a logical progression in her powers.

Annoyed she does not have the monopoly of Virtuoso's attention since Songbird came along, Soprano decides to kill her. However, Virtuoso would be outraged, so she decides to find away to frame a PC for the murder instead. If a PC has sonic powers, it will be that much easier.

VACUUM

While her powers would not work in a vacuum, unless the GM wills it, Virtuoso does his best to keep The Choir from such areas, and Soprano certainly wouldn't stand for it. Because of this, it's not really much of a limitation and she received no savings for it.



Appearance: Soprano is an Italian beauty who has not yet reached the age of twenty-one. Her hair is a cascade of dark ringlets, and her deep brown eyes are almost as bewitching as her voice. Her costume consists of a red corset-like garment that blends into a flowing gown that shows her legs to good effect. A thin gold trim garnishes the edges, and matches the golden earrings shaped like soprano symbols that she wears while on crimes. She scorns true masks, but at Virtuoso's prodding has applied stage makeup to resemble one.

When not in costume, Adriana dresses in the very best of clothes. Red remains her favorite color.

Soprano

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
10	STR	0	11-	Lift 100 kg; 2d6 HTH [1]
23	DEX	39	14-	OCV: 8/DCV: 8
21	CON	22	13-	
10	BODY	0	11-	
13	INT	3	12-	PER Roll: 12-
11	EGO	2	11-	ECV: 4
25	PRE	15	14-	PRE Attack: 5d6
22	COM	6	13-	
5	PD	3		Total: 18 PD (15 rPD)
8	ED	3		Total: 23 ED (15 rED)
5	SPD	19		Phases: 3, 5, 8, 10, 12
7	REC	2		
50	END	4		
30	STUN	4		

Total Characteristics Points: 122

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

Cost	Powers	END
70	<i>Vocal Gift:</i> Multipower, 70-point Reserve	—
7u	1) <i>Fill the Chamber:</i> EB 7d6, Area Of Effect (8" Cone, +1), No Range (-1/2)	7
7u	2) <i>Mere Practice:</i> EB 9d6, Reduced Endurance (0 END, +1/2)	0
7u	3) <i>Some Effort Required:</i> EB 11d6, Reduced Endurance (1/2 END, +1/4)	4
4u	4) <i>Shattering Note:</i> RKA 4d6+1; Only versus Rigid Nonliving Objects (-1)	8
7u	5) <i>Dizzying Performance:</i> Drain DEX 3d6, Area Of Effect (3" Radius, +1), Personal Immunity (+1/4)	7
5u	6) <i>Bel Canto di Morte:</i> EB 4d6, NND (Defense is Being Deaf, or Hearing Group Flash Defense, +1), Does BODY (+1), No Knockback (-1/4)	6
6u	7) <i>Overwhelming Performance:</i> Hearing Group Flash 10d6, Does Knockback (+1/4), Double Knockback (+3/4)	6
15	<i>The Mantle of Song:</i> Elemental Control, 30-point Powers	—
15	1) <i>Uplifting Performance:</i> Flight 15"	3
15	2) <i>Holding the Crowd at Bay:</i> Force Field (15 PD/15 ED)	3
16	3) <i>Countersong:</i> Missile Deflection (All Ranged Attacks), Ranged (+1), Costs END (-1/2)	4
20	<i>Adjusting for One's Audience:</i> Find Weakness 11- with <i>Vocal Gift</i> Multipower	0
5	<i>Not So Delicate Hearing:</i> Hearing Group Flash Defense (5 points)	0

Talents

3 Perfect Pitch

Skills

3 High Society 14-

3 KS: Music 13-

2 Language: English (Conversation, Italian is Native)

2 Language: French (Conversation)

3 Mimicry 12-

7 PS: Singing 18-

3 Seduction 14-

3 Teamwork 14-

Total Powers & Skills Cost: 228**Total Cost: 350****200+ Disadvantages**

10 Distinctive Features: Mutant (Not Concealable, Unusual Senses)

15 Hunted: Stalker 11- (As Pow, Painful Capture)

10 Hunted: Sapphire 8- (As Pow, Capture)

15 Psychological Limitation: Cruel and Sadistic (Common, Strong)

20 Psychological Limitation: Narcissistic, Must be Center of Attention (Very Common, Strong)

5 Rivalry: Other Singers

15 Social Limitation: Secret ID (Adriana Tabacchi) (Frequently, Major)

55 Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 350

Virtuoso

Background/History: Harrison read the review. He was too well bred, and too strong-willed to shred it as he noted those most damnable of praises within “adequately conceived, and well executed. However, there is nothing truly great in his work.” Adequate, nothing truly great; terms like these stung and tore at him with a gnawing frustration. All his life Harrison had done well at anything he strove for, often even excelling. There seemed to be no skill, no craft, he could not master once he put his mind to it. He never, however, had been dubbed “the best” at anything. Dance, Chess, the playing of instruments, even the martial arts competitions; the prize of being the true virtuoso of a field eluded him. His entire life was one of class, poise, and a quest for perfection, yet until that perfection was reached, he would never be satisfied. Like Tantalus of legend, that which could slake his needs was forever out of reach.

Placing the paper down, Harrison turned on the television to see what snippets of distraction might be gleaned. The insipid newscasters recounted yet another tale of superheroics, and the failure of some villain team to best the Sentinels... again. It was hardly a surprise to Harrison. From what he could gather, the “mastermind” of the team had so alienated his own people that the heroes found and exploited their weaknesses easily.

Why is it, he wondered, that these people never incorporate the needed elements for greatness in their little felonious flocks? Vision, intellect, and knowing how to motivate those under you – those were the things needed for shaping and unifying a group’s artistic endeavor. Why couldn’t that happy balance ever be found for villainy? Some came close, with two out of three, but really, there were only a few even worth mentioning. Not that one would believe that with the praise lavished on even the mediocre supervillain teams.

An almost insane thought occurred to him. Why not? What did he have to lose? A great deal actually, he admitted to himself; his freedom at the very least, his place in polite society, and he’d be risking his life while madmen like that Thunderbird fellow were out there. But what wouldn’t he give, to finally be the best at something? This could be an Art, and art demanded sacrifice.

He began training and preparing the next day.

Personality/Motivation: Harrison Raymond is a man with a desperate need as yet unfulfilled. He has decided to become the very best at something, a relatively specialized field. He wants nothing more than to become a master criminal, mixing art and intelligence to

devastating effect. As Virtuoso, he molds and crafts The Choir through any method that works: seduction, manipulation, and the garnering of loyalty. He picked or at least permits each member to be among them, and sees himself as the maestro directing them, and thus their crimes must be grand performances.

Rich or upper class people are never crazy, they’re just eccentric. Following a similar logic; Harrison isn’t a sociopath, he’s just dedicated to the craft of crime. Driven by his own desperate lunge to be at the zenith of some profession, his love of music, beauty, and artistry have blended with his natural arrogance and creative genius to make Virtuoso the man he is today. When he prevents others from killing, it’s not because he cares about life, but because it doesn’t feel right or fit the needs of the performance. The important thing to remember about Virtuoso is he sees everyone in terms of what they can do to help or hinder him. His sheer presence and understanding of human nature allow him to gauge and use people. He’s loyal and generous in return... until it risks his vision. Then all deals are off.

Quote: “Enter the Heroes, about to give their all; unaware it will not be enough. My friends, you star in a tragedy already pre-scripted.”

Powers/Tactics: What Virtuoso lacks in superhuman powers, he compensates for by resources, tactical knack, some gadgetry, sheer charisma, and years of training driven by artistic obsession. His hand-to-hand fighting style is a blend of various martial arts and dance. Virtuoso carries on his belt and other parts of his garb throwing weapons that he uses for foes at range that he cannot or would not wish to close in on.

The weapons in question are shaped like musical symbols. The attacks vary from sharp notes that live up to their name, flats that release sonic waves, whole notes that grow to entrap foes within them, half notes that simply club a foe at a distance, and eighth notes that release a sonic pitch that makes it that much more difficult to stay conscious. The quarter note, however, is a particular favorite. When it strikes, it breaks into micro particles that are quickly breathed in by the target, and rob him of his voice. Not only does this make it useful for silencing an opposing team leader, Virtuoso finds stealing a voice from one who’d oppose him “poetic justice.”

Virtuoso has also blended in his love of theatrics with his other more protective gear. His flowing cloak makes it difficult to draw a bead upon him and his mask has protections of its own as well as night vision lenses. The entire wardrobe is reinforced to defend him from bullets and the like. No doubt, with his wealth and connections he could get more advanced

VIRTUOSO PLOT SEEDS

Virtuoso wishes for The Choir to tour Europe, but realizes they are no match for Eurostar. It galls him that his polished performances are given less credit and attention than the mere terrorism of that psychopath Fiacho. So, using his resources he attempts to locate Fiacho, and drop some hints to the PCs to remove his rival for him.

One of the female PCs (or a female DNPC of a PC if none of the characters are women) is captured by The Choir after intruding on a “performance.” Rather than have her harmed, he instead has dinner with her at his hidden base and is a perfect gentleman. Is he merely lonely? Is there an honest attraction on his part? And can she turn this to her advantage and learn the secrets of The Choir then get the heck out of there?

Deciding some superheroes have finally gotten on his nerves once too often, Virtuoso uses his own formidable acting skills to impersonate certain do-gooders, and some technology from ARGENT to mimic their powers. While the ruse is not 100% perfect, it’s good enough to fool most of the Press, and much of the public.

Virtuoso gives the performance of his life as one by one he tries to sink the reputation of the PCs.

gear, but he's highly reticent when it comes to over-reliance on such. His foes must know that in the end, the master masters more than the instruments he uses.

Tactically, Virtuoso is very canny. Despite his arrogance, he is wise enough to know when to play spoiler and often assists or backs up the members of his team instead of stealing center stage. He directs, they perform, and their successes *are* his, so has no problems hanging back (often in the shadows) until he is needed. One of his first goals in any battle against a superhero team is to try to destroy their coordination and cooperation with each other. Given the various methods The Choir has of deafening, separating, and otherwise causing chaos, this is not a hard task. On the other hand, he will try to keep his team in perfect harmony. This, given the membership, can be a wee bit trickier.

If Virtuoso has a failing in his stratagems, it is his stubborn insistence in doing things with artistry. His love of panache does not keep him from sounding a retreat for his team, but he may succumb to the tendency to give a grandiose speech or even begin to obsesses over besting those who ruined The Choir's "performance."

Campaign Use: Virtuoso is a hubris ridden man who is self aware enough to be frustrated by his own secondary standings in every endeavor he's ever tried. He is intended to be a master villain and team leader that mixes artistic genius with ruthless ambition to great effect and style. He is a charismatic leader that actually does look after his team, even though that has more to do with his pride than any true affection. A GM can find him useful either fighting in the line side by side with his underlings, or turn him completely into the power behind the curtains, unseen and even unreachable until the final grand finale of a storyline.

As a hunter, Virtuoso is quite dangerous. This is, after all, a man of many skills and resources even before he decided to seek acclaim as a villain. He's also quite concerned with the reputation of both himself, and The Choir. While not juvenile enough to swear vengeance on anyone who merely insults him, continued

ruination of his plans will not be tolerated and dealt with lethally if need be. The quarry will not only have Virtuoso, but the entire Choir after them. Fortunately for those he does hunt, his love of style may cause his methods to be more convoluted or elaborate than they need to be. Defeating his opponent may not be enough, a stage upon which to do it may be required.

Despite being built on the most points of this team, many of Virtuoso's points are tied up in skills and perks, so one shouldn't count on him standing toe to toe with an entire team of PCs on his own in raw battle, despite martial prowess. Should a GM wish, the various gadgets and combat skills could be removed entirely, making him completely behind the scenes, a mastermind of musically themed crimes who is quite vulnerable if ever caught and cornered. Should you wish to raise his threat level and make him more powerful, feel free to give him yet more gadgets, resources, or even a boost to his characteristics.

However, he should never be "the best" at any one thing, be it hand-to-hand combat or a humble knowledge skill. At his core, such limitations are what drives and motivates Virtuoso. By all rights, he should not be a supervillain. There is no great need for vengeance, he doesn't need money, and he has the respect of his peers in all he tries. However, that arrogance is fueled by a great insecurity and pettiness. His unfulfilled drives gall him. A GM could portray him as one who, if he could only come to accept his good fortune, would be a great man, but instead reduces himself to a small man attempting to cast a very large shadow.

Appearance: Virtuoso dresses in a dramatic costume, akin to the more elegant guise found in the Phantom of the Opera style save with a cowl substituting for a hat. The colors of his wardrobe depend on his mood, and the theme (if any) of the crime being pulled for he has more than one costume.

Out of costume, Harrison is a tall, brown haired man appearing in his early to mid thirties, with a commanding gaze and an air of class about him. He prefers to wear the best.

Virtuoso

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
20	STR	10	13-	Lift 400 kg; 4d6 HTH [2]
26	DEX	48	14-	OCV: 9/DCV: 9(11)
23	CON	26	14-	
12	BODY	4	11-	
23	INT	13	14-	PER Roll: 14-
18	EGO	16	11-	ECV: 6
30	PRE	20	13-	PRE Attack: 6d6
18	COM	4	13-	
8	PD	4		Total: 16 PD (8 rPD)
8	ED	3		Total: 18 ED (10 rED)
6	SPD	24		Phases: 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12
10	REC	2		
46	END	0		
42	STUN	8		

Total Characteristics Points: 182

Movement: Running: 9"/18"
Leaping: 6"/12"
Swimming: 4"/8"

Cost	Powers	END
37	<i>Music Themed Arsenal:</i> Multipower 45-point, 30 Charges (+1/4), OIF (-1/2)	-
1u	1) <i>Sharp:</i> HKA 1d6 (2d6 with STR), Penetrating (+1/2), Ranged (+1/2), OAF (-1), Range Based on STR (-1/4)	[30]
2u	2) <i>Flat:</i> Energy Blast 6d6 (versus ED), Area Of Effect (1 Hex, +1/2), OAF (-1), Ranged Based on STR (-1/4)	[30]
2u	3) <i>Whole' note:</i> Entangle 4d6, 5 DEF, Can Be Missile Deflected (-1/4), Cannot form Barriers (-1/4), OAF (-1), Range Based on STR (-1/4)	[30]
2u	4) <i>Half Note:</i> Energy Blast 9d6 (versus PD), OAF (-1), Range Based on STR (-1/4)	[30]
2u	5) <i>Quarter Note:</i> Voice Flash 15d6, Does Not Affect Desolid (-1/4), OAF (-1), Range Based on STR (-1/4), LS: No Need to Breathe and Certain Masks May Act as Free Flash Defense or Even Grant Full Immunity (-0)	[30]
2u	6) <i>Eighth Note:</i> Drain STUN 3d6, Ranged (+1/2), OAF (-1), Range Based on STR (-1/4)	[30]
23	<i>Protective Costume:</i> Armor (8 PD/10 ED), Hardened (+1/4), OIF (Costume, -1/2)	0
3	<i>Fluttering Cloak I:</i> Lack Of Weakness (-6) for Resistant Defenses; OAF (Cloak and Cowl, -1)	0
5	<i>Fluttering Cloak II:</i> +2 DCV Levels, OAF (Cloak, -1)	0
3	<i>Protective Mask:</i> Sight Group Flash Defense (5 points), OIF (-1/2)	0
3	<i>Optional Night Lens:</i> Nightvision, OIF (-1/2)	0

8	<i>Earplugs:</i> Hearing Group Flash Defense (10 points), IIF (-1/4)	0
6	<i>Athletic Prowess I:</i> Running +3" (9" Total)	2
2	<i>Athletic Prowess II:</i> Leaping +2" (6" Total)	
2	<i>Athletic Prowess III:</i> Swimming +2" (4" Total)	1

Martial Arts: Intense Combat Training

Maneuver	OCV	DCV	Notes
4 Block	+2	+2	Block, Abort
4 Disarm	-1	+1	50 STR Disarm
3 Leg sweep	+2	-1	9d6 Strike, Target Falls
4 Release	+0	+1	8d6+v/5, Target Falls
4 Open Palm	+0	+2	10d6 Strike
4 Side Step	—	+5	Dodge, Abort
4 Slip Away	+0	+0	55 STR Escape
5 Spinning Kick	-2	+1	12d6 Strike
16	+4 Damage Classes (already added in)		

Perks

20	Base: Team HQ
20	Contacts: Various in High Society and Musical Related Areas
10	Money: Wealthy

Skills

20	+2 Overall
16	+2 with All Combat
3	Acrobatics 14-
3	Acting 15-
3	Analyze Combat Technique 14-
3	Breakfall 14-
2	Disguise 11-
3	High Society 15-
3	Linguist
2	1) Language: American Sign Language (Fluent with "Accent")
2	2) Language: French (Fluent with Accent)
2	3) Language: Italian (Fluent with Accent)
1	4) Language: Japanese (Conversation)
2	5) Language: Portuguese (Fluent with Accent)
2	Mimicry 11-
3	Oratory 15-
3	Persuasion 13-
3	PS: Composition 15-
3	PS: Dancing 14-
3	PS: Musician 15-
3	PS: Singing 15-
3	Seduction 15-
3	Stealth 14-
2	SS: Psychology 11-
5	Tactics 15-
3	Teamwork 14-
3	Scholar

Virtuoso

- 2 1) KS: Literature 14-
- 2 2) KS: Music 14-
- 2 3) KS: Superheroes 14-
- 2 4) KS: The Superhuman World 14-
- 2 5) KS: Supervillains 14-
- 2 6) KS: Theatre 14-

Total Powers & Skills Cost: 318

Total Cost: 500

200+ Disadvantages

- 20 Hunted: PRIMUS 8- (Mo Pow, NCI, Capture)
- 10 Hunted: Stalker 11- (Less Pow, Painful Capture)
- 15 Psychological Limitation: Sees Crime as an Art Form (Very Common, Moderate)
- 15 Psychological Limitation: Determined to be "The Best" at Something (Common, Strong)
- 15 Psychological Limitation: Loves Beauty, Art, and Fine Music (Common, Strong)
- 5 Reputation: Leader of The Choir, 8-
- 10 Rivalry: with Other Villain Team Leaders (Professional, Some in Superior Position)
- 15 Social Limitation: Secret ID (Harrison Rayburn) (Frequently, Major)
- 195 Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 500

