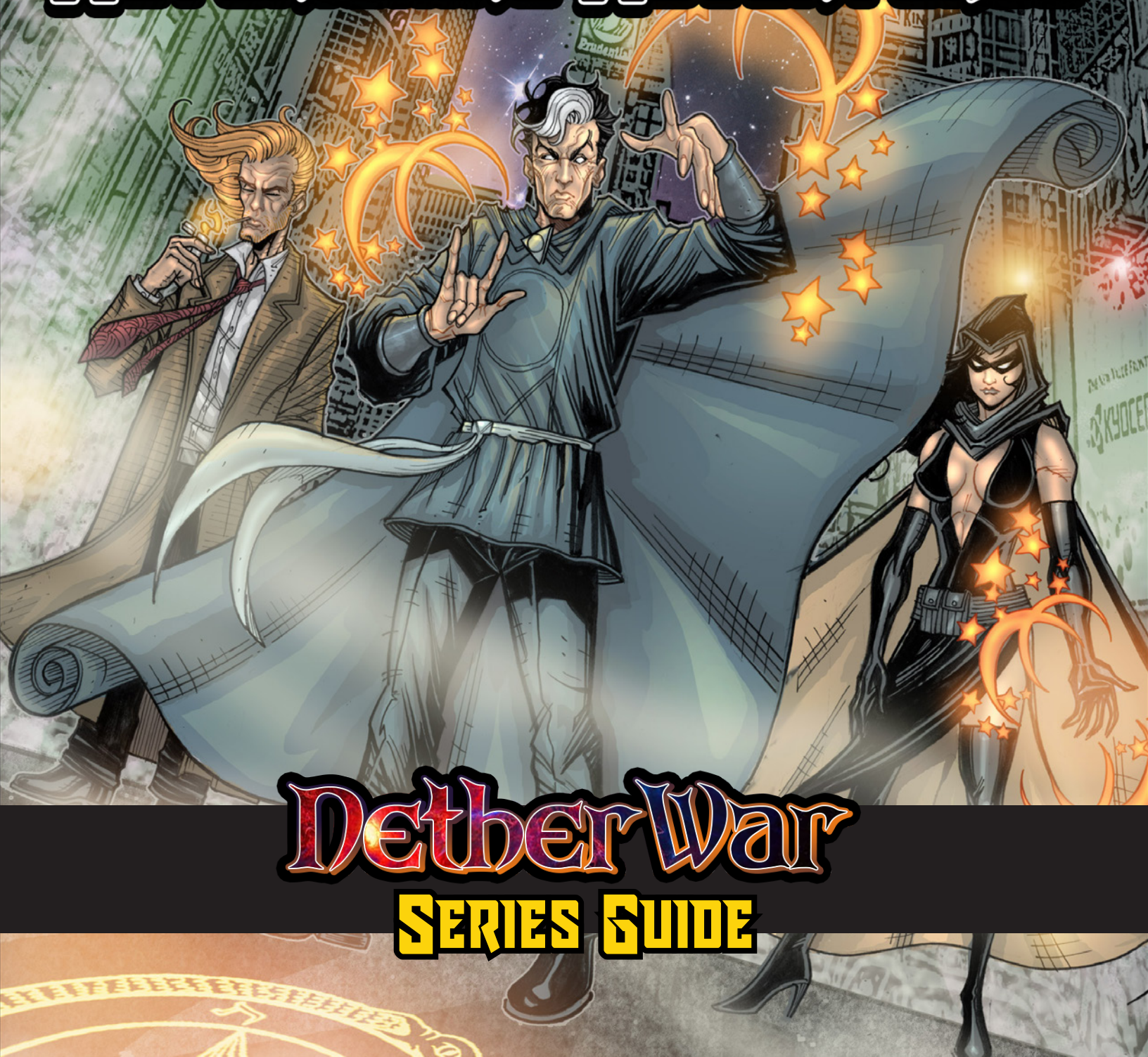


MUTANTS & MASTERMINDS

ASTONISHING ADVENTURES



Nether War SERIES GUIDE

NetherWar



NETHERWAR SERIES GUIDE

The shadows grow long, the night is cold, and dark power flows to those with dark intentions. Earth has plunged headfirst into the *NetherWar*, and no one even knows they're fighting for their lives.

Ever since he first discovered the lost Temple of Sirrion, Adrian Eldrich has protected Earth-Prime from the wicked forces that covet the world. The mantle of Master Mage—granted to him by ancient spirits of Atlantean mages—was thrust upon him as a desperate reaction to powerful dark magics that had begun to fester in the shadows of the world following the death of Master Mage Lady Violet Pennyworth over 40 years earlier. He tamed evil wizards, elemental forces, demons, gods, and powerful Dark Lords—the Master Mages of other dimensions whose greed and corruption twisted them into malignant reflections.

And eight years ago, without cause or fanfare, he died.

The power and responsibility of Master Mage passed quietly to Eldrich's apprentice, the young witch Seven. Within weeks, Seven was tested against Eldrich's ultimate foe: Una the Unrelenting, Dark Lord of the Netherworld. With Eldrich gone, all the contracts he brokered on Earth-Prime's behalf expired, including the fateful deal that kept the omniverse's most powerful sorcerer from conquering Earth! Una invaded, tricking the role of Master Mage out of Seven's grasp, and imposing her own malignant will upon Earth's magic. Seven eventu-

ally defeated the Dark Lord, consuming her entirely in a blast of primordial magic, but by ancient decree she inherited Una's empire and title. Unlike Earth-Prime, Una's Netherworld and the 999 worlds she had conquered were shattered wraiths, held together by magic and willpower rather than the laws of physics. Without a Dark Lord, Una's empire would literally crumble and cast untold billions of lives into the void. Unable to let the masses perish, Seven reluctantly accepted this new responsibility, and left Earth-Prime behind.

And the mantle of the Master Mage has remained unclaimed ever since, leaving Earth-Prime ungarded from evil supernatural influence and conspiracy.

Just as it had before Eldrich was called, dark magic has begun to flex itself and reach deep into the world of Earth-Prime. Spirits offer corrupting deals to the easily tempted, demons embrace dark souls to grow their number, and cults and dark wizards plot, all with no appointed force to balance out their rising tide of evil. Cynical mystics even insist that this dark tide has corrupted the souls of common people, stoking xenophobia and apathy in once-gentle hearts. Technological villains like Maestro and Toy Boy have found new leases on life through literal deals with the devil, while those already empowered by magic have found their powers growing stronger as the vile things in the shadows fuel their flames.

But something far darker grows. A wicked seed planted years ago and left to flourish in Earth-Prime's magical essence. A new god is awakening, and her minions need only destroy Eldrich's few remaining safeguards to unleash her onto this world and countless others beyond.

WHAT IS NETHERWAR?

NetherWar is a multi-part **MUTANTS & MASTERMINDS** adventure arc that tells the story of rising dark magic on Earth-Prime and the hidden divine force that is accelerating the world's corruption. It plays out over five adventures in the *Astonishing Adventures* PDF series—*Assault on the Nerian Nexus*, *The Pentagon Peril*, *Broken Strings*, *Bound by Gold*, and *Three Made One*—as well as a sixth adventure that serves as a prequel, *Master of Earth*. Any of the adventures can be played alone, but when played together they form an ongoing story arc like you might find in a major crossover event from your favorite comic series. It covers a variety of themes, including duty versus responsibility and the compromises people make to survive... or to help others.

The *NetherWar* arc is designed for a team of 4-6 heroes of PL 10, and will provide enough experience for heroes to grow to PL 11 before its end. Game Masters can run the series with heroes of higher or lower

KNOWN MASTER MAGES

While many have shouldered the burden of Master Mage over the eons, many names have been lost to the sands of history or deliberately erased, sometimes by their enemies, but other times by wizards themselves to protect their works and families. Those Master Mages known to have played a major role in the history of Earth-Prime include:

- **Ios the Seer** (Unknown)
- **Malador the Mystic** (Unknown)
- **Naran the Wise** (ancient Atlantis)
- **Simon Magus** (circa 100 CE)
- **Merlin** (700-unknown)
- **Abraham Hildebrandt** (Unknown-1871)
- **Broken Crow** (1871-1890)
- **Lady Violet Pennyworth** (1890-1895)
- **Adrian Eldrich** (1935-2013)

PL, but should adjust the challenge provided by the villains and various challenges to compensate and/or provide more or fewer Hero Points than outlined in each adventure.

PLAYER'S GUIDE TO NETHERWAR

While the rise of evil magic is the focus of the storyline, you are by no means limited to creating only magic-based heroes to play it out. While heroic wizards, mystic knights, and divinely empowered champions play a definite thematic role, knowledge of the supernatural isn't necessary to defeat the danger and save the day. Heroes only need to be brave, resourceful, and compassionate. If they succeed, they can slow the rising power of evil until a new Master Mage can be found, but if they fail, Earth-Prime could be plunged into chaos and ripped apart at its magical seams!

The heroes will gain a powerful magical ally early in the series: Adrian Eldrich's former apprentice Seven. Seven's position as Dark Lord of Una's former holdings prevents her from returning to Earth for now, but she can contact the heroes to provide insight and expertise they may lack. Players who play through the *NetherWar* prequel adventure can even fight alongside Seven or step into her shoes in her tense battle against Una.

THE ROLE OF A MASTER MAGE

The power and responsibilities of a Master Mage crops up time and time again throughout the *NetherWar* storyline. A dimension's Master Mage serves as a guardian and shepherd for its magical energy, authorized by the mystic powers that be to negotiate and bargain on behalf of their entire realm—a sort of cosmic power of attorney. Malador the Mystic, for example, once offered up all of Earth to his dark gods in exchange for power—and even those mystic powers aligned with light were bound to honor his arrangement even though they found it detestable and maneuvered their own agents to undermine it.

In mechanical terms, being a Master Mage is a rank 4 status Benefit. Heroes hoping to take on the status of Master Mage themselves can gradually purchase ranks in this Advantage over the course of the series, but cannot purchase their final rank until the conclusion of

events. The gradual evolution of a magician's status to this point carries its own benefits and reputation:

- **Status 1 Adept of Note):** Many magical beings have heard of the hero or at least whoever trained them in the arts and are more likely to take them seriously as a friend or foe.
- **Status 2 (Potential Inheritor):** The hero's name is known to many magical creatures and spellcasters, and many suspect they could be the next Master Mage if they're clever.
- **Status 3 (Heir Apparent):** Most beings in the magical community recognize the hero's name or reputation, and generally accept that they will become the next Master Mage. They may try to ingratiate themselves or go out of their way to target the hero.
- **Status 4 (Master Mage):** The hero has gained the title of Master Mage and can demand respect and deference from the magical beings of their world. Other spellcasters are at least aware of their name and power.

The Master Mage also acts as a lens to focus the magic of their world, a task requiring incredible will. A good-hearted or disciplined Master Mage tames the wild surges of magic that can cause strange phenomenon and disasters, while refining the magic of their world into a form easier for like-minded spellcasters to harness. But a corrupt Master Mage taints the magic of their world with their inner demons, coloring the arcane energy with their same rage, perversion, or lust for power. Those who learn to harness that lens and direct the magic of their world ascend to Dark Lords, powerful beings straddling the divide between mortal and god, whose realms reflect their twisted dispositions. This effect is best handled as a narrative element of the position; as a character acting as the Master Mage for their dimension changes their behavior and outlook, it becomes easier for magical beings aligned with that outlook to enter their world, and more difficult for opposing practitioners to harness the plane's magical energy.

A Master Mage's final role is arbiter and authority over the magical forces of their realm. The mantle comes with considerable respect from mystics and spellcasters, and even those who don't directly obey the Master Mage must at least pay their words heed. Many magical creatures native to their realm are compelled to obey their direct orders, while mystic beings from other dimensions can sometimes be driven back to their own realms through force of will alone. This effect is generally handled as a plot device, but Game Masters may allow a Master Mage to use their ranks in the Benefit (Status: Master Mage) advantage as Luck that can only be spent on social interactions against magical creatures.

That potential for corruption is why the mantle of Master Mage is so carefully tended and guarded. The title is normally passed via ritual—a circle of spellcasters can call the mantle down, once it is freed by its current holder's death—but it can pass naturally through a strong bond, such as from master to apprentice, or be won in a duel arcane if the current bearer of the title agrees. Magics that can unwillingly strip the mantle from a host are forbidden by the oldest pacts, and even the darkest entities—Bal'hemoth, Kar'Kradas, Shatachna, Vhoka—devour adherents who turn to such arts. Only forces of true chaos such as the Howling Dream and the Unspeakable One would give power to such rituals.

Without a Master Mage, the Earth realm has no shepherd and no lens. Its magic runs wild and untamed, licking at the heels of civilization and twisting the dreams of mortals into strange new forms. Normally, chaotic beings would be drawn to this increasingly feral ecosystem, but evil, as always, is opportunistic. And without a guardian to hold them back, terrible things flourish.

CREATING NETHERWAR HEROES

As mentioned before, heroes don't need to be particularly magically inclined to enjoy the *NetherWar* story arc. A team of science-focused heroes is just as appropriate as a team of alchemists. Any existing character you have can enjoy playing through *NetherWar* and saving the world from evil magic.

If you're making a new hero from scratch for these adventures, or leveling up your existing hero, consider some of the following advice to get the most out of the experience.

LEGACIES

If you would like to tie your character's background more directly into the magical history of Freedom City or Earth-Prime, you may want to create an apprentice of Adrian Eldrich or Seven who is carrying out their duties in their absence. If this doesn't appeal to you, *Freedom City* includes several mystic and mystic-adjacent legacies you can select, such as the Light-Bearer, a champion of light destined to fight back against the rising darkness, or the Scarab, a reincarnating psychic hero who has stood against corrupt mages time and time again. A heroic mage may be one of the Door Wardens (see the *Atlas of Earth-Prime*), masters of interdimensional magic who guard Earth from outside threats and monitor magical transport.

SKILLS

As always, a good mix of skills and specializations is important to a superhero team. The challenges throughout the story arc call upon a hero's wits, physicality, and empathy, and many scenes allow for creative solutions.

Expertise (Freedom City): Much of the *NetherWar* story arc is based on the history and characters of Freedom City, and some knowledge of the city's history will help heroes know who's who. If your Game Master plans to set *NetherWar* in a different city, swap out for the appropriate Expertise or consider a variation like "Villains" or "Local History." This is doubly true if no one in your team has Expertise (Magic).

Expertise (Magic): Unsurprisingly, a little knowledge of magic—even if a hero isn't a magician themselves—will help the entire team understand the personalities and stakes involved and recognize magical creatures and artifacts.

Insight: Trickery is afoot! Magical beings are rarely straightforward in their dealings, and many are intentionally misleading, even if they aren't explicitly lying. Insight can help a hero know when to keep on their toes or when they're on the bad end of a deal.

Investigation: There are many mysteries and crossed motivations at the heart of the *NetherWar* and having at least one team member who can scout out clues and suss out their meaning will help your heroes get to the heart of the conflict.

Persuasion: The magical world is filled with neutral agents—neither good nor evil—who can be swayed to assist either side, not to mention ancient vendettas between villains that heroes can use to their advantage. A hero or two skilled in gathering information from living sources can likewise back up the efforts of an investigative hero.

Technology: While the primary adversaries of *NetherWar* are magical beings, the heroes will still encounter technological challenges they must overcome, computers to access, and locks to defeat. Given how unfamiliar most of the magical community is with modern technology, this skill may even be an ace in the hole—an unexpected solution to problems their enemies never considered.

ADVANTAGES

NetherWar includes plenty of dramatic conflicts between good and evil, so all the old combat staples—Accurate Attack, All-Out Attack, Power Attack, and so on—will help keep the heroes' tactics flexible against a variety of foes.

Several Advantages allow players to choose how and when they apply. For these options, consider the following:

BENEFIT

There are several applications of the Benefit Advantage that can cater specifically to the story and themes of the *NetherWar* story arc.

- **Apprentice Master:** You studied under a powerful spellcaster—perhaps even Eldrich or Seven—to help prepare you to take over the role of Master Mage one day. You're a prime candidate to inherit the title of Master Mage one day, particularly after a major act of heroism. Your reputation grants you a +2 circumstance bonus on Persuasion checks against mages and magical beings who respect the Master Mage, and a +2 circumstance bonus on Intimidation checks against mages and magical beings who hate or fear the Master Mage.
- **Cynical:** Everything has a scientific explanation, and just because we can't explain something yet doesn't mean it's "magic" any more than a Neanderthal not understanding electronics makes a smartphone magic. You gain a +1 bonus to your Will defense and Fortitude defense that is only effective against attacks with the magic descriptor. PL caps still apply to this bonus.

- **Spiritual Diplomat:** Whether you have spiritualist ancestors or died briefly and returned, the spirit world sees you as an arbiter or conduit between them and the living. Unaligned magical creatures and ghosts won't attack you unprovoked and begin with an Indifferent or Favorable attitude toward you, and you gain a +2 bonus to Persuasion checks against spirits, ghosts, and magical creatures that aren't hostile to you. For an additional 2 ranks, you can also see ghosts, spirits, and magical creatures who are normally invisible (and spellcasters using Concealment effects).
- **Sixth Sense:** You get a chill up your spine when too close to the supernatural, allowing you to identify magic and supernatural effects nearby with a Perception check (DC 10, with a -1 penalty to your check per 10 feet of distance). For 2 ranks, you may use this keen sense to track magical effects and creatures to their source. This is essentially an Advantage version of the Senses (Magic Awareness) and Senses (Tracking) powers.
- **Weak Aura:** Your aura is muted and difficult for supernatural creatures to detect, perhaps due to chronic illness, cybernetic parts, or skeptical nature. You gain a +2 circumstance bonus on Stealth checks to avoid being noticed by supernatural creatures and spellcasters, and creatures that can sense the dead or detect life may mistake you for dead with a successful Deception check.

EQUIPMENT

Any equipment is appropriate for this story arc, but your Game Master may allow your heroes to acquire low-power magical devices as equipment rather than devices. You heroes will have the opportunity to acquire a magical headquarters early in the story arc, and so you may wish to set aside 3-5 equipment points for this during character creation.

FAVORED ENVIRONMENT

NetherWar is a globetrotting series of adventures that takes heroes to strange corners of the world as well as magical planes of existence. Frequently visited terrain includes "Mystic Dimensions", "Underground", and "Urban."

FAVORED FOE

Heroes will still face killer robots and mutants in addition to the mystic threats, but arcane villains make up the bulk of opposition throughout the *NetherWar*. Because of this, Game Masters may decide that definitions for Favored Foe like "Magical Creatures" are too broad and that heroes will need to be more specific. Appropriate Favored Foes include "Demons", "Ghosts and Spirits", "Wizards", "Magical Constructs", and "Cultists."

LEADERSHIP

More than most villains, magical villains are known for unleashing strange effects to instill fear, bind, or exhaust their foes, and so a hero who can help their allies recover from such conditions will be a boon.

POWERS

A variety of powers will prove useful throughout *NetherWar*, but a few may be more or less significant than normal due to the story arc's focus. In particular, powers that control technology may have limited application. The heroes will spend a fair amount of time in ancient temples and mystic dimensions where there won't be much technology to

BECOMING MASTER MAGE

As a mystic force, the title of Master Mage requires ritual and ceremony to pass along. It is normally passed from master to apprentice, or between peers when one's time comes. Lacking ritual to direct it, the mantle frees itself when its previous bearer dies and may leap to a shining beacon of potential. It might also lie dormant for decades, as it has done recently, and as it did before passing to Eldrich in 1935.

The title of Master Mage does not come with any direct magical power. Instead, a bearer must already wield mystic arts to be able to accept the title. In Adrian Eldrich's case, the spirits of bygone Atlantean sages used their power to unlock his own knowledge of magic from a previous life, in essence "jump-starting" him into the role. Normally, the title falls to an experienced practitioner who is well-known in the mystical community of their dimension.

apply such powers to. In these cases, Gamemasters should award the handicapped hero a Hero Point for losing access to one of their major abilities. Powers that simply derive from technology, like high-tech devices and powersuits, generally won't be affected by this limitation.

Players interested in playing mystics in this series will find the **Magic Powers** and **Mental Powers** sections of *Power Profiles* especially useful. The **Magic Powers** section also includes named entities who will appear at least in name over the *NetherWar* adventures.

A few specific notes on powers include:

- **Damage:** Many magical beings have oddly specific weaknesses to particular substances, elements, or even colors. Take the extra effort to describe your damage effects in detail and it might pay off.
- **Immunity (Magic):** Given the ubiquity of magic as a power descriptor among the opponents in *NetherWar*, immunity to magic is a significant advantage given its low cost of 10pp. Game Masters may decide to require the Limited (half effect) flaw, increase the cost of magic immunity to 20 points, given how common magic will be, or both. It's also important to remember that while Immunity to magic effects renders you safe from magic targeting your hero directly, it doesn't help when the magic is applied to something else. A hero immune to magic could still be bludgeoned with a mystically levitated boulder, for example, or pummeled by a minion whose strength is magically augmented.
- **Movement (Dimension Travel):** The ability to travel into mystic dimensions (and back) will be a valuable tool in many of the *NetherWar* adventures, though the nature of mystic dimensions often means that they may be easy to access and very difficult to exit, even with appropriate powers.
- **Nullify (Magic):** Like Immunity (Magic), the ability to neutralize magic may prove more valuable than its low point cost would suggest, even with the Broad Extra that normally requires. Your Game Master might require a more narrow category of magical effects, such as "magical curses," "magical attacks," "augmentations," or increase the cost of Nullify (Magic) by one additional point per rank.
- **Summoning:** The ability to conjure minions is a common magical trope, but just as some mystic dimensions interfere with Dimension Travel powers, they may likewise disrupt a hero's ability to summon magical minions.

COMPLICATIONS

Complications provide a steady source of Hero Points for your characters to use during an adventure, and on some occasions, magical effects may force Complications to come up, such as by invoking a character's worst fears or inner demons. Including a few interesting character faults—especially Obsessions, Phobias, Relationships, and Responsibilities—can help you make the most of these scenes.

A few specific Complications require special consideration:

- **Addiction (magic):** Characters who worry about abusing their magic will spend the entirety of *NetherWar* surrounded by temptation, for better or for worse.
- **Enemy:** If a hero wants personal enemies that recur and have a grudge against them personally throughout the course of the *NetherWar*; Medea, Toy Boy, and Warden (see *Freedom City*) all appear multiple times in the course of events. Alternatively, you can pick almost any magical villain and ask your Game Master to work them into the plot—either to replace one of these recurring villains or to augment their numbers. Remember that your chosen villain likely also gains the hero as an Enemy Complication, and so should also gain the equivalent of a Hero Point to spend when they show up in the story.
- **Phobia:** Powerful fears appear often in magic-associated superhero stories, either the result of contact with a powerful supernatural creature or haunting or because the hero's focus on mind-over-matter unintentionally lends power to their subconscious dread. Common fears that may appear in *NetherWar* include claustrophobia, snakes, demons, and the undead.
- **Power Loss:** Casting magic spells almost always requires some element of potential Power Loss. Most mages cannot use their powers when they can't speak or gesture—such as when underwater, gagged, or bound by a snare attack. Others need special implements—wands or staves or charms—to use their spells; these implements may have no power on their own (and so aren't devices), but are needed to focus the mage's potential. Mages and magical creatures bound to a particular element may lose their powers when surrounded by the opposing element, such as an air elemental losing her powers when underground.
- **Responsibility:** Heroes with some duty or responsibility to maintain the magical balance of the world will find plenty to motivate them. Their dedication to a greater cause may occasionally mean siding with characters they dislike. Heroes bound to hunt and contain dangerous magical entities, for example, may need to ally with shifty characters who have the ability to contain defeated mages.
- **Weakness:** A weakness to magic puts a hero at a severe disadvantage throughout the course of the *NetherWar* story arc, but also gives that character the ability to earn plenty of Hero Points. Common weakness effects against magic include halving the hero's appropriate defense bonus against magic effects or increasing the severity of failed resistance checks by one step. In general, a hero only earns a Hero Point for a weakness the first time it shows up in a scene, not every time they're targeted by that effect, and only when that effect endangers the hero, not simply when it is present. Less omnipresent weaknesses to magic may include a sensitivity to magical travel that leaves the hero fatigued for the next scene or the inability to benefit from magic effects like positive transformations and healing.

BEQUESTS

At several points throughout the *NetherWar* adventure arc, characters have the option to inherit bits of magical bequest—magical objects, contacts, control of locations, and titles—especially those left behind by the absent Adrian Eldrich. Making use of any of these options requires investing power points—either experience or pp saved from character creation—and most are relatively inexpensive, ranging from 3-10pp. Not immediately spending the points to acquire a bequest doesn't mean the opportunity vanishes forever. Characters can retain the physical items or have the potential to gain an ally for weeks or years to purchase later, or even draw upon in an emergency by spending a Hero Point to edit the scene. They simply don't have the control to make regular use of that bequest until you invest power points into it—magic is strange and willful, and so needs discipline and focus to master, even if in one's grasp.

The bequests in *NetherWar* exist as fun opportunities for a character to develop new abilities and resources. Your heroes aren't obligated to keep any of the bequests and acquiring them isn't central to completing the plot. If more than one player wants to acquire the same bequest for their hero, discuss the options and the potential to share it. Two or more heroes can share the cost of a sidekick or headquarters, for example, but probably can't wear the same magic cloak. In these cases, the Game Master might want to introduce additional, similar items or allow players to create their own bequests invested with similar backstories.

TEAM DYNAMICS

If your gaming group is making a new team of heroes for the *NetherWar* adventure arc, it's worth taking a moment to consider why they're working together and are drawn into this storyline.

DEFENDERS OF THE CITY

The general assumption for a *MUTANTS & MASTERMINDS* campaign is that the heroes are a team of like-minded defenders of the defenseless, who apply their unique powers to stop dangers too great for average people or authorities to stand against. This option can bring the greatest variety of skills and abilities to bear, as it doesn't imply anything about the heroes' origins or powers. It also means your team has a weak thematic link to the events of the *NetherWar*; you stand against the rise of evil magic because it threatens your city and world—a heroic effort, but hardly personal. Yet.

FORMER TEEN HEROES

Many months or even years separate the events of the *NetherWar* prequel adventure, *Master of Earth*, from the main storyline. With *Master of Earth* focusing on teen heroes recruited from the Claremont Academy to help Seven defeat Una, that experience may tie heroes together, even years later, when villains begin plucking at the threads woven by Eldrich and Seven. Seven herself may even reach out to her one-time allies to bring them back together to aid her while she is still unable to return to Earth. This option gives the players some personal history with events of the *NetherWar* while still giving them a huge variety of options regarding their origins and powers. You should progress whichever PL 8 teen heroes you use for *Master of Earth* to PL 10 before continuing with the next adventure.

MYSTIC INVESTIGATORS

The rising tide of dark magic is expected, but proceeding more quickly than anyone thought it could, even without a Master Mage. Many members of Earth-Prime's magical community are concerned and baffled by this turn of events and may band together to investigate strange new developments. With the flexibility of magic and a descriptor, heroes can still have a variety of abilities—a golem powerhouse fighting alongside a demigod paragon, an energy controller fueled by an elemental, and a traditional mage—but share some common expertise and personal stake in tracking down the cause of these dire events. The only drawback is that such heroes might feel out of place investigating the ordinary crimes and non-magical villains that appear in several *NetherWar* adventures, and Game Masters may need to work to tie these events into the growing threat of corrupt magic.

RESEARCHERS

Rather than mystically inclined, the heroes are its equal and opposite—a team of science-minded individuals curious about phenomena like the shift in Earth's electromagnetic field and the rise of unexplained events. These heroes likely share a common origin—similar to Freedom City's Atom Family—that focuses on technology rather than magic and have a goal of explaining the unexplained while protecting the world. Game Masters may need to build some extra backstory into *NetherWar* adventures to help satisfy their heroes' scientific curiosity when it comes to explaining magic effects, but this approach to the series can carry fun and powerful elements of opposition to it that helps make stories like *Ghostbusters* into memorable classics.

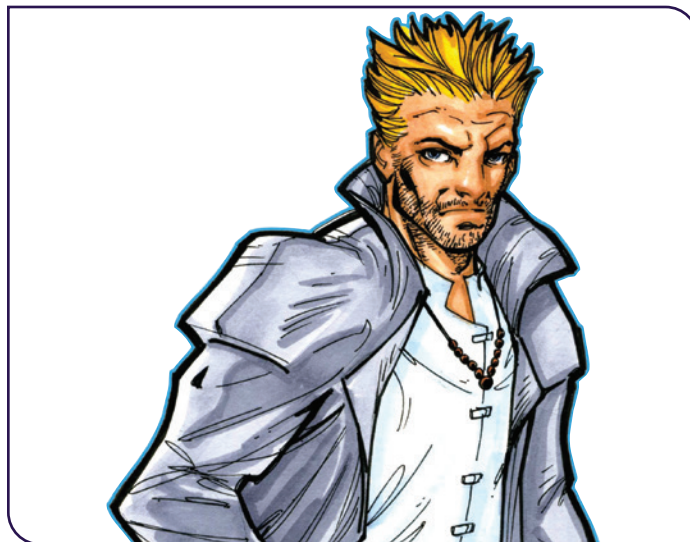
SCARRED BY MAGIC

Rather than experts and representatives of the magical community, the heroes have all been personally victimized by the rise of dark magic over the past several years. They may be afflicted with a curse that also provides them with inhuman powers, were cult sacrifices who now linger as ghosts, or are the survivors of monster attacks who have trained themselves in martial arts or mastered weapons to fight back. As with the Mystic Investigators option, these heroes have a deep personal stake in stemming the rise of evil magic, but may not possess the same expertise, contacts, or even power source as the creatures they hunt. Heroes scarred by magic likely have a large variety of magic-related Complications that Game Masters should keep in mind and may be reluctant to work alongside the magical allies that appear in the story arc.

CONCEPT ROLES

The idea of Concept Roles—first introduced in the *M&M SuperTeam Handbook*—is a narrative tool that allows heroes to fit into in the story, to feel distinct, and help them stand out in a group that may have characters with similar abilities and skills. It provides a distinct outlook and purpose and helps suggest character traits to back up a hero's personality and place on the team. Any of the Concept Roles provided in the *SuperTeam Handbook* are appropriate for *NetherWar*, but the specific nature of these adventures presents the opportunity for more specific roles.

You can learn more about Concept Roles in **Chapter 2** of the *M&M SuperTeam Handbook*.



HISTORIAN

You're an academic or a diehard fan of something appropriate. You might be magically inclined, but you might just as easily be an anthropologist or archaeologist in your secret identity who has spent their life studying ritual beliefs or a superhero nerd with a soft spot for Adrian Eldrich's 80 years of adventure. Finding yourself thrust into the middle of supernatural events is a double-edged sword: Sure, your life is in danger, but when else will anyone have the chance to study all this from the inside?

TRAIT SUGGESTIONS

Intelligence might not be your best Ability, but it's likely higher than it needs to be and helps prop up the skills you need in order to learn all you can, like Expertise (Magic), Expertise (Superheroes), Investigation, and Insight. If you're more of a documentarian, then getting people to open up and share what they know requires a decent Presence and at least a few ranks in Persuasion (or Deception), while the Second Chance and Ultimate Effort Advantages for your preferred information-gathering skills mean you'll rarely miss a clue.

COMPLICATIONS

The following complications suit this role:

Curiosity: You'll never learn anything if you don't turn over every stone! You earn a Hero Point whenever your curiosity unleashes something unpleasant or you go easy on a villain so you can learn what they know.

Obsession: Your interest borders on the unhealthy and can drive you to push yourself too hard. You can earn a Hero Point in exchange for starting an adventure with the fatigued condition (or something similar) for a few scenes as a result of pushing yourself too hard.

Responsibility: Your interests are at least partially professional—a university, publisher, or secret society wants to know what you know, so you must make time for meetings and turn over many of your findings. You might earn a Hero Point when these obligations leave you at a disadvantage—starting a scene in your secret identity or arriving late to an adventure, for example—or when crossing your employer causes you to lose access to Advantages like Connected, Equipment, or Well-informed.



INHERITOR

You should have been the next Master Mage and you're keenly aware that some character flaw cost you this opportunity. Maybe your insufferable overconfidence made you seem self-destructive or your own insecurities drove you to reject such an awesome responsibility. A part of you is deeply drawn to anything related to the legacy of Master Mage, either to earn a second shot at the title or because you feel responsible for the growing problems.

TRAIT SUGGESTIONS

Your powers are almost certainly magical in nature—probably traditional spellcasting, but maybe a specialization like alchemy, elemental control, or time magic—and you likely boast an impressive Intelligence or Awareness Ability to match. Skills like Expertise (Magic) and Advantages like Artificer and Ritualist help round out your problem-solving abilities, even if they sometimes require the investment of time. Your years of training have probably also given you an impressive Will defense, although you might have a few gaps in your mental armor (see Complications).

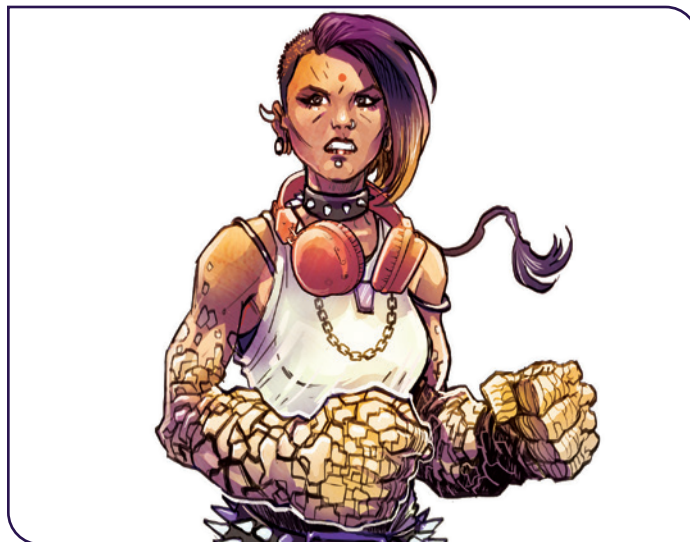
COMPLICATIONS

The following complications suit this role:

Disappointment: Someone was training you to become the next Master Mage and may be deeply disappointed in your lapse (or you might blame them for your failure). You earn a Hero Point whenever you play up this sour relationship, the relationship causes problems for you, or you go out of your way to patch things up.

Reputation: As a student intended for such a prestigious path, your identity (and failure) are widely known in the magical community. You earn a Hero Point whenever your reputation worsens another person's starting attitude toward you or imposes a circumstance penalty on your interaction checks (-2 or -5, depending on how that individual feels about you).

Weakness: Something in your personality leaves you especially vulnerable to certain kinds of manipulation. Your ego might make you more vulnerable to flattery and illusions that praise your glory, or your insecurity might leave you vulnerable to fear effects and intimidation. You can only apply half your Will defense against your foible but you earn a Hero Point whenever it comes up.



LAYPERSON

You're the uninitiated, average hero-on-the-street feeling in way over your head with all this talk about magic, dimensions, and ancient history. It may as well be Latin... and a lot of it probably is. You spend a lot of time with a confused look, asking questions that should be obvious to your magical colleagues. In media, the layperson character serves as an audience surrogate, letting the audience learn the secrets of the world as the character does. But in *MUTANTS & MASTERMINDS*, this role offers the entire group the chance to ask questions about the basics of history and how magic works, while providing you with the fun of turning mystical technobabble into oversimplified metaphors.

TRAIT SUGGESTIONS

While you have immense flexibility in building your character, you should steer clear of any of the options that would be thematically appropriate, such as the Expertise (Magic) skill and magic-based powers. Instead, invest some power points into developing an unlikely interest or skill that might be a fun and unexpected way to solve problems, like singing ability, knowledge of pop culture, or an unbreakable optimism that can inspire your friends.

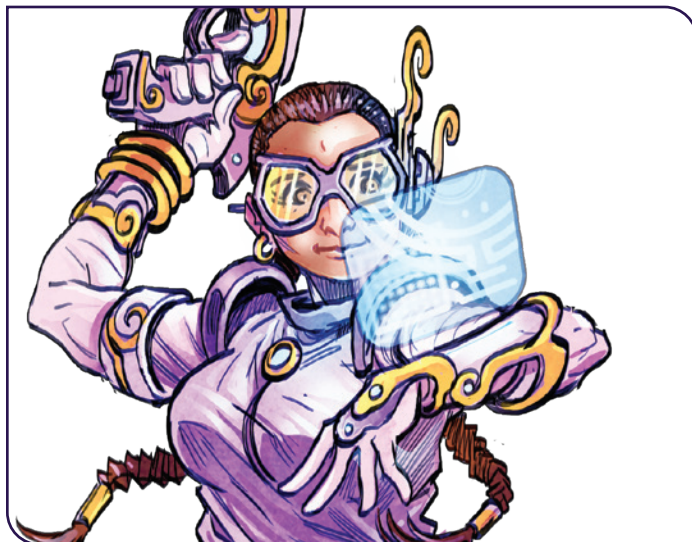
COMPLICATIONS

The following complications suit this role:

Accident: As a complete neophyte in relation to anything magical, you have a tendency to poke artifacts, drink potions, or read forbidden tomes aloud without understanding the gravity of what you're doing. Earn a Hero Point every time you accidentally make things worse by not knowing what you're doing.

Honor: As one of the uninitiated, you don't really have a horse in this race. People have been ignorant of magic even when it was at its worst and still managed to survive. So, standing by others against terrible power is a matter of honor, friendship, or human decency for you. You earn a Hero point whenever your moral code pushes you to risk life and limb against a greater foe, or you risk your life to help someone.

Phobia: People fear what they don't understand, and there is a lot you don't understand... at least not yet. While a fear of magic is a little too broad (and likely too ubiquitous), a fear of ghosts, fire, or monsters that leaves you Dazed or Impaired during an encounter earns you a Hero Point whenever it comes up.



SKEPTIC

If magic is real—and you’re not saying it is; quantum physics can go some pretty weird places—then it’s at least not this weird, quasi-divine force all these touchy-feely types keep telling you it is. Like any other superpower, it’s just something that needs to be explained, and you’re well-positioned to explain it by digging into its oldest traditions and mythology. While your eagerness to explain the unexplainable doesn’t always endear you to mystically inclined friends, it does provide you with an outside perspective that can be handy for solving problems.

TRAIT SUGGESTIONS

You need a few non-magical Expertise specialties, such as Science, Psychology, or Anthropology—to help you dig for reasonable explanations for unreasonable things. You may also rely on the Technology skill to analyze or contain the strange things you encounter. You’re accustomed to making do and thinking on the fly, making Advantages like Improvised Tools, Improvised Weapon, and Throwing Mastery natural choices for you, as is Inventor if you’re technologically inclined.

COMPLICATIONS

The following complications suit this role:

Obsession: Your need to expose the truth can drive you to extremes. Whenever your need to dig below the surface of any issue leads into a dangerous situation, you earn a Hero Point.

Secret: Your skepticism comes from some deeply personal experience you don’t like to share. Maybe you had an unexplained encounter as a child, maybe you were taken in by a con artist posing as a psychic, or maybe your parents are just leaders of a new-age sex cult and it’s really embarrassing. The stress of keeping the secret means you’re Fatigued when your secret might be revealed and Stunned for a round when someone else uses it against you—earning a Hero Point in either case. You also earn a Hero Point if you open up and share this vulnerability with trusted friends.

Self-Appointed Expert: You try not to be a jerk to others with your dedicated disbelief—*try* being the operative word. Earn a Hero Point every time you can’t help butting into a conversation and sabotaging your allies’ efforts with your “hard truths.” Doing so imposes a circumstance penalty (usually -2, but sometimes -5, depending on the sensitivity of the topic) to your group’s attempts to influence others.



TRUE BELIEVER

You aren’t necessarily a mystic, but you’re an eager student ready to learn the secrets of the world. There’s a lot of myth and superstition surrounding the things you’re interested in, and until recently, you’ve never known what was true and what was fantasy. But now it seems like the whole magical world is collapsing in on itself, and maybe you don’t have the knowledge to help, but by the gods, you have the *will*.

TRAIT SUGGESTIONS

You probably aren’t well-versed in the mystic arts, even if your powers come from a magical source; but you’ve dedicated at least a little effort into developing related interests like Expertise (History), Expertise (Biology), Expertise (Pop Culture), Insight, or Treatment. While you likely don’t have access to any magic-specific Advantages, your boundless faith makes Diehard, Luck, and Extraordinary Effort natural fits. You also likely benefit from either a respectable Intellect or Presence to either justify your boundless curiosity or to make your ranting more endearing than annoying.

COMPLICATIONS

The following complications suit this role:

Naïve: You’re eager to defer to other, more experienced, mages if it leads to new insights. You gain a Hero Point whenever you choose to fail an Insight check against a magical being or spellcaster and just believe whatever they tell you.

Relationship: A dear relative or friend was always there to support you and fill your head with inspiring stories of a magical world just outside your reach. Now that you have the strength to stand on your own, it’s your turn to protect them. You earn a Hero Point whenever your relation is threatened by a disaster or villain, or whenever your obligations to them put you at a disadvantage.

Trouble-Magnet: Maybe it’s your openness to the supernatural. Maybe it’s your body spray. But all the monsters seem to love you! You’re always the target for weird creatures, magical effects, and supernatural predators, but earn a Hero Point whenever they attack you first over your allies.

Weakness: Your openness to magic is a burden as well as a strength, leaving you Vulnerable to some (or all) magical effects.

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