

SETH JOHNSON · JON LEITHELISSER · GREEN RONIN



GREEN RONIN
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SOURCEBOOK

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MUTANTS & MASTERMINDS

IRON AGE



SOURCEBOOK

**I THINK OF A HERO AS SOMEONE WHO UNDERSTANDS
THE DEGREE OF RESPONSIBILITY THAT COMES WITH
HIS FREEDOM.**

—BOB DYLAN





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Seth's Dedication: This one is for Jon (for always leading the way), and for Andrew Trabbold (who knows what's important and what's not). As always, everything is for my family, but this one is particularly for Stella—may the dark days always be before her time. Also, special thanks to Chris and Steve for letting us build part of a superhero universe.

Jon's Dedication: Thanks to Steve and Chris, for allowing me to play in their sandbox; Seth, for being a great friend; Mom and Dad, for everything; Julia, for understanding why I spent so much time in front of the computer—love you, girl—and Dave, for getting me into all this. Rest in peace, buddy.

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T A B L E O F C O N T E N T S

INTRODUCTION.....	5	<i>Gun-Toting Mutant from the Future.....</i>	<i>64</i>
Using This Book.....	5	<i>Ninja.....</i>	<i>65</i>
CHAPTER ONE: THE IRON AGE OF COMICS.....	6	<i>Vampiric Avenger.....</i>	<i>66</i>
CHAPTER TWO: THE IRON AGE WORLD.....	12	<i>Vigilante.....</i>	<i>67</i>
Iron Age History.....	12	CHAPTER FOUR: IRON AGE CAMPAIGNS.....	68
Iron Age Settings.....	18	Reconstructing the Iron Age.....	68
<i>The City.....</i>	<i>18</i>	Supporting Cast Archetypes.....	76
<i>The Asylum.....</i>	<i>19</i>	Villain Archetypes.....	78
<i>The Company.....</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>Hero Archetypes as Villains.....</i>	<i>78</i>
<i>The Lab.....</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>Assassin.....</i>	<i>79</i>
<i>The Capitol.....</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>Crime Boss.....</i>	<i>80</i>
<i>The Airport.....</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>Cult Leader.....</i>	<i>81</i>
<i>The Foreign Country.....</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>Evil Ninja.....</i>	<i>82</i>
<i>The Dying World.....</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>Magic Killer.....</i>	<i>83</i>
Genre Conventions.....	25	<i>Mercenary.....</i>	<i>84</i>
<i>Shades of Gray.....</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>Metahuman Dictator.....</i>	<i>85</i>
<i>Villains.....</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>Psycho.....</i>	<i>86</i>
<i>Black Ops.....</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>Supernatural Menace.....</i>	<i>87</i>
<i>Guns, Guns, Guns!.....</i>	<i>28</i>	CHAPTER FIVE: THE IRON AGE OF FREEDOM.....	88
<i>Leather & Latex.....</i>	<i>30</i>	History.....	88
<i>Ninja!.....</i>	<i>30</i>	Freedom City in the Iron Age.....	92
<i>Lone Wolves.....</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>The Moore Administration.....</i>	<i>92</i>
<i>Realistic Powers.....</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>CODE.....</i>	<i>93</i>
<i>A New Generation.....</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>AEGIS.....</i>	<i>93</i>
Genre Rules.....	33	<i>Organized Crime.....</i>	<i>95</i>
<i>Lethality.....</i>	<i>33</i>	FORCE Ops.....	96
Realism and the Rules.....	35	<i>The Warehouse.....</i>	<i>96</i>
<i>Abilities.....</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>Sky-Bike.....</i>	<i>96</i>
<i>Skills.....</i>	<i>36</i>	The Eyes of Night.....	103
<i>Feats.....</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>Evening.....</i>	<i>104</i>
<i>Powers.....</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>The Eye of Justice.....</i>	<i>105</i>
<i>Characteristics.....</i>	<i>38</i>	The Fearsome.....	106
<i>Devices and Equipment.....</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>Silverback.....</i>	<i>106</i>
<i>Combat.....</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>Subject Nine.....</i>	<i>106</i>
CHAPTER THREE: IRON AGE CHARACTERS.....	42	<i>Verman.....</i>	<i>106</i>
<i>Starting Power Levels.....</i>	<i>42</i>	RIOT.....	108
<i>Realistic Street-Level Characters.....</i>	<i>42</i>	<i>Armored.....</i>	<i>108</i>
<i>Cinematic Street-Level Characters.....</i>	<i>43</i>	<i>Flag-Burner.....</i>	<i>108</i>
<i>Classic Iron Age Characters.....</i>	<i>43</i>	<i>Insurgent.....</i>	<i>110</i>
<i>Over-the-Top Iron Age Characters.....</i>	<i>43</i>	<i>Little Hawk.....</i>	<i>110</i>
Iron Age Abilities, Skills & Feats.....	44	<i>S. D. Ivan.....</i>	<i>111</i>
<i>Iron Age Skills.....</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>Slam Dance.....</i>	<i>111</i>
<i>Iron Age Feats.....</i>	<i>44</i>	Other Iron Age Criminals.....	111
Iron Age Powers.....	48	The Iron Age Freedom City Series.....	114
<i>Problem Powers.....</i>	<i>48</i>	<i>FORCE Ops.....</i>	<i>114</i>
<i>Complications.....</i>	<i>48</i>	<i>Nevermore.....</i>	<i>114</i>
<i>Drawbacks.....</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>Lone Wolves.....</i>	<i>114</i>
Devices & Equipment.....	50	<i>Agents of AEGIS.....</i>	<i>114</i>
<i>The Iron Age Armory.....</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>Empire City.....</i>	<i>115</i>
<i>Iron Age Weapon Accessories.....</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>The Eldrich Circle.....</i>	<i>115</i>
Hero Archetypes.....	57	<i>Freedom City Blues.....</i>	<i>115</i>
<i>Black Ops Agent.....</i>	<i>58</i>	<i>Legacies of the Iron Age.....</i>	<i>116</i>
<i>The Claw.....</i>	<i>59</i>	BAD MEDICINE.....	117
<i>Cursed Mystic.....</i>	<i>60</i>	INDEX.....	123
<i>Cyborg.....</i>	<i>61</i>	CONTRIBUTOR BIOS.....	125
<i>Demon of Vengeance.....</i>	<i>62</i>	OPEN GAME LICENSE.....	126
<i>Grown-Up Sidekick.....</i>	<i>63</i>		

INTRODUCTION

When scholars and experts discuss the history of comic books, they borrow from classical poets Ovid and Hesiod and divide the span of years into different eras: a Golden Age, followed by the Silver and Bronze Ages, which led to an Iron Age and the nascent Modern Age. This book's focus is on the Iron Age of Comics, a ten-year-long span characterized by mature themes, increased levels of violence and death, and stories without black-and-white solutions.

The first year of the Iron Age is reckoned at 1986, which saw the publication of Frank Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' *Watchmen*. Coming as they did out of Reagan's United States and Thatcher's England, the creators of these works showcased political and moral extremes as a warning of where the policies of the day could lead if left unchecked. Due to the popularity of both series, other artists and writers adopted their trappings—hard-line heroes, cynicism, darker tone and subject matter, and an increased sense of realism—and incorporated them into their own works. This resulted in many new and re-imagined books, stories, and characters that *looked* like those in *Dark Knight Returns* or *Watchmen*, but lacked any kind of social conscience or message.

In a lot of ways, these “grim-and-gritty” characters were representations of exactly what Miller and Moore cautioned against. They did, however, make for some great action-adventure stories. These tales weren't necessarily far-fetched plots enacted by silly, two-dimensional characters, either; these were plausible stories filled with flawed, human characters trying to do what they could to make the world a better place, no matter the cost. In addition, these new characters with a more practical view of the world addressed the same questions readers of comics had pondered for years:

“Why not just kill the villains instead of locking them up so they can't get away again?”

“Isn't what comic book heroes do just another kind of vigilantism?”

“What drives a person to dress up in costume and fight crime? Isn't that more than a little crazy?”

Iron Age allows gamers and comic-book fans alike to explore these same action-packed ideas, using the best-selling *Mutants & Masterminds* RPG as a guide. In these pages, the darkest time in comic books meets the World's Greatest Superhero RPG.

USING THIS BOOK

To play in the Iron Age, you'll need a copy of *Mutants & Masterminds, Second Edition*, a twenty-sided die, some pencils, copies of the character sheet in the back of *M&M*, and a group of players who want to kick ass and take names...and maybe make the world a safer place in the process. Other sourcebooks, like *Ultimate Power* and *Mastermind's Manual*, can serve as useful references, but are not necessary. Feel free to add miniatures, dry-erase maps, and anything else you like to the mix.

CHAPTER ONE: THE IRON AGE OF COMICS

Chapter One provides a brief history of the Iron Age, from its earliest days to the dawn of the Modern Age. This section gives an overview of the time period and provides the information you'll need to bone up on the world of comics in the 1980s and 1990s.

CHAPTER TWO: THE IRON AGE WORLD

Chapter Two looks at the elements that make Iron Age campaigns different from other *Mutants & Masterminds* games. It shows the ways in which changes in the real world had an impact upon comics of the time, and show you how to make those things manifest in your adventures.

CHAPTER THREE: IRON AGE CHARACTERS

Chapter Three gives you all you'll need to create Iron Age heroes. Characters and stories from the Iron Age were much more mature

than in prior eras, and this chapter provides you with all the tools to create fitting characters.

CHAPTER FOUR: IRON AGE CAMPAIGNS

Chapter Four gives information to Gamemasters on how to create Iron Age adventures and adversaries. Villains define the heroes that oppose them; during this era, they're even darker and more menacing than usual. This chapter gives GMs everything they'll need to make great Iron Age campaigns a reality.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE IRON AGE OF FREEDOM

Chapter Five looks at the Iron Age of the *Freedom City* campaign setting: a dark period in the city's history when costumed superheroes were outlawed and struggled against a corrupt city government and the criminal syndicates supporting it. It includes information on the hero team FORCE Ops and their various foes, as well as advice on how to set your own Iron Age game in Freedom City.

BAD MEDICINE

Iron Age concludes with the adventure *Bad Medicine*, in which a group of heroes investigates street drugs, organized crime, and corruption at the highest levels in Freedom City. It's suitable as the start of an Iron Age series, as a flashback, or just a change-of-pace adventure.



CHAPTER ONE: THE IRON AGE OF COMICS

Although the Iron Age truly flourished in the late 1980s and early 1990s, its roots twine back several decades earlier. As comic books matured as an art form, and everyone from fans and creators to publishers and distributors struggled to find their place in an ever-changing industry, even the brightest icons of the comic book world found themselves thrust into darkness.

CRACKING THE CODE

During the Silver Age, comic book stories took place in a surreal world whose moral character was diligently maintained by the Comics Code Authority. Starting in the 1950s, most publishers submitted each comic they created every month to the CCA, which would verify that neither the story nor the artwork contained anything prohibited by the Code before allowing the publisher to print the comic with the CCA's stamp of approval on the cover. The CCA stamp, in turn, granted those comics access to newsstands, which were the primary means through which comics were sold across the United States.

Through the 1950s and 1960s, the tenets of the Comics Code served to strangle entire genres of comic book. Restrictions barring werewolves, vampires, and zombies (along with the use of the words "horror" or "terror" in the title) caused once-popular horror comics to

virtually disappear. Self-censorship by publishers trying to avoid the Code's ban on stories of "seduction" and tales that "stimulate the lower and base emotions" watered down the lurid tales-of-romance comics until they, too, were nearly gone from comic racks. Under the CCA's strict mandates on how both criminals and law enforcement ought to be depicted, crime comics began to wane. Superhero comics were one of the few genres to flourish in this environment, yet even in those the Comics Code Authority presented obstacles to creators wishing to explore certain topics in a nuanced manner.

In 1971, the United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare asked Marvel Comics editor-in-chief Stan Lee to write a story warning of the dangers of drug abuse. The result was printed as *Amazing Spider-Man* #96-98, wherein Spider-Man fights to save a friend who is becoming addicted to drugs. Although the taking of drugs was portrayed as dangerous and unglamorous, the CCA would not approve a story depicting drug use, regardless of context. Lee and Marvel Comics publisher Martin Goodman chose to publish the issues without the CCA stamp—the first such comics to reach most newsstands in more than a decade.

The drug storyline in *Spider-Man* was well received, and the CCA was criticized publicly for refusing to approve those issues. This led to a major revision of the Code in 1971. In the revised Code, drug

use could be shown in comics, provided that it was depicted as a "vicious habit." The new version of the Code also made allowances for story elements ranging from corrupt policemen to the return of werewolves and vampires.

In those cracks in the Comics Code, the seeds of the Iron Age were planted.

TAKING IT TO THE STREETS

Since 1969, artist Neal Adams and writer Denny O'Neil had been bringing their own social consciences to DC Comics via a remake of Green Arrow that reshaped not just the hero's costume, but also his attitude. The Green Arrow became a modern-day Robin Hood, acting as an outspoken advocate for the downtrodden and underprivileged. Though the archer first took on his new role in the pages of *Justice League of America*, he had a bigger impact in 1970 when he began appearing in a comic he shared with JLA teammate Green Lantern. In a series of O'Neil-penned stories known as "Hard-Traveling Heroes," Green Arrow and Green Lantern toured the United States in a beat-up truck, seeing a side of America rarely depicted in mainstream comics and confronting challenges like racism and poverty that even superheroes found themselves unable to defeat.

Following the drug story in *Amazing Spider-Man* and the subsequent 1971 revision of the Comics Code, O'Neil and Adams moved quickly into the newly opened territory. Yet rather than finding drugs in grimy back alleys, Green Arrow found it in his own home, as he discovered his sidekick Speedy had become a heroin addict. From that issue forward, Speedy's slow recovery from addiction would become an important part of a major supporting character's story and would be touched upon for years to come.

This approach led to the introduction of new, more urban characters as part of a surge of street-level stories in the 1970s. At Marvel Comics, this included heroes like Luke Cage, the first African-American superhero to star in a self-titled book. It would also include the morally ambiguous Punisher, a gun-toting vigilante who, in his first appearance, was duped into hunting down Spider-Man.

Throughout the decade, other comic creators made strides toward increased diversity and social relevance in their works. Len Wein and Dave Cockrum relaunched Marvel's X-Men as a team of mutants drawn from many nations and races: a Russian hero named Colossus; the Japanese champion, Sunfire; Storm, the African weather goddess; and the violent Canadian mutant known as Wolverine. The team also included a Native American hero called Thunderbird, who died on the team's second mission, never to return.

DARK FUTURE, DARK PRESENT

Thunderbird's death and Speedy's drug habit were followed by even darker elements to come in the 1970s and early 1980s, and the shine of the Silver Age slowly faded into the past as they accumulated. Spider-Man's girlfriend Gwen Stacy died tragically as the hero failed to save her; the Flash was put on trial for murdering the villain who killed his wife; Iron Man became an alcoholic. Batman's villains slowly slid from outrageous camp into utter madness, and his new nemeses included Ra's al Ghul, whose genocidal master plan was to destroy humanity to bring the world into environmental balance.

As Cold War tensions rose, the persistent potential for nuclear annihilation was reflected in the apocalyptic futures presented in comics. The absurd post-disaster future with talking animals in DC's long-running *Kamandi, Last Boy on Earth* slowly gave way to more grim depictions, such as the 1985 that was home to the time-traveling cyborg warrior Deathlok, where vicious corporate warfare had shattered the entire world. Even western hero Jonah Hex had his series cancelled and relaunched as *Hex*, where the Old West gunslinger found himself flung through time, fighting to survive a future ravaged by nuclear war.

Yet the alternate future that resonated most with readers was first presented in the pages of *Uncanny X-Men #141*. This was a world where many superheroes had been killed, and most of the surviving mutants were held captive in concentration camps by giant mutant-hunting robots called Sentinels. Though the plot hinged on the X-Men preventing this dark future from coming, the story proved so popular that elements from it showed up again and again, casting a lingering shadow across future issues.

Meanwhile, creators like Frank Miller continued to take heroes like Daredevil in darker and more "edgy" directions, forgoing four-color villains in favor of adversaries like the Kingpin, lord of organized crime, and the ninja death cult called the Hand. New heroes were more likely to follow the model of Cloak and Dagger—a pair of runaways who gained powers when forced to take an experimental drug—than the "gentleman adventurers" and scientific explorers of the Golden Age. Even characters cast from old molds were made from darker stuff; when the young boy destined to become the new Robin was orphaned, it was because his parents were thrown into a pit and eaten alive by crocodiles.

WARS AND CRISES

Not all factors contributing to comics' darker turn in the 1980s could be found within the covers of the books. In 1972, as the first comics under the revised Code were coming off the presses, New York convention organizer Phil Seuling made an arrangement to purchase comics directly from publishers rather than from newsstand distribution organizations. Gathering together orders from the few stores at the time specialized in selling comic books, Seuling convinced the publishers to waive shipping costs in exchange for purchasing the comics on a non-returnable basis. With that agreement, the direct market for comics was born.

A direct distribution channel between publishers and stores benefited both ends. Comics sent out to newsstands might come back as returns, costing the publisher money. The non-returnable orders from the direct market not only allowed the publishers to escape that risk, but also helped them set their print orders more precisely. In return, publishers could give stores in the direct market a higher discount on the comics they ordered, enlarging the stores' profit margins. Moreover, specialty stores received their comics sooner and in better condition than those sent to newsstands, attracting more of the growing numbers of comic book collectors to their stores. Though Seuling's Seagate Distribution was the first direct comics distribution company, several other national and regional comic distributors came into being through the 1970s.

Growth of the direct market in the 1970s was slow and steady, but during the 1980s that growth became explosive. In 1979, the

direct market represented 6 percent of Marvel's gross sales; by 1985, that number had risen to 50 percent, and the other major publishers were seeing similar numbers. On the newsstand, comics competed for consumers' money with books, magazines, and candy. The readers and collectors coming into a direct market store were focused, returning every month and often every week for the latest comics.

The increasing numbers of comic fans and specialty stores created a demand for more comics, giving publishers the opportunity to release material that might not have succeeded on the newsstand. DC Comics released limited series created explicitly for the direct market, including Mike Barr and Brian Bolland's science fantasy, *Camelot 3000*. Marvel Comics did the same, although they stayed with superheroes, gathering together many of its characters for a three-issue series called *Contest of Champions*. They also released a limited series featuring Wolverine, the most popular of the new X-Men. Illustrated by Frank Miller, now a fan favorite from his work on *Daredevil*, the first issue of *Wolverine* showed the vicious hero with his metallic claws bared and a finger crooked toward the viewer, daring him to come closer. The cover (and the series) might have caused controversy if it were sold at newsstands, where parents passing by still believed comics were children's fare. In the direct market, it was a hit.

By the mid-1980s, publishers walked a tightrope trying to make their comics both accessible to new readers in the mass market of drugstores and newsstands and appealing to the readers of the direct market. When Marvel created a major twelve-issue limited series to promote a toy line to the mass market, they modeled the story on *Contest of Champions*, pitting the most popular Marvel heroes against the most popular villains in a winnertake-all battle on a distant planet. *Marvel Super Heroes Secret Wars* was an enormous hit, and went beyond the expectations of a simple tie-in series by not only introducing new heroes and villains, but also making lasting changes to many of the characters involved. Notably, Spider-Man's famous red and blue costume was destroyed and replaced by a striking, shape-shifting one in black and white.

Secret Wars was still wrapping up in early 1985 when DC Comics launched a major limited series of their own. This one would not just overhaul a few characters, but their entire universe. *Crisis on Infinite Earths* featured characters from the multitude of parallel Earths created by DC throughout the Golden and Silver Ages, bringing them together in a titanic battle that threatened to destroy them all. In the end, those on the varied Earths were saved as the worlds were compressed into a single one, but not without a cost. Many heroes and villains died, including Supergirl and the character that launched the Silver Age, the second Flash.

Through *Crisis*, DC tried to make their characters more accessible to new readers by wiping away much of the complicated history that had grown from month to month since the Golden Age. The characters that emerged were superheroes with the same names and colorful costumes, but reconsidered and remade on a less fantastic scale. Superman no longer had the ability to juggle planets; instead, he strained to carry an airliner and his more-limited invulnerability didn't extend to his costume's often-tattered cape. When Kid Flash became the new Flash after his mentor's death in the Crisis, his super-speed was limited to the speed of sound, and he made his powers available to those who could pay for his services.

After the Crisis, Batman no longer walked the streets of Gotham City openly as an honorary policeman. Now, he lurked in the shadows, considered an urban legend by the citizens he strove to protect and hunted as a vigilante by the authorities. However, the moments that would redefine his character in the minds of the public and truly mark the arrival of the Iron Age were yet to come.

DARK KNIGHTS AND DARK REFLECTIONS

In the 1970s, before he worked on *Daredevil* and *Wolverine* for Marvel Comics, Frank Miller did some of his first professional work on minor anthology titles for DC Comics. In the early 1980s, while working for Marvel, Miller wrote and penciled one of DC's first Prestige Format limited series, a bloody science fiction story called *Ronin* that was heavily influenced by Japanese manga. But both his career and his work with DC Comics reached new heights in 1986 when he wrote and penciled a new limited series called *The Dark Knight Returns*. Set in the future, it featured an aging Batman coming out of retirement to fight a gritty and violent war against a world consumed by crime. Though set outside the continuity established in the monthly Batman stories, *Dark Knight's* depiction of Batman as a grim and utterly pragmatic general in the war on crime resonated with comic fans.

During the same period, English writer Alan Moore, who had won acclaim for his work in British comics, was recruited by DC to take over the failing monster title, *Swamp Thing*. In less than a year, Moore had revitalized both the character and the book's sales. From backup stories featuring a planet-sized Green Lantern to the last Superman stories published before *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, Moore proved his skill, versatility, and value to DC over and over. Finally, in 1986, as *The Dark Knight Returns* was being published, Moore wrote a limited series for DC called *Watchmen*. Illustrated by Dave Gibbons, *Watchmen* showed costumed adventurers investigating the murder of one of their own in a world teetering on the brink of nuclear war.

Watchmen and *Dark Knight Returns* were enormous commercial and critical successes, and the major media coverage of both titles helped redefine comics in the minds of the public as a medium capable of serious adult storytelling. Inside the industry, the influence of both series and their creators spread like wildfire.

With this rising interest in "grim and gritty" storytelling, Marvel Comics decided to give a regular monthly comic to Wolverine. Furthermore, though Marvel had previously been uncomfortable with casting a cold-blooded killer as the protagonist of a comic, in 1986 they launched a limited series starring the Punisher. It proved so popular it was followed by an ongoing monthly *Punisher* comic and, within a year, a second title called *Punisher War Journal*. While working on *Dark Knight Returns*, Frank Miller also made a return to *Daredevil* to write a new story arc called "Born Again," wherein the Kingpin tore apart Daredevil's life piece by piece after discovering his secret identity. In *Elektra: Assassin*, Miller brought back a character he had created back in his first issues of *Daredevil* and, with artist Bill Sienkiewicz, ratcheted up the action as they pitted her against an army of ninjas and cyborgs.

In the following years, many Marvel mainstays fought their greatest battles with their own dark reflections. After Captain America discovered he was serving a corrupt government in *Daredevil's* "Born Again" arc, he resigned in his own title. Steve Rogers set aside his blue Captain

America uniform to don a black costume and become known simply as “the Captain.” The government quickly created a replacement for Rogers by giving the Captain America costume and role to a gun-ho soldier named John Walker. Meanwhile, Iron Man found his technology had been co-opted by both super villains and the government, and started the “Armor Wars” to either reclaim or destroy the devices. Around the same time, Spider-Man discovered the black and white costume he had worn since *Secret Wars* was actually an alien symbiote attempting to take over his body. After Spider-Man managed to painfully separate himself from the creature, it escaped and bonded with a new host: Peter Parker’s professional rival, photographer Eddie Brock. Though it looked a bit like Spider-Man, this new pairing was much more muscular, had a wide, slaver jaw of sharp teeth, and a new name: Venom.

Back over at DC, Frank Miller returned to Batman for a story that, this time, was firmly in continuity. *Batman: Year One* told the tale of the hero’s early days in a hopelessly corrupt Gotham City. Less than a year later, Alan Moore told his own Batman story in *The Killing Joke*, taking The Joker, Batman’s clownish nemesis, across the line from “crazy” to psychopath as he shot and paralyzed Batgirl, then kidnapped and tortured her father, Gotham City Police Commissioner Gordon. Both stories were major influences on director Tim Burton as he began work on a new Batman movie. When a black-costumed Batman prowled the streets of a dark and dirty Gotham in the 1989 film, the smiling Batman of Silver Age comics and the 1960s television series seemed to be gone forever.

The Iron Age had arrived.

FORGED IN IRON

The Iron Age followed in the wake of the success of *Secret Wars* and *Crisis on Infinite Earths*. Through the late 1980s and into the early ‘90s, both Marvel and DC regularly held “event” storylines that spanned multiple months, tying characters and comics together company-wide. Many of these stories reflected the darker currents running through comics at the time. DC’s *Legends* had humanity turning against superheroes, with the American president declaring martial law and banning their activities. In Marvel’s “Inferno” storyline, many heroes were corrupted into twisted, evil versions of themselves as demons invaded Earth. *Armageddon 2001* centered on a search for the DC hero destined to turn on his friends and conquer the world, and *The Infinity Gauntlet* began with Marvel’s mad demigod Thanos killing half the living creatures in the universe. *Eclipto: The Darkness Within* brought out the dark sides of dozens of DC characters, and *Operation: Galactic Storm* divided Marvel’s Avengers when some of their number chose to execute one of their enemies.

DC even allowed their readers to participate in this new trend of darker storytelling. When the second boy to wear the Robin costume in the Batman comics was proving unpopular with fans, *Batman* launched a storyline called “A Death in the Family.” In the third issue of the four-issue arc, the Joker savagely beat Robin with a crowbar and left him in a warehouse next to a bomb about to explode. The outcome of the storyline was left in readers’ hands, as they were asked to call one of two phone numbers: one if they voted to save Robin, the other if they wanted him to die. Whether inspired by references to a dead Robin in *The Dark Knight Returns* or out of a morbid curiosity to see if DC would actually kill one of their main-



stay characters, after 10,000 votes were cast, a slim majority voted to kill Robin. Following Robin’s demise in the last issue of “A Death in the Family,” Batman emerged as a grim loner, nearly broken by the experience of losing his partner.

Both new and existing characters were transformed to match the tone of the Iron Age. A heavily armed cybernetic soldier from the future named Cable was one of the most popular new characters in X-Men comics of the time. Perhaps because of Cable’s popularity, Marvel brought back the similarly cybernetic Deathlok in a new series; this time, the dystopia he came from wasn’t in the distant future but among corrupt mega-corporations of the present. DC’s *Legion of Super Heroes* had told stories of a bright Silver Age future for nearly thirty years, but suddenly the storyline and its characters jumped forward five years to a darker future where the world had been conquered by the alien Dominators.

THE IRON RUSH

Their eyes still on the comic industry after *Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen*, and the Batman movie, major media outlets gave wide coverage to some of the changes and storylines of the early Iron Age. However, many of the news stories focused not on reading comics but on collecting them, detailing the high prices fetched for copies of the first appearance of Wolverine in *Incredible Hulk* #181 and speculating on similar values for Iron Age comics. Comic shops were flooded with new customers, many buying multiple copies of trendy comics so they would have one to read and one or more to sell later at the inflated prices predicted by newspapers and magazines.

As print runs for individual comics exploded in the speculator boom of the early 1990s, a new generation of comic creators followed Frank Miller and Alan Moore to superstardom. A group of Marvel artists who felt they were helping spur these increased sales through their work approached the publisher about greater creative and financial participation in the company. When their demands were dismissed, these artists decided to break away and start a new company called Image Comics.

The launch of Image in 1992 marked the peak of the Iron Age, and the titles produced by the founders for the launch are particularly representative. Jim Lee produced a comic called *WildC.A.T.s* about two groups of aliens fighting a covert war on Earth. Erik Larsen's *Savage Dragon* featured a transformed police officer fighting criminal "superfreaks." *Youngblood* from Rob Liefeld followed the adventures of a group of young celebrity superheroes; Todd McFarlane's *Spawn* was about a man returned from the grave as a monstrous avenger, struggling against his own corruption as he battled evil. All the books were enormous hits as speculative collectors snapped up multiple copies of each first issue from the celebrity creators.

While some fans complained these new comics had derivative characters and poor storytelling, Image titles remained at the top of the sales charts. As none of the Image founders cared to have the Comics Code Authority stamp of approval, their stories were free to feature profanity, over-the-top violence, and controversial characters. (One of *Spawn*'s early nemeses was a multiple-count child murderer.) These stories helped Image titles find a core following among fans

hungry for such material, and the newcomers continued to rival the top sellers of established publishers like DC and Marvel.

MIDNIGHT

The success of Image and the increased competition drove Marvel to even darker and more outrageous stories in an attempt to attract readers and keep sales numbers high. Venom, now a popular nemesis to Spider-Man, was eventually given his own miniseries. In *Venom: Lethal Protector*, he played the role of full-fledged antihero; to take his place as a villain, Marvel gave a similar alien companion to a serial killer and dubbed him Carnage. A third Punisher series called *War Zone* was launched, and *Punisher Armory* specials regularly detailed the vigilante's enormous military arsenal. In *Fantastic Four*, the Human Torch married the long-time girlfriend of a now further-mutated Thing, the son of the Invisible Woman was kidnapped and returned after being raised in the future as a soldier, and Doctor Doom and Mr. Fantastic seemingly perished at one another's hands. The Super-Soldier serum in Captain America's veins slowly began to consume his body, and he was forced to don a powered exoskeleton. Iron Man was unmasked as a traitor to the Avengers, and killed several characters before sacrificing himself and being replaced by a teenaged version pulled from his own past.

DC also followed suit. Aquaman had one of his hands eaten away by piranha and replaced with a harpoon-like hook. Wonder Woman was removed from her post by the Amazons and replaced by a militant female warrior who wielded a bow and arrows. But DC attracted more mass media attention than ever when they announced the "Death of Superman" storyline, and even more with "Knightfall" in the Batman comics, where the drug-addicted criminal Bane defeated Batman and snapped his spine. Both heroes were—seemingly permanently—replaced with new characters. The paralyzed Batman handed his role over to the unstable hero Azrael, whose Batman wore heavy armor and wielded both razor-sharp claws and a flamethrower. In the Superman comics, four different characters claimed to be Superman reincarnated, among them a cyborg and a humanoid Kryptonian who dealt out lethal justice to criminals.

Once the true Superman predictably returned, the cybernetic Superman was shown to be an imposter and his actual plot revealed: to aid the alien warlord Mongul in turning Earth into a weapon called Warworld. Part of this plot involved the destruction of Coast City, home to the DC hero Green Lantern. Though Mongul and the Cyborg Superman were defeated, Coast City was annihilated and many of Green Lantern's friends and family were killed. When his mighty power ring proved too weak to bring Coast City back to life, he set out to collect the rings of other members of the Green Lantern Corps...by force, if necessary. Green Lantern killed many of his one-time allies to take their power, in the process becoming the villainous Parallax. The lone power ring to survive was given to a young man who became the new Green Lantern. Paying homage to the days of "Hard-Traveling Heroes," he was partnered with a new Green Arrow, son of the original, who had been killed in a terrorist explosion.

Comic fans were up in arms as they saw their favorite characters systematically corrupted, replaced, or both. Speculators, finally seeing that many of their hot "investment" comics were worth less than their cover prices, began to leave comics for other, more lucrative hobbies. Sales began to drop, making publishers even more desperate.



MELTDOWN

In the mid-1990s, as sales faltered, Image Comics began to fracture as its founders clashed. Upset with the way Image was being managed, Marc Silvestri left with his Top Cow imprint, returning only after a unanimous vote among the other partners ousted president Rob Liefeld and his studio from the company. Image titles, infamous for shipping on extremely irregular schedules, saw fans drifting away and order numbers sinking.

Even the Spider-Man titles were undergoing a similar decline at Marvel, as a *second* Spider-Man appeared and brought with him uncertainty as to whether or not the character fans had been following for nearly twenty years was the true Spider-Man or a duplicate. The ensuing "Clone Saga" lasted more than two years and spread across four monthly titles and a number of specials and spin-offs. When the convoluted storyline was seen by Marvel executives to be bulwarking sales of the Spider-Man titles, much as the equally complicated "Age of Apocalypse" storyline was doing for the X-Men titles, they mandated the storyline continue, far beyond the length desired by even the editors and writers behind the titles.

Seeking a similar solution to flagging sales on *Avengers*, *Captain America*, *Iron Man*, and *Fantastic Four*, Marvel made the incredible decision in 1996 to farm out those titles to two of the rebellious creators who had left Marvel five years previously to found Image Comics. Jim Lee's Wildstorm Productions took over *Iron Man* and *Fantastic Four*, while Rob Liefeld's Extreme Studios took over *Avengers* and *Captain America*. The "Heroes Reborn" event was controversial with critics and fans but a financial success, and Marvel took back the titles a year later in a story called "Heroes Return."

Interestingly, Marvel took advantage of the transitions and transformations in "Heroes Reborn" to undo some of the wilder changes of the Iron Age, such as the teenage Iron Man. In looking for a way to improve sales, everyone was taking a fresh look at stories of recent years, particularly in the light of some recent successes.

SILVER REFLECTIONS

As the mid-1990s approached, the Iron Age continued, but sales of once-popular characters were slumping. In 1993, the Punisher had three comics of his own; two years later he would have none. Whether out of pure nostalgia for better times or publishers seeking to rebuild sales, comics by creators looking back toward the brighter days of the Silver Age began to appear on shelves. One of the brightest examples was a four-issue 1994 miniseries called *Marvels*. In *Marvels*, writer Kurt Busiek and artist Alex Ross reexamined the history of the Marvel universe from the street-level eye of a news photographer, and exposed a new generation of readers to Silver Age wonder. The series was an enormous commercial and critical success, winning multiple Harvey and Eisner Awards. Busiek continued carrying the Silver Age torch with a new series called *Astro City* (with Ross doing character designs and the covers for each issue) that set modern, literate stories in a world fondly reflective of the great comics of the past. Marvel attempted to follow up *Marvels* the next year with a miniseries called *Ruins* that mimicked the painted style of *Marvels* but took a much more cynical tone, as it showed everything in Marvel history going horribly awry. (The title was met with much less fanfare.)

After disputes with both Marvel and DC in the late 1980s, Alan Moore had sworn off working with the major publishers as he spent the following years producing more eclectic comics. In 1993, however, he returned to superheroes with a series of six one-shot specials published by Image called *1963* that harkened to the stories and characters of the Silver Age. Though touted in the fan press as building toward a final 80-page "annual" where the *1963* characters would meet the Iron Age characters of modern Image comics, that final issue was never released.

At DC, the future of the Legion of Super Heroes had seen its own return of the Silver Age in the early 1990s when clones of the Legion from their younger, brighter days were discovered, and their adventures chronicled in a new series called *Legionnaires*. Even the heroes of DC's Golden Age thrived, as the Justice Society of America were given a new limited, and then an ongoing, series, which was followed by critical and commercial success when they were featured in a four-issue Elseworlds miniseries called *The Golden Age*. Yet in DC's 1994 summer event series *Zero Hour*, several members of the JSA were killed, others were forced to retire, and in the aftermath DC launched new series such as *Fate* and *Manhunter* that were darker, Iron Age takes on classic characters.

The final battle for the future between the past and the Iron Age was about to take place at DC Comics.

FINAL BATTLES AND SAFE HAVENS

In 1996, Alex Ross produced a fully painted miniseries called *Kingdom Come* for DC Comics with writer Mark Waid. Set twenty years into the future of the DC Universe, in *Kingdom Come* Superman emerges from seclusion to lead a charge against a new generation of violent and amoral vigilantes. Much as *Marvels* looked at comic books of the Silver Age from the perspective of the present, *Kingdom Come* looked at comics history up through the Iron Age from the perspective of a potential future and followed its events to the final conflict between the Iron Age-flavored vigilantes and Superman's Golden- and Silver Age heroes. In the aftermath of that final and deadly battle, the survivors from both sides conceded that the only way to survive is to coexist.

So it was with comics, and as up-and-coming creators began to tell their own stories in the late 1990s, they were built upon the best elements of the past—including the Iron Age. Even bloodier and more profane comics had a place, not just through independent publishers, but also at the major companies under Marvel's MAX and DC's Vertigo imprints. The eternally sunny days of the Silver Age would never return, but neither would the endless dark night of the Iron Age. As the end of the twentieth century approached, both were woven into a more natural interchange of day and night: the Silver Age sense of wonder mixing with the serious, nuanced storytelling of the Iron Age.

In the first decade of the new millennium, the continued popularity of these themes is clear, as the comic book readers of the '90s have become the comic book creators of the present. It's easy to see an echo of the death of Superman in the assassination of Captain America, or a reflection of *Watchmen* as Tony Stark engineers a registration program for costumed heroes in *Civil War*. Limited series like *Identity Crisis* from DC and *Decimation* from Marvel demonstrate that readers still crave stories that take their heroes through the wringer when Silver Age legend and myth and Iron Age reality collide.



CHAPTER TWO: THE IRON AGE WORLD

The Iron Age reflects both a period in history as well as a style of storytelling common at that time. This chapter serves as a guide to the decades when the Iron Age of comics rose and fell and to the major elements of the genre, and how you can capture them in your *Mutants & Masterminds* games.

The focus of this chapter is on historical events pivotal to the style and character of the Iron Age of comics, and the broad brushstrokes of the genre. You'll also find suggestions on modifying the *M&M* game rules to get a more "Iron Age" feel, although the emphasis is on recreating the Iron Age through narrative rather than enforcing it through rules.

IRON AGE HISTORY

War, technology, economics, popular culture, crime...few of the elements that shaped comics of the Iron Age are unique to that era. The forms those elements took, however, and the way they combined in the hearts and minds of the people of the time made up a distinct perspective reflected inside the pages of Iron Age comics. From elevated political tensions and rapid economic changes to sensationalist reports of violent urban crime and the pervasive sense of imminent apocalypse, the dark comics of the Age were fueled by real-world events, as creators adapted their stories and characters to suit the times, with varying degrees of success.

Though the Iron Age didn't really begin until the mid-1980s, this chapter looks at the historical events that set the stage in the 1970s and continues through the end of the Iron Age in the mid-1990s,

helping *M&M* Gamemasters and players lay the groundwork for campaigns set during that era.

MUTUALLY ASSURED DESTRUCTION

The 1970s found the United States of America entering a third decade of the Cold War with the Soviet Union. In the aftermath of tensions born while they were allies during World War II, they found themselves as fierce opponents in a competition for ideological and military supremacy that played out across the globe, though both sides were often kept in check diplomatically or forced to use other nations as proxies. The threat that open conflict between the two sides would lead to another world war was a constant worry, particularly during the Korean War, the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, and

the Vietnam War. Though the U.S. withdrew from Vietnam in 1973, the Cold War continued, and the American people remained bitterly divided over the military action.

As two of the largest nations on earth, the capitalist United States and the communist Soviet Union came to be called “superpowers” because of their incredible political influence and military might. Both nations were armed with enormous numbers of atomic and thermonuclear weapons, and Cold War leaders regularly implied they were ready to launch their full arsenals of intercontinental ballistic missiles as soon as they detected a launch by the enemy. This global rain of nuclear missiles was calculated to be enough firepower to destroy every living being in both America and Russia, as well as countless millions more during the worldwide winter of radioactive fallout that would follow.

This state of stalemate between the superpowers was known as the doctrine of “mutually assured destruction,” and was feared to be inescapable by people of both nations during the Cold War. Since 1947, the Board of Directors at the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* had tracked how close the two nations were to war, using an image printed on their cover called the “Doomsday Clock”: the closer the clock’s hands were to midnight, the nearer they judged the world to be to nuclear apocalypse. As the arms race escalated between the two nations, the Clock was set to four minutes to midnight in 1981, and ticked a minute closer in 1984.

In 1987, the U.S. and the Soviets signed a treaty eliminating intermediate-range nuclear missiles, requiring both countries to destroy part of their nuclear arsenals for the first time. The Doomsday Clock was, accordingly, rolled back to seven minutes to midnight. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 marked the success of anti-communist movements across Eastern Europe. Combined with Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev’s new policy of *glasnost*, the Clock was set at ten minutes to midnight. Further treaties and arms reductions, along with the breakup of the Soviet Union, moved the hands of the clock back even more, to seventeen minutes to midnight in 1991. This was the farthest the world would be from disaster before the *Bulletin* began to have concerns about former Soviet scientists and nuclear weapons spreading to other parts of the world and terrorist groups in the latter part of the decade.

COLD WARRIORS

Cold War tensions make a rich backdrop for Iron Age campaigns that play out on a global stage. In a world with superhumans, the United States and the Soviet Union would undoubtedly race to add superpowered beings to their arsenals alongside thermonuclear weapons. Characters who are powerful or draw too much attention might be cornered by one nation or another, forced to declare their allegiance to the government or be branded as traitors.

Whether as agents or allies of a Cold War superpower, characters may find themselves sent on missions to defend or further that superpower’s interests. They might be asked to engage in espionage, spying on the enemy or stealing their secrets and assets. More commonly, agents of a superpower could find themselves sent to the front lines of a conflict with explosive potential, similar to the Cuban Missile Crisis, and their actions might mean the difference between a quiet resolution and the beginning of World War III. In

a few cases, when a Cold War superpower topples the government of a smaller nation, allied characters with superhuman powers and abilities could be directed to step in as part of a more...durable and loyal replacement government.

Of course, there will be plenty of characters that, out of pragmatism, personal ideology, or just a rebellious streak, will choose not to pick a side in the Cold War. They might live their entire lives adventuring in their city, and neither care nor be asked to play a part in the global struggle. Or they may choose to play the most dangerous game of all as a free agent pursuing their own mission, regardless of whether they are aligned with or up against a superpower. Though this may put them in the bull’s-eye of a superpower’s considerable arsenal and influence, they might also find themselves at the center of world-changing events while remaining free to make their own choices about the outcome.

SCANDALS AND INFLATION

Many opposed to the Vietnam War developed a strong distrust of government and those in power, and felt their fears justified in the early 1970s when President Richard Nixon was implicated in a break-in at the offices of political rivals at the Watergate Hotel. The ensuing investigation resulted in the convictions of several White House staffers and was leading toward Nixon’s impeachment when he chose to resign from office.

The Watergate scandal demonstrated how high the stakes (and often, how base the actions) were between America’s two major political parties, and led many Americans not only to mistrust their government, but to become increasingly cynical about the entire political process. In turn, government officials became more careful about anything that might be used against them, such as the recorded conversations that led to Nixon’s downfall. The press became more aggressive about searching for skeletons in the closets of politicians. Despite pressure for more government openness and transparency in the aftermath of Watergate, it would still be more than a decade before the Freedom of Information Act was signed.

Meanwhile, the growth of the American economy slowed dramatically throughout the 1970s, leading to enormous inflation and rising unemployment that peaked in the early 1980s. The government attempted a variety of programs to combat the nation’s economic weakness, including deregulation of many industries. Though the economy finally recovered in the mid-1980s, it was not before significant problems developed in those deregulated industries, particularly the savings and loan institutions, which collapsed and lost their creditors a combined total of 150 billion dollars. The U.S. treasury subsidized most of the losses; this, combined with a growing trade deficit and deficit spending, helped transform the nation from one of the world’s largest creditors to one of the world’s largest debtors by the end of the decade. Despite all these problems and a major stock market crash in 1987, as the 1980s continued, the American economy slowly recovered.

Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister of the United Kingdom in 1979, as the nation found itself in an economic situation similar to that in America. Elected as part of a political party that promised reforms after the labor strikes of the “Winter of Discontent,” Thatcher’s policies (such as raising the value-added tax) nearly

doubled unemployment in Great Britain. A second term for Thatcher seemed unlikely, until a British victory in the Falklands War of 1982 and the wave of British patriotism that followed gave her party the chance to stay in power and continue to implement their policies.

CEOS AND SHADOW CABINETS

By the time of the Iron Age, the environmental slogan "Think globally, act locally" could be read with a more sinister tone. National governments had grown enormous and omnipresent, and many corporations swelled until they had an international reach. When woven together through graft and contracts, as during the Vietnam War, the two forces combine into what some have called the "military-industrial complex."

In the Iron Age, brilliant industrialists are as often cast in the roles of villains as they are heroes, and a huge multinational corporation can be as powerful a nemesis to the heroes of an Iron Age campaign as any caped supervillain. Distant factories and foreign offices are home to the villainous corporation's worldwide network of employees and agents, not all of whom may be aware the company's five-year plan actually hides a more nefarious agenda. Though the most obvious motivation for an evil corporation might be accumulation of wealth, its dark board of directors may be content to let wealth accrue over time and instead scheme to accumulate power and influence. Some evil corporations maintain a veil of respectability they will go to any lengths to protect, while the darker practices of others may be a matter of public

record and policy; the latter will likely have a battalion of unscrupulous lawyers to protect them from the legal system and an army of security guards to shield them from those who might threaten to bring the corporation to justice outside the courtroom.

Even when the corporations are completely law-abiding, an Iron Age campaign might turn their focus away from the boardrooms to look into the dark streets and back alleys of the city. As income flowed toward the wealthy and inflation mounted in the 1970s and 1980s, the ranks of the poor swelled, creating unprecedented urban decay. In the shadow of cheaply built towers of subsidized housing, many of those who called streets lined with fire-gutted tenements home became increasingly desperate. Iron Age heroes and villains might be born from these mean streets. Either might attack the corporations or the wealthy: heroes to redistribute money as modern-day Robin Hoods and villains to seize the wealth and power for themselves.

In an Iron Age campaign, those with power can rarely be trusted, and even the smallest favors might have a hidden agenda and a terrible cost. Whether whispered in the halls of government or hidden between the lines of a corporation's quarterly report, a scandal or a collection of secrets can be the driving force behind an Iron Age campaign. Heroes could be working to protect a secret, or they might be assisting reporters (or themselves be super-powered reporters) trying to unravel a curtain of lies to reveal the truth behind it. Enough secrets, and enough people working to protect them, can create a conspiracy, an unassailable foe striking out from the shadows at anyone who gets too close.

FOREIGN TENSIONS AND TERRORISM

The Soviet Union was not the only political and ideological rival to the western nations in the late twentieth century. After years spent as a battleground for colonial and Cold War powers, the Arab nations of the Middle East were increasingly opposed to both the United States and Great Britain. The Ayatollah Khomeini, leader of Iran following the 1979 revolution, decried the United States as the "Great Satan" and encouraged his people to demonstrate against them and their allies. A group of student revolutionaries did just that when they seized control of the American embassy in Tehran late that year. Though the students initially planned to only hold the embassy for several hours while issuing their political statement, they ended up taking 66 hostages and holding them for 444 days until early 1981.

Attacks against western targets became increasingly frequent in the 1980s. In 1983, suicide bombers detonated truck bombs outside the barracks of American and French troops in Beirut, Lebanon, killing hundreds of soldiers, and the U.S. embassy, killing 63 more people. When the ocean liner *Achille Lauro* was hijacked in 1985, an American man in a wheelchair was shot and dropped overboard. Several Americans were among the hostages executed by the hijackers of EgyptAir flight 648 in 1985. In 1986, a bomb exploded in a Berlin nightclub frequented by American servicemen, injuring more than 200. Another bomb exploded aboard TWA flight 840, injuring five and ejecting four Americans from the aircraft to their deaths. In 1988, a bomb onboard Pan Am flight 103 detonated, killing all aboard over Lockerbie, Scotland en route to New York. These incidents and others put terrorism in the forefront of



American minds, as it had been for many Britons living through the multiple bombings and attacks across England by the Provisional Irish Republican Army through the '70s and '80s.

FEAR, SURPRISE, AND FANATICS

As in the real world, terrorists and terror groups in an Iron Age campaign have a number of different motivations. Some have political or ideological goals, and are fighting against a government or organization. Others fight for religious beliefs against those they hold to be heretics and infidels. Regardless of motive, terrorist attacks are sudden and unexpected, usually violent, and often deliberately target non-combatants. Even the most cold-hearted Iron Age heroes might go to extraordinary lengths to save innocents from a potential terrorist attack, and may go even further to mete out vengeance in the aftermath of one that succeeded.

While a single terrorist might be easy for a super-powered character to overcome, terrorist organizations are much more difficult to defeat. Tightly knit units known as "cells" operate independently and in complete ignorance of the activities of the other members of the group, aware only of the organization's overall goals and sharing the common mission of achieving them by any means necessary. Self-motivating, self-sufficient, and self-activating, a cell might remain dormant until they hear of an attack by another cell in the organization, or they may choose their own time to strike, initiating an attack whenever and wherever they choose. Worse still, in some terrorist organizations, cells are allowed to splinter, each of its members starting their own new cell, helping the organization to grow swiftly, silently, and exponentially. For each terrorist cell Iron Age heroes can defeat, two may rise to take its place.

In this way, fighting terrorism could form the foundation of an entire Iron Age campaign, as heroes wage a "war on terror." From investigating the first whispers of a possible plot and racing to defeat an attack in progress to closing down terrorist cells and eradicating the organization entirely, a single terrorist organization could take many adventures for heroes to defeat. Of course, after one terrorist organization goes down, the next one rises from the shadows. In fact, the destruction of one group may be the impetus for surviving members to form the next, this time vowing vengeance specifically on the heroes of the campaign.

However, terrorists aren't the only small bands of well-armed people fighting for their beliefs outside the law; the same definition might be applied to some groups of Iron Age heroes! If they aren't working with the government or cooperating with the police, all it takes is a single battle gone wrong—some unexpected collateral damage, or the death of innocent bystanders—for a group of rebellious heroes to be labeled a terrorist organization.

BIG EXPLOSIONS AND BIG STORIES

American films had featured action sequences for years, from shootouts to car chases. But in the 1980s, the action film became a genre in its own right, with some of the most successful films of the decade featuring lead characters much more militaristic than leads of the past. In 1982, Sylvester Stallone played Special Forces soldier John Rambo in *First Blood*, with two sequels to follow later in the

decade. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who first garnered fame as Conan the Barbarian and as a killer robot in the movie *The Terminator*, released a string of action movies in the 1980s that began with 1985's *Commando*. American filmgoers flocked to these increasingly violent movies.

As Stallone and Schwarzenegger built their blockbuster careers through the 1980s and into the 1990s, martial arts stars such as Chuck Norris, Steven Seagal, and Jean-Claude Van Damme followed in their wake to fill the film-going public's insatiable craving for more action. Bruce Willis joined them in 1988 with the release of his first hit movie, *Die Hard*, which created an entire genre of action films that imitated the successful formula of a sarcastic, harried hero who overcomes insurmountable odds and survives several large explosions.

Gossipy tabloids had long been popular in America, as had investigative journalism on television. The 1980s saw the pairing of the two, as tabloid television programs began to appear on American television. From corporate collapses to celebrity scandals, tabloid television programs such as *Hard Copy* presented their stories in the most sensational manner possible, attracting both viewers and criticism. Daytime television turned similarly lurid in the late '80s and early '90s, led by talk-show hosts Geraldo Rivera, Morton Downey, Jr., and Jerry Springer. With topics ranging from Satanic rituals and gang initiations to racist skinheads and adulterous lesbians, no topic was out of bounds if it would help improve ratings. Soon the antics on the shows became news in and of itself, even if much of the reporting was highly critical of what came to be called "trash TV."

AS SEEN ON TV

Using the movies and television of the 1980s and 1990s as inspiration for your Iron Age campaign is easy. A few high-octane action movies and a few hours of "classic" tabloid television and Gamemasters will have been exposed to the loudest and flashiest parts of Iron Age popular culture. But an ambitious Gamemaster can go beyond that, working such things into the fabric of the game's events.

In the real world, larger-than-life soldiers were the stars of the silver screen. In a comic-book world, superheroes might surpass mundane soldiers in popularity, particularly if they have an appropriately Iron Age outlook. If the heroes of the campaign acquire some notoriety, they might become celebrities in their own right, and find movies being made about them, starring actors who might have otherwise been in military action movies. Canny heroes might even embrace Hollywood and sign on with agents to make sure they get their piece of the box office. Depending on how common powers are in the world, directors might try to save money by setting off their enormous explosions around actors that are inhumanly tough. Even simple but flashy powers might be enough to make a hero a star of stage, screen, or television...though it might cause problems patrolling the streets as a hero when villains and bystanders alike recognize them as an actor from TV!

Actors, heroes, villains, and celebrities all find themselves in the tabloids sooner or later. The cheapest and most desperate magazines paste celebrities into suggestive photos and make up their stories from scratch. But bigger tabloids with national audiences field

armies of paparazzi to gather salacious photos (or innocent photos with salacious captions) and reporters who pay top dollar for good gossip. The best way for the tabloid giants to protect themselves from libel lawsuits is to print nothing but the truth, even though they make their money by printing only the most scandalous parts of the truth. It's hard enough for a popular hero to hide a secret identity, but one with skeletons in the closet when the tabloids unleash their dogs might find themselves in a bigger battle than any fought with a costumed villain.

GANGS AND VIGILANTES

A popular topic both on tabloid television and major news programs of the 1980s and '90s was the increasing level of urban crime. The violent crime rate in the United States climbed throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and the murder rates in large American cities like New York, Detroit, and Washington, D.C. were at all-time highs.

The 1974 movie *Death Wish*, featuring Charles Bronson as a man who becomes a vigilante bent on killing criminals after the murder of his wife, had been incredibly popular with urban dwellers who felt threatened every time they left their homes. Four increasingly violent sequels would be released in the 1980s, beginning with *Death Wish 2* in 1982. In 1984, New York City saw a "real-life vigilante" when Bernard Goetz shot four men who attempted to rob him on the subway. In the aftermath of the shooting, Goetz became a folk hero to those in the public who felt increasingly terrorized by urban crime, but the incident became a flashpoint in the debate over use of force by civilians.

Much of the rising crime rate, particularly in the late 1980s, was attributed to the new and cheaper form of cocaine called "crack" that appeared on American streets. Though gangs of the past restricted themselves to limited turf, from a single block or neighborhood to a city or stretch of highway, the 1980s saw the rise of major gangs like the Bloods and the Crips that spread across the entire United States, with branches in nearly every major city. Increasingly sophisticated smuggling brought drugs into the country, put it into the hands of the gangs, and spread it from city to city. Where the drugs went, violence followed close behind. Newspapers and magazines regularly chronicled the bloody wars between gangs and the violent crimes of addicts in search of money to feed their habits.

MEAN STREETS

In the Iron Age, not all criminals wear capes and rob banks. With the explosive growth of gangs during the era, many Iron Age crimi-

nals work at street level, often indistinguishable from the civilians around them. Even as gangs prey on the streets and neighborhoods where heroes live, it might be hard to identify them, let alone bring them to justice.

There's never a shortage of street crime in the Iron Age, from muggings and robbery, to stealing cars, illegal gambling, protection rackets, and prostitution rings. But dominating it all is the drug trade, and Iron Age heroes are likely to find pushers everywhere from the playground in the inner city to the dining room at the country club, all of them with some connection, close or distant, to the gangs that are the main distribution network for drugs.

Even once they learn to identify members of gangs, heroes may also be surprised to find who belongs to them. Money is tight among the lower classes of the Iron Age, and many urban poor are drawn to gangs simply by the easy, steady income offered by the drug trade. Gangs also offer a sense of family, belonging, and safety to many who felt threatened and alone out on the streets. Finally, there are those who are happy to let a gang come in and take over their neighborhood, because the gang's "law of the gun" provides order in areas where the police never seem to come when called.

Gangs and crime are so pervasive in the streets of the Iron Age that many civilians feel the need to arm themselves when they go to the streets. Some of these people may become the heroes of an Iron Age campaign, but most are just among the millions of people carrying concealed weapons, dreading the moment they feel threatened enough to use them, but ready to do so.

Drugs, gangs, crime, guns, and a fearful populace make Iron Age cities a powder keg. The heroes may be the only thing keeping it from exploding, or they may inadvertently become the spark that sets it off.

THE WAR ON DRUGS

President Nixon laid the foundation for a national anti-drug initiative in the 1970s with the Controlled Substances Act. In 1988, President Reagan established the Office of National Drug Control as part of what had been by then named the "War on Drugs." This "war" was fought throughout the decade, beginning with an increase in the severity of penalties for drug-related offenses, which caused U.S. prison populations to soar as hundreds of thousands of criminals were jailed. Those prisons didn't stop the most powerful street gangs; some leaders ran their operations even while imprisoned.

While the U.S. worked to incarcerate the American gangs responsible for sale and distribution of illegal drugs, their real targets in the

THE BRIGHTER SIDE OF THE IRON AGE

Though this chapter concentrates on the darker events that helped shape the comics of the Iron Age, it's important to remember that many positive events occurred as well.

Space exploration in the Iron Age saw new space probes sent to explore the solar system, the launch of the first space shuttle, and space stations put in orbit by both the U.S. and Russia. Medical advances included artificial hearts, the first cloned mammals, and the development of DNA "fingerprinting" techniques. Personal computers and other electronic devices developed rapidly and became widespread in the home.

In the end, despite all the fears of the Iron Age, our 1984 did not end up like the 1984 of George Orwell's novel. Heroes of Iron Age comics became darker, yet they were still heroes fighting against evil and for their beliefs. Though *M&M* campaigns set during the Iron Age may take place in the shadows, players and Gamemasters should never forget that shadows cannot exist without light.

War on Drugs were the cartels in Central and South America that produced the drugs and smuggled them into United States. Groups such as the Medellín and Cali cartels made tens of millions of dollars each month smuggling drugs, and killed any who threatened their operations, including the Justice Minister of Colombia. Though the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency led operations against the smugglers and cartels throughout the 1980s, the most significant American operation in the War on Drugs during the decade came in 1989, when the U.S. invaded Panama in 1989 to remove General Manuel Noriega from power.

Yet each time a major victory was declared in the War on Drugs with the capture of a cartel leader, the confiscation of a major drug shipment, or the destruction of a jungle manufacturing facility, others seemed to appear in its place. The new war continued into the 1990s, with no end in sight.

FRONT LINE HEROES

City streets are one front in the war on drugs, but the other is in far-off jungles. If street gangs are a match for local law enforcement, then the drug cartels of Central and South America are powerful and well-armed enough to challenge armies. Heroes who start their own war on drugs in the streets may find the trail eventually leads to more powerful opponents than they might have expected.

Always in search of potent new allies, the cartels might make advances to heroes with powerful abilities or in a position to influence events. Enormous bribes are just the beginning of what the cartels could offer. Enough money might make even the most stalwart heroes consider the value of their morals. But while heroes might refuse to become the allies of the cartels, the cartels may still try to make the heroes their tools, threatening their loved ones or something the heroes else hold dear until they come around. ("We will kill one innocent in your city each day you refuse to help us.") Once under their sway, the cartels make sure the heroes *stay* bought, either through continued rewards, threats, or blackmail. But if the heroes refuse—or worse, if they betray the cartels—they will be reminded that while violence may not always be the first strategy of the cartel, they will not hesitate to use it.

If heroes take the battle to the home turf of the cartels, they'll find many are powerful enough to make their own law. Just like the people in neighborhoods who respect the gangs who rule their streets, many citizens in the cartels' home nations respect their wealth and power more than their own governments. Taking down the cartels will require the heroes go far deep into countries where the authorities cannot help them and the streets are full of people ready to turn informer for a quick reward.

THE MELTING POT SIMMERS

The mid-twentieth century was a time of great change, and the Iron Age era in the late-twentieth century saw a society still struggling to incorporate and accept many of those changes. The women's rights and civil rights movements had made great strides, but not without resistance from those who still felt things should be otherwise, or who objected to any kind of widespread change being forced upon society.

Following the open discussion of sexuality in the preceding decades, a surge of social conservatism and repression swept the United States. The spread of HIV/AIDS in the gay community spurred a backlash from those who now saw homosexuality as not only morally wrong, but as a threat to public health. In England, the conservative resistance was even stronger, as Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's government oversaw the controversial Section 28, which outlawed even the discussion of homosexuality as anything but unacceptable.

Class tensions continued to be an issue as well. When many were feeling the pinch of inflation and unemployment, a new upper-middle class was forming. Movies such as *Wall Street* and billionaire Donald Trump's best-selling autobiography, *The Art of the Deal*, marked a time of greed and excess often criticized as driving wealth toward the wealthy without regard to the human costs. Hostile takeovers and insider trading scandals led stockbrokers and investment bankers to be vilified as much as they were envied, as exemplified in the 1991 novel *American Psycho*, telling of a wealthy New York "yuppie" stockbroker who was also a serial killer and cannibal.

Racial tensions in Los Angeles came to a boil in 1991 when the beating of black motorist Rodney King by four police officers was videotaped by a bystander and widely broadcast. Though the officers involved were brought up on charges for their use of force, they were acquitted on April 29, 1992. The judgment triggered widespread rioting in Los Angeles. The riots lasted three days and resulted in more than 50 deaths, 2,300 injuries, and more than a billion dollars in property damage before the Marine Corps and National Guard restored order to the city.

CAN'T WE ALL JUST GET ALONG?

It would be unusual for an Iron Age *Mutants & Masterminds* campaign to have the resolution of cultural tensions as its main conflict. (Not impossible, though. In 1993, Dwayne McDuffie and other African-American writers and artists founded Milestone Media as a response to the lack of minority representation in comics. Titles like *Static*, *Blood Syndicate*, and *Icon* might provide inspiration for such a game.) On the other hand, issues of race, class, culture, and gender are pervasive in modern society, and the problems that arise can help inform and influence the events and characters of your Iron Age world.

A team of heroes can be united in their fight against evil, yet still feel the pull of their differing backgrounds, morals, or political leanings. Someone perfectly willing to put her life into the hands of her teammates could still be nervous about discussing her sexuality once she takes off the mask. A hero who grew up on the streets and built all his own equipment might bear some resentment toward the millionaire who funds his heroics with an inheritance or a corporate sponsorship.

Whether played out on a large or small scale, be careful: players and Gamemasters are likely to have feelings about these issues stronger than any characters in a roleplaying game. If treated carelessly, you might find such tensions spilling over from the world of the Iron Age into your own.

WAR OVERSEAS, ATTACKS AT HOME

In August 1990, the Middle Eastern nation of Iraq invaded the neighboring country of Kuwait. While the U.S. had supported Iraq during the Cold War, relations between the two nations had cooled following Iraq's war with Iran during the 1980s. The U.S. was quick to lead an international coalition to Kuwait's rescue. Kuwait was successfully liberated within a week, and the Gulf War ended less than six months later.

The victory by the U.S. and its allies reignited opposition to the Western nations by groups who objected to their involvement in conflicts in the Arab world. In 1993, a fuel-oil bomb was detonated in the parking garage beneath the World Trade Center in New York City, killing six people and injuring more than 1,000. Three years later, a truck bomb exploded outside a building in the Khobar Towers that housed foreign military personnel in Saudi Arabia, killing 19 Americans and injuring hundreds from around the world.

Not all terror attacks in the 1990s came from overseas. Many were driven by local conflicts and tensions. The IRA continued their campaign of bombings and killings in Britain throughout the decade, broken only by occasional ceasefires. In 1995 the Federal Building in Oklahoma City was destroyed by a bomb set by two men sympathetic to American anti-government militias, killing 168 people. The

next year, a bomb exploded in Atlanta's Centennial Park while the city hosted the Olympic Games. This turned out to be the first of four nail bombs set by a far-right extremist that, in total, killed more than 100 people. In 1995, the religious group Aum Shinrikyo released toxic sarin gas into the Tokyo subway system, killing a dozen people and injuring more than 1,000.

YOU SAY YOU WANT A REVOLUTION?

The first Gulf War marks the beginning of the latter half of the Iron Age, a period after the end of the Cold War when the United States became actively and openly militarily involved in the Middle East. Depending on their allegiances and agenda, heroes might be drafted into the military conflicts in the Persian Gulf, either changing its outcome or making the Coalition victory as much about superpower superiority as technological superiority.

As discussed earlier in **Fear, Surprise, and Fanatics**, anti-terrorism can be a basis for an entire Iron Age campaign. In a campaign set late in the Iron Age, though, the terrorists chased by heroes are just as likely to be from the heroes' own city or country as part of a terrorist organization from the far side of the world. Heroes may even find themselves recruited by freedom fighters who have been inspired by the heroes' activities outside the law and feel the only way to change the world is to do so the same way—by force.

IRON AGE SETTINGS

Iron Age campaigns might start in dark, narrow back alleys of the city, but they can take heroes around the world and to any comic-book locale. This section is a guide to incorporating a wide variety of settings into your campaign, and giving them each the proper Iron Age flavor.

THE CITY

Cities of the Iron Age take many forms. Some groan under the weight of history, with a core of stone and steel towers downtown surrounded by a sprawl of old housing and well-used industrial areas. Other cities are brand-new products of urban planning and modern design. Regardless of the city's age, though, the signs of decay are apparent.

Cities planned as technological utopias show their perfection going awry once an imperfect populace is introduced to its streets and buildings. Sometimes, flaws have been hidden in the design from the start by a person, group, or power that benefits—politically, financially, magically, or otherwise—from its failure. Heroes of an Iron Age campaign in such a city might be agents of the plan, trying to maintain its dream of perfection against encroaching corruption, or they may be rebels fighting against the corrupt forces trying to control the city and its inhabitants.

Older cities turn dark in the Iron Age through the passing of time. The stone towers that once dominated the skyline are shoved side-by-side with newer buildings of iron and steel, all coated in a film of grime. The people of the city, particularly the older citizens, speak longingly of "the good old days," pointing toward a past when the city was a brighter and happier place.

All Iron Age cities suffer from a rise in crime. From muggers to supervillains, heroes will find they have more criminals to deal with than ever. Street gangs rule streets and neighborhoods, funded by the drug pushers in every park and on every corner. In some cities, heroes might feel compelled to set aside their secret identities and private lives to fight crime full time. In others, crime and criminals are regularly ignored by the people of the city; a hero might be tempted to give up the fight altogether.

THE SLUMS

The darkest parts of an Iron Age city are usually the poorest sections, with plenty of dilapidated buildings to provide cover and hiding places. Alleyways between ramshackle tenements form shadowy paths where criminals can prey on the unfortunate and do business with each other. The alleys are often so narrow a criminal on the run could leap across them from above, moving across rooftops patched with plywood and tarpaper among a forest of television aerials and squat, aging water towers.

While supervillains and crime lords operate from hidden headquarters elsewhere, this is the part of an Iron Age city street gangs call home, often recruiting members from among the people who live there. Though the gangs may bring crime and violence to the neighborhoods, many of the residents are surprisingly loyal to them. Gangs bring money to poor neighborhoods from wealthy downtown businessmen and well-off suburban teens that venture in to buy drugs. When under-funded police forces pay more attention to the needs of the wealthy and abandon the poor neighborhoods, street

gangs provide protection to the people on the block—even if it's only protection from the street gang itself.

THE STREETS

The streets of the city are the real battlegrounds of the Iron Age. Even when empty, they seem packed with menace: garbage might blow down the gutters, or pile up at the curbside during a strike by trash collectors. Puddles of oily water collect in innumerable potholes in the cracked pavement. Shadows from tall buildings block out the sun unless it's directly overhead; the best the streets can hope for is perpetual twilight. Between the pools of light cast by the occasional streetlamps, the only light comes from the buzzing neon and flickering marquees of 24-hour bodegas, liquor stores, and strip clubs.

Urban gangs claim neighborhoods for their own, and they fight in the streets to expand their territory or to weaken rival gangs. Careless bystanders can get caught in the middle of a drive-by shooting, though some may turn a fight between gangs into a three-sided battle, drawing the concealed weapons they carry to feel safe and joining in the fray.

In an Iron Age campaign, the streets can be the primary setting for heroes' adventures as they try to clean up the city. Or, as the heroes journey from one larger adventure to the next, the crime-ridden streets of the city might simply serve as a reminder to the heroes that they are always surrounded by darkness.

THE PENTHOUSE

The rich and powerful of the Iron Age keep themselves high above all this, in luxury penthouse apartments. Still, even when surrounded by bodyguards and security systems, the corruption of the Iron Age manages to find the wealthy. Many of those who made their fortune through inheritance or hard work may turn to devious means to stay that way, including embezzlement, insider trading, or high-stakes blackmail. Those who have never been wealthy may see white-collar crime as a faster, easier path to getting rich than actually earning the money or picking up a gun.

Heroes whose adventures take them among the upper class will find the wealthy are part of an interconnected web of loyalties and rivalries. Families may have master plans that reach across generations, and they prize honor and loyalty as much as any crime family or street gang. For those who have more money than they can spend, secrets may be the only real currency, and the most valuable thing they keep locked up in their private vaults.

THE ASYLUM

Attached to a hospital or out on the edge of the city is another standard Iron Age setting: the asylum. In the past, asylums were little more to superheroes than specialized prisons to hold particularly crazy or dangerous opponents. But in the Iron Age, those who are merely disturbed or depressed are housed in the sort of hospitals, sanitariums, and mental health centers that are rarely seen in a



superheroic campaign. The asylum is home to the worst adversaries a hero can face...and only heroes dare go beyond its gates to confront the madness within.

Heroes will find old opponents within an asylum. Some will be bound by straitjackets and behind locked doors, yet still planning their escape and a return to crime. Others may well have been changed by their stay in the asylum and, through medication or therapy, made progress toward curing their madness. They will also find many patients who may not have super powers, but are still quite dangerous, from lunatics to serial killers.

Yet as the asylum strips patients' psyches bare, it may also create new or more formidable opponents. The revelation of hidden truths may cause a bent mind to break entirely. In an attempt to help, the asylum may inadvertently unleash a new madman upon the world. While working to heal a patient's mind, the asylum may help a villain to overcome a phobia or mental disorder that previously held them back, giving heroes one less weakness to exploit in their next battle.

On rare occasions, a hero may find themselves a patient of the asylum. Even if the hero is admitted to the asylum voluntarily, some doctors could see it as an irresistible opportunity to explore or experiment upon the heroic mind. Some doctors might even see their unshakeable drive toward heroics and altruism as a madness of its own, and try to cure it. Forced upon a journey into the recesses of their own minds, heroes may discover for the first time what truly motivates them, or face the demons buried deep within.

THE COMPANY

By the Iron Age, the largest corporations had grown large enough to rival small countries, with tens of thousands of employees, operating budgets in the billions of dollars, and completely self-sufficient facilities. Their headquarters might be hidden away inside a generic building in a suburban industrial park, or they may have their own enormous skyscraper in the heart of the city.

THE BOARDROOM

Large corporations might be publicly held, owned by innumerable shareholders. If heroes find themselves coming into conflict with an Iron Age corporation, it's because the shareholders tolerate the company's darker Iron Age agenda for the sake of profit. Or perhaps the corporation is held privately by a small number of individuals accountable to no one. Either way, its mission is guided from the closed confines of the boardroom by its board of directors.

Without leaving the conference table, the board can reach out to distant branches of the company and monitor the progress of their plans and those of their competitors via spies, surveillance, and reports from middle- and low-level managers. The members of the board may be well known, in the belief they are untouchable. Or the board may be shadowy and mysterious, and only by getting into the boardroom will heroes ever discover their true identities or their real agenda.

THE CUBICLES

The second half of the twentieth century saw more of the work in American corporations being done by the burgeoning ranks of mid-

dle management. Innumerable white-collar workers do their daily work in rows and ranks of desks and cubicles. Sometimes content to be faceless cogs in the larger machine of the corporation, and sometimes unable to be anything else even if they have the ambition, cubicle-bound "drones" may be carrying out the evil plans of an Iron Age corporation without even being aware of what they're doing.

Sometimes the office workers and middle managers of the cubicles take advantage of their anonymity. Simple corruption, like stealing office supplies, is commonplace. On the other, a small group who truly understand the labyrinthine operations of the corporation and how to manipulate them might send their own instructions into other parts of the company, sending reports to the board of directors telling them only what they expect to hear. If the plan comes to fruition—or unless it is discovered by a group of heroes—it's possible they might be able to stage a silent *coup d'état*.

THE FACTORY

After all the meetings are held and the paperwork is passed around, the actual products of many companies need to be produced somewhere. No matter where their home office is, the company's factories could be just outside the city or on the far side of the globe.

Some Iron Age factories are indistinguishable from those of a century earlier, with workers in grubby overalls working raw materials and parts into finished goods. Others show some of the developments of modern times, and have partially-assembled products moving down assembly lines from station to station, with each worker doing part of the overall job. A few employ all the cutting-edge techniques of the Iron Age, where the dirty factory floor is replaced with polished tile and pre-programmed machines and robots work the assembly line.

Always capable, the factory workers of the Iron Age are increasingly likely to be technologically sophisticated enough to operate and maintain the complex machinery around them. Heroes might be startled to enter a factory and find automated death weapons on the assembly line, along with workers fiercely loyal to the company who trust it to be doing the right thing. ("A contract with the military, I think.") Of course, it may have workers who simply don't care who they work for or what they're doing as long as they get paid.

THE LAB

The Iron Age was a time of continuous and sometimes controversial technological development. While some of it happened in garages and basements, much of it occurred in specialized scientific and technological research laboratories. Many companies of the Iron Age have their own research and development divisions, and the business of some companies is entirely research and development, with their innovations sold or licensed to other businesses and industries.

The form an Iron Age laboratory takes depends on what is being researched. High-level medical and biological research requires sterile environments, as does the creation of microchips and micro-electronics, and scientists working in the fields may need to pass through airlocks and be wearing full-body "clean suits" or even suits with sealed environmental systems before they can enter the lab. Engineering and robotics labs may be offices where only design

BRIGHT MOMENTS IN DARK DAYS

This chapter paints a relentlessly grim picture of the Iron Age world. Cities seem to be shadowy, corrupt places, and from corporations to foreign countries, their sections seem to focus only on their more seedy aspects. While this is meant to give the proper tone for each in an Iron Age campaign and to suggest adventures for superheroes, it doesn't mean the Iron Age was without bright moments or happy days. Giving the heroes of an Iron Age campaign something that brings joy to their lives—family, friends, a good career, or even a sunny afternoon in the park—helps to remind them they have something to fight for, as well as against.

work is done, but it's much more interesting if they have extensive electronics shops.

Computers are a big part of any Iron Age research facility, with networks of computers and terminals attached to a central mainframe (which may well be artificially intelligent and assisting in the research.) More modern research labs also have small rapid prototyping facilities, where parts created in computer drafting software can be rapidly produced in a day or two rather than waiting a week or more for a factory to cast samples.

The Iron Age was also a time of large-scale research into fundamental science, from space telescopes to giant underground particle accelerators more than a mile in diameter. Like the labs, any of these research facilities might be the target of industrial espionage or the origin of a hero's powers. Though Iron Age technology tends to be realistic, some of the more fantastic laboratories can be the source of any comic-book super science needed for an Iron Age campaign.

THE CAPITOL

From international diplomacy to the beat cop on the street corner, the government is never far away in an Iron Age campaign. When heroes work outside the law or work to bring villains within it, they are working with or around the laws written by government officials inside the halls of power, whether at City Hall, a state capitol, or the national capitol.

In the past, the government may have tolerated or even cooperated with heroes, allowing their vigilante activities for the greater good of defeating supervillains and their schemes. But in the Iron Age, where the growth of street gangs and the overhanging spectre of nuclear annihilation are only two of the elements contributing to a time of unprecedented fear for the average citizen, their government may change its attitudes toward superheroes.

Like firearms, the government may try to control super-powered beings by requiring them to be registered. Any use of super powers without a government-issued license becomes illegal and punishable by imprisonment or even death. While this has the benefit of assuring most supervillains are convicted of some crime regardless of their scheme, the heroes might chafe at being registered and tracked, depending on how voluntarily they acquired their powers.

If some or all of the powers in an Iron Age world are the result of a deliberate program, such as cybernetic enhancement or genetic manipulation, governments might seek to control or even ban the creation of powered beings. All previously created super powered beings might be imprisoned or pressed into military service. Of course, technology is a Pandora's box, and once the ability to grant powers is created, the government might have difficulties keeping control of the technology. In such a world, black-market powers and underground clinics might exist, able to give superhuman abilities

to those who want them badly enough and are willing to pay the price.

Whether powers require registration or have been banned, there will always be villains who ignore the law, and heroes who for their own reasons choose or are forced to work outside them. Both sides are outlaws, fighting against one another while trying to escape the attention of the government. If a government has particularly intolerant anti-power laws, outlaw heroes and villains who were once enemies might even find themselves thrown together to fight for survival.

In some Iron Age worlds, super-powered beings are common enough that they will be given a role to play in representative governments. (If they are powerful enough, they may even be able to insist upon it.) That part could be as small as a governmentsanctioned supergroup given official supplies and support in their war on crime, or it could lead to a national government with a full Department of Superhuman Affairs, a Superhuman Enforcement Division, or more.

THE AIRPORT

M&M campaigns set in earlier eras may have focused exclusively on a single city and a struggle of a group of heroes to clean up its streets. By the onset of the Iron Age, villainous organizations have the ability to communicate and move around the world at great speeds. Heroes following a criminal gang's chain of command may suddenly find the next link is two continents away.

Of course, those continents are made up of many different countries, each with its own laws and regulations. Heroes who are given *carte blanche* by their local government might journey to another country where powers are outlawed. Depending on the level of technology available, passports, X-ray machines, and chemical sniffers at various checkpoints might be joined by devices that can detect powers in order to control the presence of superhumans within the borders. Smugglers can get drugs and weapons into countries where they aren't wanted; perhaps they can get heroes into places where they aren't allowed.

THE FOREIGN COUNTRY

Though many *M&M* campaigns are centered in the Western world, Iron Age adventures often took superheroes to parts of the world far from home. This section gives a broad overview of the rest of the planet, with hooks to bring them into an Iron Age campaign.

THE IRON CURTAIN

Through most of the Iron Age, especially during the Cold War, Europe is divided in two by a metaphorical barrier called the "Iron Curtain." On the eastern side of the Curtain are those countries under the political influence of the Soviet Union since the Warsaw Pact was

THE FICTITIOUS NATION

If anything you read here piques your interest, a bit of research will reveal this chapter shows only the tip of the iceberg, and a full campaign could be built from the details you'll find in just one corner of the Iron Age world.

But don't forget *Mutants and Masterminds* is a game of comic-book adventure, and you shouldn't get so lost in details you forget to have fun. Nor should you let a commitment to realism keep you from leading your campaign in the direction of your choice. The Iron Curtain might not fall in the late 1980s, or the Cold War might break into a new ground conflict as Russian tanks roll into West Germany in 1987. Your campaign might reveal a drug cartel is selling hyper-addictive mutagenic drugs worse than anything they produced in the real world...or it may reveal the cartels were actually heroes of the people painted with propaganda by their former allies in the CIA.

Just as you can make up a city (like Freedom City) in which to base your Iron Age campaign, and you can alter Iron Age history to your liking, you have the freedom to create new foreign nations that serve the purposes of your campaign. Many comics feature fictional countries that echo real-world nations but are appropriate to the needs of the story, from the technologically and socially advanced African nation or the European kingdom still steeped in nineteenth-century tradition, to any number of corrupt South American banana republics and Asian island nations. Steal elements of the real world where you can, make up the rest, and if you keep track of the details as you go, you'll soon have fictional countries that would be perfectly at home in any Iron Age almanac.

signed in the 1950s. For decades, the Pact and the threat of military force kept pro-Soviet governments in place in the nations of the "Eastern Bloc." But, over the course of the Iron Age, growing economic problems and the rise of anti-Communist movements in many Eastern Bloc countries make it increasingly difficult for the Russians to maintain control of its satellite states. Slowly, they begin to let the countries choose their own paths—a movement jokingly called the "Sinatra Doctrine" after Frank Sinatra's signature song, "My Way"—until East and West Germany reunified in 1990 and countries began to pull out of the Warsaw Pact in 1991.

Countries behind the Iron Curtain are fertile ground for adventure during the Iron Age. Early in the Iron Age, Eastern Bloc countries are hotbeds of espionage, and sometimes the battleground for proxy wars between Cold War superpowers that can't fight in their own countries without bringing on Armageddon. Even when the Eastern Bloc was firmly under the thumb of the Soviets, local governments were sometimes far enough from Moscow to be riddled with corruption. As Soviet control slowly eroded, massive amounts of Russian military hardware slipped out of armories and into the black market. Once the Sinatra Doctrine allowed the people of the Eastern Bloc to shape their own political destinies and form their own new governments, old rivalries between religious and ethnic groups resumed almost immediately.

The roles of Eastern Bloc super heroes and super villains would undoubtedly change as their homelands did. Even those who were once state-maintained super soldiers might find themselves thrust into the open market or even the black market to seek out their own fortunes. Some might try to shore up or even rebuild the crumbling Soviet power structure, while others might attempt to hasten its downfall.

THE SOVIET UNION

Though fiercely dedicated to their opposing ideologies, in many ways the Soviet Union is similar to the United States during the Iron Age. The 1970s and 1980s are a time of slow economic growth in the Soviet Union, though they managed to keep their military technology and nuclear arsenals on par with the U.S. throughout the era. The slowed economy, along with the death of long-time Soviet ruler Leonid Brezhnev in 1982, led to a government that was extremely

conservative and slow to change, even as the world continues to change around them.

People of the Soviet Union are often loyal and conformist Russian citizens in public, but during the Iron Age the Soviet people have greater freedom to experiment in their private lives, leading to an explosion of personal expression and the slow influx of outside influences. Western artists and musicians were allowed to come into Russia for the first time, and heroes might be able to slip into the country as an artist, musician, or part of their entourage.

Once inside, the differences between Russia and the United States become apparent. All media, from television and radio to newspapers and book publishing, are strictly controlled and censored by the state. All economic and industrial production is centrally controlled and guided by the government's "five-year plans." Despite growing cultural freedom, there are entire "closed cities" that are completely forbidden to outsiders and sometimes even Russian citizens. Inside, the Russian military and scientists work in secrecy to advance the nation's technological and military might, and even their space program in "Star City." In an Iron Age *M&M* campaign, it's likely Russia has a "Hero City" dedicated to creating new super-powered beings to serve the Communist state.

THE ARAB WORLD

Behind the Iron Curtain, the fires of anti-Western sentiment have been aflame for decades and have burned down to well-tended smoldering coals. But in the Middle East of the Iron Age, anti-American flames are newly lit and burning ever higher as they're fanned by groups rebelling against Western influence in the region.

Despite efforts by the Arab League to unite the Arab world during the Iron Age, the nations of the Middle East continued to wage open war on one another with everything from missiles to tanks. Meanwhile, groups within the nations are developing ways of advancing their political agendas and supporting larger movements through guerilla fighting and terrorist attacks. Heroes visiting the Arab world who clearly identify themselves with a western nation (such as the American Eagle or the Londoneer) may find themselves marked as targets. Even Western villains might be seen as too culturally and ideologically different from Arabs to be anything but ostracized.

The streets of an Arab nation are the easiest place for heroes to get caught up in their internal and external conflicts, but terrorist plots by Arab organizations might find them anywhere in the world. Heroes could be part of a group trying to stop suicide bombings and truck bombs in the Middle East, or they might be onboard a plane or ship when it is hijacked by political extremists.

THE FAR EAST

From World War II and the second Sino-Japanese War through the Korean and Vietnam Wars, the Far East was under fire for much of the twentieth century. But in the Iron Age, there is little open warfare, and the primary story of the region is one of economic reconstruction and political maneuvering.

In the aftermath of World War II, Japan dedicated itself to a program of aggressive industrial development, leading to an incredible four decades of growth that, by the Iron Age, make it an economic powerhouse. Japanese conglomerates of the era are so wealthy that, as they began acquiring large foreign companies from American movie studios to French wineries, some foreigners complained Japan had set out on a campaign of economic conquest. Japan's organized crime groups, known as *yakuza*, made incredible profits during the period as well, albeit through much less savory businesses like prostitution, blackmail, extortion, and illegal gambling. Heroes who come to Japan in the Iron Age might be involved in adventures among the wealthy elite of Japanese society. (See **The Penthouse**, earlier in this section.) They might be moving through the world of the *yakuza*, or they may find themselves following the silken threads of influence, power, money, and extortion that tie the two together.

Split into two nations in 1945, each supported by one of the two Cold War superpowers, the two parts of Korea soon fought one another for complete dominance over the Korean peninsula. It was a war that ended in a stalemate that persisted through the Iron Age. South Korea saw economic growth, yet also significant repression through the 1970s, until power was seized in a coup in 1980 and a milder (albeit still widely protested) government took over. The first truly democratic presidential elections were held there in 1988, the same year the country hosted the summer Olympic Games. North Korea, a communist nation, continues to see support from communist China and Russia throughout much of the Iron Age, but has an aggressive military stance. Reports of widespread human rights violations, such as enormous detention camps and rumors of experimentation upon prisoners, alienate the small nation from much of the rest of the world. Two countries in turmoil, as both try to maintain internal control and find a position of power in the larger world; either would make a perfect setting for Iron Age adventure, and any situation that places heroes in the middle of the conflict between North and South Korea would ratchet up the stakes considerably.

China remains a major power, and is fiercely dedicated to its communist ideals even as the system is crumbling elsewhere. Economic reforms in China help it keep pace with the rest of the world. Many foreign countries have their goods manufactured in Chinese factories to take advantage of cheap labor drawn from China's massive, burgeoning population. Political reform makes less progress, as protestors who seek social and political reform are met with troops and tanks by the Chinese government. Hong Kong is still under British

colonial rule during the Iron Age, and it remains a center for intrigue in the region, as East and West meet in its streets. In 1984, it was decided control of the city would return to China late in the century, but that serves only to raise tensions in the area as citizens and companies prepare for the transition by either digging in or pulling up stakes and setting out for other parts of the world. Heroes who venture to China during the Iron Age will find it contradictory: modern cities of glass and steel only miles from plantations where farmers still work the fields by hand, a government working for economic growth yet insistent on social control, and all the individual agendas of the largest population in the world. Adventures in the area will be similarly diverse, though as in other countries under stringent governmental control, heroes can expect the authorities not only disapprove of their activities, but might attempt to imprison them unless they have specific permission.

The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979, maintaining control of the country for nearly a decade until international pressure and losses to Afghani guerilla forces trained by the United States convince them to withdraw in 1989. Until then, heroes venturing into Afghanistan in the Iron Age are stepping onto an active battlefield in the Cold War. After 1989, the matter is resolved as far as Cold War nations are concerned and both sides remove their forces from the area, creating a wholly new battlefield. Heroes coming to Afghanistan in the latter part of the Iron Age—perhaps in pursuit of opium growers as part of the drug war—will find a country tearing



itself apart as highly trained, highly armed, and experienced guerilla fighters war with one another under the command of warlords who slowly carve up the nation into their personal territories.

SOUTH AND CENTRAL AMERICA

The primary focus of many adventures involving South and Central America in the Iron Age will be the ongoing war on drugs being waged by the United States on the drug cartels in the region. Yet there are many other events and groups in the region that might serve as hooks for heroic adventure. Kidnapping is a criminal industry across the region; some gangs even set up roadblocks to determine whether or not passing foreigners are wealthy enough to be snatched—a practice called “miracle fishing.” Murder is equally rampant, and by the end of the Iron Age, Colombia was the murder capital of the world with an average of 67 murders per day. In Brazil, murderous death squads run by corrupt, off-duty police officers deal out justice not only to those suspected of crimes, but anyone who happens to be nearby, leading the common people to distrust the police and courts enough to hire hit men to settle their disputes.

Leaders of drug cartels and the richest families of most South American countries live in mansions and luxury apartments similar to those found around the world. But they make up a very small proportion of the countries' populations, and the teeming masses of the poor live in ad hoc shantytowns assembled from scrap metal, lumber, and even garbage on the outskirts of many major cities. As in other countries, urban gangs call these slums home, and in countries such as Brazil are so powerful in the shantytowns that the police cannot even enter the area unless they come in force. Heroes who come to the shantytowns might become champions of the poor, but they also might come into conflict with the gangs or poor who resent them.

THE DARK CONTINENT

“The Dark Continent” was a name given to Africa when it was still a place of mystery to the rest of the world, little but a shoreline surrounding blank spots on the map. By the Iron Age, Africa has been almost wholly explored, but the nickname might be better applied to some of the events taking place on the continent during this era. Starvation is rampant across many parts of the continent, and the AIDS epidemic sweeping the globe during the Iron Age begins in Africa. By the end of the Iron Age, in some African nations more than 15% of adults are infected with HIV.

South of the Sahara, many African nations are ruled by hopelessly corrupt governments that weaken efforts by outsiders to help or intervene in ongoing crises. Many hold power only through the use of brute force, and many countries are in a constant state of civil war that verges in some cases on genocide as the powerful and well-armed eliminate their enemies and forcibly recruit even young boys into the ranks of their militias.

THE DYING WORLD

Most Iron Age adventures featured a realistic world ripped from the headlines of the era. But in a time where many people feared that sudden global catastrophe was a real and continuous possibility,

some *M&M* campaigns might visit or could be set in a number of apocalyptic settings:

THE POST-NUCLEAR EARTH

In this dark Iron Age, the Cold War came to its inevitable conclusion with the United States and the Soviet Union unleashing their massive nuclear arsenals upon each other and much of the rest of the world. Heroes in this world journey through a blasted landscape, somehow protected from the radioactive fallout, searching for survivors and pieces of the devastated past.

THE THIRD WORLD WAR

There are many possibilities for a new world war during the Iron Age: Open warfare might break out in the Iron Age between the two Cold War powers yet somehow not escalate into a full nuclear exchange; a group of powerful and extraordinarily well-armed drug cartels could band together to fight the War on Drugs and set the western hemisphere ablaze; economic warfare might turn into running engagements between armed security teams of powerful multinational corporations that manage to rise above the laws of any one country; or a rising wave of religious or political sentiment could unleash continuous worldwide attacks by guerilla groups and terrorist cells around the world. Regardless of the scenario, a third world war in the Iron Age is a time of worldwide chaos where the player characters are the only ones who can keep the world as they know it from changing forever or dissolving altogether.

THE ALIEN INVASION

An alien invasion might seem too over the top for the era, but in Iron Age comic books, aliens are often used as a metaphor for the “outsider”: another race, culture, or religion. Their arrival less often features “death rays from the skies” and tends toward the quiet and peaceable—sometimes even involving permanent emigration to Earth. Aliens might mix with human society, or they may be isolated in urban ghettos or a distant part of the country. Their technology could be the basis for superhuman powers in an otherwise realistic Iron Age, but serve no greater part in the campaign...or the aliens might have a sinister plot that unfolds during the campaign, dragging Earth into the dark corruption of the Iron Age.

THE POLICE STATE

Street gangs might grow so powerful that not even the police can stop them as they claim entire cities as territory. Bloody attacks by foreign or domestic terrorist groups could grip the entire country in fear. An attempt to outlaw or control super-powered beings could result in explosive rebellion by hero and villain alike. Any of these could lead to an Iron Age where the government takes control of the streets, patrolling them with heavily armed soldiers and armored personnel carriers. Communications and transportation may be heavily restricted for the common citizen in order to maintain security, curfews set to keep everyone off but government troops off the streets at night, and those troops given orders to shoot anyone outside the ever-tighter boundaries of the law. As the police state becomes more and more restrictive, even heroes might reconsider defending the place they once called home.

GENRE CONVENTIONS

The rise of the Iron Age saw the world of superheroes change. Clearly distinguished lines between good and evil were replaced by a state of moral ambiguity in which it was hard to tell the good guys from the bad guys. Vigilantes took the place of bright, upstanding heroes; they hunted down criminals and villains with extreme prejudice and often did so for their own reasons, unconcerned with the law. With these changes in psychology also came a change in the trappings of heroes. Their costumes were darker, more menacing, and made up of practical clothing that helped them in their private wars.

The following pages explore the typical stories, story elements, characters, and tropes that made the Iron Age what it was. Gamemasters and players can use this information to help them recreate the genre in their own *M&M* games.

SHADES OF GRAY

Telling the White Hats from the Black Hats in the Iron Age is tricky. The heroes abandoned the hopefulness and positive attitude (some would say naïveté) of the heroes of the past in order to adopt a harder-edged approach to heroism that was harsher and more practical.

This change was particularly obvious in regard to heroic motivations. Once upon a time, heroes were motivated by the desire to right wrongs and make the world a better place because it was the right thing to do, or to protect innocents from being victimized like the hero had been. In the Iron Age, heroes are driven by revenge and the desire to mete out justice...or, at least, what they consider justice.

MORAL AMBIGUITY

Iron Age heroes often feel and act like they're above the law. Because of their powers and their dedication to a higher cause, they'll break laws in order to pursue what they believe to be right. To outsiders, who can only see how the hero looks and the actions he takes, he appears to be a vigilante at best—a villain at worst. Those outsiders don't understand that, although the hero is often looking out for their best interests, he's not concerned with how he's perceived by them, which means he's viewed in the worst possible light. All of this makes him seem immoral and uncaring, while that's not necessarily true.

At the same time, there are a number of characters that really *are* as bad as they seem and only look like heroes because their personal goals occasionally fall in line with what the public considers "good" or "heroic." As the saying goes, "Even a broken clock is right twice a day." The rest of the time, these anti-heroes do as they please and look out only for themselves.

No matter where the character sits on the spectrum of good and bad, the real question is this: If a good guy can look bad and a bad guy can look good, what does it mean to be a hero? Is it about the character's intentions? Is it the act itself? Is it all a matter of perception? Does any of that matter as long as the results are good?

Then there's the matter of law. The justice system is imperfect;

that's as true in the real world as it is in the Iron Age world. Many heroes are sick of that system and have decided to take matters into their own hands. After all, if the bad guys can get away with murder, why can't the heroes—especially if it's the "right" thing? What choice does a person have? When the law fails, how can there be justice? If a law is unjust, why should it be obeyed?

For a lot of characters, those questions don't matter. To them, so long as they remain true to the mission (whatever it is) that's all that matters. They're the heroes of their own internal stories; they understand their motivations and what they're trying to achieve, so they're the good guys, no matter what anyone else thinks.

All of these issues make for characters with strong viewpoints, but lacking the black-and-white simplicity of earlier heroes. The stories are more true to life, which also makes them murkier than those in traditional comics. This is a striking change to the genre, and one that influences every aspect of its stories and characters.

LETHALITY AND MORALITY

Armed with both the latest in military-grade weapons and an array of superhuman abilities, heroes fight a war against the criminal empires that run the world. Whether the bad guys are members of the Mafia, billionaire businessmen, international drug cartels, alien invaders, or super-powered villains, they're "the enemy," and in war,



the goal is to kill the enemy so you can achieve your ultimate objective. That's what a lot of heroes do: kill the bad guys to make the world a safer place.

Villains have always killed to get what they want, and now the heroes are fighting back using the same rules. Soldiers and the police use lethal force, so why shouldn't the player characters do the same and still be considered heroes? The problem is the public doesn't see it that way. The character probably isn't deputized (especially in the Iron Age) or a member of the military, and even if he were, war hasn't been declared on criminals. In addition, murder, even in pursuit of a noble cause, is still murder and must be addressed in the name of a society that values law and order. When some members of society start killing others in a personal crusade, they have to be controlled, whether they're heroes or villains.

Nevertheless, the Iron Age is full of heroes who kill. To them, it's a necessary evil. The bad guys always seem to come back, whether they escape from prison or return from exile in another dimension, so killing them is the logical way to remove them and the threat they pose permanently.

Besides killing, Iron Age characters have a penchant for other moral lapses as well. It's not uncommon to find characters that suffer from drug addictions or other personal problems that endanger themselves, their friends, family, and the public. A hero with schizophrenia or a drug addiction can be an erratic and dangerous thing.

Finally, there are characters that use their powers not for the betterment of mankind, but to fill out their bank accounts. Making money off one's powers is considered pretty vulgar by traditional heroes, but not to those in the Iron Age. It's simply a matter of economics: the hero has something other people want, so he's going to charge for it. Maybe he ends up working for the government, individuals, or corporations. It doesn't really matter to him, as long as he gets paid.

THE DEATH OF ALTRUISM

The naïve belief that society is going to improve because of the heroes' actions went the way of the dinosaur for most Iron Age heroes. Heroes no longer buy into the idea that one man can make a difference. He may not like the system, but the best he can hope to do is chip away at the symptoms, not treat the disease. With the death of hope arises despair; it's not an attractive trait for a hero, but definitely realistic in a world laden with overwhelming social problems with no clear solutions.

Characters don't see themselves as icons or individuals to be emulated. Instead they feel they have a job to do that no one else has the guts to tackle. Their worldview may not be pretty, but that's just the way it is. There are no heroes or villains, really—just people with their own agendas who will do anything to achieve them.

VILLAINS

Heroes and villains have always played by the rules of the superhero genre, but in the Iron Age, those structures have broken down, leaving villains able to do anything they want. In addition, some villains have moved on from robbing banks to owning them and using the resources to fund even more evil schemes.

PRACTICAL AND POLITICAL

The political world is full of crooks, so why not throw some villains into the mix as well? Masterminds and "thinking" villains have always led large organizations, and now they've moved into the public political arena in order to gain access to nearly limitless resources. Once in positions of power, these villains are able to turn the authority of the government against the heroes. The irony of the situation escapes no one; the villains are the authorities and the heroes are the outlaws. Besides further blurring the lines between good and bad, right and wrong, it makes sense. The system has always mistreated the common man, and now there's a reason for it: the villains are in charge. For the most heroic of Iron Age heroes, all that means is that they have to work that much harder to change the system. For the not-so-heroic, it means they'll always have enemies to defeat in their ongoing war.

Villains fill many roles in the government, from mayor of the city to president of the country. The higher the position, the more influence he's able to exert over the world and the more resources he's able to bring to bear on the heroes. If the villain isn't interested in public service, perhaps the best option is to work behind the scenes, using guile and extortion to shape public opinion. Another plan is to work as part of a government-sponsored "hero" team while pursuing an agenda that makes the villains look good and the heroes look bad.

IN THE BOARDROOM

As Iron Age bad guys learn from past mistakes, they quickly change tactics. Why work as a patsy for a company when you could run a company? Smart villains who are able to use their knowledge, savvy, or technical know-how can easily create prosperous businesses and legitimize themselves. With the power and wealth provided by a successful business, the villain can spend his time thinking up and executing longer-term schemes that benefit him, his friends, and his company at the expense of the heroes and the common man.

Similar to political villains, the corporate villain has incredible resources from which to draw, including weapons, headquarters, minions, vehicles, money, and more. The only things holding him back are his desire to keep the law out of his business (frozen accounts are much more devastating than a punch in the face) and his need to make the company look good (it's better for profits).

PSYCHOTIC TWISTS

Now that heroes can kill, the villains are even more extreme. It's as if the heroes stole the villains' one trick, the thing that really makes them *bad*. In order to make the villains really stand out, they have to go beyond murder and move into truly reprehensible behavior, including torture, cannibalism, human slavery, serial killing, terrorism, and random, nonsensical murder.

Usually, the most twisted and psychotic villains are the arch-nemesis villains, not the run-of-the-mill bad guys the heroes encounter every day. Rather, it's their opposite numbers—the ones who define the heroes and their role. That said, most villains have almost no problem with killing indiscriminately in order to get what they want. In the past, villains killing people only happened now and again, but in the Iron Age, they're all more lethal and see widespread death and destruction as inevitable collateral damage.

ESPIONAGE AGENCIES OF THE IRON AGE WORLD

America's CIA and the Russian KGB, along with the UK's MI-6, are widely known intelligence agencies responsible for the foreign intelligence (and espionage) activities of their nations. Though you may choose to create new and unique espionage agencies for your Iron Age campaign, following is a short list of foreign intelligence agencies from around the world during the Iron Age you might seed into your games:

Australia: Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS)

Brazil: *Serviço Nacional de Informações* (SNI), the National Intelligence Service (1960-1990) and *Secretaria de Assuntos Estratégicos* (SAE), the Strategic Affairs Secretariat (1990-1995)

China: *Guojia Anquan Bu* (Guoanbu), the Ministry of State Security

Egypt: *Al-Mukhabarat al-'Ammah*, the General Intelligence and Security Service

England: Special Intelligence Service (MI-6)

France: *Service de Documentation Extérieure et de Contre-Espionnage* (SDECE), the External Documentation and Counter-Espionage Office (1942-1982), and *La Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure* (DGSE), the General Directorate of External Security (1982-present)

Germany: *Bundesnachrichtendienst* (BND), the Federal Intelligence Service

Iran: *Sazman-e Ettelaat va Amniyate Keshvar* (SAVAK), the Organization for Intelligence and National Security (1957-1979) and *Sazman-e Ettela'at va Amniate Mellie Iran* (SAVAM), the Ministry of Intelligence and National Security (1984-present)

Iraq: *Jihaz Al-Mukhabarat Al-A'ma* or *Mukhabarat* (IRIS), the Iraqi Intelligence Service

Israel: *Ha-Mosad le-Mod'in u-le-Tafkidim Meyuhadim* (Mossad), the Institute for Intelligence and Special Operations

Japan: *Naikaku Joho Chosashitsu* (Nachio), the Cabinet Intelligence and Research Office

Korea: Agency for National Security Planning (ANSP)

Mexico: *Centro de Investigación y Seguridad Nacional* (CISEN), the National Security and Investigation Center

Saudi Arabia: *Al Mukhabarat Al A'amah*, the General Intelligence Directorate

South Africa: South African Secret Service (SASS)

Spain: *Centro Nacional de Inteligencia* (CNI), the National Intelligence Center

Turkey: *Millî İstihbarat Teşkilatı* (MIT), the National Intelligence Organization

USA: Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)

USSR: *Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti* (KGB), the Committee for State Security

BLACK OPS

Many superheroes had long ago declared war on crime; in the Iron Age, that war became more than just a metaphor. Heroes in the Iron Age are as likely to have received their combat training from the military as trained themselves, and an Iron Age *M&M* "campaign" might be just that: heroes as soldiers in a series of military operations against carefully-selected targets.

SUPER SOLDIERS

Some characters before the Iron Age had been trained by the military, but in an Iron Age game they may still be part of the military in a unit dedicated to facing "supernormal targets" or "extreme threats." The organization might be a clandestine one, seeking to protect civilians from the evil in the shadows, or it may be extremely public due to the massive property damage caused by their heavy weaponry.

The villains heroes face in the Iron Age may also be connected to the military. They may have received their training in the military, and decided to use their deadly skills to their own advantage. Some may still be in the military, part of a unit answering to a corrupt branch of their government. Alternately, the villains might be part of a rogue military unit, staying within the military to take advantage of its vehicles and arsenals, but secretly operating outside the chain of command.

Codenames will be a familiar part of operations to any character with a military background, given to missions, equipment, and even individual agents. Thus, names of characters, equipment, teams, and

vehicles in Iron Age military superheroics may stem from military traditions. Codenames may be used either on a rotating basis to maintain a level of operational security or a fixed basis to clarify their abilities: a character may be codenamed "Condor" on one mission and "Detonator" on the next if they are trying to hide their weakness to cold or their unit's allegiance from the enemy, or they may be codenamed "Fireball" to give their superiors a shorthand means for remembering the powers of Agent 5674.

Even those Iron Age characters not part of a military or paramilitary organization still borrow many of the trappings of the military, beginning with the jumpsuit style and the darker or camouflaged color of their costumes, now often called "uniforms." Bright utility belts were replaced with drab web-belts supporting holstered pistols and grenades rather than the sci-fi gadgetry of the Silver Age, along with ammo belts slung over their shoulders. Experienced characters that know that magic or a universal hiccup can temporarily or permanently cancel their powers might carry assault rifles or a katana so as not to be caught unarmed in the heat of battle. With the appearance of heavy firepower in the hands of heroes and villains alike, both are also more likely to wear Kevlar vests worn by police or some of the lighter, composite body armor developed for the military.

HEROES FOR HIRE

The Iron Age was a time of moral ambiguity, when some heroes followed the winds of change rather than a moral compass, and for heroes with military training, that might mean becoming mercenaries and putting their services on the auction block for the highest bidder. Of course, there are plenty of normal soldiers to serve as foot

soldiers and faceless minions; when in service to others, the super-powered heroes in an Iron Age campaign will likely serve as personal protectors for important officials or as the equivalent of a Special Forces strike team.

Governments are not the only ones who might hire a group of super-powered mercenaries. By the 1980s, there were many private security firms around the world that had grown beyond groups of watchmen and bodyguards to maintain their own private armies. Large corporations also maintained highly trained security forces to keep watch over their sizeable headquarters complexes or to act as the local authority in foreign facilities. Finally, the ultra-rich often hired trained and experienced military professionals to act as their own personal security. Mercenary heroes who don't want permanent employment might jump from job to job with any of them...or they might hire themselves out as professional opposition, to test the systems and precautions of security forces.

It is possible for the characters to be mercenaries more interested in personal gain than any nation or cause, yet it's likely they will find their moral codes tested as their actions are continually dictated by the orders of their employers. The Iron Age may have been a time of ambiguity but, at least for heroes, it was never completely amoral. A career as a mercenary will take heroes around the world, from hotspot to hotspot, never far from the next flare-up of action. Mercenary heroes will need to consider their employers carefully, lest they find their paychecks turned to blood money.

COVERT AGENTS

Not all super-powered military operatives operated in the open during the Iron Age. Espionage played a bigger part than open military conflict in the battle between the superpowers of the Cold War, and Iron Age intelligence agencies naturally raced to recruit, train, and field super-powered agents.

Cadres of psychics, pre- and post-cognitives, and remote viewers might stand alongside aerial and satellite photography as means for Iron Age intelligence agencies to collect information from afar, but every method of gathering intelligence from a distance can be countered. Heroes in an Iron Age campaign might be asked to use their powers or military training in secret service to their nation, assembled into a secret task force of agents for infiltrating enemy territory and gathering protected information. While some missions might require simply a successful theft of the target, whether it be secret files, advanced technology, or even a critical person, many more will require the agents accomplish their mission without leaving a trace of their passing—a difficult task for heroes who might be more apt to blow something up than wipe it down for fingerprints.

Again, nations aren't the only ones who might employ heroes as espionage agents. Freelance heroes might find their services retained by large corporations hoping to engage in industrial espionage by acquiring crucial information from their rivals. Failing that, corporations might be willing to take advantage of the more destructive habits of Iron Age heroes by hiring them to engage in industrial sabotage, though more moral heroes may take some convincing before they undertake a purely destructive mission.

However, those who engage in espionage tend to be good at concealing their motives and can often disguise the true reasons for a

mission, even from the agents sent to undertake it. Espionage is a game played in the shadows, and through blackmail, misdirection, or loyalty, heroes can find themselves maneuvered by a spymaster into undertaking a job where they have no idea what's waiting on the far side.

Heroes who go too deep into the shadows can find themselves caught up in the web of conspiracies that underlies the world of espionage. In the shadow-world where evading foreign laws is second nature, it's not unusual for some spymasters and intelligence agents to decide it's easier to evade or ignore the inconvenient aspects of their native laws as well. In an Iron Age black ops campaign where heroes find they've been drawn in too deep, an entire second stage might involve them fighting their way out and bringing those leading the way into darkness to justice. Remember, in the world of Iron Age comic books, any of your favorite real-world conspiracy theories might be entirely true!

GUNS, GUNS, GUNS!

The Iron Age saw more firearms than ever before in the hands of private citizens—not just hunting rifles, but a growing collection of everything from a wide variety of pistols to fully automatic weapons. Many felt threatened by the rise of urban gangs with ever-higher firepower, and felt the need to arm themselves appropriately to protect themselves against the criminals. Iron Age heroes were no different. In the Iron Age, most heroes set aside flashy blasters, energy swords, and fantastic Silver Age gadgets in favor of a more realistic (and often much more lethal) arsenal. Even characters with inherent powers often carried a pistol or grenade to back up or supplement their abilities.

ARMING UP

While guns are commonplace in the Iron Age, that doesn't mean all weapons are easy to acquire. In the United States, sales of automatic weapons, silencers, and short-barreled shotguns have been severely restricted since the 1930s. Following several political assassinations in the 1960s, the 1968 Gun Control Act required all guns to carry serial numbers to track their owners, prohibited gun ownership by felons, and required any company who manufactured or sold firearms across state lines to have a federal license. The attempted assassination of President Ronald Reagan in 1981 initiated a push for even tighter gun control that persisted throughout the Iron Age and culminated in 1994 when the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act, which required anyone purchasing a handgun to wait five days while the seller performed a background check on the buyer, became law.

Heroes of the Iron Age will find they can purchase a wide array of weaponry, but doing so legitimately will take significant time and money, and leave a wide paper trail. Street-level heroes might lack the money for all the weaponry they desire, and heroes who wear a mask to protect their identity will be averse to filling out forms for a background check. Thus, many Iron Age campaigns will feature some of the many alternate ways of acquiring an arsenal.

Some heroes acquire their weaponry as legitimate purchases from a sporting goods store, a gun show, or another legal venue and either no longer care if they are identified or have taken steps

(such as filing the serial numbers off the weapon) to break the links between the gun and their identity. Alternately, even if an Iron Age hero doesn't have a military background, they may have a connection to someone in the military with access to weaponry. Of course, the hero may be asked to perform a service to the military on either a one-time or ongoing basis (see **Black Ops** earlier in this section) in exchange for their weaponry.

Then there's the third option: the black market. From back-alley grifters selling Saturday night specials out of a suitcase to world-class arms dealers operating illegal underground showrooms secretly selling tanks and artillery pieces, nearly anything is available to anyone for the right price, if you know where to look. Some of those same weapons a hero might have been given in service to the military could be among those that slip on the black market, making advanced military technology available to heroes and villains alike who were decidedly not in the military. Those weapons may be particularly dangerous to carry, though, given that the military is more zealous about tracking down missing rocket launchers than a sporting goods store might be if a shotgun slips off the books.

A REAL ARSENAL

The arms trade in the Iron Age is rarely in "phase pistols," "shock rifles," "atomic rockets," or any other fantasy technology. Arms dealers of the Iron Age usually deal with detailed catalogs of weapons, listing their features, from the "Ruger Speed Six, a double-action magnum revolver with a one-piece frame for superior strength and an easily removed trigger group for field stripping" to the "Mossberg Model 500 Persuader, with the 20-inch barrel and the same heavy barrel and military trigger group as the 590A1 military-restricted version." At the very least, characters of the Iron Age are much more likely to say "Colt M4 Carbine" rather than "assault rifle." (Later in this chapter, you'll find a "Specific Weapons by Type" sidebar that will let Gamemasters and players sprinkle the names of specific Iron Age weapons into their games and conversations.)

Just as important as the weapons heroes of the Iron Age will encounter and carry is how those weapons are used. Even soldiers of the Silver Age might have loaded up their pistols with rubber "mercy bullets" or drugged "sleep shot" and tried to knock out the enemy with a single well-placed shot. In the Iron Age, heroes load their magazines—more likely into assault rifles than mere pistols—with live ammunition and go into the enemy stronghold with their guns blazing on full automatic. Since the enemy is likely wearing body armor of some sort, it's also likely the guns are loaded with Teflon-coated, brass-core, armor-piercing ammunition so that when a target goes down, they stay down.

BLADES OF FURY

Guns are far from the only part of the Iron Age hero's arsenal. Whether in hand, on a belt, or jammed in a boot, knives are also carried by the well-armed Iron Age hero. While a very few might still carry the traditional twelve-tool-in-one pocketknife, many wield the modern version of the Bowie knife, a massive hooked and serrated stainless steel commando knife. Some might carry a perfectly balanced throwing knife, or maybe even a brace of them.



While some in the Iron Age developed their penchant for weaponry as part of their military training, others learned about weapons during their martial arts training in the Far East or at their neighborhood dojo. These martial artists might still carry a pistol, but it will be alongside a *katana*, a *wakizashi*, *nunchaku*, or any of a variety of martial arts weapons. Swords may not be commonly seen on the streets, but martial arts heroes carry them out of honor, or perhaps because they're so effective at cutting people into bloody ribbons. Of course, even if they do carry a gun, many martial artists carry a pocket full of shuriken to take out targets at range without the flash and bang of gunfire.

UPGRADES

Setting aside Silver Age-flavored weaponry doesn't mean the heroes of the Iron Age don't like their weapons to be high-tech. To the detail-obsessed hero of the Iron Age, a basic weapon, no matter the quality of its construction, has accessories and options to peruse and choose in order to construct the perfect tool for the mission: a simple pistol might get outfitted with an extended magazine, a telescopic sight, a silencer, and a recoil buffer. A commando knife might get a compass in the pommel and a miniature survival kit packed into its hollow handle.

As Iron Age readers sought to explain their psyches of their heroes, they also demanded the same explanations of their arsenals. When super-tech weapons do appear in the Iron Age, they are rarely explained away with technobabble. Rather, they ride just outside the

edges of already existing technology. Instead of a “laser sword,” a katana might have an edge “nano-carved from a slice of synthetic diamond,” and a “tripod-mounted mag-rail” replaces a “gamma cannon” as an emplaced heavy weapon.

LEATHER & LATEX

A striking, iconic appearance is a staple of the superhero genre. That’s true in the Iron Age as well, but the styles have changed significantly. Outfits aren’t merely costumes; instead, they’re a part of the character’s crime-fighting kit, featuring holsters, body armor, numerous pockets, and other accessories that help the character in some way.

PRACTICAL OUTFITS

Gone are the days of bright, attention-grabbing costumes with little to no utility. These are dark, concealing outfits that help characters to blend in and to get their job done. Characters go into the field equipped with what they need instead of relying only on their powers to get by. If a character sneaks around in costume, he typically wears dark clothing and combat boots, carries nightvision goggles, a flashlight, camera, and any other tools he needs on a regular basis in his bandolier of pouches. The costumes of the past have become the paramilitary uniforms of today, and stress function over form instead of the other way around.

Body armor and other protective devices, even sunglasses, are *de rigueur* for heroes. Whereas in the past heroes would go out and fight crime protected by nothing more than a layer of spandex, now heroes are smart enough to protect themselves appropriately. After all, it’s a deadly world out there; it’d be foolish to enter it unprepared.

Oddly, the costumes villains wear haven’t changed very much, with many wearing exactly what they did in earlier eras. Some villains wear outfits similar to those of the heroes, tricked out with armor, shoulder pads, and pouches. Still others wear costumes that reflect their twisted psyches, made of living material that responds to their every twisted thought.

FASHIONABLE HEROES

On the other hand, practical matters aside, characters want to look good. No self-respecting hero or villain hits the street in normal clothes to do his work. Costumes represent who you are and what you’re about; they’re intimidating, frightening, or whatever else the character wants it to be.

Tight-fitting leather or form-fitting vinyl with belts, buckles, and snaps are typical of those heroes and villains (especially the women) who are interested in a more “mature” appearance. Sexuality and the appeal of the perfect human form are played up, no matter how outrageous the costume might be. Add to that the introduction of tattoos and piercings as fashion accessories for heroes and villains, and characters look unlike any that came before—but do they look cool!

SHEDDING THE PAST

Not only have heroes done away with the attitudes and mores of the previous generation, they’ve also done away with the “sillier”

aspects of the super-heroic costume. Capes have been replaced by leather jackets or long coats; they serve the same functions, but also have pockets, and can conceal the costume underneath with very little effort. Domino masks, which could hardly have protected anyone’s identity, have been replaced by helmets, gas masks, faceplates, or the aforementioned highly fashionable sunglasses.

NINJA!

Ninja, and all the mysticism and trappings that go along with them, are incredibly popular and effective characters, as heroes, villains, or minions. With the rise in popularity of Asian culture, the onset of the ninja was inevitable. No other character type is as prolific or adaptable. In the Iron Age, it seems like every team includes a ninja.

MARTIAL ARTS

Martial arts of all types allow the average person to become a living weapon. In the hands of a ninja, the fighting arts are even more impressive, allowing her to go toe-to-toe with super-powered adversaries and work as an assassin, thief, or reconnaissance specialist.

Couple her martial skills with the mystical abilities often attributed to ninjas and there is very little of which the well-trained ninja is incapable. It makes no difference if the character is a ninja trained here on Earth or is a member of a cabal of warriors from a distant planet or dimension; her fighting skills are unparalleled.

ROGUE NINJA

A lot of ninja make it through their training and then, for whatever reason, rebel against the clan that trained them, often turning against their former masters and their clan’s agenda. Usually these ninja strike out on their own and become heroes, while the ninja that remain loyal work together to hunt down their errant brother or sister. In some cases, the rogue ninja is part of some obscure prophecy, or is in some way important to the clan. No matter what, the rogue ninja is forever tied to the clan. She may be able to defeat any of the minions they send after her, but she’ll only end the clan’s involvement in her life if she topples it, removes the leaders, or takes it over. Luckily, rogue ninja are typically the most powerful ninja the clan has ever seen. That’s even truer after they live on the run, constantly fighting for their lives and honing their skills. The clan may be relentless, but the rogue ninja is up to the task of facing every member.

WESTERNER AS NINJA

A staple of the genre, these are characters who hail originally from the West, but travel to the Far East in order to train in the martial arts and to master chaotic, out-of-control emotions. These characters return home tempered by their experiences to carry out their mission.

The reason this archetype exists is because the comics where these characters appear are produced for American or European customers. However, the paradoxes that surround such characters are interesting. She’s from the West, but has mastered the secrets of the East, usually better than the natives have. Although she’s spent so much time training in the East, she’s never felt welcome there, and

frequently encountered prejudice from the other ninja-in-training, especially from the student or master that becomes her arch-nemesis. In addition, due to the amount of time she's spent out of Western culture, she has little in common with other Westerners. All of this means the Westerner ninja feels isolated, no matter where she is.

NINJA AS MINIONS AND TEAMMATES

The ninja is an incredibly versatile character and is able to play any part—hero, villain, or minion—and fill the role of combatant, stealth specialist, or assassin. Due to their adaptability, a ninja is a great addition to any team. Even without powers, a well-trained ninja is capable of helping a team in almost any capacity. With powers, the ninja is an even bigger threat.

Ninja villains usually fall into two camps; the minion or the master. Minions are just like minions described in *M&M*; they're cannon fodder thrown at the heroes in waves. (Oddly, despite how powerful solo ninja are, groups of ninja seem to grow weaker in greater numbers.) On the other end of the spectrum are the master ninja, who are usually equal to player-character ninja. In rare circumstances, small teams of master ninja might work together to achieve some goal.

LONE WOLVES

In the earliest days of comics, heroes fought on their own yet were quick to band together, and through the Golden and Silver Ages most heroes were the members of one or more teams. However, in the Iron Age, some teams shattered or disbanded, while others barely managed to stay together. In troubled times, the new heroes of the Iron Age were often unable to see the benefits of joining a team and unwilling to put up with the obligations of being a member, choosing instead to strike off on their own.

THE NEW SELF-MADE HERO

In the Golden and Silver Ages, self-made heroes were ordinary people who uplifted themselves into something more than human, from great athletes and master sorcerers to brilliant scientists and wealthy industrialists. But in the Iron Age, a self-made hero is often someone whose once-normal life has been broken down or shattered, and becomes a hero to claw their way out of the hole.

The Iron Age hero may have been kicked out of a group, fired from their job, or exiled from their country. They may have lost a family member, their entire family, or even been killed themselves. Whether through mutation or bionic augmentation, they may no longer even feel human. Regardless, the Iron Age hero often believes they are no longer the normal person they once were, and sometimes wonders if they ever can be again.

Isolated by the change they've undergone and feeling ostracized from the world, the Iron Age hero still fights. Some fight for the traditional heroic reason of making the world a better place, or making certain no other innocent suffers as they have. But for others the fight is much more personal. They've been deeply wounded, and they feel the best way to make the world better is to destroy those responsible before they can harm the hero, or anyone else, ever again. Sometimes this vow of vengeance has a specific target: a difficult-to-reach crime lord or a prominent, well-protected politician.



But more often, the vow is against the entire class of villains who have wronged the hero, whether it be street gangs, corrupt politicians, drug smugglers, mad scientists, or an entire nation.

The wounds that drive Iron Age heroes are deeply personal, and once they've undertaken their personal vows of vengeance, it will be hard to sway them from their chosen course. It may also be hard to join them; the hero may feel that nobody else completely understands the quest, or it may be that the vengeance is sweeter if the hero deals it out independently.

THE "I" IN TEAM

Iron Age heroes may tend to be loners by nature, but there are still reasons for them to be part of a team. Some heroes may be part of a military unit, or a group modeled on one, and remain bound together by duty or obligation. Others might be forced to be part of a team, whether through blackmail or something more direct, like an explosive implanted in their bodies by their would-be commander. A few might treat the team as a surrogate family they can escape to when the burden of their lone quest gets too heavy, a reminder of a simpler and more innocent time when societies of gentleman adventurers banded together to fight evil as an ideology rather than something seen walking the streets.

If nothing else, even the most antisocial of heroes might band together with teammates out of pragmatism when a mission is unarguably too much for a single person. When breaking down the front door, it helps to have someone watching the back door. Also, no matter how well trained or how well armed a lone hero might be, there are also times when they may not have the powers needed to accomplish a mission, and a teammate might turn an impossible task into something merely treacherous and *potentially* deadly.

REALISTIC POWERS

In the Iron Age, every aspect of the superhero genre was re-examined and re-imagined with an eye towards increasing verisimilitude. While no one wanted to get rid of super-powers entirely, many characters were re-thought and their powers re-explained to give them consistency and make them seem more realistic.

POWERS EXPLAINED

The desire to quantify superpowers or to compare them to other real-world effects was popular in the Iron Age. In the past, powers were entirely abstract flights of fancy; in the Iron Age, they're treated as if they existed in the real world. The amount of damage a plasma blast can do is compared to pounds of dynamite. Lasers cut through flesh, bone, metal, and masonry, just like a super-powered version of a real-world laser ought to. A person capable of hefting tons could use that strength to literally rip someone apart, and so on.

With this new approach to powers, super-powered individuals became walking weapons that had to be monitored or controlled at all times. To the authorities, superpowers were the same as any other deadly weapon and had to be protected against in the same way: regulation. Some comics in the genre addressed this topic by outlawing all superpowers; others mandated registration or proper training, and still others pressed the super-powered into service.

In many cases, re-explained powers became less powerful. Characters that possessed them had to get creative, supplement their weakened abilities with other weapons, gadgets, and skills, or take on a secondary role, such as secret agent, weapons maker, or information broker. In many cases, the powers were still incredibly potent, but significantly less powerful than before, so the character was challenged by foes that didn't previously pose a serious threat.

LOWER-POWERED HEROES

Heroes in the Iron Age often don't have powers, or have only low-level ones. Typically, these characters arm and armor themselves appropriately to fight their battles, using their powers as an unexpected ace in the hole to help them out of any jams they can't escape any other way. More than others, these low-powered characters are likely to use lethal force, usually in the form of firearms and other conventional weapons, while relying on their powers only when they need to.

CONSEQUENCES OF POWERS

The increase in emphasis on realism in comics means the effects of powers are more tangible and dangerous; attacks that miss their mark destroy streets, knock down walls, or kill bystanders instead of just being an inconvenient miss in combat. A battle between superbeings (or worse, *teams* of superbeings) is an incredibly dangerous place for innocents. Any bystanders injured or killed in a fight, which happens often with the energies being thrown around, is fuel for the authorities to turn public opinion against super-types and crack down on all superbeings, good or bad.

The consequences of using powers are a big potential drawback. Heroes respond to this threat by concealing their activities or being so powerful they're able to deal with the fallout. Villains, on the other hand, revel in the danger they pose to the rest of the world and use their powers whenever and wherever they can cause the most damage.

STRANGER AMONG MEN

One of the more interesting aspects of the Iron Age was that it dealt with the question of what it might mean to be a god among men. In this case, a "god" is anything from a mutant to a demon to an alien to an actually divine figure. These characters must deal with finding or defining their place in a world when they have powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal men. After all, when no one can stop them from doing anything they want, the only thing that holds them back is their morality and grasp on reality. These sorts of characters run into trouble when they lose touch with their humanity and start imposing their desires upon the world without regard for the other people in it. Villains and heroes both are guilty of this sort of activity, although heroes are usually pulled back from the edge by loved ones, while villains are defeated by their own desire to fail or the intervention of heroes.

A NEW GENERATION

The Iron Age arrived in an ongoing publishing revolution where each year, each month, and each comic had something new. Universes and characters were torn apart and rebuilt from the parts, or created

anew from blank slates. Some were tied to comics that had come before, while others were a deliberate rejection of the past.

NEW UNIVERSE, NEW HEROES

The world of an Iron Age campaign may be a darker place because, at its beginning, the world has no heroes—or at least none with superhuman powers suited to facing the rising challenges of the Iron Age. The heroes may be the first of their kind, breaking new ground as they break the faces of criminals. With no superheroic past, these Iron Age heroes won't be called out for not wearing a cape!

Many new universes of the Iron Age had a common, shared explanation for why heroes came into being at the same time, and an Iron Age campaign might have the same sort of common background for its characters and their abilities: a blast of energy from the stars, a hiccup in the timeline, or the release of a mutagenic compound. Any one of them could create an entire array of new heroes. A group of heroes could also be the result of a government, scientific, or corporate program deliberately working to grant or induce powers in test subjects. Finally, a group of heroes may be bound together by common police or military training that both shaped their abilities and bound them together, though they may not remain tied to those who trained them once they set out to be heroes.

OLD UNIVERSE, NEW HEROES

Alternately, the world of an Iron Age campaign may have a long and storied past of heroes and villains but, as in other well-established comic universes, events have occurred to bring on an Iron Age. This

could be simple, or as drastic as a disaster that fundamentally alters the nature and history of the universe. New heroes of the time will follow the shape of this new world, appearing in darker forms than the past, with darker attitudes.

Even without the universal reboot of a comic-book event, the mere accumulation of historical trends like those described in the **History of the Iron Age World** section earlier in this chapter might cause the world of an Iron Age campaign to take a turn for the dark and gritty. Heroes in this world might rebel against the past, seeing its bright and innocent heroes as silly, naïve, and unprepared to face the “real world” of the Iron Age. Some of these heroes will be new ones who create their own rules and define their own heroic roles, but some may have been handed the legacy of a hero of the past, only to reject it wholesale or reform it into something entirely different that they feel is more appropriate to modern times.

OLD UNIVERSE, OLD HEROES

Finally, there are those heroes who were around before the Iron Age who watched the shadows lengthen around them until the world fell into darkness. Some might stand as beacons in the night, shining examples of how they feel the world should be. Others might abandon the ways of the past and embrace the Iron Age. A very few will look within themselves, stop to think about why they truly do what they do, and seek out the reasons they've undertaken their heroic quests. They'll find that the seeds of the Iron Age have been within them all along, waiting to blossom.

GENRE RULES

The Iron Age has an atmosphere and style you'll want to capture. Setting scenes, running adventures, and roleplaying characters appropriately are all ways to go about this, but using the right rules helps to reinforce those ideas within the structure of the game system. The *Mutants & Masterminds* rules are great for simulating the action of comic books, but they focus mainly on Silver Age and Modern Age styles of games. For *Iron Age* games, you'll want to inject more realism to give powers more *oomph* and to make combats feel threatening to the heroes and their opponents.

This section details some areas of the game to tweak, along with rules to help make your game feel more Iron Age. Future chapters hold information on developing characters and creating campaigns that reinforce a darker mood, but this section concentrates on how you can use the rules to change the style of your game.

Throughout the following pages you'll encounter a number of rules suggestions and options; don't get overwhelmed by the choices being offered. If some of the rules look difficult to incorporate, then skip them. There are enough ideas here that you'll find something that both appeals to you and works with how you like to run or play your games. The goal isn't to add layers and layers of complex rules; it's to give you the tools to make your game feel more like the Iron Age genre.

LETHALITY

Iron Age games are deadly. In the real world, a punch from a powerhouse capable of picking up a tank or ripping a bank vault door off its hinges would leave a huge hole in the poor soul on the receiving end. You can make the players feel as though they have that sort of power through a few changes to the way you run your game.

Before delving into the rules, though, be sure to discuss how much death you and the players want in the game. Some players will look forward to laying into the bad guys with no holds barred, while others will want to maintain the heroic ideals that keep them from killing. It's best to know everyone's expectations from the start. That way, you can work out any problems and tailor the level of lethality appropriately.

Here are a number of topics to consider in order to imitate the Iron Age properly. Some suggest cosmetic changes to your games, while others alter the rules that handle combat and damage. Choose whichever options work best for you, your players, and your campaign.

THE POWER OF NARRATION

One of the most powerful tools you have for cranking up the lethality of your *Mutants & Masterminds* games is your use of narration. In the comics, the writer and artist use strong words and graphic

images to make the story more explosive and dramatic. You can do the same thing, supplementing the roll of the die with vivid, realistic descriptions. If a hero dodges an energy blast, describe how close it comes, what it feels like, and the damage it causes to the surroundings. When a villain takes a blow from a hero's attack, tell the players how his head snaps back and blood flies from his mouth, splattering against the wall. Turning up the blood and gore is definitely called for in an *Iron Age* campaign. Likewise, when describing the landscape of the fight, move away from the clean style of most comics and stress the damage, destruction, and bloody aftereffects of high-powered combat. When your descriptions engage the players' senses, they'll feel connected to the world and to the action taking place. Even if you don't change any of the rules, the "feel" of the game can be conveyed through your words.

Exactly how much narration you need for your campaign is for you to judge. You know your players, so play to your audience. Above all, you don't want to bore your players. Engage them and give them enough description to get excited, but not so much that their eyes glaze over when you start setting the scene.

ACTION SCENES AND REACTION SCENES

Action keeps the game exciting and moving forward, but it's important to vary the pace by alternating scenes of wild excitement with more sedate ones for contrast. By varying the pace, you and your players get to enjoy moments of interaction interspersed with combat, rather than non-stop violence or endless in-character discussions. Keep the player characters moving from one scene to the

next, whether they're chasing after a bad guy, searching for a kidnapped victim, or discussing the meaning of a clue from a recent crime scene.

HEROES

Heroes in the Iron Age are able to dish out incredible amounts of damage while taking at least as much in return. It's common to see a hero take blow after blow in a fight and come out scraped, battered, and bloody. In some cases, the damage looks so extreme that there's no way that the hero could survive, but somehow he takes a few deep breaths, wipes his brow, and soldiers on to the next encounter. Conversely, the bad guys, especially thugs, rarely walk away from the fight unscathed, if they walk away at all.

Some GMs may want to make most, or all, damage directed against heroes lethal damage, but it's not recommended. Heroes in the Iron Age didn't die in droves; bad guys, minions, and supporting cast did, but not the heroes. (Unless, of course, you desire a game in which the heroes are just as likely to die as anyone. They have Hero Points to save them, if nothing else.)

As a result, there aren't any alterations to the system that should be applied solely to the heroes. The standard *Mutants & Masterminds* rules are well suited to reflect the place of the player characters in the game: heroes should be able to take a lot of damage, but still walk away without suffering permanent harm. However, as outlined in **The Power of Narration** above, the GM should describe the damage the characters take in such a way as to make it seem worse than it actually is. Initially, players may balk because it makes their heroes look weak, but after a couple of fights where they come out looking like they've been through hell, only to shrug it off, they'll enjoy how tough all that damage makes them look.

VILLAINS

Like the heroes, the villains in the Iron Age were capable of dealing a lot of damage; unlike heroes, the villains in the Iron Age were always in danger of being killed. A mistake or moment of weakness on their part could mean the end of the line, so they fought dirty. In addition to any other rules you change for your campaign, you may want to have villains suffer lethal damage from most, or all, attacks—at least within reason. For more details about this rules change, see the **Powers and Weapons, Gadgets, and Devices** sections that follow.

When playing a *Mutants & Masterminds* game, if the players kill a villain, it's possible he or she might return in the future. The initial sense of accomplishment at ending the career of the villain (after all that hard work!) is replaced with shock, and probably a little anger. This trick should be used sparingly. Miraculous resurrections are common in other ages, but not very likely in the Iron Age. In order to maintain the flavor of the genre in the campaign, the threat of permanent death needs to seem real.

MINIONS

Minions are weaker than heroes and villains (see **Minions**, *Mutants & Masterminds*, page 163). They lack a number of benefits other characters have, and gain drawbacks that make them useful as distractions



or a delaying tactic, but not so good as toe-to-toe opponents. The role of minions remains the same in *Iron Age* as it does in *Mutants & Masterminds*: They take the brunt of the heroes' attacks so villains can succeed with their nefarious plans or make an escape.

In *Iron Age* games, minions do something they don't often do in other superhero games: they die. This may not seem like a major point, but it is. Heroes and the powers they possess are deadly. The villains may not fall over dead when they're attacked a couple of times, but minions do. Heroes in most ages don't kill—that's left to the villains and the vigilantes—but in *Iron Age* games, the player characters can be as lethal as the bad guys. When minions die, this idea is reinforced in the minds of the players and the GM. In order to reflect this in the game, make the following changes to the rules for minions.

POWER LEVEL

The power level of minions has a wider range in *Iron Age* games. Players are used to facing off against hordes of minions of a lower power level than they are, but that doesn't have to be the case. Some unimportant villains might secretly use the minion rules. The players don't need to know the group running the protection racket in their neighborhood is made up mostly of minions with one or two actual villains mixed in. All they know is, when the fight is over, a couple of the bad guys are down for the count or have managed to get away while the rest lie dead in the street.

Also, minions don't have to be pushovers. Deadly combat and big guns were commonplace, so minions often carry weapons of much higher power than in other *M&M* games. When minions come heavily armed, they're a significant threat to the heroes. They can deal a lot of damage, but they lack the defenses necessary to last very long in a fight. That balance makes them excellent opponents for *Iron Age* heroes.

This "minions as villains" approach allows the GM to create adversaries that can challenge the player characters, while letting the players feel like their characters are dangerous heroes in an *Iron Age* campaign. If you choose to make some minion-villains, don't let the players know. The heroes should always feel like they're fighting for their lives, even if that's not really the case. If the players learn that some or all of the bad guys they're fighting are minions, the intensity will drain out of the fight. In order to keep that information secret, you'll need to decide how damage is applied and whether or not the last blow a hero deals knocks the minion-villain unconscious or kills him.

UNCONSCIOUS OR DYING?

Under the standard rules, a minion that fails a Toughness save against nonlethal damage is knocked out. In the *Iron Age*, combat is a bit more dangerous.

- If a minion fails a Toughness saving throw against either lethal or nonlethal damage, that minion is dying. Attackers may choose a lesser effect, if desired.

This option ramps up the lethality of the game for nonessential characters. Minions serve mainly as speed bumps, so it hardly matters whether they live or die. If the players need some minions to survive the battle, then they can choose to knock them unconscious instead of killing them.

If some of the villains in your campaign were created as minions, you should decide whether or not they're knocked unconscious or dying based on whatever criteria you choose. Besides, one of the minion-villains may have grown on you during the course of the campaign, so you may want him to survive and become an actual villain, with all the benefits thereof.

REALISM AND THE RULES

Iron Age comics attempted to bring a higher level of realism to comics in terms of character abilities, powers, and motivations. To emulate the comics more closely, and give the players the experience they expect, you may wish to aim for more realism in your *Iron Age* games as well.

This section looks at some optional rules you can use to customize *Mutants & Masterminds* for an *Iron Age* style game. It includes references to useful rules options found in the *Mastermind's Manual* sourcebook as well.

In addition to these genre-enforcing rules options, players will find more information on how to create characters that fit into the *Iron Age* in **Chapter 3**, and the GM will find more tips for customizing the campaign from the ground up in **Chapter 4**.

ABILITIES

Your character's abilities define what he's capable of, both mentally and physically. In typical *M&M* games characters can push themselves far beyond their listed statistics with few or no aftereffects. In

an *Iron Age* game, the ability strain rules from *Mastermind's Manual* offer players more options while making their circumstances feel more realistic.

ABILITY STRAIN

Characters can choose to suffer a temporary reduction in an ability score in order to gain a brief, one-time bonus to an ability score check. This represents pushing the ability beyond its normal limits, resulting in some strain from which the character must recover. Ability strain can be used in conjunction with the effect of spending hero points in play, allowing characters to go that extra distance when the odds are against them.

When attempting an ability check, you can accept a temporary -1 penalty to your ability score to receive a +1 bonus on your check. The penalty goes into effect the round after the results of the check, whether successful or not. You can accept a maximum penalty of -5, granting you a bonus of up to +5, but you cannot suffer a penalty that would render the character debilitated, with an ability score of 0 or less.

Once you've strained an ability score to its limit (having taken a full +5 bonus and resultant -5 penalty over one or more checks), you can't do so again until it is fully recovered. The time required for recovery depends on the ability: strained Strength and Dexterity recover in an hour, strained Constitution recovers in six hours, and strained mental ability scores (Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma) recover in four hours.

ABILITY STRAIN AND EXTRA EFFORT

Additionally, at the Gamemaster's option, ability strain can serve as a substitute for the fatigue caused by extra effort (see the **Characteristics** chapter of *M&M*). One rank of fatigue is equal to the maximum penalty of -5. This may be applied across the board, or for just the physical abilities. Allowing ability strain for extra effort in conjunction with fatigue gives players the opportunity to use extra effort more often without their heroes passing out from the fatigue. It can also be combined with other options for extra effort, like extraordinary effort (see **Chapter 6** of *Mastermind's Manual* for more information).

EXTRA EFFORT REQUIRES ABILITY STRAIN

With this option, characters are able to use extra effort normally, but instead of being fatigued, they *must* strain an appropriate ability. For example, a character who uses extra effort to increase her carrying capacity would strain her Strength. If no ability seems appropriate (as in the case of using extra effort to increase a power or gain a power stunt), only then is fatigue appropriate. Exactly which ability is strained, or if fatigue is applied, is up to the GM.

To further limit extra effort, the GM might require both ability strain *and* a level of fatigue in order to use it. Characters are able to spend a hero point to negate the fatigued condition, but they still suffer the effects of the ability strain.

Coupling ability strain for extra effort with limiting the effect of hero points (see later in this section) makes extra effort a bigger challenge. This option makes extra effort more of a rare, last-ditch option, which may appeal to some GMs.

SKILLS

Skills define a character's knowledge about a subject and its practical applications. Since Iron Age-style characters likely don't have access to plot-stopping superpowers like Insubstantial or Telepathy to discover important clues, they have to rely on their skills to ferret them out.

The *Mastermind's Manual* offers options for broad skills or narrow skills. Neither is particularly recommended for an *Iron Age* game. Broad skills don't offer enough granularity to reflect the level of realism desired in such a game, and narrow skills are typically too specialized and require players to invest many points into skills, which may mean they don't have enough points to invest into other areas of their character. However, if you're looking to use one of them, consider the narrow option for highly realistic games that reward a big investment in skills.

Skill options from the *Mastermind's Manual* suitable for an Iron Age style game include skill challenges; expanded uses for skills

like Computers, Sense Motive, and Sleight of Hand; new skills like Demolitions, Forgery, Power Use, and Research; extended skill checks; and the masterful tactics option for Master Plan. One option, skill synergy, is so appropriate for Iron Age games that it has been reproduced here for easy reference.

SKILL SYNERGY

Characters may have two skills that work particularly well together. In general, having 5 or more ranks in one skill gives the character a +2 bonus for favorable conditions on skill checks with its synergistic skills. This is a situational bonus and therefore does not count toward power level limits. Multiple bonuses applied to the same skill do stack. If a skill cannot be used untrained, then the character must have at least 1 rank in the skill to benefit from any synergy bonuses to it. The GM should feel free to assign other synergy bonuses to skills as appropriate for the game.

SKILL SYNERGIES

5 OR MORE RANKS IN...	GIVES A +2 BONUS ON...
Bluff	Diplomacy checks
Bluff	Disguise checks to act in character
Bluff	Intimidate checks
Bluff	Sleight of Hand checks
Disguise	Intimidate checks with an appropriate disguise
Disguise	Stealth checks with an appropriate disguise
Handle Animal	Ride checks
Knowledge (streetwise)	Gather Information checks
Search	Survival checks to follow tracks
Sense Motive	Diplomacy checks
Survival	Knowledge (earth and life sciences)

FEATS

In addition to the new feats presented in **Chapter 3**, there are a number of feats from the *Mastermind's Manual* that fit particularly well into an Iron Age game: Challenge (with a number of examples in **Chapter 3**), Combat Concealment, Dedication, Finishing Blow, Improvised Weapon Proficiency, Low-Profile, Martial Strike, and Tough.

The Powers as Feats option from the *Mastermind's Manual* also suits the low-powered heroes of the Iron Age who may have extraordinary training or talents in the form of feats. The Opportunity and Proficiency feats suit Iron Age games using the optional rules for attacks of opportunity and proficiency, while combat styles are important enough to the Iron Age genre that they're reproduced and discussed in detail in **Chapter 3**.

POWERS

Offensive and defensive powers undergo some adjustments in Iron Age games to reflect the greater lethality of the genre. Power options from the *Mastermind's Manual* particularly apt for an Iron Age game include: energy points, slow progressions (to limit the overall reach of

powers), flight maneuverability, and Impervious and Penetrating progression (if you want competition between “hardened” defenses and “armor piercing” attacks). Power surges may suit some Iron Age games, but only those where powers are dangerous and difficult to control.

OFFENSIVE POWERS

Altering the effects of attack powers and the damage they inflict is the quickest way to make the game deadlier. In standard *M&M* games, powers inflict nonlethal damage unless the player specifically declares they’re dealing lethal damage... not so in the Iron Age! Here are a number of options, depending on just how dangerous the GM wants the campaign to be.

NO CHANGE

Use the rules as written in *Mutants & Masterminds*. All damage is considered nonlethal unless the player (or GM) declares they’re intending to do lethal damage.

This option allows the players to decide whether they’re trying to kill or knock out their opponents. It’s not as bloody as the Iron Age is typically portrayed, but it also doesn’t force the game to be run any differently. If you want to play a bloodier campaign, this isn’t the option for you. (Of course, the players can opt to always deal lethal damage.)

CHOOSE EFFECT

Damage is handled exactly as described in the *M&M* rules, except when any character is knocked unconscious, the attacker may choose whether the defender is unconscious or dying, just like the rule for minions.

This change is mostly invisible to the players, because it allows everyone to play the game as they always have. The only difference is that when a character fails that last important save, their attacker can decide if they were attacking to incapacitate or kill.

LETHAL POWERS

All damage inflicted by offensive superpowers is lethal by default.

This is the most extreme approach, and also the deadliest, especially if the characters *can’t* choose to do nonlethal damage. That’s appropriate for the setting, but may cause a lot of problems for the GM when all the bad guys (and maybe some of the heroes) end up dead at the end of the night. If your campaign uses this option you may also want to allow characters to declare they’re aiming to wound (nonlethal) instead of kill (lethal). Typically the heroes should stick with lethal damage, but if it’s important someone makes it through the fight alive, they still have that option.

LETHAL SUPERBEINGS

The damage dealt by superbeings, whether they have superpowers or are trained martial artists, is lethal. Normal people, supporting cast, and minions all deal nonlethal damage, unless they declare they’re dealing lethal damage.

Similar to **Lethal Superpowers**, this option sets superhumans apart from the rest of the world. Any character hit with an attack from a superbeing is in danger of being killed. That’s not a major

concern for other superbeings, who have good defenses, but for normals it’s a veritable death sentence. Conversely, non-super-powered characters can’t do serious damage to a superhuman. They may be able to knock out a super-powered character, but they can’t kill one. This makes superhumans seem very powerful and normals seem very weak, which is a nice effect for the genre.

Another possibility that’s less deadly for the heroes and villains is to make all damage dealt to non-superhumans lethal, while all damage dealt to superhumans is nonlethal unless they say otherwise. In this case, heroes and villains appear even more godlike to the rest of the world because they can stand up to each other’s attacks, but normal people can’t.

SOME LETHAL

Some attacks are lethal and some are nonlethal. At the start of the campaign, the Gamemaster sets down the ground rules. The GM may rule guns and swords (and other sharp weapons) always deal lethal damage, clubs and fists deal nonlethal damage, and powers and martial arts can deal either. After all, guns and knives always deal lethal damage in the real world, so it makes sense they should do the same in the game world.

This option requires a bit of bookkeeping, but makes for a consistent world that also feels right to the players. If your campaign goes with this choice, the GM will need to make sure all common weapons are defined, as are all the attacks of the heroes and villains.

NONLETHAL BECOMES LETHAL

Damage is handled normally, but after a character is unconscious he or she runs the risk of dying if hit with an attack.

When an unconscious character is hit by an attack, that character must make a Fortitude saving throw (DC 10 + 1 per bruised or injured condition, whichever total is greater). If the save fails, the character is *dying*. If the save succeeds, the character remains unconscious.

No matter what option is used in your campaign, the **Nonlethal Becomes Lethal** option is a good one to add. It not only feels realistic, it also adds a level of danger to the game that *Iron Age* games really need. Some players may not like the “unheroic” need to keep beating unconscious characters to finish them off, but it does reflect accurately how injury works in the real world.

DEFENSIVE POWERS

Because the level of lethality of an *Iron Age* campaign is higher than in a standard *M&M* game, players will be aware their characters are in danger of dying unless they have good defenses. Defenses take many forms, from body armor to Regeneration to a high Defense score, and characters in the Iron Age often doubled up in order to make sure they’d survive. The challenge to characters is they’re operating in a more realistic world, so their defensive options might be limited. This section outlines a handful of ways to make defensive powers effective, while also making sure death is a real possibility.

PROTECTION LIMITS

A lot of heroes in the Iron Age were normal human beings, albeit highly trained and well armed ones. Such characters couldn’t take

as much punishment as super-powered heroes without help from armor and gadgets. In order to reflect this in the game, the GM can choose to limit access to the Protection power to truly superhuman characters like hulking brutes and demons from Hell, encouraging other characters to have ranks in the Defensive Roll feat as well as Toughness bonuses granted by equipment and devices.

IMPERVIOUS LIMITS

A particularly good way to limit defensive capabilities for *Iron Age* games is to place restrictions on how much Impervious Toughness characters can have. A good guideline is half the character's Toughness power level limit, rounded *down*. So a PL10 character could, by default, have up to 5 points of Impervious Toughness (10 divided by 2). If the character had a trade-off for +2 to the Toughness limit, that would increase the Impervious Toughness limit by +1 as well. This restriction helps make even the toughest characters just a bit more vulnerable, because they can't be sure to shake off as many weaker attacks.

ARMOR LIMITS

Most superhero games don't concern themselves with being very realistic. One of the areas that's clearest regards how resistant armor is to damage. It's not uncommon in some games for a character to have skintight armor tougher than steel. In games striving for a higher level of realism and increased lethality, armor should be limited to a maximum Toughness bonus based on the level of technology available to the characters.

Exactly what that means is up to the GM. Considering full plate armor offers a Toughness Bonus of +6 (see **Armor**, *Mutants & Masterminds*, page 141), GMs may wish to limit armor to a Toughness bonus of +6 to +10, which would reflect the most advanced armor in the world. Keep in mind this limitation applies only to armor purchased as a Device. Characters that possess Protection or Force Field as a power aren't subject to the same limitations devices are. There's a benefit to being super-powered.

CHARACTERISTICS

Heroes aren't just collections of abilities, skills, feats, and powers. They're also defined by their origin, their appearance, their personality, and their ability to keep going after everyone else has given up. In *M&M*, the last effect is simulated by the use of extra effort and hero points. Gamemasters can alter these aspects of the game to make extreme tasks more challenging for the characters. In addition, in a game modeled on the real world, maintaining one's public image can be very important; replicating that in *M&M* requires the inclusion of rules for reputation, which are presented below.

EXTRA EFFORT

Restricting extra effort (see **Extra Effort**, *Mutants & Masterminds*, page 120) makes it more difficult for characters to "push" their abilities beyond the norm. If you're looking to play heroes that don't have bottomless wells of power and endurance from which to draw, these options make that happen within the context of the rules.

CHECK REQUIRED

When a character wants to use extra effort, the player must first make a check (DC 15) using an appropriate trait determined by the GM before its effects can be applied. The Concentration or optional Power Use skills are good choices. Other options include a Will saving throw or (to restrict extra effort even further) an ability check like Constitution or Wisdom.

REQUIRES A HERO POINT

In order to use extra effort, the player must spend a hero point. Once this hero point is spent, the character can use extra effort normally. This hero point does *not* cancel the effects of fatigue—doing so would cost an additional hero point at the start of the following round.

HERO POINTS

Hero points allow heroes to do some pretty remarkable things (see **Hero Points**, *Mutants & Masterminds*, page 121). Restricting the effects they grant, especially with regard to improving rolls or granting a recovery check, goes a long way toward making the game more lethal.

IMPROVE ROLL

Normally, spending a hero point to improve a roll results in a roll of at least 11, but that can differ depending on how "heroic" your GM wants hero points to be.

- **Improve by 5:** One hero point allows you to re-roll any die roll you make and take the better of the two rolls. On a result of 1 through 10 on the second roll, add 5 to the result; an 11 or higher remains as-is (so the second roll is always a result of 6-20). You must spend the hero point to improve a roll *before* the GM announces the result of your roll. You cannot spend hero points on die rolls made by the GM or other players without the Luck Control power.
- **Unmodified Re-roll:** One hero point allows you to re-roll any die roll you make and take the better of the two rolls. You must spend the hero point to improve a roll *before* the GM announces the result of your roll. You cannot spend hero points on die rolls made by the GM or other players without the Luck Control power.

VILLAIN POINTS

Some Gamemasters may be attracted to the concept of villain points as described in **Chapter 6** of the *Mastermind's Manual*. It certainly sounds like they'd make an excellent addition to an Iron Age game, but they're really intended to encourage characters to be heroic and reflect a previously good character's descent into villainy and evil. The more villain points, the harder it is for the character to redeem himself and return to the side of the angels. As such, villain points should primarily be limited to Iron Age games where characters are expected to wrestle with temptation and *not* easily give in.

RECOVER

Heroes may use a hero point to recover faster. As the rules are written in *M&M*, this allows a character to immediately shake off a stunned or fatigued condition. In the Iron Age, spending a hero point to recover allows the character to make a Constitution check (DC 10). If successful, the character can shake off the stunned or fatigued condition. If the check fails, the character doesn't shake off the stunned or fatigued condition, but the hero point is still spent.

The other effects hero points grant fit into Iron Age games just fine and shouldn't be altered.

REPUTATION

This system models how well known a character is and how that reputation affects interactions with others. A good reputation can be a useful advantage, but a bad one can be a troublesome hindrance.

Reputation affects non-combat interaction checks between characters by providing a modifier. A positive reputation makes others more likely to favor and help the character, while a negative reputation makes the character's social entreaties less effective.

FAME OR INFAMY

A reputation bonus represents a character's notoriety. Those with a Reputation of +4 or higher can be considered well known within their professional and social circle. Whether the character is famous or infamous depends on the point of view of the person recognizing the character.

REPUTATION AND SECRET IDENTITIES

Characters with secret identities effectively have two separate reputation bonuses: one for the costumed identity and another for the secret identity. The character should use whichever bonus is appropriate. One reason many supers maintain secret identities is to leave their Reputation (and the recognition that comes with it) behind for a while to live a "normal" life.

REPUTATION CHECKS

Most of the time, the character doesn't decide to use his or her reputation; instead, the GM decides when reputation is relevant to the scene or encounter. When it becomes relevant, the GM makes a reputation check for an NPC that might be influenced in some fashion by your character's notoriety.

A reputation check is $d20 + \text{reputation bonus} + \text{the NPC's Int modifier}$. The GM may substitute a Knowledge skill bonus for the Int modifier if your activities apply to a particular field. Knowledge (popular culture) is particularly appropriate for known superheroes and supervillains, while Knowledge (arcane lore) might apply to a hero with magical powers, and Knowledge of the various sciences could apply to characters known as leaders in various scientific fields.

The standard DC for a reputation check is 25. If the NPC succeeds on the check, he recognizes the character. That recognition grants a bonus or penalty on subsequent interaction skill checks based on the NPC's reaction. A character with a Reputation bonus of +24 or more is instantly recognizable and known to virtually everyone.



SKILL CHECKS

When an NPC with an Intelligence of 5 or higher has a positive opinion of your reputation, you get a bonus of Bluff, Diplomacy, Gather Information, and Perform checks equal to half your reputation bonus, rounded down.

When an NPC with an Intelligence of 5 or higher has a negative opinion of your reputation, you get a penalty on bluff, Diplomacy, Gather Information, and Perform checks equal to half your reputation bonus, rounded down, but gain a bonus of the same amount to your Intimidate checks.

The bonus or penalty only applies when you are interacting outside of combat with an NPC who recognizes you and is therefore aware of your reputation. Those unaware of your reputation are unaffected by it either way.

NPC REPUTATIONS

Players decide how their characters act. Sometimes, however, it's appropriate for the GM to call for a skill check using an interaction skill affected by reputation. For example, an NPC might use Bluff to lie to the heroes, who, in turn, use Sense Motive to detect the lie. If an NPC tries to intimidate a hero, the GM can use the NPC's Intimidate check result to determine which heroes see the NPC as intimidating and which don't. Similarly, a Diplomacy check can tell the GM which characters find an NPC persuasive and which don't. Players may also want to know if their heroes recognize a particular NPC. Reputation checks can be useful in these situations.

The GM should make a reputation check in secret to see if player characters recognize an NPC. This prevents the players from using the results of reputation checks as a means of measuring the importance of every NPC they encounter.

Modify the results of the NPC's interaction skill checks by their reputation bonuses when they interact with characters who recognize them.

DETERMINING REPUTATION

Determining a character's reputation is based on two factors: power level and points invested in the Renown and Low-Profile feats.

As a default, all characters have a reputation bonus equal to their power level. For heroes, this is the power level of the campaign. For NPCs, it is their power level relative to the campaign; more powerful characters tend to be better known. Heroes in a PL11 campaign would have a base reputation bonus of +11, meaning their reputation comes into play on a roll of 14 or better with a DC 25 reputation check.

The GM may wish to vary the base reputation bonus according to the needs of the campaign. If the heroes are some of the only super-powered individuals in the setting, for example, they may have greater reputations, perhaps one-and-a-half to twice the campaign's power level. If they are covert agents or otherwise out of the public eye, their reputation bonus may be lower or even a base of +0.

Each rank in the Renown feat increases a character's reputation by +3. Each rank in the Low-profile feat reduces a character's reputation by -3. (See **Chapter 4** or the *Mastermind's Manual* for descriptions of these feats.)

EVENT-BASED REPUTATION

Reputation also changes based on the things the characters do...at least, the things other people know about. When a character performs some notable act, the Gamemaster can assign a Reputation modifier based on it. This can range from +1 for acts of local fame (saving the city, stopping a major crime wave) to +4 or more for things like saving or trying to take over the world. Keep in mind a Reputation bonus only measures how well known a character is, not whether those impressions are for good or for ill.

The GM can likewise decrease a character's Reputation for staying out of the limelight, lying low, and otherwise not attracting attention for a while. People move on and forget about old headlines. Still, a hero or villain with a significant Reputation usually has to be out of circulation for years before most people forget.

DEVICES AND EQUIPMENT

Grim and gritty heroes loved to carry around scads of equipment and gadgets. In some cases, these devices were integral elements of the character and are best replicated using the Device power. Other times, they had normal equipment available to anyone with the right contacts and enough resources.

Equipment options from the *Mastermind's Manual* well suited to Iron Age games include vehicle combat and pursuit, the "money talks" option for Wealth, proficiency for weapons and armor, and armor penalties. Options for ammunition are especially appropriate and detailed in this section.

WEAPON DAMAGE

Making weapons more lethal definitely fits the style of the Iron Age. As with powers, Gamemasters should decide ahead of time which weapon effect are lethal and which are nonlethal using the same options listed under **Offensive Powers**. In most cases it makes sense to have weapons deal lethal damage, unless specifically designed otherwise.

AMMUNITION

Ammunition has generally been disregarded for the ranged weapons in *M&M*, much as tracking ammunition is ignored in comic books most of the time. Assume a weapon's ammo capacity is great enough that it doesn't constitute a significant power modifier. Reloading a weapon is mostly for effect; characters rarely run out of ammo, except as an occasional setback.

Gamemasters interested in more realistic weapons may require players to keep track of ammunition. Generally pistols have clips or cylinders with 6-15 shots, machine pistols and submachine guns between 15-30 shots, and assault rifles 30 or so. Blasters have between 30-50 shots before they deplete their power packs. Reloading a weapon is generally a move action. Characters with the Quick Draw feat can reload as a free action.

Ammunition is simply one of the normal drawbacks of equipment, worth no discount in cost. At the GM's discretion, having to count ammo may be a power drawback for a Device: 25 uses before reloading is a 1-point drawback, 10 uses is a 2-point drawback, and 5 uses is a 3-point drawback. In this case, running out of ammo is not con-

sidered a complication, since the character already has additional points from the drawback.

For a self-sustaining effect that diminishes over a set period of time, such as that of a rocket burst or a gas grenade, apply the Duration modifier to a sustained power to make it continuous, then apply the Fades flaw to its continuous use: the self-sustaining power loses 1 power point of effectiveness per round, slowly weakening until its effect is entirely gone. So, for example, a smoke grenade might provide Obscure 3 (visual) with the previous modifiers, lasting for a minute (1 round per power point) but diminishing in size from 15 feet in radius to 5 feet before dispersing altogether.

COMBAT

Combat in *Mutants & Masterminds* is fast-paced and exciting; the last thing you'd want to do is complicate things and slow the game down too much. In addition to suggestions for making combat more dangerous (see **Lethality**, earlier in this chapter), here are other options to play with in order to make the game more realistic yet not overly complicated.

Combat options from the *Mastermind's Manual* suitable for Iron Age games include combat challenges, out-of-turn defense, Toughness save failure, lethal penetration, and the various options for lethal attacks (particularly attack roll penalties for changing damage type). Attacks of opportunity *may* suit some Iron Age games, but further complicate combat, as does tactical movement. A couple of particularly suitable options are reproduced here.

DOUBLE CRITICAL HITS

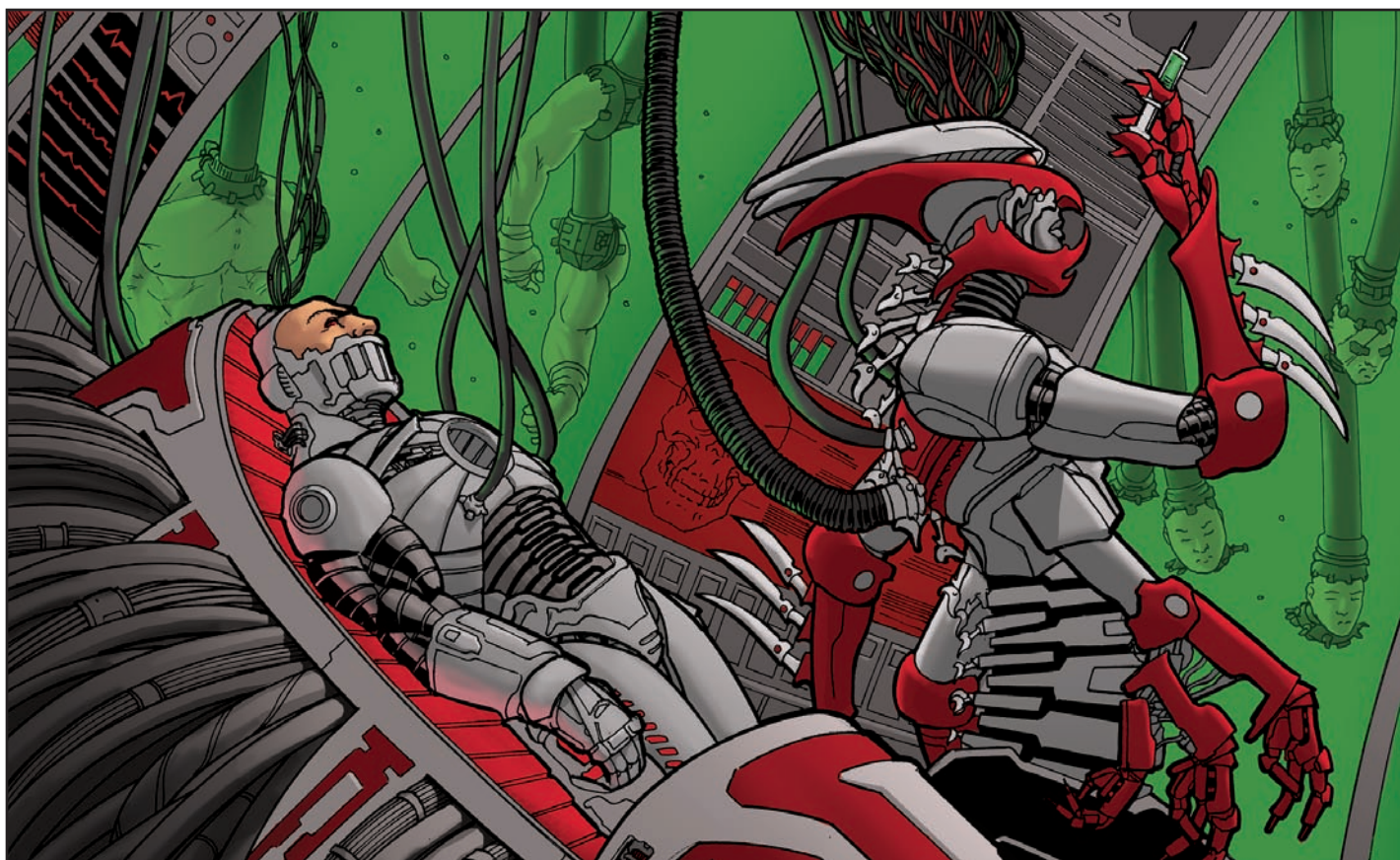
Ordinarily, an attack roll of a natural 20 that would have hit the opponent's Defense normally is a critical hit, increasing the attack's damage by +5. Optionally, when a critical hit is scored, make an additional d20 roll. If this second roll comes up a 20, then the target of the attack is immediately 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.



SAVE VS. STUN

With this option, rather than automatically suffering a stun result from damage, the character makes a Fortitude saving throw (DC 10 + attack's damage bonus) to avoid being stunned. This adds some variability to the chances of a stun, and provides a slight edge to characters with better Fortitude saves, but also adds another die roll to combat, which may slow things down.

MUTANTS & MASTERMINDS



CHAPTER THREE: IRON AGE CHARACTERS

Characters from the Iron Age have much in common with heroes from typical *Mutants & Masterminds* campaigns. They have access to the same powers, they're of similar power levels, and they want to stop the bad guys. It's the differences, however, that make an Iron Age character stand out. Powers typically have darker, deadlier, or more

demonic effects than those possessed by characters from other ages. In addition, when an Iron Age hero stops the bad guys, they *stay* stopped.

This chapter helps you to create characters that are appropriate for an Iron Age campaign. Use the standard *M&M* rules unless this book says otherwise.

STARTING POWER LEVELS

Iron Age comic books featured characters of many different levels of power, from "street-level" vigilantes armed with modern weaponry and years of combat experience to powerful demons and mutants tapping into forces beyond their ability to fully control. This section outlines how these differences translate into the *Mutants & Masterminds* rules.

REALISTIC STREET-LEVEL CHARACTERS

Using the word "realistic" to describe any game including super-powered characters is tricky, but this type of game pushes powers to the margins and concentrates on vigilantes with guns, gadgets, and hand-to-hand fighting skills. These campaigns focus on non-powered,

often non-costumed (in the traditional sense), ex-military types who have gone through an experience that changed them psychologically, if not physically as well.

These characters benefit from years of combat experience that they now apply against gangs, the mob, terrorists, and other "mundane" villains threatening society. Unlike the two-fisted heroes of the pulp era, these characters are deeply flawed, with harsh, pragmatic worldviews that nearly make them anti-heroes.

While these characters may encounter psychics, mystics, or other super-powered foes, they rarely have those powers themselves, instead relying on their ability to outgun, outthink, and outfight their opponents. This can result in characters that closely resemble each

other on paper, but such a campaign offers players the challenge of further defining their hero (or anti-hero) through specializing in an area of expertise and through roleplaying.

Campaigns featuring such characters start at PL 6 with 90 power points to spend. Some players and GMs may want to begin with more power points, but still maintain the “realistic” feel of this sort of game. If that’s the preference of your group, PL 8 may be a better choice for you, but everyone should be careful that the characters remain rooted in “the real world.”

The *Agents of Freedom* sourcebook is a useful additional resource for this type of campaign, which combines agent-level characters with an Iron Age ethos. The sourcebook provides considerable information on running campaigns with “agent” characters that have no powers apart from their training and equipment.

CINEMATIC STREET-LEVEL CHARACTERS

Cinematic games cover a wide range of character possibilities, from normal humans with an incredible ability to endure punishment to martial arts masters able to use their *chi* to amazing effect. At its upper range, it even includes characters on the verge of being “real” superheroes.

Characters in these games often appear to lack powers, but can nevertheless dish out and handle extreme amounts of damage. In addition, they have access to specialized equipment just beyond what’s available in the real world. Depending on the setting, these characters may have low-level or inconspicuous powers, or ones that make them just a little more powerful than a “normal” person has any right to be. Heroes may be costumed or not, depending on the game’s setting and the character’s background. The characters from *Watchmen* fall into this category, with the clear exception of the high-omnipotent Dr. Manhattan.

Given the looser restrictions on powers, it’s easier to differentiate the roles of the heroes. Like the characters in street-level games, thugs and agents are still a threat to cinematic characters, but not nearly as much of one. Campaigns with cinematic street-level characters start at PL 8 with 120 power points. It’s possible to start at a higher power level, but that may make the characters too strong to be threatened by the mooks they’d often face in a street-level game. For more capable characters, give the players more power points (from 125 to 150 or more), while keeping the power level at 8. This allows players to diversify their characters’ abilities while keeping them within the limits of a cinematic game.

CLASSIC IRON AGE CHARACTERS

This is the standard power level for *Iron Age* (and *Mutants & Masterminds*) characters. While it may seem like lower power levels are more appropriate for Iron Age games, such limits are best for games featuring skilled normals as player characters. The Iron Age was loaded with heroes with fantastic powers that could be threatened only by other superbeings, and that’s the norm for this book. Characters at this power level aren’t limited to being “mostly human”; players can create demons, cyborgs, time-travelers, and more. The differences between standard superheroes and Iron Age characters are in attitude and focus, not power level.

Classic Iron Age heroes may look completely mundane, but it’s just as likely they’re flaming-skulled demons or inhuman were-creatures. Importantly, as opposed to heroes from other ages, the Iron Age heroes’ powers are often regarded as curses, barely controlled or understood. Other characters, whose powers come from mundane sources, like training or specialized knowledge, have access to any powers available to standard *M&M* heroes, but the manner in which the character employs them differs.

The setting of a *Mutants & Masterminds* game informs many of the decisions players will make during character creation, but this is even more true in classic Iron Age games because the range of potential character types, powers, and backgrounds is so wide. A gadgeteer whose family was killed by the mob may be hard to fit into the same game as a mage tasked with hunting down supernatural evil and a man from the future trying to prevent World War III. It’s easy to make unique characters, but it means the GM must work with the players to ensure the characters will function as a group.

Classic Iron Age games are PL 10 with 150 starting power points.

OVER-THE-TOP IRON AGE CHARACTERS

The comics that inaugurated the Iron Age centered on two types of characters: those mostly human and those truly superhuman. As part of their stories, both *Watchmen* and *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* asked, “What does it mean to the rest of humanity when gods exist alongside us?” It’s appropriate, then, to use *Iron Age* for those players and GMs that want a game with similar characters and themes.

Characters in this range tend to be inhuman in some way, whether actually alien or just with a sense of “the other” about them. It’s important that these godlike beings feel separate from the rest of humanity. Their powers are beyond the scope of others in the same setting, at least in terms of pure offensive capability if not intelligence or cunning. Their only weakness, if it can be called such, is these beings *want* to be human, so they often hold their powers in check or ignore the effect they could have on the world if they applied themselves.

These super-powerful entities often work best as non-player characters, because their abilities overshadow those of the players’ characters. But a GM comfortable with a mix of power levels and a story that offers challenges to all involved could have a very memorable game, so this option is open. The important thing to remember in this type of campaign is to give everyone a chance to shine, not just the players of characters who could crack the Earth in half if they wished to.

In Realistic or Cinematic Street Level games, godlike beings could act as adversaries for less powerful heroes. Player characters unable to defeat the adversary head-on could, with some investigation and planning, figure out a way to negotiate with or neutralize the threat this sort of character poses to them and the world.

Over-the-top characters are also well suited for post-modern adventures where larger-than-life superhumans combine the powers and capabilities of classic superheroes with the style and often body-count of the Iron Age, for heroes punching minions’ heads clean off and smashing armadas of invading enemies in spectacular action-movie style.

Over-the-top characters start at PL 12 with 180 power points, but can go much higher.

IRON AGE ABILITIES, SKILLS & FEATS

Iron Age and standard *Mutants & Masterminds* games share the same abilities and ability benchmarks. These reflect your character's capacity to lift, avoid, hit, resist, reason through, perceive, or influence obstacles. Characters in the Iron Age do tend to concentrate more heavily on physical abilities (Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution) than on mental abilities (Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma).

The watchword for the era was "action," so abilities that make it possible for characters to do more, better and faster, are definitely the way to go. On the other hand, many human-level Iron Age characters do rely heavily on their intellect, wits, and force of personality to get the job done. Consider the brilliant detective, the fearsome predator of the night, or the cunning crime boss operating behind the scenes.

IRON AGE SKILLS

Skills in *Iron Age* are virtually unchanged from *Mutants & Masterminds*. Each skill provides your character with the same knowledge and the ability to perform a given task as in the core game. Unless otherwise stated, a given skill works exactly as described in *Mutants & Masterminds*. The Computers skill is the only skill with any sort of *caveat*.

COMPUTERS

Computers in the Iron Age were nowhere near as advanced as those of the present day. However, in terms of game-play, there was little difference. Each subheading under the Computers skill operates in the same fashion. However, until the later years of the Iron Age, there was no such thing as the World Wide Web or ubiquitous Internet access. Networks of computers stretching across the globe are virtually unheard of except within large companies, and the information held there is usually very specific.

Still, the Iron Age borrowed heavily from the cyberpunk sub-genre of science fiction, and cybernetic characters and hackers of various sorts were popular. Computers often had capabilities far beyond what they could do in the real world, and hackers could pull off amazing feats considered unrealistic by today's standards. Iron Age GMs should feel free to allow such opportunities in their own games.

IRON AGE FEATS

The feats listed in this section were created to inject additional color into your Iron Age games and to make the player characters more capable of dealing with the different situations they'll face in this violent and dangerous era. Some of the feats below should be familiar. There is a new choice for the Benefit feat from the core rulebook, and Challenge from the *Mastermind's Manual* has some sample uses suitable for combat-intensive games like those set in the Iron Age.

These feats are useful in any *Mutants & Masterminds* game.

NEW FEATS

The Iron Age was a time for dark, mysterious heroes with murky backgrounds and amazing combat abilities. The feats included below help your characters fit that mold, especially when coupled with the feats already available in *Mutants & Masterminds*.

BENEFIT: ENIGMA

GENERAL, RANKED

Your background is shrouded in mystery, and individuals and organizations trying to learn more about you have a difficult time finding anything of much value. Perhaps all public information on you has been magically wiped clean, or you've rewritten your history so thoroughly that even the government's records are absent, incorrect, or lacking in detail. This doesn't mean that interested parties can't start taking accurate notes about you, only that your previous history is a blank.

You can take this feat multiple times. Each time, it imposes a +5 DC to Gather Information checks (including those granted by the use of the Well-Informed feat) and Knowledge checks when characters attempt to find out more about you. At lower ranks, this feat is a mere inconvenience to those who would pursue you, but higher ranks make it appear as though you do not exist. This feat removes or conceals only information that anyone could find through normal means, given enough resources. Characters new to the planet don't need it to hide their history before arriving on Earth, for example, unless they're being investigated by an otherworldly detective.

CHALLENGE

GENERAL, RANKED

The Challenge feat (from *Mastermind's Manual*, page 43) allows you to choose a specific task you can perform better than normal. Usually, challenges incur a -5 penalty or a +5 DC to the task, but purchasing the challenge feat for a given task allows you to perform it at no additional modifier. Below are examples of specific challenges.

You can take this feat multiple times. Each time, it applies to a different challenge or reduces the penalty with an existing challenge by an additional +/-5.

- **Improved Demoralize:** You can make yourself particularly frightening or impressive. You may attempt to demoralize using your Intimidate skill (see **Intimidate**, *M&M*, page 49) as a move action.
- **Improved Distract:** Your presence is very disconcerting, especially in combat. When you use the Distract feat (see **Distract**, *M&M*, page 60), you may attempt to distract as a move action.
- **Improved Feint:** Your style of combat is confusing to your opponents, making it easier for you to strike them from unexpected directions or before they expect it. You may attempt to feint as a move action (see **Feint**, *M&M*, page 156).
- **Improved Taunt:** There's something about you that makes people want to punch you in the face...a lot. You may attempt

to demoralize someone using the Taunt feat and your Bluff skill (see the demoralize section of **Intimidate**, *M&M*, page 60) as a move action.

DAMAGING ESCAPE

COMBAT

When you escape from a grapple, you get an unarmed attack against the grappler as a free action. You still have to roll to hit. This feat works with the Takedown Attack feat (see **Takedown Attack**, *M&M*, page 64), making it very effective against minions grappling you in large numbers.

DEDICATED DODGE

COMBAT

When you are targeted by two or more attackers, you can increase your dodge bonus by up to +5 against one opponent and subtract the same amount from your dodge bonus versus all other attackers. Your dodge bonus against the single opponent cannot more than double, and your dodge bonus against all other attacker cannot be reduced below +0. The changes to your dodge bonus are decided before the first attack roll is made against you each round and last until your next round.

IMPROVISED WEAPONS

COMBAT, RANKED

You have +1 damage bonus with improvised weapons per rank in this feat. You can use normal objects as weapons more effectively than usual. You must follow all the rules for using improvised weapons (see **Improvised Weapons**, *M&M*, page 162) except your damage bonus may be greater than +2 and, at the GM's discretion, your weapon may grant you extended reach appropriate to the weapon you're using. Your maximum damage bonus with this feat is limited by your power level.

PRECISE STRIKE

COMBAT

When making a melee attack, you ignore the defense bonus from any cover that is less than total.

QUICK STUDY

SKILL, RANKED

You can study a subject relatively quickly to gain a basic working understanding of it. Given time to study or learn from a teacher, you can gain a temporary Knowledge skill rank about a particular topic. Each rank takes 1 hour of study, and you can have a maximum number of temporary Knowledge ranks equal to your rank in this feat. Feat ranks may be divided among multiple Knowledge skills as desired.

Temporary Knowledge ranks fade at the end of the adventure or after a day of game time passes, whichever comes sooner. Once you've acquired temporary ranks in a Knowledge skill, you are no longer considered untrained and can add your ability modifier to any skill checks for that skill.

RALLYING CRY

FORTUNE

Your signature call reminds your friends they're not alone in the fight. As a standard action, you can spend a hero point to grant your

allies within auditory perception range a new Will save to overcome fear and lasting mental effects.

REVERSAL

COMBAT

When you escape from being grappled, you may immediately make a grapple check against the attacker from whom you escaped. If you escaped from multiple grapplers, you must choose one to be the target of your grapple check.

ZIG-ZAG

COMBAT, RANKED

You're able to keep your speed up when charging, even if you change course. When charging, each rank you have in Zig-Zag lets you make a single change in direction of 90 degrees or less. You must move in a straight line for at least 10 feet after each change in direction in order to maintain momentum and you must move a minimum of 10 feet before completing the charge.

MARTIAL ARTS

Comic books in the Iron Age were fascinated by the martial arts. Samurai, ninja, and esoteric mystics of the Far East were very popular. Often, heroes would travel to Asia for training or in pursuit of mysterious foes, or the streets of an American city would be protected by a powerful foreign stranger. For readers, this was a chance to see different cultures and styles of action clash. And, from the point of view of the artists, it didn't hurt that martial artists often struck impressive poses that made the books more exciting.

It's not unusual to find that *Iron Age* characters have devoted lots of points into feats and powers in order to simulate the martial arts, including the fantastic sorts of tricks one sees in movies or in animation. In order to reflect these sorts of characters, players and GMs may wish to define martial arts more concretely using the following rules.

FIGHTING STYLES

Mutants & Masterminds presents the idea of using various collections of feats to duplicate different fighting styles, including various martial arts. This section expands upon that idea and offers some suggestions for creating your own fighting styles.

UNARMED VS. WEAPON STYLES

Some fighting styles focus on fighting unarmed, others with a particular weapon or weapons, and a few with both. The distinction between unarmed and armed fighting styles is largely one of flavor and description. Combat feats work the same whether you're using them unarmed, armed, or with superhuman powers. The GM may choose to apply certain situational modifiers based on a style's usual weapons as needed.

SKILLS AND STYLES

Some fighting styles teach particular skills in addition to feats. A true expert in the style is likely to have at least some training in these associated skills. As with the style's feats, you can choose how many points (if any) to invest in them.

OPTION: WEAPON ELEMENTS

If you want a more detailed way of defining which weapons or attacks are usable with which fight styles, you can use the following guidelines.

Each fighting style gets one “weapon element”—an attack it’s intended to work with—at no cost. An unarmed style works automatically with unarmed attacks; an armed style must choose a particular weapon (or a narrow category of weapons, like blades, at the GM’s discretion). Adding another weapon to the style requires the Weapon Element feat, which grants an additional type of attack.

Example: The kung fu style is defined as unarmed, so all of its feats are usable with unarmed attacks automatically. However, various types of kung fu also teach the use of weapons, including nunchaku, swords, and staves. Each of these types of weapons is considered a Weapon Element feat for the style. A character must have the feat in order to use the style’s combat feats in conjunction with those weapons.

Note that characters can spend a hero point to emulate the Weapon Element feat just like any other, granting a one-time use of a different attack in conjunction with a particular fighting style.

This option is best suited for fairly realistic games (any Iron Age game is appropriate) where it’s important to differentiate between otherwise similar martial artists. For more general superhero settings, it’s probably more detail than the setting or characters require.

The most common skills for fighting styles are Acrobatics, Bluff (primarily aimed at feinting in combat), Intimidate (primarily aimed at demoralizing an opponent in combat), Sense Motive (primarily aimed at detecting and avoiding the previous two effects), and Sleight of Hand (for quick hand movements and feinting dependent upon them).

ATTACK AND DEFENSE AND STYLES

None of the fighting styles in this section require or grant any specific attack bonus or defense bonus, although some may have the Attack Focus or Dodge Focus feats. You might decide that a particular fighting style calls for the Attack Specialization feat for a particular type of attack associated with the style. Like other ranked feats associated with a fighting style, these feats are available in multiple ranks, up to the campaign’s normal power level limit.

CREATING FIGHTING STYLES

Creating a fighting style is a matter of collecting a list of the style’s feats, plus any associated skills (and weapon elements, if that option is in use). Characters trained in a style invest power points into its traits. They don’t have to take all of them at the same time; indeed, most students do not gain complete mastery of a fighting style all at once.

Generally speaking, a complete style should consist of between six and 12 feats; fewer usually isn’t enough to constitute a coherent style, while more tends to represent branching out into mastery of multiple styles of combat. That is, unless you want to create a “master style” or secret martial art for your game that encompasses *every* combat feat. (True masters of such a style should be rare indeed!)

SAMPLE FIGHTING STYLES

A number of sample fighting styles are presented here. You can use them in your game as-is, modify them to suit your own view of the style, or use them as models for creating new fighting styles of your own.

Students of these and other martial arts in the real world should note that this material isn’t intended as a detailed rendition of combat techniques, but a general set of fighting styles useful for a superhero game. Think of these collections of fighting feats as useful shorthand, and if you are so inspired, use them as a basis for a style that more closely matches your experiences.

AIKIDO

Aikido is a Japanese martial art school founded by Sensei Morihei Uyeshiba in the 1920s. It is the epitome of a “soft” martial arts style, focusing on “flowing” with an attack and using the attacker’s momentum against him. Aikido emphasizes throws and evading attacks, along with a few holds for “guiding” an attacker to the ground.

Feats: Defensive Attack, Dodge Focus, Evasion, Grappling Finesse, Improved Grapple, Improved Pin, Improved Throw, Improved Trip, Uncanny Dodge.

BOXING

Called “the sweet science” by some, modern boxing is a fairly brutal and direct fighting style involving powerful punches and evasive footwork, usually close in with an opponent. Feinting is a common technique, used to get an opponent to lower his guard for a devastating attack.

Skills: Bluff, Sense Motive.

Feats: All-out Attack, Attack Focus (melee), Defensive Attack, Elusive Target, Improved Block, Power Attack, Takedown Attack.

CAPOEIRA

The national martial art of Brazil, capoeira originated among African slaves. When these slaves rebelled, they developed an unarmed fighting style disguised as ritual folk dancing. Capoeira involves many handstand moves, allowing practitioners to use it while their hands are bound or chained. It’s usually practiced to music, like a dance form.

Skills: Acrobatics, Performance (dance).

Feats: Acrobatic Bluff, Dodge Focus, Improved Grab, Improved Throw, Power Attack, Prone Fighting.

ESCRIMA

This Philippine stick-fighting style typically uses a pair of short batons, but is also practiced with a balisong knife or unarmed (and may include either as a weapon element, at the GM’s discretion). It focuses on deflecting or blocking attacks and fast strikes to the body.

Feats: Accurate Attack, Defensive Attack, Improved Block, Improved Disarm, Improved Pin, Power Attack, Quick Draw, Stunning Attack.

SIMULATING MARTIAL ARTS ABILITIES

Martial artists have displayed a dizzying array of powers in comics and movies over the years, including blazing energy fists, leaping and wall-running, stone-like flesh, healing, supersenses, and a nearly countless number of others. The only real limits when creating a super-powered martial artist are your character concept and your GM's approval.

The lists below include powers from *Ultimate Power* as well as from *Mutants & Masterminds*.

REALISTIC MARTIAL ARTS POWERS

Adrenal Surge
Blending (only in shadows)
Chi (not including Immunity)
Silence
Speed
Strike
Stun (though the Stunning Attack feat is more likely)
Super-Movement (Sure-Footed, Trackless)

CINEMATIC MARTIAL ARTS POWERS

Astral Form
Blending
Chi (including Immunity)
Clairaudience
Clairvoyance
Death Touch
Dream Travel

Energy Aura (defined as counterpunching)
Exorcism
Hypnosis
Ignite
Immovable
Kinetic Control
Leaping
Magic (with GM's approval)
Mind Switch (Permanent only)
Paralyze
Protection
Regeneration
Spirit Control
Summon (minion)
Super-Senses
Super-Movement (Permeate, Slow Fall, Wall Crawling, Water Walking)
Suspended Animation
Ward

SUPER MARTIAL ARTS POWERS

Animal Mimicry
Blast
Dream Control
Electrical Control
Fire Control
Immortality
Immutable
Life Control
Light Control
Mental Blast
Mind Shield
Nemesis
Pain
Reflex Memory
Super-Strength
Super-Movement (Air Walking)
Transmit
Weapon Summoning

FENCING

"Fencing" is used here to describe Western sword-fighting styles in general. Traditional fencing uses a slim, light sword like a foil, but characters in *M&M* can fence with whatever sort of sword the GM approves. Fencing focuses on speed, with a combination of defensive blocks and offensive strikes and thrusts, along with feints to fake-out your opponent. The more "swashbuckling" style of fencing also involves Acrobatics and Acrobatic Bluff.

Skills: Sleight of Hand.

Feats: Accurate Attack, Attack Focus (melee), Defensive Attack, Improved Block, Improved Disarm, Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Taunt.

JUJUTSU

This style, also known as judo, grew out of a number of Japanese fighting styles over hundreds of years, and spread to the western world in the 19th and 20th centuries. Its primary techniques focus on throws and holds to put an opponent on the ground and keep him there. There are hundreds of modern sub-styles teaching variant techniques, allowing you to justify including most unarmed combat feats in it.

Feats: Accurate Attack, Defensive Attack, Improved Disarm, Improved Grab, Improved Pin, Improved Trip, Stunning Attack.

KARATE

Karate originated on the Okinawa Islands. When Japanese conquerors forbade the natives from carrying weapons, they focused on this style of unarmed combat. Karate incorporated various farming

tools that could be discreetly carried as weapons, including the staff, *nunchaku* (threshing flail), *kama* (sickle), rope and chain, and *tonfa* (mill-wheel handle). Modern karate tends to focus on unarmed techniques. It spread widely to the West after American soldiers learned it in Japan after World War II. Karate is a "hard" style focusing on powerful punches and kicks. A karate teacher is called *sensei* and the practice hall of school is a *dojo*.

Feats: All-out Attack, Attack Focus (melee), Improved Block, Improved Disarm, Instant Up, Power Attack, Stunning Attack.

KRAV MAGA

Krav Maga developed about 40 years ago for use by the Israeli Defense forces (and later Israeli police and Mossad intelligence agents). It's a highly practical style, borrowing moves from many different fighting styles and focused entirely on quickly and efficiently disabling an opponent. It lacks the "forms" of other fighting styles, since it's intended solely for fighting, not for show. This fighting style can be used to represent other modern, constructed styles taught to commandos and military personnel.

Feats: All-out Attack, Chokehold, Dodge Focus, Improved Block, Improved Disarm, Improved Grapple, Improved Trip, Power Attack.

KUNG FU

Kung fu, loosely translated, means "hard work" or "great skill." It is the common name of an ancient Chinese style of martial arts dating back a thousand years or more. It's most famously associated with the Shaolin Temple, where it was taught starting in the

sixth century AD. It spread to the West with Chinese immigration in the 1800s, but did not become popular among Westerners until the mid-1900s. There are hundreds of kung fu variants and styles, many based on the movements of animals. (Crane, Dragon, Leopard, Mantis, Monkey, Snake, and Tiger, to name some). A kung fu teacher is called a *sifu* and the practice hall is called a *kwoon*.

Skills: Concentration.

Feats: Defensive Attack, Improved Block, Improved Critical, Improved Sunder, Improved Trip, Instant Up, Power Attack, Startle.

MUAY THAI

Also known as Thai kickboxing, Muay Thai is a brutal fighting style of kicks, knee- and elbow-strikes, and punches. It relies on blocks for defense and has no holds or throws—the intent is to beat an opponent to a pulp as quickly as possible.

Feats: All-out Attack, Improved Block, Improved Critical, Power Attack, Stunning Attack, Takedown Attack.

NINJUTSU

Not a “fighting style” per se, ninjutsu is associated with Japanese ninja and other stealthy assassins. The ninja fighting style is technically called *taijutsu*, but the style here assumes the broad range of “ninja training.” It does not include whatever superhuman capabilities the GM wishes to grant ninja; those are better acquired as powers.

Skills: Acrobatics, Climb, Stealth.

Feats: Blind-Fight, Chokehold, Dodge Focus, Evasion, Hide in Plain Sight, Sneak Attack, Startle, Stunning Attack, Takedown Attack.

SUMO

Sumo wrestling is a Japanese martial art usually practiced by large, heavy fighters. The object of a match is to push the opponent out of the fighting ring or pin him down within the ring. Sumo matches tend to be short, but involve a great deal of lengthy ritual. Unlike most Asian martial arts, sumo relies on strength and size.

Feats: Improved Grab, Improved Grapple, Improved Pin, Improved Trip, Power Attack, Stunning Attack.

TAE KWON DO

The name of this Korean martial art means “the way of kicking and punching.” It’s a forceful fighting style, widely taught in schools throughout the world. As its name implies, tai kwon do relies on both powerful strikes and various types of kicks, including side and flying kicks.

Feats: All-out Attack, Defensive Roll, Improved Block, Power Attack, Takedown Attack.

WRESTLING

Wrestling includes numerous grappling techniques, ranging from Greco-Roman style to modern televised wrestling matches, which may involve greater use of the Perform skill than fighting feats.

Feats: Chokehold, Improved Disarm, Improved Grab, Improved Pin, Power Attack, Weapon Bind.

POWERS, COMPLICATIONS & DRAWBACKS

Though the gun-wielding vigilantes attracted much of the attention, they were hardly the only people in masks running around in the streets. The Iron Age was also filled with super-powered characters of all stripes, including half-alien hybrids, time-traveling gadgeteers, demons, mystics, psychic ninja, interdimensional castaways, and more. In keeping with the over-the-top feel of the era, players should feel free to purchase any power that fits their concepts of their characters.

PROBLEM POWERS

Some powers will pose greater challenges to a *Mutants & Masterminds* Gamemaster than others. It’s not always easy to accommodate plotbusting powers like ESP, Mind Control, Mind Reading, Precognition, Postcognition, or X-Ray Vision. A character with Healing can wipe away the effects of a hard-fought combat, diminishing the gritty after-effects that make the Iron Age distinctive. Insubstantial, Invisibility, and Morph can make conventional barriers and security useless. What’s more, these sorts of powers were *commonplace* in the Iron Age. Dozens of popular characters had them, and some had three or four at once!

These powers and several others are covered in depth elsewhere (see the *Mastermind’s Manual*, pages 67-70) along with potential solutions to the difficulties they can cause.

COMPLICATIONS

Characters in the Iron Age were defined as much by their complications as by their attitude or their adversaries. The ones detailed below are particularly appropriate for an *Iron Age* campaign. When choosing, keep the “mature” feel of the era in mind—complications that have a darker edge to them will be more suitable for the story, and more likely to provide a benefit to you. A complete list of complications can be found in *Mutants & Masterminds* (pages 122-123).

ACCIDENT

Heroes in the Iron Age tend to expect large amounts of collateral damage during and after a fight. This isn’t always an accident, but can have the same effect during a game and similar consequences for heroes with an appropriate moral core. This is only worth a hero point to a character to whom the accident will cause some concern.

ADDICTION

This complication was often used to put a modern spin on the origins of heroes from earlier eras. A hero created by exposure to a super-soldier serum or other super-science chemical would find his powers fading as the drugs left his system. Regular doses of a less-effective version of the original compound would maintain his powers, leading to the sorts of troubles that more conventional addictions can

cause. This complication is best suited to short-term plots; addictions render even the most jaded Iron Age heroes erratic and ineffectual.

HATRED

Vengeance was a common theme in the Iron Age, and characters from that era could be single-minded in their mission to eliminate those whom they saw as responsible for their problems. If your character is hunting a particular group, hatred only becomes a complication when its consequences seep into ordinary life. Fighting a bunch of mobsters in the latest game isn't worth a hero point; discovering the woman that you've fallen in love with is related to the mob might be, as your anger drives you to do something you'll both regret.

HONOR

Honor was an odd thing in the Iron Age. Since most of the goody-goody motivations used for heroes in previous ages had been tossed out, what a character *wouldn't* do often defined them. This is a great complication for players and Gamemasters to use to figure out to what lengths characters will go before stopping to question their actions.

LEGAL ENTANGLEMENTS

The Iron Age made the law into a hindrance for many heroes, rather than something to uphold. Stories explored the legal ramifications of vigilantism, heroes wearing masks and concealing their identities, criminal procedures, and similar themes, and these all make suitable complications for Iron Age characters. What happens when a corporation trademarks a hero's emblem, name, or image and uses it for its own ends, or simply slaps the hero with a legal injunction to stop using his own name? What about when a victim of collateral damage decides to sue? An unscrupulous lawyer could be a costumed vigilante's worst nightmare, as he sees super-criminals get off on legal technicalities time after time.

PREJUDICE

This complication comes up quite often in the Iron Age. Bigotry between "mutants" and "normals" would often serve as a stand-in for the sorts of biases that plague us in the real world, and characters with such an origin may face prejudice wherever they go. In some cases, the prejudice is against heroes in general, as ordinary people made it clear that they didn't want or need superhuman involvement in their lives.

REPUTATION

Although it might appear that Iron Age characters *wanted* to have bad reputations, it was more likely that they simply didn't care what people thought of them; they had a job to do, and if the general public didn't like them or their tactics, that was their problem. This

callous, hard-nosed attitude often led to trouble with the authorities and other people with more traditional views on law and order.

SECRET

Secrets come up all the time in comics, but in the Iron Age, the secrets were bigger and often completely unknown even to the hero, who discovered them along with the reader. Comics of the time were full of stories where would encounter an inconsistency in his past and track it down, only to find out that everything the hero knew of his own history was a carefully crafted lie. Eventually, the character would go after the villain responsible for it to learn the whole story and uncover the truth, if that was possible.



Using the secret complication in this way can make for a long story, but it often causes problems for the character, which makes it worth hero points. He may have to deal with some complications that couldn't exist in any other story. ("My dead parents are alive, but they were just actors hired to play roles in my implanted memories!")

Gamemasters should avoid completely subvert a player's vision of a character's past with this complication. Abrupt or absurd changes can make a hero much less fun to play.

DRAWBACKS

Heroes in the Iron Age give the impression of being tougher and more realistic than those from the Golden and Silver ages. Even so,

many still suffer from some kind of drawback: the demon who lives as a normal person most of the time, the mutant with a disability only partially alleviated by his powers, the normal man with no control over when he transforms into a monster, the cyborg who's obviously deformed in some way, the vampire who grows weaker on holy ground, and so forth.

There are plenty of examples of heroes from the Iron Age who avoided any sort of drawback at all. In part this was to avoid the superhero clichés of the past, but it was also chic to project an image of invulnerability even when the character was just a well-trained, well-armed, normal human. Of course, these were often characters loaded with personal complications rather than mechanical drawbacks.

DEVICES & EQUIPMENT

Iron Age characters relied heavily on mundane equipment and the occasional device; even those who normally didn't use equipment like guns or armor in prior ages of comics carried some. It was particularly common for hero teams to have "standard issue" equipment like communicators, team uniforms with built-in armor, shared vehicles, and so on.

This section looks at some of the common equipment for an Iron Age game, expanding upon the equipment lists from the *Mutants & Masterminds* rules. *Iron Age* GMs may also find the additional equipment and guidelines in *Agents of Freedom* useful for these types of games.

THE IRON AGE ARMORY

Though players may wish to create their own super-weaponry using the rules laid out in **Chapter 7** of the *Mutants & Masterminds* core rulebook, many Iron Age heroes opted to arm themselves with a variety of realistic weaponry, from pistols and automatic weapons to swords and other martial arts weapons.

This section provides detail on the expansive real-world armory used in the Iron Age. Beyond what is explained, all normal rules are in play.

PROJECTILE WEAPON TYPES (FIREARMS)

HOLD-OUT PISTOLS

Small, cheap, concealable "pocket pistols" primarily used by civilians carrying for personal protection or street thugs who can't afford or acquire more powerful weapons.

LIGHT PISTOLS

Small-caliber revolvers and semi-automatics that have more firepower than a hold-out yet are more easily concealed than a heavy pistol.

HEAVY PISTOLS

The ubiquitous hand cannons of the Iron Age, carried by good guys and bad guys alike, and include medium- and large-caliber revolvers, semi-automatics, and automatics.

SHOTGUNS

These types of guns can fire shot, which does +5 damage with a +2 bonus to hit due to the spread, but does only +3 damage against targets with any increase in their natural Toughness save bonus. They can also be loaded with solid slugs, which inflict +6 damage.

SAWED-OFF SHOTGUNS

These are sometimes shotguns manufactured with shorter barrels, but are more often standard shotguns that have had their barrels shortened by owners seeking greater concealability and willing to settle for a shorter range.

PUMP SHOTGUNS

These are commonly used both as military and sporting weapons. Models modified for use by soldiers or the police, sometimes called "combat shotguns," have increased ammunition capacity via a tube or box magazine.

RIFLES

Rifles are long-barreled manual- or semiautomatic-action weapons used primarily in the Iron Age as hunting weapons.

SNIPER RIFLES

Sniper rifles are typically found only in the hands of highly trained marksmen, such as those in military service or serving as freelance assassins.

ASSAULT RIFLES

These longarms are the standard weapon of militaries and special police units around the world.

SUBMACHINE GUNS

Submachine guns are light, fully automatic weapons that are occasionally carried by the military but are more often found (illegally in most cases) in the hands of civilians and criminals; they tend to be the weapon of choice in street gang drive-by shootings.

PROJECTILE WEAPON TYPES (FIREARMS)

NAME	DAMAGE	CRITICAL	RANGE	SIZE	COST
<i>Handguns</i>					
Hold-out pistol	+2 Ballistic	20	20 ft.	Tiny	4
Light pistol	+3 Ballistic	20	30 ft.	Small	6
Heavy pistol	+4 Ballistic	20	40 ft.	Medium	8
<i>Longarms</i>					
Sawed-off shotgun	+6/+7* Ballistic	20	10 ft.	Medium	13
Pump shotgun	+5/+6* Ballistic	20	40 ft.	Large	11
Rifle	+5 Ballistic	20	50 ft.	Large	10
Sniper rifle	+5 Ballistic	19-20	250 ft.	Large	13
Assault rifle	+5 Ballistic, Autofire	20	50 ft.	Large	15
Submachine gun	+4 Ballistic, Autofire	20	40 ft.	Medium	12
<i>Machine Guns</i>					
Light machine gun	+5 Ballistic, Autofire	20	50 ft.	Large	15
Medium machine gun	+6 Ballistic, Autofire	20	60 ft.	Large	18
Heavy machine gun	+7 Ballistic, Autofire	20	70 ft.	Large	21

* = See individual description for **Shotguns** below.

PROJECTILE WEAPON TYPES (EXOTIC WEAPONS)

NAME	DAMAGE	CRITICAL	RANGE	SIZE	COST
Flamethrower	+6 Line	-	-	Large	18
Grenade Launcher	+5 Explosion	-	70 ft.	Large	15
Rocket Launcher	+10 Explosion	-	150 ft.	Large	30

EXPLOSIVE WEAPONS

NAME	EFFECT	RADIUS	REFLEX DC	SIZE	COST
<i>Grenades</i>					
Fragmentation	Blast 5, Explosion	50 ft.	15	Tiny	15
Smoke	Obscure (visual)	10 ft.	-	Small	2
Flashbang	Dazzle (visual and auditory) Burst 4	20 ft.	14	Tiny	14
Tear gas	Dazzle 4 + Nauseate Explosion 4	40 ft.	14	Small	20
<i>Explosives</i>					
High Explosive	Blast Explosion 5	50 ft.	15	Tiny	15
Plastic Explosive	Blast Explosion 10	100 ft.	20	Small	30
<i>Land Mines</i>					
Anti-Personnel	Blast Explosion 5	20 ft.	15	Small	12
Anti-Tank (m-kill)	Blast Explosion 10	30 ft.	20	Small	23
Anti-Tank (k-kill)	Blast Explosion 20	50 ft.	30	Small	45

LIGHT MACHINE GUNS

These are military weapons heavier than the assault rifles issued to infantrymen. They're typically moved from point to point to give infantrymen covering fire as they advance.

MEDIUM AND HEAVY MACHINE GUNS

These guns are usually found mounted on vehicles or in dug-in emplacements protecting important positions, due to their extreme weight.

PROJECTILE WEAPON TYPES (EXOTIC WEAPONS)

FLAMETHROWERS

These nightmarish weapons project an ignited stream of flammable liquid, and are used almost exclusively by the military. A flamethrower shoots a stream of fire 5 feet wide and 25 feet long in front of the attacker as an area attack.

SPECIFIC WEAPONS BY TYPE

Sometimes, only a particular brand or model of firearm will satisfy the discerning mercenary. For players who wish to get specific, the following lists offer a sampling of weapons that fall within the guidelines of the general weapon types listed in this section.

HOLD-OUT PISTOLS

AMT Backup
Beretta 3032 Tomcat
Cobra CA32
Cobra CA380
Jiminez JA
Kahr .40
Kahr 9mm
Kel-Tec P-11
Kel-Tec P-32
Kel-Tec P-3AT
Kel-Tec PF-9
NAA Guardian
Rohrbaugh 9mm
Seecamp LWS
Skyy CPX-1

LIGHT PISTOLS

Astra A-60
Beretta 80 series
Beretta 950
HK P7K3
LEI Mark 2
RSA PSM
Sig-Sauer P230
SITES M380 Revolver
Walther PP
Walther PPK

HEAVY PISTOLS

Astra A-90
Beretta 92 F-M
Beretta 92FS
Bernadelli P-018
Browning High-Power
Calico M950
Colt 2000
Colt Agent
Colt Double Eagle
Colt M1911A1
Colt Python
CZ 75
FN BDA 9
FN Five-seven
Glock 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23
HK .45 Mk 23
HK P7M8
HK P7M10
HK P7M13
HK P9S
HK USP 9mm
HK USP 45

IMI Baby Eagle
IMI Desert Eagle
LeFrance Nova
LEI Mark 2
Llama M-82
Llama M-87
MAB PA15
Manhurin MR73
RSA P6
RSA Tokarev TT-30
Ruger P85 MkII
Ruger Security-Six
Ruger Speed-Six
S&W 10 M&P
S&W 19, 29
S&W 1006, 1066, 1076
S&W 3913, 3914
S&W 4005, 4506, 4516, 4566
S&W 6904, 6906
S&W Mk22
Sig-Sauer P220, P225, P226, P228
SITES M9, M40 Resolver
Star 30M
Star Firestar
Steyr GB
Steyr SPP
Tanfoglio Baby
Tanfoglio GT41
Tanfoglio TA90
Walther P5, P-88, P-99

SHOTGUNS

Atchison Assault
Atchison AA-12
Benelli 121 M1
Benelli M1 Super 90
Beretta 1201 FP3
Beretta M3P
Beretta RS202-M2
Bernadelli B4, B4/B
Ceiner Ultimate
Daewoo USAS-12
DAO-12 Street Sweeper
Franchi SPAS-12, SPAS-15
HK 512
Ithaca 37
Mossberg 500
Pancor Jackhammer
Remington 870 P
Winchester 1300 Defender
Winchester 1300 Marine
Winchester 1897

SNIPER RIFLES

AI Covert
AI PM
Barrett Model 82A1, 82A2
Barrett Model 90
Beretta Sniper
GIAT FR-F1, FR-F2
GIAT PGM UR Intervention
Grendel SRT
HK G3 SG/1
HK MSG90
HK PSG1
IMI Galil Sniper
LEI DeLisle Mark 3, Mark 4
Parker-Hale Model 85
Remington M24, M40
Remington Model 700
RSA Dragunov SVD
Sig-Sauer SSG 2000, 3000
Springfield M21
Steyr AMR
Steyr SSG 69
Technika Destroyer
Technika Top Gun
Walther WA 2000

ASSAULT RIFLES

AK-47
AK-74
Alliant Techsystems OICW
APS Underwater Assault Rifle
AN-94
Beretta AR70
Beretta SC70
CETME C, L, LC
CFI SAR 21
Chinese Type 81
CIS SR 88
Colt M4 Carbine
Colt M16A1, M16A2
Colt M16 Commando
Enfield SA80
FAMAS
FN FAL, FNC
GIAT FA-MAS
HK G3A3, G3A4, G3K
HK G11, G33E, G33K
HK G36E, G36K
HK G41E, G41K
Howa Type-89
IMBEL MD
IMI CTAR-21

IMI Galil ARM, SAR
IMI STAR-21
IMI TAR-21 Tavor
KAC Stoner SR-25
KAC SR-25, SR-25-K
Norinco QBZ
Sa vz.58
SIG SG 540, 550, 551
Steyr AUG

SUBMACHINE GUNS

ARES Folding
Armstrong BXP
Beretta 12
Beretta 93-R
Bushman IDW
BXP
Calico M960 A
Colt 9mm
CNI Type 64
CZ Model 61
FAMAE Mini-SAF
FAMAE SAF
FN P90
Glock 18
HK MP5
HK MP 53
HK MP2000
HK VP70
IMI Galil MAR Micro
IMI Micro-Uzi
IMI Mini-Uzi
IMI MTAR Micro
IMI Uzi
Intratec TEC-9
JATI Matic
MAC Ingram M10, M11
Owen Machine Carbine
RSA AKSU-74
Ruger MP9
SITES M-4 Spectre
Star Z-84
Sterling L2A3
Steyr AUG 9mm Para
Steyr MPi 69, 81
Steyr TMP
Suomi M-31
Thompson
Vz.61
Walther MPK, MPL
Weaver PKS-9 Ultralight

SPECIFIC WEAPONS BY TYPE

LIGHT MACHINE GUNS

Bren L4
CETME Ameli
CIS Ultimex 100
Colt M16A2 LMG
FN Minimi
HK21
HK23
IMI Negev
M249 Squad Automatic
Weapon
RPD
RPK-74
RSA PKM
RSAF L86A1
Steyr AUG HBAR
ZB vz.26

MEDIUM MACHINE GUNS

M1919 Browning
FN MAG
HK 21E
M60
M240
Rheinmetall MG3
Saco M60E1
UKM-2000

HEAVY MACHINE GUNS

Browning M2
Browning M1917
CIS .50 CIS
FN M2HB/QCB
MG 131
RSA Degtyarev DShKM
RSA NSV

FLAMETHROWERS

M2A1-7
M2-2

GRENADE LAUNCHERS

HK GMG
HK69, 79
M136 AT4
M203
M72 LAW
M79
Milkor MGL
Mk.19 AGL
Mk.47 AGL

PAW-20 "Neopup"

QLZ-87

XM307 ACSW

ROCKET LAUNCHERS

9K38 Igla
Anza HN-5B, QW-1, QW-2
AT4
AT4 CS
FIM-43 Redeye
FIM-92 Stinger
Gustav
L2A1 (ILAW)
M-160 Rocket Launcher
M202 FLASH
M72 LAW
Pansarskott m/86
RPG-7, RPG-26 and RPG-29
SA-7, SA-14

SMAW
SRAAW
STRIM F1

FRAGMENTATION GRENADES

F1
M61, M67
M6A3
Mk 2 "Pineapple"
MkIII A2
Mk40 Underwater grenade

SMOKE GRENADES

EX 1 Mod 0
M1 FS
M8, M83
M15, M16, M34
M18
Model 308-1 White Smoke

FLASHBANG GRENADES

M116/A1 "Flash-Crash"
Mk 141 Mod 0
XM84/M84

TEARGAS GRENADES

M1 "Frangible" CNS/AC
M6/A1, M7/A1, M7A2, M7A3
M25/A1/A2
M47
XM47/E1/E2/E3
XM58

HIGH EXPLOSIVES

ANFO
AnWax
Composition H6
Dynamite
Gelignite
Goma-2
HBX
Mexall 1500
Nitroglycerine
Pentolite
PLX
TATB
TNT
Torpex

PLASTIC EXPLOSIVES

C-4
Cyclotol
Nobel 808
OKFOL
RDX
Semtex A

ANTI-PERSONNEL LAND MINES

BLU-43 Dragontooth
M16
M18 Claymore
MON-50, -90, -100, -200
PFM-1 Blue Parrot
POMZ

ANTI-TANK LAND MINES

Barmine LNA1-8
BLU-91
Chinese Type 72
M75

NUCLEAR BOMBS

AN 11
AN 22
AN 52
B53
B57
B61
B77
B83
B90

NUCLEAR ARTILLERY SHELLS

W33 203 mm
W75 203 mm
W79 203 mm
W48 155mm
W82 155mm
W82-0 155mm Enhanced Radiation
W82-1 155mm Fission

NUCLEAR WARHEADS

AN 51
AN 52
Dong Feng 5
Dong Feng 31
JL1
JL2
MR 31
MR 41
TN 60
TN 61
TN 70
TN 71
TN 75
TN 80
TN 81
TN 90
W62 for Minuteman III ICBM
W68 for Poseidon SLBM
W69 for AGM-69 SRAM
W70 for Lance SRBM
W71 for LIM-49A Spartan ABM
W76 for Trident I SLBM
W78 for LGM-30 Minuteman III
W80 for AGM-86 ALCM,
AGM-129 ACM and BGM-109
Tomahawk
W81 for Standard missile
W84 for BGM-109G Gryphon
GLCM
W85 for Pershing II IRBM
W86 for Pershing II IRBM with
Earth-penetrating warhead
option
W87 for Peacekeeper ICBM
W87-1 for MGM-134 Midgetman
ICBM
W88 for Trident II SLBM
W89 for AGM-131 SRAM II
W91 for SRAM-T

RANGED WEAPON TYPES (OTHER WEAPONS)

NAME	DAMAGE	CRITICAL	RANGE	SIZE	COST
<i>Archaic Weapons</i>					
Blowgun	Stun 3	-	30 ft.	Tiny	12
Shuriken	+1	20	10 ft.	Tiny	2
<i>Simple Weapons</i>					
Bow (compound)	+3	20	75 ft.	Large	8
Crossbow (compound)	+3	19-20	75 ft.	Medium	8
Crossbow (pistol)	+2	20	20 ft.	Small	4
Taser	Stun 5	-	5 ft.	Small	16

MELEE WEAPON TYPES (SIMPLE AND MARTIAL ARTS WEAPONS)

NAME	DAMAGE	CRITICAL	RANGE	SIZE	COST
Brass knuckles	+1	20	-	Tiny	2
Caltrops	+1	-	-	Tiny	6
Club	+2	20	10 ft.	Med	4
Handclaws	+1	-	-	Tiny	3
Knife	+1	19-20	10 ft.	Tiny	4
Nunchaku	+2	20	-	Small	3
Pepper spray	Dazzle + Stun 5	-	-	Tiny	11
Shock prod	Stun 7	-	-	Tiny	14
Sword	+3	19-20	-	Med	5
Tonfa	+1	20	-	Med	2
Whip	+0	20	15 ft.	Small	5

GRENADE LAUNCHERS

These weapons are sometimes carried as independent shoulder-fired weapons, but are just as often mounted on assault rifles, although still fired separately. Though grenade launchers typically fire fragmentation grenades, they can be loaded with multiple types of grenade; increase the cost by +1 for each type of grenade carried.

ROCKET LAUNCHERS

Rocket launchers are shoulder-mounted missile launchers that may be as simple as a rocket-propelled grenade or as complex as a laser-guided surface-to-air smart missile. Rocket launchers have the Area: Explosion extra, and most rocket launchers can only fire one or two shots before they must be reloaded as a full-round action.

EXPLOSIVE WEAPONS

HIGH EXPLOSIVES

These dangerous materials can be used for many legitimate purposes from stump removal (in small quantities) to demolition of buildings (in much larger quantities), but access to high explosives is typically tightly controlled. Damage and cost on the table is for a standard amount of the explosive; each increase of the amount on the **Time and Value Progression Table** (see page 70 of the *M&M* core rulebook) increases damage by +1.

PLASTIC EXPLOSIVES

These explosives, on the other hand, are limited only to military uses. While they can be used on their own, they are also incorporated into the detonation systems of much larger devices like missiles and nuclear warheads. Damage and cost on the table is for a one pound block; each increase of the amount on the **Time and Value Progression Table** (see page 70 of the *M&M* core rulebook) increases damage by +1.

ANTI-PERSONNEL LAND MINES

Devices like these were buried explosives detonated by an above-ground trigger when they were first invented in the nineteenth century. By the Iron Age, AP mines are much more sophisticated. They include stake mines mounted above ground, bounding mines with lifting charges that raise the explosive above the ground before detonation, and directional mines that shape their explosive power into a particular arc.

ANTI-TANK LAND MINES

Anti-tank land mines come in two varieties: m-kill AT mines (for "mobility kill") designed to immobilize the vehicle that detonates the mine, and k-kill AT mines (for "catastrophic kill") designed to disable or destroy both the vehicle that detonates the mine and its entire crew. Both kinds of AT mine use pressure triggers requiring a heavier weight to detonate, in order to prevent them from being set off by passing infantry.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Whether atop an intercontinental ballistic missile or as part of a terrorist's homemade bomb, the threat of nuclear arms is a crucial part of the Iron Age. However, given the sheer destructive power of a nuclear weapon, should one make an appearance in an Iron Age *M&M* campaign it's best handled via the **Impossible Toughness Saves** section on page 163 of the *M&M Core Rulebook* rather than by treating them as weapons.

Even those lucky enough to survive the initial flash from the explosion, thermal radiation, and blast damage of a nuclear detonation might wish they hadn't. The aftermath of a nuclear detonation includes the following:

EARTHQUAKES

Earthquakes may follow surface or underground detonations of nuclear weapons if the pressure wave from the explosion causes geologic fault lines to release stored-up pressure. These are usually minor, but could be augmented intentionally as a secondary effect of the detonation.

ELECTROMAGNETIC PULSES

Electromagnetic pulses emanating from the detonation of a nuclear weapon will induce a sudden high electric current in electronic devices, melting their circuitry and disabling most electronic systems from wristwatches to jet airplanes.

IONIZING RADIATION

Ionizing radiation released by a nuclear detonation is not only fatal to more than half of those exposed, but also takes significant time before it can be dispersed. In the meantime, the ionized upper atmosphere disrupts wireless communication among any devices that survived the electromagnetic pulse.

FALLOUT

Fallout is created when solid material vaporized by the explosion combines with ionizing radiation. It gets drawn into the stratosphere by air currents and rains down for months or even years—not only on the site of the explosion, but worldwide, as the fallout is carried by the winds of the upper atmosphere.

ARCHAIC RANGED WEAPONS

BLOWGUNS

Blowguns are small tubes used to fire darts that do little damage but are typically tipped with mild poisons or tranquilizers. Blowguns have the Sedation power feat; when a target is knocked unconscious they may make recovery checks only once every 20 minutes.

SHURIKEN

Shuriken (also known as throwing stars) are flat metal stars or spikes used as ranged weapons by ninja and other martial artists. They can be thrown in groups by applying the Autofire extra. Although they are thrown weapons, shuriken do not add the thrower's Strength bonus to damage.

SIMPLE RANGED WEAPONS

COMPOUND BOWS AND CROSSBOWS

These are versions of archaic weapons updated with Iron Age technology, made not just of wood but also plastic, fiberglass, and carbon foam. At the ends of its limbs are a system of cams and pulleys, with cables running between them that allow a much stronger draw and impart more force and speed to fired arrows. Compound bows add the wielder's Strength bonus to their damage, and their superior construction allows for the addition of up to a +8 bonus. Compound crossbows do not add the wielder's Strength bonus to its damage.

PISTOL CROSSBOWS

Pistol crossbows are smaller versions of the standard crossbow, less powerful but able to be fired with one hand. Like larger crossbows, the wielder's Strength bonus is not added to its damage.

TASERS

Tasers are weapons that fire small metal darts with trailing wires that release a powerful electric charge into the target upon contact, requiring a Fortitude save (DC 15) against a Stun effect.

MELEE WEAPONS

BRASS KNUCKLES

Brass knuckles are typically made of steel (despite their name) and shaped to fit into the wielder's fist and around their knuckles, concentrating the force of a punch into a smaller, harder area and allowing the wielder to do +1 damage with unarmed strikes.

CALTROPS

Caltrops are handfuls of tiny sharpened tripods that can be scattered to slow pursuers; they have the Area modifier with the Trail shape and a Continuous Duration modifier, and will damage any who pass through the 10-foot space immediately behind where the wielder drops them, even as the wielder moves further away.

CLUBS

Clubs in the Iron Age include not only baseball bats and pieces of lumber, but also collapsible riot batons carried by the police.

HANDCLAWS

Handclaws, also known by their traditional name of *shuko*, are worn over the palms of the hands. In close combat, they can be used to scratch an opponent, but they are more often used as climbing aids. A character wearing handclaws receives a +3 bonus to Climb checks.

KNIVES

Knives include any bladed weapon up to a length of 18 inches, including pocket knives carried by civilians, hunting knives, the survival knives carried by commandos, and shorter *wakizashi* carried by ninja.

PEPPER SPRAY

Pepper spray is a concentrated form of the chemical *capsicum* derived from plants in the genus of the same name, including chili peppers. Though used on a large scale for crowd control, where it is

STUPID PIECE OF JUNK!

Though most weapon failures such as jams will occur via complications, a player looking to save points might actually recreate a favorite weapon with weapon flaws or power drawbacks representing the weapon's singularly frustrating, inconvenient nature. A pistol whose Blast power has the Action flaw, for example, might have an abnormally high trigger draw, requiring all the effort and concentration of the wielder to fire. Gamemasters who wish to more accurately simulate the maintenance required for the upkeep of complex modern weapons might give them the Fades power flaw. Particularly cantankerous weapons might have the Unreliable power flaw to represent jamming or unexpectedly running out of ammunition in the heat of battle. A weapon with the Noticeable power drawback could have a particularly notable report or flash when fired—which could allow the police or enemies to trace the aftermath of a battle back to the PCs by matching eyewitness reports of the battle to the distinctive weapons of the heroes.

sometimes dispersed via chemical grenades), it is also available in small pressurized containers carried by civilians for personal protection and police as a non-lethal means for subduing suspects. Sprayed into a target's face at close range to blind them, pepper spray combines a visual Dazzle effect with a Stun effect. If the attack roll hits, the target makes a Reflex save (DC 15). Failure means the target is blinded. A blinded target makes a Fortitude save (DC 15) each round to recover, with a +1 bonus per save. A target blinded by pepper spray must also make a Fortitude save (DC 15). On a failure, the target is stunned. The Fortitude save to recover from being blinded is also used to recover from the stun effect.

SHOCK PRODS

Shock prods can be small, palm-sized devices carried by civilians for personal protection or built into batons carried by riot police. A shock prod hits its target with a powerful charge of electricity, requiring a Fortitude save (DC 17) to avoid a Stun effect.

SWORDS

Swords are any weapon with a blade 18 to 30 inches long, whether single- or double-edged, including longer *wakizashi*, *katana*, sabers, short swords, scimitars, rapiers, and longwords.

TONFA

Tonfa are the T-shaped weapons carried as "side-handled nightsticks" by the police and by martial artists.

WHIPS

Whips can strike targets up to 15 ft. away (though no further), and the wielder can use one to make trip attacks and to disarm opponents with a +2 bonus, as with the Improved Trip and Improved Disarm feats; if the wielder already has those feats, the benefits stack with those granted by the whip.

IRON AGE WEAPON ACCESSORIES

While Iron Age heroes may be happy to wield a wide array of standard weapons, they'll probably have a favorite—a pistol passed down from their war-veteran father, a submachine gun appropriated from a fallen enemy, or a sniper rifle they've been saving for just the right occasion. Lavishing particular care on these weapons, they may not just keep them properly maintained; they may choose to outfit them with accessories that make them even better and more useful. (Of course, they may choose to do that with their entire arsenal. Why not be armed with the best possible?)

If you're looking to improve the weapons of your PC, the following guide lets you rebuild them with a variety of Iron Age accessories:

SILENCERS

Silencers are a popular addition to pistols and sniper rifles. Also known as "noise suppressors", silencers force the gases emerging from the barrel when a gun is fired to expand more slowly. Carefully designed interiors cause the sound waves created by the gunshot to cancel out. Recreating the chosen weapon with the Subtle power feat simulates the addition of a silencer. Despite the name, real-world silencers merely reduce the amount of noise rather than eliminating it entirely, and reduce the muzzle velocity of the bullet. But in comics, as in movies and other popular culture, silencers cause gunshots to be entirely silent.

FLASH SUPPRESSORS

Flash Suppressors contain the bright flash of exploding gases created by firing a weapon in many of the same ways as a silencer. As such, recreating a weapon with the Subtle power feat can also simulate the addition of a flash suppressor. A silencer and a flash suppressor could be combined into a single device that damps both the sound and light from gunfire; recreating a weapon with two applications of the Subtle power feat (as explained on page 110 of the *M&M* core rulebook) makes firing the weapon nearly undetectable.



TELESCOPIC SIGHTS

Telescopic sights, also known as “scopes”, are optical magnifiers mounted on top of a weapon to allow the wielder to more accurately fire on distant targets. Scopes are available in a variety of magnifications for nearly all kinds of ranged weapons, from pistols and assault rifles to rocket launchers and crossbows. As telescopic sights allow the wielder of the weapon to fire more accurately at range without increasing the maximum range of the weapon, recreating the weapon with the Improved Range power feat simulates the addition of telescopic sights.

LASER SIGHTS

Laser sights are mounted on a weapon to project a beam of light parallel to the weapon's line of fire, leaving a small but visible spot very close to where a projectile fired by the weapon will strike. Laser sights can be used in conjunction with telescopic sights to allow for accurate shots at extreme distances; in some cases, rather than have both accessories, they are combined in a unit called a “red dot sight” where an image of a red dot appears inside a telescopic sight at the point of impact, providing the benefit of a laser sight without giving the target any warning. Of course, in some cases, the weapon's wielder prefers to have an actual laser sight for the psychological impact upon the target when they notice the red dot dancing on their head or chest. Laser sights can be simulated by recreating a weapon with the Accurate power feat, though only one application would be appropriate, as multiple lasers give no benefit beyond the first.

ARMOR PIERCING AMMUNITION

This ammunition is available for a variety of weapons, from “cop killer” bullets for pistols and “broadhead” arrows to depleted uranium ammunition for heavy machine guns. In the Iron Age, as many heroes and villains started to wear more armor into combat, it also became common for weapon-wielding characters on both sides to carry heavier ammunition capable of penetrating that armor. Though *Mutants and Masterminds* doesn't track the use of ammunition (see **Under the Hood: Ammo, Batteries, and Charges** on page 137 of the *M&M* core rulebook), recreating the weapon with the Penetrating power modifier represents a weapon loaded with AP ammunition.

HAIR TRIGGERS

Weapons modified with a hair trigger have been adjusted so they require less pull by the wielder, making them easier and faster to

fire. Though not all weapons in the real world can be modified to have hair triggers, in the Iron Age world of comic-book technology, a weapon that does not possess it already that is recreated with the Autofire power modifier might be said to have a “hair trigger.”

STARLIGHT SCOPES

These weapon accessories allow the wielder of a weapon to fire more accurately in near blackness by amplifying available visible and infrared light to provide a clearer view inside the scope. A starlight scope can be added to a weapon by recreating it with the SuperSenses power at 2 ranks to give it the Darkvision option; more sophisticated starlight scopes might provide better clarity if they have an additional rank of the power to give it the Acute option as well. Thermographic cameras that amplify the infrared spectrum to show the world as patterns of heat and cold are more often used in the real world as a separate camera and display, or built into goggles. In the world of comic books, a starlight scope might be changed into a thermographic scope by recreating it with SuperSenses and the Infravision option rather than Darkvision, or both if the scope has multiple modes.

RECOIL BUFFERS

These are added to weapons to cushion the impact of their moving parts, reducing some of the “kick” of the weapon's recoil. In the real world, recoil buffers and “soft recoil” systems are most effective on large weapons such as artillery weapons (where the barrel of the gun moves forward prior to firing) and rocket launchers (where the gas of firing the weapon is expelled out the rear, making them “recoilless”), while recoil buffers on smaller weapon such as pistols primarily reduce wear and tear on the moving parts. “Improved recoil buffers” might explain why a weapon would be recreated with the Precise weapon modifier, granting the benefit of the Precise Shot feat (as explained on page 63 of the *M&M* core rulebook.)

TIMERS AND REMOTE TRIGGERS

These devices are often used to detonate explosives when a hero doesn't want to remain tethered to the explosive by detonation cord or a wired detonator. Recreating an explosive device with the Triggered power feat simulates a timer that can be set with a delay of the user's choice. To give a device a remote trigger with an extreme range may require multiple uses of the Improved Range feat when recreating the explosive.

HERO ARCHETYPES

The Iron Age includes most of the heroic archetypes you find in **Chapter 1** of *Mutants & Masterminds*, but there are some archetypes specific to this type of campaign that are covered in the following pages. In addition to these, the Costumed Adventurer, Gadgeteer, Martial Artist, Powerhouse, and Weapon Master archetypes in *M&M* are excellent choices for the Iron Age. All of these archetypes are Power Level 10 (PL 10). Villain Archetypes common in the Iron Age are presented later in this book (see **Villain Archetypes**, beginning on page 78).

The heroes presented in this book don't use the new feats or options presented in *Iron Age*. That way, if you choose not to use these new rules, you won't need to alter the archetypes.

Included with each archetype is a new heading; **Name Options**. These names are suggestions to choose from if you're using the archetype as a hero or villain, but don't want to come up with a name on your own or aren't sure what to call the character. This also makes it easy for players to choose an archetype and start playing right away.

BLACK OPS AGENT

POWER LEVEL 10

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+3	+4	+3	+2	+2	+2
16	18	16	14	14	14

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+8	+6	+8	+6

Skills: Acrobatics 4 (+8), Bluff 4 (+6), Climb 6 (+9), Computers 8 (+10), Diplomacy 4 (+6), Disable Device 4 (+6), Disguise 8 (+10), Drive 4 (+8), Escape Artist 8 (+12), Gather Information 4 (+6), Intimidate 6 (+8), Investigate 4 (+6), Knowledge (current events, tactics) 4 (+6), Languages 4 (choose four), Medicine 4 (+6), Notice 8 (+10), Pilot 4 (+8), Ride 2 (+6), Search 8 (+10), Sense Motive 4 (+6), Sleight of Hand 4 (+8), Stealth 8 (+12), Survival 4 (+6), Swim 2 (+5).

Feats: Blind Fight, Chokehold, Connected, Contacts, Defensive Roll 3, Equipment 6, Evasion 1, Improved Initiative 1, Power Attack, Precise Shot 1, Redirect, Sneak Attack 2 (+3 damage), Takedown Attack, Teamwork 2, Uncanny Dodge 1 (hearing).

Powers: **Adaptation 1** (Extras: Reaction), **Strike 5** (combat training; Power Feat: Mighty).

Equipment: *Blaster Rifle* (+8 damage, Cost: 16), *undercover shirt* (+2 Toughness; subtle; Cost: 3), *Nightvision Goggles* (Cost: 1 point), 10 more points of equipment.

Combat: Attack +12 (black ops rifle), +12 (strike), Grapple +15, Damage +8 (black ops rifle), +8 (strike), Defense +12, Knockback -5, Initiative +8.

Abilities 32 + Skills 31 (124 ranks) + Feats 24 + Powers 16 + Combat 38 + Saves 11 = 150

"I'VE DONE THIS BEFORE.
FOLLOW MY LEAD"



A former Black Ops Agent who's split from the organization that trained and equipped him and gave him purpose. Now he uses his abilities to do the things the capes think are beneath them. The Black Ops Agent has skills that make him excellent at intrusion, reconnaissance, interrogation, and combat. Add in high-tech gadgets and training that allows him to work as well with a team as without and he makes the bad guys cringe. Black Ops Agents tend to be a bit secretive (who in the Iron Age isn't?), but he's still highly effective in every role from leader to sneakthief.

Name Options: Agent X, Drake, Mr. Cross, Mr. Smith, Network

The power given for the Black Ops Agent (other than Strike) reflects one of many options available to the archetype. If you elect to choose a new power and leave the rest of the archetype as-is, you have 10 power points to work with. Choose one of the following:

Concealment 5 (invisibility and silence; total Concealment to all visual senses and normal hearing).

Dimensional Pocket 1 (Capacity: 100 lbs), **Dimensional Movement** (to dimensional pocket), **Teleport 2** (200 ft.; Extras: Accurate).

ESP 3 (sight and hearing; Range: 1,000 ft.), **Mental Awareness**.

Gaseous Form (smoke form; **Insubstantial 2**).

Mind Shield 4, **Sensory Shield 3** (all senses).

Morph 3 (humanoids; +15 to Disguise), **Growth 1** (Flaws: Limited—Only Usable with Morph), **Shrinking 2** (Flaws: Limited—Only Usable with Morph).

THE CLAW

POWER LEVEL 10

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+4	+5	+4	+1	+3	+2
18	20	18	12	16	14

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+8	+8	+8	+5

Skills: Climb 8 (+12), Escape Artist 4 (+9), Intimidate 8 (+10), Notice 8 (+11), Search 4 (+5), Sense Motive 4 (+7), Stealth 8 (+13), Survival 8 (+11).

Feats: All-Out Attack, Blind-Fight, Elusive Target, Endurance, Evasion, Improved Critical (claws), Improved Initiative 1, Instant Up, Sneak Attack 1 (+2 damage), Takedown Attack 1, Uncanny Dodge 1 (olfactory).

Powers: **Protection 4** (*Extras:* Impervious), **Strike 10** (claws; *Extras:* Penetrating), **Super-Senses 7** (danger sense [olfactory], infravision, scent, tracking 3 [all-out], ultra-hearing).

Combat: Attack +10 (claws, crit. 19-20), +10 (unarmed), Grapple +14, Damage +10 (claws), +4 (unarmed), Defense +12, Knockback -6, Initiative +9.

Abilities 38 + Skills 13 (52 ranks) + Feats 11 + Powers 35 + Combat 44 + Saves 9 = 150

"BLEED!"



The past of the Claw is shrouded in mystery. Is he really some kind of cat-person or was he experimented on, or enchanted? Perhaps his powers are an extreme mutation that makes him some kind of throwback? Who knows? Definitely not the Claw, but he doesn't really care, either. He has powers that make him faster than all but the fastest and deadlier than almost everyone. Add supersharp senses and the fact that everyone finds him strangely attractive and he's more than happy to make the most of his situation.

Name Options: Blade, Cutter, Edge, Scratch, Wildstrike

CURSED MYSTIC

POWER LEVEL 10

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+1	+2	+2	+2	+3	+3
12	14	14	14	16	16

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+12/+2*	+5	+5	+10

*without force field

Skills: Concentration 8 (+11), Gather Information 5 (+8), Intimidate 10 (+8), Investigation 5 (+8), Knowledge (arcane lore) 5 (+8), Notice 10 (+13), Search 5 (+8), Sense Motive 8 (+11), Sleight of Hand 8 (+10), Stealth 8 (+10).

Feats: Hide in Plain Sight, Improved Block, Power Attack, Quick Change 1, Ritualist, Weapon Break.

Powers: **Astral Form 6** (*Power Feats:* Alternate Power—**Flight 5** [250 MPH] and **Force Field 10** [*Extras:* Impervious]), **Device 5** (Sword of Sirrion, easy to lose, Restricted 2: [Affects Insubstantial; Limited to magical creatures], [Affects Insubstantial; Limited to magical creatures]), **Super-Senses 4** (Magical Awareness, Acute, Precognition [*Flaws:* Uncontrolled]).

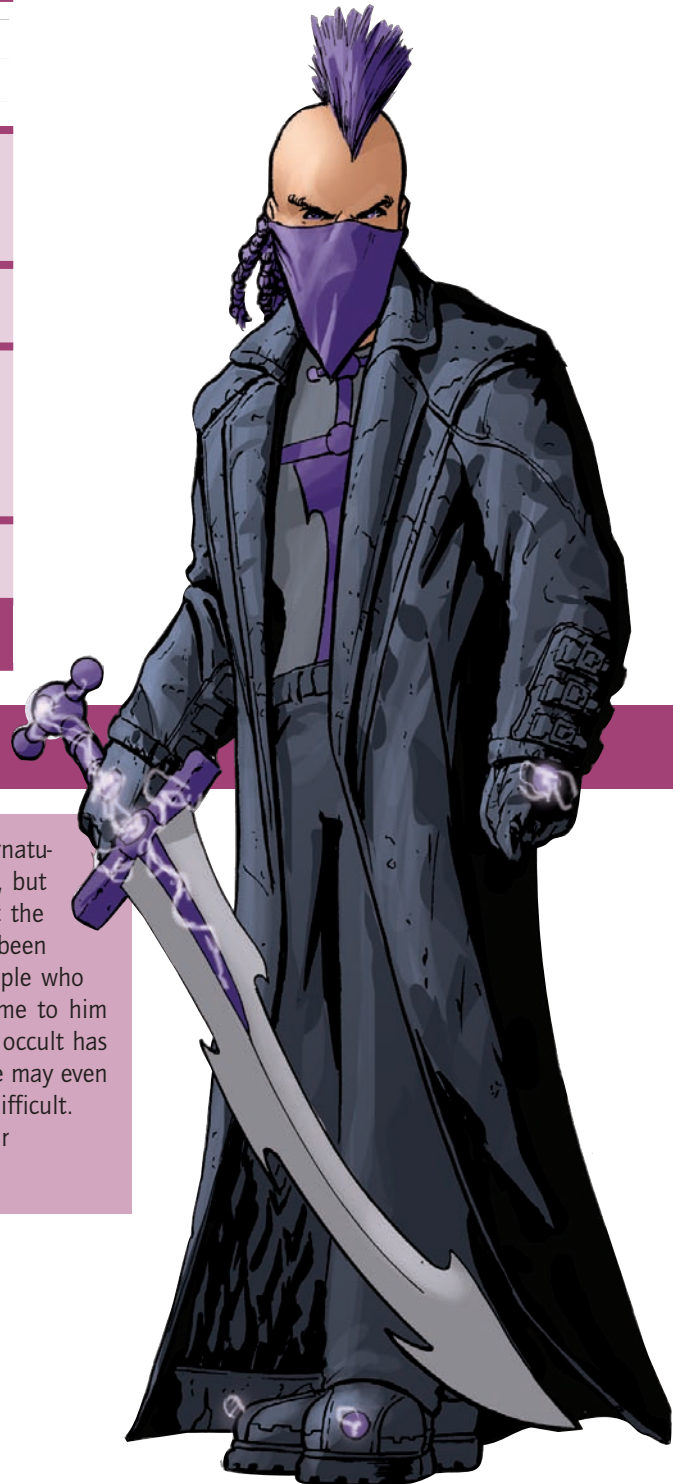
Combat: Attack +10, Grapple +11, Damage +10 (corrosion sword), +10 (magic blast), Defense +8, Knockback -1 (-11 with Force Field), Initiative +3.

Abilities 26 + Skills 18 (72 ranks) + Feats 6 + Powers 51 + Combat 36 + Saves 13 = 150

The Cursed Mystic was curious about mysticism and the supernatural. He tried his hand at various minor spells and incantations, but he lacked any real power...until one of his experiments caught the attention of something bigger and far more powerful. Now he's been tasked with hunting down rogue supernatural entities and people who would use dark forces to increase their power. These tasks come to him in the form of cryptic, haunting dreams. His background in the occult has helped him in his quest to root out the causes and, ironically, he may even be enjoying his new job, even if it does make his life a lot more difficult.

Name Options: Bane, Karma, Kadmon, Mr./Ms. Magus, Templar

"YOUR EVIL ENDS NOW!"



CYBORG

POWER LEVEL 10

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+10	+5	+10	+2	+1	+1
30/6	20/6	30/12	14	12	12

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+10	+10	+5	+4

Skills: Acrobatics 4 (+9), Climb 4 (+14), Computers 4 (+6), Intimidate 8 (+9), Notice 6 (+7), Search 6 (+8), Stealth 4 (+9).

Feats: Diehard, Eidetic Memory, Endurance, Improved Aim, Improved Initiative, Improvised Tools, Instant Up, Jack-of-All-Trades, Precise Shot 2, Quick Draw 1.

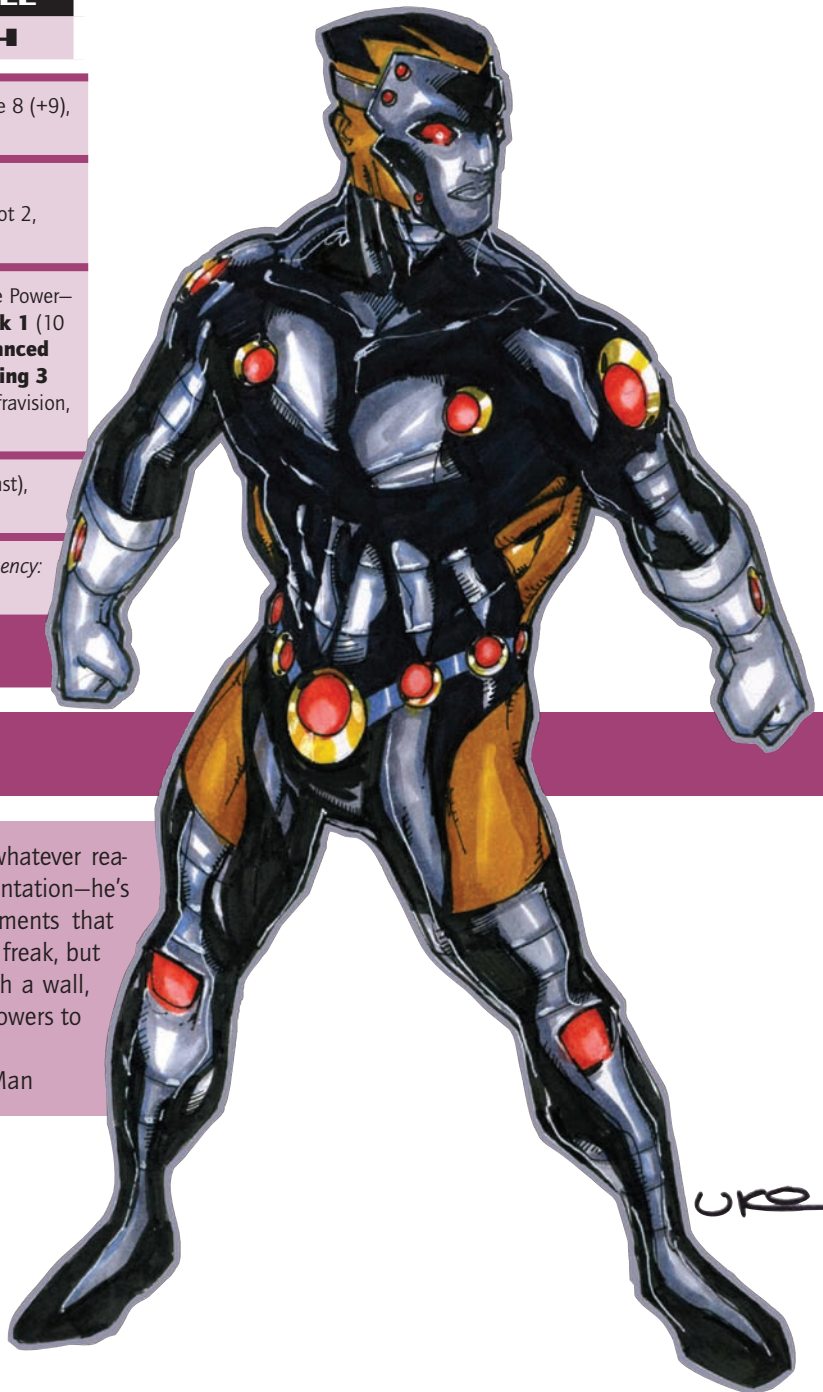
Powers: **Blast 10** (sonic screamer attachment; *Power Feats:* Alternate Power—**Nauseate 10** *Extras:* Ranged; *Flaws:* Action—Full Action), **Datalink 1** (10 ft.), **Enhanced Constitution 18**, **Enhanced Dexterity 14**, **Enhanced Strength 24**, **Immunity 4** (cold, heat, no need to breathe), **Leaping 3** (200 ft.), **Speed 4** (100 MPH), **Super-Senses 3** (danger sense, infravision, radio), **Super-Strength 2** (*Heavy Load:* 3 tons).

Combat: Attack +10, Grapple +22, Damage +10 (unarmed), +10 (blast), Defense +10, Knockback -5, Initiative +9.

Drawbacks: Noticeable: Enhanced Constitution (cyborg body) (*Frequency:* Uncommon; *Intensity:* Minor (DC 5)).

Abilities 2 + Skills 9 (36 ranks) + Feats 11 + Powers 86 + Combat 40 + Saves 3 + Drawbacks -1 = 150

"I'VE GIVEN UP A LOT,
BUT IT WAS WORTH IT."



The Cyborg was once a normal, healthy man, but for whatever reason—an accident, dedication to a cause, forced experimentation—he's now visibly inhuman, but possesses powerful enhancements that *may* have made all the sacrifices worthwhile. Sure, he's a freak, but how many freaks can run as fast as a car, punch through a wall, and take a mortar round to the chest? Now he uses his powers to do what he was made to do...fight!

Name Options: Blacksteel, Gears, Metal, Overload, Tin-Man

DEMON OF VENGEANCE

POWER LEVEL 10

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+7	+4	+7	+0	+3	+4
25	18	24	10	16	18

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+12	+7	+5	+6

Skills: Intimidate 8 (+12), Notice 4 (+7).

Feats: Fearless, Fearsome Presence 5 (25 ft., DC 15).

Powers: Flight 1 (10 MPH), Hellfire Control 12 (Power

Feats: Alternate Powers—Mental Blast 6, Strike 12 [hellfire weapons]), Immunity 9 (life support), Insubstantial 4 (incorporeal; Power Feats: Alternate Power—Teleport 6 [20 miles; Extras: Accurate]), Protection 5, Super-Senses 2 (tracking 2 [may move full speed]).

Combat: Attack +8, Grapple +20, Damage +12 (hellfire blast, strike), +6 (mental blast), Defense +8, Knockback -6, Initiative +4.

Drawbacks: Involuntary Transformation (innocent blood spilled within sight; Frequency: common; Intensity: moderate (DC 10)) -3, Normal Identity (Frequency: full-round action; Intensity: major) -4.

Abilities 51 + Skills 3 (12 ranks) + Feats 2 + Powers 65 + Combat 32 + Saves 4—Drawbacks 7 = 150

"BLOOD CALLS OUT FOR VENGEANCE!"



Once upon a time, the Demon of Vengeance was a normal man, but then he was killed in the crossfire of a battle between the Tongs, or the Russian Mafia, or superbeings, or something similarly dangerous. It hardly matters, because that ordinary guy made a deal to come back and use his otherworldly powers to wreak havoc on anyone who'd dare to harm an innocent. Now, the host has to deal with living his own life while still serving the thing that lives inside him and calls out for revenge!

Name Options: The Apparition, Bloodburn, Darkfyre, Hellspawn, Hell Rider

GROWN-UP SIDEKICK

POWER LEVEL 10

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+4	+4	+3	+1	+1	+1
18	18	16	12	12	12

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+6	+6	+10	+6

Skills: Acrobatics 8 (+12), Climb 6 (+10), Computers 4 (+5), Disable Device 4 (+5), Drive 6 (+10), Escape Artist 6 (+10), Gather Information 8 (+9), Intimidate 6 (+7), Investigate 6 (+7), Knowledge (streetwise) 6 (+7), Notice 8 (+9), Search 8 (+9), Sense Motive 4 (+5), Stealth 8 (+12).

Feats: Attack Focus 2 (melee), Benefit—Wealth 2 (wealth bonus 16), Equipment 4, Evasion 1, Improved Initiative 1, Interpose, Power Attack, Precise Shot 1, Ranged Pin, Takedown Attack 1, Uncanny Dodge (hearing)

Powers: **Device 5** (all hard to lose; **Blast 8** [disclades; *Power Drawback*: Reduced Range—Thrown, 1 point], **Protection 1** [padding], **Protection 2** [costume; *Extra*: Impervious], **Shield 4** [shield], **Super-Senses 1** [costume; infrared vision]), **Strike 4** (combat training; *Power Feat*: Mighty), **Speed 2** (25 MPH), **Super-Movement 1** (swinging), **Super-Senses 1** (danger sense [hearing]).

Equipment: Camera (*Cost*: 1), cell phone (*Cost*: 1), commlink (*Cost*: 1), computer—laptop (*Cost*: 1), digital audio recorder (*Cost*: 1), handcuffs (x4; *Cost*: 4), flashlight (*Cost*: 1), multi-tool (*Cost*: 1 point), motorcycle (*Cost*: 9 points).

Combat: Attack +12 (melee combat), +10 (ranged), Grapple +16, Damage +8 (unarmed), +8 (disclades), Defense +14 (+10 without Shield), Knockback -4, Initiative +8.

Abilities 28 + Skills 22 (88 ranks) + Feats 16 + Powers 30 + Combat 40 + Saves 14 = 150

Sometimes a sidekick gets older and transforms his identity from the hero's buddy to a crimefighter in his own right. The Grown-Up Sidekick benefits from years of experience and training, so little surprises him, but at the same time there is very little mystery surrounding him. The Grown-Up Sidekick's training makes him an effective character, with skills and powers with depth as well as breadth. Due to his long history in the hero business, the Grown-Up Sidekick is often a natural leader (especially around new heroes) and takes a proactive view of the work heroes do.

Name Options: Eclipse, Street Shadow, Overseer, Wraith

"I'VE BEEN ON THE FRONT LINES OF THIS WAR FOR A LONG TIME; I KNOW WHAT I'M DOING."



GUN-TOTING MUTANT FROM THE FUTURE

POWER LEVEL 10

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+5	+4	+4	+4	+4	+4
20	18	18	18	18	18

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+8/+4*	+8	+10	+5

*without Force Field

Skills: Acrobatics 5 (+9), Computers 6 (+10), Craft (electronic) 5 (+9), Craft (mechanical) 5 (+9), Gather Information 5 (+9), Intimidate 6 (+10), Knowledge 5 (technology) (+9), Notice 5 (+9), Search 5 (+9), Stealth 5 (+9).

Feats: Benefit-Wealth 2 (wealth bonus 16), Equipment 11, Evasion, Improved Initiative 1, Improvised Tools, Inventor, Jack-of-All-Trades, Precise Shot, Well-Informed.

Powers: Force Field 4, Super-Senses 4 (precognition), Telekinesis 2 (Heavy Load: 100 lbs.).

Equipment: Blast Cannon—Blast 10 (Power Feats: Alternate Powers—Dazzle 10 (visual), Stun 6 [Extras: Ranged]; Cost: 22 points); Power Truncheon—Strike 5 (Power Feat: Mighty; Cost: 6 points); Sensors—Super-Senses 3 (darkvision, radio; Cost: 3 points); Teletunnel—Teleport 6 (20 miles; Extras: Accurate, Portal; Flaws: Long-Range; Cost: 24 points).

Combat: Attack +10 (blast cannon), +10 (power truncheon), Grapple +15, Damage +10 (blaster), +10 (power truncheon), Defense +12, Knockback -4, Initiative +8.

Abilities 50 + Skills 13 (52 ranks) + Feats 20 + Powers 12 + Combat 44 + Saves 11 = 150

"I'M HERE TO SAVE THE WORLD...NO MATTER WHAT I HAVE TO DO."



The Gun-toting Mutant from the Future is an odd archetype, but it's one of the signature characters from the Iron Age. This character has traveled time to prevent certain key events from happening and make sure that other key events take place. He'll do whatever it takes to make sure the future he desires takes place. His arsenal includes big, futuristic weapons and gadgets, mutant powers, and enough knowledge of the "past" to be dangerous.

Name Options: Commander, Hardware, Kordd, Vigil

NINJA

POWER LEVEL 10

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+1	+5	+2	+0	+3	+1
12	20	14	10	16	12

"THIS ISN'T WHAT I DO, IT'S WHO I AM."

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+8	+5	+10	+5

Skills: Acrobatics 10 (+15), Bluff 4 (+5), Climb 8 (+9), Disable Device 4 (+8), Escape Artist 4 (+9), Gather Information 4 (+5), Intimidate 4 (+5), Languages 2 (Japanese, Chinese), Notice 8 (+11), Perform 6 (+7), Search 4 (+4), Sleight of Hand 4 (+9), Stealth 10 (+15), Survival 2 (+3), Swim 2 (+3).

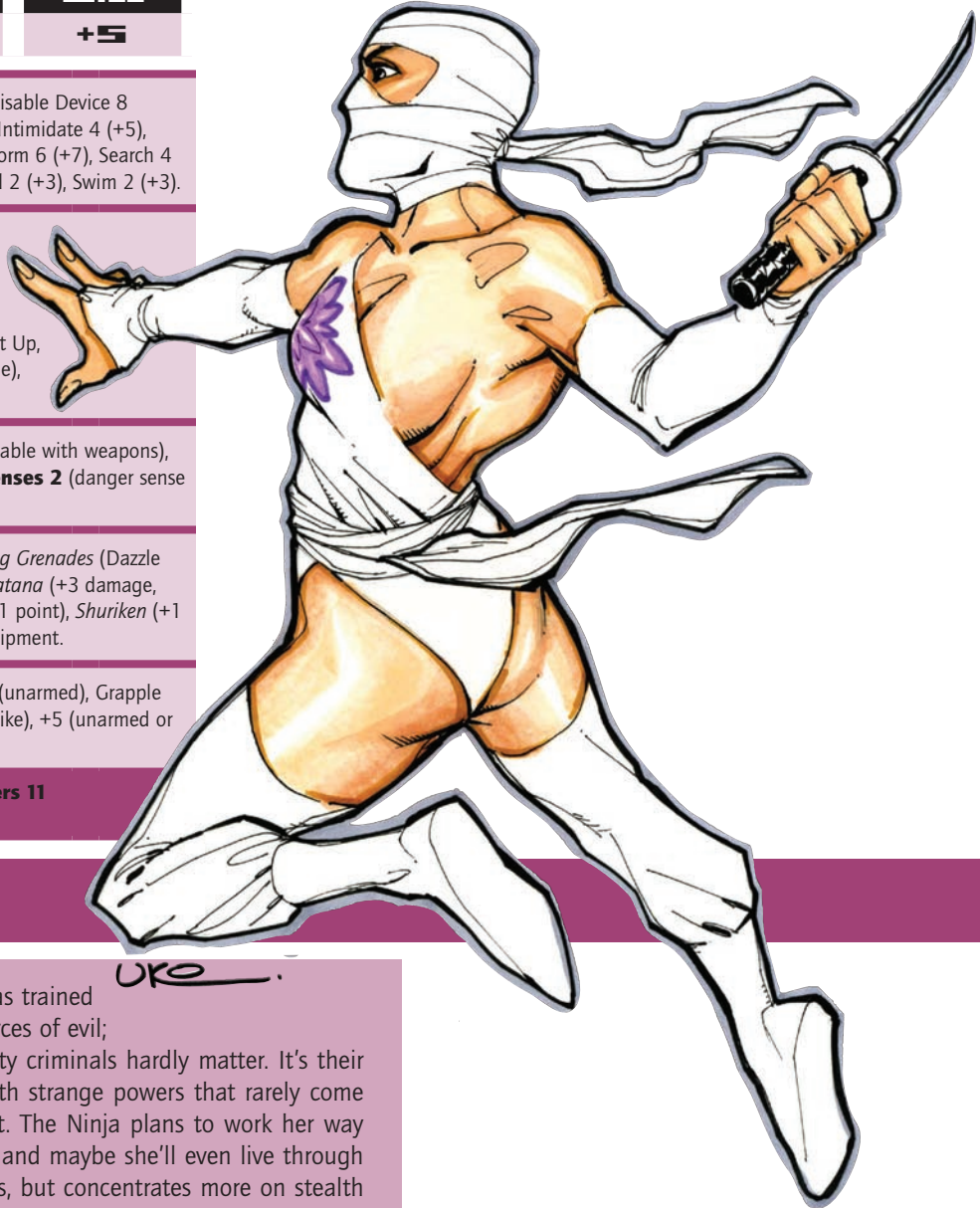
Feats: Acrobatic Bluff, Blind-Fight, Chokehold, Defensive Attack, Defensive Roll 6, Elusive Target, Equipment 8, Evasion 1, Grappling Finesse, Improved Defense 2 (+8 for total defense maneuver), Improved Grab, Improved Grapple, Improved Initiative 2, Improved Throw, Instant Up, Precise Shot 1, Quick Draw, Sneak Attack 4 (+5 damage), Takedown Attack, Uncanny Dodge 1 (mental).

Powers: **Strike 4** (martial arts; *Power Feats:* Mighty, Useable with weapons), **Super-Movement 2** (slow fall, sure-footed), **Super-Senses 2** (danger sense [mental]).

Equipment: Bow (+3 damage; *Cost:* 9 points), *Flash-Bang Grenades* (Dazzle 4 [visual and auditory; *Extra:* Area-Burst; *Cost:* 16), *Katana* (+3 damage, crit. 19-20; *Cost:* 5 points), *Nightvision Goggles* (*Cost:* 1 point), *Shuriken* (+1 damage; *Extra:* autofire; *Cost:* 3), 6 more points of equipment.

Combat: Attack +12 (katana), +12 (bow, shuriken), +12 (unarmed), Grapple +17, Damage +8 (katana with strike), +8 (bow with strike), +5 (unarmed or shuriken), Defense +12, Knockback -4, Initiative +13.

Abilities 24 + Skills 20 (80 ranks) + Feats 37 + Powers 11 + Combat 48 + Saves 10 = 150



The Ninja is a staple of the Iron Age. She was trained by a semi-mystical group to hold back the forces of evil; everything else is secondary. The lives of petty criminals hardly matter. It's their bosses' bosses that concern her, the ones with strange powers that rarely come into the open and never seem to get caught. The Ninja plans to work her way up the food chain until she reaches the top, and maybe she'll even live through it. The Ninja is similar to other martial artists, but concentrates more on stealth and lethal attacks. Her daily life takes a back seat to her mission and she's often uncomfortable in social situations that don't have something to do with her goal.

Name Options: Lotus, Silver Shadow, Steel Viper, Storm-Strike

VAMPIRIC AVENGER

POWER LEVEL 10

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+7	+5	+5	+1	+3	+3
24	20	20	12	16	16

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+8	+8	+10	+8

Skills: Bluff 6 (+9, +13 with Attractive bonus), Diplomacy 4 (+7, +11 with Attractive bonus), Gather Information 4 (+7), Intimidate 6 (+9), Knowledge (arcane lore) 2 (+3), Knowledge (streetwise) 6 (+7), Notice 6 (+9), Search 4 (+5), Sense Motive 6 (+9), Stealth 8 (+13).

Feats: Attractive 1, Benefit (legally dead), Evasion 1, Fascinate (Diplomacy), Favored Environment 2 (nighttime; +2), Fearless, Fearsome Presence 2 (DC 12), Improved Grab, Improved Pin, Sneak Attack 1 (+2 damage).

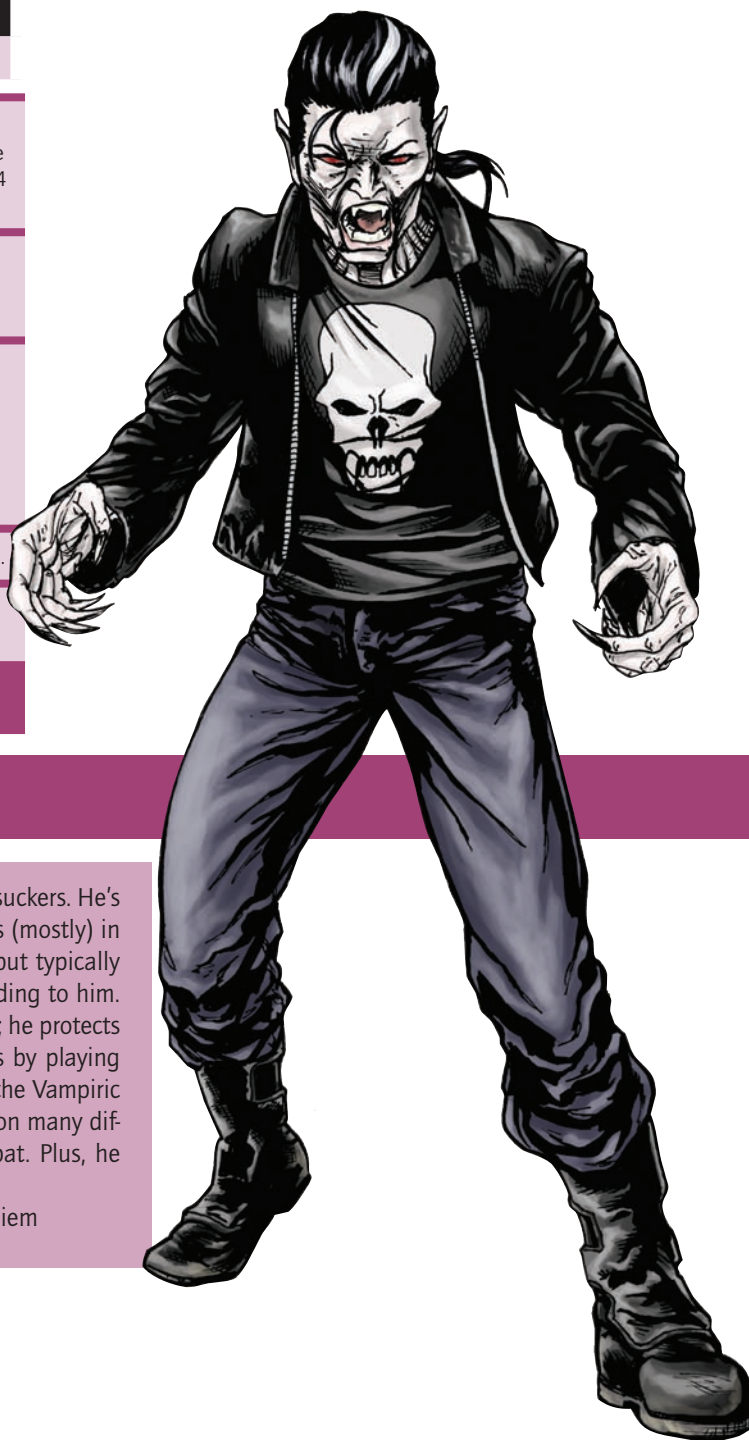
Powers: **Animal Control 4** (Extras: Area—Burst; Flaws: Limited—bats, rats, and wolves only, Limited—nighttime only), **Drain Constitution 1** (blood drain; Extras: Slow Fade—1 day), **Flight 2** (25 MPH), **Immunity 9** (life support), **Insubstantial 2** (gaseous; Flaws: Limited—nighttime only), **Protection 8** (Extras: Impervious 2), **Regeneration 1** (Resurrection; not when cremated or beheaded), **Strike 3** (claws; Power Feats: Mighty).

Drawbacks: Vulnerable (vs. Holy; Frequency: Uncommon; Intensity: moderate) -2.

Combat: Attack +9 (claws or unarmed), Grapple +16, Damage +10 (claws), +7 (unarmed), Defense +11, Knockback -5, Initiative +5.

Abilities 28 + Skills 13 (52 ranks) + Feats 11 + Powers 47 + Combat 40 + Saves 13—Drawbacks 2 = 150

"LET'S SEE IF YOU HATE BEING DEAD AS MUCH AS I DO."



Somehow this creature of the night is different from other bloodsuckers. He's able to walk in the daylight, albeit somewhat weakened, and is (mostly) in control of his darker, more bestial side. He still needs to feed, but typically only does so from those who deserve to be preyed upon—according to him. It's an understatement to say the Vampiric Avenger is conflicted; he protects some from being preyed upon, yet he preys on others. Perhaps by playing hero he's balancing out his own actions. Regardless of motive, the Vampiric Avenger is a versatile and dangerous enemy capable of taking on many different challenges, from reconnaissance and seduction to combat. Plus, he can be downright spooky when he needs to be.

Name Options: Blood-Knight, Hellion, Nightrage, Omen, Requiem

VIGILANTE

POWER LEVEL 10

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+3	+4	+3	+2	+3	+4
16	18	16	14	16	18

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+8	+8	+8	+6

Skills: Acrobatics 4 (+8), Climb 6 (+9), Computers 4 (+6), Craft (electronics) 4 (+6), Disable Device 4 (+6), Disguise 4 (+8), Drive 6 (+10), Escape Artist 4 (+8), Gather Information 6 (+10), Intimidate 8 (+12), Investigate 4 (+6), Knowledge (criminology) 4 (+6), Knowledge (streetwise) 6 (+8), Medicine 4 (+7), Notice 6 (+9), Pilot 4 (+8), Search 6 (+8), Stealth 6 (+10), Survival 4 (+7), Swim 2 (+5).

Feats: Blind-Fight, Chokehold, Contacts, Defensive Roll 2, Equipment 9, Improved Disarm 1, Improved Grab, Improved Throw, Master Plan, Power Attack, Precise Shot 1, Quick Draw 1, Takedown Attack 1, Uncanny Dodge 1 (hearing).

Powers: **Strike 4** (combat training; *Power Feats:* Mighty).

Equipment: Commlink (*Cost:* 1), Mini-Tracer (*Cost:* 1), Nightvision Goggles (*Cost:* 1), Flashlight (*Cost:* 1), Knife (+1 damage, crit: 19-20; *Cost:* 2), Heavy Pistol with Suppressor (+4 damage; Subtle; *Cost:* 9), Sniper Rifle with Laser Sight and Targeting Scope (+5 damage; *Cost:* 12), Body Armor (+3 Toughness; *Cost:* 3), Motorcycle (*Cost:* 9), plus 6 other points in equipment.

Combat: Attack +12 (shotgun), +13 (heavy pistol), +12 (knife), Grapple +15, Damage +5/+6 (shotgun), +4 (heavy pistol), +8 (knife), Defense +12, Knockback -4, Initiative +4.

Abilities 38 + Skills 24 (96 ranks) + Feats 23 + Powers 5 + Combat 48 + Saves 12 = 150

"I'M INTERESTED IN JUSTICE,
NOT LAW."



The Vigilante is obsessed with justice. Something happened to the Vigilante in his life that made him come just a little unglued, and since that day he's dedicated his life to meting out justice. First and foremost, the Vigilante is interested in getting revenge on criminals for what they did to him or his loved ones. The fact that his actions also result in making the world a safer place for others is a happy accident. Sometimes the Vigilante comes close to being truly heroic, but then the bullets start flying, people start dying, and you're reminded that he's motivated by a blinding need for revenge, not a need to help. What makes this archetype dangerous is intelligence and fanatical dedication backed up by the right equipment.

Name Options: Avenger, Harbinger, Jury, Magistrate, Nemesis, Night-Hunter



CHAPTER FOUR: IRON AGE CAMPAIGNS

This chapter contains information Gamemasters need to run an Iron Age campaign. Everything in these pages will help you run an Iron Age game that feels like it was pulled from the comics of the time. This chapter works best if you've already read **Chapter 2** because it builds on the information given there in order

to present a complete picture of what Iron Age campaigns are like and how to run them.

Also included in this chapter are supporting cast commonly encountered in Iron Age comics as well as a collection of new villain archetypes you can use in your campaign.

RECONSTRUCTING THE IRON AGE

More comics fit the Iron Age approach to stories and characters than were actually published during the core period of the era (roughly 1986 through 1996). Books that dealt with real-world consequences of the existence of superbeings, and books that delved into the motivations that drove heroes and villains have existed since the earliest days of comics.

In the decade or so before the Iron Age, these sorts of stories became more common as fans and creators wanted to see heroes that fit into the world they saw outside their windows. Superman was the perfect hero for his time, but his flawless image didn't reflect what the audience expected from their heroes in the '70s, '80s, '90s, and onward. The readers and fans wanted real people with superhu-

man powers, in a setting as close to the modern world as possible. Tastes were changing, and comics changed with them; some would say they had matured.

Gamemasters and players looking to play a campaign set in the Iron Age will find all the information they need in this chapter. This section gives you campaign design and role-playing advice to help create an authentic-seeming Iron Age campaign. Like its counterpart in *Golden Age*, this chapter uses modern comic books as a comparative baseline, so if you're unfamiliar with the conventions of modern superhero comics, please read **Chapter 10** of *Mutants & Masterminds* to get a basic overview of the current state of comics before proceeding. Or go read some comics!

DEFINING CAMPAIGNS

Before starting a game, you have to decide how you want to approach it. You've already decided to play an Iron Age game, which comes with a number of assumptions already made for you and your players (for an exhaustive explanation of those assumptions, see **Chapter 2**).

Some GMs prefer to discuss things with the players to get an idea of what everyone is looking for from the game. Other GMs prefer to come to the table with a solid idea all her own of what she'll be running. This section covers both options, with tips on how to get the most out of either approach. Both options will help you to create a campaign that feels like the Iron Age that you and your players want to see.

GM-DEFINED CAMPAIGNS

Gamemasters and players that are interested in running and playing in an Iron Age game have some challenges in front of them to make sure the game runs smoothly, but keeps that Iron Age feel. As GM, how you address those challenges sets the stage for the campaign, but as players, your friends will set the tone. Your goal as GM is to give the players enough choices to feel unrestrained when making their characters, but not so many that they come up with something that doesn't fit into the campaign you want to run.

Before you sit down with the players to write up their characters, you need to make some decisions about the game. Here are a number of topics to consider; you can decide for yourself which ones are most important. The more work you do ahead of time, the easier it will be for you to write up supporting cast, villains, and adventures, and the easier it will be for your players to sit down and create heroes that fit the campaign you have planned.

SCOPE

Will the heroes be saving the universe, the world, their country, or the people on their block from various threats?

Scope defines how big the story you're telling will be. Sometimes this changes over the course of a campaign as heroes become more powerful or you come up with a creative way to tell bigger or smaller stories. However, deciding on a "default" scope for the game sets everyone's expectations at the same level. If you tell your players you're running a game that centers on street-level stories in a gang-infested neighborhood, you have a much smaller chance of one of the players creating an alien prince looking to take back his throne.

ELEMENTS

What sorts of encounters or adventures should the players expect in the game?

The elements of a game define its genre as well as indicate the sorts of encounters players should expect. A campaign that concentrates on espionage could be assumed to include spies, black ops missions, and secret bases. In a campaign that emphasizes the supernatural, the players would be right to expect to see demons, spellcasters, and magical artifacts. The elements of a campaign should also give clues as to what sort of origins and power sources the players will see... and what might be good options for their characters. If you let your

players know what elements to expect, you'll get characters that fit them and avoid the problem of having to shoehorn in character concepts that don't jibe with the campaign background.

SETTING

What setting(s) will the characters most often be in?

Setting ties into scope, but they're two different things. Scope defines how big the story is; setting defines where the story takes place. Hell's Kitchen, Seattle, Route 66, and the gladiatorial arena-city on Alpha Centauri are settings that all conjure up different images, even if the players don't know exactly what those places look like. The setting helps players get a concrete idea of what their character's surroundings will be and help them conceive a character that fits that milieu.

THEME(S)

Is there an idea or motif you'll be communicating with your story, and what is it?

A campaign with a theme features a key idea at its heart. For example, a campaign in which the heroes are all ex-convicts might include redemption as a theme. Each of the characters at some point during the campaign would have to address the question of whether or not they can redeem themselves—if so, how, and if not, why?

Not all games have themes. That's fine; it's possible to run a fantastic game and never define a theme or themes. Campaigns that start with a theme, however, always have a default premise that the GM can fall back on. In addition, themes help the players define their characters better during play, which makes for excellent role-playing opportunities.

THE ROLE OF THE HEROES

Where do the heroes fit in the campaign?

Do the player characters operate in the public eye on the fringes, or somewhere in between? Are they concerned with fighting a danger only they can see, or do they fight threats that exist normally in a super-powered world? Defining this aspect of the game gives the players another piece of information to help them create characters that fit the style of the campaign you're trying to run. In addition, it will help you to come up with adversaries to threaten the heroes over the course of the campaign, whether it's a longtime foe or the "villain of the week." Another benefit of defining this aspect of the game is that gives you an idea of how the players might approach a situation. Characters who operate in the shadows are unlikely to fly up to the police surrounding a hostage situation and offer their help; instead they'll survey the situation and make their way in without anyone knowing.

PERCEPTION

How are the characters viewed by the public and the authorities?

Are the heroes regarded as heroes, vigilantes, or villains? Do different groups see them differently? Perhaps the heroes have claimed

SAMPLE CAMPAIGN OPTIONS

Here are some examples of the various topics covered under Defining Campaigns. These lists are just the tip of the iceberg, but they give a range of options that will hopefully spur ideas of your own.

SCOPE

City streets
Citywide
Galaxy-spanning
International
Inter-dimensional
Time-spanning

ELEMENTS

Aliens
Mega-corporations
Espionage
Ninjas
Supernatural monsters
Time travel

SETTING

Alien planet
City streets and back alleys
Corporate headquarters

Highways and back roads
Near-future
Other dimensions

THEME(S)

Earning your place (especially good for a legacy hero)
Humanity lost/humanity regained
Price of revenge
Self-destruction
Redemption
Responsibility vs. Duty

THE ROLE OF THE HEROES

Corporate-sponsored militia
Criminal-hunting vigilantes
Defenders of the streets/city/etc.
Dimension-hopping bounty hunters
Superspies
Villains turned (reluctant?) heroes

PERCEPTIONS

Hated and regarded as mentally unbalanced
Mistrusted or misunderstood
Regarded as urban legends
Super-beings are completely unknown
Tolerated until a reputation is established
Viewed as vigilantes and outlaws

AFFILIATIONS

Alien monarchy
Corporation
Espionage organization
Police
Secret society
Time travel enforcement agency

a section of your campaign city as their own: to everyone outside their neighborhood, they're nothing more than an urban legend; to the authorities, they're outlaws that sow lawlessness, but to the people in their neighborhood they're true heroes of the common man. Deciding how the heroes are perceived sets the tone of the game. It also gives everyone a good idea of where the heroes fit into the game world as well as how people will react to them.

AFFILIATIONS

Are the heroes part of, or do they work for, a larger group?

This decision will have a huge impact on the game. If the heroes are on their own, do they have resources or a headquarters that they can rely on? If they work for a corporation, agency, or other group, are they constrained by rules and regulations? Players who know up front they'll be surviving on their own make different decisions about their characters than those who design them as part of a larger organization. Gamemasters always have to populate the campaign with recurring locations and supporting cast, but those can have very different meanings depending on the affiliations of the characters.

CHARACTERS

What have the players given you to work with?

Finally, the characters your players have created are the most important part of the campaign, because the stories to come are about them and how they affect the world around them. In order to head off character conflicts or too much overlap, talk to the players to understand the types of characters they're contemplating. If two or more characters are too similar, or if it looks like they won't get along

in play (vampire, meet vampire-hunter), this is the time to make changes. Players can be reluctant to alter their character concepts, but it's better to do it before the game starts, so the player can wrap his head around the updated concept, rather than being surprised by the problem in the first session. The same is true of character overlap: if two or more characters have too much in common, players can feel like they don't have a chance to shine during games. It's best when each character has an area of personal expertise distinct from the others in the group.

FINALLY...

After you've made all these decisions and defined your campaign as much as you can before actually playing, start the game. Once the player characters are loose in the world, you have to be prepared to change any of your earlier decisions. The heroes may change their image—for better or worse—during the game; if this happens, the way they're perceived should be updated accordingly. The same is true of the other topics in this section. Allow the players to have an impact upon the campaign and they'll see that their crime-fighting and role-playing efforts aren't being wasted.

GROUP-DEFINED CAMPAIGNS

In order to create a campaign that matches everyone's expectations, talk to your players ahead of time, optimally when you're all sitting around the table. Their preferences may come from the comics they've read, the characters they want to play, or somewhere else entirely. A group of players working together will always come up with ideas you wouldn't have thought of on your own. This approach to campaign design is organic, with everyone's ideas for the game

feeding on each other to combine in unexpected ways. Because this approach is so unpredictable, you never know what you'll end up with, so be prepared to adapt. As GM, you should direct the discussion to cover all of the topics discussed in the GM-Defined Campaigns section preceding this one. No matter how cool some of the ideas are, if you don't think you can run a good game based on them, get rid of them. Ultimately, you have to run the campaign, so if you're not comfortable with the ideas being thrown out, let the players know so you can get back to more comfortable ground. Remember that you need to be excited about the game, just as the players do!

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS

Every campaign has areas in which problems can arise. In Iron Age games, these pitfalls are even bigger. Luckily, they're also more obvious, so you can head them off before they cause you real trouble. Because the Iron Age is filled with hard-nosed heroes with a very confrontational style, it's easy for them to get into trouble in ways traditional heroes don't. The following sections cover some of these problem areas and offer suggestions on how to deal with them ahead of time and what to do when they crop up.

REAL, BUT NOT TOO REAL

Because the Iron Age has its roots in the real world (at least more so than the comic ages that came before it), players expect a higher level of detail. *Mutants & Masterminds* is many things, but realistic is not one of them. This allows it to emulate comics very, very well, but it doesn't do realism anywhere near as well.

Instead of fighting the system, strive for "cinematic realism." (That's something the system also does very well.) There are no hit location tables, or long charts that describe the effects of a critical hit, but that means you get to work those things into the games as you're playing. Games are more exciting when the GM offers good descriptions, so when one of your players rolls an impressive hit on a villain, describe it in better detail and map out the effects for them. The system allows you to impose penalties, so use them! One of your players just hit one of your bad guys and it doesn't matter to you if he escapes? Tell your players that Mr. Nasty has been hit in the leg and will suffer from slowed movement and additional penalties.

The hidden benefit of this is that if you hand out penalties like that to the villains, the heroes will expect the same treatment. That will reinforce the level of realism everyone is looking for, and the players will worry that the next hit they take could have wider-reaching effects than those outlined in the rules.

Some words of caution, though: use these penalties sparingly on the heroes. Players hate to lose, and additional penalties may make the game seem more realistic, but also more frustrating. Consider handing out hero points when you hit a player's character with a penalty; that should soften the blow, but still send the right message. (See **Chapter 2** for more ways to bring realism to your games.)

KILL! KILL! KILL!

Ultra-violence was one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Iron Age. As such, you have a much greater chance of having heroes in your game that are willing to "waste" your bad guys. Besides the

fact that you may have to write up a lot more adversaries than you normally might, this also makes it difficult to have recurring villains, and also means the heroes may run into issues with the law (see **The Law**, following).

In order to combat this, find out from your players what they expect from the game. If they want to have huge body counts, work with that. You may need to alter your concept of the campaign, but that should be possible without too much work. Instead of the heroes facing off against the same villain a few sessions in a row before they finally thwart his plans, make the bad guys a large group, like the Mob or a ninja clan. That way, you'll be able to throw the same adversary at the heroes time after time, and they'll still get the satisfaction of taking out the bad guys the way they want.

In truth, it's seldom the agents they should be worried about; it's the head of the organization. The mastermind behind all their problems is smart enough to avoid direct contact with the heroes, so he survives when his lackeys don't. Eventually, the heroes figure out a way to confront the mastermind and end the threat of his criminal empire.

Another way to counter this problem is to create adversaries from time to time that are immune to your most violent characters' attacks. In addition to solving the lethality issue, the character now must come up with a different way to finish off the target. The player will be excited by the change of pace and look forward to encounters with that villain again.

Lastly, there's the ever-popular GM Fiat clause. You want your bad guy to survive? Somehow, he does. This works best if the character died somewhere the player characters couldn't get reach or from which they couldn't recover the body. Some variants appropriate to the Iron Age include the legacy villain and the villain reborn. In the case of the legacy villain, the hero kills his foe, but he's replaced by a friend, sibling, son, daughter, or a random person who found the costume. In the "villain reborn" scenario, the villain is killed (or disappears), but returns better than ever. Perhaps a large criminal organization recovered him before the heroes could so they could magically heal and enhance him, or turn him into a cyborg, or something similar. It might be that a version of the adversary from the future travels back to gain vengeance on the characters that thwarted him, only with better technology and knowledge of the original fight. You get to re-use the character—possibly with some upgrades, but with the same motivations and goals. Plus, now the hero and villain have history, which makes things more interesting.

THE LAW

The high body count in Iron Age stories—both on the side of the heroes and the villains—ought to bring the law running to lock everyone up. The heroes may be significantly more powerful than the police (or whatever group is hunting them), so it won't be long before they must consider alternate ways to bring the player characters in. And while it's sometimes fun when the heroes have to worry about the authorities arriving, it's a whole different matter when they're actively hunted.

The most realistic way to handle heroes wanted by the law would put the heroes on the run for the course of the campaign. With modern forensic science, the heroes' identities would be discovered

relatively quickly, then plastered all over the news. In addition, given the level of superscience available in most games, the police might have a team of well-trained officers armed with weapons that can threaten the heroes. All of this adds up to a campaign full of a lot of running and very little adventure since the heroes don't get a chance to pursue any story threads you place in front of them.

A more elegant way to handle heroes with a long list of offenses is to have the issue come up only now and again. Your goal should be to reinforce the idea that the police view the heroes as a hostile force that they would want to arrest and bring up on charges if the opportunity ever arose. The authorities put some effort into hunting down the heroes from time to time, but not so often that the heroes are constantly on the run. The police are an ever-present threat, not an ever-present adversary.

When you take this approach to the authorities, it frees you to introduce members of your supporting cast that work for the police, but recognize that the heroes sometimes do good work...even if it's illegal. That NPC could be a longtime ally to the heroes, or may eventually turn against them due to professional pressures. No matter what, you have an interesting new storyline that wasn't available to you before and it makes the threat represented by the police more real.

If the heroes are brought in somehow, an escape or breakout is an exciting change of pace. If you and the players decide to go this route, be sure that the player whose character is captured has something to do while his friends attempt to break him out, whether he plays a character that's normally an NPC, plays an absent player's character, or has things to do with his own character to contribute to the escape. No matter what, you don't want the player to sit there with nothing to do for a large part of the game session. The character is in jail, so the player is already not having as much fun as possible.

Finally, if the hero ends up in court, you have another challenge in front of you. Courtroom dramas have always made for exciting television and movies, but in games, you as GM spend an awful lot of time narrating NPC speeches as the players sit there. In the *Mastermind's Manual*, there are optional rules on how to handle court cases (see **The Legal System**, *Mastermind's Manual*, page 126). That system is highly abstracted, but is perfectly suitable for trying the heroes as well as the villains they face. Breakout attempts and escapes are possible throughout the trial, on the way to prison, or even once the hero makes it to jail. You'll need to talk to the players involved and see how they want to handle it, remembering that one player should not have to sit out while his character is on trial.

LONERS

Typical of the genre, but a difficult addition to any game, are lone-wolf characters. The attraction is clear: he's a "rebel who follows his own rules" and "answers to no one." He's also a lousy character in a game with more than one or two players. So, be sure to let your players know when you're starting the game that loners aren't a good choice for a character. All the players know they'll be part of a group, so if something in their character doesn't allow them to be a bit of a "joiner," then come up with something else that will work.

That said, it's always good to give each of the player characters the spotlight once in a while so their particular specialty can really

shine. The Raven is the stealth and recon specialist, so let her sneak ahead and case the villains base while the other heroes sit back for a few minutes. That way, the Raven's player gets to enjoy the sneaky aspect of the character and the other players get to see what she adds to the team.

If some of your players want a little more time in the spotlight, consider running some one-on-one sessions. Adventures focusing on one character are exciting changes of pace for you and the player since he knows he can't rely on his teammates for help and you know you can give the character all of your attention and pack a lot more adventure into the same amount of time because there aren't as many distractions.

PLOTS AND ADVENTURES

In terms of storylines and settings, Iron Age comics covered as much ground as other comics. They avoided detours into the cartoonier areas common in some ages, but made up for it by exploring the darker, grimmer parts of the world rarely seen in comics.

Gamemasters are free to create any plotlines that fit their campaigns and characters, but this section includes a number of plots common to the Iron Age. All of these examples include both long-term and short-term adventure ideas that you can mine to use in your own games.

MOB STORY

Organized crime rears its head in almost every superhero game. That's because the Mob has it all. First, they're a criminal empire in their own right, with their fingers in every illegal activity known to man. Second, they have a hierarchy that makes it easy to throw mooks at the characters in one session, leading them up the ladder to power players in later sessions. Third, they have nearly limitless resources, so players can have their heroes mow down thugs and blow up cars to their hearts' delight and the Mob will always have more to fill in the holes. Fourth, when the Mob can't handle a problem on its own, the bosses hire out. In a world in which superpowers exist, that means the nearest super-powered enforcer or assassin is only a phone call away. Fifth, they have wide-ranging influence, so they can "attack" the characters indirectly by convincing politicians, the police, or some other powerful group that the player characters are a problem to be dealt with. Sixth, the top bosses can be super-powerful in their own right, or be the patsies for an even more powerful over-boss whose existence is completely unknown to the general populace. With all that going for them, it's no wonder the Mob is a staple adversary in comics in general and the Iron Age in specific.

SHORT-TERM PLOT

The Mob is smuggling high-tech weapons, including battlesuits, into the city. They've grown tired of always being on the losing end of conflicts with the cape wearers that run loose in the city and they're betting this shipment shifts the odds a little. The heroes learn of this shipment from mobsters they take out, their contacts on the streets, or by stumbling upon some suspicious activity. If things go well for the heroes, they can prevent at least one shipment of very expensive battlesuits and weapons from reaching the bad guys.

LONG-TERM PLOT

Mob bosses have decided to expand their idea of organization to another level. Now they want to get all of the supervillains in town together using the same sort of scheme. Some villains work the streets acting as enforcers. They report to their bosses, who oversee and collect from the lower-level villains, and those bosses report to underbosses that do the same, all the way up to the big boss. Using this hierarchy, the Mob hopes to control the villains' normally random activities, while also making everyone a lot more money and avoiding a lot of unnecessary conflict between villains. For the heroes, this leads to a big problem because villains who join up have access to more legal resources and can coordinate with other members when they need backup or help. Over the course of the campaign, the PCs will have to work hard to disassemble the Supervillain Mob before the idea really takes off and other bosses start similar programs.

DEMON HUNTERS

Games that feature magic or include supernatural characters often encounter otherworldly menaces. Demons make excellent opponents for heroes because they can take nearly any form. When you need to throw something at the characters with a little more staying power than the average thug, a demon is a good choice. In addition, demons (or any sort of supernatural creature) have a wide variety of powers to choose from. A gang member with a gun may not be all that impressive to a hero, but a fire-breathing demon dog might be just the thing to keep the character guessing—even if the power levels of the two are exactly the same.

Supernatural creatures, especially sorcerers or demons, often have followers (human or otherwise) that perform tasks for them. An adversary with a goal and the power to summon powerful allies to make his schemes come true is perfect for nearly any roleplaying game, even if your campaign doesn't feature much in the way of the supernatural.

In the Iron Age, it was common for characters with mystical origins to not only oppose supernatural menaces, but to actively hunt them down and eliminate them. A campaign or storyline in which the heroes take a more pro-active stance toward the villains could be just the thing you need in order to shake up the players' expectations about the game.

SHORT-TERM PLOT

A long-time occultist and magic-chaser has learned of an item that will grant him significant magical power. The spell book or item gives him insight into how to accrue even more power for himself, so he starts committing a number of ritualistic sacrifices. The heroes encounter the mage as he flees one of the murders and they have to find out what he's up to.

LONG-TERM PLOT

The mayor, or some other important figure in town, has been possessed by a demon. Over the course of the campaign, he commissions the construction of a number of pieces of public art that actually act as parts of a city-wide artifact that gathers magical power. As the magical energy grows, more and more supernatural beings start

appearing. Eventually, the mayor uses the gathered power to make himself even more powerful and open a portal to Hell, allowing demons to spill through and overrun the city.

INVADERS

The invasion plotline is a classic one that's withstood the test of time. You can use it with aliens, other-dimensional beings, Atlanteans, subterraneans, or just about anything else you can come up with. Even in the Iron Age, this storyline works well. Even the most violent gunslinger counts as a "good guy" when the adversary is so clearly defined as evil, and this plotline allows the heroes to be as blood-thirsty as they like, since there should be plenty of grunts to defeat.

Their goal is simple: they want to take over. The precise form your invaders take is up to you, but some ideas include shape-shifting aliens (or aliens that look human) who've been here for years waiting for a signal to rise up and attack, or other-dimensional creatures who've been bred with humans for centuries and are now called by their "master" to reveal themselves and join his army. In some cases, the heroes themselves are members or hybrids of the alien race and identify more with their human parentage than with their alien origin. Other times, the heroes might stumble upon the plot and become targets because they know too much.

Invaders allow you as GM to pull out all the stops when it comes to creating adversaries. Low-powered grunts of all shapes and sizes fill the invasion force's front ranks. One step up are their command-



ers, who are almost a match for the heroes, wielding powers and weaponry that make them a threat. Another step up the ladder and the heroes are dealing with teams of superbeings that truly rival them and act as troubleshooters for the ultimate master. Finally, the mastermind behind the invasion force is the powerhouse that the heroes don't meet until they've fought their way to him.

SHORT-TERM PLOT

A friend of the heroes goes missing (a reporter or cop is a good option) and, when they investigate, they find out that she was looking into a human smuggling ring. What the heroes don't know is that what's actually being smuggled are half-human/half-alien hybrids from all over the world who are coming to town to join an army of people just like them. Their immediate goal is to rescue their friend, but now that they know about the growing army, what do they do about it?

LONG-TERM PLOT

The mastermind behind the alien invasion has decided that, now that the heroes know of his growing army (as outlined in the previous paragraph), he can act against them directly. To do so, he assembles a team of hybrid villains that he sends after the heroes over and over in order to keep them distracted. The villains play no other role than keeping the heroes busy. Eventually, the heroes will have to defeat the villains, and then follow that up by tracking down the mastermind and taking him down...or at least confounding his plans.

ESPIONAGE

Superheroes do a lot of things the public never finds out about, but in the Iron Age, heroes took on secret missions that heroes in previous times wouldn't ever consider taking. This is one area in which you can really differentiate your Iron Age campaign from other superheroic campaigns you've run. Instead of the heroes responding to a threat, using an espionage plot, you can send the heroes out to head off a problem before it becomes an imminent danger. Their mission may involve destroying a location, kidnapping or eliminating a person, or stealing an item of great importance.

Espionage plotlines are often more freeform than more traditionally heroic plots, but they don't have to be. In fact, some play out more like dungeon crawl from fantasy games: the players receive information on a location, they scout it out, and then sneak in, taking out opponents as they encounter them until they reach their goal and escape. This deviation from the plots your players have come to expect from superhero games should be a welcome change for everyone.

The driving force behind an espionage plot needn't be the government or some top-secret spy organization; corporate espionage is a valid option. A number of Iron Age groups worked for corporations (or owned them), so it makes sense that they'd use their powers to get ahead in the business world or investigate another company with immoral experimentation and research practices—especially if they're somehow connected with alien invaders or some other ongoing campaign plot.

Opponents in espionage plots run from normal agents to highly trained mercenaries with high-tech weapons and continue all the way up to villainous teams who've signed on with the company. So, as

a GM you can maintain the same power level for the bad guys, but change up the adventures a bit more using an espionage framework.

SHORT-TERM PLOT

Word has reached a corporation friendly to the heroes about a competitor's new product. Their scientists have discovered a substance that grants psychic powers and they're planning to begin testing on human subjects. The heroes are tasked with finding the testing facility, breaking in, recovering anything they can about the substance, and then returning with it. Although this is the first time the substance will be tested on humans, the prior successful test subjects haven't disappeared; the heroes have to deal with super-smart animal guardians who are protecting the psionic fluid for their masters.

LONG-TERM PLOT

The leader of a small nation has announced it will grant refuge to anyone with powers in exchange for helping defend the country from "outside threats" to its sovereignty. The offer is condemned by the international community, but the nation still attracts enough super-powered fugitives that no one can move on the country without worrying about its super-powered army. The PCs are sent in to reconnoiter and convince the leader to change his policy or remove him, if it comes to that.

MERCENARIES

The player characters aren't so much heroes as mercenaries. Perhaps they sell their services as international guns-for-hire to the highest bidder; perhaps they work as heroes, but still expect to be compensated for their time. Regardless, they typically hire themselves out as opposed to acting for free. Sometimes they may do some *pro bono* work, but that's mostly for publicity; they expect people and organizations to pay for their talents.

This type of plotline typically flavors the entire campaign, so the heroes would have been created with the mercenary lifestyle in mind. However, it's possible that at different times during the campaign a group of heroes might work as mercenaries, taking on a job as hired help or as a favor to a contact or business associate.

During the course of a mercenary plot, the heroes take on tasks similar to those found in espionage plots, but typically with more combat. In addition, it's common for the mission to go completely off course, so the heroes have to fight their way in, then fight their way out of an even worse situation. In addition, mercenaries often learn too late that they're working for the bad guys, so when they get to their objective they end up defending it rather than destroying it, making an enemy of their employer.

SHORT-TERM PLOT

The heroes are hired to recover a package from a supposedly abandoned experimental weapons depot in the middle of a war-torn country. Once the heroes hit the drop zone, they make their way to the site, where they find that it's well defended and ready for transport. Now the heroes have to make their way into the camp and steal the weapons—but what do they do when they find out the horrible effect the weapon has and that it was being taken away to be destroyed, not used, which is what their employer wants?

LONG-TERM PLOT

The heroes are brought in to steal and recover item after item until it becomes clear to them that they're assembling some kind of weapon, portal, or something else that will cause chaos. Once the heroes figure it out, they have to decide whether or not they're going to complete their contracts or if they're going to go rogue and oppose their former employer. This plotline allows you to run a lot of different adventures linked by a common thread, featuring recurring supporting cast members who can act as friends or rivals.

LEGACIES

Whether the heroes know it or not, they're the children or inheritors of the powers of the previous generation of heroes. As legacy heroes, the player characters have a built-in history that unfolds as the campaign progresses. Over time, the heroes encounter a number of friends, allies, and villains who worked with or opposed the last people to hold the player characters' names or powers.

This plotline has a big effect on the campaign in general and the character creation process in specific. If the players are open to leaving their background a mystery until you reveal the origin of their powers, or if they're willing to work with you on their background to make it fit the campaign, the results can be impressive. Characters with strong ties to the campaign world will feel more real and interesting to you and the players.

There aren't any real guidelines on adversaries for a legacy hero, but as GM you'll be able to develop backgrounds that tie directly into the hero's past; perhaps the newest villain in town is the PC's long-lost sibling who was kidnapped and raised by another villain, or maybe the hero receives a package in the mail with a miniature recreation of how his father died in some villain's deathtrap. When a character has connections to the world, more story options open up than if the character is created and dropped into the game without addressing who he is and how he fits into the world.

Iron Age heroes were often legacy heroes, so this is a common theme from the era. Sometimes heroes were re-imagined and redesigned to fit into the grim, dark world of the Iron Age. By changing the character, the writers were able to free the hero from the continuity that kept them from acting like fans wanted, but kept enough of it to give the character connections, a place in the world, and villains to fight that were familiar to the readers. You can do the same sort of thing with your players' characters, especially if you have a game world with a lot of history to draw on.

SHORT-TERM PLOT

The child of an old villain announces his presence in the city by publicly challenging the legacy hero to a duel to prove that the scion is superior to his father. The new villain uses his powers in inventive new ways that may actually make him a challenge to the hero.

LONG-TERM PLOT

Unbeknownst to one of the heroes at the start of the game, she's a legacy hero. Over the course of the campaign, she keeps encountering villains that know more about her powers than she does. Eventually she finds out why and, at the same time learns that the



person who possessed the powers before her may still be alive. It's up to her to track him down, rescue him, and convince him to fill her in on her history and the significance of her powers.

CONSPIRACY

Conspiracies were very popular during the Iron Age. Everything from government cover-ups of the existence of aliens to grand plans involving a false apocalypse in order to bring humanity closer together and everything in between were popular topics for stories.

There's no common story in a conspiracy-driven plotline. The only common factor is that something is being kept secret or hidden from the populace. Whether it's that shapeshifters have infiltrated the government, the origin of super-powers, or something of your own devising is up to you. No matter what it is, it should be something that the players and their characters learn about as they go, digging deeper to find out more. Every time they learn something new, it should reveal some useful information, but lead to even more questions. Conspiracies can be difficult to run well; doling out the right amount of information at the proper time is key to their success. If too much is given away too soon, the whole plot becomes a non-issue as the PCs run to the press and reveal the proof; too little, and the players become frustrated. Planning is of the utmost importance in a campaign that centers on a conspiracy plotline.

Since conspiracies include everyone from an average accountant all the way up to the masterminds behind it, the bad guys that face your heroes can be of any power level. This is especially true if their opponents are merely pawns in the game and have no idea that they're attacking the heroes at the behest of a group far more insidious and powerful.

PLOTS

There are no typical examples of long-term and short-term plots for conspiracies since they cover such a wide range. When you've developed your conspiracy, plots that fit will flow naturally. The important thing to remember is that conspiracy plots should be multilayered, with every layer leading to another, each more perplexing than the last.

WORLD GONE MAD

This could also be called the Apocalyptic or Post-Apocalyptic plotline. Typically, this story takes place in a world like our own

but much darker, as if viewed through slate-colored glasses. All of the hopeful and positive aspects of such a world have been overwhelmed by the darkness that grows like a cancer everywhere and in everyone...except the heroes. The heroes see the world as it is, corrupt and wasted, but they work to oppose the forces causing the problems: criminals, psychos, the media, mutants, demagogues, et cetera. Most likely, they are viewed as radical agents who ought to be locked up, but they know their work is important and must go on, no matter what. Their goal is nothing short of transforming society.

While this plot makes for a good campaign, it can also be used as a short-term plot if the heroes are somehow transported into an alternate dimension or timeline, or if their own world changes around them into something different and darker. In this case, the heroes know, or quickly discover, that something is wrong and then work to fix it.

Because this plot alters the entire campaign, all of the adversaries are likewise changed. Heroes and villains that were previously familiar to the players are now complete mysteries. In fact, what the players know about the world may now work against them because of their preconceived notions.

SHORT-TERM PLOT

Pulled into the future by a desperate group of freedom fighters, the heroes are petitioned to help—and told that they can't return until the machine that brought them here is repaired. (It overloaded shortly after they arrived.) While they're in this new land, the heroes are needed in order to rescue the group's more powerful members who've been captured by giant robot enforcers and sent to a prison camp. Once the other freedom fighters are rescued, the machine is repaired and the heroes are sent home.

LONG-TERM PLOT

A villain somehow becomes incredibly powerful and remakes the world into a nightmarish reflection of her own damaged psyche. The mutant sets herself up as empress and rules the world with an iron fist, oppressing everyone and crushing any sort of rebellion. The heroes spend their time opposing her until they finally learn that the secret to her increased power is an item that can be disabled or destroyed. Once she's crippled, the world returns to normal with no one but the heroes aware of what happened.

SUPPORTING CAST ARCHETYPES

This section includes new Supporting Cast Archetypes often encountered in Iron Age comics and games. Many of the Supporting Cast Archetypes in *Mutants & Masterminds* (see *M&M*, pages 226–229) are also appropriate.

In most cases, the thing that makes an *Iron Age* Supporting Cast Archetype different is attitude. Almost any setting could feature a Detective, but in the Iron Age that character is likely to be a dirty cop who's only interested in getting the best for himself, or a down-on-his-luck private investigator who's looking to make a name for

himself by uncovering the identity of a hero and exposing it to the world, or blackmailing the hero, whichever will net him the most money.

Some archetypes, like the Mutant Gang Member, are only appropriate to games that have very different backgrounds from the "default" Iron Age game. The Mutant Gang Member may be common in such a setting, but completely unheard of in other Iron Age worlds. As always, use your discretion when choosing Supporting Cast for your games.

DETECTIVE

POWER LEVEL 3

Str 12	Dex 14	Con 12	Int 14	Wis 14	Cha 10
Skills: Bluff 2 (+2), Climb 2 (+3), Computers 2 (+4), Diplomacy 4 (+4), Disable Device 4 (+6), Drive 4 (+6), Gather Information 4 (+4), Intimidation 2 (+2), Investigate 4 (+6), Knowledge (current events) 2 (+4), Knowledge (streetwise) 4 (+6), Medicine 2 (+4), Notice 6 (+8), Profession (detective) 4 (+6), Search 4 (+6), Stealth 4 (+6), Sense Motive 6 (+8).					
Feats: Connected, Contacts, Equipment 2.					
Equipment: pistol (+3 damage), handcuffs, cell phone, 2 points of additional gear.					
Combat: Attack +3, Grapple +4, Damage +3 (pistol), +1 (unarmed), Defense +3, Knockback -0, Initiative +2.					
Saving Throws: Toughness +1, Fortitude +3, Reflex +3, Will +3.					
Abilities 16 + Skills 15 (60 ranks) + Feats 4 + Combat 12 + Saves 4 = 51					

The Detective archetype can be a police detective, an undercover agent, or a private investigator. He's well trained and competent, with a number of informants and contacts. The Detective fills a number of roles in a campaign, from acting as the players' liaison with the police to investigating the hero's secret identity for a powerful third party who's interested in what the player character does with all his free time.

GANG MEMBER

POWER LEVEL 2

Str 14	Dex 14	Con 14	Int 10	Wis 10	Cha 12
Skills: Bluff 2 (+3), Climb 2 (+4), Drive 2 (+4), Intimidation 4 (+5), Knowledge (streetwise) 4 (+4), Stealth 2 (+4).					
Feats: Equipment 2.					
Equipment: leather jacket (+1 Toughness), pistol (+3 damage), knife (+1 damage, crit. 19-20).					
Combat: Attack +3, Grapple +5, Damage +3 (pistol), +2 (knife), +1 (unarmed), Defense +2, Knockback -1, Initiative +2.					
Saving Throws: Toughness +3 (+2 without jacket), Fortitude +2, Reflex +2, Will +0.					
Abilities 14 + Skills 4 (16 ranks) + Feats 2 + Combat 10 + Saves 0 = 30					

The Gang Member makes up the bulk of a gang or similar group of people. This archetype isn't the muscle or the leader, but instead is the average guy working the street, dealing drugs, tagging territory, or backing up the tougher members. The average gang member is full of bravado, but relies on threats and numbers to get what he wants. If worse comes to worst, he's not afraid to use violence, but it will typically be in a situation that gives him an advantage.

GANG MEMBER, MUTANT

POWER LEVEL 2

Str 18	Dex 12	Con 16	Int 8	Wis 8	Cha 14
Skills: Climb 2 (+6), Intimidate 4 (+6), Stealth 2 (+3).					
Feats: Attack Focus 1 (melee), Equipment 3, Power Attack.					
Powers: Super-Strength 1 (<i>Heavy Load</i> : 600 lbs.).					
Equipment: leather jacket (+1 Toughness), pistol (+3 damage), club (+2 damage).					
Combat: Attack +4 (+3 ranged), Grapple +9, Damage +6 (club), +3 (pistol), +4 (unarmed), Defense +1, Knockback -2, Initiative +1.					

Saving Throws: Toughness +5 (+4 without jacket), Fortitude +4, Reflex +2, Will -1.

Abilities 16 + Skills 2 (8 ranks) + Feats 5 + Powers 2 + Combat 8 + Saves 3 = 36

Some Iron Age settings have a decidedly post-apocalyptic feel to them. In these settings, it's not unusual for street gangs to include mutants. Whether their mutations were caused by radiation, drugs, or industrial chemicals, Mutant Gang Members are the toughest of the tough. Despite their low power level, they should be a bit of a challenge to the average hero, especially when encountered in a group with other gang members. In an appropriate setting, the Mutant Gang Member can be a real nuisance, and possibly even a real threat, to the heroes.

MOBSTER

POWER LEVEL 3

Str 12	Dex 12	Con 12	Int 12	Wis 12	Cha 12
Skills: Bluff 4 (+5), Climb 2 (+3), Disable Device 4 (+5), Drive 4 (+5), Intimidate 6 (+7), Knowledge (streetwise) 6 (+7), Notice 2 (+3), Search 4 (+5), Sense Motive 2 (+3), Stealth 2 (+3).					
Feats: Connected, Equipment 5.					
Equipment: pistol (+3 damage), shotgun (+5/+6 damage), knife (+1 damage, crit. 19-20), sap (+2 damage), cell phone, 1 point of additional gear.					
Combat: Attack +3, Grapple +4, Damage +3 (pistol, sap), +5/+6 (shotgun), +2 (knife), +1 (unarmed), Defense +3, Knockback -1, Initiative +1.					
Saving Throws: Toughness +2, Fortitude +4, Reflex +2, Will +2.					
Abilities 12 + Skills 9 (36 ranks) + Feats 6 + Combat 12 + Saves 6 = 45					



Mobsters are the “made men” of the Mafia or similar organizations. They’re connected to the right people and know what’s happening on the street. As the “middle management” of the street, the Mobster gets things done for his boss and keeps him informed. The Mobster plays many roles, including informant, muscle, spy, assassin, bagman, and just about anything else asked of him. As such, he has access to the people and equipment he needs to get the job done.

PSYCHOLOGIST/PSYCHIATRIST

POWER LEVEL 1

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

Skills: Computers 2 (+5), Diplomacy 4 (+5), Gather Information 4 (+5), Knowledge (behavioral sciences) 6 (+9), Knowledge (current events) 4 (+7), Knowledge (life sciences) 4 (+7), Language 1 (choose one), Medicine 6 (+9), Notice 4 (+6), Profession (psychologist or psychiatrist) 6 (+8), Sense Motive 4 (+6).

Feats: Benefit–Wealthy 2 (wealth bonus 18), Equipment 2.

Equipment: cell phone, PDA, SUV.

Combat: Attack +0, Grapple –1, Damage –1 (unarmed), Defense +0, Knockback –0, Initiative +0.

Saving Throws: Toughness +0, Fortitude +0, Reflex +0, Will +2.

Abilities 10 + Skills 12 (44 ranks and one language) + Feats 4 + Combat 0 + Saves 0 = 26

Iron Age heroes and villains are often more than a little *conflicted*, and sometimes they need to (or have to) talk to someone about it. The Psychologist/Psychiatrist fills that role. Whether she’s there to help the player characters or act as an expert witness on behalf of a severely disturbed villain, this archetype can be an interesting addition to a campaign’s list of NPCs—and may be the one “villain” the heroes have a truly difficult time beating in the traditional sense.

RETIRED HEROINE

POWER LEVEL 6

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

Skills: Acrobatics 2 (+6), Bluff 3 (+5), Climb 2 (+5), Computers 3 (+5), Disable Device 3 (+5), Drive 3 (+7), Escape Artist 3 (+7), Gather Information 2 (+4), Intimidate 4 (+6), Notice 4 (+6), Profession 5 (+7), Search 4 (+6), Sense Motive 4 (+6), Sleight of Hand 2 (+6), Stealth 4 (+8).

Feats: Assessment, Benefit–Wealthy 1 (wealth bonus 14), Defensive Attack, Equipment 2, Improved Block, Improved Trip, Power Attack.

Equipment: camera, cell phone, laptop computer, flashlight, multi-tool, 5 additional points of equipment.

Combat: Attack +8, Grapple +11, Damage +3 (unarmed), Defense +8, Knockback –2, Initiative +4.

Saving Throws: Toughness +4, Fortitude +4, Reflex +6, Will +3.

Abilities 32 + Skills 13 (52 ranks) + Feats 8 + Combat 32 + Saves 5 = 90

At some point during their career, things changed for the Retired Hero/ine. Maybe they got too old, maybe the violence became too real, or the villains became too extreme. Whatever the cause, it was too much for the Retired Hero/ine to handle, so he or she got out. She’s still in great shape and can hold her own in a tussle, but she’s officially out of the business now. This character may be the mentor of one of the player characters and still plays an important role in his life, or perhaps she’s a well-respected member of the “old guard” who’s managed to retire (a rarity in this life) and sell her story for enough to live comfortably. This archetype is a good choice as the proprietor of a bar frequented by the hero set, or maybe she just found that her interests lay in another direction and has turned her considerable talent to a less dangerous, but just as interesting (to her) profession. Regardless, she’s still a competent fighter and may be a good ally in a fight...but then again, she may end up being a liability.

VILLAIN ARCHETYPES

Comics in the Iron Age were filled with criminals who were above the law and deadly adversaries with resources and agendas that far outstripped those of the heroes they faced. In addition, villains from this time period go to extremes to achieve their goals, far beyond what villains from previous ages did. Exactly how the villains behave is determined in the course of the game, but the archetypes and descriptions on the following pages will give you, as GM, enough information to make these bad guys forces to be reckoned with.

Heroes and villains are often mirror images of each other, and the villainous archetypes of the Iron Age follow that maxim even more closely. The Psycho is the Vigilante taken to its most extreme, the Magic-Killer and the Supernatural Menace are closely related to the Cursed Mystic, the Mercenary is the dark side of the Black Ops Agent and the Gun-Toting Mutant from the Future, and the Evil Ninja is clearly the opposite of the Ninja.

In addition to the following archetypes, most of the archetypes from *Mutants & Masterminds* work very well in the Iron Age. In the right circumstances, the Armored Megalomaniac, the Brain in a Jar, Corrupt Sorcerer, Evil Robot, Kung Fu Killer, Mad Scientist, and

Savage Man-Beast all make excellent adversaries for Iron Age heroes with few changes.

HERO ARCHETYPES AS VILLAINS

Naturally, any of the hero archetypes are suitable for use as villains, too. Just give the character a suitably villainous motivation, name, and style, and you’re ready to go. In fact, in an *Iron Age* campaign it may be difficult to tell the heroes from the villains, so it’s entirely appropriate to use almost any of the archetypes given in this book for the opposite role. However, if you decide to use a villain archetype as a hero, you’ll need to alter the character to bring it in line with the power level of the game.

The villains presented in this book don’t use the new feats or options presented in *Iron Age*. That way, if you choose not to use these new rules, you won’t need to alter the archetypes.

Included with each archetype is a new heading; **Name Options**. These names are suggestions to choose from if you’re using the archetype as a hero or villain, but don’t want to come up with a name on your own or aren’t sure what to call the character.

ASSASSIN

POWER LEVEL 10

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+3	+4	+3	+1	+2	+3
16	18	16	12	14	16

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+7	+8	+10	+5

Skills: Acrobatics 8 (+12), Bluff 8 (+12), Craft (knives) 8 (+9), Disable Device 8 (+9), Disguise 4 (+7), Drive 4 (+8), Escape Artist 8 (+12), Gather Information 6 (+9), Intimidate 6 (+9), Knowledge (current events, streetwise) 4 (+5), Notice 8 (+10), Profession (assassin, wealth bonus 10) 8 (+10), Search 4 (+5), Sleight of Hand 8 (+12), Stealth 8 (+12).

Feats: Ambidexterity, Attack Specialization (knives), Benefit–Alternate Identity 1, Blind-Fight, Defensive Attack, Defensive Roll 2, Elusive Target, Evasion 2, Improved Aim, Improved Critical 1 (knives; crit. 19-20), Improved Grab, Improved Initiative 1, Master Plan, Power Attack, Precise Shot 2, Quick Draw 1, Sneak Attack 4 (+5 damage), Takedown Attack 1, Throwing Mastery 5 (+5 damage; 50 ft.), Ultimate Aim 1 (knives), Uncanny dodge 1 (hearing).

Powers: **Blast 7** (knives; *Power Feats*: Alternate Power–**Strike 4** [*Power Feats*: **Mighty**]), **Immunity 2** (suffocation), **Leaping 3** (65 ft.), **Protection 2** (*Extras*: Impervious), **Speed 3** (50 MPH), **Super-Movement 1** (wall-crawling), **Super-Senses 3** (infravision, low-light vision, radio).

Combat: Attack +12 (knives), +10 (punch), Grapple +13, Damage +7 (knives), +3 (punch), Defense +13, Knockback -4, Initiative +12.

Abilities 32 + Skills (104 ranks) 26 + Feats 31 + Powers 33 + Combat 46 + Saves 14 = 182

"SOMEONE WANTS YOU DEAD.
GUESS WHO THEY CALLED?"



At some point, the player characters are going to be targeted by the bad guys for elimination. When that happens, especially in an Iron Age campaign, the bad guys call the Assassin. The Assassin has only ever been good at one thing: killing. As such, the Assassin is a hit-and-run specialist. He has excellent attack and damage values, but limited defense and toughness. He knows this and will work the battle to his advantage in any way possible, including running away and striking again when the circumstances are better. The Assassin is typically portrayed as a weapon wielded by a villain with extensive influence, but not as much physical power. However, it's very common for the Assassin to take on a life of his own after he first appears. This is often because he's not motivated by malice or need, but rather by money or the chance to prove he's the best in the world. A well-run Assassin makes for a great recurring bad guy for your heroes to hate, hinder, or maybe even help.

Name Options: Corporal Punishment, Crosshairs, Skinner, Terror

In the Crosshairs. The archetypal plot for the Assassin is that he's been hired to eliminate someone by an interested third party. The target could be anyone: the mayor, a visiting dignitary, a hero, or even a seemingly random person. The heroes either stumble upon the assassination attempt or hear rumors that something's afoot. The heroes may stop one assassination, but the Assassin won't stop until his contract is fulfilled, so they'll have to stop the Assassin permanently, then find out who wants the target dead and how they can convince them otherwise.

Prison Break. After being defeated and sent to prison, the Assassin decides he's been in captivity long enough. It's bad for his reputation, after all. He takes out a couple of the guards and frees some of the more powerful inmates, and while they cause trouble and knock holes in the walls, the Assassin attempts to sneak out in the confusion. The heroes have to take out the powerhouses and find the Assassin before he can get out into the world and reconnect with his underworld friends.

Revenge. After the heroes have encountered the Assassin a few times, he starts to resent the fact that they always manage to beat him. In order to get back at them for thwarting his previous missions, the Assassin targets the heroes (or their friends) for assassination. This is an excellent way to change the campaign's roster of PCs (or NPCs) and reinforce the fact that this is an Iron Age game. After all, how far can the heroes go to protect themselves and their loved ones from harm? Ultimately, the Assassin will have to be dealt with.

CRIME BOSS

POWER LEVEL 10

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+4	+1	+3	+6	+5	+7
18	12	16	22	20	24

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+11	+10	+6	+10

Skills: Bluff 8 (+15), Concentration 4 (+9), Diplomacy 8 (+15), Gather Information 8 (+15), Intimidate 8 (+15), Knowledge (business, civics, current events, streetwise, tactics) 8 (+13), Languages 5 (Chinese, French, Japanese, Russian), Notice 4 (+9), Perform (oratory) 8 (+15), Profession (importer/exporter) 8 (+13), Profession (criminal) 8 (+13), Search 4 (+10), Sense Motive 8 (+13).

Feats: All-Out Attack, Benefit–Status (social elite), Benefit–Wealthy 3 (wealth bonus 22), Connected, Contacts, Defensive Roll 8, Distract 2, Equipment 6, Fearsome Presence 2 (10 ft., DC 12), Inspire, Leadership, Master Plan, Minions 10 (30 power points, 500 minions, use Criminal or Thug, see *M&M*, page 226), Minions 9 (45 power points, 100 minions, use Mobster, see page 77), Well-Informed.

Powers: **Device 2** (electro-cane; easy to lose; **Strike 12** [*Flaws:* Unreliable–5 uses]), **Strike 4** (*Power Feat:* Mighty).

Equipment: 30 points (mostly vehicles and headquarters).

Combat: Attack +8 (electro-cane), Grapple +12, Damage +12 (electro-cane), +8 (punch), Defense +8, Knockback –5, Initiative +1.

Abilities 52 + Skills 30 (120 ranks) + Feats 48 + Powers 11 + Combat 32 + Saves 17 = 190



The Crime Boss is the king of the criminal world. He may not be the most physically powerful opponent the heroes will ever face, but he's no pushover, even versus super-powered heroes. However, he has economic, social, and political power that's undeniable. When the Crime Boss decides to pay attention to the heroes, they should be very careful. His hired hands and informants are everywhere, and while they may not be able to overpower the heroes on their own, they can be a serious threat as a group. The Crime Boss is known for "attacking" from directions that the heroes don't normally expect from a villain, like through acquaintances, friends, and loved ones. After all, if the hero is tied up rescuing his girlfriend, he can't be across town interfering with the Crime Boss' drug trafficking, weapon sales, slavery ring, or whatever he happens to be involved in.

When worse comes to worst, the Crime Boss isn't above calling in specialists to get the job done. He'll hire anyone from super-powered thugs, to assassins, to sneak-thieves in order to get what he wants, usually through middlemen, so the deed can't be traced directly back to him. The watchword for the Crime Boss should be *frustration*; the heroes know that he's behind what's going on, but they have no way to prove it, but since this is the Iron Age, they may decide to handle it some other (more violent) way.

Name Options: The Big Boss, El Capo, The King, Mastermind

Party Crashers. The Crime Boss throws one of his legendary parties at his penthouse, mansion, or yacht and invites the upper crust of society along with a selection of other interesting people from around town. In addition to maintaining connections, he's interested in removing a few of the attendees from circulation, so he's brought in a team of kidnappers (super-powered or otherwise) to pose as terrorists. During their assault on the party, they make off with the person or people the Crime Boss wants. Does he want the targets because of some piece of information, or is it for blackmail? Whatever it is, the heroes have an opportunity to beat up on the terrorist-kidnappers, track down the target, rescue him or her, and then throw it all in the Crime Boss' face.

Mob War. Criminals feed on each other as well as the average Joe. In a Mob War scenario, one or more Crime Bosses have decided to move in on another's territory. When this happens, the streets become a very dangerous place, with shootings, fire-bombings, and car bombs erupting at random through the day and night. The heroes are caught in the middle. They might like to let the Crime Bosses finish each other off, but a lot of innocents will be caught in the crossfire. Do they try and negotiate a peace, or attempt to take out the bosses before they can get the job done on their own? Of course, nature abhors a vacuum, so once they take out a boss or two, another will rise to take his place—and the new one may be even worse than his predecessor.

CULT LEADER

POWER LEVEL 11

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+5	+5	+10	+5	+7	+10
20	20	30	20	24	30

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+10	+10	+8	+12

Skills: Bluff 10 (+20), Concentration 8 (+15), Diplomacy 10 (+20), Gather Information 6 (+16), Intimidate 8 (+18), Knowledge (current events, streetwise) 6 (+11), Knowledge (business, civics) 8 (+13), Knowledge (behavioral sciences, theology & philosophy) 10 (+15), Knowledge (arcane lore) 12 (+17), Notice 8 (+15), Perform (oratory) 12 (+22), Profession (cult leader) 8 (+15), Search 8 (+13), Sense Motive 12 (+19), Stealth 6 (+11).

Feats: Attractive, Benefit—Wealth 6 (wealth bonus 34), Connected, Contacts, Diehard, Elusive Target, Equipment 20, Evasion 1, Fascinate 2 (diplomacy, perform), Inspire 4, Leadership, Master Plan, Minions 12 (2,500, fanatic, 30 point followers; use Cultist, *M&M*, page 226), Minions 9 (50, fanatic, 45 points followers; use Ninja, *M&M*, page 227), Skill Mastery (bluff, diplomacy, intimidate, perform), Trance, Ultimate Skill—Perform.

Powers: **Emotion Control 8** (*Power Feats:* Subtle 2; *Extras:* Conscious, Area—Perception; *Flaws:* Sense Dependent [auditory]), **Flight 3** (50 MPH), **Hypnosis 8** (*Power Feats:* Subtle 2; *Extras:* Conscious, Area—Perception; *Flaws:* Sense Dependent [auditory]), **Immunity 10** (aging, life support), **Magic 12** (**Fog of Forgetfulness 12** [*Power Feats:* Dynamic, Subtle 1]; *Power Feats:* Alternate Powers—**Glamour 12** [*Power Feats:* Dynamic, Subtle 1], **Healing 12** [*Power Feats:* Dynamic], **Light of Truth 12** [*Power Feats:* Dynamic], **Mystic Blast 12** [*Power Feats:* Dynamic], **Mystic Passage 12** [*Power Feats:* Dynamic], **Scrying 6** [*Power Feats:* Dynamic]), **Super-Senses 3** (magical awareness, darkvision).

Equipment: 100 points (mostly vehicles and headquarters).

Combat: Attack +10 (mystic blast, emotion control, hypnosis), Grapple +15, Damage +12 (mystic blast), Defense +12, Knockback -5, Initiative +5.

Abilities 84 + Skills 39 (156 ranks) + Feats 64 + Powers 126 + Combat 44 + Saves 8 = 355

"THEY ARE ALL MY CHILDREN. SOME COME WILLINGLY...OTHERS MUST BE SHOWN THE WAY."



The Cult Leader heads up an alternative and misunderstood religious or mystical group. Either due to what the members believe or due to the influence of the Cult Leader, the group has radical beliefs and members work to convert unbelievers and eliminate those who oppose them with equal zeal. The Cult Leader is a powerful figure with extreme charisma. Her powers belie her appearance, usually stemming from magic or sources that appear magical but are actually high-tech devices in disguise. The Cult Leader surrounds herself with fanatically loyal followers who are willing to lay down their lives to protect the cult and its leader. A Cult Leader typically has thousands of followers by the time she's become powerful enough to the attention of heroes; in that time, she's also acquired significant material wealth, including vehicles, headquarters, weapons, and possibly even a nation for herself and her flock.

Name Options: Faith, the Hooded One, Lilith, Magister

City on the Edge. The Cult Leader's most powerful weapon is her ability to control others. In this scenario, the Cult Leader is granted access to a wide audience at a public rally she's attending or a televised program she's on. Before the big event, the Cult Leader increases her power with the aid of magical rituals (or enslaved mentalists, or high-tech wave generators, or whatever's appropriate) so that when she speaks, the people of the city fall under her thrall. Perhaps her goal is to swell the ranks of her cult, or perhaps she commands the public to riot or attack the heroes when they appear. The heroes have to fight their way through the city (hopefully without killing too many innocents) and cut the Cult Leader off from her newfound power. Then, they can tackle her directly.

Joiner. A good friend of one of the heroes, or perhaps even one of the heroes (especially good if a player will be gone for a few sessions), decides that the Cult Leader has some good points and joins her throng. Perhaps the character is infiltrating the cult to learn more about it, perhaps not. Regardless, somehow the Cult Leader gets her claws into the character and wins her over, most likely with mind control of some kind. The next time the heroes see their friend, she makes it clear where her loyalties lie and she's willing to kill or die to stay in the cult and protect the Cult Leader. Once the heroes extract their friend, they can deal with getting her some help.

EVIL NINJA

POWER LEVEL 11

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+1	+5	+2	+1	+1	+0
12	20	14	12	12	10

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+8	+5	+10	+3

Skills: Acrobatics 10 (+15), Bluff 10 (+10), Climb 8 (+9), Computers 4 (+5), Disable Device 8 (+9), Disguise 8 (+8), Escape Artist 8 (+13), Gather Information 6 (+6), Intimidate 8 (+8), Language 1 (English), Notice 10 (+11), Ride 4 (+9), Search 8 (+9), Sleight of Hand 10 (+15), Stealth 10 (+15), Swim 4 (+5).

Feats: Acrobatic Bluff, Bind-Fight, Chokehold, Defensive Attack, Defensive Roll 6, Elusive Target 1, Equipment 7, Evasion 2, Fearless, Grappling Finesse, Hide in Plain Sight, Improved Aim, Improved Block, Improved Defense 1 (+6 for total defense maneuver), Improved Grab, Improved Grapple, Improved Initiative 2, Improved Throw, Instant Up, Move-By Action, Power Attack, Precise Shot 2, Quick Draw 2, Sneak Attack 1 (+2 damage), Stunning Attack, Takedown Attack 2, Uncanny Dodge 1 (mental).

Powers: **Leaping 2** (55 ft.), **Strike 4** (martial training; *Power Feats:* Mighty, Useable with weapons), **Super-Movement 4** (slow fall, sure-footed, trackless, wall-crawling), **Super-Senses 2** (danger sense [mental], low-light vision).

Equipment: *Bow* (+3 damage; *Cost:* 9 points), *Katana* (+3 damage, crit. 19-20; *Cost:* 5 points), *Shuriken* (+1 damage; *Extra:* autofire; *Cost:* 3), 18 more points of equipment.

Combat: Attack +12 (martial arts, bow, katana), Grapple +17, Damage +8 (katana with strike), +8 (bow with strike), +5 (unarmed or shuriken), Defense +12, Knockback -4, Initiative +13.

Abilities 20 + Skills 30 (116 ranks and 1 language) + Feats 43 + Powers 18 + Combat 48 + Saves 10 = 169

"I AM THE DARKEST PART OF THE SHADOW."



The classical ninja is a dark, mysterious warrior with little or no honor. In the case of the Evil Ninja archetype, that isn't far from the mark. The Evil Ninja isn't one of your run-of-the-mill strip-mall-dojo ninja that show up in hordes during the Iron Age. Instead, he's the upper echelon of the clan. He's a skilled warrior capable of challenging any hero all by himself. In addition to his combat skills, he's also equipped with semi-mystical abilities and whatever weapons are appropriate to his current mission. While the Evil Ninja shown here is equipped with traditional weapons, there's no reason to think that a ninja in the modern world wouldn't use contemporary weapons and equipment, including firearms. The Evil Ninja is capable of playing any number of roles, from assassin to bodyguard.

Name Options: Genyosha (Black Ocean), Night Blade, Shadowmaster

Enemy of the Clan. The Evil Ninja is sent to make an example of someone. Whether the victim is targeted because she knows something she shouldn't, or because she's a rogue ninja is up to the GM. The target knows the Evil Ninja is after her and comes to the heroes for help. When the Evil Ninja attacks and is run off by the heroes, he returns, possibly with help, until he succeeds or is killed. This is a classic plot for the Evil Ninja and ninjas in general.

Hired Sword. The Evil Ninja is hired by someone to act as his troubleshooter. In this role, he does whatever he's told by his patron, whether that's to assassinate a businessman, shadow a lover, steal valuables, protect someone, or insure that a deal goes down without interference from nosey heroes. In this role, the Evil Ninja could be a long-term adversary for the heroes.

The Chosen. Ninja are often linked to mystical, even demonic, powers and sometimes those powers are threatened by the appearance of their opposite number. In this case, someone has just been discovered, or born, who might eventually be powerful enough to oppose the demon, so the Evil Ninja has been sent to kill the target. Or perhaps he's been sent to kidnap her so she can be corrupted by the demon and the ninja clan. Whatever the case, the heroes learn of this plan and have to step in to make sure the fledgling hero survives long enough to get her feet under her. This is a good opportunity to introduce an ongoing NPC hero, until she decides she has to leave and learn about the new world on her own.

MAGIC KILLER

POWER LEVEL 12

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+5	+3	+10	+1	+4	+3
20	16	30	12	18	16

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+12	+12	+6	+10

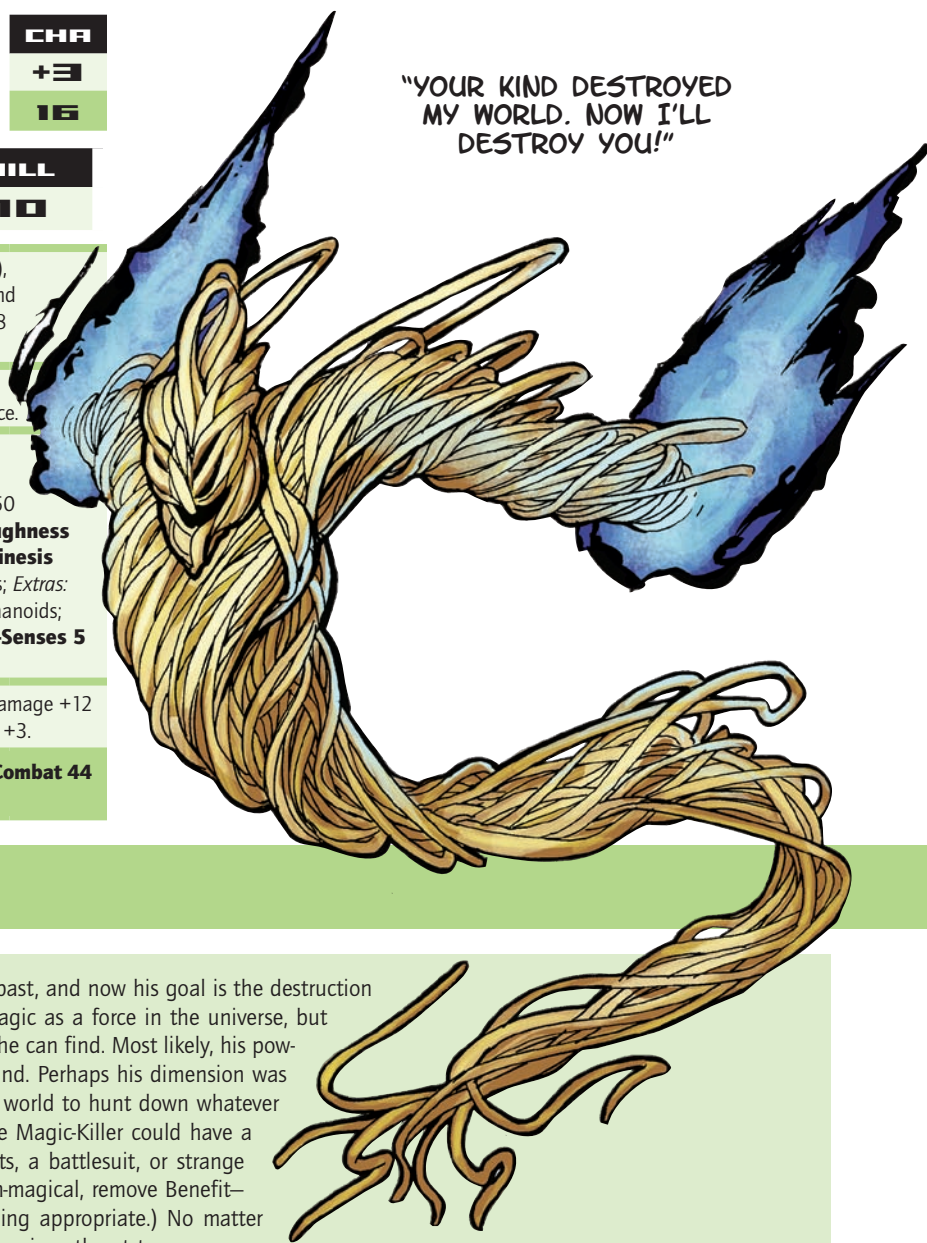
Skills: Concentration 8 (+12), Diplomacy 4 (+7), Intimidate 8 (+11), Knowledge (arcane lore) 8 (+12), Knowledge (tactics, theology and philosophy) 4 (+8), Notice 6 (+9), Search 6 (+10), Sense Motive 8 (+11), Survival 8 (+11).

Feats: All-Out Attack, Benefit–Status (alien royalty), Benefit–Wealth 6 (wealth bonus 32), Fearless, Power Attack, Ritualist, Trance.

Powers: **Alternate From–Ghost 8** (**Concealment 10** [all sense types], **Insubstantial 4** [incorporeal]), **Environment Control–Distraction 3** (mental interference; 25 ft., DC 10), **Flight 5** (250 MPH), **Immunity 11** (life support, critical hits), **Impervious Toughness 10**, **Magic 12** (**Blast 12**, **Mental Blast 6**, **Paralyze 12**, **Telekinesis 12** (Heavy Load: 50 tons), **Telepathy 12**, **Teleport 7** [200 miles; Extras: Accurate; Power Feat: Progression 3 (1,000 lbs.)]), **Morph 4** (humanoids; +20 to Disguise), **Protection 2** (Power Feat: Impervious), **Super-Senses 5** (magical awareness, darkvision, detect magic, tracking).

Combat: Attack +12 (blast, mental blast, paralyze), Grapple +17, Damage +12 (blast), +6 (mental blast), Defense +10, Knockback –12, Initiative +3.

Abilities 52 + Skills 16 (64 ranks) + Feats 12 + Powers 123 + Combat 44 + Saves 11–Drawbacks = 258



Magic has played a major negative role in the Magic-Killer's past, and now his goal is the destruction of all magic. The Magic-Killer may not be able to remove magic as a force in the universe, but he's dedicated to wiping out any magic users or magic items he can find. Most likely, his powers actually stem from a mystical source tied to his background. Perhaps his dimension was destroyed by out-of-control magic and now he's come to this world to hunt down whatever magic he can find here before moving to another world. The Magic-Killer could have a non-magical source for his powers, such as high-tech gadgets, a battlesuit, or strange artifacts from an alien civilization. (If your Magic-Killer is non-magical, remove Benefit–Status, Ritualist, and Trance and replace them with something appropriate.) No matter what, the Magic-Killer should have enough power to pose a serious threat to any mage, either due to pure offensive power or intelligent planning and subterfuge.

Name Options: Blackguard, Crusader, Crux, Xorcist

The Hunt. After a few magic-wielding heroes and villains are found dead, the heroes might understand that there's a different sort of bad guy in the campaign; one that might eventually threaten one of them if they use magic in any way. The Magic-Killer starts the hunt on this world by finding out exactly how powerful he is here. As his confidence grows, he takes on more and more powerful mages. His attention will quickly turn to the heroes if they appear to be on his trail, especially if any of them use magic and would eventually be targeted anyway. No matter what, the Magic-Killer is on the loose and he's eliminating anyone or anything magical, from undead to mages to artifacts; nothing magical will survive long once he ferrets it out.

End the Curse. The Magic-Killer is tired of his cursed existence and is stealing what he believes will cure him. You, as GM, will have to decide exactly what he's trying to do, but options include purging himself of magic, restoring his appearance to normal, resurrecting his family or world, or freeing him from his life trapped between dimensions. Instead of hunting down characters with magical powers, it appears that the Magic-Killer is cobbling together items, devices, or people that can help cure him—even if he has to force them to do it. The Heroes have to find out what he's doing and then decide if they want to help him or stop him. After all, there's a chance that if he gets his way he'll be out of their hair forever, but what if something goes wrong?

MERCENARY

POWER LEVEL 10

STR	DEK	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+4	+4	+4	+2	+1	+1
18	18	18	14	12	12

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+8	+8	+8	+10

Skills: Acrobatics 8 (+12), Bluff 8 (+12), Climb 6 (+10), Computers 6 (+8), Disable Device 8 (+10), Drive 6 (+10), Escape Artist 6 (+10), Intimidate 8 (+9), Knowledge (streetwise, tactics) 8 (+10), Notice 8 (+9), Pilot 6 (+10), Profession (mercenary, wealth bonus 10) 6 (+8), Search 8 (+10), Sense Motive 6 (+7), Stealth 10 (+14), Survival 6 (+7), Swim 2 (+6).

Feats: Ambidexterity, Assessment, Beginner's Luck, Benefit—Alternate Identity, Blind-Fight, Elusive Target, Endurance, Equipment 3, Evasion 1, Improved Block, Improved Initiative 1, Instant Up, Jack of All Trades, Master Plan, Power Attack, Quick Draw 2, Seize Initiative, Uncanny Dodge (mental).

Powers: **Communication 10** (10,000 ft.; *Extra:* Area; *Power Feat:* Selective), **Device 4** (blaster and sword; easy to lose; **Blast 8** [*Power Feat:* Alternate Power—**Strike 4** (*Extra:* Mighty)]), **Luck Control 3**, **Mind Reading 5**, **Mind Shield 5** (included in Will save), **Protection 4** (*Extras:* Impervious), **Super-Senses 6** (mental awareness, blindsight [mental], danger sense [mental]).

Equipment: Cell Phone (*Cost:* 1 point), Flashlight (*Cost:* 1 point), Multi-tool (*Cost:* 1 point), 12 points of other equipment.

Combat: Attack +12 (blast, strike), Grapple +, Damage +8 (blast, strike), Defense +12, Knockback -6, Initiative +8.

Abilities 32 + Skills 31 (124 ranks) + Feats 21 + Powers 54 + Combat 48 + Saves 12 = 198

"IT'S NOTHING PERSONAL. I DO WHAT I'M PAID TO DO."



There are all sorts of for-hire villains and NPCs in *Mutants & Masterminds* campaigns, but the Mercenary archetype represents a character at the top of her field. When other lesser hirelings have failed, the Mercenary gets things done—usually solo, but she's not averse to working with a group. Mercenaries are popular because they subvert what it means to be a hero. The Mercenary is willing to do "good" as well as "bad," but she sells her services. She usually means it when she says beating on the heroes is nothing personal, but once the heroes have encountered (and defeated) the Mercenary a few times, it may become personal. The Mercenary is a professional; she won't fight a losing fight because it's the right thing to do. She's paid to get results, and if her current plans are failing, she'll pull out and return when things look more favorable. After all, there's no point in going to jail—it takes time and hurts her reputation. A well-run Mercenary is a character the players love to hate. Eventually, the heroes and the Mercenary might even come to respect and understand each other.

Name Options: Fatale, Solitaire

Take 'em Down! The heroes have frustrated their non-super-powered enemies for the last time! The Mercenary has been called in to coordinate a strike on the heroes. After collecting intelligence on the heroes, which they may or may not notice, and armed her own impressive abilities, the Mercenary attacks. Since she's no fool, she tries to take the heroes down individually instead of as a group. Once the heroes figure out what's happening, after one or two of their friends have been captured, it may be too late. So, how do the heroes protect themselves, rescue their teammates, and stop the Mercenary? And once they do, will she give up the names of those who hired her?

War Zone. The Mercenary has turned part of downtown into a war zone. Maybe it's a distraction, or an attempt to make the heroes look like they can't protect their streets, but the Mercenary has seemingly lost her mind, firing into crowds of innocents, throwing grenades, planting bombs, etc. The heroes have to stop her and figure out the cause of this abnormal behavior.

METAHUMAN DICTATOR

POWER LEVEL 12

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+12/-1	+3	+5	+10	+7	+5
35/8	16	20	30	24	20

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+12	+10	+6	+10

Skills: Computers 10 (+20), Diplomacy 10 (+15), Intimidate 15 (+20), Knowledge (behavioral studies, current events) 6 (+16), Knowledge (civics, history, tactics) 8 (+18), Knowledge (life sciences) 9 (+19), Notice 6 (+13), Perform (oratory) 10 (+15), Profession (dictator) 12 (+17), Search 6 (+16), Sense Motive 6 (+13).

Feats: All-Out Attack, Benefit—Diplomatic Immunity, Benefit—Status (ruler of a nation), Benefit—Wealth 6 (wealth bonus 34), Connected, Eidetic Memory, Equipment 20, Fearless, Improved Grapple, Improved Pin, Leadership, Power Attack, Precise Shot 1, Stunning Attack, Takedown Attack 1.

Powers: **Enhanced Strength 27**, **Flight 7** (1,000 MPH), **Force Field 7** (Extra: Impervious), **Immovable 5**, **Super-Strength 5** (Heavy Load: 50 tons), **Telekinesis 12** (Heavy Load: 50 Tons; Power Feats: Alternate Power—Deflect 12; Extra: Damaging).

Equipment: 100 points (mostly vehicles and headquarters).

Combat: Attack +12 (unarmed, telekinesis), Grapple +29, Damage +12 (unarmed), +12 (telekinesis), Defense +12, Knockback -14, Initiative +3.

Abilities 58 + Skills 29 (116 ranks) + Feats 39 + Powers 108 + Combat 48 + Saves 11 = 293



Combine a mutant who wants equality for his people and a nation looking to make a name on the world stage and you have the controversial Metahuman Dictator. Using his political savvy and considerable powers, the Metahuman Dictator has risen to lead a country. Often he's taken over a pre-existing nation and changed it to fit his goals, but it's just as likely he's created his own nation somehow, possibly by raising a new island. The Metahuman Dictator has a nation of followers to use as resources; they may not believe in what he's doing, but he's always good to them, so they support him. In addition, he has access to money and weapons on a scale a few orders of magnitude higher than the heroes encounter in their own cities. He may be radical, but his power and agenda can't be ignored, especially when he's working on a plan which, if successful, could have a significant impact on the entire world.

Name Options: Baron Tellos, Primus

Free My People. Those who are different have always been treated differently, and in some cases, unfairly. In this scenario, the group that the Metahuman Dictator identifies with has been oppressed for too long, so he comes to town to free them in the name of equality. The players get involved when the Metahuman Dictator announces to the city and the world that he's here to free "his" people. This may mean that he's breaking criminals out of prison or any number of other things, but that doesn't matter to the Metahuman Dictator; he's here to right a wrong and make the world safe for the downtrodden. **Safe Haven** is a good follow-up adventure to this one, as the Metahuman Dictator takes the recently rescued back to his nation where they can be safe from persecution and add to his power base.

Safe Haven. In order to provide better protection for "his people," whether they're mutants, aliens, super-criminals, or super-humans in general, the Metahuman Dictator announces to the world that anyone who comes to his nation will be protected from extradition and prosecution for any crimes they committed in other nations. This is a huge problem for the world powers because the Metahuman Dictator has enough power to back his play and he's likely to have even more power at his disposal if anyone takes him up on his offer. The heroes may not be able to do anything about the creation of this haven for criminals, but it should offer plenty of opportunities for covert operations in the super-powered nation. If things go really bad for the heroes in their own country, they may eventually call the Metahuman Dictator's country home themselves.

Super-Terrorism. This is a big change to introduce to a character, but given the state of the real world, it seems perfectly appropriate for a militant, radical character like the Metahuman Dictator. In this scenario, the Metahuman Dictator sponsors, or even creates (through cloning, genetic manipulation, or whatnot), terrorists to target nations or people whose policies the Metahuman Dictator disagrees with. This sort of plot can be headed off before the attacks take place, but it may be more powerful to have the attacks take place and then task the heroes with tracking down the parties responsible and dealing with them.

PSYCHO

POWER LEVEL 10

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+6	+2	+8	+5	+5	+3
22	14	26	20	20	16

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+8	+10	+5	+8

Skills: Bluff 4 (+7), Disable Device 6 (+11), Disguise 8 (+11), Drive 4 (+6), Escape Artist 4 (+6), Gather Information 6 (+9), Intimidate 10 (+13), Knowledge (art) 8 (+13), Notice 4 (+9), Perform 6 (+9), Profession (sculptor) 4 (+9), Search 4 (+9), Sense Motive 8 (+13), Stealth 8 (+10).

Feats: Contacts, Distract (bluff), Equipment 4, Fearsome Presence 2 (10 ft., DC 12), Leadership, Master Plan, Minions 6 (10 minions, 45 power points each), Startle, Well-Informed.

Powers: **Immunity 24** (aging, poison, critical hits, ballistic damage, piercing damage), **Impervious Toughness 4**, **Morph 4** (humanoids; +20 to Disguise; *Flaws:* Action—20 Minutes, Distracting), **Suffocate 10** (*Power Feats:* Alternate Power—**Corrosion 10** [*Flaws:* Limited—Only vs. Living, Range—Touch]), **Super-Movement 2** (permeate 1), **Super-Senses 1** (infravision).

Equipment: 20 points of equipment (mainly vehicles and headquarters).

Combat: Attack +10 (suffocate, corrosion, punch), Grapple +16, Damage +10 (suffocate, corrosion), +6 (punch), Defense +12, Knockback -6, Initiative +2.

Abilities 58 + Skills 19 (76 ranks) + Feats 18 + Powers 53 + Combat 44 + Saves 8 = 200

"SCREAM.
SCREAM FOR
ME."



Whether a "normal" with a gimmick or a powered character, The Psycho is a highly disturbed sociopath. He's an excellent foil for the dark heroes of the time and generally compelling in his own right. The Psycho is a capable combatant, but he mainly relies on his minions to carry out his crimes while he leads from the rear. (Except for the killing. He likes the killing, and handles it personally.) The background of the Psycho is typically tragic; he's been horribly scarred physically, psychologically, or both, and he's externalized his pain by inflicting it on others—just like some of the Iron Age heroes. In the Psycho's case, he takes his frustrations out on the "undeserving."

Name Options: Dr. Waxman, Mudjack

It's All Your Fault! The mental and physical damage inflicted on the Psycho is someone else's fault—at least in the Psycho's eyes—so he's decided to hunt down the person responsible and put them through Hell. Because the Psycho is interested in making his victim experience new levels of fear, he starts out slow by threatening, kidnapping, or killing those close to the victim. Then, he moves on to the victim herself, stalking and terrorizing her. When she's sure she couldn't be more afraid, the Psycho shows himself, explains why he's doing what he's doing, and slowly and painfully kills the victim. The heroes get involved in the early stages when bodies start showing up, or when the victim contacts them and asks for help against something the police have no ability to handle. This is an excellent scenario for introducing the Psycho.

Themed Horrors. Take away all the gimmicks and powers, and the Psycho is really just one thing: a sociopath. As such, he makes an excellent serial killer. He kills without pity and leaves bodies in his wake. Even his henchmen need to stay on their toes around him. In this scenario, the Psycho has gone on a spree, killing people in more and more spectacular ways that fit with the theme of his particular insanity. Perhaps he makes his victims into wax statues that show the sin the victim was guilty of in life. No matter what the theme, the deaths should be gruesome and quickly come to the attention of the media and the heroes.

Payback! Revenge is a common theme in every genre of storytelling; why should it be any different in the Iron Age? Revenge is a powerful motive and the Psycho takes to it like no one else. The difference is that when he sets his mind to something, the results are usually quite spectacular. In this case, the Psycho has been thwarted by the heroes one too many times, so he comes back, not to pursue his normal demented agenda, but to remove the heroes from his path permanently. The tactics he uses are similar to those outlined in **It's All Your Fault!**, but this time it's much more personal, because he's targeting the hero and his supporting cast. In addition, he may decide to work with other villains, even organizing them into some sort of revenge squad, to make sure he won't be defeated this time.

SUPERNATURAL MENACE

POWER LEVEL 14

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+10	+5	+6	+4	+5	+5
30	20	22	18	20	20

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+14	+12	+8	+10

Skills: Concentration 12 (+17), Diplomacy 10 (+15), Intimidate 10 (+15), Knowledge (arcane lore, civics) 12 (+16), Knowledge (history) 4 (+8), Knowledge (tactics, theology & philosophy) 8 (+12), Notice 8 (+13), Profession (tyrant) 12 (+17), Search 4 (+8), Sense Motive 8 (+13).

Feats: Artificer, Benefit—Status (alien royalty), Benefit—Wealth 5 (wealth bonus 30), Diehard, Endurance, Fearless, Fearsome Presence 5 (25 ft., 15 DC), Leadership, Minions 11 (250 minions, 60 power points each), Power Attack, Ritualist, Startle.

Powers: **Comprehend 4** (languages; speak, read, understand all, understood by all), **Flight 10** (1,000 MPH), **Hellfire Control 14** (Power Feat: Alternate Power—**Mental Blast 7**), **Immunity 9** (life support), **Protection 8** (Extras: Impervious), **Super-Movement 2** (dimensional movement, water walking), **Super-Senses 4** (blindsight [magical]), **Super-Strength 6** (Heavy Load: 50 tons).

Combat: Attack +14 (hellfire, mental blast), Grapple +30, Damage +14 (hellfire), +7 (mental blast), Defense +14, Knockback -11, Initiative +5.

Abilities 70 + Skills 27 (108 ranks) + Feats 30 + Powers 93 + Combat 56 + Saves 14 = 290



"YOU WILL BOW
DOWN BEFORE
ME!"

The Supernatural Menace believes he should be in command of everything. Most likely he's not from Earth, but believes it's his for some reason. It may be that he was "given" this world by "those who came before," or that he used to run Earth when it was known as Hell before he left to explore the rest of this dimension or any of the worlds adjacent to it. Now that he's returned, he wants to regain control. In order to achieve this, he's willing to employ lesser villains. The Supernatural Menace is a regal villain, usually operating behind the scenes until he chooses to reveal himself. In

addition to overwhelming power, the Supernatural Menace typically has a group of powered underlings to carry out his commands and enough other resources to take care of any petty whims. All he really cares about is reclaiming his rightful place as the ruler of the world.

Name Options: Lord Abyss, Prime-Evil, Skullos

Awaken! The Supernatural Menace may have arrived here alone, but he left some of his subjects behind when he left all those years ago. Now he's decided to call to his subjects and release them from the purgatory they've been trapped in for so long. Exactly what form this takes is up to you as GM, but it might include normal people suddenly transforming into hideous monsters, or strange, demonic beings climbing out of their hidden cities under the Earth, or summoning them from somewhere else. No matter where his minions come from, chaos results. The heroes get involved when some normal thugs they're facing suddenly transform into strange creatures. It's only after they've defeated the things that they notice it's happening all over the city, and maybe the world. They may not be able to undo the damage, but they can certainly confront this new menace and try to make things right.

Power Behind the Throne. While the Supernatural Menace is unquestionably "in charge," that doesn't mean his forces can't be usurped by others, like his most trusted advisor. In this case, the vizier has decided to use some of his master's resources without his knowledge. Perhaps he perceives that his master was weak for agreeing to a truce, or he's decided to prove his worth to his master by doing something truly impressive. No matter what the specifics are, the heroes think they're dealing with the Supernatural Menace right up until the time they confront the master villain and discover he's someone else entirely. Do the heroes dispose of the vizier and risk the Supernatural Menace's wrath, or do they turn the vizier over to him and let him deal with his power-grabbing servant? In any case, this scenario makes for a different sort of encounter that will allow for more time interacting with the Supernatural Menace than a fight with him does.



CHAPTER FIVE: THE IRON AGE OF FREEDOM

The previous chapters of *Iron Age* offer an overview of the Iron Age of comics and how to duplicate it in your *Mutants & Masterminds* games. This chapter takes a specific look at the Iron Age period of the Freedom City setting (as described in the *Freedom City* sourcebook). It provides a ready-made Iron Age background and setting for *M&M* adventures, or a worked example you can use in creating your own Iron Age settings, characters, and adventures.

While much of the material in this chapter—particularly the individual characters—is usable on its own, the background and other material assume you have access to the *Freedom City* sourcebook for details on the World of Freedom as a whole. The focus of this chapter is on the Iron Age period in particular and how things differ from present-day Freedom City.

HISTORY

The Iron Age of Freedom City is a dark decade of the city's history, spanning about thirteen or fourteen years from 1979 or '80 (opinions differ somewhat on "when it all started to go wrong") up until the shock of the Terminus Invasion of 1993, although some things had started to turn around even before then, notably the election of Mayor O'Connor.

This section looks at the highlights of those years in Freedom City's history, touching on the major events. A comprehensive and detailed description of the Iron Age years could take up most of a book this size, so this section is primarily intended as an overall look at the "big picture" in Freedom. It also provides Gamemasters with

some room to fill-in historical details and events as desired during an Iron Age series set during these years.

The earlier chapters of this book provide details on both real world and comic book history during the Iron Age. This chapter focuses specifically on that period in Freedom City history. You can borrow ideas from the earlier chapters of *Iron Age* for use here: assume most real world events of the time happened in Freedom as they did in our world, and use the comic book history as a source of inspiration for your own Iron Age happenings in Freedom City.

You can even use the benefits of hindsight to know what is coming in the "near future" of the Iron Age of Freedom, both in terms of

real world history and events detailed in the timeline in the *Freedom City* sourcebook.

1977

A serial killer stalks and murders four prostitutes in Freedom City's Fens neighborhood over the course of several weeks. The killer turns out to be Jack-a-Knives, although the public believes it is actually a copycat imitating the crimes of the 19th century serial killer of that name. The Eyes of Night track down the killer and help banish the Murder Spirit back to Tartarus. Eldrich tells them certain mystic barriers warding Earth from other-dimensional threats appear to be weakening.

The Atom Family, including daredevil Jack Wolf and a young debunker of the paranormal called Mentac the Magnificent, explore other dimensions, outer space, and the deepest recesses of the Earth. Although they fend off alien invasions, rampaging dinosaurs, and would-be conquerors while exploring lost worlds, fantastic ruins, and the inner Earth, few of the Atom Family's adventures become widely known to the public.

Due to pressures in his personal and professional life, the third Bowman secretly begins drinking again, leading to concern from his colleagues—particularly his ward and partner, Arrow.

Star Knight (A'lan Koor) leaves Earth to return to Citadel, taking the captured Blackstar there for trial and imprisonment. Star Knight resigns from the Freedom League for the foreseeable future. This follows on the departure of a number of other Freedom Leaguers, including Lady Liberty, Daedalus, Pseudo, Sea-King, and the Black Avenger over the past few years, significantly depleting the team's strength.

1978

The Daring Duo suffers a humiliating public defeat when Bowman goes into action drunk. He resigns from the Freedom League and retires in disgrace shortly thereafter. Arrow (Ethan Keller) defeats the Shark Syndicate on his own, and continues to operate solo, refusing to adopt the name and costume of Bowman or to associate with his former mentor.

SHADOW stages a second Operation Inundation using a cloned army. The Scarab is able to use his psychic powers to unleash the clones' buried egos, resulting in each considering himself the "true leader" of SHADOW and turning their disciplined ranks into a chaotic rout.

Leftist Sandinista guerillas fight to overthrow the ruling government in Nicaragua.

1979

Lucius Cabot returns to Freedom City for the first time in about a century and relocates the firm of Cabot, Cunningham & Crowley from New York to Freedom City at the behest of his infernal patron. From the very beginning, Cabot has run-ins with Freedom's occult community, particularly Eldrich.

Margaret Thatcher elected Prime Minister of Great Britain.

Peril at Pyramid Plaza: Brainstorm and Scarab sacrifice their lives to save the Freedom League from the mental domination of

PLAYING OUT THE IRON AGE

One option for an Iron Age *Freedom City* series is to start near the beginning of the period, such as with Archer's founding of FORCE Ops or a similar team, and play through the historical events of the years until the Terminus Invasion. You can either aim for an outcome somewhat similar to the official *Freedom City* timeline, or diverge into your own alternate timeline where things can play out any way you like.

Perhaps the heroes in your series bring down Mayor Moore's corrupt administration sooner, or help to avert the Terminus Invasion (or at least lessen its effects). On the other hand, they might make things worse, failing to oust the mayor or causing a new disaster that turns public opinion against them and in support of Moore or another anti-vigilante administration. Maybe they survive the brutal Iron Age to become heroes in modern-day Freedom City, or their efforts simply lay the foundations for a new generation of heroes, and an all-new *Freedom City* series, when the Iron Age is over and done.

the Scions of Sobek, a cult of long-dead Egyptian sorcerer-priests awakened by the machinations of Wilhelm Kantor and SHADOW. The Freedom League begins a series of reorganizations and changes following this tragedy, never quite recovering its footing.

Radical Iranian students seize control of the U.S. embassy in Tehran, taking the staff hostage.

1980

Ethan Keller (the third Arrow) adopts the code-name Archer and begins a ruthless one-man war on drug lords and organized crime in Freedom City. Unlike his predecessors, Archer uses lethal force against his opponents to strike fear in the hearts of criminals.

Following on the Bowman's disgrace and his ward's adoption of more violent methods, Citizens for Order, Decency, and Ethics (CODE) is founded in Freedom City. The organization calls for greater regulation of costumed and masked heroes, citing dangers to impressionable children as well as to law and order in the city.

1981

The Freedom League disbands: Tectonic and Halogen, two new members of the Freedom League, die stopping the rampage of the Katanarchists cult led by the second Crimson Katana. Following their memorial services at Heroes' Knoll, Centurion disbands the Freedom League before any more lives can be lost.

The Freedom City Police Department makes Evening and the Eye of Justice honorary police officers and invests them as deputies of the Department. This honor is officially revoked as part of the Moore Act three years later.

The Gemini Case: AEGIS agent Harry Powers tracks down and overcomes the telepathic serial killer called Gemini, earning him national fame and a fast-track promotion within the agency.

1983

A terrorist truck bomb in Beirut, Lebanon kills 237 U.S. Marines.

The Blackstone Riot: Doc Abattoir and Countess Azure mastermind a prison break at Blackstone Penitentiary, but their plan goes awry and the escaped super-criminals are forced to take hos-

tages after setting off a riot inside the prison. Botched handling by Freedom City's administration leaves the warden and forty guards dead by the end of the siege, along with almost a dozen inmates, including the instigators of the riot. A total breakdown and mass escape is prevented only by quick action from a rookie guard named Joshua Drummer and Dr. Abby Wallace, one of the prison security experts.

Blame for the disaster falls on the city's administration as well as absent heroes like the former Freedom Leaguers, despite evidence that various distractions were arranged to keep heroes like Centurion occupied when the prison-break occurred. CODE, in particular, rails against the failures leading up to the incident, and the group's membership swells in its wake.

1984

A Wedding of Worlds: The wedding of Andrea Atom and Prince Mentac marks the end of the original Atom Family's adventuring careers. Jack Wolf leaves Freedom City to become a mercenary with the Soldiers of Fortune.

Overshadow makes contact with a drone of the Curator and attempts to interface to gain all the knowledge in the cosmos. Thanks to superhero intervention, the resulting data stream fries the mastermind's brain, putting him into a coma. The Penumbra takes the reins of SHADOW and, under the guidance of Franklin Folkes, begins Operation Blackguard, a systematic program to ruin the reputations of costumed heroes.



In investigating the activities of a criminal organization that turns out to be a front for other-dimensional scouts, Evening and the Eye of Justice are exiled to the Terminus. They survive two years there before returning to Earth.

By this time, Freedom City is without a major hero team, and has only scattered solo heroes. The Centurion remains the city's most prominent, powerful, and active costumed protector, but not for very long.

Franklin Moore is elected mayor of Freedom City on a platform of "zero-tolerance" for crime and vigilantism, which includes costumed vigilantes as well. Moore's campaign rails against failures like the Blackstone Riot and the apparent inability of costumed heroes to defend the city, given incidents like Bowman's public failures and the disbanding of the Freedom League. The support of CODE and similar grassroots groups features strongly in the campaign.

The new mayor's first act in office is to outlaw costumed heroes. With the signing of the Moore Act, even stalwarts like Centurion are forced to stop operating in Freedom City rather than defy the new law. Centurion begins operating out of his Sanctum and focuses his efforts globally rather than locally in Freedom.

1985

Castle Comics starts up in New York City and buys up the rights to the pulps and comic properties of the long-defunct Aurora Press and Aurora Publishing Group. Their collaborative of hot young artists turns out a number of hit titles, adopted by youth culture as "rebellious," given the turn in public opinion against superheroes.

Maximus Atom, the first of the Atom Family siblings, is born to Andrea Atom and Prince Mentac of Farside City. Andrea's mother Anne Atom dies from complications due to cancer a few months later.

In defiance of the Moore Act, Archer forms FORCE Ops, uniting a young and sometimes brutal cadre of heroes to fight Mayor Moore's corrupt political machine along with more standard menaces and enemies. The new heroes are quickly branded outlaws by the administration and the Freedom City Police Department.

1986

Tess Atom is born. The Atom Family begins splitting its time between Freedom City and Farside, allowing Mentac to advise the council of Farside City while Dr. Atom and Andrea study Farsider technology.

A Soviet nuclear reactor in Chernobyl suffers a massive systems failure.

The Eyes of Night return to Earth from the Terminus to find Freedom City a changed place. (Indeed, at first they believe they've arrived on some parallel Earth.) When Evening discovers she is pregnant, the couple leaves the city to allow their child to be born in safety elsewhere.

1988

Victoria Atom is born.

Franklin Moore is reelected to a second term in office, despite rumors and accusations of political corruption, misappropriation of funds, and nepotism within the administration. Once again, the support of CODE and similar citizen-action groups is pivotal. It's later revealed the Moore campaign has aid from criminal organizations, from the

Freedom City Mob to shell political action committees funded by SHADOW and the Labyrinth.

The Eyes of Night return to Freedom City and operate in defiance of the Moore Act in the West End and Fens neighborhoods.

1989

After several incredibly successful years, the bottom drops out of the comics market and Castle Comics nearly implodes. Publisher Harry Wiseman takes the helm of Castle Comics and immediately plans to move its central publishing house and offices to Freedom City.

Chase Atom, the last of the Atom siblings, is born in Farside City on the Moon. He is the only member of the Atom Family (apart from his father Mentac) not born on Earth.

Freedom City celebrates its bicentennial.

The Berlin Wall is torn down.

The Crimson Mask steals the Mirror of Souls from Eldrich's sanctum and uses it to restore Overshadow's shattered mind, allowing the arch-villain to seize control of SHADOW once more.

1990

The End of SHADOW? Overshadow returns, armed with the Tapestry of Fate, and attempts to kill AEGIS Director Jack Simmons. The former Patriot overcomes his old foe. After Overshadow falls to his apparent death, it's widely believed that SHADOW is broken and defeated. In the wake of Simmons' retirement and SHADOW's apparent defeat, public and administration support from AEGIS begins to wane. The cost of operating the agency is increasingly called into question and AEGIS is in serious danger of being de-funded or incorporated into other federal agencies.

The Cold War begins to come to an end with the collapse of the USSR and the reunification of East and West Germany.

1991

The POF-SWAT squad kills a super-powered teenaged gang member called Captain Blood after AEGIS captures him in a raid in Southside. POF-SWAT members claim the mutant teenager was killed during an escape attempt, but video evidence later surfaces showing the officers beat and then shot him while he was still helpless in power-dampening manacles. Although placed on trial, the officers are acquitted due to irregularities in the chain of evidence. AEGIS and some Freedom City heroes narrowly prevent a riot in Southside from growing out of control in the wake of the decision.

Attempted coup by Marxist hard-liners in Moscow thwarted in part due to efforts of the People's Heroes. Mikhail Gorbachev resigns as Russian president, succeeded by Boris Yeltsin.

1992

Michael O'Connor's "No Moore" campaign wins him the Freedom City mayoral election by a landslide—particularly after FORCE Ops exposes some of Franklin Moore's ties with organized crime. The newly elected O'Connor devotes his efforts (and considerable personal fortune) toward rebuilding people's trust in their leaders and in Freedom City. He also begins working to repeal the Moore Act.

WHAT IF... THE IRON AGE NEVER ENDED?

One variation for running a modern-day Iron Age Freedom City series is to assume the city's Iron Age didn't end as described in the timeline, but continued on to the present. Perhaps FORCE Ops didn't successfully implicate Mayor Moore and help force him from office. Michael O'Connor's mayoral campaign may not have been as successful; he could have been assassinated, blackmailed, or even turned out to be as corrupt as his opponents. Rather than being a new hope for Freedom City, a corrupt O'Connor administration might have sealed its fate, making the administration virtually unassailable, controlling every part of the system intended to keep it in check.

Likewise, perhaps the Terminus Invasion wasn't followed by an era of renewal for the city. If Dr. Metropolis doesn't exist (or, worse yet, falls under the influence of certain unscrupulous parties), then Freedom can't recover as quickly from the devastation inflicted upon it. Without the repeal of the Moore Act, super-heroes can't move back to the city to help rebuild and are forced to either operate in secret (in defiance of the law) or to wash their hands of the whole thing. This lets you re-imagine modern Freedom City as everything from a dark-gothic maze of hastily rebuilt structures to an ironically-named hell-hole, walled off from the rest of the civilization and inhabited solely by the desperate, the predators, and a powerful and corrupt elite ruling over them all.

1993

The Terminus Invasion: The forces of Omega invade Freedom City. The largest alliance of heroes ever seen unites to repel the interdimensional invaders, including many heroes not seen in Freedom City for years. Many heroes are seriously injured, killed, or lost in the ensuing battle. Centurion sacrifices himself to shatter Omega's support armor, forcing the dimensional overlord to retreat back into the Terminus. Freedom City and the world mourn the loss of their greatest hero. FORCE Ops is no more in the aftermath of the invasion, leaving Freedom without a team of resident heroes once again.

I Am Metropolis: Dr. Metropolis makes his presence known in Freedom City and lends his powers to the reconstruction effort, allowing it to occur at tremendous speed.

Jack Wolf returns to Freedom City, with Andrea Atom and Mentac missing and presumed dead following Omega's defeat. Dr. Atom, himself dying of cancer, transfers his intellect into a holographic computer system. Jack becomes the legal guardian of the Atom children.

The sacrifice of AEGIS agent Luke Bonham (killed in action during the invasion) and the clear threat posed by the Terminus revitalizes support for AEGIS and helps to heal rifts between the organization and the superhero community.

Mayor O'Connor officially repeals the Moore Act, making costumed heroes legal in Freedom City once again. Many of the heroes who came to fight Omega choose to remain and help with reconstruction. A grateful city welcomes their return with open arms and the so-called "Iron Age" draws to a close with the reestablishment of the Freedom League by Captain Thunder.

FREEDOM CITY IN THE IRON AGE

The *Freedom City* sourcebook describes the modern city, which is similar, but not identical, to the city as it was during the Iron Age years.

In particular, Dr. Metropolis, Daedalus, and other super-heroic volunteers completely rebuilt Freedom City (or at least the whole of the downtown area) following the devastation of the Terminus Invasion. In the years just before, Freedom City was starting to show its age: the art deco and neo-classical buildings of the city's Golden Age were faded, old, and crumbling, some replaced by slightly more modern, but less pleasant, steel and concrete structures. Years of corrupt political administrations meant no money for public works or urban renewal. The city was grimy, crime-ridden, and overall *darker* than the Freedom City of today.

Geographically, Freedom City in the 1980s was largely the same. Outlying neighborhoods like Grenville and Ashton were smaller and less developed than they are now, while the bad neighborhoods like Southside, Greenbank, the Fens, and parts of the West End were *really* bad before the election of Mayor O'Connor. The Iron Age is the height of Mob influence in Freedom City along the Boardwalk, and of the "Combat Zone" in the Fens, with its sleazy porn theaters, prostitution, and drug dealers.

THE MOORE ADMINISTRATION

The defining element of the Iron Age of Freedom City is the administration of Mayor Franklin Moore. Broadly speaking, the span from his election to the mayor's office to his defeat by Michael O'Connor defines the start and end of the city's darkest era.

At the uppermost levels—Moore and his direct cronies and advisors—the administration is the most corrupt Freedom City has ever seen. Lower-level administrators and government officials in Freedom City at the time vary widely. Some are sincere in their beliefs and trying to do the right thing in difficult times, while others are lapdogs and toadies of their bosses, or trying to further their own ambitions by going along with popular sentiment. A rare handful of people in the city government are honest, trustworthy, and willing to take action; it's these individuals who might become allies to costumed vigilantes operating outside the law, risking their careers, futures, or even their lives to do so.

MAYOR FRANKLIN MOORE

Franklin Moore was born and raised in Freedom City, as he reminded voters so often during his first campaign. Moore grew up in the West End neighborhood of Freedom in a lower-middle income family. He was bright, ambitious and, most of all, ruthless, in his quest to make a better life for himself.

That quest led him to marry into a family chain of convenience stores in the city and parley them into a successful business venture. It led him to make connections with powerful people in the city, people who could help get things done and eliminate certain obstacles. It eventually led him to seek the office of mayor in order to change "his" city to suit his vision.

Moore never liked the "costumed freaks" who lorded their presence over ordinary people. They were like gods who deigned to bestow their help as suited their whims. In truth, he was always jealous of them, but lacked the courage to try and climb to their level. Instead, he would bring them down to his.

Moore's anti-vigilante attitude earned him support from those powerful people he knew who wanted to eliminate the masks even more than he did. Moore's campaign exploited rising concerns and shaken faith in the city's superheroes, sweeping him into office on a platform of law and order and making frightened voters feel safe and in control again.

Although he enjoys playing the dutiful public servant and "man of the people," Franklin Moore is none of these things. His actions are all coldly calculated to secure his own power and authority and to bring down those he envies. If he cares for Freedom City at all it is as a possession, something he can control. His only concern for his constituents is to keep them dependent on him for guidance and protection.

Use the Politician archetype (*M&M*, page 228) for Mayor Moore's game stats: increase Charisma to 17, drop Computers and Craft, and add Intimidate 6.



POLICE COMMISSIONER ROY ALQUIST

For some time it was a toss-up whether Roy Alquist would end up a cop or a mobster. As it turns out, he became equal measures of both. Alquist became a police officer, but his ambitions were always political. He learned how to work the department and keep his record clean enough for promotion while taking advantage of some of the "perks" offered by the job (namely taking bribes on the side).

Alquist became acquainted with Franklin Moore when Moore offered him some of those "perks" to look the other way when it came to some of his business dealings. When Moore's ambitions turned political, Alquist supported him and was rewarded when Mayor Moore appointed him Police Commissioner on a strong platform of "restoring law and order" to Freedom City.

Commissioner Alquist's position gives him the best of both worlds in his view. On the one hand, he practically has *carte blanche* to deal



with crime in the city: the most brutally effective cops are rewarded, while those who refuse to “play the game” are quietly passed over for promotion and positions of authority. On the other hand, Alquist is still very much on the take from organized crime and uses his connections to help create the *appearance* of law and order, at least so far as most of the voters are concerned.

Like most bullies, Roy Alquist is a coward at heart. He'll gladly abuse a helpless victim (verbally or physically) but he flees when confronted with actual danger. He has a small cadre of officers who basically serve as his personal bodyguards, since he knows more than one “costumed whacko” would be willing to take a shot at him if given the opportunity.

Use the Police Chief archetype (*M&M*, page 228) for Alquist's game stats: drop the Climb and Medicine skills, increase Intimidate to 8 ranks, and add the Contacts feat.

THE PRICE OF FREEDOM SQUAD

One of Commissioner Alquist's “innovations” in the FCPD has been the establishment of a special SWAT team called “Price of Freedom,” or “POF” for short. The FCPD has actually had special squads in the past (including the Science Brigade and the “Dog-Pound Squad”) but Alquist and his public relations mouthpieces blithely ignore this, touting POF-SWAT as the greatest boon to the city since Mayor Moore's election.

Publicly, the Price of Freedom squad was intended to deal with “special criminal threats,” namely superhumans, costumed super-criminals, and would-be vigilantes violating the Moore Act. While they did so, privately the POF squad serves as Moore and Alquist's personal enforcers and bodyguards. They are the dirtiest of dirty cops, willing to use their authority to blackmail, bribe, intimidate, or even murder—whatever their boss wants done—while claiming to be the city's stalwart defenders.

The head of the POF-SWAT squad is Captain Al Miller, a brutal ex-soldier with a head of grey stubble, dark five-o'clock shadow, and a vicious sneer. He's exceptionally proud of the physical shape he's in and takes opportunities to show off when he can.

Use the SWAT Officer archetype (*M&M*, page 229) for POF-SWAT Officers, including Capt. Miller, with the addition of whatever special heavy equipment or experimental devices you see fit. You can use some of the special police equipment in *Agents of Freedom* for inspiration. At a minimum, POF-SWAT has access to the same kinds of scanners and nullifying manacles given for AEGIS on page 71 of *Freedom City*.

CODE

Mayor Moore's strongest ally outside of his circle of cronies is the Citizens for Order, Decency, and Ethics (CODE), a grass-roots organization devoted to civic duty and improvement that has tragically chosen to back the wrong horse. Moore plays the fears and ambitions of CODE and its members like a finely-tuned instrument, allowing him to gain the kind of public leeway and support people would never give him under other circumstances.

Although CODE wants to improve public safety, its focus tends to be more on perceived “immorality” and concern over the activities

of costumed heroes (or “lawless vigilantes,” as they're more often called in the organization's literature). In particular, CODE is concerned masked heroes are given too much trust and leeway by the public and the government, and feels their role should be severely curtailed. Unfortunately for Freedom City, their opinion seems borne out in events leading up to the organization's founding and Mayor Moore's election. On several occasions, Freedom City's heroes have failed it as never before, and CODE has seen to it that the citizenry is not so forgiving.

Naturally, CODE strongly supports the Moore Act, which was, in many ways, passed in exchange for their support during the election. Since the Act's passage, CODE has served as a kind of “watchdog” group (more of an “attack dog” group in some ways), calling for severe penalties for anyone caught violating the law and painting those heroes who do so as nothing more than criminals themselves.

Despite their rather hysterical and narrow-minded tendencies, CODE members for the most part are decent citizens of Freedom City trying to do what they feel is right. The organization is unaware of the Moore administration's corrupt activities, and one of the mayor's biggest challenges is the tightrope he walks in maintaining CODE's support. He loses it when the truth comes out and CODE stays out of the election that brings Michael O'Connor to office.

The executive director of CODE during the Moore Administration is Wilhelmina Fredricks, a concerned mother whose son David was a bystander killed by falling rubble during the Freedom League's assault on Pyramid Plaza while still under the control of the Scions of Sobek.

Use the Politician archetype (*M&M*, page 228) for Mrs. Fredricks' game stats, removing the Computers skill.

AEGIS

The Iron Age of Freedom is both a difficult and a heady time for AEGIS. On the one hand, the agency is given more responsibility than ever and some of its most famous and effective agents are in the field. On the other hand, it becomes more difficult to distinguish who the bad guys really are, and AEGIS is in the unenviable position of having to enforce a law that most of its agents consider foolish at best, outright wrong at worst.

AEGIS Director Jack Simmons has strong opinions about masked heroes, considering he used to be one himself. Still, as the Patriot, Jack was an agent of the U.S. government, not some costumed vigilante taking the law into his own hands. That always separated him somewhat from his teammates in the Liberty League, and influenced Jack's attitude towards the Moore Act and its enforcement. While he didn't like the idea of having to go up against old friends, he liked the idea of unrestricted vigilante activity even less. So AEGIS and its Director do their duty and cooperate fully with local law enforcement when it comes to the Moore Act.

The effective elimination of superheroes in Freedom City has given AEGIS plenty to do. Since POF-SWAT and the FCPD can't be counted on to handle paranormal crime in the city, it's up to the feds. AEGIS tries to focus on cases of true importance to national security, but more often than not gets involved with what could be considered local matters. Relations between the federal agents and



the local police are cool at best, verging on outright hostile at times, although it isn't until the "Captain Blood" incident towards the end of the Moore administration that AEGIS outright *knows* Alquist and his department are dirty.

In the meanwhile, AEGIS does its job and tries to get along with everyone, walking the difficult line between obeying the law and local jurisdiction and doing what they feel is right and necessary given the situation.

You can find stats for the typical AEGIS field agent on page 70 of *Freedom City*. For more detailed information and agent archetypes, see **Chapter 3** of *Agents of Freedom*.

LUKE BONHAM

Luke Bonham is Freedom City Chief of Operations for AEGIS, answering directly to Jack Simmons, the founder and director of the agency. Bonham, like many first-generation AEGIS agents, joined up as a young maverick with something to prove, but he has learned caution and discretion in his years with the agency, perhaps a bit too much, according to some.

Bonham is in a difficult position in Freedom City: on the one hand, he thinks superheroes have been a valuable asset to the city and the nation. He can think of a number of occasions when their actions have prevented the destruction of Freedom, if not the world, and those are just the ones where he was personally present. On the other hand, Bonham agrees that super-powered "amateurs" are a

LUKE BONHAM

POWER LEVEL 6

Str 16	Dex 16	Con 17	Int 15	Wis 13	Cha 18
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Skills: Acrobatics 4 (+7), Bluff 7 (+11), Climb 4 (+7), Computers 4 (+6), Diplomacy 6 (+10), Disable Device 4 (+6), Drive 4 (+7), Gather Information 6 (+10), Intimidate 6 (+10), Investigate 5 (+7), Knowledge (behavioral sciences) 6 (+8), Knowledge (current events) 5 (+7), Knowledge (streetwise) 2 (+4), Knowledge (tactics) 5 (+7), Medicine 2 (+3), Notice 6 (+7), Pilot 4 (+7), Search 7 (+9), Sense Motive 8 (+9), Sleight of Hand 4 (+7), Stealth 6 (+9), Survival 7 (+8), Swim 4 (+7)

Feats: Assessment, Attractive, Contacts, Equipment 3, Evasion, Fearless, Grappling Finesse, Improved Aim, Improved Critical (pistol), Improved Disarm, Improved Grapple, Improved Trip, Leadership, Move-by Action, Precise Shot, Prone Fighting, Quick Draw, Takedown Attack, Teamwork

Equipment: blaster pistol (+5 damage), armored jumpsuit (+3 Toughness), commlink

Combat: Attack +7, Damage +3 (unarmed), +5 (blaster pistol), Grapple +8, Defense +6 (+3 flat-footed), Initiative +3

Saving Throws: Toughness +6 (+3 without armor), Fortitude +8, Reflex +9, Will +7

Abilities 35 + Skills 29 (116 ranks) + Feats 23 + Powers 0 + Combat 26 + Saves 16 = 129

HARRY POWERS

POWER LEVEL 7

Str 14	Dex 13	Con 13	Int 16	Wis 15	Cha 18
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Skills: Acrobatics 4 (+5), Bluff 8 (+12), Climb 4 (+6), Computers 4 (+7), Diplomacy 8 (+12), Disable Device 8 (+11), Drive 8 (+9), Escape Artist 4 (+5), Gather Information 8 (+12), Intimidate 8 (+12), Investigate 8 (+11), Knowledge (behavioral sciences) 4 (+7), Knowledge (civics) 6 (+9), Knowledge (current events) 8 (+11), Knowledge (streetwise) 8 (+11), Language 2 (French, Russian), Notice 8 (+10), Search 8 (+11), Sense Motive 8 (+10), Sleight of Hand 8 (+9), Stealth 8 (+9), Survival 8 (+10), Swim 4 (+5)

Feats: Assessment, Contacts, Defensive Roll 2, Elusive Target, Equipment 3, Evasion, Improved Initiative, Precise Shot, Quick Draw, Track

Powers: **Concealment 2** (detect and sense powers, Close Range, Permanent), **Super-Senses 4** (Sense Powers, Ranged, Radius)

Equipment: blaster pistol (+5 damage), armored jumpsuit (+3 Toughness), commlink

Combat: Attack +9, Grapple +11, Damage +2 (unarmed), +5 (blaster pistol), Defense +8, Knockback -3, Initiative +5

Saving Throws: Toughness +6 (+4 flat-footed, +3 without armor), Fortitude +5, Reflex +7, Will +6

Abilities 29 + Skills 38 (152 ranks) + Feats 13 + Powers 9 + Combat 34 + Saves 14 = Total 137

potential danger: they lack discipline, guidance, and oversight. He'd rather see some of the capes come under the direction of AEGIS, where they could do the most good, but outlaws like FORCE Ops just won't do that. So long as they're breaking the law, it's Bonham's job to enforce it.

HARRY POWERS

The most famous AEGIS agent in the field is none other than C. Horatio "Harry" Powers, still a few years from becoming Director of the agency. Powers earned fame and a reputation for accomplishing the impossible early in his time with AEGIS when he tracked down

and overcame the telepathic serial killer called Gemini. The incident was made into a film, cementing Powers's reputation as a capable agent.

In the years following, Harry Powers handled a number of high-profile cases for AEGIS, always able to rely on an uncanny sense of what to do under pressure. What Powers hasn't revealed to anyone—particularly in light of events in Freedom City—is that he has a super-power himself, albeit a minor one. He can sense others with powers nearby. Also, unknown even to him, he's extremely difficult to sense in the same way (which is why various scanners and tests have never revealed his ability).

Freedom City Chief Bonham doesn't like Powers that much, simply because Powers is younger, smarter, and more popular, and because he reminds Bonham of his own younger days, when he wasn't weighed down with so much responsibility or hard-earned experience.

For information on the present-day Director Powers of AEGIS, see pages 71-72 of *Freedom City*.

ORGANIZED CRIME

With Franklin Moore in office, it's a good time for organized crime in Freedom City; at least, it would be, if they were the only ones trying to take advantage of the situation. Organized crime helped put the mayor in office, although Moore isn't exactly in their pocket.

Now the Freedom City underworld is leveraging its newfound influence, but also dealing with newcomers to the Freedom City scene, like the Japanese *yakuza*. The shadows of the city are a battleground between the syndicates and their proxies, all of them looking to claim the territory for themselves.

AUGUSTUS ROMAN

For years, the most powerful criminal syndicate in Freedom City was Augustus Roman's Circus Maximus. The so-called "Caesar of Crime" moved lesser crime-bosses like pieces on a chessboard and matched wits with the Centurion himself. Roman's masterstroke, however, was when he chose to back Franklin Moore's mayoral bid. He was finally able to confound his old foe the Centurion and other costumed heroes with the one thing they couldn't oppose: the law. Or at least, so he thought.

Initially, Roman was quite right. The Moore Act drove the law-abiding heroes out of Freedom City or forced them into retirement. Even the Centurion operated in the city only to help deal with natural disasters and similar emergencies. Patrolling to reduce crime was out of the question. Like a victorious Caesar, Roman created a new empire for himself, becoming the unquestioned king of Freedom's underworld. At least part of Roman's success is inspired by his desire to secure the future of his young daughter, Saturnalia.

Heroes in the Iron Age of Freedom will deal with Augustus Roman sooner or later. He's the kingpin of crime, and there's very little going on in "his" city that he doesn't know. Vigilantes going up against the Freedom mob will run into the Circus Maximus and its leader. Roman may try to bribe or threaten them, but more likely he'll send men to eliminate them: common thugs at first, then hit-men and enforcers playing up their boss's obsession with

ancient Rome. Augustus Roman's "legions" are many; sometimes they seem almost limitless.

Of course, Roman's luck runs out when Moore's administration is exposed as thoroughly corrupt and his fingerprints are all over the payoffs. His syndicate collapses, and his former lieutenant Raphael Oliverti takes power in the Freedom underworld, while Roman is forced to look for greener pastures.

For more on Augustus Roman, see page 83 of *Freedom City*, which details the crime-boss's present circumstances, including his creation of the Circuit-Maximus underground fighting ring.

RAPHAEL "RAFE" OLIVERTI

Raphael Oliverti is the head of the Oliverti Mob and Augustus Roman's right-hand man. He fills the job well, since he is the blunt instrument that stands in contrast to Roman's refinement and class. Of course, Oliverti has learned more than a little about strategy in his time with Roman's syndicate...something his boss will learn in a few years' time.

Oliverti is a fairly young man for someone in his position and he's ambitious. Mr. Roman knows this, and manages to keep Oliverti on a relatively short leash. Eventually, Boss Oliverti will become the head of Freedom City's Mob until he, too, is toppled by a rival, "Big Al" Driogano.

Boss Oliverti handles much of the day-to-day operations of the syndicate, doing Roman's "dirty work" and generally enjoying it. He behaves more than a bit like royalty in Freedom City, since he's protected by his boss's reputation, his own, and Mayor Moore's influence. He started out as a lowly thug with family connections, and now look at him. He has determined his family, especially his sons, will now have only the best.

Use the Mobster archetype from **Chapter 4** for Raphael Oliverti's game stats.

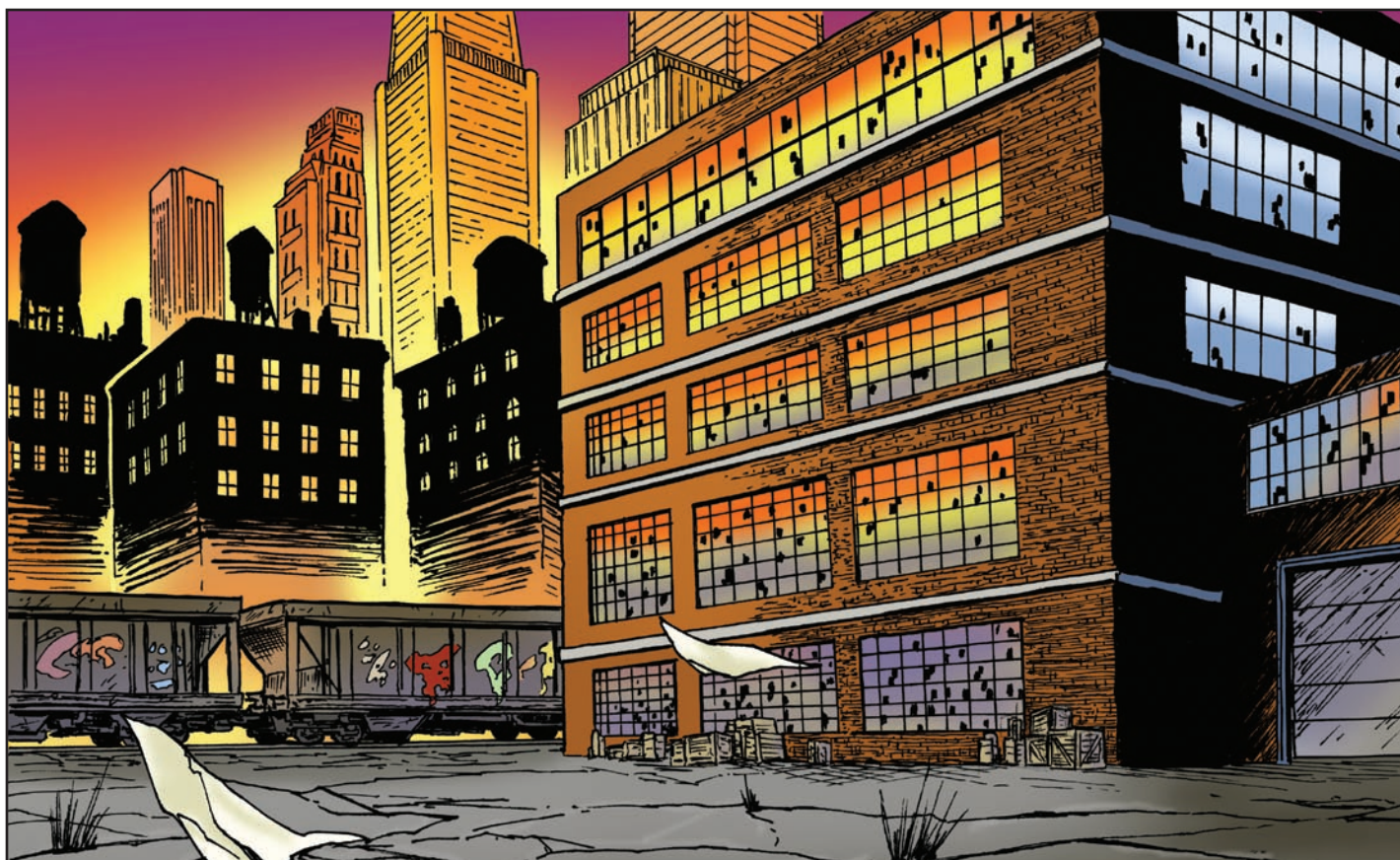
OYABUN SAITO TAKAHASHI

The newest face in the Freedom underworld is the cold visage of Saito Takahashi, the ambitious *oyabun*, or head, of the Takahashi Yakuza clan. The Japanese syndicate sees an opportunity to expand its operations into Freedom and North America during this time, particularly with the Moore Act limiting the activities of costumed vigilantes in the city and with Japanese corporations taking a greater financial stake in Freedom City's industry.

Takahashi faces an uphill battle dealing with the established Mob, but he relishes the challenge. Initially, the Yakuza work quietly in concert with the new Japanese interests coming into the city. Eventually, their presence touches off a gang-war with the Circus Maximus and Augustus Roman's people, with anyone foolish enough not to get out of the way caught in the crossfire.

Takahashi takes a somewhat different attitude towards vigilantes than the entrenched syndicate. He is often willing to cooperate and even assist outlaw heroes, provided they're going after the interests of his rivals. The Oyabun is honorable in his own fashion, and deals fairly with those he sees as honorable as well.

Use the Crime Boss archetype from **Chapter 4** for Saito Takahashi's game stats. The ninja archetype from *M&M* is suitable for his more capable minions.



FORCE OPS

Freedom City in the Iron Age is a place that cries out for heroes, only costumed heroes are not allowed by law to operate in the city. By definition, the only heroes in Freedom City are those willing to defy the law in order to do the job. That devotion to justice and doing the right thing over the letter of the law is the foundation of the Freelance Organization of Criminal Elimination Operatives, or FORCE Ops.

Ethan Keller, AKA Archer, formed FORCE Ops using the resources at his disposal—mainly a trust fund established by his mentor, Fletcher Beaumont, Jr., the third Bowman. With access to money and information initially provided by the *Freedom Ledger*, Archer tracked down potential allies: heroes or outcasts operating in the shadows of the city. He brought them together and forged the unlikely allies into a powerful crime-fighting team.

FORCE OPS HQ

FORCE Ops works out of an old industrial warehouse in the Greenbank district of Freedom City (see page 29 of the *Freedom City* sourcebook). Archer bought the warehouse through a dummy corporation and arranged for some discreet associates to renovate and retrofit it. The Warehouse is situated just below the Wallace Expressway near the South River on the Greenbank side of the Mona-Glenn Bridge.

Compared to headquarters like Freedom Hall, the Nucleus, and Centurion's Sanctum, the Warehouse is modest, to say the least. Still, it has state-of-the-art computer and communications systems, crash-space for all of the the members of the team, parking space for a few cars and the sky cycles (see the following) and its own generators.

Naturally, FORCE Ops keeps the existence and the location of the Warehouse a secret. They make all efforts to throw off pursuit before returning to headquarters, and often do so along a roundabout route. The team uses the computer in their HQ to monitor an online BBS (bulletin board system) for informants and contacts, as well as eavesdropping on public police bands and other communications for signs of trouble.

THE WAREHOUSE

HEADQUARTERS

Size: Medium; *Toughness:* 10; *Features:* Communications, Computer, Concealed, Garage, Gym, Living Space, Power System, Security System

Cost: 10 equipment points (Equipment 2)

SKY-BIKE

The FORCE Ops' primary mode of transportation is a pair of sky-bikes of a design originally created by Daedalus and used by the Freedom

League. The bikes use anti-gravity propulsion, making them swift and virtually silent. Each sky-bike has room for a driver and a passenger seated directly behind the driver as well as a small cargo compartment.

Since Network is the only member of the team who can fly or travel quickly, the rest of FORCE Ops takes the sky-bikes, although Nightrage will sometimes assume mist form when traveling short distances. Archer and Kismet usually pilot the bikes, although the

other members of the team at least know how (even if they're not always the most skilled).

SKY-BIKE

VEHICLE

Strength 20, Speed 4 (air, 100 MPH), Defense 10, Toughness 5, Size Medium

Cost: 10 equipment points (Equipment 2)

ARCHER

POWER LEVEL 10

Real Name: Ethan Keller

Identity: Secret

Occupation: Vigilante

Base of Operations: Freedom City

Affiliation: FORCE Ops

Height: 6'

Eyes: Brown

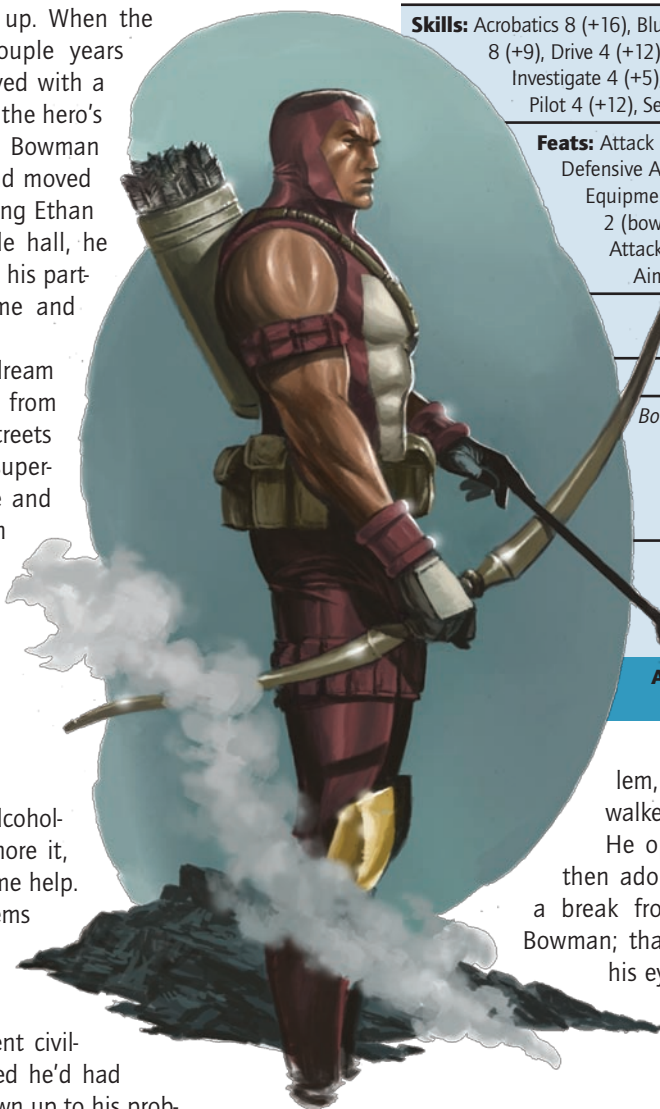
Weight: 190 lbs.

Hair: Black

Ethan Keller never knew his father and lost his mother when he was just ten years old to violence in the Lincoln neighborhood where he grew up. When the third Bowman met him a couple years later, Ethan was already involved with a Lincoln gang and tried to steal the hero's car. He almost succeeded, too; Bowman was impressed by his talent and moved by his plight. Rather than turning Ethan over to the police and juvenile hall, he took him in and trained him as his partner, the third to use the name and costume of Arrow.

For a while, it was like a dream come true for Ethan: he went from being a poor orphan on the streets to the heroic sidekick of a superhero! He lived in a penthouse and had private tutors along with training in archery, martial arts, and criminology. For a few years, it was the best time of his young life, but then things changed.

Due to pressures in his personal and professional life, Fletcher Beaumont, Jr. (the third Bowman) relapsed into alcoholism. At first, Ethan tried to ignore it, then tried to get his mentor some help. Nothing worked, and the problems only worsened. Matters came to a head when Bowman's drinking endangered both their lives and those of innocent civilians. That's when Ethan decided he'd had enough: Fletcher could either own up to his prob-



STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+2	+8	+2	+1	+3	+4
14	26	14	13	16	18

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+6/+2*	+6	+10	+6

* Flat-footed

Skills: Acrobatics 8 (+16), Bluff 8 (+12), Climb 8 (+10), Craft (mechanical) 8 (+9), Drive 4 (+12), Gather Information 6 (+10), Intimidate 6 (+10), Investigate 4 (+5), Knowledge (streetwise) 8 (+9), Notice 8 (+11), Pilot 4 (+12), Search 8 (+9), Sense Motive 8 (+11), Stealth 8 (+16)

Feats: Attack Focus (ranged) 4, Attack Specialization (bow), Defensive Attack, Defensive Roll 4, Dodge Focus 4, Equipment 6, Evasion 2, Improved Aim, Improved Critical 2 (bow), Instant Up, Precise Shot, Ranged Pin, Ricochet Attack, Quick Draw, Seize Initiative, Taunt, Ultimate Aim

Equipment: The Warehouse and two sky-bikes (see previous)

Powers: Device 3 (bow and arrows, easy to lose)

Bow and Arrows: Blast 5 (razor arrow, Alternate Powers: **Obscure 5** [visual, smoke arrow], **Snare 5** [tangler arrow], **Stun 3** [Ranged, taser arrow], **Super-Movement 1** [swinging, cable arrow], **Trip 5** [cable arrow])

Combat: Attack +9 (melee), +13 (ranged), +15 (bow), Grapple +11, Damage +2 (unarmed), +5 (bow), Defense +14 (+5 flat-footed), Knockback -3, Initiative +8

Abilities 41 + Skills 25 (100 ranks) + Feats 33 + Powers 9 + Combat 38 + Saves 9 = Total 154

lem, or they were through. In the end, Ethan walked away.

He operated solo as Arrow for a short while, then adopted a new name and costume to make a break from his past. He wouldn't be the next Bowman; that name was tarnished and disgraced in his eyes. Instead, he called himself Archer and declared a one-man war on crime and corruption in Freedom City. Ethan felt he was getting back to his roots: fighting organized crime and gang violence

in Lincoln, Southside, and the West End rather than going after costumed weirdos with crazy schemes for blackmail or world conquest.

When the Moore Act came down, Archer watched the rest of the so-called “heroes” of Freedom City walk away from their responsibilities, just like Bowman had done. But he wasn’t about to turn his

city over to the criminals and corporate raiders. He sought out and recruited other outcast heroes—people willing to follow his leadership and do what was right, what was necessary, even in defiance of the law. Since then, FORCE Ops has become both Archer’s new family to replace those he has lost, and soldiers in his cause to protect and clean up Freedom City, no matter what.

BRUISER

POWER LEVEL 9

Real Name: Paul Alan Petrus

Identity: Secret

Occupation: Vigilante

Base of Operations: Freedom City

Affiliation: FORCE Ops

Height: 8’

Eyes: Black

Weight: 600 lbs.

Hair: None

Paul Alan Petrus was a junior biochemist at ASTRO Labs after graduating at the top of his class at the Hanover Institute of Technology. A college friend of his, Doug Romens, approached him with a theory on human-machine interface, and the two of them prepared experiments to test it. Unfortunately, their work drew the attention of a Labyrinth spy working at ASTRO Labs and hired mercenaries interrupted the experiment at a delicate phase. Doug was apparently killed, while Paul was kidnapped. After determining he was of no real use to them, the Labyrinth turned Petrus over to the tender mercies of Grant Conglomerates and the DNAscent process.

He became an early subject of their strength-augmenting process, which transformed him into a hulking mass of enhanced muscle with rock-hard skin. He would have ended up the brainwashed puppet of the Labyrinth if it hadn’t been for the intervention of his friend Doug, who wasn’t killed, but transformed by the accident. Using his new powers, he was able to locate and free Paul, who wrecked the underground lab in his escape. The incident got the attention of Archer, who confronted the hulking monster and the humanoid figure composed of electricity before learning who they were and what happened to them.



STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+11	+0	+11	+4	+2	+1
32	10	32	18	14	12

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+11	+13	+3	+5

Skills: Computers 4 (+8), Craft (chemical) 6 (+10), Disable Device 4 (+8), Intimidate 7 (+8), Knowledge (life sciences) 7 (+11), Knowledge (technology) 5 (+9), Medicine 4 (+8), Notice 4 (+6), Pilot 2 (+2), Sense Motive 5 (+7)

Feats: Attack Focus (melee) 4, Improved Pin, Interpose, Power Attack, Takedown Attack

Powers: Growth 4 (large, +8 Str, +4 Con, -1 Atk/Def, +4 grapple, -4 Stealth, x2 carrying; *Extra:* Continuous, *Flaw:* Permanent, *Power Feat:* Innate), Impervious Toughness 8, Super-Strength 6 (heavy load: 133 tons)

Combat: Attack +7 (melee, includes -1 large), +3 (ranged, includes -1 large), Grapple +29, Damage +11 (unarmed), Defense +7 (+4 flat-footed, includes -1 large), Knockback -9, Initiative +0

Drawbacks: Disability (clumsy, -2 on tasks requiring manual dexterity, very common, minor, -3 points)

Abilities 46 + Skills 12 (48 ranks) + Feats 8 + Powers 32 + Combat 24 + Saves 8—Drawbacks 3 = Total 127

Paul and Doug joined FORCE Ops as Bruiser and Network, both hoping to find ways to ultimately reverse what had happened to them. They allowed their families to think they were dead, although Paul is severely torn about getting back into contact with his girlfriend, Jeanie March. He wants to spare her pain and fears she will either reject him in his current state or, perhaps worse, choose to stay with him, when she deserves better than a life on the run with a monster.

Given his appearance, many people underestimate Bruiser, not realizing that he’s actually the smartest member of FORCE Ops. His size, strength, and somewhat clumsy hands limit the amount of experimentation Paul can do, but he usually gets lab assistance from Network, and he has turned his biochemical knowledge into some skill with forensics and investigation.

EL GATO

POWER LEVEL 9

Real Name: Maria Villagatos**Identity:** Secret**Occupation:** Vigilante**Base of Operations:** Freedom City**Affiliation:** FORCE Ops**Height:** 5'7"**Eyes:** Brown (were-form: Red)**Weight:** 125 lbs.**Hair:** Brown (were-form: Brown fur)

Maria is the only daughter of Colombian drug-lord Hector Villagatos and his wife. Before Maria was born, an old wise woman told her mother the gods of old had chosen the child as an instrument of justice. Hector Villagatos doted on his daughter, but she soon came to understand the kind of business he was in.

When Maria was a teenager, her father's enemies killed her mother in an attempt to get at him. They would have killed her, too, except the wise woman's prediction came true: Maria became the gods' instrument of vengeance when the shadow of a wild cat came upon her. She doesn't remember that first transformation, only waking up covered in blood in an alley in Bogotá.

Maria fled Colombia and found her way to the United States. Along the way, she encountered the wise woman and learned to control her transformations, to unleash the beast at her command. Archer found her in Freedom City, working whatever jobs she could find and using her powers in the West End and Greenbank neighborhoods. He convinced "El Gato" (as the locals called her) to join his team.

Originally certain she was under a terrible curse, Maria has learned to draw strength from her feral nature, going from a confused girl to a confident young woman. Kismet has been a mentor and role model of sorts for her, and she looks up to Archer like a confident older brother. Maria is quite fond of Paul (Bruiser) and Doug (Network) but Nightrage raises her hackles a bit. She empathizes with Rick, however, since she understands what it's like to feel like a monster.

To El Gato, the real monsters in the world are people like her father, who has spearheaded an expansion of the drug trade in Freedom City. Hector Villagatos wants his daughter back at his side, but Maria wants nothing to do with him. Still, Hector won't allow anyone, even his own blood, to get in the way of business.

El Gato is well known and popular in the city's Hispanic community. For the most part, Maria keeps control over her animalistic side, but she has still cut up more than a few thugs and low-lives and the Freedom City police consider her an armed and dangerous criminal (like the rest of FORCE Ops).

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+5	+8	+5	+0	+3	+1
21	26	21	10	16	13

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+6/+5*	+9	+11	+6

*flat-footed

Skills: Acrobatics 7 (+15), Climb 9 (+14), Intimidate 9 (+10), Knowledge (current events) 4 (+4), Knowledge (streetwise) 7 (+7), Language 1 (Spanish), Notice 8 (+11), Search 8 (+8), Sense Motive 8 (+11), Stealth 7 (+15), Survival 8 (+11)

Feats: All-out Attack, Attack Focus (melee) 4, Dodge Focus 2, Fearless, Move-by Action, Rage, Uncanny Dodge (hearing)

Powers: Leaping 3 (x10 distance), **Strike 3** (claws, Mighty), **Super-Movement 2** (slow fall, sure-footed), **Super-Senses 5** (danger sense [hearing], low-light vision, scent, tracking [scent], ultra-hearing), **Super-Strength 2** (heavy load: 1,840 lbs.)

Combat: Attack +10 (melee), +6 (ranged), Grapple +17, Damage +5 (unarmed), +8 (claws), Defense +12 (+5 flat-footed), Knockback -3, Initiative +8

Drawbacks: Involuntary Transformation (into El Gato when hurt or angry, common, minor, -2 points), Normal Identity (Maria Villagatos, major, common, -4 points)

Maria Villagatos: Str 10, Dex 14, Con 10, Int 12, Wis 14, Cha 13; halve all Str and Dex skill ranks (round down), no feats or powers, Attack +5 (melee and ranged), Defense +5

Abilities 47 + Skills 19 (76 ranks) + Feats 11 + Powers 20 + Combat 32 + Saves 10 – Drawbacks 6 = Total 133



KISMET

POWER LEVEL 9

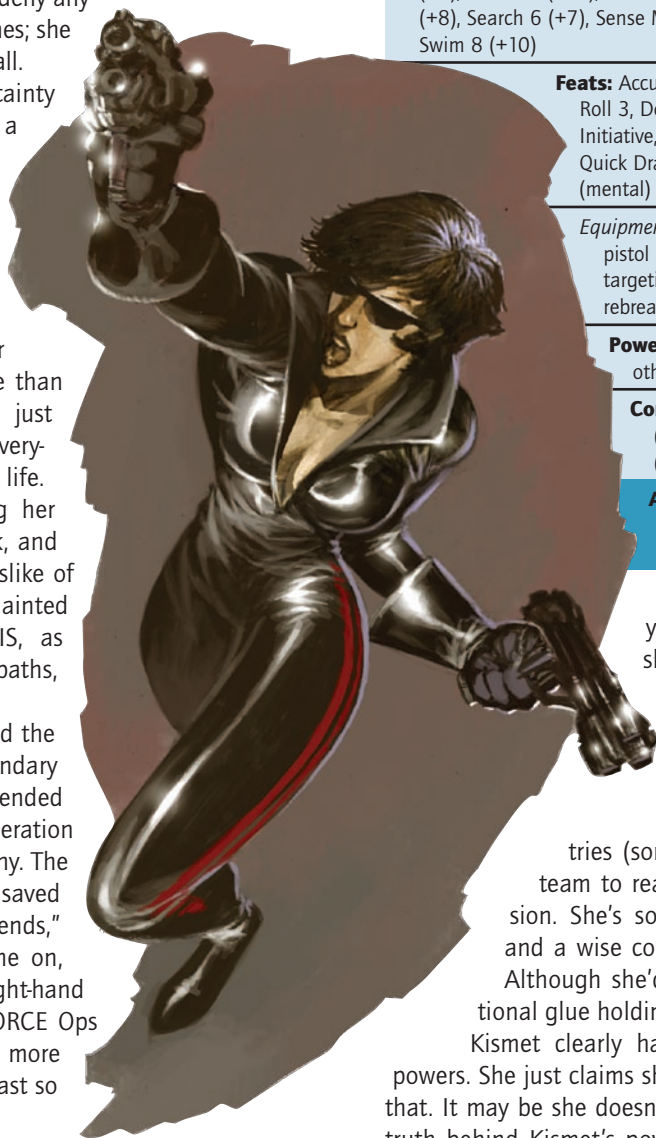
Real Name: Unknown**Identity:** Secret**Occupation:** Mercenary**Base of Operations:** Freedom City**Affiliation:** FORCE Ops**Height:** 5'7"**Eyes:** Black**Weight:** 130 lbs.**Hair:** Black

Rumor and innuendo surround the woman known as Kismet like exotic perfume. No one knows her real name or history, although some claim they do. Some speculate that she is the granddaughter or even daughter of the legendary Doc Prophet, an exiled scion of Russian nobility (or at least a former KGB-trained agent), a clone, or a genetic super-soldier designed by the government and gone rogue. Kismet doesn't confirm or deny any of these stories, or even wilder ones; she refuses to talk about her past at all.

What is known with some certainty is that Kismet has worked as a mercenary, spy, and soldier-for-hire all around the world. She worked for a number of years with the Soldiers of Fortune, and on occasion with Jack Wolf when he first left the Atom Family. She's hinted that her relationship with Jack was more than just camaraderie, but remains just as elusive about that as with everything else about her personal life. She knew Evening back during her Brigade Six days as Agent Black, and the two women have a chilly dislike of each other. She's also well acquainted with Harry Powers from AEGIS, as the two of them have crossed paths, though rarely on the same side.

Not long after Jack Wolf joined the Soldiers of Fortune, Kismet's legendary luck turned against her and she ended up on the wrong side of an operation against a Labyrinth front company. The one who pulled her out of it and saved her life wasn't any of her "old friends," but Ethan Keller. From that time on, Kismet has been Archer's loyal right-hand woman, although the rest of FORCE Ops wonders if their relationship is more than professional. (It's not, at least so far as Kismet is concerned.)

Kismet is a study in contrasts. On the one hand, she's the most hard-bitten and cynical member of FORCE Ops. She considers it her job to rein in the occasional flashes of idealism and naiveté from her



STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+2	+4	+2	+1	+2	+3
14	19	15	12	15	16

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+7/+4*	+6	+8	+6

*flat-footed

Skills: Acrobatics 8 (+12), Bluff 8 (+11), Climb 8 (+10), Computers 4 (+5), Concentration 8 (+10), Disable Device 8 (+9), Drive 8 (+12), Escape Artist 8 (+12), Gather Information 6 (+9), Intimidate 6 (+9), Investigate 4 (+5), Knowledge (streetwise) 8 (+9), Knowledge (tactics) 8 (+9), Medicine 4 (+6), Notice 8 (+10), Pilot 8 (+12), Profession (mercenary) 8 (+10), Ride 4 (+8), Search 6 (+7), Sense Motive 8 (+10), Stealth 8 (+12), Survival 6 (+8), Swim 8 (+10)

Feats: Accurate Attack, Ambidexterity, Contacts, Defensive Roll 3, Dodge Focus 2, Equipment 6, Evasion, Improved Initiative, Instant Up, Move-by Action, Precise Shot, Quick Draw (reload), Takedown Attack, Uncanny Dodge (mental)

Equipment: armored jumpsuit (+2 Toughness), heavy pistol (+4 damage), assault rifle (+5 damage, autofire, targeting scope), climbing cable, mini-flashlight, rebreather

Powers: Enhanced Luck 5, Luck Control 2 (affect others, force re-roll)

Combat: Attack +13 Grapple +15, Damage +2 (unarmed), +4 (pistol), +5 (rifle), Defense +11 (+5 flat-footed), Knockback -3, Initiative +8

Abilities 31 + Skills 40 (160 ranks) + Feats 22 + Powers 11 + Combat 44 + Saves 12 = Total 160

younger teammates and to give them the skills they need to survive doing what they do. She's part drill sergeant and part den mother. On the other hand, Kismet has an infectious love of life and a wild streak a mile wide. She likes to get out and enjoy herself and tries (sometimes in vain) to get the rest of the team to realize there's more to life than their mission. She's something of an older sister to El Gato and a wise counselor and sounding board for Archer. Although she'd deny it, in many ways she's the emotional glue holding the team together.

Kismet clearly has some sort of probability-influencing powers. She just claims she's "always been lucky" and leaves it at that. It may be she doesn't fully understand her gifts herself. The truth behind Kismet's powers is left for the GM to decide, if an explanation is ever needed. The same is true for the mysteries surrounding Kismet's origin and background: flesh them out (or not) as you see fit for your series.

NETWORK

POWER LEVEL 9
Real Name: Doug Romens

Identity: Secret

Occupation: Vigilante

Base of Operations: Freedom City

Affiliation: FORCE Ops

Height: 5'8"

Eyes: White (no pupils)

Weight: Indeterminate

Hair: None

Doug Romens learned how to write code by the time he was 12 years old. In high school, he had minor brushes with the law for computer hacking: not because Doug set out to do anything illegal, but because he enjoyed the challenge. It surprised no one that he went on to attend the Hanover Institute of Technology's computer science program or that he graduated with honors.

Doug was fascinated by the potential of human/computer interfaces and intended to focus his post-graduate work on it. He enlisted the help of his former roommate at HIT, Paul Petrus, now a junior biochemist at ASTRO Labs, to test some of his theories. When they tested a prototype interface device Doug designed, hired mercenaries chose that moment to try and kidnap both Doug and Paul. An accidental power surge apparently disintegrated Doug Romens, leaving only the smoking remains of the equipment and the chair where he sat.

In fact, the accident somehow translated Doug's body into pure electricity and drew him into the power grid. After regaining consciousness and learning to control his new "body," Doug's newfound abilities allowed him to discover his friend Paul, being used as a test subject in an underground lab. Doug freed his friend, who wrecked up the lab before escaping, and Archer confronted the two of them. After explaining their circumstances, they accepted the vigilante bowman's offer of help and soon joined FORCE Ops.



STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+0	+1	+1	+3	+2	+0
10	13	12	17	14	11

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+7	+5	+6	+6

Skills: Bluff 5 (+5), Computers 12 (+15), Concentration 6 (+8), Disable Device 8 (+11), Knowledge (current events) 4 (+7), Knowledge (technology) 8 (+11), Notice 5 (+7), Pilot 2 (+3), Profession (computer programmer) 6 (+8), Search 4 (+7), Sense Motive 4 (+6)

Feats: Attack Focus (ranged) 2, Dodge Focus 2, Improved Initiative, Move-by Action, Precise Shot

Powers: **Electrical Control 10** (Alternate Powers: **Datalink 10**, **Strike 4** [electric shock, Extras: Affects Corporeal, Aura, Sustained]), **Electrical Form 12** (Extras: Continuous; Flaws: Permanent; Traits: **Flight 9** [5,000 MPH; Alternate Power: **Teleport 9** (Medium-wiring)], **Immunity 20** [aging, electrical effects, life support], **Insubstantial 3** [energy], **Protection 6**)

Combat: Attack +6 (melee), +8 (ranged), Grapple +6, Damage +5 (unarmed, electrical aura), +10 (blast), Defense +11 (+5 flat-footed), Knockback -4, Initiative +5

Abilities 17 + Skills 16 (64 ranks) + Feats 7 + Powers 82 + Combat 30 + Saves 13 = Total 165

Network (as Doug calls himself) is more content with his transformation than Bruiser, but he would still like to find a means to achieve some sort of normal life, ideally without giving up the amazing powers he now has. He's considered the possibility of an android body his electrical energy could inhabit and animate, although it would only be a small step closer to normal existence. Ideally, he wants to find a way to switch between human and energy form at will.

Note that although Network's Electrical Form power is permanent, his Insubstantial effect from it is not: he can "solidify" his energy through the use of complex magnetic fields, letting him interact with the physical world, but he still remains in energy form. This uses the option for Alternate Form given in the *Ultimate Power* sourcebook.

NIGHTRAGE

POWER LEVEL 9

Real Name: Rick Van Danski**Identity:** Secret**Occupation:** Musician, vigilante**Base of Operations:** Freedom City**Affiliation:** FORCE Ops**Height:** 5'10"**Eyes:** Red**Weight:** 170 lbs.**Hair:** Black

Rock star Rick Van Danski had it all: fame, fortune, and a stalker fan...only Rick's stalker was a century-old vampire named Melinda who wanted him to be her eternal consort. Friends and associates thought Rick was strung out from endless partying, when in fact he was suffering from strange fever dreams of late-night visitations and slow and steady blood loss.

Eventually, Melinda made her move and transformed Rick into one of the undead. To her surprise, her "beloved" did not appreciate the gift she'd given him. He defied and rejected her, and she swore vengeance,



although the start of her revenge was to leave him as he was: forever cursed. Rick considered finishing the job Melinda started and just ending it all, but couldn't bring himself to do it. He isolated himself for a time,

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+7	+2	—	+0	+2	+4
24	14	—	11	14	18

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+8/+7*	—	+6	+7

*flat-footed

Skills: Bluff 4 (+8), Intimidate 8 (+10), Knowledge (popular culture) 7 (+7), Notice 6 (+8), Perform (singing) 8 (+10), Perform (stringed instruments) 10 (+12), Pilot 2 (+4), Search 4 (+4), Sense Motive 4 (+6), Stealth 7 (+9)

Feats: Animal Empathy, Attack Focus (melee) 3, Defensive Roll 1, Fascinate (Perform), Fearless, Improved Pin, Power Attack, Startle

Powers: **Animal Control 8** (*Extras:* Area; *Flaws:* Limited to bats, rats, and wolves), **Drain Constitution 1** (blood drain), **Flight 1** (Limited to mist form), **Immunity 30** (Fortitude effects), **Insubstantial 2** (mist form), **Protection 7** (*Extras:* Impervious; *Flaws:* Limited against blessed, silver, or magical weapons), **Regeneration 12** (+9 recovery bonus, Resurrection 1/five hours, not when staked or beheaded; *Flaws:* Source—blood), **Super-Movement 1** (wall-crawling), **Super-Strength 2** (heavy load: 2,800 lbs.)

Combat: Attack +10 (melee), +7 (ranged), Grapple +19, Damage +7 (unarmed), Defense +10 (+5 flat-footed), Knockback -7, Initiative +2

Drawbacks: Weakness (dependence on blood, common, minor, -2 points), Weakness (sunlight, minor, per round, destroyed after 10 rounds, -8 points)

Abilities 21 + Skills 15 (60 ranks) + Feats 10 + Powers 77 + Combat 34 + Saves 9—Drawbacks 11 = Total 155

grappling with his unnatural hunger for blood. He could feed off of blood stolen from blood banks or from animals, but the beast within him still craved hot human essence. He channeled his need into nightly excursions where he became the scourge of muggers and rapists in Liberty Park and other dark corners of Freedom City, the "Nightrage." Unleashing his vampiric powers against the city's criminals helped Van Danski to keep his urges in check.

He initially rejected Archer's offer to join his new team, not wanting to be around people, but concern over his fading humanity led him to accept. FORCE Ops helps to serve as an anchor for Nightrage, giving him friends and teammates who know his dark secret and understand him. Rick still clashes with Archer from time to time, bristling against his leadership, but he always supports his team when the chips are down.

Rick maintains his music career. He still records and even performs (at night, of course) and his reputation as a mysterious, brooding, sunglasses-wearing recluse has only enhanced his mystique. He devotes some of his personal wealth to maintaining FORCE Ops and sometimes operates solo in Freedom City or elsewhere. His greatest foe remains his maker, Melinda, who controls a cult of vampire worshippers and wants to see Nightrage suffer before she destroys him.

THE EYES OF NIGHT

Operating in tandem on the streets of Freedom City in early 1977, Evening and the Eye of Justice were first called the “Eyes of Night” by Stephen Barker in an op-ed piece in the *Freedom Ledger* in October of that year. The Eyes of Night are among the most steadfast heroes of Freedom City, if not the most famous. Throughout their career, they have battled every form of crime from street-level thugs to Mafia enforcers, supervillains, and extradimensional entities.

Deputized as elite members of the FCPD from 1981 through 1984, the Eyes of Night have always fought for the people of Freedom City, even when the city didn’t want them around. Their only absences were during the four years of exile in the Terminus (from late 1984 through early 1986) and for the birth of their child in 1987. They returned as heroes to Freedom City in 1988 and operated there until the Terminus Invasion. Over the years, they have allied (formally and informally) with FORCE Ops, AEGIS, Adrian Eldrich, the Scarab, and members of the Freedom League.

The heroine Evening made her Freedom City debut in 1975 when she stopped a bank robbery in the Theatre District, and she became an unofficial hero of the city’s West Side. Unfortunately, 1976 saw numerous battles between her and the cyborg called the Eye of Vengeance, who had been sent by the Labyrinth to kill her. Despite the cyborg’s greater power, Evening incapacitated the Eye of Vengeance with her uncanny mental prowess and overrode the programming subsuming his human consciousness.

By the end of the year, Evening and the renamed Eye of Justice were in love. The two heroes made Freedom City their home, fighting threats from local crime lords to mystical beings like Jack-a-Knives and the Ferryman. They married in 1981 and remained active heroes even once their identities were exposed after Doc Abattoir’s death during the Blackstone Riot in 1983.

The following year, Evening and the Eye fought with Eldrich against Nhorox and the other “demons” summoned by Sebastian

OTHER VIGILANTES

Although FORCE Ops and the Eyes of Night fought a lonely battle against injustice in Freedom City, they did not operate entirely alone. Other vigilantes haunted the nighttime streets of the city, although none of them chose to join Archer’s little band, even when given the opportunity (as with Evening and the Eye of Justice).

THE FURIES THREE

In the 1970s, Daedalus ventured into artificial intelligence once more when he designed and built a trio of androids named Aria, Paeon, and Panegyric, basing their artificial neural patterns on those of deceased Freedom Leaguer Mary Minstrel. He also granted the androids somewhat similar sonic powers and called them the Chorale. (“A Greek chorus,” Centurion once called them.)

When Daedalus left Earth in 1975, he left the Chorale behind. They continued their exploration of humanity, but didn’t much like what they found. The departure of their creator, the disbanding of the Freedom League, and the inception of the Moore Act left the Chorale adrift and in need of guidance. A brush with the Murder Spirit Jack-a-Knives inspired Hades to offer them that guidance. The Lord of the Underworld turned the Chorale’s confusion and doubt into bitterness and vengefulness. The three “sisters” renamed themselves Tisiphone, Megara, and Alecto and become the Furies Three, singing the song of doom for evildoers!

The Furies have nearly identical game traits. The most relevant are Immunity 30 (Fortitude effects, due to their android construction) and Sonic Control 9, including the Alternate Powers Blast 9, Blast 9 (Burst Area, Touch Range), Nauseate 6 (Ranged), and Stun 6 (Ranged).

THE HELLRIDER

Michael “Mickey” Graves was a student at the Claremont Academy in Bayview (then a fading private school). He attended through powerful connections, since his father was influential in the Freedom underworld. Mickey’s hatred of his father, the school, and conflict with his arrogant privileged classmates awakened the Vengeance Spirit (see *Hero High* for details). The combination of the spirit and Mickey Graves became known as the Hellrider: a terrible spectral figure surrounded by ghostly flames who rode a motorcycle through the streets of the city at night, dealing harsh justice to criminals.

Mickey initially recalled nothing of his nighttime excursions as the Hellrider save blackouts and strange nightmares. He eventually learned of his role as a vessel of the Vengeance Spirit, and even gained a measure of control over it. The Hellrider is immune to most mortal considerations (life support and Immunity to aging) and has Hellfire Control 8. See the traits of the Burning Ghost in *Hero High* for further inspiration.

THE SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE

Only marginally “heroes,” the Soldiers of Fortune are a group of highly skilled mercenaries working for clients able to meet their price. Kismet was a member of the Soldiers, as was Jack Wolf from the Atom Family, and his game stats are usable as a model for the other Soldiers (*Freedom City*, page 125).

The founder and leader of the Soldiers of Fortune is Nathan “Nat” Fortune, an experienced and hard-bitten mercenary who has seen action the world ‘round. Fortune is not without principles (in particular, a sworn contract is sacred to him) but he’s not interested in do-gooding or crime fighting. He’s a soldier, but with enough problems with authority that he’s better off leading his own unit on his own terms.

Provok. When Eldrich banished the entities back to their home dimension, Betty and Jack got dragged along with them into the Terminus. They spent two years in the Terminus before they finally returned to Earth. Their adventures there delayed Omega's invasion of Freedom City by a number of years and gained them the enmity of a number of powerful foes.



Evening and the Eye of Justice did not return to crime fighting immediately, as Betty discovered she was pregnant. For months, they recuperated at an isolated island estate in the Mediterranean until after their child was born. Their absence from Freedom City and their life of danger ended when attacks on Eldrich's Freedom City townhouse drew them back into the fray in 1988. They continued to operate in Freedom City until the Terminus Invasion, and are still remembered by the city's police department (which reinstated their status as special deputies).

EVENING

Elizabeth "Betty" Munroe was born in York, England, her father unknown and her mother dead of complications in childbirth. An orphan and ward of the state, Betty had an unremarkable childhood save for an incredible aptitude for gymnastics. At puberty, she developed the power of levitation. The Ministry of Powers placed her in a training program for super-powered children, and it was there Betty became friends with an older student, Troy Griffin (son of the Human Tank and Lady Celtic).

Betty learned control of her levitation power and began training in espionage. By the time she was 19, Betty was Agent Black, a spy in Her Majesty's service for Brigade Six, a secret branch of British intelligence along with Troy Griffin (Agent Silver), Charles Parker (Agent White), and Anne Gordon (Agent Gold).

For several years, Brigade Six performed operations too dangerous for normal agents, and Betty and Charles fell in love. When Troy uncovered a conspiracy within the Ministry of Powers and the House of Lords, the agents realized they'd unwittingly been used as double agents against the Crown. Exposing the threat took two years of careful planning, but they eventually brought down a number of powerful politicians, exposing a spy ring in league with Communist Russia and SHADOW. It cost them dearly; Anne died when she absorbed a virulent plague agent meant to be unleashed on London, and Charles and Betty were captured vacationing in Greece and sold to the Labyrinth, a parting shot by the exposed SHADOW agents.

Betty and Charles both underwent extensive brainwashing and were subjected to drug therapy to develop new powers. Betty escaped but, despite her best efforts, was nearly captured while trying to carry the unconscious Charles, and was forced to leave him behind.

Betty contacted Troy Griffin, who arranged her return to the United Kingdom. Within three weeks, she mastered her new powers and she and Troy mounted a rescue effort to get Charles out. While they found the lab again and destroyed the technology, it was obvious Charles had gone insane from the DNAscent Process and he nearly killed them both. With Troy's blessing, Betty made a fresh start and moved to Freedom City, where she met the man destined to be her partner and husband.

EVENING

POWER LEVEL 8

Real Name: Elizabeth "Betsy" Carlton	Aliases: Agent Black, numerous others
Identity: Secret	Occupation: Vigilante, former spy
Base of Operations: Freedom City	Affiliation: The Eyes of Night
Height: 5'6"	Eyes: Hazel
Weight: 120 lbs.	Hair: Brown

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+3	+5	+3	+1	+2	+3
16	20	16	12	14	16
TOUGHNESS		FORTITUDE		REFLEX	WILL
+6/+3*		+6		+9	+6

*flatfooted

Skills: Acrobatics 8 (+13), Bluff 7 (+10), Computers 5 (+6), Diplomacy 7 (+10), Disable Device 9 (+10), Disguise 8 (+11), Gather Information 10 (+13), Intimidate 7 (+10), Knowledge (current events) 6 (+7), Knowledge (streetwise) 9 (+10), Pilot 6 (+11), Profession (spy) 10 (+12), Search 7 (+8), Sense Motive 8 (+10), Stealth 8 (+13)

Feats: Attack Focus (melee) 2, Attractive, Connected, Defensive Attack, Defensive Roll 3, Dodge Focus 3, Improved Initiative, Move-by Action, Power Attack, Startle, Takedown Attack, Taunt

Powers: **Communication 6** (mental), **ESP 6** (visual and auditory, *Flaw:* Limited to the area around Eye of Justice), **Flight 1** (*Flaw:* Levitation), **Mental Blast 6** (*Flaw:* Limited to at night or in areas of darkness)

Combat: Attack +12 (melee), +10 (ranged), Grapple +15, Damage +3 (unarmed), Defense +10 (+4 flat-footed), Knockback -3, Initiative +9

Abilities 34 + Skills 27 (108 ranks) + Feats 17 + Powers 31 + Combat 34 + Saves 11 = Total 154

THE EYE OF JUSTICE

Born in 1947 to a traditional post-war family, John "Jack" Carlton devoured comic books as a kid, especially those by the Castle Comics Group. Nothing about his childhood or adolescence was controversial until a bully attacked Jack in 1962. The bully broke his hand on Jack's stomach, and Jack's panicked swing knocked him clear across the street, landing the other boy in the hospital.

Jack hid his abilities from everyone until he mastered them, and another dream came to mind. At the age of 20 and after a few years of saving up for college, Jack dropped out after one semester, took his savings, and moved to Freedom City in hopes of becoming a superhero.

The night rooftops of Hanover soon saw a new hero in 1968: Kid Gargoyle. While he tried his best to make a big name for himself, he always seemed to arrive too late to stop the bad guys, and some other hero already handled the situation. While he kept at it as a vigilante by night, he became a beat cop in the Fens during the day.

Jack thought he'd found his big break when he pieced together clues pointing towards some shady dealings going on inside Grant Conglomerates. He figured Kid Gargoyle would crack the case, and

EYE OF JUSTICE

POWER LEVEL 8

Real Name: John Richard "Jack" Carlton	Aliases: Kid Gargoyle
Identity: Secret	Occupation: Vigilante
Base of Operations: Freedom City	Affiliation: The Eyes of Night
Height: 5'11"	Eyes: Green (right), red (left)
Weight: 245 lbs.	Hair: Black

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+8	+1	+8	+1	+0	+0
26/16	12	26/16	12	10	11
TOUGHNESS		FORTITUDE		REFLEX	WILL
+8		+10		+4	+4

Skills: Computers 10 (+11), Craft (electronics) 8 (+9), Disable Device 10 (+11), Knowledge (civics) 4 (+5), Knowledge (current events) 4 (+5), Knowledge (streetwise) 9 (+10), Knowledge (technology) 8 (+9), Notice 8 (+8), Profession (police officer) 8 (+8), Search 7 (+8)

Feats: Attack Specialization (eye-beam), Interpose, Power Attack, Precise Shot

Powers: **Blast 6** (laser eye-beam), **Enhanced Strength 10**, **Enhanced Constitution 10**, **Feature 1** (datajack, able to interface with computers), **Impervious Toughness 5**, **Leaping 5** (x50 distance), **Quickness 4** (x25 speed, computer brain enhancement, *Flaw:* Limited to mental tasks only), **Super-Movement 1** (wall-crawling), **Super-Senses 3** (infravision, low-light vision, tracking [infravision]), **Super-Strength 4** (heavy load: 7.3 tons)

Combat: Attack +8 (melee), +10 (eye-beam), Grapple +20, Damage +8 (unarmed), +6 (eye-beam), Defense +8 (+4 flat-footed), Knockback -7, Initiative +1

Drawbacks: Vulnerable (sonics, +50%, uncommon, moderate, -2 points)

Abilities 17 + Skills 19 (76 ranks) + Feats 4 + Powers 58 + Combat 32 + Saves 9—Drawbacks 2 = Total 137

then Officer Jack Carlton could make the collar. It would cement his reputation on the force and in the superhero community. Unfortunately, Jack had no idea just how high up (or, technically, how far down) things went. When he tried to break into the GrantCo offices, he was caught and turned over to the Labyrinth.

The cybernetic augmentation process was painful, and the brainwashing was as much to prevent him from going mad as it was to secure his complete loyalty. Jack's mutant physiology was the only thing that allowed him to survive, which made him the perfect test subject. Soon, the Eye of Vengeance was ready to serve his masters. His first assignment: eliminate the rogue Subject Three, now known as Evening.

After several unsuccessful attempts, Evening turned the tables. She freed him from the Labyrinth's conditioning and nursed him back to health. In time, they became partners, friends, and eventually husband and wife. Jack learned some hard lessons about being a hero along the way, but always told friends it was worth it because of what it got him in the end.



THE FEARSOME

A loosely grouped quartet of villains who each failed to become a crime lord in the city banded together from 1979 onward to work together. Doc Abattoir originally led the team he created with Sir Razor, Ms. Malice, and Silverback and often fought the Eyes of Night. After the Blackstone Riots of 1983, only Silverback remains of the original Fearsome, and he's recruited other teammates over the years, his only constant ally being Subject Nine.

The most effective incarnation of the Fearsome was the third—Silverback, Subject Nine, and Verman—which quietly dominated the West End underworld from 1984 to 1988 after ousting several other criminal gangs there. The members of the Fearsome, all DNAscendants, have good reason to dislike Grant Conglomerates, and some of their schemes have involved thefts aimed at GrantCo and other corporations in Freedom City.

SILVERBACK

Through the DNAscent process, Nicholas Landon's formerly slight body was permanently transformed into a gorilla-like form with silvery metallic fur and enhanced strength. His intellect has grown over the years and he has led several incarnations of the Fearsome since the death of Doc Abattoir, his mentor and the quartet's original leader. Silverback's immunity to mental powers makes him amena-

ble to using mentalists like Subject Nine as his allies quite often. He is unaware the Labyrinth keeps nano-tracers on him and has audio and videotape recordings of everything he sees, hears, and does.

SUBJECT NINE

One of the tragic results of the early DNAscent Process, the former Agent White went mad during the drug treatment, but hid his psychoses until the final phase. Charles Parker gained mental powers that further unhinged his mind. All his rage is focused on his former lover Evening, whom he blames for his current condition and for abandoning him, and he despises her partner, the Eye of Justice, for taking his place in Evening's heart. Subject Nine isn't even aware of his own name any more, and refers to himself in the third person. His telekinetic and mind-control powers make him a useful tool and ally of Silverback.

VERMAN

A test subject of the early DNAscent process, Herman Willard was a street person transformed into a half-man, half-rat with great speed, strength, and agility, along with tenacious survival instincts. He initially survived by hiding out in the city sewers and subway tunnels, emerging only at night to steal food. Silverback and Subject Nine

SILVERBACK

POWER LEVEL 9

Real Name: None**Identity:** Secret**Occupation:** Criminal**Base of Operations:** Freedom City**Affiliation:** The Fearsome**Height:** 6'4"**Eyes:** Red**Weight:** 300 lbs.**Hair:** Silver

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+6	+2	+2	+2	+3	+3
22	15	14	15	17	16
TOUGHNESS		FORTITUDE		REFLEX	
+9		+8		+8	

Skills: Acrobatics 8 (+10), Climb 8 (+9), Intimidate 7 (+10), Knowledge (streetwise) 8 (+10), Knowledge (technology) 7 (+9), Notice 7 (+9), Sense Motive 7 (+10)

Feats: Acrobatic Bluff, Attack Focus (melee) 3, Power Attack, Stunning Attack, Takedown Attack

Powers: **Growth 4** (large, *Extra:* Continuous; *Flaw:* Permanent; *Power Feat:* Innate), **Immunity 10** (mental effects), **Protection 7** (Impervious), **Super-Senses 2** (low-light vision, scent), **Super-Strength 5** (heavy load: 16.6 tons)

Combat: Attack +10 (melee), +7 (ranged), Grapple +20, Damage +6 (unarmed), Defense +9, Knockback -8, Initiative +2

Abilities 39 + Skills 13 (52 ranks) + Feats 7 + Powers 49 + Combat 32 + Saves 17 = Total 157

SUBJECT NINE

POWER LEVEL 9

Real Name: Charles Parker**Aliases:** Agent White**Identity:** Secret**Occupation:** Criminal, former spy**Base of Operations:** Freedom City**Affiliation:** The Fearsome**Height:** 5'9"**Eyes:** Pale blue**Weight:** 155 lbs.**Hair:** Blond

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+1	+1	+1	+3	+4	+2
13	13	13	17	18	15
TOUGHNESS		FORTITUDE		REFLEX	WILL
+8/+1*		+5		+5	+9

*without force field

Skills: Bluff 8 (+10), Computers 5 (+8), Concentration 8 (+12), Escape Artist 5 (+6), Intimidate 6 (+8), Knowledge (streetwise) 6 (+9), Language 3 (German, Latin, Russian), Notice 6 (+10), Search 4 (+7), Sense Motive 8 (+12), Stealth 5 (+6)

Feats: All-out Attack, Attack Focus (ranged) 2, Eidetic Memory, Startle

Powers: **Flight 2** (*Flaw:* Levitation), **Force Field 7** (Impervious), **Mind Control 8**, **Mind Shield 4**, **Telekinesis 9** (Damaging)

Combat: Attack +7 (melee), +9 (ranged), Grapple +8, Damage +1 (unarmed), +9 (telekinesis), Defense +10, Knockback -7, Initiative +1

Abilities 28 + Skills 16 (64 ranks) + Feats 5 + Powers 67 + Combat 34 + Saves 13 = Total 163

VERMAN

POWER LEVEL 9

Real Name: Herman Willard**Identity:** Secret**Occupation:** Criminal**Base of Operations:** Freedom City**Affiliation:** The Fearsome**Height:** 5'5"**Eyes:** Red**Weight:** 140 lbs.**Hair:** Grey fur

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+5	+5	+5	-1	+2	-1
20	21	20	8	14	9
TOUGHNESS		FORTITUDE		REFLEX	WILL
+7/+5*		+9		+9	+4

Skills: Acrobatics 7 (+12), Climb 7 (+12), Escape Artist 7 (+12), Intimidate 10 (+9), Notice 8 (+10), Search 7 (+6), Sense Motive 7 (+9), Stealth 7 (+12), Swim 4 (+9)

Feats: All-out Attack, Attack Focus (melee) 4, Defensive Roll 2, Dodge Focus 2, Elusive Target, Rage, Uncanny Dodge (scent)

Powers: **Additional Limbs 1** (prehensile tail), **Leaping 2** (x5 distance), **Strike 3** (claws, *Extras:* Penetrating; *Power Feats:* Mighty), **Super-Movement 1** (wall-crawling), **Super-Senses 3** (low-light vision, scent, tracking [scent]), **Super-Speed 2**, **Super-Strength 2** (heavy load: 1,600 lbs.)

Combat: Attack +10 (melee), +6 (ranged), Grapple +17, Damage +8 (claws), Defense +11 (+5 flat-footed), Knockback -4, Initiative +13

Abilities 32 + Skills 16 (64 ranks) + Feats 12 + Powers 29 + Combat 30 + Saves 10 = Total 129

*flat-footed

found him and helped bring out some of his buried personality and memories, leading him to join the Fearsome. Verman is a vicious and barely-human killer who has become accustomed to his mutations and enjoys his status as a "predator."

Verman is, in many regards, the most dangerous of the Fearsome; while Silverback is more intelligent and cunning, and Subject Nine is

most definitely crazier, neither of them can match Verman for sheer viciousness and bloodlust, particularly when the rat-man is backed into a corner. If you're looking for a villain to demonstrate some of the blood-spattered inhumanity of the Iron Age to your players, Verman is a good choice.



RIOT

FORCE Ops' opposite numbers in many respects, RIOT (the Revolutionary Imperialist Overthrow Team) may be the first truly "manufactured" villain team. They were created using the DNAscent process at the order of Taurus, although no one outside of the Labyrinth knew that at the time, including the members of RIOT themselves.

They underwent extensive cybernetic and biochemical alteration, along with brainwashing and memory implantation, to make them into fervent would-be anarchists and mercenaries dedicated to the violent overthrow of the government: the Freedom City government, in particular. Thus RIOT became poster children for just the kind of threats Mayor Moore's administration wanted to stop, and a useful foil for FORCE Ops.

On more than one occasion, RIOT put FORCE Ops in the position of having to save the corrupt city government they wanted to bring down simply because RIOT's way of doing it threatens too many innocent lives. Archer and his team want to see Moore and his cronies stopped, but not by blowing up City Hall, destroying the city's infrastructure, or poisoning the drinking water with hallucinogenic chemicals.

Unbeknownst to them, the members of RIOT were all implanted with tiny neural transceivers, allowing the Labyrinth to monitor and, to a degree, control them. Taurus's organization remains aware of

everything RIOT does and can usually "push" them in a particular direction through careful manipulation. They don't go so far as to issue direct orders (since they can't, really), but they can decide what becomes the next focus of the team's rather limited mania.

The Labyrinth also provides RIOT with an "escape clause" even they don't know about. Their influence is sufficient to arrange escapes, jail-breaks, and strokes of "good fortune" to help keep RIOT on track and serving Taurus's interests in the city. Plus, so long as heroes like FORCE Ops and the Eyes of Night are busy dealing with the loud and in-their-faces threat of RIOT, they're not digging for clues about the Labyrinth.

ARMORINE

The DNAscent process transformed Armorine into a woman of "organic steel" with metallic skin and hair and fingernails honed razor-sharp. Armorine is a front-line fighter and likes to mix it up hand-to-hand. She delights in using her claws, but will also use her superhuman strength to pick large objects and hit opponents with them.

FLAG-BURNER

Flag-Burner is a faceless figure in a tattered red, white, and blue uniform shrouded in flames. He mocks the patriotic American heroes of times past and hates the hypocrites who support American impe-

INSURGENT

POWER LEVEL 8

Real Name: Unknown, if any**Identity:** Secret**Occupation:** Revolutionary**Base of Operations:** Freedom City**Affiliation:** RIOT**Height:** 5'4"**Eyes:** Black**Weight:** 110 lbs.**Hair:** Black

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+0	+2	+0	+2	+2	+4
10	15	11	14	15	19
TOUGHNESS		FORTITUDE		REFLEX	WILL
+4/+0*		+4		+6	+6

*flat-footed

Skills: Bluff 8 (+12), Concentration 8 (+12), Diplomacy 4 (+8), Disguise 8 (+12), Gather Information 6 (+10), Intimidate 6 (+10), Knowledge (behavioral sciences) 6 (+8), Knowledge (popular culture) 4 (+6), Knowledge (streetwise) 4 (+6), Notice 6 (+8), Sense Motive 8 (+10), Stealth 8 (+10)

Feats: Blind-Fight, Defensive Roll 4, Dodge Focus 4, Elusive Target, Equipment 1, Improved Initiative, Sneak Attack

Equipment: pair of curved daggers (+1 damage)

Powers: **Concealment 2** (visual, total, *Flaw:* Limited to areas of shadow; *Power Feat:* Close Range), **Emotion Control 8** (*Extra:* Burst Area; *Power Feat:* Mind Blank; *Alternate Power:* **Confuse 8** [*Extra:* Burst Area; *Power Feat:* Mind Blank]), **Teleport 6** (*Extra:* Accurate; *Flaw:* Medium—shadows; *Power Feat:* Easy)

Combat: Attack +6, Grapple +6, Damage +0 (unarmed), Defense +12 (+4 flat-footed), Knockback -2, Initiative +6

Abilities 24 + Skills 19 (76 ranks) + Feats 13 + Powers 42 + Combat 28 + Saves 12 = Total 138

ARMORINE

Real Name: Unknown, if any**Identity:** Secret**Occupation:** Revolutionary**Base of Operations:** Freedom City**Affiliation:** RIOT**Height:** 5'9"**Eyes:** Grey**Weight:** 260 lbs.**Hair:** Silver (metallic)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+7	+2	+1	+0	+1	+0
24	15	13	10	12	11
TOUGHNESS		FORTITUDE		REFLEX	WILL
+9		+6		+7	+5

FLAG BURNER

POWER LEVEL 10

Real Name: Unknown, if any**Identity:** Secret**Occupation:** Revolutionary**Base of Operations:** Freedom City**Affiliation:** RIOT**Height:** 6'**Eyes:** Blue**Weight:** 180 lbs.**Hair:** Black

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+0	+3	+1	+2	+2	+3
11	17	13	14	14	16
TOUGHNESS		FORTITUDE		REFLEX	WILL
+9/+3*		+5		+7	+6

*without force field

Skills: Concentration 8 (+10), Intimidate 8 (+10), Knowledge (civics) 6 (+8), Knowledge (streetwise) 6 (+8), Knowledge (tactics) 8 (+10), Notice 6 (+8), Sense Motive 6 (+8)

Feats: Attack Focus (ranged) 3, Defensive Attack, Defensive Roll 2, Dodge Focus 2, Leadership, Startle

Powers: **Fire Control 11** (*Alternate Powers:* **Blast 11** [flame], **Blast 7** [fireball, *Extras:* Burst Area], **Blast 5** [ignite, *Extras:* Concentration Duration, Perception Range], **Dazzle 7** [visual, *Extras:* Burst Area]), **Force Field 6** (Limited to flammable or meltable weapons), **Immunity 10** (fire effects), **Strike 6** (flame aura, *Extras:* Aura, Sustained Duration)

Combat: Attack +6 (melee), +9 (ranged), Grapple +6, Damage +0 (unarmed), +11 (flame blast), Defense +11 (+5 flat-footed), Knockback -5, Initiative +3

Abilities 25 + Skills 12 (48 ranks) + Feats 10 + Powers 63 + Combat 30 + Saves 12 = Total 152

POWER LEVEL 9

Skills: Intimidate 5 (+5), Knowledge (streetwise) 5 (+5), Notice 5 (+6), Search 4 (+4), Sense Motive 5 (+6)

Feats: All-out Attack, Attack Focus (melee) 3, Endurance, Improved Critical (claws), Power Attack, Takedown Attack

Powers: **Density 6** (metallic body, +12 Str, +3 Impervious Protection, +2 Immoveable, +2 Super-Strength; *Extra:* Continuous; *Flaw:* Permanent), **Immunity 6** (cold and hot environments, critical hits, disease, poison), **Protection 5**, **Strike 2** (claws, *Power Feat:* Mighty), **Super-Strength 3** (heavy load: 22 tons)

Combat: Attack +9 (melee), +6 (ranged), Grapple +21, Damage +7 (unarmed), +9 (claws), Defense +9 (+5 flat-footed), Knockback -8, Initiative +2

Abilities 13 + Skills 6 (24 ranks) + Feats 8 + Powers 38 + Combat 36 + Saves 14 = Total 115

rialism at home and abroad and the oppression and repression of the American people. He also really likes just setting things on fire, which is his favorite tactic in combat, and often used as a distraction when RIOT needs one.

Flag-Burner is the closest an anarchist collective like RIOT has to a leader, although his teammates ignore his orders when it suits them. Still, he has a keen tactical mind, and the rest of RIOT has learned to appreciate it.

LITTLE HAWK

POWER LEVEL 9

Real Name: Unknown, if any**Identity:** Secret**Occupation:** Revolutionary**Base of Operations:** Freedom City**Affiliation:** RIOT**Height:** 5'6" (maximum height)**Eyes:** Brown**Weight:** 150 lbs. (maximum height)**Hair:** Black

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
-5	+3	+1	+1	+0	+1
1	16	12	12	10	12
TOUGHNESS		FORTITUDE		REFLEX	WILL
+5/+3*		+4		+3	+4

*flat-footed

Skills: Acrobatics 7 (+10), Bluff 6 (+7), Craft (electronics) 8 (+9), Disable Device 8 (+9), Intimidate 4 (-1, includes size), Knowledge (technology) 8 (+9), Notice 8 (+8), Search 8 (+9), Sense Motive 6 (+6), Stealth 5 (+20, includes size)

Feats: Dodge Focus 2, Elusive Target, Evasion 2, Improved Initiative, Move-by Action, Set-Up, Taunt

Powers: **Device 4** (flight harness, hard to lose), **Shrinking 12** (diminutive, +4 Atk/Def, x1/4 carrying; *Extra:* Continuous; *Flaw:* Permanent)

Flight Harness: **Flight 4** (100 MPH, *Power Feat:* Subtle 2), **Protection 3**, **Strike 7** (razor-wings)

Combat: Attack +11 (includes size), Grapple -10 (includes size), Damage +7 (razor-wings), Defense +13 (+8 flat-footed, includes size), Knockback -3, Initiative +7

Abilities 12 + Skills 17 (68 ranks) + Feats 9 + Powers 28 + Combat 28 + Saves 13 = Total 107

S.D. IVAN

POWER LEVEL 9

Real Name: Unknown, if any**Identity:** Secret**Occupation:** Revolutionary**Base of Operations:** Freedom City**Affiliation:** RIOT**Height:** 5'10"**Eyes:** Blue**Weight:** 180 lbs.**Hair:** Black

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+2	+1	+4	+0	+0	+1
14	12	18	10	11	12
TOUGHNESS		FORTITUDE		REFLEX	WILL
+9		+9		+4	+4

Skills: Concentration 9 (+9), Intimidate 6 (+7), Language 1 (Russian), Notice 5 (+5), Sense Motive 5 (+5), Survival 6 (+6)

Feats: All-out Attack, Attack-Specialization (ice blast), Endurance, Environmental Adaptation (ice and cold)

Powers: Cold Control 10 (*Alternate Powers:* Blast 10 [ice], Drain Toughness 10 [Ranged, Limited to Objects], Snare 10 [ice bonds]), Immunity 10 (cold effects), Protection 5 (icy armor), Speed 2 (ice skating, 25 MPH), Super-Movement 3 (sure-footed 3, Limited to ice and snow)

Combat: Attack +6, +8 (ice blast), Grapple +8, Damage +2 (unarmed), +10 (ice blast), Defense +9 (+5 flat-footed), Knockback -5, Initiative +1

Abilities 17 + Skills 8 (32 ranks) + Feats 4 + Powers 43 + Combat 30 + Saves 12—Drawbacks 2 = Total 112

SLAM DANCE

POWER LEVEL 8

Real Name: Unknown, if any**Identity:** Secret**Occupation:** Revolutionary**Base of Operations:** Freedom City**Affiliation:** RIOT**Height:** 5'11"**Eyes:** Brown**Weight:** 170 lbs.**Hair:** Brown (often dyed)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+1	+0	+1	+0	+1	+0
13	11	12	10	13	11
TOUGHNESS		FORTITUDE		REFLEX	
+9/+1*		+5		+4	
WILL					
+5					

*vs. energy attacks

Skills: Climb 6 (+7), Drive 6 (+6), Gather Information 6 (+6), Intimidate 4 (+4), Knowledge (current events) 6 (+6), Knowledge (popular culture) 6 (+6), Knowledge (streetwise) 8 (+8), Notice 6 (+7), Search 8 (+8), Sense Motive 4 (+5)

Feats: All-out Attack, Contacts, Improved Pin, Set-Up, Sneak Attack, Teamwork

Powers: **Duplication 6** (83-point duplicates; *Extras:* Action 3—Reaction [to being struck], Duration—Continuous, Survival; *Power Feats:* Progression 6 [up to 100 duplicates]), **Protection 8** (*Extra:* Impervious, *Flaw:* Limited to Physical Damage)

Combat: Attack +9, Grapple +10, Damage +1 (unarmed), Defense +7, Knockback -9, Initiative +0

Abilities 10 + Skills 15 (60 ranks) + Feats 6 + Powers 56 + Combat 32 + Saves 12 = Total 131

appears of Arabic descent, Insurgent—like all of RIOT—has no real ties to any political faction or organization.

LITTLE HAWK

How dangerous can a man the size of a doll be? Very, if he happens to have a high-speed flying harness equipped with bladed wings. Little Hawk is RIOT's other skilled spy, and the only member of the

INSURGENT

The cloaked and veiled Insurgent moves like a shadow and can disappear in the blink of an eye. She can also twist the emotions of a crowd to the boiling point, sending them against whatever she chooses as the focus of their ire. Most often it's authority figures, government buildings, and heroes like FORCE Ops. Although she

team who can fly. He slips inside places where nobody bothers to look up, and buzzes battlefields, slashing with his razor-wings and helping distract his teammates' opponents (via his Set-Up feat). Little Hawk is both embittered about his permanently tiny size and perversely proud of his ability to bring down "big game."

S. D. IVAN

He affects a Russian accent and the attitude of a Marxist revolutionary, but S. D. Ivan's real name and background (like the rest of RIOT) remains unknown. He wields cryokinetic powers that he claims come from "Father Winter" from Russian myth, but which are apparently psionic in nature, enhanced by the DNAscent process. Ivan bemoans the weakening of the revolution in Mother Russia and the plight

of the worker worldwide, and likes to remind his foes "no one overcomes the power of a Russian winter!"

SLAM DANCE

"C'mon, hero, let's dance!" Slam Dance takes a beating and gives it back in spades—each and every one of him. His power absorbs kinetic energy and allows Slam Dance to "split" into identical duplicates each time he's hit hard enough. He's like a hydra in combat, splitting into two foes for every one that you strike. He often uses deliberate body slam and head-butt moves to trigger his own duplication, and his duplicates make useful distractions. More than once an opponent thinks he has Slam Dance dead to rights, only to find out that it's a duplicate, and the real thing is long gone.

OTHER IRON AGE CRIMINALS

Heroes like FORCE Ops and the Eyes of Night regularly fought any number of super-criminals, often shortlived subjects of the Grant Conglomerates' burgeoning DNAscent process (in terms of their powers, sometimes also their life spans). Some of the noteworthy ones are described here.

CARL "DICE" DESANTO

A low- to mid-level figure in the Mafia, Dice DeSanto organizes much of the criminal activity around the Fens. Despite a rap sheet longer than his arm, Dice has yet to be convicted due to an elaborate web of intimidation and the fact that witnesses against him disappear. He also seems to have some extraordinary luck tied to the pair of dice he obsessively keeps close at hand.

COUNTESS CARET

Tiffany Caret (clearly an alias) is a European jewel thief and con artist obsessed with diamonds. Although she's not a true countess (so far as anyone can determine), she has masqueraded as foreign royalty before to get close to potential targets. She uses a combination of second-story work and old-fashioned social engineering to acquire her marks. Countess Caret has crossed paths (and swords) with Harry Powers, the Eyes of Night, and Archer on different occasions.

Countess Caret is a tall, willowy, athletic woman with platinum blonde hair. She tends to dress in white with diamond jewelry. You can use the Femme Fatale archetype from *Agents of Freedom* (page 28) for her game stats, if you have that book. Otherwise, a power level 6 version of the Costumed Adventurer archetype from *M&M* will suffice.

THE DNASCENDANTS

The Labyrinth, through Grant Conglomerates, refined and developed the DNAscent process through testing on numerous subjects, mostly unwilling victims kidnapped off the streets of Freedom City: runaways, the homeless, victims of "random and senseless crime," and those the city government needed to disappear. They also occasionally used the process to enhance paying customers, building super-powered thugs to order.

In addition to Bruiser, Evening of the Eyes of Night, the members of RIOT, and most of the members of the Fearsome, other subjects of the DNAscent process include the Contenders (Bear-Knuckles, Fly-Boy, Heavyweight, and TKO), the Faretti Brothers (Strong Manny, Joey Brains, and Slick Willy), Oliverti Family enforcers Knee-Breaker and Strongarm, Feral, Xegnome, Daddy-O Long-Legs, Death Caul, Howl, Midnight Owl, and Urban DK.

Latter subjects, like the members of Larceny, Inc. (Get-Away, Grab, Smash, and Trap-Door), the Millennium Bug, El Matador, and the





brother-sister team of Rant & Rave, underwent the process after the Terminus Invasion and are still active in present-day Freedom City.

FEAR-MASTER

Dr. Arthur Levitt, otherwise known as the Raven's old foe the Fear-Master, is still active in Freedom City during the Moore era. The criminal psychologist has supposedly cleaned up his act and works as a consultant, but in truth Levitt continues his experiments in the nature of fear, and finds Freedom City under the Moore Act an ideal environment for his "research." He makes money by doing occasional work for the Mob and other clients, and sharing data with Grant Conglomerates (and, through them, the Labyrinth).

The first Fear-Master's game stats are similar to those of the second (*Freedom City*, page 197): drop the Perform skill and replace Craft (electronic) with Craft (chemical) and Escape Artist with Profession (psychologist). His fear weapons are chemical in nature rather than sonic.

GEMINI

Harry Powers takes on one of his most famous cases in this period when he goes up against the telepathic serial killer Gemini. Characters active before 1981 might encounter Gemini (or one of his victims). Options for what might happen after Powers brings down Gemini are discussed on page 239 of *Freedom City*, and could just as easily happen in the Iron Age as they could in the modern day.

JACK-A-KNIVES

Jack-a-Knives is active in Freedom City during the Iron Age, working at behest of Hades, although sometimes it seems the underworld god merely wishes to sow murder and mayhem by unleashing the Murder Spirit. He's also willing to "loan" Jack-a-Knives to Taurus on occasion in exchange for a suitable sacrifice, so the Murder Spirit can appear in conjunction with the Labyrinth's plots.

The Murder Spirit doesn't change over time: the game stats given for Jack-a-Knives on page 203 of *Freedom City* apply the same in this era as any other.

THE LABYRINTH

Like a spider at the heart of a web, Taurus and the Labyrinth sit at the center of the corruption and decay spreading through Freedom City in these years. Although many layers removed, Taurus is largely responsible for the rising power of the Moore Administration and the removal of many of his costumed adversaries from Freedom City. Of course, the Labyrinth does not operate unopposed: heroes like FORCE Ops and Evening and the Eye of Justice still work to thwart their schemes, but even they only scratch the surface of the Labyrinth's true depths.

The Labyrinth is suitable as a powerful behind-the-scenes adversary in an Iron Age *Freedom City* series. The characters may or may not ever know of the organization's existence, apart from fronts like the Grant Conglomerates. Heroes can spend an entire campaign fighting against Taurus' criminal empire.

The description of the Labyrinth on pages 162-170 of *Freedom City* is sufficient for an Iron Age game. Keep in mind that, of the detailed characters, only Taurus, Ms. Scarlet, and Dr. Reeds are active with the organization at this time. Dr. Peter Hanks begins working for Grant Conglomerates in 1987 under the guidance of Jonathan Grant, and Constantine Urallos is also an ally of Taurus. Replace the present-day super-agents of the Labyrinth with the members of RIOT (working unwittingly at Taurus' bidding) or DNAscendants of your own creation.

THE KATANARCHISTS

The Katanarchist Cult is a broken, but still dangerous, organization in the Iron Age of Freedom City. Founded by Toshiro Ranaga, the second Crimson Katana, the Katanarchists operated as fearsome mercenaries and assassins for hire in all of Asia during the 1960s and '70s. In 1977, they had been all but wiped out by a reprisal from the Russian Mob.

The surviving members came to Freedom City to regroup and rebuild their forces. That they were able to kill two members of the Freedom League a few years later was a testament to both the cult's ability to regain its fearsome reputation and the League's disorganization at the time. The Crimson Katana and his followers later become involved in aiding the Yakuza in infiltrating the city's underworld. When the attempt failed, the Katanarchists went underground and Toshiro Ranaga smuggled the surviving members of his family into the United States.

The second Crimson Katana's game stats can be found on page 191 of *Freedom City*. The ninja archetype from *Mutants & Masterminds* can be used for the Katanarchists, or you can use the more powerful ninja archetype from **Chapter 4** for truly elite assassins of the cult.

MARTIN KOHNE

This high-untouchable businessman has tried to steal Eye of Justice's cybernetic secrets numerous times. Kohne Technologies is an R&D biotech and chip-tech corporation with facilities worldwide. While many suspect wrongdoing (and a few suggest links to the Labyrinth or the Foundry, though none can prove them), Martin Kohne and his underlings act alone and provide many beneficial medical and prosthetic technologies. Very few people suspect such a pillar of the medical community could be involved in criminal activity.

MELINDA

Melinda is Nightrage's vampiric "maker" and the self-proclaimed priestess of a blood cult in Freedom City. She lived in 19th century England when she was taken as a "bride" by a vampire, whom she eventually destroyed to gain her freedom. She has survived for over a century in the shadows, but she became fixated on Rick Van Danski and decided to take him as her consort. History repeated itself when Rick defied her and became the vigilante Nightrage. Use the Vampire Lord archetype on page 225 of *Mutants & Masterminds* for Melinda's game stats.

NHOROX

A demon originally summoned as a protector for the senior partners of Cunningham, Cabot, & Crowley, Nhorox is among the more loyal of their agents and the most frequently encountered deterrent who keeps the Eyes from finding the full truth about the firm.

More wily than powerful, Nhorox enslaves innocents to do his bidding. He has other demonic powers if forced to confront heroes directly. Once believed to be human (in his alias as the sleazy lawyer Nathan H. Aurox), he has survived enough mortal damage on numerous occasions that the Eyes know he's far more than human (though they're not entirely certain about his demonic nature).

The Warrior Demon archetype on page 233 of *Mutants & Masterminds* can serve for Nhorox, with the addition of Int 13, Cha 13, Morph 5 (humanoid forms), and Hellfire Control 7.

SHADOW

SHADOW is in its "corporate" phase during the Iron Age, with Overshadow incapacitated and the Penumbra in control of the organization. Franklin Folkes is the embodiment of this "new" SHADOW. An ambitious middle manager and a brilliant marketing and public-relations executive, Folkes directs SHADOW towards more profitable operations than world conquest while pursuing a program of systematic destruction of the reputations of costumed heroes. He dreams of spreading the "success" of the Moore Act to encompass the entire United States and to inspire similar legislation in other nations, until SHADOW's worst enemies are all outlaws.

Use the Crime Boss archetype from **Chapter 4** for Folkes, if his game stats are needed. Ideally, the heroes won't directly encounter him much, as the SHADOW director prefers to operate behind the scenes and through various proxies.

TAARVON THE UNDYING

Immortal corrupted by the forces of the Shadow World in the creation of the Terminus, Taarvon wields great mystic power, but desires even more in his never-ending quest to defeat Omega and become the new Lord of the Terminus.

The Eyes of Night were trapped in the Terminus for some time and Taarvon, in an illusory guise, became their ally. He tried to use them as pawns in a ploy to defeat other powers of the Terminus, but Evening and the Eye of Justice eventually learned his true nature and turned on him and Taarvon swore revenge against them.

Taarvon is detailed in the *Worlds of Freedom* sourcebook, but you can use the Corrupt Sorcerer archetype (*M&M*, page 214) for his game stats.

THE ZODIAC CARTEL

The Zodiac Cartel, criminal threat to Freedom City and the world, doesn't really exist in anything other than name. The organization serves as a front for the Labyrinth, a layer "behind" its public fronts like Grant Conglomerates and Delphic Industries. Heroes occasionally hear rumors about the mysterious Cartel and its ruling "Council of Twelve," with masked identities based on the signs of the Zodiac. It primarily exists as a red herring to allow heroes to chase leads down blind alleys and pursue suspected members of the organization, allowing the Labyrinth to operate undisturbed.

Gamemasters should feel free to flesh-out the Zodiac Cartel as much as desired. With Taurus's resources, the organization could easily be as well equipped as a real criminal syndicate! Likewise, the Cartel might have various members, agents, and so forth carrying out operations benefiting the Labyrinth.

THE IRON AGE FREEDOM CITY SERIES

This book and the *Freedom City* sourcebook provide everything you need to run a series set in the Iron Age of Freedom, or just a change-of-pace adventure for another Freedom City series, involving flashbacks or time-travel. Different ages can meet (and clash) if you take material from the *Golden Age* sourcebook and mix it with this one. Imagine an accident involving Dr. Tomorrow's time-travel technology catapulting the Liberty League or Allies of Freedom to Freedom City circa 1985 to deal with some serious Iron Age problems, while confronting their "successors" in FORCE Ops.

There are a number of different frameworks for an Iron Age of Freedom City series, from the characters as members of FORCE Ops or an all-new team of costumed vigilantes to lone crime-fighters, agents of a law-enforcement organization like AEGIS, or even ordinary beat-cops trying to keep the lid on crime and corruption run rampant in a city that has outlawed costumed heroes. This section looks at some of the options available to you and how to use them.

FORCE OPS

The presence of FORCE Ops provides a model for a superteam typical of the Iron Age and suitable for use in an Iron Age Freedom City series. Players can take the roles of existing members of the team described in this book, or create their own to replace or supplement the FORCE Ops characters herein. You can use Archer as the team leader and motivating force, or replace him as well.

Perhaps Archer gathers different or additional heroes in your Iron Age series, leading to a different FORCE Ops team with the same basic goals. Some or all of the existing members could be NPCs or, alternately, rivals or even criminals. It's not difficult to re-imagine FORCE Ops as a band of heartless mercenaries, for example.

Even if FORCE Ops isn't directly opposed to the heroes, they can remain suspicious rival vigilantes. If the heroes are more law-abiding (perhaps even police or government agents), they might be trying to bring FORCE Ops in. If they're vigilantes too, there's still room for a classic superheroic misunderstanding and fight, Iron Age style. Even

FORCE Ops' leader is pretty hotheaded, and the team as a whole is likely to shoot first and ask questions later.

NEVERMORE

In "mainstream" Freedom City history, Duncan Summers, the Raven, retired following his final defeat of Dr. Sin in 1972, never to take up the cowl again. However, it's not difficult to imagine the former dark-clad vigilante, faced with crime and corruption growing in Freedom City, deciding to do something about it. In this campaign framework, he does.

The Raven returns to become the mysterious coordinator and leader of "Nevermore," a group of vigilante heroes devoted to saving Freedom City whether it wants it or not. Backed by Summers's fortune and considerable experience, Nevermore can be even better organized than FORCE Ops. They're also less violent in their approach, at least at first. Duncan Summers still holds to the ethics and mores of an earlier age, and expects his agents to do the same.

Duncan Summers' game stats on page 132 of *Freedom City* can serve for his traits in this campaign as well, although he remains a largely off-stage figure, coordinating the team's efforts and training them in between missions. He may choose to keep his true identity secret, still operating under the name and mask of the Raven, if only to protect the lives of his wife and young daughter.

If you wish, Nevermore can even be a secret part of "mainstream" Freedom City history rather than an alternate. Duncan Summers' activities during the Iron Age are largely unknown, so it is possible he operated as the organizer of an underground team no one every truly knew about.

LONE WOLVES

It's possible, albeit difficult, to run an Iron Age Freedom City game where the heroes are all independent operators who occasionally team up or cooperate against more significant threats. They could be a loose network of sometime allies, or they might have an informal "non-team" where they all acknowledge belonging to a team, but without the training sessions, regular meetings, or even headquarters. It makes sense: in the environment of Iron Age Freedom City, a team of heroes has a greater chance of being hunted down by the authorities than a loose collection of individuals.

This framework easily allows characters to come and go in the series and works well for groups where the same players are not always available from one game session to the next. On the other hand, it can sometimes be difficult to come up with reasons why the heroes all happen to be operating together unless the GM establishes some sort of common network or pool of information for them.

AGENTS OF AEGIS

As Freedom City's heroes were forced to retire, either to civilian life or to the shadows, AEGIS (*Freedom City*, page 70) stepped up to help fill the void. The Iron Age of Freedom was, in some respects, a

ADVENTURES IN ATOM-SITTING

The four siblings of the Atom Family described in the *Freedom City* sourcebook are born during the Iron Age era, from 1985 through 1989, which serves as the primary reason why the Atom Family are largely inactive as adventurers and explorers during this time. Still, it doesn't mean you can't use them as supporting NPCs.

An interesting and off-beat adventure for a group of hard-bitten Iron Age heroes would be having to deal with a group of toddlers who have the run of the most advanced high-tech headquarters around, especially if Dr. Atom, his daughter and son-in-law are called away for some reason and the kids are left in the care of their robotic "nanny" ALEX. Someone might try to kidnap the young Atoms or simply break into the Nucleus to gain access to its technological treasures or something like the Terminus portal in Dr. Atom's lab. In a late 1989 adventure, the Atom kids would be ages 5, 4, 2, and less than a year (for newborn Chase).

high point for AEGIS, when the organization took the battle to its foes in SHADOW during the last years of Director Simmons's tenure. It was the time when Harry Powers was one of AEGIS's most outstanding field agents, and the agency's ability to operate relatively unhindered in Freedom City gave AEGIS its chance to shine.

Of course, it wasn't always easy: AEGIS was often forced into confrontation with illegal vigilantes like FORCE Ops, regardless of how the director or his agents felt about them. The agency's primary job was to uphold the law, and they did so, even when it was difficult or distasteful, because nobody else was willing to do it.

The Iron Age therefore makes an interesting setting for an *Agents of Freedom* series, using that sourcebook as the basis of an AEGIS game with the player characters as agents operating in a Freedom City without legally recognized superheroes. They can fight the machinations of a newly emboldened SHADOW, explore the twisting plots of the Labyrinth and corporate corruption, and have to deal with vigilantes breaking the law (allowing you to use the various heroes in this book at NPC antagonists or occasional wary allies).

EMPIRE CITY

Another possibility for an Iron Age series isn't set in "Freedom City" at all, but in the city's mirror-duplicate, Empire City on Anti-Earth (*Freedom City*, page 106). On Anti-Earth, good is evil and vice versa, so Empire City is a totalitarian nightmare the likes of which Franklin Moore only imagined, dominated by the corrupt Tyranny Syndicate, that world's evil version of the Freedom League (after they betrayed and overthrew Praetor, Anti-Earth's Centurion, and the city's previous ruler).

Empire City is an excellent setting for Iron Age *M&M* games because it embodies so many of the elements of the genre: it's a corrupt world virtually without heroes, where psychotic and powerful villains run amok and those in authority are either on the take or powerless to do anything to stop them. A group of violent vigilantes trying to set things right and overthrow the existing order would fit right in. For fun, they can be modeled on existing Freedom City villains, or they may be entirely original creations of the players. Either way, you can have fun with a crossover adventure where they meet their Earth-Prime counterparts, who are notorious criminals!

As a plus, you can use all the existing heroes in the *Freedom City* sourcebook as villains in an Empire City game. The Tyranny Syndicate replaces the Freedom League. The Atom Family are vicious, spoiled children of privilege, exiled from the isolationist Farside City by its rightfully elected Queen. The Next-Gen are criminal students of the villainous Raven, brainwashed by the propaganda of the Syndicate and groomed as its new foot soldiers (although some of them have greater ambitions).

THE ELDRICH CIRCLE

The dark years for Freedom City were also a time when certain sinister arcane powers thrived in the shadows. Heroes like Hell-Rider struggled against them, as did Earth's Master Mage, Adrian Eldrich (*Freedom City*, page 139). For a mystically-themed Iron Age series, the heroes can be agents recruited by Eldrich to assist him in the defense of the Earth against evil supernatural forces such as the Serpent People, vampires, demons, the Brotherhood of the Yellow Sign (and similar cults), and malevolent spirits like Jack-a-Knives.



As Master Mage, Eldrich is often focused on "the big picture," protecting Earth's entire dimension from threats like Una, Queen of the Netherworld, and arch-sorcerers like Malador the Mystic. He doesn't always have time to root out a clutch of vampires operating in Riverside or to exorcise a ghost haunting the Fens. That's where the player characters can come in. They're ghost-hunters and vampire-slayers, or perhaps supernatural beings themselves, from wizards and witches in training to spirits, ghosts, golems, or the undead. The Master Mage has called them to service and they have answered, for various reasons of their own.

FREEDOM CITY BLUES

At no other time in Freedom City's history were honest cops more needed than during Mayor Moore's administration and at no other time were they harder to find. The Freedom City Police Department of the Iron Age is riddled with corruption, in some ways worse than the criminals they supposedly pursue. Still, even at its worst, there were officers devoted to their duty to the city, its people, and the law, and they did their job, no matter what.

An offbeat sort of Iron Age series can be playing the roles of ordinary police officers in Freedom City using the guidelines and information from the *Agents of Freedom* sourcebook. The player characters can be some of the last honest cops left in the city, who band together for mutual protection and to fight the corruption they see in their own department while doing their duty to keep the city safe.

LEGACIES OF THE IRON AGE

Although many would rather forget the dark years of Freedom City's history, it has left a strong impression on the city, and many heroes and villains from the Iron Age have legacies that live on in present-day Freedom. This section looks at some of them and how you can use them in your own *Freedom City* games.

ARCHER

In the official *Freedom City* setting, Ethan Keller survives the Terminus Invasion but the encounter with something as big and powerful as Lord Omega and his forces takes the fight out of him. After losing his surrogate family, witnessing Centurion's sacrifice, and helping bring down the Moore government, Archer is grateful to quit the hero game with a whole skin, hangs up his bow, and retires. He currently works as a freelance security consultant with companies like Stronghold and Titan Security (*Freedom City*, page 39). He keeps up his skills, although not quite to peak level. Thus far, he has refused Duncan Summers' offer to teach at the Claremont Academy, even after Bowman (Fletcher Beaumont III, his old mentor's son) graduated and left the school.

THE DNASCENT PROCESS

The process first used extensively by Labyrinth fronts in the Iron Age is still (with minor variations) in use in present-day Freedom City. The GM can easily expand upon the list of DNAscendants as desired, and decide on their individual fates in the present day. Since the process affects genetics, DNAscendants from the Iron Age could also pass on their mutant genetic traits to their offspring, resulting in a "new generation" of DNAscendants in modern Freedom as heroes, villains, or bystanders.

THE EYES OF NIGHT

The identity and fate of the offspring of Evening and the Eye of Justice are left up to the Gamemaster. Given the usual qualities of the Eyes of Night and conception in the Terminus the child (or children, if it was twins or triplets) could be almost anything, including completely normal! It's a suitable origin for a new hero or villain in the series.

Likewise, the ultimate fate of the Eyes of Night is for the individual GM to decide. The only "official" information is they are no longer active in present-day Freedom City. They might have died during the Terminus Invasion or been pulled back into exile in Omega's realm, where they might still be working against him. Perhaps they survived the Invasion and decided to retire quietly and raise their family, at least until something from their colorful past returns to haunt them.

THE FURIES THREE

The Furies Three dropped out of sight not long before the Terminus Invasion and only returned in recent years seeking revenge against their creator, Daedalus. He has sought ways of helping to restore the Chorale to sanity, but with no success thus far. The Furies remain at large, continuing their relentless pursuit of criminals and vengeance.

THE HELLRIDER

When his father Eddie Graves turned state's evidence against the Mob in 1989 and accepted a jail sentence, the Vengeance Spirit no longer possessed Mickey Graves, and the Hellrider has not been seen in Freedom City since. Graves now owns a garage and auto-repair business in Southside.

As detailed in *Hero High*, the Vengeance Spirit still exists in Freedom City and has not yet fulfilled its purpose. It will almost certainly seek another host eventually, or else Seven will learn more about it and its past connections to her family and heritage. The Spirit's activities could be anything from the creation of a new Hellrider to a powerful new villain.

KISMET

Kismet's ultimate fate is left for the GM to decide. It's assumed that she perished during the Terminus Invasion but, as anyone would quickly point out, Kismet's power was to be *very* lucky. If there was any way to survive, no matter how unlikely, she could have found it. Kismet might have been trapped in the Terminus, or she could have gone quietly underground for a while before deciding to retire or return to her life as a mercenary. Depending on what other secrets the GM decides Kismet is hiding, she might even still be as young and vital as she was in the Iron Age and interested in returning to Freedom City to settle old scores.

NETWORK

Although Network didn't *appear* to survive the Terminus Invasion, it's difficult to say exactly what a being of pure energy can do. It is entirely possible Network still exists in some form. Perhaps his form was simply dispersed or disrupted. He might have escaped into the Freedom City electrical or telecommunications grids and become trapped there, a disembodied essence. Likewise, he could have been drawn into the Terminus, stuck in the void or reformed on an alien world. It might even be possible for a character with electrical or cybernetic powers (like Captain Thunder or Bolt from *Freedom City*) to reconstitute him.

Of course, even if Network is still "alive" in some sense, that doesn't vouch for his state of mind. Years of disembodied exile might have driven him mad, creating a dangerous electrical "monster" or a cyberkinetic "ghost in the machine" that hates living "flesh creatures". Such a fate could create a new supervillain ready to ally with foes of humanity like Talos.

NIGHTRAGE

Likewise, although Nightrage was apparently destroyed during the Terminus Invasion, it isn't easy to permanently slay one of the undead. Mystical rituals might be able to restore Nightrage, although he wouldn't necessarily be happy about returning from peaceful oblivion. He could resume his vigilante career or he might simply have a death wish to end his unliving existence.

Nightrage may have also passed on his vampiric curse to someone, knowingly or unknowingly. Any vampiric spawn of his would have similar powers, although not necessarily Rick's willpower or self-control.

BAD MEDICINE

B*ad Medicine* is a short introductory adventure for an Iron Age *Mutants & Masterminds* game. It is intended for a team of four to six power level 9 characters, with some suggestions for adjusting it to suit other power levels.

The adventure is set during the Iron Age of Freedom City, as described in **Chapter 5** of this book. Access to the *Freedom City* campaign setting sourcebook is useful, but not required, to run this adventure. Gamemasters wishing to set *Bad Medicine* somewhere other than Freedom City should adjust the names and locations to suit the new location.

The plot of the adventure involves criminal efforts to recover certain designer drugs that have found their way into Freedom City's underground while the heroes trace down the origin of the newest scourge on the streets and encounter a larger scheme than they originally expected.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

Grant Conglomerates is an international company with assets all over the world. Unbeknownst to its shareholders, it also serves as a front for the sinister criminal conspiracy known as the Labyrinth. GrantCo's primary purpose is scientific research, including the work that pioneered the DNAscent process. A secondary purpose is producing illegal goods for the black market, particularly designer drugs, banned genetic enhancers, and so forth.

GrantCo exec Kyle Harrison doesn't know a thing about the Labyrinth, but he does know his company is involved in some dirty business. That's because Harrison is the kind of man you hire if you want executives who don't care how dirty your business gets, so long as it remains profitable. Unfortunately for GrantCo, Kyle Harrison's corruptibility has led to serious drug abuse issues.

In order to feed his habit, Harrison leaked samples of some of the company's black market goodies to his dealer, who fed them up the chain to his supplier. They haven't figured out all the implications, but they *have* cracked enough of the formula to start selling a new designer drug called "meta," one that's taking the city's party scene by storm.

Of course, meta is also creating a new culture of addicts, and having some unexpected side effects. Based on one of the drugs used in the DNAscent process, meta temporarily "unlocks" certain genetic potential in the user. It has granted some users feelings of invincibility, and sometimes gives them the superhuman strength and durability to back it up!

GrantCo has traced the new drug in town back to their own labs and wants the security leak plugged, permanently. The heroes, on the other hand, want to find the source of this new and deadly drug and stop it for good.

The adventure starts off with the heroes following up on a tip leading them to a street lab where meta is being produced. Clues then lead them to GrantCo executive Kyle Harrison, but super-powered mercenaries associated with the Labyrinth also show up to deal with Harrison. The heroes have to try and keep their informant alive while

fending off the mercs and hopefully gathering enough evidence to trace the source of the drugs back to Harrison's employers.

GETTING THE HEROES INVOLVED

You can get the heroes involved in the events of *Bad Medicine* in a number of ways, depending on whether the characters are already members of a team, not yet part of a team, or perhaps not even superheroes yet (if you want to use *Bad Medicine* as the first adventure in an *Iron Age* series).

EXISTING TEAM

If the heroes are already an existing team of crime-fighters, it's a fairly easy matter to involve them in the investigation of meta and the drug's source. Just tell the players their heroes have been looking into the new drug and have gotten a lead that has brought them to the drug lab late one night, and you're ready to go.

If you want to introduce *Bad Medicine* into an ongoing series more gradually, you can start things off with the heroes first hearing about this new drug called meta, and perhaps encountering an out-of-control meta addict or a low-level dealer who doesn't know much, to show them what a potential threat it is. Then they get a lead on the production lab, leading into the start of this adventure.

To provide a personal hook, you can have a friend or loved one of a hero get caught up in the investigation. Someone in law enforcement might be investigating meta as well, or could have gotten injured by a meta addict or a dealer. A reporter could also be investigating for a story and get in too deep. Younger siblings have friends who try meta or run with the wrong crowd, and so forth.

NEW TEAM

If the heroes are not yet allied as a team, the events of *Bad Medicine* might convince them to do so. The potential spread of meta and

META

The designer drug called "meta" on the streets of Freedom City plays an important role in this adventure as a catalyst for the heroes' investigation, but isn't likely to see much use, unless a character foolishly decides to give some a try. If that's the case, or you simply want to drive home how dangerous the drug can be, feel free to treat it as a plot device and give it suitable effects.

Generally, meta creates an inflated sense of power and confidence in the user, and it can have unpredictable effects on some people, unlocking latent genetic potential. For a superhuman user, the effects could be almost anything. You can introduce complications to the hero's personality or powers as you see fit for the adventure (see **Complications**, *M&M*, page 122).

Meta's effects are temporary, lasting only a matter of hours, although a meta-induced origin or other alteration (see **New Heroes**) can be permanent at the Gamemaster's discretion.

ADJUSTING FOR OTHER POWER LEVELS

This adventure is suitable without modification for a group of about four PL 10 heroes or four to six PL 9 heroes. If the heroes in your series are lower power level (PL 6 or 7), you might want to eliminate one or two of the members of RIOT in the opposition to even things out a bit. You can also alter the stats of RIOT, making them a power level or two lower, particularly if you're starting a lower power level *Iron Age* series and you want RIOT to be a recurring villain team fairly evenly matched for the heroes.

If you're running an *Iron Age* series with government agents or police officers (possibly using the guidelines from *Agents of Freedom*), you'll want to drop a member of RIOT for each power level below 8, and each character below six, so a PL 6 agent series with five characters should face only three members of RIOT rather than all six (with the others on another job, perhaps). You can also substitute a rival agency for RIOT, such as giving the Labyrinth their own trained agents roughly equal in ability to the heroes.

the creation of new addicts threatens a major crime wave, and the revelation that a major organization is ultimately behind the drug's creation could lead the heroes to (rightly) conclude that it's more than any one of them can handle.

You can choose to handle the heroes getting together "off-camera," in which case it's much like the introduction of an existing team, except they haven't existed for very long. You can also have the heroes meet up in the first scene of the adventure, either upon breaking into the drug lab or just outside of it, with each of them following their own investigation. The drawback to this approach is the possibility the heroes *won't* cooperate or decide to work together. You may want to suggest to players beforehand the importance of their characters forming a team in this first adventure.

NEW HEROES

Lastly, you can use *Bad Medicine* to as an origin for entirely new heroes with personal reasons for investigating meta and fighting crime in Freedom City. A common origin gives the heroes something

in common from the very beginning of the adventure and good reason to cooperate.

The characters could all be people granted super-powers by exposure to meta. They might be young people, closet drug-users, party goers "spiked" with meta without their knowledge and so forth. They could also be unwilling subjects of the DNAscent process (like many *Iron Age* characters), the same process that gave RIOT their powers. In this case, they could be looking for clues about who transformed them and why, assuming they escaped from the GrantCo lab before they could be brainwashed, but also before they could learn very much.

If some players want different kinds of characters, you can combine this approach with some independent heroes investigating meta production and distribution in Freedom City, with all the heroes teaming up when they converge on the drug production lab, as in **New Team**, previously.

MODERN ADAPTATION

If you have a modern-day Freedom City campaign and still want to run *Bad Medicine*, you have a few options in adjusting the adventure to take place after the *Iron Age*.

The first is to simply transplant the elements of the adventure into modern Freedom City. After all, the Labyrinth is still around and GrantCo is still involved in creating DNAscendants and designer drugs. You can either use RIOT as described, or replace them with modern incarnations created by GrantCo (maybe clones of the originals) or a new group of modern villains. Mercenaries like the Power Corps (*Freedom City*, page 175) work well for this.

The other option is to run a parallel adventure: start off with a "flashback" where the players run *Iron Age* characters (such as FORCE Ops, or other predecessors to their modern heroes) tracking down leads in meta production. Then jump forward to the present, with the modern heroes finding leads suggesting someone is producing meta (or a similar designer drug) in Freedom City once again.

META-RAIDING

Once you've decided how the heroes get involved in the adventure (see **Getting the Heroes Involved**), the story begins at a meta lab in the Freedom City Greenbank neighborhood they've been able to track down and are about to raid. Read the following to the players:

From the outside, the building looks just like plenty of the run-down former industrial warehouses in the Greenbank area: windows covered or boarded up, brick and concrete walls covered with layers of gang tags and markings. Still, from your vantage, you make out a few telltale signs: faint light leaks out around the window coverings and fresh marks show the doors have been opened recently. Your contacts told you someone was using the building as a makeshift lab for making meta, and it looks like they were telling the truth.

Allow the players to come up with their own plans for getting into the building and dealing with the criminals inside. The interior of the warehouse is mostly open space, with a few old packing crates and barrels. There's a second story catwalk overlooking the floor below, with a receiving office on the first floor and a manager's office on the second, along with an employee locker room and break room. The ceiling has an old tracked cargo hook that still works, controlled from the catwalk.

The heroes can come in through the front door or the back loading dock, or they can break in through the windows; assume any hero can kick in the door or smash through a window so long as they've got a positive damage bonus. (Otherwise, it would be quite embarrassing for the hero and player.) Naturally, super-powered heroes may have other means of entry, ranging from passing right through the walls to teleporting inside. Let the players use their imagination, awarding them with hero points for a truly dramatic entrance.

NEW THUG CITY

The criminals in the drug lab consist of a technician (Scientist archetype, *M&M*, page 229) and eight thugs (Thug archetype, *M&M*, page 229) armed with submachine guns. There's sufficient drug paraphernalia in the warehouse for even the corrupt FCPD to take the criminals into custody, assuming the heroes leave any for the cops to arrest.

The thugs' response to the heroes' arrival is to try and kill them, while the lab tech (a weaselly fellow named Milo) tries to escape with a briefcase of papers and materials. The thugs are not especially capable combatants, although they may try and use combined attacks (*M&M*, page 155) and similar tactics against the heroes if the opportunity presents itself.

This encounter should be a fairly easy one for the heroes and an opportunity for them to show off and engage in a bit of ultraviolence against some criminal scum. However, you can introduce a few complications into the fight to add variety and give the players some hero points. Possibilities include:

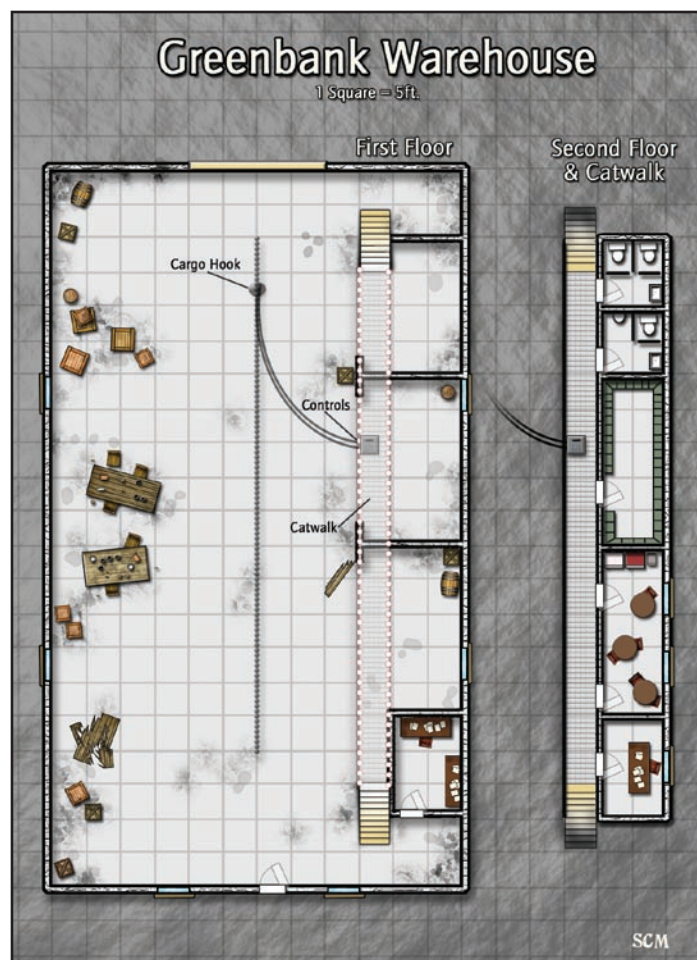
- Milo or a thug uses the cargo hook on the ceiling to grab a hero who doesn't have any movement powers.
- The fight tips over a Bunsen burner and some volatile chemicals, causing a sudden fire.
- Milo throws a flask of chemicals at a hero, getting a lucky shot and causing an unexpected reaction.
- One of the desperate thugs takes a shot of meta and gets lucky, gaining a temporary set of powers, including Enhanced Constitution and Strength 12, Leaping 3, and Super-Strength 3, making him much more of a threat. If you *really* want to give the heroes more of a challenge, you can even pump the thug up to the Hulking Brute archetype (*M&M*, page 216), perhaps even creating a recurring villain for your series.
- One of the criminals stumbles upon a hero's weakness or vulnerability and gets in a surprisingly effective shot.
- Milo could initially get away from the heroes and lead them on a chase through the streets and alleys of Greenbank, either on foot or in a nearby car, depending on how complicated you want to make it for them to stop him.

RUNNING DOWN THE CLUES

The primary goal for this investigative scene is for the heroes to find out about Kyle Harrison's involvement in the production of meta so they can go after Harrison. There are a number of ways in which the heroes can learn this information, described here. Adapt these general guidelines to the flow of the heroes' investigation.

INTERROGATION

Assuming the heroes left any of the people at the drug lab alive and conscious, they can interrogate them to find out more information. The thugs don't know much of anything except that they're paid to guard and transport the goods.



Milo, on the other hand, can direct the heroes to the information found in the following section; all it takes is a successful Intimidation check versus the lab tech's Will save (which is only +3) and he spills what he knows. Telepathy and other powers may also extract the information.

REACH OUT AND TOUCH SOMEONE

A successful search of the drug lab (Search check, DC 15) turns up a scrap of paper with a Freedom City phone number (555-1012) and the initials "K.H." scrawled on it. If heroes trace the number (either via contacts they might have or with a DC 20 Computers check), they find out it's a residential number for a "Harrison, Kyle," with an address for a high-rise apartment in Parkside.

They can also simply call the number and try to get information out of Harrison. This requires a Bluff check against Harrison's Sense Motive check result, modified depending on what information the hero tries to get. Simply getting Harrison to confirm his name or address is an unmodified opposed check, assuming the character uses a reasonably plausible cover story. Getting him to admit to any involvement with the meta lab is considerably more difficult (+10 to Harrison's Sense Motive check) unless the hero has a means of posing as one of Harrison's contacts, which lowers the increase in DC to +5. (Harrison is still wary when dealing with his criminal contacts.)

GLASS HOUSES

Eventually, the heroes will piece together the clues to track down Kyle Harrison and his address. (If they don't, feel free to help them along, or encourage a player to spend a hero point for some useful inspiration in the right direction.) If all else fails and the heroes simply don't pick up on the clues or refuse to investigate them, they can hear about RIOT showing up at Harrison's place and head over there to intercept them. Whatever the case, when they go to check out Harrison's Parkside apartment, read the following:

The Parkside address belongs to a high-rise apartment building overlooking Liberty Park. The building soars some thirty floors from the street, a sleek pillar of glass and steel. A doorman and some discreet private security in the lobby keep out any unwanted visitors, although you bet they're not paid to deal with the likes of you.

Unfortunately for the heroes, they're not the only ones in Freedom City looking for Kyle Harrison. GrantCo knows the executive has leaked information to his supplier, and they've sent RIOT to remove Harrison from the picture so they can start cleaning things up. See **Chapter 5** for details about RIOT and their abilities. They think Harrison is a "corporate leech" responsible for spreading his poison on the streets and that they're doing "justice" by removing him, not knowing the idea comes from the Labyrinth and serves GrantCo's interests.

You can use the reporter archetype (*M&M*, page 228) for Kyle Harrison's game stats, changing the Profession skill specialty to "business administration." The building's doorman is the Butler archetype (with a different Profession skill) while the hired security in the building can use the Thug archetype (*M&M*, pages 226 and 229, respectively).

GETTING IN

Getting into the apartment building can be straightforward or complex, depending on how the heroes approach it and how stealthy they wish to be.

- The most straightforward approach is flying, climbing, or otherwise reaching the outside of the apartment on the fourteenth floor and breaking in. The windows are simple Toughness 1 glass and fairly easy to break, although breaking in sets off an alarm, alerting building security and the police. The windows don't open, so the only way through is to break them or to use powers like Insubstantial or Teleport to bypass them altogether. It is possible to disable the alarm circuits before breaking in with a Disable Device check (DC 25).
- From the inside, the heroes have to get past the security guards in the building lobby, who check to make sure visitors are expected by a building resident. Use the police officer archetype (*M&M*, page 228) for the two guards. The heroes can try to sneak past them (check Stealth against the guards' Notice bonus of +5) or bluff their way past them (check Bluff against the guards' Sense Motive bonus of +5). Various powers can obviously make it easier to bypass the guards. Handle these situations as they arise.
- The door to Harrison's apartment is locked (Disable Device check, DC 25, to bypass it). The door itself is Toughness 3 wood. Simply knocking on the door will bring Harrison over to see who it is, but it requires a successful Bluff check (versus his Sense Motive bonus of +7) to get him to open the door, considering the circumstances.

COMPLICATING MATTERS

The events of this adventure are fairly straightforward: take down the meta lab, track down Kyle Harrison, fight RIOT, and either rescue Harrison from them or pursue them and trigger their trap. If you want, you can further complicate matters by introducing factions interested in meta and Harrison or vying for control of Freedom City and its underworld, using the material from **Chapter 5**. Some possibilities include:

- **The Yakuza:** The ambitious Yakuza is looking for a foothold in Freedom City and meta is an excellent opportunity for them. They might send a squad of ninja (*M&M*, page 227), possibly led by a Evil Ninja archetype from **Chapter 4**, to recover Kyle Harrison or existing samples of the drug and its formula.
- **The Mob:** Likewise, the Freedom City Mob has an interest in the production and sale of meta; it's cutting into their illicit drug business, so they either need to stop the supply or control it for themselves. An up-and-coming Mob boss might try to get control of meta, or Augustus Roman's gang could take interest in it. Some Mob enforcers or more powerful mercenaries could complicate things.
- **The Fearsome:** For some extra super-criminal activity, have Silverback and the Fearsome take an interest (see **Chapter 5**). Silverback might even recognize the telltale signs of GrantCo involvement in the drug's production and try to use that information to his advantage. Keep in mind the Labyrinth sees and hears everything the leader of the Fearsome does, and they might try and manipulate the whole situation to their advantage.
- **The Government:** Finally, the Freedom City government has to be considered in any criminal activity in the city. Mayor Moore or his underlings might want to try and control the supply and sale of meta themselves, or at least cut a deal with whatever faction does control it to look the other way in exchange for a cut of the profits. On the other hand, if the city administration senses weakness, they'll go for a quick collar to score public relations points for "cleaning up the city's streets" in their ongoing "war on drugs." This could get Commissioner Alquist and the POF-SWAT team involved, and they're not going to like vigilante heroes getting in their way.

CONFRONTING HARRISON

When the heroes have a chance to confront and interrogate Harrison about the production of meta, they'll need to either bluff or intimidate the GrantCo exec into telling them what he knows. Encourage the players to roleplay the interrogation, giving them bonuses for good roleplaying and clever interrogation techniques. If the heroes also save Harrison from RIOT, give them a hefty bonus (+5 or more, depending on circumstances), especially if they imply they could always hand him back over to the people trying to kill him....

The interrogation is an opposed check of the hero's Bluff or Intimidate skill and Harrison's Sense Motive skill (+7) or his Will save (+3). It shouldn't be overly difficult to get him to crack, especially if the players have a hero point reserved for this purpose.

Once they get him to talk, the heroes can essentially learn all the information given in the **Adventure Summary**: Harrison works for Grant Conglomerates, and meta is based on something GrantCo researchers have been developing. He sold the formula and some samples to his dealer to pay off the mounting debt from his own drug habit. Harrison doesn't know why GrantCo is developing the drug, but he's fairly sure the company is involved in some shady dealings. He doesn't know the truth about things like the Labyrinth or the DNAscent project, but he is aware the company is engaged in a lot of "genetic research."

Once he talks, Harrison is also more than willing to cut a deal with the authorities in exchange for immunity or protective custody, assuming the heroes are willing to turn him over.

I PREDICT A RIOT

At some point, RIOT shows up at Harrison's place to kill him. Exactly when depends on the flow of your adventure and how this scene plays out; if the heroes are casting about aimlessly or not pursuing clues, RIOT is there as they arrive just in time to prevent Flag-Burner or Armored from delivering the killing blow to Harrison.

On the other hand, if the heroes are diligently following the clues, they can find and talk with Harrison and uncover what he knows before RIOT comes crashing into his apartment. If things lag during the scene—the heroes have trouble getting into Harrison's place, or the interrogation doesn't go well—that's a good time for a confrontation with RIOT to shake things up.

Regardless of when RIOT makes their appearance, it's certainly a setback for the heroes: award them each a hero point, since they're going to need it!

RIOT's primary objective is eliminating Harrison, but they'll make sure the heroes are out of the way first. Ideally, they want to nab Harrison and get away, giving them time to make a proper spectacle out of his "execution," but if things go wrong, they'll try to take out the heroes and kill Harrison on the spot.

Play up the running fight through the high-rise apartment building, using the scenery and setting to full effect and adding as many complications as you like. A few things to keep in mind:

- The windows are Toughness 1 glass. Interior doors are Toughness 3 wood, while interior walls are Toughness 5 wood and sheet-



rock. Remember that electrical wiring and plumbing run inside the walls, offering opportunities for broken pipes and wires.

- While Harrison's apartment is spacious, it's still going to get crowded fast with two super-teams slugging it out! Characters can get knocked through walls into neighboring apartments or out windows to a fourteen-story drop.
- The building has plenty of innocent people in it, providing opportunities to endanger civilians or rescue them. It can range from the comic relief of a hero crashing through a wall to land in the middle of somebody's dinner table or snuggly movie night on the couch, to members of RIOT seizing hostages as a bargaining chip to use, or simply tossing people out of windows as a distraction.
- RIOT's various powers (notably Flag-Burners incendiary powers and S.D. Ivan's cold powers) inflict collateral damage. Odds are the heroes have some collateral damage potential themselves. This can result in things like the building catching fire or suffering severe damage. A *lot* of damage to the building might compromise its structural integrity, threatening to bring the whole thing down! It's left for the GM to decide exactly if or when this happens, but it makes for a very dramatic distraction or opportunity for RIOT to get away. The villains might even damage the superstructure deliberately for this reason.



- Building security might respond to the fight (although they might also be smart enough to stay out of the middle of a super slug-fest!). Likewise, the Freedom City PD's POF-SWAT squad might respond to reports for a fight between capes in Parkside. You can have either or both show up in the middle of the fight for added complications.

RIOT CONTROL

The two most probable outcomes of the fight are that the heroes defeat RIOT or the heroes lose and RIOT gets away with Harrison.

If the heroes win, Harrison gladly surrenders to them and tells them whatever he knows in exchange for his continued safety. He'll surrender to the police if left to his own devices, or the heroes can turn him over if they're so inclined, assuming they don't just off him themselves for being such a low-life and infesting the city with a new drug problem.

If the heroes lose, RIOT takes Harrison and disposes of him elsewhere. You can offer the heroes the opportunity to try and track them down to arrange a rematch if you want to extend the events of the adventure. Otherwise, the trail ends here, and the heroes have to wonder how it is RIOT found Harrison so quickly and what their real interest in the affair was (laying the initial clues to bigger things involving the Labyrinth and Taurus' plans for Freedom City).

If the cops don't show up during the fight, they arrive shortly after it's over, meaning the heroes have to either make a quick exit or take on the Freedom City PD, since their vigilante activities are illegal under the Moore Act. They can leave Harrison or any members of RIOT behind for the cops to find, although they learn later that RIOT escaped police custody (with some covert help from their Labyrinth masters, of course) and are still at large.

CONCLUSION

If the heroes did well in the adventure, award them each a hero point. You might want to give them an additional point if they hit all the points of the adventure: keeping Kyle Harrison alive and essentially cutting off the source of meta in Freedom City.

The trail of the meta supply largely ends with Kyle Harrison. Grant Conglomerates quickly brands Harrison a rogue and criminal element acting entirely on his own (which has the additional merit of being true). They quickly bury any evidence of illegal activity of their part and leave Harrison holding the bag, whether he's dead or alive. If he didn't survive, so much the better, as it makes it easier to lay the blame for everything at his feet.

GrantCo does its best to clean things up and take their research back, but it's difficult to put the genie back into the bottle, and the heroes may find themselves dealing with meta and similar spin-off drugs for some time until they manage to eliminate the trade in it entirely. Depending on how things went, they could also find themselves the targets of RIOT, Grant Conglomerates, or the Labyrinth if they threaten their larger plans. If some or all of the characters gained their powers from exposure to meta, the villains might want to capture them for study in order to replicate their origins.

FURTHER ADVENTURES

If Kyle Harrison survives the events of the *Bad Medicine*, the heroes may be able to convince him to testify against Grant Conglomerates in exchange for reduced charges against him. In that case, Harrison will need protection from company-hired assassins (possibly including RIOT again) in the time leading up to the trial. GrantCo will try to frame Harrison as a corrupt executive selling legitimate company research to drug dealers (which is essentially true, except for the "legitimate" part). At best, Harrison's testimony will bring down a division of GrantCo, and certainly won't threaten the Labyrinth, since Harrison knows nothing about it.

Heroes may continue to investigate GrantCo, leading to efforts to throw them off the trail or simply put them out of the way. Their investigation might even dig up connections to bigger illegal operations, touching on the periphery of the Labyrinth itself. Alternately, they might focus their efforts on the illegal drug trade, bringing them into further conflict with organized crime in Freedom City, and allowing you to use the crime-lords in **Chapter 5** as adversaries in your series.

INDEX

A

Accident (complication).....	48
Addiction (complication).....	48
AEGIS.....	93-95
Aikido (fighting style).....	46
Airport (setting).....	21
Alien Invasion (setting).....	24
Arab World (setting).....	22
Archer.....	97, 116
Archetypes	
<i>Hero</i>	57-67
<i>Supporting Cast</i>	76-78
<i>Villains</i>	78-87
Armored.....	108
Armor Piercing Ammunition.....	57
Assassin.....	79
Assault rifles.....	50, 52
Asylum (setting).....	19
Augustus Roman.....	95

B

Benefit: Enigma (feat).....	44
Black Ops Agent.....	58
Blowguns.....	55
Boxing (fighting style).....	46
Brass knuckles.....	55
Bruiser.....	98

C

Caltrops.....	55
Campaigns.....	69-73
Capitol (setting).....	21
Capoeira (fighting style).....	46
Carl "Dice" DeSanto.....	111
Central America (setting).....	24
Challenge (feat).....	44
City (setting).....	18
Claw, the.....	59
Clubs.....	55
CODE.....	93
Company (setting).....	20
Complications.....	48-50
Compound bows.....	55
Computers (skill).....	44
Countess Caret.....	111
Crime Boss.....	80
crossbows.....	55
crossbows, pistol.....	55

Cult Leader.....	81
Cursed Mystic.....	60
Cyborg.....	61

D

Damaging Escape (feat).....	45
Dark Continent (setting).....	24
Dedicated Dodge (feat).....	45
Demon of Vengeance.....	62
Detective.....	77
DNAscendants.....	112
DNAscent Process.....	116
Drawbacks.....	50
Dying World (setting).....	24

E

Earthquakes.....	55
Electromagnetic Pulses.....	55
El Gato.....	99
Escrima (fighting style).....	46
Evening.....	104
Evil Ninja.....	82
Exotic Weapons.....	51
explosives.....	54
Explosives.....	53
Eye of Justice.....	105
Eyes of Night.....	103-105, 116

F

Factory (setting).....	20
Fallout.....	55
Far East (setting).....	23
Fear-Master.....	112
Fearsome, the.....	106-107
Feats.....	44-45
Fencing (fighting style).....	47
Fictitious Nation (setting).....	22
Fighting Styles.....	46-48
Firearms.....	50-51
Flag-Burner.....	109
Flamethrowers.....	51, 53
Flash Suppressors.....	56
FORCE Ops.....	96-102
Foreign Country (setting).....	21
Furies Three.....	103, 116

G

Gang Member.....	77
Gang Member, mutant.....	77

Gemini	112
Genre Conventions	25-33
Genre Rules	33-35
Grenade launchers	54
Grenade Launchers	53
Grenades	53
Grown-Up Sidekick	63
gun-Toting Mutant from the Future	64

H

Hair Triggers	57
Handclaws	55
Harry Powers	94
Hatred (complication)	49
Hellrider	103
History	88-91
Honor (complication)	49

I

Improvised Weapons (feat)	45
Insurgent	110
Ionizing Radiation	55

J

Jack-a-Knives	112
Jujutsu (fighting style)	47

K

Karate (fighting style)	47
Katanarchists	113
kismet	100
Kismet	116
Knives	55
Krav Maga (fighting style)	47
Kung Fu (fighting style)	47

L

Lab (setting)	20
Labyrinth	113
land mines	
<i>anti-personnel</i>	54
<i>anti-tank</i>	54
Land Mines	53
Laser Sights	57
Legal Entanglements (complication)	49
Little Hawk	111
Luke Bonham	94

M

machine guns	51, 53
Magic Killer	83
Martial Arts	45-48
Mayor Franklin Moore	92

Melee Weapons	55-56
Melinda	113
Mercenary	84
Metahuman Dictator	85
Mobster	77
Moore Administration	92-93
Muay Thai (fighting style)	48

N

Network	101, 116
Nhorox	113
Nightrage	102
Ninja	65
Ninjutsu (fighting style)	48
Nuclear Weapons	53, 55

O

Organized Crime	95
Oyabun Saito Takahashi	95

P

Penthouse (setting)	19
Pepper Spray	55
pistols	50, 52
Plots	72-76
Police Commissioner	92
Police State (setting)	24
Post-Nuclear Earth (setting)	24
Power Levels	42-43
Precise Strike (feat)	45
Prejudice (complication)	49
Price of Freedom Squad	93
Psychiatrist	78
Psycho	86
Psychologist	78

Q

Quick Study (feat)	45
--------------------------	----

R

Rallying Cry (feat)	45
Ranged Weapons	55
Raphael "Rafe" Oliverti	95
Realism	35-41
Recoil Buffers	57
Remote Triggers	57
Reputation (complication)	49
Retired Heroine	78
Reversal (feat)	45
Rifles	50
RIOT	108-111
Rocket launchers	54
Rocket Launchers	53

Roy Alquist 92

S

S. D. Ivan 111
 Secret (complication) 49
 Settings 18-25
 SHADOW 113
 Shock prods 56
 shotguns 50
 Shotguns 52
 Shuriken 55
 Silencers 56
 Silverback 106
 Skills 44
 Sky-Bike 97
 Slam Dance 111
 Slums (setting) 18
 Sniper rifles 50, 52
 Soldiers of Fortune 103
 South America (setting) 24
 Soviet Union (setting) 22
 Starlight Scopes 57
 Streets (setting) 19
 Subject Nine 106
 Submachine guns 50, 52
 Sumo (fighting style) 48

Supernatural Menace 87
 Swords 56

T

Taarvon the Undying 113
 Tae Kwon Do (fighting style) 48
 Tasers 55
 Telescopic Sights 57
 Third World War (setting) 24
 Timers 57
 Tonfa 56

V

Vampiric Avenger 66
 Verman 106
 Vigilante 67

W

Weapon Accessories 56-57
 Whips 56
 Wrestling (fighting style) 48

Z

Zig-Zag (feat) 45
 Zodiac Cartel 113

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