

PARAGODS

DO THE IMPOSSIBLE...CHANGE THE WORLD!



A MUTANTS & MASTERMINDS CAMPAIGN SETTING



PARAGONS

A GREEN RONIN PRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to a world where "reality" doesn't mean quite the same thing it used to, where the word "impossible" is used conditionally when it has any meaning at all, and where you *will* believe a man can fly, because there's a good chance of seeing it on the evening news. Welcome to a world of normal people with paranormal powers, the world of *Paragons*.

When planning releases for the second edition of *Mutants & Masterminds*, we realized one place to expand the game line was settings. If *M&M* was to be a true broad-based superhero roleplaying game, its support should reflect the broad range of super-powered fiction over the years; not just comics and prose, but also popular television and film. *Paragons* was conceived early on as a new setting to compliment and contrast with the four-color *Freedom City* superhero setting. *Paragons* would tap a different vein of super-powered fiction, one that asks "what happens when you give otherwise normal people, in a world much like our own, the kind of power possessed by characters in comic books?"

Paragons turned out to be some time in coming; other projects took priority with the launch of the second edition of *M&M*, particularly more rules-heavy books like *Mastermind's Manual* and *Ultimate Power*. Still, the concept of *Paragons* continued to percolate on the back burner, and we did those other books with an eye towards things we could use in this setting.

Paragons also needed a diverse and, frankly, kind of weird setting. It was a great opportunity to play around with ideas for characters, powers, and factions that didn't suit a four-color comic book world like *Freedom City*, the sort of things that wouldn't show up in most comics, but would likely happen if real people had super-powers. Therefore, we recruited a diverse team of freelancers to populate and flesh out the paranormal world. You'll find the fruits of their efforts in **Chapter Four** and **Chapter Five**, and we think they offer a wealth of options for your own *Paragons* games.

Options are, in many ways, what *Paragons* is all about, both as a game setting and as a theme within the setting itself. With power comes a greater range of choices, many of them difficult choices. We wanted *Paragons* to be a world where the players helped set the tone and direction and their characters could make decisions that would alter the world.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

In many RPG books (including more than a few *M&M* books), this section would probably be better entitled "What's In This Book," but *Paragons* is different in that you really *do* need a guide on how to use the material you'll find in these pages.

The reason is this: *Paragons* does not present a fully defined setting, assuming certain events, particular power-players, and factions with pre-defined goals. Why? Because a big element of the genre *Paragons* seeks to emulate is *discovery*: The thrill of being among the first paranormals to discover and use their powers, the excitement of pursuing the mysteries of the setting: Finding out about antagonists and allies firsthand, uncovering secrets and conspiracies. Those are difficult things to do when everything about the

world is a given, already established and available for anyone to read about in the source material.

Therefore, *Paragons* takes a somewhat different approach to setting source material. Instead of a fully fleshed-out world with all the pieces already in place, this book gives you a framework, and all the pieces, and lets you (and your players) assemble them however you want. In some cases, there are even multiple pieces to go into the same "place" in the setting; you choose what (if anything) goes there and what that means for your *Paragons* world.

Chapter One through **Chapter Three** lays out the framework, the skeleton of the *Paragons* setting. It tells you the broad base assumptions about the world and how they affect things. You'll find many of these elements can be interpreted in a number of different ways; this is deliberate, and factors into the options for the world discussed in **Chapter Six**. The only reason these chapters provide any general assumptions about the setting at all is to offer some common ground; otherwise the options would be too broad for any book this size to contain them all!

In **Chapter One** you'll find a discussion of paranormals: Their powers, origins, and capabilities, largely from the perspective of someone confronted with the strange new phenomenon of paragons. This chapter also discusses some issues paranormals and their powers may create in the world, offering inspiration for events in your own series.

Chapter Two broadens the perspective to the world and the effect paragons can have on it. What is it like to live in a world where the fantastic and "impossible" are daily realities of life? How do nations, cultures, governments, corporations, and other bodies react to the paragons among them? What of paranormal phenomena that exist but *are not* directly connected to any known paragon? This chapter looks at the framework of the world itself and the "holes" where later pieces of the setting may fit.

Chapter Three deals with the largest framework of the setting: The otherworldly realm of the Imageria. Is it "just" a veridical hallucination brought into being by paranormal powers or is it the source of those powers, and perhaps even the entire universe? Does it prove the existence of the supernatural or demonstrate all such beliefs are equally unreal?

Once the first three chapters set up the framework, **Chapter Four** and **Chapter Five** give you the pieces to go into it.

Chapter Four looks at factions involving paragons to one degree or another. They can serve as patrons, allies, antagonists, or simply background color for your setting. You can elevate some factions over others, making them centerpieces of your series, downplay or eliminate ones that don't fit your conception of the world, and customize them all to your heart's content.

Chapter Five is a casting-call, featuring a variety of characters suitable for use in a *Paragons* series in various roles, from mentor, ally, or student to rival or antagonist, from world-shaking power level to fairly ordinary people with some very unusual "talents." As with **Chapter Four**, you pick and choose which characters to include, and how they interact with the setting and the player

characters. Give some of these characters important roles in your series, relegate others to supporting cast or "background color" and ignore the rest as you see fit.

Chapter Six brings it all together by discussing in detail how to assemble the pieces in the framework to create your own *Paragons* series. It looks at diverse questions; from the origin of paranormal powers to the meaning of the Imageria and the place of the various factions and characters in the world. It also outlines a variety of approaches to the setting, each with a different style and emphasis for a different kind of series. With the tools in this chapter, you can create numerous *Paragons* games, each with its own distinct flavor and style.

THE FUTURE THAT MAY BE

Many characters, organizations, and events in this book discuss the past, since it's difficult to talk about such things without putting them into context. However, these past events are placed in broad, general time frames ("a few years ago," "some time past," "in the recent past," and so forth). There's also nothing that says they have to be the past of your *Paragons* series. In fact, they might be the future, depending on when you decide your game takes place.

For example, while the Initiative is described as a full-fledged organization in **Chapter Four**, it may or may not be when your *Paragons* series begins. Perhaps the Initiative forms in response to the player characters' actions in early adventures, if they are among the first paranormals. Conversely, the organization may have existed for some time by the start of the game, either because paranormals have been around a while, or simply because the Initiative had some sort of foreknowledge or awareness of secret paragons before their existence became widespread.

This approach means the "history" in this book isn't just the dead past, but potential history waiting to happen in your own game. You decide how far along any given character, faction, or facet of the *Paragons* setting is in your own series, as best suits your plans and the needs of your story. Changing where elements of the setting are in their respective histories is just another tool for customizing the series to suit your own vision.

SO NOW...

The world of *Paragons* is in your hands, to do with as you will. You might want to read through the **Terminology** section that follows, then jump right into **Chapter One** through **Chapter Three** to get an overall feel for the structure and style of the setting before heading on to **Chapter Six** for discussion of how you can construct it and the kinds of games you can run, or **Chapter Four** and **Chapter Five** for the important power-players and characters you can use in the setting.

If your intention is to use the characters, groups, and rules information in this book in an existing or wholly original *Mutants & Masterminds* game, you'll probably want to skip the first couple chapters to get to those parts right away and come back and check out ideas for a *Paragons* series later.

Whatever you do, and however you choose to use this book, you'll find plenty of suggestions for ways to customize and change the *Paragons* world to suit your needs, and numerous series frameworks and adventure ideas to fire your imagination about a world not unlike our own, where the impossible isn't necessarily so, and some people have the power to change things in surprising new ways. This is the story of *Paragons*, and it is yours to tell.

TERMINOLOGY

Paragons uses various terms and jargon, usually to refer to elements of the setting. These terms are presented here for easy reference. Gamemasters may find including some or all of these terms in the setting helps to put players into the right frame of mind and gives the world its own unique flavor, different from other superhero campaign settings.

ACME device: An "impossible" piece of technology made by a paragon that functions in spite of known physical laws and scientific information, but is usually dependent on a paragon's powers to work. ACME devices are named after the maker of impossible gizmos in children's cartoons.

awaken: To activate or stimulate the development of a paranormal's power, becoming paranormal is *awakening*; a more common term for this is *breakout*.

breakout: To become a fully functional or capable paranormal. "Breaking-out" is the moment when a paragon's powers or paranormal abilities surface. "The Breakout" (the definite article) is the initial mass breakout, when the first paranormals manifested their powers. Some call a particularly traumatic breakout a "freak-out" (especially if it results in freakish or unusual traits). Less common is "awakening," often used by paragons with more spiritual or mystical overtones.

break-through: A deliberately triggered breakout, involving a peak experience that "breaks through" from the normal to the paranormal. Break-throughs are extremely rare, most attempts to trigger a breakout fail (often with tragic consequences). See *origin chaser*.

centipede effect: The theory that a paranormal's powers work best (or at all) when the user doesn't overanalyze them. This is related to the *Dumbo effect*.

channel: A paranormal medium capable of "channeling" disembodied intelligences so they can act or communicate through the channel's body. The personality of the channel is usually suppressed while channeling. See also *walkin*.

Dumbo effect: The theory that a paranormal's powers work because they believe (on some level) that they do. Named after the cartoon character that believed it could fly, so it could.

ectoplasm: A strange "primal material" produced by some paranormals, also called *prima materia* by the more esoteric and mystical sorts. It most often appears in its "raw" form as a silvery liquid or silver or white mist and in any case defies material or physical analyses of its composition or nature.

eidolon: Literally "shadow" or "image," an eidolon is an archetype or "higher" being found in the Imageria. Eidolons may be actual gods (or godlike beings) or "merely" reflections of deep archetypes of the collective unconscious. Some paragons have the ability to interact with eidolons, while a few claim to be eidolons (or beings that would be classified as such).

Fortean: Named for Charles Fort, famous scholar of the strange. It refers to strange or unexplained phenomena without any apparent paranormal agent involved; almost synonymous with "weird" or "unexplained" in *Paragons*.

freak-out: A breakout resulting in crazed behavior or freakish or unusual physical traits.

Imageria: The realm of potential, related to the collective unconscious, essentially the imagination made manifest. It's accessible to some paragons and *may* be the source of their powers (or they might be the source of its existence, no one's sure). See **Chapter Three** for more information.

impossible: Something a paragon hasn't done yet.

normal: Non-paranormal. Sometimes used ironically or derisively by paragons to describe non-paranormals, also used proudly by non-paranormals to describe themselves in relation to "not normal" or "unnatural" paranormals. "Norm" and "norman" are common slang terms among paragons.

origin: A common term for the circumstances under which a paranormal first breaks out or manifests powers. Sometimes used as a synonym for breakout (see *breakout*).

origin chaser: A person who deliberately tries to trigger an origin, hoping to become a paranormal. More than a few origin chasers end up dead or seriously injured, and the practice is commonly viewed as a creative means of committing suicide.

para-: Prefix meaning "above" or "beyond," thus *paranormal* means "beyond normal" or supernatural. Since the Breakout, the prefix is commonly applied to create terms dealing specifically with paragons in one fashion or another.

para-Christian: Also *Xtian*, in slang use. Common name for a member of the Church of Christ, Paragon, which believes Jesus Christ was a historical paragon, and modern paragons are the chosen of God (and heralds of the divine elevation of humanity). More broadly applied to any Christian sect with theology strongly connected to paranormals.

paragon: Common term for a paranormal, often applied with a degree of irony.

paranormal: Scientific name for abilities beyond the understanding of science, and the people who possess them.

parascience: Most branches of science have elements studying the paranormal. *Parapsychology* studies the mind and "psionic" powers. *Paraphysics* is the study of paranormal powers acting upon the physical world. *Parabiology* involves paranormal biologies and forms of life (although no biological differences have been isolated as yet). *Parapsychiatry* is the study of mental health among paranormals. *Paratheology* is the study of the effect of paranormals on religious and spiritual belief as well as the role of paranormals and their powers in faith and religious doctrine. Parascientific disciplines—even "established" ones like parapsychology—are in their infancy, with a lot of questions but few, if any, answers as yet.

parasensory: Also *extrasensory*. Sensory information that comes by means other than the normal five senses possessed by most people.

paratechnology: A more scholarly term for *ACME devices*, technology dependent on paranormal powers to function.

peak moment: The precise moment at which a normal human has a breakout and becomes paranormal. A peak moment can be anything from a feeling of joy or fear to an extreme sense of Zen-like calm. An individual's state of mind during a peak moment often has a significant impact on the type of abilities developed and their power level.

prop: A phrase, activity, or item of some type that some paranormals must say, perform, or have in order to use their powers.

psionic: Paranormal powers of, or affecting, the mind. It's possible all paranormal powers are psionic in nature; generally, however, the term refers specifically to "mental" powers like telepathy.

quiet breakout: A breakout that lacks a stressful or dramatic trigger. Quiet breakouts are generally achieved during moments of bliss, peace, and calm. In all other ways it's the same as any other breakout.

reality comics: A genre of comic books and "graphic fiction" based on actual paranormals; the biggest publishing trend in modern comic books.

savant: A paranormal with superhuman capabilities in a particular skill. There is a very fine line between savants and highly skilled normals, so fine, in fact, that it's unclear exactly where it lies.

shutdown: When a paragon's powers cease working, temporarily or permanently, often due to a crisis of confidence or similar mental impairment.

sleeper: Also *sleepwalker*. Paranormal term for a non-paranormal, one who has not "awakened" like a paragon has. Not in common use, it crops up more among paranormals of a mystical bent.

spark: To trigger a paranormal's breakout is to "spark" or "jump-start" that paranormal. "Awaken" is also used in conjunction with awakening.

spark-party: Also a *spark-rave* or a *breakout*: a group event where people attempt to provoke a breakout. Most spark-parties involve extreme-sports type challenges, drugs, psychedelic music, pyrotechnics, or all of the above, and most of them end in injury or death for one or more of the participants.

spook: A spy, particularly a paranormal working in intelligence or espionage.

stealth paragon: An individual with paranormal abilities that are impressive, but not obviously superhuman, allowing the paragon to "pass" as a normal (albeit a highly capable one).

super-science: A common term for scientific discoveries or technologies made by paranormals. The latter are sometimes known as *ACME devices*. Some make a distinction between "normal" science and technology developed by paranormals and true "super-science," which is technology dependent on a paragon's power in some fashion to function.

walk-in: Also *avatar*. Where a different personality or "spirit" appears to possess someone accompanied by the manifestation of paranormal powers. Some walk-ins claim to be gods, spirits, or aliens, while others believe they are psychological conditions like dissociative disorder or multiple personalities.



CHAPTER ONE: POWERS & ABILITIES

Throughout history, humanity has told stories of extraordinary people with powers and abilities beyond those of ordinary, everyday men and women. In the distant past, these people were epic heroes, demigods, or saints. In more recent years, they were characters in pulp and speculative fiction, comic books, and television and film. As the stories of such paragons shifted from myth and legend to popular culture and entertainment, it became more and more clear that they were not real, just power-fantasies and archetypes...until now.

Now, paragons walk the Earth: Men and women who can change the course of mighty rivers or bend steel in their bare hands. Are they the demigods and heroes of legend returned to a world where they were almost forgotten or are they something new, a tremendous step forward in the evolution and development of life? No one can say for certain but, whoever or whatever they are, there can be no doubt that paranormals have forever changed the world around them, and "normal" may never truly be normal again.

WHAT IS "PARANORMAL"?

One of the great difficulties posed by paranormals is where to place the dividing line between "normal" and "paranormal." So far as anyone has been able to determine, there is no clear, objective difference between a normal person (one without any paranormal abilities) and a paranormal who has broken-out and regularly displays paranormal abilities, other than the paranormal abilities themselves. All tests—physical or psychological—thus far show no discernable differences between normal and paranormal apart from the fact that paranormals can apparently do the impossible.

This means it is often unclear whether or not someone is a paranormal. For example, no recorded athlete had run a mile in under four minutes until Roger Bannister came along in 1954 and did it in three minutes and 59.4 seconds. He did something no human being was known to have done before that point: Was he a paranormal?

"...WITH POWERS AND ABILITIES FAR BEYOND THOSE OF MORTAL MEN!"

-SUPERMAN TELEVISION SERIES

Are all those who have broken his record since paranormal as well? Likewise, are genius-level intellects or people with extraordinary talents in art or mathematics paranormals? It's difficult to say.

Generally speaking, the term "paranormal" is reserved for abilities *clearly* beyond normal human capabilities. Some even limit it to abilities or feats that violate scientific laws as we know them, so-called "miracles" or "supernatural" powers. These are clearly paranormal. Other, lesser capabilities *may* be paranormal or simply peak-level "normal" abilities.

One consequence of the unclear division between normal and paranormal has been the theory that all humans (perhaps even all living or thinking creatures) have at least the potential for paranormal abilities, that is, we are all "paranormal" to one degree or another. Paragons just have an unusual or nascent talent for tapping into this buried potential. This theory is common among evolutionists who believe paragons are a new stage in the development of intelligence or life, and religions with theology claiming some sort of spiritual "evolution" or personal development can lead to paranormal abilities.

Another effect of the vague nature of paranormals is the so-called "stealth paragon," someone who has paranormal abilities and either conceals them, appearing normal, or doesn't even know about them! Such paragons probably had a "quiet" breakout and were able to pass off their experience as the rush of a peak-experience, or a freak one-time stroke of luck, or something similar. Their powers are also presumably subtle enough to go undetected; stealth paragons tend towards enhanced normal abilities and things like unusual inventiveness, or the like, rather than overt miracles.

Given these things, the exact number of paranormals in the world is difficult to determine with any certainty. The assumption is they are relatively rare, approximately one in a million or so, perhaps less, perhaps a bit more. Until there's a clear means of detecting them, other than the exercise of paranormal powers, there's no way to know for sure.

BREAKOUT

Paragons experience what is commonly called a "breakout" when they first manifest their paranormal potential. Breakouts seem to most often occur as a reaction to some powerful stimulus where the latent paranormal feels intense, primal emotion—terror, rage, lust—pure fight-or-flight survival instincts. A few paragons who've had "quiet" breakouts say they came from experiencing true bliss or through peaceful meditation, but generally breakouts are dramatic and forceful.

A breakout often happens in reaction to a situation that provokes the necessary emotions (and their associated bio-chemical

reactions). In particular, near-death situations commonly trigger breakouts in latent paranormals; the powerful rush of fear, excitement, adrenaline, and such "pushes" the latent to breakout and become paranormal.

ORIGIN CHASERS

Given what is known about breakouts, some people try to deliberately trigger a breakout and become paranormal by inducing situations and feelings associated with a breakout. They figure,



under the right circumstances, they will manifest paranormal powers if they have the potential (and, according to some, *everyone* has the potential to varying degrees). Such people are known as "origin chasers" or sometimes "sparkers," trying to "spark" an awakening in order to become paranormal.

Unfortunately, the kinds of situations associated with breakouts can be extremely dangerous, and some origin chasers believe they have to be as genuine as possible in order to work. So a "life-threatening" situation with no risk of actual harm isn't enough. Some origin chasers try extreme sports: Things like skydiving or bungee jumping, but self-proclaimed experts believe you have to jump out of a plane or off a bridge *without* a parachute or a cord to catch you, an all-or-nothing risk for glory.

Naturally each year this results in multiple deaths and in many more permanent injuries from failed breakout attempts. The darkly humorous joke this is truly "evolution in action," but authorities and mental health professionals worry about and warn against the dangers of origin chasing, trying to educate the public about the risks of trying to provoke a breakout and the complete uncertainty regarding paranormal potential. In some cases, extreme origin chasers have been hospitalized or institutionalized for refusing to stop attempting to become paranormal and endangering themselves and others.

SPARK PARTIES

An extreme example of the origin chaser phenomenon is the so-called "spark party," an event where a group of origin chasers or thrill-seekers get together and cooperate to try and provoke a paranormal breakout (and often have some fun and excitement in the process).

The typical spark party is either a group of young people (teens or early 20s) who engage in either "extreme sports" or 24-hour parties (complete with heavy drug and alcohol use) to push their endurance to the limits, or cults

using either "arcane" rituals or suicide-pact methods to facilitate their "ascension" to a "higher state of being." In all cases, the results are usually tragic, ending in one or more deaths, with the survivors psychologically scarred by the experience. Some spark parties have killed all the participants.

What's worse, on a very rare occasion, an origin chaser or spark party is *successful* in producing a true paranormal. Those who study paragons believe this is simply a matter of random chance: Someone with the right paranormal potential is exposed to the necessary stimulus to breakout. The problem is there's no way of knowing who has latent potential until a breakout actually happens, so origin chasing remains incredibly dangerous. The rare successes only encourage hopeful would-be paragons to continue pursuing their dream, even if it means risking their lives: better a slim chance to be special than a lifetime of mediocrity, they claim.

SHUTTING-DOWN

It's apparently possible for paragons to *stop* being paranormal at some point, reverting to normal human beings once more. In essence, the paragon's paranormal abilities or powers stop working; he or she loses all paranormal traits. This has come to be known as "shutting-down" and may or may not be a permanent condition.

Like all things about paragons and their abilities, the causes of a shutdown are unknown. Apparently conditions similar to those that cause breakouts can also cause shutdowns: Extreme stress, near-death experiences, trauma, and so forth. This includes severely overtaxing a paragon's powers or physical or mental endurance.

Crises of confidence have also been known to cause shutdowns, such as a paragon dealt a severe setback or suffering from serious self-doubt.

In some cases, shutdown is temporary and the paragon's powers return after a time, either after the removal of the triggering situation or some time later (often following rest and recuperation). In other cases, the paragon's powers have yet to return, and the shutdown may be permanent. Some paragons have even undergone a second breakout following a major or lengthy shutdown, where they gain enhanced or even completely different paranormal powers.

Believers in the psychological aspects of paranormal powers (see **Paranormal Psychology**) think shutdowns are primarily psychological in nature, resulting from mental fatigue or trauma impairing a paragon's abilities. This same theory often goes on to say that some paragons, rather than shutting-down in response to trauma, actually experience *enhanced* capabilities, but at the expense of the paranormal's mental health.



PARANORMAL ABILITIES

What can paragons do? It's a difficult question to answer. The best possible answer thus far is a catalog of things paragons *have* done, since no two paranormals have exactly the same capabilities and it's unclear even how many there are or what the ultimate limits on their powers may be. "Impossible" has come to be redefined—at least according to some—as something a paragon hasn't managed to do...yet. As the study and understanding of paranormals continues, more is learned about the limits of their powers. For now, this section discusses general trends and observations about paragons and their abilities.

PHYSICAL ABILITIES

Some paragons have enhanced or truly superhuman physical traits, particularly things like strength, speed, agility, endurance, or durability.

Note that a number of physical abilities displayed by paragons, particularly superhuman strength, may be classified as "miracles," given they often defy our understanding of things like leverage, mass, gravity, and so forth.

For example, many super-strong paragons can do things like lift cars, trains, even entire buildings or bridges, without having these objects collapse or crumble under their own weight, or having the structure on which the paragon stands collapse under the increased weight: A paragon has picked up a 10-ton truck by its bumper and lifted it overhead while standing on a stage without either falling through the stage or having the bumper simply snap off in his hands. That's saying nothing about issues like any human-shaped and -sized being, no matter how strong, exerting sufficient leverage to lift that much weight without being anchored to the ground in some way.

The reasons for this remain as unknown as those for other paranormal powers: Speculations abound about some sort of telekinetic ability that acts on lifted objects as a whole and keeps them together, or a localized ability to "edit" physical laws, making the impossible possible, and allowing a paranormal to almost literally "click and drag" a physical object through space, but these are nothing more than theories at this point, and some do not wholly explain the things paragons can do.

The same is true of other enhanced physical abilities: There are paragons able to run faster than the speed of sound, in spite of having apparently normal muscle and bone tissue, which shouldn't be able to withstand the stresses of moving at such incredible speeds. Paranormal subjects exhibit tremendous resistance to injury, literally able to flatten bullets against their flesh, which otherwise remains pliable and apparently normal to the touch. Some super-strong paragons can punch holes in concrete without harming their hands, but display no other particular resistance to injury.

There's considerable speculation as to where the line between "normal" and "paranormal" physical abilities should be drawn. Experts believe some "stealth" paragons could have impressive, but not superhuman, levels of ability. It's impossible to say how many talented athletes may actually be paranormals.

MENTAL ABILITIES

Paranormals display a number of enhanced mental faculties, including memory, calculation, speed of processing information, acquisition of new learning, and so forth. Some of these mental abilities border on the parasensory (see the following).

For example, there are paranormals able to perform mathematics as quickly as any computer, or absorb information from text as quickly as they can turn the pages or have it scroll past on a display. Other paragons display near perfect memorization, able to accurately describe anything they have experienced, even momentarily, with complete accuracy. Conventional intelligence testing rates some paranormals with IQs higher than ever seen in the history of the testing method, sometimes by orders of magnitude.

A particular paranormal mental capability is heightened inventiveness. There are some paragons capable of designing and building technological devices more advanced than present knowledge and techniques allow. In some cases these are amazing syntheses and advancements involving existing technology. In others, the results are so-called "ACME devices" or paratechnology (see **ACME Devices** under **Power and Belief**, following).

Also loosely classified as paranormal mental ability are enhanced or even superhuman levels of social skill, paranormals able to persuade people of nearly anything, or influencing people on a wide scale. This capability edges strongly into certain parasensory abilities or miracles, but again the dividing line is unclear. Is it "paranormal mind control" or just hitherto unknown levels of charisma, or a similar intangible human quality?

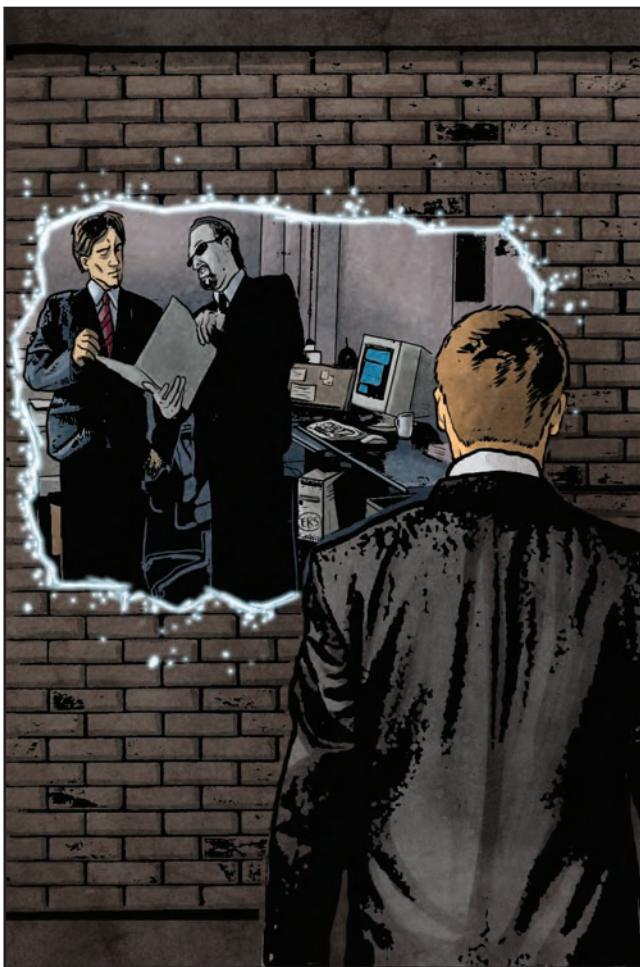
Closely connected to enhanced mental faculties are the enhanced sensory abilities some paranormals experience: Unusual acuity of the five senses, along with a greater sense memory. Some of this may be related to an improved mental ability to process what the senses perceive.

PARASENSORY ABILITIES

Beyond enhanced sensory abilities are truly paranormal or "parasensory" capabilities, beyond the range of the normal five human senses, sometimes even extending into a sixth sense, or more.

Paragons display a range of unusual senses, from being able to "see" in extended bands of the electromagnetic spectrum (far beyond the wavelengths actually detectable by humans due to the physical structure of the human eye) to hearing in the ultra- and infrasonic range, displaying precise biochemical analysis through scent and taste, and super-sensitive touch able to differentiate between highly similar materials purely through tactile differences. Echolocation, sonar, even radio reception are known paranormal abilities.

Moreover there are paranormal examples of what has been called ESP (extrasensory perception) or telepathy. Some paragons can "read minds," knowing what another person is thinking or able to learn information known to them without any kind of direct contact or communication. Some can likewise sense events happening at great distances or even have visions of the past or future. The mechanism for these parasensory powers remains as unknown as all the others. Theories about the quantum entanglement of con-



sciousness and the holistic nature of reality are little more than wild speculation at present.

SAVANTS

Some paragons display superhuman levels of skill, often with little or no formal training or practice, a kind of paranormal "knack" for a particular skill or area of study. Such paragons are commonly known as "savants," although they are some of the most difficult to positively identify, given the blurry line between "normal" and "paranormal" ability in a skill. Savants are often tagged with their particular area of expertise, such as tech savant, combat savant, art savant, math savant, and so forth.

A common pattern for savants is a spontaneous development of a skill. For example, a tech savant might know little or nothing about science, technology, or engineering, but suddenly develops a tremendous thirst for information on those topics, consuming reference materials at an astounding rate and integrating all that knowledge to make astonishing leaps in logic and understanding. In a matter of days, the paragon exceeds the knowledge base of most experts in the field and explores new theoretical material. The same is often the case for other savants.

Some savants are previously capable in their area of expertise but achieve a breakthrough—technically a paranormal breakout—taking them to an entirely new level. These are the most difficult savants to isolate, since their progression often seems like a part of their normal learning, albeit to a most impressive degree.

Paranormal researchers note savant abilities seem to share traits in common with other powers, and can be subject to shutdown

and the other quirks evidenced by paranormals (see **Paranormal Psychology** for details). For example, some savants need "lucky charms" or particular rituals to access their enhanced skills, while confidence and state-of-mind in general seem to play a role in their exercise of their abilities.

MIRACLES

The last, and broadest, category of paranormal abilities is often known as "miracles." It includes any power outwardly defying scientific explanation, but more specifically focuses on abilities that are not enhancements of the paragon's physical, mental, or sensory capabilities. Thus miracles include such diverse feats as telekinesis (mind over matter), teleportation, transmutation, generation and direction of energy (with no apparent source), shape changing, and many other "super-powers" demonstrated by paragons.

Although the term has religious implications, secular scientists also use it to indicate the unknown nature and mechanism of paranormal abilities, what one expert called the "then a miracle occurs" part of the equation. Some powers can *almost* be explained by conventional science, except a miracle (no matter how large or small) needs to happen somewhere along the line. The source of that "miracle" is the basis for most theories about the origins of paranormals (see **Paranormal Theories**).

MINOR MIRACLES

Although all miraculous paranormal powers involve some as yet unexplainable element, not all are quite as spectacular as one might imagine. Indeed, some paranormal powers are actually quite minor, although no less impossible in terms of how they work. For example, a paranormal might have the ability to transform water into wine, and nothing else. It's impressive from a scientific standpoint (and potentially a theological one) but not terribly useful unless the paranormal intends to open a winery or start a new religious sect.

Just as the exact mechanism for powers remains unknown, so too do the reasons why some paragons are far more powerful than others. There are those with truly godlike powers while others have minor abilities. Theories include the conditions of the paranormal's breakout, a variety of emotional and psychological factors, and also, an as yet unknown degree of "potential." A measure of subconscious wish-fulfillment may also play a role: Some powers are minor, but suit the paranormal's personality or desires in some fashion, making them more meaningful to the user, if not to anyone else. Some examples of minor miracles include:

- The ability to attain a perfect weight and toned physique without the need to exercise or diet.
- Various food-oriented powers, including the ability to season food at will, produce coffee out of nowhere, or transform raw ingredients into cooked meals instantly.
- Functional "gaydar," allowing the paranormal to definitively know anyone's sexual orientation simply by looking at them.
- The ability to function like a living remote control for television sets, changing channels and turning them on or off at will.
- "X-ray vision" that only allows the user to see through any sort of clothing.
- Emission of scented perfume from sweat glands, with conscious control over the different scents.

PARANORMAL POWERS IN M&M TERMS

A significant reason for the "impossible" and reality-bending aspects of paranormal powers in *Paragons* is to make those powers function largely like super-powers in the comic books, and therefore like the powers in the core *Mutants & Masterminds* rules. So you can use most M&M powers (from the core rules and from sourcebooks like *Ultimate Power*) with no modification in a *Paragons* game. A character able to lift a building overhead might seem incredible, but it's quite possible in *Paragons* without having to worry about all the physics of the feat.

Some paragons might face more limits on their powers or have to deal with realistic problems stemming from their use (see **Chapter Six** for more on this), but for the most part, neither you nor your players need to be concerned about the effectiveness of a character's powers in a *Paragons* series; unless specified otherwise, powers in *Paragons* work just like they do in the core *Mutants & Masterminds* game rules.

- The power to transform worn clothing into other outfits that fit the wearer perfectly (which allowed the woman who possessed it to become a plus-sized paranormal fashion model).
- A clairvoyant ability to read any written material at normal speed by touch, including closed books and sealed envelopes.
- The power to control coin flips so the desired side always comes up, but not to influence the outcome of any other random events.

Given the difficulty of distinguishing between true paranormal abilities and otherwise normal unusual talents there may in fact be far more minor powers out there than is presently known. One radical theory even suggests *everyone* is paranormal, but only a small

fraction has anything approaching useful powers; the vast majority have abilities they either haven't discovered (how do you find out you can mentally control paper, for example, until you try?) or that are so minor they go unnoticed or get passed off as simply odd talents or quirks.

Still, many "minor miracles" are more than sufficient to bring someone fame and fortune, if they're used correctly, such as the aforementioned paranormal fashion model or some who use their talents to become minor celebrities, business owners, or the like. If they can't come up with a use for their unique ability, they can be fairly sure a company like the Silber Agency can (see **Chapter Four** for more information).

PARANORMAL PSYCHOLOGY

The mind plays a significant role in the paranormal; exactly how significant is not yet known, but it's at least clear that paragons' psychological states and ability to think and concentrate have a considerable effect on many of their powers, especially mental and sensory abilities and miracles. Even the name of the growing science of parapsychology shows the connection between the paranormal and the psychological.

POWER AND BELIEF

There's evidence demonstrating a relationship between a paranormal's state of mind and the functions of his or her powers. Some describe paranormal abilities as functions of "will," "belief," or even "faith," and that seems to be at least partially the case. Paragons unable to concentrate and mentally focus often suffer impairment of their abilities. Some attempt to use this to their advantage, either creating distractions to inhibit the use of powers (flashbangs, sirens, irritants, etc.) or using things like drugs to affect a captured paranormal's concentration.

PEAK MOMENTS

Psychology has a strong connection with paranormal breakouts. Parapsychologists refer to the "peak moment," an especially strong emotional state that triggers a breakout. In many cases the emotion is fear or pure survival instinct, but in others it is rage, joy, jealousy, or ecstasy. Some paranormals don't report a peak moment of emotion in their breakouts, but only because they don't remember the experience at all. In other cases, experts speculate that extraordinary calm and centeredness—a kind of "Zen" state—may constitute a kind of peak moment in and of itself.

The nature of the peak moment, the individual's state of mind, also seems to influence the manifestation of paranormal poten-

tial. Theories suggest that paragons' powers are somewhat derived from their emotional needs when they breakout. So fear or survival instincts produce defensive or offensive abilities (depending on the flight or fight reaction), rage and anger produce more offensive abilities, and so forth. Most believe this is simply part of a complex psychological equation including conscious and subconscious desires, past experience, personality, beliefs, environment, and other factors.

Although the peak moment appears to be a major component of breaking out, it's clearly not the only one, since not everybody who experiences the same heightened level of emotion becomes a paranormal. Still, spark parties and similar origin chaser events are usually based around trying to manufacture peak moments as a way of triggering breakouts.

THE DUMBO EFFECT

If paranormal powers are products of the mind, then to a certain degree paranormals are capable of doing what they believe they can do. Parapsychologists have termed this the "Dumbo effect" after the cartoon elephant that could fly because he believed so strongly in it. Of course, "believe" may not even be the correct term, since the initial reaction of many paranormals to their talents is one of *disbelief*, which doesn't seem to hinder them, at least initially.

Still, the continued function of paranormal powers seems at least partially fueled by the individual's self-confidence and determination. Paranormals who experience depression, self-doubt, or prolonged disbelief in their own capabilities tend to experience a self-fulfilling diminishment of their own powers, at least until they do something to reaffirm their confidence. This is very much the same as any normal person experiencing "performance anxiety"



and losing proficiency with a particular skill. In the same fashion, the cure seems to be not giving up and persisting until a pattern of success reaffirms the individual's confidence.

In keeping with the Dumbo effect, some paranormals pick up various "props" to shore up their confidence and make them more effective. Examples include different rituals, ranging from mantras and prayers, to gestures and dance moves. Others adopt items, such as "magic" rings, necklaces, weapons, and personal keepsakes, or articles of clothing from ritual or religious garb to outlandish costumes. While a fixation of a prop can help paragons overcome self-doubt, it can also produce a dependence on that prop, making it a kind of "crutch" for their abilities, just as Dumbo depended on his "magic feather" in order to fly, even though he didn't really need it.

ACME DEVICES

A particular corollary of the Dumbo effect may be the so-called "ACME devices" created by some paranormals. The various jokes and theories about what "ACME" stands for, from "Always Contradicting Major Experts" to "A Confusing Mechanical Excuse" and "Actualized Conceptual Methods and Equipment." In truth, they're named for the ubiquitous purveyor of impossible gadgets in children's cartoons. The more serious prefer "paratechnology," but the former term has found its way into popular usage and stuck. ACME devices produce results in defiance of known scientific laws, much like paranormal miracles, and often shouldn't function at all due to their construction and make-up.

The prevailing theory is these machines are actually just elaborate props, often to the point where some paranormals completely focus their abilities on the creation of ACME devices and can't produce

paranormal effects without them. Others can produce machines capable of effects they themselves cannot produce, but also have powers usable without such props. Most paranormals can't make ACME devices at all, but some are still able to use such devices made by others.

The apparent portability of ACME devices varies. In some cases, they function only for their maker: No one else can use them to produce any paranormal effect. Other machines are usable by other paranormals, or even by anyone, while some are usable only by one person, which may (or may not) be the item's maker. In all cases, ACME devices are unique. Efforts to reproduce them using traditional means usually fail, and only succeed in the case of one paranormal copying the work of another. They're impossible to mass-produce and each ACME device is an individual work.

The existence of ACME devices makes paranormal contributions to scientific and technological progress spotty. Many "breakthroughs" by paragons are simply manifestations of their own powers unable to benefit anyone but them. Still, some ACME devices usable by non-paranormals are capable of having significant effects, and are prized possessions.

There's some question whether or not ACME devices are dependent on continued support from their maker. Would devices usable by others continue to function if their maker was mentally incapacitated or died? This remains unknown as there hasn't been an instance to test it yet, and it's another reason why few are willing to rely overly much on paranormal-built machines.

THE CENTIPEDE EFFECT

Related to the Dumbo effect is the so-called "centipede effect." It is named for the proverb in which a centipede is asked how it manages to control its many legs. It replies, "I never thought about it!" and promptly trips over its own feet, now all-too self-conscious about them.

Some paranormals experience a similar effect when they contemplate exactly how their abilities work. Most powers appear fully-functional when a paranormal breaks-out, and their use is almost instinctive and subconscious. Paragons don't generally know how they do the things they do, only that they can do them if they choose. Using a power usually requires no more effort than thinking about it, unless the paragon relies on some sort of prop (as previously described). In fact, the more the paranormal thinks about it, the harder it is for them to use their powers, much like the centipede tripping over its own feet.

The theory is that a state similar to (but not necessarily as intense as) a peak moment is most conducive to activating or using powers. Thus, it's better for paranormals to "clear the mind" in order to wield their abilities, and techniques of focused concentration are valuable tools, whether they be meditation, arcane rituals, or simple repetitious practice, so the activation of an ability becomes second-nature, like any other trained skill.

SOLIPSISM AND THE PARANORMAL

The theory that paranormals in some way alter reality, consciously or subconsciously, raises some troubling questions, not the least of which is "what is reality?" On a somewhat more narrow scale, the possibility of reality-shaping makes some wonder: If reality can be changed through thought, if it is in some way subjective, then does anything "really" matter?

Practically speaking, this question only comes into play in two areas. The first is among academics, philosophers, and theologians, who debate ontology, epistemology, and the nature of being, and what the existence of paragons and their powers implies for these things. For the most part, the general public has little interest in this discourse; paranormals exist and they can do what they can do and the practical implications are more important than the philosophical ones.

The other, more important area, is among paragons themselves. In some cases, the question of the nature of reality in relation to a paragon's power to influence reality leads to the development of solipsism and even megalomania and other psychological disorders. Powerful paranormals are already given to feelings of grandeur, so it's not a big step for them to reach that conclusion that "Reality is whatever I believe it to be." There's even some support for this position in that egotistic, solipsistic, and megalomaniacal paragons are often quite powerful.

Like other areas of paranormal psychology, the relationship between mental state and powers appears reciprocal: Powerful paragons are more given to certain kinds of psychological problems, those problems, in turn, seem to sometimes unlock greater power within the affected paranormal, and so forth.

POWER AND SANITY

If paranormal powers are connected, wholly or partially, to the mind, what happens when the mind in question is unbalanced? There appears to be a connection between the kinds of impossible things a paragon can do and the individual's state of mind. The common theory says those paranormals able to think and reason in unusual ways also have unusual powers, and particularly unusual levels of power.

EXPERIENCES OF GRANDEUR

As one psychologist put it, when describing symptoms of megalomania and delusions of grandeur in a paranormal patient, "technically, these are not 'delusions,' as the patient really *is* a godlike being—who's to say he shouldn't feel unshakably superior to 'mere mortals' like us?" Having godlike power leads some paragons to act like the capricious and often cruel deities of myth or even to believe they *are* gods, superior beings able to do as they please without moral constraint. The members of the Pantheon (see **Chapter Four**) are classic examples of this.

WALK-INS

A "walk-in" is someone who believes that the original or inborn personality or mind of their body has "walked out" or departed and a foreign intelligence—often associated with an alien or higher being—has "walked in," taking up residence in that physical body and assuming its existence. In the case of paranormals, a walk-in often possesses powers, and the moment when it took on its current corporeal body is the same as a paragon's breakout.

Psychologists commonly believe the walk-in phenomenon represents a cognitive break: The person's original personality is unable to deal with the strain of a situation and retreats, allowing a new personality capable of handling things to emerge. This process also triggered a breakout and the development of latent paranormal powers. The "walk-in" personality isn't really an alien, ascended master, reincarnated guru, or whatnot, but a coping mechanism.

Walk-ins, of course, disagree. They claim they *are* a variety of "higher" beings, come to Earth to assist humanity through a coming transition towards enlightenment (or something similar). Not surprisingly, paranormal walk-ins demonstrate powers consistent with who and what they believe they are, making it even more difficult to disprove their claims. A number of supporters firmly believe walk-ins are spiritual or religious figures.

CHANNELS

Related to the walkin is the "channel," a kind of paranormal medium, those who allow disembodied intelligences to communicate and act through their body. Channels are essentially like temporary walk-ins: Rather than the new personality permanently displacing the old, the original personality is merely suppressed temporarily while the "spirit" or other entity controls the physical body. Icon in **Chapter Five** is an example of a paranormal channel.

Paranormal channels have claimed to interact with beings from mythological gods to the spirits of the dead or incorporeal aliens from other worlds or dimensions. As with walk-ins, their powers tend to substantiate their claims, although skeptics say it is just a matter of the channel's expectations influencing the breakout and manifestation of his or her abilities.

AVATARS

Like a walkin, an avatar claims to be something other than a normal human being: A mythic figure, spirit, deity, alien, or the like. The difference is, where a walk-in has occupied an existing human body, an avatar claims to have *created* a human form, spontaneously coming into existence.

Some so-called avatars have been proven to be walk-ins with absolutely no memory of their "prior" lives: From their point of view, it was like they simply came into being one day, and they deny any association with another, normal life. Others, however, cannot be demonstrably proven to exist prior to their appearance as paragons: No records can be found matching their appearance, fingerprints, or even DNA in some cases. Other self-proclaimed avatars differ significantly enough from the human norm that identifying their prior identity (if any) is practically impossible. Proteus in **Chapter Five** is one example: A shapeshifting silvery mass, he no longer has sufficient distinguishing physical traits to match with a prior human existence (or even determine "his" true sex, for that matter).

MIND AND POWER

From the point of view of many psychologists, the phenomena of walk-ins, channels, and avatars are evidence of various disorders experienced by paragons, particularly multiple personalities or various dissociative behaviors. In short, they say paranormals who believe they are foreign entities, divine beings, or the like, are mentally ill. Any evidence supporting their claims is "manufactured" by their powers, which do, after all, react to the user's state of mind. Thus, for example, Icon isn't really channeling ancient mythological gods, she only seems to be.

While the mental health field generally agrees with this view, there really isn't a clear way to prove it. Indeed, there's more evidence on the other side of the argument, even if this model dismisses such evidence as artificially created by the paranormals themselves. Until a great deal more information is available, particularly of the

mental health and physical condition of pre-breakout paranormals, it remains just one theory among many.

ONLY NORMAL

Paragons aren't the only ones experiencing psychological impacts from their unusual abilities, of course. The mere existence of the paranormal has an effect on the psyches of normal people, one mental health professions are only beginning to imagine, and one that will likely only get worse as time goes on.

The primary issue revolves around feelings of inadequacy: When someone can bench-press a city bus or run around the world in a matter of minutes, benching a few hundred pounds or breaking the world-record for running a mile seem like paltry achievements. The same is true of brilliant experts in fields of learning, outdone by paranormals with little, or no, formal training; or devout clergy who witness paragons performing literal miracles, from healing the sick and dying to transmuting matter. In a world where people can do such things, does "ordinary" achievement mean anything?

These feelings feed strongly into the origin chasing sub-culture, where people who feel inadequate try to address it by seeking to become paranormal. Others sink into depression, losing the determination to strive or work towards goals that seem meaningless in the face of paragons. Many normal people become avid "paragon-watchers" and fans, living vicariously through their favorite heroes

and often imitating them, leading to cult-like behavior and outright worship of such god-like beings.

Other people feel understandably threatened by paranormals: What chance do normal people have against them? This leads to declarations that paragons are menaces to society or, worse yet, "unnatural" or morally tainted in some fashion. Anti-paranormal movements like the Seven Thunders (see **Chapter Four**) feed off these sentiments and stoke them further in their adherents. Paranormal "watchdog" organizations follow the exploits of paragons as avidly, if not more, than the fans, scrutinizing everything they say and do for some ulterior or underhanded motive.

A small number of people feel truly inspired by paragons: If people are capable of achieving the impossible, then even the sky isn't a limit any more, and you really can do anything if you set your mind to it. This inspiration often edges into origin chasing, especially when people come to believe you can even become paranormal if you try hard enough. For most, it's the kind of inspiration people have always drawn from emulating heroes.

The majority of people in the world continue to go about their normal lives largely unaffected by paragons apart from what they see on the news or in popular culture, but the overall impact of the Breakout and existence of paranormals on the human psyche is still too significant to ignore or easily dismiss. Some speculate whether or not "normals" truly have a future in a paranormal world.

FORTEAN PHENOMENA

Not all paranormal events in the world can be connected to a paragon "agent." Since the Breakout, strange things simply *happen* from time to time, with no apparent rhyme or reason. These events have come to be known as "Forteans" after Charles Fort, famous cataloguer of the strange and unusual.

Explanations of Fortean phenomena are as common as those for paranormals and their powers, and about as reliable. There are a number of theories, but no hard evidence for any of them as yet. Like paranormals, many Fortean events seem unexplainable, at least by the known laws of science. Some of the known unusual events include:

- Rains of frogs, crickets, fish, or small stones that appear out of nowhere (often at night with a clear sky). They last only a few minutes, and then stop. When examined, the fallen objects appear completely normal, although they're often foreign to the area where they fall.
- Incidents of spontaneous human combustion, where people rapidly burn to ashes without any heat damage to their surroundings or even their clothing.
- What has been termed "the Babel effect" in which people in an area suddenly lose the ability to communicate, developing a kind of spontaneous aphasia, which eventually reverses itself after anywhere from minutes to hours. Conversely, there's at least one known incidence of people in an area suddenly gaining the ability to understand each others' spoken language, in spite of language barriers.
- Unexplained lights or noises, often associated with unidentified flying objects or "ghost lights" moving through dark and abandoned areas.

- Poltergeist phenomena, including sudden unexplained sensations of cold, free-standing liquids freezing solid at room temperature, objects suddenly moving or even flying violently across a room, glass spontaneously shattering, and so forth.
- The sudden appearance of unexplained objects, such as four dozen ticking clocks, all set to the correct time, appearing in the parlor of a French home, chiming the hour, then disappearing, or three steel pyramids, each a half meter high, appearing four meters in the air above a Shinto shrine in Japan, hovering there for 52 minutes, then vanishing.

The exact line between "true" Fortean phenomena and mere unusual happenstance is even more blurred than with paranormal abilities. Scholars generally require an event to be *truly* unusual for it to qualify, and the catalog of possible Fortean events is an order of magnitude greater. Many people include virtually anything out of the ordinary, and some would include every unusual or unexplained event in history, from the Bermuda Triangle to the Tunguska Blast to the existence or sinking of Atlantis.

FORTEAN THEORIES

Three major theories attempt to explain Fortean phenomena: The involvement of paranormal agents, some as yet undetermined influence from the Imageria, or the fluid and fundamentally chaotic nature of reality itself.

PARANORMAL AGENTS

The most common explanation for unusual phenomena is that a paranormal is responsible, whether the "agent" knows it or not. That is, all Fortean events are actually exercises of paranormal power,

but sometimes—indeed quite often—the paragon isn't consciously causing the event. Since there's no common means of detecting paranormal influence, there's no way of proving or disproving the theory, although critics point out many phenomena occur while no one is present. Supporters counter that paranormal powers often seem to transcend space (and even time) as we understand it, so proximity may not be an issue.

There is at least *some* support for this theory in that some “Fortean” events have turned out to have paranormals as their cause: Either as part of a knowing hoax, or the work of a latent, or newly awakened, paragon lacking control over his or her powers. When the paranormal is exposed, the phenomenon stops. However, this makes up only a fraction of Fortean events and can't explain all of them.

IMAGERIAL INFLUENCE

Another explanation of unusual events is influence “bleeding” into the material world from the Imageria, essentially paranormal “energies” or “forces” come through from another dimension and manifest as strange events. This theory relies on the existence of the Imageria or something like it (see **Chapter Three**), so it's less widely accepted. It also doesn't explain how, or why, these “imagerial influences” occur, essentially using one complete unknown to explain another.

Things like imagerial protrusions and entities lend some credence to this theory. Paragons with more experience in the Imageria—such as the Pact (see **Chapter Four**)—also have some success in screening out imagerial forces and stopping, or preventing, Fortean events.

FLUID REALITY

Perhaps the most disturbing theory regarding Fortean phenomena involves the nature of the universe and causality. It posits a much more fluid and chaotic structure to reality than was previously believed. What we perceive as order and structure in our universe is little more than happenstance; the seemingly stable world can give way to random unusual events at any moment, with no apparent cause.



If this theory is true, it's unprovable simply because *nothing* in reality is truly stable and there is no such thing as “natural” or “scientific law,” instead there are “common habits” of the universe, which can change suddenly and without warning. The implications of such a level of cosmic meaninglessness are enough to keep many from pursuing it too vigorously.

PARANORMAL THEORIES

The number one question plaguing scholars of all stripes across the world is: What are paranormals? And the follow-up questions: Where do their powers come from? How do they work? How can they do what was previously considered impossible? The world is desperate for answers to these and many more questions about paragons, basically summed up in the two big mysteries of “how?” and “why?”

Already a number of theories have emerged about the issue, but they're all unproven. The very nature of paranormals makes these theories difficult to test with any sort of definitive results. Every time the experts have proclaimed a breakthrough in paranormal research, the results have been called into question or even disproven, and that's just for the theories subject to the scientific method. Other theories may be improvable, given their nature, but to some have the virtue of also being irrefutable for the same reasons.

For more on how these various theories can affect your *Paragons* series, see **Chapter Six**.

SUBJECTIVE REALITY

The most popular and pursued theory regarding paranormal powers involves extensions of quantum physics. Essentially, the theory says reality as we know it is at least somewhat subjective and influenced by the consciousness of individuals interacting with it. Thus paranormals are essentially able to consciously or unconsciously “edit” reality to suit them, creating effects otherwise impossible according to known physical laws. The most likely mechanism is some sort of “quantum entanglement” of interactions in the brain with sub-atomic interactions in the outside world. Of course, the theory doesn't really provide a clear mechanism and is based on considerable speculation, but it has the most “hard” science of any current theory available.

The subjective- or quantum-reality theory also doesn't address a number of questions, particularly why paranormal powers appeared in the first place and why some people are paragons and others are not. It also doesn't explain why paragons have such a variety of powers rather than all having the same ones, why paranormals

who share the same power exhibit it in different ways and at different power levels, or why there are any limits on paranormal power at all, if it's entirely a matter of consciousness influencing reality. Some borrow psychological elements from the psionic model (following) in an attempt to explain some of these things.

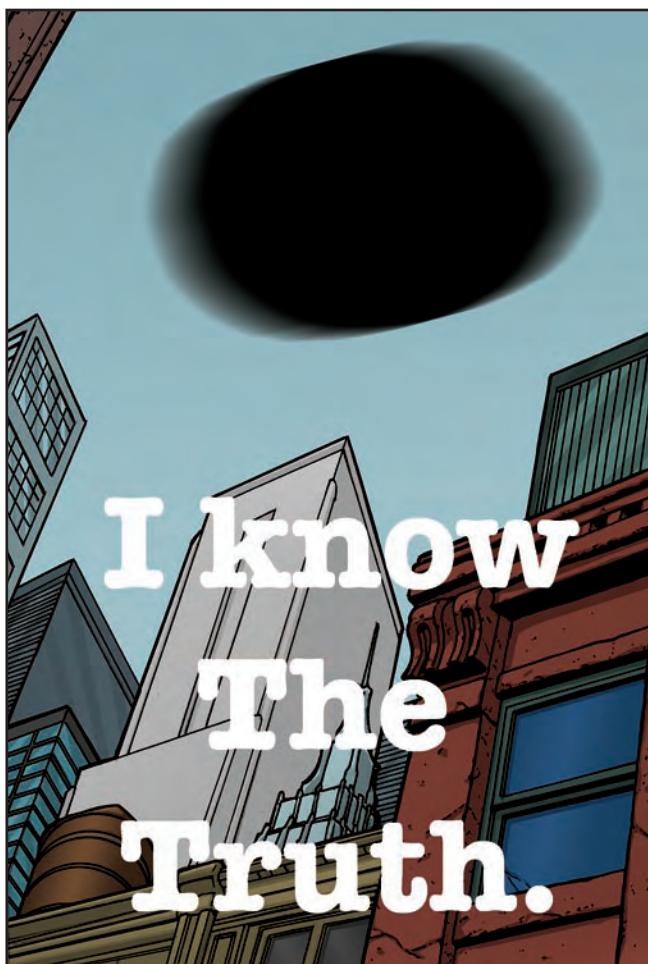
Initial research along these lines primarily involves taking detailed scans and measurements of paranormal brain activity during use of their powers in an effort to isolate different brain states creating different effects.

PSIONICS

The next major theory, overlapping the subjective reality theory in many areas, is the "psionic" model of paranormal activity. The pseudo-science of parapsychology experienced a sudden explosion of interest after the Breakout. Once paranormal powers like telepathy and telekinesis were proven beyond the shadow of a doubt, many experts began pouring over years of parapsychology research and writing with renewed interest.

The psionic or psychic theory suggests there are untapped abilities of the mind, capable of creating paranormal effects. Most theorists believed in the existence of the paranormal long before the breakout, with numerous examples of lesser paragons (or "paranormal agents" as they're known) creating unusual effects, although not quite on the current scale. Thus many genuine psychics, remote viewers, mediums, and so forth were precursors to modern paranormals.

Unfortunately, while the psionic model has considerable anecdotal and experimental data, it still lacks an explanation for the mecha-



nism of paranormal abilities, or the reasons for the Breakout. One of the more popular ideas for how psionic/paranormal powers work is essentially the same as the subjective-reality theory (previously). Other theories involve the existence of invisible and otherwise undetectable "energy fields," possibly connected in some way to a psychic gestalt of the Universal Unconscious or the like. One theory suggests the "power source" for paranormals is the collective brain-power of all humanity, with only a few people able to tap into and use it for paranormal effects.

SUPERNATURAL

At the fringe of "accepted" theories regarding the paranormal are those relying on the supernatural, either the intervention of higher or spiritual powers, or the existence of hitherto unacknowledged magical or occult forces. Few scientists or scholars are willing to give these ideas credence, although some are forced to admit they don't have any better explanations and they can't rule out any possibility.

MIRACLES

For a great many people of faith, the explanation for paranormal powers is clear: They are miracles granted by a higher power or, in some cases, provided by a force of supernatural evil to mislead the unwary. In short, paranormals are empowered by either God or the Devil, or both.

On the surface, there's no denying paragons often perform miracles like those in ancient religious texts: They heal with a touch, transmute matter, fly through the air, command natural forces, and much more. There's even some evidence that faith plays a role in the effectiveness of a paragon's power, although faith in what doesn't seem to matter.

This theory leads many faiths to question claims by *other* faiths of paragons empowered by their god(s). Non-believers are labeled as misguided abusers of their divine gifts at best, knowing agents of supernatural evil at worst. Some religious extremists even believe most, if not all, paragons are empowered by the Devil and associate them with a coming Apocalypse.

See **Religion & Spirituality** in **Chapter Two** for more on the effect of the paranormal on matters of faith.

MAGIC AND THE OCCULT

Closely tied to theories of the miraculous are ideas connecting paranormals and their powers to some form of "magic." This ranges from European occultism from the Middle Ages on up to the 19th and 20th centuries to modern neo-paganism and New Age philosophy to Eastern disciplines like yoga and the martial arts.

All these things are certainly the outward style of some paragons' powers. Members of the Pact, for example (see **Chapter Four**) certainly *seem* to be genuine magicians, but the question remains whether their powers are "real" magic or just the appearance of magic. After all, any paranormals' abilities are equally implausible and "magical." Still, self-proclaimed magicians do apparently conjure spirits, demons, and similar creatures. Are they really what they appear or just creations from the magician's consciousness?

The strongest support for occult theories of the paranormal is how the Imageria often conforms to various magical philosophies (see **Chapter Three** for details). Critics of the theory point out how the Imageria—if it truly exists—is shaped by preconceptions and thought.

Magical traditions are based on ancient and primal beliefs, so it's not surprising the structure of the Imageria seems to reflect them.

Even those who don't believe the paranormal is "magic" as such still take an interest in the occult simply because many of the techniques and theories associated with magic seem to work well in training and improving paranormal powers. Things like meditation, visualization, and inducing altered states of consciousness are apparently useful tools for paragons, regardless of the true nature of their powers.

CRACKPOT THEORIES

As outlandish as the previous ideas about the nature of paranormals and their powers might seem, they are actually the most reasonable of the theories flying around to explain what might actually be unexplainable. Paragons have spawned countless wild and crackpot theories to explain who and what they are and how and why they can do what they can do.

None of these theories have any widespread scientific or philosophical support, but that doesn't stop those who believe in them for one minute, nor does it prevent them from finding their way into popular culture and urban legend.

ALIENS

Paranormals are the creations of aliens, or paragons *are* aliens. While this idea has only really taken hold in UFO fringe culture, there actually is some support for it. After all, couldn't some walk-ins be called "alien?" Some paragons even claim they're from other worlds, or at least acknowledge they could be, if they remembered their origins at all. Some breakout stories are very similar to alien abduction experiences and, although experts say there's no genetic difference between paranormals and ordinary humans, who is to say they're telling the truth or the changes are detectable by terrestrial technology?

This theory doesn't do anything to explain how paranormal powers work apart from vague talk about "alien technology" and invocations of Clarke's Third Law ("Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic") or borrowing the subjective-reality or psionic theories, but claiming aliens are behind them.

Clear, verifiable evidence of alien life has yet to emerge, even from paranormals able to scan (or even visit) distant worlds, but that doesn't stop some from believing. See the Harbingers from **Chapter Four** for one faction firmly rooted in the belief aliens are not only "out there" but active on Earth.

CONSPIRACY

Countless conspiracy theories rush to fill the informational vacuum about the origins of paranormal powers. Sure, the authorities claim they don't know the cause and source of these powers, but is that the truth or just what "They" want you to believe?

Paranormal conspiracy theories are numerous and constantly mutating. Each basically claims someone is concealing the truth about paranormals from the general public and then goes on to say who that someone is, what it is they are concealing, and why. Most often it's the government hiding experiments with alien DNA, "black science," occult artifacts, or Satanism. For others it is the Freemasons, the Illuminati, the United Nations, the Zionists, the Commies, the Extreme Right/Left, the Military-Industrial Complex, or one or more sinister Mega-corporations. In a few cases, it's all of the above.

They're usually hiding some kind of complicity in the creation of paranormals, most often through an experiment gone wrong. Sometimes they're just hiding a larger truth the conspiracy theorist supports or fears, such as paragons being the chosen of God (or the Devil) or the work of aliens (benevolent or not). In some theories the paragons are all in on it, in others, they're just ignorant dupes, or somewhere in between.

Not all conspiracy theories come from obsessed theorists, either. A majority are urban myths and rumors that take on lives of their own and spread in water-cooler conversations, emails, and stories told in schoolyards.

NIHILISM

For some the existence of paragons and Fortean phenomena is simply proof the universe is a chaotic and ultimately meaningless place beyond our petty efforts to impose order and meaning upon it. Some go so far as to claim nothing can be "truly" understood because later events can completely contradict it, much as the paranormal contradicts much of what was believed understood about how the world works.

This theory is mostly used as an excuse for nihilistic behavior and "nothing means anything, so do what you want" attitudes, although there is a very real corrosive effect such ideas have on society and mental health. Some people confronted with the possibility the universe is essentially random develop serious psychological problems or anti-social behavior. A few experience breakouts and become paragons, often with severe psychological problems or anti-social behavior....



CHAPTER TWO: STRANGE NEW WORLD

Imagine living in a world where the impossible happens on a daily basis, where so much of what we thought about reality has been turned upside-down by the sudden appearance of people and phenomena science can't explain, with the power to affect change on a large scale. The once solid foundations of reality are revealed as built on sand, and everyone can feel it shifting under their feet. That's the world of *Paragons* and it can be a strange world indeed.

This chapter looks at some ways in which the world might respond to the appearance of paranormals and Fortean phenomena, strange happenings unexplainable by conventional science. It presents things in broad strokes, discussing the way things *might* happen, but it's up to you

"THE UNIVERSE IS NOT ONLY STRANGER THAN WE IMAGINE, IT IS STRANGER THAN WE CAN IMAGINE."

- ARTHUR STANLEY EDDINGTON

to decide how they actually occur in your own *Paragons* series. This chapter looks at the key points for consideration, and gives you some ways to fill in those blanks in your series, but feel free to change them around as you see fit.

The chapter first looks at the Breakout, the pivotal event in which paranormals first appear, then goes on to examine different aspects of the world and how they adapt (or don't) to the presence of paragons. Geopolitics, technology, culture, economics, and religious faith all change in response to the Breakout and the actions of paranormals. Depending on how long after you decide to set

your *Paragons* series, the paranormal world may look quite different from the one we all know.

THE BREAKOUT

With paragons there are individual breakouts and the Breakout (capital "B"), the occasion when the phenomenon of paranormals became widespread and (most likely) widely known. Like many aspects of *Paragons*, the exact details of the Breakout are left up to you, but, more than likely, it goes something like this....

A series of increasingly strange incidents occur around the world, minor enough to be dismissed but unusual enough to draw attention. They continue to increase in number and intensity until, eventually, there's an event so significant it can't be overlooked. Typically this is the breakout of one or more paranormals involving the display of their powers. So a paragon might breakout in the aftermath of a plane crash, bombing, or other accident, or paragons might breakout *during* such events, allowing them to change the outcome. Their deeds (and faces) are splashed all over the news, with the world wondering who they are and how they can do what they've done.

The initial appearance of paranormals may lead to other breakouts, like a chain reaction. It's like the awareness of the impossible suddenly makes it more possible. Soon breakouts occur worldwide, first a handful, then dozens, then a hundred or more. The resulting paranormals range in terms of power and abilities as well. Some manage to keep their existence and abilities secret while others breakout publicly and don't have that option.

Not surprisingly, there's a measure of public panic. People spend a lot of time glued to their television sets and Internet news feeds in shock, trying to process the information coming in. There are sporadic outbursts of violence or rioting as people react with fear and hysteria. Some areas are forced to impose martial law to deal with civil unrest, paranormal outbreaks, or both. The majority of people try to stay calm, watch the news, and trust to the authorities to keep the situation under control and keep them safe.

The more civic- and duty-minded paragons take matters into their own hands and do their best to help out. The benefits of their actions extend far beyond the immediate, as they help to cement the idea in the public mind that paranormals are more than just freaks or monsters, they can be heroes, and connections are immediately made between them and comic book superheroes, as well as mythic and religious figures.

Eventually, things begin to calm down. The number of breakouts decreases while the existing paragons begin to settle into having and using their abilities. The public becomes better informed about paranormal phenomena and major theories about it emerge, although there's still a distinct lack of certainty. Some paragons become famous or infamous, and they begin to cluster into groups and factions based on their own interests and agendas. While some paranormals take full advantage of their abilities, others are less certain, and look to existing authority figures for direction.

The world begins trying to adapt to the ongoing existence of paranormals when it becomes clear they're not going away, and whatever caused the initial breakout appears to be ongoing as well, albeit at a slower, steadier rate than before. The paragons are here to stay and people begin to accept the idea of living in a post-Breakout world, a paranormal world.

BREAKOUT EVENTS

While the Breakout is a significant event in and of itself, it is often connected to or precipitated by some other circumstance, a trigger of some sort, setting off the process by which certain people attain paranormal powers. It can be a real-world event or one of your own making, and the involvement of newly awakened paragons in the event can affect how people see them.



For example, the Breakout event could be a major natural disaster like an earthquake or tsunami. The resulting stress and panic causes people in or near the event to breakout, creating paragons. Some of them may assist in dealing with the disaster, while others actually make matters *worse* because of their inability to understand or control their powers.

A Breakout event allows you to place the line between the normal and paranormal worlds at a particular point. Once the dust starts to settle, nearly everyone will consider that point "when the world changed," and theories about the paranormal will try and use the Breakout event to help explain what happened.

If you pick a Breakout event from real history, then by definition the Breakout happened some time ago, with how long depending on the event. If you prefer to have the Breakout occur at the start of your series, you either have to begin before the present day (creating an alternate history from the time of the Breakout onward) or come up with a new event to have the Breakout happen in the present.

Even if one of the events described here is not the trigger for *the* Breakout, there's nothing saying they could not have been triggers for other, individual, breakouts either before or after the main event. After all, even following the wide Breakout of paranormals, breakout events still occur and many paragons awaken to their potential due to tremendous stress.

POTENTIAL BREAKOUT EVENTS

Here are just a few possible breakout events you can choose for your *Paragons* series. You don't have to have a Breakout event at all: As mentioned previously, the Breakout itself is one of the most significant events in human history, and in some series it needs no embellishment. Also, remember the Breakout is likely to spawn a number of major events, like the "Evanston Incident" described in the Vanguard entry in **Chapter Four**.

NATURAL DISASTER

The awesome power of a natural disaster is enough to make anyone feel small and helpless, perhaps bringing on a Breakout. The disaster can be anything from an earthquake, flood, or tornado to something totally unexpected, like a massive volcanic eruption to rival Krakatoa or even an asteroid collision with Earth. In addition to the Breakout, the paranormals have the aftereffects of the disaster confronting them.

The 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake in the San Francisco Bay area could trigger a local Breakout, spreading out from the West Coast

of the United States. Likewise, Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath in New Orleans can constitute a Breakout event, with some of the new paranormals displaced like other inhabitants of the area, others remaining behind. On a larger scale, the Pacific tsunami on December 26, 2004 could easily be a Breakout event, with paranormals appearing out of the devastation, but initially concentrated in Asia, which can make for an interesting start to the series.

CATASTROPHIC ACCIDENT

Man-made accidents can be just as disastrous as the forces of nature, if not more so. The immediate damage inflicted by a terrible storm or earthquake pales in comparison to the long-term damage done by a massive oil or chemical spill or, worse yet, the meltdown of a nuclear reactor. Even something like a massive power-failure or crippling computer virus could have serious consequences, putting people into life-or-death situations and forcing them to breakout and attain their paranormal potential.

The 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident affected a community of some 14,000 in the Ukraine. The release of radiation could have triggered a Breakout in what was then the Soviet Union, perhaps leading to a very different version of recent history, depending on what the newly empowered paragons chose to do with their abilities. Similarly, the Union Carbide disaster in Bhopal, India, which released a cloud of poisonous gas that killed hundreds, could have triggered a Breakout, making India the center for paranormals in Asia or the world.

ACTS OF VIOLENCE

Little triggers the human instinct to survive as easily as a sudden outbreak of violence. Sadly, such things are not at all difficult to find. War zones, terrorism, and acts of genocide plague the world, and could be the spark lighting the fuse of the Breakout. Paranormals awakened by violence may have the powers to strike back at their attackers, either to defend themselves and others, or for vengeance, pushing the cycle of violence further.

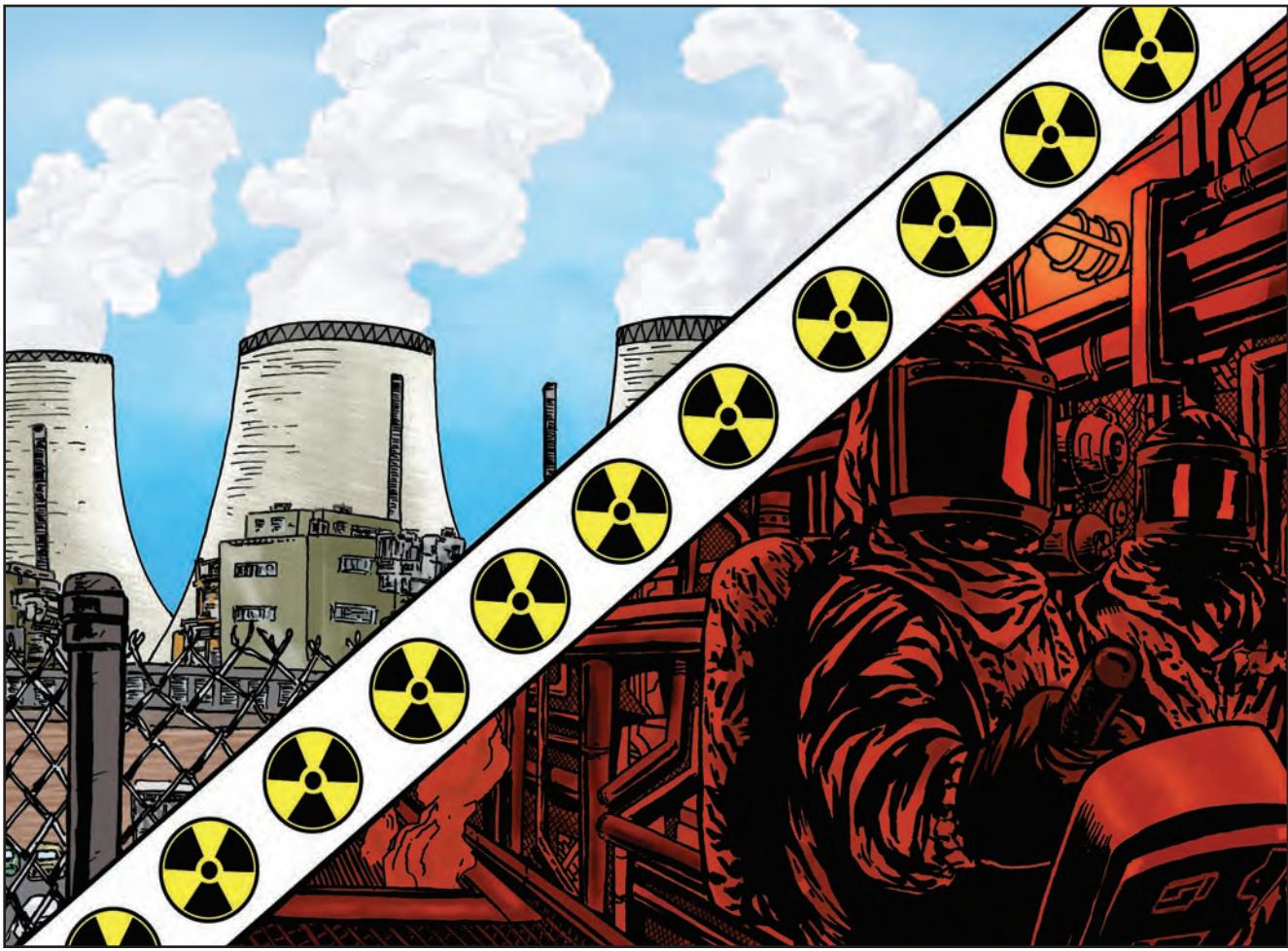
The September 11th, 2001 terrorist attack on the United States could trigger a Breakout that begins in New York City and spreads across the USA with secondary Breakouts in other places around the world. It's unlikely the Breakout will change the outcome, unless one or more of the new paragons happen to be on board the hijacked planes or in the World Trade Center. Otherwise, even if a newly awakened paragon is among the victims, rescue workers, or citizens of New York City, odds are they won't be able to use their powers quickly or proficiently enough to save the World

THE SECRET BREAKOUT

The material in this chapter assumes the Breakout was a fairly widespread and public phenomenon, but that doesn't have to be the case. It's possible the Breakout occurred gradually and quietly enough to go unnoticed, at least initially. Newly awakened paranormals keep their abilities to themselves, out of a reasonable fear of persecution or simply being considered crazy or ill, with a few just trying to keep their "edge" to themselves. Likewise, authorities learning of the paranormal try to cover it up until they can get some sort of verification and later to avoid public panic and the kinds of consequences described in this chapter.

A Secret Breakout allows for a setting much more like our normal world, with the paranormal going on behind the scenes. It is well suited to a conspiracy setting where secret factions of paragons work against each other in pursuit of their various agendas, while cooperating to conceal the truth from the rest of the world.

Eventually, the truth can get out to the public, transitioning from a secret paranormal series to a more open one, with the changes in this chapter coming into effect. You can even start an open paranormal series with the assumption that "the Breakout" isn't actually the first, just the latest. Perhaps there is an entire secret paranormal history the world doesn't know about yet, and the characters are the ones to uncover it.



Trade Center, much less prevent the attack. Still, a quick-thinking paranormal on the scene could save numerous lives and become instantly world-famous. How the newly awakened paranormals react in the aftermath can also strongly influence the course of history.

SCIENCE GONE WRONG

Finally, in the quest for knowledge, humanity might unintentionally tap into larger forces. This is similar to Catastrophic Accidents (previously), but subtler in that the Breakout is an unintended (and often unnoticed) side effect, at least at first. For example, it's a common idea in superhero comic books to have a rise in super-mutants accompany the increase in atmospheric radiation due to nuclear tests, atomic power, and the degradation of the ozone layer. This could also serve as an explanation for the appearance of paranormals, especially if they have a genetic origin (see **Chapter Six**).

The so-called "Philadelphia Experiment" in 1943 to render the destroyer escort *USS Eldridge* invisible could have unleashed inter-dimensional or trans-temporal forces leading to the Breakout. Needless to say, placing the Breakout as far back as during the Second World War creates a very different timeline and present day, but it's an option for a *Paragons* series set in the past and intended to explore the alternate history paranormals may create.

Closer to the present are various atomic tests, perhaps their aforementioned cumulative effect on the Earth's background radiation. Other scientific triggers include vaccinations, common food additives or medications with unexpected side effects, increased radio waves or emissions from cell phones, microwave transmissions, and so forth. Modern physics experiments involving the recreation of conditions found during the formation of the universe, micro black holes, or other exotic phenomena could also be responsible for "bending" the laws of space-time or otherwise provoking a breakout.

GEO POLITICS

The community of nations is a delicate interconnected web of relationships, many of them predicated on power: Economic, military, and social. Introduce individuals with the power to upset this balance, and the nations of the world are certain to take notice, and take action. Exactly what that action is depends on the nation and the nature of the Breakout.

First-world nations operating under the rule of law may declare a national emergency, or even martial law, if events start to get out

of control. Their first priority is to prevent public panic and keep the situation under control as much as possible. The assistance of civic-minded paragons during this time can help, although governments are reluctant to trust unknown civilians who appear—at least at first—to be part of the problem.

Less scrupulous nations may take immediate action against paranormals. In some parts of the world, angry and panicked mobs attack anyone seeming to exhibit "strange" or "unnatural" abilities,



and even accusations can lead to lynching and impromptu "executions." Governments can use this violence as a pretext for martial law and clamp down on individual rights, while rebels might use it as an opportunity to strike against the government or even stage a coup (with or without paranormal aid).

As quickly as possible, the community of nations attempts to ascertain the source of paranormal phenomena, with only limited success. While some individual "agents" (the paragons) are identifiable, how they do what they can do remains elusive. There may be an effort to contain paranormals in some fashion, either to take them into protective custody so they can undergo examination and receive assistance with their newfound abilities, or to forcibly detain them. Governments interested in exploiting paranormals may kidnap them and use coercion, drugs, torture, or other methods to force their cooperation. Where that's not possible, vivisection and extensive autopsies of known paranormals are possible, to find out what makes them tick (which, again, remains frustratingly elusive).

As time goes on, paragons (willing and otherwise) become a vital "national asset" and the potential for any nation or group to have its own "super-weapon" is a matter of national security (for a number of nations) on the world stage. Intelligence agencies keep careful track of known paranormals and any evidence of breakouts. Recruitment of paragons becomes at least as important a goal as pursuit of other strategic weapons, like nuclear, chemical, and biological devices. Keeping "paranormal proliferation" in check is a difficult task for the community of nations, although the existence of organizations like PAX and Vanguard may help (see **Vanguard** in **Chapter Four** for details).

NEW FRONTIERS

Paragons accelerate another potential area of conflict for the nations of the world: The exploitation of space. Some paranormals can fly unaided in outer space, even exceeding the speed of light! Others have teleportation powers sufficient to reach nearby or even distant planetary bodies, or just enough to teleport to near-Earth orbit and back, which is still tremendously useful for satellite placement and the like.

These capabilities suddenly open up whole new frontiers. Can nations claim other planets or planetoids in the solar system and plant colonies there? Odds are, the United Nations would say "no," but even with Vanguard at their command (see **Chapter Four**), some paranormals or countries might choose to defy them.

An even greater concern is weaponizing space. If you can put a permanent base on the Moon, you can potentially set up a railgun or mass-driver capable of flinging rocks at targets on Earth. A space-capable paragon could conceivably put an asteroid on a collision course with Earth, sufficient to wipe out civilization—perhaps even all life—as we know it. That's to say nothing of things like space-based weapons of mass destruction like nuclear or chemical warheads.

SOVEREIGN POWERS

How do you deal with an individual who holds more power than his or her entire nation? How would you, as that individual, feel about the ability of a relatively weak nation to represent your interests? Would it even bother to do so, given your power and ability?

While many, if not most, paragons retain their citizenship and loyalty to a nation (at least ostensibly), some might choose otherwise. There is a case to be made for treating certain paragons as "sovereign powers" equal in strength and position to entire nations. National governments have recognized the influence of other powerful groups before, why not individuals?

Naturally, many nations are reluctant to share power or to establish such a precedent, but they might not have much choice in the matter. If a doctrine of sovereign powers is necessary to avert war with paranormals capable of defeating entire armies, then the nations of the world might adopt it, if only to stall for time, and seek a diplomatic solution.

This approach not only relinquishes the authority of a nation over its paranormal citizens but also accords some, or all, paragons the authority of nations unto themselves. For example, they might have a measure of "diplomatic immunity," provided a nation has recognized diplomatic relations with them. Of course, since a paragon can't be expected to judge him- or herself, some sort of authority may be required, a paranormal tribunal or council for when the need arises.

This is the kind of thing the Pantheon would very much like to see (consult their description in **Chapter Four**). Paranormal groups hoping for their kind to coexist with humanity might oppose it, if only because it further isolates them and has the potential for abuse. The concept of sovereign powers can form the basis for an entire *Paragons* series where the characters make world-influencing decisions. The "On the Vanguard" series framework in **Chapter Six** offers some ideas on paranormals and international relations.

PARAGONS AND THE LAW

The mere existence of paragons raises a number of legal questions. How will society's laws change and adapt to people with unusual powers? What laws will regulate and control paranormals and their abilities? Who will make them and will paragons obey them? What if they don't? The potential legal questions are numerous, but the major ones revolve around regulation of paranormals, privacy, crimes committed by paragons, and paragons involved in stopping criminals.

THE PARANORMAL REGISTRATION ACT

One of the most frightening things about paranormals, apart from their considerable power, is their anonymity. Apart from another paragon, there's no way to detect them; they blend in with ordinary humanity. *Anyone* could be a paragon, carrying a "concealed weapon" capable of leveling a city block.

Certain segments of society may demand the right to know about the paranormals in their midst. The government needs the information to provide public safety and deal with potential threats to local and national security. Communities want to know about the possible risks of living near people who could explode or bring all their appliances to life, or countless other things. Law-enforcement needs to know if they might be dealing with someone able to bench-press a tractor-trailer or bounce bullets. All these reasons lead to demands for a Paranormal Registration Act.

The details may vary by setting, but the essential idea is all paranormals are required to register with the authorities, giving their personal information (name, address, etc.) and whatever they may know about their powers. This information goes into a database available to certain agencies, allowing them to do their jobs more effectively.

While some may object to the invasion of privacy the Act represents, the real concern is for the other things enabled by it. For example, once the government knows who all the paranormals are, it's easier to keep tabs on them using covert surveillance. They can require things like electronic "tagging" of registered paranormals. It's also easier to make demands such as checking-in on a regular basis with a "regulation officer" or even instituting a "draft" of known paragons to serve the good of society with their abilities (as directed by the government). This is to say nothing of terrible possibilities like mass arrests, detainment, and pogroms aimed at wiping out the paranormal population, or at least "culling" it of its most dangerous members.

Even just the looming specter of a Paranormal Registration Act can be the basis for an entire *Paragons* series, while enforcing one is definitely a full-time job. See *The Law is Paramount* series framework in **Chapter Six** for an example of this type of series.

PRIVACY

Mind probes, psychometry, and similar paranormal senses have tremendous potential to violate personal privacy. In most criminal justice systems, they're not considered evidence or even admissible in a court of law. Mind-reading is most likely a violation of the right against self-incrimination in the United States and similar legal systems. At best, a paranormal witness may be permitted to testify as to what he or she perceived, but such testimony may be thrown out or treated as circumstantial evidence at best.

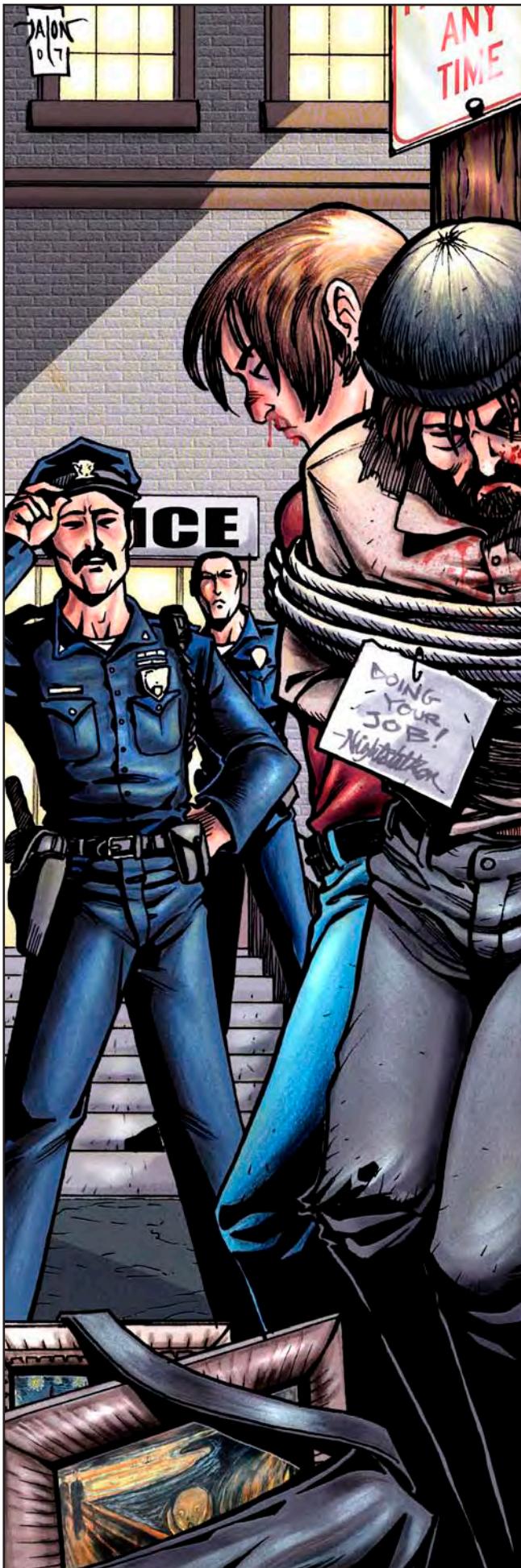
On the other hand, the paranormal ability to determine when someone is *lying* may find a place in court analogous to that of polygraph tests. It would most likely be voluntary, and witnesses would still have the same option to not answer questions; it would only detect deliberate lies under oath (which are perjury and illegal). Still, the accuracy of any such test could be called into question, and it would require a paranormal on-hand to perform it, not something every courtroom can have. The paragon would also need to be a truly impartial third-party in the case to provide unbiased information.

PARANORMAL CRIMES

In addition to committing traditional crimes more easily, some paragons can use their powers to commit crimes no one has even imagined. Consider some examples:

- Paranormal sensory abilities can invade the privacy of others, making it possible to spy or commit acts of voyeurism, or even to eavesdrop on someone's private thoughts or memories.





- Is precognitively playing the stock-market insider trading? Is failing to report or prevent a crime predicted using precognition covered under Good Samaritan laws? Is giving a sloppy, or inaccurate, prediction negligence?
- Most will agree controlling someone's mind is (or should be) illegal. Are people responsible for acts committed while under paranormal influence? If not, how do you *prove* you weren't acting of your own free will? How do you stop real criminals from claiming they were "mind controlled" and therefore not responsible for their actions?
- Teleportation, flight, and insubstantiality allow numerous opportunities for trespassing and violations of privacy. For that matter, they may constitute a serious traffic hazard in some areas. Should the Federal Aviation Administration or similar agencies regulate paranormal fliers? Do you need a license to fly under your own power?

PARANORMAL CRIMEFIGHTING

Emulating comic book superheroes, some paragons choose to use their talents to fight crime or arrest criminals. This means the legal system has to deal with superhuman vigilantes more capable than entire police departments. The legal ramifications are considerable, but hinge on a few important points.

LEGAL SANCTION

Some paranormals may actually work as law enforcement officers; either with local police forces or under the umbrella of a national agency like the Federal Bureau of Investigation or the Paranormal Regulatory Agency (see **Chapter Four**). These characters operate with official sanction, but they're also bound by the same rules and regulations as ordinary people within their agency. Thus paranormal police have to work within the bounds of just cause, Miranda rights, and so forth. Officials and the public are likely to scrutinize the activities of paranormal officers even more than their counterparts to ensure proper procedures are followed.

CITIZEN'S ARRESTS

Other paragons behave more like their superhero role models, making "citizen's arrests" of criminals. Common law in many nations allows civilians to detain criminals until the police can arrive, and paranormals have a much greater ability to do so without risk to themselves (and, ideally, to the criminal or any bystanders).

On the one hand, citizen's arrests are much easier for paranormals; they're not subject to the same regulations as arrests made by the police, and a paragon who sees a crime in progress, or has reason to believe a crime has been committed, can take action. In particular, civilians are not subject to the same search and seizure regulations as police officers, so a paranormal can, for example, act on information gained from unusual senses, so long as there's some hard evidence to back it up.

The big drawback is civilians making citizen's arrests have no legal protection from the consequences of their actions should they prove mistaken. They're subject to civil and criminal action for wrongful or malicious arrest, harassment, or the use of excessive force in making the arrest. They can also run into problems of evidence; while paranormal civilians don't need search warrants or the like,

they do need to turn up evidence admissible in a court of law. You can't arrest someone for something that haven't yet done or based on reading their mind to determine their guilt, for example, unless there is some other evidence of pre-meditation or a crime being committed. These risks make some paranormals less willing to put themselves out there and make arrests without sanction.

CONCEALED IDENTITIES

In the American criminal justice system, the accused has a right to face his or her accusers. This generally means witnesses are expected to appear in court, state their full names and place of

residence, and be sworn-in to testify under oath. Some paragons conceal their true identities or don't even *have* a legal identity! This usually bars them from testifying in a court of law without some special dispensation. If the testimony of a masked, or unidentified, paranormal is the sole evidence against a criminal, the case will most often be dismissed due to lack of admissible evidence.

By the same token, evidence gained solely through paranormal means isn't likely to be admissible in a court of law. Examples include things like precognition and telepathy; "But I *knew* he did it, Your Honor!" isn't considered sufficient, even if the character is a proven mind reader.

PARANORMAL TECHNOLOGY

Modern technology depends on the application of a tremendous body of known scientific information. When the paranormal threatens to throw all that out the window, what does it mean for technology? As it turns out, a tremendous amount of potential, tempered with a lot of risk, and more than a few false starts.

Paranormals influence technology in a number of different ways: Designing and creating new technologies or applications of existing technology, producing and manufacturing technology, and in the not yet clearly understood field of "paratechnology," devices as impossible as their paranormal makers.

Some paragons have impressive intellectual abilities and technical skills, making them well suited for developing and designing new technology. Of course, the line between "talented engineer" and "paranormal savant" remains unclear, but most paranormals follow the same steps when it comes to creating new technologies.

Paranormals get an edge in other areas of technological development. For example, abilities like tremendous mental processing speed and acuity allow paragons to do complex design work incredibly fast. Likewise, a super-fast paranormal can potentially build a prototype in record time. Sensory abilities allow some paranormals to directly observe phenomena undetectable to others, which can be useful in the creation of micro- or nano-scale technology.

Powers can also affect manufacturing. A great many technologies might be viable if only some particular problem could be solved. A paranormal able to solve that problem could make a great deal of money doing it. For example, transmutation could mass-produce sufficient quantities of particular elements of raw materials

required in the manufacture of one device or another. Telekinesis and similar matter manipulation can perform fine work beyond the capabilities of even precision tools and robots.

PARATECHNOLOGY

The most spectacular paranormal inventors actually have the *least* impact on technological development due to something called "paratechnology" or, so-called, "ACME devices" (see **Chapter One**). Essentially, many paranormal inventions simply *shouldn't* work from a design standpoint, and in fact often don't work for anyone other than their designer, or sometimes other paranormals. Attempts to reverse-engineer the technology are fruitless; sometimes even just looking inside is enough to make technicians wonder how the thing works at all.

Paratechnology has led to some scientific oddities, devices that are to ordinary technology as paranormals are to ordinary human beings, but has little overall effect on the world. Many are frustrated by the inability to replicate the creations of many paragons, and dismiss anything labeled an "ACME device" almost out of hand. An interesting side effect of this prejudice allows paranormal inventors who want to keep their developments secret to *claim* they are paratechnology, even when they're not, in order to deflect any outside interest in them, at least until they can be successfully patented.

MEDICINE

Direct healing is the power with the greatest potential to impact the practice of medicine. Paranormal healers like Panacea (see

ACME DEVICES

The existence of so-called "ACME devices" in *Paragons* is for two reasons. First, it allows for essentially "impossible" super-science devices of the kind you might see in the comic books. If you want a paranormal inventor creating sentient robots, shrink rays, or cosmic portals into the Imageria, go right ahead.

Second, and more important, it allows the GM to fine-tune exactly how much paranormal technology can be reverse-engineered and replicated on a larger scale. Want to keep paragon-spurred technological advancement under control? Simply make *all* paranormal inventions ACME tech, manifestations of their innate powers, and none of it will ever be mass marketed. Paragons will still be able to spur some technological innovations (you can't have people able to do the impossible and not find some technical uses for their abilities), but Dr. Science won't necessarily be providing personal battlesuits to every citizen at a low, low price.

You can also choose which things are "impossible super-science" (ACME devices) and which are plausible technological developments able to influence the series. For example, faster-than-light travel might be impossible without paranormal intervention, in which case any working FTL drive automatically can't be duplicated because it's ACME tech. The same approach can apply to any problematic technology. Of course, there's always the possibility someone will come along with a new version that *isn't* ACME tech, a potential plot hook and way to shake things up in the series.



Chapter Five) can treat wounds, injuries, and even disease and poisoning with little more than a touch and a moment's concentration. However, there's no way for paranormal healers to treat all the patients in need of their care; even dozens of them wouldn't be enough. Economics make it likely for at least some healers to provide their services to the highest bidder; even the most charitable might do so occasionally in order to raise money to cover *pro bono* work healing the less fortunate.

Beyond direct healing powers there are other paranormal abilities useful to medicine. Super-senses can provide more accurate diagnoses, particularly if a paragon can actually see, or otherwise sense, inside a patient's body. Telepathy allows a paranormal doctor to literally know how a patient is feeling, without the need to describe

symptoms. The ability to induce unconsciousness or to control sensations can substitute for anesthesia, while some paranormals have built-in scalpels (in the form of claws or the like) or even the power to reach inside someone using telekinesis or becoming incorporeal, obviating the need for some surgical procedures.

Traditional doctors, finding paranormal healers a threat to their profession, might encourage prosecution of any paragon practicing medicine without a license and insist on controlling such licensing themselves. They can back up their demands by threatening to go on strike, although such a move could split the medical community, as some will see it as a violation of the Hippocratic Oath to refuse to provide care.

PSYCHOLOGY

Paranormal sensory and mental powers can have a huge impact on psychology and mental health. Telepathic paranormal healers can know firsthand what a patient is experiencing, gaining a much deeper understanding of mental disorders. There may be unforeseen risks to this approach, however: are mental illnesses contagious to telepaths? Do they suffer stress or shock from reading a disturbed mind? These things can limit their effectiveness in the field.

The potential for mental and psychological healing via paranormal "reprogramming" is both vast and disturbing. On the one hand, paragons could cure people of mental illness as easily as their counterparts heal physical injuries. On the other hand the mind is even more complex and less understood than the physical systems of the body. Who knows what side effects might come from paranormal tampering?

Worse yet, who defines exactly what constitutes a "mental illness" suitable for treatment? While ethical paranormals might limit themselves to disorders identified by reputable professional groups and associations (like the American Psychological Association), diagnoses are often unclear, and not everyone agrees as to what is, or is not, a "disorder." Should paranormal "brainwashing" be used to cure things like Attention Deficit Disorder or anti-social behavior? What about disorders leading to criminal behavior? Then what about behaviors some people consider immoral? Such treatments can quickly become a slippery slope.

Similar to conventional medicine, mental health professionals may find paranormal treatments threatening and seek to curtail and license them at the very least. Many may claim "parapsychiatry" doesn't work at all and bring lawsuits against paragons claiming they can heal and change minds with their powers.

COMMERCE & ECONOMICS

While their effect on technology has the potential to revolutionize many industries (see **Paranormal Technology**, previously), paragons can influence the world of commerce and economics in a variety of other ways, from innovative business ideas to a range of goods and services.

As in other fields of endeavor, paranormal savants display superhuman skill as business managers, economists, brokers, traders, and so forth. A paranormal logician or manager can increase a business' efficiency tremendously, if given sufficient authority to implement changes. The primary limitation is that of a human staff, which can only be "fine tuned" so much. Similarly, paragons can potentially make fortunes trading on the stock market, or investing in real estate, or other business assets, with astonishing acumen. Given

the often subjective nature of savant abilities, it's nearly impossible to say whether a successful business figure is a paranormal or merely skilled and blessed with good fortune.

Governments seek to ban the use of active paranormal abilities—such as precognition—to "play" the stock market via a kind of "insider trading." The same is true of paranormal sensory powers ranging from mind reading to overhearing things with superhuman hearing or cracking computer security with "cyberpathic" powers. Still, such activities are difficult to prove, especially when no known paranormal agent is involved. Unscrupulous paragons—and those willing to hire or sponsor them—can potentially make fortunes through corporate and industrial espionage.

Even the legitimate uses of paranormal powers can be tremendous moneymakers. Paranormal service professionals work as highly paid consultants or freelancers, selling their talents to the highest bidder. Organizations like the Paranormal Professionals Society and companies like the Silber Agency and Foregone Conclusions exist to serve the needs of this new segment of the working world (see **Chapter Four** for more on these organizations).

The services paragons can provide are limited solely by their powers. Super-speedsters and teleporters can delivery goods and sensitive documents faster—and usually more securely—than any other means. (see **Blueshift** in **Chapter Five** for an example) Telepaths can transmit information instantly across great distances (see **Network** in **Chapter Five** for one example). A variety of powers are useful in engineering and manufacturing, as described under **Paranormal Technology**. Mathematical savants can do the kinds of calculations that usually require advanced software, with full understanding of the results and the ability to review their own work. Combat capable paragons find work as bodyguards, soldiers, mercenaries, or even replacements for while military units (see **Foregone Conclusions** in **Chapter Four** for some examples). The list goes on and on.

ADVERTISING & MARKETING

Alongside their powers, perhaps the greatest ability paragons have in commerce is their fame. A known paragon is an almost instant celebrity, a potential spokesperson for any number of products and services, a marketing icon with tremendous appeal.

The Mighty Miracle Guardians team is a prime example (see **Chapter Four**): A corporate-sponsored group of paragons, who serve as a living marketing campaign for their patrons. Even though none of the team-members have powers suited to producing products, their images and endorsements alone move tremendous amounts of merchandise. Indeed, such paragons are a form of merchandise, when you factor in all of the products based on them, from comic books and toys to video games, films, cartoons, and the like.

In fact, it's the corporate marketing machine that helps drive the idea of paragons in popular culture, which feeds back into the usefulness of paragons as pop-culture icons and spokespeople. See the following section for more on this.

POPULAR CULTURE

The Breakout is an event without precedent in human history. No other moment has so redefined the nature of the world and the future of humanity (and para-humanity). So it's something of an understatement to say popular culture around the world has gone paranormal-crazy. People around the world are positively *obsessed* with the living gods who walk amongst them, with all the good and bad that implies. The paranormal is the driving force in popular culture, drawing everything else along in its massive wake.

PRINT MEDIA

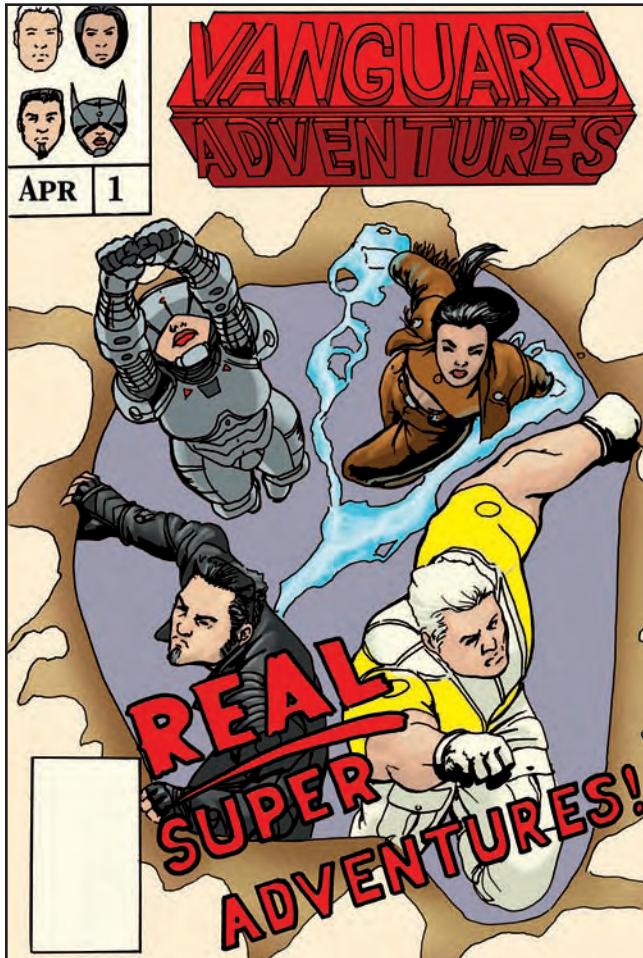
Traditional magazines and newspapers have found a great deal more to report, and discuss, in the wake of the Breakout. Print news coverage of paragons, or stories involving them in some fashion, is almost continuous. Print publications try to make up in depth and accuracy what they lack in speed and immediacy compared to online venues. They're only partially successful, since a great deal of the facts concerning the paranormal remain unknown or in dispute. The best they can usually do is provide in-depth information about the paragons themselves, and investigative journalism has come under fire in a few cases for invading the privacy of otherwise ordinary people dealing with extraordinary circumstances. Journalists involved counter that the public has a right to know, especially when someone with the power to level a city block might be living in their midst.

Book publishers have tell-all accounts of the Breakout, individual stories about paragons, and endless books of theory and speculation on the paranormal pouring into bookstores or waiting in the wings. Biographies and books by known paragons top the sales charts as people hunger to know everything they can about these new icons.

REALITY COMICS

The existence of real, live people with superhuman powers has led to a massive revival in the comic book publishing industry, but also

an equally large change in focus. Readers are far more interested in "reality comics" based on real paragons and their supposed "adventures" (or other activities) rather than stories about fictional superheroes, repackaged and retold for the umpteenth time.



Readers both young and old snap up these stories—in both older, traditional art styles and Japanese-influenced *manga*—as fast as they're published. The shift to "timely" reality comics (often based on real-world events) has also revived the monthly publication of comics magazines, which had been flagging compared to book-length graphic novels.

Naturally, comic book publishers seek to license hot new paranormal talents to publish reality comics about them, and such comics are typical elements of a widespread marketing campaign involving paragons. Comic publishers and creators are even called upon—by the paragons themselves or the companies that sponsor them—to provide designs and inspiration for paranormals, from costumes to "code-names" and more.

With the decline in popularity of fictional superhumans, major comic book publishers have hit upon a new idea: Licensing their properties to real, living paranormals! After all, if you were a paragon with amazing athletic abilities and the power to stick to walls, would you rather build up your own "brand identity" or associate yourself with one of the most famous in the world? The idea has proven popular and has the potential to tremendously revitalize existing comic properties, while bringing in considerable licensing income. There remain some concerns over finding just the right "fit" for an existing character identity and just how much (if at all) such characters should be tailored to their new "wearers." Publishers are also considering the eventuality of having to transfer a property to a new licensor, much like having a new actor play a popular, long-running role.

FILM & TELEVISION

With the appearance of paranormals, the line between "news" and "entertainment" in the public broadcast media has become almost non-existent. People watch 24-hour news channels in hopes of seeing exclusive footage of their favorite paragons, catching all the current gossip, and just finding out what incredible new things have happened in the world today. The new *Paragon Network* provides continuous news coverage of all things paranormal. In fact, so many people spend time glued to their televisions (or online news feeds, or both) that a certain amount of "news fatigue" sets in after a while.

Paragons are the hot new topic for all kinds of television and film. The biggest explosion is the immediacy of "reality TV" dealing with the paranormal in some form or another. The hit series *Prime Paragon!* is the biggest example, featuring paranormal competitors for existing costumed identities and fat endorsement contracts, showing off their powers and performing for the cameras. The *XTREME! Action Combat Championships* combine the spectacle of professional wrestling with amazing displays of paranormal power.

Story-driven television and conventional film are somewhat slower to catch up, although Hollywood is rife with proposals for vehicles based around this or that aspect of the post-Breakout world, from dramas to situation comedies. The potential for casting paranormal actors is there; people able to do their own stunts and "special effects." The formerly unknown actor Mark "Masque" Doucette has a promising career ahead using his paranormal ability to change his appearance to imitate famous people (depending on the resolution of pending court cases claiming violations of personal intellectual property and "human copyright").

THE INTERNET

The Breakout has brought the Internet into its own as a medium for news and information, and a great many people get their up-to-the-minute updates on what's going on from online news feeds, blogs, podcasts, and similar resources. Indeed, with ubiquitous digital cameras and Internet-capable cell phones and the like, a good deal of the "reporting" about the paranormal comes from ordinary people who happen to be in the right place at the right time (or wrong time, as the case may be). They capture images the traditional news media is too slow to get.

The number of websites and blogs dedicated to paragons grows exponentially, with popular sites having millions of hits daily. Paranormals are by no means immune to this phenomenon; in fact, some of the most popular sites are those run by paragons, or featuring them speaking in their own words to the public.

As much as the Internet is a source for information, it's also a source of misinformation. In particular, the "origin chaser" subculture has its primary home online and at various websites. In spite of attempts to shut down, or counter, such things as spark party networking sites and the like in the interest of public safety, authorities have been only partially successful. The 'net is jammed with various scams claiming to make people into paranormals, cults for or against paragons, and endless theory and speculation about the Breakout and what it all means, much of it uninformed at best, paranoid ranting at worst.

PARANORMAL ARTS

Paranormal artists are only beginning to explore the potential of their powers for art. In addition to artistic savants (or those who claim to be savants), some paragons could create or perform art beyond the capabilities of others.

MUSIC

Paranormal singers could potentially hit and sustain notes beyond the human range of hearing, although such music has a limited appeal to human audiences (some "ultra-soprano" overtones might be audible in the performance to human ears). More likely, paragon songsmiths could have music with paranormal effects, from bliss- or hallucination-inducing to emotion controlling! While some "special effects" can draw an audience, others are more likely to attract paranoid suspicion. Even just the accusation of "paranormal mind control" could damage the reputation of a popular performer. How do you prove fans love you for your work and not because of some hidden power?

Still, paranormal musicians have tremendous potential as "novelty acts," especially if they're any good at music. They're likely to earn the attention of music promoters, agents, and publishers looking to set them up on tours and market them like any other paranormal commodity.

PERFORMANCE

The potential for paranormal performance art is considerable and unexplored. Paragons can achieve performances normal people can only imagine, from aerobatics to fire-and-light shows, to realistic illusions where *anything* is possible. Exhibitions of paranormals simply "showing off" what they can do are hugely popular, either broadcast or—especially—live and in person.

So long as they're confined to spectacular "special effects" and "magic tricks," paranormal performance pieces are likely to go over

big with potential audiences. It's when audience participation enters the mix that trouble arises. People become skittish about the idea of "undue influence," so performances where a paragon directly affects the emotions, perceptions, or (worse yet) physical being of the audience make people nervous. They make promoters and venues nervous, too, given the tremendous potential for liability.

That said, there's still an audience for paranormal performances involving things like mental projections, emotional manipulation, and the like, especially among thrill-seekers, paranormal groupies, and spark ravers. Such things tend to remain underground due to the risk factors involved.

RELIGION & SPIRITUALITY

What is the impact of people with godlike powers on religion? What about godlike beings who claim to be *actual gods* and can seemingly back up their claims? The Breakout has considerable effect on established religions and the practice of faith throughout the world, for both paranormals and the normal people living around them.

MAJOR RELIGIONS

The following is a look at some of how the major world religions might deal with the issue of paranormals in their midst. There are just suggestions, not definitive answers, and you should feel free to modify things to suit your own *Paragons* series.

CHRISTIANITY

Christian reaction to the Breakout is as diverse as the many branches and denominations of Christianity. The two extremes are deification and veneration of paragons or demonizing them as hell-spawn.

Some Christians see paranormals as living saints, able to perform miracles. This is particularly true when paragons appear in devout communities, and certainly some do have saintly-appearing powers ranging from healing to transmutation. Some paragons accept this veneration and belief about their abilities while others turn away from it. Cults tend to spring up around such "miracle workers" and they range from fairly harmless to growing concerns as their paranormal leaders preach their own version of the Gospels. The Church of Jesus Christ, Paragon is one such sect (see **Chapter Four**).

The majority of Christians and Christian faiths are undecided with regards to what part, if any, paranormals play in religion and vice versa. They admit they simply don't know any more than anyone else what paragons are or how they can do what they do. Their powers *may* come from God, but unless or until He chooses to give a sign of this, there's no way of knowing. Some accept the divine nature of paragons on faith, others remain doubtful. A middle ground seems to be that paranormal abilities are like all God-given gifts, but free will permits them to be used for good or evil purposes. Some paragons are particularly favored by Heaven and may even be prophets or divine messengers of some sort.

Some conservative evangelical branches of Christianity denounce paranormals as "false gods" and, moreover, claim their powers come from Satan! These sects, most prominently the Seven Thunders (see **Chapter Four**) also believe paragons are heralds

VISUAL ARTS

In addition to savant levels of skill in drawing, painting, and other visual media, some paragons can "paint" with light, or sculpt rock or metal with their bare hands. Others can use pigments to reproduce images with photorealistic accuracy and some paranormal works of art even seem to have a "life" of their own, making them a kind of ACME device (see **ACME Devices** under **Paratechnology**): Animate statues, paintings that talk, drawings able to alter the emotional state of the beholder, and so forth. As with other manifestations of paranormal power, exactly how the things happen remains unknown; they simply do.

RELIGION & SPIRITUALITY

of the End Times and the coming Apocalypse, a "call to arms" for Christians to reaffirm their values and save as many souls as they can before the Final Judgment.

JUDAISM

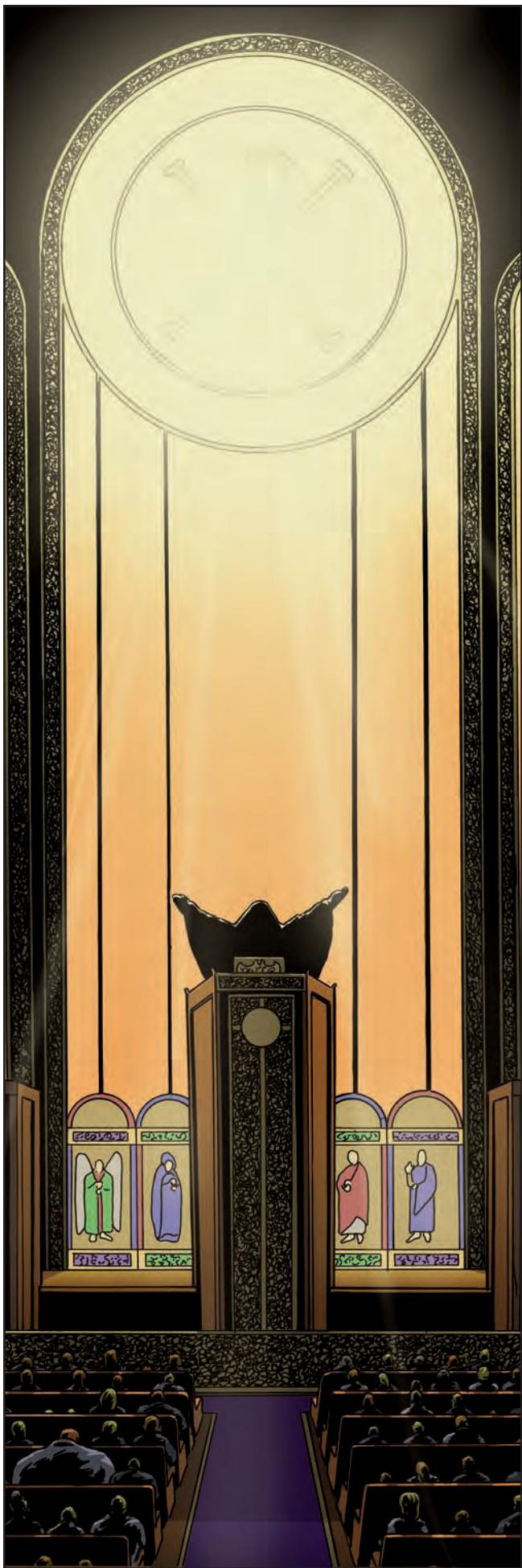
Jewish reaction to the Breakout is, as a whole, fairly blasé. Some Rabbinical scholars speculate about paragons as divinely empowered, but since paranormals are found all over and among many different peoples, it makes little difference to them. Most still believe the Jews are God's chosen people, although a few wonder if perhaps He has found new favorites with the paragons.

The relationship between paranormals and Judaism is far more political than spiritual, as Israel is more concerned about the potential for paranormal violence and terrorism, as well as recruiting sympathetic paragons to defend the nation from those threats. Jewish paragons, in particular, suddenly have a considerable voice in international affairs, and the complete attention of nations around the world. Israel calls on them and others to defend the Jewish homeland, but will they do so?

ISLAM

The general attitude towards paranormals in the Islamic world can be summed up with "if you're not with us, you're against us." That is, paragons of the faith, who choose to serve the cause of Islam, are heralded as the favored chosen of Allah, might *ghazis* to fight the infidel. Non-Muslim paranormals or, worse yet, Muslim paragons who either do not fit expected molds (women, for example) or refuse to do their duty to support the cause and laws of Islam, are agents of evil. The middle ground is found among Muslim minorities in some nations. They tend to adopt the opinion of other moderate religious factions, saying they do not know if paranormals are divinely empowered or not.

As with Judaism, Islamic paranormals are more of a political issue. The specter of paranormal terrorism hangs over every nation, and the first-world powers fear paragons will further destabilize an already unstable Middle East. Many nations have turned their attention from acquiring nuclear and biochemical weapons of mass destruction to the more realistic goal of finding paranormal agents. Rumors abound about "training facilities" that are little more than death-camps intended to unleash latent paranormal powers, and psychological experts have pointed out how the extreme experiences of training in terrorist camps—to say nothing of their actual missions—fit the typical breakout experience.



HINDUISM

The diverse numbers of gods in the Hindu pantheon combined with the mythic tradition of *devas* (celestial beings) and avatars has led to a number of Hindu paranormals becoming objects of worship, whether as gurus or as true living gods. The nature of avatars is even such that multiple paranormals can all be avatars of the same deity. Hindu beliefs encourage the process of attaining enlightenment by "waking up" and realizing unity with Brahman or the godhead. Some liken this to the awakening, or breakout, of a paranormal.

Since Hindu tradition also emphasizes a guru-student relationship to achieve greater spiritual enlightenment, those who believe paragons are more spiritually advanced—if not incarnated divine beings—naturally seek them out as gurus. Some paranormals accept this role, while others shun it. There are also paragons, like Ravana (see **Chapter Five**) who claim to be gods and lead cults of worshippers.

BUDDHISM

Broadly speaking, Buddhists tend to see paranormals and Fortean phenomena as just another aspect of the *maya* or illusion of the physical world (albeit unusual aspects). Although the amazing feats of paragons do resemble deeds of great spiritual teachers and gurus, present-day teachers and gurus tend to consider these things *siddhis*, or "tricks," better suited to distract one from the path to enlightenment rather than advance one along it. In fact, a few of the teachers who say this are paranormals themselves.

In practice, a number of Buddhists believe paranormal abilities represent a higher level of spiritual development, perhaps the ability to manipulate the "illusion" of reality. They also think such abilities represent the potential to go beyond the surface layer of reality and perhaps transcend the Wheel of Reincarnation, achieving enlightenment. Paragons are therefore *bodhisattvas*, the enlightened who choose to remain incarnated in order to aid others in achieving enlightenment. In this regard, the view is similar to that of the Church of Jesus Christ, Paragon.

NEW AGE SPIRITUALITY

Various New Age and neo-pagan subcultures tend to embrace paranormals, albeit often without a lot of in-depth consideration. Many believe paragons tap into previously hidden or latent powers of the mind, essentially the same things done by great adepts, gurus, or spiritual teachers in the past. Some believe it's a matter of physical or spiritual evolution, others a "tipping point" in the collective unconscious of humanity or the like.

Some followers of these faiths remain skeptical about the true nature of paragons, but far more would-be followers, students, and disciples have sprung up. Some focus on paranormals as teachers, guides, or even living gods, while others simply try to emulate them as role models. Both the Internet and the metaphysical sections of bookstores are crammed with systems claiming to unlock paranormal power, from energized meditation to shamanism to "authentic" ancient occult rituals. Study groups, circles, and covens work towards enlightenment, empowerment, or both. The kind of casualties found at spark parties are less common, but some groups do go to extreme measures, with the usual tragic results.

Naturally, there are also some paranormals who subscribe to New Age or neo-pagan faiths, some of whom consider themselves true magicians, witches, or even gods. Members of the Pact (see **Chapter Four**), for example, follow mystical spiritual traditions, although primarily as a path to power. Likewise the paragon Gaia and some others of the Pantheon (see **Chapter Four**) believe they are ancient pagan gods in physical form, empowered by the worship of their followers.

NEW FAITHS

The existence of living gods has led to a number of new religious movements based around paragons, the Breakout, and their effects on society. The Pantheon is one such example (see **Chapter Four** for details).

PRO-PARANORMAL FAITHS

"Pro-paranormal" generally means a faith that worships paragons, or at least accords them special spiritual significance. The Church of Jesus Christ, Paragon, for example, believes paranormals are especially blessed examples of "spiritual development" and all humanity has the potential to acquire paranormal powers through faith, prayer, and introspection. A number of other religious sects focus on the "paragon potential" in humanity, claiming a variety of spiritual disciplines can unlock that potential and allow humanity to attain its superhuman birthright. These range from esoteric yogis to mystical Jewish Kabalists, Zen and Taoist philosophers, and evangelical or mystical Christian sects.

The other type of "pro-paranormal" faith essentially revolves around the worship of either paragons in general or a specific paragon demagogue. After all, many paranormals do possess powers like mythological deities or other religious figures, and more than a few actually believe they *are* gods, or something akin to them. It's far easier for some people to have faith in a figure who actually does perform miracles and answer prayers.

Naturally, established religions tend to consider these new paranormal cults false faiths and are alarmed by the rate of their growth. Society at large is concerned about the potential influence these cults may offer their objects of worship and the impact they might have on society. How can paranormals be equal citizens of a nation as well as religious icons? There's also the simple fact that worship of paragons places them on a higher plane than ordinary people; for some it's simply acknowledging the obvious: Paragons *are* superior to normal humans. For others, it encourages an elitist system that devalues "ordinary" people and suggests paranormals should be at the top tier of society.

ANTI-PARANORMAL FAITHS

The Breakout has led most, if not all, religions to take a stance on paragons, and that stance isn't always favorable. Even in cases where it is, splinter groups of the faith often break off over the issue of paranormals. The Seven Thunders sect of Christianity is one such example (see **Chapter Four**); while most Christians accept paranormals as people subject to Original Sin and capable of salvation just like any other person, the "Seveners" believe so-called "paragons" are actually agents of Satan and heralds of the End Times and the coming Rapture.

A great many anti-paranormal sects and religious groups are also apocalyptic in nature, inspired by the chaos of the Breakout to claim the world is either coming to an end or will end due to the actions of paranormals unless something is done about them. These sects don't always assert paragons are responsible for the end of the world; their existence is merely a sign of the times, but rarely a favorable sign.

The most moderate of the "anti-paranormal" religions don't believe paranormals are inherently evil or immoral, but are troubled by the potential of their abilities. The first concern is along the lines of "power corrupts" and the greater capacity paragons have to commit evil acts, if they chose to do so. Some faiths claim no one should have the kind of power wielded by some paranormals, and encourage careful scrutiny of them and their motives. Others believe paranormal power represents a distraction from a truly spiritual existence, a temptation to entangle one's self too much in the material world. They also advocate the moderate application of power, when it must be used at all. Not surprisingly, few paragons actually subscribe to either belief.

PARANORMAL PATHS

Some esoteric spiritual traditions limit themselves to paranormal members, that is, one has to be a paragon in order to follow the spiritual path laid out by the faith and attain spiritual enlightenment or understanding. Spiritual traditions based on exploration of the Imageria fall into this category as well, since doing so is impossible without some kind of paranormal assistance.

Paranormal esoteric traditions may have "outer" and "inner" levels, where the outer level admits normals, either to support the inner level or to one day unlock their potential and attain the inner level (as with the Church of Jesus Christ, Paragon). The inner level of the tradition is limited to paragons and may be sub-divided into ranks or grades based on spiritual achievement. The Pact in **Chapter Four** is somewhat like this, in that the core of the mystical order has paranormal abilities.



CHAPTER THREE: THE IMAGERIA

The Breakout revealed more than just people with paranormal powers to the world, it also opened up entire new worlds for them to explore, or an entire realm that contains many other worlds, depending on how you look at it. It is a place of imagination made manifest, a realm of thought, idea, myth, and potential, called the Imageria.

In essence, the Imageria is an immaterial alternate dimension that appears to encompass all of human thought, myth, and story. Literally every idea anyone has ever had can exist somewhere in its depths, and the more who have shared in a particular idea, the stronger its presence in the Imageria. The very strongest ideas form

"THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY, FROM WHOSE BOURNE NO TRAVELLER RETURNS, PUZZLES THE WILL..."

- SHAKESPEARE, HAMLET, ACT 3, SCENE 1

unique worlds and even beings capable of interaction with visitors. Some claim these places and powers are the gods of human belief, others consider them psychological archetypes or primal forces, appearing as gods in order to impress or simply so humans can comprehend them.

The Imageria may well be as infinite as the imagination itself,

although it does have several distinct zones or layers to it, so far as anyone has been able to determine. What lies in the furthest reaches of the imaginal realm remains unknown, as no one can claim to have ventured there and returned, at least, no one sane or trustworthy.

THE NATURE OF THE IMAGERIA

The true nature of the Imageria is not entirely clear, to say the least. There are a number of theories, but slim and often contradictory evidence.

The Imageria appears to be a non-material realm of existence strongly influenced by human thoughts and beliefs. It may be an alternate dimensional plane, a reality made up purely of thought and accessed telepathically, or a "higher" spiritual layer to the universe, perhaps connected with deeper truths and mysteries about existence. Whatever the case, the Imageria has certain clear qualities and traits, described here. Gamemasters should see **Chapter Six** for some options concerning the nature of the Imageria.

ENTERING AND LEAVING

There are two means of entering and leaving the Imageria: physically (bodily) and mentally (psychically; spiritually according to some).

Mentally entering and leaving the plane appears the most common: the traveler enters a trance state and his or her consciousness shifts from the material world to the Imageria, manifesting there in a form (usually) like the traveler's physical body. Some imagerial visitors have a different appearance while there, often dictated—consciously or not—by their self-image. In game terms this difference in appearance is cosmetic and costs no points: the advantages (disguise, for example) are generally balanced by the drawbacks (difficulty being recognized by those familiar with the other appearance).

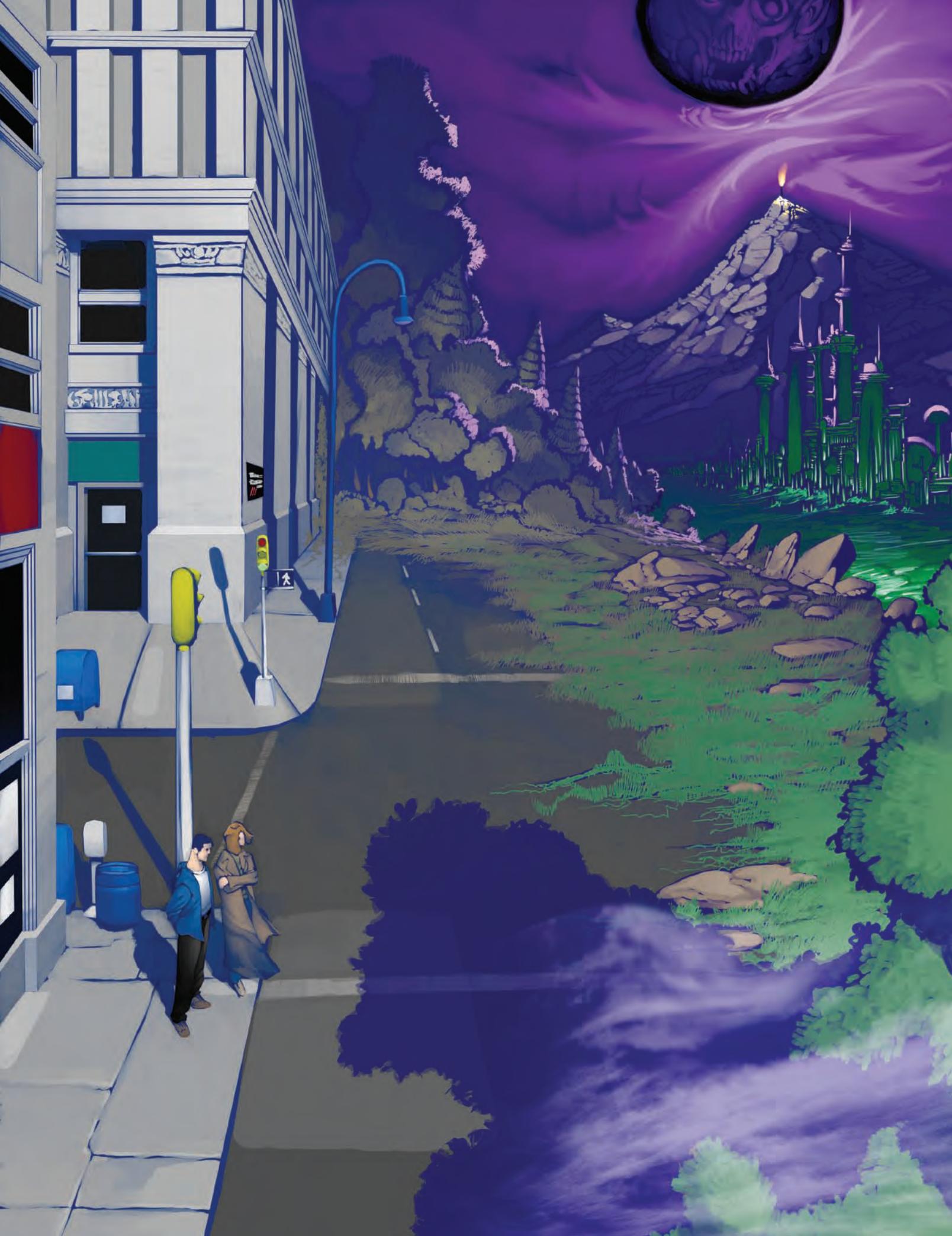
A mental visitor to the Imageria is "solid" there, even if normally incorporeal on the material plane. Other imaginal beings and objects can interact with the visitor and even present dangers or obstacles. Some point to this as proof the Imageria is "real," but it is just as easily explained away as a side effect or a realm where belief is the foundation of reality and visitors "believe" they are real—and therefore solid—as are the things they encounter.

Astral Form is the most common mental means of entering the Imageria. The basic form of the power accesses the Border region of the realm, while Astral Form with the Dimensional power feat allows the user to move deeper into the Imageria. Only one rank of Dimensional is required, although the GM may wish to make it one rank per "layer" (Reaches, Depths, and Deep Beyond) in *Paragons* games heavily concerned with the Imageria and travel therein.

For the ability to travel mentally *solely* to the deeper levels of the Imageria (the Reaches and beyond), the GM may allow Dimensional Movement with a mental descriptor, since the two forms are largely the same in terms of their effects. Physical travelers don't leave a vulnerable body behind, but they also have no "anchor" in the physical world and may not necessarily return where they left it.

Physical travel to the Imageria involves the use of the Super-Movement power, namely Dimensional Movement. Like the Dimensional modifier, one rank of Dimensional Movement is sufficient to allow the character to enter or leave the Imageria, although the GM may require multiple ranks to access the deeper levels of the realm, or at least to *return* from them easily (see the following). The character shifts from one world to the other, simply disappearing. Those with sufficient Progression can even bring others along with them. Physical characters in the Imageria are subject to its rules, and interact with mental travelers in much the same fashion.

Apart from paranormal powers, the only other way to enter the Imageria is largely by chance. In some cases unexplained "shallows," gates between the two realms, have appeared, permitting travel between them (see **Shallows** in the **Border** section for details, later in this section). Likewise, the actions of another paragon can send some people into the Imageria. One theory claims





everyone enters the Imageria when they sleep and dream but if so, they are only capable of interacting through paranormal means and so effectively exist "outside" of the realm until then.

Entering the Imageria can often be easier than leaving. Sometimes things prevent an imagerial traveler from returning. The first thing is the layered aspect of the realm. The "deeper" one goes into the Imageria, the more difficult it is to return. Powers accessing the Border of the realm can only return a traveler to the physical world from there. So if you move into the Reaches, you first have to find your way back to the Border before leaving the Imageria. The longer the voyage out, the longer the journey back becomes. Higher ranks of the Dimensional power feat or Dimensional Movement allow travelers to "skip" layers in their journey, moving immediately from the physical world to a deeper level and vice versa. The only exception to this is the Abyss, which is an abso-

lute barrier. Travelers *must* cross it rather than "jumping" over it via paranormal powers.

IMAGERIAL MATERIALS

Things in the Imageria—including visitors—are made up of *ectoplasm*, a kind of "primal material" responsive to thought and emotion. Travelers are converted bodily into ectoplasm upon visiting the plane, while a psychic visitor manifests a body of ectoplasm in the Imageria.

For all intents and purposes, ectoplasmic objects in the Imageria are like real things: they seem solid, liquid, or gaseous, like their material counterparts, and function in a similar way. So an ectoplasm wall is a solid, impassable barrier just like a real wall, unless someone uses some sort of power to bypass it. Ectoplasmic creatures are tangible and can interact with visitors to the plane just like physical beings. Generally, you can treat an experience in the Imageria just like a real world interaction, with the same effects and consequences.

IMAGERIA SHAPING

Some areas of the Imageria are especially sensitive to psychic impressions, "unformed" and subject to outside influence. In these "soft" places, strong-willed visitors can actually change the substance of the plane as they wish. Essentially, any free-willed being can make use of the Create Object power with a rank equal to the character's Will save bonus, creating "solid" objects out of the raw, unformed ectoplasm of the plane. Two or more competing shapers can make contested Will saves to see who assumes control of a particular shaping, or can conjure up different things to compete with each other. See the Create Object power in *Mutants & Masterminds* (see *M&M*, page 80)—and the expanded description in *Ultimate Power* (see *Ultimate Power*, page 36)—for details.

IMAGERIAL ENVIRONMENTS

Virtually any environment can and does exist in the Imageria, but visitors are not necessarily subject to their effects. In the Border and most of the Reaches, the environment is harmless, regardless of how it appears. Travelers can pass through deep water, fiery deserts, and more without the least discomfort. The environment is little more than a "special effect" of the realm.

In the Depths and beyond, Imageria environments take on more real qualities. Travelers may find themselves on other worlds subject to other rules, challenged by the environment. For example, travelers in the Depths can end up on a frigid wintry landscape,

IS THE IMAGERIA "REAL"?

There's a great deal of speculation and debate as to whether or not the Imageria is a "real" place or layer of reality or simply some kind of sophisticated hallucination experienced by paranormals with the ability to access it. Thus far, there's no conclusive evidence that gives credence to one explanation over another.

There is proof the Imageria can affect physical reality in various ways. Some paragons can summon or conjure things from its depths, things with physical substance and even permanence. Likewise, some paranormals are able to bodily enter the Imageria, disappearing from the physical world entirely and even taking passengers along with them! Others only enter the Imageria in a mental or spiritual state, leaving their physical body behind in a deep trance, but even then the physical form often shows signs of whatever the paranormal is experiencing in the other realm.

Experiences in the Imageria have affected paranormals' powers, insights, and psyches. More importantly, there's considerable evidence it's possible to be injured or even die in the Imageria and, for most paragons, that's more than enough evidence of its "reality" for them.

subject to the intense cold, or crossing a desert with the same need for water and shade they might have in the physical world. Usually, environments in the Depths aren't immediately fatal, but they can be dangerous and debilitating.

PARANORMAL POWERS

Paranormal powers may or may not work as they usually do in different regions of the Imageria. For the most part, powers work normally in the Border and Reaches, although the lack of "solid" things in the Border may limit the use of some powers. Powers used in the Border do not affect the physical world, or vice versa, unless the power has the Dimensional power feat or perception range and a mental power descriptor (such as Mental Blast). Additional ranks of the Dimensional feat may allow powers to extend to the deeper levels of the Imageria, or to reach out from them to the

physical world, at the Gamemaster's discretion (see **Entering and Leaving**, previously).

In some areas of the Reaches and virtually all of the Depths and the Abyss, "reality" may operate under its own rules, such that some or even all powers don't work as expected. So there are places where paranormals have no more powers than ordinary humans, others where their powers are unusually enhanced, or completely different from normal. So, for example, a flame-projecting paragon might have no powers in the elemental realm of water but enhanced abilities in the realm of fire, or the domain of a fiery god or being. On the other hand, a place in the Depths associated with battle could enhance violent powers but inhibit more peaceful or communicative ones. The changes are largely a matter of GM Fiat, based on the nature and needs of the place in question. If the rules of a particular place provide a complication for a character, award the player a hero point for it.

MAPPA MONDI: PATHS OF THE UNKNOWN

It's somewhat difficult to talk about the Imageria in terms of mundane geography: it is a realm beyond space and time as we know them, simultaneously everywhere and nowhere. It's impossible to point to where it lies in three-dimensional space, or to talk about its regions as anything other than experiences, rather than places.

The most applicable model of the Imageria is one of layers. Think of the peaks of mountainous islands, thrusting up above a thick layer of clouds. Standing upon one of those peaks, you can see others thrusting up above the mists. The peaks are like individual people, the realm above the clouds like the real world in which we live. Unable to see any deeper, the individuals seem unconnected, the forces moving the mist appear somewhat random.

Walk down the slope and into the mist and you're in the first layer of the Imageria, the Border, the part touching upon the physical world. You can still see the peaks above the clouds, but faintly, and less and less as you move further away. So it is in the misty borders of the Imageria, just beyond the physical into the realm of thought.

Down and down, the slope finally reaches the surface of an island, surrounded by an ocean. The island is the Reaches, the "near realms" of the Imageria, and it is even inhabited. It's some distance from the high peaks of the real world, but what goes on there in the clouds still affects things here.

All the way downhill, you come to a beach and the ocean. Walk out into the ocean and the waters begin to close over you as you pass into the Depths, the deepest part of the Imageria it's possible to easily reach. Just like water is thicker and heavier than air, the thoughts and forces are stronger and more viscous, life is more primal.

Down, down into the depths, where the light of the world cannot reach, lies the Abyss; darker and deeper than any ocean trench, where life is as alien and strange as you can imagine. It is the "smoker vents" of the deep mind, the lightless chasm of the soul.

If you could go all the way to the bottom, braving the darkness and whatever dwells there, you would eventually find the sea-bed, the Deep Beyond, and you would see how the island peaks all merge into one surface, one land, one world at this level, just as the Imageria and all reality merge into one, a singularity of expe-

rience and existence. Few ever reach this depth, and fewer still return from it.

Of course, the Imageria is not an ocean, or islands, or mist, and the real world isn't made of mountaintops, but it's as good an explanation as any for the experience of traveling into a place that is not a place at all but more a state of mind.

THE BORDER

As might be expected, the Border is the region of the Imageria between the material world and the further Reaches of the other plane. There is some debate whether or not the Border is properly part of the Imageria or a realm unto itself. It is more like an "overlap" between the two planes, allowing them to touch and travelers from one to visit the other.

The material world is visible from within the Border, although details are sometimes misty and indistinct. The Border and anything there are largely invisible and undetectable from the physical world, although some mental senses can pick up on things in the Border. Psychic Awareness, for example, can sense active power use in the Border just like it can in the physical world, and other mental senses can pick up things in the Border.

Creatures in the Border of the Imageria are like ghosts to the physical world: incorporeal (like the fourth rank of Insubstantial) and invisible, with full concealment to all but mental senses. They can also move in any direction, unrestricted by gravity and passing harmlessly through physical objects. Powers and items with the Affects Incorporeal power feat can affect beings in the Border, creating barriers against them, for example.

Mystical explorers of the Imageria (like the Pact in **Chapter Four**) equate the first level of the Imageria with the "astral" or "ethereal" plane of occult lore, and beings there with ghosts or spirits. The Astral Form power is the most common means of entering or leaving the Border, although some visitors reach it bodily using Dimensional Movement or via a shallow (see the following).

SHALLOWS

In some places the "veil" or barrier between the physical world and the Imageria are especially thin, allowing the physical to "dip" into the Border and the two to interact. In a shallow, physical and imag-



erial things co-exist. Imagerial beings and objects in the Border are essentially solid and noticeable to physical beings and vice versa. So an imagerial "ghost" entering a shallow would become visible and tangible to any physical person there. Likewise, an astral traveler could actually touch and interact with a physical creature in a shallow, as if both were present on the same plane.

Moreover, a physical visitor can actually enter the Imageria through a shallow, literally walking away from the physical world and deeper into the imaginal realm. This is most often an act of will, but can happen by accident. Some travelers follow an imagerial creature into a shallow—be it a cave, wooded glade, stone circle, or abandoned subway station—and pass from the physical into the imaginal realm. The challenge for these travelers is finding their way back to the physical world, since they need another shallow or a prominence (see the following) to leave the Imageria; that, or the aid of someone else able to bridge the gap between worlds.

While some shallows are permanent features of the landscape, others are temporary, appearing and disappearing at regular intervals or even seemingly at random. These irregular shallows often form the basis of local legends about hauntings or other strange happenings and can become the source of Fortean phenomena involving the Imageria. Since shallows themselves are visible only by their effects, such phenomena are often how they are discovered.

PROMINENCES

While shallows are places where the real world overlaps the border of the Imageria, prominences are apparently places where the Imageria emerges into the real world, like an island rising from the ocean or a solar flare erupting off the surface of the Sun. Essentially imagerial objects or beings appear in the physical world as solid and "real" as anything else. The House That Hate Built (see **Chapter Five**) may be a particular prominence, the same for other Fortean phenomenon around the world involving the appearance of unusual objects, beings, or even terrain.

While in some cases a prominence is permanent (or at least appears so), most prominences are transitory, lasting only a short while (hours or days, perhaps even minutes) before fading back into the Imageria. Their appearances are often on a particular cycle, such as the phases of the Moon, only a night (or during the daytime), once each year, and so forth. There may even be prominences with a tremendously long cycle, such as only once a decade, century, or even longer, that gave rise to ancient myths and legends but have not yet reappeared in the post-Breakout world. The more fringe theories believe everything from the lost continent of Atlantis to the fabled city of El Dorado might be a prominence. If so, then some prominences could be places from the Reaches or Depths "rising up" through the Border into the physical world before "descending" back whence they came.

THE REACHES

Past the Border (inasmuch as such directions have any meaning in the Imageria) lie the Reaches, the first level of the Imageria distinct from the physical world. It is a realm of "surface" ideas and images, or myths and legends brought to life.

Getting to the Reaches is primarily a matter of intent: one simply wills it while traveling "away" from the Border and the physical

WHO KNOWS ALL THIS?

Who knows all the information about the Imageria given in this chapter? That's largely up to you, depending on the type of *Paragons* series you intend to run, but there are some general guidelines.

The Imageria is the most mysterious aspect of the paranormal world. It remains unclear exactly what it is, how far it extends, and how much influence it has over paranormal powers and phenomena in the "real" world. A great many people don't even believe the Imageria exists, or consider it some sort of "side effect" of paranormals' powers rather than an "alternate universe," much less evidence of some higher spiritual plane of existence.

The Imageria is likely best known among scholars and theorists, particularly paranormal explorers with the ability to access it. Any of them might have the truth about the imaginal realm, or none of them, depending on what you decide its true nature should be. So, for example, factions like MERLIN, the Pact, and the Rosemont Center all likely have experience with the Imageria, even though they approach it in different ways: MERLIN as an alternate layer of quantum reality, the Pact as a magical higher order, and the Rosemont Center as a reflection of the Universal Unconscious (and the source of Dr. Rosemont's abilities). One of them could be right, they might all be wrong, or they could even all be *right*, depending on how you look at it.

Odds are the general public knows little or nothing about the Imageria. They might be vaguely aware of paragons able to travel to "other dimensions," influence dreams, summon strange things, and so forth, but don't connect it all with some cosmic otherworld. Experts in paranormal and Fortean phenomena have various theories about the Imageria or something like it, but don't necessarily agree as to its existence or true nature. Paranormals are much the same, except they usually have practical experience to back up their personal theories about the Imageria.

In practical game terms, this means information about the Imageria is probably limited to "hard" levels of appropriate Knowledge skills (DC 20 or higher), with different skills subscribing to different theories regarding the nature of the Imageria: physical sciences probably connected to quantum theory and entangled consciousness, behavioral sciences talking about the Universal Unconscious and psychic abilities, and arcane lore referencing the "higher realms" described by members of the Pact and other mystics.

world, which becomes progressively more misty and less distinct until it fades away altogether. Then the mists part and the traveler arrives in the Reaches, although not always at the intended destination.

Although the Reaches appear to mimic various real-world (and fantastic) landscapes and environments, they are harmless to visitors. So it's possible to journey "under the sea" to Atlantis or the realms of elemental water or the like without any danger of drowning or hypothermia, for example. You can generally ignore rules for the harmful effects of the environment in the Reaches; the "environmental effects" here are essentially symbols, for show, rather than real hazards.

PLACES IN THE REACHES

The Reaches are made up of "places" with no true fixed position in physical terms. A place is a distinct locale or destination, with the space "between" places made up of vague paths, ranging from dark forest trails to subway tunnels, rainbow bridges, fast-flowing rivers, or anything else that can constitute a route from place to place. Encounters can take place along the paths, just like on any physical trail, but most inhabitants of the Imageria remain in their places, unless they have reason to do otherwise.

THE ELEMENTAL REALMS

The four cornerstones or compass points of the Reaches are the elemental realms, associated with the primal elements of earth, air, fire, and water. The realm of earth lies "closest" to the border and the material world, with the realm of water opposite it and closest to the depths. The realms of air and fire exist to either "side," further from the Border than earth, not quite as close as water.

The elemental realms are mostly gradations; where they overlap there are places mixing their nature. Water and air create ice, water and earth form mud and swamps, fire and earth volcanoes and

lava fields, and so forth. The further one moves towards the pure realm, the more pronounced the elements become: mountains rise higher and higher into the air, an endless desert gives way to burning plains and rivers of fire, and the land falls away along the shores of a vast and endless ocean.

The elemental realms are not just manifestations of material forces but also spiritual, mental, and emotional qualities associated with those forces. So the realm of fire, for example, tends to be passionate, quick-tempered, and willful, while the realm of air is cool, intellectual, and sometimes tempestuous. Beings found in the different realms tend to conform to their qualities.

FAERIE

In the realm of earth are vast, practically endless, primeval forests and glades unlike any seen in the material world for generations. Some of these are the domain of Faerie, the place of the fey folk, elemental and ancestral beings of legend. Technically, "Faerie" is made up of numerous domains, claimed by different kings, queens, princes, barons, and the like. It includes beings from throughout human myth and legend, and extends to the lakes and rivers flowing to the realm of water (and the nixies, merfolk, and other inhabitants). True to the legends, many of the inhabitants of Faerie are capricious and given to cruelly toying with intruders, although bound to the letter of their word and true to the particular rules of their place.

THE CITY OF BRASS

Rising from the burning sands of the realm of fire is the legendary City of Brass, stronghold of the Caliph of Fire and Sultan of the Ifrit. The mountains surrounding it are home to metal working dwarves with fire in place of their hair and beards. Dragons are said to lair in the deep caverns, along with older and more sinister things, perhaps brought up from the Abyss itself by the greed of the deep-delvers. A "bazaar of the bizarre" fills the central

square of the great city, with strange wares from far and wide, but buyers should beware bargains made here (and elsewhere in the Imageria).

THE CITADEL OF THE FOUR WINDS

Atop the highest mountain peak of the realm of air sits the Citadel of the Four Winds, an eternal watchtower and observatory, windows open to the starry, cloud-swept sky. Visitors able to pass the riddle tests of the mysterious keepers of the citadel may enter and seek knowledge and (hopefully) wisdom in its vast libraries of books, scrolls, and even touch-sensitive display screens. Beyond the Citadel lies endless clouds and mists of the realm of air; it is said the solid ground drops away beyond it, and one can fall forever. Those favored by the keepers (or cunning enough to outwit them, which may be the same thing) can fly through the realm mounted on griffins or giant eagles kept at the citadel.

ATLANTIS

On the shores of the realm of water stand the shining towers of the fabled city of Atlantis, ruled by the wise philosopher-kings, port-of-call for white-winged ships from distant, unnamed lands beyond the shining waves of the endless sea. It is a cosmopolitan, enlightened place, tolerant of visitors and their strange ways, but not of dissent or troublemaking. Its Grand Market puts even the bazaar of the City of Brass to shame, and travelers can often find passage out onto or across the realm of water, or descend the Sunken Steps to the mirror-realm of Atlantis-Below-The-Waves, a shadow of the city's future (or past, depending on whom you believe); merfolk and sea-dwellers swim and dwell among the cyclopean ruins there. The Undersea Road leads out away from the Eternal Shore and into the Depths.

IMAGERIAL ABDUCTIONS

One phenomenon connected with the Imageria is the "abduction experience." Essentially, a person (or, rarely, group of people) experiences being "taken" by unknown beings, often examined or questioned, before being returned to the real world. While modern "alien abductions" are the most well known cases, there have been similar stories for generations, previously thought to involve "faeries" or other supernatural beings, which apparently exist in the Reaches of the Imageria.

Some suggest imagerial beings are "abducting" people from the real world for reasons unknown, and may have been doing so for a very long time. They may be capturing the victim's mind or "psychic body" in some fashion, usually during sleep, or physically taking people into the Imageria, perhaps both. Theories as to why are wide-ranging, from a prelude to an invasion to the need for reproduction, simply curiosity, inhuman cruelty and sport, or an effort to create or spark paranormals for some reason. While some abductees have reported paranormal phenomena after their abduction, they don't all consistently become paranormals (at least, not yet).

THE DEPTHS

The distinction between the Reaches and the Depths is sometimes less clear than even the misty Border, but the Depths are more primal, more iconic, simultaneously more real and more unreal. They are the dwelling place of dreams and nightmares, of gods and

beings proclaiming their godhood, many of them worshipped by human followers.

PLACES IN THE DEPTHS

As in the Reaches, the Depths are made up of places, loosely connected by different paths, although the route from one place to another is not always the same. The Depths, however, lack the "compass" of the elemental realms. There is only the way from the distant shores of the Reaches to the edge of the Abyss. Travel off that axis can lead to any of a near-infinite range of destinations, and only experienced travelers dare to venture so far without aid or escort.

DREAM REALMS

The Depths are a reality of dreams and imaginings, and many of their places seem drawn from dreams, or nightmares. They can be literally anything imaginable. Indeed, some claim everything that is imaginable exists in the Depths by definition, because it is the place where such dreams are born.

The dream realms vary in size from a dark closet where a fearful child cowers under the clothes, hiding from the banging on the door, to entire *galaxies* of planets and stars, seemingly filled with billions of intelligent beings. There are worlds much like our own alongside fantasy realms of myth and magic, countless visions of the future that might be (and futures that never were), dark and twisted nightmares, and more. Dream realms include all stories ever imagined, so visitors can find themselves wandering through the greatest (or worst!) worlds of literature.

It may well be all places in the Depths are dream realms of one sort or another, some perhaps even the dreams of non-humans (aliens, animals, plants, even rocks or oceans?). More stable places could well be very old dreams, existing for so long they have taken root in the Depths of consciousness. These places are the closest thing the Depths have to anchor-points like the elemental realms of the Reaches.

THE ETERNAL BATTLEFIELD

Near the edge of the Abyss, armies are endlessly locked in battle. To some visitors they are ancient or medieval men or creatures with metal armor, swords, and spears. To others they're more modern, versions of the First or Second World War, or even futuristic conflicts between humans and strange aliens. In some cases, the armies are pitted against creatures emerging from the Abyss. The only constant of the Eternal Battlefield is conflict. The Battlefield is generally encountered as an obstacle for travelers to cross in order to reach their goal, although some find their way here to fight for one side or the other.

THE ELYSIAN FIELDS

This idyllic place consists of rolling hills and fields filled with grasses and wildflowers amidst bubbling streams and ponds. Tame animals roam here and there, co-existing peacefully. People report meeting human inhabitants of the Elysian Fields, often deceased loved ones or historical personages, although whether or not they are the actual spirits of the dead or simply psychological (or psychic) impressions of them remains unknown. Some visit the Elysian Fields looking for a particular spirit, to carry a message or to find information.

GODSHOME

Mount Olympus, Asgard, Heliopolis...all the various domains of the gods from time immemorial exist somewhere in the Depths of the Imageria, populated by their mythological inhabitants. Travelers in the Depths can toast Odin in his own hall, or speak with the Japanese sun goddess Amaterasu, if she agrees to the meeting. Visitors report slightly different details to the different places associated with the gods of myth, but many things remain surprisingly consistent.

In spite of this consistency, the existence of "real" gods in the Imageria is a matter of considerable debate (see **The Big Questions**, following). Christian, Jewish, and Islamic experts have noted all sorts of stories of encounters with various choirs of angels and even archangels in the Depths, but no descriptions of an almighty God outside of the Deep Beyond. God—if He exists, in whatever form He exists—can perhaps only be found in the ultimate level of the Imageria.

THE ABYSS

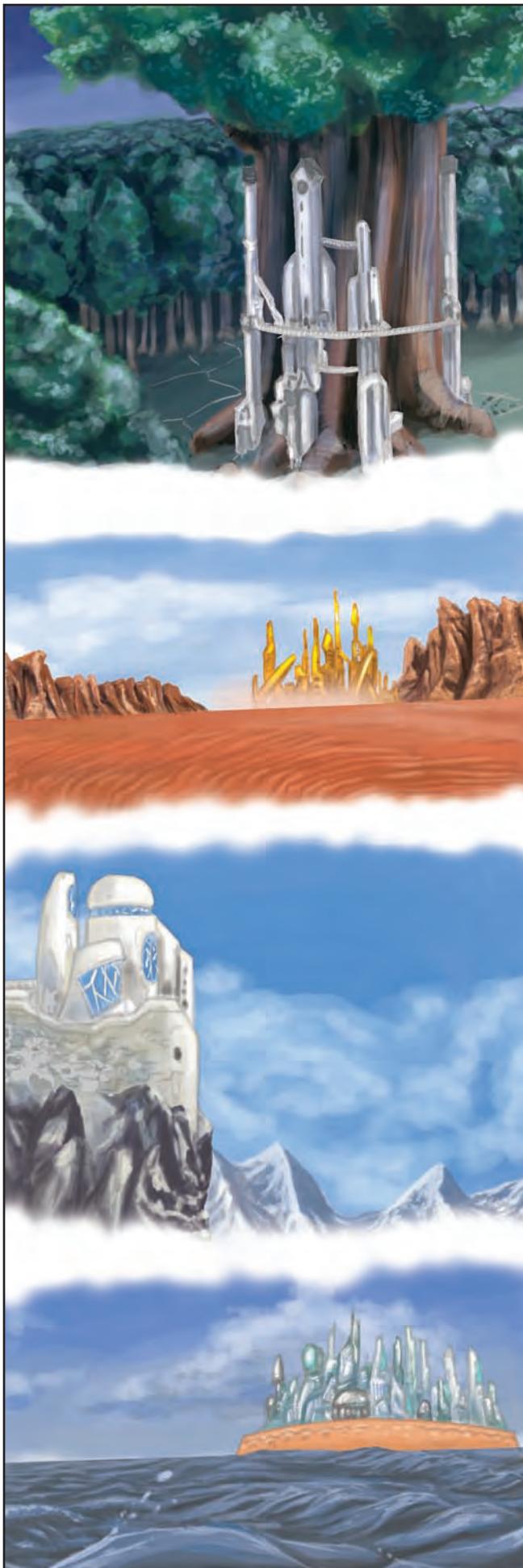
Between the Depths and the mysterious Deep Beyond lies the near-impassable barrier of the Abyss. It is like an endless chasm, into which flows the very stuff of dreams like an endless cataract. On the far side await the mysteries and secrets of the Deep Beyond. For most imagerial travelers, the edge of the Abyss is as far as they go, since to go any further means daring madness, death, and possibly worse.

Although it may appear utterly bottomless, the Abyss does have one, along with many layers of dark detritus and miasma on the way down to that bottom. Things live there, growing and festering in the cracks and crevices of reality, scuttling and crawling along the walls of the Abyss, lying in wait for potential prey. Even bigger and nastier things dwell in the lower depths, until one gets to where the Beast is found. Exactly what the Beast is remains in dispute: a gigantic world-serpent, a many-headed monster, a great dragon, a tentacled horror, your worst fear, or some unholy combination of all of these. Whatever it is, the Beast devours any and all who dare enter its territory, making crossing the Abyss a true feat.

There are sometimes ways across other than climbing down and then up again. Some travelers report a Bridge of Swords, where one literally walks on a razor's edge, or a single thread stretched across. Others say the crossing requires a leap of faith, and those who plunge into darkness, well, their faith clearly wasn't strong enough, was it?

THE DEEP BEYOND

The far side of the Abyss is the Deep Beyond and it is a mystery to both those who have not reached it and those who have. The few who can claim to have braved the Abyss and reached the greatest depth of the Imageria all tell different tales: it is the Face of God, divine unity, Heaven, Nirvana, non-existence and the destruction of the ego-self, the start of a whole new layer of reality, and many other things. The experiences in the Deep Beyond are so highly subjective, it's difficult to tell if any of them represent the "true" nature of it, or if its true nature is even knowable to embodied, material beings.



THE BIG QUESTIONS

The Imageria raises any number of major philosophical and religious questions, but does not offer much in the way of definitive answers. To some, it doesn't offer *any* answers, since they don't believe the Imageria actually exists outside of the subjective experiences of those who "visit" there. Even people who believe the otherworldly realm exists, do not necessarily believe it's proof of the existence of divinity or an afterlife. On the other hand, there are plenty of people who believe the Imageria is proof of a spiritual dimension to existence and either seek to learn more about it or to fit descriptions of it to their own religious beliefs.

DOES THE DIVINE EXIST?

Beings very *like* gods exist in the Imageria, and many of them claim to be ancient or mythic deities or spirits. Interestingly enough, completely contradictory mythologies and divinities seem to co-exist. For example, there are angels and archangels who claim an omnipotent creator-God made the world but also Norse gods who say the All-Father Odin and his brothers made the world from the body and bones of the giant Ymir and Babylonian deities who hold that one of their number, Marduk, formed the world from the body of the great dragon Tiamat.

Likewise, there seem to be multiple versions of similar deities: the Roman and Greek gods have appeared as distinct entities, for example, while Thoth-Hermes seems an independent being from both Thoth of the Egyptian pantheon and Hermes of the Greek pantheon. Some suggest similar gods are simply "masks" of a higher divine being, others that they are truly separate entities, but potentially infinite in number.

IS THERE ONE TRUE RELIGION?

If so, the Imageria does not offer conclusive evidence. So far as anyone can tell, the other realm suggests *all* religions are "true," at least to some degree, and one can find supporting evidence for

any religious belief. This is not surprising, considering it also seems clear the Imageria contains or reflects human thought and imagination. If everything humanity has thought, believed, or imagined can be found there, that must include all myths and religions ever. Some even suggest the previously-unknown beings in the Imageria are actually just forgotten stories, myths, or beliefs held by people long ago and lost to the modern world until now.

IS THERE AN AFTERLIFE?

The appearance of beings in the Imageria like the disembodied spirits of the deceased has given many hope of the existence of some form of afterlife. On the other hand, as with divinities, there are different accounts of these "spirits" and their qualities, such that people may have even encountered different "versions" of the same deceased people. One theory says if the Imageria is a repository of thought, memory, and knowledge, then the "ghosts" or "souls" within it are just collections of disembodied thoughts, memories, and beliefs held together in a semblance of a living person, a kind of re-creation. Others ask what the difference is between a "real" person and a "collection of thoughts, memories, and beliefs"?

IS THERE AN EMBODIMENT OF EVIL?

There are certainly cruel, hateful, monstrous, and alien beings in the Imageria: from mythic monsters to living nightmares. Are any of them the embodiment of evil? If there is a God in the Imageria, must there also be a Devil? Again, opinions vary, with the more psychological approach claiming any "evil" in the realm is just a reflection of what lies within us, while others point to particular beings, including elementals, mythic gods, or the inhabitants of the Abyss, as proof of "demons" or similar evil beings. True malthiests believe the ultimate evil is in the Deep Beyond, a kind of cosmic joke on those who believe they can find some sort of enlightenment there.

INHABITANTS OF THE IMAGERIA

Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of the Imageria is it appears inhabited by a bizarre variety of beings. As with any experience in the other realm, there are some questions about how "real" these entities are, as well as where they originate and what their relationship is to the material world (if any).

ELEMENTALS

"Elementals" are the inhabitants of most of the places of the Reaches, especially the elemental realms. Elementals are aligned in one fashion or another with a particular element. They include the classical mystic entities made up entirely of a particular element, but are not limited to them. Elementals also include what many might call "faeries," otherworldly beings—some human-like, others resembling animals or altogether different creatures. Faeries are often capricious and their motives mysterious from a human point of view. They span a variety of cultural myths from Celto-European to Japanese, African, and Native American. Elementals also include the djinn and ifrit of the City of Brass in the realm of fire and even the humanlike inhabitants of Atlantis or the Citadel of the Four Winds, the merfolk of the realm of water, and so forth.

Scholarly mystics, like the Pact, tend to sub-divide elementals into "pure" elementals (being composed entirely of their element), faeries or fae, djinn, kami (nature spirits), and so forth. There's some religious debate as to whether or not elementals have souls as embodied humans do, although the question remains a niche academic issue, of little interest to most, who question if such beings even truly exist.

EIDOLONS

"Eidolon" literally means "image" or "icon" and eidolons are essentially embodied icons or archetypes in the Imageria. They are as broad as the imagination itself; theoretically, anything we can imagine can or does exist as an eidolon in the Depths of the Imageria. The most prominent—and perhaps, most powerful—eidolons appear associated with the oldest or most common archetypes in human culture and thought. In particular, mythological gods and other religious icons often manifest as eidolons, including saints, angels, deities, demons, and the like.

As discussed under **The Big Questions**, there's considerable debate whether or not eidolons are "really" the beings they appear or "merely" psychological complexes given a kind of apparent life

by the nature of the Imageria and perhaps the individual psyche of the visitor there. Most eidolons think they are real enough, and act accordingly, which is enough for many visitors, since the icons possess very real power there.

PRIMORTALS

So-called "primortals" may be a sub-type or spin-off of eidolons. They are imagerial beings with the appearance and persona of fictional or imaginary characters. The exact line between an eidolon and a primortal is unclear, to say the least. Are mythological deities or ancient cultural heroes "fictional"? Do characters and stories from relatively modern literature constitute "mythology"?

Whatever the case, primortals tend to be clearly identifiable as characters or creatures from fiction. Most of them exist in equally fictional dream realms in the Depths, which are like stepping into the "world" of a story. From their point of view, they are entirely real and the imagerial "visitors" are the strange beings. Most primortals don't care to be told they are "just fictional." Anyway, they are functionally real enough in the Imageria: able to interact with visitors just like real people.

Primortals (and their fictional dream realms) raise interesting philosophical questions. Are they and their worlds the creations of authors and artists or have creative people in the real world somehow "tapped into" the Imageria and drawn upon pre-existing places and beings for their stories? Does an artist "own" the primortals and their realm? Can changes in stories told in the real world change the dream realm as well? There's a great deal of study to be done, and the answers may determine the fate of entire worlds.

OUTSIDERS

"Outsider" is the Pact's term for imagerial beings associated with the Abyss, and perhaps even outside the Imageria itself (or from a deeper layer no one has yet visited and returned from). They are uniformly alien and predatory, feeding on life in some fash-

ion, from the simple need to devour living things to more refined "feeding" on life force, emotions (especially fear and hate), pain, or even corruption, giving them the need to taint otherwise "decent" people to sustain themselves. They're also known as predators, horrors, qlippoth, or simply as demons, although the latter may not be entirely accurate.

Their appearance varies widely, and many outsiders are shapeshifters or illusionists, able to appear in different forms. Encounters with them are thankfully quite rare: for the most part, they seem "held" by the pull of the Abyss. They can only escape it with some sort of outside—usually paranormal—aid, creating a "bridge" for them to cross. Even then, outsiders often feel the "pull" of the Abyss and can be drawn back to it if they fail to sustain their presence outside of it.

Ways in which outsiders appear include deliberate summons, usually by mystic paranormals, although it's possible a paragon could be summoning outsiders without knowing it. Concentrations of negative emotion in a shallow or prominence seem to draw them and may allow them to appear there (see **Shallows** and **Prominences**, previously). Travelers in the Imageria sometimes also encounter them, especially while near or trying to cross the Abyss. Actually entering the Abyss makes encountering outsiders virtually certain.

The primary goals of outsiders are survival, freedom, and, ultimately, the accumulation of power, particularly by causing as much death and destruction in the real world as possible. Even the most corrupt sorcerers of the Pact tread lightly when dealing with these beings, knowing the potential threat they pose to all existence.

Outsiders may be responsible for some paranormals and Fortean phenomena. Certainly, some believe there are paragons with infernal or demonic powers. Less directly, a brush with an outsider could certainly trigger a breakout. Beings like the Necropolitan and Proteus (see **Chapter Five**) might even be outsiders, manifested in the material world somehow.



CHAPTER FOUR: ALL THE AGENTS

Human beings are social animals and the advent of paranormals hasn't changed that; paragons gather together in groups based around common interests just like anyone else, and organizations and factions form around paranormals as much as, or more than, any other event in recent history. Whatever their opinions about the Breakout and the existence of the paranormal may be, virtually everyone has one, and virtually every opinion has a group to back it up.

The groups in this chapter are intended to provide the building blocks for a *Paragons* series, the broad brush-strokes for conflict in the setting, by drawing the lines and dividing things up into sides. You can focus as narrowly as one particular group against another, or even a conflict within an individual faction, or you can have a free-for-all with every group in this chapter (and more) pursuing their own agendas in a world where reality simply isn't what we thought it was any more.

Each group in this chapter is broken down into a general overview, then a description of the group's structure, base(s) of operation, and available resources. This is followed by information on using the group in a *Paragons* series, and things characters can learn about it. The write-up concludes with a look at the group's membership, and may include sample characters, archetypes, or the like.

LEARNING ABOUT THE Factions

Each group in this chapter has a section of information characters may learn about the group using their various skills, particularly Gather Information (see *M&M*, page 48). Note that inquiries with Gather Information with a DC of 20 or greater may draw the attention of others, an important consideration given the conspiratorial nature of many factions!

The Knowledge skill checks associated with most groups are usually for things characters can simply know about them as part of their skill. In a few cases they specify research or inquiries characters need to make, but you can generally assume Knowledge checks are for things characters might, or might not, already know. Inquiries other than researching books and other reference materials should be handled with Gather Information.

Also keep in mind opportunities for players to take 10 and take 20 on these skill checks. While taking 20 is not an option for Gather Information, it is for Knowledge with access to the right research materials. Even taking 10 may provide significant information and a character's relevant skill bonus +10 is a good guideline to the level of information about a faction that character is likely to have immediately on hand.

CHOOSING AND USING Factions

The factions in this chapter are diverse in their agendas, memberships, and potential roles in a *Paragons* series. The assumption is most series are *not* going to use every faction: to do so would be quite the tangled web of conflicting plot threads and plans! The idea behind this chapter, like other elements of *Paragons* is to choose and use what you want, and downplay or ignore the rest.

The easiest approach is to choose the central faction or factions of the series. If the characters will belong to a particular group, then that one is central by default, the same is true if you have a group in mind as the primary antagonist of the series. You can then look over the rest of the factions and decide what role, if any, they might play in the overall series.

For example, say you decide to run a series where the characters all start out undergoing treatment and training at PSI, the Paranormal Studies Institute, eventually transitioning to working for PSI to find and assist newly awakened paranormals, aiding the authorities with paranormal incidents, and so forth. That makes PSI the central group for the series.

Glancing over the other groups, you decide PSI is going to strike sparks on occasion with the PRA, Paranormal Regulatory Agency, the governmental body charged with handling paragons. The Agency considers PSI a bunch of civilian eggheads who tend to get underfoot. They're not antagonists, as such, but potential rivals that characters may run into often. The Rosemont Center has a somewhat similar objective to PSI—finding and aiding paranormals in need—so characters could run up against the Collected from time to time. On the other hand, factions like the Initiative and the Pantheon are opposed to PSI's goals. The Initiative wants to limit the influence of paranormals while the Pantheon wants *no* limits. Both groups could be adversaries for characters in the PSI series. Lastly, some factions like the Pact or Vanguard don't really touch upon PSI either way, so you can just choose to ignore them unless you have a particular idea for using them in the series.

Note that ignoring a faction isn't necessarily the same as not including them in the setting of the series at all. You can use various factions as background color to flesh out the world even if they never take an active roll. On the other hand, if a particular faction just doesn't work with your concept of the series, and the characters wouldn't know about it without directly encountering it (such as the Pact or the Syndicate, for example), feel free to leave it out altogether.

"AT MIDNIGHT ALL THE AGENTS AND THE SUPERHUMAN CREW COME OUT AND ROUND UP EVERYONE THAT KNOWS MORE THAN THEY DO..."

-BOB DYLAN, DESOLATION ROW



CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST, PARAGON

What if Jesus Christ and the saints were paragons? What if being a Christian meant becoming a superhero? The Church of Jesus Christ, Paragon, a sect expelled from the Orthodox Church in North America, believes Jesus of Nazareth was the preeminent paragon and Christian martyrs and mystics throughout history have followed in his footsteps with their miraculous—nay paranormal—deeds. To *para-Christians*, as the sect's members are called, the Breakout is a sign from God, a sign that the miracles of Christ and the saints were real, a sign that the faithful of today are called to achieve feats of equal wonder.

OVERVIEW

In the early days of the Breakout, rumors arose in Manhattan of miracles at the Cathedral of Saint Nicholas, an Eastern Orthodox church on the Lower East Side. At first dismissed as Breakout hysteria, the rumors became more and more compelling. People had gone to the cathedral terminally ill and left completely healthy. Others witnessed a priest giving doves instructions outside the cathedral—to hold an icon of the Virgin Mary aloft for the feast of the Annunciation—and the doves obeyed. Still others listened to the cathedral's bishop, Archbishop Theodosius, give a sermon in ancient Greek and understood it, despite not knowing a word of the language. And many had seen the icons of the saints that, when kissed or touched with veneration, animated and recited the saints' most beloved sayings or told their tales of martyrdom.

Theodosius soon captured the city's imagination with his proclamation that everyone could work such wonders if they would devote themselves to Jesus Christ and a life of spiritual discipline. The *New York Times* verified the cathedral's paranormal phenomenon, including the fact that Theodosius himself was a paranormal, yet the paper published a skeptical editorial about his claim: "Certainly

CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST, PARAGON

Agenda: To guide normals toward holiness, which para-Christians believe includes paranormal power. To counsel paranormals in the godly use of their miraculous abilities. To admonish and stop those who misuse such gifts for wickedness.

Structure: Religious hierarchy, governed by Archbishop Theodosius and three other bishops.

Symbol: A Christogram (the Greek letters chi and rho) enclosed in a sunburst, symbolizing Jesus Christ and the glory he and other paragons bring to the world.

Common Allegiances: The sect's most to least common allegiances are para-Christianity, Archbishop Theodosius, Hieromonk Gregory, asceticism, and good.

Wealth: The sect's Wealth bonus fluctuates between +16 and +28. A typical parish has Wealth +5 to +15, depending on its parishioners' tithes. The Holy Transfiguration Monastery has Wealth +21 to +25.

many extraordinary, even miraculous, events have arisen in recent months, but this unfortunately seems an opportunistic attempt to swell the church's numbers. The archbishop has proven himself a wise, if mysterious, humanitarian; this seems beneath him."

"*GOD BECAME MAN SO THAT MAN MIGHT BECOME GOD.*"

- SAINT ATHANASIUS

Opportunistic or not, Theodosius's teaching did swell the cathedral's numbers by hundreds, and reports, eventually in the *Times* itself, confirmed some of the cathedral's laypeople had devoted themselves to prayer, fasting, and regular liturgical worship and had subsequently manifested paranormal powers. It was impossible to tell if the religious observances had caused the paranormal abilities or had simply coincided with them, yet many in the city came to believe the archbishop's claims. It was a message of hope for them, that spirituality could have glorious manifestations, that a life of holiness could also be a life of power. Soon the Liturgy (the Eastern Orthodox mass) was being attended not only by non-Orthodox Christians but also by non-Christians. People would line up outside the front door to catch a glimpse of the archbishop and to hear him preach, each hoping to pray him- or herself into being a paranormal.

As the weeks went by, Theodosius spoke of a deeper understanding of the Christian faith, of a truth that had eluded the church for centuries: Jesus Christ himself was a paranormal, the paragon of paragons, who had come to the world to set people on the path toward their full potential, which was to become paragons themselves, humbly sharing in God's divinity. Theodosius, along with the nuns in the convent adjoining the cathedral, wrote tracts expounding this teaching and attempted to show that wonder-working saints throughout history had been paranormals. Many people wondered why miracles had subsided in the modern age. Theodosius's answer was simple: "Our hearts have grown cold. In the two thousand years since the Holy Spirit's outpouring at Pentecost, we have struggled to feel the holy fire within, much less share it with the world. But the Holy Spirit has come again!"

This became a recurring theme for Theodosius, one he stated most forcefully on the first Pentecost after the Breakout, when he quoted the Acts of the Apostles: "'It will come to pass in the last days,' God says, 'that I will pour out a portion of my spirit upon all flesh...And I will work wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below...'" With eyes joyfully gleaming, Theodosius said, "The last days are upon us, my beloved. See the signs and wonders!" With paranormals appearing almost daily outside the sect, its members wondered, "Are these paragons also inspired by God?" Theodosius answered yes: "In His wisdom, God has inspired saints, and saints to be, all around us." The names of paranormals thus came to be whispered in veneration, and some iconographers painted icons of them, as if the paranormals were saints. But what about the paranormals who use their powers for evil? "They have been seduced by the devil," said Theodosius. "They have turned a grace into a curse. But we must pray for them. With love, they may yet return to righteousness."

Other bishops began to grumble about and then openly oppose these teachings. In a sharply worded letter, Theodosius's peers demanded he immediately cease his teachings or face charges of heresy. "You risk misleading all the faithful," the letter stated. "We are called to faith, hope, and love, not miracles. Indeed the Lord graces the world with wonders through His saints, but miracles

are not a sign of salvation. And our chief concern is the well-being of souls." Theodosius responded with a letter reminding them that the Orthodox churches had affirmed the doctrine of deification for centuries, that God had become human so humans could become divine. What surer sign of that divinity than miracles? "You would be fooled by the devil working wonders," one of the bishops retorted. After several fruitless attempts to persuade the bishops, Theodosius chose schism rather than renounce his beliefs. To the other bishops' disappointment, parishes throughout the United States and Canada left the church with him.

Whole communities of Orthodox and Catholics, as well as Pentecostals and other Protestants, later converted to para-Christianity. Thirteen wonderworking monks, from the Holy Transfiguration Monastery north of San Francisco, joined them. This turned out to be the sect's most influential addition. The monks' abbot, Hieromonk Gregory, possessed great power. He could ingest poison unharmed, cure the sick, foresee the future, and even raise the dead, according to some. He was also a prolific writer, and his interpretations of the para-Christian way began to eclipse the archbishop's.

At first, Theodosius considered Gregory an eloquent ally, but he disagreed with the abbot's apocalyptic tone and his emphasis on extreme asceticism as the way to awaken paranormal power. Gregory urged long fasts, all-night vigils, and painful mortifications of the flesh. Theodosius became particularly alarmed at rumors of flagellation at the monastery. There were darker rumors, of the monks somehow being involved in the disappearances of paranormals who had refused to heed Gregory.

The archbishop sent the abbot letters urging moderation, but Gregory would not budge, saying he was merely pushing Theodosius's teachings to the logical next step. The synod of bishops consequently wants to be rid of the abbot, but Gregory's influence has become widespread; the synod risks sundering the newborn sect if they expel him. For now, there is an uneasy truce, but a poison has begun to spread in the sect's veins, as ascetic practices have veered from the therapeutic to the punishing and rumors have begun to abound of Gregory's monks turning into vigilantes and inciting others to do likewise.

STRUCTURE

With parishes throughout North America, the para-Christian sect has grown into four dioceses: the Archdiocese of the East, governed by Archbishop Theodosius; the Diocese of the Midwest, governed by Bishop Tikhon; the Diocese of the West, governed by Bishop Basil; and the Diocese of Canada, governed by Bishop John. Decisions affecting the entire sect are made by the synod of bishops through consensus, with Theodosius as chair. On a local level, parish councils make decisions under the guidance of clergy.

Keeping with Orthodox tradition, the sect's entire clergy is male, although there is a growing movement to ordain women, given the number of paranormal nuns and laywomen. The bishops are split on this, with Theodosius and Basil leaning toward it, and Tikhon and John, against. All four agree the second greatest paranormal in history—Mary, the Mother of God—is a model for all believers, whether or not women are ordained.

BASES OF OPERATIONS

The Cathedral of Saint Nicholas in New York remains the sect's spiritual headquarters. Theodosius's apartment and the archdiocesan offices and library are on one side of the Russian-style church, with



its star-spangled onion domes. On the cathedral's other side is the Convent of Saint Mary of Egypt, home to a handful of nuns, one of whom is the paranormal iconographer responsible for the cathedral's wondrous icons.

The other three dioceses are headquartered in Ottawa, Chicago, and San Francisco. Parishes in all four dioceses are mostly in cities where immigrants from traditionally Orthodox countries (Greece, Russia, Romania, and so on) are most common. The sect has seven monasteries, the largest of which is Holy Transfiguration Monastery, which has a large compound, including rooms for visitors. The basement of the main building is a labyrinth of cells filled with strange devices, most of which look like implements of torture. "They are for the purgation of sin and the inflammation of power," Gregory explains.

RESOURCES

The sect is rich in theological and philosophical knowledge, which has become progressively esoteric as para-Christians have used paranormal abilities to plumb the depths of the Imageria for truths about God and the cosmos. Many of their writings are housed in the archdiocesan library. Theodosius is able to understand any language, so the library includes texts in almost every known language, as well as the archbishop's half-finished translation of the New Testament, of which he says, with no arrogance, "This will shape theological study for the next fifty years."

Holy Transfiguration Monastery is also a storehouse of important texts, although they are more obscure and often bizarre, with a large collection of books on the occult and heresy (Gregory's personal collection).

ARCHBISHOP THEODOSIUS**PL 10**

Str 8 Dex 10 Con 10 Int 18 Wis 26 Cha 16

Skills: Concentration 8 (+16), Diplomacy 12 (+15), Knowledge (history) 12 (+16), Knowledge (theology and philosophy) 15 (+19), Languages 4 (French, Greek, Hebrew, Russian, [English is native]), Perform (oratory) 9 (+12), Sense Motive 8 (+16)

Feats: Eidetic Memory

Powers: **Boost 10** (all powers at once; *Extras:* Range—Perception; *Flaws:* Limited—Others only; *Alternate Power:* **Drain 10** [all powers; Ranged]), **Comprehend 4** (languages), **Super-Senses 12** (postcognition; divine, magical, mental, and mutant awareness, extended)

Combat: Attack +4, Grapple +3, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +4 (+2 flat-footed), Knockback -0, Initiative +0

Saving Throws: Toughness +0, Fortitude +7, Reflex +3, Will +15

Abilities 28 + Skills 17 (68 ranks) + Feats 1 + Powers 71 + Combat 16 + Saves 17 = Total 150

HIEROMONK GREGORY**PL 11**

Str 20 Dex 14 Con 20 Int 16 Wis 14 Cha 18

Skills: Bluff 16 (+20), Concentration 5 (+7), Diplomacy 8 (+12), Escape Artist 10 (+12), Intimidate 16 (+20), Knowledge (arcane lore) 8 (+11), Knowledge (history) 8 (+11), Knowledge (theology and philosophy) 8 (+11), Language 1 (Russian [English is native])

Feats: Diehard, Endurance, Fascinate (Bluff)

Powers: **Healing 12** (*Extras:* Resurrection; *Power Feats:* Progression 4 [60 hours]), **Protection 7** (*Extras:* Impervious 5), **Super-Senses 4** (precognition)

Combat: Attack +8, Grapple +13, Damage +5 (unarmed), Defense +8 (+4 flat-footed), Knockback -8, Initiative +2

Saving Throws: Toughness +12, Fortitude +13, Reflex +6, Will +10

Abilities 42 + Skills 20 (80 ranks) + Feats 3 + Powers 56 + Combat 32 + Saves 20 = Total 173

USING THE SECT

Just as the Cathedral of Saint Nicholas has many doors and oratories, so does the paragonist sect have many ways for heroes to interact with it, whether as allies or adversaries. Heroes could be members of the sect, having awakened to their powers while deep in prayer. They could come to it seeking a reason for their powers, longing for meaning as they grapple with the existential enigma of the Breakout. They could investigate the sect, trying to verify its teachings or discovering exactly what Hieromonk Gregory is up to. They could join the sect on expeditions into the Imageria, taking part in Theodosius's quest to discover more about God, the saints, and the very structure of existence.

The sect can provide the backbone for a series, from the awakening of the heroes in the Cathedral of Saint Nicholas to missions of mercy across the country and the world, to investigating the extreme practices of the Holy Transfiguration Monastery, to battling Hieromonk Gregory and his followers. The sect is also useful as texture in a series' background. Need a quirky religious group with interesting cultural details? The Church is perfect for that.

The sect is also meant to contrast with organizations such as the Seven Thunders, which, if in the same series, would be its natural nemesis. And the sect has surprising sides to it. Theodosius knows Empress of

the Pact, for instance, and enjoys arguing metaphysics with her, even though he disapproves of the Pact's activities and agenda. The Pact even refers to the synod of bishops as "the Four Old Wizards," since each is a paranormal with a wizardly air about him.

If used as the basis for a series, the Church of Jesus Christ, Paragon, can provide a kind of *X-Men* flavor, with Archbishop Theodosius as the peace-loving idealist who believes in a higher purpose for paragons and Hieromonk Gregory as the bitter self-appointed savior claiming humans and paranormals cannot live together in peace, but must inevitable fight a holy war.

LEARNING ABOUT THE SECT

The following is information characters might learn about the Church of Jesus Christ, Paragon:

GATHER INFORMATION

Here are sect members' typical responses after a character succeeds on a check.

DC 15: His Grace, Archbishop Theodosius, will visit such-and-such parish next Sunday. It will be a great blessing!

DC 20: He said I should quietly ponder the disciplines he gave me, but you seem sincere; I don't think Elder Gregory would object if I told you that I'm to scourge myself while praying, 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner, that your power might be mine.'

DC 25: You promise you won't tell them I told you? Well, Gregory said to meet the monks at midnight. We're going to stop that devil-loving paranormal from defying the Lord's will.

KNOWLEDGE (HISTORY)

DC 20: Hieromonk Gregory's behavior and appearance uncannily resemble the infamous Grigori Rasputin, advisor to the Romanovs.

KNOWLEDGE (THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY)

DC 15: The sect is as traditional as it is unorthodox. Its services are almost indistinguishable, in structure and feel, from those in a regular Orthodox church.

DC 20: Hieromonk Gregory's extreme teachings echo certain sects' beliefs in Rasputin's day.

MEMBERS

There are now nearly a million para-Christians, a few hundred of whom are paranormals with limited powers. The four bishops, Gregory, and his monks have a wider range of abilities. For example, in addition to his paranormal grasp of languages, Theodosius can sense the use of powers in a several-block radius, as well as see the past of anyone he touches and boost or dampen their powers.

Several members appear to be possessed by figures from the church's past. Using his postcognition, Theodosius has confirmed Saint Seraphim of Serov speaks through one of the cathedral's priests, and he is all but convinced that Gregory is Rasputin reborn, with all that implies.

Despite its abundance of paranormal members, a question dogs the sect: Does faith *actually* have anything to do with their powers? Theodosius ponders this more than he cares to admit.

FOREGONE CONCLUSIONS

Foregone Conclusions is famous for its role as one of the world's primary sources of paranormal "freelance security consultants" (read: "mercenaries"). Unlike its competitors, Foregone Conclusions is known for not asking too many questions when negotiating for contracts, and for not caring about the nature of the work it's asked to provide.

OVERVIEW

Foregone Conclusions began as a mercenary company several years before the emergence of paragons in the public eye. Its founder, James Anderson, a veteran of several conflicts in wartorn areas of the world, struggled to keep his company afloat amid constant cultural revolutions in regions where Foregone Conclusions operated. Then Anderson witnessed a group of trained soldiers firing upon unarmed civilians. It was a slaughter, up until the moment a paranormal emerged from the crowd and tore the soldiers, and their jeep, to pieces with his bare hands. The man obviously had no combat training, but that did not matter in the least. Anderson was stunned by the incident, and the notion of recruiting paranormals sprang to mind almost immediately. He began attempting to locate men with the proper abilities and a suitable mindset at once.

Anderson's first few new recruits were men with an unquenched, and untrained, taste for violence. They had no experience in any sort of real combat, but each one had the power of a whole squad or more of soldiers. To Anderson, they were weapons to be exploited for his own purposes. He gave them enough training to survive in the field, promised them all the carnage they could want as well as a fat paycheck, and took them into the field.

The results were exactly what he expected. Even with minimal training, as long as the paragons followed Anderson's orders, they were devastating on the battlefield. Interest in acquiring the company's services increased tenfold, and Anderson continued his recruitment attempts. More and more paranormals flocked to his banner, and the operation expanded again and again. After a particularly unpleasant dust-up in Cambodia, Anderson began working on strategies for dealing with other paranormals on the

battlefield, and gave his men a bit more training before sending them out into the field.

Recently, Anderson had the notion to expand the company's operations to non-military engagements, primarily as a means of increasing their profile in the public eye. To do so, he hired an entertainment attorney from Los Angeles named Gregory Levinson. Levinson has taken to the task with gusto, recruiting a number of other paranormals and hiring them out as bodyguards, escorts, or even media-event entertainment, anything to generate money. While Levinson and his operation have developed a rather unpleasant reputation, the increased funding has had the effect that Anderson wanted, and he turns a blind eye to Levinson's excesses so long as he continues to bring in new clients and more revenue. The new division has also brought Foregone Conclusions into more direct competition with the Silber Agency (see their description in this chapter).

STRUCTURE

There is one authority within Foregone Conclusions, and that is "Colonel" James Anderson, or sometimes just "The Colonel." He oversees all military operations, and has sole authority to review and accept contracts, and assign teams to particular duties. He has seven captains working beneath him, all men he trained and personally supervises, and trusts to operate as he would in the field. Beneath them are a handful of sergeants to oversee training, also hand-picked by Anderson. Anderson occasionally refers to his rank and file as "legionnaires," indicating perhaps some past involvement with the Foreign Legion, but he does not discuss the matter. Anderson has never attempted to change his self-appointed designation as a Colonel, most likely because he frequently works for generals in the various militaries of Africa and Southeast Asia. By maintaining a lower "rank" than his clients, Anderson engenders a more favorable working relationship.

Company teams typically consist of a captain and between five and 20 men, depending upon the nature of the contract. It is unusual for a mission team to be deployed without at least one paranormal member, generally referred to as "mission specialists." Team composition is determined by the Colonel, and tends to vary depending upon the contract requirements and the skill-sets of individual members. Over the years, particular teams have developed specializing in demolitions, security, reconnaissance, and other military activities.

Gregory Levinson is treated as a partner of sorts by Anderson, and has authority over the company's entertainment division, since the

FOREGONE CONCLUSIONS

Agenda: The principals of Foregone Conclusions have but one objective: the accumulation of wealth and influence. All other goals: expanding operations, gaining more powerful agents, acquiring more lucrative contracts, and the like, serve to further the company's primary goal.

Structure: The bulk of the company is a paramilitary organization, complete with several ranks and a large compound where the company's assets are stored. The recently established entertainment division is organized more like a temp agency, with a central clearinghouse for contracts and a number of freelancers working exclusively for the company on a contract basis.

Symbol: The symbol of Foregone Conclusions is a stylized F.C., meant to resemble a military insignia. The letters are set with a star in the background, which is further set atop a set of bars in a V-shape, somewhat similar to an inverted sergeant's insignia. Of late a second version of the insignia has been used in marketing for the company's non-military solicitations.

Common Allegiances: Those employed by Foregone Conclusions are loyal to the company, primarily due to the exceptional wages paid them, and a license to commit acts of mayhem. The company deals with "traitors" harshly.

Wealth: The company's recent expansion has consumed some of its previously considerable resources, leaving it with a Wealth bonus of +15. When purchasing military goods, however, the company has expansive contacts that ensure excellent prices, and is treated as having a bonus of +20.



Colonel prefers not to involve himself in it. Levinson has his own office staff and a "stable" of paragons on-contract he uses on a regular basis.

BASES OF OPERATIONS

The primary base of Foregone Conclusions is just outside the city of Conkary, the capital of Guinea on Africa's western coast. This is where Colonel Anderson first began the company, and the simple building where he gathered his first mercenaries has been expanded into a massive compound, complete with a motor pool and airfield. The compound houses over a hundred men, including over a dozen paranormals, and has facilities to accommodate twice that many. However, there are typically multiple mission teams on assignment across the globe at any one time, rather than stationed at the compound.

Foregone Conclusions maintains a second, much smaller base of operations in Los Angeles, California. There, Levinson oversees the company's non-military endeavors, the majority of which are either in Los Angeles, or across the country in New York. Levinson's offices are relatively small, primarily because he does not trust anyone to oversee any significant operation without his direct supervision.

RESOURCES

At present, the majority of the company's resources are tied up in military hardware and expansion projects. Between expanding the compound outside Conkary and establishing the entertainment division in Los Angeles, the company's liquid assets are a bit limited.

Fortunately, the entertainment division is already beginning to pay for itself, and a number of social upheavals throughout central Africa are promising to bring in a new wave of contracts. At the compound, the company has four jeeps with mounted weapons, two armored personnel carriers, two civilian helicopters modified to carry weapons, and one retrofitted cargo plane for transporting the vehicles. The compound also has a secure arsenal, protected by an elaborate security system far beyond the means of any simple guerilla raid to circumvent, containing several hundred military-grade firearms of varying types, from assault rifles and grenades to semi-automatic pistols.

USING FOREGONE CONCLUSIONS

Involving characters with Foregone Conclusions depends upon the nature of the series. Those of mercenary bent can easily find lucrative employment with the company, either as soldiers-of-fortune or paranormals-for-hire with the entertainment division. Working for any length of time with Col. Anderson or Mr. Levinson should be a challenge to all but the most morally-flexible characters, and part of the drama of the series will likely be how far the characters will go in pursuit of wealth and power.

Paragons belonging to other factions can easily run up against Foregone Conclusions, depending on who is hiring the company that week. Peacekeepers like Vanguard can encounter FC mercenaries; the same goes for company rivals from the Silber Agency. Other factions might discover FC working for their adversaries to provide paranormal muscle; Anderson doesn't ask a lot of questions as long as the client's credit is good.

Foregone Conclusions is obviously an organization with flexible morals, to say the least. Its reputation is not particularly good, except with the sort of individuals who don't care how a job is done, only that it is completed in a timely and efficient manner, with no questions asked. Because the company is so well known, it would be difficult to entangle a group of heroes with them in a favorable light unless they were approached as part of an employment opportunity and made no effort whatsoever to learn more about their potential employers (in which case, they probably deserve whatever happens!).

Given that Foregone Conclusions is a (morally questionable, but) legitimate business entity, and typically serves legitimate, if corrupt, governments and agencies, facing off against them can not only prove a difficult conflict, but there can be long-term legal and political ramifications as well. Col. Anderson prides himself on not taking business matters personally, but he also has a long memory for everyone who has ever crossed him.

LEARNING ABOUT FOREGONE CONCLUSIONS

The following is information characters might learn about Foregone Conclusions:

FOREGONE MERCENARY**PL 3**

Str 14 Dex 14 Con 12 Int 12 Wis 10 Cha 10

Skills: Disable Device 4 (+5), Drive 4 (+6), Intimidate 8 (+8), Knowledge (tactics) 4 (+5), Profession (mercenary) 4 (+4), Stealth 8 (+10), Survival 8 (+8)**Feats:** Attack Focus (Ranged) 2, Equipment 4, Improved Initiative, Power Attack**Equipment:** Submachine gun (+4 damage), 8 points of other equipment, weapons, and armor**Combat:** Attack +3 (melee), +5 (ranged), Grapple +5, Damage +2 (unarmed), +4 (submachine gun), Defense +3 (+2 flatfooted), Knockback -0, Initiative +6**Saving Throws:** Toughness +1, Fortitude +2, Reflex +2, Will +3**Abilities 12 + Skills 10 (40 ranks) + Feats 8 + Combat 12 + Saves 4 = Total 46****GATHER INFORMATION**

Making this check represents asking around about Foregone Conclusions, which can potentially get back to people in the company who keep track of anyone making inquiries.

DC 15: Foregone Conclusions is one of the most well-known mercenary companies in the world, primarily because they employ paranormal operatives. Rumor has it they'll take on any job, no matter what they're asked to do, as long as the money's right.

DC 25: The company is responsible for several totalitarian governments staying in power, and in toppling a few others. They've fought various "proxy wars" for corporate clients looking for a favorable government (or lack thereof) in different parts of the Third World.

KNOWLEDGE (CURRENT EVENTS)

Making this check represents actively searching recent news and media sources.

DC 10: The company has expanded its operations to include an entertainment division, which supplies paranormal personnel for various entertainment events, including security for large events or more discreet services for private parties.

DC 15: The company has operations ongoing in central Africa and in Southeast Asia, mostly working for governments with a history of human rights violations.

DC 30: The owner of Foregone Conclusions, Colonel Anderson, has ties to the Guinean government, and maintains a military compound outside the capital city of Conkary. It is largely through his efforts that the government remains in power despite recent civil unrest.

MEMBERS

The men, and handful of women, employed by Foregone Conclusions are not nice people. They do not serve out of a sense of altruism, and making the world a better place has likely never crossed their mind (unless someone is willing to pay them handsomely to do it). The sort of individuals attracted to serving with the company are those with a talent (and often a taste) for violence who have no qualms about the questionable activities they will be called upon to do in the name of earning their generous paycheck.

PARANORMAL MERCENARY**PL 7**

Str 24/16 Dex 14 Con 21/14 Int 10 Wis 12 Cha 10

Skills: Climb 4 (+11), Drive 4 (+6), Intimidate 8 (+8), Knowledge (tactics) 4 (+4), Notice 4 (+5), Profession (mercenary) 4 (+5), Search 4 (+4), Stealth 8 (+10), Survival 8 (+9)**Feats:** All-out Attack, Attack Focus (ranged) 2, Fearless**Powers:** **Blast 5** (Extras: Autofire), **Enhanced Constitution 7**, **Enhanced Strength 8****Combat:** Attack +7 (melee), +9 (ranged), Grapple +13, Damage +5 (blast), +7 (unarmed), Defense +7 (+4 flatfooted), Knockback -2, Initiative +2**Saving Throws:** Toughness +5, Fortitude +7, Reflex +7, Will +7**Abilities 16 + Skills 12 (48 ranks) + Feats 4 + Powers 30 + Combat 28 + Saves 13 = Total 103****GORDON TECHNOLOGY UNLIMITED**

Like the rising sun, Gordon Technology Unlimited, or GTU, is poised for great things. It is a company founded on a boyhood love of science fiction, made real by paranormal power. Jack Gordon always wanted the future he imagined as a child. Now in this brave new world of paragons, his company strives to turn his dreams into reality.

OVERVIEW

Jack Gordon loved reading. He grew up an introspective child of wealthy parents, often seen with his face buried in a book. He read everything he could get his hands on, but his true love was science fiction: stories full of robots, space ships, alien creatures. As a young man he was injured in a boating accident that left him in a coma for a week. His injuries awakened something in his brain, after he recovered he discovered he could hear other people's thoughts. Friends and family noted after the accident Jack seemed like a new man. He left behind his old introspective ways, replacing them with a new charm and an outgoing nature. He always seemed to know the perfect thing to say.

Jack grew interested in his father's shipping business, something he never cared about before. He excelled as a salesman, using his telepathic powers to strike the perfect deal. When Jack Gordon's father died of lung cancer, he inherited the business. Jack sold the business and tucked the money away. He had other plans. He watched a television interview with a Chinese national, who could move at superhuman speeds and had a keen mind for creating gadgets. Gordon believed with this man's help he could start a company to produce all the high-tech wonders he loved as a boy. He met the man, whose name was Liang Zhao, and of course, Jack Gordon knew exactly what to say to convince Zhao to come and work for him.

Gordon Technology Unlimited took off, growing rapidly. The company created buzz through a media blitz and releasing podcasts of product testing, dramatic footage of a flying woman with a jet-pack set to a sweeping musical score. Interest in the company rose, but GTU seemed to be in trouble before it could even get started. Gordon had the company working on too many projects at once;

GORDON TECHNOLOGY UNLIMITED

Agenda: GTU aims to make a profit producing and marketing what the company refers to as "retro-future" consumer goods, a marriage of cutting edge technology with the look and feel of old school science fiction. The company has plans to produce a range of items like jetpacks, flying cars, and personal home robots.

Structure: GTU is a jointly-held company, although many people believe it to be wholly owned by founder Jack Gordon.

Symbol: GTU's corporate logo is a red stylized rocket ship. The rocket's exhaust swoops under the ship to form a semi circle. Blasting out of the semi circle is GTU written in block letters leaning to the right as if propelled at great speed.

Common Allegiance: Jack Gordon tries to make Gordon Technology Unlimited a challenging yet engaging company to work for. As a result, most employees hold a common allegiance to the company or its founder.

Wealth: There is a joke, told only partly in jest, that Jack Gordon has the paranormal power to raise money. He has raised millions for his company, but GTU's pre-production work has claimed most of it. Currently the company only has a wealth bonus of +10 to reflect its liquid assets.

GTU was bleeding money and about to collapse. Necessity forced Gordon to accept a partnership deal that would save the company.

Experience has taught Jack Gordon to focus. GTU is prioritizing their designs with an effort to get a product to the marketplace. Gordon has chosen the *Pegasus* flying car as their flagship product. He believes once people see an air car in action, demand will skyrocket. He has also been courting military and security firms with the idea of the next generation of hand-held weaponry, with a design sense mined from the past, of course.

STRUCTURE

Jack Gordon shares ownership of GTU with a silent partner. In the past Gordon has fought to keep the company from going public, as he does not wish to risk losing control. However, after a series of setbacks the company had burned through the majority of its capital, leaving Jack Gordon desperate for cash. He received a partnership offer too good to ignore. The partner had a lot of money to invest and promised not to interfere with the direction of the company. Gordon accepted, despite the feeling he was making a deal with the devil, especially since he could not read his new partner's mind.

Beneath Gordon and his partner there are several different departments such as accounting, marketing, research and development, human resources, and production. GTU also employs its own security force. Each department supports its own hierarchy with a department head at the top. There is a weekly department head meeting to keep Gordon updated.

BASES OF OPERATIONS

Gordon Technology Unlimited is headquartered in Boston, Massachusetts, near the harbor. The core of the company's employees work there and Jack Gordon keeps his office there. The company also runs a pilot plant for research and development in southern New Hampshire. GTU takes security seriously and the lab and testing area is heavily protected by company security. GTU maintains several warehouses containing raw materials and is currently scouting locations for production sites.

RESOURCES

GTU is on the cusp of going into production with its first product and is carefully managing the company's resources. Financially, the company is stable, despite the its previous problems. Much of its money has been spent on the acquisition of raw materials. Large warehouses, full of supplies, await the call of production

orders. The company's greatest resource is its intellectual property; it owns designs for several products in various stages of completion.

At the present, GTU employs five paranormals, most whom work in research and development, although the company recently hired an accounting savant. Gordon believes paranormals will be the key to his company's success. He keeps this opinion to himself, for the sake of company morale.

USING GORDON TECHNOLOGY UNLIMITED

Gordon Technology Unlimited is always looking to hire more paranormals. Jack Gordon has been trying to start a company-sponsored team of paragons. Such a team, decked out in flashy uniforms and equipped with GTU prototypes would be a tremendous public relations and marketing boost for the company. The team would also provide much-needed revenue when rented out to various clients.

Paranormals with technological skills are certain to attract GTU's attention, and the company may try to hire them for its R&D division, or simply ensure they don't become competition. Paranormals with more physical abilities could find work for Gordon Tech as security personnel or public relations agents, like the aforementioned team. Jack Gordon carefully avoids dealing with paranormal psychics, especially telepaths, in order to keep his own "talents" under wraps.

Paranormals can change the familiar ways the world works, and Gordon Technology Unlimited is intended to be a vehicle for that change. GTU plans for their products to have as much impact on society as radio, television, and the personal computer have. The technology the company's designs are based on exist today in one form or another, yet are impractical or unfeasible to implement. A paranormal with a superhuman intellect can change that. However, as great as the potential for success is, it is not guaranteed. The primary barrier GTU comes up against is ACME-tech, since some paranormal inventions can't be replicated or mass-produced, and even the ones that can are often difficult to explain to non-paranormals. This allows you to fine-tune just how much technology GTU is actually capable of taking to market.

An increase in technology presents society with a new series of concerns. New traffic laws would need to be drafted to take flying cars and jet-packs into consideration. Mass-produced robots could threaten to take even more jobs from human workers—and not just

jobs in manufacturing. GTU has also commenced work on artificial intelligence, despite the legal (and ethical) concerns about producing a self-aware product. GTU's weapon technology may produce juicy military contracts, but they could also cause problems for law enforcement agencies. Current body armor is unable to effectively combat a laser beam and criminal forensic teams will find it difficult to gather evidence when the murder victim has been struck by a disintegrator ray.

The identity and goals of Jack Gordon's silent partner are left for the Gamemaster to decide. He or she is willing to allow Gordon to make all decisions about the course of the company, but it is unclear whether that will remain the case. The partner may simply believe GTU represents a good return on investment, but perhaps there is an ulterior motive at work.

LEARNING ABOUT GORDON TECHNOLOGY UNLIMITED

Gordon Technology's security keeps a tight watch on the flow of information about the company, especially knowledge concerning the company's intellectual property. Any attempts to question GTU employees may draw their attention unless done discretely.

GATHER INFORMATION

Making this check represents the information a character can acquire about Gordon Technology Unlimited by making inquiries in the business world.

DC 10: GTU is a company poised to bring the consuming public "retro-future" technology like jet-packs and flying cars.

DC 15: At the moment GTU has no contracts, nor does it have any designs in production. These facts coupled with the amount of money GTU is spending makes some think that the future health of the company is questionable.

DC 20: Jack Gordon recently took on a silent partner to relieve some of the company's money problems.

DC 30: Jack Gordon is possibly a paranormal, but his powers, if any, are unknown.

KNOWLEDGE (TECHNOLOGY)

Making this check represents knowledge of the technology GTU plans to produce.

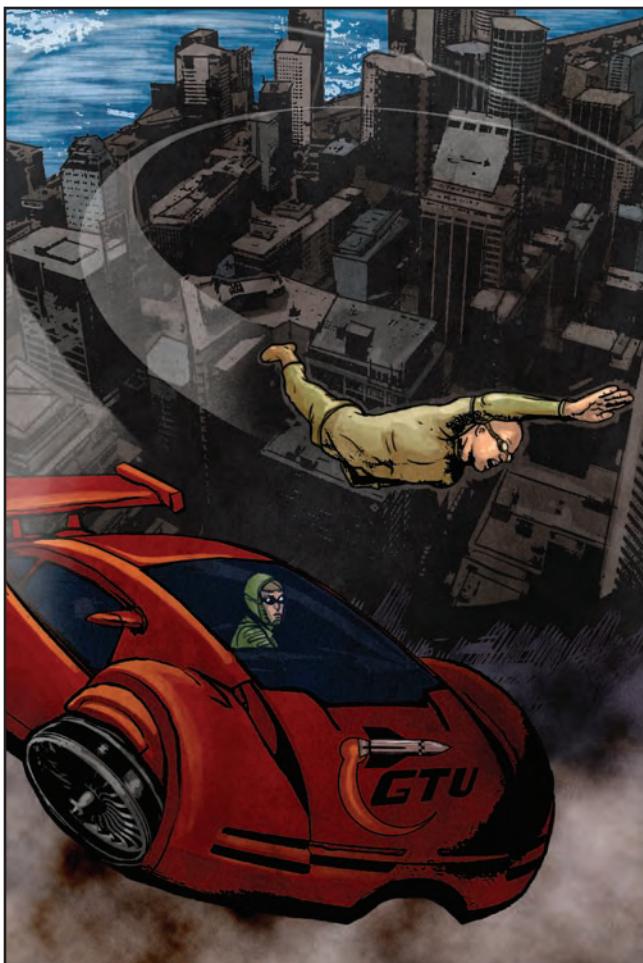
DC 10: GTU employees refer to the company's designs as "retro-future" tech, part state-of-the-art science combined with the romance and feel of science-fiction gear from the stories Jack Gordon read as a child.

DC 20: GTU has several working prototypes, but no designs in production yet. The GTU *Pegasus*, a prototype flying car, is nearing production, however.

DC 25: GTU has begun work on artificial intelligence for their line of robots.

MEMBERS

Gordon Technology Unlimited currently employs approximately one hundred employees. Statistically, most employees are young males, only a few years out of college. Use the Bystander archetype (see *M&M*, page 226) or the Scientist (see *M&M*, page 229) to represent GTU employees. Here are a few employees of note:



LIANG ZHAO

Zhao is a paranormal with a superhuman intellect and superhuman speed. He has been clocked running at 1,000 MPH and is adept at multi-tasking. He serves as GTU's head of research and development. Zhao has his own lab in which he can unleash his full speed without risk of injuring a co-worker. He accomplishes unbelievable amounts of work this way, but creates a lot of wear and tear on his equipment, too.

NATHAN "BIG BROTHER" BRADDOCK

Nathan Braddock is GTU's head of security. He possesses the power of ESP, which he uses to "patrol" the company grounds from the comfort of his office. His nickname comes from fellow employees, who can never tell when Braddock might be "peering" over their shoulders, although supposedly he does no such thing.

JESSICA PORTER

A paranormal working in the Research & Development Department as a product tester, Porter is a paranormal able to generate a personal force field able to withstand powerful impacts. Porter, who used to test aircraft, is as serious as a heart attack. Jack Gordon has tried without success to convince Porter to lead a company-backed paragon team, but she has always replied, "The whole costume and code-name thing is pretty silly, Jack."

GTU SECURITY GUARD

GTU employs their own security detail, hiring from a pool of former law enforcement officers and military personnel. Their stats

GTU SECURITY GUARD

PL 4

Str 14 Dex 12 Con 13 Int 10 Wis 12 Cha 10

Skills: Drive 2 (+3), Intimidate 4 (+4), Knowledge (tactics) 2 (+2), Notice 4 (+5), Profession (security guard) 4 (+5), Sense Motive 4 (+5)

Feats: Equipment 3

Equipment: commlink, flashlight, handcuffs, tonfa (+2 damage), light pistol (+3 damage), tactical vest (+3 Toughness)

Combat: Attack +3, Grapple +5, Damage +4 (melee with tonfa), +3 (ranged), Defense +2 (+1 flatfooted), Knockback -2, Initiative +1

Saving Throws: Toughness +4 (+1 without vest), Fortitude +3, Reflex +3, Will +2

Abilities 11 + Skills 5 (20 ranks) + Feats 3 + Combat 10 + Saves 6 = Total 35

GTU PEGASUS FLYING CAR

VEHICLE

Size: Large; Strength 25, Speed 5 (ground and air), Toughness 8, Defense +9; Features: Navigation System, Remote Control

Cost: 16 equipment points

here depict security guards before Gordon Technology Unlimited has entered production on any of its products. After the company swings in to action the GM may wish to change these stats to represent the new technology. Replace the light pistol with a "ray-gun" (**Device 2** [easy to lose; **Blast 5**]) and give the security guards a jet-pack (**Device 2** [hard to lose; **Flight 3** (50 MPH)])

GTU PEGASUS FLYING CAR

The GTU *Pegasus* is the company's first generation flying car. Currently a few prototypes exist and the vehicle is on the verge of full-scale production. Jack Gordon hopes this will be the product to put his company on the map. The *Pegasus* operates the same as any vertical take off and landing (VTOL) vehicle, but uses next-generation technology. The *Pegasus* can reach a top speed of 250 MPH and operates on the ground as well as in the air. The *Pegasus* is designed with a remote control GPS navigational system. The car seats two comfortably with a small trunk space. The prototype is white with a stylized image of a flying horse on the side in gray.

THE HARBINGERS

Where do paragons get their powers? How are ordinary people transformed into extraordinary beings? One organization believes they know the answer: aliens. Believing the human race in mortal peril from hidden alien invaders, the brilliant Dr. Julian Gaither brought together like-minded people to save the world from the paragon conspiracy... by any means necessary.

OVERVIEW

Dr. Julian Gaither is an incredibly gifted inventor and scientist, known and respected in a variety of scientific fields. When paragons first appeared he was involved with the work of a government-sponsored thinktank tasked with discovering the source of their powers. Having never really encountered failure before, Dr. Gaither took the job confidently. Time passed and frustration took hold as the group encountered one dead-end after another. Eventually the government disbanded the research group and looked elsewhere

for answers. Dr. Gaither was thanked for his time and then quietly sent back to home to New Mexico.

On his first night home Dr. Gaither peered off into the cosmos and considered the possibility that, for the first time in his life, he might have failed. Then he quietly, so quietly not even he has ever noticed, broke out. It was exactly that moment when Doctor Julian Gaither decided he had been tricked.

Dr. Gaither reasoned if he, quite possibly the smartest man on Earth, could not discover the source of paragons' powers, then clearly that source was not of terrestrial origin; which meant extra-terrestrial beings were responsible for the existence of paranormals. In fact, the aliens had probably infiltrated the government and then arranged for him to be called in, *knowing* he was the only one who could ever possibly catch them, just to make sure their experiments were undetectable! However they had made it *too* perfect, and now he saw through their charade. What could possibly come next but an alien invasion, lead by genetically altered paranormal agents?

Knowing the truth was empowering, and being the person who would bear that truth to humanity and save it during its darkest hour was humbling, but Dr. Gaither was not fool enough to think people would listen to him. After all, the aliens had already had time to make arrangements ensuring he would be dismissed as a crackpot or some kind of paranoid fanatic. Instead he vowed to bring his message to others slowly, to build resistance to the invasion, unite the world under his leadership, and defeat the alien menace. This time he could not and would not fail!

Dr. Gaither set to using his contacts and resources to build an organization to defend the Earth. As the bringer of a terrible truth, Doctor Gaither began to think of himself almost as an angel, a harbinger for the difficult days ahead. He conceived of an ever-growing host of such messengers and protectors, like seraphim, with himself the first among many. With this image in mind he named his new organization the Harbingers.

Up until recently the Harbingers have been acting in small ways, spreading public distrust of paragons through various media, but with breakouts on the rise, Dr. Gaither feels the need to speed up his schedule. The Harbingers are fully trained and their labs equipped to deal with the alien menace, the way is paved for stage two: elimination.

STRUCTURE

At the summit of the Harbingers is Dr. Gaither, who makes all final decisions about what missions to undergo, where money is spent, and how to approach current or long-term problems, a role he juggles with being the organization's top scientist. Despite his full schedule, Dr. Gaither does not appear to have much difficulty running his organization and is a leader of such charisma that no Harbinger has even thought of displacing him.

Underneath Gaither are three department heads: Doctor Kendall Lewis is an older woman, and has known Dr. Gaither for years. She runs the labs when the doctor is not in and keeps him apprised of any scientific concerns or discoveries.

Neil Clark is a charismatic and friendly man who has worked as the doctor's PR manager for years. He keeps an ear to the ground and an eye on the news media both for news of paranormal events and to make sure the Harbingers are as well hidden as they need to be.

THE HARBINGERS

Agenda: The Harbingers consider paragons the tools of alien invaders seeking to dominate the Earth. To avert the doom they foresee as imminent they have developed two primary goals: to discredit paragons and to unite the world behind their leader, Dr. Gaither, so he can lead the rest of humanity in resisting the invasion.

Structure: As far as most of the world is concerned the Harbingers do not exist. If ever encountered, their members claim they belong to some other organization or, even more often, the government. Their bearing and knowledge means they pass at least a superficial inspection as government agents. The actual structure of the Harbingers is hierarchical, with Dr. Gaither at the top followed by several specialist lieutenants.

Symbol: A crescent with the points downward crossed by a vertical telescope with the larger lens at the apex of the design. The effect is something like an abstracted bow and arrow aimed toward the sky. It is meant to serve as a reminder to the members of the organization: always keep watch and be ready to take action.

Common Allegiances: Given the seriousness of their mission, most Harbingers' primary allegiances are to the cause or humanity, the organization, and Dr. Gaither, usually in that order.

Wealth: The Harbingers have a Wealth bonus of +29, thanks largely to Dr. Gaither's resources.

Major David Kinsey "retired" from the service after Dr. Gaither talked to him several years ago, and now leads the Harbinger's para-military forces with strict discipline. He is an older man with cold eyes and a permanent scowl.

Each of the three department's heads runs their section as they see fit and effectively hold equal rank within the organization, answering to Dr. Gaither.

BASES OF OPERATIONS

The Harbingers are a national phenomenon, and they have properties all over the United States. Generally these are small buildings usable as safehouses capable of supporting a six-person squad for a month before needing to be resupplied.

Dr. Gaither's government contacts have also supplied two training bases, one in Iowa nestled deep in fields of corn, and the other tucked in the West Virginia mountains. These bases are built along military lines and even get their weekly supplies from the United States military.

The heart of the organization is in New Mexico, on Dr. Gaither's private estate. Years before the Breakout Dr. Gaither bought a large patch of land on which he built his house, his laboratory, and an observatory, choosing New Mexico for its view of the stars and for its sense of privacy. He had a dream of a collective of scientists working together to unlock the secrets of the universe and had always intended that others who shared his vision would eventually come to join him at "The Ranch."

When his vision of the future changed, his vision for the Ranch altered to fit what he saw as the needs of the world. The original structure designed for scientific inquiry still exists and his home is still quite luxurious, but security has been ramped up and the subterranean levels expanded to labyrinthine proportions. The Ranch houses equipment, development labs, and a small theater, as well as a broadcast and recording studio. No military training is done at the Ranch, though there is certainly a security presence, helping the base lay that much lower on the world's radar.

RESOURCES

The Harbingers' top resource is Dr. Gaither himself, a brilliant inventor and charismatic leader who has amassed considerable wealth of his own. Because he assumes at some point the aliens and their paragon servants will attempt to silence him, Dr. Gaither has

developed a tough material called nanoweave that is used in body armor. Doctor Gaither also carries a personal sidearm, the Zero Pistol, with him at all times. This pistol has a variety of settings, but the most notable is the ability to shut down a paranormal's powers. Unbeknownst to anyone else, these items are ACME-tech; they only work because of Dr. Gaither's paranormal nature.

The Harbingers provide cutting edge technology to their large militia and Dr. Gaither and the other Harbinger scientists create weaponry designed to handle specific paranormals. Dr. Gaither has also built up a web of contacts in business and politics to keep the Harbingers well informed and well supplied.

USING THE HARBINGERS

Depending on the series, the Harbingers may be a small cluster of paranoid nutcases led by the biggest loon of them all or lone freedom fighters against the greatest conspiracy the world has ever known. A great deal depends on whether or not "Doc Harbinger" is right, although there's nothing saying he can't be both right *and* crazy!

Paragons who have some sort of secret could be exposed or framed by the Harbingers. Any paragon who claims their powers came from aliens will come under immediate surveillance and will, if possible, be eliminated. Someone the heroes know might also be targeted by the Harbingers and may mention "feeling watched" shortly before disappearing. If the characters are not paragons it is possible they will be approached for membership. It is even possible that a character may know a Harbinger or the Gaither himself, and not realize how close to the conspiracy they are.

The Harbingers are active, but low profile. Their eventual goal is the unification of all the "real people" (non-paranormals) in the world to defeat the alien invasion they are fully expecting to happen in the near future. In the short term, they try to spread as much distrust and as many negative perceptions of paragons as possible. They are more than willing to frame a paragon if they believe the charges would stick, but prefer to reveal facts about a paragon's "dirty secrets" to the media. Sometimes these facts have been slightly twisted to suit the Harbinger's vision of the world, always showing the least sympathetic side of any paragon.

If Dr. Gaither believes, for whatever reason, that an individual is a willing servant of the aliens, or a danger to "real people," then he will immediately arrange for their quiet elimination. As the



Harbingers gain more followers and the organization's plans progress they will begin to attack political targets with the goal of replacing them with politicians friendly to their cause. Their tactics will go up to and include leading coups in small foreign countries and replacing the heads of state with anti-paragon politicians.

LEARNING ABOUT THE HARBINGERS

While the Harbingers have kept a low profile there are a few avenues of investigation available. A political or business contact might be aware of some odd accounting occurring and a money trail will eventually lead to Dr. Gaither. Inquiry into the biological nature of paragons might also lead a hero to the Gaither, though would likely reveal little about the Harbingers themselves. It is also possible that a friend or former friend could be drawn into the Harbingers, which would at the very least alter their relationship with any paragon characters.

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 20: Some funding for state and federal projects has been diverted to an unknown paragon-related project.

DC 25: Large amounts of corporate funding have likewise been diverted.

DC 30: Whatever the project is, it is being run through one of Dr. Julian Gaither's companies.

KNOWLEDGE (CURRENT EVENTS OR SCIENCE)

DC 10: Dr. Julian Gaither is a well-known scientist and inventor.

DOCTOR JULIAN GAITHER

PL 9

Str 10	Dex 11	Con 10	Int 26/18	Wis 26/18	Cha 26/16
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Skills: Bluff 5 (+13), Computers 12 (+20), Concentration 8 (+16), Craft (chemical) 14 (+22), Craft (electronic) 14 (+22), Craft (mechanical) 14 (+22), Diplomacy 7 (+15), Disable Device 8 (+16), Gather Information 8 (+16), Intimidate 6 (+14), Investigate 6 (+14), Knowledge (physical sciences) 14 (+22), Knowledge (technology) 12 (+20), Language 6 (French, Latin, Spanish, Japanese, Mandarin Chinese, Russian, [English is native]), Medicine 8 (+16), Notice 6 (+14), Profession (scientist) 8 (+16), Search 4 (+12), Sense Motive 8 (+16)

Feats: Attack Focus (ranged) 3, Attack Specialization (Zero Pistol), Benefit 3 (wealth bonus 20), Defensive Roll 3, Distract (Bluff), Equipment 6, Connected, Contacts, Fearless, Inventor, Precise Shot, Leadership, Master Plan, Minions (fanatical) 9, Taunt, Well-Informed

Equipment: The Ranch (HQ) plus up to 10 points of other equipment.

Powers: Enhanced Charisma 10, Enhanced Intelligence 8, Enhanced Wisdom 8, Super-Senses 4 (danger sense, direction sense, distance sense, time sense), **Device 6** (Zero Pistol, easy to lose), **Device 1** (nanoweave armor, hard to lose)

Zero Pistol: **Nullify 9** (all powers; *Alternate Powers: Blast 9* [Extras: Autofire], **Blast 9** [Extras: Penetrating], **Blast 9** [Extras: Cone Area, Penetrating; Flaws: Range—Touch])

Nanoweave Armor: **Protection 5**

Combat: Attack +3 (melee), +6 (ranged), +8 (Zero Pistol) Grapple +3, Damage +9 (Blast), +9 (Nullify), Defense +8 (+4 flat-footed), Knockback -4, Initiative +0

Saving Throws: Toughness +8 (+5 flatfooted), Fortitude +4, Reflex +4, Will +12

Drawbacks: Vulnerable to Bluff attempts involving aliens (uncommon, moderate, +50%, -2 points)

Abilities 23 + Skills 42 (168 ranks) + Feats 44 + Powers 52 + Combat 22 + Saves 12—Drawbacks 2 = Total 193

THE RANCH

HEADQUARTERS

Size: Huge; Toughness: 10; Features: Communications, Computer, Defense System, Fire Prevention System, Garage, Gym, Hangar, Infirmary, Isolated, Laboratory, Library, Living Space, Pool, Power System, Security System, Workshop

Cost: 20 equipment points

DC 15: When paragons first appeared Dr. Gaither was one of the scientists the government asked to investigate them.

DC 20: Dr. Gaither led the inquiry into the origin of paranormal powers for a year before the government determined it was a failure and pursued other avenues of inquiry.

DC 25: It was Dr. Gaither's first recorded public failure. He has apparently become a recluse since that time.

MEMBERS

The majority of the Harbingers are everyday people, often with paramilitary or military training. However, there is also a strong academic core of scientists from a variety of fields who believe Dr. Gaither's dark vision of the future. Several of these scientists work for the Paranormal Studies Institute while also secretly being members of the Harbingers, passing along their research findings and technolo-

logical discoveries. In addition, several important businessmen and politicians covertly fund and support the Harbingers, hoping to help avert the events Dr. Gaither has convinced them are near.

Most members of the Harbingers can be represented by an archetype. Their equipment and vehicles can be made more sophisticated to alter the challenge they represent as determined by the Gamemaster. In general presume they have the standard equipment listed plus a single mission-specific item for each soldier created by the Dr. Gaither and his scientists.

For the scientists use the scientist archetype (see *M&M*, page 229), but for Doctor Kendall Lewis increase her Intelligence and Wisdom to 16 and add the Inventor feat.

For Neil Clark use the reporter archetype (see *M&M*, page 228), but raise his Charisma to 14 and add the Attractive, Connected, and Contacts feats.

The security and military personal may be represented by the soldier archetype (see *M&M*, page 229), but for Major David Kinsey change the Wisdom to 14, add Sense Motive +6 (+8) to his skills, and Leadership to his feats.

THE INITIATIVE

There have always been those with the power to change the world. Unlike the newcomers with their flashy paranormal abilities, these individuals are not generally known or recognized: they work behind the scenes, within the governments, religions, and organizations of the world. With the advent of paranormals, the number of those with the power to change the world has grown dramatically and those already in power are not all pleased, particularly those without paranormal abilities of their own. Some of them have decided to do something about it, to "take the Initiative," as it were.

OVERVIEW

The Initiative is perhaps the world's best kept open secret, which is saying a great deal in a world rife with conspiracies. The Initiative began as a method for certain individuals, those of key influence around the globe, to retain their power in the paranormal age. Thus was born the Inner Circle, a group of powerful individuals sharing a single goal: dealing with the effect of paranormals on the world. The color of their motivation differs; some fear for the future of humanity, some want to defend the world from paranormal threats, and others simply don't want to share power with superhuman upstarts. Many have put aside mutual differences to work towards their common objective, for the time being.

The Initiative works secretly through the media, governments, and other organizations to accomplish their goals, cooperating from their shadowy meeting rooms, pulling the unseen strings as they have since before the Breakout. No paragon is safe from their web of information, intrigue, and influence.

STRUCTURE

The Initiative is a loosely organized group. While there is no set chain of command, there is a rough pecking order based on the ebb and flow of the Inner Circle's personal power.

While the members of the Initiative have pledged aid to further their common goal the fact is many were once, and are still, rivals or

bitter enemies. Personal grudges and feuds bleed into the support members lend each other. While loose alliances occur, garnering increased influence on the Initiative, as a whole these cliques are short lived, as no member of the Initiative is accustomed to cooperation and trust does not come easily to them.

While the independence of the individual members is often a liability, it is also strength. Since each conspirator in the Initiative has his or her own power-base, the loss of a single member of the Inner Circle does not compromise the alliance as a whole, much like the cells of an insurgent organization.

BASES OF OPERATIONS

Each member of the Initiative maintains independent bases of operation. The lack of trust between members does not allow them to cooperate enough to build any communal space and their meetings almost always take place over encrypted video connections, rarely in person. Each member of the Inner Circle has a meeting room, lined with displays, each one keyed to another individual video feed allowing for a mass meeting where all participants can see the others as if face-to-face. While it is rare for the entire Initiative to gather, smaller groups of three to five members with a specific common goal do sometimes organize.

RESOURCES

Each member of the Initiative would be a formidable adversary due to their resources and influence. Together they can buy and sell small countries. In fact, several of the members *are* rulers of small countries. Regardless, the real power of the Initiative comes from their influence within other organizations. Financial, research, and military organizations across the world have moles doing the bidding of, or reporting to, the Initiative, either knowingly or unwittingly.

Against a paranormal adversary even the might of nations may be insignificant; for this reason the Initiative has indirectly become an employer of every significant paranormal freelancer or freelance organization. To the Initiative, using one paranormal to defeat another not only furthers their goals, it increases the chances paragons eliminating each other.

INVOLVING THE CHARACTERS

To the Initiative, paragons have two roles: targets or dupes. Targets are to be eliminated or neutralized and dupes are to be used. Influential or particularly insightful paranormal are dangerous to the Initiative and targeted for removal. Still, the Initiative only acts when victory is ensured, since they do not wish to alert their most dangerous rivals.

Dupes are used to attack targets. Characters could easily be dupes of the Initiative if they are mercenaries. If the player characters aren't mercenaries, it's more likely that the Initiative would hire investigative paranormals to uncover any dirty secrets the characters might have. These secrets are often legitimate, previously uncovered by the Initiative, set up to be revealed to the world, however the Initiative has no problem manufacturing embarrassing secrets—but in their experience almost everyone has *something* they do not want the world to know.

Characters could also be involved on the periphery of an Initiative objective, not directly affected, but pulled in as a friend or witness to another act. Perhaps they overhear part of an illicit conversa-

THE INITIATIVE

Agenda: To contain, limit, or eliminate the effects of paranormals on the world.

Structure: The Initiative is a conspiracy of a small number of influential people. Each lends his or her own resources to the group. In truth, the Initiative has little in the way of formal structure, simply agreements between its members to assist each other to achieve their common goals.

Symbol: The informal symbol of the Initiative is a Roman-style letter "I" in a triangle or pyramid but, for the most part, the organization does without logos or outward signs of its existence.

Common Allegiances: The members of the Inner Circle share a common allegiance to the Initiative and its goals, although their primary allegiance is usually to themselves and their own agendas. Agents of the Initiative are chosen for allegiance to the group or humanity's cause (in that order).

Wealth: Effectively limitless wealth as an organization, easily as much as a major industrialized nation, though individuals vary, having a wealth score of +30 at a minimum, often higher.

tion or are asked to help someone fearing for his life as he flees an underworld organization. Regardless, contact with the Initiative is almost never directly identifiable as such because they work through proxy, rarely if ever getting their own hands dirty or leaving traces any but the most talented investigators would have a chance of finding.

The Initiative could indirectly sponsor a group of paranormals for the purpose of dealing with other paranormals, often with "extreme prejudice." These paranormals form a military organization or a mercenary group, bringing them in direct conflict with other paranormals. The group might work for a legitimate organization but certain elements of the organization are connected to the Initiative. While the mission of the organization to which the characters belong may appear benign, from time to time the group would be sent on missions meant to further the Initiative's

agenda. Digging to the center of what is wrong could be the focus of an entire series.

USING THE INITIATIVE

The Initiative is a powerful conspiracy. They could be behind any plot that would weaken the world position of paragons. They control or influence nations, corporations, and organizations around the globe to advance what they see as the welfare of humanity over that of the paranormal. Behind any law, weapon, or research targeting the paranormal one might find the Initiative, particularly research into the origin of paranormal abilities, and how to eliminate them.

One area the Initiative uses extensively in their secret war against paranormals is the media. Through their influence in the parent corporations, the Initiative rewards those able to discredit or embarrass paranormals. Tell-alls about the true activities of the world's favorite paragons are lucrative and the rest takes care of itself. From the sleaziest paparazzi to the most trusted news anchor, all of them work for the Initiative whether they know it or not.

A favorite ploy of the Initiative is to pit two or more paragons against each other: regardless of the victor, the Initiative wins. From paranormal fight clubs to paragon mercenaries, from hate-groups to paranormal supremacists inspiring fear, the Initiative fosters them all.

Regardless of tactics, the Initiative is best used as the unknown enemy, indirectly attacking paranormals in general and specifically targeting individual paragons with more serious threats. Perhaps the characters have the misfortune of earning their attention. At first this attention takes the form of negative—even fictitious—press, but eventually escalates to mysterious attempts on the characters' lives as the Initiative moves to have them eliminated.

LEARNING ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

The Initiative is a highly secretive organization that uses other organizations to do their work, rarely acting directly. The multiple layers between operatives and even the first layers of the Initiative make it difficult to pin down the conspiracy.

Additionally, every member of the Initiative invests significant effort and attention to keeping their secret. It can be dangerous to discover any information about the Initiative because it uses any means necessary to throw investigators off their trail or distract them in some way. Those looking for proof of its existence should beware, as more than one inquisitive type has simply disappeared.



GATHER INFORMATION

Given the influence the Initiative has garnered over the years, making this check can represent nearly any line of inquiry. The Difficulty Classes represent uncovering information from particularly appropriate sources such as intelligence agencies, investigative journalists, and astute conspiracy theorists. Other sources should have the DCs adjusted by +5 or more for adverse conditions.

DC 25: The Initiative is a group of powerful people that controls half the world. It's the classic story of the Illuminati and about as believable.

DC 30: They exist and they keep tight control over who knows about them. Knowledge is power and they knew it all...before the paragons showed up. Now they're trying to regain control by bad-mouthing the paragons in the press.

DC 35: The Initiative is the biggest conspiracy group of all time and has been for years, but they really started to work together once the paragons showed up. They're responsible for all the news coverage—especially the negative coverage—that paragons get. The group is dangerous to investigate and they fight back if they have to...and they fight dirty.

MEMBERS

Each member of the Inner Circle of the Initiative is a power in his or her own right, though one that most likely could not stand toe-to-toe with a paranormal. Additionally, members of the Initiative are all secretive people, preferring to avoid the limelight, working from the shadows. Members are never who anyone would think they would be, either because they are names no one has heard, or because they are the last people anyone would think of as involved in a worldwide conspiracy.

The Inner Circle of the Initiative currently consists of 23 members from many nationalities and locations, each offering a unique set of skills, contacts and influence. The number is not set by any convention or conscious choice, it is simply the number that has been maintainable since the group's inception—or so they say. Members have come and gone, mostly eliminated by other members due to a lack of caution on their part, and their replacement is chosen to fit the same, or a similar, niche.

THE HIDDEN CIRCLE

If you wish, the truth about the Initiative could be even deeper than most of involved with the conspiracy know. Perhaps the Inner Circle is only a front for a true "Hidden Circle" controlling the organization and using it to cause trouble for paranormals, while ferreting out their secrets.

Such a Hidden Circle could be one of the other factions in this chapter, such as the Pact, the Pantheon, or the Paramount Club, or it could even be one of the characters in the following chapter. Could the Initiative be a creation of a "rogue" duplicate of Mr. Zero or a forgotten creation of Dr. Rosemont?

The Hidden Circle members could be secret paragons who prefer to profit from their talents while eliminating any paranormal competition in the world. If so, feel free to create your own "secret masters" of the Initiative, or use suitable characters from this book.

HARUKO SAEKI

PL II

Str 10	Dex 14	Con 14	Int 18	Wis 18	Cha 14
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Skills: Bluff 6 (+8/+12*), Concentration 6 (+10), Diplomacy 12 (+14/+18*), Gather Information 15 (+17), Intimidate 9 (+11), Knowledge (business) 16 (+20), Knowledge (current events) 10 (+14), Knowledge (popular culture) 8 (+12), Language 4 (Cantonese, English, Korean, Mandarin [Japanese is native]), Notice 4 (+8), Profession (media mogul) 16 (+20), Sense Motive 14 (+18)

* includes Attractive bonus

Feats: Attractive, Benefit 7 (wealth +36), Connected, Contacts, Well-Informed

Combat: Attack +2, Grapple +2, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +5 (+3 flatfooted), Knockback -1, Initiative +2

Saving Throws: Toughness +2, Fortitude +2, Reflex +4, Will +9

Abilities 28 + Skills 30 (120 ranks) + Feats 11 + Powers 0 + Combat 14 + Saves 7 = Total 90

HARUKO SAEKI

Haruko Saeki is the daughter of a media mogul, a hard man who, while wealthy and powerful, did not give Haruko much to get started, expecting her to build and learn on her own. She learned a great deal, building up a communications empire through intelligence and vicious determination. Her father died of a heart attack after she bankrupted his company and bought it out from under him for a fraction of its worth.

Ruthless as she is beautiful, Haruko is a public figure and her name is common knowledge. She owns companies providing news service for television, newspapers, and radio as well as newsfeeds, blogs, and public record sites. She is a founding member of the Initiative.

Haruko does not deal in lies, she deals in painful truth. Power corrupts after all and Haruko's organization can shine a light into any corner. Haruko guides her organization and information to expose the skeletons of public figures who work to incorporate paragons into society, chipping away the more moderate figures from the equation, factionalizing and dividing society on paranormal issues.

In addition to her varied media and communications empire, Haruko employs a massive force of investigators, from reporters to gumshoes. From the gritty underbelly of society to government offices, someone in Haruko's organization is always listening and she uses the information to make a hefty profit on the side through extortion and deal-brokering.

MERLIN

MERLIN (the *Mobile Experimental Research Laboratories International Network*) is a motley collection of non-traditional scientists, self-styled technosavants, urban front-liners, visionary social engineers, and other brilliant social malcontents, with the same overriding need: to know the whys and wherefores of a world that suddenly got a whole lot stranger and full of new mysteries than anyone ever imagined.

OVERVIEW

Founded by "Calamity" Jane Haskell as an independent think tank beholden to no special interest, unfettered by borders or hidebound traditionalists and their pre-conceived notions of what should and shouldn't be considered "science," MERLIN has a reputation for

MERLIN

Agenda: Publicly, MERLIN's stated goal is to "expand the boundaries of human knowledge." Internally, and less formally, it's more commonly phrased as "crack open the post-Breakout universe, see what makes it tick, go through its pockets for loose change, and share everything with the world."

Structure: A privately-held corporation, location of central offices unknown to the public and open to speculation.

Symbol: MERLIN has two primary symbols: first, its corporate logo, the name "MERLIN" in heavy black gothic type, overlaid with a silvery web of stylized circuitry. The second is an abstract and stylized owl, all curves, ovals, and circles representing eyes, beak, chest feathers, and wings, enclosed in a tight circle of blue or silver on a black background.

Common Allegiances: The most common allegiances among the rank and file at MERLIN are to MERLIN itself, their fellow "explorers of knowledge," the philosophy that science and reason can solve any problem, and most prevalent of all, a personal loyalty to "Calamity" Jane Haskill (see [Chapter Five](#)).

Wealth: Thanks to patents from Haskill and many MERLIN luminaries, all of which have profits funneled back to the organization, combined with the minimized operating costs associated with their work, MERLIN usually has more significant financial resources than might otherwise be expected. A team leader in the field is authorized to draw funds equal to Wealth +16 without clearing it (though they will need to justify it later, of course, when turning in final reports). Jane can access a Wealth +32 bonus through MERLIN when necessary, but that's the limit without operations starting to take a hit.

showing up when things get their weirdest, always willing to help (or at least watch and record for posterity).

Jane's status as a poster girl for geek and tech culture gives her access to an outstanding, albeit sometimes more than a little odd, recruiting pool. She has a small list of qualities she looks for in recruits: brains, expertise in useful subjects and skills, a particular brand of idealism, and the ability to, at a minimum, tolerate the other members enough to actually get things done. Given those guidelines, she has about fifty times as many applicants as she does available positions.

As a rule, MERLIN doesn't involve outside organizations in their investigations. Similarly, they don't look kindly upon other organizations "nosing in on" or impeding MERLIN's research. This isn't so much an anti-authoritarian streak as it a lack of trust. Jane has little faith in personnel she didn't vet and no love of secrecy that wasn't her decision—she knows MERLIN's goal is to enlighten the masses, not control them, but she isn't so sure about anyone else's agenda. Knowledge is power and power corrupts...at least, it corrupts those outside of MERLIN, in Jane's view. Needless to say, people and groups thriving or depending on compartmentalization of information don't tend to be on friendly terms with MERLIN or its personnel. As a second rule, Haskill and her people (and they are always "her" people) generally only support "hiding the goodies" (i.e., secrecy) where use of information or discoveries present a clear and present threat to the well-being of potential recipients. This is a very narrowly defined classification.

Despite understandable friction with other organizations, Jane is able to leverage her people's expertise to get assistance from outside groups when they need it. Haskill collects information on potential "obstacles" or "external assets" with the same precision and care she does on paranormal phenomena, and isn't above using it to pressure individuals into granting assistance when other leverage fails. In addition, regardless of friction or reticence over methodology, Haskill and her people almost always produce results—and keeping them willing to share has proven worth the investment.

STRUCTURE

To an outside viewer, there seems to be little actual hierarchy within the ranks at MERLIN. This is both accurate and misleading at the same time. There is an organization to the way MERLIN operates, but it's fluid. Haskill ultimately calls the shots, and is the

final arbiter and authority on all decisions. However, below her there is an informal, but recognized, ranking based on seniority and acknowledged level of applicable expertise within a particular geographic area or dedicated mission grouping. Outside of this ranking, there's the cyberlinked hacker supreme that goes by the name Quicksilver Queen; apparently, only Jane knows the Queen's actual name, with everyone else seeing only the computer image of the obviously anime-inspired robotic looking silver-skinned female that the Queen uses to interact with others. Aside from Jane at the top of the ladder, and the Queen outside any ranking at all, the remainder of MERLIN's personnel function in many ways like an idealized commune, moving from project to project as their talents allow, forming project teams as needed based on who is available, who is closest to an investigation's site, and who has the skills a particular project needs. Within that loose framework, leadership roles are adopted by those who've been with MERLIN the longest, or who has the greatest demonstrated degree of skill for the task at hand, or, when all else fails, those who simply have the best people and organizational skills. If the members of the team can't decide, "protocol" calls for the team to ask Jane to decide.

Within the membership, there is an informal pecking order based on the above. This order is generally common knowledge to those within the organization, helps inform the team hierarchy decisions, and generally is also subject to change over time as members get more experience in their fields. Its considered bad form to exploit a person's position within that order, and equally informal acts of "retaliation" by peers against those perceived to be abusing their "bragging rights" are usually enough to make everyone stay in line.

BASES OF OPERATIONS

MERLIN has very few facilities of its own, purposefully, but is instead a distributed network of young, brilliant, and sometimes *dangerously* enthusiastic researchers, linked by a computer and communications system whose security is legendary. Communication between both actual facilities and remote teams is done via either a devoted computer network or encrypted cellular transmissions. Mission teams generally rent space in any appropriate buildings local to the site of an investigation.

Its headquarters, as such, is a converted warehouse in Winterbridge, Massachusetts; a small and otherwise sleepy

college town. This building houses the few offices in use, and doubles as Jane Haskill's living space (one of the sub-basements constructed when the building was refurbished). Hard copy of most of the organization's records and recordings are stored in another sub-basement, one designed to withstand ground zero of a tactical nuclear device (not that most of the crew involved actually expect such an occurrence, but they all humor Jane's paranoia as a matter of habit, and besides, it was fun to design and build). Outside of this facility, there are about a half-dozen lab environments set up in isolated locations around the world; small but very well designed for maximum and most efficient usage of space and MERLIN's cutting-edge technology—most of which was developed in-house. In addition to these labs, there is also an old missile silo that Jane bought from the government and which Quicksilver Queen effectively "disappeared" from the government's records. The silo is home to the Queen, the Queen's life support system, and the massive computer system which the Queen uses to basically live in the net.

Other than these brick-and-mortar locations, MERLIN uses a small fleet of white vans, logo plastered on their sides, each of which houses a portable and fully-functional forensics lab combined with some of the most sophisticated sensor equipment available. These vehicles, when they're spotted and recognized, are the only clue to the public that MERLIN is in the area.

RESOURCES

Though it may be lacking in political power, when it comes to intellectual capital, MERLIN is second to none. Their ability to communicate with each other, respond to a call to action, investigate, and provide technical assistance is only limited by the GM and the dictates of the story.

USING MERLIN

Most frequently, heroes will come into contact with MERLIN peripherally, as phenomena with which they are involved come under MERLIN scrutiny. Alternately, the encounter could be adversarial, as the PCs themselves, or their actions, are what MERLIN is investigating, and not with positive attitudes. PCs with technical or scientific backgrounds could also have been members of MERLIN at one time or could even consider them rivals.

As described above, PCs can find MERLIN a valuable ally or a formidable nuisance, depending on backgrounds, connections, and personal viewpoints.

MERLIN makes a suitable patron organization for a series focused on investigating the mysteries of the paranormal world, whether delving into the depths of the Imageria or digging up evidence of prior paragons and their deeds through "reality archeology." See **Chapter Six** for more information.

GAME INFORMATION

When trying to break into either MERLIN's computer network or its computer-based security, the presence of Quicksilver Queen makes static Difficulty numbers inaccurate. Such contests should be resolved instead with a Computer skill check from Hsien setting difficulties instead. When he feels it necessary, Hsien can also call on the services of support staff to hit the intruders with him—assume that no more than half a dozen staff can effectively help at any one time (others are merely "noise"), so another +12 or so as a circumstance bonus from aid others actions is added to his already prodigious base. In other words, the intruder better be very, very good to stand any chance at all. Investigations can be shortened in a similar fashion, if so desired. Choose a central operator from the mission team in question, and add a bonus for the number of assisting personnel, and then make the appropriate skill check. Given the base skills from such a team, this will usually give fairly impressive resolutions—perfectly in keeping with MERLIN's reputation.



LEARNING ABOUT MERLIN

The following is information characters might learn about MERLIN:

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 10: Private think-tank that investigates paranormal phenomena around the world.

DC 15: Founded and run by Jane "Calamity" Jane Haskill.

KNOWLEDGE (POPULAR CULTURE OR TECHNOLOGY)

DC 15: Membership and experience with MERLIN's ranks is considered the pinnacle of geek-chic achievement. People who leave are avidly sought for government and industry positions.

DC 25: "Super-hacker" Quicksilver Queen is not only a member of MERLIN, but is the reason their computer security has traditionally "owned" the best the hacker community could throw at it.

MEMBERS

On average, there are about 600 on-call members of MERLIN at any one time. Their backgrounds are incredibly varied, and ages range from teen prodigies to elder gurus, their dedication to each of their paths of knowledge their only common ground.

For the majority of MERLIN personnel, the Scientist archetype from the core rules suffices (see *M&M*, page 229). Simply trade around the Knowledge, Craft, and Computer skill ranks to suit the background of the egghead in question (engineer, researcher, programmer, etc.) and add a feat or two for distinction—Eidetic Memory or Lightning Calculator are both good options, though the selection could range to Fascinate, Taunt, or even Fearless, for that matter.

QUICKSILVER QUEEN

Hsien Tsi was a computer prodigy, about to receive a scholarship to MIT to fulfill his potential. He was also gay, openly, and not in a community known for its tolerance. The week before he was to leave for school, he had the misfortune to come to the attention of a group of drunken bigots. He was horribly beaten, suffering spinal damage that rendered him paralyzed from the neck down. He probably would have stayed trapped in the prison of his own body if he hadn't come to Jane's attention through mutual associates. Thanks to her efforts, Hsien Tsi was given a new lease on life, in a fashion. The combination of their technical talents resulted in the creation of a cybernetic interface through which Hsien can roam the ether of cyberspace. The machine is the size of an MRI scanner, but it works. Hsien communicates through an avatar that resembles a silverskinned woman from an anime series, and at least part of the legendary level of security attributed to MERLIN's network is due to his near omnipresence in those systems.

Hsien has come to terms with his physical limitations, and enjoys the experiences afforded by his virtual existence, but would still not turn down a means to heal his injuries and restore his mobility. He (or MERLIN, acting on his behalf) might seek out someone like Bodyshop or Panacea—or a player character with suitable powers—to help with this.

QUICKSILVER QUEEN

PL 8

Str 0	Dex 0	Con 8	Int 20	Wis 14	Cha 12
Skills: Bluff 5 (+6), Computer 13 (+18), Concentration 8 (+10), Diplomacy 2 (+3), Knowledge (physical sciences) 3 (+8), Knowledge (popular culture) 5 (+10), Knowledge (technology) 8 (+13), Language 1 (Mandarin Chinese [English is native]), Notice 3 (+5), Search 6 (+11), Sense Motive 6 (+8)					
Feats: Benefit (status, hacker community), Environmental Adaptation (cyberspace immersion), Favored Opponent 3 (hackers), Speed of Thought					
Powers: Device 2 (cyberspace interface, hard to lose; <i>Power Feats</i> : Restricted; <i>Drawbacks</i> : Noticeable)					
<i>Cyberspace Interface:</i> Datalink 9 (radio; cyberspace)					
Combat: Attack —, Grapple —, Damage —, Defense -5, Knockback -0, Initiative +5					
Saving Throws: Toughness -1, Fortitude +1, Reflex —, Will +8					
Drawbacks: Drawback (quadriplegic, -5 pts)					
Abilities -6 + Skills 15 (60 ranks) + Feats 6 + Powers 8 + Combat 0 + Saves 8—Drawbacks 5 = Total 26					

MIGHTY MIRACLE GUARDIANS

The Mighty Miracle Guardians are a handpicked team of Japanese paragons recruited, supported, and controlled by a broad corporate network of sponsors. They have a public image based on decades of "superhero" and Sentai ideals and expectations, and their handlers make sure that each and every opportunity to display that image is exploited to the fullest for their adoring fans, millions and millions of whom have opened their hearts (and wallets) for their "national heroes."

OVERVIEW

When paragons began to hit the scene, people's reactions ranged from fear and hatred to adoration and worship. But in his corner office in the Kyoto division of Yoshima Technologies, Ando "Danny" Rokku saw dollar signs (or Yen signs, as the case may be) and came up with a clear vision of how to make his fantasies a reality. He came up with the idea of a national group of paragons, that did humanitarian work in the public eye as necessary in order to build a marketable image. Their carefully tailored public persona also benefited from a well-designed marketing campaign that spotlighted the products of the various corporations that he recruited as sponsors. The team's actions and behavior enabled Rokku and his partners to mold the minds and desires of an adoring public and thereby tap into their disposable income on a mind-boggling level. The team was designed to be the idols to end all idols. First, he found sponsors who bought into his plan. After that came the national search for suitable candidates. Stretched out over months, and including public participation with a phone bank and voter registry, the talent search that ended up producing the five finalists became a preview of the expertly managed media blitz that became a hallmark of the team.

Yoshima Technologies was only one of a large consortium of companies that funded the national team of paragons whose name translates as "Mighty Miracle Guardians." The names and public personas, the designs of their heavily Sentai-influenced costumes were conceived by and decided on by a committee of marketing specialists. Giant 66, Ghost Angel Goddess, Invincible Iron Whirlwind, King Fire, and Resplendent Fighting Phoenix get as much press as the consortium can arrange and maintain. They are media darlings and fantastically popular throughout their home country, very much the model of modern Idoru, surpassing even Rokku's dreams of their stardom and impact. Their exploits receive bizarrely comprehensive coverage, making their personal lives more like a cross between reality TV and a soap opera (some of their interaction is rumored to be heavily scripted, up to and including the so-called romance between Ghost Angel Goddess and King Fire).

- *Ghost Angel Goddess* (Satanobe Myoshi) is a telekinetic with enough control and power to bend space for tricks like teleportation and image displacement; before her abilities developed, she was already a media personality, thanks to her electronically composed music albums.
- *Giant 66* (Tobiachi Suki) is a young woman with the ability to, unsurprisingly, grow to gigantic proportions; she sparked during a yakuza hit (apparently her brother had some seri-

MIGHTY MIRACLE GUARDIANS

Agenda: To promote a (carefully-crafted) public image of larger-than-life heroes and national icons, as decided on by what their sponsors want the public to think and buy. And in the view of the public; to be living symbols of their nation and its interests.

Structure: The Mighty Miracle Guardians is a corporate entity, their images, names, and other trademarks all owned jointly by a holding company in turn controlled by a large number of different corporations. The five members of the team are the official agents of that entity, supported by Marketing, Public Relations, Legal, and various other company organs. Their "manager" is Ando Rokku a.k.a. Danny Rokku. He functions as a combination spokesperson and legal representative for contract and public management. They have recently acquired a small staff of official government liaisons in an effort to better coordinate corporate and national interests in terms of public appearances and deployment opportunities (corp-speak for the emergency rescue work, charity involvement, and occasional (sometimes staged, sometimes not) displays of crime-fighting).

Symbol: In Japan, their logo is a circle comprised of the kanji of "Mighty Miracle Guardians" looped together with the kanji for "victory" inside the circle. In other parts of the world, their logo is the English words "Mighty Miracle Guardians" stacked vertically on one another in metallic-chrome block letters with "Mighty" as an upward pointing trapezoidal, "Miracle" as a rectangle, and "Guardians" as a downward pointing trapezoidal; the top two words are joined by the kanji for "victory," and the bottom two by the kanji for "honor." There are also stylized kawaii ("Cute") cartoon images of the team members in their Sentai-inspired costumes that are sometimes used as symbols for the team as a whole.

Common Allegiances: The members of the team nominally have allegiance to each other, to the image of the team, to their corporate sponsors, and to their country, in that order. This is the ideal. The reality is that King Fire and Resplendent Fighting Phoenix are really the only patriots, Ghost Angel Goddess and Invincible Iron Whirlwind have their first loyalty to themselves with everyone and everything else much further down the line, and Giant 66 places the concerns and well-being of her family above all else—sometimes even irrationally so. Their support staff are varied, mostly representing allegiances to their parent corporations and to themselves at varying degrees depending upon what is being asked of them.

Wealth: Thanks to the backing of their corporate patrons, their individual contracts on merchandising and other forms of income, each of the five members of the team is obscenely wealthy in their own right (Wealth Bonus 30+). Taken together, the Consortium itself represents a staggering cross section of Japanese industry—though it may take some time to gather their combined economic power into transferable assets (and a very pressing reason, as they aren't sponsors to *lose* money), if that were to happen, they could conceivably clear a Wealth bonus of +40 or more, with the cap placed only where the GM thinks is reasonable.

ous gambling debts) and before that was a nationally-ranking Kenpo (martial arts) champion.

- *Invincible Iron Whirlwind* (Atsuko Toshiro) is the son of the mayor of the Kyoto Prefecture, and in addition to some finely developed skills in handling the press, he's a martial artist of some repute. His powers all him near total control over kinetic force.
- *King Fire* (Sitochi Enzo) was a student heavily into self-publishing many of his own manga series until his sophisticated pyrokinetic abilities sparked after he survived an attempt by a deranged student group to recreate the Aum Shinrikyo sarin gas subway attack.
- *Resplendent Fighting Phoenix* (Koji Tatsuo) is a former policemen with respectable combat skills and relatively minor light control abilities that are really only good for producing pyrotechnic displays. In addition, he also has the strange ability to "save a copy" of himself at particular points in time. After being defeated, his body vanishes and he reappears fresh and unharmed. On at least two of these occasions, the form that vanished was his corpse—hence his name.

STRUCTURE

There are really two teams involved with the Mighty Miracle Guardians. The first is the public face; the five members of the team proper and Danny Rokku. The second face is the support personnel, ranging from secretaries and mechanics to PR execs and high-priced lawyers. The second functions much as any corporation would, particularly one devoted to the marketing of a single product. The first answers to Danny in private, and to Invincible



GHOST ANGEL GODDESS						PL 10
Str 8	Dex 13	Con 13	Int 15	Wis 18	Cha 15	
Skills: Bluff 3 (+5/+13*), Computers 3 (+5), Concentration 8 (+12), Craft (artistic) 3 (+5), Diplomacy 6 (+8/+16*), Knowledge (art) 3 (+5), Knowledge (popular culture) 6 (+8), Perform (keyboards) 8 (+10), Profession (avant garde musician) 8 (+12), Sense Motive 4 (+8)						
* includes Attractive bonus						
Feats: Attack Focus (melee) 2, Attack Focus (ranged) 1, Attack Specialization (telekinesis) 3, Attractive 2, Benefit (status, Idoru), Benefit 6 (wealth bonus 32), Dodge Focus 3, Fascinate (Diplomacy), Taunt						
Powers: Environmental Control 1 (anime-like telekinetic side-effects, usable simultaneously; Distraction 1, Light 1, Low Gravity; <i>Flaws:</i> Linked to Telekinesis, Uncontrolled), Flight 4 (100 MPH), Force Field 11 (<i>Extras:</i> Impervious 8), Telekinesis 10 (<i>Extras:</i> Damaging, Range—Perception; <i>Flaws:</i> Feedback; <i>Power Feats:</i> Precise; <i>Alternate Power:</i> Deflect 7 [all; <i>Extras:</i> Ranged], Displacement, Teleport 7 [<i>Extras:</i> Portal])						
Combat: Attack +5 (melee), +10 (telekinesis), Grapple +4, Damage -1 (melee), Damage +10 (telekinesis), Defense +8 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback -10, Initiative +1						
Saving Throws: Toughness +12 (+1 without Force Field), Fortitude +4, Reflex +4, Will +8						
Abilities 22 + Skills 13 (52 ranks) + Feats 20 + Powers 64 + Combat 16 + Saves 10 = Total 145						

Iron Whirlwind in the field. Whirlwind is supposed to be the leader (especially in the eyes of the public), though on the few occasions where coordination and teamwork have proven necessary, the team has deferred to Resplendent Fighting Phoenix, as he is far better at coordinating the team than Invincible Iron Whirlwind.

BASES OF OPERATIONS

The team has a suite of central business offices in Tokyo, and an "official headquarters," full of props, trophies, and other eye candy for the public, in the city of Chiba. That facility also includes their training areas, the team's private (and spacious) quarters, and a press room. Video monitors are everywhere, and are constantly recording.

RESOURCES

As mentioned previously, the team has access to enormous financial backing resources and can call on more when necessary. In addition to the facilities described above, the team also has a modified VTOL jet that functions as their team transport—it is very distinctive and immediately recognizable to the public.

USING MIGHTY MIRACLE GUARDIANS

There are many ways to bring PCs in contact with the Mighty Miracle Guardians. They could be allies *du jour*, as the team faces down a threat that also concerns the players. Or, possibly easier, they could be rivals of the PCs for media attention, fighting for coverage on the same channels at the same times, depending on backgrounds. Another possibility is that the PCs and the Guardians are manipulated by the team's handlers into fighting each other in order to get more attention; whether or not the teams remain unfriendly after their first "unfortunate" contact is up to them.

RESPLENDENT FIGHTING PHOENIX						PL 10
Str 16	Dex 16	Con 16	Int 13	Wis 15	Cha 15	
Skills: Bluff 4 (+6), Climb 4 (+7), Intimidate 6 (+8), Knowledge (streetwise) 6 (+7), Knowledge (tactics) 6 (+7), Notice 6 (+8), Profession (police officer) 8 (+10), Search 8 (+9), Sense Motive 8 (+10), Stealth 4 (+7)						
Feats: Assessment, Attack Focus 2 (ranged), Attack Specialization 1 (blast), Benefit (status, Idoru), Benefit 6 (wealth bonus 32), Defensive Roll 4, Evasion, Improved Initiative, Leadership, Power Attack, Sneak Attack 2, Startle, Teamwork						
Powers: Flight 3 (50 MPH), Immunity 10 (fire-based damage, light-based damage), Light Control 5 (<i>Power Feats:</i> Indirect 3, Variable Descriptor; <i>Alternate Powers:</i> Blast 5, Dazzle 5 [Visual]), Regeneration 53 (+9 Recovery bonus, all conditions including Resurrection, No Action Required; <i>Extras:</i> True Resurrection; <i>Flaws:</i> Limited—Only when unconscious or killed), Protection 3 , Teleport 3 (<i>Flaws:</i> Linked—Regeneration, Self-Only, Short-Range, Uncontrolled; <i>Power Feats:</i> Triggered—When Regeneration used)						
Combat: Attack +8 (melee), +10 (ranged), +12 (blast), Grapple +11, Damage +3 (melee), +5 (blast), Defense +10 (+5 flat-footed), Knockback -5, Initiative +7						
Saving Throws: Toughness +10 (+6 flatfooted), Fortitude +7, Reflex +7, Will +7						
Abilities 31 + Skills 15 (60 ranks) + Feats 23 + Powers 69 + Combat 36 + Saves 13 = Total 187						

LEARNING ABOUT MIGHTY MIRACLE GUARDIANS

The following is information characters might learn about the Mighty Miracle Guardians:

GATHER INFORMATION OR KNOWLEDGE (POPULAR CULTURE)

The following information is easily garnered from any number of sources, including perusing the right chat rooms, walking the floors at the right conventions, watching the right cable-access programs, or simply reading the right magazines, comics, or journals.

DC 10: Japanese group of paragons with massive media presence.

DC 20: Critics and rumormongers insist that most of the team's heroic activities are staged photo ops.

MEMBERS

Membership is locked and static, as far as the team of paragons is concerned. There have been no changes since the team was formed. The supporting cast changes, sometimes frequently given the incredible level of stress involved.

Game statistics for Ghost Angel Goddess and Resplendent Fighting Phoenix are included in this section. Giant 66 and Invincible Iron Whirlwind are both based off of the Kung Fu Killer (see *M&M*, page 217). Both drop 4 points from their Attack Bonuses, 3 points from their Defense Bonuses, and 4 ranks from each of their skills. Giant 66 also drops 4 points from her Strength and then adds **Growth 8** (Full Round to change sizes). Invincible Iron Whirlwind adds **Flight 4**, **Force Field 6** (Impervious), **Kinetic Control 12** (Precise, *Alternate Powers:* **Deflect 12, Drain Movement 12, Immovable 12** [*Extras:* Unstoppable], **Move Object 12, Nullify Movement 12**). King Fire is essentially the Energy Controller archetype (see *M&M*, page 18)

with Craft (artistic) 10 (+10) and the following as his array structure: **Fire Control 10** (Power Feats: Precise, Subtle; *Alternate Powers: Flame Blast 10, Flame Objects 10, Ignite 6, Melt 10*).

For their support people, use the appropriate supporting cast. The Politician archetype works well for all of the various executives and their ilk that swarm around the team whenever press coverage offers a chance to shine in the public's eye for their watching bosses (including, Danny, who has his social skills at three ranks above the archetypes' standards). Similarly, the Reporter archetype is a good fit for the army of public relations people that make the team's image continue to shine through whatever they encounter, and the Bystander is adequate for the assistants, hairdressers and gofers. In each case, simply trade out Profession skill specialties as needed.

THE PACT

Long before the world changed and living, breathing supermen appeared, there were those who sought powers and abilities they thought would elevate them above the common man. Before the Breakout and the introduction of new terms to explain the presence of these powers, they were all grouped into one category... "magic." The Pact are an order comprised of those men and women who have mastered those mysterious forces and who want dominion over all paranormals, which they feel is their right. Of special interest, is the supernal realm called The Imageria which the Pact claims to have always had knowledge of and power over. The Imageria is populated with all the lands, peoples, gods, and devils from all the stories ever told—all of which the Pact hopes to exploit, manipulate, and use for their own purposes.

OVERVIEW

To the rest of the world, the Pact, or as its more innocuous face is publicly known, "the Esoteric Brothers of Solomon's Legacy," seems to be a private organization similar to the Shriners (or to the more conspiratorially minded but equally clueless, the Rosicrucians or the Freemasons as they exist in occult myth and folklore) –only with stratospheric dues and membership requirements; in other words, just another excuse for the moneyed and powerful to gather and drink to their own success. This is the image that the true power players within the organization *like* for the unenlightened masses to accept as the truth.

STRUCTURE

The Pact is global in scope, and owes much of its trappings and organizational schema to a complicated interpretation of western hermetic traditions of scholastic mysticism, alchemy, and astrology. At the top of the organization's strictly observed hierarchy is the Council of Elders, each of whom in turn represents a "house." These houses purportedly represent certain correspondences of mystical elements and astrological alignments; each also takes its name from one of the seven planetary metals of alchemical tradition: Gold, Silver, Copper, Iron, Tin, Mercury, and Lead. Membership in each house is delegated based on a sophisticated reading of a prospective member's astrological significance—rumors that such readings are sometimes skewed to meet the needs and desires of the Elders are ruthlessly quashed by the Elders when discovered. Within each house, ranking is divided among seven "Chairs;" these seats take their names from the original seven celestial bodies given importance by medieval and renaissance alchemists: the Sun, Mercury, Venus, the

Moon, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. Starting with the Council of Elders, there are seven ranks within the order, with the Council designated as the First Rank. According to tradition, every member of the first six ranks has seven inferior "magi" who report to him or her for their patronage and continuing guidance. Though this should mean that there are seven ranks of multiple groups of seven members each, for a combined membership of seven to the seventh power (or over 800,000 members), many of these ranks and chairs exist only on paper and remain unfilled—actual membership does indeed number in the thousands around the world, but in the low thousands, and only those in the upper ranks are cognizant of the actual breadth and power of the organization as a whole. Members who aren't in the upper ranks view the Pact as little more than one more club to belong to that gives them valuable contacts and the occasional opportunity for favor-trading. Only the higher-ranked members know that they and their brethren more similar to the Illuminati or the Priory of Zion than they are the Masons.

Any member of the Pact can be named by their position within the above-described hierarchy—Sillas the Elder, for example, is also known as the First Chair of Mars, House of Iron. As another example, Anais du Chantaine (the representative archetype detailed later in this section) is the Third Chair of the Moon, House of Silver.

BASES OF OPERATIONS

The Pact, through innumerable shell companies and fronts, owns properties all over the world. These range from the manors that act as headquarters for the individual houses, such as the House of Gold's Wycroft Manor on the Isle of Man, to the most inconspicuous safehouses buried in urban mazes. Each of the seven houses



THE PACT

Agenda: The members of The Pact believe all paranormal powers and related phenomena are magical in origin and that it is their place to control all magic and magical beings for their own personal advancement and aggrandizement. Temporal power, vast and far-reaching, is their ultimate goal; the Pact and its members are dedicated to the idea that they're destined to control and use all magic (including everything from ancient lore to the newest paragons) to further their personal agendas.

Structure: Global hierarchy of lodges controlled by the Council of Elders.

Symbol: A Seal of Solomon, encircled by a ring containing the alchemical symbols for the metals of the seven planetary houses.

Common Allegiances: In order, a member of the Pact has his or her first allegiance to him- or herself, secondary allegiance to the structures and expectations of The Pact, and the final allegiance is to the complex set of arcane dogma filtered down through centuries of occult lore—but only if its granted the practitioner actual power.

Wealth: The combined economic might of the Pact is truly impressive. Assume a base +40 bonus to Wealth checks on average, but it could go much higher depending on need and the GM's discretion.

maintains its own "motherhouse" and the Council of Elders meets in a palatial estate located, appropriately enough, near Glastonbury Tor in Britain.

RESOURCES

Primarily, the Pact opts to display temporal resources and contemporary weaponry rather than openly use arcane might. There's little need to expend valuable and possibly irreplaceable mystic resources when well-armed thugs will do the job just fine. Mercenaries are kept on payroll at strategic locations for just such eventualities (use the SWAT Officer, see *M&M*, page 229). Thanks to their legion of contacts in the halls of powers throughout the world, it's quite possible for the higher ranking members of the Pact to strike through legitimate authorities and bureaucratic nightmares without ever showing their faces at all. Similarly, if used as a patron for PCs, the limits of the physical assets at the players' disposal rivals those of the best black ops teams and covert agencies. Additionally, whether as boon or bane for the players, as a final asset, the higher ranking members of the organization can actually use magic.

USING THE PACT

A mysterious invitation arrives for a player character with an arcane background...a world-renowned occultist is murdered...contacts in the more exotic corners of the underworld start dying mysteriously...the possibilities are only limited by the backgrounds of the characters and the type of campaign a GM wants to run and how she'd like to introduce the Pact. As an enemy, the heroes can stumble onto any number of schemes being run by various factions within the Pact, in some cases without even knowing for a number of sessions who it was running the operation. The organization is large, and the various factions rarely know what the others are doing, or even where they are. As patrons, appropriate PCs can be approached through mundane or exotic channels with offers of power beyond their fondest dreams. PCs don't even have to have an occult background—good muscle is always valuable, and the Pact *knows* that paranormal powers are actually true magic, regardless of what the hero calls them or believes.

It's assumed that in most campaign models, the Pact will probably have an adversarial relationship with the player characters. This is particularly true if there are PCs with powers or abilities that seem magical in nature and who possess moral codes or philosophies at odds with the Pact's agenda. The GM can treat the Pact as anything ranging from an ominous group that sits in the background and makes the players nervous to a world-shattering

menace that threatens to overwhelm and obliterate the PCs at their first misstep or miscalculation. Given that the individual members of the Pact are so varied in location and level of power, this threat level can be fine-tuned for different campaign styles as suits the GM.

Conversely, the PCs could also be part of the Pact, either as members of the grand conspiracy themselves or as part of schisming factions within the body of the organization working to bring it down from the inside (or at least bring down parts of it, anyway).

Motif and presentation are an important part of making the Pact distinct from its four-color cousins. Schemes and adventures involving them should be in the flavor of Robert Ludlum channeling Jim Butcher and Umberto Eco rather than a Lee and Kirby iteration of "...And Lo, There Shall Come A Wizard!" Crack open a book on western hermeticism or simply trawl the Web—crib symbols, terms, and imagery and then apply liberally. Keep players guessing as to the full extent and scope of this shadowy octopus of an organization; one part Illuminati to two parts "Things Man Was Not Meant to Know." Who are its members and agents, and who aren't? Is there a real difference? Are the players struggling to fight the good fight, or are they simply pawns on a chessboard?

Even campaigns that don't actually involve magic as a viable concept behind paranormal abilities can still get use out of the Pact—power is power, and no matter how someone decides to define it for themselves, as long as it works when called, does it really matter if it's magic? They may be crazy, but that doesn't mean those lightning bolts don't hurt, that things don't creep out of the shadows in the dead of night, and...oh, yeah...there's still those squads and squads of heavily-armed mercenaries to survive.

LEARNING ABOUT THE PACT

The following is information characters may be able to learn about the Pact:

GATHER INFORMATION

Making this check represents the information a character can acquire by making inquiries in the law enforcement community. Keep in mind that such inquiries might draw unwanted attention unless the character is particularly discrete.

DC 20: Shadowy organization said to have its fingers in every pie in the occult underworld—probably just another bogeyman story.

ANAISS DU CHANTAIN**PL 5**

Str 8 Dex 10 Con 10 Int 16 Wis 16 Cha 16

Skills: Bluff 7 (+10/+14*), Concentration 7 (+10), Diplomacy 7 (+10/+14*), Gather Information 7 (+10), Intimidate 4 (+7), Knowledge (business) 8 (+11), Knowledge (arcane lore) 6 (+9), Language 2 (English, German [French is native]), Notice 4 (+7), Profession (CEO) 8 (+11), Sense Motive 8 (+11)

* includes Attractive bonus

Feats: Attractive, Benefit (CEO of Papillon Cosmetics), Benefit 5 (wealth bonus 28), Connected, Ritualist

Combat: Attack +3, Grapple +2, Damage -1 (melee), Defense +4 (+2 flatfooted), Knockback -0, Initiative +0

Saving Throws: Toughness +0, Fortitude +3, Reflex +3, Will +10

Abilities 16 + Skills 17 (68 ranks) + Feats 9 + Combat 14 + Saves 13 = Total 69

DC 30: Actual organization, terribly high up the food chain not only in the occult world, but also in the mundane world as well.

KNOWLEDGE (ARCANE LORE)

The following information can usually be found by asking people within the occult community. Be aware that such communities are usually guarded about their lore, and information is often only available in exchange for like, or for favors/services owed.

DC 20: Power players of the highest order, able to pull the strings of kings and presidents, elemental lords and angelic hosts alike.

MEMBERS

It's important to keep in mind that many members of the Pact don't have flashy spells to throw around. For that matter, they may have little actual magical knowledge themselves at all. What they do have is money, connections, and influence, and those things they have in spades. Those in the know will probably, but not necessarily, have respectable ranks in Knowledge (arcane lore) and the Ritualist feat, or possibly even the Artificer feat. Only the rarest members (or assets) have actual in-your-face mojo at their command. This is one reason they haven't already succeeded at their goals. Or have they...?

ANAISS DU CHANTAIN

Anais comes from a long line of devil-worshippers that traces its origins back to an ancestor who believed diabolic intervention saved his life during the Reign of Terror. Her position owes more to her impressive acumen in the corporate arena than any demonic influence, but she remains devout nonetheless.

MR. STYX

Mr. Styx nominally answers to the Council of Elders as their personal errand boy and assassin; however, the other elders know that it's Silas that holds his leash in truth. Exactly who, or what, Mr. Styx is remains unknown and is left for the GM to decide in a particular *Paragons* series. He may be a paranormal agent of the Council, or a creature from the Imageria, summoned and bound by Silas the Elder to do his bidding (much like Glyph from **Chapter Five**).

MR. STYX**PL 10**

Str 10 Dex 16 Con 14 Int 12 Wis 18 Cha 8

Skills: Climb 4 (+4), Computers 6 (+7), Concentration 4 (+8), Knowledge (arcane lore) 4 (+5), Notice 8 (+12), Search 6 (+7), Sense Motive 8 (+12), Stealth 12 (+15)

Feats: Accurate Attack, Defensive Roll 6, Equipment 2, Fearless, Improved Critical (Guns) 3, Improved Initiative 2, Move-By Action, Precise Shot, Skill Mastery (Notice, Search, Sense Motive, Stealth), Sneak Attack 4, Uncanny Dodge (visual)

Equipment: Silenced light pistol (+3 damage, subtle), encrypted cellphone

Powers: **Mind Control 10** (Extras: Burst Area, Duration—Continuous; Flaws: Limited—one command: "Ignore me while I'm here and forget me after I'm gone," Range—Touch; Alternate Power: **Concealment 10** [all senses; Flaws: Distracting; Power Feats: Close Range]), **Transform 6** (Any lock to an open lock; Flaws: Requires Concentration check)

Combat: Attack +12, Grapple +12, Damage +0 (melee), +3 (pistol), Defense +12 (+6 flatfooted), Knockback -4, Initiative +11

Saving Throws: Toughness +8 (+2 flatfooted), Fortitude +5, Reflex +8, Will +12

Abilities 18 + Skills 13 (52 ranks) + Feats 23 + Powers 33 + Combat 48 + Saves 16 = Total 151

PANTHEON

Their critics refer to them as "spoiled celebrities and sociopaths," but the Pantheon is something more. They are self-proclaimed new gods who disdain mortal laws and restraints placed upon their abilities. They are the focus of a growing religion and they answer the prayers of their followers in an undeniable manner.

OVERVIEW

In the beginning the Pantheon was nothing more than a loose collection of paranormals. They had no common goals; they had no formal meetings. They didn't even have a name for their group. The only thing they shared was a love of their powers and a disdain for the normal world. The first paranormals quickly discovered the modern world was ill-equipped to deal with them. There were no laws governing super powers and no one capable of enforcing them if there were. It's difficult to respect authority if you can bounce their entire arsenal off your force field. For those who would become the Pantheon it was a chance to take what they wanted and let the world know there was a higher link to the food chain. Soon it would mean more.

Stephanie Crane bounced between religions and spiritual movements, trading gurus with the regularity of the moon. They never satisfied her. She dropped out of college and backpacked around the world. While in Sri Lanka, an earthquake struck the small village she was staying at. The earth swallowed Stephanie. She struggled in the darkness, terrified of being crushed, when something inside her awoke. It was like being reborn. She emerged from the earth encased in living stone; her hair was flowing granite and when she blinked she heard the sound of stone grating against stone. The earth responded to her will and she repaired the damage done to the village. Grateful villagers surrounded her and Stephanie received her first inkling of what it was like to be worshiped.

Not long after her breakout, Stephanie received a vision. She saw a colossal well carved from marble. Silver tendrils shot up from the well, traveling around the planet. The tendrils attached themselves to people's forehead, bestowing power to whomever they touched. Stephanie could feel the power flowing through her own tendril. That power grew stronger when the villagers gathered before her. When she awoke it was clear to her all paranormals received their supernatural abilities from one source. The power was divine and grew stronger when people worshiped the bearer of that power. Stephanie, who now called herself Gaia, knew why she could never find a religion to suit her; she was a goddess.

Most paranormals found Gaia's theory of the origin of super powers insane, but she found a willing audience in the group soon to be known as the Pantheon. She organized the Pantheon the best she could, convincing them that even if they didn't believe in her ideas there was still safety in numbers. Nations would think twice before confronting a small army of paragons. The small number of paranormals who accepted their divinity disappointed Gaia, but she knew more would join her as she grew in strength.

The Pantheon announced their existence by answering the prayer of a girl who claimed her father was a political prisoner held by the United States. Three Pantheon members assaulted the prison holding the girl's father. After a brief, bloody battle the Pantheon reunited the girl with her father. The Pantheon broadcasted the girl's prayer with video footage of the rescue along with a simple message: "Worship us and your prayers will be answered." The response was immediate; people around the world downloaded

the video despite the U.S. attempts to suppress it. Soon the prayers began to arrive.

People who wish to beseech the Pantheon have several options. First, they can call the Pantheon's prayer hotline. Operators are there to take down the callers' personal information and record their prayers. The Pantheon can also be reached through their church website. Finally a few churches have been built by the Pantheon and they have sent missionaries out to spread the word and to take down prayers.

The Pantheon receives millions of prayers. They have acknowledged the impossibility of answering them all. They offer results, not omnipotence. Once a prayer is chosen the supplicant is contacted. The god answering the prayer demands sacrifice. Often this involves a tribute of money—the Pantheon members live expensive lifestyles that must be supported. However, the Pantheon has been known to ask for other sacrifices, such as servitude for a year and a day. The Pantheon's website and prayer hotline are run by the faithful paying off their sacrifice. A few gods have asked for first-born children, which has led to the rumor that the Pantheon eat babies.

The Pantheon has made many enemies. Followers of established religions are offended by the Pantheon's claims of godhood and the crass nature of the bartering for and with believers. The Pantheon does not acknowledge national borders and the concentration of so many paranormals make nations nervous—especially after the attack on the U.S. prison.

STRUCTURE

The Pantheon is run like a commune for the super powered. The individual members don't try to tell the others what to do because none of them acknowledge any higher authority than themselves. Any decision the Pantheon must make is decided by a simple vote. All members are expected to follow the outcome regardless of whether they attended the vote or not. Those who fail to follow this rule are the only examples of the Pantheon policing itself, which they do forcefully.

Pantheon members have few duties. They are expected to come to the aid of a fellow god. Fear of retribution has kept many paragons safe as they trample laws around the world. Members are not required to answer the prayers of the faithful, but they are encouraged to do so.

BASES OF OPERATIONS

A small, 500 square mile island called Hearthstone serves as the Pantheon base of operation. The island is located just south of Sri Lanka in international waters. Hearthstone serves as a display of the Pantheon's power. The group raised the island from the ocean floor slowly over the course of several days, terraforming it into the lush paradise it is today. The island's rise caused tidal waves to wreak havoc on nearby coastlines.

All paragons are welcome to visit Hearthstone regardless of their allegiance, but normal humans are forbidden from doing so, with the exception of the faithful taken into servitude as part of their tribute.

The Pantheon has established a few churches around the world. These institutions are a means to draw more worshipers to the fold, increasing the Pantheon's power. The exact number and location of these churches are left to the Gamemaster.



PANTHEON

Agenda: The Pantheon has two goals. The first is to follow their own whims and desires. The Pantheon believes their powers place them above human concepts, such as law and morality, so they are free to do as they like. The organization's second goal is to increase the power of the architects of the Pantheon. This faction, made up of only a handful of members, actively promotes the idea of the Pantheon as a religion. They believe all paragons' abilities flow from the same source. The more people who believe in the power of a paragon, the more power the paragon can draw on.

Structure: The Pantheon appears to be a hierarchy, controlled by the members most commonly in the public's eye, such as Gaia, Enchanter, and Wrath. This is not entirely true, and the misconception irritates some members.

Symbol: The pantheon's symbol is an arm reaching towards the sky with the hand grasping as if holding something. Hovering just above is a stylized sun with fiery rays. A swooping shadow eclipses half of the sun's disc.

Common Allegiance: Most members of the Pantheon only show allegiance to themselves. They support the Pantheon because the organization supports them.

Wealth: The Pantheon does not have any money as an organization. However many members of the Pantheon are wealthy, some even possess a wealth bonus as high as +31.

RESOURCES

Their power is the Pantheon's greatest resource. The faction's philosophy attracts the powerful and those who enjoy exercising their abilities. When they work together the members of the Pantheon have the ability to keep themselves, their staff, and Hearthstone well-supplied with everything they need to survive, and then some. However, many members prefer not to contribute because it's too much like real work. Most members use their powers to answer the prayers of the faithful, living off their tribute.

Financially the Pantheon is poor, the organization does not receive a percentage of paid tributes, but its needs are few. Expenses, such as the day to day maintenance of Hearthstone are picked up by the group's wealthier members.

The Pantheon has little interest in material or intellectual pursuits, although individual member's attitudes vary greatly; with some members accruing as much material wealth as they can while others pursue philosophical, theological, or scientific mysteries to the exclusion of almost everything else.

USING THE PANTHEON

The Pantheon serves as an excellent adversary, either as a group or individually. They revel in the use of their powers and most members do not care about the consequences of their actions. Local authorities are ill-equipped to deal with such a threat and would need heroes to help deal with a reckless Pantheon member. Once stopped, the problem would only be exacerbated as the rest of the Pantheon would be compelled to get involved.

The Pantheon cares little about the morality of the prayers they answer. They often clash with authorities as they reap death and destruction for the faithful. They take any attempt to stop their godly acts seriously as they believe failure to answer an acknowledged prayer weakens the link to their faithful which ultimately weakens their connection to what they believe is the source of their power.

The Pantheon can also serve as the patron of a series. Pantheon player characters represent the total freedom that can come with having super powers. They could answer a variety of prayers, perhaps discovering if there is truly a link between their powers and Gaia's source. Pantheon members would draw the attention of anti-paragon groups, such as the Initiative and the Seven Thunders, as the Pantheon's uninhibited use of their powers represents the worst fears of these groups.

The Pantheon is like fire, providing benefit to those who know how to use them (by worshipping), but to everyone else they're a considerable danger. At their best, they help people achieve their desires, preaching a philosophy of personal freedom. At their worst they're powerful rogue element in a fragile world.

The Pantheon is interested in power. They only answer prayers because they believe it will make them stronger. How they use their power depends on the individual member, some of whom are better than others, but the group as a whole has a negative reputation.

LEARNING ABOUT THE PANTHEON

Learning about the Pantheon is not difficult as the group believes they have nothing to hide. However everyone has their secrets and player characters who pry too much may face the wrath of a god.

GATHER INFORMATION

Making this check represents information gained through making inquiries through law enforcement agencies and paranormal watch groups.

DC 10: The Pantheon is a group of paragons who believe they are above such "mortal" concerns such as law and morality.

DC 15: Some Pantheon members believe they are gods and are worshiped.

DC 20: The Pantheon dwell on an island they raised from the bottom of the ocean using their powers.

DC 25: The Pantheon "gods" believe all super powers flow from one source. When they receive the worship and belief of others their power increases.

KNOWLEDGE (RELIGION)

Making this check represents knowledge about the beliefs of the Pantheon religion.

DC 10: The Pantheon claim to answer the prayers of people who worship them.

DC 15: The Pantheon *do* answer prayers, but they demand a sacrifice for it. This usually involves money, but may include anything the "god" desires, including servitude.

PANTHEON MISSIONARY**PL 3**

Str 10 Dex 10 Con 11 Int 12 Wis 14 Cha 14

Skills: Bluff 4 (+6), Computer 4 (+5), Concentration 4 (+6), Diplomacy 4 (+6), Intimidate 2 (+4), Knowledge (religion) 4 (+5), Notice 4 (+6), Perform(oratory) 4 (+6), Sense Motive 2 (+4)**Feats:** Benefit (status, Chosen of the Pantheon), Connected, Inspire, Tough**Powers:** Device 2 (priest's staff; easy to lose)**Priest's Staff: Illusion 3** (visual senses, hearing)**Combat:** Attack +1, Grapple +1, Defense +3 (+2 flat-footed), Knockback -0, Initiative +0**Saving Throws:** Toughness +1, Fortitude +2, Reflex +2, Will +4**Abilities 11 + Skills 8 (32 ranks) + Feats 4 + Powers 6 +****Combat 8 + Save 6 = Totals 43****DC 20:** The Pantheon have built a few churches and sent out missionaries.**DC 25:** The members of the Pantheon believe worshipers will increase their power.**MEMBERS**

The Pantheon is the largest concentration of paragons in the world, a fact that makes a lot of people nervous. The group doesn't keep records of its membership and considers any paranormal to be a member, whether they've "joined" or not. The number of paragons that actively participate with the group fluctuates, but approximately fifty paranormals consider themselves part of the Pantheon. A third of that number belongs to Gaia's religious faction.

Pantheon members share a common belief that their powers set them above the rest of the human race. The Pantheon rejects the findings that state there are no genetic difference between paragons and normal humans.

Pantheon members cover a variety of power levels, although most fall under PL 10. Notes on a few notable members follow.

ENCHANTER

A young man with the power to manipulate emotions, Enchanter doesn't believe he's a god as such, but he doesn't mind being *worshiped* as one. Enchanter treats the world as one big party with him at the center of attention. He is often involved in scandal and is popular with the tabloid press. Use the Puppeteer archetype (*M&M*, page 221), substituting Emotion Control for Mind Control.

WRATH

When the faithful pray for death and destruction to befall their enemies, they pray to Wrath. He is a barely contained psychopath who can generate a blue flame he refers to as "godfire." He is loyal to Gaia and a true believer in her theories. Use the Energy Controller archetype (*M&M*, page 220) for his stats.

ADAM FORGE

A super-human genius with the power to create incredibly detailed objects with the power of his mind, Adam Forge is one of the Pantheon's most secretive members. He rarely leaves Hearthstone, preferring to work on his designs in privacy and safety. He invented the illusion generating staves the Pantheon's missionaries carry.

Use the Mad Scientist archetype (*M&M*, page 218) for Adam's game stats.

PANTHEON MISSIONARIES

The Pantheon missionaries are people who have, in exchange for their prayers being answered, devoted a part of their life to increasing the number of those who are faithful to the Pantheon religion. They carry a high-tech staff capable of generating complex audio and visual illusions, using them to draw attention and deliver messages from the Pantheon gods. They are the chosen of the Pantheon and fall under the group's protection. Those who accost a Pantheon missionary risk attracting the retribution of the group.

PARAMOUNT CLUB

Perhaps one of the paranormal marvels who founded the Paramount Club put it best when he dryly said, "Since the Breakout, I've found the only thing I *can't* do is relax." It was of this sentiment that the Paramount Club was born. Beginning its existence as a gathering spot exclusively for paragons, it quickly evolved into something much more ambitious and somewhat more Byzantine: the premier fraternal organization for paranormal individuals.

OVERVIEW

The Paramount Club's primary function has always been as an organization for paragons to relax, providing a proverbial "secret handshake" for members to know that they are elite even among paragon society. There are two fundamental rules that all members of the Club adhere to: the Paramount Club is private, and the Paramount Club is hospitable. The first rule dictates that members don't discuss details of the Club—including information on its membership, activities, or holdings—to non-club members. Those who violate this or allow too much information to leak are officially threatened with expulsion; unofficially, they may be threatened with worse.

The second rule dictates that the Club treats its members well, and members are expected to return the favor as necessary. Members can call on the Club to perform any typical minor service, and the Club can ask the same of its members. However, the Paramount Club's primary function is relaxation, and members are encouraged not to pester each other too much.

Beneath the surface of the Club's duties to provide relaxing services for its members, the Club is much more than it seems.

STRUCTURE

To outsiders, the Paramount Club resembles a regular fraternity (open to both sexes) or social club, with little structure beyond that. In fact, many members of the Paramount Club believe this to be the case. However, the Paramount Club possesses a rigid hierarchy, with different levels of membership labeled as "Strata" and given the names of noble gasses.

The lowest "rank"—Helium—is actually the designation given to beings without powers. Many Club members use this term derisively. One poetic paragon wrote, "The squeaky voices of the helium masses have little hope, save that they might breakout from the surrounding air and become something greater." Those of the Helium Stratum are not really members at all, although the normal human staff members of the Clubs are required to wear small pendants with a stylized helium atom: four dots circled by two smaller

dots.

The first official rank is the Neon Stratum; these are the casual members. Again, some members often use the obvious imagery of "glowing" brighter than the teeming millions. There can theoretically be as many of these members as there is interest in the Paramount Club, although 112 is usually a rough estimate of the size of this Stratum. Membership at this level costs \$100,000, although this fee has been waived for those who have done a significant favor for the Club.

Next is the Argon Stratum; the only authority these 54 members possess that the Neons do not is the ability to sponsor new members. Above them is the Krypton Stratum. This group of 28 paranormals is in charge with amassing as much information—public or clandestine—as possible on all paranormal individuals and phenomena.

Above Krypton is the Xenon Stratum. This 14-member team is responsible for managing the considerable resources and finances of the Paramount Club. They are in charge of acquiring materials and money, investing their resources, and so on. They can deal with normals and paranormals, members and nonmembers, to perform their services, but they cannot invoke the name of the Club when doing so; their activities are scrupulously recorded within the Club's databanks.

The penultimate authority of the Club is the Radon Pinnacle. This group of seven paranormals holds sway over the entire Club, deciding policies and future plans. In addition, members of the Radon Pinnacle vote quarterly in secret for the ultimate leader of the Paramount Club, who is designated the Eka-Radon, the highest level in the Club. Utilizing a computer designed by a super-intelligent paranormal (a system that all Radon members can inspect before and after the election to ensure it hasn't been compromised), only the Radon who won knows the victor and receives the all-important infrastructure access codes for that quarter. It's entirely possible—and, indeed, likely—that there is no winner, if no one receives a plurality, in which case the seat goes unfilled. Thus the Club finds itself lead (possibly) by one of a tight-knit circle who knows that one of them might hold dominion, but it doesn't know who.

The Radon Pinnacle and the Eka-Radon both have similar powers within the Paramount Club. They can access all information about and within the Club (paragon histories and dossiers, financial data, membership ranks, and so on). They can command those of the Argon and Xenon Strata toward tasks (such as "investigate this person and gather more data" or "look into the resources and funding required to build a geostationary space station") and put in requests for other strata ("free membership for a year to anyone

who returns information on this person's civilian identity").

In the event two Radon commands conflict or overlap, the matter is brought at the next weekly Radon meeting; there they debate and sort the matter among themselves, putting it to a binding vote, if necessary. In addition, the Eka-Radon has the ability to supersede any actions of the other Radons, issuing secret orders from within the same computer network.

The Eka-Radon also has one other privilege that no one else in the Paramount Club possesses: the ability to delete or modify data without supervision. In all other situations, information within the Paramount Club is cumulative; like a gargantuan wiki, all data is modified or sidelined but information on modifications are kept. However, the Eka-Radon can do practically anything with this data, for good or ill.

The exact details of the Club's structure are a secret even to members of the Club. In general, people know rough details on the two Strata above them. (Thus the staff member Heliums often know of the Neons and know that there are sponsors above them, the Kryptons and Xenons know that they receive orders from higher up, and so on.) Only the Radon Pinnacle knows of the Eka-Radon.

To join the Club, one need merely prove to a sponsor they are paranormal and pay the required annual fee of \$100,000, unless it's waived. Becoming a member of the Argon Stratum costs \$250,000 a year. Those of the Krypton and Xenon Strata are actually paid for fulfilling their duties; Kryptons receive \$1 million a year and Xenon receive 50% of all profits they make from their endeavors. Radons do not receive or pay any money, but generally consider their position of power payment enough. All positions of the Club are considered "part-time"; members are expected to have lives outside their involvement, and even the higher levels must only invest approximately five to ten hours a week. (For example, many of the Krypton Stratum are full-time explorers or investigators, submitting information gleaned from their activities to the Club.)

To elevate to a higher Stratum requires that there be an opening (a common occurrence) and the approval of either someone of a higher Stratum *or* three members of the Stratum desired. Thus someone wishing to elevate from Krypton to Xenon would need either three Xenons or one Radon (or the Eka-Radon) to vouch for him.

BASES OF OPERATIONS

The Club has three official headquarters. Its primary base in Winnipeg, Canada—The Paramountountain—is a converted three-story office building that has been expanded with two secret subterranean levels. The elevator possesses buttons for the three above-level

PARAMOUNT CLUB

Agenda: To the outside world, the Paramount Club is nothing more than a social club—a place for its members to meet and mingle. However, beneath the pedestrian exterior the higher strata of the Paramount Club have access to considerable power, and get together to determine if and how it should be utilized.

Structure: The Paramount Club is a strictly hierarchical organization.

Symbol: An equilateral triangle with three lines coming from the top—one straight up from the center and the other two one-third down from the top. This represents a stylized mountain with the sun's rays emerging behind it.

Common Allegiances: The Paramount Club, Order, Self, Camaraderie, Privacy

Wealth: The Paramount Club collects significant dues from its members, as well as reaping the benefits from running a successful business. As such, the club has an effective wealth bonus of 30.

floors and a thumbprint scanner. The scanner does nothing for most members, but those of Krypton or higher Strata who use the device automatically go to their assigned floors upon scanning, although Radon Pinnacle members can override this to get to the Krypton/Xenon floor by pressing the "1" key immediately after scanning.

The first floor is the primary public gathering and social spot. There is an excellent restaurant (The Paranormal Palate), a seldom-used stage, a sports-bar style gathering locale, a formal ballroom suitable for dining or dancing (complete with another bar), and a sound-proof club room with a modern sound system and yet more alcoholic options.

The second floor is intended for more private gatherings. Sectioned into four large quadrants (each of which can be divided again into four separate rooms), this area is designed for members to reserve for their own functions. Past events have included private dinners, global politicking, team meetings, and the like.

The third floor is the most heavily shielded and is designed around the primal desires of Club members. This includes a combat/training arena, private soundproof rooms for lodging or intimate affairs, and another private dining area (with food brought up from the Paranormal Palate).

The first subterranean level is home of the Paramount Clubs databases and includes offices for all Krypton and Xenon members. This is where the computer that controls Radon elections is also held. The second subterranean level is strictly for the Radon Pinnacle; it is built around a central meeting chamber, surrounded by seven private chambers for the seven Pinnacle members to appoint as they like.



The entire Paramountian complex is devoid of any surveillance devices, and the usage of such to spy on other members is one of the few offenses that will get one banned (a direct attempt to disband the Club being the other); the Club takes its privacy commandment very seriously.

The Club also has two other minor locales unknown to the public. One is in a private ballroom in a Las Vegas casino that caters to locals: the Tomorrow Palace. Although known paragons are not permitted to gamble within the casino itself, the establishment's management turns a blind eye toward any games they wish to play amongst themselves. As such, it attracts all manner of high-spirited paragons drawn to the Vegas night life. The second locale is in a seemingly abandoned mansion ten miles outside Charlotte, North Carolina. With discreet parking in nearby woods and blackened windows, "Charlotte's Web" (as it's known) is an ideal spot for Club members to use for low-key socialization, private gatherings, and personal retreats.

Observant members of the Club note that the three locations make an approximately equilateral triangle on a Mercator projection map. The significance, if any, is open to debate.

Although Paramount Club facilities are intended primarily for its members, each member is provided with two day passes each year that can enable others to enter the Club's facilities. In addition to the escort of a Paramount member, a normal human requires two day passes to enter; those who can exhibit paranormal abilities require only one. Additional passes cannot be purchased from the Club, but they can be given, sold, or traded among members, and all Radons have access to an unlimited number. Members with paranormal friends use them to encourage their associates to join, while those who have too many normal acquaintances often find themselves indebted to other Club members.

Finally, the hospitality rule of Club membership means that there are numerous unofficial gathering sites. Because members are required to provide other members with lodging and accommodations, should it be requested of them, a member merely needs to ask the paragon within ten miles of that person's property. Unfortunately, the Club's privacy rule makes utilizing this benefit of membership tricky at best; unless one manages to determine the private address of a member (either via investigation or because it was offered), one may be in a city with a dozen Club brethren and never know it.

RESOURCES

For most, the greatest resource the Paramount Club offers is a social environment, useful for relaxing, politicking, and making contacts. The Club spares little expense for the comfort of its guests; members do not pay any additional fees for any provisions or lodging at its facilities, although those who bring guests are expected to compensate the Club for anything they utilize. Beyond that, the Club's paranormal database is of immense value to those who know of it, as are the financial resources and expertise. Finally, the Club provides considerable resources for its upper Strata; Kryptons and Xenons are given considerable gear and assets to accomplish their mandates, and the Radons have their own luxurious accommodations.

USING THE PARAMOUNT CLUB

The Paramount Club is a public secret, akin to the Freemasons; many paranormals may know of its existence but know little else. As such, any player characters interested in joining should be able to track down parties that can help them, though it may require

some effort. In addition, membership can be dangled as a reward for those who perform services for anyone of Argon or higher Strata. Finally, the Club can be featured as the focus of an adventure, with either one (or more) of its members involved in something worthy of investigation, or with the Club itself taking action against a paragon's interests.

The Paramount Club is designed to mix elements of both a social club and a conspiratorial organization. Player characters can be casual members or directly involved in the Club's intrigues, hoping to sway its (currently perpetually gridlocked) influence for some wider purpose. They can also count the Club as a patron if they work for it; for example, one PC or the whole team could be members of the Krypton Stratum. The Club can serve as a safe haven for paragons (player characters or otherwise), a spot to pick up leads or spend downtime, the basis for a few adventures, or even the center of an entire campaign.

LEARNING ABOUT THE PARAMOUNT CLUB

The Paramount Club is designed around the ideal of privacy, although this idea morphed quickly within its walls to "secrecy." As such, while general information is simple to come by for the suitably inquisitive, deeper information is incredibly difficult, even for members. There are two classes of Gather Information here: those for members and those for non-members.

GATHER INFORMATION (FOR NON-MEMBERS)

DC 10: To become a member of the Paramount Club, you need to be sponsored by another member and be paranormal.

DC 15: The principle headquarters of the Paramount Club is in Winnipeg, Canada. It is centered around privacy and hospitality for its members.

DC 20: The Paramount Club has a large number of members, but it—as an organization—doesn't seem tied to any activities (good or ill). Non-paranormal employees of the club are required to wear a pendant declaring their normalcy.

DC 25: The Paramount Club controls vast resources of money and information even most of its members don't know about.

GATHER INFORMATION (FOR MEMBERS)

DC 15: There is a level above Neon—Krypton—that has information on paragons.

DC 20: Above Krypton is Xenon, which controls the Club's finances.

DC 25: Krypton's goal is to amass information on all paranormals. Above Xenon is the seven-member Radon Pinnacle.

DC 35: The entire Club is controlled by the Eka-Radon, who may or may not exist.

MEMBERS

Members are drawn from all levels of paranormal society, although only the most adept—either socially or at another skill—advance significantly in the club's ranks. It's left for the GM to decide which, if any, of the characters in this chapter and **Chapter Five** are members of the Paramount Club and, if so, at what stratum. Characters joining the club could discover not only are rivals or

enemies members, but high-ranking ones at that! Dealing with the need to set aside personal conflicts within the club could pose an interesting roleplaying challenge.

The paragons you choose for the higher strata of the Paramount Club may determine its agenda, if there is one beyond providing a place for paranormals to gather and spend time with their peers. If you want the club as a cover for a conspiracy, it could be the creation of a faction like the Initiative or the Pact, or the tool of a paragon like Mindbender, Mr. Zero, or Proteus.

PARANORMAL PROFESSIONALS SOCIETY

As long as there have been people of power on this world, there have been organizations designed to accommodate their needs and work toward their best interests. Thus it is logical that one of the first international organizations for paranormals is the Paranormal Professionals Society (PPS), serving the needs of those who have devoted their professional lives and livelihoods to doing the impossible.

OVERVIEW

Shortly after the Breakout, various governments at the state, federal, and international levels found themselves scrambling to enact new laws or procedures to deal with paranormals. Do Good Samaritan Laws protect paragons from the consequences of their actions? Can insurance be issued to an alias with no known public identity? Under what circumstances can you utilize the testimony of someone who can speak with dead? After disastrous initial legislation in some municipalities, it became obvious to the burgeoning paranormal community that there had to be a unified front to tackle these issues, lest their rights and personal lives be litigated into oblivion. From this need arose the Paranormal Professionals Society. Assembling in quasi-secret for months before making themselves public, their official launch was on Super Bowl Sunday, with a famous ad featuring dozens of paragons performing (staged) public deeds of heroism with briefcases and business suits; the slogan was, "Didn't you ever wonder why they're called paralegals?"

From that well-received moment, the PPS has walked a delicate line, fighting for the rights of its paranormal members while attempting to position themselves as defenders of the common good. As the Society vice-president put it, "We're not fighting for *our* rights;

PARANORMAL PROFESSIONALS SOCIETY

Agenda: The Paranormal Professionals Society exists as a cross between a professional trade organization and a general advocacy group focusing on paragon rights.

Structure: The PPS is a nonprofit organization headed by a board of directors.

Symbol: A stylized version of Atlas in a suit and tie, with the "globe" he holds displaying the letters "PPS" in the center ringed by the words "Paranormal Professionals Society."

Common Allegiances: Law, Good, Professionalism

Wealth: +31



we're fighting for what could be *your* rights. As best we know, each and every one of you is an origin away from joining us."

The PPS is an amalgam of a trade organization, a professional group, and an advocacy association. The last is its most public function, as it's in both the courts of law and public opinion that they spend most of their time. Nations around the globe are struggling to define how law applies to a post-Breakout society, and the PPS almost always sides with rules and interpretations that favor the greater rights of paranormals. Among the most frightening developments the Society is railing against in the United States are proposals in various state legislations to change the burden of proof from "reasonable doubt" to "preponderance of evidence" in cases where demonstrated paranormal involvement is proven beyond reasonable doubt. This stems from a case in Michigan where a shapeshifter committed seven murders before being apprehended, but was found not guilty by the jury because they concluded that the prosecution couldn't establish beyond reasonable doubt that the people the shapeshifter impersonated weren't responsible.

As a professional group, the Society provides counseling and advice for its members as to the current laws. Members who are planning to travel abroad, for example, are encouraged to visit a PPS representative to see what their rights and responsibilities are in that nation. Other member benefits include various insurance programs, help establishing a secret identity, and mentor programs for inexperienced paranormals to spend some time with those more established.

Probably the most visible Society function is its various volunteer efforts. In times of crisis or public need, paranormals are gathered to accomplish great humanitarian deeds. Originally, this function was utilized primarily for relief efforts for various natural disasters,

but in recent months, their focus has been on cleaning up the aftermath of paragon activities. The latter is an especially important function of the PPS; reconstruction efforts after paranormal incidents help mitigate public relations fallout from such incidents. Unfortunately, such incidents are becoming more common, and the Society president worries that there may not be enough volunteer hours available to cover the need in coming years. In addition, the Society sometimes embarks on rescue, defense, or investigatory missions that affect paranormals (such as the recovery of a paragon team trapped in a sunken submarine or inquiries into someone engaging in a smear campaign against a paranormal).

Finally, the PPS is a "trade" organization, designed as a service for the paranormal community and normals who might be interested in them. Its biggest drives in this regard are its two annual shows: the ParaCon and the Pro Show.

Hosted in Las Vegas every June, the Pro Show is a two-day combination social event and professional exhibition. Booths are open to anyone willing to pay the table fees (\$2,000 per table). Exhibitors consist of those seeking to woo paranormal interests, such as Foregone Conclusions, the Silber Agency, the Rosemont Center, Xtreme! Paranormal Wrestling League, vendors of uniforms, insurance agents, and many others. Each year has its own surprises in oddball tables; last year saw a mid-sized WestCoast town with a booth hoping to woo its own paranormal to take up residency, and another exhibit had a recording agency seeking performers for an all-paragon cover album of 1970s ballads. In addition, the Pro Show hosts seminars of interest to paranormals (such as "Supplemental Insurance: Are You Covered?", "Establishing a Community Identity," and "Protecting Your Hollywood Self") and has at least one formal dinner and another informal brunch for paragons to meet and mingle. Only paranormals can become registered attendees (\$1,000 for non-PPS members, free for PPS members), although Society members can bring up to two normals with them.

The ParaCon is a convention for all things paranormal-related. This four-day convention hosted in Los Angeles in February is part media spectacle, part collectors' mart, part gathering for fans of the paranormal. Paragons get in free, while normals pay \$75 a day (\$200 for a four-day pass); tables are also free to paranormals (one table per person) and \$1,000 for normals and for paragons seeking additional tables. Exhibits here are mostly targeted at the general public and include those offering paranormal services (such as Foregone Conclusions and the Silber Agency); paragon fan clubs; books, videos, collectables, and other materials relating to paranormals; and paracelebrities hawking their wares or ideas (such as the animal psychic offering a cookbook for treats known to please pets or the inventor seeking funding for his Martian religious colony). There are, again, panels covering all aspects of the paranormal life, designed for normals to attend. Here the appeal for paragons is to meet the public in a relatively safe and controlled environment, and the appeal for the normals is a chance to meet with their idols.

STRUCTURE

The PPS is a nonprofit trade organization. It is governed by a twenty-member board of directors, who decide upon the president, vice-president, and treasurer from among their numbers. This board of directors has traditionally been filled by heads of affiliate offices, but several "outsiders" have been elevated in the past. Although the board and treasurer don't necessarily need to be paranormals, the president and vice-president *do* need to be paragons; traditionally, the board has filled over half its seats with powered individuals.

BASES OF OPERATIONS

The PPS is headquartered in New York City, with staffed affiliate offices in the 20 largest cities of the United States (plus Washington D.C.) and locations in Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, London, Paris, Berlin, and Tokyo. Most of the PPS staff is normals, and only the headquarters in New York is likely to have any paranormals in the office at any time. Although the PPS has the bulk of its locations in North America, it is an international organization, and if the need arises it can (and does) send members wherever needed.

RESOURCES

The PPS has always been coy about the material wealth to which it has access (even though its finances are a matter of public record); its fear in this regard is that the world's normals might view paragons as being in an ivory tower of wealth and privilege, and resent them for that. As such, the Society rejects almost all displays of ostentatiousness in its representatives; its lawyers fly business class instead of first class, its company vehicles are all mid-level cars, and its travel accommodations are at modest hotels.

In fact, it doesn't have much wealth, as measured in liquid capital. However, it does have access to many volunteer paranormals (which it semi-jokingly refers to as "paragon-hours"), arguably its greatest resource. In addition, it possesses the world's largest and most-skilled team of experts—normal or paragon—on issues that relate to professional matters in the paranormal world: lawyers, lobbyists, researchers, authors, and so on.

USING THE PARANORMAL PROFESSIONALS SOCIETY

Although the PPS can be used as the focus of a campaign, it is primarily designed to be a secondary source of adventure possibilities. The requirements for volunteer time mean that PC heroes can be called upon to do a myriad of interesting tasks for the Society, while maintaining primary focus elsewhere.

In addition, player characters should encounter the PPS frequently in the background of the setting—television appearances, billboard campaigns, news reports. PCs might also meet members of the PPS when the Society sends a pro-bono team to accomplish some task (either working toward the same goal as the heroes, at cross purposes with them, or even cleaning up after them).

Finally, the two trade shows of the Society provide a perfect opportunity for adventures or springboards for future plot threads.

The PPS is intended as the "go-to" group representing the interests of paranormals, both in the "workplace" and in everyday life. If there's a legal drama playing out and it involves a paranormal, it's a surety the PPS will be at least tangentially involved. If there's a talking head on a 24-hour news channel debating about paranormal responsibilities or the threat of paragons, one of those heads will belong to a Society representative.

LEARNING ABOUT THE PARANORMAL PROFESSIONALS SOCIETY

As a non-profit organization, the PPS is required by law to be as open as possible about its dealings; most information about them is on their website, and practically all information from the "Overview" section is available with a minimal amount of effort and a Gather Information check (DC 10).

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 25: Member attendance at the Pro Show is good, but paranormals tend to avoid the more chaotic ParaCon. The PPS uses some of its volunteer hours to send a few of its members as attendees, with the hope that such "ringers" will drum up further interest from their community. To date, this tactic has worked, but paragons might catch on in the future.

DC 30: Going by their membership statistics, on paper the PPS appears to have access to one of the largest paranormal groups in the world. Were it to call all its volunteers at once, it would have an amazing force at its disposal.

KNOWLEDGE (CIVICS)

DC 20: The PPS has an above-average success rate in cases it's taken to trial in the United States, although all appealed cases are still winding their way through court and it will be at least a year before Supreme Court precedent is made.

DC 25: The Society has been filing *amicus curiae* briefs almost constantly since its formation, even in cases that seem to have nothing to do with paranormal activities (such as those involving genetic manipulation of crops).

MEMBERS

The Paranormal Professionals Society currently claims a membership of approximately 7% of all paragons in the United States and approximately 0.5% of the rest of paragons worldwide (with most of those originating from Europe), plus several thousand unpowered members.

Those wishing to join the PPS have to decide which is more valuable to them: time or money. Members of the PPS are expected to donate 40 hours a year to the cause. However, the number of hours required can be reduced by monetary donations; it costs \$1 to reduce this time by one hour, and the cost doubles for each additional hour waived. Popular plans include 30 hours/\$512 and 20 hours/\$524,288. So far as anyone knows, no one has spent the half-trillion dollars required to have a membership without volunteer time, but any such hyper-rich paragons probably value their privacy anyway. As a result of this pricing structure, the PPS has won considerable praise for its egalitarianism; nearly everyone who is a member can also be called upon to serve, for at least a few hours. Because of this, all members require some means of contact by the organization, although this can be as discreet and untraceable as an anonymous e-mail address.

Actual paragon membership numbers for the PPS are sketchy but are pegged at somewhere between dozens and hundreds; the membership list is not public, and not all members proudly proclaim their affiliation.

In addition to members who contribute time, the PPS employs several hundred normals and about a dozen full-time paragons. The former provide support and bureaucratic duties while the latter serve as the most-tapped members.

Those in the PPS who have donated hours in return for their membership are asked to give the organization information regarding their abilities and the types of missions they would prefer to undertake. However, they do not get to pick how their hours are used (although they can put in requests or suggestions). Rather, they find themselves on-call for specific missions: "The PPS needs you to serve as protection for our expert witness before Congress

tomorrow. It should take about six hours; are you interested?" The leadership is almost always understanding of personal reasons and requirements (an Orthodox Jewish paragon would be granted an exclusion never to be called on Saturday, and a pacifist paragon would be permitted to bow out of any missions that may lead to violence), and they try to give enough notice so that members can schedule around missions. In addition, all members called to service can deny a mission for any reason at all; however, should the member ever refuse three missions total, that paragon is expelled from the Society permanently.

For the most part, the PPS hardly ever draws upon the full reserve of their volunteers, and most members who have contributed time have yet to find themselves tapped for more than half the amount they donated. However, some abilities—such as anyone with research skills and super-speed—are more in-demand than others.

In exchange for membership, any member can access the PPS' resources of accumulated aid and information. Popular programs include property insurance (claims for which are usually "paid" via member repairs, if possible), international travel and consultation, and legal advice. In addition, members can request the assistance of the PPS for any issue that affects paragons. Officially any paragon can ask for such help; in practice, however, non-members have a harder time getting their situations addressed. Cases affecting many paragons ("an extremist group in Libya is hunting down suspected paragons and killing them" or "the government wants to declare me an unfit parent simply because I'm a paragon") are more likely to get immediate assistance than those that won't have repercussions or establish precedents.

THE PARANORMAL REGULATORY AGENCY

Paragons may have abilities outside our understanding, but they cannot be outside the law, or else civilization as we know it is threatened. That's the premise upon which the United States Paranormal Regulatory Agency, or PRA, was founded. It's their job to track and regulate paranormals and to keep normal society safe from paragons who might abuse their power.

OVERVIEW

The PRA is a US government agency charged with regulating the use of paranormal abilities in the United States and investigating

PARANORMAL REGULATORY AGENCY

Agenda: To regulate the use of paranormal abilities in accordance with the laws of the United States of America and to investigate any paranormal threats to the safety and security of the United States and its citizens.

Structure: U.S. government agency, answering to the Department of Homeland Security (ostensibly).

Symbol: A shield displaying an eagle holding a lightning bolt in its outstretched claws, with the name "Paranormal Regulatory Agency" written around it.

Common Allegiances: The Agency, America, the Law, Order

Wealth: +28 (via government requisition)

any crimes involving paragons or their powers. The agency also gathers information about paragons in general, providing intelligence reports to the US government.

STRUCTURE

The PRA is similar in structure to the American Federal Bureau of Investigation, and serves as something of a "sister" agency to the FBI. It has a director who oversees and handles operations on a national level, and deputy directors who manage the agency on a local and department level. The Director of the PRA reports to the Secretary of Homeland Security, who in turn reports to the President of the United States.

The body of the PRA is made up of agents and support staff. Agents are field operatives, and must undergo rigorous screening and testing. At a minimum, PRA agents must have top secret security clearance, pass a variety of physical and psychological tests, and undergo drug-screening and polygraph tests. Other, paranormal, tests like mind scans or "truth reading" by a paranormal are rumored, but there's no evidence of them, if they exist.

The PRA makes some slight provisions for agents with paranormal abilities, bending the requirements for them, which does not generate goodwill among non-paranormal agents. Still, paranormals clearly unfit for service as field agents are technically assigned as support staff, even if practically their abilities sometimes allow them to outrank or overrule an agent in the field. Officially, the PRA places greater importance on agent training than paranormal powers, and expects its field agents to be able to deal with paranormal challenges without any powers of their own.

The Agency also has at least as many support staff as it does field agents, including administrative personnel, analysts, language and technical specialists, and scientists. They specialize in dealing with paranormals, of course, including the study of their powers and their effects. For more routine crime-scene investigations and the like, the PRA relies on cooperation from the FBI and local police.

BASES OF OPERATIONS

The Paranormal Regulatory Agency is based out of Washington, DC, but maintains field offices throughout the United States. In most cases, the local FBI field office also serves as the PRA field office for a region, although some heavily populated areas (such as New York City) have their own separate PRA field office. As time goes on, the PRA is adding new field offices and establishing its own presence throughout the country.

Additionally, the Agency has some of its own facilities, particularly for paranormal studies and research. It maintains "the Academy," a paranormal training facility in the mountains of upstate New York where agents train in dealing with paragons and paranormal recruits practice their abilities under the supervision of experts from the Agency, who also have the opportunity to closely study their powers and progress.

Rumors abound about a secret prison for paranormals operated by the PRA and the US government (possibly in cooperation with agencies like the FBI and CIA). Problematic paragons are said to "disappear" into it, where they become the subjects of illegal and unethical medical and scientific experiments. The PRA officially denies the existence of any such facility and whether it exists at all (and if so, under who's control) is left for the Gamemaster to decide.

RESOURCES

For a relatively new federal agency, the PRA has considerable resources, although they are strongly focused on its primary mission of investigating and regulating paragons and their abilities. For more general matters, particularly criminal investigations, the PRA still relies heavily on the resources of other agencies like the FBI, a situation that chafes some PRA field agents, many of whom worked for those other agencies and are subject to some inter-agency rivalry.

The PRA has somewhat limited resources when it comes to personnel, simply because it's difficult to find qualified people willing and able to deal with paranormal threats on a regular basis. In particular, the Agency always has a shortage of both qualified field agents and paranormal personnel; individuals who fit into both categories are the rarest of all and unofficially paranormal field agents are accorded unusual latitude because they're so valuable. This special treatment does nothing to endear such agents to the rank-and-file of the agency's personnel, who often consider paranormal agents dangerous mavericks or a potential threat.

USING THE PRA

Characters in a *Paragons* series can be agents of the PRA, sometime allies, rivals, or outright enemies hunted by the Agency.

The PRA can serve as a patron for characters who belong to the agency, either as field agents or some sort of elite team of specialists, perhaps with paranormal powers and unusually broad discretion in discharging their duties. This allows the GM to create adventures as missions assigned to the agents by their superiors in the agency. See "The Law Is Paramount" campaign framework in **Chapter Six** for an example of this.

Characters working as agents for the Agency should meet the requirements of the PRA Field Agent template given later in this section. The Agency might be willing to bend the rules somewhat to accommodate paranormals, given their value; it's left for the GM to decide exactly how much they're willing to do so.

If the characters work for another faction or organization, particularly one outside the jurisdiction of the United States government (such as PAX, for example, see **Chapter Four**), then the PRA and its agents might be rivals, friendly or unfriendly as the GM and circumstances dictate. For example, characters working for the Paranormal Studies Institute or the Rosemont Center trying to track down and help a new paranormal might run up against PRA agents looking for the same subject for other reasons.

The Paranormal Regulatory Agency is also a natural antagonist for criminal paranormals, although "criminal" may be something as simple as willfully defying laws regarding paranormal registration or behavior in the United States as a form of civil disobedience. If the agency is involved with covert intelligence gathering, it could come into conflict with paragons who discover its operations. It's left up to the Gamemaster exactly how ruthless the PRA is in carrying out its agenda, depending on the style of the series.

The Paranormal Regulatory Agency can serve a number of different functions in a *Paragons* series. It may range from a minor background element to the driving force of the plot, whether as a patron for player-run investigators, or as an antagonist working against paragons.

As a background element, the PRA provides some measure of control on American paragons who abide by the law, or at least want to avoid any legal trouble. They're sure to investigate power abuse and similar incidents, which may encourage characters to exercise some restraint and discretion.

PARANORMAL REGISTRATION

If you decide that the law of the land in the United States (and possibly elsewhere) is that paranormals must register themselves and their abilities with the government, then the PRA is in charge of enforcing that law and tracking down violators.

You can base an entire *Paragons* series around a team of PRA agents charged with locating new paragons when they breakout in order to register them and ensure they're not a threat while also tracking down "rogue" paranormals who choose to defy the law for various reasons, ensuring their compliance or putting them in prison. Such a series can address questions like the morality of paranormal registration and the measures taken by ordinary humans to protect themselves against rogue paragons.

See "The Law Is Paramount" series framework in **Chapter Six** for more on this idea.

THE SECRET PRA

If paranormals have existed for some time before the Breakout makes them public knowledge, then the PRA may have also existed as a top-secret government agency for dealing with and containing the dangers posed by paragons and their powers. Once paranormals became publicly known, so did the Agency, although its true origins and history are kept secret. Thus, the PRA may have existed



PRA GAME INFORMATION

Generally speaking, status as a PRA agent should be considered a Benefit feat, since it gives the character certain legal enforcement powers. Of course, the character is also subject to the agency's oversight and direction while working as an agent.

For quick creation of a new PRA agent, apply the following template of requirements to the base character traits before spending any other power points on the character's other traits:

PRA AGENT

TEMPLATE

Abilities: +1 Str, +1 Con (2 points)

Skills: Computers 2, Diplomacy 2, Drive 4, Gather Information 4, Investigate 4, Knowledge (civics) 2, Knowledge (current events) 2, Notice 4, Profession (government agent) 2, Search 2 (7 points)

Feats: Equipment 2 (listed equipment for the archetype) (2 points)

Combat: Attack +2, Defense +2 (8 points)

Total: 19 points

as long as paragons have, or at least as long as the government has been aware of them.

In a *Paragons* setting with publicly known paranormals, the PRA might maintain both a "public" and a "covert" face: regulating paranormal affairs publicly, but also covertly continuing its work to understand and contain the dangers paragons pose to ordinary humans. This makes room for as elaborate a conspiracy as the GM wants in the series, possibly grappling with other secret organizations and their agendas over the years in a "Secret War" for the future of humanity.

LEARNING ABOUT THE PRA

The following is information player characters could potentially learn about the Paranormal Regulatory Agency:

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 10: The Paranormal Regulatory Agency (PRA) is a government agency charged with investigating and dealing with crimes involving paranormals and their powers.

DC 15: The PRA has both normal and paranormal agents, although its paranormal agents are comparatively rare.

DC 20: The Agency maintains a training academy somewhere in the mountains of upstate New York.

DC 25: The character learns the location of the PRA's Academy facility and learns generally about its layout and security.

DC 30: If the PRA has a secret history, this level of success is sufficient to learn about it, unless the GM decides it involve truly extraordinary circumstances (alien intervention or something equally fantastic).

KNOWLEDGE (CIVICS)

DC 10: The Paranormal Regulatory Agency (PRA) is a government agency charged with investigating and dealing with crimes involving paranormals and their powers.

DC 15: The PRA reports to the US Director of Intelligence, who reports directly to the President. This gives the organization considerable authority in dealing with paranormal matters.

PRA AGENT

PL 3

Str 12	Dex 11	Con 13	Int 13	Wis 14	Cha 10
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Skills: Computers 2 (+3), Diplomacy 3 (+3), Drive 4 (+4), Gather Information 4 (+4), Intimidate 4 (+4), Investigate 6 (+7), Knowledge (civics) 2 (+3), Knowledge (current events) 2 (+3), Knowledge (streetwise) 2 (+3), Notice 4 (+6), Profession (government agent) 3 (+5), Search 4 (+5), Sense Motive 4 (+6), Stealth 4 (+4)

Feats: Benefit (PRA agent), Defensive Roll, Equipment 2

Equipment: light pistol (+3 damage), handcuffs, digital camera, cell phone, notebook computer

Combat: Attack +3, Grapple +4, Damage +1 (unarmed), +3 (pistol), Defense +4 (+2 flat-footed), Knockback -1, Initiative +0

Saving Throws: Toughness +2 (+1 flat-footed), Fortitude +4, Reflex +2, Will +5

Abilities 13 + Skills 12 (48 ranks) + Feats 4 + Combat 14 + Saves 8 = Total 51

MEMBERS

PRA agents are primarily recruited from the military and other law-enforcement agencies, particularly the Federal Bureau of Investigations and the Secret Service, as well as security and intelligence agencies like the National Security Agency and the Central Intelligence Agency.

The PRA recruits trustworthy and capable paranormal agents when possible, but "trustworthy" and "capable" are considered more important qualities than "paranormal" under most circumstances. The agency's work is often very delicate, and it doesn't want or need loose cannons mucking about, no matter what their powers may be.

Paranormal agents are well aware that the PRA keeps a closer eye on them, since their work often involves dealing with their "own kind" under difficult circumstances. It's not difficult to imagine a paranormal agent feeling sympathy for other paranormals and betraying the Agency, something they guard carefully against.

PRA AGENT

The archetype on this page represents a typical field agent paranormal characters might encounter, should they draw the PRA's attention for some reason.

PARANORMAL STUDIES INSTITUTE (PSI)

The current Paranormal Studies Institute grew out of the Parapsychological Studies Institute, originally founded to research parapsychology and ESP. PSI researchers believe their predecessors may have documented the very first paranormals (albeit far less powerful ones than the present generation). After the widespread appearance of paranormals, the Institute changed its name and garnered considerable attention (and new funding) for its experience in dealing with, researching, and documenting the paranormal.

OVERVIEW

Well before the Breakout brought paranormals into the public eye, the Parapsychological Studies Institute researched unusual abilities and phenomena, seeking quantifiable results and a unified expla-

nation for things like psychokinesis, telepathy, remote viewing and similar things. Although they gathered a tremendous amount of data, their experiments were often frustratingly inconclusive. While some showed what seemed like remarkable demonstrations of paranormal or psi ability, such things never proved reliable, making the experiments impossible to duplicate and therefore prove to the scientific community's satisfaction. PSI was relegated to the extreme fringes of science, struggling for funding and legitimacy.

That all changed when paranormals burst onto the scene and the existence of their extraordinary powers could no longer be denied. Lacking an explanation for these unusual abilities, people turned to the experts. Suddenly PSI was lavished with donations, offers of assistance, and their pick of some of the finest scientific minds in the world. Of course, the Institute was also the recipient of considerable media scrutiny and buy-out or incorporation offers from a variety of sources.

PSI chief administrator Dr. Samuel Nidor and the Board of Directors chose to keep the Institute independent, feeling it was the best way of ensuring unbiased and successful research. They were able to navigate the sometimes-dangerous waters of the new paranormal world and parley PSI's long reputation and body of work into a valuable resource to secure the Institute's future.

Now PSI is regarded as the premier research institution for the paranormal, on the cutting edge. Governments, corporations, and the media all consult its researchers and experts, and the Institute has a tremendous waiting list of applications for research personnel and projects. PSI's independence has also allowed it to function as a voice for the paranormal, educating the public about paragons and their powers and calling for equal and fair treatment from the government and society at large. Without PSI as an advocate, things might be more difficult for many paranormals in the world.

STRUCTURE

PSI is an independent non-profit organization with its own Board of Directors, which hires a chief administrator to oversee the entire Institute. The administrator has a research director handling all research projects, a chief financial officer dealing with the Institute's finances and fundraising, and a chief of security, handling security of PSI facilities and personnel as well as information (through the security division's chief of information security).

Each PSI facility also has its own version of these roles: an on-site administrator, research director, and security chief. Oftentimes one person will fill both the administrator and research director roles at a facility. The individual facility administrators report to the chief administrator at the home office, who in turn reports to the Board.

Each facility has research personnel as well as support staff (clerical, security, and maintenance). Since the Breakout, PSI has also added a public relations and media contact to each facility, to act as the Institute's spokesperson in dealings with the public. This has helped to both raise PSI's profile and their reputation at large.

BASES OF OPERATIONS

The Institute's headquarters is in Virginia in the United States, but it has regional offices and facilities throughout North America, with expansion plans underway for Europe, East Asia, and South America. Proximity to the US capitol allows PSI to cooperate with authorities like the FBI and Paranormal Regulatory Agency and function as a kind of paranormal lobby, but also raises concerns the Institute might be too chummy with the federal government.

RESOURCES

PSI is funded through private and government grants and endowments and, although it's one of the best-funded organizations of its type, it is always working to get more and better financial support. PSI does its best to remain independent of any one organization or supporter; it doesn't do the bidding of any government or corporate sponsor, which often makes fundraising difficult. Things have improved somewhat as PSI has picked up more paranormal help and some of its patents have come through.

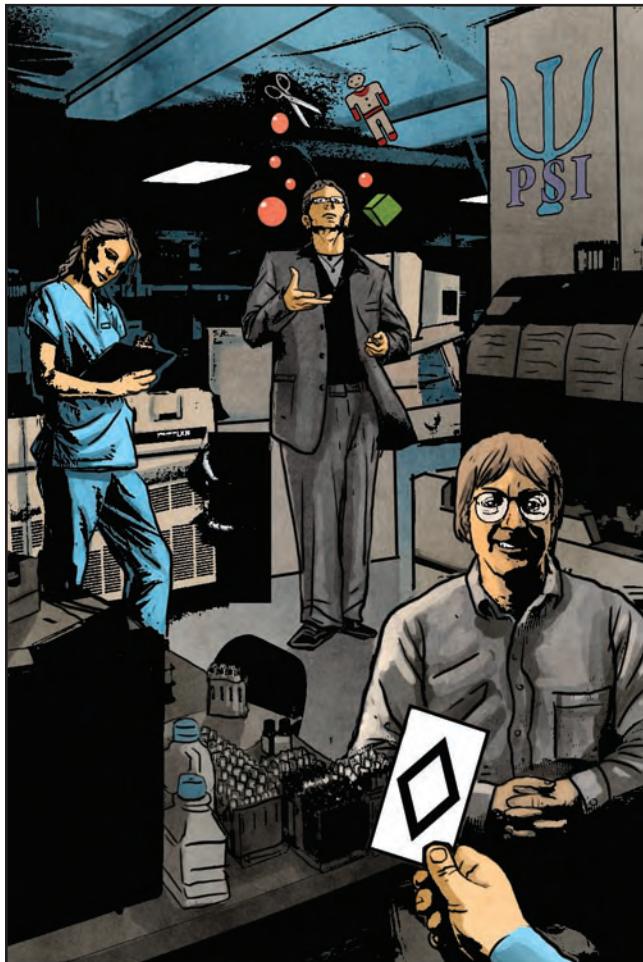
PSI facilities have laboratory space for conducting tests on paranormals and their abilities, including full medical exams. The larger facilities have reinforced testing rooms and advanced equipment like MRIs for conducting brain scans.

USING PSI

PSI primarily serves as either a supporting organization of experts or a framework for a *Paragons* series based around the Institute.

In most series, PSI is a source for paranormal research, information, and occasionally new technology involving paranormals. If you want to introduce some scientific breakthrough into your series, PSI is a good means for doing so. Likewise, it can be where characters take newly awakened paranormals for examination and training, not affiliated with any governmental body or the like. It's also where characters can go if something odd happens with their own abilities, giving you a channel for passing on plot-related information, using the experts at the Institute as mouthpieces.

PSI can also work at the center of a *Paragons* series, where the characters are all subjects trained by the Institute after their breakout.



PARANORMAL STUDIES INSTITUTE (PSI)

Agenda: Research into the origins and nature of paranormal abilities; education regarding the paranormal; advancement of the cause of paranormal civil rights and fair treatment.

Structure: Independent research institute headed by a Board of Directors and managed by a chief administrator.

Symbol: The Greek letter psi, usually in blue or purple, often accompanied by the Institute's name or acronym.

Common Allegiances: PSI personnel are often dedicated to things like Knowledge, Progress, and Science, in addition to any allegiance they might have to the Institute itself.

Wealth: +24

They choose to stay on with PSI and assist research into the paranormal, aiding other paragons and working for better understanding between paranormals and normals. Characters might cooperate with the Collected from the Rosemont Center (see its write-up in this chapter) or the two groups could be rivals, friendly or otherwise. Characters might decide to leave the Institute and strike out on their own, while still maintaining ties and good relations.

PSI SINISTER

If your *Paragons* series is more given to conspiracies and hidden agendas, then PSI may have one, if not several. The Institute could easily be a front for a conspiracy of paragons looking to increase their power and influence or an anti-paranormal scheme to learn about their powers in order to come up with countermeasures and limit their influence, perhaps in cooperation with the Initiative.

Indeed, an anti-paranormal version of PSI could be a branch or front organization for the Initiative, using legitimate research to gather as much information as possible about paragons and their powers. The Institute can also serve as a recruiting ground for potential agents, both normal and paranormal, funneling them into Initiative training and operations.

On the other hand, PSI could be a means for a cabal of paragons to recruit and train others of their kind, indoctrinating them into a philosophy of paranormal supremacy, not unlike that of the Pantheon. The key difference is, where the Pantheon's philosophy is largely "do whatever you want because you can," the PSI cabal's

DR. SAMUEL NIDOR

PL 3

Str 9	Dex 10	Con 10	Int 17	Wis 12	Cha 10
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Skills: Bluff 2 (+2), Computers 4 (+7), Concentration 4 (+5), Diplomacy 6 (+6), Gather Information 4 (+4), Knowledge (business) 4 (+7), Knowledge (behavioral sciences) 4 (+7), Knowledge (current events) 4 (+7), Knowledge (life sciences) 4 (+7), Knowledge (physical sciences) 8 (+11), Knowledge (technology) 4 (+7), Medicine 4 (+5), Notice 4 (+5), Profession (administrator) 8 (+9), Profession (scientist) 8 (+9), Sense Motive 4 (+5)

Feats: Benefit (PSI administrator), Connected, Well-Informed

Combat: Attack +0 Grapple -1, Damage -1 (unarmed), Defense +0, Knockback -0, Initiative +0

Saving Throws: Toughness +0, Fortitude +2, Reflex +2, Will +3

Abilities 8 + Skills 19 (76 ranks) + Feats 3 + Powers 0 + Combat 0 + Saves 6 = Total 36

is "we should control the world because we can." Mindbender (see **Chapter Five**) fits in particularly well as the puppeteer behind a sinister version of PSI.

LEARNING ABOUT PSI

The following is information characters might learn about PSI:

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 10: The Paranormal Studies Institute is an independent research organization studying paragons and their abilities.

DC 15: PSI gets a first look at a lot of newly-awakened paranormals and many of the Institute's "alumni" seem pretty loyal, supporting it with donations, testimonials, volunteer work, and so forth.

DC 20: PSI has some pretty serious connections in government and the business world. They work as consultants on some hush-hush matters involving paranormals, from criminal investigations to top-secret research projects.

KNOWLEDGE (BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES)

DC 10: The Paranormal Studies Institute is an independent research organization studying paragons and their abilities.

DC 15: PSI actually got its start before the Breakout, investigating the paranormal and "fringe" sciences like parapsychology. Needless to say, a number of people at the Institute feel quite vindicated by clear evidence regarding paranormals and their abilities. There's a bit of tension between the "old timers" who kept the faith and "newcomers" who have only jumped on the bandwagon since the Breakout.

DC 18: PSI's research shows a clear bias towards a "psionic" explanation for paranormal abilities based on some inherent special quality of the conscious mind. Other theories are dismissed as "unscientific" much like the scientific community once dismissed PSI's own research, actually.

PSI RESEARCH SUBJECT

PL 4

Str 10	Dex 10	Con 10	Int 10	Wis 10	Cha 10
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Skills: Concentration 4 (+4), Knowledge (current events) 2 (+2), Knowledge (popular culture) 2 (+2), Profession 4 (+4)

Powers: Choose one of the following (or another power or powers worth 15 points):

- **Astral Form 3**

- **Blast 6** (*Alternate Powers:* **Blast 4** [Extras: Burst Area], **Dazzle 4** [visual group; Extras: Burst Area]), **Immunity 1** (own powers)

- **ESP 5** (visual and auditory)

- **Insubstantial 3** (energy form)

- **Mental Blast 3**

- **Telekinesis 5** (psychokinesis; Extras: Range—Perception)

- **Comprehend 3** (languages; *Flaws:* Linked to Telepathy), **Telepathy 4** (*Alternate Power:* **Confuse 4**)

Combat: Attack +0, Grapple +0, Damage +0 (unarmed) or by power, Defense +0, Knockback -0, Initiative +0

Saving Throws: Toughness +0, Fortitude +0, Reflex +0, Will +2

Abilities 0 + Skills 3 (12 ranks) + Feats 0 + Powers 15 + Combat 0 + Saves 2 = Total 20

PSI GAME INFORMATION

How much PSI knows about the true nature of paranormal abilities depends on just how close their psionic theory is to the truth. (See **Chapter Six** for details on this.)

You should also decide what sort of advances PSI may have pioneered in technology related to paranormals. In some series, the Institute has nothing but theories, in others, it develops practical applications of its research, such as the following:

ELECTRONIC MIND SHIELD

This small device creates a short-range jamming field that protects the wearer against mind-influencing powers. The electronic mind shield (or EMS for short) grants the benefits of the Mind Shield power (see *M&M*, page 93) but it's expensive (a purchase DC of 15 + its rank, if you're using the optional Wealth rules, *M&M*, page 132) and limited in capability to no more than 5 ranks. This tends to limit mind shields to the wealthy, prominent government officials, and the like.

1 EQUIPMENT POINT PER RANK

PARANORMAL DETECTION METER

The paranormal detection meter or "para-meter" is a hand-held device like a PDA with a screen displaying its readings. It is capable of picking up the use of a paranormal power at fairly close range (about 40 feet) and can be set to flash a light or give an audible indicator when it does so. A para-meter isn't sensitive enough to distinguish what power is in use, only the presence of paranormal activity and the general direction of the source.

3 EQUIPMENT POINTS

MEMBERS

Use the Scientist (see *M&M*, page 229) for the typical PSI researcher, substituting Medicine for Craft for medical doctors on-staff. Security personnel use the Police Officer (see *M&M*, page 228), substituting the appropriate Profession skill, while other support personnel can generally use the Bystander (see *M&M*, page 226).

PSI has relatively few paranormals on-staff. Those it does have are either specialists with powers useful in research (notably things like supersenses or paranormal detection) or paragons working for the Institute's security division. On the other hand, PSI has a great number of "alumni" who trained there once or were treated following their breakout, along with some currently undergoing treatment or training, so it can call in quite a few favors from the paranormal community when necessary.

DR. SAMUEL NIDOR

The current PSI chief administrator is a parapsychologist with decades of experience in the field. Dr. Nidor's original training was as a physicist, but he became increasingly interested in psychic abilities and other paranormal phenomena. His peers dismissed his early research and papers on the subject as "fringe science", but Dr. Nidor remained undaunted, convinced only an unknown X-factor could explain the body of experimental data gathered on paranormal abilities over the years.

Following the Breakout, Dr. Nidor experienced a brief celebrity as an expert on the paranormal consulted on news programs and the like. He used his fifteen minutes of fame to take fundraising and attention for PSI to new heights, while also taking no small amount of personal satisfaction from the vindication of his theories. He's certain it's only a matter of time before someone manages to crack the secret behind paragons and their powers, and he's determined PSI will be at the forefront of that search.

Although Nidor's game statistics assume he has no paranormal powers of his own, if you are using PSI as a front for some sort of paranormal conspiracy, you may decide Dr. Nidor is a secret paranormal with whatever powers suit the story (perhaps even a cover identity for a paragon from **Chapter Five**, like Mr. Zero or Proteus). Alternately, Nidor could simply be an unwitting dupe of such a conspiracy, perhaps a mind-controlled puppet or Mindbender or other paranormals behind PSI.

PSI RESEARCH SUBJECT

This archetype represents a fairly typical PSI research subject, a paranormal undergoing tests and training at the Institute. Subjects vary considerably in terms of age, background, and paranormal abilities, however, so virtually any sort of character the GM wishes to include could potentially show up at a PSI facility. A number of the characters from **Chapter Five** might also volunteer to serve as research subjects, either to further understanding of the paranormal or for reasons of their own (such as gaining access to PSI's facilities, personnel, or research).

ROSEMONT CENTER

The Rosemont Center is the world's premier psychiatric center dealing solely with paranormals and their often peculiar psychological difficulties. A team of talented and dedicated mental health professionals, led by the respected Dr. Emily Rosemont, ensures the best possible care for those paranormals whose condition either before or after their breakout is less than ideal. Any major world organization that employs paranormals both knows and most likely employs the Center or their staff for checkups of their exceptional personnel.

Under this public veneer lies two important secrets few even suspect. First, Emily Rosemont is herself a paranormal, using her ability to reach into the Imageria (see **Chapter Three**) and manifest images and objects to hide her physical handicap and to aid in her chosen work. Second, the Center is also home to a small group of paranormals, the Collected, all currently or at one time under Dr. Rosemont's care. The Collected are dedicated to the goal of finding and giving aid to paranormals with difficulties similar to their own.

The activities and goals of Rosemont and the Collected are sometimes at odds with the authorities and other factions in the paranormal world. While none have connected the Center to these activities, those under Rosemont's care have attracted the shadowy attention of the Initiative (if that group exists in your series) and fight an ongoing battle to remain both anonymous and effective.



OVERVIEW

The Rosemont center began when Emily Rosemont, a rising star in the field of psychiatry, broke out with her own paranormal abilities, both empowering and crippling her. Permanently tied to her home and estate, unable to leave or interact with others in what would be considered a normal fashion, Dr. Rosemont chose to help others like her, to explore her new abilities and to assist others in their own explorations.

Using her personal fortune and inherited estate, Dr. Rosemont built a center that has become the world's premier psychiatric institute catering to the paranormal and their sometimes peculiar mental disabilities. The staff members of the Center are all highly sought after experts in the fields of psychiatry and human development,

able to provide the best care and training to the newly paranormal even under adverse conditions.

To the outside world, the Rosemont Center is a psychiatric institute studying the mental maladies of the paranormal, a vital link in keeping the world's paragons happy and healthy. To those in the confidence of Emily Rosemont and the Collected it is more; it is also an organization involved in the exploration of the Imageria as one possible source of paranormal powers, a rescue center collecting and assisting unfortunate paranormals born into pain and confusion, and a training center for fostering the development and understanding of paranormal power. These less public purposes are continually disguised through misdirection and stealth, by the excellent job the Center does at its publicly-stated purpose and through Dr. Rosemont's use of her own powers.

STRUCTURE

All things in the Center flow down from Emily Rosemont. The Center is small, servicing few enough paranormals, that Dr. Rosemont can take a personal interest in every case coming through her doors. Patients at the Center can expect personal attention from the famous doctor on a nearly daily basis as the woman rarely seems to sleep.

All other functions of the Center, such as food service, waste disposal, and even legal services are contracted to outside businesses. The two non-medical tasks of note handled directly by Center staff are security, which can be particularly daunting given the average client, and much of the gardening, done by patients as part of their rehabilitation and concentration exercises.

BASES OF OPERATIONS

The Rosemont Center is housed at the Rosemont estate, the personal residence of Dr. Rosemont, who has turned her family home into the health center it is today. Several buildings have been added to house patients and the equipment required for their care, but at its core, the grounds are still the rolling hills, terraced gardens, and palatial Victorian mansion that have been in the Rosemont family for generations.

Underneath the grounds lies the secret facility serving as housing and a base of operations for the Collected. The secure location, built secretly due to Rosemont's powers and resources, also houses Emily's body in a safe room with various life support machines to feed and hydrate her helpless physical form. Emily uses her powers and those of the Collected to keep the facility both hidden and

ROSEMONT CENTER

Agenda: The Rosemont Center's stated goal is to acclimatize any newly arrived and existing paranormals into society as a whole by assisting them with the unique psychological stresses that come with their powers. Additionally, the Center trains individuals in the use of their powers and researches the source and limits of paranormal powers to better the treatment of these powerful individuals.

Structure: The Rosemont Center is a privately run mental health facility with numerous government and corporate grants and contracts. The Center has a staff of doctors, nurses, and administrators as well as a team of legal professionals on retainer. It is owned and operated by Emily Rosemont, one of the world's preeminent researchers into the unique psychological impairments of paranormal humanity.

Symbol: The Rosemont Center's emblem is a modified caduceus, substituting a pair of intertwined flowering roses for the usual snakes.

Common Allegiances: The Collected, Dr. Rosemont

Wealth: Emily Rosemont herself is quite well off with a wealth score of +22, however, the resources of the Center far exceed her own and qualify as quite rich at +28. It is worth noting that with Emily's particular ability the Center rarely lacks for anything, even those things that it can not strictly afford.

secure. Few that spend any time at the Center could even guess at its existence.

RESOURCES

Many employers of paranormal agents, from multinational corporations to governments, use the Center to ensure their personnel operate at peak performance. These organizations understand it is in their best interests to make certain the Center lacks for nothing in the care of their valuable resources. While this means the center has significant financial resources it also means it has considerable influence when it comes to policy and some leeway when it comes to regulation.

The small and talented medical staff at the Center consists of some of the greatest hearts and minds available in the highly specialized field of paranormal psychiatry, including Dr. Rosemont herself. These professionals are highly sought after for consultation and opinion around the world, creating a lucrative private business that is both encouraged and sponsored by the Center. This helps the Center retain its preeminence in the industry.

In addition to the current patients at the Center, a tight-knit group of capable paranormals calling themselves the Collected are at the disposal of Emily Rosemont. Unbeknownst to the Center staff and the outside world, the Collected work in constant communication with Dr. Rosemont to ensure the safety of patients as well as to gather others in need of the care the Center provides.

USING THE ROSEMONT CENTER

Paragons in high-stress roles are often sent to the Rosemont Center to learn to better deal with their stress. In addition, new paragons come to the Center to learn to cope with the assumptions and baggage of their former lives. Characters might encounter the Collected in dealing with a new breakout or other less mentally stable paragon. The Collected also serve as shadow security for the Center and might be forced to act against an individual or group threatening to uncover the Center's secrets. Members of another organization involved in paranormal research could work in competition with the Center over resources or research material.

Alternately, the characters might be a new group of Collected, having less fortunate beginnings they would be highly compassionate of those in similar circumstances. Under the guidance and direction of Dr. Rosemont, the group could aid the unfortunate and explore the use of their own abilities. Out of duty and compassion these heroes are called on to help those the authorities would prefer to put behind bars or eliminate. This puts the group in conflict with the police, military, or organizations like the Paranormal Regulatory Agency.

The Center is a place of learning, discovery, and healing, and any paragon looking for any of these things would be well served by the Center and Dr. Rosemont. The Center is publicly known as a place of healing and paragons could seek it out or be sent there as this service is needed. Occasionally, the Rosemont Center takes in dangerous paranormals for treatment under court order.

Dr. Rosemont could seek out others who explore the limitless reaches of the Imageria to discuss a new discovery or answer some questions. With dozens copies of herself exploring the Imageria, Dr. Rosemont herself could be something of a mystery in the Imageria as explorers work to track down the source and purpose of the

ubiquitous identical creatures roaming the "landscape" and cataloging as they go.

The Collected, as an arm of the Center, can be used on their own or in conjunction with the Center. They provide a certain amount of covert muscle in defense of the Center, but could also be encountered while collecting a new paranormal. In their own way the Collected are defenders of the rights of the paranormal; starting with the right of an individual to life and happiness. This can, and does, run them afoul of the authorities as they collect a paranormal they view as an unfortunate in need of help, but whom the authorities view as a threat to public safety.

Given their proclivity toward the defense of paranormals, the Collected are also against any person or group that mistreats individuals simply due to their paranormal status, making them opposed to anti-paragon legislation, organizations, and activity. While the Collected would not often act directly against these organizations, they would work to help others affected by them.

LEARNING ABOUT THE ROSEMONT CENTER

The following is information characters might be able to learn about the Rosemont Center:

GATHER INFORMATION

Making this check represents the information a character can acquire through medical and public channels as well as personal interviews of those who have spent time at the facility.

DC 10: The Rosemont Center is the world's premier psychiatric hospital for the treatment and training of paranormals.

DC 15: The heart of the Rosemont Center, is its founder, Dr. Emily Rosemont, one of the greatest authorities on paranormal psychology.

DC 25: The Rosemont Center is all it's reputed to be and more. They have their own security handled by some of the most powerful paragons available—all of whom apparently spend most of their time at the Center.

DC 30: There is a direct connection between the Collected and the Center. They don't just drop off paranormal patients there, they live there too, and I think they even take their orders from Dr. Rosemont herself.

PROFESSION (ANY MEDICAL)

DC 10: The Rosemont Center is the world's premier psychiatric hospital for the treatment and training of paranormals.

DC 15: The heart of the Rosemont Center, is its founder, Dr. Emily Rosemont, one of the greatest authorities on paranormal psychology.

DC 20: Emily Rosemont suffered some sort of breakdown, or medical issue, some time ago that has left her at least partially debilitated, which is why she rarely leaves her estate.

DC 25: Dr. Rosemont may be paranormal, or received some sort of paranormal treatment at the Center in order to save her life after her "accident." She's apparently fine now and is completely dedicated to helping paranormals deal with their powers and the problems they may cause.

DR. EMILY ROSEMONT**PL 14**

Str 0 Dex 0 Con 8 Int 16 Wis 16 Cha 12

Skills: Concentration 15 (+18), Craft (artistic) 8 (+11), Diplomacy 4 (+5), Knowledge (behavioral sciences) 12 (+15), Knowledge (life sciences) 12 (+15), Language 1 (French [English is native]), Medicine 10 (+13), Notice 5 (+8), Profession (psychiatrist) 12 (+15), Sense Motive 9 (+12)

Feats: Eidetic Memory, Speed of Thought

Powers: **Animate Objects 14** (*Extras:* Duration—Continuous, Horde, Move Action; *Flaws:* Limited—Created objects; *Power Feats:* Progression 5 [50 objects]), **Communication 8** (*Flaws:* Limited—Animated objects; *Power Feats:* Dimensional 3, Subtle 2), **Create Object 14** (*Extras:* Duration—Continuous; *Power Feats:* Precise, Progression 10 [140K-ft cube], Subtle), **ESP 8** (all senses; *Extras:* Duration—Sustained; *Flaws:* Medium—animated objects; *Power Feats:* Dimensional 3, Subtle), **Immunity 1** (no need to sleep), **Super-Senses 6** (mental awareness, sense paranormals [mental, acute, extended 2, range])

Combat: Attack +0, Grapple —, Damage +0, Defense +0, Knockback -0, Initiative +3

Saving Throws: Toughness -1, Fortitude +2, Reflex —, Will +8

Drawbacks: Disability (immobile, uncommon, minor, -1 point)

Abilities -8 + Skills 22 (88 ranks) + Feats 2 + Powers 181 + Combat 0 + Saves 8 — Drawbacks 1 = Total 204

MEMBERS

Besides as many as one hundred medical, nursing, and security staff, the Center also houses a number of paranormals. Various outpatient visits during the day are also common. Nearly any paragon might be seen at the Center for treatment or training at any given time.

While the Collected generally keep to themselves in the underground facility, it is not uncommon to find Rachel Carson or Vom Stahl wandering the grounds. Clio Bianchi (Pontifex), serves in a counseling role to the medical staff and Dr. Rosemont herself. (See **Chapter Five** for details on the members of the Collected.)

DR. EMILY ROSEMONT

Emily Rosemont was educated in the best schools and was well on her way to being a respected psychiatrist when her parents died in a car crash, leaving her a fortune and the Rosemont estate. Dealing with the reality of her loss and the responsibilities of the Rosemont fortune increased her stress level beyond anything she had felt before. She was falling apart both mentally and physically.

That was when her breakout occurred. Emily Rosemont collapsed, alone at her estate, falling unconscious as her body gave out. As her eyes opened, she found the estate populated with people and creatures from her imagination, all of which were under her control. She was capable of creating realistic animated constructs limited only by her imagination. The cost of her extraordinary power was steep; she could no longer move on her own.

Since her breakout, Dr. Rosemont has not only created the Center, but has experimented with her

own powers and developed them to a much greater level. She can create dozens of constructs, and control them all as long as they remain within the confines of the Rosemont estate. Over time she began to wonder at the origin of her own and other paranormal abilities. Through experience, experimentation, and exploration she has come to believe the Imageria is the source of all paranormal abilities and its mythic presence has drawn much of her attention.

Recently she has lost contact with some of her most powerful constructs, both inside and outside the Imageria. While some of her attention has been diverted to tracking them down, the day-to-day work at the Center and the almost hypnotic draw of the distant reaches of the Imageria have left her with few personal resources to devote to finding constructs she believes have most likely dissolved without her attention. Her apparent lack of control over her massive paranormal ability does concern her, however, and she does what can be done with the resources at hand to ensure her power remains under her conscious control.

THE SEVEN THUNDERS

Christian sects have believed the end of the world was imminent many times throughout history, but never has the evidence been so strong that the Day of Judgment will soon be at hand. The world has gone mad with people openly defying the word of God, not just in their immoral and sinful behavior, but in their use of devilish powers, contravening the natural order.

OVERVIEW

As with many religious sects, the Seven Thunders began with a vision. Luke Butler, the fiery young pastor of an evangelical Christian church in Wyoming, heard the news of the Breakout and all that followed. From the pulpit, he warned his congregation to be true to their faith, because he had seen the signs: the End Times were coming and would soon be upon them.

Then the Holy Spirit came over Reverend Butler and he was taken with a terrible fit. Parishioners who rushed to his side to help still his thrashing, heard him cry out a passage from the Book of Revelations and speak in tongues. When the shadow of the Holy Spirit passed, the Reverend Butler brushed off the aid of his flock and staggered back to the podium, his eyes shining with fervor. He had a message for them...a message from God.

Butler poured out his message: the so-called "paranormals" were no less than demons in human flesh, the Horsemen of the Apocalypse. They would create false religions to worship them and turn people away from faith in Jesus Christ. They would bring about a war in which the earth would shake, the sky would burn, and the oceans would be as blood. They were the destroyers, servants of Hell!

But all hope was not lost; so long as the faithful continued to believe

and do God's work they would be saved and taken up into Heaven, while the corrupt world of the paragons and their worshippers would die in fire and be cast into eternal torment.

"AND WHEN THE SEVEN THUNDERS HAD UTTERED THEIR VOICES, I WAS ABOUT TO WRITE: AND I HEARD A VOICE FROM HEAVEN SAYING UNTO ME, SEAL UP THOSE THINGS WHICH THE SEVEN THUNDERS UTTERED, AND WRITE THEM NOT."

- REVELATIONS 10:4

STRUCTURE

The Holy Church of the Seven Thunders (its full name) is essentially an independent Christian evangelical sect with the Reverend Luke Butler as head of the church. Below him are various deacons and church officials, but they fulfill subordinate roles and hold little prominence in the organization. Major executive decisions go through Rev. Butler, although he has a staff that handles the day-to-day operations of the church.

Other congregations loosely affiliate themselves with the Seven Thunders. Plans are underway to bring many of these formally into the church and expand the reach of its message, but it's a somewhat slow process, since it often represents established churches breaking away from their current affiliations. Unsurprisingly, there's a considerable amount of political maneuvering and controversy surrounding the Seven Thunders sect. Although Butler navigates it with confidence and grace, he has at least as many enemies in the evangelical community as he does allies.

BASES OF OPERATIONS

The Seven Thunders sect is based at Reverend Butler's church in Laramie, Wyoming, which has grown considerably since the Reverend's vision. Butler himself travels frequently, giving public sermons to large crowds to spread the truths revealed to him. Smaller congregations of Seven Thunders believers have sprung up in parts of North America, particularly through the rural South and West, and Rev. Butler's message has reached other sympathetic Christian churches and congregations, although they are not officially affiliated with his church.

The Seven Thunders also maintain a number of secret "safe havens" for the faithful. These are private properties supplied, fortified, and capable of housing a small community should members need them. Most of these properties are on farms or have sufficient land for farming and possibly hunting, should the worst happen.

RESOURCES

The sect is funded entirely by private donations, both large and small, from the faithful, which make up a considerable cash-flow. Most of this goes into paying for upkeep and expenses, travel for Rev. Butler and high-ranking members of the church, and media access like television and print advertising, production of print materials, and the sect's active website and email lists. At least, that's what all the church's accounts say.

THE SEVEN THUNDERS

Agenda: The Seven Thunders sect is made up of warriors for God intent on bringing the truth about the paranormal to people and punishing the wicked before all are finally judged.

Structure: The Seven Thunders sect is a religious group led by the Reverend Luke Butler. Although they can claim status as a religious organization, the sect is loosely organized under the Rev. Butler's leadership.

Symbol: A stylized golden "7" with its vertical stroke in the form of a lightning bolt, superimposed over a purple cross. Some members wear three thunderbolt 7s as a gold pin or other ornament (as 777 is the number of God).

Common Allegiances: According to the doctrine of the sect, allegiance to God (manifested through the Seven Thunders' doctrine) should be the highest allegiance. In practice, many members have a greater allegiance to their own social or political agendas, or the sect itself rather than any higher power.

Wealth: +30. The Seven Thunders survive primarily on donations and tithes from members, who give generously to support God's work; which in turn makes the sect very wealthy.



What isn't generally known is there's money going to purchase stockpiles of food, weapons, and survival gear, kept at the various safe havens owned by the church. The members plan to retreat there when the final conflict Reverend Butler has foreseen comes to pass—or should the governments controlled by the paragons and their human puppets try to stop them from spreading God's truth to the people.

Although the sect makes full use of modern technologies like the Internet, they disdain inventions associated with paranormals, believing they are as tainted as their makers. This includes technologies invented by paragons as well as true paratechnology (which isn't usable by normals anyway). The Seven Thunders would eagerly adopt anti-paranormal technology from other sources, however. If equipment like that on page 79 is available, the sect will find a way to get and use some of it.

USING THE SEVEN THUNDERS

The primary use of the Seven Thunders sect is as antagonists, given their beliefs about paranormals. If the series need a hate-filled mob (or somebody to whip up a hate-filled mob), they're an excellent resource. Likewise, if you need a talking head to rant about how paragons will destroy the world as we know it, you can use Reverend Butler or one of his underlings.

Butler's immunity to paranormal powers is primarily to keep irate characters from blasting him right from the get-go, although they should generally find dealing with the Seven Thunders difficult. After all, any direct attack on the sect or its followers merely confirms what they say about the dangers of paranormals—and may end up lending more credence and followers to the sect if the attack is made in public.

In a lower power level series, the Seven Thunders can pose a very significant threat. Newly awakened paragons might be menaced by lynch mobs in some areas where the sect holds sway. There's also the possibility of death threats, or worse, towards even *suspected* paranormals, as a witch-hunt mentality takes hold.

If you want the Seven Thunders to pose a more direct and physical threat to the characters, you can fill out its ranks with a few more "blessed" with unusual abilities like Rev. Butler, with the same doubt as to whether or not they are paranormals or something else. Naturally, some will accuse the sect of hypocrisy for sheltering and using some "paragons" while targeting others, but

such claims are dismissed as ignorant or originating from their enemies.

You could have an unusual *Paragons* series with characters as members of the Seven Thunders with aforementioned "blessings," an elite "God squad" to do Reverend Butler's bidding. Maybe the characters realize they're being used, or perhaps the sect is *right* and they are among the only true paragons in the world, with all other paranormals empowered by the Adversary as part of the final showdown between Heaven and Hell.

IS BUTLER A PARAGON?

That's up to the Gamemaster. Reverend Butler might well be a paranormal. One could easily interpret his initial vision as part of a breakout experience (or the trigger for one) and his immunity to paranormal powers due to his tremendous faith as a power in and of itself. Since Butler doesn't "register" as paranormal to those able to sense such things, it's almost impossible to prove.

On the other hand, it could well be Butler is *right*, at least to a degree. Perhaps his immunity and related abilities are supernatural and intended to negate the abilities of paranormals (wherever they may come from). If so, it doesn't necessarily mean the Seven Thunders' theology is correct. Butler's gifts could be divinely inspired, but they could just as easily be a devilish deception intended to thwart the true chosen, the paragons. That's certainly how sects like the para-Christians (see the Church of Jesus Christ, Paragon, earlier in this chapter) see it.

LEARNING ABOUT SEVEN THUNDERS

Note that inquiries into the group may be noticed, and the sect takes a dim view of outsiders—especially godless paranormals—looking into their affairs. The following is information characters can learn about the Seven Thunders:

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 10: The Seven Thunders are an evangelical Christian religious sect, led by Reverend Luke Butler. They believe paranormals are agents of Satan and will bring about the Apocalypse.

DC 15: Reverend Butler had some sort of fit, accompanied by a spiritual vision, not long after the Breakout. The direction of the Seven Thunders sect is driven by this vision. US authorities have reason to believe the Seven Thunders are connected to acts of violence against paranormals and their supporters, but have no clear evidence against the sect or its leader.

DC 18: Reverend Butler is supposedly protected against the powers of paranormals in some way. Sect members say he has blithely ignored paranormal abilities through "the shield of his faith" and claim others can do the same, if they truly believe.

DC 20: The claims about Butler's immunity are at least partially true. When a fire-projecting paranormal tried to kill the Reverend, the flames just flowed around him. Even his clothing was untouched, although the stage around him was burned.

KNOWLEDGE (RELIGION AND THEOLOGY)

DC 10: The Seven Thunders are an evangelical Christian religious sect, led by Reverend Luke Butler. They believe paranormals are agents of Satan and will bring about the Apocalypse.

REVEREND LUKE BUTLER

PL 5

Str 11	Dex 10	Con 13	Int 15	Wis 17	Cha 18
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Skills: Bluff 5 (+9), Concentration 6 (+9), Diplomacy 8 (+12), Gather Information 6 (+10), Intimidate 6 (+10), Knowledge (civics) 4 (+6), Knowledge (current events) 6 (+8), Knowledge (religion and theology) 10 (+12), Notice 4 (+7), Perform (oratory) 8 (+12), Profession (pastor) 8 (+11), Sense Motive 8 (+11), Survival 5 (+8)

Feats: Connected, Fascinate (perform), Fearless, Inspire, Leadership, Minions 13 (approx. 5,000 30-point followers), Ultimate Effort (Perform), Well-Informed

Powers: Immunity 60 (all paranormal powers; *Power Feats:* Subtle 2)

Combat: Attack +3, Grapple +3, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +3 (+2 flat-footed), Knockback -0, Initiative +0

Saving Throws: Toughness +1, Fortitude +4, Reflex +3, Will +9

Abilities 24 + Skills 21 (84 ranks) + Feats 20 + Powers 62 + Combat 12 + Saves 12 = Total 151

SEVEN THUNDERS THUG

PL 3

Str 12	Dex 12	Con 13	Int 10	Wis 10	Cha 10
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Skills: Craft (mechanical) 4 (+4), Drive 2 (+3), Intimidate 4 (+4), Knowledge (popular culture) 2 (+2), Knowledge (religion and theology) 2 (+2), Profession (choose one) 4 (+4), Swim 2 (+3)

Feats: Equipment 2

Equipment: light pistol (+3 damage), and 4 points in miscellaneous equipment

Combat: Attack +2, Grapple +3, Damage +1 (unarmed), +3 (pistol), Defense +2 (+1 flat-footed), Knockback -0, Initiative +1

Saving Throws: Toughness +1, Fortitude +4, Reflex +1, Will +1

Abilities 7 + Skills 5 (20 ranks) + Feats 2 + Powers 0 + Combat 8 + Saves 4 = Total 26

DC 15: While the Seven Thunders base much of their theology on passages from the Book of Revelations in the Bible, a great deal of the sect's doctrine comes from the Reverend Butler's initial and later visions, and therefore isn't subject to much scrutiny or debate. Numerous Christian denominations deny statements put forth by the Seven Thunders.

MEMBERS

REVEREND LUKE BUTLER

Reverend Lucas Samuel Butler was called to ministry from a young age. He was raised in an evangelical church and it became the focus of his life. He understood early on that most people didn't understand his faith, even mocked it with their smug, secularist attitudes, but when the Holy Spirit was in him, he pitied them, because they would not know such happiness and certainty of purpose.

Butler didn't want to be anything other than a preacher of the Gospel, and was one long before he went to divinity school, earned his degree, or worked for his first congregation. He combined a sharp mind with a powerful speaking voice and a keen understanding of people, making him quite popular with his flock. Although in his early thirties, Butler is unmarried, as he has been so strongly focused on doing God's work.

The Breakout and the subsequent appearance of paranormals were like a blow to Rev. Butler. How could such things even be? How could God permit them to exist? Then his vision and a revelation: they were indeed a part of God's plan, signs of the End Times, people who sold their souls to the Devil, sold their place in Paradise for power in this world! Since that day of hearing the voices of the Seven Thunders, Reverend Butler has a new mission: to share his vision and warn the world—even the hell-spawned paragons—to accept salvation before it's too late.

Butler's Immunity power means he automatically succeeds on any saving throw against a paranormal power; this includes Toughness saves against damaging powers. Powers that don't allow saves work on him normally. Even things like paranormal Enhanced Strength don't affect him (although he still makes a Toughness save against the non-enhanced portion of the attacker's Strength score).

The Gamemaster should adjudicate Butler's immunity as best suits the story,

since it's primarily a plot device. In some cases, you may want to award players a hero point for the setback imposed by the Reverend's unusual immunity.

THE SILBER AGENCY

Few are unfamiliar with the name and face of Augustus Silber, the unassuming yet imposing head of the Silber Agency. Despite the public relations around the man, he remains something of a mystery, jealously guarding every moment of privacy that his fortune can afford.

Those that wish to hire a paranormal agent need only contact one of the regional offices of the Silber Agency located throughout the world. The Silber Agency has expert normal and paranormal contractors in the areas of research, espionage and intrusion, combat, protection and physical and electronic security among others. No job is too small or too large for the Silber Agency which can be contracted by anyone that can pay its sliding scale. The scale is based on criteria known only to Augustus Silber himself who takes a personal hand in every significant contract.

OVERVIEW

Augustus Silber launched the agency not long after the emergence of paranormal beings. He realized that these beings of immense power also had immense possibility as a force both for change and economic growth. Beginning as more of a temporary placement agency, finding the right paranormal to fill a job and employing

them on a temporary basis, it has grown to be much more while maintaining that basic concept of the right person for the right job.

Silber's organizational genius quickly turned a handful of contacts in the paranormal world into a network of paragons for hire. The original bodyguard and investigative work the company started doing has branched out into the avenues of site security, computer intrusion protection, technological research, and media and public relations among others. Almost any para-

normal and normal service capable of being contracted can be acquired through the Agency, even the hiring of personal armies of paranormals is not beyond the capabilities of Silber.

Augustus Silber is always in the public eye, filling the gossip and business pages with reams of data, but very few details about his private life. Many have conjectured that Silber leads a double life, keeping part of his persona hidden from the public view to hide some other agenda. What this agenda is and why he must keep it hidden is unknown, and so far Silber has remained silent about it when questioned.



THE SILBER AGENCY

Agenda: The Silber Agency strives to maintain its status as the world's foremost paranormal hiring agency.

Structure: The Silber Agency has small local offices in hundreds of cities around the globe that accept appointments, phone calls, and walk-in service in addition to the company's Web presence. It is common knowledge however that this complex, apparently decentralized, system is little more than a vetting method to cull from the infinite contacts the few who seriously want or need the help that the Agency can provide and pay the price that it demands.

The Silber Agency is one of the most profitable privately owned companies in the world. Silber himself runs the company headquarters where all decisions are made and all contracts written. While the total number of paranormal contracts written each year is not staggering, the sums of money often paid for the perfect match of power and ability to a task can be mind boggling. Silber himself takes a personal hand in many contracts that catch his attention pricing them as he sees fit. Occasionally, Silber contracts a job at a ludicrously low rate. What criteria Silber uses to determine who benefits from these acts of charity are unknown.

Symbol: The Silber Agency uses a shielded coat of arms reminiscent of ancient times. The Silber shield is blue and white bisected vertically by a sword of silver and black.

Common Allegiances: To all those under contract with the Silber Agency, the contract is law. Failure to uphold the contract, barring all but the most unusual of circumstances, cancels not only payment but opportunity for future employment. For all others that are employed by the company, Silber prizes loyalty and honesty above all other traits.

Wealth: The Agency maintains minimal wealth above operating costs and contract startup fees, paying much of its profit out in a profit sharing agreement in shares to employees. Silber himself maintains many profit shares as well as his own personal fortune (wealth bonus +40 or more).

STRUCTURE

The Silber Agency is entirely owned by Augustus Silber. While many have an interest in the company through employment and profit sharing, Silber himself is sole owner and proprietor of the company. Many of the higher-profile contractors deal directly with Silber himself, including most government contracts. In truth, while there are legal separations between the man and the organization, functionally the man and Agency are one.

Silber takes a direct interest in operations at headquarters when he can, but he has much less direct contact with the local offices. This is handled through a team of thirteen directors at the headquarters, each coordinating the efforts of a number of local offices, primarily broken down by continent, with several handling the offices within a single prominent country or locality.

Local offices have a great deal of autonomy in day-to-day operations but are set up to funnel employment and contract inquiries to the headquarters. Each office uses company standardized information gathering techniques and electronic forms to parse applicants and opportunities to the correct headquarters to pursue or decline. Each local office has the responsibility to set up a network of contacts to provide logistical support for any contract operations necessary within a predetermined region.

BASES OF OPERATIONS

While almost every major city has an office of the Silber Agency, all significant business is funneled through headquarters in Sion, Switzerland. The headquarters building is an unimposing structure, rebuilt and modernized from an old business block so as to retain its traditional Swiss style. The nearby small mountain airport houses a private terminal and tarmac for the guests of Augustus Silber and the Agency as well as a handful of Silber's private hypersonic planes (designed using paranormal material and aeronautical science).

Following in the pattern of the headquarters, the many local offices of the Agency are rarely new construction. The Agency prefers to work within the framework of an existing building, repairing and modernizing it to fit their needs and often providing additional space for other local businesses.

RESOURCES

Beyond Augustus Silber's personal fortune the Agency's greatest resource are its unparalleled reputation for confidentiality and its network of paranormal agents. While the material and logistical support the local offices supply is significant, these functions are bolstered by several paranormals which allow the near instantaneous transportation of personnel and materials to anywhere on the globe when necessary. The Agency keeps several paranormal security agents on retainer as well as at least one precognitive, although the exact use of the latter resource is a closely guarded secret of which only Silber himself knows the full breadth.

The Agency and Silber contract additional normal and paranormal resources as needed which allows the organization to adapt to changing conditions in the market, currencies, or world politics with considerable agility despite its global nature.

USING THE SILBER AGENCY

The Silber Agency has contracts with many organizations throughout the world. Even if the characters are not part of the employment pool they may be contacted by the Agency if one of their usual on-contract paragons cannot perform a task. Perhaps more interestingly, the right group of paragons could be contracted to find out what happened to the originally contracted paragon(s) while completing their assigned task.

Silber's knowledge of, and enmity toward, the Initiative could cause him to assist any paranormals that somehow come into conflict with that organization. Alternately, the characters may uncover a connection between Silber and the worldwide conspiracy against paranormals, causing them to oppose the Agency directly. The two groups might work out their differences and team up to deal with the Initiative or perhaps remain adversaries, fighting each other as pawns of a greater conspiracy.

As a less conspiratorial adversary, the Agency could be contracted to uncover a character's secrets or unmask or oppose them in some other way; or if the character plays fast and loose with the law, to bring them to justice. The characters could come face-to-face with Silber agents on security detail for a prominent

business person, politician, or secure location in either an adversarial or cooperative role. Alternately, the characters may hire the Silber Agency to provide them with some hired help with a particular skill or ability that they lack, but need, in order to accomplish some task.

The Silber Agency can be used to fill the place of an employer of temporary paranormal workers. Any bodyguard, security, or other potentially temporary employee might have been hired through the Silber Agency. Their involvement in such activities may be so widespread and common that people take the company's presence for granted; if someone has a paranormal bodyguard it doesn't even bear mentioning that he or she came from the Silber Agency. The Agency as designed is the foremost employer of paranormals in the world, however, which should make it more than just window dressing in your series. While there are other players in the industry, particularly in the fields of investigation and contract military operatives, the Agency makes the top of the list in every category. In any situation where employment of a paranormal agent is discussed the name Silber is mentioned. Not everyone may like the company—or the man—but none can argue with the results that the Silber Agency provides.

The Silber Agency could act as the patron for a series in which the players are a cadre of characters that are pivotal contracted agents of the organization. Unless the group forms a tightly-knit team for a specific task, this type of campaign may best be served in troupe style play where each player has multiple paranormal characters and the best team for any given contract is built based on its requirements. For one shot adventures the Agency could approach some members of the group with a contract that their powers are particularly well-suited to fulfill, and, of course, paying rates that would be difficult to ignore.

Additionally, Silber himself is the sworn enemy of the Initiative and he uses his influence to fight them wherever he can. Much of what the Silber Agency does is intended to make normal everyday people accept paranormals as normal, so to speak. It is much easier to accept a group when it's as mundane as Silber hopes to make paranormals. While Silber is not necessarily an ally to individual paragons, he does champion the cause of paranormals as a whole, highlighting and encouraging the good that one being of immense power can accomplish.

LEARNING ABOUT THE SILBER AGENCY

Augustus Silber and the Silber Agency are household names, they both hold celebrity status in popular culture. Finding a Silber Agency office is simple, they're listed in the phone book and have their locations listed on their website. However, Silber is more difficult to pin down, he has his secrets and as a man of significant resources he is able to make certain his closets remain closed.

GATHER INFORMATION

Use of this skill represents speaking with former employees or contract workers for the Agency. Additionally this skill can be used to represent information gathered from long-term employers of the Silber Agency, such as various militaries and governments.

DC 15: Silber always delivers but his pricing is all over the board. He has some sort of methodology for this but no one has been able to figure it out so far.

DC 20: Silber always hated being in the limelight, so it's strange that he seems to seek it now. He and his company are very high profile and sometimes he's willing to let the company take jobs just for the exposure. No doubt, the man is trying to show people something by doing that.

KNOWLEDGE (BUSINESS)

Making a check with this skill represents information gathered through contacts in the corporate world who know Silber or have worked with the Agency.

DC 15: There isn't a major company around that isn't using some of Silber's efficiency modeling. He was making a fortune in that business, but he left to start the Silber Agency.

DC 20: Silber had some dealings with a handful of shadowy figures right before he started the Silber Agency, then something changed. He was like a different man and had more of a purpose, but he was just as driven.

MEMBERS

The Silber Agency has literally thousands of employees in hundreds of offices around the world. A significant number of the world's paragon population has done work for Silber, but few are permanently employed by the Agency. In fact, Silber prefers contract labor in the workforce, keeping as small a number on his actual payroll as he can. His goal is to keep the company small and agile, so that it can rapidly respond to changes in the market and the world.

Those employed in a permanent capacity know that the home office in Switzerland houses the Agency's most trusted advisors and confidants and those that wish to progress in the company seek assignments there. Those that work in the home office know that Silber himself is a harsh taskmaster and a micromanager, but that he rewards competence and forgives minor mistakes.

AUGUSTUS SILBER

Augustus Silber is a man consumed by his own goals and driven to succeed. He was born into a poor family, but was raised with a good work ethic. Silber is a self-made man and built his fortune in corporations around the world as a reorganization specialist before starting his own business.

AUGUSTUS SILBER

PL 5

Str 14	Dex 12	Con 14	Int 20	Wis 14	Cha 18
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Skills: Bluff 5 (+9), Computers 4 (+9), Diplomacy 10 (+14), Gather Information 4 (+8), Investigate 4 (+9), Knowledge (business) 10 (+15), Knowledge (civics) 5 (+10), Knowledge (current events) 4 (+9), Language 3 (French, German, Italian [English is native]), Notice 5 (+7), Profession (business operations) 10 (+12), Sense Motive 4 (+6)

Feats: Assessment, Benefit (security clearance), Defensive Roll 2, Fearless, Master Plan

Combat: Attack +4, Grapple +6, Damage +2, Defense +4 (+2 flat-footed), Knockback -2, Initiative +1

Saving Throws: Toughness +4 (+2 flat footed), Fortitude +4, Reflex +2, Will +7

Abilities 32 + Skills 17 (68 ranks) + Feats 6 + Powers 0 + Combat 16 + Saves 8 = Total 79

With the arrival of paranormals, Silber saw an opportunity and put his organizational skills to use setting up the logistic support required to create a massive temp agency for paranormal agents. But that's not the whole story. The full truth is that Silber was approached to help organize something else, something far more sinister and secret proposed by a group of individuals powerful, resourceful, and egotistical enough to try and "deal with" the paranormal "threat" (possibly the Initiative). Silber saw another future, one hopeful and bright, one which normal and paranormal people could build together.

In that moment, Silber discovered who he was and what his ethics demanded; and he put together a plan to make his vision of the future a reality. He would be part of building this better world, one that synthesized these new and powerful beings into day to day life. Before this, Silber was selfish, but he realized that he was part of something bigger than himself. He's still just as competent and savvy as ever, but he lives a much more public lifestyle now, hoping that his open acceptance of paranormals will inspire others to feel the same way. At the same time he wages a secret war against an enemy that wants to make paranormals the scapegoats for all the world's ills.

THE SYNDICATE

Throughout history, criminals have organized into gangs, families, clans, guilds...syndicates able to extend their influence far beyond what one person or gang could manage. Many of the leaders of those criminal organizations have dreamed of seizing control of, or eliminating, their rivals, becoming the king of thieves, boss of bosses, *capo di tutti capi*, the most powerful crime lord in the world. Although some have come close, it seemed like an impossible goal. But "impossible" just isn't what it used to be since the Breakout, and the Syndicate is growing in the shadows of the paranormal world.

OVERVIEW

The Syndicate is a criminal umbrella organization. It gathers entire crime cartels under its banner much like a smaller mob might gather individual families or gangs together. In total, it is by far the largest organized crime operation in the world, and aims to be the *only*.

The origins of the Syndicate lie with the mysterious man known only as the "Capoyabun," a fusion of the titles "Capo" and "Oyabun," for Sicilian and Japanese crime-bosses, respectively. It's unclear who he is or where he came from; by the time anyone in power had heard of him, he was already a powerful criminal figure. Now, he's the most influential criminal mastermind in the world. Those who have defied him have fallen hard, although there's never been any

evidence of his direct involvement. Those wise enough to join his organization have prospered, so long as they haven't disappointed the boss.

Although the Syndicate has been incredibly (one might say paranormally) effective in concealing its activities, it hasn't been completely successful. Major law enforcement organizations, like Interpol, and various national intelligence agencies, are aware of the Syndicate's existence. For the time being, they keep the information under wraps, since the public is shaken enough by events since the Breakout without revealing a world-wide criminal conspiracy about which the law hasn't been able to get definitive information.

The Syndicate's agenda, beyond attaining control of all organized crime in the world, remains a mystery. Likewise, the Capoyabun has not made any move towards appointing a successor. Various law enforcement experts have noted that eliminating its elusive leader might set off the largest criminal gang-war in history as the survivors fight for control of the Syndicate. Needless to say, the authorities move with caution around such a ticking time-bomb.

STRUCTURE

Like other criminal empires, the Syndicate has a hierarchical feudal structure, that is, low-level members are pledged to and know their immediate superiors, who in turn work for and know their immediate superiors, and so on, from the lowliest street hustler or dealer all the way up to the Capoyabun himself.

This structure insulates the higher ranks of the organization from enemies. If someone takes down a low-ranking boss, all they get is him and his subordinates. Perhaps they're able to get the names of his immediate superiors in order to go after them, but the Syndicate is known to "sterilize" such problems, cutting off the trail that would lead deeper into the organization. This gives higher-ups good reason to either keep their underlings out of trouble, or ensure they can never talk.

BASES OF OPERATIONS

The Syndicate has no fixed headquarters or base of operations. The story is that the Capoyabun and his entourage are always on the move, working from a private yacht sailing international waters, or on a private plane or some other vehicle soaring above the clouds. Orders are dispatched through encrypted communications lines and message drops, money transferred into numbered secret accounts, much of it happening invisibly, behind the scenes.

Individual cells of the Syndicate have their bases of operation, of course, from illegal sweatshops, warehouses, and brothels to high-rise offices and private estates; wherever criminals operate, they are found. These are the "headquarters" most often raided by the police and civic-minded paranormals. Although they may clean out

THE SYNDICATE

Agenda: To acquire as much control over illegal means of profit as possible and, through them, acquire legal means of profit.

Structure: Feudal hierarchy of loyal bosses answering to the Capoyabun.

Symbol: The Syndicate has no symbol or logo.

Common Allegiances: Syndicate members are primarily devoted to their own advancement, although some unusual ones have a strong allegiance to their immediate superior or to the Syndicate itself. The rest have allegiances to profit.

Wealth: +45 or even more if the GM wishes. The Syndicate controls a vast criminal empire, so its wealth is extensive.

one rat's nest, the Syndicate moves on, recruits new personnel, and sets up shop elsewhere.

RESOURCES

The Syndicate's resources are difficult to calculate, but they are vast. The organization controls property, liquid wealth, goods (both legal and illegal), and personnel on a scale greater than many nations. The Syndicate is capable of buying, stealing, or bribing its way into acquiring anything it needs.

Paranormal resources are a somewhat different matter. The Capoyabun seems to prefer keeping paragons at arm's length, so most of those working for the Syndicate don't even know it. They're typically freelancers paid by a front company and smart enough not to ask too many questions, or paranormals who owe one of the Syndicate's many vassals a favor and trade their services to pay off the debt. In fact, the Syndicate's stock-in-trade is collecting markers from various important people, paranormal or otherwise, and cashing them in when necessary.

USING THE SYNDICATE

The Syndicate's primary role is that of a shadowy, overarching adversary in control of any number of criminal factions. Characters involved in crime-fighting or dealing with the criminal underworld in any fashion might run up against them without even knowing it, at least at first.

The Syndicate can work as a patron in some *Paragons* series. If the characters are criminals, they might work directly for the organization, helping expand and protect its operations. Other paranormals work for the Syndicate without even knowing it, employed by front-companies and middle-men. Freelancers like the Silber Agency or Foregone Conclusions may do jobs for the Syndicate with or without knowledge of their employer's true identity.

Lastly, paragons looking to make a difference on a global scale can run up against the Syndicate as a kind of "world crime league," making them a useful adversary for a group like the Vanguard or the player characters.

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE SYNDICATE

Who is the Capoyabun, how and why did he start the Syndicate, and how does he keep it growing? These things are ultimately for the GM to decide, using the basic information presented here as a framework, and the style and direction of your *Paragons* series as a guideline. Some possibilities include:

- The Syndicate is a front for another faction or group in this chapter, representing its control over certain criminal elements. Potential candidates include the Initiative, the Pact, the Paramount Club, or the Tribe. The Capoyabun is either a member of the group that actually runs the Syndicate, or their agent.
- The Capoyabun is a walk-in or avatar from the Imageria. He's the literal incarnation of the *concept* of a crime lord, an idea made real. His very nature drives him to take control of criminal operations in the world, even when his abilities could be applied more profitably to legitimate interests. Either his previous identity was wiped clean when he broke-out or he simply never had a prior existence.
- The shadowy crime lord of the Syndicate is a creation of another paragon. He might be one of Dr. Rosemont's rogue figments,



one of Mr. Zero's duplicates (still loyal to the other Mr. Zeroes or a rogue with plans of his own), a psychic puppet of Mindbender, or a cover identity for Proteus (see their descriptions in **Chapter Five**). Thus the entire Syndicate could be a piece in a much larger puzzle. The Syndicate could even be Mr. Zero, with the sinister mastermind replacing middlemen and bosses in organized crime with his own shapechanging duplicates.

- The Syndicate is *itself* a kind of paranormal, or Fortean phenomenon. It's a "living syndicate," a kind of criminal gestalt-mind. The Capoyabun is a nobody, just a mouthpiece for the entity itself. The assimilation of other criminal gangs and syndicates is how it grows, gaining in strength. Gamemasters familiar with the Unity group-mind from the adventure *A More Perfect Union* (the introductory adventure produced for *Paragons*) can use it as a basis for the Syndicate. Indeed, the Unity and the Syndicate (and possibly other paranormal group-minds) could be rivals for control of humanity!
- The head of the Syndicate is apparently a famous criminal mastermind from history or fiction, or at the very least a paranormal who has taken on that identity so completely it might as well be true. Perhaps the Syndicate is even run by a cabal of the greatest criminal minds ever, and the Capoyabun is simply their mouthpiece and cover identity.

LEARNING ABOUT THE SYNDICATE

Learning about the Syndicate is a dangerous business, since the organization values its anonymity. Gathering virtually any useful information is likely to draw the Syndicate's attention unless the investigator is *very* careful (taking a -20 modifier on the Gather Information skill check).

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 15: The Syndicate is an urban legend. Some story about a "secret criminal empire" out to control all organized crime in the world.

DC 20: The Syndicate is real and it's dangerous. The rumors, the stories, the urban legends, they're *all* true.

DC 25: No government or law enforcement organization will acknowledge it, most of the low-level types don't even know it, but they've found clues pointing to a single overarching organization slowly gaining control over various criminal syndicates around the world. The problem is they don't know who's doing it, what they're goals are, or how they're doing it.

DC 30: The Syndicate spreads almost like a virus. It creeps in and, before you know it, it takes over and this crime family or that gang belongs to them. The ones that put up a fight show up in the papers listed as victims in the increasing problem of gang violence.

DC 35: The head of the Syndicate is called the Capoyabun. He's the ultimate crime lord, almost like a fictional character come to life. His background is a total cypher, but his influence is unbelievable.

KNOWLEDGE (STREETWISE)

DC 15: The Syndicate is an urban legend. Some story about a "secret criminal empire" out to control all organized crime in the world.

DC 25: The Syndicate is real and it's dangerous. The rumors, the stories, the urban legends, they're *all* true.

THE CAPOYABUN

PL 9

Str 13	Dex 15	Con 13	Int 17	Wis 18	Cha 16
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Skills: Acrobatics 4 (+6), Bluff 12 (+15), Climb 4 (+5), Concentration 10 (+14), Diplomacy 12 (+15), Escape Artist 8 (+10), Gather Information 14 (+17), Intimidate 10 (+13), Knowledge (art) 8 (+11), Knowledge (business) 12 (+15), Knowledge (civics) 12 (+15), Knowledge (current events) 10 (+13), Knowledge (streetwise) 14 (+17), Knowledge (tactics) 10 (+13), Language 18 (Choose 18 languages and a native language), Notice 8 (+12), Pilot 8 (+10), Search 4 (+7), Sense Motive 12 (+16), Stealth 9 (+11), Swim 5 (+6)

Feats: Assessment, Blind-Fight, Connected, Contacts, Defensive Attack, Defensive Roll 4, Dodge Focus 2, Elusive Target, Evasion, Fearless, Fearsome Presence 4 (20 ft., DC 14), Improved Throw, Leadership, Master Plan, Move-by Action, Power Attack, Sacrifice Minion*, Seize Initiative, Takedown Attack, Uncanny Dodge (auditory), Well-Informed

*As per the Sacrifice power stunt of Duplication.

Note that the Capoyabun's stats do not include ranks of Equipment or Minions: assume he has access to various vehicles, bases of operation, equipment, and an entire organization's worth of minions, as set by the GM.

Powers: None known.

Combat: Attack +11, Grapple +12, Damage +1 (unarmed) or by weapon, Defense +11 (+5 flat-footed), Knockback -5, Initiative +2

Saving Throws: Toughness +5 (+1 flat-footed), Fortitude +5, Reflex +7, Will +10

Abilities 32 + Skills 51 (204 ranks) + Feats 28 + Powers 0 + Combat 40 + Saves 15 = Total 166

MEMBERS

Syndicate members range from the lowest street criminals affiliated with a larger organization to powerful regional crime lords. The Criminal, Gang Leader, and Thug archetypes (see *M&M*, pages 226, 227, and 229, respectively) cover the majority of its members, while the Crime Lord archetype (see *M&M*, page 226) handles the middle-management and the Assassin archetype (see *M&M*, page 226) is good for a Syndicate hit-man. Gamemasters with access to the *Agents of Freedom* and *Iron Age* sourcebooks can find additional archetypes useful for a Syndicate-focused adventure or series.

THE CAPOYABUN

His name is unknown and even his title is spoken in hushed tones and with the greatest respect, because one never knows if he might be listening. No one can say where he came from or how he became the head of the most powerful criminal organization in the world or, if they can, they're smart enough to keep it to themselves.

What little is known about the Capoyabun is this: he's a man of mixed European and Asian heritage, appears to be between 25 and 45 years old or so, and extremely fit. He's skilled in various martial arts, speaks numerous languages, and possesses a keen intellect and appreciation for the finer things in life. He's also utterly ruthless when necessary. If the eyes are the windows to the soul, then his show no sign he even has a soul.

Naturally, there's a great deal of curiosity about the identity of the head of the Syndicate and whether or not he is a paranormal, but smart people know to keep their questions to themselves. The game stats given here are just suggestions; feel free to modify them to suit whatever truth you decide lies behind the Capoyabun's origin.

Potential powers might include: Enhanced Abilities (such as higher Dexterity and Intelligence), Comprehend (he can actually "speak" *any* language), Luck Control (things don't just "happen" where he's concerned) and various Super-Senses (part of the reason he knows so much). More obvious powers can be added at the Gamemaster's discretion.

THE TRIBE

One genius hacker can topple the servers of a major corporation or small government. Imagine hundreds of genius hackers working as one. The Tribe is a movement, a club, and in some ways, an intelligence of its own. Psychologists have long known that a crowd or angry mob behaves in ways that individual members may not be able explain or even realize. The motives and plans of the Tribe are equally mysterious to its own members, the Tribe acts for its own reasons.

The individual member of the tribe may be any of the following: the typical, shy adolescent at home with an internet connection, someone at an internet cafe playing a "harmless" internet game, a worker drone for a major corporation, or an anarchist with a homemade system. Individually they have little or no idea about the ultimate consequences of their actions. They may be aware that they are part of something bigger than themselves; they may even believe that they are in charge. But the tribe has a mind of its own.

The Tribe is an emergent entity like an angry mob, a flock of geese, or a hive of bees. It has its own motives, and its own goals, how-

THE TRIBE

Agenda: The Tribe exists to stretch and cross the boundaries of "legitimate" computing, and to chasten those who would try to horde, hem off, misuse, or monopolize data. As such they are both criminals and crusaders. They are not malicious or evil, but they might perform dangerous pranks (such as playing havoc with the Early Warning Missile Detection System, or fouling automatic train controls), or they might appropriate the bank funds of "big corporations" to fund their own projects. They are not particularly heroic, though they may bring to light government or corporate secrets or help protect the privacy of people in danger of exposure by such groups.

Structure: Most of the world, including the relevant police and intelligence agencies, believes that the Tribe is a group of hackers with some sort of leadership, but that leadership is unknown. When individuals are "caught" participating in Tribe related mischief, they are interrogated, but usually found to be ignorant of any underlying structure. Attempts to infiltrate the Tribe have been remarkably unsuccessful, with government and corporations unwittingly doing the Tribe's business while trying to investigate it. The membership of the tribe fluctuates as needed; some members are keenly aware that they are part of some kind of organization, others have only a vague sense that they are doing something at the Tribe's behest, others are entirely unaware of their involvement. During highly productive coding and hacking sessions members of the tribe can take on an almost trance-like state as they type automatically into their keyboards with no conscious awareness of what they are doing, or of the world around them.

Symbol: The members of the Tribe are non-descript, and could be anyone, but the tribe itself makes use of two "signatures", the first is an ASCII skull and cross bones in its digital signature, the second is a very large unproven prime number in binary code which is spaced throughout any data sent by the Tribe to verify its identity.

Common Allegiances: Members of the Tribe tend to follow the so called "hacker values" of: curiosity, hostility to secrecy, distaste for authority, playfulness, and a compulsive urge to defeat the best computer security.

Wealth: The Tribe does not keep funds for itself, however, it will access bank accounts, especially highly encrypted Swiss and Cayman Island accounts of the super rich, corrupt dictators, or mega-corporations, to fund any project it needs to. If it can accomplish the same simply by commandeering the goods through hacking, it's just as likely to do that. Thus there are few limits to what it can purchase, which typically means it's limited to high tech computing gear, the occasional bribe, and pizza and soda deliveries for its hungry tribesmen during an all-nighter.

ever the tribe does not "exist" independently of the individual members. It 'lives' across a distributed network with no "core" or "brain" anywhere in the world.

The Tribe may manifest in a number of ways. With virtual control over all electronic communication, it can use email and instant messaging to contact (and be contacted by) anyone with internet access. It can send messages over other connected systems: ATMs, electronic street signs, stock tickers, television, SMS phones, and PDAs.

OVERVIEW

STRUCTURE

The Tribe is a distributed network with no individual leadership. Some members are more aware of what they are doing, and are selected (self selected?) to perform the operations that require specific goals, generally those conducting the operation know little, or nothing, of what they are doing. The Tribe itself exists in code they write and in the minds of its members all over the world, still, if enough members were taken offline, or the code were systematically erased across all systems, the Tribe could be effectively eliminated.

BASES OF OPERATIONS

There is no central base of operations, the Tribe is distributed as widely as the Internet itself. However, there are occasions when an operation is localized to some small group working together, at an internet café, a corporate office, or even someone's basement. These operations are the most efficient, but also the most dangerous because that level of intense operation in such a small area is more likely to attract the attention of the authorities. For missions dealing with closed systems, someone would need to infiltrate the building housing the system. These sorts of gatherings are pretty

unusual for the Tribe and might require them working with agents outside their organization.

RESOURCES

The primary resource of the Tribe is its vast collective intellect. The Tribe works as a single organism but has the mental resources of each of its members (plus the vast stores of knowledge on the Web). The Tribe itself is able to orchestrate this cooperative computing through some paranormal means, linking everyone through electronic media, but not requiring any other communication. It might also link to some people and convince them that they are doing something else, if their minds would not consciously agree to the actions of the Tribe. A law abiding person might be tricked into participating in some illegal activity by believing she was merely playing a complex game, but in reality the game was only a faux front end to some complex logical reasoning. The Tribe could conceivably wreak chaos on the world economy by shutting down the Web, or ruin a person's life by destroying his credit or fabricating incriminating evidence, however, the Tribe itself is too abstract to be motivated by jealousy, revenge, or resentment.

USING THE TRIBE

Computer-savvy heroes might find themselves recruited by the Tribe, and work with it either knowingly or not. Other characters might have NPC contacts in the computer industry who are recruited and find themselves the targets of scrutiny by the authorities or jealous corporate (or criminal) groups. The heroes might be forewarned by the Tribe of pending actions by antagonist groups, with the Tribe serving as a sort of electronic oracle. While the Tribe is hyper-intelligent it is not omniscient, and it has a bit of tunnel vision, seeing only its goals, and not the long-term consequences of its actions. The Tribe's various pranks and operations might seriously endan-

TRIBE GAME INFORMATION

When a Tribe member or recruit is deeply engaged in Tribe activities, he or she is constantly being bombarded with subliminal messages and data moving at a fast pace on-screen. Normally it is best to use GM Fiat for this and simply state that the person is fascinated by this effect (see **Fascinated**, *M&M*, page 171), if it qualifies as a setback for a player character then that character should receive a hero point for this.

ger the public and require heroic intervention. Likewise, despite its vast intelligence the Tribe is likely to use public, blunt, and obvious means to achieve a goal when subtlety would be better. So it might liberate a falsely jailed hero by unlocking the entire prison she was kept in. It is also possible that the Tribe might see a technologically- or computer- oriented hero as a threat or competitor and challenge him or her for supremacy, this is more likely if a hero is purported to be a genius by the press, or possesses his or her own factories and labs.

The Tribe is a great source for information, even highly secret information, so long as that information is or was transmitted over the Web. Heroes might be given this information, or try to contact the Tribe itself for help. The Tribe has no real personality or interest in the heroes, no real loyalty, or allegiance. It is therefore not useful as a contact itself, though individual members might be.

It can account for many kinds of "manmade" disasters from massive citywide traffic jams to nuclear power plant meltdowns. Typically such actions will be a distraction in order to draw attention away from its activities, but such acts might also be intentional lures to draw heroes to the scene of something for which the Tribe feels it needs them. For instance it might cause a black out throughout the city, except for an "arrow" pointing to a lonely warehouse, to alert the heroes to some nefarious plot it is aware of but unable to

stop. The heroes may then be forced to deal with both the blackout and the plot the Tribe is trying to stop.

Participation in the Tribe can itself be a mystery; almost like a disease or addiction that afflicts socially awkward nerds causing them minor amnesia, inexplicable behavior, and absences. For both PCs and NPCs this can be a sub-plot or major story in a long-running series. Participation is not always voluntary, and the heroes may need to rescue an unwilling person from its influence. Unexplained deposits in the character's bank accounts, failing to make promised meetings, keeping odd hours, and even strange "dreams" about Tribe activities could all be phenomena linked to the Tribe.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

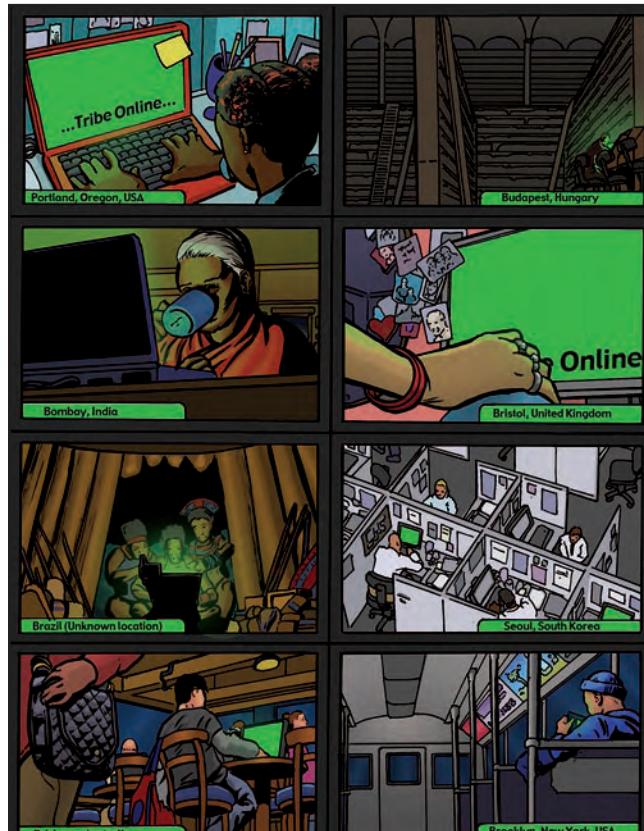
- A young hero (or NPC friend) is accused of hacking into a major gaming company's system to download advanced copies of gaming material. The parent company of the game company is also a military contractor, and several of their top secret plans were copied as well.
- Details from a series of complex robberies are posted on the Web in the form of first person shooter games. Remote controlled robots used in the robberies were connected to the game. When the heroes get involved in the robberies, avatars duplicating the heroes appear in the game.
- Banks report a sudden series of "Robin Hood" style robberies through their electronic systems, transferring millions of dollars from the rich, to the poor and ATMs spewing cash into the air. Attempts to remedy this problem result in rioting as people refuse to give back their sudden windfall.
- A series of high-tech deliveries are diverted from their normal destinations to train cars, and empty warehouses. Dozens of prototype systems are lost to the Tribe, but where are they?
- The Tribe hears of a "round-up" of paragons by elements of a shadow government and begins to send clues to the heroes. The Tribe is afraid to draw attention to itself, so it cloaks the clues in the guise of a terrorist threat.
- The Tribe has no preset capabilities or limitations. If it suits the game, the Tribe can be small and limited to a geographical area, or it can span the entire world. It can be a group of teenagers testing their abilities by hacking into the local high schools' systems, or a guerrilla group hacking into the CIA or other super secret agency. The Tribe may manifest in the physical world using remote controlled robots, or exist entirely in cyberspace.

LEARNING ABOUT THE TRIBE

The following is information characters can learn about the Tribe:

GATHER INFORMATION

DC15: The Tribe is a group of independent genius hackers of unknown morals and goals.



...Tribe Online...

DC20: The Tribe is distributed all over the world, but has dense 'cells' in various high-tech regions such as Silicon Valley, Bangalore, Shang Hai, Seattle, and the Research Triangle in North Carolina.

DC25: The Tribe has no leader and no governing body, but it does have some sort of emergent intelligence all its own. Tribe members themselves may not be aware of what they're doing when they're doing the Tribe's business. The Tribe "hijacks" almost all of its major equipment, weapons, vehicles, and robots. It does not possess its own factories or resources in the traditional sense.

KNOWLEDGE (TECHNOLOGY)

DC15: The Tribe appears to have knowledge well beyond that of normal technology, able to fashion robots, high-tech gadgets, weapons, etc.

DC20: The Tribe cannot be permanently shut down due to its distributed network. It doesn't exist in one location, person, or object.

COMPUTERS

DC 20: The Tribe communicates subliminally through computer screens, using something akin to machine language that taps directly into the human mind.

DC 25: The Tribe has its own coding buried in countless programs, from operating systems to shareware and games. An entirely "clean" (written from the ground up) system would be difficult, if not impossible, for the Tribe to hack.

MEMBERS

Most Tribe members are such only temporarily. They are used to accomplish some end, then rarely, if ever, contacted again. These temporary members are typically just random computer-savvy people. They can be people in positions of use to the Tribe; government agents, military intelligence officers, corporate security agents, or the like. They're generally unaware of their involvement with the Tribe. However, some highly-skilled, -motivated, or -intelligent members may be frequent tribesmen, and may even begin to gain an understanding of the Tribe itself. These members are likely social outcasts (and certainly are once they voluntarily join the Tribe), and are somewhat paranoid about their involvement with the Tribe being discovered. Even the most involved members of the Tribe have no control over the Tribe itself.

VANGUARD

When paranormal danger threatens international stability; they are there to restore order. When disaster leaves thousands injured, homeless, and hungry; they are there with medicine, food, and shelter. When despots use paranormal mercenaries to enforce their tyrannical agendas; they are there to stand for justice and peace. In a world where the line between right and wrong is all too often blurred, one group has dedicated itself to international cooperation and the preservation of integrity. From all around the world, these paragons have pledged themselves and their astounding abilities to this cause. They are the Vanguard.

TRIBE HACKER

PL 3

Str 8	Dex 14	Con 8	Int 16	Wis 14	Cha 8
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Skills: Computers 8 (+11), Knowledge (pop culture) 4 (+7), Knowledge (technology) 6 (+9), Notice 2 (+4)

Feats: Benefit (Tribe membership), Equipment 1

Equipment: Desktop computer, laptop computer, cell phone, PDA, multi-tool

Combat: Attack +0, Grapple -1, Damage -1 (unarmed), Defense +1, Knockback -0, Initiative +2

Saving Throws: Toughness +0, Fortitude -1, Reflex +2, Will +4

Abilities 8 + Skills 5 (20 ranks) + Feats 2 + Powers 0 + Combat 2 + Saves 2 = Total 19

OVERVIEW

Sometime after the Breakout redefined "impossible" for most of the world, an unidentified paranormal appeared on the outskirts of Evanston, Wyoming in the United States and, unwittingly, changed the course of history. Travelers eastbound on Interstate 80 towards Evanston from Utah reported a strange figure staggering down the middle of the highway, seemingly bound for Evanston from parts unknown. Described by witnesses as 'bewildered and possibly intoxicated,' the unusual figure was apparently unaware of the danger he was in from late evening traffic, prompting the intervention of the state's highway patrol. It wasn't until local authorities attempted to detain the individual for his own safety that the situation became dangerous. Confused and frustrated, the paranormal lashed out at the officers confronting him, killing them instantly. As the situation quickly escalated, the frightened paranormal tried to escape only to be confronted again by Evanston police, resulting in a confrontation that all but destroyed several blocks of commercial property. Within hours, National Guard units arrived in Evanston intent on containing the situation. Unable to cause even the slightest harm to the now-enraged superhuman confronting them, the situation spiraled out of control. The ensuing altercation caused millions of dollars in property damage and cost the lives of hundreds of people. Although the paranormal escaped and was never clearly identified, the devastation was shocking...particularly to the millions of spectators who watched the events unfold live on news channels across the globe.

The 'Evanston Incident' solicited a panicked response from all corners of the world. Paranormal events had been covered in news reports before, but this was the first time that the danger posed by paranormals had been made starkly, staggeringly clear to the masses. While government officials in every major country had been aware for sometime that paranormals with both criminal and terrorist agendas were a very real and very dangerous threat to both national and international security, the Evanston Incident moved these concerns from the realm of possibility into reality. Worst of all, such dangers had been realized in full view of the public. Fearful that paranormal monsters now lurked around every corner, ready to explode amidst unwary citizens at a moment's notice, the world's populace demanded a response from their leadership. Within days of the events in Evanston, anti-paranormal demonstrations were organized in major cities across the globe, many of which devolved into riots. In several countries, gangs of self-styled "witch-hunters" assaulted and, in many cir-



cumstances, publicly executed suspected paranormals in an effort to reclaim the world for 'normal' men. The chaos grew and soon threatened to consume international safety and peace of mind.

As national governments scrambled to respond to the demands of a frightened populace, a ray of hope appeared, albeit from an unexpected source. Scant days after the events in Evanston, the United Nations Paranormal Action Executive, or PAX, a sub-committee of the UN Security Council, met in a carefully secured closed session. The PAX committee had been formed, initially, to study Fortean phenomena as it appeared with greater frequency around the globe and to make recommendations to the Security Council on paranormal occurrences. Events in Evanston were, obviously, extremely concerning to the global community but, PAX had never before met in a closed session. While the exact nature of the discussion that occurred that day was never disclosed, two things are known. First, the meeting lasted, uninterrupted, for over seven hours. Second, four individuals were in attendance at that meeting who had never attended of meeting of PAX before. Two of these individuals were United States Army Colonel Jackson Cross and a New York criminal psychologist named Jeremiah Prophet, while the other two were later identified as the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Governor of the State of New York.

On the morning following this meeting, PAX officials held a press conference on the steps of United Nations plaza. The Secretary-General of the UN announced the formation of a new organization that would be dedicated to preserving international peace and security in response to the potential threats posed to both by the "amoral and unconscionable use" of paranormal abilities. "If indi-

vidual nations," the Secretary-General said, "are incapable of taking action to deal with the threat to international security posed by these new phenomena, then the UN must be at the vanguard of such an effort." As the astonished media listened, the Secretary-General went on to say that this new organization, code-named 'Vanguard', would operate under sanction from the United Nations. The then-Governor of the State of New York, took the podium and announced that the state, as a sign of goodwill and support, had donated Governor's Island to the United Nations in order to provide Vanguard with a base of operations. Colonel Jackson Cross, stepped forward to introduce himself as Executive Director of Vanguard Global Operations, and to introduce Vanguard Mission Team Alpha: Luminary, Raindance, Valkyrie, and Vector. "These," Colonel Cross stated, "are the first of many we will recruit to aid in our mission to ensure the safety, security, and sovereignty of the nations of the world."

Today, Vanguard is a shining example of what the nations of the world are capable of when they work together. Although not always greeted warmly by every nation on the globe, Vanguard mission teams are typically a welcome sight in a time of crisis; be it a natural disaster or a Fortean danger. The first line of defense in the war against paranormal terrorism and crime on an international scale, Vanguard and its members are some the most visible and recognizable paranormals operating in the world today.

STRUCTURE

Vanguard is structured on a paramilitary model roughly analogous to international police agencies like Interpol and Europol. At the top of the command structure is the Executive Director of Global Operations,

who oversees the bureaucracy and support staff that allows the agency to function on day-to-day basis. The Executive Director is also responsible for Vanguard's relationship with outside agencies and organizations, including local governments and law enforcement agencies, and is answerable directly to both PAX and the Secretary-General of the UN. The current Executive Director of Vanguard is United States Army Colonel Jackson Cross. Immediately beneath the Executive Director is the Deputy Director of Field Operations, a position currently held by Jeremiah Prophet. The Deputy Director of Field Operations is responsible for coordinating the activities of the true heart of Vanguard, the mission teams.

Vanguard's mission teams form the core of the agency's ability to respond to global threats. Recruited from all corners of the globe, all mission team operatives operate under authority from the United Nations and have international police powers. Generally composed of between four and eight individuals, the mission teams are assembled as needed from those agents who are both immediately available and best suited to the task at hand. One agent, usually the most senior, acts as the team's Field Commander. Several mission teams exist on a permanent basis, as is the case with Mission Team Alpha, which is tasked with providing ongoing paranormal protection to both the Guardtower and UN Headquarters. Simultaneously, members of Mission Team Alpha are often called upon to reinforce other mission teams in the field when those teams encounter more opposition than they are able to deal with on their own. As the mission teams are the public face of Vanguard, all agents currently operating as part of one are held to a strict code of conduct that includes working respectfully with local authorities whenever possible and protecting human life and safety above all else.

BASES OF OPERATIONS

Vanguard is based out of a high-tech facility that dominates most of the southern half of Governor's Island, a 172-acre island in Upper New York Bay approximately a half-mile from the southern tip of Manhattan. Generally referred to as "The Guardtower", the sprawling complex employs a staff of over 500 and acts as the center of both administrative and technical operations for Vanguard. From here, Jeremiah Prophet and Mission Team Alpha coordinate the activities of other Vanguard mission teams in the field. The Executive Director of Vanguard Operations, meanwhile, maintains offices at United Nations Plaza, where he is within easy reach of both PAX and the Secretary-General.

RESOURCES

Vanguard's funding seems almost limitless but the exact source of the funding is something of a mystery. While the United Nations does provide the agency with substantial monetary support, the agency's expenditures clearly exceed that funding by many millions of dollars. Even with the subsidy provided by donations from corporations such as WorldTree Technologies, Vanguard's operations should regularly bankrupt the agency, but such is clearly not the case.

Regardless of the source of its funding, Vanguard has enormous resources at its disposal. Through the United Nations and its members, Vanguard has access to a wide-array of military-grade equipment and thanks to Valkyrie's able assistance, Vanguard also has a wide-array of high-tech hardware available nowhere else; most notably, the supercomputer ODIN (see **Valkyrie** in **Chapter Five**). Additionally, Vanguard maintains excellent relations with other international police agencies such as Interpol and Europol, with whom Vanguard shares information freely. This, in turn, gives Vanguard operatives access to the legal and criminal databases of those agencies.

Arguably, the most impressive resource Vanguard has to draw upon is the United Nations itself. All representatives of Vanguard are endowed by the United Nations with international police powers, allowing them to act as deputized police officers in the course of their duties—so long as the nation in which they're operating recognizes those powers. Further, all members of the Vanguard organization are considered ambassadors and, as such, are afforded diplomatic immunity while operating on the soil of any UN member nation. The protection and goodwill of the United Nations is a boon that no Vanguard operative can do without.

USING VANGUARD

Vanguard provides an ideal organization for a new group of player characters. As Vanguard is constantly recruiting new paranormal operatives (see **Prophet** in **Chapter Five**), opportunities to join the organization are boundless. The player characters could begin the game as new recruits still in training just as easily as they could join the organization later on. If they aren't recruited by Vanguard directly, they could easily run into a Vanguard mission team during the course of the series, perhaps developing a friendly rivalry with the members of the mission team. If the player characters have already founded a group of their own, they might be approached by Vanguard to perform a mission as a subcontracted

VANGUARD

Agenda: Vanguard is committed to enforcing international law and protecting people when paranormal dangers threaten. It is also committed to furthering the goals of the United Nations charter, including peace, economic development, human rights, and social progress whenever and wherever it can.

Structure: Vanguard is a paramilitary organization, split into mission teams controlled by a central authority and supported by the United Nations Paranormal Action Executive, or PAX.

Symbol: A golden "V" atop the PAX emblem, which is a stylized white dove over the UN logo of a globe surrounded by olive branches. Vanguard mission team members wear the emblem as a shoulder patch on their uniforms, as do support personnel.

Common Allegiances: Members of Vanguard are devoted to the organization's cause, so allegiances include human rights, individual (typically home) countries, justice, the United Nations, Vanguard, and world peace.

Wealth: Vanguard has considerable resources at its disposal, only some of which comes from UN funding. The organization has an effective wealth bonus of +40, although large purchases must be cleared through Vanguard central command.

mission team, paid by Vanguard, but not officially part of the organization—leaving open the opportunity of making the relationship official later on.

Vanguard could also prove to be a good nemesis for a group of player characters. A GM could decide, for example, that some of the mystery surrounding the organization has a nefarious undertone and that Vanguard is ultimately up to no good, making Vanguard and its mission team operatives the central antagonists of a campaign. Perhaps Vanguard is an elaborate front for the ambitions of a character such as Mindbender or, alternately, the Syndicate may have infiltrated Vanguard at a variety of levels and turned the agency's mission teams into high-powered pawns for their schemes. In some settings, Vanguard may have sinister motives of its own, perhaps driven by Prophet's visions, taking steps to prevent (or ensure) some future events.

LEARNING ABOUT VANGUARD

The following is information player characters could potentially learn about Vanguard:

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 10: Vanguard is an international police and anti-terrorist organization associated with the United Nations. Vanguard employs a number of paranormal agents in its operations, several of whom have become quite famous. Most notable among these are the members of Vanguard Mission Team Alpha.

DC 15: Vanguard is answerable directly to the United Nations Paranormal Action Executive (PAX) and the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

DC 20: The exact reason why PAX agreed to sanction and fund Vanguard's operations is a mystery. Many theories as to why are circulated regularly.

DC 25: The Governor of the State of New York is rumored to have agreed to donate Governor's Island as the base of Vanguard's operations because of some information he was provided by paranormal clairvoyant. Whatever it was, it was clearly convincing.

KNOWLEDGE (CIVICS)

DC 10: Vanguard is an international police and anti-terrorist agency operating under official sanction from the United Nations.

DC 15: Vanguard operatives are able to exercise international police powers in the course of their duties. They are also considered ambassadors and, as such, have diplomatic immunity while operating in the territory of any member nation of the UN.

DC 20: Vanguard isn't welcomed universally. In particular, the agency isn't regarded kindly by countries such as North Korea and the People's Republic of China or most of the Middle East and, to date, no Vanguard mission team has operated publicly in either country.

MEMBERS

Vanguard's members are recruited from countries around the globe. To ensure that their personal motivations are in keeping with Vanguard's mission statement, potential paranormal operatives are observed carefully before being approached. As a result, Vanguard's agents are as diverse as they are genuinely dedicated to their work.

XTREME! ACTION COMBAT CHAMPIONSHIPS

If you want to see the *toughest*, most *extreme* paragon fighters in the world go up against each other in astounding, *earth-shaking* battles, the XTREME! Action Combat Championships are for you! Tune in to watch these champions duke it out in no-holds-barred competitions, where the winner takes all and the loser leaves in disgrace. See paranormal powers like you've never experienced before! We allow it all, folks: from flight to fireballs, magic to mind control. See superhumans tear up the landscape as they obliterate their opponents, then rake in the cash. Who will win this year's Championship Crown? Tune in to see!

OVERVIEW

The XTREME! Action Combat Championships put on violent, paranormal spectacles for a rabid audience. These exhibitions are like professional wrestling for paragons. Everything about the XTREME! matches is over the top, with flash, bang, bling, and as much razzle-dazzle as the marketing and technological wizards can pour into them. The announcer's voice thunders from the television set as the animated logos explode across the screen, then the cameras flash to the contestants amid deafening cheers piped in from spectators with front-row seats. The company creates elaborate sets that represent everything from crowded downtown metropolises to jungles, then scatters cameras everywhere, and pits their paragon "athletes" against each other for the viewing public to consume. The fights never go to the death, but they aren't staged, either. Paragons compete against each other for glory and cash.

XTREME! also has a number of specialty combats, such as two teams of paragons facing off, or a military squad going against a paragon. Such exhibitions are especially popular. The organization is also known for hosting grand tournaments, a couple times a year, in which *any* paragon can show up to compete. These competitions are highly publicized and function much like reality shows crossed with extreme sports. The champions of these tournaments earn glory, cash, fame, and the option to be slotted into XTREME!'s roster of contract fighters who participate in the year-long championship brackets.

STRUCTURE

Television mogul Joseph Richter is responsible for the XTREME! Action Combat Championships. Before the Breakout, he owned several small media properties, including regional wrestling and fight leagues and other sports shows. He kept his eye out for the next big thing, and when the Breakout occurred, he knew he had it. He pounced on the opportunity and is now the head of XTREME!, one of the most popular "sports" organizations in the world. Richter is still the driving force behind the organization and ensures that the testosterone and energy remain ramped up and that the organization offers sufficient rewards to collect some of the greatest—and most impressive-looking—paragons in the world.

Richter is CEO, but he's smart enough to delegate most of the organization's operations to others. These underlings include Shirley Goodman, vice president of recruitment, George Grace, vice presi-

dent of marketing, and Theodosia Lane, vice president of licensing. Of course these and other corporate leaders of the organization have a great many people working for them, from the popcorn-sellers on up.

Like any organization, XTREME! is divided into a number of divisions, including the aforementioned recruitment, marketing, and licensing. Many others also exist, from janitorial services to human resources to technicians. The closest parallels to XTREME! are other popular and professional sports organizations. These organizations have witnessed a decrease in popularity since the Breakout, and many of their corporate leaders and players view XTREME! with a certain amount of bitterness.

BASES OF OPERATIONS

XTREME!'s corporate headquarters is in New York, New York, but regional headquarters appear throughout the world. They are most prevalent in America (which has 27 such headquarters), Asia (19), and Europe (13), but at least one regional headquarters appears in every continent except Antarctica. The regional headquarters organize local matches and coordinate with corporate to create the yearly championships, which is the most famous match the organization puts on.

In addition to these headquarters, XTREME! has six grand arenas scattered throughout the world: two in America, one in Spain, one in China, one in Japan, and one in Australia. Additional grand arenas are planned, or under construction, in Canada, Mexico, South Korea, the United Kingdom, Russia, Brazil, and South Africa.

The grand arenas are where the fights actually take place. Each is huge: several miles from one end to the other. Over many months, workers turn an arena into whatever climate and landscape that the corporation dictates; these landscapes are called "battlefields" in XTREME! lingo. Such battlefields can be almost anything: downtown metropolises, jungles, snow-shrouded mountains, tropical islands, volcanic cavern complexes, and so forth. At any given time, each of the world's grand arenas contains a different battlefield. The organization flies its athletes to the appropriate arena for the upcoming match.

Tiny cameras and microphones are scattered throughout the arenas, as are a variety of devices that decontaminate the arena, clean up dangerous refuse and gases, and otherwise make it safe for normal people to enter after a paranormal battle. They also have a number of holographic emitters that depict certain elements of a battlefield that the organization cannot otherwise represent, like bystanders on a street or animals in a forest. The projections react realistically (though not perfectly) during battles, further enhancing the illusion. The fans love it when a holographic person gets fried in a fireball or crushed beneath a toppling building. Some critics have pointed out that XTREME!'s holographic people have far more blood than a normal person, and it is far more likely to go spurting out at high velocities. These allegations are true—and the fans love it.

Each grand arena also contains spectator boxes. They are limited in number and are hot commodities; people fly hundreds or thousands of miles to see a fight live. One reason for this is that seeing a fight from the spectator boxes is the *only* way to see it live; normally the fights are aired a few hours after their completion, so the technicians have a chance to combine the images in the best way. Each spectator box has a number of monitors



that show the battlefield from various cameras, as well as controls to switch to different views. The boxes are well-appointed, with couches, chairs, and a full bar. They are, understandably, expensive to book.

RESOURCES

XTREME! is a large corporation, and has access to all the normal resources of such an organization. Since XTREME! is a media corporation, it also has the ability to reach the public. XTREME! management decides which advertisements their shows air; they usually air the advertisements that pay them the most money, but on occasion feature advertisements and messages that promote their personal or corporate beliefs.

XTREME! also has paranormal resources; specifically, it has its fighters. Over two dozen paragons have long-term contracts with XTREME! and appear in many shows and battles throughout the year. XTREME! pays its paragons well, but also controls a number of their rights, such as publicity and commercial appearances. If you want a popular paragon fighter to appear on your show or your advertisement or to appear next to you during your campaign speech, you need merely get XTREME!'s permission—which requires yet more money.

Because XTREME! controls celebrities, it has access to a number of less tangible resources such as influence over a number of powerful individuals and corporations. Its athletes can influence an entire generation, and many of them are friends with other powerful paragons or business heads. Also, individually the paragon athletes are powerful; together they are a truly devastating force.

XTREME! ACTION COMBAT CHAMPIONSHIPS

Agenda: To make a ridiculous amount of money by portraying the coolest, flashiest, most testosterone-pumped paragon fights anywhere!

Structure: Corporation.

Symbol: The XTREME! Corporation has several symbols. The most popular appears on television screens during the fights and commercials. Two chrome figures exhibiting different powers in the center of the screen, their foreheads pressed together, and fists raised. The word "XTREME!" comes crashing in on top of them, then "Action" and "Combat" come flying up from below, clanging into the rest of the logo with a slight bounce, then "Champions" explodes through the center. When it can't animate the logo (on paper, for example), the corporation often uses the same logo, but with the word "Championships" beneath everything else. The corporation also uses a stylized "X" on occasion.

Common Allegiances: Wealth, fame.

Wealth: +35

XTREME!'s grand arenas also contain technology unseen elsewhere. On occasions in the past, the corporation has rented these spaces to movie makers or millionaire thrill-seekers. Theoretically, someone could use an arena to stage—and present to the public—a detailed falsehood of just about anything he wanted.

USING XTREME! ACTION COMBAT CHAMPIONSHIPS

The most obvious way to involve the heroes with XTREME! is for them to become athletes and compete in an action combat match. This method is a good one; fighting for XTREME! is a way for heroes to vent their violent tendencies and make some money doing it. Glory hounds will appreciate the chance to win fame and respect by thrashing their opponents on national television.

Methods to recruit the heroes in this way are varied. XTREME! might hold an open competition, inviting any and all paragons to compete. A rival paragon (or group of paragons) might challenge the heroes to such a match. The heroes might see an important character—a villain or someone with vital knowledge, for example—on an XTREME! match and need to enroll in the organization so they can speak to her. The corporation could have some sort of internal problem (from mundane corruption to takeover by paranormal creatures), and the only way for the heroes to get on the inside is to sign up as athletes. XTREME! is also a good origin point for heroes; a player might decide that his character was an XTREME! athlete before undertaking whatever adventure begins the series.

You might involve the heroes with XTREME! in other ways as well. As a large corporation that controls paranormals, XTREME! can be an obstacle or resource for the heroes. If they get on someone's good side, XTREME! might allow one or two athletes to join them on a particular mission or otherwise grant them aid. XTREME! has talented—and paranormal—medical staff to attend to the athletes after a match, and the heroes might avail themselves of it. Of course, if the heroes aren't already good friends with someone in a high place, XTREME! could demand some sort of recompense for such aid.

If you use XTREME! as an obstacle, the heroes might find their investigations mysteriously stymied. They eventually find out that XTREME!, is throwing money around to keep the heroes from finding out important facts. Why the corporation might do this depends on your series and what role you want XTREME! to play within it.

A final possibility is to make the XTREME! Action Combat Championships merely a front for something else—something possibly helpful, but probably sinister. The corporation might lure paranormals into signing up, hoping to win glory and money, then perform fiendish experiments on them. They might replace them with shapeshifters who engage in XTREME! matches for a time to throw off suspicion, then move out into the world with a new agenda. XTREME! could be run by a group of supervillains who use the corporation as a cover so people don't start wondering why all these paragons are hanging out together.

XTREME!'s intended role is simple: it's a way for the heroes to fight other paragons! You can use it like modern-day gladiatorial combat, pitting paranormal fighters against each other for cash and recognition. You might use it for some simple paranormal head-bashing, especially after an adventure focused on investigation and legwork. Most players (and characters) enjoy exercising their combat skills.

XTREME! is also a source for other paragons. An NPC or villain might be involved. The heroes can see paragons battling each other (and other things) on national TV, so they have an idea of what paragons can do—or at least, what some of them can do.

LEARNING ABOUT XTREME! ACTION COMBAT CHAMPIONSHIPS

GATHER INFORMATION

This check represents information characters can gain by asking questions in the media and paranormal communities. Word of their interest could easily get back to XTREME!'s athletes and moguls, who may or may not care.

DC 10: XTREME! is just what it appears to be: the rough equivalent of paranormal boxing. The corporation's goal is to make money.

DC 20: XTREME! *claims* its fights don't go to the death, but rumors say that in a couple cases, fighters who immediately "retired" following a difficult match did, in fact, die during the fight. (The truth of this rumor is for you to decide.)

KNOWLEDGE (CURRENT EVENTS)

Just about everyone has at least heard of the XTREME! Action Combat Championships. How much someone knows depends upon how much she watches TV and is otherwise immersed in entertainment media.

DC 10: The XTREME! Action Combat Championships are televised spectacles in which paranormals fight each other in a variety of simulated environments. It includes a lot of explosions, animated logos, loud noises, and exclamation points.

DC 15: Over two dozen signed paragon athletes compete in these games. XTREME! also has a number of specialty events, including those in which *any* paranormal can show up and compete for a spot on the permanent roster—or just for fun, cash, and glory.

DC 20: XTREME!'s founder, Joe Richter, still calls the shots at the organization's top.

MEMBERS

XTREME! athletes are all paragons. They range in overall power, but most are at least power level 10. The public likes powers that are flashy and visually interesting, so a lot of XTREME!'s competitors have powers like Flight, Blast, Alternate Form, and the like. Since XTREME! matches are all about beating people up with paranormal powers, the athletes' powers are usually dangerous—powers like ESP and Datalink are rare, while Strike and Boost are common. However, as combat takes place in a variety of environments and the corporation encourages creative solutions (at least to a limited degree), some of the competitors have powers that are less obviously dangerous: Darkness Control and Illusion, for example.

XTREME! athletes have snazzy nicknames and costumes that range from over-the-top to actually-cool. Most of those on the permanent roster are conceited. The current champion is Star Phoenix Fire, a blond, cocky jerk with a variety of fire-based and healing powers. Like most of the competitors, he knows exactly how to play to the crowd and is skilled at talking to the media.

ZERO LATITUDE

Called terrorists by some and heroes by others, the members of Zero Latitude are the paragons most devoted to saving the world... from itself.

OVERVIEW

After the Breakout, in the earliest days of paranormalcy, many people who found themselves able to do the impossible sought to emulate the fictional heroes of their youth and "save the world." Those early idealists accomplished more individually than any one person had done previously. A flying paragon with the power to transmute matter created ozone in Antarctica, and helped to mitigate the damage caused by pollution; an aquatic marvel who spoke with dolphins and whales convinced them to relocate to safer environs; a mind manipulator inspired lust in pandas to get them to mate.

But no matter how much any one person did to reverse damage, each could do little more than stem the tide of the most egregious assaults on the planet. Within months, several like-minded paragons had gathered together, and they quickly reached a conclusion: the only way to restore the balance of the ecosystem was to be as proactive as possible, taking rapid action against those forces (most of them manmade) causing the problems. They picked an easy initial target on which to test their teamwork, and managed to utterly intimidate the destructive loggers along the northern Brazilian edge of the Amazon rainforest into ceasing their activities.

Thus was forged Zero Latitude, an organization that claimed its name from both the ruthlessness of their mission and the site of their victory (and eventual headquarters): the equator. Its members call themselves ZeLats (pronounced "zealots"), while detractors use the obvious label of "Zeros."

Zero Latitude has a standard uniform: hemp-based green camouflage shirt with black pants and their sigil emblazoned on the shirt

sleeve and one pant leg. Members are encouraged to customize this outfit according to their own desires or power needs, and they can also dispense with it altogether (although this is usually only done for those with a need for undercover operations or some other need to be discrete; excessive individuality is seen by many ZeLats as antithetical to their unified goal).

Although many paragons lay claim to being defenders of the planet, few have the devotion of the ZeLats. Their primary philosophy centers around a policy of "act first"; they decry world leaders' efforts to postpone, put off, or sidestep attempts at curbing the environmental impact of their citizens, and they are intent on acting on the "truth" as science knows it. However, they are also keenly aware of the fragile nature of the world's geopolitical realities and recognize that any direct action that angered any of the great global powers too much could do more harm than good. In particular, they fear acting too forcefully and inspiring a retaliatory strike with nuclear weapons; regardless of the effects on Zero Latitude themselves (and they do have contingency plans to survive such an attack), the environmental impact would be devastating and almost certainly not worth whatever short-term goal was achieved.

The ZeLats' greatest success story to date has been in the Amazon rainforest, where they have managed to intimidate most loggers and deforesters into curtailing their activities. They have managed to cut the annual forest loss by 70%, although they find themselves stymied by their inability to do more; attempting to regularly patrol over a million square miles would be a daunting task for even the most powerful of paragons.

Some other possible goals or actions of Zero Latitude (either past or present) include accumulation of rare or endangered animal and plant species, perhaps building an "ark" or genetic repository; thwarting any new significant land development in lightly populated regions of the world; planting acres of new trees; and protecting and restoring the poles' ice shelves. They are also likely to attempt to strike out at human activities if they believe such will not have global repercussions. For example, they have stopped two civil wars (one in Africa and another in South America) where participants were setting fires to flush out antagonists, killing endangered animals for game, and planting landmines. In both cases, the ZeLats believed—correctly—that these internal conflicts were off the radar of the geopolitical scene and were thus unlikely to inspire retaliation.

ZERO LATITUDE

Agenda: Through various means, humanity works tirelessly to destroy the only planet in the universe known to support human life. Zero Latitude seeks to stop them, by any means necessary.

Structure: Zero Latitude is a loose affiliation of paragons united by a common goal. Although part of one team, they are organized into smaller subteams, or cells, each controlled by a leader.

Symbol: A circle with a curved line in the center and a three-line "lightning bolt" extending vertically through it. The circle is the Earth, the curve is the equator, and the lightning bolt symbolizes Zero Latitude's "act first" philosophy.

Common Allegiances: Planet, Zero Latitude, Anti-Industrialism, Nature, Chaos.

Wealth: 21

Zero Latitude is as much a philosophy as it is a movement, and they recognize that global change will only be affected if they can sway enough of the general populace to their way of thinking. As such, they spend considerable resources taking their case to the court of public opinion, relying heavily on Internet chat rooms, blogs, videos, and similar information services. Of all groups that come into conflict with other paragons on a frequent basis, Zero Latitude probably has more widespread support and sympathizers among non-members than any other organization. Before the Breakout a common defense against such problems was, "What can one person do?" Zero Latitude has turned the question around, asking "What *can't* one person do?"

This philosophical bent means that Zero Latitude is often also at conflict with itself, and the danger exists for it to fragment at any time into splinter organizations. Some of the tough questions they face are: is it desirable to disrupt the natural world while trying to restore some previous balance (such as attempting to undo the damage caused by invasive species)? Is it good to use unnatural techniques—such as cloning—to attempt to restore the balance? Is humanity even part of the natural order, and if it is, can their subjection of Earth be considered "natural?"

There is one more disturbing trend within Zero Latitude that its members won't admit publicly: a non-trivial percentage of the organization holds that the eradication (or culling) of humanity is the only way to save the Earth. Although the leader of Zero Latitude and most cell leaders do not believe this currently, a large enough group of ZeLats that believed this could change the entire organization to one that is much more bloodthirsty. A small yet growing faction within Zero Latitude believes that the establishment and

foundation of a nation—especially one with nuclear and paranormal resources—is the only way to carry enough weight in the geopolitical community to affect real change. This notion frightens those in the outside world almost as much as it does some ZeLats.

STRUCTURE

Zero Latitude is a cell-based organization, with clusters of four to six members feeding into the larger whole. In general, there are just three levels of participants: the leader of Zero Latitude, the leaders of individual cells, and everyone else.

BASES OF OPERATIONS

Zero Latitude claims as its base of operations a large disc-shaped saucer, referred to as Biosphere Zero, invented by a super-genius. Capable of supporting about 100 individuals indefinitely, it houses a self-contained environment. In fact, the structure is space-worthy, although it only possesses the energy to get into orbit once. More amazingly, the structure is equipped with paratechnology that does two "impossible" things: It feeds off the combined psychic trauma of the bio-matter being harvested within the Amazon rainforest, and uses that energy for all its power needs *and* to vibrate the entire complex out of phase with the material world, shifting it into the Reaches of the Imageria. It only manifests within the physical world long enough for occupants to enter or leave, and then only does so according to mission requirements or times scheduled infrequently—no more than once a week. ZeLats have described some aspects of their headquarters to the outside world, including its powering system. They note, with no small degree of smugness, that the world has the ability to cut off its base's energy, if it could just stop the senseless destruction of the rainforest; Biosphere Zero's continued power gives them ample justification that they still have work to do.

Beyond this, Zero Latitude maintains temporary bases around the globe as necessary, generally choosing accommodations with as little environmental impact as possible (including camping in the wild, if an option). One added benefit of this policy is that Zero Latitude tends to make less of an impact on their environment, making it more challenging to track them down (+5 to any Search difficulties or other checks that require physical evidence).

RESOURCES

Zero Latitude has relatively meager financial means, in terms of actual cash assets; attempting to cultivate and amass capital ties one to the very consumer-industrial complex they believe is a primary cause of the world's woes. However, they possess some of the greater (though radical-minded) intellects of the paranormal world, and they have little scruples about taking what they need. In addition, as Zero Latitude is a lifestyle more than a team, its members—most of them paragons—are considered "on call" for most other members, giving them much greater paranormal resources than other higher-staffed organizations.

USING ZERO LATITUDE

Some players may want to take up the challenge of playing Zero Latitude members, exploring their devotion to the cause and their self-removal from society while fighting the latest "environmental threat of the week." However, most PCs will probably encounter them in two major capacities: thwarting one of their plans or finding them on their side in an adventure that threatens the well-being of the world.



Alternatively, it might be possible to involve the heroes in Zero Latitude by having them become recruits as "sleeper" agents, working from within to garner enough information to permanently shut it down. Of course, this gambit requires the PCs to side with the ZeLats enough to gain their trust (perhaps doing repugnant or "evil" tasks), and they always run the risk of realizing they have too much in common with the enemy to go through with their mission.

Zero Latitude is both a philosophy and an organization, and is designed to present difficult questions to player character paranormals: does might make right? If you have the might and believe an organization to be correct in its ideals, is it still possible to act against them with a clear conscience? Does being a paragon mean you have a devotion to reshaping the world, or should you not get involved on things of that scale?

Likewise, it's intended to spark debate, both from within a group of PCs and with the rest of the world. If you find yourself agreeing with Zero Latitude's philosophies but disagreeing with their actions, what are the alternatives? Can the ZeLats be tamed or otherwise convinced to work with humanity?

Finally, Zero Latitude is one of the groups most likely to act during any world-shaking crises, which may place heroic player characters in the difficult position of needing to forge a temporary alliance with them. For their part, most ZeLats will gladly work alongside others in such an event, and probably use the opportunity to try to convert the PCs: "You know, if you'd ever like to make saving the world a full-time occupation..."

LEARNING ABOUT ZERO LATITUDE

Zero Latitude is surprisingly open with their goals and philosophies, mostly via the Internet (most nations' media outfits refuse to give much room to their ideas).

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 10: This level of success will reveal most Zero Latitude philosophies: cell-based environmental fighters who believe in quick and decisive action. This level will also reveal many success stories: species saved from extinction, regions protected, and so on.

DC 15: Zero Latitude glosses over more egregious results of their activities (such as how attacks on slash-and-burn farmers in a region may result in much death and suffering due to starvation), but this level of research will reveal evidence that their actions obviously place humanity below their primary concerns.

DC 20: Zero Latitude seems to be at conflict with itself over how to handle the continued existence of humans. Most members believe that some incidental human casualties are unavoidable and not to be dwelt upon (although there are a few diehard pacifist members), but some believe the organization should do more to eliminate the "scourge" that is humanity.

DC 25: Several members of Zero Latitude have a plan to forge a new nation, using the threat of nuclear weapons as a bargaining tool to affect real change.

MEMBERS

There are between a dozen and two dozen paranormal members of Zero Latitude. In addition, there are affiliate members, who are usually normals. The affiliates are afforded no rights in the organization, but they may occasionally donate money or resources—such as lobbying governments or sabotaging factories—to the cause.

Membership requires completion of a task set by a cell leader; this initiation rite varies from cell to cell, but generally consists of two parts. The first part involves performance of an action that would be considered dangerous or repugnant by the rest of society, such as the destruction (without fire) of an oil refinery. The second part is a philosophical debate with the cell leader, where the leader attempts to determine the candidate's worthiness and devotion to the cause. There are no right or wrong answers during this debate, but revealing that one's dedication is weak or that you're involved for some ulterior motive is usually enough to be denied membership. If successful, the candidate becomes a probationary member of a cell, elevating to full member status if accepted by the leader of Zero Latitude (who may well require another task or a separate debate).

Leaders cannot be challenged during a mission or other times of crisis, but otherwise leadership transitions democratically. If anyone challenges a cell leader, the two engage in debate in front of the rest of the cell (the other cell members may or may not be invited to participate, depending on the wishes of the current leader). The matter is then left to a vote of all cell members, with a simple majority winning. The absolute leader of Zero Latitude is supposed to be a more stable position; a challenger for that position must first be a cell leader and must win by a two-thirds majority of all available ZeLats, but otherwise the procedure (including the debate) is the same. The two-thirds majority drops to a simple majority if the leader is captured or killed.



CHAPTER FIVE: GODS & MONSTERS

With the Breakout and the advent of the Paragon Age, nothing is impossible, and nothing demonstrates this more than the variety of paranormals appearing in the world. This chapter presents a cross-section of paragons, great and small, for use in a *Paragons* series as supporting characters, allies, rivals, or enemies, or possibly all of these, depending on the circumstances. Many of the paranormals in this chapter have ties with the organizations and factions in **Chapter Four** and can be used in conjunction with them. Others stand on their own, fitting into the series wherever you wish.

As with other elements of the *Paragons* setting, these characters are intended to be modular: Use all, some, or even none of them as best suits your own concept for the series. Change around their histories, relationships, goals, or traits as needed, and feel free to eliminate characters you find redundant, particularly if they occupy a niche you want to free up for a GM- or player-made character in the series.

LEARNING ABOUT THE CHARACTERS

Each character in this chapter has a section providing guidelines for Gather Information and often Knowledge checks involving that character. These sections give you a quick reference guide to what the characters in your series can find out through routine investigation or what they might already know from specialized knowledge.

These guidelines are just that, modify them as you see fit to suit the style and background of your series. In particular, if paragons are a covert phenomenon in your setting, you may want to increase the DCs of some of the checks by +5 or more to reflect the general difficulty of finding out anything about a paranormal. (You'll also want to eliminate some of the more public characters from the series, but that's a separate matter.)

Keep in mind the guidelines for Gather Information checks (see *M&M*, page 48), particularly the chance of others noticing inquiries

into particular people or topics with a DC of 20 or higher. Generally, an opposed Gather Information skill check can determine whether or not anyone else noticed the character's inquiries, and taking a -20 modifier on a Gather Information check (an option for some particularly capable characters) ensures no one else notices the character's investigation.

ADJUSTING CHARACTERS

In addition to changing around characters' backgrounds, allegiances, and the like, you may wish to modify them to suit a particular style or power level. This is usually a matter of raising or lowering the character's power level and adjusting all power level limited traits accordingly.

So, for example, if you wish to use the members of Vanguard (from **Chapter Four**) in a power level 8 *Paragons* series and not have them seriously outclass the protagonists, lower their power levels to 8 and adjust their PL limited traits. Since they are NPCs, you don't have to worry about their power point totals, so long as their traits fall within the power level guidelines. You can do the same when raising the power level of some characters, but keep in mind that many of the lower power level characters in this book can still provide a substantial challenge in ways other than direct conflict; many of them are shadowy figures working behind the scenes, where power level is less important overall.

Another easy way to adjust characters in this chapter to suit different types of *Paragons* games is by applying different descriptors to their powers. By default, all characters have "paranormal" powers, but in some series, such powers stem from different sources. Feel free to change things around, giving some characters "magical" powers or others "psychic" ones. Even if all paranormal abilities in your *Paragons* setting have the same basic source they can still have different descriptors based on how character *perceive* them. Remember, in *Paragons*, power and belief are tied together. So if mystics think their powers are magical in nature, then they are! You can use this to help distinguish different character types in your setting.

CHARACTERS AND ULTIMATE POWER

Some of the characters' write-ups in this chapter make use of some of the additional effects, power modifiers, and power feats from the *Ultimate Power* sourcebook. Although use of this sourcebook is not required for a *Paragons* game, it is recommended, as it offers players more options for creating their characters and several refinements to existing *M&M* powers.

If you don't have *Ultimate Power*, or aren't choosing to use some of its options in your *Paragons* series, simply ignore the traits taken from that book and replace them with their nearest equivalents from the *M&M* rulebook. If necessary, you can hand-wave some of the unusual abilities possessed by non-player characters in your *Paragons* game. After all, paranormals regularly do the impossible, so there's no reason for the characters (who haven't read the rulebooks) to know whether a particular paragon is operating "within the rules" or not. If this is likely to be a problem for your players, discuss it with them in advance, explaining that in the world of the paranormal, not everything is going to be "according to the rules."



ALPHA MALE

"MOVE ASIDE AND WATCH WHAT A REAL AMERICAN HERO CAN DO."

John Cordwainer Wright III was given everything in his life, but until the spark that changed him into something more than human, all he ever gave back was disappointment. The son and grandson of senators, Wright was a mediocre student and much better at looking like an athlete than actually being one.

Things changed the night he and some of his Ivy League fraternity buddies were set upon by hoodlums after leaving a bar while they were out slumming. The violence caused Wright to breakout, and even if he had wanted his new abilities to be downplayed, his big-mouthed friends made sure *everyone* knew about them after he saved their collective butts. His family's PR machine took over from there, building John up as an archetypal American hero (whose public "performances" sometimes just happened to coincide with his relatives' need for good publicity). Initially reluctant, Wright, or "Alpha Male" as he's been billed, has grown to thrive on his celebrity and all its perks. In his mind, he's finally earning the appreciation of his family after too many years of being "forced" to play the black sheep.

Alpha Male has a carefully designed public persona, systematically constructed by marketing and public relations consultants. Everything from his costume to his (usually) scripted dialogue has been calculated to appeal to the widest demographics. In areas where his larger-than-life boy scout with the affectations of a professional wrestling icon persona fails to find purchase it's more finely tailored for the local market—ranging from the "hard-nosed champion of the common man" in the rust belt of the North to "good-old-boy just doing what needs to be done" throughout the South. Playing his various personas has become so practiced and reflexive, Wright's own recollections and self-image have begun to blur—that is to say, he's long since started buying into his own press.

Wright is normally an inhumanly fast, low-level powerhouse until his primary ability kicks in—he's an empathic capacitor. He unconsciously excites the emotional states of everyone around him, and in turn, feeds off their emotions to boost his own strength, speed, and endurance. Further, his unconscious connection to the emotional states of those around him makes it difficult to lie to or frighten, or in some cases even seduce him, as he's unconsciously all too aware of what's going on (even though he often chooses to ignore his powers in cases where he's getting what he wants, or when he's deluding himself as to the outcome). He gets a physical rush out of any emotion, but the purest high is from adul-

ation. In fact, he's become addicted to that particular high and now looks for PR opportunities like a junkie looking for his next fix. He's been angling for an invite to join Vanguard, but hasn't succeeded yet despite his family's best efforts to pull strings.

USING ALPHA MALE

Alpha Male's most obvious use is as a potential rival. No matter how much characters may try to shine or fight the good fight, Wright and his publicists will always move the spotlight back to him.

Wright doesn't consider himself a fake, or a bad person. He thinks he's a hero, a notion reinforced by his handlers to make him easier to use in the right situations as well as help his public persona. He's actually done some real good for several people along his path to fame and glory, and has thrown himself into some scraps bravely (his handlers would say recklessly) where he stood a solid chance of not walking away under his own power. Guidance from paranormals managing to separate Alpha Male from his marketing machine could end up putting a powerful ally on the side of the angels for real and not just in press releases.

Alpha Male has an addiction; one that figures heavily into his reactions. As with many addicts, he has an elaborate set of self-justifications for his behavior, reinforced by the people around him who use it to get Wright to do what they want him to do. This leads into a third possible use for Wright: An object lesson. Alpha Male can become a cautionary tale of the ever-present dangers of self-aggrandizement, and the destructive price of letting one's ego call the shots.

Of course, you can also always just ignore all of the more sympathetic uses suggested above and use Alpha Male to give the players someone to really hate. Wright's handlers, their smooth and professional control of any situation, and the way his persona comes across could easily get on people's nerves.



Regarding his powers, whenever he encounters a situation that triggers an adrenal response, Alpha Male automatically generates a psionic compulsion in the minds of everyone within 200 feet of him able to see him. This compulsion increases the intensity of that person's emotional states. As long as even a single person is affected (*i.e.*, fails the DC 18 Will Save), Alpha Male's body reacts by heightening his enhanced abilities even further. Neither of these effects requires any sort of action from Alpha Male.

Note the similarities between Alpha Male and Patriot's powers (see **Patriot** in this chapter) may imply some other connection between the two of them. The two men could be rivals (especially given Patriot's current favored status with the US government) or friends. Wright or someone close to him might try to blackmail Patriot or ruin him if they ever got hold of the truth about him (whatever the GM decides it is).

LEARNING ABOUT ALPHA MALE

The following is information characters can learn about Alpha Male:

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 10: He comes from the Wright family. The Wrights are heavily involved in state and national politics and have benefited greatly from Alpha Male's fame.

DC 15: His abilities increase in the presence of an audience. He's always playing to the crowd.

DC 25: Some of Alpha Male's public displays of heroism have been staged.

KNOWLEDGE (POPULAR CULTURE)

Alpha Male is a popular public figure, he's a national celebrity and highly visible personality. As such, the following information is easily acquired by asking the right people, trawling the Web, or even reading the right publications.

DC 10: Wright doesn't publicly date very often, he says it's "out of fear of exposing innocents to danger from his many enemies," but it's more likely that he's afraid of exposing himself to a potential scandal.

DC 15: Various opinion polls have been floated to test the waters for his eventual political aspirations. They seem generally favorable.

DC 20: Despite the dating policy described above, Alpha Male has been tied to any number of discreet relationships with several different starlets and debutantes.

THE ANSWER

"WHAT'S THE TRUTH? I THINK THE PUBLIC DESERVES TO KNOW, DON'T YOU?"

Tom Anwar admired crusading journalists and investigative reporters; they inspired him to major in journalism and to dedicate himself to pursuing the truth for the public good. That's how his official bio reads, anyway. What Tom doesn't admit, even to himself, is how much he enjoys the pursuit, the process of digging to get at a story, the triumph of revealing things on-air. He's still dedicated to the ideals of investigative journalism, but sometimes the line between what the public needs to know and the public's desire to know get blurred.

Tom's dedication would have eventually made him a name in investigative journalism regardless, but his big break came when he was able to get a local city council member to openly confess to illegal activities in an on-camera interview. Although the official later tried to retract his statements, they proved entirely true. Then came the on-camera confession from an accused serial rapist, including facts no one else could know about the case. Defense lawyers tried desperately to have the confession thrown-out of court, but to no avail.

Tom Anwar's reputation skyrocketed, and major news networks began competing to hire him. It wasn't long before "the Answer," Tom's new news segment "persona," was growing in popularity by leaps and bounds. It seemed like there was no nut too tough for him to crack: He put politicians, celebrities, business figures,

ALPHA MALE						PL 12
STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA	
+9/+2	+8/+2	+9/+2	+1	+0	+4/+2	
28/15	26/14	28/15	12	10	18/15	
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL			
+12	+9	+9	+3			

Skills: Bluff 3 (+7/+5), Diplomacy 5 (+9/+7), Intimidate 4 (+8/+6), Knowledge (civics) 3 (+4), Knowledge (pop culture) 5 (+6), Sense Motive 4 (+4)

Feats: All-out Attack, Attack Focus 2 (melee), Attack Specialization (unarmed), Attractive, Benefit 3 (wealth bonus +20), Benefit (status), Connected, Dodge Focus 3, Power Attack, Sneak Attack, Startle

Powers: **Boost 6** (All enhanced traits at once; *Extras:* Action-Reaction; *Flaws:* Emotional, Range-Personal; *Power Feats:* Slow Fade 3), **Emotion Control 8** (*Extras:* Burst Area [Progression 2], Duration-Continuous, Action-Reaction [adrenal]; *Flaws:* Limited-Only enhances existing emotional states to greater levels, Sense-Dependent [Sight]; *Power Feats:* Subtle), **Enhanced Charisma 3**, **Enhanced Constitution 13**, **Enhanced Dexterity 12**, **Enhanced Strength 13**, **Immunity 9** (cold, disease, heat, interaction skills [Limited to one-half effectiveness], poison), **Protection 3** (*Extras:* Impervious), **Speed 3**, **Super Strength 4** (*heavy load:* 9.6 tons)

Combat: Attack +8 (unarmed), +6 (melee), +4 (ranged), Grapple +19, Damage +9 (unarmed), Defense +8 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback -7, Initiative +8

Abilities 21 + Skills 6 (24 ranks) + Feats 16 + powers 135 + combat 18+ Saves 4 = Total 200

and others under the spotlight and got them to reveal intimate or incriminating information, often during live interviews. A famous film star came out publicly as gay, an actress revealed a years-long battle with drug addiction, a politician admitted complicity in a vote-rigging scandal. The Answers interviews became like taped church confessions, and people were, rightly, afraid to appear on his show.

That hasn't limited Anwar's popularity one bit: Now his reputation is a blunt instrument. Why refuse a request for an interview, he asks; do people have something to hide? More than once, he's been able to shame people into appearing on the show, then get them to spill their guts. The Answer has had some less spectacular interviews, but they're far outweighed by what he manages to get most of the time.

Of course, Tom Anwar has a few secrets of his own, not the least of which is the source of his incredible "interviewing skills;" the Answer is a paranormal. He has the psychic power to *make* others answer his questions truthfully, whether they really want to or not. The compulsion is subtle enough that the victims aren't even aware they're doing it until it's too late. Anwar wasn't even aware of his power at first, but he has learned of it through trial and error and the fact that some interviews with particularly strong-willed or resistant subjects leave him feeling more drained than others.

He doesn't have any moral problems with compelling others to answer his questions, however. He tells himself it's the public's

right to know certain things. It's not the ratings or the sponsors or the fame that really matter; it's that he's doing important work. If some of his interviews ruin people's lives, well, they deserve it, don't they? He quickly changes his own line of thought when he wonders how he'd answer whether or not he was paranormal.

USING THE ANSWER

The Answer is a potential complication for any character with a public life, since Anwar can be relentless in his questioning, and embarrassing answers have a way of "slipping out" when he's around. If you want to expose some facet of the characters' pasts



or activities, an interview on Anwar's *The Answer* program can do the trick, but be sure to award the players a hero point or two when they get blindsided by the reporter's paranormal power (more if you also decide to have them fail the saving throw by GM Fiat).

Naturally, Tom Anwar has more than his share of enemies: He has ruined lives, gotten people arrested and convicted of crimes, and ended more than a few careers. The network might hire paranormal bodyguards to keep an eye on him and protect him from his enemies, or Anwar could end up kidnapped and in need of rescuing by paragons working for the network or the authorities (or simply looking to do a good deed).

If characters suspect the Answer is a paranormal, they're faced with a dilemma. On the one hand, Anwar and his show have done a lot of good: Exposing hypocrisy, corruption, crime, and helping to clean-up business and government. On the other hand, the covert use of his powers is ethically gray at best, rank hypocrisy at the worst, and has violated the privacy of many people, exposing things that are none of the public's business, no matter how interested they might be. Do characters give "the Answer" a taste of his own medicine by exposing him or do they keep his secret, possibly using it as leverage to ensure Anwar keeps theirs?

LEARNING ABOUT THE ANSWER

The Answer is a well known public figure. The following is information characters might learn about him:

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 10: Tom Anwar is an investigative journalist and interviewer nicknamed "the Answer," which is also the name of his top-rated program in which he interviews a variety of people, often getting surprisingly forthright answers from them.

THE ANSWER PL 9

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+0	+0	+0	+1	+2	+2
10	10	11	13	14	15
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+0	+3	+3	+5		

Skills: Bluff 8 (+10), Concentration 6 (+8), Diplomacy 6 (+8), Gather Information 8 (+10), Intimidate 4 (+6), Knowledge (behavioral sciences) 4 (+5), Knowledge (civics) 4 (+5), Knowledge (current events) 10 (+11), Knowledge (popular culture) 8 (+9), Notice 4 (+6), Perform (oratory) 6 (+8), Profession (reporter) 10 (+12), Search 4 (+5), Sense Motive 10 (+12)

Feats: Connected, Contacts, Skill Mastery (Bluff, Concentration, Gather Information, Sense Motive), Well-Informed

Powers: **Mind Control 9** (*Extras:* Conscious, Duration—Sustained; *Flaws:* Limited—Compelling truthful answers to questions; Sense-Dependent [Hearing]; *Power Feats:* Subtle 2)

Combat: Attack +1, Grapple +1, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +1, Knockback -0, Initiative +0

Abilities 13 + Skills 23 (92 ranks) + Feats 4 + Powers 20 + Combat 4 + Saves 9 = Total 73



Wall Street knows Garret is a golden goose and watches Watermark closely. When Garret needs to keep a lower profile he invests through any number of shell holding companies set up and collapsed as needed. How far his investments extend beyond that is anyone's guess. Garret knows if you can see a man's money, you can see what a man wants, so he plays of the game carefully; only letting others see what he wants them to see while hiding his real intentions.

Garret is in his early fifties, stocky, but not much more out of shape than any other sedentary middle-aged man. His dark hair is graying at the temples, and he is most often seen in a shirt and tie, sleeves rolled up to his elbows as he burns the midnight oil pouring over the latest spreadsheets.

A veteran negotiator, Garret is blunt rather than smooth, relying on hard-hitting facts and indisputable conclusions to make his point, almost daring people to contradict him when he knows so much more than they do. But despite this brusque front, Garret is not really comfortable around other people. He does his best to hide it, but people make him nervous. Trends are clear to him, but he can't anticipate what an individual will do in the here and now, and he does not trust what he can't predict. Garret has no real friends, and keeps as few associates around him as possible. He would probably be lonely if he wasn't so busy obsessing over and integrating every mote of information that crosses his path.

Arbiter needs information to make predictions, but to anyone else it can be hard to see how the data he has leads to the conclusions he makes. What does a weather report have to do with fluctuations in interest rates? Garret believes his conclusions are logical deductions based on clear facts others are just too obtuse to see, but it's possible he is just deluding himself. He may actually be fully precognitive, seeing the future and then rationalizing this foreknowledge with mundane data. His current predictions could just be the tip of the iceberg for his powers, awaiting just the right data or stimulus to fully unlock them.

DC 15: Anwar's rise in television journalism has been meteoric since he developed his signature style of being able to elicit incredibly personal information from his interview subjects. He came out of nowhere with it quite suddenly.

DC 25: There's quiet speculation about the Answer being a paranormal, but absolutely no proof has appeared, even from paragons able to detect others of their kind. Still, some people wonder about his amazing ability to get people to admit things on his show they would never admit to anyone, much less publicly.

KNOWLEDGE (CURRENT EVENTS OR POPULAR CULTURE)

DC 10: Tom Anwar is an investigative journalist and interviewer nicknamed "the Answer," which is also the name of his top-rated program in which he interviews a variety of people, often getting surprisingly forthright answers from them.

DC 15: Anwar's rise in television journalism has been meteoric since he developed his signature style of being able to elicit incredibly personal information from his interview subjects.

DC 20: The Answer is often at the center of controversy for revelations made on his show, but so long as people keep tuning in every week to see somebody else spill their guts, the network and sponsors will continue to back him.

ARBITER

"YOU'RE RIGHT, I DON'T CARE ABOUT CATCHING THE ARSONIST. BUT YOU DO, AND IF YOU WANT TO KNOW WHERE HE'S GOING TO STRIKE NEXT, YOU'RE GOING TO NEED ME."

A dip in coastal weather patterns means clear skies. Clear skies mean inattentive drivers. Inattentive drivers mean traffic accidents, which means busier police, which means slower response rates to crime, which means nervous citizens, which means conservative spending patterns and a small but exploitable change in the market. At least until it rains on Thursday...

A renowned financial wizard and investment mogul, Chandler Garret's power is to recognize patterns in seas of meaningless data, giving him uncanny predictive talents bordering on precognition. Garret watches the world around him like a game of N-dimensional chess, a game where he can see two hundred moves ahead—not only can he see the end of the game, he can see the players leaving the table, he can see what they have for lunch afterwards and how much they tip the waiter.

He uses these powers to further his personal profits. He makes deals. He trades info. He tells people what's going to happen and by doing so decides what's *going* to happen, which is how among people in the know (the people who make deals and decide what's going to happen) he became known as the Arbiter.

In the public eye, Garret is the financial brains behind the Watermark Fidelity investment fund; for all intents and purposes he *is* Watermark Fidelity, since his decisions determine what happens to the millions of dollars investors put in his care. He turns a handsome profit for his investors and makes a fortune for himself in the process. Everybody wins.

ARBITER

PL 13

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
-1	+0	-1	+18/+3	+18/+3	+2
9	10	9	46/16	46/16	14
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
-1	+1	+2	+9		

Skills: Bluff 9 (+11), Diplomacy 11 (+13), Gather Information 9 (+11), Intimidate 6 (+8), Knowledge (business) 13 (+16), Notice 4 (+7), Profession (finance) 13 (+16), Sense Motive 7 (+10)

Feats: Benefit 5 (wealth bonus 28), Connected, Contacts, Fascinate (Diplomacy), Master Plan, Well-Informed

Powers: Enhanced Intelligence 30 (*Flaws:* Limited—Predicting the future), Enhanced Wisdom 30 (*Flaws:* Limited—Predicting the future), Super-Senses 5 (precognition, acute)

Combat: Attack +0, Grapple -1, Damage -1, Defense +0, Knockback -0, Initiative +0

Drawbacks: Power Drawback (prediction requires data, -1 point), Power Drawback (cannot predict immediate future, -1 point)

Abilities 14 + Skills 18 (72 ranks) + Feats 10 + Powers 35 + Combat 0 + Saves 10—Drawbacks 2 = Total 85

Note: Arbiter's Enhanced Abilities give him an additional +15 bonus to Int and Wis skill checks in conjunction with his predictions, so he has a total +31 bonus for Knowledge (business) checks when using his knowledge of what is to come, for example. Since these bonuses only apply some of the time, they are not included in his skill totals.

USING ARBITER

Garret is the man you don't want to trust, know you can't trust, but still wind up turning to because he knows what you need to know. He can be a valuable source of information, but his motives are always self-serving, making him a dubious and often temporarily. One day he may help the characters and the very next collaborate with their adversaries, depending on which side furthers his interests at the moment.

On the bright side, Garret doesn't lie in his predictions. Lying would ruin his credibility, and that's bad for business, but he may omit quite a bit when it suits his purposes. He also won't be the first to break a deal, but he may have far more irons in the fire than he admits, including plans that make other deals effectively meaningless—you wanted the drug bust, he gave you the drug bust, but he also sold out the whole cartel to a rival gang so it collapsed before you even moved in to make arrests.

Even when he appears to help in the short-term, he is always looking twenty moves ahead. He invests heavily in a small company to encourage it to over-expand and collapse, clearing the way for his real plans. He helps predict where the warehouse arsonist will strike next, but correctly anticipates the collateral damage of the confrontation will turn public sentiment against the characters, bolstering the outcry for anti-paranormal legislation months down the road. The political deal-making to satiate the public furor sabotages a trade deal he wanted buried all along, so he gets what he wants in the end.

He is perfectly willing to set himself up for short-term defeats if they lead to his long-term goals. Sometimes a sacrifice or even an

outright disaster is the necessary ingredient for victory. If he sighs and admits defeat, it may mean his real plan is just getting started. Only the Arbiter ever knows how deep a game he's really playing, and he's not telling.

For all his predictive powers and elaborate schemes, Garret has no way of knowing what is about to happen right now, because individual impulses in the very short term are one thing he cannot predict. A random mugger could gun him down in the street and he would never see it coming. If an associate planned to double-cross him, he might see the trend and be prepared, but if it was caused by sudden anger or an unplanned impulse, he would have no warning. He is all too aware of this blind spot, and it keeps him from ever really trusting or getting intimately involved with anyone.

LEARNING ABOUT ARBITER

The following is information player characters could potentially learn about the Arbiter:

GATHER INFORMATION

Finding out about Garret's public business activities is easy enough, but the more interesting information about his behind-the-scenes deal-making is not common knowledge.

DC 15: The Arbiter is Chandler Garret, successful financial investor and manager of Watermark Fidelity.

DC 20: Garret is a deal-broker with many questionable associations, but his public business deals are on the up-and-up.

DC 25: The Arbiter is a low profile paranormal capable of fantastic predictive deductions.

KNOWLEDGE (BUSINESS)

Chandler Garret is a well-known figure in financial circles and a frequent topic of discussion in the business section.

DC 10: The Arbiter is Chandler Garret, successful financial investor and manager of Watermark Fidelity.

DC 15: Watermark Fidelity returns an excellent profit to its investors. Wall Street pays close attention to Garret's investment decisions.

DC 20: Garret keeps some of his business deals out of the public eye to avoid giving away his edge.

BLUESHIFT

"PLEASE CALL US AGAIN FOR ALL YOUR SPEEDY AND DISCREET DELIVERY NEEDS."

Aaron Bierer was attending Stanford University as a computer science and business double major whose vague plans for the future included creating the next big search engine and becoming fantastically rich. During college however, money was still a little scarce so Aaron worked as a bicycle courier to make ends meet.

Aaron enjoyed the work and the feeling of freedom speeding from house to house gave him, though the pay wasn't much and the job included the traditional hazards of irate customers, hazardous traffic, and territorial dogs. While making a delivery one day one such dog, a huge black mastiff, managed to break loose from his leash

and chase the young student until neither he nor his bike could go any further. Breathless, Aaron stood with his back against the wall while the growling dog advanced on him.

"Maybe," he thought "if I can just run fast enough...maybe I can get by him." Before he knew what had happened, Aaron had run up and over three nearby buildings, two palm trees, and a taxi. With a yell of triumph and a mind racing with opportunities, Aaron Bierer greeted his breakout with open arms.

Aaron created the name Blueshift as both his "professional" name and as the name of his new company, Blueshift, Inc. As Blueshift, Aaron sold his speed to people who needed small items or messages hand delivered incredibly fast and with the utmost discretion. Word got around and soon Blueshift, Inc. was a thriving business with Aaron sitting pretty as the founder, CEO, only employee, and the sole beneficiary of its income.

That's when things began to go pear-shaped. A man who would only give his name as "Mr. Doe," contacted the company. The name didn't really concern Aaron though, he had worked for many who preferred to remain anonymous and had few problems and even fewer moral compunctions about working with them as they inevitably paid very well. When he met his contact at the VIP lounge that night, however, he found "Mr. Doe" accompanied by several large, well-armed men. "Mr. Doe," whose only real memorable feature was a tendency to drum his fingers constantly, told Aaron that his country needed him. "Mr. Doe" told him, in the name of duty, some of those discreet messages would have to be a little less secret from now on. "Mr. Doe" never gave his real name, but he assured Aaron that no one would ever know Blueshift, Inc. was compromised, so long as he cooperated. He also said Aaron was free to maintain his enterprise as he saw fit, just so long as he also relayed messages to his new nameless, rankless, and, above all, intimidating contact. Though Aaron knew he could run and likely never be caught by "Mr. Doe" or his armed guard, that would mean leaving his newfound creature comforts far behind as well.

Since that time Aaron has dreaded the day his duplicities would be revealed, or (even worse in Aaron's mind) when his nameless exploiter changed his terms and threatened Aaron's well-being.

USING BLUESHIFT

Note that while Aaron thoroughly believes his contact's claim of governmental interference, this is not necessarily the case. The nameless man could be a mob enforcer, wealthy nut job, or a representative of any one of the other factions detailed in this book



that might have an interest in the information Blueshift supplies.

Even though his business has been compromised, Blueshift is still a fantastically successful courier for small, sensitive items, highly sought by both private and public sources. If the characters need something in a hurry and they have the means to hire him, Aaron will literally come running. He could conceivably come to the characters for help, but he is so terrified of losing everything it would take a great deal of trust before he ever dared share his dark secret with anyone.

In combat Aaron's primary tactic is to run away as fast as possible. He is well aware that while he is an ineffective hand-to-hand fighter at best, he can also outrun nearly anyone (or anything) on the planet.

Generally speaking this means that when a commotion starts Blueshift is typically the first one gone. Even in a situation where a direct escape is seemingly impossible,

Blueshift will zip around looking for an exit rather than attempt confronting an adversary. If questioned later Blueshift will claim he was only insuring he would not get in the way of more capable fighters, but he is in truth something of a coward when it comes to physical confrontation.

In a social confrontation Aaron is far more confident. Comfortable in a battle of wit and words, Aaron has the benefit of natural charisma and well-honed skills he uses to turn any social situation in his favor. He is never insulting, always polite, and capable of convincing most people that he is the only person on the planet they can trust. Naturally this skill helps in his business pursuits, but Aaron unabashedly uses this same glibness in pursuit of pleasure. He is often seen hobnobbing with the well-to-do and is not above spreading compliments and money around to put an attractive woman on his arm for the night. If Aaron ever did find a situation he couldn't talk his way out of, his first inclination would be to run. However, the right kind of bait (a threat or boon to Blueshift, Inc. in particular) will always bring him back.

LEARNING ABOUT BLUESHIFT

Blueshift Inc.'s services are public knowledge, though its prices are exorbitant and only extremely wealthy companies or individuals can afford to routinely use them. However, Blueshift does have a reputation as one of the most efficient and discreet couriers in the business and would most likely be encountered in this role.

Aaron is of the "work hard, play hard" school of thought and tends to spend his wealth club hopping with the rich and famous all over the world. It is not unusual for him to take in parties in Milan, Ibiza, and Japan all in one night. (He goes to fewer American events these days in the hopes of avoiding as much contact with his mysterious "handlers" as possible.) Any particularly social characters

BLUESHIFT

PL 9

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+1	+2	+2	+3	+2	+3
12	14	14	16	14	16
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX		WILL	
+3/+2*	+2	+3		+2	

*Without leather jacket

Skills: Bluff 5 (+8), Computers 7 (+10), Diplomacy 7 (+10), Gather Information 4 (+7), Knowledge (business) 6 (+9), Knowledge (popular culture) 4 (+7), Profession (businessman) 5 (+7), Ride 4 (+6), Sense Motive 6 (+8)

Feats: Benefit 3 (wealth bonus 20), Equipment (cell phone, comm link, GPS receiver, PDA, leather jacket)

Powers: Super-Speed 15 (Deflect, Wall Run, Water Run)

Combat: Attack +2, Grapple +3, Damage +1, Defense +15, Knockback -1, Initiative +62

Abilities 26 + Skills 12 (48 ranks) + Feats 4 + Powers 77 + Combat 34 + Saves 6 = Total 159

may know Aaron from almost any place in the world where wealthy pleasure-seekers gather. Characters might even know Aaron Bierer from his days at Stanford, and might recognize his face in an ad or a photo from one of his many social engagements.

KNOWLEDGE (BUSINESS)

DC 15: Blueshift, Inc. has a reputation for moving small objects and documents quickly and discreetly.

DC 20: Blueshift, Inc.'s success is based on the abilities of its speedster founder, Aaron Bierer.

DC 25: Aaron Bierer attended Stanford University on a scholarship. He has since become quite wealthy due to his paranormal abilities and work with his company, Blueshift, Inc.

KNOWLEDGE (POPULAR CULTURE)

DC 15: Aaron Bierer is a speedster courier who likes to hobnob with the cultural elite.

DC 20: Aaron Bierer is a wealthy speedster who likes to party all over the world on weekends with the rich and powerful.

DC 25: Aaron used to go to primarily American parties, but now tends to favor international events.

BODYSHOP

"SO, WHO DO YOU WANT TO LOOK LIKE TODAY, AND HOW MUCH ARE YOU WILLING TO PAY TO MAKE IT HAPPEN?"

Josephine Pelham lived a miserable life, once. The girlfriend of a drug dealer, she was treated as either property or a pet depending on what mood he was in when he came home. Josie had the full "White Trash Hell" package, complete with all the self-loathing and shoe-bottom self-esteem that went with it. Then everything

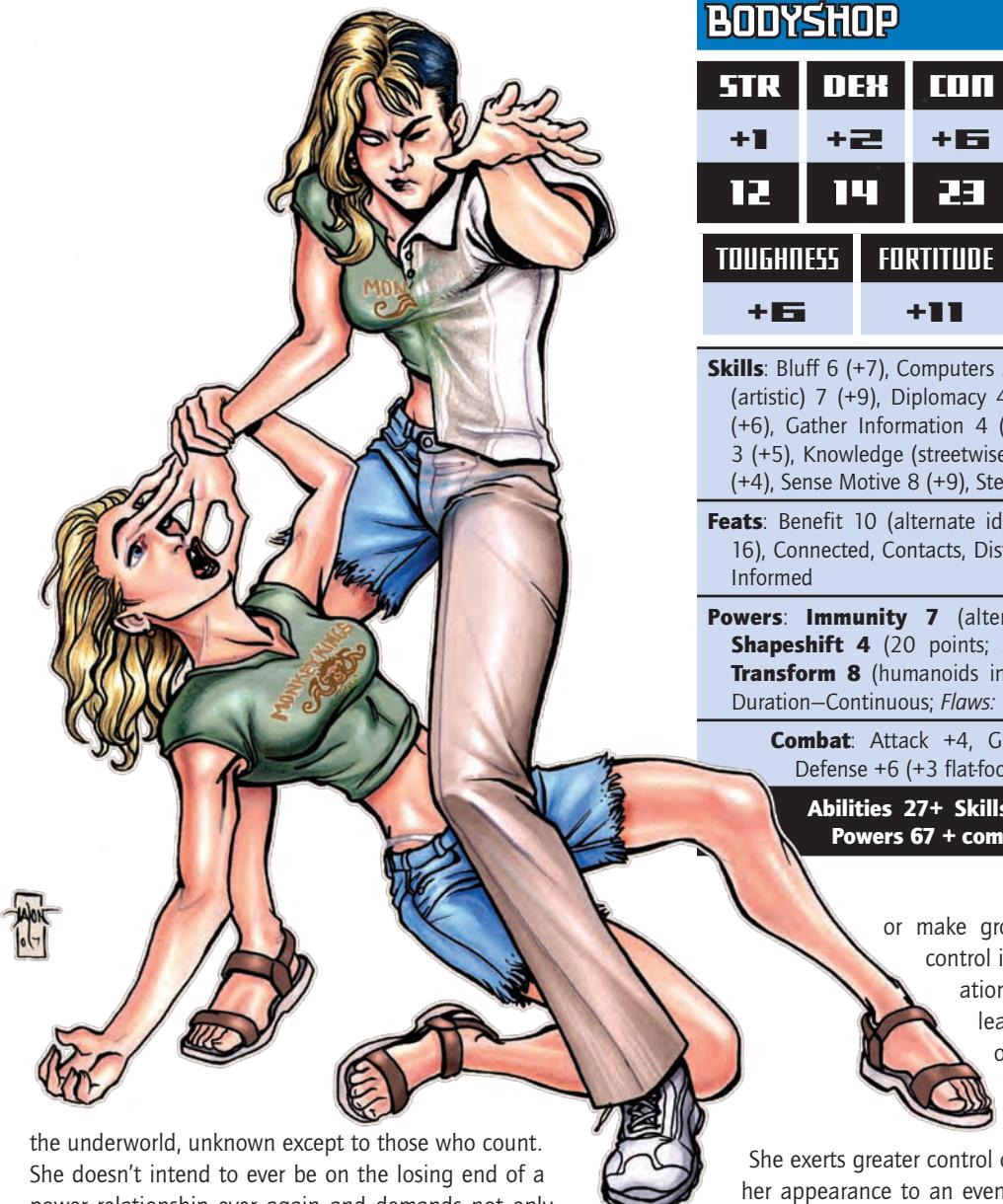
changed...for her, anyway. She almost died that morning, purposefully overdosing on the copious "product" that lay around the house. She was surprised when she actually woke up, feeling better than ever. When her boyfriend tried to take his anger out on her (because of what her suicide attempt cost him), she instinctively tried to ward off his blows with her hands, all the while wishing he no longer had the ability to strike her or yell his hateful words at her.

It took her a few seconds, cringing, her eyes scrunched shut, to register that his blows and yelling had stopped. Opening her eyes, she saw her abuser was desperately reeling and fumbling about the room—his arms apparently merged into his torso and his face beneath his eyes a solid and featureless curve of flesh. Within moments, he dropped to the floor, suffocating as she watched. She stayed in their, well, *his* house for a while after that...just staring in shock at his cooling body. Finally, she walked over to his corpse and touched it, just to verify she hadn't lost her senses. With her touch, her former abuser's form melted back into its previous state, as if nothing had ever happened. Still in shock, she gathered what few things in the home she truly considered her own, but not before adding the "rainy day funds" she knew he kept hidden. She locked the door behind her and didn't look back as she walked away. Her new life, her real life, began then and there.

Over the next few weeks and months, Josephine experimented with her new abilities. She discovered she could mold flesh—both others' and her own—like clay. With practice, she could even change finer and more detailed features, such as textures, and colors. Long before her money ran out, she was looking up people she had met through her old life, offering interesting new services in exchange, at least at first, not for money, but for education. She learned how the streets worked, who bought and sold what (and who), who moved what where, and all the other fundamentals separating the professionals from losers and bottom-feeders like her old boyfriend. The new Josephine was an able student and took her lessons to heart. Eventually, she found herself giving advice more than seeking it, and word of her talents spread to all the right people. She and the service she provided were both sought-after commodities. It may not have been the love or acceptance she once thought she wanted, but it was money, it was power, and it was respect, and Josephine soon decided she liked those a lot more.

Bodyshop is a very specialized resource. For the right price, she can alter a person's features, faster and more effectively than any plastic surgeon. Better yet, she can do it with no signs of surgery, and no required recovery time. Also, her talents can accomplish changes that are impossible anywhere outside a Hollywood fantasy. Height, weight, build, even apparent ethnicity (and in some cases even gender...though that costs extra) are all mutable in her hands. More than one organized crime figure sports an entirely new appearance thanks to her. There's also the matter of how gruesome and "instructive" her transformations can be when punishment is the goal instead of cosmetics. There are various open cases throughout North America where forensics has proven completely unable to determine cause of death, where a victim suffocated, or their bones broke, or organs were turned to jelly, with no apparent cause. If she took the time to undo her work, even those clues are gone.

Josephine is selective about her clientele, and has the resources and connections to make it difficult to find her if she doesn't want to be found. That's assuming her would-be hunters even know of her existence in the first place. As Bodyshop, she's a shadow within



the underworld, unknown except to those who count. She doesn't intend to ever be on the losing end of a power relationship ever again and demands not only exorbitant fees for her work, but collects favors from her clients like trading cards.

USING BODYSHOP

Bodyshop's most obvious use is as a complicating factor in character's careers. Are they hunting for particular movers and shakers in the underworld? Having those people able to change their appearance certainly increases the difficulty of finding them. Have they angered the wrong people? Being dragged to Bodyshop for an object lesson makes for a potentially harrowing experience.

Perhaps the characters have ties to intelligence communities or need new faces themselves. Gangsters and racketeers aren't Bodyshop's only clients, or even her most lucrative. With the right connections and bankrolls, she *can* be found and she *can* be hired.

Bodyshop can alter the base appearance of any human (or humanoid, depending on the variety present in a setting). She can change any cosmetic feature, alter morphology, and even make minor changes to physiology (such as metabolic rates). She cannot alter another person's body mass (though it might appear otherwise)

BODYSHOP

PL 9

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+1	+2	+6	+2	+1	+1
12	14	23	14	12	12
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+6	+11	+5	+5		

Skills: Bluff 6 (+7), Computers 2 (+4), Concentration 5 (+6), Craft (artistic) 7 (+9), Diplomacy 4 (+5), Disguise 8 (+9), Forgery 4 (+6), Gather Information 4 (+5), Knowledge (popular culture) 3 (+5), Knowledge (streetwise) 9 (+11), Notice 6 (+7), Search 2 (+4), Sense Motive 8 (+9), Stealth 2 (+4), Swim 2 (+3)

Feats: Benefit 10 (alternate identities), Benefit 2 (wealth bonus 16), Connected, Contacts, Distract (Bluff), Fascinate (Bluff), Well-Informed

Powers: **Immunity 7** (alteration effects, disease, poison), **Shapeshift 4** (20 points; *Flaws:* Limited—Humanoid forms), **Transform 8** (humanoids into other humanoid forms; *Extras:* Duration—Continuous; *Flaws:* Range—Touch)

Combat: Attack +4, Grapple +5, Damage +1 (melee), Defense +6 (+3 flatfooted), Knockback -3, Initiative +1

Abilities 27+ Skills 18 (72 ranks) + Feats 17 + Powers 67 + combat 20 + Saves 12 = Total 161

or make gross alterations to physiology—her control isn't quite that complete. Her alterations last until she changes them and leave no traces of being anything other nature's handiwork, even though more outré alterations may make them suspect.

She exerts greater control over her own body, able to change her appearance to an even greater degree than with her clients, up to and including simulating any number of minor superhuman abilities through finely-tuned changes—increasing muscle density for heightened strength, reinforcing striking surfaces or growing claws, manifesting gills, or even wings, and so on. Josephine rarely keeps a specific appearance for very long, always experimenting and changing everything from head to toe to match her whims; she takes male forms infrequently (she prefers being "pretty") and has experimented with both asexual and even more exotic configurations. Sometimes she changes appearance while talking to a client, just to rattle them.

LEARNING ABOUT BODYSHOP

The following is information characters might learn about Bodyshop:

GATHER INFORMATION

Making this check represents the information acquired from inquiries in the criminal underground. Keep in mind such inquiries might draw unwanted attention unless the character is particularly discreet.

DC 25: "Bodyshop" is a reputed underworld "fixer" wanted for questioning by certain authorities, assuming he or she even exists as stories are few and far between—and frequently dismissed as fiction and urban legend.

KNOWLEDGE (STREETWISE)

This represents what a character with background and experience with this particular subculture already knows, though the circumstances behind gaining this knowledge may invoke some of the same difficulties as with **Gather Information** above.

DC 20: "Bodyshop" is a paranormal with the ability to permanently change the way a person looks...for a hefty price tag.

DC 25: Not a person to be crossed—there are horror stories about what Bodyshop has done to some people, and those were when he or she didn't have personal stakes involved.



THE BURNING MAN

**"GIMME THE PILLS, MAN,
I NEED MY PILLS!"**

The Burning Man is quite literally a *burning man*; suffering from spontaneous human combustion on a massive scale. Witnesses to this amazing being might hear his screams of pain as the flames continually burn away his flesh, which is constantly regenerating. At once terrifying and pitiable, the Burning Man is constantly on the edge of sanity, broken by his pain, and willing to stop at nothing to end his suffering.

Before his breakout, Wendell Olsen was a run of the mill drug user and dealer living in squalor, brewing methamphetamine in his grandparents' basement. His powers manifested the day of an unexplained fire in his lab. His grandparents were killed in the blaze, and he was hospitalized for burns over his entire body, but within days he was miraculously healed. Not much of a thinker, Olsen returned to what passed for his life. A few days later it happened again. This time, he awoke when the fire department hosed down the remains of the tenement he'd been crashing in, again his burns healed rapidly. The pain is his only warning of the flames to come: If he can stop the pain in time, he can stop the fire.

Olsen is no hero, and he makes a pretty pathetic villain. His life was a shambles before his breakout, and now it is even more so, but one could hardly tell from Olsen's behavior. He still roams the streets looking to make a score, or trying to figure out how he can get his lab back in shape, with the simple goal of selling more drugs, now with the additional need to buy painkillers. In the underworld, he might even acquire a reputation as a man willing to trade illicit drugs for prescription painkillers. If given a chance to clean up his act and control his powers, Olsen is more than likely to slide back into the cesspool he crawled out of in the first place.

He keeps a low profile when he can, and does his best to avoid capture or the onset of his combustion. When on fire he has only a few minutes to get to safety before he passes out from the pain. He causes himself pain if he needs to, in order to escape from capture. Also, he might be able to use smaller doses of painkillers to extend how long he can remain aflame, without preventing his powers. However his control is limited. He might be able to maintain a "low burn" long enough to make an escape without igniting everything around him, but as soon as things get distracting he likely loses any control and burns at full power.

USING THE BURNING MAN

The Burning Man can appear as a lonely solitary figure avoiding contact with the world, as a ward of the state (for his own protection), or as the tool of some sinister group or mastermind. His weakness for painkillers and his near complete lack of control of his power makes him vulnerable to exploitation and accidents.

The exact cause of his powers turning on and off is unknown. Stress and pain seem to accompany the burning, and if he can combat those early enough, he (or anyone else) might be able to prevent him from burning. Once aflame, there is very little can extinguish his blaze (other than complete lack of oxygen). Normal water just turns to steam as it gets near him. If he is rendered unconscious,

the blaze runs its course, taking anywhere from a few seconds to a few hours. When the fires eventually burn out, he recovers rapidly from any damage he suffered as a result.

While his powers are active, the Burning Man feels the pain of his fire. Concentration checks should be made by him to do anything complicated or detailed. In the early encounters with the Burning Man, he may search wildly for some means of extinguishing his flames, running in panic, leaping into water, rolling in the dirt, what have you. Nothing so simple will work.

His various powers are meant to represent the catastrophic fires that surround him. The flames obscure vision, which makes pinpointing his exact location a challenge for anyone without super senses. The pressure wave of heat and winds whipped up by the fires slow movement around him, almost ensuring anyone near him will be in his fires for some time. Even the toughest of characters may find their defenses weakened by the time they reach him.

It may be that with specialized drugs or training the Burning Man could control his powers, but at present they control him.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

- The Burning Man is still on his own, trading methamphetamine for painkillers. He gets ripped off with some fake painkillers, and at an inopportune moment, his powers kick in. To make matters worse, he is living in a squalid room in the projects, so when his flames ignite the building is likely to go up with him. PCs must deal with him and a major blaze.
- The Burning Man is in a state hospital for the criminally insane. His powers go off when his meds are stolen from him by another inmate. PCs must deal with him, the blaze, and any potentially dangerous criminal inmates, and there are hundreds of patients, doctors and staff to rescue.
- The Burning Man, in normal guise, is robbing a pharmacy for painkillers. Police arrive to stop the crime, and a tense stand off occurs. The PCs may arrive during the stand off, and try to negotiate a solution, or they may arrive too late and need to deal with the consequences.
- A evil organization (or mastermind) has found the Burning Man and now supplies him with painkillers and experimental drugs which give him a measure of control over his powers, in exchange he does their bidding. Of course, they might overestimate the effectiveness of their control or fail to recognize how mired he is in his sorry lifestyle.

LEARNING ABOUT THE BURNING MAN

The following is information player characters could potentially learn about the Burning Man:

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 10: There have been a string of serious, but unexplained, fires throughout the area (or across the state or country depending on the scale of your series). Most of these have been in the poorer parts of town. The size of the fires seems to indicate arson, but no evidence of arson was found.

THE BURNING MAN

PL 14

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+1	+1	+3	+1	+0	-2
13	12	26	13	10	6
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+14/+8*	+8	+4	+4		

*When not aflame

Skills: Bluff 4 (+2), Craft (chemical) 8 (+9), Disable Device 4 (+5), Gather Information 4 (+2), Profession (drug dealer) 4 (+4), Stealth 4 (+5)

Feats: Connected

Powers: **Environmental Control 4** (hamper movement, one-quarter normal; *Extras:* Duration—Continuous; *Flaws:* Range—Touch, Uncontrolled*), **Force Field 6** (*Extras:* Duration—Continuous, Impervious; *Flaws:* Uncontrolled*), **Immunity 6** (heat, personal powers), **Obscure 4** (visual; *Extras:* Duration—Continuous; *Flaws:* Range—Touch, Uncontrolled*), **Regeneration 12** (bruised: one round, no rest; injured: one round, no rest; disabled: 20 minutes) **Strike 14** (fire; *Extras:* Duration—Continuous, Explosion; *Flaws:* Uncontrolled*)

Combat: Attack +4, Grapple +5, Damage +1 (unarmed), +14 (fiery explosion), Defense +4 (+2 flatfooted), Knockback -10, Initiative +1

Drawbacks: Weakness (Addicted to Daily Pain Killers, one hour, Moderate, Common) (-2 points)

Abilities 20 + Skills 7 (28 ranks) + Feats 1 + Powers 94 + Combat 16 + Saves 7—Drawbacks 2 = Total 143

Note: The Burning Man has no conscious control over his powers. The GM decides when they activate (although pain is the usual trigger). The Environmental Control, Force Field, Obscure and Strike are all linked, so they happen simultaneously. His powers generally operate at full power, but the GM is free to modify this for dramatic effect.

DC 15: Characters with ties to the underworld or drug culture know that one drug dealer has begun accepting various prescription painkillers in trade for methamphetamine.

DC20: The Burning Man's fire resists normal extinguishers, water hoses, etc. but immersion in a large water source (ocean, lake) will eventually extinguish him.

DC25: The Burning Man regenerates from most forms of lethal damage.

DC30: The Burning Man has no control over his powers, and once on, he cannot turn them off, even when unconscious. However, once off, if he is not in pain, he cannot activate them himself (except by inflicting pain on himself)

KNOWLEDGE (PHYSICAL SCIENCES)

DC15: Like most flames, his needs oxygen, the rate of burn is so intense that The Burning Man will evacuate a sealed room of oxygen in seconds, then snuff out his own flame.

CALAMITY JANE

**"IT WASN'T SUPPOSED TO BLOW UP..
WELL, OKAY, IT WAS SUPPOSED TO BLOW UP
...BUT NOT LIKE THAT!"**

As with many paranormals, Jane Haskill's background contains a number of mysteries. Attempts by governmental and media types to dig up dirt on her have always run into a well-constructed and utterly bland back-story that no one accepts as the truth: Adopted, ordinary home life in the suburbs, coupled with home-schooling before breezing through her entrance exams at Cal-Tech. Degree here, degree there, humanitarian work on the side, etcetera. Even the majority of those who work for her know only as much as she wants them to know, and it's a rare confidant who gets to her real story.

The truth is that Jane is the result of one of the many covert offshoots of the CIA's MKUltra program, code-named Crèche 313. The object of the program was to create a smarter human, but the failures eventually became too dangerous, either psychotic or freakish or both, to allow the program to continue. One of the doctors, who was a step ahead of her superiors who were terminating the program and its subjects, went underground and took three of the geneengineered children with her. She raised them as her own, using connections in the intelligence community to forge new identities for them all. Although the twin brothers ran away from her when they were teenagers, the girl she named Jane stayed until her adoptive mother succumbed to cancer. Jane Haskill then entered the world at large, committed to "making a difference" so the woman she had called mother would not have sacrificed her life in vain. To those she trusts enough to tell her story, as wild as it may seem, it fits both Jane's character and her abilities.

Jane is the founder and main force behind MERLIN (see **Chapter Four**). Her nickname is "Calamity Jane," due mostly to her tendency to "test to destruction" her theories and inventions... though she also tends to leave her workspace in a shambles, like a manic, super-genius Pigpen from the *Peanuts* comic strip.

Jane is intellectually far beyond anything even remotely testable by psychologists, and prone to manic periods she controls with medication. She's also an indefatigable champion of the idea that pure science is the answer to all mankind's problems, that logic can solve anything, and information exists to be used and, most importantly, shared. However, she's also pathologically conscientious about the potential downsides of her work—half of the things she's invented over the years have never seen the light of day, once their possible misuses became clear to her. She lives for her work and the money from her constantly growing list of patents goes back into MERLIN.



Calamity Jane has captured the imagination of tech-heads and geeks the world over and, with no effort on her part, garnered a major following among them. Recruiting for MERLIN is seldom a problem, particularly when the invitation comes directly from Jane herself.

USING CALAMITY JANE

Jane's a benevolent sort of "mad scientist." She can be a patron or valuable ally for technologically- or scientifically-oriented characters, or a relentless hunter for those who misuse those same gifts. If the characters are part of MERLIN, she could easily grow attached and become a mentor, overtly or otherwise. She doesn't have much use for traditional authority figures, particularly those she deems close-minded or patronizing (which covers a lot of ground from her perspective), and has made the "hit list" of quite a few individuals: Characters with ties to government or traditional industry may even have her as an enemy, or at the very least an incredibly galling rival.

Another potential story complication involves her background. Though she tries (mostly successfully) to hide her need for mood regulators and other psychotropics, it's entirely possible Jane's shadowy "secret origin" may be nothing more than a fantasy, created out of whole cloth from her overly active imagination. In such a case, the GM will need to decide what really happened. Perhaps her background is every bit as mundane as it reads. Of course, the possibility of someone with Jane's intellect, skills, and connections being delusional (or lying to her closest friends for some reason instead), opens whole other story possibilities entirely.

Assuming she isn't delusional, what happened to her "brothers?" Two other rogue geniuses with Jane's level of ability could provide any number of plotlines to pursue.

Calamity Jane is not built for combat as such. Her Gadgets power can supply necessary attacks (replete with ranks in the Accurate power feat, if necessary) or defenses like the Shield or Force Field powers. In such cases, her power level is only a guideline to how much "oomph!" can be milked from her inventions. Considering how seldom she goes into the field, Jane doesn't really need a lot of combat clout. Of course, anyone attempting to get to her must first contend with

her robotic "Binkys" (Binky-Bear, Binkster-Boo, and so on), and just because the robots are painted pink with adorable little teddy-bear designs in the center of their torsos doesn't make those enormous metal fists hurt any less when they hit.

Jane's precognition power represents her subconscious ability to extrapolate from myriad data sources the most likely outcome or set of outcomes in the technological, political, or social arenas. She is a futurist *par excellence*, able to predict with extreme accuracy the paths of technological development, political changes, and social trends of all stripes.

LEARNING ABOUT CALAMITY JANE

The following is information characters might learn about Calamity Jane:

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 10: She's a geek "pin-up" girl who's always being talked about online. She's some kind of paranormal inventor and mad-scientist, but she's cute.

DC 15: She's the director of MERLIN, a think tank devoted to studying all sorts of weird events and phenomena, especially paranormals.

DC 25: Her background is seamless, way too "clean" with way too many convenient "stands-without-need-of-corroboration" sections to be real.

KNOWLEDGE (POPULAR CULTURE OR TECHNOLOGY)

The following information can be found by perusing the right chat rooms, walking the floors at the right conventions, watching the right cable-access programs, or simply reading the right magazines or journals.

DC 10: Calamity Jane is queen of the geeks and every nerd's secret (or not so secret) crush.

DC 15: She's the creator of a lot of cutting edge chic-tech, including the popular "Play-It, Learn-It" series of educational video games.

DC 20: She goes to great lengths to keep her private life private, and is seldom seen outside MERLIN facilities unless needing to publicize some new discovery or invention.

CHUD

"WELL, WE DON'T KNOW EXACTLY WHAT'S DOWN THERE, BUT WE'RE TAKING IT VERY SERIOUSLY."

- RICK MONTGOMERY, POLICE CHIEF

Something dwells beneath the streets of the city. Everyone knows it. Everyone knows it thanks to the media, which takes every opportunity to run a story about the "sewer monster." And a monster it is: Dangerous, mysterious, and cannibalistic. Surveillance has a strangely difficult time capturing the creature on film, but the occasional glimpse of a shadow reveals that it's roughly humanoid. Marla DeVeer, journalist for the local newspaper, called the creature "Chud" after a cult B-movie and the name stuck. Now, people wonder what it is and why the authorities have such a difficult time finding it. They wonder if it's time to call in paranormal experts.

The first signs of Chud came several months ago, when sanitation worker Eleanor Marshall went missing in the sewers. Her body was found days later, decomposing and partially devoured, with great rents in her flesh that appeared to have been caused by large claws. Since that time, more than a dozen people have disappeared in a similar way, including a SWAT team that attempted to find the creature. The authorities have kept most of the stories from the media, but a few trickle through—and journalists pounce on them.

CALAMITY JANE

PL 10

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+0	+2	+1	+10	+4	+3
10	14	13	30	18	16
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+1	+4	+5	+3		

Skills: Bluff 5 (+8), Computers 10 (+20), Concentration 9 (+13), Craft (electronic) 10 (+20), Craft (mechanical) 10 (+20), Craft (structural) 10 (+20), Disable Device 10 (+20), Gather Information 8 (+11), Investigate 2 (+12), Knowledge (behavioral science) 4 (+14), Knowledge (business) 4 (+14), Knowledge (civics) 4 (+14), Knowledge (current events) 4 (+14), Knowledge (earth science) 6 (+16), Knowledge (life science) 6 (+16), Knowledge (physical sciences) 10 (+20), Knowledge (popular culture) 4 (+14), Knowledge (streetwise) 2 (+12), Knowledge (technology) 12 (+22), Medicine 8 (+12), Profession (think tank director) 8 (+12), Search 4 (+14), Sense Motive 4 (+8), Sleight of Hand 4 (+6), Stealth 2 (+4)

Feats: Beginner's Luck, Equipment, Connected, Dodge Focus 3, Improvised Tools, Inventor, Jack-Of-All-Trades, Luck 3, Minions 10 (The Binky Brigade, Minion Rank 7, x 25, Fanatical), Taunt, Well-Informed

Equipment: Really Nice Cell Phone, Equally Swank PDA, Gosh-What-A-Pretty GPS, "Hello Kitty" Multi-tool

Minions: Use the Medium Robot from the core rulebook (see *M&M*, page 235), for each Binky robot, except with Str 30 (+10) and Super Strength 1 (*heavy load*: 1.5 tons)

Powers: **Device 2** (Computer bracer, Hard-to-Lose), **Gadgets 4** (easy to lose), **Quickness 6** (Limited—Mental tasks), **Super Senses 8** (detect flaws [ranged, acute, analytical; Limited—Technology only], precognition [Limited—Macroscale trends])

Computer Bracer: **Datalink 5**, **Super Senses 5** (detect energy spectra [ranged, acute, analytical])

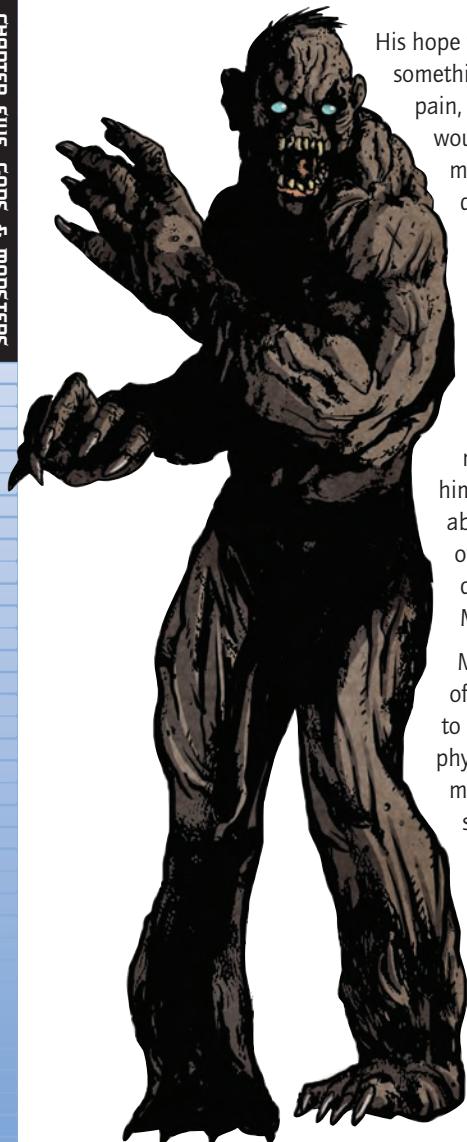
Combat: Attack +3, Grapple +3, Damage +0 (melee), Defense +8 (+3 flatfooted), Knockback -0, Initiative +2

Abilities 41+ Skills 40 (160 ranks) + Feats 28 + Powers 39 + Combat 16 + Saves 10 = Total 174

None of them know the truth, although some suspect: Chud was once a man. The media is correct in calling him a monster, though, because that is what he is now.

Mike Dodge was a bedraggled and defeated homeless man who never got a break in his life. He lived in abandoned subway tunnels and derelict basements, moving from place to place, suffering abuse and bullying from other homeless people. Mike walked with a limp, a scar crossed his face, and one eye was swollen to a perpetual squint.

The highlight of his existence came whenever he discovered discarded prescription medicine in dumpsters or garbage sacks. Mike consumed the pills, sometimes binging, other times carefully paring them out over days and weeks. He read the labels as best he could, but couldn't understand them—anything he found, he took. Sometimes he got high. Sometimes he got sick. Several times he awoke to find days had passed and scavengers had stripped him to his skin. The drugs blasted his mind and ravaged his body, but he continued his scavenging.



His hope was, eventually, he'd find something that would stop the pain, maybe something that would make him smart, some miracle drug inadvertently dumped with the refuse.

He hoped he'd find something that would get him *out* of his miserable existence. Eventually, he found it. Or maybe it wasn't the drugs at all, but something else; maybe something inside him snapped at the latest abuse, or a combination of chemicals catalyzed a change. Six months ago, Mike Dodge broke out.

Mike awoke in the middle of one pain-filled night to find himself changed, physically and mentally. His mind, already unstable, slipped further into its own hazy world. His body was radically different. He had become something bestial: A humanoid creature of scales and sparse hair and tough flesh, of bulging yellow eyes and immense, bony claws. Along with this

monstrous transformation came great strength and stealth, and Mike—now the creature called Chud—slunk away from his den.

Chud's first target was a homeless couple who used to give him a hard time, taking his food and kicking him in the ribs. Chud sniffed them out, ripped them to pieces, and left them in a subway tunnel. Authorities put it down to a couple idiot bums who got mashed by a train.

After that, Chud developed a taste for power, and human flesh. He went on an underground rampage, slashing apart anyone he came across and creeping throughout the city's underground: Through its subways, its building foundations, and its sewers. He left some people barely recognizable, others still alive, vomiting blood as they wheezed their last. At one point, Chud became hungry from his exertions. The flesh of his latest victim was on his claws, and it was warm and his teeth were sharp. Chud would never eat garbage again.

At the end of this massacre, Chud had carved out a territory: A vast portion of the city's sewers and subway tunnels. Authorities discovered the bodies and, since these were homeless people no one cared about, simply put the slayings down as gang violence and called in the janitorial staff. Not until sanitation worker Eleanor Marshall entered Chud's territory did the media—and the public—become aware of the monster lurking beneath them.

CHUD

PL 13

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+6/+0	+3/-1	+7/+2	-2	+1	-1
22/10	16/8	24/14	7	13	8
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+12	+12	+8	+6		

Skills: Acrobatics 7 (+10), Climb 12 (+18), Handle Animal 3 (+2), Notice 14 (+15), Search 4 (+2), Stealth 15 (+18), Survival 11 (+12), Swim 10 (+16)

Feats: Attack Focus (melee) 4, Blind-Fight, Critical Strike, Favored Environment 5 (underground), Improved Grab, Power Attack, Rage 2 (duration)

Powers: **Concealment 4** (sight group; *Extras:* Duration—Continuous; *Flaws:* Limited—Electronics, Permanent), **Enhanced Constitution 10, Enhanced Dexterity 8, Enhanced Strength 12, Protection 5** (*Extras:* Impervious), **Strike 6** (claws; *Power Feats:* Mighty), **Super-Senses 4** (darkvision, scent, track), **Super-Strength 2** (heavy load: 2,080 lbs.)

Combat: Attack +9 (melee), +5 (ranged), Grapple +17, Damage +12 (claws), Defense +9 (+5 flat-footed), Knockback -8, Initiative +3

Abilities 0 + Skills 19 (76 ranks) + Feats 15 + Powers 59 + Combat 28 + Saves 15 = Total 136

USING CHUD

Chud's obvious role in a series is as an antagonistic. An adventure might begin when the characters learn people are disappearing—first sewer workers and similar folks, then people from the streets (some reports say they are pulled into manholes and storm drains). Someone close to the characters might be one of the victims, spurring them to action. Or an official agency (the government or the local police department) might seek paranormal aid to deal with the problem. The characters descend into subterranean tunnels beneath the city and enter Chud's territory. They spend the adventure hunting Chud and dealing with his traps and ambushes, finally confronting him at the end. The characters either defeat the beast or Chud escapes to fight another day, undoubtedly harboring resentment and anger in his vengeful little heart.

Another option is to use Chud as a somewhat sympathetic, but morally-challenged character. Instead of being a definite bad guy, Chud is a man who never got a break in his life—and now that he's a paragon, his new powers wreak havoc with an already fragile mind and allow him to do the things he's always wanted. Chud has descended into madness and follows his animalistic urges now, but bits of his humanity remain. Perhaps the heroes can discover Chud was once human and attempt to redeem him. Clues as to his former life—a once-cherished belonging or a distanced relative—might force him to lower his guard. Similarly, once the characters discover Chud's true nature, scientist PCs could try to solve his problems by studying him and trying to develop a way to bring him back from madness. Alternatively, some authorities may be interested in discovering if certain factors (biological or environmental) might cause a new paragon's breakout to be more dangerous and damaging to the individual's personality and ask the player characters to help them capture Chud so they can study him.

LEARNING ABOUT CHUD

The following is information player characters could potentially learn about Chud:

GATHER INFORMATION

This check represents information a character can acquire from media personnel (especially those behind the scenes: cameramen, boom operators, and the like) as well as the victims' families. Investigators can also gain this information from authorities such as the police, the sanitation department, and animal control officers.

DC 20: While most believe Chud is some sort of Fortean creature or paranormal animal, rumors persist that it is a paranormal that has transformed into something no longer completely human.

DC 25: Chud's territory in the sewers is much larger than the public is aware, and authorities blame him for the death or disappearance of over a dozen people.

DC 30: One sanitation worker—Bob Calhoun—was down in the sewers, thinking himself safely outside Chud's territory, when he heard a haunting melody echoing from the distant tunnels. It sounded like someone humming a lullaby. "I knew it was that Chud thing, man, I just knew it. That thing is *human*, or was. It sounded like he misses his mommy." Authorities have silenced Bob on the subject to avoid an unfortunate public reaction.

KNOWLEDGE (CURRENT EVENTS)

Anyone who follows the news has at least heard of Chud; those who keep their fingers on the pulse of current events know a bit more.

DC 10: A creature the media has dubbed "Chud" dwells in the sewers of the city. It is vicious and mysterious.

DC 15: At least two deaths or disappearances have been blamed on Chud.

DC 20: Not long ago, authorities discovered a body in the sewers, apparently mauled by a large animal and partially eaten. Everyone blames Chud.

DC 25: A few security devices have caught glimpses of Chud's shadow; the creature itself seems to have the remarkable ability to avoid detection even from modern technology. It appears roughly humanoid.

CRYBABY & LULLABY

"WAAAAAHHHH!"

"HUSH LITTLE BABY..."

Mother and son against the world; she wants only a normal life for herself and her child. Sadly, that possibility is long gone. Together they travel across the country scraping by on whatever work Iris Walker can find, and causing mayhem whenever they run into trouble. When distraught, this baby's cries can send people into a frenzied rage, causing a riot that can spread across blocks. Only the soothing song of his mother can calm him. But her somniferous song induces sleep in *all* who hear its gentle tones.

Hers is a classic hard luck story. She grew up in rural America, the daughter of a working class family with deep-seated religious val-

CRYBABY

PL 12

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
-4	-3	+0	-2	+2	+2
2	4	10	6	14	14
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
-3	+0	-3	+3		

Powers: **Emotion Control 12** (*Extras:* Duration—Continuous, Explosion; *Flaws:* Sense-Dependent [Hearing], Limited—Rage Only, Range—Touch; *Power Feats:* Mind Blank), **Immunity 1** (Lullaby's powers; Limited immunity [calming]), **Shrinking 8** (tiny; *Extras:* Duration—Continuous; *Flaws:* Permanent; *Power Feats:* Innate)

Combat: Attack +0 (effectively), Grapple -12, Damage —, Defense +2 (due to size), Knockback +2, Initiative -3

Drawbacks: Disability (infant, -5 points), Disability (-3 Toughness, -3 Points)

Abilities -2 + **Skills** 0 (0 ranks) + **Feats** 0 + **Powers** 17 + **Combat** 0 + **Saves** 6 + **Drawbacks** -8 = **Total** 13

LULLABY

PL 12

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+0	+1	+1	+0	-1	+2
10	12	12	10	8	14
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+1	+1	+4	+4		

Skills: Bluff 4 (+6/+10 with Attractive bonus), Concentration 4 (+3), Knowledge (popular culture) 4 (+4), Perform (singing) 8 (+10), Sense Motive 4 (+3), Survival 4 (+3)

Feats: Attractive

Powers: **Fatigue 12** (*Extras:* Explosion; *Flaws:* Sense-Dependent [Hearing]; *Power Feats:* Sedation), **Immunity 1** (Crybaby's powers)

Combat: Attack +0, Grapple +0, Damage +0, Defense +2 (+1 flat-footed), Knockback +0, Initiative +1

Abilities 6 + **Skills** 7 (28 ranks) + **Feats** 1 + **Powers** 26 + **Combat** 4 + **Saves** 8—**Drawbacks** 0 = **Total** 52

ues. She showed great vocal talent as a girl, and had high hopes for her talent giving her a life of fame and fortune. Things didn't work out as she'd hoped: She dropped out of high school to run away with her boyfriend and his band. He disappeared when she got pregnant, and she was on her own.

Her baby Michael is her only love, and she will do anything for him. Sadly, she has no skills, limited common sense, and considerable bad luck. They move from town to town, living with one boyfriend or another, but inevitably they are forced to leave.

When not manifesting their powers, Crybaby and Lullaby are completely non-descript. In many ways the banality of their situation makes them almost invisible to those around them. Some turn away from them when they meet on the street, others look right past them. They look like any other single mom and baby. Their



clothes are second-hand, she doesn't usually wear much make-up, a cigarette is normally in her nervously shaking hand. On a good day, with clean clothes and a rare bit of optimism, she is attractive and charismatic. Most days, however, she inspires pity or worse. She lives in fear of someone taking her baby away from her, so she does her best to keep away from the authorities.

USING CRYBABY AND LULLABY

Crybaby and Lullaby are meant to appear together, though there may be occasions where one appears without the other. Crybaby appears to be a normal infant approximately seven months old. (GMs who wish, may retard the growth of Crybaby to keep him

GAME INFORMATION

Crybaby's power uses the following option for Emotion Control:

EMOTION CONTROL (RAGE)

The subject becomes furious, this may manifest as arguing with the nearest person, or cursing the object of the subject's attention (could be a person, building, object, etc). Subjects already in combat take an aggressive stance (see *M&M*, page 159). Rage will not cause a person to do something they strongly oppose, like harm a baby. If the save fails by 5 or more, the target will attack the nearest person or object.

a baby longer.) He is as helpless physically and mentally as any child of that age. Lullaby usually appears to be an average-looking young woman who is clearly bedraggled and weary. When cleaned up, she looks much more attractive. She also inspires a level of protectiveness in men, at least until the crying begins.

Crybaby and Lullaby are more victims than anything else. However, both Crybaby and Lullaby possess considerable power to cause chaos wherever they go.

Normal infant needs motivate Crybaby: hunger, thirst, temperature, fatigue, dirty diapers, need for comfort, and minor ailments. He can be very fussy, and his mother is often ill-equipped to deal with his needs (as she is usually unemployed, harried, or otherwise in trouble). When he is needy or fussy, those around him pay for it. Usually only his mother can calm his screams.

However, if his needs are met by some other means (giving him a bottle or even just holding him) he may settle down.

Lullaby is motivated by fear her baby will be hurt, or taken away from her, and a desire for a normal life. The latter may cause her to let down her guard to a sympathetic friend, or latch onto someone who seems a good prospect to give her what she wants. The former may cause her to pick up and leave town as soon as she suspects someone is on to them.



Both Crybaby and Lullaby can be used as weapons in the hands of some sinister group or mastermind. Crybaby's powers are well-suited to causing distractions, rendering guards useless, and even bringing down a team of paragons.

At some point, it's possible that a mob created by Crybaby's powers could turn on Crybaby and Lullaby. His power need not cause that, but it is possible. An angry mob chasing mother and child through the night streets with murder in their eyes could provide ample opportunities for heroism. Of course, if the mob attacks the child, the story takes on much darker tone, which may not fit with the type of series you're running.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

- Crybaby and Lullaby are at a local grocery store buying diapers, Lullaby does not have enough money, she pleads with the hapless clerks as Crybaby begins his wail. Chaos ensues.
- Crybaby and Lullaby are at the hospital hoping to treat his colic; the emergency room is busy with people, including perhaps some people involved in the aftermath of a crime. The hospital refuses to treat the baby, saying it is just colic. The crying begins, mayhem follows. Although Lullaby can put the child to sleep, it awakens crying shortly thereafter.
- Crybaby and Lullaby are at a local check cashing place. Having been refused cash, Lullaby begins to sing to her baby and causes everyone to fall asleep. She begins robbing the place, in hopes of getting enough cash to get by. An alarm is triggered.
- Crybaby is kidnapped by thieves using earplugs. They plan on taking the child to the Metropolitan Art Museum and unleash-

ing his powers on the patrons. Once the riot is going on, the thieves will steal several priceless works replacing them with pre-damaged forgeries.

- Crybaby and Lullaby are kidnapped, and Lullaby is forced to sing the guards of a local prison to sleep in order for her kidnappers to move in and rescue an allied villain or criminal leader. Bonus complication, Crybaby is exposed to the prisoners and guards causing a riot inside the prison.

LEARNING ABOUT CRYBABY AND LULLABY

The following is information player characters could potentially learn about Crybaby and Lullaby:

GATHER INFORMATION

DC15: There have been a number of spontaneous "flash riots" throughout the region in the last few months. The participants have little memory of why exactly they rioted.

DC20: Examining the locations and dates of the riots, a trail following the national bus line can be drawn. Carefully combing through the reports, someone finds accounts of people feeling as if they reached the breaking point when a baby in the vicinity would not stop crying.

DC25: A deaf person who was caught up in on riot reported how everyone around her started freaking out and she couldn't understand why. This was the only reported case of a person in the area simply not being affected.

TIMOTHY "DIRE" STRAITS

"THE ONLY PEOPLE WHO DON'T MIND WAR ARE THE ONES WHO DON'T FIGHT."

Timothy Straits graduated from an inner city high school with average grades and had some hard decisions to make. College was looking out of his reach, since his grades weren't good enough for a scholarship and his family couldn't afford tuition. Eventually, the constant pressure from recruiters ended with Timothy enlisting in the Marines.

Going through boot camp, Timothy excelled in marksmanship. He learned the in and outs of more weapons than even his instructors could keep up with. He seemed comfortable with any firearm. Perhaps, it was the praise this garnered him that helped him weather the verbal abuse and mind games. Along with thousands of other soldiers, Corporal Straits shipped out to the Middle East.

They say war does something to a man. One patrol near Falluja changed Timothy Straits forever. There was sudden gunfire and the squadron, like clockwork, immediately found defensive positions. One of the soldiers spotted muzzle flares from the end of the block. That was the last thing he saw. As they slowly moved forward, taking cover the whole way, the gunfire grew more intense. Perhaps it was pressure, who knows, but the squad began to fire blindly in the direction of the gunshots until they stopped. They closed in to find all the corpses dressed as if for some celebration. Later, a member of the squad who understood Arabic recounted what one of the wounded said:

"You, who see yourselves as the new Crusaders seeking to take everything from us—you will see, Allah will take your fortunes and your names and crush you into dust just as he did centuries ago. He will strip you of everything you hold dear just as you have stripped of us our happiness and our lives! And you will live to regret your actions as we live on in eternal peace with Him!"

As the war went on, Timothy began to believe that he would never see his family again. The "curse" began to seem true. Maybe Allah was starting by taking him away from his family. Timothy gradually contracted a persistent cough. No matter what he took, the best he could do was to get it to subside for a few hours. And that was at first. A few months later, no medicine would work. The medics could find nothing wrong, but a loud, uncontrollable cough made him unfit for the field. So, approximately a year later, he was sent home.

However, there was not much home to return to. Just about everyone he once knew had moved away or moved on. Some of them died from getting involved in the wrong crowd. Both of his parents died while he was away, leaving nothing but debt. His physical condition had not improved in the meantime, and now he suffered from night-



mares. He tried consulting the VA hospital but couldn't even get an appointment due to federal cutbacks. Talking to someone in the military about it just got him the ol' "suck it up, soldier" routine.

Trying to return to civilian life was harder than the commercials made it seem. There just weren't many jobs out there for guys who know how to use military-grade firearms and demolitions, but were rated as unfit for combat. Timothy tried to go back to school, but he didn't have a dime for tuition. Turns out the GI Bill only funded him as long as he was in the service. He couldn't even get a job at a burger shack for long. The employers were always afraid of a "Falluja flashback." Sure, they didn't say so—they didn't have to.

So now Timothy Straits makes his way from halfway house to halfway house and back again taking whatever odd jobs he can. He has done some "dirty work" on occasion when finances are difficult enough to require it. And that seems to be the case more often than not.

USING "DIRE" STRAITS

Timothy has extensive physical training from his time as a Marine. Some of it has been lost due to inactivity, but he is still an incredibly capable marksman. His experience has also given him great insight and knowledge about urban combat and guerilla warfare. Timothy still denies he is cursed, but when forced to give up the self-deception he falls into fits of depression and rage. Timothy's life as a drifter has garnered him a few ears on the streets and a familiarity for street-life. He has a lot of contacts with veterans

TIMOTHY "DIRE" STRAITS						PL 10
STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA	
+1	+3	+0	+0	+1	+1	
13	16	10	10	13	13	
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX		WILL		
+4/+0*	+6	+10		+8		

*flatfooted

Skills: Climb 6 (+7), Computers 3 (+3), Concentration 3 (+4), Drive 3 (+6), Gather Information 4 (+5), Knowledge (theology and philosophy) 4 (+4), Knowledge (technology) 5 (+5/+25 for firearms), Notice 6 (+7), Profession (soldier) 6 (+7), Search 4 (+4), Sense Motive 3 (+4), Stealth 5 (+8), Survival 6 (+7), Swim 6 (+7)

Feats: Chokehold, Defensive Roll 4, Endurance 2, Equipment 4, Favored Environment 2 (urban), Improved Initiative 2, Improved Grapple, Interpose, Rage 2 (duration), Stunning Attack, Takedown Attack 2, Teamwork 2

Equipment: two heavy pistols (+4 damage), plus up to 4 points of miscellaneous equipment

Powers: Enhanced Attack Focus (ranged) 3, Enhanced Knowledge (technology) 20 ranks (Flaws: Limited—Firearms), Quickness 2 (x5; Flaws: Limited—Firearms maintenance)

Combat: Attack +7 (melee), +10 (ranged), Grapple +8, Damage +1 (unarmed), +4 (pistols), Defense +9 (+5 flatfooted), Knockback -2, Initiative +11

Drawbacks: Cursed (common, major, -4 points), Flashbacks (uncommon, moderate, -2 points)

Abilities 15 + Skills 16 (64 ranks) + Feats 22 + Powers 7 + Combat 32 + Saves 20 + Drawbacks -6 = Total 106

from various wars. He can be very elusive—after all, who expects that bum who only wants to wash your windshield to know everything there is to know about more guns than most NRA members can even recognize?

LEARNING ABOUT TIMOTHY STRAITS

The following is information characters can learn about "Dire" Straits:

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 10: Timothy Straits was honorably discharged from the Marines. Most records regarding his past are sparse. They've either been lost in accidents or misplaced.

DC 15: Timothy has begun extensive research into Muslim theology and Arabic occult lore. Though he outwardly denies giving any credence to "curses," he secretly searches for a cure to the curse slowly stripping his existence to nothingness all around him.

DC 20: Timothy's most recent medical records have not yet been lost. They are from the Detroit VA Hospital. They show Timothy has some neverbefore seen strain of Lupus Syndrome. He has not been told because the doctors haven't been able to contact him and even if they manage to, they're not sure how to treat him.

KNOWLEDGE (ARCANE LORE)

DC 15: It seems that Timothy does actually suffer from a death curse. Such curses are potent indeed—even in these times of technology and science. Timothy will continue to lose his identity bit by bit every time he kills. It will not stop until his entire identity is erased—even from his own memory.

DC 20: It would seem that the curse is also affecting Timothy's health. He has contracted a rare form of Lupus Syndrome that isn't a disease at all. Rather, it is the curse attacking not only his identity, but his body as well.

DC 25: There may be a way to erase the curse placed upon Timothy. But such a ritual requires an incredibly high price, both to travel to said the location the ritual has to be performed and in materials. Some say, the ritual can break any curse but, in return, the subject loses what he or she treasures most.

KNOWLEDGE (BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES)

DC 10: His experiences with the military have left Timothy bitter. He feels like he was used and thrown away by his government. He is, therefore, distrustful of any government organization—no matter how apparently benign.

DC 15: Timothy shows symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. It has gone untreated for quite some time and Timothy has become—dangerously—inured to the nightmares induced by the malady. This form of dissociation has made Timothy into a veritable time-bomb and only time, a caring environment, and supportive allies can defuse him.

DC 20: Timothy is starting to show signs of Dissociative Identity Disorder. He seems to have developed an unnamed alternate personality that takes over whenever he has to do anything violent—even in self defense. This other self is extremely violent and prone to fits of berserk rage.

EMPRESS

**"YOUR FUTURE'S IN THE CARDS...
AND IT'S NOT LOOKING TOO GOOD RIGHT NOW."**

Grace and brutality makes for a strange juxtaposition, but succinctly describes Evangeline Summerfield's upbringing. Her family had long used the occult to maintain their position and primacy over their holdings; not that her relatives had much power, but even the smallest magics, when used ruthlessly enough, can go a long way to maintaining an iron hold over the superstitious inhabitants of a rural area, particularly when backed by the right stories and rumors strategically planted and cultivated over a long enough period of time.

When Evangeline was born, she already had two brothers who stood to inherit everything between them, and neither cared much for losing even the slightest amount of attention to her. She was raised with all the privileges her family's wealth and status could provide and was taught to be a proper lady. This was the plan, at least; she had other ideas. Skillfully manipulating tutors and servants from an early age, Evangeline got her way and also learned the subjects her brothers studied, even those as archaic and seemingly pointless as fencing. She grew up fully aware her family's cultured image was just that, an image. Her relatives hated each other, maneuvering for the slightest advantage and more than willing to use extreme methods.

And then her abilities surfaced. Unlike the minor talents of her relatives, Evangeline was born able to do so much more. Her gifts made those of her relatives seem trivial, immediately inspiring hatred and jealousy—not a healthy situation for her, given her family's proclivities. Internecine squabbling changed overnight and became focused on her because she was a common "threat." She never detected the poison in her food that fateful night.

She came to her senses moments before her family was able to enact a "dreadful accident" and only through desperate effort and her untested gifts was she able to turn the tables and condemn them to the fire meant to claim her life. Drunk with power, and not yet free of the poison's aftereffects, she didn't stop until her entire family was incinerated and the ancestral estate was engulfed in flames. The Summerfield legacy perished that day, but Evangeline moved on. With her talent, connections, and presence, teachers and employers were never hard to find. Soon the Empress met Silas the Elder and the Pact, and a dreadful alliance was born.

USING EMPRESS

Empress is one of the three primary agents working for Silas the Elder. She's the velvet glove to Styx's dagger, the diplomat to Glyph's sly thief. She plays the role of femme fatale to the hilt, relishing in the spotlight. Her name comes from her habit of one-handed (the left hand, of course) shuffling a deck of tarot cards and occasionally flipping one card up, which is always the Empress. As with many of the Pact, whose occult preoccupation leans heavily against *anyone* knowing your true name, her title is the only name she ever uses. In fact, she's made efforts to erase her past as best she can, going so far as to kill more than one person who knew things she wanted kept private. To distance herself from her roots, she goes so far as to affect a very convincing British accent.

Magic is only one weapon in Empress' arsenal, and she was twisting hearts and manipulating master manipulators from an early age on. In the grand old tradition of femme fatales everywhere, she's happy (and proficient) using her looks to achieve her goals first; it's when those fail that the white leather gloves come off and things get messy. The charm and the looks, like the personality and mannerisms she chooses to use, are nothing more than calculated tools. Underneath, she is cold and almost reptilian in her heartlessness. Sentimentality and emotion clouds judgment, breeds weakness, and invites failure—she has long since excised anything resembling compassion from her make-up, no matter how soft or vulnerable she may make herself seem to a target.

Empress insists her powers are magical and she uses showy "spells" from the Western Tradition, replete with lots of Latin incantations and elaborate pyrotechnics. Her magic is not subtle, not even in the slightest, perhaps stemming from a desire to be the center of attention. When stealth and subtlety are called for in an operation, Empress will either rely on her other skills, or simply defer to Mr. Styx.

It is important to note that, regardless of how a particular series defines paranormal abilities, in Empress' mind, what she does is *magic* and no amount of argument will change her perspective. To differentiate her powers from others, play up the elaborate and esoteric



EMPRESS

PL 10

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+0	+3	+3	+4	+6	+4
10	16	16	18	23	18
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+11/+3*	+6	+6	+12		

*without enchanted armor

Skills: Appraise 4 (+8), Bluff 7 (+11/+15*), Concentration 6 (+12), Diplomacy 4 (+8/+12*), Gather Information 4 (+8), Knowledge (arcane lore) 8 (+12), Knowledge (art) 4 (+8), Knowledge (business) 4 (+8), Language 3 (Enochian, French, Latin [English is native]), Notice 6 (+12), Search 6 (+10), Sense Motive 9 (+15), Sleight of Hand 7 (+10), Stealth 4 (+7)

* includes Attractive bonus

Feats: Attack Specialization 2 (guns), Attack Specialization 3 (swords), Attractive, Dodge Focus 4, Equipment 3, Fascinate (Bluff), Improved Block, Improved Disarm, Improved Initiative, Ritualist, Trance, Ultimate Skill (Bluff), Ultimate Skill (Sense Motive)

Equipment: Light pistol (+3 damage), fencing sword (+3 damage/crit. 19-20), plus 4 points of other equipment as needed.

Powers: **Device 4** (enchanted mail hauberk, hard to lose; **Power Feats:** Subtle, Restricted), **Magic (Mystic Blast 10** [silver fire; **Extras:** Shapeable Area, Penetrating; **Power Feats:** Homing 5], **Alternate Powers:** **Dazzle 8** [roaring silver fireballs; visual and auditory; **Extras:** Area Burst, Selective Attack; **Power Feats:** Incurable, Reversible], **Deflect 9** [glowing shields; All ranged; **Extras:** Automatic, Reflection], **Nullify Magic 10** [sparkling wave of silver fire; All magic effects at once; **Extras:** No Saving Throw, Nullifying Field, Selective Attack; **Flaws:** Distracting; **Power Feats:** Selective], **Snare 10** [silver pulsating ribbons; **Extras:** Constricting, Suffocating; **Power Feats:** Accurate 2, Obscures Sight and Hearing, Reversible], **Summon Elementals 6** [90 pt. minions; **Extras:** Broad Type, Fanatical, Horde; **Power Feats:** Progression 5 (50 minions)], **Telekinesis 11** [**Extras:** Damaging; **Power Feats:** Precise]), **Super Senses 5** (detect magic [ranged, acute, analytical], mystic awareness)

Device: Enchanted Mail Hauberk: **Dimensional Pocket 1, Feature 1** (immaculate appearance), **Immunity 4** (critical hits, disease, poison), **Protection 8** (**Extras:** Impervious 5)

Combat: Attack +11 (swords), +9 (guns), +5 (other), Grapple +5, Damage +11 (telekinesis), +10 (mystic blast), +3 (pistol), +3 (sword), Defense +9 (+2 flatfooted), Knockback -8, Initiative +7

Drawbacks: Noticeable (Empress' Magic is very loud and *always* produces a highly visible light show, -1 point), Power Loss (Magic, when unable to speak and gesture freely, -2 points)

Abilities 41+ Skills 19 (76 ranks) + Feats 21 + Powers 74 + Combat 20 + Saves 12–Drawbacks 3 = Total 184

elements, the visual special effects, the naming conventions rife with Latin and classical references ("Cestus Caelesti," not just telekinesis, "Hecate's Scorn" not just nullify). Go over the top—it's all in character.

The delicate gold chain mail Empress wears underneath her white leather outerwear is subtle enough to go unnoticed. Still the armor grants her substantial protection, and counters wear, grime, bad lighting, and always presents Empress at her best. It also hides a small other-dimensional pocket she can use to hide things from scrutiny, drawing them forth at will.

LEARNING ABOUT EMPRESS

The following is information characters may learn about Empress:

GATHER INFORMATION

Making this check represents inquiries in the law enforcement community. Keep in mind such inquiries might draw unwanted attention unless the character is particularly discreet.

DC 15: Empress is a paranormal claiming to possess sorcerous powers. She works for an organization called the Pact.

DC 20: She's a suspected killer and thief, though authorities have yet to pin anything on her.

DC 25: Her British accent is affected—Empress is actually from the American south, not the United Kingdom.

KNOWLEDGE (ARCANE LORE)

Asking people within the occult community can usually find the following information. Be aware that such communities are usually guarded about their lore, and information is often only available in exchange for like, or for favors/services owed.

DC 10: She's a member of the Pact; a deadly sorceress and apparently of British origin.

DC 20: Empress is one of Silas the Elder's people and is one of his most effective agents.

DC 25: She's believed to be a member of an old aristocratic family with centuries-long ties to the occult.

ENIGMA

**"THE ANSWER IS NOT THE PROBLEM...
THE ISSUE AT HAND IS: WHAT IS THE QUESTION?"**

The man who became Enigma was once Bakari Fuara, a talented investigative journalist who discovered evidence of a secret so terrible he had to die. Bakari strongly suspected the existence of a massive worldwide conspiracy of powerful individuals who, unbeknownst to the world at large, were in control of every significant government, corporation, and organization. Bakari was driven to uncover the truth, and so became part of the secret world of the Conspiracy. He became an Enigma.

Perhaps Enigma's breakout occurred earlier in his life and lead to his discovery of the Conspiracy, or perhaps it was as a result of his suspicions, regardless, he was to become the revealer of truth and savior of an unknowing public. Armed only with his enhanced mind, capable of discerning patterns in most chaotic of systems, Enigma trained to become the world's greatest detective, taking on the Conspiracy to expose its secrets. He single-mindedly studied combat, investigation, linguistics and espionage. He diligently dissected news, culture, and the criminal underworld, setting up the groundwork for multiple identities, preparing for each time he is uncovered, planning to disappear and resurface elsewhere as someone else altogether. After several years, he was ready...or so he thought.

Since taking up his quest, Enigma has uncovered considerable circumstantial evidence, but his quarry is elusive and has yet to allow him to expose it in more than a cursory fashion. Despite this, he pursues every instance of fraud and deception he finds, seeing

the Conspiracy in every clue. Sometimes he finds inspiration to continue his work, but more often than not he reveals a mundane secret, one that saves the public from heartache and trouble, but does not further his goals. As time has passed, Enigma has stretched the boundaries of morality, ethics and the law, using lies, deception and even murder; the tools of his impersonal enemy. Ultimately, whether this causes him to be no better than those he fights is a question he doesn't ask; not because he's concerned about the answer, but because the quest has consumed so much of his humanity that he's little more than an obsessed shell of a man.

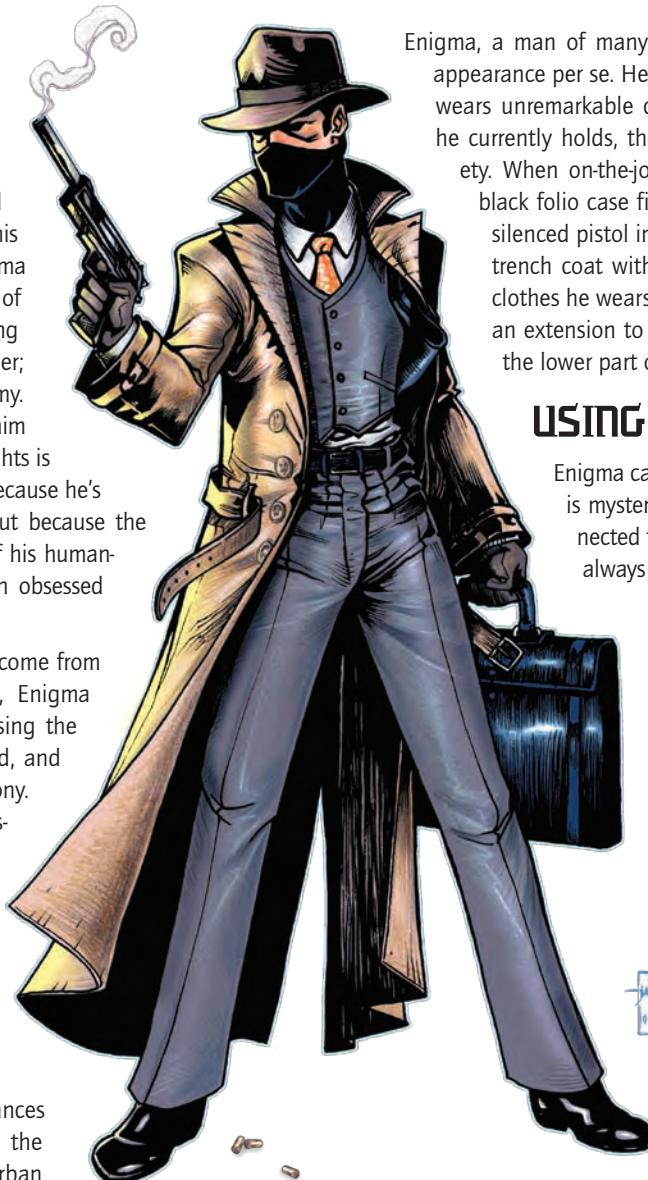
Not all clues to the Conspiracy come from his own efforts. Knowing this, Enigma keeps his ear to the ground using the Internet, authorities, underworld, and even the corporate hegemony. Anyone asking enough questions will garner his attention.

If the need is great enough, he has been known to help those that cannot help themselves. This doesn't always turn out so well for whomever he's "saving" because he's not completely stable. His mysterious appearances and disappearances among the downtrodden have lead to an urban legend of a masked crusader who champions the cause of the little man.

While not entirely accurate, the characterization is sometimes helpful and Enigma fosters it as best he can.

Enigma often alerts the authorities or the media when doing so might damage to his nemesis. Because of his actions the Conspiracy has attempted to end his life a number of times, but so far Enigma has remained one step ahead of Them. He knows his luck will run out eventually and hopes he can find his grail before that day comes. Daily, Enigma fights a battle to stay out of the hands of his pursuers, discover the truth and to remain grounded, lest he spiral into dementia.

Recently, Enigma has learned the Conspiracy has a name: The Initiative. Additionally, there may in fact be more than one conspiracy or perhaps facets and divergent factions. Their ultimate goal, besides power, has so far eluded him although he knows there is some connection to the paragon phenomenon. Regardless, Enigma knows a few more bits of information and the right lever are all he needs to crack the Conspiracy wide open. He is concerned, however, of rumors of a person, or perhaps more than one person, who can flawlessly assume the physical appearance of any individual. Where this being fits into the Conspiracy, or even if they do at all, Enigma is not yet certain, but this person's mere existence causes him great concern.



Enigma, a man of many identities himself, has no particular appearance *per se*. He is in excellent physical condition and wears unremarkable clothing appropriate to whatever job he currently holds, though generally of a white-collar variety. When on-the-job his dark-gloved hands carry a flat black folio case filled with the tools of his trade and a silenced pistol in a shoulder holster under a long grey trench coat with matching fedora. Under his normal clothes he wears a black stretch fabric undershirt with an extension to the collar that can be pulled up over the lower part of his face to hide his identity.

USING ENIGMA

Enigma can be used in any situation where there is mystery, intrigue, or conspiracy whether connected to the larger Conspiracy or not. He will always look for, and often see, larger connections, even if none exist. A group could encounter him while investigating a government cover-up or corporate scandal as either direct source of information or an ally.

Additionally, Enigma can be used as an adversary of sorts. Enigma's particular ability and his high level of skill often put him one or more steps ahead of a group of characters. He would not be above using a group of paragons to his advantage as either partners or pawns in his war against the Conspiracy, in a direct raid or sending them against a red-herring adversary. Regardless, Enigma should be an enigma, appearing and disappearing seemingly at random and following his own agenda.

LEARNING ABOUT ENIGMA

Enigma pays careful attention to anyone trying to find him. He quickly determines if they pose any threat. If so, his *modus operandi* is to hide his tracks and disappear along one of his many pre-planned escape routes. Once Enigma is convinced he's safe, the individuals involved should be prepared for the skeletons in their closets to be brought into the public eye.

Those looking for Enigma's help are likely to hear from him before they find him, receiving a late-night visit or mysterious (untraceable) phone call or email. The puzzle-solving paranormal is known to help others because he believes it will lead him to valuable information, or simply because their problem intrigues him.

GATHER INFORMATION

Making this check represents knowledge that can be gained about Enigma by making inquiries in both criminal and law enforcement organizations.

DC 25: Enigma is just that, no one knows where he comes from or where he goes. He appears, solves a mystery and fades back into the shadows. He always seems unhappy, as if there were something missing from his successes.

ENIGMA

PL 6

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+2	+3	+3	+5	+3	+2
14	16	16	20	16	14
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+6/+3*	+5	+6	+10		

*flat footed

Skills: Acrobatics 6 (+9), Bluff 10 (+12), Climb 5 (+7), Computers 13 (+18), Concentration 10 (+13), Craft (chemical) 5 (+10), Craft (electronic) 6 (+11), Diplomacy 6 (+8), Disable Device 13 (+18), Disguise 6 (+8), Escape Artist 8 (+11), Gather Information 13 (+15), Intimidate 6 (+8), Investigate 13 (+18), Knowledge (behavioral sciences) 8 (+13), Knowledge (current events) 13 (+18), Knowledge (popular culture) 5 (+10), Knowledge (streetwise) 8 (+13), Language 9 (Afrikaans, Amharic, Arabic, French, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Swahili, Turkish [English is native]), Medicine 4 (+7), Notice 13 (+16), Profession (journalist) 7 (+10), Search 13 (+18), Sense Motive 13 (+16), Sleight of Hand 8 (+11), Stealth 8 (+11), Survival 3 (+6)

Feats: Assessment, Benefit (alternate identity), Defensive Roll 3, Eidetic Memory, Equipment 3, Jack-of-All-Trades, Seize Initiative, Skill Mastery (Disable Device, Investigate, Search, Sense Motive), Well-Informed

Equipment: silenced pistol (+3 damage; subtle), binoculars, camera, concealable microphone, handcuffs, mini-tracer, parabolic microphone, portable computer

Powers: Quickness 10 (Flaws: Limited—Mental actions)

Combat: Attack +6, Grapple +8, Damage +2 (unarmed), +3 (pistol), Defense +9 (+5 flatfooted), Knockback -3, Initiative +3

Abilities 36 + Skills 58 (232 ranks) + Feats 13 + Powers 5 + Combat 30 + Saves 12 = Total 154

DC 30: The man is unhinged. Believes there is a Conspiracy, big C, controlling everything. The scary part is that he may be right because people have asked about him after some of his appearances.

KNOWLEDGE (STREETWISE)

Use of this skill represents knowledge of urban myths and rumors.

DC 20: He uncovered the kickbacks the former mayor was getting from construction companies to allow them to "rebuild" the ghetto.

DC 25: He's interested in going up against the government or any other large, powerful organization that doesn't have completely transparent goals. He pursues his goals to the exclusion of everything else and doesn't like it when people try to pull him away from his work.

COMPUTERS

Use of this skill represents finding fringe Internet sites that unknowingly track the Conspiracy and those connected to it.

DC 25: There is reference to, and a blurry picture of, a man known as Enigma on a conspiracy site, it says that he fights the good fight...then the picture disappears and the site crashes.

EPICURIUS

"WELL OF COURSE I'M HERE, DARLING.
IT'S A PARTY, ISN'T IT?"

Epicurius is a modern mystery, an unknown quantity that appeared in the public eye a short time ago and, despite constant media scrutiny, has maintained an infuriating anonymity.

What little is known about him is found not in any reputable media outlet, but in gossip columns and entertainment websites all across the world. Epicurius maintains a lifestyle even self-professed hedonists look upon with envy, and perhaps even a sense of alarm. His true identity is a mystery, perhaps even to him. He has made many off-hand comments about his past that seem completely contradictory, often to deflect questions and change the subject in the rare instances when he has spoken to the media at all.

The truth of the matter is Epicurius has very little memory of the man he used to be, and is completely comfortable with that. In fact, he prefers it. He has a vague memory of the sort of person he used to be, and he despises it. He was small-minded, uptight, and completely absorbed in the monotony of his everyday mundane life. Routine was important. Conformity satisfied him on some basic, fundamental level. Anything out-of-the-ordinary was wrong and despised.

When his pheromone-based paranormal abilities began to manifest, the people around him began to act...differently; work, home, church, everywhere he went, it was chaos. Everyone around him suddenly acted without thought or inhibition. He saw the most horrible things, the most liberating things, and he simply could not adjust to it. Within two weeks of his breakout, his old self went away and Epicurius was born.

Epicurius vaguely remembers being in an institution of some sort, but his abilities made it difficult for others to help him; it seems psychologists cannot accurately diagnose their patients while experiencing a state of euphoria, and after a while they no longer want Epicurius to leave the institution anyway. Epicurius believes he was sedated for a significant portion of this period, and has only vague, blurry memories of someone coming to save him. Epicurius was freed from the institution, but he's fairly certain the facility itself, as well as the staff who had been abusing him, did not survive the incident.

With the aid and assistance of his new friends, a group calling themselves the Pantheon, Epicurius gradually began to emerge from the shattered cocoon of his former life, like a colorful new butterfly emerging from its cocoon. Everything about his personality had changed and, although medication and therapy would have allowed him to become his old self again, he wanted none of it.

The Pantheon was more than happy to aid him in casting aside his previous life, and he embraced the philosophy that they, as paranormals, were superior in every respect to normal human beings. The newly liberated Epicurius craved excitement, thrills, and most of all, pleasures of every sort. Morality, restraint, and even common consideration for others were no longer burdens he carried. While he did not share the more militant aspects of the Pantheon's philosophy, he was wise enough to let that pass without objection, and to use their influence to gain everything he desired from life.

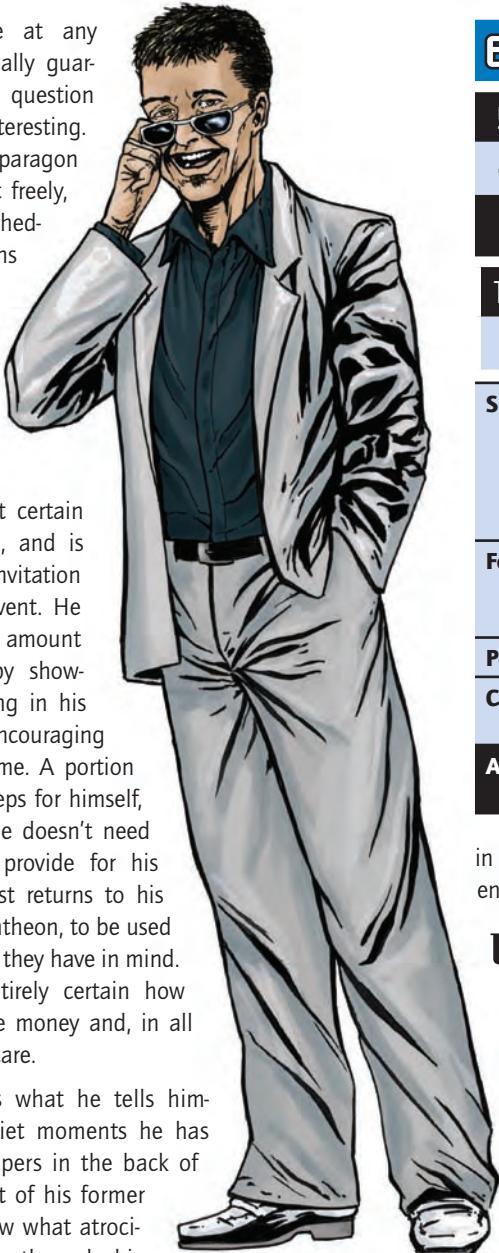
Epicurius's presence at any social function virtually guarantees the event in question is going to be interesting. Proximity to the paragon causes others to act freely, as if intoxicated, shedding their inhibitions and making headlines all across the globe with their wild antics. Epicurius is paid enormous sums to make "spontaneous" appearances at certain clubs and functions, and is on the top of the invitation list to any media event. He makes a tremendous amount of money merely by showing up and indulging in his many vices, and encouraging others to do the same. A portion of this money he keeps for himself, although honestly he doesn't need it as his admirers provide for his every desire. The rest returns to his allies among the Pantheon, to be used for whatever agenda they have in mind. Epicurius is not entirely certain how they plan to use the money and, in all honesty, he doesn't care.

Or at least, that is what he tells himself. In the rare quiet moments he has to himself, the whispers in the back of his mind—a remnant of his former life—demand to know what atrocities he is enabling through his mindless hedonism. Most of the time, he is able to silence those whispers with a quick drink or some other diversion, but there are times when they simply won't go away. It is in those moments that Epicurius wonders if eating, drinking, and being merry will every truly be enough to vanquish his doubts.

USING EPICURIUS

Epicurius is a rather non-conventional character in so much as he is unlikely to take a role as either an ally or an enemy in the normal senses of the words. He is best used as a means of demonstrating the different roles paranormals can take in the world, and can be used in the background to present a more three-dimensional setting. It is possible for him to take a more active role in the story, particularly if the characters are in a position to rub elbows with the rich and famous on a regular basis.

Epicurius could be a means by which the characters learn about the Pantheon, or a means by which they can try to get more information regarding them. Epicurius is not likely to divulge this information freely, however, and the price the characters must pay



EPICURIUS

PL 8

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+0	+2	+0	+2	+1	+8/+4
10	14	11	14	12	26/18
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+2	+2	+4	+7		

Skills: Bluff 5 (+13/+21*), Computers 4 (+6), Diplomacy 5 (+13/+21*), Disguise 8 (+16), Gather Information 13 (+21), Intimidate 8 (+16), Knowledge (Popular Culture) 8 (+10), Notice 12 (+13), Perform (Dance) 8 (+16), Sense Motive 13 (+14)

*includes Attractive bonus

Feats: Attractive 2, Benefit 3 (wealth bonus 20), Connected, Contacts, Fascinate (Bluff), Fascinate (Diplomacy), Fascinate (Perform [Dance])

Powers: Enhanced Charisma 8, Pheromones 8, Protection 2

Combat: Attack +4, Grapple +4, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +6 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback -1, Initiative +2

Abilities 19 + Skills 21 (84 ranks) + Feats 10 + Powers 42 + Combat 20 + Saves 10 = Total 122

in order to secure his cooperation can lead to an entire series of encounters.

LEARNING ABOUT EPICURIUS

The following details information characters may be able to learn about Epicurius:

GATHER INFORMATION

Making this check represents a character delving into legitimate news sources for information on a public figure such as Epicurius. Due to Epicurius's nature, finding such information from something more reputable than a celebrity gossip column is more difficult than normal.

DC 15: Epicurius is a paranormal socialite of some sort who travels in the same circles as the rich and famous. His real name, and the source of his wealth, is unknown.

DC 20: Epicurius is rumored to have some sort of pheromone-based ability that induces a sense of euphoria in others. His very presence at a party or event ensures those present will have the time of their lives, hence his overwhelming popularity with both hosts and guests.

DC 25: There are rumors that Epicurius is part of a society of paranormals who believe they are not only above the law, but a completely separate and superior species.

KNOWLEDGE (POPULAR CULTURE)

Making this check represents the information a character may have picked up on Epicurius purely by watching television or reading the Internet, particularly entertainment or celebrity-based websites.

DC 10: Epicurius is a well-known paranormal socialite who travels in the most elite celebrity circles. On any given night he can be found alongside actresses, musicians, and heiresses at some combination of nightclubs, parties, or media events.

DC 15: Epicurius is supposedly the life of the party, literally, because those around him gain some sort of natural high purely because of his presence. Because of this, a number of infamous young celebrities are almost slavishly devoted to him.

DC 20: There are some who say that Epicurius's lifestyle is funded by a group of nightclub owners and media moguls who only require him to attend their functions on a regular basis. Presumably this is so they will benefit from his popularity in some manner.

FELICIA DUMONT

"THE GREATEST TRICK SATAN EVER PULLED WAS CONVINCING THE WORLD HE DOESN'T EXIST"

Felicia DuMont was a woman with problems most people wish they had. Born of old money, Felicia never wanted for anything during her childhood. However, that same money, while granting her financial independence and freedom, garnered her very little respect in the modern world of high society. Her world changed with an unassuming trip to a historic museum in Prague.

The trip proceeded uneventfully and Felicia spotted two flintlock pistols in one of the exhibitsbeautiful, ornate, and awe-inspiring. Yet for Felicia, they held a certain familiarity, as though long lost and now rediscovered by happenstance. It just seemed a matter of course that she'd reclaim them. And though the price was high—millions of Euros—claim them she did.

Since that day, Felicia began noticing weird things. Strange symbols or sigils tattooed on people. Some people appeared distorted. Some of them even appeared sort of...decayed. Their names would sound distorted when she heard them. They smelled of sulfur, excrement, and mold. The stench left a cloying taste in the back of the throat. And the air would be filled with...wrongness. Sometimes ennui, depression, or hatred would fill her heart. It was one of these attacks that led Felicia to bury her head in her hands in grief, crying until she fell asleep. Only to awaken in an ICU with self-inflicted facial wounds and a missing eye.

Things got progressively worse. Attempts were made on her life. The "distorted people" she saw began to notice her, too. Her peripheral vision was haunted by nightmarish...things, but when she turned, it was just some kid or the guy next to her at the bank or the pundit on TV ranting on the "evils of the Liberal media." And now...they're everywhere. She had to terminate most of her house staff after noticing they were creatures as well. But then she noticed the pistols again. Somehow...they were the answer.

After researching the symbols and sounds she'd seen and heard, Felicia found answers in books on demons and fallen angels. Felicia may have become involved in something much larger than herself.

USING FELICIA DUMONT

Felicia is quite wealthy which makes her a good ally for financial support. Born of a long line of old money from France, she is independent of corporate sponsorship. However, it also makes her somewhat unprepared for the deviousness of the new world

she has been thrust into. Felicia's innate physical abilities make her good at scouting and shadowing. She has researched much in the subject of demonology. She has yet to discover anything pertinent about the history of the pistols she now possesses. But, she has learned that they are well over 300 years old.

Felicia is a potential ally of mystically-oriented paragons, particularly if they're after some of the creatures that are after her. She could be an adversary for the Pact or a target if someone like Silas the Elder decides he's interested in her or her armaments.

LEARNING ABOUT FELICIA DUMONT

The following is information characters might learn about Felicia DuMont:

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 10: Felicia DuMont is a wealthy heiress that, while living the life of a playgirl, has never been serious about anyone. There is little spoken about her save that she is incredibly resilient. Felicia has multiple offenses as a juvenile on record—mainly shoplifting and possession.

DC 15: Felicia is the great grandchild of Henry DuMont and Annalee Tissolm, a woman from Mississippi, 20 years Henry's senior. Annalee was rumored to be a witch. While such rumors were never proven, she did survive her husband by 40 years.

DC 20: The DuMont line is traceable to the old nobility of France before the French Revolution. The family has long been involved with the Catholic Church. Two men of the DuMont line actually served in the clergy, one as an archbishop and the other as a cardinal. The Tissolms were slave-owners in Mississippi who were secretly involved in black magic. Orville Tissolm, master of the estate was arrested and hung in 1882 for the murder of his entire family.

KNOWLEDGE (ARCANE LORE)

DC 10: Felicia has never dabbled in magic spells. She's researched the occult quite a bit, but that's as far as her experience with it goes.

DC 15: Some of the "sigils" that Felicia describes as "tattooed" on people represent brands. It is said that these brands were seared on a person's spirit to seal a pact made with a demon.

DC 20: The pistols she has are engraved with ancient script in a long-dead language. In occult circles the phrases inscribed are wards of some type. The metal is uncommonly pure silver believed to have spiritually purifying qualities.

DC 25: In very sparse manuscripts, it is eluded to that some of the people executed during the Spanish Inquisition were actual heretics, witches and willfully possessed. It is also said that one prelate was accosted by a demon during the trial of a man arraigned for heresy. The prelate, one Tomas de Torquemada, used a pair of "strange weapons" that "spat forth Holy flame laying low the daemon".

KNOWLEDGE (BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES)

DC 10: Felicia had been attending regular therapy sessions for two years, but suddenly stopped. She displayed no symptoms of psychoses; however she is beginning to show signs of depression. Also she may suffer from paranoia.

FELICIA DUMONT

PL 10

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+1	+4	+2	+2	+0	+1
12	18	14	14	11	13
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+2	+7	+9	+3		

Skills: Acrobatics 6 (+10), Bluff 6 (+7/+23 with Attractive bonus), Climb 5 (+6), Disable Device 6 (+8), Drive 3 (+7), Escape Artist 5 (+9), Gather Information 6 (+7), Knowledge (arcane lore) 6 (+8), Knowledge (streetwise) 5 (+7), Language 3 (English, plus two ancient languages [French is native]), Notice 5 (+5), Search 7 (+9), Sense Motive 6 (+6), Sleight Of Hand 5 (+9), Stealth 6 (+10), Survival 3 (+3), Swim 5 (+6)

Feats: Ambidexterity, Attractive 4, Equipment 2, Improved Critical (flintlock pistols), Improved Initiative, Instant Up, Precise Shot, Sneak Attack 2

Equipment: 10 points

Powers: **Healing 4** (Extras: Total; Flaws: Personal; Power Feats: Persistent), **Device 7** (pair of flintlock pistols, hard to lose, extra effort strains Felicia and not the pistols)

Flintlock Pistols: **Blast 10** (ballistic; Power Feats: Accurate 2, Alternate Power: **Nemesis 3** [15 points; Flaws: Limited—supernatural opponents]), **Super Senses 12** (demonic awareness, scent, true sight [automatically see through any Concealment, Illusion, or Obscure effect])

Combat: Attack +6, +10 (flintlock pistols), Grapple +7, Damage +2 (unarmed), +10 (flintlock pistols/crit. 19-20), Defense +9 (+5 flatfooted), Knockback -1, Initiative +8

Abilities 22 + Skills 22 (88 ranks) + Feats 13 + Powers 37 + Combat 30 + Saves 13 = Total 137

DC 15: It is recommended that Felicia DuMont be convinced to return to therapy as soon as possible in order to prevent possible psychological deterioration. Without proper guidance, it is believed that she will further sink into her beliefs of "hidden demons" in the world and set out to cause herself or others harm.

DC 20: The last session Felicia attended delved deep into talking about describing the "demons". How she sensed them and why she thought they were demons. Then the doctor started asking about the the pistols and the session abruptly ended when Felicia walked out.

KNOWLEDGE (LIFE SCIENCES)

DC 10: Felicia DuMont has a generally clean bill of health. Her physicals all show her in good health.

DC 15: Felicia seems to have had the same physician all her life. A Dr. Nigel Hemmingford. His records never seem to show recovery times for treatment.

DC 20: Dr. Hemmingford's records seem deliberately vague in some respects. Serious injuries, what few are mentioned, are the prime example. Phrases like "Beginning treatment of trauma to left leg" abound. In fact, it seems he has never prescribed any medication for Felicia.



THE GHOST

"WHY CAN'T I REST?"

Phil Kinsey thinks he died in that automobile accident. When he came to his senses, wreckage was all about him, even skewering his body, but he found he could pass through it and easily move away from the crash site. No one seemed able to see or hear him, and Phil's own reflection showed him looking years younger. Phil was coming to an awful realization when the EMT turned and passed directly through his body. That's when Phil knew the truth: He was dead. He was a ghost.

Phil went through a difficult adjustment. He railed against the woman who had crashed her semi into his car; he wept at his current state; he sat alone, wondering why he wasn't allowed to move on to...to whatever was next. He very nearly went mad.

Eventually, though, he decided to get up and *do* something.

His first stop was his family: his wife, two daughters, and young son. They mourned him. His heart broke as he watched them, and he resolved to make their lives easier. He had done what he could

when he was alive; now that he was a ghost, maybe he could still do something.

The Ghost's first acts were to reassure his family that he was still with them. He couldn't actively manipulate the physical environment as living people could, but found if he concentrated, he could move objects with his mind. He spent hours one night spelling out "I am here" on the kitchen table, using marshmallows one of his daughters had left out. The family was alarmed at first, and they still don't know exactly what's going on, but they believe their father and husband has returned as a ghost—though they haven't told anyone else of these beliefs.

The Ghost remained near his family, doing what he could to help them. When a neighborhood thug attempted to steal his son's bicycle, the Ghost lashed out, unreasonably mad. He found that he could *strike* people with his mind; using a similar method as he did for moving objects. After a couple blows, the thug fled in terror.

Since that time, the Ghost has expanded his definition of what it means to help his family. He sneaks through school walls to help his daughters cheat on their tests (by placing their study notes in secret places near their desks). Students who might give them a hard time in school find themselves beset by unfortunate or embarrassing events: They trip down stairs, get pantsed in the halls, or the door on the bathroom stall flies open.

Recently, the Ghost's methods have become more extreme. Last month, when his wife competed with another woman for a promotion, the competition met with a calamity when a flowerpot tumbled from an apartment balcony and cracked the other woman's skull. The Ghost isn't

even sure if he went far enough. Seeing his family wrenches his heart. If his wife ever started dating again or took a lover, he doesn't know what he'd do.

The Ghost's interests lie in more than just his family. These days, he spends much of his time searching. He wonders why *he* has come back as a ghost, and why he has never met any others. What unfinished business does he have that he must stay behind, denied his eternal rest?

In attempts to find other spirits, the Ghost frequents places of death. He tries to be on the scene as soon as possible if he hears of an accident. He wants to be around death, so he hovers around hospitals and emergency rooms. When someone dies in his presence, he watches anxiously, looking for some clue that another spirit has appeared—or trying to catch a glimpse of one as it moves on, so he can learn how to do the same.

The Ghost's efforts have been fruitless so far, and his frustration grows. Sometimes he lashes out at nearby objects or people, creating stories of haunted locales. Twice he even hastened hospital patients on their way to the afterlife, by pulling a plug or closing a door. As he becomes more desperate, more thoughts of outright murder—or trying to *make* more ghosts—creep into his mind.

Since he has had no luck observing the dead and dying, he wonders if his return as a ghost is related to the new paranormal activity sweeping the world. Thus, he tries to be on hand during paranormal occurrences, especially those not obviously caused by a paragon—what the scientists call Fortean events. He follows paranormal news as best he can, and he travels great distances—hitching rides in cars and planes and subways—to observe such events. He is especially interested when death and the paranormal intersect.

Someday, he hopes, he'll find an answer.

USING THE GHOST

The Ghost has a number of potential uses. One such use is as an actual ghost, or at least something people believe is a ghost. He has the power to move small objects and damage people and things, if he wishes, while remaining unseen.

Such activity might arouse the imaginations of ghost hunters or lead to stories about people who have "seen the ghost" or been to "haunted" locales. The heroes might suspect the truth (or not) and be inclined to investigate. A more sinister version of this technique is for the Ghost to attack people—he might believe they are after his family, he might think they deserve to die, or he might be so desperate to find other ghosts he intends to create them himself. In this case, the victims, their families, and/or the authorities need assistance of a paranormal nature. If you use the Ghost in this way, he becomes primarily an antagonist; while he doesn't have great combat potential, he is slippery, so the mystery comes from trying to determine who or what is behind these phenomena and the tension comes when characters determine how to find and defeat the Ghost.



THE GHOST

PL 3

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+0	+1	+0	+0	+0	+0
10	12	10	10	10	10
TOUGHNESS		FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL	
+0		+2	+4	+6	

Skills: Computers 5 (+5), Craft (electronic) 3 (+3), Notice 4 (+4), Profession 4 (corporate drone) (+4)

Powers: **Concealment 8** (visual, auditory, olfactory, total; *Extras*: Duration—Continuous; *Flaws*: Permanent), **Immunity 30** (Fortitude), **Insubstantial 4** (incorporeal; *Extras*: Duration—Continuous; *Flaws*: Permanent), **Super-Movement 2** (air walking), **Telekinesis 3** (Str 15; *Extras*: Affects Corporeal, Damaging, Range—Perception; *Power Feats*: Subtle 2)

Combat: Attack +0, Grapple +0 (+6 with telekinesis), Damage +0 (unarmed), +3 (telekinesis), Defense +0, Knockback -0, Initiative +1

Abilities 2 + Skills 4 (16 ranks) + Feats 0 + Powers 87 + Combat 0 + Saves 11 = Total 104

You might also allow the heroes to determine the truth about The Ghost: He is a paranormal who believes he is dead. The Ghost might seek them out, having heard of their expertise in such matters, or they might encounter him in some other way. Convincing the Ghost that he is alive probably takes some doing—he is convinced of his death—but can be as difficult or easy as you like.

Similarly there's the possibility the Ghost is right and he *is* really dead. What are the implications of real ghosts in your *Paragons* series and why is Phil Kinsey the only one?

The Ghost might ask for the heroes' help in finding other ghosts, or ask them what he must do to achieve the peace of death, or threaten them (or outright attack them) if they do something he doesn't like. The heroes might encounter the Ghost when they notice something strange—footprints leading away from a puddle, for example, or the sound of someone breathing in an empty room—while they do something else. The Ghost is most likely to show up at the scenes of deaths and places having to do with death (cemeteries, mortuaries, and the like), at Fortean occurrences, and around his family.

LEARNING ABOUT THE GHOST

The following is information player characters could potentially learn about the Ghost:

GATHER INFORMATION

This check represents information a character might uncover simply by asking the right people about strange phenomena. Questions about ghosts or spirits also turn up this information. You may wish to lower the DCs by as much as 10 if the characters are specifically investigating the Kinsey family or Phil Kinsey's death.

DC 25: The Kinseys' father died several months ago, but his wife and children report they sometimes feel his presence or believe he leaves messages for them. Maybe, they think, he has returned as a ghost.

DC 30: The Kinseys report a streak of good luck since their father passed away: Test scores are above normal and promotion opponents have met with accidents.

KNOWLEDGE (ARCANE LORE)

This check represents information characters might glean if they start thinking about whether or not the Ghost could actually *be* a ghost.

DC 15: Stories of hauntings and ghosts were uncommon, but certainly apparent, before the Breakout. Since no one ever invented a scientific test to verify such phenomena, the truth remains a mystery.

DC 20: Such tales have increased since the Breakout, but the reasons are obvious: More paranormal occurrences in the world means more tales of the supernatural and unusual. There's still no definitive proof that "ghosts" exist.

DC 25: A new paranormal is likely to breakout during a stressful or catastrophic event, like an automobile accident. Paragons can do or be just about anything; a paranormal, for example, might be invisible and intangible.

GLYPH

**"YOU CAN KEEP THE TRINKETS AND BAUBLES,
BUT I SUPPOSE I COULD TAKE THAT
MUSTY, NASTY OLD BOOK OFF YOUR HANDS."**

Sometimes, even our mistakes can bring us good fortune. Several years ago, while performing a ritual through his fabled Obsidian Oracle, Silas the Elder lost his patience and his temper after fruitless hours plumbing the depths of the Imageria for the truth behind a complex mystery. Venting his frustration, he exclaimed loudly, "Gods Above and Below! I just want the bloody answer! I am tired of endless secrets! Can't you give me something?"

It was the mistake of an apprentice, to lose control of his emotions in the midst of a ritual. He had been in the middle of his conjuring circle and not yet completely through the latest in a series of invocations. It was completely possible his outburst had been made part of the ritual's structure. He immediately regretted his words, and dreaded the response—magic as a rule, was neither forgiving nor predictable when it came to errors. After a few moments of waiting for the ground to swallow him or the skies to rain down thunderbolts, Silas calmed down and his pulse returned to normal. Then he realized he wasn't alone in the circle. Behind him stood a figure, unclothed, sexless and without features, almost as if it was a sculpture or mannequin.

"Do you understand my words?" he asked it, hesitantly.

"I do now," it responded, the voice clear and strong in his head as a rapid series of untranslatable symbols raced across where the being's face should have been.

"An interesting choice of bindings and wards...but inadequate for the task you performed," it said, the words resonating in Silas' mind.

The figure lifted its hand as Silas watched, half in amazement, half in horror, as the protective symbols he'd placed around the casting circle literally rose off of the floor, circled in the air, and disappeared without a trace. The creature then turned away from him and walked out of the circle and over to the one of the shelves lining the walls of the room.

Stopping in front of a decorative symbol painted on the wall between shelves, it asked, "What is this symbol, here? What is its meaning? I do not recognize it."

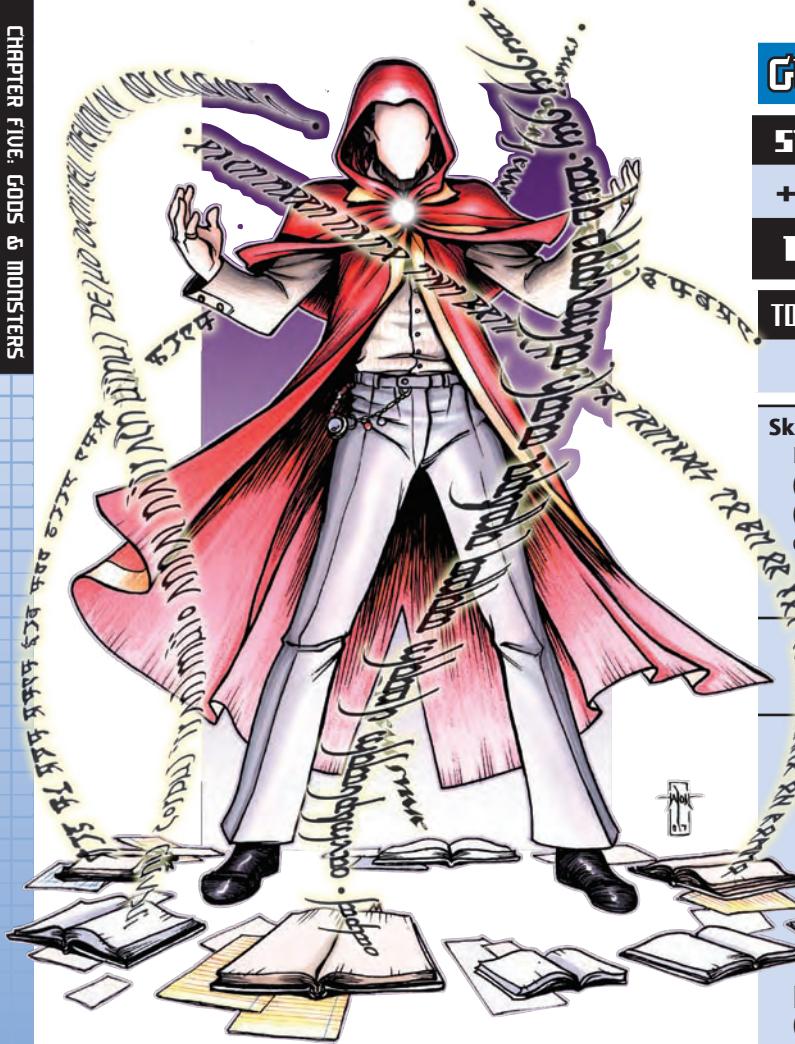
"It's just a glyph...has no meaning, it simply is." Silas answered.

"Glyph...yes. I too simply am. I need a name...'Glyph' will suffice," he heard it say, followed immediately by, "The Seventh Tablet of Isis holds the answer you seek, Magi...and I know where it is currently located. Give me time and resources and I will bring it to you. Relinquish any claim you may have upon me because of your summoning, and I will bring you answers now and always. Many answers, enough to sate even your appetite. Is this bargain acceptable?"

"I have a few trifling other conditions to add, trivial things really, but I think we can...do business," Silas finally said, recovering his wits and masterfully hiding the smile trying to fight its way onto his face.

USING GLYPH

Glyph isn't human...not even remotely. He isn't even a "he," technically, although it's the pronoun Silas uses, given Glyph's shape is roughly masculine. Silas has called him "a daemon sprung from the hands of Trismegistus himself," and "the avatar-messenger of



secrets unfolded, lore hard won, and wisdom without boundaries." Of course, Silas does like to hear himself talk.

What is known with certainty is Glyph is not susceptible to many of the frailties of humanity. No secrets are safe from Glyph, not written in a vault, not buried in the most paranoid of minds. He can talk to and receive answers from anything that holds information—books, scrolls, computers, etc. No language or cipher presents a barrier and he can pluck answers to his unspoken questions straight from someone's mind with that person being none the wiser.

Glyph doesn't fight. He finds the concept of physical confrontation vulgar and pointless. If faced with violence, the air around Glyph explodes with rapidly changing words, images, and colors that overwhelm the human mind, either freezing people in place or rendering them senseless.

Glyph now operates as one of the stranger thieves in the business, among other sidelines. This is understandable given that he prefers to specialize in acquisitions of an occult nature. He's a procurer of information of all types and has established a network of contacts around the world the envy of many a mover-and-shaker, but he's most at home with more outré targets. He almost purrs while stroking a newly acquired grimoire or book (prompting Empress to occasionally quip, "Would the two of you like a room?"). Though he mostly works by himself, he does frequent jobs for Silas and members of the Pact who are favored by the old man.

Most of the people feeding him information never actually lay eyes on Glyph, instead, they go through layers of middlemen, and that's probably a good thing as his appearance is more than a little disturbing: he doesn't have a face; when he speaks, his words appear

GLYPH

PL 10

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+2	+4	+3	+5	+5	-1
14	18	16	20	20	8
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+11	+7	+4	+9		

Skills: Bluff 6 (+5), Computers 2 (+7), Concentration 5 (+10), Diplomacy 6 (+5), Disable Device 6 (+11), Escape Artist 6 (+10), Gather Information 15 (+14), Knowledge (arcane lore) 10 (+15), Knowledge (current events) 8 (+13), Knowledge (popular culture) 8 (+13), Knowledge (streetwise) 8 (+13), Notice 5 (+10) Profession (thief) 5 (+10), Search 15 (+20), Sense Motive 15 (+20), Sleight of Hand 4 (+8), Stealth 8 (+12)

Feats: Assessment, Connected, Contacts, Dodge Focus 3, Eidetic Memory, Ritualist, Ultimate Skill (Gather Information), Ultimate Skill (Search), Well-Informed

Powers: Communication 3 (mental; *Extras: Area; Power Feats: Rapid 2, Selective, Subtle*), **Comprehend 7** (codes, languages 4, objects 2 [*Flaws: Limited—Only objects used to store or display information; Drawbacks: Noticeable*]), **Feature 1** (visual display of symbols and words), **Immunity 13** (critical hits, life support, sleep, starvation and thirst), **Paralyze 10** (information overload; *Extras: Area Burst; Flaws: Sense-Dependent [Sight]; Alternate Powers: Mind Reading 6 [Extras: No Saving Throw; Power Feats: Subtle 2], Nauseate 10 [information overload; Extras: Area Burst; Flaws: Sense-Dependent (Sight)]*), **Protection 8**, **Quickness 6** (*Flaws: Limited—Only for information intake*), **Super Senses 8** (detect information [accurate, acute, analytical, extended 2, radius])

Combat: Attack +3, Grapple +5, Damage +3 (melee), Defense +8 (+2 flatfooted), Knockback -5, Initiative +4

Drawbacks: Weakness (needs to "consume" information as sustenance, major, every 5 hours, -1 points)

Abilities 36 + Skills 33 (132 ranks) + Feats 11 + Powers 76 + Combat 16 + Saves 8—Drawbacks 1 = Total 179

in listeners' minds while obscure glowing symbols appear in the air in front of him; and when he wishes, he can absorb the contents of a book or written document by laying his hands on it and making copies of its text scroll up his hands and across his body. Glyph is careful about appearing or acting in public—he wouldn't want to frighten off potential suppliers of his beloved lore, and a contact's squeamishness may have no bearing on his or her actual value, after all.

Silas tells his colleagues what Glyph doesn't know isn't worth knowing and what information he can't get isn't worth having, and that may well be true.

LEARNING ABOUT GLYPH

The following is information characters might learn about Glyph:

GATHER INFORMATION

Making this check represents making inquiries in the law enforcement community. Keep in mind that such inquiries might draw unwanted attention unless the character is particularly discreet.

DC 15: Glyph is an information broker working through a large network of contacts and middlemen.

DC 20: Glyph will find out almost anything a client wants to know but seems to specialize in rare books, manuscripts, and similar texts.

DC 25: Few people have met the man himself, but those who have say he isn't human...at least not completely.

KNOWLEDGE (ARCANE LORE)

The following information can be found by asking people in the occult community.

DC 10: The "go-to guy" for grimoires, scrolls, and pretty much any other rare or obscure written piece of occult paraphernalia—just don't expect to meet him personally.

DC 15: Somehow connected to the Pact, probably through Silas the Elder.

DC 20: If someone has information of any kind that he actually wants, he *will* find them and he *will* procure the information. His history on this fact is legendary among occult circles.

Of course, Noora's paragon status has its complications. Teleporters, especially long-range ones able to bring along passengers and cargo, are relatively rare and useful for all sorts of things other than visiting restaurants. Ms. Laine has turned down numerous offers to work for intelligence agencies, smugglers, and the like.

She has occasionally taken on courier jobs as a profitable sideline, but doesn't much care for them, especially since one of her clients attempted to use her as a "mule" to smuggle contraband without her knowledge. Her ability to bypass national borders, checkpoints, and the like is of concern to any number of international authorities, who would like to restrict her access, but as yet have no means to do so.

She has also been the target of at least one kidnapping attempt by a terrorist cell hoping to use her power to deliver suicide bombers. Noora now sometimes hires a bodyguard from the Silber Agency to accompany her on her travels to potentially dangerous destinations.

Unknown to anyone but herself, the Gourmand actually has paranormal abilities beyond her unique form of teleportation. Her metabolism is also superhumanly efficient, allowing her to eat all manner of food while maintaining a perfectly fit and healthy figure. While some have commented on Noora's slim figure in contrast to her place

THE GOURMAND

*"OH, I KNOW A LOVELY BISTRO NEAR CALAIS...
NO, NO GUNFIRE THERE, EITHER."*

Food has always been Noora Laine's first love, from the dishes of her native Finland, prepared by her mother to the cuisines of all nations, so it was no great surprise that Noora became a celebrated food and restaurant critic on the Internet. She's known for her lively interest in new dining experiences and her photojournalistic approach to eating, including beautifully shot color photos of meals in her columns. She firmly believes a good meal engages all the senses: sight, scent, and even sound as well as taste and feel, and tries to convey that experience to her readers.

Noora traveled a good deal in search of new dining experiences, although not nearly as much as she would have liked, until one day, she was struck with a sudden craving for Thai food...from Thailand. She stepped out her door, and found herself in the foyer of a restaurant in Bangkok!

Since that day, Noora Laine has possessed the ability to travel instantly to any eatery, anywhere in the world, simply by stepping through the nearest doorway. Once she recovered from her initial shock and figured out how her paranormal ability worked, Noora revolutionized her culinary blog: It now extends to her travels all over the world to try new cuisine and new restaurants, and Noora—or "the Gourmand," as she has come to be known, particularly in continental Europe—is a world-wide celebrity, particularly in culinary circles. She can eat for free virtually anywhere she likes, since a mere mention of a restaurant in her column is tremendous publicity.

For her part, Noora revels in her paranormal abilities, which are a dream come true for her. She has even opened a small restaurant in Helsinki, which she uses as a "home base" for her travels. She has since refined her abilities to bring other people along with her, and sometimes leads whirling culinary tours, with three or four meals (often including a high tea) in different destinations.



THE GOURMAND

PL 2

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+0	+0	+1	+2	+1	+1
10	11	13	14	12	13
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX		WILL	
+1	+4	+3		+4	

Skills: Computers 4 (+6), Craft (artistic—photography) 4 (+6), Diplomacy 4 (+5), Gather Information 4 (+5), Knowledge (art) 4 (+6), Knowledge (civics) 4 (+6), Knowledge (current events) 6 (+8), Knowledge (popular culture) 7 (+9), Knowledge (streetwise) 4 (+6), Language 2 (Finnish, French [English is native]), Notice 6 (+7), Profession (food critic) 7 (+8), Sense Motive 4 (+5)

Feats: Connected, Equipment 4

Equipment: cell phone, digital camera, PDA, pepper spray (see *M&M*, page 138)

Powers: **Immunity 1** (ingested poisons, weight-gain), **Teleport 9** (*Extras*: Accurate, Portal; *Flaws*: Limited—Restaurant destinations, Long-Range, Medium—Doorways; *Power Feats*: Easy)

Combat: Attack +1, Grapple +1, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +3 (+2 flat-footed, Knockback -0), Initiative +0

Abilities 13 + Skills 15 (60 ranks) + Feats 5 + Powers 20 + Combat 8 + Saves 9 = Total 70

as perhaps the world's most famous "foodie," no one has connected it to a paranormal ability, except as the occasional joke. Even the Gourmand isn't aware that her ability also makes her immune to any type of ingested or inhaled toxin; she cannot be poisoned by anything she eats, drinks, or even breathes. Her body harmlessly processes it.

USING THE GOURMAND

In addition to her use as a background character, the Gourmand can play various roles in a *Paragons* series, from patron to ally or even victim.

As mentioned, Ms. Laine sometimes hires paranormal bodyguards for her trips, which could include the player characters. Alternately, if they are also celebrities, they might make a joint appearance, or join Noora for a meal as part of some promotion or publicity event. If any of the characters share her interests in cuisine or travel, they could simply be friends who enjoy dining with Noora on a regular basis.

Although she is not fond of the idea of using her powers for things like espionage, smuggling, or the like, the Gourmand might be convinced to serve as a courier or transportation for a group of paranormals in need with a worthy cause. In this case, she can provide an "in" to an otherwise difficult-to-access part of the world, along with an emergency "escape clause". Of course, should something happen to her in the midst of things, the characters could end up stranded.

Finally, the Gourmand's abilities make her a potential target for those looking to exploit her, and the characters could be called upon to come to her rescue, should she be abducted, for example. The limits on her powers make it possible for kidnappers to hold her, and the potential threat of a rogue teleporter would be enough for any number of factions to get involved in her rescue (or at least ensuring she was "neutralized" as a threat, possibly with extreme prejudice).

LEARNING ABOUT THE GOURMAND

The following is information player characters could potentially learn about the Gourmand:

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 10: Noora Laine is a Finnish food and restaurant critic with the paranormal power to teleport to any restaurant in the world.

DC 15: Laine owns a restaurant in Helsinki, but often travels to various eateries around the world in order to sample their cuisine.

DC 20: The Gourmand has been willing, from time to time, to take "passengers" along with her, and not necessarily just to sample the food.

KNOWLEDGE (POPULAR CULTURE)

DC 10: The Gourmand, or Noora Laine, is a paranormal food critic who maintains a world-famous blog and review website, based on her ability to travel instantly to different restaurants to sample their food.

DC 15: Laine is a native of Finland and owns a small restaurant, also called the Gourmand, which she uses as a home base for her travels. She sometimes gives "guided tours" of world restaurants to small groups of well-to-do foodies. She's often a guest of the Paramount Club, although she's just as likely to show up at any restaurant anywhere in the world.

DC 20: The Gourmand was involved in a charity effort to end world hunger involving transporting food to places in the Third World, which was an exception to her usual policy of not acting as a "courier" or messenger.

THE HOUSE THAT HATE BUILT

"ENTER FREELY AND OF YOUR OWN WILL."

Stories of haunted buildings are as old as the concept of buildings themselves. There is a considerable body of lore concerning the presence of structures forever tainted by the terrible acts committed within them, cruelty and insanity forever imprinted in the very walls. Whether any of this actually has any bearing on the structure known as "The House That Hate Built" is open to speculation.

What is known is that the structure itself, which resembles a small, bleak 19th century New England manor house, is apparently able to move through space of its own volition, and is never found in the same location twice. Those lured to enter its doors seldom exit, as its interior warps and changes at the whim of whatever malign intelligence rules the place. Further, the interior changes include death traps aplenty, apparitions as deadly as they are terrifying, and any number of other touches intended to reduce unfortunate "guests" to cringing, gibbering fetal balls before finally adding their names to the litany of victims who came before them.

USING THE HOUSE THAT HATE BUILT

The House appears to "feed" off the fear and pain it causes. It won't hesitate to kill if it feels the time is right, but in most cases

it prolongs the experience to milk it for all that it's worth. In other words, it generally won't deliver a quick death when lingering and horrible pain is an option.

To get out of the house, a visitor must "win" freedom by finding the heart of the structure: A furnace in the basement that burns with a cold, black flame. Extinguishing the flame transports the surviving victims outside the house as it vanishes, seeking new prey elsewhere. The exact nature of what visitors must undergo and the trials the house inflicts is up to the Gamemaster's fiendish imagination, but should be nerve-wracking and brutal. The house *must* allow visitors a chance to survive and win their freedom; it's an unchangeable part of its very nature. It drops clues how to "defeat" it, and if the participants fail to figure them out, it savors their fate all the more. As a reflection of human expectations, it also targets people based on its judgment of their moral character. If nothing else, treacherous and untrustworthy types rarely work together to save themselves, so the House is more likely to claim them as victims, which is its goal.

Essentially, the house exists as a construct, normally immobile, and very durable. It can change its appearance to fit into whatever area (residential, commercial, etc.) or style (architectural style, period, etc.) it necessary. Its Disguise skill represents an innate artistic talent with its Morph power and should only apply if the house has time to "fine tune" the appearance its Morph power generates—use the time guidelines under the skill's description. It can view anywhere inside its dimensional pocket regardless of apparent distance (ESP). The listed Toughness Save is only for the external structure, as the inside uses a Create Object rank from its Variable Power. If the House is destroyed, the Imageria recreates it within a short time, and if the House is damaged enough or has claimed all the victims it can, it taps into the power of the Imageria and moves elsewhere.

Within its own structure, the House creates a Dimensional Pocket where its Variable Power allows it to control reality completely. Create Object and Illusion can make it look like the inside of whatever kind of house or building it wants, creating hallways, stairs, and rooms only moments before they are found. It can then warp that structure to create traps and various dangers of many different varieties, from brick walls that explode into a deadly wave of shrapnel or guns and archaic cannons that suddenly manifest from "hidden compartments" (Blast), to floorboards becoming a fanged maw to bite a person in half or buzz saws appearing from previously unnoticed floor or wall slits (Strike). Rugs suddenly wrap around and pin a poor victim or cages slide around them from nowhere (Snare). The visual "special effects" and details can change to suit the house's whim, but the basic effects are the same and limited by its power level (and the GM's judgment).

The House uses Environmental Control to create a suitable "atmosphere," from sudden increases or decreases in temperature, to floors buckling like waves or even Escheresque dioramas or an overwhelming sense of foreboding (different kinds of Distract effects, or even Fearsome Presence). If this isn't enough, realistic illusions come into play, either to reinforce the previously mentioned scenarios or for other mind games (never underestimate the psychological impact of watching loved ones you thought were safe outside die horribly in front of you or having those you trust lead you into a trap and then laugh viciously at your misfortune).

Entering the dimensional pocket is usually a matter of stepping through a door or window. However, the Subtle Aura modifier allows the house to attempt to draw in anyone touching its structure—with the visual effect of unseen hands dragging the victim along the side of the house and in through the closest door or window.

When dealing with paranormals, thanks to its Detect and the Nullify or Power Control powers it can emulate using its Variable Power, the house is aware of any superhuman abilities and can take control of most of them. This is usually done subtly and for best effect: Defensive powers simply turn off at the worst possible times; offensive powers go off, or increase or decrease when least



THE HOUSE THAT HATE BUILT PL 12

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
—	—	—	+5	+5	+0
—	—	—	20	20	10
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+18	—	—	+12		

Skills: Concentration 8 (+13), Disguise 12 (+12), Intimidate 12 (+20)

Feats: Distract (Intimidate), Fearless, Redirect, Seize Initiative, Speed of Thought, Startle

Powers: **Concealment 2** (mental senses; *Extras:* Duration-Continuous; *Flaws:* Permanent), **Dimensional Pocket 10** (*Extras:* Aura, Duration-Continuous; *Power Feats:* Subtle), **ESP 4** (all senses, 1 mile; *Flaws:* Limited- Only inside its dimensional pocket; *Power Feats:* Dimensional), **Feature 1** (dissolves into nothingness if destroyed), **Growth 16** (*Extras:* Duration-Continuous; *Flaws:* Permanent), **Immunity 30** (Fortitude effects), **Morph 4** (broad group: houses and other structures), **Protection 10** (*Extras:* Impervious), **Regeneration 6** (Recovery Bonus +0, Resurrection 1/ per week, True Resurrection), **Super Senses 4** (detect powers [acute, analytical, ranged]), **Teleport 9** (*Extras:* Accurate; *Flaws:* Long-Range Only, Requires Concentration Check), **Variable Power 12** (reality control, any combination of traits totally 60 power points; *Flaws:* Limited-Only inside its dimensional pocket)

Combat : Attack +0, Grapple +0, Damage (varies, up to +12 from powers), Defense +0, Knockback -30, Initiative +5

Abilities -42 + Skills 8 (32 ranks) + Feats 6 + Powers 289 + Combat 32 + Saves 7 = Total 300

convenient; movement powers either fail to work or (like Teleport or Dimensional Movement) only put the user right back where they started; and Super-Senses (or especially ESP), only show what the house wants the character to perceive ("No matter how far out you stretch your ESP's limits, you see only an infinite number of rooms resembling the one you're in now.") The sentience of the house is concealed from any mental powers that might otherwise detect it.

LEARNING ABOUT THE HOUSE THAT HATE BUILT

The following is information the characters could learn about the House That Hate Built, primarily in the form of urban legends, but also research from paranormal experts aware of the House's existence.

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 15: Reports of a mysterious "haunted" structure appearing and disappearing litter the records of many different agencies in many different jurisdictions.

DC 25: Few people who have entered the House are ever seen again, and those who are tell bizarre horror stories of the trials they faced while trapped inside.

KNOWLEDGE (ARCANE LORE)

DC 10: The House That Hate Built is a haunted structure that lures the brave and gullible inside and kills them.

DC 15: The House is an intelligent entity that feeds off the pain and death it causes.

DC 20: All the terrible things that occur inside the house are a twisted form of contest—meaning there must always be a way out, if the victim is wise enough to find it.

ICON

"EVER HEAR THE STORY OF HERAKLES AND ANTAEUS? PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO THE PARTS I PUNCTUATE WITH MY FISTS."

Sylvia Browning loved the past, the older, dustier, and more obscure the better. It's what attracted her to archaeology in the first place. Though she loved stories of ancient gods and heroes, she had always considered them just that, stories. She always considered herself a pragmatic, well-grounded professional—definitely in the "X never marks the spot" school of her peers. That worldview was forcibly shredded in front of her eyes the day of that fateful dig in the mountains just north of the Black Sea.

She and her team were assaulted by what she swears looked like a squad of turbaned ninja, when she found the jeweled amulet, like nothing that should have been in that region of the world, and the central gem of the amulet imbedded itself in the palm of her right hand.

Since that day, with but a thought, she can summon the power of any number of archetypal figures from folklore and mythology, ranging from the Dark King to the Great Mother. Abstract and colorful features superimpose themselves over her like what anthropologists would call a shamanic mask, while she enjoys the gifts people of ages long past attributed to whatever figure she's currently calling upon.

Sylvia would still like to know who those people who tried to kill her were, but in the meanwhile, she's grown rather fond of what she can do, helping people while simultaneously bringing a sense of wonder back to peoples' minds...even when the behavioral changes brought on by "invoking" a particular figure causes her problems (she has to be really careful about certain fertility figures). The formerly prim and proper archeology professor has learned to enjoy letting her hair down and living through figures that have always been larger than life.

USING ICON

Sylvia Browning can assume the powers and proclivities of a number of mythic archetypes encompassing figures from cultures and stories around the world. The specific "entities" listed in her stats only represent the most frequent examples, the ones she's grown most comfortable using.

Note the archetypes are broad enough that gender titles should be ignored—*e.g.*, Dark King could just as easily be a Dark Queen with no substantive change in what it represents on an archetypal level. Further, the anima effect can change to more closely resemble figures local to the area: Skyfather can represent Zeus, Thor, Perun, or Susano-we or even Thunderbird, for example, and the Horned God anything from Cernunnos to Herne to Pan. The GM can permit other iconic forms as power stunts, adding in Firebringer (enhanced physical abilities and Charisma plus Fire Control), or the aforementioned Skyfather (Weather Control and Flight), or anything else that suits the story. Pick a figure from mythology or folklore and run with it.

Icon's power is essentially an array of Alternate Forms. When Icon switches between alternate powers, she actually changes her entire power set, as well as aspects of her personality. Though the core persona remains Sylvia Browning, there are additional elements from each archetype adopted—when "invoking" the Champion, for example, she becomes dangerously brave and utterly dismissive of physical danger to herself; also, as the Champion she tends to be more aggressive, prone to violence as the solution to pretty much any problem, and preoccupied with being the center of attention.

For many of the archetypes she uses, these changes aren't really that much of a problem—but there are exceptions—while timeless themselves, these archetypes are not necessarily adapted to modern civilization and its social mores. On occasion, Sylvia has had trouble exerting the willpower to change back to normal. The Horned God, for another example, is somewhat addictive in its raw presence and primal hedonistic needs. Not placing enough restraint on that particular representation was what cost Browning her job in academia, as she cycled through careless sexual trysts with a number of her students before being discovered and dismissed.

Since then, she's been more careful... or tried to be, at least.



ICON						PL 10
STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA	
+0	+1	+1	+3	+3	+5/+2	
10	13	12	16	16	20/14	
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL			
+1	+3	+3	+7			

Skills: Bluff 3 (+8/+12*), Climb 4 (+4), Diplomacy 3 (+8/+12*), Knowledge (earth sciences) 2 (+5), Knowledge (history) 8 (+11), Knowledge (theology and philosophy) 4 (+7), Language 6 (ancient Greek, Aramaic, Coptic Egyptian, Hebrew, Sanskrit [English is native]), Notice 3 (+6), Profession (teacher) 5 (+8), Search 4 (+7), Sense Motive 4 (+7), Survival 2 (+5), Swim 4 (+4)

* Includes Attractive bonus

Feats: Attractive, Beginner's Luck, Connected, Taunt

Powers: Enhanced Charisma 6, Enhanced Feats 13 (Attack Focus [melee] 5, Dodge Focus 3, Inspire 2, Luck 3), **Regeneration 1** (Resurrection 1/week; *Extras:* True Resurrection),

• **Trickster Form: Illusion 8** (all senses), **Immunity 5** (interaction skills), **Shapeshift 7**

Alternate Powers include the following:

• **Artificer Form: Create Object 8** (*Extras:* Duration—Continuous, Movable; *Power Feats:* Innate, Precise, Subtle), **Enhanced Intelligence 10**, **Enhanced Skills 12** (Craft [electronic] +10, Craft [mechanical] +10, Craft [structural] +10, Disable Device +10, Knowledge [technology] +8), **Enhanced Wisdom 10**.

• **Champion Form: Enhanced Constitution 25**, **Enhanced Feats 3** (All-out Attack, Fearless, Power Attack), **Enhanced Strength 25**, **Impervious Toughness 8**, **Leaping 2** (70 feet), **Speed 2** (25 mph), **Super Strength 5** (heavy load: 50 tons)

- **Dark King Form: Drain Constitution 12**, **Enhanced Feat 10** (Fearsome Presence 10 [50 ft., DC 20]), **Enhanced Skill 3** (Intimidate +12), **Summon Spirits 10** (*Extras:* Broad Type, Horde; *Power Feats:* Mental Link, Progression 8 [250 minions], Sacrifice)

- **Great Mother Form: Animal Control 10**, **Comprehend 4** (Animals 2, Plants 2), **Healing 8** (*Extras:* Total), **Plant Control 10**

• **Horned God Form: Confuse 10** (*Extras:* Burst Area; *Flaws:* Sense-Dependent [Hearing], Range—Touch; *Power Feats:* Incurable, Reversible), **Emotion Control 8** (*Extras:* Aura, Duration—Continuous Aura; *Flaws:* Limited—lust only, Permanent Aura, Sense-Dependent [sight]), **Enhanced Charisma 8**, **Enhanced Constitution 10**, **Enhanced Dexterity 10**, **Enhanced Strength 10**, **Fatigue 6** (*Extras:* Burst Area; *Flaws:* Action—Full Round, Sense-Dependent [Hearing]; *Power Feats:* Incurable, Reversible, Sedation), **Strike 1** (horns and hooves; *Power Feats:* Mighty)

Combat: Attack +8 (melee), +3 (ranged), Grapple +8, Damage +0 (melee), Defense +7 (+2 flat-footed), Knockback -0, Initiative +1

Drawbacks: Noticeable (Form Array has a bright and obvious anima effect "overlaying" an appropriate archetypal image while in use, -1 point)

Abilities 21+ Skills 13 (52 ranks) + Feats +4 + Powers 119 + Combat 14 + Saves 8—Drawback 1 = Total 178

Sylvia is sort of a wandering scholar-for-hire, making her way around the globe while pursuing the interests of her various bankrollers. As such, Icon can be used as an ally or a rival, depending upon the relationship between characters and Sylvia's employers (or the nature of the characters' views on "magic").

She can also be used as an adversary, if you want to play up some of the potentially less friendly aspects of her different "masks" (Earth Mother as eco-terrorist, Horned God as sexual predator, and so on). The history behind the gem in her palm, or the possible figures behind the attack on her dig site, are also good starting points for investigation in a series. After that, it's just a matter of which questions you want to ask: How much control do her other personas exert without Browning's knowledge? Is she even aware of their influence? How do religious figures view these blatantly pagan personas? How do neo-pagans react to someone claiming to invoke their gods? Can Sylvia ever return to just being human again? Does she even want to?

LEARNING ABOUT ICON

The following is information the characters could learn about Icon:

GATHER INFORMATION

This is easily garnered from any number of sources, including magazine articles, newspaper stories, and Internet coverage.

DC 10: Icon is former archaeologist Sylvia Browning, a paranormal able to "channel" the abilities of various mythic figures.

DC 15: Browning was dismissed from Yale after incidents of inappropriate physical relationships with several of her students.

DC 25: Icon works for hire for clients like MERLIN, PSI, and various governments.

KNOWLEDGE (ARCANE LORE)

DC 10: The "anima effect" that exhibits itself when Icon uses her powers resembles what is known as a shamanic mask, almost as if she were invoking totemic powers.

DC 25: The gem imbedded in her hand is supposedly the centerpiece from the Crown of Ages, an ancient artifact belonging to the priesthood of a lost civilization. How it became part of an amulet—or attached to Browning, for that matter—is unclear.

IMPOSTER

"I'M NOT WHO YOU THINK I AM."

To the few who have heard of him, Imposter is often regarded as little more than an urban myth. Even among the ranks of paranormals, the idea of an individual so gifted at deception and impersonation he can replace virtually anyone with such skill even their closest friends and family won't notice, is somewhat preposterous. And yet that is exactly who and what Imposter is. He is the perfect answer to a pressing need to be in two places at one time, or the need to impersonate an enemy or friend, regardless of the circumstances.

Norbert Franks was nobody. He came from nothing, with parents he barely knew. He dropped out of school as soon as he was able and moved out of the trailer park where his family lived. He took a menial job as a nighttime custodian at an office building. Norbert existed on virtually nothing, living in a nameless fleabag apart-

ment complex with no friends or associates to speak of. He went days without speaking to other people, simply because there was no need to do so, and no one with a pressing desire to speak to him in the first place. Norbert didn't need anyone. He had his one true love: espionage thrillers.

Norbert was completely absorbed by espionage. He read novels and biographies, watched movies, and studied historical accounts on the Internet at the public library. The monotony and drudgery of his everyday life was forgotten while he was absorbed in his obsession. One evening he was walking to work, thinking about the plot of the movie he had watched the previous evening, when someone on the street screamed.

Norbert tucked his head down and attempted to keep moving. He had learned as a child it was best to ignore trouble. Unfortunately, that was not possible. A woman ran up to him, babbling almost incoherently. Norbert stared at her in confusion as she called him by a different name, the name of the leading man in the movie he had seen the previous evening. Norbert looked around, thinking perhaps it was a joke, and caught his reflection in a storefront mirror. There, standing in his place, wearing his clothes, was the movie star he'd been thinking of.

Norbert ran. He didn't know what was happening, but he ran to work because it was closest. When he arrived, he looked in a mirror, afraid of what he would find, but he only saw his own reflection this time. Norbert relaxed and went to work, and for the first time in his entire life, he had something different to think about while he cleaned toilets at the office building where he worked.

Despite his circumstances, Norbert was not stupid. He was familiar with the increasing phenomenon of paranormal abilities, and that night at home, he practiced until he was able to duplicate the ability he had demonstrated the night before. Excited by his new ability and eager to attempt the sorts of things he had read about his entire life, he decided to try something. The following night he stole a suit from the office building where he worked. The next morning, he put it on, changed his appearance to that of the movie star, and went out on the town.

His deception was flawless. Norbert went to a number of stores and opened accounts in the actor's name, then spent thousands of dollars on things he wasn't even interested in. He did it simply to see if he could. When a photographer showed up, called by an employee of the store where he was shopping, Norbert didn't shy away, but acted exactly the way he had seen the movie star act in interviews and on television. His ruse was completely convincing until one of the media representatives arriving on the scene asked how he could have gotten back to America after having appeared on a live broadcast in Europe only a few hours earlier. Alarmed, Norbert said something about tape delays and left as soon as he could, his loot tossed into a dumpster only a few streets away from the stores.

Later, Norbert reflected on what he had done. He had enjoyed the deception, far more than the material goods (although in retrospect he regretted disposing of those so quickly). His abilities made him the ultimate spy, the supreme infiltrator; far superior to the fictional characters he idolized his entire life. He set about making some inquiries into advertising his abilities, and within a year was taking on private clients through a handful of trusted and confidential sources like the Silber Agency (see **Chapter Four**).

For all intents and purposes, Norbert Franks no longer exists. Imposter has taken his place, and never appears the same way

twice. Even those whom he trusts to represent his interests to potential clients do not really know him, his name, or what he really looks like. All his payments go to a numbered offshore account. Most who hire him never see him, but only know that he gets the job done regardless of circumstances.

USING IMPOSTER

Imposter is perhaps best used as an implied threat. After introducing the idea of his existence to the heroes, any suspicious behavior or unexplained lapses in memory could very well be attributed to Imposter.

An interesting use of his abilities might be to have Imposter affect the series before the characters ever learn he exists, and only afterward will they begin to question certain oddities that have plagued them in the past. The characters could investigate a strange disappearance or atypical behavior on the part of a target, and discover the existence of Imposter only through their investigation. Imposter might infiltrate the group, ideally while a player is absent, taking on the role of their character, gathering information or setting up plans for a particular client.

Imposter has considerable potential to make the characters (and their players) paranoid, since he could be almost anyone at any time. For a double-blind game, Imposter makes a useful stalking horse for Mr. Zero, another shapeshifting conspirator. He might anonymously hire Imposter to pose as one of his own identities to mislead characters into thinking they've caught the real metamorph behind Mr. Zero's conspiracy.

LEARNING ABOUT IMPOSTER

The following describes information characters may be able to learn about Imposter:

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 20: The name "Imposter" has come into vogue among conspiracy theorists since the emergence of paranormals. The name has been used to implicate faceless government agencies and vast corporate conspiracies into any number of mysterious deaths or unusual occurrences. Some even attribute things like the Kennedy assassinations to Imposter, despite the obviously ludicrous nature of such a claim.

DC 30: Imposter is supposedly a flawless duplicate, one who can replace anyone perfectly, and who sells his or her talents for anyone who can pay the exorbitant price attached to the service.

KNOWLEDGE (STREETWISE)

DC 10: Rumor has it Imposter is the perfect assassin and duplicator, and he or she will kill and replace anyone for a price. The price for such services is rumored to be in seven figures.

DC 25: Imposter does exist, but he or she is not an assassin. Imposter specializes in replacing targets, whomever they may be, for short periods of time even when close scrutiny is expected. Supposedly even a target's closest friends and family have so far proven unable to discover such infiltration....

DC 30: Imposter can imitate anyone, with only minimal preparation time. His or her abilities extend to skills, natural abilities, and virtually any non-paranormal ability a person possesses. Imposter is rumored to be unable to duplicate paranormal abilities.

IMPOSTER

PL 7

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+2	+3	+2	+1	+1	+1
14	16	14	12	12	12
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+2	+7	+11	+11		

Skills: Bluff 12 (+13), Diplomacy 12 (+13), Disguise 12 (+13/+63 with Morph bonus), Gather Information 8 (+9), Search 8 (+9), Sense Motive 8 (+9)

Feats: Ambidexterity, Assessment, Benefit 7 (alternate identities), Elusive Target, Hide in Plain Sight, Improved Initiative

Powers: **Mimic 10** (all traits at once; *Extras:* Duration—Continuous, Range—Perception; *Flaws:* Limited—Does not mimic powers), **Morph 10** (humanoids)

Combat: Attack +5, Grapple +5, Damage +2 (unarmed), Defense +10 (+5 flat-footed), Knockback -1, Initiative +7

Abilities 20 + Skills 15 (60 ranks) + Feats 12 + Powers 90 + Combat 30 + Saves 23 = Total 190



JACOB CASTLE

"I'LL SEE THEM ALL BURN."

As a self-proclaimed comic book geek, Jacob Castle became ecstatic when paranormals first began to appear around the world. He obsessed about these new paragons, collecting every scrap of news about them. He posted their exploits on his website. The site, the most thorough of its kind, grew in popularity and Jacob gained a reputation as a pop culture expert on the paragon phenomenon.

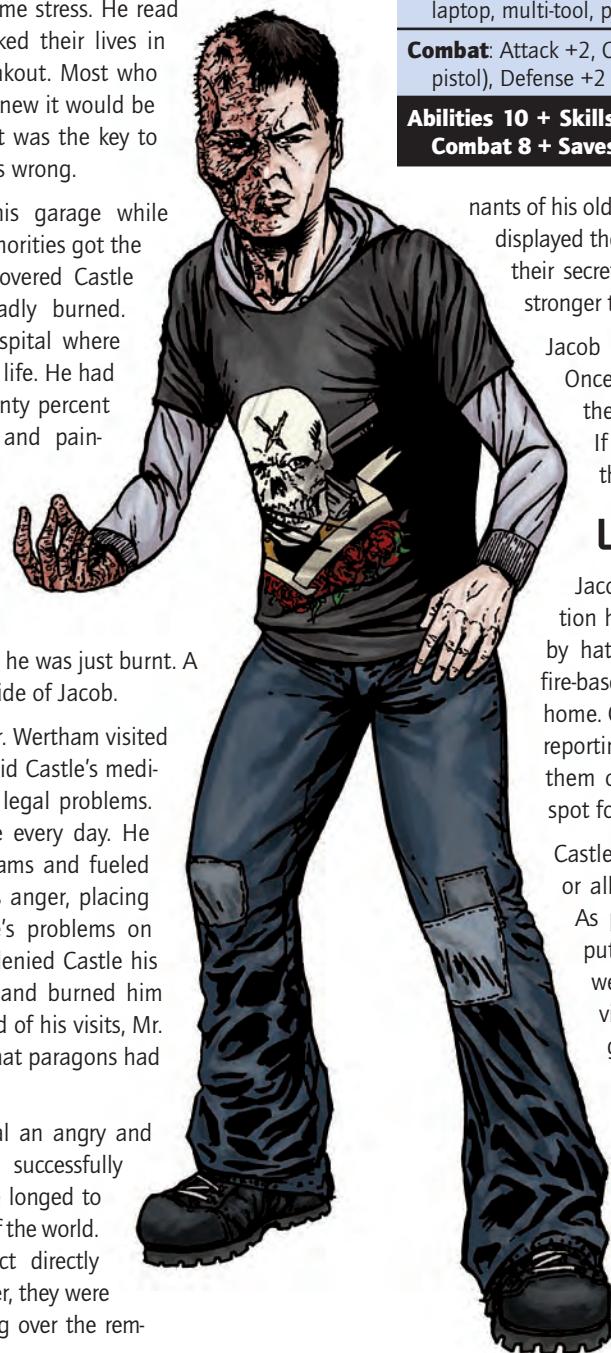
But it wasn't enough. Castle did not want to merely comment on paragons, he wanted to fly among them, to be one of them. He always felt he was special, that he had a destiny, but he was never clear about what that destiny might be. After the Breakout, he knew it was to be paranormal.

The wait grew long and Jacob became desperate. He knew from his research that paragons often gained their powers during moments of extreme stress. He read accounts of people who risked their lives in an attempt to trigger a breakout. Most who tried were killed, but Jacob knew it would be different for him. He knew it was the key to unlocking his destiny. He was wrong.

Jacob Castle set fire to his garage while trapped inside. After the authorities got the fire under control they discovered Castle inside, unconscious and badly burned. EMTs rushed him to the hospital where doctors were able to save his life. He had third degree burns over seventy percent of his body. With a long and painful recovery ahead of him, Castle wondered what went wrong. His memory of the incident was hazy, but it has clear his destiny had been denied. He should have been invincible, instead he was just burnt. A seed of bitter anger grew inside of Jacob.

A man who called himself Mr. Wertham visited Castle in the hospital. He paid Castle's medical bills and dealt with any legal problems. Wertham visited with Castle every day. He knew of Castle's broken dreams and fueled the fire of the injured man's anger, placing the blame for all of Castle's problems on the paranormals. They had denied Castle his rightful place among them and burned him for his audacity. Near the end of his visits, Mr. Wertham convinced Castle that paragons had started the fire.

Jacob Castle left the hospital an angry and twisted man. Mr. Wertham successfully directed Castle's rage and he longed to strike at all the paranormals of the world. Castle knew he couldn't act directly against the paragons, however, they were too powerful for that. Pouring over the rem-



JACOB CASTLE

PL 3

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+0	+1	+1	+2	-1	+0
11	13	12	15	8	11
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+1	+5	+4	+2		

Skills: Bluff 4 (+4), Computers 8 (+10), Craft (electronic) 8 (+8), Diplomacy 4 (+4), Disable Device 5 (+7), Gather Information 8 (+10), Knowledge (popular culture) 8 (+10), Knowledge (streetwise) 8 (+10), Knowledge (technology) 8 (+10), Notice 4 (+3), Search 3 (+5),

Feats: Connected, Contacts, Equipment 3, Minions 4

Equipment: Digital audio recorder, heavy pistol (+4 damage), laptop, multi-tool, parabolic microphone, PDA, video camera

Combat: Attack +2, Grapple +2, Damage +0 (unarmed), +4 (heavy pistol), Defense +2 (+1 flatfooted), Knockback -0, Initiative +1

Abilities 10 + Skills 17 (68 ranks) + Feats 9 + Powers 0 + Combat 8 + Saves 10 = Total 54

nants of his old life, an idea came to Castle. Once his website displayed the exploits of paranormals, now it would reveal their secrets. With their weaknesses exposed, someone stronger than Castle could bring them down.

Jacob Castle burned the reminders of his past. Once he wished to soar among the clouds with the paragons. That wish was denied. So be it. If he could not fly with them, he would bring them all crashing down to earth.

USING JACOB CASTLE

Jacob Castle is consumed by anger. The admiration he once had for paragons has been replaced by hatred. He especially hates paranormals with fire-based powers. He lives alone, rarely leaving his home. Castle's investigators do most of the legwork, reporting their findings back to Castle, who posts them online. Castle's scars leave him too easy to spot for delicate surveillance work.

Castle could work independently or as a member or ally of a hate group like the Seven Thunders. As part of a team, Castle would use his computer skills beyond the daily maintenance of his website, such as creating havoc with computer viruses. He has connections all around the globe in the anti-paragon movement. Castle is an information broker on paragon activities. He maintains extensive profiles of all known paragons. Anyone who gained access to his files would find a treasure trove of information about almost any paragon.

Castle is on a constant lookout for recent breakouts. He knows he can't hurt para-

gons directly, so he strikes from the shadows. Any new group of paragons is sure to attract the attention of his investigators. They follow paranormals, along with their friends and families, breaking into their homes, rifling through their trash, digging up every weakness and dark secret to post on the Internet for all to see. Castle and his team have engaged in identity theft and breaking and entering to get their information. Castle enjoys using paranormals' money, credit, and other resources to support paragon hate groups. Use the criminal stats (see *M&M*, page 226) for Castle's investigators.

Castle's website also serves as a recruitment tool for anti-paranormal groups. The site sports numerous belligerent essays detailing the supposed evils of paragons. Castle pens some, but other authors send most of them to him. The most outrageous of these is the weekly blog by a man called "Apocolypto", who claims to be a paranormal who can no longer stand his life as "an unnatural tool of the Devil." Each entry is another example in the long list of depraved acts he had been forced to commit as a paranormal: killing babies, drinking blood, and planning to sell out humanity to his alien masters. The site also has forums for like-minded haters to get in contact with each other, although they never discuss their plans in such a public fashion. The forum has developed its own code for such discussions.

It's possible Castle's attempt to trigger his own breakout was actually *successful*. His powers might be subtle, such as Luck Control or an Immunity of some kind, and so far have escaped his notice. It's also possible the trauma of the fire might have suppressed the manifestation of his powers. If that is the case, his abilities probably won't stay hidden forever. It is unclear what gaining paranormal powers would mean to Castle at this point. He may feel used and turn his back on the anti-paragon movement, or sudden feelings of remorse may move him to make amends. Should he make this decision, Castle's vast list of contacts and his knowledge of their activities would prove invaluable to any paranormal combating anti-paragon groups. However such a change may be impossible for Jacob Castle. His anger over his perceived rejection could be too strong to let go. He might use any newfound powers to openly attack paranormals, something he has wanted to do since his disfigurement.

LEARNING ABOUT JACOB CASTLE

Jacob Castle lives in constant fear he will be discovered by paranormals he has hurt through his activities. This is not an unreasonable fear, as he has made considerable enemies in the short time he has been working for the other side. With the help of his contacts, he maintains secure locations around the world. He is always on the move and ready to leave any location at a moments notice. Indiscreet attempts to learn about Castle will most likely cause him to flee to another safehouse. Should the characters prove persistent, Castle will call upon his connections in the hope that a more permanent solution to his problems may be found.

GATHER INFORMATION

Making this check represents knowledge about Jacob Castle a character may gain by making inquiries in the criminal underworld, law enforcement agencies, or paranormal hate groups.

DC 10: Castle used to run a popular website for paranormal activity. It was consider the most extensive of its kind.

DC: 15: Castle was badly burned in a fire he started. He was attempting to spark his own breakout.

DC: 20: Castle maintains many contacts involved in anti-paragon activities.

DC 25: Castle collects personal information on known paragons and posts them on a website for anti-paragon groups to exploit.

KNOWLEDGE (POPULAR CULTURE)

Use of this skill represents pop culture information a character might know pertaining to Jacob Castle.

DC 15: Castle was a major paragon geek once. Networks would go to him whenever they needed a pro-paragons sound bite.

DC 20: Castle stopped maintaining his website after he was badly injured in a fire. Most of the content has been removed.

DC 25: Castle has moved to the far end of the spectrum. He now hates paragons with the same intensity as he once admired them.

LOGAR

**"THEREISHEREANDTHEREISHEREISHEREAND
THEREISHEREANDHEREHASGONEAWAY..."**

While engaging in cutting-edge quantum research, Professor Nicholas Virtis noticed a previously controlled reaction escalating off the scale. Remarking to his research assistant, he said, "It seems to be growing logar-." He was unable to complete the thought before the restraints on the reactor exploded, bathing him in odd energies that increased his speed, movement, and thought processes to paranormal levels. Basking in his newfound abilities, he completed the equivalent of several years of research and writing over the course of the evening.

Unfortunately, the next day Dr. Virtis found himself to be, once again, another normal human being, unable to explain or recreate the phenomenon; while there were plenty of witnesses, there was little other hard evidence about exactly *what* transpired.

Curiously, on the other side of the globe, seconds after Dr. Virtis re-assumed the mantle of normalcy, Celeste Saa found herself imbued with an odd energy force—which she sensed as having the name of "Logar"—that enabled her to complete tasks around her village with remarkable speed; indeed, she was able to improve her and her family's fortunes enough in short order that the Saa name is considered one of the more powerful in Somalia. Yet this force left Celeste in less than two days as well.

And so the sequence of curious events continues, with seemingly random people imbued with preternatural speed for short periods of time. Today, Logar (also known as "the Logar Essence") travels the world—and perhaps beyond—possessing people for less than two days and giving them supernatural swiftness. It does not discriminate; indeed, it seems more often than not people use their newfound abilities for ill (or at least selfishness) rather than good, although that might be more a statement of human nature than Logar's nature.

In fact, Logar is an energy source containing a growing spark of sentience; it seeks to understand the world by becoming one with random people and seeing what they do and how they react. At

LOGAR (TEMPLATE)

PL II

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
-	+10	+5	-4	-4	-5
-	30	20	2	2	1
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX		WILL	
+5	+5	+10		-4	

Skills: As the host.**Feats:** As the host.

Powers: Insubstantial 4 (*Extras: Continuous; Flaws: Permanent*), **Possession 15** (*Extras: Continuous; Flaws: If Int, Wis, or Cha of the target is higher than Logar's, then the target uses the highest of all shared abilities, Target retains full control of power*), **Super-Speed 17** (considered to be a mental power, Quickness portion is Continuous and Permanent and cannot be turned off; *Power Feats: Rapid Attack, Wall Run, Water Run*)

Combat: Attack +5, Defense +5 (flat-footed +3), Knockback -2, Initiative +78

Abilities 5 + Skills 0 (0 ranks) + Feats 0 + Powers 138 + Combat 20 + Saves 0 = Total 163

present it does not control or influence its hosts, although that may change soon; as it gains experience and knowledge, it may attempt to learn more by acting directly with (or against) the world. Each host influences Logar's emerging personality and outlook, although this may not become obvious until it's too late.

Logar manifests in its subjects as a glowing sheath of energy; in addition, the inability of the subject to move at anything less than superhuman speeds is an obvious sign of a Logar possession. It is noteworthy that Logar has not yet inhabited a paranormal host. It remains unknown if this is by choice or inability or what would happen if it tried (or was forced) to do so.

USING LOGAR

Logar is intended to serve as a wild card; it is predictably unpredictable, and its abilities can manifest in anyone (or anything) sentient. It is probably of primary interest to investigators of the paranormal; paraphysicists would be fascinated to investigate how normals can be imbued with a walk-in's abilities (even for a short period), while parapsychologists would be keenly interested in investigating the continuing development of an Imagerian mind.

In addition, Logar is a means of spicing up standard encounters. A run-of-the-mill hostage situation becomes much more chaotic when one of the participants—a captor, a hostage, a reporter—is imbued with the Logar Essence.

Given that Logar is a source of paranormal power unattached to a human host, there might be agents seeking to capture and harness this power for themselves, for good or ill. Such a task would no doubt be incredibly difficult; not only is Logar a unique expression of paranormal energy, but from a game-balance standpoint, anyone who was successful in claiming Logar's energies would find themselves 251 power points richer.

Finally, Logar is an evolving entity, meaning subsequent encounters with it can be significantly different. Depending on the caliber of the



minds it temporarily fuses with, it could become either an ally or enemy as it evolves and gains more and more sentience and awareness.

The desire to understand and ultimately neutralize Logar could form the basis for a long-running subplot, as could efforts to return Logar to the Imageria. Of course, efforts to return it could cause adventurers to encounter other beings like Logar...

LEARNING ABOUT LOGAR

From a series standpoint, Logar is intended to be equal parts mystery, mayhem, and menace; as such, the GM should carefully control the pace of information revealed depending on the adventure's needs. While the basic underpinnings of Logar's existence are straightforward, the deeper truths—mental absorption, Logar's soul (or lack thereof), its source—are not so easily understood. Ultimately, Logar could well serve as a plot point to spark major revelations about the true nature of the Imageria in the series.

GATHER INFORMATION

This check represents information investigators might receive if they were to research news reports, interview former hosts, and examine locales of its activities.

DC 10: Logar's inhabitation period seems consistent. Its hosts are chosen seemingly at random, and new host bodies are just as likely to be anyone anywhere on Earth. Unfortunately, the sample size thus far is too small to be certain its hosts are chosen at random.

DC 15: Logar's inhabitation period *is* consistent; it stays within its hosts for exactly 131,072 seconds, which is two to the seventeenth power. It then travels as fast as possible, pushing itself to find someone else at random on Earth. It seems likely there *is* no pattern.

DC 20: Logar is unable (or unwilling) to leave a body ahead of time, even if its host body is endangered. If a body is killed before the end of the time, the Logar energies seem to dissipate for the remainder of the time, only to reappear at the end its 131,072 seconds. In addition, at least one host commented that he went to extraordinary measures—staying within force field within a lead-walled laboratory—to keep Logar fused to him. This ended up being for naught; it seems no force can permanently kill or contain Logar.

DC 25: Early hosts report the force as having no impact on their own thoughts, while the more recent hosts describe a child-like presence in their minds. It might be possible to conclude Logar is gaining more mental acumen and sentience as time goes on.

KNOWLEDGE (BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES)

This check represents information a parapsychologist or parapsychiatrist might discern from speaking with one formerly possessed. If such a person has access to Logar while in the middle of a possession, the scientist receives a +5 bonus, assuming it can understand the Logar/human fusing (which isn't assured, given the compulsion it infuses to move as fast as possible).

DC 10: It's curious that Logar's period of possession is an exact mathematical number of Earth-seconds. It's either a remarkable coincidence, or else whatever aspect of the Imageria has spawned Logar is not some random force but rather has deeper ties to the "collective unconscious" that binds humanity's desire for numerical consistency.

DC 15: Logar seems to be tapping, accessing, and draining the psychic energies of its host bodies; the energy taken doesn't seem to adversely affect its hosts, but the energy taken appears cumulative.

DC 20: Logar has acquired "shadows" of all the minds it has touched; these echoes are shaping Logar's personality and adding to its collective mind. Evil or selfish minds beget a selfish evolution, while altruistic minds guide it more positively. Within a year, it should be as smart as a 13-year-old child. Within two years, it should be an exceptionally formed mind in the top tenth percentile of intelligence. Hypothetically speaking, if Logar is choosing its hosts randomly now, there might come a time when it is solid enough in its own thoughts to seek new hosts based on some criteria...although what it would be looking for in that case is unknown.

DC 25: Because of the psychic shadows of minds contained within Logar, it should be possible to access the minds of those it has tapped, even if the previous host's mind is unwilling or gone. Thus if Logar possessed someone with powerful secrets, those secrets should be accessible (though not readily available) to a new host or a parapsychiatrist interviewing Logar. (DC = Logar's current Int + 10)

KNOWLEDGE (PHYSICAL SCIENCES)

DC 25: Although it seems Logar chooses its next host at random, in fact Logar follows a complex application of chaos theory to determine the vector and magnitude of its relocations. As such, if one can know (or control) where Logar is when it leaves a body, one can determine where it will appear next, and perhaps even be positioned in place to be chosen (another Knowledge check at DC 25 to discern that location).

LUMINARY

**"HIT 'EM HARD AND FAST, VANGUARD!
WE NEED TO GET THESE PEOPLE OUT OF HERE!"**

Luminary is a man without a past. He has no memory of his life before waking up on a laboratory table five years ago and even that memory is hazy and fragmented. He remembers the lab's warm lights shining down, obscuring his vision, and he remembers the shadowy presence of lab personnel going about their business. He also recalls the restraints holding him to the cold, metal table and how easily and cleanly they snapped when he tried to stand, but everything else is a blur. He vaguely recalls shouting, people running and gunshots being fired but then nothing before awakening a final time in the middle of the New Mexico desert.

Lost, alone and with no memory of where he came from, Luminary wandered the desert for days. During that time, he made some startling discoveries about himself. He quickly realized he wasn't affected by heat or cold, and he wasn't hungry or thirsty. Experimentation revealed other abilities: He discovered not only was he immensely strong and resistant to harm, but he also had the ability to fly and manipulate light. Despite his impaired memory, Luminary knew such abilities were unusual and the desire to know who he was became even stronger. Luminary flew to the nearby community of Roswell intent on finding answers.

While en route to Roswell, Luminary happened upon an airliner in distress. Realizing that the plane's erratic flight pattern and quick descent was a sure sign of trouble, Luminary responded. Literally snatching the plane out of mid-air, Luminary he brought the flight in safely, providing the plane's pilots with ample opportunity to call ahead and inform traffic control of their unusual situation.

Once safely on the ground, the flight and its rescuer were greeted by a host emergency vehicles, airport personnel and the press, all of whom demanded to know the identity of the mysterious hero who had so dramatically saved so many people. Unable to think of any meaningful response, Luminary simply responded that he was "a visitor in search of answers." Disclosing his amnesia to reporters gave the media ample ammunition for its various headlines and reports of Roswell's new "visitor," along with a plethora of theories regarding his origins, which were soon splashed across newspapers and televisions around the country.

The grateful airline put Luminary up in a hotel, providing him with some resources to begin researching his identity. No sooner had he begun his search, however, than Luminary received a knock on his hotel door. Whether Jeremiah Prophet had seen the news on the previous day's events or whether he had been drawn to Roswell based on his own unique insights was irrelevant. What was important was the offer he had for the mysterious, luminous stranger. Prophet explained if Luminary was willing to put his prodigious

paranormal powers to work for the greater good, then Prophet was willing to help unravel the mystery of his past. A brief demonstration of Prophet's abilities convinced Luminary the offer was too good to pass up and he accepted.

Luminary spent time training with Prophet's other recruits, during which time Luminary's natural leadership abilities and knack for tactics became apparent. When the existence of Vanguard Mission Team Alpha was revealed to the world, Luminary was introduced as its field commander. Already something of a celebrity, Luminary has since become Vanguard's primary spokesman and "poster-boy," appearing on talk shows, and speaking with the press when the occasion calls for it. Vanguard, in turn, has done everything it can to foster Luminary's popularity, even going so far as to license his image for use in toys, video games, and cartoons.

Jeremiah Prophet has made good on his offer to help Luminary discover his true identity, albeit with limited success. Thus far, Luminary been genetically tested and his fingerprints run through the files of both the FBI and Interpol. Neither has yielded results. Even Prophet's extraordinary clairvoyant abilities have proven inadequate to the task. In the meanwhile, Prophet has used



Vanguard's government connections to create the mundane alternate identity of Randall Allen for Luminary's use, allowing him to pursue and live a relatively normal life when not on active duty with the team.

Luminary is supremely dedicated to Vanguard's mission and ideals. As one of Vanguard's "heavy-hitters" he is usually at the forefront of dangerous field missions. Also, as Vanguard's most senior Field Commander, Luminary is responsible for training most of the agency's paranormal field operatives. This, combined with his role as Vanguard's voice to the media, makes Luminary one of the most visible members.

USING LUMINARY

Luminary is an obvious choice to feature prominently in any series involving Vanguard. A GM wishing to run a Vanguard series can introduce Luminary as the characters' trainer and mentor. Luminary would also make a good mentor for a group of newly empowered paranormals seeking to live up to his example.

Luminary's true origin is left entirely up to the GM. This provides an individual GM with a great deal of flexibility when deciding how to use Luminary in a campaign. For example, one GM could decide Luminary is an esoteric eidolon refugee from the Imageria just as easily as another might decide Luminary is the result of government genetic research gone awry (possibly even involving alien DNA or the like). He could be one of Dr. Rosemont's "rogue" creations (see **The Rosemont Center** in **Chapter Four**). Perhaps Luminary is the result of one of Mindbender's origin-chaser experiments (see **Rampage** for an example) or a cleverly hidden deep-cover agent

LUMINARY

PL 12

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+12/+2	+12/+2	+12	+2	+2	+2
34/14	34/14	34	14	15	15
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+12	+12	+6	+6		

Skills: Diplomacy 12 (+14), Concentration 10 (+12), Intimidate 12 (+14), Notice 7 (+9), Search 7 (+9)

Feats: Accurate Attack, Fast Overrun, Improved Initiative 2, Improved Overrun, Move-By Action, Power Attack, Quick Change

Powers: Enhanced Constitution 20, Enhanced Strength 20, Flight 7 (1,000 MPH), Immunity 17 (cold, disease, heat, light effects, poison, pressure, radiation, starvation), Impervious Toughness 10, Light Control 12 (Alternate Powers: Blast 12, Dazzle 12 [visual senses; Extras: Cone Area (120-ft long x 120-ft wide); Flaws: Range-Touch], Dazzle 6 [visual senses; Extras: Burst Area, Range-Perception], Invisibility [total concealment]), Super-Senses 3 (Infrared Vision, Low-light Vision, Ultraviolet Vision), Super-Strength 6 (heavy load: 90 tons)

Combat: Attack +10, Grapple +28, Damage +12 (blast), +12 (punch), Defense +10 (+5 flat-footed), Knockback -11, Initiative +10

Drawbacks: Disability (Amnesia, uncommon, minor, -1), Weakness (Energy drain, uncommon, moderate, every round, -6)

Abilities 26 + Skills 12 (48 ranks) + Feats 8 + Powers 124 + Combat 40 + Saves 8 – Drawbacks 7 = Total 211

for another faction. Whatever the case, eventually Luminary's past should catch up to him, if only because he is so intently looking for the truth.

LEARNING ABOUT LUMINARY

The following is information characters could potentially learn about Luminary:

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 10: Luminary is the leader of Vanguard Mission Team Alpha: super-strong, nigh invulnerable, and able to manipulate light.

DC 15: Luminary is Vanguard's unofficial spokesman. As such he is often quoted in the media and makes regular television appearances on Vanguard's behalf.

DC 20: Luminary claims to have no memory of his past, although he actively works to re-discover his origins.

DC 25: Despite the best efforts of Vanguard and its paranormal agents, knowledge of Luminary's past continues to remain hidden and seems, for all intents and purposes, to be an almost unsolvable mystery.

KNOWLEDGE (POPULAR CULTURE)

DC 10: Luminary is one of the most famous members of Vanguard, the leader of Vanguard Mission Team Alpha: super-strong, nigh invulnerable, and able to manipulate light.

DC 15: Luminary's fame is phenomenal. His comic book, cartoon, and toyline are all incredibly popular and generate millions of dollars of revenue yearly.

DC 20: Vanguard controls the licensing associated with Luminary's image and is reported to have final approval on media content relating to him, specifically the content of his comic book line and cartoon show.

DC 25: Vanguard is currently negotiating with a major Hollywood producer to create a series of films featuring Luminary and, possibly, other members of Vanguard Mission Team Alpha.

MAN-A-KIN

"IT HAD TO BE A LINGERIE MODEL, DIDN'T IT?"

Orphaned as a teen, Micah Tenson bounced back and forth between foster families and juvie so many times that he'd grown accustomed to being on his own. His only real sense of family came in the form of monthly adventures in comic books. No matter where he ended up, Micah always made sure to follow the heroes in his favorite titles, even when he was locked up for "causing trouble".

In fact, it was amidst trouble when Micah found himself locked in a store warehouse, being chased down by a drug-dealer and his gang. Finding no real hiding spaces, he dove into a pile of manikins, hoping that he'd blend in with the life-like figures. That's when the breakout hit him. Not only did he conceal himself in a pile of manikins, but he also managed to somehow jump *into* one. After a bit, he emerged from his hiding space, checking his surroundings for any signs of the goons that were after him and looking for an exit. A bit shaken from the experience, Micah went back to his current "family".



After a good night's sleep, he returned to the warehouse to confirm he wasn't going crazy. Examining one of the manikins, he found that he hadn't been hallucinating...he could actually "jump" into it. Excited and amazed, Micah began experimenting. After a few hours, he learned that he could not only jump into the figures, but that he could move around while inside them and act as though the manikin were his body. Thinking of his comic book heroes, Micah decided he must've gained his powers much like the characters in his comics, and with this great power came great responsibility.

After spending the day taking a few of the manikins and fashioning himself a makeshift costume, he went on a test run with his new powers. Calling himself "Man-A-Kin," Micah jumped into a male sports manikin and went looking for trouble. He found the

MAN-A-KIN**PL 6**

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+1	+2	+2	+1	+2	+1
12	14	14	13	14	13
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+4/+2*	+2	+2	+2		

*Flatfooted

Skills: Bluff 3 (+4), Concentration 3 (+5), Diplomacy 2 (+3), Disable Device 1 (+2), Disguise 2 (+3), Drive 2 (+4), Investigate 2 (+3), Knowledge (popular culture) 3 (+4), Notice 2 (+4), Search 2 (+3), Sleight of Hand 3 (+5), Stealth 3 (+5)

Feats: Defensive Attack, Defensive Roll 2, Diehard, Distract, Endurance, Evasion 2, Hide in Plain Sight, Improved Pin, Luck 2, Redirect, Sneak Attack 3, Taunt

Powers: **Animate Object 3** (Flaws: Limited—Manikins only), **Possession 7** (Linked to Animate Object, Range—Perception, Shapeable Area)

Combat: Attack +7, Grapple +8, Damage +1 (unarmed), Defense +7 (+4 flatfooted), Knockback -2/-1*, Initiative +2

Abilities 20 + Skills 7 (28 ranks) + Feats 17 + Powers 48 + Combat 28 + Saves 0 = Total 120

TYPICAL ANIMATED MANIKIN

Str 18	Dex 12	Con –	Int –	Wis 1	Cha 1
Skills: Acrobatics 2 (+3), Climbing 1 (+5), Stealth 5 (+6)					
Feats: Fearsome Presence 2					
Powers: Immunity 30 (Fortitude), Protection 6 (Impervious 5);					
Combat: Attack +7, Damage +4 (unarmed), Defense +7 (+4 flatfooted), Initiative +1; Toughness +6, Fortitude –, Reflex +1, Will –5					
Saving Throws: Toughness +6, Fortitude –, Reflex +1, Will –5					
Abilities -28 + Skills 2 (8 ranks) + Feats 2 +Powers 41 + Combat 28 + Saves 0 = Total 45					

dealer he had had problems with a few days ago and, with a heroic stance, told him to surrender. Laughing, the dealer took out a gun and shot the manikin, leaving the possessing Micah a bit startled, but unharmed. Lashing out in retaliation, Man-A-Kin managed to take down the dealer and tie him up, leaving a note with a stylized "M" on it for local authorities to find.

Within a month, Man-A-Kin became a local folk hero, with news reports investigating his sightings and the beginning of Man-A-Nites, a Man-A-Kin fan group. Feeling a bit more like a true hero with every day that passes, Micah has decided to dedicate his life to using his powers for the good of mankind. Unfortunately, his nightly excursions have also attracted the attention of organizations like the Initiative (see **Chapter Four**), who are following up on various rumors and personal accounts. Micah realizes someone is getting close to discovering who he is, but he's hoping between the use of a costume and his manikins that he can stave off any investigations.

In the meantime, Micah is learning a great deal about how to use his powers effectively; crime fighting gives him plenty of practice. He still has no idea why his power is specifically limited to

manikins. He has tried "possessing" and animating other objects without success, even human-shaped things like statuary. Thus far, only store manikins work. He keeps a number of "decorative" manikins around his apartment, just in case.

USING MAN-A-KIN

Man-A-Kin is a (would-be) hero, plain and simple. Though some may consider his powers a bit lame, he considers them a sign and plans on doing what he can for the community. Typically, he can be found at night, helping to clean up the suburban neighborhoods of drug dealers, predators, and other criminal influences.

As Micah Tenson, he could be used as a friendly NPC for other paragons. Perhaps he's inspired a few of them into becoming heroes and they seek mentoring from him. Another possibility is, because of his comic book knowledge, perhaps he's seeking others like himself to form a team, or he's looking to gain a few allies. After all, it must be weird enough being different...but being alone and different? That can't be any fun.

In combat, if possessing a manikin, Man-A-Kin typically sticks to hand-to-hand fighting, preferring to get in close to his target. Before combat, he often likes to use his fearsome presence to scare off any reinforcements, often times relying on the common person's hesitation around manikins (especially when they're moving!) to spook them. He often tries not to get the manikins too damaged, hoping to reuse them at a later date. As Micah, he defends himself until he can make a break for it and find something to possess. He knows all too well the difference in durability between his flesh and the faux-flesh of a manikin.

LEARNING ABOUT MAN-A-KIN

The following is information player characters could potentially learn about Man-A-Kin:

GATHER INFORMATION

Making this check is considered general fact finding from sources on the street, hearsay, rumor, and various news reports.

DC 10: Man-A-Kin is a crime-fighter that's popped up in suburbia. Some say he's not real, while others say he wears a costume like a manikin or can actually transform into a manikin.

DC 15: According to news reports, Man-A-Kin usually takes on people who prey on kids. They say his first opponent was some drug dealer that's doing time now.

DC 20: There was this one gang member who says he shot Man-A-Kin with a full clip...and Man-A-Kin kept coming at him even with all of those holes in him. **Knowledge (popular culture)**

Making a check with Knowledge (popular culture) represents a more intensive check with media sources and, in Man-A-Kin's case, his fan groups called the Man-A-Nites.

DC 5: Man-A-Kin is a superhero that protects the youth of the city.

DC 10: The press has been trying to track him down and have only managed to get distant pictures of him. According to the Man-A-Nites, Man-A-Kin is a true hero of our time.

DC 20: The pictures of Man-A-Kin seem a bit odd and almost seem to denote that it may be more than one person...some shots look like a woman, while others have looked like various men and even children.

MINDBENDER

**"TOO MUCH THINKING CAN BE DANGEROUS.
DON'T YOU AGREE?"**

Caitlin White is quite possibly the most dangerous woman in the world.

From a young age, it was obvious to everyone that Caitlin was especially gifted, although only she knew how truly "gifted" she was. Born to an affluent British family, Caitlin wanted for nothing and had the finest education money could buy. Although often described as "cold" and "distant" by those who knew her, she was a peerless student overshadowing her classmates at every turn, often seeming to know as much about any given subject as her teachers. She sailed through primary and secondary education, graduating university by 18 and medical school by 20. At 24 she had completed graduate work in both neurosurgery and genetics and was quickly on her way to being recognized as the top in her field in both disciplines.

Then, quite suddenly, Caitlin White disappeared. More surprising than Caitlin's sudden disappearance was, perhaps, that no one seemed to notice. If asked about her today, none of Caitlin's colleagues would remember anything about her but the vaguest details. Likewise, any inquiry into her history shows her school records seem to have been lost due to a series of computer problems, just as the premature deaths of her parents wiped out most direct knowledge of her upbringing. For all intents and purposes, Caitlin White no longer exists. And that's just the way she prefers it.

Caitlin realized at an early age she could not only hear the thoughts of others but could change what other people were thinking and feeling. As a youth, this meant she wanted for nothing. Not only did she have every physical comfort she desired but she also had all the attention she wanted from whomever she wanted it from. The wills of others were playthings to her and she had no moral qualms about using her powers.

After effortlessly completing her education, she pursued a career in research medicine, hoping to discover the root of not only her own paranormal abilities but those of others, convinced the key to such powers lay hidden somewhere in humanity's genetic code. When she had exhausted all resources available to her through conventional means, Caitlin decided to pursue her objectives through "alternate channels." After removing the memory of herself from the minds of her colleagues and acquaintances, she finalized her plan to disappear from public view by arranging the deaths of her parents. Taking their substantial fortune with her, Caitlin vanished into the shadows, never to be seen again.

It wasn't long after Caitlin's disappearance, though, that a variety of bizarre occurrences around the globe began to raise suspicions

that a new force was now at work in the world. In Europe, for example, someone other than their rightful owners emptied over a dozen Swiss bank accounts anonymously, only to be discovered when said owners attempted to do some banking of their own. On another front, in the United States, several shipments of military-grade weapons and computer components were loaded onto a boat in New York Harbor and sent off to destinations unknown by a crew of military officers who, later, had no memory of doing so.

Similarly, in China, a high-ranking Party official was assassinated by his long-time aid and childhood friend, who suffered a massive brain aneurism moments after the attack. As these occurrences continued to mount, officials around the globe began to theorize that, as one United States Senator put it, "some mindbender must be at work here."

From afar, Caitlin White simply smiled to herself and continued her work.

Mindbender, a name Caitlin now uses herself with a touch of irony, is a powerful telepath.

Not only can she read minds, she can manipulate another's mind and she does so casually and remorselessly. Mindbender is brilliant, creative and sociopathic. She is convinced of her own superiority and has absolutely no use for the "ungifted" (normal humans).

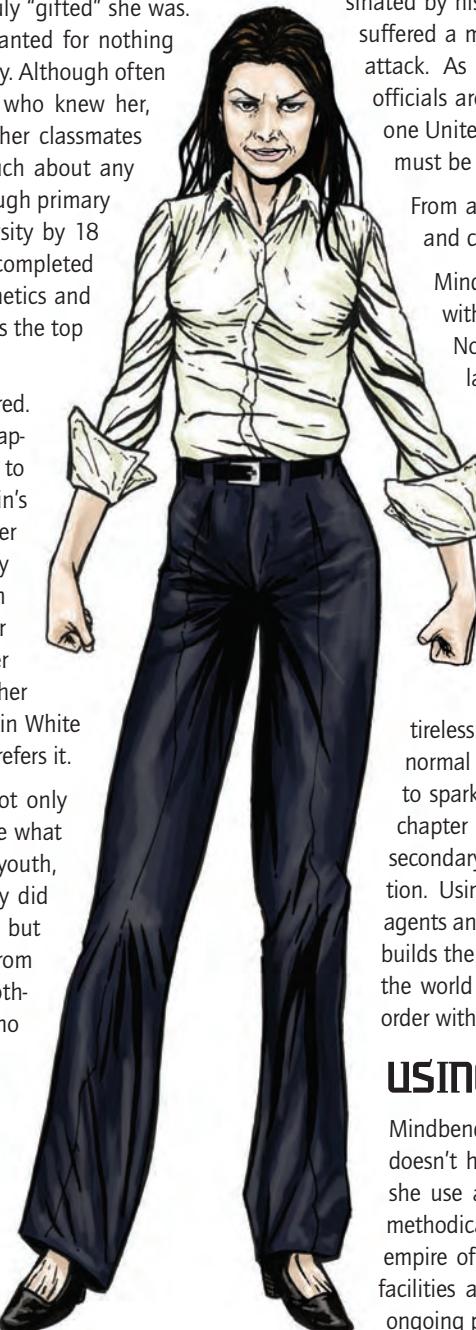
She is convinced she, and others like her, represent the next stage in human evolution and she is determined to not only unlock that potential but to use it to exert control over the entire world. To that end, she

tirelessly researches the origins and nature of paranormal abilities, even going so far as to attempt to spark other paranormals (see **Rampage** in this chapter for an example). Her research, however, is secondary to her primary agenda—global domination. Using a combination of brainwashed sleeper agents and her own vast intellect, Mindbender slowly builds the resources she needs to bring the leaders of the world to their knees and establish a new world order with her at the top.

USING MINDBENDER

Mindbender is the mastermind in the shadows. She doesn't have a vast army at her disposal, nor does she use a lot of flash and thunder. She is a slow, methodical planner. Over time, she has built a secret empire of informants, contacts and hidden research facilities around the globe all of which support her ongoing plans to bring the world under her control.

While she believes it is her destiny to rule the "ungifted masses," only the most extreme situation would ever motivate Mindbender to operate openly. To that end, she funds and equips terrorist cells in a carefully arranged plan designed to topple the existing socio-industrial complex and replace it with a new order of her own design. All of her remaining plans are executed using mind-controlled pawns and subjugated operatives. If one of her operatives is captured and questioned, she will most likely mind-wipe the victim from a distance or, in extreme



MINDBENDER

PL 14

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+1	+2	+1	+6	+5	+4
12	14	12	22	20	18
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX		WILL	
+1	+4	+6		+15	

Skills: Computers 7 (+13), Concentration 5 (+10), Diplomacy 8 (+12), Gather Information 10 (+14), Intimidate 8 (+12), Investigate 8 (+14), Knowledge (life sciences) 12 (+18), Knowledge (technology) 5 (+11), Medicine 12 (+17), Notice 5 (+10), Profession (physician) 10 (+15), Search 6 (+12), Sense Motive 12 (+17)

Feats: Assessment, Connected, Eidetic Memory, Equipment 20, Master Plan, Well-Informed

Equipment: 100 points of equipment, including headquarters and vehicles.

Powers: **Mind Control 14** [Extras: Burst Area (70-ft radius), Selective Attack; Power Feats: Mind Blank, Subtle; Alternate Powers: **Concealment 10** [Extras: Affects Others, Burst Area (50-ft radius); Power Feats: Dynamic, Selective; Flaws: Phantasm], **Emotion Control 14** [Extras: Burst Area (70-ft radius), Selective Attack], **Illusion 14** [all senses; Power Feats: Dynamic, Progression 3 (100-ft radius), Selective; Flaws: Phantasm], **Memory Alteration 14** [mental transform; Extras: Range—Perception, Duration—Continuous], **Mental Blast 14**, **Mind Control 14** [Extras: Conscious, Duration—Sustained; Power Feats: Mental Link, Subtle], **Pain 11**, **Paralyze 14** [Extras: Range—Perception], **Telelocation 9** (anywhere on earth), **Telepathy 9** (anywhere on earth; Extras: Sensory Link), **Super-Senses 2** (Danger Sense [mental], Uncanny Dodge [mental])]

Combat: Attack +5, Grapple +6, Damage +14 (mental blast), Defense +12 (+6 flatfooted), Initiative +2

Abilities 38 + Skills 27 (108 ranks) + Feats 25 + Powers 106 + Combat 34 + Saves 17 = Total 247

circumstances, simply use her powers to kill him. In either case, this usually eliminates any and all connection to her, allowing her to continue on with her master plan.

Mindbender is a natural rival to other masterminds like Mr. Zero and conspiracies like the Initiative. She can potentially be the force behind other factions, pulling their strings behind the scenes.

LEARNING ABOUT MINDBENDER

Mindbender's presence in the world is suspected but not confirmed. Vanguard officials, in particular, have become convinced there is a force of unknown origin manipulating the minds of officials, terrorists, military officers, and the like around the globe but can establish no solid proof such an individual exists. To the rest of the world, however, Mindbender is just a myth albeit a myth more and more people are convinced is true every day.

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 10: There is a theory about a single paranormal mastermind responsible for a number of seemingly unrelated terrorist events in recent years but this is most likely just an urban legend.

DC 20: Government and military officials around the globe firmly believe a single individual they call "the Mindbender" is responsible for a number of seemingly unrelated terrorist events in recent years.

DC 25: United Nations officials, in conjunction with government agencies around the world, have begun initiating a series of security measure dubbed "the Mindbender Protocols" to address security concerns related to Mindbender's terrorist methods.

DC 30: Mindbender is at the top of Vanguard's Most Wanted list in connection with the deaths of over a dozen high-ranking United Nations officials.

MR. ZERO

"ONE MAN CAN CHANGE THE WORLD, IF HE'S ME."

Mr. Zero is a conspiracy of one. His existence is rumor, a ghost story for paranoids and crackpots. His real name is unknown; he has forgotten even his true appearance, but he can create hundreds of duplicates, all with the power to alter their looks. He and his clones have infiltrated all aspects of society, tailoring it to fit Zero's grand design.

Mr. Zero is a genius, who despised working with others as they never lived up to his standards. He considered himself a visionary with a blueprint for a brave new world, which often clashed with his own limitations of what he could realistically accomplish. As a young man he struggled while taking on too many projects, hampered by his inability to work with others. Then he developed debilitating headaches. Doctors could find no cause and blamed the pain on stress, recommending he slow down. Mr. Zero ignored their advice and continued to push himself until he eventually succumbed to the pain and collapsed. He awoke days later to find the evidence of his new power: Duplicates of himself surrounded him, working on the tasks he had left unfinished, their appearance shifting with the regularity of blinking.

A whole new world opened up to Mr. Zero. He would no longer need to cut back on his activities; in fact he could take on more than ever before. His vision could be more than a dream, now he could make it a reality. He trained in the use of his powers, creating more and more duplicates and improving his ability to change his shape until he could impersonate people so well their loved ones had difficulty spotting the difference. When he felt he was ready he abandoned his old identity and got down to work. He started small, as a test, infiltrating local government and businesses. As he grew more confident, he increased the scope of his activities until eventually he was working on a global level.

Mr. Zero manipulates or controls outright several corporations, many of them specializing in either biotech or communications, including one manufacturer of cell phones. He also has his fingers in several media companies, working towards his own secret monopoly as he believes controlling the flow of information is essential to the success of his mission. He is interested in any information pertaining to paranormal powers and other Fortean phenomena.

Mr. Zero seeks to control culture and politics around the world. Several of his duplicates hold some kind of political office. At one time he has been the selectman from a small town in Missouri, a Somali warlord, and multiple United States senators on both sides of the aisle.



Mr. Zero wants to change the world, not control it. He hopes one day, with his plans complete, to step away and view what he has accomplished. He is a control freak and the development of his powers has only exacerbated this personality trait. He trusts no one outside of himself. He is cold, calculating, and patient, willing to wait years for his plans to unfold. Nothing is personal to Mr. Zero.

USING MR. ZERO

Mr. Zero has the potential to be a hero, villain, or something in between. The nature of Mr. Zero's conspiracy is left to the Gamemaster. He is a lateral thinker and following his thought processes can be difficult at best. Uncovering his conspiracy can be like completing a jigsaw puzzle with no idea of what the picture is supposed to be. His actions are hard to follow and often seem to contradict each other. He is the head of a South American drug cartel, shipping his product north for distribution; he is the DEA agent confiscating the ten percent at the border. He is the envi-

ronmental activist spreading the word about global warming while also the CEO of one of the worst corporate polluters. He is the right wing talk show host railing against the liberal bias of the newspaper he works for as an editor. All of it has a purpose, at least to him.

Mr. Zero is designed with certain flexibility in his use. His role in a series greatly depends on the ultimate goal of his conspiracy. He runs an elaborate game with many players, most whom do not know they are even playing. He should be cloaked in mystery, nothing more than an enigma.

matic series of clues left behind for the heroes to sift through as they uncover the organized force manipulating their lives and the lives of everyone on the planet. Some of his duplicates are in it for the long haul, assuming new identities for months or years at a time, while some temporarily change their appearance to infiltrate security or change a vote.

As the man behind the curtain, he makes an excellent adversary. He may feel he is doing the world a favor, or simply not care what "the little people" think. The only thing that matters is the completion of his goal. He has no tolerance for those who oppose him, even if they aren't aware that they're doing so. Mr. Zero strikes from the shadows. When confronted, he seeks to neutralize his enemies through subtle means, such as cutting their funding, entangling his opponents in scandal, or even implicating them in a crime. He believes violence only draws attention to him, although if his foe is stubborn,

Mr. Zero is not afraid to dirty his hands.

MR. ZERO
Mr. Zero could also function as a benefactor for a group of heroes should he find that his goals coincide with theirs. It is unlikely he would trust them, but he may secretly supply them with information and other aid from time to time should it further his ambitions. He may begin to trust them over time, slowly dropping hints revealing the scope of his goals.

Of course, Mr. Zero may help *and* hinder the characters. For Mr. Zero the journey is meaningless, only the destination is important. He would throw up obstacles for a group of paranormals if they threaten his plans and later aid them should it prove useful to him.

While Mr. Zero trusts his duplicates completely, perhaps it is unwise for him to do so. His clones are capable of acting independently of him and some of them may decide his goals are not their own. The heroes could find themselves caught in the middle of a shadow war between Mr. Zero and a rebel faction of his own duplicates.

LEARNING ABOUT MR. ZERO

Gathering any information about Mr. Zero is a difficult task. The nature of his conspiracy is mercurial and contradictory. Several of his duplicates' sole mission is to keep a watch on those who look too closely into his activities. He wages a disinformation campaign

MR. ZERO

PL 7

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+0	+1	+3	+7	+4	+3
11	13	16	25	18	16
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX		WILL	
+1	+5	+5		+14	

Skills: Bluff 12 (+15), Computer 8 (+15), Concentration 12 (+16), Diplomacy 10 (+13), Disable Device 6 (+13), Disguise 12 (+15/+55 with Morph bonus), Escape Artist 4 (+5), Gather Information 8 (+11), Intimidate 8 (+11), Knowledge (civics) 8 (+15), Language 4 (German, Japanese, Russian, Spanish [English is native]), Notice 6 (+10), Perform (acting) 8 (+11), Search 10 (+17), Sense Motive 12 (+16)

Feats: Assessment, Connected, Contacts, Eidetic Memory, Master Plan, Teamwork, Well-Informed

Powers: Duplication 9 (*Extras: Duration—Continuous, Heroic, Survival; Power Feats: Progression 8 [500 duplicates]*), **Immunity 10** (mental effects), **Morph 8** (humanoid forms; *Extras: Duration—Continuous*)

Combat: Attack +4, Grapple +4, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +4 (+2 flat-footed), Knockback -0, Initiative +1

Abilities 39 + Skills 32 (128 ranks) + Feats 7 + Powers 87 + Combat 16 + Saves 16 = Total 197

and it is always possible the informant the characters are dealing with is Mr. Zero himself, trying to mislead them. Any false information obtained in the place of a successful Gather Information check is an example of Gamemaster Fiat and worth a hero point.

GATHER INFORMATION

Making this check represents knowledge about Mr. Zero gained through inquiries in the criminal underworld and law enforcement agencies. Indiscreet questioning is liable to draw the attention of Mr. Zero or one of his duplicates.

DC 15: Mr. Zero is the head of a global conspiracy. The scope and design of the conspiracy is unknown.

DC 20: Mr. Zero has the power to alter his appearance; creating impersonations so convincing even loved ones have been fooled.

DC 25: Mr. Zero is a global conspiracy. He can create duplicates of himself numbering in the hundreds.

KNOWLEDGE (CURRENT EVENTS)

This skill roll represents knowledge of Mr. Zero's effect on current events.

DC 10: Mr. Zero had a direct hand in the outcome of the last World Series.

DC 15: Mr. Zero has used his abilities to influence elections, both large and small.

DC 20: Mr. Zero has an interest in paranormal activity and provides funding for many organizations researching it.

DC 25: Mr. Zero manipulates most of the media conglomerates in an attempt to control the flow of information.

NAGA

"COME TO ME, MY CHILDREN."

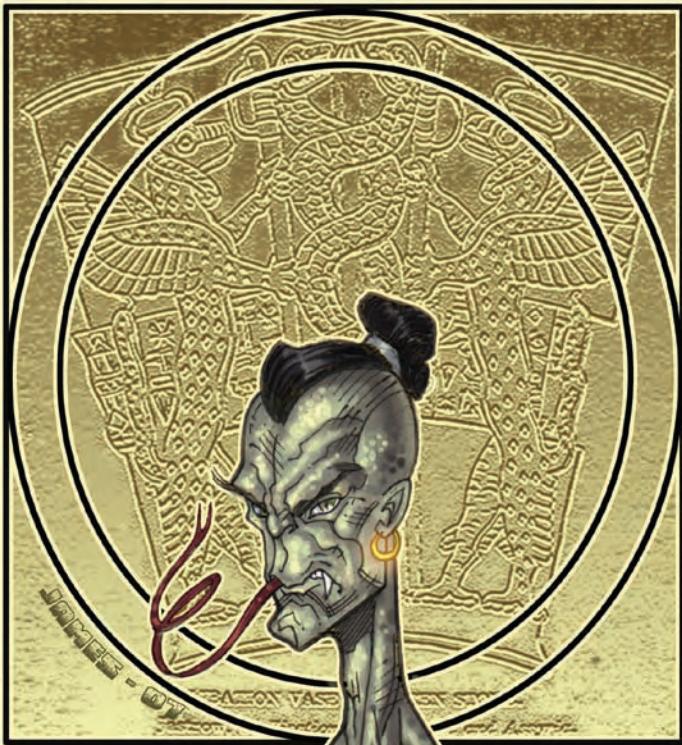
As a child, snake charmers in the streets of his native Bangladesh fascinated Shreeyash Palshikar. He would sit for hours and watch them ply their trade, seemingly as entranced by the charmers' music as the serpents themselves. While the musical talents of the charmers was certainly engaging, it was the fearsome cobras and asps that most intrigued Shreeyash. This fascination with snakes eventually gave way to scientific curiosity about reptiles in general, which lead Shreeyash to pursue a career in herpetology, eventually becoming one of Asia's foremost authorities on reptile biology.

Soon after completing his doctorate, Professor Palshikar was asked to lecture at the University of Colombo in Sri Lanka. During his visit, the professor happened upon a snake charmer in the streets. Although late for a meeting with the Dean of the University, Palshikar was, nonetheless, overcome by happy memories from his childhood and felt compelled to donate to the charmer's worthy cause as he passed. As the professor bent to lay several rupees in the charmer's donation tin, however, the charmer's cobra suddenly became agitated and struck at Palshikar. The cobra's long fangs penetrated Palshikar's neck, pumping venom directly into his jugular. The attack ended swiftly as the charmer was forced to kill his beloved pet but, for Palshikar, it was already too late. By the time medical assistance arrived on the scene, he succumbed to the deadly toxin coursing through his bloodstream.

Palshikar's body, however, had an unusual reaction to the cobra venom. Rather than killing him, it put Palshikar into a deep, euphoric coma. Fevered dreams of divine, writhing serpents tormented him as his body was wracked by fever and uncontrollable seizures. Finally, after nearly a month in his unique fugue, Palshikar awoke and sat up in bed. As the surprised nurse caring for him approached, Palshikar gripped her hand and drew her close, locking her gaze with his terrible, now inhuman eyes. The nurse's screams were heard throughout the hospital but, by the time help arrived, Palshikar's room was both quiet and empty, save for the crumpled body of the dead nurse and a layer of human-shaped skin in the bed where Palshikar had been.

The comatose fever changed Palshikar both physically and mentally. He now possessed the abilities of not only cobras but also, seemingly, all reptiles, able to assume their forms and take on their abilities as he desired. This convinced Palshikar that the visions delivered to him during his coma had blessed him as a messenger of heavenly will. As he spent the next several months hiding and hunting alone in the jungles of Sri Lanka, his sanity dwindled as his delusions of grandeur grew. He was, at least in his own mind, the perfect blend of man and serpent, the divine incarnation of the serpentine gods once so revered in Asian mythology: A naga given physical form.

Believing it his destiny to bring the message of his own superiority and divinity to humanity, Palshikar began to stalk the edges of civilization, presenting himself to the downtrodden and the poor as a messiah, a divinely empowered savior capable of raising them from rags to glory. In short order, Palshikar developed a small but devoted cult who began to range far and wide, bringing Naga's messianic message to those who would hear it. Within a year, Naga



had converted small numbers of followers in countries throughout Southeast Asia, Malaysia and Indonesia and his divinely inspired message of service was soon available for download on the Internet. Almost overnight, Naga had become an international celebrity and religious figure.

But Naga was still wanted both for the death of the nurse in the Colombo hospital and in connection with several similar, unexplained deaths in rural Sri Lanka. When investigations into his cult revealed human sacrifice was a component of Naga's twisted worship, international authorities moved quickly to take him into custody. However, the combination of Naga's powers and the devotion of his worshippers made efforts to capture him all but impossible. Naga quickly slipped into the shadows and disappeared from public view. Rumors of his activities and those of his cult continue to circulate, however, and law enforcement in most of the countries of Southeast Asia continue to be vigilant for an opportunity to capture Naga and bring him to justice.

NAGA

PL 11

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+2	+6	+6	+3	+2	+2
14	22	22	16	14	14
TOUGHNESS		FORTITUDE		REFLEX	
+6		+8		+8	
+6		+6		+6	

Skills: Diplomacy 10 (+12), Disguise 2 (+4), Intimidate 8 (+10), Language 3 (Sinhala, Hindi, Vietnamese [Bengali is native]), Knowledge (life sciences) 8 (+11), Notice 8 (+10), Profession (scientist) 8 (+10), Search 7 (+10), Stealth 6 (+12)

Feats: Chokehold, Improved Grab, Improved Pin, Minions 8, Prone Fighting, Startle

Powers: **Hypnosis 10** (Flaws: Sense-Dependant [Sight]; Alternate Power: **Paralyze 6** [Extras: Range-Perception; Flaws: Sense-Dependant (Sight)]), **Immunity 1** (poison), **Regeneration 7** (bruised 1/round with no action, injured 1/round; Power Feats: Regrowth), **Shapeshift 10** (Extras: Action-Free; Flaws: Reptiles Only), **Super-Senses 3** (Accurate, Acute Scent)

Combat: Attack +9 (melee), +9 (ranged), Grapple +11, Damage +2 (unarmed), Defense +10 (+5 flatfooted), Knockback -3, Initiative +6

Abilities 42 + Skills 15 (60 ranks) + Feats 13 + Powers 113 + Combat 38 + Saves 8 = Total 229

USING NAGA

Naga is a somewhat tragic figure. Once a successful and respected scientist, his breakout drove him hopelessly insane. While still brilliant, his keen intellect has been redirected toward the manipulation of others, both to validate his ego and satiate his growing taste for human flesh. Naga is now an inhuman monster, albeit a complicated one.

Naga is a multi-faceted character and, as such, has a variety of uses in a campaign, depending on the needs of the GM. Naga could be used as a secret mastermind whose cult is actually a front for other criminal ambitions. In this scenario, Naga and his cult might be the unwitting pawns of the Syndicate who are using the cult to infiltrate various levels of society in Southeast Asia.

Similarly, Naga could have ambitions to infiltrate and ultimately overthrow Syndicate leadership, placing himself at the head of the world's criminal elite. Another alternative would be to have Naga working with the Syndicate by choice; perhaps because he was promised more converts for his cult or because he simply needs cash and the Syndicate needs his unique abilities.

Naga could also fill the roll of a serial killer; and the players are sent to investigate a series of gruesome murders in a Southeast Asian country like Cambodia or Laos, only to discover the mad Naga is the culprit. A similar scenario might find Naga at the center of an elaborate plot to create other half-human, half-ophidian creatures like him.

Naga and Ravana (see his description in this chapter) have a number of similarities, not the least of which is belief in their own "divine" missions and their cults of followers. They could be mortal enemies or, worse, potential allies. The union of their two cults would be a serious concern.

In campaigns with a more humanitarian or heroic focus, the tragedy of Naga's situation should be emphasized. The PC's could be hunting Naga hoping to rehabilitate him or cure him of his growing insanity, a potential challenge for groups like the Rosemont Center and the Collected. Characters can also become involved if a friend or loved one falls under the sway of Naga's hypnotic personality and joins his cult.

LEARNING ABOUT NAGA

The following is information characters could potentially learn about Naga:

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 10: Naga is a paranormal cult leader operating in Southeast Asia.

DC 15: Naga is rumored to be a shapeshifter capable of assuming the form and abilities of any type of serpent.

DC 20: Naga and the members of his cult are wanted in several countries in Southeast Asia on counts of kidnapping and in connection with a series of violent murders.

DC 25: Naga is Dr. Shreeyash Palshikar, a respected scientist driven mad by his breakout.

KNOWLEDGE (LIFE SCIENCES)

DC 10: Dr. Shreeyash Palshikar was a respected scientist and expert in reptile genetics. He died some years ago.

DC 15: Dr Shreeyash Palshikar was a pioneer in the field of herpetology. His thesis regarding reptile evolution is considered the premiere treatment of the subject.

DC 20: Dr Shreeyash Palshikar was killed several years ago as the result of being bitten by a cobra while visiting Bangladesh.

DC 25: Dr. Shreeyash Palshikar survived his seemingly deadly encounter with a cobra, presumably due to the paranormal abilities he developed soon afterward. Today he is wanted in several Southeast Asian countries under the pseudonym "Naga."

THE NECROPOLITAN

*"I AM PEACE, TRUE AND EVERLASTING.
EMBRACE THE GIFT I OFFER YOU."*

The first reported sighting of the entity known as the Necropolitan was as it was seen leaving the rubble of a burning factory in Birmingham, England. It wasn't a sight any of the witnesses would ever forget: He walked not on the ground, but a few inches above it. His bare and sallow torso was covered with rough cloth ribbons nailed into his flesh, each covered in occult symbols and flapping in a wind none of the witnesses felt. His face was hidden behind a featureless black iron mask floating just in front of his face.

The factory had been abandoned years earlier; though the police suspected some idiot teenage Satanists were using the place for their "rituals" (*i.e.*, parties). None of those teenagers has been seen since that day. Soon after, authorities became aware of a strange and growing religious movement called the Thanoptikon, centered on someone or something called "The Necropolitan," spreading from country to country. Deemed a suicide cult based on what sketchy

information surfaced regarding its teachings, the movement has thus far shown a surprising solidarity and resilience on a global scale.

Very few people ever see the figure described from Birmingham—mostly they see his "acolytes," each of whom *resembles* one of the youths that went missing that day (though none of them act like teenagers). Many of the people who have joined the movement have disappeared completely, resulting in legal action and a large number of investigations. Members of the Pact avoid the movement entirely, and become quiet and evasive whenever it's brought up. Regardless, the only thing that is known for certain about the Thanoptikon cult is the statement attributed to its founder that forms the center of its philosophy: "For I am the one true path away from the lies of Heaven and of Hell, and only through me will be found true peace and redemption everlasting."

The Necropolitan is a gestalt entity, an avatar of death made flesh. It is extremely hardy physically and has demonstrated the ability to kill with a glance, among many other displays of staggering necromantic prowess. Its "inner circle;" those it has elevated from within the movement, demonstrate many of the abilities traditionally associated with the undead in various folklore, though each pales in comparison to their lord and master.

USING THE NECROPOLITAN

The Necropolitan is intended to be terrifying on a number of levels, existentially first, viscerally later. Characters have to find it before they can meet it, which means either infiltrating the Thanoptikon or somehow locating or summoning the entity itself. Since the first of these choices involves eventually encountering one of his true acolytes, even the easier path can be quite difficult: The acolytes aren't easily fooled, nor are they pushovers. Encounters with the acolytes should be thoroughly creepy experiences, especially for religious characters, as much of the cult's liturgies and rituals are perversions of those embraced by existing faiths. Get past the Inner Circle or overcome them, and eventually the group encounters the boss himself, and that's when things get ugly.

What exactly the Necropolitan is up to is for you to decide, based on the type of series you're running. Perhaps it really is an Avatar of Death, summoned in a foolish late-night ritual. This is the view taken by the Pact, which has a standing ban against any of its members seeking out or interacting with the Necropolitan (an initial meeting went incredibly poorly, and left a seat open on the Pact's Council of Elders).

The Necropolitan could simply be proof that, much like the House That Hate Built, the Imageria *does* occasionally listen to the wrong petitioners at the wrong time and is the home of as many nightmares as it is dreams.

Whatever the Necropolitan is, encountering it should be memorable, and potentially costly. First, the entity has considerable powers: it can summon spirits or nightmarish creatures and build phantasmagoric death machines or other constructs from bones and leathery flesh. Death and pain seem to strengthen it, and others who attempt to use similar powers against it see their strengths turned against them. Any damage it suffers regenerates with frustrating speed, and the Necropolitan seems every bit as beyond the frailties of the flesh as one might expect from the unliving.

There are two things to keep in mind when running The Necropolitan. The first is that, until blood spills or someone passes on around him, his powers aren't really at full strength. He's tough,

THE NECROPOLITAN

PL 15

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+9	+6	—	+6	+10	+5
28	23	—	23	30	20
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+12	—	+8	+15		

Skills: Bluff 5 (+10), Diplomacy 3 (+8), Intimidate 10 (+15), Knowledge (arcane lore) 4 (+10), Knowledge (theology and philosophy) 6 (+12), Sense Motive 4 (+14)

Feats: Distract (Intimidate), Fascinate (Intimidate), Fearless, Fearsome Presence 10 (50 ft., DC 20), Minions 11 (as Cultist Archetype [see *M&M*, page 226], minion rank 2, x 1000, fanatical), Ritualist, Startle, Taunt

Powers: **Drain Constitution 10** [Extras: Range—Perception, Total Fade; Power Feats: Subtle, *Alternate Powers*: **Boost 12** [all traits; Flaws: Limited—When someone around him is injured or killed, Range—Personal; Power Feats: Subtle, Slow fade 3], **Animate Objects 17** [Flaws: Limited—Dead flesh and bone; Power Feats: Progression 7], **Create Object 9** [necrotic flesh constructs; Extras: Duration—Continuous; Power Feats: Precise, Innate], **Insubstantial 4** [incorporeal], **Paralyze 10** [mournful wail; Extras: Burst Area, Selective Attack; Flaws: Sense-Dependent (Hearing)], **Power Control 15** [Extras: Burst Area, Duration—Continuous; Flaws: Limited—Necromancy, Range—Touch] & **Mental Blast 3** [Extras: Action-Reaction, No Saving Throw; Flaws: Limited—When someone tries to attack him with necromancy, Linked to Power Control], **Summon Undead 8** [Extras: Broad Type, Horde; Flaws: Distracting, Action—Full Action; Progression 7]), **Flight 3** [Extras: Duration—Continuous; Flaws: Permanent], **Gestalt 10** (Power Feats: Progression 1), **Immunity 32** (critical hits, Fortitude effects), **Protection 12**, **Regeneration 32** (+9 Recovery, Bruised 1/round, Unconscious 1/ round, Injured 1/ round, Staggered 1/round, Disabled 1/round, Resurrection 1/ day; Extras: True Resurrection)

Gestalt Components: as Vampire Lord (see *M&M* page 225; add Super Senses [communications link 4 (mental, other components)])

Combat: Attack +5, Grapple +14, Damage +9 (melee), Defense +6 (+3 flatfooted), Knockback -6, Initiative +6

Drawbacks: Power Loss (His attack powers won't work on anyone with "True Faith" [GM's call what that means], -2 points), Unholy (Anyone with "True Faith" [GM's call] who brandishes a holy symbol of their faith can force an opposed Will save against The Necropolitan, with success forcing him to flee the area, -2 points)

Abilities 64 + Skills 8 (32 ranks) + Feats 38 + Powers 143 + Combat 22 + Saves 7—Drawbacks 4 = Total 278

but operating below his normal power level. Once his Boost kicks in however, that changes—his Toughness becomes monstrous, and his various necromantic powers increase up to almost his full power level. Gauge the characters' capabilities carefully or you risk overwhelming them with the Necropolitan's full power. The second is that a lot of what makes The Necropolitan memorable isn't his power level, but his presence, style, and power effects. Play up the ghastly aspects to their fullest: a tower of bones and effluvia, spinning like a tornado and bowling through the characters (Animate or Create Object), or the bodies of fallen comrades risen to feast on living flesh. The possibilities are nearly endless; be creative, be graphic, and above all, be gruesome.



LEARNING ABOUT THE NECROPOLITAN

The following is information the characters might learn about the Necropolitan:

GATHER INFORMATION

Making this check represents making inquiries in the law enforcement community. Keep in mind that such inquiries might draw unwanted attention unless the character is particularly discreet.

DC 10: "The Necropolitan" leads some sort of religious cult called the Thanoptikon, currently at its largest in Europe, but growing in number in the US and elsewhere.

DC 20: The Thanoptikon cult is suspected of complicity in the supposed "suicides" of dozens of teenagers and young adults around the world, but authorities haven't been able to prove anything substantive.

KNOWLEDGE (ARCANE LORE)

DC 15: The Necropolitan is a being of great power. His followers claim he's the Angel of Death, cast out of Heaven for refusing to play God's games any more.

DC 20: Necromancy and other forms of magic involving spirits and the undead simply don't work right in his presence, almost as if he dampens or corrupts them just by being there.

NETWORK

*"GOOD MORNING, MR. ALEXANDER.
IT'S ONLY 4:00 AM IN HONG KONG, SO I'M
AFRAID IT WILL BE DOUBLE THE NORMAL RATE.
IS THAT ACCEPTABLE? I'LL CONNECT YOU AT ONCE."*

Network is a consummate businessman and entrepreneur. He has single-handedly parlayed his rather specific paranormal abilities into a successful global enterprise that has placed him on the Fortune 500 list the past two years in a row. His small client base contains some of the wealthiest, most influential, and well-known individuals on the planet, and others who wish to gain access to his services constantly court him.

Marshall Collins graduated at the top of his class in high school, but found college somewhat less rewarding than he had expected. He was a quick learner and understood the theories behind his business classes well enough, but college did not present him with the opportunities to exploit his social networking skills to what he felt was an adequate degree. Collins' test scores were adequate, but it was his ability to connect with people that allowed him to overcome his mediocre college performance and gain entry into a prestigious telecommunications firm over other candidates with far better qualifications.

Actual industry work was far more to Collins' liking than the academic environment of college. He gradually learned the ins and outs of his chosen field, and his gregarious nature enabled him to form particularly close, successful bonds with many of the firm's more profitable clients. Collins quickly became a threat to several people in the company, all well above his pay grade, but by the time they realized how dangerous he was to their position, he

had made himself so indispensable to the company that anyone attempting to eliminate him would seal their own fate because of the lost revenue. Content with his position, Collins settled in for a while, certain that he could eventually leverage himself into a much better position with another firm by bringing several of his clients with him when he jumped ship in a year or two.

The emergence of paragons among mankind completely ruined Collins' plans. His telepathy manifested itself early, but he didn't realize that anything had changed. He knew things without understanding that he had plucked them from the minds of clients and co-workers, and inadvertently established mental communication between random people that he touched during the course of a given work day. Chaos reigned throughout the company for three days until Collins was discovered to be the only element in common with all the strange occurrences. Finally possessing the leverage to eliminate a hated rival, a particularly vengeful vice president fired Collins on the spot and assured him that he would never work in telecommunications again.

It took Collins several days to figure out exactly what had happened. It took him less than a week to learn to control his abilities. It took him less than one month to come up with a means of utilizing them to his advantage. He experimented somewhat with a few friends he still had from work, and then began discreetly contacting former clients with whom he felt he had salvageable relationships. The process was not easy. Collins' former rivals had taken great pains to destroy his reputation utterly, and even some of those clients that he had considered close friends wanted nothing to do with him. Using his normal charm and aplomb, however, he managed to convince a handful of them to try the services he offered for a brief period, free of charge of course, to compare it to more conventional means of communication.

None of the clients who took up Collins' offer failed to sign him as one of their



service providers. With his assistance, Collins' clients could confer with one another instantaneously, even when involved in separate meetings. Fact-checking the claims of a competitor took only seconds, and entire committees could participate in meetings attended by only one of their coworkers. Some balked at the prices Collins charged, but he was prepared for that as well; he had prepared a detailed prospectus for each of his clients, showing exactly how much money they could potentially save using his services in the first year alone. In the span of six months, ParaComm, Inc. became one of the most profitable businesses in the country, a claim aided by the fact that Collins, now calling himself Network, had virtually no overhead costs to worry about.

Now that he has established himself as a major player in the telecommunications industry (Collins enjoys joking that telecommunications now means "telepathic communications"), Network is beginning to look at new markets for his company. His talents are more or less maximized at the moment, and he is very cautious about extending his client base beyond the number he can actually provide service for. He has begun discreetly seeking out other less powerful telepaths, however, and has a notion to use a handful of such individuals to duplicate his success with smaller businesses at a reduced price, capitalizing on entirely new client bases in the process. For now, he hasn't found anyone who shares his gifts, but he has not yet given up the search.

USING NETWORK

Network is a consummate businessman. He enjoys his wealth and prestige, but in all honesty it is the challenge and thrill of creating and maintaining a completely new service industry that is far more rewarding to him. Everything in life is a business proposition, and that includes any and all interactions Network has with the heroes. If they come to him seeking to gain admittance to his network, they will find the price quite steep and potentially out of their range...unless, of course, they have some proposal for him that will make it worth his while. In truth, this is the best tactic to use when approaching Network about anything, as his natural love of a challenge will make it almost impossible for him to resist a new endeavor unless he determines that it is either not worth his time or doomed to failure. Approaching Network in hopes of gaining information on his clients will result in an immediate and vehement denial, and a subsequent introduction to his personal security forces. On the other hand, if someone were to somehow gain access to Network's private information through whatever means, then there is little he wouldn't do to ensure his reputation of confidentiality was secure, up to and including hiring the heroes to investigate the matter on his behalf. Discreetly, of course.

LEARNING ABOUT NETWORK

The following describes information characters may be able to learn about Network:

GATHER INFORMATION

Making this check represents the character asking around about Network as well as using standard media outlets as a source of information.

DC 10: Network is a telepath that works in the telecommunications field in some capacity.

NETWORK						PL 10
STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA	
+1	+2	+1	+4	+2	+2	
12	14	12	18	15	14	
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL			
+1	+5	+6	+12			

Skills: Computers 12 (+16), Diplomacy 8 (+10), Drive 4 (+6), Gather Information 8 (+10), Knowledge (business) 12 (+16), Knowledge (civics) 10 (+14), Knowledge (current events) 10 (+14), Notice 8 (+10), Search 8 (+12)

Feats: Benefit 3 (wealth bonus 20), Connected, Contacts, Minions 5 (5 minions, use Government Agent, see *M&M* page 227), Well-Informed

Powers: **Impervious** Will 8, **Telepathy** 10 (200,000 miles; *Extras:* Area, Duration—Continuous; *Flaws:* Limited—To people he's touched; *Power Feats:* Selective, Subtle), **Comprehend** 3 (Languages; *Extras:* Area, Linked to Telepathy, Usable by Others; *Power Feats:* Subtle)

Combat: Attack +5, Grapple +5, Damage +1 (unarmed), Defense +6 (+3 flatfooted), Knockback -2, Initiative +2

Abilities 25 + Skills 20 (80 ranks) + Feats 11 + Powers 63 + Combat 22 + Saves 18 = Total 159

DC 20: Network makes his living by allowing telepathic communication between his clients, granting them an instantaneous and completely confidential means of conferring regardless of their location or circumstance.

DC 25: While Network is not necessarily a particularly powerful telepath, the range and clarity of his abilities is rather unusual, and it is this defining characteristic that has allowed him to make his mark in the industry.

KNOWLEDGE (BUSINESS)

Making this check represents a character's use of business contacts and knowledge of the business world in general to find out information concerning Network and his corporation, ParaComm, Inc.

DC 10: ParaComm is a multi-million dollar corporation that currently consists of only one individual, the owner and operator, a paranormal known as Network.

DC 15: The CEO of ParaComm is a powerful and highly specialized telepath named Marshal Collins, also known as Network. Network is somehow able to allow individuals to communicate mentally instantaneously, anywhere on the planet. His clients pay very handsomely to use his services.

DC 25: Network's telepathic abilities only work on those he has touched. He allows clients to contact one another mentally, guaranteeing instantaneous communication regardless of location or circumstances. The rates charged for these telepathic communications vary depending upon time and location. Network's clients include some of the wealthiest men and women on the planet.

NIGHTSTALKER

"NO MATTER WHERE YOU TRY TO HIDE, LOWLIFE, I'LL FIND YOU. ALL I HAVE TO DO IS FOLLOW THE SMELL OF YOUR FEAR."

Carter James grew up in one of the oldest parts of Detroit. From an early age, Carter's parents instilled in him a sense of civic pride and volunteerism. Long-time activists, the James' were pillars of their community and encouraged Carter to live by their example. Carter excelled in school, both academically and physically. A natural leader, Carter attended college on an ROTC scholarship, eventually becoming an officer in the United States Army upon graduation.

Specializing in communications and surveillance, Lieutenant James served with distinction during the first Gulf War, earning an array of commendations as well as the attention of his superiors. Among these was a young Major Jackson Cross, attached to the Army's Special Operations division. Cross served with Lt. James in a variety of circumstances and was impressed with the combination of Carter's technical skill and determination.

At the conclusion of Gulf War, Cross approached Carter with an offer to serve in a Special Operations unit. Although Carter was anxious to get home to his family, Major Cross made a convincing argument. Within months, the newly-promoted Captain Carter James relocated to a clandestine Special Ops base in Costa Rica where he became part of a covert task force waging a war against the drug cartels dominating Central and South America. Carter spent the next several years sabotaging drug-smuggling operations in Columbia, Panama, Paraguay and Venezuela. Through a combination of luck and planning, the unit's missions were highly successful, earning Carter and his company the enmity of some of South America's most powerful drug kingpins.

Unfortunately, Carter's luck didn't last. During a particularly difficult raid involving a major cartel's key distribution facility, Carter's unit was ambushed by a group of mercenaries. An intense fire-fight broke out, during which Carter was seriously injured. His communications equipment destroyed, he ordered his men to retreat and the unit made a run for the nearby jungle. Using all of his training, Carter tried to elude his pursuers but his injuries slowed him down. Taking refuge in the heights of a tree, Carter watched from hiding as the mercenaries combed the jungle floor for any sign of his passing. In the distance he could hear the cries of his men as gunfire ripped through the

jungle canopy. Wracked with pain and sinking into shock, Carter's grip became progressively less solid as those hunting him steadily approached his precarious refuge.

Suddenly, Carter became aware he wasn't alone. As he raised his head, he found himself eye to eye with a jaguar perched mere feet away. It regarded Carter calmly for a moment before the snap of a fallen branch under a heavy heel drew the jaguar's attention from Carter to the jungle floor below.

Carter's shock was transformed into wonder as he watched the great cat leap gracefully from the branch to attack the men below. The surprised mercenaries were easily overtaken, and Carter was astounded by the graceful ferocity of the beast that dispatched his would-be captors. Easily evading the mercenaries' gunfire, the jaguar finished off the last soldier before looking up at Carter. As he locked eyes with the great cat, Carter suddenly realized not only was the pain of his wound gone but he was back on the ground with the mercenaries' bloody bodies surrounding him. There was no jaguar. There never had been. There was only a young Army Captain who was now a changed man.

Carter eventually found his way out of the jungle and made his way back to base where he learned the covert operation was immediately scrapped and a relieved Carter James was released from duty and allowed to return home. The strange events in South America, however, were quickly replaced in Carter's mind when he returned home to Detroit and received the devastating news that his parents had been murdered. He was further shocked to discover the humble, historic neighborhood he had grown up in had been overtaken by crime and gang violence; his once peaceful, prosperous community was beleaguered and crime ridden. Worse, Carter learned his parents had been killed while trying to organize a neighborhood watch and advocating for an increased police presence in their neighborhood.

Seeing what his childhood home had become, the beast within Carter James began to growl. Never prone to sit back and watch, he decided to take action. Drawing upon his childhood heroes for inspiration, Carter devised a costume to hide his identity. Incorporating some equipment of his own design to supplement his abilities and military training, Carter undertook a mission to reclaim his home from the drugs and crime that had all but consumed it.

It wasn't long before every criminal and dealer in Detroit came to live in mortal fear of the rumors out on the streets: The Nightstalker was on the prowl.



USING NIGHTSTALKER

Nightstalker is a vigilante through and through. Although he is willing to work with authorities, he rarely does so, feeling they've already failed the communities he is trying to protect. Instead, Nightstalker relies on fear tactics and force to bring his point home. Although he doesn't kill wantonly, he's willing to use deadly force when the situation calls for it. He attacks with military precision, striking hard and fast and retreating quickly and quietly.

As a vigilante operating outside of the law, Nightstalker could come into conflict with any paranormals working in a law enforcement capacity or with a law enforcement agency. On the other hand, a character or group of characters with a similar *modus operandi* might be inclined to seek out Nightstalker and offer him their assistance.

While Nightstalker usually confines his activities to dealing with mundane criminal matters, he could just as easily come into conflict with a paranormal criminal or group of criminals. For example, the local drug lord with ties to the Syndicate might acquire the services of one or more paranormal enforcers, forcing Nightstalker to seek out other paranormals to help him deal with the dangerous new threat to his home turf.

If the characters are particularly based in one city, feel free to shift Nightstalker's turf from Detroit to that city if it better suits the series.

LEARNING ABOUT NIGHTSTALKER

The following is information characters could potentially learn about Nightstalker:

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 10: Drug and gang activity in the city are down dramatically in recent months. Law enforcement officials are unusually quiet as to why.

DC 15: A vigilante calling himself Nightstalker has been encouraging locals to use his website to report suspected drug and gang activity.

DC 20: The Nightstalker's one-man war on drugs and gangs is the reason some neighborhoods are now so much safer at night, much to the chagrin of law enforcement, which considers him an outlaw.

KNOWLEDGE (STREETWISE)

DC 10: Drug dealers and gang bangers in the city are afraid to do business in certain neighborhoods as some of their associates have met with a messy end.

DC 15: Local graffiti in some of the older neighborhoods now have warnings claiming "the Nightstalker is on the hunt" Most people believe the Nightstalker is a myth.

DC 20: The Nightstalker is a very real paranormal vigilante, working to protect the people of the city's historic neighborhoods from crime and illicit drug activity.

DC 25: In addition to hunting drug dealers and gang bangers, the Nightstalker is also working to rid the city of corrupt police officers and officials in league with organized crime, who allow it to continue in order to fill their own pockets.

NIGHTSTALKER

PL 10

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+8/+2	+12/+3	+2	+3	+2	+2
26/14	34/16	14	16	14	14
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+8/+2*/+5**	+5	+12	+6		

*without body armor AND flatfooted ** without body armor OR flatfooted

Skills: Acrobatics 2 (+14), Climb 6 (+14), Computers 7 (+10), Craft (electronic) 7 (+10), Craft (mechanical) 7 (+10), Drive 1 (+13), Escape Artist 1 (+13), Gather Information 8 (+10), Investigate 7 (+10), Knowledge (current events) 4 (+7), Knowledge (streetwise) 6 (+9), Language 1 (Spanish [English is native]), Notice 12 (+14), Stealth 3 (+15), Survival 8 (+10)

Feats: Acrobatic Bluff, All-Out Attack, Attack Focus 2 (melee), Defensive Roll 3, Equipment 5, Evasion, Grappling Finesse, Inventor, Instant Stand, Move-By Action, Power Attack, Takedown Attack 2

Equipment: Body armor (+3 Toughness), flash-grenades (**Dazzle 4**: visual; Burst Area), handcuffs, mini-tracer, rebreather, multi-tool, smoke grenades

Powers: **Device 2** (mask, hard to lose), **Device 5** (gauntlets, hard to lose), **Enhanced Dexterity 18**, **Enhanced Strength 12**, **Leaping 3** (x 10; *Alternate Power: Speed 3* [50 MPH]), **Silence 1**, **Super-Movement 2** (slow fall, trackless), **Super-Senses 9** (accurate hearing, accurate scent, danger sense [auditory], extended hearing, low-light vision, tracking scent, ultra-hearing), **Super-Strength 2** (*heavy load*: 1.8 tons)

Mask: **Sensory Shield 4** (visual), **Super-Senses 6** (Darkvision, Distance Sense, Microscopic Vision 2, Telescopic Vision)

Gauntlets: **Penetrating Strength Damage 4**, **Snare 7** (Tether), **Super-Movement 3** (Swinging, Wall Crawling 2)

Combat: Attack +12 (melee), +10 (ranged), Grapple +26, Damage +8 (punch), Defense +12 (+6 flat-footed), Knockback -4, Initiative +12

Abilities 28 + Skills 20 (80 ranks) + Feats 20 + Powers 80 + Combat 44 + Saves 7 = Total 196

OTHERKIN

"NOT AGAIN! I CAN'T CHANGE NOW!"

Rachel Carson's family abused her mentally and physically for her entire early life. In the crucible some develop unrivaled mental strength, not so with Rachel. Rachel became a mirror reflecting the will of those around her; having none of her own. She moved from one abusive relationship to another nearly marrying the last because that was what he wanted; a docile show wife to bring to company events. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, for Rachel she walked in on her fiancé and his most recent dalliance the night before the wedding. Her breakout occurred in that moment of pain.

Rachel does not know exactly what happened then, but remembers a cacophony of voices in her head and a single voice, not exactly her own trying to stabilize her and calm her down. While Rachel's inner conflict raged, her body was in a constant state of metamorphosis, exhibiting power after power damaging and destroying much of the surrounding area. The authorities were unable to do more than cordon off the area. Before more extreme measures



could be taken, a massive metallic form was seen entering what was left of the building and then the eruption of strange power ended as quickly as it began.

Brought to the Rosemont Center, Rachel was assessed with not one but at least three additional personalities each with their own sets of powers and radically altered appearances, even different genders. She learned that by surrendering to one of these personalities that she physically and mentally became that person. As Chi Dragon she is a skilled martial artist; as Photonic, one of her male forms, she controls and manipulates light; and Jack Shadow, her other male body, harnesses a living and hungry darkness.

Rachel's weak will allows the strongest of her personalities to move forward in times of weakness or some other specific outside stimuli. Photonic, an adventurous and boastful soul, moves forward in moments of particular self-satisfaction, mental curiosity, or when in a crowd of people; he likes performing to an audience. Jack Shadow, a thief, gains ascendancy in moments of greed and jealousy, during the night, or when Rachel's flight response is dominant; Jack is good at running away. If Jack is Rachel's flight mechanism, Chi Dragon is her fight response and asserts herself when Rachel is in danger, threatened, or scared. Of all her personalities only Chi Dragon brings Rachel any comfort. However, since meeting Vom Stahl, Rachel has begun to be jealous of Chi Dragon's natural charm and beauty. Rachel has picked up many of the hobbies she enjoyed when she was younger in order to bolster her own personal self worth and particularly enjoys art museums and signing.

As Otherkin, Rachel helps Vom Stahl collect other less fortunate paragons while working with Dr. Rosemont to strengthen her

will and assert control over herself and her powers. Her exercises include harnessing the other personalities at will, an ability she uses often in her excursions with Vom Stahl. In her time with the man of metal, Rachel has come to both respect and care for him deeply, a feeling that she shares with Chi Dragon. Rachel knows that Vom Stahl has feelings hidden deep within his metal shell, feelings she shares, but she suspects that those feelings are in fact for the part of her person that is Chi Dragon. Jack Shadow, usually more than a bit cold-hearted has also expressed his feelings for Pontifex, feeling that he has found a kindred spirit. Rachel has begun to fear these emotions (and her fear of them) stills her tongue and saps her will, facts that Dr. Rosemont would be most interested to discover.

USING OTHERKIN

Otherkin is something of a wildcard when it comes to those at the Rosemont Center. She can be played straight in which case she is a force to be reckoned with (three full high power paragons in one), or she can be played as truly unfortunate; her changes occurring almost completely outside her control. Either way she has deep emotional connections with Vom Stahl, Emily Rosemont, and the Rosemont Center which are all help her on her path to reclaim some semblance of normality and control over her life. Rachel, and her other personalities, are all thankful for the help they're receiving and are happy to help their friends.

Otherkin's individual personalities have goals of their own and could be encountered individually before the player characters learn that they're all part of the same person. Chi Dragon is one of the world's paramount martial artists and strives to better herself

CHI DRAGON

PL 12

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+3	+6	+4	+2	+6	+4
16	22	18	14	22	18
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+8/+4*	+4	+12	+10		

*flat footed

Skills: Acrobatics 12 (+18), Climb 5 (+8), Concentration 14 (+20), Escape Artist 10 (+16), Gather Information 4 (+8), Intimidate 8 (+12), Knowledge (theology and philosophy) 5 (+7), Language 3 (Cantonese, Hakka, Mandarin [English is native]), Medicine 4 (+10), Notice 8 (+14), Sense Motive 4 (+10), Sleight of Hand 4 (+10), Stealth 6 (+12), Survival 4 (+10), Swim 5 (+8)

Feats: Accurate Attack, Acrobatic Bluff, All-out Attack, Attractive, Blind-Fight, Critical Strike, Defensive Attack, Defensive Roll 4, Dodge Focus 4, Elusive Target, Evasion 2, Grappling Finesse, Improved Critical (unarmed), Improved Block, Improved Disarm, Improved Grab, Improved Pin, Improved Sunder, Improved Throw, Improved Trip, Instant Up, Power Attack, Prone Fighting, Startle, Stunning Attack, Takedown Attack 2, Uncanny Dodge (danger sense), Weapon Bind

Powers: Chi 5 (Boost 5 and Healing 5; Power Feats: **Immunity 7** [cold, disease, heat, poison, starvation and thirst, suffocation]), **Morph 4** (Flaws: Action—Full Action, Limit—Metamorph only; Power Feats: Metamorph 2), **Super-Senses 5** (cosmic awareness, acute and analytical danger sense, mental awareness), **Super-Speed 1** (rapid attack)

Drawbacks: All forms have: Involuntary Transformation (various forms, various stimulus, moderate, -3 points), Normal Identity (full round action, -5 points)

Combat: Attack +14, Grapple +20, Damage +3 (unarmed), Defense +14 (+5 flat footed), Knockback -4, Initiative +10

Abilities 50 + Skills 24 (96 ranks) + Feats 36 + Powers 27 + Combat 48 + Saves 10—Drawbacks 8 = Total 187

and do good deeds. She could be encountered training individuals to defend themselves, training with another powerful and versatile fighters, or even simply stopping crime on the streets. Photonic loves the limelight and prides himself on his scientific prowess and could be found saving people from a burning building, attending a science lecture or making public appearances to an adoring public. Jack Shadow is a generally selfish creature and thief, though one with a heart, and could be found stealing valuables from organized crime or a public figure he believes could use a come-uppance. He could also be encountered helping the defenseless escape an otherwise inescapable predicament or even breaking in to the characters' impregnable fortress for some reason. Rachel herself could be encountered at a museum or onstage at the local open mic night.

Finally, the forms detailed in this text could be just the beginning of Otherkin's forms. Perhaps other spirits begin to inhabit Otherkin, leading her to exhibit new powers and personalities, not all of which might be benign...

PHOTONIC

PL 12

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+1	+2	+2	+5	+2	+3
12	14	14	20	14	16
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+14/+2*	+5	+4	+4		

*without force field

Skills: Concentration 8 (+10), Diplomacy 5 (+8), Knowledge (physical sciences) 10 (+15), Knowledge (technology) 7 (+12), Search 6 (+11), Sense Motive 4 (+6)

Feats: Accurate Attack, All-out Attack, Attack Focus 4 (ranged), Environmental Adaptation (zero gravity), Favored Environment (outer space)

Powers: **Comprehend 3** (Language; understand and speak with universal understanding; Extras: Affects Others; Power Feats: Progression 1 [2 individuals]), **Create Object 12** (solid light; Power Feats: Affects Insubstantial, Improved range 3 [range increment: 100 ft.], Tether; Alternate Powers: **Dazzle 12** [visual group; Power Feats: Accurate], **Healing 8** [Extras: Energizing; Power Feats: Persistent]), **Flight 12** (Alternate Powers: **Teleport 10** [Extras: Accurate; Flaws: Long-Range; Power Feats: Progression 4 (2,500 lbs.)]), **Force Field 12**, **Immunity 9** (life support; Extras: Affects Others, Burst Area; Drawbacks: Noticeable), **Morph 4** (Flaws: Action—Full Action, Limit—Metamorph only; Metamorph 2), **Space Travel 1**

Combat: Attack +3 (melee), +7 (ranged), Grapple +4, Damage +1 (unarmed), Defense +8 (+4 flatfooted), Knockback -7, Initiative +2

Drawbacks: All forms have: Involuntary Transformation (various forms, various stimulus, moderate, -3 points), Normal Identity (full round action, -5 points)

Abilities 30 + Skills 10 (40 ranks) + Feats 8 + Powers 101 + Combat 22 + Saves 7—Drawbacks 8 = Total 170

RACHEL CARSON

PL 3

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
-1	+1	+0	+1	-1	+2
8	12	10	12	8	14
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+0	+2	+2	+1		

Skills: Concentration 5 (+4), Craft (artistic) 8 (+9), Knowledge (art) 5 (+6), Knowledge (popular culture) 2 (+3), Notice 5 (+4), Perform (singing) 7 (+9)

Feats: Beginner's Luck, Inspire 2

Combat: Attack +2, Grapple +1, Damage -1 (unarmed), Defense +4 (+2 flatfooted), Knockback -0, Initiative +1

Abilities 4 + Skills 8 (32 ranks) + Feats 3 + Powers 0 + Combat 12 + Saves 3 = Total 30

JACK SHADOW

PL II

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+8	+2	+8	+3	+1	+1
26	14	26	16	12	12

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+13	+8	+8	+8

Skills: Bluff 8 (+9), Disable Device 6 (+9), Knowledge (streetwise) 5 (+8), Language 2 (Hindi, Urdu [English is native]), Notice 4 (+5), Profession (burglar) 5 (+6), Search 5 (+8), Sense Motive 5 (+6), Stealth 8 (+10)

Feats: Attack Focus 4 (melee), Evasion, Favored Environment (darkness), Improved Grab, Improved Grapple, Improved Pin, Sneak Attack

Powers: **Animate Shadows 5** (Power Feats: Progression 1), **Concealment 4** (visual; Flaws: Limited —Areas of shadow and darkness), **Elongation 6, Fatigue 12, Insubstantial 1** (fluid-like), **Morph 4** (Flaws: Action—Full Action, Limited—Metamorph only; Power Feats: Metamorph 2), **Protection 5** (Extras: Impervious), **Super-Movement 3** (slithering, wall-crawling 2), **Super-Senses 2** (darkvision), **Super-Strength 3** (heavy load: 4 tons)

Combat: Attack +9 (melee), +5 (ranged), Grapple +26, Damage +8 (unarmed), Defense +8 (+4 flat-footed), Knockback -9, Initiative +2

Drawbacks: Vulnerable (light based attacks, save DC +50%, -2 points); All forms also have: Involuntary Transformation (various forms, various stimulus, moderate, -3 points), Normal Identity (full round action, -5 points)

Abilities 46 + Skills 12 (48 ranks) + Feats 10 + Powers 83 + Combat 26 + Saves 8—Drawbacks 10 = Total 182

LEARNING ABOUT OTHERKIN

Otherkin is a member of the Collected and a patient and confidant of the Rosemont Center, for these reasons, it's more difficult to learn much about her. This increased difficulty is reflected in the difficulties. See the Rosemont Center for more information that can be garnered about Otherkin and the Collected.

GATHER INFORMATION

This check represents information that can be gathered through use of contacts in medicine, law enforcement or the media.

DC 20: Otherkin is a paragon connected to one of the smaller paranormal groups sighted from time to time; called the Collected. Otherkin has a number of different paranormal forms each with their own set of powers.

DC 25: Otherkin doesn't just have a series of forms; she is several people in one. Each personality has a separate set of powers and motivations. She's received treatment at the Rosemont center.

PANACEA

"PLEASE...TRY TO HOLD STILL,
IT'LL BE BETTER IN A MOMENT."

Isabella Riveria was born and raised in Spain, where she attended medical school and became a trauma specialist working in the emergency room of the Costa del Sol Hospital in Andalusia, one of the finest hospitals in Spain. She thrived on the chaos of her work environment and enjoyed putting her skills to the test, helping the people who most needed her help.

Dr. Riveria's life changed late one night during a particular trauma case: The teenaged victim of a hit-and-run accident. Her injuries were so severe she was not expected to survive and, even if she did, she would almost certainly be crippled for life. When she flat-lined on the table and failed to respond to resuscitation, Dr. Riveria continued working past the point where many doctors would have given up. Other doctors and nurses in the ER witnessed the golden light that shone from Riveria's hands and flowed over the patient, completely healing her injuries. In moment, she opened her eyes and sat up, asking where she was. Dr. Riveria fainted.

Isabella woke a short while later in a bed in her own hospital and learned a miracle had happened. Somehow, Maria Vargas, the girl that was brought in, was completely healed, without a mark on her, despite being bloody, broken, and near-death less than an hour before. Dr. Riveria could offer no explanation, but she was able to repeat the miracle: By simply touching a patient and concentrating, she could evoke a golden light that healed them; sometimes completely, other times only partially, but always immediately and to an incredible degree, with no apparent explanation.

Medical associates tagged Dr. Riveria with the nickname "Panacea," a true cure-all. In no time at all, Costa del Sol was bombarded with patients of every sort from all across the country, then all across the world. Dr. Riveria proved able to cure even the incurable in many cases: Patients with cancer, AIDS, Ebola, and life-threatening injuries. In fairly short order, she was forced to leave the hospital, as it became unable to deal with the flow of requests to see the "miracle healer."

Dr. Riveria established the Panacea Clinic in Andalusia and set up a private practice. Fees are assessed on the client's ability to pay, and Panacea does considerable *pro bono* work, even so the clinic has considerable income and Dr. Riveria's waiting list is up to three years long in some cases.

At first awed by her newfound healing ability, Panacea has come to quietly resent it for a number of reasons. First, it has taken a great deal of the skill and challenge out of her work. Her healing power requires little or no medical knowledge: She simply lays hands on the patient and wills them to heal and it happens. She might need to set a bone or manipulate some damaged tissue on occasion, but she's afraid her diagnostic and surgical skills are atrophying.

Second, the demands on her time and attention are tremendous. Local police have had to break up huge crowds outside the Panacea Clinic, demanding to get inside. The waiting list of patients is so long, she may never catch up, even at a breakneck pace of seeing dozens each day. Although exhausted by the frantic pace, Isabella still feels pangs of guilt for every patient she can't see, every hurt she can't heal.

Considerable jealousy has developed in the medical community over her practice. If she weren't already a licensed physician, she's certain the medical authorities would have shut down the clinic. As it is, there's talk of restricting her ability to apply her unusual "treatments" despite their proven effectiveness, or requiring greater amounts of monitoring and study. She has to fight red tape and bureaucracy almost constantly.

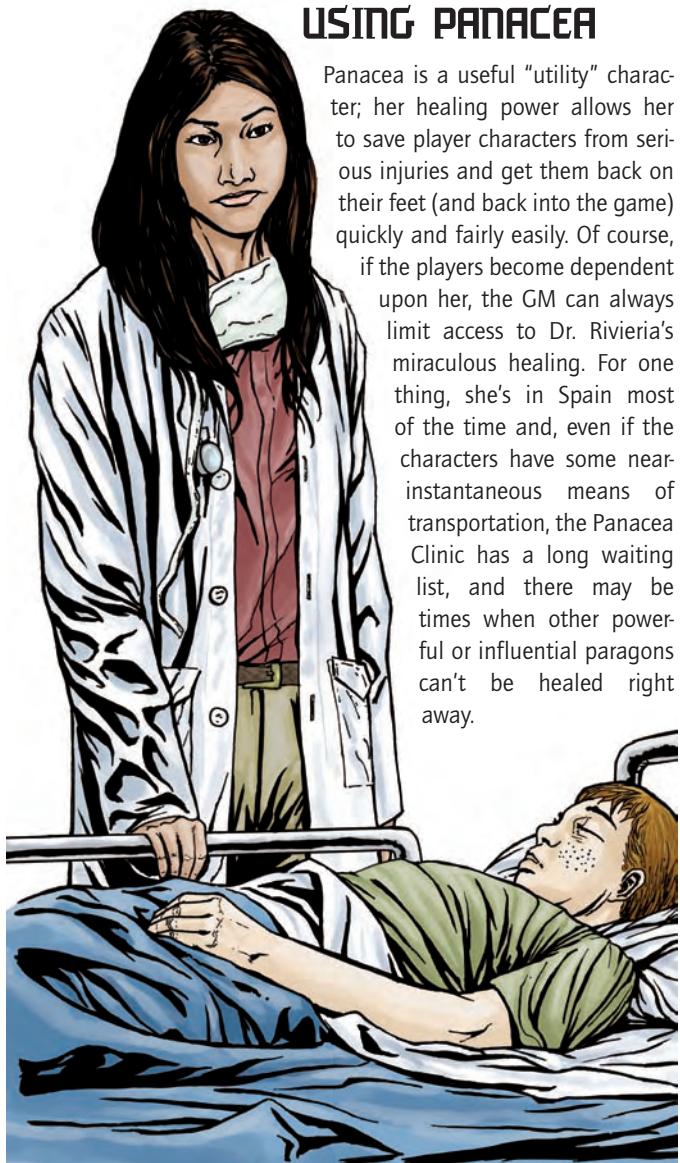
Lastly, and perhaps most distressing to Isabella, a small number of people have come to see her as a saint or religious figure and her healings as miraculous. They're led by Maria Vargas, the young woman Panacea first healed with her powers, and loosely affiliated with Christian sects like the Church of Jesus Christ, Paragon. Although raised Catholic, Dr. Riveria believes there is a scientific explanation for her abilities. However, she has no idea what it is, and there are moments when even she wonders if perhaps it's true: What if she *is* a saint or in some way especially blessed? The potential ramifications to her life and her faith often keep her up late at night.

Panacea has also kept the full extent of her power to herself. Through lab experimentation and trial and error, she has learned that she has the ability to control a variety of life functions, not just healing, and that her power can also harm, or even kill, if she chooses. The potential for this frightens her, and she hopes never to have to reveal it.

USING PANACEA

Panacea is a useful "utility" character; her healing power allows her to save player characters from serious injuries and get them back on their feet (and back into the game) quickly and fairly easily. Of course,

if the players become dependent upon her, the GM can always limit access to Dr. Riviera's miraculous healing. For one thing, she's in Spain most of the time and, even if the characters have some near-instantaneous means of transportation, the Panacea Clinic has a long waiting list, and there may be times when other powerful or influential paragons can't be healed right away.



PANACEA

PL 7

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
-1	+1	+2	+2	+1	+0
8	13	14	14	13	11
TOUGHNESS		FORTITUDE		REFLEX	
+2		+5		+4	
WILL		+5		+5	

Skills: Concentration 8 (+9), Knowledge (life sciences) 8 (+10), Language 1 (English [Spanish is native]), Medicine 12 (+13), Notice 5 (+6), Profession (physician) 11 (+12), Sense Motive 5 (+6), Swim 6 (+5)

Feats: Attack Focus (melee) 1, Skill Mastery (Medicine, Notice, Profession, Sense Motive)

Powers: **Life Control 12** (Flaws: Range—Touch; Alternate Powers: **Drain Constitution 12, Fatigue 12, Healing 8** [Extras: Energizing], **Healing 8** [Extras: Total], **Stun 12**)

Combat: Attack +1 (melee), Grapple +0, Damage -1 (unarmed) or by power, Defense +4 (+2 flat-footed), Knockback -1, Initiative +1

Abilities 13 + Skills 14 (56 ranks) + Feats 2 + Powers 29 + Combat 8 + Saves 10 = Total 76

Panacea is also a good example of the awesome weight of responsibility that comes with paranormal power. It should be clear to anyone who spends a significant amount of time with Dr. Riviera that she is troubled by her paragon status on many levels, and often worn-out from overwork. How much can one person, even a "miracle worker" be expected to do, and what is the duty of the paranormally gifted to the world?

The general vagueness about the true nature of paranormal powers in the setting, along with the rules for extra effort in *Mutants & Masterminds* (see *M&M*, page 120) provide you with some leeway in terms of presenting Panacea's powers.

There are occasions when she can't entirely cure a patient and the exact reasons why remain unknown. Some speculate it's a matter of will-to-live, subconscious drive, or pure luck while others—particularly those who believe Panacea's gifts are divinely inspired—think it's a matter of worthiness. In game terms it may be the occasional failed recovery check but, essentially, you can choose to have her healing powers fail or only partially succeed when it's convenient for you and the story (perhaps awarding the players a hero point for a setback if you use GM Fiat in this way).

Similarly, you may choose to use extra effort to grant Panacea unusual, one-time, power stunts, up to and including Persistent Healing, Regrowth, or Healing with the Resurrection extra to resuscitate dead subjects.

LEARNING ABOUT PANACEA

The following is information player characters could potentially learn about Panacea:

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 10: "Panacea" is Dr. Isabella Riviera, a Spanish physician with the paranormal ability to heal.

DC 15: Dr. Rivieria has a private clinic in Adalusia, Spain where she sees clients. The clinic has a very long waiting list.

DC 20: Panacea has the power to heal virtually any injury and has even brought patients back to life in some cases, although the extent of her ability to do so is unknown. Some consider her a saint or blessed by God.

DC 25: Dr. Rivieria still does considerable charity work: Healing patients who don't have the ability to pay. In fact, she's known as a very hard worker devoted to her calling as a healer and hardly ever takes any time off from her hectic work schedule.

KNOWLEDGE (LIFE SCIENCES) OR MEDICINE

DC 10: "Panacea" is Dr. Isabella Rivieria, a Spanish physician with the paranormal ability to heal.

DC 15: Dr. Rivieria was an ER trauma specialist at Costa del Sol Hospital in Andalusia, one of the finest hospitals in Spain. She discovered her paranormal ability when treating the victim of a hit-and-run, who was near death, but miraculously healed.

DC 20: Although Panacea's healing talent has been studied by a number of experts, who believe it hyper-accelerates the natural healing process, there's still no known mechanism by which it functions (as with other paranormal powers). Some believe Dr. Rivieria is a saint or faith healer, although she denies such claims.

PATRIOT

**"I JUST WANT TO GIVE BACK TO MY COUNTRY
FOR ALL THAT IT HAS GIVEN ME."**

An American soldier prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice for his country instead experienced his breakout and became the ultimate soldier for his country. Wrapped in the red, white, and blue of the United States, the Patriot is an example of what an American paranormal can be; a true paragon for his country and his people. At least, that's the *official* story.

Kyle Griffin is indeed a paragon, but the Patriot is largely manufactured. It's true Kyle was in the Army (still is, in fact) and that he had his breakout while serving his tour of duty. The rest of the story is largely the creation of public relations, speechwriters, and a carefully crafted plan to help make Lieutenant Griffin into a true-blue American icon.

It's not exactly the job Griffin signed up for, but, all things considered, it's better in a lot of ways. After all, nobody heard of ordinary Lt. Kyle Griffin, but *everyone* has seen and heard of the Patriot! Sure, he's still subject to orders, but now he takes them from the President and the Joint Chiefs of Staff rather than some lower-ranking commanding officer. Plus, the government makes sure he's well taken care of as well, to say nothing of the perks of being able to fly, pick up cars with one hand, or bounce bullets off his bare skin.

While most media-savvy people realize the Patriot is something of a publicity stunt on the part of the American government, that doesn't stop millions of Americans, and other people around the world, from idolizing "their" costumed hero, who seems to embody everything that's good about the greatest nation on Earth. Patriot is like a comic book character come to life, almost

too good to be true, and that makes people *want* to believe in him.

THE PATRIOT'S SECRETS

It's a good thing so many people believe in him, too, because the Patriot's paranormal power is directly based on just how many people *do* believe in him! Kyle Griffin has innate paranormal abilities—lower-level versions of his well-known powers—but his powers grow in relation to the number of people who look up to him and believe in him as a symbol of America. The theorists and think-tanks aware of the Patriot's unique power speculate that he's some sort of "psychic gestalt" or "paranormal belief battery," essentially: The more people love him and believe in him, the more powerful he gets.

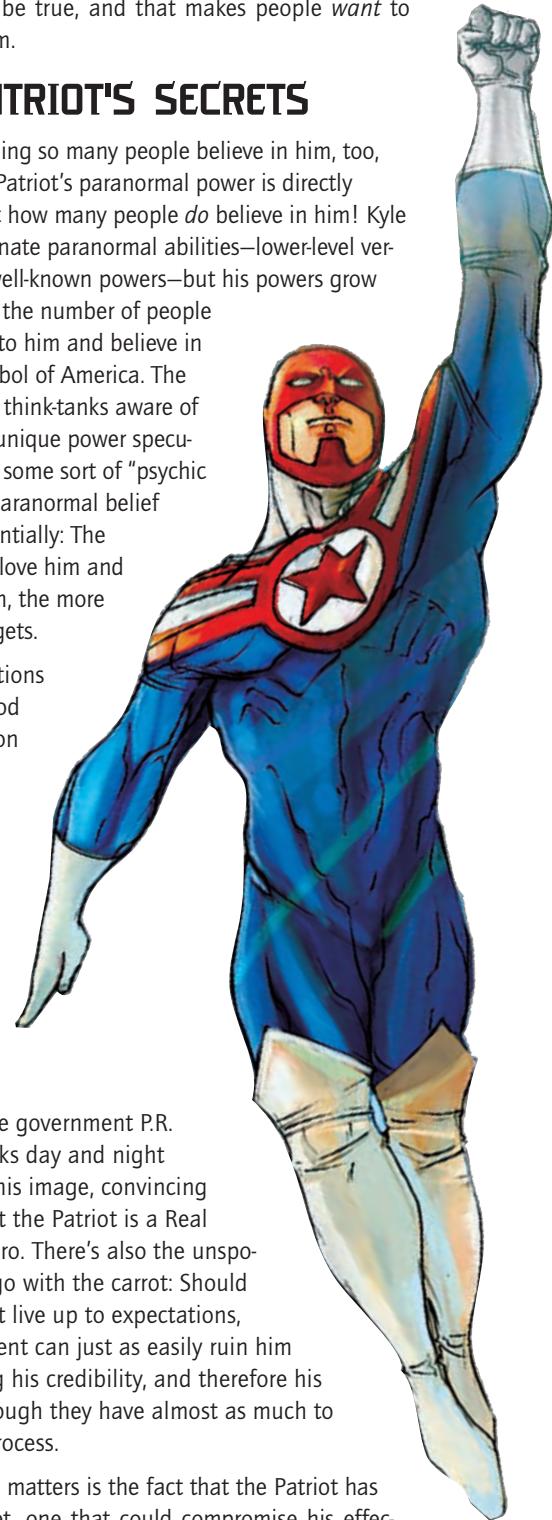
If public relations weren't a good enough reason for the U.S. government to hype the Patriot, the mechanism of his powers is: To keep their "secret weapon" in top

condition, the government P.R. machine works day and night to maintain his image, convincing everyone that the Patriot is a Real American Hero. There's also the unspoken stick to go with the carrot: Should Lt. Griffin not live up to expectations, the government can just as easily ruin him by destroying his credibility, and therefore his powers, although they have almost as much to lose in the process.

Complicating matters is the fact that the Patriot has *another* secret, one that could compromise his effectiveness, and his power, should it ever get out. Kyle Griffin is something of a prisoner of his own success, unable to reveal the truth even if he wanted to for fear of losing everything that he has. His government handlers do whatever they can—whatever is necessary—to protect the Patriot's secret, and therefore protect their most powerful paranormal.

The exact nature of the Patriot's dark secret is left for you to decide as best suits your own *Paragons* series. Some possibilities include:

- Kyle Griffin's breakout was a result of the stress and panic he suffered when he deserted his post, *not* because of some act of bravery in the face of adversity during his time with



the military. He's only brave because people *believe* he is; in truth, he's really a coward without his paranormal abilities to fall back on.

- The Patriot is an addict, an abuser of alcohol or drugs, and it was this substance abuse that triggered his powers. Now he requires a regular "fix" to maintain them, otherwise they start to fade, but the more powerful he gets, the more he needs to get high. His handlers carefully regulate what he takes, but it's an inexact science at best, and there are times when the Patriot's behavior is erratic.
- Kyle Griffin is secretly gay; the pressure of hiding his sexual orientation in the military contributed to his breakout. Now he has to stay in the closet for fear the American people will find out their "hero" is not what they believe at all. He may have even managed to keep the truth from the government, although there are sure to be some people who know about it.
- Far from the Mom-and-apple-pie American hero he pretends to be, Kyle Griffin is a dangerous sociopath. He became paranormal after committing some heinous war crimes, but the government covered up the truth rather than lose such a valuable "asset." In fact, they continue to cover-up the Patriot's "indiscretions" for the same reason.

USING PATRIOT

Patriot is the poster-paragon of the United States government and, to a lesser extent, America itself. In that role, he's a potential ally for other government or patriotic characters, an enemy of those who oppose the agenda of the US government. He's also a rival for paragons with agendas that aren't necessarily in accord with those of his nation or government.

If the main characters are agents of the US government, they might work with, or for, Patriot. He can easily be set up as the leader of a United States paranormal team, rivals to the Vanguard, for example. Teammates can both come to respect the Patriot, but also learn things about him they'd rather not know, resulting in a difficult test of their loyalties.

Paranormals opposed to the US government in one fashion or another might run up against the Patriot, although his "handlers" will be reluctant to expose their poster-boy to a potential public defeat. They'll want to be as sure as possible he can win; even taking steps to help tip the odds in his favor. Similarly, anti-US paragons might want to take down Patriot, particularly if they discover the truth about him.

Lastly, Patriot is likely to show up to deal with high-profile crimes, disasters, and similar problems in the United States, giving him the opportunity to show up "unsanctioned" paranormals, or potentially, to work with them. After developing a rivalry with Patriot, the characters might be glad to see him brought low, or they may actually be sympathetic towards his plight, depending on how things go.

LEARNING ABOUT PATRIOT

The following is information player characters could potentially learn about Patriot:

PATRIOT						PL 12*
STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA	
+15/+1	+0	+15	+0	+1	+3	
40/13	11	40	10	12	15	
TOUGHNESS		FORTITUDE		REFLEX		WILL
+15	+15	+4	+6			

Skills: Bluff 4 (+7), Concentration 4 (+5), Drive 4 (+4), Intimidate 4 (+7), Knowledge (civics) 4 (+4), Knowledge (tactics) 4 (+4), Notice 4 (+5), Profession (soldier) 4 (+5), Sense Motive 4 (+5), Survival 4 (+5)

Feats: Attack Focus (melee) 2, Benefit (government backing), Connected, Move-by Action, Ultimate Effort (Strength checks)

Powers: Enhanced Constitution 27, Enhanced Strength 27, Flight 12 (50,000 MPH), Impervious Toughness 10, Super-Strength 8 (*heavy load*: 800 tons)

Combat: Attack +9 (melee), +7 (ranged), Grapple +32, Damage +15 (unarmed), Defense +9 (+5 flat-footed), Knockback -12, Initiative +0

Drawback: Power Loss (all powers, 1 power point per decrease in value progression of supporters, -5 points)

Abilities 14 + Skills 10 (40 ranks) + Feats 6 + Powers 104 + Combat 32 + Saves 9—Drawbacks 5 = Total 170

**Patriot's power level is somewhat variable; see description.*

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 10: The Patriot is a paranormal working for the federal government of the United States of America. He is superhumanly strong and tough and able to fly at great speeds.

DC 15: The Patriot is ostensibly attached to the Department of Justice, but effectively answers directly to the President.

DC 25: The Patriot's real name is Kyle Griffin—Lieutenant Kyle Griffin, US Army—classified by the federal government after his breakout. He's still a soldier and answers to the Commander-in-Chief.

DC 30: A lot of top-secret government research surrounds the Patriot, a good portion of which seems to focus on how he is perceived by the general public and ways to make him even more popular with the American people.

DC 35: The real reason for government public relations machine pumping up the Patriot is because the more popular he is, the more powerful he becomes! The government is trying to both increase the power of their "pet" paragon while at the same time tying his fortunes to theirs even more.

DC 40: The Patriot's *real* secret is... (Insert whatever you decide it is. At this level of success, the character learns what it is.)

KNOWLEDGE (POPULAR CULTURE)

DC 10: The Patriot is a paranormal working for the federal government of the United States of America. He is superhumanly strong and tough and able to fly at great speeds.

DC 15: The Patriot is ostensibly attached to the Department of Justice, but effectively answers directly to the President.

PEACEMAKER (AS-SALAAM)

**"NO, PLEASE,
NO MORE FIGHTING!"**

Fatima Yassim only ever wanted peace. She prayed for it daily; in her family, in her community, in Palestine, in the world. She wanted peace and an end to the fighting and killing, but she was only a young woman from a poor family. Things would be as God willed, what could she, of all people, do about it?

So Fatima tried her best to please her family, to keep peace. She married, and tried to keep her husband Yusef happy as well. He was able to change things, or so he thought, but he fought, even though Fatima pleaded with him not to. All it got her was the back of his hand and a reminder to remember her place. So she cried, and she prayed for peace each night until, one night, it came, but not for her.

One night at her prayers, Fatima felt as though she soared up to Heaven. There she could feel all the pain of the people around her: their anger, fear, hatred, and fatigue. Her heart went out to them, regardless of their origin, for they all felt the same. She wanted to soothe their hurts, to give them peace, and she did, by taking their burdens from them.

It was nearly overpowering, the bitter draught of emotion that poured into her that night, it brought tears to her eyes and she bloodied her palms as she dug her nails into them as she tried to hold in all she had taken before surrendering it to God. Instinctively, she knew the pain she felt was worth it. That night, for miles around, there was a peace such as no one had known in their lifetimes, and people spoke of it in hushed and reverent tones the next morning. A tiny hope blossomed in Fatima's heart. Could it be God had answered her prayers and made her His instrument of peace and healing? Could she really change the world?

She dared to share her hopes with Yusef, but he beat her for her presumption and locked her in her room to pray and consider what she had done. She prayed all that night, and received God's blessing once more. Again, she felt the outpouring of her people's pain, and took it within her to give them the gift of peace.

This time, however, she could not contain the terrible rage within her. All of it seemed to focus on Yusef, who shouted for her to be quiet or he would beat her again. The look of shock on his face when she broke down the door made her almost feel sorry for him, but it didn't prevent her from flying at him in a frenzy. She poured out all the rage and pain and anger she had taken, then stepped back in horror as Yusef clutched his chest, cried out, and fell to the floor to lie still and silent.

The night's peace in the neighborhood was broken only by the sudden death of Yusef Yassim. A heart attack was unusual in a man so young, but his neighbors said he was ill tempered and drank. Their sympathies went out to his widow. As she helped prepare her husband's funeral, Fatima saw the fullness of God's plan unfold before her like a dark flower: She was His giver of peace, but also His furious sword, to punish those who would violate it.

USING PEACEMAKER

Power for Peacemaker, like many paranormals, is a mixed blessing. She is a kind of empathic "sponge," able to soak up negative emotions from all around her. She then has to deal with that negative energy, which builds up within her. She can attempt to control it, risking serious harm (her Side-Effect flaw), or she can expel the energy as a powerful, raw, blast of psychic force, capable of killing another person. Those drained of their negative emotions experience a period of mental clarity and peaceful calm.

Peacemaker, or *as-Salaam* ("the Peace," one of the 99 Names of God), believes it is her divine mission to bring peace and to punish those who are warmongers and wrongdoers in the eyes of God. In essence, for Fatima to continue using her powers, she must find a victim to suffer the psychic brunt of the negative emotions she channels. She chooses the worst people she can think of, and uses her paranormal senses to know "their hearts are evil" before she kills them.

The more Peacemaker uses her powers, the more they seem to grow (points going into more Progression ranks). She dreams of the day when she will be able to bring peace to the world and, when the last evil-doer is justly punished, she knows God will relieve her of her burden and permit her to experience the peace she has brought to everyone else, a new golden age will dawn, or so she keeps telling herself.

Authorities on all sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, meanwhile, are baffled by both the unexplained series of deaths and the strange peacefulness slowly spreading outward across the territories. Some sort of paranormal activity is suspected, and everyone is investigating. Once Peacemaker's powers become known, it remains to be seen if she can keep the peace when she's the object of the conflict.

Many of the factions in **Chapter Four** will want to control Fatima and her powers and use them to further their own agendas. They include Foregone Conclusions, the Initiative, the Pact, PSI, the Silber Agency, the Syndicate, the Vanguard, and potentially others.

Characters involved in international affairs, peacekeeping, espionage, or any related fields might learn of the incidents Peacemaker is responsible for, or they may be asked to investigate them. Paranormals with psychic abilities could sense Peacemaker's powers at work, both creating calm and releasing killing force shortly thereafter. There's also the question of what characters will do with Fatima once they find her: She will not be easily swayed from her divine mission to bring peace to the world, and there's the significant concern that she could be right.

LEARNING ABOUT PEACEMAKER

The following is information characters might learn about Peacemaker:

GATHER INFORMATION

This check requires contacts in Israeli or Palestinian territory near Jerusalem or the West Bank, a difficult area for strangers to ask a lot of questions about local goings-on.

DC 15: It seems God has blessed this area with a recent stretch of peaceful days; incidents of violence and terrorism have greatly lessened.

PEACEMAKER

PL 12

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
-1/+5	+0	+1	+0	+1	+1
8/20	11	12	11	12	13
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX		WILL	
+1	+3	+2		+4	

Skills: Bluff 4 (+5/+9*), Concentration 4 (+5), Diplomacy 4 (+5/+9*), Gather Information 4 (+5), Notice 4 (+5), Sense Motive 4 (+5)

* includes Attractive bonus

Feats: All-out Attack, Attractive

Powers: **Emotion Control 12** (Extras: Burst Area; Flaws: Limited—Calm, Range—Touch; Power Feats: Progression 9 [approx. 10 mile radius]), **Mental Blast 12** (Flaws: Limited—Only after using Emotion Control, Side-Effect [Mental Blast 11], Range—Touch; Drawbacks: Mental Blast deals Lethal Damage; Alternate Powers: **Boost Strength 12** [Limited—Only after using Emotion Control]), **Super-Senses 5** (sense emotions at range, acute, extended 2)

Combat: Attack +3, Grapple +2 (+8 boosted), Damage -1 (unarmed), +5 (unarmed, boosted), +12 (mental blast), Defense +4 (+2 flat-footed), Knockback -0, Initiative +0

Abilities 7 + Skills 6 (24 ranks) + Feats 2 + Powers 27 + Combat 14 + Saves 7 = Total 63

DC 20: Some are concerned, however, that the recent peace is not God's work but man's. In particular some suspect a new kind of weapon or the like that *forces* people to feel calm when they should in fact be filled with righteous outrage. Rumors are circulating about secret weapon tests.

DC 25: Not *everything* has been so peaceful; there has been a series of mysterious deaths that are completely unexplained. The victims have all suffered no apparent wounds or trauma, and there is no evidence of poison, they simply dropped dead. Rumor has it at least one of the dead men suffered some sort of stroke. The conspiracy theorists suggesting the "peace outbreaks" are some sort of weapon also believe the deaths are covert assassinations, perhaps carried out with the same or a similar secret weapon.

DC 30: The first death connected with the peace outbreaks anyone can recall was Yusef Yassim, a man with suspected extremist ties, like most of the others who died. His wife, Fatima, claims she came home and found him dead of a heart attack, but Yusef was a young and healthy man.

PHENOM

"FABULOUS DARLING, SIMPLY FABULOUS!"

Love them or hate them, paragons are *not* ordinary people. They are the select few that stand head and shoulders above the crowd.

Victoria Alsatia Helena St. Croix is a celebrity paragon known as "Phenom," the jet-setting, party darling heir of old British aristocracy, now a favorite of the media and (to believe her publicists) the worldwide public. Except everything about her is a lie, from her



fictitious noble blood all the way to the powers she doesn't really have. Even her accent is fake.

Her real name is Merritt Parker, born into a painfully ordinary family in central Ohio. To escape that humdrum existence she re-invented herself as Phenom, a persona carefully constructed (along with her fictitious past) for maximum media appeal, a façade designed to launch her into fame and stardom, and it worked.

A media darling and celebrity for celebrity's sake, she races to where the trouble is just in time to take credit and get her picture in the paper, but red carpet appearances and flashing smiles for the cameras are more her style.

Tabloid gossip writers waste column inches speculating about what her powers actually are (beyond irresistible media appeal), but only her harshest—and largely ignored—critics dare to guess that she has no powers at all and is a total fake. She dismisses these critics outright ("Little boys with dirty mouths should have them washed out with soap," or "She's a horrid little person!"). Direct questions about her powers are met with coy retorts ("A lady never tells, and a gentleman doesn't ask..."). Even when confronted with her blatant fabrications, like the non-existent St. Croix royal line, she breezily spins it as being another facet of her secret paranormal life—if it's a lie, it's only because it conceals an

even more impressive truth she is sworn to protect, and shouldn't the interviewer know better? Evasive and secretive but always charming, she maintains a careful aura of mystery with a nod and a wink that makes a would-be interrogator feel like they are sharing in her glamorous secrets, without finding out a single thing.

Phenom is slim and poised, her fine aristocratic features offset by oversized sunglasses and framed by her wavy blond hair (sometimes worn long, sometimes short). She dresses in designer outfits, always gleaming white and almost always in a 60s Mod style. Her trademark ensemble is a short plastic raincoat and knee-high go-go boots, but she sometimes appears in a sleek zippered cat suit or a broad-belted mini dress.

When she arrives on the scene, it's in a classic stretch Rolls Royce driven by chauffeur, or a Jaguar roadster driven at break-neck speeds through city streets. Her car is always spotless white with gleaming silver trim and always a convertible, so she can be seen.

Phenom's studied enough Judo and Karate to strike a good pose and look the part but not enough to win a fight that isn't staged—which is fine because she has no interest in getting in any real fights anyway. If she's expecting real trouble she's likely to show up with a cadre of liveried footmen (dressed in spotless white, naturally). Just for back up, of course.

USING PHENOM

Phenom can be a nuisance, a self-centered dilettante who shows up at the worst possible time to hog the glory, glibly taking credit for things she didn't do during interviews. Desperate for attention, she could go so far as to stage trouble so she can show up to save the day, like handily trouncing a gang of fake thugs hired to play the part. They fight viciously against anyone else on the scene, but one karate chop from the winsome Phenom and down they go, moaning in agony.

For a more nefarious angle, she can be a capricious criminal mastermind, a two-faced schemer staging high profile crimes she foils as a distraction from other criminal activities she's orchestrating. She uses her popularity to subtly undermine public confidence in paragons, luring them into ambushes she comes out of just fine while they get pounded, all of which keeps them busy and prevents them from uncovering her real schemes.



No matter how she starts off, interactions with the characters and events in the game could change her attitude. Inspired by genuine heroes, she could come to the realization that her vanity is hollow, and strive to live up to a more heroic ideal. On the other hand, the media flocks to trouble more than it applauds success, so in her quest for attention she could easily slip further and further into being bad just to stay in the spotlight. If her lies about her past or powers are exposed and she is publicly shamed, she could become bitterly fixated on regaining her fame, doing whatever it takes to stage a comeback and humiliate those who ruined her.

Phenom's apocryphal superpowers are an important part of her character arc. She starts off as a paragon-poser, maintaining the illusion she has secret powers and striving to keep the fans guessing. She may even stage situations to lend credence to the rumors: Having a fake thug shoot her repeatedly (firing blanks) as she just smiles and shrugs it off, planting a thug with a trick gun that explodes harmlessly in his hand when she points at it, or having a whole gang of fake thugs rush her but then fall to the ground and pretend to be dazed when she sweeps her gaze across them. Grainy footage, supposedly taken by a lucky eyewitness but really a careful fake leaked to the media, could catch a glimpse of Phenom flying low over the rooftops. Phenom acts appropriately secretive about any powers that are "revealed" and never tries to paint a coherent picture of what the scope of her abilities really are; she leaves that up to her fans.

If doubt builds or she starts to lose public attention, she may resort to hidden devices that give her fake powers, such as a concealed harness that can project a dazzling light show that looks impressive but doesn't do much else (the equivalent of Light Control 4).

Of course the holy grail, the pot of gold "Victoria" has wanted all along, is to get real powers, to breakout and become a true paragon. It would cement her fame forever. But does it ever happen, or does she just wind up a bitter and vengeful origin chaser? And if it does happen, are they powers that she can control, or should she have been more careful what she wished for?

If you like, it could be that Phenom *does* have powers; after all, her con game of "paranormal celebrity" *has* been unusually successful. Maybe Phenom has a degree of "super-charisma" or other latent powers allowing her to pull off her con with such aplomb, without being questioned or found out. If so, and if she learns to harness

PHENOM						PL 7
STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA	
+0	+2	+0	+3	-2	+4	
10	14	10	16	7	19	
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX		WILL		
-2/-0*	+3	+3		+6		

*flatfooted

Skills: Bluff 8 (+12/+16*), Diplomacy 8 (+12/+16*), Disable Device 5 (+8), Drive 8 (+10), Escape Artist 5 (+7), Intimidate 2 (+6), Knowledge (popular culture) 5 (+8), Notice 6 (+4), Perform (acting) 4 (+8), Pilot 5 (+7), Ride 6 (+8), Sense Motive 5 (+3), Sleight of Hand 5 (+7)

*includes Attractive bonus

Feats: Attractive, Benefit (fame), Benefit 3 (wealth bonus +20), Connected, Defensive Roll 4, Distract (Bluff), Equipment 4, Fascinate (Bluff), Improved Initiative 2, Improved Throw, Improved Trip, Minions 7 (ten footmen, see following), Redirect, Second Chance (Bluff), Taunt

Equipment: 20 points of vehicles

Combat: Attack +5, Grapple +5, Damage +0, Defense +8 (+4 flatfooted), Knockback -0, Initiative +10

Abilities 16 + Skills 18 (72 ranks) + Feats 30 + Powers 0 + Combat 26 + Saves 17 = Total 107

that power, she could go from vapid pop-culture star to worldwide cult leader, especially if she lets the power go to her head.

LEARNING ABOUT PHENOM

The following is information player characters could potentially learn about Phenom:

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 10: "Phenom" is the stage name of Victoria St. Croix, media darling and celebrity paragon.

DC 15: Phenom is mostly famous for being famous; nobody seems to really know what her powers are or what she can do apart from hog a spotlight.

DC 20: It's clear quite a bit about Phenom is staged: "St. Croix" isn't even a British noble line. It's a good bet even more of her supposed history and persona is fake.

DC 25: Phenom's British accent is probably fake.

DC 35: Phenom's real secret is she isn't a paranormal at all. If she is, then all the supposed displays of powers have been faked, and her "real" power, if she has one, has been kept secret.

KNOWLEDGE (POPULAR CULTURE)

DC 15: She might have a movie deal in the works. Or was that a record deal? Certainly not a book deal, unless someone else ghostwrote it.

DC 20: Phenom's harshest critics allege she's a "paragon-poser," that there is no proof she has actual powers.

PHENOM'S FOOTMEN

PL 4

Str 15	Dex 12	Con 14	Int 12	Wis 10	Cha 12
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Skills: Bluff 5 (+6), Diplomacy 4 (+5), Drive 4 (+5), Intimidate 5 (+6), Perform (acting) 5 (+6), Sleight of Hand 5 (+6)

Feats: All-Out Attack, Defensive Roll 2, Distract (Intimidate), Equipment 2

Equipment: truncheon (+2 damage) as footman or heavy pistol (+4 damage) as thug

Combat: Attack +4, Grapple +6, Damage +4, Defense +4 (+2 flatfooted), Knockback -1, Initiative +1

Saving Throws: Toughness +4 (+2 flat footed), Fortitude +5, Reflex +3, Will +2

Abilities 15 + Skills 7 (28 ranks) + Feats 6 + Powers 0 + Combat 16 + Saves 7 = Total 51

PONTIFEX

"YOU THINK THIS IS ANGRY? IF I WERE ANGRY YOU WOULD NEVER EVEN SEE ME COMING."

Clio Bianchi grew up in southern Italy, living the happy life of a princess. Her family was wealthy, her mother never lacked for anything and her father's business came to him at his estate. She could not have been happier.

Unfortunately, her family was deeply connected to the criminal Camorra organization and was targeted for death. When she was fourteen her family was executed in front of her eyes. Her deep rage triggered her unique and painful breakout. In fact, her rage literally expelled itself from her body as a psychic force that made short work of the murderers, rending their minds in an emotional storm, leaving some dead, others permanently comatose or mad.

Unable to control her rage Clio followed leads from one hired thug to another, leaving a trail of tortured and broken minds in her wake. At first the authorities were thankful for the vigilante taking care of their business for them, but quickly discovered this new player was little more than a serial killer. The media hype over a paranormal "mind-killer" brought the dangers of the paranormal to the forefront, particularly in the Italian government, which began debating harsh anti-paranormal legislation to protect its citizens. Fortunately for Clio, it also caught the attention of Dr. Rosemont, who dispatched Vom Stahl and Otherkin to collect this tortured paranormal.

With the help of Dr. Rosemont and the staff, Clio has learned to contain her rage. She has remembered what it means to care for someone and discovered her paranormal empathic abilities. She retains the ability to release her rage as a deadly psychic force, leaving her physical body vulnerable, but prefers to use her developing empathic and social abilities to solve problems whenever possible. Clio is a dichotomy of passionate caregiver and cold calculating killer.

Since meeting Vom Stahl, she has developed a burgeoning love for the man of metal. With her abilities she can sense his hard outer shell covers a soft and fragile heart. This has forced her into an indirect path to win his heart. Using her abilities she is building the metal man's feelings and counseling him to accept them rather than misinterpret or internalize them as he generally does. Until she can

PONTIFEX

PL 9

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+0	+2	+2	+1	+4	+4
10	14	14	12	18	18
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX		WILL	
+5/+2*	+4	+5		+11	

*Flatfooted

Skills: Bluff 6 (+10), Climb 4 (+4), Concentration 6 (+10), Diplomacy 14 (+18), Gather Information 14 (+18), Handle Animal 8 (+12), Intimidation 6 (+10), Knowledge (behavioral sciences) 6 (+7), Language 2 (English, Greek [Italian is native]), Notice 4 (+8), Sense Motive 10 (+14), Swim 4 (+4)

Feats: Benefit 2 (wealth bonus 16), Defensive Roll 3, Dodge Focus 2, Fascinate (Diplomacy), Improved Initiative

Powers: **Astral Form 2, Emotion Control 6** (Power Feats: Subtle), **Mental Blast 8** (Extras: Vampiric; Flaws: Limit—Only in astral form), **Super-Senses 4** (sense emotion, acute, ranged; mental awareness)

Combat: Attack +2, Grapple +2, Damage +0 (unarmed), +8 (mental blast), Defense +8 (+3 flatfooted), Knockback -2, Initiative +6

Abilities 26 + Skills 21 (84 ranks) + Feats 9 + Powers 59 + Combat 16 + Saves 13 = Total 144

help Vom Stahl overcome his inner fears, she helps him on missions to gather other unstable paranormals and, with her empathic abilities, assists Dr. Rosemont. So far neither Rosemont nor Vom Stahl realize the game of manipulation she is playing with Vom Stahl's emotions, but it may simply be a matter of time.

Clio's agents are still searching for information on who had her parents killed. So far all of the leads have brought her to dead ends. She has begun to believe someone within the Italian government or perhaps some other authority was involved due to the level of complexity and number of false paths she has followed. So far she has yet to uncover anything significant but she believes her investigators are getting close as some of them have started to disappear. When a morsel of real evidence arrives she will act decisively, using her powers to follow the trail to its end and give those responsible the fate they deserve.

USING PONTIFEX

Pontifex can be encountered as part of the Collected or, in conjunction with the Rosemont Center, in the guise of Clio Bianchi, one of the counselors. Clio is a young woman, just coming to understand what it means to be both rich and beautiful, and could also be encountered in any gathering of young people looking to have a good time.

Clio could engage the characters to uncover who killed her parents. Highly honorable characters or those working within the confines of the law might also discover Pontifex is wanted by the Italian authorities and that she intends to eliminate those who killed her parents.

Despite her criminal past and dark sentiments, Pontifex is loyal to the Collected, the Rosemont Center, and Emily Rosemont. As

Clio she plays a role in the day-to-day activities at the Center and as Pontifex she and the other Collected are an effective deterrent to those who might threaten the Center. Characters sent to the Rosemont Center to uncover its secrets or for other more nefarious purposes may find Pontifex's empathic senses difficult to fool.

LEARNING ABOUT PONTIFEX

Those crossing Pontifex should be warned she is difficult to fool and has a harsh sense of justice. Both Pontifex and Clio have secrets, not the least of which is they are one in the same.

GATHER INFORMATION

Use of this skill represents uncovering information and rumor from contacts in some way connected to the Rosemont Center. In addition this skill could be used as a survey of the Center's patients to garner information.

DC 15: Clio is one of the counselors at the Rosemont Center. She always knows just what to say to make you feel better. Given her age she must be some sort of intern, but given her skills I have no doubt the Center will put her on the staff in no time.



DC 20: Clio's skills with people are uncanny. She once calmed down Amok with just a few words, which has lead many to believe she's paranormal.

KNOWLEDGE (STREETWISE) OR PROFESSION (ANY LAW ENFORCEMENT)

Both Clio and Pontifex left a trail through the criminal underbelly of Italy. This information is most easily discovered at the source in, either through underworld contacts in the Old World or through a European law enforcement agency. This information might be available elsewhere as well, but with a difficulty modifier of +5.

DC 15: Clio is the surviving daughter of the Bianchi family. They were killed because of their involvement in the criminal underworld. Apparently Clio saw the whole thing. There may still be people looking for her.

DC 20: Clio may have had something to do with a number of businessmen dying shortly after her parents were killed. All of the men had some connection with her family. She moved away and hasn't returned.

DC 25: There is some connection between Pontifex and Clio Bianchi. The mobsters who were killed were killed outright or left as drooling idiots. Most of them died from a lack of a will to live. Pontifex emigrated from Italy right after the killings, just as the authorities were looking more closely at the Bianchi family murders.

PROMETHEUS

**"I'M SORRY, BUT I CAN'T LET YOU DO IT.
YOU HAVE TO BE STOPPED."**

If you knew someone was going to do something terrible, knew without a shadow of a doubt, and you had the power to do something about it, would you? That question confronted Nikolas Kollois after his breakout. He developed extrasensory abilities, allowing him to know what certain people would do before they did it.

At first, he dismissed his impressions as flights of fancy and later as hallucinations. He feared he was suffering some sort of mental breakdown. Then, after getting the impression that a client at the bank where he worked as a teller was planning to commit suicide, he read about the woman's death in the newspaper the following day. The incident not only convinced Nick his ability was real, but instilled in him a deep sense of responsibility to use it.

So when he sensed that a man entering the bank intended to rob it, Nick wondered what to do. If he gave a warning, would anyone believe him? He set off the silent alarm just before the man pulled a gun and demanded money. In the intense situation, Nick focused all his attention on the idea of stopping the gunman and was shocked when the man cried out and collapsed. By the time the police arrived, the would-be robber was dead. The exact cause of death was never determined.

Things started to crystallize for Nick: Not only did he have the ability to foresee certain things, he also had the power to do something about them. He began using his talents more actively, to try and warn people about certain dangers and to prevent tragedies

from occurring. He has sent anonymous notes and emails to media outlets, using the name "Prometheus," after the Greek titan who could see the future. His anonymous tips have proven largely correct, leading the authorities to take notice. What they don't know is the tips that fail to pan out do so because Prometheus has taken action, usually resulting in the unexplained deaths of people intending to commit serious crimes.

As time goes on, Prometheus becomes increasingly torn about his gifts and his responsibility. On the one hand, he hasn't found a non-lethal use for his power; he can apparently kill with little more than a thought, but he has little else in the way of weapons. He tries to use non-lethal methods, but also comforts himself with the idea he is dispensing "justice" to people who would have otherwise committed mass murders or similarly terrible crimes. Truthfully, he also feels tremendously powerful when acting as pre-emptive judge, jury, and executioner. He's considering ways to expand his "mission," including taking money and other resources from the criminals he kills to fund his activities, which are cutting into his



PROMETHEUS

PL 9

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+0	+0	+0	+1	+0	+0
10	10	10	12	11	10
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+0	+3	+10/+2*	+4		

*without Enhanced Save bonus

Skills: Bluff 3 (+3), Computers 2 (+3), Concentration 4 (+4), Disguise 4 (+4), Gather Information 5 (+5), Knowledge (behavioral sciences) 4 (+5), Knowledge (business) 4 (+5), Knowledge (civics) 4 (+5), Knowledge (current events) 8 (+9), Notice 4 (+4), Profession (bank teller) 6 (+6), Search 4 (+5), Sense Motive 4 (+4/+12)

Feats: None

Powers: Enhanced Feats 10 (Dodge Focus 6, Evasion 2, Uncanny Dodge [mental], Well-Informed), Enhanced Reflex Save 8, Enhanced Skill 2 (Sense Motive +8), Mental Blast 9 (*Flaws:* Linked to Nauseate 9 [intense pain; *Extras:* Range—Perception, Will Save]; *Drawbacks:* Mental Blast deals Lethal Damage), Mind Reading 9 (*Power Feats:* Subtle 2), Super-Senses 4 (precognition)

Combat: Attack +2, Grapple +2, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +8 (+1 flat-footed), Knockback -0, Initiative +0

Drawbacks: Power Loss (precognition only works on intentional acts, -1 point)

Abilities 3 + Skills 14 (56 ranks) + Feats 0 + Powers 107 + Combat 8 + Saves 9—Drawbacks 1 = Total 140

work time and leading to questions he'd rather not answer. He hasn't foreseen any problems yet, but that doesn't mean there won't be any.

USING PROMETHEUS

Prometheus poses a challenge for characters: On the one hand, he's doing some good, trying to prevent the terrible events he foresees from coming to pass. On the other hand, does he really have the right to accuse, much less execute, people for things they haven't even done yet? Is it fair to attack or arrest someone purely based on paranormal suspicions? Prometheus argues that it is, especially considering the consequences should he *not* act, but the characters (and certainly the authorities) may disagree.

Paranormals could easily mistake Prometheus for a serial killer. He apparently kills without rhyme or reason, unless you happen to have the same foreknowledge he does. Will characters believe Prometheus when he tells them the victim of his powers was planning a shooting spree, for example? What if there's evidence he was? On the other hand, what if there's *no* evidence, other than Prometheus' impressions?

Prometheus is a useful plot device for handing the characters a dire warning in the form of an anonymous email or note signed only with his *nom du paragon*. If they don't know who this "Prometheus" is, they might disregard the warning at first, at least until it comes true. Then they might suspect Prometheus is involved somehow, leading to a search so they can question or confront him.

Eventually, Prometheus may run into a prediction too big for him to handle on his own. Seeking help, he turns to the characters, either because they're connected with the authorities or because he doesn't want to go to the authorities. This gives you a useful adventure hook if Prometheus foresees something like a terrorist attack, paranormal assault, or worse.

Then there's the possibility Prometheus foresees that one or more of the *characters* will be responsible for some terrible act (intentionally or otherwise). He might try to warn them to change the outcome, or he could simply decide to eliminate them "for the greater good." Paragons then wonder why this Prometheus character is attacking them out of the blue for no apparent reason. Worse yet, what if Prometheus is *right* and the characters will do something terrible in the future, but they prevent him from warning or stopping them?

Prometheus could be recruited to join a particular faction that believed in his abilities and promised to help carry out his mission, if he helped with theirs—as long as their terms weren't too demanding or suspect. He would find the opportunity to work with a group like the Vanguard tempting (although odds are he'd be jealous of Prophet's superior mental powers) and might be interested in MERLIN, the Pact, or a freelance group like the Silber Agency.

LEARNING ABOUT PROMETHEUS

The following is information characters might learn about Prometheus:

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 10: "Prometheus" is a mysterious figure who sends dire warnings to media outlets and the authorities, warning of certain crimes or similar events, some of which seem to come true.

DC 15: Unofficially, the authorities suspect Prometheus is a paranormal, and question whether or not he (or she) is involved in the "predicted" crimes, perhaps making them happen in order to "prove" the prediction correct.

DC 20: There's some evidence Prometheus is doing more than just making predictions; some unsolved murders tie-in with predictions that *haven't* come true, leading to speculation that Prometheus is pro-actively *preventing* them from happening. It's noteworthy that all of Prometheus' predictions involve people and not natural disasters or random accidents lacking some sort of deliberate human involvement.

DC 25: The unsolved murder cases are such because there's no apparent cause of death, the victims simply...stopped living. Paranormal involvement is, naturally, suspected.

KNOWLEDGE (CURRENT EVENTS)

DC 10: "Prometheus" is a mysterious figure who sends dire warnings to media outlets and the authorities warning of certain crimes or similar events, some of which seem to come true.

DC 15: In at least one case, police owe the capture of a serial killer to anonymous tips provided by this Prometheus, who apparently predicted when the next killing would take place, which allowed the police to be on-hand to arrest the killer. If they hadn't followed up on the lead, the killer would probably still be at large.

PROPHET

"WHY DO PEOPLE TRY TO HIDE THINGS FROM ME? WHY?"

Jeremiah Prophet was, at one time, a respected criminal psychologist and profiler famed for his work with the FBI and New York City police department. Insightful and creative, Jeremiah had an uncanny ability to not only unravel the psyches of the some of the most deranged maniacs on the planet but to seemingly anticipate even their most complex plans. Prophet had, therefore, become highly sought after by jurisdictions across the United States to aid in investigations of the most perplexing and impenetrable criminal cases in history. He was at the top of the heap in a difficult and challenging field and seemed to have limitless potential for growth.

Then the dreams began.

At first, they were minor coincidences: He dreamed of oranges, only to have his elderly neighbor drop off a bundle her daughter had sent to her from Florida. Then the dreams became more frequent and more profound. He dreamed of cases he was working on, seeing the face of a killer—only to be confronted by that same face when the killer was finally captured. Next the dreams became unrelated to work. He would dream of a child being hit by a bus in another city—only to see the image on the news the next evening.

Then the dreams stopped coming only at night and he began to have them whether he was asleep or awake. He experienced images of people he didn't know doing things both benign and malevolent. He would flash on the image of an unknown woman cutting her hand in the kitchen and be confronted by the same stranger with her hand bandaged on the subway. In one instance, he envisioned an entire killing spree from the point of view of the killer and, after the murderer had killed his first victim, he was able to direct authorities to the specific location of the second victim just as the murderer arrived, saving the lives of over a dozen women. Finally, augury and reality blurred even further as Jeremiah dreamed the events of entire days of his life ahead of time. He was stricken with severe, nearly uncontrollable headaches and his life spiraled out of control.

Realizing he was slowly losing his ability to discern reality from augury and in nearly unbearable, constant pain, Jeremiah sought help to better understand what was happening to him. He had met Colonel Jackson Cross in the course of doing work for the FBI and the two had become fast friends and colleagues, working together in a variety of roles over the years. Taken aback by Prophet's slowly deteriorating condition, Cross immediately contacted a

mer associate now working with the Paranormal Studies Institute, hoping to enlist their aid.

The tests PSI ran on Jeremiah were startling. Jeremiah clearly had paranormal abilities but such abilities had never been so clearly demonstrable. Prophet was possessed of not only nearly limitless precognitive abilities, but he was clairvoyant to such a degree that he could seemingly pinpoint the location of anyone on Earth. He also possessed the ability to read and understand people that far and away surpassed his professional training.

But, Prophet's burgeoning powers were clearly burning him out. With Cross' willing assistance, he spent several months working with PSI to help bring his powers under control. After PSI researchers were able to develop a drug regime designed to dampen Prophet's powers and control the mental fatigue associated with their use, he was able to settle in and began exploring how to control his abilities. It was during this time that Prophet had what is his most troubling precognitive experience to date. When he speaks of it at all, he calls simply, "the Vision."

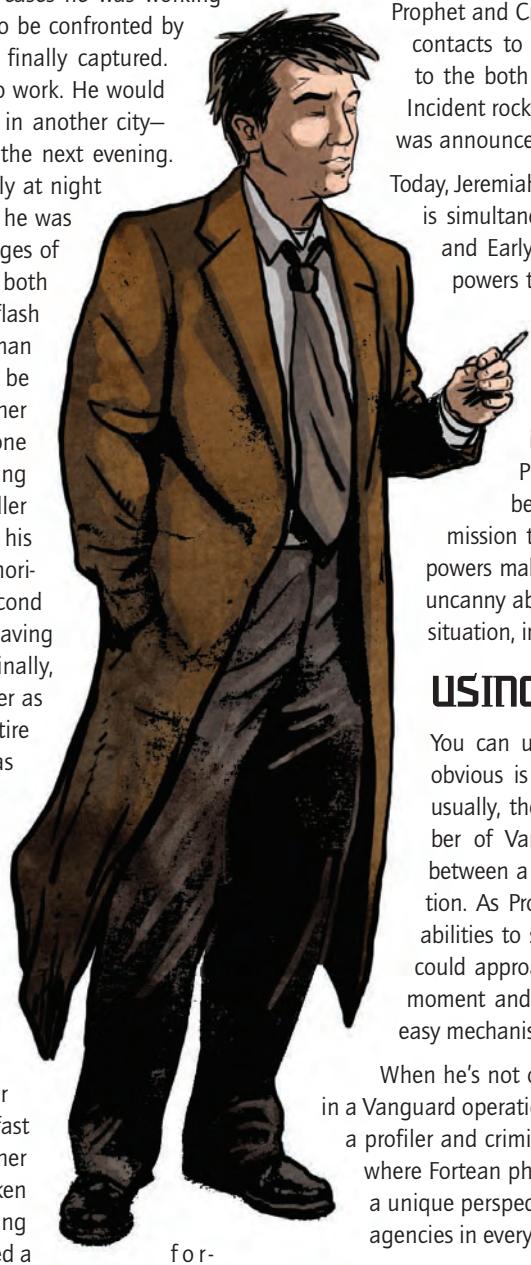
Upon experiencing the Vision, Prophet immediately contacted Cross and described it to him in detail. Within days, both Prophet and Cross were hard at work using their respective contacts to gather resources for a project known only to the both of them. Three months later, the Evanston Incident rocked the world and the formation of Vanguard was announced, with Cross and Prophet at the helm.

Today, Jeremiah Prophet is the eyes and ears of Vanguard. He is simultaneously Vanguard's Chief Recruitment Officer and Early Warning System. When he is not using his powers to search out potential candidates for one of Vanguard's mission teams, he is using his unique combination of abilities to untangle the plans of paranormal terrorists and mercenaries at odds with Vanguard's ongoing operations. Although rarely in the field, Prophet is no stranger to a fight and can often be found leading one of Vanguard's special mission teams on one of their covert operations. His powers make him a formidable opponent, as he has an uncanny ability to know the best course of action in any situation, including a one-on-one confrontation.

USING PROPHET

You can use Prophet in a variety of ways. The most obvious is as a key member of Vanguard. Prophet is, usually, the first point of contact for a would-be member of Vanguard. As such, he can become the link between a group of potential recruits and the organization. As Prophet spends a great deal of time using his abilities to seek out and recruit new team members, he could approach almost any paranormal character at any moment and make a recruitment pitch. This provides an easy mechanism to get characters involved with Vanguard.

When he's not out recruiting new members or participating in a Vanguard operation, Prophet continues to pursue his career as a profiler and criminal psychologist. In the post-Breakout world where Fortean phenomena are a part of life, Prophet provides a unique perspective desperately needed by law enforcement agencies in every corner of the globe. A plot involving local or



PROPHET**PL 10**

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+2	+2	+2	+4	+4	+3
14	14	14	18	18	16
TOUGHNESS		FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL	
+4		+6	+12	+10	

Skills: Concentration 2 (+6), Gather Information 7 (+10), Investigate 8 (+12), Knowledge (behavioral sciences) 10 (+14), Knowledge (civics) 4 (+8), Notice 7 (+11), Profession (psychologist) 10 (+14), Search 10 (+14), Sense Motive 10 (+14)

Feats: Assessment, Connected, Ultimate Save (Reflex), Well-Informed

Powers: Enhanced Feat 4 (Improved Initiative 4), Enhanced Reflex Save 10, ESP 10 (all senses; *Alternate Power: Probability Control 10*), Mind Reading 10, Strike 8 (Power Feats: Mighty), Super-Senses 14 (danger sense, detect paranormal traits [accurate, acute, ranged], postcognition, precognition)

Combat: Attack +10, Grapple +12, Damage +10 (strike), Defense +16 (+8 flat-footed), Initiative +18

Drawbacks: Addiction (pain killers, common, major, -4 points)

Abilities 34 + Skills 17 (68 ranks) + Feats 4 + Powers 88 + Combat 52 + Saves 10–Drawbacks 4 = Total 201

federal law enforcement could easily include Prophet, who's been called in to consult on the case.

Then there's the Vision. Whatever Prophet saw that fateful day worried him enough to put into a motion a plan that led to the creation of the world's most powerful paranormal organization. To date, Prophet has only shared the particulars of the Vision with a select few individuals. Although it's a sure bet Jackson Cross knows the full detail of the Vision it's suspected that key members of the United Nations, particularly the Secretary-General and the members of PAX, have also been briefed on it. Ultimately the exact nature of the Vision is left for the GM to decide as best suits the series.

LEARNING ABOUT PROPHET

The following is information characters could potentially learn about Prophet:

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 10: Dr. Jeremiah Prophet is a criminal psychologist known for his work with both the FBI and New York City Police Department.

DC 15: Prophet is known to work with both Interpol and Vanguard.

DC 20: Prophet is actually a paranormal with amazing clairvoyant abilities, using his powers in conjunction with his training as a psychologist to track down criminals both nationally and internationally.

DC 25: Prophet is a key member of the Vanguard organization and responsible for recruiting most of its new members. He can either detect paranormals or simply knows when a breakout will happen before it happens (or possibly both).

KNOWLEDGE (BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES)

DC 10: Dr. Jeremiah Prophet is a criminal psychologist known for his work with both the FBI and New York City Police Department.

DC 15: Dr. Prophet is highly respected and sought after in his field and has been a consultant on nearly every major multiple murder case in the United States in the past 10 years.

DC 20: Prophet is a paranormal who uses his extraordinary clairvoyant abilities, combined with his peerless psychological training, to aid both national and international law enforcement agencies in the capture of the most elusive criminals.

PROTEUS

"HUMANITY IS OBSOLETE! IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE YOU'RE ALL WIPE OUT!"

No one knows where the paranormal known as Proteus originated: His nationality, his name, even if he is truly a "he" at all, given that Proteus is a genderless silvery figure with a fluid nature that is able to transform into any shape. More than a few people would like to know where Proteus came from and who he is, given that he may be one of the world's most dangerous paragons.

The danger Proteus poses isn't entirely physical, although he is a formidable threat: able to morph into different forms with a variety of physical capabilities, immune to biological hazards, able to rapidly heal, and teleport virtually anywhere in the world. The true threat posed by Proteus comes from his philosophy of paranormal supremacy and radical evolution, which has been embraced and exemplified by the Pantheon (see their description in **Chapter Four**).

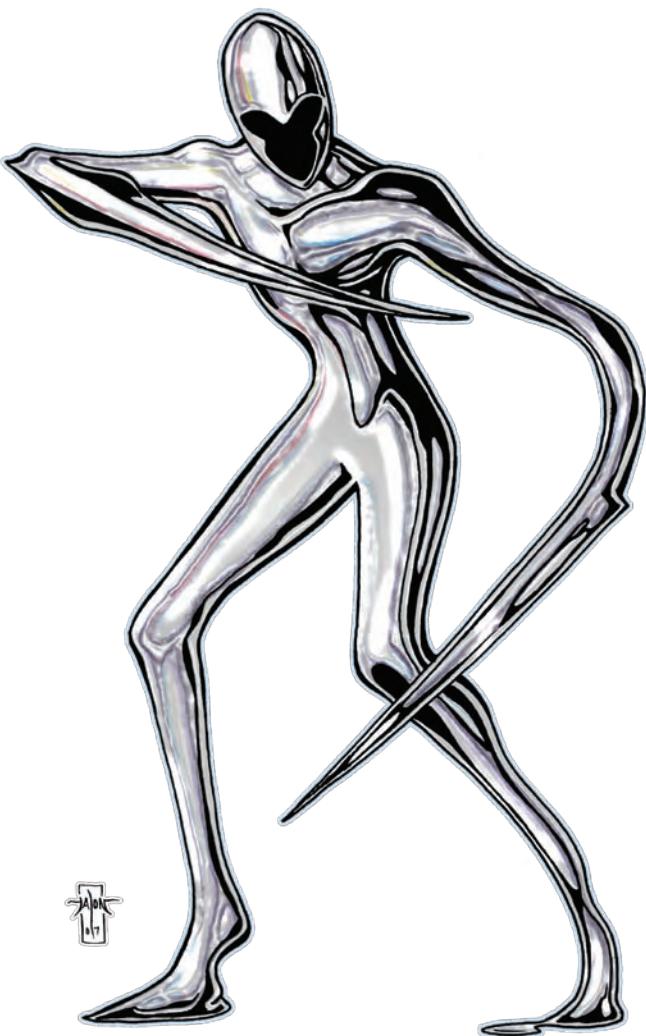
Proteus has made it clear from his very first appearances in public that he considers himself—and other paragons—something more than human. They are the next stage of evolution, he claims, transhumans destined to replace *Homo sapiens* as mammals replaced the dinosaurs. Therefore paragons are not subject to human law or custom any more than humans were expected to follow the customs of apes and monkeys. In fact, "monkey" is a common derisive term Proteus uses for normal humans.

Proteus' pronouncements, along with his refusal to identify his place of origin or birth name, have made him an outlaw, which sits perfectly fine with him. He claims the right of "self-defense" should any "monkey nation" or authority attempt to confront him. Unfortunately, any authority that might confront him can't bring sufficient firepower to bear against him before he simply disappears, and the kinds of weapons needed to harm him would do unacceptable collateral damage in inhabited areas.

For his part, Proteus continues rabble-rousing, drawing the attention of paragons interested in his message of transhumanism and living "beyond" the laws and boundaries of mere monkeys. He does as he pleases, although he proudly disdains all human activities like eating, drinking, or seeking companionship other than his own kind.

THE TRUTH ABOUT PROTEUS

The exact truth about Proteus is left up to the individual Gamemaster to decide as best suits the series. In all cases, Proteus is a paranormal supremacist and a patron for the Pantheon, but the other details vary. Some possibilities include:



- Proteus is a paragon but his (or possibly her) awakening resulted in a radically post-human form and his powers have had a similar influence on his state of mind, which is as fluid as his body. At least a part of Proteus' attitude is based on the fact that he can no longer truly have a "normal" human life, therefore he rejects the experience.
- Proteus isn't human at all, but an alien from another world, sent to Earth as a scout or conqueror. He may be fomenting conflict between paranormals and normals in order to soften Earth up for an invasion or outside conquest.
- Proteus is a kind of avatar, a being of pure ectoplasm from the Imageria, able to assume virtually any form. It is the living essence of the paranormal sense of superiority, a kind of embodied megalomania, and therefore seeks to encourage that sort of behavior.
- Proteus is the creation of another paranormal, intentionally or unconsciously. He could be one of Dr. Emily Rosemont's "rogue" thoughtforms, for example (see **The Rosemont Center** in **Chapter Four**).
- Proteus isn't a living being, but a sentient mass of nano-machines. It might have been created in a lab on Earth, or on an alien planet and sent to Earth as a kind of probe or scout. He might even be a kind of ACME device built by another paragon (see **ACME Devices** in **Chapter One**).
- Proteus isn't from the present, but actually a time traveler from the future. His reasons for espousing paranormal supremacy have

PROTEUS

PL 12

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+1	+2	+4	+2	+1	+2
12	15	19	14	13	15
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+10*	+4	+6	+13*		

*often enhanced with Shapeshift, up to +15

**includes Mind Shield bonus

Skills: Acrobatics 6 (+8), Bluff 12 (+14), Concentration 8 (+9), Diplomacy 4 (+6), Gather Information 8 (+10), Intimidate 10 (+12), Knowledge (current events) 6 (+8), Knowledge (history) 8 (+10), Knowledge (tactics) 6 (+8), Notice 8 (+9), Perform (acting) 10 (+12), Search 8 (+10), Sense Motive 10 (+12), Stealth 8 (+10)

Feats: All-out Attack, Chokehold, Elusive Target, Environmental Adaptation (zero-gravity), Fearless, Grappling Finesse, Instant Up, Master Plan

Powers: **Comprehend 4** (speak and understand all languages),

Immunity 30 (Fortitude), **Mind Shield 3**, **Protection 6** (Extras: Impervious), **Regeneration 12** (+5 recovery bonus, injured 1/minute, disabled 1/5 minutes; Power Feats: Regrowth), **Shapeshift 10** (50 points for traits), **Teleport 10**

Common Shapeshift Forms:

• **Battle Form: Elongation 2, Enhanced Strength 20, Protection 5** (Extras: Impervious, stacks with Protection from above), **Strike 3** (change arms in to weapons; Power Feats: Mighty), **Super-Movement 1** (wall crawling), **Super-Strength 6** (heavy load: 50 tons) [50 points]

• **Cloud Form: Flight 1** (10 MPH), **Insubstantial 2** (gaseous), **Suffocate 10** (sometimes **Nauseate 10** instead) [32 points]

• **Flying Form: Enhanced Dexterity 7, Flight 3** (50 MPH, grows wings; Drawbacks: Power Loss if wings are entangled or grappled) [12 points]

• **Liquid Form: Immunity 40** (all physical damage, Half Effect), **Insubstantial 1** (fluid) [25 points]

Combat: Attack +9, Grapple +10, Damage +1 (unarmed), +14 (battleform) Defense +9 (+4 flatfooted), Knockback -8, Initiative +2

Abilities 28 + Skills 28 (112 ranks) + Feats 8 + Powers 166 + Combat 36 + Saves 13 = Total 279

something to do with foreknowledge of the future and a desire to influence the outcome, either towards a foreordained paranormal victory or to change a paranormal defeat from his past.

USING PROTEUS

Proteus is primarily designed as an adversary: His supremacist attitude and plans for a war on humanity make it likely he'll be on the opposite side from most player characters. Still, he has some potential as a very uneasy ally in some circumstances, depending on the nature of the series.

As an enemy, Proteus is a powerful and subtle one. He's quite capable in a fight, especially if he knows his opponents well, but he's more effective when his shapeshifting and teleportation powers are used to their fullest extent for spying and sowing confusion. Proteus can literally be anyone, any time, anywhere, and his presence can quickly make the characters (and their players!) paranoid and unlikely to trust anyone, which may be just as Proteus plans.

As an ally, he's fickle at best. His smug and superior attitude and complete lack of regard for normals is likely to grate eventually. You can soften Proteus somewhat and make him a more sympathetic "paranormal rights advocate," if you like, but he's better suited to the role of ruthless would-be "savior" of paranormals.

Proteus' Teleport power is primarily intended as a plot device to make it difficult to capture or contain him. When the odds turn against him, he can simply leave. If you want to make it somewhat easier on the players, you can remove this power and force Proteus to rely on his shapeshifting to make good an escape, which he can still do by flying away, disguising himself as a bystander (or even an inanimate object), or flowing somewhere hard to reach, like sewer pipes or storm drains.

LEARNING ABOUT PROTEUS

The following is information player characters could potentially learn about Proteus:

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 10: Proteus is a shape-shifting paranormal terrorist associated with the Pantheon.

DC 15: No one can claim to have seen Proteus' "true" appearance. It might be the silvery, near-featureless humanoid form he often adopts, but that might be a disguise as well. Some even believe Proteus isn't actually human.

DC 20: Proteus' behavior is odd and somewhat unpredictable. He doesn't seem motivated by wealth, power, or allegiance to any organization. Even his involvement with the Pantheon is largely inspirational. It's difficult to tell at any given time just what he'll do.

DC 25: Even the best intelligence agencies have absolutely nothing on Proteus, and that concerns them. There's no DNA evidence, no fingerprints, no fibers, nothing to trace. Proteus could be from anywhere and the speculation that he's not even human could potentially be true.

PROXY

"NOW THAT WAS FUN!"

Roxanne Chell wanted to be a daredevil, an adventurer, she wanted to live life on the edge, but instead all she ever did was read about it in books and see it in movies. She worked in a bookstore and lived alone except for her two cats. Her life couldn't have been more boring. She never really took a chance in her whole life until she realized life was leaving her behind.

Finally, she decided to go for it. She signed up to go skydiving, but when the moment came she couldn't jump, no matter how hard she tried. The same thing happened with bungee jumping; she chickened out at the last minute. She was afraid, and angry about it. In her apartment that night she saw an extreme sports broadcast on cable and something in her snapped. She smashed the TV screen in a fit of rage...and broke out.

That night a very different Roxanne hit the S&M club scene in San Francisco. While police spotted another diving off the Golden Gate Bridge, and a third woman matching her description took on a mugger in Golden Gate Park and beat him soundly. Roxanne woke

up in the morning to see three copies of her standing over her, grinning fiercely. As soon as they touched her, she absorbed them and knew everything they'd experienced the previous night. It was a rush like she'd never had before.

From that moment on, Roxanne Chell was a true adrenaline junkie. But she never had to take the risks herself; she just sent one of her "proxies" to do it. The memories were the same as if she'd done it herself, but with no risk. In fact, she's "died" several times doing foolhardy stunts, but now she knows the limits of her abilities very well. One time, while flirting with a dangerous man, one of Roxanne's proxies was assaulted and she killed her attacker in self-defense. That was a most unexpected rush for Roxanne, too, and she loved to feel the power it gave her, to say nothing of the fact that she had an ironclad alibi. She wanted more of that feeling.

So "Proxy" became a freelance paranormal for hire, using her duplicates to carry out the "dirty work" while keeping her real identity a secret. The training wasn't difficult when she could work on a dozen different things at once. The more dangerous the job, the more Proxy likes it, since it gives her a shot at some real thrills. Her opponents can never be sure if they're dealing with the real Proxy or just another duplicate, and more than one has made the mistake of thinking she was dead after a particularly disastrous encounter.

Proxy's powers have had a definite influence on her personality and behavior. Once somewhat shy and fearful, she has become daring, bold, and utterly fearless, willing and even eager to take wild risks just for the thrill of it. She's developed a certain solipsistic attitude since it has become increasingly more difficult to say which of her selves is "real." She's experienced trauma and even death first-hand, but she's still alive and perfectly healthy, which has contributed to a certain subconscious belief that she's immortal, at least so long as she hedges her bets by having a "spare" duplicate tucked away somewhere all the time.

USING PROXY

Proxy has the paranormal power to duplicate, creating exact copies of herself out of nowhere. When multiple versions of her recombine, they share memories, so the combined whole knows everything each duplicate experienced. She also "evens out" any damaged suffered, recovering faster when recombining. While duplicated, she gains the strength of will of multiple minds at once (her Mental Shield power). Her various selves also coordinate well, since they can think as one, and her Set-Up and Teamwork feats apply when she's working with her duplicates.

Proxy is an antagonist with long-term potential, simply because each time the characters encounter her, it may be a different "her" they encounter. Proxy's duplicates are all effectively equally "real" in the sense that so long as one of them survives an encounter, so does she. While she may lack the kind of firepower some paragons have, she makes up for it in persistence and willingness to take risks.

Of course, Proxy isn't just a cardboard villain: She has her own goals and motivations. She might become interested in a player character romantically or as a friendly rival, particularly if the character is a high-profile risk-taker like her. Proxy makes a very useful, if somewhat fickle, ally, since she's an entire group unto herself.

The similarities between Proxy's powers and those of Mr. Zero may be more than mere coincidence. Perhaps Mr. Zero has fully realized the potential Roxanne only touches upon for now. She could become as powerful a duplicator as he is, although there's a question as to what

PROXY

PL 9

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+1	+3	+1	+0	+1	+2
12	16	13	11	12	14
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX		WILL	
+6/+3*	+4	+3		+4	

*Flatfooted

Skills: Acrobatics 9 (+12), Bluff 6 (+8), Climb 8 (+9), Concentration 8 (+9), Diplomacy 4 (+6), Disable Device 8 (+8), Drive 4 (+7), Escape Artist 6 (+9), Gather Information 7 (+9), Knowledge (current events) 8 (+8), Knowledge (streetwise) 10 (+10), Notice 8 (+9), Pilot 4 (+7), Search 8 (+8), Stealth 8 (+11), Swim 6 (+7)

Feats: Attack Focus (melee) 2, Defensive Roll 3, Dodge Focus 2, Equipment 4, Elusive Target, Fearless, Improved Initiative, Improved Throw, Improved Trip, Luck 2, Move-by Action, Power Attack, Set-Up, Teamwork

Equipment: jumpsuit (light body armor, +2 Toughness), pistol (+3 damage), plus up to 12 points in miscellaneous equipment, as suits her current job.

Powers: **Duplication 9** (Extras: Heroic, Survival; Power Feats: Absorption Healing, Mental Link, Progression 3 [10 duplicates]), **Mind Shield 10** (Flaws: Limited—1 rank per active duplicate)

Combat: Attack +12 (melee), +10 (ranged), Grapple +13, Damage +1 (unarmed), +3 (pistol), Defense +12 (+5 flatfooted), Knockback -3, Initiative +7

Abilities 18 + Skills 28 (112 ranks) + Feats 22 + Powers 46 + Combat 40 + Saves 11 = Total 165

she would do if she did. There's also the possibility Mr. Zero might take interest in a female with powers similar to his own. Perhaps all the one-man conspiracy needs is "a better half" to complete him.

LEARNING ABOUT PROXY

The following is information player characters could potentially learn about Proxy:

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 10: Proxy is a freelancer with a daredevil reputation and extraordinary luck.

DC 15: Proxy's "luck" comes at least in part from her ability to duplicate. She can literally be in two (or more) places at once and it's impossible to tell her duplicates from the real thing. She's picked up some considerable skills in a fairly short period of time because of her ability to do multiple things at once.

DC 20: Proxy's real name is Roxanne Chell; she's an American from San Francisco. Although she's worked for companies like the Silber Agency and Foregone Conclusions, Proxy is true freelance: Working for the highest bidder, or sometimes just the job she thinks will be the most fun.

DC 25: Proxy is limited to no more than a dozen duplicates at once, maybe slightly less. She coordinates her "selves" incredibly well, functioning like a single mind. That might mean some



kind of telepathic contact between the duplicates. She's still frequently seen in the San Francisco Bay Area and might still have a home there (or, at least, one of her might).

KNOWLEDGE (STREETWISE)

DC 10: Proxy is a freelancer with a daredevil reputation and extraordinary luck.

DC 15: Proxy has literally come back from the dead on occasion, because she can duplicate herself, and she sends her "body-doubles" to do the dirty and dangerous work. Apparently, she can survive if they die.

DC 20: Proxy is an adrenaline junkie, maybe because she can take such major risks without anything actually happening to the real her. She sometimes takes jobs for the challenge, and she likes to keep things "interesting."

RAINDANCE

"I CAN FEEL SOMETHING IN THE AIR. LET ME CHANGE THAT."

When Danielle Sullivan was a child, her grandmother would fascinate her with stories of the Thunderbird. Long ago, her grandmother said, a Thunderbird descended from the Great Spirit's Mountain and took human form, for the Thunderbird had fallen in love with a Lakota woman and wished to be her husband. According to the story, although the Lakota woman's father, the chieftain of the tribe, initially objected to the union, the Thunderbird promised to be a good spouse and further pledged that should any of the chief's descendants come to harm in the future, the Thunderbird would throw off his human guise to protect them. Satisfied, the chieftain blessed the marriage and the couple soon had many children. One of those children, at least according to Danielle's grandmother, was Danielle's great-grandfather.

Although Danielle's grandmother died when Danielle was very young, stories like these continued to enchant Danielle as she grew older. So much so, in fact, that by the time Danielle was in college she had chosen them as her primary field of study, becoming an Anthropology major, minoring in social work, both with a focus on Native American studies. This provided Danielle with a much-needed connection to her Native American birthright and, much as her grandmother's stories had done in her youth, her academic studies of Lakota tradition and mythology instilled in her a fierce sense of pride in her heritage. By the time she was in graduate school, Danielle decided to connect with them physically, eventually relocating from her home in Minneapolis to the Cheyenne River Indian Reservation in South Dakota to further her research.

Danielle was disgusted by what greeted her in South Dakota. Many of the communities of Cheyenne River were, shockingly, without adequate water systems, making it all but impossible to live in sanitary conditions. Additionally, with so few jobs available, much of the local population was living daily with feelings of hopelessness and despair that created



a shamefully high suicide rate among the local youth. Incensed, Danielle immediately set to work to improve conditions.

But, Danielle quickly realized there was stark opposition to her efforts to improve the lives of her people. Not only were the state and federal governments unwilling to unravel their respective bureaucracies to effectively help the Lakota, the people of Cheyenne River themselves looked upon Danielle as an upstart outsider and refused to help her help them. Luckily, several months after arriving in Cheyenne River, Danielle fell in love and began a relationship with a Lakota woman, Sue Whitecloud. While this brought her a sense of comfort during difficult times, it also greatly improved her relationship with the community leaders of Cheyenne River, who soon came to look upon her as one of their own. Eventually, Danielle and Sue formalized their relationship in a Lakota ceremony, Danielle taking Sue's name both to cement her relationship with Sue and to further solidify Danielle's connection to the community.

But Danielle's troubles were far from over. She also found opposition to her efforts to help the Lakota from local whites, many of whom were thriving on the miserable conditions of the reservation by providing the Lakota alcohol and drugs. Despite Danielle's pleas, law enforcement outside the reservation was completely unwilling to become involved. Things came to a head when, one cold night, as Danielle was on her way home after speaking to the mayor of neighboring town, a gang of local drug-dealers ran Danielle off the road outside the Reservation boundary. Cornering her, they were intent on keeping Danielle's do-gooder nose out of local business. Although Danielle did her best to keep things peaceful, the confrontation turned violent.

Then, as if in answer to a long unfulfilled promise, the sky opened up and descended furiously on Danielle's attackers. With wind and lightning, Danielle sent her attackers and their weapons flying, as she herself took to the air and escaped. The storm she summoned raged around her, seeming to embrace her as if she were family. Before her eyes, the clouds took the shape of an enormous dark feathered eagle, a Thunderbird, and she knew immediately what had transpired. She returned quickly to the Reservation where members of the Tribal Council and a host of locals who seemed

to be waiting for her greeted her warmly. As she landed, the crowd parted and looked quietly at her as if waiting for her to speak. "The Thunderbird," she said finally to the gathered crowd, "has thrown off his human guise."

Several weeks later, as drug and alcohol trafficking into the Cheyenne River Reservation continued to dwindle under threat of hurricane winds and lightning strikes, Jeremiah Prophet arrived to speak with Danielle. After a lengthy private discussion, Danielle became convinced that a more public persona would allow her the opportunity to be a more effective advocate for the Lakota, if not all Native American peoples. Taking the name Raindance, she joined Vanguard as a member of Mission Team Alpha. In this capacity, she continues to be a vocal advocate for the needs of Native American peoples. She is a visible and vocal supporter, both financially and otherwise, of economic redevelopment efforts in Native American communities across the United States and Canada.

USING RAINDANCE

Raindance is a public figure, well known to much of the world as a member of Vanguard Mission Team Alpha. As such, Raindance could feature prominently in any series with that organization. She could serve as a mentor to a less experienced group of paranormals. Likewise, she could be temporarily assigned to a new mission team, either as field commander or as a replacement for an injured or otherwise unavailable operative.

Raindance is a hero to many Native Americans, as her presence in their community and her advocacy on their behalf has done much to change the fortunes of Native Americans in the modern world. Another character of Native American descent might know of Raindance, perhaps having a similar breakout experience. In her work to advocate for the needs of Native American communities in the United States, she could recruit a group of like-minded paranormals to become the protectors of those communities, while she continues work abroad with Vanguard. Likewise the seemingly mystical nature of Raindance's powers could involve her in nearly any campaign dealing with similar themes.

A GM interested in pursuing a campaign focused on social justice might choose to involve Raindance as a supporting character. Raindance makes no secret of the fact that she is a lesbian, nor does she hide her relationship with Sue Whitecloud. This makes both Raindance and her partner targets for hate-groups. Characters could be called upon to aid the Whiteclouds as they deal with any such threats.

LEARNING ABOUT RAINDANCE

The following is information characters could learn about Raindance:

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 10: Raindance is a Native American member of Vanguard Mission Team Alpha with the ability to control the weather.

DC 15: Raindance is actually Danielle Whitecloud, an anthropologist, social worker and advocate for Native American rights.

DC 20: Danielle Whitecloud is also a gay rights activist. A lesbian, she is currently involved in a long-term relationship.

DC 25: Sue Whitecloud, Danielle's partner, is currently a member of the Lakota Tribal Council of the Cheyenne River Indian Reservation.

RAINDANCE						PL 11
STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA	
+0	+3	+1	+2	+3	+3	
10	16	12	14	16	17	
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL			
+1/12*	+4	+3	+9			

*with Force Field

Skills: Computers 3 (+5), Concentration 7 (+10), Diplomacy 11 (+14), Drive 3 (+6), Knowledge (behavioral sciences) 5 (+7), Knowledge (earth sciences) 5 (+7), Knowledge (theology and philosophy) 5 (+7), Language 1 (Lakota [English is native]), Notice 7 (+10), Survival 5 (+8)

Feats: All-Out Attack, Attack Focus (ranged) 2, Defensive Attack, Uncanny Dodge (Tactile)

Powers: **Flight 5** (250 MPH), **Force Field 11**, **Immunity 7** (cold, heat, electrical damage), **Weather Control 11** (cold, 2 mile radius, Dynamic; *Alternate Powers* [all Dynamic]: **Air Control 11**, **Fog 11** [Obscure: Visual Group], **Heatstroke 7** [Fatigue: Ranged], **Lightning Flash 7** [Dazzle: Visual Group; Burst Area (35-ft radius)], **Lightning Strike 7** [Blast; *Extras*: Penetrating 6; *Power Feats*: Indirect 2], **Suffocate 7** [Ranged], **Thunderclap 11** [Dazzle: Auditory Senses; *Extras*: Burst Area (55-ft radius)], **Tornado 7** [Blast; *Extras*: Burst Area (35-ft radius)], **Weather Control 11** (distraction), **Weather Control 11** (hamper movement), **Weather Control 11** (heat), **Wind 11** [Blast], **Wind Screen 5** [Deflect; slow projectiles; *Extras*: Action-Reaction]) **Super-Senses 7** (danger sense [tactile], wind sense [accurate ranged touch, extended 2])

Combat: Attack +7 (melee), +9 (ranged), Grapple +9, Damage +11 (wind blast), Defense +9 (+5 flat-footed), Knockback -6, Initiative +3

Abilities 25 + Skills 13 (52 ranks) + Feats 5 + Powers 84 + Combat 32 + Saves 14 = 173

RAMPAGE

"DESTROY!"

Gregor Yaschenko immigrated to the United States with his parents at the age of 3. Originally from the Ukraine, Gregor's parents, like so many that lived in the former Soviet Union, wanted a better life for themselves and their children and so were quick to seize the opportunity to leave when the occasion presented itself.

Like many immigrant children, Gregor learned most of his early English by watching television. In particular, Gregor developed a fondness for Saturday morning and after school cartoons, especially those featuring superheroes. His parents, recognizing this as an opportunity, began buying Gregor comic books with what little additional money they had, hoping that his fascination with costumed characters would accelerate his reading skills. While the comics certainly provided ample motivation for Gregor to read, they also provided him with an escape from the difficulties of being the youngest of six children in an immigrant household struggling to make ends meet. Comic books and the colorful characters that populated their pages became a welcome refuge into which Gregor often retreated when the trials of mundane life became too much for him.

As a child, Gregor developed a rich fantasy life centered on superheroes and their amazing abilities. He would often imagine himself in the role of a superhero, possessed of astounding abilities that made him the center of attention for both his family and his community. As he grew older, Gregor's dreams of colorfully costumed heroes evolved into a fascination with real-life paranormal abilities and the seemingly normal, everyday people that were demonstrating them around the world. When he was a teenager, Gregor's dreams of spontaneously developing

outlandish powers and becoming a hero to the downtrodden bloomed anew. He studied news about paranormals and their powers furiously, hoping to discover some common thread, some overlooked piece of data that would spark a grand insight into how he too might become more than he was.

It was during this research that Gregor came upon the classified ad that said, simply enough: "Volunteers needed for research into paranormal abilities." Unable to contain his excitement, Gregor immediately called the number in the ad and was at

the research facility the following day. Although only 16, Gregor lied about his age, completed the forms they required and was, somewhat to his surprise, immediately accepted into the research program. A week later, he and several dozen other like-minded candidates, all with dreams of developing paranormal abilities of their own, boarded a bus bound for a research facility in Utah. Once there, they were taken to the facility's comfortable dormitories and introduced to the Dr. White, the project leader. Dr. White explained in detail that each of the candidates would be subjected, one after the other, to a series of simple psychological and physical exams, designed to test each candidates' reaction to certain types of stimuli. The excited crowd listened intently, signed all the remaining paperwork, and then retired to the facility dormitories to wait their turn.

That was the last time Gregor Yaschenko saw any of his fellow test subjects alive.

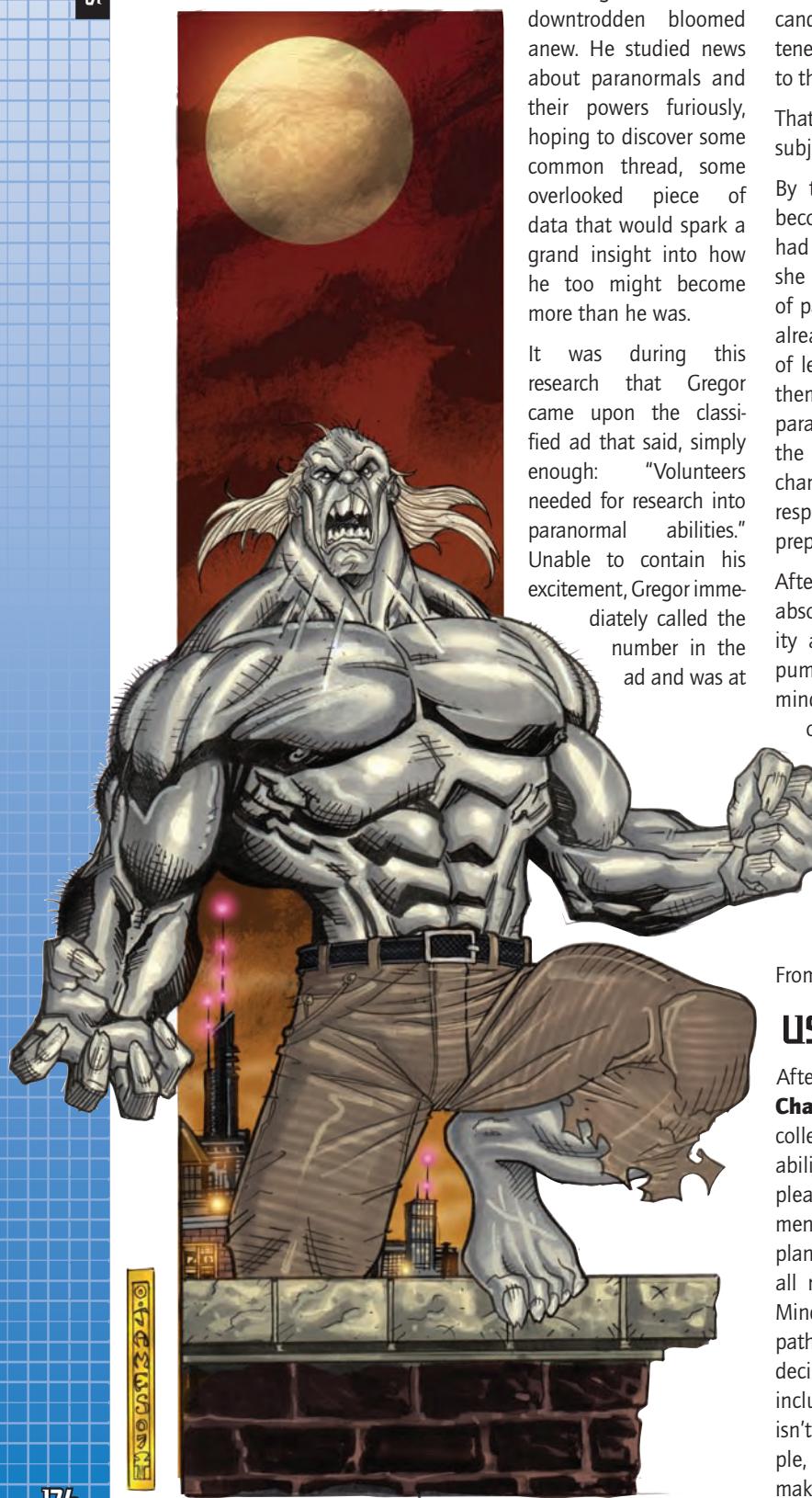
By the time she got to Gregor Yaschenko, Caitlin White had become obviously discouraged by the results of her pet project. She had hoped that, given the psychological profiles of the test group she had gathered, at least one of them would have had some type of paranormal response. By the time she came to Gregor, she had already subjected over two dozen other test candidates to a variety of levels of psychological and physical conditioning and none of them had survived, let alone developed any noticeable degree of paranormal ability. She had high-hopes though that Gregor, being the youngest candidate and, seemingly, the most open to the changes she was trying to achieve, would finally demonstrate a response to the program. Unfortunately, Mindbender wasn't quite prepared for the response Gregor had.

After a nearly a week spent in total sensory deprivation, with absolutely no sensory stimulus other than images and of brutality and violence, the psychoactive drugs that Mindbender had pumped into Gregor Yaschenko's blood finally did their work. His mind snapped and with it, his body began to change. In moment of desperate rage and uncontrollable anger, Gregor Yaschenko became something else, a hulking monstrosity of muscle and teeth. He effortlessly broke out of the containment unit that confined him, nearly destroying the entire research wing of the facility and killing most of the security staff that attempted to contain him, what was once Gregor Yaschenko headed east into the night, toward the small town of Evanston, Wyoming.

From afar, Mindbender simply smiled.

USING RAMPAGE

After nearly destroying the town of Evanston (see **Vanguard** in **Chapter Four** for more information), Mindbender was able to collect the creature she dubbed 'Rampage' and use her telepathic abilities to calm his raging mind. To say that Mindbender was pleased with the results of her experiment would be an understatement. She now had the perfect tool to use in her ever-evolving plan to bring order to the world: A secret weapon and bodyguard all rolled into one. Rampage is, seemingly, completely loyal to Mindbender, although whether that is due to Mindbender's telepathic influences or Rampage's own psychological issues is a decision best left to the GM. Rampage is a natural character to include in any campaign that involves Mindbender, although he isn't necessarily limited to that roll. Mindbender could, for example, offer Rampage's service to anyone willing to pay her price, making Rampage a candidate to appear in campaigns featuring



paranormal mercenaries or, perhaps, as a paranormal bodyguard to a high-ranking government official. Rampage could also, presumably, escape from Mindbender's control for a time as well, which would bring him into conflict with just about anyone that crossed Rampage's aimless path.

It's also important to note that Rampage's relationship to Mindbender is not generally known. As the cause of the Evanston Incident, Rampage is still hunted, not only by the United States government, but also Mexico and Canada, both of whom are concerned that the now missing monster might be a threat to their national security. A government or a private research firm might hire paranormals to find and detain Rampage, the latter intent on studying him, the former intending to destroy the creature.

The breakout of Rampage's abilities provided Mindbender with some extraordinary insights into the development of paranormal abilities. She is hopeful to recreate her success with him elsewhere. Rampage could be the first of many such minions she creates to assist her in her plans. A GM could, therefore, tie any number of additional paranormal antagonists to Rampage's origin. Such a character could either be a survivor of the same set of experiments that created Rampage or the result of a completely separate test conducted elsewhere in the world.

It's important to remember that Rampage is, in many ways, a tragic case. After all, trapped somewhere in Rampage's massive, brutal form is whatever remains of the broken psyche of a 16-year old boy with dreams of being a hero to his community. A group of heroes might learn this through some set of circumstances and seek to help rehabilitate Rampage and re-connect him with his family.

LEARNING ABOUT RAMPAGE

The following is information player characters could potentially learn about Rampage:

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 10: Witnesses to the 'Evanston Incident' described the feral paranormal involved as a 'walking rampage.' News media continued to use the term during ongoing coverage of the Incident and its aftermath eventually coming to call the paranormal simply 'Rampage'.

DC 15: Infrequent sightings of the paranormal called Rampage continue to be reported across North America and in some parts of Central America, making him something of a legend akin to Bigfoot.

DC 20: Law enforcement and military agencies in several countries are working together to find and possibly capture Rampage.

DC 25: The United States government considers Rampage a threat to national security and has convened a special task force with orders to find and, if possible, destroy the creature.

RAVANA

"Mmmm, TASTY LOOKING POWER YOU HAVE THERE."

Sanjeev Pashwara wanted more than anything else to be special, but he never was. Even though he was first in his family to go to college, he was never top of his class. Even though he got a good

RAMPAGE						PL 14
STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA	
+17	+0	+17	-1	+2	+0	
44	11	44	8	15	10	
TOUGHNESS		FORTITUDE		REFLEX		WILL
+17		+17		+2		+3
Skills: Intimidate 14 (+16*), Notice 6 (+8), Sense Motive 8 (+10) * includes Growth modifiers						
Feats: Diehard, Endurance, Improved Grab, Improved Initiative 2, Improved Pin, Startle						
Powers: Growth 4 (Extras: Duration—Continuous; Flaws: Permanent; Power Feats: Innate), Immovable 10 (Extras: Unstoppable), Immunity 12 (cold and heat damage, fatigue, pressure), Impervious Toughness 10, Leaping 10 (x2,500; 10.89 miles), Regeneration 5 (Bruised 1/round, Injured 1/round), Super-Strength 10 (heavy load: 11,500 tons; Power Feats: Shockwave, Super-Breath, Thunderclap)						
Combat: Attack +10*, Grapple +41, Damage +17, (unarmed) Defense +7* (flat-footed +3), Knockback -27, Initiative +8						
Abilities 60 + Skills 7 (28 ranks) + Feats 7 + Powers 93 + Combat 38 + Saves 8 = Total 213						

job, he was one corporate technician amongst many. He was just a face in the crowd, a nobody.

That feeling only intensified when the first paranormals appeared. In India, some paragons were hailed as avatars, living gods. Sanjeev always felt strangely, powerfully drawn to them. Not to worship them, but to be like them. He felt he had a special destiny, but didn't know how to reach it.

As his work and personal life suffered, Sanjeev first made contact with the Rakshasa, an underground cult as obsessed with paragons as he was. Like many origin chasing groups around the world, the cult sought to awaken paranormal potential within its members, but not through traumatic breakout events. Instead, the Rakshasa harkened to their ancient namesake, a cannibal cult. They sought to consume the flesh of the paragons, and so become like them.

Sanjeev's unique sense about paranormals aided this quest and, in the first true rite of the cult, his destiny came upon him: Sanjeev Pashwara was no more. In his place stood Ravana, the king of the Rakshasa. The other members of the cult hailed him as their guru and guide, and Sanjeev was special at last.

Since that fateful day, the paragon called Ravana has become a fearsome power. To most he's simply a mercenary with a mythological motif; few know the true source of his powers or the reason why he specializes in hunting and killing his own kind. Each successful kill adds to Ravana's power and he has become convinced that his awakening was only the first step: Once he has accumulated enough power, he will throw off the guise of mortal flesh and truly ascend to godhood, overthrow the gods themselves and attain ultimate power.

Ravana uses the first power he acquired to assume an "avatar form," that of a muscular Indian man with a white and black tiger's head, allowing him to conceal the mortal identity he left behind the day Sanjeev Pashwara disappeared. He generally dresses in an archaic



Indian style with loose-fitting clothes that allow him freedom of movement. He speaks in a deep and snarling voice that helps him to strike fear into his prey.

USING RAVANA

Ravana makes a useful foe for a group of paragons because he has a builtin reason to hunt them (in order to claim their powers) and the flexibility of his power allows the Gamemaster to tailor his capabilities by adding powers to his list.

Ravana's ability to sense paranormals also makes him useful for pointing out latent paragons who might not otherwise be aware of their abilities (and who make for easy prey). For example, if Ravana begins stalking certain people, odds are good they are paranormals, whether they know it yet or not. A close brush with a superhuman serial killer may be enough to trigger any latent powers in a most spectacular way!

Lastly, Ravana might end up hunted himself, either by a faction wanting to use his abilities or looking to study him and figure out how his power works (and, by extension, how paranormal powers work in general). He's a potential asset to the Initiative or the Syndicate and a potential member of the Pantheon or the Pact, depending on how the GM sees his capabilities.

Note that Ravana's gruesome Mimic power—in addition to its substantial rank—has an additional special effect: He can “recall” any power he has previously mimicked, so his available pool of power points is just the total points in powers he can have active at *once*. He can also swap out powers, losing some and “recalling” others by taking a standard action to do so. Once Ravana has absorbed a set of powers, he always has access to it, making him more versatile and dangerous the more paragons he kills.

Technically, Ravana doesn't need to *kill* his victims: He just needs to consume a substantial amount of their DNA, roughly equal to a pint of blood or a literal pound of flesh. Given the Rakshasa cult's practices, Ravana hasn't discovered this just yet, as it is both easier

RAVANA

PL 10

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+3	+2	+3	+2	+2	+2
16	15	17	14	14	15
Toughness	Fortitude	Reflex	Will		
+5/+3*	+7	+6	+7		

* Flatfooted

Skills: Acrobatics 4 (+6), Concentration 8 (+10), Gather Information 6 (+8), Intimidate 8 (+10), Knowledge (technology) 4 (+6), Knowledge (theology and philosophy) 8 (+10), Language 1 (English [Hindi is native]), Medicine 4 (+6), Notice 6 (+8), Profession (tech-support) 7 (+9), Search 8 (+10), Sense Motive 8 (+10), Stealth 8 (+10)

Feats: Assessment, All-out Attack, Attack Focus (melee) 2, Defensive Roll 2, Dodge Focus 2, Fearless, Improved Initiative, Minions 8 (Rakshasa cult: 100 fanatical 30-point minions), Power Attack, Startle

Powers: **Mimic Powers 40** (all traits at once, 200 points total; *Extras*: Duration—Continuous, Extra Subject 4 [25 subjects], Stacking; *Flaws*: Limited—Subjects whose flesh he has consumed), **Super-Senses 7** (detect paranormals [mental sense], Acute, Extended, Ranged, Radius, Sense, Tracking)

Mimicked Power Sets:

• **Healing Factor: Regeneration 19** (+5 recovery bonus, bruised 1/round, injured 1/round, staggered 1/minute, disabled 1/20 minutes, ability damage 1/20 minutes; *Power Feats*: Regrowth) [20 points]

• **Invisibility: Concealment 4** (total visual concealment) [8 points total]

• **Shape-Shifting: Morph 6** (humanoid forms, +30 Disguise bonus; *Extras*: Duration—Continuous) [18 points]

• **Vibratory Control: Immunity 2** (suffocation; *Flaws*: Limited—Only while Insubstantial), **Insubstantial 4** (vibratory phase-shift; *Power Feats*: Subtle), **Strike 10** (vibratory; *Extras*: Affects Corporeal, Penetrating), **Super-Movement 1** (air-walk; *Flaws*: Limited—Only while Insubstantial) [53 points total]

Combat: Attack +10 (melee), +8 (ranged), Grapple +13, Damage +3 (unarmed), +10 (strike, penetrating), Defense +12 (+5 flatfooted), Knockback -2, Initiative +6

Abilities 31 + Skills 20 (80 ranks) + Feats 28 + Powers 367 + Combat 36 + Saves 13 = Total 495

for him to feed on dead victims and it allows him to give the rest of the remains to his followers, who all hope to share in their god's divine power and become avatars as well. While some Rakshasa cultists go into frenzied states where they feel transported and transformed by their rites, none have truly broken-out as paranormals yet, which suits their leader just fine. If any did, Ravana would most likely want to add their powers to his own as soon as possible....

The catalog of powers Ravana has already taken is merely a suggestion, tailor it to suit the series. If you want Ravana to be just starting out, give him just one or two weaker powers like Concealment or Morph, and have him strike from surprise. If you want him to be more of an immediate threat, give him additional power sets, perhaps even by making some other characters in this book into his victims! If nothing else, it's a good “use” for characters you don't plan to have in your *Paragons* series any other way.

LEARNING ABOUT RAVANA

The following is information player characters could potentially learn about Ravana:

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 10: Ravana is a freelance assassin specializing in killing paranormals. He either wears a realistic tiger's head mask or else has an actual tiger's head. He styles himself after a figure from Hindu mythology.

DC 15: Ravana's known powers include flight, invisibility or enhanced stealth, and the ability to slash through even steel with his bare fingers (called the "claws of Ravana" by some). He's been known to shrug off a fair amount of damage; ignoring gunfire and the like.

DC 20: Ravana is the head of a cult based in India that worships him as a god. The cult is officially outlawed, but is still quite active underground.

DC 25: There are rumors that Ravana's Rakshasa cult is made up of cannibals and that Ravana is the worst of the lot; his mercenary activities are really just an excuse to indulge in his homicidal tendencies and get paid for it.

KNOWLEDGE (STREETWISE)

DC 10: Ravana is a freelance assassin specializing in killing paranormals. He either wears a realistic tiger's head mask or else has an actual tiger's head. He styles himself after a figure from Hindu mythology.

DC 15: Ravana is strictly a solo act; none of the freelance companies will work with him and he seems fine with that. He does get support from an underground cult of worshippers in India called the Rakshasa, after a type of Hindu demon.

DC 20: The Rakshasa cult is involved in some *very* dirty business: buying and selling people, kidnapping, murder-for-hire, and possibly worse.

RED TIDE

**"THE MOTHER OF LIFE WILL BE AVENGED,
AND I AM HER WEAPON!"**

His life was worthless, and he had betrayed his heritage and his people. These were the thoughts running through Tepolo Mehi's mind daily as he shuffled sullenly, and often drunkenly, through his excuse for a life. His once proud clan had dwindled to nothing more than tired old men, chattering old women, and viciously clueless teenagers...and the "tribe" to which they nominally owed loyalty to fewer than three dozen members overall, where once they had numbered in the hundreds. Subsistence fishing, some menial day labor, and weekly lodge meetings almost no one attended—this was the depth to which he and his had sunk. His ancestors wept.

Mehi knew this because the sound of it filled his dreams every night, he who was supposed to take over leadership from his senile father, and only the solace of the bottle managed to drown out the voices and hide him from the pain of his lost dignity. It was a sad state of affairs. When his younger brother tried to rouse these remnants to protest the building of a chemical treatment plant near



what little land they still held, polluting the waters they were supposed to still view as sacred, Mehi merely sneered and dismissed the whole episode. That moment of cynical, self-centered weakness still burns in his soul, so many years later. Without a clear head to lead them, the young rowdies turned to violence as their path of protest, setting explosives to destroy the plant that had become the focal point of all their frustrations and hate.

A pity they really didn't know what they were doing.

The explosives did destroy the main processors...but they also released a cloud of poisonous gas and dumped chemical reservoirs into the ocean, further polluting the waters. Insult added to injury, the explosions also killed the would-be saboteurs when they detonated earlier than planned. The cloud poisoned and killed many of the residents around the plant, including the majority of Mehi's few remaining kin. Even if they had survived, the damage to the surrounding environment wiped out even the pitiful dregs of a fishing industry that had been the only real source of sustenance and income anyone Mehi knew by name. Even the miserable excuse for a life he had known was now only a memory. With nothing left but his self-pity, Mehi walked out into the ocean and began to swim. Eventually he would reach a point where he wouldn't have the strength to swim back and the ocean would claim him. This was good. It would be a fitting death to one who had failed in his

RED TIDE

PL 11

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+10	+4	+9	+1	+2	+4
30	18	28	13	15	18
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX		WILL	
+13	+11	+6		+6	

Skills: Acrobatics 3 (+7), Bluff 3 (+7), Handle Animal 6 (+10), Intimidate 8 (+12), Knowledge (earth science) 3 (+4), Knowledge (life science) 3 (+4), Language 2 (English, Japanese [Maori is native]), Notice 4 (+6), Search 6 (+7), Sense Motive 6 (+8), Stealth 3 (+7), Survival 5 (+7), Swim 8 (+18)

Feats: Animal Empathy, Attack Focus 4 (melee), Connected, Contacts, Dodge Focus 4, Environmental Adaptation (underwater), Fearless, Improved Grab, Improved Initiative, Inspire 2, Move-by Action, Rage, Startle, Stunning Attack, Taunt

Powers: **Immunity 3** (cold, drowning, pressure), **Protection 3**, **Super-Strength 5** (heavy load: 24 tons), **Super-Senses 1** (low-light vision), **Swimming 5** (50 mph), **Water Control 15** (Alternate Powers: **Blast 10** [Extras: Cone Area], **Blast 10** [Extras: Line Area], **Snare 10** [Extras: Regenerating, Suffocating; Flaws: Entangle], **Stun 10** [Extras: Ranged], **Trip 10** [Extras: Line Area, Knockback])

Combat: Attack +10 (melee), +6 (ranged), Grapple +25, Damage +10 (melee), +10 (blast), Defense +10 (+3 flatfooted), Knockback -6, Initiative +8

Abilities 62 + Skills 15 (60 ranks) + Feats 22 + Powers 57 + Combat 24 + Saves 8 = Total 188

responsibilities to the ocean on every level. When the waves closed over his head and cold water filled his lungs, he simply let go and embraced death as everything went black.

He was quite shocked when death spurned him. Coming to his senses, he realized two things at the same time: First that he was breathing under water without any difficulty, and second, there before him, immense and glorious, singing to him, was a whale. No one had seen a whale in these forsaken waters since before Mehi had been born, the migratory paths changing to steer clear of the area. Mehi's people had taken that cruel fact of nature as yet another rejection aimed at them, but now, here, Mehi was forgiven for his failures and sins. In his mind, there was no other explanation for what was happening to him. As his redemption swam away from him, Mehi saw in a bright, clear revelation what the future needed from him, what his ancestors demanded. The ocean needed an avenger and protector, and he had been chosen. His old life gone behind him, Mehi's eyes burned with the fire of pure faith and fanaticism, reflecting the fires to come.

Outside of a very few remaining close friends and family of Mehi's, recognizing him from TV news artists composites but resolute in keeping their silence, nobody knows who "Red Tide" really is, and the authorities of several nations would like to change that. Also known in the press occasionally as "Riptide," Red Tide is an eco-terrorist who wears the label as a badge of honor. He has destroyed whaling ships, demolished oil platforms (while leaving the taps undamaged), and generally been an extremely expensive nuisance to any number of commercial concerns around the globe,

though his threat to life and limb has been overplayed to garner public support. Thus far, photographic and video evidence has been sketchy. His name comes from a piece of amateurish poetry he left at the scene of one of his earlier acts of "Mother Earth's Vengeance," where he described his coming as a red tide, heralding an age of man paying for his ecological folly. Subsequent messages left for the press have been equally melodramatic (some would say operatic) and many believe Red Tide has messianic delusions. This hasn't stopped him from drawing followers in various parts of the world, including a few other paranormals here and there, and today his title is just as often applied to this loose group of "accomplices" as it is to him.

Enormously strong and apparently amphibious, Red Tide has demonstrated hydrokinetic abilities of varying power that seem to grow stronger the further away from shore he is. He was once thought to have some degree of control over sea-life as well, but it is now believed this is actually an ability possessed by one of his paranormal associates.

USING RED TIDE

Mehi broke-out due to the trauma of almost drowning, but he refuses to think of himself as a paranormal, or accept any other explanation for his abilities other than as a gift from Mother Earth.

The most obvious use for Red Tide is as an adversary. His rhetoric aside, Red Tide places far less value on human life than he does on his cause. He won't go out of his way to take a life, but if, say, a few whalers go down with their ship, this is nothing more or less than they deserve. He is forthright in his philosophy, but ruthless in its pursuit.

In a series where characters may be sympathetic to his cause, you can introduce Mehi as a potential ally, playing up the positive aspects of his crusade...before brutally displaying for the characters the full extent of his fanaticism, an object lesson in the "there but for the grace of God..." vein.

Appearances and assumptions of the media to the contrary, Red Tide leads no organization. He's a loner. However, he frequently receives aid and cooperation from like-minded paranormals and radical eco-groups. He returns the favor when possible, but keeps his own plans strictly to himself.

LEARNING ABOUT RED TIDE

The following is information characters can learn about Red Tide:

GATHER INFORMATION

The following information is easily garnered from any number of sources, particularly news services, Internet sites devoted to the politics of ecological causes, and various "underground" anti-establishment newsgroups and their followers.

DC 15: Red Tide is a paranormal eco-terrorist operating mostly in the Pacific Ocean.

DC 20: Red Tide has amassed quite a following around the world, including a number of like-minded paranormals. Russian and Japanese corporate and state interests both have hefty prices on his head, figuratively speaking (and literally, if rumors are true).

FATHER SEBASTIAN ROJAS

**"MY CHILD, FEAR NOT WHAT IS IN YOUR HEART.
FEAR ONLY WHAT IS IN MINE."**

Sebastian Rojas grew up in an affluent, devoutly catholic Argentine family. As the youngest of three brothers, Sebastian was pressured from an early age to enter the priesthood, particularly by his paternal grandmother who was convinced having a priest in the family would be to everyone's benefit. The naturally shy and reserved Sebastian seemed an obvious choice to pursue a non-secular career, particularly considering his scholastic aptitude and his position as the family's youngest son.

Sebastian, for his part, was more than open to the option, especially when, in his early teens, he became aware of his growing attraction to other men. Given his conservative Catholic upbringing, it was no surprise Sebastian became progressively more uncomfortable with his sexual orientation, eventually deciding the seminary and a celibate lifestyle was the most attractive career choice if he wanted to lead any kind of life his family would approve of.

Upon graduating seminary, Sebastian was sent to a remote community in Argentina's La Rioja Province, at the base of the Andes Mountains, to complete his training under the tutelage of Father Rodrigo, a nearly retired priest who had run the community's small mission for decades.

While the distance from his overbearing family was appealing, Sebastian found the isolation of the small village almost as difficult to deal with as the villagers themselves. Rural isolation had made the townsfolk fearful of outsiders and highly superstitious, both of which seemed reinforced by Father Rodrigo and his Old World style. Sebastian quickly came to feel as if he were lost in a strange land. Seeing this, Father Rodrigo reached out to Sebastian, seeking to make his time in La Rioja more rewarding. Despite the profound differences in their age and background, Sebastian and Rodrigo became close friends, Sebastian even going so far as to confide his true reasons for joining the priesthood to his newfound mentor.

The sense that Sebastian had somehow been transported to foreign soil was reinforced when, late one night, an obviously agitated Father Rodrigo woke Sebastian saying they were needed in town. The pair made their way as quickly as they could to the home of a young local family, whereupon they were escorted to the room of the couple's young son. As the door opened, Sebastian was confronted with an unbelievable site: The young boy, not even ten years old, was drenched

in sweat and hurling expletives in what Sebastian immediately recognized as Latin. But was most shocking of all was the boy was doing all of this from ceiling of the room!

"He is possessed," Father Rodrigo stated plainly, "and we must exorcize the demon within him." While Sebastian was skeptical, he trusted Father Rodrigo, so the two of them set to work. For nearly five hours, they struggled with the child, who in addition to a startlingly vile grasp of Latin also demonstrated an unnatural strength, resulting in both Father Rodrigo and Sebastian being thrown across the room more than once. But the priests were dauntless and, eventually, through focused prayer and conviction, managed to overcome the demon and free the boy.



But, while the child soon returned to normal, Father Rojas was profoundly changed by the exorcism. Over the next several weeks, Sebastian found himself losing increasingly longer spans of time while, simultaneously, strange acts of unexplained violence plagued the local community. Finally, one day Sebastian looked into the mirror to see a grim face not his own staring back at him. Frightened, Sebastian immediately went to Father Rodrigo seeking guidance. Rodrigo examined Sebastian and was dismayed to realize the demon exorcized from village boy seemed to have taken root in Sebastian's soul.

Although Father Rodrigo's efforts to further exorcize the demon met with failure, Rodrigo was able to offer Sebastian a ray of hope. He told Sebastian this might be part of God's plan for him, an opportunity for

ROJAS

PL 12

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+8/+1	+2	+10/+1	+2	+3	+3
26/12	14	30/12	14	17	17
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX		WILL	
+10	+10	+6		+8	

Skills: Bluff 4 (+7), Intimidate 8 (+11), Knowledge (arcane lore) 8 (+10), Knowledge (theology and philosophy) 8 (+10), Language 4 (English, Italian, Latin, Portuguese [Spanish is native]), Notice 4 (+7), Sense Motive 8 (+11)

Feats: Fearless, Ritualist

Powers: **Enhanced Feats 7** (Accurate Attack, All-Out Attack, Defensive Attack, Power Attack, Quick Change, Startle, Taunt), **Enhanced Strength 14, Enhanced Constitution 18, Hellfire Control 12** [Alternate Powers: **Emotion Control 12** [Extras: Burst Area (60-ft radius); Flaws: Range-Touch], **Fire Control 12**, **Hellfire Blade 12** [Strike; Extras: Penetrating], **Hellfire Chains 12** [Snare], **Teleport 9** [anywhere on earth; Power Feats: Change Direction, Change Velocity, Progression 3 (1,000 lbs), Turnabout]), **Immunity 10** (aging, life support), **Leaping 5, Super-Strength 4** (heavy load: 7.2 tons)

Combat: Attack +10, Grapple +22, Damage +8 (melee), +12 (hellfire), Defense +10 (+5 flat-footed), Knockback -5, Initiative +2

Drawbacks: Normal Identity (major, uncommon, -3), Involuntary Transformation (uncommon, moderate -2)

Abilities 26 + Skills 11 (44 ranks) + Feats 2 + Powers 91 + Combat 40 + Saves 9–Drawbacks 5 = Total 174

Sebastian to overcome all of his demons. An avid student of the occult, Father Rodrigo claimed with the right incantations and invocations, Sebastian might be able to not only bind the powers of the demon within him, but also use those powers to do good in the world.

Intrigued by the possibility, Rojas agreed to try. After spending the next several months in intense study and meditation, Rojas eventually learned to call forth the powers of the demon at will, although doing so initiated a significant physical change in Rojas. His demonic self was taller and broader of build, with deep red skin and fiercely burning eyes. The first test of Rojas' newfound abilities came when a spring flashflood threatened the town. Although it frightened the locals to see him do so, Rojas was forced to call upon his demonic powers to rescue several villagers from the rushing waters.

The superstitious townsfolk, however, could not let such an incident pass and, days later, descended on Father Rodrigo's mission with machetes and torches, demanding Rodrigo surrender his young protégé to meet with Christian justice. When Rodrigo refused, the infuriated villagers attempted to burn the mission to the ground with Rodrigo and Rojas still inside. Unable to contain his rage, Rojas' demon-half burst forth and, in a blind rage, slaughtered the entire mob. Unable to contain or control himself, he was also unable to save his friend. Father Rodrigo died in the fire and, to the rest of the world, so did Rojas.

Filled with shame and grief, Rojas set out on his own. To this day, he travels the back roads of South America, offering what help he

can to those in need, all the while seeking a better way to control the demons within him.

USING ROJAS

Whether Rojas is friend or foe is up to the GM and the style of the series. If Rojas' efforts to contain and control his demonic nature are successful, he could be a powerful ally, using his paranormal powers as a modern day Robin Hood, helping the less fortunate, possibly ministering to and protecting the needy on the back roads of Argentina and Chile, in which case he might be sought out by an agency like Vanguard as a potential recruit.

Alternately, a GM could decide Rojas' demonic nature is completely uncontrollable, which would make him a potent antagonist and a threat to the safety and security of everyone who crossed his path.

The most interesting option may be to mix the two scenarios. In this case, Rojas' struggle with his demonic side might be a hard won fight, one moment serving to assist him in his desire to shield and shepherd the weak, the next becoming a slathering monster intent on slaughtering anyone in reach. Rojas might become involved with other religious paranormals or groups, such as the Church of Jesus Christ, Paragon (where he could be aligned with either faction) or even the Seven Thunders, if he decides his true purpose is to "exorcise" the demonic taint of all paranormals.

LEARNING ABOUT ROJAS

The following is information characters could potentially learn about Rojas:

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 10: Tourism in La Rioja, a rural province of Argentina has begun to dwindle amidst rumors that the superstitious locals are convinced all outsiders are "possessed."

DC 15: A mission in rural La Rioja was recently burned to the ground by a mob, claiming the priests of the mission were harboring demons. The two priests were killed in the conflagration.

DC 20: Villagers claim that, before they attacked the mission, one of the priests transformed into a demonic figure and attacked several villagers.

DC 25: Other witnesses claim the same demonic figure rescued several townsfolk from drowning during a flash flood only days earlier.

17

"GOD DIDN'T WANT YOU TO HAVE THAT PUPPY WHEN YOU WERE YOUNGER; THAT'S WHY HE TOOK IT."

The person formerly known as Zephaniah Hallowbrook has told his full story to very few, but the rumors of his "power" have spread. Once a brilliant but proud professor of cultural anthropology (popular with his Penn State students and peers but largely unknown to the outside world), 29-year-old Professor Hallowbrook's life changed during a hobbyist spelunking expedition with his friend and colleague, Dr. Manny Havel. While exploring a section of a cave in the Poconos that didn't appear on their surveys, Hallowbrook ended up separated from Dr. Havel after he slid down a steep passage.

Dazed after his long fall, Dr. Hallowbrook was awoken by a casually dressed stranger who offered him a cigarette. Zephaniah refused,

and the two struck up a conversation. The stranger (who sidestepped questions about his name) asked him about himself: his wants, his desires. Hallowbrook scoffed, "Are we playing Twenty Questions?"

The stranger picked up the theme. "What if we were? What if I offered *you* twenty questions, with answers provided as truthfully as possible in one breath?" The price (he explained) was only his soul. Hallowbrook, a forceful agnostic, chuckled; his body ached from the abrasions and contusions and he was sure he had a concussion and was quite possibly hallucinating. As the searching cries of Dr. Havel echoed faintly to them, Hallowbrook agreed to this game, then he passed out.

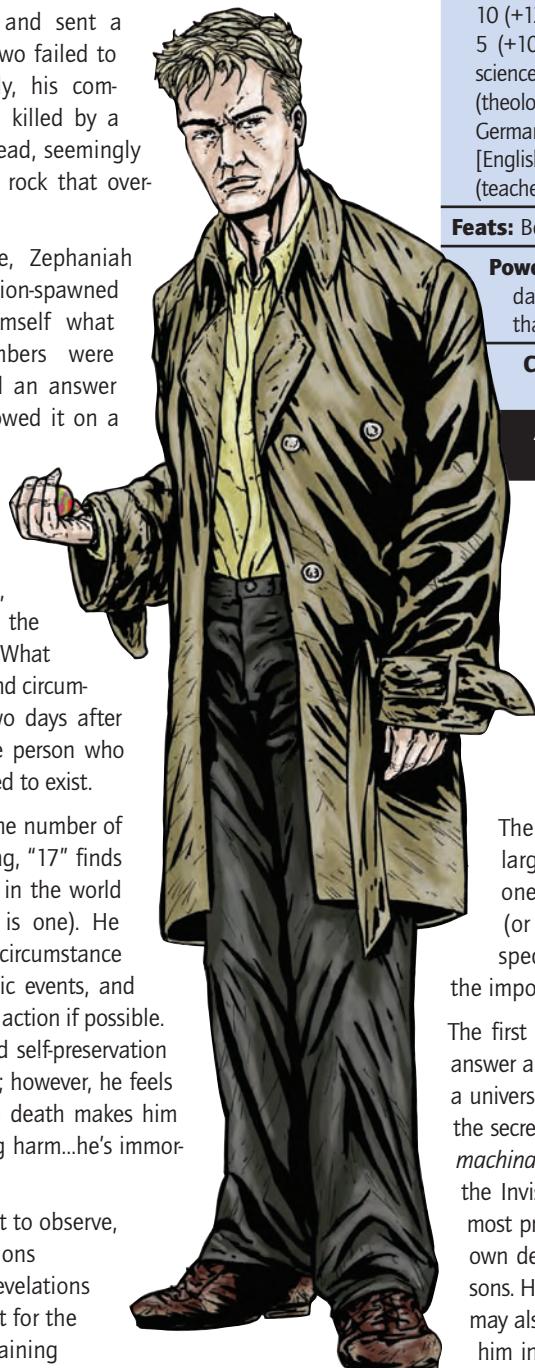
He awoke in a hospital; his rescuers had followed caver protocol and sent a recovery party after the two failed to rendezvous. Unfortunately, his companion Manny had been killed by a mysterious blow to the head, seemingly caused by a large fallen rock that overwhelmed his helmet.

After he returned home, Zephaniah remembered his concussion-spawned delusions and asked himself what tomorrow's lottery numbers were going to be. He received an answer out of nowhere and followed it on a whim. The next day Dr. Hallowbrook was a multimillionaire.

Now a believer, he used two more questions to ask, "What is the truth behind the existence of God?" and "What are the exact date, time, and circumstances of my death?" Two days after receiving the answers, the person who was Dr. Hallowbrook ceased to exist.

Taking his moniker from the number of questions he has remaining, "17" finds himself an unlikely figure in the world of paragons (if he even is one). He often finds himself—by circumstance or choice—near cataclysmic events, and places himself close to the action if possible. He has an attitude toward self-preservation others would find suicidal; however, he feels his knowledge of his own death makes him invulnerable to any lasting harm...he's immortal until his time comes.

Beyond that, 17 is content to observe, offer advice and observations (although never the full revelations of his questions), and wait for the right times to use his remaining questions. Given his reluctance to ask them, he probably believes he has a long time to deliberate. Once he uses another question, 17 will change his name to 16...and so on. Who he will be when he becomes "0" is a matter of some debate, but he comforts himself by saying that day is far off.



17

PL 10

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+0	+1	+0	+5	+1	+2
10	12	10	20	13	15
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+0	+4	+6	+9		

Skills: Bluff 15 (+17), Computers 2 (+7), Concentration 4 (+5), Diplomacy 10 (+12), Gather Information 15 (+17), Intimidate 5 (+7), Investigate 5 (+10), Knowledge (arcane lore) 6 (+11), Knowledge (behavioral sciences) 9 (+14), Knowledge (popular culture) 6 (+11), Knowledge (theology and philosophy) 7 (+12), Language 10 (Esperanto, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Latin, Lojban, Russian, Spanish [English is native]), Medicine 3 (+4), Notice 10 (+11), Profession (teacher) 10 (+11), Search 8 (+13), Sense Motive 15 (+16)

Feats: Benefit 6 (wealth bonus 32), Connected, Fascinate (Bluff)

Powers: Immunity 50 (lethal physical damage, lethal energy damage, mental effects; **Flaws:** Limited—Only vs. lethal damage that would kill him, Mental effects limited to his powers only)

Combat: Attack +4, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +0, Initiative +1, Knockback -0

Abilities 20 + Skills 35 (140 ranks) + Feats 8 + Powers 45 + Combat 8 + Saves 17 = Total 133

Eschewing any sort of formal costume, 17 is nevertheless distinctive. With wire-rim half-circle glasses and disheveled dirty-blonde hair, he wears a yellow dress shirt and black slacks with a tan trench coat from the 1920s. He carries around two sets of metal Baoding or "harmony" balls, which he rotates around in his hands almost constantly; in a pinch he can use them as thrown weapons.

USING 17

The role the enigmatic 17 plays in a campaign depends largely on the Gamemaster. While 17 *claims* to possess one of the most awesome powers imaginable, his ability (or willingness) to back up his claims is somewhat circumspect; if he were in a world where people *don't* routinely do the impossible, he would be immediately dismissed as a lunatic.

The first option is 17's power is exactly what he claims: He can answer anything with absolute truth. In this case, 17 could serve as a universal plot device, either as a catalyst for adventure ("What is the secret for designing an undetectable pathogen?") or a *deus ex machina* for resolving one ("What is the compound for neutralizing the Invisible Plague?"). Given that 17 views his questions as his most precious resource and he knows the time and nature of his own demise, he is unlikely to utilize his powers for frivolous reasons. However, he can be persuaded in extreme situations, and he may also offer a *carte blanche* use of a question to those who aid him in a project of his choosing (providing a unique campaign reward).

The stats for 17 presume that his abilities are genuine. For the most part, his question ability (if it's real) should be handled via GM fiat; it's a plot device to provide otherwise unknowable information. If guidance is required, treat it as if 17 can automatically succeed on

any Knowledge or Gather Information check at any level of difficulty, provided the information can be revealed in one "normal" breath. His immunity to mental effects only applies to attempts to force him to use his questioning ability. He can be mind controlled, but he can't be compelled to use his power; paranormals can read his mind on any subject except for the answers he's received to any questions, and so on. Since this is a side effect of an ability he may not "really" have, it is worth no points.

Likewise his immunity to lethal attacks only applies to effects that can kill him; he can be knocked unconscious, injured, and so on, but he can't die until it's his time to die. (Technically, nobody dies until it's their turn to die, either, but this power is listed more to represent the foreknowledge he has of his own mortality, which enables him to take risks others dare not.)

The second option is 17 is a fraud (albeit a lucky one who won the lottery); he might be a charlatan or merely delusional. However, given the nature of most of his claims and his ability to fast-talk and tell people what they want to hear, it's a hard bluff to unmask. In this case, 17 can serve as a living example of what it means to be paranormal; trying to prove that someone *can't* do the impossible is tricky.

If the GM decides 17 is a charlatan, simply drop his powers entirely. He's merely been lucky so far in his delusions about his own immortality, and possesses sufficient social skills that most people he meets are likely to believe what he says about his "powers."

One final option is everything 17 says is true (as he perceives it), but he has been misled about the nature of his powers; he might actually be able to use his abilities as often as he likes, and the twenty questions was just an arbitrary limit established by the mysterious stranger (or himself). In this case, should 17 ever discern his true nature—probably after burning through his 17 remaining questions—he could quite possibly become one of the most powerful paragons ever.

Regardless of 17's ultimate truth, his wealth makes him a suitable option for a patron, either for specific adventures or as a series regular. Missions for 17 might focus on gleaning greater understanding of the universe, investigating the nature of the entity with which he made his deal, or searching for new topics worthy enough of utilizing a question.

LEARNING ABOUT 17

Information on 17 is difficult to come by. Nevertheless, investigations of police or eyewitness accounts for trench-coatclad individuals suspiciously near the scenes of paranormal activities might provide some leads.

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 10: The person known as 17 is called such because he can supposedly know the answers to any 17 questions.

DC 15: The enigmatic 17 started with twenty questions, but he has used three of them already.

DC 20: One of the questions was about the winning lottery numbers and he *did* win the lottery.

DC 25: The two others questions were, "What is the truth behind the existence of God?" and "What are the exact date, time, and circumstances of my death?" So far as anyone knows, 17 has never told the answers to his two questions to anyone. He also seems immune to efforts to retrieve that information (for example, via paranormal powers).

DC 30: Although the answers to 17's questions are unknown, with his reluctance to use his remaining questions and his general lack of personal regard, he seems to have faith in the answer to the question about his own death.

DC 35: An individual named Zephaniah Hallowbrook won the lottery a week before 17's first known sighting; Hallowbrook disappeared shortly thereafter and his current whereabouts are unknown. Rumor has it Hallowbrook sold his soul for his powers.

SILAS THE ELDER

"HUMOR AN OLD MAN, CHILD...AS YOU SAY, THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS MAGIC, SO WHAT POSSIBLE HARM COULD THERE BE IN A SIMPLE BARGAIN, HMM?"

A member of the Pact's Council of Elders, Silas is a master of innuendo and the half-whispered statement. He has artfully dropped hints to various people implying he has known, or even been, many of the great mystics of history—also implying he's far older than even his apparent advanced age. The actual truth may turn out to be more straightforward, or it could even be stranger still than the tales he spins.

Though a powerful member of the Pact, Silas has never demonstrated the kind of sorcerous powers members of that organization claim to have, or, at least, he's never done so openly. He likes to move and act through proxies and pawns when he can, keeping his own hands clean. He prefers to exercise his power through politics and personal connections, despite any arcane prowess he may possess.

It's been demonstrated for the lower ranks in the organization that Silas is either feared or deeply respected by the other Elders. Bicker among themselves as they might, the others all seem to go quiet when he speaks, and his carefully worded "suggestions" or "advice" are always heeded. None of the other Elders seem prone to arguing with him, at least not for very long, nor ever twice on the same subject. Be it through some arcane power or simply because he knows where all the bodies are buried, Silas is obviously the real power at the Elders' table—leaving everyone else to jockey for second place.

Corpulent, rotund even, he is also seldom seen to stir far from his manor house in Glastonbury, England. This doesn't stop him from being involved with the occult community around the world, but it does provide him with an airtight alibi regarding complicity in any of the dozen or so plans he has in motion at any given time around the world.

USING SILAS THE ELDER

Silas is reminiscent of Sydney Greenstreet in *The Maltese Falcon* (although with more competent agents) or perhaps as an evil and arcane reflection of Rex Stout's detective Nero Wolfe, the mastermind who works through his agents while he rests safely in the center of his web, hatching one self-serving scheme after another—those are certainly images that would amuse Silas greatly. His agents, Empress, Glyph, and Styx, are the characters players are more likely to encounter (and learn to hate, should it come to that).

Silas can be of great use as an obstacle and enemy. He isn't a gloating victim of melodramatic megalomania, nor does he aspire to anything as grandiose as world-domination or all that nonsense. His agendas are pragmatic, carefully planned, and expertly executed. Think in terms of a highly successful corporate boardroom power-player, not so much the serial movie villain. Silas has no qualms

SILAS THE ELDER

PL 10

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
-1	+0	+0	+5	+6	+4
8	11	11	20	23	18
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+3	+3	+2	+12		

Skills: Bluff 14 (+18), Computers 2 (+7), Concentration 8 (+14), Diplomacy 8 (+12), Gather Information 8 (+12), Intimidate 4 (+8), Knowledge (arcane lore) 13 (+18), Knowledge (business) 7 (+12), Knowledge (civics) 8 (+13), Knowledge (theology and philosophy) 8 (+13), Language 7 (Ancient Greek, Aramaic, Classical Latin, Enochian, French, German, Russian [English is native]), Notice 6 (+12), Profession (international businessman) 9 (+15), Search 6 (+11), Sense Motive 14 (+20), Sleight of Hand 2 (+2)

Feats: Benefit 8 (wealth bonus 40), Connected, Contacts, Fascinate (Bluff), Master Plan, Minions 23 (as assassin archetype x 5, as crime lord archetype x 10, as cultist archetype x 250 [see *M&M*, page 226]), Ritualist, Skill Mastery (Bluff, Diplomacy, Gather Information, Sense Motive), Taunt, Tough 3, Well-Informed

Powers: **Device 3** (Ring of Osiris, hard to lose), **Device 7** (Obsidian Oracle, hard to lose), **Immunity 1** (aging), **Mind Control 10** (geas; *Extras*: Duration—Continuous; *Flaws*: Action—Full Action, One Command—“keep this bargain”; *Power Feats*: Subtle), **Super Senses 1** (mystic awareness)

Ring of Osiris: **Regeneration 4** (Resurrection 1/hour), **Healing 5** (*Extras*: Total; *Flaws*: Personal Only; *Power Feats*: Triggered by successful resurrection)

Obsidian Oracle: **ESP 9** (all senses; *Extras*: No Conduit; *Flaws*: Concentration Check Required, Distracting; *Power Feats*: Dimensional 2 [Imageria and related dimensions], Subtle 2), **Super Senses 8** (precognition, postcognition; *Flaws*: Unreliable)

Combat: Attack +3, Grapple +2, Damage -1 (unarmed), Defense +4 (+2 flatfooted), Knockback -1, Initiative +0

Abilities 31+ **Skills 31 (124 ranks)** + **Feats 42 + Powers 63 + Combat 14 + Saves 11 = Total 192**

about compromising the effectiveness of his erstwhile foes in any way he can, whether he buys them off, or uses any other means that he comes up with. He's equally cold and soulless when it comes to killing. If that's the most effective option, then that's what he arranges, but murder is so messy, inelegant, and vulgar—seldom the most efficient solution to a problem and almost never as satisfying as owning your opponent outright. Waste not, want not, Silas says.

Conversely, Silas makes for a valuable, albeit demanding, ally or patron. In Silas' world, everything is a matter of *quid pro quo*. He doesn't dole out favors so much as he amasses debts owed. Though his connections and resources can be useful, they come with unbreakable strings attached. The characters should never know when Silas is going to require something from them, even if it's only to test their loyalties.

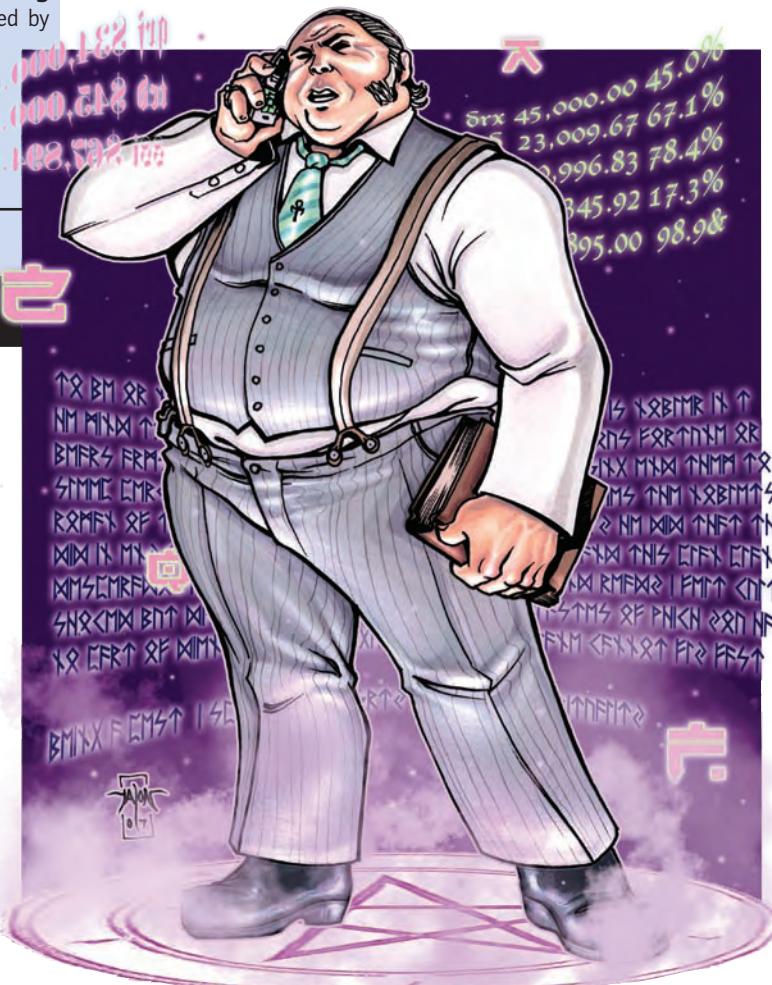
As with many members of the Pact, Silas doesn't have direct and showy spellcasting abilities, but is instead a

master of occult lore, symbolism, and ritual. Between his Knowledge (arcane lore) bonus and his Ritualist feat, he can accomplish impressive magic, given time and resources. His major arcane tools are his mastery of the geas—when Silas makes a bargain, that bargain is *kept*—and his apparently arcane artifacts, especially the Obsidian Oracle, an ancient talisman with legendary divining and scrying abilities. The Oracle allows him, with effort, to see anywhere on Earth or in the Imageria (though this latter feature may draw unwanted attention, so he uses it sparingly). It also allows him to pierce the veils of time, either into the future or into the past. However, if he tries to be too precise in his extra-temporal viewings, the images become muddled, and the Oracle turns the entire experience into cryptic images and riddles that must be deciphered, often by Silas' agents.

Note that Silas is not built for combat (or much else involving physical exertion). Of course, to get your hands on Silas, you have to find him first, and get past his layers of traps, defenses, and minions before he can make good his escape. Even then, he's more resilient than his appearance suggests, and the Ring of Osiris grants him a second chance should he meet his demise. Then comes his careful yet terrifying revenge...

LEARNING ABOUT SILAS THE ELDER

The following represents information characters can learn about Silas the Elder. Keep in mind the guidelines for Gather Information checks, since Silas keeps an ear to the ground about inquiries into his affairs, and will take the appropriate action should somebody become too curious for their own good.



GATHER INFORMATION

Making this check represents the information a character can acquire by making inquiries in the law enforcement community.

DC 20: His name has been mentioned in connection with numerous dealings in the occult underworld.

DC 25: That name is an alias believed to be used by a British national and businessman Silas Pettigrew, a noted collector of antiquities who is believed to be less than particular regarding the origins of the items he acquires.

KNOWLEDGE (ARCANE LORE)

Asking people within the occult community can usually find the following information. Be aware that such communities are usually guarded about their lore, and information is often only available in exchange for other knowledge, or for favors/services owed.

DC 15: He's a member of the Council of Elders. They're the leaders of the occult fraternity known as the Pact.

DC 20: He's a powerful "fixer" within the occult underworld, able to provide services and difficult-to-find resources...but his services come with a high price tag, and not always in terms of money alone.

DC 25: He holds the strings behind a number of powerful figures in the international occult community, including dangerous ones like Empress or Mr. Styx.

UGLY JAKE

"WHATCHOO LOOKING AT?!"

The day Jacob Terelli decided to become an actor was the day he turned his back on his family and their heritage. For four generations, the Terellis worked as cogs within the Mafia machine and Jacob, the youngest of the newest generation, decided he wanted more in life. So, with high hopes and a Masters in Theatrics, Jacob left his family and traded a future life of crime for a supporting role in a few B-movies. His life wasn't perfect, but he felt he was making a difference and was enjoying his craft. Then his breakout happened, granting him the ability to cause sickness within anyone looking at his face.

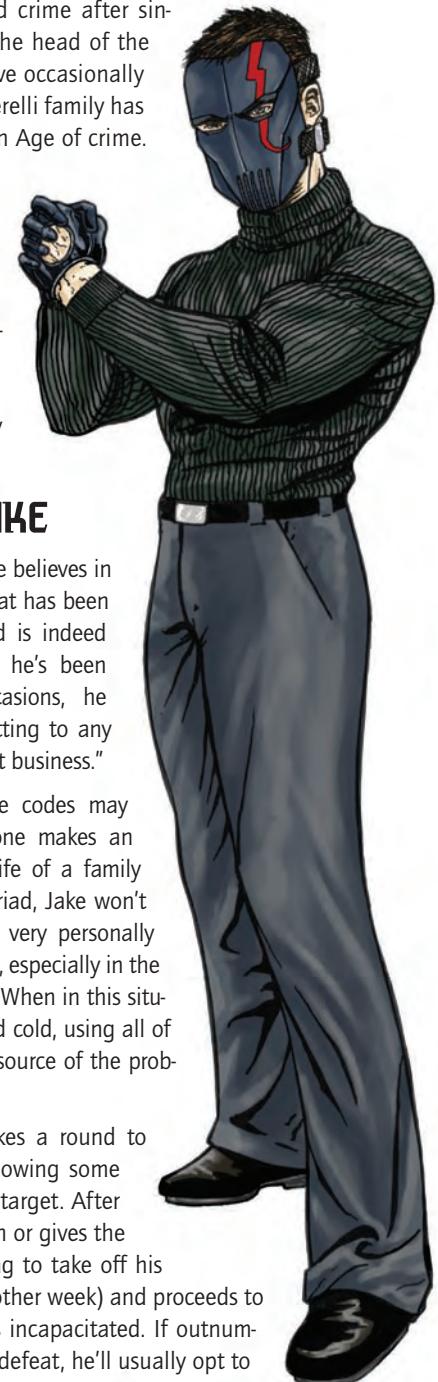
In the few days it took for his powers to fully manifest, his hopes were crushed and his potential career had become a thing of the past, destroyed by his newfound "gift." Directors who were interested in him suddenly shut their doors and the money quickly dried up. With nowhere else to go, Jacob turned to his family. Even with his strange abilities, they took him in with open arms. Within a few months, the disappointment of his former career was replaced by duty to family. At first, it was small jobs like shaking down a shop owner or informing people they owed the "family" money. But, as time progressed and he understood how his powers worked, Jacob, or "Ugly Jake" as he'd become known, became one of the Terelli family's top enforcers.

On one job, he and his brothers, Marco and Peter, were supposed to meet with Jimmy Gin, the leader of the Gin Triad, a rival family for the territory. The meeting was supposed to smooth over any bad blood between the two families and help them come to a truce. But when the Terelli brothers got there, they found more than they bargained for. Jimmy Gin was indeed there, but so were many of the Triad's members.

Feeling like lambs led to a slaughter, Marco attempted to talk to Gin about the problems. Those were the last words that Marco said. Within seconds, the room was filled with the bursts of gunfire. Peter and Jake dove for cover, pulling out their own weapons. As they landed on the ground, Jake looked over and noticed Peter was lying in a pool of his own blood.

Enraged, Jake ripped off his mask and stood up, squeezing the triggers of his pistols until everyone fell down from his power or a bullet wound. He then finished off any remaining members of the Triad. When he finally found Jimmy Gin among those lying dead, he lowered his pistol and stared at the man, pushing the barrel hard against the other's forehead before he squeezed the trigger and put a bullet through his head. With that, he gathered his brothers' bodies and, by the time the police responded, there was no trace of the Terelli family being involved.

Since then, Ugly Jake has become something of a celebrity within organized crime after single-handedly taking down the head of the Gin Triad. Other families have occasionally asked for his help and the Terelli family has experienced a sort of Golden Age of crime. On the downside, however, their "good fortune" has also garnered the notice of the Syndicate, which has talked to Jake a few times. Thus far, he's managed to keep them at bay by explaining his loyalty to his family...but that can only last so long.



USING UGLY JAKE

Jake isn't really a bad guy. He believes in staying loyal to the family that has been loyal to him and that blood is indeed thicker than water. Though he's been confronted on various occasions, he rarely holds a grudge, admitting to any opponents that his job is "just business."

The only times where these codes may be broken are when someone makes an attempt on his life or the life of a family member. Like with the Gin Triad, Jake won't hold back and takes things very personally when his family is threatened, especially in the wake of his brothers' deaths. When in this situation, he's both merciless and cold, using all of his skills to exterminate the source of the problem in the swiftest way.

In combat, Jake usually takes a round to use his Assessment feat, allowing some of his minions to swarm his target. After which, he either pulls his gun or gives the code that signifies he's going to take off his mask (which changes every other week) and proceeds to beat on his target(s) as he's incapacitated. If outnumbered or within moments of defeat, he'll usually opt to run, using anything or anyone nearby to facilitate his

escape. If captured, he'll use his connections to get the best lawyers available to get him out of jail. He's rarely anywhere without a few of his men (use the Gang Leader archetype, see *M&M*, page 227) and often keeps many "on-call" in the event that he needs backup.

LEARNING ABOUT UGLY JAKE

The following is information player characters could potentially learn about Ugly Jake:

GATHER INFORMATION

This check represents information a character may find in reputable sources such as newspapers, public files or police contacts.

DC 10: Ugly Jake wears a mask for some reason and he apparently works for the Mob.

DC 15: Jake is being sought for questioning regarding a gangland massacre that happened in Chinatown.

DC 20: For some reason, seeing his face makes people fall ill, some of whom have required hospital time.

KNOWLEDGE (STREETWISE)

Making this check represents the information a character may acquire by making inquiries in the criminal underground or with organized crime. Keep in mind that such inquiries might draw unwanted attention unless the character is particularly discreet.

DC 5: Ugly Jake works with the Terelli family.

DC 10: Jake took down Jimmy Gin, leader of the Gin Triad, and his men all by himself. Most people these days steer clear of him unless they're family.

DC 15: For some reason, seeing his face makes people fall ill, some of whom have required hospital time.

DC 20: Ugly Jake is bad news. He runs with a group of armed men who act has his enforcers and bodyguards. Because of the Gin Triad's defeat, even the Yakuza have considered making allies with the Terelli family now.

THE UNIFIER

"YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE UNITY, BUT YOU WILL."

Trauma often triggers a paranormal's breakout, the realization of their superhuman potential. A traumatic event may also influence the shape and form of a paragon's powers. This is certainly the case with Carol Molloy. Carol—a married suburban elementary-school teacher—has always strongly valued family and community. She lives in the small town of Unity with her husband Tom (a freelance technical writer) and their two sons, Derek (age 12) and Kevin (age 8).

Recently, a car accident left Carol comatose, and triggered her latent paranormal potential in a most unexpected way. Her unconscious mind sought out connections with the people around her, forging a telepathic link. This link brought about a literal "meeting of the minds." The people mentally connected to Carol mingled their consciousnesses, becoming a single mind, strongly influenced by her overriding subconscious. What's more, they served as "carriers" of their mental connection, and passed it on to other people by physical contact, further expanding the group-mind.

UGLY JAKE						PL 10
STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA	
+3	+3	+3	+2	+2	+3	
17	16	16	15	15	17	
TOUGHNESS		FORTITUDE		REFLEX		WILL
+7/+3*		+4		+5		+4

*Flatfooted

Skills: Acrobatics 3 (+6), Bluff 5 (+8), Diplomacy 3 (+6), Disable Device 3 (+6), Disguise 2 (+5), Drive 3 (+6), Gather Information 3 (+6), Intimidate 5 (+8), Knowledge (Civics) 3 (+5), Knowledge (Popular culture) 5 (+7), Knowledge (Streetwise) 4 (+6), Knowledge (Tactics) 2 (+4), Language 4 (Italian, Japanese, Russian [English is native]), Medicine 1 (+3), Notice 3 (+5), Perform (Acting) 5 (+8), Search 5 (+7), Sense Motive 4 (+6), Sleight of Hand 2 (+5), Stealth 4 (+7)

Feats: All-Out Attack, Assessment, Attack Focus (ranged), Benefit (Terelli Crime Family enforcer), Connected, Contacts, Defensive Roll 4, Diehard, Distract (Bluff), Equipment 5, Fascinate (Intimidate), Fearsome Presence (5 ft., DC 11), Minions 8, Power Attack, Quick Draw 2, Startle, Well-Informed

Equipment: Cell-phone, two heavy pistols (+4 damage), quick-release mask, shotgun (+5/+6 damage, see *M&M*, page 139)

Powers: **Nauseate 10** (Extras: Duration—Continuous, Aura, Range—Perception; Flaws: Sense-Dependent [Sight] Permanent)

Combat: Attack +8 (melee), +9 (ranged), Grapple +11, Damage +3 (melee), Defense +7 (+4 flat-footed), Knockback -3, Initiative +3

Abilities 36 + Skills 17 (68 ranks) + Feats 32 + Powers 60 + Combat 30 + Saves 5 = Total 180

Guided by Carol's subconscious, this new "Unity" has taken on a life of its own. To the components of the Unity, their existence is infinitely better than that of ordinary people. They are connected in a most profound way. They are truly united in understanding and without hate, fear, or prejudice, and they want to share their newfound understanding with others, for their own good...whether they want it or not. Soon, everyone will understand the true meaning of belonging, and the world will be one, and finally at peace, unless someone does something to stop it.

USING THE UNIFIER

The Unifier and the Unity are meant to offer a moral quandry: What is the price of peace and happiness? On the one hand, the Unity claims it means no harm, and people who join it seem content. On the other hand, the Unity goes against all ideals of individual worth, independence, and self-determination. By its very nature, the entity must take away the free will of other to survive and grow. It is difficult, at best, for the Unity to peacefully co-exist with humanity.

You can use the Unity as a misunderstood paranormal force in your series, putting the characters in the position of having to stop it, one way or another. Alternately, you can make the entity more malevolent in order to remove any moral doubts the characters might have. If the Unity is more predatory—a clear and present danger to humanity—then characters can more easily do what must be done, although it still shouldn't be easy when it finally comes down to eliminating a wife and the mother of two young boys for the good of humanity.

THE UNITY AND A MORE PERFECT UNION

If you have or intend to run the *Paragons* adventure *A More Perfect Union*, the characters may have already encountered the Unifier and the Unity. If so, then use of the character in your series depends on the outcome of that adventure. Assuming Carol Molloy is alive, her powers as the Unifier may resurface. Even if Carol is dead, it doesn't mean the Unity is gone: The group-mind's essence could have taken shelter in one or more of the minds connected to it, waiting and gathering strength to grow and expand once more. Consult the **Further Adventures** section of *A More Perfect Union* for details and more options.

LEARNING ABOUT THE UNIFER

The following is information characters might learn about the Unifier. It assumes they have not encountered Mrs. Molloy or the group-mind previously.

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 10: Unity is a small town of few thousand people. It's really insular and not too friendly towards outsiders.

DC 15: A few people have gone missing near Unity or passing through town. The local police are investigating but, it may be a cover-up of some sort.

DC 20: The police are in on it. Everyone in the town is in on it. Unity is a cover for some kind of cult or something. Stay away from there, if you know what's good for you.

THE UNIFER (CAROL MOLLOY) PL 10

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
-1	+0	+0	+12/+1	+12/+1	+1
8	10	11	34/12	35/13	12
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX		WILL	
+0	+2	+2		+15	

Skills: Diplomacy 4 (+5), Knowledge (civics) 2 (+14), Knowledge (current events) 4 (+16), Knowledge (history) 4 (+16), Notice 2 (+14), Profession (teacher) 6 (+18), Profession (writer) 4 (+16), Sense Motive 2 (+14)

Feats: Second Chance (Will saves vs. Mind Control), Ultimate Effort (Will saves)

Powers: Enhanced Intelligence 40 (*Flaws:* Limited—Bonus equal to the force modifier of the Unity; see the **Mass Combat** rules in **Chapter Six** for details, effectively at rank 22), Enhanced Wisdom 40 (*Flaws:* same as Enhanced Intelligence, effectively at rank 22), Mind Control 9 (*Extras:* Conscious, Contagious, Instant Command, Sensory Link, Duration—Sustained; *Flaws:* Requires Grapple, Range—Touch; *Power Feats:* Mind Blank, Mind Link, Subtle), Mind Reading 9 (*Extras:* Duration—Sustained; *Flaws:* Limited—Mind Control subjects only)

Combat: Attack +0, Grapple -1, Damage -1 (unarmed), Defense +0, Knockback -0, Initiative +0

Drawbacks: Disabled (comatose, very common, major, -5 points)

Abilities 6 + Skills 7 (28 ranks) + Feats 2 + Powers 88 + Combat 0 + Saves 7—Drawbacks 5 = Total 105

KNOWLEDGE (BEHAVIOR SCIENCES)

DC 15: The Unity seems to function in many ways analogous to an insect hive: a collection of individuals, connected on a fundamental level, and directed to some degree by a "queen bee."

DC 20: Members of the Unity are not fully independent beings; although they're capable of pretending to be, and speaking on their own, they're so deeply connected they're more like a single mind inhabiting multiple bodies at once.

THE MECHANICS OF THE UNITY

The Unity is based on Carol Molloy's paranormal power, namely her Mind Control (see the Unifier's game stats for more information). Because the Mind Control effect is Contagious, the entire Unity can "use" the power effectively.

Whenever someone comes into prolonged physical contact with a member of the Unity, they must make a Will saving throw (DC 19 for the power's rank). A failed save means the victim falls under the influence of the group-mind and begins the process of assimilation into the Unity. A successful save means the victim is able to shake off the mental influence, and the Unity cannot attempt to incorporate that mind for at least 24 hours as it "adjusts" to the subject's mental defenses (of course, potential victims don't necessarily know this).

Note that the operative word in the previous condition is "prolonged" physical contact: simply touching someone who is part of the Unity won't "infect" you with the group-mind. It takes at least several seconds for the effect to take hold. In game-terms, this means a member of the Unity must successfully grapple or be grappled by someone in order to infect them. Out of combat, physical contact like a prolonged handshake or embrace can also do the trick, but give the potential victim a Sense Motive check (DC 15) to pick up that something is amiss and pull away at the last possible moment. Groups of Unity hosts can (and do) work together to grapple potential targets in order to infect them.

Once someone falls under the Unity's influence, the victim's subconscious continues to struggle, trying to break free. This is represented by additional Will saves for each interval on the Time Progression table that passes (see *M&M*, page 70); so a victim gets a new Will saving throw after one minute, then 5 minutes, 20 minutes, and so forth. The intervals get progressively longer as the subject's resistance weakens until, after about a month's time, the victim is essentially incorporated entirely into the group-mind (gaining another save only after a year passes).

Given the difficulty of the Will save, few ordinary people can overcome the Unity's influence, although a small percentage manages to do so. Like people who succeed on the initial Will save, they are protected for 24 hours as the Unity adjusts to their resistance, but it can then infect them again, and few people manage to escape influence more than once.

The spread of the group-mind is also insidious: the Unity's Mind Control is Subtle, so victims need to succeed on a Sense Motive check (DC 20) in order to even be aware of the mental influence! Their efforts to fight off the effect (the Will saving throw) is an entirely subconscious response, so potential victims might not even be aware of narrowly escaping incorporation into the group consciousness. Potential victims with Mental Awareness or a similar mental sense can detect the Unity's influence, and the group-mind is wary of such people, as they represent a potential threat.

Members of the group consciousness are capable of behaving like their "normal" selves (because the Mind Control effect has the Conscious modifier), but observers might pick up on hints of unusual behavior (Sense Motive check to notice influence, DC 19). Members of the Unity tend to look a bit distracted and they all tend to respond in unison, even to the point of often blinking and breathing in rhythm.

VALKYRIE

*"ODIN GIVE ME AN ANALYSIS...
IS THIS WHAT I THINK IT IS?"*

When Vanessa Ashe was 13, she was brutally raped and beaten by an unidentified assailant. Although she survived the encounter, damage to her spine confined her to a wheelchair for the rest of her life. While she recovered from the attack as much as possible physically, she by no means recovered from it psychologically. Images of the attack continued to haunt her, and her wheelchair became an ever-present reminder of that horrific night.

Vanessa's natural aptitudes for math and science, however, didn't suffer as a result of her trauma. If anything, her dedication and hard work intensified, and she became an incomparable student, graduating valedictorian first from high school, then from college, before going on to do graduate work at MIT in the fields of computer engineering and robotics. This brought her to the attention of some of the most prominent high-tech firms in the country and she became one of the top minds in her field, consulting on projects from corporations and government agencies throughout the western hemisphere.

All of this, however, was secondary to her ultimate agenda: Vanessa Ashe was determined to walk again. Moreover, she was determined that her knowledge and technical skills could prevent what had happened to her from happening to others. Using the scientific knowledge and resources she acquired from her various contracts, she began working in secret. After completing the first phase of her project, the AI computer system she dubbed ODIN (Optronic Data Intelligence Network), Vanessa began experimenting with cybernetic technologies designed to replace her damaged nervous system. After years of work, she finally succeeded in walking again through a combination of cybernetic interfaces and a servo-mechanical exoskeleton.



It was during the testing of the third generation of her cybernetic exoskeleton that Jeremiah Prophet approached Vanessa. Shocked Prophet not only knew about her secret research but the location of her lab, Vanessa was even more surprised by the offer Prophet made: If she were willing to lend her technical talents to their cause, his organization would fund her research while allowing her to pursue her own agenda. After a brief discussion about the group's goals, Vanessa agreed and has since wholeheartedly supported Vanguard by not only developing cutting edge computer, weapon, and intelligence systems but also by donning her cybernetic armor as the elite Vanguard operative, Valkyrie.

Since joining Vanguard, Vanessa Ashe has founded her own high-tech firm, WorldTree Technologies. In the short time since its inception, WorldTree has become a global leader in computer software and hardware development, as well as one of the foremost producers of high-tech medical equipment in the world. It's

Vanessa's hope that the research and resources she has developed will ultimately help others achieve their goals. She intends for wheelchairs to become outdated in her lifetime. WorldTree's success has made Vanessa quite wealthy, and she regularly gives to medical charities and research trusts, when she's not supplementing Vanguard's own (in her words) "woefully inadequate research budget."

USING VALKYRIE

Valkyrie can play a variety of roles in a *Paragons* series. Just as she is a source of high-tech equipment for Vanguard, she could supply such equipment to another group. Paranormals in need of high-tech support, or simply information about a high-tech problem, might be directed to consult with WorldTree Technologies. This could draw Vanessa Ashe's attention to the problem, perhaps eventually leading her to backing group or recruiting them into Vanguard's ranks.

Valkyrie and her corporation could easily become the targets of thieves in need of high-powered weapons or computer systems. Perhaps operatives of the Syndicate have become aware of a new WorldTree research project and decided the results would be put to better use in their hands. ODIN could become a target of a similar plot. A group of characters could become aware of a plan by an individual or group to steal one or more of ODIN's key components, forcing the paragons to intervene.

Valkyrie, while lacking any paranormal physical abilities, has demonstrated the remarkable ability to design and build technology that, by all accounts, shouldn't exist. Her armor, for example, although theoretically possible, shouldn't function as effectively as it does given the materials used to create it. Similarly, ODIN is a wonder of technology no one has been able to duplicate. Vanessa's most sophisticated inventions are likely examples of what some call ACME-tech, and wouldn't exist without her unique talents.

VALKYRIE**PL 12**

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+10	+7	+5	+6	+2	+2
30/9*	24/10*	20/10*	22	15	14
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+11/+0*	+5/+0*	+7/+0*	+6		

*without Battlesuit

Skills: Computers 12 (+18), Craft (electronic) 8 (+14), Craft (mechanical) 8 (+14), Disable Device 6 (+12), Knowledge (business) 6 (+12), Knowledge (technology) 6 (+12), Language 2 (German, Norwegian [English is native]), Notice 8 (+10), Search 4 (+10)

Feats: Benefit 6 (wealth bonus 32), Eidetic Memory, Inventor, Minion 8 (ODIN, Fanatical)

Powers: **Device 24** (cybernetic battlesuit, hard to lose), **Super-Senses 1** (Communication Link with ODIN [radio])

Cybernetic Battlesuit: **Adaptation 1, Enhanced Constitution 10, Enhanced Dexterity 14, Enhanced Feat 1** (Quick Change), **Enhanced Strength 21, Flight 6** (500 MPH), **Plasma Control 12** (Alternate Powers: **Plasma Shield 8** [Deflect; All Ranged Attacks], **Plasma Blade 12** [Strike; Extras: Penetrating]), **Protection 6** (Extras: Impervious), **Super-Senses 10** (Direction sense, Distance Sense, Infravision, Radar, Radio, Time Sense, Tracking [Infravision]), **Super-Strength 4** (heavy load: 12 tons)

Combat: Attack +9, Grapple +23, Damage +12 (plasma blast), +10 (melee), Defense +10 (+5 flat-footed), Knockback -8, Initiative +7

Drawbacks: Disability (Paraplegic, uncommon, major, -3 points), Normal Identity (uncommon, major, -3 points)

Abilities 20 + Skills 15 (60 ranks) + Feats 24 + Powers 97 + Combat 38 + Saves 4 – Drawbacks 6 = Total 192

Lastly, the true identity and fate of Vanessa's attacker is left for the GM to develop (or not) as suits the series. Certainly, if an opportunity to pursue the matter appeared, Valkyrie would pursue it relentlessly, torn between the desire for justice and revenge.

LEARNING ABOUT VALKYRIE

The following is information characters might learn about Valkyrie:

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 10: Valkyrie is an armor-clad member of Vanguard Mission Team Alpha.

DC 15: Valkyrie is often heard talking to herself when operating in the field.

DC 20: When Valkyrie is talking to herself in the field, she is actually communicating with Vanguard's supercomputer ODIN, which Valkyrie supposedly designed and built herself.

KNOWLEDGE (TECHNOLOGY)

DC 10: Vanessa Ashe is the CEO of WorldTree Technologies, an up and coming competitor in the fields of computer hardware and software development.

ODIN**PL 10**

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
—	—	—	+8	+3	+1
—	—	—	26	16	12
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+10	+0	+0	+11		

Skills: Computers 6 (+14), Knowledge (civics) 6 (+14), Knowledge (current events) 6 (+14), Knowledge (earth sciences) 6 (+14), Knowledge (history) 6 (+14), Knowledge (life sciences) 6 (+14), Knowledge (physical sciences) 6 (+14), Knowledge (popular culture) 6 (+14), Knowledge (technology) 6 (+14), Search 6 (+14)

Feats: Eidetic Memory, Fearless

Powers: **Communication 9** (radio, anywhere on earth), **Comprehend 3** (languages), **Datalink 9** (radio, anywhere on earth; *Alternate Power: Machine Control 12* [Flaws: Limited—Computers only]), **Immunity 40** (Fortitude Saves and Mental effects), **Protection 10, Super-Senses 1** (Communication Link with Valkyrie [radio])

Combat: Attack +4 (using computer-controlled weapons), Grapple —, Damage +10 (Guardtower weapons), Defense +10, Knockback —, Initiative +8

Drawbacks: Disabled (immobile, very common, minor, -3)

Abilities -6 + Skills 15 (60 ranks) + Feats 2 + Powers 76 + Combat 28 + Saves 8—Drawbacks 3 = Total 120

DC 15: Vanessa Ashe graduated top of her class at MIT and is an expert in fields of both theoretical and applied computer sciences.

DC 20: Confined to a wheelchair due to a childhood trauma, Vanessa Ashe is a strong advocate for increased research into spinal injury and spinal replacement.

DC 25: Vanessa Ashe is a rape survivor, having been assaulted by an unknown assailant at an early age, the result of which left her paralyzed and unable to walk.

ODIN

The Optronic Data Intelligence Network (or ODIN) is one of Valkyrie's greatest accomplishments. Originally designed to assist Vanessa in her research, ODIN is the world's first true artificially intelligent computer. Since "his" creation, however (ODIN has a male voice, image, and personality), he has evolved to become much more. Developing a personality all his own, ODIN is has evolved to become Valkyrie's faithful major domo and companion, taking great pride in organizing not only her life but her business affairs. He is fiercely loyal to and protective of his creator, and habitually monitors her progress from afar when she is operating in the field.

After Valkyrie joined Vanguard, she installed ODIN's core operating systems at the Guardtower. As such, ODIN is now the central computer system for Vanguard's base of operations, capable of controlling the facility's defensive and communication systems as needed. Most Vanguard agents, in turn, have come to think of ODIN as an unofficial "mascot" of sorts, while ODIN has come to be almost as protective of the Mission Team Alpha operatives as he is of Valkyrie.

VECTOR

"I'M FEELIN' THE NEED FOR SPEED."

The last Winter Olympics had many highlights but perhaps the most notable was the rise to fame of a relative unknown by the name of Travis Hawk. A mere 19 years old, Travis was a last minute addition to the United States Olympic Snowboarding team after a short but highly successful tour on the professional snowboarding circuit. His Olympic performance was stellar, gaining him not only a gold medal but also several lucrative endorsement deals that, combined with his natural good looks, made him a media icon overnight.

Time in the limelight proved both a blessing and a curse for Travis. While the money and the fame were appealing, so was the potential for romantic entanglements. Soon after taking the gold, Travis became involved with a famous supermodel his own age, making him and his new girlfriend targets for anxious paparazzi. Their greedy cameras proved the undoing of his athletic career.

As Travis and his girlfriend were leaving a popular New York nightclub, an aggressive photographer surprised them, intending to capture some candid shots for the tabloids. Travis confronted the photographer physically, but the flashes of the camera had already blinded his girlfriend.

Disoriented and unable to see, she stumbled into the street, directly into the path of an oncoming truck. Travis reacted almost unconsciously. In the blink of an eye, he interposed himself between his girlfriend and the oncoming vehicle, and the truck stopped dead in the street in a shimmer or redirected kinetic energy. As shocked onlookers gasped, the photographer took advantage of the situation, snapping some dramatic photos that were plastered across the front page of every major newspaper in the country the following morning.

The revelation Travis Hawk was a paranormal shocked the world of professional sports. Within days, an Olympic committee formed to review Travis' participation in the Winter Games. Despite his assertions that his now famous encounter with the truck was the first manifestation of his paranormal abilities, Travis' pleas fell on deaf ears. Without any way to prove he had no such abilities at the time of his participation in the games, the committee had no choice but to strip him of his gold medal. Several similar panels were forced to reach the same conclusion regarding his successes in the world of professional snowboarding. Without his titles, Travis' sponsors withdrew their financial support and, to make matters worse, his girlfriend ended their relationship on advice from her management. Within the space of a month, Travis Hawk went from a wealthy media sensation to pariah.

Then, just as stress and shame threatened to overwhelm Travis Hawk's life, Jeremiah Prophet knocked on his door and everything changed.

Although Travis was hesitant to use the powers that had cost him his life, Jeremiah made a compelling case. Inevitably, Travis came to realize his abilities could be as much an asset as they had, to this point, been a liability. After spending time out of public view, training in secret with Jeremiah's other associates, the announcement of the formation of Vanguard thrust Travis Hawk back into the media spotlight. As Vector, a member of Vanguard Mission Team Alpha, Travis was once again a darling of the media and photographers couldn't get enough of him. His picture was on magazines and in newspapers across the globe. Fan sites and clubs dedicated to him followed soon after. His fame rekindled, Vector found the same corporations that shunned him begging him to endorse their products again. Travis was a back where he once was, this time as the youthful superhero everyone longed to be.

Travis makes no effort to hide his true identity, although he still cringes when reporters ask him questions about his previous career in professional sports. As much as he longs for those days, he revels in his new life as one of the most visible members of the world's premiere team of paragons, pursuing his Vanguard field assignments with the same verve and daring he once demonstrated on the slopes.

USING VECTOR

Vector is both a reluctant hero and a complete showoff. While he enjoys his powers and the newfound notoriety they bring him, he still longs for the day he can return to the world of professional sports and laments the perception that his skill at snowboarding was due to his powers. As a result, he has a chip on his shoulder when it comes to his own self-worth and abilities. He often pursues adventures as if he's got something to prove to the world. This tends to make him something of a gloryhound. As a result, he can often be found in the news, performing a variety of "noble tasks" simply for the sake of notoriety. Given his powers, Vector could potentially show up almost anywhere at any moment to "lend a hand" or, more likely, steal the spotlight from a group of paranormals already doing so.

Vector is also one of the most visible paranormals, as he appears in a variety of advertising and media globally. Characters with media ties might run across Vector in a variety of situations, particularly at charity events but, just as easily, at a hot new nightclub Vector frequents with his latest romantic entanglement. Similarly, if one of the characters is also a media star of some kind, Vector might be paired up as a partner or, perhaps, as a romantic interest...at least in the tabloids.

As a highly visible celebrity with ties to the most powerful paranormal agency on Earth, Vector is also a natural target for Vanguard's enemies. While Vector is a powerful opponent, he's only 19 years old and far from unbeatable, especially if separated from his teammates. A terrorist organization wishing to get back at Vanguard or gain information about the organization might



VECTOR

PL 10

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+2	+2	+1	+1	+1	+3
14	14	12	12	12	17
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX		WILL	
+11/+1*	+4	+9		+4	

*without Force Field

Skills: Acrobatics 8 (+10), Bluff 9 (+12/+20**), Diplomacy 5 (+8/+16**), Knowledge (current events) 9 (+10), Knowledge (popular culture) 9 (+10), Notice 6 (+7), Profession (snowboarder) 12 (+13), Search 6 (+7)

** includes Attractive bonus

Feats: Attractive 2, Elusive Target, Fast Overrun, Improved Overrun, Move-By Action, Quick Change 2 (any clothes)

Powers: Enhanced Feats 6 (Improved Initiative 4, Interpose, Redirect), **Force Field 10** (Extras: Impervious), **Immovable 10** (Extras: Unstoppable), **Kinetic Control 10** (Alternate Powers: **Deflect 10** [slow and fast projectiles], **Drain Movement 10**, **Nullify Movement 10**, **Slow 6**), **Quickness 6**, **Speed 8** (2,500 MPH; Water Run, Wall Run)

Combat: Attack +10, Grapple +12, Damage +10 (kinetic blast), +10 (running punch), Defense +9 (+5 flatfooted), Knockback -20, Initiative +18

Abilities 21 + Skills 16 (44 ranks) + Feats 8 + Powers 86 + Combat 38 + Saves 13 = Total 182

attempt to kidnap or, worse, kill Vector as a means of furthering their agenda. As such, characters might become aware of the plot and be called upon to aid or protect Vector, especially if he already has some ties to the group.

LEARNING ABOUT VECTOR

Here is information characters could potentially learn about Vector:

GATHER INFORMATION

DC 10: Vector is a famous paranormal and member of the international paragon team called Vanguard.

DC 15: Vector is a spokesman for a variety of consumer products, including energy drinks and athletic apparel. He can be seen in all types of media including television advertising, billboards and has several fan-based websites dedicated to him.

DC 20: Vector is a code-name used by former Olympic gold medalist Travis Hawk, who was stripped of his gold medal upon the discovery that he was actually a paranormal.

KNOWLEDGE (POPULAR CULTURE)

DC 10: Travis Hawk is a snowboarder who won a gold medal at the 2002 Winter Olympics. He was stripped of his Olympic gold medals when the public discovered he possessed paranormal powers.

DC 20: Travis Hawk currently uses the code-name Vector and uses his paranormal powers as an agent of the international organization Vanguard.

VOM STAHL

"STAHL IST HALT."

Vom Stahl is a man, or at least part of one, who has lost both his body and his memory. His first memories, which haunt him daily, are of fire and pain. He remembers waking up being burned alive and pinned beneath a massive armored vehicle before passing out again from the pain. Each night Vom Stahl awakes from terrible nightmares in which he relives the experience.

When he awoke after the accident the doctors informed him he was different and his change had saved his life. His breakout somehow linked him with the metal that pinned him to the desert sand. It saved him from him from dying, but at a price. The broken parts of his body had been replaced with mechanical parts built somehow created from the metal of the vehicle that had pinned him. The most advanced medicine couldn't reverse the process and while his brain and spinal column were mostly intact, almost all that remained was machine.

Taking his new name from the metal he had become, Vom Stahl possessed amazing strength and resilience and an unconscious power to rebuild any damage done to him as long as he had a source of raw material. His new body and paranormal power gave him a technological affinity allowing him to speak to machines and electronics as if they were alive. The initial downside of weighing over a ton seemed a minor inconvenience compared to what he had gained.

Then he realized food had no flavor, while it sustained life, it could bring him no pleasure. His sense of smell was missing as well. As for touch, he could detect pressure and sensation but none of the subtleties of touch existed for him. No longer would feel the exhilarating cold fall air or the warmth of human contact. It was like he was in a video game, the sights and sounds were there, but nothing of the subtler senses that make the world real. He was a machine, the software might be organic, but the heart was made of steel. The man who was Vom Stahl began to recede into the steel hulk of his body as life lost meaning for him. He woke up each day simply to trudge through life and survive.

The doctors at the hospital did what they could for him but his mind was beyond their reach. That task they left to Emily Rosemont, a specialist in the unique psychological issues facing the paranormal.

The Rosemont Center staff and Dr. Rosemont were able to turn Vom Stahl from his self-destructive mindset, but the greatest change in his psyche occurred when Rachel Carson came to the Center. Rachel was barely able to function or connect to another human being due to the multiple voices in her head when she arrived. The cold and quiet of the steel man was a pleasant diversion from her inner turmoil. In return, Rachel's need focused Vom Stahl on what it meant to be human. Emily Rosemont encouraged the two of them to continue to support each other.

Vom Stahl came to the realization that the help the Rosemont Center could give to unfortunate paranormals was more than important, it was critical. It was he who imagined a group of heroes, protecting and collecting the less fortunate, and bringing them where they could get help. He and Rachel, who had taken the name Otherkin, went in search of others who could benefit from the care they had been given. With his near invulnerability and her access to a multitude of powers, the two were able to collect several others before



learning some of the deeper secrets of the Rosemont Center.

At first, Emily Rosemont was critical of the idea of collecting other paranormals, but she quickly grew to both accept and help the two in their quest. The Rosemont Center became the headquarters of the Collected and Emily

Rosemont used her abilities, influence, and fortune to keep the group a secret. She now helps the Collected find others in danger.

Vom Stahl has grown used to his lack of pain, but he is careful not to leave himself open to the kind of wound his power cannot heal. He has grown increasingly fond of Rachel, who soothes him when he wakes from the worst of his nightmares, and he aches to tell her. He is terribly afraid the woman he is falling in love with is neither her nor her alter ego, but some amalgam of the two he has created in his own mind. It is this fear that makes him hold his tongue, that and the fact that one of Rachel's other selves seems to have feelings for Pontifex, making him wonder about not only his feelings, but hers as well.

USING VOM STAHL

Vom Stahl can be used as muscle in any dealings with the Collected or the Rosemont Center. He is protective of his friends and of the Center, acting as the *de facto* battle commander of the team. Vom Stahl also spends time trying to determine who he was before his accident and could be encountered doing research with an active military unit or working with a professional investigator to determine the truth.

Vom Stahl might engage the services of one or more of the characters to discover who he was before his accident. Characters might discover a great deal of information that could lead them back

to the Rosemont Center and other secrets. Less savory characters might be hired to investigate Vom Stahl by an outside party to potentially blackmail or remove him from service to the Rosemont Center and the Collected.

LEARNING ABOUT VOM STAHL

As a member of the Collected and a patient of the Rosemont Center, Vom Stahl is more difficult to find information on than he might otherwise be. The increased difficulty is reflected in the difficulties below. See **The Rosemont Center** in **Chapter Four** for more information about Vom Stahl and the Collected.

GATHER INFORMATION

This check represents information that can be gathered through use of contacts in medicine, law enforcement or the media.

DC 20: Vom Stahl is a paragon connected to one of the smaller groups of paragons that's seen from time to time called the Collected

DC 25: Vom Stahl has been seen at the Rosemont Center and has received treatment there.

VOM STAHL PL 10

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+12	+1	+5	+2	+2	+1
34	12	20	14	14	12
TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL		
+15	+11	+5	+2		

Skills: Climb 4 (+6), Computers 8 (+10), Disable Device 8 (+10), Drive 5 (+6), Intimidate 5 (+6), Knowledge (tactics) 5 (+7), Knowledge (technology) 4 (+6), Language 1 (English [German is native]), Notice 4 (+6), Pilot 6 (+7), Profession (soldier) 6 (+8), Sense Motive 4 (+6), Stealth 6 (+7), Survival 6 (+8)

Feats: All-out Attack, Attack Focus (melee) 2, Diehard, Power Attack

Powers: **Comprehend 2** (machines), **Datalink 2**, **Density 10** (Effects: Strength +20, **Immovable 3** (Extras: Unstoppable), **Protection 10** (Extras: Impervious), **Super-Strength 3**; Extras: Duration-Continuous; Flaws: Permanent; Power Feats: Innate), **Immunity 9** (life support), **Regeneration 16** (Recovery Bonus +4, bruised 1/round, unconscious 1/round, injured 1/round, staggered 1/round, disabled 1/hour; Flaws: Source—metal; Power Feats: Persistent, Regrowth), **Super-Strength 2** (including Super-Strength from Density, this gives a total of **Super-Strength 5**; heavy load: 45 tons)

Combat: Attack +8 (melee), +6 (ranged), Grapple +25, Damage +12 (unarmed), Defense +5 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback -12, Initiative +1

Drawbacks: Disability (deadened sense of touch, taste and smell, -1 point), Vulnerable (saves that have both mental and fire descriptors, save DC +50%, -2 points)

Abilities 26 + Skills 18 (72 ranks) + Feats 5 + Powers 73 + Combat 22 + Saves 10—Drawbacks 3 = Total 151

CHAPTER SIX: THE PARAGONS SERIES

The *Paragons* campaign setting provides a context for *Mutants & Masterminds* adventures focused on realistic settings and characters. This chapter builds on material found in **Chapter 9** and **Chapter One0** of *Mutants & Masterminds*, with ideas specific to the more post-modern setting of *Paragons*.

The material in this chapter is for *M&M* Gamemasters interested in running a *Paragons* series, and includes series frameworks, various options for the origins of paranormal powers, different ways to customize how powers work in your *Paragons* series, and various

ways to look at the world of *Paragons* that completely change the setting depending on your point of view.

The most important message of this chapter (and, indeed, the rest of this book) is that **Paragons is your setting**, to make of whatever you will. Take these options, your own imagination, and that of your players, and create a unique world where ordinary people are confronted with extraordinary powers and challenges where reality is no longer as stable as it once seemed, where they must become...paragons.

CREATING A PARAGONS SERIES

This section offers suggestions and advice on creating your own unique *Paragons* setting. Although this book describes many aspects of a "default" setting, Gamemasters may wish to modify it to suit their own vision of the *Paragons* world, or create an entirely new setting for their paranormal characters to influence and change.

PARANORMAL ORIGINS

One of the first things to decide when starting a *Paragons* series is: where do paragons come from? The rest of this book specifically does *not* tell you the origin of paranormal powers. People in the world of *Paragons* don't know it, after all, so why should the source material? Instead, the decision to reveal the source of the paragons and their powers, and what it is, has been left up to you, the Gamemaster, as best suits your own series.

This section and the setting material offer a number of possible origins for paranormals and their powers. The primary things for you to consider when choosing an origin for paranormals are: what are the origin's effects on available character concepts, the future of paragons, and the creation of new paragons?

Certain origins limit or preclude certain character concepts. For example, if paranormal powers are all the result of some genetic mutation, then it's unlikely paragons have mystical powers. That means paranormal "sorcerers" or "gods" are either deluded or non-existent. If paranormal powers are all magical in nature, on the other hand, then paranormal gadgeteers and scientists may be limited (or similarly deluded). Perhaps what they believe is "scientific invention" is really just an unconscious application of magical or psychic abilities? Try to take the sorts of characters the players want to run in the game into account when choosing the origin of paranormal powers.

You also need to decide if the origin of paragons is an ongoing thing or a one-time event. Will there be other paranormals in the future or is the first "generation" the only one? Also, is it possible to deliberately create paranormals and, if so, is anyone doing so?

The event that creates paragons may be unique; meaning the num-

ber of paranormals at the beginning of the series is all there will ever be. This means the player characters have to be among these first paragons, since they're the only ones. Paranormal "evolution" may also be an ongoing process, with more appearing as time goes on. For example, if paranormals are created by a particular genetic mutation, then perhaps the first paragons are "triggered" to break-out by some circumstance (a disaster, experiment, or intervention of a pre-existing paranormal). As time goes on, more and more paranormals are "triggered" and breakout. Since their power is genetic in nature, it can be passed on to their children. If it's a dominant trait, then eventually all humanity will become paranormal.

Whatever the origin of paragons, it's fairly certain people will be trying to learn more about it and, if possible, duplicate it under controlled conditions. The ability to create paranormals is a tremendous power, one various nations, organizations, and individuals will want. Their efforts may be doomed to failure (especially if they're based on some incorrect assumptions about the nature of paranormals and their powers) or they might achieve some success. One interesting twist for a *Paragons* series can be an innovation that endows *everyone* with paranormal powers! What will become of humanity then?

THE FIRST PARAGONS?

While considering the origin of paranormals, give some thought as to whether or not the characters will be among the first paragons to appear or part of a later "generation." If the characters are not the very first paranormals, they're at least familiar with the concept and existence of other paranormals before they breakout, and there are likely other paranormals more powerful than they are, who have had more time to establish themselves and their agendas.

That does not have to be the case, however. You can decide to make the player characters the first (or among the first) paragons. The world is just like ours, until people with powers appear. This makes the setting very much a clean slate for the players to write upon as they see fit. They can dictate a great deal about the future and the development of paranormals, depending on the choices they make early in their careers.



WELCOME TO
UNITY

EST.

1859

Of course, making the characters the first paragons may rob the setting of some of its unique flavor, since other paranormals and their actions haven't yet shaped it. Still, you can use the "historical" events given in the earlier chapters and have them occur as the series progresses, allowing the player characters to influence things as they go. This is likely to cause elements of the setting to diverge from the descriptions given in this book. The further back you start, the larger the changes might be.

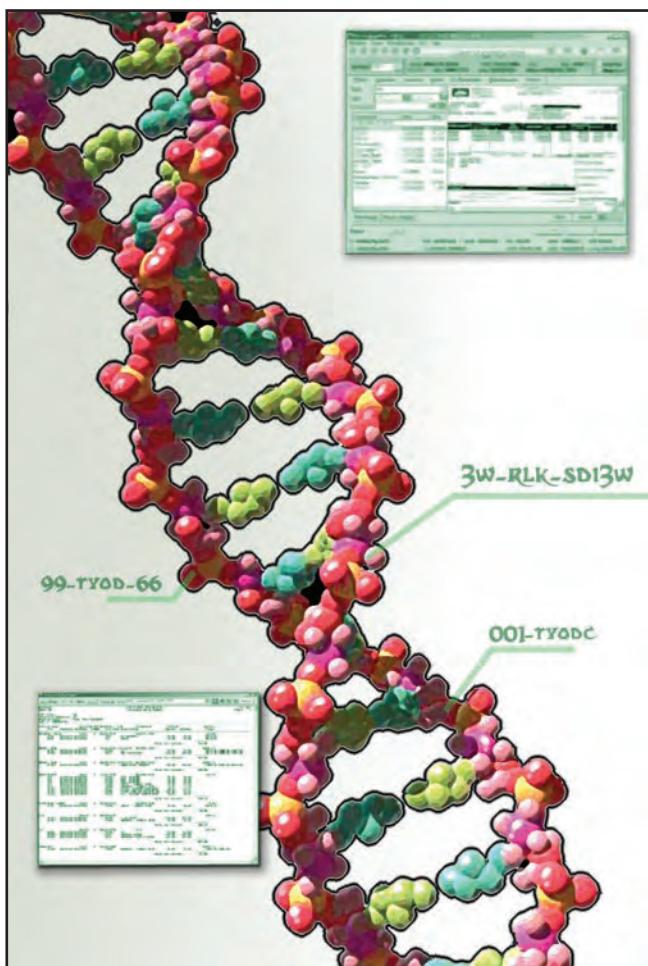
GENETICS

There's still so much we don't know about the genetic code of life: untold information may be hidden in the structure of our DNA, just waiting for the right circumstances to go into action. Just a small change in the genetic code could lead to incredible changes in the future of our species, and our planet.

Of course, a genetic origin for paranormals still leaves many questions: is it an induced genetic mutation or a product of natural evolution? Could it have been deliberately engineered and, if so, by whom? Can paragons breed others of their kind, and what does that mean for the future of humanity?

MUTATION

A number of factors can cause changes in the genetic code, mutations passed on to offspring. In the modern world these can include chemicals (particularly in food, water, or the surrounding environment), radiation (from increased solar radiation to background radiation to irradiated materials), and possibly deliberate genetic alteration (see the following sections for more on this).



It's possible these random genetic mutations have led to human mutants with paranormal powers. Either the mutations have created the gene-complexes or DNA sequences that cause their powers, or they have "activated" certain dormant genetic information leading to the manifestation of powers. The mutations themselves may lie dormant until activated by hormones and neurochemicals related to stress (and therefore connected to the awakening process).

EVOLUTION

Although the popular conception is often that evolution is the process that brought modern humans into existence, some don't consider that the process hasn't stopped. Evolution is ongoing, never-ending, so long as a species exists and retains the potential for benevolent mutation.

Perhaps humanity is meant to evolve into a godlike race of paragons, all possessing amazing powers, and paranormals are just the first stirrings of this tremendous evolutionary leap forward. If so, the process has been ongoing for some time, and there may be historical paragons, random mutations with limited (or not so limited) powers. Of course, no one understood what they were, so they were relegated to myths, urban legends, and conspiracy theories.

SECRETS OF THE DOUBLE HELIX

If paranormal powers are genetic in origin, sooner or later someone will crack the genetic code that governs some or all of them. If nothing else, so long as there's *any* possibility of a genetic basis, scientists will keep looking. The search for the "paragon gene" (or genes) has a number of implications.

First is the potential genetic test for whether or not someone is a paranormal, or has the potential to be one. Initially, this could require complex genetic screening from a DNA sample, but it would still have profound implications for identifying present and potential paragons and it would significantly change things like origin-chasing, since there's no reason to try and trigger a breakout if you don't have the potential to become a paragon (although that may not stop some hopeful few).

Identifying paranormal genes also makes selective breeding and genetic engineering possible: efforts to create new and more powerful types of paragons, perhaps even godlike super-beings far more powerful than their progenitors, and presumably loyal to their creators, at least until something goes wrong.

A genetic source for paranormal powers could also lead to a genetic treatment; some type of gene therapy to block or "switch off" the affected genes, possibly removing a paranormal's powers. If this is even possible, it becomes a powerful weapon in the hands of anti-paranormal factions, or even a paranormal faction willing to use it against others of their kind. A retroviral "cure" could even be released into the environment, effectively ending the existence of paranormals, if someone could create it.

FINE YOUNG SPECIMENS

Experiments to find a genetic explanation for paranormals will require genetic material *from* paranormals on which to experiment. For some, things like hair, blood, and skin samples will suffice, but there are certain to be unscrupulous sorts willing to kidnap experimental subjects and engage in post-mortems or even vivisection in the quest for knowledge.

Any data from this research will become quite valuable, especially if it does turn up useful evidence. It's a commodity that corporations, governments, and other factions will kill to get, or to protect. It's information paranormals (some of them, at least) might want to keep out of their hands.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOUR CHILDREN ARE?

If there is the possibility of a genetic cause for paragons, if they are a mutation or the next stage of human evolution, then the specter arises: what about ordinary humanity? Are *Homo sapiens* obsolete, to be replaced by *Homo superior*? Has the rest of humanity reached an evolutionary dead-end, doomed to extinction? Even if that's not the case, there are people who will believe that it is, and some of them might act on that belief.

Groups like the Initiative or the Seven Thunders (see **Chapter Four** for details on these groups) may be driven as much by a desire to protect the future of humanity as by any political or religious goals, because paranormals as an evolutionary force may be the greatest single threat humanity has ever faced.

DIVINE INTERVENTION

Gods really *do* walk the Earth in *Paragons*, or at least people invested with the power of gods. Why have divine powers intervened in the future of humanity, and what does it mean for human faith and religion? Are paragons chosen prophets or vessels for leading the world into a new Golden Age, or are they soldiers in a divine Final War that spells the end of the world, perhaps even all existence?

The first question to ask on deciding to make paranormals the result of divine intervention is: which god(s) intervened? Are they the work of a single, omnipotent creator-god like in Western monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) or the individual work of a variety of deities, like in ancient polytheist mythologies or modern traditions like Hinduism, Shinto, or neo-paganism?

Maybe it's not so much divine intervention, but religious *faith* empowering paranormals: their belief in a particular higher power or ideal gives them access to their amazing abilities. Of course, that makes it difficult to explain agnostic or atheist paragons: where do their powers originate? Can things like agnosticism or atheism constitute an equally strong belief in terms of granting superhuman abilities? What about abstract things like patriotism, political leanings, or even narcissism or megalomania?

DIVINE CHAMPIONS

Paragons might be the chosen champions of particular divine forces, invested with a portion of their power and also with a particular mission, whether they know it or not. For example, a paranormal with a "death-touch" might be champion of a deity of death, charged with consigning souls to the afterlife. A few paranormals have the awareness needed to understand their divine nature and mission, but unfortunately they're mostly considered crazy by everyone else, and quite a few of them really *are* mentally ill.

The divine champions of deities with opposed portfolios or agenda might be expected to oppose each other as well, perhaps explaining some conflicts among paranormals. Some in the Pact (see **Chapter Four**) believe paragons are playing out a kind of "higher world" drama or conflict in the material realm. If they're right, then clashes between paragons may be foreordained, even inevitable.

BAIT AND SWITCH

The explanations in this section are all equally probable, or usable, in a *Paragons* game based on the earlier chapters of this book, so it might be that what people *think* is the explanation is simply just a front for the truth, which you can reveal as the series progresses.

For example, you can set up a game where the prevailing theory is some sort of psionic capability, but have it turn out that paragons are actually tapping into ancient magical forces, dormant since the last Age of Magic, but now returning to the fore. Likewise, what people think is reality bending truly is, but bending reality also attracts certain preternatural *things* from outside space and time, weakening the fabric of the universe, and so forth.

The possible combinations are almost endless, and certainly enough to keep players guessing. You can even throw in a red herring or two with other crackpot theories about the nature of the paranormal from factions like the Harbingers, MERLIN, or PSI, or individual "experts." Are the characters *truly* certain there's nothing to them? What if evidence emerges supporting them?

As time goes on, paragons could become more aware of their divine patronage. Perhaps all that's required is for someone to delve deep enough into the Imageria to make the breakthrough and contact the deities who give paranormals their powers. Maybe the gods are even trapped in the other levels of reality, needing mortal aid to free them.

DIVINE AVATARS

More than just chosen champions, paragons could actually *be* gods made flesh, manifest in the material world. In this approach they not only wield the power of the gods but they are the gods themselves, or at least aspects or portions of them. They are *avatars*, mortal incarnations of divine beings.

Some already believe some paragons to be avatars of various deities or divine powers: the Rakshasa cult considers Ravana (see **Chapter Five**) a god of sorts, and the Church of Jesus Christ, Paragon, believes firmly in the divine nature of man and the potential to achieve it shown by God. What if they're right?

While divine avatars might be unaware of their godly nature at first, some re-awaken to it sooner than others. At first, such paragons are considered deranged, but as more and more feel the stirrings of godhood within, the truth becomes difficult to deny. When paranormals discover they not only possess the power but also the divine nature of gods, what will they do? What will humanity do if confronted with paragons who think and act like gods as well as wielding their power?

TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

Many myth-cycles feature stories about the end of the world or the "twilight of the gods." What if the manifestation of divine power in the form of paranormals is a sign of the coming apocalypse, the Final Conflict, in which the paragons play a key role?

One possibility is an apocalyptic final showdown between different families or pantheons of deities. The Pantheon (see **Chapter Four**) might be a foreshadowing of this, paragons aware of their godlike nature and eventual role. Alternately, paragons could be a last ditch effort by divine eidolons (see **Chapter Three**) to save their own essence from oblivion. Perhaps a coming shift in the



Imageria threatens their existence and they need human hosts in order to survive.

If paranormals are empowered by divine essence of some kind, perhaps there's a drive towards gathering it. A paragon might grow in power from killing others, somehow absorbing their store of energy; the paragon who absorbs the most might even achieve a kind of apotheosis or godhood. This is certainly the kind of path Ravana is on (see **Chapter Five**): how much more terrifying would the cannibal cult leader be if he truly achieved godhood?

MAGIC

There are factions in the world of *Paragons* who believe in magic; the Pact is the primary example (see **Chapter Four**). Are they delusional or could they be right? After all "magic" is as good a definition as any for the kinds of powers paranormals have at their command, and the Imageria does encompass many of the realms of myth and mystery described by occultists and magicians over the centuries.

POWER OF THE PACT

The members of the Pact, and some other paragons, truly believe their powers are arcane, or magical, in nature. In some settings, they may be right, in which case most paranormals unconsciously manipulate magical forces to achieve their amazing effects. Trained sorcerers, on the other hand, *consciously* control these forces and, as such, have more refined and often broader powers at their disposal.

Even if the Pact is wrong, of course, their arcane rituals and disciplines are useful in expanding the range and effectiveness of their

powers. So long as it works like magic, it might as well be "the real thing." The difference between "true magic" and things like miracles or psionic powers with arcane window-dressing is largely semantic.

In a *Paragons* game where magic is a real and active force, the Pact is the most likely organization to hold the deepest secrets of the occult. Members of the group might have access to powers most characters do not, and could manipulate magical forces to their advantage. For example, they might know secrets of stripping paragons of their powers (temporarily or even permanently), how to bestow powers on others, or how to summon and command the inhabitants of the Imageria.

DWELLERS IN THE IMAGERIA

To the Pact and other magic-workers, the Imageria is the supernatural world, representative of every mythic Otherworld, from the sephiroth of the Kaballah to the shamanic world tree or the Nine Worlds of the Aesir of Norse myth. It is a realm of pure magical energy and powerful spirit-beings, from the least elements up to archangels, demon lords, and gods. In this origin for paranormals, the Pact is entirely correct. To most, the Imageria is accessible only vaguely in dreams but for the truly talented and initiated, it is a realm of tremendous insight, and power.

Of course, the beings dwelling in the Imageria have agendas of their own, and many of them may work through human agents in the world to carry them out. The Pact is known to make deals with otherworldly powers from time to time, although they are careful not to swear undying allegiance with anyone or anything, preferring a more mercenary approach. Some paragons could be agents

or avatars of powers from the Imageria (as described under **Divine Champions** and **Divine Avatars**, previously).

Not all of the inhabitants of the Imageria have their own self-interest at heart, however. Some may truly wish to help humanity survive and grow. Perhaps these benevolent beings—representatives of a true higher power?—help guide certain paragons to safeguard the world from their less scrupulous brethren. Factions like the Church of Jesus Christ, Paragon, might be their chosen, or dupes of a more sinister force.

PSIONICS

Who knows the limits of the conscious mind? How connected is consciousness with the very fabric of reality? Perhaps more connected, and less limited, than we imagine.

SLEIGHT OF MIND

The information presented in **Chapter One** is all consistent with powers originating from the mind, with any rituals, quirks, material devices, or other trappings essentially becoming unconscious crutches, or expectations, that a given paragon has regarding his or her powers. After all, the mind remains mysterious in terms of how it works, and many of the limitations on paranormal powers could be due to unconscious blocks, or simply the inability to fully comprehend our own potential at this point.

This approach easily fits in with things like the Dumbo effect and the idea that mentally unstable or imbalanced paranormals are often more powerful in wildly unpredictable ways.

MIND VS. BRAIN

A psionic explanation of powers in particular may need to draw a distinction between the mind—the consciousness, personality, and ego—and the physical brain. Some powers may even allow the mind to *separate* from the brain, either wandering as an incorporeal “astral form” or switching bodies via possession, mind-switching, or the like.

Generally speaking, psionic powers remain with the *mind*, wherever it may go, but the condition of the brain influences a paranormal’s ability to effectively wield powers. Thus experimentation with things like brain surgery, neurochemicals, and similar technology might provide ways of limiting a paranormal’s powers, removing them, or enhancing them. Given time, it could even provide means of artificially inducing such powers, possibly creating breakouts in otherwise normal people.

PSI-TECH

If psionic powers have some basis in physics and neurochemistry, it might be possible for technology to replicate some or all of their abilities. In some *Paragons* settings, this might only be possible via ACME tech, where the technology isn’t really providing the powers at all (its maker or user is). In other worlds, ordinary technology can produce paranormal effects, once someone figures out how. Such “psi-tech” has the potential to revolutionize the world, depending on what it can do. Details are left as an exercise for the interested Gamemaster, but some possibilities include:

- Drugs or chemical treatments to enhance or retard powers, or perhaps even bring out latent powers, triggering a breakout.
- Electronic power-enhancers or power-inhibitors that perform a similar function without the need for drugs.

- Devices that duplicate certain powers, ranging from telekinetic force-projectors to mind-reading scanners to star-spanning “teleportal” drives for faster-than-light travel.

ALIENS

Paragons and their powers are certainly unearthly in many regards. What if their origins are truly extraterrestrial? Are aliens interfering in human development and, if so, why?

THE PROGENITORS

Alien involvement in the creation of paranormals might have taken place long before the present day, perhaps as far back as the origins of life on Earth. The modern development of paragons might be the result of alien tinkering with human or pre-human DNA from the ancient past. Such alien “Progenitors” could be connected with the most primal human myths surrounding the origins of life and the universe, or they might pre-date human life, or civilization, sufficiently that we can only know them by tantalizing hints of their work.

Of course, this leaves many questions, including who were the Progenitors and why did they engineer the potential for paranormals in the human genome? Are they responsible for other human qualities (intelligence, for example)? Perhaps most important, are they still around after all this time, watching and waiting to see their plans finally unfold?

If the Progenitors existed, there may be other things connected to them, such as ancient technological artifacts, perhaps described through the ages in human legends. They could have also left information (messages, instructions, even diagrams and software) encoded in human DNA, waiting for our technology to become sophisticated enough to read it.

CONTACT AND COMMUNION

Paranormals could be subjects of “alien abduction,” knowingly or unknowingly. What they think is a “breakout” experience is either their recollection of the abduction or simply a false memory given to them to cover up the truth. Alternately, it could be a peak experience that triggers previous modifications made during an abduction the paragon can’t remember at all.

Many abductees describe strange medical procedures and “implants.” These might be literal surgical alterations or additions, or a metaphor for a more sophisticated modification of the subject’s brain, mind, aura, or what have you, to grant them unusual powers. Perhaps the aliens are not even *granting* the powers so much as awakening the latent potential within certain people, allowing them to become paranormals.

If aliens are responsible, why are they doing it? They could seek to aid in human evolution and the eventual ascension of our species to join the benevolent Galactic Federation, or they could need paranormal brains to drive their starships and control their weapon-on-systems. Maybe there’s more than one race involved, each with its own agenda and its own unwitting human agents.

If aliens have been in the process of breeding or making paranormals for some time, then they could be the source of ancient myths of superhuman gods and heroes, strange visitors and “alien astronauts,” and of wars between Heaven and Hell or different factions of gods.

THE PRETERNATURAL

When one says "aliens" are involved in the creation of paranormals, they might not be creatures anything like us. In fact, they could be so alien as to be completely foreign to our experience, or even the physical laws or space-time of our universe. These aliens are more akin to Lovecraftian horrors or "elder gods;" beings of immense and unknowable power and motives. Why did they create paragons? Why do they do anything, really? How do you ascribe motive to a being that doesn't think or reason anything like us?

This type of origin for paranormal powers may explain why they can so casually violate everything we think we know about how the universe works, and may imply some long-term effects of working "outside the law" of nature. It's particularly suited for a creepy or horror-tinged series, where insanity lends paragons power and a major theme is avoiding the slow slide into madness. See the **Paranormal Taint** section of **Optional Rules** later in this chapter.

If you want a slightly more hopeful approach, perhaps paragons aren't the creations of preternatural forces, but a natural reaction to the intrusion of those forces on our reality. Paranormals are a kind of "universal antibody" intended to repel beings from outside our space-time continuum and preserve reality as we know it, assuming they don't fall prey to their own hubris or the temptation to ally themselves with preternatural forces.

WE ARE THE FUTURE

In this version, the "aliens" are not alien at all, but humans from the far future, who are empowering paranormals for reasons of their own. Most likely, they wish to alter history to fit a particular goal, or perhaps to ensure their history comes about as it is "supposed" to occur. Paragons could have a "butterfly effect" on the course of history, shifting things in all kinds of ways, or some might even be directed towards particular ends.

If future forces are tampering with the present day, there could be more than one faction at work, in which case, some of the differing organizations in **Chapter Four** work for one faction or another, or none at all. Some—like the Harbingers, MERLIN, or the Pact—might know the truth and be working against *all* of the temporal factions in order to ensure present-day humanity controls its own destiny.

REALITY-BENDING

To one degree or another, it can be said that paragons are "bending" reality when they use their powers; certainly some paranormal abilities violate the laws of physics as we understand them. To what degree do paragons change or alter reality and what does that mean for our understanding of "reality" and the very structure of reality itself?

REALITY IS HIGHLY OVERRATED

Essentially, in this explanation, reality isn't as solid and stable as we like to think it is. In fact, reality is highly sensitive to consciousness, because it's the interaction of consciousness with the holographic interference pattern of sub-quantum forces that actually *creates* reality from moment to moment, which is just a technobabble way of saying that the ancient concept of *maya*, that what we perceive as reality, is nothing more than an illusion.

Paragons have the ability to manipulate the illusion of reality to one degree or another, creating impossible effects that seem to

defy what we know can happen. This is practically the same as the psionic explanation for the paranormal, except the paragons have a direct connection between thought and reality, rather than any sort of medium like psionic "energy," or the like. In their case, thought creates reality, so there's no energy involved.

This is why a paranormal's concentration and state of mind are so important to the functioning of their powers, and why mentally unstable paragons often have unexpected powers: they're simply able to think and visualize differently and have fewer of the perceptual filters and subconscious blocks most paragons place of their powers.

This explanation raises questions about the nature of reality itself. If it can be manipulated and changed, is anything "really real," or are we all living in a mutually agreed upon hallucination? If some paragons can manipulate reality on a small scale ("small" being things like lifting buildings and being virtually invulnerable), are there some paragons who are able to create bigger changes in reality? If there were, would we even know it, if we changed along with the rest of reality? Is the "real" world truly "real," or is it just another part of the Imageria, as unreal and dream-like as that world?

VIRTUALITY

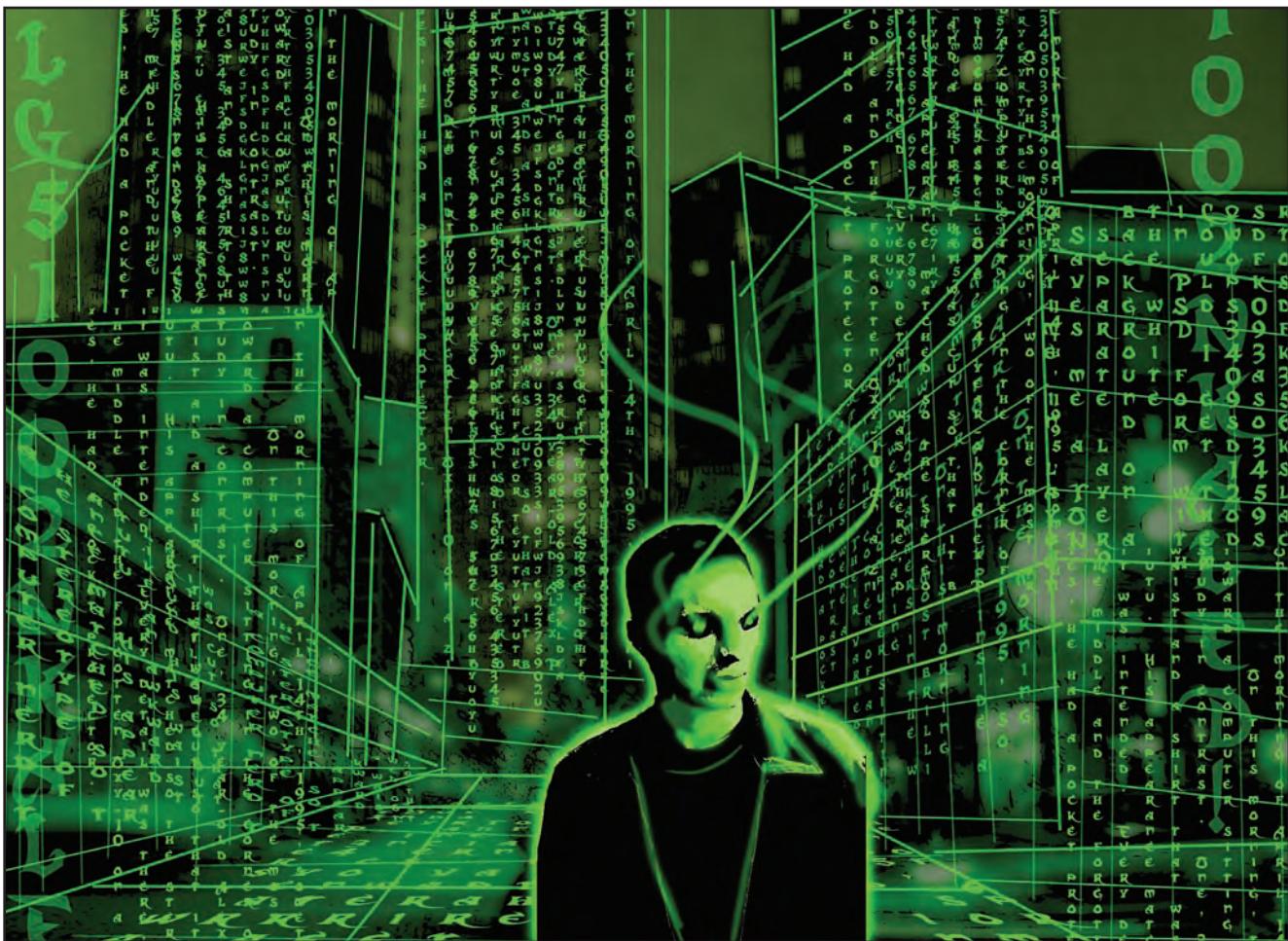
A fairly extreme possibility is that "reality" isn't at all what most people think it is. It's a fake, a facade covering up something else. Because the reality in which the characters exist isn't truly "real," some can manipulate it to one degree or another, like having "cheat codes" in a video game.

In fact, a video game is the most common sort of virtuality: a "virtual" world created within a computer and projected into the minds of the people in it. The player characters (or paragons in general) could be the only true people living inside a giant video game, or all the people might be real, but the world isn't, and only some people have the talent to see beyond the illusion enough to influence it.

Of course, nothing says the virtual reality has to be created by computers. It could be a magical illusion, or the work of a powerful reality-shaping being changing the world around us. It might be that what the heroes think is the "real" world actually exists deep in the Imageria, a veridical "dream world" where some people can fly and do amazing things, just like in dreams. Do the characters have waking lives in the real world? If so, why can't they remember them? Is their daily reality "just a dream" or is it interaction on another "level" of reality?

If "our" world isn't the real world, then what is the real world like? It could be completely mundane, like the world outside our windows, with all the strangeness concentrated in the virtual world, or it could be even more fantastic, or terrible, than a world where normal people have paranormal powers: totalitarian cyberpunk, post-apocalyptic, far-flung future, or anything else you can imagine.

Lastly, if reality as we know it is false in some way, then who is creating and sustaining the illusion and why? If it's a kind of dream world or imaginary realm, it might just be the collective unconscious of humanity, or the characters' dreaming minds, that are doing it. A more constructed virtual reality could be the work of aliens, artificially intelligent machines, secret corporate or government research projects, psychic paranormals from the



"real" world, or a cabal of mystics, to name a few. Obviously, the secret masters of reality have both an edge in terms of power in "their" world and good reason to keep the true nature of things a secret.

Factions from **Chapter Four** likely to be fronts for such a conspiracy include the Pantheon, the Pact, the Paramount Club's inner circle, and the Tribe. Groups like the Initiative, MERLIN, or Gordon Technologies might stumble upon the truth in their investigations, making them havens for those who work against the controllers of the virtuality. Proteus (see **Chapter Five**) could be a kind of "glitch" or "virus" in the system, attempting to overthrow it, or a "god mode" controller of reality playing games with the people in it for reasons of his own.

NOVELTY

Novelty theory, primarily put forth by Terrance McKenna in his analysis of the *I Ching*, suggests that the universe, human knowledge, and human civilization are constantly bringing forth new things, and thereby becoming more and more complex. Moreover, this rate of novelty, the number and range of new things, is increasing, and will continue to do so until reaching an "omega point" or "singularity," when essentially everything that is possible will be happening all at once. In the lead-up to the omega point, novelty will proliferate tremendously, often described as a feeling that time itself is accelerating, and advancement and evolution along with it.

While generally dismissed as a scientific theory, novelty could provide an explanation for paranormals at least as good as any other: paragons and their powers are just the latest example of the rapid

development of the universe and human consciousness, the crossing of a threshold into a new level of existence, which will in turn accelerate change and move things towards the coming singularity (which McKenna predicted in 2012 a.d., but you can tinker with it as you see fit).

Novelty is very like the subjective model of reality (see **Reality Is Highly Overrated**, earlier in this chapter) with the primary difference of the looming omega point. Those who claim paranormals are heralds of the end of the world are essentially correct: reaching singularity *is* the end of the world, at least as we know and can understand it. By definition, whatever lies beyond the singularity is outside our current comprehension. Is it a future that paragons might try to stave off, or encourage? Is it even something they *can* prevent, if their very existence encourages it?

THE WILL OF THE ONE

A singular person or entity might be responsible for the creation of paranormals. This individual may be a paragon (perhaps the first and only "spontaneous" paragon) who, desiring peers and companionship, used tremendous powers to "spark" the creation of others. The progenitor of paragons may be a scientist who discovered a particular gene-sequence, or invented the means to unlock paranormal powers and used it, or caused the accident leading to the creation of the first paranormals. Perhaps he or she is a tremendously powerful reality-shaper who created the world, or at least changed it to its present state. The progenitor may be tremendously powerful, greater than any other paragon, or may be just an ordinary human, save for the knowledge of how to create paranormals and, possibly, how to destroy or control them....

WE MAY NEVER KNOW

Although there are many perfectly good explanations for paragons in this section, you don't have to use any of them, or provide *any* explanation for where paranormals and their powers came from. After all, the real focus of most *Paragons* games is on what people *do* with their extraordinary powers, rather than where they got them or how they really work, and it's quite possible no one can actually explain them.

If you prefer to maintain the mystery of the *Paragons* setting, feel free not to worry about the origin of powers. Just assume they exist and work as described and move on from there. After all, you can always decide to pick a particular origin and reveal it to the players later on. Plus, there's always the possibility the origin "revealed" to them at one point in the series is a hoax or red herring and the real truth is still out there, waiting to be found....

ORIGIN VS. SOURCE

Something to consider in deciding on the origin of paranormal powers is the difference between the *origin* of powers and their *source*, as defined in the *M&M* sourcebook, *Ultimate Power*: essentially, origin is what causes people to have powers, while their source is where their energy or "power" comes from. So, for example, while powers might have a genetic origin, they probably don't draw the energy for their effects from the user's DNA as such. They might also have a psionic (or mystical, or cosmic) component to them.

This consideration is really only important if you want to differentiate between the origin and source of powers in your *Paragons* series and provide additional detail, particularly with regard to certain other effects targeting particular descriptors. Since all paragons presumably share the same for both (but see the following section) it shouldn't have too great an effect on game-play either way.

MORE THAN ONE ORIGIN?

There's nothing that says more than one of the origins for paranormal powers in this section can't be true. Perhaps some paragons are examples of the future of human evolution, but others really *are* avatars of divine forces, or channeling forgotten magic, or what have you. This can create some interesting conflicts within the setting as the truth is revealed about who is using what sort of power and why.

Having multiple origins for powers in a *Paragons* series can make things more complex and, to some degree, more like a comic book superhero world, which usually have all sorts of different origins for powers.

ONE-TIME OR ONGOING ORIGINS

Finally, you might want to consider if the origin of paragons is a one-time event unlikely to happen again or an ongoing process occurring over and over with each new breakout. For example, if paranormal potential is genetic, then new paranormals can be born over time, and "latent" paranormals may continue to breakout. New people can be exposed to sources of power, or are chosen by whatever mysterious agent grants paragons their powers.

If the creation of paranormals is a one-time event, then it won't be long until someone figures out where they came from, and who

they are. Attempts to recreate the breakout event are likely, if at all possible. It will be difficult for paranormals to conceal their identities, particularly if information about their origin gets out. It also sets a limit on the number of paragons in the world and makes it somewhat easier to identify and track them, perhaps with an eye towards containing or even eliminating them. This assumes the origin event is at least somewhat public; if not, then paragons might be able to keep their existence and identities secret for a while longer.

If paranormal origins are ongoing in some fashion, then efforts will tend to focus on figuring out the mechanism for a breakout and how to identify "latent" paragons, if at all possible. This can lead to techniques for inducing or preventing breakouts, perhaps even artificially creating paranormals or "curing" latents and keeping them from ever awakening. It can also lead to mundane tests for identifying paranormals, such as blood tests or psychological exams. Depending on how frequent new breakouts are, the paranormal population may steadily increase, leading some to wonder as to the eventual fate of ordinary humanity, even if the increases will take generations or centuries to reach critical levels.

SECRET POWERS AND TRAITS

Paragons do not necessarily come into being with full knowledge of their powers and capabilities. While a paranormal's breakout and initial power manifestations usually make it clear what his or her basic powers are, there is always a measure of uncertainty about exactly what any given paranormal can do. Power stunts and power surges (if they exist in the series, see **Power Surges**, later in this chapter) only compound this, since it's often difficult to separate one-time abilities paranormals manifest from their more "routine" powers. Theoretically, a paragon may be capable of *anything*!

Gamemasters may wish to reflect this in the series by keeping some of the details of the player characters' powers—and limitations—secret from the players. To begin with, the Gamemaster may wish to keep the existence of, and mechanics for, things like power surges and taint from the players initially, allowing them to discover those particular problems and how to deal with it on their own. Of course, if the characters are not the first paranormals, then it's likely they'll have at least *some* idea about the downsides of paranormal powers (since some are sure to have happened before), although they may not know exactly how they work or how to deal with them yet.

You may also want to ask players to set aside a certain number of points when creating their characters, points you can use to give the character additional powers the player (and therefore the character) might not be aware of yet. You may wish to make this option voluntary if you use it, so players who don't want to know about all of their characters' powers right off can take it, but those who don't enjoy that sort of thing don't have to do so.

You can also choose to "shave" a bit off the adventure awards given to players, setting those points aside and using them to give characters unexpected new powers or abilities. A particularly interesting power stunt could be made permanent using these points, for example, or a character might develop a completely new and unexpected power, perhaps in response to some event in the series. Again, let the players know you are doing this in advance so they're aware you're not short-changing them on adventure awards and will eventually see the benefits of those shaved points.

MYSTERIES OF THE IMAGERIA

What is the Imageria and what are the implications of its existence? Does it even really exist at all? This section looks at some options to consider regarding the information in **Chapter Three**.

IMAGERIA ORIGINS

The origin of the Imageria is strongly linked with the origin and nature of paranormal powers in the setting. It also influences how the Imageria is viewed, which is no small thing given how point of view and belief affect that realm.

The Imageria tends to fall into one of two broad types of origins, depending on the type of paranormal powers available in the setting. There are other possibilities, discussed at the end of this section, and suited to some specific *Paragons* settings.

THE PSYCHIC MODEL

This could also be called the “psychological model” of the Imageria. In essence, the imaginal realm exists as part and parcel of the Universal Unconscious, a deep level of interconnectedness speculated upon by some early pioneers in psychology. It exists “inside” the mind, in as much as three-dimensional directions have any meaning when dealing with other dimensions. Because it is so intimately connected to consciousness, particularly human consciousness, the Imageria reflects human thoughts and beliefs.

In this model, the Imageria emerges from thought and consciousness. While it may have predated human civilization, it likely didn’t predate humanity, and most likely came into being with the first vestiges of human thought: when primitive humans first looked on the world and wondered “why?”

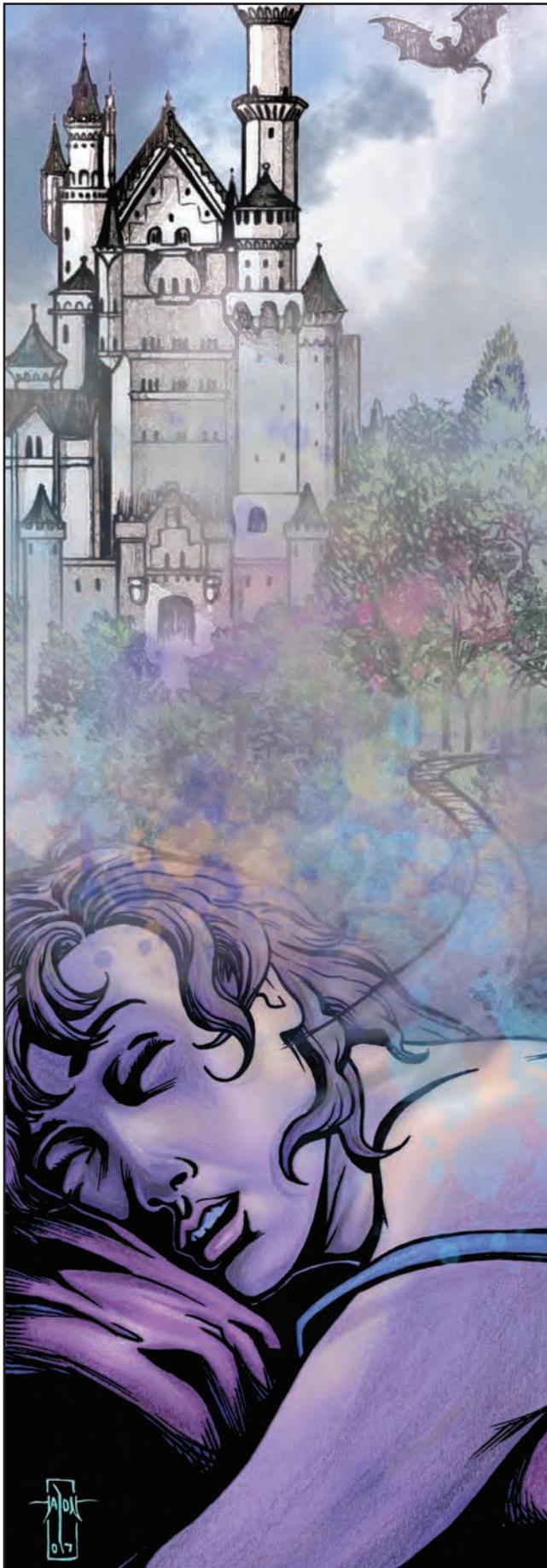
Likewise, the inhabitants of the Imageria, particularly the deepest reaches, are quite old, but still no older than the myths and legends of humanity. The gods, spirits, and other inhabitants of the Imageria arise from humanity in the psychic model, rather than the other way around: the gods are made in our image. Embodying as they do major human archetypes, it’s more likely eidolons are aspects or fragments of greater beings. The psychic model lends itself to endless variations on a relatively small number of themes.

THE SPIRITUAL MODEL

In this model, the Imageria is a higher spiritual plane of some sort. Technically, it is *every* sort of higher spiritual plane, a kind of amalgam of every heaven, hell, or otherworld envisioned by every spiritual tradition in history. Indeed, it is glimpses of the Imageria that give the world’s spiritual and religious traditions their visions of spiritual realms.

Psychological doubletalk about “archetypes” and “icons” is just that. The gods really *do* exist in the Imageria, and so do mythic creatures, spirits, and much more. The supreme creator God, if He exists, does so as far into the Imageria as anyone can possibly go, and not everyone who reaches that most distant place comes back to tell of it. Still, those who do can rightly claim they have been in the presence of God, whatever that may mean for them.

The spiritual model may also feature an Imageria that came into being before the material world. In the “descent” concept, the material world is a condensation or crystallization of the very



OTHER IMAGERIA MODELS

There are some other potential explanations for the Imageria, depending on the style of *Paragons* game you want to run:

VIRTUALITY

The Imageria is a kind of vast “virtual reality,” or another virtual reality, if it turns out what the characters think is reality is also just a virtual creation (see **Virtuality** under **Reality-Bending**, previously). In this case, the Imageria is no more or less “real” than anything else; it may simply have looser restrictions or rules, making things more subject to whims and imagination.

FRINGES OF REALITY

If reality isn’t as solid and stable as we like to believe, then the Imageria may represent a “fringe” region of reality, where normally stable physical and metaphysical laws begin to break-down, heading towards a region of complete chaos beyond the understanding of our ordered minds. If so, then it’s possible the “fraying” edge of the Imageria could be intruding on the real world and the existence of things like paranormals and Fortean phenomena represent reality literally coming apart at the seams!

THE MIND OF GOD

The Imageria may be a mental realm, much like in the psychic model (previously), with one significant difference: it exists solely in *one* mind! The Imageria could be the creation or side effect of a single paragon’s abilities; Emily Rosemont is a good candidate (see **The Rosemont Center** in **Chapter Four**). In essence, an entire universe (several of them, in fact) exists in the creator’s mind, accessible to other paragons in much the same way other minds are accessible to those with certain mental powers. This means anything affecting the sustaining paragon could have tremendous repercussions on the Imageria itself and any insights found there may reflect more personal truth than universal truth. On the other hand, it might be that the Imageria always exists within the mind of *someone*, and if something happens to its paranormal “caretaker,” it passes on to someone else....

refined energies from the depths of the Imageria, so progression back into the Imageria is in many ways like traveling back in time to the primeval origins of creation.

Naturally, the spiritual model of the Imageria best suits settings with a magical or spiritual origin for paranormal powers, although it isn’t necessarily limited to those settings. It might be an interesting twist for paragons in an otherwise “scientific” world to discover the Imageria and find considerable evidence suggesting it is a spiritual otherworld, just as it appears to be.

THE IMAGINARY MODEL

This model essentially says the Imageria doesn’t really exist. It’s nothing more than a hallucination experienced by some paranormals as a side effect of their powers. There’s no “other world” or “immaterial realm” of any sort, just what the minds of some people have imposed on experiences too difficult for them to comprehend any other way.

Similarities in stories between imagerial travelers? Shared cultural and psychological history. Shared experiences by groups of explorers? Temporary telepathic gestalt or link creating shared hallucination. Imagerial forces manifesting into reality? Products of paranormal creation (conscious or otherwise). Whatever the situation, the imaginary model dismisses it as something other than the existence of an alternate reality.

This approach is best for *Paragons* series where you largely intend to ignore, or even debunk, the Imageria. It makes it easy to pretend all the imagerial material in this book doesn’t really exist, or at least has more grounded, real-world explanations.

IMAGERIA RULES

The following are some options you might wish to use in handling the Imageria in your *Paragons* series.

THE STUFF OF DREAMS

Whatever its true nature, the Imageria is a realm of imagination, of dreams and possibilities. Therefore you might want to give para-

normals certain enhanced abilities while in the Imageria, or within its furthest and most iconic reaches. This can range from simply widening the range of what characters can reasonably do with power stunts (see *M&M*, page 120) to allowing a certain number of “free” power stunts, or uses of extra effort (perhaps requiring a suitable Concentration check, DC 10 + power’s rank), or effectively giving all paragons a Variable Effect (see *Ultimate Power*, page 113) essentially allowing them to redistribute their power points at will. Again, this might require a Concentration or other skill check (things like Knowledge [arcane lore] and Knowledge [technology] are good candidates) with a DC of 10 plus the effective power rank and some amount of time, anything from a free action to a full-round action or longer.

This option gives the Imageria a more wide-open feel and allows for potentially *anything* to happen there. On the other hand, it might be a bit too wide-open for some groups. Players may find themselves paralyzed by the overwhelming range of options and the Gamemaster’s carefully laid plans can be blown to smithereens by an unexpected creative application of the players’ imaginations. So you may wish to place some restrictions on this option if you use it at all. Requiring the players to stick to the motif of the imagerial realm around them can limit things somewhat, as can requiring things like skill checks, extra effort, or additional actions (to represent concentrating on an unusual effect).

MENTAL GRAPPLING

The mental grappling rules (see *M&M*, page 157) can cover many aspects of conflict in the Imageria, given that it is a largely psychic or mental plane of existence. Indeed, if you choose, *all* forms of conflict in the Imageria can be handled via mental grappling, with a strong Will save bonus being the only deciding factor of effectiveness there. This places more emphasis on the “psychic” nature of the realm and less on the individual powers of paragons, however, and some players may find it too restrictive. It’s best reserved for *Paragons* games where you want a more “astral plane” feel to the Imageria, where psychic or mental capabilities are paramount.

PARANORMAL IS RELATIVE

The Imageria also offers a prime opportunity for "changing the rules," particularly with regard to paranormal powers. It's already a realm potentially filled with Power Level X plot device characters (see **X-Traits**, *M&M*, page 211), able to dwarf the abilities of even paragons. On top of that, you can have places, or regions, of the Imageria where the characters' powers don't work as expected, or don't even work at all! If you want to run a change-of-pace adventure with the characters in a different setting, time period, or genre, the Imageria

provides you with the means to do so and to explain away any changes in how things work as an effect of the unusual setting.

If you're doing this as a one-time thing in a larger adventure, consider awarding the players hero points for this particular use of GM Fiat, but if you're setting an entire adventure in a realm where things work differently, you don't necessarily have to award the players extra points: the "complication" is part of the larger framework of the adventure. One extra hero point at the start of the adventure, to make up for their lack of powers, would be appropriate, if you're feeling generous.

CHARACTER CREATION

Character creation in a *Paragons* series uses the same rules described in the *Mutants & Masterminds* rulebook, with a few slight modifications to better reflect the style of the setting and its characters. In particular, players are encouraged to create a normal human character first, and then apply additional power points to make the character into a super-powered paranormal.

POWER LEVEL

Paragons games can be played out at a wide range of power levels, from otherwise ordinary people with a single useful power (which may have multiple facets or applications) to godlike paragons with the power to literally reshape the world in a variety of ways. The choice of power level for the series depends on the type of game you want to run and the types of characters you want to encourage your players to create. Here are some examples of possible power levels for a *Paragons* game, with some discussion of the pros and cons of each.

NORMAL PEOPLE, PARANORMAL POWERS (PL 6, 90 POINTS)

Some *Paragons* games may take the approach of fairly ordinary people who suddenly develop an extraordinary ability: from telekinesis to regeneration or the power to walk through walls. Whatever the case, the characters are not quite the larger-than-life heroes from the four color comic books. They're just people from all walks of life who happen to have a "special talent" of some sort.

This power level suits a series where characters spend around 20 to 40 or so points on powers (including things like Enhanced Ability). It's enough for them to have one or two significant, related powers, perhaps an Array of suitable Alternate Powers, without making them so powerful they can ignore mundane concerns and threats.

Note that even PL 6 paragons can be quite powerful, having sufficient Impervious Toughness, for example, to ignore most hand-held weapons, and being able to dish out damage equal to that of a flame-thrower or (with some trade-offs) even something like a mortal round! Plus, 20 or more power points can go a long way when invested in powers without power level limits. Gamemasters may even want to set some additional limits on powers in this level series to ensure the character's abilities remain suitably "low-level." On the other hand, the challenges posed by playing a character able to teleport anywhere in the world, who is otherwise an ordinary human being, for example, can be quite interesting.

PARANORMAL HEROES (PL 8, 120 POINTS)

Paranormals at this power level start to approach the capabilities of comic book superheroes, having fewer mundane concerns or limitations. They have a greater breadth of powers and can more easily afford the typical *Mutants & Masterminds* combination of offensive, defensive, and utility powers (movement, senses, etc.). Paragons who apply their points primarily to enhanced traits like abilities and skills can be as capable as action-film characters, with an impressive range of training and knowledge.

This power level is good for either a high-powered version of "Normal People, Paranormal Powers," or else a good mid-range between that power level and a truly superheroic level. It's good for games where players are still getting the feel for the full range of *M&M* options and also where the GM wants a lot of growth potential, giving the characters more room to improve and develop over time.



EMPOWERING YOURSELVES

One option for a *Paragons* series is for the players to take the roles of fictionalized versions of themselves, who awaken to the potential for paranormal powers and have to deal with the impact those extraordinary abilities have on their lives and on the world.

The first step in such a character creation process is largely the same: creating non-powered versions of the player characters and determining their relevant game traits. The benchmarks given for ability scores and skills in *Mutants & Masterminds* may be helpful here, and the GM should encourage the players to be objective (but also not too harsh) in figuring out what their own game traits should be. The GM should exercise good judgment in helping the players and balancing out the right trait ratings.

It's likely the characters won't all have the same point totals at this stage, which is just fine, so long as the players all have the same number of points to spend. As with normal character creation, the GM should decide if the players will determine their characters' paranormal traits or if they will be decided for them, and kept a secret until the characters learn more about what they can do.

Playing yourself in a *Paragons* game can be fun, but groups should also be aware that this sort of roleplaying can be intensely personal, and some players may take offense at either discussion of what their game traits should be or at things that happen to the fictional versions of themselves in play, even more so than with entirely fictional characters. If any of the players are uncomfortable with the idea of playing themselves, they should be encouraged to create fictional characters using the regular guidelines instead.

THE POWERS THAT BE (PL 10, 150 POINTS)

Power level 10 is the default for a four-color *Mutants & Masterminds* series. For *Paragons*, it's a significant power level for a group of paranormals. They're essentially beyond most ordinary concerns, although conventional weapons, particularly military forces, can still threaten them. Those with especially focused powers will have them at considerable ranks, while savants can have tremendously broad ranges of skills.

This power level is best suited for series focused on truly superhuman paranormals. A number of different characters from **Chapter Five** fit in this power level range and provide suitable examples, allies, or antagonists.

PARANORMAL PANTHEON (PL 12, 180 POINTS)

At this power level, the characters are practically gods amongst mortals. They potentially have the kind of power to ignore conventional weapons (save for tac-nukes and the like) and overthrow whole armies. They may have wide-reaching powers, not only with save DCs high enough that no ordinary human could resist them, but with extras like Area and sufficient Progression to cover large swaths of territory.

This power level is best suited for a world-spanning series where the characters are intended to be above most ordinary concerns, holding the power to re-shape the future of the world, if they're so inclined. The Vanguard (see **Chapter Five**) is a good example of a group of character for this type of series.

STARTING AND OVERALL POWER LEVELS

Another thing to consider is how powerful is the "average" paranormal in the series? How powerful is the most powerful paranormal, and where do the player characters fall in that range?

You might decide to start the player characters off at a higher or lower power level relative to the rest of the paranormal population. For example, if the player characters are among the most powerful paragons in the world, then their actions have even more importance in the context of the series. It is also more difficult to challenge them, although a large group of less powerful paranormals may still prove formidable, especially if they employ cunning tactics and teamwork.

You can also start the player characters out as significantly less powerful than the average paragon. They have to deal with powerful paranormal adversaries using their wits and teamwork in addition to their powers if they hope to have a chance. This approach takes away some of the "unbridled power" aspects of the setting, but does encourage the players to work together, since they are faced with many more powerful opponents. Perhaps the characters are allowed to grow into greater power, or maybe an event later in the series results in a dramatic increase in power (allowing them to jump ahead several power levels at once in the form of a large advancement award).

STAGE ONE: NORMAL

At this stage of character creation, consider your character's life before breaking out. Take a base of 50 power points (sufficient for a power level 3 starting character) and build that character. Consider the character's early life, professional experience, hobbies, and so forth and choose the appropriate abilities, skills, and feats.

Your character doesn't have any powers at this stage, and don't choose unusual or heroic traits without a good reason for them. Perhaps your character was a police officer, soldier, government agent, or the like before his or her breakout, but paranormals come from all walks of life, most of them fairly ordinary.

Once you've created your normal character, it's time for a breakout.

STAGE TWO: PARANORMAL

Now spend any remaining power points you have, based on the series' starting power point total. So a 90-point series gives you 40 remaining power points to apply to your character's paranormal abilities, while a 150-point series gives you 100 power points.

Of course, not all your paranormal power points need to be applied to powers: you can also use them to enhance your character's abilities, and acquire new or improved skills and feats, representing either training following the character's awakening or direct savantlike enhancement. The same goes for things like Benefits or Equipment your character acquires as a paragon, perhaps from belonging to a particular faction or working for an organization from **Chapter Four**.

Don't overlook things like attack and defense bonus or saving throws, which are probably also enhanced from the character's normal values. Again, this might reflect training and experience or simply a benefit of becoming paranormal.

SERIES FRAMEWORKS

The series frameworks in this section provide the Gamemaster with options for running a *Paragons* series in a variety of different styles, from high-powered heroes working to change the world to ordinary humans acting as secret agents in a world where gods walk the Earth. Each framework has a summary of what the series is about, what sort of characters are suited to it, appropriate game system options, and sample adventure ideas to get you going.

Generally, **this information is for Gamemasters only**. Players may not want to read this section in order to preserve their enjoyment of the game and any surprises that might come with it.

Gamemasters should read over the frameworks carefully for ideas. Feel free to use these frameworks as jumping-off points for their own *Paragons* series. Modify or mix-and-match them as desired to create the type of series you have in mind.

THE BREAKOUT

As the chopper's blades roared to life, Liz couldn't help but think of that old Chinese curse: "may you live in interesting times." And report on them, she added silently to herself. These certainly were interesting times. If the early reports were to be believed, incredible things were happening all over the world: priests speaking—and being understood—in ancient Greek in New York, deserts blooming in Africa, ancient gods sighted in South America, and a woman in Arkansas who lifted a train engine off someone.

The copter lifted off the roof with a lurch that always made Liz grab for the nearest handle, clutching her bag with the other hand. Just then, there was a flash and a deafening boom: a lightning strike? Transformer exploding? She had no time to ponder as the chopper swerved wildly. There was a sickening squeal of twisting metal, a feeling of freefall as the skyline spun, the ground dozens of stories below swinging up to fill her line of sight.

Just as quickly, the copter righted itself, and Liz found herself looking into the gently smiling face of a young man who was shifting the damaged helicopter back onto the roof with his bare hands, nothing supporting him but open air hundreds of feet to the street below.

"Don't worry," he said, "I've got you."

Interesting times, indeed.

SUMMARY

The heroes are among the very first paranormals to breakout and discover their abilities and they have to deal with the consequences of their discovery and its effect on the world around them.

BACKGROUND

The player characters are just ordinary people, going about their ordinary lives, or so they believe. Then, one day, without explanation or warning, they all discover they are...different. For some, it might be a sudden and unexpected trauma that triggers things: a mugging, an accident, even an argument, or they may just wake

up one day to discover they can do things, things no one else can do, things that should be impossible.

The heroes explore their newfound capabilities and discover there are others like them, both the other player characters and various NPCs (including some from **Chapter Four**). Some paragons are otherwise ordinary people, but others are barely human, and more than a few are willing to use their powers to get whatever they want. How do the player characters deal with their paranormal abilities, and what do they do with them? How do they handle the challenges of being the first paragons in a world completely unprepared for such an event?

It's up to you whether or not the Breakout is the first real manifestation of the paranormal in the world, also whether it is a wide, public phenomenon or a limited, potentially secret one. See **Chapter Two** for some ideas on how the Breakout might happen.

If the Breakout is the first real example of the paranormal, it is going to catch pretty much everyone off-guard. Depending on how widespread it is, there could be public panic and the need for strong leadership and a response from those in positions of authority. How things are handled early on can determine a lot about how people are going to view paragons and their place in the world. If there are some paragons and awareness of the paranormal before the widespread Breakout, some may be prepared to handle the situation, or take advantage of it, when it finally happens.

If the Breakout occurs quietly enough for the initial paranormals to



conceal their abilities, things won't change considerably until the existence of paragons becomes public knowledge, which can take as long as you like and even form the basis for the whole series.

THE CHARACTERS

The heroes in a Breakout series should start out as ordinary people. You may even want to have the players do the first stage of *Paragons* character creation—building a normal person—and then stop, waiting to apply the remaining power points to the characters' paranormal traits until *after* play begins.

A Breakout series can vary significantly in power level: the characters might breakthrough to tremendous power (applying a full 100 power points—or more!) or their powers could be more modest, in the area of only 20 power points or so. That's still enough for a decent rank in one or more powers, but characters are likely to be more focused on just those one or two powers (or possibly an array of Alternate Powers).

FACTIONS

The following factions from **Chapter Five** may play important roles in a Breakout series. How much of a role depends on whether the series is the very first breakout of paranormal activity (and therefore the genesis of many of the setting's factions) or there has been enough limited activity or forewarning for some factions to already exist and react to the characters' breakout.

THE INITIATIVE

The Initiative is potentially a key player in a Breakout series, depending on just how much the organization knows about the existence of paranormals before the player characters first breakout. If the Initiative is already in existence and knows of other paragons, then a new Breakout will be of great interest. The organization might try to recruit the new paranormals, and will at least keep tabs on them to ensure word doesn't get out and they don't pose a danger to the public. At first, the characters might think they have incredible luck or a "guardian angel" ensuring their activities remain hidden, at least until they find out about the Initiative's existence and true purpose.

PSI

PSI has a potentially more benign role in the series, offering new paragons the opportunity to learn more about their abilities and to meet others like them. PSI might approach the characters after they breakout and encourage them to take part in studies of their powers. This is a good way of getting a group of disparate characters together at the start of a series. Of course, if the heroes come into contact with the Initiative first they might not be so inclined to trust PSI's good intentions when they do get in touch with them. Depending on what you've decided for the series, they may well be right.

ADVENTURES

The *Paragons* introductory adventure, *A More Perfect Union*, is suitable to start a Breakout series, with the new or nascent paragons drawn to the small town of Unity by events there as they discover each other and their capabilities and face their first paranormal challenge.

Adventures in this type of series tend to revolve around the paragons discovering what they can do and deciding how to apply their

unique abilities. There are likely those who want to influence their decisions, for good or ill, or simply take the decision out of their hands and claim their power for themselves.

Characters may be very self-motivated and choose their own path, or they might allow circumstances to choose for them. A Breakout series can easily transition into another type of *Paragons* series as the characters choose what they're going to do with their gifts.

DON'T LOSE YOUR HEAD

Ravana (see **Chapter Four**) has the ability to detect paranormals and can claim their powers for his own, by killing and consuming them. He stalks the player characters, individually or collectively, sensing their power or potential. Perhaps a brush with the psychotic paragon actually triggers a character's breakout, giving him or her a fighting chance. Once the player characters understand their common problem, they might band together for mutual protection and try to figure out who the psycho-killer stalking them is and why he's doing it.

HELLO, WORLD

It can be hard to keep a secret like the ability to fly or lift cars over your head. Try as they might, the fledgling paragons probably aren't going to be able to conceal their true nature forever (at least, not without some serious help). Perhaps they don't even *want* to hide what they really are. Eventually, something happens: a public display of power that ends up on the 11 o'clock news, a tell-all interview, a press conference (complete with demonstrations of paranormal ability), or what have you. Then the characters need to deal with the repercussions of public revelation of their existence and the instant overnight stardom that comes with it.

ON THE VANGUARD

The army had been bad enough, destroying towns and killing people, but when enough of them got organized, had enough of the death-squads, and fought back, there was hope for a brief while. But then money talked and fire rained from the sky. Men who could pick up jeeps, who couldn't be cut or hurt, came and told them the insurrection was over.

Some decided to fight anyway; better to die fighting for the slim hope of freedom than to surrender to those who burned fields and towns and butchered friends and family. They would make their stand and be remembered that way. Still, it was no easy thing to face down hired soldiers with the power of gods.

When the first volley of fiery arcs came streaking in, they didn't run, but stood their ground. They watched in amazement as a man glowing as bright as the sun flew in front of the fire. It splashed off him like water, touching no one and nothing in the town. The woman clad in shining metal came next, hurling spears of light at the attackers.

"We won't let them hurt you," the shining man said. "This ends today."

SUMMARY

A team of paragons sponsored by the United Nations keeps watch to protect the world from unusual and paranormal threats, but also has to fight in the most dangerous arena of all: international politics.

BACKGROUND

In *On the Vanguard*, the characters are agents of PAX, the Paranormal Action Executive, an agency established to coordinate the efforts of a team of elite paranormals to deal with threats to the world as a whole and help establish international peace, cooperation, and understanding. Of course, that's all easier said than done.

The series begins when PAX recruits the characters, either as the first paranormal agents for their program or simply as the latest group of candidates, perhaps to form a satellite or supplementary team. The Vanguard team from **Chapter Five** is intended as an example of the kind of group PAX could recruit, but you can decide for yourself what criteria the Executive uses, besides sheer power.

The team is supplied with a headquarters, training, equipment, and direction in the form of a PAX liaison. From there, it's a matter of the sorts of missions characters undertake. They can include everything from averting massive worldwide disasters (asteroid strikes, earthquakes, tsunami, etc.) to heading off wars, apprehending terrorists and other violators of "international law" (in as much as it exists), and perhaps even trying to address more serious and systemic economic, environmental, and social problems, from global warming to genocide.

Since the characters are likely to take on big challenges with an eye towards changing the world for the better, the options for **Mass Combat** and **Paradigm Shifts** later in this chapter may be useful in this type of series.

THE CHARACTERS

Paragons in this type of series are likely to be powerful, power level 10 or greater; they have to be, if they're going to take on the kinds of challenges facing the world. This is a series well suited for higher power levels, 12 or even higher, where the paranormals have the ability to change the world, literally and figuratively.

Characters are likely going to want a reasonable amount of combat ability, whether it's invulnerability and offensive power like a living missile, or tremendous combat skill like a one-person army, since chances of the group facing off against an entire army are fairly good.

More than power, however, the characters in this series need to be *motivated*. They have to want to change the world for the better rather than simply cashing-in on their power and fame. In many regards, they have to be like four-color superheroes: willing to fight a "never-ending battle" to make the world a better place, and willing to sacrifice for that goal.

FACCTIONS

Obviously PAX, or an organization like it, is a significant faction in this series, although it doesn't have to be. If the characters are "self-starters" they could take it upon themselves to bring peace, prosperity, and freedom to the world, possibly whether the world wants it or not. This basically sets the characters up as adversaries of nearly *all* of the factions in **Chapter Four**, since they essentially want to "conquer" the world, or at least keep everyone else from doing so.

THE PANTHEON

The Pantheon's role in this series depends somewhat on the group's outlook about saving the world but odds are good the Pantheon won't be an ally. At best, they and the characters might agree to go their separate ways and ignore each other but, sooner or later, a Pantheon member will decide it is his or her "divine right" to conquer a region,

massacre an army, rearrange the landscape, or something else likely to cause friction. Still, the similarities between the aloof and superior Pantheon and the involved and superior PAX peacekeepers can make for interesting commentary as well as fun rivalries.

MR. ZERO

A faction unto himself, Mr. Zero and his one-man conspiracy can be a long-term adversary for this type of series. Unless he has outside paranormal help, his is a subtle opposition, but no less powerful because of it. Mr. Zero is more likely to manipulate events behind the scenes, turning public opinion against the characters, alienating their allies, and generally isolating them from their support-base while furthering his own agenda. How far is the group willing to go in the face of overwhelming public opposition? Do they really know what's best for the masses, does their superior power give them the right—if not the *obligation*—to decide?

ADVENTURES

Adventures for an *On the Vanguard* series are meant to be "wide-screen," larger than life. They should approach the level of scenarios for comic book superheroes, with a post-modern *Paragons* spin to them.

HAMMERFALL

Near-space tracking has detected an asteroid on a collision course with Earth and estimates it will hit the planet in just under 48 hours, wiping out all life. A mission is scrambled to send the team out into space to intercept the asteroid and change its course before it's too late.

While it's possible the asteroid collision is a coincidence, other possibilities lurk in the shadows. Could a paranormal have aimed the giant rock at Earth and, if so, why? What if it was aliens that decided the Breakout on Earth represents a cosmic danger in need of "sterilization"? What will they do if their initial plan fails?

KEEPING THE PEACE

Russia and China are threatening to go to war over oil reserves in Kazakhstan, ostensibly over tampering in local elections. Both nations have massive armies on the Kazak border and, of course, nuclear capabilities, if things escalate. The characters have to put themselves in between two powerful armies, uncover the truth about foreign intervention in the country, and hopefully arrange a peaceful solution to the conflict before war erupts.

THE LAW IS PARAMOUNT

It was just another day in the trenches, another day in some small rural town I'd never heard of—in one of the square states, I think—trying to keep a low profile, but knowing odds were against us having that kind of luxury. Not that it matters, since sometimes it's better when people can see that we're doing our job, whether we like it or not.

The coffee in the diner was actually pretty decent, the service, too. I was thinking of asking the waitress for her number when I felt it: contact. There was activity in the area, and it was pretty significant, too. I got on the telepathic link and told Jon I'd tagged our quarry and to send backup as I dropped some cash on the counter and headed out the door as fast as I could without drawing attention.

It was close, very close. I scanned the street, the faces of people going about their daily lives, doing their best to remain unaware that a war was happening all around them. I looked across the parking lot, then across the street. There. It was there. A pickup truck skidded to a stop as I dashed to the other side of the street, thinking the coordinates to Control.

She spotted me. I could see it in her eyes as she looked up from the stroller she was pushing, just as I sensed there was not baby under those fleece blankets. There was a moment of shocked recognition, and she bolted. Damn!

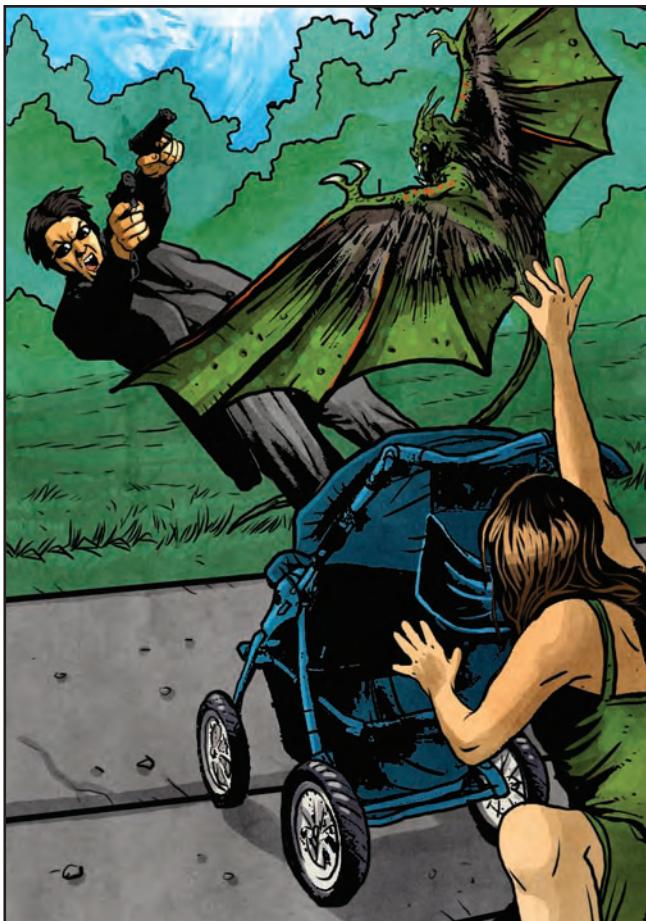
"PRA!" I yelled, flashing my badge, and people on the street suddenly took notice and got out of the way as fast as they could. Good thing, too, because just then the blankets stirred and something out of a nightmare erupted up out of them, spreading bat-like wings and flexing powerful talons as it shrieked a hunting cry. A summoner, great, that wasn't going to make the job any easier.

"Jon?" I said over the mindlink, "I could really use that backup right now."

Just another day in the PRA....

SUMMARY

The heroes are agents of the United States Paranormal Regulatory Agency (see **Chapter Five**), charged with the task of registering and tracking paragons within the borders of the U.S.A. and among the nation's citizens. They must contend with an active and dedicated underground pledged to defy all aspects of the nation's Paranormal Registration Act.



BACKGROUND

States and governments exist in part to help safeguard their citizens and the existence of paranormals and their powers is perhaps the greatest threat the world has ever known. Civilized nations largely agree: paranormals *must* be regulated and carefully monitored if society is to remain both safe and stable. Unfortunately, not all paragons agree.

The Paranormal Registration Act in the United States was met with overwhelming public approval, but mixed reactions from the paranormal community itself. Some paragons were quick to volunteer, acting as role models and examples to their kind, registering with the government and providing details of their abilities. Others were reluctant, concerned about what compliance meant in terms of their civil liberties, and what the government would do with the information. Some were outright defiant, refusing to register, hiding their identities beneath masks or manifestations of their powers. The PR Act was illegal and unconstitutional, they said, a violation of civil rights.

Whether or not the PRA is constitutional is a matter for the courts to decide. Until they do, it's the Agency's job to enforce the law and to do that they need agents willing and able to investigate paranormal crimes and take on the criminals to keep the public safe.

THE CHARACTERS

Characters are most likely to be agents of the PRA, complete with the necessary training and equipment; see the Agency's description for details. It's possible in the early days of registration, as the PRA gets up to speed, for "freelance" paragons to find work since their abilities are in short supply. Such "scabs" or "traitors" are likely to face derision and hostility from others of their kind defying Registration.

The Law is Paramount is best suited to relatively low power-level games, from PL6 to 8. Higher power levels are possible, if you want to run something more like a traditional superhero game where powerful paranormals duke it out in urban areas or the like. The default power level is better suited to adventures where mundane training, connections, and support make more of a difference, and the government actually has a chance at legally regulating paragons and their activities.

In addition to whatever powers the characters might have, things like investigative and interaction skills are important in this series. PRA agents are likely to spend a lot of time at crime scenes, performing investigations, and tracking down paranormal "runaways."

FACTIONS

The primary factions in *The Law is Paramount* are the pro- and anti-Registration sides, regardless of what their other affiliations may be.

PARANORMAL REGULATORY AGENCY

The Paranormal Regulatory Agency from **Chapter Four** is at the center of this series. While the Agency's mandate is enforcement of the Registration Act and the investigation of paranormal crimes, it is by no means monolithic. The PRA can include a variety of characters from dedicated law-enforcement officers to political manipulators or even corrupt officials with their own agendas. What seems to be a straightforward mission statement could hide a deeper conspiracy for the characters to uncover as the series progresses.

THE ROSEMONT CENTER

The Collected and their gathering of psychologically-damaged paranormals become even more problematic in this series, since what they're doing is likely in violation of the PRA. The Rosemont Center might become part of a resistance movement where paranormals try to help and police their own kind, even if it means challenging the law. On the other hand, Dr. Rosemont and her assistants could also be *supporters* of the PRA, still trying to help those in need, but with the Collected working more as agents to find unregistered paranormals and keep them on the straight and narrow.

THE UNDERGROUND

The other major faction in *The Law is Paramount* is the side opposed to the Paranormal Registration Act and its enforcement. This "paranormal underground" could actually be made up of many factions and individuals, loosely organized and united in their Opposition to the PRA. Some oppose the Act on moral grounds while others simply want the freedom to do whatever they wish, or see the Registration Act as an obstacle to their own goals.

ADVENTURES

Adventures in this series primarily take the form of PRA case assignments, which can range from criminal investigations to tracking down rogue paranormals and bringing them in.

BY THE GRACE OF GOD

The Church of Jesus Christ, Paragon (see **Chapter Four**) is running an "underground railroad" to get unregistered paranormals out of the United States, smuggling them to Canada and then elsewhere in the world. The Agency knows about the operation and wants it shutdown without provoking a public confrontation with the sect and its followers. To make matters worse, the more radical elements of the Church are using the Underground Railroad as a recruitment center for paranormal terrorists, something Archbishop Theodosius fears, but cannot yet prove.

INSIDE OUT

A paranormal informer tells the agents a shape-shifting paragon has infiltrated the Agency (Imposter or Mr. Zero from **Chapter Five** are both good candidates). The informant knows the imposter is in a position of authority, but nothing more than that. Who can the agents trust with this information, and what are they going to do about it? What if there is no infiltrator, and they're just being sent on a wild goose-chase or, worse yet, what if they're just supposed to *think* they've confirmed there's no mole in the Agency when there actually is?

FREELANCERS

It was just another job....

That's what Lancer told himself anyway, but looking over the village, already scarred with bomb craters and pockmarked with bullet-holes, he had to wonder: These people are a threat? Still, the client was paying for the elimination of the partisans, and that was what he was going to get, so long as the money in his numbered Swiss account held out.

The outward quiet in the village didn't fool Lancer for a minute, but he let them think it did. If it seemed like he strode into the place unconcerned about an ambush it was only because he wasn't, just not for the reasons they thought. Folks in this part of the world should know better if a lone guy shows up without a platoon of support in tow, but even here people somehow expected paranormals to appear in spandex rather than fatigues, or carrying some other sign of who they were.

Lancer's sign was the distinctive blue shimmers in the air around him as the first shots bounced off his force field. Then he demonstrated his signature ability and punched through the wall of the house with a translucent blue lance of force. He must have gotten lucky and nailed the gunman with it, too, because the shots stopped instantly.

He stepped through the hole in the wall to see a young woman crouching beside the man crumpled at the foot of the wall with a considerable dent, hand held to her mouth in shock and horror, the rifle lying forgotten on the floor. He was probably dead, especially if he took a direct hit. Somewhere in one of the nearby room a baby began to wail.

It's just a job, Lancer told himself as he advanced on the two figures. Time to get it done.

SUMMARY

The player characters are paranormal mercenaries, freelancers, working for one or more agencies or on their own as individuals or a group. They hire out their unique talents to clients able to meet their fee.

BACKGROUND

In a *Freelancers* series the characters are, or decide to become, mercenaries. It's a fairly easy matter for paranormals to hire themselves out to a variety of clients interested in their special abilities, for jobs ranging from paramilitary operations to public relations. They can make considerable fortunes, assuming money is what motivates them to enter the marketplace and not fame or just the opportunity to bust some heads and get paid for it.

The characters can all work for the same agency or as independent operators. Either way, the framework provides a convenient hook for adventures and a cohesive group: an employer brings the characters together, gives them a job to do, and they go do it, after which they (most likely) get paid. There's also room for personal agendas, double-dealing, and inter-group or inter-agency politics and struggles, to say nothing of grudges over previous jobs, held by people with a less "professional" approach than the characters.

THE CHARACTERS

Paranormals are a unique and valuable resources regardless of the power level, so characters in a *Freelancers* series can cover a wide gamut from PL 6 "normals with powers" to PL 10 and on up, although the truly high-power-level characters might need a motivation other than wealth, given that their powers can easily place them above such petty concerns (or earn them money in much easier ways than hiring themselves out as mercenaries).

While many paragons can get by solely on their powers, most will want some other traits in order to make it in the harsh world of



the professional mercenary. Skills like Knowledge (tactics) and Profession (mercenary) may be helpful in knowing what to do and who to trust. The same goes for Sense Motive, necessary in a job rife with double-dealing and people who aren't what they seem. Both technical and operational skills (from Craft and Disable Device to Stealth and Survival) are useful on various missions.

Mercenary characters—particularly the paramilitary types—may want ranks in Equipment for their field gear, and those lacking offensive capabilities will want some kind of weapons. Of course, not all paragons for hire work as mercenaries, but even more laid-back types are likely to encounter dangerous situations and will want a means of self-defense. The GM should decide up-front if the Equipment feat is needed or if ordinary equipment is available based on Wealth, letting characters load up with whatever they need and can afford.

FACtIONS

The primary factions in a *Freelancers* series are various mercenary organizations and those opposed to them. The characters might get into the game by starting up their own company selling their services, rather than working for an existing one. For models of freelance paranormal businesses, see the following, and **Chapter Four**.

THE SILBER AGENCY

The Silber Agency is the premier paranormal "talent agency," securing fat for-hire contracts for its clients and maintaining a stable of the most capable and reputable paragons in the business. It's likely to play a role in any *Freelancers* series, whether as a patron

to the characters, a rival (friendly or otherwise), or a direct competitor. If the characters aren't working for, or with, the Silber Agency, its paranormals might be working for the other side of a conflict. Things can get interesting if characters have to go up against colleagues who, just the week before, were genial allies but who now work for the opposition.

FOREGONE CONCLUSIONS

Foregone Conclusions is the most paramilitary and mercenary of the freelancers, making them suitable as opposition in series where the characters are more principled mercenaries; or the company can serve as a patron to paranormals who don't much care who's signing the checks, so long as they clear. You can even run a series about freelancers trying to remain principled while working for an agency known for dirty tricks and doing whatever it takes to get the job done.

ADVENTURES

The typical *Freelancer* adventures are various jobs the characters are hired to do, ranging from fighting proxy wars anywhere in the world to espionage and skullduggery, body-guarding, or even public relations appearances.

BRUSHFIRE WAR

Rebel forces in a Third-World nation under totalitarian rule have scraped together enough money and other valuables to hire paranormal mercenaries to aid in the overthrow of their corrupt and tyrannical "president," with promises of cooperation and gratitude once a new, democratically-elected, regime is in power. Unfortunately, the current president has more than enough money to hire his own mercenaries, both normal and paranormal, to defend the capitol city and presidential palace, so what happens when super-soldiers fight on both sides in a proxy war? If the freelancers do overthrow the present government, why (apart from their professional reputations) should they turn over control to the rebels?

RESEARCH & DESTRUCTION

A corporation hires the freelancers to steal plans and a prototype for a new technological innovation, intending to beat a rival company's development to market. Unfortunately, the device's designer is a paranormal and the innovation isn't all that it's cracked up to be: it won't work without assistance from its creator's powers.

ECHOES OF THE PAST

"How could there even be an island here?" Shane asked, looking around at the towering ruins.

Prophet shrugged. "Obviously there is one. We're here. Besides, how does anything really work in the world anymore?"

"Yeah, but c'mon, it's never been seen on any maps. Satellites must have passed over this area hundreds of times!"

The psychic sighed deeply, having had this conversation many times before. It was amazing how Shane continued to cling to outdated definitions of what was and wasn't possible. "Look," he began, "do we really have to go over the theory of retroactive insertion via causal induction zone again? Honestly, it's as simple as..."

The bellowing roar from the depths of the jungle interrupted his tirade. All of them just stood for a moment as it washed over them, and for a few moments after as the echoes died away in the vine and moss covered ruins.

"What," Shane asked, "was that?"

A thin smile tugged at Prophet's lips. "An impossible creature on an island that shouldn't exist. Let's go see."

SUMMARY

Most people think paranormals are a recent phenomenon, but they're wrong, at least about their definition of "recent." There have been paragons in the world for a long time, perhaps always, and the evidence is there, if you know where to look. The characters are "paranormal archeologists" digging up the secrets of the past, secrets some would prefer to keep buried, often secrets that should remain buried.

BACKGROUND

Paragons is a setting with a lot of "secret history" and conspiracy potential. After all, once you accept the idea of people with physics-defying powers, some of the crackpot ideas about history sound positively plausible. Indeed, some paranormals seem to prove them right!

While most think of the Breakout as the first appearance of the paranormal, what if they're wrong? What if there was once an entire history of fantastic superhumans, from ancient myth all the way up through tales of brightly clad heroes and villains in the past six or seven decades, but something happened. Perhaps there was a cosmic crisis, some catastrophe, maybe the universe simply rebelled, or the great cosmic creator decided it was time for a "retcon." Whatever happened, that fantastic history was overturned, buried, and the one we know came into being.

But the fantastic has a way of resurfacing, and that's exactly what happened with the Breakout: the world of amazing powers and the people who wield them returned to the surface. Although the powers are back, there's still a great deal of that other history still buried underneath our own, waiting to be found. Who knows what strange flotsam or jetsam the Imageria might cast onto our shores?

Some people just can't resist a mystery, and odds are some paranormals will be curious enough to start poking around the odd corners of things. The clues they find drive them on to look deeper, uncovering more of what was, and wondering how it all went away. They can explore dusty caves beneath stately old manor houses or in the depths of the arctic, finding strange relics from another world. Perhaps those places and things even stir memories of other times, other lives, different from those they lead now.

THE CHARACTERS

Characters in this series are primarily investigators, adventuring archeologists of a sort, with an emphasis on skills like Knowledge and Investigation over flashier abilities. Still, odds are good the investigators will run into trouble from time to time and certain powers can come in very handy both in digging up the past and in protecting one's present-day existence.

FACTIONS

In an *Echoes of the Past* series, it's all about those who want to dig up the truth and those who want to keep it buried. Both sides have their reasons, and may come into conflict with others who share their goal, but don't necessarily share their views or methods of achieving it.

ADVENTURES

Adventures are likely to revolve around the "mystery of the week," with characters following tantalizing clues to the source of some unexplained phenomenon. The easiest adventure formula for *Echoes of the Past* is to take some mythic or pop culture story and "bury" it, then give the characters a trail allowing them to find and dig it up once again.

One idea is to use the *Freedom City* sourcebook as a resource for "buried treasures." Assume the Terminus Invasion, the Time of Crisis, or event ended that world and began the *Paragons* reality and go from there!

HOUSE OF MIRRORS

A mysterious "haunted" carnival funhouse has a Hall of Mirrors where the reflections of paranormals are distorted, but not twisted, more like variations from different histories. What's more, if you watch them long enough, those reflections move and act of their own accord, more like looking through a mirror into another world than viewing your own reflection. Then the first paranormal disappears, replaced by one of her reflections, determined to let others free from their "mirror prison" to replace their counterparts in this world.

MYSTERIOUS ISLAND

A tropical island is found where no island should be. Its interior is mountainous, the lowlands filled with vast and ancient ruins of unknown origin, the whole of it covered with a jungle canopy that blocks satellite surveillance, surrounded by dangerous coral reefs. Explorers discover the island is home to numerous "lost island" beings, from giant creatures to savage tribes to ape-men and jungle queens. Where did it come from and why has it appeared now?

TAKING THE INITIATIVE

Ross was the first to break the long silence. "He should have been back by now," he said to no one in particular.

"He might have run into trouble," Connor replied. She didn't look up from her laptop; still busy trying to crack the encryption on the files they'd managed to recover. If she was the slightest bit concerned, she didn't show it, but that was always how she operated.

"That's what I'm worried about," Ross replied, fiddling with his sidearm. He'd been methodically checking and cleaning all his gear, just for something to do with his hands while they waited. He wasn't a techie like Connor; he needed to do something. All this waiting around....

Both of them immediately came alert at the sound of someone outside the door. Connor reached for the pistol sitting on the bed next to her. Ross was already on his feet, flat against the wall beside the door. They both marginally relaxed when the confirmation code came over the lock, but it could have been compromised.

Uzbeki stumbled through the door, clutching his arm. Blood soaked his sleeve and Ross had to catch him to keep him from stumbling. He got him over to the bed and started taking a look at the gunshot wound while Connor secured the door.

"sokay," Uzbeki muttered, "I don't think I was followed."

"What the hell happened?" Ross asked, stripping away the bloody cloth. He was lucky: it looked like the bullet went through clean.

"We were right," he said through gritted teeth. "It's Mr. Zero. The Agency's been compromised. We're on our own."

SUMMARY

In a world of gods and monsters, who looks out for ordinary people? Who will secure the future of humanity in a post-human world? That's the job of the Initiative, like it or not, and the players take the roles of Initiative agents: either humans who have to face-off against virtual gods, or paranormals willing to turn against their own kind for the greater good of all.

BACKGROUND

The series either starts out with the Initiative recruiting the characters to the agency's cause or with a group of characters already working for the Initiative, given assignments by their often mysterious superiors. Depending on when the series begins, the characters could even be involved in the founding of the Initiative, one of the driving forces behind it, or among its very first agents.



As described in **Chapter Four** the Initiative primarily exists to help protect the *status quo* from paranormal interference and to ensure a future for normal humanity in a paranormal world. The organization isn't necessarily anti-paragon so much as it is pro-normal. The Initiative realizes paragons have a tremendous potential for good, but they also realize the tremendous potential to change the world in dramatic, and often traumatic, ways. Left to their own devices, paranormals could trample over thousands of years of civilization like giants in a playground. The agency can't, and won't, allow that to happen.

THE CHARACTERS

Characters in a *Taking the Initiative* series generally come in two types: elite human agents tasked with handling paranormal threats or paragons sympathetic to the Initiative's cause, willing to curtail others of their kind for the greater good.

The Initiative normal agents make a lie of the tag "normal." They are among the most elite and experienced people working for intelligence and law enforcement organizations around the world, the best of the best. They have to be, since their job involves taking on people with godlike powers, some of whom are immune to petty concerns like bullets and are capable of setting things on fire just by looking at them, for starters.

Human Initiative agents should be in the area of power level 6 to 8, with a corresponding number of starting power points, but no paranormal abilities. This gives them an impressive range of skills and feats, along with whatever cutting-edge equipment the agency can supply. Gamemasters running a *Taking the Initiative* series with primarily human agents may wish to consult the *Agents of Freedom* sourcebook for more details on human-level agents handling superhuman opponents and the like.

When it comes to paranormal agents, the Initiative is less particular in terms of training and background. Their primary concern is loyalty, and it takes real dedication to the cause for a paragon to work for an organization trying to limit what paranormals can do in the world. The Initiative takes steps to weed out potential infiltrators and double agents; how draconian they are about it is up to you. Not surprisingly, they tend to go for "stealth" paragon agents and those with powers suited to covert or intelligence operations, but they can't necessarily afford to be choosy. If a paranormal recruit has different powers, the Initiative will still find a use for them somewhere.

FACtIONS

The following factions from **Chapter Four** are likely to be prominent in a *Taking the Initiative* series.

THE INITIATIVE

The primary faction in the series is the Initiative itself. The GM should read over the organization's description in **Chapter Four** and decide in advance just how "dirty" the Initiative gets. That doesn't mean the characters know the entire truth in advance; an Initiative series can start out with them "fighting the good fight" and discovering over time some of the agency's dark secrets. What they choose to do about them will determine the direction of the series.

THE PANTHEON

As the primary group dedicated to paragons doing whatever they want, the Pantheon is at least philosophically opposed to

the Initiative. In practice, the Pantheon doesn't do much of anything as a group, although individual members associated with it may become adversaries for characters in a *Taking the Initiative* series.

THE PARAMOUNT CLUB

The closed-door meetings and secret hierarchies of the Paramount Club are likely to get the Initiative's attention. They'll want to know what goes on in those meetings and what sort of threat (if any) the Club poses to their agenda. Characters could be tasked with infiltrating the Club and gathering information, and such operations could spark a long-term conflict between the Initiative and the exclusive paragons-only organization.

FREELANCERS

Paranormal freelance companies like Foregone Conclusions and the Silber Agency are going to cross paths with Initiative agents sooner or later. The mercenaries can be allies, rivals, or adversaries as the adventures (and their current clients) demand. Some Initiative agents, especially paranormal ones, might have worked for one or more of the freelancers in the past. The Initiative may also hire some paranormal mercs through various blinds and fronts to carry out missions when necessary.

CONSPIRACIES

Virtually any conspiratorial character or faction fits into a *Taking the Initiative* series. Characters like Enigma, Mindbender, and Mr. Zero from **Chapter Five** can appear as allies or adversaries, while other factions like the Pact, the Rosemont Center, and the Tribe can become involved in matters of concern to the agency. Who knows? Several of those factions are part of a much larger conspiracy for the characters to unravel.

ADVENTURES

Taking the Initiative adventures are mostly spy-thrillers, with agents going on secret missions ranging from information gathering in dangerous or difficult situations to covert theft, kidnapping, and assassination ("sanctioning rogue paranormals") in pursuit of the agency's cause. Complications arise from the agency's secret nature, internal rivalries and politics, and the challenges of otherwise normal people dealing with paranormal threats.

OPERATION ACHILLES

How do you kill an indestructible man? That's the job handed to the team when they get an assignment to eliminate an African tribal warlord who apparently has paranormal invulnerability to harm. He's using his power to terrorize and conquer his local region and the agency is concerned his influence will spread quickly beyond there. The characters have to figure out his weaknesses (if he has any) and use them to remove him from the equation, all without getting caught.

ZERO SUM GAME

The team uncovers inconclusive evidence suggesting Mr. Zero (see **Chapter Five**) has infiltrated the Initiative and is manipulating the agency for his own purposes. If it's true, how do the agents root out the conspiracy within their own organization without knowing whom to trust? If it's not true, is it simply a ploy by Mr. Zero, or

someone else, to sow suspicion and mistrust within the Initiative? Can the organization survive an internal witch-hunt aimed at purging any disloyal elements or moles?

IMAGINAUTS

"Okay, I'll admit," Hanson said, looking around at the towering Art Deco and neo-classical architecture. "This is pretty cool but I was expecting...I don't know, something more...cosmic."

"It's always about the 'cosmic' with you," Kurtzman replied, putting out an arm to stop them as they passed a newsstand. "Research materials," he said, stepping up to look over the headlines, title banners, and magazine offerings.

"No...way..." Kurtzman muttered, eyes widening. The guy inside the stand gave them a raised eyebrow before returning to help his current customer. Kurtzman ushered his partner down towards the other end of the stand.

"What?" Hanson asked.

*"Freedom City," came the reply. "Look," Kurtzman pointed to the cover of a newspaper called the *Freedom Ledger*.*

"What?" Hanson repeated. Kurtzman gave him a disgusted look like it was the dumbest question he'd ever heard.

*"Freedom-freakin'-City!" he repeated, grabbing the paper and holding out it for emphasis. The headline read: *FREEDOM LEAGUE FOILS MASTERMIND* and the accompanying photo showed brightly clad paranormals fighting what looked like some sort of robots.*

"They're comic book characters," Kurtzman said excitedly. "I have the whole original series! But here they're real."

Hanson shook his head sadly. "You are such a geek." Kurtzman wouldn't be baited, he just grinned like a kid on Christmas.

"Yeah, who thought it would have come in so handy?"

"Hey, buddy," the guy behind the counter interjected. "This ain't a library. You gonna buy something or what?"

Kurtzman immediately fished in his pockets for cash, grabbing a couple other items off the display. "Think we can find some Mylar bags?" he asked his partner as he counted out change. "These are so gonna be worth something when we get home."

SUMMARY

It's a strange and fantastic world, and paragons have the power and, some say, the responsibility, to explore and learn what's out there. The characters are paranormal explorers of the incredible, challengers of the mysterious, "imagineauts."

BACKGROUND

The strangeness of the post-Breakout world is frightening to many but alluring to others. They find themselves drawn to the unusual, the unexplained, and the unexpected. They want to understand and sometimes just want to be able to experience it all firsthand.

An *Imagineauts* series is primarily about a sense of wonder and also the dangers of exploring the unknown. Whether the characters work for someone else or do their exploring on their own,

they'll have the opportunity to see things no one else has seen and discover whole new worlds waiting for them. They might want to share what they've learned with the world or try and keep secret those things people aren't ready to know yet, but the real drive is the experience.

This series emphasizes Fortean phenomena and the exploration of the Imageria more than interaction with other paragons, although that's likely to happen, too. The GM will want to come up with fantastic places, strange happenings, unusual beings, and other things for the characters to discover. Some of those things may pose a danger to the world, giving the explorers the opportunity to become heroes, too.

THE CHARACTERS

Imaginauts characters tend to be inquisitive types, either scientists, scholars, or artists or otherwise ordinary people caught up in the wonder and excitement of things beyond their imagination. A few such characters are outcasts of one sort or another, and explore new worlds because they have few, if any, ties with the old one. They're looking for acceptance, belonging, or perhaps they're holding out hope of becoming "normal" again in some way. You can even have an entire group of such characters, brought together by their similarities, like the Collected (see **The Rosemont Center** in **Chapter Four**).

Paranormals in his series can have virtually any type of powers, but some sort of enabling travel power is useful: either a character with Super-Movement or Teleport (or both) or a device filling that role. The GM may find it easier having the "enabling" character or device as a plot device or NPC; that way, it's easier to control where the characters go and to occasionally take away their ability to return, when the story calls for it.

FACtIONS

Some factions in an *Imaginauts* series are equally interested in exploring the unknown, while others have agendas other than knowledge and experience, or want to keep the wonders of the paranormal world safely under wraps. Groups like the Initiative and the Paranormal Regulatory Agency (see **Chapter Four**) fall into the latter category. The following groups fall into the former category. Either might be allies, rivals, or adversaries in an *Imaginauts* series.

MERLIN

MERLIN is made up of scientific *imaginauts* and makes a fine patron for a series about them. MERLIN's founder has enough of a "hands-off" attitude about operations for a group of characters to work largely on their own, occasionally calling in help as they need (or dealing with trouble from higher-ups when they deserve it). They can be full-fledged paragons, "stealth" paragons with a lot of enhanced abilities (especially Intelligence) and paratechnology, or even just smart and capable normal humans with a paranormal means of going to interesting new places.

THE ROSEMONT CENTER

The Rosemont Center and the Collected offer a more philosophical and psychological approach to an *Imaginauts* series. The Collected are all damaged personalities to one degree or another, a set-up for a similar group of outsiders to deal with the weird and the unexpected while trying to help out others like them and protect an unsuspecting world from threats beyond imagination.

THE PACT

Whether magic is "real" or not, the Pact includes skilled delvers into the Imageria who are likely to take an interest in anything others discover in the otherworld. Pact agents like Glyph and Empress might try to acquire information and artifacts (by bargaining, subterfuge, or force). Explorers could run up against Pact activities in the real and Imaginal worlds, uncovering plots by the Council of Elders and preventing them from coming to pass. The Pact is likely to try and co-opt any rivals, or eliminate them if they cannot do so.

ADVENTURES

Adventures in an *Imaginauts* series tend to focus around a new discovery or exploration, or the unintended consequences of the same. You can easily do an extended series of adventures about the characters exploring some complex new facet of the paranormal world or taking an extended trip into the many worlds of the Imageria.

THE POSSIBILITY PLAGUE

After returning from exploring the Imageria, or some manifestation of it, the characters discover they've somehow brought something back to the material world with them, a kind of "ideovore" or immaterial creature that feeds on thoughts and dreams and, in the process of "digesting" them, makes them a part of reality! The creature's feeding patterns induce a kind of local "breakout" where it seems like paranormals are popping up *everywhere* in the area due to the sudden increase in Fortean phenomena. Of course, people aren't necessarily guarding their idle thoughts and fantasies, and some of them cause serious problems. The characters have to find a way to isolate the creature and send it back because there's evidence it's growing and, once it has feed enough, it will start to reproduce....

INFINITE SECRET CROSSOVER

The *imaginauts* shift "sideways" in reality into a parallel world, the world of *Freedom City!* (Or any other comic book style superhero setting you prefer). They're confronted with living, breathing comic book characters, some of whom might even appear in comics in the real world. Naturally, the locals take interdimensional visitors pretty much in stride (not like they haven't seen any before). The catch is the characters introduce some foreign element into the world. Perhaps their method of arrival weakens dimensional barriers, allowing some interdimensional threat to invade, or their sheer disbelief in four-color comic book mores could create a "realism plague" that threatens the very fabric of this reality!

THE EIDOLON EMANATION

"It was not easy to acquire..." the faceless man said in a flat voice. Silas the Elder waved one wrinkled hand in a gesture of dismissal. The candlelight caught on the blood-red stone set in the ring he wore.

"I'm not interested in your labors," he told the creature. Truthfully, Glyph's thought-voice grated on his nerves, but Silas wouldn't let him know that. He still got the job done.

Wordlessly, a glowing symbol hovering in front of his blank face, Glyph handed over the lock of hair bound in a black ribbon. Blood would have been better, but more difficult to acquire and transport.

"You're certain she doesn't know of this?" the old mage asked, eyes flicking from the hair to Glyph's featureless face and back.

"Yes," the thought-voice said, the hovering symbol shifting and changing. "The distraction was more than adequate." Silas nodded curtly.

"Good. You've done well. You'll be rewarded, particularly if this proves as effective as I suspect."

"The sympathetic spells to control Icon through this connection should be entirely effective."

Silas allowed himself a thin, lipless smile. Glyph was useful, and knew a great deal, but could be terribly literally minded and so uncreative at times.

"Oh, I have no interest in controlling her," he said, holding up the lock of hair and examining it. "But she is a channel through which gods manifest in the material realm, and a channel can be tuned both ways..." He tucked the hair into one of the many pockets of his robes. "Leave me," he told Glyph. "I have a great deal of work to do." If the faceless figure felt any emotion at the sudden dismissal, it didn't show. He simply turned and exited the room, leaving Silas alone with his books.

The others would become gods, the mage thought, looking for the volumes he'd set aside with the proper incantations and symbols. But I shall command the gods!

SUMMARY

All most people can see are the paragons and their powers. They don't really understand what all these weird and incredible things really *mean*, where they come from. Only those versed in certain occult secrets understand that a drama as old as history is being played out once again, perhaps for the final time.

BACKGROUND

Occultists like the Pact talk of how the Imageria has layers or levels to it, from the vast unknown of the Deep Beyond becoming progressively more complex and solid until it reaches the misty borders of the material world, which they claim is merely the most solid manifestation of higher reality. In the levels of the other world, there are immaterial beings of great power, *eidolons*, archetypes or essences of higher concepts (see **Chapter Three** for details).

In Hermetic philosophy is the maxim "as above, so below," and many Pact magicians believe the Breakout and awakening of paragons on Earth is simply a reflection of cosmic forces at work in the higher levels of the Imageria. After all, so much about paragons reflects ancient myths and legends about gods, heroes, and religious figures. They believe paranormals are simply the material manifestations of those powerful archetypes, channeling their power from the Imageria and playing out conflicts dictated by their nature, scions of ancient and powerful lineages, as it were.

Another hermetic maxim is the Law of Sympathy, that a symbol of a thing can be used to control it. If paragons are symbols or mani-

festations of higher beings, what could one versed in the mystic arts do with such a symbol and the proper rituals? To the Pact and others who know the truth, the paranormal world is simply the latest stage in a cosmic struggle for mastery over all creation!

THE CHARACTERS

Characters in an *Eidolon Emanation* series fall into two main categories: unaware paranormals and mystic avatars.

In the first case, characters are simply "ordinary" paragons (in as much as the term applies). They can be from any background and possess any paranormal powers. Whether they know it or not, however, they are channels for ancient and powerful arcane forces, living avatars. Like most paragons, they're completely unaware of this, except perhaps at the deepest unconscious level. They are, however, potential pawns for the factions aware of the truth, operating behind the scenes.

Some paragons understand their divine or "higher" nature, although others consider them mentally unbalanced. The characters could be paranormals who understand the true source of their powers and their role in the cosmic drama unfolding on Earth. Of course, most people think they're more than a little crazy for associating themselves with mythic gods and heroes.

FACtIONS

The primary factions of an *Eidolon Emanation* series are those with some awareness of the importance of the Imageria and the supernatural power of paragons.

THE PACT

The Pact is the primary faction of this kind of series, they are the most experienced with mystic forces, possessing the greatest body of arcane knowledge, and the will to use it to gain control over the powers unleashed by the Breakout. While the Council of Elders almost certainly has differing understandings and agendas, the Pact is a force to be reckoned with in this series.

The order could be the primary antagonist, seeking to claim the powers of paragons for themselves and manipulating mystic forces, alignments, and artifacts to change conditions to suit their plans. Alternately, characters might belong to the Pact, one of several houses or factions struggling to decide the fate of the world, either for their own selfish purposes or to safeguard creation from the most power hungry members of their order.

THE PANTHEON

If paragons really are manifestations of gods, then the Pantheon is essentially right. Their behavior, as irresponsible as it might appear to "mortals" is actually no less than the right of gods who walk the Earth. Of course, these divine beings have to deal with other paragons who don't understand or appreciate their true nature, frightened normals who seek to defy them, and traitors like the Pact who believe they can control them.

The Pantheon might try to recruit paranormal characters aware of the greater conflict, seeking valuable allies, or they could be looking to eliminate potential rivals. Characters can be members of the Pantheon, trying to unite disparate and often contentious paragons against their common foes, while limiting some of the excesses of their fellow "gods" along the way.

ADVENTURES

Eidolon Emanation adventures involve the struggle for greater and greater power, alongside plots reflecting ancient mythological conflicts.

THE TWELVE LABORS

The characters are placed under a *geas*, or magical compulsion, by one of the Pact to complete a series of twelve tasks related to the twelve signs of the Zodiac, which must take place around the world by certain appointed times in order to complete a mystical ritual that will grant the ritualist tremendous insight, perhaps even knowledge of what lies in the Deep Beyond of the Imageria! Alternately, the characters might be competing to complete the twelve tasks with other paragons; whoever's finished the most of them by the appointed time will reap the benefits of the ritual.

THE GOD-QUEST

To achieve the understanding and power they need to overcome their foes, the paragons must journey to the heights and depths of the Imageria, a long quest away from the material world and into the realms of myth and legend. They overcome challenges and face tests along the way, giving them insight and experience, until eventually they must cross the Abyss and reach the Deep Beyond. What do they find there, and will they decide to return once they've reached it? Moreover, what's happening in the material world while they're gone?

THE OUTER DARKNESS

"... it is not meant we should voyage far," he muttered, looking over the shapes formed by the bloodstains.

"What's that?"

"Lovecraft," he replied without looking up. "H.P. Lovecraft, from a story called 'Call of Cthulhu.' I've been re-reading a lot of his stuff lately."

"I'd think you'd get enough of that on the job," came the rather sour reply, then a pause. "What do you think? Copycat?"

"No, definitely not, not even the work of an individual, actually."

"A cult?" A nod and a throaty sound were the only replies. Ash bent to examine the faint marks on the floor. It was old hardwood; the blood would never come out of it. A pity.

"Look at these," he said, waving a hand over them.

"Scratches."

"Mmm-hmm, but look at the pattern. Claws. I don't think our cult is even human, or they have some decidedly non-human friends."

"Paranormals?"

"Or something else," he mused. "Something even further away from human than we've seen before."

BACKGROUND

If you take a moment to ponder beyond the cool powers of paranormals and what they can do with them, the basic premise of the *Paragons* setting, that reality is no longer as solid and dependable as we thought, is a pretty terrifying one. The *Outer Darkness* series takes it even further: what if the cosmos is just a random and chaotic place and what we think of as "order" is just a façade, a psychological and cultural construct to keep us all from going mad? In this series, that's exactly what it is.

What lies beyond the depths of the Abyss in the Imageria? Absolutely nothing, save perhaps unformed chaos, and that's the ultimate truth. In the depths, at the very roots of reality, are creatures so alien they are beyond our comprehension, and so powerful even the mightiest paragons are no more than mites to them. Their corruption and chaos festers in the depths like a cancer, poison seeping into what we call reality in the form of a breakdown of formerly somewhat reliable laws. The Breakout and all that follows are just symptoms; the universe is diseased and dying, and there's nothing we can do to stop it; delay the inevitable, perhaps, but that's all.

Still, those who know the truth—and survive with their sanity intact—struggle to do just that, while others give in to despair and madness, some hope to bring about the inevitable conclusion rather than passively wait for it. Their madness often brings power with it, or perhaps their claims about the dark blessings of the mad gods of the Outer Darkness are true, which means they do take an active hand in accelerating our inevitable demise and things are even worse than we thought....

THE CHARACTERS

Characters in an *Outer Darkness* series can be of any power level, since power is largely immaterial: no matter how powerful the paragons might be, they're nothing compared to the forces of the Abyss, which are essentially Power Level X beings (see **X-Traits**, *M&M*, page 211). Should one of them intervene directly, the best the characters can hope to do is escape with mind, body, and soul intact.

FACTIONS

Most factions in an *Outer Darkness* series fall on either side of the divide: some know the truth and fight to preserve hope and hold back the darkness for just a short while longer. Others know the truth and embrace the darkness, hoping to be spared, or at least granted a quick demise. The rest remain blissfully ignorant, at least until they go too far, find out too much, or disturb something best left sleeping.

THE HARBINGERS

It could well be "Doc Harbinger" is *right*: paranormals *are* a part of an alien conspiracy and the prelude to an invasion of some sort. Even if the Harbingers are just partly right, they're going to be some of the best prepared to handle what's coming. On the other hand, it could be they're dead-wrong, but even so, there's still something alien out there, lurking in the shadows or the depths of the Imagerial Abyss. When it rears its many-tentacled head, Dr. Gaither and his colleagues are going to take it as all the evidence they need!

THE INITIATIVE

The Initiative's opposition to the paranormal isn't just the fear of humans at being outdated or replaced, it is rooted in a knowledge

SUMMARY

The characters are paranormal investigators who discover the truth about the world is far worse than they could have imagined, and not even the power of a paragon can overcome some threats.

that the paranormal is *wrong*, a symptom of cosmic malaise, connected with the Abyss and the eventual downfall of reality. In truth, the Initiative and its agents are the defenders of reality and humanity against threats almost too big to imagine. They do what must be done and stand guard on the walls of reality to safeguard an unsuspecting world. If some of what they do seems harsh, consider the alternative.

MERLIN

If any faction is likely to mess with things "Man Was Not Meant to Know," it's MERLIN. In fact, putting that label on something practically ensures they'll poke and prod it just to find out *why* it's so fearsome! Characters can belong to MERLIN in a series of bold explorers of the unknown, much like an *Imaginauts* series, but with a darker tone, since their explorations are largely doomed from the start, and may be responsible for unleashing the end of everything; or at least the end of the human race as we know it.

THE PACT

In an *Outer Darkness* series, the Pact can fill several different roles. The loose alliance of mystics and would-be magicians could be all that stands between humanity and utter annihilation by forces beyond our comprehension. This becomes problematic if the Pact is also still just as selfish, arrogant, and manipulative as it is described. Is it worth joining and even sustaining the "lesser evil" in order to preserve reality as we know it?

The Pact can just as easily be allied with the enemy, making them ready-made bad guys. They can be unwitting dupes of the Outer Darkness, confident they can command forces beyond their ken right up to the point where something they've summoned up decides to devour them. Alternately, they might be a cult of willing servants mad enough to ally themselves with terrible beings from beyond reality, perhaps hoping they will be spared or even granted power over the world.

THE PARANORMAL REGULATORY AGENCY

Agents of the PRA are used to dealing with some strange stuff, but there's strange and then there's *unnatural*. The Agency makes a good patron for starting off a group of unsuspecting normal or paranormal characters with a setup like *The Law is Paramount*, then having them come upon evidence of weird goings-on and unusual things even for those investigating the paranormal. Nobody else seems willing or able to do anything about them as the agents uncover the terrible cosmic truth and are faced with a choice of defending reality to the last or surrendering to horror, despair, and madness.

ADVENTURES

Adventures in an *Outer Darkness* series tend to start out as investigations tinged with horror and even the ones that turn into big slugfests are Pyrrhic victories at best, sacrificing whatever's needed to stave off the inevitable doom of humanity for another brief moment in the cosmic span of time.

STRANGE INVESTIGATIONS

What begins as the investigation of a series of disappearances in a sleepy New England coastal community turns into the discovery of a malevolent and seemingly ancient inhuman cult of



paranormals devoted to the worship of unspeakable cosmic entities. Can the investigators escape with their bodies, minds, and souls intact?

THE STARS ARE RIGHT

A splinter sect of the Pact is conducting blasphemous rites at places and times of power around the world, building towards a crescendo of cosmic power, when the gates between the material world and the Imageria will be thrown open and the darkness and madness of the Deep Beyond will flood into the world, erasing any vestige of order or sanity forever. Can the paragons stop the process before it's too late? Will they ally themselves with the rest of the Pact to do so, and how far can they trust the secretive magicians as their allies?

PARAGONS AND FREEDOM CITY

On the face of it, the *Paragons* setting and the *Freedom City* setting (also available from Green Ronin Publishing) don't seem very compatible. After all, *Paragons* is designed in many regards as the opposite of *Freedom City*, which is more of a traditional comic book setting with a mix of Silver Age and Modern Age styles, and costumed heroes and villains. Still, it's possible to combine the two settings in various ways, if you wish. This section looks at some of them.

PARALLEL WORLDS

The simplest explanation is the classic comic book plot device of parallel worlds: the Earth of *Freedom City* (called "Earth-Prime" by its superpowered inhabitants) and the world of *Paragons* are just two

of an infinitude of parallel worlds, all existing in the same space, but on different planes of existence. Different sorts of dimensional travel can bridge the gulf across worlds, allowing characters from one to visit the other, either intentionally or (more often) by accident.

Of course, any meeting between the two worlds is likely to see some friction since *Freedom City* features four-color superheroes that hold to comic book codes of heroism and behavior, while *Paragons* deals with super-powered people with more realistic attitudes regarding their abilities and obligations. Some of the *Freedom City* characters will seem outlandish or downright crazy to visiting paragons, while many *Freedom City* heroes will be horrified by the state of the *Paragons* world (depending on just how much the presence of paranormals has affected things).

An accidental meet-up between the two worlds could (after some initial conflict) lead to understanding and even friendship between their superhuman inhabitants. With dimensional-travel powers or technology, there could even be regular "team-ups" or crossovers between the two settings, although the ultimate effects of such on both worlds are left for the GM and players to explore.

Gamemasters interested in using this option may find the *Worlds of Freedom* sourcebook on time- and dimensional-travel and alternate worlds particularly useful.

FREEDOM CITY, USA

Ignore Freedom City's history of costumed heroes and villains, alien invasions, and so forth, and you can use the fictional city as a setting for a *Paragons* game. After all, the sourcebook still provides a complete city setting and describes a plethora of locations and characters useful in any *Mutants & Masterminds* series. You can make the player characters among the first paragons to awaken in Freedom City, and they can become famous (or infamous) for their deeds there.

You can also adapt various heroes and villains described in *Freedom City* for use as *Paragons* characters, retaining their game-stats, but changing their background and outlook. For example, the Raven still works just fine as a *Paragons* character, although she's more likely to be the half-Vietnamese daughter of a crippled war veteran waging a one-woman war on crime rather than the inheritor of a heroic mantle from a retired superhero and granddaughter of a sinister Asian mastermind. Her crime-fighting methods are probably also more brutal and direct than those of a comic book heroine, making her much more like Nightstalker from **Chapter Five**. The same can go for most *Freedom City* characters, providing new spins on the existing write ups (and lending some weight to the parallel worlds theory described previously).

A WORLD OF IMAGINATION

Freedom City may not exist, in the material world, at any rate. It might exist in the Imageria, however (indeed, one could argue that it already does). There it's an archetypal comic book city of costumed heroes and their villainous foes. In the "real" world of *Paragons*, Freedom City could be a popular line of comic books owned by a media megacorporation, the intellectual property of a small Pacific Northwest publisher, or even just a dream shared by one or more roleplaying game groups.

Whatever the case, it's possible for some paragons to actually visit Freedom City (and other fictional places) in the Imageria, and the experience is essentially real for them there. It may even be possible for the characters they encounter there to come and visit their

world, effectively creating a situation like the parallel worlds scenario described previously, with a slightly different explanation.

Of course, the inhabitants of Freedom aren't likely to take kindly to having themselves and their world labeled "fictional" or "imaginary," and that's not going to stop megalomaniacs like Overshadow or Mastermind (or Omega, for that matter...) from trying to bridge the gap between worlds for their own nefarious purposes. Of course, those four-color villains could be in for a surprise when they encounter the *Paragons* world for the first time!

This approach to Freedom City can make it anything from a fun one-time "imaginary" story to a regular feature of your *Paragons* setting, allowing the two to cross-over from time to time.

THE FAÇADE OF FREEDOM

The Freedom City people think they know is a lie, a façade, an illusion, created to fool everyone into believing they live in a comic book world of heroes and villains. Well, *almost* everyone, as it's quite likely not everyone in Freedom City is actually real....

In this scenario, Freedom City exists merely to fool the characters, allowing them to either live lives as superheroes or ordinary citizens in a world of superheroes. Why? There are a number of possibilities.

"Freedom City" might be a kind of virtual reality simulation intended to stimulate the development of paranormal powers, serve as a training simulator for them, or both. The characters might really be in sensory deprivation or life-support tanks, or wired-up in hospital beds undergoing testing or modification while they dream of virtual lives in Freedom. Who's controlling the simulation? That's another question.

The Freedom City setting might exist in the Imageria (as described previously) but the characters' "mental selves" are trapped there somehow, either as a consequence of their awakening or due to the machinations of a paranormal or Imagerian, so they don't know it's not the real world. They might find themselves haunted by strange dreams and flashbacks about their real lives that start to bring the reality of their Freedom City experience into question.

The "Freedom City" where the characters live isn't Freedom City at all, but X-Isle, the Living City, an extradimensional mockery of the real Freedom City in the depths of the Terminus, which can just as easily be shifted to the depths of the Imageria. See the *Freedom City* sourcebook for more information. In this scenario, the characters could be paragons abducted from the real world to sate X-Isle's need for inhabitants, or they might not be real either, just creations of the Living City with an unexpected degree of self-awareness.

Finally, a very powerful paragon might have *created* Freedom City, altering reality to bring it into existence and create a world of comic book adventures, where people with powers aren't scary and good and evil are more clear-cut. Unfortunately, the strain is proving too much, and the façade is starting to crack, plus other paranormals have flashes and impressions that the world around them is *different* somehow. It's only a matter of time before someone finds out the truth and tries to do something about it.

These scenarios are good options for transitioning an existing *Freedom City* series into a *Paragons* game. Imagine when heroes who always thought they were living in a four-color superhero world discover what they thought was their world is only a lie, and the truth is stranger than they could have imagined.

RULES OPTIONS

Generally speaking, the core rules from the *Mutants & Masterminds* rulebook are sufficient to run a *Paragons* series using characters and material from this book. Depending on the type of *Paragons* game you decide to run, you might want to implement some modifications to the existing rules to better capture the particular style or tone or your game. This section offers various rules options, including some adapted from the *Mastermind's Manual*, and how you can apply them to a *Paragons* series.

Keep in mind: *all* of the options in this section are just that, optional. Use them, or not, as you see fit and as best suits your vision for your game. Each option usually discusses the kinds of effects you can expect if you implement it in your game. Take these into consideration before you choose whether or not to use that option.

POWER LEVEL TRADE-OFFS

Mutants & Masterminds presumes a single power level for a series, with all of the players' characters conforming to the limits of that power level unless or until the GM decides to raise it for advancement purposes.

A *Paragons* game, however, might feature characters of disparate power levels, including paranormals with unusually potent abilities. While this can be handled by setting a power level and players creating some characters well below its limits, some groups may prefer the option for individual characters to exceed power level limits at a cost.

In addition to using trade-offs (see *M&M*, page 24), the Gamemaster may allow the following option: at the cost of 15 power points, a player may increase the power level for his or her character by 1. So, creating a character on 15 less power points than everyone else in the game allows the player to operate as if the power level were 1 higher for that character. Given the cost, this option only works well for especially focused characters that need a higher level of power in just one or two traits, and the GM must approve the character's design, as usual.

DAMAGE AND LETHALITY

The default *Mutants & Masterminds* rules lend themselves to a "four-color" comic book reality where characters are regularly punched through walls and hit with tremendous damage, but nobody really dies, or is even seriously hurt, unless the story calls for it. The *Paragons* setting takes a somewhat more realistic view of things, calling for some adjustment in its approach to how damage is handled.

The *Mastermind's Manual* provides plenty of damage variants, but the easiest to implement is to remove the assumption that all attacks do non-lethal damage unless the attacker specifically chooses to inflict lethal damage. Instead, each attack has a default damage "mode," lethal or non-lethal, which cannot be changed, specified when the attack is acquired. So fists are non-lethal, for example, while guns and blades do lethal damage (just as they do in the real world). Characters with one mode of damage looking to change it have a couple of options.

First, you can use an attack of one damage mode to inflict damage of the other sort by taking a -4 penalty to the attack roll. This can represent striking with the flat of a blade, or making precision hits with bare

hands to break bones or do other severe damage. The GM can rule that some attack descriptors don't qualify for this option: it can be argued that it's impossible to make a "non-lethal" attack with a machine gun or a flamethrower, for example. Likewise, some specifically non-lethal weapons might be incapable of doing lethal damage.

The other option is to acquire an attack of the opposite mode as an Alternate Power feat of the base attack, either by spending a power point on the feat or acquiring it temporarily via extra effort. So a flame-projecting paranormal could have a lethal fiery blast, but also a non-lethal blast of super-heated air that causes shock and fainting as an Alternate Power.

POWER AND DOUBT

Paragons places a certain emphasis on the importance of belief in the use of paranormal powers. While *M&M* already requires a degree of concentrations to use powers, as described in **Chapter Five** of the rulebook, there's no particular need for self-confidence or faith in one's own abilities. If you want to highlight this element in your *Paragons* series, you can use the following optional rule.

When a paranormal character is shaken as a result of an interaction skill (primarily *Intimidate* and *Bluff* in conjunction with the *Taunt* feat, see *M&M*, page 64), the player must make a Concentration skill check for the character to maintain any powers, just as if the character had been stunned (see **Duration**, *M&M*, page 70).

Normally, this only affects concentration and sustained duration powers, just like being stunned. At the GM's option, it could affect *all* powers, including continuous and even permanent ones, which automatically return once the character is no longer shaken, or succeeds on a Concentration check, whichever comes first. This means a paranormal can literally be "shaken" out of his invulnerability or immunity just like anything else!

This option puts a greater emphasis on the use of interaction skills; intimidation and taunting in combat are likely to become mainstays of a paragon's arsenal, and most players are going to invest in a decent Will save bonus, ranks of *Sense Motive*, or both, along with ranks of Concentration for back-up in case those fail.

REALISTIC CONSEQUENCES

One element of the *Paragons* setting is superhuman powers often—but not always—have more realistic consequences and complications than in the traditional superhero comic books. The unknown mechanism of paranormal powers allows you to ignore this, if you prefer: after all, if you can accept the idea of someone being able to lift a ten-ton truck in the first place, why not go the extra step of accepting that things like leverage and the square-cube law don't really apply?

If you want to add some "realistic" flavor to your *Paragons* series without the additional complexity of imposing specific flaws or drawbacks to characters' powers, you can do so through judicious use of complications and awarding hero points (see *M&M*, pages 121 and 122). Essentially, whenever you think characters should get tripped-up by the consequences of their powers, have it occur as a complication and award the player a hero point as compensation for the problem.

For example, you decide super-strong characters can generally ignore the problematic physics of a human-sized and -shaped individual exerting enough force to lift multiple tons. However, when a character jumps from the roof of a parking garage holding a sport-utility vehicle over his head, you decide the character manages to (harmlessly) drive himself up to his knees into the pavement below. This makes moving a problem until the character takes a moment to pull himself free and you award the player a hero point for the added hassle of having to deal with things comic book characters don't generally worry about.

EFFECT COUNTERING

Using one effect to counter another (see *M&M*, page 70) depends a great deal on the descriptors of the two effects. In *Paragons*, it also depends on the origin and nature of paranormal powers, as examined in **Paranormal Origins** section earlier in this book.

Since, as a default, all paranormal powers share the same origin, they all automatically share a descriptor and may potentially be able to counter each other. This means the default assumption is any paragon can use any active power to counter the power-use of any other paragon, even if their powers don't share any other similarities.

If you prefer otherwise, simply decide that having a common origin descriptor isn't enough: two powers must have some other suitable descriptor(s) in order to counter each other, such as fire vs. ice or heat vs. magnetism. This limits the paragons with "free" countering abilities to roughly the same as a four-color *Mutants & Masterminds* series where characters have a variety of different origins.

PARANORMAL AWARENESS

By default, paranormals are no more "aware" of their unique abilities, or those of their fellow paragons, than anyone else. If powers share a common origin (and therefore descriptor), it's possible to have an Awareness SuperSense (see *M&M*, page 103) applying to all paranormal powers in the setting; that is, a character with Paranormal Awareness can sense when anyone uses *any* active paranormal power nearby (or further, if the character's Paranormal Awareness is also Extended).

One option is to make Paranormal Awareness a default capability so all paragons can sense the use of powers near them. If, for example, paranormals all subconsciously influence the structure of reality, then perhaps they can also all sense when it's being done, giving them some awareness of other paragons and their power usage.

In such a case, you can either require all paranormal characters to take the necessary rank of Super-Senses for Paranormal Awareness (making it part of a paranormal template, essentially) or you can just waive the cost if it's something every player character in the game will have regardless. The cost is really only an issue of you intend to mix paranormal and human characters in the group, in which case the paranormals should be required to pay for a capability the normals lack (namely, their Paranormal Awareness).

Making Paranormal Awareness ubiquitous limits the ability of paragons to use their gifts covertly, since any paranormal can potentially detect any other. Even paranormals with relatively minor powers might find employment as "detectors" or even "hounds" in a setting where rogue paragons are hunted down by the authorities or anti-paranormal groups.

You can also extend the capabilities of paranormal awareness to suit the series. For example, perhaps paranormals have the additional ability to sense when breakouts occur (feeling a "disturbance" or the like), giving them the ability to track and locate newly awakened paragons. This ability could be separate from sensing paranormal powers in use; in some settings paragons can only detect breakouts, or only detect power usage (which might occur in conjunction with a breakout), while in others they can do both, or neither.

The ability to detect when a breakout occurs can provide story hooks for a *Paragons* series where the characters will need to track down new paranormals. Of course, it may provide a similar capability for their rivals as well.

PARANORMAL TAINT

As the saying goes, "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." It's fairly easy for a *Paragons* series to touch upon themes of corruption and the abuse of power: simply place great power in the wrong hands and it's almost certain someone will abuse it. However, you might want to address the issue of corruption in more concrete terms, perhaps even themes of paranormals becoming something other than completely human. The optional rules in this section look at ways to model these and other kinds of taint in a *M&M* game.

TYPES OF TAINT

"Taint" is just a general term for some imbalance or progressive problem a character faces. It can come in many different forms and it's up to the Gamemaster which (if any) forms of taint exist in the setting. Some possible types of taint include (but are not limited to) the following:

- **Biological** taint is some sort of mutation or transformation of the victim's body. It can be anything from a rampant disease to a kind of "evolution" toward some other form, something other than human.
- **Moral** taint is sometimes referred to as corruption. It is essentially the taint of evil on the character's mind, heart, or soul (or all three). It represents an erosion of the character's morals; moral taint paves the path to wickedness and villainy, whether willingly or unwittingly.
- **Psychological** taint is the touch of madness, a creeping lunacy intruding on the character's psyche. The more it progresses, the more the individual's grip on reality weakens, sliding down the slope toward complete and utter insanity.

CAUSES OF TAINT

Any number of things can cause taint, but ultimately, taint in the game should be caused by the character's choices in some way for it to be anything other than an arbitrary punishment. That is, taint should be a side effect of a choice the player makes on behalf of the character; this makes taint into a mechanism to give that choice a definite consequence.

So, for example, moral taint may result from the moral choices someone makes. If you choose to do evil, then you risk becoming tainted by that choice. Likewise, if someone does something psychologically scarring, then psychological taint may result. Even biological taint can occur as the result of a choice to use certain devices or powers with mutational or toxic side effects, or to go into an area filled

with dangerous energies, for example. Of course, the choice to avoid taint isn't always easy—paragons may need to use those dangerous devices, go into that forbidden area, or bargain with evil forces—but it should still be a choice, in order to be meaningful.

The only real occasion when taint should be imposed from without is in a horror-themed game, where a slow and inevitable progression into corruption and madness are important elements of the genre. There, taint can be used to emphasize feelings of helplessness and unfairness. In most *M&M* games, however, it's best restricted to a matter of choice.

ACQUIRING TAINT

Taint is measured, like most things in *M&M*, in terms of points, similar to ability score points or power points. How do characters acquire taint points?

Once you've decided on the cause of a particular kind of taint, it may just happen. That is, if you make a choice that causes taint, you get a taint point automatically. This makes the consequences of that choice certain (at least in terms of taint). This may make some players especially cautious, however. If they know they'll get taint from doing something, they can (and likely will) just avoid doing it.

Alternately, doing something that causes taint may only lead to a possibility of acquiring a taint point. The best mechanic for this is a saving throw: if the save succeeds, the character acquires no taint; if it fails the character acquires 1 (or more) taint points. The type of save—and the difficulty class—depends on the type of taint, and often the cause.

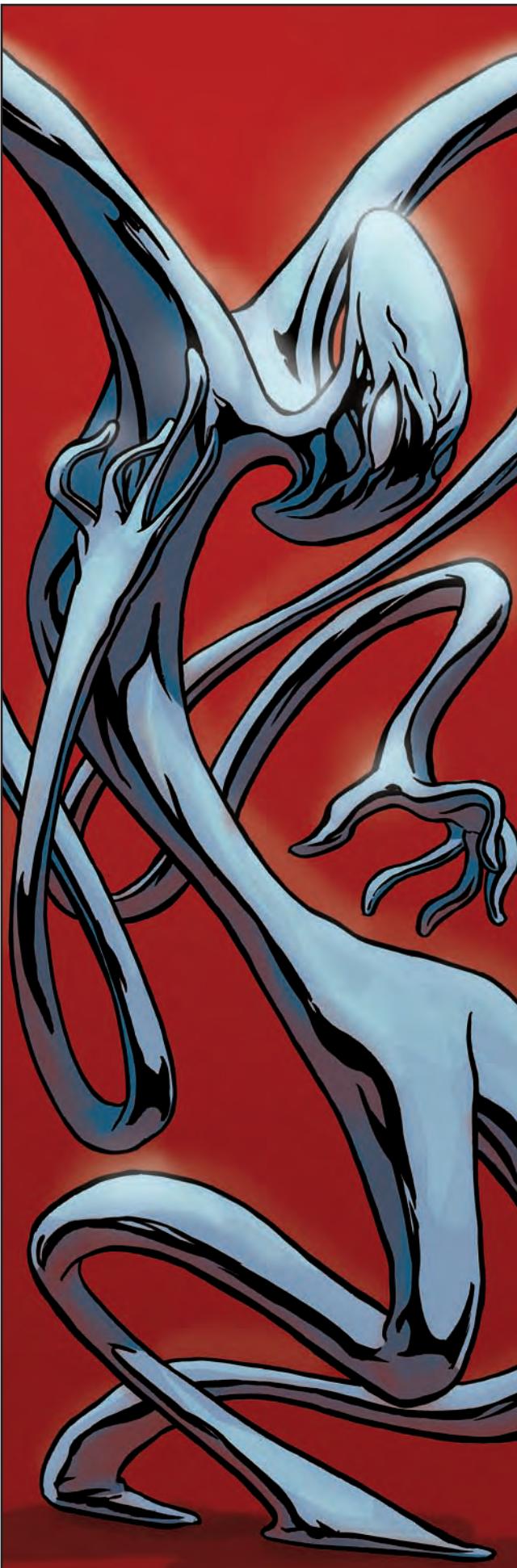
Fortitude saves are best suited to biological taint affecting the character's body and health. Will saves are better for taint that's moral, psychological, or spiritual in nature, and can also be suited for biological taint caused by willful actions (such as the psychic feedback from a device causing biological taint). Reflex and Toughness saves generally aren't suitable for resisting taint.

The Difficulty Class of the saving throw is based on the cause of the taint. Did the character commit a minor infraction or a terrible, mortal, sin? Was it a small dose of mutagenic energy or a massive one? Was the action disturbing or sanity-shattering? As a general guideline, the DC for a taint saving throw should be $10 + \text{half the series' power level}$ on average, giving most paragons a fair chance of success.

Another good way for characters to acquire taint is through extra effort (see *M&M*, page 120). Some or all of the uses of extra effort, particularly those involving powers, may cause taint. So, for example, whenever you use extra effort to perform a power stunt or enhance a power, you may incur taint. Alternately, you can make taint an alternative to suffering fatigue from extra effort; then players have a choice of a level of fatigue or a point of taint. In this case, you may want to rule that hero points cannot reduce the fatigue from extra effort; only taking taint points can. This keeps extra effort useful, but gives the edge to those willing to suffer taint.

EFFECTS OF TAINT

So what do taint points do once you've acquired them? Generally, taint imposes some sort of disadvantage (or, again, there would be no reason to avoid it). Taint may also provide some *benefit*, although it's usually outweighed by the drawbacks.



DRAWBACKS

The most common effect of taint is the imposition of drawbacks. These drawbacks may include things normally considered complications, like personality quirks, unusual appearance, addictions, and so forth (see the **Drawbacks vs. Complications** sidebar, *M&M*, page 124 for details).

As a general rule, the drawbacks imposed by taint should have a power point value equal to the total taint points. So a character with 3 points of taint has 3 power points' worth of drawbacks. Note that characters don't get any additional power points for these drawbacks, nor do they count as complications for awarding hero points; they're the price the character pays for having taint.

It's up to the GM whether or not characters have to acquire taint-related drawbacks immediately, or if they can "defer" some taint and not acquire a drawback until their taint reaches a certain total. A good guideline is to allow the player to choose, but to require a drawback when taint reaches a total of 5 points and to require the drawback to have a value equal to the unallocated taint points. So, the longer you put off acquiring a taint-related drawback, the worse it becomes, going from an uncommon, minor (1-point) drawback to a very common, major (5-point) drawback.

Gamemasters can also create particular structures for taint-related drawbacks, such as a "pyramid" structure, where the first drawback can be as little as 1 point, but each successive drawback must be worth 1 point more. So the second taint drawback must be 2 points, then 3 points, and so forth. The time between acquiring drawbacks increases, but so does their severity.

The GM also decides what kinds of drawbacks are appropriate and may allow players to choose them, or impose them directly. Certain kinds of drawbacks suit particular kinds of taint, as shown in the **Examples of Taint** section.

ABILITY LOSS

A particular drawback of taint may be loss of ability score points. For example, a character may lose a point of Wisdom (or some other ability) for every point of taint acquired. This loss affects the character normally, and if a score is debilitated, the effects become more severe. This effect is best for taint representing a kind of disease or other slow erosion of the character's physical or mental health.

BENEFITS

Taint may also have some beneficial side effects, although the drawbacks should generally outweigh them. The most common benefit, apart from the benefits encouraging characters to risk taint in the first place, is to make taint points a prerequisite for acquiring certain traits.

For example, if you want to make magic a "forbidden power" in your game (perhaps including some other troublesome powers like Mind Control and Summon), you can decide a character must have a certain level of moral or psychological taint before being able to invest power points in magical powers. This makes all sorcerers tainted by their arts, whatever their original intentions for learning magic might have been.

This kind of "taint prerequisite" is an effective tool for controlling access to certain traits and creating the right feel for certain kinds of settings, particularly those where power (or certain kinds of power) comes at a price.

TAINT LIMITS

The Gamemaster should decide if there's a limit to how much taint you can accumulate and, if so, what it is and what happens when you reach the limit.

The effects of taint may create an inherent limit. For example, if each point of taint results in the loss of a point of Constitution, then victims die when the reach Con 0, so they can't have more taint than their Constitution score, minus 1. On the other hand, some taint effects don't have built-in limits. Theoretically, a character could continue accumulating taint-related drawbacks indefinitely, for example.

It can be useful to set a maximum taint limit for two reasons. The first is to keep taint undesirable and give players reasons to avoid it. The other is to provide some dramatic tension as characters draw closer to an ultimate effect of accumulating taint.

Whatever the exact effect of reaching the taint limit, the game system effect is the character is taken out of the player's hands, becoming a non-player character. This can be due to permanent insanity, irredeemable corruption, total physical (or psychological) transformation, or even death.

Where to set the taint limit depends on how soon you want characters to get there, but a limit of between 10 and 20 taint points is a good guideline. A lower limit (around 10 points) is best for settings where any taint is a serious concern and tainted characters often hover close to the limit. A higher limit is better for those games where taint is a problem, but rarely gets so out of hand that a character succumbs to it completely.

ELIMINATING TAINT

Once you have taint, can you get rid of it and, if so, how? Generally, getting rid of taint should be possible, but difficult, and it should again be a choice made by players to do what's necessary to rid their characters of their taint.

The process of eliminating taint should be difficult enough for taint to remain a significant risk. If it were easy to get rid of, everyone would do it. Some possible means of eliminating taint include the following.

- **Abstinence:** The character must abstain from some activity to get rid of the taint, usually whatever caused the taint in the first place. For example, if using certain powers causes taint, then the character has to abstain from using those powers for a time (which may be an inconvenience). A minimum of a week per point of taint is recommended, although it could be longer.
- **Penance:** The character has to take some action to address the cause of the taint in order to get rid of it. For example, taint caused by wrongdoing might require the character redress those wrongs and seek forgiveness to remove the taint, while taint reflecting a character out of tune with his nature might require actions more in tune with the character's true self to eliminate the problem.
- **Treatment:** There is some treatment able to remove taint. Generally, it should be time-consuming, difficult, expensive, or all three. Physical taint might be treatable using medicine, and characters could remove psychological taint through therapy. The Gamemaster should decide the course of treatment, any check(s) required, and how much taint each treatment removes.

EXAMPLES OF TAINT

Here are three examples of how taint can work. These are by no means the only ones, and Gamemasters should feel free to come up with their own variations. Any or all of these examples could coexist in a setting, providing multiple forms of taint that characters can incur!

CORRUPTION

In this application of taint, good and evil are more than just abstract moral concepts—or at least evil is, anyway. Those who do especially wicked deeds have a stain upon their souls. This darkness can eat away at the spirit, until there's nothing left inside but emptiness and corruption.

- **Acquiring Corruption:** Characters acquire corruption by doing evil deeds. The exact definition of "evil" is left up to the Gamemaster, but generally means any deliberately harmful action undertaken for reasons other than the defense of one's self or others. In some cases, you may want to limit the list of potential "sins." For example, perhaps murder and torture are corrupting, while simple theft is not.
- **Effects of Corruption:** Corruption points impose mental drawbacks associated with sociopathic or even psychopathic behavior. The more corruption the character accumulates, the worse (or more numerous) the drawbacks become, and the more likely the character is to acquire further corruption, continuing the cycle. A corrupt character also loses the ability to use powers with a holy or good descriptor; the character is simply too tainted. On the other hand, a corrupt character may gain the ability to use unholy or evil powers.
- **Eliminating Corruption:** Corruption is removed not only by refraining from doing evil deeds, but also by actively doing good deeds in an effort of redemption. A truly good and noble act removes a point of corruption from the character's tally. Of course, any corruption-induced drawbacks will make it more difficult to stay on the straight and narrow; the player may need to spend hero points to allow the character to overcome the drawback long enough to do the right thing.

MADNESS

The mind can only stand so much pressure before it breaks. There are things no one was meant to see, or do, or know, and they can bring on a creeping madness, leading to total insanity.

- **Acquiring Madness:** Characters suffer madness from exposure to traumatic events. These events require a Will saving throw (or a Stability save if you are using that variant—see **Chapter One**) with the Difficulty Class of the save set by the intensity of the trauma, ranging from DC 10 (suffering a painful injury or receiving a sudden shock) to DC 30 or more (prolonged torture or witnessing Things Man Was Not Meant to Know). A failed save results in a madness point. A successful save means there's no effect this time.
- **Effects of Madness:** Accumulated madness points result in mental drawbacks with a point value equal to the total madness points. The player and GM should choose these drawbacks to reflect the effects of the trauma(s) causing the madness: being attacked by a swarm of spiders may cause arachnophobia, for example. As madness points accumulate, the character may acquire new drawbacks, or existing ones may become more severe.

In settings where madness is linked to certain powers—particularly psychic or magical powers—madness points may increase a character's level of power. For example, perhaps magical powers in the setting are only available to characters with madness points and any individual power can't have a rank or point cost greater than the character's madness point total (or total times some multiplier like x2, x5, etc.).

- **Eliminating Madness:** Eliminating madness points takes time, rest, and usually some form of psychotherapy or psychological treatment. The Gamemaster can set an amount of time or treatment for characters to eliminate accumulated madness points, such as a month's quiet rest, or a week (or more) of therapy. Depending on the style of the game, these times could be even longer, like months of therapy per madness point, with rest alone having no real effect. Any occasion where the patient has to make a Will save against madness again means no progress during that time.

MUTATION

Life is impossibly complex, a galaxy of countless cells. It takes so little: just a small change in a DNA strand for things to alter. Such changes can spread, transforming an ordinary person into something...else. Something unnatural.

- **Acquiring Mutation:** Characters usually acquire mutation points from exposure to mutagens like radiation or certain chemicals. In some settings exposure to things like "chaos energy" or certain powers may also cause mutations. Characters usually get a Fortitude saving throw to avoid accumulating mutation points, with the DC determined by the intensity of the mutagen: DC 10 for a fairly mild to 30 or more for especially intense mutagenic sources.

- **Effects of Mutation:** Mutations generally cause physical drawbacks equal in value to the accumulated mutation points. Note that multiple mutations affecting appearance don't count separately but are treated as a single more intense version of the same mutation (so long as their sole effect is the reaction others have to the character's unusual appearance).

Mutations might also grant new or additional powers, depending on their nature, although the character doesn't usually get much say in the nature of these powers; they may come with certain flaws or power drawbacks like Side-Effect, Uncontrolled, or Full Power. Exposure to mutagens can be the origin for a character's powers without necessarily accumulating any mutation points. This is a plot device rather than an application of taint.

- **Eliminating Mutation:** Mutation points are difficult to eliminate, since they are permanent changes in the character's physical makeup. Short of the character getting an entirely new body, the only means of removing mutation points may be extensive (and complex) gene therapy or the use of certain powers. Perhaps Healing with the Regrowth feat (or a customized power feat or extra) can remove mutation points on a 1-for-1 basis. In some setting there may be *no* way of eliminating mutation points!

TAINT AND POWER

Chapter One implies a connection between a paranormal's level of taint (particularly corruption or madness) and the paranormal's degree of power: some of the most powerful paragons seem to be physically, psychologically, or spiritually changed (or all of these) by the effects of their powers.

This can indicate any or all of the three types of taint discussed here exist in the *Paragons* setting, if you decide to use them.

In addition to acquiring taint in play, you can permit players to give their characters taint-associated drawbacks for additional power points. Paragons are more likely to suffer from physical and mental problems than traditional costumed superheroes, especially if their powers have a detrimental effect on their physical and mental well-being.

POWER SURGES

Sometimes superhuman powers surge out of control, often with serious consequences. This is a new power drawback, known as a *power surge*. The Power Surge drawback is generally Common and Strong, worth 4 power points. Power surges are optional, since they're somewhat complex and require a separate system of tracking surge points, outlined here.



BUT DO I GET POINTS FOR IT?

It's up to the Gamemaster whether or not characters get the drawback points for Power Surge. If Power Surge is required of all superhumans in the setting, the GM can simply say it isn't worth any points, since it's series-specific and all superhumans suffer from it. On the other hand, the GM can also decide characters deserve the extra points for having to deal with the risks of power surges.

WHEN POWER SURGES OCCUR

A power surge may occur when any of the following conditions are met:

- The paragon uses extra effort to enhance a power in some way, whether increasing the power's rank temporarily, or gaining a temporary power feat. The chance of a power surge is the same whether or not the player spends a hero point to ignore the fatigue of extra effort.
- A player rolls a natural 1 on any roll involving an active use of a power (including attack rolls, and skill, ability, or power checks). This does not apply to passive uses of powers, such as Protection.
- The character is stunned. This may occur in combat or from other effects.
- When the character is under extreme emotional stress. This may be due to mental or psychological complications, or decided by roleplaying and the Gamemaster's judgment. It's also possible to goad someone into a power surge using interaction skills like Bluff and Intimidate, but the GM should require at least two successful checks against the target, and may wish to give the character a +2 or better bonus on checks to avoid this sort of manipulation.

When any of the conditions are met, the player makes a Will saving throw, with a Difficulty Class of 10 plus the character's power level (the series power level for player characters or an NPC's calculated power level). Thus, as paragons become more powerful, their powers become more difficult to control, although their Will save bonus may also increase.

In cases where multiple trigger conditions apply, each additional condition increases the DC of the Will saving throw by +2. A character is only required to make one Will save per round to avoid power surges, regardless of the number of conditions, and makes only one save per condition for as long as that condition applies. So only one saving throw is required for a particular emotional stress or stunned condition, for example, even if it lasts longer than a round.

A successful Will save means no power surge but the character gains a *surge point*. A failed Will save means a power surge occurs. Players may spend hero points to improve Will saves and avoid power surges.

POWER SURGE EFFECTS

A power surge causes the character's powers to go out of control. It is much like an uncontrolled use of extra effort, with results dictated by the Gamemaster.

The character is stunned by the power surge with the usual effects: loss of the character's next action and loss of dodge bonus to Defense, with an additional -2 to Defense. The player can spend

a hero point to shake off this stun condition normally, although this does not prevent the power surge from occurring.

On the round after the power surge ends, the character is fatigued and recovers from this fatigue normally. If the character was already fatigued (such as from a previous use of extra effort), then he is exhausted, if exhausted, then he becomes unconscious. The player may also spend a hero point to ignore the fatigue of a power surge.

For a normal power surge, apply the effects of extra effort and the Uncontrolled flaw to one of the character's powers. The Gamemaster decides the exact effects of any given power surge, with input from the players, as desired. Possible power surge effects include:

- A power is used for an immediate attack against a random target with a +2 bonus to power rank. The attack is rolled normally, using the character's normal attack bonus.
- The character acquires a new power feat (like a normal use of extra effort) that activates wildly on its own. A superhuman with Energy Blast might suddenly acquire an area version as a power stunt, emitting an omni-directional blast of power, or a Dazzle effect as a power stunt, releasing a cascade of blinding light.
- One of the character's other powers activates at random and at +2 power rank, such as a flying character suddenly taking off at full speed or a teleporter vanishing into thin air.

CONTINUOUS POWER SURGES

If a power surge involves an instant power like Energy Blast, then its effects occur and end immediately, although the after-effects may linger for some time. A surge involving a sustained or continuous power may continue after the initial round. Each round after the initial surge, the player makes another Will save for the character with the same DC, but a +1 bonus for each round. A successful save means the superhuman gets the surge under control and its effects stop.

A failed save means the surge continues another round. The surge may continue with the same effects as before, or it may change, depending on the Gamemaster's whim. The surge doesn't grow any more powerful, but an out-of-control flier may suddenly change direction, or a character uncontrollably broadcasting his emotions may change the feeling he's generating.

A successful Will save to stop an ongoing power surge does not earn a surge point, unlike a save to prevent a power surge from occurring.

SURGE POINTS

The previous section describes the normal effects of a power surge. Those change if the character has garnered any surge points from resisting previous power surges. Each successful Will saving throw to avoid a power surge causes the character to acquire a surge point. Characters can accumulate an unlimited number of these points and they are difficult to get rid of (see following). Surge points represent a build-up of power; by resisting a power surge the character only delays it, and ensures the surge will be more severe when it finally does happen.

When a character with surge points fails a Will save to avoid a power surge, the surge points augment the effects of the surge. The Gamemaster applies all accumulated surge points as if they were hero points, except surge points must be spent at all once and their effects are cumulative. Surge points can have any of the effects hero points do and enable a power surge to apply

multiple levels of extra effort (much like **Extraordinary Effort** in **Chapter Six**).

Some examples of the effects of surge points include:

- Applying additional increases to the affected power's rank: +2 per surge point. As a general rule, most powers won't exceed twice their normal rank, but this is at the GM's discretion.
- Applying additional power feats. The most common is the Progression feat (see **Power Feats**, M&M, page 108).
- Improving die rolls associated with the power surge. One surge point allows the GM to add +10 any die roll associated with the surge that's 10 or less. Two surge points turn any such die roll into an automatic 20 (although not a natural 20). This only applies to rolls made by the Gamemaster for the affected power, not things like saving throws or other checks made against the power's effects.

After a character suffers a power surge, the character's surge point total is reset to 0 and he begins building up surge points again from successful Will saves until a new power surge occurs.

ELIMINATING SURGE POINTS

Naturally, characters try to avoid power surges as much as possible. However, the more you avoid a power surge, the worse it will be when you inevitably succumb and lose control. A character with enough surge points built up can do considerable damage. Therefore, characters may try to find ways to "bleed off" their excess power, developing various sorts of "pressure valves" to keep them under control.

One means is for the character to trigger a *deliberate* power surge, under controlled conditions. You can always choose not to make a saving throw to prevent a power surge, so some may choose to go somewhere suitably isolated, where they can trigger a power surge with a measure of safety and "blow off steam" before they lose control.

The drawback is the unpredictable nature of power surges. The character doesn't have any control over *how* the surge manifests and, the broader the character's powers, the more unpredictable the surge becomes. Since power surges can add power feats to a power (including Alternate Powers), there's no telling what might happen. Therefore, it's questionable whether or not any place is entirely "safe" for setting off a surge. For example, a character out in an isolated area like the Sahara Desert or Antarctica might trigger a power surge that creates an environmental catastrophe, such as a massive shockwave creating a desert storm or a heat pulse melting a tremendous amount of polar ice or turning desert sand into a sheet of glass.

Characters capable of surviving in space and leaving Earth have an additional option: they can trigger a power surge in deep space, with nothing nearby for millions of miles. This is the safest possible alternative, but there's still no way of knowing what might happen. A space-faring character is still capable of generating energy pulses that might affect Earth in some way, from interfering with communications to bombarding the planet with increased levels of radiation, for example. Bring things like mental powers into play, and almost anything could happen.

The other drawback to deliberate power surges is that a surge stuns the character (unless the player uses a hero point to overcome this). This means characters may be momentarily bereft of their protective powers after they surge. So a space-faring character must have appropriate Immunities; otherwise the cure is far worse

than the malady as the character is exposed to the vacuum of space. An opponent may lie in wait and try to take advantage of the character's momentary disorientation and fatigue. There's also the possibility of encountering trouble on the way to an isolated locale to safely trigger a power surge. This may cause the character to surge prematurely.

The other means of eliminating surge points is the opposite of a deliberate power surge. A character who refrains from using any powers *at all* for a length of time can slowly "bleed off" the excess energies leading to power surges. This takes considerable time: a character must not use any powers for a full week to eliminate a single surge point. This includes continuous powers, which must be "switched off" during this time. Permanent powers still function, but the character cannot use any other powers during this time. Use of *any* power, even for a moment, means he has to start the process all over again.

The difficulty with this approach is it renders the character an ordinary mortal while eliminating surge points. This leaves paragons vulnerable to their enemies, although they don't necessarily advertise their vulnerability (and their enemies may not *know* the character's powers are "on hold"). It also generally keeps them from pursuing any goals or activities requiring their powers. In fact, some paranormals simply *can't* take a week off when there's so much for them to do. The GM may call for Will saves to resist the temptation to use powers while trying to shed surge points.

A character trying to avoid using any powers, but forced into a situation where power use is necessary, may be considered under the kind of stress that can cause a power surge. So, the effort of trying to desperately refrain from power use may actually trigger the power surge the character is hoping to avoid in the first place!

POWER SURGE VARIANTS

The default assumption is power surges are potentially harmful to everyone *except* the character causing them. That doesn't have to be the case, however. Gamemasters wanting to add a different element of risk to power surges may decide the characters are at the greatest risk. Surging powers may destroy their users or alter them beyond recognition.

FORTITUDE SURGES

In this variant, substitute Fortitude saving throws where power surges normally call for Will saving throws. This makes controlling power surges more a matter of health, endurance, and constitution rather than willpower and self-control. Strong, healthy characters are less prone to power surges than physical weaklings, and mental discipline has nothing to do with controlling a power surge. This typically means surges are more of a biological process, perhaps even linked to a kind of degenerative illness or physical defect more likely to affect those with less Fortitude.

SURGE POINT PENALTY

The default assumption is the buildup of surge points has no adverse effects on characters until they fail a Will save and a power surge occurs. Some Gamemasters may wish to have the buildup make characters more prone to power surges. In this case, apply a penalty to the Will save against power surges equal to his current surge point total. So a character with 3 surge points suffers a -3 penalty on saves to avoid further power surges. This means there's a finite number of surge points a character can build up before

inevitably failing a Will save, and it makes racking up surge points a more serious matter.

SURGE DAMAGE

Instead of, or in addition to, their other effects, power surges are potentially harmful and may cause lasting or permanent damage to the characters causing them, even leading to death. When a damaging power surge occurs, the player must make a Fortitude saving throw against a lethal damage bonus equal to half the character's power level. Players can spend hero points normally on the save against a damaging power surge. You can also choose to have damaging power surges resisted by a different save, such as Will.

At the GM's option, the number of surge points the character possesses may increase the damaging effects of a power surge. Increase the surge's damage bonus by 1 per surge point. This means massive power surges are more likely to seriously injure or kill.

SURGE TAINT

Out-of-control powers may reshape or warp their wielders in various ways. Instead of, or in addition to, its normal effects, a power surge gives the character taint (see **Taint** previously in this chapter). Each failed power surge check usually results in 1 point of taint, although the GM can vary this amount to achieve the desired effect.

Taint caused by power surges may be of any type found in the setting, although mutations and psychological taint are the most common results. If super-powers are innately "immoral" in some way (all derived from an evil source, for example), then even moral taint is an option.

DEATH SURGES

A paragon's death throes can potentially unleash a catastrophe. The default assumption is a character's death *doesn't* cause a power surge if the paranormal dies instantly or is unconscious at the time of death. If there's no chance to react, there's no chance of provoking a power surge. On the other hand, a prolonged or painful death almost certainly requires a Will save to prevent a surge, and some may choose to forgo the saving throw, hoping to get a last chance at revenge against their killers.

At the Gamemaster's option, a power surge may occur when a character dies under *any* conditions. This approach may actually decrease the amount of violence in the series if Power Surge is a common or default drawback, since superhumans won't be so quick to kill each other if they know each of them is essentially a bomb waiting to go off. Better to defeat, or overpower, a foe and then dispose of them somewhere relatively safe, where the resultant power surge isn't as dangerous, such as leaving them in a "sure-fire" deathtrap...

Finally, there's always the possibility of a paranormal's dying power surge doing something unusual. Perhaps a dying curse is given life by the power surge, or maybe that last surge of power creates an incorporeal "ghost" to cause more trouble in the future. Is it really the spirit of the deceased character or just some power construct? Only the Gamemaster knows for sure.

Death surges, if they exist, may also be far more intense than normal power surges. Gamemasters may decide to apply additional surge points to a death surge, using the guidelines for last-ditch effort (see *Mastermind's Manual*, page 82); this will ensure the death of any paragon becomes a spectacular (and potentially cataclysmic) event.

TWENTY POWER SURGES

If you're feeling in need of inspiration for a power surge or two, look over this list for some ideas of things you can do, or even roll randomly and choose one of the effects described here, so long as it is appropriate for the character. If you come up with an inappropriate effect, and the character doesn't have enough surge points to justify it, roll again or choose a different effect better suited to the character's powers.

1. EXPLOSION

The paranormal's power is released as a concentrated bolt or a massive explosion. The typical effect is to add the Area extra to a power like Blast, with surge points providing Progression or increases in power rank (or both) so there is a powerful explosion. The nature of the explosion depends on the power descriptors. It's usually related to a type of energy the paragon controls, although it could differ in some way. For example, a fire-wielding paragon probably releases a fiery explosion, but might also suddenly drain all the heat from the surrounding area, creating a flash-freeze effect.

2. BLINDED BY THE LIGHT

The surge takes the form of a Dazzle effect. If the paranormal already has the Dazzle power, then the surge adds the Area extra (or Progression, if the power already affects an area). Those in the area are blinded (or deafened, or have another sense disabled). At the GM's discretion, an especially powerful Dazzle attack may disable the sense of a character who fails the Reflex saving throw against it by more than 15 (not unusual for normal humans saving against a paranormal power) for a full day or week before the victim gets a Fortitude save, and may permanently disable targets failing their save by more than 20.

3. A NEED FOR SPEED

One of the paranormal's movement powers activates at full speed and the paragon cannot stop it or change direction until he gets the surge under control. This may result in the paranormal slamming into (or through!) obstacles, shooting off into the upper atmosphere (or space), teleporting somewhere at random (possibly even another dimension), and so forth. This type of surge has the potential to be instantly fatal to a paragon without the right defenses, so the GM should be careful about imposing it on such characters.

4. BULL IN A CHINA SHOP

The paragon has a seizure or fit, combined with superhuman strength. This is an uncontrolled use of Super-Strength stunts like Shockwave and Thunderclap. If the character doesn't have Super-Strength, choose another surge effect or apply surge points to provide it. Surge points may increase the character's Strength bonus or the radius of the effect, making powerful paragons into one-person earthquakes. The surge almost certainly shatters windows in the affected area and sufficient power ranks can also seriously damage streets and buildings, even collapsing some structures.

5. SEEN IT ALL

The paragon's senses are enhanced to such a degree that ordinary sensory input threatens to overload them. A paranormal with Super-Senses may lose control of them such that the paragon is blinded

by ordinary daylight, deafened by the normal noises of a city, sees through *all* objects rather than just those that he chooses, and so forth. The paranormal is effectively Dazzled at his own power rank. Needless to say, a paranormal lashing out blindly can be just as big a threat as the surge itself.

6. ALL YOUR MINDS ARE BELONG TO US

The paranormal unconsciously and uncontrollably influences the minds of people nearby. This may be a single target affected by Mind Control acquired as a surge "stunt," or the application of the Area extra and Progression to a paragon's existing Mind Control power, causing it to affect a potentially large number of subjects. The command issued is often either something the paranormal truly wants or has repressed. It may be related to the cause of the surge. For example, a paragon feeling crowded might cause people to flee in terror while one seeking acceptance might be mobbed with people overcome with love or lust.

7. A CHANGE FOR THE WORSE

The surge creates a powerful Transform effect, how powerful depends on the paranormal creating it. It might be a one-use Transform power stunt affecting a single target or a massive area-effect (for paranormals who already have Transform powers or have accumulated a lot of surge points). Even cosmetic transformations can be traumatic, such as a paragon who causes everyone in a particular area to look exactly like him, or like a person the paragon loves (or fears, or hates). Maybe the paranormal causes people to change race or gender to fit with subconscious wishes or prejudices. More radical transformations are limited solely by the GM's imagination. A powerful surge could transform animals into mutant monsters, or people into trees, reptiles, apes, giants, zombies, or composite flesh-monsters.

8. THE EARTH STOOD STILL

The power surge thrusts the paragon into a world where everything seems frozen in time. Paragons with super-human speed may be pushed into "overdrive," where they're moving so fast time seems to stand still. They're "outside" ordinary time altogether. No one can see or hear them because they're simply moving too fast. The effect could last for hours, days, or even longer in the paranormal's subjective time while no more than a second passes in the normal world. The other option is for the paragon to literally "freeze" time, a kind of massive paralysis effect (or Time Stop, *Ultimate Power* sourcebook, page 197). The area it covers depends on how many surge points the paranormal has. The GM may decide other paranormals are immune to the effect or it only extends to living beings; people are paralyzed, but machines continue to run (with all the potential for disaster that implies).

9. THE NIGHT THE LIGHTS WENT OUT

The power surge causes a blackout of power systems, either by overloading them or draining them of available energy. This is a type of Blast or Nullify, depending on the paragon's powers and the effect the GM chooses, with Area and possibly Progression. The blackout may be temporary or may permanently disable the power grid in the area, lasting until repairs are made. A blackout in a small area may cause problems on a much wider scale while a widespread blackout can create havoc.

10. SYSTEM CRASH

The paragon's power surge crashes computer systems. This may involve the Datalink power (possibly as a surge stunt) or the paranormal may emit an electromagnetic pulse that overloads and wipes out electronics and magnetic storage media. This is typically an Area extra on one of the paranormal's existing powers, with surge points providing Progression to widen the radius. With computers so common in the modern world, a widespread system crash can cause all sorts of problems, from wiping out personal and business computers, cell phones, PDAs, and so forth to crippling communications, security, and even vital systems like traffic control, hospitals, and such.

11. DOWN THE DRAIN

The paranormal temporarily acquires Absorption as a power stunt of an existing power and uncontrollably absorbs an existing source of energy, which augments the effects of the paranormal's powers during the surge. For example, a paragon might drain all the heat from a forest fire, all the electricity from a city's power-grid (see **The Night the Lights Went Out**, previously), the energy from a reactor or generator, and so forth. Other, even stranger, possibilities include draining life energy from the people around the paranormal, aging or even killing them, or absorbing quantum energy, perhaps temporarily weakening the boundary between quantum dimensions. This extra energy may boost another of the paragon's powers that isn't already at its maximum rank, or even boost a power beyond the paragon's normal power level (at the GM's discretion).

12. THE POWER IS YOURS

The power surge creates an Empowerment effect (see *Ultimate Power*, page 154), essentially granting other people temporary (or even permanent!) paranormal powers! A normal surge may only affect one other character while a surge with one or more surge points behind it can apply various extras to Empowerment to grant a wide range of powers to many different subjects. Of course, these new paranormals could also be subject to power surges themselves, which can create a far worse situation. At the GM's discretion, this sort of power surge may trigger a breakout in some characters, creating new paragons with permanent abilities.

13. A HEADACHE THIS BIG

Instead of a physical effect, a Mental Blast strikes a target or area. The GM decides if the Mental Blast does stun or lethal damage, inflicting terrible pain and knocking targets unconscious or injuring and killing people outright (perhaps with various gory special effects like exploding heads). Either type of Mental Blast can cause serious problems in an area crowded with people.

14. VOICES

A telepathic paranormal (or a non-telepath with one or more surge points) develops an uncontrollable Area extra for Telepathy, bombarding the paragon with the thoughts of all the people in the area. The paragon is stunned for the duration of the power surge. Alternately, the paranormal may be overwhelmed by the thoughts and desires of others, affected like a use of Mind Control and forced to carry out those thoughts for the duration of the surge.

15. CREATURES FROM THE ID

The power surge has the effect of the Illusion power, creating images from the paranormal's consciousness or perhaps from the buried

desires or fears of the people nearby. More powerful surges create illusions over a larger area, perhaps applying the Damaging and Selective extras to plunge each person in the area into his or her own personal dreamscape (or nightmare) where mental images come to life. If other paranormals are affected, the illusions may cause additional power surges. The "illusions" could even be beings inadvertently summoned from the Imageria and given substance by the paragon's powers.

16. DISASTER!

The power surge triggers a natural disaster of some sort. For a low-level surge this may simply be a misdirected use of a power like Element Control, creating a minor earth tremor, or a powerful wave (or some exploding water-mains in a city). With the addition of some surge points the magnitude of the disaster grows. A power surge could create a massive earthquake, tsunami, hurricane, tornado, or other weather phenomenon. A powerful enough surge could even trigger volcanic eruptions (which in turn set off other natural disasters).

17. THE BABEL EFFECT

This type of power surge is similar to a reverse of the Comprehend power, creating a "zone of confusion" wherein communication is all but impossible. The default effect is the paranormal loses the ability to comprehend language. Everything the paranormal sees, hears, or says is incomprehensible. Additional surge points may extend this effect to cover a larger area, affecting everyone in the area and making it impossible for people to understand each other. Mental powers like Telepathy are unaffected but otherwise no (meaningful) communication is possible with anyone in the affected area.

18. THE STARS ARE RIGHT

The power surge tears open a rift in the fabric of space-time, an opening between Earth and another dimension (part of the Imageria by default). It's up to the Gamemaster what may lie beyond the dimensional portal. The rift might allow interdimensional invaders to pour into Earth's dimension, expose the area to strange interdimensional energies or forces, or simply draw the attention of malevolent, or alien, beings beyond human comprehension. Nearby things might also be pulled through the warp to wherever it leads.

19. FORTEAN PHENOMENON

The power surge causes something strange and unexpected to happen. It might transform all inorganic matter in an area into glass (or gold...), cause toads or fish to rain from the sky, render an entire area invisible, teleport a section of real estate somewhere randomly, or some similar effect. See **Fortean Phenomena** in **Chapter One** for some additional ideas.

20. THE LAWS OF PHYSICS REPEALED

Something *incredibly* weird or unexpected happens, which may or may not be related to the nature of the paranormal's powers. The more surge points the paragon has, the stranger (and more widespread) the effect becomes. Gravity ceases to function as we understand it. Time runs backwards for a few seconds, a few minutes, or even longer. Non-living matter becomes incorporeal. Nearly anything can happen, if the Gamemaster wishes. This is essentially a GM Fiat level of power surge, usable as a plot device. If it has consequences truly out of proportion with the character's powers and surge point total, you may want to award the player a hero point for the additional complication.

MASS COMBAT

While the basic *Mutants & Masterminds* combat rules handle the one-on-one superhero vs. supervillain clashes of the comic books quite well, large-scale battles, whether between armies or a small handful of superhumans against an army, are on a different scale altogether. Even paragons can find themselves overwhelmed by a sufficient force while some paranormals can take on entire armies and win! Things can get a little hectic for the Gamemaster, when a fight involves dozens or even hundreds of participants!

The following optional rules are designed to assist Gamemasters in simulating mass battles between large forces. These rules are based on the Field Battle rules that first appeared in the *Golden Age* sourcebook for *M&M*, updated and revised to handle more modern combat along with the characters and powers for *Paragons*.

FORCES

The mass combat system sums up the actions and traits of a number of less powerful combatants and treats them as a single more powerful character for the purposes of combat and conflict. This combined entity is called a *force*, as opposed to an individual character. Rounds in the mass battle system proceed somewhat slower than in normal combat and reflect more tactical actions and movements.

Like individual characters, forces have their own particular traits, measuring their capabilities. In general, the traits of a force are based on the components making up that force (individual soldiers, for example), with certain traits gaining a modifier based on the overall size of the force.

FORCE SIZE

The most important quality of a force is its size, how many individuals make up that particular force. Gamemasters may choose to treat an entire group as a single force or split the group up into smaller forces, as suits the dramatic needs of the story. Sometimes having the player characters deal with two or four smaller forces can be more interesting than a single massive force, particularly if more than one character is interacting with the force(s) at the same time.

A force's size determines its *force modifier*, which is an increase in certain traits based on the total number of individuals in the force. Each step up the **Progression Table** from one individual provides a +1 force modifier. So a force of two individuals has a force modifier of +1, five individuals +2, ten individuals (a squad) +3, and so forth. The **Military Unit Size** table shows the force modifiers

for common military units. Generally speaking, it's easier to break entire armies down into corps, divisions, or brigades and use their force modifiers.

MILITARY UNIT SIZE

UNIT TYPE	APPROX. NO. OF TROOPS	FORCE MODIFIER
Corps	20,000-50,000	+14
Division	9,000-15,000	+12
Brigade	6,000-8,000	+11
Regiment	3,000-4,000	+10
Battalion	500-1,000	+9
Company	140	+6
Platoon	30-50	+5
Squad	10	+3

TROOP QUALITY

Troop *quality* refers to the overall abilities of the individuals making up a particular force and forms the basis for the force's traits. There are three levels of troop quality: green, trained, and veteran. Gamemasters may want to divide a larger force into smaller forces in order to differentiate them by troop quality. For example, a force of 1,000 soldiers might be made up of three forces: a force of 100 veteran troops (+6 modifier), a force of 250 trained troops (+7 modifier), and a force of 500 green troops (+8 modifier).

Green troops are inexperienced and largely untrained, unfamiliar with combat and working together as a unit. Conscripts and average people are green quality, as are troops in societies where armed conflict is rare.

GREEN TROOPS

Attack +1, Damage +4, Defense +1, Toughness +0, Initiative +0, Morale -3

Trained troops have experience and training in combat and unit tactics. Most trained military fall into this category, along with police officers and others experienced in combat situations.

TRAINED TROOPS

Attack +2, Damage +5, Defense +2, Toughness +1, Initiative +2, Morale +0

WHAT THIS SYSTEM IS NOT

The mass combat system is *not* intended as a realistic wargame simulation for battles between superhuman foes and vast armies. It's a fast and general system for resolving conflicts between powerful paranormals and large numbers of considerably less powerful opponents quickly and easily, rather than having to deal with the minutiae of individual soldiers or units in a large-scale conflict. It gives the GM the tools to decide how difficult a particular force is to overcome and see if the characters are capable of doing so without having to play out hours of combat.

As with all game systems, the mass combat system is not meant as a substitute for common sense. If a particular outcome seems unreasonable, the GM should feel free to modify it as needed to suit the series and the story (refer back to Rule Number One, *M&M*, page 7). In fact, Gamemasters don't have to use this system at all if they're not looking to play out a battle in game terms. If a particular large-scale engagement is just background color for one of your adventures, it's perfectly fine for it keep it that way, providing the occasional complication for the heroes, but nothing more.

Veteran troops have considerable experience and training in warfare, tactics, and working together as a unit. They include special-forces units and other elite military units.

VETERAN TROOPS

Attack +4, Damage +6, Defense +4, Toughness +2, Initiative +4, Morale +3

ATTACK BONUS

A force's attack bonus is the total of its base attack bonus for troop quality and the force modifier, so a larger force has a greater attack bonus than a smaller one of the same quality. A force's total attack bonus is based on a large number of troops making simultaneous attacks and using coordinated tactics and such. It doesn't assume all the troops attack or may hit at once; like other traits, it abstracts the entire force's capability.

DAMAGE BONUS

A force's damage bonus is the total of its base damage bonus and the force modifier. This assumes larger forces of troops have access to both more and more powerful weapons, so it takes into account that a large force is likely to be using grenades, rocket launchers, and eventually tanks, bombs, and other heavy weapons in addition to man-portable armaments. The force's damage capabilities are generalized and summed up as single damage bonus.

Generally speaking, a military force's damage bonus is lethal damage, unless the GM decides the force is specially armed with stun-damage and incapacitating weapons (more likely in a comic book setting, but becoming more plausible in the real world). A force's damage bonus works just like an individual's damage bonus and is saved against in the same way.

DEFENSE

A force's Defense represents how difficult it is to inflict a successful attack on that force. Defense is based entirely on the force's quality, with no modifier for size. A larger force is easier to "hit" overall, but can also suffer more damage than a smaller force (represented by applying the force modifier to Toughness save).

Note that a force does not have a dodge bonus to Defense; conditions on the battlefield change too rapidly for dodge bonus to be considered a factor in the force's overall Defense. The Gamemaster may permit certain maneuvers to modify a force's Defense, but otherwise situational modifiers only apply if they affect the *entire* battlefield.

TOUGHNESS

Add the force modifier to base Toughness bonus for troop quality to determine the force's total Toughness saving throw bonus.

For a force as a whole, this Toughness save doesn't quite represent the ability to shrug off damage (as it does for individuals) but rather how long a force can suffer damage and continue fighting. See **Force Damage** for details on force Toughness saves.

INITIATIVE

A force's Initiative modifier is likewise based solely on troop quality, unaffected by unit size. A force uses its Initiative modifier just like a character, and all parts of the force are assumed to act together as a unit during its turn in the initiative order. Unlike characters,

forces are not flat-footed before their first turn in the initiative order (since, in order for a force to act at all it needs a certain degree of readiness).

FORCES AND SURPRISE

Under the right conditions, such as a well-planned ambush—the GM may rule that a force is surprised at the start of a combat. This has its normal effects: the attacker gets to take an action during the surprise round before combat begins. There's still no modification to the force's Defense for being "flat-footed" unless the GM feels the *entire* force was caught by surprise, in which case the force's defense bonus may be halved for the surprise round alone.

MORALE

A force has a modifier to its morale checks based on troop quality, unmodified by unit size. When the force must make a morale check, apply its morale modifier to the check. See **Morale Checks** later in this section for details.

FORCES IN ACTION

When one or more forces are involved in a conflict, the combat shifts to *battlefield rounds*. Each battlefield round is approximately ten times the length of an ordinary six-second combat round, or one minute, and represents a considerable amount of maneuvering and activity on the battlefield during that time.

Individual characters and forces can take the normal allotment of actions during a battlefield round: one move action and one standard action (possibly trading the standard action for an additional move action), or a full-round action. Free actions and reactions are also allowed, up to the limits imposed by the GM.

A force makes an attack just like an individual does: a d20 roll, plus the force's attack bonus, against the Difficulty Class of the target's Defense, whether the target is another force or an individual character. A force may also move before or after an attack. Typically a force's movement is limited so long as a significant portion of the force is on foot. Motorized forces may be able to move more quickly as the GM's discretion.

MANEUVERS

A force can use particular maneuvers in battle, much like individual characters. These maneuvers are similar in many ways to character-scale maneuvers.

OFFENSIVE POSTURE

A force that takes an offensive posture sacrifices Defense in exchange for greater attack accuracy: for every -2 penalty (up to -4) that the force takes to its Defense, it gains a +1 attack bonus.

Trained and veteran forces can trade Defense for attack bonus on a 1-for-1 basis (that is -1 Defense equals a +1 attack bonus) up to a total of -5 to Defense (and +5 to attack bonus).

DEFENSIVE POSTURE

A defensive posture is the opposite of an offensive posture; the force sacrifices attack ability for improved Defense (including intercepting some incoming attacks using the force's offensive capabilities): for every -2 penalty (up to -4) that the force takes to its attack rolls that round, it gains +1 to Defense.



Trained and veteran forces can trade attack bonus for Defense on a 1-for-1 basis (that is -1 on attack rolls grants a +1 Defense bonus) up to a total of -5 on attack rolls for +5 Defense.

CHARGE

A force can charge, moving up to twice its normal movement in a relatively straight line. A charging force suffers a -2 modifier to Defense, but gains a +2 bonus on attack rolls for the round.

SPLIT

A force can choose to split off into smaller forces with reduced force bonuses, but with greater maneuverability and freedom of action. A force must be made up of troops of the same quality; the force uses the traits of its least qualified troops if it has troops of mixed quality.

Splitting a force is a full-round action. When a force splits, it becomes two forces, each with a portion of the troops of the original force. Each separate force has its force modifier recalculated according to its new troop compliment. If the original force suffered any damage, both of the split forces have the same damage.

COMBINE

Two forces may also choose to combine to form a single, larger, force. Combining forces is a full-round action. This increases the force's size, and therefore force modifier, normally. For example, if two forces of 250 troops combine to form a single force, that force has a force modifier one higher than the original forces.

If any of the forces are disrupted when they combine with another force, the combined force has the highest total of hits from among

its components. The components' hits are not added together. Disabled forces cannot combine with others.

COORDINATED ASSAULT

Two or more forces may attempt to make a coordinated assault on a target. Each assisting force makes a normal attack roll against the target. Each successful attack inflicts no damage, but grants the coordinating force a +2 bonus on its attack roll against that same target.

Note that a coordinated assault does not increase the attack's damage, only the likelihood of a successful attack, so several small forces looking to increase their damage potential are better off combining into a larger force with a higher force modifier (see **Combine**, previously).

FLANKING

Two forces may attempt to catch an opponent in between them, *flanking* that opponent. If two forces are located on opposite sides of a target, each force gains a +2 attack bonus against that target.

TERRAIN & CONDITIONS

Certain kinds of terrain and environmental conditions make things difficult (or easier) for large forces in combat.

A force fighting in particularly difficult terrain (rocky, broken, confined urban areas, etc.) suffers a -1 penalty to attack, defense, and initiative. A force fighting in an area under cover of darkness, heavy fog, severe weather, and so forth must deal with concealment modifiers, unless the force has equipment to overcome these



DAMAGE CONDITIONS

The potential damage conditions resulting from mass combat damage are as follows:

DISRUPTED

The force is suffering from the chaos of battle. Casualties and wounded are starting to add up and it is beginning to feel the pinch of lost manpower. Cohesion is starting to break down under stress, making it difficult to relay orders from component unit to component unit. Moreover, the loss of officers or other leaders is adversely affecting the force's ability to fight effectively. The sight of dead and wounded comrades has begun to hurt the force's morale.

As a result, each disrupted condition enforces a -1 penalty to all the force's rolls, including further Toughness saves and morale checks. The penalties for multiple disrupted conditions are cumulative with each other and with any other penalties incurred.

SHAKEN

The force suffers a dramatic loss. Maybe an attack hits central command, a trusted and respected officer is killed, or a previously unseen enemy machine gun nest mows down an entire subunit.

Whatever the cause, the force cannot take any actions during the next round. During this time, it suffers a -2 penalty to all rolls but any additional shaken results are ignored. The force recovers automatically on the following round, but may then be shaken again as normal.

STAGGERED

The force's soldiers are no longer fighting at peak efficiency, as fear and confusion hamper their decision-making and losses weaken their strength. The force is limited to a standard or move action each round, not both.

DISABLED

A disabled force has been demoralized or damaged to the point where it can no longer fight effectively. It may not attack other opponents, but it may still attempt saving throws to resist attacks against it, and take actions to retreat from the field of battle.

DESTROYED

A destroyed force has had its morale completely broken. Scattered elements may continue to fight, but their impact on the battle is negligible as the majority of the force has been killed, captured, or has taken flight in a disorganized retreat. The force in question is obviously done in the battle at hand—and likely for all battles to follow, for that matter.

PLAYER CHARACTERS AND FORCE DAMAGE

As a general rule, player characters—whether ordinary grunts or paranormals—are considered separate from a force with regard to damage. Damage to the overall force does not directly affect the heroes, except insofar as it weakens the support they can expect.

Gamemaster's should handle possible damage to the paragons individually according to the standard *M&M* combat rules. So a mortar bombardment would require a Toughness save from the overall force, and the GM might call for Reflex and Toughness

FORCE DAMAGE

Units successfully attacked during a round attempt Toughness saving throws as per the standard *M&M* rules. The results of Toughness saves are found under the **Force Damage** table below.

Each round's attacks are considered to happen simultaneously in mass combat. Therefore, the effects of damage are not applied until the start of the following round.

FORCE DAMAGE

TOUGHNESS SAVING THROW...	EFFECT
Succeeds	No Effect
Fails	Disrupted
Fails by 5 or more	Shaken + Disrupted
Fails by 10 or more	Staggered + Disrupted + Disabled
Fails by 15 or more	Destroyed

saves against a particular instance of Explosion Damage from the player characters.

MORALE CHECKS

Certain events require a force to make a *morale check* to determine if the majority of the force is still willing and able to continue the fight. A failed morale check means the force is disrupted, as described under **Force Damage**, previously. A second failed moral check means the force is shaken, suffering a -2 penalty on attack and defense until the force succeeds at a morale check. A third failed morale check in a row means the force is routed. The force's fighting spirit is broken and the force either surrenders or flees (based on the conditions and the GM's discretion).

A morale check is a d20 roll plus the force's morale modifier (based on troop quality). The Difficulty Class for morale checks starts out at 10, but each failed morale check increases the DC by 1, and each disrupted condition the force suffers also imposes a -1 morale check modifier. Forces must make morale checks after any of the following events:

- The force fails a Toughness save and suffers damage.
- The force fails to inflict any damage against any target for two successive battle rounds.
- The force suffers a serious setback or reversal (in the opinion of the Gamemaster).

Additionally, the Gamemaster may impose modifiers to the morale check based on the conditions. An especially effective use of Intimidation or powers by a superhuman foe may apply a -2 (or greater) penalty to a force's morale checks, while the presence of an especially charismatic leader may apply a bonus (equal to the leader's Charisma modifier) on the force's morale checks.

FEATS

The effects of most combat feats are *not* incorporated into the mass combat rules. The Gamemaster might assign the Improved Critical feat to a veteran unit, or Sneak Attack to a paratrooper division, or Precise Shot to a platoon of expert marksmen. For the most part, however, combat feats don't apply when dealing with mass battles, and the average soldier doesn't have that many of them, anyway.

General and skill feats are too small-scale and individual to figure into these rules. Sure, it'd be no fun to suffer the effects of the Taunt feat from an entire regiment, but it's hard to hear even the most cutting comment over machine-gun fire. In any case, their targets are probably more worried about being shot and killed than they are about the enemy bustin' on their mommas.

POWERS

For the most part, powers affect forces in the way they affect individuals, with a few exceptions.

- Powers that inflict damage are assumed to do their normal damage against the force as a whole, even if the power does not normally affect an area. The wielder is assumed to be making multiple attacks with that power during the battle round.

Damaging powers with the Area extra inflict +2 damage to a force, with each Progression feat increasing this bonus by +1, but the total additional damage from Area and Progression cannot exceed the target force's force modifier (since the damage effec-

THE LIMITS OF THE MASS COMBAT SYSTEM

The mass combat rules are intended to provide quick "shorthand" for Gamemasters to handle conflicts between superhumans and large forces. It can be quite tedious to run combats involving dozens, much less hundreds or thousands, of troops, and it's unfair not to give large forces at least a chance against super-powered foes. Seen one-on-one, no soldier has a prayer against a power level 10 character with significant offensive and defensive powers, but working as a unit, a force of soldiers should have a chance (even if only a slight one).

The system is necessarily abstract, boiling down several rounds of normal combat into longer battle rounds that resolve many different exchanges of attacks and maneuvers in one or two die rolls. It's quite possible to resolve a conflict between a paranormal (or group of them) and an entire army in just a couple battle rounds (as seen in the example previously). It also summarizes the inclusion of things like equipment, weapons, and tactics with few additional rules.

The Gamemaster is responsible for providing the description of the battle and what exactly occurs, while the system provides a general outline of things (who won and by how much, etc.). Gamemasters who feel that the mass combat system tends to run *too* quickly should try breaking a single large force into two or more smaller forces and running the battle with those, giving the individual characters a few more "opponents" to overcome. This is particularly true for battles involving multiple super-powered characters. As a rule of thumb, try to give each character involved in the battle either a superhuman foe or a single force as an opponent, preventing the characters from "ganging up" on a single force and quickly ending the battle.

The mass combat system is *not* intended as a war game for resolving military conflicts between armies; its main intent is as an individual vs. force system. It's far better to handle large-scale military engagements by GM Fiat, modified according to the actions of the heroes and their major foes. There are plenty of far better and more detailed games for playing out actual battlefield conflicts, if that's what you're looking to do.

tively encompasses the entire force at that point). Essentially, the attack's additional area "cancels out" the force's Toughness bonus for being a large group.

- Non-damaging powers that do not normally affect an area have a negligible effect on a force in battle. The character can only use such powers if they have the Area extra and sufficient Progression to encompass the entire force. So a character with the Mind Control power, for example, could not attempt to Mind Control an entire force unless he possessed sufficient area for the power to affect the entire force. The GM can allow these powers to operate normally at the individual scale; they just don't have much influence on the outcome of force-level conflicts. Of course, the GM is free to allow plausible power-use in a mass combat situation, if it can reasonably affect the outcome.
- A particularly spectacular or destructive use of powers may impose a modifier to a force's morale checks at the GM's discretion, either a penalty for an enemy force or a bonus (rallying the troops) for an allied force.
- Impervious Toughness is compared against the force's *total* damage (including force modifier) before determining whether or not the character has to make a Toughness saving throw against the force's attack. This is one of the advantages of

larger forces: they can overcome—through superior numbers and firepower—Impervious Toughness that would render a target immune to the attacks of a smaller force. So, for example, a character with Impervious Toughness 10 can ignore the damage of a platoon of green troops (+9 damage total) but not that of a trained platoon (+10 damage) that knows how to apply its firepower.

SAMPLE CONFLICT

A force of 100 trained troops is defending a military base from Bruiser, a paranormal freelancer. The troops have a +6 force modifier for their numbers. This gives the force the following traits:

TROOPS

Attack +8, Damage +11, Defense +2, Toughness +7, Initiative +2, Morale +0

Unfortunately for them, Bruiser is a physically powerful foe. His Impervious Toughness is 11, however, not quite high enough to ignore the force's attacks (which have the same bonus), so they at least have a chance. Bruiser has the following traits:

TROOPS

Attack +9, Damage +13, Defense +9, Toughness +11 (Impervious), Initiative +2.

As an individual character, Bruiser doesn't have a morale bonus or make morale checks.

The troops get initiative and attack Bruiser. They roll an 11 on their attack roll for a total of 19, which is a hit, so Bruiser makes a Toughness save (DC 26, the force's damage of +11, plus 15). He gets a 22 and suffers a hurt result, hissing angrily at the "bugs" stinging at him.

Then the paragon counterattacks: he only needs to roll a 3 or better to hit the troops, given his attack bonus. The force needs to make a Toughness save (DC 28 for Bruiser' +13 damage). With their +7 Toughness save bonus, they need to roll a 20 to succeed. They roll a 19, and manage to suffer only a disrupted result. However, the force has taken damage, so they must make a morale check (DC 10). The GM rolls and gets a 9. They suffer an additional disrupted result from the display of Bruiser's power.

The troops attack again and hit. The paragon makes another Toughness saving throw (modified for his hurt result) and succeeds, shrugging off their assault. He counterattacks and the force makes another Toughness save. This time they roll only a 10, which fails the save by 11, meaning the force is disabled. The GM rules that Bruiser's fierce onslaught overturns vehicles, smashes bunkers, and sends the remainder of the force packing.

Mere minutes after his arrival, Bruiser leaves a devastated military base behind, carrying away what he came to get from the top-secret base. Only a few scattered troops remain to tell others of the paragon's assault so they can go after him.

PARADIGM SHIFTS

A key difference between four-color superhero adventures and those of *Paragons* is that superheroes primarily exist to maintain the status quo: protect the world from outside threats, fight crime, and so forth. In *Paragons*, paranormals can—and almost certainly will—change the world by virtue of their very existence, to say nothing of their actions. Some of these potential changes are examined in **Chapter Two** in terms of the broad implications of paragons and their powers.

This section looks at the idea of paranormals affecting change directly, to further whatever personal agenda(s) they may have. It provides guidelines for defining the existing state of a society, from a small town to the entire world, and determining how paragons and their actions may alter it.

Note that, as with the mass-combat system (see the preceding section), these rules are a necessary abstraction of a very complex interplay of individuals and events. They exist as guidelines to give the GM the "big picture" of a society and how changes affect it. The small details are left for the individual GM to decide as best suits the flow of the story and the series.

THE PARADIGMS

Areas where characters can affect change are broadly defined by social *paradigms*, measurements of achievement in particular areas of society. Like other traits, paradigms are given a rating (from 1 to 20) to determine the extent of their influence. This rating changes as the characters (and others) exert efforts to increase or decrease the influence of that paradigm on society. The six paradigms, and their areas of influence, are:

EDUCATION

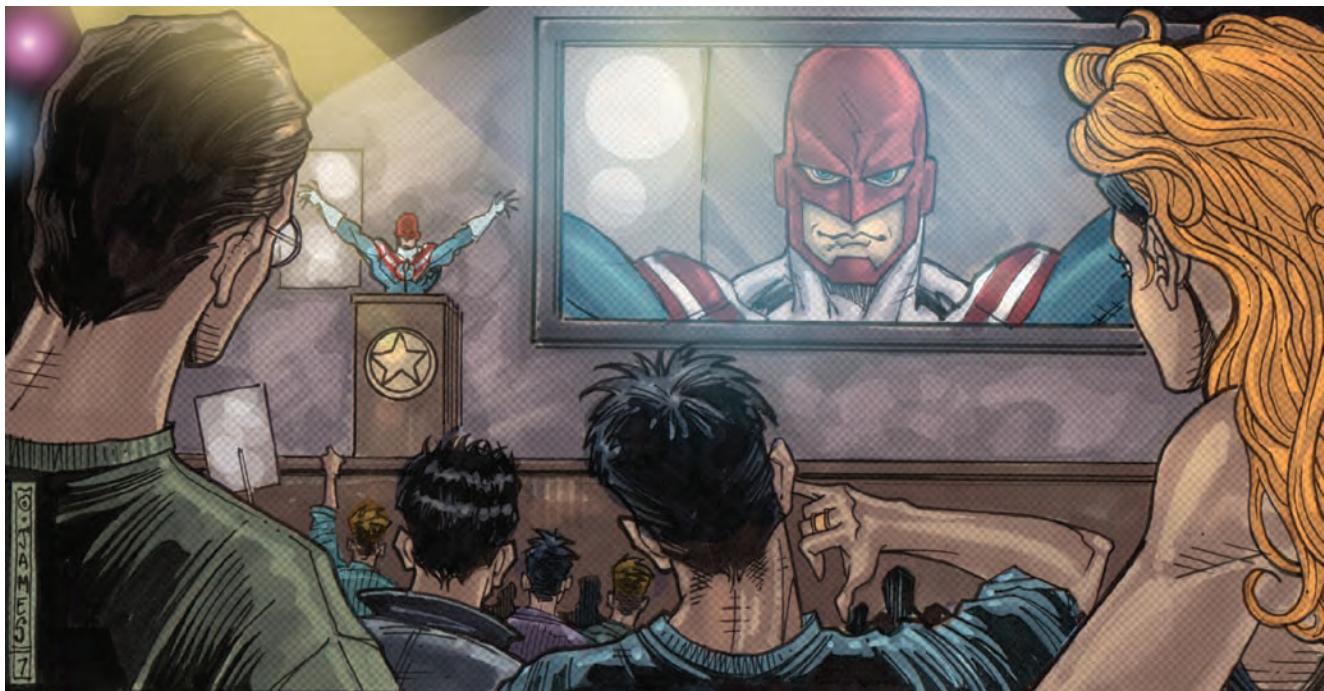
The Education paradigm measures both the quality of education in a society (in terms of teachers, institutions of learning, accessibility, and availability of choice) as well as how much the society values education and learning overall. A high Education paradigm tends to indicate a society open to a wider range of ideas and generally better informed and interested in learning. A low Education paradigm suggests a society that's close-minded, ignorant, hidebound, or that generally devalues education.

ETHICS

The Ethics paradigm is a measurement of a society's devotion to ethical behavior, which is broadly defined as individual and social responsibility. A high Ethics society makes every effort to be above-board, honest, open, law-abiding, and responsible, whereas a low Ethics culture is dishonest, corrupt, and hypocritical when it comes to obeying its own laws and codes of conduct, if they prove inconvenient. Ethics also relates to a belief in individual freedom, dignity, and rights, balanced as much as possible against the needs of society as a whole.

INCOME

Income is an overall measure of a society's productivity or, more precisely, what the society gets out of the application of its labor. A high Income society is highly productive, and likely hard-working (or possessed of work-enhancing technologies and techniques, or both) and produces a strong regular income. A low Income society is less productive, due to underemployment, limits on production (drought or environmental conditions, for example), and so forth.



SAFETY

Safety measures a society's order and stability and therefore rule of law. The greater the Safety rating, the safer and more secure people in the society are and the less concerned they are about their safety on a daily basis. High Safety societies also tend to be more stable, static, and, to a degree, rigid, simply in terms of what people can expect day-to-day. Change is slow and gradual, if it happens at all. Note that unlike Ethics, a high Safety culture isn't necessarily *lawful*, it is more of a matter of law *enforcement* than an ethical belief in acting in a lawful manner (although a culture can be both high Ethics and high Safety).

SERVICES

Services measures overall standard of living, particularly the services and conveniences available to a society. It is part market economy, part social safety net (and related support networks), and part technological advancement, which contributes to both. A society with a high Services rating provides people with a high standard of living and relative material comfort, although other paradigms (like Ethics, Income, and Wealth) may determine to what degree people can take advantage of these things.

WEALTH

The Wealth paradigm measures a society's capital resources, it's "savings" rather than its regular productivity and income or its investment in infrastructure and Services. It's also a measure of a society's "disposable" resources and ability to afford luxuries (and, therefore, its appetite for the same). High Wealth societies tend to be more indulgent but conversely more conservative as well, interested in maintaining the *status quo*.

MAKING PARADIGM SHIFTS

Once the GM sets paradigms for a particular society, it's possible for the characters to change, or *shift*, those paradigms by taking

the appropriate action and spending accumulated power points to push the paradigm in the desired direction.

The appropriate action depends entirely on the desired goal, adjudicated by the Gamemaster. Give the players at least a general idea of which paradigms have to change, and by how much, for the characters to achieve their goal. This way, the players know roughly how difficult it will be.

Example: Say the characters want to overturn the *Paranormal Registration Act in the United States*, granting *paranormals more privacy and freedom from government control*. The GM decides the key paradigms are *Education* (better informing people about *paranormals and their abilities*) and *Ethics* (a stronger belief in *personal freedoms for all*), which need to increase. So the characters can embark on *education campaigns, expose unethical applications of the Registration Act or the people managing it, or demonstrate the ethics and restraint of paragons and why they should be trusted*. Naturally, some oppose the characters' efforts and try to stop them.

If the characters successfully complete the necessary actions to put a shift into motion, the players can then spend power points to make the shift happen. The number of power points required depends on the extent of the shift (how big a society it is intended to influence), as shown on the **Paradigm Shift Costs** table.

PARADIGM SHIFT COSTS

Area	Power Point Cost
Town or Neighborhood	5
City or County	10
State (or small nation-state)	25
Nation or national alliance	50

Players can "pool" unspent power points in order to pay for a paradigm shift. Once they've successfully taken action and paid the necessary power points, the shift takes place, moving the paradigm up or down 1 point as the characters intended.

OPTION: PARADIGM POINTS

The basic paradigm shifting system uses power points awarded to the players during the game, which tends to mean characters who want to effect significant change in the world need to defer their own personal growth and development in favor of their cause, or at least balance the two needs. Gamemasters who don't care for this approach (wanting the players to be able to spend their earned power points freely on advancement), can use the following option.

Award the players separate *paradigm points* for successful actions advancing towards their goals. These points are only useful for paradigm shifts, but are otherwise spent and used in exactly the same way. The players have separate power point awards they use to advance and improve their characters. This eliminates the need to choose between personal advancement and advancement of goals.

If you want to keep an element of choice, allow players to trade earned power points for additional paradigm points so those who defer personal advancement can effect greater change. It is not recommended to allow the opposite (trading in paradigm points for power points), since it is likely to make character advancement too rapid and only encourages selfishness.

Example: Having exposed a major abuse of the Paranormal Registration Act by the Paranormal Regulatory Agency, the characters have fulfilled the GM's requirement for taking action. For it to really "stick," however, the players need to spend 50 power points to cause a 1 point increase in Ethics nationwide, leading people to begin seriously questioning the value of the Registration Act and the rightness of enforcing it.

If players fail to spend sufficient power points to bring about a paradigm shift, the change doesn't "stick." There might be a brief, temporary shift, but things quickly revert back to the status quo, the actions of the characters largely overlooked. For this reason, players may want to wait until they have accumulated sufficient power points before taking decisive action to cause a shift.

PARADIGM SHIFT SIDE EFFECTS

Of course, it's difficult to change one aspect of society without changing others. In fact, when characters cause a paradigm shift, two other paradigms automatically change, one increasing and the other decreasing, as shown on the **Paradigm Shift Reactions** table. So when characters increase Ethics, they also increase Services, but decrease Safety (as personal freedoms and general trust in ethical behavior goes up).

If characters *decrease* a paradigm, reverse the results of the table, so decreasing Ethics also decreases Services (society is less interested in providing them) but increases Safety (as the culture become less trusting and more paranoid).

PARADIGM SHIFT REACTIONS

Increasing...	Increases...	and Decreases...
Education	Income	Wealth
Ethics	Services	Safety
Income	Education	Services
Safety	Wealth	Education
Services	Ethics	Income
Wealth	Safety	Ethics

The side effects of a paradigm shift might help or hurt the characters' goals, depending on what they are. In the example, characters increasing Ethics to overturn the Paranormal Registration Act can benefit from the decrease in Safety that accompanies it, since it can reflect a loosening of legal restrictions on paranormals and their powers. On the other hand, they might get resistance when improving Education decreases Wealth and those in power seek to hold on to what they've accumulated.

Players can eliminate the side effects of a paradigm shift by spending additional power points equal to the original cost of the shift. Each additional amount removes one of the side effects. So eliminating one side effect (either the increase or decrease) costs double, while eliminating both costs triple. This assumes the characters are taking greater precautions and focusing their efforts to ensure measured and precise change (also meaning it will take them longer to achieve their goal).

RUNNING A PARAGONS SERIES

Gamemastering is a big job, but running a *Mutants & Masterminds* series with a conventional comic book superhero style and tone is pretty straightforward: the villains plot crimes, the heroes stop them. Occasionally, heroes confront a natural disaster or some other threat, or deal with subplots involving their personal lives. Overall, the tone is fairly light, the situations clear-cut, and the solutions—while they might require some thought and effort—are pretty simple. Players who have read comic book stories (or seen them in films or on television) have a good idea of what to do.

That isn't necessarily the case with *Paragons*. When you introduce superhuman powers into a world with realistic expectations and consequences, all bets are off. Few, if any, paranormals are going to conform to the mold of a comic book superhero. Many paragons probably have never even *read* a comic book, except perhaps in passing years ago when they were children. They certainly aren't going to want to put on brightly colored tights and go out and

fight crime! So how do you run a *Mutants & Masterminds* game set in such a world? That's what this section is all about.

ADJUDICATING CHARACTER CREATION

The GM's first job in running *Paragons* is to oversee the creation of the characters, ensuring they are both suited to the series and likely to provide fun for the players without being disruptive or problematic. In a *Paragons* game you can give players more latitude than you normally would with regard to character balance. Paragons are *supposed* to be powerful, and to potentially impact the world. Still, you should be on the lookout for problem powers and character concepts that don't necessarily fit into the series framework. Some things to keep in mind while helping players create their characters:

LONERS

Some players may create anti-social or "loner" characters not interested in interacting or dealing with anyone else. While such characters may be interesting in stories, they don't always work well in the socially driven experience of RPGs. If one character is always off on his own, it creates more work for the GM and takes time away from the other players. Therefore, unless you feel able to juggle one or more loner characters in the group, you may want to discourage players from creating them.

SHOWSTOPPERS

A player may propose a character with a "show-stopping" power, one with the potential to bring the entire series to a screeching halt. If you feel a particular power is likely to upset the game from the start, you may wish to suggest the player come up with another power, or concept, for the character. There are also ways you can work show-stopping powers into the series. One is to have the power show up as a power surge, outside the character's control (see **Power Surges** earlier in this chapter). The character gets to "have" the power, but it doesn't show up often enough to become a problem. The other opportunity is to allow the character to acquire the power during advancement, when the series is a bit further along and you're not as concerned about the characters changing things. Since *Paragons* series are meant to end eventually, there's no point in keeping the players from having an unbalancing power toward the end. Let them loose to do whatever they want and you should be able to bring the series to a conclusion in short order.

UNSUITABLE CONCEPTS

Some players may want to play types of characters that don't suit the sort of series you have in mind. For example, a player might want to run an alien character, when you've decided there are no aliens (or at least none on Earth). In these cases, talk with the player and try to come up with a suitable compromise. Maybe the character *believes* he or she is an alien. Maybe the character really is an alien, but doesn't know it yet, and everyone believes he or she is a paranormal. Maybe the character is from a parallel Earth instead of another planet, and so forth.

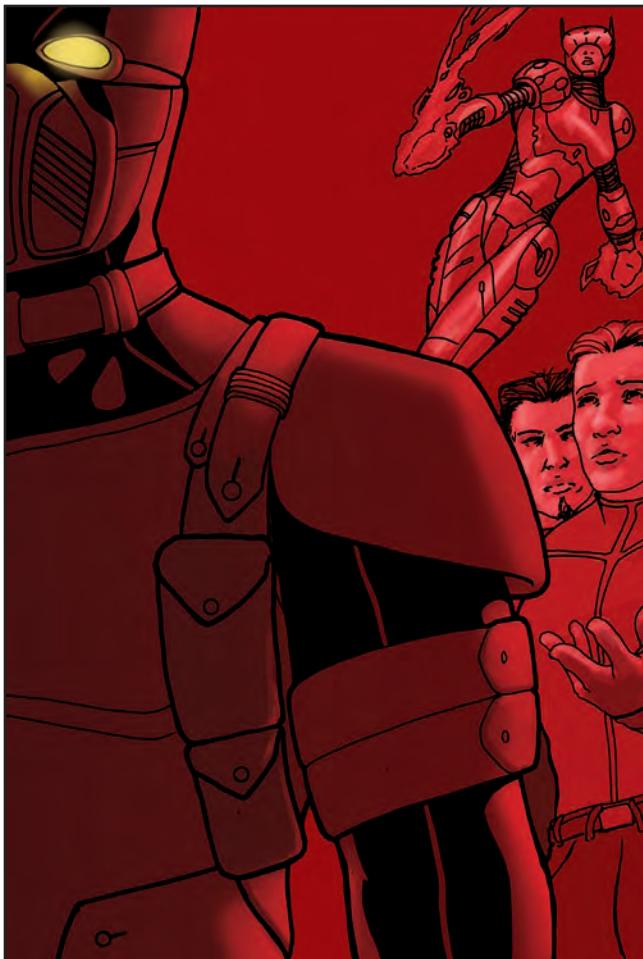
On occasion you may just have to ask a player to put aside an unsuitable concept and come up with something better suited to the series. In the long run both you and the player will be happier with the decision.

STYLES OF PLAY

One decision you should make before you begin running your *Paragons* series is to consider, what kind of style your game will have? Style means overall tone and the way you and your players approach the game. Is it a fun opportunity for the players to kick butt and smash cities like comic book characters, is it a serious exploration of the themes of power, responsibility, and what it means to be human, or is it somewhere in between?

THE POWER

It's quite possible to play *Paragons* entirely for the tremendous power characters have. Let the players run wild and play fast-and-loose with the consequences of their actions. Sure, they may level cities or cause disasters, but the loss of life and property damage



aren't as important as the titanic struggles between people with the powers of gods. As in most myths and epic stories, the fate of the "little people" doesn't really matter. Things are played much more for the super-powered battles and the chance for the players to do whatever they want. This is an opportunity to forget all the good advice you know about game balance, storytelling, and world building and let loose with some pure, world-wrecking action! If, in the end, the paranormals end up destroying the world, it doesn't really matter, as long as everyone had a good time. You can always start up a new game with a shiny new world.

THE RESPONSIBILITY

Other groups may prefer to play *Paragons* with a more serious tone, focusing on the roleplaying opportunities inherent in characters with power ordinary mortals were not meant to wield. This style has plenty of opportunities for in-depth roleplaying and characterization. The powers and super-battles are not as important as their effects on the world and on the characters. It's the *decisions* of the paranormals that matter the most, since they're the ones who change the world, for better or worse. This sort of series offers players chances to play characters whose actions really matter, who are at the heart of whatever is happening in the world. Since the future of the *Paragons* world isn't pre-determined, it is for you and your players to decide how things will play out. Can the characters avoid the pitfalls of absolute power and save the world from itself?

SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN

Most games are likely to fall between the two extremes given above, with a measure of combat action and cool powers balanced

"PARAGONS-LITE"

Some gaming groups may find the whole "power and consequences" theme of *Paragons* too heavy for their tastes. In this case the GM has to decide whether or not a *Paragons* series is really suited to the group's interests. If it is, the GM may simply wish to play down the human drama of the consequences of the paragons' actions and focus instead on the cool powers and tremendous battles.

This approach is perfectly appropriate, so long as everybody is having fun with it. Paragons can duel each other like characters in a giant video game, demolishing cities and the landscape in the process, without a second thought as to the property damage, loss of life, or other effects that their struggles cause. (In fact, this is one of the most frightening portrayals of paragons, in many ways!)

More importantly, the characters aren't penalized for acting this way. In a "Paragons-lite" series, resist the urge to tug at the players' heartstrings with the consequences of their characters' actions and focus things on the interactions of paranormals and their individual struggles. Make it more about the tremendous powers and super-battles, with the occasional power surge to spice things up, but don't try to make the players feel responsible for anything other than having a good time.

against roleplaying and decision-making. Exactly how much of each style to add to the mix depends on what's the most fun for the players. You might want to try experimenting with both to see which the players prefer, and vary the style a bit from time to time so things don't become too predictable.

Whatever style of play you choose, keep in mind that *Paragons* is all about your freedom to play the game any way you like. There's no "right" or "wrong" style of *Paragons* series so long as it's a game everyone enjoys.

WITH GREAT POWER...

Comes the likelihood the players will use it. Characters in *Paragons* have the ability to wreak havoc with the world. They can re-arrange the landscape, both literally and metaphorically (in terms of society and politics). Moreover, unlike some other RPGs, you're expected to let them do it, although there's nothing that says you have to make it easy. The characters also have tremendous potential to do good and change the world for the better, although they may find along the way that change doesn't always come easily, even for people with tremendous power.

IT'S THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT

And you should feel fine. One thing to keep in mind is *Paragons* is designed with the intention that not only can the player characters significantly change the world, they can also seriously mess up the world, or even destroy it, and odds are pretty good that they will, sooner or later. Even paranormals with the best of intentions have powers mere mortals were never meant to have, and their actions may have serious consequences. There's a decent chance a *Paragons* series is going to end when the paranormals have destroyed the world, or at least brought about the end of civilization as we know it.

This tends to go against a Gamemaster's instincts, which are to create long-term, stable settings. It can be difficult to see the world and the characters you've so lovingly crafted casually destroyed by the actions of the players, but that's exactly what *Paragons* encourages you to do. You and the players don't have to set out to destroy the world (although you can, if you want), but you don't have to shy away from it, either. After all, it's just a game, and it allows you the opportunity to really let loose without having to worry about things like the long-term viability of the setting or the characters.

The point of a *Paragons* series is to create an interesting and fun story rather than to perpetuate the series. You certainly can create a stable ongoing *Paragons* game if you wish, but consider the possibility of just letting the players loose and allowing the chips to fall where they may, depending on what they choose to do with their powers. A significant part of the fun of roleplaying games is you never know how the story is going to develop and unfold during the game. *Paragons* takes that idea and runs with it.

WE DON'T WANT TO STOP CRIME, WE JUST WANT TO FIGHT IT

One thing you may discover is your players—given tremendous power and the freedom to use it—actually don't quite know what to do with it. Traditional roleplaying games tend to provide "hooks" to one degree or another, leading players through adventures: parties of adventurers are hired, given clues, or assigned duties by an outside organization or a higher sense of purpose. While these hooks exist in *Paragons*, the power level of the characters makes them less beholden to anyone else in the world. Paragons have the power to do as they please, and some players may find that sudden freedom of choice paralyzing. When you can do *anything*, what do you do first?

In cases where the players are finding it difficult to choose a direction for their characters, you can help provide it. Paragons are important people, whether they want to be or not, and major events tend to occur around them. Even if the players are hesitant for their characters to take action, other characters in the setting won't be. Have someone approach the characters with an offer to work for them, or have a rival paragon decide to make a pre-emptive strike to ensure they don't mess with his plans. Mix the characters up in a government conspiracy to control paranormals. Once they're faced with a problem to solve, the players will likely take action and, once they've acted, their actions will create consequences, which you can spin out into new events and plotlines for the series, and you're off.

YOU SAY YOU WANT A REVOLUTION

On the other hand, it's also quite possible players given the tremendous power of paragons *will* want to use it, and will be quite unrestrained. Playing a paranormal can be a tremendous rush, just because they're capable of doing so much.

If you have players getting into using their characters' paranormal powers to do whatever they want, don't worry! That's pretty much exactly what they are supposed to be doing. They're offering you the opportunity to tell stories about what happens when people with tremendous power use it. There are just a few things you need to keep in mind as you guide your players through the series.

First and most important, make sure everyone is having fun. If the players are enjoying playing paranormals using their powers to the fullest, then great. If some players aren't having fun, however, try to find out why and address the problem. Perhaps some players are more interested in problem solving or roleplaying than knocking down mountains or changing the futures of nations. Try to incorporate elements into your stories catering to all the players' tastes and give them all something fun to do.

Next, try to manage conflict between the players. Some groups can play out rivalries or even conflicts between player characters and have a great time. Others just end up with hurt feelings and arguments between players over whose character should win. If it looks like your group is headed in that direction, you may want to give them something to focus on other than their own conflicts, such as a suitable paranormal enemy or a crisis to unite them. Then, whatever their differences, the characters have to rely upon each other to handle the problem, forcing them to work together.

Finally, you can use other paragons as foils for the characters. If a particular character has an agenda, create another paragon who opposes that agenda. This encourages the characters to work together to overcome obstacles and achieve their goals, where many other paranormals prefer to go it alone.

POWERS AND CONSEQUENCES

A major theme of *Paragons* is that actions have consequences, and the actions of powerful people have major consequences. Whereas characters in the comic books are often insulated from the consequences of their actions, paranormals are not. Paragons may be faced with life-or-death decisions and their actions can have tremendous repercussions. For some gaming groups this can create a rich and powerful story, but for others it may just be a bore. You should consider the type of *Paragons* game you want to run with this in mind.

In many respects, the *Paragons* setting is "rigged" against the players. Paragons are giants in a fragile human world. Even the most well-intentioned paranormal is capable of over-doing it and one mistake can have terrible consequences. Paragons really trying to make the world a better place should probably leave Earth and take as many other paragons with them as possible. Of course, even then, there may be consequences, such as when Earth is invaded and there are no paranormals around to protect it. Every decision a paragon makes has consequences.

The trick for you as the Gamemaster is to balance the good and bad consequences of the players' decisions. Don't deny them their successes and victories, but don't make it easy on them, either. The deck is stacked against them from the start, but should only make their achievements that much more precious. Give them a fair shot at achieving their goals, but threaten them along the way and make them work for it. Confront the characters with the outcomes of their actions, both good and bad.

PROBLEMS IN PLAY

Certain problems may arise during a *Paragons* series you as the Gamemaster need to address. Some of the common potential problems are discussed here.

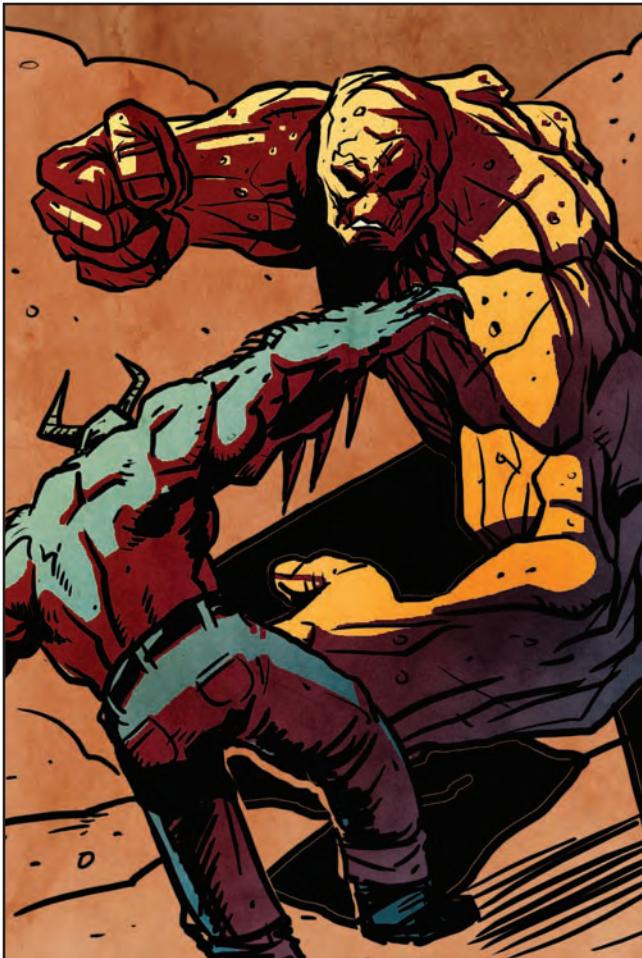
PLAYER CHARACTER CONFLICT

On occasion, characters come into conflict. This is more common in *Paragons* than in some other RPGs, since player characters have considerable power and aren't as reliant on group unity. Characters are also more likely to have their own agendas and goals, which may conflict. So it is possible two or more player characters might come into direct conflict during the game.

This is only a problem if such a conflict isn't enjoyable for the players or if the players' feelings are hurt because of an in-game conflict. Some players may be too competitive, making in-character conflicts unpleasant rather than interesting challenges for game play and character development. If this is the case, you should intervene to put a stop to the conflict. You can do this in one of two ways.

The first is to provide the characters with an in-game reason for cooperation, such as a common problem or adversary. If two paranormal characters are in conflict over a goal, throw an opponent at them whose goals conflict with both of theirs', and encourage them to unite against this new threat. You can also give the other characters reason to involve themselves, helping to unite the two sides.

The other solution is to discuss the problem with the players outside the game. Tell them it seems like the conflict between the characters is becoming problematic and ask them for ideas on how to resolve it so the series can move on. Generally good players are willing to cooperate for the overall good of the game.



THE ONLINE PARAGONS SERIES

One venue where separating the characters for long stretches of time works fairly well is online play, particular play-by-email (PBEM) or play-by-post (PBP) games. In the former the players exchange e-mail with the Gamemaster (and possibly each other), describing what their characters do while the GM replies with the outcome of their actions. Play-by-post games have players and the Gamemaster post actions and outcomes to an online message board. Such games are becoming more common on the Internet and are a relatively easy way of finding a game to join, even if there are no other players in your area.

Since the Gamemaster needs to deal with each player individually to some degree in an online game, and game play is slower than a live tabletop game, it's easier to handle characters who are off doing their own thing. Other players can even "lurk" and read what their fellow players are up to, just like someone reading a story, without being bored waiting for the other players to do something. Gamemasters may find online play well suited to the style of *Paragons*, although it tends to lack the immediacy of face-to-face games.

POLITICS AND RELIGION

Part of the fun of *Paragons* is getting directly involved in real-world conflicts and problems normally off-limits to more four-color superhero games, but this also carries some dangers.

After all, no one's likely to be offended when your heroes slay the evil sorcerer-king in your fantasy game. On the other hand, announcing that your paranormal just razed the Vatican or assassinated a world leader you dislike can ruffle feathers. The Gamemaster's portrayal of real-world political and religious figures also has the potential to offend if some players find it unfair, inappropriate, or unrealistic.

If everyone in your gaming group shares similar views, these are unlikely to be problems. If not, then everyone has a responsibility to ensure in-game actions don't spark real-life problems.

The best way to head off disputes is to talk things out before the start of play. Perhaps everyone can agree to leave in-game events in the game, and not get worked up over how real-world issues or people are handled. Or perhaps the players and Gamemaster need to work up a few ground rules, such as specific hot-button topics or people that simply won't be part of the series.

If a real-life political or religious dispute crops up unexpectedly in play, then it falls to the Gamemaster to keep things on an even keel. The players may be having a grand time arguing their respective cases, in which case the Gamemaster may simply wish to nudge the debate back into the game world instead of the real one. But if tempers are heating up and real-life passions are being inflamed, the Gamemaster needs to call a break to let things cool off.

Some mediation may be needed to resolve whatever in-game actions sparked the disagreement, too, though this calls for special care. Erasing one player's actions to appease another tends to just shift the resentment around. On the other hand, a player who feels his real-life views are being trampled and complaints ignored can be enormously destructive to the health of the game and the group.

Finally, the Gamemaster has a special responsibility to ensure that, in crafting the consequences to actions taken in the game, he does not try to punish actions with which he personally disagrees.

Consequences are crucial—they may be the only real check on paranormal behavior—but they must be fair and logical. Slapping player characters around for offending the Gamemaster's personal beliefs can end a game more quickly than just about anything.

SPLITTING THE GROUP

Since paranormal characters often have divergent goals and enough power to pursue them on their own, they have less reason to join together into a coherent group. That means the characters may go off in different directions in the series, either individually or in smaller groups, leaving you to juggle different plotlines at once while ensuring everyone gets equal play-time in the game. This can be a difficult challenge and can affect players' enjoyment of the game (to say nothing of your own).

If you are confident juggling multiple plotlines, feel free to do so. Try to shift between one group of players and another fairly often, so players are not left idly watching others play for long stretches of time. Also try and find commonalities between the player characters' stories, allowing for opportunities to get them back together as a group, even just occasionally.

If you find splitting the party is proving too much of a headache for you, or is making players bored or frustrated, then you need to try and create more group unity to keep the characters together. Once again, a common foe or problem is one approach. If the same enemy is after all the characters, they're more likely to band together (there's safety in numbers). Give the player characters a common allegiance or perhaps a shared base of operations, where they all live, work, or both. Provide them with an easy means of communication, such as compact commlinks or even a telepathic connection. The more opportunities the characters have to cross paths and communicate, the less likely they'll be to split up.

The need to pool adventure awards to bring about really big world changes via the paradigm shifts system also provides an incentive for players to have their paranormals work together, or at least for the paragon most interested in the change to try to recruit some help. (See **Paradigm Shifts** in this chapter for more information.)

DISPUTES WITH PLAYERS

In addition to conflicts between the players, there is the possibility of conflict between players and the Gamemaster. Players may dispute the GM's decisions on occasion, or feel the Gamemaster is being unfair toward them. This can lead to unhappy players who either don't contribute to the game, or deliberately try to sabotage it because they're not having a good time.

The best thing to do in the case of a dispute with a player is to listen to the player's concerns and do your best to accommodate them, but also be firm when it comes to your decisions and making sure the game is enjoyable for everyone. If you feel you can accommodate the player's wishes, by all means do so. On the other hand, if the player simply doesn't agree with your decision or wants an unfair advantage that may make the game less enjoyable for the other players, politely explain why you made your decision and remain firm about it.

In the case of a particularly disruptive or uncooperative player, you may have to ask the player to leave the game (either temporarily or permanently). This should be a last resort, however. Most disputes with players can be settled through compromise and understanding long before such punitive action is necessary.

UNCERTAIN SITUATIONS

Sometimes during a game you may find yourself uncertain about the “right” way to handle something. You may not be familiar with a particular rule or there may not be a precise rule for the situation at hand. Although the *Mutants & Masterminds* rulebook tries to cover all the bases, there are simply too many possibilities in the paranormal world to cover them all in detail. Sooner or later something will come up the rules don’t address.

When you encounter an uncertain situation, the best thing to do is make a note of it and handle it in as quick and simple a manner as you can. As a general rule of thumb, make use of the characters’ attribute modifier (ability scores, skill bonuses, and power ranks) and the general Difficulty Class numbers given in *M&M*. Choose an appropriate attribute and have the player make a roll against a Difficulty Class and resolve the situation based on the outcome of that roll. Common sense and a feel for what best suits the current story should prevail in these cases. If necessary, tell the players this is how you’re handling the situation for the moment and you’ll see about a more definitive rule later.

After the game, take the time to look through this book and the *M&M* rulebook for further information on the situation and give some thought about how you’d like to handle it in the future. You can find out what the proper rule is or, if necessary, come up with a house rule to cover that situation. Then the next time it—or something similar—comes up, you’ll be prepared.

PROVIDING CHALLENGES

When dealing with characters who can literally move mountains, it can be difficult for Gamemasters to provide sufficient challenges. This section offers some guidelines on giving the players and their characters appropriate challenges in a *Paragons* series.

POWER LEVEL BALANCE

Power level gives you a rough estimate you can use to balance challenges against the characters. A reasonably challenging task is something with a DC about 10 greater than the character’s maximum bonus for that power level, granting that character a 50% chance of success. A reasonably challenging opponent is one with a similar power level and bonuses within about 5 points of the character’s.

This is not an exact figure, but an estimate. A great deal depends on the exact powers and skills the characters possess. Defusing a bomb (DC 20) is incredibly easy for a character with a +20 Disable Device bonus, but virtually impossible for a character with no ranks in the skill. The same is true of characters in conflict. A paranormal opponent of the same power level as the characters may be a substantial challenge if his powers counter the characters’ advantages or give him a unique advantage (such as creating an area of darkness only he can see through or being able to turn incorporeal, if none of the characters have *Affects Incorporeal* attacks). Try and take these factors into account when coming up with challenges for the player characters.

AUTOMATIC SUCCESS AND FAILURE

The power level of some paranormals makes certain tasks ridiculously easy for them. If a paranormal is completely immune to conventional harm (short of a tac-nuke or its equivalent) and capable of smashing through a foot of solid steel with a single blow,

THE GAMEMASTER'S TOOLKIT

Being prepared can help a game to run smoothly and deal with many minor things that crop up. *Paragons* Gamemasters may wish to consider preparing a “toolkit” of the following things and have them on-hand during a game. These tools often help to solve problems before they occur.

CHARACTER QUICK REFERENCE SHEET

Have a sheet with the relevant statistics of the player characters in a short, easy-to-reference format, so you can see at a glance what a character’s Defense score or saving throws are, for example. Make sure your reference sheets match what the players’ characters have; you may want to have the players update the reference sheets for you so they reflect any changes they’ve made since the last time you played. You may also want to have a quick reference sheet for major non-player characters in the adventure.

LIST OF NAMES

Prepare a list of generic first and last names (male and female, from a number of different nationalities and ethnic backgrounds). When you need a name for an NPC on the spot during a game, pick one off your list and make a note of it. Instant character!

MAPS

You may find it useful to have some map references on-hand. A compact world atlas can be handy, along with some maps of generic locales the player characters might visit (offices, malls, city streets, etc.). Remember, many paranormals can quickly travel almost anywhere in the world. You never know when you might need to refer to a map of, say, Asia or Antarctica.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE SHEET

Prepare a “cheatsheet” listing the names of all the important characters in your game along with a brief (one sentence) description of each. This way if you forget a particular character’s name, you can look it up quickly without disrupting the flow of the game.

then a group of normal humans, no matter what they’re armed with, is simply no threat. There’s really no point in playing out the rounds of a combat between such a paranormal powerhouse and a collection of human opponents. It’s a foregone conclusion. Rather than spending time rolling dice and figuring out the results, just assume the paranormal wins, and move on with the game.

That’s not to say you should always gloss over an encounter between paranormals and normal humans. Sometimes it’s both interesting and gratifying to allow the players to enjoy having such godlike power at their command. You can emphasize what it’s like to be a paranormal by occasionally allowing the characters to wade through a group of normal human opponents, overcoming them at will, fully aware that nothing the normals can do will really stop them. This also serves to inspire the players with the kind of self-confidence paranormals should feel. When and if they run into humans that *do* pose a threat to them, they’ll be that much more surprised, since it will be such a contrast with the typical cakewalk human encounter.

Also, although they’re a match for any individual, or even a small group, some powerful paranormals will find a human military force a challenge. See the guidelines in the **Mass Combat** section (earlier in this chapter) for these kinds of encounters, keeping in mind they are *guidelines*, not detailed simulations of conflict between paranormals and military forces.



When dealing with tasks paranormal characters can do with ease, it's often best to not worry about having the players make die rolls that can slow down the game. Just as you wouldn't have the player of an ordinary human character roll to pick up a book or to swat a mosquito, you don't need to have a super-strong and nigh-invulnerable paranormal roll to pick up a dump-truck, resist small-arms fire, or punch out an ordinary human opponent.

ADVERSARIES AND FOILS

Paragons adversaries can have capabilities similar to those of the player characters, allowing them to challenge the PCs on equal terms. These paranormal adversaries may not have exactly the same powers as the player characters, but they should be equal overall.

Paranormal adversaries are not comic book supervillains, but characters with their own goals and motivations, which may simply conflict with those of the player characters. Few, if any, paranormals consider themselves "the bad guys." In fact, it's more likely adversaries see the player characters as in the wrong! Some paranormal enemies may be mentally unstable, but beware of over-using the "crazy paranormal of the week" as an ongoing challenge. Other paranormal enemies might be perfectly sane; they simply have goals different from those of the player characters.

Another type of adversary is the foil, a character who seeks to thwart one or more of the player characters in some way, and has the means of doing so. A foil may actually be considerably *less* powerful than the paranormal character, at least in terms of combat power. In fact, a foil may even be a normal person, but one with the ability to stymie or otherwise cause trouble for the characters. For example, a foil might be a particular government

bureaucrat, who works to entangle the characters in red tape, or a crusading journalist who wants to expose whatever secrets the paranormals may be keeping, citing the public's right to know (or just the fact it will sell).

In some respects, foils can be even more troublesome than paranormal adversaries, since characters may not be able to use their powers to make such problems go away. Even if they do, there are likely more foils where the first ones came from, and their foils may have friends, family, or allies who will take up their cause, even if the character does manage to get rid of them.

UNUSUAL CHALLENGES

Of course, not all the challenges facing paranormals come from humans or other paranormals. Some challenges come from the environment, society, or even from within the characters. Consider some of the following challenges for your *Paragons* series.

DISASTER

Paragons may be faced with terrible disasters, and their aftermaths, particularly once power surges become more common, triggering various disasters around the world. Paranormal powers may be all but useless against some disasters. While a weather controlling paranormal might be able to turn aside a hurricane or tornado, there's little other paranormals can do except evacuate the area and help fill sandbags or build barricades. The same is true for things like earthquakes, floods, and so forth. A natural (or paranormal-caused) disaster may prove a serious challenge, and dealing with the disaster has the potential of creating more power surges, setting off even worse disasters!

FIFTY PARAGONS ADVENTURE IDEAS

1. Someone (such as Panacea from **Chapter Five**) claims to have the power to "cure" paranormals of their "condition," turning them into ordinary, powerless human beings. Some paranormals want the cure, others want the "healer" out of business permanently, while some factions want to use this new power to eliminate or control their enemies.
2. A newly awakened paragon devastates the downtown core of a city with a massive explosion. There's plenty of rescue work to do, but the aftermath of the blast is even worse, as the public calls for authorities to "do something" about dangerous paranormals.
3. An angry cyberkinetic paragon has loosed a "daemon" on the Internet that hunts down and "flames" people who say things that anger or annoy him, killing them with a powerful electrical discharge. The paranormal might not even be aware that he's doing it.
4. It's *Prime Paragon!*, the new hit reality show where paranormals compete for the chance to join a corporate-sponsored team with their own name, logo, costume, and lavish headquarters! Who will be voted-off the show this week, and what if things happen to veer off the script?
5. A young Arab in the Middle East breaks-out with the power to teleport, creating a powerful explosion in his wake as he disappears (but not at his destination when he appears). Recruited by a terrorist cell, he has the potential to become the ultimate "suicide bomber," able to go anywhere and attack targets over and over.
6. A space-faring paragon returns to Earth from a trip out into deep space, but there's something not right. Did the paragon encounter something out there beyond the Solar System and, if so, what was its effect, or did something "hitch a ride" back?
7. There's concern when a paragon runs for high political office (president, prime minister, etc., of an entire nation). Is it "fair" to allow paranormals to compete as candidates or would it be unfairly limiting their rights not to? What about the rumors of mind-control or undue influence?
8. A secret program is recruiting and training paranormals for military and "black ops" missions, making paragons the "new A-bomb," particularly for nations lacking the resources to research weapons of mass destruction.
9. The scientific community is shocked by a paranormal able to scoop people from the past and bring them into the present before sending them back to the same moment they left, none the wiser. Are these real historical figures? Are there unforeseen dangers to the space-time continuum?
10. Parents are concerned about "Tomorrow's Children," a cult of young people organized around a popular paragon who claims to teach enlightenment. Is it a harmless fad or cover for something sinister?
11. A new designer drug called "paradise" is working its way through the scene like wildfire. Its source isn't a drug-lab, however, but a paranormal able to manufacture the drug biologically. What will the syndicate do to control its source and what are the unforeseen side effects?
12. "Origin raves" are becoming increasingly common as young people (and more than a few adults) try to deliberately provoke paranormal awakenings, usually with tragic results. Profiteers are encouraging the practice with phony "triggers," usually just common street drugs.
13. A non-human-looking being shows up at a world capitol (Washington D.C., the U.N. building in New York, etc.) claiming to be an alien ambassador. Is this First Contact or just a paranormal hoax? Do the aliens come in peace or is it prelude to an invasion?
14. The Rakshasa cult (see **Ravana** in **Chapter Five**), begins growing outside of central Asia, to the concern of authorities and paranormals everywhere.

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DISEASE

A particular type of disaster is a plague or other biological crisis, something most paranormals can't easily fight. Even if they are immune—and there's no guarantee of that—the paranormals may be able to do nothing except stay idly by as ordinary people are infected and die. Paragons willing to take draconian measures like sterilizing entire areas to keep a disease from spreading may be able to stem the tide of an epidemic, but at what cost? Disease as a challenge also extends to mortality in general. A paranormal may be capable of amazing things, but most of them are still mortal, and have ties to the mortal world. Paranormal power isn't necessarily immunity to the human condition, or to the loss of loved ones over time.

PUBLIC OPINION

Paragons have to wrestle with the issue of public opinion, and public perception of them and their actions. From the moment their existence is known, paranormals are under the watchful eyes of the entire world, which waits to see what they're going to do next, and either supports or condemns their actions.

Negative public opinion—or concern about it—may prove an effective means of controlling how the player characters act. Certainly, paranormals who disappoint their fans or don't live up to their

standards may suddenly find themselves without a fan-base and *persona non grata* with society at large. Public opinion is an effective way for the GM to communicate some of the consequences of the characters' actions in the game.

Paragons also have to contend with positive public opinion, which can be almost as much of a burden as negative public opinion. Indeed, most paranormals have to deal with both in equal measure: criticism from one segment of the public and complete adoration from another. Their worst challenge may not be the people out to make things difficult for them, but bitter ex-fans the paranormals inadvertently disappointed.

That's the drawback of even good public opinion: people may come to expect a great deal of paragons. When they don't get it, they're likely to be disappointed and upset. The higher paranormals climb in the esteem of the public, the further they have to fall if they should fail. Regaining public support and trust after such a failure may be one of the greatest challenges for a paranormal.

SELF-CONTROL

Paragons are, in many ways, their own worst enemies. All it takes is one moment of bad judgment, one slip of self-control, for disaster to occur. Like everything else about them, paranormal mistakes are

FIFTY PARAGONS ADVENTURE IDEAS (CONTINUED)

15. An organization called the Independent Paranormal Ethics Committee (IPEC) tries to encourage paragons to police themselves, and sets itself up as a moral authority to help deal with issues of paranormal power abuse, in an effort to stem public backlash and draconian legal measures. Are they legit or just a front?
16. A candidate for public office (mayor, senator, even president) is a secret paranormal able to exude a mind-affecting chemical from his skin. Every handshake in public gives him another vote, and he's shaken hands with more than a few famous paragons, too. Now a reporter who got too close to the truth has turned up dead and the only evidence has found its way into the characters' hands.
17. Victims of a mysterious serial killer are turning up. The twist? The police are concealing the fact that the victim's all have bite marks, their bodies drained of blood. What's worse, three days after the first killing, the victim's body disappeared from the morgue....
18. A foreign paragon decides to defect from her oppressive homeland and seek asylum. Unfortunately, her homeland isn't about to allow such a valuable asset to go without a fight and the host country wants to avoid an international incident.
19. A sudden upsurge in paranormals in the criminal underground is traced to a figure called "The Fix" who can supposedly grant people powers, but those powers are temporary, and highly addictive.
20. A state-run home for at-risk youth is haunted by an angry poltergeist. Is it a real ghost or is one of the kids (or one of the staff) a newly awakened paranormal?
21. People report "visitations" by a figure that sounds like an angel by all accounts: beautiful, winged, appearing in a halo of golden light. Is the "angel" a new paragon, a mass hallucination (perhaps caused by a paragon), or something else entirely?
22. A new paragon hits the world stage with a mass-media blitz: 'netcasts, video programs, souvenirs, toys, comics, and so forth. In addition to the potential income, the real motivation is that this paranormal draws power from belief and public adoration, much like Patriot (see **Chapter Five**). Just how powerful will he become, and what will he do with all that power?
23. Concerned parents want their teenaged child rescued from a paragon-worshipping cult. The only trouble is, the "cult" seems to have done the rebellious and wayward teen a world of good and emphasizes self-empowerment and determination, at least on the surface. Is it too good to be true?
24. A clairvoyant approaches the characters, telling them she's had a vision of the future in which they sacrifice their lives in order to save the world. Is it something that is going to happen or can it be averted? Even if it can, what happens if the characters don't meet their destiny on schedule?
25. A rogue paranormal or group (such as the Pantheon, see **Chapter Five**) overthrows the government of a small third-world nation, proclaiming the country the new "homeland" for paranormals. How do the international and paranormal communities react?
26. Authorities are investigating a serial killer who seems to have paranormal abilities and they begrudgingly call on some "outside experts" (the characters) to assist with the case.
27. One of the characters meets a version of him- or herself who claims to be from the future, and warns the paragon off some course of action before disappearing without a trace. Was it a real visitation and, if so, what does the warning mean?
28. The characters are the targets of a lawsuit and legal harassment. It could be over their previous actions, claims of negligence, a dispute over ownership of their trademark name(s) or likeness(es), or whatever else the GM cares to dream up.
29. One or more of the characters begins having apocalyptic visions of the future in dreams and, later, even while awake. What do they mean and are they real, a trick by some foe, or signs that the character's sanity is slipping?
30. A paranormal with performance-enhancing powers is "doping" athletes in exchange for big payments, undetectable by drug screenings, and perhaps even without the athletes' knowledge! It's a scam the paragon, organized sports, and the Syndicate will kill to keep secret.
31. The characters wake up one morning to find that the world is different, as if history has been changed in some way. Did a paragon really manage to alter history or is it just some kind of trick or illusion? If it's for real, how was it done and can the characters change things back?
32. One or more paranormals propose to the United Nations that paragons be granted "sovereign immunity," treated diplomatically like independent nations, given that many of them are at least as powerful as some small nations. The proposal provokes considerable debate and seems designed to create confrontation between normals and paranormals.

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greatly magnified in comparison to those of ordinary people. When a paranormal screws-up, bad things happen, often *very* bad things. So paranormals either struggle to keep from accidentally causing disaster, or they decide they don't really care any more, making them a menace to public safety (or they simply decide to go somewhere else, where their presence, or power surges, can't endanger anyone).

Not only do paranormals have to keep their powers under tight control, they're faced with the same temptations and opportunities as everyone else, with the difference being they can indulge

themselves far more easily. If a paranormal really decides to do something, who is going to stop her? In fact, paranormals often face the same challenges as any other person who suddenly gains great wealth and power, the challenge not to abuse those advantages. Those paranormals who don't gain great wealth or notoriety might wonder why they shouldn't use their powers to get them, or anything else they want. The choice of how to use their power may be the most important one the player characters make, and it can decide—or change—the entire course of the series.

FIFTY PARAGONS ADVENTURE IDEAS (CONTINUED)

33. A paragon or group (such as Zero Latitude, see **Chapter Four**) take it upon themselves to "terraform" a desolate area of the world, making it into a lush and vibrant ecosystem. Do they have the right to interfere in the "natural order" on this scale and what are the unforeseen complications of doing so?

34. Paranormal "bio-sculpting" powers grant a paranormal (such as Bodyshop in **Chapter Five**) a lucrative business reshaping the bodies of clients able to meet high prices. Now some suspect this paragon is also providing flawless disguises for criminals and terrorists, even creating doppelgangers to replace the wealthy and powerful, and want it stopped.

35. A nation, multi-national alliance, or even corporation uses the mass teleporting powers of a paranormal to reach the Moon or Mars and establish a permanent base there, without consulting the international community. There's outcry over the "interplanetary land grab," but what can be done about it? If the paranormal "bridge" between worlds disappears, what about the people now stranded millions of miles away from Earth?

36. Near-space observatories report a massive asteroid on a collision course with Earth. Par anomals and their powers may be the only hope of preventing an extinction-level event from wiping out all life as we know it.

37. To the world's astonishment, aliens invade the Earth! Perhaps the aliens first appear peaceful, but turn out to have sinister motives or an invasion force simply appears in orbit, with Earth's paragons the only force able to intercept and stop them before they bombard cities from space. Are the aliens really creatures from another world or some sort of paranormal hoax?

38. A pre-teen breaks out with paranormal powers exceeding all those previously seen. Unfortunately, absolute power quickly corrupts absolutely; how do the characters handle the threat of an apparently invincible kid turned almost inhumanly vicious and spoiled, with no real understanding of right and wrong?

39. A trial lawyer has a truly amazing record of getting clients declared innocent in the most difficult of circumstances. There's some speculation he's using paranormal powers to do so but, if he is, no one has been able to find any proof yet.

40. A disastrous paranormal breakout levels several city blocks in a massive, uncontrolled explosion, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of people. Now the authorities are holding the remorseful new paragon, as forces on both sides are gathering to call for his release or punishment and the public reacts to the new "paranormal threat."

41. A mysterious, anonymous blogger begins posting information about the player characters on the Internet, information that's both accurate and intimate. It could be Jacob Castle (see **Chapter Five**) but he operates pretty openly, so why the sudden secrecy? Is it to protect a source? Is the blog the work of the characters' enemies, and how are they getting their information?

42. A new paragon claims to be a time traveler from 25 years in the future, come back to the past to avert a terrible catastrophe that leads to the downfall of human civilization. Is he on the level or delusional? If his "mission" requires things like killing an otherwise innocent child, can the characters allow it?

43. A city or town disappears inside a space-time "fold" generated by an unwitting, perhaps newly awakened, paragon. In effect it becomes isolated from the rest of the world by a barrier only other paragons can pass through. What happens to the people inside? Will some par anomals (like the Pantheon) try to claim it for themselves? Will the "pocket" eventually "break off" from Earth's reality altogether and slip into some other universe?

44. The characters wake-up one morning to discover everyone in their home city (perhaps even their home *country*) has disappeared without a trace. What is the cause of this, can anything be done about it, and what will the paragons do in the meanwhile, especially when suspicion and blame begin to fall on them?

45. A paranormal with tremendous interstellar teleportation powers discovers a habitable planet orbiting a star hundreds of light-years from Earth. In cooperation with a wealthy and visionary patron, he offers to ferry interested colonists to "New Earth" to start an entirely new world. Even if the offer is for real, what potential dangers await would-be colonists on this new world? What if the paranormal's offer only extends to others of his kind, in an effort to create a "paragon home world" and remove par anomals from Earth?

46. A mind-controlling paragon is committing a series of murders using other people as puppets. Initially the police suspect a series of copycats, but evidence suggests otherwise (especially when new killers imitate aspects of the crimes not released to the public). Is there a way of tracking and stopping this killer?

47. The lone survivor of a terrorist attack is a paranormal with considerable power and an unquenchable thirst for revenge. Although his one-man "War on Terror" is enormously popular, it poses serious political problems and may lead to a catastrophic war if he isn't reined in. The conventional authorities don't have the means, and call on paranormal assistance to resolve the problem.

48. A paranormal (intentionally or otherwise) laces the drinking water of a major urban area with a hallucinogenic biochemical. Although public reaction is largely peaceful there are still numerous accidents and "bad trips" and the backlash is considerable.

49. Characters find themselves in a mental institution (the Rosemont Center, perhaps? See **Chapter Four**). They're told their whole experience of being "paragons" is merely a psychotic delusion. Are they really mentally ill or is someone trying to convince them they are? If so, who is doing it, and why?

50. Someone discovers a means to triggering a breakout, turning someone into a paranormal. There are only two catches: first, the process is unpredictable and there's no way to control what sort of powers the subject will acquire, or to what level. Second, and more important, the process requires the extraction of a large amount of neurochemicals from the brain of an active paranormal, a process that's fatal to the "donor."

SERIES WORKSHEET

Series Title:

Summary:

SERIES

Power Level:

Major Factions:

Minor Factions:

Non-existent Factions:

Major Characters:

Minor Characters:

Non-existent Characters:

PARANORMAL POWERS

Source(s) of Powers:

Are Paranormals Publicly Known? For How Long?

What happened during the Breakout?

PARADIGMS

Starting	Desired
----------	---------

Education

Ethics

Income

Safety

Services

Wealth

THE CHARACTERS

Starting Power Points

Normal:

Paranormal:

Additional Power Level Limits:

RULES OPTIONS

Option	Yes	No
Power Level Trade-Offs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Damage and Lethality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Default Damage Mode	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Alternate Mode at -4 penalty	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Alternate Mode as Alternate Power	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Power and Doubt	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Effect Countering	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Same origin (all powers counter others)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Same descriptor (some powers counter others)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Paranormal Awareness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Available as a Super-Senses effect	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Default capability of paranormals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Paranormal Taint	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Biological (mutation)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Moral (corruption)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Psychological (madness)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Paranormal Power Surges	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fortitude Surges	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Surge Point Penalty	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Surge Damage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Surge Taint	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Death Surges	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mass Combat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Paradigm Shifts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Paradigm Points	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Paradigm Point and Power Point trade-off	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Imageria	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enhanced Paranormal Powers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mental Grappling for Conflicts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

REFERENCES

Paragons draws on a rich history of stories about people with superhuman abilities dating all the way back to ancient myths and legends. A few sources were particularly inspirational in the creation of this book and should serve Gamemasters in the same way in the creation of individual *Paragons* games.

NON-FICTION

All the Myriad Ways, Larry Niven. A collection of Niven's essays, including several useful for *Paragons* Gamemasters, such as "The Theory and Practice of Teleportation," why time travel shouldn't work, and the classic "Man of Steel, Woman of Kleenex" which should be required reading for the realistic implications of some paranormals and their powers.

The Science of Superheroes and The Science of Supervillains, Lois H. Gresh and Robert Weinberg. What stuff in the comics is way out there and what is actually more plausible than you might think? Gresh and Weinberg take a look at most of the major comics characters through the lens of modern science and technology. Useful resources for paranormal "miracles" and such.

Suppressed Transmission and *Suppressed Transmission 2*, Kenneth Hite, Steve Jackson Games. These two compilations of Ken Hite's "Suppressed Transmission" column for the *Pyramid* website are difficult to categorize, being highly gameable ruminations on conspiracy and High Weirdness, but since they primarily connect the dots between real world sources in all sorts of interesting ways, let's call them "non-fiction." Both books are potential gold mines for *Paragons* games. Technically, you shouldn't even need to dig; you can just pan for the nuggets in the stream of Hite's consciousness. Pure gold.

FICTION

Gladiator, Phillip Wylie. Said to be one of the seminal works influencing Siegel and Schuster in the creation of Superman. The novel gives a look at the kind of alienation superhumans may experience due to their "superior" nature.

It's Superman! Tom De Haven. A modern re-interpretation of the early life of Superman in the 1930s, good at asking some of the tricky questions about the Man of Steel.

Superfolks, Robert Mayer. A ruthlessly tongue-in-cheek look at comic book foibles that made many comic book writers rethink the genre. Good inspiration for some of the more realistic views of *Paragons*.

Wild Cards, George R. R. Martin, editor. A long-running anthology series (along with some stand-alone novels) recently revived for a "next generation" of stories about a world where an alien retrovirus gives some people super-powers and turns others into mutant freaks. Excellent resource for *Paragons* in terms of power mechanics and inspiration for oddball characters.

COMIC BOOKS & GRAPHIC NOVELS

The Authority, Warren Ellis, Bryan Hitch, Paul Neary, et. al., Wildstorm. One of the definitive comic resources for a *Paragons* series, featuring a team of "world-class" supers who decide fight-

ing crime and protecting the *status quo* isn't enough and discover changing the world for the better isn't all that easy.

DP7, Mark Gruenwald, Marvel Comics. One of Gruenwald's lesser-known projects, featuring a group of seven "Displaced Paranormals" (the "DP7") dealing with the effects of their unusual talents on their lives and an apparent conspiracy to control them. Out of print, but well worth reading for almost any type of *Paragons* series.

Elementals, Bill Willingham, Comico. A comic series about people who become mystical paranormals by dying, including a number of mature themes like violence, death, sexuality, and faith. Good inspiration for a mystic-oriented *Paragons* series involving factions like the Pact and the Seven Thunders.

JLA: the Nail, Alan Davis, DC Comics. An *Elseworlds* title showing how quickly a comic book style world could go off-kilter if just one thing (in this case, the presence of Superman) was changed. Other *Elseworlds* titles take a similarly hard look at some of the assumptions of mainstream comics.

Miracleman, Alan Moore, et. al. Originally published as *Marvelman* in the UK, Moore's series is one of the first comics to look at superheroes and their powers in a realistic light.

Newuniversal, Warren Ellis, Marvel Comics. An update of Marvel's "New Universe" setting (which included *DP7*) with a more modern, science-fiction style. An interesting unfolding look at an event like the Breakout and a world's reaction to the sudden appearance of paranormals.

Planetary, Warren Ellis. The quintessential "reality archeology" comic, featuring characters digging around in a secret past filled with all manner of pop culture artifacts from comics, television, and film, with an over-arching conspiracy trying to keep the truth from the rest of the world. Required reading for the *Echoes of the Past* series framework.

Rising Stars, J. Michael Straczynski, et. al., Wildstorm. The creator of *Babylon 5* tells the stories of "Specials" empowered *in utero* by a meteor strike. The series is a good model for a paranormal breakout, with an interesting twist about the nature of paranormal powers.

Squadron Supreme, Mark Gruenwald, Marvel Comics. A superhero team is faced with a world in ruins and the question "why not rebuild things better than they were before?" The answer, and the process of getting there, makes for some thought-provoking reading. J. Michael Straczynski's later take on Gruenwald's characters in *Supreme Power* and *Squadron Supreme* is also worth checking out; much slower paced and darker but potential inspiration for a *Paragons* breakout.

Stormwatch, Warren Ellis, et. al., Wildstorm. The end of this Wildstorm comics series sets up all the tropes Ellis later explores in *The Authority*. It's well worth reading for looks at superhumans as international "super-powers" as well as their potential to change the world, and the reactions of those who don't want it to change.

Ultimates, Mark Millar, Bryan Hitch, et. al., Marvel Comics. Marvel's take on the idea kicked off in *The Authority* with re-imagined ver-

sions of the Avengers and other Marvel Universe characters kicking butt and taking names.

Watchmen, Alan Moore, Dave Gibbons, DC Comics. A seminal comic book series about superheroes and what their real roles and impact might be in the world.

X-Men, Marvel Comics. No other long-running comic series captures as many of the themes in *Paragons*, or has captured as many readers with thought-provoking questions about the nature of humanity, power, and responsibility. Substitute "paranormal" for "mutant" and you can use a great deal of *X-Men* material as inspiration for a *Paragons* series. Marvel's *Ultimate X-Men* series is also good for ideas for more post-modern style series.

FILMS

The Matrix. This film is the go-to source for any *Paragons* series using the "virtuality" options discussed in **Chapter Six**. Paranormals could all be "reality hackers" like Neo and his friends.

Spider-Man. "With great power comes great responsibility," as the saying goes. This film and its two sequels are object lessons in the responsible use of power as well as ripping good comic book stories.

Unbreakable. Comic books as universal archetypes playing out in a world much like our own. Mr. Glass, in particular, could easily be a *Paragons* character working behind the scenes.

X-Men and *X2*. Like the *X-Men* comics, just change "mutant" to "paranormal" and you've got a good model for a *Paragons* series, particularly one featuring opposing views on the relations between paragons and normal humans. The less said about the third film, the better.

TELEVISION

Buffy the Vampire Slayer, FOX Television. Buffy and some of the other characters on this show could be paranormals, particularly in a series with a magical focus. The spin-off show *Angel* has even more examples of potential paranormal characters. Both are also good examples of normals and low-powered paranormals working together.

The 4400, USA Network. Various people who have mysteriously vanished all reappear together one night, gifted with unexplained powers. Not a bad potential kick-off to a *Paragons* series, either.

Heroes, NBC. This popular show on NBC (still in its first season as of the writing of this book) could easily be the basis for a "Secret Breakout" *Paragons* series where paranormals and their powers are initially unknown to the world at large (but known to a select few who seek to control or exploit them).

Misfits of Science, NBC. Played mostly for laughs, this shortlived show about a group of low-powered paranormals could still serve as inspiration for *Paragons* characters and games, particularly ones focused on humor.

Smallville, The CW Network. A retelling of Superman's boyhood in small-town Kansas that takes the classic story in some interesting new directions. Good ideas for a *Paragons* series involving aliens or otherworldly characters of one kind or another.

Torchwood, BBC. A secret organization "beyond the police," deals with the paranormal. A good model for an Initiative or PRA series featuring (largely) normal characters.

ROLEPLAYING GAMES

A number of RPGs have addressed the idea of modern-day people with superhuman powers and may be useful source material for a *Paragons* game, including:

Aberrant, White Wolf Games, 1999. Perhaps the definitive "supers meet the real world" RPG, *Aberrant* suffered a bit of "middle child syndrome" (being the second in a trilogy of games that began with the sci-fi game *Trinity* and ended with the pulp RPG *Adventure!*) However, it still managed to provide plenty of thought-provoking material on what might happen if some people gained superpowers and how the world might treat them.

The Authority, Guardians of Order, 2004. Licensed superhero RPG based on the Wildstorm comic series. Out of print, but worthwhile for its Gamemastering and series advice as well as its gorgeous visual presentation.

Brave New World, Matt Forbeck, Pinnacle Entertainment. Paranormal "deltas" struggle against a totalitarian American regime established by a superhuman John F. Kennedy. Out of print, but good source material for *Paragons* games making use of the Paranormal Regulatory Agency and the Paranormal Registration Act.

GURPS International Super Teams, Robert Schroeck, Steve Jackson Games, 1991. Out of print, but available in electronic format, this setting focuses on metahumans created by alien intervention emerging in the late 1930s (just like comic book superheroes) and their effect on the world around them. Plenty of interesting ideas for a more realistic treatment of paranormals and their abilities.

Mage: the Awakening, White Wolf Games, 2005. One of the *World of Darkness* series of games, focusing on mages secretly living amongst ordinary mortals. Good inspiration for a secret paranormal *Paragons* game, particularly one with the mystical bent, *Mage* really comes into its own as inspiration for the Imageria and its countless realms (and inhabitants).

Scion: Hero, White Wolf Games, 2007. The first in the *Scion* trilogy of games, which revolves around the children of gods as they play their role in a secret war. Provides good source material for a series in which paragons are the result of interference from gods or other supernatural beings. It may also prove useful to provide motivations for paragons who model themselves after gods, like members of the Pantheon.

Underground, Ray Winniger, Mayfair Games, 1993. Although out of print, this game of super-powered genetically-engineered vets of foreign wars in a dystopic near-future is well worthy of mention for both its social commentary on the abuses of power and its groundbreaking social parameter mechanics that inspired the paradigm shift rules in this book.

Wild Cards, John Jos. Miller and Steve Kenson, Green Ronin Publishing, coming in 2008. The forthcoming *Wild Cards* sourcebook for *Mutants & Masterminds* can provide useful ideas, characters, and game system options for a *Paragons* series (and vice versa), given that it also has a singular source for powers and some fairly unusual characters.

Wild Talents, Dennis Detwiller, Greg Stolze, and Shane Ivey, ArcDream Publishing, 2006. An expansion of the One Roll Engine (ORE) system first presented in *Godlike*, along with a continuation of that setting's history and a fun essay by Kenneth Hite on creating super-worlds (particularly mucking around with history in the process). Its predecessor *Godlike* is also well worth checking out, and packed with flavorful details (albeit focused on World War II).

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Steve came up for the original concept for *Paragons* when proposing the second edition of *Mutants & Masterminds*, and the concept for *A More Perfect Union* while working with Patrick Sweeney of Firefly Games on a related superhumans RPG that never materialized. Never one to waste a perfectly good idea, Steve brought it over to *M&M* and this adventure came into being.

Steve has worked as an RPG writer and designer since 1995, authoring books for games like *Shadowrun*, *Earthdawn*, *Changeling*, and *Aberrant*, among others. He became *Mutants & Masterminds* line developer in early 2005 and began working on the second edition of the game almost immediately. Steve lives in New Hampshire with his partner, Christopher Penczak, and maintains a website at www.stevekenson.com. His possession of paranormal powers remains debatable.

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Man-A-Kin, Ugly Jake

If someone had told DT Butchino that he'd be in this book a year ago, he'd probably have called them a damn liar. In fact, he's still trying to figure out just how he managed to get in here... and also where the bathroom is.

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Epicurius, Imposter, Network, Foregone Conclusions

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Chud, the Ghost, XTREME!

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Logar, 17, The Paramount Club, The Paranormal Professional Society, Zero Latitude

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STEPHEN SCHOLZ (DESIGN)*Burning Man, Lullaby and Crybaby, The Tribe*

"If he spent half as much time on his school work (job hunts, grad-school, publishing papers) as he does on his games, he could really go far." He's been hearing that for 25 years. Instead he teaches college philosophy in North Carolina, raises two kids with his wonderful wife, and still makes time for gaming.

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Once upon a time in a city in Kentucky... huh, what? Yes, there are cities in Kentucky. No, really. Honest. Anyway, Aaron Sullivan is a writer and general all-around gamer geek and comic book junkie living in Louisville with his incredibly understanding and long suffering wife, as well as way too many cats. He's one of the Blackwyrm Games crew and is responsible for writing *The Algernon Files* M&M Superlink stuff (so don't blame the others if you didn't like it) as well as some other sundry M&M and *True20* madness. Yes, he is every bit as evil and demented as his work may make you think he is. What? Yes, I was serious about the cities. Get over it, okay? Sheesh.

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Jon Leitheusser works as a freelance game designer, writer, and editor. He's had the pleasure of editing a number of *Mutants & Masterminds* books (including the rulebook and *Ultimate Power*) and is looking forward to the release of the *Iron Age* sourcebook, which he co-wrote with his good friend Seth Johnson. Jon originally hails from Burlington, Wisconsin, but now calls West Seattle his home.

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