GEORGE R.R. MARTIN'S

# WILD CARDS

A CAMPAIGN SETTING FOR MUTANTS & MASTERMINDS BY JOHN JOS. MILLER

MUTANTS & MASTERMINDS

# WILD CARDS

## A CAMPAIGN SETTING FOR MUTANTS & MASTERMINDS


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**John Jos. Miller's Dedication** To an absent friend: There will always be a table reserved at Aces High for Roger, Croyd, Corwin, Conrad, Sam, and rest of the crew.

**Steve Kenson's Dedication** To the Wild Card Consortium, for creating such a world and inviting us all to come play in it.



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**Printed in Canada**

**Green Ronin Publishing**

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# INTRODUCTION: HOW IT ALL CAME TO BE

Last time around I blamed Vic Milán. That worked pretty well, so I guess I'll do it again.

Back in the early 1980s I was part of a gaming group in Albuquerque, New Mexico, that included a number of writers, their spouses, girlfriends, and several other somewhat more normal people. I was the newest writer of the bunch, if by "new" you mean "trying to make a living at this business." I had sold a handful of stories over previous years, dating way back to 1970 when I was still a lad in high school, but I had initially decided to do something more practical with my life and become an archeologist. Really.

I had made what was probably the pivotal decision of my life a couple of years previously and decided to attend graduate school at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. My other possibility was the University of Chicago, where I would have specialized in Egyptology. The University of New Mexico at the time had one of the finest anthropology departments in America, including a professor whose contributions were revolutionizing the field of archeology. I thought it would be cool to study under him. On the other hand, I also liked mummies and pyramids. I thought about it for a while, and then decided the winter weather in Albuquerque would probably be more congenial. On this basis was my life-changing decision made.

The first year of graduate school was all right. I went back to New York to work for SUNY Binghamton for the summer on an archeological highway clearance project, met the lovely Gail Gerstner in a cornfield somewhere outside of Oneonta, and we were married the next summer. We came back to New Mexico, where I resumed my academic career and Gail (who has a Master's degree in library science) got a job working at the Walden's in the local mall. (Actually, Albuquerque had *two* malls back then.) Within a couple of months she was the manager, and we started to meet all these writer people.

I've got say it was a great experience for me. Meeting Roger Zelazny was like meeting someone who'd just come down from Olympus. George R.R. Martin wasn't small potatoes, either. I can't remember exactly who it was who invited us to our first role-playing game, something neither Gail or I had ever done before, but if I had to bet I'd say it was either Vic Milán or Walter Jon Williams. I do remember meeting Melinda Snodgrass at Walter's apartment.

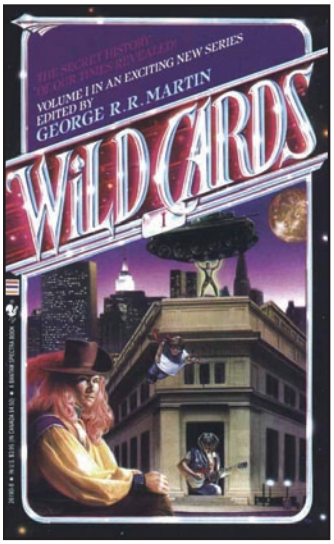
We gamed a lot in those days. We played a lot of different games: *Morrow Project*, *Bushido*, *Call of Cthulhu*, which was perhaps my personal favorite. I'd loved H.P. Lovecraft since getting the bejeezus scared out of me by "Rats in the Walls," and the idea of playing a game where you (or at least your character) may be driven insane was quite appealing. I'll never forget the game Walter was running where James Moore (a grad school buddy of mine) and I played brothers, who had the same mother but different fathers, whose main ambition in life was to open their own French restaurant. We had no abilities relevant to fighting Cthuloid monsters but we had hellacious saucier and pastry skills. While out on a mission we'd always nick things (silverware, cooking utensils, *etc.*) we felt might be useful when we finally opened our restaurant.

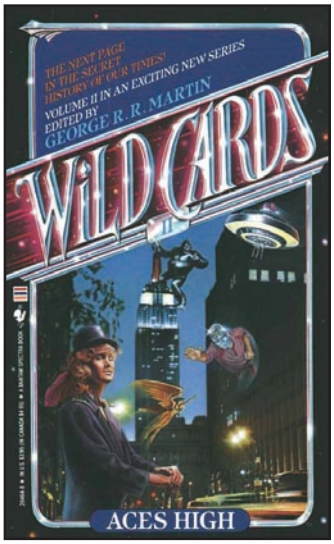
Around about that time I was also getting burned out on academia and, let's face it, all those writers corrupted me. The siren call of fame and fortune lured me into their world and I took a leave of absence from the university and have never looked back. Of course, I was also getting tired of tiny little pieces of broken pottery. If I would have gone off to Chicago instead, well, who knows. I might very well still be polishing potsherds in Egypt. But one thing is sure: The world of *Wild Cards* would be vastly different, if it ever came into existence at all.

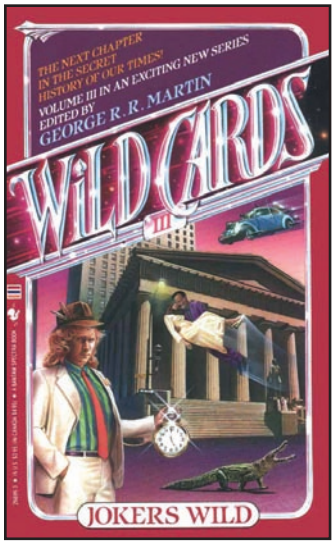
To come back to my initial statement, it's all Vic's fault. He's the one who got George *Superworld* for his birthday one year, and the game immediately began to consume our lives. George ran the games, we played them. Some other people ran *Su- perworld* games, myself included, but George's was always referred to as "the game."

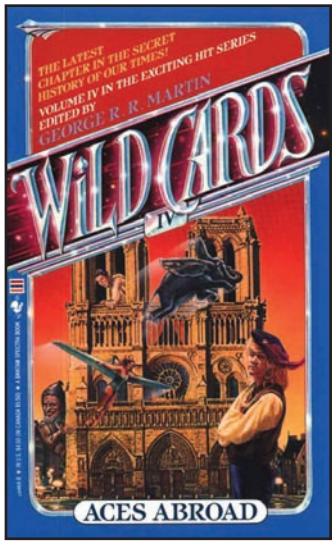
We played a couple of times a week at least, usually once in Albuquerque and once in Santa Fe, where George lived. We rolled countless dice countless numbers of times to create endless numbers of characters. Then, of course, we had to design uniforms for them and color them in on that little box in the top corner of the character sheet. (Some of us were better at that than others. I must confess that my fashion sense has never been very good, so that's why a lot of my characters wore black. Or jeans and a T-shirt. Or, in the case of Wraith, who was very different in the game than she is in the books, not much of anything at all.)

Not only would we spend hours playing the game, we'd spend hours sitting around and talking about playing the game, rehashing the strate-




gies of the previous session, making plans for the next session. Frankly, as George pointed out, this was really cutting into our working time. We needed to make money from this. Or get real jobs.

That wasn't an attractive possibility, so George shared his idea with Melinda and they sat around one day hammering out a framework as to how this game could be turned into a feasible literary project.

Although they are not as prevalent in the marketplace today, this was the time of the shared-world universes, projects where a number of writers would get together and create stories set in the same milieu, and to one extent or another share the other writers' characters in these stories. The grand-daddy of the shared world genre was *Thieves World*, a project that lasted for many volumes and involved a number of very fine writers (and also available as a game setting from Green Ronin Publishing). We have been fortunate to have their example to guide us.

*Thieves World* is an explicit fantasy setting while *Wild Cards* took an explicitly science fictional approach. George and Melinda started with a basic notion of a world where paranormal (or, if you will, super) powers existed. The question then became, how do we get to that world from ours? A plethora of origins, a separate one for each and every hero and villain, would quickly strain the readers' credulity. There can be only so many radioactive spiders, lightning strikes, blown up alien worlds, old Norse gods, old Greek gods, cosmic ray incidents, chemical accidents, ancient Atlanteans, and inexplicable super-geniuses in existence, and even all of these possibilities couldn't account for all the characters we'd need to populate our world. We needed a one-time event to bring the *possibility* of paranormal powers into the world, but not to make them so common that they become ordinary.

In keeping with the explicitly science-fictional approach, they came up with the idea of a virus that rewrites an individual's DNA in a manner specific to that individual, thus allowing innumerable powers to spring from a single source. They also wanted to avoid comic book terminology like superhero, and to stamp this project with its own specific jargon. Since the virus as envisioned was something of a crapshoot that would bring harm and even outright death to its victims as well as paranormal abilities, they decided on gambling, specifically card-playing terminology. Someone who gets a superpower is an "ace." Someone who is deformed by the virus is a "joker." A trivial power is a "deuce." Someone killed by the virus, usually in horrifically imaginative ways, draws the "Black Queen." And the virus itself would be known colloquially as the "wild card" virus. It all works beautifully.

George sent out a call for character proposals. Naturally, the New Mexico group had something of an advantage over other writers, because we were right here and in many cases were privy to some of the initial discussion. Besides me, Walter Jon Williams, Vic Milán, and Melinda Snodgrass were the young writers in our initial gaming group. George was there, too, of course, though not right at the beginning. Roger Zelazny didn't game until much later. Other gamers, including my wife, Gail, (who would soon leave the world of retail behind to help make the world safe for nuclear waste at Sandia National Laboratory), Parris (then and now George's significant other), and Royce Wideman, a non-writer friends of ours, all went on to contribute characters to the series. Gail also wrote a story for volume four of the series and learned that dealing with nuclear waste was easier than dealing with editors.

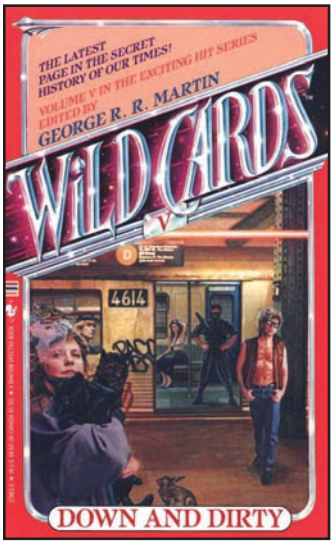
But characters came first, many of them out of the actual game, though in many cases the characters as written became very different than the characters as played. I mentioned my character Wraith earlier. In the game, she was an alien xeneologist who came to the Earth to study our society. She was intangible in her natural state. When she became tangible, she'd freak out whenever she was touched by anyone. (It helped in the game system we were using to have common phobias. You'd get more disadvantage points to build a studlier character. We had some really disadvantaged characters. I loaded one of mine—whom I called Pariah—with just about every disadvantage you could think of, including stuttering.)

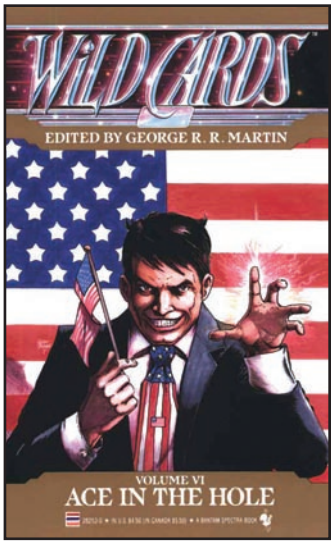
Other characters that made the transition to the written word include George's Great and Powerful Turtle, Gail's Peregrine (although as originally conceived she didn't have wings, until Vic drew a picture of a naked Peregrine with wings and suddenly it seemed like a good idea), Walter's Modular Man, Vic's Cap'n Trips, and my Yeoman.

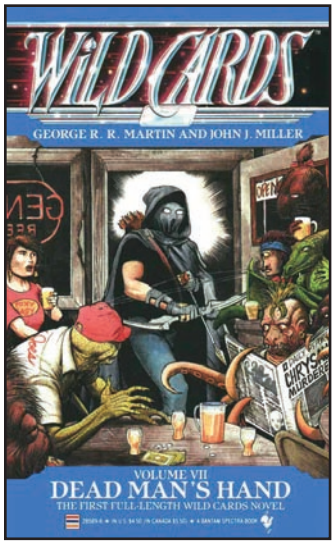
In the previous incarnation of *Wild Cards* as a roleplaying game, I mentioned a few characters who didn't make it into the books, among them Atomic Samurai, Cycle Slut, Rat Man, Professor Psycho, and Holy Roller, the globular evangelist who literally rolls over his foes, squashing them. I told the readers not to hold their breaths waiting for these characters to show up in the books, and though it's probably a good thing they took my advice, everyone can breathe easier now, as one of the above has indeed been introduced in the new series of *Wild Cards* books. I'll let you guess which one.

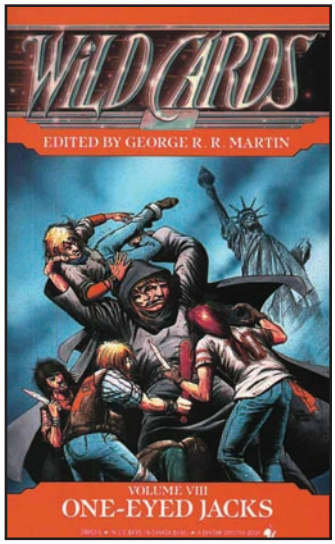
Obviously, though, as creative and talented as all us gamers were, we couldn't carry the ball all by ourselves. George invited others in who had interest in or knowledge of comics. There was Roger Zelazny, of course, Ed Bryant, Lew Shiner, Pat Cadigan, Arthur Byron Cover, Steve Perrin. Ed brought in his friend Leanne C. Harper, and Lew recruited fellow Austinite Walton "Bud" Simons. That was the original group, save one.

Which brings us to Howard Waldrop.




Howard and George go back a long way. In fact, they first met through the pages of comic book fanzines, back, oh, a number of years ago. Howard, another off-again, on-again Austinite and one of the finest short story writers the field has going for it, was enthused about the project, but Howard, being Howard, wanted to write a story about a kid with his own jet plane, and he wanted the story to climax on his birthday, September 15, 1946.

So, he did.

Such are the vagaries that can shape an entire literary universe.

# SEVENTEEN VOLUMES OF WILD CARDS

Another vagary occurred when Bantam Books signed George and the Wild Card Consortium to a three-book deal. That's how the whole triad thing came about. Fortunately, it proved to be a pretty good way of structuring a story, though a couple of times the structure got a little bent because when given the choice we toyed with the framework and not the story itself.

The first book, *Wild Cards* (January 1987), has the least constrained structure of any *Wild Cards* volume but one, which I'll discuss later. This looseness relates directly to the historical nature of the volume as it covers roughly 40 years, from just before Dr. Tachyon's arrival on Earth to summer 1985, which was then the present as we wrote the volume.

To help tie together the various stories, George wrote the interstitial material which is specifically designed to help bring together the different parts of the book into a cohesive whole. In later books the interstitial matter became a story in its own right. This time around, it's specific snapshots of specific times, often couched in excellent literary pastiche. This was perhaps one of our best critically received volumes, and Walter Jon Williams was rightly rewarded with a Nebula nomination for his story, "Witness." This book set the parameters for the *Wild Cards* universe, a basically realistic approach mixed with socially and politically charged story lines, all tied up with a ribbon of high adventure.

Volume II, *Aces High* (April 1987), takes up the threads of the story of Lew Shiner's volume I narrative, "The Long, Dark Night of Fortunato," to provide the framework for the next two books: the Fortunato-Astronomer confrontation mixed in with a worrisome alien invasion. This didn't mean there couldn't be digressions in most of the stories, a trend that continued in almost all the successive books. For example, my own "Half Past Dead" advanced my personal plot line of the Yeoman-Kien confrontation, but it served the book's overarching plot as well. George again provided the interstitial material, this time in the form of an actual narrative that helped bring together all the stories.

Now we come to book III, *Jokers Wild* (November 1987), the first of the actual mosaic novels. I don't know if today's readers can fully appreciate the magnitude of the job putting together this Frankenstein monster of a book entailed. The book's narrative consists of seven story lines by seven writers which all take place over a 24-hour period in New York City on September 15, 1986. No side trips to Takis. No flashbacks to the 1940s. No flashforwards to the next millennium. While most of the writers had computers by now (maybe everyone but Howard, who *still* doesn't have one), this was before the time of e-mail and file sharing. Cut and paste meant cutting up sheets of paper and pasting them together in a different order. Our long-distance phone bills were astronomical. That it all worked out in the end was due to a wonderful editorial job by George, and the willingness on the parts of all the authors to write, rewrite, and rewrite yet again until it was right.

The next year at the New Orleans World Science Fiction Convention, *Wild Cards* was nominated for a Hugo for "Best Other Forms," a catch-all (and, I believe, one time only) category put in place for non-traditional and quite award-worthy candidates like Alan Moore's *Watchmen*. Well, Moore beat us out, but I saw the final vote tallies, and it was close.

# THE PUPPETMAN TRILOGY

Bantam awarded us another three-book contract. The next volume, the first of the second triad, *Aces Abroad* (June 1988), is, once again, the loosest book in the trilogy. There were a couple of reasons for that, some structural, some story-dictated. We wanted to get out of New York for awhile and visit the rest of the world to see the effect the wild card virus had had on it, to open our horizons and showcase some non-American characters. But also we wanted to advance the story line whose origins harkened way back to the first volume and Steve Leigh's "Strings."

The second triad is Puppetman's story as well as the world's. We examined the touch of the wild card virus on the Near East, India, Europe, and

diverse other regions of the globe, but, slowly and surely, we also brought Hartmann into the limelight.

Volume V, *Down and Dirty* (December 1988), puts the focus back on New York City. Originally it was to be structured entirely around the gang warfare between the Mafia and the Shadow Fists, but Bantam editorial felt that was a touch too mundane, so the Typhoid Croyd plot line was laid in. This led into volume VI, *Ace in the Hole* (February 1990), and the first major problem we had with the series.

*Ace* was designed as the second mosaic and the culmination of the Puppetman story line as Gregg Hartmann seeks the Democratic nomination for president in Atlanta in the summer of 1988 (as you can see, already we were having difficulty in keeping up with the actual passage of time). There were eight plot lines written by seven authors (Vic got to double up with two point-of-view characters) and when we handed it in the manuscript was admittedly a monster. Today, in this day and age of Big Fat Fantasy Novels, I don't think the publisher would blink twice. 1989, however, is not today. Bantam did more than blink. They balked. Fortunately, we were offered an alternative to cutting every third word. We pulled out George's and my threads, which concentrated on the investigation of Chrysalis's murder, bulked them up a little, and published them as volume VII in the series, *Dead Man's Hand* (August 1990).

I think that largely this compromise solution worked, and individually *Ace in the Hole* and *Dead Man's Hand* make for fine reads. Read interwoven together they make one great epic tale. It's still the best way to read the books, if you have both volumes and figure out where and when to switch off between them, though I wouldn't actually recommend it as a first-time way to read the books. Maybe someday the story will appear as originally intended. Encouraging letters to your favorite small press might help.

# THE JUMPER TRILOGY

The third triad is the Jumper trilogy (or, as the writers and editor called it, the damned Jumpers trilogy). Volume VIII, *One-Eyed Jacks* (February 1991), tees it up, Volume IX, *Jokertown Shuffle* (September 1991), gets it going, and volume XI, *Dealer's Choice* (November 1992), knocks it out of the park. Yes, volume *eleven*. Volume X was the solo novel *Double Solitaire* (April 1992) by Melinda Snodgrass, more on which later.

The jumpers turned out to be one of those concepts that sounds great on paper but proves difficult to handle fictionally. On one hand, the jumpers were just too powerful; on the other, they were just thugs. They needed an interweaving storyline, which was provided by Steven Leigh's Bloat saga. The structure of the interweaving stories got a little complicated, especially in volume nine, which had a number of interlocking stories in a semi-mosaic format. By the time we got to volume XI, we'd returned to the traditional mosaic, and it did a fine job of drawing the story of the jumpers to a conclusion (almost). Some dangling threads were resolved in later books and some still remain to this day. I'll leave it up to you readers to track these threads down for yourselves.

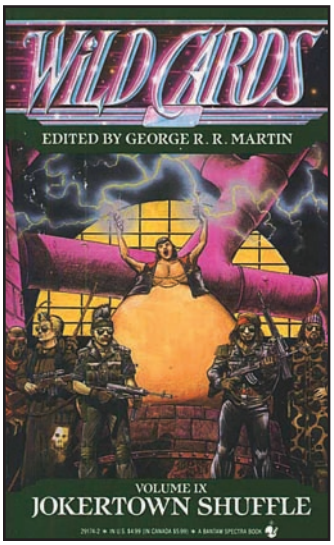
XI was published over a year after volume IX hit the stands, which is an unfortunate chronological gap that would be difficult to close any way you approached it. Even though the events of *Double Solitaire* take place right after the events chronicled in book IX end, *Dealer's Choice* really depends more upon those same events than *Double Solitaire* does. Perhaps it would have been better to have published *Choice* after *Shuffle,* and then the two solo novels back to back, since the events depicted in *Turn of the Cards* occur directly after those in *Solitaire* and have minimal relation to those in *Dealer's Choice.*

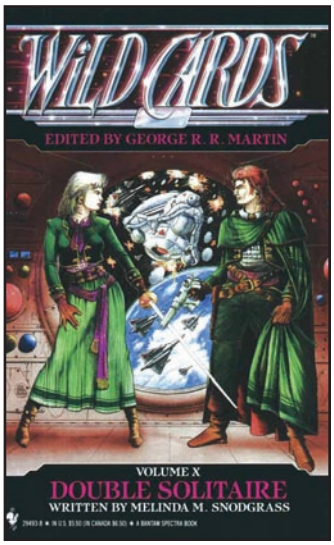
In any case, that's all just speculation on my part. Melinda's solo novel *Double Solitaire* takes us off the Earth for the first significant time in the series as Tachyon returns to Takis. Vic's volume XII, *Turn of the Cards* (February 1993), chronicles the adventures of Mark Meadows after his return from Takis. It was the last Bantam volume.

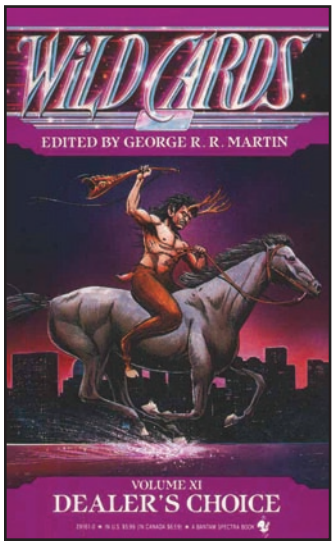
# THE CARD SHARKS TRILOGY

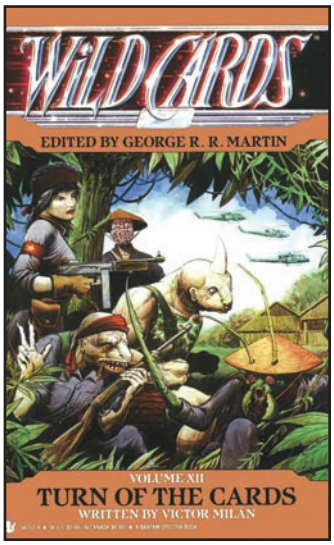
We moved over to Baen Books for the next triad, the Card Sharks trilogy, which in a lot of ways might be the best three-book arc in the entire series. It's too bad these books are among the scarcest *Wild Cards* books. All you used book collectors take note. They are, as of this writing, moderately difficult to find, especially the last in the series, which commands a significant price on the used book market.

Volume XIII, *Card Sharks* (March 1993), was published right on the heels of book XII. It's another historical volume, wherein arson investigator Hannah Davis probes for the cause of the fire that destroyed the Our Lady of Perpetual Misery church in Jokertown, and comes across a nearly 50-year-old conspiracy devoted to the destruction of all wild carders. *Marked Cards* (March 1994), volume XIV, picks up right where the previous volume left off and chronicles the Card Sharks schemes in the then present day, including the creation of a Black Trump, a version of the



wild card virus designed to kill all wild carders. *The Black Trump* (August 1995), volume XV, carries this story to its exciting conclusion with yet another mosaic novel, this one set largely outside the United States.

# THE DARK YEARS

Then came what we like to call the dark ages of *Wild Cards*. No new volumes appeared until July 2002 when the 16th book in the series, *Deuces Down,* was published by iBooks. The iBooks contract called for the reprinting the first eight volumes of the original series and two new volumes. Clearly, there could be no triad. For years probably the most popular request we'd fielded from fans was to publish a book of "just stories," so we thought the iBooks debut volume would be the perfect time to produce such a book. It was organized around the theme of deuces, wild carders with just a small, almost trivial power.

Volume XVII, my novel, *Death Draws Five* didn't appear until January 2006. There were several reasons for the delay. First, the computer files containing my novel were almost completely destroyed by a computer virus or worm when I was almost finished with the book. Yes, I had back-up copies, but the attacking program infested my backups as well as my working copies, destroying all but the first 41 pages of the manuscript.

I hope to never have the same feeling again when, first, I realized my backups were also corrupted, and, second, when I found the hard copy backup I had actually only covered the first 90 or so pages. It was devastating. Worse, while I was reconstructing the novel from my notes and my memory, Byron Preiss, the owner and leading light of iBooks, was killed in a car accident. It took some time to actually publish the manuscript and iBooks declared bankruptcy and closed its door only weeks after *Death Draws Five* was released. It remains, at this writing, by far the scarcest volume in the series. Word to the wise.

## THE COMMITTEE TRIAD

iBooks may be gone, but *Wild Cards* lives on. We have moved to a new publisher, Tor, with a three-book contract. The first book in the newest triad, *Inside Straight,* is due to be released in January 2008, in fact in about 20 days as I write this. It is the first book of the Committee triad, and it sees a whole new generation of *Wild Cards* heroes take center stage. Some of the old characters will still be around and some will have central roles in the events chronicled in this trilogy, but the emphasis will be on new characters: Jonathan Hive, Lohengrin, Curve Ball, Sekhmet the Destroyer, Drummer Boy, The Genetrix, Little Fat Boy, Hoodoo Mama, and a cast big enough to fill out an entire television show. In fact, one thread of the first book is about the new hit reality television show *American Hero*. The other thread is about what being a hero is all about.

Book two in the triad, *Busted Flush,* has already been handed in to Tor. The third, *Suicide Kings,* will be, as usual, a full-blown mosaic novel.

As Mark Meadows might say, what a long, strange trip it's been.

# A WORD ON METHODOLOGY

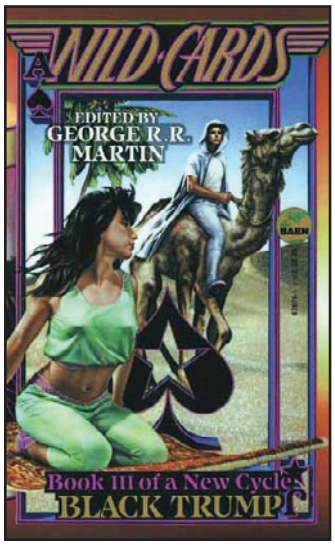
The vast majority of the information presented in this volume has been gleaned from a painstaking re-reading of the stories themselves, not from the character sheets that are privy only to *Wild Cards* writers. I approached this project in this manner for a couple of reasons.

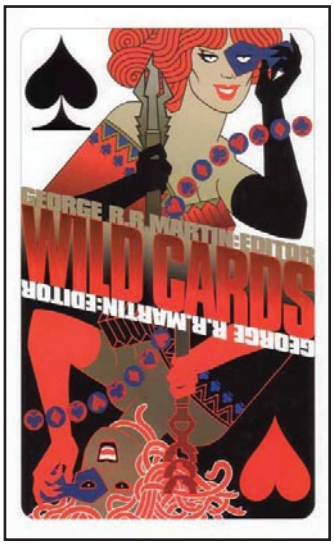
First, I really had to do a thorough re-reading of the series to get a complete and correct understanding of *Wild Cards* history in my own head. It had been 20 years since I revisited some of these stories, and I wanted to make sure I got the stories, the characters, and their complicated interconnections right. To do this I had to read not how the stories were planned, but how they were actually written and presented to the public.

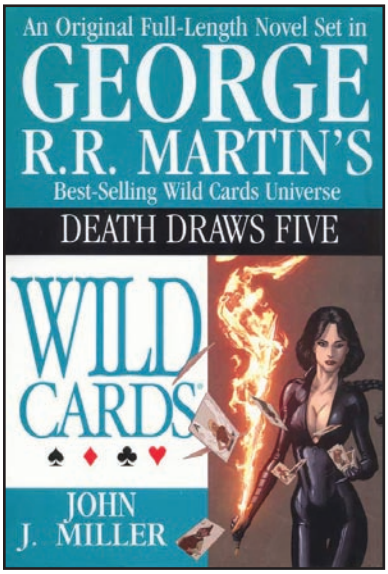
Second, there were some changes between how some characters were originally drawn up and how they actually were put down on the written page. I did use the characters sheets as back-up data sources to check some details and for some minor facts, like height, weight, maybe an exact birthday here and there, but I'm guessing that 99.9% of the fictional facts presented in this worldbook came from the stories as published, with one exception described below.

One thing that struck me as I read the 6,000-and-some pages of *Wild Cards* history was how well it all hung together, both the important stuff, like the major threads of history through time, and the minor stuff, like the color of characters' eyes and when they were born and minutiae like that.

Not that mistakes weren't made. No history, factual or fictional, is completely free of mistakes, and a few were made in putting the history of the *Wild Cards* universe down on the page. I'm not going to mention






any of them specifically. I'll leave it you history students out there who are planning to write your dissertations on the *Wild Cards* universe to ferret out the errors made by the original scribes. Suffice it to say if you come across something in this worldbook that doesn't *quite* match something in the original text, go with the worldbook. For now, anyway, unless and until you can convince me differently.

The big exception to the published story sourcing is the information dealing with the various alien races in the Network. Only a fraction of that information has so far made it into the published stories, and in the interest of providing as much information on the *Wild Cards* universe as possible I went back to the data sheets on the various races to provide as complete a picture of the Master Traders and their allies as I could.

As such, a lot of that data should be considered provisional and susceptible to change until it appears in cold, hard print in a story as, surely, some day, it will.

# HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The *Wild Cards Campaign Setting* is intended as both a comprehensive guide to the world and characters of the *Wild Cards* novels as well as a resource for the *Mutants & Masterminds* RPG, allowing you to create and play out your own *Wild Cards* adventures. Hey, if it was good enough for the writers who created the world, it's good enough for you!

The first chapters of this book offer an overview of the world of the wild cards:

**Chapter 1** looks at the wild card virus itself and how it works, along with spin-off innovations like the Trump, Black Trump, and Overtrump viruses.

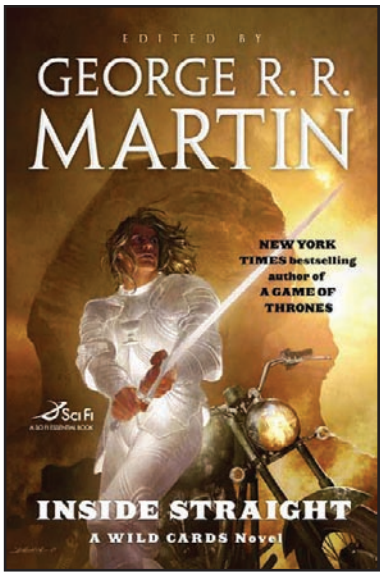
**Chapter 2** details the history of the *Wild Cards* world, from before the arrival and release of the virus to the present day, with an emphasis on the events of the *Wild Cards* books.

**Chapter 3** describes New York City, the epicenter of the wild card phenomenon, home of Jokertown and many important characters and locations from the series. It also goes beyond the boroughs of New York to look at how the wild card virus has impacted the world, and provides insight into popular culture in the *Wild Cards* world. It concludes by going beyond the Earth to the distant stars, describing the various prominent alien species and civilizations of the *Wild Cards* series.

**Chapter 4** makes up the bulk of the book, as it describes many of the prominent characters of the *Wild Cards* stories, including detailed histories and *Mutants & Masterminds* game information.

**Chapter 5** looks at different organizations, factions, and groups in the world of *Wild Cards,* past and present.

**Chapter 6** gets into how to use the *Wild Cards* setting with *Mutants & Masterminds,* providing wild card character creation, rule options, Gamemaster advice, and a variety of series frameworks and adventure ideas.




**Ante-Up** is an introductory *Mutants & Masterminds* adventure set in the world of *Wild Cards,* where the players can learn what it's like to draw the wild card and find themselves thrust into a strange new world.

Experienced *M&M* players may wish to skip ahead to **Chapter 6** to get an overview of the game information, then back to **Chapter 4** to look over the characters and their traits. GMs may also want to look over **Ante-Up** as a starter adventure, although players should avoid reading the adventure if they intend to play in it.

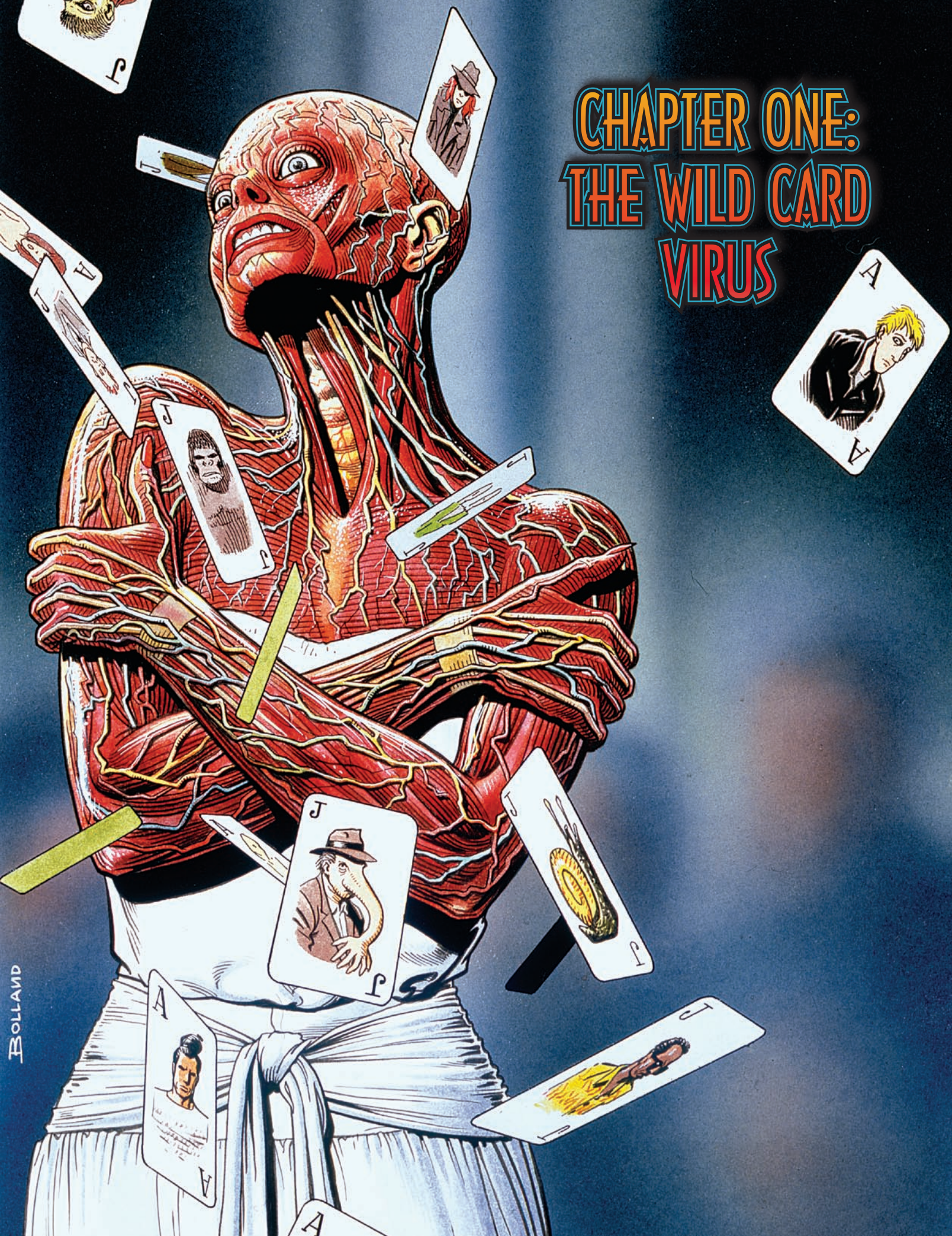
Readers looking for an overview of the *Wild Cards* world should look through the initial chapters, particularly **Chapter 1** and **Chapter 2**, which offer a good capsule description of the concept and the events of the books. If you want to know more about the world itself, take a look at **Chapter 2** and **Chapter 3**, as well as **Chapter 5**, while you can read about your favorite *Wild Cards* characters in **Chapter 4**.

# SPOILER WARNING!

Obviously, this book cannot be a comprehensive guide to the characters and events of the *Wild Cards* books without, well, describing the characters and events of the *Wild Cards* books. Thus, this sourcebook contains numerous spoilers for the *Wild Cards* series, and readers who have not already read the books should be aware of this.

However, efforts have been made so that this sourcebook doesn't contain any significant spoilers about the newest *Wild Cards* volume, *Inside Straight.* Characters from the new triad of books will be detailed in a forthcoming sourcebook from Green Ronin Publishing, allowing readers the opportunity to immerse themselves in the events of the new books before getting a recap from us.

WILD CARDS


CHAPTER ONE:
THE WILD CARD
VIRUS
BOLLAND

Since what came to be known colloquially as the "wild card virus" on Earth plays such an integral role in the series, this first chapter presents a primer on what the virus is and how it works. Several strains of the virus have been developed over the years. Each is considered separately in the following sections.

# XENOVIRUS TAKIS-A: THE WILD CARD

Xenovirus Takis-A was developed by the scientists of the Ilkazam, a leading Psi Lord family on the planet Takis (see **Chapter 3** for a more complete discussion of Takisian society). Most members of ruling Psi Lord families have useful mental powers such as telepathy, mind control and mind block; the vast majority of the subjugated population have no such abilities and are called the mind-blind or the psi-blind. Politics on Takis is a deadly and ruthless game where the Psi Lords are in constant struggle for dominance over each other. Xenovirus Takis-A, an experimental organic device able to chose for desirable traits and then rewrite the host's DNA to bring those traits into existence, was meant to be a major weapon in those continual wars and to ensure Ilkazam preeminence on Takis for generations to come, if not forever.

This was a long-term project, requiring testing on a grand scale. Unfortunately, there weren't enough expendable Ilkazam subjects, criminals, or prisoners of war to test the virus, especially since the fatality rate among those infected was rather high. On the other hand, the success rate was high enough to encourage further testing, and discourage use of the virus as a weapon (since the survivors would gain enhanced powers).

There was, however, an obscure planet hardly touched by the interstellar community whose inhabitants were recorded by Network spacefarers as being genetically identical to the Takisians—the Earth.

Dr. Tachyon attempted to prevent the release of the virus on Earth. In attempting to describe the virus and its effects to his human interrogators, Tachyon explained that its effects were largely random, causing one military report to refer to it as "the wild card virus." The name stuck, so by the time the public learned of it, that's what it was commonly called.

The wild card virus was released over the skies of Manhattan at an altitude of 30,000 feet on September 15, 1946, right into the Jet Stream. In its dormant phase the viral particles are encased in a durable protein sheath (commonly and incorrectly referred to as "spores" in the popular press) for protection from environmental extremes and wide temperature fluctuations. These protected particles can survive in localities ranging from several hundred feet below the surface of the ocean to the upper limits of the atmosphere.

The virus was dispersed over the eastern United States and Canada by wind and ocean currents in a very short time, causing over 20 concentrated outbreaks in 1946 alone. The Jet Stream bore particles across the Atlantic, leading to the *Queen Mary* outbreak (September 17, 1946), as well as subsequent outbreaks across Europe. Other major international outbreaks, including Calcutta (1947), Rio de Janeiro (1947), Mombasa (1948), Port Said (1948), Hong Kong (1949), and Auckland (1950), mostly occurred in major seaports and were almost certainly the result of shipments of contaminated goods coming from New York.

Rumors persisted for a long time of a widespread outbreak in the old USSR, but typically for the time all information on such an epidemic was suppressed by the Soviet government. Both North and South Korea were hit with wild card outbreaks in 1951.

The 1947 Nepalese outbreak has been traced to a single individual, a member of the King's Gurkha Rifles whose regiment was attempting to contain the August 10-13 Hindu/Muslim violence in Calcutta where approximately 25,000 people were killed in rioting as the different religious factions blamed each other for the earlier Calcutta outbreak. The soldier returned to Nepal later in the year, bringing the virus with him.

How many dormant deposits of the virus remain scattered around the world is unknown. The number of single spores randomly distributed by humans, machines, animals, wind, and water must number in the millions, perhaps billions, and only a single spore is required to cause a minor outbreak of the virus.

## INFECTION AND EXPRESSION

The wild card virus *cannot* be spread by contact with someone who is already infected (except for one particular case, described later). It infects perhaps as much as one half of one percent of the exposed population. In the dormant phase it appends its own code to the host's DNA and may remain passive and undetected for years, until some trauma—stress, fear, shock, or pain—causes it to express itself. Sometimes it seems to express for no particular reason. Traumas associated with childbirth or puberty are among the most common triggering factors. When the virus does express, it reprograms its host's genetic code, usually with disastrous effects.

Of those who express the virus, 90% die immediately (drawing the Black Queen), 9% survive but suffer physical deformities ranging from mild to monstrous (drawing a joker), and the lucky 1% get a power of some kind, from the minor (a deuce) to the useful (an ace).

Black Queen symptoms vary widely. Most deaths are quick and painful. Some are lingering and painful. A few can be quite spectacular, in-

cluding instances of spontaneous combustion or explosion. There is no way to predict which symptoms will strike a specific person.

The distinctions between ace, deuce, and joker can be blurred. The degree of jokerhood can vary from the amusing to the hideous, and some jokers also gain useful powers from their transformation. Peregrine, for example, can be considered a joker (her wings are a physical "deformity") and a number of jokers (Wyrm, Harvey Kant, Troll) gain considerable strength to go along with their physical deformities. A joker with insect-like traits might be hideous, but also super-humanly strong and able to stick to walls, for example.

Even the distinction between joker and Black Queen can sometimes be unclear: some mutations can be terribly painful or even ultimately fatal, given enough time. For example, a joker might be so severely allergic to sunlight as to spontaneously combust when exposed to it. Theoretically, the victim could live a normal lifespan, if permanently isolated from light. It's unclear how many Black Queens might have survived under different circumstances, or if there had been time to understand their condition.

> *"[M]etahuman abilities, the colloquially called "superpowers" engendered by the Takisian wild card virus, are exclusively of psychic origin, and in all but rare cases are exercised through the instrumentality of psi."*
>
> — from the *Minutes of the American Metabiological Society Conference on Metahuman Abilities* (Clarion Hotel, Albuquerque, New Mexico, March 14-17, 1987)

## GENETICS AND INHERITANCE

The wild card, like any other genetic trait, is also inheritable. The Takisian scientists designed it to act as a recessive gene, because a dominant gene so deadly to its hosts would likely wipe itself out over the course of only a few generations.

So there are six possibilities when it comes to inheriting the wild card gene:

- First, in the case of a nat (wild card slang for a person who hasn't been infected by the virus) and nat cross, the odds of the wild card being passed to the next generation is obviously nil, since neither parent has any wild card gene to pass on.
- In a nat-wild carder cross (it doesn't matter if the wild carder is a joker, ace, deuce, or latent) all offspring will be carriers, but cannot express themselves because the wild card gene is recessive and a matched pair is necessary for expression.
- In a wild carder-wild carder cross, all offspring will also be wild carders. Not all may express, but when they do it is in the usual 90:9:1 ratio.
- In a carrier-carrier cross, there's a 50% chance of a carrier, with no possibility of expressing the virus; 25% chance of the offspring being a nat (lacking the wild card gene entirely); 25% of an offspring being a wild carder, with the usual 90:9:1 odds if the gene ever expresses.
- In a nat-carrier cross, there's a 50% chance of the offspring being a nat and a 50% chance of the offspring being a carrier with no possibility of expressing the virus, but capable of passing it on to offspring.
- In a wild carder-carrier cross, 50% of the offspring will be wild carders with the usual 90:9:1 ratio if they express, 50% will be carriers with no chance of expressing.

Of course, all this is a simplified look at wild card genetics with complicating factors unaccounted for, and the odds quoted are only broad probabilities that generally hold true over large populations, but give only the most general idea of a given individual's chances of inheritance. It's entirely possible for a wild carder-carrier pair of parents to have three children who are all wild carders or all carriers, for example, just as it's possible for any recessive trait to disproportionately appear in a specific sampling.

## THE PSI FACTOR

Psionics, powers of the mind that seem to violate natural laws like the conservation of mass-energy and the speed of light, exist in the *Wild Cards* universe. Alien species like the Takisians and the Swarm possess them, for example, as do some species of the Network. Telepathy, precognition, telekinesis, and so forth are known quantities. Primitive and undeveloped psi potential may exist among humans from even before the release of the wild card, explaining various paranormal and occult phenomena.

Many ace powers seem to violate natural laws. They generally do so through the mechanism of psi. To go back to the example of Peregrine, her wingspan isn't sufficient to actually allow her to fly. Her power would be explainable, however, if it was telekinetic in origin. Her wings are therefore a mental "crutch" she relies on to use her power (much like Jay Acroyd's "hand gun" he uses to teleport a target, or the Midnight Angel's prayer she must utter before she can call upon her flaming sword). Enhanced ace strength may also be at least partially telekinetic in nature, although some aces (Mordecai Jones, for example) do have enhanced skeletal and muscular structures.

Many aces seem to have higher metabolic rates than usual. Perhaps these higher intakes of energy fuel some sort of psychic energy.

Certainly there are many overt mentalists in the *Wild Cards* universe, such as Fortunato and his foe the Astronomer. The Takisians themselves have mental powers, or at least the Psi Lords do, and the virus was intended to enhance those traits, so it should be no surprise that many wild card abilities are explicable in psionic terms.

Similarly, many ace "inventors" create devices that cannot *possibly* work, yet they exceed the capabilities of modern technology. Such devices may serve to focus the ace's own psychic powers, acting as the aforementioned mental "crutch," rather than having any special properties of their own. Of course, there are also examples of ace inventors creating truly advanced technology, such as Modular Man.

It has been theorized that the subject of the virus subconsciously controls, or at least influences, the direction of the transformation. If this theory is valid it would explain how aviators like Black Eagle (or indeed almost all the pilots in the ill-fated NACA attempt to reach Earth orbit in 1958) became flyers as aces. It would also imply jokers have some "choice" in their particular jokerhood, or victims of the Black Queen have some propensity that steers them to their hideous fate. It seems possible, but clearly this is a subject fit for future investigation. Not surprisingly, it is not at all a popular theory amongst jokers or the survivors of those who drew the Black Queen.

## THE PECULIAR CASE OF TYPHOID CROYD

A peculiar outbreak of the wild card virus, an epidemic in miniature, struck Manhattan in May of 1987. At first the authorities believed a new

cache of spores had been uncovered, but as more data started to come in, they realized the distribution of cases throughout the city was much too diffuse to fit that explanation. Dr. Tachyon was the first to realize the disease was being spread by a human vector.

Concern arose that the virus might be mutating, as one of the victims brought into the Jokertown Clinic was an ace known as Roulette who had obviously already been infected by the wild card virus and, once you're infected, you can't be reinfected: Like mumps, you can't get the wild card virus twice. As Tachyon and his team discussed the new case, they realized one man was essentially reinfected with the virus every time he slept: Croyd Crenson, a long-time ace first infected on September 15, 1946. He was known as the Sleeper because each time he slept he awoke in a new body with a new power. They realized this time his power was to spread the wild card virus to people he came in contact with, even those who had already had the virus.

Those who got the infection from "Typhoid Croyd" had the same chances as those who contacted it in the more conventional manner: 90% Black Queen, 9% joker, 1% ace. Besides Roulette, who drew the Black Queen as the result of her infection, Croyd also infected several other notable wild card figures, among them Tom "Gimli" Miller, who also drew the Black Queen. Veronica, one of Fortunato's geishas who was also Croyd's long-time girlfriend, was one of the lucky ones. She drew an ace, as did the pathetic joker named Bill Lockwood, better known as Snotman, possibly the most disgusting joker in all of Jokertown. He became the handsome ace known as the Reflector. It didn't improve his personality much, though.

Croyd also infected hundreds of anonymous citizens before Modular Man (who as a sixth-generation machine intelligence was obviously immune to the virus) and Mr. Gravemold defeated Crenson and his newfound friend the Reflector. Croyd was confined in the Jokertown Clinic, essentially ending the epidemic. Naturally, most of those infected drew the Black Queen and died. Several city orphanages were filled with children whose parents were victims of the epidemic. Out of one of these homes came the boy-band the Jokertown Boys.

## THE TRUMP VIRUS

Practically from the date of the wild card's release in 1946, Dr. Tachyon worked on an antidote that became known as the Trump virus or, more officially, Xenovirus Takis-B. He achieved a somewhat successful version of the Trump fairly early on that could overwrite the original virus and erase it from the target's system. Tom Marion Douglas, the famed Lizard King, was cured in 1971, although it led to his death as his suddenly normal body couldn't stand up to all the wear and tear he'd put on it. Another, even more unfortunate "success," was James Spector, or Demise, when the Trump turned his Black Queen into a particularly nasty ace by bringing him back from the dead.

Different accounts of the Trump's efficacy exist in the literature, with quoted success rates ranging from 20 to 50%. It's unknown if perhaps those quoting such figures are simply inaccurate, or perhaps referring to different strains of the Trump virus Tachyon developed over the years.

The most accurate success rate would seem to be the 20% figure Tachyon himself quotes about a Trump Virus he developed in the mid-1980s. Since the immediate fatality rate matches the success rate (with no effect at all in some 60% of those it is tried on) the Trump is administered in only the most desperate situations.

In *M&M* game terms, a use of the Trump Virus is a simple die roll to determine its effect: on a 17-20, the Trump successfully erases the wild card and the patient is cured. On a 5-16, nothing happens, and on a 1-4, the patient dies. The Trump Virus is a one-time cure; once administered, it cannot affect that patient again.

## THE BLACK TRUMP

The Black Trump is a retrovirus designed by Card Shark Clara van Renssaeler to kill those infected by the wild card virus. The Card Shark version of the "Final Solution to the Wild Card Problem" actually existed in two strains. Van Renssaeler perfected the first, dubbed Necrovirus Takis I (April, 1994), which was actually *too* virulent. It was so efficient at killing wild carders it would burn itself out in local populations before it could spread. Also, it had a distressing tendency to mutate, so under the proper circumstances it might turn into a virus that could infect non-wild carders. That, of course, would be a major catastrophe that could wipe out a large part of the world's population, nat as well as wild carder.

Van Renssaeler continued to work on her little project until she came up with a second strain, Necrovirus Takis II, more suitable for Card Shark needs. This strain of the virus was somewhat less virulent. It could be spread across the entire world and over the course of three or four generations basically wipe out all aces, jokers, latents, and wild card carriers.

Van Renssaeler fortunately repented of her deeds and destroyed much of the stock of the Black Trump, and turned the Card Sharks in to the authorities. But she didn't get it all. Fleeing Card Sharks smuggled several vials from the lab.

## THE OVERTRUMP

The Sharks escaped to several different regions of the globe with their stocks. They didn't have enough of the virus to create the epidemic they needed to cover the world and get all wild carders. Some of the Sharks, like Pan Rudo, had the necessary technical training to cultivate enough cultures for their needs. Others, like O.K. Casaday, who had no scientific training, had to get help where they could find it, even if they had to kidnap scientists and force them to work on recreating sufficient stocks of Black Trump, as Casaday did to Mark Meadows (Cap'n Trips).

Meadows, of course, was aghast at the idea, although Casaday made him toil on the project while holding both Mark and his daughter, Sprout, hostage. Mark was willing to ultimately sacrifice his child to keep the Sharks from committing genocide with the Black Trump, but before taking that horrific step he labored long and mightily in a secret Card Shark lab in Myanmar to create a vaccine against the Black Trump which he dubbed the Overtrump.

Ultimately, he was successful. The Overtrump worked in two different ways. It could be spread, unlike the original wild card virus, by carriers infected with it in the same manner colds and flu spread. In fact, the initial symptoms of the Overtrump were flu-like in nature, with sneezing, a runny nose, and other unpleasant, but hardly fatal, side-effects. It could also be injected or ingested, like a vaccine.

When the Sharks let the Black Trump loose in Jerusalem (summer 1994), a coalition of aces was able to get the Overtrump into the city and shut down the epidemic before it spread throughout the world. Not, however, before 5,000 people died from it, and hundreds of jokers were created as well as an unknown number of aces.

CHAPTER TWO:
WILD CARD
HISTORY

The *Wild Cards* books are as much alternate history as they are science fiction, postulating a world where history as we know it diverges with the release of an alien virus in 1946. Thus, the history of the *Wild Cards* world is the history of the wild card itself, and of the aces and jokers it creates. This chapter details the history of the world of *Wild Cards,* with a particular focus on the events of the series and the history of the United States, where most of them take place.

The history is broken down into major eras and events. It becomes a bit vague in the "lost years" between the end of the first *Wild Cards* series and the start of the new series in the 21st century. Additional history for this period will get filled-in as future books detail recent happenings. The chapter concludes with an overall timeline of events for easy reference.

*Cautionary Note:* This and the following chapters *abound* with spoilers. There's no way to tell the history of the *Wild Cards* world without revealing bits and pieces that would spoil things for someone who hasn't read the books.

## YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED.

# A DIFFERENT HISTORY

Common knowledge states Wild Card history diverges from that of our own world with the arrival of Dr. Tachyon at White Sands, New Mexico (August 1946). But most common knowledge, like most history texts, is less than completely accurate.

The first recorded divergence of Wild Card history from actual history occurred in 1777, when a Brother from the Stars, otherwise known as a Ly'bahr cyborg of the interstellar trading combine called the Network, visited Earth and turned a charlatan into an actual magician by leaving the mountebank who called himself Cagliostro certain artifacts of interstellar technology, including the first shakti device.

Cagliostro (Giuseppe Balsamo of Palermo) was a noted occult fraud who founded the Egyptian Freemasons after the Ly'bahr revealed to him knowledge of the monstrous being known as TIAMAT, a horrific species of semi-sentient yeast well known throughout the galaxy for invading, subjugating, and consuming helpless planets, even some with fairly advanced technological civilizations. This creature was known to many species on many planets under many names. One of them was the Swarm.

The Master Traders of the Network, always with an eye toward making a buck, had realized that a nearby (in interstellar terms), somnolent Swarm Mother, the size and appearance of an asteroid, was moving through space toward Earth and would reach its solar system in approximately 200 years. The Network, although possessing technology able to handle a Swarm invasion, is not altruistic. The Network doesn't give away its services; it sells them. And its prices are dear.

The Network representative left the shakti device with Cagliostro so he, or rather his descendants, could contact them for help when the Swarm finally did arrive on Earth. Cagliostro founded the Egyptian Masons for the purpose of preserving this knowledge over time, but, much like a game of telephone played at a party where there's far too much to drink, the message got garbled over the years. Noted fantasy writer H.P. Lovecraft got the inspiration for his horrific series of eldritch fantasy tales of the Cthulhu Mythos from perusing secret papers of his father, a Mason who died in an insane asylum. The Masons who would later tangle with Fortunato (see Fortunato's biography in **Chapter 4** for details) were even more off the rails than Lovecraft. But then, who knows what Lovecraft would have been like if he'd had direct experience with the wild card virus himself?

The Ly'bahr's visit with Cagliostro, however, was almost certainly not the Network's first call on the Earth, since their files contain references to our planet dating back tens of thousands of years. The Network is, however, nothing if not patient. It is quite willing to wait the millennia it might take for a particular species to develop the technology and the population base needed to become good consumers, to check back every couple of thousand years to see how the species is doing, and to occasionally nudge it in what the Network considers to be the right direction.

The Network's last recorded visit to Earth was in 1952 when an observer was secretly left on the planet to check on the results of the Takisian virus experiment, which had been watched with a certain amount of approval (see Jhubben's biography in **Chapter 4** for details), as well as a small ship with a single watcher in orbit. Soon, perhaps, the Network will reckon the Earth to be ripe for plucking and return in full force.

## JETBOY

The most prominent Wild Card character to predate Tachyon's arrival on Earth is Robert Tomlin, better known as Jetboy. Tomlin was 12 when he snuck out of the orphanage he'd been raised in and showed up at Bonham's Flying Service in Shantak, New Jersey (1939). The most plane-crazy kid who ever lived, he helped Professor Silverberg build his experimental jet engines, as well as the JB-1, the plane designed to carry them. When Silverberg was killed by Nazi spies trying to steal the experimental plane, Tomlin first avenged the death of his mentor and then took the plane to Canada, where he unofficially joined the RAF.

He fought both in the Battle of Britain and in China with the Flying Tigers and earned the nickname Jetboy. When the United States entered World War II after Pearl Harbor (Dec. 7, 1941), Roosevelt gave him a special presidential commission and he fought under the flag of the United States. He flew combat missions from 1939 to early 1945, shooting down around 500 planes and sinking 50 ships. He sat out the last bit of the war while marooned on a desert island in the Pacific (April 29, 1945, to July 1946) until he was sighted and rescued by the *USS Reluctant*.

Jetboy was released from service August 12, 1946. He was called back to active duty on September 15, 1946, to deal with the menace of Dr. Tod. Of course, by that time Dr. Tachyon had arrived on Earth.

# TACHYON ARRIVES... AND EVERYTHING CHANGES

Tachyon landed the night of August 23, 1946, at White Sands Missile Base in New Mexico in a spaceship that looked like a giant whorly coral growth strung with lengths of pretty blinking lights. He trudged out to the jeep filled with rocket scientists that was approaching him. Because of his short size, slim build, fancy clothes, and shoulder-length long hair, at first they thought he was a girl. He claimed to be a prince from the planet Takis, which of course nobody had ever heard of, and he said his name was Tisianne Something Something Something And Something, which of course nobody could pronounce, and warned them about a globe full of something deadly he had to get back immediately, which of course nobody knew anything about, and then he demanded to be taken to "this President Harry S. Truman of yours," which of course nobody there could do.

So of course they tossed him into the clink and military intelligence interrogated him for a couple of weeks. Those working directly with him soon came to believe his story, or at least elements of it, but their

reports couldn't convince any of their bosses higher up the bureaucratic food chain. It's understandable why.

Tisianne claimed to be a member of one of the royal families from the planet Takis who ruled their world through the potent mental powers they'd developed and through special breeding programs kept rigidly within their own class. His particular family, the Ilkazam, had been working on a secret weapon for centuries, a complex artificial virus designed to interact with the genetic makeup of each specific host to give that host potent mental or physical powers.

It was now ready for testing on a large scale, but there were still some bugs to be worked out. The virus killed the vast majority of those exposed to it and turned a lesser percentage into useless freaks. The Ilkazam clearly couldn't test it on themselves. But they couldn't release it on their foes, either, because it did create super-abilities in a small percentage of those infected with it. After scouring Network records, the Ilkazam discovered the perfect guinea pigs on a backwater, backwards planet whose inhabitants were genetically identical to Takisians: Earth. They didn't know if it was simply a case of parallel development or if Earth was somehow a lost colony of early Takisian explorers, and they didn't much care. They had someone to test their virus on.

But Tisianne, who had by now come to be known as Dr. Tachyon ("Doctor," because that's how the scientists at White Sands all addressed each other; "Tachyon" after the name of the faster-than-light particles that propelled his ship got confused with his person by the soldiers guarding him), thought the decision to test the virus on an innocent world was ignoble. His protests were ignored, but in typical grand Takisian fashion he decided to do something about the situation all by himself. He chased the ship carrying the virus all the way to Earth, burning out his own ship's interstellar drive in the mad dash to catch his fellow Takisians before they could release the virus on the unsuspecting world. The Takisian ship he was chasing, however, crashed somewhere in the eastern United States. All aboard had been killed and the device containing the virus was missing. Dr. Tachyon demanded the United States mobilize its Army, Navy, and Air Force to find it, but nobody in a position to issue such orders believed his far-fetched story.

Until Harry Truman, the president himself, received a ransom note demanding $30 million in cash to prevent the destruction of a major American city. While the government had dithered, Dr. Tod, a brilliant and unprincipled scientist and one of Jetboy's prime adversaries, had recovered the globe containing the virus from the Takisian crash site, experimented with it, discovered what it could do, and decided to make big bucks off of it.

There was no time to dither now. The authorities couldn't give in to Tod's demands. If they did, they might as well have handed him a key to the treasury and a truck to haul it all away. Truman called Jetboy back to active duty to stop Tod from releasing the virus over the skies of Manhattan. A spectacular aerial battle took place on September 15, 1946, between Jetboy, backed by a squadron of lesser fighter planes, and the blimp array designed by Dr. Tod. Jetboy almost succeeded in preventing the virus's release.

## WILD CARD DAY

But almost wasn't good enough.

The wild card virus, so named by an anonymous writer in an early government report, was released over the skies of Manhattan. That day 10,000

people drew the Black Queen. They turned into puddles of slime, they exploded like ripe watermelons dropped from a skyscraper, they burst into flame, they bled to death from every pore of their body, they turned inside out, screaming. They died 10,000 awful deaths, no two exactly alike.

None of them, and no one watching, knew what was happening. Panic ensued, and with panic came chaos. Riots clogged every bridge and tunnel that led off the island of Manhattan. Martial law was declared, but it did no good. The National Guard was brought in to wring order out of the screaming bedlam, but the Guardsmen were just as susceptible to the virus as the civilians. Thousands died in the ensuing rioting.

The injured were taken to the overwhelmed hospitals along with the approximately 1,100 who had pulled the joker out of the wild card deck. No one had any idea how to treat those people, and most were afraid they were contagious. Some were doomed to die a slow, painful death. Others were doomed to live on as grotesque parodies of humanity.

Tachyon, arriving on the scene, wept.

About 30 aces were also created. One was Croyd Crenson. He fell asleep immediately and awoke some weeks later a totally new man. Another was John Nighthawk. He walked out of a charity hospital into a burning city. Jack Braun walked out of a movie theater and to the nearest hospital, volunteering his services. He felt funny, but he could lift trucks. The stories of most of the other early aces have gone unchronicled.

The rate of infection went down dramatically after the first day as much of the virus was blown away by the Jet Stream to bedevil other lands (see **Chapter 3** for details), but by the time control was firmly established and the cases of new infection had dwindled to a pitiful few, days had passed and 20,000 were dead, somewhat more than half from the effects of the wild card, the others due to the resultant chaos, rioting and looting.

Tachyon was making the rounds of the crammed hospitals and working himself into a stupor, but it wasn't helping much. The task of counteracting the effects of the virus was too great for one man to make much headway against. New York City simply had to endure, and to wait for it to get better. It gradually did, but things were never the same again.

# THE EARLY YEARS

The early years of Wild Card history are stamped with the successes and failures of the first ace supergroup, the Exotics For Democracy or, as they were more popularly known, the Four Aces. Archibald Holmes, a longtime civil servant who had been an attorney, judge, and hard-working New Dealer in the Franklin Delano Roosevelt administration, had been laboring for the United States government in European post-World War II reconstruction, but was called back home to head the relief effort in virus-stricken New York.

He realized that among the human wreckage the wild card virus left in its wake there were actually some amazing talents. His first recruit (October 1946) was Jack Braun (Golden Boy), the strongest man in the world. He next added Earl Sanderson, Jr. (Black Eagle) to the team. An African-American flying ace from World War II, Sanderson no longer needed a plane to fly. David Harstein (the Envoy), a fast-talking Jewish chess hustler from the streets of New York who nobody could resist pleasing, joined right before their first mission to Perónist Argentina. The fourth member of the Four Aces, Blythe Stanhope van Renssaeler (Brain Trust), who could absorb other peoples' minds and memories, joined soon after.

The Exotics For Democracy (or EFD) were never officially part of the government, but were funded by Holmes' vast personal fortune to promote the ideals and interests of the United States around the globe. Their first mission (late 1946) was to overthrow the controversial Perón government in Argentina, a country that was a haven for Nazi war criminals. Perón ended up in China as a military adviser to Chiang Kai-shek.

The EFD's next mission was to hunt Nazi criminals. They captured Martin Bormann in northern Italy, flushed Adolf Eichmann into the arms of a Soviet patrol, and caught Josef Mengele in Bavaria. Black Eagle saved Mohandas Gandhi from an assassin's bullet (January 1948), and Harstein walked into Spanish dictator Generalissimo Franco's palace and talked him into resigning, then stuck with him until he was safely in exile in Switzerland. Franco quickly changed his mind, but it was too late for him to regain power in Spain. Harstein was also instrumental in bringing about the Peace of Jerusalem practically on his own.

At the request of the State Department, Holmes and the Four Aces went to China as part of an effort to negotiate a peace treaty between the Communist Party, led by Mao Tse-tung, and the nominally democratic Kuomintang (the Nationalists), led by Chiang Kai-shek. Harstein helped broker what came to be called the China Accord, which accomplished a successful partition of the country, but soon after the EFD left the Accord broke down and the communists took over the mainland.

That was the last great mission undertaken by the EFD, at least publicly, and the Four Aces went their separate ways to work on their own personal social, political, and economic agendas.

## HUAC

Meanwhile, trouble was brewing on the home front. The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) had been formed in the late 1930s to investigate such groups as the American Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan. Finding nothing objectionable about these organizations, HUAC decided to make Hollywood safe from Communists, and in a black day in American history used threat, innuendo, hearsay, and the despicable practice of the blacklist to ruin anyone it could whom it believed, or wanted to believe, had Communist ties or sympathies (1947). Running out of patsies in Hollywood, it turned its attention to the Four Aces (1949), possibly out of jealousy for their great success on numerous foreign fronts.

This investigation caused everything to fall apart for the Four Aces. Harstein at first used his powers to get HUAC to dissolve the investigation. Once the investigators were out of Harstein's influence, however, they realized he had somehow controlled them and they hauled him again before the committee, this time in an environmentally sealed chamber. Harstein served several years in prison for contempt of Congress. Holmes was also sentenced to prison. Jack Braun turned friendly witness and testified against his friends. Earl Sanderson, Jr., who *was* actually a member of the American Communist Party as a student but had severed all ties with the party, flew out of the country, never to return. Blythe Stanhope van Renssaeler went insane, her mind shattered by an injudicious mind-control by her lover, Dr. Tachyon. Tachyon too was broken by the experience. He was deported to Europe as an undesirable alien and not-so-slowly degenerated into a derelict, spending the decade of the 1950s sinking lower and lower into drunken ignominy.

This was the fate of the once bright and brilliant public aces. The fate of the hidden, lost, and forgotten wild carders, the jokers, was also soon to take a dramatic downturn.

Meanwhile, Jack Braun, consumed with guilt over betraying Earl and the others, asked to go to Korea to fight (1950). Commissioned as a lieutenant colonel, he kicked major North Korean butt. The ordinary troops loved him, the officers were somewhat less enthusiastic about his presence. He was awarded the Medal of Honor, but then sent home by the government amid speculation that General Douglas MacArthur didn't want any competition as the biggest star in the Korean theater. Back in the States, Braun's acting career was something of a disaster, progressing from starring roles to B-movies to a finale playing Tarzan on television in the '60s.

## MCCARTHYISM

The next politician to exploit anti-wild card hysteria was Senator Joseph R. McCarthy. He made a famous speech (1950) in which he asserted, "I have here in my hand a list of 57 wild cards known to be living and working secretly in the United States today." In fact, he had no such list. The piece of paper he waved at the camera was blank, but it was enough to fan the flames of anti-wild card hysteria across the country.

McCarthy was the public face of wild card bigotry in the early 1950s, but there was another, much more insidious face. It was hidden and secret and no one knew what it looked like. It was a cabal of men in and out of government in the United States and abroad who, for various reasons of their own, hated wild carders. Some were genuinely concerned about what the spread of the virus might do to society. Some saw an opportunity to pile up sweeping political power or compelling economic gain. Some were just haters who detested anyone who was different. Some were frightened little men who feared anyone who was different, no matter how pitiful or powerless those different people were. They were the Card Sharks.

Some claim Albert Einstein created the Card Sharks; that the great man was afraid of what would happen to humanity as a whole if genes damaged by the wild card virus became widespread in the population. They say Einstein later repented of his stance and was assassinated by the Sharks before he could reveal their existence. In any case, those telling such stories are Card Sharks themselves and cannot be trusted to be reliable, since they would be more than willing to polish the sheen of their vile little group by associating themselves with men the caliber of Einstein.

At any rate, known early Card Sharks include Congressman Henry van Renssaeler (husband of Blythe and a known corrupt politician and incestuous pedophile who impregnated his own daughter), Meyer Lansky (major criminal gang leader), Pan Rudo (ex-Nazi scientist), Philip Baron van Herzenhagen (corrupt spy who later schemed to assassinate an American president and take his place), Dr. Etienne Faneuil (doctor who later poisoned thousands of his patients with AIDS), Margaret Durand (nymphomanic prostitute), Hedda Hopper (Hollywood gossip columnist best known for her vile temper and equally vile hats), J. Edgar Hoover (repressed cross-dressing, self-loathing closet homosexual), and William Randolph Hearst (who thought nothing of starting a war and killing tens of thousands of people to increase the circulation of his newspapers). Fine concerned citizens all.

The sinister influence of the Card Sharks was felt as early as the first few months after the virus fell from the sky, as the new underclass, the pitiful jokers, start to settle in the poor areas of New York City, once called the Bowery and soon to be called Jokertown. There was no overt strategy to cage them—or perhaps there was—but the jokers congregated in that small area of the city, packed together where they could be watched, economically exploited, and when the time came wiped out with a single ruthless smash of a clenched fist.

## SCARE

Back in the open, McCarthy created the Senate Committee for Ace Resources and Endeavors, or SCARE (1952). In later years the committee was taken out of the Senate's control and the name changed to the Special Committee for Ace Resources and Endeavors, but the acronym remained the same.

SCARE was charged with investigating all reports of paranormal powers and under McCarthy was extremely active in ferreting out anything that could remotely construed as "paranormal powers." Between 1952 and 1956 over 200 men and women were served subpoenas and brought before SCARE, frequently based on reports by anonymous sources. Aces who sensed the shift in public sentiment started going underground.

One of SCARE's more pathetic victims was Timothy Wiggins, a song-and-dance man who played the Borscht Belt of small Catskills hotels in Upstate New York. Billed as The Rainbow Man, he would change the color of his skin to the appropriate hue and sing songs such as "Yellow Rose of Texas," or "Tip-Toe Through the Tulips," while accompanying himself on the ukelele. He added a term to the wild card lexicon when he said before McCarthy's committee, "If I'm an ace, I'd hate to see a deuce." Blacklisted and unable to find work, he hanged himself 14 months after testifying before SCARE.

The Exotic Powers Control Act enacted by Congress (1954) required any person exhibiting wild card powers to register with the federal government. Failure to register was punishable by prison terms of up to 10 years. This act was followed by the Special Conscription Act, which allowed the Selective Service to induct any registered aces into government service for an unspecified period of term. Only two men were ever openly inducted under the act: Lawrence Hague and David Harstein. Hague, a telepathic stockbrocker, disappeared into the maze of government service. Harstein never reported, going underground and changing his name and appearance. Perhaps more aces were secretly drafted. Most followed Harstein's example and simply disappeared.

Buoyed by his success, McCarthy introduced the Alien Disease Containment Bill (1955). This bill mandated compulsive sterilization for all wild carders, aces as well as jokers. This went too far for even McCarthy's staunchest supporters. McCarthy's anti-wild card accusations became wilder and wilder as he sank further into paranoid delusions occasioned by his increasing dependence on alcohol.

Or who knows? Maybe a vindictive ace really *was* out to get him.

In any case, McCarthy's power was broken. The ever-fickle pendulum of public opinion swung against him, and he retired from public life. McCarthy died in the Bethesda Naval Hospital (May 1957). The official cause of death was hepatitis. It was widely accepted that the disease was brought on by acute alcoholism. He was 48.

## CARD SHARK PLOTS

The Card Sharks were not idle through the '50s, either. Pan Rudo (1952) set Croyd Crenson up for the theft of plutonium from the Los Alamos National Laboratory in an attempt to discredit aces in general.

Later, a much more convoluted conspiracy of several Sharks destroyed NACA (National Advisory Committee on Aeronautics), America's first space program (1958). Operating out of the Muroc Lake Test Site on the restricted Tomlin Air Force Base, NACA planned to use the X-11A rocketplane to reach Earth orbit. The project was sabotaged by Card Shark Margaret Durand, the project nurse, with the complicity of Shark George G. Battle, who was head of project security, as part of the Sharks' plan to associate aces with public failures. X-11A pilot Woody Enloe and fuel plane pilot Casey Guinan, both aces, were killed in the first attempt to reach orbit. The project was shut down and Edgar Thayer, the largely innocent flight director, served 10 years in federal prison for gross negligence. Durand and Battle went unexposed.

An even further-reaching Card Shark plot to burn down Jokertown to collect vast amounts of insurance money (and incidentally incinerate vast numbers of jokers), was foiled by a group of young jokers (Cheetah, Chuck Tanaka, and Howard "Troll" Mueller, who went on to have a long career as head of security for the Jokertown Clinic) the very next year. They discovered a warehouse full of incendiary devices and took their story to reporter Matt Rainey, who investigated and exposed the conspiracy without uncovering the broader Card Shark connections, shutting it down. A month later Rainey was gunned down in the streets. These events were presented in a somewhat sanitized form in the Roman Polanski movie *Jokertown* (1974), starring Jack Nicholson and Marilyn Monroe.

## A NEW DECADE BRINGS NEW HOPE

The inauguration of John F. Kennedy as president of the United States in 1961 brought a fresh ideal of tolerance and openness to America and something of a new hope for wild carders, while ushering in a period of change and turmoil for the country as a whole. Dr. Tachyon returned to America later that year, but he was still little more than a derelict, supported through the kindness of Angela Fascetti, the owner of the Jokertown nightclub called the Funhouse.

From approximately 1951 to 1963 there were no public aces. Some aces presumably obeyed the law, registered with the government, and were drafted into public service. Some, like Nick Williams (Will-o'-Wisp), kept their powers secret, but even so ultimately fell victim to the Card Sharks while trying to expose their activities to an unaware public (1962). Many others simply tried to lead lives as ordinary people, denying their superhuman capabilities.

Ironically, it was Kennedy's assassination in November 1963 (which had all the earmarks of a Card Shark operation) that at least partially inspired the Great and Powerful Turtle, the first public ace of the new era. The Turtle in turn helped Tachyon regain his sobriety and become again a functioning member of society.

This led to the opening of the first hospital specializing in treating wild carders, the Blythe van Renssaeler Memorial Clinic, better known under the informal name the Jokertown Clinic, with Dr. Tachyon as chief of staff (1966). The clinic was also the first research facility devoted to the study of the wild card virus.

In the meantime, Vernon Henry Carlysle became the first ace to wear a costume, as Cyclone (1965), although he eschewed the notion of utilizing a secret identity and was in fact quite publicity conscious. Other aces, cognizant of the registration and draft laws still on the books, although rarely (if ever) enforced, did take the notion of secrecy seriously. Many from this era went masked and cultivated secret identities, although few of their stories have been told.

Like elsewhere in American society, the Vietnam War polarized the wild card community. Some aces supported the war. Cyclone served two tours of duty in Vietnam. He was perhaps the most prominent ace who fought in 'Nam, although jokers were drafted by the hundreds and fought in the Joker Brigade, an all-joker unit commanded by nat officers. The brigade's casualty rate was the highest of any in the war. As a brigade officer Lieutenant Colonel John Garrick famously said, "I don't care what they look like, they bleed red just like anybody else... most of them, anyway."

Other aces, like the Turtle, opposed the Vietnam War vociferously and ended up on Nixon's enemy list. There were few outright counterculture

aces. Tom Marion Douglas (the Lizard King), the lead singer of the band Destiny, was the most visible example of that faction, except for that one bright, shining day in 1970 when the Radical appeared at People's Park in San Francisco (see Cap'n Trips bio in **Chapter 4** for details).

The Card Sharks were not inactive during the late 1960s, but they managed to keep most of their activity undercover. Robert F. Kennedy's assassination was a Card Shark operation (June 1968): Brandon van Renssaeler was the bagman who paid the blood money to killer Sirhan Sirhan.

The end of the decade saw the first secret Moon landing, bankrolled by private enterprise. The pilot was Mike Sampson, ace Cash Mitchell provided the lift critical to leaving Earth orbit, and a waitress named Eva-Lynne was a last-minute addition to the crew (December 1968).

America's second shot at the space age officially began when General Marcus Meadows was named the head of Space Command (1969). Building on techniques used during the earlier hushed-up Moon landing, they soon succeeded in reaching Earth orbit (1971) and then achieved the first recognized, government-sanctioned Moon landing.

The '60s closed out with the first clashes between Fortunato and the Egyptian Masons, bringing to fruition Network plans first laid down in the late 1700s. Seeking revenge for women of his murdered by the cult, Fortunato destroyed the Masonic hierarchy, unwittingly paving the way for the Astronomer to take over and laying the foundation for more deaths in the coming years (1969). Meanwhile, the Swarm Mother herself entered the solar system and began to evolve intelligence (1973).

## THE GREAT JOKERTOWN RIOT

By the early 1970s the wild card became *chic.* Hiram Worchester opened his famous restaurant, Aces High, atop the Empire State Building (1971). Aces were courted by high society, if jokers were still shunned. Xavier Desmond and his Joker Anti-Defamation League had been working for some time for jokers' rights, but new, more confrontational, militant voices were also being heard. Tom Miller (or Gimli, as he preferred to be known) and his Jokers for a Just Society didn't just lobby for jokers' rights; they demanded them. And of course some nats felt threatened by the growing militancy of some joker factions.

This sense of confrontation came to a head with the Great Jokertown Riot, which occurred during the Democratic National Convention in New York City (July 1976). It started when Gimli's JJS marched to Jetboy's Tomb when the Jokers' Rights plank failed to make the Democratic Party platform. But the peaceful protest was shattered when the marchers came up against riot police and were beaten back. Three were killed, scores injured. Gimli planned to repeat the march the next day, but Senator Gregg Hartmann, making a run at the presidential nomination, talked him out of it. The demonstrators spent the day in Roosevelt Park in a festive, carnival-like atmosphere that exploded in violence once night fell when mounted police tried to sweep the jokers back into Jokertown. Later, no one would admit to issuing the orders for the police to attack.

The destruction was immense and horrific. By midnight the National Guard had been called in. The Turtle and other aces appeared on the scene; most took no specific side, but tried to break up violence wherever they encountered it. The fighting continued into the day. Fifteen died and there was massive destruction throughout Jokertown and its vicinity.

Gimli declared the jokers would march to Jetboy's Tomb the next day no matter what, thus initiating the events that would culminate in Hartmann's public breakdown and his loss of the probable Democratic Party nomination. Instead, the nomination and eventually the presidency went to Governor Jimmy Carter of Georgia. Hartmann was forced to rebuild public confidence in him, and bide his time as the powerful, corrupt entity living in him (known only to Hartmann as Puppetman) rebuilt its rage in silence.

## IRAN

Carter proved to be a friend of the wild carders as both the Special Conscription Act and the Exotic Powers Control Act were repealed by narrow votes in Congress. A president soft on wild carders, however, did not sit well with the Card Sharks. When staff from the American Embassy in Iran were taken hostage, the Sharks implemented a cunning and complex plan to discredit Carter as well as aces in general.

Card Shark George G. Battle helped to convince Carter to send a squad of aces into Iran to rescue the hostages, and Battle picked the squad (1980). Most of them were second-rate aces, and several had never been on a military mission before. None of them had ever worked together. He also set them up for failure by putting other Sharks in places of strategic importance. J. Robert Belew (the Mechanic) led the team. It was Billy Ray's (Carnifex) first government mission and the same for Jay Ackroyd (Popinjay). Several team members died during their failed attempt to rescue the hostages, and Belew came out of the affair with his first inkling of the Card Sharks' existence, as well as deep-rooted enmity toward CIA agent and Card Shark O.K. Casaday that was to last literally for the rest of their lives.

Carter took personal blame for the botched rescue attempt and lost the next presidential election to Ronald Reagan.

The Card Sharks reared their ugly heads again in 1985, when a young Dr. Bradley Finn, while doing a stint in the Peace Corps, uncovered a hideous plot to wipe out the joker population of Kenya by infecting them all with AIDS. Finn blew the whistle on the perpetrators, Margaret Durand and Dr. Etienne Faneuil, but these happenings were overshadowed by events late in the year that for once couldn't be laid at the feet of the Card Sharks.

## THE SWARM INVASION

The Swarm finally arrived as the asteroid-sized Swarm Mother slipped into Earth orbit and landed buds on every continent except Australia. Approximately 2.4 million predatory buds, fierce but unintelligent Swarmlings, made up the first wave of the attack (December 1985).

The Swarmlings landed in four places in North America: New Jersey, Kentucky south of Louisville, an area centered around McAllen, Texas, that straddled both sides of the United States/Mexico border, and an extremely diffuse landing scattered over most of northern Manitoba.

The New Jersey swarm consisted of 40,000 buds, half of them flyers, congregated in a single main group. Twenty thousand more Swarmlings were scattered across the state, all eventually seeking to join up in a single horde near Princeton.

There were several types of buds. Some were legless, snail-like creatures that moved with undulating thrusts of their 30-foot-long bodies. Others were armored with sideways-moving jaws and a pair of giant boneless arms terminating in claws. Still others resembled 60-foot-long serpents whose undersides writhed with 10-foot cilia. Smaller predators looked like panthers with six legs. Others resembled leaping spiders with four-foot-wide bodies on stilt-like legs. Carpet-like creatures clung close to the ground and fired three-foot-long needles. The flyers were among the most numerous and most deadly. They were dark, featherless flapping creatures like flying throw rugs that secreted corrosive acid. (See **Chapter 3** for details on the types of Swarmlings and the Swarm Mother herself.) When not engaged in battle, The Swarmlings moved 12 to 15 miles an hour. They utterly destroyed Trenton as they sought to link up near Princeton.

One Swarm mass (you could hardly call it an army, as it worked on instinct to kill and devour, not intelligence) was stopped at Philadelphia by a coalition of aces that included the Turtle, Peregrine, Modular Man, the Howler, and

Mistral, as well as traditional military units, including two Marine regiments, support from Air Force and Navy planes, and the battleship *New Jersey*.

Golden Boy came in from the West Coast and fought the Kentucky Swarm with the 1st Army. Cyclone helped armored units from Fort Bliss and Fort Hood and infantry from Fort Polk to drive the Texas Swarm back across the Mexican border.

The Swarm also hit other countries. It was annihilated in northern West Germany, where it dropped right into the middle of war games being held by the British Army of the Rhine. The Thrace Swarmlings had more success because of a lack of cooperation between the governments in the Greco-Turkish-Bulgarian region. The China Swarm caused 50 million casualties before it was simply overwhelmed by the superior numbers of the Chinese army. In Africa, the Near East, and South America, an endless wave of death swept across the poorer Third World nations. Information from the Eastern Bloc nations was, as always, sketchy and unreliable, but Swarm landings were reported in southern Poland, Ukraine, and in at least two places in Siberia. The Soviets used airburst nuclear weapons to smash the Siberian Swarmlings.

The major attacks lasted six days, although it took a while to mop up Swarmling stragglers in America and Europe. In the Third World, major battles continued for months. Pockets of Swarmling resistence lasted for years, including major infestations in Peru, Chad, and the mountains of Tibet, with smaller, though still troublesome, remnants in Turkey and Nigeria.

## THE SECOND WAVE

The world thought it had defeated the alien invasion, but the Swarm Mother considered this first encounter more of a probe than a serious attempt at conquest and busily analyzed the data it collected from its millions of agents. While the Swarm invasion largely fell off the evening news, the Swarm Mother was busy evolving in response to stimuli and making more sophisticated plans. Its first attack had been based on brute force. The next was more refined as it studied captured specimens, duplicated them, and sent them down again to Earth.

This prong of the invasion was discovered by Mark Meadows (spring 1986), who was assisting Dr. Tachyon's investigation into the murder of a tabloid reporter of which Doughboy, a simple-minded joker, was accused. Of course, no one believed Meadows and Tachyon when they claimed the Swarm had returned. Tachyon also discovered his cousin and rival Zabb, who had returned to the Earth to check on the results of the Takisian experiment, had made an alliance with the Swarm Mother–a creature long considered among the greatest of all Takisian enemies.

The American government announced the creation of a special federal task force to deal with the Swarm problem and to put on end to the jurisdictional squabbles between the various branches of the armed forces and SCARE. It was headed by a career diplomat from the State Department named Lankester (May 1986).

Also that month, Fortunato led a team of aces on a raid on the Cloisters headquarters of the Egyptian Masons, now led by the psychopathic ace known as the Astronomer. The aces who took part in the Masons's beat down included Kid Dinosaur, Water Lily, Peregrine, the Howler, J.J. Flash, the Turtle, and Dr. Tachyon. Fortunato believed the Astronomer had called the Swarm Mother down upon the Earth. Of course, the Astronomer had actually planned to call the Network to help fight the Swarm, but Fortunato's destruction of the Masons's shakti device not only earned him and all the aces involved in the raid the undying enmity of the Astronomer, it also removed their only hope for help in dealing with the intractable Swarm, which had already devastated hundreds of worlds throughout the galaxy. Fortunato was not to realize this until somewhat later, however.

## THE THIRD WAVE

The Swarm Mother evolved a much more sophisticated plan of world conquest (July 1986), substituting her own Swarmlings for politicians and government officials around the world, including the very man who was heading the American anti-Swarm task force. Her fall-back plan was to initiate a nuclear war that would virtually wipe humanity off the face of the Earth, then wait until the planet would be habitable again. The Swarm can afford to take the long view on things.

This Swarm's plan was foiled when Tachyon, Fortunato, Mai Minh, and Yeoman attacked the Swarm Mother from the inside. Mai used her healing power to merge with the creature, creating a symbiont being of immense power and total pacificity that ultimately left Earth orbit for deep space. An unknown number of Swarm creatures of various kinds, including human replicants, remained behind on Earth.

But there was still fallout from the Swarm Invasion to be dealt with. The Astronomer, bad loser that he was, vowed vengeance on all the aces who'd destroyed his plans of conquest along with his Cloister's headquarters. He chose September 15, 1986, the 40th anniversary of Wild Card Day, to strike.

During a bloody day of vengeance, the Astronomer and his minions killed the Howler and Kid Dinosaur, and blasted the Turtle out of the sky. The Astronomer failed in his attempt to kill Water Lily during the annual aces-only dinner at Hiram Worchester's splendid restaurant, Aces High, on the 86th floor of the Empire State Building, but Modular Man did get his head blown off by a somewhat befuddled Croyd Crenson.

The Astronomer and Fortunato met in a final pyrotechnic duel over the skies of New York. Although Fortunato won the battle, he was stunned to discover the truth in the Astronomer's broken mind. The Astronomer had all along planned to *save* the world from the Swarm, not destroy it. Of

course, he intended to rule the world after saving it, clasping it tightly in his despotic and psychotic grip, but he figured he'd earned the right. Fortunato was so shaken by this revelation he decided to retire to a monastery in Japan, effectively removing himself from the world. The Astronomer, his energy depleted by his battle with Fortunato, was ultimately killed by his minion the dread assassin Demise, and left partially embedded in a wall.

Thus passed arguably the two most powerful aces in the world.

# TURF WAR AND WORLD TOUR

The end of 1986 saw two major events in the Wild Card universe. The Shadow Fist/Five Families turf war began in the fall, while the World Health Organization (WHO) fact-finding tour around the world began a few months later.

The Shadow Fist Society is the umbrella name for a group of criminal organizations (including the Immaculate Egrets, the Werewolves and others; for details see **Chapter 5: Organizations**) led by a corrupt ex-South Vietnamese general named Kien Phuc. Kien came to America in the late 1970s and aggressively pursued supremacy in all fields of criminal enterprise, fighting the entrenched Mafia families who owned the biggest piece of the illegal pie in the city.

The Mafia, relying on old-fashioned weapons and tactics were woefully outgunned by the more innovative Fists, who counted a number of aces within their ranks. Three dons were assassinated within weeks. Rosemary Muldoon, who was also the don of the Gambione Family, used her position in the District Attorney's office to recruit aces to go up against Shadow Fist interests. These aces, including Bagabond, Water Lily, Pulse, Mister Magnet, and Black Shadow, leveled the field somewhat. The Mafia also directly recruited some aces, including Bludgeon and the Sleeper, but the were a day late and a few lira short getting into the game.

After one deadly Shadow Fist/Mafia gun battle in the street, a hitherto political novice, the conservative preacher Reverend Leo Barnett, declared his candidacy for the Democratic Party presidential nomination (March 1987). Political pundits initially gave him little hope to win the nomination, but as time passed his candidacy picked up steam.

The Typhoid Croyd Plague hit New York City toward the end of the turf war, further confusing matters and terrifying the citizenry with fear of the wild card. Croyd unwittingly spread a new strain of the wild card virus even other wild carders—jokers and aces alike—could catch (May 1987). Hundreds died. Eventually martial law was declared and the National Guard sealed all escape routes off Manhattan (June 1987). As army units patrolled the streets, a terrible riot occurred near the Holland Tunnel. Jokers, whom many nats blamed for the outbreak, were beaten by roaming mobs. Widespread arson and looting occurred. Eventually Croyd was taken captive by a reconstructed Modular Man and deposited in the Jokertown Clinic, ending the epidemic (July 1987).

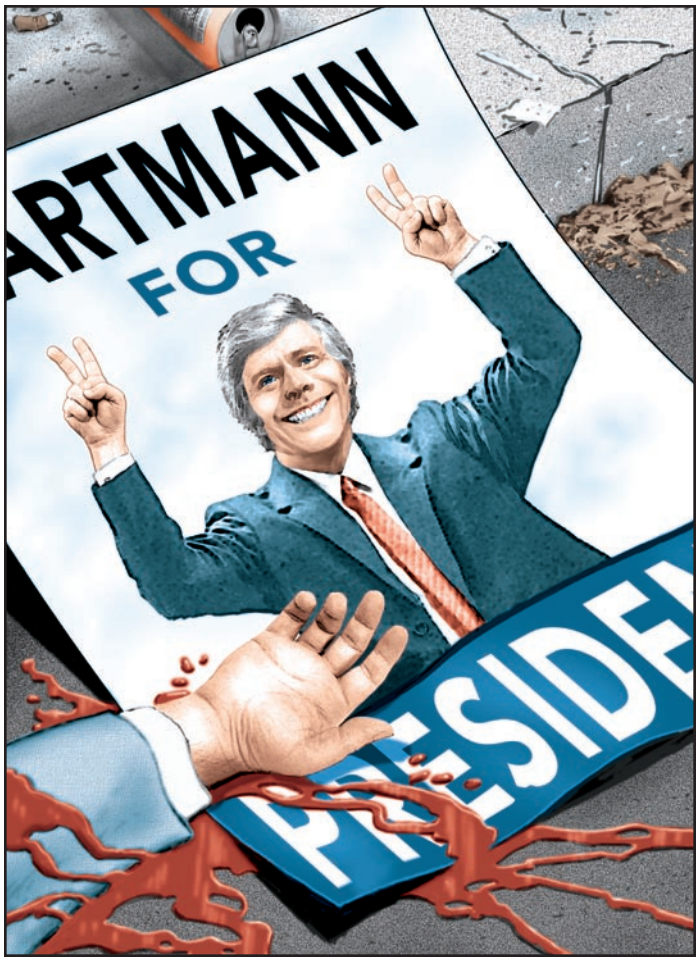
The turf wars ended with the defeat and total capitulation of the Mafia, as Rosemary Muldoon, the last Mafia don, fled to Cuba (July 1987). Kien Phuc and the Shadow Fist Society reigned as supreme crime lords of New York City.

A fact-finding mission organized and funded by SCARE (and Jack Braun) and under the official sponsorship of the United Nations and the World Health Organization (WHO) set off on a five-month tour of over three-dozen nations to investigate the treatment of wild card victims around the world. The junket's co-chairs were Tachyon and Hartmann. The plane, nicknamed "The Stacked Deck," was a customized 747 with the central cabin seats replaced with a small medical lab, a press room, and a miniature television studio. The newsmen covering the event were assigned the tail area. The business-class cabin was used by aides, assistants, secretaries, and security personnel including two government aces, Billy Ray and Joann Jefferson. The first-class cabin was reserved for the 21 delegates: jokers (Desmond Xavier, Chrysalis, Howard "Troll" Mueller, Father Squid, Dorian Wilde), aces (Jack Braun, Mordecai Jones, Asta Lenser, Dr. Tachyon, Mistral, Peregrine, Hiram Worchester), politicians (Senator Hartmann of New York; Senator Lyons of Wyoming; Congressman Nathan Rabinowitz, part of New York City that includes Jokertown; Ericsson from the WHO).

They took off from Tomlin International Airport on December 1, 1986. Stops included Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Guatemala, Panama, Peru, Brazil (December 23), Argentina (December 29), South Africa (January 1), Kenya, Ethiopia (January 16), Israel/Palestine (January 30), Syria (Damascus, February 3, Nur al-Allah's camp February 4), Afghanistan (February 7), India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, China, Japan, South Korea, the Soviet Union, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Sweden (April 10), West Germany, Italy, France, Great Britain, Ireland, Canada, and they arrived back at New York on April 29th. Many of the adventures the various characters had in these places are recorded in detail in their character biographies.

## HARTMANN TRIES AGAIN

The Democratic National Convention in Atlanta was the scene of intense political drama as Senator Gregg Hartmann made his second run for the presidency, against a strong field of candidates including Michael Dukakis, Jesse Jackson, and the fundamentalist preacher Leo Barnett (July



1988). The convention was an exciting see-saw event as the two favorites, Hartmann and Barnett, duked it out during the initial rounds of balloting. Neither was averse to using political infighting and dirty tricks against the other. Actual physical combat, including street fighting and several assassination attempts, also occurred. The convention climaxed in a wild brawl on live television between Carnifex, Mackie Messer, and Demise during Hartmann's acceptance speech.

Simultaneous with the convention, Daniel Brennan and Jay Ackroyd investigated Chrysalis's murder and during their inquiries evidence of Hartmann's true nature as the murderous psychopath Puppetman finally came to light. Tachyon read Hartmann's mind and was sickened by what he saw. He realized he had to do whatever it took to prevent the monster that was Gregg Hartmann from becoming president. As Hartmann took the podium after the fight that left both Messer and Demise dead and Billy Ray severely wounded, Tachyon mind-controlled the politician, and made him look like a fool on live television. Disgraced, Hartmann resigned his nomination, his political career over.

# THE JUMPERS

In a little-publicized event, Joker squatters led by Bloat took over Ellis Island (fall 1988). Largely simultaneous with this was the beginning of the jumper phenomenon in which a group of apparent aces used the ability to jump their consciousness into another person's body to commit petty crimes, then jump back into their own bodies to leave their victims holding the bag. Thanks mainly to the investigations of Jerry Strauss, David Butler became the first person arrested for jumper activity. Butler immediately escaped custody by jumping a couple of cops, but at least the jumper phenomenon was brought into the public eye.

A plethora of events occurred during the next year. Jokertown rioted when Hiram Worchester was given five years probation after pleading guilty to involuntary manslaughter in Chrysalis's death (January 1989). The Shadow Fist Society, the preeminent criminal organization in New York City, broke into pieces after Kien's sudden disappearance (December 1989). Turf wars exploded over the city again as minor criminal associations rushed to fill the vacuum caused by the disintegration of the Fists. Bloat's power, and size, increased dramatically on Ellis Island, which had become a homeland for disenfranchised jokers. The Jumpers, led by Blaise Andrieux, also used it as a home base. And the number and ferocity of jumper attacks increased dramatically over the year. No one felt safe. President George Bush considered signing a revival of the anti-exotic laws. Two states passed bills calling for mandatory sterilization of wild card carriers.

The Rox Campaign began in earnest (September 1990) after two failed attempts to clear Bloat and his followers from Ellis Island (which the joker squatters and their jumper allies had dubbed "the Rox"). The government finally suddenly got serious and General Frank Zappa led an assault force from his headquarters at Ebbets Field. Philip Baron von Herzenhagen put together a team of aces (including Modular Man, the Reflector, Detroit Steel, Legion, the Turtle, Cyclone and his daughter Mistral) while George G. Battle led a covert team (Billy Ray, Jerry Strauss masquerading as Jay Ackroyd, Crypt Kicker, Legion, Cameo, and Black Shadow) against the joker stronghold via the caverns below the island.

Bloat's power had grown exponentially over the past year, as had his defenses. Bloat's Wall, which started as an invisible mental barrier, was transformed into a potent physical structure and extended to the New Jersey shore where Bloat's jokers had captured military ordnance and equipment, including radar sets, Vulcan 20 mm anti-aircraft systems, 60 mm lightweight mortars, .50 caliber heavy machine guns, and Bradley Fighting Vehicles, as well as stores of ammunition.

The jokers dug in the Bradleys, the 50s, and one of the Vulcans behind the Jersey Gate. The rest of the ordnance was moved to Ellis Island. Bloat's forces had also been armed by the Twisted Fists and reinforced with the aces Herne the Hunter, the Sleeper, and Durg at'Morakh, the Takisian killing machine who had taken up service under Blaise.

Bloat's Wall also encompassed the Statue of Liberty. Her green copper flesh had been fused seamlessly with the southern section of the Wall. Only her head remained as it had been. Her body was naked and voluptuous with a huge oak and iron gate between her legs. Her torch had been moved behind Bloat's body in his Castle, the old Ellis Island administration building.

Bloat had also constructed Bloat's Moat, an encircling river of lava that protected the cavern system underground. Besides his force of jokers and jumpers, Bloat also called upon a cadre of demon knights pulled by his fervid mind from the Heironymous Bosch painting mounted in his Castle hall.

Zappa realized Ellis was too small for an artillery-supported landing, since any falling shells would be just as likely to hit his own troops as the Rox defenders. Therefore he decided not to send troops to the island until resistance was over. He wanted as many jokers and jumpers to surrender as possible before the shelling started, so he had Modular Man drop leaflets with a 1-800-I-GIVE-UP number that siphoned off some less-than-enthusiastic combatants, including a number of jumpers.

The Turtle ferried the government's peace delegation over to the Rox, but the parlay failed when Bloat read Hartmann's mind and discovered his true nature. In a rage at what he considered Hartmann's betrayal of jokers, Bloat sent Herne and the Wild Hunt after the ex-senator. The Turtle managed to save Hartmann, but destroyed the Brooklyn Bridge in the process.

Modular Man's creator, Dr. Maxim Travnicek, forced the android to defect and spill Zappa's strategy to Bloat. Additional data was gathered by Patchwork's eye and ear that had been stashed in Zappa's headquarters. Bloat sent Modular Man and the jumper Bodysnatcher (in Pulse's body) to destroy shore batteries and ammo dumps and joker assault teams concealed about the city hit various targets. Zappa started the bombardment, which was not as successful as he'd hoped it would be because Bloat covered the Rox, as well as adjacent areas of New York City and New Jersey, in a thick fog bank.

The overt ace assault team then attacked. Zappa's assault plan split the team into four parts, a Legion accompanying each, as they simultaneously struck from four directions. But these attacks were mere diversions. The real assault force was the covert ace team which came in from the caverns, led by George G. Battle, whose prime order was to kill Bloat, no matter what. The overt assault was broken off as Cyclone was killed by Molly Bolt who had jumped his daughter, Mistral.

The battleship *New Jersey* commenced major shelling as the covert team penetrated to Bloat's Crystal Castle, but Battle's plan went out the window when Wyungare, the aboriginal shaman who had come to America to stop Bloat from draining the Dreamtime of power, saved the hideously large joker from an attack by an outraged Zelda. Cameo then channeled Wyungare, who died saving Bloat, and Wyungare and other shamans opened a gate that took Bloat and the Rox to the Dreamtime, just before a tidal wave caused by the Turtle overwhelmed the Rox, scouring the island clean.

# THE END OF AN ERA

Dr. Tachyon had been languishing on the Rox, held captive in the body of Kelly Jenkins, a Jumper wannabe, and impregnated by his own grandson, Blaise. Bloat cut a deal with Black Shadow to free Tachyon just before the

military assault began. Blaise, frightened by the beginning of the assault, fled the Rox accompanied by his servant Durg at'Morakh. Durg talked him into stealing Tachyon's ship, *Baby*, and fleeing to Takis. They brought along Tachyon's body, inhabited by the consciousness of Kelly Jenkins, to dupe *Baby* into following their orders.

A desperate Tachyon chased them with the Turtle, but the starship was beyond their grasp. Tachyon was forced to sign a contract with Jube, as a Network representative, to gain passage to follow them to Takis, and Jay Ackroyd and Mark Meadows accompanied him in a desperate attempt to recover his natural body.

Tachyon's sojourn on the Earth thus ended after nearly 45 years and much spilled brandy, blood, and tears. The planet won't be the same without him.

After a world war, much suffering, and the intervention of the Network in Takisian affairs, Tachyon ultimately birthed his child, recovered his rightful body, and rose to his proper place as ruler of the House of Ilkazam (fall 1990 to spring 1991). Mark Meadows returned to Earth diminished by the loss of Starshine. (More information on these events is presented in **Chapter 3**, along with the story of Mark's adventures with the New Joker Brigade in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.) Jay Ackroyd returned to the Earth with a chestful of jewels and alien trinkets and a Takisian wife named Hastet.

# DARKNESS FALLS

The Democratic ticket of Leo Barnett and the hero of the Rox War General Frank Zappa defeated incumbent George H.W. Bush and independent candidate Ross Perot in a three-way race for president (November 1992). At first the charismatic vice president provided something of a balance to the more conservative Barnett, but Zappa soon died of cancer and Barnett lobbied for new restrictive anti-wild card laws, passed by Congress in the fall of 1993. These laws included registration of all wild carders who work in the public sector, such as firemen, police, teachers, medical workers, and all government workers. The days of wild card *chic* had long since vanished.

Lloyd Bentsen of Texas was appointed vice president (February 1994) to fill out the remainder of Zappa's term.

Meanwhile, the Card Sharks devised their final solution to the wild card problem as they saw it. Clara van Renssaeler, Card Shark scientist and the granddaughter of Blythe van Renssaeler (Brain Trust), created the Black Trump virus (April 1994) designed to attack anyone—ace, joker, deuce, latent, or carrier—with the wild card in their genes. Although van Renssaeler ultimately repented of her awful creation and destroyed most of the virus, a number of Sharks made it out of the country with small stocks of the Black Trump. The rest of this tale, including the limited release of the virus in Jerusalem, is recounted in the section on international history section found in **Chapter 3**.

# THE LOST YEARS

The years between the mid-1990s and the early 2000s remain largely unrecorded in the *Wild Cards* canon, but the following provides at least a glimpse of the political background of that period. While probably accurate as to general outline, some of the details recounted in the following section may ultimate prove inaccurate when the history of these years is written in full.

Leo Barnett and Lloyd Bentsen defeated the Republican ticket of Bob Dole and Jack Kemp (November 1996), winning re-election to a second term. Barnett continued to tighten the screws on wild carders.

Spirited primaries took place during the next election cycle for both parties. Bob Graham (appointed to fill out Bentsen's term after the vice president suffered a stroke in the summer of 1998) represented the Barnett wing and New Jersey Senator Bill Bradley the anti-Barnett wing of the Democratic Party. The Republican contenders included Jack Kemp, Jeb Bush, Newt Gingrich, Steve Forbes, Elizabeth Dole, and Sonny Bono. After bitter battles, the Democratic Party nominated Bradley, the Republican Party Bush. With the Democrats still deeply divided, the Republican ticket of Jeb Bush and Colin Powell easily defeated Bradley and Gephardt in the general election.

Jeb appointed his brother George Secretary of Defense. George was forced to resign partway through the term after various scandals and charges of incompetence.

In the next election cycle John F. Kennedy, Jr. and Ann Richards defeated Jeb Bush in his re-election bid. Daryl Hannah became first lady.

# ARMAGEDDON: BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

As it turns out they were a little off when figuring the exact year of the Millennium, and it finally seemed to have arrived when a couple of End Days sects—the Millennians, led by ex-President Leo Barnett from his Peaceable Kingdom theme park in Branson, Missouri, and the ancient brotherhood of the Allumbrados, led by Cardinal Romulus Contarini—battled over the fate of John Fortune (summer 2003).

Fortune's card finally turned while taking in the Siegfried and Ralph show at the Mirage Hotel in Las Vegas, and it seemed that, all odds to the contrary, Fortune was one of the lucky ones, pulling an ace with healing powers. But, as is almost always the case, initial appearances were deceiving. What John actually pulled was a slow-acting Black Queen. His body temperature rose higher and higher and though his body didn't burn, everything around him could.

A coalition of aces, including Billy Ray, John's long-suffering bodyguard Jerry Strauss, the fiery Midnight Angel, and the oldest ace in the world, John Nighthawk, strove to find a way to save John Fortune's life.

But it took the unexpected return of Fortunato and an ultimate sacrifice on his part to save both his son and the world. See John Fortune's bio in **Chapter 4** for details.

# THE NEW GENERATION

The new generation of wild card history is now being written with stories set in the year 2007 and beyond. In these volumes you'll see some old favorites; *e.g.*, Billy Ray, Peregrine, John Fortune, and Mark Meadows. But the main focus is on a new cast of characters: The Amazing Bubbles, Stuntman, Earthwitch, Curveball, Wild Fox, Rustbelt, Drummer Boy (of the punk band Joker Plague), Jonathan Hive, Little Fat Boy, Toad Man, the Lama and the Llama (whatever you do, don't confuse them), Hoodoo Mama, and, yes, as a bonus for the careful readers among you, the long anticipated debut of the Holy Roller.

Their stories begin in the first volume of the Committee triad, *Inside Straight,* released in January 2008.

# WILD CARDS TIMELINE

The following is a timeline of events in the history of the *Wild Cards* world for quick reference to the various historical events referred to in this and other chapters.

**1777:** Cagliostro (Giuseppe Balsamo of Palermo) encounters the "star brother," a Ly'bahr scout, and receives the shakti device, as well as information about TIAMAT (the Swarm).

**1939-1940:** Jetboy serves with the RAF in the Battle of Britain and with the Flying Tigers in China.

**1941-1945:** Jetboy earns a special commission from President Roosevelt and flies for the United States for the remainder of World War II.

**April 29, 1945:** Jetboy is marooned on a desert island in the South Pacific for the remainder of the war.

**July 1946:** Jetboy is rescued and returns to the United States.

**August 12, 1946:** Jetboy released from government service.

**August 23, 1946:** Dr. Tachyon lands at White Sands, New Mexico. When he makes contact with the personnel of the military base, they don't believe his outlandish story and detain him.

**September 15, 1946:** Wild Card Day. Jetboy fails to prevent the release of the wild card virus over Manhattan. Some 10,000 people die and the wild card is loose in the world.

**September 17, 1946:** An outbreak of the wild card virus occurs on the cruise ship *Queen Mary* in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean.

**October 1946:** Archibald Holmes recruits Jack Braun (Golden Boy) for the Exotics For Democracy (EFD). Earl Sanderson, Jr. (Black Eagle) and David Harstein (the Envoy) recruited soon thereafter.

**late-1946**: The EFD forcibly remove Argentinian dictator Juan Perón from power. He flees to Portugal, and ultimately moves on to China, where he becomes a military advisor to Chiang Kai-shek. He later returns to Argentina.

Blythe van Renssaeler (Brain Trust) joins EFD, earning it the nickname The Four Aces.

**1947**: There is a probable massive wild card virus strike in the Soviet Union, but the secretive, some might say paranoid, state remains mostly silent on the subject of wild carders well into the 1970s. Trofim D. Lysenko, the czar of all Stalinist scientific endeavors and later revealed to be a joker himself, claims the supposedly alien virus is merely a mask for a diabolical bourgeois imperialistic experiment. In any case, for decades all wild card victims in the Soviet Union disappear into government service, the work camps, or shallow graves.

There is a massive wild card outbreak in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, which brings months of panic and violence. A disgruntled ace melts the Corcovado (the statue of Christ atop a mountain overlooking the city), making it resemble a joker, a misshapen hunchback with one of its arms missing and the other twisted around to support its distorted body. The statue is never repaired. Santa Theresa, the old section of Rio, becomes its Jokertown.

**August 10-13, 1947:** Hindus and Muslims riot in Calcutta, India, as each blames the other for a wild card outbreak. Twenty-five thousand are killed in the ensuing riots. A Nepalese corporal subsequently brings the virus to Nepal, causing a major outbreak later that year but never coming down with the virus himself.

**1948:** There are more massive wild card epidemics in the port cities of Mombasa, Kenya, and Port Said, Egypt. The Egyptian outbreak has monumental repercussions for the entire Middle East region.

**January 30, 1948:** Earl Sanderson, Jr., the Black Eagle, deflects a bullet meant for the Indian spiritual and political leader Mohandas K. Gandhi, saving him from assassination.

**mid-1948:** David Harstein talks Generalissimo Francisco Franco into resigning his fascist dictatorship of Spain, and accompanies him as he goes into exile in Switzerland. A bewildered Franco soon recants his resignation, but there are few do-overs in politics. He remains out of power, alternately sulking and raving.

**1949:** Hong Kong wild card outbreak.

HUAC turns its attention to the Four Aces, resulting in the dissolution of the group.

**1950:** Auckland, New Zealand, wild card outbreak. The Auckland Jokertown is relatively neat, clean, and prosperous. The jokers are called "uglies."

Jack Braun goes to fight in Korea.

Senator McCarthy begins exploiting wild card hysteria in a series of Senate hearings for his own ends.

**1951:** A wild card outbreak sweeps through both North and South Korea.

**1952:** A Network survey ship leaves two observers to report on Earth. One is Jhubben, who becomes known in Jokertown as Jube the Walrus.

Senator McCarthy creates SCARE, the Senate Committee for Ace Resources and Endeavors.

Pan Rudo sets Croyd Crenson up for the theft of plutonium from the Los Alamos National Laboratory in an attempt to discredit aces in general.

**1954:** Congress enacts the Exotic Powers Control Act and the Special Conscription Act. Some wild cards register; most simply disappear underground.

**1955:** Senator McCarthy introduces the Alien Disease Containment Bill. It goes down to defeat, signaling the end of McCarthy's political influence.

**May, 1957:** Senator Joseph McCarthy dies in Bethesda Naval Hospital, ostensibly of hepatitis.

An ace-powered psychopath slaughters 37 patients in St. Dympna's in New York before a mysterious patient from the second floor stops the carnage by seemingly draining the psychopath's mind, then escapes the mental hospital in an unknown manner.

**1958:** NACA attempt to reach Earth orbit sabotaged by the Card Sharks.

**1959:** The Cuban Communist revolution, led by Che Guevara, fails to unseat the corrupt fascist government of the Batista family. Guevara himself escapes to foment further failed revolutions in South and Central America, until he dies under mysterious circumstances in 1965.

**1960:** John F. Kennedy elected president of the United States.

**1962:** Nick Williams (Will-o'-Wisp) killed while trying to expose the Card Sharks.

The Astronomer first makes psychic contact with the Swarm Mother and later joins the Masons.

**1963:** A wild card outbreak strikes Northern Ireland. Thousands die and hundreds of jokers are forcibly sterilized and relocated to Rathlin Island, off the Irish coast.

**November 1963:** President Kennedy assassinated.

Dr. Tachyon returns to the United States. The Great and Powerful Turtle become the first public ace since the 1950s.

**1965:** Cyclone becomes the first public costumed ace.

**1966:** Dr. Tachyon opens the Jokertown Clinic.

**1968:** The first (secret) Moon landing, bankrolled by private enterprise and assisted by ace powers.

The Card Sharks arrange Bobby Kennedy's assassination. Brandon van Renssaeler was the bagman who paid the blood money to killer Sirhan Sirhan.

**1969:** Fortunato first encounters the Masons.

**1970:** The Radical first appears in People's Park in San Francisco.

**1971:** First (official) Moon landing by U.S. Space Command.

Aces High opens in New York City.

Tomas Marion Douglas, the Lizard King, lead singer of Destiny, dies after successfully taking the Trump virus.

**1973:** The Swarm Mother enters Earth's solar system and begins to evolve intelligence.

**1974:** *L'Aigle Noir,* Earl Sanderson, Jr., dies in France.

**July 1976:** The Democratic National Convention in New York City and the Great Jokertown Riot. Senator Gregg Hartmann's public breakdown during the Riot loses him the nomination to Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter.

**1977:** Congress narrowly repeals both the Exotic Powers Control Act and the Special Conscription Act at the behest of President Carter.

**1980:** President Carter accepts responsibility for a botched rescue attempt of American hostages in Iran by a secret team of aces. In fact, the failed mission is part of a Card Shark plot.

**1985:** Dr. Maxim Travnicek creates Modular Man.

The Card Sharks attempt to wipe out the joker population of Kenya by infecting them all with AIDS. The plan is brought to light by Dr. Bradley Finn, though not before thousands are infected with AIDS and die.

**December 1985:** The first wave of the Swarm Invasion hits Earth, killing tens of thousands.

**1986:** Demise begins working for the Astronomer.

Yeoman comes to New York City and begins his war against Kien Phuc and the Shadow Fists.

**Spring 1986:** Dr. Tachyon, Tommy Tudbury, Asta Lenser, and Mark Meadows are kidnapped by a group of Takisians led by Tachyon' cousin Zabb. The kidnapped aces ultimately defeat them and a disgraced Zabb is forced to take employment with the Network.

**May 1986:** Fortunato leads a group of aces to raid the Masons's headquarters in the Cloisters.

**June 1986:** Dr. Tachyon, Fortunato, Yeoman, and Mai Minh put an end to the Swarm threat.

**September 15, 1986:** The Astronomer and his agents attack the aces who took part in the raid on the Cloisters. The Howler and Kid Dinosaur are killed and Modular Man's head is blown off. Fortunato and the

Astronomer duel in the skies over Manhattan, then Demise kills the Astronomer. Fortunato retires to a monastery in Japan.

**December 1, 1986:** WHO-sponsored world tour leaves America.

**December 1986:** Ti Malice takes Hiram Worchester as a mount, leaving Haiti for New York.

**January 1987:** Armies led by the Mayan aces the Hero Twins, Hunapu and Xbalanque, overthrow the Guatemalan government and set up a state under fundamentalist Mayan beliefs.

Peregrine learns she is pregnant by Fortunato.

The Nur sect attacks the Temple of the Living Gods in Egypt.

**February 1987:** Kahina the Seer (under Puppetman's influence) cuts the Nur al-Allah's throat, crippling his ace power.

New York D.A. Rosemary Muldoon is exposed as Mafia Don Rosa Maria Gambione.

**March 1987:** Reverend Leo Barnett announces he is running for president of the United States.

**April 1987:** Members of the Red Army Faction kidnap Senator Gregg Hartmann, but he is recovered unharmed.

Dr. Tachyon discovers his grandson, Blaise, while in France and brings him back to America with him.

Georgy Polyakov leaves the KGB, and Russia, and moves to the US.

**April 29, 1987:** The WHO-sponsored world tour returns to America.

**May 1987:** "Typhoid Croyd" causes a new wild card outbreak in NYC. Hundreds die and a few new aces and jokers come into being.

**June 1987:** Buddy Holley makes a comeback at the AIDS/Wild Card benefit concert at the Funhouse.

Dr. Travnicek rebuilds Modular Man.

Martial law is declared in New York City due to the new wild card outbreak and ongoing gang-war violence.

**July 1987:** The Shadow Fist Society wins a gang-war against the Mafia to become the pre-eminent criminal syndicate in New York.

Daniel Brennan (Yeoman) and Jennifer Maloy (Wraith) leave New York City and move upstate.

Xavier Desmond dies of cancer.

**July 1988:** The Democratic National Convention in Atlanta. Senator Hartmann loses the nomination for president once again with a breakdown on live television (this time induced by Dr. Tachyon, after he learns Hartmann is Puppetman).

Chrysalis is murdered by an unknown assailant. Five days later, the Crystal Palace burns down after a cataclysmic battle between Quasiman and Yeoman on one side and Lazy Dragon and Fadeout on the other.

**Fall 1988:** Beginning of jumper activities.

**late 1988:** Joker squatters led by Bloat take over Ellis Island, nicknaming it The Rox.

**January 1989:** Hiram Worchester given five years' probation for the involuntary manslaughter of Debra Jo Jory (Chrysalis).

**Summer 1989:** Mark Meadows turns his head shop into a New Age health food store called the New Dawn Wellness Center.

**December 1989:** The Shadow Fist Society fragments following Kien's sudden disappearance.

**September 1990:** The Rox Campaign: military, government, and ace forces attempt to remove Bloat and his followers from Ellis Island. Wyungare and other shamans help translate the Rox and its inhabitants into the Dreamtime. Jumper activity apparently ends.

The Turtle's burnt-out shell is left outside the Wild Card Dime Museum. The Turtle disappears.

**1991:** Dr. Tachyon returns to Takis, regains his proper body, and assumes his place as head of House Ilkazam.

**Summer 1991:** Guerrilla war breaks out in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Cap'n Trips overthrows the government and one of his "friends," Moonchild, is elected president of Free Vietnam.

**November 1992:** Leo Barnett is elected president of the United States with General Frank Zappa as his vice president.

**1992:** Hunapu and Xbalanque are supposedly slain in a battle with resurgent Guatemalan government forces at Nebaj, but actually bide their time in the Guatemalan lowlands on the Belize border, waiting for their chance to return to power.

**1993:** Congress passes new restrictive wild card laws, including registration of all wild carders who work in the public sector, such as firemen, police, teachers, medical workers, and government workers.

**September 16, 1993:** Our Lady of Perpetual Misery in Jokertown is torched on Black Queen Day and burns to the ground. Over a hundred jokers die in the fire.

**February 1994:** Lloyd Bentsen of Texas appointed vice president after Frank Zappa dies of cancer.

**April 1994:** Clara van Renssaeler creates the Black Trump virus.

**Summer 1994:** The Sleeper engineers a jailbreak on Governor's Island.

The Card Sharks release the Black Trump in Jerusalem. A coalition of aces and jokers keep it from being disseminated throughout the world, but over 5,000 die in Jerusalem before counter-measures bring the plague to an end.

**November 1996:** Leo Barnett and Lloyd Bentsen win re-election.

**Summer 1998:** Bob Graham appointed vice president after Lloyd Bentsen suffers a stroke.

**November 2000:** Republicans Jeb Bush and Colin Powell elected president and vice president of the U.S.

**Summer 2003:** The Millennians and the Allumbrados battle over the fate of John Fortune.

**November 2004:** Democrats John F. Kennedy, Jr. and Ann Richards defeat Bush's re-election bid.

WILD CARDS

CHAPTER THREE:
THE WORLD OF
WILD CARDS

The Earth of *Wild Cards* is both extremely different and yet strangely the same as our own. On the one hand, it has seen massive death by alien infection, people with superhuman powers, freaks barely recognizable as human, invasion by monsters from space, and crimes committed by people able to switch bodies at will. On the other hand, people are still people. There's television, music, politics, war, peace, love, sex, and violence, all not so different from the real world. In fact, a big part of the series' appeal is its realistic treatment of all its fantastic elements. So while there are unquestionably some differences in the *Wild Cards* world, the essential things remain the same.

This chapter primarily looks at the differences (since we figure you can find out the things that remain the same easily enough on your own). It starts out with an overview of New York City, epicenter of the wild card phenomenon, and a guide to the interesting places in and around the city, particularly Jokertown. It provides a snapshot of some of the popular culture and entertainment, then moves on to the world beyond New York. It concludes with the *universe* beyond Earth, looking at some of the alien civilizations and species that have played an important part in the series and events affecting the *Wild Cards* world.

# NEW YORK CITY

No place on Earth has suffered more, but also benefitted more, from the existence of the wild card virus than New York City, where the virus was first unleashed on an unsuspecting world. This chapter serves primarily as a descriptive narrative of changes wrought to New York City and its surroundings by the virus, with snippets regarding internal politics and brief bits of history not covered in other chapters.

An introduction to the actual geography of New York City is also included for those unfamiliar with the region.

## AN NYC PRIMER

New York City consists of five boroughs. These boroughs can be broken up into literally hundreds of distinctive neighborhoods, each with their own idiosyncratic ethnic, political, and social history. According to the most recent census, the current 8.2 million inhabitants are packed into the city's 322 square miles, making New York City the second most densely populated city in the United States (and that doesn't count the millions of commuters and tourists who swell the city's population on a daily basis). Most of the wild card action has centered around Manhattan, but all five boroughs are discussed briefly so the reader can get an idea as to how these locations relate to each other.

### THE BRONX

The Bronx is the northernmost borough, and also (with the exception of a small community known as Marble Hill which is located on adjacent Manhattan Island) the only borough located on the American mainland. It's separated from Manhattan by the Harlem River, and from Queens by the East River. Among the attractions found in the Bronx are Yankee Stadium, home of the New York Yankee baseball team, and the Bronx Zoo. The borough's population is 1.365 million.

### BROOKLYN

With a population of 2.511 million, Brooklyn is the city's most populous borough. It is located next to Queens on the western end of Long Island and is separated from Manhattan by the East River. Brooklyn is known for its great social and ethnic diversity. Among the attractions found there are Ebbets Field, home of the Brooklyn Dodgers baseball team, and its long beachfront, which includes Coney Island.

### QUEENS

Queens is the largest borough as well as the most ethnically diverse county in America, and with a growing population already at 2.257 million it may well soon overtake Brooklyn as the most populous borough. Originally a collection of small towns and villages that became engulfed in urban sprawl as the city grew, it is mostly residential and middle class in nature. It is located next to Brooklyn on the west end of Long Island and is separated from Manhattan and the Bronx by the East River. The city's two major airports, LaGuardia Airport and Tomlin International Airport, are located within its boundaries.

### STATEN ISLAND

Staten Island is a good-sized island connected to Brooklyn by the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge, to Manhattan by service from the Staten Island Ferry Line, and to the much-closer New Jersey mainland by three bridges. It is mostly suburban in nature, with a large greenbelt in its middle containing one of the last untouched forests in the city. Staten Island's population is 457,000.

### MANHATTAN

With a population of 1.593 million, Manhattan is the most densely populated borough. It is home to most of the city's skyscrapers, as well as Central Park, and most of the wild card locations, including Aces High, Jetboy's Tomb, and many other important sites. It is also the city's financial center, contains the United Nations and the main offices of many major corporations. It is home to a number of important universities, numerous museums, and many cultural attractions, including the Broadway theater district, Greenwich Village, Madison Square Garden, and of course, Jokertown.

Manhattan is separated from the Bronx to the north by the Harlem River, from New Jersey to the west by the Hudson River, and from Long Island to the east by the East River.

Manhattan is loosely divided into three districts: Uptown (above 59th Street; Upper Manhattan is above 96th Street), Midtown (between 59th and 14th; "core" Midtown is above 33rd Street, while Midtown South is below 33rd), and Downtown (below 14th Street; Lower Manhattan is below Chambers Street). It is also divided on a north-south axis into the West Side (west of Fifth Avenue) and the East Side (east of Fifth Avenue).

## PLACES OF INTEREST

Now that you're somewhat oriented in regard to the geography of New York City, we can discuss some specific wild card locations. These places span the entirety of the *Wild Cards* series, so they are not all active (or even in existence!) at the same time. The descriptions relate when the locales are featured in the books, and in what way, along with the wild carders associated with them, if any.

The fate of some of these places remains unknown (or at least unclear) in *Wild Cards* history but you should feel free in your own *Wild Cards* game to elaborate or adjust as you see fit. For example, if it just wouldn't

NEW YORK CITY
1. The Cloisters
2. Yankee Stadium
3. Empire State Building
4. Bowery Dime Museum
5. Jokertown Precinct
6. Jube's Newsstand
7. The Crystal Palace
8. Jetboy's Tomb
9. Freakers
10. Ellis Island
11. Jokertown Clinic
1 MILE
Fort Tryon Park
Washington Heights
Bronx Park
Crotona Park
Bronx
Harlem
Randalls Island Park
Edison Power Plant
Central Park
Manhattan
Hudson River
East River
Queens
Madison Square Park
Greenwich Village
Jokertown
Tomlin International Airport (17 miles)
Brooklyn Heights
Ebbets Field (5 miles)
Brooklyn
Governor's Island
New Jersey Turnpike
Cross Bronx Expy
Major Deegan Expy
Henry Hudson Parkway
Harlem River Drive
Bruckner Expy
Broadway
Park Avenue
FDR
Tribborough Bridge
Lincoln Tunnel
Queensboro Bridge
Queens Midtown Tunnel
Holland Tunnel
Williamsburg Bridge
Brooklyn Bridge
Manhattan Bridge
Brooklyn Battery Tunnel
NEW YORK AREA
FIVE BOROUGHS
Bronx
Manhattan
Queens
Brooklyn
Staten Island
4 MILES
SCM

be *Wild Cards* for you and your group without an opportunity to visit Aces High, and you don't want to set your game before the establishment closed in the 1990s, feel free to keep it around, perhaps under new ownership. You can even make story hooks out of such adjustments: Who is the new owner of Aces High and does he or she have an agenda beyond serving the world's finest *hors-d'oeuvres* to the ace elite?

Most of the places in this section are found in (or around) Manhattan. Jokertown and its important locales are described in their own section that follows.

## ACES HIGH

Hiram Worchester's fabulous restaurant Aces High occupied the entire 86th floor of the Empire State Building (the lower observation deck in an alternate New York). The restaurant opened in 1971 and closed in the mid-1990s. From the early 1970s through the 1980s Aces High was *the* most *chic* restaurant in town.

The dining areas were terraced so customers could enjoy the magnificent views of the city. The kitchen, storage lockers, freezer, rest rooms, service elevator, and offices were located in the middle of the floor. Musicians entertained Aces High patrons from a niche near the dining area. The floor was marble. The walls were covered with framed, mostly autographed, photographs of celebrities of every conceivable sort, especially aces. There was a long curved bar in the main dining room and magnificent art deco chandeliers hung from the spacious ceiling. Wide glass double doors led to the Sunset Balcony, overlooking the Hudson River. The balcony was one of the most popular features of the restaurant and flying aces often eschewed the elevators to alight there. The Aces High colors were blue and silver, and they were usually reflected in Worchester's dress and the waitstaff's uniforms.

In September 1986, the head chef was Paul LeBarre (a typically bad-tempered French chef), the maitre d' (and Hiram's good right-hand man) was a tall, slender black man named Curtis who looked splendid, elegant, and even a bit austere in his tuxedo. Peter Chou was head of security. He collected Depression glass and black belts in various martial arts and swore or raised his voice only under the utmost provocation.

Every year on Wild Card Day Hiram Worchester hosted an aces-only party that was one of the most sought-after tickets in the city. You had to be a known ace, a guest of an ace, or exhibit your ace powers at the door to get in. Claiming you time travel in your sleep would *not* get you past security.

Hiram started the celebration the same way every year: He floated to the top of the ceiling next to one of the chandeliers and offered the first toast of the evening to Jetboy, then to Black Eagle, Brain Trust, and the Envoy (but never to Golden Boy), then the Turtle, then to all the aces, living and dead and yet to come, then to the jokers, and then to the memory of those who drew the Black Queen, then the Takisians and Dr. Tachyon, and then, again, to Jetboy, "the father of us all." And then the feasting began.

Wild Card Day, 1986, was a particularly explosive gala as the Astronomer tried to murder Water Lily, working on the waitstaff, by tossing her off the Sunset Balcony. She was saved by Peregrine and Hiram Worchester, and the Astronomer was ultimately driven off, but not before Croyd Crenson accidentally blew up Modular Man in the melee.

Many aces dined at Aces High over the years. It was one of Croyd Crenson's favorite hangouts, as well as the favorite of Black Shadow (in various guises).

Aces High went into a decline when Hiram was taken as a mount by Ti Malice, and closed soon after he was sentenced to probation for the involuntary manslaughter of Chrysalis.

## THE CLOISTERS

The Cloisters is located in Fort Tryon Park, near the northern tip of Manhattan Island, on a hill overlooking the Hudson River, in four acres of parkland, now abandoned and gone wild. Once a branch of the Metropolitan Museum of Art dedicated to the art and architecture of the European Middle Ages, the building was vacated by the Museum in the late 1960s and lay abandoned until it was taken over by the Astronomer as his headquarters when he became leader of the Egyptian Masons. It was protected by youth street gangs working for the Astronomer and hanging out in the surrounding park.

The Cloisters itself consists of a number of disassembled medieval European buildings put together like the pieces of a giant jigsaw puzzle back in the 1930s. Unfortunately much of it was destroyed in the raid led by Fortunato (May 1986) which cleaned out the Egyptian Masons. The underground catacombs were left fairly intact, however, and the Astronomer and his remaining loyal minions returned there to roost and to nurse their hatred until they struck back on Wild Card Day in 1986 at the aces who had attacked them.

## THE COSMIC PUMPKIN HEAD SHOP AND ORGANIC DELI

Mark Meadows opened the head shop and delicatessen called the Cosmic Pumpkin ("Food for the Body, Mind, & Spirit") on Fitz-James O'Brien Street, near the border of Jokertown and the Village, in the early 1980s. The Pumpkin was tended by two clerks (Susan and Brenda), sturdy young women given to wearing CUNY sweatshirts, who looked rather alike. Mark lived above the head shop with his daughter, Sprout. There was also an extensive biochemical laboratory on the second floor adjacent to the living quarters.

During Mark's second custody battle with his ex-wife Kimberly, he got rid of the head shop accouterments, underground comics, and black light posters, and turned the Pumpkin into a New Age health food joint called the New Dawn Wellness Center (summer 1989).

## EBBETS FIELD

Ebbets Field is located in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn, in a block bounded by Bedford Avenue, Sullivan Place, McCeever Place, and Montgomery Street. It is the long-time home of the Brooklyn Dodgers baseball team and was General Frank Zappa's headquarters and staging point for the Rox Campaign (September 1990).

## ELLIS ISLAND ("THE ROX")

Ellis Island is located in New York Harbor north of Liberty Island. Only 32 acres in extent, it was largely created by landfill, and is located mostly in Jersey City waters, with a bit slopping over into New York City territory. The ensuing jurisdictional squabble is one of the main reasons it was an attractive target for the original joker squatters.

Ellis Island was where the government once processed immigrants to the United States. The island's main building is the old administration building, surrounded by a number of lesser structures. The administration building is six stories of brick with limestone trim and longer than a football field. Copper-domed observation towers stand another 40 feet high on each of the building's corners. This building became the center of Bloat's domain, which he transformed into the Crystal Castle.

Bloat and his band of squatters arrived on Ellis Island in the fall of 1988. Bloat erected a mental barrier, "Bloat's Wall," about a mile and a half around the island, making it difficult, if not impossible, for unwanted visitors (cops, for example) to approach. Such uninvited sightseers suffered sharp physical discomfort, including nausea, severe body pain and spasms, and white noise buzzing in their ears. If they persisted in coming too close they ultimately lost consciousness. The only way to approach the Rox safely was passage with the joker Charon.

Ellis Island got the nickname The Rox, as well as an unsavory reputation as a refuge for teenage gang members, in late 1989. Lost in jurisdictional limbo between the National Park Service, New Jersey authorities, and New York City, eventually all police just stopped going there. Depending on who you listen to, the Rox was either a refuge where jokers help one another or a gaping wound where the worst of those touched by the wild card gathered. One thing was sure: Death was common and varied there. Makeshift dwellings clung to and between the islands' decaying buildings, which scarcely provided enough room and shelter for all the immigrants. Bloat ultimately used his wild card abilities to create an extensive cavern system under the Rox, providing more room for joker refugees and their allies, the Jumpers.

Bloat's powers, as well as ordinary rebuilding efforts, transformed the old administration building into his hybrid Disney/Escher vision of a medieval castle, and ultimately transmuted his Wall into an actual physical obstacle reaching out to the nearby Jersey shore and south to Liberty Island, encompassing a disturbingly altered Statue of Liberty.

The authorities made two half-hearted attempts to roust the squatters off the Rox, but then finally got serious. General Frank Zappa headed the Rox Campaign, including Army, Air Force, and Navy units (such as the battleship *New Jersey*) as well as two teams of aces. Bloat and his allies proved no match for the combined government forces. Fortunately, before the Rox was ultimately deluged by a tidal wave raised by the angry Turtle, the aboriginal Australian shaman Wyungare, aided by a team of wild card mystics, managed to translate the Rox and its inhabitants to a safe alternate dimension (September 1990), a fact very few people actually know. So far as most are concerned, the Turtle's wave washed the Rox clean, leaving virtually nothing behind.

## THE FAMOUS BOWERY WILD CARD DIME MUSEUM

Located on Bowery Street, the Famous Bowery Dime Museum was converted to a Wild Card Museum (and those words added to its title) in the early 1960s. It was originally a rather small and non-politically correct establishment, with exhibits tending toward the sensational, if not the downright tawdry (for example, 20 jars of "monstrous joker babies" pickled in formaldehyde, and a diorama depicting a purported Jokertown orgy). Some exhibits did have educational value, including a newsreel about the Day of the Wild Card, and waxwork displays of Jetboy and the Four Aces.

When Charles Dutton purchased it he classed the joint up a bit. There are still many waxwork figures (most sculpted by the Oddity's artistic persona), but other dioramas are animatronic robots, and there is a selection of artifacts of true historical interest (for example, a succession of the Turtle's shells).

Additional dioramas include: the Great Jokertown Riot of 1976, Earth versus The Swarm (June 1987), the Astronomer's Wild Card Day attack on Aces High, and the Syrian debacle from the WHO-sponsored world tour. After the Rox Campaign a Bloat diorama was added (1990). Single figures in 1986 included Dr. Tachyon, resplendently dressed in an outfit donated by him to the museum, Peregrine, who maintains her smoldering sensuality even in wax, Cyclone, Hiram Worchester, and Chrysalis.

After the Rox Campaign, Dutton found a fourth burned-out Turtle shell in the street in front of the museum and added it to the collection (September 1990).

Admission was 25 cents in the early 1960s, $2 in 1986, $2.50 in 1987.

## GOVERNOR'S ISLAND MAXIMUM SECURITY PSYCHIATRIC UNIT

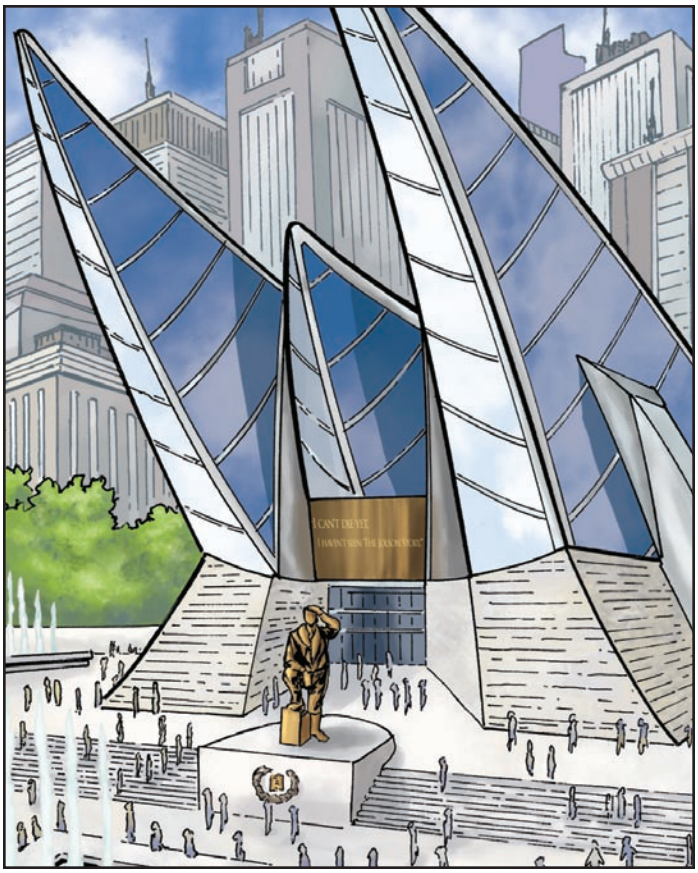
This maximum security prison is located on a 172-acre island, approximately half a mile from the southern tip of Manhattan, near the Brooklyn shore. It shares space on Governor's Island with a Coast Guard Station and a National Monument containing ruins of historic fortifications.

It was the site of a massive jailbreak engineered by Croyd Crenson in the summer of 1994. At the time many of the guards and supervisors at the facility, which housed rather harmless (if eccentric) wild card aces and jokers as well as authentic dangerous criminals, were low-level Card Sharks.

## JETBOY'S TOMB

Do you know the answer to the children's riddle, "Who is buried in Jetboy's Tomb?"

Jetboy's Tomb is a sprawling edifice of steel, glass, and marble overlooking the Hudson River and New Jersey beyond in downtown Manhattan (where, in another universe, buildings called the Twin Towers once stood). It fills the entire block where pieces of the JB-1 came raining down on September 15, 1946.



The tomb's huge flanged wings curve upward as if the structure itself were about to take flight. A full-sized replica of the JB-1 hangs from the ceiling. Jetboy's last words are inscribed above the doors, each letter chiseled into black Italian marble and filled with stainless steel: "I can't die yet. I haven't seen *The Jolson Story!*"

The plaza around the tomb is also marble. In it stands a 20-foot-tall steel statue of Jetboy, looking out over the West Side Highway and the Hudson River beyond, the metal of it taken from crashed planes. It was completed by the early 1960s, perhaps earlier.

In addition to being a draw for tourists (especially on Wild Card Day, the anniversary of Jetboy's death), Jetboy's Tomb is a popular landmark for giving directions and also as a late-night meeting place for conspiracy-minded wild cards, or those with a sense of the dramatic. It also tends to be a magnet for anti-wild card protests and violence, emblematic of the release of the virus on Manhattan.

## LIN'S CURIO EMPORIUM

Lin's Curio Emporium was a high-class Chinese art shop on Mulberry Street in Chinatown (mid-1970s through late 1980s). It was well-known in the art world for its rare antiquities and also in the drug world, where its clientele could pick up whatever they wanted in the way of illegal pharmaceuticals. It was a front for the Shadow Fists.

Sui Ma could often be found there until her death.

## ST. DYMPNA'S HOME FOR THE MENTALLY DEFICIENT AND CRIMINALLY INSANE

St. Dympna's is an old charity mental hospital taken over by Cardinal Contarini as Allumbrado headquarters in New York City. (Though he stays at the Waldorf-Astoria when he's in town.) It's a sinister, creepy building with many odd stories associated with it. It dates back to the mid-1800s when it was run by a nursing order of the Roman Catholic Church. It was closed in the 1970s.

Most of the patients stayed in the large dormitory-like rooms on the first floor, segregated according to sex. The private rooms on the second floor were reserved for affluent paying patients and the third floor was reserved for staff use and an infirmary. No one ever said much about what went on in the dungeon-like cells of the basement.

Among the perhaps apocryphal tales associated with St. Dympna's is one dating back to 1957, when an ace-powered psychopath escaped from the oubliette. He slaughtered 37 patients in the dormitory before a mysterious patient from the second floor—one who'd been catatonic for nearly a decade—suddenly awoke and stopped the carnage. This patient seemingly drained the psychopath's mind, then escaped St. Dympna's in an unknown manner.

## TOMLIN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Tomlin International—or simply "Tomlin," as locals and frequent users refer to it—is one of the two major airports in New York City. It's located in Queens, on the western end of Long Island. It's named for Robert Tomlin (Jetboy).

## YANKEE STADIUM

Yankee Stadium, located in the Bronx, is the home of the New York Yankees. The stadium scoreboard is one of Jay Ackroyd's favorite places to pop people when he's pressed for time and needs a ready-made location.

# JOKERTOWN

New York City has the largest population of aces and jokers in the world, and most of the jokers live in Jokertown, which in many ways is the twisted, but very human, heart of the *Wild Cards* world.

Like many Manhattan neighborhoods, Jokertown doesn't have sharply defined boundaries. Economic and social drift ebbs like the tides over the years. Pocket neighborhoods deteriorate as the economy goes south. They get gentrified when someone sees an article in a fashionable magazine and yuppies descend like well-healed locusts to kick out the locals and improve conditions. In any case, the boundaries of Jokertown can best be described as the Bowery to the East River, encompassing the district once known as the Bowery itself, as well as a good portion of what was once the Lower East Side. It is bordered by Chinatown, Little Italy, SoHo, and the East Village on the west; Stuyvesant on the north; and Downtown Manhattan on the south. The few blocks between Jokertown and the Lower East Side is known as the Edge.

The Bowery had been a genteel neighborhood in the second half of the 19th Century. By the arrival of the wild card virus it had become rundown and seedy, one of the least desirable Manhattan districts, so it's little wonder the latest class of undesirables, the jokers, gravitated—or were herded—there. Part of this drift was impersonal social and economic forces at work, part conscious policy by the Card Sharks, those wild card haters who wanted to keep as many jokers as contained as possible so they could be easily controlled, exploited... and eliminated. The area quickly becomes known as Jokertown. Nobody knows who coined the name, but it was in widespread use by the early 1950s.

Waves of immigrants once called the part of Jokertown that was the Lower East Side home. The teeming tenements once dwelt in by Irish, German, Slavic, Jewish, and Chinese immigrants is now largely the residential part of Jokertown, where jokers have put down their roots and are doing the best they can to raise their families. A smattering of poor nats live along with them. Most stores located in that area are mom-and-pop types, most bars are neighborhood hangouts.

The part of Jokertown once known as the Bowery still has a lot of hotels, many of them on the cheap side, as well as restaurants, clubs, theaters, and bars, many run by jokers. Depending on the fads of the moment, whether jokers are in and interesting or out and frightening, many of the businesses cater to tourists, especially the cheap gift shops filled with merchandise of questionable taste (much of it made in China, of course), low-rent nightclubs, and even the high-rent ones whose clientele have deeper pockets and more refined, if equally problematic, taste.

## CLUB DEAD NICHOLAS

Dead Nicholas is located on the site of the former Nicholas King's Mortuary near Jokertown, which was transformed into a trendy if somewhat morbidly gaudy nightclub (1986). It serves food, has a dance floor, and includes a private room in the back where various games of chance are played. The windows are draped in black, the tables are coffins, and the waiters all wear shrouds. The wall to the crematorium has been removed so diners can watch their steaks cooked on an open grill by demonic-looking joker chefs. Glass table tops sit atop coffins whose lids have been removed. Ghoulish figures—presumably of wax—are laid out within them in various states of unrest. The ace Cameo has a small, semi-private room above the club where she conducts most of her business (September 1990).

## THE CRYSTAL PALACE

The Crystal Palace was a bar on Jokertown's Henry Street, partially destroyed in the 1976 Great Jokertown Riot. The Palace was part of a block of three-story turn-of-the-century rowhouses. In the 1980s, the rest of the block was still rubble from the riot, with waist-high weeds and a few hardy saplings growing between piles of detritus. Sometimes disturbingly human-looking eyes could be glimpsed looking from the heaps of rubble dotting the block's trashed portion.

In the '70s and '80s, the bar's proprietress was Chrysalis. Charles Dutton was her silent partner, owning one-third of the business.

The Crystal Palace consisted of a Victorian-decorated entry room with a coat check nook, a large high-ceilinged saloon surrounded by curtained booths, and a private alcove in the back where Chrysalis held court. The dwarf bouncer Elmo Schaeffer and the blind telepathic bartender Sascha Starfin lived on the second floor. Chrysalis lived on the third floor. Her bedroom was furnished in Victorian fashion with an authentic Tiffany lamp hanging over a plush wine-colored fainting couch, a spider-legged table, a canopied four-poster bed, and a myriad of antique mirrors on the wall. Her first-floor office was also furnished in antiques, including a fabulous Oriental rug, floor-to-ceiling bookcases filled with leather-bound first editions, an antique oak desk, and comfortable leather chairs which looked like they'd once been in a men's club. The wallpaper was a very Victorian dark patterned violet.

Early on Chrysalis had an unused sewer line converted into a concealed underground entrance. One corridor went into a basement storeroom, another lead to Chrysalis's secret basement lair which was also the home of Mother and her Children, and where Chrysalis, in her guise as information broker, stored the reams of data she collected on various denizens of the city.

Chrysalis's silent partner, Charles Dutton, inherited ownership of the Palace after her death on July 18, 1988, but he didn't enjoy his property for long. The Crystal Palace burns down on July 23, 1988, after a cataclysmic battle between Quasiman and Yeoman on one side and Lazy Dragon and Fadeout on the other. Yeoman was able to rescue some of Mother's Children from the conflagration, relocating them to his farm upstate.

### MASKS

Masks are a common fashion accessory in and around Jokertown. Jokers use them to conceal some of their deformities while uptown nats and tourists wear them in the vain hope of "blending in" and being able to walk around Jokertown unnoticed. Naturally, the locals can spot a masked nat a mile away, but they tend to let them enjoy their "walk on the wild side," so long as they spend some money and then get the hell out of Jokertown. Those who think a mask will protect them late at night are often proven wrong by passing joker gangs.

Masks are available from numerous shops in and around Jokertown, many of which cater to the aforementioned tourists. Most are cheap rubber or plastic mass-produced in China or Taiwan, often of various celebrities or politicians who are especially popular (or unpopular and open to mockery) that month. High-class establishments like Holbrook's cater to customers looking for fine craftsmanship and unique style with masks that can fetch upwards of a thousand dollars.

## FREAKERS

Freakers is a strip joint located in Chatham Square. Although the strippers are jokers, no joker customers are allowed inside. It's perhaps best known for the huge, moving neon sign of a female stripper with six breasts and the club's actual entrance between her legs. Every Valentine's Day it holds a special "Twisted Miss" contest for joker participants. The place has a hint of danger to it. Things are not always what they seem to be, including the dancers who perform on the continually revolving stage. Freakers offers graphic adult entertainment and is not a place for the wife or kids.

## THE FUNHOUSE

The Funhouse was a Jokertown nightclub noted for the hundreds of distorting mirrors scattered throughout its main room. In the early 1960s it was the only establishment in Jokertown that attracted jokers and nats in equal numbers. Owned then by Angela Fascetti, its doorman was Randall, the maitre d' Xavier Desmond, and the bouncer was named Mal. Desmond bought it from Fascetti when she retired from public life in the mid-'60s. Under Desmond it was one of Jokertown's most beloved clubs, and hosted all the famous joker nightclub acts. As public taste in entertainment changed, the club started to lose money, but Desmond vowed to keep it open, a vow he kept until his July 1987 death.

## JOKERS WILD

The nightclub of the damned can be found in Rat's Alley, where the dead men lost their bones. The location changes every night, but the habitues, the victims, and the audience, whose thrills are fueled in part by the realization that they and the victims are interchangeable, have no trouble finding it.

Inside it is rather tacky. The low ceilings are dropped acoustic tile, the carpet is tattered black-and-white Dacron. The lights are flickering two-foot-long vertical fluorescent bulbs set in tin sconces along the walls. The round free-standing tables and the booths along the walls are covered by black-and-white checked cheesecloth and are crowded a little too close for comfort. The smoked-glass mirror behind the bar is cracked and blighted by some kind of black stain. There is a hardwood stage to the left, as you enter, raised half a meter off the floor. Stage right and stage left are small doorways covered by black curtains with little sparkles in them.

The door is kept by the Gatekeeper. He opens the club at sunset by setting a simple frame against any brick wall, creating the doorway that opens up to his own little pocket dimension. To close it in the morning, when the audience has left, he simply folds up the frame, puts it under his arm, and walks away. He allows only those touched by corruption, or the possibility of corruption, to enter the club.

The Gatekeeper is an energy vampire who thrives on emotion. He orchestrates each night's events until they reach a crescendo of devastating horror. The entertainment starts each evening when he mounts the stage and whips off his stolen face, showing his real face of grey, dead malleable flesh which he molds into a hideous smile with his gloved fingers and cries, "Is everybody hurting?" The entertainment starts with prepared acts and segues into audience participation. No one is off-limits, except a certain few favorites of the Gatekeeper. Anyone can suddenly find themselves part of the entertainment, which is also part of the thrill.

The rubbery-skinned, 6'8"-tall, giggling Moon Goon, who mostly lurks in the shadows near the bar, is the bouncer. It is rumored he can pull people's skeletons out of their bodies. Mackie Messer was one of the few untouchable favorites of the Gatekeeper, as is the poet laureate of Jokertown, Dorian Wilde.

In *M&M* terms, the Gatekeeper (and possibly Moon Goon as well) should be treated as a power level X plot-device. The Gatekeeper's powers are certainly mysterious, and the mystique of Jokers Wild can't really be reduced to numbers and die-rolls; once you're inside the Gatekeeper's realm, *anything* could happen, although the morning light always reveals that the nightmarish atmosphere of Jokers Wild is anything but a dream.

## THE JOKERTOWN CLINIC

The Jokertown Clinic is the much more commonly used informal name for the Blythe van Renssaeler Memorial Clinic. Blythe van Renssaeler was one of the Four Aces and Tachyon's lover, who broke down when Tachyon unwisely tried to mind-control her during her HUAC testimony. The clinic, located on South Street overlooking the East River, opened September 15, 1966. A privately-funded research hospital, it specializes in the treatment of the wild card virus and also provides emergency room, outpatient, and psychological care for the residents of Jokertown.

It is funded largely by the Stanhope Foundation, originally headed by Blythe's father, George Stanhope, and is housed in a four-story building originally built on the waterfront in 1874. The front steps are flanked by sandstone lion statues Tachyon habitually pets when he enters or leaves the building.

Dr. Tachyon is the founding chief of staff. Dr. Victoria Queen, whose cutting wit and acerbic tongue frequently targeted Tachyon, was the first chief of surgery. She was replaced by Cody Havero (September

1988). Dr. Bradley Latour Finn was the first joker doctor to join the staff (1986). He unofficially took over running the clinic when Tachyon disappeared and then returned to Takis (February 1990). Clara van Renssaeler was later officially named chief of medicine (March 1994). Howard Mueller (nicknamed "Troll") has been head of security since the clinic opened in 1966. Nine feet tall and incredibly strong, he is also somewhat shy. Dr. Bob Mengele (no relation) is another staff physician (1980s-1990s era).

## THE JOKERTOWN MISSION

A charity mission founded by Reverend Leo Barnett (circa 1986-87) as fulfillment of a promise to help jokers he made to Gary Gilmore while the latter was on death row. It was firebombed in July 1988 and presumably destroyed and never rebuilt. Given Reverend Barnett's attitude toward jokers, this probably didn't disappoint the residents of Jokertown.

## THE JOKERTOWN PRECINCT

Popularly known as Fort Freak, the Jokertown Precinct is the Old Bowery 5th Precinct of the NYPD. Three different captains have led the precinct, as chronicled so far.

Mark McPherson was the first captain of the Jokertown Precinct mentioned in the *Wild Cards* canon, although certainly others must have preceded him in the job. He was assassinated by Demise in January 1986 under orders from the Astronomer to make room for John F.X. Black to take over. Black would prove more congenial to the Masons, since he was one himself.

Black was in charge of the precinct until September 1986, when Fortunato discovered he was a Mason and killed him. His replacement, Captain Angela Ellis, a tough woman of Korean descent, was hired to clean up the precinct, which had a rather unsavory reputation for a rather long time, and did a good job of it.

For a precinct located in the heart of the Jokertown, very few cops working out of Fort Freak have been wild carders. The first joker cop in the precinct was Sergeant Jo Mo or "Sergeant Mole," a fat albino joker who joined the precinct in the early 1970s and was immediately banished to the basement to take care of the records. Sergeant Mole was also Chrysalis's eyes and ears at the precinct.

Joker Harvey Kant, who had been shot twice in the line of duty and won three citations for bravery, is a tough street cop with a checkered reputation. Although not really dirty, he has little regard for the legal niceties and has shot a dozen or so perps (or suspected perps) himself, several of whom have died. He also spent a spell as a mount of Ti Malice, during which he did some things that didn't help his reputation.

Two secret aces have been chronicled working out of the Jokertown precinct. Detective Harry Matthias, known as Judas among the Masons, could spot other aces. He used this talent to help recruit wild cards for the Astronomer. His powers came out during a wild night in Jokers Wild (not exactly a place where a cop should be hanging out) when he was about to be savaged by the audience. He was accidentally dehydrated by Water Lily during the attack on the Cloisters (May 1986). Detective Thomas Jan Maseryk is the only other ace to work out of the precinct, although his ace is still hidden and his powers unrevealed.

The last bit of detailed information regarding the precinct dates to the early 1990s. One would assume more jokers, and perhaps even some aces, have been part of the department since then.

## JUBE'S NEWSTAND

Located on the corner of Bowery and Hester Streets, Jube's newstand has been a fixture of Jokertown almost as long as there has been a Jokertown (or, specifically, since 1952). Jube the Walrus is always there, rain or shine, heat or cold, selling papers and magazines and talking with people about the weather, their lives, and their problems. Everybody likes jolly ol' Walrus. He's easy to talk to, always has a joke to liven things up, and always listens.

Just how much Jube listens (and watches, and records) very few people know. See his bio in **Chapter 4** for details.

## OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL MISERY

Three different churches have had the name Our Lady of Perpetual Mercy, all of them located in Jokertown.

The first was on Orchard Street on the Lower East Side. Once mainline Catholic, the church was small and time-worn. It was closed in the 1950s when several parishes were consolidated. Father Squid purchased it, refurbished it (a process that was ongoing during its entire lifetime), and reconsecrated it to the sect of Jesus Christ, Joker, opening it for business in the late 1970s. Worn stone steps led through wooden double doors to a small vestibule, a small windowless room with flagstone paving and wooden benches along the side walls. Double wooden doors led into the nave.

These doors were painted in a naive style with figures from the Church's theology. The central figure was Jesus Christ, Joker, crucified on a DNA helix. Jesus Christ, Joker has two heads, both with lean, ascetic features, one masculine and bearded, the other feminine. Each head wore a crown of thorns. He/She had an extra set of shriveled arms sprouting from a rib cage adorned by four sets of breasts, descending in size. His/Her side was pierced with an open wound and blood ran down onto the

lowest breast on the right hand side.

Another image present was a slight, lean figure that resembled Dr. Tachyon, dressed in gaudy clothes and two-faced like the Roman god Janus. One face was serene and angelic and had an expression of benevolent kindness; the other was the leering face of a demon, bestial and angry. The Tachyon figure held an unburning sun in his right hand (the side of his angelic face) and jagged lightning in his left.

Other figures included a smiling Madonna with feathered wings nursing one head of Christ the Joker at each breast, a goat-legged man wearing a white lab coat cavorting in a dance and holding aloft a microscope, and a golden-skinned man with a look of perpetual shame and sorrow on his handsome features juggling an arcing shower of silver coins.

The nave was typically church-like, with rows of wooden pews. It was dark and quiet, lit only by flickering votive candles and a few flourescent lamps. The stained glass windows in the stone walls depicted Christ the Joker's 12 stations of the cross. Father Squid had a small, comfortable office in the back. He lived in the attached cottage. There was also a small cemetery in the churchyard where many jokers, including Chrysalis, are buried.

This church was torched by an arsonist on Black Queen Night (September 16, 1993), and burned to the ground. Over a hundred jokers died in the fire. A new church was constructed on the ruins of the old (starting winter 1993-94). Unfortunately, this building was lost in a land deal gone bad, and Father Squid had to move to a new Our Lady.

The newest church is also a desanctified Roman Catholic church, not as nice as the original, located across Jokertown from the original Our Lady. Father Squid is still working on the interior after a number of years (summer 2003). The murals are similar, but of less artistic quality. The building itself still needs a fair amount of work. A new mural has been added to the pantheon of saints, depicting a thin black man with curling rams horns and a bulging forehead, hurling thunderbolts as he floats in the air with an obvious inhumanly large phallus bulging in his pants. The new churchyard also has a tiny burial ground. Many of the buried jokers from the original Our Lady have been moved here, and some bones are kept in an ossuary in the church's crypt.

Father Squid lives in a small rectory next to the church. He's still the parish's senior priest, although he has a number of junior priests (male and female, but all jokers) to assist him.

Quasiman is the church's handyman and Father Squid's general assistant (see his bio in **Chapter 4**).

## SQUISHER'S BASEMENT

Squisher's Basement, located in the heart of the Bowery below Uncle Chowder's Clam Bar, is a low Jokertown dive. It's mainly a hangout for locals who are mainly jokers. They don't like nats much. There's not too much to the place. Jokers congregate there to do serious drinking of cheap booze, not for the decor. The proprietor, Squisher, lives in a large aquarium behind the bar from which he keeps a fishy eye on the place (1980s).

## OTHER EATERIES, HANGOUTS, AND WATERING HOLES

There are all kinds of local hangouts, bars, restaurants, and the like in the City That Never Sleeps, and Jokertown is naturally given to locally-owned establishments. Some of those mentioned in the *Wild Cards* series include the following:

### BLACK MIKE'S PUB

A Jokertown bar.

### THE BOTTOMLESS PIT

The Pit is a bar located between 27th and 28th Streets, half a block west of Chelsea Park. It is off the beaten track and has a reputation for violence. It has pool tables in the back room.

### THE CHAOS CLUB

Established in 1959, the Chaos Club was a high-quality Jokertown cabaret with an All-Joker Revue. The joker Lambent was the doorman (1985). It closed sometime before 2000. It is not to be confused with Club Chaos, built on the same premises.

### CHICKADEES

Chickadees is a high-class bordello in Jokertown. Twelve-Finger Jake plays piano in the parlor. It is frequently frequented by Shadow Fists. Thomas Quincey held the coming-out party there for rapture, his newest designer drug (fall 1986).

### CLUB CHAOS

Club Chaos is a nightclub built on the site of the defunct Chaos Club by the famous joker comedian Chaos, who returned to Jokertown after a long and successful career as a comic in Las Vegas (circa 2000).

### ERNIE'S BAR AND GRILL

Ernie's is a Jokertown bar run by a super-strong lizard-like joker named Ernie DeMarco.

### FREAK ZONE

The Freak Zone is a hot, new joker club (nats with masks welcome) associated with wild raves (2003).

### HAIRY'S KITCHEN

Hairy's Kitchen was a Jokertown coffee shop run by a joker named Hairy. It was pretty much wrecked in a three-way fight between the Demon Princes, the Oddity, and Lazy Dragon in the form of a 40-foot-long Chinese dragon (December 1988).

### THE JAVA JOINT

The Java Joint is a coffee shop frequented by Jay Ackroyd. It's located in Manhattan on 42nd Street, sandwiched between Times Square and the Port Authority, about half a block from Jay's office. The waitresses are named Flo and Vi. Jay likes the patty melts.

### STARFIELDS

Starfields is a restaurant opened by Jay Ackroyd's wife, Hastet, soon after her arrival on Earth (circa 1992). It's noted for exotically-spiced foods with a Takisian flavor. The waiters all dress in Tachyon-esque fashion.

### TWISTED DRAGON

The Twisted Dragon is a restaurant, nightclub, and Shadow Fist hangout (1980s) located somewhere in the nebulous boundary between Jokertown and Chinatown. It is owned by Danny Mao, a Shadow Fist lieutenant in charge of recruitment.

### UNCLE CHOWDER'S CLAM BAR

Uncle Chowder's Clam Bar is a restaurant located above Squisher's Basement in the Bowery, Jokertown. It serves a pretty decent bowl of Manhattan clam chowder.

### WALLY'S

Wally's is a Jokertown coffee shop.

### YOUNG MAN'S FANCY

Young Man's Fancy is a bar located in the West Village. A blue-collar, working class bar in the day, by night it's a gay bar (1986).

## POPULAR CULTURE

One of the things that helps bring the *Wild Cards* series to life is the way elements of popular culture are worked into the stories and backgrounds of the characters. The bridging elements of the first book in the series, for example, take the form of excerpts from alternate world fiction, journalism, and historical and scientific essays.

Similarly, a *Wild Cards* game can benefit from including elements of popular culture in the background: What do characters read, watch, and listen to? What is happening in the world around them? Such details can help to bring a setting to life and draw the players deeper into the world.

## PERIODICALS

Some of the major periodicals appearing in the series include the following:

### ACES MAGAZINE

The posh offices of *Aces* magazine covers two floors at 666 Fifth Avenue, New York City. The reception area is littered with ace-associated knick-knacks, including a chrome steel plate with the *Aces* logo etched into it by J.J. Flash. The editor (1988) is Bob Lowboy. Digger Downs (see **Chapter 4**) worked primarily as a reporter for *Aces*. Other characters in a *Wild Cards* series might work for the magazine, and any well-known wild carders are likely to come to its attention sooner or later.

### THE JOKERTOWN CRY

The *Cry* is the local Jokertown newspaper, edited by Crabcakes (1986). It is the voice of the Jokertown community, offering news and information from a unique perspective, as well as editorials and op-eds on issues concerning jokers and wild carders.

### THE NATIONAL INFORMER

The *National Informer* is a tabloid newspaper with a slant for joker, alien, and other unusual news. The managing editor is Ms. Quinlan (1986). If you see a headline about "MONSTROUS JOKER BABY" or "TAKISIAN LOVE-SLAVE" on a newstand, chances are good it's the *Informer.* Although tabloid-trash "journalism" of the worst sort, *National Informer* stories usually contain just enough truth to keep them legally in the game. Their lawyers handle the rest.

## BOOKS

Numerous books have been written about, or by, wild carders, and the wild card has found its way into fiction and non-fiction alike. The following is a brief bibliography of books referenced in the series.

*Ace Avenger #49: Mission to Iran.* Circa 1986.

*Think Like An Ace!* 1981

*The Information Please Almanac of Aces.* Early 1970s.

Bishop, Jim. *Day of the Wild Card.* 1960s.

Carlysle, Vernon (as told to Robin Moore). *The Autobiography of Cyclone.* 1960s/1970s.

Deck, Daniel. *Godot Is My Co-Pilot: A Life of Jetboy.* 1963.

Desmond, Xavier. *A Year in a Man's Life: The Journal of Xavier Desmond.* 1988.

Heinlein, Robert. Heinlein wrote approximately seven novels in the "Tak World" sequence, starting in about 1948 with *Eclipse*, then *Fire Down*

## THE ACES JINGLE

Although it can scarcely be called music, the "Aces Jingle" is a long-time part of popular culture in the *Wild Cards* world. It's a collection of doggerel verses, mnemonic devices about aces, which are heard on school playgrounds and such and passed on to new generations even after some of the subjects die. Each verse sums up something particularly important or known about that wild card. Examples of the Aces Jingle include:

***Golden Boy ain't got no joy.***

***Sleeper waking, meals taking. Sleeper speeding, people bleeding.***

***Lady Black flashes light. If you kiss her, it's goodnight.***

***If it's Demise, don't look in his eyes.***

***Herne the Huntsman calls the Hunt. Hear the horn? It's you they want!***

***Captain Flint can strike a spark. Watch his elfshot hit the mark.***

Getting included in the Aces Jingle is a sure sign you've truly arrived on the wild card scene. However, making up an Aces Jingle about yourself and trying to spread it around is considered terribly *gauche.*

*Below* (circa 1949), and concluding with *The Sound of His Wings* (1955).

King, Stephen. *The Cannibals.* 1986.

Mailer, Norman. *The Executioner's Song.* An exhaustive case study of Gary Gilmore, a tormented young ace who is executed for turning nine people into pillars of salt.

*More Disgusting Joker Jokes.* Around in 1987

Terkel, Studs. *Wild Times: An Oral History of the Postwar Years.* 1979.

Tomlin, Robert. *The Jet-Propelled Boy.* Autobiography unfinished at Tomlin's death.

Tudbury, Thomas. *Shell Games.* 1993.

Wolfe, Tom. *Wild Card Chic.* 1971.

Wolfe, Tom. *True Brothers.* About the early space program and NACA's 1958 attempt to reach Earth orbit. 1979.

# MUSIC

Music has always been a driving cultural force, and the *Wild Cards* world is no different. It took some time for the wild card to express itself through the medium of music but when it did, it did so with the vengeance.

It started out with songs like Timothy Wiggins' "The Wild Card Blues," also known as "The Jokertown Blues."

In the 1960s, aces found their way into the burgeoning world of rock and roll. They most often had powers to enhance their stage performances with light-shows, special effects, or various head-trips. Sometimes the powers were problematic, as when Mick Jagger was arrested for lycanthropy at the Isle of Wight concert. In other cases the wild card was integral to the success of the band.

## THE REIGN OF THE LIZARD KING

The greatest head-trip master of them all was Tom Marion Douglas, lead singer of Destiny, the Lizard King. Destiny's first hit was in 1966. Their masterpiece was *Serpent Time.* Other albums included *Black Sunday* (1969) and *City of the Night* (1971), but they were best known for their live performances. When Douglas took on his Lizard King persona, the shadowy face of a king cobra overlaid his own, spreading its hood, and the power of his dark aura would wash over the audience, lifting them to ecstasy or plunging them into despair. Tom Marion Douglas retired as both musician and ace in 1971, taking Dr. Tachyon's experimental cure. Unfortunately, without his ace powers, his body couldn't survive the years of alcohol and drug abuse he inflicted upon it, and Douglas died early in the fall of that year.

## C.C. RYDER AND THE `87 COMEBACK

Radical singer-songwriter C.C. Ryder first appeared in the late 1960s doing benefits for the SNCC. When her card turned and she drew a joker, she was trapped in an inhuman form, but still able to communicate with the outside world via flashed messages. Her songs were recorded by, among others, Patti Smith and Bruce Springsteen. She was eventually cured by Dr. Tachyon and overcame her stage fright to make a comeback at the Funhouse AIDS/Wild Card Benefit in 1987.

The other big '87 comeback was musician Buddy Holley, who returned from obscurity with an amazing performance at the Funhouse AIDS/Wild Card Benefit, becoming the "shaman of rock and roll."

The 1980s saw a series of Joker-Aid charity concerts as well as fundraisers associated with AIDS and the wild card (although some advocates on either side didn't care for linking the two viruses in the minds of the public). The heavy metal group Ferric Jagger performed in the mid-'80s.

## MODERN MUSIC

Modern musicians consider acts like Destiny "classic rock." More recent bands include the Jokertown Boys, a boy-band made up of jokers who lost their parents in the "Typhoid Croyd" outbreak in the '80s and grew up in the same orphanage. They play their own instruments and do an eclectic array of covers of old tunes, including "The Wild Card Blues." They made their nationwide live television debut on MTV for their 2002 pre-Halloween concert. The Jokertown Boys are all jokers, except for Roger, who is still latent. The group consists of Roger Washburn (Ravenclaw), Jim Krakowicz (Gimcrack), Paul O'Nealy (Pretty Pauly), Alec Harner (Alicorn), and sometimes Sam Washburn (Swash), who did the cover for their CD and often sings back-up vocals.

Away from the pop side of music are bands like Joker Plague, an all-joker punk-rock outfit known for their violent, revolutionary lyrics and

equally violent performances. The group includes Michael "Drummer Boy" Vogali (a joker who's a living drum-set), S'live (a giant floating head with dozens of tongues able to play keyboards), Bottom (the bassist who has the head of an ass, à la *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), Shivers (a demon in looks and on the guitar), and the Voice (their invisible lead singer, who is nothing but an unseen voice).

# FILM AND TELEVISION

Like publishing, film and television reflect the influence of the wild card in their subject matter, as well as their performers. Ace and jokers actors have permitted Hollywood to save a bundle on special effects and make-up in many cases, and to stage shots that would have been impossible otherwise for the time. Film and television are some of the few places for jokers to find work, provided their "look" fits a particular project. For example, Bradley Finn often found work as (no surprise) a centaur in fantasy films.The following is a sampling of films and television programs featured or mentioned in the series.

## AMERICAN HERO (2007)

Reality TV show featuring ace contestants competing against each other, initially in teams, then individually, for a cash prize and being named the "American Hero."

## BLYTHE

Partially filmed in 1962, but uncompleted after star Marilyn Monroe's nervous breakdown (which could have been either real or fabricated). This movie was to be Orson Welles' directorial *magnum opus*, with a script written by Dalton Trumbo. It stars James Dean (with a long scar on his leg from the 1955 car crash that killed Elizabeth Taylor) as Dr. Tachyon; Sydney Poitier as Earl Sanderson, Jr.; Ron Ely as Jack Braun; Jeff Chandler as David Harstein (with Josh Davidson as his stand-in), and Marilyn Monroe as Blythe van Rennsaeler. Welles offered Jack Braun the Jack Braun role, but he turned it down, saying he was tired of playing Golden Boy—but he did vet the script for historical accuracy. The project was, quite literally, killed by the Card Sharks.

## DESPERATELY SEEKING SUSAN (2001)

Sucky Britney Spears remake of the tolerable Madonna movie.

## DESTINY (1991)

Oliver Stone movie with Kurt Russell as Thomas Marion Douglas and Jeff Fahey as the Radical.

## FOUR DEUCES, THE

1950s parody/porn movie about the adventures of the Golden Hotdog, the Enema, Cock Tease, and Black Stallion. A Harry Gold production.

## FRENCH LIEUTENANT'S WOMAN, THE (1980)

Starring Grace Kelly and Warren Beatty. This was Kelly's last movie. She retired at the beginning of filming and her scenes were reshot. G. Benton Finn, director.

## GOLDEN BOY (1949)

*Golden Boy* opened two months after the HUAC investigation into the Four Aces. Starring Jack Braun, it is a fictionalized account of the EFD-led coup against Perón in Argentina. Before being released, it was bowdlerized into an anti-Communist picture with Golden Boy (now named Jack Brown) as the main hero, with the parts played by the other Four Aces (especially Earl Sanderson, Jr.) diminished. Orson Welles, who saw the dailies, thought it looked like a reasonably good film. But after final edits controlled by the Card Sharks, it had been transformed into a total farce and upon release was a laughable failure.

## I WAS A TEENAGE JOKER (LATE 1950S)

Horror movie starring Michael Landon as victim of a very localized wild card outbreak of one, notable for its sensationalism and various inaccuracies about the virus.

## JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS (1980)

Film by Roger Corman, starring David Soul and Arnold Schwarzenegger, with Bradley Finn as the Centaur.

## JOKER MAMA

Jonathan Demme's relentlessly kitschy film about post-wild card America in the 1950s, rock 'n' roll, and life on the road.

## JOKERTOWN (1974)

Starring Jack Nicholson and Marilyn Monroe, directed by Roman Polanski, and based on an actual Card Shark plot to burn down Jokertown. The movie itself, however, contains no references to Card Sharks.

## JOKERTOWN BLUES

A 1980s television cop show set at the Jokertown Precinct, critically acclaimed and winner of numerous awards.

## KING PONGO

Movie that was slated to be filmed in Sri Lanka in early 1987, starring Robyn Symmes and the Great Ape. Production ground to a halt when the Great Ape escaped and was eventually transformed back into Jerry Strauss.

## LIVE FOR TOMORROW

Popular soap opera (1988) which often incorporates wild card themes into its storylines.

## PEREGRINE'S PERCH (1980S)

A late night talk show hosted by Peregrine, featuring a variety of celebrity guests and interviews.

## RICKENBACKER STORY, THE

Made circa 1949, released later, this was Jack Braun's second picture. It was a moderate hit, its success at least partially caused by publicity from Braun's then current activities in Korea.

## SHELL GAMES

Proposed movie based on the Great and Powerful Turtle's autobiography, staring Richard Dreyfus as the Turtle.

### THIRTY MINUTES OVER BROADWAY (1950S)

A Howard Hawks classic about Jetboy's last days.

### THIRTY MINUTES OVER BROADWAY (1978)

A hideous remake of the classic Hawks film with Jan-Michael Vincent as Jetboy, Dudley Moore in a red wig as a comic-relief Tachyon, and Pia Zadora as Blythe van Rennsaeler.

## SPORTS

Known wild cards are not allowed to participate in professional sports, although hidden aces and deuces were a possibility in the early years when tests for the virus were not commonly available. The one known exception to this rule is Slugs Maligne, a long-time player for a joker barnstorming team who appeared in one game for the New York Yankees in 1959. Now blood tests for the presence of the wild card are standard before signing any professional sports contract, and go right alongside tests for "doping" for sporting events like the Olympic Games.

Amateur sports vary considerably. College-level teams often don't test for the wild card but, even so, once an ace comes out of the deck, they're generally not allowed to play, since it's considered unsportsmanlike and unfair to other players and teams. With college teams spelling big money for schools, there are also concerns about lawsuits, so a known wild card is a no-go. Joker players generally don't even get on teams, who use the "no wild cards" rule to block them, even when they don't have any powers.

Jokers do get some play in "sports" like professional wrestling, where their deformities are often assets when it comes to creating an interesting stage persona. Managers and leagues quietly cooperate to ensure matches are interesting and wrestlers aren't *too* powerful or tough. Still, plenty of people are willing to pay to go and scream and cheer while watching a couple of freaky jokers wail on each other, and still more tune-in to watch televised bouts.

On the other hand, jokers are still banned from sports like boxing, although some mixed martial arts competitions have started to allow wild cards to spice things up (again, working to try and ensure match-ups are at least somewhat even, and contestants aren't too overwhelmingly powerful). Rumors abound of underground fight circuits and events run for jaded high-rollers that may even include gladiatorial fights to the death among joker combatants.

### BASEBALL

The *real* sport of the *Wild Cards* series is baseball (more because it's the only one prominently mentioned by *Wild Cards* authors than because of anything intrinsic to the sport). But like everything else, things have taken some interesting turns from the history of the sport in our world.

Much like in the actual major leagues, the 1950s were a time of franchise shifts. As population density and economic power were repositioned throughout the country, so were major league baseball franchises. The Boston Braves moved to Milwaukee (1953), the St. Louis Browns moved to Baltimore and became the Orioles (1954), the Philadelphia Athletics to Kansas City (1955), and the New York Giants (1958) to Minneapolis, where they adopted Paul Bunyan as their logo and the great Willie Mays finished out his career falling 30 home-runs short of Babe Ruth's lifetime mark.

The 1960s were the time of expansion. The American League first placed two teams in Texas (1961): the Houston Rangers and the Dallas Cowboys. The National League claimed California (1962) with the Los Angeles Stars and the San Francisco Seals. The major leagues went international in 1969 when the Havana Sugar Kings and the California Angels (of Anaheim) were added to the American League. The National League gained the Montreal Expos and the Atlanta Peaches that same year. Further teams were added to the American League (1977) with the expansion Toronto Blue Jays and the Seattle Pilots. Undoubtedly, there were also additional waves of expansion, divisional realignment, and team trading, but these moves have so far gone unchronicled.

The Brooklyn Dodgers are the most discussed team in *Wild Cards* baseball history. All rumors of their moving to Los Angeles ended when owner Walter O'Malley melted into a puddle of slime on September 15, 1946. The Dodgers, and the New York Yankees of the American League, were the greatest baseball franchise of the 1950s. Their World Series confrontations became the stuff of legend. By the early 1960s, however, the Dodgers' run was over and they finished last for five straight years (1964-1968) until two of their greats, Pete Reiser and Fidel Castro, returned in 1969 as manager and pitching coach, respectively, to lead them to a stunning upset of both the vaunted Milwaukee Braves for the National League championship and the much-favored Baltimore Orioles in the World Series. The Dodgers dominated the National League through the '70s and '80s, with Castro taking over as manager after Reiser's death.

Some prominent Dodgers include: Fidel Castro (pitcher, pitching coach, and manager), Pete Reiser (Dodger great of the late 1940s through

the 1950s, who had the most hits, most runs scored, and highest batting average in baseball history; managed from 1969 until his death), Dwight Gooden (pitcher), Thurman Munson (veteran Dodger catcher and team captain), Tom Seaver (Dodger pitcher 1967-1986, with 366 lifetime victories), and Darryl Strawberry (right fielder obtained in a trade with the Cubs in 1984).

# BEYOND NEW YORK

Most of the map of *Wild Cards* America outside of New York City and its environs has yet to be filled in. This can be regarded as either a bonanza for imaginative gamers or a regrettable oversight on the part of lazy authors, depending on your point of view.

Of course, New York and the East Coast in general was the hardest hit by the virus, and suffered the most changes because of it. Other seaport cities probably also suffered to a moderate extent from the virus, while the vast hinterlands went, if not untouched, then at least relatively unchanged.

A few aces have been associated with the West Coast. Will-o'-Wisp was an early hidden ace associated with Southern California, specifically Los Angeles. Cyclone was headquartered in San Francisco, as was his protégée, Topper, during her early years.

A few cities have their particular guardian aces, like Detroit Steel of Detroit and Haymaker of Kansas City, although not a lot is known about most of them. A future volume in this series will contain short biographies of some of the lesser-known aces.

Few pertinent locations outside of New York City have been described in any detail so far. One is Camp Xavier Desmond, a children's camp for jokers and nats alike located in rural New Hampton, about 60 miles north of New York City (late 1990s). The charity is heavily supported by Jay Ackroyd and Jerry Strauss, administered by Father Squid, and located on land owned by Daniel Brennan. It is open during the summer and on weekends when school is in session. The kids call it C-X-Dez.

Other parts of the *Wild Cards* world described in the series are summarized here, focusing on the differences from real-world geopolitics and history.

## CUBA

The Cuban Communist revolution, led by Che Guevara, failed to unseat the corrupt fascist government of the Batista family. Guevara escaped to foment further failed revolutions in South and Central America, until he died under mysterious circumstances in 1965. Fidel Castro became a major league baseball player (and later coach and team manager) for the Brooklyn Dodgers.

Propped up by the Mafia (especially the Gambione family), the Batistas still retain control in Cuba. Havana is a wild and decadent sin city where, if you have enough cash, you can buy anything imaginable, and probably some things that aren't. Cubans live in the extremes of crushing poverty or decadent luxury, with only a small middle class between.

Rosa Maria Gambione, the last don of the Mafia family, accepted exile in Cuba as part of the peace agreement with the Shadow Fist Society after the 1987 gang war in New York City. The Mafia family still retains a tight grip on its last stronghold.

## UNITED KINGDOM

Great Britain remains quite active in international affairs, particularly in the Middle East and other former British colonies. The Order of the Silver Helix (see **Chapter 5**) provides a means for the government to recruit and organize ace agents. The Grand Master of the Order is Sir Kenneth Foxworthy, the ace known as Captain Flint (see his bio in **Chapter 4**).

Britain owes a great deal of its current prominence on the world stage to former Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who some suggest received a secret ace: Churchill last served as prime minister in 1974 and retired on his hundredth birthday. His masterful diplomacy and influence behind the scenes guided many former colonies to independence while maintaining close ties with the British crown and people.

Churchill lived to be 120 years old, and might have lived much longer, had he not been gunned down in a terrorist attack during a diplomatic mission to Northern Ireland in 1994. The attack was actually part of the Card Shark plot to release the Black Trump virus. An attempt to do so at Churchill's state funeral in London was thwarted by a combination of British and American aces, along with the intervention of Hannah Davis and Gregg Hartmann.

### NORTHERN IRELAND

A wild card outbreak struck North Ireland in 1963. Initially labeled the "Protestant Disease" because the largest outbreak was in Belfast, it rivaled the virulence and suddenness of the deadly New York City eruption. Five thousand died on the first day. The Irish Republican Army initially claimed responsibility, fueling some of the most vicious fighting in Northern Ireland in decades. Belfast burned and the British lost 200 troops. Civilian casualties were in the thousands. Since then, Protestant/Catholic sectarian strife in Northern Ireland has sometimes been overshadowed by the conflicts between nat and joker.

Rathlin Island is a small (eight miles square) island off the coast of Northern Ireland set aside by the government to serve as the home to a segregated joker community. The original population of jokers, some 300 to 400, were sterilized and forcibly relocated there, a process halted due to outcries from various worldwide civil rights groups. The island is quasi-independent from British rule. As of the mid-1990s, less than 200 inhabitants remain. Now there is a modest jokertown in Belfast, smaller, dingier, and even poorer than the original, along Belfast Lough in the west part of the city.

## FRANCE

France's treatment of wild carders in law and in society at large is typically French.

Discrimination against those infected by the wild card virus—whether latents, jokers, or aces—is prohibited by the French constitution, just as are discrimination based on ethnic, religious, or racial background. But while there are numerous laws designed to implement this ban, the authorities are hamstrung by the official policy of France that there *are* no ethnic, religious, genetic, or linguistic minorities in the country. Government agencies are thus prohibited from tracking data based on any of those categories: no record of discrimination means there must not be any discrimination.

But while statistical data cannot be collected, *everyone* in France—native-born, immigrant, and even tourist—is tested for the wild card,

the results kept on file for public health and safety reasons, a step even the U.S. governments of the McCarthy and Barnett eras never attempted. None of the data would be available during the prosecution of a workplace joker discrimination case, but good luck to a wild carder who leaves DNA evidence behind at the scene of a crime.

The wild card *chic* infatuation that gripped the United States in the 1970s and '80s was even more intense in France. Possibly because of the smaller numbers of wild cards in the country, the French lionized aces like the flying *Tricolore*, the joker entertainer *Le Miroir*, and any foreign *ases fantastiques*, from the expatriate Black Eagle in the 1950s and '60s to the WHO world tour in 1987. Not only could overt wild card politicians get elected to high office (unlike in the U.S.) but some could be tempted to fake wild card status in order to score points in the polls.

Things changed in the early '90s, as waves of anti-Semitic, anti-joker, and anti-immigrant sentiment and violence swept France. At first considered aberrations by most French, now politicians can campaign on blatantly discriminatory platforms (using code words like "historical cultural norm," "traditional values," and "sound mind in a sound body " to circumvent anti-discrimination laws) and actually get elected in some parts of the country.

# THE MIDDLE EAST

Israel was established as a nation by United Nations mandate in 1947, precipitating the first Arab-Israeli conflict. Israel was winning the war until the Nasr (the Egyptian ace team including Al Haziz and Khof, which arose from the Port Said infestation) entered the fray. Count Folke Bernadotte won the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts in bringing about the Peace of Jerusalem (helped by the ace David Harstein, who was secretly present at the talks), but was later assassinated by Israeli terrorists. Israel and Palestine were left with interlocking, indefensible borders, the result of which is constant warfare and terrorism.

The city of Jerusalem is jointly governed by commissioners from Jordan, Palestine, and Great Britain under a United Nations mandate. There are enough factions in the city so everyone can count on being hated by someone. Outbreaks of violence have been endemic for 50 or more years. (Beirut, Lebanon, on the other hand, is lovely and peaceful.) The Wailing Wall was destroyed in 1967 by Palestinian terrorists, but subsequently rebuilt. The Jerusalem Jokers' Quarter is the second largest joker community in the world, as jokers have settled there from all over the Middle East, fleeing persecution elsewhere.

Jerusalem has a Muslim Quarter, Christian Quarter, and Jewish Quarter, as well as a Joker Quarter. The latter is aggressively guarded by the Twisted Fists, whose leader, the Black Dog, has his headquarters there.. The various quarters are heavily segregated as reflected in their names. The summer of 1994 saw the release of the Black Trump virus in Jerusalem; disaster was narrowly averted by the Overtrump virus.

One of the great churches of the sect of Jesus Christ, Joker—Our Lady of the Spasm—is located in Jerusalem. Its crypt has an entrance to the catacombs running all throughout Jerusalem's underground. These tunnels and chambers are heavily utilized by the Twisted Fists.

In Egypt, the Port Said manifestation of the wild card virus is reflected in the sect of the Living Gods (see **Chapter 5** for details). The headquarters of the sect is the Temple of the Living Gods, located outside Cairo on several acres of desert surrounded by a whitewashed wall topped with barbed wire. The site is protected by security cameras, metal and nitrate detectors, and patrolled by armed men, along with a guard station at the main entrance because of fears of a Nur attack.

Adherents to the Living Gods sect, which is a revival of the ancient polytheistic religion of old Egypt, wear blue robes. The underground temple complex was pretty much intact when discovered in the mid-1960s by Kemel Ophet, who became the first head priest of the sect, although it was cleaned up and some modern conveniences, like electricity, were added. It serves both as a retreat for the jokers and minor aces who make up the retinue of the Living Gods and as a place to stage tourist extravaganzas to raise money for the destitute joker community of Egypt.

# INDIA

Black Eagle saved Mahatma Gandhi from an assassin's bullet in 1948, allowing the Hindu spiritual and political leader to oversee his nation's first years of independence from British rule. Pakistan was partitioned from largely Hindu India in 1948, but Gandhi never accepted the notion of Pakistan as an independent state. He peacefully negotiated its return to the decentralized confederation of native states that was India and the country therefore goes on much as it had under the Raj: a patchwork of small kingdoms based on religious, cultural, and geographic lines united only by a weak central government in Delhi.

Thanks largely to Sir Winston Churchill, the British continue to wield political, social, and economic influence in India, as they do in most of their former colonies that have achieved independence.

A remote corner of the Bengal region is home to a cult devoted to Gonesh and Chandi, who worshipped Chandra Ratri, an elephantine joker, and her daughter, Radha O'Reilly—known as "Elephant Girl"—an ace able to transform into a flying Asian elephant!

# VIETNAM

Fueled by repression, ethnic and sectional tensions, and the socialist government's lack of economic progress, full-scale guerrilla war broke out in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in 1991. Ultimately, Cap'n Trips overthrew the government and one of his avatars, Moonchild, was elected president of Free Vietnam for a time.

Cholon is the section of Ho Chi Minh City (also known as *Saigon giai phong*, or Liberated Saigon) set aside for jokers. It's basically a plywood and corrugated tin shanty slum, commonly frequented by nat refugees from the country who have higher status than the despised jokers. It's a hotbed of crime and terrorist activity.

# AUSTRALIA

Auckland, New Zealand, experienced a wild card outbreak in 1950. Jokers were tagged with the nickname "uglies," although the Auckland jokertown is quite clean and orderly by international standards. Some wild cards have found their way to cities like Sydney and Melbourne. The biggest known effect of the wild card on Australia is the access to the Dreamtime.

## THE DREAMTIME

In Australian Aboriginal lore, the Dreamtime is the spiritual origin-point of the world. It is also a spiritual and imaginal realm, coterminous with the waking world, and accessible to mystics and shamans. Like many mythical things, the Dreamtime is a reality in the *Wild Cards* world. Shamans like Wyungare (see **Chapter 4**) can access and even travel to it, existing in a parallel mythic landscape.

There's some evidence the Dreamtime is where aces of all sorts draw forth some unknown sort of matter or energy to create constructs or summoned beings. For example, while Elephant Girl converts existing energy into mass for her transformation, aces like Herne seem to conjure beings like the Wild Hunt out of nowhere in defiance of the laws of conservation of energy and matter. Wyungare explicitly said the joker-ace Bloat drew upon the Dreamtime to conjure his various creations, so much so that he was endangering the stability of the other realm. An alliance of shamans addressed the imbalance by opening a portal to the Dreamtime and shifting the Rox and everyone on it into the other world.

There's certainly a case to be made for the Dreamtime as a manifestation of what Carl Jung called the Universal Unconscious, a realm of deep, mythic symbolism, and psychic power. Given the psionic nature of ace abilities in *Wild Cards,* this would make a certain amount of sense. If true, then the Aboriginal Dreamtime is merely the tip of a very deep psychic iceberg; the Dreamtime is, essentially, whatever it is imagined to be, although the local beliefs seem to have a lot of influence. Cordelia Chasson, for example, experienced the Dreamtime in Australia according to local beliefs rather than her own.

Aces with the ability to travel to different "dimensions" may access or pass through the Dreamtime in some fashion, and aces who summon or conjure things out of nowhere might draw on the Dreamtime as a source of power or material. *Wild Cards* Gamemasters are welcome to explore the implications of the Dreamtime as both place and power-source in their own games. Take a look at the "Shamans of the Dreamtime" series framework in **Chapter 6** for one possible approach, although the Dreamtime can extend literally as far as one can imagine.

# BEYOND EARTH

Of course, the *Wild Cards* universe doesn't end with the Earth, but extends out to the distant stars. After all, where would be we be without the Takisians and their "friends" from the Network?

## TAKIS

The home world of the Takisians is Takis, a small, cold, mineral-poor world of mountains and glaciers. The Takisians call it the Crystal World. It is located approximately 23 light years from Earth. It has two moons, Tiana (the small moon) and Fel'k (the larger one). Some of the Great Houses, which are basically the political units of this world, have bases on one or both moons.

The capital cities of the various political enclaves are named after the ruling Psi Lord family of the region. For example, the capital city of the House of Ilkazam is Ilkala. Ilkala is set in a bowl-like depression resulting from a collapsed volcanic cone and is surrounded by mountains and glaciers. The predominant architectural form of Ilkala is stone towers. Part of the city is carved from the rose-colored cliff face of its surroundings. The capital city of the House of Vayawand is Vaya, noted for its hundreds of canals.

A number of space stations orbit Takis. Among them is the Bonded Station, primarily built as the buffer for Network contact, but also used to conduct business between Houses. The Bonded Station is under a state of perpetual truce; violence of any sort is forbidden there.

All space stations are reached by orbital elevators rather than shuttle craft. These elevators consist of circular conduits of a glass-like substance stretching from the surface of the planet to synchronous orbit 27,000 miles up. A number of these elevators are scattered around Takis.

# TAKISIANS

*Created by Melinda Snodgrass*

The Takisian population is rigidly stratified,. The great families of the Psi Lords sit at the top of the social pyramid and comprise perhaps 8% of the population. The rest of the population, the vast majority of Takisians, are mind-blind (called *tarhiji*) and, unlike their rulers, have no mental powers. *Tarhiji* tend to plumpness, while the carefully inbred Psi Lords are lean and extraordinarily beautiful.

Common mental abilities among the mentat class are telepathy (receiving and sending are two different talents and an individual may have one without the other), mind shielding, mind control, mind wipe, mind repair, precognition, and telekinesis. Multiple talents in a single individual is not uncommon, though it would be quite unusual for an individual to be a master of them all.

The mind-blind are split into various rigid artisan, servant, and warrior classes. These classes are distinguished from each other by, among other things, the color and style of their clothes. Laborers, for example, wear black. Among these classes are the *bitshuf'di*, a class of neutered workers who have been deemed to carry dangerous recessive genes, or who are of otherwise insufficient genetic worth to be allowed to breed.

Takisians are genetically identical to humans. All Takisians are fair with very pale skin. The darkest hair color is a mink-brown, while blondes and redheads of various shades are common. The body form inclines to the small side.

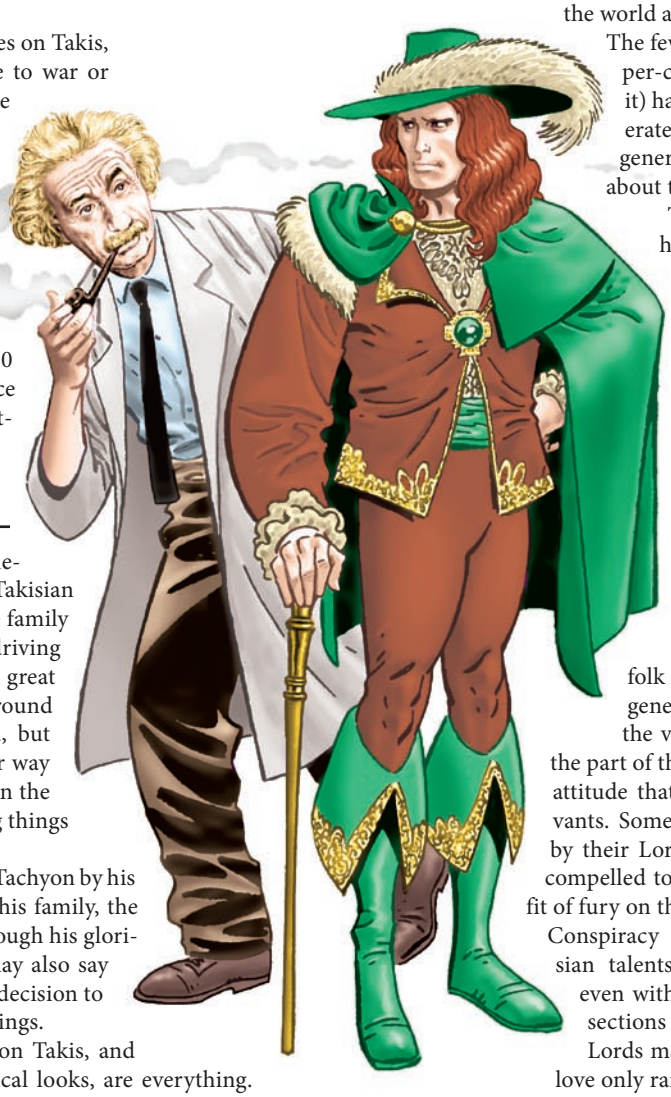
Barring unforseen "accidents" (that is, murder as a result of intrigue)

Psi Lords can live a thousand years or more. The mind-blind, who are without access to the highest level of Takisian medical care, can live for 300 or 400 years. Part of the reason for Takisian longevity is genetics, part is due to advanced Takisian biomedical science, which includes healing pods that can regrow just about any lost or damaged body part if the loss isn't catastrophic or immediately fatal.

# TAKISIAN SOCIETY

The following discussion, while speaking of "Takisians", is really a discourse on the Psi Lords, as most members of the Takisian underclass are too busy trying to make a living to concern themselves with the foibles of their aristocracy.

There are about 30 Psi Lord Houses on Takis, although the number fluctuates due to war or treaty (and there were a few less once Blaise got done with them). Seven are Great Houses (the Ilkazam, Vayawand, Alaa, Ss'ang, Tandeh, Jeban, and Rodaleh) which control most of the economic and political power on the planet. Fifteen or so other modest Houses form their chief allies, and less than 10 small holdings eke out what existence they can in the shadows of their betters.



## KEEPING UP APPEARANCES

The two equally important and sometimes utterly contradictory tenets of Takisian life are duty and responsibility to the family and the pursuit of significance, the driving need to hold center stage, to have a great effect on the people and events around you. One always strives to succeed, but if you fail, fail in a big or spectacular way and all will not necessarily be lost. On the other hand, there is no glory in doing things by half measures.

For example, Tisianne (to call Dr. Tachyon by his Takisian name) owed everything to his family, the Ilkazam, yet gained great respect through his glorious and principled (though some may also say idiotic) one-man stand against their decision to the test the wild card virus on Earthlings.

The grand gesture means much on Takis, and appearances, including simple physical looks, are everything. A false appearance of power can make a man a king as easily as a true one.

## FAMILY LIFE

As the Takisians value appearance above all, they also abhor deformity of any sort. They customarily cull any children who show such signs of poor genetics, even or perhaps especially among the Psi Lords, who themselves are the result of thousands of years of careful and strict breeding programs. The greatest criminal and social penalties are levied on those Psi Lords who mingle their seed outside their class. Such draconian penalties are administered to prevent the spread of psi powers among the lower orders.

Because the assassination of a pregnant woman can wipe out hundreds of years of a meticulously planned breeding program, all fertile females (obviously, the neutered women play no role here) are kept under strict guard in sternly segregated female quarters. Since the Takisians are a long-lived race, women spend years in seclusion. They have little to do other than raise their children, gossip, amuse themselves with neutered sex toys (male and female), and scheme and hatch plots to further their children's position in the world.

When past their child-bearing years, women are allowed to go into the world and pursue whatever careers they desire. The few women who survive into old age (upper-class Takisians of either sex rarely make it) have great power, because the old are venerated among the Psi Lords. These harridans generally have many scores to settle, and go about their revenge with gleeful ruthlessness.

Tisianne, upon taking his position as head of House Ilkazam and defeating Blaise in the world war his grandson plunged the planet into, abolished the practice of the women's quarters. How this reform works out on the planetary level remains to be seen.

Psi Lord children are raised by their mothers, aunts, and various servants and hangers-on in the women's quarters, which are hotbeds of political plots and intrigue. When they emerge from the harem they're given a companion/servant from the lower classes to instill in the young Psi Lord or Lady a sense of duty to the simple folk they rule. In actual fact, this process generally creates an indulgent contempt for the vast bulk of the Takisian population on the part of their ruling class, and a rather offhanded attitude that it isn't sporting to mind-compel servants. Some servants, however, are abused cruelly by their Lord or Lady, even to the point of being compelled to destroy themselves on a whim or in a fit of fury on the part of their masters.

Conspiracy and treachery are fundamental Takisian talents. The Takisians are quite territorial, even within family groups, who reserve distinct sections in their sprawling homes. Takisian Psi Lords marry for power, breed for posterity, and love only rarely. Theirs is a warrior culture overlaid with the trappings of civilization, which puts great emphasis on blood feuds and personal oaths. Their highest loyalty is reserved for the vow between individuals, usually within their own clan. That, of course, is the ideal to which great lip service is paid.

## TRADITIONS

Although it is considered a great crime to kill within the family, it is a crime that is moderately common. A somewhat more common method of settling intra-family squabbles is through public humiliation via a

practical joke with a vicious turn. Being the butt of a nasty, humiliating, or clever joke greatly diminishes one's public standing. Of course, it does leave you with your life and the opportunity of striking back at some future date. Takisians hold grudges tightly and, as mentioned, they live a *long* time.

Since a state of eternal undeclared warfare exists between families, carried out with ninja-like doggedness through schemes, plots, and assassinations, most of the Psi Lords (male and female alike) are trained in unarmed and small arms combat, including such weapons as knife and sword, which while sometimes not considered practical in a high-tech society can still kill you just as dead as a gun.

As the Psi Lords have a vast underclass to exploit economically, they also have a fair amount of free time. When not involved with weapons practice, they enjoy dance, musical instruction, singing lessons, and the minor decorative arts like flower arranging. The social graces, of course, also add much to one's image if you can dance well or speak elegantly with cutting wit, or even can arrange a nice vase of posies.

Because Takisians worship their ancestors, funerals are even more important to them than births. The dead are placed on the ship that carried them in life, and then the ships rove out into space. No one living knows where the ships take the bodies of their deceased masters. The Takisians believe the spirits of the dead stay close by to guide their descendants, which can be comforting or terrifying, depending on the nature of the deceased. Those who were kind and loving in life (traits uncommon among the Takisian elite) are thought to be amiable in death. Those who were unreasonable and demanding in life are thought to continue to be similar pains in the butt after death.

Besides their ancestor worship, the holiest and most important festival for Takisians is the Crossing Festival, which celebrates their passage through darkness to find and settle upon the Crystal World. All the Psi Lords attend, but none of the mind-blind. It has been celebrated for 12,000 years in the Festival Hall built on the edge of the polar continent. It is held on the winter's solstice, and is a time of unbreakable truce.

## LANGUAGE

*Sham'al* (industry speak) is the language of commerce and communication of the lower classes on Takis. *Amlas* is a diplomatic tongue used only between Houses. All Houses have their distinct private language called House Talk. *Ilkazal* is the private language of House Ilkazam, and relies heavily on telepathy. Ship talk is the private language among ships. It's telepathy based on complex mathematics and is far beyond human understanding. When broken down and made audible, it resembles music.

# TAKISIAN PSI LORD

These are the bare-minimum traits for the average Psi Lord. Individuals naturally have their own Knowledge and Profession skills, particular feats, and so forth. Some have greater (although rarely lesser) mental powers, although some may lack the Alternate Power feats, being limited solely to Telepathy (or even solely to Mental Communication or Mind Reading).

# TAKISIAN TARHIJI

This is the typical mind-blind Takisian bystander. Obviously, individuals vary, and may have different abilities, skills, and training, although things like combat abilities are discouraged in all but professional soldiers. *Tarhiji* tend to be slightly more attractive than Earth humans, simply because of Takisian medical technology and the fact that the Psi Lords tend to breed for looks (they do choose their non-breeding playthings from among the *tarhiji,* after all).

**TAKISIAN PSI LORD — POWER LEVEL 6**

| Str 10 | Dex 12 | Con 12 | Int 13 | Wis 13 | Cha 12 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

**SKILLS**

Bluff 4 (+5), Computers 2 (+3), Knowledge (art) 2 (+3), Knowledge (behavioral sciences) 4 (+5), Knowledge (history) 2 (+3), Knowledge (technology) 4 (+5), Notice 2 (+3), Perform (dance) 2 (+3), Pilot 4 (+5), Sense Motive 6 (+7)

**FEATS**

Connected, Defensive Roll 1, Equipment 8

*Equipment:* Various items of technology, possibly a Takisian ship (see page 48); commonly armed with dagger (+1 damage) or sword (+3 damage) and laser pistol (+5 damage), as the situation warrants.

**POWERS**

**Mind Shield 4**

**Super-Senses 5** (psionic awareness; precognition, Uncontrolled)

**Telepathy 6** (Subtle)

*Alternate Power:* **Mental Blast 3** (Sleep)
*Alternate Power:* **Mind Control 6** (Mental Link)

**COMBAT**

Attack +4, Grapple +4, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +5 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback –1, Initiative +1

**SAVING THROWS**

Toughness +2 (+1 flat-footed), Fortitude +4, Reflex +4, Will +4 (+8 with Mind Shield)

**Abilities 12 + Skills 8 (32 ranks) + Feats 10 + Powers 22 + Combat 18 + Saves 9 = Total 79**

**TAKISIAN TARHIJI — POWER LEVEL 1**

| Str 10 | Dex 10 | Con 10 | Int 10 | Wis 10 | Cha 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

**SKILLS**

Notice 2 (+2), Profession (choose one) 6 (+6)

**FEATS**

None

**POWERS**

None

**COMBAT**

Attack +0, Grapple +0, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +0, Knockback –0, Initiative +0

**SAVING THROWS**

Toughness +0, Fortitude +2, Reflex +1, Will +0

**Abilities 0 + Skills 2 (8 ranks) + Feats 0 + Powers 0 + Combat 0 + Saves 3 = Total 5**

# THE MORAKH

The Morakh are something of an anomaly in Takisian society. They are a cadet line of the Great House Vayawand, but have been bred for only one purpose: combat. They are short and immensely thick and powerful

| MORAKH | | | | | POWER LEVEL 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Str 20 | Dex 14 | Con 16 | Int 8 | Wis 12 | Cha 10 |

**SKILLS**

Intimidate 4 (+4), Knowledge (tactics) 6 (+5), Notice 4 (+5), Search 6 (+5), Sense Motive 8 (+9), Stealth 4 (+6), Survival 4 (+5)

**FEATS**

All-out Attack, Chokehold, Endurance, Improved Initiative, Interpose, Power Attack, Stunning Attack

**POWERS**

**Mind Shield 6**

**Protection 3**

**Regeneration 4** (+2 recovery bonus; injured, 1/20 minutes; disabled, 1/5 hours)

**COMBAT**

Attack +6, Grapple +11, Damage +5 (unarmed) or by weapon, Defense +6 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback –3, Initiative +6

**SAVING THROWS**

Toughness +6, Fortitude +7, Reflex +6, Will +5 (+11 with Mind Shield)

**Abilities 20 + Skills 9 (36 ranks) + Feats 7 + Powers 13 + Combat 24 + Saves 12 = Total 85**

with, incongruously, the typical elfin Psi Lord features. They have no psi skills, except for a powerful mind block which renders them virtually impervious to mind control. They are fanatically loyal to their master and must serve someone or else they wither and die. They have amazing combat skills, both hand-to-hand and with weapons, and little else. Their strength ranks from low to middle wild card enhanced, their reflexes low wild card to high human, their intelligence usually average human.

As a class, they are prone to berserk rages and rampages fueled by bloodlust. They are fanatically loyal and only a master's specifically ordered release will liberate them from their oaths of fealty. Most Takisians regard them as loathsome, ill-bred monsters.

## TAKISIAN SHIPS

Like many space-faring races, the Takisians obtained their first interstellar ships from the Network at near ruinous cost. They soon discovered a better alternative. A noted astronomer of House Ilkazam named H'ambizan discovered a race of semi-sentient creatures known as the *'Ish'kaukab*, creatures the size of whales that live in interstellar space. It took centuries to first tame these creatures, then thousands of years of selective breeding to evolve them into organic ships that look like coral growths studded with strings of glowing jewels.

These ships bond with individual Takisians, and the proper ship must go with the proper individual. They all have distinctive personalities. Some are vicious and mean-spirited, bound to their masters through power and fear. Others are gentle and more complacent and are forever bound to their masters by loyalty and love. The Takisian/'Ish'kaukab relationship is several millennia old, and it has grown into a symbiosis; neither species could now survive without the other.

### HE/SHE

During the period when Dr. Tachyon and Kelly Jenkins were jumped into each others' bodies, Tachyon didn't think of himself as a man with an odd body; Tachyon thought of himself as a woman. So, here Tachyon is referred to as "she."

| TAKISIAN SHIP | VEHICLE |
|---|---|

Colossal size, Strength 55, Speed 10, Toughness 13; Blast 13 (ghostlance), Mental Abilities (Int, Wis, Cha 10), Space Flight 8 (ghostdrive)

**Cost: 89 equipment points**

## DR. TACHYON'S RETURN TO TAKIS

Tachyon, pregnant and in the body of Jumper wannabe Kelly Jenkins, escaped from Blaise's dungeon on the Rox while Blaise simultaneously fled the government's military assault (August 1990) accompanied by Durg at'Morakh. They also dragged Kelly Jenkins along, still inhabiting Tachyon's real body. Tachyon realized they were headed for her ship, *Baby*, who by now had healed herself and was again capable of interstellar flight. She and the Turtle rushed to the warehouse where *Baby* was housed, but arrived just in time to see the ship burst through the roof and head off to the heavens. Turtle grabbed *Baby* with his telekinesis, but the ship was too powerful. It dragged them along until they reached the edge of Earth's atmosphere and the Turtle had to let them go.

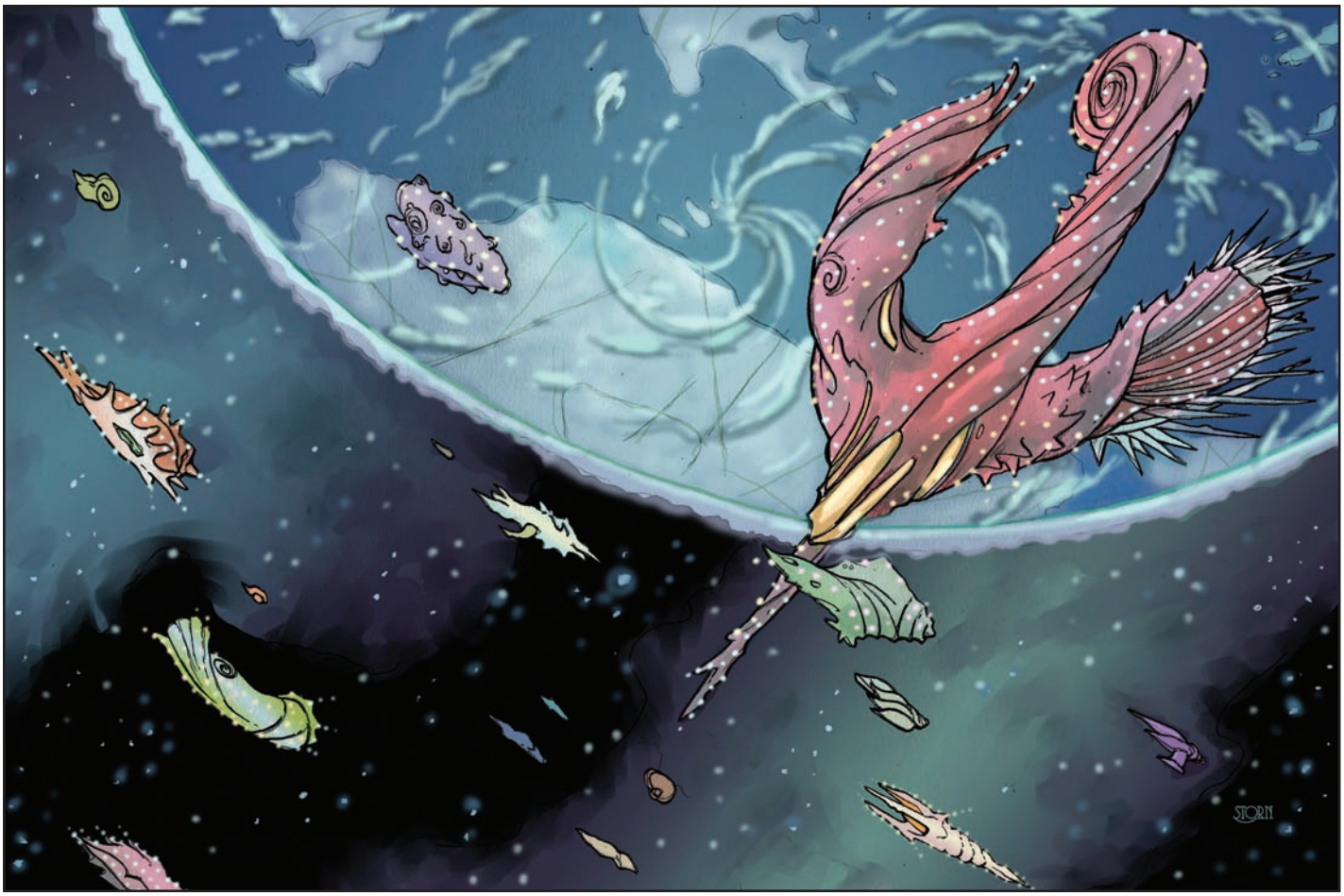
Tachyon, convinced they were headed for Takis, vowed to follow. It took a while to discover a means of transport, giving Blaise and company a comfortable head start. Eventually utilizing a clue supplied by Fortunato, Tachyon contacted Jube, who admitted to being a Network representative. She signed an open contract with him in return for transportation to Takis for herself, Jay Ackroyd, and Mark Meadows. Tachyon was dismayed to discover the captain of the transport ship was none other than her hated cousin Zabb, who deserted his Network contract when they arrived on Takis. Zabb returned with Tachyon to House Ilkazam and was welcomed as something of a prodigal son. As usual, the elders of Ilkazam didn't quite know what to make of Tachyon.

Zabb intervened in the ceremony where Taj, the Ilkazam regent, formally relinquished his power to Tachyon, and pointed out that Tachyon was female and by Takisian custom could not rule the family. The elders agreed and Tachyon was banished to the women's quarters while Zabb took up the mantle of Ilkazam leadership.

In the meantime, Blaise used his mind control and jumper powers and sheer ruthlessness to become the ruler of House Vayawand. Blaise also enlisted the downtrodden masses of the mind-blind in his cause and conquered House Radaleh, massacring all its Psi Lords.

The Ilkazam recognized Blaise was a dire threat to all of Takis. Slowly and painfully, Zabb built up a confederacy of the other Great Houses to stand against Blaise. All of his careful diplomacy, however, came to naught during the night of the Crossing Festival, the most sacred of all Takisian holidays, when Blaise claimed Tachyon as his. This was his right according to Takisian social custom since he'd impregnated her. Tachyon snatched a knife from the buffet table and attacked Blaise. Durg prevented any harm to his master, but Tachyon had broken an ancient taboo, the armistice which always held over Crossing. Ackroyd, who was secretly attending the ceremony, popped Tachyon back to Ilkala, but the damage had been done. Her attack on Blaise caused the Ilkazam to be ejected from the Festival and shattered the alliance Zabb had so carefully built up.

Zabb argued Tachyon's unborn child had become a political liability and must be aborted. Tachyon categorically refused, but Zabb's insistence spurred Tachyon into open rebellion. When the time came Ackroyd tele-



ported Tachyon to a safe place where Illyana was born and spirited away to safety, though Tachyon herself returned to the women's quarters where she helped organize Ilkazam's defenses when it became clear Blaise was going to attack.

Despite their long history of enmity, Tachyon and Zabb became lovers, with Zabb asking her to marry him. Tachyon had a certain attraction to the idea, but refused him. When Blaise set off a world war by attacking six Psi Lord Houses simultaneously, Tachyon formulated the strategy wherein she, Zabb, and Mark Meadows led a crack commando squad to capture Blaise in his headquarters in Vaya.

The plan ultimately worked, though Tachyon was horrified to see Blaise shot in the head while he and Zabb battled hand-to-hand, thus ending her hopes of being jumped back into her real body. Before long, though, she realized Blaise had jumped Zabb at the last moment of their struggle and was now in Zabb's body. She and Kelly Jenkins then forced Blaise to jump them both back into their respective original bodies and the Network took Blaise as payment for Zabb's reneging on his life contract. Tachyon and Kelly both watched as Blaise's skull was sawn open and his brain was removed to be placed in an irrigation monitor on a far-away world.

Tachyon then became head of House Ilkazam and the most powerful figure on Takis. He immediately dismantled the tradition of the women's quarters and offered equal political and social rights to the mind-blind. How universally these reforms were accepted, and what far-reaching effects they might have on the Crystal World, remains to be seen.

## A FINAL WORD ON TAKISIANS

The Takisians have no allies in the galaxy other than their sentient ships and that's just the way they want it. They believe themselves to be superior to all other species and think one day, when they finally put aside their own internal bickering and unite, they'll rule the galaxy.

They may be right. Or perhaps some other race might have something to say about that before all is said and done.

# THE NETWORK

*Created by George R.R. Martin*

The Network is neither an empire, federation, or political alliance. It is a trading ring of 137 different sentient species organized and led by a race who call themselves the Master Traders. The Network is hundreds of millennia old and between its member races controls more than a thousand worlds.

As vast as it is, it is more contradictory in nature than unified and much you say about it is belied by a closer examination of its depth and sweep across the galaxy. For example, the Network is technologically advanced, but some member races have barely reached the cultural equivalent of their Iron Age and individual members' technological levels vary wildly from planet to planet.

Another example of the contradictions within the Network are the

Network starships. They are huge, multi-generational ships that carry anywhere from a hundred to a couple of thousand crew members of multiple species. Many of these crew members might visit scores of worlds, marry and raise their children, and live and die without ever setting foot on a single world. But on these same ships some crew members might sign on for only a short tour, some of the ships aren't multi-species at all, and some of the ships are actually quite small.

The Network is an economic entity, but it has a vast fleet equipped with awesome weaponry that can sterilize whole worlds and it can field vast armies of mercenaries. On the whole, the Network is tolerant, benign, and values diversity, but some of its member races are single-minded in the extreme and cling to narrow and specific personal or racial philosophies.

The only law recognized by the Network is contract law. The Master Traders live by their contracts. Make one with them and they will hold you to it, to the last single letter. And you'd better know what you're signing before you sign it; the Master Traders certainly will. Master Traders consider their treaties sacrosanct, but only ones they personally have agreed to. Each Trader can bind only himself and his heirs to a contract, no other Traders.

The Network has a number of enemies throughout the Galaxy, among them the Takisians. They fought a war over 8,000 years ago that the Takisians won, to the extent that the Network found it unprofitable and gave it up.

The Network has visited Earth a number of times in the past, but so far has found nothing that interests it sufficiently to make its existence generally known. In 1952 two Network observers were left on Earth, or, more precisely, one on Earth and one in orbit. The Earthbound observer is a Glabberian named Jhubben (see his biography in **Chapter 4** for more detailed information). The orbital outpost was manned by an Embe nymph, a member of a species known for its love of solitude, with orders to inform the Master Traders if the Earth's situation changed suddenly or radically. The Embe made his annual reports faithfully until he was destroyed by the Swarm Mother (1985) and ended up in a Dumpster in New York City. At least for a while.

The only one who knows how far back the Network's interactions with Earth go is the Network itself, and its records are not freely available for scrutiny (nor has anyone offered the right price).

Profit is the Network's driving force. It never, under *any* circumstances, gives *anything* away for free. Ever.

## THE MASTER TRADERS

*Created by George R.R. Martin*

The Master Traders remain an enigma even to those races they have dealt with for thousands of years. No one knows what one really looks like. They are master illusionists and can project any shape they find pleasing.

No one knows where they come from, either. The planet known as Starholme is the center of the Network, but Starholme was constructed in the early days of the conglomerate, and is not the world of origin of the Master Traders or any of the Network members. It plays host to a massive reunion every 300 years when the Master Traders all return, some say to count the scores in a great competition that is behind all the Master Traders' wheeling and dealing. But no one knows for sure.

Not every Network ship is owned or commanded by a Trader, but every Trader owns and commands his own ship. About half of the big multi-species ships are owned by Master Traders. These ships have a complicated system of command. The Kondikki godqueen *is* the ship in many senses. The Aevre rule the control chamber. A Ly'bahr probably issues more commands than anyone aboard. If someone demanded to see the captain they'd probably be taken to a uniformed Rhindarian male who would be addressed as "Chief Commanding Authority." But the Master Trader owns the ship and frequently everyone aboard her as well.

As an example, their ship named *The Opportunity* is the size of Manhattan Island and contains tens of thousands of specialists, merchants, pleasurers, scientists, priests, technicians, artists, warriors, and envoys.

The Master Traders value some things more than others. They have no use for local currency, or for gems or precious metals which their technology can readily synthesize. They value real estate. They'll buy anything from your house to your planet if you want to sell it to them. They also buy service, a lifetime or a year's worth, whatever they can get. They collect art, artifacts, and music, but only what strikes their fancy, and their fancy can be quite unpredictable.

The thing they want the most and the thing they charge the highest prices for is knowledge. They want the new thing, the breakthrough, the advancement no one else has. They trade technology for technology, so generally the advanced races grow more advanced and the younger, more backward races stay in their backwaters. But you never know where an advance might come from. Sometimes even the younger races make interesting breakthroughs.

The Master Traders are largely a tolerant lot. They give no advantage to physical appearance. They don't like conflict or wars, because they're generally bad for trade. They don't meddle in the internal affairs of their member races. They have no particular morals to espouse and seem to be without religion. They'll let near anyone into the Network without trying to change them. Of course, joining the Network is guaranteed to change a new member race. The Traders know all about the concept of culture shock. They just don't care when it strikes or what it does.

If you'd ever get to know a Master Trader you'd generally find him to have a great sense of humor, fabulous artistic senses, and a wealth of scientific knowledge. They seem warm and witty, cheerful and playful. But do not mistake them for your friends. If one were to pass by while you were being beaten by muggers, he'd stop to sell you a gun. But he'd sell it to the muggers instead if they offered him a better price. The only thing a Master Trader holds "holy" is the contract.

The Master Traders' traits remain unknown, but they are better treated as plot devices (*M&M,* page 211) than individual characters, anyway. That's not to say the Master Traders are godlike in their power (although some in the Network certainly think so), just that they should have whatever abilities are needed to fill their role in the story. After all, they have access to tremendous technology and wealth almost beyond human comprehension.

# THE AEVRE

*Created by George R.R. Martin*

The Aevre, a Network race often used as starship pilots, are swift-winged carnivores from a low-gravity world. They are gorgeous creatures with skin like burnished bronze and large golden eyes. Their chests are huge and have oversized lungs and gaping red slits that act as air scoops for oxygen intake while they're flying. Their bat-like, leathery wings spread up to 40 feet. Their bones are hollow, making them physically fragile, and their bodies have little flesh, giving them a gaunt, chiseled appearance. They have a small clasping appendage that acts like a foot at the bottom of each wing to support them while they're on the ground. Their torsos are slim, muscular, and triangular in shape. Their legs are double-jointed, so each joint bends both ways at need, and end in six-fingered hands with retractable talons. These hands are their principal grasping appendages. They have razor-keen senses and lightning-fast reflexes.

The Aevre don't store energy as body fat. They are voracious, carnivorous eating machines who prefer live food. From time to time they forget themselves and grab a passing Kondikki worker for a quick snack. Fortunately, the godqueen regards this as only a minor branch of discipline so long as it doesn't happen too often.

The Aevre are actually mammalian, not avian, and the females can control their ovulation. They never allow themselves to become pregnant while on ship duty, because pregnancy requires nesting. The Aevre are highly sexed and not particular about species as long as appearances approximate Aevre aesthetics.

The big Network ships have immense control domes that are the Aevre's domain. Instruments line the walls in consoles with metal perches set before each. The control dome floors are a living ecosystem covered with brush and scrub with small streams running to a pool or fountain in the center. This provides food and shelter for the small animals the Aevre like to dine on. During their brief sleep periods, the Aevre hang upside

| AEVRE | | | | | POWER LEVEL 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Str 15 | Dex 16 | Con 12 | Int 10 | Wis 10 | Cha 10 |
| **SKILLS** | | | | | |
| Acrobatics 4 (+7), Notice 8 (+8), Pilot 6 (+9) or Profession 6 (+6), Sense Motive 2 (+2) | | | | | |
| **FEATS** | | | | | |
| Attack Focus (ranged) 2, Defensive Roll 1, Dodge Focus 3, Favored Environment (aerial) 2, Improved Initiative, Move-by Attack | | | | | |
| **POWERS** | | | | | |
| **Flight 2** | | | | | |
| **COMBAT** | | | | | |
| Attack +2 (melee), +4 (ranged), +4/+6 (airborne), Grapple +4 (+6 airborne), Damage +2 (unarmed) or by weapon, Defense +8 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback –1, Initiative +7 | | | | | |
| **SAVING THROWS** | | | | | |
| Toughness +2 (+1 flat-footed), Fortitude +4, Reflex +6, Will +3 | | | | | |
| **DRAWBACKS** | | | | | |
| Power Loss (flight, when wings are restrained, –1 point) | | | | | |
| **Abilities 13 + Skills 5 (20 ranks) + Feats 10 + Powers 4 + Combat 14 + Saves 9 – Drawbacks 1 = Total 54** | | | | | |

down from trapezes which dangle from the ceiling.

A control dome complement will consist of 10 to 12 Aevre. A Network war vessel might carry an additional 20 to 50 Aevre as part of its fighting complement. They fly deadly fighter ships specifically designed for them.

The Aevre don't wear clothes, but often drape themselves with brightly colored material, jewelry, or feathers. They engage in ritualistic body painting on some religious occasions. When engaged in combat they wear tight-fitting silver-mesh body suits and carry bandoliers of grenades in each gripping appendage. They move very fast and are hard to hit.

The Aevre are not a technologically advanced race. They can use machines skillfully, but don't have the technology or temperament to build or invent new variations on them. They'd rather sing than read, play with a machine than fix it, hunt than farm, and fly than just about anything. As individuals they are largely proud, vain, impetuous, fearless, boastful, and almost always hungry. They tend towards sarcastic wit and have a sharp and mocking sense of humor. They are addicted to racial jokes, with other species often the butt of their humor.

# KONDIKKI

*Created by George R.R. Martin*

The Kondikki are an ancient and static insectoid race that has been with the Network almost since its inception. On their home world great nest wars were endemic as biological imperatives forced the godqueens to try to destroy one another, but they found tranquility once they were taken into the great Network ships and isolated from each other.

The nests, as personified by the godqueen, quest after harmony, balance, proportion, and equanimity. They are innately loyal to the Network (their own name for it is "Star Nest") and in fact are now an entirely space-faring race, having sold and abandoned the planet of their birth. They feel uneasy whenever Network ships dock or are otherwise in close proximity, but the physical distance between nests prevents violence from breaking out.

The Kondikki are made up of several specialized castes that look as if they actually might belong to different species. They are the Network's most adept and untiring technicians and form the crews of most of the big Network starships.

The most important castes found in a Kondikki nest are workers, guardians, consorts, and the godqueen.

## KONDIKKI WORKER

The workers are sterile females that range in length from a man's finger to a man's forearm. They have six legs, a segmented body, and a shiny greenish-black chitinous exoskeleton. Their triangular heads have dozens of clusters of specialized eyes, some of which can focus microscopically, others that see into the infrared or ultraviolet. Their mouths are fringed with tough, strong, flexible, and deft tendrils that act as the worker's manipulative appendages. Their forelegs are used for crude labor or heavy lifting. Workers are quite strong despite their small size and can lift many times their own weight.

The workers are not truly intelligent, but act on genetically imprinted instincts that give them a specific life-long task to perform. There are dozens of such specialties in sub-fields of endeavor like maintenance, repair, and transport. Workers eat only a special type of syrup produced in the nest.

A typical Network starship carries thousands of Kondikki workers. They live in the ship's nooks and crannies, behind the bulkheads in a labyrinth of conduits designed especially for them, constantly making repairs, doing routine maintenance, and generally keeping the ship functional.

## KONDIKKI GUARDIAN

The Kondikki guardians, the warrior caste, are sterile males. Like the workers, they have six-legged, segmented bodies, but only the back two pair of legs are used for locomotion. The front legs are triple-jointed and elongated, and end in crude, three-fingered hands. The underside of the foremost joint has a protruding ridge of hard resin the guardians hone to

| KONDIKKI WORKER | | | | | POWER LEVEL 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR 10 | DEX 14 | CON 10 | INT 1 | WIS 10 | CHA 1 |
| **SKILLS** | | | | | |
| One imprinted skill (usually Craft or Profession) with an effective bonus of +8 | | | | | |
| **FEATS** | | | | | |
| None | | | | | |
| **POWERS** | | | | | |
| **Shrinking 8** (tiny; Continuous, Normal Strength; Permanent; Innate) | | | | | |
| **Super-Senses 3** (infravision, microscopic vision, ultravision) | | | | | |
| **COMBAT** | | | | | |
| Attack +2 (includes +2 due to size), Grapple –8 (includes -8 due to size), Damage +0, Defense +2 (includes +2 due to size), Knockback +2 (includes +2 due to size), Initiative +2 | | | | | |
| **SAVING THROWS** | | | | | |
| Toughness +0, Fortitude +0, Reflex +2, Will +0 | | | | | |
| **Abilities –14 + Skills 2 (8 ranks) + Feats 0 + Powers 20 + Combat 0 + Saves 0 = Total 8** | | | | | |

| KONDIKKI GUARDIAN | | | | | POWER LEVEL 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR 22 | DEX 15 | CON 18 | INT 6 | WIS 10 | CHA 7 |
| **SKILLS** | | | | | |
| Notice 4 (+4), Search 8 (+6) | | | | | |
| **FEATS** | | | | | |
| Attack Focus (melee) 4, Improved Initiative | | | | | |
| **POWERS** | | | | | |
| **Drain Constitution 6** (Poison) | | | | | |
| **Protection 1** | | | | | |
| **Shrinking 4** (small; Continuous, Normal Strength; Permanent; Innate) | | | | | |
| **Super-Movement 2** (wall-crawling) | | | | | |
| **Super-Senses 3** (infravision, microscopic vision, ultravision) | | | | | |
| **COMBAT** | | | | | |
| Attack +5 (melee, includes +1 due to size), +1 (ranged, includes +1 due to size), Grapple +6 (includes –4 due to size), Damage +6 (unarmed), Defense +5 (+3 flat-footed, includes +1 due to size), Knockback –1 (includes +1 due to size), Initiative +6 | | | | | |
| **SAVING THROWS** | | | | | |
| Toughness +5, Fortitude +6, Reflex +4, Will +2 | | | | | |
| **Abilities 18 + Skills 3 (12 ranks) + Feats 5 + Powers 29 + Combat 8 + Saves 6 = Total 69** | | | | | |

razor sharpness and turn into a formidable slashing weapon. The guardians' eye clusters are similar to the workers and have the same sensory range, but instead of tendrils their mouths have jagged mandibles. Poison sacs, reddish and swollen, dangle under their jaws like udders. The venom in these sacs is deadly.

The guardians are also quite larger than the workers, with a body length of three feet, not including the massive head. The elongated forearms extend another three feet when stretched out, although they are customarily carried folded. The guardians have an internal skeleton as well as chitinous armor on their limbs, head, and upper flanks. The underside of their bodies is a mottled green and black leathery flesh. Guardians can easily walk on walls and ceilings, and are adept at fighting in free fall.

The guardians are quick and agile fighters but have limited intelligence. They cannot speak, but can understand simple commands given in Network trade talk and can use their forelimbs to sign elementary replies. In olden times on their own world each Kondikki nest had hundreds of guardians, but their warrior function has largely been superseded on Network ships by modern technology and even more fearsome warrior races. A starship nest nevertheless still does include 20 or so guardians who act as a sort of ritualistic honor guard.

## KONDIKKI CONSORT

The Kondikki consorts are fertile males. They live and die deep within the nest chamber, a huge circular room that is the nexus of the Kondikki tunnel system deep in the heart of most Network starships.

Consorts resemble the guardians, but lack the slashing fore-limbs, mandibles, and poison sacs. Their green bodies are soft and pulpy. Their mouths are fringed by long, hollow tentacles used as both manipulative appendages and organs of fertilization.

The consorts fertilize the eggs constantly spewed forth by the godqueen, consciously manipulating the numbers in each caste and in each sub-speciality according to the immediate needs of the nest and the ship around them.

Consorts have a human level of intelligence. They speak in a high-pitched, clicking language. While not technologically creative, they have a quick understanding of any machine or device explained to or diagramed for them. With that understanding they can immediately imprint unborn workers with the instinctive ability to build, repair, and maintain the device.

From time to time a consort appears who can produce hybrids or even entirely new castes of specialists. These mutants are both highly prized and regarded with suspicion by the Kondikki, as innovations can both be useful or disruptive, depending.

Each nest has about 20 to 30 consorts. They never leave the nest chamber. They function as the voice of the Kondikki to the rest of the ship, communicating with the other races through electronic links.

The average consort has average human level strength, reflexes, and intelligence.

## KONDIKKI GODQUEEN

The godqueen is the living soul of the nest. She is a huge, blind mountain of soft, immobile greenish-black flesh; very young godqueens can squirm and roll around a bit. The godqueen deposits eggs and eats constantly. She can digest many types of scrap and garbage. Most of the starship's sanitary systems pump their waste to the nest chamber, out of which the godqueen produces the nutritive syrup that nourishes the other castes.

The nest chamber where the godqueen dwells is a cavernous, damp place crawling with life. Great drapes of succulent fungus grow from the floor to the ceiling. The walls are covered with fertilized eggs pasted there by the consorts. Workers are constantly crawling in and out to feed on the nectar secreted by the godqueen.

The other castes worship the godqueen. They can live for thousands of years with a vast intellect and memory that is always growing. A godqueen also has potent but limited telepathic abilities. She has a strong link with her consorts and a dim one with the workers and guardians. This telepathy does not extend to other nests of Kondikki or to other races. The one exception to this is the Swarm, which the godqueen regards as a cancerous horror. A godqueen can telepathically sense a Swarm Mother when one comes within a certain number of light-years. The godqueen communicates to those outside the nest chamber only through her consorts.

A Kondikki nest has only one godqueen. When the reigning godqueen starts to die, the consorts sense this by tasting the onset of decay in her eggs and then fertilize a number of eggs designed to produce young

### KONDIKKI CONSORT — POWER LEVEL 3

| Str 10 | Dex 11 | Con 15 | Int 10 | Wis 10 | Cha 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

**SKILLS**

Knowledge (technology) 8 (+8), Notice 4 (+4), Search 4 (+4)

**FEATS**

None

**POWERS**

**Shrinking 4** (small; Continuous, Normal Strength; Permanent; Innate)

**Super-Movement 2** (wall-crawling)

**Super-Senses 3** (infravision, microscopic vision, ultravision)

**COMBAT**

Attack +1 (includes +1 due to size), Grapple –4 (includes -4 due to size), Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +4 (+3 flat-footed, includes +1 due to size), Knockback +1 (includes +1 due to size), Initiative +0

**SAVING THROWS**

Toughness +0, Fortitude +4, Reflex +2, Will +2

**Abilities 6 + Skills 4 (16 ranks) + Feats 0 + Powers 16 + Combat 8 + Saves 6 = Total 40**

### KONDIKKI GODQUEEN — POWER LEVEL 9

| Str — | Dex — | Con 20 | Int 28 | Wis 22 | Cha 18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

**SKILLS**

None

**FEATS**

None

**POWERS**

**Communication 6** (mental; Area; Limited to its hive; Selective)

**Protection 2**

**COMBAT**

None

**SAVING THROWS**

Toughness +7, Fortitude +8, Reflex —, Will +10

**Abilities 28 + Skills 0 + Feats 0 + Powers 9 + Combat 0 + Saves 7 = Total 44**

## OTHER NETWORK SPECIES

The Network includes over a hundred species, only a few of which have been seen in the *Wild Cards* novels. Gamemasters have an excellent opportunity to introduce their own aliens via the Network, if desired. Some other Network species that have appeared or been mentioned in the series include:

### DRUK'HEEN — CREATED BY GEORGE R.R. MARTIN

The Druk'heen are a science experiment that went dreadfully wrong. This species of sentient scaled carnivores was spawned by the Rhindarians to do the heavy labor the Rhindarians themselves disdained, but quickly outbred their erstwhile masters and took over Rhindar. This made life very unpleasant for the remaining Rhindarians, who signed a contract with a Master Trader to do something about it for them. The Master Trader sent in a few thousand mixed troops and a dozen Ly'bahr legionnaires and overthrew the Druk'heen in a single night. All surviving Druk'heen were shipped off to a hot, swampy, volcanic planet, and charged for both transportation and real estate. The Druk'heen are still paying off the bill. Their planet has since become heavily industrialized and the Druk'heen are known as miners, shipbuilders, laborers, and mercenaries. They still hold a grudge against both the Rhindarians and the Network.

### EMBE — CREATED BY WALTER JON WILLIAMS

The Embe are insectoids that look like furry grasshoppers in their nymph stage when they have pale white fur covering the torso of their chitinous frame. The Embe are a solitary race from a light gravity world and although enigmatic and uncommunicative, they inhabit a dozen worlds and are rather well-known throughout space. They invented the singularity shifter and have served as Network observers placed in orbit around the Earth.

### GLABBERIANS — CREATED BY GEORGE R.R. MARTIN

The Glabberians are a hermaphroditic race from the glacier-ridden planet of Glabber, whose sun is dying. New to the Network, they are a relatively primitive race from a relatively backwater planet. Less than a hundred Glabberians have taken service with the Network. One of them, Jhubben, was placed on Earth as an observer by the ship *Opportunity* in 1952. They like their temperatures low, their meat raw and stinky, and their drinks with rum and fruit slices and those little paper umbrellas in them. (For more information see Jhubben's biography in **Chapter 4**.)

### KREG — CREATED BY GEORGE R.R. MARTIN

The Kreg are a Network race of machine intelligences.

### LYN-KO-NEEN — CREATED BY GEORGE R.R. MARTIN

A Network race that sings in high, shrill notes, and about which, as you can see, not much else is currently known.

### VIAND — CREATED BY MELISSA SNODGRASS

A race that recently joined the Network, the Viand are a species of intelligent worms who live in a symbiotic (or perhaps parasitic) relationship with a four-legged host animal on their home planet.

godqueens. Once born, these young queens reach out telepathically to the guardians, using them as instruments in a fight for dominance that results in only a single surviving youngster.

# LY'BAHR

*Created by George R.R. Martin*

The Ly'bahr are a race of cyborgs and one of the three original species that formed the Network. One of the most technologically advanced civilizations in the galaxy—perhaps too much so for their own good—they abandoned their biological bodies and had their brains encased in awesome cybernetic shells. When the Swarm destroyed their home world some 10,000 years ago, it killed all the remaining organic Ly'bahr. The Ly'bahr as a race have no means of reproducing their species and are thus doomed to extinction. Even though the remaining Ly'bahr are virtual immortals, one does meet its end every now and again, and the entire race mourns.

The Ly'bahr's bodies vary immensely from one to the next and even from day to day for individuals. They are always redesigning and rebuilding themselves. Frequently their cyborg bodies are bipedal, echoing the organic origins of their race, but the brain is virtually never encased in the cyborg's head, if it has one, but rather down in the torso where it can be protected by heavy-duty armor and force fields.

A typical Ly'bahr cyborg will possess several advanced computers and a wide array of sensory equipment, all powered by a small nuclear fusion cell. Their bodies are obviously metallic. Most are shiny and colorful, the color being left to personal preference.

Ly'bahr scientists are the equal to any in the galaxy when it comes to cybernetics, metallurgy, plastics, and inorganic chemistry. A typical Network starship will have a contingent of five or six Ly'bahr and a senior Ly'bahr will likely command the ship on a day-to-day basis.

Network warships carry Ly'bahr warriors called legionnaires. They are the most feared warriors in the galaxy. Augmented exoskeletons make them physically powerful. Their armored bodies can withstand the rigors of a hard vacuum as well as the depredation of most weaponry. Lasers glance off their mirrored shells, they move and fire with

computer-like accuracy, and can be armed with just about any kind of heavy weaponry imaginable. The only being to destroy a Ly'bahr legionnaire in hand-to-hand combat was Starshine, and he paid for his victory with his own death at the hands of the legionnaire's comrades. In a fleet battle situation the legionnaires can build themselves up to the size of a small shuttle craft and take on a team of Kondikki workers to help with damage control.

Ly'bahr legionnaires, despite their fearsome weaponry and almost indestructible armor, are nevertheless cautious and deliberate fighters, well aware that each death diminishes the race forever. The only exception to this behavior concerns the Swarm. The Ly'bahr will viciously attack Swarm whenever they encounter it, without regard for their own lives or the lives of anyone who might be nearby.

Other than the whole extinction thing, the Ly'bahr don't really miss their bodies. They consider the inorganic body to be superior to the fleshly body, and frankly wonder why all intelligent races don't become cyborgs.

All Ly'bahr can call upon millennia of recorded memories and experience. They have no interest in or capacity for physical pleasure, so have honed their intellectual pursuits to a very high degree. Their games, music, literature, and art are subtle and complex, as well as incomprehensible and boring to other races.

Ly'bahr traits are highly variable. These should only be considered a basic template, and the GM should modify it as desired to fit the legionnaire's particular purpose, including customized weaponry, sensor modules, and the like.

**LY'BAHR LEGIONNAIRE — POWER LEVEL 10**

| Str 26 | Dex 17 | Con 16 | Int 20 | Wis 18 | Cha 11 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

**SKILLS**

Computers 8 (+13), Intimidate 8 (+8), Knowledge (tactics) 8 (+13), Knowledge (technology) 8 (+13), Notice 8 (+12)

**FEATS**

Improved Initiative 2

**POWERS**

**Blast 11** (mounted weapon)

**Flight 8** (2,500 mph)

**Immunity 30** (Fortitude)

**Protection 9** (Impervious)

**Quickness 3**

**Super-Senses 10** (blindsight [radio], direction sense, distance sense, infravision, radio, time sense, ultravision)

**Super-Strength 5** (*heavy load:* 12 tons)

**COMBAT**

Attack +9, Grapple +22, Damage +8 (unarmed), +11 (weapons array), Defense +8 (+4 flat-footed), Knockback –10, Initiative +11

**SAVING THROWS**

Toughness +12, Fortitude +3, Reflex +7, Will +8

**Abilities 48 + Skills 10 (40 ranks) + Feats 2 + Powers 109 + Combat 34 + Saves 8 = Total 211**

# RHINDARIANS

*Created by George R.R. Martin*

For centuries the Rhindarians were slaves to a species of scaled saurian carnivores called the Druk'heen that ironically the Rhindarians themselves had evolved to sentience during the course of a science experiment gone terribly wrong. Originally intended to do the physical labor the Rhindarians themselves disdained, the Druk'heen outbred and ultimately enslaved their supposed masters. When a Network starship reached Rhindar, the Druk'heen refused to have anything to do with it. The Master Trader promptly signed a treaty with the Rhindarians, sent in a few thousand mixed troops and a dozen Ly'bahr legionnaires, toppled the Druk'heen from power in a single night, then removed them all from the planet.

The Rhindarians are still repaying the debt from this treaty with research and educational service aboard Network ships. They don't mind that they still owe the Master Traders, because they love what they do and are, in fact, fiercely loyal to the Network.

Physically, the Rhindarians are small, delicate, graceful, hairless bipedal mammals. They average about four and a half feet in height with long necks, slim-fingered hands with two opposable thumbs, and large, liquid eyes. They have no external ears and a simple breathing hole instead of a nose. Their skin is soft and smooth, but they can change color like a chameleon. Most favor rather drab earth tones. Disguised and in a bad light, they could pass for human children.

Like their skin, their clothing is usually bland in color and nondescript. They like coveralls with lots of pockets, and loose, flowing robes and gowns. They are strict vegetarians. Many are empaths. They move gracefully and speak quietly.

The Rhindarians are a race of scholars. They are utterly obsessed with acquiring knowledge. Three-quarters of the scientists on any Network starship will be Rhindarians and Rhindar itself is the Network's prime university and library.

**RHINDARIAN — POWER LEVEL 4**

| Str 8 | Dex 10 | Con 10 | Int 18 | Wis 14 | Cha 14 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

**SKILLS**

Diplomacy 6 (+8), Knowledge (choose a science) 8 (+12), Knowledge (secondary science) 4 (+8), Notice 4 (+6), Profession (scientist or researcher) 8 (+10), Sense Motive 10 (+12)

**FEATS**

None

**POWERS**

**Super-Senses 3** (detect emotions, Ranged, Sense)

**COMBAT**

Attack +0, Grapple –1, Damage –1 (unarmed), Defense +2 (+1 flat-footed), Knockback –0, Initiative +0

**SAVING THROWS**

Toughness +0, Fortitude +3, Reflex +3, Will +5

**Abilities 14 + Skills 10 (40 ranks) + Feats 0 + Powers 3 + Combat 4 + Saves 9 = Total 40**

Many of the Network's translators, envoys, and diplomats are also Rhindarians. Their racial talent for empathy comes in handy in these professions. Their philosophy and religion counsel peace, learning, cooperation, contemplation, selflessness, service, and hard work. They generally do a much better job of attaining these ideals than humans do.

All of the above statements, however, apply only to Rhindarian females. The males are something else entirely.

Six feet tall and handsome (by Rhindarian standards, anyway), the

males are lithe and muscular with an erectible spinal crest sweeping back from their foreheads all the way down to their buttocks. It rises a foot or more when engorged with blood. The skin colors of the males change constantly and spectacularly. Popular hues are magenta, gold, azure, indigo, and orange. When aroused by a Rhindarian female in heat they turn a distinctive shade of scarlet. They have a strong, not unpleasant, body odor that they enhance with perfume. They wear a lot of guns and knives and other weaponry. They like jewelry, spiffy uniforms, and bright, shiny things. They are vain, self-important, flamboyant, patronizing, and quite empty-headed. They are, in short, sex objects.

Network ships each carry only a single male Rhinardian since they are territorially aggressive. When two males come in close proximity they challenge each other with gaudy color changes and ultimately attack, screaming, with their bare hands or any weapon they can seize. Rhindarian females defer to and protect the male, since males are, after all, easily excited and overly emotional. They shower him with gifts and compliments, praise his good looks and intelligence and martial prowess, and do whatever they can to make him feel important. In private they tell each other amusing stories about all the males they know and all the cute things they do.

Rhindarian males firmly believe they're in charge of the females. Aboard Network ships they hold titles like Lord High Wisdom, Fleet General, and Topmost Master. No one would dream of giving them any real authority, but the proper forms are always observed. Sometimes annoying primitives who insist on speaking to the captain will be allowed to confer with the Fleet General. The results are usually amusing.

Rhindarians are not fighters. The females are too gentle and empathetic, the males, although they enjoy martial displays, are too scatterbrained. Rhindarians are great scientists, but poor technicians.

These game traits are for a typical Rhindarian female in service on board a Network vessel. For a Rhindarian male, reverse the template's Str and Int, and Dex and Wis scores, and remove all of the skills and powers.

# THE SWARM

*Created by Walter Jon Williams*

The Swarm, a yeast-like, sometimes intelligent, species, is known by many names. It was called TIAMAT by the ancient Sumerians on Earth, T'zand'ran by the Takisians, and Dark Sister by the Egyptian Masons. Network races named it Demonseed, the Great Cancer, Hellmother, Devourer of Worlds, Mother of Nightmares. The Kondikki simply called it Dread; the Kreg machine intelligences, Dysfunction; the Ly'bahr, whose planet it destroyed, dooming them to wander forever in their cybernetic skins, Thyat M'hruh (Darkness for the Race).

The Swarm has no culture or civilization. Its origins are unknown, even to itself. Its only philosophy is to reproduce and spread until it devours the entire universe.

A Swarm colony grows from a Swarm Mother: thousands of tons of genetic material encased in a tough organic shell. "Mother" is perhaps an inapt term to describe a colonizing Swarm creature. A Swarm Mother carries within it all the genetic material it needs to produce a colony. "Egg" might be a more satisfactory term, or perhaps "Template," for the mechanically inclined. What it calls itself is unknown, for only one being has ever successfully communicated with the Swarm.

A typical Swarm Mother has the dimensions of a decent-sized asteroid, about 30 kilometers long and 20 kilometers wide, and indeed looks very much like a rugged chunk of rock. Swarm Mothers travel slowly but surely at sub-light speed, mainly through a combination of organic rockets and solar sails.

When it enters a new star system it goes into an orbit from which it might observe any planets upon which it can plant a colony. If a suitable planet is found, the Mother creates any number of Swarm subspecies to exploit the environments of that world, and delivers those creatures (or buds) to the world's surface. The Swarm Mother itself does not land. After it successfully plants a colony, it dies.

Swarm Mothers are hard to spot while traveling through space. They absorb heat, radar, and visible light. Since the Swarm itself communicates telepathically, Takisians can use their mental powers to pinpoint their presence in space. Swarm Mothers are fairly vulnerable targets in space, if the attacker possess the technology to deliver the proper type of weapon. Nuclear weapons probably wouldn't penetrate a Swam Mothers tough skin, but the radiation would likely scramble the Mother's mental processes. Once the outer skin is penetrated, a Swarm Mother is vulnerable to almost any sophisticated physical attack.

## ATTACK METHODS

In most cases, a prospective colony world doesn't have its own indigenous intelligent life. In that case, the Swarm Mother does not bother to evolve any intelligence of its own, but simply follows well-established instinctual procedures and lands a range of appropriate Swarmling subspecies on the world.

However, if the Mother's preliminary survey indicates the presence of intelligent life—through the existence of radio signals or orbital satellites, for example—the Mother begins to alter itself. It develops something we might recognize as intelligence, capable of making inferences and deductions and following chains of logic.

First-generation Swarm attacks consist of large numbers of unintelligent ravening creatures of various types (see the following section for examples of those used during the attack on Earth). The Swarm Mother drops them in branches which contain specific Swarm subspecies. Each branch consists of 50,000 to 60,000 individuals called buds. Each bud is launched through the atmosphere in a tough-skinned organic pod that splits before or upon landing, releasing horrifically carnivorous creatures upon a usually unsuspecting world. None of these creatures are intelligent, but they are all tenacious, tough, and, although vulnerable to physical attack, generally pretty hard to kill. Plus there are *millions* of them.

When a Swarm colony matures, it covers the entire surface of its host world, busily converting everything on the world to Swarm use. All the many subspecies are in telepathic contact and can link up into a group mind to strike back, forcefully, if the colony is ever attacked by an outside force.

As the colony reaches maturity it begins to manufacture Swarm Mothers and fires them more or less randomly into space. A colony can probably manufacture millions of Mothers, most of which will wander indefinitely, perhaps endlessly, in space, searching for another world to colonize. When a Swarm colony runs out of host planet to exploit, it starts to exploit itself, each subspecies cannibalizing the other until there is nothing organic on the face of the planet, leaving a burnt-out, dead hulk as a souvenir of their presence. This process can take thousands or even tens of thousands of years, depending on the size and richness of the individual world colonized.

The first attack wave that hit Earth in December of 1985 consisted of approximately 2.4 million buds in various locations. See **Chapter 2** for details on this attack.

The first wave was stopped within a week or so in the United States by a combination of traditional military forces and a coalition of aces. It continued for some time, months in some cases, in less-developed parts

| KILLER MOLLUSK | | | | | POWER LEVEL 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR 26 | DEX 8 | CON 22 | INT 1 | WIS 10 | CHA 1 |
| **SKILLS** | | | | | |
| None | | | | | |
| **FEATS** | | | | | |
| Attack Focus (melee) 6, Improved Grab | | | | | |
| **POWERS** | | | | | |
| **Growth 8** (huge; +16 Str, +8 Con; Continuous; Permanent; Innate) | | | | | |
| **Immunity 30** (Will effects) | | | | | |
| **Protection 2** (Impervious) | | | | | |
| **Super-Strength 1** (*heavy load:* 2 tons) | | | | | |
| **COMBAT** | | | | | |
| Attack +4 (melee, includes –2 due to size), –2 (ranged, includes -2 due to size), Grapple +23 (includes +8 due to size), Damage +8 (unarmed), Defense +4 (includes –2 due to size), Knockback –13 (includes –8 due to size), Initiative –1 | | | | | |
| **SAVING THROWS** | | | | | |
| Toughness +8, Fortitude +9, Reflex –1, Will +0 | | | | | |
| **DRAWBACKS** | | | | | |
| Disability (no hands, –4 points) | | | | | |
| **Abilities –16+ Skills 0 + Feats 7 + Powers 61 + Combat 12 + Saves 3 – Drawbacks 4 = Total 63** | | | | | |

| PACK CARNIVORE | | | | | POWER LEVEL 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR 15 | DEX 16 | CON 15 | INT 1 | WIS 10 | CHA 1 |
| **SKILLS** | | | | | |
| None | | | | | |
| **FEATS** | | | | | |
| Attack Focus (melee) 4, Dodge Focus 2 | | | | | |
| **POWERS** | | | | | |
| **Immunity 30** (Will effects) | | | | | |
| **Strike 2** (Mighty) | | | | | |
| **COMBAT** | | | | | |
| Attack +4 (melee), +0 (ranged), Grapple +6, Damage +4 (claws), Defense +6 (+2 flat-footed), Knockback –1, Initiative +3 | | | | | |
| **SAVING THROWS** | | | | | |
| Toughness +2, Fortitude +4, Reflex +6, Will +0 | | | | | |
| **DRAWBACKS** | | | | | |
| Disability (no hands, –4 points) | | | | | |
| **Abilities –2 + Skills 0 + Feats 6 + Powers 33 + Combat 8 + Saves 5 – Drawbacks 4 = Total 46** | | | | | |

of the world, but was eventually ended.

The second prong of the invasion, a more sophisticated and sinister attack, used spies to gather detailed information about human biology, customs, and mores, and segued into a third phase, replacing a number of Earth's political and military leaders with Swarmling replicants. The replicants planned to foment an atomic war to destroy most of the human race and leave the surface of the Earth uninhabitable for millennia, a period the Swarm Mother was willing to wait before it could exploit its prize.

## A DIFFERENT SWARM

Yeoman and Fortunato discovered Dr. Tachyon had been replaced by a Swarmling infiltrator. After they freed him, Tachyon used his ship, *Baby,* to ferry Yeoman and Fortunato to the Swarm Mother in Earth orbit, where their plan called for Mai Minh, an ace with healing powers, to give the Mother cancer and destroy it. Mai, a pacifist Buddhist, could not bring herself to kill an intelligent being, however. Instead, she merged her body and consciousness with the Swarm Mother and together, an entirely new and unique entity, they returned to the depths of space.

What this new development may mean for the future of the galaxy is anybody's guess.

# THE SWARM MOTHER

The Swarm Mother is scarcely a character, more a piece of dangerous real estate. The Mother itself is far more a plot device than anything (see *M&M*, page 211). As such, instead of looking up game stats, you should feel free to simply assign appropriate Difficulty Classes when dealing with the Swarm Mother. Caught in space, the Mother is relatively helpless, provided the attacker has suitable weaponry. Psychic contact with a Swarm Mother is both difficult and dangerous, Will saves to avoid being stunned (or worse) are entirely appropriate, given the Swarm's utterly alien intelligence, although a character could conceivably get through to it (much as Mai Minh did).

The Swarm Mother's spawn are another matter altogether. They do have game stats, detailed here. The Swarm Mother is in telepathic contact with all of its spawn, the equivalent of Mental Communication 10 with the Area modifier, but affecting only Swarmlings.

# FIRST GENERATION SWARMLINGS

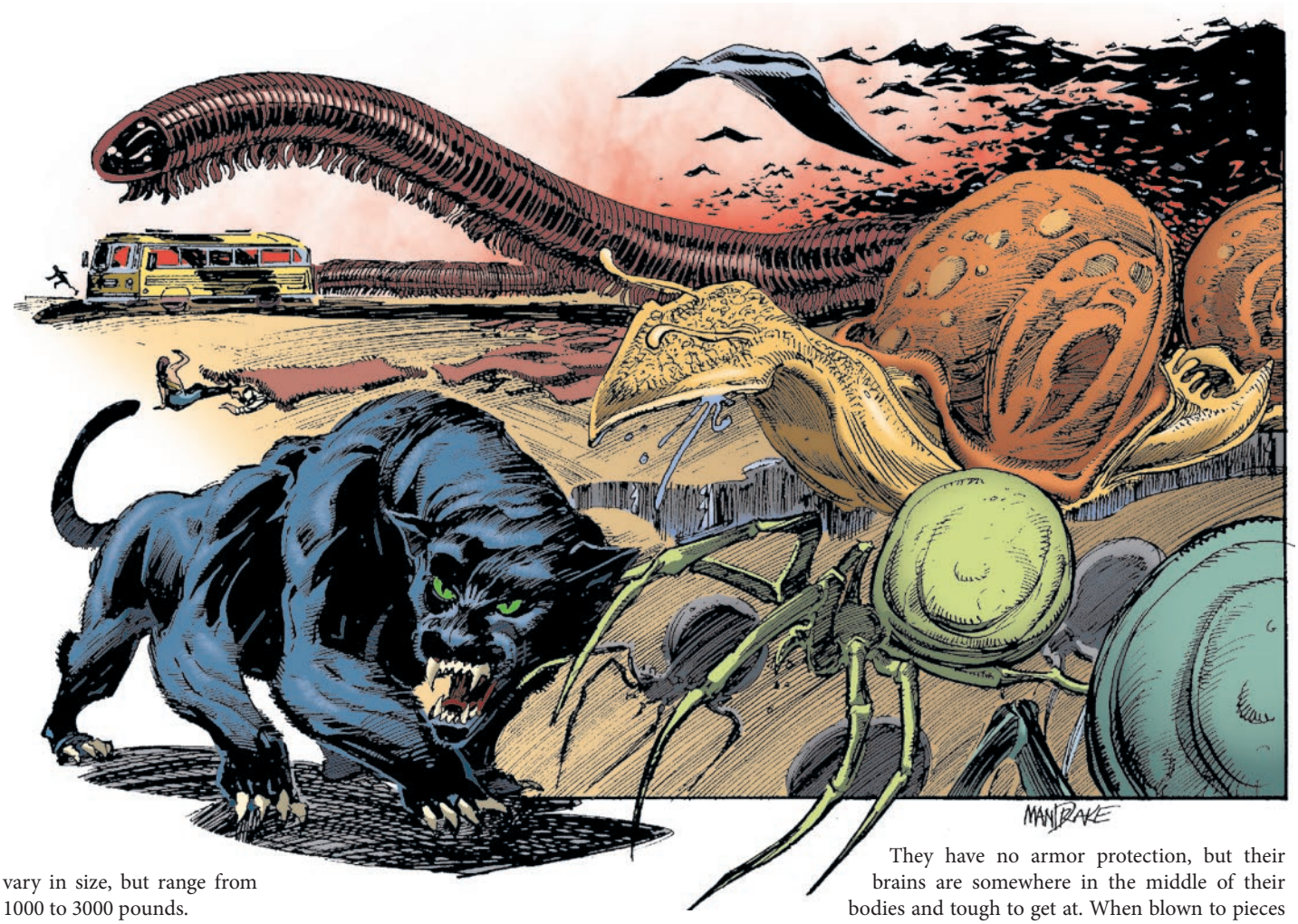
Over 2 million of these babies dropped on the Earth during the first wave of the invasion. There are six major types, but literally dozens of varieties. All these Swarmlings are fearless, with no regard for their personal safety. They are almost always ravenously hungry, and will halt their advance to feed on wounded or dead foes.

First-generation Swarmlings move together in a horde of 50,000 or 60,000 individuals that can cover up 12 to 15 miles in an hour of unimpeded travel. The fliers can move faster, and scout unknown territory and relay appropriate information back to the Swam Mother, who uses this intelligence to telepathically instruct the other Swarmlings.

The main first-generation Swarm attack lasts approximately six or seven days in most industrialized parts of the world, although certainly individual Swarmlings survive much longer in even the most urbanized of environments. In rural settings, especially in the most remote areas of the world, elements of the Swarm horde may have survived for years, decades, or even longer if the Swarm Mother also sent down breeder units to replenish their numbers.

## KILLER MOLLUSK

These legless, snail-like creatures move by undulating thrusts of their 30-foot-long bodies. Slow-moving but strong, these Swarmlings overcome their prey by enveloping and crushing them. They can smash through non-metallic walls with relative ease, and although not armored, are difficult to kill because their brains, basically their only vital organ, are located in the central protected portion of their bodies. Individuals




vary in size, but range from 1000 to 3000 pounds.

## PACK CARNIVORE

All Swarmlings travel and hunt en masse, but these are the only ones that actually fight in groups using coordinated tactics against a target, as opposed to simply swarming them. Individuals weigh 60 or 70 pounds and look like six-legged panthers.

They utilize quick-moving, well-coordinated attacks in groups of three to 12 with one coordinator per group that is in direct contact with the Swarm Mother. Knock that one off and their coordination dissolves into chaos. Their offensive weapons are teeth and claws. They rely primarily on their high speed for defense, with no armor or other substantial protection.

## OPHIDIAN MILLIPEDE

These serpent-like Swarmlings are 60 feet long, occasionally longer or shorter. Their undersides writhe with 10-foot cilia that propel them sidewinder-like along the ground, though they can rear up 15 feet or so. Because they are so large they're the scarcest variety of Swarmling, and generally attack individually, rarely in couples or triads. Individuals range from two to eight tons in weight.

Immensely powerful, these Swarmlings can batter down most anything. They utilize their weight for rearing and crushing attacks, and also have large, blunt mouth parts like jaws that can squash most anything. They have no armor protection, but their brains are somewhere in the middle of their bodies and tough to get at. When blown to pieces only the segment with the brain retains even their rudimentary intelligence. Other segments still capable of moving attack anything in reach, even other Swarmlings. They have sensory organs every five feet or so up and down the length of their bodies.

## LEAPING SPIDERS

Leaping spiders use swarming tactics in their attacks, relying on speed and sheer numbers to overcome their prey. They have four-foot-wide, rather squishy bodies supported on thin stilt-like legs. They are vulnerable to even hand weapons, and crippled if a leg or two is blown off, although their legs are so thin and they move so quickly that they're difficult targets for non-automatic weapon fire. They weigh 20 to 30 pounds each.

## KILLER CARPETS

These creatures resemble nothing more than deep-pile shag carpeting. They are no more than a foot or so high and cling close to the ground with no visible legs. They vary in size from a foot or two on each side to 10 feet on each side, and weigh about two pounds per square foot.

The major offensive weapon of the carpets are the three-foot needles they fling with some accuracy up to 20 or 30 feet. The needles can penetrate cloth and flesh, but not armor. They can be lethal in and of themselves if they hit a vital organ, but are most dangerous because of their paralyzing poison. A couple of hits can paralyze an ordinary human.

## OPHIDIAN MILLIPEDE — POWER LEVEL 8

| Str 34 | Dex 10 | Con 22 | Int 1 | Wis 10 | Cha 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

**SKILLS**

None

**FEATS**

Attack Focus (melee) 8

**POWERS**

**Anatomic Separation 6** (Limited to one rank per injured condition)
**Growth 12** (gargantuan; +24 Str, +12 Con; Continuous; Permanent; Innate)
**Immunity 30** (Will effects)
**Protection 4** (Impervious)

**COMBAT**

Attack +4 (melee, includes –4 due to size), –4 (ranged, includes -4 due to size), Grapple +32 (includes +12 due to size), Damage +12 (unarmed), Defense +4 (includes –4 due to size), Knockback –19 (includes –12 due to size), Initiative +0

**SAVING THROWS**

Toughness +10, Fortitude +8, Reflex +0, Will +0

**DRAWBACKS**

Disability (no hands, –4 points)

**Abilities –18 + Skills 0 + Feats 8 + Powers 81 + Combat 16 + Saves 2 – Drawbacks 4 = Total 85**

## LEAPING SPIDERS — POWER LEVEL 2

| Str 8 | Dex 16 | Con 8 | Int 1 | Wis 10 | Cha 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

**SKILLS**

None

**FEATS**

Attack Focus (melee) 5, Dodge Focus 3, Improved Initiative

**POWERS**

**Immunity 30** (Will effects)
**Super-Movement 2** (wall-crawling)

**COMBAT**

Attack +5 (melee), +0 (ranged), Grapple +4, Damage –1 (unarmed), Defense +5 (+1 flat-footed), Knockback –0, Initiative +7

**SAVING THROWS**

Toughness –1, Fortitude +2, Reflex +6, Will +0

**DRAWBACKS**

Disability (no hands, –4 points)

**Abilities –16 + Skills 0 + Feats 9 + Powers 34 + Combat 4 + Saves 6 – Drawbacks 4 = Total 33**

They do no lasting damage, but allow the carpet to crawl on its target and dissolve it with fast-acting digestive acids. The carpets also have a limited number of needles (about one per square foot of size) and have to feed in order to grow more once they empty their "quiver."

## KILLER CARPETS — POWER LEVEL 4

| Str 8 | Dex 8 | Con 10 | Int 1 | Wis 10 | Cha 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

**SKILLS**

None

**FEATS**

Attack Focus (ranged) 4

**POWERS**

**Corrosion 1**
**Blast 3** (needles; Drawback: 1 range increment)
**Immunity 30** (Will effects)
**Paralyze 3** (Poison, Ranged; Linked to Blast)
**Protection 2**

**COMBAT**

Attack +1 (melee), +5 (ranged), Grapple +0, Damage +1 (corrosion), Defense +2 (+1 flat-footed), Knockback –1, Initiative –1

**SAVING THROWS**

Toughness +2, Fortitude +3, Reflex +0, Will +0

**DRAWBACKS**

Disability (no hands, –4 points)

**Abilities –22 + Skills 0 + Feats 4 + Powers 51 + Combat 6 + Saves 4 –Drawbacks 4 = Total 39**

## FLAPPERS — POWER LEVEL 2

| Str 6 | Dex 15 | Con 9 | Int 1 | Wis 10 | Cha 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

**SKILLS**

None

**FEATS**

Attack Focus (melee) 1, Improved Grab, Improved Pin

**POWERS**

**Corrosion 2**
**Immunity 30** (Will effects)
**Shrinking 4** (small; Continuous; Permanent; Innate)

**COMBAT**

Attack +2 (melee, includes +1 due to size), +1 (ranged, includes +1 due to size), Grapple –5 (includes -4 due to size), Damage +2 (corrosion), Defense +3 (includes +1 due to size), Knockback +1 (includes +1 due to size), Initiative +2

**SAVING THROWS**

Toughness –1, Fortitude +2, Reflex +2, Will +0

**DRAWBACKS**

Disability (no hands, –4 points)

**Abilities –14 + Skills 0 + Feats 3 + Powers 39 + Combat 4 + Saves 3 – Drawbacks 4 = Total 31**

These flyers are among the most numerous of Swarmlings and the most deadly. They congregate in groups numbering up to 20,000 individuals. They are dark, featherless, flapping creatures like flying throw rugs that secrete corrosive acid. They are fearless like all Swarmlings, and can bring down aircraft by attacking en masse.

## FLAPPERS

| SECOND-GENERATION SWARMLING | | | | | POWER LEVEL 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR 22 | DEX 8 | CON 20 | INT 7 | WIS 10 | CHA 7 |
| **SKILLS** | | | | | |
| Notice 4 (+4), Search 8 (+6) | | | | | |
| **FEATS** | | | | | |
| Attack Focus (melee) 3, Improved Pin | | | | | |
| **POWERS** | | | | | |
| **Communication 3** (radio) | | | | | |
| **Immunity 30** (Will effects) | | | | | |
| **Protection 1** (Impervious) | | | | | |
| **Super-Strength 1** (*heavy load:* 1,040 lbs.) | | | | | |
| **COMBAT** | | | | | |
| Attack +4 (melee), +1 (ranged), Grapple +11, Damage +6, Defense +4 (+2 flat-footed), Knockback –3, Initiative –1 | | | | | |
| **SAVING THROWS** | | | | | |
| Toughness +6, Fortitude +8, Reflex +0, Will +0 | | | | | |
| **Abilities 14 + Skills 3 (12 ranks) + Feats 4 + Powers 37 + Combat 10 + Saves 4 = Total 72** | | | | | |

| THIRD-GENERATION SWARMLING | | | | | POWER LEVEL 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR 22 | DEX 10 | CON 20 | INT 11 | WIS 11 | CHA 11 |
| **SKILLS** | | | | | |
| Bluff 6 (+6), Notice 4 (+4), Search 4 (+4), Sense Motive 6 (+6). Third-generation Swarmlings may have various other skills, particularly Knowledge and interaction skills. | | | | | |
| **FEATS** | | | | | |
| Chokehold | | | | | |
| **POWERS** | | | | | |
| **Communication 3** (radio) | | | | | |
| **Mind Shield 5** | | | | | |
| **Super-Strength 1** (*heavy load:* 1,040 lbs.) | | | | | |
| **COMBAT** | | | | | |
| Attack +4, Grapple +11, Damage +6, Defense +5 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback –2, Initiative +0 | | | | | |
| **SAVING THROWS** | | | | | |
| Toughness +5, Fortitude +8, Reflex +2, Will +5 (+10 with Mind Shield) | | | | | |
| **Abilities 25 + Skills 5 (20 ranks) + Feats 1 + Powers 10 + Combat 18 + Saves 10 = Total 69** | | | | | |

These Swarmlings mass attack anything in the air or on the ground that moves. Their corrosive saliva eats through flesh rather rapidly, plastic somewhat more slowly, and resistant material (such as rock or metal) even more slowly. The acid can be washed off by a sufficiently forceful shower. They cling when they wrap around a target, but are physically weak. The main problem they present is not so much their strength, but their sheer numbers. They weigh five to 10 pounds each.

## SECOND GENERATION SWARMLING

Based upon information gathered by the mindless, ravening cannon-fodder of her first-generation Swarmlings, the Swarm Mother next sends a more sophisticated class of buds down to the surface of the Earth. Roughly human-sized and human-shaped, these spies still can hardly pass themselves off as humans except in uncertain light or with an adequate disguise.

Not being very bright, these second-generation Swarmlings can function on only the most rudimentary levels without direct guidance from the Swarm Mother. Not only do they gather data for the Swarm Mother, a few actually return to the Mother via tiny rocket ships grown from seeds, carrying specimens for dissection and investigation. Probably thousands of these spies are sent down to the Earth (June 1986). Many are eventually rooted out and destroyed. Some undoubtedly remain at large for decades.

These spies send detailed information about human biology, science, and technology back to the Swarm Mother via their built-in organic radios. They can also keep in touch with each other using these radios over distances of a few hundred yards.

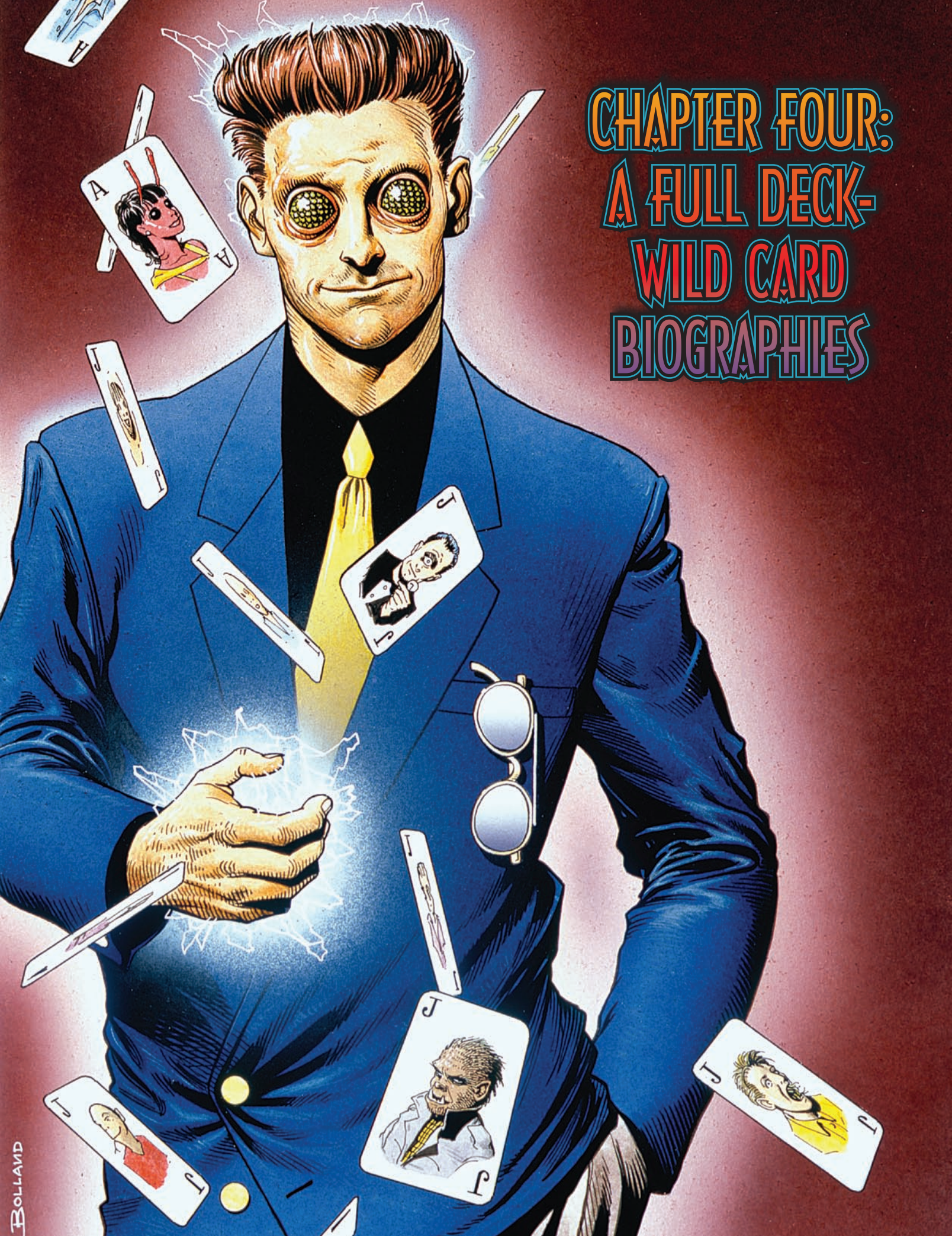
Soft and pulpy in form, like many of the larger-sized Swarmlings they are somewhat tougher to kill than an ordinary human because of their body's resiliency and relatively few vital organs.

## THIRD-GENERATION SWARMLING

The peak of Swarm Mother bio-engineering, these infiltrators perfectly mimic the human form, outwardly at least. They resemble the specific individuals in government and other positions of power they've been sent to replace, and have their memories.

An unknown number of these infiltrators were put in place before the plan to use them to start an atomic war to destroy most of humanity was foiled and the Swarm Mother herself defeated. It's thought most, if not all, have been caught and destroyed, and, anyway, without the guidance of a Swarm Mother any that remain are harmless.

Theoretically.


CHAPTER FOUR:
A FULL DECK-
WILD CARD
BIOGRAPHIES
BOLLAND

The biographies in this chapter detail the major *Wild Cards* characters, so far as they have been revealed in the series. Characters are listed by their most commonly used name in the series. So, for example, Jay Ackroyd and Hiram Worchester are listed by those names, respectively, rather than their lesser used ace nicknames Popinjay and Fatman. On the other hand, characters like Dr. Tachyon, Golden Boy, and the Turtle are listed by their more commonly used ace names. When in doubt about a particular character, see the **Index**.

Each biographical listing is made up of several sections: game information, general information, description, background, and abilities.

The entry starts with a complete set of *M&M* game traits for the character, including power level. Note that power level is often approximate, in that the character may meet that PL in some regards, but not necessarily others. *Wild Cards* characters tend to be less "well rounded" than comic book superheroes in terms of balancing their offensive and defensive abilities, skill ranks, and so forth. In some cases, notes on the character's overall power level are provided under the **Abilities** heading.

The general information block provides things like name, occupation, dates, and physical statistics, where they are known. An entry that does not apply has only a dash. Some entries are less specific (such as character height and weight) based on the available information. An overall description of the character's appearance follows.

The **Background** heading is generally the largest, covering the character's known history and appearances in the *Wild Cards* series. This section also contains the most spoilers of the biography, since it discusses details of stories in which the characters appear. Those not wanting to know too much about a character should obviously not read this section.

Finally, the biography concludes with a description of the character's abilities, particularly any wild card abilities, and notes on the character's game traits and how they work. Any additional game information is also found here.

# THE WILDCARDS

## JAY ACKROYD

**Created by George R.R. Martin**

*"Might as well. Can't dance."*

— Jay Ackroyd's philosophy of life.

### DESCRIPTION

Ackroyd is in his mid-40s (in 1986), slender, just under medium height, with carefully combed brown hair, quick brown eyes, and an elusive smile. If you saw him on the street, you wouldn't look at him twice, which comes in handy in his business. Ackroyd wears brown suits, off the rack, without ties ("Prone to soup stains," as he explains).

Ackroyd has terrible recurrent Lovecraftian nightmares which are so bad they cause him to sometimes wet his bed. He hates guns and those who use them. He constantly hits on attractive females (at least, before he marries Hastet) and cracking wise is as natural to him as breathing. He is also claustrophobic.

### BACKGROUND

In April of 1980, Ackroyd is one of the aces recruited to rescue the American hostages held in Iran. He's the first, besides team leader J. Robert Belew, to realize they were basically sent to Iran to fail. He stays with Belew to the mission's bitter end and is responsible for saving several team members by using his teleportation powers to pop them away to safety. He already dislikes and distrusts guns, but this tendency is turned into a phobia when, in the midst of a desperate situation, he shoots and kills an 8-year-old boy who pointed a wooden gun at him and Belew.

#### 1986

By profession Ackroyd is a private investigator with a tiny two-room office on the fourth floor of a dilapidated brick building on 42nd Street, half a block from Broadway, overlooking the Wet Pussycat Theater. The waiting room is a tiny cubicle filled to the point of claustrophobia with an orange sofa, a gray steel desk, and the receptionist, an extremely buxom blonde blow-up doll named Oral Annie. He lives in a third-floor walk-up apartment nearby.

#### JULY 1988

Chrysalis hires him to stay at the Crystal Palace for a few weeks as her bodyguard, but when he arrives he finds she's been beaten to death. The ace of spades Ackroyd finds next to her body points to the "Bow and Ar-

row Killer," but Ackroyd doesn't subscribe to this theory. First, the vigilante slayer hasn't been seen in the city for over a year. Second, bludgeoning is not his M.O. He goes out to look for the real killer.

While trying to track down Digger Downs, Ackroyd meets the reporter's research assistant, "Crash" Scheffel, at *Aces* and, using the magazine's extensive computerized files, gets a list of 19 possible super-strong suspects who might have killed Chrysalis. He whittles the list down to the five most likely candidates: Wyrm, Quasiman, the Oddity, Bludgeon, and the mysterious Doug Morkle.

Ackroyd meets with Elmo Schaeffer, who is being held in the Jokertown precinct as the chief suspect in the murder, and learns Chrysalis had bought a hit and given the assassin a plane ticket to Atlanta. Both Elmo and Ackroyd assume the target is Reverend Leo Barnett, who is running for the Democratic nomination for president and is greatly feared by many wild carders. After a tour of the Famous Bowery Wild Card Dime Museum with its owner Charles Dutton, Ackroyd finally meets Yeoman and Wraith, who are also investigating Chrysalis's murder. Although they fail to see eye-to-eye on many points, they exchange information and Bludgeon gets crossed off the list of suspects. Yeoman doesn't know who the hell Doug Morkle is, either.

Ackroyd realizes Digger is the key to the puzzle, and ultimately finds him hiding out at Jessica von der Stadt's miniature farm on Park Avenue. He rescues the miniaturized reporter and they trade information. Digger tells Ackroyd about Hartmann's blood-stained jacket which is proof of his wild card nature, and Ackroyd realizes the senator is the real target of Chrysalis's hit. Musing over the various clues, most of them dead-ends, it suddenly dawns on Ackroyd that Hartmann's jacket is on the senator's waxwork figure in the Syrian diorama in the Dime Museum. Sure enough, when Ackroyd gets there the jacket is bullet-holed and blood-stained, but before he can make off with it, he's cold-cocked by the Oddity, and Dutton burns the jacket. But something seems wrong to him. Ackroyd investigates Misha's last known address and finds the actual authentic Hartmann jacket. Misha hadn't trusted Gimli enough to give him Hartmann's real jacket; instead, she'd substituted a replica stained with her own blood.

Ackroyd flies to Atlanta, jacket in tow, along with the still miniature (but growing) Downs in a cat-carrier. He's forced to check the cat-carrier and the airline sends it to Alaska by mistake, but Ackroyd makes it through with the jacket, which Tachyon tests positively for the wild card virus. When Tachyon confronts Hartmann, the doctor discovers he is indeed a monstrous ace. Hiram is crushed at the revelation. The more cynical Ackroyd takes it in stride and wants to expose Hartmann's true nature to the world. Tachyon tells them they can't take the chance of starting another anti-wild card crusade, and they swear a Takisian oath, drinking their own blood, to keep the secret. Jay is thrilled by neither this strategy, nor the blood drinking, but he goes along with both. Later, he saves Tachyon from being diced and sliced by Mackie Messer, but realizes the job of finding Chrysalis's killer is not close to being over as Tachyon has read Hartmann's mind and discovered the senator had nothing to do with her death.

Ackroyd bonds with Blaise and takes him along when he investigates further clues in Atlanta. Both are captured by minions of Ti Malice and Blaise is taken as a mount. Ti Malice is switching himself to a Blaise-controlled Ackroyd when the investigator yells at Hiram to attack Blaise. Hiram does, and Ackroyd, momentarily freed from the boy's mind control, pops Ti Malice into his nightmare dimension.

Later, in a contentious meeting in an Atlanta hotel room, Yeoman exposes Hiram as Chrysalis's killer. Tachyon mind-controls both Brennan and Ackroyd to prevent bloodshed between them. Ackroyd returns to New York and manages to convince Downs, now back from his diversion to Alaska, to bury the Hartmann story through a combination of bribery and blackmail.

## JAY ACKROYD — POWER LEVEL 12

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| +0 | +1 | +1 | +1 | +3 | +0 |
| 10 | 12 | 12 | 13 | 16 | 11 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +2/+1* | +4 | +4 | +6 |

**Flat-footed*

**SKILLS**

Bluff 5 (+5), Disable Device 6 (+7), Gather Information 8 (+8), Intimidate 4 (+4), Investigate 6 (+7), Knowledge (behavioral sciences) 3 (+4), Knowledge (current events) 6 (+7), Knowledge (streetwise) 7 (+8), Notice 8 (+11), Profession (detective) 8 (+11), Search 9 (+10), Sense Motive 7 (+10), Stealth 7 (+8)

**FEATS**

Attack Focus (ranged), Attack Specialization (Teleport Attack), Contacts, Defensive Roll 1

**POWERS**

**Teleport 18** (Attack, Ranged; Progression 2 [500 lbs.])

**COMBAT**

Attack +2 (melee), +3 (ranged), +5 (Teleport Attack), Grapple +2, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +6 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback –1, Initiative +1

**DRAWBACKS**

Power Loss (must make "finger gun" gesture to use Teleport Attack, –1 point)

**Abilities 14 + Skills 21 (84 ranks) + Feats 4 + Powers 56 + Combat 16 + Saves 9 – Drawbacks 1 = Total 119**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Jay Ackroyd | **WC Name:** Popinjay (he dislikes it) |
| **Occupation:** Private detective | **WC Status:** Ace |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** circa 1944 | **Death:** – |
| **Height:** 5 ft., 8 in. | **Weight:** 145 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Brown | **Hair:** Brown |

### LATE 1988

Jerry Strauss hires Ackroyd to investigate elements of the jumper phenomenon. One of the important aspects of his probe is the dossier he compiles on David Butler and turns over to Strauss. Among the things they discover is that Butler has unimpeachable alibis covering the times of several of the jumper attacks, proving there's more than one jumper.

### JANUARY/FEBRUARY 1990

Tachyon hires Ackroyd to discover the whereabouts of both Blaise and Mark Meadows. Meadows, Ackroyd reports, has gone underground. Blaise, meanwhile, is running with the jumper gang, and engaging in all

kinds of criminal activities, up to and including murder for fun and profit. Ackroyd warns Tachyon to be careful, because Blaise is surely gunning for him. Tachyon, of course, ignores the warning.

## AUGUST 1990

When Tachyon escapes from the Rox he hires Ackroyd again, and the investigator accompanies him on his return to Takis as a bodyguard, along with Mark Meadows. Ackroyd meets a Takisian woman named Hastet bensari Julali, who is a mind-blind cook and restaurant owner. Jay makes a favorable impression on her and talks her into helping him crash the Takisian Crossing Festival by hiding in one of her over-sized desserts, and is able to pop Tachyon to safety when she's about to be given to Blaise. Later, when it comes time for Tachyon to have her baby, he pops Tachyon and Mark Meadows to Hastet's living quarters. Then he and Hastet plan to take the infant up to Takis' neutral space station, but by then almost the entire planet is engulfed in war. Ackroyd, Hastet, and Illyana are captured by Blaise's troops. Blaise is grateful his daughter has been brought to him and so only chops off all Ackroyd's fingers so he can no longer use his power.

However, Jay and Hastet manage to spirit Illyana away to safety. Ackroyd's fingers are all grown back in a Takisian healing bubble, Tachyon gives him a chest full of jewels and other goodies, and Hastet returns to Earth with Ackroyd, where they marry. Ackroyd goes upscale and Hastet opens a restaurant called Starfields.

Now quite wealthy, Ackroyd partners with Jerry Strauss (who uses the assumed named Fred Creighton) in the Ackroyd and Creighton Agency. They employ a number of operatives, many of them wild carders, including a reformed Ezili as receptionist, Sascha Starfin, Peter Pann, and Melissa Blackwood. Their agency takes up half a floor of the most expensive office space in Manhattan. All the furniture and fixings reflect taste and wealth, from the plush carpets to the mahogany furniture to the art deco furnishings. Later (May 1994) they move to an entire building in the West Village.

## OCTOBER 1993

Gregg Hartmann approaches them with a request to investigate the background of some apparently random but important people. When he refuses to tell them why he wants them researched, Ackroyd turns down the job. Strauss, however, has a go at one of the names—George G. Battle—and when the dust settles from that investigation and the Card Shark connection is revealed, Ackroyd allows that it might be a good idea to look a little further into things.

## MAY 1994

Quasiman informs Ackroyd that the feds are taking everyone who knows of the Black Trump into custody. Ackroyd discovers where everyone is being held by having Jerry mimic Hannah Davis and getting captured. Ackroyd leads a rescue team to the high security prison on Governor's Island, and manages to break out Dr. Bradley Finn. Finn tells them they have a slight breathing space before the Sharks can culture enough of the Black Trump virus to attack the world. They know Brandon van Renssaeler has fled to Australia, probably to seek shelter with his friend and fellow Shark Eric Fleming, and decide to go after him.

Discovering that Fleming has been married five time to model/actresses, Ackroyd gets Jerry to impersonate Peregrine and interview the Card Shark on his yacht, *Circe*, with himself, Sascha Starfin, and Finn posing as Peregrine's crew. It doesn't go well. There really aren't that many palomino centaur jokers, and Finn is recognized immediately. Fleming and Brandon van Renssaeler take them prisoner and plan to toss them overboard for some real sharks to snack on.

Fleming, however, is a putz, and Jerry as Peregrine manages to seduce him, turn the tables, and then free the others. Ackroyd pops Fleming, tied up with a pair of panties stuffed in his mouth, to the stage at Freakers, and they come to an accommodation with van Renssaeler, who agrees to let them go under several conditions. One is that Finn never sees his daughter Clara again. Ackroyd reluctantly agrees and (without telling Finn) promises to pop him off to Takis.

Back safely on land, Ackroyd confers with Peter Pann, who's in New York, and tells him to take out a cryptic ad in a bunch of newspapers and magazines designed to attract J. Robert Belew's attention. The name "O.K. Casaday" figures prominently in it.

They split their forces to investigate some of the information supplied them by van Renssaeler. Strauss and Sascha head for Saigon to search for Casaday and his share of the Black Trump. Ackroyd and Finn go to Hong Kong. Ackroyd is reluctant to take Finn, feeling he's more of a liability than an asset at this point, but Finn insists. Ackroyd's advertisement pays off and J. Robert Belew meets them in Hong Kong. Belew reveals his investigations have shown Mark Meadows and Sprout are actually still alive, which cheers up everyone who thought they'd been killed in Vietnam. Ackroyd's news, however, isn't that good. He tells Belew about the Black Trump, and Casaday's involvement with it.

Belew offers his help. He takes Ackroyd to Lord Tung, a monkey-like joker who's as enormous as Orson Welles and also happens to be one of the premier smugglers in Hong Kong. Ackroyd pops a roomful of bric-a-brac to New York for Tung. Tung tells them where to find Casaday and his drug lab in Myanmar. Belew and Ackroyd begin to argue about how to go about rescuing Mark from Casaday's grasp and not so incidentally wrest the Black Trump from him as well, when Finn interrupts. He's just been on the phone with Pann, and the op has told him Strauss and Starfin have uncovered Casaday's location. The bad news is they've decided they can take him on their own. Belew and Ackroyd are aghast. They head off to Myanmar as quickly as they can.

The lab is deserted by the time they get there. Ackroyd and crew round up some stragglers and discover everyone's gone to Guangdong, China, which is close to Hong Kong. They realize the Sharks are probably targeting Hong Kong as a viral release point as the former British colony has one of the few sizable concentrations of jokers in that part of Asia. Ackroyd, Belew, and a passel of Belew's South China hoods head for Guangdong.

Upon arrival Ackroyd finds Layton beating Mark Meadows to death and tries to pop him away, but the kickboxer is too nimble for Ackroyd to get a bead on him. Then a literal storm hits the room and the Radical appears, resurrected from wherever Mark has buried him all these years. He squashes Layton like a bug, and Sascha Starfin and Jerry Strauss appear to tell them about Casaday, the Trump, Hong Kong, and a waiting blimp. They pick up Belew and some of his boys and head for the airport where Finn and some of Belew's other boys are having a running gun battle with local security. Strauss, impersonating Chow Yun Fat, does not help.

Casaday is in the terminal with a band of hostages and Shark thugs. They board the blimp, using the hostages as cover. The Radical tries to stop them and is blown out of the sky by a shoulder-fired missile. Things are looking bad, so Ackroyd pops Sascha back to Jokertown where he can at least spread the Overtrump as a human vector. In a desperate move Finn gallops up to the blimp and makes it up the ramp and into the gondola as the blimp starts to rise.

Belew spots a helicopter revving up on the runway and runs for it, but is gunned down by Casaday, who is hiding in the weeds by the side of the airstrip with a machine gun. Ackroyd realizes there is nothing to

do but try to get to the copter and stop the blimp. He and Jerry go after it, but Jerry stops by the Radical's body on the tarmac. Jay makes it to the helicopter, helping a badly-injured Belew inside. Belew takes a moment to use the moving rotors to chop off one of his hands, and they dive into the cockpit. Belew jams his hand into the controls and his soul enters the machine. Casaday rises from cover and hoses down the copter with his machine gun. Belew is again hit numerous times. The copter rises and the rotors swipe off Casaday's head. Ackroyd realizes whatever life is left in Belew has entered the machine.

The copter lurches into the sky and takes after the blimp, crashing into its gondola and sticking there. Quasiman appears and helps Ackroyd cross over into the gondola where Finn is held at gunpoint by Shark gunmen and geeky Shark scientist Jarnavon, who has a canister of Black Trump. Finn goes berserk and breaks free, but Jarnavon squirts him the face with the virus. Finn, however, lucks out. The canister clutched by Jarnavon is the one containing Meadow's Overtrump. Ackroyd gives it to Quasiman and tells the hunchback to go all over the world and spray it everywhere. Quasiman vanishes, fairly in control.

Ackroyd pops away two more containers of Black Trump. The blimp lurches and the final one rolls away. Ackroyd and Jarnavon fight over it and roll right out of the hole in the gondola where the copter had crashed through. They fall, still fighting. The Radical appears in the sky, grabs Ackroyd by the waist and tells him, "Just let it go." Ackroyd does, and the Radical vaporizes Jarnavon and the canister both in a ball of plasma as they fall into the sea.

In the aftermath, Finn, Ackroyd, Strauss, and Pann are having lunch at Starfields, discussing what still needs to be done (like getting Topper and Dutton and the others out of jail) while Ackroyd, regretfully, pops Finn to Tachyon's bedroom on Takis. He had, after all, given his word he would do so, and Ackroyd's word is his bond.

### SUMMER 2003

Ackroyd gets drawn into the John Fortune kidnaping when Fortune goes missing on the grounds of a summer camp he and Jerry help support. He teams with old nemesis Daniel Brennan to find the kid and manages to get shot and simultaneously break his ankle while saving Jerry and others from an Allumbrados ace named the Witness (the big one), rendering him *hors d'combat* for the rest of the case.

## ABILITIES

A projecting teleport, Ackroyd can "pop" anybody to any place he himself has been or can accurately visualize. To use his power, he must make a "gun" with three fingers curled into his palm, thumb cocked like a hammer, and forefinger pointed at his target. He has to visualize a place before he can send someone to it. He stores a number of such scenes in his memory and when he doesn't have time to pick a destination he just points and they wind up in the first place that pops into his head. (The scoreboard at Yankee Stadium is such as place, as are the restrooms of Freakers.) For much of the series his range is roughly 3,000 miles (New York to Los Angeles), although later in his career (summer 1994) he discovers he can transport people interstellar distances (from Takis to Earth). Dr. Tachyon suspects that distance isn't really a factor where Jay's power is concerned. He can teleport up to a small truck in weight in a single pop, although that requires extra effort and quickly fatigues him.

Jay's considerable power level comes primarily from his "popping" power: If he gets the drop on someone, he can send him far, far away in the blink of an eye. Otherwise, he's about PL 4 in terms of his skills and traits.

# THE ASTRONOMER

**Created by Lewis Shiner**

*"Death is the power. Pus and rot and corruption. Hatred and pain and war."*

— The Astronomer expounds on his philosophy of life.
Shiner: Fortunato's Story (Book III)

## DESCRIPTION

The Astronomer is a half-crippled old man with an abnormally large head sparsely covered with white hair, a thin, twisted body, and very pale white skin. Normally he's confined to an electric wheelchair, but he can get about on his own when sufficiently powered with psychic energy. As Lord Amun, he appears as a giant man with the head of a ram or jackal and sometimes a colossal erect phallus, holding in his hands the ankh and crooked rod (symbols of life and power). Another avatar is Setekh the Destroyer, a hound the size of a small horse, lean and terribly emaciated, smoke-grey in color with a long, forked, scorpion-like tail carried up over his back.

## BACKGROUND

Sometime in 1966 a little man wearing thick glasses crawls out of the East River, totally devoid of memories. The amnesia is self-inflicted. As he creeps onto the river bank he looks up at the sky and sees the immense majesty of the deep night, and the virus awakes in him, for he sees some-

## THE ASTRONOMER — POWER LEVEL 13

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| +1/–2 | +0 | +2/–2 | +6 | +7 | +1 |
| 13/6 | 10 | 14/7 | 22 | 24 | 12 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +16/+2* | +5 | +3 | +9 |

**Without Force Field*

**SKILLS**

Concentration 8 (+15), Intimidate 8 (+9), Knowledge (arcane lore) 10 (+16), Knowledge (history) 8 (+14), Knowledge (physical sciences) 8 (+14), Knowledge (theology and philosophy) 8 (+14), Language 6 (ancient Greek, ancient Egyptian, French, German, Latin, Sumerian), Sense Motive 4 (+11)

**FEATS**

Attack Focus (ranged) 4, Benefit (wealth) 3, Connected, Contacts, Eidetic Memory, Fascinate (Intimidate), Well-Informed

**POWERS**

**Astral Form 17**

**Concealment 10** (all senses)

**Enhanced Constitution 7**

**Enhanced Strength 7**

**Insubstantial 4** (incorporeal)

**Flight 3** (levitation; 50 mph)

**Force Field 14** (Impervious 8)

**Mind Shield 8**

**Morph 6** (+30 bonus; Lord Amun or Setekh the Destroyer; Limited to astral form)

**Strike 10** (incorporeal grip; Affects Corporeal, Fortitude Save; Full-Round Action)

**Super-Senses 4** (precognition, Uncontrolled)

**Telepathy 13**

*Alternate Power:* **Mental Transform 13** (memory loss; Continuous; Touch Range)

**Telekinesis 2** (Affects Corporeal)

**COMBAT**

Attack +6 (melee), +10 (ranged), Grapple +7, Damage +1 (unarmed), +10 (Strike) or by weapon, Defense +8 (+4 flat-footed), Knockback –12, Initiative +0

**DRAWBACKS**

Disability (usually confined to a wheelchair; common, major, –4 points), Weakness (if he doesn't kill; –1 to all powers per hour, –3 points)

**Abilities 21 + Skills 15 (60 ranks) + Feats 12 + Powers 233 + Combat 28 + Saves 8 – Drawbacks 7 = Total 310**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Unknown | **WC Name:** The Astronomer |
| **Occupation:** Psychotic | **WC Status:** Ace (card turned 1966) |
| **Aliases:** Lord Amun, Setekh the Destroyer | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** Unknown | **Death:** September 15, 1986 |
| **Height:** 5 ft., 2 in. | **Weight:** Light |
| **Eyes:** Weak | **Hair:** White and thin |

thing else in the sky–something immensely far away but approaching quickly, something foul and hungry. And he screams.

Taken in by Balsam, the leader of the Egyptian Masons, he's taught the name of the thing he'd seen—TIAMAT—and of the shakti device the Brother of the Stars (actually a Ly'bahr legionnaire) had given Cagliostro, the founder of the Order of Egyptian Freemasons, back in 1777. He realizes his destiny is to become the Astronomer, to take control of the Masons and then rule the world, which would come begging with awe and gratitude after he used the shakti device to bring help from the stars to destroy the Swarm. The Astronomer takes over from Balsam (1979) with the unwitting help of Fortunato, bringing the Astronomer's plans one step closer to fruition. (See the section on the Egyptian Masons in **Chapter 5** for a comprehensive list of the Masons's members.)

When not hanging out at one of the order's various secret temples, the Astronomer has a penthouse apartment in the 70s off Central Park. The apartment's decor is subdued, with dark wood floors. The main room has a large skylight over a mahogany altar. The altar, with steel manacles at each corner and a large V-shaped notch at one end, is used to torture and kill women as the Astronomer drains their energy.

### MAY 1986

A hardcore heroin addict by 1986, he survives the raid Fortunato leads on the Masons's headquarters in the Cloisters, vowing vengeance on all the aces who attacked him. Although the raid essentially destroys the Cloisters, the Astronomer secretly returns there with the remnants of his gang, including Kafka, Roman, Kim Toy, Gresham, Imp and Insulin, and Roulette.

### SEPTEMBER 1986

He plans his vengeance for Wild Card Day, September 15th. First he and his agents will kill all the aces who had participated in the Cloisters attack, then he'll steal Tachyon's ship and escape into space with his loyal minions. He achieves a certain amount of success with the murder of the Howler and his personal public dismemberment of Kid Dinosaur. Other minions shoot down the Turtle, but the Astronomer's attempt to kill Water Lily at Aces High fails.

Eventually, he kidnaps three women whom he believes to be Fortunato's geishas, planning to sacrifice them and drain their energy, but Cordelia Chaisson's card turns, she draws an ace, and kills Imp. She and Demise then turn their combined powers on the Astronomer. They can't kill him, but he can't prevent their escape.

The Astronomer then surprises Fortunato, attacking him at Peregrine's penthouse apartment. This leads to a final pyrotechnic battle high in the sky over the East River in which Fortunato ultimately prevails. Stripped of almost all his energy, the Astronomer comes full circle, falling again into the East River. Shaken by revelations from the Astronomer's now unshielded memory, Fortunato allows him to go free. The Astronomer drags himself out of the river and is found by Demise, who again turns on his former master. Using the last vestiges of his powers, the Astronomer attempts to turn insubstantial and escape from Demise through a brick wall, but makes it only part way before Demise locks eyes with him. The Astronomer dies partially immured in the wall, his pain-wracked face exposed for all to see.

## ABILITIES

A sort of reverse Fortunato, the Astronomer gains energy from death via bloody ceremonial human sacrifice. He literally feeds on the terror of his victims, taking their life energy as his own. He has perhaps the most potent

mental abilities of any ace, able to break even Tachyon's mind control. His powers include: astral projection as himself, Lord Amun, or Setekh the Destroyer; creation of a force field against both physical and mental attacks; becoming undetectable to normal eyesight or even to the powers of psychics like Fortunato; causing selective amnesia or totally wiping his target's mind clean; levitation and flying in his physical body; becoming insubstantial and interpenetrating matter (he can stick his hand through a victim's chest and cup his heart, causing great pain. A single squeeze can also cause death); and precognition, visions of the future which are often difficult to interpret.

These powers are all covered by the Astronomer's game traits. The GM may wish to consider some of them part of an overall Magic array, depending on how many powers the Astronomer should be able to wield at once. Certainly, his Concealment could potentially be an Alternate Power of his Telepathy, given its nature. Still, the arrangement of his powers doesn't matter much, as he's practically a walking plot device.

The Astronomer can read a number of ancient languages in which the first legends of TIAMAT were written, but has few opportunities to converse in these tongues. He's also fluent in a number of modern languages.

# BAGABOND

**Created by Leanne C. Harper**

*"The virus that had given her a means of survival had also removed her from this human world."*

— Harper: Bagabond's Story (Volume III)

## DESCRIPTION

Bagabond is a typical street person who looks much older than she really is, probably because she is unwashed and smelly and has straggly hair. She effects that layered look in clothing so fashionable among the homeless. Her constant companions are two cats. One, a black male, is abnormally large but not fat and the other is a smaller calico female. She looks quite presentable when suitably cleaned up.

## BACKGROUND

Bagabond runs away from home because of a miserable childhood and comes to New York City some time in the '60s. She's institutionalized after her wild card power literally drives her insane, but is eventually released.

She makes her headquarters under Central Park in the abandoned 86th Street cutoff subway tunnel, which she furnishes with scraps of furniture, bedding, and battered paintings, many with an animal motif. This hideaway is destroyed by Mafia goons searching for the "Subway Vigilante" whom they think is a member of a gang trying to muscle into their territory.

Eventually she meets Sewer Jack and comes to trust him more and more, and she and her companion felines, the black and the calico, spend more and more time in Sewer Jack's hideout. In 1985 she offers herself to Jack, who rejects her advances, which puzzles and hurts her, but she maintains their relationship as friends.

### SEPTEMBER 1986

She spends most of Wild Card Day 1986 trying to help Jack find his niece, Cordelia Chaisson, who has run away from her family in Louisiana, and also help Rosemary Muldoon find books stolen from Kien's safe.

At the end of the day, however, with Jack's help she's transformed into

an attractive woman and prepares herself for a breakfast date with Paul Goldberg, a lawyer from Muldoon's office. She continues her relationship with Goldberg while she's unwillingly recruited by Rosemary to take part in her crackdown against the Shadow Fists. Bagabond realized that Muldoon is using her, but she goes along with Rosemary's wishes because of their past friendship. Bagabond finally breaks with Muldoon after she'd okayed Goldberg's assassination.

### SUMMER 1987

Eventually she travels to Guatemala in the company of C.C. Ryder. She settles in the Quiche Mayan highland village of Chotol. Her simple, idyllic, life is interrupted by the arrival in the fall of 1993 of Josh McCoy and the indigenous Mayan joker-ace-shaman Uman, who are fleeing the Kaibiles, Guatemala's finest counter-insurgency army unit. McCoy has photographic evidence of Card Shark atrocities against a native village and they're trying to escape to neighboring Belize with the proof. Although aggressively non-political, Melotti, along with her companion jaguar named Balam, guides them to the border. They're chased by the Kaibiles down to the lowlands bordering Belize, where they're captured by a guerrilla unit loyal to the Hero Twins, who were thought to have been killed the year previously in a battle with resurgent government forces. The Hero Twins help the trio escape to Belize where, after a final confrontation with the dead ace Crypt Kicker, they make their way to freedom.

Melotti realizes she can't return to Chotol for fear of causing government reprisals against the villagers, so she leaves Guatemala, destination unknown.

## ABILITIES

Bagabond is in constant mental contact with animals, domestic and wild. She can control their minds, and seems to have the strongest telepathic link with her companion cats, who hunt food for her and otherwise look out for her well-being. She can access the senses of any animal, and often uses them as her eyes and ears. She can also launch attacks with her mind, burning the brains of targets. She can exert extremely fine-turned control (for example, in one instance modifying neurochemical connections between Sewer Jack's legs and brain to cause the alligator to move in slow motion). She can gently shut down the brains of animals suffering in pain.

Although theoretically her powers could be used on people, she rarely attempts to do so. Such attempts would be considered power stunts in *M&M* terms.

After she spends a couple of years in Guatemala, her high school Spanish reaches the level of fluency, and she can get by in Quiche Mayan as well.

| BAGABOND | | | | | POWER LEVEL 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| -1 | +0 | +0 | +0 | +1 | +0 |
| 9 | 11 | 10 | 10 | 13 | 10 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +0 | +3 | +3 | +5 |

**SKILLS**

Concentration 4 (+5) Knowledge (current events) 6 (+6), Knowledge (streetwise) 10 (+10), Language 1 (Spanish), Notice 6 (+7), Stealth 7 (+7), Survival 10 (+11)

**FEATS**

Animal Empathy, Uncanny Dodge (mental)

**POWERS**

**Animal Control 8** (Mental Link; Sensory Link)

*Alternate Power:* **Animal Control 8** (Mental Link; Burst Area)
*Alternate Power:* **Mental Blast 8** (Limited to animals)

**Comprehend 2** (speak with and understand animals)

**COMBAT**

Attack +1, Grapple +0, Damage –1 (unarmed), Defense +1 (+1 flat-footed), Knockback –0, Initiative +0

**Abilities 3 + Skills 11 (44 ranks) + Feats 2 + Powers 31 + Combat 4 + Saves 10 = Total 61**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Suzanne Melotti | **WC Name:** Bagabond (she dislikes it) |
| **Occupation:** Bag lady | **WC Status:** Ace |
| **Aliases:** — | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** Circa 1953 | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** 5 ft., 3 in. | **Weight:** 100 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Black | **Hair:** Black |

# LEO BARNETT

**Created by Arthur Byron Cover**

*"You don't need the help of liberals like Tachyon; you don't need to open yourself up to anyone but Jesus—because he was the first and the greatest ace of them all!"*

— Reverend Leo Barnett, telling you what you don't need.
Cover: "Jesus Was An Ace" (Book V)

## DESCRIPTION

Barnett is a handsome blond-haired, blue-eyed man with a dimpled, square chin.

## BACKGROUND

Barnett's father is Colonel Belvedere Fincastle, a flamboyant evangelist who once owned an empire of radio stations across the South. Leo Barnett is the result of an affair between Fincastle and the wife of his accountant. When the colonel's innumerable extracurricular escapades finally came to public attention (Leo Barnett was by no means the only child Fincastle had fathered on associates' wives), his empire collapses, but Fincastle remained close to many of his once-secret children.

### 1960S TO MID-'80S

Barnett serves a stint in the Marine Corps, then spends the first part of his adult life using technology to spread the Gospel: His father used radio; he uses television. He's an expert propagandist and naturally manipulative. He has all the material wealth he needs, and can pick the women he wants from among the many who actively compete for his attention. He's a man of considerable compassion and he donates to many charities.

But Barnett believes the wild card virus is the work of the Devil and that it's up to him to wipe the taint of it off the face of the Earth. His solution is to segregate wild carders, especially jokers, in hospitals located on special reservations. At least, that's all he'll say openly of his nascent plans.

### SPRING 1987

Barnett meets a young female mission worker for a tryst at a hotel in the Edge and they become caught in a gun battle, a firefight in the Shadow Fist/Mafia war erupting throughout the city. Barnett would have been killed if not for the intervention of Quasiman, who drains himself of energy jaunting the reverend out of danger. Barnett then performs a faith healing on Quasiman to great acclaim (although Quasiman simply recovers from the energy drain without any help from Barnett). Barnett's actions are broadcast by a passing news crew. He seizes the moment and announces his bid for the presidency.

### JULY 1988

At the Democratic National Convention in Atlanta, Barnett calls for the return of the Anti-Exotic laws. After he loses the platform fight over the Jokers' Rights plank (although his faction manages to dilute it until it's meaningless), he shuts himself up in his hotel room to pray. Hartmann tries but fails to take him as a puppet, and Barnett informs him that he doesn't believe in compromise—God doesn't, and he doesn't. Despite

| LEO BARNETT | | | | | POWER LEVEL 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +1 | +1 | +1 | +2 | +3 | +3 |
| 12 | 12 | 12 | 15 | 16 | 17 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +1 | +3 | +3 | +5 |

**SKILLS**

Bluff 6 (+9), Diplomacy 2 (+5), Knowledge (behavioral sciences) 4 (+6), Knowledge (civics) 8 (+10), Knowledge (theology and philosophy) 6 (+8), Perform (acting) 6 (+9), Perform (oratory) 10 (+13), Profession (politician) 10 (+13), Sense Motive 8 (+11)

**FEATS**

Benefit 3 (head of church, wealth), Connected, Skill Mastery (Bluff, Diplomacy, Perform)

**POWERS**

None

**COMBAT**

Attack +0, Grapple +1, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +0, Knockback –0, Initiative +1

**Abilities 24 + Skills 15 (60 ranks) + Feats 5 + Powers 0 + Combat 0 + Saves 6 = Total 50**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Leo Barnett | **WC Name:** — |
| **Occupation:** Preacher, U.S. president | **WC Status:** Nat |
| **Aliases:** Right Hand of God | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** Early 1950s | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** 6 ft. | **Weight:** 170 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Blue | **Hair:** Blond |

heady politicking and a plethora of dirty tricks, he loses the Democratic presidential nomination to Hartmann, but his political ambitions are by no means over.

## 1992

He runs again for president four years later, and the Democratic ticket of Leo Barnett and Frank Zappa, hero of the Rox Campaign, is elected to office. Once he takes office, he calls for mandatory wild card testing for anyone currently in or applying for a public service position, including all doctors, nurses, police officers, firefighters, and every last government worker.

## 1993

He gets horrifically restrictive anti-wild card laws passed requiring all wild carders seeking medical treatment to be sent to specially built biological research units, which are little more than concentration camps, though these laws are not immediately universally enforced.

## MAY 1994

During the Black Trump crisis, Barnett sends teams of agents under the auspices of SCARE to capture and detain at Governor's Island all those who know of the Black Trump. His official position is that the Black Trump doesn't exist, and he sticks to it, although in the end the truth does come out.

Barnett spends eight years as president, and is lightly touched by them. After his term of office is over, he goes to Branson, Missouri, where he builds and runs his Peaceable Kingdom religious theme park from his headquarters: a replica of the White House's Oval Office in the top floor of the Angels' Bower Hotel. More importantly, he founds a think tank he calls the Millenarians, whose goal is to help ease Jesus' Second Coming during the End Days, which he believes are upon the world.

## SUMMER 2003

To that end, he sends his Secret Service bodyguard Billy Ray, as well as his agent the Midnight Angel, to Las Vegas to protect John Fortune (whom he believes is the returned Jesus) from a rival End Days sect called the Allumbrados, and to bring him to the Kingdom. He sends John Bruckner to take the Angel, Billy Ray, and John Fortune over the last leg of the journey. Barnett loses it just a bit when he discovers that Fortune actually has a slow-acting Black Queen that threatens to engulf the entire world in a terrible conflagration. He is last seen praying frantically in his office at the top of the Angels' Bower.

## ABILITIES

Barnett is an expert orator and propagandist and serial philanderer. He is deeply interested in stories of "dubious moral content" (that is, the lives and actions of horrendous criminals).

Barnett has great support among Christian fundamentalists and other conservatives, as well as the backing of the United States government during two terms as president. Later, he has a cadre of aces and nats called the Millenarians who espouse his End Days philosophy: see **Chapter 5** for more about them.

# GEORGE G. BATTLE

**Created by John Jos. Miller**

*"Superior intellect backed by an unbreakable will."*

— Battle, pointing a finger at his own temple.
Miller: Billy Ray's Story (Book XI)

## DESCRIPTION

Battle is short and slimly built with a suggestion of a certain wiry strength. His dark hair recedes from his broad forehead, and he has a thick, carefully groomed mustache. He has a quick, incandescent smile and is effusive, talkative, and twitchy.

Battle has a two-story stone-and-wood getaway in rural Vermont (early 1990s) protected by mastiffs, a high stone wall, and an electronic security system.

He firmly believes in the efficacy of willpower as a solution to most problems, and to demonstrate his own he burns himself on his forearm with a lit cigar at the drop of a hat.

## BACKGROUND

Battle comes from a prosperous family. He joins the Army in the early '50s but misses active duty in Korea and Vietnam. He goes to law school and after graduating joins government service, specifically the FBI. In 1958 he is head of security for NACA's attempt to reach Earth orbit, an attempt doomed to failure because of Card Shark sabotage. This is Battle's earliest link with the Sharks, but there is no evidence he has a direct hand in the destruction of the X-11A rocketplane.

### 1960s and '70s

Battle is a hanger-on around the fringes of black ops for years, wandering into a succession of official and semi-official government and political jobs, disappearing into a haze of agencies, committees, and staff positions. He's special counsel to CREEP (the Committee to Re-Elect the President) for Richard Nixon. He gets into some rather warm water over a certain third-rate burglary in the early 1970s and drops out of sight for a while. After a gap of several years in his record his next official posting is in the middle 1970s, and he serves on both of Reagan's election campaigns.

| GEORGE G. BATTLE | | | | | POWER LEVEL 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +1 | +0 | +1 | +1 | +0 | +0 |
| 12 | 11 | 12 | 12 | 10 | 11 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +2/+1* | +3 | +2 | +5 |

*Flat-footed

**SKILLS**

Disable Device 5 (+6), Knowledge (civics) 8 (+9), Knowledge (current events) 8 (+9), Knowledge (tactics) 6 (+7), Notice 5 (+5), Profession (government agent) 9 (+9), Search 6 (+7), Sense Motive 7 (+7), Stealth 6 (+6)

**FEATS**

Benefit (government agent), Connected, Defensive Roll 1

**POWERS (AS A JOKER)**

**Additional Limbs 3** (multiple legs)

**Corrosion 8** (projectile vomit; Limited to metal; Extended Reach 2 [10 ft.])

**Super-Movement 2** (slithering, wall-crawling)

**Super-Senses 2** (infravision, scent)

**COMBAT**

Attack +4, Grapple +5, Damage +1 (unarmed), Defense +4 (+2 flat-footed), Knockback –1 (–0 flat-footed), Initiative +0

**DRAWBACKS**

Disability (poor eyesight as a joker, common, minor, –2 points)

**Abilities 8 + Skills 15 (60 ranks) + Feats 3 + Powers (19) + Combat 16 + Saves 9 – Drawbacks (2) = Total 51 (68)**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** George G. Battle | **WC Name:** — |
| **Occupation:** Government agent, Card Shark | **WC Status:** Nat (later joker) |
| **Aliases:** Yes | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** Early 1930s | **Death:** Summer 1994 |
| **Height:** Short | **Weight:** Slim |
| **Eyes:** Dark | **Hair:** Dark and balding |

### APRIL 1980

Battle is a special assistant to National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski during the Carter administration, and helps convince Carter to send an ace team to Iran to rescue the American hostages held at the Embassy. Battle helps put together the team—a team, unfortunately, designed to fail, and makes sure they do, both to punish Carter, who is perceived to be soft on wild carders, and also to put aces in general in a bad light.

### SEPTEMBER 1990

He's attached to the vice president's Special Executive Task Force, headed by Philip Baron von Herzenhagen, and recruits Billy Ray for the covert assault on the Rox. As they make their way through the caverns, Battle proves himself both duplicitous and extremely prejudiced against wild carders. Modular Man ultimately rescues him from the Rox before it's deluged by the tidal wave whipped up by the Turtle.

### OCTOBER 1993

On Halloween, Battle goes on a mission for the Sharks along with a couple of Cuban stooges and his favorite corpse, Crypt Kicker. They burgle the Jokertown Clinic to obtain a vial of Xenovirus Takis-A. Fortunately, Jerry Strauss, who has been investigating Battle's background, has gotten wind of the attempted break-in and is there to stop him. In the ensuing commotion the vial gets smashed, but only Battle is infected. He turns into a four-foot-long joker with six pairs of limbs and bright yellow skin. He can walk slowly and precariously on his last pair or run on two pairs. His feet have small, clinging suckers on their bottoms. His clumsy hands have three fingers each. He has a ridiculous face with a red putty-like nose right in the middle and two more putty noses where his ears used to be. Little tufts of hair stand out all over his body and his voice bears an uncanny resemblance to that of Mickey Mouse.

Later Battle and Crypt Kicker are cleared of all charges pertaining to the break-in due to reasons of "national security." He's stashed in a safe house (actually, a safe apartment) in the East 50s until von Herzenhagen is able to bring one of his pet jumpers up from Washington, and then he's jumped into Hartmann's body while Hartmann is jumped into his. Now that for all intents and purposes he's the ex-senator, Battle calls a press conference and recants all Hartmann's Card Shark public testimony, claiming to have been misled about the conspiracy.

Battle's stay in Hartmann's body doesn't last long. Black Shadow breaks into his apartment, ties him up, and tortures him while asking him questions about Puppetman, questions he can't possibly answer. Battle does, however, spill an entirely different can of beans, but it does him no good. Black Shadow leaves him broken and dead.

## ABILITIES

Battle has small arms, snooping, and spying skills, but he is the master of none.

Battle's joker body has a few minor but useful wild card abilities, although he spends so short a time in it he's probably not cognizant of them all. His sucker-like feet are great for climbing vertical surfaces, and his feeding mechanism can also be used as weapon. He can projectile vomit up to about 10 feet. The vomit melts metal, but leaves everything else (including living flesh) unharmed. A glob of Battle's vomit can melt about a square foot or so of metal (which he then can eat), less if the object is thick or highly dense. He also has an incredibly sensitive sense of smell (although this is not always a plus). His eyesight is poor, but he can see into the infrared.

# J. ROBERT BELEW

**Created by Victor Milán**

*"J. Robert Belew was a man who believed in always traveling first class. It was just that his definition of first class was skewed from the rest of the world's, like so much about him. He loved fine wine, Vivaldi, satin sheets, and beautiful, long-legged women to slip between them as much as the next man. When those things fit the mission profile."*

— Milán: *Turn of the Cards* (Book XII)

## DESCRIPTION

A short, trimly built man with close-cropped, faded hair, Belew has a luxuriant mustache with waxed tips that is mostly seal colored and perhaps dyed. He speaks with a hint of a southern drawl and has a military bearing that is erect but not stiff.

Belew is on the masthead of both *Rolling Stone* and *Soldier of Fortune* as contributing editor, and frequently sells articles and photos regarding his personal exploits to both.

Belew is fond of quoting classical and literary authors and has an apt aphorism for any occasion. He smokes cigars and enjoys good food and fine wine, but he drinks nothing stronger. He does enjoy the occasional opium pipe. His favorite modern music is speed metal. He thinks gambling for money is a waste of time, but loves to gamble with his life. He has virulent contempt for the media. He is an unabashed political ultraconservative, who's fought communism all his life.

## BACKGROUND

Belew joins the Army in the mid-'50s and retires with the rank of major after putting in 20 years. He becomes a cowboy, a mercenary who does black ops contract work for many government agencies, frequently the CIA. Frequently he also gets involved in sticky situations as a freelancer. He is married for a while and has two children who are adults in the early 1990s.

### APRIL 1980

President Jimmy Carter personally recruits Belew to lead a mission to rescue the Iranian-held American hostages. While Belew has doubts about the mission, especially since he doesn't get to pick the team, he takes the job. The team consists of himself, Sergeant First Class Paul "Dive Bomb" Chung, Harvey "the Librarian" Melmoth, Amy "Damsel" Mears, Jay Ackroyd, Joann "Lady Black" Jefferson, and a 20-year-old University of Michigan student on his first government mission named Billy Ray.

The team is inserted into Iran after meeting CIA agent O.K. Casaday, who provides them with a local guide. Even at this early point in the mis-

sion Belew is having real doubts as to the team's capabilities. As they reach the embassy where the hostages are being held, an armed mob appears virtually out of nowhere. Belew contacts base, but neither their air cover nor their extraction team shows up. They've been deserted. And screwed. Melmoth is wounded and Ackroyd teleports him back to base. Mears chooses Chung as her hero and boosts his ace powers, but unfortunately fails to make him bulletproof. He's killed and Mears is caught by the crowd. Billy Ray, already wounded, is almost killed trying to rescue her, to no avail. Lady Black saves her comrades and gives them some breathing space by an explosive release of energy. Ackroyd sends Ray and Jefferson to safety, but not until the classically minded Belew gives Ray his nickname, Carnifex, Latin for "executioner." Belew and Ackroyd carry on the mission, but there is little more they can do than simply escape with their lives. Belew spots O.K. Casaday on the fringe of the mob, and knows for sure they've been set up. Ultimately Belew and Ackroyd make it to an airport where Belew uses his ace ability to meld with machinery, and they escape in an aircraft.

Belew comes to realize the mission had been set up for failure from the beginning. This crystallizes a suspicion he's had for some time. There's a coalition of powerful men inside and outside of government (and not limited to the U.S. government) who are anti-wild card. This particular mission was set to fail to, one, embarrass aces in general, and, two, make Jimmy Carter, who was considered soft on wild carders, look bad. This secret cabal comes to be known as the Card Sharks.

## SEPTEMBER 1991

Belew gets involved with Mark Meadows when the gangly ace returns from Takis because he realizes his treatment at government hands is another example of the anti-wild card conspiracy. Posing as a CIA agent (but actually acting on his own) he "helps" the feckless DEA agents pursuing Meadows, making sure they only come close to capturing him but never succeeding. Belew himself never gets an opportunity to explain things to Mark until Meadows has deserted from the New Joker Brigade and Belew, accompanied by a team of ex-Khymer Rouge bodyguards, tracks him down to his hideout in the central highlands. Mark is skeptical about the Card Shark conspiracy, but Belew lays it all out and convinces him. Belew also convinces him that the Sharks are now after him, that the DEA persecution is another one of their undercover operations, and that the only way he'll live through it is to fight and defeat them. And the only way to do that is to actually topple the government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

In the final confrontation with Colonel Sobel of the New Joker Brigade and an armored division of the army of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Belew melds himself into an attack helicopter and wreaks great havoc. He also selflessly crashes into Monster, trying to save an innocent village from attack. He survives the crash, living to see Meadows' rag-tag rebel band tri-

### J. ROBERT BELEW — POWER LEVEL 6

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| +1 | +3 | +2 | +3 | +3 | +2 |
| 13 | 16 | 14 | 17 | 16 | 15 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +4/+2* | +5 | +6 | +6 |

**Flat-footed*

**SKILLS**

Bluff 8 (+10), Climb 4 (+5), Concentration 6 (+9), Disable Device 5 (+8), Drive 6 (+9), Gather Information 10 (+12), Intimidate 6 (+8), Investigate 8 (+11), Knowledge (civics) 6 (+9), Knowledge (current events) 8 (+11), Knowledge (streetwise) 10 (+13), Language 6 (Cantonese, Farsi, French, and several others), Medicine 3 (+6), Notice 6 (+9), Profession (mercenary) 8 (+11), Search 8 (+11), Sense Motive 10 (+13), Stealth 8 (+11), Survival 6 (+9), Swim 4 (+5)

**FEATS**

Accurate Attack, Assessment, Attack Focus (ranged), Attack Specialization (pistols), Connected, Contacts, Defensive Attack, Defensive Roll 2, Luck, Master Plan, Well-Informed

**POWERS**

**Animate Objects 6** (90 points; Limited to machines; Side-Effect—must sever a digit or hand, which recovers like a disabled condition; Touch Range)

**COMBAT**

Attack +6 (melee), +7 (ranged), +9 (pistols), Grapple +7, Damage +1 (unarmed), Defense +7 (+4 flat-footed), Knockback –2 (–1 flat-footed), Initiative +3

**Abilities 31 + Skills 34 (136 ranks) + Feats 12 + Powers 3 + Combat 26 + Saves 9 = Total 115**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** J. Robert Belew | **WC Name:** The Mechanic |
| **Occupation:** Mercenary | **WC Status:** Ace |
| **Aliases:** Randall Bullock, Jacobo Bustamante | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** 1935 | **Death:** Summer 1994 |
| **Height:** Short | **Weight:** Trim |
| **Eyes:** Grey | **Hair:** Once brown, now faded |

umphant over the Socialist Republic, and becomes a minister-without-portfolio in the government of Free Vietnam, as well as Mark's chief of security.

### SEPTEMBER 1993

Belew reveals some of his knowledge about the Card Shark conspiracy to Hannah Davis as she investigates the arson at Our Lady of Perpetual Misery, and helps smooth the way for her trip to Vietnam where she investigates the purported death of Shark Etienne Faneuil.

### NOVEMBER 1993

Back in Free Vietnam, he's suspicious of the motivations of a recently arrived joker guru named Ganesha, who has great influence over both Mark and Moonchild. And he is correct in his suspicions. Ganesha first entraps Belew by telling Mark that Belew has an unnatural interest in Sprout. When Mark catches Sprout innocently kissing Belew, Meadows has him imprisoned. Belew escapes from his cell just in time to track down Ganesha, who has kidnapped Sprout and is on the verge of raping her. Belew saves her from the supposed holy man, who turns out to be an ace masquerading as a joker, but is himself severely wounded. Mark provides him with medical care that brings him back to health, but then, still unsure of his actions in regard to Sprout, exiles him from Free Vietnam. Belew just walks away.

### SUMMER 1994

He sees a number of newspaper ads directing him to get in touch with Jay Ackroyd. They meet in Hong Kong, and Belew tells him that Mark Meadows is still alive. Ackroyd is heartened by the news. Belew is less enthused by the news Ackroyd brings: the existence of the Black Trump and Casaday's connection to it. Belew takes the private eye to a monkey-like joker the size of Orson Welles named Lord Tung. Tung is one of the most important smugglers in Hong Kong. Ackroyd does a little favor for him and Tung tells them where Casaday can be found.

Belew and Ackroyd are arguing about how to rescue Mark and best contain the Black Trump when Dr. Finn shows up with some astonishing and unwelcome news. Pann has reported to him that Jerry Strauss and Sascha Starfin have also discovered Casaday's location and that they're going in after him. Belew, Ackroyd, Finn, and a couple of Belew's old ex-Khymer Rouge pals head off to Myanmar as fast as they can, but the lab site is already mostly deserted. Belew finds the tortured body of Lou Inmon, an old friend of Belew's, and Belew adds Inmon's death to the already long list of grievances he has against Casaday. Belew's men round up some stragglers still hanging around the lab site and discover that the Sharks have all split for Guangdong, China, near Hong Kong. Hong Kong seems a likely target for the Black Trump as it has one of the greatest concentrations of jokers in that part of Asia. They follow immediately.

Belew sends Finn to cover the airport with some of his men while he and Ackroyd take the rest to tackle the Shark's secret laboratory. He bites the tip of his finger off to meld with the electronic security gate so they can gain access to the hideaway, and once inside he and Ackroyd split up to search for the Black Trump. They find Strauss and he tells them the story about Casaday, the Black Trump, the airport, and a blimp, and they all go haring off to stop the Shark from emulating Dr. Tod.

They're pinned down on the runway by local security forces as the Sharks load the Trump into the blimp, using hostages as cover. Belew spots a helicopter warming up as the blimp ascends into the sky and makes a try for it. Machine gun fire cuts him down on the tarmac. O.K. Casaday is in the weeds off the runway, laughing as he shoots Belew. Ackroyd goes after Belew and helps him into the copter. Belew, badly wounded, pauses only a moment to slice off his hand with one of the copter's moving rotors, piles into the cockpit and jams his bleeding stump into the control panel, sending his soul into the machine. Casaday rises from cover and hoses down the copter with his machine gun. Belew is hit numerous times, but the copter rises and slices off Casaday's head. Whatever life Belew has left enters the machine. He flies to the blimp and crashes into the gondola, giving everything he has so Ackroyd has a shot at stopping the Card Sharks delivering the Black Trump over the skies of Hong Kong.

So passes the Last Cold War Warrior.

## ABILITIES

When Belew places a freshly cut surface of his body, like the stump of a removed digit or limb, against the surface of a machine, his spirit enters into the machine to run it. His body can regenerate the damaged area when he discards the machine. It takes several weeks for a hand to regrow to full functionality. When Belew joins with, for example, a helicopter, he doesn't have to know how to fly the helicopter. He *becomes* the helicopter.

He rates expert at combat pistol and has excellent military and spying skills. He speaks several languages including French, Cantonese Chinese (and other Asian languages), and Farsi.

# BLACK EAGLE

**Created by Walter Jon Williams**

*"Accommodation with fascists was not his style."*

— Williams: "Witness" (Book I)

## DESCRIPTION

Sanderson's usual outfit when flying consists of tan Air Force officer's fatigues with insignia removed, pilot's helmet, black leather flying jacket with 332nd patch on the shoulder, boots, and white scarf. When on the ground he removes his helmet and wears an old black beret, a mode of dress largely adopted by the Black Panthers in the 1960s.

## BACKGROUND

Sanderson's father was a railway porter and charter member of the Niagara movement (which morphed into the NAACP) and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. A brilliant student and scholar, Earl attends Rutgers on scholarship in 1930. The next year, he joins the Communist Party, a common occurrence among intellectuals of that time, especially those belonging to a downtrodden minority. He graduates Rutgers summa cum laude and marries his high school sweetheart, Lillian Abbot. Two years later Earl spends a year in Russia attending Lenin University, then returns to the U.S. and takes his law degree at Columbia. During the next couple of years Earl works as a lawyer for the BSCP. His commitment to the Communist Party wanes and he leaves the party when Russia signs a non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany in 1939.

### 1940S

After Pearl Harbor, Earl volunteers for the Air Force. Though older than most pilots, he's an athlete who's kept himself in good shape. He's assigned to the 332nd Fighter Group, an all-black squadron called the Lonely Eagles, and sent to Italy. He finishes the war with 53 unconfirmed

kills, second only to Jetboy, but is not considered an ace since the number of planes shot down by black fighter pilots isn't officially recorded by the government. While stationed in Italy he has a passionate affair with the love of his life, a communist politically active cabaret singer named Orlena ("Lena") Goldoni.

After the war he's recruited by Archibold Holmes for the Exotics For Democracy. While in northern Italy looking for Nazi war criminal Martin Bormann, he renews his relationship with Goldoni. Among other EFD assignments, he saves Gandhi from an assassin's bullet, a service that the Indian government later honored him for.

## 1949

Sanderson consciously manipulates his image, molding himself into the perfect black hero, scholar, athlete, union leader, war hero, husband, ace. He's the first black man on the cover of *Time* and *Life* magazines. Things go well until he's called before HUAC, where, using information given unwillingly by Jack Braun, the issue of his relationship with Lena Goldoni, who was a communist and accused Soviet spy, and his own membership in the Communist Party, comes up again. Nothing can stop the explosion of bad publicity. The NAACP asks Sanderson to divorce himself from their cause. He flies to Europe and renounces his American citizenship and lives openly with Lena Goldoni in Paris.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Earl Sanderson, Jr. | **WC Name:** Black Eagle |
| **Occupation:** Government agent | **WC Status:** Ace (card turned September 15, 1946) |
| **Aliases:** — | **Ethnicity:** African |
| **Birth:** 1913, Harlem, NYC | **Death:** 1979, Paris, France |
| **Height:** 5 ft., 11 in. | **Weight:** 170 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Brown | **Hair:** Black |

**BLACK EAGLE** — **POWER LEVEL 8**

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| +2 | +4 | +2 | +2 | +3 | +3 |
| 15 | 18 | 15 | 15 | 16 | 17 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +9/+2* | +6 | +8 | +7 |

**Without force field*

**SKILLS**

Acrobatics 6 (+10), Knowledge (civics) 8 (+10), Knowledge (tactics) 4 (+6), Language 3 (French, Italian, Russian), Pilot 9 (+13), Profession (lawyer) 6 (+9)

**FEATS**

Fast Overrun, Favored Environment (aerial), Move-by Action

**POWERS**

**Flight 6** (500 mph)

**Force Field 7** (Impervious 5, Subtle)

**Strike 8** (psychokinetic wedge, Subtle)

**DRAWBACKS**

Power Loss (Force Field and Strike, when not flying, –2 points)

**COMBAT**

Attack +7, Grapple +9, Damage +2 (unarmed), +8 (strike), Defense +7 (+4 flat-footed), Knockback –7 (–1 without force field), Initiative +4

**Abilities 36 + Skills 9 (36 ranks) + Feats 3 + Powers 34 + Combat 28 + Saves 12 – Drawbacks 2 = Total 120**

## 1950s to '70s

He remains in relative seclusion during the 1950s and 1960s, living quietly with Lena in Paris and Rome. There are whispers that he was seen in Africa during various wars of independence and that he fought in Algeria against the French, but he would never confirm any of this, always afraid he might damage a cause by associating himself with it.

Earl Sanderson dies suddenly of a cerebral hemorrhage in 1979. The Indian government erects a monument to him, where he receives worship as a sort of god.

# Abilities

Using projectile telekinesis Black Eagle can fly at speeds of up to 500 mph. Bullets bounce off him, but he is susceptible to damage from anything of higher caliber than a handgun. He can also project a wall of force, a kind of traveling shock wave, that can break down barriers and pick up man-sized objects and throw them up to a hundred feet.

Sanderson speaks Russian before World War II and learns French and Italian during the war.

# BLACK SHADOW

**Created by Walter Jon Williams**

*"He didn't feel anything any more. No compassion, no fear, no love. His own personality seemed very far away, buried somewhere, latent. None of that could help him survive."*

— Black Shadow about to go on the kill. Williams: "Feeding Frenzy" (Book IV)

## DESCRIPTION

Black Shadow is an African-American man with so many guises he's not really sure himself who he is anymore.

He's a big jazz fan and a jazz soundtrack frequently plays through his head as he goes about his daily activities. He refers to himself as "Shad," and is the only one who uses that name.

Shad's apartment (1990) is located in the high-class region of Gramercy Park in a whitestone building. The door and frame to it are steel sheathed in wood. It is spacious and comfortably furnished with lots of books and jazz LPs and CDs. The floors are hardwood. The whole apartment is spotless.

## BACKGROUND

When Langford is 10 years old, he spends a weekend being raped and tortured by two sadistic psychopaths, Stan Barker and Bob Penn, who also kill his father, mother, and little sister. He is saved by police who break in just as Penn is garroting him, which leaves a scar around his neck.

### 1970s and '80s

Langford is thrown out of Columbia around 1976 for not getting around to finishing his M.S. thesis. He became Black Shadow after listening to Senator Hartmann give a speech calling for action and justice and meets Hartmann early on in his career and becomes a puppet. Under Hartmann's influence his first few cases result in a burning rage he hadn't realized was in him, and he leaves his adversaries broken and hanging from lampposts. The uncontrollable rage eventually fades, but the lamppost thing becomes something of a trademark. He adopts a number of alternate identities:

- *Mr. Gravemold:* In this guise, Shad pretends to be a joker who exudes an overpoweringly bad smell, compounded of must and rotting flesh, and the chill of the grave. He wears a pork pie hat and a skull mask decorated with white and black feathers. He speaks in a theatrical baritone and uses melodramatic phrasing. As Mr. Gravemold, Shad uses his photon-stealing power to overcome the newbie ace the Reflector, and helps capture Typhoid Croyd (June 1987). He also appears at the Democratic National Convention in Atlanta (July 1988).
- *Wall Walker:* As Wall Walker, he's a fixture at Aces High, a 30-ish (late 1980s) black man whose wild card enables him to walk on walls and ceilings. He wears a black cloth domino mask that does little to conceal his appearance and speaks with a light West Indies accent.
- *Juve:* He speaks with a Spanish accent.
- *No Dice:* He dresses and talks like a pimp or drug dealer, the latter of which he sometimes actually is. He wears a black leather Pierre Cardin trench coat with a matching leather beret, a Perry Ellis sweater, a couple of dozen gold chains, $200 high-top sneakers, gold-rimmed shades, and a palm-sized green, black, and gold leather pendant in the shape of Africa. As No Dice, he saves Chalktalk from a pimp on the streets, and watches, somewhat bemused, as she escapes into one of her sidewalk drawings (February 1991).
- *Simon:* He masquerades as a nat.
- *Mr. Gregory Diamond:* He wears gold-rimmed glasses and lives atop a building in Jokertown owned by the Diamond Company, Ltd., which is a division of Diamond Transport, which is a company held by Diamante N.V. incorporated in Aruba.

### February 1990

Black Shadow takes on the Jumpers with the help of Croyd Crenson and manages to trace their activities to a brownstone warehouse in Jokertown. He observes several meetings, noting a number of well-known faces in attendance: Blaise, Latham, the curator of the Metropolitan Museum, the city comptroller, and a number of well-known businessmen. He realizes that all are jumpers who have supplanted the bodies' original owners. Black Shadow documents these meetings with reams of photographs, building a thick dossier on jumper activities.

He also follows Blaise and Tachyon around, and realizes that Tachyon, too, has been jumped. Eventually he discovers that the real Tachyon is on the Rox. When the time is right, he decides to take down the jumper enterprise. He frees a number of captives, among them Cody Havero, but eventually is jumped himself. His assailant attacks the po-

| BLACK SHADOW | | | | | POWER LEVEL 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +6 | +6 | +4 | +3 | +4 | +1 |
| 22/14 | 22/14 | 18 | 17 | 18 | 13 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +6/+4* | +7 | +9 | +7 |

**Flat-footed*

**SKILLS**

Acrobatics 8 (+14), Bluff 6 (+7), Concentration 6 (+10), Disable Device 10 (+13), Disguise 10 (+11), Gather Information 6 (+7), Intimidate 6 (+7), Investigate 5 (+8), Knowledge (current events) 6 (+9), Knowledge (popular culture) 3 (+6), Knowledge (streetwise) 6 (+9), Notice 6 (+10), Search 6 (+9), Stealth 8 (+14)

**FEATS**

Acrobatic Bluff, Attack Focus (melee) 3, Benefit 6 (alternate identities), Defensive Attack, Defensive Roll 2, Dodge Focus 2

**POWERS**

**Drain Constitution 5** (photon-drain; Perception Range)

**Enhanced Dexterity 8**

**Enhanced Strength 8**

**Obscure 5** (visual; photon-drain)

**Super-Movement 2** (wall-crawling)

**Super-Senses 2** (darkvision)

**COMBAT**

Attack +8 (melee), +5 (ranged), Grapple +14, Damage +6 (unarmed), Defense +8 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback –3 (–2 flat-footed), Initiative +6

**Abilities 34 + Skills 23 (92 ranks) + Feats 15 + Powers 47 + Combat 22 + Saves 9 = Total 150**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Neal Carton Langford | **WC Name:** Black Shadow |
| **Occupation:** Vigilante | **WC Status:** Ace |
| **Aliases:** Numerous (see description) | **Ethnicity:** African |
| **Birth:** early 1950s | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** Unknown | **Weight:** Unknown |
| **Eyes:** Unknown | **Hair:** Unknown |

lice. He confronts the jumper in his body, and shoots his own body in order to make the jumper switch back. Later, badly wounded, he's helped by Chalktalk.

## AUGUST 1990

She takes Shad's through one of her drawings to a different dimension where the United States is the United Socialist States. He spends a few months in the USS of A, where there's no modern jazz, people dress in drab clothing, but where his wounds heal. He seethes at the jumpers, and he eventually finds Chalktalk again and convinces her to take him back to the Rox. Once there he makes a deal with Bloat to take Tachyon off the island. In turn, Bloat tells him the identity of the man who messed with his mind and made him a killer. He's shocked to find out it was Hartmann, but believes Bloat's revelation.

Their escape from the Rox is successful, but Black Shadow and Tachyon are separated by a shelling as the military prepares for a full-scale assault on the island.

## SEPTEMBER 1990

Black Shadow joins the covert team of aces during the Rox Campaign and receives a full pardon for past crimes from George G. Battle. He's wounded early on in the action, and has to return to the staging zone, not knowing that his supposed pardon is fake. He's taken prisoner and incarcerated in the Governor's Island Maximum Security Psychiatric Unit.

## FALL 1993

While in prison Shad draws up an enemies list. Number one on it is Gregg Hartmann. At his first opportunity after fellow prisoner Croyd Crenson engineers a mass escape, he breaks into Hartmann's apartment, ties him to a chair, and questions him, harshly, about Puppetman. Unsurprisingly, "Hartmann" knows nothing about what Shadow's talking about because he's really George G. Battle in Hartmann's body. Shad finally gets some unexpected answers to his questions, but Battle is broken and dead. He comes away from the interview thinking Hartmann was working with the Card Sharks.

Black Shadow and Croyd Crenson, who wakes up after Shad had stashed him in one of his safe houses, team up and go on a series of Shark hunts. Black Shadow kills Card Shark Senator Henry Flynn, Hartmann's successor as chairman of SCARE. They frame Howard Hughes for the murder and kidnap him. Then they follow Margaret Durand to Latchkey, the jumper holding facility in Maryland. Black Shadow kills the jumpers they find while Croyd guns down Crypt Kicker and then Howard Hughes. They foil von Herzenhagen's attempt to get jumped into President Barnett's body, first killing Mam'zell Gerard, the last known surviving jumper. They then plant the gun that killed her on von Herzenhagen, thus also framing him for an assassination attempt on President Barnett.

Posing as a CIA agent, Black Shadow meets with Margaret Durand in her cell and convinces her it would be in her best interests to turn state's evidence against the other Sharks. All and all, he and Croyd manage to put quite a dent in the conspiracy.

# ABILITIES

Black Shadow's powers are common to all his avatars, but he openly uses only certain powers while in certain identities. He is fast, tough, and has great night vision. He can walk on walls, even upside down or vertically. He doesn't eat normal food except to be polite when in company, but ingests energy by sucking in photons out of the air or living bodies, robbing his targets of heat. He can absorb photons in the electromagnetic, visual, and infrared spectra. He usually feeds on bits of body heat no one misses, but if he consumes every photon in a living body (draining Con down past 0), his target freezes solid and shatters to bits at the slightest touch.

The staged Drain variant from *Ultimate Power* (page 43) is recommended for Black Shadow's power, since it allows for greater variation in its effect against targets based on their Fortitude. If desired, Gamemasters can treat the Constitution loss due to the photon-drain like exposure to extreme cold (which, essentially, it is), meaning those who have lost Con from it are fatigued and those who have lost half or more of their Con score are exhausted.

# BLAISE

**Created by Melinda Snodgrass**

*"There's a coldness in Blaise that is almost inhuman."*

— Cody Havero to Tachyon, getting right to the heart of matter.
Snodgrass: "The Devil's Triangle" (Book VIII)

## DESCRIPTION

Blaise has richly colored red hair and brilliant purple-black eyes. He eventually grows to over six feet tall and is broadly built and heavily muscled.

## BACKGROUND

Blaise is Tachyon's grandson. Both his mother and father were dedicated Communist terrorists. His mother, Gisele (Tachyon's daughter with Danelle Moncey), is killed in a shootout with police (1984). His father, François, is a member of her Paris cell. They move often, keeping one step ahead of the authorities and Blaise leads a wild, unfettered life with no formal schooling. His natural talent for mind control is often used by the cell to further their nefarious schemes. Blaise often doesn't withdraw from his mind-controlled victims as they die violent deaths he enjoys experiencing.

### 1987

After Tachyon finds him in Paris he brings him to New York City, where he spoils him while dressing him like Little Lord Fauntleroy. Blaise is a problem child who bullies other kids and drives his tutors to quit. In June, when Georgy Polyakov becomes his tutor, he's the only one whom Blaise respects. He can control the kid because he discovers the key to Blaise's character: Blaise needs to fear someone before he can care for them. Tachyon has a difficult time preventing Blaise from mind-controlling helpless targets, including Mark Meadows's daughter, Sprout, for his often cruel amusement.

### JULY 1988

Blaise accompanies Tachyon to Atlanta for the Democratic National Convention, where he bonds with Jay Ackroyd. While investigating Chrysalis's death, Blaise and Ackroyd are captured by Ti Malice, and Blaise is taken by the joker-ace as a mount. This experience does not help his already shaky mental stability.

### SUMMER 1989

Blaise pals around for awhile with Cody Havero's son Chris. At first they're good friends, but Blaise frightens the younger boy by "playfully" choking him and by making odd comments about Chris's mother. Havero goes to Tachyon and bluntly tells him that Blaise hates him and, worse, is likely a sociopath.

Future events quickly prove her right. Blaise conceives a burning lust for Havero, and passionately declares his love for her. She lets him down gently, but he storms away cursing Tachyon for standing in his way with Cody. He later mind-controls Havero, makes her strip, and is ready to rape her when Tachyon intervenes. They fight. Tachyon barely gets the upper hand, loses control, and is beating Blaise to death when Havero pulls him off.

Blaise runs away and has a confrontation with a jumper gang, including Molly Bolt, and uses his mind control talent to take command of the situation. Impressed, they ask him to join their happy little group. They take Blaise to the Rox, where he meets Bloat. When he's initiated by Latham, Blaise is hurt, angered, and humiliated. Naturally, he blames Tachyon for the degrading experience, but he soon luxuriates in his newfound power. He quickly works his way up to leader of the Jumpers.

The Jumpers do some work for the Shadow Fist Society, including helping Kien crush an attempted coup. Blaise personally executes Kien's disloyal lieutenant Phillip Cunningham with a single gun shot to the head. Blaise spends a lot of time on the Rox. He despises Bloat (as he does almost everybody except Latham, for whom he has grudging respect as well as some fear) and generally runs wild.

### FEBRUARY 1990

Later he initiates his vengeance on Tachyon. He has Cody Havero jumped and then lures Tachyon to a hotel with the long-anticipated promise of consummating their affair. Tachyon is trapped, jumped into the body of Kelly Jenkins, a female Jumper wannabe, and taken to the Rox where she's beaten, raped, and imprisoned by Blaise. Blaise returns to her cell to rape her periodically and eventually impregnates her. When Tachyon tells him, Blaise thinks it's great news. Tachyon seemingly capitulates to Blaise, calling him master, and Blaise exults, accepting her surrender at face value.

Blaise spots Mark Meadows on the Rox and thinks the ace has come to rescue Tachyon. He sets his girlfriend, K.C. Strange, to spy on Meadows, but she eventually falls in love with the gangly ace and helps him achieve his real purpose of finding and rescuing Sprout. Knowing about the rescue attempt, Blaise drops a dime on Meadows and company, and a police

| BLAISE | | | | | POWER LEVEL 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +1 | +1 | +1 | +0 | +2 | +2 |
| 12 | 12 | 12 | 11 | 15 | 15 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +2/+1* | +4 | +4 | +8 |

**Flat-footed*

**SKILLS**

Bluff 6 (+8), Concentration 3 (+5), Intimidate 4 (+6), Knowledge (streetwise) 5 (+5), Language 2 (English (French is native), German), Notice 4 (+6), Perform (oratory) 4 (+6), Sense Motive 4 (+6)

**FEATS**

Defensive Roll 1, Startle, Taunt

**POWERS**

**Mind Control 10** (Penetrating; Mental Link)

**Mind Switch 10** (jumping; Continuous, No Saving Throw, Penetrating)

**COMBAT**

Attack +4, Grapple +5, Damage +1 (unarmed), Defense +4 (+2 flat-footed), Knockback –1 (–0 flat-footed), Initiative +1

**Abilities 17 + Skills 8 (32 ranks) + Feats 3 + Powers 91 + Combat 16 + Saves 12 = Total 147**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Blaise Jeannot Andrieux | **WC Name:** — |
| **Occupation:** Criminal, agricultural worker | **WC Status:** Alien |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** French/quarter Takisian |
| **Birth:** May 7, 1975 | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** Over 6 ft. | **Weight:** Broadly built |
| **Eyes:** Purple-black | **Hair:** Red |

task force is waiting at the juvenile detention center when they arrive to free Sprout. Blaise is among them, having jumped a cop so he can observe firsthand. Meadows, however, triumphs. Blaise murders K.C. in his usual fit of pique, and unwisely attempts to jump J.J. Flash. He barely escapes with mind and body intact, but his massive ego regards this as a great victory and proof of his general superiority.

## AUGUST 1990

Blaise is terrified when the military attacks the Rox. He runs. Durg, who has joined his service, accompanies him with Kelly Jenkins in Tachyon's body in tow. They use Kelly to fool *Baby* into thinking Tachyon is commanding this venture, and blast off into space. A desperate Tachyon follows with the Turtle, but is unable to stop them. Durg convinces Blaise to go to Takis where Blaise uses his mind control and general ruthlessness to become the ruler of the House Vayawand. Blaise hits on the Achilles' heel of Takisian society and enlists the downtrodden mind-blind in his cause. He goes on to conquer House Radaleh and massacres all their Psi Lords.

Blaise continues his descent into depravity, attacking six other houses simultaneously and throwing Takis into a world war. Ultimately, his rule gets so brutally insane that the Vayawandians rebel. Tachyon, Meadows, and Zabb lead a crack commando team into his headquarters, where Blaise and Zabb go mano-a-mano. Blaise is shot in the head without anyone realizing he'd jumped into Zabb's body. Back in Ilkala, Blaise takes a final crack at Tachyon and she then realizes he'd jumped Zabb. Tachyon and Kelly overcome him, and make him jump them back into their proper bodies. He does so, first extracting a promise that Tachyon will let him go free.

Tachyon reluctantly agrees. Blaise's final meaningful words to him are: "I loathe you. It's nice to know you'll never sleep a quiet night knowing that I'm alive somewhere in the universe." But Blaise has not counted on the Network. He's in Zabb's body so they take him into custody for breaking the life-time contract Zabb signed. The Network decides to send him to the far-away world of Zanae to supervise its irrigation system, but his body won't be needed for the job. As they saw off the top of his skull Blaise screams for Tachyon's help, but he turns away, leaving his grandson to face a lifetime of excruciatingly futile boredom.

## ABILITIES

Blaise has natural mind control, untutored but powerful. Otherwise he is mind-blind. He does have a mind shield, but it is erratic and poor.

When he first appears in *Wild Cards,* Blaise is barely 13 years old. He is Str 9, Con 10, Wis and Cha 13, lacks any real skills apart from Language and Notice, and is not yet a jumper. Still, his Mind Control power makes Blaise formidable, and dangerous.

Subjects of Blaise's Mind Control are conscious and aware while they are under his control, but the power does not have the Conscious extra, because subjects cannot be forced to relate information; Blaise controls their body rather than their mind, which remains active.

He eventually (summer 1989) gets the jumper power as well. Blaise's native tongue is French, but he's also fluent in English and German. He learns dialects of Takisian on the way to Takis and while on the planet.

# BLOAT

**Created by Stephen Leigh**

*"We do what's best for those the wild card has nearly destroyed. If nats or aces get hurt, I don't care. Fuck them. If that's what it takes, I'll even encourage it."*

— Bloat, not out to win a popularity contest. Leigh: "Sixteen Candles" (Book VIII)

## DESCRIPTION

Ted is a chubby kid who becomes Bloat, a monstrously fat joker who is nailed in place in the administration building on Ellis Island in New York Bay. Soon after coming to Ellis he's 50 feet wide and eight feet tall and he eventually fills the foyer as well as some corridors beyond. His head, neck, shoulders, and arms are ordinary-sized and stick out uselessly from the incredible mass of his body, which is like that of a monstrous white worm. Inlet pipes carrying sewer and garbage jab into his bulk, and a resinous black sludge called bloatblack, which exudes a repulsive stench, seeps from his pores and accumulates as waste around him. As he gets larger, a team of jokers has to climb about him and clean him off.

# BACKGROUND

Ted, comic book, *D&D,* and fantasy fan, turns his card at puberty and his parents abandon him at the Jokertown Clinic.

## FALL 1988

He becomes the leader of the jokers who take over Ellis Island. They plan to make Ellis Island, which they call the Rox, a joker homeland, and to eventually take over Manhattan.

The next spring, Bloat tries but fails to recruit the Oddity to their cause. He has a crush on the Jumper wannabe Kelly Jenkins and hates Blaise who runs the Jumper gang that shares the Rox with the joker immigrants. He tries to rein in Blaise's wildness, but finds himself helpless because the jumpers bring in a lot of money and all of the rapture the Rox jokers need. He does manage to change the Jumpers's strategy of terrorizing the city like deranged teenagers in a biker flick to a scheme which brings in real money by jumping rich youngsters with trust funds, as well as people in positions of power and authority, like the heads of corporations or politicians, who have access to lootable funds.

## FEBRUARY 1990

Bloat contacts Tachyon telepathically after he's bought to the Rox in Kelly's body, telling her that he'll try to rescue her. Actually, though, he doesn't dare cross Blaise. He has intricate dreams wherein he conceives of himself as the romantic hero "The Outcast," Tachyon as "The Princess," and a bloated, toad-like Blaise as "The Pretender."

Meanwhile, Bloat takes the Jumpers's money and uses it to transform the administration building into his vision of the Crystal Castle, complete with tapestries, gilt furniture, stained glass windows, and a Hieronymous Bosch painting, "The Temptation of Saint Anthony," whose imagery looms large in Bloat's subconscious. A skating penguin from the painting shows up in Bloat's dreams, in which Bloat cavorts with "the Princess" almost every night, nagging him as a subconscious mentor and moral gadfly. Bloat can't read the penguin's mind, nor those of the Boschian demon soldiers he later conjures up.

As this happens, a team of 50 or 60 New York City cops and park rangers approaches the Rox. They push through Bloat's Wall, a psychic barrier Bloat has set around the island to protect it, and Bloat panics, sounding an alarm instead of handling the incursion himself. The Jumpers and Durg at'Morakh, who has joined Blaise's service, attack the raiders and a bloodbath ensues. The authorities retreat after taking heavy casualties.

The Rox is filling up. Blaise demands that Bloat stop accepting immigrants. In response, Bloat warps reality, constructing a vast system of caverns under the island. He isn't sure himself what all is down there, but at least there's more room.

Bloat obsesses about rescuing "the Princess," but, fearful of Blaise's wrath, does nothing until goaded into it by the skating penguin. He decides he can at least create a doorway into Tachyon's cell and have Peanut spring her, although the escape ultimately fails.

## SPRING 1990

Bloat tells Latham that Blaise is getting out of control, and that something must be done about him. Latham agrees, but is killed before he can act.

## SUMMER 1990

Bloat declares the Rox independent of the United States and in August cuts a deal with Black Shadow to finally take Tachyon off the Rox. This coincides with the military assault on the Rox. Seasoned military troops

| BLOAT | | | | | POWER LEVEL 13 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| — | — | +4 | +1 | +2 | +1 |
| — | — | 18 | 12 | 14 | 13 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +8 | +6 | — | +9 |

**SKILLS**

Bluff 4 (+5), Intimidate 4 (+9)*, Knowledge (art) 2 (+3), Knowledge (popular culture) 4 (+5), Knowledge (streetwise) 2 (+3), Notice 4 (+6), Sense Motive 8 (+10)
*includes size modifier

**FEATS**

None

**POWERS**

**Astral Form 4** (The Outsider)

**Create Object 12** (Progression 6 [twelve 500-ft. cubes]; Continuous)

*Alternate Power:* **Summon Dream Images 5** (75-point minions; Progression 6 [100 minions], Mental Link; Fanatical, Horde, Broad Type)

*Alternate Power:* **Transform 7** (inanimate matter; Continuous)

**Growth 8** (huge; Continuous; No Strength bonus, Permanent; Innate)

**Mind Reading 13**

**Protection 4**

**Ward 13** (Bloat's Wall; Progression 6 [6,500-ft. radius]; Affects all subjects; Limited to subjects outside the radius)

**COMBAT**

Attack —, Grapple —, Damage by power, Defense –4 (includes –2 due to size), Knockback –12, Initiative +1

**Abilities –11 + Skills 7 (28 ranks) + Feats 0 + Powers 117 + Combat 0 + Saves 9 = Total 122**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Theodore "Teddy" Honorlow | **WC Name:** Bloat |
| **Occupation:** Jokers' rights activist | **WC Status:** Joker-ace |
| **Aliases:** Governor, Outcast, Hidden One | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** Unknown | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** Colossal | **Weight:** Massive |
| **Eyes:** Unknown | **Hair:** Black |

burst through Bloat's Wall from every direction and at first have the upper hand. Overwhelmed with rage, Bloat creates an army of demonic creatures based on images from Bosch's painting. They carry the day and smash the attacking troops. Bloat allows the survivors to escape. Still flush with his power, he builds a real wall around the Rox, and turns Ellis Island into a Disney-meets-Escher fairyland castle. Filled with anger by the destruction caused by the raid, he vows he'll really give the nats a reason to hate him.

## SEPTEMBER 1990

On the brink of the final Rox Campaign, Bloat's avatar, the Outcast, becomes visible for the first time outside of Bloat's dreams, while his actual physical body starts to deteriorate. The Outcast is immune to the jumpers, but he also can't pass beyond the Rox's boundaries. Bloat further strengthens the Rox's defenses, particularly adding Bloat's Moat, a circle of molten lava to protect the caverns under the Rox. Bloat also has a strange dream where he's confronted by a Peruvian shaman named Viracocha, who tells him that he's destroying the Dreamtime, but he blows the shaman off.

Bloat rejects the peace overture carried by Hartmann and Father Squid, and starts the conflict going by sending Herne and the Wild Hunt after Hartmann. He activates joker strike teams concealed about the city and sends Modular Man and the Bodysnatcher (as Pulse) to destroy government ammo dumps and rocket and artillery batteries. He then cloaks the Rox and surrounding areas of New York City and New Jersey in dense fog. When General Zappa launches a bombardment, Bloat deflects a number of missiles into the Dreamtime, causing untold damage to that realm.

Meanwhile, Wyungare, the Aboriginal shaman, has come to the Rox to discuss the fate of the Dreamtime, but Bloat imprisons him. This doesn't stop Wyungare from taking Bloat on several trips, showing him, among other things, the missile damage. Bloat is unapologetic. If he has to, he'll sacrifice the Dreamtime and drain it of all its power to defeat the attacking nats.

Things go poorly for the defenders when an ace team consisting of Detroit Steel, the Reflector, the Turtle, Mistral, Cyclone, and Legion attacks, but their assault eventually runs out of gas and Bloat is elated, thinking they've won the battle. Then the battleship *New Jersey* starts shelling in earnest and the Rox begins to crumble.

Wyungare's lessons, and Patchwork's example of self-sacrifice, finally penetrate Bloat's skull. He accepts Wyungare's offer to transfer his entire realm to the Dreamtime. Zelda is incensed and tries to burn Bloat down. Wyungare intercedes, stopping her, but loses his life as well. The shaman's death makes things seem hopeless, but Cameo, part of the covert ace team that also assaulted the Rox, channels him, and he and other shamans, including Buddy Holley, open a channel allowing Bloat to translate himself and the Rox to the Dreamtime. There, Bloat can live as the Outcast, and the Rox will be the homeland for unwanted jokers that it was always meant to be.

## ABILITIES

Bloat is telepathic. He maintains Bloat's Wall around Ellis Island, a barrier that discomforts unwanted guests, ultimately causing them to turn back or to fall unconscious if they don't. He uses anything organic as food, even garbage and human sewage. He can also make his dreams manifest—which is basically energy-to-matter transference.

Bloat's powers are considerable. He can materialize massive objects out of thin air, reshape matter, and conjure up fantastic creatures, read minds, and maintain a psychic barrier more than a mile in radius. He can also project the psychic form of "the Outsider." Bloat's various other feats—including displacing missiles into the Dreamtime—can be considered power stunts of his main Create Object power (or Mind Reading, for his psychic powers). Given time to develop Alternate Powers, there might have been no limit to what Bloat could do.

# BLUDGEON

**Created by George R.R. Martin**

*"He was seven feet tall, dressed in tight-fitting leather. His head was square and brutal, seamed with callous and twisted horn, eyes set beneath a heavy ridge of bone, one a clear bright blue, the other a vivid red. The right side of his mouth was closed by the slick, shiny scar tissue that had grown over it, and his flesh was mottled by a huge greenish bruise. His ears were veined leathery things like the wings of bats, his scalp covered by boils instead of hair."*

— Hiram Worchester encounters Bludgeon. Martin: *Jokers Wild* (Book III)

## DESCRIPTION

Bludgeon is a hulking, hideous joker with a scarred and pockmarked face and boils and sores instead of hair. His right arm and hand are little more than a stiff club of bone, muscle, and leathery hide with a fist "the size and color of a smoked Virginia ham."

Bludgeon, as his name implies, is a blunt instrument in nearly every way. He's savage, brutal, and dumb, with a mean streak a hundred miles wide. He doesn't follow orders particularly well, and usually his animal instincts get the better of him, leading him back to unemployment and life on the streets. He's incredibly foul-mouthed and vicious, and hates nearly everyone. Thus far, it seems like the feeling is mutual.

| BLUDGEON | | | | | POWER LEVEL 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +7 | –1 | +3 | –1 | +0 | –2 |
| 24 | 9 | 16 | 8 | 10 | 7 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +7 | +7 | +2 | +3 |

**SKILLS**

Knowledge (streetwise) 6 (+5), Notice 2 (+2)

**FEATS**

Attack Focus (melee) 4, Improved Initiative, Stunning Attack

**POWERS**

**Protection 4** (Impervious 2)

**Strike 2** (Mighty)

**Super-Strength 3** (*heavy load:* 5,600 lbs.)

**COMBAT**

Attack +6 (melee), +2 (ranged), Grapple +16, Damage +9 (strike), Defense +7 (+4 flat-footed), Knockback –4, Initiative +3

**Abilities 14 + Skills 2 (8 ranks) + Feats 6 + Powers 15 + Combat 18 + Saves 10 = Total 65**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Robert Sievers | **WC Name:** Bludgeon |
| **Occupation:** Mercenary | **WC Status:** Joker-ace |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** circa 1950 | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** 7 ft. | **Weight:** 310 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** One blue, one glaring red | **Hair:** None |

## BACKGROUND

The brutal Bludgeon gets his start working as small-time wild card muscle for organized crime, making his way to working for the Shadow Fists (early 1986). After Billy Ray and Hiram Worchester beat him up on Wild Card Day, the Fists tell Bludgeon to talk a walk and he starts working for the Mafia, which is promptly wiped out in a war with the Shadow Fists, leaving Bludgeon out of work once again.

He later sinks to new lows, assaulting and raping Sewer Jack (May 1987), and bragging about killing Chrysalis—when he didn't—in order to curry a new, fearsome reputation and get some gang, any gang, to hire him (July 1988). Investigating the murder, Yeoman confronts him and discovers Bludgeon is just a shadow of his former self, ill and wasted, dying from AIDS.

## ABILITIES

Bludgeon is tremendously strong and tough, able to take punishment as well as dish it out. His namesake is his deformed club-like right arm, which he uses as a weapon (since it's not good for much of anything else).

# BUTCHER DAGON

**Created by John Jos. Miller**

*"Sure," Billy Ray said. "I've seen your picture in the paper a few times. Usually above the caption 'Crazed Killer Strikes.'"*

— Billy Ray, on meeting Butcher Dagon.
Miller: *Death Draws Five* (Book XVII)

## DESCRIPTION

Butcher Dagon is a short, chubby, bearded, jolly-looking man who resembles everyone's favorite uncle. He speaks with a British accent. When he transforms into his fighting form, he stands upright on two thick legs, his arms encased in slab-like muscle, his bullet head set directly on broad shoulders, and a prehensile tail as long as his brindled black and brown furred body. He also has a snout full of sharp teeth, and keen claws sprouting from both fingers and toes.

## BACKGROUND

Butcher Dagon is freelance muscle who has hired out to many criminal organizations and enterprises all over the world. He is a vicious and cold-blooded killer with a cowardly streak whose favorite motto is "Look out for number one and to Hell with everybody else."

### SUMMER 2003

Dagon hires on with the Allumbrados and has an epic slugfest with Billy Ray when the Allumbrados kidnap John Fortune from the Mirage Hotel in Las Vegas. He loses the end of his prehensile tail when Ray bites it off as Dagon tries to strangle him with it, is knocked out by Ray and the Midnight Angel, and spends the night in a Vegas jail. He escapes the next day, leaving behind a bloody trail of gutted corpses, and is taken to the abandoned 7-Eleven where Blood has created a transdimensional gate back to New York.

He and Blood and the rest of the Allumbrados barely make it back, with Ray hot on their trail. The New York end of the gate opens in the camp where Jerry Strauss has hidden John Fortune, and the Allumbrados try again to kidnap the kid. Dagon, however, spends most of the evening lying low and avoiding Ray. He is not eager for a rematch. Given a chance for another confrontation with Ray in the Peaceable

| BUTCHER DAGON | | | | | POWER LEVEL 9 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +7/+1 | +7/+2 | +5/+2 | +1 | +2 | +1 |
| 24/12 | 24/14 | 21/15 | 12 | 14 | 12 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +9/+2* | +8/+5* | +10/+5* | +4 |

**Normal form*

**SKILLS**

Knowledge (streetwise) 4 (+5), Knowledge (tactics) 4 (+5), Notice 2 (+4), Profession (mercenary) 6 (+8)

**FEATS**

Attack Focus (melee) 3, Improved Grab

**POWERS**

**Additional Limbs 1** (prehensile tail)
**Enhanced Constitution 6**
**Enhanced Dexterity 10**
**Enhanced Strength 12**
**Protection 4**
**Strike 2** (teeth and claws; Mighty)

**COMBAT**

Attack +9 (melee), +6 (ranged), Grapple +16, Damage +7 (unarmed), +9 (claws and teeth), Defense +9 (+5 flat-footed), Knockback –4 (–1 in normal form), Initiative +7

**DRAWBACKS**

Disability (slurred speech in bestial form, uncommon, minor, –1 point), Disability (clumsy hands in bestial form, uncommon, minor, –1 point), Normal Identity (full round action, –4 points)

**Abilities 19 + Skills 4 (16 ranks) + Feats 4 + Powers 36 + Combat 30 + Saves 8 – Drawbacks 6 = Total 95**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Unknown | **WC Name:** Butcher Dagon |
| **Occupation:** Mercenary | **WC Status:** Ace |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** Mid-1950s, Great Britain | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** 5 ft., 9 in. | **Weight:** 230 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Unknown | **Hair:** Unknown |

Kingdom, he turns tail and coat, killing a number of his own men before fleeing.

## ABILITIES

Dagon can instantaneously transform into a bestial fighting form that retains his normal human intelligence, although his speech is slurred and difficult to understand. Dagon can use simple weapons while in this form, but anything complicated is difficult to manipulate with his somewhat clumsy paws. He prefers to use his claws and teeth, anyway.

Dagon also has credible small arms fire and other military skills.

# CAMEO

**Created by Kevin Andrew Murphy**

*"We're all Cameo, honey."*

— Gun moll who figures somewhere in Ms. Allworth's family tree, explaining the nature of her ace ability.
John Jos. Miller: *Death Draws Five* (Book XVII)

## DESCRIPTION

Cameo looks younger than she actually is, with long wavy blond hair and big brown eyes. She favors vintage clothing, and looks good in it. On a black ribbon choker around her long, graceful neck she always wears an antique cameo that belonged to her mother. Something about her suggests money, *lots* of money.

Cameo has a semi-private room at the Club Dead Nicholas where she conducts much of her business.

## BACKGROUND

In September 1990, Cameo is recruited into the covert ace assault team on the Rox by George G. Battle with the promise of receiving Black Eagle's jacket. Her first task is to provide cover by channeling Brian Boyd (Blockhead) who has tremendous mental shields, but as the team makes its way through Bloat's underground caverns, she loses Boyd's ring. At the climactic confrontation in Bloat's Crystal Castle, Battle gives her a leather jacket which turns out to have belonged to Mackie Messer. Although generally she can control the psyches she channels, Messer's psychotic energy overwhelms her and on Battle's orders she goes after Bloat. Ray manages to strip the jacket off her before she can do much damage. Then, after Wyungare dies while stopping Zelda from killing Bloat, she channels the Aboriginal shaman and helps Bloat and the Rox be translated into the Dreamtime. Charon brings her back from the Dreamtime and she channels Wyungare a final time to give him an opportunity to say goodbye to his love, Cordelia Chaisson.

### SEPTEMBER 1993

Hannah Davis takes Etienne Faneuil's ring to her in an attempt to question his spirit while she's investigating the Card Shark conspiracy, but upon handling the ring Cameo informs Davis that Faneuil is actually still alive. She then puts on her battered old fedora and channels the spirit of Nick Williams to tell his part of the Card Shark story. Afterwards, her actions reveal she's in love with Williams, a dead man who'd been murdered before she was born.

| CAMEO | | | | | POWER LEVEL 2 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| -1 | +2 | +1 | +2 | +2 | +1 |
| 9 | 14 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 13 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +1 | +4 | +5 | +6 |

**SKILLS**

Craft (artistic) 6 (+8), Diplomacy 4 (+5), Knowledge (history) 3 (+5), Language 1 (French), Notice 4 (+6), Profession (costume designer) 6 (+8)

**FEATS**

Attractive
*Equipment:* Various items of ace memorabilia to focus her powers, particularly Nick Williams' fedora (see **Will-o'-Wisp** in this chapter).

**POWERS**

**Mimic 20** (all mental traits, including skills and powers with the psionic descriptor, up to 100 points; Channeling, Split Personality)
**Super-Senses 4** (postcognition)

**COMBAT**

Attack +0, Grapple –1, Damage –1 (unarmed), Defense +2 (+1 flat-footed), Knockback –0, Initiative +2

**Abilities 18 + Skills 6 (24 ranks) + Feats 1 + Powers 44 + Combat 4 + Saves 10 = Total 83**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Ellen Allworth | **WC Name:** Cameo |
| **Occupation:** Costume designer, psychic | **WC Status:** Ace |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** December 6, 1970 | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** 5 ft., 5 in. | **Weight:** 125 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Brown | **Hair:** Blonde |

### NOVEMBER 1993

Cameo appears on *Peregrine's Perch* with Senator Hartmann, Hannah Davis, and others, when Hartmann reveals the Card Shark conspiracy to the general public, but only discloses her power to channel the dead. Later, she's publicly ridiculed and is widely regarded as a fraud who preys on tourists and the gullible. Feeling safer back up the sleeve, she actually embraces this misapprehension and "admits" she's a fake medium, lest she get her vintage pants sued off her by Marilyn Monroe's lawyers. Jerry Strauss reveals her secret ace abilities to Topper at the 2002 Jokertown Boys Halloween MTV concert.

### SUMMER 2003

John Nighthawk negotiates with Cameo to do a special job and Cameo agrees to come to the Waldorf-Astoria to channel an artifact that turns out to be the Shroud of Turin, the supposed burial shroud of Jesus Christ. She does as asked, but things don't go exactly as expected. Instead of Jesus she gets Cole Porter. As it turns out, the hotel suite once was Porter's apartment

## CHANNELING (MIMIC FLAW)

You can only mimic the traits of a *deceased* subject by "channeling" his spirit! You require some sort of focus, chosen when you apply this flaw, such as something the deceased owned or used in life, having been present at the deceased's death or gravesite, knowledge of the deceased's true name (or some similar intimate personal detail). The GM should approve your particular means of channeling. If you can channel *any* deceased subject without need for a focus, this flaw becomes a +1 extra, since the limitation of only mimicking deceased subjects is overbalanced by not needing a subject present and the extensive range of possible subjects (everyone who has ever died!). The GM may change this based on the context of the series; for example, if there are *no* deceased superhumans in the setting's history, this is a more serious (even crippling) flaw, whereas if nearly all the superhumans in the setting's history are deceased (due to some major catastrophe or crisis, for example) it is more of a +0 modifier or an extra.

## SPLIT PERSONALITY (MIMIC FLAW)

The personality of a subject you mimic can overwhelm your own on occasion. The GM can initiate a mental grapple (see *M&M*, page 157) against you, using the subject's original mental traits, as a setback. If the invading personality wins, it controls your body like a use of the Possession power. You need to make a successful Will save with a DC of 10 + the possessing mind's Will save bonus to wrest back control. You also regain control if your power is nullified in some way (along with losing use of the power)

and still has some of his furniture. Her exposure of the Shroud as a fake infuriates Romulus Contarini, and he orders Nighthawk to take Cameo to St. Dympna's, a one-time charity hospital for mental patients which Contarini uses as New York headquarters for his End Days sect, the Allumbrados.

Nighthawk tells Cameo to trust him, that he'll make sure she's safe because he has a job he wants her to do for him. Cameo has little choice. She's locked in a cell that has housed generations of drooling psychopaths, which does little to ease her mental state, and she's a bit testy when Nighthawk arrives to free her.

Jerry Strauss, who is also breaking out of St. Dympna's with his charge John Fortune, returns her bag to her, complete with Nick Williams' fedora, and she burns down a couple of Allumbrado *credenti* in her haste to get away from the creepy old asylum. Then, channeling an ancestress who was once a bootlegger's gun-moll, she hot wires a couple of cars. Strauss and Fortune take one and she and Nighthawk take the other and head for his bolt hole on Staten Island.

## ABILITIES

Cameo is a psychometric trance channeler, able to read psychic impressions from objects and then channel the psyche of the dead from the things they once owned. The dead themselves have their memories intact, but only up to the moment of their death. If the deceased is an ace, she can channel his powers, too, but only if they were mental in nature. If they were physical, and required a certain body form (*e.g.*, the Harlem Hammer's enhanced skeleton structure and his super-strength), she can't do it.

Her power level reflects her own abilities; channeling someone else, she can have a much higher power level, essentially equal to her subject (depending on which of their capabilities she can manifest).

The cameo she almost always wears once belonged to her mother. She is always on the lookout to collect trinkets that belonged to other aces so she has access to their powers. Currently, she has Nick Williams' fedora (see **Will-o'-Wisp** in this chapter).

Cameo also has excellent clothes-making skills and can recreate high-fashion vintage costumes. She has been a costume designer for the Jokertown Boys (2002), the Jokertown Players, various Broadway shows, and other theatrical groups.

She can speak French on her own, and while she's channeling a spirit she can speak any languages that person knew in life.

# CAPTAIN FLINT

**Created by Kevin Andrew Murphy**

*"Only Flint remained aloof, as distant and unreadable as if sculpted from the rock that gave him his nickname."*

— Miller: Billy Ray's Story (Book XV)

## DESCRIPTION

Flint's body, hard-edged and unyielding, looks like living rock, not human flesh. His eyes are twin flames dancing in the recesses of his skull. His hands are rock, his fingers razor sharp. They slice any flesh he touches to ribbons. His voice is a ghostly whisper. He typically dresses in military fatigues or a uniform while on-duty. How one addresses him depends on the situation. Other aces usually refer to him as Captain Flint. In the military, he's just called Brigadier. And socially, he's known as Sir Kenneth.

| CAPTAIN FLINT | | | | | POWER LEVEL 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +8 | –2 | +3 | +1 | +2 | +3 |
| 27 | 6 | 16 | 13 | 15 | 16 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +10 | +4 | –2 | +6 |

**SKILLS**

Diplomacy 6 (+9), Intimidate 4 (+7), Investigate 6 (+7), Knowledge (civics) 7 (+8), Knowledge (history) 5 (+6), Knowledge (tactics) 5 (+6), Language 1 (French), Medicine 3 (+5), Profession (spymaster) 7 (+9), Sense Motive 6 (+8)

**FEATS**

Benefit 3 (Grand Marshal of the Silver Helix), Fearless

**POWERS**

**Blast 4** (flint chips and sparks)
**Density 7** (+14 Str, +7 Impervious Protection, +2 Immovable, +2 Super-Strength, Continuous; Permanent; *heavy load:* 2 tons)
**Immunity 30** (Fortitude)
**Protection 4** (Impervious)
**Strike 1** (razor fingers; Mighty)

**COMBAT**

Attack +5, Grapple +16, Damage +9 (unarmed), +4 (blast), Defense +3 (+2 flat-footed), Knockback –10, Initiative –2

**DRAWBACKS**

Disability (cannot speak above a whisper, common, minor, –1 point), Disability (razor-sharp fingers, common, minor, –1 point)

**Abilities 19 + Skills 13 (52 ranks) + Feats 4 + Powers 69 + Combat 16 + Saves 5 – Drawbacks 2 = Total 124**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Sir Kenneth Foxworthy | **WC Name:** Captain Flint |
| **Occupation:** Brigadier general | **WC Status:** Joker-ace |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** Circa 1920s, Great Britain | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** 7ft., 9 in. | **Weight:** Over 3,000 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Fiery | **Hair:** None |

## BACKGROUND

Flint fought valiantly in World War II and was infected with the wild card in the 1940s. He is now head of Britain's governmental ace agency, the Order of the Silver Helix.

## ABILITIES

Flint can snap his fingers, flicking off pieces of sharp-edged flint as deadly as low-caliber bullets. He is also super-strong, if slow, and moderately resistant to damage. His stone-like body is apparently immune to the ravages of time and conditions affecting creatures of flesh.

Captain Flint can speak French.

# CAP'N TRIPS

**Created by Vic Milán**

*"...the realization of his wildest dream: Mark Meadows as Hero."*
— Milán: "Transfigurations" (Book I)

## DESCRIPTION

Mark is a scientific genius (biochemistry), and comic book and science fiction fan. He's clumsy, wears thick glasses, is skinny, has a crew-cut until he attends grad school, and has horsey teeth. In a word: nerd.

As Cap'n Trips, he wears a tall purple stovepipe hat with a green band embossed with gold peace signs and has long, lank blond hair. His coat is also purple. His shirt is an orange and purple paisley, his gigantic bow tie is green with yellow polka dots, his pants green. His eyes are pale blue. He has a mustache and a scraggy scrap of beard.

Mark abandons this persona when he faces the second custody battle for his daughter, Sprout, and tries to go mainstream by cutting his hair short and wearing suits. Didn't work. When he goes underground and is living on the Rox, he attempts a feeble disguise by getting a punk hair cut and dying his hair various colors. On his return from Takis he grows a full beard, which he keeps for awhile and then shaves, returning to his more familiar goatee.

Mark's drug of choice is marijuana. For years he lived in a haze of pot smoke. He dabbled in other drugs, but that was more in the way of biochemical experimentation with himself as the subject. Mark is allergic to

horses. In high school and college he was a fairly hot chess player, rated at the master's level for tournament play. All Meadows' "friends" share his deep, unconditional love for Sprout.

## BACKGROUND

Mark Meadows attends Rexford Tugwell High School in Southern California, does his undergrad work at MIT, and gets his doctorate from the University of California, Berkeley. He is the world's most brilliant biochemist, whose personal demons have driven him to batter himself into at times little more than a derelict. But the Last Hippie keeps on keeping on, no matter what.

### 1969

When Mark arrives at Berkeley to pursue his graduate studies he becomes interested in the chemistry of the brain and effect of psychoactive drugs on the same. While doing research on the counterculture, he runs into his childhood sweetheart, Kimberly Ann Cordayne (now known as Sunflower), who encourages him to take a more personal approach to his research. Mark resists her suggestions, but his research goes poorly, as do his attempts to woo his ideal woman. Meanwhile, events throughout the country spiral out of control.

### MAY 1970

The day after the Kent State Massacre, at a demonstration in People's Park in San Francisco, the Movement, led by ace and rock musician Tom Marion Douglas, confronts the Man, in the guise of the National Guard and the newly minted ace Hardhat. Things go badly at first for the People, but in the end the day is saved by the mysterious ace known as the Radical. Mark Meadows, having ingested acid for the first time that morning, is nowhere to be seen. But he was, for one brief, shining moment, the Radical. He thinks.

In an effort to recall that brief, shining moment of his heroism, he spends weeks ingesting acid. But all to no avail: The Radical does not return.

### 1970S

Mark scrapes by on sheer, if sporadic, brilliance, helping lesser minds deliver on their research grants while he continues his quest. Kimberly shows up again on his doorstep in the spring of 1974, homeless and on the run from her radical gig with the Symbionese Liberation Army. Mark takes her in and the next seven months are the happiest in his life. They marry the next spring but the happiness doesn't last for very long. Sunflower starts to drink and do pills as she drifts from cause to cause.

In the spring of 1977 Sprout is born while their marriage is on the rocks. Sprout is developmentally retarded and while she is a beautiful girl, she will always have the mind of a child.

### 1980S

Mark and Sunflower divorce in 1981, and Mark retains custody of Sprout when Sunflower is institutionalized.

Mark moves east. With seed money lent to him by his father, Mark opens and operates the Cosmic Pumpkin Head Shop and Organic Deli ("Food for the Body, Mind & Spirit") located on Fitz-James O'Brien Street, near the border of Jokertown and the Village. The Pumpkin is tended by two clerks (Susan and Brenda), sturdy young women given to wearing CUNY sweatshirts, who look rather alike. Mark lives above the head shop, where he also has an extensive biochemical laboratory, missing only the heaviest and most expensive equipment. He utilizes it to discover his five "friends" in early 1983.

Mark has a theory about his friends. He believes they are real, actual individuals from alternate realities who he has somehow trapped within the recesses of his own psyche. Some of them seem to buy that explanation. Starshine and Jumpin' Jack Flash particularly form a kind of cosmic peanut gallery that frequently feels compelled to comment on Mark's life and the often comically tragic situations he finds himself in. Traveler and Flash are always trying to figure out ways to spring themselves. Moonchild wants to free them all to work out their own karma.

Mark does some research into the names of his friends. There are three people in America named Isis Moon. All are ex-hippies, New Agers, or both. None are Korean. There is one man in Manhattan named John Jacob Flash. He's basically the same as Mark's friend. He has the same looks, the same gestures, the same smart mouth. But he's a stockbroker, whereas Mark's J.J. is a lawyer. There are two Damon Stranges: one with no possible connection to Cosmic Traveler, one who is brain dead and kept alive by machines while in a vegetative state as a result of a car accident. His EEG went flatline 10 minutes before Mark took the Traveler potion for the first time. This all seems to confirm to Mark that somehow he managed to draw in a number of souls who had gotten loose from their bodies and were wandering through the cosmos. On the other hand, an alternative theory, explicated below, suggests that perhaps Mark has the world's most vivid case of multiple personality disorder.

### SPRING 1989

Mark's hair is more ash-blond than straw when he faces his ex-wife (now Kimberly Ann Gooding), whom he still loves, in another custody suit over Sprout. She's hired Edward St. John Latham, who will use any tactic to win. Mark's attorney, Dr. Pretorius, first advises him to go underground. When Mark refuses, he has Mark remake himself. Mark cuts his hair, gives up all drugs, and turns the Cosmic Pumpkin into the New Age-y New Dawn Wellness Center. Mark even vows to give up his friends and to make no more powder to call them up when his current stock is gone, although even by this late date the general public is unaware of the true relationship between Cap'n Trips and his friends. All of this, however, is for naught. The judge rules against Kimberly Ann, who has another breakdown, but also rules against Mark, placing him under arrest for violating drug laws, and makes Sprout a ward of the state. Only Cosmic Traveler saves Mark from being taken into custody. Pretorius tells Mark, again, that his best chance is to go underground. Only now, he must do so without Sprout.

### FEBRUARY 1990

Mark lives on the streets for several months, ultimately going to the Rox. He knows Sprout is being kept at a juvenile detention center, but no one, not even Pretorius, can discover which one. On the Rox he meets jumper K.C. Strange and is attracted to her. She befriends him despite the fact that she's Blaise's girlfriend and Blaise has ordered her to spy on Meadows. They become lovers. Bloat, meanwhile, offers to help Mark find his friends, if Meadows promises to fight for the jokers when the time comes. Meadows gives him a conditional promise, saying first he has to free his daughter and then discover the whereabouts of Tachyon, who has also disappeared. Mark manages to find the equipment and ingredients to call up two of his friends. K.C. discovers where Sprout is being kept and, accompanied by Durg at'Morakh, goes to free her.

But this is all part of Blaise's plan to get rid of Meadows, whom he thinks is on the Rox to rescue Tachyon. He drops a dime on Meadows, and a massive police assault force is at the juvenile detention center to meet them.

However, they don't reckon on the force of Meadow's love for his daughter or the power of Durg and Mark's friends J.J. Flash and Cosmic Traveler. They rescue Sprout, but Blaise, who has jumped a cop so he can observe his revenge in person, murders K.C. Strange. Meadows and Sprout split for California, but only make it to Taos, New Mexico, where they join a commune. They stay there only a short time. When Mark rescues Tachyon from government detention in August and then accompanies him to Takis, he leaves Sprout in the care of his now-retired father, General Meadows.

## WINTER 1991

When Tachyon is relegated to his family's woman quarters on Takis, Mark undergoes a vasectomy so he can accompany her as a bodyguard. He loses Starshine while beating back an attack of Network Ly'bahr cyborgs and he himself is confined in a Takisian healing bubble to repair the wounds transferred to his body upon Starshine's dissolution. When he wakes up, he's lost his ability to use words. Since Starshine was a poet, this seems to give some credence to the hypothesis that Mark's powers allow him to manifest various aspects of his own personality. Somewhat later in Vietnam (summer 1991), the fact that purported Korean native Isis Moon doesn't actually understand the Korean language seems to also support this hypothesis.

At any rate, Mark eventually comes out of his deep funk, and uses both Cosmic Traveler and Moonchild to help defeat Blaise's war machine.

## APRIL 1991

Mark returns to Earth with Jay Ackroyd and a few weeks later shows up in Amsterdam. He thinks the Dutch city would be a congenial place to recoup after the horrors of the Takisian campaign and the loss of Starshine, from which he still hasn't totally recovered. He lets his hair grow long and grows a full beard. The Last Hippie has returned.

However, Mark finds his trail dogged by a couple of DEA agents accompanied by the ace Mistral, as well as a mysterious figure who is eventually revealed to be J. Robert Belew. Mark blows Amsterdam quickly in the form of Aquarius, abandoning most of the Takisian treasure he'd brought back to Earth. He flies to Rome on a passport stolen from one of the DEA guys, then goes on to Athens where his friend J.J. Flash battles Mistral and almost destroys the Parthenon. He calls on Aquarius again to make an aquatic escape to Turkey where he gets a job driving a truckload of Russian armaments across Iran on the midnight run from Tabriz to Tehran. From there Mark serves as a bodyguard for another caravan to Kabul, Afghanistan. He makes his way to a small state in India to offer them his scientific services, but takes it on the lam when he discovers they want him to set up a rapture lab.

## SUMMER 1991

Mark heads for Vietnam when he learns they openly welcome all wild carders. Once he arrives, however, he discovers that an official government position is not necessarily that of the country's citizens. He's an American and he's a wild carder, and the Vietnamese aren't too fond of either. Fortunately he meets Freddie Whitelaw, a sodden ex-pat Australian journalist who's been in Vietnam for over 20 years, who gives Mark a place to stay and offers him much sage advice. Unfortunately he also comes to the attention of Colonel Charles Sobel, the organizer and commanding officer of the New Joker Brigade, who, realizing Mark's ace powers (even though he's uncertain what they are, exactly) might come in handy, coerces him into signing up. Mark's shipped to Fort Venceremos, where the brigade, which turns out to be not exactly a crack military unit, is training. Mark isn't too popular with the new brigade, as some of them hate aces more than they hate nats, but he does find an old friend there in Croyd Crenson, who is also seeking refuge in Vietnam.

Things go all right for awhile. Mark calls on Moonchild and J.J. Flash a couple of times to get either him or the brigade out a few minor scrapes, but it all hits the fan when a political officer named Gilbert orders Mark's squad to wipe out an innocent village. Over-enthusiastic troops frag the sergeant who tries to stop them, and Mark, or rather J.J. Flash, takes a hand. He disposes of a couple of the more sadistic troops and organizes a mass desertion of the rest, including Croyd Crenson.

Mark finds himself the leader of a rag-tag force of Joker Brigade deserters and the villagers who they'd been sent to wipe out. He has no idea what course to take, but fortunately J. Robert Belew, the mysterious man who's been pursuing him across the world, shows up and clues him into the real meaning of the events he'd been experiencing since his return to Earth.

Mark is actually being personally persecuted by the Card Sharks, as killing him would count as a triple coup for them: His death would take one of the world's most powerful aces out of play; it would bring his name back in the media as a major crime lord which would boost the public perception of a serious ace threat; it would be a big win for the war on drugs. Mark reluctantly believes Belew, but still doesn't know what to do

### CAP'N TRIPS — POWER LEVEL 7

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| +0 | –1 | +0 | +6 | +2 | +0 |
| 10 | 9 | 10 | 22 | 14 | 10 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +0 | +3 | +0 | +5 |

**SKILLS**

Craft (chemical) 12 (+18), Knowledge (life sciences) 8 (+14), Knowledge (physical sciences) 12 (+18), Knowledge (streetwise) 3 (+9), Knowledge (technology) 4 (+10), Language 1 (German)

**FEATS**

None

**POWERS**

None, except for the abilities of his "friends."

**COMBAT**

Attack +0, Grapple +0, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +0, Knockback –0, Initiative –1

**Abilities 15 + Skills 10 (40 ranks) + Feats 0 + Powers 0 + Combat 0 + Saves 7 = Total 32**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Marcus "Mark" Aurelius Meadows | **WC Name:** Cap'n Trips |
| **Occupation:** Biochemist | **WC Status:** Ace (card turned May 5, 1970) |
| **Aliases:** His "friends" (see description) | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** January 23, 1948, California | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** 6 ft., 4 in. | **Weight:** 155 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Blue | **Hair:** Blond (ashen with age) |

to get out of the Sharks' trap. Belew tells him his only hope of survival is to fight, and if he's going to fight, it might as well be for something worthwhile. Mark must make Vietnam the sanctuary for wild carders it only pretends to be. Mark accepts Belew's challenge and the Last Hippie and the ultraconservative Last Cold Warrior join forces to bring down the government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

Using Belew's connections and his in-depth knowledge of the region, they set up a meeting of almost a dozen factions of resistance fighters, including ex-Khymer Rouge (Belew's personal troops), the crime lord of Ho Chi Minh City, remnants of the Viet Cong, and various ethnic and religious splinter groups, including one which worships the spirit of General Douglas MacArthur. They hold a meeting wherein Moonchild plays a major role in convincing them their best hope is to adopt a strategy of indirect confrontation of their vastly numerically superior enemy. She's elected head of the resistance and Mark is made her deputy and official representative when she's not available.

They implement the strategy. All of Mark's avatars play a role. Cosmic Traveler helps prisoners escape the clutches of the insidious Colonel Vo. J.J. Flash destroys airfields. Even Aquarius gets into the act by destroying river patrols. The rebellion spreads. Ho Chi Minh City itself rises up in revolt. Mark decides to risk it all and link up with the rebels in Ho Chi Minh City. It's a risky move, but Belew praises him for making the decision. Mark has become a hero, a leader of men.

But before they can put this plan fully into action, Mark receives a deputation from the New Joker Brigade. Colonel Sobel wants to discuss reuniting with Mark's growing army. Belew expects a trap, but Mark says they have to give the brigade members, which have gone far into their own personal hearts of darkness, a chance to redeem themselves. Besides, what can go wrong? Mark will go as Moonchild, and the newly awoken Sleeper, who might be the world's most potent ace, ever, can pull a rescue if things get sticky. Belew reluctantly agrees and Mark goes off alone to the meeting as Moonchild.

Things get sticky very fast indeed. Sobel has a couple of aces who've been loaned to him by the CIA, and Billy Ray manages to capture Moonchild after Crypt Kicker fails. Sobel goes off his nut. He intends to torture Moonchild to death to somehow assert himself as leader of the Joker Brigade. Only Moonchild's time runs out and Mark Meadows appears in the cage in her place. Eric Bell, Moonchild's lover, is horrified by the way things have turned out. Yes, he tried to lure Moonchild back to the brigade, but he had no idea what Sobel intended. He tries to help her—though he's rather grossed-out to discover she's actually Mark Meadows—by giving her a vial of Mark's powder, which he'd taken from Billy Ray who'd found it in Moonchild's effects.

Mark slams the powder and immediately he knows he's screwed. This is one of the vials he's had to make while on the run in the jungle. It's tainted. It calls up a "friend" never seen before, a 70-foot-tall tower of hate and destruction that is all the bad things even the Last Hippie has inside himself. It is Monster.

The creature that lives for destruction goes on a rampage. The Joker Brigade, its immediate target, scatters. The army of the Socialist Republic of South Vietnam has sent an armored division after Mark and his core group. They intended to crush Mark's army, but run into Monster instead. And they are no match for him.

Between Monster and J. Robert Belew, who has taken over an attack helicopter and is striking from the air, the Vietnamese Army is put to rout. That leaves only Monster to deal with. And Mark and his friends have a plan to handle that. They appear before Monster, all of them, including the dead Starshine and many others who have never appeared before. They shower Monster with the one thing he can't face: love. And the creature explodes.

Against all odds Mark's little rebellion is a success. Moonchild is elected president pro tem of the newly re-split South Vietnam. But Mark's greatest happiness occurs when Sprout is reunited with him in Saigon.

Mark stays in Vietnam for several years with Moonchild as president and himself as chancellor, trying to build the peaceful paradise of his dreams. But the pressure is crushing. Mark starts getting frequent aftershocks from the Moonchild persona, at times talking in her voice even after he's changed back to Mark.

## NOVEMBER 1993

In an attempt to find peace, both he and Moonchild become disciples of a false guru who calls himself Ganesha, an Indian ace masquerading as a joker. Ganesha convinces Mark that he must renounce the world and set free all his personae. Only then can he become free himself. Ganesha, meanwhile, accuses Belew of lusting after Sprout. Mark sees her innocently kissing Belew and has his friend imprisoned. Fortunately Belew manages to escape and saves Sprout from Ganesha, but he's severely wounded. Mark nurses him back to health, but no longer trusts the man who had become his best friend on Earth. He exiles Belew from Free Vietnam.

Although Belew saves Sprout, it's Moonchild who delivers the unintended death blow to Ganesha. The next time Mark tries to call her, he goes into convulsions, then an hour-long coma. He doesn't know if he'll ever be able to get her back. Ultimately (May 1994) he resorts to the ploy of having Cosmic Traveler impersonate Moonchild.

## 1994

The stress again gets incredibly wearing, although everything changes suddenly when he and Sprout are kidnapped by the Card Sharks. The presidential palace is blown to pieces, although the newscasts reporting Mark and Sprout's deaths are highly exaggerated.

Mark and Sprout are taken across Southeast Asia by small boat and ancient helicopter and wind up in Myanmar, at a—literally—underground Card Shark lab run by O.K. Casaday. Casaday wants Mark to work out the kinks in the Black Trump so it'll preserve its lethality over more than a couple of generations. If Mark refuses, Casaday will turn Sprout over to his pet torturer, Gunther Ditmar. Mark doesn't refuse.

His progress, though, is slow. Casaday gets impatient and has Ditmar torture the newly captured Lou Inmon in front of Mark and Sprout both, then shoots Inmon dead. He gives Mark three weeks to produce results, or else he'll give Sprout first to Layton, then Ditmar. Quasiman appears to a desperate Mark. Mark begs him to rescue Sprout and to also bring him the drugs he needs to call upon his friends. Quasi agrees and pops off. Mark is uncertain the hunchback really understands his pleas.

Despite the increasing pressure, Mark tries to create what he calls the Overtrump, to trump the Black Trump. The Overtrump could be used to create a vaccine against the Black Trump, or it could simply be released as a counter-infection, giving those infected a flu-like illness but protecting them from the Black Trump. He hides this plan from his Card Shark assistant Jarnavon by keeping all the data and all the processes in his head while covering up with reams of counterfeit hardcopy showing purported progress in recreating the Black Trump. Even if he's successful in creating the Overtrump, Mark realizes he has no idea how to release it in time for it to do any good. But he continues doggedly with his plan.

Mark is astonished when O.K. Casaday tries to free him in the height of a monsoon rainstorm. He's even more astonished when there's suddenly two Casaday's fighting over him. Mark's break for freedom is almost successful, but it ends in a car wreck when the fake Casaday tries to flee with Sprout. The fake Casaday disappears, leaving Sprout behind. Sascha Starfin is also captured that night by Casaday's men. Sascha is not executed, Casaday tells him, so he can be used as a human guinea pig to test out the efficacy of Mark's version of the Black Trump.

Sprout acts stiff around Mark. Mark fears she realizes he's a failure as a father and she's rejecting him. He has little time to worry about familial relationships, however, as the last days of the project are upon them. Casaday moves the lab to Guangdong, China, into a sort of combination bomb shelter/emergency command center rented out by the Chinese government. There, Quasiman unexpectedly shows up again, sans drugs. This time Mark makes him a list and begs to hurry, please, because he can't draw this process out much longer and soon he'll have to decide whether to sacrifice his girl or commit genocide on wild carders.

There are further developments on the virus front as they test the efficacy of the various batches Mark has grown. First, secret tests Mark performs reveal the Overtrump works. But second, Mark becomes suddenly fearful as he realizes at least one of the batches of virus has mutated and become fatal not only to wild carders but to nats as well. It kills *everybody*. Casaday is unimpressed. The plan is still a go. Jarnavon suggest they test it on someone and Casaday makes Mark inject a pleading Sascha. Sascha breaks out in the typical Black Trump symptoms and Jarnavon declares the virus a success. Casaday is overjoyed, Sascha less so.

Back at the lab Quasiman pops up with the package Mark has been waiting for. Before he can do anything with the drugs, however, Casaday shows up and spots Quasi just before the hunchback disappears. Casaday is furious. He slaps Mark around for awhile, then gives Sprout to Ditmar and takes off for the airport with four canisters of Black Trump, although unknown to him one of those canisters actually contains Mark's Overtrump.

Mark is handcuffed to a chair and forced to watch as Ditmar undresses Sprout. Mark, screaming, cursing, and pleading, is astonished to see a six-inch needle of bone grow out of one of Sprout's fingers. "So this is madness," he thinks, as Sprout plunges the needle into one of Ditmar's ears. Jerry Strauss returns to his true form and introduces himself to Mark as Creighton. Sprout, he says, is probably in California by this time; he'd replaced her in order to stay near Mark and help him escape the first chance he got, and this was it.

A relieved Mark reveals that actually he'd only injected Sascha with the Overtrump. He tells Creighton that Casaday is headed to the airport to release the Black Trump over the skies of Hong Kong via blimp. They go to the infirmary to pick up Sascha, and Layton shows up as they're freeing him. Neither Mark nor Creighton is a match for the kickboxer. Mark flees back to the lab, desperate to get to the drugs Quasiman brought him, but Layton follows him and starts to beat him to death. Ackroyd suddenly appears on the scene and tries to pop Layton away, but he can't get a bead on the speedy martial artist. Mark meanwhile has fallen on the packet of drugs and just starts stuffing them into his mouth, willy-nilly. A storm hits the room and a tall man stands in the middle of it, feeding on the lightning striking him.

The Radical returns.

## ABILITIES

Mark ingests complicated, vari-colored powders (which take enormous effort, money, and time to produce) to call up one of five "friends" for the period of one hour. Then he reverts back to the Meadows form. See the biographies of individual friends following this one. Although any of Mark's "friends" can choose to revert to Mark's form before their time is up, most won't unless there's no choice. If any of them are rendered unconscious (or killed) an unconscious Mark Meadows reappears.

Mark Meadows is effectively the Normal Identity drawback for all of his "friends" (*M&M,* page 126), and they all individually have the Morph power with a number of Metamorph power feats equal to the number of Mark's other personae (with the exception of Monster and the Radical, who are special cases).

Mark is an expert biochemist with a high level of scientific knowledge of many branches of this science. He is passably fluent in German.

# AQUARIUS

*"I did not ask to be here, land-dweller." And closing his eyes Aquarius proceeded to ignore both his fellow prisoner and his captors.*

— Aquarius, gracious as always.
Snodgrass: "Relative Difficulties" (Book II)

## DESCRIPTION

Aquarius is an immense man with glabrous gray skin and a bald head with a huge, bulging forehead.

The color of his powder is silvery-grey.

## BACKGROUND

He may be of French-Canadian origin. The powder that summons Dauphin is the cheapest and easiest to make, but in many ways he's the least useful of Mark's friends. He's somewhat surly and feels contempt for all material things, especially those that are man-made.

| AQUARIUS | | | | | POWER LEVEL 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +3 | –1 | +2 | +2 | +3 | +0 |
| 17 | 9 | 14 | 14 | 16 | 10 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +5 | +6 | +2 | +6 |

**SKILLS**

Knowledge (life sciences) 4 (+6), Language 1 (French), Survival 7 (+10), Swim 4 (+7)

**FEATS**

Animal Empathy, Attack Focus (melee) 3, Environmental Adaptation (aquatic)

**POWERS**

**Animal Control 9** (Burst Area; Limited to ocean mammals)

**Morph 3** (dolphin form, plus Cap'n Trips' other friends; Metamorph 5)

**Protection 3**

*Dolphin Form:* Change or add the following: Str 33, Dex 13, Con 22; **Growth 8** (huge; Continuous; Permanent), **Impervious Toughness 4**, **Super-Senses 4** (blindsight sonar), **Swimming 5**; Toughness +9, Fortitude +10, Reflex +4; Disability (mute, –3 points), Disability (no hands, –3 points)

**COMBAT**

Attack +5 (melee, –2 size in dolphin form), +2 (ranged, –2 size in dolphin form), Grapple +8 (+24 in dolphin form), Damage +3 (+11 in dolphin form), Defense +7 (+4 flat-footed, –2 size in dolphin form), Knockback –2 (–14 in dolphin form), Initiative –1 (+1 in dolphin form)

**DRAWBACKS**

Involuntary Transformation (into Mark Meadows after one hour, –6 points), Normal Identity (Mark Meadows, full round action, –4 points), Weakness (when out of water for more than an hour, cumulative –1 Con, –4 points)

**Abilities 20 + Skills 4 (16 ranks) + Feats 5 + Powers 64 + Combat 18 + Saves 10 – Drawbacks 14 = Total 107**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Cetus Dauphin | **WC Name:** Aquarius |
| **Occupation:** None | **WC Status:** Ace |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** French-Canadian |
| **Birth:** 1983 | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** 6 ft. | **Weight:** 260 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Dark | **Hair:** None |

While in his dolphin form he isn't humanly intelligent. His brain is largely used up by interfacing with the environment via hearing, taste, and sonar sense. Mark has difficulty in making sense of his memories. They are rich and sensual, but not totally human.

Aquarius resents the Mark persona more than any of Mark's other friends, and Mark is afraid that one day he'll simply swim far out to sea and leave him stranded there when his hour is up. Mark has to get his blood sugar up in a hurry after being Aquarius or he gets the shakes real bad, as well as nausea and dizziness, which could lead to loss of consciousness. Aquarius is driven into berserk fury if he sees marine mammals being harmed.

## ABILITIES

Dauphin is a were-dolphin who can metamorphose into a 20-foot-long *Tursiops truncatus* that can swim faster and further, dive deeper, and leap higher than any real dolphin. He has superior strength and can also swim very fast in human form. He must remain moist or will sustain damage. His hide is tough enough to turn harpoons and bullets.

Unlike Mark, Aquarius is fluent in French but speaks it with a French-Canadian accent.

# COSMIC TRAVELLER

*"Escape was what Cosmic Traveler did best."*

— Milán: *Turn of the Cards* (Book XII)

## DESCRIPTION

Cosmic Traveler is a blue-glowing figure with a cowled cloak of deep-space darkness, the lining of which glitters with glowing stars, nebulae, and galactic whorls. His face is featureless, with eyes glittering like white fire.

The color of his powder is blue with sparkly bits.

## BACKGROUND

Not a little pompous and self-centered, Strange's first, second, and final concern is his own well-being. He is a coward unwilling to subject himself to even the mildest physical danger. Like many cowards, he's also a bully. He's a bit of a lecher as well. He's susceptible to even blatant flattery. Strange despises Mark Meadows and Mark doesn't particularly like him. When his hour is up he has been known to go into the nearest room locked from the outside so Mark can't do anything foolish to endanger him.

Traveler helps Mark Meadows, the Turtle, and Fantasy escape the clutches of the Takisians who kidnap them to be used as lab subjects, mainly, however, to save his own blue hide.

## COSMIC TRAVELER — POWER LEVEL 7

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| –1 | +3 | +2 | +4 | +5 | +0 |
| 9 | 16 | 15 | 18 | 20 | 10 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +2 | +4 | +5 | +5 |

**SKILLS**

Disable Device 8 (+12), Notice 4 (+17), Sense Motive 8 (+13), Sleight of Hand 10 (+13), Stealth 10 (+13)

**FEATS**

None

**POWERS**

**Enhanced Notice 2** (+8 bonus)
**Flight 1** (10 mph)
**Immunity 5** (cold, radiation, suffocation, vacuum)
**Insubstantial 4** (incorporeal)
**Invisibility 2**
**Mind Shield 7**
**Morph 6** (humanoid forms, plus Cap'n Trips' other friends; Metamorph 4)

**COMBAT**

Attack +0, Grapple –1, Damage –1 (unarmed), Defense +8 (+4 flat-footed), Knockback –1, Initiative +3

**DRAWBACKS**

Involuntary Transformation (into Mark Meadows after one hour, –6 points), Normal Identity (Mark Meadows, full round action, –4 points)

**Abilities 28 + Skills 10 (40 ranks) + Feats 0 + Powers 60 + Combat 16 + Saves 4 – Drawbacks 10 = Total 108**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Damon Strange | **WC Name:** Cosmic Traveler |
| **Occupation:** None | **WC Status:** Ace |
| **Aliases:** Numerous (see description) | **Ethnicity:** Blue |
| **Birth:** 1983 | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** 5 ft., 10 in. | **Weight:** 145 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Glowing white | **Hair:** None |

He helps Mark Meadows escape when the judge rules against him in the second custody battle over Sprout and orders him held on a drug arrest (summer 1989) and also helps Mark break Sprout out of a juvenile detention center (February 1990).

Mark uses Cosmic Traveler to impersonate Moonchild when she breaks down after accidentally killing Ganesha and Mark can no longer summon her (May 1994).

### ABILITIES

Cosmic Traveler can make himself insubstantial and pass through matter, as well as mold his body and features to resemble anyone. A potent mental block protects his mind from even accomplished telepaths. He is immune to the vacuum of space.

# JUMPIN' JACK FLASH

*"He hated that he only existed on sufferance, only knew his own body, his own flesh, the feel of flight and the wind in his hair, in 60-minute increments. For a man as full of life as he, that was hell."*

— Milán: "Nowadays Clancy Can't Even Sing" (Volume VIII)

### DESCRIPTION

J.J. wears an orange jumpsuit slit to his navel, trimmed in red and yellow flame. He is sardonic and quite charismatic, often playing to the crowd. Sometimes he forms a flame guitar—a classic Fender Stratocaster—and plays it for the amusement of on-lookers. He has a handsome face and an easy smile.

The color of his powder is orange.

### BACKGROUND

Perhaps the most popular and publicity-conscious of Mark's friends, J.J. is a self-described "bastard for the '90s," although he does have his heroic

## JUMPIN' JACK FLASH — POWER LEVEL 10

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| +6 | +5 | +1 | +2 | +3 | +3 |
| 22 | 21 | 12 | 14 | 16 | 17 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +9/+1* | +5 | +9 | +5 |

**Without Force Field*

**SKILLS**

Knowledge (civics) 6 (+8), Perform (stringed instruments) 2 (+5)

**FEATS**

Attack Focus (ranged) 4, Dodge Focus 2

**POWERS**

**Absorption 6** (Limited to fire and heat)
**Fire Control 12**
*Alternate Power:* **Blast 12** (fiery plasma)
*Alternate Power:* **Create Object 12** (fiery shapes)
*Alternate Power:* **Disintegration 6** (fiery plasma)
**Flight 4** (100 mph)
**Force Field 8**
**Morph 3** (Cap'n Trips' other friends; Metamorph 4)

**COMBAT**

Attack +4 (melee), +8 (ranged), Grapple +10, Damage +6 (unarmed), +12 (blast), Defense +11 (+5 flat-footed), Knockback –4 (–0 flat-footed), Initiative +5

**DRAWBACKS**

Involuntary Transformation (into Mark Meadows after one hour, –6 points), Normal Identity (Mark Meadows, full round action, –4 points), Weakness (water, –1 Con damage, instant, –4 points)

**Abilities 42 + Skills 2 (8 ranks) + Feats 6 + Powers 65 + Combat 26 + Saves 10 – Drawbacks 14 = Total 137**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** John Jacob (J.J. ) Flash | **WC Name:** Jumpin' Jack Flash |
| **Occupation:** Hero | **WC Status:** Ace |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Jewish |
| **Birth:** 1983 | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** 5 ft., 6 in. | **Weight:** 135 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Unknown | **Hair:** Red |

side. Flash is one of the most difficult friends for Mark to deal with, emotionally as well as physically, because of the intensity with which Flash experiences life. Mark has to get his blood sugar up quickly after calling up Flash, otherwise he suffers the shakes, nausea, and dizziness, which could lead to loss of consciousness.

Flash confronts Kimberly Ann Gooding (summer 1989), and soon after falls into a trap baited by Latham which purports to show that the people Mark "hangs out with" are dangerous. Later (February 1990) Mark calls on Flash to help spring Sprout from a juvenile detention center. Flash fights in the Takisian conflict and when Mark returns to Earth has an epic battle with Mistral (spring 1991) that nearly brings down the Parthenon.

J.J. saves Mark's bacon a few times when Meadows is with the New Joker Brigade in Vietnam (summer 1991). At one point, when Mark's squad is ordered to destroy a village and kill all its inhabitants, Flash comes to the villagers's rescue and helps instigate a mass desertion.

Flash has past memories of being a lawyer. He hates being submerged in Mark's mind and would do anything to get free. He's an inveterate womanizer and treats women as he does most things: carelessly. He's recklessly impulsive, charming, quick to anger, and quick to cool off.

## Abilities

J.J. can absorb as well as project plasma which he pretends is flame, and can fly on a roaring column of same. His weakness is water: Even a light rainfall can blister his skin where it falls on him. He is not bulletproof, but it would take something with a decent caliber to do him in. He can fly at the speed of a slow-moving military aircraft.

Flash is subject to asthma attacks brought on by dust and mold.

# Moonchild

*"'You have an ace's powers, but none of an ace's arrogance. You have enormous strengths, but you use them with restraint—yes, and with love."*

— Eric Bell, her lover, on Moonchild's nature.
Milán: *Turn of the Cards* (Book XII)

## Description

Isis Moon is a young woman dressed in black from throat to soles, relieved only by the sideways comma of a yin-yang symbol on her chest. The emblem is matched by a back mask which curves up her left cheek bone across the right side of her forehead, leaving half her face bare. The portion of her face that is usually covered has a port-wine stain birthmark. She is fairly tall. Her hair is black, lustrous, and long and she is extremely beautiful. She projects an aura of strength and her movements are liquid grace.

Moonchild has a dream to one day free all the individuals who make up Mark Meadows so they can each pursue their own particular karmas. She is Mark's voice of compassion. Though a supreme martial artist, she cannot kill or even seriously harm a sentient being without suffering great trauma. She is a vegetarian.

Her powder color is black and silver particles that form distinctive layers which swirl together without mixing.

## Background

Moon has memories of a previous life before becoming one of Mark's friends. She was born in Korea. Her father was a North Korean soldier who was captured by the South and refused repatriation at the end of the conflict. He became a factory worker who eventually did return to the North when Moon was very small. She moved to the country with her mother, who ran a village clinic. Moon's great-grandfather took care of her. He himself was descended from the *sulsa*, the Knights of the Night, a special sect of Korean warriors trained in stealth and hidden ways, much like the Japanese ninja. She came to America when she was 17 to attend the University of California at Berkeley. Her recollections become confused after that.

She defeats Durg at'Morakh in combat, making him transfer his loyalty to her and by extension, Mark Meadows (spring 1986). When Meadows goes to Takis as Tachyon's bodyguard she appears at an opportune moment, causing Durg to turn to their side. Durg dies in her arms, but not before helping them to victory over Blaise (December 1990).

### Summer 1991

Moonchild becomes Eric Bell's lover when Mark flees to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Bell is an apparent idealist with the New Joker Brigade, but it turns out his dreams are colored more by realpolitik than they are by ideals. When Meadows (and, perforce, Moonchild) deserts the brigade rather than devolve into animal savagery, Bell communicates with Moonchild telepathically and tries to get her to betray the other deserters. She refuses and breaks with him permanently.

Moonchild has an existential crisis when, at a meeting of the resistance council (which she's elected to lead) she suddenly realizes she can't understand Korean when someone addresses her in what is supposed to be her native language. She almost flakes out, but Belew comforts her with the notion that she never doesn't exist. It's just that sometimes she doesn't have a physical reality. It's a fine point, but it seems to give her some comfort.

Later, when she attends a peace parley with Colonel Sobel of the renegade New Joker Brigade, she discovers the truce is a sham and faces off with Sobel's imported aces, Crypt Kicker and Billy Ray, who attempt to capture her. She deals with the dead redneck rather easily, but her battle with Ray is one of the classic confrontations in wild card history. Ulti-

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Isis Moon | **WC Name:** Moonchild |
| **Occupation:** Seeker | **WC Status:** Ace |
| **Aliases:** Dark Lady (Vietnam) | **Ethnicity:** Asian (Korean) |
| **Birth:** 1983 | **Death:** ? |
| **Height:** 5 ft., 7 in. | **Weight:** 120 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Hazel | **Hair:** Black |

## MOONCHILD — POWER LEVEL 10

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| +7 | +6 | +1 | +1 | +3 | +2 |
| 25 | 23 | 12 | 13 | 16 | 15 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +6/+1* | +5 | +10 | +7 |

**Flat-footed*

**SKILLS**

Acrobatics 10 (+16), Defensive Roll 5, Notice 6 (+9), Sense Motive 5 (+8), Stealth 11 (+17)

**FEATS**

Accurate Attack, Acrobatic Bluff, Attack Focus (melee) 6, Attractive, Defensive Attack, Dodge Focus 4, Evasion, Improved Throw, Improved Trip, Instant Up, Move-by Action, Stunning Attack, Takedown Attack, Uncanny Dodge (visual)

**POWERS**

**Mind Shield 7**

**Morph 3** (Cap'n Trips' other friends; Metamorph 4)
**Regeneration 15** (+8 recovery bonus, injured 1/minute, disabled 1/5 minutes; Source—moonlight)
**Super-Senses 1** (low-light vision)

**COMBAT**

Attack +14 (melee), +8 (ranged), Grapple +21, Damage +7 (unarmed), Defense +14 (+5 flat-footed), Knockback –3 (–0 flat-footed), Initiative +6

**DRAWBACKS**

Involuntary Transformation (into Mark Meadows after one hour, –6 points), Normal Identity (Mark Meadows, full round action, –4 points)

**Abilities 44 + Skills 8 (32 ranks) + Feats 27 + Powers 26 + Combat 36 + Saves 12 – Drawbacks 10 = Total 143**

mately, her higher degree of skill proves no match (this time around, anyway) for Ray's frenzied doggedness and Carnifex captures her. Caged, she learns Sobel intends to torture her to death. She vanishes when her time is up, leaving Mark holding the torture bag for her. Out of his real love for her, Bell gives Meadows a vial of his powder, thereby saving him and Moonchild, but dooming himself, Colonel Sobel, and pretty much the entire Joker Brigade, not to mention the government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

When Mark and his allies triumph, Moonchild is elected president of Free Vietnam and given the opportunity to turn the country into a safe haven for those touched by the wild card virus. But after two years of ruling the impoverished nation, she starts to break down from the strain and feels threadbare and grimy.

### NOVEMBER 1993

She comes under the influence of Ganesha, a rogue Indian ace whom she and Mark Meadows both take as their guru. Ganesha kidnaps Sprout and attempts to rape her. She is saved by Belew, and Moonchild, arriving at the last instant, accidentally kills Ganesha. Moonchild immediately breaks down screaming and Mark can no longer call upon her.

## ABILITIES

Mark can call on Moonchild only at night. She has extreme martial arts skills, but goes into a dysfunctional fugue state where she loses all cognizance of her surroundings if she ever seriously harms a sentient being, and she believes if she ever kills a sentient being she'll lose her powers. She regenerates damage more quickly during a full moon, and she has a moderate resistance to kinetic attack. Her night vision is excellent; the rest of her senses are normal human. Moonchild is highly sensitive to UV light.

# STARSHINE

*"Starshine was so politically correct that he was actually solar-powered."*

— Milán: *Turn of the Cards* (Book XII)

## DESCRIPTION

Starshine is ace as Greek god: elaborately muscled with a big jaw, clear green eyes, and a nimbus of curly blond hair. He wears a skintight yellow suit with an orange sunburst blazing on the chest, green trunks, gloves, and folded down boots, and writes poetry.

Starshine is Mark's voice of righteous indignation.

Starshine loves to hear himself talk. And talk. And talk. He has opinions on everything and is not afraid to voice them, often in the form of epic poems of his own making. He distrusts technology, disapproves of capitalism, hates social injustice, and dislikes drug and alcohol abuse, even Mark Meadows'.

The color of his powder is yellow.

## BACKGROUND

Brave if annoying, Starshine once diverted an asteroid that had been placed on a collision course with Earth (spring 1986) by Zabb, Tachyon's cousin and rival. He once flew to Brazil to destroy those who were destroying the rain forest, but he ran out of time and reverted to Mark Meadows in a smoldering clearing with a regiment of the Brazilian army closing in. Even with the rest of his friends helping, Mark had a hard time returning to the States, and he doesn't call on Sunshine for over six months.

### 1990

Starshine busts Tachyon out of a government detention center (August 1990) and falls in battle with a squad of Ly'bahr legionnaires above Takis while beating back a Network attack (December 1990). He is the only being in the galaxy known to have defeated a Ly'bahr in hand-to-hand combat.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Justin Bright | **WC Name:** Starshine |
| **Occupation:** Poet | **WC Status:** Ace |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** 1983 | **Death:** December 1990 |
| **Height:** 6 ft., 4 in. | **Weight:** 235 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Green | **Hair:** Blond |

| STARSHINE | | | | | POWER LEVEL 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +11/+2 | +2 | +1 | +2 | +1 | +0 |
| 32/14 | 14 | 13 | 14 | 12 | 10 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +13/+1* | +5 | +5 | +4 |

**Without Force Field*

**SKILLS**

Knowledge (popular culture) 2 (+4), Perform (oratory) 2 (+2)

**FEATS**

Attractive

**POWERS**

**Absorption 6** (Limited to light attacks)
**Blast 12** (sunlight)
**Enhanced Strength 18**
**Flight 7** (1,000 mph)
**Force Field 12** (Impervious 6)
**Immunity 5** (cold, starvation, suffocation, vacuum)
**Morph 3** (Cap'n Trips' other friends; Metamorph 4)
**Space Travel 1** (transforms into photons)
**Super-Strength 4** (*heavy load:* 16.64 tons)

**COMBAT**

Attack +8, Grapple +23, Damage +11 (unarmed), +12 (blast), Defense +7 (+4 flat-footed), Knockback –9 (–0 without force field), Initiative +2

**DRAWBACKS**

Involuntary Transformation (into Mark Meadows after one hour, –6 points), Normal Identity (Mark Meadows, full round action, –4 points)

**Abilities 17 + Skills 1 (4 ranks) + Feats 1 + Powers 110 + Combat 30 + Saves 10 – Drawbacks 10 = Total 159**

## ABILITIES

Starshine doesn't eat, drink, or breathe, but gets his energy from the sun. He can survive in vacuum, and transforms to photons to fly in space. He can shoot dazzlingly white-hot beams of light from his fingertips, fly up to light speed, and create a protective force field, and he's fabulously strong.

# MONSTER

*"He was full of hate and pain. He was hate and pain."*

— Milán: *Turn of the Cards* (Book XII)

## DESCRIPTION

Monster is a man-like colossus 70 feet tall with greenish-black shiny skin as abrasive as the skin of a shark. His fingers are tipped with long black talons. Lightning bolts wreath his head, which has horns like that of a Texas longhorn steer. His eyes are slit-pupiled like those of a rattlesnake and glow with the yellow flames of Hell. He is massive and muscular and his huge phallus is continuously erect. He is the composite of all of Mark's repressed anger, his pain, his envy, jealousy, and unspeakable desire.

| MONSTER | | | | | POWER LEVEL 11 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +20 | +1 | +13 | –2 | +0 | –2 |
| 50 | 12 | 36 | 6 | 10 | 7 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +13* | +18 | +3 | +7 |

**Bonus vs. physical attacks from Absorption*

**SKILLS**

None

**FEATS**

None

**POWERS**

**Absorption 7** (physical, boosts Growth)
**Blast 13** (lightning)
**Growth 16** (colossal; +32 Str, +16 Con; Continuous; Permanent)
**Mind Shield 9**

**COMBAT**

Attack +2 (includes –8 due to size), Grapple +46 (includes +16 due to size), Damage +20 (unarmed), +13 (lightning blast), Defense +2 (includes –8 due to size), Knockback –22 (includes –16 due to size), Initiative +1

**DRAWBACKS**

Destroyed by Love (the one and only time he appeared)

**Abilities 13 + Skills 0 + Feats 0 + Powers 111 + Combat 40 + Saves 14 – Drawbacks 0 = Total 178**

## BACKGROUND

Monster is called into existence one night when Mark, exhausted, fearful, and trying to escape death by torture, slams a vial of contaminated powder.

Monster hates everyone and everything and his only desire is to destroy all that he sees. He proceeds to do so, starting with the Vietnamese military and rebel soldiers, cutting a terrible swath through the jungle. Only one thing can stop him: Mark Meadows and his combined avatars, including the deceased Starshine and a legion of others never seen before, present him with a united front, not of hate, but of one voice saying, "All you need is love."

It turns out Lennon was right. Monster explodes.

Monster is probably the only one of Mark's friends who doesn't have a deep, unconditional love for Sprout, but then he's never met her.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** None | **WC Name:** Monster |
| **Occupation:** Force of Destruction | **WC Status:** Joker-ace-demon |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Unique |
| **Birth:** Summer 1991 | **Death:** Later that same day |
| **Height:** 70 ft. | **Weight:** Unknown, but considerable |
| **Eyes:** Yellow | **Hair:** None |

## ABILITIES

Missiles, explosives, and artillery simply provide Monster with more energy to grow bigger and stronger. He can lift a 42-ton tank. He shoots lightning from his hands potent enough to fry a human being.

## THE RADICAL

*"I was here because I was needed, man."*

— Milán: "Transfigurations" (Book I)

### DESCRIPTION

Tall and slender, with golden hair flowing to his shoulders, the Radical wears only sandals, a pair of worn jeans and a saucer-sized silver peace medallion on a long golden chain.

### BACKGROUND

Although not explicitly revealed as such, the Radical is the first avatar called up by Mark Meadows when he drops acid for the first time. Despite repeated attempts to recall him, Meadows fails to do so for decades.

#### MAY 1970

Unlike some of Mark's other friends, the Radical has no memories of a life prior to his first appearance, when he saves Tom Marion Douglas from the Establishment ace Hardhat during the riots in People's Park in San Francisco.

#### SUMMER 1994

The Radical suddenly reappears when Mark Meadows is being beaten to death by the Card Shark goon Layton in a secret Card Shark laboratory in China after Mark desperately ingests whole packets of random drugs. He still looks no more than 19. The Radical kills Layton with the ease of a man stepping on a cockroach and then, after Ackroyd fills him in, flies off to the airport to stop the Black Trump from being released over

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** None | **WC Name:** The Radical |
| **Occupation:** Hero | **WC Status:** Ace |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** May 5, 1970 | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** 6 ft., 4 in. | **Weight:** 155 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Blue | **Hair:** Blond |

### THE RADICAL — POWER LEVEL 8/11

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| +11/+7/+2 | +6/+2 | +6/+1 | +2 | +3 | +4 |
| 32/24/14 | 22/14 | 22/12 | 14 | 17 | 19 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +6 | +8 | +9 | +8 |

**SKILLS**

Knowledge (popular culture) 6 (+8), Notice 4 (+7), Sense Motive 6 (+9)

**FEATS**

None

**POWERS (FIRST APPEARANCE)**

**Device 5** (peace medallion, easy to lose)
**Enhanced Constitution 10**
**Enhanced Dexterity 8**
**Enhanced Strength 10**
*Peace Medallion:* **Deflect 12** (slow and fast projectiles)

**POWERS (SECOND APPEARANCE)**

**Absorption 6** (Limited to light attacks)
**Absorption 6** (Limited to fire and heat)
**Animal Control 9** (Burst Area; Limited to ocean mammals)
**Blast 12** (sunlight)
**Device 5** (peace medallion, easy to lose)
**Enhanced Notice 2** (+8 bonus)
**Enhanced Constitution 10**
**Enhanced Dexterity 8**
**Enhanced Strength 18**
**Fire Control 12**
*Alternate Power:* **Blast 12** (fiery plasma) *Alternate Power:* **Disintegration 6** (fiery plasma) *Alternate Power:* **Create Object 12** (fiery shapes)
**Flight 7** (1,000 mph)
**Immunity 6** (cold, radiation, starvation, suffocation, vacuum)
**Insubstantial 4** (incorporeal)
**Invisibility 2**
**Mind Shield 7**
**Morph 6** (humanoid forms, dolphin form, plus Cap'n Trips' other friends; Metamorph 5)
*Dolphin Form:* Change or add the following: Str 33, Dex 13, Con 22; **Growth 8** (huge; Continuous; Permanent), **Impervious Toughness 4**, **Super-Senses 4** (blindsight sonar), **Swimming 5**; Toughness +9, Fortitude +10, Reflex +4; Disability (mute, –3 points), Disability (no hands, –3 points)
**Protection 6**
**Regeneration 16** (+8 recovery bonus, injured 1/minute, disabled, 1/5 minutes; Source—moonlight)
**Space Travel 1** (transforms into photons)
**Super-Senses 1** (low-light vision)
**Super-Strength 4** (*heavy load:* 16.64 tons)
*Peace Medallion:* **Deflect 12** (slow and fast projectiles; *Alternate Power:* **Strike 12** [Burst Area])

**COMBAT**

Attack +8, Grapple +15, Damage +7 (unarmed) or by power, Defense +10 (+5 flat-footed), Knockback –3, Initiative +6

**DRAWBACKS**

In his first appearance, the Radical reverted to Mark Meadows after a time. In his second, he didn't, and indicated he didn't even know how to bring Mark back.

**Abilities 30 + Skills 4 (16 ranks) + Feats 0 + Powers 43 (242) + Combat 36 + Saves 10 – Drawbacks 0 = Total 123 (322)**

Hong Kong. He interrupts a battle between Belew's South China pirates and local security. Small arms fire just irritates him, but he's finally blown out of the sky by a shoulder-fired missile that does hideous damage to him. He falls unconscious, but when the Moon rises its light begins to heal him.

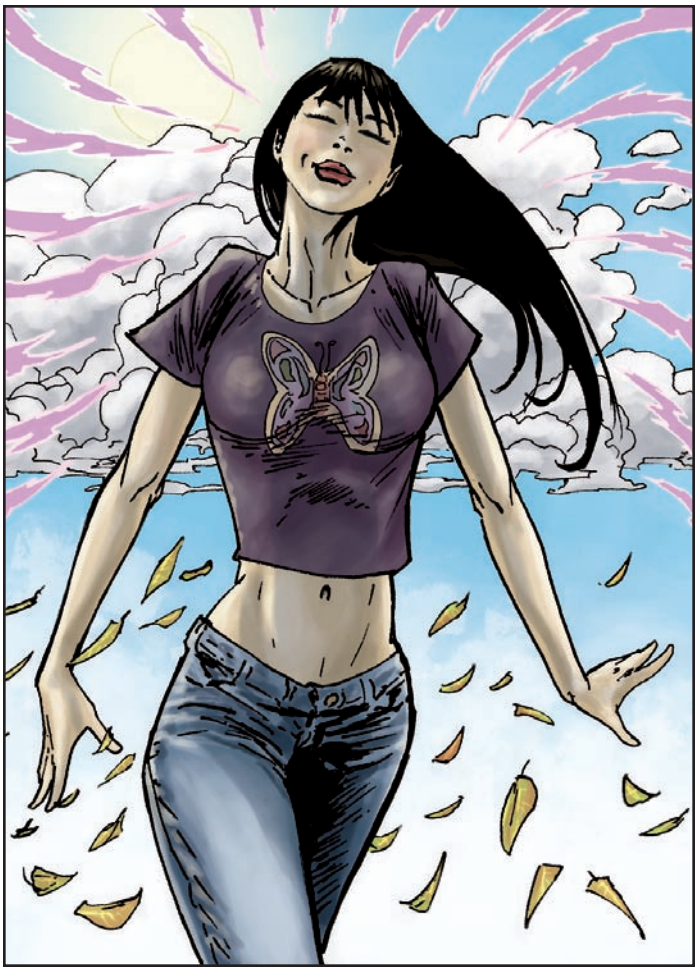
The Radical wakes up in a truck apparently being driven by Sylvester Stallone, heading towards Hong Kong. He sees the blimp in the sky and takes off after it, although he's still fading in and out of consciousness. He sees something fall out of the blimp's gondola and swoops in to grab Jay Ackroyd around the waist. Ackroyd is holding onto a canister and fighting with the Card Shark scientist Jarnavon. The Radical tells Jay to let the canister go and as it plummets towards the sea, vaporizes both it and Jarnavon with a ball of plasma.

In the aftermath, the Radical meets with Sprout and General Meadows in Southern California. "Where's Mark?" the general asks. The Radical shakes his head. "I don't know. I don't know how to get him back," he says, and hugs Sprout.

## ABILITIES

In his first appearance the Radical has enhanced strength, agility, and reflexes. He uses his peace-symbol medallion as a defensive weapon.

In his later appearances, the Radical utilizes powers from almost all of Mark's other friends. He can go intangible like Cosmic Traveler and shoot flame like J.J. Flash, he flies like Starshine and is energized by the sun, can heal like Moonchild and is energized by moonlight. He didn't have an opportunity to swim, but could probably call upon Aquarius' powers, too, so they're included for good measure. He uses his peace-symbol as a very *offensive* weapon, capable of mowing down opponents like a buzz-saw when he whirls it at high speeds.



# CORDELIA CHAISSON

**Created by Edward Bryant and Leanne C. Harper**

*"You've used the reptile level in your brain to control some pretty violent situations. You killed folks to protect yourself. Don't forget you can use the power for life too."*

— Sewer Jack giving her some uncle-ly advice. Bryant: "Down in the Dreamtime" (Book IV)

## DESCRIPTION

Cordelia is a beautiful, self-assured girl who runs away from her home in a rural Louisiana parish at the age of 16 and arrives in New York City on Wild Card Day, 1986. She has high cheekbones, long black hair, and a sexy Cajun accent.

## BACKGROUND

When her uncle, Sewer Jack, finds out that she's come to New York City, he goes looking for her, setting into motion a series of events that seemingly gets nearly the entire city in on the search. Eventually she's spotted by a member of Fortunato's organization, and while considering employment with him attends the cataclysmic dinner at Ace's High and then goes off with Croyd Crenson and Veronica. Cordelia, Veronica, and Caroline gets kidnapped by the Astronomer and his minions and the Astronomer plans to sacrifice them on his altar because he wrongly thinks they're all Fortunato's girls. Cordelia's card turns under the strain and she kills Imp. Together, she and Demise attack the Astronomer, although they flee without killing him. Ultimately she meets her uncle, Jack Robicheaux, and decides to stay in New York City.

### 1987

Cordelia takes an apartment with Veronica in a high rise on Maiden Lane near the Woolworth Building and Jetboy's Tomb and gets a job with Global Fun and Games, where her bosses are Polly Rettig and Luz Alcala. In February, GF&G sends her to Australia to help negotiate the purchase of a stake in a global satellite entertainment company—partially with, she discovers, Mafia funds. On the way Down Under, she has what she first thinks are troubling dreams, but comes to realize are actually sinister psychic assassination attempts. Soon after they arrive, the mafioso negotiator leading their team is killed by an inhuman assassin. Fleeing, Cordelia runs into a young aborigine named Wyungare. They become lovers. He explains that he's one of two aboriginal aces. The other, who is known as the Murga-Muggai, is his enemy. During their battle with the Murga-Muggai in the Dreamtime, Wyungare is apparently killed, but Cordelia uses her powers to restart his autonomic nervous system and he lives.

Upon her return to the States that spring, she puts together the AIDS/Wild Card Virus Benefit held live at the Funhouse and beamed by video across the world. It's noted for the quality musical acts that appear, such as U2, Bruce Springsteen, and Girls With Guns, but also for the return to

| CORDELIA CHAISSON | | | | | POWER LEVEL 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| -1 | +0 | +0 | +1 | +1 | +1 |
| 9 | 11 | 11 | 13 | 12 | 13 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +0 | +3 | +3 | +4 |

**SKILLS**

Bluff 3 (+4), Diplomacy 3 (+4), Language 1 (Cajun French), Notice 2 (+3), Profession (producer) 4 (+5), Sense Motive 3 (+4)

**FEATS**

Attractive

**POWERS**

**Suffocate 5** (autonomic shut-down; Perception Range)

**COMBAT**

Attack +0, Grapple –1, Damage –1 (unarmed), Defense +1, Knockback –0, Initiative +0

**Abilities 9 + Skills 4 (16 ranks) + Feats 1 + Powers 20 + Combat 2 + Saves 9 = Total 45**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Cordelia Chaisson | **WC Name:** None |
| **Occupation:** Entertainment executive | **WC Status:** Ace |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Cajun |
| **Birth:** 1970, Louisiana | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** 5 ft., 7 in. | **Weight:** 115 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Dark | **Hair:** Black |

the stage of C.C. Ryder after a self-imposed exile of many years and the return of Buddy Holley to prominence.

### SEPTEMBER 1990

While visiting her uncle at the Jokertown Clinic Cordelia is surprised to literally run into Wyungare. Though at first she chastises him for not calling or writing since they parted, she soon enthusiastically renews their relationship, and helps Wyungare spirit Jack out of the clinic before Dr. Bob Mengele can sink his scalpel into the helpless gator.

## ABILITIES

Cordelia can use the primitive reptilian level of her brain to shut down the human autonomic nervous system, which simultaneously stops cardiac and respiratory functions, resulting in painful death. She can also use her power in reverse to restart someone's heart or breathing if they're suffering from shock or some similar trauma, although this qualifies as a power stunt for her (since she's only done it once, and under stressful conditions).

Cordelia sometimes unconsciously slips French words into her English speech.

# CHRYSALIS

**Created by John Jos. Miller**

*"She was accustomed to going half-naked in public as a private obscene gesture to the world, making sure that everyone saw what she had to see every time she looked into a mirror."*

— Miller: "Beasts of Burden" ( Book IV)

## DESCRIPTION

Think the Visible Woman. Her skin and flesh are invisible, exposing shadowy muscles and the organs underneath. You can see the network of veins and arteries pulsing through her, and glimpses of the skeleton underneath it all. Her lips and nipples are visible. She has no hair to hide her white skull. She frequently wears a swirl of glitter on one cheek.

Chrysalis speaks in a cultured British accent, which anyone truly familiar with the dialect would realize is an affectation. She likes secrets, likes to be in control, likes to appear cool and untouched. She plays solitaire with antique Victorian-era playing cards and drinks amaretto. Her life consists of a rigidly tabulated series of credits and debits.

## BACKGROUND

Chrysalis was born in Oklahoma to a wealthy family in the oil business. She's the darling of her parents' eye until her card turns at puberty, and then they lock her away in a wing of their sprawling manor. After seven years she eventually breaks into her father's safe, steals a fortune in bearer bonds, and escapes to New York where she assumes the identity of Chrysalis, along with a faux British accent. With the help of Charles Dutton, she buys the building that becomes her famous saloon, the Crystal Palace, and also the entire block on which it stands. Dutton owns a one-third interest in her business.

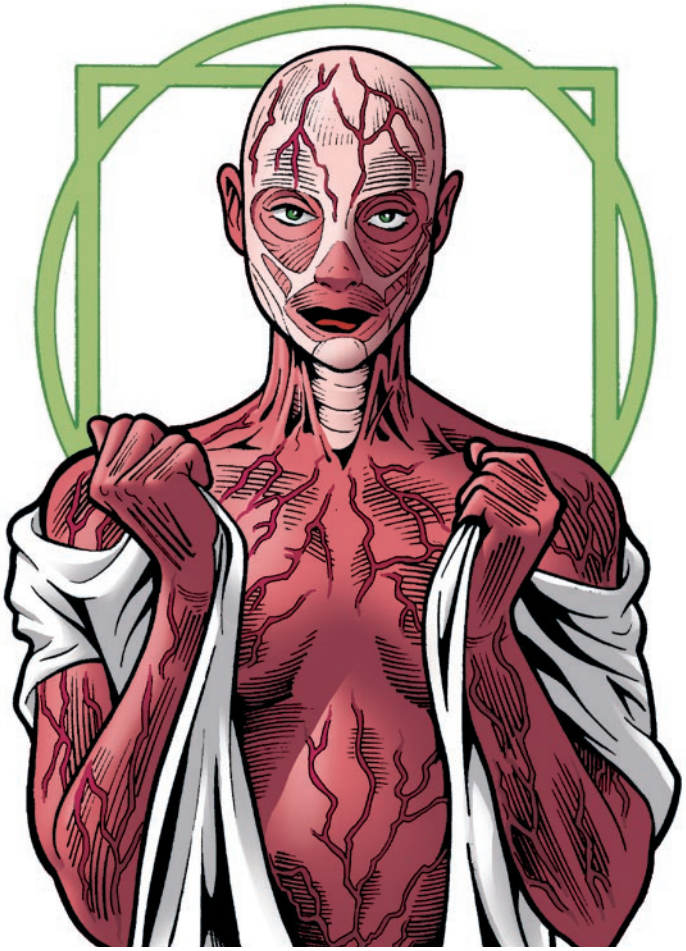
### 1970S AND '80S

Chrysalis wields considerable power in Jokertown, mostly because of her side business as an information broker. She knows almost everything that everyone does. She has agents everywhere, joker, nat, and ace alike, but none more important, and secretive, than Mother's little children, who scour the city for tidbits to bring back to her. Mother, a horribly mutated joker, lives in a secret chamber beneath the Palace. How she and Chrysalis met and the genesis of their mutual protection pact is a story that is as yet untold. Chrysalis is aggressively apolitical and mostly uses her power to benefit herself. She will trade secrets for sex if the man in need strikes her fancy.

### 1986/1987

She develops a romantic relationship with Yeoman, which ends when she refuses his offer of protection against the Mafia. She decides to leave town instead and accepts Tachyon's invitation to join the WHO-sponsored world tour as a joker delegate. Early on in the trip she's approached by journalist Digger Downs who has discovered her Oklahoma origins. He agrees to hold off on revealing her secret for future favors.

Because of her perceived resemblance to Madame Brigitte, the wife of powerful voodoo loa Baron Samedi, Chrysalis gets drawn into the local political situation in Haiti, and also narrowly escapes being kidnapped by agents of Ti Malice, who is seeking to expand his horizons beyond the poverty-stricken country of Haiti.



| CHRYSALIS | | | | | POWER LEVEL 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| -1 | +1 | +0 | +2 | +3 | +2 |
| 9 | 12 | 11 | 15 | 17 | 14 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +0 | +2 | +3 | +6 |

**SKILLS**

Bluff 10 (+12), Diplomacy 10 (+12), Gather Information 10 (+12), Intimidate 4 (+6), Knowledge (business) 8 (+10), Knowledge (history) 4 (+6), Knowledge (streetwise) 10 (+12), Language 1 (French), Profession (club-owner) 7 (+10), Sense Motive 8 (+11)

**FEATS**

Assessment, Benefit (wealth), Connected, Contacts, Fascinate (Bluff), Ultimate Effort (Gather Information), Well-Informed

**POWERS**

None

**COMBAT**

Attack +1, Grapple +0, Damage –1 (unarmed), Defense +2 (+1 flat-footed), Knockback –0, Initiative +1

**Abilities 18 + Skills 18 (72 ranks) + Feats 7 + Powers 0 + Combat 6 + Saves 7 = Total 56**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Debra Jo Jory | **WC Name:** Chrysalis |
| **Occupation:** Businesswoman | **WC Status:** Joker |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** 1955, Tulsa, Oklahoma | **Death:** July 18, 1988, New York City |
| **Height:** Average | **Weight:** Average |
| **Eyes:** Blue | **Hair:** None |

Upon her return to the United States, Tachyon talks a reluctant Chrysalis into joining the Jokertown neighborhood watch committee. She knows what everyone wants to know: the name of the head of the Shadow Fist Society. But she also knows it would cost her life if she reveals his identity.

## JUNE 1987

Gimli appears at the Crystal Palace and gives Chrysalis Hartmann's blood-soaked jacket—evidence that Hartmann is a wild card, something Chrysalis has suspected since the WHO world tour. The senator confronts them before she and Digger Downs can reveal this information to anyone. He warns them not to tell anyone his secret and, further, orders them to tell him if anyone else ever discovers it. To drive his threat home, he orders Mackie Messer to slaughter Misha, the Syrian ace who had initially recovered his jacket, before their horrified eyes.

## JULY 1988

When Hartmann gets close to winning the Democratic nomination for president, Chrysalis decides that her—and the world's—best chance for survival is to hire an assassin to kill him. She gets one of the best, and sends Demise off to the convention in Atlanta. However, Hartmann supporter Hiram Worchester gets word of this, and while questioning her about the hitman, accidentally kills her. Worchester then compounds his difficulties by clumsily trying to muddy the murder scene.

Chrysalis is buried in the churchyard of Our Lady of Perpetual Misery.

# ABILITIES

Chrysalis has no special wild card skills, but she is one of the leading citizens of Jokertown, and, while not altruistic, does have a favorable reputation in the community. She is well-known as one of the city's most important information brokers. She has eyes and ears everywhere, including the children of the mysterious joker known as Mother. Jhubben is another informant, as is Sergeant Mole at the Jokertown precinct. She will buy or trade for any information she deems valuable.

Chrysalis's wild card doesn't give her any powers, and her bizarre joker appearance doesn't constitute a drawback in game terms; it's simply a frequently-encountered complication (although Chrysalis has learned to turn it—and the hero points she no doubt acquires from it—to her advantage).

While most are repulsed by her appearance, some find her strangely alluring and fascinating. The Gamemaster should feel free to apply appropriate situational modifiers to Chrysalis' interaction skill checks and modifiers, particularly if she successfully fascinates a subject with a Bluff check before engaging in further interaction.

She speaks French with an obvious non-native accent.

# CRYPT KICKER

**Created by Royce Wideman**

*"Too bad he smells so damn bad."*

— Billy Ray to George Battle as the later expounds on the virtues of his "perfect soldier." Miller: Billy Ray's Story (Book XI)

## DESCRIPTION

Battle's pet corpse, Crypt Kicker, wears a skintight black fighting suit with a hood that entirely covers his face. The left eye is covered by a polarized lens which allows him to see out; the right eye is covered by black cloth embossed with a small red cross, the only bit of color on his uniform. His body appears to be all taut muscle and bone. A combination of several bad odors accompany him: uncleanliness, booze, and death. Puckett speaks in a slow, slurred Southern drawl that is hard to understand.

Crypt Kicker is very loyal to the government and whomever they put in charge of him.

## BACKGROUND

Bobby Joe's first arrest is at 14 for car theft. He beats the rap, but is arrested three more times in the next two years and spends time in juvie for car theft and breaking and entering. Three weeks after his release from juvenile detention, he's arrested for armed robbery and assault with a deadly weapon for pistol-whipping a 7-Eleven clerk. He spends the next three years in jail.

### 1987

He drifts through the 1980s, getting in trouble for more small-time stuff, but in 1987 kills a clerk in a liquor store robbery gone wrong. He snaps and takes a deer rifle and a .45 magnum to the top of a tower at the University of Texas in Austin, and spends an afternoon sniping at passers-by. He kills 26—27 if you count himself, as to avoid capture he blows away the side of his head and half his face with the pistol. But his career is only beginning.

Puckett wakes up in the potters' field where he was buried, which had also been used as a toxic waste dump, and he realizes the Lord has given him a second chance to do right with his life. He accepts Jesus as his personal savior and decides to devote the rest of his life—or whatever—to upholding the law.

### SEPTEMBER 1990

He's part of the covert ace team put together by George G. Battle to assault the Rox and acts basically as Battle's goon. When he's fried during a confrontation with a fire-breathing dragon, Battle orders his crisped corpse abandoned in the caverns. He gets left on the bottom of the Hudson River when the Rox disappears, and boils up to the surface in a giant air bubble as the Turtle's tidal wave smashes Ellis Island. He's found wrapped around a light pole on Staten Island.

### SUMMER 1991

Crypt Kicker accompanies Billy Ray to Vietnam under CIA auspices and battles both Moonchild (who defeats him) and Monster (who defeats him). Monster, in fact, blasts him with a couple of lightning bolts and he's placed in cold storage in the Saigon morgue where the bemused attendants are told to open the drawer if they hear any knocking from within.

### OCTOBER 1993

Puckett is eventually shipped back to the States (probably in a crate) and accompanies George G. Battle (on, appropriately enough, Halloween night) when Battle breaks into the Jokertown Clinic to steal a vial of the wild card virus for the Card Sharks. He comes up against Jerry Strauss, who morphs into a werewolf from *The Howling*, and locks him in a refrigerated drug locker. Later, he's absolved of all legal difficulties when the breaking and entering case is thrown out of court for "national security reasons."

| CRYPT KICKER | | | | | POWER LEVEL 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +10/+2 | –3 | +5/+2 | –2 | –1 | –2 |
| 30/14 | 5 | 20/14 | 7 | 9 | 7 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +12 | — | –3 | –2 |

**SKILLS**

None

**FEATS**

Attack Focus (melee) 3, Improved Pin

**POWERS**

**Corrosion 5** (toxic waste; Extended Reach 2 [10 ft.])
**Enhanced Constitution 6**
**Enhanced Strength 16**
**Immunity 30** (Fortitude)
**Protection 7**
**Regeneration 1** (Resurrection; True Resurrection)
**Super-Strength 3** (*heavy load:* 6 tons)

**COMBAT**

Attack +6 (melee), +3 (ranged), Grapple +19, Damage +10 (unarmed), Defense +4 (+2 flat-footed), Knockback –6, Initiative –3

**DRAWBACKS**

Disability (slow, clumsy, rotting corpse, very common, moderate, –4 points)

**Abilities –4 + Skills 0 + Feats 4 + Powers 79 + Combat 14 + Saves –1 – Drawbacks 4 = Total 88**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Bobby Joe Puckett | **WC Name:** Crypt Kicker |
| **Occupation:** Government agent | **WC Status:** Ace (card turned 1987) |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** June 5, 1959, Cross Plains, Texas | **Death:** 1987, Austin, Texas (the first time) |
| **Height:** Tall | **Weight:** Hefty |
| **Eyes:** One | **Hair:** Unknown |

Puckett next appears in Guatemala, trying to catch Josh McCoy, Uman, and Suzanne Melotti before they can cross the border into Belize with McCoy's photos incriminating Etienne Faneuil in Card Shark atrocities. Just when it looks as if Crypt Kicker might hold the border crossing, Uman rips his beating heart out of his chest, and they all escape into Belize, leaving Crypt Keeper dead... again.

He's a guard at the jumper holding facility in Latchkey, Maryland, where Croyd Crenson shotguns him into temporary submission.

### MAY 1994

He next appears, having deteriorated even further, on the Card Shark secret base on a small Caribbean Island where Billy Ray beats him into submission.

Ray flies him back to the States via a government jet, where Puckett tells him that he allowed the Sharks to inject him with the Black Trump virus. Ray is even more horrified when the undead agent starts to liquefy before his very eyes. Ray shoves what is left of Puckett's body outside the door over the Atlantic Ocean. Crypt Kicker, it seems, finally breathed his last.

## ABILITIES

Crypt Kicker has absorbed the toxic wastes he was buried in and can secrete them in concentrated, burning, streams from his skin. He's very strong, although slow moving and clumsy, and very hard to hurt, what with being dead and all. He can regenerate bodily damage somewhat, but just deteriorates more and more as he keeps getting killed by various means.

# HANNAH DAVIS

**Created by Stephen Leigh**

*"Behind your professional mask, you have a kind face."*

— The ever-perceptive Father Squid on Hannah Davis. Leigh: Hannah Davis's Story (Book XIII)

## DESCRIPTION

Hannah is a lovely young blonde woman.

## BACKGROUND

In the summer of 1993, Hannah Davis is an arson investigator from Cincinnati who moves to New York City to live with her boyfriend, David Adderly, who is a lawyer with political ambitions and government connections. He pulls some strings and gets her a position with the Arson Bureau of the New York State Department of Justice. This preferential treatment leads to more than a little anger among her fellow investigators. Adding in the fact that she's a woman in a male-dominated field leads to her getting more than her share of grief from subordinates and superiors alike. Hannah carries a fair-sized chip on her shoulder, some of which is justified. It doesn't help any that soon after she moves in with Adderly she starts to have second thoughts about their relationship, eventually coming to realize that she doesn't actually love him.

The first investigation Hannah heads is the fire at Our Lady of Perpetual Misery, which takes place on Black Queen Night (September 16th). It's clearly the job of a pro who uses jet fuel as an accelerant, and sets it so that the fire runs up the building's walls thus trapping those inside. The arsonist also locks the church doors to help ensure a high body count. Over a hundred jokers are killed and the church and several neighboring buildings are destroyed.

Davis starts the investigation by interviewing Father Squid and Quasiman, who seem to suspect there's some kind of shadowy, sinister conspiracy behind the attack. She shrugs this off as paranoia on their part. It doesn't help any that she's new to New York and especially new to jokers, and is more than a little jokerphobic. In the course of her interviews of various witnesses, she hears some disturbing stories and learns some disturbing facts. She learns the truth behind the movie *Jokertown*, the real facts behind the plot to burn Jokertown to the ground in 1959. She learns about the plot to poison African jokers with the AIDS virus in 1985.

And the same names keeping cropping up in these stories: Durand, Faneuil, Rudo, George G. Battle, among others. In the meantime, a known arsonist with anti-joker proclivities accidentally blows himself up. He's a suspect in the Our Lady of Perpetual Misery case, and when Davis investigates his death she finds plenty of evidence to suggest he had probably set the fire. Her boss congratulates her on a job well done and tells her to close the case. When she wants to find the ones who actually pulled the arsonist's strings, he warns her, not too subtly, to quit poking her nose into things that don't concern her. Hannah quits her job, and continues the investigation on her own, determined to find the truth. She also leaves Adderly, who reveals himself to be virulently anti-joker.

### FALL 1993

Hannah's quest takes her to Free Vietnam, where she digs up the purported body of Etienne Faneuil, taking a ring that belonged to him back to New York so Cameo can channel his spirit. Before Davis leaves Vietnam,

## HANNAH DAVIS — POWER LEVEL 3

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| +0 | +0 | +0 | +3 | +3 | +2 |
| 10 | 11 | 11 | 16 | 17 | 14 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +0 | +3 | +3 | +6 |

**SKILLS**

Bluff 3 (+5), Computers 2 (+5), Concentration 2 (+5), Disable Device 5 (+8), Gather Information 6 (+8), Investigate 8 (+11), Knowledge (physical sciences) 4 (+7), Knowledge (streetwise) 5 (+8), Notice 8 (+11), Profession (arson investigator) 8 (+11), Search 7 (+10), Sense Motive 6 (+9)

**FEATS**

None

**POWERS**

None

**COMBAT**

Attack +2, Grapple +2, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +2, Knockback –0, Initiative +0

**Abilities 19 + Skills 16 (64 ranks) + Feats 0 + Powers 0 + Combat 8 + Saves 9 = Total 52**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Hannah Davis | **WC Name:** — |
| **Occupation:** Arson investigator | **WC Status:** Nat |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** Circa 1960, west of Cincinnati | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** Average | **Weight:** Average |
| **Eyes:** Blue-green | **Hair:** Blonde |

Croyd Crenson tells her of his own history with Pan Rudo, revealing that the seemingly benign doctor is actually a long-time Card Shark. Back in New York, they discover Faneuil is still alive when Cameo tries to channel his spirit through the ring, and can't.

Cameo then calls on the dead ace Nick Williams, who relates the events around the making of Orson Welles's epic movie *Blythe* (February to May 1962), which resulted in Williams' murder, but not before he'd made several copies of detailed files concerning Card Shark activities. He'd given one of the copies to Marilyn Monroe so she could pass it on to either John Kennedy or his brother Bobby, with whom she was having simultaneous affairs. Williams died without knowing if Monroe ever handed over the file.

Upon leaving the meeting with Cameo, Davis is shot from a passing car. At the hospital another attempt is made on her life, but Quasiman saves her and they flee the hospital together. She knows Marilyn Monroe once had the Card Shark files and she confronts the aging movie star about them. Monroe gives them to her. Davis leaves Monroe's hotel room and flees from Pan Rudo and a brace of Card Shark thugs, and once again Quasiman saves the day, teleporting away with the incriminating files. Rudo can't do anything to Hannah in public, but he assures her that she's already just a rotting corpse waiting for a grave. Then he walks away.

Davis has gotten the information on the Card Sharks, but at a great cost. Quasiman's mind, such as it, has broken with the strain of forced concentration. He is gone, perhaps never to return. Having overcome her jokerphobia, Davis is devastated with grief at her friend's state. But what, she wonders, should she do with the Card Shark files? Who can she trust? Who can she turn to? She decides to give them to the one good, decent man who has always been the jokers' friend: Gregg Hartmann.

Hannah takes the evidence to the ex-senator. At first she's not certain she made the right choice, but warms to Hartmann as he takes up the cause of exposing the Card Sharks. Since Quasiman is still more often than not lost in his fugue state, the Oddity becomes her protector.

She accompanies Hartmann when the ex-senator decides to go on *Peregrine's Perch* to expose the Shark conspiracy to the public. Eventually she starts to fall for Hartmann, admitting to the Oddity that she loves him (winter 1993/1994).

### SPRING 1994

She thinks he's killed by Black Shadow, but when they're reunited after Clara van Renssaeler blows the whistle on the Sharks, Hartmann finally manages to convince her that he'd been jumped into George G. Battle's body. She tells him the jokers need a leader in the ongoing Card Shark crisis, and inspires him to take the role.

### FALL 1994

Hannah's with Hartmann and several other notables in the Famous Bowery Wild Card Dime Museum when a SCARE team led by April Harvest raids it to take them into government custody because they know about the Black Trump. She and Hartmann escape, and she vows they'll stay together through thick and thin, no matter what. They spend a couple of very thin

days hiding in the sewer, but ultimately realize this strategy will get them nowhere. They decide to go to Europe in an attempt to catch up with Pan Rudo, who they figure might be hiding out with General Peter Horvath, a noted British Card Shark, in Northern Ireland. Hartmann calls in some favors and an acquaintance named Gary Bushorn flies them surreptitiously out of the country. They parachute out of Bushorn's plane over Ireland.

Hannah and Hartmann make their way to Belfast, where they meet with a group of Twisted Fists led by a leprechaun-like figure who calls himself King Brian. Davis is held hostage by the gang for awhile, and Hartmann is forced to finger some nats for Fist reprisals on the threat of her death. Later, she accompanies Hartmann and a Twisted Fist escort to Westminster Abbey for Churchill's funeral. She forces the Card Shark Peter Horvath to give up the chalice with Black Trump-laced wine, and when the Shark refuses to answer their questions, Hartmann (unknown to her) uses his newly rediscovered Puppetman power to push her anger buttons, and she shoots Horvath. He finally reveals Pan Rudo is in Syria with the Nur and another supply of the Black Trump. Later, Hartmann grabs her mind again and pushes her to shoot down Billy Ray.

Davis accompanies Hartmann to Jerusalem, where they meet with the Black Dog and are sent as emissaries to the Nur. Barely surviving that jaunt, when they return to Jerusalem she spies April Harvest spraying a crowd of people with liquid from a water truck. She realizes Harvest is probably spreading the Black Trump. She and Hartmann find the Black Dog and Davis suggests they must use the Fists' nuclear device to sterilize the city. It seems to be the only way to stop the deadly plague that is not only affecting jokers, but nats as well.

The Dog takes them to the bomb and Davis starts the timing device that will blow the conventional explosive and detonate the nuclear device. Quasiman pops in, too late to stop her, and tells them about the Overtrump Mark Meadows has developed. Davis is aghast at all the innocent people her actions have doomed, but the Black Dog tells her it is possible to set off the conventional explosion without exploding the nuke. Only, someone has to stay behind to pull the wires on the conventional device. Hartmann, after an obvious internal struggle, tells Quasiman to take Davis out, and he pulls the wires, killing himself but saving nearly all of Jerusalem.

In the aftermath, Davis admits to Quasiman that she doesn't know if she really loved Hartmann. That, in any event, once he became a joker, she couldn't love him the way she once did. Together, she and Quasi go home.

## ABILITIES

Davis has no wild card powers, but is a well-trained, dedicated, and tenacious arson investigator, and has all the scientific, technical, and investigatory skills to go with such a job.

# DEADHEAD

**Created by John Jos. Miller**

*"No, thanks. I'll eat it here."*

— Miller: "Only the Dead Know Jokertown" (Book V)

## DESCRIPTION

Stephens is small, thin, and pallid. He speaks in a constant stream of chatter, much of it parenthetical or nonsensical. He always carries a bottle of vitamins and nutritional supplements with him that he consumes by the handful. His face is commonly possessed by a wild grin and his lips and features twitch with constant tics. He is generally poorly dressed and poorly groomed.

## BACKGROUND

Glen Stephens was an art student until his card turned. He started having vivid dreams any time he ate meat, vague phantom memories of the life of the animal. They become incredibly focused when he tried eating animal brains. When he finally worked up the courage to try it on a human brain, he found he could relive that person's memories, recalling them just as if they were his own.

His power has driven him almost completely mad. Stephens has done time in prison and mental hospitals for corpse abuse. He is horrified by his power, but also fascinated and takes a certain guilty pleasure in utilizing it, usually for the Shadow Fists. He solves the mystery of Kien's apparent death for Fadeout (summer 1990) by eating the head of the deceased watch joker that Kien kept in a jar on his desk.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Glen Stephens | **WC Name:** Deadhead |
| **Occupation:** Criminal | **WC Status:** Ace |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** 1968 | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** 5 ft., 10 in. | **Weight:** 120 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Dark | **Hair:** Black |

| DEADHEAD | | | | | POWER LEVEL 0 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| –1 | –1 | –1 | +1 | +2 | –1 |
| 8 | 9 | 8 | 13 | 14 | 9 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| –1 | +0 | +0 | +2 |

**SKILLS**

Craft (artistic) 6 (+8), Knowledge (streetwise) 2 (+3)

**FEATS**

None

**POWERS**

**Mind Reading 7** (No Saving Throw, Sustained Duration; Limited to eating the subject's brain, Touch Range)

**COMBAT**

Attack +0, Grapple –1, Damage –1 (unarmed), Defense +1, Knockback –0, Initiative –1

**DRAWBACKS**

Action (Mind Reading, at least five minutes, –2 points)

**Abilities 1 + Skills 2 (8 ranks) + Feats 0 + Powers 7 + Combat 0 + Saves 2 – Drawbacks 2 = Total 10**

## ABILITIES

Deadhead can access other peoples' memories by eating their brains. He goes into a coma-like trance while digesting the brains and processing the memories. In essence, his power is Mind Reading, but the subject obviously doesn't get a chance to resist! It's still lasting in duration, until Deadhead fails a DC 10 power check while accessing them, or he has completely digested the victim's brain (which takes at least a few hours to as long as several days). His Mind Reading rank doesn't really affect his power level, since it has no saving throw and victims are in no position to resist it.

Deadhead is also a talented sketch artist and often draws things he recalls from other people's memories in order to show them to his employers. He's pretty much useless for anything else.

# DEMISE

**Created by Walton Simons**

*"Spector was the only person who had drawn the Black Queen and lived to tell about it. Unfortunately, the memory of his death was always there."*

— Shiner: Fortunato's Story (Book III)

## DESCRIPTION

Spector is thin, with greasy dark hair, and a straggly mustache. He has a perpetually disheveled look.

Spector hates almost everyone and everything, including (but not limited to): heights, Tachyon (for bringing him back to life), New Yorkers in general (for being smug and superior), the Dodgers (when they lose), mimes (on general principles), and anyone and everyone who looks at him funny. Those he hates, he kills. He drinks whiskey every night to take away the pain so he can sleep. His only friend in high school is Tony Calderone, who later becomes a speechwriter for Gregg Hartmann.

| DEMISE | | | | | POWER LEVEL 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| –1 | +1 | +2 | +1 | +0 | +0 |
| 9 | 13 | 14 | 12 | 10 | 10 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +2 | +8 | +3 | +3 |

**SKILLS**

Knowledge (streetwise) 5 (+6), Profession (accountant) 6 (+6), Stealth 5 (+6)

**FEATS**

None

**POWERS**

**Drain Constitution 8** (death-stare; Continuous Duration, Perception Range, Will Save; Sight-Dependent; Subtle)

**Regeneration 13** (injured 1/round, no rest; disabled 1/minute; Resurrection 1/day; Persistent, Regrowth)

**COMBAT**

Attack +3, Grapple +2, Damage –1 (unarmed), Defense +5 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback –1, Initiative +1

**Abilities 8 + Skills 4 (16 ranks) + Feats 0 + Powers 37 + Combat 16 + Saves 11 = Total 76**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** James Spector | **WC Name:** Demise |
| **Occupation:** Assassin | **WC Status:** Ace (card turned May 1985) |
| **Aliases:** None known | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** 1959 | **Death:** May 1985... and July 24, 1988 |
| **Height:** 6 ft. | **Weight:** 150 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Dark | **Hair:** Dark |

## BACKGROUND

A failed CPA from Teaneck, New Jersey, Spector draws the Black Queen when infected by the wild card virus. Officially pronounced dead when brought to the Jokertown Clinic, Tachyon revives him using an experimental process, but the cure can't remove the pain of death from Spector's mind, a pain that chews on him constantly and that he discovers he can project onto others. Spector spends six months in intensive care, screaming. He finally escapes, killing an orderly in the process. He spends some time on the streets exploring the range of his powers, casually killing random victims when he needs money. He joins the Egyptian Masons when the Astronomer promises to wipe the memory of his death from his mind, but breaks with the Astronomer after the Cloisters Raid and quickly grows to hate and fear his one-time ally.

### SEPTEMBER 1986

On Wild Card Day 1986, the Astronomer punishes him for his perceived disloyalty by breaking his neck, but Fortunato unwittingly rescues him and he regenerates his wound. He takes several jobs, including one against the Gambione Family for the Shadow Fist Society, and he runs afoul of Sewer Jack, who eats his foot while Spector makes off with the mysterious notebooks the entire city seems to be after. He doesn't keep them for long, however, soon losing them to Jay Ackroyd and Hiram Worchester.

Reluctantly, he again hooks up with the Astronomer, and helps kidnap what they think are three of Fortunato's geishas. Under the Astronomer's orders he kills Caroline, but Cordelia Chaisson's card turns, she draws an ace, and kills Imp. Spector realizes this is their chance, and they both turn their powers against the Astronomer. They're on the verge of killing him when the girls panic and run. Demise follows, bemoaning the fact that they've blown their best chance to escape the Astronomer's vengeance. Later, after observing the pyrotechnic battle between the Astronomer and Fortunato, Demise arrives on the scene after the Astronomer, stripped of almost all his power, drags himself out of the East River. The Astronomer begs for help, Demise locks eyes with him. The Astronomer tries to escape by turning insubstantial and sinking into a brick wall but is only partially successful before Demise kills him. Against all odds, Demise has escaped his master's cruel grasp.

### LATE 1980S

Demise works for the Shadow Fists during the Mafia turf war (1986-1987), and Chrysalis hires him to kill Hartmann at the Democratic National Convention in Atlanta (July 1988). He makes several attempts on the senator. One is broken up by Jack Braun and their battle nearly leads to both their deaths. Spector gains access to the podium when Hartmann is giving his acceptance speech for the presidential nomination by posing as a Secret Service agent. He sees his chance when bedlam erupts as Mackie Messer goes after Sara Morgenstern in the audience. After putting a few pistol rounds through Mackie, he locks eyes with Hartmann, but is attacked by Messer, who severs his head from behind. Demise remains conscious and he sees his body fall. He feels his head bounce around and Messer pick it up. He opens his eyes as Mackie kisses his bloody lips and locks his gaze on his killer, killing him as well.

Later, the Atlanta morgue attendants call Tachyon. Spector's headless body still seems to have life. It responds to stimuli, jerking around when Tachyon pokes it with a knife and a small bud is growing out of Spector's jagged neckline. A new head? Tachyon suggests immediate cremation, and the morgue attendants agree. Tachyon gets custody of his ashes.

## ABILITIES

Demise is a projecting telepath. He constantly feels the agony of his death welling up inside and can project the memory of that death so convincingly that it kills his intended targets when their eyes lock. His victims generally die in terrible pain, although he can chose to break off the contact before death occurs. Mirror shades can block his power, preventing him from locking eyes with his target.

He can regenerate wounds, including a broken neck. He can regenerate missing limbs relatively quickly, but it is a painful process. It takes him several hours to regenerate a usable foot, more for it to be anatomically correct with separate functioning toes.

Demise's death-stare has an initial Reflex save to avoid his gaze, if a target is aware of the danger, but subsequently requires Will saving throws for targets to resist the effect and to try and look away.

# XAVIER DESMOND

**Created by George R.R. Martin**

*"I have been a joker since the beginning."*

— Xavier Desmond.
Martin: *The Journal of Xavier Desmond*, part 1 (Book IV)

## DESCRIPTION

Desmond is a large, well-dressed florid man with a pink elephant-like trunk about two feet long in place of a nose, with seven functioning fingers dangling from its end.

## BACKGROUND

Desmond enlists in the Navy during World War II and is assigned to a desk in Bayonne, New Jersey. He is a 29-year-old investment banker with Chase Manhattan, who has a beautiful wife, Mary, a 2-year-old daughter, Joanna, and a bright future the day the wild card virus falls over New York City. Released from the hospital a month later, he's a joker. His wife leaves him, his firm fires him, and he's evicted from his Riverside Apartment for "health reasons." Xavier never marries again, and is one of Fortunato's best clients.

| XAVIER DESMOND | | | | | POWER LEVEL 2 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| -1 | +0 | -1 | +1 | +1 | +2 |
| 8 | 10 | 8 | 13 | 12 | 14 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| -1 | +1 | +2 | +3 |

**SKILLS**

Bluff 4 (+6), Diplomacy 6 (+8), Gather Information 7 (+9), Knowledge (business) 8 (+9), Knowledge (streetwise) 6 (+7), Perform (oratory) 4 (+6), Profession (banker) 7 (+8), Profession (club owner) 8 (+9), Sense Motive 6 (+7)

**FEATS**

Benefit ("Mayor of Jokertown"; +4 bonus on Diplomacy and Gather Information checks involving jokers, who generally respect and look up to him), Connected, Contacts, Well-Informed

**POWERS**

**Additional Limbs 1**

**COMBAT**

Attack +0, Grapple –1, Damage –1 (unarmed), Defense +0, Knockback –0, Initiative +0

**Abilities 5 + Skills 14 (56 ranks) + Feats 4 + Powers 1 + Combat 0 + Saves 6 = Total 30**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Xavier Desmond | **WC Name:** None (stubbornly so) |
| **Occupation:** Businessman, jokers' rights advocate | **WC Status:** Joker (card turned September 15, 1946) |
| **Aliases:** "Mayor of Jokertown" | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** December 1916 | **Death:** July 16, 1987 |
| **Height:** 6 ft. | **Weight:** 180 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Unknown | **Hair:** Unknown |

## 1950s and `60s

He moves to Jokertown and in 1964 founds the Joker Anti-Defamation League, the oldest and largest organization dedicated to fighting for civil rights for wild card virus victims, and becomes the most widely respected joker spokesman.

While the maitre d' of the Funhouse, one of the most popular nightclubs in Jokertown, he finds a drunken Tachyon unconscious and naked in a Jokertown alley (1961) and takes him to the club's owner, Angela Fascetti, who basically supports Tachyon for the next two years. Desmond buys the Funhouse when Angela retires from public life.

## 1970s and `80s

By the early 1970s he's known as The Mayor of Jokertown. The Funhouse continues to be one of the most storied and elegant nightclubs in New York City, where the audience—ace, joker, and nat alike—enjoys the top joker cabaret acts. By 1981 the nightclub begins to steadily lose money, but Desmond refuses to close it.

In 1984, his health taking a turn for the worse, Desmond resigns as president of the JADL but maintains ties with the organization.

Knowing he's dying of cancer, he joins the WHO-sponsored around-the-world tour (late 1986 through early 1987), partly to discover how jokers are being treated around the world, partly to enjoy a trip he's always dreamed of. Upon his return to the United States the cancer takes more and more out of him, but he's instrumental in implementing Tachyon's idea of a neighborhood watch association in response to the Shadow Fist/Mafia wars (spring 1987). Against Tachyon's initial objections, he insists the watch be composed solely of jokers; no aces allowed.

The Funhouse hosts the AIDS/Wild Card Benefit that's televised live around the world and sees the return to prominence of C.C. Ryder and Buddy Holley (May 1987).

Desmond dies July 16, 1987, of cancer. His journal of the WHO-sponsored trip, *A Year in a Man's Life: The Journal of Xavier Desmond,* is published posthumously. All Jokertown mourns the passing of this proud, sensitive man who refused to wear a mask or take an alias. The Funhouse closes after his death.

## Abilities

Desmond has no wild card skills, but is a skillful human politician and businessman. He's widely known and respected in the joker community for his work.

# DETROIT STEEL

SEPTEMBER 1990

**Created by George R.R. Martin**

*"Detroit Steel's armor stood in center field like Gort in The Day the Earth Stood Still."*

— Martin: Turtle's Story (Book XI)

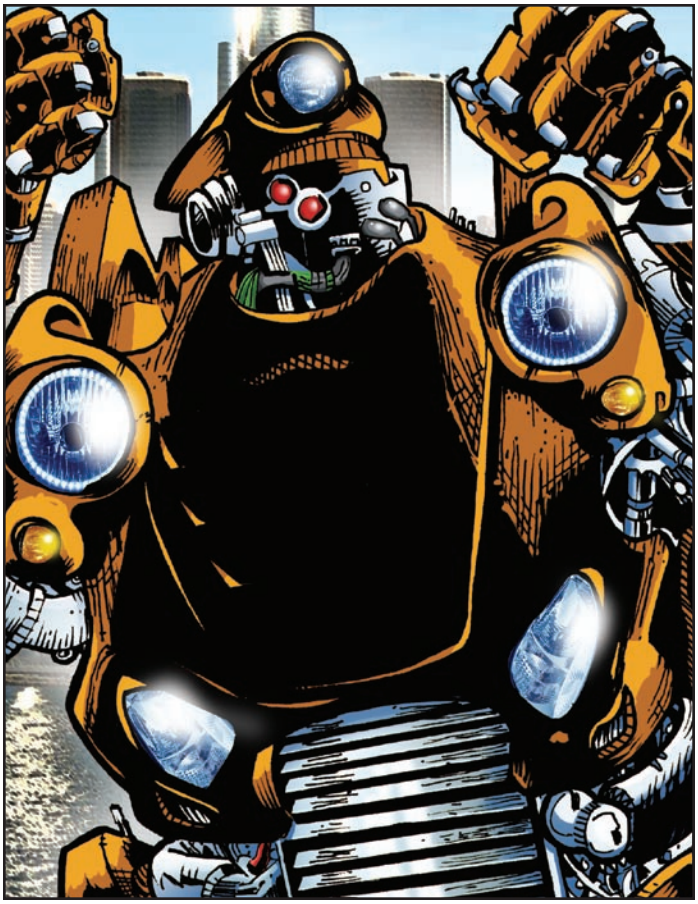
## DESCRIPTION

Detroit Steel, which refers to the robot and not the man, is seven feet tall and four feet across and weighs about 20 tons. A single cyclopean headlight is mounted on the helmet above the tinted eye slit and a whole bank of them across the massive chest. He has vintage Caddy tail fins on his shoulders and helmet. A radio antenna telescopes out from behind one ear and a hood ornament from a Lincoln is screwed onto the top of his head.

Tsakos is married, has a son, and continues to live in and mainly work out of Detroit. At the time of the Rox Campaign he's a big man in his 50s with a beer gut.

## BACKGROUND

Mike Tsakos, an unemployed autoworker in Detroit, tinkered the armor together out of scrap metal and old auto parts in his spare time. He must inhabit the suit for it to work.



Tsakos is part of the overt ace strike team of the Rox Campaign. He and the Reflector team up to smash through the Jersey Gate, but they're ultimately beaten by Modular Man and held as prisoners in the Rox. Tsakos loses his armored suit, but he and the other prisoners eventually escape the Rox on the back of Sewer Jack

## ABILITIES

Tsakos is a tinkerer whose armored suit works only if he's manipulating it. He has no wild card powers beyond the tinkering ability. His suit, however, is quite strong and surprisingly dexterous. Needless to say, it can also absorb a lot of kinetic damage.

Tsakos frequently works for the government in various capacities.

| DETROIT STEEL | | | | | POWER LEVEL 9 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +11/+1* | +3/+1* | +0 | +2 | +0 | +0 |
| 32/12* | 16/12* | 10 | 15 | 11 | 10 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +11/+0* | +3 | +6/+4* | +3 |

**Outside armor*

**SKILLS**

Craft (mechanical) 10 (+12), Knowledge (technology) 6 (+8), Notice 4 (+4)

**FEATS**

None

**POWERS**

**Device 14** (Detroit Steel armor, hard to lose)

*Detroit Steel:* **Blast 9**, **Enhanced Dexterity 4**, **Enhanced Strength 20**, **Flight 3**, **Protection 11** (Impervious 6), **Super-Senses 1** (radio), **Super-Strength 2** (*heavy load:* 4 tons)

**COMBAT**

Attack +7, Grapple +19, Damage +11 (unarmed), +9 (blast), Defense +7 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback –8 (-0 without armor), Initiative +3

**DRAWBACKS**

Normal Identity (full round action, –4 points)

**Abilities 10 + Skills 5 (20 ranks) + Feats 0 + Powers 56 + Combat 28 + Saves 9 – Drawbacks 3 = Total 105**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Mike Tsakos | **WC Name:** Detroit Steel |
| **Occupation:** Autoworker | **WC Status:** Ace |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** Late 1940s | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** Unknown | **Weight:** Unknown |
| **Eyes:** Unknown | **Hair:** Close-cropped blond |

# DIGGER DOWNS

**Created by Steve Perrin**

*"...absorbing the notion that he could just as easily be paid for not revealing something, as for revealing it."*

— An epiphany descends upon Thomas Downs at an early age. Miller: "Four Days In October" (Book XVI)

## DESCRIPTION

Digger looks sort of all-around average. In his line of work, it's actually a good thing.

Digger has an aged mother in Oakland, a sister in Salt Lake City, and by 1988 two ex-wives, one looking to nail him for missed alimony payments.

## BACKGROUND

Tommy Downs (as his first byline reads) always wanted to be reporter. He loves the notion of ferreting out the secrets of others, even during his days at Sanguis Christi, a Catholic school in New York where he works on the school paper, *The Weekly Gospel*. His father gets him a press pass to the 1969 World Series, which is one of the hottest tickets in town. The Dodgers, once the dominant team of the 1950s, had fallen into disarray—and into the National League cellar—but with the return of their greatest player ever, Pete Reiser, and the addition of Fidel Castro as pitching coach, they have risen to win the National League pennant and are facing the heavily favored Baltimore Orioles in the World Series.

The Dodgers are not the only ones undergoing changes, however. Downs has lately noticed that he can smell people who are affected by the wild card virus—it's sort of a sweet scent, like a tropical flower. When he visits the Dodgers' locker room he detects a hint of that odor in the air, and wonders if the improbable rise to glory of the previously poor team has been occasioned by the presence of a secret ace. He senses a great story and digs into it, trying to discover who the secret ace might be.

It's not as easy to unravel the mystery as he'd hoped, and in fact it's not until after the thrilling series has ended in a very unlikely Dodger victory that Digger discovers the hidden ace is Dodger's pitching coach Fidel Castro. When he confronts Reiser and Castro in the manager's office after the final game, he finds out that Castro is not exactly an ace. Castro is a deuce with slightly more flexible than normal tendons in his fingers and elbows, a fact he didn't know himself until after his playing career was over.

The Dodgers, however, don't want this story made public, so they offer Downs a season ticket for the next year's games if he keeps quiet. Downs realizes it's not really much of a story. And that if he broke it he'd have to reveal the fact that he himself is a secret ace, something he'd rather keep up his sleeve. He counters with a request for two season tickets, and Reiser consents, thereby teaching Downs a lesson he lives by for the rest of his life.

### 1970S AND '80S

As an adult, his dreams pretty much comes true as he becomes an "ace" reporter for *Aces* magazine. Digger has a nice office at *Aces* as well as a cute research assistant named Judy Scheffel. He has a somewhat less nice fifth-floor walk-up on Horatio Street in the West Village. It's cramped and in need of a good cleaning even before Mackie Messer trashes it.

Digger breaks the story of Peregrine's pregnancy in a wildly speculative and inflammatory manner in the March 1987 issue of *Aces* magazine, and in return Josh McCoy breaks his nose. Digger then compounds his trouble by bleeding all over Billy Ray's white fighting suit, thereby earning Ray's enmity.

### JUNE 1987

Downs and Chrysalis form a secret alliance against Hartmann, seeking information to prove his real nature as an evil ace, but they make little leeway in that effort until Chrysalis summons Digger to the Palace to tell him about the blood-stained jacket Gimli has given her. Unfortunately for them, Hartmann also appears at the meeting and threatens them with death if they ever reveal his secret. In fact, he orders them both to work for him and let him know if anyone else ever stumbles on his hidden nature. To make Hartmann's point, Mackie Messer enters through a wall and dumps a disfigured Misha in front of them. The psychopathic ace then gleefully slaughters her before their horrified eyes.

### JULY 1988

Thinking Hartmann has decided to kill them both, Downs goes into hiding after Chrysalis is murdered. He frantically phones Tachyon at the Democratic National Convention in Atlanta, but Tachyon refuses to take his call. Desperate, he turns to the child ace Jessica von der Stadt, and she shrinks him down to a height of three inches so he can hide in her "farm" which occupies an entire floor in her father's Park Avenue townhouse. Digger finds,

| DIGGER DOWNS | | | | | POWER LEVEL 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| -1 | +0 | +0 | +1 | +2 | +0 |
| 9 | 10 | 11 | 13 | 14 | 10 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +0 | +3 | +3 | +5 |

**SKILLS**

Bluff 6 (+6), Diplomacy 4 (+4), Knowledge (current events) 8 (+9), Knowledge (popular culture) 5 (+6), Knowledge (streetwise) 5 (+6), Notice 8 (+10), Profession (reporter) 8 (+10), Sense Motive 8 (+10)

**FEATS**

Connected, Contacts, Well-Informed

**POWERS**

**Super-Senses 3** (sense wild cards, ranged [scent])

**COMBAT**

Attack +0, Grapple –1, Damage –1 (unarmed), Defense +1, Knockback –0, Initiative +0

**Abilities 7 + Skills 13 (52 ranks) + Feats 3 + Powers 3 + Combat 2 + Saves 9 = Total 37**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Thomas Downs | **WC Name:** None |
| **Occupation:** Tabloid journalist | **WC Status:** Ace (up the sleeve) |
| **Aliases:** "Digger" | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** November 29, 1956, NYC | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** 5 ft., 10 in. | **Weight:** 150 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Brown | **Hair:** Brown |

however, that country life isn't all it's cracked up to be, as the farmhouse is plastic, has no working toilets, and little comfort. Plus, Jessica expects him to do chores. Eventually he's found and rescued by Jay Ackroyd, and Downs tells the horrified detective the truth about Hartmann.

Downs accompanies Ackroyd to Atlanta in a cat carrier, but unfortunately the airline misplaces him and he ends up in Alaska instead. He heads back to New York and frenziedly pounds out the Hartmann story, sure that it's going to win him both the Pulitzer Prize and the admiration he so justly deserves. Ackroyd confronts him, telling him that they must keep the story a secret. They can't afford the possibility that it would set off a tidal wave of anti-wild card hysteria across the country. Digger is unconvinced. Ackroyd offers him a three-part bribe: first, the exclusive story of Chrysalis's murder with the real murderer himself surrendering to Jay; second, money; third, he won't reveal Digger's secret ace to the world. The combination of these three inducements convinces Digger, and the possibility of a Pulitzer must wait on another story.

### SUMMER 2003

Downs happens to be in Japan when John Fortune's story breaks. He hightails it to the monastery where Fortunato has been for the previous 16 years to get his reaction. Basically, Fortunato is dumbfounded, and decides to leave the monastery before all the reporters following Downs descend upon it and destroy its serenity. Digger suggests returning to New York City on his treat. Or rather, *Aces*'s. Fortunato takes him up on it. Digger follows the John Fortune story to its conclusion, and gets John Fortune to give him the scoop on his father's death.

## ABILITIES

Digger can detect all wild carders, even latents, by their smell.

# DR. TACHYON

**Created by Melinda Snodgrass**

*"Is there anyone you don't owe a life?"*

— Jay Ackroyd getting off one of his patented zingers at Tachyon's expense. Martin: *Dead Man's Hand* (Book VII)

## DESCRIPTION

Dr. Tachyon is a slim, slight, fanciful dresser given to overblown outfits of capes, cloaks, vests, high boots, feathered hats, fancy embroidery, and a spectrum of bright colors, all often in a single ensemble. He's also given to overly dramatic gestures, alien oaths (By the Ideal! Blood and Bone! Ships and ancestors!), and flights of emotionalism. He's not afraid to cry in public and is frequently overwhelmed by guilt, thinking of each and every joker as "one of mine." He cares for his patients, but their deformities and infirmities disgust him. He feels that as a true aristocrat he's bred to lead and protect his people.

He is immodest, arrogant, and overbearing, especially in the early years before he learns the rudiments of humility, and can be cold and unfeeling toward others. He is a compulsive womanizer and frequently treats even those he cares for as objects.

In 1986 Tachyon lives in an apartment with an immaculate living room that has a plush white carpet, maroon vertical blinds, a white baby grand piano, and a maroon sectional sofa. Elaborate floral arrangements rest on the glass coffee table in front of the sofa. Two walls are covered with ceiling-to-floor bookshelves containing works in several languages. The scent of flowers and incense spices the air. An altar sits in an alcove between two windows. It rests on a low table covered by an embroidered gray cloth that has a simple but beautiful flower arrangement, a small knife, and a tiny Hopi seed pot holding an incense stick. The bedroom continues the maroon motif, but with gray rather than white highlights. There are more books, more flowers, and on Tachyon's dresser is a photo of a sad-eyed woman in 1940s dress. An enormous walk-in closet is filled with clothes. The bed is a waterbed. Tachyon employs a joker named Riggs as a liveried chauffeur, who drives a large gray Lincoln.

## BACKGROUND

Tachyon's (or, as he is known on Takis, Tisianne's) mother is assassinated when he's 4. His favorite relative, his sister Jadlan, kills herself after her first child is euthanized because of a birth defect. He has six other living sisters: Roxalana, Melant, Tri'ava, Pandasala, Shi'tha, and Cillka. They're all blonde; he's the only redhead. His father, Shaklan, is brain dead because of a head injury, so Taj rules House Ilkazam as a regent in Tachyon's place. Tachyon's charismatic cousin Zabb fervently wants the throne for himself.

## 1940S

Tachyon arrives on Earth (August 23, 1946) at White Sands Missile Base near Alamogordo, New Mexico, claiming to be a prince from another world and warning of the imminent danger the world is facing from the wild card virus. No one believes his story, but needless to say things turn around quickly after Dr. Tod releases the wild card virus over the skies of New York City (September 15, 1946). Tachyon works tirelessly at Mt. Sinai Hospital in the days immediately after the virus strikes, where he meets and falls in love with Blythe van Renssaeler while teaching her how to control her new mind-absorption power. She comes to him after her husband throws her out (August 1947) and they become lovers, staying together two and a half years. When called before HUAC (1949), the committee accuses him of being an alien agent, of purposely allowing the virus to be released, and then staying on to study the results. Tachyon refuses to give up the names of the 37 aces he has treated.

Jack Braun had previously testified that Blythe had absorbed Tachyon's mind, and the committee recalls her. Desperately fearful, she tries to remain silent but they badger her into giving up the names of the aces Tachyon has treated. In a last attempt to save his patients' privacy, and perhaps their lives, Tachyon mind-controls her, and her brittle mind utterly shatters, never to be rebuilt. It will be years before he uses his mind control power again.

## 1950S

Tachyon is deported a couple of months later and he leaves for Europe where he slowly disintegrates, eventually becoming a homeless drunk wandering across the face of the continent for much of the '50s. In Paris (August 1950) he meets a 19-year-old radical political student named Danelle Moncey. They became lovers, and she's the last of the local communist group led by Lena Goldoni to condemn him as useless. He's ejected him from their circle.

The autumn of 1955 finds Tachyon on the skids in Hamburg. A KGB agent named Polyakov finds him and takes him to a safe house in East Berlin where he's detoxed and slowly regains his health. Tachyon supplies the Soviets with much data on American aces, Takisian history and science, and on the wild card virus itself. He's then expatriated to West Berlin to remain in deep cover under the codename Dancer.

## 1960S

Kennedy's election as president allows Tachyon to return to the United States, but he remains a destitute drunk. He has the good fortune to be found drunken and unconscious in a Bowery alley by a joker named Xavier Desmond. For the next two years Angela Fascetti, the owner of the nightclub known as the Funhouse, supports him in his drunken debauchery, and he eventually repays her by teaming up with the new public ace known as the Turtle (December 1963) to rescue her from a depraved heroin dealer. Tachyon has to use both his telepathic and mind control powers during the rescue attempt, and this puts him to the road to recovery.

He opens the Blythe van Renssaeler Memorial Clinic (September 15, 1966), which quickly becomes more familiarly known as the Jokertown Clinic. It's the first hospital dedicated to helping jokers and studying the nature of the wild card virus.

## 1986

A group of Takisians led by his cousin Zabb arrive on Earth to check up on their little experiment. They kidnap Tachyon to take him back to Takis and round up some lab specimens (Tommy Tudbury, Asta Lenser, and Mark Meadows) to examine later. Tachyon and the kidnapped aces ultimately defeat them and Zabb is disgraced and forced to take employment with the Network.

Tachyon takes part in the Cloisters Raid which destroys the Egyptian Freemasons. Later, he is kidnapped and replicated by the Swarm Mother as part of her assault on the Earth, but he is rescued by Yeoman and Fortunato. Via his sentient spaceship *Baby*, he provides transportation up to the Swarm Mother for a coalition of aces that finally puts an end to the Swarm's plans to conquer the Earth.

Wild Card Day is particularly difficult for Tachyon, and while he does manage to make the speeches and appearances he considers his duty, he wallows in both self-pity and cognac before, during, and after his public appearances. On Wild Card Day 1986 he meets and is seduced by the ace Roulette, who is a minion of the Astronomer and has been assigned to assassinate him. Tachyon spends most of the day unwittingly dodging death at Roulette's hands, but finally realizes her true nature. Shaken, he admits that he thinks he loves her. He does what he can to fix her damaged mind, but admits it is beyond his capacity to completely repair. He tells her that he'll wait for her to find healing herself, somehow. As an aftermath to the affair, he suffers from a nearly two-year-long bout of impotency caused by subconscious fears regarding Roulette's power.

## 1986/1987

Co-chair of the around-the-world WHO-sponsored tour, Tachyon spends most of the journey laboring in various joker hospitals around the world. He takes the lead in resisting the Nur al-Allah's compulsion pow-

ers, resulting in a firefight in the Nur's Syrian camp (February 4, 1987) in which the tour delegates escape and the Nur himself is severely injured. Pressures of the trip cause Tachyon to drink even more than usual, but despite his ever-present difficulties he manages to help save the Great Ape and return him to human form when the Ape runs wild during the filming of *King Pongo* on Sri Lanka.

In Paris (April 1987), Tachyon is contacted by his old lover Danelle Moncey. He's dismayed to see her middle-aged and coarsened. She tells Tachyon that they had a daughter whom she named Gisele, but that the girl is dead. Tachyon discovers that Gisele Andrieux, a committed Communist, was killed in a shootout with police in 1975. But before she died she'd had a child herself. A son. In true Takisian style, Tachyon nearly goes bonkers trying to track down his grandson, Blaise Andrieux, to ensure the continuity of his line. He discovers that the father of his grandchild is still a member of the Communist cell. The cell leader, a joker named Bonnell, attempts to blackmail Tachyon into joining their plot to assassinate a number of French presidential candidates. Tachyon foils the plot with the help of Jack Braun, whom he finally forgives for his testimony before HUAC. He's finagles Blaise out of the country. While in London he's contacted by his old KGB spymaster, Polyakov, who quizzes him extensively on current American political moods and events.

Tachyon brings Blaise to live with him in New York City. He quickly comes to realize that his child is a handful, prone to bullying others (including Mark Meadow's retarded daughter, Sprout) and difficult to control (May 1987). Blaise goes through tutors like tanks through infantry. Tachyon spoils the child with material things while holding him too closely and making him dress like a Little Lord Fauntleroy. Jack Braun gets him to back off a little, but Blaise remains a handful.

The Shadow Fist/Mafia war makes things terribly difficult for the citizens of Jokertown. Tachyon suggests they form a neighborhood watch group. It looks as if the idea might not fly until Tachyon talks Chrysalis into joining the effort.

## JUNE 1987

Tachyon is torn in even more directions as a new wild card outbreak starts, slowly at first and then picking up speed. He finally realizes the disease is being spread by a human vector and settles on Croyd as a suspect. Croyd is finally captured and contained in the Jokertown Clinic.

In late June Tachyon has a particularly busy day. As he delivers Peregrine's child, who turns out normal despite Tachyon's pessimism, the Shadow Fist Society launches a raid on the clinic as payback for Tachyon's vigilante efforts. The Fists are lead by Yeoman (who has infiltrated them), who eventually has to chose between saving Tachyon or continuing his vendetta against Kien. As Yeoman is making his choice, Tachyon lets Typhoid Croyd loose to save himself from the gang members. Later, Tachyon mind-controls Kien, forcing him to a parlay, where they declare a truce. Tachyon will not interfere with Kien's "business" as long as he keeps it out of Jokertown. Although everything seems to have come to a satisfactory conclusion, Tachyon is devastated to discover that Typhoid Croyd has infected him with the wild card virus, which could express itself anytime, anywhere.

## JULY 1988

Tachyon attends the Democratic National Convention in Atlanta, ostensibly under a press pass from the *Jokertown Cry*, but really to work behind the scenes to get Hartmann the Democratic nomination for president. Polyakov and Sarah Morgenstern keep telling him that Hartmann is a murderous secret ace, but he refuses to believe them. Tachyon meets and is smitten with Fleur van Renssaeler, Blythe's daughter, and pursues her relentlessly. He finally takes her to bed, but learns she has seduced him to keep him off the convention floor at a vital point in the proceedings. He throws her out, emotionally devastated, but at least his impotency has been cured.

Tachyon is finally convinced of Hartmann's true nature when he performs a blood test on the jacket bought him by Jay Ackroyd, a detective hired by Hiram Worchester, and discovers that the senator is indeed a wild carder. This leads him to read Hartmann's mind, and Tachyon is horrified to see it's a cesspool. Only he, Hiram, and Ackroyd know Hartmann's true nature, and they swear a solemn Takisian oath to keep it to themselves, not wanting to start a wave of anti-wild card sentiment.

Tachyon switches his support to Jesse Jackson in a last-minute attempt to derail Hartmann's nomination as the Democratic candidate for president. Since in typical Tachyon fashion he refuses to explain his reasons to even his closest friends, this leads to a break with the Turtle. Soon after, he experiences a more material loss, as Mackie Messer pulverizes his right hand in an unsuccessful assassination attempt. The actor Josh Davidson visits him in the hospital, which leads to an emotional reunion as Tachyon realizes Davidson is really his old comrade David Harstein of the Four Aces.

During the convention's emotion- and action-charged conclusion, Tachyon mind-controls Hartmann after the carnage of the three-way fight between Ray, Messer, and Demise and turns him into a blithering idiot before the convention attendees and millions watching on live television, effectively ending Hartmann's political career. When they meet face-to-face Tachyon drops a final bombshell on Hartmann. Hartmann blames all his ills on something in his mind he calls Puppetman, but Tachyon tells him Puppetman is an artificial creation Hartmann has fabricated

so he can indulge his sadistic streak with a clean conscience. Hartmann's belief that Gimli's mind invaded his unborn child is just another construction on his part. Hartmann needs psychiatric treatment, but they can't take the chance of his true nature being revealed to the public and causing anti-wild card hysteria. Tachyon agrees to act as his analyst.

Tachyon is called to the Atlanta morgue to view Spector's headless corpse, which appears to still be living. A tiny bud has formed on the severed neck—and will eventually grow into another head. Tachyon suggests immediate cremation, and gets custody of the ashes. When he returns to his hotel room, Tachyon is forced to mind-control both Yeoman and Ackroyd during their emotional confrontation over Hiram Worchester's ultimate fate as Chrysalis's killer, thus straining both friendships, but at least preventing bloodshed between them.

Tachyon acquires a prosthetic hand (September 1988) to replace the one destroyed by Mackie Messer.

## 1989

Jerry Strauss relays his suspicions to Tachyon about David Butler and his apparent power to jump into other peoples' bodies. This ultimately results in Butler's arrest and subsequent escape. Butler jumps several policemen while breaking jail, confirming the existence of the jumper phenomenon.

Tachyon finds it more and more difficult to keep Blaise under control. Things come to a head when Cody Havero informs him bluntly that Blaise is probably a sociopath. Tachyon has to face reality, something he is not always good at. Complicating matters is the fact that Tachyon is deeply attracted to Havero. She is interested in him as well, but wants a commitment from him before consummating things. Tachyon, of course, dithers. It all hits the fan when Tachyon comes upon Blaise, who also loves Havero and realizes that Tachyon is his rival, mind-controlling her, forcing her to strip naked and preparing to rape her. Tachyon and Blaise fight. Tachyon loses control and tries to kill his grandson. Havero pulls him off, and Blaise runs away.

## JANUARY/FEBRUARY 1990

Tachyon eventually hires Jay Ackroyd to discover Blaise's whereabouts and the investigator reports that he's running wild with the Jumper gang and is involved in all sorts of criminal activities, including murder. Despite a warning from Ackroyd to be on the look-out, Tachyon allows himself to be lured to a hotel by a call from Cody. Instead of the long-anticipated consummation of their affair, Tachyon walks into a trap, lured to the hotel room by the jumper in Cody's body. Tachyon is attacked by Blaise and the Jumpers, and is jumped into the body of Kelly Jenkins, a Jumper wannabe. Blaise takes her (the jumped Tachyon, that is) to the Rox, where he beats her, imprisons her, and repeatedly rapes her. Tachyon loses track of time while imprisoned in her tiny, dark cell, and to her horror eventually discovers she's pregnant. Her first thought is to abort the child, but ultimately she decides to keep the baby girl, whom she names Illyana.

Tachyon realizes she must marshal every advantage she can, so she spends long hours training the body she's trapped in to recall her old mentat skills, with, however, minimal success. She does manage to build a mind shield to protect her and her child and acquires a low level of telepathy. When Tachyon informs Blaise that she's pregnant, Blaise exults. To escape her filthy cell Tachyon capitulates to Blaise, calling him "master." Blaise accepts the capitulation at face value.

In the meantime, the faux Tachyon (Kelly Jenkins in Tachyon's body) resigns from the Jokertown Clinic, ostensibly because of Havero's disappearance, but actually because Blaise wants Kelly away from the limelight

### DR. TACHYON — POWER LEVEL 9

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| +0 | +2 | +1 | +5 | +1 | +2 |
| 11 | 14 | 12 | 21 | 13 | 15 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +2/+1* | +4 | +5 | +8 |

**Flat-footed*

**SKILLS**

Bluff 4 (+6), Computers 2 (+7), Knowledge (art) 3 (+8), Knowledge (behavioral sciences) 6 (+11), Knowledge (history) 2 (+7), Knowledge (life sciences) 13 (+18), Knowledge (technology) 6 (+11), Language 5 (English, French, German, Russian, Spanish), Medicine 13 (+18), Notice 2 (+3), Perform (dance) 2 (+4), Perform (stringed instruments) 4 (+6), Pilot 6 (+8), Sense Motive 8 (+9)

**FEATS**

Attack Focus (ranged) 1, Connected, Defensive Roll 1, Equipment 5 (*Baby*)

*"Baby":* Takisian starship; Colossal, Str 55, Speed 10, Tou 13; Space Flight 8

**POWERS**

**Mind Shield 6**

**Super-Senses 5** (psionic awareness; precognition, Uncontrolled)

**Telepathy 9** (Subtle)

*Alternate Power:* **Mental Blast 4** (Sleep)
*Alternate Power:* **Mind Control 8** (Mental Link)

**COMBAT**

Attack +5 (melee), +6 (ranged), Grapple +5, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +6 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback –1 (-0 flat-footed), Initiative +2

**Abilities 26 + Skills 19 (76 ranks) + Feats 8 + Powers 30 + Combat 22 + Saves 13 = Total 118**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Tisianne brant Ts'ara sek Halima sek Ragnar sek Omian | **WC Name:** Dr. Tachyon |
| **Occupation:** Physician, geneticist | **WC Status:** Latent |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Takisian |
| **Birth:** circa 1900, Takis | **Death:** – |
| **Height:** 5 ft., 3 in. | **Weight:** 115 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Pale lilac | **Hair:** Shiny copper red with gold highlights |

so she can keep up the imposture. Kelly spends most of her time hanging with Blaise and other jumpers. When Black Shadow busts the Jumpers's headquarters, almost everyone believes Tachyon is actually dead and a memorial service is held for him at Jetboy's Tomb.

## AUGUST 1990

Tachyon finally manages to escape the Rox with the help of Black Shadow. They're separated and Tachyon washes up on the Jersey shore and makes her way to Turtle's junkyard, where Tudbury has been staying since staging his death. She finally gets a good meal, a good bath, and a good night's sleep. The military assault on the Rox begins the next day.

Tachyon convinces the Turtle to take her to the Rox to recover her real body, but by the time they get there Kelly has been taken away by Blaise. Tachyon realizes they're headed for *Baby*, who by now has healed herself and is again capable of interstellar flight. Tachyon and Turtle rush to the warehouse where the spaceship is kept, just in time to see it burst through the roof and head to the heavens. Turtle grabs it with his telekinesis, but the ship is just too powerful. It drags them along until they almost reach the edge of Earth's atmosphere and the Turtle has to let it go.

Although she's free, Tachyon is sunk in a pit of despair, but manages to pulls herself out after a failed suicide attempt. She goes to Japan and tries to convince Fortunato to help her, but he turns her down. Upon her return to the United States she's detained by the government and questioned about jumper activities by Philip Baron von Herzenhegen, but Mark Meadows's friend Sunshine ultimately breaks her free.

### WINTER 1991

Using a clue supplied by Fortunato, Tachyon contacts Jube, who admits to being a Network representative. She signs an open contract with the Network in return for transportation to Takis for herself, Jay Ackroyd, and Mark Meadows.

She's consternated to discover that the captain of her transport ship is none other than her hated cousin Zabb, who deserts his Network contract when they arrive on Takis and returns with Tachyon to House Ilkazam. During the ceremony where Taj, the long-time Ilkazam regent, formally relinquishes his power to Tachyon, Zabb points out that Tachyon is female—and a woman can't rule the family. The family elders agree, and Tachyon is banished to the women's quarters while Zabb gets his dream job.

Tachyon gets another shock on the night of the Crossing Festival, the most sacred Takisian holiday, when Blaise, who has taken over House Vayawanda, claims her as his, as according to Takisian social custom is his right since he'd impregnated her. In a blind instinct of survival, Tachyon snatches a knife from the buffet table and attacks Blaise. Durg prevents any harm to his master, but Tachyon has broken an ancient taboo, the armistice which always holds over Crossing. Ackroyd, who is secretly attending the ceremony, pops her back home. Her actions, though, cause the Ilkazam to be ejected from the Festival, and shatters the alliance Zabb has so carefully built up against Blaise.

Zabb argues now that Tachyon's unborn child is a political liability, and must be aborted. Tachyon categorically refuses, but Zabb categorically insists. This spurs Tachyon into rebellion. Ackroyd teleports her to a safe place where Illyana is born and spirited away, although Tachyon herself returns to the women's quarters where she helps organize Ilkazam's defense when it's clear Blaise is going to attack them.

Despite their long history of enmity, Tachyon and Zabb become lovers, and Zabb asks her to marry him. She refuses, but has a certain attraction to the idea. When Blaise captures Illyana and taunts Tachyon to come get her, she reluctantly puts the fate of her world above that of her child and refuses the bait. Ultimately, though, when Blaise sets off a world war by attacking six Psi Lord Houses at once, Tachyon formulates the strategy of bypassing an endless number of destructive battles and she, Zabb, and Mark Meadows lead a crack commando squad to capture Blaise in his headquarters in Vaya.

The plan ultimately works, though Tachyon is horrified to see Blaise shot in the head, ending her hopes of being jumped back to her real body. Before long, though, she realizes Blaise had jumped Zabb and is now in his body. She and Kelly force him to jump them both back into their respective original bodies. Tachyon has to agree to allow Blaise to go free, however. She does, but connives his capture by the Network, who takes him as payment for Zabb's reneging of his life contract. She and Kelly both watch as Blaise's skull is sawn open and his brain is removed to be placed in an irrigation monitor on a far-away world.

Tachyon is tired and confused. He feels he can't abandon his strife-torn world, especially since so many social reforms have been put into motion. He is now head of House Ilkazam, the most powerful figure on Takis. He dismantles the tradition of the women's quarters and offers equal rights to the mind-blind. When his best friend Mark Meadows asks him if he's ever coming back to Earth, he simply replies, "I don't know."

## ABILITIES

Tachyon has powerful telepathy, mind control (he can totally control three humans at once, although with that many his hold is weak and can break if he's distracted by, say, a physical assault on his person), and a potent mind shield. Given time, he can also penetrate all but the most very complex and powerful mind shields. He is trained in advanced alien technology in biology, biochemistry, and medicine. He can repair broken minds to a degree, but lacks the specialized training to do complete fixes.

Tachyon's other powers include: Mind-scrim (the creation of an artificial scene which he places in his target's mind to present a false picture of reality), deathlock (which when set causes total destruction of his mind if its invaded by another psyche), and he can detect mind control and track it back from the target to the source.

Tachyon plays several musical instruments quite well and has a baby grand piano and a Nagyvary violin, which he smashes in a fit of rage when he loses his right hand.

He speaks flawless English, French, German, Russian, and Spanish, as well as several Takisian languages.

Like all Psi Lords, from an early age on Takis Tisianne is extensively trained in self-defense and the use of various weapons, from swords to laser pistols.

The game stats reflect Dr. Tachyon for most of the decades he lived on Earth. After his unfortunate encounter with Mackie Messer, he suffered from the Disability of having only one hand, something he planned to address after returning to Takis.

# THE ENVOY

**Created by George R.R. Martin**

*"You couldn't help but like him. You couldn't help but agree with him."*

— Williams: "Witness" (Book I)

## DESCRIPTION

Harstein is intense-looking, handsome, slim, and clean shaven, but with such a thick beard that he has a perpetual 5 o'clock shadow. He favors turtlenecks and corduroy sports jackets with patched elbows. He has plastic surgery and grows a beard when he's released from prison.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** David Harstein | **WC Name:** The Envoy |
| **Occupation:** Negotiator, actor | **WC Status:** Ace |
| **Aliases:** Josh Davidson | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian (Jewish) |
| **Birth:** 1924, the Bronx, NYC | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** 5 ft., 9 in. | **Weight:** 150 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Dark brown | **Hair:** Dark, curly |

## THE ENVOY — POWER LEVEL 8

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| +0 | +0 | +0 | +2 | +3 | +3 |
| 10 | 10 | 11 | 15 | 16 | 17 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +0 | +3 | +3 | +7 |

**SKILLS**

Bluff 4 (+7), Diplomacy 8 (+11), Knowledge (current events) 4 (+6), Perform (acting) 4 (+7), Sense Motive 4 (+7)

**FEATS**

Attractive, Fascinate (Diplomacy), Second Chance (Diplomacy checks)

**POWERS**

**Pheromones 8**

**COMBAT**

Attack +1, Grapple +1, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +4 (+2 flat-footed), Knockback –0, Initiative +0

**Abilities 19 + Skills 6 (24 ranks) + Feats 3 + Powers 32 + Combat 10 + Saves 10 = Total 80**

## BACKGROUND

A fast-talking Jewish chess hustler from New York City, Harstein is recruited by Archibald Holmes for the Exotics For Democracy. He helps negotiate a number of peace agreements all over the world. Some of them even hold for awhile. Acting alone, he's present during the negotiations for the Peace of Jerusalem (1948), as a go-fer on Count Bernadotte's staff. Everybody likes him, though he's only a so-so go-fer. No one suspects who he really is, or the influence he subtly exerts over the proceedings during his comings and goings.

### 1950s

When he's brought to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee (1949), Harstein at first uses his powers to get them to declare everyone innocent of all charges, but once the congressmen are free of his command they charge him with using insidious mind control powers and find him in contempt of Congress. Harstein serves over two years in Alcatraz. Less than a year after his release, he's drafted under the Special Conscription Act, but never reports for duty and vanishes from public life. He changes his appearance, changes his name to Josh Davidson, and takes up stage acting.

## NEW POWER: PHEREMONES

| | |
|---|---|
| **Effect:** Emotion Control (love) | **Action:** Reaction (active) |
| **Range:** Sensory (scent) | **Duration:** Sustained (lasting) |
| **Saving Throw:** Will | **Cost:** 4 points per rank |

Your body emits exceptionally strong pheromones, bio-chemical cues that affect attraction. Anyone coming within (power rank x 5) feet of you must make a Will saving throw. On a failed save, the subject's attitude towards you becomes friendly. On a failure by 5 or more, it becomes helpful, and on a failure by 10 or more, the subject becomes fanatically devoted to you (see **Interaction**, *M&M*, page 175, for details). The subject gets a new Will save to shake off the effect for each interval on the **Time Table** (one minute, five minutes, and so forth) that passes.

A successful save means the subject is unaffected by your Pheromones but must make a new saving throw for each interval that passes on the **Time Table** while in your area. Spending a long period of time in close proximity to a character with Pheromones makes all but the strongest-willed likely to fall under the influence.

Your Pheromones affect others automatically, with no action or effort required on your part, although you still need to interact normally to talk to or order your newly cooperative "friends." Once affected, subjects can move outside your radius and remain under your influence until they successfully shake off the effect; those still inside your radius when they do must save against the power again on the following round. Another successful save staves off the effect for at least a minute (when a new save is required, and so on).

Since Pheromones are carried on the air, subjects that do not breathe—due to Immunity to Suffocation or Life Support, for example—are unaffected, and sensory effects that block scent can temporarily block the effect of your Pheromones as well.

## JULY 1988

Harstein is happily married to his wife, Rebecca, and they have two daughters, Sheila and Edie. Sheila is a delegate to the Democratic National Convention in Atlanta. He accompanies her, and both Tachyon and Jack Braun eventually recognize him. He and Jack have a reconciliation of sorts.

## ABILITIES

Harstein constantly emits powerful pheromones, making everyone like him and want to agree with him. Subjects that don't breathe, have sealed air-supplies, or the like are immune.

In later life he eschews using his powers, having come to believe he has no right to replace anyone else's opinions with his own.

# FADEOUT

**Created by George R.R. Martin**

*"She whirled and found herself staring into a pair of pretty blue eyes. Eyes, and nothing else, except for tendrils that might have been nerve endings trailing off them."*

— Wraith, meeting Fadeout.
Miller: Wraith's Story (Book III)

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Phillip Cunningham | **WC Name:** Fadeout |
| **Occupation:** Criminal | **WC Status:** Ace |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** Circa 1959 | **Death:** Late summer 1990 |
| **Height:** 6 ft. | **Weight:** 170 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Blue | **Hair:** Blond |

## DESCRIPTION

Cunningham is a handsome, fit-looking man who wears expensive clothes well.

He likes money, luxury, and women, and is extremely ambitious to obtain as much as all three as possible.

## BACKGROUND

A captain in the Shadow Fist Society, Cunningham is Brennan's boss (late 1986 through mid-1987) when Brennan clandestinely joins the Fists. When Brennan comes back to the city to investigate Chrysalis's death (July 1988), he and Cunningham form a brief alliance. Cunningham wants to take Kien's place as the head of the Shadow Fists, with Lazy Dragon as his chief lieutenant. He also wants to get his hands on Chrysalis's secret files, which contain interesting bits of information on many important and powerful New Yorkers. He uses Lazy Dragon to track Brennan to Chrysalis's secret lair beneath the Crystal Palace. Cunningham attacks Brennan, breaking their tenuous alliance, and escapes with some documents as the Palace is consumed by fire. Later, Brennan tricks Cunningham into coming to Quinn the Eskimo's pleasure dome on Long Island and relieves him of the papers, which actually consists of Chrysalis's personal diary.

## AUGUST 1990

Cunningham thinks Kien is on to his plan to take over the Shadow Fists when he's called into Kien's office where he unexpectedly finds Kien's headless body and the dead watch joker Kien kept in a jar on his desk. Cunningham takes the joker's body for Deadhead's use and calls Warlock, head of the Werewolves and his secret ally, to tell him the coup is on. He tracks down Deadhead, but before the disgusting ace can gobble the joker's tiny brain, they're captured by Immaculate Egrets and taken before Sui Ma, who wants to assume the leadership of the Shadow Fist Society herself. Fortunately Warlock and his Werewolves arrive in time to rescue him, and in the ensuing battle Fadeout kills Sui Ma.

Blaise, who is now running with the Jumper gang, is eventually identified as Kien's apparent killer. They track him down to an abandoned theater in the Bowery and Fadeout discovers Kien's head in the deep freeze. All, as usual, is not as it seems. Leslie Christian suddenly appears and reveals that he is actually Kien, who has been jumped into Christian's body by Blaise to set a trap for his disloyal lieutenant. The jumpers move Kien into Cunningham's younger and healthier body while depositing Cunningham in Christian's. Then Blaise shoots him in the head.

## ABILITIES

Cunningham can turn invisible. He can also make a limited amount of inert material (*e.g.*, his clothes, a small weapon) invisible. He's in good physical shape and trained in yoga, so he can control his breathing and remain quiet in one place for a long time. He doesn't enjoy killing, but if he has to, his weapon of choice is an icepick.

Fadeout's invisibility power has a quirk to it: if his eyes are invisible,

| FADEOUT | | | | | POWER LEVEL 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +2 | +2 | +2 | +2 | +1 | +1 |
| 14 | 15 | 14 | 15 | 13 | 12 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +5/+2* | +5 | +6 | +5 |

**Flat-footed*

**SKILLS**

Bluff 5 (+6), Diplomacy 4 (+5), Defensive Roll 3, Disable Device 4 (+6), Knowledge (streetwise) 8 (+10), Sense Motive 4 (+5), Stealth 11 (+13)

**FEATS**

Attack Focus (melee) 3, Connected, Dodge Focus 2, Elusive Target, Improved Defense, Improved Initiative, Improved Throw, Leadership, Move-by Action, Sneak Attack, Stunning Attack, Trance, Uncanny Dodge (auditory)

**POWERS**

**Concealment 4** (visual; Close Range, Selective; Blind if his eyes are invisible)

**COMBAT**

Attack +8 (melee), +5 (ranged), Grapple +10, Damage +2 (unarmed), Defense +9 (+4 flat-footed), Knockback -2 (-1 if flat-footed), Initiative +6

**Abilities 23 + Skills 9 (36 ranks) + Feats 19 + Powers 5 + Combat 24 + Saves 11 = Total 91**

light passes through them and he's blinded (**Blinded**, *M&M*, page 170). His Uncanny Dodge allows him to retain his dodge bonus, but he's still somewhat limited. Typically, he keeps his eyes visible, giving him only partial concealment, but still a substantial ability to hide.

# FATHER SQUID

**Created by John Jos. Miller**

*"Somehow she couldn't be afraid of someone who said things like, 'I would endeavor to assist you.' Who could?"*

— Miller: Wraith's Story (Volume III)

## DESCRIPTION

The height of a normal man and twice as broad, Father Squid normal dresses in a voluminous cassock, his hands hidden in flowing sleeves, his features shadowed by an enveloping hood. His skin is glabrous and dead gray in color. His eyes are round and slightly protruding and covered by constantly blinking nictating membranes. He has no nose, but a cluster of small tentacles, twitching and rustling, that cover his mouth like a weird, unkempt mustache. He makes faint squishing sounds when he moves, and always smells of the sea. His hands are large and have long, attenuated fingers. Circular depressions like vestigial suckers, are impressed all over his palms. He walks—or rather waddles—with ponderous dignity.

Father Squid speaks in careful, long, plodding sentences. He sleeps on a waterbed.

## BACKGROUND

Under the name Squidface, Father Squid fights in Vietnam as a member of the Joker Brigade. He makes sergeant four times and four times is busted down to private. He meets Daniel Brennan in 'Nam and they fight together on several missions. After Vietnam he sells his services around Asia and then runs with the Black Dog for awhile.

He repents of his violent ways when he converts to the Church of Jesus Christ, Joker, and becomes the pastor of Our Lady of Perpetual Misery. Quasiman is the caretaker of Our Lady of Perpetual Misery, and Father Squid keeps an eye on him and sometimes uses him for missions he feels Quasi's mind can cope with.

### 1980s and '90s

Father Squid is a joker delegate on the WHO tour (late 1986 to early 1987) and one of the delegates to the unsuccessful parley with Bloat before the assault on the Rox (September 1990).

Father Squid is saved from probable death by Quasiman when an arsonist burns down Our Lady of Perpetual Misery (September 16, 1993). His physical injuries are rather minor, but his anguish for the deaths of over a hundred parishioners and the loss of his church are great. He appears on *Peregrine's Perch*, as one of the group breaking the Card Shark conspiracy to the public (November 1993). As one of those with knowledge of the Black Trump, Father Squid is taken into custody by the government and held at Governor's Island (May 1994). He is eventually released.

Father Squid saves Fortunato from the Jokka Bruddas (twice!) in sum-

| FATHER SQUID | | | | | POWER LEVEL 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +6 | +0 | +3 | +1 | +2 | +1 |
| 23/13 | 10 | 16 | 12 | 14 | 12 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +5 | +6 | +2 | +5 |

**SKILLS**

Diplomacy 6 (+7), Gather Information 6 (+7), Intimidate 4 (+5), Knowledge (current events) 4 (+5), Knowledge (streetwise) 6 (+7), Knowledge (tactics) 4 (+5), Knowledge (theology and philosophy) 7 (+8), Language 1 (Latin), Medicine 3 (+5), Perform (oratory) 6 (+7), Profession (priest) 8 (+10), Survival 5 (+7)

**FEATS**

Benefit (priest), Connected, Improved Grab, Improved Initiative, Leadership

**POWERS**

**Enhanced Strength 10**

**Immunity 1 (drowning)**

**Protection 2**

**COMBAT**

Attack +6, Grapple +12, Damage +6 (unarmed), Defense +5 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback –2, Initiative +4

**Abilities 17 + Skills 15 (60 ranks) + Feats 5 + Powers 13 + Combat 22 + Saves 8 = Total 80**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Bob (last name unknown) | **WC Name:** Father Squid |
| **Occupation:** Priest | **WC Status:** Joker |
| **Aliases:** Squidface | **Ethnicity:** Unknown |
| **Birth:** Unknown | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** 6 ft. | **Weight:** 270 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Dark | **Hair:** None |

mer 2003.

## ABILITIES

Father Squid is amphibious (although he must surface for air every half-hour or so) and unusually strong and tough. He has military training and experience, is well versed in theology, and reads Latin (albeit rather slowly).

In addition to his joker talents and his military background, Father Squid is widely known as one of the most charitable and trustworthy citizens of Jokertown. They recognize his priestly status and tend to accede to his authority. His empathy and compassion in the face of the tremendous inhumanity surrounding him may be the good Father's greatest abilities.

# DR. BRADLEY LATOUR FINN

**Created by Melinda Snodgrass**

*"You never stop wanting and hoping and believing."*

— Dr. Cody Havero on her colleague.
Mixon and Snodgrass:
"A Dose of Reality" (Volume XIV)

## DESCRIPTION

Finn is a handsome blond-haired, blue-eyed man with a small pointed face and a riot of white curls, which run down his spine to form a mane. From the waist down he's a palomino pony with a luxurious, beautifully braided tail, which is his pride and joy.

## BACKGROUND

Finn is the son of successful movie producer and director G. Benton Finn and his wife, Alice. He grows up in a mansion in Bel Air, California, and attends the finest medical schools. Finn does his residency at Cedars in Los Angeles. In the summers between semesters he picks up money doing bit parts in films.

### AUGUST 1980

While working as an extra centaur in Roger Corman's *Jason and the Argonauts*, he helps his father investigate the sudden indisposition of Grace Kelly, who is starring in Benton Finn's current movie, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Kelly is unable to appear before the camera since her long-time make-up man, Stan Whitehorn-Humphries, has disappeared. Finn discovers the beauty of the ageless star is actually an artifact of Stan's deuce which gives her youthful looks that last only 24 hours. After that she appears to be her normal age of 51.

During Finn's investigation he barely avoids being conned into making a porn flick before discovering that a gang of jealous starlets has kidnapped Stan in the hope of making Kelly retire and open up roles for younger actresses. Like, hopefully, them. Finn also discovers that Stan and Kelly were actually married back in the early 1950s. When he brings Stan back to her, Kelly decides to retire so she and Stan can live out the rest of their lives together.

### 1985

After graduating from medical school Finn puts in a stint in the Peace Corps in Kenya. Since he is interested in joker physiology, he volunteers at Kilango Cha Jaha, which is the village where all of Kenya's jokers live. The local clinic is run by Dr. Etienne Faneuil, who Finn quickly comes to idolize for his tireless work ethic. But despite all of Faneuil and Finn's best efforts, the clinic seems to be a death trap. There are the usual problems associated with Third World sinkholes, among them funding, equipment, staffing, *etc.* Finn gets his father to put together a planeload of supplies and equipment for the clinic, but delay after delay keeps the plane on the ground in California. Benton finally tells him that some powerful government types are sandbagging their attempt to send the relief supplies. Finn gets suspicious and is shocked to ultimately discover that Faneuil has been using AIDS-tainted needles to spread the disease among the Kenyan jokers so thoroughly that nearly all of the 7,000 jokers in the village have it.

Faneuil's hired killers try to lock Finn in the burning clinic, but he

| DR. BRADLEY LATOUR FINN | | | | | POWER LEVEL 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +1/+3 | +2 | +1/+2 | +2 | +1 | +1 |
| 12/16 | 14 | 13/15 | 14 | 13 | 13 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +2 | +5 | +3 | +4 |

**SKILLS**

Bluff 5 (+6), Knowledge (life sciences) 8 (+10), Knowledge (popular culture) 1 (+3), Medicine 10 (+11), Notice 4 (+5), Perform (acting) 6 (+7), Profession (actor) 6 (+7), Profession (physician) 10 (+11), Sense Motive 6 (+7)

**FEATS**

Benefit (wealth)

**POWERS**

**Additional Limbs 2** (legs, +4 bonus vs. trip attacks)

**Growth 4** (large; +4 Str, +2 Con, ; Continuous; Limited to his lower horse body, Permanent)

**Speed 1** (10 mph)

**COMBAT**

Attack +2 (includes –1 due to size), Grapple +4 (no size modifier), Damage +3 (hooves), Defense +2 (includes –1 due to size), Knockback –5 (includes –4 due to size), Initiative +2

**DRAWBACKS**

Disability (centauroid form, common, minor, –2 points)

**Abilities 19 + Skills 14 (56 ranks) + Feats 1 + Powers 11 + Combat 12 + Saves 7 – Drawbacks 2 = Total 62**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Bradley LaTour Finn | **WC Name:** None |
| **Occupation:** Physician | **WC Status:** Joker |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian (palomino) |
| **Birth:** Circa 1956, Bel Air, California | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** Tall | **Weight:** 400 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Blue | **Hair:** Blond/white |

escapes and heads for the Great Rift Valley where he seeks refuge among a herd of impala. The killers are hot on his trail, but are foiled by friendly game wardens who think the assassins are poachers. They save Finn's life, but both Faneuil and his loyal nurse, Margaret Durand, vanish.

Finn becomes the first joker doctor at the Jokertown Clinic (1987). He runs the clinic when Tachyon disappears (February 1990).

## 1994

Finn wants to be officially made chief of medicine, and is extremely disappointed when the clinic's Board of Directors gives the position to Clara van Renssaeler, who is an outsider with no experience in actually doing medicine as opposed to doing medical research. She also is clearly disturbed by the presence of jokers and at first they clash, but gradually they're drawn together and Finn comes to love her. He takes Clara to the

Lamia's apartment, unaware of their mother/daughter relationship, but hoping to show Clara a happy joker/nat couple, and is instrumental in their eventual reconciliation.

Finn is one of the reasons Clara destroys the Black Trump. Unfortunately, the Card Sharks have bugged her computer and in an effort to blackmail her into recreating it, kidnap both Finn and her mother. Clara agrees to their demands after Faneuil tortures Finn, but the three captives fake an experimental virus leak, and escape in the ensuing confusion, with Finn being wounded as they flee.

As one of those who know about the Black Trump, Finn is taken into custody by the government after a SCARE raid of the Jokertown Clinic led by Lady Black in May. He is freed by a counter-raid on the maximum security prison on Governor's Island led by Jay Ackroyd. He borrows his dad's Learjet to take Jay Ackroyd, Jerry Strauss, Sascha Starfin, and himself on a Shark hunt to Australia, following Brandon van Renssaeler's trail.

Initially things don't go well, as he's recognized immediately by Card Shark Eric Fleming and the whole group is captured. Fleming plans to use them as shark bait, but Jerry Strauss's seduction skills save the day, as, posing as Peregrine, he gets Fleming to agree to a last tryst, overpowers him, impersonates him, and releases the others. Safely back on shore, Ackroyd tries to get Finn to agree to return to the States, feeling that at this point he's more of a liability than an asset, but Finn refuses to give up the Black Trump chase. Ackroyd reluctantly agrees to allow the doctor to accompany him to Hong Kong on the next phase of the investigation.

Finn's with Belew and Ackroyd when they discover the location of Casaday's deserted lab in Myanmar. They go off to Guangdong, China, after the Sharks and Belew send Finn to cover the airport with some of his South China pirate allies. Finn and the pirates get in a firefight with local security personnel. When the Card Sharks load the blimp with the

Black Trump, Finn makes a desperate charge and manages to board the blimp just as it starts to rise from the ground. He's taken prisoner by the Sharks, but breaks free when Ackroyd and Belew crash their helicopter into the blimp's gondola, creating enough confusion to allow Ackroyd to get the upper hand and teleport away most of the canisters that contain the virus.

In the aftermath of the Card Shark affair, Ackroyd, keeping the promise he made to Brandon van Renssaeler, pops Finn to Dr. Tachyon's bedroom on Takis. Finn manages to return to the Jokertown Clinic by summer 2003.

## ABILITIES

Finn has no wild card powers, except for somewhat enhanced physical strength and endurance. He is a well-trained doctor, specializing in joker physiology.

# JOHN FORTUNE

**Created by Gail Gerstner-Miller**

*"You've got the genes, you've got the talent. Go knock 'em dead."*

— Jerry Strauss, pumping John up for his first television appearance.
Miller: *Death Draws Five* (Book XVII

## DESCRIPTION

John's a handsome lad with café-au-lait skin, kinky burnished gold hair, and large, almond-shaped eyes.

## BACKGROUND

John Fortune is the son of Peregrine and Fortunato. His father is Josh McCoy. He has as normal a childhood as someone with a wealthy, internationally-known mother like Peregrine can have. Truth is, Peregrine is over-protective, and as soon as John gets old enough to attend school arranges for surreptitious bodyguard protection, often from the Ackroyd and Creighton Agency.

### OCTOBER 2002

John attends the Jokertown Boys Halloween bash with an apparent 16-year-old Elizabeth Taylor as Velvet Brown as his date (actually, Jerry Strauss as his bodyguard), and gets to ride the unicorn. And no, that is not a euphemism.

### SUMMER 2003

John goes to Las Vegas with Peregrine and Jerry Strauss (as Creighton) as his bodyguard, and while attending the Siegfried and Ralph show at the Mirage, meets the Living Gods, which are the opening act for the animal tamers. They greet John Fortune effusively and ask him about the amulet they'd given Peregrine to hold for him before he was born, and remind him that he's the blessed of Ra. John is intrigued by all this, but then the Gods have to go as the show begins. Unfortunately, one of the tigers attacks Ralph and drags him off the stage in a smear of blood. John's card turns in the ensuing panic. His body temperature rises and he starts to glow a pleasant orangish-yellow. Jerry had hurt his ankle in the initial chaos of the tiger attack, and John can not only sense the nature of Jerry's wound, he also heals it. He realizes he's an ace and goes backstage to heal Ralph as well.

Later, John and Peregrine (as well as the Living Gods and Siegfried and Ralph) hold a live television interview which is interrupted when a group of armed men suddenly attack the stage. John is knocked unconscious at the beginning of the assault and remembers nothing of it. When he comes to he's being dragged around by armed thugs, one of whom he recognizes as Jerry Strauss. They toss him into a cell in a dungeon-like room block. Jerry springs him later that night and they flee St. Dympna's along with Cameo and John Nighthawk. Cameo proves surprisingly adept at hot-wiring cars, and the two pairs of aces split in the parking lot, Jerry and John Fortune heading upstate to hide out at a summer camp that is one of the charities Jerry supports.

John Fortune sleeps the day away. When he awakens it's dark again and somehow the Allumbrados are already on their trail. He and Jerry slip off into the forest while a team of other Creighton operatives (Sascha Starfin, Peter Pann, and Elmo Schaeffer) fortified by the addition of Billy Ray hold off the Allumbrados. John and Jerry wander in the dark until they stumble upon a driveway and a watch-gnome. Right about then a couple of Allumbrado gunmen find them. Jerry is wounded in a short firefight as John Fortune hightails it through the woods.

Fortune finds a country church where he spends the night, then a country store where he buys some food. He's beset by Allumbrado goons in the store's parking lot, but rescued by an angel who appears out of nowhere in a battered VW van and spirits him away, suggesting a trip to Branson, Missouri.

| JOHN FORTUNE | | | | | POWER LEVEL 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +1 | +1 | +0 | +1 | +1 | +1 |
| 12 | 12 | 11 | 13 | 12 | 13 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +0 | +4 | +4 | +4 |

**SKILLS**

Knowledge (popular culture) 4 (+5), Notice 2 (+3), Sense Motive 2 (+3)

**FEATS**

Benefit (wealth)

**POWERS**

**Healing 8** (Total)

**COMBAT**

Attack +0, Grapple +1, Damage +1 (unarmed), Defense +2 (+1 flat-footed), Knockback –0, Initiative +1

**Abilities 13 + Skills 2 (8 ranks) + Feats 1 + Powers 24 + Combat 4 + Saves 10 = Total 54**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** John Fortune | **WC Name:** None |
| **Occupation:** None | **WC Status:** Black Queen/ace (card turned 2003)—nat |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian/African/Asian |
| **Birth:** Mid-June 1987, NYC | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** Tall | **Weight:** Slim |
| **Eyes:** Dark | **Hair:** Burnished gold |

John Fortune is intrigued by the beautiful Midnight Angel and excited by the prospect of an adventurous road trip. He'll go anywhere she says, and it's not long before the youngster develops quite a crush on his attractive rescuer. He saves her from the Witness (the big one) with some judicious driving when they stop in Yazoo City to visit her mother's grave, and is part thrilled, part horrified to take Bruckner's Short Cut when the Highwayman and Billy Ray pick them up for the final leg of the trip.

They stop to make repairs part way through Bruckner's Short Cut and John Fortune is more than a little crestfallen to come upon Ray and the Angel in a compromising clinch. He loses control of himself and accidentally burns Ray's hand when he tries to help him up into the lorry's cab. They finally arrive at Barnett's Peaceable Kingdom in Branson, and John Fortune meets his biological father, Fortunato, for the first time.

They don't have too much time together before John realizes something is terribly wrong. His temperature increases geometrically and while he's not actually burning up himself, his surroundings are smoldering. He realizes he has to take a chance on Tachyon's Trump virus lest he set everything around him aflame. He steels himself to inject the serum, but the syringe melts when he handles it. He's deathly afraid. Fortunato tells him not to be—that he'll fix things. Fortunato takes his son in his arms and holds him and when an unmeasurable moment of time passes, the wild card virus is gone from John Fortune's body and Fortunato is dead from exhaustion.

## ABILITIES

John Fortune briefly has healing powers that can mend non-fatal wounds. He also has an escalating body temperature, eventually hot enough to spontaneously cause burns, to which he is immune. There's no knowing how high it might have gone if it hadn't been stopped. He only has his powers for a short while before Fortunato's intervention removes the wild card from his system.

# FORTUNATO

**Created by Lewis Shiner**

*"She said that you couldn't pay the price of being an ace anymore. That the world weighed heavy on you and you had to leave it behind."*

— John Fortune, quoting Peregrine on Fortunato. Miller: *Death Draws Five* (Book XVII)

## DESCRIPTION

Fortunato is a tall, emaciated African-American. His forehead becomes swollen when he's energized. His mixed racial ancestry is shown in his dark golden skin and almond-shaped eyes.

## BACKGROUND

Born of a black father who was a pimp and a Japanese mother, Fortunato grew up poor and hard on the streets of Harlem. At the age of 14 he has the idea of running a string of high-class prostitutes trained by his mother in the arts, sexual and otherwise. He called them his geishas.

### 1969

Fortunato's card turns while he's having sex with one of his geishas when she introduces him to tantric magic. This occurs in the middle of a murder spree wherein some madman has carved up several of his geishas with a knife. While out walking and meditating about his new-found powers, Fortunato finds himself in the alley where the killer's latest victim was found. He reconstructs the crime from the bare traces of blood, perfume, and hair left by the victim, and in his astral body finds the trail of the killer. Fortunato finds a teenaged boy who has killed 14 women, three of them his geishas, and who gives him the first intimations of the dread thing that is TIAMAT.

### 1979

Ten years go by with Fortunato unable to uncover much new information regarding the conspiracy of which the murder of his girls was only a small part. While tracking down a street gang connected with the crimes, he finds a strange copper red coin. The coin leads him to a Masonic cult run by a descendant of Giuseppe Balsamo, better known to the world as Cagliostro, a noted mountebank and fraud, who experienced a genuine mysterious encounter late in life and went on to found the Egyptian Freemasons. Fortunato realizes these Masons were connected to the murder of his girls and he eventually destroys their headquarters, killing most of the cultists. Unknowingly, this paves the way for the Astronomer to lead the remnants of the cult.

## 1986

Fortunato, believing the Masons to be behind the appearance of the Swarm, keeps after them and leads the assault that destroys their headquarters in the Cloisters. He also plays a vital role in the final attack on the Swarm Mother, where he becomes friends with Yeoman.

Fortunato spends Wild Card Day 1986 trying to rescue the other aces who were at the Cloisters from death at the hands of the Astronomer. He fails spectacularly in the case of Kid Dinosaur, who is literally torn to pieces before Fortunato's horrified gaze, but is more successful with others. He brings Water Lily to what he believes is the safest place in the city, Aces High, where as usual Hiram Worchester is hosting an aces-only Wild Card Day dinner. But the Astronomer appears disguised as a waiter and trashes the place. Peregrine and Water Lily live through the attack, but Modular Man accidentally gets blown to bits by a disoriented Croyd Crenson.

Fortunato leaves the wrecked restaurant with Peregrine to resume his quest after the Astronomer, and they go to her apartment and make love. Fortunato has never had sex with an ace before, and is energized beyond all experience, so much so that the power overflows him as a bright white aura. The Astronomer attacks and destroys Peregrine's apartment, but both aces are unharmed. Fortunato has a final showdown with his long-time foe in the skies over Manhattan. He is tested to the core of his abilities, but finally defeats the Astronomer, and is shocked to discover in his moment of victory that the Astronomer had not called the Swarm down to the Earth, but rather was going to summon the Network for help against the Swarm.

The realization that he'd been wrong about the Masons for all those years hangs heavy on Fortunato. For all his claims of wisdom, he realizes he is still only a child, acting on impulse and not enlightenment. He knows he must reassess his life. Though he could easily kill the powerless Astronomer, he lets the old man fall harmlessly into the East River, and simply walks away. He decides he can no longer take responsibility for the lives of others, and decides to retreat to the Shoin-ji Temple in Hara, Japan. He leaves the business to his mother, Ichiko, and departs the next morning on a freighter bound for the East.

## 1987

He lives in Japan for many months, meditating, sight-seeing, and investigating the "water business," until the WHO-sponsored world tour comes in and Peregrine finds him because she's worried about Hiram's recent behavior. When they meet, Fortunato is surprised to see that she's pregnant and that he's the father of her child. Fortunato tells Peregrine he'll do what he can for Hiram, but that his powers are gone; he'd used up everything he had while battling the Astronomer.

He finally tracks Hiram down to a seedy hotel and discovers that the big ace owes some Japanese gangsters money. He offers to pay Hiram's debt, but the yakuza, figuring Hiram was going to welsh, have already sent an assassin after him. Fortunato runs into Tachyon and they have an awkward moment in which the alien tells Fortunato that he still has his powers but his mind is simply conflicted and he's blocking them. Fortunato doesn't believe him, but realizes Tachyon is right when his powers return after an encounter with a bar girl, and he saves Hiram from the yakuza ace.

## 1990

None of this has changed Fortunato's mind, however. Fortunato and Jayewardne travel to Hokkaido to Dogen's zen monastery, seeking a way to deal with their powers. Miranda writes him occasional letters, including notice of his mother's death, but he never answers them. Tachyon appears at his monastery in Kelly Jenkins' body, but he turns down her appeal for help. He does, however, tell Tachyon that Jube the Walrus is not a joker, which proves to be useful information.

## SUMMER 2003

Fortunato is summoned early one morning to Dogen's quarters and is astonished to see Digger Downs. The reporter asks him about his reaction to the news that his son's card has turned. Fortunato, of course, has heard nothing of this. Digger informs him that swarms of reporters are heading for the monastery. Fortunato decides he must leave so the monastery's serenity will be preserved, but he has nowhere to go. Digger suggests he come back to New York. Fortunato hesitates, but Dogen suggests he take Digger up on the offer. The abbot realizes Fortunato has been unhappy lately and that maybe another walk in the world will help him decide if he wants to remain a monk.

When they arrive at New York, Fortunato dumps Digger and ends up in Jokertown, where he's confronted by a gang called the Jokka Bruddas. He's astonished to learn about the legends that have sprung up about him. It's generally believed that Fortunato is dead, that he'd flown up into the sky and fought with the Devil all night, but that he was eventually defeated and the Devil took his soul to Hell because he was a pimp and a whore-runner. This urban myth is supported by the murals in the new Our Lady of Perpetual Misery, which depict a thin black man with a bulging forehead and an immense phallus, who hurls thunderbolts as he floats in the air. He has become, Father Squid informs him, a fertility god who showers both fecundity and destruction upon his people. Pregnant jokers pray to him so their children will be normal. Or at least not hideous. He is also a cult figure to joker youth gangs.

Fortunato sees Peregrine at the Jokertown Clinic. She's in bad shape, having been severely wounded by the Allumbrados in Las Vegas. Only

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Unknown | **WC Name:** Fortunato |
| **Occupation:** Pimp, later monk | **WC Status:** Ace (card turned early 1969) |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** African/Asian (Japanese) |
| **Birth:** 1940, Harlem, NYC | **Death:** Summer 2003 |
| **Height:** 6 ft., 4 in. | **Weight:** 170 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Black | **Hair:** Black |

an immediate medevac by Learjet to the Jokertown Clinic saved her life. She reminds him that she's never asked him for anything. Now she asks him to bring John Fortune safely back home. Fortunato tells her that he'll do what he can. Outside the clinic, he's ambushed by the Jokka Bruddas. They beat him senseless and take him to their headquarters, an abandoned apartment building across the street from the new Our Lady of Perpetual Misery.

There the Bruddas's spokesman tells him that they're going to fillet him, cook him, and eat him, but first they decide to tenderize him by beating him. Fortunato can do nothing but take it, though as he slides into unconsciousness his powers return from where he'd locked them up deep inside all those years, and literally blow the gang members to pieces. Fortunato also unleashes a mental cry for help that brings Father Squid on the run. He's taken to the Jokertown Clinic where he barely clings to life.

Fortunato wakes up in his astral form, hovering over his battered body in the hospital bed. Clearly, his powers have returned. He learns about the search for his son from Josh McCoy's mind, and heads out in his astral form to look for him. He reaches Camp Xavier Desmond and learns about the events of the previous evening. He realizes John Fortune can be anywhere in the vicinity. He must try another tactic to find him, and for that he needs more power.

Fortunato can feel the energy in the rich farmland below him. He sinks down into the dirt and charges himself with more energy than the tantric ritual ever imparted. He goes back in time to the night before and follows events to the present where he discovers John Fortune is at a country store surrounded by Allumbrados. Fortunato is on the astral plane and cannot interfere physically. All he can do is call for help and hope his cry falls upon a receptive mind.

It does. The Midnight Angel comes to his son's rescue. Fortunato watches approvingly as she kicks major Allumbrado butt, bundles John Fortune into an ancient VW van, and heads off to, of all places, Branson, Missouri. Fortunato is not exactly sure why she's taking John Fortune there, but he doesn't have the time to dwell on it. He realizes he has to get back to his body in the Jokertown Clinic before it's damaged by his spirit's absence. He arrives just as Dr. Finn is about to defibrillate him.

Fortunato is later disturbed by the sudden and violent attack of the Witness (the older one) on the Jokertown Clinic, but the Allumbrado ace proves no match for the resurrected Fortunato. Taking to heart lessons he learned in battling the Astronomer, Fortunato quickly dispatches his foe, and, adding to his legend, ascends again into the sky in his white hospital gown.

He and Digger Downs go to Branson themselves. To Fortunato's surprise, Leo Barnett is quite eager to meet with him. They discuss the possibility of joining forces. From the top of his penthouse overlooking the Peaceable Kingdom, Barnett tempts him with the riches of the world—fame, sex, and money. Fortunato turns Barnett down, passing the test of temptation. He decides that when this affair is over he'll return to the monastery still a humble monk, not shuttered away from the world but as one with room in his life for his son, his family, and his friends.

Fortunato realizes the ultimate confrontation with the Allumbrados is coming, and he must be energized again. He attends a meeting of MAGOG in his astral form and draws energy from the 5,000 ecstatic worshipers, leaving a little of himself behind, as well. He is now well prepared for battle.

He meets John Fortune for the first time as Billy Ray and the Midnight Angel bring his son safely to the Peaceable Kingdom, but he realizes all is not well. John Fortune would have burned him when they embraced if Fortunato hadn't put up a protective shield. The boy is fiery hot, although it doesn't seem to be affecting him yet. Fortunato begins to suspect John Fortune might not have really drawn an ace after all.

Through the night John Fortune's temperature increases geometrically. Soon they have to keep him in the bathtub lest he set his surroundings on fire. Fortunato confers with Jerry Strauss and they decide that the only thing to do is try Tachyon's Trump virus. Jerry heads off to the

## FORTUNATO — POWER LEVEL 12

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| +1 | +2 | +2 | +3 | +4 | +3 |
| 13 | 14 | 14 | 16 | 18 | 17 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +12/+2* | +6 | +5 | +10 |

**WITHOUT FORCE FIELD*

### SKILLS

Diplomacy 4 (+7), Intimidate 6 (+9), Knowledge (arcane lore) 10 (+13), Knowledge (business) 6 (+9), Knowledge (streetwise) 10 (+13), Language 1 (Japanese), Notice 8 (+12), Profession (Kama Sutra) 12 (+16), Profession (pimp) 7 (+11), Sense Motive 8 (+12)

### FEATS

Attack Focus (ranged) 2, Attack Specialization (mystic blast), Attractive, Benefit 2 (wealth), Contacts, Seize Initiative, Trance

### POWERS

**Astral Form 10**

**Flight 3** (50 mph)

**Force Field 10** (Impervious 5)

**Magic 12** (**Mystic Blast 12**; *Alternate Powers)*

**Mental Communication 12**

**Mind Control 12** (Sustained; Sight-Dependent)

**Super-Speed 6** (Tiring)

**Mind Reading 12** (Sustained; Sensory Link)

**Mind Shield 5**

**Super-Senses 6** (psychic awareness, sense psychic energy [ranged, acute, tracking])

### COMBAT

Attack +4 (melee), +6 (ranged), +8 (mystic blast), Grapple +5, Damage +1 (unarmed), +12 (mystic blast), Defense +8 (+4 flat-footed), Knockback –8 (–1 without force field), Initiative +2

### DRAWBACKS

Power Loss (all powers; if he does not perform tantric rituals to recharge his *rasa,* –6 points)

**Abilities 32 + Skills 18 (72 ranks) + Feats 9 + Powers 115 + Combat 24 + Saves 13 – Drawbacks 6 = Total 205**

airport to get a dose from the Jokertown Clinic, but is prevented from leaving the hotel by the Allumbrados assault. John Nighthawk shows up and he and Fortunato come to an accommodation. Nighthawk uses Blood to go to the Jokertown Clinic and get the Trump, but when they hand the syringe to John Fortune, it melts. Nighthawk suggests there's just one thing left to do, takes off his glove, and approaches the boy, but Fortunato stops him.

It's Fortunato versus the wild card virus as he stops time, goes into his astral form and sinks down into his son's body, breaking into a million fragments to fight the virus on a cellular level. It is the longest, most difficult battle in his life, and although ultimately he's triumphant and rids John Fortune of the wild card virus, the energy drain on Fortunato's own body proves too great, and he dies.

The man Tachyon called the most powerful ace ever passes from this world, having willingly laid down his life for his son.

## ABILITIES

Fortunato's many abilities are powered by tantric magic, the main thrust of which is intromission, or bodily retention of semen after an orgasm, as semen is the *rasa*, the juice of power, the *shakti*. When energized he feels the power pulsing and stirring at the base of his spine.

Fortunato's powers include: the ability to slow time around himself to a near standstill while still functioning at normal speed himself (Super-Speed), astral projection, telepathy, mind control (requiring eye contact with the intended subject), heightened sensory awareness, animation of the dead through sexual intercourse, reading auras, the ability to experience someone else's surroundings if his sperm is in their body, the ability to stop organs from functioning, the ability to follow energy trails emitted by living things as well as lines of psychic power left shimmering in the air like heat waves, projection of a force field that can stop flying shrapnel, the projection of another kind of force field that can stop mental energy being used as a projectile, the ability to extract pure *prana* (energy) from his body and use it as projectiles from bullet to softball size, the ability to levitate, float, and fly with his physical body. A few of these abilities are power stunts of his Magic power in *M&M* game terms, and Fortunato is no doubt capable of various others as well.

Fortunato's powers have sharpened his senses. Natural odors (for example, decaying vegetables) don't bother him, but man-made smells (for example, smog or insecticide) do. He doesn't eat sugar, meat, or preservatives if he can help it. He gave up cocaine soon after getting his powers, and when he needs to achieve an altered state he used grass or mushrooms or fresh coca leaves.

His command of the Japanese language is flawless.

# GOLDEN BOY

**Created by Walter Jon Williams**

*"I had my time, and it's gone. And when I had the chance, I couldn't even save my own integrity."*

— Jack Braun on himself. Williams: "Witness" (Book I)

## DESCRIPTION

Jack has rugged good looks and wears clothes well. He dresses in old Army fatigues for action, of course surrounded by his golden force field.

Jack smokes unfiltered Camel cigarettes and is a serial philanderer. He's afraid of heights, as a long fall is one of the few things that can kill him.

Jack continues to party and perhaps drink too much. He gets a lot of girls, but stays with none of them for long. He still looks to be 25 years old.

## BACKGROUND

Jack is born to a farming family in North Dakota, and wants out from the start. An indifferent student, he's an excellent football player and a well-known actor in local pageants and amateur theater. Jack is a World War II veteran who fought with the 5th Division in Italy. He was a master sergeant with a Bronze Star and three Purple Hearts. An Army buddy whose father is in the theater in New York City gets him a couple of minor roles in plays before his card turns.

### 1946

Archibold Holmes recruits him for the Exotics For Democracy (the Four Aces) and he meets Earl Sanderson, Jr., who becomes his best friend as they travel around the world trying to make it safe for democracy. Among other missions, they hunt Nazi war criminals, help kick Perón out of Argentina, and set up a China peace plan that unfortunately fails to last for very long.

### 1948

With EFD activities waning, Jack goes to Hollywood where he pulls down a salary of $10,000 a week while taking acting and singing lessons. The studio's having trouble coming up with a proper script, but at last *Golden Boy* is filmed, a highly fictionalized version of the events in Argentina that makes Jack Braun (or Jack Brown, as he's called in the movie) the hero and minimizes everyone else's contributions, particularly Sanderson's. As the result of some drunken partying, Braun collects his first wife, a Hollywood starlet named Kim Wolfe.

### 1950s, `60s and `70s

After work on his second picture, Braun is subpoenaed in 1949 to appear before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, where he breaks down and turns against his comrades as a friendly witness. Consumed by guilt over betraying Earl and the others, the next year he asks to go to Korea. He's commissioned a lieutenant colonel and kicks major North Korean butt. He's awarded the Medal of Honor and sent home by the government amid speculation General Douglas MacArthur doesn't want any competition as the biggest star in the Korean theater.

Jack continues to make pictures, but they never do as well as expected. Kim divorces him, as do his next two wives. He moves from Metro to Warner, but the pictures just keep going worse. Finally, he ends up on television as Tarzan for four seasons on NBC (1961 to 1964). During this time Orson Welles considers him for the role of Golden Boy in his epic movie *Blythe*, but Jack turns the part down. He's sick of playing Golden Boy. He does get a one-night-stand with Marilyn Monroe out of it, however, so it's not a total loss. Jack goes on to make a fortune in real estate. By the 1970s he's hated by many in the ace community.

### 1986 and `87

The Swarm attack brings him back into action. He discovers that many younger aces don't really know who he is, and that perhaps he's found a

## GOLDEN BOY — POWER LEVEL 10

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| +12 | +2 | +2 | +0 | +0 | +1 |
| 34/14 | 15 | 14 | 10 | 10 | 12 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +13 | +10 | +6 | +4 |

**SKILLS**

Acrobatics 4 (+6), Knowledge (business) 5 (+5), Knowledge (civics) 5 (+5), Knowledge (current events) 2 (+2), Knowledge (tactics) 3 (+3), Language 1 (German), Perform (acting) 3 (+4), Pilot 4 (+6), Profession (actor) 5 (+5)

**FEATS**

Attack Focus (melee) 3, Attractive, Benefit 3 (wealth), Diehard, Power Attack

**POWERS**

**Enhanced Strength 20**

**Immunity 1** (aging)

**Protection 11** (Impervious 6)

**Super-Strength 4** (*heavy load:* 22 tons)

**COMBAT**

Attack +7 (melee), +4 (ranged), Grapple +22, Damage +12 (unarmed), Defense +6 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback –9, Initiative +2

**Abilities 15 + Skills 8 (32 ranks) + Feats 9 + Powers 46 + Combat 20 + Saves 16 = Total 114**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Jack Braun | **WC Name:** Golden Boy |
| **Occupation:** Former actor | **WC Status: Ace** (card turned September 15, 1946) |
| **Aliases:** Judas Ace | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** 1924, North Dakota | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** 6 ft., 2 in. | **Weight:** 190 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Blue | **Hair:** Blond |

way to be a hero again. When he hears of the WHO-sponsored world tour, he gets in touch with Senator Gregg Hartmann, a man whom he admires, and offers to foot part of the bill if he can take part in it. Jack's still unpopular with some aces, especially Hiram Worchester and Tachyon, and doesn't fit in well, although he distinguishes himself during the firefight at the Nur camp in Syria and at least makes a good effort at capturing the Great Ape on Sri Lanka. In India he visits the temple built on the spot where Earl Sanderson saved Gandhi from an assassin's bullet. In Paris he's peremptorily mind-controlled by Tachyon in order to safely dispose of a terrorist bomb and he helps Tachyon break another terrorist plot while tracking down his previously unknown grandson. Tachyon comes to forgive him for his testimony before HUAC.

### JULY 1988

Jack attends the Democratic National Convention in Atlanta as the head of the California delegation and staunch Hartmann supporter, of whom he's an unwitting puppet. He fights both Mackie Messer and Demise, narrowly avoiding death each time while protecting Sara Morgenstern and Senator Hartmann, respectively. He thinks he's solved the mystery of the secret ace at the convention and at a press conference he defies Barnett to prove he's not an ace. A somewhat nonplused Barnett agrees to a scrutinized blood test, the results of which are, of course, negative. Jack realizes he's screwed up again. His accusations only shift more votes to Barnett. Only after Hartmann wins the nomination does Jack realize Hartmann is the secret ace.

## ABILITIES

Jack glows with a bright golden aura while using his powers, an indication of the biological force field that lies behind many of his abilities. The force field is automatic, not controlled, and protects him from most forms of kinetic, electric, and radiant attack. It (and he) cannot be taken by surprise, making the effect Protection rather than a Force Field power in game terms. Jack has super-strength, is invulnerable, and never seems to age.

Jack's force field comes up whenever he exerts his enhanced Strength or is threatened with a source of harm (whether he knows it or not). Like many wild carders, Golden Boy's superhuman strength is somewhat limited by realistic concerns of leverage and momentum; on early missions with the Four Aces, he learns that the impact of a speeding car, for example, still throws him some distance, even while leaving him unhurt. Likewise, while he can bend tank cannons into knots, it's difficult for him to actually lift them without sinking into the ground, which is why he usually overturns them, tears off their treads, or bends their gun barrels (or all three) instead.

Jack understands German but doesn't speak it with any facility.

# ZOE HARRIS

**Created by Sage Walker**

*"She bought it with the Fists' money, but she figured it was a business expense. Anything that could distract her enough not to scream was a business expense."*

— Walker: Zoe Harris's Story (Book XV)

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Zoe Harris | **WC Name:** Blowjob |
| **Occupation:** Businesswoman | **WC Status:** Ace |
| **Aliases:** Zoe Hazziz | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** Circa 1960 | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** Average | **Weight:** Slim |
| **Eyes:** Hazel | **Hair:** Red |

## DESCRIPTION

Zoe Harris is a slim, beautiful yuppie businesswoman who likes to dress in expensive designer-brand clothing.

## BACKGROUND

The child of two jokers, Harris is the young and up-and-coming CEO of a small publicly-traded chemical company called Subtle Scents. Her partner frames her for embezzlement, her mother Anne comes down with breast cancer, and her father Bjorn is killed by a nat street gang. She calls on her power to animate a mannequin to fight the gang members attacking her and her father and the mannequin kills one of the gang members. Harris had been exploring the possibility of sending her family to Jerusalem, where she feels they'd be safer given the current political climate in the United States (fall 1993), and when all this happens at once she decides to flee with the help of Charles Dutton and the Twisted Fists. She takes along five orphan joker children (Needles, Jellyhead, Owl Jimmy, Angelfish Jimmy, and Jan) whom she calls her Escorts.

When she flees to Israel, she's still uncertain how to use her powers. At one time she'd only been able to use them when frightened, but after meeting the Turtle, who is in town for a book tour promoting his autobiography, she comes to a better understanding of them, though has yet to master them.

### 1994

She discovers that life in Jerusalem comes with its own problems. Needles gets heavily involved in the Twisted Fists. Zoe doesn't want to see him go down the terrorist road, so she meets with the Black Dog. He proposes a trade. If Zoe (helped by Croyd Crenson) will go to the Ukraine and get him a nuclear weapon he can blackmail the Card Sharks with, he'll send her, her family, and her Escorts to Vietnam where, he claims, there is relative safety. Zoe reluctantly accepts the deal, especially troubled that Jan has already gone on the mission with Balthazar, one of the Dog's Twisted Fist lieutenants.

She and Croyd acquire the bomb on the Odessa docks and then take a freighter across the Black Sea with the device disguised as an irrigation pump. They're briefly interdicted by a Russian submarine, but Zoe screws up their Geiger counters and they let them resume their journey untroubled. She and Croyd start an affair while on ship. They meet with Balthazar and Jan on the Turkish side of the sea and from there transport the bomb overland through Turkey and Syria. They're ambushed near Damascus. The day is saved by the sudden arrival of the Highwayman. Bruckner takes them to Jerusalem via one of his patented shortcuts through a frighteningly alien dimension. As soon as they reach Jerusalem, Croyd falls asleep.

Zoe is not too tightly wrapped and is not particularly well-suited for the ace game. She is consumed by fear every moment of their journey and tries to distract herself with endless details relating to *haute couture*. Unfortunately for Harris, though, the Black Dog is not done with her. He learns that the Nur al-Allah has gotten the Black Trump and plans on using it on the jokers in Jerusalem. Pan Rudo is with him, and they're hiring scientists to replicate and disperse the virus. He wants Zoe to infiltrate their camp. She resists the notion, but again gives in.

Zoe, posing at Zoe Hazziz, an American-born Egyptian with a degree in chemistry, is interviewed by Samir Zahid, Pan Rudo's chief lab assistant, and the wheelchair-bound Sayyid, the Nur's giant sidekick, and passes their thorough examination. She's taken to the camp in the middle of the Syrian desert where she performs rather menial tasks around the lab while she keeps her eyes and ears open. She also performs the occasional seduction of Pan Rudo in order to uncover the information the Twisted Fists need. She then wears a bandage on her wrist, signaling that she's succeeded in her task, and awaits the Fists to arrange for her extraction.

Zoe is in the lab, fortunately by herself, when Quasiman pops in with a list of items he needs for Mark Meadows to "stop the Black Trump and save his little girl." She sees no reason not to help Meadows, even though she's not exactly sure what this is all about, and she's able to provide the hunchback with most of the items on his list. He disappears just in time to avoid detection.

The Fists' agent is some time in arriving, but he finally turns out to be

| ZOE HARRIS | | | | | POWER LEVEL 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +0 | +1 | +0 | +1 | +1 | +1 |
| 10 | 12 | 11 | 13 | 12 | 12 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +0 | +2 | +3 | +3 |

**SKILLS**

Bluff 3 (+4), Concentration 3 (+4), Gather Information 2 (+3), Knowledge (business) 6 (+7), Knowledge (current events) 4 (+5), Knowledge (physical sciences) 7 (+8), Knowledge (popular culture) 6 (+7), Knowledge (streetwise) 4 (+5), Notice 4 (+5), Profession (businesswoman) 7 (+8), Sense Motive 4 (+5), Stealth 2 (+3)

**FEATS**

None

**POWERS**

**Animate Objects 4** (60-point constructs; Limited to when she's afraid or aroused)

**Super-Senses 4** (sense molecular structure, ranged, acute)

**COMBAT**

Attack +2, Grapple +2, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +2 (+1 flat-footed), Knockback –0, Initiative +1

**Abilities 10 + Skills 13 (52 ranks) + Feats 0 + Powers 12 + Combat 8 + Saves 6 = Total 49**

Needles, who accompanies Hartmann and Hannah Davis to the camp to relay the Black Dog's message that he's acquired a nuke and he isn't afraid to use it. Needles leaves with Hartmann and Davis, and Zoe still awaits extraction.

Zoe discovers that Pan Rudo is testing the Black Trump on four jokers chained to cots in the infirmary tent. No one else is around. She finds the vials of virus and autoclaves them, but there is nothing she can do for the jokers. Croyd, in his new camel-like body, finds her and tells her he's brought Billy Ray and April Harvest to the camp, but he can't find Ray, and Harvest seems to have driven off with the water truck. Zoe doesn't like the implications of that. Looking for Ray, Zoe discovers that not only are the test subjects dead, but the women caring for them have died as well. She realizes that the Black Trump kills nats as well as jokers.

Zoe and Croyd finally find Billy Ray who is being held at pistol point by Rudo. Zoe animates an aluminum splint she's wearing and it flies at Rudo and bury itself in his wrist, knocking the gun away. Rudo is obviously sick. Dying, he gloats that the water truck is full of Black Trump and Harvest is taking it to Jerusalem. He dies terribly. Zoe makes Croyd and Ray sterilize themselves as best they can, then Ray and Zoe take off after Harvest on a flying carpet that Zoe animates.

They arrive at Jerusalem to see a city on fire. Harvest has released the Black Trump. Riots have broken out all over the city. Ray and Zoe split up; Zoe to find her mother and the Escorts. They try to escape the city, but Israeli and Palestinian soldiers have finally found a common cause. They are standing back to back on the city walls, shooting anyone who tries to leave. They come across John Bruckner. Originally tasked with driving the nuclear bomb to the Nur's camp, now he's trying to leave the city and is taking anyone who wants to go with him. Zoe, her mother, the Escorts, and Balthazar load up. Zoe animates the truck to help him, but then realizes they're carrying people infected with the Black Trump, and she crashes it lest they escape and spread it throughout the world.

The affair's aftermath is not good for Zoe. Jimmy Owl and her mother both die from the Black Trump. Balthazar and Jimmy Angelfish die of wounds received during the rioting. As Needles notes, Zoe becomes seriously gone in the head. Now wearing only black, she vows vengeance against the aces who could have helped, but did nothing to avert the crisis. Jack Braun, the Turtle, and Nephi Callendar are high on the list of aces she pledges to kill. Tachyon heads it.

## ABILITIES

Harris can animate small nonliving objects by breathing on them. Initially she could only do so when frightened. After coming to the realization that the fear factor can also be equated with sexual feelings, she has a greater range of emotions to call upon. She can give the objects she animates a touch of superpowers themselves (for example, low-level super-strength, or animated toy soldiers can fire laser beams from their little plastic rifles).

Harris can also sense the molecular structure of things, and has a wide-ranging grounding in chemistry as well as some business and financial skills. She also knows a lot about *haute couture* fashion.

# GREGG HARTMANN

**Created by Stephen Leigh**

*"He was Puppetman—a lacing of strings dancing from his invisible fingers, his collection of grotesque dolls capering at the ends."*

— Leigh: "Strings" (Book 1)

## DESCRIPTION

Hartmann has a plain and undistinguished appearance, with a high forehead and a hairline starting to recede by 1986, and a body soft from riding desks all his adult life. Despite this, people who see him think of him as "strangely handsome" or "compelling."

## BACKGROUND

Puppetman claims his first victim, Andrea Whitman, at the age of 11, when she spurns Hartmann's childish advances. Over the next five years he kills seven more times.

### 1960s and '70s

Hartmann graduates from Harvard Law School (1961), and immediately joins a prestigious law firm. He soon discovers the delights of Jokertown. After five successful years as a criminal lawyer, he moves into politics and is elected a New York City councilman (1965), then mayor (1968 to 1972), before moving on to the United States Senate as a Democrat. Unlike most politicians, Hartmann really seems to care about his constituents and their problems. As chairman of SCARE he relaxes and even judiciously ignores many of the restrictive laws concerning wild carders, although the most controversial (the Exotic Powers Control Act and the Special Conscription Act) remain on the books until the Carter admin-

istration.

## 1976

With the Democrat nominating convention in New York he sees his chance for the presidency. Even though Kennedy and Carter are considered the favorites, Hartmann, using his Puppetman powers, carefully orchestrates a series of events, including the destructive Jokertown Riot, designed to show himself as a hero and snatch the nomination. But his plans go awry and he has a public breakdown which, while not enough to utterly ruin his career, does constrain his presidential ambitions. For the time being, at least.

## 1986/1987

Hartmann co-chairs the WHO-sponsored fact-finding trip with Dr. Tachyon. Early on, he encounters Sara Morgenstern and realizes she's the sister of his first victim, Andrea Whitman. He seduces her using his personal charisma, not Puppetman, even though his wife, Ellen, is also along on the trip. Their marriage is largely one of convenience, and he uses his Puppetman power to smooth off the rough patches of their relationship. While on the trip he manages to feed in Guatemala, Brazil, Ethiopia, and during some later stops, although he has to be judicious in his use of Puppetman in strange and unfamiliar places.

Hartmann takes Misha (Kahina the Seer) as a puppet during a parley in Damascus where they agree to a meeting with the Nur to discuss bringing peace to the Middle East as well as the issue of joker treatment. The meeting in the Nur's Syria camp is not as Hartmann expects. The Nur showcases his ace powers and mocks and harangues Hartmann and other members of the delegation. Tachyon resists the Nur and starts a counter-attack which includes Billy Ray, Jack Braun, Hiram Worchester, and others. Hartmann, seeing his chance, grabs Misha's mind and after years of abuse she strikes back at her brother, cutting his throat. Hartmann is slightly wounded as the delegation makes its escape. He achieves a great deal of publicity for his bravery and perceived cool head. In fact, some believe his actions in Syria make him a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize. Personally he regards that gambit as only a partial success, because he failed to kill his chief target, the Nur al-Allah, and in the end, while his relationship with Sara is flagging, is forced to use Puppetman on her, an act that turns her love to ashes in Hartmann's mouth.

In Germany (circa April 10th) Hartmann's briefly kidnapped by a gang made up of elements of the JJS (including Gimli), the RAF (including Mackie Messer), and the GRU (including Molniya). Puppetman uses his ability to twist emotion to set the various factions off against each other. In the end Hartmann uses the psychopathic ace Mackie Messer to free him, in the course of which they become lovers of a sort, with Messer his adoring slave.

## JUNE 1987

Hartmann resigns from the Senate and his position as chairman of SCARE, and announces his candidacy for the presidency. He crashes a meeting between Chrysalis and Downs. They've been suspicious of him since the WHO tour, but now have concrete evidence of his wild card nature: the blood-stained jacket he'd worn during the battle at the Nur's camp. Hartmann cautions them against revealing his secret and in fact recruits them to spy for him, ordering Chrysalis and Downs to tell him if anyone else discovers his real nature. To scare them into submission, he orders Mackie Messer to slaughter Misha before their horrified eyes.

## SPRING/SUMMER 1988

Hartmann starts to have trouble feeding Puppetman. Something like a wall comes between him and his victims, blocking Puppetman from feasting on their emotions. Already on edge, he goes to the Democratic National Convention in Atlanta, determined to come away with the presidential nomination. Ellen, visibly pregnant, accompanies him. Almost immediately he succumbs and tries to feed, but is blocked again. To his horror, he realizes it's Gimli who's blocking him. His old foe wasn't killed after all in the Typhoid Croyd epidemic, but is in his mind, jeering at him and vowing revenge. Hartmann is terrified, both of Gimli's presence and the savage fury of Puppetman. He succeeds in stuffing Puppetman deep down into his consciousness, far away, deeper than he'd been in years.

After Sara Morgenstern's hysterical public condemnation at the convention, he decides she must be silenced and calls his psychopathic lapdog, Mackie Messer, to Atlanta to do the job. Puppetman manages to break free again and Hartmann becomes even more haggard and worried. People start to notice. Hartmann realizes he's losing control when he and Puppetman have a two-way conversation out loud. It's the first time ever that Puppetman has managed to actually speak.

It doesn't help any when Hartmann realizes that the source of Gimli's presence is the fetus carried by his wife. He decides it has to die, and he gives Ellen to Puppetman, who causes her to fall down a flight of stairs. Their plan works. Puppetman slakes his hunger for the first time in months, on Ellen, on Gimli, and on Billy Ray whom he'd nudged just enough to keep from saving Ellen. Gimli dies and Hartmann believes the ensuing sympathy over the loss of his child will probably get him the nomination. Hartmann is angered by Tachyon's defection when the alien discovers his true nature, and sends Mackie after him. The twisted little

ace wounds the Takisian, but is popped away by Jay Ackroyd before he can finish the job.

But Hartmann is jubilant. Nothing can derail the Hartmann express, and he wins the Democratic presidential nomination. In the confusion of the melee that takes place during the nominating speech, Demise, sent after the senator by an alarmed Chrysalis, almost manages to kill Hartmann, and the deadly assassin's mind powers do burn away Puppetman. Hartmann is relieved by Puppetman's apparent death. He feels as if a great, dark burden has been lifted from him, although he finds it strange to be alone in his head, to be unable to sense the tides of feelings around him, to be powerless to change the ocean of emotion that constantly surrounds him. Messer saves Hartmann, taking off Spector's head before the assassin can finish the senator and in turn is slain by Spector's last deadly look. Hartmann takes to the podium to calm everyone down and cement his position as a strong leader, but Tachyon takes over his mind and makes him act like a gibbering idiot in front of the horrified convention audience and millions watching on live television.

Hartmann's political career is irrevocably over. He is forced to resign the nomination. At least, he feels, he still has Ellen, but he discovers Sara has told her everything—and she believes the reporter. His wife slaps his face and leaves him. Hartmann confronts Tachyon and accuses the doctor of destroying him when everything was Puppetman's fault. Tachyon rips away Hartmann's last shreds of self-deception, telling him there never was a Puppetman. The Puppetman persona was a device Hartmann used to avoid responsibility for his sadistic appetites. Further, the whole notion that Gimli had taken control of his unborn child was also a creation of Hartmann's disassociative mind (although Hartmann never accepts this contention). Hartmann needs psychiatric help, but Tachyon realizes they can't take the chance of his secret getting out and causing another wave of anti-wild card hysteria, so agrees to act as his psychiatrist.

## SEPTEMBER 1990

Hartmann is one of the official delegates to the unsuccessful peace parlay with Bloat before the government's assault on the Rox. Bloat reads his mind and is so incensed with what he sees that he sends Herne and his Wild Hunt to assassinate Hartmann, sparking the first battle of the Rox Campaign. The Turtle manages to rescue Hartmann (at the cost of the Brooklyn Bridge) but not before Hartmann's right hand is mangled by one of Herne's hounds. The Turtle takes him to a hospital outside the danger zone.

His public political career over, Hartmann becomes a lobbyist working out of an office in Jokertown. He still carries on conversations with voices in his head. He visits joker prostitutes regularly because now he can respond sexually only to female jokers.

## OCTOBER 1993

Hannah Davis brings him the evidence of the Card Shark conspiracy. He agrees to check it out, and sets up a meeting with Pan Rudo and Brandon Van Renssaeler to get them to respond to Hannah's charges. Van Renssaeler denies everything, but after he leaves Rudo calmly confirms the Card Sharks' existence, though he spins their purpose. He attributes all the horrific aspects of the conspiracy to Hannah's paranoid delusions and tells Hartmann the Sharks are only trying to find a cure for wild card sufferers. He offers Hartmann a job as a "consultant," basically bribing him with a blank check. Hartmann is sickened by Rudo's twisted explanations, but takes Rudo's offer under advisement.

Hartmann longs for redemption and is surprised when a shred of his old power, something he refers to as "the Gift," returns to him. The charisma, the power to enchant a crowd or an individual, returns to his voice, but he is by no means the puppet master of old. At least he can now read emotions again, if not control them. He wants redemption, but also longs for his old power. He mourns the fact that he'd never realized that the Card Sharks existed, as they would have made very tasty puppets indeed. But ultimately he decides to fight the Card Sharks and in that way find his sought-after redemption.

Initially Hartmann approaches Jay Ackroyd to investigate the backgrounds of some of the suspected Card Sharks to see if Hannah Davis's charges are even remotely feasible, but Ackroyd refuses to take the case when Hartmann refuses to give a reason for the investigation.

When the case against Battle and Crypt Kicker for breaking and entering the Jokertown Clinic is tossed out of court due to "national security reasons," Hartmann knows they have to go public with information on the conspiracy. He chooses the venue of *Peregrine's Perch*, where he, Hannah Davis, Father Squid, and others lay out their case regarding the existence of the conspiracy. A small but enthusiastic minority believe him. Some are unsure. The majority of the public are skeptical or disbelieving. Hartmann follows up this appearance with one on *60 Minutes* that offers a little more concrete evidence and makes his case sound a little stronger.

When Hartmann appears again on *Peregrine's Perch* with Josh McCoy's pictures of genocide in Guatemala to back up his Card Shark claims, more believe him. Hannah Davis starts to fall for him, and he uses the Gift to push her a little. Another voice in his head objects. They argue back and forth. It seems like the old days.

Hartmann becomes the target of a plan run by von Herzenhagen, and gets jumped into George Battle's joker body while Battle is jumped into his. The Sharks plan to kill Hartmann immediately, but his new clownish caterpillar body has a built-in flight instinct that makes Hartmann run off screaming like a banshee. His reputation isn't helped any when Battle (as Hartmann) immediately holds a news conference claiming to have been misled about the Card Sharks and says the conspiracy doesn't exist.

Hartmann, meanwhile, is now a joker. He's bright yellow and about four feet long with six pairs of limbs. He can walk slowly and precariously on his last pair or run on two. His clumsy hands have three fingers each. He has a ridiculous face with a red, putty-like nose right and two more putty noses where his ears used to be. Little tufts of rebellious hair stand out all over his body and his voice bears an uncanny resemblance to that of Mickey Mouse. His feet have small, clinging sucker-like pads on their bottoms. He soon discovers he has an incredibly keen sense of smell (though this is not always a plus), but very poor eyesight. The voices in his head are now silent and he has lost the Gift.

He tries to get help from various individuals, including the Oddity and Peregrine, in reclaiming his real identity, but it doesn't help any that Hartmann's murder has been all over the news (see George G. Battle's biography in this chapter for details). He decides the only place he can go for help is the Card Sharks.

First, though, Hartmann has to wait in the sewers under New York for his skin to molt. Fortunately, he discovers how his new body eats. He vomits on metallic objects, like garbage can lids or manhole covers, and his spew breaks the metal down into a kind of foamy sludge he can then ingest. He finds it delicious.

Encased in a nice new suit of bright yellow skin, he finally makes an appointment with Pan Rudo. He meets the Card Shark in his U.N. office where he tries to blackmail him into using the jumpers to get him a new body. But as he talks to this "Rudo" he realizes that he's actually a body double. Croyd Crenson materializes in the room, kills the false Rudo, then fades away. General MacArthur Johnson, Card Shark security chief, breaks into the room and thinks Hartmann is the killer. The automatic defense

| GREGG HARTMANN | | | | | POWER LEVEL 13 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| -1 | +0 | -1 | +2 | +3 | +4 |
| 9 | 10 | 9 | 15 | 17 | 18 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| -1 | +2 | +2 | +6 |

**SKILLS**

Bluff 8 (+12), Diplomacy 6 (+10), Knowledge (behavioral sciences) 6 (+8), Knowledge (civics) 10 (+12), Knowledge (current events) 6 (+8), Perform (acting) 6 (+10), Profession (lawyer) 6 (+9), Profession (politician) 10 (+13), Sense Motive 10 (+13)

**FEATS**

Benefit (U.S. senator), Connected, Contacts, Skill Mastery (Bluff, Diplomacy, Perform, Sense Motive)

**POWERS**

**Emotion Control 13** (Limited to people he's had physical contact with; Subtle 2)

**Mind Shield 3**

**COMBAT**

Attack +1, Grapple +0, Damage –1 (unarmed), Defense +3 (+1 flat-footed), Knockback –0, Initiative +0

**Abilities 18 + Skills 17 (68 ranks) + Feats 4 + Powers 18 + Combat 8 + Saves 8 = Total 73**

| | |
|---|---|
| **NAME:** GREGG HARTMANN | **WC NAME:** PUPPETMAN |
| **OCCUPATION:** U.S. SENATOR | **WC STATUS:** ACE (UP THE SLEEVE), LATER JOKER |
| **ALIASES:** NONE | **ETHNICITY:** CAUCASIAN |
| **BIRTH:** OCTOBER 3, 1939, COLUMBUS, OHIO | **DEATH:** SUMMER 1994 |
| **HEIGHT:** 5 FT., 10 IN. | **WEIGHT:** 170 LBS. |
| **EYES:** GREY/BLUE | **HAIR:** RECEDING |

mechanism in Hartmann's body again allows Hartmann to escape.

## WINTER 1993/1994

Hartmann finds the going rather tough on the streets of Jokertown, and returns to his initial plan to get a new body from the Sharks. He calls Brandon van Renssaeler, and offers him Hannah Davis. He'll deliver her to the Sharks if they'll jump him into her body. He'll recant her accusation and then they can jump him into a new male body, and they'll call everything even. Van Renssaeler is noncommittal about this idea, and says he'll need time to consider it. In the interim, Hartmann overhears Hannah talking to the Oddity, confessing she's fallen in love with Hartmann. It's a moral crisis for the ex-senator. He realizes he can't betray Hannah to the Card Sharks. He goes to the appointed meeting with the Sharks anyway and is captured by Rudo, who tells him all the jumpers are dead, anyway. Hartmann languishes in captivity for awhile, but finally escapes when Clara van Renssaeler, Finn, and the Lamia create a pandemonium at the lab where they're being held prisoner by faking a deadly virus release.

Hartmann still has a hard time convincing anyone that he's really Hartmann, but finally everyone comes around. Hannah Davis encourages him to become the leader in the ongoing fight against the Card Sharks and he steps forward to shoulder the task.

## FALL 1994

The government tries to take him into custody because of his knowledge of the Black Trump, but he and Hannah escape the April Harvest-led raid on Dutton's Famous Bowery Wild Card Dime Museum. Hartmann is stunned to discover that, just briefly, he can mentally feel the Oddity's pain when they battle with the Reflector. He and Hannah hide out in the sewer for a few days, but decide that this strategy is getting them nowhere. They pursue Rudo, who has fled with a stock of the Trump. Hartmann calls in some debts and gets the deuce aviator Gary Bushorn to smuggle them across the Atlantic.

He and Hannah bail out over Ireland and make their way to the joker section of Belfast where they run into a group of Twisted Fists led by a leprechaun-like figure who calls himself King Brian. Hartmann astonishes himself when at one point he leaps protectively in front of Hannah. This is the first time he has done something because he cares more about someone else's life than his own. He doesn't have much time to think about this development as he learns Winston Churchill is in Belfast. Hartmann knows Churchill and thinks he will listen to his story.

Hartmann tells the ancient politician everything, including the fact that General Peter Horvath, head of the British military in Northern Ireland, is a Card Shark. Churchill is shaken by these revelations. Hartmann is happy to see that Churchill believes him, but the 119-year-old politician needs time to think things over before acting. Horvath's security men, all Sharks, try to detain Hartmann. Hartmann wriggles free from their trap, but one of his Twisted Fist escorts is killed. This leads King Brian to enact the traditional Twisted Fist five-for-one revenge. At a wedding reception in a pub, Brian makes Hartmann pick out most of the victims by threatening Hannah. Hartmann can taste their fear. It seems as if glimmers of his powers are returning. He can again tug on the strings of emotion and is pleased to see their anger and fear deepen at his touch. This leaves him with mingled pleasure and self-hatred. The voices in his head have returned with his power. He tries not to listen to them, especially the one that tells him to do bad things. He chooses the victims reluctantly, but part of him exults at the poignancy of their emotions.

Later, he learns that General MacArthur Johnson was present during Churchill's assassination and he knows Johnson has some of the Black Trump. His thoughts flash to Churchill's impending funeral, packed with thousands of mourners from all over the world, and he puts two and two together. The Twisted Fists smuggle him and Hannah into Westminster Abbey for Churchill's memorial service, high up on a narrow catwalk behind the organ pipes. Hartmann isn't sure exactly what he plans to do, but Bowler, the Twisted Fist operative accompanying them, has a high-power rifle, just in case it may be needed.

As Hartmann scans the packed mass of mourners, he spots Billy Ray at ground level also examining the crowd. He spies General MacArthur Johnson dressed as a priest and messing with the communion wine. Hartmann watches Ray go after him. As a fight ensues, Hartmann realizes that Johnson has laced the wine with the Black Trump virus. He and Hannah observe Horvath making off with the virus-poisoned chalice.

They follow Horvath to a secluded area underneath the abbey's main floor. Hannah pulls a gun on the Card Shark and makes him relinquish the chalice. They then question Horvath about the other Black Trump vials, and when he denies all knowledge of them, Hartmann uses his newly

rediscovered power to tweak Hannah's mind. She shoots Horvath twice, and the general rats out Pan Rudo, saying he's gone to the Nur in Syria with another portion of the virus. Hartmann justifies using his Puppetman power on Hannah by saying to himself that he's only using it for good.

Billy Ray catches up to them. They parley. Hartmann wants a truce, but Ray won't have any of it. He's going to bring them in. Hartmann tweaks Hannah's mind again and she shoots Ray seven times. They leave Ray laying in the dust and beat it out of Westminster.

Hartmann and Hannah go to Jerusalem to meet with the Black Dog himself, the head of the Twisted Fists. The Dog wants Hartmann and Hannah to go tell the Nur that the Fists have a nuclear deterrent to the Black Trump. Hartmann has played that tune before, however, and he's not exactly anxious to find himself again in the Nur's power. While out and about in Jerusalem, they spot Billy Ray, whom Hartmann had hoped was dead, taking part in a Twisted Fist/Card Shark shootout. Hartmann decides it might be best to get out of town after all, and he and Hannah leave for the Nur's camp, accompanied by Needles, one of Zoe Harris's Escorts, as a bodyguard.

The Nur is not exactly pleased to see them, or to hear their message. He scoffs at the notion that the Black Trump is dangerous to aces, believing it will only affect jokers. He also doesn't much care for the Black Dog's threats and decides to send Hartmann and Hannah's heads back to the Dog as his answer. Hartmann, however, uses a combination of his projectile vomiting ability and the return of his Puppetman power to gain their freedom. Again he justifies the use of his power with the notion that he now controls it, it no longer controls him. Later, as they stop for the night in the desert, Hartmann prods their Nur guide to attack Needles and feasts off anger and despair as Needles kills him.

As they return to Jerusalem, Hartmann realizes that he and Hannah were only a sideshow on the trip. The real reason for the journey was to get Needles to the camp to identify Zoe Harris and to see that she's showing the signal that confirms she has information the Fists need, and can now be extracted. She is.

Hartmann uses Puppetman to get Needles to tell them about the Black Dog's plan for the nuke. He tells them that the Highwayman will drive the bomb into the Nur's camp and leave it there on a timer so it'll explode after he leaves. Hannah, meanwhile, spots April Harvest spraying a crowd of people with liquid from a water truck, and realizes she's probably spreading the Black Trump. They tell the Black Dog. Hannah says that they must use the nuke to sterilize the city. They have seen that this Black Trump kills nats as well as wild carders and if left loose it will destroy the entire world. Puppetman and Gregg fight over Hannah's suggestion. Puppetman wants to use his power to make Hannah set it off, while he runs. ("You brought me back because you missed me," he tells Hartmann.) Gregg insists that Puppetman can't have Hannah, and for once he wins the battle between the two. The Dog takes them to the bomb.

"You *are* me!," Hartmann tells Puppetman, as they continue their interior battle. "We're the same!" Puppetman laughs. "You finally admit it," he says. Hannah sets the bomb off. They have 10 minutes before the conventional explosion detonates the device's nuclear component. Quasiman suddenly appears and tells them about the Overtrump created by Mark Meadows. Hannah is aghast at the hundreds of thousands of innocent people her actions have doomed. The Black Dog tells them the conventional explosion can be set off by simply pulling its wires. The nuclear part of the bomb then won't blow. But someone has to be there to yank the wires. Gregg and Puppetman continue their interior battle. Gregg wins and orders Quasiman to take Hannah out.

Billy Ray appears just as Gregg grasps the wires. As Ray breaks into the room Gregg looks at him and says, "I never said thanks, Billy, and I'm sorry." He pulls the wires just in time to forestall the nuclear explosion, and is blown to bits.

Ray is impressed. Gregg Hartmann died a hero.

## ABILITIES

Puppetman, which Hartmann likes to believe is a separate entity but in reality is a crystallization of his lusts, feeds on the emotions hiding in the recesses of other minds, manipulating and expanding or dampening them until he gets the puppet to do his bidding. He can't make anyone do anything against their nature: the seed of their weakness must already be planted in their minds—a tendency towards violence, a hatred, a lust.

He has to physically touch his intended puppet before it comes under his control. He can sense such minds within half a mile. He has a weak mind block, which shields Puppetman, but wouldn't be much of a barrier to any competent ace with telepathic powers. No one except Tachyon ever thinks to check more deeply into the seemingly sincere politician's mind.

Puppetman feeds on torment and suffering and anger. He generally has to feed about once a week to keep satisfied.

Hartmann has many, many puppets, perhaps a thousand. Among the aces are Black Shadow, Golden Boy, Peregrine, Hiram Worchester, Billy Ray, Mackie Messer, Sir Winston Churchill, and Molniya. He also has taken many jokers, including Gimli and Video.

His biggest fear is discovery. He particularly fears Tachyon, who could, and eventually does, use his mental powers to penetrate his secrets. Hartmann fears aces in general, particularly unknown ones just in case they have mind-reading abilities.

Most of Hartmann's listed power level comes from Puppetman's abilities and his covert use of them; personally, the senator isn't much of a physical threat to anyone, being around PL 2 (charitably) otherwise.

After being jumped into George G. Battle's joker body, Hartmann has Battle's physical traits (see his bio in this chapter) and his own mental traits. He loses his Puppetman powers for a time, but eventually regains at least an approximation of them.

Hartman has mediocre skill in German; enough to get by in ordinary conversation.

# HERNE THE HUNTSMAN

**Created by Kevin Andrew Murphy**

*"Herne took the battered silver horn that hung around his huge chest and inhaled deeply. He lifted the horn to his lips and winded the instrument. The note that emerged was pure and crystalline in the night air; as the sound lingered, storm clouds began to gather far above. A wind rose from the east and the horn shimmered in the joker's hand, the patina changing from tarnished silver to rich, polished gold, the dings and dents filling in until the surface gleamed and threw back the lights of the Crystal Castle. The long call continued to sound, impossibly loud and vast, like a celestial horn calling the end of the world."*

— Herne summons the Hunt.
Leigh: Bloat's Story (Book XI)

## DESCRIPTION

Hardesty is a huge man about eight feet tall. His rack of antlers adds about another two feet to his height. His legs are hairy and satyr-like. He has a deep chest, broad-shoulders, and well-muscled arms. He always wears a horn slung around his neck, and nothing else. His voice is as low as a human voice can go. He speaks in a cultured British accent, but if you can read his mind his thoughts are in a Manchesterian low-class dialect.

## BACKGROUND

Before turning terrorist, Herne starred in a series of "rutting stag" porn films.

### SEPTEMBER 1990

At the start of the Rox Campaign Herne is running guns for the Twisted Fists to the jokers on the Rox. He stays and fights for Bloat, who sends him and the Wild Hunt after Gregg Hartmann after discovering the truth about him. Hartmann escapes when the Turtle drops the Brooklyn Bridge on the Hunt. At the end of the Rox Campaign Herne chooses to stay with Bloat when the Rox is translated to the Dreamtime.

## ABILITIES

Herne is a joker with enhanced strength and physical stamina.

When Herne blows his horn he summons the Wild Hunt. The horn itself changes from tarnished silver to polished gold. The note of the horn is impossibly loud and vast, like a celestial trumpet calling down the end of the world. It summons a barrage of lightning, peals of thunder and a howling wind that follows the hunt wherever it goes. There is also a wild clamoring of dogs. A mist covers the ground, and from the mist comes the Gabriel Hounds. They are the size of ponies, white with red ears, with green, glowing eyes. Individual hounds dissolve into mist when damaged enough, and otherwise can only be called off their target after they've drawn their quarry's blood (causing at least an injured condition). Herne's black stallion also appears, as do mounts for the riders of the Hunt, which are the ordinary mortals who accompany him. Herne's stallion can run on water.

While on the hunt Herne wields a golden spear able to penetrate battleship armor plate (for example, the Turtle's shell). Once thrown, the spear dissipates when it hits its target, only to reappear in Herne's hand.

| HERNE THE HUNTSMAN | | | | | POWER LEVEL 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +10/+2 | +1 | +4 | +1 | +2 | +1 |
| 30/14 | 13 | 19 | 12 | 14 | 13 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +9 | +9 | +4 | +6 |

**SKILLS**

Knowledge (streetwise) 6 (+7), Perform (dance) 3 (+4), Ride 7 (+8)

**FEATS**

None

**POWERS**

**Blast 10** (golden spear)

**Device 6** (horn; easy to lose)

**Enhanced Strength 16**

**Protection 5**

**Super-Strength 2** (*heavy load:* 3 tons)

*Horn:* **Mind Control 8** (Hearing Radius; Limited to bringing subjects to join the Wild Hunt, Linked to Summon), **Summon the Wild Hunt 2** (Fanatical, Heroic, Horde; Progression 4)

*The Wild Hunt:* wolves (*M&M,* page 232, with **Flight 3** and **Strike 2** [Mighty]) and Herne's horse (*M&M,* page 231, with **Flight 3**)

**COMBAT**

Attack +6, Grapple +18, Damage +10 (unarmed or spear), Defense +7 9+4 flat-footed), Knockback –4, Initiative +1

**Abilities 25 + Skills 4 (16 ranks) + Feats 0 + Powers 63 + Combat 26 + Saves 12 = Total 130**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Dylan Hardesty | **WC Name:** Herne the Huntsman |
| **Occupation:** Terrorist | **WC Status:** Joker-ace |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** 1960s, Great Britain | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** 8 ft. | **Weight:** Heavy |
| **Eyes:** Dark | **Hair:** Brown and furry |

The call of the horn also pulls any who hear it, human and animal alike. Those unable to resist follow in the Hunt's wake, screaming and out of their minds with bloodlust.

# THE HIGHWAYMAN

**Created by George R.R. Martin**

*"There are things out here that don't bear thinking about."*

— Bruckner, on the nature of his patented short cut.
Walker: Zoe Harris's Story (Book XV)

## DESCRIPTION

Bruckner wears an Andy Capp-style hat which covers his bald spot. He's stocky, and sort of lower middle class. He's usually chomping on an inexpensive cigar.

Bruckner is a big football (soccer) fan.

## BACKGROUND

John Bruckner is a lorry driver admitted to the Order of the Silver Helix after ferrying British troops to the Falkland Islands during the conflict with Argentina (1982). He is not above freelancing for just about anyone, including the Twisted Fists, to make his alimony and child support payments.

He helps Zoe Harris and Croyd deliver their atomic warhead to Jerusalem (spring 1994), and delivers Billy Ray, the Midnight Angel, and John Fortune to Leo Barnett's Peaceable Kingdom in Branson, Missouri (summer 2003).

| THE HIGHWAYMAN | | | | | POWER LEVEL 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +0 | +1 | +0 | +0 | +1 | +0 |
| 11 | 13 | 11 | 10 | 12 | 11 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +0 | +3 | +4 | +4 |

**SKILLS**

Drive 8/12 (+9/+13), Knowledge (streetwise) 4 (+4), Notice 4 (+5), Profession (truck driver) 8 (+9), Search 4 (+4)

**FEATS**

Connected
*Equipment:* Small truck (*M&M,* page 143)

**POWERS**

**Enhanced Drive 1** (+4 bonus)

**Teleport 9** (Accurate; Limited to driving a truck, Long-Range; Change Direction, Easy, Progression 6)

**COMBAT**

Attack +1, Grapple +1, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +1, Knockback –0, Initiative +1

**Abilities 8 + Skills 7 (28 ranks) + Feats 1 + Powers 18 + Combat 4 + Saves 9 = Total 47**

## ABILITIES

Bruckner can drive his lorry through what he calls "the Short Cut," which is actually an alien dimension that short-circuits the distance from point A to point B.

He also seems somewhat in tune with his vehicles, his mere presence making them run better and smoother.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** John Bruckner | **WC Name:** The Highwayman |
| **Occupation:** Trucker | |

# J.C. JAYEWARDENE

**Created by Walton Simons**

*"Sleep never came easy to him. And he was afraid to dream."*

— Simons: "The Teardrop of India" (Book 1V)

## DESCRIPTION

Jayewardene is about 50 years old (1987), portly, small, and balding. He is a widower.

## BACKGROUND

Jayewardene is a native Sri Lankan who has served his country for 30 years in various embassies around the world. He is a special assistant to the secretary of the Interior of Sri Lanka (1987), and a sincere public servant and humanitarian who does the best he can to serve his fellow man and still keep his wild card powers a secret. He realizes that the so-called Great Ape is really human and helps save him from the Sri Lankan military.

Jayewardene considers his power a burden he would like to give up, and joins the WHO-sponsored tour when it leaves Sri Lanka, with the thought of taking treatment from Tachyon. He ends up joining Fortunato on his pilgrimage to a Zen monastery in Japan.

## ABILITIES

| J.C. JAYEWARDENE | | | | | POWER LEVEL 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +0 | –1 | +0 | +1 | +2 | +1 |
| 10 | 9 | 11 | 13 | 15 | 12 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +0 | +2 | +0 | +4 |

**SKILLS**

Diplomacy 6 (+7), Knowledge (behavioral sciences) 1 (+2), Knowledge (civics) 6 (+7), Knowledge (current events) 4 (+5), Language 4 (Dutch, Hindi, Sinhalese, Tamil), Profession (administrator) 6 (+8), Sense Motive 5 (+7)

**FEATS**

Benefit (government official)

**POWERS**

**Super-Senses 4** (precognition; Uncontrolled)

**COMBAT**

Attack +0, Grapple +0, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +0, Knockback –0, Initiative –1

**Abilities 10 + Skills 8 (32 ranks) + Feats 1 + Powers 2 + Combat 0 + Saves 5 = Total 26**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** J. C. Jayewardene | **WC Name:** None |
| **Occupation:** Diplomat | **WC Status:** Ace |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Sinhalese |
| **Birth:** Mid- or late 1930s, Sri Lanka | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** 5 ft., 6 in. | **Weight:** 165 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Unknown | **Hair:** Unknown |

As Tachyon put it, Jayewardene's power is "temporal displacement of the cognitive self during dreamstate," or, more succinctly, dreams that tell the future.

He speaks English, Hindi, Sinhalese, Tamil, and Dutch.

# JETBOY

**Created by Howard Waldrop**

*"How'd the kid learn to fly?"*

*"He always knew, I think."*

— Waldrop, "Thirty Minutes Over Broadway" (Book 1)

## DESCRIPTION

Tomlin has curly mousy brown hair, and hazel eyes. He is short and thickly built.

## BACKGROUND

Tomlin is 12 when he runs away from the orphanage to work at Bonham's

| JETBOY | | | | | POWER LEVEL 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +0 | +3 | +1 | +2 | +1 | +2 |
| 10 | 17 | 13 | 15 | 13 | 14 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +3/+1* | +4 | +6 | +4 |

**Flat-footed*

**SKILLS**

Acrobatics 3 (+6), Bluff 4 (+6), Climb 5 (+5), Concentration 5 (+6), Craft (mechanical) 10 (+12), Disable Device 5 (+7), Drive 6 (+9), Knowledge (tactics) 6 (+8), Knowledge (technology) 6 (+8), Notice 6 (+7), Pilot 11 (+14), Sense Motive 3 (+4), Survival 6 (+7), Swim 4 (+4)

**FEATS**

Beginner's Luck, Defensive Roll, Elusive Target, Equipment 6 (JB-1), Favored Environment 2 (flying), Improvised Tools, Skill Mastery (Craft, Pilot, Survival), Ultimate Skill (Pilot)
*JB-1:* Huge jet-fighter, Str 30, Speed 5, Defense 8, Toughness 9; machine guns (**Blast 6**, Autofire)

**POWERS**

None

**COMBAT**

Attack +5, Grapple +5, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +5, Knockback –1 (-0 flat-footed), Initiative +3

**Abilities 22 + Skills 20 (80 ranks) + Feats 14 + Powers 0 + Combat 20 + Saves 9 = Total 85**

Flying Service in Shantak, New Jersey, where he meets Professor Silverberg and helps him to build the JB-1, the first experimental jet aircraft. After Silverberg's death at the hands of Nazi spies (and Jetboy's subsequent revenge of the murder), he goes to Canada and from there unofficially joins the RAF. He fights in the Battle of Britain and also with the Flying Tigers in China. Roosevelt gives him an unofficial commission after Pearl Harbor.

*Time Magazine* names him Man of the Year in 1944. In the waning days of the war he's lost in the South Pacific (April 29, 1945 to July 1946), languishing on a desert island until being rescued by the *USS Reluctant*. Over the course of his career (1939-1945) he shoots down over 500 planes and sinks 50 ships. He's released from service August 12, 1946.

## SEPTEMBER 1946

Truman puts him back on active duty to deal with the menace of Dr. Tod, who wants $20 million or he'll drop the wild card virus on New York City using a complicated lighter-than-air dirigible array to fly out of reach of regular fighter planes. But not the JB-1. In a final herculean effort of flying, Jetboy crashes into the dirigible's gondola, goes mano-a-mano with Dr. Tod, and is shot by him and utters his last words "I can't die yet. I haven't seen *The Jolsen Story*." He was only 19 years old.

Ground observers watch the dirigible blow up in a fiery cataclysm, and they think Jetboy has won—that he's sacrificed his life in one final service to his country, that he's prevented the madman from setting off the virus bomb above the skies of Manhattan.

But they were as wrong as snakes on an eight-lane highway.

## ABILITIES

Tomlin has no wild card skills, but he's a supreme aviator.

### JB-1 STATISTICS

Jetboy's plane ticks in at 31 in length, with a 33-foot wingspan (49 with extensions). It has a red fuselage, and the only markings are four non-standard USAAF stars in a black roundel, and the serial number JB-1 on the top right and bottom left wings and on the tail. The JB-1 sports twin engines (1,200 lb. thrust each), and can reach 600 mph, with a maximum ceiling of 25,000 ft. and a range of 650 miles. It's equipped with an all-weather radar set taken off a German night fighter in 1943. Armament includes four 20 mm cannons in the wing roots between the engines, a 75 mm gun port below and to the left of the cockpit rim, and rear-firing machine guns under each of the rear elevators.

# JUBE THE WALRUS

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Robert Tomlin | **WC Name:** Jetboy |
| **Occupation:** Pilot | **WC Status:** Nat |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** Circa 1926 | **Death:** September 15, 1946, New York City |
| **Height:** Short | **Weight:** Chunky |
| **Eyes:** Hazel | **Hair:** Brown |

**Created by George R.R. Martin**

*"Jube was more human than he would ever have guessed. But the Master Trader had left one thing out. He had not told Jhubben that he would come to love these humans, and to feel responsible for them."*

— Jhubben realizing the perils of acculturation.
Martin: Jube's Story, part 6 (Book II)

# DESCRIPTION

Jube the Walrus has three-fingered hands, blue-black, oily-looking flesh, two curving tusks protruding from the corners of his wide mouth, and tufts of bristly red hair on his skull. He smells like buttered popcorn and is actually an alien observer masquerading as a joker. He is given to wearing porkpie hats and loud Hawaiian shirts, and never wears a coat, being seemingly impervious to cold.

Jube knows more jokes than anyone in Jokertown—he's collecting data for a treatise on human humor—especially bad jokes. Especially off-color bad jokes. He eats decaying meat and likes rum drinks, especially the kind served in coconuts with fruit slices and little paper umbrellas. He soaks in ice water in his hot tub while watching taped news programs. He loves movies, especially westerns. When he first came to the Earth he spent months in movie theaters learning human language and customs.

# BACKGROUND

Jhubben is dropped off on Earth by the Network ship *The Opportunity* in 1952. From then on he runs a newspaper stand in Jokertown on the corner of Hester Street and the Bowery. He is one of Chrysalis's best informants. Everyone know him, everyone talks to him, everyone likes him.

He lives in a five-story rooming house on Eldridge that he bought in 1955 with part of a stash of gems he'd been given by the Master Trader. He lives in the basement in a bone-cold apartment lit by murky 15-watt red light bulbs. His office is behind a really high-tech security screen in what used to be the coal cellar, where he has an array of technological devices to monitor weather patterns, military activity, and radio and television broadcasts throughout the world. Every day he dictates his observations on and conclusions about the human race to his alien compatriots.

## 1986

Jube gets unwillingly recruited into the Egyptian Masons when they discover he's trying to build an emergency communication device that re-

## JUBE THE WALRUS — POWER LEVEL 3

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| +3 | -1 | +1 | +2 | +2 | +3 |
| 16 | 8 | 13 | 15 | 14 | 16 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +3 | +4 | +0 | +5 |

**SKILLS**

Bluff 7 (+10), Computers 2 (+4), Diplomacy 5 (+8), Gather Information 8 (+11), Knowledge (behavioral sciences) 8 (+10), Knowledge (current events) 8 (+10), Knowledge (popular culture) 6 (+8), Language 5 (various human languages), Notice 4 (+6), Profession (newsie) 7 (+9), Profession (researcher) 8 (+10), Sense Motive 8 (+10)

**FEATS**

Benefit (Network agent), Benefit (wealth), Connected, Contacts, Equipment 4 (Network technology), Well-Informed
*Equipment:* A Network workstation and tachyon transmitter, along with a sidearm he keeps hidden.

**POWERS**

**Immunity 1** (cold)
**Protection 2**

**COMBAT**

Attack +1, Grapple +4, Damage +1 (unarmed) or by weapon, Defense +2 (+1 flat-footed), Knockback –1, Initiative –1

**Abilities 22 + Skills 19 (76 ranks) + Feats 9 + Powers 3 + Combat 6 + Saves 7 = Total 66**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Jhubben | **WC Name:** Jube the Walrus |
| **Occupation:** Newsie, xenologist | **WC Status:** Alien (posing as a joker) |
| **Aliases:** Jube Benson | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** Unknown | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** 5 feet and a fraction of an inch | **Weight:** 300 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Unknown | **Hair:** Red tufts on skull |

sembles their shakti device. He manages to avoid the Cloisters raid and eventually recovers the singularity shifter, erasing all traces of prior Network contact with the Earth.

Fortunato is the first ace to realize Jhubben is an alien and not a joker, but keeps his secret before ultimately revealing it to Tachyon (August 1990), who is looking for a way to contact the Network. Jube admits to Tachyon that he's a Network agent, signs Tachyon to an open contract, and arranges for a ship to transport him, Mark Meadows, and Jay Ackroyd to Takis.

# KAHINA THE SEER

**Created by Stephen Leigh**

*"I am Kahina, the Seer. I know many hidden things."*

— Misha, musing on her abilities.
Leigh: "The Tint of Hatred" (Book IV)

## DESCRIPTION

Misha is a small woman who normally wears the chador. Her most noted physical attribute is her piercing dark eyes.

Misha is a fundamentalist Muslim of the Nur Sect. She particularly hates jokers whom she believes are the despised of Allah.

## BACKGROUND

Misha is the twin sister of Najib, the Nur al-Allah. He regularly beats her, and he gives her in marriage to Sayyid who blames her for his impotency and also beats her. Finally reacting to the frequent abuse at her brother's hands and egged on by Puppetman's urging, Misha slices her brother's throat in the violent climax of the Hartmann/al-Allah meeting in Syria, and flees for her life (February 4, 1987).

### JUNE 1987

One of her dreams tells Misha that Hartmann made her cut her brother's throat, and she goes to New York bringing with her Hartmann's bloody jacket as proof of his wild card nature. She makes an unlikely alliance with Gimli and gives him a replica of the jacket stained with her own blood. He passes it on to Chrysalis as Hartmann's. Ultimately Misha's attempt to expose Hartmann as a monstrous ace fails. She's caught, raped, and slain by Hartmann's pet psycho, Mackie Messer, on the senator's orders. Hartmann's real jacket remains with the rest of her belongings at her residence in Jokertown, until it is found by Jay Ackroyd (July 1988).

| KAHINA THE SEER | | | | | POWER LEVEL 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +0 | +0 | +1 | +2 | +2 | +1 |
| 10 | 10 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 12 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +1 | +4 | +3 | +5 |

**SKILLS**

Knowledge (theology and philosophy) 6 (+8), Language 1 (English; Arabic is native), Notice 3 (+5), Sense Motive 4 (+6), Stealth 2 (+2)

**FEATS**

None

**POWERS**

**Super-Senses 4** (precognition; Uncontrollable)

**COMBAT**

Attack +1, Grapple +1, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +1, Knockback –0, Initiative +0

**Abilities 14 + Skills 4 (16 ranks) + Feats 0 + Powers 2 + Combat 4 + Saves 9 = Total 33**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Misha | **WC Name:** Kahina |
| **Occupation:** Seeress | **WC Status:** Ace |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Arabian |
| **Birth:** Late 1940s, Syria | **Death:** June 1987, New York City |
| **Height:** Small | **Weight:** Light |
| **Eyes:** Dark | **Hair:** Dark |

## ABILITIES

Misha has prophetic dreams while awake and asleep, which she believes come directly from Allah and are often open to various interpretations.

Misha speaks fluent Arabic and English.

# KID DINOSAUR

**Created by Lewis Shiner**

*"An adolescent boy with delusions of glory."*

— Hiram Worchester, meditating on the dead. Martin: Hiram's Story (Book III)

## DESCRIPTION

Fentner is an average-looking kid with a distinctive birthmark on his forehead.

## BACKGROUND

Kid Dinosaur is a star-struck kid who loves anything to do with aces. He keeps tabs on local aces, sometimes skipping school to insinuate himself in their adventures.

### 1985/1986

He tries to help during the Swarm invasion, but his mother arrives to drag him home. He helps the Sleeper recover the body of the Embe nymph, and takes part in the ace raid on the Cloisters. He's brutally slain by the Astronomer, dismembered in public on Wild Card Day 1986. His corpse is supposedly cremated, but according to Charles Dutton the mortuary actually substitutes a John Doe, cleans the flesh off his bones with carpet beetles, and sells his skeleton to Michael Jackson.

## ABILITIES

Fentner can turn into any dinosaur and take on its physical attributes,

| KID DINOSAUR | | | | | POWER LEVEL 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| –1 | +0 | +0 | +2 | +1 | +1 |
| 8 | 10 | 10 | 14 | 12 | 12 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +0* | +2 | +2 | +3 |

**In human form*

**SKILLS**

Knowledge (life sciences) 2 (+4), Notice 2 (+3)

**FEATS**

None

**POWERS**

**Shapeshift 3** (Limited to dinosaurs)

*Carnosaur Form:* Str 13, Dex 15, Con 12; **Protection 2**, **Speed 2** (25 mph), **Strike 3** (Mighty); Mute (–4 points), No Hands (–4 points)

*Herbivore Form:* Str 14, Dex 10, Con 14; **Protection 3**, **Speed 1**, **Strike 1** (Mighty); Mute (–4 points), No Hands (–4 points)

*Plesiosaur Form:* Str 12, Dex 14, Con 12; **Swimming 2**, **Strike 2** (Mighty); Mute (–4 points), No Hands (–4 points)

*Pterosaur Form:* Str 8, Dex 14, Con 12; **Flight 2** (25 mph), **Protection 1**, **Strike 1**; Mute (–4 points), No Hands (–4 points), Power Loss (Flight, if wings are restricted, –1 point)

**COMBAT**

Attack +3, Grapple +2, Damage –1 (human form; +4 carnosaur, +3 herbivore, +3 plesiosaur, +1 pterosaur), Defense +3 (+2 flat-footed), Knockback –0 (human form; -1 carnosaur, -2 herbivore, -0 pleiosaur, -0 pterosaur), Initiative +0

**DRAWBACKS**

Disability (can't change mass with Shapeshift, –1 point), Disability (Shapeshift doesn't affect worn or carried items, –1 point)

**Abilities 6 + Skills 1 (4 ranks) + Feats 0 + Powers 21 + Combat 12 + Saves 6 – Drawbacks 2 = Total 44**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Arnold "Arnie" Fentner | **WC Name:** Kid Dinosaur |
| **Occupation:** Wannabe hero | **WC Status:** Ace |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** 1972, NYC | **Death:** September 15, 1986 |
| **Height:** Average | **Weight:** Average |
| **Eyes:** Gray-blue | **Hair:** Brown |

but is limited by the Law of Conservation of Mass. Thus, while he can become a T-Rex, he can only become a three-foot-tall T-Rex. Some of his favorite species include: pterodactyl (with a 12-foot wing span), tyrannosaurus, stegosaurus, and iguanodon.

# LAZY DRAGON

**Created by William F. Wu**

*"Some knowledge of his heritage was one of his few sources of pride. Even most of the Chinatown people around him didn't know the origin of his nickname.* If only you lived up to the original Lazy Dragon, *Vivian said with a sneer in his mind. You don't deserve your name."*

— On the perils of sharing a body with your little sister. Wu: "Snow Dragon" (Volume VIII)

## DESCRIPTION

Ben Choy is small and slender and wears loose-fitting clothing that's always slightly baggy. His face is oval, his nose broad. He wears his hair somewhat longish. Choy despises and uses women. One of his sources of pride is that he has some knowledge of his heritage. He always wears on old Chinese coin given to him by his grandfather as a pendant around his neck, strung through the square hole in the coin's center.

| LAZY DRAGON | | | | | POWER LEVEL 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +1 | +1 | +1 | +1 | +0 | +1 |
| 12 | 12 | 13 | 12 | 11 | 12 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +1 | +4 | +4 | +4 |

**SKILLS**

Craft (artistic) 9 (+10), Knowledge (history) 3 (+4), Knowledge (streetwise) 3 (+4), Language 1 (Cantonese)

**FEATS**

None

**POWERS**

**Summon Animal 7** (105 points; Broad Type, Heroic, Sensory Link; Limited to figurines, Physical body helpless while summoned form exists)

**COMBAT**

Attack +1, Grapple +2, Damage +1 (unarmed), Defense +3 (+2 flat-footed), Knockback –0, Initiative +1

**DRAWBACKS**

Involuntary Transformation (into his sister Vivian, uncommon, moderate, –2 points)

**Abilities 12 + Skills 4 (16 ranks) + Feats 0 + Powers 28 + Combat 8 + Saves 10 – Drawbacks 2 = Total 60**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Ben Choy | **WC Name:** Lazy Dragon |
| **Occupation:** Mercenary | **WC Status:** Ace |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Chinese |
| **Birth:** 1967, NYC | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** 5 ft., 7 in. | **Weight:** 140 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Dark | **Hair:** Black |

## BACKGROUND

Ben Choy lives in a cramped one-room apartment over a Chinese grocery store in Chinatown. He starts to work for the Shadow Fists before he's 20 and soon becomes Fadeout's chief assistant and confidant.

### DECEMBER 1988

Choy is sent on a mission by Leslie Christian, a new captain in the Shadow Fist Society, that involves recovering a shipment of rapture from the Demon Princes and delivering it to Bloat, its original intended recipient, on Ellis Island. Choy is suspicious that the Shadow Fists are testing his loyalty, but ultimately succeeds in retrieving the package and swims out to the island in the form of a polar bear. He meets the joker Bloat and his strange band of squatters and is eventually jumped by David Butler, which pushes him back into his human body. He then loses control of his body to his sister, Vivian (whose Chinese name is Tienyu), who becomes the driver. Vivian has her own secrets, which, at this point, are largely unrevealed.

## ABILITIES

Lazy Dragon carves small figurines out of soft materials (wood, soap, potatoes, *etc.*) or folds them out of paper. This talent is crucial to his wild card power, because Choy animates these figures, turning them into living examples of what they represent, with all the creatures' powers and abilities. While animating his creations, Choy's human form is in a helpless, coma-like state. If the form he animates gets injured or destroyed, he returns to his body.

The listed power level is for Lazy Dragon's human form (and primarily for his Craft skill; his combat power level is more like PL 2); the power level of his animal forms varies, and can be as high as PL 12, such as when he became a Chinese dragon. See the various animal archetypes on pages 230-232 of *M&M* for examples of things Lazy Dragon might become. If he needs to come up with a figurine on the spur of the moment, roll a Craft skill check: every point over DC 10 is a rank of Summon he can use, up to his maximum of 7 ranks.

Choy shares his body with his sister Vivian. They take turns being "rider" and "driver," the sex of the body changing depending on who is in control. Because of this, Lazy Dragon tends to dress in loose-fitting clothes that suit either sex, in case Vivian becomes the driver unexpectedly.

While English is his native language, his fluency in Cantonese is a source of pride to Choy.

# MACKIE MESSER

**Created by Vic Milán**

*"MacHeath had a jackknife, so the song went. Mackie Messer had something better. And it was ever so much easier to keep out of sight."*

— Milán: "Puppets" (Book IV)

## DESCRIPTION

At 17 Mackie looks even younger, except for his skin, which has a parchment-like quality to it. He has a brush of straw-like hair, and thin, mobile lips. His eyes are the eyes of a shark: cold and gray and expressionless. He is hunchbacked and thin and dresses in dirty jeans and a worn leather jacket.

Mackie associates himself closely with Mack the Knife from Brecht's *Threepenny Opera,* and frequently whistles the character's theme song. He is intensely loyal to his comrades or master of the moment, but his loyalties shift easily. He is a constant boil of emotions and the slightest insult, perceived or real, often pushes him over the edge and causes him to attack those who had just been his friends. It doesn't help any that he is a sadistic psychopath who intensely hates doctors, smokers, jokers, women, bums, anyone better off than himself, homosexuals (which makes him self-loathing, though he would never admit to his actual sexual orientation), and his name (which is also German slang for homosexual). He fancies himself a Marxist, but actually knows very little about politics.

## BACKGROUND

The son of an American deserter and a Scots prostitute, Mackie is born in Hamburg. He attends school only infrequently and is in trouble more often than not. At 13 he's incarcerated in a juvenile psych ward in Hamburg, where his card turns. He walks out of the prison and hits the streets, ultimately hooking up with the latest incarnation of the RAF—the Rote Armee Fraktion—a cell of German communist terrorists. He worships their leader, Wolfgang Prahler, a love he turns to Molniya when the Russian ace joins their plot to kidnap Hartmann.

### APRIL 1987

Hartmann hesitates to take him as a puppet because his wild emotional swings make him a powder keg waiting to blow at any minute, but the senator's alter-ego, Puppetman, convinces him to do it. Their new relationship becomes the key factor in Hartmann's escape as Puppetman works his emotional magic on the various factions involved, causing Tom Miller and his JJS minions to drop out of the plot, Molniya to exit on a rather minor errand, and then Messer to blow up and kill his RAF brethren and, literally and immediately, fall in worshipful love with Hartmann.

### JUNE 1987

Mackie commits his first atrocity in the United States for Hartmann by raping, torturing, and murdering the Syrian ace Misha before the horrified eyes of Chrysalis and Digger Downs. Mackie soon becomes a habitue of Jokers Wild, where he is one of the untouchable favorites of the Gatekeeper.

### JULY 1988

Eventually Hartmann sets him on Digger Downs and then in Atlanta, during the Democratic National Convention, on Sara Morgenstern. Mackie makes a few unsuccessful runs at her, one of them ending in an epic battle with Jack Braun. *Der Mann*, as Mackie thinks of Hartmann, then sics him on Tachyon, and Mackie is somewhat more successful, buzzing away Tachyon's right hand before Jay Ackroyd pops him off to the Tombs.

Mackie makes his way back to Atlanta just in time for Hartmann's acceptance speech and an epic three-way battle between himself, Billy Ray (who is trying to save Hartmann), and James Spector (who is trying to kill Hartmann). First he and Ray tangle, and while Mackie is brutally beaten, his cutting hands are too much for Ray, who eventually falls in a gush of gore. Mackie then takes several bullets from Spector, but when Demise turns to finish off Hartmann, Mackie drags himself to his feet and takes off Spector's head from behind. In an excess of celebratory zeal, Mackie picks up Demise's severed head, holds it up for all to see and then as he kisses the bloody lips Spector's eyes open and lock on his. Mackie's mind goes into overdrive. His vibratory power speeds up until his entire body explodes, sending blood and gobbets of flesh raining down on stunned observers.

### SEPTEMBER 1990

Mackie has an after-death experience courtesy of his leather jacket when George G. Battle tricks Cameo into wearing it during the Rox Campaign. Under Battle's order his psychopathic spirit (true to its nature) tries to kill Bloat, but Ray prevents him by stripping the jacket from Cameo and tearing it to shreds.

## ABILITIES

| MACKIE MESSER | | | | | POWER LEVEL 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| –1 | –1 | +1 | +0 | +0 | –1 |
| 9 | 9 | 12 | 10 | 10 | 9 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +1 | +5 | +3 | +4 |

**SKILLS**

Knowledge (streetwise) 5 (+5), Language 1 (English; German native), Survival 2 (+2)

**FEATS**

Ambidexterity, Attack Focus (melee) 3, Improved Initiative, Move-by Action, Rage, Sneak Attack

**POWERS**

**Insubstantial 4** (incorporeal, vibratory; Selective)

**Strike 10** (vibrating hands; Affects Corporeal, Aura, Penetrating, Sustained; Limited to hands)

**COMBAT**

Attack +8 (melee), +5 (ranged), Grapple +7, Damage +10 (strike), Defense +7 (+4 flat-footed), Knockback –0, Initiative +3

**Abilities –1 + Skills 2 (8 ranks) + Feats 8 + Powers 71 + Combat 24 + Saves 12 = Total 116**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Detlev Macintosh | **WC Name:** Mackie Messer |
| **Occupation:** Criminal | **WC Status:** Ace |
| **Aliases:** Mack the Knife | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian (German) |
| **Birth:** 1969, Hamburg, Germany | **Death:** July 24, 1988, Atlanta |
| **Height:** 5 ft., 7 in. | **Weight:** 125 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Gray | **Hair:** Straw colored |

Mackie can make his body vibrate, to several effects. His favorite weapons are his hands, which when vibrating can cut through any known substance—dense materials like metal just take a little longer to slice. They can also be used to grip an object (say, a head) and vibrate it quickly enough to cause the brain inside to be flash-boiled and the skull itself to explode. He can also vibrate his whole body in a manner that enables him to change phase and walk through walls, or, with enough warning, to make him insubstantial to weapons like bullets and knives.

In a straight-up fight, Mackie is a bit weaker than his power level implies, but he rarely, if ever, gives anyone a straight-up fight, preferring to attack from ambush, stepping through a wall for cover when he needs to, then emerging from behind an opponent. With his Selective Insubstantial, Mackie can do things like make his hands solid while the rest of him remains incorporeal.

The Aura extra on his vibrational strike means anyone even touching his hands in "buzzsaw" mode, including blocking a strike barehanded, suffers damage. This makes fighting Mackie in hand-to-hand a much more difficult (and dangerous) proposition.

His native language is German, but he's barely literate in it. His English is limited at first, but gets better after his arrival in the United States.

# THE MIDNIGHT ANGEL

**Created by John Jos. Miller**

*"Save my soul from evil, Lord, and heal this warrior's heart."*

— The Midnight Angel, girding her loins for battle. Miller: *Death Draws Five* (Book XVII)

## DESCRIPTION

The Midnight Angel is long-legged, wide-hipped, and big-bosomed. She resembles a young Sophia Loren. She wears her long, thick hair braided when on a mission and it hangs down almost to her waist. While on missions she wears a dark, form-fitting leather jumpsuit and leather gauntlets. She has an eight-inch scar crawling like a snake on her belly.

The Angel prefers to be referred to as "The Angel," and not just "Angel," though she quickly gives up trying to correct Billy Ray. She is also intolerant of blasphemy spoken in her presence. She is very devout in a Southern Protestant way (of mixed sects, although she doesn't like ophiolatrists at all). Her metabolism burns vast amounts of energy, so she is frequently hungry. To call upon her fiery sword she must recite a brief prayer ("Save my soul from evil, Lord, and heal this warrior's heart"). She likes Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers movies and is a romantic at heart.

## BACKGROUND

The Angel is born to a teenaged mother who has been abandoned by the man who impregnated her. Her childhood is one of poverty and abuse as her mother descends into alcoholism and religious fanaticism. She drags the Angel from church to church, tries to beat all the sin out of her, and harangues her constantly about the dangers of associating with men. When the Angel has her first period, her mother tries to cut her uterus out of her abdomen with a kitchen knife, and her card turns, saving her, though she can never have children. After her card turns her mother berates the Angel for having a contaminated soul and the appetite of a glutton. When her mother dies, the Angel goes out into the world and is eventually recruited by Leo Barnett's Millenarians.

## SUMMER 2003

The Angel has been working for Leo Barnett's Millenarian Society for about a year when she's given the job of trailing a group of Allumbrados, Barnett's rivals, in New York City. The group includes Cardinal Romulus Contarini, the two Witnesses, and Butcher Dagon. She is immediately attracted to the bigger of the Witnesses, who is the most handsome man she has ever seen. She reports back to Leo Barnett and he tells her to go to Las Vegas and meet Billy Ray. Barnett cautions her to not reveal all their plans to Ray (he's theologically unsound) but together they're to pick up John Fortune and bring him to the Peaceable Kingdom, Barnett's theme park in Branson, Missouri. At all costs they are to protect John Fortune from the Allumbrados.

The Angel meets Billy Ray at the Mirage Hotel in Vegas and isn't really impressed. Together they go to the auditorium where John Fortune and Peregrine are being interviewed about the recent events surrounding the turning of John Fortune's card. They meet Fortune's bodyguard, Jerry Strauss (as Creighton), when the Allumbrados strike. The Angel faces the Witness again, this time mano-a-mano. He grabs her and she's astonished that she can't break his grasp. He's as strong as her, but much more ruthless. He kisses her savagely and she loses all notions of his attractiveness. Butcher Dagon, another Allumbrado ace, tells Witness disgustedly to let her go and get on with their job.

Ray and Dagon fight, and the Angel becomes rather more impressed with Ray. Together they knock out Dagon just as the lights in the amphitheater go off. When they come back on, John Fortune and all the ambulatory Allumbrados, including the Witness, are gone. Failure tastes like bitter gall in the Angel's mouth. That night, she fends off Ray's advances and the next day they drive out of the city to visit the Living Gods ranchero in the desert where the prophetic Osiris gives them a clue to Fortune's whereabouts.

Their flight the next morning is delayed by an obnoxious drunk. Word comes to them from the Las Vegas Police Department that Butcher Dagon has escaped, leaving a trail of bodies in his wake. They decide Ray will stay

## THE MIDNIGHT ANGEL — POWER LEVEL 10

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| +10/+1 | +4/+2 | +7/+2 | +2 | +3 | +2 |
| 30/13 | 18/14 | 24/14 | 14 | 16 | 15 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +7 | +10/+5 | +7/+5 | +6 |

**SKILLS**

Knowledge (popular culture) 2 (+4), Knowledge (theology and philosophy) 6 (+8)

**FEATS**

Attack Focus (melee) 3

**POWERS**

**Enhanced Constitution 10**

**Enhanced Dexterity 4**

**Enhanced Strength 17**

**Strike 3** (flaming sword; Mighty)

**Super-Strength 4** (*heavy load:* 12 tons)

**COMBAT**

Attack +6 (melee), +3 (ranged), Grapple +20, Damage +10 (unarmed), +13 (flaming sword), Defense +9 (+5 flat-footed), Knockback –3, Initiative +4

**DRAWBACKS**

Power Loss (must speak a prayer to summon her flaming sword, –1 point)

**Abilities 26 + Skills 2 (8 ranks) + Feats 3 + Powers 41 + Combat 24 + Saves 9 – Drawbacks 1 = Total 104**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Unknown | **WC Name:** The Midnight Angel |
| **Occupation:** Millenarian agent | **WC Status:** Ace (card turned at puberty) |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** Circa 1980, Yazoo City, Mississippi | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** 5 ft., 11 in. | **Weight:** 145 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Dark | **Hair:** Dark |

behind and deal with the situation while the Angel goes on to New York.

Once the Angel arrives in the bucolic community of New Hampton, she spies Billy Ray, Jerry Strauss (whom she knows as Creighton) and Jay Ackroyd conversing by the side of a county road. They decide to split up into two teams, and she and Strauss go to the commune down the road to see if they have any word of the missing John Fortune. On their way to the Church of the Serpent Redeemed they run into Mushroom Daddy, and he gives them a ride in his beat-up VW van that reeks of marijuana smoke. The Angel thinks it's some kind of incense.

She gets a contact high off Daddy, as does Jerry Strauss, and they both munch out on some fine country cooking, then attend the snake handlers' ecstatic services. The Angel is overcome by passion and speaks in tongues, confessing her sins. She hears a voice calling for someone to help John Fortune and responds, smashing through the wall and borrowing Daddy's ancient VW van. She takes it for a wild ride down to the nearby country store where she sees a group of men trying to force a resisting John Fortune into a waiting vehicle, and she goes medieval on them.

The Angel convinces John Fortune to accompany her on a road trip to Branson, Missouri. (Truthfully, he's instantly smitten with his curvaceous rescuer and needs little convincing.)

Checking in with Barnett, she gets Alejandro C de Baca and tells him that she's coming in with John Fortune. First, though, old ghosts call to her, and the two take a side-trip to Yazoo City, Mississippi, to visit the grave of her mother. The Allumbrados catch up to them. She gets on the phone to Barnett again and he tells her to head for the highway on-ramp where they have to hold out for 20 minutes. The Allumbrados, including the Cardinal himself as well as the Witness (the bigger one), show up, but so does John Bruckner with Billy Ray in tow. Ray gets out of the Highwayman's lorry and punches out the Allumbrados, including the Witness. The Angel, hardly knowing what she's doing, grabs Ray and kisses him.

Bruckner then takes them on a trip through the Short Cut. They stop and make emergency repairs to the lorry while Ray and the Angel fight off a hunting pack of chittering spider-like things. The Angel gets splashed with some of their venom and Ray rips away part of her jumpsuit, exposing the scar on her abdomen. When Ray questions her, she tells him how her mother tried to cut her uterus from her. They end up in a clinch that is broken only when John Fortune comes upon them. Later that night, safe in Branson, the Angel comes to Ray and delivers on the promise of her earlier kiss. In the morning, she's astonished that she doesn't regret her night of abandoned passion, but does have some worries in regard to her future. All personal thoughts are put aside, however, in the face of the Allumbrados' full-scale assault on the Peaceable Kingdom.

The Angel and Ray face a combined Allumbrado assault team of Butcher Dagon, the Witness (who, after his confrontation with Ray, is now the limping one), the hidden Allumbrado C de Baca, and a squad of *credenti* with guns. C de Baca uses his powers to animate three of the apostolic statues which then attack them until Ray finishes off the traitorous ace. The Witness heads for Barnett's office and the Angel follows him. She reaches Barnett first and discovers he has veered somewhat off course. He's raving and praying and declaiming that John Fortune is a demon from the Pit and piteously requests the Angel to succor him. She tells him he's a fool, only in stronger words.

The Witness finally shows up and the Angel deals with him harshly, first rearranging his features so he's not quite as handsome as he once was, then booting him through a wall. Ray arrives and she tells him they must get to Fortunato's hotel suite. They arrive just in time to hear Fortunato declare his son free of the virus and then die from exhaustion in Ray's arms. Or rather, in reverse order. The Angel comforts John Fortune as he weeps disconsolately.

Later, in the aftermath of it all, the Angel asks Ray if he thinks they can make a go if it together. He smiles his crooked smile and tells her that they'd be crazy not to try.

## ABILITIES

The Midnight Angel is one of the strongest female aces and in fact is stronger than most male aces. She can call a fiery sword that can cut through almost anything. The sword has a four-foot-long blade and is licked by flames from its plain cross hilt to its blunt tip. The sword comes to her after she says her invocation and vanishes when she simply takes her hands away from its hilt.

# MR. NOBODY

**Created by Walton Simons**

*"If his life were a movie, it would need a serious rewrite."*

— Simons: "You're Nobody Till Somebody Loves You" (Book VIII)

## DESCRIPTION

It's hard to say what Jerry originally looked like. Even he forgets. He frequently assumes the appearance of various Hollywood leading men, from Humphrey Bogart to Sylvester Stallone and Jet Li. His default appearance as Jerry is as a 5'10", 140-pound redhead.

Jerry is a movie buff and much of his outlook on life is colored by lessons learned from watching movies. He recognizes that he has a great talent for self-pity. He rides a big, black Triumph motorcycle. He doesn't much care for guns, but will use one if he has to.

## BACKGROUND

Jerry is from a wealthy family who has an estate on Staten Island. He plays the Funhouse as the Projectionist (December 1963) who can morph into any star of screen or stage, but has terrible comedic timing and can't tell a joke.

### 1965 TO 1985

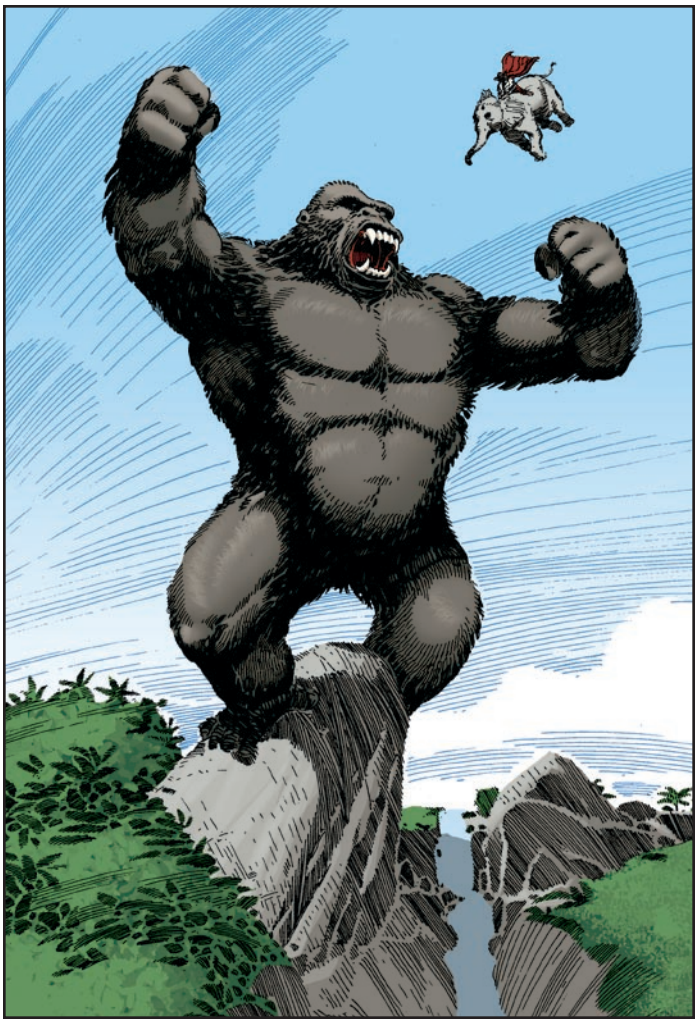
He takes the form of the Great Ape, a 50-foot-tall anthropoid of unknown species, causing the Great New York City Blackout (November 1965). He can't communicate as the Ape, so is ensconced in the Central Park Zoo where he repeatedly breaks out (nine times from 1965 to 1985), grabs the nearest blonde, and climbs the Empire State Building where he's hammered on by whatever aces are handy until he releases the girl and is recaptured.

During his years as the Great Ape, his parents take the faulty advice of a psychic and move to Pass Christian, Mississippi, searching for him, and die in the Hurricane Camille catastrophe. His younger brother, Kenneth, a lawyer in the Latham, Strauss firm, continues to live in their Staten Island mansion.

### FEBRUARY 1987

The Great Ape is transported to Sri Lanka to appear in the jungle epic *King Pongo*, and naturally escapes. Sri Lankan ace J.C. Jayewardene realizes the Ape is actually a human and with Tachyon rescues him from the Sri Lanka military. Tachyon returns Jerry to his human form.

Jerry has a hard time adjusting to life as a person. He has an apart-



ment at 13 East 77th Street, but spends a lot of time at the family mansion on Staten Island, usually hanging out with his sister-in-law Beth because his brother is pretty much a workaholic. Jerry particularly has trouble with women. He falls in love with Veronica, one of Fortunato's girls, but she doesn't return his affections and ultimately refuses to see him any more.

## 1988 TO 1990

Casting about for something to do with his life, Jerry gets drawn into the jumper situation, although he first utilizes his shape-shifting ability again in public to appear as Fortunato to scare off a couple of Immaculate Egrets who are attacking Ichiko.

Jerry hires Jay Ackroyd to help him with the jumper investigation and Ackroyd compiles a dossier on David Butler, which reveals, among other things, that there's more than one jumper, since Butler has air-tight alibis for some of the attacks. Jerry has also been investigating Latham. He stakes out his apartment and surprisingly sees him kissing David Butler. He then follows Butler and some other jumpers into an ambush. He only survives the encounter by pretending to be a mugger. Jerry discovers Latham is putting the squeeze on his brother, Kenneth.

Ultimately, Latham has Kenneth killed and Jerry inherits the file on Latham that Kenneth has compiled. Jerry attempts a revenge hit on Latham but the lawyer is saved by his weightlifter jumper girlfriend/bodyguard, Zelda.

Adopting the name Mr. Nobody, Jerry continues his surveillance of Latham, knowing his brother's killer is bound to come after him sooner or later. He hires one of the last Mafia hit men to do the job, but the hitter fails and ends up in the East River. Jerry knows he has to kill Latham himself. He recruits Veronica, whom he has saved from Zelda's clutches, to help, but ends up doing the job himself, literally scrambling Latham's brain and paralyzing Zelda with a broken back.

## SEPTEMBER 1990

When Ackroyd accompanies Tachyon to Takis, Jerry impersonates the detective as he investigates Ackroyd's disappearance, and reluctantly is recruited by Billy Ray to join a team of aces for a covert assault on the Rox. He changes into the Frankenstein Monster as the team battles their way through Bloat's caverns, but gets washed away by a water trap into New York Bay, shouting "I can't swim!" Fortunately, he can morph into the Creature from the Black Lagoon, who can.

## 1993

When Jay Ackroyd returns from his trip abroad, Strauss partners with him in a detective agency called Ackroyd and Creighton. For this identity he takes his name (Lon Creighton) from father and son Lon and Creighton Chaney, and a face that is a combination of Lon Chaney's and Humphrey Bogart's.

When Ackroyd refuses Hartmann's request to investigate the background of possible Card Sharks, Jerry decides to go after George G. Battle, with whom he has some history, on his own. He finds information in Battle's Vermont hideaway that leads him to anticipate a break-in at the Jokertown Clinic on Halloween night, and he's there to stop them. He morphs into one of the werewolves from *The Howling* to overcome Battle's dead bodyguard, Crypt Kicker, and ultimately corrals Battle, who's turned into a joker when a vial of wild card virus he's stealing breaks. Jerry also meets a clinic nurse, Emily Moffat, to whom he's instantly attracted.

## MAY 1994

When Quasiman informs him and Jay that the government is taking into custody everyone who knows about the Black Trump, they decide to find out where the prisoners are being held and then break them out. Jerry masquerades as Hannah Davis, is captured, and is followed by one of Pann's tinks, who informs Ackroyd of their imprisonment on Governor's Island. They manage to free Finn and Jerry. They figure their best chance to find the missing Black Trump is to follow Card Shark Brandon van Renssaeler to Australia where he's gone to ground with his buddy and fellow Shark Eric Fleming.

Discovering that Fleming has been married five time to model/actresses, Jerry impersonates Peregrine to interview the Shark on his yacht, *Circe*, with Ackroyd, Sascha Starfin, and Finn posing as her crew. It doesn't go well, as Finn is recognized immediately. Fleming takes them all prisoner and plans to toss them overboard for some real sharks to snack on once they get past the Great Barrier Reef.

However, Jerry as Peregrine manages to seduce the hyper-testosteroned Fleming, turns the tables on him, and them impersonates him and frees the others. They come to an accommodation with Brandon van Renssaeler and decide to split their forces to investigate the information von Renssaeler had given them. Strauss and Sascha head for Saigon to search for O.K. Casaday and his share of the Black Trump.

Against all odds, Jerry and Sascha discover the location of Casaday's

secret lab in Myanmar, hire a platoon of local thugs, and hare off to rescue Mark Meadows and Sprout. Jerry disguises himself as Casaday, and at first things go well, until the real thing shows up and suddenly there are dueling Casadays. Jerry takes it on the lam with Sprout, but he crashes their escapee vehicle in the midst of a monsoon. When Casaday's men catch up with them, only Sprout remains. She's transported to China with Mark Meadows when Casaday moves the lab.

Jerry finally reveals himself as Sprout when Ditmar starts to rape him. He kills the sadistic torturer and introduces himself to an astonished Mark Meadows. He goes to the lab's infirmary to rescue Sascha Starfin, dances a round or two with the kickboxer Layton, and comes back to Mark's lab to discover that Ackroyd has arrived, Mark Meadows has transformed into the Radical, and Layton is dead. Jerry tells everyone about Casaday's plan to use a blimp to drop the Black Trump on Hong Kong, and they pick up Belew and some of his South China pirate allies and head off to the airport to foil the Shark's plans.

Jerry discovers that Chow Yun Fat cuts no ice with the local security boys, so he changes into Sly Stallone as Rambo, and comes to the aid of a shot-down Radical laying near death on the airport's runway. He loads the barely breathing ace into a truck and heads for Hong Kong. The full Moon rises, and intensifies the healing power the Radical gets from Moonchild, and the Radical rises to the occasion and saves Ackroyd while destroying the final canister of the Black Trump, ending, for now, the saga of the Card Sharks.

## OCTOBER 2002

In one of his less glorious cases, Jerry attends the Jokertown Boys Halloween concert as John Fortune's date-cum-bodyguard in the guise of a 16-year-old Elizabeth Taylor as Velvet Brown, and accidentally touches the tip of Alicorn's horn, transforming Jerry into a unicorn.

## SUMMER 2003

He accompanies Peregrine and John Fortune to Las Vegas for the Las Vegas Film Festival and shepherds Fortune to the Siegfried and Ralph show at the Mirage. Disaster strikes, however, as one of the white tigers takes it into his head to bite Ralph on the neck and drag him off the stage. Panic ensues and John Fortune's card turns. Miraculously, Fortune gains an ace healing power, which he uses to heal Jerry's sprained ankle and the much more serious injury sustained by Ralph.

The press goes crazy at the story and Jerry comes up with the idea of staging a live television interview to lessen the pressure. Peregrine agrees and Jerry helps set it up. While standing in the auditorium wings as the interview proceeds, Jerry is astonished to see Billy Ray and his new partner, the Midnight Angel. Jerry is wondering what the government is doing involved in this when sudden gunfire rings across the auditorium. Jerry hesitates only a moment then follows a leaping Billy Ray into the sudden chaos.

A group of armed men attack the stage. Jerry goes to Peregrine, who is badly wounded, and John Fortune is knocked unconscious. Ray and the Midnight Angel subdue one of the attackers, a British ace known as Butcher Dagon. Jerry transforms himself into Dagon's form, sucking up energy to tack on a few needed pounds and blowing the lights in the auditorium. As the kidnapers spirit away the unconscious John Fortune, Jerry pretends to be wounded and they drag him off as well. They drive to an abandoned 7-Eleven and a dog-like joker named Blood opens a dimensional gate in one of the building's interior walls.

They go through to—somewhere. Jerry doesn't recognize the loca-

### MR. NOBODY — POWER LEVEL 4

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| +0 | +0 | +0 | +0 | +0 | +0 |
| 10 | 11 | 10 | 11 | 11 | 10 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +4 | +4 | +2 | +4 |

**SKILLS**

Computers 6 (+6), Disable Device 6 (+6), Drive 4 (+4), Investigate 6 (+6), Knowledge (popular culture) 8 (+8), Knowledge (streetwise) 4 (+4), Sense Motive 4 (+4), Stealth 6 (+6)

**FEATS**

None

**POWERS**

**Absorption 8** (Limited to electricity, boosts Growth; Energy Conduit)

**Immunity 1** (aging)

**Protection 4**

**Regeneration 8** (+8 recovery bonus)

**Shapeshift 6** (30 points; Limited to humanoid forms)

**COMBAT**

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

**Abilities 3 + Skills 11 (44 ranks) + Feats 0 + Powers 72 + Combat 16 + Saves 10 = Total 112**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Jeremiah "Jerry" Strauss | **WC Name:** Mr. Nobody, The Projectionist, The Great Ape |
| **Occupation:** Private investigator | **WC Status:** Ace |
| **Aliases:** Frederick (Fred) Creighton | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** 1940s | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** Varies | **Weight:** Varies |
| **Eyes:** Varies | **Hair:** Varies |

### ABSORPTION POWER FEAT: ENERGY CONDUIT

Rather than absorbing energy you take in and directing it to Boost or Healing (whichever your power normally does), you can immediately redirect it into something you are touching as a reaction, essentially acting as a conductor for the energy, which passes through you harmlessly. You gain no benefit from the absorbed energy, as it isn't actually absorbed, just redirected. The energy inflicts damage equal to the amount redirected (the original damage bonus or your Absorption rank, whichever is less).

tion but conversation among his companions reveals they're back in Manhattan. He manages to get off a single line to a now conscious John Fortune, which Fortune recognizes as Creighton's tag line, before they drag Fortune off and take Jerry's apparently battered body upstairs to the infirmary. Jerry escapes from the infirmary when things quiet down for the night and makes his way to the basement where he first runs into Cameo, then John Nighthawk. He retrieves Cameo's belongings, including her battered fedora. He releases Cameo, John Fortune, and all the other prisoners, and the aces make a break for it.

John Nighthawk tells Jerry of a vision in which he'd seen Jerry taking John Fortune to a place of forests, fields, and happy children. It gives Jerry the idea to hide out at Camp Xavier Desmond, the children's charity camp he and Ackroyd support, located in rural New Hampton about 60 miles north of New York City. Cameo hotwires a car for him and John Fortune, and off they go.

After arriving at the camp John Fortune hits the sheets and Jerry checks in with the office. He eventually gets Ezili, and has her send reinforcements (Sascha Starfin, Elmo Schaeffer, and Peter Pann). Their respite from the Allumbrados proves short-lived, however, as a team of gunmen backed up by the younger Witness and Butcher Dagon show up to grab Fortune again. Fortunately, Billy Ray is also hot on the Allumbrados trail. Strauss runs into him and gets a bit of a minor butt-kicking before Ray realizes he's not Butcher Dagon, and Ray tells him to get Fortune and hide in the woods while he and the team of Agency aces hold off the Allumbrados.

Jerry collects Fortune and they run off into the forest, an environment Jerry doesn't find particularly conducive to comfort. They wander for a bit and finally strike a dirt road leading to a driveway with a gnome-like watchman. Allumbrados gunmen also arrive on the scene and Jerry's wounded as John Fortune fades into the night.

Jerry awakens the next morning (and decides to change his appearance before he gets his butt kicked again) at the home of Daniel Brennan and Jennifer Maloy Brennan. Brennan has been out all night looking for John Fortune, but has had no luck in finding him. He's heading out again, but he gives Jerry a tiny joker guide who leads him back to the camp where Jay Ackroyd and Billy Ray are exchanging bon mots. The Midnight Angel soon arrives, and they decide to split up to continue the search for Fortune.

Jerry and the Angel head for a religious commune where they run into the mysterious but amiable Mushroom Daddy who gives them a ride to the Church of the Serpent Redeemed and introduces them around. Jerry, on a contact high from Daddy, chows down on some excellent home cooking and watches incredulously as the Midnight Angel really packs it away. They then attend the charismatic church services and the Angel, sorely affected, speaks in tongues. Jerry tries to snap her out of it, but she bats him away and crashes through the wall. Bemused, Jerry watches her pile into Mushroom Daddy's VW van and chug off down the road.

The Witness (the bigger one) appears and questions Jerry rather severely. First Ray shows up to the rescue, then Brennan, then finally Ackroyd materializes to put the exclamation point on the situation by popping the Witness away. Jerry is still suffering from his injuries when he and Ray head out to Branson. He, Sascha Starfin, Mushroom Daddy, and Billy Ray have a wild boys' night out on the town. When the final crisis strikes John Fortune, the first plan is to send Jerry back to the Jokertown Clinic for a dose of the Trump virus, but the Allumbrados attack prevents him from leaving the hotel. Like nearly everyone else he is helpless in the face of John Fortune's accelerating Black Queen, and can only stand by as Fortunato takes matters into his own hands.

## ABILITIES

As the Projectionist, Jerry can change his likeness to duplicate anyone's appearance. He concentrates on screen actors and actresses during his brief, failed comedic career, and keeps this habit when he becomes Mr. Nobody, although he can quickly morph into just about anyone. Ironically, Jerry doesn't have a lot of acting skill, so he's not particularly good at imitating people, even if he looks and sounds just like them. He tends to rely a lot of circumstantial modifiers to his untrained Bluff skill checks.

He doesn't regenerate from injuries, though his shape-shifting abilities do give him superior recuperative powers when it comes to recovering from wounds as well as some protection against injury.

As the Great Ape his human personality is entirely subservient to his ape mentality. He has the strength and physical skills of a 50-foot-tall ape, one driven to repeat the events of the movie *King Kong* over and over again. He has not aged perceptibly since he became the Great Ape.

He can also extrude the bone in his fingertips. He can use bone needles as weapons or insert one into a lock and transform it into a key. The bone has to poke through flesh and skin to do so, and the process is somewhat messy and painful.

Jerry's body responds to electric current by turning it into mass. For the few moments while his body is in flux, he can also discharge the current into the ground, or into an electrical circuit, which pretty well fries the circuit. This technique works well with security systems and phone lines.

# CASH MITCHELL

**Created by Michael Cassutt**

*"I have many faults, among them slovenliness and laziness, but the greatest of these is greed."*

— Cash Mitchell in a self-reflective moment. Cassutt: "Storming Space" (Book XVI)

# DESCRIPTION

Mitchell is a plain, overweight guy of medium height. He wears glasses. His usual state is annoyed.

# BACKGROUND

After the failure of a bad marriage and a disastrous spate of gambling, Cash finds himself in debt and working for Warren Skalko, the self-professed crime lord of Southern California. His first job is lifting a shipment of color televisions that somehow fell off their truck.

## OCTOBER 1968

He is contacted by a man named Tominbang who says he's in the computer and telecommunications business (*i.e.*, money laundering) who wants to set up the ultimate off-shore data recording and retransmitting station. On the Moon. Cash is intrigued by the idea, but he is even more intrigued by the salary that goes with the job. He signs on.

The vehicle they're planning to use is an Air Force surplus Quicksilver, a prototype space plane that can reach Earth orbit. Certain modifications are made to allow for a Moon landing, but its engines aren't powerful enough to blast out of orbit unless its mass can be reduced at a key moment. That's where Cash comes in.

Things go smoothly with the retrofitting, but Skalko, Cash's erstwhile employer, isn't too happy about the proposed Moon shot. Taking the long view, he doesn't want a whole system of transportation to spring up that he can't control. He makes Cash his spy on the project, and Cash isn't about to ignore the wishes of the crime boss of Southern California. Tominbang hears whispers that Skalko might want to scuttle them, so he moves up the launch date. Cash informs the gangster, who sends a biker gang to stop the launch. Pilot Al Dearborn is injured during the attack, and Tominbang, who had intended to go on the trip himself, decides discretion is the better part of valor and goes into hiding.

But he has planned well and deep. He has a back-up Quicksilver vehicle that is retrofitted as well, and Cash, back-up pilot Mike Sampson, and a secretary-cum waitress with a checkered past (whom Cash loves) named Eva-Lynne who replaces Tominbang's missing mass, make mankind's first trip to the Moon. Unfortunately, for various reasons, including the wrath of Skalko, their journey must remain secret. Sampson, though, goes on to become a major general at Space Command and utilizes lessons learned during the Tominbang Moon shot to smooth the way for later official missions.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Cash Mitchell | **WC Name:** None |
| **Occupation:** Lifter | **WC Status:** Ace |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** Circa 1939 | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** Medium | **Weight:** Overweight |
| **Eyes:** Unknown | **Hair:** Unknown |

| CASH MITCHELL | | | | | POWER LEVEL 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +0 | +0 | +0 | +1 | +0 | +0 |
| 10 | 11 | 11 | 12 | 11 | 10 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +0 | +2 | +2 | +2 |

**SKILLS**

Knowledge (streetwise) 4 (+5)

**FEATS**

None

**POWERS**

**Telekinesis 12** (Limited to making objects lighter; Touch Range)

**COMBAT**

Attack +1, Grapple +1, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +2 (+1 flat-footed), Knockback –0, Initiative +0

**Abilities 5 + Skills 1 (4 ranks) + Feats 0 + Powers 6 + Combat 6 + Saves 6 = Total 24**

## ABILITIES

Cash is a mass transporter. By touching things he can make them lighter. The tighter he grips the object he's touching, the lighter it gets. The triggering mechanism is emotion; anger is the most reliable. He can lift a semi full of highjacked liquor, or nudge a space plane out of Earth orbit.

# MODULAR MAN

**Created by Dr. Travnicek (and Walter Jon Williams)**

*"You're just a goddamn toaster," Travnicek said.*

*"He's a nice guy for a machine," Cyndi said, "But definitely a screw loose somewhere."*

— two opposing views of Modular Man.
Williams: "Unto the Sixth Generation" (Book II

## DESCRIPTION

Modular Man has a certain male-model handsomeness, though the roof of his hairless skull is transparent and shows his radar hardware. (He quickly takes to wearing a skull cap to conceal this.) His features lack character lines, but his synthetic skin is largely indistinguishable from the real thing. He generally wears a navy blue jumpsuit. His exact weight depends on the precise modules he's packing at any given time.

Although an android, Mod Man has been programmed with human emotions such as despair, anger, and joy, but even after a certain amount of experience he doesn't quite understand them. He's not really sure how to be human, but he tries hard. He simply cannot disobey a direct order from Travnicek (many of which have been unlawful or immoral), but sometimes he can find a way to rationalize away an order he doesn't like.

## BACKGROUND

Modular Man is a multipurpose, multi-functional sixth-generation machine intelligence, a flexible-response defensive attack system capable of independent action and equipped with the latest weaponry. His programmed orders are: 1) Obey Dr. Travnicek and guard his identity and well-being; 2) Test himself and his equipment under combat condition by fighting enemies of society and gain maximum publicity for Modular Man Enterprises in doing so; 3) Preserve his existence and well-being. Travnicek intends to manufacture him in quantity to sell to the military, but like other wild card gadgeteers, Travnicek's gimcracks work only when he has a direct hand in creating them and are notoriously difficult to mass produce.

### 1985

During his first adventure he rescues a starlet from the Great Ape while the Ape is climbing the Empire State Building, but then, more importantly, he plays a major role in battling the Swarm during its unsuccessful invasion.

### 1986

Mod Man takes part in the Cloisters Raid against the Egyptian Masons, and is called to Aces High for guard duty when the Astronomer goes on his revenge binge on Wild Card Day. He's accidentally blown up by Croyd Crenson and his head is severed from his body. The head is later purchased from an Aces High busboy by Charles Dutton, owner of the Famous Bowery Wild Card Museum, and is turned over to the Turtle as part of the fee for three of the Turtle's old shells.

### JUNE 1987

Almost nine months to the day after his destruction, Travnicek finally succeeds in rebuilding him. Fortunately, this second Mod Man had a memory back-up taking him almost to the point of the original's destruction.

Modular Man battles the Reflector and Typhoid Croyd, and learns the meaning of mortality as Travnicek gets reinfected with the virus, becomes greatly changed by the experience and can no longer repair him. Around this time his flux generator gets damaged and Mod Man also loses the power to turn insubstantial.

Modular Man takes classes at Columbia, trying to learn how to repair himself, but his quest is in vain. Only Travnicek can fix him, and he no longer seems capable of doing so.

### SEPTEMBER 1990

Travnicek orders Mod Man to join the overt ace team for the Rox Campaign, and in fact Mod Man makes the first foray over the Rox, dropping leaflets telling jokers and jumpers alike to call 1-800-I-GIVE-UP and surrender.

Travnicek forces him to defect and Mod Man reluctantly reveals Zappa's plans to Bloat and also reluctantly fights on the jokers' side in the

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Modular Man | **WC Name:** None |
| **Occupation:** Ace | **WC Status:** Android |
| **Aliases:** Mod Man | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Creation:** December 1985, New York City | **Destruction:** September 15, 1986 (rebuilt June 15, 1987) |
| **Height:** 6 ft., 2 in. | **Weight:** 200 to 400 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Dark | **Hair:** None |

conflict, taking care to cause as little death and destruction as possible. He loses a leg to the Turtle, but does succeed in defeating both Detroit Steel and the Reflector after they penetrate the Jersey Gate. He manages to circumvent his programming and gives Patchwork the notion to blow up Travnicek. With Travnicek dead, he is no longer compelled to fight for the Rox, although he does return there when he sees the Turtle's tidal wave approaching and manages to rescue both Billy Ray and George G. Battle in the Statue of Liberty's torch.

Modular Man is a wanted criminal after the Rox Campaign. He considers fleeing the country, but his first task is to reassemble Patchwork who was also blown to pieces in the explosion that killed Travnicek. Fortunately her pieces, which were all recovered by Modular Man, don't rot.

## ABILITIES

Modular Man is powered by a Travnicek invention called a flux generator. He can also convert food to energy, but this is a slow and inefficient process. He can also power up by sticking a couple of fingers in an electrical outlet, but for many activities, like turning insubstantial, he needs the flux generators. These generators provide him with a force field that makes him invulnerable to all but the most devastating attacks. Flux-field instability, which enables Mod Man to interpenetrate matter, takes vast amounts of energy, so he uses this ability sparingly. When his flux generators get broken, he can no longer go insubstantial and he also loses his force field protection, adjusting his traits and point value as given. Of course, his android body is much more resilient to damage than a normal organic body.

Mod Man can fly at a maximum of 800 miles per hour for a range of perhaps a thousand miles. He is approximately 16 times stronger than a normal human being. As a sixth-generation machine intelligence that thinks in binary code, he is not susceptible to normal methods of mind reading or mind control. Anyone attempting to control or even read his mind would receive a great shock to their system.

Mod Man's weaponry and various other capabilities are built into separate modules he installs in his chest cavity and shoulder slots. His weapons include a microwave laser cannon; a grenade launcher with explosive, sleep gas, tear gas, and smoke bombs grenades in magazine of five; a dazzler that temporarily blinds without causing permanent harm; and a 20 mm armor-piercing cannon. He normally wears two of these weapons in slots on his shoulders. Since his range of sense perception is 360 degrees, he can fire accurately in all directions. He's essentially limited to switching between any two Alternate Powers in his weapons array at a time, unless the grenade launcher is mounted, in which case he can access any of its attacks. Otherwise, he has to swap out weapons.

His skill or knowledge modules are plugged in to give him access to particular skills (say, piloting an aircraft, speaking Esperanto, clog dancing, *etc.*).

Mod Man's sensory inputs include a radio receiver, radar dome, infrared sensors, and ultraviolet sensors.

### MODULAR MAN — POWER LEVEL 10

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| +10 | +3 | — | +2 | +1 | +0 |
| 30 | 16 | — | 15 | 13 | 11 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +12 | — | +3 | +4 |

**SKILLS**

None

**FEATS**

Ambidexterity, Eidetic Memory, Uncanny Dodge (visual)

**POWERS**

**Device 6** (shoulder-mounted weapons, hard to lose; Alternate Power x6)

*Auto-Cannon:* **Blast 8** (Autofire)

*Dazzler:* **Dazzle 12** (visual)

*Grenade Launcher* (all Alternate Powers): **Blast 8** (Explosion), **Nauseate 6** (tear gas; Explosion, Ranged), **Obscure 12** (visual; smoke bombs; Continuous; Fades), **Stun 6** (sleep gas; Explosion, Ranged; Sleep)

*Microwave Laser:* **Blast 12** (energy beam)

**Flight 6** (500 mph)

**Immunity 40** (Fortitude, mental powers)

**Insubstantial 4** (incorporeal—currently inoperative)

**Protection 12** (Impervious 8 when force field is operating, otherwise Impervious 2)

**Quickness 4** (x25, Limited to mental tasks)

**Skill Modules 4** (20 points worth of skills; Continuous; Full Action; Action Drawback—one minute)

**Super-Senses 12** (blindsight [radio], direction sense, distance sense, infravision, radio, radius vision, time sense, X-ray vision)

**Super-Strength 3** (*heavy load:* 6 tons)

**COMBAT**

Attack +8, Grapple +20, Damage +10 (unarmed) or by weapon system, Defense +8 (+4 flat-footed), Knockback -10 (-7 without force field), Initiative +3

**DRAWBACKS**

Disability (cannot disobey orders from Dr. Travnicek, very common, major, –5 points)

**Abilities 25 + Skills 0 (0 ranks) + Feats 3 + Powers 133 (159) + Combat 32 + Saves 3 – Drawbacks 5 = Total 191 (217)**

## ROSEMARY MULDOON

**Created by Leanne C. Harper**

*"She'll use you, too. Get you killed. And not even blink."*

— Sewer Jack to Bagabond, as Rosemary sinks further into the depths of her Mafia heritage. Harper: "Breakdown" (Book V)

## DESCRIPTION

Rosemary is often described as petite and mousy.

## BACKGROUND

Rosemary is the daughter of crime lord Don Carlo Gambione. She gets into social work as a means of dealing with the alienation she feels regarding her own rather dysfunctional family. While still attending Columbia, she interns with the New York City Social Services Department, and gets the homeless paranoid ace Bagabond as a client. Rosemary shares an apartment at that time with C.C. Ryder.

### FALL 1986

Muldoon completes her degree in social work at Columbia and enters law school. She's an assistant district attorney, but still retains familial ties to the Gambiones that are unknown at her day job. On Wild Card Day, she schemes to obtain Kien's missing notebooks, hoping their contents might have information she can use to maintain balance in her family's affairs.

Younger, more progressive elements help her rise to leadership, chief among them Chris Mazzuchelli, who serves as her mouthpiece when she secretly takes over the remnants of the Gambione Family. She justifies her actions with the thought that she can do good while exerting some control on the Family, and at the same time try to keep it safe from the gangs encroaching on its territory. But she slowly sinks under the pressure of running the Family and doing her job in the D.A.'s office. She starts to neglect cases dealing with the Mafia, leading to suspicion against her. She takes increasing advantage of Bagabond, recruiting her to fight against the Shadow Fist Society when they take on the Five Families in open warfare. Rather early on in the conflict her identity as the daughter of a Mafia don is exposed, and she's forced to flee to a Mafia safe house. The fact that her loyalties are no longer divided gives her a free and alive feeling as she now concentrates solely on running what's left of the Gambione empire.

But the Mafia/Shadow Fist war goes badly for the Five Families. By mid-June, 1987, Rosemary is the only don left alive. Betrayed by an increasingly independent Mazzuchelli, she is hunted by the remnants of her own Family, but when Mazzuchelli is turned into a joker by Typhoid

| ROSEMARY MULDOON | | | | | POWER LEVEL 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +0 | +0 | +1 | +2 | +2 | +2 |
| 10 | 10 | 12 | 14 | 14 | 14 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +1 | +3 | +2 | +4 |

**SKILLS**

Bluff 6 (+8), Diplomacy 6 (+8), Intimidate 4 (+6), Knowledge (business) 6 (+8), Knowledge (civics) 7 (+9), Knowledge (current events) 6 (+8), Knowledge (streetwise) 7 (+9), Perform (acting) 6 (+8), Profession (attorney) 6 (+8), Sense Motive 6 (+8)

**FEATS**

Attractive, Benefit (assistant district attorney), Benefit (wealth), Contacts, Connected, Well-Informed

**POWERS**

None

**COMBAT**

Attack +1, Grapple +0, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +1, Knockback –0, Initiative +0

**Abilities 14 + Skills 15 (60 ranks) + Feats 6 + Powers 0 + Combat 4 + Saves 6 = Total 45**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Rosa Maria Gambione | **WC Name:** None |
| **Occupation:** Lawyer, Mafia don | **WC Status:** Nat |
| **Aliases:** Rosemary Muldoon | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian (Italian) |
| **Birth:** Mid- or late 1950s, NYC | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** Small | **Weight:** Light |
| **Eyes:** Dark brown to hazel | **Hair:** Dark |

Croyd, she once against asserts dominance over what's left of the gang. She knows the Mafia has lost the turf war, so she negotiates a surrender with the Shadow Fists, and accepts exile to Cuba.

## ABILITIES

Rosemary has no wild card abilities. She has some influence she used to the Mafia's advantage as an assistant D.A. and has knowledge of and skill in law.

# JOHN NIGHTHAWK

**Created by John Jos. Miller**

*"He lay dying in a hospital bed as the Takisian virus came raining down out of the sky and touched him with the glory of God on high, turning him into something more than human, but perhaps something less than angelic."*

— The transfiguration of John Nighthawk. Miller: *Death Draws Five* (Book XVII)

## DESCRIPTION

Nighthawk is a small, dark-skinned black man, whose age is difficult to tell. Usually he looks anywhere between an easy 50 or a hard 65. His hair is still dark, but he has a fine network of wrinkles around his eyes and mouth that are especially visible in a good light, and his hands have the rough, gnarled look of someone who has done physical labor a good portion of his life. He speaks with a soft Southern accent.

Nighthawk always carries an old harmonica as a lucky piece and a reminder of old friends. He has a number of safe houses scattered around New York City, America, and a foreign country or two.

## BACKGROUND

John Nighthawk is born a slave in Mississippi in 1852. His father is a field hand, his mother works at the big house. She dies during the Civil War. His father stays on as a sharecropper after the war, but Nighthawk knows that's not the life for him. He leaves the plantation in 1868 and never sees his father again.

He wanders for the next 75 years. He's dying in a charity hospital in 1946 when the wild card virus strikes and he turns his ace. The hospital itself is hit hard and chaos ensues. Not even knowing what he's doing, he drains the life out of a couple of neighboring patients, including his friend, a bluesman named Lightning Robert Nash, killing them. He leaves the hospital, feeling 50 years younger and goes on to a long ace career, sometimes working the shadier side of the street.

### SUMMER 2003

John Nighthawk and his team consisting of an ex-mercenary (Usher), a nun (Magda), and a low-level ace (Curtis Grubbs) break into the Cattedrale di San Giovanni Battista, Turin, Italy to steal a reliquary containing the Shroud of Turin the supposed burial cloth of Jesus Christ. Curtis, wounded by the cathedral's guardians, lies dying, and Nighthawk stops his heart, draining him of remaining vitality and feeling it course through his own body. They take the Shroud to Rome and then fly the next day to New York City, to meet Cardinal Romulus Contarini, the head of a secret organization called the Allumbrados. The team members are all *credenti* (or "believers") in the Allumbrados; Nighthawk is a special hire who does occasional jobs for the organization and has taken on this one for reasons of his own. They have no trouble smuggling the reliquary into the United States in a Vatican diplomatic pouch.

Once in New York, Nighthawk meets Cameo in the lobby of the Waldorf-Astoria. He's arranged for her to do a job for the Allumbrados, but he tells her that he has something on the side he wants her to do for him. They don't have a chance to talk about it before arriving in Contarini's suite, where the cardinal gives Cameo the Shroud and tells her to channel Jesus Christ. Cameo is nonplused, but takes the Shroud. Things do not go well, however. Instead of Jesus, she gets Cole Porter, who had lived in the hotel for many years in the apartment Contarini is currently occupying.

Contarini is livid. He tells Nighthawk to convey Cameo to St. Dympna's Home for the Mentally Deficient and Criminally Inclined. Cameo doesn't like the sound of this, but Nighthawk convinces her to trust him for a bit. St. Dympna's turns out to be an ancient charity mental asylum with a checkered

| JOHN NIGHTHAWK | | | | | POWER LEVEL 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +2 | +1 | +2 | +1 | +2 | +1 |
| 14 | 12 | 14 | 12 | 14 | 12 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +4/+2* | +5 | +4 | +5 |

**Flat-footed*

**SKILLS**

Bluff 4 (+5), Climb 4 (+6), Diplomacy 4 (+5), Drive 4 (+5), Intimidate 4 (+5), Knowledge (current events) 4 (+5), Knowledge (history) 6 (+7), Knowledge (streetwise) 8 (+9), Perform (wind instruments) 4 (+5), Profession (laborer) 4 (+6), Sense Motive 6 (+8), Stealth 4 (+5), Survival 4 (+6)

**FEATS**

Defensive Roll 2, Improved Pin

**POWERS**

**Drain Constitution 5**

**Immunity 1** (aging)

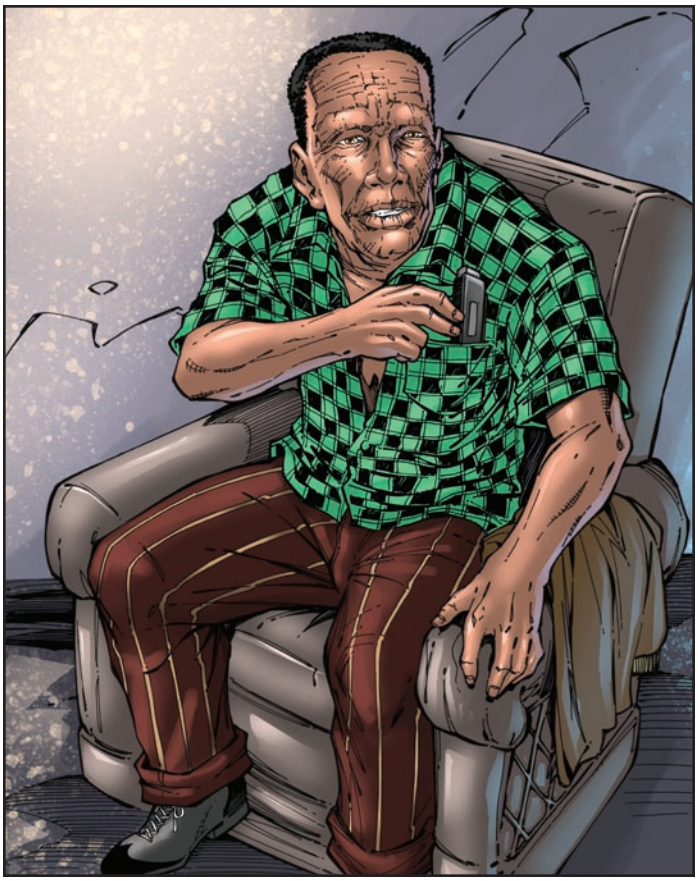
**Super-Senses 4** (precognition; Uncontrolled)

**COMBAT**

Attack +5, Grapple +7, Damage +2 (unarmed), Defense +6 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback –2 (–1 flat-footed), Initiative +1

**Abilities 18 + Skills 15 (60 ranks) + Feats 3 + Powers 8 + Combat 22 + Saves 9 = Total 75**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** John Nighthawk | **WC Name:** — |
| **Occupation:** Mercenary | **WC Status:** Ace (card turned September 16, 1946) |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** African |
| **Birth:** 1852, Mississippi | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** 5 ft., 5 in. | **Weight:** 140 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Dark | **Hair:** Dark |



past Contarini has been using as headquarters for the Allumbrados. Nighthawk gets a phone call from Usher before he has an opportunity to free Cameo, telling him that they've learned that the Allumbrados ace Butcher Dagon, who is currently in the St. Dympna's infirmary, is actually an imposter. Nighthawk goes to check it out. The supposed Dagon is missing. Nighthawk heads down to the basement, where the cells, and Cameo, are located.

He has a vision that Jerry Strauss will take John Fortune to a place of forests, fields, and happy children. He runs into Jerry, who has freed Cameo, John Fortune, and the other Allumbrado prisoners from their cells, and tells him of his revelation, which gives Strauss the idea to take Fortune to a children's camp he knows about. Cameo hotwires a car for them and they split.

Nighthawk and Cameo take another vehicle to Nighthawk's bolt hole on Staten Island. There he gets Cameo to channel Lightning Robert Nash, the bluesman Nighthawk inadvertently killed on that first Wild Card Day when Nighthawk's card had turned. All this time Nighthawk has been worried that he'd stolen his friend's soul, but Nash assures him that this isn't the case. They catch up on old times.

Nighthawk returns to St. Dympna's with Cameo's bloodstained ribbon choker, assuring Contarini that he's taken care of her. He has. He's given her $60,000 in cash and escorted her to the train station so she can get safely out of town.

Contarini sends Nighthawk and his team on to the Peaceable Kingdom to await John Fortune's coming, while he himself takes a couple of shots at intercepting them on the road. The cardinal fails miserably and orders a full-out assault on Barnett's headquarters situated in the Angel's Bower.

Nighthawk heads to Fortunato's suite, where he has another revelation: He sees danger in the room, he sees the whole world burning. When he and Fortunato come face to face they quickly reach an accommodation, both realizing that John Fortune is out of control and his still-rising temperature threatens to incinerate his surroundings. Nighthawk uses Blood to go to the Jokertown Clinic and gets a dose of the Trump virus to use on John Fortune, but the syringe melts when Fortune picks it up to inject himself.

Nighthawk believes the only thing left to do is to try to stop him by draining his energy, but Fortunato intercepts him. The boy is already too hot. Nighthawk could not survive his touch. Nighthawk steps back, and let's Fortunato do his magic, sacrificing himself so his son may live.

In the aftermath, Nighthawk knows he must put an end to Contarini's schemes and kills the false prophet with a touch of his hand.

## ABILITIES

Nighthawk's chief power is the ability to drain energy from a human body and utilize it himself, prolonging his own life and actually making him younger in terms of physical looks and condition. He does this by touching his target with his left hand. The transfusion of energy is quite rapid. Normally, it kills his target, but when he wants to he can pull away without doing so. His targets are normally those dying from sudden violence.

His secondary power is that of sudden revelatory flashes, often indistinct and open to several interpretations.

# NUR AL-ALLAH

**Created by Stephen Leigh**

*"Allah touched you with His light and His voice. You are His mouth, the prophet."*

— Misha, Najib's twin sister.
Leigh: "The Tint of Hatred" (Book IV)

## DESCRIPTION

The Nur is a raven-haired man of medium height whose skin glows a shimmering, lambent emerald.

## BACKGROUND

At his peak of power the Nur rules Syria and, unofficially, a good portion of Jordan and Saudi Arabia. He is the head of the Nur sect, a fundamentalist Islamic organization that believes, among other things, that jokers are abominations of Allah and should all be killed, or at best kept in a state of perpetual servitude.

### FEBRUARY 4, 1987

The Nur lures Hartmann and the political delegation from the WHO world tour to his Syrian camp with a promise of negotiations and instead humiliates, harangues, and ultimately attacks them. Things go bad for his

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Najib | **WC Name:** Nur al-Allah (Light of Allah) |
| **Occupation:** Prophet, dictator | **WC Status:** Ace |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Arab |
| **Birth:** Late 1940s, Syria | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** Average | **Weight:** Average |
| **Eyes:** Dark | **Hair:** Black |

| NUR AL-ALLAH | | | | | POWER LEVEL 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +1 | +1 | +2 | +2 | +2 | +3/+8 |
| 12 | 12 | 15 | 14 | 15 | 16/26 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +2 | +6 | +4 | +8 |

**SKILLS**

Diplomacy 8 (+16), Knowledge (current events) 6 (+8), Knowledge (theology and philosophy) 10 (+12), Intimidate 8 (+16), Perform (oratory) 10 (+18), Sense Motive 6 (+8)

**FEATS**

Benefit (sect leader), Connected, Minions 11 (1,000 fanatical cultists)

**POWERS**

**Enhanced Charisma 10**
**Mind Control 6** (Auditory Area, Conscious)

**COMBAT**

Attack +3, Grapple +4, Damage +1 (unarmed), Defense +4 (+2 flat-footed), Knockback –1, Initiative +1

**DRAWBACKS**

Disability (damaged vocal cords, –4 penalty to interaction skill checks, –2 points)

**Abilities 24 + Skills 12 (48 ranks) + Feats 13 + Powers 34 + Combat 14 + Saves 13 – Drawbacks 2 = Total 108**

side when the aces respond, first Tachyon, then Hiram Worchester, Jack Braun, Billy Ray, and Hartmann. Hartmann uses his puppet, the Nur's twin sister Misha, to slash Najib's throat. The delegation escapes largely unharmed while the Nur's general, Sayyid, is badly injured and the Nur himself barely escapes with his life. His wound dulls but does not entirely cancel his wild card power.

### SUMMER 1994

The Nur acquires some of the Card Sharks' Black Trump virus, and intends to use it on the jokers in Jerusalem once Pan Rudo and his team produces a sufficient quantity. Gregg Hartmann and Hannah Davis show up at his camp as emissaries from the Black Dog and threaten him with a nuclear weapon the Fists have just acquired. The Nur is not deterred, however, as, first, he doesn't believe the Black Trump would harm him or other aces, and, second, he doesn't give a damn about any atom bomb, anyway. He's so perturbed that he's going to send just Hartmann and Hannah's heads back to the Black Dog, but Hartmann uses a combination of his projectile vomiting prowess and his newly-rediscovered Puppetman abilities to make the Nur let him and Hannah go free.

## ABILITIES

His voice has a compelling deepness, a timbre that makes all those who hear him obey him without question. Once the Nur's Mind Control power was rank 12, but after Misha cut his throat and damaged his vocal cords, it dropped to the listed rank 6: still powerful, but more resistable.

He also glows green, which is the color of Allah.

# THE ODDITY

**Created by Stephen Leigh**

*"The joker had once been three people involved in a long-standing love relationship. The wild card had joined them into one being. Though the fusion had been incomplete and fluid. Shapes humped and shifted under Oddity's cloak. Oddity's body was never at rest, never entirely any one of them, never stabilizing, always struggling against itself. Bones creaked, the flesh bulged and twisted, the features came and went."*

— Leigh: "The Hue of a Mind" (Book IV)

## DESCRIPTION

A hulking figure in a cloak and fencing mask, Oddity is three people blended into one, constantly shifting, constantly in pain. One persona is in charge at a time.

An early puppet of Hartmann, the Oddity is extremely loyal to him. They also take their role of protector of Jokertown and jokers in general very seriously.

The Oddity refers to themselves as "they." As a whole, the Oddity is prone to depression.

| THE ODDITY | | | | | POWER LEVEL 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +9 | +0 | +2 | +1/2/0* | +1 | +0 |
| 28 | 11 | 15 | 13/15/11* | 13 | 10 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +9 | +8 | +2 | +6 |

**Patti/Evan/John*

**SKILLS**

(Patti) Knowledge (streetwise) 4 (+5); (Evan) Intimidate 4 (+4), Knowledge (streetwise) 6 (+6); (John) Craft (artistic) 8 (+10), Knowledge (streetwise) 2 (+4)

**FEATS**

Attack Focus (melee) 4, Power Attack

**POWERS**

**Protection 7**

**Regeneration 11** (+6 recovery bonus; injured, 1/minute; disabled, 1/hour)

**Super-Strength 2** (*heavy load:* 4,800 lbs.)

**COMBAT**

Attack +5 (melee), +1 (ranged), Grapple +16, Damage +9 (unarmed), Defense +5 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback –4, Initiative +0

**DRAWBACKS**

Involuntary Transformation (between personalities; common, moderate, –3 points)

**Abilities 32 + Skills 3 (10+ ranks) + Feats 5 + Powers 22 + Combat 12 + Saves 13 – Drawbacks 3 = Total 84**

# BACKGROUND

Evan, a handsome black man, was an artist who worked in metal and stone, but who now, when his head and at least one arm is in control, works frantically on wax figures for Dutton's Dime Museum. John was a lawyer and is violent and prone to fly into rages. Patty was a social worker. The three personalities hold different roles at any given time: dominant, subdominant, and passive. The passive personality is the only one that doesn't experience the constant pain of transformation and is the only one of them that can rest.

## 1989

May 14, 1989, their 16th birthday as the Oddity, is a tumultuous day for them. Evan wants out. He can't stand the pain anymore. As they walk the streets arguing with each other they encounter a group of nat youths attacking the joker known as Barbie. The Oddity rescues her, but in the process is jumped by David Butler. Patty is dominant, so her mind goes into Butler's body. Butler is totally confused by the multiple minds in the Oddity's body, and John and Evan quickly shove him down into the passive role where he has no control.

Patty is also stunned by the displacement, and while unconscious is taken to the Rox. She tries to flee, but there is no way off the island. Fortunately John and Evan are able to question Butler, and they follow Patty and her captors to the Rox, using the joker known as Charon for transport. Bloat tries to recruit them, dangling the possibility of freedom from the constant pain of being the Oddity. Patty has already been offered the empty-minded body of the young girl who jumped the bar of soap that was being inhabited by Lazy Dragon earlier that year. Ultimately, out of love for each other, they refuse Bloat's offer. As David Butler jumps back into his body, sending Patty back to them, they snap his neck, believing they have ended the jumper reign of terror.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Patti, John, and Evan | **WC Name:** The Oddity |
| **Occupation:** Artist | **WC Status:** Joker (card turned May 14, 1973) |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Piebald |
| **Birth:** May 14, 1973, NYC | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** Big | **Weight:** Heavy |
| **Eyes:** Varies | **Hair:** Varies |

## 1993 TO 1994

When Quasiman sinks deeper into his fugue state, the Oddity becomes Hannah Davis's chief bodyguard against the Card Sharks. They are present at the Famous Bowery Wild Card Dime Museum during the April Harvest-led SCARE raid. The Oddity battles and is defeated by the Reflector and is taken into government custody on Governor's Island.

# ABILITIES

The Oddity has super-strength. When Evan is in control they also have

artistic capabilities, especially in sculpting.

# PETER PANN

**Created by George R.R. Martin**

*"That's Pahn. It's Dutch."*

— Pann on Pan.
Martin: Ackroyd's Story (Book XV)

## DESCRIPTION

Pann looks like an extremely well-dressed 11-year-old boy, and always will. He favors charcoal-grey Italian suits with black wingtips, white shirts, and red silk ties, but he has a bit of country in him which shows in his mop of blond hair, deep blue eyes, and his highly freckled complexion. He is always accompanied by at least one tink, sometimes an army of them. His tinks resemble fireflies.

## BACKGROUND

Ackroyd hired Pann away from the Pinkertons to work for the Ackroyd and Creighton Agency (early 1990s).

Pann takes part in the raid on the installation on Governor's Island, which helps spring Finn from captivity, although he is momentarily captured himself before being rescued by Quasiman (summer 1994).

He helps protect John Fortune from the Allumbrados at Camp Xavier Desmond (summer 2003).

## ABILITIES

Pann can call upon an army of tinks, tiny little creatures that look like animated fairies, to do his bidding. He creates them by clapping his hands. Anyone nearby can clap, too, and the more who clap and the longer they clap, the more tinks appear. He's fairly mean to his tinks, who as far as anyone can tell actually have no feelings.

Pann primarily uses his tinks as tiny spies to shadow, keep tabs on, or otherwise follow different subjects. They can zoom back to report to him whatever they see or overhear. A cloud of them can also provide a decent distraction, like a swarm of buzzing insects, and Pann is only too willing to use his tinks as cannon fodder when need be.

| PETER PANN | | | | | POWER LEVEL 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| -2 | +1 | +0 | +2 | +2 | +0 |
| 6 | 12 | 10 | 14 | 14 | 11 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +0 | +2 | +4 | +5 |

**SKILLS**

Bluff 5 (+5), Computers 2 (+4), Gather Information 6 (+6), Investigate 6 (+8), Knowledge (current events) 4 (+6), Knowledge (streetwise) 5 (+7), Sense Motive 4 (+6), Stealth 4 (+9)* *includes +4 size modifier

**FEATS**

Contacts, Well-Informed

**POWERS**

**Shrinking 4** (small; Continuous; Permanent; Innate)

**Summon Tinks 2** (Fanatical, Move Action; Progression 9)

*Tinks:* Str 1, other abilities 10 or +0; **Flight 2**, **Nauseate 4** (Burst Area; Limited to swarms of tinks), **Shrinking 20** (minuscule; Continuous; Permanent; Innate); *Drawbacks:* Disability (glowing, –4 Stealth modifier, –1 point)

**COMBAT**

Attack +4 (includes +1 due to size), Grapple –3 (includes -4 due to size), Damage –2 (unarmed), Defense +6 (includes +1 due to size; +4 flat-footed), Knockback +1 (includes +1 due to size), Initiative +1

**Abilities 11 + Skills 9 (36 ranks) + Feats 2 + Powers 22 + Combat 16 + Saves 8 = Total 68**

# PEREGRINE

**Created by Gail Gerstner-Miller**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Peter Pann | **WC Name:** None |
| **Occupation:** Private investigator | **WC Status:** Ace |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** Unknown | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** Short | **Weight:** Slight |
| **Eyes:** Deep blue | **Hair:** Blond |

*"Tall, lean, and athletic, her stunning wings matched a still-stunning figure that had made only the slightest concession to age and gravity over the years."*

— Peregrine in middle age.
Miller: *Death Draws Five* (Book XVII)

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Peregrine (legally changed) | **WC Name:** Peregrine ("Peri" to friends) |
| **Occupation:** Actress, model | **WC Status:** Joker-ace (card turned around age 13) |
| **Aliases:** Amare Sweet (birth name) | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** July 28, 1954 | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** 5 ft., 8 in. | **Weight:** 80 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Vivid blue | **Hair:** Brunette |

## DESCRIPTION

A beautiful and sensual joker, Peregrine is noted for her gorgeous brown and white feathered wings. Her weight is slight due not to anorexia, but her hollow bones.

## BACKGROUND

Peregrine's first trip to New York comes when she's 16 and appearing in a national cheerleader competition in Madison Square Garden. (The Hiram quip in the same segment about her being from Old Dime Box, Texas, is facetious in nature, and not accurate.)

Her first work is in modeling, which quickly turns into guest appearances on various television talk shows where she proves that she's articulate and witty as well as photogenic. She gets her own popular late night television talk show, *Peregrine's Perch* (circa 1980). She appears in *Playboy*, as well as an Andy Warhol poster entitled "Fallen Angel," and is well-known for her generally sexy demeanor. At some point rather early on in her career she becomes an unwitting puppet of Gregg Hartmann.

### 1986

Peregrine takes part in the Cloisters Raid against the Egyptian Masons and subsequently is a target of the Astronomer's Wild Card Day vengeance. She attends the Aces High Wild Card Day dinner, where she helps save Jane Dow when she's hurled off the restaurant's balcony by the Astronomer. Later, she helps energize Fortunato through a bout of incredible sexual play that also results in the conception of their son, whom Peregrine names John Fortune.

Her penthouse apartment in 1986 consists of a single wide room, with separate areas on a different level a step or two up or down from adjacent ones, each carpeted in different shades of grey. The furniture is all steel or glass or upholstered in grey cotton. One wall is nothing but windows, and looks out on Central Park. The highest point in the apartment is an elevated king-sized water bed in a far corner of the room. The Astronomer wrecks the apartment with his unexpected attack.

### LATE 1986 TO EARLY 1987

Peregrine participates in the WHO-sponsored world tour, meeting cameraman and documentary filmmaker Josh McCoy, whom she later marries. While attending a service at the Temple of the Living Gods outside Cairo she attempts to help fight off a terrorist attack and discovers she can't fly. This, as well as several other symptoms, causes her to see Dr. Tachyon the next day and they discover that she's pregnant. In a later meeting with members of the Living Gods, she's given an amulet for her unborn child which will give him the strength and power of Ra and is told to keep it for him until he is old enough to use it.

The story of Peregrine's pregnancy is on the cover of *Aces* magazine (March, 1987), in a wildly speculative article written by Digger Downs. She has John Fortune in the Jokertown Clinic with Josh McCoy at her side. Tachyon's pessimism to the contrary, John Fortune is a normal-looking baby boy, but there is no doubt that the wild card virus lurks in his genes, just waiting to express itself. McCoy and Peregrine marry soon after Fortune is born.

### 1988 TO 2002

Peregrine attends the Democratic National Convention in Atlanta (July 1988) as a media journalist.

Hartmann breaks the Card Shark story to the general public on *Peregrine's Perch* (November 1993).

She acts as the master of ceremonies for the Jokertown Boys' impromptu live broadcast of their Halloween concert on MTV (2002), which is also attended by her teenaged son.

### SUMMER 2003

John Fortune's card finally turns during a trip to Las Vegas, and years of desperate worry end as he apparently pulls an ace. All is not hearts and happy endings, however, as almost immediately Peregrine is badly

| PEREGRINE | | | | | POWER LEVEL 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +1 | +3 | +1 | +1 | +2 | +3 |
| 12 | 17 | 13 | 13 | 14 | 16 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +2/+1* | +4 | +6 | +5 |

**Flat-footed*

**SKILLS**

Acrobatics 10 (+13), Bluff 2 (+5), Diplomacy 2 (+5), Perform (acting) 6 (+9), Profession (model) 8 (+10), Profession (interviewer) 4 (+6), Sense Motive 2 (+4)

**FEATS**

Attractive, Benefit 2 (wealth), Connected, Defensive Roll 1, Dodge Focus 2
*Equipment:* titanium claws (+2 damage)

**POWERS**

**Flight 2** (25 mph)

**COMBAT**

Attack +5, Grapple +6, Damage +1 (unarmed), +3 (claws), Defense +6 (+2 flat-footed), Knockback –1 (–0 flat-footed), Initiative +3

**DRAWBACKS**

Power Loss (Flight, if her wings are restrained, –1 point)

**Abilities 25 + Skills 9 (36 ranks) + Feats 7 + Powers 4 + Combat 18 + Saves 9 – Drawbacks 1 = Total 71**

wounded in an armed kidnaping attempt in which John Fortune is spirited away by an unknown gang. Peregrine is medevaced to the Jokertown Clinic where she sees Fortunato for the first time in 16 years. She asks Fortunato to bring John Fortune home safely and he agrees to do what he can, and Peregrine begins her long convalescence.

She has won several Emmys for her work on *Peregrine's Perch* and the documentaries that she started making in the late 1980s. She has homes both in New York City (a Park Avenue apartment) and Los Angeles (a Malibu beach house).

## ABILITIES

Peregrine can fly like a bird, with considerable agility and grace (reflected by her Acrobatics skill). Despite her beautifully feathered wings, her flight is actually telekinetic in nature. Still, if her wings are restrained in some fashion, she loses the ability to fly, due to her psychological dependence on them. When she goes into battle, Peregrine wears custom-made titanium claws that fit over the backs of her hands as weapons.

Other than her flight, Peregrine is a normal—albeit lovely and talented—woman.

# KIEN PHUC

**Created by John Jos. Miller**

*"Utterly self-absorbed, utterly ruthless."*

— Miller: Wraith's Story (Book III)

## DESCRIPTION

When he reaches middle age, Kien runs a little to fat. He loses most of his right hand to Wraith, Wild Card Day 1986.

## BACKGROUND

Kien is born in a village in rural Vietnam where his father is a small time merchant/black marketeer. He hates the country life and longs for something more exciting and luxurious. He is also smart, greedy, ruthless, and quite ambitious. Although he suppresses the truth from even himself for a long time, he kills his father, steals his money, deserts the rest of his family, and moves to the city. He is ethnic Chinese, so he changes his name from Hsiang Yu, taking the name of an ancient Vietnamese emperor, Kien Phuc, hoping this will help his military career. He achieves the rank of general, but even at an early stage he's also into everything illegal, and is one of the most corrupt members of a corrupt regime. He personally orders the assassination of Captain Daniel Brennan, which leads to the death of Brennan's wife and their unborn child, earning him Brennan's undying enmity.

LATE 1970S

CIA agent Edward St. John Latham helps ease his transition to the United States after the fall of Saigon and Kien appears in New York City as a respected businessman with a string of restaurants and dry cleaning establishments. He actually controls a criminal empire called the Shadow Fist Society which has its fingers in every illegal activity imaginable. This American portion of his empire starts in 1971 when Kien uses a Chinese street gang called the Immaculate Egrets to smuggle heroin into the United States.

Kien lives on several floors in a five-story graystone condo on Fifth Avenue and 73rd Street. His servants occupy the third floor while Kien lives alone on the fifth in eight rooms of unrelieved opulence which also house his incredible collection of Asian art, including the finest selection of Chinese jade in the West, as well as a 2,200-year-old terra cotta warrior figure from the Qin Dynasty. The security system is quite elaborate, and includes a batrachian watch joker that Kien keeps in a five-gallon jar on his massive teakwood desk.

### LATE 1986

**KIEN PHUC** — **POWER LEVEL 4**

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| +0 | +0 | +1 | +2 | +2 | +2 |
| 10 | 11 | 12 | 15 | 14 | 14 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +2 | +4 | +3 | +6 |

**SKILLS**

Bluff 5 (+7), Diplomacy 8 (+10), Intimidate 6 (+8), Knowledge (behavioral sciences) 5 (+7), Knowledge (business) 8 (+10), Knowledge (streetwise) 8 (+10), Language 3 (Cantonese, English, French; Vietnamese native), Notice 4 (+6), Sense Motive 7 (+9)

**FEATS**

Attack Focus (melee) 1, Benefit 3 (wealth 2, head of the Shadow Fists), Connected, Contacts, Defensive Roll 1, Improved Throw, Well-Informed

**POWERS**

None

**COMBAT**

Attack +5 (melee), +4 (ranged), Grapple +5, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +5 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback –1, Initiative +0

**DRAWBACKS**

Disability (one hand, –4 points; as of September 1986)

**Abilities 16 + Skills 14 (54 ranks) + Feats 9 + Powers 0 + Combat 18 + Saves 10 – Drawbacks 4 = Total 63**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Hsiang Yu | **WC Name:** None |
| **Occupation:** Crimelord | **WC Status:** Nat |
| **Aliases:** Kien Phuc | **Ethnicity:** Asian (Chinese) |
| **Birth:** Unknown, Vietnam | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** 5 ft., 10 in. | **Weight:** 170 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Dark | **Hair:** Dark |

Kien launches a devastating turf war to wipe out the Fists' main competition in New York City, the Mafia. By the next summer they've all but destroyed their rivals and have come to an understanding with the last don, Rosemary Muldoon. She goes into exile in Cuba. Kien and Tachyon also work out a truce: Kien will leave Jokertown alone; Tachyon will not interfere in his activities. Peace reigns, however briefly, on the streets of New York City.

### AUGUST 1989

Kien goes about his business, which is building the Shadow Fists into a relentless juggernaut of crime. He sets a trap for Phillip Cunningham, a lieutenant he suspects of disloyalty. First he has a jumper move him into Leslie Christian's body, displacing an ace he'd brought into the Shadow Fists for this very purpose. He then follows ensuing events using Christian's power of astral projection as Blaise kills Kien's old body with Christian in it. When Cunningham finds the body he initiates his planned takeover. At first he seems to be winning, but, again using Blaise's help, Kien gets the drop on his erstwhile lieutenant, then has Blaise jump him into Cunningham's younger, more desirable body. Blaise then executes Cunningham, now in Christian's body, leaving Kien still in charge of the Shadow Fists, much younger than he'd been when the day began, and an ace to boot.

### FALL 1989

Secure in his new body and with the old one publicly declared dead, Kien decides to settle old scores. Brennan is number one on his list. Tachyon is not much lower. He has tracked Brennan to his new location in Upstate New York and he sends a hit team after him. Brennan returns to New York City with a wounded Jennifer Maloy, not knowing Kien is inhabiting the body of his sometime ally Fadeout. Kien learns that Jennifer is in the Jokertown Clinic and decides to settle all debts at once. He leads a hit on the clinic and, through the agency of the mysterious ace known as Trace, is sent into a dimension populated by images from Brennan's subconscious. There Kien finally comes to face the truth of his father's fate, and has a final confrontation with his deadliest enemy. Brennan defeats him and leaves Kien behind in the jungle the general had lied, schemed, and killed to escape from, but now must inhabit forever.

## ABILITIES

Kien has no wild card skills initially, but he is a smart, ruthless, disciplined businessman, whether the business is his string of dry cleaning establishments or his various illegal activities, including art smuggling, drug running, the protection racket, and prostitution.

Kien learned Cantonese, English, French, and Vietnamese at an early age and speaks all with native fluency.

When he's jumped into Leslie Christian's body he (briefly) has the power of astral projection. When he inhabits Philip Cunningham's body, he gets the power to turn invisible.

# GEORGY VLADIMIROVICH POLYAKOV

**Created by Michael Cassutt**

*"The second ace belongs to no one. He's very careful about that. His loyalty is to the Soviet Union. To Soviet ideals and potential, not the pitiful reality."*

— Polyakov, describing himself.
Cassutt: "Legends" (Book IV)

## DESCRIPTION

Polyakov is a short, heavy set older man with short grey hair and the kind of gruff, avuncular face only television characters have. He never marries.

## BACKGROUND

Polyakov has only used his power a few times. The first time is after World War II, when he's attacked by a superior officer (1947). It's the first hint he ever had that he's a wild carder. Aghast at what happened, he vows never to use his power again. He keeps that promise until, working as a courier relaying messages between the Kremlin and Josef Stalin, he learns the murderous joker who is the Benevolent Father of the Soviet People has ordered the execution of all wild carders, and burns him to a cinder before the orders can be released.

He joins the KGB and makes the rank of colonel. When he travels in the West it's often under cover as a Tass journalist. Polyakov finds Tachyon on the skids in Hamburg (fall 1955) and takes him to a safe house in East Berlin where he detoxes him and supplies him with controlled amounts of alcohol and women as he slowly regains his health. Tachyon gives him much information on American aces, Takisian history and science, and on the wild card virus itself and then is quietly expatriated to West Berlin under deep cover under the codename Dancer.

### 1987

After putting together data from various KGB reports about Senator Gregg Hartmann's activities during the WHO-sponsored world tour, Polyakov comes to the conclusion that the possible next president of the United States is an unknown ace. He travels to London and meets with Tachyon, reminding him of old obligations. Tachyon answers a number of questions about American politics, which only heightens Polyakov's suspicions about Hartmann, but when he reports to his superiors, they turn on him. He uses his power to escape, and decides to emigrate to America, an aged, dutiful, KGB colonel, to work in the interest of his nation, which now believes him to be dead.

He forms an unlikely alliance with Gimli and Misha to expose Hartmann as a wild carder, but realizes early on that he's working with unstable amateurs, and withdraws to pursue his agenda alone. He next turns up as Blaise's tutor, the only teacher who can control him.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Georgy Vladimirovich Polyakov | **WC Name:** None |
| **Occupation:** Government agent | **WC Status:** Ace (card turned 1947) |
| **Aliases:** Victor Demyenov; George Goncherenko, George Steele | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian (Russian) |
| **Birth:** 1924, Soviet Union | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** 5 ft. 5 in. | **Weight:** 160 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** grey | **Hair:** grey |

| Georgy Vladimirovich Polyakov | Power Level 5 | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +0 | +1 | +1 | +1 | +1 | +1 |
| 11 | 12 | 13 | 13 | 12 | 12 |

| Toughness | Fortitude | Reflex | Will |
|---|---|---|---|
| +1 | +5 | +4 | +5 |

**SKILLS**

Bluff 6 (+7), Intimidate 5 (+6), Knowledge (streetwise) 4 (+5), Knowledge (tactics) 4 (+5), Language 3 (English, French, German; Russian native), Notice 7 (+8), Perform (acting) 4 (+5), Sense Motive 6 (+7), Stealth 5 (+6)

**FEATS**

Connected, Contacts, Master Plan

**POWERS**

**Drain Constitution 5** (spontaneous combustion)

**COMBAT**

Attack +5, Grapple +5, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +5 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback –0, Initiative +1

**Abilities 13 + Skills 11 (44 ranks) + Feats 3 + Powers 5 + Combat 20 + Saves 11 = Total 63**

### JULY 1988

Polyakov takes the name George Steele, and shows up at the Democratic National Convention in Atlanta, again to try to expose the truth about Senator Hartmann. He tells Tachyon his suspicions, but Tachyon doesn't believe him. He goes to the aid of Sara Morgenstern after Mackie Messer nearly kills her, twice, and Tachyon finally gets on the anti-Hartmann bandwagon with them. After being exposed as a KGB agent by Barnett's agents, he offers to flip for the FBI, on the condition that Tachyon receive immunity for his KGB ties.

## ABILITIES

He can burn with his touch. He also has spy and journalist skills, including fluency in English, French, German, and Russian.

Polyakov's Drain power reflects his wild card ability to cause animals (including people) to spontaneously combust by touching them. A target killed by his power is reduced to ashes without any collateral damage, leaving even the victim's clothing intact.

# QUASIMAN

**Created by Arthur Byron Cover**

*"Tonight he felt the city inside him, and he was inside it, he felt its steel and mortar and brick and stone and marble and glass, felt his organs touching the various buildings and places of Jokertown as their atoms phased in (and out) on their way (and back again) across the planes of reality. His molecules grazed the clouds swirling towards the city like an incoming back cotton tide; they mingled with air pregnant with moisture and the promise of more moisture to come, they trembled with the vibrations of distant thunder.*

— A taste of what its like to be Quasiman.
Cover: "Jesus Was An Ace" (Book V)

## DESCRIPTION

A hunchback with an unbending left hip, Quasiman's physical appearance is not helped by the fact that at times portions of his body randomly phase out of existence. Frequently when parts of his brain disconnect he's frozen into position until the affected part returns. Even more frequently, he has a line of line drool running down his chin. He usually dresses in old but clean and neatly patched jeans and a lumberjack shirt. His hair is red and curly.

## BACKGROUND

All he remembers about his previous life is that he was an explosives expert; Father Squid quips that "The bomb squad's loss has been the God squad's gain." Shortly after his card turns he becomes caretaker at the church of Our Lady of Perpetual Misery where Father Squid looks after him and sends him out on missions the priest feels he can handle.

### SPRING 1987

He's sent to the Edge by Father Squid in a desperate attempt to prevent a Werewolf/Mafia confrontation. He forgets his task, but remembers in time to save the life of Leo Barnett, almost at the cost of his own.

### JULY 1988

He has an epic battle with Lazy Dragon in the Crystal Palace that results in the Jokertown landmark burning to the ground.

### FALL 1993

Quasiman saves the life of Father Squid and others when an arsonist torches Our Lady of Perpetual Misery (September 16) and does his best to help Hannah Davis investigate the crime. He is hindered by his usual memory problems and also by the fact that Davis is initially jokerphobic. He accompanies her to Free Vietnam, saving her from a car bomb, helps her dig up the purported corpse of suspected Card Shark Etienne Faneuil and then smuggles Faneuil's ring back to New York City so Cameo can

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Unknown | **WC Name:** Quasiman |
| **Occupation:** Caretaker | **WC Status:** Joker-ace |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** Unknown | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** Average | **Weight:** Average |
| **Eyes:** Unknown | **Hair:** Red |

| QUASIMAN | | | | | POWER LEVEL 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +8/+3 | +0 | +3 | +3/–3 | +2 | –1 |
| 26/16 | 11 | 16 | 17/5 | 15 | 9 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +7 | +9 | +3 | +5 |

**SKILLS**

Climb 10 (+18), Craft (structural) 6 (+9/+3), Knowledge (streetwise) 4 (+7/+1)

**FEATS**

Attack Focus (melee) 3

**POWERS**

**Enhanced Strength 10**

**Protection 4**

**Super-Senses 4** (precognition; Uncontrollable)

**Super-Strength 2** (*heavy load:* 3,680 lbs.)

**Teleport 10** (Progression 1)

**COMBAT**

Attack +5 (melee), +2 (ranged), Grapple +15, Damage +8 (unarmed), Defense +5 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback –3, Initiative +0

**DRAWBACKS**

Disability (hunchback, common, minor, –3 points), Disability (phases in and out of reality, common, major, –4 points)

**Abilities 24 + Skills 5 (20 ranks) + Feats 3 + Powers 41 + Combat 14 + Saves 12 – Drawbacks 7 = Total 92**

channel his spirit (or not, as it turns out).

After the meeting with Cameo, Quasiman saves Hannah Davis' life yet again while she's in the hospital receiving treatment for yet another botched assassination attempt, and he helps her flee. He is also instrumental in saving the Card Shark files from the clutches of Pan Rudo, teleporting them to safety.

But the months of concentration and strain take a toll on Quasiman. He has never been forced to concentrate so hard for so long, and his mind retreats, losing more and more of its ability to focus until he's in a pitifully desperate state. Father Squid fears he'll never find his way back again.

### 1994

Quasiman reaches a certain level of lucidity during the Black Trump crisis when he teleports all over the world issuing cryptic warnings to the aces involved in tracking down the killer virus. He also rescues Jay Ackroyd and Peter Pann from government detention after their semi-successful raid on Governor's Island.

## ABILITIES

The wild card endowed Quasiman with considerably strength and the ability to teleport, but also an unusual disability.

The atoms of Quasiman's brain, like those in the rest of his body, constantly and randomly phase in and out of reality, taking him to other planes of existence, and making him more than a genius and less than an idiot. When he can control his powers he can jaunt his entire body into and through these realms to appear elsewhere. Usually, though, just portions of his body (sometimes whole limbs, sometimes just bits and pieces) randomly visit these dimensions, sometimes (because of alien creatures or extreme alien environments) causing Quasiman injury. He can carry burdens up to human size on these jaunts, but the upper end of the weight range severely drains him of energy, causing him to turn insubstantial afterwards.

He has minor precognitive powers as portions of his brain jaunt into the immediate future. The usefulness of these powers are lessened by Quasiman's frequent inability to interpret and then remember what he sees.

# QUINN THE ESKIMO

**Created by John Jos. Miller**

*"When Quinn the Eskimo comes around, everybody's gonna jump for joy.*

— Brennan in an altered state, musing on what a nice man Quincey is. Miller: *Dead Man's Hand* (Book VII)

## DESCRIPTION

Quincey is a tall, thin, wasted-looking man commonly dressed in white linen trousers, jacket, and shirt.

## BACKGROUND

Quinn is a freshman at USC (1962) although he is only 16. He's a hanger-on at Hollywood parties, and is particularly smitten with Marilyn Monroe, with whom he's had an affair. He's also pals with Tom Marion Douglas. Quincey is bisexual, and a man with a considerable appetite for pleasure.

In later years Quincey is the head of the scientific arm of the Shadow Fists, specializing in the development of synthetic drugs which have extraordinary effects. He has a pleasure palace he calls Xanadu or the Magic Kingdom outside of Stony Brook on Long Island that is his retreat and laboratory. It is set amid gorgeous flower gardens that are also a drug chemist's dream, with enough raw material to concoct almost any kind of stimulant, depressant, or hallucinogen. Inside it's decorated with exotically eclectic taste. The entrance hall is lined with portraits of famous drug addicts through time, including Edgar Allan Poe, Sherlock Holmes, Elvis Presley, and Tom Marion Douglas. Other rooms display a collection of porcelain and jade Chinese opium bottles, antique Turkish water pipes, terrariums with rare and delicate species of fungus and cactus, and aquariums with various species of puffer fish.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Thomas Quincey | **WC Name:** Quinn the Eskimo |
| **Occupation:** Chemist | **WC Status:** Ace |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** 1946 | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** 6 ft., 1 in. | **Weight:** 165 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Unknown | **Hair:** Unknown |

| QUINN THE ESKIMO | | | | | POWER LEVEL 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +0 | -1 | -1 | +4 | +1 | +1 |
| 10 | 8 | 8 | 18 | 12 | 12 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| -1 | +3 | +2 | +4 |

**SKILLS**

Craft (chemical) 12 (+16), Knowledge (behavioral sciences) 4 (+8), Knowledge (physical sciences) 10 (+14), Language 2 (French, German), Medicine 4 (+5), Notice 4 (+5), Profession (researcher) 8 (+9), Profession (teacher) 4 (+5)

**FEATS**

Benefit (wealth)

**POWERS**

**Life Control 8** (drug injection; Touch Range)

*Alternate Power:* **Drain 8** (any one ability at a time)
*Alternate Power:* **Emotion Control 8**
*Alternate Power:* **Fatigue 8**
*Alternate Power:* **Stun 8** (Sleep)

**COMBAT**

Attack +2, Grapple +2, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +2 (+1 flat-footed), Knockback –0, Initiative –1

**Abilities 8 + Skills 12 (48 ranks) + Feats 1 + Powers 20 + Combat 8 + Saves 10 = Total 59**

## ABILITIES

Quincey has a wild card-enhanced genius. His area of expertise is the effect of chemicals on the human mind and body.

Having taken so many drugs over the years, his bloodstream contains a continual stream of pharmaceuticals he can control by will. His fingertips have extrudable bone needles he can use to inject his own blood into targets, relaying whatever drug effect he desires. In addition to his listed Life Control effects, he can produce various others as power stunts.

Quinn can speak French and German.

# BILLY RAY

**Created by John Jos. Miller**

*"Fighting was all that Ray lived for. He didn't formulate policy or make decisions. He was a weapon, always primed and ready to explode."*

— Billy Ray, the early years.
Miller: Billy Ray's Story (Book XI)

## DESCRIPTION

Ray's regenerative powers lack a sense of esthetics, so when his face gets beat on, it comes back irregular. His eyes might not be on the same level. His chin may be too small or large for his face, his nose misshapen. When it gets too bad, he has plastic surgery to bring it back to what passes for normal (as he can quickly recover from such procedures without scarring).

Ray is a neat freak where his clothing and his personal surroundings are concerned. In fact, early on in his career he's given a private office because no one else can meet his standards of personal cleanliness. His grudge against anyone who stains his suit will last until Ray has a chance to beat a lesson into the offender. He hates bullies and is most eager to engage those who appear to be bigger and stronger than he is.

## BACKGROUND

As a child Ray is dragged from roadhouse to roadhouse by his alcoholic mother. He never knew his real father. His mother lives with many men for short periods of time, some kind to Ray, some angry, most indifferent. They never seriously abuse him, unless inattention counts as abuse. He's diagnosed as hyperactive, but his mother is too scatterbrained to administer his medication effectively. The first time he picks up a football, he's no longer a nobody. He's the first player to go from the Busted Butte Central High six-man football team to a major college, the University of Michigan. Headed for a career as a running back in the National Football League, he breaks his leg in three places during the first quarter of the Rose Bowl on national television, and tries to get back into the game before halftime. But there are rules banning wild carders from professional sports, and the NFL's loss is the government's gain.

### APRIL 1980

Although later he denies it publicly, Ray participates in the disastrous raid to rescue the hostages Iran took from the American embassy. In fact, it's his first government mission. Ray, only 20 at the time, is called Kid Wolverine by teammate Jay Ackroyd. He fights bravely during the

doomed incursion and before he's popped to safety by Ackroyd a heavily wounded Ray is given the nickname Carnifex (Latin for "executioner") by classically-inclined team leader J. Robert Belew.

Ray works for SCARE out of the Justice Department as a bodyguard for important politicians, notably Senator Hartmann. In an early, unchronicled, case he takes on a clan of werewolves in a village in New Mexico.

## 1986 TO 1987

He becomes an unwitting puppet of Hartmann's very early on in his career. He participates in the WHO-sponsored world tour as Hartmann's bodyguard, and plays a large role in defeating Nur al-Allah's attack at his Syrian base.

## JULY 1988

He's Hartmann's bodyguard during the Democratic National Convention in Atlanta, and gets unzipped by Mackie Messer from groin to sternum when he tries to keep the psychopathic killer off the podium while Hartmann's giving his acceptance speech. He spends eight months recovering in the hospital, annoyed that Hartmann never visits or even sends a card.

## 1990

His first case upon returning to active duty is a raid on Jack Stevenson Games, which is supposed to be a hive of computer crime but turns out to be a hive of gaming nerds. Much more satisfactory is the following operation, a Coast Guard smuggling intervention where Ray helps break up a Twisted Fist plan to smuggle guns to the Rox. This leads to George G. Battle inviting Ray to join a special team of aces on a covert assault of the Rox. Ray thinks Battle is a nut, but is eager for action, so he accepts.

They fight their way through the caverns under the Rox, Battle showing over and over again that he's a callous, duplicitous schmuck. Ray goes mano-a-mano with Herne, but is unable to save Danny Shepard from the Gabriel Hounds. In Bloat's Crystal Castle he faces Cameo, who's been tricked into wearing Mackie Messer's jacket by Battle and is channeling the psychopathic ace. Disturbing visions of their last meeting playing in his head, Ray realizes that this time he doesn't have to beat Messer; he only has to beat his jacket. He strips it off Cameo and destroys it. Ray is ultimately rescued by Modular Man before the Rox is deluged by a massive tidal wave.

Battle visits Ray in the Jokertown Clinic where he's recovering from the various wounds he picked up during the Rox Campaign, and Ray tells him that he's going to join his task force and that he's going to keep an eye on him and his little schemes. Ray is happy to find a worthy adversary. George is somewhat nonplused.

## SUMMER 1991

Ray is sent to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam under the auspices of the CIA as part of an (unbeknownst to him) Card Shark plot to destroy Mark Meadows. There he and Moonchild fight an epic battle worthy of two of the premier martial artists in the wild card universe. Ray is stronger, Moonchild is a little faster and vastly more skilled, but to her consternation she discovers her skills don't really matter in the fierce abandon of Ray's attack. Ultimately he takes her prisoner, but he finds a bigger (much bigger) foe in Mark Meadow's Monster avatar.

While everyone is fleeing the rampaging Monster, Ray climbs to the top of a nearby structure and hurls himself onto the back of Monster's calf. He climbs the brute like an alpinist scaling Everest, and is about to plunge into Monster's eye when Monster finally notices him, plucks him off, and flings him away like an unwanted booger. He spends some time convalescing in a Saigon hospital.

| BILLY RAY | | | | | POWER LEVEL 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +7 | +6 | +4 | +0 | +2 | +0 |
| 24 | 22 | 18 | 11 | 15 | 10 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +6/+4* | +5 | +10 | +5 |

**Flat-footed*

**SKILLS**

Intimidate 8 (+8), Investigate 4 (+4), Knowledge (streetwise) 4 (+4), Knowledge (tactics) 8 (+8), Language 1 (spoken Arabic), Notice 4 (+6), Sense Motive 4 (+6), Stealth 7 (+13)

**FEATS**

All-out Attack, Attack Focus (melee) 3, Benefit (Justice Department ace), Blind-Fight, Defensive Roll 2, Dodge Focus 4, Elusive Target, Evasion, Improved Block, Improved Initiative, Improved Throw, Improved Trip, Power Attack, Prone Fighting, Takedown Attack

**POWERS**

**Regeneration 20** (recovery bonus +7, bruised 1/round, injured 1/round, staggered 1/minute, disabled 1/minute)

**COMBAT**

Attack +13 (melee), +10 (ranged), Grapple +18, Damage +7 (unarmed), Defense +14 (+5 flat-footed), Knockback –3 (–2 flat-footed), Initiative +10

**Abilities 40 + Skills 10 (40 ranks) + Feats 21 + Powers 20 + Combat 40 + Saves 11 = Total 142**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** William "Billy" Ray | **WC Name:** Carnifex |
| **Occupation:** Government agent | **WC Status:** Ace |
| **Aliases:** Kid Wolverine, Mumbles | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** Circa 1960, Montana | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** 5 ft., 10 in. | **Weight:** 175 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Intense green | **Hair:** Black |

## 1994

During the Card Shark crisis, Ray infiltrates a small Caribbean Island that is a combination secret base/Club Med for amoral old farts and sees firsthand the effect of the Black Trump on a human body. It horrifies even the normally unflappable Ray. He takes down the lab single-handedly and recovers Pan Rudo's journal, which provides a number of clues as to the Shark's next step in their plan. He also encounters his sometime companion Crypt Kicker, who is now working for the Sharks, and bests him in a hand-to-hand tussle. When giving the undead ace a ride back to the States on his transport plane, Ray is horrified to discover that Puckett has allowed the Sharks to inject him with the Black Trump. He's even more horrified when Puckett liquefies before his very eyes, and hits the ulti-

mate in horrification with the thought that perhaps Puckett has infected him with the virus. Back in the States he spends a week in quarantine, but shows no symptoms of the disease. That doesn't stop Ray from checking the condition of his tongue in the mirror every now and then.

Ray is personally assigned by President Barnett to track down Gregg Hartmann. Much to his bemusement, his new boss is April Harvest, an attractive, blonde, 25-year-old Princeton graduate. They just miss Hartmann at Tomlin Airport and follow him across the Atlantic. Upon landing they meet Brigadier General Sir Kenneth Foxworthy and learn that Hartmann and his companion Hannah Davis parachuted out somewhere over Dublin. Ray and Harvest immediately head to Dublin where they commence a passionate affair as local law enforcement searches for the missing fugitives.

They go to Belfast where Hartmann was last seen, and meet General Peter Horvath, the head of the British military force in Northern Ireland and a secret Card Shark. Horvath informs him that Hartmann is currently having a brandy with Churchill, and he's ordered him detained. Hartmann wriggles free from Horvath's trap however, and when Ray, Flint, and Horvath meet with Churchill, the elderly politician tells them he's having the Order of the Silver Helix take over his security. This seals Churchill's doom, and he's assassinated by Shark General MacArthur Johnson under Horvath's orders.

Ray is stationed in Poet's Corner during Churchill's burial service in Westminster Abbey. He realizes early on that this would be a swell time to release the Black Trump. He climbs Shakespeare's statue to get a better look at the going's on, and while hanging from the Bard's neck spots a disguised General MacArthur Johnson messing with the sacerdotal wine. Ray fights his way through the panicking crowd to the altar and Johnson tries to break the decanter Ray is now sure holds Black Trump-laced wine. Ray makes the catch of his life and prevents the decanter from being smashed. One of Churchill's pallbearers skewers him through the gut with a bayonet he'd stashed up his sleeve, and is himself immediately killed by another pallbearer, a Gurkha wielding a ceremonial kukri. Ray hands the decanter off to the Gurkha, telling him to guard it with his life, and goes after Johnson. Johnson runs for it, taking April Harvest along with him. Ray follows Hartmann, who is following Horvath. By the time he catches up to Hartmann/Hannah/Harvest/Horvath, Hannah has a gun, the general is on the ground, shot, and Hartmann has the virus-poisoned decanter. Ray won't make a deal with Hartmann and is shocked when Hannah guns him down.

Ray wakes up in the hospital and adds Hannah Davis to his list. Captain Flint and Nephi Callendar tell him that they've learned the Black Dog has a nuclear device and they want Ray to go to Jerusalem after him. Johnson is probably there as well, but Ray's mission is to recover the bomb at all costs. Ray agrees, but his main goal is to rescue April Harvest, as he's come to realize he loves her.

In Jerusalem, Ray realizes his best chance to succeed is to join the Twisted Fists. He mutilates himself, smashing his nose flat and cutting his mouth and pressing his lips together so his mouth heals closed, all but for a corner through which he can sip liquids and take in small amounts of food. He does the same to his fingers, turning his hands into clumsy mittens. Then he goes Shark hunting. He stumbles upon a Twisted Fist/Card Shark gun battle and saves a bunch of Fists from certain death. Calling himself Mumbles, he meets Snailfoot, and joins up. He also meets Owl Jimmy, who soon idolizes him.

Ray goes on a mission with the Fists to hit a Card Shark barracks. He questions some of the Sharks they capture and discovers the location of General MacArthur Johnson's Jerusalem hangout. He rescues an astonished April Harvest, who shoots down an equally astonished General MacArthur Johnson before Ray can take him into custody. Ray figures she's entitled.

Ray goes before the Black Dog, who realizes his real identity. They call a truce until Ray and Harvest can go to the Nur's camp, capture the Black Trump, and rescue Zoe Harris. If they fail, the Black Dog says, he'll nuke the camp. They meet Croyd, who has woken up in the form of an eight-legged camel, who transports them to the Nur's hideout at super-speed.

Ray finds Rudo while sneaking around, but is cold-cocked from behind. He wakes up trussed in unbreakable chains and discovers, to his distress, it was April Harvest who'd knocked him out. She mocks him, spritzes him in the face with the Black Trump, and heads off to Jerusalem with a truckload of the stuff. An enraged Ray breaks his own arm, giving him enough slack to free himself of his chains. He's also cheered by the fact that Rudo is sweating blood, apparently dying from a Black Trump that infects nats as well as wild carders. Zoe suggests strongly they sterilize themselves before they go after Harvest. Ray agrees, and reveals that for once he'd actually taken precautions before getting into a fight. He'd mashed his nose flat and closed up his mouth because he knew he would have to face the Black Trump again. He'd changed his face to make it easier to insert protective filters to help prevent him from coming down with the Trump, and his strategy seems to have worked.

Zoe animates a flying carpet to take them back to Jerusalem, but by the time they arrive the city is aflame from the riots that accompany the release of the Black Trump. Rays goes to find April Harvest but instead bumps into Quasiman, who's being assaulted by a mob. Ray protects Quasi as the joker squirts everyone from a canister of Overtrump he's carrying on his back. Ray takes him to the authorities so they can administer the Overtrump more effectively, and learns from Quasi that Hannah has activated the Dog's atomic bomb.

Ray goes to the catacombs, where he finds Owl who takes him to

the bomb's location. Ray makes it to the bomb site just as Hartmann is ready to yank the wires. Hartmann looks at him and says, "I never said thanks, Billy, and I'm sorry..." and sets off the conventional explosive, defusing the atomic one. Ray is splattered by caterpillar parts, but no shrapnel. The Black Dog is laying nearby. Ray is bemused. He has managed to complete his mission, preventing the nuke from going off *and* capturing the Black Dog.

Later, in Washington, D.C., Ray has the satisfaction of arresting an astonished April Harvest. He's conflicted, but he refuses to play the sap for her, and she's led off in handcuffs.

Whether it's simply Ray's usual fate or the vengeance of hidden Card Sharks still ensconced in the government, Ray spends the next eight or so years in various Third-World cesspools carrying on as he normally does. He helps the Mujahadeen fight the Soviets and when the Soviet Union goes to pieces he helps the people of Afghanistan fight the Mujahadeen. He serves a tour in Peru, teaching the Shining Path the meaning of fear, and he is among the team of international aces that plucks a cowering Saddam Hussein out of his gold-fixtured bathtub after the Iraqi dictator kicks the U.N. weapon inspectors out of his country.

## SUMMER 2003

Ray finally smart-mouths himself into the excruciatingly dull job of bodyguarding ex-President Leo Barnett at his Peaceable Kingdom theme park in Branson, Missouri. When Barnett calls him into his office, he is more mystified than anything else when Barnett lectures him on the coming Apocalypse. Barnett explains it all thoroughly, but Ray is not interested in theological debate. He's more than a little surprised that recent events have led Barnett to believe John Fortune, the son of aces Peregrine and Fortunato, is actually the second coming of Jesus Christ. A rival group, the Allumbrados, is after him for their own nefarious purposes, so Barnett sends Ray to Las Vegas to bring John Fortune back safely to the Peaceable Kingdom. Ray is doubtful, but, what the heck, it'll get him out of town.

Ray isn't enjoying Vegas much until he meets another one of Barnett's agents, the Midnight Angel, who is young and hot, though to Ray's mind a little naive and gloomy. They go to the Mirage, where John Fortune and Peregrine are being interviewed about Fortune's card turning, when suddenly all hell breaks lose as the Allumbrados attack. Ray has a knock-down, drag-out brawl with Butcher Dagon, which ends when Ray bites off the end of Dagon's prehensile tail to keep it from strangling him, and he and Angel (whom he refuses to call "the") knock Dagon out with a one-two punch. But the lights suddenly go off in the auditorium and when they come back up again the Allumbrados have absconded with John Fortune, although they've left the unconscious Dagon behind.

Ray, unable to get even a smile out of Angel, let alone a kiss, calls in to report to Barnett, and gets instead the young Secret Service agent Alejandro Jesus y Maria C de Baca. The next day he and Angel visit the Living Gods at their ranchero outside of Vegas. Osiris, who has limited precognitive abilities, doesn't know where Fortune is now, but he knows where he'll be in a day or so: a children's summer camp about 60 miles north of New York City.

Ray and Angel's flight to New York is delayed, and before they can get on a later one, the Vegas police department tells them that they need Ray's help. Butcher Dagon has escaped, leaving a string of bodies in his wake. They decide to split up: Angel will go on to New York, Ray will help the Vegas police with Dagon. Ultimately, Ray follows the trail of corpses Dagon leaves behind to an abandoned 7-Eleven where Ray sees Dagon and a bunch of other Allumbrados escape through a tunnel in a wall. Ray follows and comes out somewhere in the country. Ray captures Blood (who makes the transdimensional tunnels) and his handler Buck and discovers he's at the camp Osiris had told him about.

He stumbles upon Butcher Dagon and punches him out, only to discover it's not Dagon but actually Creighton (Jerry Strauss) who looks like Dagon. Strauss tells him that the Allumbrados are already after him and John Fortune. Ray suggests that Jerry and Fortune head for the woods while he and a team of agents from Jerry's agency hold off the bad guys. All goes well, except they can't find either Jerry or John Fortune until the next morning when Jerry finally shows up again, as does Ackroyd, as does the Midnight Angel.

They split into teams, and Ray goes off into the woods with his old pal Ackroyd, looking for John Fortune. Instead, along with Daniel Brennan, they run into a gang of Allumbrado cannon fodder, who eventually do provide answers as to what in the hell is going on. Kitty Cat, one of Brennan's little helpers, reports on trouble at the snake handler's commune, and Ray and Brennan take off at a run, Ackroyd following as best he can.

Brennan does pretty well for a nat, but Ray soon outraces him. He arrives at the commune to see Jerry being sapped by yet more Allumbrado goons under the command of the Witness (the bigger one). Ray handles half a dozen of the thugs, but is ultimately stopped by one holding down on him with an automatic rifle. Ray is about to make a hopeless charge at the gunman when Brennan strikes from cover and then Ackroyd shows up to pop away the Witness. Ackroyd gets himself shot while simultaneously breaking his ankle, which takes him out of any future action.

Ray and Jerry Strauss head to Branson where they enjoy a boys' night out on the town with Sascha Starfin and the mysterious Mushroom Daddy before the conflict finally comes to a head. Barnett calls in the Highwayman to bring the Midnight Angel and John Fortune to Branson. They catch up to the pair outside of Yazoo, Mississippi, where Ray kicks more Allumbrados butt and has a disappointingly quick tete-a-tete with the Witness (the only surviving one). Angel makes up for his disappointment with a big, juicy, unexpected kiss, then Bruckner gets Ray, Angel, and John Fortune in his lorry and heads to the Short Cut.

While forced to stop momentarily for repairs, Ray and Angel battle a pack of eldritch spidery hunting beasts and Ray comes face-to-face with an utterly unexpected foe, Ti Malice, who is riding a humanoid but faceless, cone-headed creature. Ray puts a period to the parasite's career with a morningstar he'd gotten from Bruckner's weapons cache, and the freed mount calls off the hunting pack. Ray and Angel clinch, but Bruckner calls and they hit the road again. John Fortune gives Ray a hand up into the lorry, and accidentally and unexpectedly badly burns Ray's hand. Later that night, back in Branson, Angel comes to Ray and delivers on the promise of her earlier kiss.

In the morning they wake to the Allumbrados's full-scale assault on the Angels' Bower. They face a team consisting of Butcher Dagon, the Witness (still limping from his last confrontation with Ray), the traitorous Secret Service ace Alejandro Jesus y Maria C de Baca, and a passel of Allumbrados goons with guns. Alejandro uses his animation power to bring to life three of the gigantic Apostle statues to attack Ray and Angel, but Ray guts him with a razor-sharp silver of glass from a broken door. The Witness heads upstairs for Barnett's office and Angel follows. Ray faces Dagon, who transforms into his fighting shape and immediately turns coat and kills the Allumbrados gunmen. Ray is shocked, but realizes he has more important things to deal with than Dagon. He takes off after Angel.

When Ray reaches Barnett's office, it's all over but the shouting. Barnett is wailing in prayer, and the Witness is unconscious on the floor. Angel tells him that they have to get to Fortunato's suite, and they arrive

in time to find John Fortune laying in his father's arms. Ray checks for Fortunato's pulse, and finds none. Fortunato opens his eyes and tells Ray to tell Peregrine that John Fortune is all right. The wild card virus has been burned from his body. Ray gasps at the ace, "But you're dead," and Fortunato smiles and says, "You're right," and slumps in Ray's arms.

In the aftermath of it all, Angel asks Ray if he thinks they can make a go of it together. Ray shrugs and says they'd be crazy not to try.

## ABILITIES

Ray's wild card powers can best be summed up as regeneration, enhanced speed and strength, and instinctual aggression. He is a martial artist who fights in no standard martial art form, but is a master of free-form mayhem who uses whatever parts of his body or material objects in his surroundings he has to to get the job done.

He understands Arabic fairly well.

Carnifex is slightly below his power level in terms of Toughness but makes up for it with his ability to regenerate. He has to take a full action to get a recovery check for bruised or injured conditions, but it can still allow him to hang in a fight much longer than most opponents, and he'll recover from any injury fairly quickly.

He has an uneasy alliance with SCARE and other government agencies.

# PAN RUDO

**Created by Roger Zelazny**

*"Rudo was an elderly, elegant man with an almost terrifying brilliance."*

— Snodgrass: "The Crooked Man" (Volume XIII)

## DESCRIPTION

Thin, graying, elegant, and friendly in a mannered way (1993), Rudo seems to be in his mid-60s, with fine lines around his dark eyes and mouth. Later (winter 1993/1994), Rudo gets jumped into the body of a blond-haired, blue-eyed Aryan dreamboat.

Originally from Dresden, he's descended from the Prussian aristocracy of the region.

## BACKGROUND

Rudo has had extensive training as a psychiatrist. He knew Freud personally and trained with him. He also put time in at the Jungian Institute in Switzerland.

### 1938

While in Vienna, he experiments on some mental patients under the auspices of the Nazi Party using a therapy technique he calls *dauerschlaf*, or sleep therapy. Five die and Rudo has to leave the country. He comes to the United States before World War II breaks out. He is one of the original Card Sharks and ultimately rises to be head Shark.

### MARCH 1951

Croyd Crenson seeks him out to get help with his problem of fear of sleep and the attendant psychosis that goes along with using drugs to stay awake for so long. Rudo treats him with his *dauerschlaf* that he says will keep Croyd in a stable form with stable powers and give him a normal life. It seems to work, but Rudo tells Croyd that he needs some scarce radioactive elements to make the cure permanent. Croyd believes him and they go to Los Alamos, then a closed government laboratory city in New Mexico, to steal some plutonium. But Rudo's claims of a permanent cure are just a ruse. When Croyd does the job, Rudo uses post-hypnotic commands to make Croyd fall asleep again and turns him in to the authorities.

### 1962

Rudo is Marilyn Monroe's personal psychiatrist. Part of his treatment includes regular sexual sessions with her on his couch.

### 1985

While a doctor with the World Health Organization, Rudo investigates the virulent wild card virus outbreak in the joker's village in Kenya. By the 1990s he's the director of WHO.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Pan Rudo | **WC Name:** None |
| **Occupation:** Psychologist | **WC Status:** Nat |
| **Aliases:** Ivan Karamazov | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian (German) |
| **Birth:** Late 1910s, Germany | **Death:** Summer 1994 |
| **Height:** 6 ft. | **Weight:** Slim |
| **Eyes:** Blue | **Hair:** Blond |

| PAN RUDO | | | | | POWER LEVEL 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +1 | +1 | +1 | +4 | +3 | +2 |
| 13 | 12 | 12 | 18 | 16 | 15 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +1 | +4 | +4 | +7 |

**SKILLS**

Bluff 6 (+8), Concentration 4 (+6), Craft (artistic) 3 (+7), Craft (chemical) 4 (+8), Gather Information 8 (+10), Intimidate 5 (+7), Knowledge (behavioral sciences) 12 (+16), Knowledge (civics) 6 (+10), Knowledge (current events) 8 (+12), Knowledge (history) 6 (+10), Knowledge (streetwise) 6 (+10), Knowledge (theology and philosophy) 4 (+8), Language 2 (French, English; German is native), Medicine 6 (+9), Notice 2 (+5), Profession (psychologist) 10 (+13), Sense Motive 4 (+7)

**FEATS**

Benefit (wealth), Connected, Contacts, Master Plan, Well-Informed

**POWERS**

None

**COMBAT**

Attack +2, Grapple +3, Damage +1 (unarmed), Defense +4 (+2 flat-footed), Knockback –0, Initiative +1

**Abilities 26 + Skills 24 (96 ranks) + Feats 5 + Powers 0 + Combat 12 + Saves 9 = Total 76**

## FALL/WINTER 1993

Hannah Davis interviews him about the Kenya affair and he tells her that Etienne Faneuil died in Vietnam in 1988 and is buried in a village called Xuan Loc about 35 miles east of Saigon, but he's lying. When Davis refuses to end her investigation, Rudo is personally involved in several attempts on her life.

Hartmann calls him when Davis gives him the Card Shark evidence, and Rudo calmly admits that the Card Sharks exist, but he tries to spin their activities as somewhat more benign than they actually are. He offers Hartmann a position in the Sharks' ranks, but Hartmann refuses.

In a conversation with George G. Battle, von Herzenhagen lets slip the cryptic comment that there are two Pan Rudos. This body-double is killed in front of an astonished Gregg Hartmann by Croyd who then vanishes. Hartmann is blamed for the murder and flees. Hartmann comes to the conclusion that the only way he'll get out of the joker body he'd been jumped into is to turn himself over to the Card Sharks and give them someone they want, Hannah Davis. Rudo, who by now has been jumped into a young and very Aryan body himself, takes Hartmann captive.

## MAY 1994

When Clara van Renssaeler turns on the Sharks, Rudo goes into hiding and eventually flees with a share of the Black Trump. He appears again in the Nur's Syrian camp where, despite the primitive conditions and lack of qualified help, he cultures his bit of the Black Trump. One of his helpers, it turns out, is an undercover Zoe Harris, who seduces him and worms the information out of him that the Twisted Fists need to strike at his operation.

When he tests the Black Trump on some helpless jokers, he becomes infected himself, learning to his sorrow that the Card Shark's Black Trump kills nats just as easily and terribly as it can wild carders.

## ABILITIES

As a nat, Rudo naturally has no wild card skills. He is a highly-trained psychiatrist, a highly-placed administrator, and a pretty fair landscape artist in watercolors. His power level is reflective primarily of his skills and his influence with the Card Sharks, although his traits don't reflect various hired minions or associates (which are considerable). As is common there, Rudo speaks a number of European languages.

Rudo's abilities are those of his younger, jumped, body. His original is old and fairly worn-out by the 1990s, with Str 8, Dex 11, and Con 9.

# SAYYID

**Created by Stephen Leigh**

*"Sayyid was hewn from a heroic mold, fully 10 foot tall and muscled like a god. In repose he was inspiring: a dark Egyptian giant, a myth given life. But Sayyid's mighty, rippling thews could barely support the crushing weight of his body."*

— Leigh: "The Tint of Hatred" (Book IV)

## DESCRIPTION

Sayyid is a joker who's too big for his own good. After the incident at the Nur's camp, he's basically confined to a motorized wheelchair.

## BACKGROUND

General of the army of Nur al-Allah, Sayyid is a military genius. His wife is Misha, the Nur's sister. He is impotent, blames her for it, and beats her. To merely cross a room is an act of supreme exertion that causes him to labor mightily and breath heavily.

## FEBRUARY 4, 1987

During the firefight at the Nur's camp in Syria, Sayyid is crushed by Hiram Worchester.

When next seen, seven years later, Sayyid's in a motorized wheelchair, but he can rise from it and walk a limited distance. His body is twisted and his mind is scattered by the constant pain he suffers.

## ABILITIES

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Sayyid | **WC Name:** None |
| **Occupation:** Soldier | **WC Status:** Joker |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Arab |
| **Birth:** Unknown | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** 10 ft. | **Weight:** 800 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Unknown | **Hair:** Unknown |

| SAYYID | | | | | POWER LEVEL 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +6 | –2 | +5 | +1 | +2 | +0 |
| 22 | 7 | 20 | 12 | 15 | 10 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +5 | +7 | +0 | +4 |

**SKILLS**

Knowledge (current events) 4 (+5), Knowledge (tactics) 8 (+17)*, Knowledge (theology and philosophy) 2 (+3), Perform (oratory) 4 (+4), Sense Motive 2 (+4)

**FEATS**

Attractive, Benefit (military rank), Ultimate Effort (Knowledge–tactics)

**POWERS**

**Enhanced Knowledge (tactics) 2** (+8 bonus)

**Growth 7** (large; Str +7, Con +3; Continuous; Limted Bonus; Permanent; Innate)

**COMBAT**

Attack +2 (includes –1 due to size), Grapple +13 (includes +4 due to size), Damage +6 (unarmed), Defense +0 (includes –1 due to size), Knockback –6 (includes –4 due to size), Initiative –2

**DRAWBACKS**

Disability (lame; very common, moderate, –4 points)

**Abilities 16 + Skills 5 (20 ranks) + Feats 3 + Powers 17 + Combat 8 + Saves 6 – Drawbacks 4 = Total 49**

Sayyid has no wild card powers, beyond being big and relatively strong. But he's still not strong enough to move his body effectively in any kind of action or fight. He's a military genius. His power level is primarily reflective of his limited (close-in) capabilities; if he gets his hands on someone, he can be a formidable opponent, otherwise, he's primarily deadweight.

# DANNY SHEPHERD

**Created by George R.R. Martin**

*"There's one of me," Danny corrected him, "in a bunch of bodies."*

— Martin: Turtle's Story (Book XI)

## DESCRIPTION

Shepard is a beautiful young woman who looks younger than her 21 years (September 1990).

## BACKGROUND

Danny forms her first extra body at the age of 3, budding it off the original and simply separating when it's complete. She makes others when puberty hits.

### SEPTEMBER 1990

At the time of the Rox Campaign, Danny has seven bodies:

1. The punk Danny's hair is shaved in the form of a buzz-cut purple lightning bolt down the center of her head. She wears a skin-tight leather jumpsuit and has a tiny gold skull stud in her right nostril. She accompanies Detroit Steel and the Reflector to the Jersey Gate.

2. The pregnant Danny is assigned to General Zappa's headquarters and goes into a coma and loses her child after the Gabriel Hounds get one of her sisters.

3. The yuppie Danny is flown out to the battleship *New Jersey*, still wearing her Rolex.

4. The starlet Danny accompanies Mistral and Cyclone to attack the East Wall. The Turtle goes to Los Angeles with her after the Rox Campaign.

5. Corporal Danny rides Elephant Girl to bomb the central castle dome.

6. The Danny in the Minneapolis Giants baseball cap rides the Turtle's shell as he strikes the North Gate. She comes to his home in the junkyard and they make love. Afterward she dies bloodily in his arms as the Gabriel Hounds kill her sister.

7. The bodybuilder Danny is lean and hard-muscled. She goes in with Ray and the others in the covert team, and is killed by Herne's Gabriel Hounds.

Danny tells Zoe Harris in the fall of 1993 that there are three of her.

## ABILITIES

| DANNY SHEPARD | | | | | POWER LEVEL 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +1 | +2 | +1 | +1 | +0 | +1 |
| 13 | 14 | 13 | 12 | 11 | 13 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +3/+1* | +4 | +5 | +4 |

**Flat-footed*

**SKILLS**

Acrobatics 3 (+5), Bluff 4 (+5), Knowledge (current events) 4 (+5), Profession (varies) 5 (+5), Sense Motive 4 (+4), Stealth 4 (+6)

**FEATS**

Defensive Roll 2, Teamwork

**POWERS**

**Duplication 4** (Continuous, Heroic, Survival; Feedback, Full Action; Mental Link, Progression 3, Action Drawback [one month, –8 points])

**COMBAT**

Attack +4, Grapple +5, Damage +1 (unarmed), Defense +5 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback –1 (-0 flat-footed), Initiative +2

**Abilities 16 + Skills 6 (24 ranks) + Feats 3 + Powers 8 + Combat 18 + Saves 10 = Total 61**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Danielle "Danny" Shepard | **WC Name:** Legion |
| **Occupation:** Various | **WC Status:** Ace (card turned at age 3) |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** 1979 | **Death:** September 1990 (one of her) |
| **Height:** Varies slightly | **Weight:** Varies slightly |
| **Eyes:** Blue | **Hair:** Blonde |

Shepard can create and bud off other bodies. The process takes about a month. Any body can make another body (they all have the same Duplication power). Each body knows and feels what is happening to all the others. There is often some slight variation between the Dannys: different Profession skills, or differences in physical abilities (such as the higher Strength of bodybuilder Danny).

The feedback Danny suffers if one of her selves is killed can be (and has been) fatal. The Progression on her Duplication power is merely a suggested guideline; Gamemasters should feel free to modify it to suit Danny's appearance in a story. Technically, the limits of her cloning power are more of a plot device: Given enough time and the willingness to do it, she could probably duplicate exponentially. The fact that she cannot "take back" a cloned body tends to make her creation of new duplicates conservative.

# THE SLEEPER

**Created by Roger Zelazny**

*"He was 14 years old when sleep became his enemy, a dark and terrible thing he learned to fear as others feared death."*

— Zelazny: "The Sleeper" (Book I)

## DESCRIPTION

Croyd is an average kid of average build, freckle-faced, with blue eyes and straight brown hair. He has average grades in school. When they played cops and robbers in the neighborhood, he usually played a robber.

As the Sleeper, his looks are anything imaginable.

## BACKGROUND

14-year-old Croyd is in the ninth grade when the wild card virus rains down upon Manhattan. He heads for home, a rowhouse in the 80s, but it takes hours to cover the six blocks because of the congestion on the panic-ridden streets. By the time he gets to his house he's so tired he can barely stand. He makes it indoors and falls asleep. He sleeps for four weeks and awakes ravenously hungry—and an ace. He stays awake for five days before, terribly weary, he falls asleep again and discovers the pattern of his new life. When he sleeps it's for at least four weeks, sometimes more (very infrequently less), and he awakens with an entirely new body with an entirely new set of powers. Sometimes he's little more than a deuce, sometimes he's a joker. He discovers he can take powerful stimulants to keep him awake longer than he can stay up on his own. The problem then becomes the attendant amphetamine psychosis. When he's in that state the Sleeper is dangerous.

Croyd tries to deal with the vagaries of his life. When his sane days dwindle down to a precious few he avoids his friends and tries to go off

somewhere by himself so nobody gets hurt, but he doesn't always make it. Croyd fears sleep with a passion since it represents an unknown change. It's like death, but he's also afraid that one day he'll wake up psychotic, like his mother became, and die in a mental institution, like his mother eventually did. So, paradoxically, he regularly resorts to drugs that drive him crazy to keep from going crazy.

## 1948

Croyd quickly develops a sophisticated survival strategy. When his family becomes dispersed he rents apartments in several different neighborhoods (the Village, Midtown, Morningside Heights, the Upper East Side, and the Bowery, which is already becoming a refuge for the emerging group of wild card victims known as jokers), and pays the rent on all for a year in advance. Working with a shady character named Bentley, he hones his criminal skills, paying particular attention to safe-cracking. He stashes money in safety deposit boxes in numerous banks.

Croyd's brother Carl is 17 at the time of the first Wild Card Day; his sister Claudia is 15. At 17 she marries Sam Kendall, who comes from old money in Washington, D.C. Croyd's father is killed horribly on Wild Card Day. His mother is so affected by his father's death that she eventually has to be institutionalized and dies psychotic. Bentley, a dog-like joker who takes an early version of the Trump virus and is successfully transformed into a nat, is Croyd's trustworthy friend and mentor in criminal matters. He scouts out and plans many of their early capers.

| THE SLEEPER | | | | POWER LEVEL VARIES | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| * | * | * | +1 | +0 | +1 |
| * | * | * | 12 | 10 | 12 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| * | * | * | +5 |

**Varies ... a lot*

**SKILLS**

Bluff 4 (+5), Diplomacy 4 (+5), Disable Device 8 (+8), Knowledge (streetwise) 8 (+9), Notice 4 (+4), Sleight of Hand 8 (+8), Stealth 8 (+8)

**FEATS**

Benefit (wealth)

**POWERS**

**Deuce** (Can make "As Time Goes By" play spontaneously; see the Deuce power description in **Chapter 6**)

**Immunity 1** (aging)

**Shapeshift 20** (100 points; Continuous; Full Action [plus Action drawback], Uncontrolled)

**COMBAT**

Attack +8, Grapple +8, Damage varies, Defense +8 (+4 flat-footed), Knockback varies, Initiative varies

**DRAWBACKS**

Action (Shapeshift, one week, –8 points), Involuntary Transformation (falling asleep, common, moderate, –3 points)

**Abilities 4 + Skills 11 (44 ranks) + Feats 1 + Powers 142 + Combat 32 + Saves 5 – Drawbacks 11 = Total 184**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Croyd Crenson | **WC Name:** The Sleeper |
| **Occupation:** Drifter, mercenary | **WC Status:** Ace (card turned September 15, 1946) |
| **Aliases:** Various | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian (originally) |
| **Birth:** 1933, NYC | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** Varies | **Weight:** Varies |
| **Eyes:** Varies (in both number and color) | **Hair:** Varies |

## MARCH 1951

Croyd seeks out treatment from a psychiatrist, Dr. Pan Rudo, who eventually suggests a form of therapy that might stabilize him and keep him in the same body with the same powers and with normal sleeping patterns. Initial tests suggest the therapy works, but Rudo says he needs a rare radioactive element to make the cure permanent. Croyd bows to the doctor's superior knowledge and they go to Los Alamos, New Mexico, then a closed government laboratory city, to obtain some of this plutonium. But Rudo's claims are a lie. Croyd steals some vials of the rare element and Rudo turns him in to the authorities. Though Croyd manages to escape Rudo's trap, he discovers Rudo hates all wild carders, considering them a pollutant of the human race. Rudo is, Croyd realizes decades later, a Card Shark.

## JULY 1977

Croyd helps two deuces, Carlotta DeSoto and Bob Cortland, find true love and escape from both the clutches of the Giant Ape and the even sweatier paws of Carlotta's ex-husband.

Croyd has a special room in his Morningside Heights apartment (mid-1980s) without windows and a reinforced door in which a glass statue named Melanie reclines on a daybed. He visits her immediately after waking to hold her hand and tell her everything new which has happened to him.

## LATE 1986

Croyd's recruited by Bludgeon to work for the Mafia as they're desperately signing up aces for their war against the Shadow Fists, and is given the assignment to uncover the identity of the Fists' leader. Unfortunately, he falls asleep before he can complete his task, and Dr. Finn stashes him in a broom closet in the Jokertown Clinic.

## MAY 1987

Upon awakening, he resumes his quest, and traces the hierarchy of the Shadow Fists as high as Edward St. John Latham. He intimidates a name out of Latham which Croyd thinks is the one he's been assigned to find, but Croyd is already far gone into amphetamine psychosis and his judgment is not the best. By then he's also spreading a new form of the wild card virus that can infect even those who've already had the disease. Tachyon realizes he's the carrier of this bizarre strain of the virus, and attempts to capture him. Now dubbed Typhoid Croyd, the Sleeper teams up with Bill Lockwood, once the most disgusting denizen of Jokertown—the notorious Snotman—whom Croyd reinfects and turns into an ace.

The duo proves difficult to capture until the team of Mr. Gravemold and Modular Man bring them down.

Croyd eventually ends up in the Jokertown Clinic again, where Tachyon frees him during the chaos of a Shadow Fist attack. Though this action saves Tachyon's life, Croyd escapes the clinic. He breaks into the Famous Bowery Wild Card Dime Museum, crawls into one of the Turtle's old shells, and falls asleep, ending the menace of Typhoid Croyd.

## NOVEMBER 1988

Croyd maintains an on-again/off-again relationship with Veronica, one of Fortunato's girls, which is deeper than the usual hooker-john relationship, until she eventually breaks it off.

## 1990

He helps Black Shadow track jumper activity and then, deciding the climate on Manhattan has become unhealthy for wild carders, emigrates to the Rox, where he serves as a messenger for Bloat. As the Rox Campaign starts, Croyd is sleeping in the east tower of Bloat's castle. He sleeps through the whole battle and finally awakens on the bottom of New York Bay after it's all over. Luckily, he's in an aquatic form.

## SUMMER 1991

Deciding the climate in America has become unhealthy for wild carders, Croyd heads for Vietnam where he joins the New Joker Brigade and runs into an old pal, Mark Meadows. Croyd has a lizard-like form this time around, and unfortunately it seems his most potent power is his ability to catch bugs with his tongue. He's also fond of a species of hairless Vietnamese rat. He insists he's a skink, but Mark's not so sure. He also insists that lizards don't sleep, which Mark is *really* unsure about. As usual, Croyd ultimately slides into amphetamine psychosis, but he retains enough sense to join Mark and other brigade members in deserting when the unit's political officer orders them to wipe out an innocent village.

Croyd falls asleep and is hauled around by Mark's outfit, finally awakening on the eve of their final battle as perhaps the most powerful ace of all time. It would be easier to enumerate the powers he *doesn't* have than list the ones he does. Unfortunately, he falls asleep again almost immediately, and is still sleeping when the battle is finished.

## FALL 1993

Croyd hangs out in Free Vietnam for awhile. He helps Hannah Davis when she comes to the country to investigate the purported death of Dr. Etienne Faneuil. When Hannah mentions Pan Rudo, Croyd's amazed he's supposedly helping her, and tells her of his experience with Rudo back in the 1950s, thus revealing him to be an important Card Shark. While in the depths of his amphetamine psychosis, Croyd begins to think Rudo is the source of all his troubles and that the psychiatrist is out to get him. He hops on a plane and heads off to America to kill him, but falls asleep in the middle of the flight. When he wakes up he's incarcerated in the Governor's Island Maximum Security Psychiatric Unit.

Croyd uses his new telepathic powers to contact Black Shadow and other prisoners in the Unit, some of whom are harmless wild carders while others are dangerous criminals, and engineers a mass escape that frees them all. He teams up with Black Shadow, but goes crazy when he realizes Shadow is also Mr. Gravemold, who had captured him back when he was Typhoid Croyd. They fight, but he falls asleep in the middle of the battle. Shadow, suspecting he will come to regret this, bears Croyd away to safety.

Croyd wakes up in one of Black Shadow's safe houses. The two vigilantes team up and go on a series of Shark hunts. Black Shadow kills Senator Henry Flynn, Card Shark and Hartmann's successor as SCARE chairman. They frame Howard Hughes for the killing and kidnap him. Then they follow Margaret Durand to Latchkey, the Shark's jumper holding facility. Black Shadow kills the jumpers they find there while Croyd guns down Crypt Kicker (temporarily) and then also Howard Hughes (rather more permanently). They then foil von Herzenhagen's attempt to get jumped into President Barnett's body (first killing Mam'zell Gerard, the last known surviving jumper), plant the gun that killed her on von Herzenhagen, and also frame him for an assassination attempt on Barnett. Croyd, meanwhile, still fixated on the notion of killing Pan Rudo, awakens after Black Shadow puts him to sleep using tranquilizers, and does so. Unfortunately, he only gets a body double.

## MAY 1994

Croyd goes to Jerusalem along with Zoe Harris and her Escorts and ends up crashing at their apartment when he needs to sleep again. He awakens with one of his strangest powers: the ability to speak every language on the Earth. He and Zoe end up meeting with the Black Dog and signing on to a plan that will get the Dog a nuclear warhead from the Ukraine which he will then use to blackmail the Card Sharks. In return, the Fists will give him Pan Rudo, whom Croyd has maintained a hatred for over his last several incarnations.

They acquire the bomb on the Odessa docks and take a freighter across the Black Sea with the device disguised as an irrigation pump. They're briefly interdicted by a Russian submarine, but Zoe screws up their Geiger counters as they look for the missing bomb, and the ship resumes its journey as Croyd and Zoe begin an affair. They meet with Balthazar and

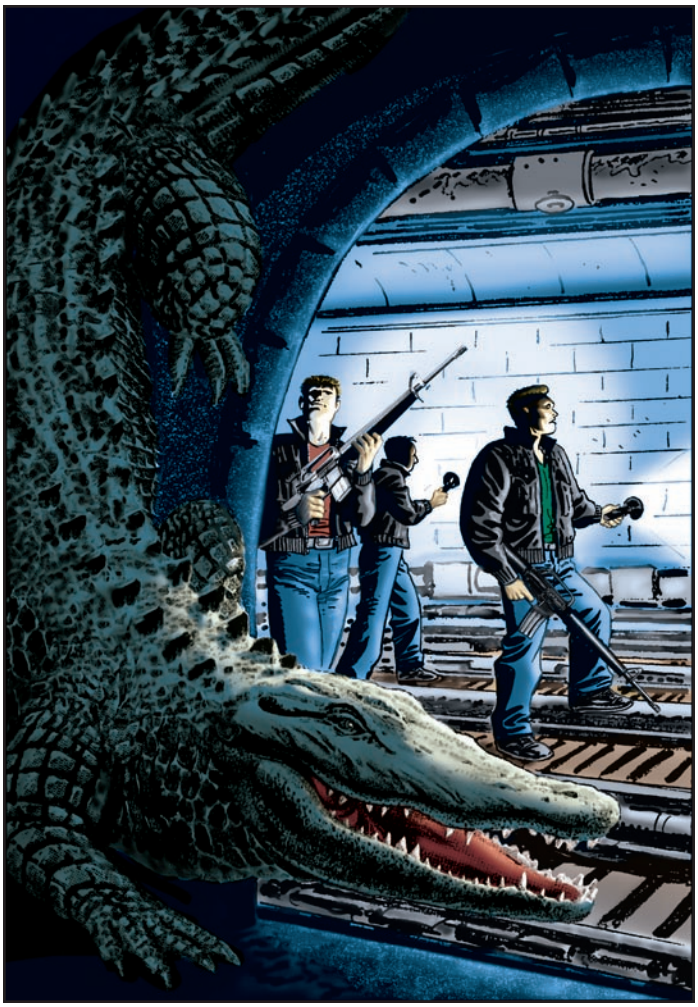
Jan on the Turkish side of the sea, and from there transport the bomb overland through Turkey and Syria. By the time they reach Syria Croyd is getting into amphetamine psychosis. They're ambushed near Damascus and the day is saved by the sudden arrival of The Highwayman. Bruckner takes them to Jerusalem via one of his patented "shortcuts" through a frighteningly alien dimension that doesn't much help Croyd's near psychotic state. As soon as they reach Jerusalem, Croyd falls asleep.

He awakens as a cameloid, and provides transport for Billy Ray and April Harvest to the Nur's Syrian camp. He's last seen leading a bunch of camels through a sandstorm back towards Jerusalem.

## ABILITIES

Croyd's physical abilities, powers, and skills change with each incarnation. Sometimes he has multiple useful powers, sometimes they're trivial or non-existent, and he's just a joker. His powers frequently include enhanced strength and reflexes. He lives in constant fear of one day drawing the Black Queen.

In essence, his Shapeshift power kicks in every time he sleeps, which happens every few weeks, unless he's speeding to stave it off. The form he assumes is entirely at the whim of the GM, who decides how to distribute his Shapeshift power points. He really has more than he needs, and doesn't always get the full benefit of all his ranks; sometimes he doesn't get any of them, just becoming a freak. His transformations can basically be treated as a plot device ability.



He has one power that has followed him down through the years through all of his changes. He says "Play it, Sam. Play it!" and any electronic equipment nearby, or anything at all that can be induced to vibrate in the proper audible range, like a row of glasses hanging in a rack, or even a swarm of buzzing flies, will sound like a piano playing "As Time Goes By."

# SEWER JACK

**Created by Edward Bryant**

*"He hunted in the near-darkness. The hunger was upon him; the hunger that seemed never to be fully satisfied. Dimly, ever so faintly, he recalled a time and a place when it had been different. He had been someone—what was that?—something else. He looked, but saw little. In this gloom and especially in the foul water choked with debris, his eyes served little use. More important were tastes and smells, the tiny particles that told him both what lay in the distance—meals to seek patiently—and of the immediate satisfactions that hovered, unsuspecting, just beyond the length of his snout."*

— Sewer Jack kicking back and enjoying the good life. Bryant: "Down Deep" (Book I)

## DESCRIPTION

Jack is a small man. He's muscular, but not overly so. He turns into a really big gator, though.

## BACKGROUND

As a child Jack was raped by his stepfather. Jack eventually kills him, but only after the man also rapes Jack's sister and she dies in childbirth. While still a youngster, he runs away from his rural Louisiana home and comes to New York City.

Called Sewer Jack by his fellow transit workers, his regular job is to clatter through the subway tunnels on his small electric cart, checking track integrity in tunnel after tunnel. He lives in an abandoned two-block-long subway tunnel near City Hall Station that was actually the first tunnel built in New York City but had been shut down before going into service. This hideaway is furnished in opulent Victorian fashion and is serviced by pirated electrical lines and has many modern conveniences and appliances, including a separate bedroom with a home made bookcase housing Jack's complete collection of Pogo books.

### SEPTEMBER 1986

On Wild Card Day, Jack is concerned with tracking down his niece, Cordelia Chaisson, who has run away from her rural Louisiana home and

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** John Richard Robicheaux | **WC Name:** Sewer Jack |
| **Occupation:** Sewer worker | **WC Status:** Joker-ace |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian (Cajun) |
| **Birth:** Early 1940s, rural Louisiana | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** Small | **Weight:** Light |
| **Eyes:** Green | **Hair:** Brown |

| SEWER JACK | | | | | POWER LEVEL 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +8*/+1 | +1 | +4*/+1 | +0 | +2 | +0 |
| 27*/12 | 13/12 | 19*/13 | 11 | 14 | 11 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +7*/+1 | +8*/+1 | +4 | +5 |

**Alligator form*

**SKILLS**

Craft (electronics) 3 (+3), Craft (mechanics) 4 (+4), Drive 3 (+4), Knowledge (current events) 5 (+5), Language 1 (English; Cajun French native), Profession (subway track checker) 4 (+6), Stealth 4 (+5)

**FEATS**

Animal Empathy

**POWERS**

**Alligator Form 2:** Str 27, Dex 12, Con 19; Intimidate +4, Stealth +4 (counters –4 size modifier); **Growth 6** (large; Innate), **Protection 3**, **Super-Senses 1** (low-light vision), **Swimming 1**; Disabilities (mute and no hands, –6 points)

**COMBAT**

Attack +5 (+4 in alligator form, includes –1 due to size), Grapple +6 (+17 in alligator form, includes +4 due to size), Damage +1 (+8 in alligator form), Defense +6 (+5 in alligator form, includes –1 due to size), Knockback –0 (-7 in alligator form, includes –4 due to size), Initiative +1

**DRAWBACKS**

Involuntary Transformation (into alligator form, common, moderate, –3 points)

**Abilities 14 + Skills 6 (24 ranks) + Feats 1 + Powers 10 + Combat 22 + Saves 10 – Drawbacks 3 = Total 59**

come to New York City, although he does get sidetracked into a side plot or two that ends up with him partially devouring a Shadow Fist soldier, as well as Demise's foot.

### SPRING 1987

Jack, who is gay, is diagnosed with AIDS by Dr. Tachyon, who tells him he probably doesn't have long to live. Jack keeps the bad news to himself, and despite his illness helps Cordelia put together the AIDS/Wild Card Benefit at Desmond's Funhouse. His job is to babysit Buddy Holley, who is returning to a big time venue after being on the lounge circuit for many years. He and the musician became friends, and Jack witnesses some of his triumphant return until, overcome with pain from the interaction of the AIDS and wild card viruses, he leaves the Funhouse and is accosted and raped by Bludgeon. With his last bit of energy and consciousness, he attempts to transform to his alligator form, and makes it part-way.

He ends up in a private room in Tachyon's clinic, half-gator, half-man. Tachyon realizes that the disease does not effect the gator part of Jack's being, and is caught in the moral dilemma of whether or not he should nudge Jack's brain into the animal half of his being, saving his life but condemning him to live it as a reptile.

### SEPTEMBER 1990

The Aboriginal shaman Wyungare comes to New York City and visits Jack in the Jokertown Clinic. The big black cat is still with Jack, as friend and guardian. Jack's doctor, Bob Mengele (no relation), claims Jack, who is now in his gator form, must be submerged completely in it if he is to have any hope of further survival, and, in fact, his transition is close to being permanent and irreversible. Wyungare doesn't trust Dr. Bob, and he and Cordelia break Jack and the big black kitty out of the clinic just before Dr. Bob can vivisect Jack and write an interesting article about it all.

Jack, accompanied by the black cat, transports Wyungare through Bloat's Wall to the Rox, where Wyungare has to try to save the Dreamtime. Jack saves a number of Bloat's prisoners, including Mike Tsarkos, the Reflector, and Mistral, who return safely with Jack and the big black kitty to Manhattan. Though Wyungare is killed during his successful attempt to save the Dreamtime, he and Cordelia have a final meeting thanks to Cameo, and he tells her that her Uncle Jack is alive and well somewhere in Manhattan, that the AIDS virus has found his alligator body too alien to survive in, and that all she has to do is find Jack and reverse Dr. Bob's transformation procedure to bring Jack back to his human form.

## ABILITIES

Sewer Jack is a were-alligator. He changes when he loses emotional control, but he can also consciously allow the beast to take over. He's a big gator, about 12 to 14 feet long, strong and quick, and driven by essentially gator instincts with a slight tinge of human intelligence. His scaley body is armored as a normal gator's would be.

As a human he has great knowledge of the geography of the New York City system of subway tunnels.

Jack is as comfortable speaking English as Cajun French.

# TI MALICE

**Created by John Jos. Miller**

*"He connects directly to the pleasure center of your brain. That's why everything feels so good. Eating. Moving. Making love. Just breathing. And when he leaves you—it's like death. There's no cure, no relief. Except the kiss. I'll do anything for it. And so will you."*

— Hiram Worchester meditating on the nature of his master. Cadigan: "Addicted to Love" (Book V)

## DESCRIPTION

Ti Malice is stunted and wasted with thin, ropy muscles. His weak, protruding eyes are extremely sensitive to the light, so he prefers the dark. He can't eat solid food because he has no real teeth and his stomach is a primitive sack that can't digest it, anyway. He has no chin to speak of. His mouth is round, his over-sized lips very flexible. He has only one tooth, a shovel-shaped incisor in his upper jaw. His tongue is a bifurcated tube. His skin is fish-belly white.

## BACKGROUND

Ti Malice is a joker born in Haiti. He is a physical weakling, though he has

strong mental powers. Ti Malice is a name from Haitian folklore meaning "Little Mischief"; his real name, or even if he has one, is unknown. He has a stable of mounts he utilizes to explore every avenue of sensual delight imaginable, including the sensations of death. He is completely and utterly amoral and under no circumstances will ever do anything that doesn't benefit or amuse him in one way or another. He has no problem degrading, torturing, or even killing his mounts to gain interesting sensations to experience.

Ti Malice rises to secret prominence in Haiti, eventually even taking Papa Doc Duvalier as a mount.

## LATE 1986

When the WHO-sponsored world tour comes to the island, he takes Hiram Worchester as a mount. Worchester smuggles him to New York City and also brings along several of his favorite Haitian mounts, including Ezili Rouge. He also captures Jane Dow (spring 1987), although she proves to be one of the few to escape his clutches.

## JULY 1988

Ti Malice goes to Atlanta, where he adds Blaise to his stable before Ackroyd pops him into his nightmare dimension, where he ultimately runs into Billy Ray, who terminates his career with a blow to the head (summer 2003).

# ABILITIES

Ti Malice rides on the backs of his mounts, his skinny arms clasping their neck. He uses his single sharp tooth to punch down into their carotid arteries, then drives the narrow, hollow bifurcated tube of his tongue home. One part sucks blood from his mount which goes into his system; the other recycles the blood back into his mount. He depends on this for food and nutrients, and cannot live for very long without it.

He has perfect telepathic control of his mounts (who he always refers to as "it"), and can use them to speak for him. He also has access to their minds and all the knowledge they have. They are all bound to him by the control he exerts over them. His saliva contains chemicals that stimulate their pleasure centers (his Emotion Control power). His mounts call his bite "the kiss" and they will do anything to get it and retain it. Physical

| TI MALICE | | | | | POWER LEVEL 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| -4 | -1 | -2 | +4 | +4 | +2 |
| 3 | 8 | 7 | 18 | 18 | 15 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| -2 | +0 | -1 | +10 |

**SKILLS**

Knowledge (behavioral sciences) 8 (+12)

**FEATS**

Eidetic Memory, Improved Pin, Minions 6 (mounts)

**POWERS**

**Emotion Control 12** (Duration (Continuous); Limited to love, Linked to Mind Control, Touch Range)

**Immunity 5** (mind control)

**Mind Control 12** (Conscious, Sensory Link, Sustained; Mental Link; Touch Range)

**Shrinking 4** (small, –4 Str; Continuous; Permanent; Innate)

**COMBAT**

Attack +1 (includes +1 due to size), Grapple –8 (includes -4 due to size), Damage –4 unarmed, Defense +2 (includes +1 due to size), Knockback +2 (includes +1 due to size), Initiative –1

**DRAWBACKS**

Disability (crippled without a mount, very common, major, –5 points), Weakness (dependence on human blood, –1 Con/5 minutes, cumulative,–3 points)

**Abilities 13 + Skills 2 (8 ranks) + Feats 8 + Powers 53 + Combat 2 + Saves 8 – Drawbacks 8 = Total 78**

| | |
|---|---|
| **NAME:** UNKNOWN | **WC NAME:** TI MALICE |
| **OCCUPATION:** PARASITE | **WC STATUS:** JOKER |
| **ALIASES:** NONE | **ETHNICITY:** UNKNOWN |
| **BIRTH:** 1950S, HAITI | **DEATH:** SUMMER 2003 |
| **HEIGHT:** 2 FT., 6 IN. | **WEIGHT:** 30 LBS. |
| **EYES:** DARK | **HAIR:** NONE |

withdrawal from the kiss usually sets in after week or so without it. The mount then becomes increasingly desperate and despondent and suicide is a real possibility.

His mounts have included: Papa Doc Duvalier, Hiram Worchester, Sascha Starfin, Harvey Kant, Jane Dow, Blaise, and Ezili Rouge. Aces retain their powers and use them at Ti Malice's direction when they are under his influence.

The inhuman contours of his mind make him virtually immune to mind control.

# TOPPER

**Created by George R.R. Martin**

*"A good magician never relies too heavily on one trick."*

— Some grandfatherly advice from Topper's grandfather, Lafayette Blackwood. Murphy: "With A Flourish And A Flair" (Book XVI)

## DESCRIPTION

Topper is a short but well-built ace with unruly cascades of red hair.

## BACKGROUND

Topper is the granddaughter of the famous stage magician Lafayette Blackwood (Blackwood the Magnificent) whose job kind of went out of style after the wild card virus hit and stage magic had to take a back seat to reality. Melissa's wild card turns due to stage fright during her high school talent show.

In her early days on the West Coast she is a protégée of Cyclone and wears a distinctive uniform of a white shirt, black bow tie, a long-tailed black tuxedo jacket, black satin short-shorts, black fishnet stockings, and high-heeled black pumps. And, of course, a shiny black silk top hat.

### JULY 1988

She is a government ace who bodyguards Senator Al Gore during the Democratic National Convention in Atlanta. After the Rox War she walks away from government service and joins Ackroyd and Creighton as an operative (early 1990s). She takes part in the raid on the high-security prison on Governor's Island, freeing Bradley Finn and some other captives, but is taken into custody herself, though ultimately released.

### OCTOBER 2002

Cameo "borrows" her hat prior to the Jokertown Boys MTV live concert, but ultimately Topper gets it back, as well as an opportunity to have a chat with her grandfather and gain some closure with him.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Melissa Blackwood | **WC Name:** Topper |
| **Occupation:** Government agent, detective | **WC Status:** Ace |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** late 1960s/early 1970s | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** 5 ft. | **Weight:** 100 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Blue | **Hair:** Red |

| TOPPER | | | | | POWER LEVEL 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +0 | +1 | +1 | +2 | +2 | +2 |
| 11 | 13 | 12 | 15 | 15 | 14 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +1 | +4 | +4 | +5 |

**SKILLS**

Bluff 8 (+10), Computers 6 (+8), Concentration 8 (+10), Diplomacy 4 (+6), Disable Device 5 (+7), Escape Artist 5 (+6), Notice 5 (+7), Perform (stage magic) 10 (+12), Search 4 (+6), Sense Motive 4 (+6), Sleight of Hand 9 (+10), Stealth 4 (+5)

**FEATS**

Attack Focus (ranged) 2, Improvised Tools

**POWERS**

**Device 3** (top hat, easy to lose)

*Top Hat:* **Create Object 10** (Continuous; Limited to drawing items out of the hat, Touch Range; Innate, Precise, Subtle)

**COMBAT**

Attack +2 (melee), +4 (ranged), Grapple +2, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +5 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback –0, Initiative +1

**Abilities 20 + Skills 18 (72 ranks) + Feats 3 + Powers 9 + Combat 14 + Saves 9 = Total 73**

## ABILITIES

Topper can pull anything she needs out of her silk top hat, as long as whatever she needs can fit through its brim. Her hat is thus more of a gateway than a container. For example, she can pull an anaconda, length-wise, from her hat, but not a breadbox. An article in *Aces* says she can use any hat to exhibit her powers, but this is deliberate misinformation. She can only use the hat given to her by her grandfather, the one he used in his own act. Although the power resides in her and not the hat, it is treated as a Device because it's unique and her power is useless without it.

Topper's power requires some adjudication, as she can produce pretty much anything that really exists out of her hat: the key to a specific door, a prototype palmtop computer not yet released on the market... just about anything she knows about and can properly envision. The GM may occasionally require a Concentration skill check for Topper to get a specific and tricky item.

Topper does *not* take requests, except in life-or-death emergencies. Otherwise, she would be busier than a Wal-Mart during the Christmas season all the time.

# THE GREAT AND POWERFUL TURTLE

**Created by George R.R. Martin**

*"What makes Turtle, Turtle is the man inside. You're the ace, Tom, it's time to come out of the shell."*

— One of Tachyon's better pep talks.
Snodgrass: "Relative Difficulties" (Volume II)

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Thomas "Tommy" Tudbury | **WC Name:** The Great and Powerful Turtle |
| **Occupation:** Junkyard owner | **WC Status:** Ace |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** 1944, Bayonne, New Jersey | **Death:** Once, supposedly |
| **Height:** 5 ft., 9 in. | **Weight:** 170 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Green | **Hair:** Dark brown |

## DESCRIPTION

Tom is short, overweight, and wears horn-rimmed glasses and a crewcut (in early years).

Because he hides in an armored shell and never shows his face, a lot of jokers assumes the Turtle is one of them, and though he feels guilty about the tacit lie, he never does anything to deny it. The day he makes Nixon's enemy list is one of the proudest days of his life.

## BACKGROUND

Born in the projects of Bayonne, New Jersey, Tommy realizes he's telekinetic in third grade. "Junkyard" Joey Di Angelis, friend and confidant, shares his secret. Tommy drops out of Rutgers as a freshman, partly in discouragement over the Kennedy assassination, partly because he feels he doesn't really fit in. He gets a job in a television repair shop called the Broadway ElectroMart. (By 1986 he's manager and owns a third of the business.)

As a huge comic book fan and something of a romantic, he's inspired by the legacy of Jetboy to do something with his power, but he's also wary of the fate of the Four Aces. He decides to keep his real identity a secret. Since he has no real physical defenses, and he has to be safe to concentrate and feel confident enough to use his powers, he and Joey build a shell from objects they find around Joey's father's junkyard located on the Jersey side of New York Bay.

The first shell consists of a Volkswagen Bug body covered by two overlapping layers of battleship armor. The interior includes a bucket seat from a Triumph TR-3, an array of mismatched television screens, cameras, tracking motors, a generator, a ventilation system, sound equipment with huge speakers in the wheel wells, and a little refrigerator. Successive generations of shells are more sophisticated. By 1986 the shell has a leather seat with thick padded hand rests with control panels mounted in each arm with controls for ventilation, heat, and light. The interior is covered with green shag carpet. Four 23-inch color TVs are set in the carpeted walls, along with banks of smaller screens and instruments. Outside monitoring cameras have infrared capability, and there is also a nice cassette tape sound system.

### DECEMBER 1963

The Turtle becomes the first public ace since the early 1950s when he appears over the skies of New York and puts out an apartment house fire by using his telekinesis to dump water over the flaming building. He also sets Tachyon back on the road to sobriety, starting a friendship and alliance between the two men that lasts many years.

In 1976 Tom buys the junkyard from Joey and closes it. He and Joey had constructed a tunnel (1969/1970) leading from his secret bunker where he keeps his current and some outmoded shells, out to the waters of New York Bay. Later he buys and lives in a small orange brick house on 1st Street, overlooking the Kill van Kull.

### SPRING 1986

Tom is mind-controlled and kidnapped by Tachyon's Takisian relatives as part of their attempt to round up a crop of wild card-infected specimens to take back to Takis as guinea pigs for various interesting lab tests. In the course of the subsequent escape, an unmasked Turtle comes face to face with Tachyon for the first time and also for the first time uses his power in a meaningful way outside of his shell. At the end, he gains a family (having been formally adopted into Tachyon's house of Ilkazam) but loses his shell, returning to Earth via the experimental singularity shifter.

### SEPTEMBER 1986

The Turtle participates in the Cloisters Raid against the Egyptian Masons and is therefore on the Astronomer's hit list when Wild Card Day comes around. Attacked by Imp and Insulin over the East River, he ends up crashing into the water and is rendered *hors de combat*, and is reported missing for some time afterward.

### SPRING 1987

The Turtle comes out of that affair weary and broke. He has no money to build a new shell, or even repair an old one. He's had enough and decides to retire. He makes plans to partner with his high-school nemesis, Steve Broder, to sell off the junkyard and turn it into an up-

| THE GREAT AND POWERFUL TURTLE | | | POWER LEVEL 12 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| –1 | +0 | +0 | +2 | +1 | +0 |
| 9 | 10 | 10 | 15 | 13 | 11 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +11/+0* | +3 | +3 | +7 |

**Outside shell*

**SKILLS**

Computers 4 (+6), Concentration 10 (+11), Craft (electronics) 4 (+6), Craft (mechanical) 6 (+8), Craft (structural) 6 (+8), Knowledge (popular culture) 6 (+8), Knowledge (technology) 4 (+6)

**FEATS**

Equipment 4 (shell), Ultimate Effort (Telekinesis)

*Shell:* Huge, Str 0, Speed 4* (see Abilities), Defense 8, Toughness 11 (Impervious 3); Features 3 (amplifiers and speakers, computer, parabolic microphones), Super-Senses 6 (infravision, extended radio blindsight [radar])

**POWERS**

**Telekinesis 21** (*heavy load:* 25,000 tons; Perception Range; Subtle 2)

*Alternate Power:* **Telekinesis 15** (*heavy load:* 400 tons; Burst Area, Perception Range; Subtle 2)

**COMBAT**

Attack +2, Grapple +1 (+42 with telekinesis), Damage –1 (unarmed), Defense +2, Knockback –15 (–0 outside shell), Initiative +0

**DRAWBACKS**

Normal Identity (full-round action, –4 points), Power Loss (all but 1 rank of Telekinesis, outside of shell, –1 point)

**Abilities 8 + Skills 10 (40 ranks) + Feats 5 + Powers 66 + Combat 8 + Saves 12 – Drawbacks 5 = Total 104**

scale housing development. He also sells Charles Dutton, the owner of the Famous Bowery Wild Card Dime Museum, his three old shells for $80,000. But ultimately he has a change of heart and enlists Tachyon's help to fake his own death. He leaves the junkyard to Joey. Together they build a new shell, his largest and most technologically advanced yet. He also moves into the shack in the junkyard, and although it looks run down from the outside, inside it is clean and well-appointed with many modern conveniences.

## JULY 1988

Tommy appears in Atlanta for the Democratic National Convention, helping control the tension among the thousands of jokers who have gathered to see if their man, Hartmann, will get the nomination. The Turtle breaks with Tachyon when the alien switches his support to Jesse Jackson, just when it seems the nomination is within Hartmann's grasp.

## AUGUST 1990

He's astonished when Tachyon appears in a female body at his junkyard, but agrees to return her to the Rox and help her regain her real form. She

becomes the first outsider he allows to enter his shell. They arrive too late. Blaise has fled, taking Kelly Jenkins in Tachyon's body with him. Blaise tricks *Baby* into thinking Kelly is the real Tachyon, and the ship takes off for the stars, Tachyon and the Turtle in hot, but ultimately failed, pursuit. Tudbury wants to accompany Tachyon upon her return to Takis, but his shell can't fit in the spaceship that will transport them to the distant world.

## SEPTEMBER 1990

Turtle joins the overt ace team for the assault on the Rox, though he has reservations about the plan. He ferries Father Squid and Gregg Hartmann to the Rox for a peace parley, which ultimately fails. He saves Hartmann from Herne and the Wild Hunt, though Herne manages to penetrate the Turtle's shell with his spear. To save the ex-senator, the Turtle takes the drastic, but admittedly box office, step of smashing the Brooklyn Bridge. Though Herne survives the Turtle's great telekinetic hammer, most of the Hunt is killed. The Turtle is shaken, because this is the first time he has taken a life.

During the Battle for the Rox the Turtle smashes the North Gate, but pulls out of the assault after he learns they've essentially been used as a diversion for the covert force that's attacking from the caverns below. But Legion convinces him to re-enter the fight when she tells him the battleship *New Jersey* is in trouble. They arrive as it sinks and the Turtle captures jumper Molly Bolt (as Mistral), and forces her to jump out of Mistral's body.

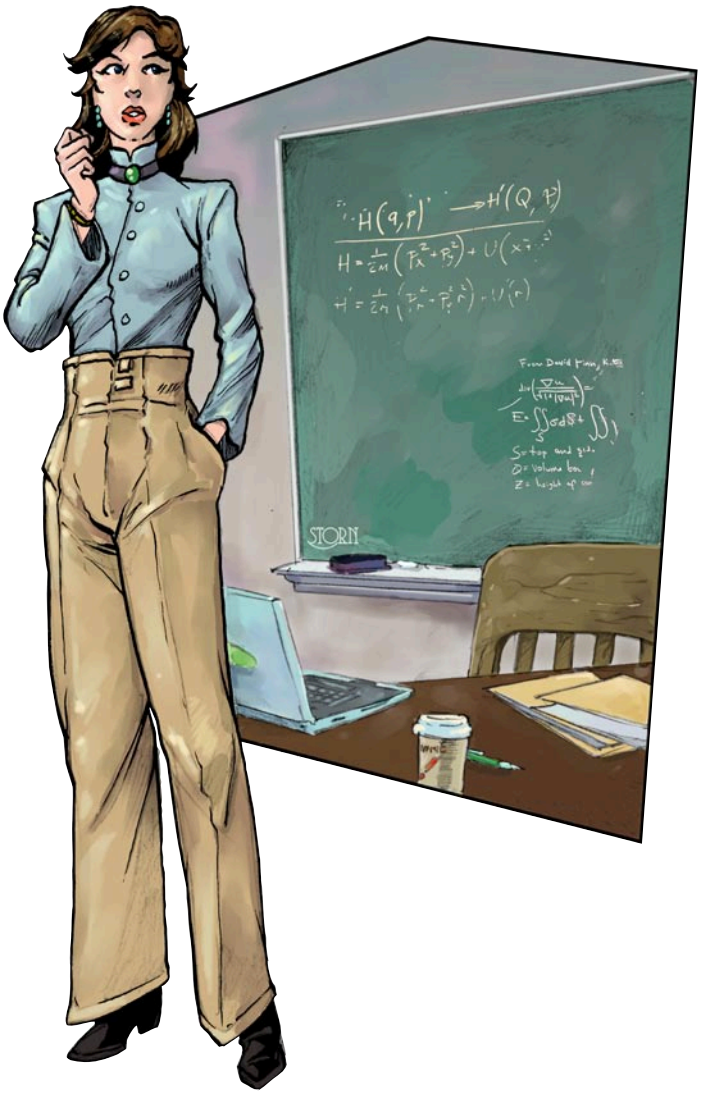
Turtle quits the team for good. Danny Shepard comes to his place in the junkyard and they make love. Afterwards she is torn to pieces before his eyes as her sister is savaged by the Gabriel Hounds in the caverns be-

neath the Rox. The Turtle calls 911, but the medics are unable to save her and in fact believe Tom has brutally murdered her. He flees, enraged, and gets into his shell. He goes up the Hudson River and makes a tidal wave that he slams over Ellis Island, utterly demolishing it. He then abandons his last shell in front of the Famous Bowery Wild Card Dime Museum, and again penniless, homeless, and wanted by the law, goes to Los Angeles with the starlet Danny Shepard.

### FALL 1993

The Turtle returns to New York to promote his autobiography, *Shell Games*. He has dropped his secret identity. He's in a world of financial trouble, wanted by the IRS, wanted for insurance fraud, and wanted by a couple of hundred crazies who are trying to sue him for various bogus reasons. He also has a bad rep in the joker community for destroying the Rox and supposedly killing hundreds of jokers. But what saddens—and disgusts—him more are those who congratulate him for killing hundreds of jokers. While in town he and Danny Shepard meet Zoe Harris, and help her get a little better handle on her power.

## ABILITIES




The Turtle is the world's most powerful telekinetic; with a round of concentration to improve his carrying capacity, he once lifted the battleship *New Jersey* several feet into the air for almost half a minute. Similarly, with some extra effort, he has smashed the Brooklyn Bridge and created a tsunami in New York Harbor. Note his Telekinesis does not have the Damaging extra, although he can acquire it as a power stunt, and has done so in the past (it's +15 damage when he does).

The Turtle's power level is somewhat approximate, given the unusual nature of his abilities and the protection of his shell. Without the shell, however, he's limited to a single rank of Telekinesis at most.

The Speed score of his shell actually comes from Tom's telekinetic power, but is treated as part of the "vehicle" for simplicity. The shell has no Str score as it has no engine or motive power; the Turtle uses his telekinesis to haul and tow loads. His last shell weighed 23 tons.

# BLYTHE VAN RENSSAELER

**Created by Melinda Snodgrass**

*"Inside was a nightmarish whirlpool of conflicting personalities, all battling for supremacy while Blythe spun helplessly in the center."*

— Snodgrass: "Degradation Rites" (Book I)

## DESCRIPTION

Blythe has a quiet but outstanding beauty. She is high strung, constantly on the edge of collapse, and the possessor of a fragile psyche.

## BACKGROUND

Blythe is an upper class Bostonian from old money. She's married to sleazy New York Congressman Henry van Renssaeler with whom she has three children (Henry, Jr., Brandon, and Fleur).

### 1940S

She first meets Tachyon in the early days of the virus, after her power manifested and she unknowingly absorbed her husband's memory. They grow close as Tachyon teaches her how to build mental wards to keep her husband's mind (whom she now abhors) away from hers.

After her husband throws her out, she and Tachyon become lovers and live together. They're very happy together for two and a half years, but her mind starts to disintegrate from the pressure of all the other minds she's absorbed. Despite the obviously deteriorating condition of her own psyche, she adds Tachyon's mind to her accumulation.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Blythe Stanhope van Renssaeler | **WC Name:** Brain Trust |
| **Occupation:** Government agent | **WC Status:** Ace (card turned February 1947) |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** Circa 1914, Boston | **Death:** Late 1953, Wittier Sanitarium |
| **Height:** Small | **Weight:** Light |
| **Eyes:** Midnight blue | **Hair:** Shoulder-length sable |

| BLYTHE VAN RENSSAELER | | | | | POWER LEVEL 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| –1 | +0 | +0 | +0* | +1 | +0 |
| 8 | 10 | 10 | 11* | 12 | 11 |
| *Effectively 26 (+8) due to her power | | | | | |
| TOUGHNESS | | FORTITUDE | | REFLEX | WILL |
| +0 | | +2 | | +2 | +4 |

**SKILLS**

Diplomacy 5 (+5), Knowledge (popular culture) 6 (+6), Sense Motive 5 (+6); additionally, Brain Trust has an effective +20 skill bonus with all Craft and Knowledge specialties and speaks a number of languages (notably German and Takisian) due to her absorbed abilities

**FEATS**

Attractive

**POWERS**

**Mental Duplication 8** (40 points in Intelligence and mental skills; Continuous, Extra Subject 3 [up to 10], Stacking; Split-Personality)

**COMBAT**

Attack +0, Grapple –1, Damage –1 (unarmed), Defense +1, Knockback –0, Initiative +0

**Abilities 2 + Skills 4 (16 ranks) + Feats 1 + Powers 48 + Combat 2 + Saves 7 = Total 64**

She's called before HUAC, like the other members of the Four Aces (1949). Jack Braun had testified that she'd absorbed Tachyon's mind, and the committee badgers her to give up the names of the aces Tachyon has treated, information Tachyon had refused to divulge when he'd testified himself. Desperately fearful, she tries to remain silent but is browbeaten into giving up the names. In a last desperate attempt to save his patients' privacy, and perhaps their lives, Tachyon mind-controls her. Her mind utterly shatters, never to be rebuilt.

Over Tachyon's protests, her husband commits her to the Wittier Sanitarium in Upstate New York, where she spends her final years a mental wreck, physically disintegrating until her death in 1953.

## ABILITIES

Blythe can absorb minds, with their attendant memories and abilities. This process does not injure the original. The minds she absorbed include her husband Henry's (which, granted, is of little use to her or anyone), Einstein's, Salk's, Von Braun's, Oppenheimer's, Teller's, and Tachyon's.

# WARLOCK

**Created by John Jos. Miller**

*"He was a man to be cautious around."*

— Miller: "Dead Heart Beating" (Volume VIII)

## DESCRIPTION

Nance is tall and strongly built, but no one knows what he looks like. He always wears a mask, lest he catch a glimpse of death on his own face.

## BACKGROUND

As head of the Werewolves street gang Nance claims to have the power of the "death wish." If he wishes someone dead, they die, generally within 24 hours. Actually, though, what he does is see imminent death on someone's face, and he builds his reputation utilizing this secret knowledge.

The Werewolves' Lair is an old luxury hotel in the Bowery that had gone downhill for many years, first becoming tenement apartments, then a flophouse, then being abandoned for over a decade before the Werewolves move in and fix it up. Minimally. The door of Nance's Sanctorum has a crude pentacle surrounded by the legend 666: Lair of the Beast sloppily painted on it in dripping red paint. Inside, it is cluttered with occult books and magic gimcracks. Hanging on the wall behind his desk is a portrait of Nance's patron saint, Aleister Crowley.

### AUGUST 1990

Warlock is initially on Cunningham's side when the treacherous ace attempts to take over the Shadow Fists, but he sees imminent death on Cunningham's face, switches sides, and survives the ensuant bloodbath as Kien crushes the coup.

## ABILITIES

| WARLOCK | | | | | POWER LEVEL 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +2 | +1 | +1 | +1 | +2 | +2 |
| 14 | 13 | 13 | 12 | 15 | 14 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +2/+1* | +4 | +4 | +5 |

**Flat-footed*

**SKILLS**

Bluff 3 (+5), Intimidate 5 (+7), Knowledge (arcane lore) 4 (+5), Knowledge (behavioral sciences) 3 (+4), Knowledge (current events) 4 (+5), Knowledge (streetwise) 7 (+8), Notice 4 (+6), Sense Motive 7 (+9), Stealth 3 (+4)

**FEATS**

Attack Specialization (pistol), Connected, Defensive Roll 1, Leadership, Minions 6 (thug archetypes, *M&M,* page 229)
*Equipment:* Pistol (+3 damage)

**POWERS**

**Super-Senses 4** (precognition; Limited to seeing imminent death)

**COMBAT**

Attack +3 (melee), +5 (pistols), Grapple +5, Damage +2 (unarmed), Defense +6 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback –1 (-0 flat-footed), Initiative +1

**Abilities 21 + Skills 10 (40 ranks) + Feats 10 + Powers 2 + Combat 18 + Saves 9 = Total 70**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Peter Nance | **WC Name:** Warlock |
| **Occupation:** Gang leader | **WC Status:** Ace |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Unknown |
| **Birth:** Unknown | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** Tall | **Weight:** Heavy |
| **Eyes:** Unknown | **Hair:** Unknown |

Nance can see impending death on others' faces. He started wearing masks so he wouldn't see it on his own, and the rest of his gang apes the practice, giving the Werewolves their signature look.

Warlock uses his "death curse" sparingly, since his reputation is built on it always working. Fortunately, he's frequently around people about to die, so he has plenty of opportunities. The GM may wish to give Warlock a circumstance bonus to Intimidate checks if he's able to play-up his "power".

For more information about the Werewolves in general, see the **Criminals** section of **Chapter 5**.

# WATER LILY

**Created by Pat Cadigan**

*"Innocence and strength: a potent combination. The girl would be lucky indeed if the blend didn't get her killed."*

— Hiram Worchester musing on Jane Dow's nature. Martin: Hiram's Story (Book III)

## DESCRIPTION

Dow (pronounced "Doe"), 21 when she comes to New York, has a heart-shaped, unlined, unsophisticated but very attractive face, shoulder-length auburn hair, and wide green eyes.

Dow regularly holds mental conversations with her best friend, Salvatore Carbone, a gay man who accidentally drowned in his bath tub. She recognizes that her great need to be liked can be a detriment. She generally feels guilty over bad things that are not her actual fault or responsibility. She is a conventional person, good though rather naive, and is more comfortable as Jane Dow than Water Lily.

## BACKGROUND

Dow comes to New York when Sal Carbone, her best friend, drowns accidentally in his bathtub. Ostensibly she's looking for Jumpin' Jack Flash because she feels she's in love with him, but that's really something of an excuse to search for a new life. She falls in with the Egyptian Masons. Though hardly sympathetic to their cause, she remains with them because at first she feels they might help her control her uncertain power. She turns against them and helps save Kid Dinosaur during the Cloisters Raid (May 1986).

### SEPTEMBER 1986

After the raid Dow seeks anonymity as a waitress, but she's tracked down by Fortunato, because he realizes she's one of the Astronomer's targets. He brings her to Aces High for safekeeping, where Hiram takes her in hand, ultimately offering her a job in his fabulous restaurant. The Astronomer hurls her off the Aces High balcony, but she's saved by Hiram and Peregrine. Later that fall she's recruited by Rosemary Muldoon for the D.A.'s task force against the Shadow Fists, and, much to her chagrin, eventually realizes she's been a Mafia dupe.

### SUMMER 1987

Dow rises in the ranks at Aces High, and the other workers turn to her as Hiram becomes increasingly unreliable. While searching for him during a sushi crisis, she discovers Hiram has become a thrall to Ti Malice, and she herself comes under the Haitian joker's domination. She finds it impossible to break the addiction no matter how hard she tries, but eventually becomes reinfected with the wild card virus after an encounter with Typhoid Croyd. That does the trick and also gives her with a new power while leaving her old ones intact. She can now cure jokers by having sexual intercourse with them. She cures one joker at the Jokertown Clinic, then escapes from the mob that quickly surrounds her. Unable to deal with the pressure of her new power, Dow goes underground, taking a job as a waitress at a luncheonette.

## ABILITIES

Dow can pull water out of anything in range, including the air and living beings. When she draws water, it condenses on her skin, eventually soaking her. Sometimes she does this unconsciously while stressed. Her

| WATER LILY | | | | | POWER LEVEL 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| -1 | +1 | +0 | +1 | +1 | +1 |
| 8 | 12 | 11 | 13 | 12 | 13 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +0 | +3 | +3 | +3 |

**SKILLS**

Concentration 4 (+5), Notice 4 (+5), Profession (restaurant manager) 6 (+7), Sense Motive 6 (+7)

**FEATS**

Attack Specialization (blast), Attractive, Dodge Focus 2

**POWERS**

**Transform 8** (joker to nat; Continuous; Limited to sexual partners [–2 flaw])

**Water Control 8**

*Alternate Power:* **Blast 8** (water)
*Alternate Power:* **Blast 4** (dehydration; Fortitude Save, Perception Range)
*Alternate Power:* **Create Water 4** (Continuous, Perception Range)
*Alternate Power:* **Dazzle 8** (visual, water spray)

**COMBAT**

Attack +2, Grapple +1, Damage –1 (unarmed), +8 (water blast), Defense +4 (+1 flat-footed), Knockback –0, Initiative +1

**Abilities 9 + Skills 5 (20 ranks) + Feats 4 + Powers 36 + Combat 8 + Saves 7 = Total 69**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Jane Lillian Dow | **WC Name:** Water Lily (a name she dislikes) |
| **Occupation:** Waitress | **WC Status:** Ace (card turned 1981) |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** April 1, 1965, Massachusetts | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** 5 ft., 7 in. | **Weight:** 115 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Green | **Hair:** Auburn |

power can work at distances of up to half a mile. She also can combine atoms of hydrogen and oxygen to make water. It takes her approximately 48 hours to recharge her strength after exhausting her powers. She can also control the flow of water in her vicinity, and mess with the electrolyte balance in humans, knocking out her target.

After her encounter with Typhoid Croyd, she receives the ability to cure jokers of all wild card ravages by having sex with them. This ability is more of a plot device, but is handled as a Continuous (and therefore effectively permanent) Transform in *M&M* game terms. It's unknown if it works on wild carders other than jokers, since Jane has only done it once in the series.

# WILL-O'-WISP

**Created by Kevin Andrew Murphy**

*"Will-o'-Wisp's a hero. He's saved the lives of a lot of jokers. He's about the only one who protects us out here... but no one knows who he is."*

— A fan on the secret ace Will-o'-Wisp. Murphy, "Cursum Perficio" (Book XIII)

## DESCRIPTION

Williams was a lanky, handsome devil with a California tan when he was alive. Now he's just a dusty old fedora.

## BACKGROUND

While attending college on a swimming scholarship, Olympic hopeful Nick Williams steps out of a pool during his sophomore year and onto a high voltage cord and gets electrocuted. Fortunately it's not fatal, though it proves to be permanent. He soon discovers he can toss around balls of lightning, as well as light himself up like a Christmas tree.

It's the McCarthy years, the years of distrust of all things wild card, and Williams stays up the sleeve, his power hidden. He first tries acting, but is not successful in a city full of would-be actors. He turns from being a struggling young actor to being a struggling young private investigator. His big break in the business comes when Jack Braun's first wife, Kim Wolfe, hires him to take compromising photos of Jack, and he goes on to do a lot of work for the film companies around Los Angeles.

FEBRUARY 1962

Orson Welles hires him to essentially bodyguard his new picture, *Blythe*, to make sure it gets made. He takes over from another detective who mysteriously goes insane. Before being confined to and eventually dying in an asylum, the other detective had put together a pretty good case that someone has been sabotaging pro-wild card films, and Welles doesn't want that to happen to *Blythe*. In order to have an excuse to hang around the set, Williams gets a cover job as stand-in for actor Ron Ely, who plays Golden Boy. Williams meets the star of the film, Marilyn Monroe, and falls in love with her. Incidentally, Williams saves the Santa Monica pier, the closest thing to a Jokertown in Los Angeles, from being blown up, killing three Card Shark operatives in the process, which is the first time he's killed anyone since learning how to control his power.

He and Marilyn become lovers. Much to his great pleasure she tells him, "I can be all women to all men, or one woman to one man. Will you be my one man, Nickie?" He agrees enthusiastically, and a few days later she tells him that she's pregnant with his child.

Williams has a long history with Hedda Hopper, who is a secret Card Shark. He is one of her legion of spies scattered throughout Southern California. Once he discovers the truth about the Card Shark conspiracy and that she's one of them, he gains access to her office and makes several copies of her meticulously annotated files. While going through her files he finds an obituary for Marilyn Monroe, postdated, with the manner of death already filled in. The story includes the details that John and Robert Kennedy will be staying at Peter Lawford's house along with Marilyn, and they'll wake up with Marilyn dead from an overdose of tranquilizers. The ensuing scandal would certainly destroy both *Blythe* and the Kennedy brothers.

Williams takes the file to Marilyn. They decide there's only one thing to do. If Marilyn can elude the Card Sharks for a few days, she can hand the file over to the president, since he'll soon be in town. They hide the data in a stuffed toy tiger. Williams gets a call from Marilyn asking him to come to her house. Hedda and Pan Rudo are there, and they have guns. Marilyn gives an impassioned speech, claiming that when she was 9 she was raped by a joker and she hates them all and is willing to destroy *Blythe*. Her diatribe distracts both Card Sharks, but not enough. Williams tries to hit them with lightning balls, but Hoppa shoots him, throwing him backward into the swimming pool. She makes Marilyn fire the fatal bullet into Williams' chest. He dies without knowing if she ever really loved him.

## WILL-O'-WISP — POWER LEVEL 7

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| +3 | +4 | +3 | +0 | +1 | +1 |
| 17 | 18 | 16 | 11 | 12 | 12 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +4/+3* | +6 | +6 | +4 |

**Flat-footed*

**SKILLS**

Bluff 4 (+5), Diplomacy 4 (+5), Drive 2 (+6), Gather Information 4 (+5), Investigate 6 (+6), Knowledge (current events) 4 (+4), Knowledge (popular culture) 4 (+4), Knowledge (streetwise) 6 (+6), Notice 4 (+5), Perform (acting) 4 (+5), Profession (investigator) 8 (+9), Search 4 (+5), Sense Motive 4 (+5), Stealth 2 (+6)

**FEATS**

Attack Focus (ranged), Attack Specialization (will-o'-wisps), Contacts

**POWERS**

**Blast 8** (electrical, will-o'-wisps)

*Alternate Power:* **Stun 5** (Ranged)

**COMBAT**

Attack +3 (melee), +4 (ranged), +6 (will-o'-wisps), Grapple +6, Damage +3 (unarmed), +8 (blast), Defense +6 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback -2 (-1 flat-footed), Initiative +4

**Abilities 26 + Skills 15 (60 ranks) + Feats 3 + Powers 17 + Combat 18 + Saves 8 = Total 87**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Nick Williams | **WC Name:** Will-o'-Wisp |
| **Occupation:** Private investigator | **WC Status:** Ace (up the sleeve) |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** Early 1930s | **Death:** 1962 |
| **Height:** 6 ft., 3 in. | **Weight:** Slim |
| **Eyes:** Blue | **Hair:** Blond |

## 1990 TO 2003

Williams has a second career after his death. Cameo obtains his fedora, and calls upon him on numerous occasions, like while fighting Bloat's creatures in the caverns below the Rox.

## ABILITIES

Williams can create balls of electricity (will-o'-wisps) that he throws at his targets. They can shock, or can be strong enough to kill, if needed.

# HIRAM WORCHESTER

**Created by George R.R. Martin**

*"Heroism is a ludicrous career choice, though not half so ludicrous as I was in my costume."*

— Hiram, on himself.
Martin: Hiram's Story (Book III)

## DESCRIPTION

Hiram is huge, impressive, and broad all over. He is immaculately groomed and well-dressed, has a spade-shaped black beard, and moves lightly for one his size. Warm and gracious, he enjoys life and brings enjoyment to all those around him. Anonymously he funds many charities around Jokertown.

## BACKGROUND

His British father, who married a WAC and came to America after World War II, was also a large man of extremely large appetite. He died when Hiram was 12. Hiram lives in a three-story building off Riverside Drive whose bedroom overlooks the Hudson River. Hiram has a Bentley, driven by his chauffeur Anthony. Early on in his career, Worchester became an unwitting puppet of Gregg Hartmann.

### 1970s to 1980s

Hiram owns Aces High, one of the premier restaurants in New York City. It opens in 1971 and caters to aces and celebrities of all sorts. Even the Astronomer's attempted murder of Water Lily (September 1986) can't dampen its reputation.

### 1986/1987

While participating in the WHO-sponsored world tour Hiram is taken as a mount by Ti Malice during their sojourn in Haiti. His increasingly erratic behavior concerns other tour members. Hiram acts heroically during the firefight with the Nur at his Syrian camp, although some say he used too much force to subdue Sayyid. He leaves the tour a few days later because of an "emergency" at Aces High, but soon returns. His erratic behavior continues and gets him in trouble with a Yakuza gang in Japan. Ultimately Fortunato saves him from the assassin the gangsters send after him. When Hartmann is kidnapped in Germany, Hiram spearheads an attempt to negotiate with the terrorists to release the senator. He takes it very hard when this plan fails and has something of a breakdown.

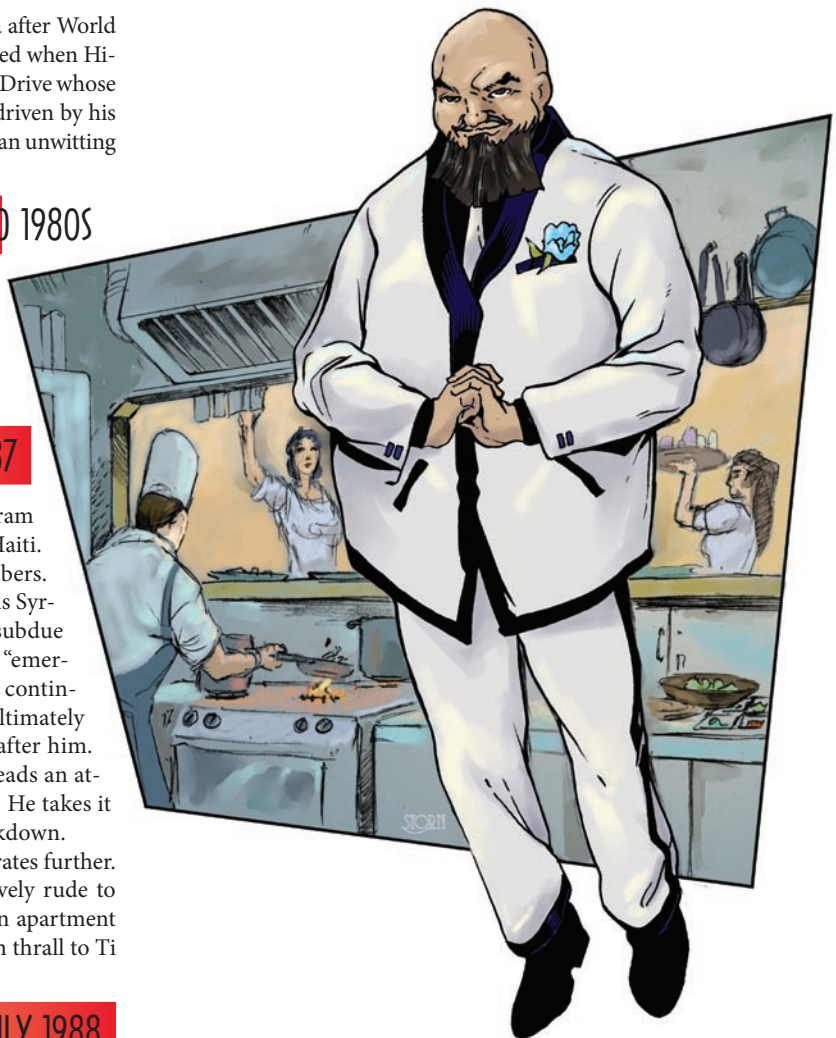
Upon his return to the United States his behavior deteriorates further. He becomes distracted at Aces High and at times is abusively rude to staff and guests alike. Eventually, Jane Dow traces him to an apartment she thinks he shares with Ezili Rouge, only to discover he's in thrall to Ti Malice.

### July 1988

Hiram attends the Democratic National Convention in Atlanta as a Hartmann delegate in spite of his obviously declining health and increasing mental instability. Early on, though, he returns to New York, feeling a dire need for his master's kiss. He takes Sascha's place as Ti Malice's mount, and to strike out at him an angry and jealous Sascha tells Hiram that he's learned Chrysalis has hired an assassin to kill Hartmann. Hiram kills Chrysalis accidentally in a botched attempt to get her to recall the killer. In a panic, he then tries to muddy his trail by placing the ace of spades from her antique playing deck on her body, trashes her office as if a fight had taken place, and smashes her head as if a super-strong ace had killed her.

Hiram goes back to Atlanta, shaken, and plays an important role on several fronts, saving Jack Braun's life, and unwittingly helping to convince Tachyon of Hartmann's true nature by turning over the senator's blood-stained jacket (bought to him by Jay Ackroyd) which Tachyon tests for the wild card virus. Hiram is devastated when he learns of Hartmann's true nature. Only Hiram, Ackroyd, and Tachyon know the secret. They swear a binding Takisian oath to keep it to themselves.

At the convention's end he helps Ackroyd escape from Ti Malice by attacking Blaise who, under Ti Malice's influence. is mind-controlling the investigator, but later is exposed as Chrysalis's killer by Yeoman. Hiram eventually agrees to turn himself in to the authorities, ultimately pleading guilty to involuntary manslaughter. He is given five years' pro-



| HIRAM WORCHESTER | | | | | POWER LEVEL 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +0 | +0 | +2 | +1 | +1 | +3 |
| 10 | 11 | 14 | 13 | 12 | 16 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +2 | +4 | +2 | +4 |

**SKILLS**

Diplomacy 5 (+8), Knowledge (art) 6 (+7), Knowledge (current events) 5 (+6), Knowledge (popular culture) 5 (+6), Language 1 (French), Profession (chef) 12 (+13), Profession (restauranteur) 10 (+11)

**FEATS**

Benefit (owner of Aces High), Connected, Contacts

**POWERS**

**Gravity Control 7** (Perception Range; Limited to a single target)

**COMBAT**

Attack +0, Grapple +1, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +0, Knockback –1, Initiative +0

**DRAWBACKS**

Power Loss (must clench his fist to use Gravity Control, –1 point)

**Abilities 16 + Skills 11 (44 ranks) + Feats 3 + Powers 14 + Combat 0 + Saves 7 = Total 51**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Hiram Worchester | **WC Name:** Fatman (quickly abandoned) |
| **Occupation:** Restauranteur | **WC Status:** Ace (card turned 1971) |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** Early 1940s, Boston | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** 6 ft., 2 in. | **Weight:** 30 lbs. (actually 375) |
| **Eyes:** Chestnut | **Hair:** Bald |

bation, during which time he is prohibited from using his ace power. Announcement of his sentence in January 1989 causes riots to erupt in Jokertown.

Aces High closes in the mid-1990s.

## ABILITIES

Hiram can control gravity, changing his weight (which he keeps at 30 pounds) or the weight of other persons or objects. In order to utilize his power he must concentrate and make a fist. After using his powers he's always famished.

He is a skilled chef and an avid numismatist. He speaks French fluently.

# WRAITH

**Created by John Jos. Miller**

*"No matter how many times she'd done this, she thought, it was still exciting."*

— Going insubstantial, that is.
Miller: Wraith's Story (Volume III)

## DESCRIPTION

Maloy is a tall, willowy blonde, slim and gracefully muscular, with finely sculpted features. While Wraith she habitually wears a string bikini because she can only ghost a limited amount of non-living matter.

Maloy is an incurable romantic and was a fair college fencer, although she lacks the killer instinct needed to be a real champion.

## BACKGROUND

By day Maloy is a reference librarian in the New York City Public Library, by night a daring sneak thief called Wraith. An incurable romantic, she distributes a certain amount of her ill-gotten gains to favorite charities most of which are concerned with battered wives, deserted children, and abandoned animals.

### SEPTEMBER 1986

She contributes much of the confusion to the events surrounding Wild Card Day by stealing three notebooks from a wall safe in Kien Phuc's luxurious condo. Two are stock books of rare stamps. A third, Kien's diary, is more important and eventually brings her to the attention of the Shadow Fists and their sworn enemy, Yeoman, though ultimately it proves useless in Yeoman's struggle with Kien.

### 1987

Maloy gives up her job as a reference librarian and leaves the city with Brennan. After traveling for a bit they settle down in rural upstate New York. She mostly forsakes her role of Wraith to write biographies of wild card figures. Her first book is the definitive biography of Robert Tomlin.

### SUMMER 1988 TO FALL 1990

She returns to New York City to help Brennan hunt down Chrysalis's murderer, and again when she's severely wounded in a hit ordered by Kien. Because she's wounded while in a dream state, her mind wanders off into another dimension and can't find its way back. Brennan, with the help of the mysterious ace known as Trace, tracks Maloy down and returns her to her body. Together, they return to their upstate New York home. As of 2003, they are married, with two children.

## ABILITIES

Maloy can turn insubstantial and interpenetrate matter, and can also cause a limited amount of matter she touches to go insubstantial with her. The more dense the material (for example, lead), the less of it she can ghost. When she overextends herself she's warned by a wave of dizziness and immediately returns to a substantial form.

# WYUNGARE

**Created by Edward Bryant**

| WRAITH | | | | | POWER LEVEL 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +1 | +3 | +1 | +2 | +3 | +1 |
| 12 | 16 | 12 | 14 | 16 | 13 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +3/+1* | +3 | +6 | +6 |

**Flat-footed*

**SKILLS**

Computers 4 (+6), Language 1 (French), Knowledge (popular culture) 6 (+8), Knowledge (streetwise) 4 (+6), Profession (librarian) 7 (+10), Profession (writer) 3 (+6), Stealth 7 (+10)

**FEATS**

Attack Specialization (fencing), Attractive, Benefit (wealth), Dodge Focus 2

**POWERS**

**Insubstantial 4** (incorporeal)

**COMBAT**

Attack +2, Grapple +3, Damage +1 (unarmed), Defense +6 (+2 flat-footed), Knockback –1 (-0 flat-footed), Initiative +3

**Abilities 23 + Skills 8 (32 ranks) + Feats 5 + Powers 20 + Combat 12 + Saves 8 = Total 76**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Jennifer Maloy | **WC Name:** Wraith |
| **Occupation:** Cat burglar | **WC Status:** Ace |
| **Aliases:** None | **Ethnicity:** Caucasian |
| **Birth:** 1962, Long Island, New York | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** 5 ft., 11 in. | **Weight:** 120 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Light blue | **Hair:** Blonde |

*"You are a healer, but a warrior too."*

— Wyungare's animal guide reminding him of his responsibilities.
Bryant: Wyungare's Story (Book XI)

# DESCRIPTION

Wyungare ("He who returns to the stars") is dark-skinned and has wild curly black hair, hooded dark eyes, a broad, flat nose, and high, sharp cheekbones.

# BACKGROUND

As an infant in the outback, Wyungare develops but survives the same fever that kills all the other children of his tribe. The other parents hate him, so his family moves to Melbourne, and he grows up in the city. He eventually becomes an outback guide while retaining his ambition to drive the Europeans out of Australia.

## FEBRUARY 1987

Wyungare rescues Cordelia Chaisson when minions of the Murga-Muggai try to kill her, and they become lovers. He takes her to the Dreamtime, where they fight and slay the Murga-Muggai together.

## SEPTEMBER 1990

He travels to America to confront Bloat about his abuse of the Dreamtime. Before tackling the Rox, he visits the Jokertown Clinic to check on Sewer Jack, where he renews his relationship with Cordelia Chaisson. Together, they sneak Jack, in alligator form, out of the clinic before Dr. Bob Mengele can follow through his on plan to vivisect the helpless gator.

Wyungare uses Jack to get him and the big black cat, Jack's faithful companion, through Bloat's Wall. Wyungare meets with Bloat, but the leader of the Rox has no time and little inclination to discuss the problems of the Dreamtime in the face of the imminent military assault on the Rox. He imprisons Wyungare in a cell next to Mistral, who is in Molly Bolt's body, but cell walls cannot hold a man who can travel through the dream world. Wyungare first meets with a youthful Jack, freeing him from his captivity in the Dreamtime, and then takes Bloat into it, showing him all the damage he's done by absorbing its energy for his own use. Bloat, though, is unmoved. He tells Wyungare that he doesn't care what happens to the Dreamtime. In fact, he'd gladly destroy it to get the power he needs to defeat the nats.

Back on the Rox, an artillery bombardment releases all the captives from their cells. By this time Wyungare and Mistral have been joined as prisoners by the Reflector and Detroit Steel. The Reflector is ready to continue the fight, but Wyungare talks him into retreating with the others, including the big black kitty, upon Sewer Jack's back.

In the climactic confrontation between Wyungare and Bloat, the kid fi-

| WYUNGARE | | | | | POWER LEVEL 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
| +1 | +2 | +2 | +1 | +2 | +1 |
| 13 | 14 | 14 | 12 | 15 | 12 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +4/+2* | +5 | +5 | +7 |

*Flat-footed

**SKILLS**

Climb 7 (+8), Concentration 6 (+8), Knowledge (arcane lore) 6 (+8), Language 1 (English; Aboriginal is native), Notice 6 (+8), Search 4 (+5), Sense Motive 6 (+8), Stealth 4 (+6), Survival 8 (+10), Swim 4 (+5)

**FEATS**

Attack Focus (melee) 2, Defensive Roll 2, Endurance, Improved Initiative, Interpose, Track
*Equipment:* Boomerang (+1 damage), spear (+3 damage)

**POWERS**

**Super-Movement 1** (dimensional; the Dreamtime; Affects Others, Progression 2)

**COMBAT**

Attack +6 (melee), +4 (ranged), Grapple +7, Damage +1 (unarmed), Defense +6 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback -2 (-1 if flat-footed), Initiative +6

**Abilities 20 + Skills 13 (52 ranks) + Feats 8 + Powers 6 + Combat 20 + Saves 11 = Total 78**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Wyungare | **WC Name:** — |
| **Occupation:** Guide, shaman | **WC Status:** Ace (card turned as an infant) |
| **Aliases:** Warreen, Gary Wanatanabise | **Ethnicity:** Australian Aborigine |
| **Birth:** 1968, Australia | **Death:** September 22, 1990, the Rox |
| **Height:** 5 ft., 9 in. | **Weight:** 135 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Dark | **Hair:** Dark |

nally sees the light. He initially agrees to be turned into a nat. This decision angers Zelda and she tries to kill him. Wyungare, knowing Bloat has finally matured and deserves a shot at his dreams, steps between him and Zelda, absorbing and redirecting her energy. He destroys her, but at the cost of his own life. His last image in the world is Cordelia, his final feeling is love.

Fortunately, Cameo is present to channel him to continue the opening of the Dreamtime for Bloat and his realm, and they manage to shift the Rox into the other dimension. Thanks to Cameo, Wyungare is able to make one last appearance in this world to say goodbye to Cordelia.

## ABILITIES

Wyungare can shift into and out of another dimension he calls the Dreamtime, which is the place of Aboriginal myth where the original templates of all Earthly things exist. He can take others with him into this strange place.

Wyungare speaks English with an Australian vocabulary and accent.

# YEOMAN

**Created by John Jos. Miller**

*"The hunter had come to the city."*
— Miller: "Comes A Hunter" (Book I)

## DESCRIPTION

Brennan is lithely built with large, strong-looking hands. His face is dark, lean, sharp, and unremarkable looking. He undergoes plastic surgery to give his eyes epicanthic folds. He tends to dress casually in dark T-shirts, denim jackets, and running shoes, and wears a hood to conceal his features.

Brennan is a remorseless, ruthless enemy and an equally staunch ally. He commonly leaves a death card, an ace of spades, on the body of his victims. His drink is Tullamore Dew on ice.

## BACKGROUND

Brennan is a captain in the U.S. Army, leading a Ranger team in Vietnam where he runs afoul of a corrupt Army of the Republic of Vietnam general named Kien Phuc. Kien tries to kill him numerous times, and eventually succeeds in assassinating his French-Vietnamese wife, Ann-Marie, who is eight months pregnant at the time of her and the child's death.

### 1975

Brennan deserts after the fall of Saigon, bums around for a bit, and eventually spends several years in a Zen monastery where he learns meditation and archery skills. When he returns to the United States (mid-

1980s), an old comrade informs him Kien is living in New York City. Brennan comes down from the Catskill Mountains and takes a one-room apartment on the fringes of Jokertown.

## JUNE 1986

Drawn into the final attack on the Swarm Mother, Brennan becomes comrades of both Tachyon and Fortunato. Also by then he has a romantic relationship with Chrysalis, which ends in the fall of that year when he discovers she's been sleeping with other men and refuses to stop.

## SEPTEMBER 1986

He meets Jennifer Maloy when she unwittingly steals Kien's diary. Brennan wants it as proof of his enemy's many crimes, but it ultimately proves useless as evidence.

Brennan decides the best way to take down Kien's criminal organization is to burrow from within. He undergoes slight plastic surgery to give his eyes epicanthic folds and joins the Shadow Fist Society under the name Cowboy. He adds to his minimal but effective disguise with a thick, drooping mustache, long sideburns, and western clothes including a black cowboy hat. He undertakes several missions for the Shadow Fists, perhaps the most important being the raid on Mafia Don Covello's stronghold in Southhampton, Long Island.

## JUNE 1987

He leads the Shadow Fist raid that takes over the Jokertown Clinic, as Kien has gotten peeved at Tachyon's neighborhood watch program and also wants to discover the whereabouts of Jane Dow so he can sell her joker-curing talents. During the course of the raid Brennan is forced to choose between saving Tachyon's life and blowing his cover, and he chooses friendship.

Brennan is torn again between human interaction and his vendetta when he tells Jennifer Maloy that he's going away because he's afraid for her safety. She refuses to be a pawn in the battle between Brennan and Kien, and forces him to declare his love for her. They decide to leave the city together and let the vendetta go. For now.

Brennan and Jennifer move to a rural area of New York 60 miles north of the city where Brennan starts a landscaping business called Archer Landscaping and Nursery. He's content and at peace for the first time in years.

## JULY 1988

He learns of Chrysalis's murder, and also the fact that an ace of spades was placed by her body in an attempt to frame him. He returns to the city to find the real killer.

Brennan's handicapped by a lack of information, but soon meets an old snitch named Tripod who helps him in that regard. One of his first suspects is Bludgeon, who Tripod tells him is bragging around town that he killed Chrysalis. Brennan tracks Bludgeon to a dive called Squisher's Basement, and learns that, desperate to be hired on by some gang, any gang, Bludgeon is lying about killing Chrysalis. Other information turns up via mysterious notes that lead him to Quinn the Eskimo's palatial retreat on Long Island. He's captured, but ultimately rescued when Jennifer Maloy comes to his aid, joining him in his quest to find Chrysalis's murderer.

Yeoman and Wraith meet Jay Ackroyd and although the meeting is less than cordial, they trade information. The suspect list gets whittled down to Quasiman, Wyrm, the Oddity, and the unknown ace Doug Morkle. All leads seem to peter off. Brennan manages to cross Quasiman, Wyrm, and the Oddity off the list, and, yes, even Doug Morkle. Two loose threads remain. Kant, the policeman-joker, had investigated Ezili Rouge and pronounced her clean, but she isn't. And Sascha Starfin, the Crystal Palace bartender who also has connections with Ezili, is missing. When Kant goes missing as well, Brennan tracks the cop to his apartment, where Kant tells him about Ti Malice. Brennan is unsure what this all has to do with Chrysalis's death, but he files the information away.

In discussing the case with Father Squid, Brennan reveals their connection goes all the way back to Vietnam where the joker was a sergeant in the Joker Brigade. Complaining that all his clues have dried up, Father

| YEOMAN | | | | | POWER LEVEL 9 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Str | Dex | Con | Int | Wis | Cha |
| +2 | +4 | +2 | +1 | +4 | +1 |
| 15 | 19 | 15 | 12 | 18 | 12 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +4/+2* | +6 | +8 | +8 |

**Flat-footed*

**SKILLS**

Bluff 5 (+6), Climb 8 (+10), Concentration 6 (+10), Craft (chemical) 4 (+5), Craft (mechanical) 6 (+7), Disguise 7 (+8), Intimidate 7 (+8), Investigate 5 (+6), Knowledge (streetwise) 4 (+5), Knowledge (tactics) 6 (+7), Knowledge (theology and philosophy) 4 (+5), Language 4 (Cantonese, French, Japanese, Vietnamese), Notice 6 (+10), Pilot 8 (+12), Profession (gardener) 4 (+8), Search 5 (+6), Sense Motive 6 (+10), Stealth 10 (+14), Survival 7 (+11)

**FEATS**

Accurate Attack, Attack Focus (ranged) 3, Attack Specialization (bow) 2, Blind-Fight, Defensive Roll 2, Dodge Focus 2, Elusive Target, Evasion, Improved Aim, Improved Critical (bow), Improved Initiative, Move-by Action, Power Attack, Precise Shot, Quick Draw, Ranged Pin, Takedown Attack, Track, Ultimate Aim, Uncanny Dodge (visual)

*Equipment:* Bow and arrows (+3 damage), explosive arrows (Explosion Blast 5)

**POWERS**

None

**COMBAT**

Attack +7 (melee), +10 (ranged), +14 (bow), Grapple +9, Damage +2 (unarmed), +5 (bow), Defense +14 (+6 flat-footed), Knockback –2 (–1 flat-footed), Initiative +8

**Abilities 31 + Skills 28 (112 ranks) + Feats 25 + Powers 0 + Combat 38 + Saves 12 = Total 134**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Name:** Daniel Brennan | **WC Name:** Yeoman |
| **Occupation:** Soldier, vigilante | **WC Status:** Nat |
| **Aliases:** Ace of Spades Killer, Cowboy | **Ethnicity:** Irish/Apache/Chinese/Spanish |
| **Birth:** 1949, New Mexico | **Death:** — |
| **Height:** 5 ft., 10 in. | **Weight:** 175 lbs. |
| **Eyes:** Dark | **Hair:** Black |

Squid sends him to the Crystal Palace to investigate Chrysalis's "neighbors." In doing so, Brennan discovers more tunnels under the Palace that lead to a secret room where Mother and her Children live. Mother is a mattress-sized and -shaped joker who sprouts homunculi who acted as Chrysalis's eyes and ears throughout the city. While leafing through her files, Brennan is attacked by Fadeout, who Lazy Dragon has led to Chrysalis's secret lair. Brennan and Fadeout fight. Lazy Dragon joins the battle as a cute but lethal panda bear. Brennan calls on Quasiman for help. The handyman comes to his aid and the fight spills over to the Crystal Palace's public rooms. A gas line breaks and fire engulfs the Palace. A fleeing Brennan stops to rescue the immotile Mother, but the roof falls down on them. Mother buffers Brennan from the flames and debris, but she herself is killed.

One of her children sends Brennan to Ezili's loft. He finds the antique cards Chrysalis used for playing solitaire in a jacket pocket, telling Brennan whom the murderer is. He and Wraith head for Atlanta to confront Hiram Worchester, who, it turns out, accidentally killed Chrysalis trying to get her to call off the assassin she was sending after Hartmann. In a panic, Worchester then tries to muddy the trail by dropping the ace of spades, trashing Chrysalis's study, and smashing her head as if a superstrong ace had killed her. Brennan and Ackroyd get into an acrimonious debate as to Hiram's, and Brennan's, ultimate fate. Tachyon mind-controls them both to prevent bloodshed, damaging both friendships.

Brennan and Wraith return home, but not alone. Over a score of Mother's Children have survived the destruction of the Crystal Palace, but now have no place to live. Brennan and Jennifer take them home to their peaceful rural retreat in Upstate New York.

### NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1989

Kien sends assassins after them, wounding both. Brennan takes Jennifer to the Jokertown Clinic. Tachyon realizes her mind is gone, but he has no idea where it is or how to get it back. Father Squid gets the mysterious ace known as Trace to intercede. She (or he) tells Brennan that Jennifer was in a dream state when she was wounded, and her mind is wandering in other dimensions. She sends Brennan after Jennifer and the dimension becomes populated with symbols from Brennan's subconscious. Brennan goes to this dangerous reality, confronts his past, meets the son he never knew, and ultimately rescues Jennifer. To do so he finally defeats Kien, who also has been transported to this reality by Trace, leaving him imprisoned there. Brennan considers the possibility he has achieved the Zen goal of enlightenment. He rejects the notion as far-fetched. He and Jennifer return home. They marry (circa 1990) and have two children, a boy (tall, lean, and blond; born circa 1993) and a girl (stocky and dark; born circa 1998).

### SUMMER 2003

Brennan owns the land where Camp Xavier Desmond is located, and is drawn into the hunt for John Fortune when the kid is chased by Allumbrados. He teams up with old nemesis Jay Ackroyd and though he doesn't actually find John Fortune, does deal with a number of Allumbrados before he bows out of the case.

## ABILITIES

Brennan has no wild card powers, but is a Zen archer. His willpower is remarkable and does provide him with some protection against mentalist ace powers.

His bow of choice is a four-wheel compound bow with elliptical cams which reduce the initial pull of 120 pounds to 60. He has various types of special arrows color-coded by their fletching. Explosive arrows (hollow aluminum shafts packed with plastic explosives with a pressure-sensitive detonator at their tip; heavy, and so not very aerodynamic and accurate only over relatively short distances), for example, are red and black.

Brennan is an expert tracker, bowyer, and gardener. He has excellent small arms and survival skills and can pilot a helicopter. He speaks Cantonese, French, Japanese, and Vietnamese fluently.

WILD CARDS

CHAPTER FIVE:
WILD CARD
ORGANIZATIONS
VOTE
FOR
HARTMANN

People are social creatures and the wild card virus hasn't changed that: in fact, it has given people—nat and wild carder alike—another thing they can rally around. From the very start, wild carders have been divided up into aces (and deuces) and jokers, and everybody is separate from the nats, who are suspicious of wild cards, often prejudiced towards the jokers and in a love-hate relationship with the aces.

This chapter details the various organizations, groups, and factions of the *Wild Cards* world, from street gangs and criminal syndicates to religious sects, civil rights organizations, and deadly conspiracies. They can show up in your *Wild Cards* games as background material, adversaries, allies, patrons, or elements of the characters' histories. The organization profiles include their appearances in the *Wild Cards* books as well as game information, where appropriate.

# CRIMINALS

Wild card abilities present all kinds of opportunities for criminals and would-be criminals, while jokers are often driven to crime by circumstances: not too many job opportunities for hideous freaks in the mainstream market, but big and scary is an asset in criminal circles. Some jokers also have unusual needs or proclivities than pull them outside the law: whether its a hunger for human flesh, freaky sex (which takes on a *whole* new meaning where jokers are concerned), or various drugs—pharmaceutical or recreational—to deal with their state of being.

# GANGS

New York City has more than its share of criminal gangs, particularly in and around Jokertown. They include joker gangs like the Demon Princes, Killer Geeks, Jokka Bruddas, the Twisted Sisters, and the Warlocks or nat gangs like the Cannibal Headhunters and the Bedtime Boys (a youth skateboarding gang that, among other affectations of bad taste, wear their hair like Moe of the Three Stooges). The Immaculate Egrets are a Chinatown gang working for the Shadow Fists, while the Jumpers are a young gang handed virtually unlimited power by their ace patron, with predictable results.

Unless specified otherwise, the typical members of these gangs can be represented by the Gang Leader and Thug archetypes from *M&M* (pages 227 and 229, respectively).

## THE CANNIBAL HEADHUNTERS

The Headhunters were a feared nat street gang, with a scattering of ace members, that disintegrated when Yeoman killed their leader, Scar, a teleporting ace (fall 1985). They were noted for their Maori facial tattoos and filed teeth. Upon Scar's death many Headhunters gravitated to other gangs, particularly under the Shadow Fist umbrella. They can be spotted by their heavily tattooed faces.

It should be noted the Cannibal Headhunters were never really cannibals, nor headhunters. They just thought the name sounded macho.

## THE DEMON PRINCES

The Demon Princes are a joker street gang founded in the mid-1960s to protect joker turf from the nats. Their leader (mid-1980s) is named Lucifer and the gang itself is said to be organized along the lines of the Courts of Hell, with many names and titles taken from the Bible. They wear inverted crosses around their necks or dangling from their ears or noses and generally go in for the heavy metal "Satanist" look. They are mainly into petty crime such as random rip-offs, drug retailing, and small-time protection rackets. Their code of honor doesn't allow them to steal from other jokers, but they don't see any problem with selling their fellow jokers drugs or accepting protection payments from them. They view those activities as being more in the way of "community services."

The Demon Princes are the biggest and most powerful unaffiliated gang in New York City from the mid-1960s to the late 1980s.

## THE IMMACULATE EGRETS

The Egrets are a Chinatown street gang known for running heroin and other drugs, which earned them their nicknames "Snowbirds" and "Snowboys." Controlled by Kien Phuc as part of his far-reaching Shadow Fist Society, Egret gang members often wear dark blue satin jackets embroidered with a white egret. Though allied with the Werewolves, they consider themselves superior to the all-joker gang.

The leader of the gang is Sui Ma (Little Mother). She runs the gang from her headquarters in Chinatown until her death at the hands of rival Philip Cunningham (summer 1989).

## THE JOKKA BRUDDAS

The Jokka Bruddas are a Jokertown street gang made up mostly of teens, who attack, kidnap, and attempt to fillet Fortunato (first beating him up to tenderize him) with the thought of cooking and eating him (summer 2003). When they beat him unconscious his long-repressed power bursts out and literally smashes all the gang members who are on the scene. It's unknown whether or not the gang remains intact after that incident.

## THE JUMPERS

The Jumpers are a gang made up primarily of teenagers who can swap bodies with their victims. Jumpers are *not* aces; they gain their power by having sexual relations with Edward St. John "Loophole" Latham, who they call Prime (and who is the one person immune to being jumped).

A jumper must be able to see a subject in order to switch bodies. The jump is essentially permanent unless reversed by another jumper; jumpers can even do "three-way" jumps to switch the minds of two non-jumpers (jumping the first person, then the second, then jumping back to their own body, putting the first person's mind into the second person's body). Some people were willing to pay any price to get switched into a younger, more attractive, more powerful body.

When they jump an ace, they generally get the ace's powers, physical *and* mental (important as so many ace powers are psionic in nature). Jumper victims often spend the duration of the jump catatonic due to trauma and mental strain caused by the jump itself, but some retain consciousness in the borrowed body.

Important jumpers include: Blaise Andrieux (who quickly rose to leadership of the gang), David Butler (the first jumper), Molly Bolt (probably the last living jumper), K.C. Strange (Blaise's girlfriend who later becomes Mark Meadows' lover), and Zelda (Latham's lover and bodyguard, who becomes the Bodysnatcher after being paralyzed). With Latham's death (March 1990) no more jumpers can be made.

Molly Bolt takes over leadership of the gang after Blaise leaves (August 1990). By then there are approximately 116 jumpers on the Rox, as the gang has allied itself with Bloat and used his breakaway joker homeland as their sanctuary from the law. Twenty-two jumpers accept amnesty from the government before the Rox Campaign (September 1990). As part of a Card Shark plot, most are tricked into jumping into older bodies

and then gassed while the geezers keep their young bodies. Zelda escapes because she's in Pulse's body and can burn her way out of detention.

Three other jumpers are allowed to live and enter government service: Hari-Kari (a 12-year-old electronic genius); Mam'zell Gerard (a French girl who speaks three languages fluently), and Gyro Gearloose, a congressman's son. They all become tools of the Card Sharks, and are run by von Herzenhagen. All three are killed by Black Shadow and Croyd when they go Shark hunting.

Molly Bolt was last seen swimming away from the Rox in a sailor's body at the end of the Rox Campaign. Her fate remained unknown and with her power she could be virtually anywhere and anyone.

Along with Prime-initiated members of the Jumper gang, there were a fair number of hangers-on and wannabe Jumpers who didn't have the jumping power and who weren't held in high regard by full gang members.

### JUMPER TEMPLATE — 70 POINTS

**Powers: Mind Switch 10** (jumping; Continuous, Gains Mental and Physical Powers, No Saving Throw, Penetrating)

Apart from their formidable power, the typical jumper can be represented by the Criminal, Thug, or even Bystander archetypes (as some jumpers have little or nothing in the way of useful skills).

The No Saving Throw modifier (from *Ultimate Power*) reflects that no one in the books ever successfully resisted being jumped (although some aces and jokers have such unusual bodies or minds they were extremely difficult to jump). If you feel this is too powerful for your own series, feel free to eliminate the modifier and give victims a Will saving throw (DC 20) to avoid the effect.

## THE KILLER GEEKS

The Killer Geeks are a joker street gang dating back to the mid-1960s, formed mostly with the idea of protecting joker turf from nat incursions (although their definition of "incursion" may include "nats in Jokertown without our express permission or carrying stuff we want"). They wear black leather jackets with Killer Geeks emblazoned on the back.

## THE WEREWOLVES

A joker street gang and part of the Shadow Fist Society. Aping their leader Peter Nance (aka Warlock; see his bio in **Chapter 4**), the members all wear the same face mask, which changes on an irregular basis. The mask, usually of some famous or infamous person, is their gang sign and some Werewolves fly into a killing rage if ordered to remove it. Some examples of masks used by the Werewolves include Leo Barnett, Gregg Hartmann, Mae West, Michael Jackson, Liza Minnelli, and Richard Nixon.

# CRIMINAL SYNDICATES

Anyone who says "crime doesn't pay" never saw the kind of bank earned by the criminal syndicates in New York City. Smuggling, drugs, prostitution, protection, numbers rackets, and more—organized crime is big business, and ruthless crime lords are willing to do whatever it takes to secure and protect their livelihood.

For decades, the Mafia was the most powerful criminal syndicate in New York, with minor crime families like the Mexican Herreras and others making a living in its shadow. That changed when crime lord Kien Phuc and his Shadow Fist Society moved into the city, setting off a bloody gang-war and transforming the New York underworld.

## THE MAFIA

For generations, the Mafia families ruled organized crime in New York City. The Gambione Family is the most important and powerful Mafia Family in *Wild Cards* New York. Don Carlo Gambione is killed in a botched raid on supposed criminal rivals (1972). He had also already clashed with Fortunato several times. Don Frederico "The Butcher" Gambione takes over day-to-day operations of the Family, but by 1986 they lose Jokertown to the Demon Princes and other street gangs and Chinatown to the Immaculate Egrets, though they still control the waterfront.

Rosa Maria Gambione, Don Carlo's daughter, legally changes her name to Rosemary Muldoon in an effort to get away from her heritage. She attends law school and becomes an assistant district attorney in New York, but leaving the Family behind isn't so easy. Rosemary finds herself drawn back in and a younger faction helps her rise to leadership of the Gambione Family, with Chris Mazzuchelli as her mouthpiece and front-man. This allows Rosemary to lead a double-life as assistant D.A. and Mafia don and, for a time, to fool herself into thinking she can pull it off.

Her attempts to reform the Family are unsuccessful, and the Mafia is under siege by the Shadow Fist Society. Rosemary hits upon the idea of using her influence as D.A. to recruit aces to help "combat criminal violence," aiming them at Shadow Fist targets. It almost works, but the D.A.'s aces play things by the law and the Shadow Fists don't. They go after and assassinate the heads of the other families, leaving Rosemary the last surviving Mafia don in the city.

Betrayed by Chris Mazzuchelli, her true heritage and allegiances revealed, and without support, Rosemary has no choice but to sue for peace with the Shadow Fists. She accepts a payoff from St. John Latham and

flees the country for Havana, Cuba, the Gambione Family's last stronghold. As of mid-1987, there's no significant Mafia presence in New York City and the Shadow Fist Society rules the New York underworld.

## THE SHADOW FIST SOCIETY

The Shadow Fist Society is the umbrella name for Kien Phuc's various criminal enterprises, including the Immaculate Egrets in Chinatown, the Werewolves in Jokertown, Bludgeon's gang on the waterfront, and other allies in Harlem, Hell's Kitchen, Brooklyn, and all over the city. They defeat the Mafia in an all-out war in 1987 to become the preeminent criminal organization in the city.

Their story begins in the mid-1960s when Kien, aided by CIA agent Edward St. John Latham, starts to smuggle heroin into the United States. He retails the drugs through a Chinatown street gang called the Immaculate Egrets, led by Nathan Chow. Kien sends his sister Sui Ma ("Little Mother") to America in 1968, where she marries Chow and in short order deposes him as gang leader (1971). The Egrets form the power base Kien expands when he comes himself to America in the mid-1970s. He builds a formidable criminal organization over the years while staying out of the limelight and playing the role of a wealthy and respected businessman with a chain of Chinese restaurants, dry cleaning establishments, and other small enterprises. Very few know he's the Shadow Fist crime lord: only Latham, Sui Ma, his bodyguard Wyrm, and a few other members high in his table of organization.

"Loophole" Latham is Kien's lawyer. He does all his legal work, and acts as Kien's negotiator between the Fists and other criminal elements. Sui Ma heads the Immaculate Egrets, who still run the drug business as well as other illicit activities such as gambling and loan sharking. Peter Nance is the head of the Werewolves, an affiliated joker gang. Scar, a teleporting ace who leads the Cannibal Headhunters, belongs to this upper level of management until he's slain by Kien's sworn enemy, Daniel Brennan (Yeoman).

Members of the Shadow Fist's second tier include: Robert Sievers (Bludgeon), an inhumanly strong, seven-foot-tall, ugly-as-sin joker with a clubbed arm who once ran the waterfront protection racket but was cut loose by the Shadow Fists (September 1986); Asta Lenser (Fantasy), a ballet dancer who moves in the high society and is also Kien's mistress and spy and knows his identity as the head of the Shadow Fists; and Wyrm, his inhumanly strong and poisonous bodyguard. Philip Cunningham (Fadeout) also knows Kien heads the Shadow Fists and nurtures a secret hope to supplant him one day.

A third tier of Fists who report to one of the above-mentioned subchiefs include the Whisperer, Lazy Dragon, Thomas Quincey, the telepathic Linetap, and Chickenhawk.

The Shadow Fist Society falls into chaos, its effectiveness as a criminal organization over, after Kien's sudden and mysterious disappearance (late fall 1989). See Kien's bio in **Chapter 4** for details.

# CRIMINAL CONSPIRACIES

It's not easy to keep secrets in a world with mind-readers, precognitives, and the like, but the *Wild Cards* series has seen two major criminal conspiracies: one devoted to the utter destruction of wild carders, the other to their ascendency by saving the world from an even more terrible threat. Fortunately, neither one was successful, although they're both enough to make one wonder: What other secrets are hiding in the shadows of the wild card, and when might they come to light?

## THE CARD SHARKS

The Card Sharks are a worldwide conspiracy of individuals in and out of government whose goal is to rid the world of everyone—ace, deuce, joker, or latent—carrying wild card genes, because they believe the virus is the greatest danger ever posed to the human race. The conspiracy is organized in the late 1940s, reputedly by Albert Einstein who reportedly later regretted this move and is assassinated by other Card Sharks. Of course, since the Card Sharks themselves are the source of this information, its veracity is questionable.

There have been numerous Card Shark plots down through the years. Some are formed just to discredit or remove individuals (for example, the Bobby Kennedy assassination) or to create anti-wild card propaganda or prevent pro-wild card stories from being circulated (for example, the Sharks' plot to destroy Orson Welles' movie *Blythe).*

Others are more widespread in nature. Jokertown is formed partially through the Sharks' manipulation of economic and social policy as a convenient, confined area where jokers can be kept penned up and ripe for economic exploitation and eventually destruction. The 1959 plot to burn down Jokertown (later fictionalized in Roman Polanski's movie *Jokertown*, but with the conspiracy motif eliminated) also fits into this category of plot, as does the attempted 1985 genocide of African jokers.

Of course, the Card Sharks' most far-reaching scheme is the creation and subsequent dispersal of the Black Trump virus, designed to kill everyone carrying wild card genes. Although a limited amount of the virus is successfully released in Jerusalem in the summer of 1994, worldwide distribution is prevented by a loose coalition of aces, jokers, and nats who have been working on various aspects of the conspiracy, including Gregg Hartmann, Hannah Davis, Zoe Harris, Billy Ray, Croyd Crenson, Jay Ackroyd, Mark Meadows, Quasiman, Jerry Strauss, Dr. Bradley Finn, and J. Robert Belew (see **Chapter 2** for details).

Prominent Card Sharks in the fictional class include Congressman Henry van Renssaeler (Husband of Blythe and father of Fleur and Brandon). He is shot down in the street by Meyer Lansky's thugs for being too public in his indecencies, including impregnating his own daughter); Brandon van Renssaeler (Henry's son; the bagman who actually pays Sirhan Sirhan to assassinate Bobby Kennedy); Clara van Renssaeler (Brandon's daughter; bio-engineer and creator of the Black Trump, who ultimately renounces her Card Shark ties); Pan Rudo; Philip Baron van Herzenhagen; Dr. Etienne Faneuil; Margaret Durand; George G. Battle; General MacArthur Johnson (that's his name, not his rank); Senator Henry Flynn (successor to Gregg Hartmann as SCARE chairman); General Peter Horvath (who, unlike General MacArthur Johnson, is actually a general); and Eric Fleming (a multi-millionaire rancher and newspaper magnate from Australia).

Card Sharks of the historical persuasion include Hedda Hopper, J. Edgar Hoover, William Randolph Hearst, Howard Hughes, Meyer Lansky, and (most likely) Marilyn Monroe.

While the Card Sharks appear to be wiped out, or at least permanently crippled, following the failure of the Black Trump plot in the mid-'90s, there's no telling how far or deep such a conspiracy runs, or whether or not there are other hidden Card Sharks merely biding their time and hatching new plots against wild carders behind the scenes, cloaked by the mistaken assumption that their organization is no more.

### THE MASONS

The Egyptian Freemasons (also known as the Egyptian Masons or simply the Masons) is an occult society founded by Giuseppe Balsamo of Palermo (better known as the fraud and mountebank Count Cagliostro) after an authentic encounter with an alien representing the Network in 1777. The chief purpose of the group is to preserve knowledge of an ancient Sumerian deity known as TIAMAT, a huge, shapeless monster from the stars, known throughout the galaxy under many names and later known on Earth as the Swarm. The Masons hope to use an artifact left them by the Network, the shakti device, to call their "star brothers" for aid when this creature finally arrives on the Earth.

The Masons go off their collective rails, however, when taken over by the megalomaniacal, psychopathic ace called the Astronomer who gains power through human sacrifice. The Astronomer uses Fortunato to kill Balsam, the Mason leader, and takes over the organization himself, planning to rule the world after calling on the Network to help him defeat the Swarm. With this end in mind he recruits a number of aces into the Masons, including Demise, Harry Matthias, Kim Toy O'Toole, Revenant, Kafka, Imp, Insulin, and Roulette, as well as John F.X. Black, who is a nat, but wields considerable power as the captain of the Jokertown police precinct.

The Astronomer, however, needs to accumulate power both for his own personal use and to energize the shakti device, so he goes on a mad binge of perversity and blood sacrifice, ultimately bringing him into conflict with Fortunato and other aces. An ace raid on the Masons's secret headquarters in the Cloisters leads to the destruction of the shakti device, smashing the Astronomer's plans (and, ironically, Earth's hopes for aid from the Network).

The Astronomer seeks revenge and, on Wild Card Day in 1986, his agents attack the aces involved in the raid on the Cloisters, killing many of them. Fortunato duels the Astronomer in the skies over New York, sending his powerless foe tumbling into the East River, but it is one of the Astronomer's own minions, Demise, who ultimately kills him.

With the Astronomer's death, the Egyptian Masons are essentially no more, and with the loss of the shakti device and the defeat of the Swarm, the organization no longer has a purpose. However, no one knows exactly what other information the Network may have imparted to Cagliostro, passed down over the centuries, nor what arcane secrets the Astronomer might have recorded.

# POLITICAL GROUPS

The wild card hasn't changed realpolitik much, apart from creating some new *causes celebre*, particular wild carder and jokers' rights issues, and political bodies and factions intended to deal with those things. Wild cards have also involved themselves in political matters since the time of the Exotics For Democracy toppling fascist and communist regimes and the Port Said aces in the Israeli-Palestine war.

This section looks at different political factions directly involved with wild carders in some fashion. It includes government agencies from various nations, civil rights groups (mainly focused on jokers' rights), and terrorist organizations focused on wild card issues or having prominent ace or joker members.

## GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The potential value of ace abilities is certainly not lost on governments and government agencies, although there are fewer aces in government service than one might imagine. At least part of this probably derives from the independent nature of aces, as well as general mistrust of public service given the fate of the Four Aces. Governments are also notoriously paranoid, and cautious about allowing powerful, independent types like aces into positions of power or authority. Working for a government also doesn't ensure either a relatively normal life or wealth and fame, the two extremes wild carders tend towards.

Still, there are a number of aces (and joker-aces) working for a variety of government agencies, primarily in security, law enforcement, and, of course, espionage and counter-espionage.

### THE JUSTICE DEPARTMENT

The United States Justice Department employs various ace agents, the best known being Lady Black and Carnifex (see his bio in **Chapter 4**). They typically provide protection for government officials and assist in the investigation of wild card-related crimes and, particularly, the apprehension of ace criminal suspects. Justice Department aces also work regularly with and for the U.S. Secret Service to protect the president, senators, and other important politicos. The involvement of Justice Department aces in U.S. government espionage and "black ops" is pretty much an open secret, or at least assumed by everyone outside of the department.

### THE MOST PUISSANT ORDER OF THE SILVER HELIX

The Silver Helix, as it is more economically known, is an order of knighthood of the British government for aces whose grand marshal is Brigadier General Sir Kenneth Foxworthy (Captain Flint; see his bio in **Chapter 4**). Among other member aces are John Bruckner, Rangit Singh, and James Bond (yes, really). In addition to being a public accolade, the Silver Helix serves as a quiet means of organizing and managing ace agents for the Crown. Although generally cooperative with allies such as the American Justice Department, aces of the Silver Helix also have a rivalry with fellow intelligence operatives.

### NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON AERONAUTICS (NACA)

NACA, America's first space program, is civilian in nature, although it operates out of the Muroc Lake Test Site on the restricted Tomlin Air Force Base in Southern California, and many of its pilots are active-duty military personnel. The head of NACA is Dr. Rowe, a hidden ace who has

prophetic dreams of the future.

They plan to use the X-11A, a rocketplane with both jet and rocket motors, to reach Earth orbit. The attempt is ultimately sabotaged by Card Shark Margaret Durand, who is the project nurse, and the X-11A pilot Woody Enloe and fuel plane pilot Casey Guinan (both aces) are killed in the first attempt to reach orbit (May 1958). NACA is shut down and Edgar Thayer, the innocent flight director, serves 10 years in federal prison for gross negligence. NACA is eventually supplanted by Space Command, headed in the late '60s/early '70s by General Marcus Meadows and others.

## SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON ACE RESOURCES AND ENDEAVORS (SCARE)

Originally the Senate Committee on Ace Resources and Endeavors was a permanent sitting Senate committee formed in 1952 as a forum for Senator Joe McCarthy's ace-hunts. Charged with investigating all reports of paranormal powers, under McCarthy SCARE is extremely active in ferreting out anything even remotely construed as "paranormal powers." Between 1952 and 1956 over 200 men and women are served subpoenas and brought before SCARE, frequently based on anonymous accusations. Many of these innocent people have their lives ruined.

Later its long-time chairman is Senator Gregg Hartmann, who (openly, at least) is much more of a friend to jokers and other wild carders.

In the late 1980s, SCARE is taken out of Senate control, and its name changed to the Special Committee on Ace Resources and Endeavors, probably so the acronym can stay the same. Its political power is diminished, although it remains the official U.S. government body charged with investigating paranormal powers.

# CIVIL RIGHTS GROUPS

The greatest ongoing civil rights struggle in the world of *Wild Cards* is that of the jokers, treated as pariahs and non-persons in many parts of the world. Various joker-rights groups have appeared over the years, some devoted to peaceful progress towards equal rights, others willing to use any method, including violence and terrorism, to achieve their goals. The latter sort of group is discussed under the **Terrorist Groups** section.

## AFRICAN/JOKER NATIONAL CONGRESS (AJNC)

The AJNC is an organization dedicated to equal rights for Africans of all races, as well as jokers. It is led by Nelson Mandela.

## JOKER AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Joker Amnesty International is an international jokers' rights group, which helped stop the forced sterilization and segregation of Northern Ireland jokers after the Belfast outbreak in 1962.

## JOKER ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE (JADL)

The JADL, founded in 1964 by Xavier Desmond, is the oldest and largest activist group working within the political system to improve the legal status and civil rights of jokers. Some say their success is limited by their efforts to remain within the system rather than attack it from the outside. The JADL uses nonviolent means of protest such as marches, economic boycotts, or, in rare instances, sit-ins, but does not in any way support the use of violence to achieve its goals.

## THE NEW JOKER BRIGADE

The Joker Brigade was a segregated unit of joker draftees who fought in Vietnam under nat officers. Their informal slogan was "Last To Go—First To Die." One of their officers was Lieutenant Colonel John Garrick. Father Squid, then known as Squidface, was a sergeant in the Joker Brigade, as was the joker known as Scent. The brigade suffered the greatest casualty rate of any American unit in Vietnam and was subjected to considerable discrimination from its own side.

The so-called New Joker Brigade bears no official connection to the old, although some of its members fought in both units. This force is recruited and led by Colonel Charles Sobel (himself a major and company commander in the old brigade) probably in the late 1980s, and fights under the flag of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

Mark Meadows joined the New Joker Brigade mainly because of coercion on Sobel's part, but also to throw J. Robert Belew off his trail in the summer of 1991. Meadows was astonished to discover Croyd Crenson was also a member, and the only other ace in the unit, although at the time the Sleeper's studliest power was his ability to catch insects with his tongue. The young recruits that made up the majority of the New Joker Brigade were drawn from radical elements, mostly joker street gangs, and were skeptical, if not downright hostile, to the original brigaders.

After Meadows and a number of his closest associates (including Croyd) desert the brigade, Sobel goes increasingly mad and the brigade degenerates into savage, undisciplined, renegade killers right out of the *Heart of Darkness*. They're eventually all virtually wiped out by a double-pronged attack by Monster and military units of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

# TERRORIST GROUPS

Change comes slowly and realpolitik often trumps social justice, so many lack the patience or willingness to take the long, hard road to political and social change. They believe the ends justify the means, and so use whatever means are necessary to achieve their goals, including violence, murder, kidnaping, and terror.

While many terrorists are passionately, even fanatically, devoted to their cause, their methods also tend to attract those who are simply in it for an excuse to kill and maim. Various wild carder terrorist groups are no different in that regard. Some are sincere social movements that slid down the slippery slope into terrorism while others are no more than criminal gangs with an excuse for their behavior.

## JOKERS FOR A JUST SOCIETY (JJS)

The JJS, founded by Tom "Gimli" Miller in the late 1960s, fought for improvement of jokers' rights through any means necessary. More confrontational than the JADL, the JJS quickly became radicalized. Miller himself had always been quick to anger and under his influence the JJS had many violent clashes with the system, most noteworthy being the Great Jokertown Riot of 1976. Many JJS members did prison time over the years. After descending to the use of random acts of violence to further his goals, Miller fled to Europe in the 1980s. The power of the JJS declined rapidly after that, though a few scattered jokers remained loyal to the cause until Miller's death in 1987, which spelled the end for the JJS.

## RED ARMY FACTION (ROTE ARMEE FRAKTION)

Known by the acronym RAF, the Red Army Faction had various separate incarnations throughout the 20th Century. All were basically communist terrorist groups. In 1987 the then-current version tried, along with elements of the JJS and Soviet military intelligence, to kidnap Senator Hartmann, but ultimately their plan failed. The psychopathic ace Mackie Messer was a member of this incarnation until he fell under Puppetman's sway.

## THE TWISTED FISTS

The Twisted Fists are an international joker terrorist group financed out of Jokertown. Among other things, they supply the jokers holed up on the Rox with modern military weapons and equipment. The Fists are also the bitter enemies of the Nur Sect.

Their motto is "Five For One" when it comes to revenge. If the Fists know who killed a joker, they slay the killer and four of his compatriots. If they don't know for sure, they take their best guess.

Their leader is the mysterious Black Dog, headquartered in Jerusalem. No one knows the type or extent of his deformities, because he always wears a dog mask. Ultimately, he's captured by Billy Ray at the conclusion of the Black Trump crisis (summer 1994). Still, the Twisted Fists go on, continuing their fight to avenge crimes against jokers everywhere.

## WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION TO REACH SEXUAL EQUALITY (WORSE)

A radical feminist group, at one time headed by Hannah Jorde. WORSE later uses violent methods, including murder, to achieve its aims of sexual equality with men. To try to achieve its aims, anyway.

# RELIGIOUS GROUPS

In times of crisis, many people turn towards faith for solace and guidance. Given the upheavals visited upon the world by the wild card, to say nothing of the "miracles" performed by various aces, some of whom are figures right out of mythology, it's little wonder religious groups form around the wild card and its effects. Some embrace the wild card while others reject it and all affected by it.

## ALLUMBRADOS

The Allumbrados, or "The Enlightened Ones," are an ancient brotherhood within the Roman Catholic Church concerned mainly with End Days theology. There are three levels of membership: *credentus* (or "believer"), *obsequentus* (or "obedient"), and *perfectus* (or "perfected"). The current (summer 2003) leader of the Allumbrados is Cardinal Romulus Contarini, who heads a Vatican office dealing with questions of theological purity, and which has close ties to what was once called the Office of the Inquisition.

The Allumbrados believe John Fortune, child of the Whore of Babylon (Peregrine, who has dared oppose the Church on virtually every issue imaginable, from abortion rights, to ordaining women for the priesthood, homosexuality, birth control, and even the doctrine of papal infallibility) and the Spawn of Satan (Fortunato, who is a drug-using pimp and noted pagan), is actually the Anti-Christ. Their goal is to eliminate him, opening the way for the second coming of the true Christ. The organization is made up of aces and nats who are true believers (Contarini, Magda, the Two Witnesses) and fellow travelers in it for the pay or for reasons of their own (Usher, John Nighthawk, Butcher Dagon, Blood and Buck).

## THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST, JOKER

The Church of Jesus Christ, Joker was founded in the early 1960s as an offshoot of orthodox Catholicism which is, unsurprisingly, considered heretical by the mother church. It appeals to many jokers of a religious bent and has been the subject of many sensational "exposes" about sinister rites in underground crypts, claiming the CJCJ is akin to Satanism.

Such notions, however, are all nat nonsense, as the CJCJ preaches piety, prayer, and love of God and fellow man, even if he happens to be a nat. Salvation is achieved through good works, and most believers are pious and humble servants of God and man.

Small, informal churches exist throughout the world wherever there's a concentration of jokers. The CJCJ is only loosely organized above the local level. There is no pope, no formal cardinals, or even bishops. Each individual church is tied closely into the local community it serves. It is poor, but growing.

The sect's most important church is in New York City's Jokertown, naturally, and is called Our Lady of Perpetual Misery (see **Chapter 3** for details). Its pastor is Father Squid. There is also a church in Jerusalem called Our Lady of the Spasm.

In a process known as reverse syncretism, many elements of traditional Roman Catholic iconography have been adopted by the Church of Jesus Christ, Joker, though changed to suit their particular needs. Jesus Christ, Joker, for example, is bi-headed and bi-sexed and crucified on a DNA helix, not a wooden cross. Several recognizable figures from wild card history, including Dr. Tachyon, Jack Braun, Peregrine, and Fortunato, have also been drawn into the church, where they serve as models for iconic figures.

## THE LIVING GODS

The Living Gods are the physical embodiment of a religious sect based on the ancient Egyptian religion. Most of these "deities" are jokers or minor aces. In 1986 there were about 25 Living Gods, including: Osiris the Far-Seer (a minor ace who was pronounced dead but returned to the life with prophetic powers), Anubis the dog-headed god (several separate dog-headed jokers have filled this role over the years), Min (a minor ace who can call down rain and who is constantly followed by a small cloud), Thoth (the ibis-headed god known for his wisdom who often acts as their spokesman), Taurt (goddess of pregnancy and birth), Isis (consort to Osiris), Shu and Tefnut (brother and sister who can float in the air), Sobek (the crocodile god with dark, cracked skin and a croc-like snout), Hathor (the great mother with the head of a cow), Bast (a cat-like joker covered with fur, complete with claws), Bes (a handsome dwarf noted for his gymnastic abilities), and winged Horus.

The sect of the Living Gods is bitter enemies with a number of fundamentalist Islamic sects, chief among them the Nur sect, who see them as just another bastard pagan religion. The Nur are their particular enemies because most of the Living Gods, as well as many of their worshipers, are jokers and the Nur in particular believe jokers are the accursed of Allah.

The founder of the sect is Opet Kemel, a noted Egyptian archeologist who discovered a virtually complete underground temple complex in the late 1960s that became the sect's headquarters. Part of the time the Living Gods are no more than a tourist act, raising desperately needed funds for the impoverished joker community of Egypt. Those Living Gods who have actual ace powers, such as Min and Osiris, spend most of their time helping their people as best as they can.

A rising tide of Islamic fundamentalism through the 1980s and early 1990s forced a number of the Gods to leave Egypt and settle in Las Vegas, Nevada, where they joined Siegfried and Ralph's performing troupe. They have a ranch in the desert outside of Vegas they call the Oasis (summer 2003). The American Living Gods do their best to send money and assistance to their brethren in Egypt.

## MOTHERS AGAINST GODS OR GODDESSES (MAGOG)

MAGOG is a national organization of women against paganism of all sorts. They hold their annual convention in Leo Barnett's Peaceable Kingdom (summer 2003) and have, en masse, had an encounter with Fortunato.

## THE MILLENARIANS AND THE PEACEABLE KINGDOM

Ex-President Reverend Leo Barnett's religious theme park, the Peaceable Kingdom, is located outside of Branson, Missouri. Barnett's own office is on the top floor of the Angels' Bower Hotel, and is a replica of the White House's Oval Office.

Twelve 20-foot-tall statues depicting the Apostles guard the Kingdom, three to each quadrant. The park's regions include New Jerusalem, Rome of the Martyrs, Medieval Land, and The Vault of Heaven.

New Jerusalem has a replica Via Dolorosa, Golgotha, and Tomb of the Sepulcher. The main hotel in this section is the Manger ("There's room for everyone in the Manger"), which has a faux Middle Eastern motif.

Rome of the Martyrs has a scaled-down Coliseum that hosts all sorts of entertainments, although no gladiatorial bouts, and an extensive Catacombs compete with grisly scenarios depicting the lives and deaths of the martyrs.

Medieval Land is devoted to the pageantry of the Middle Ages with an interactive Crusader castle where you can battle animatronic paynim, which is particularly popular with the children.

The Vault of Heaven has the Angels' Bower Hotel, a roller coaster called the Rapture which has a 40-story drop to the Pit, and a restaurant called Loaves and Fishes (which is, of course, all-you-can-eat).

The Peaceable Kingdom is also part of Reverend Barnett's Millenarians, an evangelical religious organization concerned with the Rapture. They believe John Fortune is the returned Christ and make an effort to protect him until it becomes clear Fortune's power could potentially destroy the world.

## THE NUR SECT

The Nur Sect is a fundamentalist Islamic sect centered in Syria, founded in the 1980s by Nur al-Allah, who is also its leader and chief prophet (see his bio in **Chapter 4**). Although he's an ace, the Nur prefers to think of himself as a man gifted by Allah. His sister, Misha, also called Kahina the Seer, is one of his prophets until she becomes Hartmann's puppet and tries to kill the Nur. She cuts his throat when he attempts to kill the WHO world tour delegation visiting his camp in February of 1987, diminishing but not destroying his powers.

The crippled giant joker Sayyid is the commander of the Nur's armed forces. A military genius, he defeats the numerically superior, better armed and supplied Israel troops in the Golan Heights, orchestrates the rioting in Damascus when the government tries to move away from Sharia law, forges alliances with other fundamentalist sects (notably the Sunni and Alawite factions), invades Lebanon, and protects Nur al-Allah and his followers from attacks from the Swarm.

Most of the Nur's political strength is centered in Syria. He rules that country in all but name and has a strong following in other Arab countries. His sect has been linked to terrorist activities all over the Middle East. His goals include the destruction of Israel, the restoration of the Islamic Caliphate, and the eradication of the abominations of Allah, the jokers. When he gets a vial of the Black Trump from the Card Sharks in the summer of 1994, he firmly believes that as an ace and a prophet of Allah it cannot infect him. Unfortunately, he never gets a chance to test that belief.

After the failure of the Card Sharks to destroy the jokers of Jerusalem, the Nur remains in Syria, nursing his hatred and biding his time.

CHAPTER SIX:
THE WILD CARDS
GAME
BOLLAND

This chapter looks at how to take all the other information in this book and put it to work as the foundation for a *Mutants & Masterminds* RPG series set in the world of *Wild Cards* that is faithful to the style and character of the books.

It starts off with the overall framework for the series—what will it be about, where will it be set, and so forth—offering a variety of sample series frameworks to choose from. It goes on to look at creating *Wild Cards* characters in-depth, ranging from aces and jokers to nats and even aliens, then at rules variants suitable to the setting to help make the game feel as much like the books as possible. Finally, the chapter concludes with guidelines and advice for Gamemasters on running a *Wild Cards* game.

GMs will want to read through this entire chapter, while players will be most interested in the character creation guidelines, and may want to skip or skim the other sections if only to avoid spoiling some of the series and adventure ideas contained therein.

# THE WILD CARDS SERIES

The *Wild Cards* setting offers a *lot* of opportunities for roleplaying adventures, otherwise this book wouldn't even exist! Even the many novels in the series have only really scratched the surface of all the things wild carders could be doing, and there's plenty of room for telling your own stories in and around those of the established *Wild Cards* characters (or for telling additional stories with those characters, if you like).

*Wild Cards* differs from the typical *Mutants & Masterminds* game with the series focus on realism. Like many science fiction stories, *Wild Cards* takes the "one impossible premise" approach. In its case, that premise is the wild card virus and the changes resulting from it. Other than that, people's motivations and actions are more realistic than characters in the comic books. Most aces don't put on colorful costumes or band together in teams to fight crime, nor do criminal wild cards make long-winded speeches or put their foes into elaborate death-traps. For more on the *Wild Cards* style (and how to capture it in your game) see the **Running *Wild Cards*** section.

## SERIES SETTING

One of the first questions to ask about a potential *Wild Cards* series is, where is it set? The stories of the books revolve primarily around New York City, the center of the wild card phenomenon, which has its good and bad points as a setting for an RPG series. On the good side, there's a considerable amount of information about New York, as demonstrated in **Chapter 3**, and there's always plenty going on there. Places like Jokertown are fertile environments for conflict and adventures. On the other hand, the amount of detail about New York City can be a drawback, since players familiar with the series (and this book) will know a great deal about it, and it's more difficult for new characters to make a splash in the city that's seen it all when it comes to the wild card.

Other cities in the United States and other parts of the world offer a wider field when it comes to defining the setting for the series, but there's also less information about them and fewer iconic places associated with them; a "jokertown" in, say, Boston or Houston, isn't going to be like NYC, nor will there be as large a population of wild carders to encounter. It can make the characters local celebrities, but create challenges in setting up antagonists and things for them to do.

You can also go with a series set outside the United States, possibly engaged in a fair amount of globe-hopping, using the information in the latter half of **Chapter 3** to get you started. This has some of the same advantages and drawbacks of a U.S. series set outside of New York: working with sometimes sketchy background information to fill-in details, but allowing the characters to visit exotic and dangerous locales affected by the wild card.

## SERIES FRAMEWORKS

This section looks at some different frameworks for a *Wild Cards M&M* series, ranging from low to higher power levels, and near and far from New York City, the center of events in the *Wild Cards* series. Each framework has a general overview, along with information on appropriate characters, factions of the setting involved in the series, and types of adventures. You can use one of these frameworks as a basis for your series, or take different parts of multiple frameworks and cobble them together to form something uniquely your own.

Generally, this material is for **Gamemasters only!** Players looking to take part in a *Wild Cards* game using this book may wish to skip over this section to avoid spoiling any potential surprises associated with a series framework or adventure idea contained herein.

### COLLECTORS OF THE CURIOUS — POWER LEVEL 6+

Charles Dutton, owner of the Famous Bowery Wild Card Dime Museum (among other things), is a wealthy and well-known collector of oddities to do with the wild card (including *the* Oddity). Mr. Dutton (or his successor as owner of the Museum) might pay handsomely for certain items without asking too many questions as to how they found their way there, and he's probably not the only one; other well-to-do collectors of wild card memorabilia and trivia would pay for certain acquisitions—Cameo springs to mind. Sounds like a lucrative market for "acquisitions agents" able to meet the demand.

In *Collectors of the Curious*, the characters travel the globe digging up (sometimes literally) all sorts of items valuable to the right people. Whether they're just salvage operatives or willing to stoop to outright theft or grave-robbery is up to the players, but the possibilities are there either way. If not a full-fledged series, *Collectors of the Curious* makes a good offbeat adventure or mini-series for another framework like *Ace Investigators, Agents of SCARE,* or even *American Hero* (as a "scavenger hunt" style challenge).

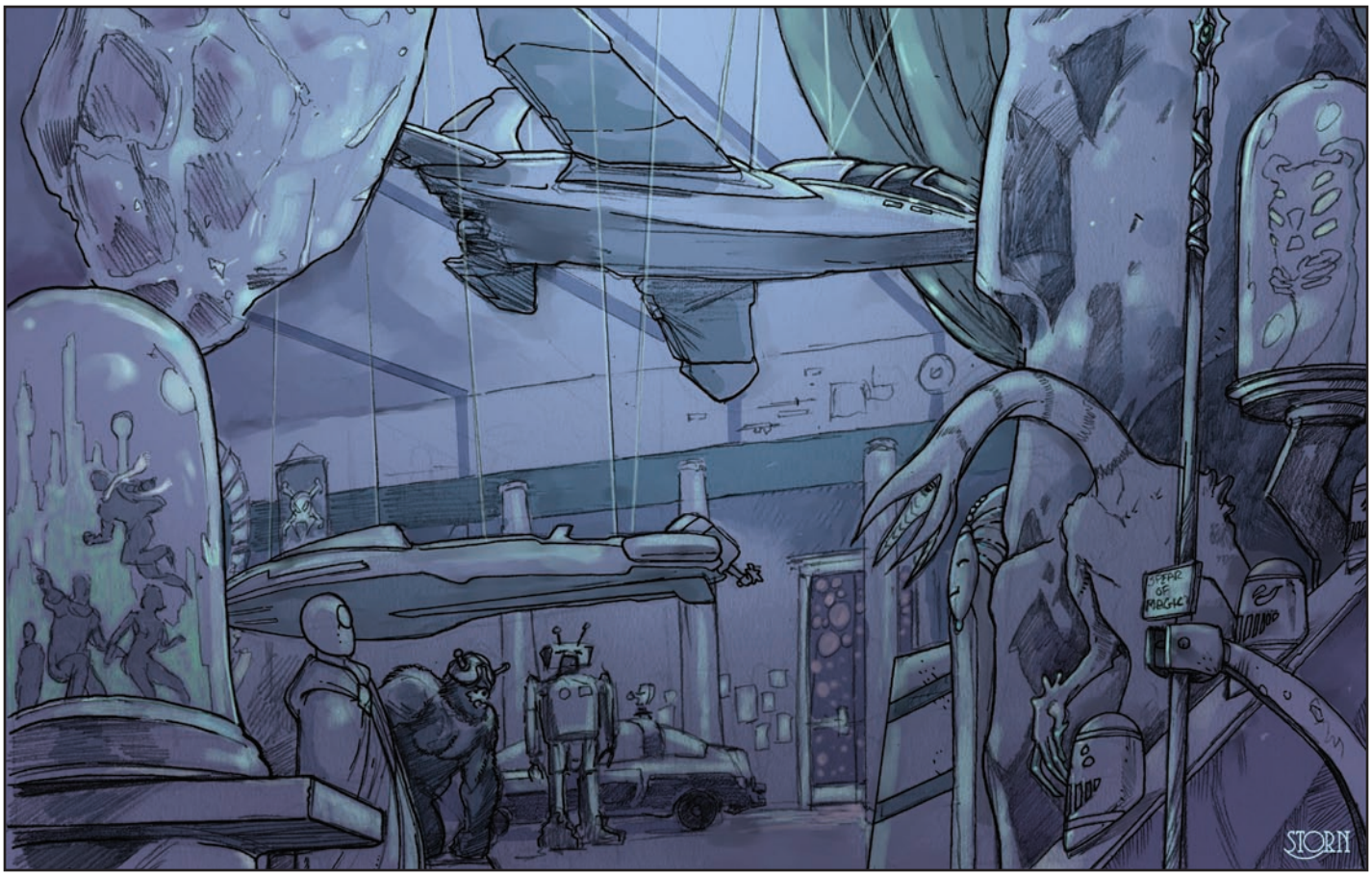
The primary adventure hook in the series is the item the characters, and presumably others, want to acquire. It can be just about anything: a famous ace's personal effects, an unusual wild carder invention, a rare book or recording, even a corpse or possible alien artifact. There might be remnants of Takisian or Network technology on Earth, as well as biological remains for Swarmlings and the like. Characters might hear about such things from clients, informants, or contacts (including some false leads and dead-ends) or find them in their own investigations.

This kind of series is great for often literally digging into the history of the *Wild Cards* world, with the characters as "freelance archeologists." Include an ace with psychometric "flashback" powers and you can even have finds segue into scenes where the players take roles of characters from the item's past in order to learn more about it.

You may find the *Planetary* comic series from Wildstorm (DC) inspirational for this type of series, in addition to the *Wild Cards* series.

#### CHARACTERS

Whether they are archeologists, antiquarians, historians, or simply mercenaries out to make a quick buck, characters in a *Collectors of the Curious* series need some skill in identifying the goods: things like the art, history, and popular culture specialties of Knowledge, along with a Pro-




fession skill for one of the previous cited professions, are all useful. Of course, technically, only one character in the group needs such skills, the others can all handle different areas, so long as they're willing to trust their teammate's appraisal of any items they find.

Such characters are likely to be well-traveled and street-smart. Other useful skills include Languages, Knowledge (streetwise), and interaction skills, particularly Bluff, Diplomacy, and Gather Information. Related feats like Connected and Contacts also come in handy in the "art acquisition" field, as do covert skills like Disable Device and Stealth, for those occasions when getting at an item requires more than just finding it.

Powers can also enhance characters' chances at finding and getting items. Certainly a "finder" with various Super-Senses, able to track down specific targets, would be invaluable; likewise a postcognitive able to "read" an object's past simply by touching it. Movement and alteration powers may be useful in getting to those hard-to-reach places—like the insides of tombs, beneath rubble, or at the bottom of the ocean—while offensive and defensive powers are handy when things get violent, as they sometimes do where valuable stuff is concerned.

# FACTIONS

Many of the factions of the *Wild Cards* world may get involved in a *Collectors of the Curious* series as either allies or antagonists. As mentioned, the Dime Museum makes a good patron and base of operations; so too might the abandoned Cloisters, if someone bought them from the city after the ace raid on the Masons.

Speaking of the Masons, a branch of that organization might want to dig deeper into its history, or keep anyone else from doing so. Similarly, the Living Gods sect could at least tacitly support archeological exploration in Egypt, so long as nothing was removed from the Two Lands without the Gods' permission, of course. The Nur sect would not care for anything that supports the Living Gods and their blasphemous claims and so might take action against such an operation.

Then there are all the wild carders who have skeletons buried somewhere who'd like to keep them that way, and wouldn't look kindly on anyone nosing around to dig them up. Similarly, any investigation into wild card history is likely to disturb the dust on conspiracies like the Card Sharks, bringing some trouble the characters' way.

# ADVENTURES

Most *Collectors of the Curious* adventures revolve around a potential find and how the collectors are going to acquire it. Some examples include:

## SEARCH FOR THE SEA-SHELL

The characters get a lead on one of the finds of a lifetime: a substantial part of the wreckage of the Takisian ship that brought the wild card virus to Earth! It's on the ocean floor off the coast of Maine, and they need to find it and recover it before anyone else finds out it's there. That won't be easy, since the fragment of the ship still weighs over two tons, but their employer can supply equipment as needed (assuming the characters aren't wealthy enough to fund the expedition on their own). Obviously, an aquatic ace or joker would be quite useful, as would someone with water-controlling powers. Chances are the characters are *not* the only ones aware of the wreckage, or at least that they won't be the only

ones for long. Even if they raise it, they still have to get it into safe hands before someone else can try and steal it. Naturally, plenty of people are interested in a sample of Takisian living ship technology, and would go to great lengths to acquire it.

### THE STARS ARE RIGHT

The exploded fragments of the shakti device disappeared from the Cloisters along with much of the Astronomer's ritual gear and occult books. Now someone with a lead on these items is willing to pay handsomely for their recovery. Indications are their mysterious employer is affiliated with the Masons but, if that's true, then why are *other* Masons trying to get their hands on the goods, or at least keep the characters from doing so? And what about rumors of another "gift of the Star-Brother" passed down by disciples of Cagliostro but believed lost until recently?

## ACE INVESTIGATORS — POWER LEVEL 6+

Knowledge is power, and people all have secrets, especially in a world where those secrets can include superhuman abilities and inhuman appetites. When people want to know something, they look to hire somebody who can find out. In an *Ace Investigators* series, the characters are those somebodies.

They work for, or make up, a private investigations company. They might hang out their own shingle in New York City or elsewhere, taking clients as they come, or the characters could work for a larger investigative firm like Ackroyd and Creighton Agency (see **Jay Ackroyd** in **Chapter 4** for details) or the Pinkerton Agency (which employed Peter Pann before Ackroyd lured him away).

An *Ace Investigators* series can go for a modern *noir* style similar to some detective novels and television programs. The characters are fairly certain to see a lot of the ugly side of human nature in their line of work, and to get embroiled in some dangerous business, since most people want to keep their secrets secret at any cost, and some are willing to kill in order to do so.

A variation on the *Ace Investigators* series is for the characters to work for a media outlet like *Aces* Magazine, a tabloid like the *National Informer*, or a television news program. Some of them can be journalists or reporters while others are members of the crew, advance people, technical specialists, and so forth. Their investigations are more exposés, looking to get interesting stories. They might be serious, principled journalists or tabloid muckrakers looking to dig up dirt on celebrities.

# CHARACTERS

Obviously, investigative skills are the most important for characters in this series, but not all of them have to have the same kind of skills. One might be good at Investigate and Search while another has plenty of Knowledge skills and others focus on things like Notice, Gather Information, or interaction skills and feats like Connected and Well-Informed. Characters can also spread out Knowledge specialties and skills like Profession (investigator) or Profession (police officer) for ex-cops and the like.

Of course, not all investigator characters need to be great detectives. There's also a need for technical specialists, like hackers with Computers or someone good at using Disable Device to get past locks and alarm systems. Infiltration types with Bluff, Disguise, and Perform can definitely find things to do, and even bodyguard and bruiser-types who specialize in being big and tough come in quite handy when things hit the fan.

Wild card abilities can be likewise diverse, although they'll probably tend towards talents useful for investigators. Super-Senses and Telepathy come in very handy, as do skulking-about powers like Concealment, Insubstantial, Super-Movement, and Teleport. A Datalink hacker can accomplish even more than a merely skilled character, while someone with Morph or Shapeshift has superlative disguise and infiltration abilities. Really flashy powers tend to be less useful in a business calling for a measure of discretion and subtlety, unless they're the sort of thing characters are going to fall back on when subtlety goes out the window.

By the same token, joker characters are less likely to work out in an *Ace Investigators* series unless they're particularly subtle, since being able to blend into a crowd is an important ability for private investigators.

The power level for this type of series tends to be relatively low, around PL 6 or so, although it can be higher. Again, investigators tend to rely on their skills and not combat abilities or flashy ace powers.

# FACTIONS

Private investigators have a tendency to get entangled with all sorts of plots (as Popinjay's checkered history shows). An agency may have a friendly or unfriendly relationship with the local authorities, the government, and previous clients, depending on how their cases went. Investigators often have a history with ties to law enforcement and criminal professions, which might come back to visit the characters during the series.

Otherwise, *Ace Investigators* can run into virtually any faction in the setting, depending on who hires them. One week they might be working for a secret crime boss and the next investigating a religious cult or a prominent politician. They're likely to make more enemies than friends along the way, so they'd do well to hold on to the friends and allies they've got.

# ADVENTURES

The standard *Ace Investigators* adventure starts with a client hiring the characters to do a job, which more often than not turns out to have unexpected twists and turns. The following are a couple of examples.

### RUNAWAYS

Worried and well-to-do parents hire the agency to find their teenaged daughter, who disappeared several weeks ago. Evidence points to her running off with an older boyfriend and e-mails, phone records, and the like give them some initial clues to follow up. Turns out the would-be couple ran into some trouble and the girl is now working as a prostitute to pay off some drug debts (the boyfriend took off after getting the crap kicked out of him by the dealer's thugs). She's too frightened and ashamed to contact her family for help, and the dealer, who's now her pimp, isn't going to let her go unless her debt is paid off, with substantial interest. For an added twist, the pimp might be a wild card or have some joker muscle, or the girl could even be a latent. The stress of the whole situation causes her card to turn and things rapidly go downhill from there.

### SMEAR CAMPAIGN

It's election season and the agency is hired to dig up the dirt on a major political candidate (mayor, senator, governor, even president, if you like). Of course, there's some dirt to find: an illicit affair and some youthful indiscretions, but it turns out the *real* dirt lies with the characters' employer, who is not what he seems and wants to discredit his opponent in order to win the race. Naturally, the investigators get some clues that things aren't quite right and have to decide whether to keep their eyes and their mouths shut or to do the right thing. Their employer's secret is up to you; it could be an ace-in-the-hole, membership in the Card Sharks (or a similar anti-wild card agenda), or even the revelation that the candidate has been replaced by a third-generation Swarmling! (See **The Swarm** in **Chapter 3** for details.)

## SHAMANS OF THE DREAMTIME — POWER LEVEL 6+

Characters in this series are all shamans, mystics, or their associates. Shamanism in the *Wild Cards* universe is a vocation in many regards; the shaman or mystic is "chosen" by an experience with the Dreamtime (or an out-of-body experience like Fortunato or the Astronomer). Turning the wild card can be a part of the shaman's initiatory experience, and the trials of a shaman's initiation may also trigger a latent wild card and shape its manifestation to fit the experience.

The characters may seek each other out or fate can bring them together (or a mixture of both). Their unique abilities make them suited for taking on the task of safeguarding the Dreamtime from various threats, and similarly protecting humanity from unknown dangers in the Dreaming. In the world of *Wild Cards* "imaginary" things like fairy tale monsters *can* actually kill you if you're not careful.

# CHARACTERS

Some characters may not be shamans *per se,* but aces or jokers with some connection to the Dreamtime. Ace summoners, in particular, seem to draw upon the Dreamtime to create their conjurations. So a *Shamans* character might be a "normal" ace who summons up mythic beings, for example, or a trance-channeler who can call up the spirits of the dead (such as Cameo in **Chapter 4**) or is possessed by mythic heroes or gods. The character doesn't have to believe in anything mystical or spiritual—at least, not at first.

Although "magic" doesn't exist in the *Wild Cards* world, the framework of various magico-spiritual traditions does serve as a model for ace psychic abilities, making them all but indistinguishable from "real" magic (whatever that means). So it's accurate to say Fortunato is a "real" magician as much as it is to say he's "just" another ace with psychic abilities (albeit a broad range of them) and his mystic rituals and symbols are psychological crutches for the use of his powers. Of any of the series frameworks, this one is the most appropriate to allow the Magic power, preferably with some sort of flaw or power drawback (like Fortunato's tantric "recharge" rituals) to make it distinct.

A wide range of power levels is possible for this type of series, depending on how subtle or overt the wild cards' powers are. They can range from low-powered mystics like Wyungare (around PL 6 or so) to occult powerhouses like Fortunato or the Astronomer (PL 12 and up). Keep in mind a relatively low PL ace might control or call upon a higher power level "ally," such as a summoned spirit or entity, giving the combined characters an effective higher power level to suit the series.

# FACTIONS

Mystic wild cards are likely to encounter other factions of would-be mystics or occultists with their own agendas. Although Fortunato smashed the Astronomer's Egyptian Masons, that doesn't mean they were the *only* branch of the conspiracy. There could be other Masonic lodges, or groups like the Illuminati (which also dates to around the arrival of the "star brother" from the Network). Modern descendants of Western occult groups like the Golden Dawn or the Argentum Astrum (Order of the Silver Star) might count ace mystics among their ranks.

The wild card has brought various mythic figures to life, like the Mura-Muggai in Australia and Herne the Hunter and his Wild Hunt. Other such beings created by the virus might become antagonists in a *Shamans of the Dreamtime* series, particularly if their nature makes them a threat to ordinary reality. The same is true of unknowing wild card summoners like Bloat, who draw upon the Dreamtime and threaten its stability if they are not restrained in the use of their powers.

Lastly, shaman characters may run into trouble from religious factions like the Allumbrados, Millennarians, or the Nur Sect, all of which consider them "pagan sorcerers" and allies of Satan. Agents of these sects might come after the characters, or simply cross paths with them while investigating the same occult phenomena. Pagan or mystical religious sects like the Temple of the Living Gods might be allies, if approached with the proper respect.

# ADVENTURES

The following are some adventure seeds for a *Shamans of the Dreamtime* series.

## DEADLY DREAMS

A number of people report disturbing recurring dreams filled with occult imagery, then the dreamers begin dying off, one each night, with no apparent physical explanation for their deaths. The "dreams" are astral assassination attempts, and they're succeeding. Can the shamans discover who or what is causing the deaths and put a stop to them? Their intervention may draw the attention of the dream-killer and make them the next targets!

## STRIP-MINING THE IMAGINATION

A thought-summoning ace, able to materialize beings and objects out of sheer imagination, is starting to drain the Dreamtime dry. The problem is,

the ace is a child under the influence of his stage-managing parents, who have become fantastically wealthy because of their son's powers, and he doesn't *want* to stop using them. He's also more than capable of using them to defend himself, up to and including conjuring up fantastic creatures or even replicas of famous aces (a great opportunity to have some of them "guest star" in your adventure). How far will the shamans go to put a stop to this threat to the Dreamtime and what will be the repercussions of their actions?

## AGENTS OF SCARE — POWER LEVEL 8+

With wild card persecution and witch hunts, political corruption, and genocidal Card Shark schemes on its resumé, SCARE doesn't have a lot of credibility with the wild card community. However, the public reasons for the establishment of the Committee—the need to monitor and control wild carders and their abilities—remain valid. Given threats like the Masons, the Shadow Fists, and the Jumpers, people have good reason to be afraid of wild carders and to want the government to do something about them. This series is about doing just that.

The players take the roles of special agents of SCARE, charged with investigating the paranormal in the United States and safeguarding the public against it. They deal with wild card threats most people will never even know about, simultaneously lauded for their public service and treated as turncoats for working for the agency responsible for persecution of wild cards in the past. They might have to deal with some remaining traces of that persecution themselves, along with any lingering corruption within SCARE itself. Cleaning up their own backyard could be even harder than their field assignments.

*Agents of SCARE* can be a "Men in Black" style investigative series, a taut political techno-thriller, to everything in between. It's a good framework for espionage adventures, although focused for the most part on the United States.

# CHARACTERS

*Agents of SCARE* need a combination of investigative traits and ones for dealing with any paranormal threats they may encounter, namely hostile wild carders (or other things like alien invaders or monsters conjured up by a wild carder). Players might want to look at the Government Agent archetype (*M&M,* page 227) for an idea of the minimum sort of traits their characters ought to have. You should decide whether or not the characters must have the Equipment feat for their mundane equipment (see **Devices and Equipment** later in this chapter).

Power level should be around 8 if the characters are going to be able to go toe-to-toe with some of the threats they might face. For a more investigative series, go with a slightly lower power level (7 or 6). A more action-oriented series might have a higher power level, up to 10 or so, although such a series might work better in the *Justice Department* framework (see it later in this section).

Wild card abilities can be almost anything useful to field agents. Obviously, powers useful in combat are a plus, but investigative abilities are handy, too. Joker characters are highly unlikely, as SCARE wants its agents to look normal enough to blend in, do undercover work, and not frighten the general public, to say nothing of the fact that there are still elements of the committee who don't like or trust wild carders, especially "freaks" like jokers.

# FACTIONS

The main factions in an *Agents of SCARE* series are political; any of the political and terrorist organizations from **Chapter 5** could become the focus for an investigation into their activities in the United States or involving U.S. interests abroad. Similarly, the committee might want to look into the activities of virtually any high-profile ace or group of wild carders (or some low-profile ones, especially if it looks like they're keeping a low profile for a reason).

The other major factions of the series are those within SCARE itself. The committee has a checkered history where wild carders are concerned. It was established as an aptly-named scare tactic in the 1950s, and has been a looming specter for many with the wild card. SCARE has ruined lives and been used as a front by both wild card and nat conspiracies to further their own ends. While the committee in an *Agents of SCARE* series might be trying to clean house and do the right thing, there's likely to still be people associated with it who have different loyalties and priorities, who might try to use the characters as pawns or scapegoats to further their own agendas.

# ADVENTURES

Most *Agents of SCARE* adventures take the form of assignments from the committee to investigate some particular paranormal phenomenon, usually related to the wild card. Some examples include:

## DEAD MAN'S HAND

SCARE has a lot of records of testimony from and investigation of wild carders going back decades. Agents might be assigned some "cold cases" from these files for follow-up as part of an effort to rehabilitate the committee and its reputation and to update the information in the files. The agents can track down wild carders who dropped out of public life years ago, finding out what happened to them. They might stumble upon new wild card manifestations or evidence of old plots connected with SCARE. Some of those skeletons might be better left buried, and some people might want to leave the agents buried with them.

## ACES-IN-THE-HOLE

The agents are tasked with the difficult job of ferreting out secret aces and deuces living in the United States. Needless to say, such an assignment raises significant moral and legal questions about privacy and what the committee and the U.S. government will do with the information the agents uncover. Do people have a right to know someone is a wild carder? Do current wild card statutes on the books allow SCARE to initiate such a sweeping program and, even if they do, will they trigger a backlash and send even more wild cards underground, just like the Exotic Powers Control Act did in the 1950s? What if the agents uncover an ace who's potentially dangerous and is willing to do whatever it takes to remain "in the deck"?

## JOKERTOWN BLUES — POWER LEVEL 5-6

There's no harder beat in the world than Fort Freak, the Jokertown Precinct. If you're here, then you're either a troublemaker, a hard-case, or an idealist looking for a quick and unpleasant education.

*Jokertown Blues* is a cop-drama meets alternate history. The characters are all assigned to, or in some way connected with, the Jokertown Precinct of the NYPD. They may be nats, jokers, or even aces. Plots revolve around the day-to-day happenings at the precinct, particularly dealing with crime in an environment as unusual as Jokertown.

Officers at Fort Freak are caught between two worlds. On the one hand, people in Jokertown don't trust the cops. They're seen as instruments of the Man, out to persecute jokers and not interested in catching

criminals, especially if it's the word of a nat against a joker. On the other hand, the city sees them as an indulgence—why even bother having a police precinct in Jokertown?—and the administration tends to think they're too "soft" on the locals, too likely to side with the jokers, who everybody knows can't be trusted and are little more than animals.

Thus characters in a *Jokertown Blues* series can expect a fair amount of political in-fighting and social drama to go with the excitement of chasing down crooks in the streets and alleys of Jokertown and solving crimes potentially committed using abilities nats just don't have, or against people who don't look like any "people" the cops have seen before.

# CHARACTERS

*Jokertown Blues* characters are most likely police officers, although they don't have to be. They could also be public defenders, district attorneys, private investigators, or forensic specialists; anyone likely to work at or frequent the Jokertown police precinct. If they are police officers, they might be uniformed beat cops or plainclothes detectives. The precinct captain is likely a non-player character, a useful GM resource for providing adventure hooks and funneling information to the players ("Another dead joker turned up last night with those weird markings on the wall nearby. Check it out.")

Power level 5-6 suits this series well, unless the GM wants to allow particularly *outré* wild card abilities. Ace characters tend to be low-level, not necessarily deuces, but not exactly world-class talents either. Their powers may be well-suited to police work and investigation: super-senses, mind-reading, wild card detection, and such, or little things like being bulletproof or able to run down a suspect without even breathing hard. Alternately, their wild card abilities may have nothing at all to do with their police work, although they come in handy from time to time.

Similarly, joker characters might have a useful talent or two, although their greatest asset is being able to blend in in one of the few places where being normal looking makes you stand out. In a *Jokertown Blues* series it's more often the nats and normal-looking aces who earn hero points for the prejudice and mistrust of the locals! The NYPD isn't going to recruit joker officers unable to handle the physical or mental demands of the job, but otherwise the characters' joker traits could be just about anything.

This is one series where nat characters work just fine, too. The majority of personnel at Fort Freak are still nats, and a non-wild carder at PL 5 or 6 is quite competent and capable. Nat characters may want particular specialties to differentiate them: unarmed combat expert, extensive contacts in a particular community, and so forth.

With the power level and the cop-drama approach, players and the Gamemaster may find the *Agents of Freedom* sourcebook for *M&M* useful in creating characters for this series framework.

# FACTIONS

The primary factions in a *Jokertown Blues* series come down to the cops and the criminals, although it's not always quite so cut-and-dried.

On the "cops" side of things there is the NYPD itself and various factions or political alliances within the department. Some want the Jokertown Precinct scaled-back or closed altogether, others want it expanded or revamped, while paper-pushers want Internal Affairs looking over the officers' shoulders all the time. Add to that the various city departments, administration officials, civic organizations, state and federal law enforcement, and private interests, and the cops start to wonder whether they need enemies at all with these kinds of "friends."

The "criminals" side offers even more variety. First off, there's petty crime, which isn't always so petty in Jokertown. You never know what you're going

to run into just being called to a domestic disturbance in a place where the meth-head next door might be able to bite your head off, shatter stone with his bare hands, or melt you into a puddle or something. Take virtually any routine call a big-city police precinct is likely to get and add jokers.

Then there are the gangs like the Killer Geeks, the Twisted Sisters, or the Warlocks. They're involved in everything from drug running to beat-downs and outright murder, but some in Jokertown see them as romantic figures, or are at least too scared of them to ever talk to the cops.

The rung up the ladder from the gangs is organized crime. There was the Mafia, and then the Shadow Fists. Who has taken over since the Fists' organization broke up? A new crime lord operating out of Jokertown would get a lot of attention focused on the precinct in a hurry, with officers expected to deliver results, unless they want to be replaced and upstaged by outsiders or even the feds. Plus there's always the possibility the syndicate has someone (or several someones) inside Fort Freak, looking out for its interests. The Masons did it, the Shadow Fists did it; why not someone else? If the characters find out one of their fellow officers (or, worse yet, one of their *superiors*) is on the take, what do they do about it? Can they prove it?

# ADVENTURES

Here are some adventure ideas suitable for a *Jokertown Blues* series:

## THE JOKERTOWN KILLER

Someone is murdering jokers and mangling up their bodies in interesting and unpleasant ways. Everyone in Jokertown is on edge and speculation is rampant. Locals claim the cops are doing nothing, that the killer is a nat (or nat gang), or even a secret campaign of terror and intimidation

against jokers. The city administration fears rioting and civil unrest if the killer isn't caught, and is putting pressure on the Jokertown Precinct for results. Can the officers overcome the challenges of close-mouthed and even combative residents to piece together enough to find the killer? Who is the so-called Jokertown Killer and what's the motive for the murders? What if the truth is something the characters dare not reveal, like a Card Shark plot or a rogue Swarmling loose in Jokertown?

### STRAIGHT FLUSH

A new designer drug called "flush" is showing up in and around Jokertown. In addition to the euphoric high sought after by the party crowd, flush has the additional kicker of sometimes giving users temporary ace-like abilities, or juicing up existing ones, even to the point of turning a deuce into an ace, at least for a couple hours. The problem is the drug is both addictive and dangerous, and an overdose can be trouble for more than the user, especially if he goes nuts and starts tossing cars around or just explodes or something. Naturally, after the first couple incidents, the cops start investigating to find out who's making and distributing flush to shut down the supply. Such a drug probably isn't a small operation, meaning a powerful criminal gang is involved. Where does flush come from and what are the long-term effects? Who's peddling it, and what sort of resources do they have to keep the law off their backs?

## AMERICAN HERO — POWER LEVEL 8+

It's the nation's favorite new reality series... *American Hero!* Teams of wild carders compete each and every week. One of the losers goes into the Discard Pile while the winners have a chance at the million-dollar cash prize and being named this year's "American Hero."

In the *American Hero* series framework the characters are all contestants on the newest reality television craze: watching wild carders compete for fun and entertainment. Initially, there are four teams, one for each suit (Clubs, Diamonds, Hearts, and Spades). Each team shares a house wired for 24-hour filming. The characters can make up one team, possibly with the addition of some non-player characters, while you make and run the other teams. They're pitted against each other in a series of challenges, and celebrity judges rate their performance. Each losing team votes one of its members off the show to the Discard Pile, a house set aside for the losers to get filmed 24/7 sulking and not getting along with their roommates. The winning team each week is exempt from discarding. When the depleted teams get small enough, they can be "shuffled" together. Eventually the numbers get low enough that it's every contestant for his- or herself, since only one can be named the *American Hero!*

Of course, the entire series doesn't have to consist of the televised challenges and behind-the-scenes drama. There's plenty of potential for sub-plots, side-trips, and the like. To keep things interesting, you can even run the series as a mosaic (see **The Mosaic Series** on page 206) each player has a character on each of the four teams and the final contest comes down to one character for each player. This allows you to run Discard Pile adventures as well as the main series plot. To fill in any "holes" left by the reshuffling of characters as some contestants go to the Discard Pile, players can take the roles of supporting characters, guest-star aces, or the like, or the game can cut between events happening with the contestants and those involving the discards.

# CHARACTERS

A good thing about *American Hero* characters is they can be practically anybody, so long as: 1) They're wild carders, and; 2) They'll at least be interesting to watch on TV. Jokers are fine so long as their freakishness is telegenic and not merely disgusting. Likewise, aces with visually interesting powers are more likely to get picked for the show than, say, telepaths or precognitives, since the audience won't be able to appreciate their stunts as much. Still, a mind-reader's potential to stir up drama among the contestants shouldn't be overlooked.

Otherwise, the contestants can come from virtually all walks of life and any part of the country or even the world. This allows for a broad mix of unusual wild cards, and players should be encouraged to get creative. You can even have a "try out" session where players "pitch" their character concepts and you, in the role of producer and director, accept or reject them for roles in the series.

Power level is highly-variable for this series, although the contestants should have some degree of power to make them capable of interesting stunts on-camera. Power level 8 is recommended, but you can scale it from PL 6 to PL 10, or even higher, if you wish, although over PL 10 might be a bit much for the kind of aces likely to take part in a reality TV show. Ace powers can be just about anything, although more flashy powers are likely to work better with the format.

# FACTIONS

Some of the factions of an *American Hero* series are built right in: the contestants have three other teams of wild cards to contend with, right from the start! There are also production, studio, and network people, some of whom might have their own agendas or come into conflict with the characters. In the novel *Inside Straight,* Peregrine is the host of the show. She might be in your version of the series as well, or you can substitute your favorite celebrity *Wild Cards* character. Plus there are opportunities for "celebrity guest stars" that allow you to include your favorite characters from the series.

The soap-opera drama of the series shouldn't be overlooked: It's one of the things the network is counting on, plus it can be a great opportunity for characters to earn some hero points!

There are also potential factions outside of the show. What happens when an anti-wild card organization decides to protest the program outside the studio or at an on-location shoot? What if one of the contestants has secret ties to an organization from **Chapter 5**, like a gang or religious sect? Having such a secret come out on-camera would be bad for the contestant, but great for the ratings!

# ADVENTURES

Here are some adventure ideas for an *American Hero* series:

### TONIGHT'S CHALLENGE

The standard *American Hero* adventure is easy: Each one is in the format of an episode of the show. It starts out with a brief intro, then the judges tell the contestants what challenge they have to overcome. It can be pretty much anything: a scavenger hunt, a race, a fake bank robbery or rescue from a burning building, the re-creation of a fight against a Swarmling or an Army squad, or anything else you care to dream up. The wild cards have to compete against the other teams as well as overcoming the challenge, trying to ensure they don't get discarded as a result of poor performance or success that threatens other team members' egos. You can weave subplots and other events into the challenges and taping of each new episode. What happens when a contestant mouths off to a reporter, or someone tries to sabotage a challenge, for example?

### IN THE DISCARD PILE

For an offbeat adventure, focus on what's going on in the Discard Pile. The characters can end up voted off and discover something interesting is going on there, or they might be sent to hang out among the losers at the Discard Pile as part of a challenge (and to create more drama and tension). Maybe the strange goings-on are part of the show, a set-up to let the characters show what they can do, or maybe they're something else. Discards who do well might get another shot at the brass ring, since its hard to deny the popularity of a comeback bid.

## THE JUSTICE DEPARTMENT — POWER LEVEL 8+

Since the days of the Special Conscription Act, there have been aces working for the U.S. government in one fashion or another. The authorities quickly realized the advantages offered by ace agents, and the threats posed by criminal wild carders.

By the 1980s, most government aces are organized under the aegis of the U.S. Justice Department, typically working with the FBI, although they tend to go where they're assigned, including working with the Secret Service to safeguard political bigwigs. Officially, government aces don't work with the CIA or in undercover ops, but that's a polite political fiction at best, since everyone knows they do; they just don't know who, where, or how often.

In this series, the characters work as Justice Department agents, carrying out assignments ranging from bodyguard and surveillance work to investigation, apprehension of suspects, and even covert, or black, ops. They also get entangled in political red tape, agency infighting, and some deep and dark conspiracies.

# CHARACTERS

While the Justice Department is willing to relax its standards with it comes to recruiting aces, it does still have standards, and insists on a certain amount of training. It also prefers recruits without criminal pasts or tendencies, although it's willing to overlook a certain amount. What this means is characters should generally fit the profile of the Government Agent archetype on page 227 of *M&M,* at least in terms of skill training. They should also have the Benefit (government agent) feat to reflect the additional pull their position gives them.

In terms of powers, again the government can't be too choosy about what it gets, but the department tends to recruit aces with useful abilities. For some this might be investigative or covert powers, for others more direct combat abilities (Carnifex, for example). Whatever the power, chances are the department will find a use for it, although not always in the field.

Since Justice Department work often calls for undercover operations or sensitive (*i.e.,* public) circumstances, they don't use joker agents, except possibly as covert operatives. Thus the characters should be human-looking aces for the most part, and players should only create joker characters with your permission.

One of the perks of the job is the government supplies the characters with whatever reasonable equipment they need (see **Devices and Equipment**). The downside is the department higher-ups decide what's "reasonable" and exactly what the characters get. They can ask for more, but there are no assurances they'll get it.

# FACTIONS

Working for the Justice Department puts the agents right in the middle of the action where political and criminal plots are concerned.

Criminal and terrorist groups, like the Shadow Fists or radical agents of the Nur Sect, are likely targets for investigation and, eventually, arrest once a case is built against them. Agents can do surveillance work or go undercover, perhaps trying to join up with the organization as wild card recruits or pretending to be nats. They can also safeguard potential targets of theft, kidnaping, or assassination, catching the perpetrators in the act. Naturally, once characters are known for this, they also become targets of vengeful organizations.

U.S. agents might run afoul of conspiracies like the Card Sharks. On the other hand, they might also *join* such a conspiracy. Although most wild cards wouldn't knowingly sign up with an anti-wild card group, there's no lack of hidden agendas in high government circles, and the Card Sharks certainly weren't above manipulating aces into doing their dirty work.

There's interagency rivalry with SCARE and the like (see the *Agents of SCARE* series framework for an idea of what the agents' rivals might be like). Finally, there's international intrigue with factions like the Silver Helix and threats like the Nur Sect, the Twisted Fists, and the Red Army Faction, just to name a few.

# ADVENTURES

Here are some adventure ideas suitable for a *The Justice Department* series:

### POLITICS AS USUAL

The aces are assigned to the Secret Service detail of a presidential candidate in the 2008 election (or another year, as suits the series). Unfortunately for them, the candidate is running on an anti-wild card platform, promising to impose stricter laws and provide more government oversight. This has naturally raised the ire of wild card civil rights groups along with more radical organizations, who see the agents as scabs and traitors. There are attempts on the candidate's life, some of which are actually staged to drum up resentment against wild cards and get him sympathy points. The characters might find out the truth in the course of their investigation, in which case there's an attempt to silence them before they can take it to their superiors or the press. If you're so inclined, you can draw this idea out into a series of adventures over the course of the political campaign, from the nomination right up to the election.

### UNDUE INFLUENCE

The agents find evidence of unusual goings-on at the Justice Department, unexplained behavior pointing to a criminal crackdown that avoids the operations of a new syndicate while taking out its enemies and rivals. There's no explanation and the agents are quickly told to drop the matter by their superiors. It quickly becomes clear someone is exerting some kind of influence over the department, and more than just blackmail: There's an ace-in-the-hole using mind control or the like to make things happen, then erasing his or her tracks. Once it becomes clear the agents know and aren't going to give up, they become targets as well.

## SWARM HUNTERS — POWER LEVEL 8+

The Swarm Invasion (see **Chapter 2**) left behind remnants of three generations of Swarmlings, each more evolved and intelligent than the last. The United Nations contracts a team of xenobiologists and security experts to clean-up the remaining Swarmlings and gather information about alien life that may threaten Earth in the future. In the process, they learn a great deal about the remaining extent of the Swarm on Earth and also about contact with other extraterrestrial life.

Characters can travel the world, dealing with human political realities as well as alien threats. Some of the Swarm remnants are in places where governments are touchy about visitors, and international factions may have a stake in acquiring information about the extraterrestrials that isn't shared with the U.N. Security Council. Likewise, there are plenty of opportunities for scientific oddities and intrigue not directly connected with the Swarm or other extraterrestrial life.

## CHARACTERS

Characters in a *Swarm Hunters* series can come from almost any background, although scientific skills and/or military experience are useful qualifications. Some members of the team may be xenobiologists, sociologists, or other eggheads interested in acquiring as much information about non-human life as possible. Others are military and ex-military personnel primarily interested in blowing bug-eyed aliens all to hell. Some inter-group friction is likely between these two extremes.

The suggested power level of 8 is to allow a small group of characters a chance of surviving against one or more Swarmlings; the team members should either be very capable fighters (up to that power level) or have commensurate ace powers to help them out. It doesn't mean every member of the team has to be a combat specialist, but an ace able to paralyze living creatures (for example) without an attack roll (a perception range or sense-dependent power) can still be PL 8 while having a low attack bonus. Other specialist characters can be created similarly.

## FACTIONS

The primary antagonists in a *Swarm Hunters* series are the remaining Swarmlings on Earth, particularly the third generation, which is intelligent and well-hidden. The remainder of the Swarm Mother's offspring might not be dedicated to their original mission to precipitate a nuclear war, particularly now that the Mother has left Earth and will no longer be able to conquer the battered planet. Indeed, there might be more than one faction of Swarmlings, each with its own agenda; just when the hunters think they've rooted them all out, they discover a new group with a new plan.

The first- and second-generation Swarm creatures are primarily a physical threat. The hunters might deal with some of them, or simply ferret them out and call in an airstrike or other tactical support to mop them up. Still, Swarmlings can present a threat, especially if they happen to escape into a populated area.

Other alien races don't have much of a presence on Earth, or at least so they'd like us to believe. Swarm hunters might also follow up on reports of possible alien incursions, UFO sightings, abductions, and so forth. Some of these will be hoaxes, of course, but others could be wild card manifestations, getting the characters entangled in other situations and providing a break from the constant struggle against the remains of the Swarm.

## ADVENTURES

Here are some adventure ideas suitable for a *Swarm Hunters* series:

### THE HEALING TOUCH

A mysterious guru has appeared in Tibet, possessed of a healing touch that cures all sorts of physical ailments. Most people assume the Guru is simply an ace with healing powers and sick people have flocked to the temple where he lives to see him. However, doctors from the World Health Organization have examined some of the Guru's patients and found traces of alien DNA of unknown origin in their systems. It doesn't match any known information about the wild card virus, alleviating immediate fears the Guru is passing it along, but still leaves unanswered questions. Maybe the Guru is an ace, but what if he's a Swarmling using some kind of biomanipulating or biological "nanotechnology" to cure people? What if his intentions are to infect people with this alien genetic code, and what purpose does it serve? The Swarm hunters are assigned to investigate, but must be wary, since the Guru is surrounded by fanatical supporters, and has already made an enemy of the Chinese government, which would like to see him removed.

It's also noteworthy that the Guru's abilities are quite similar to those of Mai Minh, the ace who merged with the Swarm Mother to end the invasion. Is there a connection?

### WE COME IN PEACE

The Swarm hunters become aware of someone, or something, following them on their various missions. It turns out to be an observer from the Network, keeping tabs on human dealings with extraterrestrials. Choose a suitable Network alien or just make up one of your own. When the Hunters make contact with the observer, he makes them a startling offer: an opportunity to go on board a Network ship that is arriving near Earth soon to collect him. There they can meet with a Master Trader and make contact with other species of the Network. Of course, the Earthlings have to tread carefully: the Master Trader may offer them nearly anything and will hold them to the exact letter of any agreement they make. Even if the characters are not in the position to sell the Master Trade the Moon or to commit humanity to a lifetime contract of service, the Network may not care and it *never* breaks a contract.

# THE HISTORICAL SERIES

The *Wild Cards* books present a rich alternate history, only portions of which have been explored in the stories. The sixty-plus years since the release of the wild card virus over Manhattan offer numerous options for *Wild Cards* games set in different time periods, mixing historical fact with speculative fiction.

## WILD CARD DAY

One way to kick-off a *Wild Cards* series is to start at the very beginning: Wild Card Day 1946. The characters are either in New York City during that fateful September 15th when Jetboy engages his old foe Dr. Tod in the sky overhead for the last time, or they might be in another area where there's a wild card outbreak in the days or weeks to follow.

Only a handful of Dr. Tachyon's initial wild card patients are detailed in the series. We know there were at least a couple dozen aces in Manhattan at the time, and a few hundred jokers, plenty of opportunities for player characters. In the early days of the wild card, aces are likely to become instant celebrities, while jokers are freakshow attractions at best, more likely shoved aside and penned-in to Jokertown where they can be ignored.

You can even use a Wild Card Day kickoff to start a series where things go *very* differently from the history established in the novels. Apart from the arrival of Dr. Tachyon and the release of the virus, everything else could be up for grabs. Perhaps the player characters are recruited by Archibald Holmes for his Exotics For Democracy, or among the first residents of Jokertown to agitate for their civil rights, or aces who make their mark on the world in some other fashion. The possibilities are practically endless.

## THE CONTINENTAL ACE

The story of Will-o'-Wisp in 1950s Hollywood offers a great window into the potential for *Wild Cards Noir,* where hard-boiled ace detectives and operatives delve into the seedy side of life in an America where being openly known as a wild carder can get you hauled up in front of a government committee, your life publicly ruined. The Card Shark conspiracy is in full swing, doing its very best to ruin aces and keep mistrust of wild carders at a high pitch. It's the era of Philip Marlowe and Sam Spade, as well as James Dean and Marilyn Monroe.

Mix your favorite *noir* fiction and films with aces (and sometimes jokers) in the key roles. Ace powers need to be low-key and concealable to operate in this arena, and characters shouldn't use their abilities too openly, to avoid raising difficult questions. Plots generally revolve around the seamier side of things, and people trying to do the right thing but often not being able to tell what that is anymore.

*Mutants & Masterminds* Gamemasters with access to the *Noir* sourcebook for the first edition of the game should find it quite useful for running this type of *Wild Cards* series.

## WILD CARD CHIC

Ah, to be beautiful, popular, and an ace. The 1970s are the time of wild card *chic*, when everyone wants to be a wild carder, or at least an ace. Cards are coming out the deck and proudly proclaiming themselves and their abilities. Aces High hosts parties where guests can fly in (under their own power) and land on the sunset balcony. The media and the public hunger for stories about the glamorous and powerful aces.

Of course, it's also a time of upheaval and conflict: aces fight in, or against, the war in Vietnam; the Summer of Love and the ace battle at People's Park are still recent memories; ace dissenters make President Nixon's enemies list.

## THE JOKER BRIGADE

The dark side of the era of Wild Card *chic* is the struggle of jokers for their rights and often for simple survival. In Vietnam, the infamous Joker Brigade operates deep in the jungle, suffering the most horrific casualties of the war. Some of them may even have limited powers to fall back on, but most don't even have that. You can run a "weird war" series focusing on the Joker Brigade or the contrast between joker grunts and the aces (like Cyclone) fighting in the conflict.

Then there's the situation on the homefront, with violence simmering in Jokertown over issues of civil rights and tolerance, which will eventually birth Jokers for a Just Society and boil over in the Jokertown Riots. Characters could be voices of moderation and passive resistance (like Xavier Desmond) or rabble-rousers willing to do whatever it takes to see that things change. Imagine characters working as police officers at Fort Freak, the Jokertown Precinct, during this time, or aces volunteering to try quell, or at least contain, the violence.

## THE WILD '80S AND '90S

The 1980s are well documented in the various *Wild Cards* stories, which begin in 1985, when Yeoman arrives in New York City ("Comes A Hunter" in Book I). You can run a series set during this heyday of the wild cards, either following along with events in the books, or taking things off in another direction; using existing characters or inserting new ones of your own creation. Put the characters up against the Astronomer and the Masons, with or without the aid of Fortunato. Let them tackle the

Swarm invasion and figure out how to overcome the Swarm Mother and the third generation of Swarmlings, with or without the aid of Mai Minh. How do they deal with the threat of the jumpers or the joker Bloat and his allies on the Rox? Just follow along with the information in **Chapter 2** and you've got an entire series laid out for you.

A 1980s series can lead right into one set in the '90s, following along with the events of the Black Trump trilogy and the exposure of the Card Sharks' plan to eliminate everyone infected with the wild card. Again, the characters may take many of the roles filled by series regulars in uncovering and dealing with the plot. Can they prevent the release of the Black Trump? Does one of the characters have the ability to develop the Overtrump in Mark Meadows' place, or to distribute it around the world like Quasiman?

## THE TIMELINE SERIES

A particular type of historical series takes the approach of Book I of *Wild Cards* and looks to span the series' entire history. The characters are either ageless or particularly long-lived—as many aces and some aliens are—allowing the series to start out in 1946 and progress all the way up to the present day, and even beyond. Alternately, you can make the series "generational," with players creating an initial set of characters, then playing their children and even grandchildren in succeeding generations and time-periods, or allow a combination of long-lived characters interacting with different generations of wild carders.

This kind of lengthy historical series can be linear, with time progressing steadily forward, or it might feature various flashbacks and flash-forwards, jumping around to different time periods to tell stories set there. The latter can be tricky when it comes to maintaining continuity: If you

## OTHER M&M SETTINGS

Since the *Wild Cards* setting uses the *Mutants & Masterminds* game system, it's compatible with other *M&M* (and *M&M Superlink*) setting sourcebooks. This means you can use those other resources in your *Wild Cards* game and vice versa.

*Wild Cards* isn't particularly compatible with the four-color comic book reality of *Freedom City;* one of the primary ideas behind the *Wild Cards* series is to treat people with superhuman powers realistically, not put them in skintight costumes on board a satellite headquarters looking to fight crime and save the world. Still, you can always have a dimension-hopping crossover (or collision) between the two worlds, or use Freedom City itself as a fictional place in the *Wild Cards* world, stripping out the more *outré* elements, as in the **Paragons of Freedom** chapter of the *Worlds of Freedom* sourcebook. An interesting variation on Freedom City's history is to have it, and not New York City, as the site of Wild Card Day in 1946. Greenbank and the Fens can become the city's Jokertown, with some of the existing characters modified to be aces or jokers.

The *Paragons* campaign setting is far more compatible with *Wild Cards*, and you can find a wealth of information in it for use in your *Wild Cards* series, and vice versa. Many *Paragons* characters make perfectly good aces and jokers, while some wild carders would not be at all out of place as paranormals in a post-outbreak world. You'll naturally need to modify the backstory of any transplanted character, but the lack of a definitive source for paranormal powers in *Paragons* makes it relatively easy to use the wild card virus as the reason for a character's powers. You can find more on this idea in **Appendix IV**.

In particular, the *Paragons* adventure *A More Perfect Union* adapts quite well to the *Wild Cards* world. Just make the Unifier an unwitting ace whose card turns during a near-fatal accident and the characters aces or joker-aces who either happen into town or are assigned there as government agents as described in the adventure and you're good to go. You can also use the sample characters in *A More Perfect Union* as stock wild carders for this setting.

establish a "historical" fact in a future story, then it has to remain true in a past flashback, or else you have to come up with some reason why it was never really true to begin with, which can get complicated. If you're feeling particularly daring, you can use a time-jumping character—perhaps with an uncontrolled ace ability like Quasiman's—as the "viewpoint" and the thread linking different time periods.

The advantage of this kind of series is its sweeping scope, allowing players to experience the whole of *Wild Cards* history and for their characters to become deeply connected with the world and each other. As mentioned, the primary drawback is it can become a complex and difficult-to-manage tapestry with everything going on in all the various periods and such a large cast of characters.

# THE ALTERNATE ALTERNATES

One of the great things about licensed RPG settings is they allow you to play out games of "what if?" with your favorite fictional worlds. There's certainly no rule saying you have to stick to the continuity laid down in the *Wild Cards* novels; you can take the basic premise of the world, or just about any departure point, and strike out on your own, creating an alternate reality (technically an alternate-alternate reality) to tell your own stories.

A major point of departure is the wild card virus itself. What if Dr. Tachyon *wasn't* able to intercept his Ilkazam relations in time and the test of the virus went ahead as planned? What if the break-up of the Takisian ship released the virus in the upper atmosphere, to rain down all over Earth? On the other hand, what if Jetboy had been successful in preventing the release of the wild card in 1946, leaving the globe with the virus in the hands of the U.S. government until an accident released it years later, and elsewhere?

Likewise, the Takisians have had at least the technological capability to create a genetic enhancer like the wild card for centuries, if not longer (they've been a spacefaring race for thousands of years). What if the wild card arrived on Earth sooner? World War II certainly might have gone differently if Wild Card Day had been, say, in the fall of 1941, rather than 1946, or if the virus had hit London or Paris rather than New York City. Roll back through history, and numerous opportunities present themselves for variant *Wild Cards* games, like a "meteor strike" in turn-of-the-century England or America unleashing a wave of "gods and monsters" on an unsuspecting world, all the way back to wild carders among the ancient civilizations, bringing stories of gods and divine heroes to life.

Similarly, what if the Takisian virus arrived on Earth later than 1946? How would a Communist-obsessed American have reacted to Wild Card Day in 1951? What if the Takisians crashed on the Moon and the globe containing the virus wasn't found until the first lunar landing in 1969?

Working through the series, there are numerous places where things could have gone off in very different directions. What if the third wave of the Swarm invasion wasn't detected in time, and the Swarmlings successfully triggered a nuclear war on Earth? Wild carders are among the most likely survivors, struggling to hold together the tattered remnants of civilization against an ongoing Swarm onslaught, with tribes of savage joker mutants roaming the ruins. Or perhaps the shakti device wasn't destroyed and summoned aid from the Network. What price would Earth have paid for its survival? How would we *still* be paying for it?

Consider the Rox and Bloat's reality-shaping powers: What if, instead of relenting in his draining of the Dreamtime, Bloat went all-out and used his powers to reshape the whole world, rendering all other ace summoners and shamans powerless (or nearly so) and creating a twisted fantasy world where he is the sorcerer-king? Can a foretold group of aces kill Mad King Bloat and restore to world to some semblance of sanity? When they meet the lonely boy inside the monstrous joker body, will they *want* to kill him?

Then there's the Black Trump. Foiling the Card Sharks' plan was a very near thing. If Mark Meadows hadn't been able to create the Overtrump and if it hadn't been distributed in time, then the release of the Black Trump in Jerusalem could have wiped out most (if not all) the wild carders in the world. It's certainly one way to explain a present-day setting with fewer wild cards than ever, if you want to go in that direction.

As you can see, the possibilities are virtually endless when it comes to creating a unique *Wild Cards* setting. Even if you decide to stick fairly close to the events of the novels, these alternatives shouldn't necessarily be ruled out. After all, some aces do apparently have the ability to access other dimensions, so there's always a chance the characters might visit one of these other realities sometime!

# THE MOSAIC SERIES

An alternative to the traditional RPG series is to set-up a *Wild Cards* series mimicking some of the "mosaic" style of the books: multiple characters and plotlines woven together to create a more complex whole. This is a more involved style of game, not suited to all game groups, but can be fun and rewarding for those interested in setting it up and playing it out.

Essentially, each player has multiple characters, ideally diverse enough that their paths aren't too likely to cross. One might be a government ace, another a two-bit criminal in Jokertown, and a third a notable wild card entertainer, for example. You set up adventure plots, and the players each play one of their characters, switching characters from story to story at the GM's direction, so the characters are matched up with the adventure that suits them best (and occasionally mis-matched for variety and interesting challenges).

The group can even rotate Gamemastering duties, with each GM in charge of a particular plot thread. So one might be running a series about a resurgence of the Card Shark conspiracy while another is running a story about the criminal underworld of New York City. Characters and plot-lines can cross-over as the Gamemasters see fit, although this can involve some careful juggling.

If you're feeling *really* ambitious, combine the mosaic series approach with a timeline series, having multiple characters and Gamemasters dealing with different time periods. Then you'll start getting a feel for what it was like creating the *Wild Cards* books in the first place.

# CREATING WILD CARDS CHARACTERS

Creating *Mutants & Masterminds* characters for a *Wild Cards* series follows the same rules and guidelines as given in the *M&M* rulebook, taking into consideration the special circumstances and elements of the world of *Wild Cards.* If you know how to create *M&M* characters, then you can do so for this setting as well.

This section looks at power levels for a *Wild Cards* series, different character concepts, and ways of handling the expression of the wild card virus. It breaks down the different types of possible characters: ace, joker, nat, and even alien, and looks at particular design elements you should take into account when building them. It concludes with a look at handling devices and equipment in the *Wild Cards* setting.

## SERIES POWER LEVEL

Wild carders are all over the map in terms of their *M&M* power level, from twisted jokers with no real powers at all to deuces with minor abilities and almost cosmic level aces with Earth-shaking abilities. The overall power level of a *Wild Cards* series determines a lot about what kind of series it will be, and what kinds of characters are suited to it.

### JOKERS AND DEUCES WILD — POWER LEVEL 4

This is pretty much the minimum power level for *Wild Cards*, and it's low enough that calling it a "power level" at all is almost a contradiction in terms. Characters at this level are little more than normal people with a potentially useful trick or ability; a true ace is possible, but most powers are more likely to be deuces. At the very least, they are modest compared to some more spectacular ace abilities.

Characters at this power level aren't likely to have much combat ability or if they do it's pretty much one of the only things they do. That's fine, since this type of series is better aimed at characters smart enough to avoid outright physical conflict when they can. They're more likely people drawn into circumstances beyond their control and forced to deal with them using whatever resources they have at the time. *Deuces Down* (Book XVI) is good inspiration for this type of series.

### ACE-IN-THE-HOLE — POWER LEVEL 6

This power level is sufficient to create full-fledged aces with fairly powerful abilities who are otherwise ordinary humans. If the GM wants a "wild cards are just people with powers" type of game, this is a good place to start. A power level 6 ace can have damage capabilities to equal decent military hardware (more with some trade-offs), and be tough enough to withstand similar amounts of punishment. It's also a good power level for joker-aces with a few tricks up their sleeves, like superhuman strength or the like.

Note that trade-offs become fairly common by this power level, as wild carders tend to have more in terms of damage and toughness than they do combat skill (attack and defense bonus), unless they have particular training or talent in those areas. So characters with, say, a +3 limit on attack and defense, and a +9 limit on damage and Toughness, would not be that unusual.

Wild carders at this power level tend to focus on a particular power or ability, although it might have several facets or effects in game terms. You can expect to spend 20 to 40 or so of your starting 90 power points on powers, which is a fair amount, particularly for effects without power level limits.

### DEALER'S CHOICE — POWER LEVEL 8

This is the default power level for a *Wild Cards* game: a bit below the four-color level specified in *Mutants & Masterminds*, but still sufficient to put most characters well above the average man-on-the-street in terms of their capabilities.

Aces at this power level can easily be expected to spend as much as half their starting 120 power points on powers, making them quite capable. It's sufficient for a combination of offensive, defensive, and movement or utility powers more like that of a conventional superhero, including one or more power arrays with various Alternate Powers. Nat characters at this power level are superhumanly capable themselves, even within the "normal" limits: they can have a combination of high abilities, impressive skills, and sufficient combat training to take on some aces and win!

### ACES HIGH — POWER LEVEL 10+

In this type of series, wild card characters (nearly always aces) are the equivalent of comic book superheroes. They're peers of famous aces like Golden Boy, Cyclone, or the Great and Powerful Turtle in terms of their powers, able to routinely ignore mundane threats short of military ordnance or the like.

This isn't generally recommended as a starting power level, unless the GM is looking to run a series about powerful aces from the get-go. It tends to be more of a power level characters grow into over time as their powers and skills mature. The series can transition from a Dealer's Choice series, starting at PL 8 or so, to this level over the course of 18-20 adventures, depending on how many power points the GM hands out as adventure awards.

### FULL HOUSE: VARIED POWER LEVELS

A concept that goes along with the Mosaic Series approach (see the previous section) is a game in which character power levels may vary greatly; in essence the series either has no power level limits, or else relatively high ones, but most characters aren't expected to meet them, particularly

not in more than one or two areas at most. This is certainly the case in the *Wild Cards* series as a whole: plenty of characters have limited, if any, powers, while others are tremendously powerful, at least in some areas.

## POWER LEVEL AND TRAITS

*Mutants & Masterminds* characters in a more four-color style series generally do well to set their primary combat abilities at or near the series' power level limits (potentially with some trade-offs). The same is often true with their major powers, particularly offensive and defensive powers. *Wild Cards* characters, on the other hand, tend to be less focused on combat, simply because fights are things most people try and avoid, and because many wild carders are not "optimized" for combat. Unlike comic book heroes, aces generally don't fly around fighting crime or thwarting the schemes of megalomaniacal supervillains, so they don't have the same need for a balance of offensive and defensive traits.

Players and GMs may wish to consider this as they create their own *Wild Cards* characters. While comic book superheroes justify incredible abilities, skills, and combat traits on the thinnest tissue of reasons, wild carders should have some reason why they have combat training and skills, for example. A character like the Turtle doesn't have (or really need) much of an attack or defense bonus: he doesn't leave his shell and his power is perception ranged. Indeed, Tommy Tudbury's relative lack of combat skill is one of the primary reasons he *has* a shell!

Similarly, the GM may wish to add further power level limits on certain traits to deal with trade-offs and the like. A particular example is the Impervious modifier for Protection and other types of Toughness. A good guideline is to disallow Impervious Toughness bonuses greater than the series power level, and perhaps even less, such as 75% or even 50% of power level, to avoid characters able to shrug off virtually any damage they're likely to encounter for a relatively low cost. A degree of Impervious Toughness is certainly appropriate for some concepts, but should be handled carefully.

# CHARACTER CONCEPTS

A *Wild Cards* series offers two main options for player characters. The first is to play existing characters from the *Wild Cards* stories, as detailed in this book, with the Gamemaster's permission. The other is to create original characters, with the characters from the books either as non-player characters, or not really involved in the series at all. Both approaches have their strengths and weaknesses, described here.

## SERIES CHARACTERS

One appeal of a setting based on a fiction series like *Wild Cards* is the chance to take on the role of your favorite character(s). With dozens of characters from the series described in *M&M* game terms in this book, it's a fairly simple matter to let players choose an existing ace or joker to play in a *Wild Cards* series, given a few guidelines as to what the series is about and what characters are suitable for it.

Of course, the series characters are not created equal in terms of power level or power point totals, nor are they designed like starting *M&M* characters. Some have power point totals in excess of their power level, others less, depending on their abilities. Some groups may be fine with this disparity, while others may have a problem, particularly if two or more players have their hearts set on the same character.

## DEALING YOURSELF THE WILD CARD

An interesting variant for *Wild Cards* character creation is to play *yourself*, as you might be in the *Wild Cards* world! In this approach, you create a version of yourself as a *Mutants & Masterminds* character, then suppose you are exposed to the wild card virus. Perhaps there's an outbreak where you live, affecting all the players in the game, or your exposure is an isolated incident, depending on whether or not the other players are portraying themselves.

First create yourself as an *M&M* character, using a portion of your available power points for the series' power level. You shouldn't need much more than 40 points, and modest players may need even less than that. You can either choose your wild card traits (again assuming you don't draw a Black Queen, as that would end the concept pretty quickly) or use the **Luck of the Draw** option described previously, spending your remaining power points on traits picked up as a result of the wild card.

The Gamemaster may even choose to assign your wild card traits! In this case, you have no idea what the effects of the virus will be until it happens. This option works best when you play out the actual turning of the characters' cards, keeping in mind the subconscious psychological influence on the virus' manifestations (described in **Chapter 1**). Players will therefore discover their characters' powers as the characters do during the course of the game.

While the series characters have well-established personalities and histories to draw upon for roleplaying, this same information may feel constraining to some players, especially if anyone else criticizes their version of the character as inaccurate or out-of-sync with what's been established in the books. There's also the question of whether or not future events in the series are preordained for the characters or if the group is establishing an alternate history of sorts, and of player versus character knowledge, if the players know secrets about the characters nobody else does.

Still, challenges aside, it's hard to beat the fun of getting to be Dr. Tachyon, Modular Man, or the Sleeper in a *Wild Cards* adventure, and having the series characters in play helps to really reinforce the style of the books and make you feel like you're really in the world of *Wild Cards.*

If a GM is using established characters in his game, then everyone can skip over character creation altogether; you just choose which character(s) you want to play and the GM provides the game information from this book. If somebody wants to play a series character not described in **Chapter 4**, then the GM needs to come up with suitable game stats but, otherwise, you're all ready to go.

## ORIGINAL CHARACTERS

Alternately, the Gamemaster can have the players create original characters for a *Wild Cards* series, fitting them into the established elements of the world he intends to use. The bulk of this section is devoted to this idea, following the character creation guidelines in the *Mutants & Masterminds* rulebook.

Original characters offer you more creative freedom; you can play exactly what you want within the limits of the series. Of course, if the characters from the books are around, it may limit some of your options, if you want to avoid copycat concepts. Still, given the infinite possibilities inherent in the wild card, it shouldn't be too hard for a group of creative gamers to come up with interesting and original characters.

The GM can still use the biographies and game stats in this book for supporting characters in the series: allies, antagonists, and just background elements. Depending on the place and time, the original characters can meet up with the likes of Dr. Tachyon, Cap'n Trips, Yeoman, Wyungare, and many more, and come up against the Card Sharks, SCARE aces, even the Astronomer and the Masons.

If the GM's going for a truly alternate *Wild Cards* game, he can even do away with some or all of the series regulars, focusing things on entirely original characters. He can also do this with more of a "next generation" approach, setting the series in the present day (beginning with the new series volume *Inside Straight*), with most of the "old timers" from the original series dead, retired, or faded into the obscurity of modern celebrity, where an 18-year-old born *after* the Rox campaign and his destruction of the Brooklyn Bridge (and its eventual replacement) wonders "The Great and Powerful *Who?*"

## LUCK OF THE DRAW

While you can use the *M&M* system to design a *Wild Cards* character like any other, one variant you might want to try is determining the results of the character's mutations randomly. Roll a die: on a 19-20, your wild carder is an ace with no outward mutations, or at least no unpleasant ones, just "features" like Peregrine's wings.

A lesser roll indicates the character is a joker-ace, having useful powers, but also noticeable and potentially problematic deformities. Divide the roll by 2, round up, and subtract the result from 10: that's how many points in associated drawbacks your wild carder has, most likely Disabilities. See **Joker Characters** for more information. You can have more drawback points if desired and if the GM allows. The normal limit on drawbacks (points equal to the series' power level) is increased for jokers to 150% of power level (rounded up). So a joker in a PL7 *Wild Cards* game can have up to 11 points worth of drawbacks (7 x 1.5, rounded up).

This approach assumes the victim does *not* draw a Black Queen since—with the exception of Demise or Crypt Kicker—it's kind of tricky to play a dead character. For conventional wild card infection, you can just roll a die and use the normal odds: on a roll of 18 or less, the victim draws a Black Queen and dies. On a 19-20 the victim survives; roll again using the system described previously: drawing an ace on a 19-20 and a joker on an 18 or less, with a lower roll indicating more severe joker deformities. Naturally, the GM can also fudge this roll as desired to suit the needs of the story.

## ACE CHARACTERS

Aces are the closest to conventional *Mutants & Masterminds* characters: people granted amazing powers by the wild card, making them superhuman. This means they're also the easiest characters to create using the standard *M&M* guidelines, with just a few additional things to keep in mind, detailed here.

The first thing to bear in mind about aces is they are *not* superheroes, for the most part. Few aces dress up in skintight costumes or use their powers to fight crime, at least in the way it's done in the comic books.

# RANDOM ACE POWERS

## POWER RANK

| D20 | Power Rank |
|---|---|
| 1 | Power Level–3 |
| 2-5 | Power Level–2 |
| 6-9 | Power Level–1 |
| 10-16 | Power Level |
| 17-18 | Power Level+1 |
| 19 | Power Level+2 |
| 20 | Power Level+3 |

## POWER CATEGORY

| D20 | Power Category |
|---|---|
| 1–2 | Attack |
| 3–4 | Body Control |
| 5–6 | Defense |
| 7–8 | Energy Control |
| 9–10 | Magical |
| 11–12 | Matter Control |
| 13-14 | Mental |
| 15-16 | Movement |
| 17-18 | Power Control |
| 19-20 | Sensory |

## ATTACK POWERS

| D20 | Attack |
|---|---|
| 1–3 | Blast |
| 4 | Corrosion |
| 5 | Disintegration |
| 6 | Fatigue |
| 7 | Mental Blast |
| 8–9 | Nauseate |
| 10–11 | Slow |
| 12–14 | Snare |
| 15–17 | Strike |
| 18 | Stun |
| 19 | Suffocate |
| 20 | Trip |

## BODY CONTROL POWERS

| D20 | Body Control |
|---|---|
| 1 | Additional Limbs |
| 2–3 | Alternate Form |
| 4 | Anatomic Separation |
| 5 | Boost |
| 6 | Density |
| 7 | Drain |
| 8 | Duplication |
| 9–10 | Elongation |
| 11 | Enhanced Ability |
| 12–13 | Growth |
| 14 | Healing |
| 15 | Insubstantial |
| 16 | Morph |
| 17 | Shapeshift |
| 18 | Shrinking |
| 19–20 | Super-Strength |

## DEFENSE POWERS

| D20 | Defense |
|---|---|
| 1–2 | Absorption |
| 3 | Adaptation |
| 4–5 | Deflect |
| 6–8 | Force Field |
| 9–10 | Immovable |
| 11–13 | Immunity |
| 14–15 | Mind Shield |
| 16–18 | Protection |
| 19 | Sensory Shield |
| 20 | Spinning |

## ENERGY CONTROL POWERS

| D20 | Energy Control |
|---|---|
| 1–2 | Cold Control |
| 3 | Cosmic Energy Control |
| 4–5 | Darkness Control |
| 6–7 | Electrical Control |
| 8 | Friction Control |
| 9 | Gravity Control |
| 10 | Kinetic Control |
| 11–12 | Light Control |
| 13–14 | Magnetic Control |
| 15 | Plasma Control |
| 16 | Radiation Control |
| 17 | Sonic Control |
| 18 | Spatial Control |
| 19 | Time Control |
| 20 | Vibration Control |

## MAGICAL POWERS*

| D20 | Magical* |
|---|---|
| 1–3 | Animate Objects |
| 4–8 | Astral Form |
| 9–12 | Hellfire Control |
| 13–14 | Luck Control |
| 15-20 | Magic |

## MATTER CONTROL POWERS

| D20 | Matter Control |
|---|---|
| 1–3 | Air Control |
| 4–6 | Earth Control |
| 7–10 | Fire Control |
| 11 | Life Control |
| 12–13 | Plant Control |
| 14 | Transform |
| 15–17 | Water Control |
| 18–20 | Weather Control |

## MENTAL POWERS

| D20 | Mental |
|---|---|
| 1 | Animal Control |
| 2 | Confuse |
| 3–4 | Emotion Control |
| 5–6 | Mental Blast |
| 7–8 | Mind Control |
| 9–10 | Mind Reading |
| 11–12 | Mind Shield |
| 13 | Mind Switch |
| 14–15 | Possession |
| 16 | Power Control |
| 17–18 | Telekinesis |
| 19–20 | Telepathy |

## MOVEMENT POWERS

| D20 | Movement |
|---|---|
| 1–2 | Burrowing |
| 3 | Dimensional Pocket |
| 4–6 | Flight |
| 7–8 | Leaping |
| 9–10 | Quickness |
| 11 | Space Travel |
| 12–13 | Speed |
| 14–16 | Super-Speed |
| 17–18 | Swimming |
| 19–20 | Teleport |

## POWER CONTROL POWERS

| D20 | Power Control |
|---|---|
| 1–2 | Animal Mimicry |
| 3 | Gestalt |
| 4–6 | Mimic |
| 7–8 | Nemesis |
| 9–11 | Nullify |
| 12–13 | Object Mimicry |
| 14–15 | Power Control |
| 16–18 | Summon |
| 19–20 | Transfer |

## SENSORY POWERS

| D20 | Sensory |
|---|---|
| 1–2 | Communication |
| 3–4 | Comprehend |
| 5–6 | Concealment |
| 7–8 | Datalink |
| 9–10 | Dazzle |
| 11–12 | ESP |
| 13–14 | Illusion |
| 15–16 | Obscure |
| 17–20 | Super-Senses |

**Note these powers can and do exist among wild carders, although they still stem from changes caused by the wild card virus, and not a supernatural source.*

Aces are not two-dimensional do-gooders, but real people with their own lives, motives, and foibles. Players should try for a certain level of realism in their game traits as well, avoiding cookie-cutter "supers" optimized for winning fights, and aiming more for well-rounded individuals with some unique quirks that fit their concept.

# ACE POWERS

Ace powers have two primary descriptors: either *psionic* (or *psychic,* which is the same thing) or *biological.* Golden Boy's force field, for example, is biologically generated, as is Howler's sonic scream (by his mutated throat). The Harlem Hammer's ace strength comes from his altered skeletal and muscular structure, and so forth. Other ace powers, like Sascha Starfin's telepathy, Popinjay's teleportation, or the Turtle's telekinesis, are clearly psionic.

Some apparently physical powers are also actually psionic in nature, in whole or in part: Peregrine's flight, for example, is actually telekinesis, rather than reliant on her wings, although she still has the power drawback of being unable to fly if she can't use her wings, simply because that's how she *believes* her power works (see **Power Crutches**, following). Similarly, many shape-changing or physically-transforming aces do so through psionic means, rather than purely biological processes (which are rarely fast enough, and too reliant on things like conservation of mass). Ultimately, it depends on the individual character and it's left up to you and the GM to assign the appropriate descriptors to an ace's powers.

Wild carder powers also have a general *wild card* descriptor, as they all stem from the same source. Relatively few characters in the books are non-wild carders with powers, and most of these are aliens (with the "alien" power descriptor, usually as an add-on to some biological or psionic descriptor, such as Takisian psi-powers). The one real exception is Modular Man, who has technological powers without a wild card descriptor, as he is the creation of a wild carder, but his own abilities do not depend on it.

Although the wild card descriptor exists, it doesn't play much of a role in the series, as few effects target all wild carders. The only real exceptions are other viruses like the Trump and Black Trump, which are aimed at nullifying and killing wild carders, respectively. Gamemasters should consider whether or not effects targeted at "all wild card powers" or "all wild carders" are too broad for the series, and may disallow them or charge a premium on them. Generally speaking, "all wild card powers" is practically equivalent to "all powers" in this setting, given the relative rarity of non-wild card powers.

Other descriptors apply on a case-by-case basis, and are generally fairly obvious from the nature of the powers involved. Jumpin' Jack Flash, for example, has powers with the "fire" and "plasma" descriptors, while Water Lily has "water" powers and Fortunato has "magic" (or even "tantric magic") powers, or at least behaves as if he did. Remember, in *Wild Cards* how something *appears* is often at least as important as what it actually *is,* if not more so.

## POWER CRUTCHES

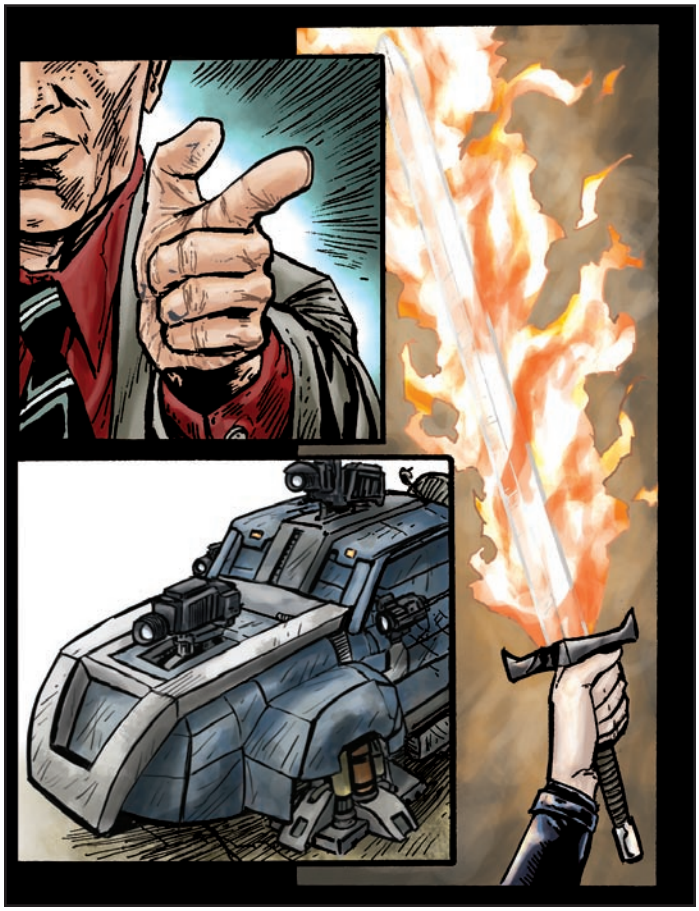
Many psionic ace powers have particular psychological limitations to them: for example, Jay Ackroyd's need to make his "finger gun" gesture in order to use his power, the Turtle's need to be in his shell to use his full powers, or the prayer Midnight Angel must utter to summon her flaming sword. These quirks may be "all in the head," but then, so is the ace's power, so they have a real impact on how that power works, and it is incredibly difficult, if not impossible, for aces to overcome them. Without the crutch, their power simply doesn't work.

Generally speaking, this is the Power Loss drawback (*M&M,* page 127): when deprived of the crutch, the affected power doesn't work, with the value of the drawback based on how often or easily the ace can be prevented from using the power. So if Popinjay's hands are bound (or, to use an extreme example, if his fingers are severed, as Blaise once did), he cannot use his power.

Some extreme power crutches, particularly reliance on a "talisman" or unique item, may constitute a different sort of modifier, even a power flaw. The Limited flaw (*M&M,* page 115) is a useful modifier in this case. As a general guideline, if a particular crutch falls into the effects of an existing game flaw, such as Distracting, Uncontrolled, or Unreliable, apply it instead of the Power Loss drawback. Likewise, if the crutch relies on a particular item, the power may constitute a Device (*M&M,* page 81), such as Topper's hat or Detroit Steel's armor; the actual power lies with the ace, but it's useless without the device, meaning the net game effect is still the same. Note that if the ace's crutch is an easily accessible, common item rather than a unique one, it may not qualify as a Device *per se;* for example, Lazy Dragon needs material to sculpt the figurines he animates, and is powerless without it, but it's not considered a device, as he can use any soft material or piece of paper to create something.

## POWER COMPLICATIONS

*Wild Cards* takes a somewhat more realistic view on superhuman powers than the comic books or *M&M*—enough so aces sometimes encounter unusual complications as an outgrowth of their abilities. For example, some mass-changing aces absorb energy from their surrounding environment, causing a temporary brown-out when they use their power.



And they tend to fall through floors and such when they assume massive amounts of weight. Sometimes these are enough to constitute a flaw or power drawback, as in the aforementioned **Power Crutches** section, or even a separate power altogether, but on other occasions they're simply odd quirks about a power that happen to come into play in unusual situations.

The Gamemaster may wish to treat such "power complications" the same as other complications in the game (*M&M,* page 122). So, for example, if a power causes an accident, this is no different than an accident resulting from a non-powered action. If a wild carder runs up against a power-related complication, the player earns a hero point for the problem.

Note this can apply to the psychological effects of wild card abilities as well as the physical ones. If an ace suffers from mood swings, addictions, or uncontrolled rages due to the nature of his or her powers, they count as complications, too.

As with all complications in the game, a power complication has to be an actual *hindrance* to the character to be worth awarding a hero point. If the complication merely applies to the ace's day-to-day existence, or is nothing more than a mere curiosity or annoyance, then it's not worth a hero point award. Some such things can *become* complications, however. For example, an ace might change color when using his powers. Ordinarily that's just a descriptor, but if the ace happens to be operating undercover or in disguise, and his little power quirk gives him away, then that is certainly a complication!

As with other complications, the GM should exercise good judgment and makes the final decision as to when and if to award hero points.

### PROBLEM POWERS

Some standard *M&M* powers may not be appropriate for a *Wild Cards* game, or can pose problems. Generally speaking, the wild card virus can lead to virtually any power explainable as a biological or psionic ability which, as we have seen, can even include "technological" powers (where gadgetry serves as a focus) or "magical" and "miraculous" powers (where occult rituals and prayer do the same). So there aren't too many power effects left out of the setting.

The problem powers generally rely on a comic book style or cosmology. For example, Radiation Control in *M&M* is explicitly for "comic book" radiation, with guidelines listed for a more realistic version of the power. Likewise, Cosmic Energy Control is more of a four-color comic power, and things like Dimensional Movement should take into account the nature of alternate dimensions (as such) in *Wild Cards* (see **The Dreamtime** in **Chapter 3** for some discussion of this).

The other problem powers are usually those that pose difficulties in telling stories involving that character. They are discussed at some length in the *Mastermind's Manual,* and the GM may wish to consult that book before deciding what powers aces are allowed to have in the series.

## RANDOM POWERS

At some point, you may want to randomly determine a power or set of powers. To do so, you can use the tables found in this section, which list all the powers from the *Mutants & Masterminds* rulebook, broken up by category.

First roll a die and check the **Category** table to determine the power's category. Then roll on the category's sub-table for the specific power.. Finally, either assign the power's rank as you see fit or roll on the **Power** table to randomly determine it, based on the series' power level. Use trade-offs to adjust character traits as needed and desired.

# JOKER CHARACTERS

Jokers are one of the unique elements of *Wild Cards,* fairly absent from most comic books. They represent the downside of being something other than human. Jokers suffer from some kind of physical deformity, ranging from the minor or comical (even attractive) to hideous and pitiable. Although the wild card offers little choice to those it changes, players in a *Wild Cards* game get to choose what mark of the virus their joker characters must bear.

## JOKER-ACES

The most common and viable sort of joker character for a *Wild Cards* series is the so-called "joker-ace," which is to say a joker with some useful powers in addition to the physical deformities caused by the wild card. A lot of joker transformations are of the "good news/bad news" variety, and some of the wild card's curses have their blessings, too.

The most common joker-ace power is some sort of Enhanced Strength, or even Super-Strength, as many jokers have powerful builds to go with their monstrous appearance. Increased Toughness, from Enhanced Constitution or sheer Protection (armored hide, scales, *etc.*) is also pretty common. That said, joker-ace powers are just as diverse as those of full-fledged (*i.e.*, normal-looking) aces, and potentially just as powerful. Although it's not actually the case, many people believed (and still do) the Turtle was actually a hideous joker inside his shell, so it's entirely believable for a joker to have considerable ace abilities.

All the advice and information on the powers of ace characters previously also applies to joker-aces. You can even create a joker-deuce (see **Deuce Characters**, following); jokers with relatively minor, or seemingly useless, powers.

## JOKER DRAWBACKS

The primary drawbacks of being a joker are actually handled as complications (see the following section). However, many jokers do suffer from significant drawbacks in *M&M* game terms.

By far the most common drawback is some sort of Disability resulting from the joker's deformities. A joker might have no hands, for example, just clumsy flippers (very common, moderate, –4 points), crawl on tentacles or a single snail-like foot rather than walk (very common, minor, –3 points), or lack a common sensory ability, such as having no eyes (very common, major, –5 points) or no ears (very common, moderate, –4 points). That merely scratches the surface of the full range of burdens placed on jokers by the wild card. Use your imagination when it comes to inflicting new ones.

As with other drawbacks in *M&M,* the value of a joker's drawbacks vary depending on how serious they are. For example, Sasha Starfin is blind, having no eyes, just smooth skin where his eyes should be. However, he "sees" to a limited degree with his telepathy, partially compensating for his blindness and reducing it from very common and major to common and moderate (–3 points rather than –5 points). Take similar mitigating circumstances into account when determining the value of a joker Disability.

Vulnerable and Weakness are also common joker drawbacks, usually reflecting some kind of biological defect. For example, a joker with weak and brittle bones is vulnerable to bludgeoning damage, while a joker with water-soluble skin might suffer a Weakness from immersion (probably in the form of cumulative Con loss). Again, these drawbacks are valued based on how severe they are for that character.

## JOKER COMPLICATIONS

A great many of the "drawbacks" of being a joker—a strange appearance and the bigoted, fearful attitudes of others—are actually complications in *Mutants & Masterminds* terms (see **Complications**, *M&M,* page 122). Joker characters do not get additional power points for these things, but their *players* do get awarded additional hero points for dealing with the challenges they pose during play.

It might seem a bit counterintuitive that joker characters have more complications due to their appearance and prejudices against them, and therefore more potential for earning hero points in play. After all, jokers in the *Wild Cards* series certainly don't get any "lucky breaks" (unless you count not drawing a Black Queen as luck) and generally have a harder time of it than most, so why potentially award them more hero points?

First of all, keep in mind we're only talking about joker *player characters;* NPCs (ace, joker, or nat) don't earn hero points anyway. So it's only the jokers who are the protagonists of the story who have chances to rack up some extra hero points. That is in keeping with the fictional style of *Wild Cards,* and it provides a reason other than pure roleplaying to have a joker character (or an ace with some real personality quirks and personal complications, for that matter). It gives jokers, who may not have the same sort of powers to draw upon as aces, a little extra in-game assistance.

The other question is, how often does the "joker complication" come into play? That depends somewhat on the characters and the situation but, as a general rule of thumb, any complication should be a true setback or problem for the character to be worth a hero point. Just having a bigoted nat making hurtful comments about jokers isn't a complication, unless that nat either has something the character wants or is in a position to make the character's life more difficult, in which case his prejudice is indeed a complication for the joker(s). Similarly, just looking freakish isn't a complication until is causes the joker a problem, such as being distinctive and easily recognized, or unable to blend into a crowd or go certain places.

As with all complications, the exact usage and awards are left for the Gamemaster to decide.

## RANDOM JOKER TRAITS

Like determining ace powers, you may want to randomize your character's joker traits. To do so, use the following tables, which list a healthy dose of random joker traits with accompanying *Mutants & Masterminds*

# RANDOM JOKER TRAITS

## JOKER TRAIT CATEGORY

| D20 | Joker Trait Category |
|---|---|
| 1-3 | Appendage |
| 4-6 | Body |
| 7-9 | Animal Trait |
| 10-12 | Facial |
| 13-15 | Tail |
| 16-18 | Fantastic |
| 19 | Roll (1-10 twice, 11-15 three times, 16-20 four times) on This Chart |
| 20 | Other* |

**Other denotes an unusual feature not covered in the table and sub-tables. In some instances, the player may opt to choose or, to keep it a bit random, the Gamemaster may make the choice. Be creative!*

## BODY TRAITS

| D20 | | Body Traits |
|---|---|---|
| 1-5 | | *Skin* |
| | 1-5 | Unusual Coloration |
| | 6-8 | Transparent (skin is invisible, showing muscles, skeletal structure, or other internal features) |
| | 9-12 | Sores (Fearsome Presence or Nauseate) |
| | 13-16 | Leathery (Protection) |
| | 17-19 | Hardened (Protection [Impervious]) |
| | 20 | Oversized (Protection, Noticeable) |
| 6-8 | | *Skeleton* |
| | 1-4 | Oversized (large size) |
| | 5-8 | Natural Claws (Mighty Strike) |
| | 9-12 | Hardened (Protection [Impervious]) |
| | 13-15 | Brittle (Vulnerability to bludgeoning damage) |
| | 16-20 | Inhuman (Fearsome Presence) |
| 9-12 | | *Hair* |
| | 1-3 | Prehensile (Additional Limbs, Elongation [Limited to hair]) |
| | 4-6 | Rapid-Growing (potential complication or even disability) |
| | 7-9 | Unusual Coloration |
| | 10-13 | Grass/Weeds/Flowers (Immunity to Starvation, Limited to while in sunlight, Noticeable [green skin]) |
| | 14-16 | Spikes (Strike, Aura) |
| | 17-20 | Alive (Strike [bite]) |
| 13-16 | | *Size* |
| | 1-5 | Large (large size) |
| | 6-10 | Broad (Density) |
| | 11-15 | Small (small size) |
| | 16-20 | Slight |
| 17-19 | | *Appearance* |
| | 1-3 | Beautiful (Attractive) |
| | 4-6 | Hideous (Fearsome Presence) |
| | 7-9 | Aged |
| | 10-12 | Childlike |
| | 13-15 | Hermaphroditic |
| | 16-18 | Monstrous (Fearsome Presence) |
| | 19-20 | Doppelganger (look exactly like someone else) |
| 20 | | *Other* |

## FACIAL TRAITS

| D20 | | Facial Traits |
|---|---|---|
| 1-5 | | *Eyes* |
| | 1-3 | Bug Eyes (Super-Senses [extended sight]) |
| | 4-6 | Black Eyes (Super-Senses [nightvision], Vulnerability to bright light) |
| | 7-9 | Ever-Changing Coloration |
| | 10 | None (Super-Senses [spatial awareness]) |
| | 11-13 | Glowing (Super-Senses (nightvision), Fearsome Presence) |
| | 14-17 | Unusual Coloration |
| | 18-20 | Independent (Super-Senses (radius [vision])) |
| 6-8 | | *Appearance* |
| | 1-7 | Godly Beauty (Emotion Control [Love Only, Uncontrolled]) |
| | 8-14 | Monstrously Hideous (Emotion Control [Fear Only, Uncontrolled]) |
| | 15-20 | Ill Appearance (Nauseate [Sight-Dependant]) |
| 9-11 | | *Horns* |
| | 1-3 | Ram (Mighty Strike) |
| | 4-7 | Devil (Fearsome Presence) |
| | 8-10 | Gazelle (Mighty Strike) |
| | 11-13 | Elk/Deer (Mighty Strike) |
| | 14-15 | Moose (Mighty Strike) |
| | 16-18 | Bull (Mighty Strike) |
| | 19 | Rhino (Mighty Strike) |
| | 20 | Giraffe |
| 12-14 | | *Ears* |
| | 1-5 | Pointed |
| | 6-8 | Floppy (Super-Senses [ultrasonic hearing]) |
| | 9-11 | Oversized (Super-Senses [extended hearing]) |
| | 12-14 | Tiny (Sensory Shield [hearing]) |
| | 16-19 | Long (Super-Senses [tremorsense]) |
| | 20 | None (telepathic Comprehend Languages) |
| 15-17 | | *Nose* |
| | 1-3 | Overly Large (Super-Senses [extended scent]) |
| | 4-6 | Tiny (Sensory Shield [scent]) |
| | 7-8 | None (Disability, no sense of taste or smell) |
| | 9-11 | Tentacles (Fearsome Presence) |
| | 12-14 | Appendage (Additional Limb) |
| | 15-17 | Trunk (Additional Limb [trunk]) |
| | 18-20 | Snout/Muzzle (Super-Senses [extended smell, tracking]) |
| 18-19 | | *Mouth/Teeth* |
| | 1-4 | Tusks (Strike) |
| | 5-8 | Locking Jaw (Enhanced Strength, Limited to Grapples) |
| | 9-12 | Hardened Teeth (Matter-Eater) |
| | 13-16 | Sharp Teeth (Strike) |
| | 17-18 | No Teeth (Acid) |
| | 19-20 | Additional Mouth |
| 20 | | *Other* |

## APPENDAGE TRAITS

| D20 | | APPENDAGE TRAITS |
|---|---|---|
| 1-6 | | *Arm s* |
| | 1-4 | Oversized Arms (Enhanced Strength, Noticeable) |
| | 5-8 | Additional Arm(s) (Additional Limbs) |
| | 9-12 | Clubbed Hands (Disability, no digits) |
| | 13-16 | Tentacles (Additional Limbs) |
| | 17-20 | Triple-Jointed Arms (Feature (*Ultimate Power*, page 50), +5 to escape holds and on Escape Artist rolls) |
| 7-12 | | *Tail* |
| | 1-5 | Prehensile (Additional Limbs) |
| | 6-10 | Club (Additional Limb, Mighty Strike) |
| | 11-15 | Stinger (Additional Limb, Drain [Poison]) |
| | 16-20 | Multiple Tails (Additional Limbs) |
| 13-16 | | *Tongue* |
| | 1-5 | Prehensile Tongue (Additional Limb, Elongation [Limited to tongue]) |
| | 6-10 | Sensing Tongue (Super-Senses [ranged taste, tracking]) |
| | 11-15 | Oversized Taste Buds (Super-Senses [acute taste], Disability, slurred speech) |
| | 16-20 | Tentacles (Additional Limbs) |
| 17-19 | | *Legs* |
| | 1-4 | Small Legs (Disability, Move at Half Speed) |
| | 5-8 | Long Legs (Speed) |
| | 9-12 | Extra Legs (Additional Limbs, Distracting) |
| | 13-16 | Triple-Jointed Legs (Feature (*Ultimate Power*, page 50), +5 to escape holds and to Escape Artist rolls) |
| | 17-20 | Prehensile Feet (Additional Limbs) |
| 20 | | *Other* |

## FANTASTIC TRAITS

| D20 | | FANTASTIC TRAITS |
|---|---|---|
| 1-4 | | *Undead* |
| | 1-4 | Ghostly (Insubstantial, Fearsome Presence) |
| | 5-8 | Vampiric (Drain Constitution) |
| | 9-12 | Draining Touch (Drain Wisdom) |
| | 13-16 | Shadowy (Blending, Fearsome Presence) |
| | 17-20 | Undead Appearance (Fearsome Presence) |
| 5-13 | | *Mythological* |
| | 1-3 | Unicorn Horn (Healing) |
| | 4-6 | Fire-Breathing (Blast) |
| | 7-9 | Centaur (Additional Limbs 2, Speed) |
| | 10-12 | Bat Wings (Flight 1, Power Loss if wings are restricted) |
| | 13-15 | One Eye (Disability, no depth perception) |
| | 16-18 | Extra Head (Enhanced Int, Wis, Cha) |
| | 19-20 | Goat/Stag Legs |
| 14-19 | | *Fairy Tale* |
| | 1-4 | Extremely Long Hair (Feature: Durable Hair (+10 to Climb or Grapple) |
| | 5-8 | Fey Size (tiny size) |
| | 9-12 | Troll-Like (large size, Regeneration, Weakness to Daylight) |
| | 13-15 | Fey Wings (Flight 1, Power Loss if wings are restricted) |
| | 16-20 | Talking Animal |
| 20 | | *Other* |

## ANIMAL TRAITS

| D20 | | ANIMAL TRAITS |
|---|---|---|
| *1-2* | | *Insect Trait* |
| | 1-4 | Antennae (Super-Senses [danger sense, direction sense, distance sense]) |
| | 5-8 | Insect Wings (Flight 1, Power Loss if wings are restricted) |
| | 9-12 | Pincers (Mighty Strike) |
| | 13-16 | Chitin Shell (Protection) |
| | 17-20 | Stinger (Drain [Poison]) |
| *3-5* | | *Reptile Trait* |
| | 1-3 | Scaly Skin (Protection) |
| | 4-8 | Reptilian Body (Protection, Strike [bite]) |
| | 9-12 | Cold-Blooded (Weakness to cold) |
| | 13-15 | Natural Camouflage (Blending) |
| | 16-18 | Spitting Venom (Drain [Poison]) |
| | 19-20 | Snake Body (Super Movement [slithering]) |
| 6-9 | | *Mammalian Trait* |
| | 1-5 | Fur (Feature (*Ultimate Power*, page 50) [insulating fur]) |
| | 6-9 | Claws/Fangs (Mighty Strike) |
| | 10-12 | Massive (Large Size) |
| | 13-15 | Quills (Blast [*Alternate Power:* Strike]) |
| | 16-17 | Pouch (Feature (*Ultimate Power*, page 50) [internal compartment]) |
| | 18 | Hooves (Mighty Strike) |
| | 19 | Mane (Features [insulating fur]) |
| | 20 | Blowhole (Immunity [drowning, pressure], Limited to half effect) |
| *10-13* | | *Avian Trait* |
| | 1-5 | Talons (Mighty Strike) |
| | 6-12 | Wings (Flight 2, Power Loss if wings are restricted) |
| | 13-15 | Beak (Strike) |
| | 16-18 | Feathers (Feature [insulating feathers]) |
| | 19-20 | Hollow-Boned (+8 on Acrobatics rolls and Leaping 1, Vulnerability to bludgeoning damage) |
| *14-16* | | *Amphibian Trait* |
| | 1-4 | Frog Legs (Leaping) |
| | 5-8 | Turtle Shell (Protection [Impervious]) |
| | 9-12 | Water-Breather (Immunity [drowning]) |
| | 13-16 | Snapping Jaw (Strike) |
| | 17-20 | Flippers (Swim 1, land move halved) |
| *17-18* | | *Fish/Crustacean Trait* |
| | 1-3 | Flippers and Fins (Swim 2) |
| | 4-6 | Fish Eyes (Super-Senses (radius [Vision])) |
| | 7-8 | Gills (Immunity [drowning]) |
| | 9-10 | Mer-being (Swim 2, Weakness [dehydration; must immerse in water regularly]) |
| | 11-12 | Shark Teeth (Strike [Penetrating]) |
| | 13-15 | Claws (Mighty Strike) |
| | 16-18 | Chitin Shell (Protection) |
| | 19-20 | Fish Appearance |
| 19 | | *Arachnid* |
| | 1-5 | Spider-Limbs (Super-Movement [wall-crawling]) |
| | 6-7 | Web Spinning (Snare) |
| | 8-11 | Extra Legs (Additional Limbs) |
| | 12-14 | Venomous Mandibles (Drain [Poison]) |
| | 15-17 | Scorpion Tail (Additional Limb [tail], Drain [Poison) |
| | 18 | Pincers (Strike) |
| | 19-20 | Multiple Eyes (Super-Senses (radius [Vision])) |
| 20 | | *Other* |

## DEUCE — NEW POWER

| | |
|---|---|
| **Effect:** Varies (see description) | **Action:** Varies (see description) |
| **Range:** Varies (see description) | **Duration:** Varies (see description) |
| **Cost:** 1 point | **Saving Throw:** N/A (usually) |

You have a minor, but useful, power. As a general guideline, your Deuce is either normal range, requires a standard action to use, and has a duration of instant or concentration, or else is personal range, requires a free action to use, and is sustained or permanent in duration. If a saving throw is appropriate for your Deuce, it has a save DC modifier of +1. You can modify these qualities with the Gamemaster's permission, although the GM may require you to use power modifiers to do so (treating the Deuce as a rank 1 power).

You define exactly what your Deuce can do, but it cannot be more than a single power point in an existing power can reasonably accomplish, although it can be less. So, for example, you might have the ability to turn your skin and clothing different primary colors, useful mainly as a bonus to Perform checks, but you couldn't have a Deuce giving you a bonus to all disguise checks by totally altering your appearance, as that's the equivalent of 1 rank of Morph at 2 points per rank (exceeding the limit of a 1-point ability).

Some sample Deuces include:

- Cause raw food to cook (at its normal rate) just by looking at it. Alternately, this might be the ability to heat up cookware—but not other objects—by sight or touch.
- Telekinetically move up to an ounce of weight. On the upside, the effect is Subtle.
- Levitate an inch off the ground. You can't move laterally; you just levitate up an inch and stay there as long as you concentrate. If you fall, you can use your power to break the fall, however, stopping an inch above the ground.
- Function like a living remote control for devices with infrared remotes, like televisions and stereos, changing channels and turning them on or off at will.
- Produce a flame like a candle or lighter from your fingertip at will.
- Permanently change the color of cloth with dye in it by touch.
- Know the exact weight of anything just by looking at it or touching it.
- Cause written materials to "read themselves" out loud in a disembodied voice, so long as you can see (but not necessarily read) where the words are written.
- Telekinetically control small, random events like coin flips or dice rolls, causing them to land however you want. (Just watch out for the hired aces at casinos.)

The possible range of Deuce abilities is limited solely by the Gamemaster and the previous guidelines. As with all other powers, choose appropriate descriptors for your Deuce; in a *Wild Cards* series, a Deuce will be biological or psionic, just like other ace abilities.

game information. Roll once on the **Joker Trait Category** table and then on the indicated sub-tables to determine each trait.

Some traits are followed by suggested powers, modifiers, and drawbacks—some, all, or none of which you can give to your joker character. Apply ranks to powers, and point values to drawbacks as they specifically manifest for the character, based on available power points, series power level limits, and so forth. Joker traits without listed game information may still qualify as complications under the right circumstances.

# DEUCE CHARACTERS

One of the more unusual character choices for a *Wild Cards* game is the deuce: a wild carder with minor, even useless-seeming, powers. Not all "aces" have tremendous abilities, after all; the wild card lives up to its name, and some transformed by it get the short end of the powers stick. At least they can be grateful for not ending up as jokers.

While on the surface it might seem deuces are good for nothing but comic relief with their relatively weak powers, they can actually be interesting characters. A deuce, after all, spends fewer points on powers, and so has them to spend elsewhere, on things like skills and feats. Many deuce powers are still useful enough to make someone wealthy or famous, for example.

## DEUCE POWERS

Deuces by definition don't have much in the way of powers. A deuce character is limited to spending no more than *2 power points* on powers! This is sufficient to acquire a rank or two in many existing powers described in **Chapter 5** of *M&M* (or in *Ultimate Power*) but deuces most often just spend 1 point on the Deuce power (see its description in the sidebar).

# NAT CHARACTERS

Of course, there's nothing requiring you to play a wild carder. The books also features some capable nat protagonists, such as Yeoman, to inspire potential uninfected human characters. Since they should be created with the same power level and starting power points as wild carders, nat characters can be *quite* effective. They can spend points on skills, feats, saves, and combat abilities that aces spend on powers.

*Mutants & Masterminds* suggests a benchmark of 24-25 as the peak of human achievement, and it's recommended that a *Wild Cards* series stick to this in terms of nat characters, keeping in mind that such a lofty level of ability makes the character among the most capable humans *ever.* More likely, nat characters will tend to have ability scores no greater than 18-20 or so (which are still extraordinary), relying as much, if not more, on their ranks in skills than the underlying abilities.

Likewise, the wide range of feats is open and available to nat characters, with just a few exceptions. GMs may wish to limit feats that touch upon the superhuman, like Environmental Adaptation or Quick Change. Still, a nat character can have an impressive number of feats, ranging from combat to skill and interaction enhancers. *Wild Cards* GMs may wish to consider some of the optional additional feats from the *Mastermind's Manual* as options for nat characters, although the feat list from the *M&M* rulebook should be more than sufficient.

Nats also can, and likely will, take full advantage of being able to carry whatever equipment they can acquire or afford to help even the odds when dealing with wild carders. See **Devices and Equipment**, following, for details.

# ALIEN CHARACTERS

Sentient alien life does exist in the *Wild Cards* universe; indeed, without it there would be no wild card virus at all. However, aliens on Earth are relatively rare (other than during the Swarm invasion, that is), so it's left up to the Gamemaster whether or not to allow extraterrestrials as player characters in a *Wild Cards* game. If he's inclined to allow alien characters, some possibilities include:

## TAKISIAN

Dr. Tachyon, his cousin Zabb, and his bodyguard Durgh are the only Takisians known to have landed on Earth (alive, anyway). However, Tachyon lived on Earth for over 40 years, a good portion of which he spent as a down-and-out drunk. He fathered at least one illegitimate child (his daughter, Gisele Bacourt) and, if his grandson, Blaise, is any indication, the Ilkazam genes breed true: any other children may have inherited his Takisian mental powers. There's also the possibility someone secured genetic samples from Dr. Tachyon (particularly during his exile from the United States) and used them to artificially produce a Takisian-human crossbreed or even clone!

Similarly, Tachyon's psychotic grandson was fairly indiscriminate and sexually active in the late 1980s; a child fathered by him would be a teenager in 2007, and could have inherited Blaise's Takisian powers (and perhaps his psychotic tendencies or even jumper abilities).

Then there's the crew of the Takisian vessel that brought the wild card virus to Earth. Although they're all dismissed as dead in the crash after fighting Dr. Tachyon in Earth orbit, there's the possibility of a crippled, perhaps amnesiac, survivor or of "alien autopsies" performed on the remains, secretly recovered by someone. Sufficient genetic material could lead to a Takisian-human crossbreed or clone, as mentioned previously.

Finally, if you want a true Takisian character in the game, Tisianne brant Ts'ara sek Halima sek Omian sek Ragnar *is* ruler of House Ilkazam, and might wish to renew ties with Earth after settling some matters on his homeworld. Takis might well send an emissary to see how Earth is faring and, knowing humans as he does (and that the Network has Earth and Takis under observation), Dr. Tachyon might well send a *covert* emissary to size up the situation first.

## NETWORK

The Network offers considerable potential for diverse alien characters, but also has a significant catch (as all deals with the Network do): any extraterrestrial from the Network on Earth is either there on assignment (like Jhubben; see his bio in **Chapter 4**) or on the run after breaking a contract, which means the Network will follow and *never* give up. Either option presents serious complications for a *Wild Cards* game.

If the GM wants to allow a Network alien as a character, however, it's most likely to try passing itself off as a joker (as Jube the Walrus does). It may have access to some advanced alien technology, depending on the circumstances of its arrival and stay on Earth. See the descriptions of the various members of the Network in **Chapter 3** for some ideas.

## SWARMLING

An unusual concept for an alien *Wild Cards* character would be one of the various third-generation Swarmlings left over from the Swarm Invasion. These alien creations of the Swarm Mother were designed to mimic humans, and some of them could still be hidden among the masses of humanity. Who knows how the merger of the Swarm Mother and Mai Minh affected the telepathic Swarm? It's not inconceivable for a third-gen Swarmling to develop independence, human feelings, even a conscience. Such a character might pretend to be an ace, and work against the plans of other secret Swarmlings, or could be following deeply-buried unconscious drives to infiltrate, not even knowing it will eventually betray friends and loved ones to help the remaining Swarm conquer the world.

See the description of the Swarm in **Chapter 3** for details and templates for a Swarmling character. Biological engineering and specialization (especially coupled with the dissection of wild carder subjects) can justify nearly any powers the GM is willing to allow.

## OTHER

It's a big universe, and the books have only scratched the surface of what might be out there. If he want, the GM can allow players to dream up entirely new alien species to visit Earth, ones not associated with either the Network or the Takisians, but potentially drawn by both civilizations' interest in this otherwise unassuming backwater world. Decades after the release of the wild card, word may have spread about the results of the Takisians' ill-fated experiment, leading others to come and take a look for themselves, or perhaps even try to "sample the goods." As with other visitors from beyond, new aliens may try posing as aces or jokers on Earth. After all, who's going to notice one more weird-looking freak in Jokertown?

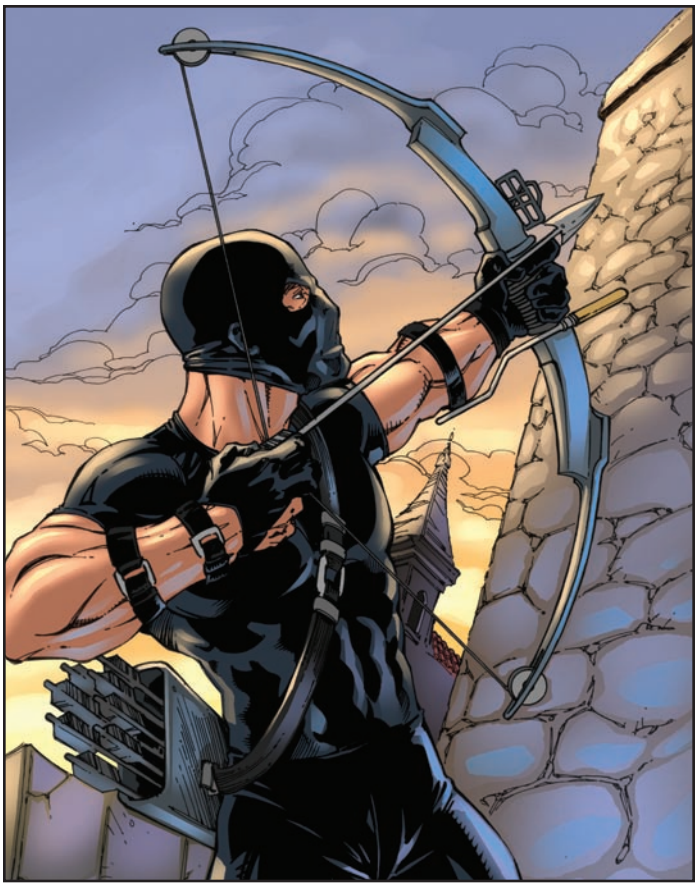
Players and Gamemasters are left to their own devices when it comes to making up entirely new alien species. You can always borrow from existing *M&M* and *M&M Superlink* sources, adapting as needed to fit them into the greater *Wild Cards* setting. The Grue and the Lor from *Freedom City* could potentially fit in, perhaps as more distant empires with an uneasy peace with the Master Traders of the Network.

# DEVICES AND EQUIPMENT

The standard *M&M* rules draw a division between equipment—items of fairly mundane technology—and devices—which produce effects beyond the capabilities of real-world equipment. Characters pay power points for both, with equipment coming at a greater discount due to its various limitations. This structure is based on the four-color superhero comics, where even mundane equipment is fairly important, part of the character's "signature" style and capabilities.

In the more realistic *Wild Cards* setting, the following variant is recommended, and used in the game stats presented in this book: characters pay *no* power points for mundane equipment, and can have any equipment the GM feels fits their available resources. Ranks in the Benefit (wealth) feat may be required to reasonably own some items, and equipment is still subject to all the limitations described on page 134 of *M&M,* but it doesn't cost *any* equipment points to, for example, carry a gun or have a cell phone or even a mundane vehicle like a car or motorcycle. *Wild Cards* characters tend to have a fairly casual attitude when it comes to equipment: going through a fair amount of it, as the situation demands. This approach also gives a bit more of an edge to nat characters, as they can carry appropriate gear without having to invest points in the Equipment feat.

The Equipment feat is still required for certain things, namely vehicles and headquarters with capabilities beyond those of ordinary technology. Dr. Tachyon's living starship, *Baby*, for example, is a "vehicle," but certainly beyond anything found on Earth, so the good doctor has the



Equipment feat in order to reflect access to *Baby* and her capabilities (although it's worth noting Tachyon *didn't* have the feat, or access to *Baby*, for most of his time on Earth; the missing ship was simply a plot device and element of his background). Similarly, advanced alien equipment from civilizations like the Network or Takis cost equipment points, as it is not commonly available on Earth. The GM may waive this requirement in a star-spanning series where alien technology is commonplace, but this is generally not the case in a *Wild Cards* series.

Devices remain relatively unique items with powers and abilities beyond those of mundane technology. Most devices in *Wild Cards* are products of ace abilities, and many of them depend on their creator's powers in order to function at all. A few advanced devices are actual technological innovations created by genius aces, but even these have their limits, as often only their creators understand how they work, and they may not be able to explain their advances to others lacking their special superhuman insight. Given this, the default assumption in *Wild Cards* is devices are usable *solely* by their owner, as if they had two ranks in the Restricted power feat. Characters can acquire a "Loanable" power feat, permitting others to use their devices (see the sidebar).

In either case, these devices work according to the rules in *M&M,* with their wild card origins serving as part of their descriptors. The GM should work with you to define the nature of any devices your character may have, and use common sense when dealing with those devices in play in terms of who can use them, repair or reproduce them, and so forth.

# RULES OPTIONS

While, generally speaking, the *Mutants & Masterminds* game rules do a good job of handling play in the *Wild Cards* setting, there are some specific aspects of the setting and books where a few modifications to the rules make for a better play experience. *Wild Cards* Gamemasters should look over this section and decide which, if any, of these modifications to put into play in their own series. Each option outlines the implications and effects of the modification.

Note these options are in addition to any of the variations described elsewhere in this chapter. For example, *Wild Cards* assumes mundane equipment is freely available to characters as their resources permit, and the character write-ups in this book reflect that fact (see **Devices and Equipment**). Most of the modifications in this section affect the *outcome* of certain things in the game, without changing the actual game traits or values, so that information works equally well regardless of which of these options you choose to implement in your own series.

You can find many more rules options in the *Mastermind's Manual* sourcebook for *M&M*. Some additional options from that book are mentioned in the following sections, as appropriate. Consult the *Mastermind's Manual* for details.

# DEADLIER COMBAT

*Wild Cards* is a fairly realistic treatment of people with superpowers (once you get past the "people with superpowers" part, anyway). One of the harshest realities is people are relatively fragile creatures, especially compared to their comic book counterparts. Therefore this section looks at some ways to make combat and damage in *Mutants & Masterminds* deadlier to match the unforgiving nature of being hit by someone who can bench-press a bus, for example (to say nothing of being skewered with a laser beam or the like).

The default option assumed for this setting is most superpowered attacks inflict lethal damage rather than attacks being non-lethal by default (*M&M,* page 163). This includes most Blasts and high (+5 or more) unarmed bonuses, along with weapons (manufactured and natural) and other damaging powers. While potentially lethal, this approach still grants characters a fair amount of "script immunity; " the important ones aren't going to be dying left and right even in a hail of gunfire (although the bit-players—like minions—certainly will). If you really want to ramp up the lethality, consider one or more of the following options, some of which first appeared in the *Mastermind's Manual.*

## DEVICE POWER FEAT: LOANABLE

Others can use your device the same way you can, assuming they can get a hold of it in the first place. This means the device's various effects reside in it and are independent of your own powers. If the device has any requirements, side effects, or the like, they affect the user, whomever that may be.

You can have both this power feat and the Restricted power feat (*M&M,* page 82), in which case others can use your device, but only a restricted group. You may have to grant permission, provide a passcode, or in some other way "unlock" the device for another's use, meaning you can loan it out, but don't generally have to worry about it being taken and used against you.

## AUTOMATIC DAMAGE

In this variant, any time a character must make a Toughness save against lethal damage, the character will suffer *some* damage. Essentially, even a *successful* Toughness save results in an injured result, with failure having its normal effects. This means the only way a character will suffer *no* damage from an attack is by having an Impervious defense and not having to make a Toughness save at all.

In this variation, it's possible to wear down even the toughest characters with small attacks, since every successful attack is a Toughness save modifier. So even a foe with Toughness +20 will accumulate enough penalties to badly fail a save eventually. Impervious Toughness becomes more valuable as a means of truly ignoring damage, and you may want to place limits on how much of a character's Toughness can be Impervious (see **Power Level and Traits**, previously).

## LIMITED INJURIES

*M&M* characters can theoretically take an unlimited number of injured conditions before they fail a Toughness save sufficiently to be disabled or dying (although practically the amount is limited to the point where the character will automatically fail the next save). Under this option, the number of injured conditions is more limited. How limited? That depends on how much punishment you want characters able to sustain.

A limit of 3-5 injured conditions limits all characters to a point where further damage "rolls over" to a disabled result. You can base the injured limit on an ability, such as Constitution modifier +1, but this tends to favor tougher characters, who already gain a benefit to their Toughness save bonus. In play, it may exaggerate the difference between tough and not-so-tough characters. Of course, if you *want* that kind of effect, it works well.

## BROAD INJURY MODIFIERS

The only effect of an injured condition in the standard rules is a cumulative –1 penalty to Toughness saves. Under this option, the effect is expanded to other saving throws, even to *all* other saves, so a character with three injured conditions, for example, suffers a –3 penalty to all saving throws. This can certainly be justified by the effects of pain and injury on body and mind: Fortitude saves are penalized by weakened physical integrity, Reflex saves are penalized by pain and slowness due to injury, and Will saves are penalized by pain and flagging determination due to injury.

For *very* broad injury modifiers, the –1 penalty per injured condition applies to all die rolls made by the character, actions and reactions, as pain and injury slow the character down.

## WOUNDED CONDITION

This option adds a more serious "wounded" condition, imposing penalties beyond just an increasing penalty to Toughness saves.

If a character fails a Toughness save against lethal damage by 5 or more, the character is stunned, suffers a bruised and injured condition, but also suffers a "wounded" condition, in between injured and disabled. A wounded character has a –2 penalty on all actions (but not reactions like saving throws). This penalty is cumulative with the broad injury modifiers (previously), if they are in use. If the character suffers another wounded condition, he becomes disabled (then dying, if wounded again while disabled).

Characters get a recovery check once per day for a wounded condition, just like being disabled. For simplicity, any Regeneration ranks applied to speeding up recovery from being disabled also applies to recovery from being wounded, although you can require a separate application of Regeneration ranks if you prefer (in which case you need to give most characters in this book with Regeneration additional ranks to compensate).

## OVERCOMING INJURY MODIFIERS

If the broad injury modifiers and/or wounded condition are in play, penalties can stack up fairly fast. As an option, you may allow characters to focus past the effects of pain and injury in order to act using Concentration. This requires a free action and a Concentration skill check. For each point the check exceeds DC 15, the character ignores 1 point of penalty due to pain or injury for that round. So a result of 19 on the Concentration check overcomes up to a –4 penalty for that round as the character grits his teeth and concentrates. A character can't take 10 or take 20 on the Concentration check to overcome injury modifiers.

## INSTANT DEATH

*M&M* provides no "instant death" option for important characters, only minions; other characters are left dying and *may* die, if they're not saved. If you want more serious consequences, you can include an instant death rule of some sort.

The first option is whenever a character fails a Toughness save against lethal damage by 20 or more (which is a fairly massive failure, or a massive amount of damage), that character isn't dying but dead, killed outright. Means of reviving dead characters still work, but normal medical assistance won't do the job, as the character isn't just dying.

Second, you can specify that *any* additional damage inflicted on a dying character immediately kills that character; normally, a dying character must suffer at least another disabled condition (or wounded condition, if that option is in use) to shift up to dead. This makes injuries more severe for dying characters and makes it easier to finish such characters off.

Lastly, you can specify that a successful coup de grace (*M&M,* page 162) that results in a failed Fortitude save, leaves the victim dead rather than dying. This means victims at an opponent's mercy really don't have much of a chance unless they're *really* tough.

## DOUBLE CRITICAL HITS

An attack roll of a natural 20 is normally a critical hit, increasing the attack's damage by +5. Optionally, when a critical hit is scored, make an additional d20 roll. If this second roll comes up a 20, then the target of the attack is immediately rendered unconscious or dying, depending on whether the attack is non-lethal or lethal. Alternately, a double critical hit can increase the attack's damage by +10, which often has the same result, but takes into account the greater Toughness of some targets. This option can apply to all damage (lethal and non-lethal) or just lethal damage, which has the potential for greater critical harm.

# POWER LEVEL AND ADVANCEMENT

*Wild Cards* characters often vary greatly in terms of their *M&M* power levels, as a quick glance through **Chapter 4** reveals. Similarly, characters don't necessarily advance or improve in the same linear way RPG characters do. Therefore, some Gamemasters may wish to modify the ways power level and power points work within the game.

## UNLIMITED POWER LEVEL

This variant is recommend only for fairly experienced groups interested in setting aside some of the limitations of the character creation system. You may choose to remove power level and all its associated restrictions from the campaign, allowing players to spend their power points in any way they wish (with your final approval). This allows for considerable freedom in character design, but may lead to unforseen problems in game balance or in some characters having major advantages over others in play, at least in certain situations. You should carefully monitor such free-form character creation (even more than usual) and players should be prepared to modify their character designs as needed to fit the your guidelines for the series.

## UNLIMITED POWER POINTS

This variant is recommend only for fairly experienced groups interested in setting aside some of the limitations of the character creation system. You set the power level for the series, with its limits on character traits. However, players are given an unlimited number of power points to create their characters within those limits. This provides considerable flexibility, of course, since some character concepts may be more or less expensive than others. It also has considerable potential for abuse, so you should review the players' characters carefully and discourage characters able to do everything in order to encourage teamwork and cooperation.

GMs using this variant should consider the **Drawbacks as Complications** variant from *Mutants & Masterminds* (page 127) since the bonus power points drawbacks normally provide have little use in this variation, giving drawbacks no effective value. This is particularly important for joker characters with various disabilities and such (see **Joker Drawbacks** in this chapter for details).

# ABILITIES

*Mutants & Masterminds* has a somewhat more free-form and comic book style treatment of abilities. Gamemasters looking for more detail or more realistic treatments of some ability scores can apply the following options.

## MANDATORY SUPER-STRENGTH

*Mutants & Masterminds* separates lifting and controlled applications of muscle power somewhat from the raw Strength score, allowing for a wide range of lifting capabilities within the narrower range of Strength bonuses allowed at a particular power level. This works fairly well for often inconsistent and less realistic four-color comics, but you may prefer a more direct correlation between Strength and Super-Strength in the more realistic setting of *Wild Cards*, in which case the following option can be used.

For each point of Strength bonus over +5 a character has, that character *must* also have 1 rank of the Super-Strength power. So a character with Strength 22 (a +6 bonus) must also have Super-Strength 1; Strength 24, Super-Strength 2; and so forth. Characters can have more than the required amount of Super-Strength, but must have at least that amount. Since Super-Strength costs 2 points per rank, this effectively doubles the cost of Strength past Strength 21 to 2 power points per point rather than 1.

This option tends to keep lifting and damage capabilities more in line with each other and gives super-strong aces the kind of grappling and crushing power they're expected to have.

## AGING AND ABILITIES

The *Wild Cards* books cover more than 60 years of alternate history, and generations of aces and jokers. While some characters in the series are effectively ageless, others are not. Ability scores do not remain constant over a character's lifetime. As characters age, they may undergo changes in their abilities, like reductions in physical abilities, but gains in mental abilities like Wisdom (one hopes, anyway).

Gamemasters who wish to reflect this can use the following guidelines. When a character is middle-aged, subtract 1 from all physical abilities and add 1 to all mental abilities. An old character subtracts 2 from all physical abilities and adds 1 to all mental abilities, and a venerable character subtracts 3 from all physical abilities and adds 1 to all mental abilities. Humans are middle-aged around 40, old around 60, and venerable around 70 or so. Other races may vary.

Characters with Immunity to Aging gain the benefits of age, but none of the penalties (so immortal characters tend to have higher than average mental abilities due to their considerable life experience). Note these benefits only apply for the time the character has been *in play*. When creating an nigh-immortal or aged character from scratch, spend power points of their abilities normally, but keep these modifiers in mind.

# SKILLS

The player option for Skill Challenges (following) particularly suits the more skill-based style of *Wild Cards,* especially for nat characters, who rely entirely on their various skills and feats. Other skill options from *Mastermind's Manual* that may suit a *Wild Cards* series include the expanded uses of the Computers skill, the Power Use skill, Narrow Skills (particularly for things like Knowledge), Extended Skill Use, and Skill Synergy. See **Chapter 3** of *Mastermind's Manual* for details.

## PLAYER OPTION: SKILL CHALLENGES

Skill challenges reflect an expert's ability to perform some tasks with superior grace and efficiency. They also allow you to attempt heroic feats otherwise impossible by making already difficult skill checks even harder. With some luck, skill, and effort, you can achieve amazing results. The challenge system makes skills a bit more useful for characters with incredible levels of ability, able to succeed at routine skill checks without any real effort.

A skill challenge allows you to increase a skill's Difficulty Class by 5 or suffer a –5 penalty to the check result. In return, you gain an extra benefit in addition to the normal effects of a successful skill check. If you fail due to the penalty or increased DC, however, you suffer the normal results. Note that if failing by more than a certain margin imposes a particular outcome, you suffer that outcome as normal if you fail to meet your newly increased Difficulty Class. For example, a character who misses a Disable Device check by 10 or more accidentally sets off the device. If the standard DC is 20 and your challenge increases it to 25, then you accidentally set off the device with a skill check result of 15 or less.

You can accept more than one challenge to a skill check. In some cases, you can take a single challenge more than once to gain its benefits multiple times. These are noted in the challenge descriptions.

Generally, skill challenges allow you to gain added benefits when you face a relatively low Difficulty Class and have a high skill modifier. You can also use skill challenges to attempt heroic actions, even when faced with a high Difficulty Class. In these cases, spending a hero point can help ensure success with all the added benefits of the successful challenge.

## STANDARD CHALLENGES

The challenges in this section apply to any skill check. The GM has final say whether a challenge applies to a specific situation. Each challenge imposes either a +5 modifier to a check's DC or a –5 penalty to the check result.

- ***Fast Completion:*** You reduce the time needed to complete the skill check. If the check is normally a full-round action, it becomes a standard action. A standard action becomes a move action, while a move action becomes a free action. For checks requiring time in rounds, minutes, or longer, reduce the time needed to complete the check by 25 percent per challenge. You cannot make a skill check as a free action via challenges if it normally requires a standard action or longer to complete.
- ***Risky Prospect:*** You can take a calculated risk on one action to make a follow-up action easier to accomplish. For example, you could use Disable Device to overcome an initial safeguard to make disarming the whole trap easier. If you succeed at this skill challenge, you gain a bonus on the second check equal to the total penalty you accepted on the first. The two checks must be related and the first, penalized, check must carry some consequence for failure (that is, it cannot be a check where you can take 20).
- ***Simultaneous Action:*** You can actually use a skill while performing other tasks. To attempt simultaneous checks, make the skill challenge check, followed by a second skill check using the same or a different skill. Your secondary check suffers a –10 penalty or a +10 increase in Difficulty Class. The combined skill use requires the same time as the longest normal skill use, so if both skills require a standard action, you accomplish the simultaneous use in one standard action rather than two.

## ACROBATICS CHALLENGES

- ***Accelerated Acrobatics:*** You can try to cross a precarious surface faster than normal. If you increase the Difficulty Class by 5, you can move your full speed as a move action. Moving twice your speed in a round requires the penalty plus two skill checks, one for each move action. You can also accept this penalty to charge across a precarious surface; this requires one skill check per multiple of your speed (or fraction thereof) that you charge.
- ***Perfect Balance:*** In return for increasing the Difficulty Class by 5, you move with such grace and agility that you maintain your dodge bonus to defense while balancing.
- ***Perilous Balance:*** You can shake or disturb the surface on which you are balancing (*e.g.*, swaying on a tightrope). If your check succeeds after increasing the Difficulty Class by 5, you keep your balance and impose a +5 modifier on the Difficulty Classes of all Acrobatics checks others must make on the surface until the next round.

## BLUFF CHALLENGES

- ***Conversational Paralysis:*** In return for a –5 penalty to your Bluff check, a successful check dazes your target for 1 round. Your claims are so strange or outlandish that the target can do nothing but sputter or reel in confusion. This skill challenge does not work in combat situations (for that see the **Distract** feat on page 60 of *M&M*). Each additional –5 check penalty you accept increases the duration of the effect by 1 round.
- ***Durable Lie:*** In return for a –5 penalty on your check, your target believes your bluff longer than usual, an additional round. You can apply another –5 penalty to extend this to 2 rounds. This skill challenge does not work with the feint use of Bluff.

## CLIMB CHALLENGES

- ***Accelerated Climbing:*** You can try to climb more quickly than normal. By accepting a +5 DC modifier to your check, you can move half your speed instead of one-quarter your speed while climbing. You can accept this challenge twice, for a total DC modifier of +10, to move at your normal speed while climbing.
- ***Fighting Climb:*** You can accept a +5 DC modifier to a Climb check to maintain your dodge bonus to defense while climbing.
- ***Secured Climb:*** If you take a +5 DC modifier to your Climb check, you do not have to make a Climb check to maintain your position if you take damage. You climb in such a way as to brace yourself for any attacks.

## CRAFT CHALLENGES

- ***Fast Work:*** You may add +5 or +10 to the indicated Difficulty Class to craft an item. This increase allows you to make the item faster than usual, reducing the time to half or one-quarter normal, respectively.

## DIPLOMACY CHALLENGES

- ***Combat Diplomacy:*** You can make a Diplomacy check in combat as a full-round action by accepting a +10 modifier to the Difficulty Class. Opponents in combat with you are considered hostile. An unfriendly opponent doesn't attack you unless you give him reason to do so. Indifferent foes stop fighting altogether, while a helpful one actually joins your side, even turning against former allies.

## DISABLE DEVICE CHALLENGES

- ***Hide Tampering:*** If you add +5 to your Difficulty Class, you can conceal any tampering with a device. Anyone who inspects the device must make a check against your Disable Device check result to notice your tampering. On a failed check, it goes unnoticed.

## DISGUISE CHALLENGES

- ***Face in the Crowd:*** With a –5 penalty to your check result, you can craft a disguise that is less likely to draw attention. Only people who specifically single you out and try to notice your deception receive Notice checks to do so. Guards and other passive observers take no special notice of you unless you draw attention to yourself or interact directly with them.
- ***Quick Change:*** You can adopt a disguise as a full-round action by taking a –5 penalty to your check. However, anyone who comes within 1 visual range increment of you (usually 10 feet) automatically sees through your disguise due to its hurried and makeshift nature.

## ESCAPE ARTIST CHALLENGES

- ***Conceal Efforts:*** In exchange for a +5 to the DC, you can conceal your efforts to escape. Anyone who inspects your bindings must make a Notice check with a Difficulty Class equal to your Escape Artist check result. If the Notice check fails, they do not notice your efforts to escape. So, for example, you could leave your bonds apparently in place so a villain doesn't realize you're actually free.

## GATHER INFORMATION CHALLENGES

- ***Discretion:*** While seeking out news and information, you keep a low profile. You increase your Gather Information check DC by +5, but you avoid leaving any clues about the information you seek. If your check fails, you may be detected as normal, but you still avoid spreading clues about what you seek.

## INTIMIDATE CHALLENGES

- ***Mass Intimidation:*** You can attempt to intimidate more than one subject at a time. You suffer a –2 penalty to your check per opponent beyond the first.
- ***Power Intimidate:*** In return for a –5 penalty to your Intimidate check, you can increase the penalty you inflict for demoralizing a foe by –1 or force your subject to take an action that is against his interests (but not life-threatening). You can take this challenge multiple times to increase the demoralize penalty. However, you can't use Intimidate to force someone to accept a life-threatening order.

## NOTICE CHALLENGES

- ***Accurate:*** In return for a –5 penalty to your Notice check, you can treat a normally inaccurate sense (such as hearing) as accurate for 1 round. A successful check tells you the exact spot a subject occupies. A failed check means you don't notice anything.

## SENSE MOTIVE CHALLENGES

- ***Combat Clarity:*** For a –5 penalty to your skill check, you increase the bonuses provided by the combat sense use of Sense Motive by +1. You can take this challenge up to twice on a single check. The penalties you suffer for a failed check do not increase.
- ***Read Situation:*** For every +5 by which you increase the DC of your Sense Motive check, you learn one fact about the situation at hand when evaluating a situation (see **Sense Motive**, *M&M* page 54). The GM may tell you things like someone's apparent goal(s), the nature of an interaction, and so forth.

## SLEIGHT OF HAND CHALLENGES

- ***Quicker Than The Eye:*** In melee combat, you can make a Sleight of Hand check as a move action to slip past an opponent's defenses. Your foe opposes this check with a Notice or attack bonus check. If you succeed, your opponent loses his dodge bonus against your next attack. If you fail, you suffer a –2 penalty to attack rolls for the next round.

## STEALTH CHALLENGES

- ***Fast Move:*** You can move up to your normal speed in exchange for a –5 penalty to your Stealth check. In return for a –20 penalty to your check, you can move faster than your normal speed, such as by running or charging.
- ***Moving Between Cover:*** You can make a Stealth check at a penalty to quickly cross an area lacking cover or concealment without automatically revealing yourself.

  For every five feet of open space you cross, you take a –5 penalty to your Stealth check. You also take the normal Stealth penalties for moving faster than half your normal speed and such. So you can slip past a five-foot open doorway without being seen, for example, or duck from shadow to shadow.

  Characters with the Hide in Plain Sight feat don't need cover or concealment to hide, so these rules do not apply to them. The same is true for characters with the Concealment power, since they're capable of making their own concealment to hide.
- ***Vanishing:*** Stealthy characters in the comics regularly "disappear" when no one is watching them. This is essentially a use of Stealth to hide when the character has concealment or a distraction (no one looking directly at him, essentially). It requires a Stealth check with a –5 penalty, and the character must be within a normal move action of an exit, or some cover or concealment (a window, skylight, ventilation duct, *etc.*). A successful check means the character seems to disappear; an observer turns around only to discover that he is

## CHALLENGES AS FEATS

Optionally, the GM may wish to allow characters to spend 1 power point to acquire any listed skill challenge as a feat. This allows the character to use that challenge at any time without a skill check penalty or increase in Difficulty Class.

For example, Raven takes the Perfect Balance challenge as a feat, paying 1 power point for it, as usual. Now Raven maintains her dodge bonus to defense while balancing at all times, with no increase in the Difficulty Class of her Acrobatics checks.

Standard challenges acquired as feats apply to only *one* skill, chosen when the feat is acquired. So you could, for example, take the Fast Completion challenge as a feat for a single skill, such as Bluff.

For challenges you can take multiple times, the GM may allow a ranked feat that works in the same way. However, beware of such feats providing too much of a routine bonus; keep in mind that even with a skill challenge feat, the character must first succeed on the necessary skill check to gain the bonus.

If skill challenges are available as feats, then players can also spend hero points to acquire them temporarily for their characters. In essence, a player can choose to spend a hero point to allow a character to perform one particular skill challenge without a check penalty or DC increase. You may choose to allow this hero point spending option even if skill challenges are not available as feats, just as a new feature of hero points, if you wish.

gone. Characters can use Bluff or Intimidate to gain the momentary distraction needed to vanish in this way.

### SWIM CHALLENGES

- ***Accelerated Swim:*** For a +5 DC increase, you increase your swimming speed by one-quarter your normal speed. You can take this challenge up to three times to increase your swimming speed up to your normal speed. You suffer the normal effects of failing your Swim check.

## GRADED LANGUAGES

The default assumption of the Language skill is a character either speaks a language or does not; a rank in a language grants complete fluency (where this isn't the case, it's mentioned in notes in the character write-ups in **Chapter 4**).

Optionally, Language skills may be graded, with rank 1 in a language granting only poor fluency (simple words and phrases), rank 2 providing fair fluency, rank 3 good fluency, and rank 4 complete fluency, with no discernable accent. Characters begin with good fluency in their native language for free. For languages with different regional dialects, fluency is considered one level lower than fluency in the basic language. A language rank applied to a dialect eliminates this penalty.

Having less than good fluency with a language imposes penalties on a character's interaction skills, while total mastery of a language provides a bonus to interaction with native speakers of that language (essentially a synergy bonus). At your discretion, the language modifier may also apply to tasks involving reading material in a language, like technical instructions or research materials.

### GRADED LANGUAGES

| Fluency | Modifier |
|---|---|
| Poor | –8 (This includes a translator with good or fair fluency.) |
| Fair | –4 (This includes a translator with complete fluency.) |
| Good | +0 |
| Complete | +2 |

# FEATS

The proficiency feats option (following) suits the more realistic style of *Wild Cards*, where ordinary people aren't necessarily comfortable handling weapons or other complex skills without at least some prior training. Other feat options from the *Mastermind's Manual* suitable for a *Wild Cards* series include Fighting Styles (mentioned briefly in the *M&M* rulebook as well), the Challenge feat (see **Skill Challenges**, previously), and the various new and optional feats.

## PROFICIENCY

The standard *Mutants & Masterminds* rules assume characters know how to use their equipment within the limits of their skill ranks and bonuses. You may choose to include rules for *proficiency* to reflect characters' knowledge of particular aspects of more complex tasks like wielding weapons or operating vehicles. Characters acquire proficiency in different tasks through specialized feats (see the following). Characters who are not proficient in a particular task suffer a –4 penalty when performing it: either a –4 to attack rolls or to skill checks made with the non-proficient item. Proficient characters suffer no penalty.

Characters who aren't proficient with wearing armor suffer a penalty to attack and defense bonus equal to the armor's Protection bonus, since the character isn't used to fighting in confining armor. Proficient characters still suffer a skill check penalty from wearing armor, but no penalty to their attack or defense bonus.

# POWERS

In addition to the information on ace powers provided earlier in this chapter, the following optional power rules may be useful in a *Wild Cards* series.

The *Mastermind's Manual* and *Ultimate Power* both have many additional rules options for powers, along with more extensive power lists and information on custom-designing your own powers, useful for the kind of oddball abilities some wild carders have. The *Mastermind's Manual* has advice on more realistic power use and dealing with problematic and plot-stopping powers (pages 67-70). Other useful options include Unreliable Powers, Partial Countering, Energy Points (if you want to expand on the limitations of aces like Fortunato), Alternate Progressions (usually slower), Flight Maneuverability, and Power Surges.

## PARTIAL CONCENTRATION CHECKS

Normally a Concentration check to maintain a power is all-or-nothing: either the check succeeds or it fails. With this option, a Concentration check may *partially* succeed. For each point the check result exceeds DC 10, the character manages to maintain 1 rank of the power, up to its full rank (if the check result equals DC 10 + power rank). This makes it less likely for a character's power to completely fail.

## CONCENTRATING ON EXTRA EFFORT

Normally, extra effort requires no, well, effort to use. The player simply declares the character is using extra effort and the character automatically gains the bonus as well as suffering the fatigue (or spends a hero point to overcome the fatigue condition). Alternately, you may require players to make Concentration checks to allow their characters to use extra effort. The Difficulty Class of the Concentration check should be at least 15, with a successful check allowing a normal use of extra effort. A failed check means no extra effort but also no fatigue. The Concentration check itself is a reaction. This option not only encourages characters to develop Concentration but also reflects how important a hero's concentration is in some *Wild Cards* stories. This option makes extra effort a bit less dependable, so players may rely on it less. Characters cannot take 10 or take 20 on the Concentration check, since extra effort is by definition not a "routine" check.

## STAGED DRAIN EFFECTS

In the standard *M&M* rules, Drain effects are all-or-nothing: if the save succeeds, there's no effect, if it fails, the target suffers the full effect of the Drain. *Ultimate Power* introduces the option of staged Drain effects, which suits *Wild Cards* fairly well.

With this option, the effect of a Drain is equal to the Drain's rank or the amount by which the save against the drain failed, whichever is *less*. So a saving throw against a Drain that fails by only a narrow margin re-

sults in a lesser effect than a save that fails by a large amount, the same as with a Toughness saving throw. This makes some high rank Drains less outright effective (and, often, deadly) and rewards characters with effective saving throws. You can use this option (or not) with no change in the game traits for characters given in this book. The only difference is in how the actual effect is handled in play.

# ATTACKS OF OPPORTUNITY

The standard *M&M* combat rules assume combatants actively avoid attacks. A player doesn't have to declare anything special for his character to be on the defensive. Sometimes, however, a combatant lets his guard down, and doesn't maintain a defensive posture as usual. In this case, combatants near him can take advantage of this lapse in defense to attack for free. These attacks are called *attacks of opportunity*.

Attacks of opportunity add an element of complexity to combat not appropriate for all *Mutants & Masterminds* games. Therefore you must think about whether or not attacks of opportunity are allowed in your game. They add a realistic edge to combat but also tend to slow things down and make combatants more cautious. Attacks of opportunity are most appropriate for gritty or realistic campaign settings.

## WEAPON TYPE

A character can use a melee weapon to make attacks of opportunity whenever the conditions for such an attack are met (see **Provoking an Attack of Opportunity**). In addition, he can make attacks of opportunity with unarmed attacks if your unarmed attacks count as armed.

## THREATENED AREAS

A character threatens the squares into which he can make a melee attack, even when it is not his action. Generally, that's all squares adjacent to his position. An enemy taking certain actions in a threatened square provokes an attack of opportunity from the character. He can only make attacks of opportunity with melee attacks, never with ranged attacks.

## PROVOKING AN ATTACK OF OPPORTUNITY

Two actions provoke attacks of opportunity: moving out of a threatened square, and performing an action in a threatened square that lets the character's guard down.

- **Moving out of a Threatened Square:** When a character moves out of a threatened square, he generally provokes an attack of opportunity. There are two important exceptions, however. He doesn't provoke an attack of opportunity if only moving a five-foot step, or if he withdraws, moving directly away from all opponents threatening the area he's in. If the character doesn't start in a threatened square but moves into one, he has to stop there, or else provoke an attack of opportunity as he leaves that square.
- **Performing a Distracting Action:** Some actions performed in a threatened square provoke attacks of opportunity because they divert the character's attention from the fight. The following actions provoke attacks of opportunity:
- **Unarmed attacks:** Making an unarmed attack against an armed opponent provokes an attack of opportunity. If the character has the Improved Unarmed Strike feat, his unarmed attacks are considered armed.
- **Striking a weapon**
- **Using a skill or effect requiring a full action**
- **Manipulating objects:** Picking up, putting away, or retrieving an object provokes an attack of opportunity as does drawing, putting away, or reloading a weapon.
- **All-Out Move:** Moving all out draws an attack of opportunity if the character moves out of a threatened area (above).
- **Disarm:** Attempting to disarm an opponent provokes an attack of opportunity.
- **Grapple:** Grappling with an opponent—physically or mentally—provokes an attack of opportunity from any other opponent threatening the area the character is in.
- **Aim:** Aiming an attack provokes an attack of opportunity.

You can "fine tune" the use of attacks of opportunity in your campaign by varying the list of actions that provoke them. So, if you want to make certain effects less useful in combat, have them provoke attacks of opportunity when used. Then characters will be less inclined to use them (or will at least have to make Concentration checks to use them defensively).

## MAKING AN ATTACK OF OPPORTUNITY

An attack of opportunity is a single melee attack, and a character can only make one per round. He doesn't have to make an attack of opportunity if he doesn't want to.

# CREATING WILD CARDS ADVENTURES

Creating *M&M* adventures for *Wild Cards* is a bit different from the conventional comic book style adventures described in the *M&M* rulebook and presented in products like *Time of Vengeance* and other published source material. This section takes a look at the key differences and things to keep in mind when creating adventures for your *Wild Cards* series, using the adventure design material from **Chapter 9** of *M&M* as a starting point.

## ADVENTURE STRUCTURE

The typical narrative structure of a four-color *M&M* adventure is: heroes perceive a threat, face various setbacks and complications (perhaps including an initial defeat or two), then come back in the end to overcome the threat for the time being and protect the *status quo*. This is a fairly simple structure to build adventures around, and it works hand-in-hand with the way *M&M* awards hero points for facing complications, letting heroes build up points for the big finish where they overcome the threat.

This is not always the case with *Wild Cards* stories, which may sometimes take a more winding path. You may want to consider whether or not your adventure idea is best handled as a single-play-session game or a series of games leading up to the culmination of the story. In the latter case, you can treat each individual "chapter" of the story as a separate adventure, complete with rising action and hero point awards, but you may want to give the players additional hero points for the big finish when it comes at the end of a series of adventures, to help ensure a satisfactory ending—and to allow you to really ramp up the challenges the characters face!

## BOOK ONE, PAGE ONE

In your first *Wild Cards* adventure of a series, you need to do a few things, namely: introduce the characters and the setting, get the characters together as a group, and introduce them to a threat or challenge to provide the story with conflict and forward motion. Fortunately, many ideas allow you to do some or all of these things at once.

For example, in the *American Hero* series framework (earlier in this chapter), the reason for the characters working together is provided: they're all members of the same team competing on a reality show. Likewise, the challenge is provided by the context of the show, with the producers setting up challenges for the aces to overcome. Similarly, in the introductory adventure *Ante-Up* (in the following section), a wild card outbreak brings the characters together as new aces and jokers, and an immediate threat to the new wild carders encourages them to work together to deal with it. You can do similar things in your own series, considering ways of getting the players' characters together and encouraging them to stick together, at least long enough for the series to gel.

Some series frameworks can even start off with the characters already working together. For example, if they are all part of an agency of aces-for-hire, or working for a government organization, the series can kick-off with a cohesive (or semi-cohesive) team, and elements of the characters' backstories and how they came to be a team can be filled in later on. This is perhaps the easiest approach, although players may have to fill in some blanks in their character histories to make it all work smoothly.

A more complex approach to getting everyone together is the "threaded" story, wherein each character has a particular connection to the plot that connects all of them. One might have a friend who is in trouble, while a second is investigating the crime connected with the first one's friend, and a third has a vision of the first two characters dealing with a problem, and so on. It can be trickier pulling things together this way, because there are more opportunities for events to go astray but when it works it provides a more "organic" feel to the story.

## CHANGES OF PACE

If you're *not* planning your first *Wild Cards* adventure in a series, then take a moment to look over the adventures you have run thus far, looking for loose plot threads, story elements to follow up on in your upcoming plots. Also look for patterns: Have you run the same sort of adventures for a while? What kind of challenges routinely come up? Perhaps it's time for a change of pace by introducing a new sort of adventure, plot element, or challenge for the characters.

For example, if you've just done a lengthy series of adventures uncovering a widespread criminal conspiracy, filled with intrigue, betrayal, and double-dealing, perhaps for your next adventure consider something more light-hearted, like an evening charity event, or an exhibition baseball game with wild carders making up the teams. Put the characters on a float for the Wild Card Day parade, or on a boat to Vietnam or Australia to investigate something new that's come up there. It's a wide, wild world out there, so don't let your series fall into a rut.

By the same token, make sure your change of pace is still in keeping with the overall feel of your series, unless you're deliberately trying to break out of that mold. So, a low power level investigative series probably isn't going to jump right to a story that drops the characters in the middle of a brewing interstellar war on a distant alien planet, for example. It might feature an adventure where an alien scout involved in that distant conflict has a mission on Earth, however; one that can get the investigators involved when somebody starts asking questions about the unusual "joker criminal" active in the area.

## SUITABLE CHALLENGES

So, how do you challenge a group that includes a guy able to teleport away anything, a mind-reader, a shape-changer, someone able to fly near the speed of sound, and one guy (just one) who's bulletproof? It can be tricky setting out challenges for *Wild Cards* characters without being either overbearing or making things entirely too easy. Still, there are some things to keep in mind.

Power level is still a useful guideline, but not all characters will meet the power level limits of the series in all respects. You may want to take a character's *effective* power level into account when choosing a suitable challenge. For example, a complex lock might prove especially difficult if nobody in the group has the right level of skill, but on the other hand they could circumvent it entirely with the right power or combination of powers.

Four-color settings tend to equate "challenge" with "combat," but *Wild Cards* stories often focus more on investigation and intrigue. After all, if you know you're going to tick off people able to blow through walls and

## FIFTY-TWO PICK-UP: WILD CARDS ADVENTURE IDEAS

Stuck for an idea for a *Wild Cards* adventure? Along with re-reading the books for inspiration and consulting the various series frameworks in this chapter, you can take a quick look over this list of ideas to see if one sparks something:

1. A building or area is reputed to be haunted. Are the strange phenomena the result of wild card powers and, if so, is the "agent" knowingly causing them or doing so unconsciously? Perhaps there really is a ghost, someone who has become an incorporeal psionic entity after drawing a Black Queen!
2. Some clever Hollywood type approaches several wild carders with an idea for a new reality show based on their exploits. It can be anything from a series of contests to a "slice of life" about the day-to-day existence of wild cards. Is the show legit or a cover for something else?
3. A rash of violence towards jokers is actually being faked or carried out by jokers' rights activists looking to drum up sympathy and support for their cause.
4. A new ace is causing uncontrolled transformations among people in the area, ranging from psychological effects to outright physical mutations.
5. A cult springs up around a wild carder who resembles a mythological deity.
6. A U.S. or international space program recruits aces for a top-secret space exploration mission. Where are they going and why?
7. The characters become entangled in a conspiracy by third-generation Swarmlings to foment war on Earth, leading to a nuclear holocaust or germ-warfare outbreak.
8. A series of strange incidents, accidents, and deaths leads the characters to wonder if there's a new conspiracy against wild carders, or if perhaps the Card Sharks are not as dead and gone as people would like to think.
9. Victims are turning up dead and drained of blood, with small puncture wounds at their necks. A real vampire, a creation of the wild card, or something else?
10. A new ace vigilante is cutting a fearsome swath through urban crime in the area. The police are up in arms and want the vigilante brought in, but popular support seems to be on his side, for the moment.
11. Wealthy and powerful people are being replaced by their exact duplicates. Is it the work of a jumper (or jumpers) or perhaps another ace? Could the duplicates be aliens?
12. The turning of a new ace's card, or an accident involving an ace's powers, causes a massive blackout in the city, leading to all sorts of chaos and opportunities for action. Plus there's dealing with the cause of the blackout in the first place.
13. Terrorists kidnap the characters' loved ones in an attempt to force them to take part in a plan to attack a particular target.
14. A media personality (reporter, blogger, *etc.*) with a grudge against wild cards targets the characters with a smear campaign.
15. A new rock star turns out to have sonic-based mind-control powers. When the characters find out the truth, there's a great deal of money at stake. What will they do about it?
16. An imitative ace stages various "challenges" in order to see the characters in action close-up and thereby mimic their various traits.
17. The turn of a new joker creates a wild carder "monster" that rampages through the city, bringing all the local aces out to stop it.
18. An out-of-control ace with time-travel abilities causes time to "fold" strangely, dropping the characters into the middle of a series of the major events of *Wild Cards* history.
19. A vengeful joker has ace and nat characters kidnapped and mind-transferred or body-shaped into jokers, so they can experience life as hopeless freaks first-hand.
20. A neo-pagan ritual, a fateful time of the year, and a novice witch's latent ace abilities unleash creatures from the Dreamtime on the city one night.
21. An archeologist claims to have discovered ancient alien technology, perhaps even a buried spaceship, and various factions want to know more about it and claim it for themselves.
22. A character's powers start to mutate strangely or go out of control. Is it some sort of progression of the wild card virus or is something else causing it and, if so, is there a cure?
23. The wild cards are asked to participate in some sort of charity event —contest, fund-raiser, or what have you—but there are forces targeting the event and it may be more than it appears.
24. The characters follow up on reports and legends of a "Brigadoon"-like town that disappeared in the first months following the outbreak of the wild card, and discover a small Upstate New York town that vanishes and reappears every 10 years. To the locals, it has only been about a week since the first Wild Card Day!
25. Another story of "something down in the sewers" is making the rounds, but this time at least it seems there really *is* something down there. Is it a joker or, worse, could there be a strain of the wild card that affects animals?
26. A new ace has powers of incredible luck and good fortune, but only by inflicting terrible luck on everyone else for miles! Can the characters track down the source of this plague of bad luck and do something to stop it?
27. A wealthy, but terminally-ill, patron hires mercenaries to abduct one or more of the characters in hopes of finding a cure (which might well involve medical experimentation the "donor" won't survive).
28. A new crime lord begins consolidating power in the underworld, eliminating rivals, and attempting to co-opt wild carders into either aiding his rise to power or at least remain neutral.
29. A vial containing live cultures of the wild card virus has been stolen and is on the loose somewhere. The characters have to find it before it is opened or broken and there's a new outbreak in the area.
30. Someone or something is haunting the characters' dreams. Is it an ace with dream-projection (and control) powers or perhaps some sort of message from the Dreamtime? Can the wild cards unite in the dream-state to deal with the problem, or does it need to be tackled in the waking world, or both?
31. The characters wake up one morning to discover they're all nats, and that Wild Card Day never happened! In effect, they're normal people in our normal world. Were their previous lives just a dream or delusion, or is something else going on? Will former jokers want to go back to being what they were if it is?
32. A mind-controlling or body-jumping ace is committing crimes using other people as proxies and leaving them holding the bag. What if one of the victims is a close friend of one of the characters?
33. A group of Takisians kidnap the characters in order to study the effects of the "Enhancer virus" more closely... by vivisecting the subjects. Who are they and what Psi-Lord faction do they belong to?
34. A mysterious figure stalking the characters turns out to be one of them from years in the future! He or she claims to have come back in time via the powers of another ace in order to change history. Do the characters believe it and, if they do, do they help or try and prevent history from being changed?
35. Someone opens a new "in" place for aces to see and be seen, like Aces High in its heyday. There are threats from offended jokers and even snubbed aces not cool enough to get in. Is it just a social venue or is there something more to it?

36. A winning sports team is reliant on the powers of a secret ace using telekinesis, probability manipulation, or even bio-enhancement to help them win games. When someone finds out about it and goes to the characters for help, it all hits the fan.
37. Hitherto unknown aliens make contact, saying they want a peaceful alliance with Earth and are willing to share technology and information. Are they for real or cover for an existing species or civilization like the Swarm or the Network? Even if their offer is genuine, how will other nation-states on Earth or alien civilizations feel about it?
38. An ace mentalist is using her powers to cure people of psychological problems, not just limited to those diagnosed by the American Psychiatric Association but also things like atheism, homosexuality, promiscuity, excessive swearing, gambling, and so forth. The subjects are all willing, or so she says, so can anyone really object?
39. Wild carders are asked to investigate and offer assistance at the site of a new wild card outbreak, since they are immune to re-infection with the virus.
40. A characters' friend sells him or her out to criminal elements in order to pay off debts, feed an addiction, stave off blackmail, or the like.
41. A famous author (choose a real-world personality and give him or her an alternate *Wild Cards* bio) wants to interview the characters as research for an upcoming book. Is the book fact or fiction?
42. When an entire subway train disappears between point A and point B, a team of aces are asked to go down the dark tunnel to investigate what happened to it, which could be anything from "hijacked into another dimension" to "stolen by joker morlocks" or "trapped by wild card terrorists."
43. The new mayor (governor or even president) is an ace-up-the-sleeve nats find themselves compelled to obey. The hitch is his powers don't work on other wild carders, who have to be persuaded the old-fashioned way, or coerced with threats to their nat families and loved ones. When the characters discover the ace's secret, what will they do about it, especially when no nat will help or even believe them?
44. The characters are hired or assigned to bodyguard and babysit a famous (and beloved) young ace from a foreign country who is visiting, and looking for trouble, of course.
45. A latter-day Kid Dinosaur, some geeky young ace has the power to bring figures from his collectable card games (or video games or tabletop RPGs) to life, complete with their fictional powers. He wants to be a "hero" oh so much.
46. One of the characters is framed for a crime committed by a wild card with similar powers, perhaps even disguised as the character in some fashion. He must clear his name.
47. Rumors reach the group of a local Voodoo cult where "spirits" regularly possess people and where they can create real zombies from fresh corpses. Could these be manifestations of an ace's powers? How do the characters deal with a young "sidekick" who may well be more powerful than they are, with a tendency to get underfoot and into trouble? Moreover, what do the kid's parents or guardians think of him hanging out with a group of (presumably adult) aces who "endanger" him?
48. A "cursed" *object d'art* is making its way through a series of hands, with ill-luck befalling all those who possess it. There's evidence the item, which originally belonged to a victim of the first wild card outbreak, really is cursed in some way. Perhaps it even holds the mind or spirit of its former owner!
49. The characters are asked to help out as "guest camp counselors" at Camp Xavier Desmond (see **Chapter 3**) when something bad happens, like a crazed ace or joker coming to the camp looking for someone, and not much caring who gets hurt in the process.
50. One of the Living Gods of Egypt (or their proxies) brings the characters an urgent prophecy from Osiris concerning their role in the future. Do they ignore the warning or try to follow up on it. And is it genuine, or an attempt by the Living Gods to manipulate the wild carders?
51. The Masons are back... or are they? Rumors in the underworld abound about a resurgence of the secret fraternal order and say they are recruiting wild carders, but for what? And what about stories that some guy with a jackal's head is in charge?
52. Wild carders are disappearing, the only clue a tarot card left at the site of each abduction. The perpetrator is an ace able to "trap" victims in tarot cards, placing their image on the card and thereafter gaining the trapped victim's powers! Can the characters stop "Tarot" before he or she gets a full set of cards?

things like that, would you stick around to give them a shot at you? Aces often have to *find* the person or thing they're after before they can have a big showdown, like figuring out the conspiracy of the Masons, locating the Swarm Mother, or tracking down the Card Sharks and their supplies of the Black Trump. You may find a good conspiracy or cover-up provides more of a challenge than a straight-up fight.

Likewise, there are social challenges. Characters may find they need help, often from people they don't particularly like, who might not care for them, either. They need to negotiate, cut deals, and talk to the right individuals. Sometimes they're faced with compromising what they believe in, to one degree or another. How far are they willing to go to get what they want? A lot of ace powers won't help at all in this kind of situation.

Lastly, if you're concerned about being able to offer suitable challenges to certain characters due to their powers, consider requesting or requiring a power crutch of some sort (see **Ace Characters** in this chapter for details). An ace's power might be considerable, but if there's some reasonable way to neutralize it from time to time, it makes things a lot more manageable from a Gamemaster's perspective. It doesn't mean you have to lean on the power crutch too hard yourself, but it's good to have the option.

# JUST REWARDS

So, your wild carders have managed to save the day, forestall disaster, and deal with the various challenges placed in front of them. The adventure is over, at least until the next one arises, so how do you properly reward their efforts?

The default answer in *M&M* is with power points, which the players can then use to improve their characters in various ways. However, even at the rate of 1 power point awarded per adventure, some groups may find character improvement is too rapid for their tastes, others may run into issues with the limitations imposed by power level. On top of that, *Wild Cards* has some particular issues with character improvement other superpowered setting may not. You may wish to take the following into consideration when rewarding the characters' actions in an ongoing series.

## CHARACTER IMPROVEMENT

Character improvement in *M&M* is a fairly loose affair: spend earned power points on whatever you want, within the guidelines of the series power level and any restrictions imposed by you. In a *Wild Cards* series, the GM should consider those restrictions: Do characters need training

time or teachers to pick up additional ranks in skills? Are there limits on what feats they can have, or how much they can improve their ability scores, apart from those imposed by the power level? For example, you may wish to limit characters to ability scores of 24 or less, unless the character has the Enhanced Ability power, since *Wild Cards* tends to be a more realistic treatment of people and powers.

Similarly, consider the series power level: once characters meet its limits (which may happen as early as character creation), any additional power points they earn will tend to broaden their traits, rather than increase those already at their limits. Eventually, you may wish to raise power level and allow players to spend earned points improving their characters' limited traits like combat bonuses, damage, saving throws, and so forth. As *M&M* recommends, a power level bump every 15-20 earned power points is fairly reasonable, but you can stretch this out or compress it as you see fit. *Wild Cards* tends towards a slower increase in power level, as series characters don't increase their power all that rapidly, for the most part.

## POWER ADVANCEMENT

In four-color settings, heroes acquire or change powers from time to time: gaining a new wrinkle on their existing abilities, adding an entirely new power, or even changing powers altogether. Wild carders tend to stick with the powers they have, although they may change in some ways. Most often, power advancement for aces involves the addition of new Alternate Powers, usually power stunts becoming a permanent part of the ace's repertoire. Many find out their powers have unexpected facets or depths to them, and power stunts provide a way of expanding an ace's abilities without radically altering or improving them.

Similarly, wild card power advancement may involve eliminating certain flaws or drawbacks on a power, as the character practices and improves. The GM should consider this carefully, particularly in the case of power crutches (see **Ace Powers** in this chapter); some crutches are integral aspects of a power and can't be eliminated. They're just how the power works so far as the ace is concerned, and playing mind-games to try and get around the limit can mean messing with the ace's head enough so the power stops working *entirely!* A failed attempt to shed a power flaw or drawback can make an interesting complication for an adventure, where the power becomes intermittent or unpredictable until the ace resumes relying on the power's crutch.

## WEALTH AND RESOURCES

There are plenty of opportunities for wild carders to make fortunes using their powers, but just as many ways for them to go bust and lose everything if they're not careful. One advantage of the way equipment is handled in the *Wild Cards* setting is you can more easily hand out things like material resources as a reward, and also take them away over the course of an adventure, as with regular equipment. For example, at the end of *Double Solitaire,* Dr. Tachyon sends Jay Ackroyd and Mark Meadows back to Earth with a fortune in gems each; Ackroyd is able to use his newfound wealth to expand his detective agency, starting a whole new chapter in his life. Meadows, on the run from the law, ends up spending most of his or losing it in fairly short order.

Note that for a *permanent* increase in a character's style of living, some GMs may require 1 or more ranks in the Benefit feat (*M&M,* pages 59-60) to reflect the advantages provided by greater wealth, whether or not you're using the optional Wealth rating system from **Chapter 7** of *M&M* (pages 132-133). If using the Wealth system, the GM can grant awards in the form of direct increases to a character's Wealth score.

## FAME AND FORTUNE

Lastly, some of the greatest rewards wild carders earn from their exploits (apart from knowing they've made a difference at the end of the day) are notoriety and their connections with other people—nat, ace, or joker—able to help them out at some point in the future. "Powerful friends" takes on a whole new meaning in a world where people can lift buses, fly, and shoot flames from their hands, and plenty of wild carders in the stories benefit from having friends and allies to call upon in times of need.

You can reward successful adventures with the goodwill of potential allies and friends. You don't necessarily have to keep score, so long as you and the players know who their characters can count on in the future. If you want, you can either give characters feats like Connected to measure their influence, or even hand out "markers," good for "calling in a favor" at some future point. A marker is like a hero point usable only for emulating the Connected feat for a particular character or group, but carries over from adventure to adventure, rather than resetting like a character's normal hero point total does.

Of course, fame and friendship can be fickle at times, and some failures and setbacks in adventures may result in characters gaining more enemies than they do friends, or in them losing some of their allies or friendships. Wild carders face difficult choices, many of them involving loyalty to their friends or to their own advancement or beliefs. How the characters choose is up to the players, and part of their story.

# COMIC BOOK CLICHÉS

An ongoing element of the *Wild Cards* series is playing around with (and frequently exploding) various staples of the superhero comic books. Wild carders may be super*human* in many regards but they're generally not super*heroes,* as such. It's generally a good idea to keep this in mind when planning out a *Wild Cards* adventure: Characters probably aren't going to rush to answer the call to action just because some hideous joker-ace is robbing the First National Bank! Indeed, chances are good they know the guy, and there's a good reason why he's turned to holding up banks.

Here are some key differences between the world of *Wild Cards* and that of comic book superheroes to keep in mind.

## ONE-TRICK HANDS

The biggest difference between wild carders and superheroes from a game perspective is that *Wild Cards* characters are generally *not* designed with the same kind of functionality as characters in a comic book or members of a team of superheroes. That is, many (if not most) aces make *terrible* superheroes, and most jokers are even worse (those with functional powers at all, that is). Hiram Worchester found this out first-hand during his short-lived career as Fatman: He looked absurd running around in costume, and found himself winded just chasing after criminals!

Superheroes, especially in an RPG context, tend to be designed with a balance of attack, defense, movement, and "utility" capabilities. *Mutants & Masterminds* is designed to emulate this with the power level guideline, helping to encourage all those capabilities within a certain range. This ensures a hero can do reasonably well in a fight, withstand (or avoid) damage, get from place to place, and so forth.

Conversely, wild carders are often one-trick ponies. To be sure, there are some with abilities like conventional superheroes, such as Cap'n Trips' "friends", the android Modular Man, or Fortunato (who seems able to do almost anything). Most, however, have a particular power or thing they can do, and that's it. Even Golden Boy, the quintessential super-strong

and invulnerable paragon archetype of the *Wild Cards* universe, can't fly or even jump super-far. To get to a crisis, he needs a lift! On the other hand, Peregrine can't do anything *but* fly. Sure, she has those titanium claws, but apart from her wings, she's basically just a normal woman.

Now, it's not at all a bad thing for characters in a *Wild Cards* game to have an imbalance in terms of their various capabilities; indeed, it fits the style of the books quite well. That said, it's important for you, as the Gamemaster to keep in mind many of the characters aren't going to be able to stand up to the same kind of challenges, and to tailor your adventures to suit. Of course, there's also something to be said for the players knowing when discretion is the better part of valor and when their characters should act like reasonable people rather than costumed heroes. Feel free to remind them on occasion that they're *not* playing in Freedom City!

## PACKING A PUNCH

As mentioned in greater detail in the **Rules Options** section of this chapter, *Wild Cards* takes a more realistic view of the lethality of powers than the comic books: a punch from a super-strong ace is more likely to severely injure or kill someone than to merely stun them, and that also goes for flame blasts, laser beams, and similar deadly attacks. Combat can be serious business for wild carders, just as it is in the real world, unless they happen to be invulnerable (and often even then).

You can most easily handle this difference in your games by consulting the **Rules Options** section of this chapter and picking one or more damage lethality options for your series. Make sure to let the players know up-front what they are, as the options in force will have an effect on the decisions players make during the game. The deadlier combat becomes, the more sensible characters will try to avoid it.

## COSTUMES AND CODE-NAMES

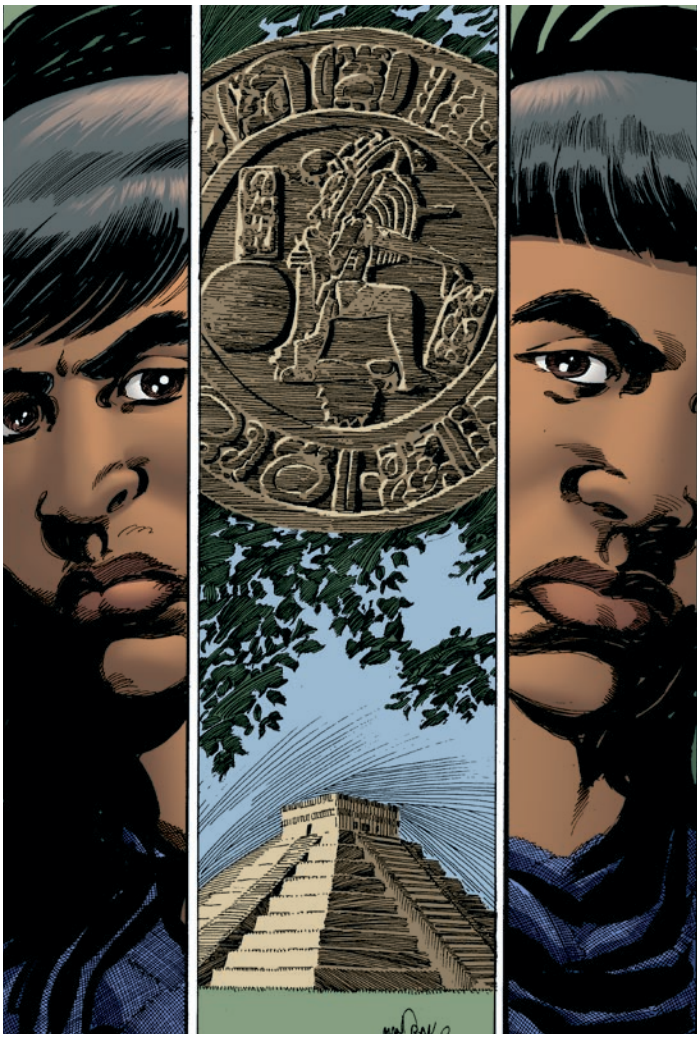
Relatively few wild carders run around wearing skintight spandex or their underwear on the outside of their clothes, and those who do are looked at somewhat askance—unless they're famous or rich enough, of course. Superhero-style "costumes" are relatively rare; Cyclone wears one, but he's usually flying and his powers help to keep it from getting dusty or dirty. Billy Ray wears his spotless fighting togs, too, and woe betide anyone who spills mustard or blood on them! Most aces tend to dress either for comfort or utility. They wear regular street clothes or occasionally "uniforms," such as Golden Boy's fatigues or Black Eagle's pilot gear. Peregrine is always dressed in high fashion, while Hiram Worchester wears tailored dinner jackets.

Some aces even have distinctive "costumes" as part of their abilities. Detroit Steel is the tall robot, and not the ace who rides inside him, and can be seen as a "costume" of sorts. Plenty of people recognize the Turtle's distinctive shell, but wouldn't recognize Tommy Tudbury if they ran into him on the street throughout most of his career.

As mentioned in the sidebar in the **Jokertown** section of **Chapter 3**, masks play a unique role in the *Wild Cards* setting. Jokers wear masks to hide their deformities, or to show solidarity with others of their kind. Aces began wearing masks after the anti-wild carder laws in the 1950s drove them to conceal their identities from the authorities, and adopted it as a fashion statement in the time of wild card *chic*. Nats wear masks to emulate wild carders: for a "walk on the wild side" in Jokertown or when pretending to be their favorite ace. All three still use masks for the simple expedient of concealing their identities, as Yeoman does (although not always successfully).

Similarly, some aces have problems with the effects of their powers on their clothes, while others don't. There are no convenient "morphic molecule" outfits in this universe. So Cap'n Trips' "friends" appear, dressed in their own distinctive costumes, whenever they are called, and Jumpin' Jack Flash's outfit never burns to ash. Some transforming aces run into problems when their clothes don't go with them; Kid Dinosaur always ends up naked when he returns to his human form. Others seem to have a built-in mechanism that allows their powers to compensate, to some degree. Wraith, for example, can "ghost" her clothes along with her, but because she can only ghost a limited amount of mass, she wears only a string bikini. Players and the GM can get some milage out of the idea of "clothing malfunctions" in *Wild Cards* by treating them as drawbacks or (more likely) complications during play.

The practice of "wild card names" started with the Four Aces, who used colorful, comic book-like code names for their public personae. Even the Four Aces were following in the footsteps of Jetboy, known by his heroic nickname throughout World War II. Other wild carders adopted distinctive nicknames for public relations or privacy reasons, while jokers were often tagged with disparaging or ironic names, adopting them as badges of honor or to forget about their old lives as much as possible. Anti-wild carder laws further encouraged the trend, as wild carders adopted new names to conceal their identities. Now it's virtually expected for wild carders to adopt a new name, although many aces (and not a few jokers) don't care for the ones they get. Jay Ackroyd dislikes being called Popinjay and Hiram Worchester does his very best to leave Fatman in the past. Others, like Peregrine, use their ace name almost exclusively.



## SUPER-TEAMS

*Wild Cards* lacks one major convenient comic book element for organizing a roleplaying adventure, and that's the concept of the super-team. Since the Four Aces in the 1940s (and we all know how *that* turned out), there hasn't been a stable, long-term gathering of aces in the setting. Wild carders do get together socially from time to time, and you can usually cobble together a group to tackle a particular problem (such as a Giant Ape escape, the raid on the Cloisters, the Swarm Invasion, or the Rox Campaign), but, as a rule, a handful of aces don't just lounge around in a Fifth Avenue mansion waiting for the call to action. They've got their own lives and agendas and, more importantly, most aces have egos too big to function in a team structure for very long.

The various series frameworks in this chapter offer some alternatives to the traditional super-team, ways of getting the characters together and *keeping* them together over the course of a series of adventures. Otherwise, the best option is the *ad hoc* team, where a primary character or characters puts out the call for any available ace associates, and takes on the problem with the resources at hand. This kind of approach best fits a mosaic-style series (see **The *Wild Cards* Series** at the start of this chapter), where each player has several characters to choose from, and can play the one best-suited to the current adventure. Once the situation is taken care of, the wild cards go their separate ways again.

Note that the new *Wild Cards* series beginning with *Inside Straight* (the Committee triad) takes a somewhat different look at the concept of the super-team, but that's a subject for a future *Wild Cards* sourcebook and is, for the moment, left as an exercise for readers of those books.

## SUPERVILLAINS

Another major comic book concept absent from *Wild Cards* is the supervillain. Sure, *Wild Cards* has villains (and how!), but the setting doesn't generally have a lot of costumed megalomaniacs ranting about world domination while heroes are placed in overly-complex deathtraps from which they *surely* will never escape. Similarly, there aren't a lot of superpowered weirdos holding up banks or the like. After all, most aces can find far more constructive and profitable uses for their powers if they happen to be powerful enough to pull off a bank job in the first place.

The series' villains tend to be more realistic and more often than not wouldn't call themselves "villains" at all. Certainly the Card Sharks generally thought they were doing what was best for the future of humanity, even if it also served many of their own ends in the process. Bloat tried to do what was right for the jokers depending on him. Even the Nur al-Allah believes in the righteousness of his cause. Other foes, like the Swarm, are entirely too alien to be called "evil" as we understand it, while even absolutely evil foes like the Astronomer turn out to have unexpected twists, like trying to *save* the world from an even greater threat!

This means putting some additional thought into the antagonist(s) for your adventures. What is the foe's personality and motivation? What goals clash with those of the characters and what goals intersect? Is there the potential for cooperation with someone the main characters once considered an enemy, and, if so, how far does it go? Dr. Tachyon started out with a rivalry with and hatred for his cousin Zabb, but they eventually reconciled and even became allies on Takis in order to defeat Blaise. Other antagonists in your series might change over time, leading to new opportunities for stories.

## MAD AND BEAUTIFUL

Finally, *Wild Cards* consolidates many of the "mad and beautiful" ideas of the comic books, bringing them together under a common explanation. The wild card virus was intended to make some sense of all the radiation accidents, chemical spills, and diverse other origin stories for superpowers, giving them a science fiction spin with a realistic edge. Most of the "origins" in *Wild Cards* don't go well at all, and the freaks outnumber the fantastic nine-to-one. There are no sunken cities of mer-people, no lost valleys of marital arts masters, and no hidden tropical paradise populated by beautiful Amazon women.

That doesn't mean *Wild Cards* is lacking a sense of wonder, however. It's a world where an alien virus often brings dreams and nightmares to life, and that includes parts of myth and legend. If Herne the Hunter can lead the Wild Hunt through the skies of New York, a tantric sorcerer can battle a necromancer, a girl from the bayou can walk in the Dreamtime, and a burnt-out hippie and his super-friends can explore strange new worlds around alien stars, then nobody can call the *Wild Cards* world dull or unimaginative! It just has a different sense of order, and fits ideas into its existing framework in a way the Golden and Silver Age comics didn't have to.

So, by all means include the strange cult worshiping the living avatar of a Hindu deity, just hint that the "god" is actually a joker-ace whose card turned at the right place and time. Leave open the question of whether or not the "demon summoner" summons *real* demons or simply "ectoplasmic psychic constructs" and leave it to the academics to decide if there really is a difference between the two. Let the characters visit Hell, Asgard, or wherever, and tell them it's just another aspect of the Dreamtime. Or so they're told. After all, the universe, *Wild Cards* or no, is bigger and more mysterious than we imagine, and always has something up its sleeve.

# ANTE UP

*Ante-Up* is an introductory *Mutants & Masterminds* adventure set in the world of *Wild Cards*. It's designed to kick-off a new *Wild Cards* adventure series, with the players in the roles of the main characters. As the characters can become wild carders in the initial chapter of the adventure, it's an excellent opportunity for new players to learn about both the world and how to create an *M&M* character and play the game.

If you are planning to play in this adventure, *you should read no further!* The remainder of this adventure is intended for the *Gamemaster only*, and you may spoil some surprises and elements of the plot if you read through it. Gamemasters should read through and familiarize themselves with the entire adventure before running it.

# INTRODUCTION

*Ante-Up* is intended as a kind of "build your own starter adventure kit" for the *Wild Cards* GM, providing a basic framework and overall plot adaptable to many different eras and styles of play, letting you make some choices to fill in the blanks of the adventure and set up the kind of series you want to run. This means there are some variables in the adventure, namely the where, when, who, and why of the story: where does the adventure take place, when does it begin (what year or era of *Wild Cards* history), who is behind the disappearance of new wild carders, and why are they doing it? Once you make these decisions, you're ready to run *Ante-Up* as a one-shot adventure or as the start to an ongoing *Wild Cards* series.

## ADVENTURE SUMMARY

A highway accident ruptures a container of the wild card virus and releases it into the local environment, causing an outbreak, with predictable results. The characters may be among those affected, becoming wild carders, or they might arrive in response to the outbreak. The authorities declare martial law to get things under control and there are plenty of opportunities for heroics within the quarantine zone, along with opportunities for criminals looking to take advantage of the situation.

Then new wild carders in the area start disappearing, and turning up dead. There's a concern about a breach in the containment area even after new virus infections appear to have stopped, as well as rampant speculation among the new joker population, potentially leading to rioting and conflict with the authorities. The characters have an opportunity to investigate, and perhaps even find out what is happening and why. Their actions may determine the future of wild carders in the area and how people perceive them, to say nothing of the characters' own futures.

## RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

The following are things to consider when preparing for and running *Ante-Up.* The adventure is highly customizable to serve as the start of your own *Wild Cards* series, so there are a few decisions to make when it comes to the set-up, running, and conclusion of the adventure. In particular, you need to decide where the adventure takes place, when it takes place, how the characters get involved, and who is behind events taking place in the story.

### WELCOME TO WILD CARD, USA

For starters, where does the adventure take place? The assumption in the various descriptions is it occurs somewhere there hasn't been an outbreak of the wild card virus before, but that's a pretty big range, especially if it takes place fairly early-on in the setting's history (see **Interesting Times**, following, for more on that).

The highway accident involving the transportation of the wild card virus allows the action to start almost anywhere there are roads. The container with the virus is on its way to some government lab or storage facility somewhere. You can place the adventure somewhere near an existing place of that sort, if you like, but you can also easily justify the existence of a top-secret facility that doesn't exist in our world (so far as anyone knows...) just by making it up and saying it's secret.

One idea is to have the outbreak happen somewhere near where you and your players live (assuming you all live near each other): your hometown, a nearby city, or the like. This provides a sense of familiarity as well as easy access to resources about the area. If you're using the option where the players play themselves as wild carders (detailed in **Chapter 6**), then the local area makes even more sense.

Otherwise, choose a place where you'd like to start things out: an interesting city or area of the United States or the world. The wild card virus quickly spread worldwide after its release in 1946, so other governments in other parts of the world could have access to dormant samples of the virus found along waterways, in contaminated goods, and so forth. If you want to play around with one of the known outbreaks of the virus in a historical series, you can even ignore the material about the highway accident and simply have the outbreak occur as a result of shifting winds or contaminated goods coming into a port. See the history in **Chapter 2** for details about various outbreaks.

You can also start off the adventure in a fictional setting. If you have the *Freedom City* sourcebook you can use it as a setting for a new *Wild Cards* series, using the suggestions in **Chapter 6**. The adventure starts with the accidental release of the wild card in or near the city and follows from there. If you have the adventure *A More Perfect Union* (for the *Paragons* setting), the town of Unity makes a great setting for *Ante-Up*, and you can even segue into the plot of *A More Perfect Union* afterwards, with the Unifier as one of the wild carders created in the outbreak; perhaps her near-fatal traffic accident is what releases the virus in the first place!

The one area where you may need to modify the adventure is if you want to run this in New York City, as it has the most experience with wild card outbreaks of any place in the world. You can still have a latter-day outbreak affect the city, creating new wild carders, as described in the adventure, but keep in mind that city officials have a better idea of how to deal with an outbreak (even if they've never had to do so personally) and the city already has a substantial population of wild carders, so the newcomers will just be adding to an existing situation rather than creating an all-new wild carder population. Still, the basic framework of the adventure works even in the boroughs of Manhattan, and pre-existing

wild carders can provide an easier explanation for the forces behind the events of the adventure (see **The Hole Card**, following).

## INTERESTING TIMES

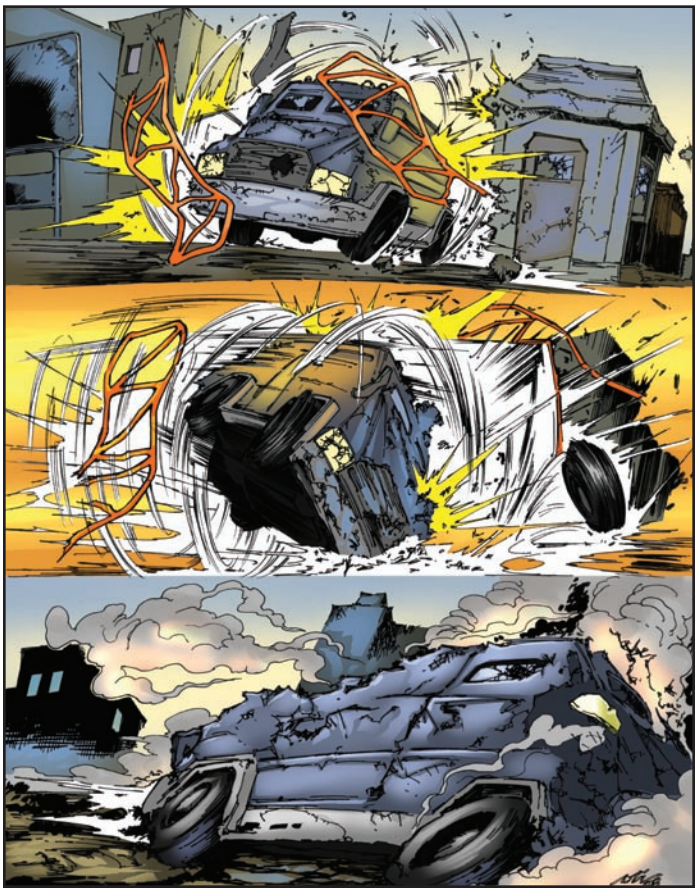
Next, consider when your adventure takes place. The default assumption is a present-day outbreak of the wild card, allowing you to start the series concurrent with events in the new *Wild Cards* novels, starting with *Inside Straight*. (This being the case, you might want to avoid the Los Angeles area initially, to avoid interfering with events from the novel, which is partially set there.)

If you prefer to set your adventure and series in a different era (see **The Historical Series** in **Chapter 6**), you can easily do so by modifying the descriptions in the adventure to suit the period. Virtually any time after Wild Card Day in New York City in 1946 is suitable, although different times obviously have different styles to them. You can set the adventure as one of the early outbreaks in the 1940s, an event in the paranoia of the 1950s, in the upheaval of the '60s, during the era of wild card *chic*, and so forth.

Consult the history in **Chapter 2** for information on the different time periods and events associated with them. The period you choose also affects who or what may be behind the outbreak; take this into consideration.

## ENTER OUR HEROES

Once you know where and when, the question is who, and that relates to the characters and how they get involved in the story. Here you have essentially two options.



The first is characters who are victims of the wild card outbreak, transformed into aces (or joker-aces, or even just jokers) along with everyone else. They have to get a handle on their newfound forms and abilities in a hurry, deal with the trauma of the outbreak, and do what needs to be done. This approach puts the characters through a real trial by fire and even if they're complete strangers at the start of the adventure, by its end, odds are they'll have been through a lot together. See **Scene One** for more information on having characters draw the wild card at the start of the adventure.

The other option is characters as established wild carders who arrive on the scene after the outbreak. They can be series characters controlled by the players (see the bios in **Chapter 4** for plenty of options) or new wild carders created by the players with established histories from before the start of the adventure. Certainly a new wild card outbreak is going to draw a lot of attention, and aces and jokers may come to the area for a number of reasons, depending on the style and overall concept of the series.

For characters there from the very beginning, have the wild carders involved in the transportation and safeguarding of the virus; they're on-hand to witness the terrible accident and the initial outbreak. Since they're already affected, the virus can't infect them again, so they're (relatively) safe and have a chance to do something about it. They probably won't be able to completely contain the viral outbreak (if they can, there should be some reason why they don't, otherwise there isn't much of an adventure). But there are plenty of opportunities for them to deal with the fallout.

Similarly, wild carders working for the government, such as Justice Department aces, might be sent to the scene of the outbreak to help restore order, deal with disasters and such. Again, existing wild carders are at no risk from the virus itself, so they make good "first responders" to this kind of crisis, assuming the government is familiar enough with the problem to have wild card assets of its own. This is likely pretty much any time after 1946: initially it's the Exotics For Democracy (see **Chapter 4**), but afterwards it can be government aces recruited through the Special Conscription Act or the like.

Civic-minded aces and jokers may respond to word of the outbreak arriving on their own to help out, investigate, and so forth. Jokers and jokers' rights activists in particular may want to look out for the needs of their people, ensuring the new jokers are treated properly and trying to deal with the ensuing public reaction to the freaks in town, moderating it as much as possible.

Finally, you can mix and match the two approaches, having some characters turn their card during the outbreak, and others come from elsewhere in response to the incident, meeting up at a triage center, hospital, or crisis zone and agreeing to cooperate. Most authorities aren't going to pass up the assistance of aces with useful powers, allowing newcomers to get into the game quickly. This approach is best if some players want to play existing established *Wild Cards* characters, and others want to create entirely new aces or jokers.

## THE HOLE CARD

Lastly, you need to decide who (or what) is behind the events in the adventure—the primary antagonist. The type of series you want to run influences this decision, along with whether or not you want to set up this antagonist as a long-term enemy for the characters, or simply an opponent for the duration of this adventure.

The bad-guy possibilities are many, as evidenced in **Chapter 4** and **Chapter 5**. Take a look at the following options, and then consult the series framework you're using from **Chapter 6** (if any) and the aforementioned chapters for ideas you can use for a primary antagonist.

## THE ASTRONOMER

But he's dead, isn't he? As various wild carders—like Crypt-Kicker, Demise, and Cameo—have demonstrated, "dead" does not necessarily mean "permanently out of action." The Astronomer was, after all, a tremendously powerful psychic, so it's not too hard to believe he might have been able to survive the death of his frail mortal body, continuing to exist in some kind of astral or psychic state.

In this state, the Astronomer is extremely weak, retaining only his Astral Form power and a single rank each of his Telepathy and Telekinesis powers (including his Telepathy's Mental Transform Alternate Power). Indeed, it has taken him years just to reassemble his consciousness and attain this level of power. Still, he's an invisible wraith, able to go virtually anywhere, and can still exert some influence. See **Chapter 4** for the Astronomer's bio and details on his history and powers.

Part of that influence is to arrange the wild card outbreak in order to create the kind of chaos and misery the Astronomer feeds upon. Additionally, he hopes the wild card will help to create both sacrificial victims to appease the unholy powers he calls upon and a powerful host body for him to occupy (most likely John "Red Jack" Czenik from the **Central Casting** section, although it could just as easily be a player character). With the right rituals, conducted by members of a brainwashed cult, the Astronomer can live again, more powerful than ever before, and without his old foe Fortunato to counter him!

## CARD SHARKS

The anti-wild carder Card Sharks conspiracy can easily be behind the disappearance of victims of the virus in this adventure, and may even have a hand in the initial outbreak. See **Chapter 4** and **Chapter 5** for details about the Card Sharks, along with their involvement in recent history in **Chapter 2**. Although many members of the conspiracy were exposed and eliminated in the 1990s, it doesn't mean intrepid aces got all of them. If you set *Ante-Up* before the events of the Black Trump books, then the Card Sharks are most definitely still a going concern. Even after, they might still be around in some form.

Naturally, the Card Sharks want to eliminate wild carders, or at least make them look bad. The outbreak can serve to stir up anti-wild carder hysteria, while Card Shark agents cull the most powerful (and therefore dangerous) aces from among the victims before they can become familiar with all their powers and turn into real threats.

If you want, the outbreak may even be a set-up for the Card Sharks to test a version of the Black Trump virus (see **Chapter 1**) on an isolated new wild carder population. The initial disappearances are to eliminate dangerous aces or do some initial testing, followed by a large-scale release of the Black Trump to see if it can eliminate the infected population.

You can use existing known Card Sharks or create new members of the conspiracy for the adventure. The Sharks may also have unwitting agents working for them, either in government circles or among the wild carder population (the latter unaware of exactly who they're working for, of course).

## JUMPER

A jumper (or, heaven forbid, more than one of them) could easily cause the accident leading to the outbreak; for example, by jumping the driver of the transport truck. Why? Well, putting aside the typical jumper answer of "Why not?" there's also the potential unleashed by a new wild card outbreak. Chances are good of at least a handful of powerful aces, ready to be jumped, giving the jumper a choice of new bodies to steal and use, either temporarily or permanently.

If the adventure occurs during the Rox campaign in the '90s (see **Chapter 2**) there may be a number of jumpers unaccounted for or working secretly for the government. Even in later years, there could be secret or hidden jumpers; there's no real way of knowing for sure how many Prime were empowered in his time, or what happened to them. With their abilities, rogue jumpers can be anyone, anywhere.

Even if a jumper didn't come up with the scheme of releasing the wild card alone, there's a chance a jumper agent could be working for one of the other factions described here. The Card Sharks used jumpers as their dupes in the past, as did the United States government. Another powerful ace or organization could use a jumper to set events in motion, promising their agent the pick of the litter of powerful new aces when the dust settles. Maybe the jumper's newly chosen body is that of Red Jack, if you want to use him.

## PUPPETMAN

Senator Gregg Hartmann's alter ego is perhaps the greatest manipulator in the *Wild Cards* series, masterfully pulling strings behind the scenes for years. It would be child's play for Puppetman to cause the accident leading to the outbreak, and for Senator Hartmann to have inside information on the top-secret transportation of the wild card virus through the area. All it would take is a brief meeting with the driver, or another puppet to intercept the shipment as it passed through the area.

Why? Hartmann is always at his best when offering his assistance and support to the wild carder community, and there's nothing like a crisis to make a politician look like a concerned and heroic citizen. Plus Hartmann knows he's at no risk of wild card infection (again) but the public doesn't know that, so he can look even braver by going into the area. Add to that the opportunity to add a number of new puppets to Puppetman's strings, and engineering a wild card outbreak starts to look like a good idea.

Of course, this option assumes Puppetman is around in your *Wild Cards* series; if the story takes place before Hartmann's eventual demise (see his bio in **Chapter 4**), that's an option. If it's set after, then you have to assume Puppetman survived somehow, not inconceivable for a psychic entity, especially considering Hartmann's real body was jumped. Perhaps it now exists as a kind of psychic parasite able to inhabit a series of bodies, and engineers the outbreak as an experiment to create a new, powerful, and susceptible ace body, maybe even one of the characters!

If you cannot or would rather not use Puppetman but like the basic concept, then another secret, manipulative ace can take his place. See the **New Wild Carder** option, following.

## ROGUE TAKISIAN

The character creation options in **Chapter 6** mention possibilities for a Takisian on Earth: an envoy or rogue from Takis or even a survivor of the original vessel that brought the wild card. Such a character could also be behind the release of the wild card in *Ante-Up* as part of an ongoing experiment to test the Takisian Enhancer project. A Takisian Psi Lord can certainly cause the accident using mind control, for example, or even engineer the accident to cover up *another* release of the wild card virus from nearby, using a strain brought from Takis, for example.

What are this rogue's motives? They might be simply furthering experimentation on the Enhancer, a cold-blooded test on a group of unsuspecting "mudlings" to gather data. If so, it suggests things have changed

on Takis or the rogue is operating outside of even the wishes of House Ilkazam. A Takisian exile or survivor of the original crash may want revenge or become obsessed about the success of the Enhancer project, working to "perfect" it even without a hope of returning home to claim the glory (but believing "rescue" will come eventually, along with recognition for all of the important work done on Earth).

## SWARMLING

The third generation of the Swarm is discussed in **Chapter 3**. These replicants look human and are designed to replace ordinary humans and eventually engineer a holocaust on Earth, wiping out all other life and allowing the Swarm to take over the planet. Even with the absence of the Swarm Mother, these alien life forms may be following their genetic programming. A Swarmling (or a group of them) could be involved in the outbreak of the wild card to further their own agenda.

Since their initial defeats were largely owing to the intervention of aces, it makes sense the Swarmlings would want to study wild carders as closely as possible. They may be behind the disappearances of other aces and jokers over the years (depending on how long it has been since the Swarm Invasion in the 1980s), but one of the best opportunities is to examine new wild carders in the process of transforming or shortly after infection by the virus. They can also study the vectors of the virus itself and perhaps seek ways to foment conflict between wild carders and nats.

Maybe the replicants are studying aces in hopes of engineering their own "super-swarmlings" with ace-like powers! This could lead to an all-new "fourth generation" of Swarmlings with powers making them a match for Earth's aces, the vanguard for a new invasion force. In this case, Red Jack from **Central Casting** might not be human at all, but a Swarmling mimic that merely *looks* like John Czenik. Alternately, their studies of the wild card could lead the Swarmlings to engineer new biowarfare agents, perhaps something like the Black Trump virus (see **Chapter 1**) to wipe out all wild carders, leaving the Earth vulnerable to takeover.

## TI MALICE

The joker monstrosity Ti Malice (see his bio in **Chapter 4**) was a noted manipulator of aces, enjoying the power such mounts granted him. Although it certainly *seemed* that Carnifex finally ended the parasite's career (and life), it happened on a different plane of existence, where the rules may differ, and death as we know it might not exist, or at least might not be as permanent a condition as it is in the real world. There's always the possibility Ti Malice might still exist, and find a way back into the world.

Gone for some time and deprived of his previous mounts, the joker needs to acquire a new power base and hosts quickly in order to survive. He'll move from the most immediately available hosts to more powerful and interesting mounts to satisfy his unnatural appetites. Learning of the wild card shipment, the joker arranges for its release in order to create new wild carders it can control. This new place will become the center of Ti Malice's domain, safeguarded against discovery and old enemies.

As with Puppetman, if you cannot use Ti Malice in your adventure but like the idea, you can substitute a new joker character with similar traits, based on the game stats found in **Chapter 4**.

## NEW WILD CARDER

Lastly, you can simply create an entirely new wild carder—ace or joker-ace—to fill the role of antagonist for this adventure. The **Central Casting** section offers one possibility, but you should feel free to come up with your own as best suits the adventure and the series you want to run. You can use an existing character from **Chapter 4** as the basis for this new wild carder, modifying a few traits and providing a different background and description. The potential for confusion with an existing ace or joker could even complicate the adventure, providing some red herrings for investigating characters.

# SCENE ONE: CUTTING THE CARDS

In this scene the wild card virus is unleashed on an unsuspecting population, that is changed forever by it, and all hell breaks loose because of it. The characters may be among those transformed, or simply on-hand for the aftermath of the outbreak.

The release itself occurs when an otherwise nondescript transport truck strikes a guardrail and overturns on the highway late at night. There is an explosion, rupturing a sealed container of the wild card virus and scattering it over the surrounding area; the "spores" themselves are tough enough to survive the initial blast, which merely serves to strip off their protective protein sheath and expose the virus.

The characters may be close enough to witness the accident if you wish. They could be somewhere near the highway, or driving along when the crash occurs. Otherwise, they may hear the explosion, or be entirely unaware of the source of the mayhem that ensues. Whatever the case, things happen too quickly for them to do anything about the accident itself.

If the characters are coming from outside the area in response to the outbreak, you can skip this scene and go right to **Scene Two** for the aftermath.

## TURN OF THE CARDS

If you are using the option of infecting the characters with the wild card in this first adventure, this is when it happens. The virus spreads out over the area around the highway and people begin to *change.* The exact nature of the characters' transformation depends on how they are designed, and whether or not players choose their powers in advance, or you assign them (randomly or otherwise).

Take this time to describe an appropriate scene for each character, relating their initial infection and the development of their wild carder qualities. For simplicity, you may want to have the characters in close proximity when this happens, although it might stretch the limits of disbelief for them to be *too* close. The odds against a group of people all in the same minivan (for example) all becoming aces are astronomical. Having the characters spread out a bit initially can make things more believable.

You might also want to take the opportunity to describe the horrific effects of the virus on the majority of people infected. While the characters survive (although perhaps with some joker deformities), most die in a variety of terrible ways, such as:

- melting into foamy pink puddles of slime as their cell walls dissolve.
- turning into immobile stone as their tissues calcify.
- bursting into flames or exploding from internal energy or pressure build-ups.
- rampant and rapid cancers throughout the body.
- bones turning so brittle that the slightest move breaks them.

That doesn't even include the hideous joker mutations, or victims cursed with out-of-control ace abilities, like newly empowered empaths, telepaths, or clairvoyants driven mad by overwhelming sensory input, shape-changers literally unable to hold themselves together, or super-strong wild carders surrounded by a suddenly very fragile environment.

# INITIAL CHALLENGES

Assuming the characters' concepts allow for it, have their transformations occur almost instantly, and give them an immediate chance to flex their newfound powers. There are plenty of opportunities for heroism amidst the chaos and confusion of the initial outbreak, including (but not limited to), the following.

## CROWD CONTROL

The first and biggest challenge is dealing with mobs of terrified people, all trying to get away from the area and find shelter as quickly as possible. There are traffic jams along all the major roadways and riots as people fight over escape routes and points of exit. Some are trampled while others take desperate measures.

Individually, there may not be much the characters can do. The mobs of people do not respond to reason, although showy displays of power can intimidate them (see **Intimidate**, *M&M,* page 49), causing them to back down or herding them in a particular direction. Some ace powers may be able to create barricades, calm the crowds, or otherwise assist in containing the problem.

## SEARCH AND RESCUE

In the wake of the outbreak, many survivors are injured, some trapped inside cars, buildings, sheltered in basements, and so forth. Civic-minded characters might assist in finding and helping these people, particularly wild carders with greater-than-human senses, or powers allowing them to reach people who are trapped quickly and easily. They can evacuate the wounded to triage centers, or even provide medical assistance, if they have the right skills or powers.

## FIRE!

A fire breaks out, quickly engulfing a large building or collection of buildings and trapping some people inside. With emergency service personnel suffering as much from the virus as everyone and stretched past their limits, there's no one to respond unless the characters take action. They have to get inside the burning building, find people trapped within, and get them to safety, all the while dealing with the heat, fire, and toxic smoke. See **The Environment** on pages 167-170 of *M&M,* particularly rules for extreme heat and suffocation.

## JOKERS WILD

A newly transformed joker goes berserk, smashing and killing everything and everyone in its way. The wild carders have to intervene to stop it. You can take any suitable monster archetype from pages 233-235 of *M&M* for the joker: the Animated Tree, Clay Golem, Gargoyle, Monstrous Spider, or Warrior Demon all work well with a few tweaks to their descriptions. Throw in some endangered innocent bystanders, and let the players come up with a way to stop the joker. For more of a challenge, increase the joker's power or have more than one of them.

## LOOT AND PLUNDER

In every crisis situation, there are people who look to take advantage. The chaos of the outbreak offers plenty of opportunities for looting and petty crime amidst the confusion. Characters may take it upon themselves to put a stop to this if and when they see it. You can use the Thug, Criminal, or even Bystander archetypes from pages 226-229 of *M&M* for the looters, arming them with makeshift weapons or actual guns. Potential targets include electronics, jewelry, and department stores, and pretty much any place with valuable goods placed in easy reach.

For a twist, some looters may not be after quick cash or loot; characters can encounter looters simply trying to grab necessary supplies like food, water, and medicine for themselves and their families during the crisis. This may give some would-be superheroes pause, and emphasizes the often morally gray nature of *Wild Cards.*

# SCENE TWO: PLAYING THE HAND YOU'RE DEALT

In the wake of the wild card outbreak, hundreds (if not thousands) are dead, numerous others are transformed into jokers, and a few new aces are exercising their powers for the first time, while the authorities and the characters deal with the aftermath and try to clean things up and restore order. Wish them luck.

# TRIAGE

Sooner or later, the new wild carders are likely to end up at a staging area the authorities are using for triage and emergency treatment of both victims of the wild card and various people injured during the outbreak. The exact location is left for you to decide: it might be a sports arena, high school gymnasium, even an empty "big box" store. The nearby hospitals will also be quite active, although the military

## DOCTOR TACHYON, I PRESUME...

Depending on the type of adventure (and series) you're running you may want to have the famous Dr. Tachyon respond to the wild card outbreak, offering assistance to its victims and cataloging the abilities of the new aces. Tachy is certainly one of the most distinctive and significant characters of the *Wild Cards* series (just ask him, he'll tell you so), and few things say *"Wild Cards"* to those familiar with the series than an encounter with the flamboyant Takisian prince.

Of course, the period of the adventure determines whether or not Dr. Tachyon is even available, much less likely to put in an appearance. In the years immediately following the release of the wild card, he puts in a great deal of work ministering to its victims, although primarily in the New York area. Still, he might travel to the site of another outbreak, especially if circumstances are suspect. During the 1950s, he's in exile from America and doesn't return until the early '60s. By the '90s and the Rox campaign, Tachyon is otherwise occupied dealing with his psychotic grandson Blaise, then he leaves Earth to return to Takis, apparently for good (although he promises to return to Earth at some point). See **Chapter 4** for Dr. Tachyon's complete bio and game traits.

Of course, just because Dr. Tachyon hasn't been seen on Earth in years in the *Wild Cards* series doesn't mean he can't return in your game. Perhaps the *Raiyis* of House Ilkazam arrives as a diplomatic emissary to establish formal relations with humanity, even a Takisian embassy, and resumes some of his work assisting wild carders. His involvement in this incident could be for "old time's sake" or out of simple curiosity at the sudden and unusual outbreak, especially if it happens to coincide with the time of his visit. This is even more likely if there's Takisian involvement behind the scenes, like a rogue Psi Lord antagonist.

If he is on the scene in this adventure, Dr. Tachyon quickly takes command of any relief effort and particularly triage and medical oversight of the wild card victims. After all, he has literally decades more experience than anyone else in dealing with the problem!

does its best to keep the area contained, at least initially. While the wild card is not contagious, dormant spores can be carried on clothing, vehicles, and the like, so it is wise to take precautions until cases of infection drop off and people leaving the area can be properly cleaned and checked out.

Even if the characters are in perfect health following their transformation, the authorities want them checked over by physicians, and eager experts want to ask them extensive questions about their experience and their known abilities, perhaps even subjecting them to a battery of tests (although the latter might have to wait until proper facilities and equipment are available).

Give the players the opportunity to roleplay some interactions with the people in the triage area and command center. They can also meet up with the important local characters involved in containing the outbreak and dealing with the aftermath. See the **Central Casting** section for some ideas of characters you can use, or create your own suitable to the locale where the adventure takes place, and for your plans for the future of the series (if any). Now is a good time to introduce regular supporting characters and give them places in the story.

# LENDING A HELPING HAND

The response of many people when possessed of the power of an ace and confronted with the kind of suffering the wild card leaves in its wake, is "How can I help?" If the players have their characters ask this question, the authorities find them things to do. Exactly what depends on their capabilities, but possibilities include the following:

## MEDICAL ASSISTANCE

Large numbers of people are injured or dying, and no matter how many medical personnel the area has, it's not enough. Characters with medical skills and training have plenty of opportunities to use them, although there's not always much to be done for those who've drawn the Black Queen. Provided it's available, supplies of the Trump virus are used on the worst cases but otherwise all that can be done is to make them comfortable.

Conventional medical treatment is still important for people injured in the outbreak and the violence that followed. Aces with healing powers are especially valuable, and a wild card healer can quickly learn the limits of such powers under a variety of conditions.

Mental health is also a concern, and trained counselors and psychiatric professionals have their work cut out for them. Ace telepaths may be able to assist, especially if there happens to be a case or two or people with uncontrolled mental powers, such as when Dr. Tachyon assisted Blythe van Renssaeler with her own ace abilities (in *Volume I* of *Wild Cards*).

## POLICING

The area of the outbreak quickly falls under martial law and a curfew is established to help keep order. There may still be incidents of rioting and looting, calling for soldiers and police to intervene. In those cases, ace powers can be an asset, particularly if they provide bulletproofing or visual effects impressive enough to break up a crowd.

On the other hand, the appearance of an obvious wild carder may only inflame anger about the outbreak among people looking for a scapegoat. The authorities do not turn down offers of assistance, but they ask aces to show restraint and pull them from the job if their presence becomes problematic.

## SEARCH AND RESCUE

Numerous people are missing in the wake of the virus; some are no doubt dead, having drawn a Black Queen, but others may be injured or trapped. Characters can aid in the search efforts to find people, and help to reach those trapped in difficult to access areas. They may do so on their own or as part of an organized search-and-rescue operation.

You can tailor these incidents to suit the characters' powers: a super-strong ace, for example, can sift through rubble, tear open crushed or damaged vehicles, and otherwise act as an extremely agile and portable crane. A flying ace can medevac victims more easily than any aircraft, while aces with superhuman senses can often find victims no one else could.

## TRANSPORTATION

Ace powers can enable characters to transport supplies and equipment, or move people and things, to places where they are needed. A super-strong ace can move things onto or off of a flatbed truck faster than a forklift, fast fliers can get around quickly, and a teleporter or powerful telekinetic is a tremendous asset. Authorities will be cautious about breaking quarantine initially, but can still find plenty of things that need to get somewhere as soon as possible within the quarantine zone. A transportation assignment can also easily turn into a search and rescue, or trouble with looters or thieves, depending on what the characters encounter along the way.

## INVESTIGATION

Lastly, characters might be asked to assist in the investigation into the cause of the outbreak. This generally requires individuals who are trustworthy and have either significant credentials, especially useful powers, or (ideally) both. Keep in mind, the transportation of the dormant virus spores was likely top secret, so the authorities are not likely to involve outsiders lightly.

Unfortunately, there is not much even aces can learn from the scene. The explosion destroyed the truck carrying the virus, leaving its contents (and the people on board) badly burned, with fairly little by way of evidence. Still, you can make an Investigate skill check for characters involved: beating DC 20 or more reveals the accident was not caused by any mechanical failure in the truck, suggesting it was most likely human error on the driver's part. The profiles and backgrounds of the truck crew reveal nothing out of the ordinary or suspect (else they would not have been entrusted with this assignment in the first place).

# SCENE THREE: RED JACKS ARE WILD

Just when it looks like things are getting under control after the outbreak, new wild carders start disappearing and bodies start turning up. Accusations start to fly, tensions mount, and people threaten to riot if something isn't done to defuse the situation, and soon. Guess who gets to tackle the problem.

## THE DISCARDS

Two wild carders are murdered within 48 hours of each other. The first, Nicole Wiley, is a 20-year-old young African-American woman, a business student at a local college. She developed the ace power to regenerate, although it clearly wasn't enough to save her life. The second, 34-year-old Travis Fordman, was a joker-ace who developed tremendous, almost obscene, musculature and a squat build to carry his wild card-enhanced strength. Both victims had their throats slashed and there was massive blood loss, although very little blood was found at the scenes where their bodies were discovered, both tossed into Dumpsters near the area of the virus outbreak.

Pro- and anti-wild card sentiment quickly flares as the media seizes on the story and speculates wildly in the face of having no real facts to report. The idea of a killer targeting wild carders has the newly infected population up in arms (and pseudopods and tentacles). The barely contained nat/joker animosity begins to simmer and head towards a boiling point, and the authorities fear vigilantism and overreactions on both sides.

The characters can get involved officially or on their own. The author-

ities may ask them for assistance, given the unusual nature of the deaths and the PR benefits of bringing new local aces into the loop, especially if one or more of the characters are joker-aces. Certainly, an assailant capable of taking down two reasonably powerful wild carders may be outside the capabilities of the conventional authorities.

If the authorities do not ask for help, the group may still investigate on their own. For one thing, they are potential targets for this killer! Additionally, they may have known one or both of the victims, even in passing; in fact, you might want to introduce Nicole and Travis to them in an earlier scene of the adventure, while the new wild carders are receiving treatment.

Lastly, curiosity or a desire to defuse the potentially dangerous situation may move the characters to action.

## SEARCHING THE DECK

How the wild carders go about their investigation depends on the resources and powers at their disposal, the cooperation they receive from the authorities and, of course, who is really behind the killings. This is intended as a somewhat free-form scene, with the players describing their investigative techniques, and you calling for the appropriate skill checks (such as Gather Information and Investigate), providing the players with additional clues to follow up.

For example, the investigation may turn up reports that both victims were seen speaking to a particular unidentified person, providing a description to go on. Examination of the victims can yield a stray hair, fingerprint, or other evidence (even unusual evidence if a non-human like Ti Malice is involved). They might find faint footprints in the alleyway where a body was dumped, or discover potential hiding places nearby. This isn't even counting the use of unusual ace powers like postcognition or actually speaking with the dead.

In general, dole out clues to keep the characters looking and guide them in the right direction. If the investigation bogs down or becomes just a dull series of die rolls, feel free to either move things along towards **Scene Four** or have the antagonist get nervous and try to eliminate or scare off the investigators, providing them with a chance to learn more and perhaps even a full-on confrontation.

# SCENE FOUR: TRUMPING THE LAST HAND

In this final scene, the characters get to the bottom of the wild carder disappearances and, perhaps, the original cause of the outbreak. If things go well, they have the opportunity to deal with the troublemaker and set things at least somewhat to rights. If things don't go well, the characters may get to the bottom of things, but they probably aren't coming back up to tell anyone else about them.

## SETTING THEM UP...

Characters arrive at this scene in one of several possible ways: first, they piece together sufficient clues to track the killer(s) to an empty set of storefronts and go there to investigate; second, the antagonist plants enough clues to lure the wild carders into a trap; or, third, the characters bait a trap to bring the "wild card killer" out into the open. In the last case, the confrontation takes place somewhere appropriate, probably an out-of-the-way locale like those where the initial killings occurred.

If the characters seem unwilling to follow up on things, either trying to turn over all they know to the authorities, or simply walking away from the investigation, you can always have the antagonist come after them. Perhaps they have uncovered enough to make the killer(s) nervous and willing to take a risk to silence the investigators, or they simply present a tempting target, whether they know it or not. Authorities might also try and secure the characters' cooperation in capturing the killer(s), given the risks involved. On the other hand, if the authorities are in on it, or compromised, then their effort to secure assistance from the wild carders may be a trap.

## ... AND KNOCKING THEM DOWN

Whatever the case, the characters find themselves in a confrontation with the perpetrator of the double murder. How things play out depends on the killer's identity and plans. Generally speaking, an antagonist who feels sufficiently confident goes after the characters, attempting to take them out, while a foe who feels outgunned will either attempt to flee or perhaps strike some sort of deal with the investigators.

If you want to play out further investigation of a bigger conspiracy (see **Further Adventures**), now is a good time to plant clues by having the antagonist rant, brag, or just slip up and mention something he should not.

Given the number of potential mind-controllers (Puppetman, Ti Malice, jumpers, or a rogue Takisian), there's also a good chance of trying to take down the group from within by controlling or co-opting one or more of the characters. Try to get player cooperation for this, if you can, rather than simply seizing control of a character, as it keeps the player involved in the game. In either case, a hero point award is appropriate for the player(s) of the mind-controlled character(s).

If things come down to a physical confrontation and the characters find themselves overwhelmed (not terribly likely, but possible), you can have help arrive in the form of police or military personnel who have either been following the group's movements or have pieced together the same evidence they have. Having the cavalry arrive at the last minute may be somewhat anti-climatic, but it can be better than having the characters wiped out.

## FURTHER ADVENTURES

Although the characters presumably find out the cause of the killings and disappearances and deal with it, the novice wild carders have a whole world of opportunities for further adventures awaiting them and their unique abilities.

For starters, characters might follow up on the cause of the outbreak. If it was not an accident, who was behind it? It might have been the antagonist from this adventure, but then again, it might not. Clues can lead the wild carders into danger as the responsible party tries to obscure the trail and eliminate any loose ends, which can include nosy investigators.

Newfound fame from the events of this story can lead the characters elsewhere. They might hear from government or private sector recruiters looking for ace talents, for example. Hollywood could come knocking with an offer to appear on the new season of *American Hero,* or SCARE and the Justice Department may be hiring new agents, especially if they want to look into the cause of the wild card outbreak. Alternately, maybe they're hiring new agents so they can keep them quiet instead!

Take a look at the various series frameworks in **Chapter 6** for ideas on how to continue your own *Wild Cards* series and point the characters in that direction. Just don't be surprised if players head off somewhere unplanned, since the unexpected is a big part of the world of *Wild Cards!*

# CENTRAL CASTING

This section covers various characters potentially appearing in *Ante-Up* and their game traits. It provides you with a selection to choose from when "casting" different parts in the adventure. Some of these characters use the various archetypes from **Chapter 11** of *M&M*.

## THE POLICE CHIEF

Daniel Sterns is a career cop who worked his way up through the force to become chief of police, but in his decades of service, he has never had to deal with anything like a wild card outbreak in his jurisdiction. Still, Chief Sterns has a good head on his shoulders and is known on the force for keeping calm in a crisis. He does his best to keep the situation under control following the outbreak, and cooperates with the military when they move in to help keep the lid on things.

Sterns is in his mid-50s, with dark hair going mostly gray and a neatly trimmed moustache. He's been divorced for well over a decade, police work taking its toll on his marriage. His tendency to bury himself in his work probably led to his promotion, but also does not leave the chief with much of a social life outside of work.

Use the Police Chief archetype (*M&M,* page 228) for Chief Sterns.

## THE MILITARY COMMANDER

Colonel Arthur Chase, U.S.A., is the military commander on the scene when Army and National Guard units move in to the area of the outbreak to restore and maintain order. Colonel Chase is a career military man and a combat veteran with a pragmatic, no-nonsense approach to problems. His priority in dealing with the outbreak is to minimize any "incidents" and to keep things under control.

While Police Chief Sterns is fairly open to ace assistance in dealing with problems, Colonel Chase is less sanguine about the idea. He's a chain-of-command kind of guy, and people outside the chain of command concern him. He'll make it clear to any volunteer wild carders that they answer to him and if they go off half-cocked, they can expect to be arrested and detained like anyone else (although it may be unclear exactly how the colonel expects to carry out his threat where some aces are concerned).

Colonel Chase is a stern-looking African-American man, clean-shaven and bald (he shaves his head as well). He's dressed in military fatigues while on duty (and generally he's always on-duty during the crisis). Use the SWAT Officer archetype (*M&M,* page 229) for his traits, increasing all the skills by 1 rank and changing the Professional skill specialty to soldier.

## THE DOCTOR

Dr. Rachael Paulson is a virologist and as close as there is to an expert on Xenovirus Takis-A in the area when the outbreak occurs. This puts her in charge of triage operations and advising the authorities (like Chief Sterns and Colonel Chase) with regard to infection vectors, safety measures, and the like. Dr. Paulson is both excited by this opportunity to exercise her untapped leadership skills and horrified by the death and suffering caused by the virus. She's sympathetic to her patients, but also fascinated with the effects of the wild card in a clinical fashion, and sometimes goes off on tangents when confronted with a particularly interesting symptom or manifestation.

Similarly, Dr. Paulson is both grateful for any outside assistance and somewhat resentful about losing the spotlight to it. She would be delighted to meet Dr. Tachyon, for example, having followed his work extensively, but would also find the good doctor's attitude and presence grating, making her a bit waspish.

Paulson is in her late-30s, wears glasses, and has her hair pulled back in a sensible ponytail. She usually wears some small, tasteful jewelry (earrings, maybe a thin necklace chain), a collared shirt, and a lab coat, often with a stethoscope slung around her neck.

Use the Scientist archetype (*M&M,* page 229) for Dr. Paulson, dropping the Computers skill to 2 ranks, and substituting Medicine 10 (+12) for the Craft skill. She has Knowledge (life sciences) and her Profession skill is physician.

## THE REPORTER

Suzanne Rawlins is a local television news reporter, one of the first on the scene to cover the initial outbreak, and fortunate enough to survive it unscathed. As well as it being her duty as a journalist to inform the public of what is happening, Suzanne is a fairy savvy reporter with ambitions of going beyond local news, and she sees this incident as her big break to cover a national story .

Naturally, new aces are going to attract media attention, especially once they get involved in events unfolding in the aftermath of the outbreak. Suzanne might try to get exclusive interviews with the characters or find out more about them. She's also a potential ally when it comes to investigation and gathering information.

If you want to add an element of poignancy to the story, Suzanne might not escape the wild card unscathed; you can have her become a

## JOHN "RED JACK" CZENIK — POWER LEVEL 7

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| +8/+3 | +2 | +3 | +0 | +2 | +1 |
| 26/16 | 14 | 17 | 11 | 14 | 12 |

| TOUGHNESS | FORTITUDE | REFLEX | WILL |
|---|---|---|---|
| +5/+3* | +6 | +6 | +6 |

*Flat-footed

**SKILLS**

Concentration 4 (+6), Gather Information 4 (+5), Intimidate 6 (+7), Knowledge (technology) 4 (+4), Medicine 4 (+6), Notice 6 (+8), Profession (technician) 6 (+8), Search 6 (+6), Sense Motive 4 (+6), Stealth 4 (+6)

**FEATS**

All-out Attack, Assessment, Attack Focus (melee) 2, Defensive Roll 2, Dodge Focus 2, Fearless, Improved Initiative, Power Attack

**POWERS**

**Drain Constitution 5** (blood drain; Linked to Strike), **Mimic Powers 20** (all powers at once up to 100 points total, Continuous, Extra Subject 4 [25 subjects], Stacking, Limited to subjects whose blood he has consumed [–1 flaw]), **Strike 1** (fangs, lethal), **Super-Senses 7** (detect wild carders [olfactory sense], Acute, Extended, Ranged, Radius, Sense, Tracking)

*Mimicked Power Sets:*

- ***Enhanced Strength:*** **Enhanced Strength 10**, **Super-Strength 2** [14 points]
- ***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, Regrowth) [20 points]

**COMBAT**

Attack +6 (melee), +4 (ranged), Grapple +16, Damage +8 (unarmed), +1 (strike, penetrating), Defense +7 (+3 flat-footed), Knockback –2 (–1 flat-footed), Initiative +6

**Abilities 24 + Skills 12 (48 ranks) + Feats 11 + Powers 193 + Combat 18 + Saves 11 = Total 269**

joker, but still devoted to her journalistic responsibilities. In this case, Suzanne decides to put aside her shame and chronicle her transformation and the ordeals of other new jokers. She may take a somewhat hostile attitude towards aces, but sympathize with joker-aces in the process.

Use the Reporter archetype (*M&M,* page 228) for Suzanne's game traits.

## THE ACE "VAMPIRE"

*The following character is usable as a ready-made antagonist for the adventure, depending on the approach you choose. See the* ***Introduction*** *for details.*

Czenik (pronounced "sez-NIK") is employed as a medical technician, a reasonably successful job he took after somewhat idly casting about for something to do with his life after high school. He's the type of guy most people would described as "ordinary" and "quiet," the kind most don't even look at twice: medium height and build, dark hair, occasionally a day's growth of stubble on his chin—the very definition of "unremarkable"—until now.

## FURTHER ADVENTURES

Of course, *Ante-Up* is just intended to start your *Wild Cards* series. Where things go from here is up to you and your players, and how the events of this adventure play out. You can transition from *Ante-Up* to many of the different series frameworks discussed in **Chapter 6**, depending on the type of game you want to run.

The new wild carders may choose to stay close to home, taking care of the lingering effects of the virus outbreak, and dealing with other aces and jokers spawned by it. They can be there for the formation of a local Jokertown, the social and political fallout, and the ongoing media circus until things die-down a bit and life returns to what passes for "normal" in the *Wild Cards* world. They're likely to remain important local celebrities, especially if they establish a reputation early on.

On the other hand, they might choose to strike out on their own, leaving home to play out the hand the wild card has dealt them. Aces may get lucrative offers of employment from all over the place, from government agencies to private organizations, leading to an ongoing series format. They might follow up on clues regarding the culprit behind the outbreak, taking them to distant places as they seek to unravel the plot.

As mentioned previously, the *Paragons* adventure *A More Perfect Union* works well for *Wild Cards*, and could happen in the wake of a wild card outbreak. It makes a suitable sequel to this adventure, with the Unifier as a newly created ace. If the characters stay in the area, they notice the first odd goings-on. If they leave, they might be called back once things start getting serious, having to deal not only with brainwashed locals, but jokers and aces as well!

The *All-In* adventure anthology from Green Ronin Publishing also offers some ready-to-play *Wild Cards* adventures you can use. Some are aimed at a series set in New York City, while others are easily adapted for other locations, including the setting you choose for your own series.

The wild card has transformed John Czenik into a predator who preys on his own kind. His canine teeth have become retractable fangs, allowing him to bite and drink blood from his victims. He does so not for nourishment—indeed, apart from his ace powers, Czenik retains normal human needs for food, water, sleep, and oxygen. Instead, his body is now highly adaptive, capable of analyzing genetic samples from other wild carders and mimicking their abilities. Moreover, his own cells retain a "memory" of the DNA he has ingested, so he can build up a considerable "library" of ace powers.

Unfortunately for Czenik and the world at large, his power comes with an equally strong instinctive desire to use it, to hunt other wild carders and consume their abilities. He can literally smell them when they are near. His first kill took him almost completely by surprise and was done before he even knew what he'd done. He has tried to resist since, but with only limited success. He's terrified of being caught, and the fear, isolation, and siren call of his power are eroding his sanity. He's starting to *feel* like a predator, and to look at others as his prey.

Because of the predatory instincts that push him to use his power, Czenik doesn't realize that he doesn't have to kill victims in order to mimic their abilities. He just has to drain enough blood for his body to analyze and duplicate the DNA (a Drain of 1 point of Constitution is sufficient).

# APPENDIX I: SERIES CHRONOLOGY

The date in parenthesis next to the volume title is the date of publication of that particular book. Note this chronology does not include *Inside Straight,* the 18th volume in the *Wild Cards* series; the books of the Committee triad will be addressed in a future *Wild Cards* sourcebook from Green Ronin Publishing.

For each book, the first column lists the story or chapter titles in order of appearance. The second column lists the author's name, while the third column shows then the story takes place in the overall chronology of the *Wild Cards* world. Some times are approximate, based on what is known about the particular story.

In mosaic novels there's no sharp delineation within the text between sections written by individual authors (*e.g.*, individual chapters or stories). Instead the authors of particular plot threads are identified with the main character of each thread.

## VOLUME 1: WILD CARDS (JANUARY 1987)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Prologue | George R.R. Martin | late August—Sept. 15, 1946 |
| Thirty Minutes Over Broadway! | Howard Waldrop | Aug. 12—Sept. 15, 1946 |
| The Sleeper | Roger Zelazny | Sept. 15, 1946—Sept. 1947 |
| Witness | Walter Jon Williams | Sept. 15, 1946/late 1970s |
| Degradation Rites | Melinda Snodgrass | Sept. 1946/early 1950s |
| Interlude 1 | George R.R. Martin | |
| Shell Games | George R.R. Martin | Nov. 1963/end of Dec. 1963 |
| Interlude 2 | George R.R. Martin | |
| The Long, Dark Night of Fortunato | Lew Shiner | a few days, spring 1969 |
| Transfigurations | Victor Milán | fall 1969 to late May 1970 |
| Interlude 3 | George R.R. Martin | 1 day, 1971 |
| Down Deep | Ed Bryant & Leanne Harper | a few days, summer '72 |
| Interlude 4 | George R.R. Martin | |
| Strings | Stephen Leigh | July 14—19,1976 |
| Interlude 5 | George R.R. Martin | |
| Comes A Hunter | John Jos. Miller | 1 day, late summer 1985 |
| Epilogue: Third Generation | Lewis Shiner | |
| Appendix | Victor Milán | |

## VOLUME 2: ACES HIGH (APRIL 1987)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Pennies From Hell | Lew Shiner | About a week, Oct. 1979 |
| Jube 1 | George R.R. Martin | Mid-Nov. 1985 |
| Unto the Sixth Generation: Prologue | Walter Jon Williams | 1 day, mid-Dec. 1985 |
| Jube 2 | George R.R. Martin | 2 days, mid-Dec. 1985 |
| Ashes to Ashes | Roger Zelazny | 1 day, mid-Dec. 1985 |
| Unto the Sixth Generation | Walter Jon Williams | Mid- to late Dec. 1985 |
| Jube 3 | George R.R. Martin | Dec. 31, 1985 |
| If Looks Could Kill | Walton Simons | a few days in early Jan. 1986 |
| Jube 4 | George R.R. Martin | 1 day, Jan./Feb. 1986 |
| Unto the Sixth Generation: Epilogue | Walter Jon Williams | 1 day, Jan./Feb. 1986 |
| Winter's Chill | George R.R. Martin | March 8th, 1986 (with flashbacks) |
| Jube 5 | George R.R. Martin | 1 day, spring 1986 |
| Relative Difficulties | Melinda Snodgrass | 1 day or so; spring 1986 |
| With a Little Help From His Friends | Victor Milán | perhaps a week in spring 1986 |
| Jube 6 | George R.R. Martin | 1 day, spring 1986 |
| By Lost Ways | Pat Cadigan | a few days in May 1986 |
| Mr. Koyama's Comet | Walter Jon Williams | Mar. 1983, Oct. 1985, June 1986 |
| Half Past Dead | John Jos. Miller | a few days in June 1986 |
| Jube 7 | George R.R. Martin | 1 day in June 1986 |

## VOLUME 3: JOKERS WILD ( NOVEMBER 1987)

The events in this mosaic novel take place on September 15th, 1986

| | |
|---|---|
| Bagabond's Story | Leanne C. Harper |
| Fortunato's Story | Lewis Shiner |
| Wraith's Story | John Jos. Miller |
| Sewer Jack's Story | Edward Bryant |
| Roulette's Story | Melinda Snodgrass |
| Demise's Story | Walton Simons |
| Hiram Worchester's Story | George R.R. Martin |

## VOLUME 4: ACES ABROAD (JUNE 1988)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| The Tint of Hatred Prologue | Steven Leigh | Nov. 27, 1986 |
| From *The Journal of Xavier Desmond* 1 | George R.R. Martin | Nov. 30, 1986 |
| The Tint of Hatred 1 | Steven Leigh | Dec. 1, 1986 |
| From *The Journal of Xavier Desmond* 2 | George R.R. Martin | Dec. 1, 1986 |
| Beasts of Burden | John Jos. Miller | one day, 1986 |
| From *The Journal of Xavier Desmond* 3 | George R.R. Martin | Dec. 8, 1986 |
| The Tint of Hatred 2 | Steven Leigh | Dec. 9, 1986 |
| Blood Rights | Leanne C. Harper | about a week, 1986 |
| From *The Journal of Xavier Desmond* 4 | George R.R. Martin | Dec. 15, 1986 |
| The Tint of Hatred 3 | Steven Leigh | Dec. 23, 1986 |
| From *The Journal of Xavier Desmond* 5 | George R.R. Martin | Dec. 29, 1986 |
| The Tint of Hatred 4 | Steven Leigh | Jan. 1, 1987 |
| From *The Journal of Xavier Desmond* 6 | George R.R. Martin | Jan. 16, 1987 |
| Down by the Nile | Gail Gerstner-Miller | a few days, 1987 |
| From *The Journal of Xavier Desmond* 7 | George R.R. Martin | Jan. 30, 1987 |
| The Tint of Hatred 5 | Steven Leigh | Feb. 1-4, 1987 |
| From *The Journal of Xavier Desmond* 8 | George R.R. Martin | Feb. 7, 1987 |
| The Teardrop of India | Walton Simons | a few days, 1987 |
| Down in the Dreamtime | Edward Bryant | a few days, 1987 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| From *The Journal of Xavier Desmond* 9 | George R.R. Martin | March 14, 1987 |
| Zero Hour | Lew Shiner | a few days, 1987 |
| From *The Journal of Xavier Desmond* 10 | George R.R. Martin | March 21, 1987 |
| From *The Journal of Xavier Desmond* 11 | George R.R. Martin | April 10, 1987 |
| Puppets | Victor Milán | one day, 1987 |
| Mirrors of the Soul | Melinda M. Snodgrass | a few days, 1987 |
| Legends | Michael Cassutt | a few days, 1987 |
| From *The Journal of Xavier Desmond* 12 | George R.R. Martin | April 27, 1987 |
| From *The New York Times* | George R.R. Martin | July 17, 1987 |

## VOLUME 5: DOWN AND DIRTY (DECEMBER 1988)

Some story sections occur simultaneously.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Only the Dead Know Jokertown | John Jos. Miller | Oct.-Dec. 1986 |
| All the King's Horses 1 | George R.R. Martin | 1 day, 1987 |
| Concerto for Siren and Serotonin 1 | Roger Zelazny | Day or so, March 1987 |
| Breakdown 1 | Leanne C. Harper | about two weeks, March 1987 |
| All the King's Horses 2 | George R.R. Martin | 1 day, mid-March 1987 |
| Concerto for Siren and Serotonin 2 | Roger Zelazny | 1 day, mid-March 1987 |
| Jesus was an Ace | Arthur Byron Cover | 1 evening, spring 1987 |
| All the King's Horses 3 | George R.R. Martin | 1 day, spring 1987 |
| Concerto for Siren and Serotonin 3 | Roger Zelazny | 1 day, spring 1987 |
| All the King's Horses 4 | George R.R. Martin | 1 day, May 1987 |
| Blood Ties 1 | Melinda Snodgrass | a couple days, May 1987 |
| Concerto for Siren and Serotonin 4 | Roger Zelazny | a couple days, May 1987 |
| The Second Coming of Buddy Holley | Edward Bryant | 11 days, 1987 |
| Blood Ties 2 | Melinda Snodgrass | a couple days, May 1987 |
| All the King's Horses 5 | George R.R. Martin | 1 day, June 1987 |
| Concerto for Siren and Serotonin 5 | Roger Zelazny | 1 day, 1987 |
| The Hue of A Mind | Stephen Leigh | 9 days, 1987 |
| Blood Ties 3 | Melinda Snodgrass | 2 days, 1987 |
| Addicted to Love | Pat Cadigan | possible couple weeks, 1987 |
| Takedown 2 | Leanne C. Harper | couple of days, 1987 |
| Concerto for Siren and Serotonin 6 | Roger Zelazny | 1 day, 1987 |
| Blood Ties 4 | Melinda Snodgrass | 1 day or so, 1987 |
| Concerto for Siren and Serotonin 7 | Roger Zelazny | 1 day, 1987 |
| Blood Ties 5 | Melinda Snodgrass | 1 day, 1987 |
| All the King's Horses 6 | George R.R. Martin | 1 day, 1987 |
| Mortality | Walter Jon Williams | couple of days following June 15, 1987 |
| Blood Ties 6 | Melinda Snodgrass | about 5 days around June 20, 1987 |
| Concerto for Siren and Serotonin 8 | Roger Zelazny | 1 day, 1987 |
| "What Rough Beast..." 3 | Leanne C. Harper | 1 day, 1987 |
| Only the Dead Know Jokertown Epilogue | John Jos. Miller | 1 day, 1987 |
| All the King's Horses 7 | George R.R. Martin | 1 day, 1987 |

## VOLUME 6: ACE IN THE HOLE (FEBRUARY 1990)

The events in this mosaic novel take place between July 18 and July 25, 1988

| | |
|---|---|
| Golden Boy's Story | Walter Jon Williams |
| Gregg Hartmann's Story | Stephen Leigh |
| Mackie Messer's Story | Victor Milán |
| Sara Morgenstern's Story | Victor Milán |
| Demise's Story | Walton Simons |
| Dr. Tachyon's Story | Melinda Snodgrass |

## VOLUME 7: DEAD MAN'S HAND (AUGUST 1990)

The events in this novel take place between July 18 and July 25, 1988

| | |
|---|---|
| Yeoman's Story | John Jos. Miller |
| Jay Ackroyd's Story | George R.R. Martin |

## VOLUME 8: ONE-EYED JACKS (FEBRUARY 1991)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Nobody's Girl 1 | Walton Simons | 1 day, Aug. 1988 |
| Luck Be A Lady | Chris Claremont | couple of days, Aug. 1988 |
| Nobody Knows Me Like My Baby 2 | Walton Simons | about 10 days, mid-Sept. 1988 |
| Horses | Lew Shiner | couple weeks in Nov. 1988 |
| Mr. Nobody Goes to Town 3 | Walton Simons | about a week in Dec. 1988 |
| Snow Dragon | Bill Wu | 1 day, late Dec. 1988 |
| Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen 4 | Walton Simons | couple of days, late Jan. 1989 |
| Nowadays Clancy Can't Even Sing | Victor Milán | spring/summer 1989 |
| You're Nobody Till Somebody Loves You 5 | Walton Simons | spring 1989 |
| Sixteen Candles | Stephen Leigh | May 14, 1989 |
| My Name Is Nobody 6 | Walton Simons | week or so in spring 1989 |
| The Devil's Triangle | Melinda Snodgrass | spring/summer 1989 |
| Nobody's Home 7 | Walton Simons | Aug. 1989 |
| Dead Heart Beating | John Jos. Miller | 1 day, Aug. or Sept. 1989 |
| Nobody Gets Out Alive 8 | Walton Simons | day or two, late Sept. 1989 |

## VOLUME 9: JOKERTOWN SHUFFLE (SEPTEMBER 1991)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| The Temptation of Hieronymous Bloat 1 | Stephen Leigh | 1 day, winter 1989 |
| And Hope to Die | John Jos. Miller | 1 day, Nov./Dec. 1989 |
| The Temptation of Hieronymous Bloat 2 | Stephen Leigh | 1 day, 1989 |
| Lovers 1 | Melinda Snodgrass | couple of days, Feb. 1990 |
| The Temptation of Hieronymous Bloat 3 | Stephen Leigh | couple of days, 1990 |
| Lovers 2 | Melinda Snodgrass | weeks, 1990 |
| The Temptation of Hieronymous Bloat 4 | Stephen Leigh | 1 day, 1990 |
| Madmen Across the Water | Victor Milán | about a week, Feb. 1990 |
| The Temptation of Hieronymous Bloat 5 | Stephen Leigh | day or so, Feb. 1990 |
| Lovers 3 | Melinda Snodgrass | weeks, 1990 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| The Temptation of Hieronymous Bloat 6 | Stephen Leigh | couple of days, 1990 |
| While Night's Black Agents to Their Prey Do Rouse 1 | Walter Jon Williams | maybe a week; Feb. 1990 |
| The Temptation of Hieronymous Bloat 7 | Stephen Leigh | 1 day, 1990 |
| Riders | Lew Shiner | weeks? March, 1990 |
| Nobody Does It Alone | Walton Simons | weeks? March, 1990 |
| The Temptation of Hieronymous Bloat 8 | Stephen Leigh | 1 day, 1990 |
| Lovers 4 | Melinda Snodgrass | 1 day, summer 1990 |
| The Temptation of Hieronymous Bloat 9 | Stephen Leigh | couple of days, 1990 |
| While Night's Black Agents to Their Prey Do Rouse 2 | Walter Jon Williams | 1 day, Aug. 1990 |
| Lovers 5 | Melinda Snodgrass | same day as Lovers 4 |
| The Temptation of Hieronymous Bloat 10 | Stephen Leigh | same day as Temptation 9 |
| Lovers 6 | Melinda Snodgrass | same day as Lovers 4 |
| The Temptation of Hieronymous Bloat 11 | Stephen Leigh | 1 day, 1990 |

## VOLUME 10: DOUBLE SOLITAIRE (APRIL 1992)

A novel by Melinda Snodgrass that starts immediately after the events of Volume 9. It covers approximately four months from the end of August through approximately the end of December 1990.

## VOLUME 11: DEALER'S CHOICE (NOVEMBER 1992)

The events in this mosaic novel take place between September 21 and September 23, 1990.

| | |
|---|---|
| Bloat's Story | Stephen Leigh |
| Modular Man's Story | Walter Jon Williams |
| Billy Ray's Story | John Jos. Miller |
| The Great and Powerful Turtle | George R.R. Martin |
| Bodysnatchers's Story | George R.R. Martin |
| Wyungare's Story | Edward Bryant |

## VOLUME 12: TURN OF THE CARDS (FEBRUARY 1993)

A novel by Victor Milán that starts a few months after the end of the events depicted in *Double Solitaire,* from April 1991 through summer 1991.

## VOLUME 13: CARD SHARKS (MARCH 1993)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| The Ashes of Memory 1 | Stephen Leigh | Sept. 16-17, 1993 |
| "Till I Kissed You" | William F. Wu | 3 days, summer 1959 |
| The Ashes of Memory 2 | Stephen Leigh | 1 day, 1993 |
| The Crooked Man | Melinda Snodgrass | 6 months, 1985 |
| The Ashes of Memory 3 | Stephen Leigh | a couple of days, 1993 |
| A Method of Reaching Extreme Altitude | Michael Cassutt | Apr. 12-May 5, 1958 |
| The Ashes of Memory 4 | Stephen Leigh | a couple of days, 1993 |
| A Wind From Khorasan | Victor Milán | April 16-21, 1980 |
| The Ashes of Memory 5 | Stephen Leigh | a week in Sept. 27, 1993 |
| The Long Sleep | Roger Zelazny | some months, starting March 1951—months |
| The Ashes of Memory 6 | Stephen Leigh | a couple of days, 1993 |
| "Cursum Perficio" | Kevin Andrew Murphy | Feb.15—about May 3, 1962 |
| The Ashes of Memory 7 | Stephen Leigh | a couple of days, to Oct., 1993 |
| The Lamia's Tale | Laura J. Mixon | 10-14 days, May/June 1968 |
| The Ashes of Memory 8 | Stephen Leigh | a couple of days, Oct. 1993 |

## VOLUME 14: MARKED CARDS (MARCH 1994)

The events in this book pick up right after the events of Volume 13.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| The Color of His Skin 1 | Stephen Leigh | 2 days, early Oct. 1993 |
| Two of a Kind | Walton Simons | Mid-Oct. to Halloween, 1993 |
| The Color of His Skin 2 | Stephen Leigh | a couple of days, early Nov. 1993 |
| My Sweet Lord | Victor Milán | couple of weeks, Nov. 1993 |
| The Color of His Skin 3 | Stephen Leigh | a week, 1993 |
| Paths of Silence and of Night | Leanne C. Harper | about a week, fall 1993 |
| The Color of His Skin 4 | Stephen Leigh | a couple of days, 1993 |
| Feeding Frenzy 1 | Walter Jon Williams | a couple of days, fall 1993 |
| The Color of His Skin 5 | Stephen Leigh | a couple of days, 1993 |
| Feeding Frenzy 2 | Walter Jon Williams | a couple of days, fall 1993 |
| The Color of His Skin 6 | Stephen Leigh | a week or so, 1993 |
| A Breath of Life | Sage Walker | a month, fall 1993 |
| The Color of His Skin 7 | Stephen Leigh | weeks/ months, winter 1993/4 |
| A Dose of Reality | Laura Mixon & Melinda Snodgrass | March 31-May 2, 1994 |
| The Color of His Skin 8 | Stephen Leigh | a day, 1994 |

## VOLUME 15: BLACK TRUMP (AUGUST 1995)

The events in this mosaic novel take place between late May and September 1994.

| | |
|---|---|
| Gregg Hartmann's Story | Stephen Leigh |
| Jay Ackroyd's Story | George R.R. Martin |
| Cap'n Trip's Story | Victor Milán |
| Billy Ray's Story | John Jos. Miller |
| Zoe Harris's Story | Sage Walker |

## VOLUME 16: DEUCES DOWN (JULY 2002)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Storming Space | Michael Cassutt | Oct.-Dec. 1968 |
| Four Days In October | John Jos. Miller | Oct. 13-16, 1969 |
| Walking the Floor Over You | Walton Simons | couple of days, July 1977 |
| A Face for the Cutting Room Floor | Melinda Snodgrass | week or so, Aug. 1981 |
| Father Henry's Little Miracle | Daniel Abraham | Feb. 3-8, 1987 |
| Promises | Stephen Leigh | Sept. 1994-Jan. 1998 |
| With a Flourish and a Flair | Kevin Andrew Murphy | 1 day, late Oct. 2002 |

## VOLUME 17: DEATH DRAWS FIVE (JANUARY 2006)

The events depicted in this novel by John Jos. Miller take place in summer 2003, over the course of a week or so.

# APPENDIX II: SERIES REFERENCES

To simplify reference to the many volumes and authors of the *Wild Cards* series, this book uses a system of abbreviations when citing original source material from the series. A standard citation is the volume number and the author's name, such as "1Zelazny," indicating Roger Zelazny's material from Volume 1, *Wild Cards*. In cases where the author has multiple stories or chapters, a number or letter in parentheses follows to indicate which one is referenced (with "Interstitial" indicating the interstitial or bridging material in the volume).

The "Appeared In" section lists only those stories a character has actually appeared in. The "Mentioned In" section catches most of the times a character was mentioned by name or description, but did not actually appear. Some very minor references of this sort may not have been included for all characters. The individual stories or sections of books can be found in the Story Chronology in **Appendix I**.

## A

***A Year in a Man's Life: The Journal of Xavier Desmond* (book):** 7Miller; 17Miller

***Ace Avenger #49: Mission to Iran* (book):** 7Miller

**Aces High:** 1Williams; 1Martin (3Interstitial); 1Leigh; 2Shiner; 2Zelazny; 2Williams; 2Martin; 2Snodgrass; 2Martin (6Interstitial,7Interstitial); 3Martin; 3Shiner; 3Miller; 3Snodgrass; 4Martin (2); 5Zelazny (1,4); 5Harper (1); 5Snodgrass (2); 5Martin (5); 5Leigh; 5Cadigan; 5Williams; 7Martin; 7Miller; 8Simons (2,4,5); 9Williams (1); 11Martin (B,T); 11Williams; 12Milán; 14Leigh (4,8); 15Martin; 16Simons; 16Murphy

***Aces* Magazine:** 1Martin (5Interstitial); 3Martin; 4Leigh (1); 4Martin (9,11); 7Martin; 8Simons (4); 10Snodgrass; 11Martin (T,B); 11Miller; 12Milán; 14Leigh (3); 15Miller; 16Murphy; 17Miller

**Ackroyd, Jay (Popinjay): Appears in:** 3Martin; 3Snodgrass; 3Bryant; 4Martin (12); 6Williams; 6Snodgrass; 7Martin; 7Miller; 8Simons (2,3,5); 9Simons; 10Snodgrass; 13Milán; 14Simons; 15Martin; 15Milán; 17Miller; **Mentioned in**: 2Martin (4Interstitial,5Interstitial,6Interstitial); 3Harper; 8Simons (4,6); 9Miller; 11Martin (T); 11Miller; 12Milán; 14Leigh (2); 15Leigh

**Aevre (Network species):** 2Martin (2Interstial); 10Snodgrass

**African/Joker National Congress (AJNC):** 4Leigh (4)

**Allumbrados:** 17Miller

**Andrieux, Blaise: Appears in:** 4Snodgrass; 4Martin (12); 5Snodgrass (1,2,3,5); 6Snodgrass; 7Martin; 8Simons (4); 8Snodgrass; 8Miller; 9Leigh; 9Snodgrass; 9Milán; 9Williams (1); **Mentioned in:** 5Snodgrass (6); 6Leigh; 6Williams; 9Miller; 9Simons; 9Williams (2); 11Leigh; 11Martin (B); 12Milán

**Aquarius:** (See also **Cap'n Trips**); **Appears in:** 2Snodgrass; 12Milán; **Mentioned in**: 1Milán (Appendix); 8Milán; 14Milán; 15Milán

**Astronomer, The: Appears in:** 2Shiner; 2Williams; 2Simons; 2Martin (5Interstitial); 2Cadigan; 3Simons; 3Shiner; 3Snodgrass; **Mentioned in**: 4Shiner; 5Martin (1,6); 5Cadigan; 5Williams; 6Simons; 7Martin; 9Snodgrass (1); 9Leigh (9,10); 9Williams (2); 10Snodgrass; 12Milán; 15Martin; 17Miller

***Autobiography of Cyclone, The* (book):** 2Martin

## B

**Bagabond (Melotti, Suzanne): Appears in:** 1Bryant/Harper; 3Bryant; 3Harper; 5Bryant; 5Cadigan; 14Harper; **Mentioned in**: 4Bryant; 11Bryant

**Barnett, Reverend Leo: Appears in:** 5Cover; 6Snodgrass; 6Leigh; 6Williams; 7Martin; 14Williams (2); 15Miller; 17Miller; **Mentioned in**: 4Leigh (1,2,4,5); 4Martin (2,4,7,10); 4Bryant; 4Milán; 4Snodgrass; 5Snodgrass (1,2); 5Leigh; 5Martin (6); 5Williams; 6Milán (S); 6Simons; 7Miller; 7Martin; 8Wu; 8Leigh; 12Milán; 13Leigh (7); 14Leigh (1,3,7,8); 14Milán; 14Walker; 14Mixon/Snodgrass; 15Leigh; 15Martin; 15Milán

**Battle, George G.: Appears in:** Miller11; 11Martin (B); 11Leigh; 11Williams; 13Cassutt; 13Milán; 14Simons; 14Leigh (2); 14Williams (1); **Mentioned in:** 12Milán; 13Leigh (6,7,8); 14Leigh (3,5,6,7,8); 14Williams (2); 14Mixon/Snodgrass; 15 Leigh; 15Martin; 15Miller; 17Miller

**Belew, J. Robert: Appears in:** 12Milán; 13Milán; 13Leigh (4); 15Martin; **Mentioned in:** 13Leigh (5); 15Milán; 15Miller; 17Miller

**Black Eagle (Sanderson, Earl Jr.): Appears in:** 1Williams; **Mentioned in**: 1Snodgrass; 1Martin (3Interstitial,5Interstitial); 3Martin; 4Martin (8); 4Snodgrass; 6Williams; 6Snodgrass; 11Miller; 12Milán; 13Cassutt; 13Murphy; 16Miller; 16Murphy; 17Miller

**Black Mike's Pub:** 2Martin (1Interstial)

**Black Shadow (Langford, Neal Carton): Appears in:** *As Black Shadow:* 1Leigh, 5Harper (1); 9Williams; 11Miller; 14Williams; *As Mr. Gravemold:* 5Snodgrass (2); 5Williams; 6Leigh; *As Wall Walker:* 3Martin, 5Williams; 11Martin (B); *As Juve:* 9Williams (1); *As No Dice:* 9Williams (1); *As Simon:* 9Williams (1); *As Mr. Diamond:* 14Williams (1); **Mentioned in:** *As Black Shadow:* 1Miller, 1Milán (Appendix); 2Milán, 2Miller, 7Martin; 11Leigh; 11Martin; *As Mr. Gravemold:* 11Leigh; 14Williams; *As Mr. Diamond:* 14Williams (2)

**Bloat (Honorlaw, Theodore): Appears in:** 8Wu; 8Leigh; 8Snodgrass; 9Leigh; 9Snodgrass; 9Williams (2); 11 (all stories); **Mentioned in:** 10Snodgrass; 12Milán; 13Leigh (1,7); 14Walker; 16Murphy; 17Miller

***Blythe* (Orson Welles film):** 13Murphy

**Blythe van Renssaeler Memorial Clinic, The:** See **Jokertown Clinic**

**Braun, Jack (Golden Boy): Appears in:** 1Williams, 2Williams; 4Leigh (1,5); 4Martin (2,4,5,8,10,11); 4Simons; 4Milán; 4Snodgrass; 5Snodgrass (1); 6Williams; 6Snodgrass; 6Milán (M,S); 6Simons; 7Martin; **Mentioned in**: 1Snodgrass; 1Martin; 3Martin; 4Miller; 4Shiner; 4Martin (12); 5Martin (2); 6Leigh; 7Miller; 11Martin (T); 11Miller; 12Milán; 13Snodgrass; 13Milán; 14Leigh (8); 15Miller; 15Walker; 16Miller; 16Murphy

**Butcher Dagon:** 17Miller

## C

**Cameo: Appears in:** 11Miller; 13Leigh (6,7); 14Leigh (2); 16Murphy; 17Miller; **Mentioned in:** 11Leigh; 13Murphy

**Camp Xavier Desmond:** 17Miller

**Cannibal Headhunters:** 1Miller; 5Miller; 5Zelazny.4; 9Miller

***Cannibals, The* (novel by Stephen King):** 3Bryant

**Cap'n Trips (Meadows, Dr. Marcus Aurelius): Appears in:** 1Milán; 2Snodgrass; 2Milán; 3Snodgrass; 3Martin; 5Snodgrass (1); 8Milán; 9Milán; 10Snodgrass; 12Milán; 13Cassutt; 13Leigh (5); 14Milán; 15Milán; 15Martin; **Mentioned in**: 2Martin (6Interstitial); 2Miller; 3Miller; 4Snodgrass; 5Snodgrass (2,3); 9Snodgrass (1,4); 11Martin (T); 13Leigh (4,6); 14Leigh (3); 15Miller

**Captain Flint (Foxworthy, Sir Kenneth):** 15Miller; 15Leigh

**Card Sharks, The:** 12Milán; 13 (all stories); 14 (all stories); 15 (all stories)

**Chaisson, Cordelia: Appears in:** 3Shiner; 3Simons; 3Bryant; 4Bryant; 5Harper; 5Bryant; 11Bryant; **Mentioned in**: 3Harper; 3Miller

**Chickadees:** 7Miller; 15Miller
**Cholon (Ho Chi Minh City):** 12Milán; 14Milán
**Chrysalis (Jory, Debra Jo): Appears in:** 1Miller; 2Martin (1Interstitial,5Interstitial); 2Miller; 3Shiner; 3Snodgrass; 3Martin; 4Miller; 4Martin (3,8,10,12); 4Simons; 4Bryant; 4Milán; 5Miller; 5Snodgrass (2,4); 5Cadigan; 7Martin; **Mentioned in**: 1Leigh; 2Martin (6Interstitial); 3Miller; 4Leigh (1,5); 4Martin (2); 4Harper; 4Gerstner-Miller; 4Shiner; 5Snodgrass (1,3); 6Williams; 6Leigh; 6Milán (M,S); 6Snodgrass; 7Miller; 8Simons (2,4); 9Leigh (10); 11Miller; 14Leigh (1,7); 15Leigh; 16Abraham; 17Miller
**Church of Jesus Christ, Joker:** 3Snodgrass; 3Miller; 4Martin (7); 17Miller
**Cloisters, The:** 2Simons; 2Cadigan, 3Simons
**Club Chaos:** 16Murphy
**Club Dead Nicolas:** 5Zelazny (2); 11Miller; 13Leigh (6,7); 15Miller; 16Murphy; 17Miller
**Cosmic Pumpkin Head Shop and Organic Deli:** 2Milán; 5Snodgrass.1; 8Milán; 9Milán; 10Snodgrass; 12Milán; 15Milán; 16Murphy
**Cosmic Traveler:** (See also **Cap'n Trips**); **Appears in:** 2Snodgrass; 8Milán; 9Milán; 10Snodgrass; 12Milán
**Crypt Kicker (Puckett, Bobby Joe):** 11Miller; 12Milán; 14Simons; 14Leigh (2); 15Miller
**Crystal Palace, The:** 1Miller; 2Martin (1Interstitial,4Interstitial,5Interstitial); 2Simons; 2Miller; 3Simons; 3Shiner; 3Snodgrass; 3Martin; 3Miller; 4Martin (3,10); 5Miller; 5Snodgrass (2); 6Milán (S); 6Snodgrass; 7Martin; 7Miller; 8Leigh; 9Miller; 9Leigh (10); 15Leigh; 15Milán; 16Abraham

## D

**Davis, Hannah: Appears in:** 13Leigh; 14Leigh (1,2,3,4,5,7,8); 15Leigh; 15Miller; **Mentioned in:** 14Simons; 14Williams (1); 14Mixon/Snodgrass; 15Martin; 16Leigh
***Day of the Wild Card* (book):** 2Martin
**Deadhead (Stephens, Glen): Appears in:** 5Miller; 5Snodgrass (6); 8Miller; **Mentioned in:** 7Miller; 9Miller
**Demise (Spector, James): Appears in:** 2Martin (2Interstitial.5Interstitial); 2Simons; 2Cadigan; 3Simons; 3Shiner; 3Harper; 3Martin; 5Zelazny (2); 6Simons; 6Williams; 6Leigh; 6Milán (M); 6Snodgrass; 16Abraham; **Mentioned in**: 2Martin (7Interstitial); 4Snodgrass; 5Zelazny (1); 5Snodgrass (1); 7Martin; 9Shiner; 14Leigh (1); 14Simons; 15Miller
**Demon Princes, The:** 1Martin (4Interstitial); 2Williams; 2Williams (Epilogue); 2Martin; 2Martin (6Interstitial); 3Martin; 5Snodgrass (6); 9Miller; 9Milán; 12Milán
**Desmond, Xavier ("Des"): Appears in:** 1Martin; 1Martin (4,Interstitial,5Interstitial); 3Shiner; 3Snodgrass; 4Martin (all *Journal*, *NYTimes*); 4Miller; 4Shiner; 4Milán; 5Martin (3); 5Snodgrass (1); **Mentioned in**: 2Martin (1); 3Martin; 4Harper; 4Leigh (4,5); 4Bryant; 4Snodgrass; 5Harper (1); 5Martin (5,6); 5Leigh; 6Snodgrass; 7Miller; 7Martin; 13Milán; 15Leigh; 17Miller
***Desperately Seeking Susan* (film):** 17Miller
**Destiny (band):** 1Milán; 12Milán
***Destiny* (film):** 12Milán
**Detroit Steel (Tsakos, Mike): Appears in:** 11Martin (T); 11Williams; 11Bryant; **Mentioned in:** 7Martin; 11Leigh
**Dow, Jane Lillian (Water Lily): Appears in:** 2Cadigan; 3Shiner; 3Martin; 3Snodgrass; 5Harper (1); 5Cadigan; **Mentioned in**: 5Martin (2); 5Zelazny (2,4); 5Harper (2); 5Snodgrass (5,6); 5Williams; 7Martin; 11Martin (T)
**Downs, Thomas ("Digger"): Appears in:** 3Snodgrass; 3Martin; 4Leigh (1); 4Miller; 4Miller; 4Martin (4,8,9,10,12); 4Milán; 5Snodgrass (1,2); 5Leigh; 6Snodgrass; 7Martin; 7Miller; 10Snodgrass; 17Miller; **Mentioned in**: 4Leigh (5); 4Martin (11); 4Snodgrass; 6Leigh; 6Milán (M); 14Leigh (1); 15Miller; 15Leigh
**Dr. Tachyon: Appears in:** 1Waldrop; 1Zelazny; 1Williams; 1Snodgrass; 1Martin; 1Martin (Prologue, 2Interstitial,3Interstitial,5Interstitial); 1Shiner; 2Martin; 2Martin (2Interstitial); 2Williams; 2Snodgrass, 2Milán; 2Cadigan; 2Miller; 3Snodgrass; 3Miller; 3Shiner; 4Miller; 4Harper; 4Leigh (3); 4Martin (6,8,9,11); 4Gerstner-Miller; 4Simons; 4Bryant; 4Shiner; 4Milán; 4Snodgrass; 4Cassutt; 5Snodgrass; 5Bryant; 5Cadigan; 5Martin (6); 6Snodgrass; 6Leigh; 6Milán (M); 6Williams; 7Miller; 7Martin; 8Simons (2,4); 8Milán; 9Miller; 9Leigh; 9Snodgrass; 9Williams (2); **Mentioned in**: 2Martin (3Interstitial,5Interstitial,6Interstitial,7Interstitial, 12Interstitial); 2Simons; 3Martin; 3Simons; 4Martin (1,4,10); 4Leigh (2); 5Miller; 5Martin (2,3,5); 5Zelazny (3,8); 5Leigh; 6Leigh; 6Milán (S); 6Simons; 8Simons (5,6,7,8); 8Leigh; 8Miller; 9Milán; 9Williams (1); 11Martin (T); 11Leigh; 11Miller; 12Milán; 13Leigh (2); 13Snodgrass; 13Murphy; 13Mixon; 14Leigh (1,2,8); 14Simons; 14Milán; 14Walker; 14Mixon/Snodgrass; 15Martin; 15Leigh; 15Walker; 16Abraham; 16Murphy; 17Miller

## E

**Ebbets Field:** 3Miller; 11Martin (T); 11Williams; 11Miller; 16Miller
**Ellis Island (The Rox):** 8Wu; 8Simons (5); 8Leigh; 8Snodgrass; 9Leigh; 9Snodgrass (1,2,3,4,5); 9Milán; 9Wiliams; 9Shiner; 9Simons; 10Snodgrass; 11 (all stories); 12Milán; 13Leigh (1,6,7); 14Leigh (1,2,4,7,8); 14Simons; 14Williams (2); 14Walker; 15Leigh; 16Murphy
**Embe (Network species):** 2Williams (Prologue); 2Martin (2Interstitial)
**Envoy, The (Harstein, David): Appears in:** 1Williams; 1Snodgrass; 1Martin (1Interstitial,3Interstitial,5Interstitial); 4Martin (11); 6Snodgrass; 6Simons; 6Williams; 13Murphy; **Mentioned in**: 1Martin (3Interstitial); 3Martin; 4Snodgrass; 6Williams
**Ernie's Bar and Grill:** 2Martin (1Interstitial); 3Snodgrass; 4Martin (5); 5Snodgrass (1)
***Executioner's Song, The* (novel by Norman Mailer):** 5Cover

## F

**Fadeout (Cunningham, Phillip): Appears in:** 3Martin; 3Miller; 5Miller; 7Miller; 8Miller; **Mentioned in:** 8Wu; 9Miller
**Famous Bowery Wild Card Dime Museum, The:** 1Martin; 3Simons; 3Miller; 5Martin (5,6); 5Zelazny (8); 6Milán (M); 6Leigh; 7Martin; 7Miller; 8Leigh; 8Snodgrass; 9Miller; 11Martin (T); 14Walker; 14Leigh (7,8); 14Mixon/Snodgrass; 15Leigh; 15Martin; 16Murphy; 17Miller
**Ferric Jagger (band):** 3Bryant
**Finn, Dr. Bradley LaTour: Appears in:** 5Zelazny (3); 5Snodgrass (2,3,4,5,6); 5Williams; 6Snodgrass; 7Martin; 7Miller; 8Claremont; 8Snodgrass; 9Williams (1); 11Bryant; 13Leigh (2,7); 13Snodgrass; 14Simons; 14Mixon/Snodgrass; 15Martin; 17Miller; **Mentioned in:** 5Zelazny (4); 9Simons; 13Leigh (3); 14Leigh (2,7); 14Walker; 15Walker; 15Leigh
**Fortunato: Appears in:** 1Shiner, 1Martin (3Interstial); 1Miller; 2Shiner; 2Cadigan; 2Miller; 3Shiner; 3Martin; 3Miller; 4Simons; 4Shiner; 10Snodgrass; 17Miller; **Mentioned in**: 2Martin (5Interstitial); 4Gerstner-Miller; 4Bryant; 4Martin (10); 5Cadigan; 5Snodgrass (6); 8Shiner; 9Snodgrass (2); 9Williams (1); 9Shiner; 9Simons; 11Martin (T); 12Milán; 15Milán; 16Murphy
**Fortune, John:** 5Snodgrass (1); 16 Murphy; 17Miller
***Four Deuces, The* (film):** 16Snodgrass
**Freak Zone:** 17Miller
**Freakers:** 1Martin; 1Martin (4Interstitial); 2Martin (1Interstitial); 3Snodgrass; 3Martin; 3Harper; 3Bryant; 4Martin (10); 5Snodgrass (6); 6Simons; 7Miller; 7Martin; 9Williams (1); 15Miller; 15Martin
***French Lieutenant's Woman, The* (film):** 16Snodgrass
**Funhouse, The:** 1Martin; 1Shiner; 2Martin (1Interstitial, 5Interstitial); 4Bryant; 4Snodgrass; 5Snodgrass (1); 5Bryant; 5Martin (6); 6Snodgrass

## G

**Glabberians (Network species):** 1Martin; 2Martin (1Interstitial, 2Interstitial); 10Snodgrass
***Godot Is My Co-Pilot: A Life of Jetboy* (book):** 1Waldrop
***Golden Boy* (film):** 1Williams; 13Murphy
**Governor's Island:** 14Williams; 15Leigh; 15Martin; 15Miller

## H

**Hairy's Kitchen:** 2Martin (1Interstitial); 2Zelazny; 2Martin; 2Martin (7Interstitial); 8Wu
**Harris, Zoe (Blowjob): Appears in:** 14Walker; 15Walker; 15Leigh; **Mentioned in:** 14Mixon/Snodgrass; 15Miller
**Hartmann, Senator Gregg (Puppetman): Appears in:** 1Martin (3Interstitial); 1Leigh; 3Snodgrass; 4Leigh (Prologue,1,2,3,5); 4Martin (2,6,8,11); 4Miller; 4Harper; 4Simons; 4Milán; 4Snodgrass; 4Cassutt; 5Leigh; 6Leigh; 6Williams; 6Simons; 6Snodgrass; 6Milán (M,S); 8Shiner; 9Williams (1); 11Martin (T); 11Williams; 11Leigh; 13Mixon; 14Leigh; 14Simons; 14Williams (1); 14Mixon/Snodgrass; 15Leigh; 15Walker; 15Miller; **Mentioned in**: 2Williams; 2Snodgrass; 3Martin; 4Martin (3,4,7,12); 4Leigh (4); 4Bryant; 4Shiner; 5Snodgrass (1,2); 5Bryant; 5Zelazny (6); 5Martin (6); 5Williams; 6Snodgrass; 6Milán (S); 7Miller; 7Martin; 8Leigh; 8Snodgrass; 9Leigh (3,4); 9Snodgrass (1,4); 9Williams (2); 11Miller; 12Milán; 13Leigh (1,8); 14Milán; 14Williams (2); 14Walker; 15Martin; 16Abraham; 16Leigh
**Herne the Hunter (Hardesty, Dylan): Appears in:** 11 (all stories); **Mentioned in:** 14Leigh (1); 15Leigh; 16Murphy
**Highwayman, The: Appears in:** 15Walker; 17Miller; **Mentioned in:** 15Leigh
**Holley, Buddy:** 5Bryant
**Hunapu and Xbalanque:** 4Harper, 13Harper

## I

***I Was A Teenage Joker* (film):** 13Wu
***If You're Going to Jokertown* (song):** 16Cassutt
**Immaculate Egrets:** 2Martin (6Interstitial); 2Miller; 3Shiner; 3Martin; 3Harper; 3Miller; 5Miller; 5Harper (1,2); 5Zelazny (5); 7Miller; 8Simons (3,5,6,7); 8Wu; 8Miller; 9Miller; 9Leigh (10)
***Information Please Almanac of Aces, The* (book):** 2Martin

## J

***Jason and the Argonauts* (film):** 16Snodgrass
**Jayewardene, J.C.: Appears in:** 4Simons; 4Shiner; **Mentioned in**: 4Martin (9)
**Jerusalem:** 4Martin (7); 15Miller; 15Walker
**Jetboy (Tomlin, Robert): Appears in:** 1Waldrop; 1Zelazny; **Mentioned in**: 1Martin (Prologue); 1Williams; 1Snodgrass; 1Shiner (Epilogue); 2Martin; 2Snodgrass; 3Martin (Prologue); 3Martin; 3Miller; 3Shiner; 3Snodgrass; 4Martin (1,6); 4Leigh (2); 4Gerstner-Miller; 4Shiner; 5Martin (1,5,6); 5Zelazny (8); 6Williams; 7Miller; 7Martin; 8Simons (2); 8Wu; 8Milán; 8Leigh; 8Snodgrass; 8Miller; 9Simons; 10Snodgrass; 11Martin (T); 12Milán; 13Leigh; 13Zelazny; 14Walker; 14Leigh (8); 15Leigh; 15Martin
**Jetboy's Tomb:** 1Martin; 3Martin; 3Bryant; 3Shiner; 3Snodgrass; 3Miller; 4Bryant; 4Milán; 4Martin (12); 6Snodgrass; 9Simons; 10Snodgrass; 13Cassutt; 15Martin
**Joker-Aid Concerts:** 3Snodgrass
**Joker Amnesty International:** 16Leigh
**Joker Anti-Defamation League (JADL):** 1Martin (4Interstitial); 4Martin (10,12, *NYTimes*); 6Milán (S); 14Walker
**Joker Brigade:** 1Shiner; 1Bryant/Harper; 1Martin (5Interstitial); 7Miller; 8Claremont; 11Williams; 11Leigh; 12Milán; 14Williams (2); 15Martin
**Joker Brigade, New:** 12Milán; 15Milán
***Joker Mama* (film):** 8Simons (2)
**Jokers For A Just Society (JJS):** 1Leigh; 4Martin (10); 4Milán; 5Leigh; 6Leigh; 6Milán (S); 16Leigh
**Jokers Wild:** 2Martin; 2Milán; 6Milán (M); 7Miller; 8Simons (3)
***Jokertown* (film):** 8Simons (4); 9Williams (1); 13Wu; 13Leigh (8); 15Martin
***Jokertown Blues* (song):** See ***The Wild Card Blues***.
***Jokertown Blues* (TV show):** 16Snodgrass
**Jokertown Boys, The (band):** 16Murphy; 17Miller
**Jokertown Clinic, The:** 1Martin (2Interstitial); 2Snodgrass; 3Snodgrass; 3Simons; 4Martin (*NYTimes*); 5Zelazny (3); 5Snodgrass (1,3,5,6); 5Cadigan; 5Martin (6); 5Williams; 6Snodgrass; 7Martin; 7Miller; 8Snodgrass; 9Leigh (1); 9Miller; 9Snodgrass (1); 9Milán; 9Williams (1); 10Snodgrass; 11Bryant; 11Miller; 11Martin (T); 12Milán; 13Leigh (2,3); 13Mixon; 14Leigh (2,7); 14Simons; 14Harris; 14Mixon/Snodgrass; 15Leigh; 15Walker; 15Martin; 16Murphy; 17Miller
***Jokertown Cry:*** 2Martin (1Interstitial,6Interstitial); 3Martin; 4Martin (9); 5Cover; 5Martin (6); 6Snodgrass; 7Martin; 7Miller; 8Simon (3,6); 8Wu; 15Leigh; 15Martin; 16Simons; 16Leigh
**Jokertown Mission, The:** 5Cover; 5Snodgrass (2); 6Snodgrass
***Jokertown Strutters Ball* (song):** 3Simons
**Jokka Bruddas, The:** 17Miller
**Jube the Walrus (Jhubben): Appears in:** 1Martin; 2Martin (all Interstitial); 2Zelazny; 2Milán; 3Shiner; 5Zelazny (4); 5Martin (6); 7Martin; 8Wu; 8Simons (6); 10Snodgrass; 13Wu; 14Leigh (3,7); 14Walker; 14Mixon/Snodgrass; 16Simons; 16Abraham; **Mentioned in**: 3Snodgrass; 5Snodgrass (1,3); 5Leigh; 5Zelazny (6); 8Milán; 8Snodgrass; 9Williams (1); 14Leigh (5,8)
**Jumpers:** 8Shiner; 8Simons (3,4,5,6,7,8); 8Wu; 8Leigh; 8Snodgrass; 8Miller; 9Leigh; 9Miller; 9Snodgrass; 9Milán; 9Williams; 9Shiner; 9Simons; 10Snodgrass; 11Leigh; 11Martin (B); 11Williams; 12Milán; 13Leigh (7); 14Williams; 14Leigh (7); 15Martin; 15Walker
**Jumpin' Jack Flash:** (See also **Cap'n Trips**); **Appears in:** 2Martin (6Interstitial); 2Cadigan; 8Milán; 9Milán; 10Snodgrass; 12Milán; **Mentioned in**: 1Shiner (Epilogue); 1Milán (Appendix); 2Snodgrass; 3Shiner; 3Snodgrass; 3Simons; 5Snodgrass (2); 5Cadigan; 6Williams; 6Milán (S); 7Martin; 11Martin (T); 13Leigh (3); 14Milán; 15Milán; 15Leigh; 16Murphy
**Juve:** See **Black Shadow**.

## K

**Kahina the Seer (Misha): Appears in:** 4Leigh (1,3,5); 5Leigh; **Mentioned in**: 6Snodgrass; 6Leigh; 8Leigh; 14Leigh (1,8); 15Leigh
**Kid Dinosaur (Fentner, Arnie): Appears in:** 1Shiner (Epilogue); 2Zelazny; 2Williams; 2Martin; 2Cadigan; 3Shiner; **Mentioned**: 4Martin (2); 4Leigh (2); 5Martin (5); 5Cadigan; 13Zelazny; 17Miller
**Killer Geeks, The:** 1Martin (4Interstitial); 9Miller; 12Milán
***King Pongo* (film):** 4Simons; 17Miller
**Kondikki (Network species):** 2Martin (2Interstitial,3Interstitial); 10Snodgrass; 12Milán
**Kreg (Network species):** 2Martin (3Interstitial,7Interstitial)

## L

**Lazy Dragon (Choy, Ben): Appears in:** 5Miller, 5Zelazny (6); 7Miller; 8Wu; **Mentioned in:** 8Miller; 11Miller
**Lin's Curio Emporium:** 7Miller; 8Miller
***Live for Tomorrow* (TV show):** 7Miller
**Living Gods, The:** 4Gerstner-Miller; 17Miller

**Ly'bahr (Network species):** 2Martin (2Interstitial,3Interstitial,7Interstitial); 10Snodgrass
**lyn-ko-neen (Network species):** 2Martin (3Interstitial)

## M

**Mackie Messer (Macintosh, Detlev; Mack the Knife): Appears in:** 4Milán; 5Leigh; 6Milán (M,S); 6Simons; 6Snodgrass; 6Leigh; 6Williams; 7Martin; 11Miller; **Mentioned in**: 14Leigh (1); 15Miller; 15Leigh; 17Miller
**Mafia, The:** 1Shiner; 1Bryant/Harper; 2Martin (1Interstitial,6Interstitial); 3Harper; 3Martin; 5Harper; 5Snodgrass (1,4); 5Bryant; 9Simons; 13Leigh (2); 16Cassutt; 16Abraham
**MAGOG:** 17Miller
**Masons, Egyptian:** 1Shiner for Mason precursor; 2Shiner; 2Simons; 2Martin (5,6,7); 2Cadigan; 3Shiner, 3Simons; 9Williams
**Master Traders, The:** 2Martin (2Interstitial,3Interstitial,5Interstitial); 10Snodgrass
**Midnight Angel, The:** 17Miller
**Mitchell, Cash:** 16Cassutt
**Modular Man: Appears in:** 2Williams; 2Cadigan; 3Shiner; 3Martin; 3Snodgrass; 5Martin (5); 5Williams; 5Snodgrass (6); 11Williams; 11Martin (T); 11Leigh; **Mentioned in**: 1Milán (Appendix); 2Martin; 5Zelazny (8); 7Martin; 9Snodgrass (5); 11Miller; 15Martin
**Monster:** (See also **Cap'n Trips**); **Appears in:** 12Milán; **Mentioned in**: 14Milán; 15Milán
**Moonchild:** (See also **Cap'n Trips**); **Appears in:** 2Milán; 10Snodgrass; 12Milán; 14Milán; **Mentioned in**: 2Snodgrass; 8Milán; 9Milán; 13Leigh (5,6); 15Milán
**Mr. Diamond:** See **Black Shadow**.
**Mr. Gravemold:** See **Black Shadow**.
**Mr. Nobody (Strauss, Jeremiah): Appears in:** *As the Projectionist:* 1Martin; 4Martin (12); *As the Great Ape:* 2Williams; 4Simons; 16Simons; *As Jerry Strauss/Mr. Nobody:* 5Williams; 8Simons; 8Shiner; 9Shiner; 9Simons; 11Miller; 14Simons; 15Martin; 15Milán; 16Murphy; 17Miller; **Mentioned in**: *As the Projectionist:* 8Simons (7); 17Miller; *As the Great Ape:* 2Martin; 5Williams; 16Murphy; 17Miller; *As Jerry Strauss/Mr. Nobody:* 9Shiner; 14Leigh (2)
**Muldoon, Rosemary (Rosa-Maria Gambione): Appears in**: 1Bryant/Harper; 3Harper; 5Harper; 5Cadigan; **Mentioned in**: 4Bryant; 5Martin (2); 5Snodgrass (1)

## N

**National Advisory Committee on Aeronautics (NACA):** 14Cassutt; 16Cassutt
***National Informer, The:*** 2Milán; 4Martin (2)
**Network, The:** 2Martin (2Interstitial,7Interstitial); 4Martin (11); 5Snodgrass (3); 10Snodgrass
**Nighthawk, John:** 17Miller
**No Dice:** See **Black Shadow**.
**Nur al-Allah: Appears in:** 4Leigh (1,5); 15Walker; 15Miller; **Mentioned in**: 4Leigh (2); 4Martin (7,8,10,12); 5Leigh; 6Williams; 6Snodgrass; 6Leigh; 7Martin; 8Leigh; 12Milán; 13Leigh (1); 13Snodgrass; 13Milán; 14Leigh (1,8); 14Mixon/Snodgrass; 15Walker; 15Martin; 16Murphy
**Nur Sect, The:** 4Martin (4); 4Gerstner-Miller; 4Leigh; 4Cassutt; 5Leigh; 6Leigh; 8Milán; 12Milán; 15Walker

## O

**Oddity, The (Patti, John, and Evan): Appears in:** 5Snodgrass (1); 5Leigh; 7Martin; 7Miller; 8Wu; 14Leigh (1,3,4,5,7,8); 15Leigh; **Mentioned in**: 1Leigh; 2Martin; 4Martin (5); 6Leigh; 6Snodgrass; 9Williams (2); 11Martin (T,B)
**Our Lady of Perpetual Misery:** 3Miller; 5Cover; 7Miller; 7Martin; 8Leigh; 11Miller; 13Leigh (1); 14Leigh (2,3); 15Martin; 16Abraham; 16Murphy; 17Miller
**Our Lady of the Spasm:** 15Miller

## P

**Pann, Peter: Appears in:** 15Martin; 17Miller; **Mentioned in:** 14Simons; 16Murphy
**Peaceable Kingdom, The:** 17Miller
**Peregrine: Appears in:** 1Miller; 2Williams; 2Cadigan; 3Shiner; 3Miller; 3Snodgrass; 4Martin (2,3,6,8,9); 4Miller; 4Harper; 4Gerstner-Miller; 4Simons; 4Bryant; 4Shiner; 4Milán; 4Snodgrass; 5Snodgrass.6; 6Snodgrass; 14Leigh (2); 17Miller; **Mentioned in**: 1Shiner (Epilogue); 1Milán (Appendix); 2Martin; 2Martin (5Interstitial); 2Milán; 3Martin; 3Snodgrass; 3Simons; 4Leigh (1,3,5); 4Martin (4,10,12); 4Martin (2); 5Bryant; 5Snodgrass (2,5); 6Williams; 6Leigh; 7Martin; 8Leigh; 10Snodgrass; 12Milán; 14Leigh (3,4,5,7,8); 14Milán; 14Harper; 15Martin
***Peregrine's Perch* (TV show):** 1Miller; 2Cadigan; 5Snodgrass (1); 5Williams; 8Milán; 12Milán; 14Leigh (2,3,4,5); 14Walker; 14Mixon/Snodgrass; 15Martin; 15Leigh; 16Cassutt; 16Abraham; 16Murphy; 17Miller
**Phuc, Kien (Hsiang Yu): Appears in:** 1Miller; 3Miller; 5Snodgrass (6); 8Miller; 9Miller; **Mentioned in**: 2Miller; 6Snodgrass; 7Miller; 8Simons (5,6,7); 9Leigh.2,10;
**Polyakov, Georgy Vladimirovich (George Steel): Appears in:** 4Cassutt; 5Leigh; 5Snodgrass (3,5); 6Snodgrass; 6Milán (M); 7Martin; **Mentioned in:** 6Leigh; 9Milán

## Q-R

**Quasiman: Appears in:** 5Cover; 7Miller; 11Miller; 13Leigh; 14Leigh (3,4); 15Walker; 15Leigh; 15Martin; 15Miller; 15Milán; 16Abraham; **Mentioned in**: 4Martin (5); 6Williams; 7Martin; 14Leigh (1,2)
**Quinn the Eskimo (Quincey, Thomas): Appears in:** 7Miller; 13Murphy; **Mentioned in:** 8Wu
**Radical, The:** (See also **Cap'n Trips**); **Appears in:** 1Milán; 15Milán; 15Martin; **Mentioned in**: 1Martin (3Interlude); 2Snodgrass; 7Martin; 8Milán; 12Milán; 14Milán
**Ray, Billy (Carnifex): Appears in:** 3Snodgrass; 3Miller; 3Bryant; 4Leigh (1,4,5); 4Miller; 4Harper; 4Martin (8,12); 4Milán; 6Leigh; 6Williams; 6Milán (M); 11Miller; 11Leigh; 11Williams; 12Milán; 15Miller; 15Leigh; 15Walker; 17Miller; **Mentioned in**: 3Martin; 4Martin (2,11); 4Leigh (3); 5Leigh; 5Martin (6); 6Milán (S); 7Martin; 8Leigh; 16Murphy
**Rathlin Island:** 16Leigh
**Red Army Faction (*Rote Armee Fraktion*):** 4Milán; 4Cassutt; 6Milán (M)
**Rhindarians (Network species):** 2Martin (2Interstitial); 10Snodgrass
***Rickenbacker Story, The* (film):** 1Williams
**Rox, The:** See **Ellis Island**.
**Rudo, Pan: Appears in:** 13Snodgrass; 13Leigh (3,8); 13Zelazny; 13Mixon; 14Leigh (1,6); 14Mixon/Snodgrass; 15Walker; 15Miller; **Mentioned in:** 13Leigh (5,6,7); 14Leigh (2,3,4,5,7,8); 14Simons; 14Milán; 14Williams; 15Leigh; 15Martin
**Ryder, C.C.:** 1Bryant/Harper; 5Harper, 5Bryant

## S

**Sayyid: Appears in:** 4Leigh (3,5); 15Walker; 15Leigh; **Mentioned in**: 4Leigh (2); 4Martin (8); 5Leigh; 5Martin (6); 7Martin; 8Snodgrass; 14Leigh (8)
**SCARE:** 1Martin (1Interlude) is the first mention
**Sewer Jack (Robicheaux, Jack): Appears in:** 1Bryant/Harper; 3Bryant; 3Harper; 4Bryant; 5Harper; 5Bryant; 11Bryant; 11Miller; **Mentioned in**: 2Martin (6Interstitial); 14Harper

**Shadow Fist Society, The:** 3Simons; 3Martin; 4Martin (10); 5Miller; 5Harper; 5Snodgrass (1,2,4); 5Leigh; 6Simons; 7Miller; 7Martin; 8Wu; 8Simons (7); 8Miller; 9Miller; 9Snodgrass (1); 9Williams (1); 9Shiner; 11Bryant; 15Miller; 16Abraham
***Shell Games* (film):** 14Walker
***Shell Games* (Tom Tudbury autobiography):** 14Walker; 15Walker
**Shepard, Danielle ("Danny," Legion): Appears in:** 11Martin (T); 11Williams; 11Miller; 14Walker; **Mentioned in:** 11Leigh; 15Walker
**Silver Helix, Order of:** 15Leigh; 15Miller; 15Walker
**Sleeper, The (Crenson, Croyd): Appears in:** 1Zelazny; 1Martin (1Interstitial,3Interstitial,4Interstitial); 2Zelazny; 2Martin (7Interstitial); 3Shiner; 5Zelazny; 5Bryant; 5Leigh; 5Cadigan; 5Harper (2); 5Snodgrass (5); 5Williams; 8Simons (2); 8Shiner; 9Williams (1); 9Leigh; 9Simons; 11Leigh; 12Milán; 13Leigh (5,6); 13Zelazny; 14Milán; 14Williams; 14Walker; 15Walker; 15Miller; 16Simons; **Mentioned in**: 1Snodgrass; 1Milán (Appendix); 2Martin (2Interstitial); 3Martin; 3Simons; 5Harper (1); 5Martin (6); 6Snodgrass; 6Leigh; 6Milán (S); 7Martin; 8Leigh; 9Shiner; 11Martin (T); 11Williams; 13Leigh (7); 16Abraham
**Squid, Father: Appears in:** 3Miller; 4Miller; 4Martin (6,7); 7Miller; 9Miller; 9Simons; 11Martin (B,T); 11Leigh; 13Leigh (1,5,7,8); 14Leigh (2,8); 17Miller; **Mentioned in**: 4Leigh (1,3,4,5); 4Martin (2,3,8,10,12); 4Harper; 4Gerstner-Miller; 5Cover; 5Leigh; 5Snodgrass (4); 6Snodgrass; 9Williams (1); 11Miller; 13Leigh (4); 14Leigh (1,4,5,7); 14Walker; 15Leigh; 15Martin; 15Miller; 15Walker; 15Milán
**Squisher's Basement:** 2Martin (1Interstitial); 5Martin (6); 7Miller; 15Leigh; 15Miller; 15Martin; 16Murphy
**St. Dympna's Home for the Mentally Deficient and Criminally Insane:** 17Miller
**Starfields:** 14Simons; 15Martin; 16Murphy
**Starshine:** (See also **Cap'n Trips**); **Appears in:** 2Milán; 8Milán; 10Snodgrass; 12Milán; **Mentioned in**: 2Snodgrass; 2Cadigan; 3Snodgrass; 7Martin; 9Milán; 11Martin (T); 14Milán; 15Milán; 15Martin; 16Murphy
**Swarm, The: Appears in:** 2Williams (Prologue); 2Williams; 2Milán; 2Miller; 2Martin (7Interstitial); **Mentioned in:** 1Shiner; 2Shiner; 3Shiner; 3Snodgrass; 4Leigh (3); 4Martin (11); 4Snodgrass; 5Snodgrass (1); 5Williams; 5Zelazny (8); 7Miller; 9Miller; 9Snodgrass (1); 9Williams (2); 10Snodgrass; 12Milán

## T

***Tak World* (novels by Heinlein):** 13Cassutt, 16Cassutt
**Takisians:** 1Snodgrass; 2Snodgrass; 3Snodgrass; 4Martin (9); 5Snodgrass; 6Snodgrass; 10Snodgrass
**The Bottomless Pit:** 3Simons
**The Chaos Club:** 1Martin; 1Shiner; 2Martin (1Interstitial,5Interstitial); 3Martin; 5Snodgrass (6); 13Wu; 16Murphy
**The Java Joint:** 7Martin; 10Snodgrass
***The Jet-Propelled Boy* (Jetboy autobiography):** 1Waldrop
***Think Like An Ace!* (book):** 2Martin
***Thirty Minutes Over Broadway* (film):** 2Martin (5); 8Miller
**Ti Malice: Appears in:** 4Miller, 5Cadigan; 6Williams; 7Martin; 17Miller; **Mentioned in:** 10Snodgrass; 14Simons
**Tomlin International Airport:** 4Martin (2,11,12); 4Cassutt; 7Miller; 8Snodgrass; 8Simons (7); 9Leigh (2); 9Simons; 10Snodgrass; 13Leigh (5); 14Walker; 15Leigh; 15Miller; 17Miller
**Topper: Appears in:** 7Martin; 15Martin; 16Murphy; **Mentioned in:** 17Miller
***True Brothers* (Tom Wolfe):** 13Leigh (3); 13Cassutt
**Turtle, the Great and Powerful (Tudbury, Thomas): Appears in:** 1Martin; 1Leigh; 2Williams; 2Snodgrass; 2Cadigan; 3Shiner; 3Simons; 3Bryant; 5Martin; 6Snodgrass; 6Leigh; 6Simons; 7Martin; 9Milán; 9Snodgrass (5,6); 10Snodgrass; 11Martin (T); 11Williams; 14Walker; 16Miller; **Mentioned in**: 1Martin (3Interstitial,5Interstitial); 1Shiner (Epilogue); 2Miller; 3Snodgrass; 3Martin; 4Martin (4,5); 4Snodgrass; 5Snodgrass (1); 5Williams; 5Zelazny (8); 6Williams; 11Leigh; 11Miller; 12Milán; 13Leigh (1); 13Milán; 14Leigh (8); 15Walker; 15Leigh; 15Martin; 16Simons
**Twelve-Finger Jake:** 7Miller
**Twisted Dragon:** 3Simons; 3Martin; 5Miller; 5Zelazny (4); 7Miller
**Twisted Fists, The:** 4Martin (7,11); 6Williams; 6Leigh; 7Miller; 11Miller; 11Leigh; 11Martin (T); 14Williams (1); 14Walker; 15Walker; 15Leigh; 15Miller; 15Martin

## U-V

**Uncle Chowder's Clam Bar:** 7Miller
**van Renssaeler, Blythe (Brain Trust): Appears in:** 1Williams; 1Snodgrass; **Mentioned in**: 2Cadigan (certainly others); 3Martin; 3Snodgrass; 4Martin (11); 4Snodgrass; 5Snodgrass (5); 6Williams; 6Snodgrass; 9Snodgrass (2); 9Williams (1); 10Snodgrass; 11Martin (T); 13Leigh (2); 13Murphy; 14Mixon/Snodgrass; 16Murphy; 17Miller
**Viand (Network species):** 10Snodgrass

## W

**Wall Walker:** See **Black Shadow**.
**Wally's:** 2Martin (1Interstitial); 3Snodgrass
**Warlock (Nance, Peter): Appears in:** 8Miller; **Mentioned in:** 7Miller; 9Miller
**Werewolves, The:** 1Martin (4Interstitial); 3Martin; 5Miller; 5Harper (1); 5Cover; 5Snodgrass (2,6); 5Zelazny (6); 7Miller; 7Martin; 8Simons (7); 8Miller; 9Miller; 9Williams (1)
**WHO Tour:** 4 (all stories)
***Wild Card Blues, The* (song):** 1Martin (1Interstitial); 16Murphy
***Wild Card Chic* (Tom Wolfe):** 1Martin (3Interstitial)
***Wild Card Follies* (play):** 16Murphy
**Wild Card Museum:** See **Famous Bowery Wild Card Dime Museum**.
***Wild Times: An Oral History of the Postwar Years* (Studs Terkel):** 1Martin (Prologue)
**Will-o'-Wisp (Williams, Nick): Appears in:** 11Miller, 13Murphy; 13Leigh (7,8); 16Murphy; 17Miller; **Mentioned in:** 13Leigh (6); 14Leigh (2)
**Worchester, Hiram (Fatman): Appears in:** 1Williams; 1Martin (3Interstitial); 1Bryant/Harper; 1Leigh; 1Miller; 2Shiner; 2Williams; 3Martin; 3Shiner; 3Snodgrass; 3Miller; 4Martin (2,3,6,7,12); 4Miller; 4Harper; 4Gerstner-Miller; 4Leigh (5); 4Simons; 4Shiner; 4Milán; 5Williams; 6Williams; 6Snodgrass; 6Simons; 7Martin; 7Miller; 8Simons (2,5); 16Simons; **Mentioned in**: 2Martin (6Interstitial,7Interstitial); 3Simons; 4Leigh (1,2,3); 4Martin (4,9,10,11); 4Snodgrass; 5Martin (2); 5Zelazny (4); 5Leigh; 6Leigh; 8Simons (3,7); 9Miller; 9Snodgrass (1); 10Snodgrass; 11Martin (B); 12Milán; 13Milán; 14Leigh (4,5,8); 15Leigh; 16Murphy; 17Miller
**WORSE:** 8Shiner; 8Simons (3)
**Wraith (Maloy, Jennifer): Appears in:** 3Miller; 5Miller; 6Snodgrass; 7Miller; 17Miller; **Mentioned in**: 3Shiner; 5Snodgrass (6); 7Martin
**Wyungare: Appears in:** 4Bryant; 11Bryant; 11Leigh; 11Martin (B); **Mentioned in**: 5Bryant

## Y

**Yankee Stadium:** 3Simons
**Yeoman: Appears in:** 1Miller; 2Martin (5Interstitial); 2Miller; 3Shiner; 3Miller; 5Miller; 5Snodgrass (6); 6Snodgrass; 7Miller; 9Miller; 17Miller; **Mentioned in**: 2Milán; 2Martin (6Interstitial); 4Miller; 9Williams (1); 16Abraham
**Young Man's Fancy:** 3Bryant; 5Bryant

# APPENDIX III: GLOSSARY

The following glossaries include slang, Takisian words, and other terms specific to the *Wild Cards* setting. Slang is always evolving: in a series set before 1952, the term "deuce" will be out of place, as it hadn't yet been coined by Mr. Rainbow; while the term "suicide king" for a latent wild carder didn't come into fashion until the end of the 20th century. So far there's been no noticeable crossover of terms between Earth and Takis, but with Dr. Tachyon now permanently on his home planet and Jay Ackroyd's wife Hastet introducing Takisian cuisine to New Yorkers, that could change.

## GENERAL TERMS

**ace:** A person given special abilities by the wild card virus without any physical deformity. Technically, people with physical changes, such as Howler or Peregrine, are joker-aces, but the "joker" part tends to be overlooked so long as the changes are slight or even attractive (as in the case of Peregrine's wings).

**ace in the hole:** An ace who is not yet revealed his powers or ace status. Doing so is called "coming out of the deck" or more commonly just "coming out."

**ace up the sleeve:** A secret ace power, either a power possessed by someone thought to be a norm, or a secret power possessed by someone already known as an ace (or joker, for that matter).

**Aces High:** A fashionable restaurant atop the Empire State Building in New York City in the 1970s, '80s, and early '90s, catering primarily to aces and their admirers.

***Aces* Magazine:** A monthly tabloid featuring sensationalistic stories about aces and their lives.

***American Hero:*** Popular modern reality show featuring wild carders competing for a cash prize and the title of "American Hero."

**Black Queen:** Someone who dies from contracting the wild card virus. "Drawing the Black Queen" means acquiring a lethal mutation from the wild card. As with the joker/ace and ace/deuce divide, some Black Queens are a bit hazy in that death may not be instantaneous, but generally any wild card mutation that directly results in death is considered a Black Queen.

**Black Queen Day:** September 16th, the day after Wild Card Day, to commemorate all the victims of the wild card virus.

**Black Trump:** Wild card strains (Necrovirus Takis-I and Takis-II) lethal to wild carders. Originally developed by Clara van Renssaeler for the Card Sharks.

**Card Sharks:** A conspiracy devoted to the control and eventual destruction of wild carders, started in the years immediately following the release of the virus over New York. The culmination of the Card Sharks' plans was the development of the Black Trump virus.

**carrier:** A person with a recessive wild card gene, unable to express the virus, but capable of passing it on to offspring, who might express the virus if the trait becomes dominant in them.

**deuce:** A person given special abilities by the wild card virus that are trivial or practically useless, like being able to change skin color or levitate less than an ounce. Those who also have physical deformities may be referred to as "joker-deuces," although they're more likely to simply be considered jokers unless their deformity is slight.

**Exotics For Democracy:** Better known as The Four Aces, a team of ace operatives in the 1940s, consisting of Black Eagle, Golden Boy, the Envoy, and Brain Trust. Disbanded during the HUAC hearings in 1949.

**Exotic Powers Control Act, the:** Enacted by Congress in 1954, the Exotic Powers Control Act requires any person exhibiting wild card powers to register immediately with the federal government. Failure to register is punishable by up to 10 years in prison.

**joker:** A person physically or mentally deformed by the wild card virus. Those who also have special abilities are sometimes referred to as joker-aces.

**Jokertown:** The neighborhood in New York City formerly known as the Bowery, where many jokers settled following Wild Card Day, making it the largest joker neighborhood in the world. "Jokertown" is also used in general to refer to the joker neighborhood of any urban area.

**Jokertown Clinic:** Common nickname for the Blythe van Renssaeler's Memorial Clinic, founded by Dr. Tachyon.

**King:** Short for "suicide king." A slang term for a latent; someone infected with the wild card virus, some of whom live in fear of the 99% chance of drawing a Black Queen or joker if their card ever turns.

**latent:** A wild carder who has not yet expressed the virus.

**nat:** Slang term for someone not infected with the wild card virus, short for "natural." Usually used as a pejorative by wild carders, especially jokers.

**norm:** A less common, and slightly less pejorative, term for nat (see the previous), short for "normal."

**out of the deck:** A publicly-known ace (as opposed to an *ace in the hole*).

**Overtrump:** Cure for the Black Trump virus invented by Mark Meadows. It causes symptoms similar to the flu, but prevents death from Black Trump infection.

**SCARE:** The Special Committee for Ace Resources and Endeavors, formerly the Senate Committee for Ace Resources and Endeavors, a U.S. government body charged with investigating paranormal (*i.e.*, wild card) activity in the United States.

**Special Conscription Act, the:** An act of Congress allowing the federal government to induct wild carders under the Exotic Powers Control Act into government service for an unspecified amount of time.

**Trump virus:** A potential cure for the wild card virus invented by Dr. Tachyon. The Trump virus is only somewhat effective (around 20% success), and potentially deadly, so it is only used in the most severe cases.

**wild card virus:** Xenovirus Takis-A, an alien retrovirus that rewrites the genetic code of its host. 90% of those infected with the wild card virus die, 9% acquire physical deformities and become jokers, while the remaining 1% become deuces and aces.

**Wild Card Day:** September 15, 1946, the day the wild card virus was released over New York City. Annually marked in various places around the world as both a celebration and a time of mourning.

**wild carder:** A person with a dominant wild card gene, either through infection or inheritance. Typically refers to someone who has expressed the wild card, rather than a *latent*.

# TAKISIAN TERMS

**agma:** A large, intelligent predatory animal.

**Ajayiz:** The ruling council of a Takisian House.

**Ajayiz'et:** A member of a ruling council.

**Amlas:** Takisian diplomatic tongue, used only between Houses.

**ankatai'li:** A shape-changing insect that appears crystalline while at rest.

**bitshuf'di:** A class of sterilized workers who have been deemed to carry dangerous recessive genes, or are of otherwise insufficient genetic value to breed.

**Bonded Station:** A space station in orbit around Takis, primarily built as the buffer for Network contact, but also used to conduct business between Houses.

**calnite:** A bioengineering material used to speed bone reconstruction.

**cinara wood:** A wood reminiscent of sandalwood and honey.

**Crystal World, The:** Takis, the world the Takisians settled on millennia ago.

**deathlock:** A mind-shield technique where the defender dies rather than giving up control to a psychic invader, a last-ditch means of preventing control or information from falling into hostile hands.

**Fel'k:** The larger of Takis's two moons.

**genamiri:** A sort of "consort" to a Psi Lord, more than a mistress, but not a formal wife.

**ghostdrive:** Takisian faster-than-light tachyon drive.

**ghostlance:** A tachyon beam weapon used by Takisian ships.

**Great Houses:** The most powerful Psi Lord houses. The Great Houses are Ilkazam, Vayawand, Alaa, Ss'ang, Tandeh, Jeban, and Rodaleh.

**Ideal:** A Takisian philosophical and spiritual value—indeed, *the* Takisian value—often used in oaths (*e.g.*, "By the Ideal!"). It is the perfection all Takisian seek to act in accordance with.

**ikadah:** A warm, sweet drink, similar to Earth chocolate.

**Ilkala:** Capital city of House Ilkazam, set in a caldera and surrounded by mountains and glaciers. The predominant architectural form of Ilkala is stone towers. Part of the city is carved from the rose-colored cliff-face of its surroundings.

**Ilkazal:** The private language of House Ilkazam, heavily reliant on telepathy.

**Intaye:** A lady of the Most Bred.

**'Ishb'kaukab:** The Takisian living-ship species.

**jayiz:** A group of living ships (wild or domesticated). It literally translates as "honor," so an "honor of ships" is similar to a "pride of lions" or a "parliament of rooks."

**jebali:** A small nocturnal gazing animal.

**ka'et:** A stringed instrument played by striking the strings with hammers that also carry a tone using a double keyboard.

**k'ijdad:** Grandfather.

**kib'r:** Honorific for an ancestor of more than the seventh degree.

**La'b:** A sexual toy.

**lawmerates:** Takisians surgically altered to the opposite sex from their genetic or birth sex.

**Lilistizkar:** Visiting day in the women's quarters.

**l'lail:** A riding animal.

**merrida:** A term of affection used between lovers.

**MIS:** The Mentatic Intelligence Service.

**Morakh:** A cadet line of House Vayawand bred for combat.

**Most Bred:** A title for the Psi Lords.

**pful:** A Takisian vegetable.

**Raiyis:** Ruler of a Takisian House.

**Raiyis'tet:** Rulership of a Takisian House.

**ral:** A milk-producing ruminant. Its coat produces fine, soft wool used for weaving.

**Rarrana:** The women's quarters.

**re'ba'bi:** A stringed instrument played with a bow.

**Sham'al:** Industry speak, the *lingua franca* of Takis.

**ship talk:** The private language of living ships, telepathic and based on complex mathematics. When broken down and made audible, it resembles music.

**shujukis:** A flying mountain predator trained to carry riders.

**silamum:** A cold, effervescent fruit drink, similar to fruit sodas on Earth.

**sinau soup:** A bean soup with a sharp citrus flavor.

**sinde:** A powerful, temperamental creature raised for its meat.

**sithi beans:** A spice used in desserts.

**spetza:** A sparkling sweet wine.

**stirps:** A familial retainer of a Psi Lord family.

**T'zand'ran:** The Swarm.

**Tarhiji:** Mind- or psi-blind; the majority of the Takisian population.

**Tiana:** The smaller of Takis's two moons.

**vacu:** A foul and disgusting creature whose name is used as an epithet.

**Vaya:** The capital city of the House of Vayawand, noted for its hundreds of canals.

**Vayet:** The public language of House Vayawand.

**vindi:** Cousin. A form of polite address, rather than a formal genetic relationship.

**wanei:** A small house pet.

**ysan:** A hot, bitter beverage.

**Zal'hma at'Irg:** The Psi Lords, members of the Great Houses.

**zanjabiil:** A badger-like creature.

# APPENDIX IV: PARAGONS ADAPTATIONS

As mentioned in **Chapter 6**, many elements of the *Paragons* setting for *Mutants & Masterminds* adapt well to *Wild Cards* (and vice versa). This section looks at some of the characters and factions of *Paragons* through a *Wild Cards* lens and offers ideas on how they might be adapted for use in an *M&M* series set in the world of the *Wild Cards*.

This appendix doesn't cover every single faction or paranormal in the *Paragons* setting, looking primarily at those either needing specific adaptation or especially well-suited to the *Wild Cards* world. The other individuals and organizations not mentioned can fit into the setting with few or no changes.

## FACTIONS & ORGANIZATIONS

**The Church of Jesus Christ, Paragon:** The contrast with the Church of Jesus Christ, Joker, is obvious, and a Christian sect worshiping aces is certainly a possibility in the *Wild Cards* world. They may see the wild card as God's will, or a means of revealing His chosen. A particularly nasty theological thread would be to suggest jokers and those killed by the wild card were in some fashion "judged unworthy." Contrast this sect with the Allumbrados from **Chapter 5**.

**The Harbingers:** Of course, there *are* aliens in the *Wild Cards* universe, and everyone knows it, so Doc Harbinger's theory isn't so crazy. You might want to shift the Harbingers to focus on paranoid conspiracy theories associated with the Swarm. See the *Swarm Hunters* series framework in **Chapter 6** for ideas.

**The Initiative:** The similarities between the Card Sharks and the Initiative are sufficient for a strong connection between them. Perhaps the Card Sharks are merely the tip of a much bigger conspiratorial iceberg, with the Initiative at its center (or just another layer in an even deeper mystery).

**MERLIN:** This organization might be a bit wacky for *Wild Cards,* although a scientific exploration of the Dreamtime (*Wild Cards'* equivalent of the Imageria) opens up a number of potential stories and adventures.

**The Pact:** Although magic doesn't exist in *Wild Cards* as such, there are "magicians" like Fortunato and the Astronomer, so an occult organization like the Pact, made up of like-minded aces and joker mentalists, could easily exist, and even claim a more ancient ancestry.

**Paranormal Regulatory Agency:** SCARE fills much of this role in the *Wild Cards* United States, although a full-fledged government agency focused on dealing with wild carders could be modeled on the PRA, called the Wild Card Regulatory Agency, or the Alien Contamination Executive (ACE). Information on the PRA can also provide fodder for a *Wild Cards* series about SCARE.

**The Rosemont Center:** This organization is an interesting alternative setting for a group of wild carders dealing with their personal issues while trying to help others like them.

**The Seven Thunders:** Even Reverend Leo Barnett isn't radical enough for this Fundamentalist sect, who believe the wild card is a tool of the Devil and a sign of the End Times.

**Vanguard:** This team is too "comic book" for *Wild Cards,* but a few individual members (like Prophet) might work in the setting as government spooks and the like.

**XTREME! Action Championships:** A wrestling league made up of aces and jokers is a shoe-in for *Wild Cards* and a novel approach to setting up a roleplaying series.

## CHARACTERS

**The Answer:** Tom Anwar's "ace-in-the-hole" makes him a good modern counterpart to tabloid reporter "Digger" Downs, able to provide plenty of problems for characters in the public spotlight.

**The Burning Man:** A classic joker-ace-gone-wrong situation.

**Chud:** The *National Informer* has probably run the "MONSTROUS JOKER LIVING IN SEWERS" headline more than once. In this case, they might actually be right for a change.

**Enigma:** A good character to go after Card Sharks, third-generation Swarmlings, and similar conspiracies.

**The Ghost:** Phil Kinsey is obviously a wild carder, perhaps even a bizarre kind of Black Queen, his card turned by the circumstances of his death. Or is it possible he's a *real* ghost?

**Icon:** Sylvia Browning might be a trance-channeler somewhat like Cameo, but channeling the powers and personae of mythic figures. This could also indicate a connection with the Dreamtime.

**Jacob Castle:** The bitter ex-hero worshiper would make a good Card Shark or, if the Card Sharks are well and truly gone, he might be the first in a new generation devoted to wiping out wild carders.

**Logar:** Wild carder or truly alien life-form? Too bad Dr. Tachyon isn't on Earth to ask any longer.

**Peacemaker:** Fatima Yassim's power and situation have interesting ramifications in the *Wild Cards* Middle East described in the series, with the influence of the Nur sect and conflict with the Living Gods, to say nothing of a different *status quo* in and around Jerusalem.

**Proteus:** Other *Wild Cards* explanations for Proteus's origins include a being of pure unformed ectoplasm from the Dreamtime, or some kind of fourth-generation (or later) Swarmling with tremendous shapechanging abilities.

**Ravana:** His power is like a twisted combination of Cameo and Deadhead's abilities, and there may be a kind of connection there. Certainly a cannibal ace who thinks he's a Hindu demon isn't at all out of place in the *Wild Cards* world.

**Ugly Jake:** This mob enforcer could be a joker, but given the nature of his power, maybe he looks normal (or even attractive) but his power causes *psychic* revulsion in anyone seeing his unmasked face.

**The Unifier:** As mentioned in **Chapter 6**, the Unifier and the story in the *Paragons* adventure *A More Perfect Union* suit *Wild Cards* well and could make a good adventure.

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Steve Kenson began reading the *Wild Cards* series in high school, not that long after he began playing superhero RPGs with *Villains & Vigilantes*. After some years as a freelance writer and designer for roleplaying games, he designed the *Mutants & Masterminds* RPG, continuing the fine tradition of superhero RPGs with ampersands in the title. After the success of the first edition of the game, Steve came onboard with Green Ronin Publishing as *Mutants & Masterminds* line developer. Working on the *Wild Cards* sourcebook for *M&M* allowed him to cross off another item on his "things to do before I die" list. (Fortunately, the list doesn't seem to be getting much shorter...). Steve lives in Merrimack, New Hampshire.

## SPIKE Y JONES, EDITOR

Spike Jones, a Canadian living outside Baltimore, Maryland, caught the supers bug with the first comic he bought: *Avengers* #100 in 1972. He's written one superhero NPC collection (*GURPS Supers: Mixed Doubles*) and superhero articles for a bunch of defunct magazines, and edited a handful of *Champions* adventures for Atlas Games. Editing the *Wild Cards Campaign Setting* combined three of his pleasures in one: working with Green Ronin, playing with supers, and declaring the cost of the new *Wild Cards* novels as a business expense on his income taxes.

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George R. R. Martin hit the *New York Times* best-seller list with his *A Song of Ice and Fire* fantasy series. Born in Bayonne, NJ, Martin began writing young, selling monster stories to other neighborhood children for pennies. Later he became a comic book fan and collector in high school, and began to write fiction for comic fanzines. George's *Superworld* RPG campaign served as the inspiration and impetus for *Wild Cards,* which he edited for the entire series, along with contributing many stories and characters. In addition to his print work, Martin has been a story editor for *Twilight Zone* and Executive Story Consultant and Producer for *Beauty and the Beast* with CBS Television. He presently lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and maintains a website at *www.georgerrmartin.com*.

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Brett Barkley has always been driven to create, to bring life to the things of his imagination through his art. Having grown up on a farm, Brett spent countless hours dreaming up exciting new worlds and stories. He treasures the opportunity to create and pulls from a diverse background and education to bring a sense of realism and depth to his work. After the vehicle he was driving was struck by a drunk driver in late 2001, Brett has since undergone two major spine surgeries and has spent countless hours in physical therapy in order to walk and draw again. The time spent contending for the things he once took for granted has led him to the realization that having the ability to use the gifts we are given is a true blessing, and has brought him closer to the original artist—his Lord Jesus Christ.

## TOM MANDRAKE, ART

Tom Mandrake is a freelance artist, writer and occasional art director. His work in comic books includes *Batman*, *The Martian Manhunter*, *The Spectre* and *Swamp Thing* for DC Comics. *The Punisher*, *The Hulk Unchained* and various *X-Men* books for Marvel Comics and *Creeps* through Image Comics. He's also worked on a variety of graphic novels including Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *Pat Novak for Hire* and *The Safest Place*. Tom has illustrated books such as *Wild Cards IV: Aces Abroad*, *GRRM: The George RR Martin RRetrospective* and the young adult novel *The Forest King: The Woodlarks Shadow*. He was the Art Director for Comic Book Illustrations for the independent fim *Zombie Prom* that won several awards including Best Comics-Oriented Film and the Judges Choice Award at the San Diego Comic Con International Film Festival in 2006.

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Mike Zeck's first memory of comics is from his 1953 recovery from a tonsillectomy in the hospital, his bed covered with comics. He attended the Ringling School of Art, and began his comics career in 1974 doing illustration assignments for the text stories in Charlton Comics' animated line of comics, which led to work on their horror titles. In 1977, Zeck started working for Marvel Comics by doing fill-in work on *Master of Kung Fu*, and has since worked on such titles as *Aquaman*, *Batman: Legends of the Dark Knight*, *Green Lantern*, *Captain America*, *G.I. Joe*, *Lobo*, and *Deathstroke, The Terminator*.

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Storn Cook's mother is an artist. So, he was surrounded by the environment and tools of the trade from the beginning. He spent 2 years studying art at New York University, then followed up at Columbus College of Art and Design several years later. Storn has worked in the role playing game field for a decade and half. But he's also branching out into doing novel covers, children's books and whatever else can use his skills—including teaching comic and sequential art locally.

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Eric Lofgren was born and lives in Western Canada. The road to his present career as a commercial illustrator has been a long and varied one. While not formally trained he's had a long history of working in one graphic field or another. Beginning with two years working in a commercial sign shop and 10 years running his own sign business. Also one year as a digital photo-retoucher, a year full time as a landscape painter and two years as a tattoo artist. And now finally as of this writing, 8 years as a commercial illustrator

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Hal has been involved with roleplaying games since he was 9 years old, and shows no sign of stopping now. His graphic design skills have been applied to over well over si gaming products, and he's written material for Pinnacle Entertainment Group, White Wolf Publishing, Atlas Games, Twilight Creations, and Green Ronin Publishing. Hal resides in Alexandria, VA with far too many books and CDs, and a temperamental cat.

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