

An adventure for
CHAMPIONS

SHARPER THAN A SERPENT'S TOOTH



ALLEN THOMAS

SHARPER THAN A SERPENT'S TOOTH



Allen Thomas

SHARPER THAN A SERPENT'S TOOTH

Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth

An Adventure For *Champions*

Author: Allen Thomas

Editing & Development: Steven S. Long

Additional Contributions: Steven S. Long

Layout & Graphic Design: Allen Thomas,
Andy Mathews

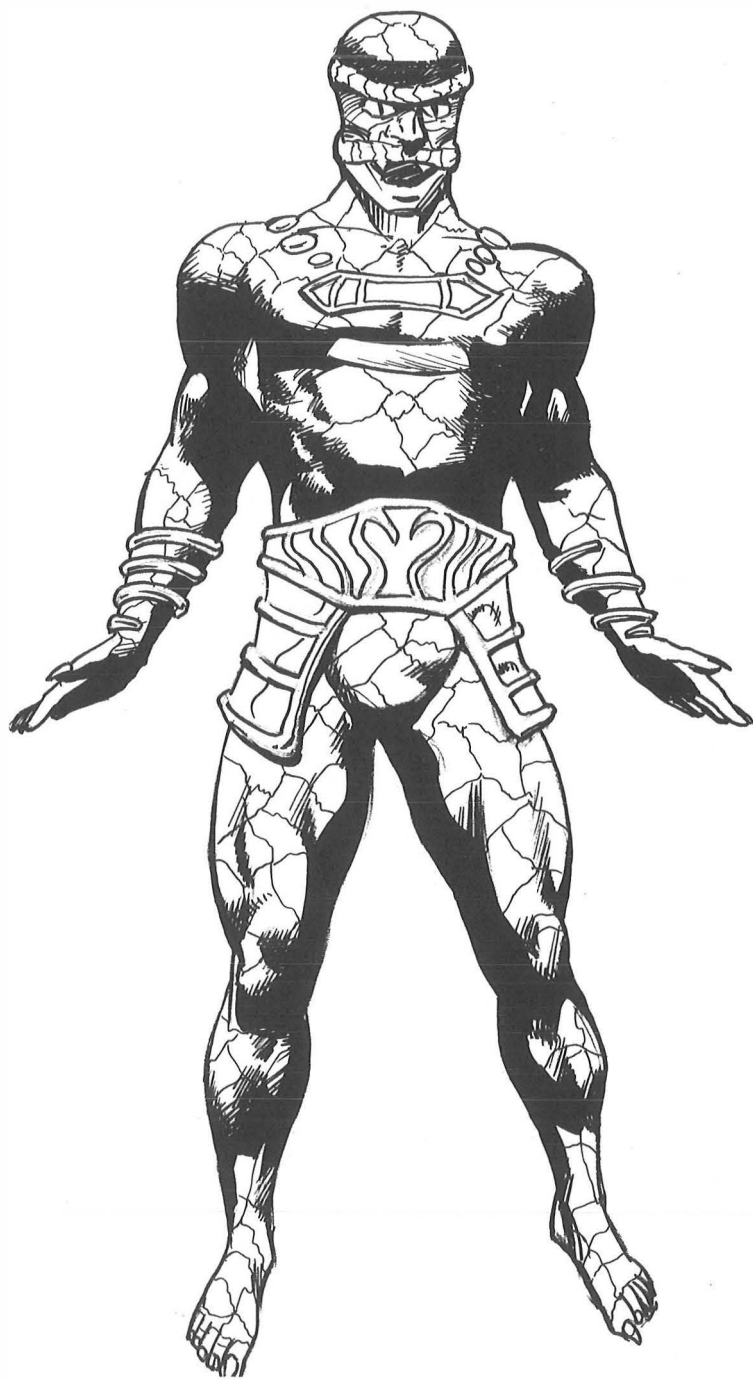
Cover Illustration: Chris Stevens

Interior Illustration: Nate Barnes, Storn
Cook, Jeff Cram, Andrew Cremeans,
Keith Curtis, Jonathan Davenport, Albert
Deschesne, Greg Smith

Cartography: Keith "Mapmaker to the
Heroes" Curtis

A WORD OR TWO OF APPRECIATION

Dedication: We'd like to dedicate this book to
Bruce Harlick, ex-*HERO System* Line Developer,
who first created King Cobra and thus inspired all
the devilry you'll find herein. Thanks, Bruce!



Hero System™ ® is DOJ, Inc.'s trademark for its roleplaying system.
Hero System © 1984, 1989, 2002 by DOJ, Inc. d/b/a Hero Games. All rights reserved.
Champions © 1984, 1989, 2002 by DOJ, Inc. d/b/a Hero Games. All rights reserved.
Fantasy Hero © 2003 by DOJ, Inc. d/b/a Hero Games. All rights reserved.
Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth © 2004 by DOJ, Inc. d/b/a Hero Games. All rights reserved.
Star Hero, Justice Inc., Danger International, Dark Champions, Pulp Hero, Western Hero © 2002 by DOJ, Inc. d/b/a Hero Games. All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or computerization, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the Publisher: DOJ, Inc., 1 Haight Street, Suite A, San Francisco, California 94102.
Printed in the U.S.A. First printing January 2004
Produced and distributed by DOJ, Inc. d/b/a Hero Games.
Stock Number: DOJHERO209 • ISBN Number: 1-58366-025-9
<http://www.herogames.com>

SHARPER THAN A SERPENT'S TOOTH

INTRODUCTION	4
ADVENTURE OVERVIEW	5
ADVENTURE SPECS	7
GM Preparation	7

CHAPTER ONE: SHOWDOWN AT SNAKE GULCH

INTRODUCTION	10
THE HOOK	10
SNAKE GULCH	11
History	11
BACK AT THE RANCH	13
Map Locations	14
Taking The Tour	18
A Day At Snake Gulch	19
Full Frontal Assault	22
THE VIPER NEST	25
1. AGENTS' LIVING AREA	26
OPERATION AREAS	28
2. Security Checkpoint	30
3. Control And Communications Center	30
4. Timothy Blank's Laboratory	30
5. Black Snake Jake's Quarters	31
CONCLUSION	34

CHAPTER TWO: THE OPHIDIAN PLAGUE

INTRODUCTION	36
INVESTIGATION	38
Captured VIPER Agents	38
COIL Infiltrators	39

Cybermind's Virus	40
The Laboratory At Snake Gulch	41
TIMOTHY BLANK AND COIL	42

OUTBREAK	43
THE OPHIDIAN PLAGUE DEFINED	43
Curing The Plague	45
THE PLAGUE HOT ZONE	46
TERROR AT THE TRAIN STATION	47
On The Scene	47
The Subway Platform	50
Notes	50
ULTIMATE SERPENT-MEN	50
Changes To The Ultimates	51
On The Scene	52
Wrapping Up	54

COIL'S ACTIVITIES	56
Results Of PC Actions	56
ENCOUNTERS AND ACTIVITIES	56
SERPENTS AND CYBERMIND	57
Preliminary Information	57
On The Scene	59
Wrapping Up	62

CHAPTER THREE: THE COILS OF THE COBRA

INTRODUCTION	64
History Of The Hothouse	65
RACE THROUGH THE SEWERS	66
IN THE SEWERS	66
Running The Scenario	66
Features Of The Sewer System	67
Boomslang's Tactics	70
COIL ON GUARD	71

THE HOTHOUSE JUNGLE	71
Running The Scenario	71
WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE	71
Features Of The Hothouse Jungle	72
Jungle Locations And Encounters ..	76
INSIDE THE CONTROL CENTER	79

THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL	80
Running The Scenario	80
THE SPIRAL	81
LAST TRAIN OUT	82
In Battle	84
Escape!	86
Ending The Fight	86
CONCLUSION	87

CHAPTER FOUR: KING COBRA AND COIL

COIL	90
GOAL AND METHODS	90
ORGANIZATION	90
THE INNER CIRCLE	91
KING COBRA	92
BOOMSLANG	95
FIRE Drake	98
GORGON	101
KRAIT	103
SLITHER	106
COIL AGENT	108

MAPS AND COMBAT RECORD SHEETS	110-25
--	--------



INTRODUCTION



"Soon, dear Naga, we will be brethren not only in spirit, but body also..."

Doctor Timothy Blank looked down admiringly at the king cobra that slithered across his workbench. He could see the dried skin flaking from its glistening scales. The cobra reared up, its hood flaring, and gently nudged Blank's hand.

"Grown so large already... soon you must join your fellows in the jungle..." He petted the serpent, scraping away the dried skin.

He turned away from the cobra. From the workbench he took up a beaker holding a reddish fluid. He put it to his lips, tilted back his head, and opened his mouth, allowing the thick fluid to ooze past his teeth and fill his mouth with its acrid taste. Soon he could feel the heat of it suffusing his body — a slow, painful burn that filled him with pleasure rather than pain. He knew the fluid was altering his cells, and the DNA at the heart of those cells. He knew the burn was just the result of a chemical change as the fluid flowed through his body and inserted his greatest discovery — the Coil Gene — into his genome. He

knew beyond the burning lay his true desire.

His body began to twitch uncontrollably; he fell to floor. Painfully he crawled to the wall. His whole body convulsed, but the satisfied smile never left his lips. When he reached the wall, he hit a button on a control panel. A barrier of plexiglass slid into place. He hit another button. The room exploded with radiation. He felt the radiation burn through his skin to kill the few cells that repulsed the Coil Gene, searing away what little remained of his humanity.

The radiation stopped; the barrier retracted into the wall. Blank stood up. Now he had no need to admire Naga; his own self was worthy of such attention. Scales covered his arms, and a livid glow emanated from his black-taloned hands. He opened his mouth, and a forked tongue darted across scaly lips and long, glistening fangs. He laughed, an ominous and malevolent hissing.

Naga reared up before him, its mouth open to show its own fangs and its sinuous length dancing.

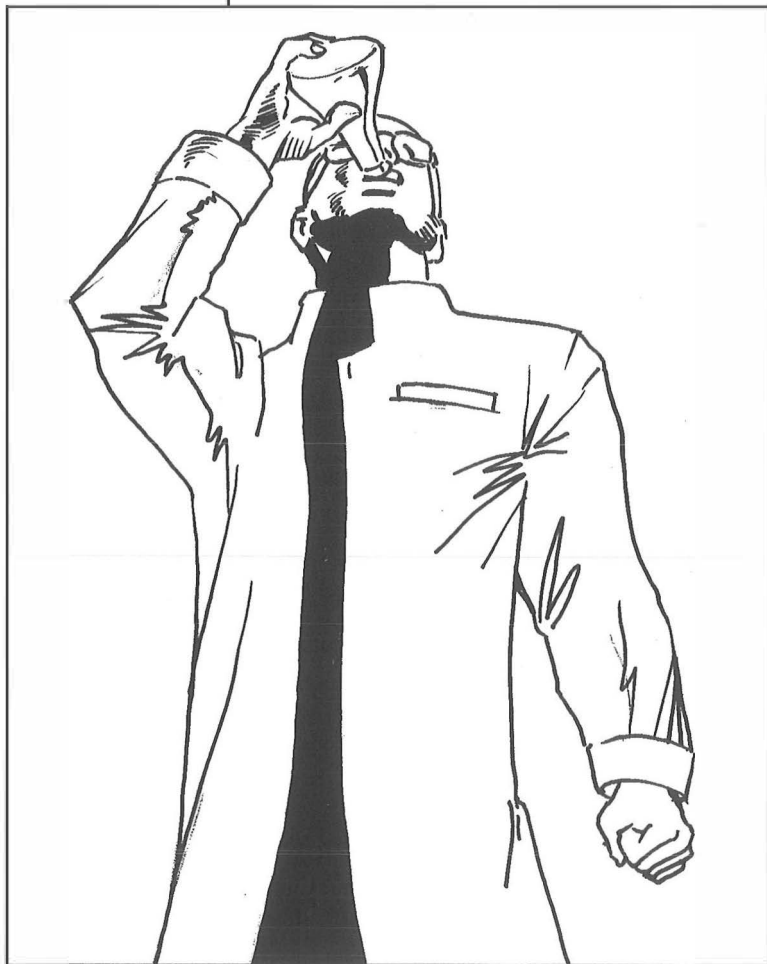
"Naga... only you bear witness to my birth and rightfully you pay me homage... but soon... soon the world will know of my arrival. And then all humanity will pay homage to King Cobra!"

"... AND YOU WILL STRIKE HIS HEEL!"

One of Dr. Timothy Blank's earliest memories is when he realized his first grade teacher was his inferior. Blank sat in class near the front of the room, staring with disgust at the man who spoke too slowly, who knew too little. Blank understood, almost intuitively, that he was the moronic man's superior. Never one to hold his tongue (even at that young age), he spoke his mind, interrupting the insulting lesson on how to color within the lines.

In no uncertain terms he informed the man of his failings. The teacher disciplined Blank for telling the truth, for stating the obvious, and the indignity Blank felt toward the man became a burning rage — a rage he came to feel toward every other authority figure in his life, from his thesis advisor in graduate school, to the head of the Biology Department at the University of Florida, to the Supreme Serpent of VIPER.

That he, Timothy Blank, should be in charge, should command, should rule all other lesser men was obvious. That few others acknowledged his superiority and right to rule fanned the flames of Blank's burning rage. For wasn't knowledge power? And who possessed more knowledge than he? Who possessed a superior intellect? Most importantly, who possessed a greater right to rule?



To Dr. Timothy Blank, the answer was obvious: no one.

When the authorities came to his lab at the University of Florida to arrest him for unauthorized experimentation on humans, he was forced to temporarily abandon his genetic research and seek protection from VIPER. Blank came to understand something: the imbeciles who populated the world lacked the intelligence to acknowledge his superiority. Perhaps they were envious. Maybe they were merely ignorant, unable to recognize his genius.

Whatever the truth, when faced with his superior intellect the ignorant masses resorted to physical force. His first grade teacher used his superior size and strength to discipline Blank. The authorities who forced him to flee the University of Florida came to his lab with their revolvers in hand, ready to gun him down if he protested the indignity of arrest. Superior intellect might give Blank the right to rule, but only superior physical power would make others acknowledge his right.

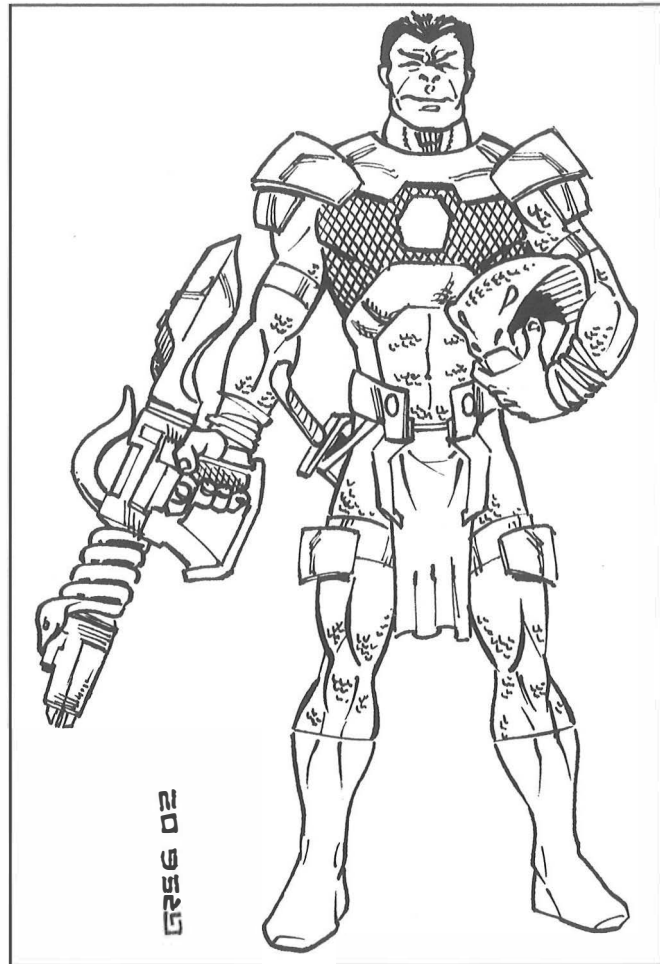
Protected from the law and now with VIPER's considerable resources at his disposal, Blank changed the focus of his research. VIPER's leaders wanted him to create superhumans for their organization. He performed this task gladly, keeping his superiors happy by occasionally providing them with the fruits of his research — the villains Boa Constrictor and Diamondback, the insidious Draysha process. But his true goal was to transform himself into the ultimate superhuman, coupling his intellectual prowess with physical abilities to match.

Blank enticed VIPER's leadership with promises of great things to come, lied to them, and gave them reason to believe his research served only to further VIPER's goals. But all the while he worked to create his greatest invention: the Coil Gene. Not only would the Coil Gene provide Blank with powers far beyond normal men, but also with absolute control over others subjected to the process.

Then came the day when he finished the task. He perfected the Coil-Gene and began a slow transformation... of which the end result would be King Cobra.

At first, the changes were slight — patches of scaly skin, eyes with slit pupils he disguised with contacts — but along with these changes he gained the power to give others the Coil Gene with the merest touch. Over the months, test subjects came and went from his lab, each subjected to the Coil-Gene Touch and now fanatically loyal to Blank. Those who experienced slight changes became a fifth column at work within VIPER, awaiting Blank's orders to strike at the organization. Blank reported the agents who experienced more dramatic changes as "dead after experimentation," but secretly shipped them out to newly-established bases, the first operations centers for Blank's own organization: COIL.

At long last, with the pieces of the nascent COIL in place, Blank defected, leaving his laboratory under false pretenses. Free of VIPER's oversight, he subjected himself to a final change — the most dramatic yet. Blank became King Cobra, a supervillain with power to match all but the might-



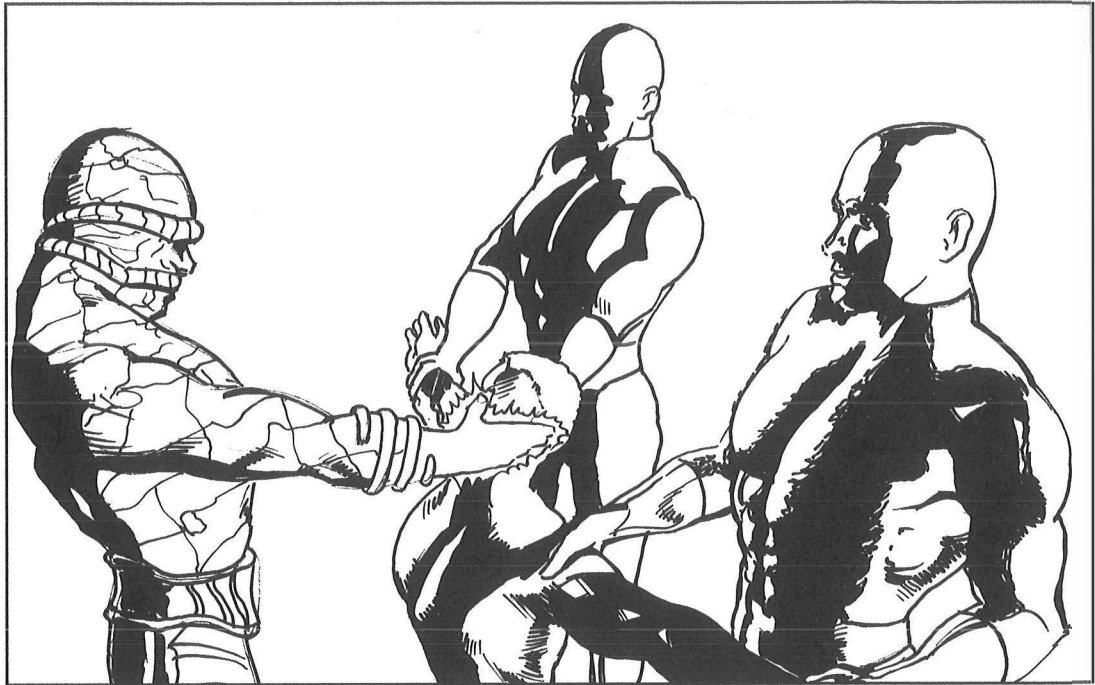
iest superhumans. Now he need no longer fear threats of physical violence. Now let the world bow down and worship their new ruler, King Cobra!

ADVENTURE OVERVIEW

In *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth*, King Cobra sets in motion his plan to create the organization, COIL, and then throw the world into chaos... paving the way for his eventual conquest of the planet.

He begins by defecting from VIPER. A research scientist in the Fix, VIPER's elite technical division, Blank has worked for many years in the field of genetics, focusing mainly on the use of ophidian genetic material in engineering superhumans. While his superiors believed his researches in these areas served only to further VIPER's goals, Blank had an ulterior motive: to create his own organization of fanatically loyal minions and turn *himself* into a superhuman capable of taking over the world.

Just prior to the beginning of *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth*, Blank has created a cadre of fanatically loyal agents and supervillains, the cornerstone of his COIL organization, and transformed himself into the powerful King Cobra. He now reveals COIL's presence to the world in a spectacular and catastrophic fashion suitable to the future emperor of the world!



ACT ONE: SHOWDOWN AT SNAKE GULCH

The PCs receive an anonymous tip about the location of a VIPER Nest in America's southwest. According to the coordinates, the Nest is located at the sight of a ghost town named Snake Gulch. One of many abandoned towns dotting the desert, this place has become a tourist attraction where people can get a glimpse of what life was like over a century ago when gunfighters squared off at high noon and the West was won.

As the superheroes investigate, they learn not all is as it seems at Snake Gulch. Behind the facade of rebuilt buildings and buried beneath the badlands lurks a snake more deadly than any sidewinder or diamondback. And once the PCs penetrate the Nest, the place begins to self-destruct.

Unbeknownst to the PCs, King Cobra is using them and their do-gooding to cover his escape from VIPER. The villainous mastermind leaked the information about the location of the Nest and now he's taking advantage of the chaos of their assault on Snake Gulch to destroy his abandoned laboratory — as well as wipe data of his experiments from the Serpentine Node, the Nest's computer.

ACT TWO: THE OPHIDIAN PLAGUE

King Cobra enacts part two of his plan to throw the world into chaos and topple the existing powers so he can rebuild the political order as he sees fit, as well as accomplish a more immediate goal: topple VIPER and take over its extensive resources.

To accomplish this he unleashes his genetically engineered virus, the Ophidian Plague. Transmitted by saliva, the plague works a strange transformation on a significant percentage of the populace, transforming normal men and women into half-serpent, half-human berserkers. The initial victims of the

plague are VIPER members, and it spreads quickly from there. Before leaving the organization, King Cobra contaminated a large supply of Snake Beer, the drink of choice for VIPER agents worldwide. As VIPER agents around the world imbibe it, they succumb to the effects of the Ophidian Plague and emerge from their hidden Nests to wreak havoc and spread the terrible plague.

The PCs must not only investigate the source of the plague, but also (a) deal with rioting civilians infected with the disease and (b) try to contain the plague's spread. Eventually their investigation leads to a warehouse where the supervillain Cybermind is under attack by King Cobra's agents. Hired to program the computer virus that infected the Serpentine Network and deleted records of Blank's research, Cybermind inserted a sub-routine that sent a copy of the deleted information to his own computer. King Cobra has found out about the betrayal and now he's out for blood!

ACT THREE: IN THE COILS OF THE COBRA

Under the streets of the city, King Cobra and his nascent organization, COIL, lurk while they wait for the chaos in the world above to spread across the globe. Then the new master villain plans to emerge from hiding and take control. When the time is right, he'll give the world a simple choice: acknowledge him as the Emperor of Earth and in return receive the antidote for the Ophidian Plague... or allow society to descend in barbarism.

Close on the heels of Cybermind's attackers, the PCs must penetrate the sewer system and discover the entrance to King Cobra's secret lair, all the while fending off attacks from the villainous Boomsnake. Once inside the lair they must struggle through an artificially-created jungle filled with dangers, fight their way past King Cobra's minions — not just genetically altered agents, but supervil-

lains fanatically loyal to King Cobra — and capture Blank himself before he can escape.

ADVENTURE SPECS

Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth is designed to challenge a group of six PCs built according to the guidelines for Standard Superheroic characters, found on page 15 of the *HERO System 5th Edition* rulebook. If the PCs fall outside these guidelines, you should adjust the encounters accordingly. The text includes suggestions for tailoring the encounters to challenge the PCs, and the "Campaign Use" section of the villains' descriptions has advice for altering their power levels.

The first act of the adventure takes place in the southwestern United States at a former ghost town turned into a tourist attraction that's actually a front for a VIPER Nest. The remainder takes place in a "generic" city and should easily fit into your campaign city. Boxed text in Chapter Two provides advice for customizing the adventure to Millennium City or for more extensive use of VIPER.

Although the organization VIPER figures prominently in this adventure, *VIPER: Coils Of The Serpent* is not necessary to use this adventure in your campaign. But if you do own that book, boxed text titled *VIPER Bites* provides advice for fleshing out the action with villains, agent types, and equipment described in it.

GM Preparation

Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth is an epic adventure spanning the course of several game sessions. In comic book terms, it's a story arc requiring four or more issues to untangle King Cobra's byzantine, world-threatening plot and thwart his evil plans. Below are a few tips to help you run the adventure successfully.

ADJUSTING THE ENCOUNTERS, IN GENERAL

Advice for tailoring specific encounter is given in the appropriate sections, but many of the encounters involve agents, both from VIPER and COIL. In general, an easy way to increase or decrease the difficulty of an encounter is to change the number of agents present, and you should keep this mind when preparing to run the adventure for your PCs.

Another general note: the last four encounters in this adventure potentially take place one after another with little time to recover between fights, so you should minimize the use of Killing Attacks. While PCs recover STUN quickly after a battle, recovering BODY takes longer. If the PCs have Healing or access to Healing, then no problem. If not, be careful about which blaster rifles you issue to COIL agents. To limit the number of Killing Attacks, simply equip the majority of agents with Standard COIL Blaster Rifles, COIL Tangler Rifles, and COIL Thunderclap Rifles, and avoid using

Enhanced COIL Blaster Rifles, Augmented COIL Blaster Rifles, and COIL Laser Rifles.

TRAVELING HEROES

The first part of the adventure takes place in New Mexico, the second part at different locations in your campaign city. To get to these locations, your PCs are going to need transportation. And if they have a team vehicle — or maybe borrow one from PRIMUS or UNTIL — the problem is solved. Otherwise, the PCs can make it to Snake Gulch simply by booking seats on the next flight out, then renting a car at the Albuquerque airport and driving the rest of the way. Moving about the city can involve getting "air lifts" from the police or traffic helicopters.

READ THE ADVENTURE

You should read *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth* from beginning to end, and familiarize yourself with both the adventure's plot and its chain of events. As you read, take notes: your initial impressions, rules to look up, events that trigger a PC's Disadvantages, places where you can insert existing campaign elements like NPCs and organizations, and anything else you feel might be important. Also be sure to *visualize* how a particular scene will play out during the game. Imagine the scene, especially what the NPCs say and do and how the PCs likely respond. This helps you anticipate the players' actions and prepare for them ahead of time.

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

Designed to take into account a variety of PC approaches to the situation as well as multiple angles of investigation, *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth* contains many different options so you can customize it as necessary. That said, there is an order of events underlying the action. The list below is a guideline you can use to keep things organized. But it's only a *guideline* to help you run the adventure; don't let it get in the way of having a good time. If the PCs are enjoying the investigation, allow them more time to investigate. If you want to insert your own scenarios into the mix, do so. (Chapter Two is a particularly good place to insert adventures of your own devising.)

- 1) *Showdown At Snake Gulch* is the first part. It takes about one 4-6 hour game session to complete, maybe two at most if the PCs decide to take the tour and enjoy roleplaying with the actors. Any initial investigation of the discoveries in the VIPER Nest can take place at the end of the assault on the Snake Gulch or between game sessions.
- 2) The second part of the adventure starts with the outbreak of the Ophidian Plague. It mainly concerns investigating the plague as well as the sub-scenarios, *Terror At The Train Station* and *Ultimate Serpent-Men*. By the end of the session, the PCs have ideally made brief contact with Cybermind.
- 3) The third session consists of *Serpents And*

INDEX OF VILLAINS

Most of the supervillains in this adventure are described at the end of this book on pages 92-107. You can find the others who play a part in Chapter Two in *Conquerors, Killers, And Crooks*, as follows:

Cybermind

Conquerors, Killers, And Crooks, page 141

The Ultimates

Conquerors, Killers, And Crooks, pages 101-114

Cybermind and *Race Through The Sewers*. The action is fast-paced as the fight moves quickly to the iron portal that leads to the Hothouse, King Cobra's lair hidden below the city. The episode ends with the PCs opening the portal to see the large — and dangerous! — jungle within.

- 4) The climactic conclusion of *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth* typically takes place in the fourth game session. The PCs make their way through the jungle, overcoming monstrous snakes and the even more monstrous Gorgon, to the elevator leading down. They then descend into the depths of King Cobra's lair to confront the madman and the rest of his inner circle as the villains try to escape. Ideally the action takes place in one game session.

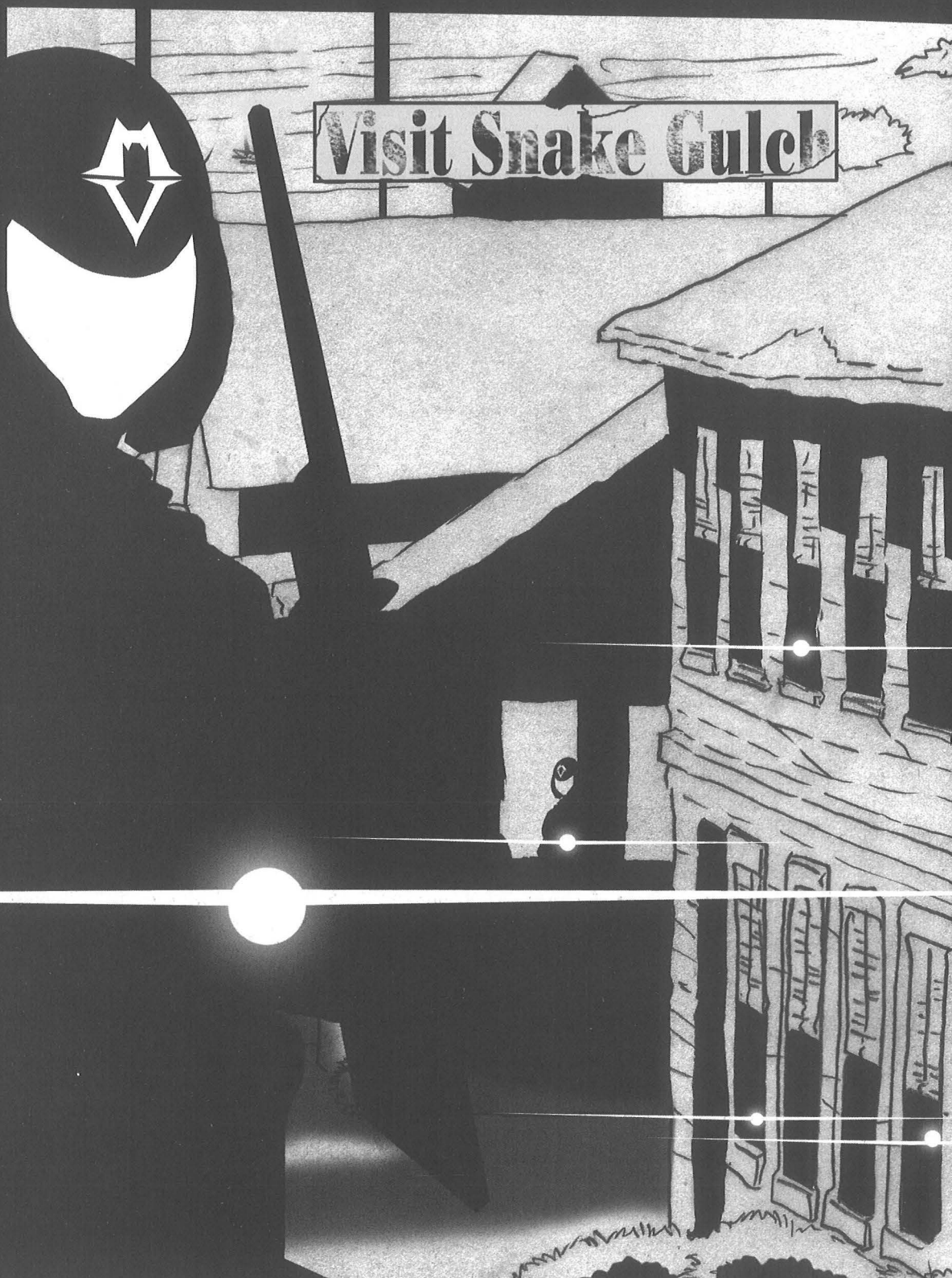
AS A STAND-ALONE ADVENTURE

A superhero team, The Champions, is described on pages 181-195 of *Champions*. If you want to run *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth* independent of a campaign, these superheroes make excellent characters for your players. With their variety of useful Skills and Powers, the Champions make perfect adversaries for King Cobra and COIL.

Start the action with the superheroes receiving the postcard at their base, Homestead, and go from there. The Ophidian Plague strikes in Millennium City and you can use the information in *Meanwhile... In Millennium City* to customize the action to that locale — and to make matters more exciting, Homestead is located downtown, at the heart of the plague's hot zone!



chapter one:



SHOWDOWN AT SNAKE GULCH

INTRODUCTION



Sharper Than A *Serpent's Tooth* begins when the PCs receive a piece of information from a mysterious source. The message is simple: 35n, 106w. The coordinates represent the longitude and latitude for a location a little less than three miles from Moriarty, New Mexico. Located in Torrance County in the central part of the state, Moriarty is a small town in the high plains about 40 miles east of Albuquerque's airport. There's not much around Moriarty, just one half-way interesting location: a ghost town converted into a tourist attraction named Snake Gulch.

THE HOOK

How the PCs receive the information is up to you. If the superheroes have a publicly known headquarters, the message arrives on the back of a postcard delivered by the United States Postal Service. The picture on the postcard shows a ghost town with a nearby billboard stating: "WELCOME TO SNAKE GULCH!" On the back are the typed coordinates, 35n, 106w, and the message: "Thought this might interest you."

If the PCs are not publicly available, but work for the government or have close contacts with UNTIL or PRIMUS, they receive a request to investigate the site from that organization. Their contact reports receiving the same mysterious message as above. The agency has already sent a pair of field agents to investigate the site and neither of those agents reported back. They were last heard from while boarding a bus to Snake Gulch. Authorities presume the agents are dead, and now they want to send in "the big guns" to investigate further.

If the PCs are more difficult to get hold of, use your imagination. Maybe they're in the midst of a much needed vacation from superheroics when they stumble on the suspicious activity at Snake Gulch. Or maybe, after raiding a VIPER Nest in their campaign city, they discover some incriminating evidence about the goings-on at the tourist attraction.

"WHY US?"

Why did the PCs receive the postcard and not someone else? That's a good question and one you have to answer for yourself based on the events in your campaign preceding *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth*. Here are some possibilities to help you:

- If the PCs are high on VIPER's "Most Wanted" list, then King Cobra chooses them because he hopes the animosity between the superheroes and criminal organization distracts or other-

wise impedes both groups from tracking him down (*i.e.*, the heroes, so accustomed to fighting VIPER, won't look for a different culprit, and VIPER hates the heroes so much its leadership won't ask them for help).

- If the PCs are inexperienced or relatively unknown, King Cobra hopes they not only invade the Snake Gulch facility, but die trying. He feels certain that highly publicized groups like the Champions would successfully take down the Nest and survive; but he's less certain about your PCs and hopes to kill two birds with one stone.
- The PCs operate out of the same city where King Cobra has his headquarters. Because of this, he thinks it likely they'll try to track him down during the outbreak of the Ophidian Plague, and he hopes the attack on Snake Gulch kills (or at least cripples) them and renders them harmless. Basically, King Cobra is trying to get the superheroes out of the way.

INVESTIGATING

The PCs can learn very little by investigating the message. The envelope bears a postmark from Albuquerque, dated four days before it arrived. The town of Moriarty is small, population 1,717 (2000 Census estimate). Founded in 1901, it was a stop along the New Mexico Central Railroad, then later changed its location to take advantage of the new highway, Route 66. It still exists mainly as a rest stop on the new highway, Interstate 40, that runs between Albuquerque and Santa Rosa. The nearest major airport is in Albuquerque and the town itself boasts two motels, a Super 7 and a Vacation Inn, usually frequented by truck drivers, people driving from one place to someplace else, and visitors to Snake Gulch. For more information on Snake Gulch, see *Snake Gulch* starting on page 11.

If one of your PCs possess Retrocognition or similar "object reading" powers, the impressions he gleanes from the postcard are vague. The postcard wasn't in the hands of the informant long enough to pick up any concrete impressions — the PC only senses that the informant takes great pleasure in sending the message, as if he were reaping his revenge or otherwise gaining satisfaction for some wrong done to him. The PC does know the postcard truly came from a gift shop at Snake Gulch where it sat in a spiral rack for many years.

WHAT'S GOING ON?

King Cobra sent the message. He and his followers have already vacated the Nest, justifying their absence to the Nest Leader by claiming they

need to travel and consult with other scientists in VIPER's employ about the results of Dr. Blank's recent breakthroughs in Project Mendel, a program to mass produce superhumans via genetics. Considering this perfectly reasonable, the Nest Leader hasn't reported it to his superiors.

King Cobra plans to use the discovery of the VIPER Nest, and the superheroes' subsequent attack that's certain follow, to cover his tracks. Two of King Cobra's undercover agents — COIL infiltrators who can conceal their serpentine features — remain in the Nest. One COIL infiltrator has orders

to set off explosives when the superheroes enter the Nest, obliterating Blank's former laboratory. The second has orders to upload the virus programmed by Cybermind into the Serpentine Node and erase the files concerning his most recent experiments. Both have orders to expedite the superheroes' attack however they can without risking discovery until the moment to accomplish their respective missions arrives.

King Cobra has maneuvered the pieces into place; now he only needs the right moment to strike!

SNAKE GULCH



The legendary Old West, where gunfighters faced off at high noon and the law was only kept by a fast gun and nerves of steel, holds a special fascination for Americans — it's a romantic period in history with legendary figures like Wild Bill Hickok, Buffalo Bill Cody, and Wyatt Earp. In the country's Southwest, ghost towns still stand in the badlands, a testament to the wide-flung and lawless communities that sprang up during the latter part of the nineteenth century. It's only natural that at one of these ghost towns, enterprising entrepreneurs would refurbish the buildings and put on a show for tourists, giving them a first-hand glimpse of what life was like when the West was won. But that such a tourist attraction would serve as a front for the villainous organization VIPER might not be so obvious!

History

See the "pamphlet" on page 12 for details about what the PCs can discover from the promotional brochure for Snake Gulch (available on-line, along with a map and directions from Albuquerque, at www.snakegulch.com):

THE TRUE STORY

In 1956, VIPER purchased the land through two agents using the false names Gerald and Evelyn McClane. Over the next four years VIPER constructed the underground facilities for a Nest, and then the aboveground tourist attraction that would become the front for their operations. The tourist attraction provided an excuse for strangers in the area to come and go from the site, and allowed VIPER to make deliveries to the Nest without arousing suspicion. The Nest has seen on and off use over the decades depending on VIPER's priorities at the time. For the last four years, it's served as a communication center for Nests operating in America's western states, as well as the research lab for Dr. Timothy Blank. Currently, it's fully staffed with forty-three VIPER agents under the command

of Black Snake Jake, the Nest Leader (his character sheet's on page 32). Many of the agents serve as actors in the ghost town and live full-time in the Nest; only Gerald and Mary McClane reside above ground, inhabiting the second floor of the main house at the Sliding V Ranch.

WHAT THE PCS CAN DISCOVER

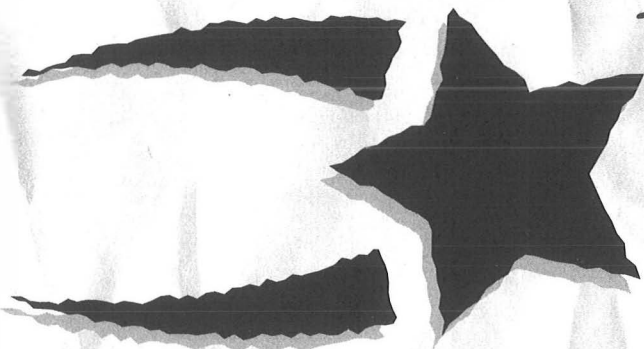
Below are some of things the PCs can discover before visiting the site itself:

The Historical Record: Investigating the history of nineteenth-century New Mexico turns up no record of Snake Gulch or James "Patch" McClane. The first recorded information about the site is when Gerald and Evelyn McClane purchased the land in 1956 and four years later applied for a business license under the name Wild West Tours and Entertainment, Inc. Gerald, Jr. and Mary McClane came into the land when Gerald's parents (Gerald, Sr. and Evelyn) died in 1986; they've owned it ever since.

The Locals At Moriarty: Questioning old-timers in the nearby town of Moriarty reveals that until 1961, when Snake Gulch opened to the public for the first time, no ghost town stood on the site. Some families in Moriarty have visited Snake Gulch and report having a good time. None of the actors at Snake Gulch live in town — they're all out-of-towners who live on the site. They occasionally come into town on a Friday or Saturday night, but there isn't a whole lot to do in Moriarty. On the rare occasions they do visit town, they keep mainly to themselves. (The VIPER agents residing at Snake Gulch travel to Albuquerque if they want a night on the town.) All in all, the town's residents don't know much about what goes on at Snake Gulch, although they're in no way suspicious of it.

Tour Guides: Some tour guides for the areas list Snake Gulch; it's generally not highly rated though. Descriptions like: "over-priced," "historically inaccurate," and "cheesy" are common.

Snake Gulch



Eounded in 1875, Snake Gulch has a short — but colorful! — history. The McClane family was the first to settle the area, and many others followed on their heels. The family's patriarch, James "Patch" McClane, had it on good authority that the railroad was coming through and when it did, he stood to make a mint! It's said that Wyatt Earp and his family stayed in Snake Gulch on the way to Tombstone, and that Doc Holliday shot the local saloon keeper for cheating at cards. Some folks claim Billy the Kid robbed the Snake Gulch Bank not once, but twice! And those are just the famous *out-of-towners* who are a part of Snake Gulch's rich history.

Twenty years later, the railroad hadn't arrived, would never arrive, and Patch McClane's good authority didn't look so good anymore. Many of the folk picked up and left for Alaska — there was gold to be had up north, and those folk who missed out on the get rich quick days in California weren't going to miss out this time! Some moved on to Santa Fe or Albuquerque. And some of those ol' cowboys and showgirls and all those other colorful characters just kind of faded away into the badlands.

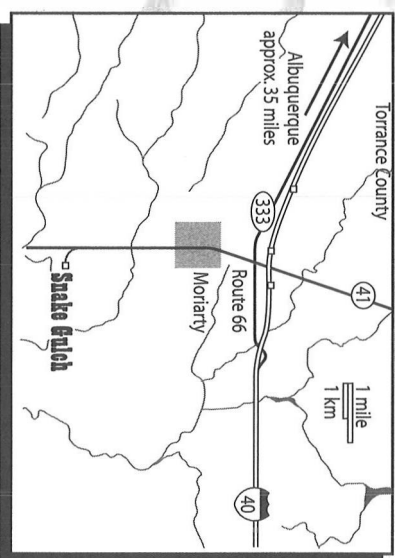
Snake Gulch stood abandoned for close to 80 years. Only the local high school kids ever visited — and we don't want to think about what

they got up to! Then my folks, Mr. and Mrs. Gerald McClane, whose great-great-granddaddy was ol' Patch McClane himself, came to visit their family roots. Well, they saw the buildings and had a mighty good idea. They thought, "Why don't we refurbish these buildings and put on a show for visitors. Folks love the Old West and we'll give them a taste of what life was like back then."

And that's what we've been doing ever since.

So come on down to the heart of New Mexico and pay us a visit. Take a gander at what life was like back then. Visit the Sliding V Ranch and watch some cowboys break broncos. See a showdown at High Noon. And maybe if you're lucky, you'll get to see bank robbers and even a trial with Judge Jebediah "Hard Justice" Smith.

Open five days a week. Call for prices and reservations. Discounts available for groups.



Calling The Phone Number: If the PCs call the number on the brochure Monday through Friday, 8:00 AM to 6:00 PM, a man answers the phone, "Snake Gulch. This is Pete in Reservations. How can I help you?" If the PC stays on the line, "Pete" briefly describes the tour offered at Snake Gulch (see below). Tickets are sixty dollars a person, which includes meals (the price is purposefully high to dissuade visitors, but not so high as to arouse suspicion), and group rates and senior citizen discounts are available (10% off). If they call outside of those hours, the PCs get a recorded message that states the place's hours and asks the caller to call back. Everything seems on the up-and-up, except one thing....

While the phone is ringing, ask the PC for a PER Roll. If successful, he hears quiet clicking noises on the line. With a successful Bugging roll, the PC thinks the call might have been recorded, tapped, re-directed, or otherwise interfered with. (In truth, the call was re-directed from the McClane's "offices" in the ranch house to the communication center in the VIPER Nest where the agent on duty answered it.)

BACK AT THE RANCH

After investigating, the PCs have two choices: they can check out the location, either via infiltration or taking the tour, or simply attack the place. The sections below detail both approaches; you might have to mix-and-match to best suit your player's actions. Some general information about the place and advice for handling the PCs' actions is as follows:

RADIO BROADCASTS

The Snake Gulch facility is a communications center for VIPER operations in the western part of the United States, and the most suspicious, easily detected activity occurring at the place are frequent radio transmissions. Receivers and transmitters are disguised as:

- The weathercock located atop the roof of the barn at the Sliding V Ranch.
- The lightning rod atop the steeple at St. Angelo's church.
- The rail switch halfway between the Train Depot and the barn housing the train.

The transmissions are cleverly concealed and scrambled to avoid casual detection. A PC with Detect Radio Transmissions, Radio Perception/Transmission, High Range Radio Perception, or similar Enhanced Senses can detect the broadcasts with a successful PER Roll (or Systems Operation roll, if he uses equipment) if he's in the immediate area and concentrates on the task. The PC suffers a -4 penalty to the roll. (Deciphering the scrambled messages is another matter entirely and left to your discretion. If VIPER is a major villain in your campaign, this is a good place to introduce clues that point to the location of other Nests and plot seeds for future adventures involving the organization.)

SNEAKING AROUND AND SURVEILLANCE

Agents working in the Nest's control and communication center constantly surveil the aboveground areas of Snake Gulch. Cameras and microphones, often concealed in light fixtures and the frames of photographs, monitor all inside areas. Any PC attempting to discover these devices suffers penalties: -3 if using Bugging; -4 if using Concealment; and -5 if using an ordinary PER Roll. A cursory inspection reveals none of the devices.

Cameras, often concealed at the crook of a peaked roof or a door frame, also cover all outside areas in the town and at the Sliding V Ranch. For simplicity's sake, sneaking around outside only requires a successful Stealth roll. You should ask for a roll as often as seems appropriate, and definitely whenever the PC enters or exits a building. The PCs suffer the same penalties for locating the outside cameras as the inside devices.

All of the cameras have Nightvision, but you should provide the stealthy PC with a +2 bonus to his Stealth roll if he sneaks around at night.

Mental Powers

Mental shields protect the underground Nest from discovery; treat it as 15 points of Mental Defense (the special effect is "hard to find with Mental Powers" rather than "resistant to Mental Powers"). The aboveground actors, however, have no protection from Mental Powers and use of Telepathy on any one of them quickly reveals he's a VIPER agent (*i.e.*, the Telepath picks up unvoiced complaints about the Nest Leader, a desire to transfer out of the Nest, and similar disgruntled thoughts).

If the PCs discover the actors' true profession, that's fine. Remember, the mystery here isn't that VIPER operates out of Snake Gulch, and the goal of this part of the adventure isn't to stymie the PCs' attempts to locate and attack the Nest. The goal is to provide the characters with clues about what happens later in the adventure, and to intrigue the players with the plot.

VIPER AGENTS AND EQUIPMENT

For the VIPER agents at Snake Gulch, you have a couple of choices. You can use the Master Villain's Agent (Skilled) and/or Master Villain's Agent (Competent) described on pages 177 and 178 of *Champions*, or the VIPER Agent (Basic) described on page 147 of *Champions Universe*. If you own a copy of *VIPER: Coils Of The Serpent*, a book describing the criminal organization in all its malevolent glory, you can refer to the boxed text, *VIPER Bites: Snake Gulch Personnel*, which provides a summary of the agents, their respective Package Deals, and preferred equipment.

The remainder of this chapter assumes the use of VIPER Agent (Basic) from *Champions Universe*, with any changes to equipment noted in the text.

Though Snake Gulch is not an operations center, Nest Leaders over the years have implemented some preventative measures in case enemies attack. One of these is that actors carry energy blasters disguised as antique firearms: derringers,

TACTICAL ADVICE

At night all of the agents except the McClanes are inside the VIPER Nest, and attacking at night may seem like a good idea, since the PCs can approach “under cover of darkness.” Additionally, the ghost town is unstaffed and unless the PCs find the hidden weapons, it might seem virtually unguarded. But it could also turn into a fiasco since all of the agents except the McClanes are inside the VIPER Nest with their full gear. In other words, once the PCs find the entrances to the Nest, they face a complement of 43 VIPER agents armed and ready for them!

During the day, on the other hand, many of the agents — namely the twenty-two actors — only have blasters and aren’t wearing armor. Superheroes should find these actors easy pickings. In fact, they might find themselves pulling punches for fear of accidentally killing someone. With twenty-two inadequately armed and armored agents out of the way, an assault on the Nest gets much easier.

If the PCs don’t think of this on their own, you should ask for a Tactics roll. If successful, mention this to them.

Colt Peacemakers, and Remington rifles. Each actor in the ghost town has access to at least one type of blaster, even if only a derringer concealed on his person. The agent has no other equipment — most especially, no armor — on his person while above-ground working in the ghost town as an actor. The game statistics for the disguised blasters are:

Derringer: *Energy Blast 6d6 (30 Active Points); OAF (-1), 4 Charges (-1). Total cost: 10 points.*

Colt Peacemaker: *Energy Blast 7d6 (35 Active Points); OAF (-1), 12 Charges (-0). Total cost: 17 points.*

Remington Rifle: *Energy Blast 8d6, 32 Charges (+¼) (50 Active Points); OAF (-1) (total cost: 25 points) **plus** +2 OCV (10 Active Points); OAF (-1) (total cost: 5 points). Total cost: 30 points.*

Increasing Agents’ Toughness

A simple way to increase the difficulty of an assault on Snake Gulch is to provide the actors with defenses. If you feel your PCs will find the attack too much of a cakewalk, you can give each of the actors a force field generator disguised as a regular belt and large silver buckle. Embossed on the buckle is the brand of the Sliding V Ranch, an oblique “V.”

Force Field Belt: *Force Field (8 PD/8 ED), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½) (24 Active Points); IIF (-¼). Total points: 19 points.*

Map Locations

The sections below provide brief summaries of the tourist attractions at Snake Gulch, including a description of the building and the names of the actors found at the site. Also described is the actor’s “spiel” to help you add some color to the locations if the PCs decide to investigate while taking the tour.

1. Lonesome Dove Boarding House

A large three-story building, the boarding house has ten bedrooms on the top two stories; the first story contains a kitchen, dining room, parlor, and sitting room. Out back there’s a chicken coop. Tourists eat breakfast and dinner here.

Playing The Part: Mr. Solomon “Solly” James and Mrs. Sally James run the Lonesome Dove. Mr. James is a tall, taciturn man who wears glasses. Mrs. James is a thin woman with brown hair and a high-pitched voice. In their roles, Mr. James says little, answering most questions with “I reckon so” or “I don’t rightly know”; if the PCs ask a question that requires a more detailed response, he refers them to his wife. Mrs. James is more than happy to tell them all about their history. She says they followed ol’ Patch McClane out here — his wife, Emily, and Mrs. James went to school together back in Virginia — and they’ve got big hopes for their little Lonesome Dove once the railroad rolls through. She wants the Lonesome Dove to be the nicest boarding house in the whole territory, and to be honest, she thinks it already is.

Snake Gulch Materials Summary

Here’s a summary of the BODY and DEF of the materials around the ghost town.

Object	DEF and BODY
Billboard	DEF 4, BODY 3
Building Wall, Brick	DEF 5, BODY 5
Building Wall, Wood	DEF 4, BODY 5
Cactus Gun	DEF 6, BODY 6
Jail Cell Bars	DEF 7, BODY 5
Noose	DEF 3, BODY 3
Saloon Chair	DEF 4, BODY 4
Satellite Dish	DEF 6, BODY 3
Secret Entrance (Depot)	DEF 16, BODY 20
Secret Entrance (Rail)	DEF 12, BODY 8
Secret Entrance (Saloon)	DEF 8, BODY 12
Train Car	DEF 8, BODY 15

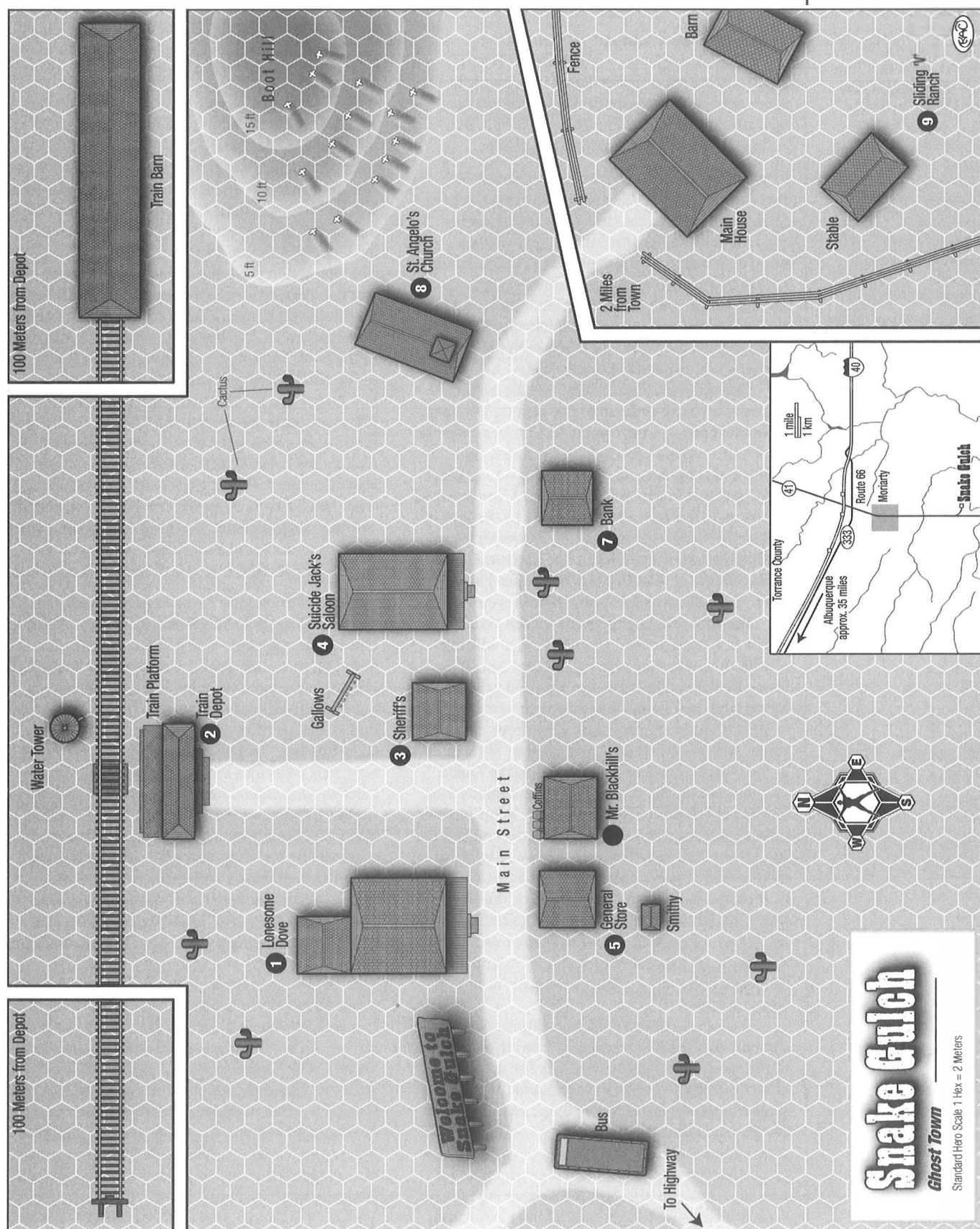
2. Train Depot

About twenty meters back from Main Street is a newly-built train depot — a roofed floor of gray flagstone with a small ticket station at the east end. The tracks only run for a hundred meters in either direction before ending. In the east is a long, narrow barn. If asked the McClanes explain that it’s true the railroad never came through Snake Gulch, but they get so many questions about it, they hope to add a genuine steam engine someday... but trains aren’t cheap and the exhibit isn’t finished yet.

Across the tracks from the train depot is a wooden water tower. Hidden inside the water tower is a satellite dish used in defense of the Nest. Inside the barn is a train with an engine, two cars, and a caboose. The engine looks like a steam engine, but is a facade for a fully modern gasoline-burning engine. Inside the caboose is a second engine. The tops of the two cars slide back, allowing large cannons to emerge from inside. For more about these defenses, see *Full Frontal Assault* on page 22.

One of the concealed entrances to the Nest is located here; VIPER personnel use this as a secondary entrance/exit for the Nest. A section of rail, just north of the depot and marked on the map, slides down and back to reveal a ladder leading downwards. Finding the entrance requires examining the tracks and a successful Concealment or PER Roll at -2. The entrance can only be opened from just inside or remotely from the control and communication center. Opening it from the outside requires a successful STR Roll at -6. The section of rail is DEF 12, BODY 8 if a PC wants to bash it in.

In addition to the personnel entrance, the entire train depot proper slides to the east, revealing a large loading and unloading area as well as a garage for an armored transport vehicle (the entire floor of the area rises up to surface level). For the armored transport, you can use the M113A2 APC listed on page 325 of *Hero System 5th Edition*, or the Phalanx Armored Van listed on page 122 of *VIPER: Coils Of The Serpent*. Like the entrance for personnel this one can only be opened from the inside or the control and communication center. Finding it is difficult, but if a PC with Tracking examines the ground directly east of the depot he spots telltale



ACTORS NOT AT A LOCATION

Some of the actors — namely the Cleeland Boys during the bank robbery, the Black Toms from the gunfight, and Judge Hard Justice Smith — don't have assigned locations. The Cleeland Boys spend time at the ranch when not robbing a bank or being hung. The Black Toms and Judge Smith remain in the VIPER Nest, only coming aboveground when it's time for their part in the show. The Black Toms come out during the bank robbery to take their places in Suicide Jack's Saloon. Judge Smith comes out while the tour is at the Sliding V Ranch. You should keep this in mind if the PCs attempt to spy out entrances to the VIPER Nest, since the emergence of the actors is a good clue.

marks — two shallow gouges in the earth — with a successful roll. Forcing it open requires a successful STR Roll at -9. The “door” covering the hidden area is heavily armored — DEF 16, BODY 20.

3. Sheriff's Office And Jail

A small, single story structure, the Sheriff's office also serves as Snake Gulch's jail. Inside is one room with three wooden desks; against the north wall are three jail cells. The bars are DEF 7, BODY 5. Out in back is a gallows with five nooses.

Playing The Part: The Sheriff, Willy Daniels, and two deputies, Zach Wild and Sam Kaster, can be found here most of the time. Sheriff Daniels has black hair, a handlebar mustache, and wears a ten-gallon hat and tin star pinned to his shirt. He speaks in a loud voice and is prone to exaggeration. Zach and Sam are in their twenties with blond hair; they don't say much. Sheriff Daniels speaks for the two deputies; they just nod or shake their heads, agreeing with whatever Daniels says.

Somehow, the Sheriff turns every question — sometimes subtly, sometimes not so subtly — into an opportunity to brag about when he was a deputy for Wyatt Earp back in Dodge City, Kansas. He claims it was because he was such a good upholder of the law that Patch McClane brought him to Snake Gulch, and Daniels accepted because he thought it only right and proper he put his God-given talent for upholding law and order to good use out here in the middle of “bandit country.” It's just like what Wyatt Earp did at Tombstone, Daniels claims.

The actor playing the role of Zach Wild has been having second thoughts about joining VIPER. A small-time criminal named Jack Williams, he did serious time for “shoplifting” diamond rings at a department store, then drifted into VIPER when he couldn't find a job. Poor material for an agent — he doesn't have a mean bone in his body — Jack ended up assigned to Snake Gulch and now wants out. If a PC indicates somehow he has ties to law enforcement (*i.e.*, one mentions that he is a policeman when not on vacation during the tour of the jail) Jack goes out of his way to stand next to him at some point during the tour — the tour of the sheriff's, the bank robbery, the showdown at high noon, a hanging, and gambling at the saloon are all good times for this. Speaking under his breath, he asks for help. If the PC acknowledges him, Jack obliquely explains the situation in as few words as possible.

You can use Jack Williams to inform the PCs not only of VIPER's presence, but also the locations of the secret entrances to the Nest. His defection also confuses the mystery of who sent the postcard. If asked directly, he claims he didn't send it, but if the PCs only hint at it or assume he sent the message, he doesn't contradict them — he wants to escape badly and doesn't much care why the PCs help him. Jack can also become a recurring NPC in your campaign — a superhero taking a reformed criminal under his wing to help the ex-con toe the straight and narrow is always a fun roleplaying. And someone's going to have protect Jack from a vengeful VIPER — an organization which

doesn't just let agents leave its employ. Jack can also become a good source of information about how VIPER operates. Caveat: if you let the PCs interrogate Jack, they're likely to learn a great deal about VIPER (such as the location and nature of VIPER Academy) which you may not want them to know just yet.

4. Suicide Jack's Saloon

Suicide Jack's Saloon is a square, two-story building. Downstairs is a bar and tables, and the stairs to the second floor are roped off (the McClanes explain that it used to contain bedrooms for “ladies of the night”). A trap door behind the bar swings open to reveal rickety wooden stairs leading down to the cellar.

Stacked in the cellar are empty crates and wooden kegs, as well as the bar's stock of drinks. In the southwest corner, behind a pyramid of wooden kegs marked “XXX,” is one of the hidden entrances to the Nest. The section of floor and wall rotate to the left. Behind it is a sloped passage leading downward and lit with track lighting; this serves as primary access to the Nest. Finding the entrance requires examining the barrels; the PC quickly realizes the kegs are all of one piece rather than separate objects. The entrance can only be opened from just inside or remotely from the control and communication center. Opening it from the outside requires a successful STR Roll at -4. The stack of kegs is DEF 8, BODY 12 if a PC wants to bash it in.

Playing The Part: Guy “Grits” Johnson works the bar, and Molly and Polly Svenson serve the drinks. Guy speaks with a poor British accent and claims to have left “merry ol” on the run from the “bobbies.” He won't fess up to what he did back in Liverpool, but hints he killed a man or some other crime that makes him seem more dangerous. They call him Grits because that's all he can cook, and those not very well. Grits tells a different story, claiming a legendary lawman named Rooster once said he had true grit, and since then everyone has just called him Grits. Finally, he says he found the Svenson sisters while traveling through southern Indiana, claiming they escaped from “some mad Scot's utopian colony or some such bother.” He says they don't exactly speak the “Queen's proper” but, he finishes with a leering wink, they speak enough to get by.

The Svenson sisters are actually life-like robots assigned to guard the Nest entrance. For their character sheets, you can use the VIPER Recon-Drone Mark VII as suggested in *VIPER Bites: Snake Gulch Personnel*, Mechanon's Summoned Robot provided free in the “Free Stuff” section at www.herogames.com, or a toned-down version of the Destroid described on page 18 of *Conquerors, Killers, And Crooks*. When Snake Gulch isn't open (*i.e.*, at night) the Svenson Sisters stand in the cellar guarding the entrance.

5. Grady's General Store

A square single-story building made of wood and painted white, Grady's General Store stands on the north side of the street. Crowded shelves con-

taining canned and dry goods (reproductions one and all) fill the inside of the store. Outside in back of the store is a small smithy where Mr. Grady hammers out nails and horseshoes at the forge.

Playing The Part: Mrs. Celia Grady, a small woman with pinched lips and her brown hair in a tight bun, works behind the counter inside the store. Mr. Jackson Grady, a laconic, overweight man in his thirties with a long beard, can often be found sitting outside on the covered porch, smoking his pipe. Mr. Grady isn't willing to talk about anything but the weather and working the forge. Mrs. Grady isn't willing to talk about anything but the price of goods. Any questions outside these areas are met with a noncommittal grunt or shrug and the question, "So... what can I do for you, because if nothing, I need to be getting back and you might as well mosey along."

6. Mr. Blackhill's

The undertaker, Mr. Isaiah Blackhill, keeps shop in the first floor of this two-story building. In the front part of that floor is a reception/office area; in the back part, an embalming room with equipment appropriate to the late nineteenth century. The second floor is empty. Outside three pinewood coffins lean against the wall facing the street.

Playing The Part: Mr. Blackhill is sallow skinned, tall and lean; he wears a black three-piece suit, a bowler, and a monocle in his left eye. He speaks in a grim and portentous voice. Any questions about his past are met with a deep, mysterious laugh. All in all, he's exactly what one would expect of an undertaker in a place like Snake Gulch.

7. Snake Gulch Bank

A square single-story building made of brick, the Snake Gulch Bank stands on the north side of the street. The door leads into an open space. At the north end is a counter where the teller, Mr. Wilbur Marshall, stands.

Playing The Part: A short, roly-poly man who wears glasses and a green visor, Mr. Marshall is less than communicative. If a PC walks up to the window and asks for anything, he demands in a whiny voice, "Do you have an account with the Snake Gulch Bank?" If the PC says anything but yes, he asks in a querulous voice, "You a part of the Cleeland Gang?" And if the PC says anything but no, Mr. Marshall slams shut wooden shutters, closing his window.

8. St. Angelo's Church

A brick building with a peaked roof and steeple, St. Angelo's church stands on the north side of Main Street, right where it turns to the southeast and heads to the Sliding V Ranch. Inside are pews facing the sacristy. The steeple holds a bell and rings



every hour. During tours Father Peter O'Malley resides inside and is responsible for ringing the bell. Behind the church is a low hill covered with crosses made from wood and painted white. (If asked, the McClanes sheepishly admit they added "boot hill" themselves; it wasn't there in the historical town. And for heaven's sake, no, there aren't any real bodies buried there.)

Playing The Part: Speaking with a Boston accent, Father O'Malley describes in great detail (to anyone who both asks and *listens*) how his Lord and Savior appeared to him one day and told him to bring God's righteousness to the den of iniquity and second Babylon named Snake Gulch. He goes on to bemoan that all he seems to do is give the last rites to condemned men and bury dead gunfighters in boot hill out back.

9. Sliding V Ranch

A little over two miles east of the town proper is the Sliding V Ranch, two and half acres of land surrounded by a split rail fence. On the ranch are three buildings: a barn, stable, and a modern two-story home where the McClanes live. The stable houses eight horses and a wagon sits outside. Inside the barn are hay and everyday farm tools like pitchforks, hoes, and picks, and a branding iron (unused, the McClanes are quick to add) with the ranch's brand, an oblique "V."

Playing The Part: Three ranch hands help out on the farm: Billy Everett, a tall brown-haired man; George McGee, a short and pudgy redhead; and Henry Adams, a bland-faced man with a beard. None of the three talk much, and the McClanes intercept questions directed at them. (Truth of the matter is they have their roles because they're the only ones in the Nest who know anything about

HOSTAGES

For an additional wrinkle, you can include a family of four touring Snake Gulch on the same day as the PCs. If necessary, VIPER agents take the family hostage and use them against the superheroes. The family is the Thompsons: Chris, the father; Josie, the mother; and their two daughters, Ellen (age 11) and Lesley (age 7). He's an car mechanic, she's a middle school teacher. From Minnesota, the family is traveling cross-country on their way to California, stopping every so often to take in the sights along the way.

You can also use the Thompsons if the PCs decide to observe Snake Gulch from a distance before making their move and you want them to see what goes on during a tour. In other words, the Thompsons take the tour the day the PCs spy on the goings-on at Snake Gulch.

horses, not because of their acting ability.) All three appear to be in their twenties.

Set back 15" (approximately 100 feet) from the buildings is a shallow creek worked by two prospectors: Crazy Ivan Slopesky and his brother, No Luck Stan. Both wear untucked flannel shirts and floppy leather hats. Their trousers are rolled up to the knee and they go barefoot, walking in a perpetual crouch. No Luck Stan does the talking for the two. He tells about the hard journey from Poland, a long trip filled with nothing but suffering and woe, to Snake Gulch, and what the Slopesky brothers are going to do once they've struck it rich (lots of women and booze for the most part). Crazy Ivan doesn't say much more than "That's right brother. Worst time of my life." and "Whoowee! We're going to be rich!" Neither Slopesky has anything resembling a Polish accent.

Taking The Tour

For sixty dollars, a person gets an all-day tour of Snake Gulch, lasting from 9:00 AM to 8:00 PM. The amount includes three meals and transportation to and from either motel in Moriarty, but not lodging. Snake Gulch only accepts reservations (no tickets at the door) and attempts to coordinate arrivals so multiple visitors come on the same day, although parties of four or more (like most superhero teams) don't have to worry about that.

If the PCs decide to go in both guns blazing, in true Old West style, refer to the section *Full Frontal Assault* beginning on page 22.

ROLEPLAYING THE MCCLANES AND ACTORS

Throughout the tour both McClanes act as guides, explaining the action in the various dramas and providing "historical" tidbits about Snake Gulch's past. The McClanes are in their mid-sixties and do a good job acting like simple country folk, always smiling and speaking in a friendly drawl. (In truth, they are former VIPER agents and cold-blooded killers, but because of their age, they stay out of any fighting that occurs if possible.) Gerald McClane is a short, balding man with a potbelly. Mary McClane is taller than her husband, has curly gray hair, and wears "granny" glasses. For character sheets, the McClanes are both standard VIPER agents with 10s in their Primary Characteristics — despite their age, they've kept in good shape with work around Snake Gulch.

Over the course of the tour, the PCs encounter various actors playing the roles of Snake Gulch's residents. These actors interact with the PCs, but won't break character. They'll happily explain what they're doing, who they are, and similar aspects of their roles — but they pointedly ignore any questions involving modern concerns and the like. These questions the McClanes step in and answer themselves. The VIPER agents-*cum*-actors are amateurs at best (Acting 11-) but have practiced their roles quite often and don't mistakenly slip out of character.

Q & A WITH THE MCCLANES

There are several details about Snake Gulch the PCs are likely to find suspicious, and they might press the McClanes for answers. The below lists some of the obvious questions and provides the McClanes' answers, as well as the truth about the situation. For anything not listed, the McClanes either make up something on the spot or shrug their shoulders and play dumb.

One thing to keep in mind: the more questions the PCs ask about the operations, as opposed to the attractions, the more suspicious the McClanes and the VIPER agents who monitor the aboveground facility become about them. For instance, if the PCs turn breakfast into an interrogation session, it's pretty likely the VIPER agents realize something is going on. Each time a PC asks a question like those below, you should require a Conversation roll. If successful, the question passes for mere curiosity; otherwise the VIPER agents know something is up and implement plans to protect the Nest from discovery.

Q: Where do the actors live, change, and the like?

A: We keep a trailer park a little ways south of here where they live.

Truth: There's no trailer park; the actors live in the Nest.

Q: All the lights in Snake Gulch are electric (flickering bulbs to maintain the ambience), but no power lines run to the site. Where do you get your electricity?

A: Back when Snake Gulch was opened, no power lines ran out here so they installed an underground generator and lines. We've kept it that way, so the power lines don't take away from the illusion of the place.

Truth: Snake Gulch gets its power from the underground VIPER Nest.

Q: That (whichever attraction) isn't historically accurate.

A: Well that's how it was at Snake Gulch. Can't speak for other places.

Truth: The McClanes don't know very much about the Old West.

Q: There's no gulch here. Why's it named Snake Gulch?

A: I ain't never thought of that before. I don't rightly know why ol' Patch McClane named this place Snake Gulch. Honey, do you know?

Truth: Some VIPER wit thought it was clever back when the project was approved.

Q: What's going on with these tire tracks? (If a PC examines Main Street or the road leading to the train depot and succeeds with a Tracking roll, he spots fresh tire tracks in the dusty street.)

A: Gotta get supplies in here somehow. Need to stock the saloon and Lonesome Dove, you know.

Truth: If the PC achieves a degree of success of 3 or more, he knows that the delivery truck isn't stopping at either the saloon or boarding house. Instead it pulls onto Main Street, drives a little ways past the road leading to the train depot, then backs up the road to the train depot and parks directly in

front of it. (This is a clue about the location of one the Nest's secret entrances.)

Q: Do you recognize *this* postcard? And do you know who sent it?

A: Why, yes, of course... it's from our gift shop. Don't know who sent it though. Must've been a friend of yours. Probably just someone who had himself a grand ol' time while visiting us.

Truth: The McClanes don't know who sent the postcard, but the VIPER agents on duty in the control and communications center become very suspicious if they catch sight of it on camera.

A Day At Snake Gulch

The sections below provide brief descriptions for the activities during a day spent at Snake Gulch. Subsections titled *Behind The Scenes* describe details that pertain specifically to superheroes, including surveillance performed by VIPER agents during the tour and what happens if VIPER discovers the PCs are on the premises. You should refer to these sections if your players decide to infiltrate Snake Gulch or otherwise check out the place before attacking.

9:00 AM, TOUR BUS ARRIVES

At 8:30 AM, a bus from Snake Gulch leaves the ghost town. Shortly thereafter, it arrives in Moriarty and picks up visitors at both motels. The transportation is an old school bus painted bright green and driven by either Gerald or Mary McClane — whichever of the two isn't driving sits in the seat directly behind the driver. Detailed in yellow paint on both sides of the bus is "Wild West Tours."

The bus leaves town, driving south on State Route 41, then pulls off onto a dirt road and travels a mile to Snake Gulch proper. The drive is uneventful, and the McClanes ask the PCs questions about where they're from and make small talk.

Behind The Scenes: Both McClanes are accomplished actors and have performed their respective roles for almost twenty years (Acting 15-). If things get physical with the PCs, they don't participate in the fracas — they run for cover.

Hidden in their matching wedding bands are radio transmitters/receivers they use to keep in touch with the control and communication center in the VIPER Nest. Any radio transmissions from the rings are disguised, and a PC attempting to notice the transmissions with Detect or another sense suffers a -3 penalty to his roll. Each McClane carries a derringier energy blaster.

Once the bus pulls up to Snake Gulch, VIPER agents working in the Nest's control and communication center observe the PCs via a hidden camera located behind the driver's rearview mirror inside the bus. The Serpentine Node for the Nest has the Skill, KS:

World Superhumans 16-. If one of the PCs has *not* disguised himself and has a public identity, the computer recognizes him as a superhero with a successful roll. If that PC wears a disguise, treat the situation as a Skill Versus Skill Contest against the PC's *Disguise Skill*.

Once VIPER recognizes a superhero, it immediately prepares to defend the base. (The attack comes at 11:00 AM during the bank robbery described below.)

9:00 — 9:30 AM, BREAKFAST

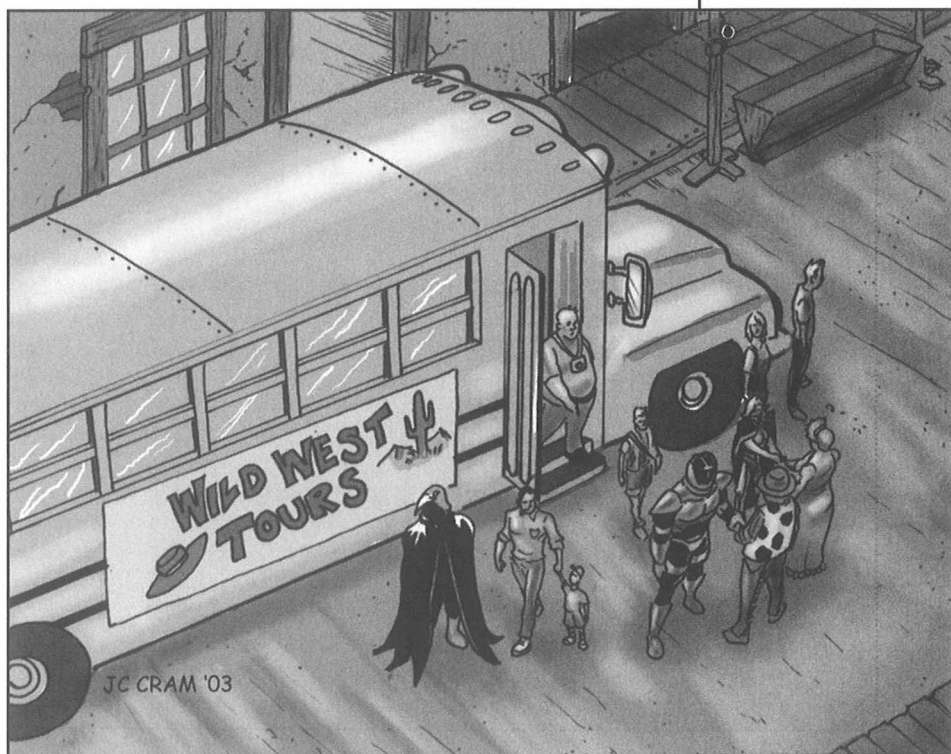
As the tour group enters the ghost town, walking along Main Street, they hear a clanging noise. Standing on the porch of nearby boarding house, The Lonesome Dove, a woman wearing period dress rings a triangle and shouts, "Breakfast's ready!"

Mr. and Mrs. James, the proprietors of the Lonesome Dove, welcome the PCs. Mrs. James leads the tour group to the dining room (it seats twelve) before retreating to the kitchen to help her husband with breakfast. Then the Jameses serve grits, bacon, poached eggs, and coffee for breakfast. Over breakfast the McClanes describe the day's itinerary.

Behind The Scenes: Hidden in the kitchen of the Lonesome Dove are two Remington Rifle blasters stored on a gun rack near the back door. In the chandelier over the dining room table is a hidden camera and microphone. Each of the chairs at the dining room table has steel bands that emerge from the arms, legs, and back to capture whoever's sitting in the chair (an Entangle with DEF 5, BODY 3). The VIPER agent observing the scene from the control and communication center can activate the chairs, but only does so if the PCs reveal themselves as superheroes, threaten the McClanes, or the like.

DISCOVERING VIPER

Don't work too hard to disguise VIPER's activities at the ghost town. After seeing names like "Snake Gulch" and the "Sliding V Ranch" the PCs should already be suspicious of the entire set-up. If the PCs have no luck discovering anything incriminating like the hidden cameras and microphones, have them stumble upon a VIPER agent in uniform, maybe sneaking a drink at the saloon or a meal at the boarding house. The mystery in *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth* isn't VIPER's presence at the ghost town — that should be fairly obvious. Instead it's Blank's defection and what King Cobra is up to.



TROUBLESHOOTING: TOUR BOGS DOWN

If the PCs decide to take the tour and early on decide on a course of action for assaulting the VIPER Nest, the players might become fidgety with roleplaying through the entire tour and increasingly eager to start the assault on the Nest. If so, you should simply and quickly narrate what they see during the tour, bringing it to a close. If a PC expresses interest in something you describe, slow down and go into more detail, roleplaying through the encounters with the actors, but when the tour moves on to the next stop go back to narrating the events.

9:30 — 11:00 AM, DAILY LIFE

After breakfast, the McClanes take the tour group through the town to observe daily life in the Old West. They watch as Mrs. James of the Lonesome Dove churns butter and Mr. James tends to the chickens out back. Then it's off to Grady's General Store, where the McClanes talk about the various items for sale back then; afterward around back to the smithy where Mr. Grady pounds out some nails and shoes a horse. The McClanes lead the PCs into the bank, church, and sheriff's where the PCs get to be put in jail, and finally to the undertaker's where Mr. Blackhill talks — gruesomely and in considerable detail — about the tools of his trade.

11:00 — 11:30 AM, BANK ROBBERY

As the PCs walk down Main Street, they hear hooting and hollering coming from the east, then the sound of galloping horses and gunfire (from cap guns). Four bandits with red handkerchiefs tied over their mouths and wearing black hats ride up to the Snake Gulch Bank. Shots are fired, women scream, then the bandits come rushing out of the bank holding bags of cash — clearly marked with a dollar sign — and mount up.

From out of the Sheriff's Office comes Sheriff Willy Daniels and his two deputies (wearing white hats of course), guns ablaze. Just as the bandits make it to the edge of town, one grabs his back, obviously pretending to be shot, and falls from his horse to the road. The rest of the bandits ride off. Upon examin-

ing the fallen bandit Sheriff Daniels loudly proclaims, "It's them Cleeland Boys again! I'm formin' up a posse. We're goin' to get 'em this time!"

The residents of Snake Gulch are standing out front of their respective buildings, and Sheriff Daniels starts picking out men for his posse. (He ignores any PCs who attempt to volunteer.)

All in all, it's a pretty poor performance, but Mr. and Mrs. McClane look on with big grins on their faces, seemingly proud of their actors.

Behind The Scenes: If VIPER has determined some members of the tour are superheroes, they spring an ambush during the bank robbery. Rather than being armed with cap guns, the bandits have blasters disguised as Colt Peacemakers. They ride toward the bank, then stop suddenly and open fire on the PCs. Taking cover in the surrounding buildings, actors armed with similar weapons also fire on the PCs. Eight VIPER agents, fully armed and equipped, emerge from Suicide Jack's Saloon to attack the PCs. (You can make this a VIPER Eight-Team; for more details about this tactical formation, see pages 78-79 and 169-170 in *VIPER: Coils Of The Serpent*, but replace the Vehicle Combat Specialist with a General Combat Specialist.)

11:30 — 12:00 AM, LUNCH

After the bank robbery, the tour goes into Suicide Jack's for lunch. The food served is cold beef and pan-fried potatoes along with soda. (A concession to the real world, the McClanes joke that: "If cowboys could've had soda, they would've drank it.") In the saloon two other men are eating. Getting on toward noon, the two men begin to shout at each other and eventually the shouting match turns into a shoving match. Then suddenly one man stops and says, "Gettin' close to high noon, you no good snake in the grass... I reckon you'll know where to find me."

HIGH NOON

The McClanes explain that this showdown is a historical event, and jokingly add that the recreation is as accurate as they can make it without someone getting killed. Both men call themselves Black Tom, and they're fighting over who has the right to the name. (Mrs. McClane tsk-tsks at the violence of it all.)

The showdown is predictable. All the folk in the buildings along Main Street come out to watch. The men stand twenty paces apart. When the church bells ring at noon, they draw and one of the Black Toms clutches his chest and falls over.

Immediately following the showdown, the undertaker Mr. Blackhill comes onto the scene with Mr. Grady and Mr. James bearing a stretcher. He takes the "dead" gunfighter back to his offices. The McClanes lead the tour after him, and at the undertaker's the PCs have a chance to be photographed with the gunfighter — still living of course; he just acts dead and occasionally he twitches or squints open one eye to look around — in a pinewood box. A hand-painted wooden board hangs around the gunfighter's neck: "Black Tom. Killed 3 men in cold blood. Got himself gunned down."



The photographer takes his pictures with a instant camera. (The McClanes answer any questions with a helpless shrug — they wish they could afford real daguerreotypes too.) The price of admission includes a photo of the visitor standing beside the infamous gunfighter.

1:00 — 4:00 PM, AT THE SLIDING V RANCH

At 1:00 PM the group heads out to the Sliding V Ranch. The ranch is several miles away from the town proper and requires a thirty minute walk to reach it. During the walk the McClanes talk about the flora and fauna of New Mexico's high plains region. They point out different types of wildflower and scrub, a couple of jackrabbits, and even a vulture or two. Their tour is exactly what one would expect during a nature walk in New Mexico.

Once at the ranch, the PCs get to visit the stable and watch one of the hands break a bronco (the horse is tame enough, but does a pretty decent job acting like a wild horse). Children have the opportunity to ride a mule around in a small circle, while adults can ride a horse.

The tour continues out around back of the ranch, where two men, the Slopesky brothers, squat beside a creek and prospect for gold. The McClanes explain in a confidential whisper that no one in Snake Gulch ever looked for gold in these parts, but so many visitors asked about it they thought it would be a good idea to have a little demonstration.

Once the tour finishes with the prospectors, it heads inside the ranch house. The McClanes have made the ground floor of the house into a museum for artifacts they claim were found during the renovations of the ghost town. Bullets, pots and pans, old revolvers, some cans of food, and more are on display in glass cases. On the walls are photos from the time. Though the photos were supposedly taken in Snake Gulch, if a PC makes a successful PER Roll he notices discrepancies: the buildings are different, the landscape is different, and similar inaccuracies. In the front room is a gift shop. On a spinning rack are postcards, including ones just like the card received by the PCs.

The upstairs, off-limits to the public, is the McClanes' residence. Wholly modern with all the amenities, there's nothing unusual or suspicious about the second floor except in the bedroom. Hanging on the wall are framed photographs: one photograph shows a younger Gerald McClane graduating from VIPER Academy in 1963; another shows Mary McClane in a VIPER uniform, circa 1970.

At 3:45 PM it's time to head back to town. Rather than making the group walk, one of the ranch hands pulls up in a wagon filled with hay so everyone can ride back.

Behind The Scenes: If a PC wants to do something while outside of VIPER's surveillance, like sneak away from the group or Mind Control the McClanes, the walk from the ghost town to the ranch is a good time to do it. The ranch is a half-hour walk from town. For the middle twenty minutes of that walk, the surrounding area is free of hidden cameras and microphones. (But don't forget

the McClanes' wedding bands with their disguised radios.)

4:00 — 5:00 PM, HANG 'EM HIGH

As the PCs return to the town, the wagon they're riding in travels down Main Street. They see a crowd gathered outside the Sheriff's Office. A man in a black suit sits at a table set out on the street. He holds a gavel in his hand, and once the PCs are within earshot, he announces, "Hear ye! Hear ye! The Honorable Judge Jebediah Smith now presiding."

Three men with sacks over their heads come stumbling out of the Sheriff's, while Sheriff Daniels and his deputies hold guns on them.

Jebediah "Hard Justice" Smith continues, "The Cleeland boys are charged with armed robbery and murder. Did any of y'all see this happen?"

Everyone in the crowd nods his or her head.

The judge turns in his seat and asks, "Do you boys have anything to say in your own defense?"

One of the bandits speaks, but the voice is inaudible because of the sack over his head.

The judge pounds his gavel again and declares, "By the power vested in me by the United States of America, I hereby sentence the Cleeland boys to hang by the neck until dead."

The sheriff and his deputies grab the condemned men and lead them around back of the Sheriff's, where a gallows with five nooses is set up. The sheriff places special collars around the necks of the three men (to protect the actors from dying). The priest from the church, Father Peter O'Malley, quickly reads the condemned their last rites. Then they are hung.

Behind The Scenes: If VIPER agents have captured any of the PCs as they were snooping around, those prisoners replace the bandits. Now wearing period dress, the captured PC has a sack over his head hiding his features. Below the sack he's gagged, and a PC with superpowers is drugged so he can barely stand on his own two feet. When it comes time for the hanging, the PC is *not* fitted with a special collar. Instead he is hung the old-fashioned way. Once the floor drops on the gallows, the spectators pull out concealed firearms and open fire on any PCs watching the spectacle. From out of hiding rush eight VIPER agents, an Eight-Team like the one described in the Bank Robbery above, fully armed and armored in modern gear.

5:00 — 6:00 PM, SUPPER

After the excitement of the hanging, it's time for dinner at the Lonesome Dove boarding house. Dinner takes place in the same dining room as breakfast. On the menu: barley soup, roast pork, baked chicken, mashed potatoes, baked beans... and for desert, homemade ice cream.

6:00 — 8:00 PM, GAMBLING

Once dinner is over, the group goes to the Suicide Jack's Saloon for drinking and gambling with the actors. (Children are sent to a back room where they can play with toys from the Old West: Lincoln logs and blocks, tin soldiers, stuffed dolls, checkers,

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE AGENTS?

In the introduction, one possible hook mentioned is that two law enforcement field agents came to Snake Gulch and never reported back. Sadly the Nest's computer identified those agents and the actors killed them.

The VIPER agents buried them on boot hill behind St. Angelo's church; PCs investigating can find two plots with freshly turned earth and less-faded painted crosses. Also, the McClanes kept a souvenir from the "excitement." One of Mrs. McClane's dresser drawers contains a picture. In the photograph the actors gather around two pinewood boxes. In the pinewood boxes are the dead agents. Around each's neck hangs a hand-painted sign: "Do-gooder. He came to pry so he had to die."

and so on). The proprietor serves beer, whiskey, and soda. The visitors receive \$100 in reproductions of 1870s currency. The McClanes magnanimously tell them they get to keep their winnings as souvenirs.

8:00 PM, BACK ON THE BUS

At 8:00 PM, the tour of Snake Gulch comes to an end and the McClanes lead the group back to the bus.

Behind The Scenes: If the VIPER agents have figured out one or more of the PCs' identities after the bank robbery at 11:00 AM, then an ambush takes place on the road to Moriarty. The McClanes drive especially slow (if asked, they comment about getting older and losing their night vision) to give the VIPER agents time to set up an ambush.

About a mile away from Snake Gulch, the bus begins to experience "engine trouble" and the driver pulls over to the side of the road. Both McClanes get out of the bus to check the engine. Once they've left, eight VIPER agents hidden in the scrub to the east open fire on the bus. (You can make this a VIPER Eight-Team; for more details about this tactical formation, see pages 78-79 and 169-170 in *VIPER: Coils Of The Serpent*.) The agents traveled to the location in the transport stored below the train depot (as described above on page 14) — either the M113A2 APC listed on page 325 of the *HERO System 5th Edition*, or the Phalanx Armored Van listed on page 122 of *VIPER: Coils Of The Serpent*.



Full Frontal Assault

If the PCs choose not to infiltrate Snake Gulch and instead simply attack the place, they face several obstacles. Though Snake Gulch is primarily a communications center, it still possesses some heavy artillery in case of assault by hostile forces. But the main challenge for the PCs is finding the entrances to the Nest: one in the cellar of Suicide Jack's Saloon, the other at the Train Depot (see above for full descriptions).

Agents in the control and communication center operate the automated defenses. Designed primarily to defend against aerial assault, the defense are also effective against ground attacks with only a few blind spots to the south, especially near the buildings, in their area of fire. The VIPER agents will destroy any and all buildings if PCs take cover behind them; it's much easier to rebuild Snake Gulch than escape from prison.

For combat purposes and simplicity's sake, all defenses have DEX 14 (OCV: 5) and are SPD 3. Three operators plus the supervisor in the control and communication center work the defenses, so four guns (usually the guns on the train plus two cactus guns) can fire on each of these Phases. In the case of a large-scale attack, the four agents working at communication consoles ignore their standard duty of monitoring Nest communications and operate weapon systems instead. This adds four more attacks each Phase, for a total of eight.

For details about the cameras around the ghost town refer to *Sneaking Around And Surveillance* on page 13.

Train Cars

The doors of the barn where the train is stored roll up and the train emerges. The roofs of the two cars slide back and two modified V-14T "Thunderbolt" cannons emerge from below. Each cannon can fire independently. The train can move along the tracks to maneuver for position, and the caboose holds a second engine so it can move at full speed in both directions. Finally, smaller laser cannons emerge from various locations on the train and provide protection from missiles and other projectiles. Each of the cars is DEF 8, BODY 15, and weighs 12.5 tons with DCV -3 (negative because of its size).

Because the train has two operators, on each of its Phases it can: Full Move and fire one cannon; Half Move and fire both cannons; Half Move, use the Missile Defense system, and fire one cannon; or simply fire both cannons.

Cost Train

- 56 V-14T "Thunderbolt" Cannon: Multipower, 90-point reserve, 25 Charges for entire Multipower (+¼); all OIF Bulky (-1)
- 4u 1) *Standard Setting*: Energy Blast 18d6; OIF Bulky (-1)
- 4u 2) *Focused Setting*: RKA 6d6; OIF Bulky (-1)
- 5 V-14T "Thunderbolt" Cannon (second one): Another V-14T Cannon

VIPER BITES: SNAKE GULCH PERSONNEL

The chart below summarizes the actors at Snake Gulch. Sorted by location, it lists the actor's name, the weapon he or she carries as a part of the costume, and the template to use for each (from pages 183-190 of *VIPER: Coils Of The Serpent*) (if desired). After the location's entry is a note about special equipment hidden at that location. If you choose to provide the actors with this equipment, you should keep its location in mind while the PCs investigate — they might stumble upon it while snooping around! Whatever the case, you should use any and all of these as you see fit. The final grouping, *Not On Location*, is for those actors only topside for a special part as discussed in *Taking The Tour* on page 18. If the PCs attack at another time, those agents are down below in the Nest proper. One final note: if you think the PCs will have too easy a time assaulting the ghost town, you can equip the actors with VFF-1 and VFF-1A Force Field Belts (*VIPER*, page 115) disguised as regular leather belts with silver buckles. All page references below are for *VIPER: Coils Of The Serpent*.

Guiding A Tour (or 9. Sliding V Ranch)

Name	Weapon	Template
Gerald McClane	Derringer	General Intel Specialist (p. 184)
Mary McClane	Derringer	General Intel Specialist (p. 184)

Notes: In one of the upstairs rooms in the ranch house is a VIPER Air-Cycle (page 125). Small explosives in the outside the wall provide an exit for the Air-Cycle if the McClanes have to make a quick escape.

1. The Lonesome Dove Boarding House

Name	Weapon	Template
Mr. Solly James	Remington	Hvy Weapons Specialist (p. 187)
Mrs. Sally James	Remington	Hvy Weapons Specialist (p. 187)

Notes: V-12 "Destructor" Blaster Cannon hidden in third-story bedroom facing Main Street; it can fire from a window.

3. The Sheriff's

Name	Weapon	Template
Sheriff Willy Daniels	Peacemaker	Superhuman Cmbt Specialist (p. 188)
Deputy Zach Wild	Remington	General Combat Specialist (p. 183)
Deputy Sam Kaster	Remington	General Combat Specialist (p. 183)

Notes: Hidden in a locked gun cabinet inside the sheriff's is standard equipment (page 183 and page 188) for the three agents.

4. Suicide Jack's Saloon

Name	Weapon	Template
Grits Johnson	Remington	Computer Specialist (p. 190)
Molly Svenson	Derringer	Recon-Drone Mark VII (p. 131)
Polly Svenson	Derringer	Recon-Drone Mark VII (p. 131)

5. Grady's General Store

Name	Weapon	Template
Mr. Jackson Grady	Peacemaker	General Combat Specialist (p. 183)
Mrs. Celia Grady	Remington	General Combat Specialist (p. 183)

Notes: Assorted grenades (choose 20; page 109) are hidden in cans labeled "beans." A disassembled VIPER Grenade Launcher (Hand-Held) (page 109) is hidden in boxes of nails, gears, metal rods, and other spare mechanical parts. It requires Mrs. Grady 1 Turn (3 Phases) to assemble the Grenade Launcher.

6. Mr. Blackhill's

Name	Weapon	Template
Mr. Isaiah Blackhill	Derringer	Melee Combat Specialist (p. 53)

Notes: VIPER Fang (page 108) hidden in a drawer among the embalming tools, and an assortment of VIPER poisons (choose 3; page 112) labeled as embalming fluids.

7. Snake Gulch National Bank

Name	Weapon	Template
Mr. Wilbur Marshall	Remington	Computer Specialist (p. 183)

Notes: Two VIPER-Mech Mark IIIs (page 129) hidden in the bank vault. The teller's cash drawer flips up to reveal a remote control device for the Mechs with a monitor that plugs into the surveillance cameras scattered throughout Snake Gulch.

8. Saint Angelo's Church

Name	Weapon	Template
Father Peter O'Malley	Derringer	General Combat Specialist (p. 183)

Notes: Hidden in the altar of the church is a VIPER BCU (Basic) and Helmet (Basic) (page 114), as well as a VF-7 "Torchie" Flamethrower (page 106).

9. The Sliding V Ranch

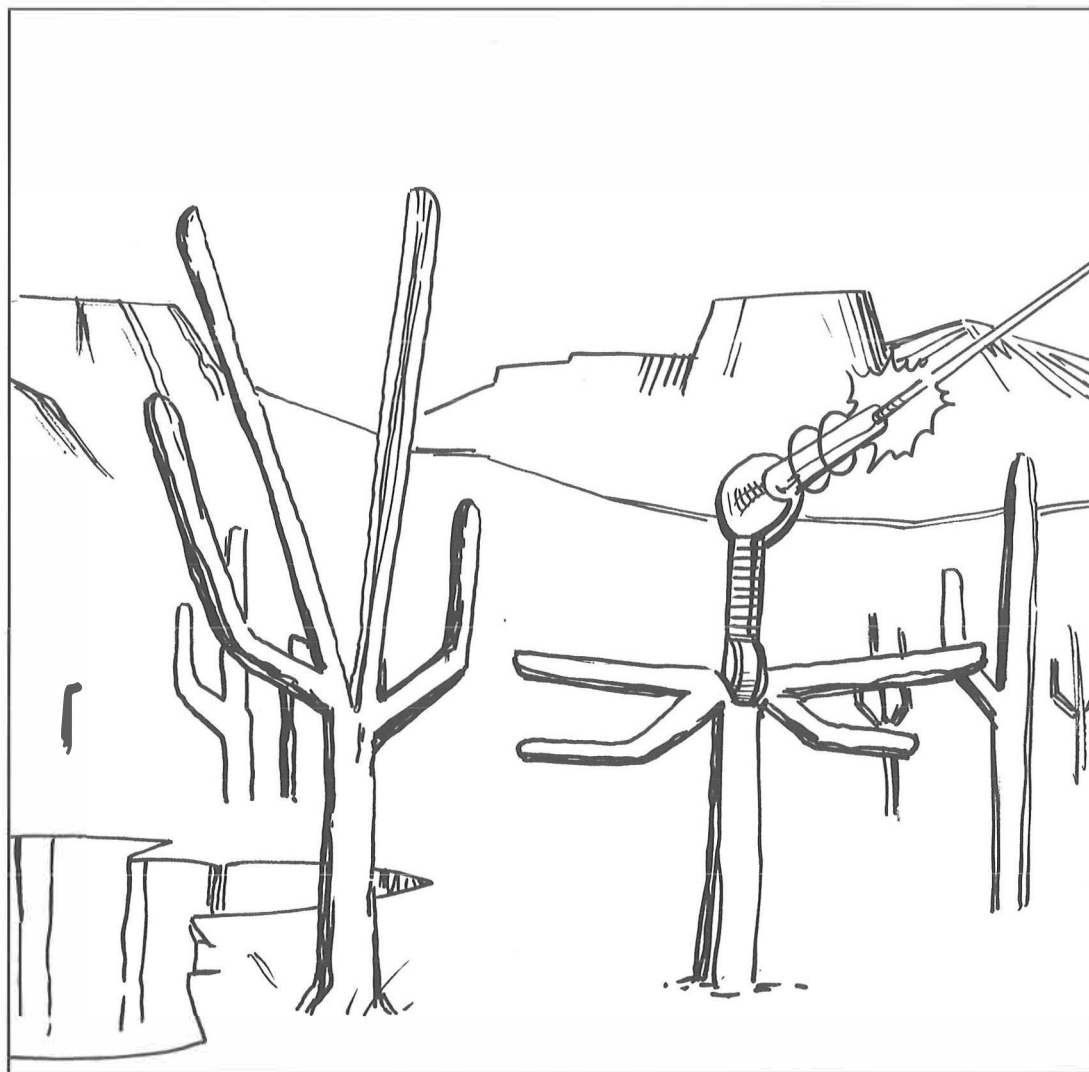
Name	Weapon	Template
Billy Everett	Peacemaker	Air Cavalry Agent (p. 186)
George McGee	Remington	Air Cavalry Agent (p. 186)
Henry Adams	Remington	Air Cavalry Agent (p. 186)
Crazy Ivan	Peacemaker	Air Cavalry Agent (p. 186)
No Luck Stan	Peacemaker	Air Cavalry Agent (p. 186)
Cleeland Boy #1	Peacemaker	Air Cavalry Agent (p. 186)
Cleeland Boy #2	Peacemaker	Air Cavalry Agent (p. 186)
Cleeland Boy #3	Peacemaker	Air Cavalry Agent (p. 186)
Cleeland Boy #4	Peacemaker	Air Cavalry Agent (p. 186)

Notes: All equipment for standard Air Cavalry Agent is hidden in the barn in a secret cellar. The doors to the cellar are buried beneath a pile of hay.

Not On Location

Name	Weapon	Template
Judge Jebediah Smith	Derringer	General Combat Specialist (p. 183)
Black Tom #1	None	General Combat Specialist (p. 183)
Black Tom #2	None	General Combat Specialist (p. 183)

Note: Both Black Toms carry ordinary cap guns. Judge Smith's gavel is a VG-6 Flame Bomb (page 109).



- 15 **Missile Defense System:** Missile Deflection (all physical projectiles), Range (+1); OIF Bulky (-1)
- 6 **Wheeled Vehicle:** Ground Movement +10" (16" total); OIF (metal wheels; -½), Restricted Path (-1), Limited Maneuverability (-1)

Total cost: 90 points.

Cactus Guns: All of the cacti surrounding Snake Gulch are fake. When Snake Gulch is under attack, the cacti split open along the middle to reveal laser cannons on swivel mounts. Cactus Guns are OCV 5, DCV 3 with DEF 6, BODY 6.

*RKA 3d6, 24 Charges (+¼) (56 Active Points); OIF Bulky (-1) (total cost: 28 points) **plus** +2 OCV (10 Active Points); OIF Bulky (-1) (total cost: 5 points). Total cost: 33 points.*

Electronic Counter-Measures: From out of the water tower emerges a satellite dish that can disrupt electrical activity, jamming radar and radio as well as electronic counter-measures and other signals. The satellite dish is OCV 5, DCV 3 with DEF 6, BODY 3.

Suppress Electronic Devices 6d6, all Electronic Device Powers simultaneously (+2), No Range Modifier (+½), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½) (120 Active Points); OIF Bulky (-1). Total cost: 60 points.

Roof Of The Sliding V: The peaked roof of the McClane's home at the Sliding "V" lowers and slides back to reveal a V-14T Thunderbolt Cannon. (See the Train Cars above for statistics.)

THE ACTORS

At night, the actors remain in the Nest. On days without a tour scheduled, they work above-ground performing maintenance on the ghost town under the supervision of the McClanes. If aboveground, they stay there during an assault and attack ground forces from their assigned locations, firing from windows. The McClanes, if guiding a tour, take the Thompson family hostage and retreat to the nearest building. Once the PCs have entered one of the two passages to the Nest, the actors head for the hills — they know when the gig is up and try to make good on their escape. You can use the chart, *VIPER Bites: Snake Gulch Personnel*, as a reference sheet to the actors' locations and weapons carried.

THE VIPER NEST



TUNNELING TO THE NEST

If the PCs attempt to tunnel to the Nest, the outside walls have DEF 12, BODY 12 with the exception of the Nest Leaders secret escape vehicle (see page 32). Also VIPER, wise in the ways superheroes' minds work, located the underground complex several tens of meters *west* of the ghost town, so any PC digging directly down doesn't stumble on it. The Nest is 10" (65 feet) below the surface.

Once they've made it past the groundside defenses and discovered one or both of the entrances, the PCs must assault the Nest itself. Nest personnel frequently drill what to do during an attack with assigned positions, fall-back positions, and the like. The sections below discuss such strategies. Adding to the chaos of the assault, King Cobra left behind two COIL infiltrators to accomplish assigned objectives and make sure his plans go smoothly. But taking the Nest shouldn't be easy for the PCs, even with the infiltrators' help; VIPER protects its own!

When running the assault on the Nest, you should keep careful track of the time. The PCs can gather several clues concerning King Cobra's activities that become important in the next part of the adventure... but only if the act quickly! For the sake of drama the arrival of the PCs at the security checkpoint triggers the events described in the timeline, but you shouldn't reward the players for dilly-dallying. If they discuss their options endlessly or similarly procrastinate, the COIL infiltrators destroy Blank's laboratory and the virus engineered by Cybermind wipes clean the records of his experiments. In other words, the PCs aren't entitled to these clues; instead they are the reward for quick thinking and successfully infiltrating the Nest.

DAILY LIFE IN THE NEST

Daily life in the Snake Gulch facility is fairly bland and easy compared to most VIPER installations. Throughout the organization, the Nest is known as a dead end for operatives; oftentimes those who show little ambition or lack a killer instinct find themselves posted here. Nest personnel don't participate in major criminal operations, the Nest itself is located in the middle of nowhere, and few individuals join VIPER because they want to act like cowboys in a tourist trap.

Forty-three agents reside in the Nest. Gerald and Mary McClane live aboveground and run the ghost town. Twenty-two of the agents work as actors at locations in Snake Gulch; on days when there's no tour, they perform daily upkeep on the locations under the supervision of the McClanes. Those roles not fixed to a site in the ghost town, like the Cleeland Boys or Judge Smith, are assigned on a monthly basis to other agents.

Seven agents stay in the control and communication center at all times,

working a twelve-hour shift. Either Black Snake Jake or one of his two lieutenants is also present in the center supervising operations. Two agents work in the security checkpoint for each twelve-hour shift, and the checkpoint is staffed at all hours. Menial duties, such as cleaning the Nest and cooking meals, are based on a rotation that includes all agents except Black Snake Jake, his two lieutenants, and the McClanes.

SECURITY CARDS

All sliding doors in the Nest require a security card to open. Each VIPER agent has one of these cards. Only the card of an agent assigned to duty in the control and communications center a half-hour before his shift begins, the cards of Black Snake Jake and his two lieutenants, or the card of the agent assigned to take care of Blank's laboratory (in truth, a COIL infiltrator) can open the door at the security checkpoint and the control and communication center door. Only Black Snake Jake's card works on his personal quarters. Only Blank's card and that of the agent assigned to look after the lab in his absence (the COIL infiltrator) can open the door to the Blank's former laboratory.

A PC can bypass the card reader with a successful Security Systems roll at -5. Unless otherwise noted, sliding doors are DEF 12, BODY 9.



JC CRAM '03

RECOMMENDED READING

Pages 165-170 of *VIPER: Coils Of The Serpent* provide excellent advice for running agents in combat. Other useful rules to re-read before running this section of the adventure include (all page numbers refer to *HERO System 5th Edition*):

Multiple Attackers on page 251 and Coordinated Attacks on pages 249-250. The VIPER agents attempt to take advantage of both these Combat Modifiers.

Explosion on page 166 and Dive For Cover on pages 260-261. When the COIL infiltrator blows Blank's laboratory and the Nest begins to self-destruct both of these are likely to come into play.

Concealment on page 249. The VIPER agents at the security checkpoint benefit from partial concealment.

THE COIL INFILTRATORS

King Cobra left behind two SPD 4 agents to set off the explosives, trigger the virus, and otherwise make sure his plans go smoothly. One agent works in the control and command center; this one triggers the virus. The other, assigned to defend the living areas, deserts his post to trigger the explosives in Blank's lab. (To get past the security checkpoint during a superhero attack, he claims to have important duties to take care of in Blank's lab. Not wanting to risk getting in trouble, the agents on duty at the security checkpoint let him pass.)

For both agents, use the character sheet for COIL infiltrator on page 109, providing them with equipment appropriate to a VIPER agent. The changes caused by the Coil-Gene Touch are subtle; both infiltrators disguise their serpentine features with cosmetics. Their fangs are retractable and they use false cuspids to disguise them. One of the false cuspids also contains a dose of a virulent poison distilled from cobra venom; they use this to kill themselves once they complete their mission or if the PCs capture them.

False Cuspid: *RKA 8d6 [standard effect: 24 BODY], NND (defense is Life Support [appropriate Immunity]; +1), Does BODY (+1) (360 Active Points); IAF Fragile (-¼), No Knockback (-¼), No Range (-½), 1 Charge (-2). Total cost: 80 points.*

THE PCS ARE CAPTURED

If VIPER agents capture any of the PCs sneaking around at night or in another situation not covered in the sections above, they bring them to the Nest and lock them in one of the empty barracks. A COIL infiltrator, pretending to defect from VIPER and claiming to have sent the message revealing the location of the Nest, frees the PCs during the night (if they haven't already freed themselves). The agent then either slips away in the ensuing chaos to destroy Blank's lab, or travels with the PC to the lab and attempts to set and trigger the explosions without the PC noticing.

1. AGENTS' LIVING AREA

Both entrances to the Nest lead into the barracks area where the agents live; this way anyone assaulting the Nest must pass through the area before reaching the secure areas.

ATTACK ON THE LIVING AREAS

Assuming the VIPER agents know the PCs are coming, they split into teams of two and take up positions at various points in the living quarters. These positions, as well as fallback positions, are marked with an "X" on the map. The agent in front kneels so the one behind can also fire. Both fire on the same target and attempt to Coordinate Attacks. As they retreat they try to draw the PCs into pre-arranged crossfires. If the battle turns into a rout, they attempt to conceal themselves in various rooms located throughout the Living Quar-

LIVING AREA MATERIALS SUMMARY

Here's a summary of the BODY and DEF for the materials found around the Nest's living area.

Object	DEF and BODY
Corridor Wall	DEF 8, BODY 6
Dirt (One Hex)	DEF 0, BODY 10
Outer Wall	DEF 12, BODY 12
Regular Door	DEF 6, BODY 4
Sliding Door	DEF 12, BODY 9

ters, then use their VIPER Helmet (Basic) Communications System to coordinate ambushes or sneak past the superheroes to the exits. (Whether the agents continue the attack or retreat is at your discretion — VIPER agents are pretty brave, but not that brave.)

If VIPER doesn't know the PCs are coming, then the personnel in the living area are split between the gym (area D) and the rec room (area E) during the day. In this case they're neither armed nor armored. They make one attempt to get to their rooms — mainly by splitting up into teams of two, every team for itself — and arm themselves. If the attempt fails, they surrender to the PCs. If the PCs attack at night, the VIPER agents (including the actors) are in their barracks. Each stows his gear in a footlocker in the room. When the alarm sounds, they arm and armor themselves, then take up defensive positions.

For actual numbers, consult the *Nest Agents Breakdown* chart on page 32.

LOCATION DESCRIPTIONS

All Snake Gulch personnel except for the Nest Leader, the McClanes, and Timothy Blank reside in this area. The room descriptions are:

A. Barracks: There are 48 rooms for VIPER agents in the Nest. Each room has a single bed, dresser, desk and chair, and a footlocker for personal effects and assigned equipment. Five of these rooms are currently unoccupied, but are kept up for guests and the like.

B. Changing Room: Here actors change into period dress for Snake Gulch. Lockers line the east and west walls, with a narrow bench running down the middle. During the day VIPER uniforms hang inside the lockers; at other times, the period dress.

C. Armory: The Nest stores larger weapons, spare standard issue equipment, and uniforms in the armory in lockers and chests. (Each agent keeps his assigned equipment in his room, locked inside his footlocker.) Against the south wall is a workbench where agents can repair damaged equipment. The armory has a sliding door that only opens for the Nest Leader and his lieutenants.

D. Gym: In the middle of the gym is a boxing ring where agents can blow off steam and practice their hand-to-hand combat. In the north part of the gym are free weights. In the south are three virtual reality shooting ranges, circular areas enclosed by a rail

Snake Gulch Nest

New Mexico VIPER Nest



Computer Station



Security Team



Desk & Typical Chairs



File Cabinets



Bunk



Secret Door

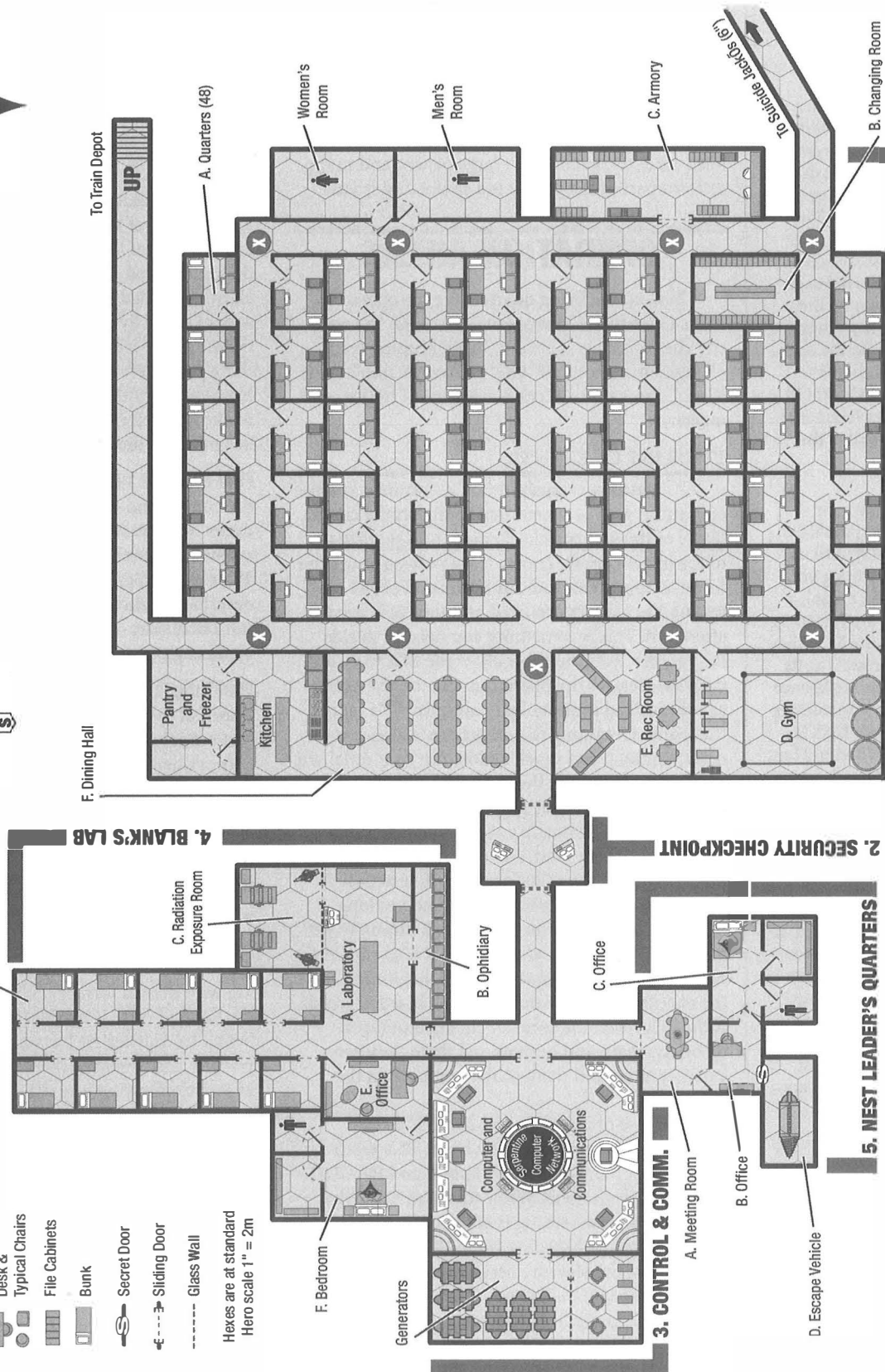
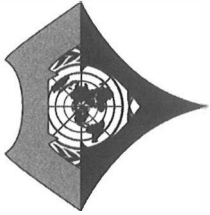
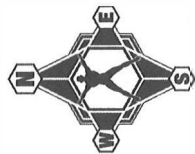


Sliding Door



Glass Wall

Hexes are at standard Hero scale 1" = 2m



1. LIVING QUARTERS

2. SECURITY CHECKPOINT

3. CONTROL & COMM.

4. BLANK'S LAB

5. NEST LEADER'S QUARTERS

TROUBLESHOOTING: HOW DO THEY KNOW?

One of the tricky parts of the assault on Snake Gulch is that the PCs might not realize they should salvage lab equipment and other things from the Nest. These things play an important part in discovering the mystery behind *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth*, but outside of suspicions regarding the message that put them on the trail, and the strange happenings in the operations area, there's no reason the PCs should try to preserve some of the equipment at the Nest.

If you believe your players might not think twice about it until it's too late, one thing you can do: if an organization asked the PCs to take down the Nest, they also give preserving its contents for intelligence purposes as a secondary mission. Both UNTIL and PRIMUS would love to get their hands on the files in the lab or downloaded files from the Serpentine Node. Even if not working at the behest of some agency, the PCs should realize the value of that kind of intelligence. If the players forget, you can ask for a Tactics or Deduction roll. If the roll succeeds, remind them of the potential value of that sort of intelligence about the enemy.

at waist-level. Hanging from the rail are helmets and blasters hooked to a small computer.

E. Rec Room: An entertainment center with pirated satellite stations dominates the north wall of this room. Facing the entertainment center are large couches. In the southern part are three square tables for playing cards.

F. Dining Hall And Kitchen: Long tables set with armless plastic chairs fill this room. An opening in the north wall provides access to the kitchen. A door leads from the kitchen to a large pantry, and in the western part of the pantry is a cooler and freezer.

OPERATION AREAS

Beyond the living quarters are the operation areas. Once the PCs have gotten through the security checkpoint, you need to begin keeping track of Segments since the COIL infiltrators implement King Cobra's plans to erase evidence of his experiments.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

As stated previously, the PCs' entrance into the operations area — when they approach the closed doors of the security checkpoint — triggers the following events. Of course if they take a long time to get to this point, you can assume all of the following has already occurred and they only see the aftermath. This is something you need to decide for yourself. You shouldn't allow the PCs to essentially lay siege to the operations center; the action should instead move quickly once the PCs reach this point. Obtaining the clues here is a *reward* for quick thinking and quick action, not a preordained event. But in the end, the goal of any adventure is that both you and your players have a good time — don't turn the situation around and make the destruction of the Nest, and the clues therein, a *punishment* for slow thinking and slow action. If the players are uncertain and hesitate too long, juggle events to provide them with a reason to get moving. The simplest way to do this is to start the Nest's self-destruct sequence at the beginning of the checkpoint rather than the end. In other words, if the PCs reach the security checkpoint (area #2 on the map) and hesitate, tell them they hear explosions behind them to the east back in the living area.

For ease of reference you should "restart" combat at Segment 12 as soon as the PCs reach the doors of the security checkpoint and the COIL infiltrator opens them. While this might clue the players in that something is going on, it not only makes your job of keeping track of the events easier, it lets the players know time is of the essence.

At this point in *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth*, the PCs might not realize anything is amiss. After getting through the security checkpoint, either of the three directions they go leads to a hint that something strange is going on: in Blank's lab, a COIL infiltrator is setting explosives; in the control and communications center, a COIL infiltrator is

uploading a virus; and in the Nest Leader's quarters, Black Snake Jake has become the first victim of the Ophidian Plague. When the PCs enter on the scene, be sure to include the suspicious activity going on in your description. This not only clues them in that not all is as it seems at Snake Gulch, but also might prompt them to look for the clues important in the next part of the adventure.

Finally, the timeline is just a guideline — you should adjust it as you see fit (and of course the PCs are likely to disrupt some, if not many, of the events below).

Before The PCs Arrive On The Scene: Once the agents know of the PCs' presence, Black Snake Jake calls for one of his lieutenants to take his place in the control and communication center, and orders alarms sounded throughout the Nest and all personnel in the living area to take up defensive positions. As Jake leaves, the COIL infiltrator stationed there purposefully bumps into him, pricking the Nest Leader with a poisoned needle. Then Black Snake Jake retreats to his quarters... where he soon becomes the first victim of the Ophidian Plague.

First Segment 12: The COIL infiltrator stationed in the control and communication center opens both doors to the security checkpoint. (Give the PCs a chance to pound on the doors for a try or two. Then when the doors suddenly open, be sure to describe the shocked look on the faces of the agents stationed there — this is not according to standard operating procedure!)

First Turn, Segment 3: The COIL infiltrator stationed at the communication console in the southeast corner uploads Cybermind's virus onto the Serpentine Node. No matter what happens, the COIL infiltrator stays at his post. This should make the PCs suspicious if they burst in: all the other agents take defensive positions and turn to fire on them... except the COIL infiltrator who works frantically at his communication console.

■ Meanwhile, in Blank's lab the other COIL infiltrator begins to plant explosive charges. He rigs one of the rooms with explosives every 3 Segments, starting with Blank's former bedroom and ending with the holding cells. If the PCs interrupt the agent before he finishes, he triggers those he has already planted. This includes the ones on his person, effectively blowing himself to smithereens. A black cylinder with a red button, the trigger sends a electronic signal; a PC with the appropriate powers may be able to disrupt or block the signal.

Plastic Explosives: *RKA 4d6, Explosion (+½) (90 Active Points); 1 Charge (-2), IIF (-¼). Total cost: 28 points.*

First Turn, Segment 4: Once the PCs break through the security checkpoint, panic sets in for the VIPER agents on duty in the control and communications center (and distracts them from COIL infiltrator in their presence). The supervising lieutenant sends an emergency distress message informing his superiors elsewhere of the situation. From here on

out, the checkpoint omits the actions of the VIPER agents — it's safe to assume that if the PCs corner them, they attack. Otherwise they attempt to flee, or at your discretion they simply surrender.

First Turn, Segment 6: Once certain the virus has uploaded, the COIL infiltrator wipes it from the CD currently in the drive.

■ Back in the bedroom of his quarters, Black Snake Jake succumbs to the effects of the Ophidian Plague.

■ In Blank's lab, the COIL infiltrator rigs Blank's offices to explode.

First Turn, Segment 9: The COIL infiltrator in the control and communication centers cracks open his false cupid and dies.

■ In Blank's lab, the COIL infiltrator rigs the laboratory proper to explode.

First Turn, Segment 12: The Serpentine Node detects the virus attacking its records and initiates the Nest's self-destruct procedures. It also shuts off all communications between the Nest and the outside to quarantine the virus... but it acts too late. The virus has already replicated itself to other computers in VIPER's network.

■ In Blank's lab, the COIL infiltrator rigs the southernmost holding cells to explode.

Second Turn, Segment 3: On the holographic display unit at the center of the control and communication center the Serpentine Node shows the message: "Alert! Alert! Serpentine Network compromised. Enacting quarantine protocols in 3 seconds... 2 seconds... 1 second..." (The euphemistically-named "quarantine protocols" are simply to

blow up the entire Nest — no one but Black Snake Jake knows this and he's in no shape to tell anyone.)

■ In Blank's lab, the COIL infiltrator rigs the northernmost holding cells to explode.

Second Turn, Segment 6: The explosives attached to the generators explode, blowing out the west wall of the control and communication center and destroying the Serpentine Node, as well as damaging those characters still standing in the room. Also, when the generators explode, all power goes out for the entire Nest (including the ghost town above).

■ In Blank's lab, the COIL infiltrator triggers the explosions, destroying the lab and killing himself in the process.

Second Turn, Segment 9: The VIPER Nest self-destructs. The final act of the Serpentine Node before exploding is to transmit an electronic signal (detectable with appropriate Enhanced Senses and the like) to explosives placed throughout the Nest. On this Segment, the self-destruct sequence begins starting in the living area, cutting off both exits from the underground complex and trapping everyone inside, then moving on later Segments inward from there. Built into the complex behind thin metal wall panels, the explosives are undetectable without N-Ray Perception or similar special Senses and Powers. Stats for the explosives are:

Self-Destruct Devices: *RKA 6d6, Explosion (1 DC per 3"; +1) (180 Active Points); 1 Charge (-2), IIF (-¼). Total cost: 55 points.*

You should assume an explosion collapses the ceiling and makes the area impassable (at least for normal forms of movement). Anyone caught in a collapse takes 8d6 Normal Damage and is buried.

ESCAPE!

Superheroes have all sort of powers and special abilities at their disposal, and your players probably come up with their own means of escaping the exploding Nest. Or maybe they just take it like heroes, let the complex bury them, and dig their way out after the dust has settled.

But just in case, the adventure has a built-in way of escaping: located in Black Snake Jake's quarters (area #5 on the map) is a secret room with a tunneling vehicle, the Mini-Subterrene. The PCs can find the room, then one drives the vehicle (without using the *Fill In Adder*) while the others follow behind.



UNEXPECTED EXPLOSIONS AND SUDDEN DEATH

6d6 Killing Damage can be a lot to handle for a 350-point superhero with defenses on the low end of the range. If you don't want a PC to die an unexpected death, here's three pieces of advice.

First, even if it goes against the timeline, let the PC see an explosion happen before he moves into the area of the next one — describe the destruction down the hall, then describe the next section of wall blowing up and resulting the ceiling collapse *before* he accidentally stumbles into the middle of an explosion.

Second, have the explosions occur at the *beginning* of a Segment rather than the end — this way the PC is more likely to have an action remaining he can use to abort to Dive For Cover.

Third, you can always reduce the damage of the explosions to 4d6 Killing Damage.

Every Two Segments Later: The explosive devices are placed along all passages 4" apart and explode in a chain reaction, the next nearest device going off every two Segments. Within five Segments (Third Turn, Segment 4) explosives have destroyed the living quarters, making the area impassable, and reached the security checkpoint (area #2 on the map). Then the chain reaction continues into the operations area and the PCs had better get moving!

2. Security Checkpoint

Located between the agents' living quarters and the operations areas, the security checkpoint is staffed by two VIPER agents at all times. Two large, metal doors close off the room — the seals on the doors are airtight, so no air or other gas can pass through — and cameras set in the hallways on either side allow the agents to view events outside the doors. The doors (DEF 16, BODY 9) can only be opened with a security card (as discussed on page 25) or from the control and communication center (like they are when the PCs reach them). Agents working in the control and communications center monitor the room at all times. The counters the agents stand behind are heavily armored (DEF 12, BODY 6) and provide them with partial cover.

An agent on duty in the control and communications center can flood the security checkpoint with poisonous gas — a extremely deadly type of cyanide — in an emergency. The gas comes in through two vents located high up on the north and south walls. The gas remains virulent for 1 Turn until dispersing. The agent in the control and communications center can also activate the evacuation mechanism, sucking the gas out of the room. (Chances are your PCs don't have the dubious pleasure of experiencing the poison gas first hand. But if they remain in the security checkpoint for several Segments *after* the COIL infiltrator opens the doors for them, a different agent — this one loyal to VIPER and quick on his feet — closes the doors and releases the gas.)

Poison Gas: *RKA 3d6, NND (defense is Life Support [appropriate Immunity]; +1), Does BODY (+1), Area Of Effect (One Hex Doubled; +¾) (169 Active Points); 1 Continuing Charge lasting 1 Turn (-1¼). Total cost: 75 points.*

3. Control And Communications Center

The heart of the Snake Gulch Nest, the control and communication center is where VIPER agents carry out the base's important day-to-day operations: monitoring and relaying communications between Nests, serving as a second security point against those attempting to trace inter-Nest telecommunication systems, and general maintenance of equipment.

In addition to the supervisor on duty, seven agents work in the place. Three monitor Nest security for the aboveground facilities (including the

radar array). The workstations for these are located against the northern wall. The other four process communications, scan messages for signs of treasonous activity, and otherwise carry out the commands of VIPER higher-ups. Their workstations are located in the corners of the room.

A single seat on a swivel faces the holographic display unit at the center of the room. Here the supervisor sits and monitors the activity of the seven agents. The holographic display unit is the user interface for the Serpentine Node, the advanced computer that helps coordinate activities in the Nest. A door in the western wall leads to the power generators and the Serpentine Node's physical components.

A. GENERATORS AND COMPUTER ROOM

Six generators lie in the northern part of this room. Each of these is rigged with explosives that only the Serpentine Node can trigger. For the sake of simplicity, treat all six explosions as one for purposes of damage:

Serpentine Node Self-Destruct Devices: *RKA 6d6, Explosion (1 DC per 3"; +1) (180 Active Points); 1 Charge (-2), IIF (-¼). Total cost: 55 points.*

The southern section of the room is walled with plexiglass. A single door leads through the wall, and visible behind the plexiglass is the Serpentine Node's hard drive and other components. The plexiglass is cold to the touch; the area inside is super-cooled to aid processing speed.

4. Timothy Blank's Laboratory

Timothy Blank's laboratory is the most recent addition to the Snake Gulch Nest. VIPER originally built this portion of the complex to hold prisoners before they were shipped overseas, then four years ago renovated it to house part of Project Mendel. Blank and his experimental subjects cleared out of the Nest over a week ago; Blank took with him all of his important notes and data, his personal journal, and anything that could be used to identify him, but left behind many of his personal effects including the clothes in his bedroom, the books in his library, and much of his lab equipment.

A. Laboratory: Here Blank conducted much of his research. A table with a centrifuge, microscope, and a computer occupies the middle of the room; the cabinets below the table contain spare lab equipment. A freezer stands against the south wall beside a sliding door. Along the east wall is a workbench filled with carefully sorted chemicals in test tubes and samples in petri dishes, as well as a container for milking venom from snakes and a large selection of antivenoms. A large portion of the north wall is made of plexiglass, beyond which is visible the radiation exposure room (described below). At the center of the plexiglass wall is a control panel for adjusting the level of radiation output, as well varying the types of radiation emitted by the projectors.

(The dials for both projectors are currently set to gamma radiation.) To the west of that section are two file cabinets with five drawers each.

(For more details about the equipment contained in the lab, especially the items important to the rest of the adventure, see *The Laboratory At Snake Gulch* in the next chapter on page 41. Since some of this equipment is important to later parts of the adventure, if the PCs come up with the idea of salvaging some of it from the self-destructing Nest, you should allow one or more of them to attempt SS: Biology, SS: Genetics, or any other Skill you deem appropriate to determine the relative importance of the equipment. With success, let them know which pieces are more likely to be important than others by consulting the descriptions in the next chapter.)

B. Ophidiary: Shelves line the walls of this narrow room. They hold glass terrariums housing all types of venomous snakes — vipers, asps, rattlesnakes, taipans, and many others. In the largest terrarium, stretching from the floor to ceiling against the east wall, is a king cobra. The cobra is huge for its species — almost twenty-four feet long (normally large cobras grow to eighteen feet). It's much too large for its terrarium and in the bottom are piles and piles of shed skin.

In all, the ophidiary contains twenty-four venomous serpents. Each of the terrariums has a label, handwritten in ink with meticulous care stating the occupant's genus and species. (Examples: *vipera berus* [viper], *ophiophagus hannah* [king cobra], *crotalus cerastes* [sidewinder]). A quick look and successful Criminology, SS: Psychology, or SS: Graphology roll finds the care taken with the labels unusual; someone obviously considered them very important or precious.

C. Radiation Exposure Room: In this room just off the laboratory are two pallets against the north wall. The pallets are metal and crossed by three leather straps; each can rotate from a vertical to a horizontal position. Beside each pallet are squat machines able to measure heart rate, EEG, and other physiological functions; piled atop each machine is a tangle of diodes. In the southeast and southwest corners are projectors able to emit different types of radiation.

D. Holding Cells: Off the hallway leading north from the laboratory are ten holding cells, five on either side, where Blank kept his experimental subjects. Each cell door is solid steel; to its right is a small monitor which Blank used to observe the occupant. Just under the monitor is a button; when pressed it floods the holding cell with knockout gas to subdue the subject and make him easier for Blank to deal with. Inside the holding cell is a simple cot and a television set.

E. Office: The northern part of this room holds bookshelves, a chair, and a low table. The books all concern chemistry, biology, genetics, and reptiles. The library is small, but impressive, and any PC with an appropriate Knowledge Skill recognizes the books as the latest research in their respective

OPERATIONS AREA MATERIALS SUMMARY

Here's a summary of the BODY and DEF for the materials found around the Nest's operations area.

Object	DEF and BODY
Corridor Wall	DEF 8, BODY 6
Dirt (One Hex)	DEF 0, BODY 10
Escape Room Wall	DEF 5, BODY 5
Outer Wall	DEF 12, BODY 12
Plexiglass	DEF 8, BODY 7
Regular Door	DEF 6, BODY 4
S. Checkpoint Door	DEF 16, BODY 9
S. Checkpoint Counter	DEF 12, BODY 6
Sliding Door	DEF 12, BODY 9

fields. In the southern part of the room is a desk. The desk holds nothing that can be used to identify the occupant — just paperclips, pens, and other quotidian office supplies.

F. Bedroom: A large, immaculately made bed lies against the west wall. At the foot of the bed, against the east wall, is an entertainment center. There are two doors in the north wall: the east one leads to a bathroom, the west to a walk-in closet. Inside the closet are men's clothing — mainly slacks and button-down shirts — that would fit a thin man somewhat shorter than six feet tall. As in the office, the PCs find nothing in this room that provides the name of the occupant.

5. Black Snake Jake's Quarters

Since Black Snake Jake's assignment to Snake Gulch two years ago, the Nest Leader and Blank have had frequent clashes. In a nutshell: Blank felt the Nest and all its personnel were there to serve him, and Black Snake Jake resented the fact that Blank's laboratory was off-limits to him and his personnel. Blank couldn't resist getting the last laugh, and before the Nest Leader departed the control and communication center, a COIL infiltrator gave him a dose of the Ophidian Plague. Now Black Snake Jake is not only a snake in name, but appearance too. (And in true comic book fashion, Blank's megalomania and thirst for revenge might provide the PCs with valuable clues for the next part of the adventure.)

Black Snake Jake, now a carrier for the Ophidian Plague, lurks in his quarters waiting to attack unwary PCs.

A. Meeting Room: Here the Nest Leader meets with his staff. The only furnishings in the room are a table with eight chairs and a white board on the wall. On the table is a holographic display unit for video conferencing with other leaders in VIPER.

B. Office: Black Snake Jake's private office has a desk and chair near the east wall. Along the west wall are bookshelves, filled mainly with biographies of military leaders from Ramses the Great to General Norman Schwarzkopf. One book on the shelf, *Nest Leading For Dummies*, is the trigger for the

NEST AGENTS BREAKDOWN

Number/Type	Daytime Location	Nighttime Location	Notes
2 Agents (McClanes)	Snake Gulch (9. Ranch/Guiding Tour)	Snake Gulch (9. Ranch)	Attempt to avoid combat.
20 Agents (actors)	Snake Gulch	Nest (1. Living Area)	See <i>VIPER Bites: Snake Gulch Personnel</i> , page 23 for more details.
3 Agents (actors)	Special (see <i>Taking The Tour</i> , page 18)	Nest (1. Living Area)	See <i>VIPER Bites: Snake Gulch Personnel</i> , page 23 for more details.
1 Agent (Lieutenant)	Nest (1. Living Area)	Nest (1. Living Area)	
8 Agents	Nest (1. Living Area)	Nest (1. Living Area)	
1 COIL Infiltrator	Nest (1. Living Area)	Nest (1. Living Area)	Goes to 4. Blank's Lab during an attack.
2 Agents	Nest (2. Security Checkpoint)	Nest (2. Security Checkpoint)	
6 Agents	Nest (3. Control & Communication)	Nest (3. Control & Communication)	
1 COIL Infiltrator	Nest (3. Control & Communication)	Nest (3. Control & Communication)	
1 Agent (Lieutenant)	Nest (3. Control & Communication)	Nest (3. Control & Communication)	
1 Nest Leader	Nest (5. Black Snake Jake's Quarters)	Nest (5. Black Snake Jake's Quarters)	

secret door that leads to the Nest Leader's escape vehicle. The secret door is behind a bookshelf, and when triggered, the bookshelves slide to the west and into the wall to reveal the chamber beyond.

C. Bedroom: Inside this room is a queen-sized bed against the east wall and a dresser against the west wall. Two doors in the south lead to a closet and a bathroom.

When the PCs arrive, a travel bag stuffed with clothes and documents is on the bed, and Black Snake Jake, having descended into bestial savagery and forgotten his escape route, lurks under the bed. If undiscovered, he waits until the PCs turn to leave, then springs out to attack the nearest superhero from behind.

D. Nest Leader's Escape Vehicle: At the center of this room is a small vehicle with room for one driver and one passenger. The door is located in back; the driver sits first with the passenger just behind him. Tracks along the top and bottom provide propulsion, and at the front end of the vehicle is a large drill. The wall facing the vehicle is thin metal over dirt. The Nest Leader in times of emergency can use the Mini-Subterrene to tunnel away from the Nest.

MINI-SUBTERRENE

Val	Char	Cost	Notes
2	Size	10	1.6" x .8"; -2 KB; -1 DCV
30	STR	10	Lift 800 kg; 5d6 HTH [0]
12	DEX	6	OCV: 4/DCV: 4
14	BODY	2	
8	DEF	18	
3	SPD	8	Phases: 4, 8, 12
Total Characteristics Cost: 54			

Movement: Ground: 6"/12"
Tunneling: 6"/12"

Cost Power **END**
40 *Tunneling Drill:* Tunneling 6" through 6 DEF material, Fill In; 1 Continuing Fuel Charge (easily-obtained fuel; 6 Hours; -0) [1cc]

- 27 *Tunneling Drill:* RKA 2½d6; No Range (-½), 1 Continuing Fuel Charge (easily-obtained fuel; 6 Hours; -0) [1cc]
- 10 *Air Supply:* Life Support (Self-Contained Breathing); 1 Continuing Fuel Charge (easily-obtained fuel; 6 Hours; -0) [1cc]
- 2 *Heavy:* Swimming -2" (0" total)

Total Abilities & Equipment Cost: 75

Total Vehicle Cost: 129

Value Disadvantages

None

Total Disadvantage Points: 0

Total Cost: 129/5 = 26

Description: The Mini-Subterrene is a prototype vehicle that's seen limited use among VIPER personnel. A small vehicle about four feet high and five feet long, it can carry a driver and one passenger while it tunnels through the earth. Originally intended for infiltration of guarded areas, in most agents' eyes it's proved too slow to be effective. The Tunneling Drill is also very loud, making it difficult to sneak into a location when anyone nearby can hear the vehicle rumbling up through the ground.

BLACK SNAKE JAKE

18 STR	18 DEX	15 CON	12 BODY
12 INT	15 EGO	26 PRE	8 COM
5 PD	5 ED	3 SPD	6 REC
30 END	55 STUN		

Abilities: HKA 1 pip, No STR Bonus (Oversized Cuspids), Transform (Plague Carrier; see page 43), Mental Defense (15 points), Only Versus Mind Control And Telepathy; Contacts (10 points' worth, throughout VIPER), VIPER Membership Perk, Breakfall 12-, Bureaucratics 11-, Concealment 13-, Deduction 12-, Fast Draw (Small Arms) 12-, Martial Arts (VIPER Brawling, all maneuvers), Persuasion 12-, Stealth 13-, Streetwise 13-, Tactics 13-, WF: Small Arms

50+ Disadvantages: Distinctive Features: Plague



Carrier; Enraged: in combat, go 14-, recover 8-, Hunted (Watched by VIPER), Physical Limitation: Limited Intelligence.

Equipment: Armor 6 PD/6 ED (Uniform).

Description: Born and raised just outside of Dallas, Jake Blackwell indulged in a life of petty crime until he was kicked out of high school... and soon afterwards, his parents' home as well. He drifted into VIPER, where he performed well and his instructors flagged him as potential leadership material. He advanced through the ranks of Cobra Division, VIPER's combat specialists, and at age twenty-two became one of the youngest to train as a Scarlet Serpent. In his five-year career with VIPER he didn't make a single mistake — but that couldn't last forever.

During a combat with superheroes, Black Snake Jake was leading a VIPER Eight-Team. When a superhero went down, he disobeyed an order to retreat and instead went for the kill. The downed superhero's teammates came to the rescue. Five

of Jake's team ended up in prison, and two to the hospital; only Jake escaped. Jake's superiors decided a lesson was in order. They promoted him to Nest Leader... but of the Snake Gulch Nest, where they felt he could cool his heels for a few years and learn patience. Black Snake Jake resents his re-assignment. He frequently clashes with Dr. Timothy Blank over resources and the McClanes over necessary funding for the ghost town tourist attraction. He looks forward to his transfer out of Snake Gulch and is careful not to screw up.

A hothead mainly because of his youth, Black Snake Jake possesses a natural tactical sense and an uncanny insight into people's character and motivations. His perception of Dr. Blank's intellectual arrogance causes Jake's frequent clashes with Blank; Jake can't abide people who look down on him.

The character sheet above represents Jake after he's contracted the plague; for a general description of the effects of the plague refer to page 43 in the next chapter.

TOTAL AGENTS/INFILTRATORS BY LOCATION

Location	Daytime Number	Nighttime Number	Notes
Snake Gulch	22 (maybe 25; see <i>Taking The Tour</i> , page 18)	2	
Nest			
1. Living Area	13 (maybe 10; see <i>Taking The Tour</i> , page 18)	32	1 Lieutenant, 1 COIL Infiltrator
2. Security Checkpoint	2	2	
3. Control & Communication	8	8	1 Lieutenant, 1 COIL Infiltrator
5. Black Snake Jake's Quarters	1	1	1 Nest Leader

CONCLUSION



With the threat of the VIPER Nest neutralized, the PCs likely contact your campaign's law enforcement agencies for mop up — if for nothing else than to capture the agents and send them to prison. There are several important clues the PCs can gather from the raided VIPER Nest, and for ease of reference, these are listed below so you can keep track of them during this part of *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth*. The beginning of the next chapter discusses the investigation of these clues in more detail. If the PCs don't immediately realize the importance of these — and they might not until the Ophidian Plague breaks out — you need to decide where they end up.

BLACK SNAKE JAKE

Jake's the first victim of the Ophidian Plague. As such, his body may provide information about the nature and course of the disease before King Cobra unleashes the plague.

BLANK'S LAB

Some part of this lab might survive the explosions — but only if the PCs act quickly. These are later useful in the search for a cure for the Ophidian Plague.

THE COIL INFILTRATORS

Both of these are examples of the effects of King Cobra's Coil-Gene Touch. One is likely blown up in the explosions in Blank's laboratory. The other, posted in the control and communication center, ingests poison; the explosion of the generators might damage or even destroy his body.

CYBERMIND'S VIRUS

If the PCs prevent the COIL agent from erasing the CD, they have a copy of the virus for analysis. Otherwise the only copy available is destroyed when the Serpentine Node self-destructs (although the PCs might retrieve it before then — any files downloaded from the VIPER computer contain a copy of the virus).

VIPER AGENTS

At least a few of the VIPER agents probably survive the raid on Snake Gulch. The PCs can question these prisoners about the goings-on at the Nest.

chapter two:



THE OPHIDIAN PLAGUE

INTRODUCTION



In the second part of *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth*, the PCs have a chance to investigate what they discovered at Snake Gulch... but they'd best be quick about it! With the destruction of the VIPER Nest Timothy Blank, now the malevolent and serpentine King Cobra, puts in motion the second part of his plan.

In one fell swoop he hopes to accomplish two goals. First, he wishes to throw VIPER into chaos. King Cobra plans to use the resulting confusion to take over a large part of the organization and co-opt its widespread Nests and considerable armory of equipment for COIL's use. Second, he wishes to destabilize more traditional authority structures by overloading civil emergency systems in preparation for his eventual takeover.

His means of accomplishing this is the Ophidian Plague. Transmitted by saliva, the plague turns its victims into serpent-like humans with little control over their baser impulses. The initial carriers of the plague are VIPER agents. King Cobra, in the months before defecting, planted some of his loyal followers throughout the VIPER organization. These COIL infiltrators have gone about their daily tasks, a fifth column at work within VIPER.

King Cobra planted a handful of these agents at a Nest located in Canada's northern wilderness, one of the locations where Snake Beer is (re-)bottled and distributed. Snake Beer (described in more detail on page 74 of *VIPER: Coils Of The Serpent*) is the beer of choice among agents, mainly because VIPER provides it free of charge. At King Cobra's order, those COIL infiltrators working in the bottling plant poisoned the beer with the Ophidian Plague. Soon after you start part two of the adventure, VIPER distributes the beer... and agents relaxing with a cold one after a day of training and criminal activities become infected with the Ophidian Plague! They burst out of their hidden Nests to wreak havoc on population centers, and as they do, they spread the Ophidian Plague, infecting even more people with the terrible virus.

CHAPTER ORGANIZATION

This chapter is divided into three sections.

The first discusses possible avenues of investigation for the PCs. Much of this focuses on the clues discovered in Chapter One of the adventure. Since it might come up at any time during the adventure, you should make sure you're familiar with it before beginning *The Ophidian Plague* — that way you can answer your players' questions quickly.

The second section details the Ophidian Plague, as well as several scenarios and the seeds of other scenarios you can use during this part of

the adventure. These range from saving the lives of terrorized civilians, to fighting a crew of rampaging supervillains infected with the plague. You can use these scenarios to better illustrate the threat posed by the disease, and to provide the PCs with additional clues about the Ophidian Plague if they missed something in the first part of the adventure.

The last section describes COIL's activities during the Ophidian Plague. King Cobra and his inner circle have established their hideout and central base for COIL's activities in your campaign city. From there, he monitors the progress of the Ophidian Plague. If your PCs make a nuisance of themselves, he dispatches his minions to distract them — perhaps permanently! This section also provides you with some context for what's going on while the PCs attempt to save the day, so you have a better understanding of the events in *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth*.

But before moving on to the next installment in King Cobra's world-threatening plot, you should consider two items:

HOW WIDESPREAD?

The events included here limit themselves to your campaign city. Included in boxed text entitled *Meanwhile... In Millennium City* are details about what happens in Millennium City, as well as advice for customizing the encounters to that venue. But the Ophidian Plague strikes at other locations as well, so you need to decide how widespread it actually is. Does it affect the world, the nation, or only a few major metropolitan areas?

Before making this decision, keep in mind a few things. First, the more widespread the plague, the more crippled VIPER is afterwards. If you have recently purchased *VIPER: Coils Of The Serpent* and want to lower the organization's threat level, as described on pages 176 and 177 of that book, this is an excellent time to do so. The Ophidian Plague cripples the organization, once a major threat to the nations of the world, and after the conclusion of *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth* VIPER must rebuild. On the other hand, if you want VIPER to come out of King Cobra's attack relatively unscathed, simply limit the plague to a few metropolitan areas.

The Ophidian Plague and its aftermath can lay the groundwork for later adventures — King Cobra's not the only one able to take advantage of catastrophe for his own gain. So if later on in your campaign you'd like to have the PCs save a small country from being conquered by a dictator or similar tyrant — a malevolent soul taking advantage of the suffering and chaos for his own advancement

— the Ophidian Plague lets you set the stage for that.

Finally, the Ophidian Plague doesn't break out everywhere at the same time. The VIPER agents must drink the poisoned beer before the plague spreads. For the sake of drama and the story, the first instance of the plague takes place in your campaign city. Once your superheroes are coming to grips with the terrible virus, you can have it spread to other locations.

(If the PCs quickly figure out how the plague spreads, they might be able to let other superhero teams across the world know about it and help stop it. This can be a good roleplaying opportunity for your PCs, since they have the opportunity to not only interact with NPC superheroes, but also save their bacon!)

When you decide how widespread the plague is, communicate that to the players. Use the information included in the *Meanwhile... In Millennium City* boxed text to give your players a sense of the widespread danger by telling them what's going on in that city. Maybe other superheroes call them for advice or to inform them of the situation in their locale. Contacts, from wherever they might be, call for help or offer to lend a hand. News broadcasts certainly have hourly — if not more frequent — updates on the spread of the terrible Ophidian Plague.

RED HERRING

In an ideal world, your players aren't familiar with earlier editions of *Champions* and they've never heard of Timothy Blank, King Cobra, and COIL. These players likely think, at least at the onset of the adventure, that VIPER is somehow responsible for the Ophidian Plague, or else it's some mysterious individual working toward his own ends within the organization. If that's the case, then this section isn't for you and you can skip ahead.

On the other hand, if your players are familiar with King Cobra because of past campaigning in the Champions Universe, the moment they hear the name Timothy Blank — which probably comes up early in the investigation — they know what's going on. Maybe not the specifics, but they at least know the plot involves King Cobra. That detracts from the mystery of the villain working behind the scenes in *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth*.

One simple solution: change Timothy Blank's name to something else. Maybe he works under a false name in VIPER because his research is so sensitive, and the only name known to the personnel at Snake Gulch is the false one. Or maybe he's a

different scientist entirely — VIPER has plenty of researchers working on creating superhumans.

A less simple solution — more difficult to pull off, but potentially more interesting — is to make it seem that Blank is still in VIPER's employ. Basically, he might be the scientist who created the Ophidian Plague, but VIPER leadership unleashed it in an attempt to take over the world. In essence, this is a red herring.

To plant an effective red herring, you should have a false story in mind. That way you can make sure to include information that points to the red herring, along with information important to the true events behind the adventure. You aren't lying to the players; instead you're including both pertinent and incidental information, and requiring them to separate one from the other.

The obvious false story in *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth*: VIPER is working on a top secret project under the direction of Blank and the Ophidian Plague is a result of the project. The organization's leadership judged the Snake Gulch facility a liability and decided to destroy it, but they needed Blank so they arranged to have him depart the Nest. An agent discovered what was going on and for some reason sent the postcard to the PCs.

One way to play this up: stress the information gained from captured VIPER agents and Black Snake Jake that VIPER leadership sanctioned Blank's departure from the Nest. Blank wasn't just clearing out, but instead he traveled to consult with colleagues in the Fix and even had official paperwork approving his itinerary and the like. Maybe even plant some of the paperwork approving his itinerary in his office at Snake Gulch. (None of this is true — Blank didn't tell the leadership he was leaving Snake Gulch — but Black Snake Jake had no reason to doubt what Blank told him and didn't report the matter to his higher-ups.)

Another item to stress is the similarity between VIPER's Draysha (see *VIPER Bites: The Draysha*) and the COIL infiltrators — this way the players might not realize the COIL infiltrators are from a different organization entirely. Rather they might believe these are top agents in VIPER.

Also make sure the PCs discover that VIPER agents considered Snake Gulch a dead-end, as well as the fact that leadership assigned Black Snake Jake to the Nest as a sort of punishment for insubordination. This makes the Nest seem more expendable.

And last, but not least: be sure to include the VIPER raid described in the boxed text, *VIPER Bites: Rescuing Black Snake Jake*, on page 45.

INVESTIGATION



The investigation centers around the clues left behind at Snake Gulch. Hopefully the PCs are curious enough about what happened in the previous part to look into the clues in the two days *before* the Ophidian Plague breaks out. After the plague begins to ravage the city, the thrust of their activity should change from curiosity about VIPER's villainous activities to an urgent need to discover a cure for the Ophidian Plague. As described at the end of part one, the clues that provide potential leads are: captured VIPER agents including Black Snake Jake; the COIL infiltrators; Cybermind's virus; and Blank's laboratory.

Captured VIPER Agents

Even if the Nest self-destructs (killing the VIPER agents inside), the ones who acted in the Snake Gulch ghost town probably survive to tell tales. You should allow the PCs to question these men and women to their heart's content. Though loyal to VIPER and confident the organization will take good care of them, the PCs can get them to spill the beans on some of the goings-on at Snake Gulch with successful Interrogation and Conversation rolls, or the use of Mental Powers.

Don't forget the captured agents' civil rights (described in detail on pages 48-50 of *Champions Universe*). VIPER agents, like many life-long, hard-bitten criminals, are autodidacts when it comes to the law; they're quick to remind the PCs what heroes can, and especially cannot, do when it comes to questioning prisoners.

If you have it, refer to page 78 of *VIPER: Coils Of The Serpent* for a detailed discussion of how VIPER deals with captured agents. In general, the organization bends over backwards to make sure agents have every reason to keep their lips sealed. It provides legal services and promises a reward to any agent who keeps his mouth shut. VIPER leadership is as familiar with the Prisoner's Dilemma as any superhero or law enforcement agent.

However the PCs obtain the information, the agents know few details about the activities at the Nest:

- They tell the PCs the name of their Nest Leader, but don't know anything about his past. They do know, however, he was fully human last they saw him, not some half-snake, half-man like the PCs encountered in the Nest.
- They reveal the Nest was a communication center for VIPER, but don't know how long it has operated and any other history behind it. (The McClanes are an exception — they

know most of Snake Gulch's history, but no more about its operations and precise function through the decades than any other agent.)

- They know Blank used the lab for experiments on live human subjects, but don't know the nature of the experiments — new subjects arrived pretty frequently, maybe once or twice a month. They overheard the project's name was Project Mendel or Project Stein. Doctor Blank worked alone in the lab, but they don't know any more than that about what went on inside. They also know not all subjects left the lab alive. All dead subjects left the lab in body bags, so no one saw what they looked like or knew the cause of death... but there were frequent rumors of a scaly arm or leg falling out of the body bag, subjects who judging from the shape of the body bag didn't have any limbs but did have a long tail instead of legs, and other strange goings-on.
- Finally, they hadn't seen Blank in the Nest for over a week. He departed with a handful of sedated subjects and one crate marked "Fragile." No one knows precisely why, but rumor was he'd be gone for a month. One agent (the COIL infiltrator assigned to blow up the lab) took care of feeding the human subjects Blank left behind (there weren't any, but Blank claimed there were so Jake would approve his request for an agent to take care of the lab in his absence), the snakes in the ophidiary, and other duties; no one else had clearance for that area of the Nest.

Black Snake Jake

Poor Black Snake Jake... he was on the fast track to criminal success, but then he made a mistake and let his temper get the better of him. Put in charge of a dead-end Nest, he didn't treat Dr. Blank with the respect the megalomaniac thought he deserved... and now he's the first victim of the Ophidian Plague.

Page 43 discusses the effects of the Ophidian Plague in more detail and describes what the PCs can discover about it via scientific testing. Briefly, Black Snake Jake shows symptoms typical to the malady: oversized cuspids, decreased intellectual capacity, patches of dry skin resembling scales all over his body (but especially prominent on the face and hands), and discolored skin (in this case a greenish-black tinge appropriate to his nickname).

Jake's criminal record shows a series of run-ins with the authorities as a youth (these records are sealed), then he seems to drop off the face of the Earth — no employment records, tax returns, or

any of the paper trail most people leave. There's no record of him as a member of VIPER because he never got caught and no one ever informed on him.

Questioning Jake: The savage bloodlust brought on by the Ophidian Plague consumes Jake's consciousness and memory. He can articulate words and the like, but can't communicate more than the simplest desire to commit violence (*i.e.*, "Kill you!" or "Die!"), and frequent hisses punctuate his words. With successful use of Telepathy, a PC can glimpse into his memories and uncover information about the Snake Gulch Nest. This requires an EGO + 20 result on the Telepathy dice (and don't forget he has Mental Defense). An EGO + 30 result with Mind Control can temporarily return Black Snake Jake to his normal mental state. Here's what he knows above and beyond the information provided by captured agents:

- Doctor Blank headed up Project Mendel and Project Stein. Both projects involved the study of reptilian, specifically ophidian, DNA and its application with respect to the human genome. Project Mendel involved creating superhumans. Project Stein focused on less pervasive uses of techniques developed over the course of Project Mendel such as regenerating limbs, distilling preternaturally deadly venoms, and other, more classified goals. (Black Snake Jake doesn't know this, but Project Stein's ultimate goal was the manipulation of the reptilian part of the human brain for purposes of mind control — a process similar to that produced by King Cobras Coil-Gene Touch.)
- Doctor Blank departed the Nest over a week ago to confer with colleagues about the results of his latest experiments, as well as meet with VIPER leadership about funding. He also took several subjects with him to "better illustrate his progress." Black Snake Jake has no knowledge of Blank's itinerary, but he said he would return to Snake Gulch within a month. Given Blank's authority and the relatively ordinary nature of the event, Black Snake Jake didn't report it to his superiors; he assumed they already knew about it.
- Black Snake Jake did not have security clearance for the lab. He attempted to intimidate the agent put in charge of taking care of the lab in Blank's absence (the COIL infiltrator) — but much to his surprise, the agent wouldn't obey his command to let him into the lab. The agent even went so far as to threaten to report him to their superiors. Jake wasn't done with the matter, but didn't have a chance to pursue it further.

COIL Infiltrators

The PCs might have rescued one or both of the COIL infiltrators from the VIPER Nest. Both of them are examples of the Coil-Gene Touch and its effects.

Each of the infiltrators has cosmetics and

prosthetics to hide his serpentine features. They use an upper plate of dentures — two normal looking cuspids — to hide their retractable fangs. Each of the cuspids contains a poison capsule described on page 26. The dentures require special manufacture, but nothing unique (or, more importantly, traceable). The poison is amazingly virulent and similar to cobra venom (obviously a result of Project Stein if the PCs have discovered the information about that project from Black Snake Jake). Contacts hide their slit pupils. The contacts are available at most specialty and novelty shops. Make-up and caked-on base hide the scales on their face and neck; false flesh held in place with spirit gum hides it on their hands. None of these cosmetics is particularly unique or difficult to find.

With successful use of KS: Genetics and a laboratory, a PC can determine that each infiltrator is the subject of genetic manipulation. With further study and time (a minimum of one day, based on the degree of success obtained with the Skill Roll), the PC can isolate the changes to the genome that resulted in the physical features exhibited by both COIL agents: patches of scaly skin (not merely dry skin that looks scaly), retractable fangs, and slit pupils. But no amount of study provides him with any insight about how exactly the genetic changes were caused. He also knows, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that neither is a victim of the Ophidian Plague — whatever caused the mutation in the two people is different from the plague. Black Snake Jake is the victim of a virus; these two are the result of genetic engineering.

A Poisoned Needle: The COIL agent assigned to the control and communication center carries a poisoned needle hidden in a VIPER class ring (class of 2000, VIPER Academy). A PC can find the needle with a successful Concealment roll at -3. If the wearer twists the green "gemstone," the needle emerges from the band; a reservoir of poison — in this case the plague — lies under the gemstone's setting and a hollow within the band runs from the reservoir to the needle.

From the needle, a PC can obtain a sample of the Ophidian Plague mixed with blood. Analysis of his blood show that it matches Black Snake Jake's. For more details about the Ophidian Plague, see *The Ophidian Plague Defined*, page 43.

Still Alive?: In the unlikely event the PCs take one of the COIL agents alive, or have a means of viewing the past or speaking with the dead, here's some background information you can use to answer their questions.

As stated elsewhere, Blank went through several stages of transformation before becoming King Cobra. The first stage gave him the Coil-Gene Touch with only slight physical changes, and he underwent this change months before leaving Snake Gulch. Shortly before he departed, he called both agents to his quarters individually. He then tricked each into the holding cells, flooded the cell with knock-out gas, and subjected him to the Coil-Gene Touch. Finally he gave them their orders: one was to blow up the lab (Blank was not aware of the

VIPER BITES: THE DRAYSHA

In *VIPER: Coils Of The Serpent*, pages 62 and 63 describe the serpentine Draysha, agents gifted with temporary superhuman abilities in exchange for the possibility of developing leukemia.

When his superiors demanded results — VIPER had invested considerable money in Blank's projects and was tired of seeing "results inconclusive; further study needed" on his status reports — Dr. Blank provided them with the Draysha process. Unwilling to part with his best work, he planted a fatal flaw in the process, namely the increased rate of leukemia among the subjects. The process itself is a precursor to the more stable mutation occurring in those subjected to the Coil-Gene Touch. It also lacks the genetic hooks that make COIL agents fanatically loyal to King Cobra.

If you use the Draysha in your campaign, the PCs might find out about them during the investigation — that is, if they haven't already encountered the deadly agents in the scaly flesh! Both UNTIL and PRIMUS certainly have files on the Draysha and if the PCs contact either organization about the results of their tests on the COIL agents, it's likely to ring some bells. Studies show the mutations resemble each other, but with distinct differences — they probably result from a similar line of research. The same is true in comparisons with Black Snake Jake and other victims of the Ophidian Plague — but here the tests reveal one key element that links the two: serpent venom. Additionally, the Draysha process is known to be the result of Project Stein; field agents report that the head of Stein is either Timothy Blank or Phillippe Moreau. (For more about Moreau see page 134 of *VIPER* and pages 130 and 147 of *Champions Universe*.)

self-destruct devices); the other was to upload the program on the compact disk to the Serpentine Node (the COIL infiltrator does not know what's on the disk). They know nothing about the larger plot and Blank ordered them to kill themselves once they accomplished their respective missions. Fanatically loyal to King Cobra, they attempt to carry out this last order at every opportunity.

Getting this information out of them via mundane means (such as Interrogation or Conversation) is impossible. Successful use of Mind Control, Telepathy, or similar methods requires an additional +20 effect on the total dice because of the genetic hooks put in place by the Coil-Gene Touch to ensure their loyalty to King Cobra. If the PCs succeed, remember that neither agent saw Blank as King Cobra; they only have a "mental image" of the scientist as a normal-looking human. Furthermore, both were unconscious when subjected to the Coil-Gene Touch, so they don't know how the transformation occurred. And afterwards, now fanatically loyal, they were unconcerned about the what happened to them and never questioned or even thought about it.

Cybermind's Virus

Hired by King Cobra, Cybermind, a villain with powers of cyberkinesis and a superhuman talent with computers, designed the virus uploaded onto the Serpentine Node in part one of *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth*. The purpose of the virus was to spread throughout VIPER's computer network and erase records of Blank's progress with Project Mendel and Stein. King Cobra thus hoped to stymie VIPER's efforts to find a cure before the Ophidian Plague completely crippled the organization. Unless the PCs somehow thwarted the spread of the computer virus, it succeeded before VIPER's computers could identify and neutralize it. Now VIPER possesses very few records of Blank's research, mostly fragments of computer files and whatever hard copies were in the hands of members of the Fix. Most importantly, it does not know enough to quickly devise a cure for the plague.

Unbeknownst to King Cobra (at least for now!), Cybermind programmed a sub-routine into the virus that forwarded copies of the erased records to his own computers. Later in the adventure (*Serpents And Cybermind*, page 57), Cybermind posts the files to an Internet auction site and plans to sell them to the highest bidder.

There are two ways the PCs can discover the computer virus. First, if they prevented the COIL agent from erasing the CD, then took it from the Nest when the place self-destructed. The same applies if they downloaded any files from the Serpentine Node before it self-destructed. If they downloaded information from the Serpentine Node, all they obtained was a copy of the virus and some fragmented files. Realizing it was under "attack," the computer began to erase itself to safeguard VIPER secrets; between that and the virus little remained in the computer's memory files.

(Unless, of course, you want to plant the seeds for future adventures with VIPER. This is an excellent place to start laying the groundwork for later scenarios by providing the PCs with information about VIPER's activities from files downloaded from the Nest's Serpentine Node. If that's the case, include any and all plot hooks for future events in your campaign here.)

To "hack" the virus requires a successful Skill Versus Skill Contest: the PC's Computer Programming against Cybermind's 20- with the Skill (assume that, given the extra time he took, his advanced equipment, and the like, Cybermind made his roll by 12). Success allows the PC to determine the purpose of the virus and gain a list of keywords it uses to select files for deletion. If the character rolls exactly what he needs, he knows the virus erases selected files and that's it; for each additional point by which he makes the roll, he also learns one of the keywords the virus uses to select files to erase. The list of keywords is: Project Mendel or Project Stein (counts as one keyword), Timothy Blank, David Green, Ezekiel Hamilton, Uwe Meyer, and Zanita Stefanos. (You should either choose which one the PC discovers, or determine randomly with a roll of 1d6.) For more information

about these keywords and follow-up research, see *Timothy Blank And COIL* on page 42.

If the character makes his roll by 8 or more, he discovers that the virus not only deletes selected files, but also emails a copy of the files to the address, nuz4u@wahoooo.com. For more information on tracking down this email address, see *Serpents And Cybermind* on page 57.

The Laboratory At Snake Gulch

If the PCs didn't move the equipment from the laboratory at Snake Gulch or somehow prevent its destruction, there's *no way* they can cure the plague in time to stave off a disaster of epic proportions without discovering King Cobra's safehouse under the city. It requires far too much research and study. Despite his insanity, Blank is a genius and one of the world's foremost experts in both genetics and herpetology; tracing his work is time-consuming even for the likes of Teleios, Dr. Silverback, or Mentiac. It requires weeks, if not months, to retrace all of his steps leading up to the Ophidian Plague and then *begin* formulating a cure for the plague. A character can do it, to be sure, but the time required is too much to stave off disaster.

Assuming the PCs didn't prevent the place's destruction, the best case scenario is that they got some or all of the equipment and samples out of the lab. The sections below describe the important items and what the PCs can learn from each. Any items not listed are not helpful to the investigation.

Computer: Thanks to VIPER security measures, the computer is a dummy terminal that hooked into the Serpentine Node. In other words, it doesn't have its own hard drive; it accessed the Nest computer to perform all functions, and the user stored files on the main computer making it more difficult to keep secrets from VIPER leadership. (Blank, aware of the dangers of using the dummy terminal, also used a laptop where he kept his most important files and results. He also did a lot more work on paper than the average modern-day scientist.)

The PCs can however retrieve a set of Blank's fingerprints from the keyboard with careful handling and a successful Criminology roll. With success by 3 or better, the PC notices subtle changes in his fingerprints if compared with older fingerprints from the lab. With a successful Deduction roll, the PC suspects scales on the fingers result in the difference... assuming he has reason to, such as if the team captured the COIL agents or Black Snake Jake.

File Cabinets: Blank took the important files with him and destroyed any paperwork that contained clues about his work he couldn't carry out of the Nest, but if the PCs spend several hours scanning the files that remain, they can confirm what Black Snake Jake said about Project Mendel and Project Stein. The former concerns itself with engineering superhumans, the latter with specific applications of Project Mendel's advancements. They also gain some insight into Blank's methodology that can

play a part later in the adventure and help discover a cure for the plague.

One additional piece of information: a single piece of paper, fallen to the bottom of the cabinet (the eastern one on the *Snake Gulch Nest Map*), lies crumpled under the last drawer. The paper is a mission statement concerning Project Stein's ultimate goal: to discover a means of using genetic engineering for the purposes of mind-control. A photocopy of the original and signed by Blank, the project statement is dated several years ago, addressed to the "Supreme Serpent," and marked for circulation to the "Council of Thirty."

The PCs can also obtain fingerprints from the file cabinets (like with the computer above); they obtain two sets however, both recent and older (without scales).

Samples From The Workbench: None of the samples from the workbench are particularly informative. They contain various forms of venom and skin scrapings for use in DNA analysis. Analysis of the skin shows that some of the samples come from superhumans of various types (*i.e.*, mutants, mutates, and so on), as well as several samples experiencing changes similar to both the COIL infiltrators and Black Snake Jake. With successful use of SS: Genetics or SS: Biology, the PC knows Blank is an expert in his field and focuses on ophidian genetics.

The PCs can also obtain fingerprints from the vials and petri dishes (like with the computer above); they obtain two sets however, both recent and older (without scales).

Samples In The Freezer: The freezer holds carefully arranged vials, test tubes, and petri dishes. The vast majority of these — all but one in fact — provide the PCs with the same information as the samples from the workbench described above. One stands out, however, simply because it lacks a label. This is an early attempt to create the Ophidian Plague; for more details see *The Ophidian Plague Described* on page 43.

The PCs can also obtain fingerprints from the vials and petri dishes (like with the computer above); they obtain two sets however, both recent and older (without scales).

Snakes From The Ophidiary: While experimenting with his newly gained Coil-Gene Touch, Blank used his power on the king cobra in the large terrarium out of idle curiosity. With study and successful use of SS: Genetics, a PC knows the modification process is similar to that used on the COIL infiltrators. In addition to causing the cobra to grow, the process increased the potency of its already deadly venom. The cobra also shows signs of heightened aggression, so the PCs had better be careful when handling this snake! Upon study of its metabolism, it seems to have an accelerated growth rate — it's larger than any other recorded specimen of its species and shows no sign of stopping any time soon. (The size of this cobra foreshadows the monstrous snakes the PCs encounter in Chapter Three, *The Hothouse Jungle*.)

All of the snakes carry the Ophidian Plague (harmless in serpents). Blank used them to “incubate” the plague; their venom is a key ingredient in its creation. A PC can discover this by testing a blood or venom sample and successful use of SS: Biology or similar skill (SS: Herpetology is a Complementary Skill).

TIMOTHY BLANK AND COIL

Through investigation, mainly by discovering the keywords used by the computer virus, several names might come to the PCs’ attention. For ease of reference this section describes in brief what a cursory research (*i.e.*, an Internet search, a quick examination of the public record) turns up about each name. For more details you should consult the character sheets located at the back of this book.

Timothy Blank: A former geneticist on faculty with the Biology Department at the University of Florida, Blank went on the run from the authorities six years ago when school officials discovered he was testing humans (including graduate students and other professors) without prior approval. Law enforcement knows he works with VIPER. Last known whereabouts: Gainesville, Florida.

David Green: A former building maintenance engineer, Green caused a local controversy when he

saved a family from a burning building. When it was revealed that he was a mutant with powers over flame, some people felt Green might have caused the fire himself. He eventually dropped out of sight four years ago and no one has seen him since. Last known whereabouts: Kansas City, Missouri

Ezekiel Hamilton: A former Marine, Hamilton was dishonorably discharged from the service over two years ago for dereliction of duty. Last known whereabouts: Little Rock, Arkansas.

Uwe Meyer: A former agent of the now defunct Stasi, Meyer has a long record with intelligence agencies as a covert operative and assassin. He is a known VIPER agent. He participated in an unknown capacity during the VIPER-Eurostar War before he suffered a life-threatening beating at the hands of Durak that left him missing an arm and leg. Last known whereabouts: Munich, Germany.

Zanita Stefanos: Human interest articles from European news agencies report that Zanita, an orphan from Athens, enrolled in an elite private school, the Institute for Advanced Children, located at a remote chateau in the Swiss Alps. Various charitable contributions, including a sizable one from Duchess Industries, paid for her tuition. That was two years ago when she was fourteen; there’s been no mention of her since. Last known whereabouts: the Swiss Alps.

TROUBLESHOOTING: DID EVERYTHING RIGHT

Maybe through a combination of quick thinking, good tactics, perfect powers for the situation (*e.g.*, control over radio waves to stop the explosions, cyberkinesis to take control of the Serpentine Node), spot-on guesses, and just plain luck your PCs did everything right — not only in part one of the adventure, but also during the investigation in the days leading up to the Ophidian Plague. They know everything there is to know about the situation... in the worst case scenario, the team is getting the civil authorities ready for the outbreak of a plague that turns people into serpent-men and asking you when Blank, now looking like an overgrown cobra with arms and legs, is going to show up.

Probably not likely, but it could happen, so what do you do?

First, the Ophidian Plague still breaks out. It’s hard to imagine the PCs discovered the tainted Snake Beer, since none of the clues point to it. Plus the plague begins two days after the events at Snake Gulch, and discovering a cure without the files King Cobra took from his lab is going to take at least that much time. In other words, the PCs must deal with containing those infected and saving

those free of the plague. This being the case, you can still use the events in *Outbreak* effectively, just reduce the size of the hot zone to reflect the authorities’ quick response time because the PCs forewarned them of the trouble. (In short, reward the PCs by diminishing the plague’s effect, but don’t get rid of it entirely.)

Second, King Cobra remains at large. If they’re traditional superheroes, the PCs undoubtedly want to find him, bring him to justice, and end the threat he poses to humanity. The main change is the PCs take on a more proactive role in searching for King Cobra... but they aren’t the only ones taking aggressive action! If King Cobra learns the PCs know about him — *i.e.*, they make a public broadcast to warn the city about the coming plague — he comes after them with hopes of thwarting their efforts to find a cure, or even for simple (but bloody) revenge. Slither, hiding among terrorized commuters or plague victims in *Terror At The Train Station*, might attempt an assassination while the PCs seek to stave off the onslaught of serpentine plague-carriers. Or Boomslang, leading a cadre of COIL agents, might attack from ambush during *Ultimate Serpent-Men*.

OUTBREAK



Amere two days after the PCs' successful assault on the Snake Gulch Nest, the Ophidian Plague strikes. After a night of drinking cold Snake Beers, mutated VIPER agents burst out from their Nests to terrorize the populace... and spread the virus! Not only must the PCs figure out the cause of the Ophidian Plague, but they must help civilian agencies stop its spread and rescue uninfected civilians from the plague victims.

The plague is like a citywide riot... with two sharp fangs. The plague victims loot, destroy, set fires, and otherwise cause mayhem. Through it all, hapless civilians find themselves caught in harm's way with no path to safety... unless the superheroes can rescue them. The plague victims have an overwhelming desire to commit violence and, more importantly, spread the plague. Since it's transmitted by saliva, they use their overgrown — long and unnaturally sharp — cuspids to bite those not infected and give the poor victims the Ophidian Plague.

This section of Chapter Two details two scenarios you can use to provide your PCs with challenging encounters and an opportunity to prove their mettle as superheroes, as well as give them more clues about the plague and its nature. It also includes ideas for other scenarios you can use during this part of *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth*, plus some detail about the results of likely PC actions such as tracking down the plague's epicenter. You should use any and all of these as you see

fit to enliven the game and keep the action moving at a headlong pace to the adventure's conclusion. When you're ready to move on to Chapter Three, *In The Coils Of The Cobra*, you should proceed to the last scenario, *Serpents and Cybermind*, on page 57. From there the PCs can track the COIL agents led by Boomslang to King Cobra's lair under the city.

But before you get started with the heroics, you need to know the effects of the Ophidian Plague itself:

THE OPHIDIAN PLAGUE DEFINED

This section has information about the plague that is likely to come up during the course of the adventure. It also includes a discussion on how the PCs can cure the plague.

THE PLAGUE'S GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

The Ophidian Plague is, first and foremost, a plot device. As such it does what you want it to do to increase the drama of the adventure. For instance, if you want your PCs to run the risk of contracting the plague when dealing with average plague victims, because you think the threat of becoming infected adds drama to the adventure, you should change it as you see fit (and making this particular change is discussed in more detail in



PLAGUE VICTIM

Here's a character sheet for the standard civilian plague victim — John or Jane Q. Public who has the plague and terrorizes the city in mobs with other plague victims. This character sheet could see extensive use during this part of the adventure, so you should photocopy or otherwise copy down these statistics and paperclip them to your GM's Screen for reference. The BODY listed assumes the victim suffered 3 BODY when infected by the plague and has yet to heal the damage — the full value is 8 BODY.

15	STR	8	DEX
8	CON	5	BODY
8	INT	8	EGO
15	PRE	4	COM
3	PD	2	ED
2	SPD	5	REC
16	END	40	STUN

Abilities: HKA 1 pip (no STR bonus), Major Transform 2d6 (see text), Mental Defense (12 points total), Only Versus Mind Control And Telepathy.

Disadvantages: Distinctive Features: Plague Victim; Enraged: Berserk all the time; Physical Limitation: Limited Intelligence.

Player Characters As Victims, below). But as a rule of thumb, these are the Ophidian Plague's general effects defined in *HERO System* terms:

Cost Power

- 3 *Oversized Cuspids:* HKA 1 pip; No STR Bonus (-½)
- 50 *Plague Carrier:* Major Transform 2d6 (normal human into plague victim; heals back with cure), NND (defense is Life Support [Immunity to Viral Infections or All Terrestrial Diseases and Biowarfare Agents]; +1), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); Only Works If HKA Does Body (-½)
- 32 *Insane Fury:* +7 STR, +7 PRE, -4 COM, +20 STUN
- 5 *Bloodlust:* Mental Defense (10 points total); Only Versus Mind Control And Telepathy (-½)

Total Cost of Abilities: 90 points.

Value Disadvantages

- 25 Distinctive Features: Plague Victim (Not Concealable; Causes Extreme Reaction [fear])
- 45 Enraged: Berserk all the time (Very Common), go 14-, recover 8-
- 15 Physical Limitation: Limited Intelligence (Frequently, Greatly Impairing)

Total Value Of Disadvantages: 85 points.

Plague Carrier: This power describes in game terms how the victim infects another person. It's a standard Major Transform, so once it does twice the BODY of the victim it infects him with the plague. For the sake of simplicity, apply the Standard Effect Rule of 3 BODY per die (total of 6 per successful bite) when dealing with NPCs. Thus, the average person has to be bitten three times to be Transformed. At the end of these three bites, the victim has also suffered 3 BODY because of the HKA.

The plague takes effect instantaneously — a fact that actually helps to contain the epidemic since it quickly becomes obvious who has it. (If you want more realism in your game, you can add a *Gradual Effect* Limitation to the Transform, but it shouldn't be longer than an hour or so.) Life Support: Immunity to Viral Infections or All Terrestrial Diseases and Biowarfare Agents prevents the plague from taking hold, but won't cure the plague if the victim has already contracted it!

Distinctive Features: Plague Victim: A victim of the plague bears the distinctive marks of its ravages. His cuspids grow long and sharp and protrude from the his mouth. Patches of skin, especially on the hands and face, grow dry and flaky, resembling scales, and the victim's complexion takes on an unnatural color (typically brown, green, or blackish-gray). On most victims, bite marks are visible — obviously from the infected individual who transmitted the plague.

Enraged: Berserk all the time: Like a rabid dog, the victim turns mean and violent. He can only control himself with great difficulty... and because of the Physical Limitation: Limited Intelligence few vic-

tims have any desire to calm down.

Physical Limitation: Limited Intelligence: The plague affects the victim's mental faculties in the extreme; he can barely think (-4 to all INT-based rolls except PER Rolls). Despite this, most victims retain their cunning and some knowledge of how things work (simple everyday know-how — they don't forget how to open doors, for instance). But whatever faculties a victim retains turn toward violence, harming others, and most especially infecting others with the Ophidian Plague. In other words, plague victims possess the same level of intelligence as a zombie in a standard zombie movie — when in plain sight or under observation, they seem incredibly dull-witted, yet when it comes to tracking down their prey, they exhibit an uncanny — and unnatural — cunning.

Characters Versus Plague Victims

As it stands, the standard plague victim isn't much of a threat to a superhero. If you want your PCs to run the risk of contracting the Ophidian Plague from the standard victims, here's a few pieces of advice:

- First, increase the damage of the HKA to ½d6 or 1d6 and remove the Limitation *No STR Bonus*. This makes the attack either 1d6 or 2d6 Killing Damage
- Second, all of the plague victims go on the same Phase, either 6 or 12. Have one (or more) Grab a single limb, while one or two Hold their Actions. Remember to use the rules for Multiple Attackers described on page 251 of *HERO System 5th Edition*.
- Third, once the PC is immobilized, the plague victim(s) that Held his Action attempts to bite him. Apply the Hit Location modifiers listed on page 276 of *HERO System 5th Edition*. The victim goes for the jugular.
- Fourth, if the PC wears armor or some other obvious protection device, the plague victims attempt to tear it off him.
- Consider this: it's difficult to Dodge or Dive For Cover when twenty or more savage plague victims surround a PC.

PLAYER CHARACTERS AS VICTIMS

In *Ultimate Serpent-Men*, the PCs run the risk of contracting the Ophidian Plague when they face the infected villain Blackstar — whose bite is stronger than an HKA 1 pip — and his teammate Radium (with his new Infection Blast). The effects of the plague, as described above, effectively remove an infected PC from play... which isn't very fun for the player.

You should allow an infected PC an EGO Roll to resist succumbing to the Enraged and Physical Limitation for the plague — the hero struggles to maintain his intellect with a superhuman act of will. Have him roll each day... and to lend immediacy to his plight apply a cumulative -1 penalty per day. (If he resists the effects of the plague, the infected PC should *not* gain the Characteristic bonuses from Insane Fury, but does suffer the -4 COM.)

Curing The Plague

The quickest, surest to cure the Ophidian Plague is to track down King Cobra and take the cure from him, but your PCs shouldn't be able to find him at the onset of the plague. Therefore they might attempt to discover a cure themselves.

As previously stated, without the plague sample from the freezer in Blank's lab at Snake Gulch or the poisoned needle hidden in the COIL infiltrator's ring, the PCs don't have a chance of successfully curing the plague in time to have an impact on *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth*. All they can do is rescue civilians until they get a lead on King Cobra's whereabouts.

With 1 Day's time of work in a fully-equipped laboratory and a successful SS: Biology or SS: Biochemistry roll (at your discretion, you can allow the PC to substitute SS: Chemistry or SS: Medicine with a -2 penalty), a character can identify a sample as a deadly virus and conclude that it produces symptoms in the victim like those seen in the Ophidian Plague. If the PCs rescued Black Jake Snake from the Nest, whether dead or alive, they know about the plague and its effects before the outbreak. The PC also knows it's a virus in some ways similar to rabies, but much more deadly. Finally, he knows it's curable.

Alas for the PCs, knowing it's curable and finding a cure aren't the same thing. Blank spent years working out the methodology and theory, not to mention the actual testing of hypotheses and experimenting, that led to the creation of the Ophidian Plague... and he's a genius at the cutting edge of his field.

The PC begins with a -13 penalty and the task requires 1 Month on the Time Chart. (This means one month of uninterrupted study — saving civilians and fighting infected supervillains counts as an interruption!) He can work faster, but suffers a -3 penalty for each level down the Time Chart as discussed on page 28 of *HERO System 5th Edition*. Regardless of the character's degree of skill, the task requires a minimum of 1 Day. SS: Biology, SS: Biochemistry, or SS: Medicine is the Skill required; the PC can use one of the others as a Complementary Skill if he has it. The PC gains the following bonuses from any materials rescued from the Snake Gulch lab:

- +2 from samples taken from either the workbench or freezer.
- +2 from going through the files from the file cabinets.
- +4 from studying the snakes from Blank's ophiidary.

The PC can only receive one of the above bonuses if he spends a day studying the item listed; he can receive multiple bonuses, but this requires one day per item studied. However, the PC can delegate the studying to other who have the appropriate Skills and still receive the bonus to his roll to create a cure by "reading a summary of their findings."

REALISM AND GENRE CONVENTIONS

Curing the Ophidian Plague, even with a single month of intensive study, is not incredibly realistic. Many viruses go decades without an immunization being developed, let alone a cure. That said, it's common in four-color comic books for the super-scientist on the team, after working day and night at a feverish pace, to concoct a cure for a deadly disease. Thus, the above guidelines for curing the Ophidian Plague are included here. If you prefer more realism in your campaign, you might want to adjust the time required, or omit the possibility of finding a cure entirely.

One compromise which maintains a more "realistic" feel, but still gives the player whose character is a super-scientist an opportunity to shine: rather than a cure, the character develops an immunization serum following the same steps as

VIPER BITES: RESCUING BLACK SNAKE JAKE

Own a copy of *VIPER: Coils Of The Serpent* and want to throw some fuel on the fire, adding to the chaos of the Ophidian Plague epidemic?

VIPER knows early on that the Ophidian Plague specifically targets it. It also realizes a computer virus wiped records of Blank's research from its computers. Finally it knows the PCs assaulted Snake Gulch. Now desperate to stop the plague that's crippling their organization, VIPER's leaders want whatever the superheroes took from that Nest back... including Black Snake Jake (or his corpse).

Being a criminal organization, VIPER decides to take what the PCs have by raiding the superheroes' headquarters (or wherever else the PCs store the stuff). It doesn't cross VIPER's collective mind to simply ask the PCs for help — VIPER's a nefarious criminal organization bent on world conquest, after all, not the sort of people to discuss things with superheroes. (At least not at this juncture, see the boxed text, *VIPER Bites: Speedy Delivery From VIPER-X*, page 54, for what VIPER does when it gets *really* desperate.)

To the PCs it might seem like VIPER is trying to cover its tracks. In the end, all this raid might accomplish is to further obscure the real enemy behind the Ophidian Plague. But from where you're sitting as the GM, that's the real point of the raid!

VIPER sends two Eight-Teams (described on pages 78 and 79 of *VIPER: Coils Of The Serpent*) in Falcon Hover-Vans (page 126) with an *Anaconda-Class* Light Tank (page 123) as an escort to retrieve the materials "stolen" from Snake Gulch. The agents are on a "need to know" basis and aren't aware of why their leaders ordered them to attack the superheroes; they only know the goal of their raid and have specific orders to rescue any agents captured at Snake Gulch (especially the Nest Leader).

If necessary, you can have the VIPER raid take place "off stage" while the PCs are in the hot zone. This adds further confusion to the situation, but keeps the PCs from getting too worn down from fighting VIPER to deal with COIL later.

WHO'S IN CHARGE HERE?

In the following sections, you'll read the following: "...and the authorities get in touch...."

Just who those authorities are is left up to you, but you should definitely put a name to them to customize *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth* to your campaign. It can be the mayor or vice mayor, the leader of the city council, the police commissioner, a precinct captain, an officer in the National Guard, an UNTIL or PRIMUS commander, an important official from the CDC (Centers for Disease Control), or any one of numerous persons in your campaign city.

described above. This helps halt the spread of the plague and provides the player with the satisfaction of seeing those points he spent on INT and Skills put to good use. At the same time it's more realistic and makes it imperative for the PCs to hunt down King Cobra.

THE PLAGUE HOT ZONE

At 5:00 AM EST on the morning of the third day after the PCs' assault on Snake Gulch, the outbreak of the Ophidian Plague begins.

It starts at a VIPER Nest(s) in your campaign city; before running the adventure you need to decide how many Nests are affected. Not every Nest need suffer from the Ophidian Plague, and if you don't want to expose any existing Nests, just add another one hidden somewhere in the campaign city — this is the one that received the contaminated Snake Beer and whose infected agents started to spread the plague. The rest remain free of the plague.

This chapter assumes the Nest is downtown in the campaign city, and the hot zone spreads to roughly a five mile radius before civil authorities effectively contain it by erecting makeshift barriers across streets leading from the area and manning the barriers with police in riot gear. Assume, unless the PCs come up with a great plan, the authorities contain the plague by 10:00 AM.

The plague victims haunt the edges of the hot zone, attempting to find a way out, while mobs run amok through the streets. Through this nightmare world uninfected people attempt to make their way to the edges of the hot zone, and some find safety upon the roofs of high buildings where eventu-

ally police helicopters or flying superheroes airlift them out. All in all, the outbreak of the plague is a disaster of unimaginable scope, effectively shutting down the entire city and putting the lives of tens of thousands — maybe hundreds of thousands depending on your city's population density — in grave danger.

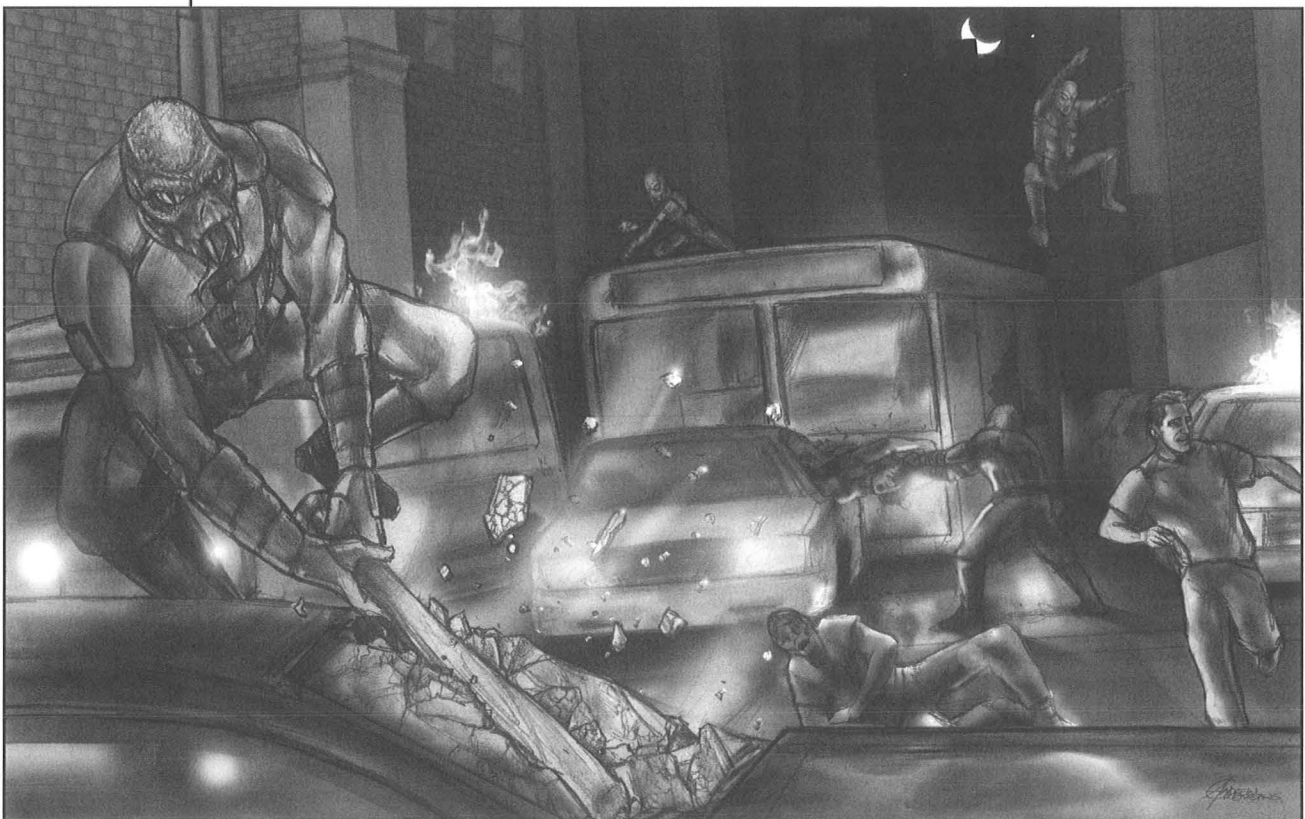
THE PLAGUE EPICENTER

The hot zone is vaguely circular in shape and at its heart is the plague's epicenter, the VIPER Nest. If the PCs examine the center of the hot zone in person or through Clairsentience or similar Power, they make a startling find. Littering one of the streets are the torn fragments of VIPER uniforms, ripped from the infected agents by civilians fighting for their lives — here a sleeve with rank insignia, there a collar with the Nest's symbol.

As long as the PCs investigate the area before noon (see below), a quick fifteen minute search of the area and a successful PER Roll turns up a manhole cover tossed to the side. From the entrance to the sewer, a PC can see a section of wall is open. Beyond this secret door, left open by berserk plague victims, is the entrance to the Nest.

Inside the Nest the place is empty, but there are signs of struggle throughout — overturned beds in the barracks and similar disarray. By counting beds, the PCs can figure out that 32 agents were stationed in the Nest.

In the agents' recreation area, set on the tables in front of the entertainment center, are open bottles of Snake Beer... and amongst all those empty bottles is a single empty bottle of a name-brand import — a stout in fact — from Ireland. A PC notices the lone bottle with a casual look in the room and a PER Roll. Obviously one agent doesn't



appreciate the beers stolen by VIPER, usually American or Canadian brands, re-labeled Snake Beer, and then provided free-of-charge to agents. He chooses instead to spend his hard-earned dollars on something more to his taste.

That VIPER agent, Frank Norton, spends the morning hiding in a stall in the men's bathroom at the Nest. He is, for obvious reasons, a little freaked out and remains there until approximately noon. At that time, he comes out and finds himself alone. He then shuts the secret entrance and contacts his superiors (who tell him to stay put).

Norton's Story: Frank blabs the story to any superhero who finds him. At this point he's just grateful someone's going to rescue him. He and most of the other agents in the Nest went out to the bars last night with guests of the Nest Leader, whose names Frank doesn't know. (These are the Ultimates; see *Ultimate Snake-Men* on page 50.) The agents returned to the Nest around 3:00 AM, said their good-byes to the guests, and decided to watch a DVD and drink a few more beers before turning in for the night. After an hour or so, everyone began to act strangely, as if they were having a fit. Next thing Frank knew they began to turn into snake-men. He ran for his life and hid in the bathroom stall, standing on the toilet so no one could see his feet.

If the PCs test the residue in the bottles of Snake Beer, they find traces of the Ophidian Plague. They find the same if they test the unopened bottles in the Nest. They can use these samples of the plague to help find a cure in the same manner as the samples from Blank's lab at Snake Gulch.

TERROR AT THE TRAIN STATION

On a run-of-the-mill workday, the early morning commute to work quickly becomes a nightmare when VIPER agents, carriers of the Ophidian Plague, rampage across the city. Using the emergency broadcasting system, officials warn civilians to stay in their homes and bar their doors... but for some people, it's too late!

At a train station, disaster strikes. Commuters trying to get to work early so they can get a jump on the day ahead come face-to-face with berserk plague victims. Using cell phones, as-yet unaffected commuters inform the authorities of their desperate plight. But civil authorities are already strained to the breaking point trying to contain the epidemic. Only your superheroes can rescue the commuters now!

THE HOOK

This encounter takes place soon after the initial outbreak of the plague at 5:00 AM, sometime in the next half-hour or so.

Involving the PCs should be simple if they're traditional superheroes sworn to protect the innocent. If they're publicly known, the authorities get hold of them via the usual channels. If not, a plea

for help goes out over television and radio, along with recorded phone calls from the desperate commuters. The plight of the trapped commuters is becoming a media focus during the epidemic, mainly because of the cell phone calls of the trapped commuters.

If your PCs have more mercenary motivations, then maybe a DNPC is one of the commuters caught at the train station. Alternately, perhaps the families of the commuters offer a reward for their rescue.

Getting to the train station is a little more difficult. If they have a team jet or similar super-vehicle, they can simply fly. The streets in the hot zone are free from the usual traffic and the team jet can land in the street. Or maybe they can "hitch a ride" with a traffic helicopter from a local news station. If they go on foot, be sure to describe the ravages of the plague victims and maybe even have them encounter an angry mob *en route* to the train station.

RUNNING THE SCENARIO

This scenario moves quickly to its conclusion; ideally you should use it to begin a game session. It shows the effects of the Ophidian Plague on everyday life, making the impact more immediate for the PCs than if you merely narrated to them what's going on.

It also gives your superheroes an opportunity to shine as protectors of the innocent. The challenge of *Terror At The Train Station* isn't defeating the plague victims — superheroes should have little trouble with that. Instead it's rescuing the commuters before the plague victims get them.

At the same time, if the PCs have Codes Versus Killing or similar moral codes typical to superheroes in a four-color world, they must take care not to kill the plague victims. These aren't supervillains — they're average men and women who can't control their actions and don't have high defenses. Against a target with PD 3/ED 2 and only BODY 5, even an Energy Blast on the low end of Active Point ranges for 350-point heroes can inflict a lethal injury — not something most superheroes want to do.

This is a part of the challenge in this scenario, but before a superhero cuts loose with an Energy Blast or other attack, you should remind him of the potential consequences of his actions. Players often forget their characters' power relative to normal humans, so a quick warning before the action starts is appropriate here.

On The Scene

Both a subway stop and a final destination for trains running from the southern suburbs, the train station is underground and a single stairway to the north leads 3" down from street level to the place. The ceiling of the train station is 2" (13 feet) high.

Once the heroes get down into the station, several situations involving commuters in obvious need of rescue confront them. These are marked on the map with a number, further described below. When the PCs enter the area, describe areas #1 and

TROUBLESHOOTING: NO SUBWAYS

If you've already established that your campaign city doesn't have subways, there are a few things you can do to the scenario to make it fit. First if your city has elevated trains, just reverse the stairs leading down to the subway so that they lead up to the el train platform and omit the walls and tunnels at the platform. Second you can make the subway a second commuter train — maybe one that runs out to the eastern and northern suburbs — and simply omit the walls.

If this scenario won't work at all, then you can refer to *Other Civilian Threats* on page 50 for some other ideas that you can use to start Chapter Two.

RECOMMENDED READING

Below are some rules you might want to re-read before running this section of the adventure. All page references are to *HERO System 5th Edition*.

Stopping moving objects on page 238. The PCs need to stop the subway train that's hurtling out of control.

Pulling A Punch on page 261. When fighting plague victims, a PC should take care not to kill them.

TRAIN STATION MATERIALS SUMMARY

Here's a summary of the DEF and BODY for some of the materials found around the train station.

Object	DEF and BODY
Bathroom Door	DEF 5, BODY 5
Bench	DEF 4, BODY 6
Commuter Train Car	DEF 6, BODY 15
Roped Line	DEF 3, BODY 1
Subway Train Car	DEF 6, BODY 12
Ticket Booth Window	DEF 6, BODY 4
Train Wall (1" section)	DEF 6, BODY 5
Trash Can	DEF 5, BODY 3

#2. Also ask each character for two PER Rolls. If the first succeeds, the PC sees the tipped-over train beyond the glass doors in the south (area #4). If the second succeeds, the PC hears screams, yells, and angry hisses coming from the stairway to the west that leads down to the subway platform. Noticing area #3 before the hidden boy reveals himself requires Enhanced Senses, Spatial Awareness, or a similar Power.

As soon as the PCs come down the stairs, 6 plague victims turn to attack them.

1. TRAPPED TICKET AGENTS

Inside a booth with bulletproof plexiglass windows stand two ticket agents, Thomas Horton and Jeremiah Brown. They have barricaded the door against a mob of 20 plague victims, and 6 of those victims are by the nearest bench. The PCs can see them pulling and heaving on the bench. The plague victims yank it from the floor on their Phase in Segment 12. On their Phase in Segment 6 of the next Turn they use it as a battering ram against the booth.

Thomas Horton has a cell phone; he's one of the people who called the authorities for help. The PCs can see him talking into his cell phone — he's on live with a local radio station, relating the arrival of the superheroes on the scene. Until his rescue, Horton tells the public about the superheroes' actions, so this scenario can enhance the superheroes' public relations... as long as everything goes well!

2. TRAPPED IN THE BATHROOM

Seven commuters have barricaded themselves in the men's bathroom. All of them stand at the door, pushing it closed, but it's only a matter of time before the 10 plague victims, using their insanity-derived strength, batter open the door... in fact as soon as the PCs enter the train station, on the plague victims' Phase in Segment 12, the inevitable happens! The door gives and plague victims charge inside.

3. LOST LITTLE BOY

Seven year old Tim McAdoo (his mom calls him Timmy, but he steadfastly insists everyone else call him Tim) has lost his mother to the plague.

They recently moved to the city but still don't have an apartment, so they came downtown early from their hotel out in the suburbs to have a nice breakfast and get an early start on apartment hunting.

His mother's last instructions were to hide under one of the benches facing the doors to the south until help came. Tim did as he was told and so far the plague victims haven't noticed him. A fan of superheroes (and maybe an especially big fan of one of your PCs), he hopes help has finally arrived when he sees the PCs. On his Phase in Segment 7, he crawls out from under the bench and yells for them... attracting the attention of the plague victims!

After The Scenario: The PCs have some babysitting to do after you've completed *Terror At The Train Station* — Tim McAdoo's mom is currently incapacitated by the plague, his father passed away several years ago, and the boy's new to the city with no one else to take care of him. Refugee services and shelters — those not overrun by plague victims — are jammed with people who escaped from the hot zone.

You should use Tim McAdoo's plight to illustrate the impact of the Ophidian Plague on everyday life in the campaign city — to give it a "human dimension." It can also be a good idea to sometimes have PCs interact with children — whose idolization of superheroes is undiluted by cynicism or other adult traits — to remind your players how some people look up to their characters.

Finally Tim can become a recurring NPC for your team in several ways. These range from the drastic — his mother doesn't survive the Ophidian Plague, so the heroes take him in — to more low-key ways (for example, he tries to fix his rescuer up with his widowed mother, Rosalyn McAdoo).

4. TIPPED OVER COMMUTER TRAIN

When the conductors of the suburban commuter trains saw what was happening at the station, they put the trains in reverse and got out of there. All but one.

One of the trains, while waiting for the line ahead to clear, got mobbed by plague victims. When the line finally cleared, the driver panicked and took the train out of the station too fast. As the train came to the section of track where the two lines come together, the wheels lost the rail and the train began to tip. Then the mob of plague victims finished the job. Now helpless, fifty morning commuters find themselves trapped inside the train as 35 plague victims swarm over it trying to get in.

The PCs can also get to this area without going through the train station, since it's outside several meters south of the stairway leading from the sidewalk. A retaining wall to the west bounds the area; the wall is cement and 3" high (plenty high enough that any commuters placed on it are safe from the plague victims in the trainyard). Beyond the wall is a small park. The train is four cars long and each car weighs 12.5 tons.



-  Benches
  Sliding Door
-  Window
  Glass Door
-  Trash Can
  Door

Hexes are at standard Hero scale 1" = 2m

OTHER CIVILIAN THREATS

Want to include some other threats to civilians in this chapter? This is a great place to re-use the maps from *Champions Battlegrounds*. How much chaos is wreaked when plague victims go on a rampage at Omega-world, a nearby amusement park? How many families and couples, looking to watch the dawn at Memorial Park, can the PCs rescue before they succumb to the ravages of marauding victims? And the managers of mall stores are used to angry customers... but not this angry! How long can they hold out against the plague victims — early-morning shoppers looking to get the best bargains — invading the New Urbana Galleria?

Try to include the superheroes' DNPCs in the action. Even if the DNPCs aren't caught in the hot zone, you should remind your players that NPCs near and dear to their characters' hearts live in the city, and this plague threatens not only their livelihood, but also their lives. And if the DNPC lives downtown, be sure to include a scene where a superhero must rescue his DNPC from mobs of plague victims.

Caveat: simply having a DNPC catch the plague might not go over well with a player, and you should take care not to heap too much abuse on poor, helpless DNPCs. The PC should have at least a chance to save his DNPC before the worst comes to pass.

The Subway Platform

Beyond the turnstiles in area #2 a passage runs to sets of stairways leading down to the subway platform. The stairs are steep and lead down 5". The ones in the east lead down to the northbound subway platform; those in the west, to the southbound.

On the subway platform the northbound subway is stopped on the tracks with the passengers trapped inside. Coming up to the station, unaware of the situation, the subway came to a stop and plague victims pulled the driver from his car through an open window. Luckily a quick-thinking passenger in the first car rushed into the driver's compartment and closed the window before the plague victims thought to climb inside, but none of the passengers knows how to operate the subway. Now 20 plague victims mob the stopped cars, banging at the doors and scratching on the windows. The subway train holds thirty-three passengers and is three cars long; each car weighs 12.5 tons.

Three Segments after the PCs arrive at the subway platform, the southbound subway comes hurtling through the tunnel out-of-control. When it passes, in the illumination of flickering track lighting the PCs can see plague victims standing in the driver's compartment (one wears the uniform of a city transportation worker). As each of the four cars rushes past, the PCs see the faces of fear-stricken passengers pressed against the grime-streaked windows.

On the southbound train are three plague victims and forty-two passengers. A PC can hear the train coming two Segments before it arrives with a successful PER Roll — in other words, each PC gets two chances to hear it before it comes hurtling past. Four cars long (each car is 7" or 45 feet long) the train is STR 60, SPD 2, and moves 88" per Phase (its maximum Noncombat speed). Each car weighs 12.5 tons. Refer to page 238 of the *HERO System 5th Edition* for slowing a moving object with STR. The tunnel is 2" (13 feet) in diameter; the train is 1.5" (10 feet) wide and high. The end of the line is five miles away (it takes the subway 5 minutes to cover the distance), and if the PCs don't stop the subway in time, it really is the end of the line for the passengers.

Notes

Listed below are some general notes concerning *Terror At The Train Station*.

- 36 total plague victims are inside the train station. 35 more plague victims are outside around the commuter train.
- 20 total plague victims are on the subway platform.

TIMELINE

First Segment 12: Describe areas #1 and #2. Ask for two PER Rolls.

- On DEX 8, 6 nearby plague victims move into

HTH Combat range with the PCs. Six of the victims from area #1 free the bench from its moorings. The 10 plague victims in area #2 break down the door to the bathroom (but don't yet enter the bathroom).

Segment 6, First Turn: On DEX 8, 6 of the victims use the bench as a battering ram on the ticket agents' booth in area #1. (The plexiglass window holds... this Segment at least!) In area #2, 10 plague victims bite 7 commuters. Assume each commuter struggles valiantly, but takes 1 BODY and 6 BODY worth of Transform.

Segment 7, First Turn: Little boy in area #3 reveals himself at the end of this Segment.

Segment 12, First Turn: On DEX 8, 4 plague victims from area #1 rush to attack the little boy in area #3. Back in area #1 the remaining 14 victims batter through the ticket agents' booth. In area #2, plague victims continue to bite commuters. Assume one commuter contracts the plague this Segment, and the other 6 suffer 1 BODY and 6 more BODY worth of Transform... it's all downhill from here for those commuters!

Subway Platform, 3 Segments After Arrival: Southbound train goes hurtling past.

ULTIMATE SERPENT-MEN

Yesterday, back before the Ophidian Plague broke-out, the VIPER Nest Leader met with the Ultimates, a team of mercenary supervillains, to discuss a job opportunity. (The exact job is left up to you and is a good place to lay the groundwork for further adventures involving either The Ultimates and/or VIPER. If nothing else, VIPER wanted to pull off a robbery at a local high tech firm that has a contract with the U.S. Air Force.) The Ultimates got the red-carpet treatment from VIPER: lavish accommodations at a downtown hotel, dinner with the Nest Leader at a four-star restaurant, a night out on the town with the agents from the Nest in tow, and at the end of the night, a case of Snake Beer to take back to their room.

Not all of the supervillains drank those beers, but by the time the fight spills out onto the street, only Thunderbolt hasn't succumbed to the effects of the plague.

Binder, one of the three supervillains who didn't drink the beer and the team's leader, originally ordered the uninfected Ultimates to subdue the infected team members. He knew if they were allowed to run amok they'd end up captured by superheroes. (He also believed this was a plot perpetrated by VIPER.) Along with Radium and Thunderbolt he fought tooth-and-nail against his teammates, the battle raging through the hotel, but in the end he fell to Slick and Cyclone — his helmet was torn from his head and he was infected with the Ophidian Plague. Then Radium fell to Blackstar. Now Thunderbolt, who's immune to the plague because his body is composed of electricity, stands alone against his teammates.

THE HOOK

Rioting plague victims, normal men and women infected with the virus, cause extensive damage to the city — how much more damage can a berserk team of supervillains suffering from the effects of the Ophidian Plague cause? But the situation here is more grave than just property destruction!

While law enforcement officers are confident they can contain the plague victims, they know they can't stop the Ultimates from breaking through the makeshift barriers erected at the edges of the hot zone. And several of the Ultimates can fly! So it falls to your PCs to subdue the villains.

Soon after rescuing the commuters from the train station, the PCs receive an urgent request from the authorities to deal with the rampaging Ultimates. (Hopefully, after the train station, the authorities have a way to get in touch with the PCs. If not, you can always have the ticket agent with the cell phone get a call for the PCs immediately after they rescue him.) If the PCs don't perceive the threat posed by the infected supervillains, the authorities spell it out for them.

RUNNING THE SCENARIO

A straight-forward brawl between superheroes and villains, this scenario should provide a nice change of pace for your players. In the preceding encounter, and maybe even back at Snake Gulch, they've had to pull their punches to avoid accidentally killing someone. Not here!

That said, here's a few wrinkles you can easily add to this scenario:

- The uninfected Thunderbolt (who has Life Support: Total) might try to form a truce with the superheroes and then team up with them against the rest of the Ultimates. If the superheroes don't promise to let him go free after the fight ends, he doesn't agree to the truce.
- A mob of plague victims rushes out from the hotel to attack a superhero.
- An uninfected taxi driver, huddled on the floor of his cab under the dash, suddenly makes his presence known when a superhero or Blackstar lifts the vehicle and makes ready to throw it at his opponent.
- A civilian family trying to escape the hot zone stumbles into the fight.

In addition to those wrinkles, the PCs don't immediately know which villains are infected. Blackstar and Slick show symptoms, but Binder and Cyclone wear armor and Radium wears a full-body containment suit. Furthermore, they might not realize Thunderbolt is *not* infected. While this probably won't prevent them from attacking the supervillains hard, you still shouldn't provide them with more information than they would rightly have.

Finally, the deeper purpose of this scenario is to infect one or more PCs with the plague. As described on page 44 in *Player Characters As Victims*, a superhero can resist the effects of the plague



by exerting his superhuman will... but he can't hold out forever! This lends urgency to the scenario; now it's not just the city the heroes must save from the Ophidian Plague, but one of their own.

Changes To The Ultimates

In addition to the effects of the plague (*The Ophidian Plague Defined* on page 43) several of the Ultimates have gained other abilities. The virus has reacted strangely with the mutated physiologies of Blackstar and Radium, and you should add the following Powers to their character sheets as described in *Conquerors, Killers, And Crooks*. If you feel the Ultimates *sans* Thunderbolt are already powerful enough for your PCs or if you don't want to infect the superheroes with the Ophidian Plague, you should simply omit any or all of these changes.

BLACKSTAR

Blackstar can control his density, increasing his mass along with strength to superhuman levels... and when his density increases his bones — including his two long and sharp teeth! — become as hard as diamonds. Replace the Oversized Cuspids with the following:

Dense Oversized Cuspids: HKA 2d6 (4d6 with STR). Total cost: 30 points.

IN THE MIDDLE OF A FIGHT?

The background for this scenario is that the Ultimates have been fighting for some time before the PCs show up. To reflect this you might want to reduce their STUN and END. Also Binder and Radium were infected with the plague by their teammates, so you may want to reduce their BODY as appropriate.

If you feel this would severely reduce the challenge of the fight, assume the villains have taken one or more Recoveries just before the PCs arrived on the scene — the infected Ultimates getting ready to pounce hard on their uninfected teammate, while Thunderbolt tries to decide whether to continue fighting or flee the scene.



RADIUM

Radium's body has assimilated the virus in a strange way, melding it with his irradiated physiology. He can fire blast of energy that infects the target with a strange, mutated strain of the Ophidian Plague. You should add the Infection Blast to Radium's *Radiation Powers* Multipower.

Because the attack is radiation-based and different from a plague infection from saliva, Power Defense applies versus the Transform *and* appropriate forms of Immunity protect the target from infection.

Infection Blast: *Energy Blast* 3d6, NND (defense is LS [Safe Environment: High Radiation]; +1) (total cost: 30 points) **plus** Major Transform 2d6 (normal human into plague victim; heals back with cure) (30 Active Points); Linked (-¼), Negated By Life Support (Immunity to Viral Infections or All Terrestrial Diseases And Biowarfare Agents) (-¼), Only Works If Energy Blast Does STUN (-½) (total cost: 15 points). Total cost: 45 points.

On The Scene

The Ultimates were staying at a hotel in town. When the PCs arrive at the hotel, Thunderbolt stands alone in the shattered lobby amidst overturned furniture and broken glass. Surrounding him are his infected teammates, closing in for the kill. (The initial positions of the villains are marked on the map.)

FIRST SEGMENT 12

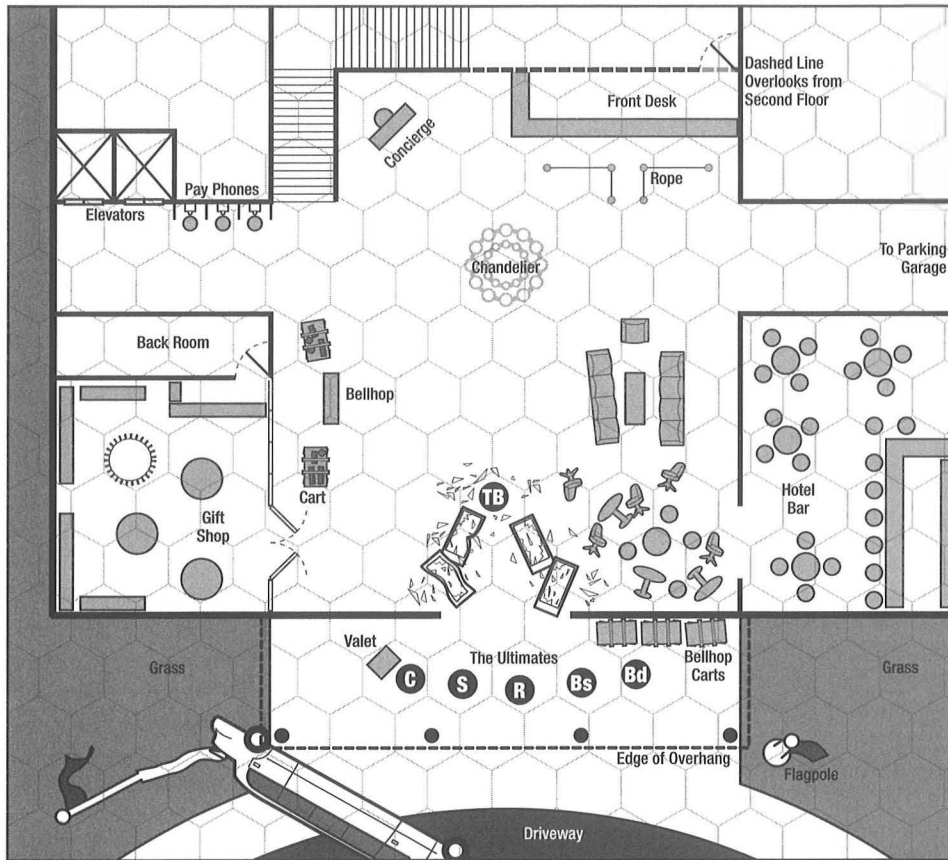
The sections below list the villains in order of their DEX and suggest some tactics for them to use. Usually the Ultimates are a highly trained team whose members work well together. In this case, the Ophidian Plague has taken its toll and they aren't quite as well coordinated — except when it comes to infecting the PCs with the plague!

As a rule of thumb, their basic tactic against flyers is to knock the PC from the air toward Blackstar so he can Grab and infect the PC with the Ophidian Plague, or to Entangle a PC so he's a sitting duck for Radium and his new Infection Blast.

HOTEL MATERIALS SUMMARY

Here's a summary of the DEF and BODY for some of the materials found around the hotel.

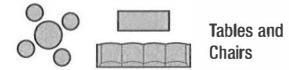
Object	DEF and BODY
Bellhop Cart	DEF 2, BODY 3
Chair	DEF 3, BODY 3
Chandelier	DEF 1, BODY 4
Couch	DEF 4, BODY 4
Coffee Table	DEF 3, BODY 2
Glass Doors	DEF 2, BODY 2
Interior Wall	DEF 3, BODY 3
Outside Wall	DEF 6, BODY 5
Payphone	DEF 8, BODY 5
Rubble	DEF 6, BODY 3
Street Sign	DEF 4, BODY 2
Valet/Bellhop Stand	DEF 3, BODY 3



Ultimate Serpent-Men

Lobby

- TB** Thunderbolt
- C** Cyclone
- S** Slick
- R** Radium
- Bs** Blackstar
- Bd** Binder



Standard Hero Scale, 1 Hex = 2m

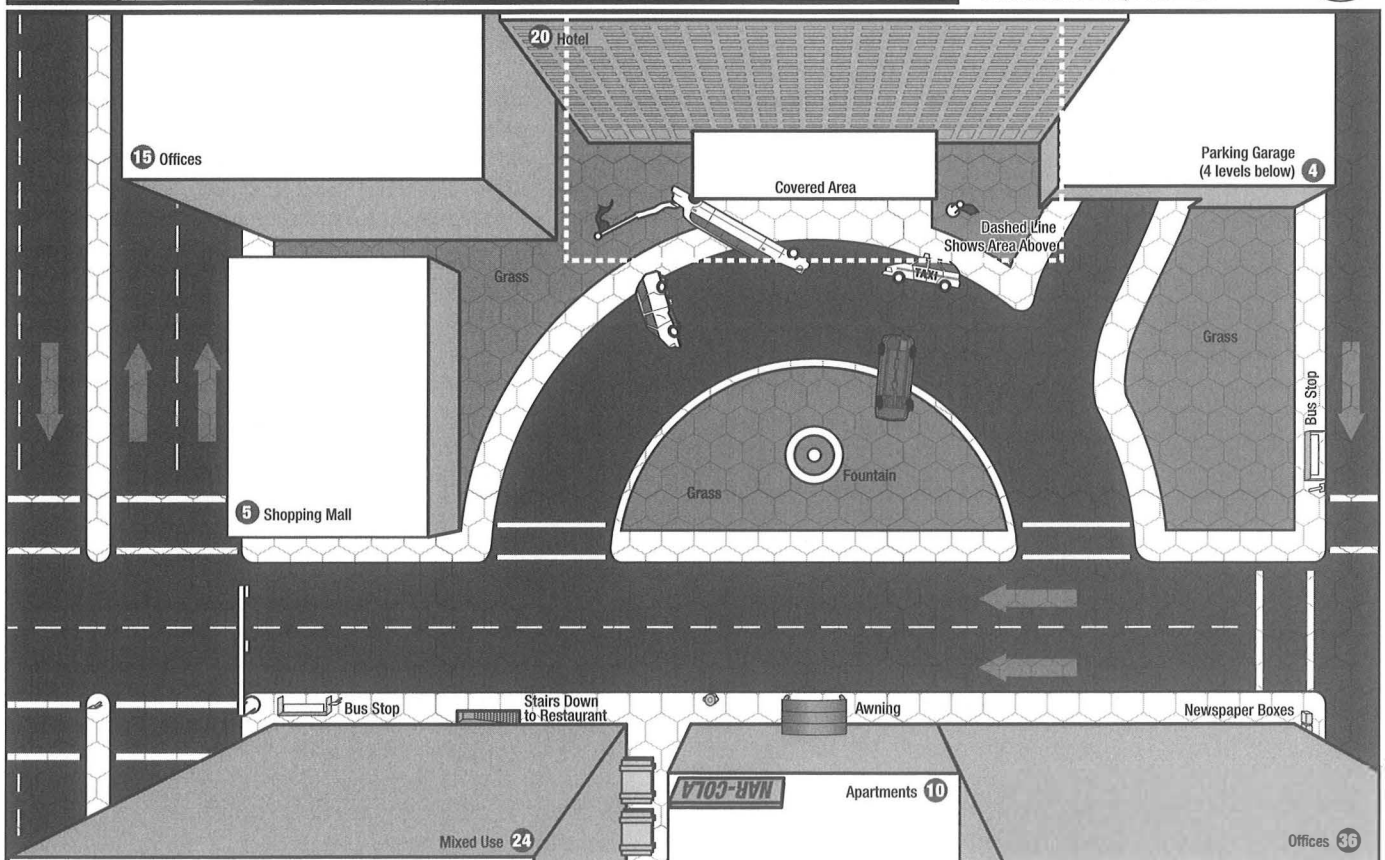


Street Map

- Dumpster
- Hydrant

- 5** Indicates height of building in stories
For simplicity, 1 story = 2 1/2"

Standard Hero Scale, 1 Hex = 2m



RECOMMENDED READING

Below are some rules you might want to re-read before running this section of the adventure. All page references are to *HERO System 5th Edition*.

Entangle on page 108 and Transform on page 152. The Ultimates basic tactic uses both these attacks.

Movement Skill Levels on page 243. Many of the Ultimates have these and make use of them during the fight.

Slick (DEX 28)

Slick takes a Half Move to run, placing his Levels with Running into DCV. Then he chooses an opponent near Radium and uses his Friction Manipulation (Focused) to Entangle him.

Cyclone (DEX 25)

Cyclone uses his Cyclone Blast (Wide-Beam) or Cyclone Effect on as many opponents as he can. If he can't get more than one opponent in the Area of Effect for either of those Powers, he takes a Half Move to get above a flying PC, then uses his Cyclone Blast (Focused) to knock his target directly downwards into the ground (and preferably near Blackstar).

Radium (DEX 23)

Radium fires his Infection Blast at the PC immobilized by Slick. If Slick's attack failed, Radium uses Withering Radiation on the nearest opponent.

Thunderbolt (DEX 23)

Unless you've chosen to have Thunderbolt offer an alliance with the PCs, he flees the scene when superheroes show up. He knows he'll have an easier time freeing his teammates if he's not in jail with them... and heck, with this entire turning into snake-men thing, maybe it's time for a solo career anyway. He uses Lightning-Riding to Teleport along phone lines, starting with the house phone in the lobby.

Binder (DEX 20)

Binder attempts to Entangle a foe with his Narrow Glue-Beam if the target is a brick or otherwise appears to move slowly (*i.e.*, has a low DCV). He uses Glue-Blob against other opponents. His first choice are flyers with Restrained means of flight (like wings) and PCs in power armor.

Blackstar (DEX 18)

At maximum density when the fight starts (and don't forget the STR increase from the Ophidian Plague), Blackstar chooses an Entangled PC and bites him. If no one nearby is Entangled, Blackstar attempts to Grab an opponent, and if successful bites on his next Phase.

SUBSEQUENT TURNS

The Ultimates continue to fight as above: knock opponents from the air, so Blackstar can reach them. Radium continues to use his Withering Radiation attack; his hope is to lower an opponent's CON so much that even an average hit will Stun the PC. Cyclone especially takes advantage of this if he notices a PC has succumbed to one or more of Radium's blasts of Withering Radiation.

If a PC goes down, rather than deliver the *coup de grace*, Binder or Cyclone removes his helmet and attempts to bite the PC. For obvious reasons they won't try to bite big rock or steel guys, but those dependent on Force Fields for Resistant Defenses might be in trouble....

Wrapping Up

The conclusion of the scenario is straightforward: when the PCs have subdued the infected Ultimates, the fight's over. Their better judgment overridden by the plague, the Ultimates fight until the bitter end. At the edges of the hot zone, law enforcement has supervillain restraining devices and power dampeners waiting, so the PCs can just drop the subdued supervillains off.

If the PCs determine which room the Ultimates were staying in — not necessarily an easy task unless they allied with Thunderbolt, since the hotel staff are victims of the plague — they find the empty bottles of Snake Beer. See *The Plague Epicenter* on page 46 for more details about the beer.

VIPER BITES: SPEEDY DELIVERY FROM VIPER-X

VIPER isn't idle when the Ophidian Plague breaks out. The organization's leadership quickly realizes, as agents stricken with the plague cripple Nest after Nest, that VIPER is under attack by some unknown party. They capture some victims of the plague and ship them to Dr. Phillippe Moreau for study. Doctor Moreau is certain the plague derives from Blank's work on Project Stein... but he's also certain he can't cure it anytime soon because of Cybermind's computer virus.

VIPER is in trouble and the Supreme Serpent knows it. Page 157 of *VIPER: Coils Of The Serpent* describes the supervillain VIPER-X, a former Silver Avenger with a reputation for honorable conduct. If the PCs are a little lost during this part of the adventure, you can have VIPER-X get in touch with them. He offers information about Blank and his research in the hope that the PCs stop Blank. At your discretion, the PCs can receive any and all information described earlier in this chapter (although VIPER doesn't know that Blank has transformed himself into King Cobra).

A further possibility: you could have VIPER-X offer to team up with the PCs to track down Blank. This lets you reveal to your players the depths of this interesting villain — a former super-patriot who turned on his country because he felt betrayed when his family died at the hands of Dr. Destroyer — by changing the relationship from more than just two sides who get into occasional brawls. By the end of the adventure, the PCs might come to respect Kevin Armstrong — for his extreme competence, if nothing else — as well as sympathize with him. They may even have the chance to turn him from the path of villainy.

More importantly, it adds an interesting wrinkle to the end of the adventure. First, VIPER-X and Krait have an acrimonious history that can make for some interesting roleplaying during the last fight. Second, if the PCs have Codes Versus Killing, what will they do since VIPER-X has explicit orders to execute King Cobra?

MEANWHILE... IN MILLENNIUM CITY

Here's how events play out in Millennium City. You can substitute them for what's described above if you want. If you leave Millennium City or these events to NPC heroes, substitute "the Champions" wherever it says "the heroes" below.

In Millennium City the plague breaks out at 5:00 AM EST (6:00 AM Central Time) when VIPER agents at two of the city's three Nests leave Vitruvian Investment Services in the downtown and the McCloskey Tunnel on the waterfront. (If you don't want to keep the locations of these Nests secret, you can have them rampage violently out into the city; otherwise you can assume they cover their exit somehow.) Thanks to the skyways that connect Millennium City's buildings, the plague spreads especially quickly through the city, since victims have easy access between the downtown offices and hotels.

The first crisis the heroes must deal with takes place at the Detroit River Gondola System. Plague victims overrun the cable car station, jam the controls, and find themselves on a car headed to Windsor, which is as yet unaffected by the plague. Left with no other choice, the authorities will cut the cables and allow the car to drop into the Detroit River, killing the hapless victims... unless the heroes can somehow stop it from crossing.

The second crisis occurs when mentalists from PSI, caught in their civilian clothes and without protection against the sharp teeth of the plague victims, rampage through the streets. Unbeknownst to the PCs, the building for Mind, Inc. serves as headquarters for the supervillain group and the building is now overrun with plague victims.

Meanwhile, at the Greene Scales And Gauges Nest, the Russian dispatches her agents in two teams. She orders the first to comb the city and round up infected VIPER personnel. She tells the other to secure the McCloskey

Tunnel, a resource far too valuable to allow its accidental discovery. As they roam the streets looking for their infected fellow agents, the first team doesn't treat the victims with kid gloves and a battle breaks out between them and the heroes, who fight to defend a mob of plague victims.

Back at the Vitruvian Investment Services Nest, King Cobra has a special surprise for that Nest Leader. During his criminal endeavors in biotechnology, the Vitruvian claimed some discoveries as his own... which he in truth stole from Timothy Blank. King Cobra sends a cadre of COIL agents to capture the Vitruvian, give him the cure to the plague, and then torture him. After receiving the cure, the Vitruvian escapes from his captors and his building. From a nearby pay phone, he calls the heroes in hopes they'll rescue him, then keeps running. (He knows his fellow Nest Leaders hate him and are happy to let him die.) The heroes can rescue the Vitruvian and discover there's a cure for a plague, and perhaps take him to Dr. Silverback for further study.

As the plague continues, three locations in the two hot zones become havens for uninfected civilians. The supervillain henchmen at Leo's Bar gather at their favorite watering hole and use high-tech gear left over from various jobs to defend the bar against the plague victims. At the Barlowe Hotel, head concierge Valery Dubac takes charge, and the staff and guests successfully guard the location from victims. The Barlowe's roof becomes the central spot for air lifts into the downtown hot zone. Finally the Champions open their base Homestead to refugees.

As the nightmarish day wears on, the heroes hear from Dr. Silverback, who's completed an initial study of the Vitruvian and the cure in his bloodstream. His results indicate it will take several days, if not weeks, to recreate the cure.



COIL'S ACTIVITIES



King Cobra and his inner circle lurk deep below the city in an old VIPER Nest abandoned decades ago and now forgotten. They watch as the Ophidian Plague ravages the world above, eagerly awaiting news of an outbreak elsewhere and observing with malignant satisfaction as civilization crumbles. But King Cobra wants more than to just cause suffering. He wants to take advantage of it!

This section details COIL's activities while the authorities struggle to contain the Ophidian Plague. You should use the last part, *Serpents And Cybermind*, as the concluding encounter in this chapter, since events occurring at Cybermind's warehouse move quickly to the PCs discovering COIL's hidden lair.

Results Of PC Actions

If you include the *Slither-ing Shadow* and *Moving Day* options when you run this adventure, the PCs might suspect that COIL has set up operations in their city before you run *Serpents And Cybermind*, and try to track down the group's headquarters. Here are some general results of such investigation; you should customize these as necessary to suit your PCs.

Mind Scan: COIL's hideout has shields against Mind Scan and other Mental Powers, so the PCs can't locate King Cobra with this power. At your discretion, the mentalist might detect roaming bands of COIL agents. The mentalist senses a strange psychic presence, quite different than that of the plague victims, moving through the hot zone.. but gets nothing more than a strong impression that they're carrying out orders with a fanatic loyalty far greater than the standard VIPER agent. If the mentalist made telepathic contact with the COIL infiltrators from Snake Gulch, he recognizes the psychic presence as very similar in nature.

Word On The Street: If one of your PCs has contacts with the mercenary or criminal underground and investigates the goings-on, he does hear one interesting story. Word has gone around for the last month or two that an individual wanted to hire mercenaries with a reputation as troublemakers, traitors, backstabbers, rabble-rousers, cowards, and shirkers — in other words, the bottom of the mercenary barrel (and that's a pretty deep and dingy barrel). For some of these guys this rumor is about their last chance to find work.

With a little more digging and a successful Streetwise roll (or other appropriate Skill), the PCs

discover that anyone interested was to arrange a meeting at a seedy bar in a bad part of the city. (You should provide the location; if you don't have one, you can use the name "Joe's Last Gasp.")

The plague has pretty much shut down the city and the bar with it, but after a little searching through public records the PCs can find the owner. With a successful Interrogation roll, the owner spills the beans. The contact was a tall Pakistani or Indian man (the owner can't tell the difference) whom everybody called "Sahib." The PC can make a sketch from the bar owner's description and with the right resources (*i.e.*, access to UNTIL or PRIMUS's database on super-terrorists) he can match the sketch with Krait, a VIPER defector and mercenary who specializes in procuring high-tech gear for terrorist groups and the like.

ENCOUNTERS AND ACTIVITIES

Here are a few events you can throw into the mix to hint at COIL's involvement as the PCs try to contain the plague victims.

SLITHER-ING SHADOW

King Cobra and most of his inner circle stay safe and sound in their hideout below the city... all except for Slither. In charge of intelligence operations for COIL, the ex-Stasi agent turned supervillain haunts the streets of the hot zone. King Cobra sent him out to discover the location of the local VIPER Nest and he quickly does so. Then, his mission complete, he observes the carnage throughout the city, occasionally indulging his sadistic streak.

Slither moves about the hot zone, using his Shape Shift ability to disguise himself as a plague victim. At your discretion, you can include him among the plague victims in *Terror At The Train Station*, an unpleasant surprise for a superhero on his own trying to save innocent lives. Or Slither might disguise himself as an uninfected commuter — an even more unpleasant surprise for a heroic PC. You can also use him in *Ultimate Serpent-Men* if you decide to have a mob of victims rush from the hotel at some point during the fight.

In general, Slither keeps himself hidden and only reveals his true nature if he feels he has a good chance of killing a superhero. Under no circumstances does he fight until the bitter end. If his plans go awry, he retreats and looks for a mob of plague victims he can join in disguise, then makes his way back to COIL's hide-out.

MOVING DAY

As stated at the beginning of Chapter Two, King Cobra had two goals in mind when he unleashed the Ophidian Plague. He has successfully achieved one: the plague has strained the authorities to the breaking point. Later that day, King Cobra decides it's time to accomplish his second goal: take over VIPER's resources.

He sent Slither out to find the local Nest, which Slither did. Now King Cobra decides it's time to send a cadre of COIL agents to occupy that Nest.

If the PCs investigate the plague's epicenter, you can have them stumble upon these agents. The situation quickly becomes a firefight, since the agents don't surrender quietly and do everything in their power to carry out King Cobra's command to secure the Nest. The number of agents is left to you, but two agents per PC is a good number to work with.

If you use this event, it means the PCs learn for sure someone other than VIPER is at work here. The COIL agents, described on page 108, have pronounced serpentine features. They also wear uniforms and carry weapons distinct from those worn and carried by VIPER agents. There's nothing wrong with this; just be prepared for the PCs to start tearing the hot zone apart looking for COIL's secret lair.

Moving Day Elsewhere

You can also have the PCs receive confusing reports of COIL agents in other cities moving on VIPER Nests — King Cobra hopes to co-opt a large part of VIPER's organization, not just its operations in your campaign city. This way the PCs learn of a mysterious organization working behind the scenes, while at the same time you don't expose COIL to the PCs' scrutiny before you're ready to move on to Chapter Three. It also reminds players that the Ophidian Plague is more than just a localized threat — its horrors are felt across the nation or world (depending on how widespread you decided to make the plague).

ATTACK ON THE BARRICADE

By late morning, law enforcement agencies and emergency response teams have contained the hot zone, stopping the spread of the plague... but not if King Cobra has anything to say about it!

Sometime around noon, a cadre of agents arrive the borders of the hot zone under the command of Slither. The agents take up positions in the abandoned buildings nearby, each within firing range of the police officers responsible for keeping the barricade secure. Slither, disguised as a plague victim, starts to lead mobs to the spot. Soon a large group of plague victims — the largest group seen in a single place — stands just outside the barricade. Then the agents open fire.

So long as they're in touch with the authorities, the PCs hear about the massing plague victims and hopefully respond to urgent requests for backup. If they're not, the plague spreads further across the city — and this might be the crisis that breaks the authorities' back!

The challenge in this fight depends on the number of plague victims — there should be enough that the PCs seriously worry they can't stop them all. Use the COIL agents to snipe at the super-heroes and interfere with their efforts to halt the spread of the plague victims. And Slither's presence among the plague victims should make for quite an unexpected shock....

SERPENTS AND CYBERMIND

King Cobra hired Cybermind to program a computer virus that would search through VIPER's computer network and erase files containing one or more keywords. The virus did its job well — since its task was simple and not disruptive to day-to-day operations, it was several hours before VIPER detected its presence and guarded its systems against the virus, and by then it was too late.

At Snake Gulch the PCs had an opportunity to get a copy of this virus, and in the investigation section at the beginning of this chapter details some information the PCs could discover. That section left off with the email address nuz4u@wahooooo.com.

Preliminary Information

Here's the background information for the scenario:

Nuz4u@wahooooo.com

Wahooooo.com provides e-mail accounts to anyone who wants one; they have no verified personal information on their users. If the PCs contact the service provider, and either make a successful Bureaucrats or Conversation roll (use of Interrogation results in the service provider hanging up the phone) or go through official channels (meaning someone important from the city calls the service provider and explains that it has to do with the Ophidian Plague), they can find out three items.

First, the address is registered to first name "Big," last name "Brain," and the so-called Big Brain's location is listed as your campaign city. Second, Big Brain has several other usernames registered to him, including nuz2u@wahooooo.com and tehshnizz@wahooooo.com. Finally, Big Brain, under the username "tehshnizz," logs onto a chat room provided by Wahooooo.com for discussing first-person shooter video games between 7:00 and 8:00 PM nightly.

If the PCs join the chat room that night — this is the night before the Ophidian Plague breaks out; the next night the chat room is empty — tehshnizz@wahooooo.com logs in right on schedule. He quickly becomes the center of attention; everyone else online either idolizes or vilifies him. After a discussion of nothing in particular, the conversation scrolls up the screen:

[tehshnizz](mailto:tehshnizz@wahooooo.com): <— got big nuz 4 u all later

nonessential: o yeah? hak the gibs? *snort*

[tehshnizz](mailto:tehshnizz@wahooooo.com): bigger. bigger & bader & bigger

TROUBLESHOOTING: FINDING CYBERMIND

If one of the PCs has cyberkinesis or some other Power that allows the team to track Cybermind to his lair, they might find the villain before the plague breaks out. In this case you have to juggle things a bit.

Run the attack on Cybermind's warehouse as described here *without the COIL agents and Boomslang*. Basically the PCs must assault Cybermind's hideout on their own.

Then proceed to the outbreak of the plague. While you're running those scenarios described there, you can introduce Slither, either as described in *Slithering Shadow* or *Attack On The Barricade*. At some point during the battle Slither attempts to escape and you can proceed to *Race Through The Sewers*, replacing Boomslang with Slither. Or you can run *Moving Day*, but now Boomslang leads the cadre of COIL agents when they attempt to take over the abandoned VIPER Nest. During that fight Boomslang retreats and you can proceed to *Race Through The Sewers*. Or you can simply include information about the Hothouse, described on page 71, among Cybermind's pilfered files and move on to Chapter Three.

again than that holywood \$#!%
i_sez: bigger than last time?
tehshnizz: ooooooh yeah. bigger than tincan's
system. mucho bigger.

At this point, ask the PCs for a KS: Supervillains or KS: The Superhuman World (any sort of Skill concerning the computer world or similar is a Complementary Skill). If successful the PC thinks "tehshnizz" is Cybermind, a supervillain with a reputation as a hacker... and more importantly, a hacker who likes to brag and claims to have broken into Mechanon's computers.

If the PCs confront Cybermind via the Internet, he just mocks them with plenty of smiley faces and tells them to keep an eye on his online auctions — the superheroes can bid on the goods just like everyone else. (If the PCs simply send an email to the nuz4u address, they receive the same response.)

At midnight Cybermind, posting as "tehshnizz," lists an auction with the title: "L@@K! SECRET FILES... HISS... HISS..." The description reads: "Top secret files from very infamous criminal organization! An exclusive look inside the organization — for top bidder's eyes only! Who knows what fiendish plots and devilish plans are contained herein?!?" The auction ends in a week; the opening bid is a hundred thousand dollars.

The Heroes' Actions

Tracing Cybermind's location is impossible short of cyberkinesis or similar Power (and the

GM should keep in mind Cybermind's own abilities of that sort). The villain has had years to set up blinds, false accounts, and re-routes — all of this aided by his powers of cyberkinesis — and there's no way a PC can track him down in time to impact this adventure. By going to the authorities, the PCs can have wahooooo.com close the auction and suspend Cybermind's email accounts, but that doesn't accomplish much since Cybermind retains possession of the goods.

There is one way the PCs can convince Cybermind to hand over the files: definitely a crook but not a killer, Cybermind has a Code Versus Killing. When the Ophidian Plague breaks out, the villain doesn't realize his files are related to the plague — he's not a scientist after all and can't make heads or tails of the information. If the PCs convince him the two are related, he anxiously hands over the files and adamantly disavows any involvement with the plague currently raging through the city. Of course, none of this can take place until *after* the plague begins — if the PCs try to convince him of any this before that happens, Cybermind thinks they're trying to trick him.

However the PCs handle the situation, the auction accomplishes one thing: it draws COIL out of hiding.

King Cobra Retaliates!

Even though it would take the PCs months to track Cybermind down via the Internet, King Cobra has had those months. Well before hiring the hacker, he had Krait find Cybermind's hideout using the some of the best computer specialists money can buy — none nearly so talented as Cybermind, but all of them talented enough that with sufficient time they could find out where the villain operated from.

At the time, King Cobra only wanted some insurance in case Cybermind betrayed him... and when Cybermind sends him an e-mail letting him know about the auction and inviting him to bid on the files, King Cobra knows the time has come to punish the treacherous and insolent hacker. He dispatches Boomslang and sixteen COIL agents to Cybermind's warehouse to retrieve the files and capture the man... so he can experience the Coil-Gene Touch and never betray King Cobra again.

THE HOOK

The PCs can learn about COIL's attack on Cybermind one of two ways.

If they're in touch with the villain via the nuz4u@wahooooo.com account, they receive an urgent e-mail — a very, very urgent e-mail. Unless the PCs have some serious protections on their computers, the e-mail "takes control" of their system, causing all the monitors in the base to flash red while speakers emit a high-pitched whine punctuated by a nasal voice saying: "You have mail!" The racket continues until one of the PCs opens the e-mail. In it, Cybermind tells the superheroes he's under attack and offers the files in exchange for their help and protection.

If the PCs haven't contacted Cybermind yet, the authorities get in touch with them and



report a warehouse in a section of town outside the hot zone is under attack. The authorities go on to describe the attackers. If you've included the *Moving Day* option, the PCs should quickly recognize the description of the attackers' uniforms. Even if the PCs haven't previously encountered COIL agents, they should still be suspicious.

RUNNING THE SCENARIO

The PCs' objective in this scenario is to save the pilfered VIPER files from destruction. While rescuing Cybermind from the COIL agents is certainly a heroic thing to do, it doesn't save the files. He doesn't have them memorized; they're stored on a computer in his hideout. Cybermind doesn't keep backup copies elsewhere, since he was positive his system was the most secure on the planet (and maybe it was — just not secured against blasters and concussion grenades).

As GM, your objective with this scenario is to start the chase scene that leads to *A Race Through The Sewers* in the next chapter. Hopefully, the action moves quickly from Cybermind's hideout, to pursuit of the fleeing Boomslang, to the Hothouse.

But if the PCs let Boomslang escape or capture him before he makes it to the sewer entrance, not to worry! There are other ways to get them on the trail and the first part of Chapter Three only requires slight adjustments to keep it entertaining.

Making It More Challenging: Here are a few ideas for making this scenario more challenging for your PCs.

- Move the snipers from atop the roof to inside the buildings. This way the PCs are less likely to spot them as they approach the scene.
- Three agents inside the warehouse are unconscious when the PCs arrive on the scene. Have these agents Recover in the first Turn of the battle.
- Change Boomslang and his agents' radios so Cybermind can't eavesdrop on their communications. Apply a -4 or -5 penalty to PER Rolls to detect the radio communications.

On The Scene

Cybermind's warehouse is in a run-down industrial section of town. There are no homes in the immediate area and because of the Ophidian Plague no one came into work, so the PCs don't have to worry about innocent bystanders getting caught up in the action.

As they approach, they see that two COIL agents operating a large cannon have already blasted large gaping holes in both the perimeter wall and the side of the warehouse. The agents and cannon are in the middle of the street; they now stand guard against outside interference. Those two are the only visible attackers. Some of the COIL agents are inside the warehouse (more details below); Boomslang and the remainder of his cadre have taken up positions in the surrounding buildings. These six COIL agents cover all

sides the warehouse and plan to shoot Cybermind if he attempts to escape. The Xs on the map mark their locations.

As the PCs approach, ask for a Tactics roll. If successful, the PCs realize they can't locate a means of transportation for the COIL agents.

Seismic Cannon: A large energy weapon that requires a crew of two, the seismic cannon is one of many prototypes stolen from VIPER and now used by COIL agents. The cannon is extremely useful against inanimate objects; its concussion blast sets up a vibration in the target that destabilizes anything but the most resilient or elastic materials. The Energy Blast in the description is the force blast; the Drain, the vibration that results from a successful hit with the force blast. Given time, weapon designers feel the Seismic Cannon can destroy just about anything. When the PCs arrive the agents have fired two of the seismic cannon's Charges. Boomslang has instructed the agents to guard the street and discourage unwanted visitors. (King Cobra briefed Boomslang on Cybermind's powers and the villain doesn't want him to take control of the cannon.)

Energy Blast 12d6 (60 Active Points); OAF Bulky (-1½), Crew-Served (2 agents; -¼), 16 Charges (-0) (total cost: 22 points) **plus** Drain DEF 4d6, Range (+½) (60 Active Points); OAF Bulky (-1½), Linked (-½), Crew-Served (2 agents; -¼), Gradual Effect (1 Turn; -¼), 16 Charges (-0) (total cost: 17 points). Total cost: 39 points.

Snipers: All of the Snipers except Boomslang lie flat on the roofs of the surrounding buildings with Augmented COIL Blaster Rifles (page 109) trained on the street below. They're visible to anyone approaching from the air; anyone on the ground must examine the rooftops and make a successful Concealment roll at -3, or PER Roll at -5, to spot them — maybe a glint of light from the gun barrel or a rain of pebbles from the roof gives the sniper away. The snipers and Boomslang maintain frequent radio contact, checking in with one another every Turn or so; if an agent doesn't respond, Boomslang immediately becomes suspicious and orders one of the nearby snipers to check on the situation. A PC can detect the radio transmissions with the appropriate Enhanced Senses and a successful PER Roll.

Boomslang: Boomslang lurks inside the building directly across the street to the south of Cybermind's warehouse. He stands beside a second-story window, but rarely peeps out. He depends instead on the agents to keep him apprised of the action via their helmet radios. The "B" on the map marks Boomslang's location at the start of the fight. In the alley that runs behind Boomslang's building is an entrance to the sewer he uses to escape.

Perimeter Wall: The perimeter wall surrounding Cybermind's warehouse is 1.5" (9.75 feet) tall, .5" (3.25 feet) wide, and made entirely of cinder block. On top of the wall, broken glass protrudes from the

THE PCS' APPROACH

Boomslang's nobody's fool. If the PCs make a spectacular and loud approach and he thinks his snipers are compromised (*i.e.*, the superheroes create sonic booms while flying through the sky, or approach in the team jet, thrusters burning), he orders them to either change position or fire at will. In other words, if he thinks it likely the PCs saw the snipers — and if they approach the scene from the air, he does think that — he doesn't let his men become sitting ducks.

If the PCs make a visible approach, start the first Segment 12 whenever you feel the COIL agents spot them. There's no reason you have to start the battle with the PCs right on top of the warehouse.

RECOMMENDED READING

Below are some rules you might want to re-read before running this section of the adventure. All page references are to *HERO System 5th Edition*.

Brace on page 255 and Set on page 259. Booms-
lang and the snipers attempt to take advantage of these Combat Modifiers.

Dive For Cover on page 260. Allow a PC to use this Combat Maneuver to catch the grenades thrown by the COIL agents into Cybermind's hideout.

rough mortar; anybody standing or landing atop the wall suffers ½d6 Killing Damage. The COIL agents have already blasted the gate off its hinges.

Warehouse: Like the perimeter wall, the warehouse is made of brick. A windowless building, it stands three stories high with a flat roof. The entire inside is open to the ceiling, so it's approximately 7" (45 feet) high. Three loading/unloading areas with aluminum doors face the south. The COIL agents have already blasted away the personnel entrance, leaving a gaping hole.

INSIDE THE WAREHOUSE

The warehouse is just a front for Cybermind's true hideout. The villain has had the whole inside of the place gutted and walls knocked down, making it little more than a shell. Once past the outside walls of the warehouse, the PCs see a smaller building, a cube with metal walls, nested inside the gutted place. This is Cybermind's sanctum.

Four COIL agents (standard equipment; page 108) are inside the warehouse trying to breach the walls of Cybermind's hideout. They're 4" away to the west of the hideout. Nearer the hideout, three of their fellow agents are on the ground unconscious. One other is caught in Cybermind's defense system: metal tentacles extruded from the hideout's walls and electrified with a high-voltage current. Though Cybermind has successfully defended himself so far, the COIL agents have accomplished their objective — they've set plastic explosives, primed and ready to go, around the entrance of the hideout. To make matters worse for Cybermind, the trigger mechanisms for the explosives are shielded from his cyberkinesis.

Hideout Physical Description: Cybermind's hideout is a metal cube, 4" (26 feet) to a side. A sliding door of metal, a little less thick than the wall, is in the west wall. From circular openings, thick metal tentacles wave about, ready to grab anyone who comes within 3", and then shock the victim with a jolt of electricity. Via a special console inside the hideout, Cybermind operates the tentacles with his Machine Manipulation. At each of the cube's upper corners is a camera (the COIL agents have shot out both cameras that face west). The tentacles are SPD 7, OCV/DCV 8. Each is DEF 8, BODY 6 and there are a total of twenty-eight, seven to a side.

Entangle 6d6, 8 DEF, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½) (105 Active Points); Cannot Form Barriers (-¼), Limited Range (3"; -¼) (total cost: 70 points) plus Energy Blast 4d6, NND (defense is target is completely insulated; +1) (40 Active Points); Linked (-½), Limited Range (3"; -¼) (total cost: 23 points). Total cost: 93 points.

Inside The Hideout: The inside of the hideout is a computer geek's fantasy. The north wall is dominated by a huge entertainment center and speakers in the wall provide surround sound. Multiple game systems in a tangle of cords and controllers lay on the floor in front of the entertainment center including the *piece de resistance* of his collection,

CYBERMIND'S WAREHOUSE MATERIALS SUMMARY

Here's a summary of the DEF and BODY of the objects in the warehouse:

Object	DEF and BODY
Cybermind's Work Station (total)	DEF 2, BODY 8
Hideout Door	DEF 12, BODY 6
Hideout Wall	DEF 12, BODY 8
Perimeter Wall	DEF 8, BODY 11
Tentacle	DEF 8, BODY 6
Warehouse Wall	DEF 8, BODY 9

an Atari 2600 with every game cartridge produced for the system plus two original joysticks that still work. (If pressed, Cybermind admits he made some improvements to the original joystick design.) Against the east wall are two stand-up arcade games. The south wall is Cybermind's work area: several computers and multiple monitors sit on a simple metal table, and the whole area is covered with spare motherboards, memory modules, and cables, as well as empty bags of potato chips and half-full plastic bottles of soda.

FIRST SEGMENT 12

The sections below list the villains in order of their DEX and suggest some tactics for them to use.

Booms- lang (DEX 24)

If he spots the PCs, Booms-
lang orders the two agents with the seismic cannon to fire on the super-heroes, appraises the agents inside the warehouse of the situation, then orders the snipers to fire on his mark.

COIL Agents (DEX 16; 4 agents inside the warehouse)

One triggers the explosives and blows the door off Cybermind's hideout. Two Hold their Actions and cover the hole in the side of the warehouse — they fire as soon as they see a superhero. The last one Holds his Action and covers the entrance to Cybermind's hideout. (The one caught by a tentacle is Knocked Out this Segment.)

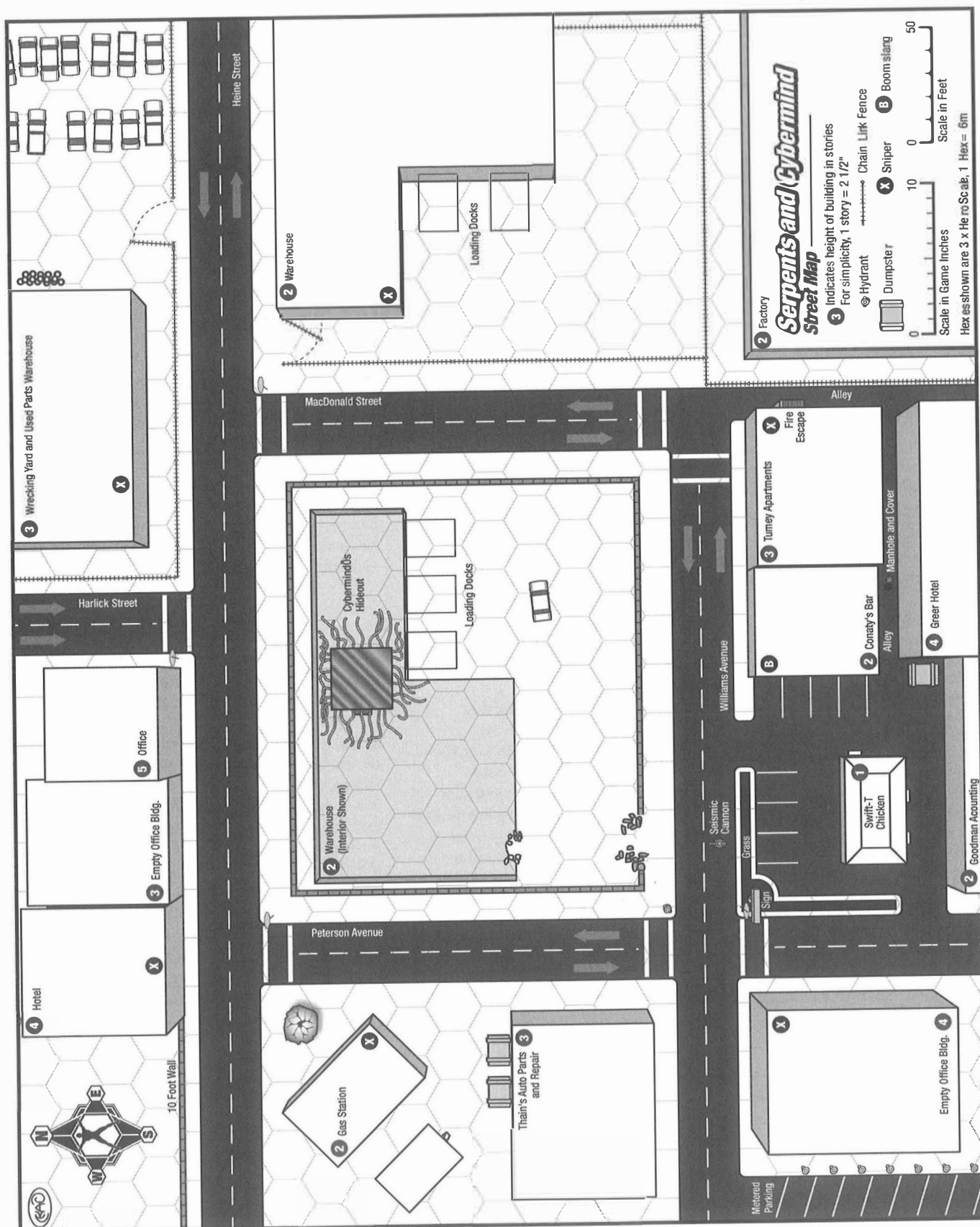
Even if the PCs attack the COIL agents before they get their Phase, one ignores them to trigger the explosives. If the one with the trigger is incapacitated, then another one picks up the trigger and sets off the explosives.

COIL Agents (DEX 16; 2 agents with the seismic cannon)

These fire the seismic cannon at the super-heroes. A vehicle is their first target; the physically largest PC, their second.

COIL Agents (DEX 16; 6 snipers)

Booms-
lang orders the two snipers nearest him (located atop the buildings to the east and west of the one he hides in) to open fire when the super-heroes approach the seismic cannon. He hopes to draw the PCs away from the warehouse.



WHAT'S IN THE FILES ANYWAY?

The information in the files is similar to what the PCs can gather by investigating Blank's lab (although more detailed and extensive). Blank didn't keep information pertinent to COIL's set-up or his biggest breakthroughs on VIPER's computers, knowing that if he did someone would probably find out what he was up to. The one advantage of the files is that rather than spending a day going through paper files, analyzing samples, and similar investigation, the files Cybermind has spell out Blank's research for the superheroes.

The other information concerns the subjects in Project Mendel who later went on to become COIL's inner circle. Anything that happened after Blank transformed himself is *not* included, but most of the other information in their backgrounds is there. Also included are computer-generated projections Blank filed with his superiors about what the subjects might become if Project Mendel succeeded. It shows a "before picture" of the subjects Zanita Stefanos, Uwe Meyer, and David Green. The "after picture" for Stefanos and Meyer is very accurate; that for Green is just plain wrong; it shows a man similar in appearance to a standard COIL agent.

All six snipers can see beyond the warehouse's perimeter wall. If the PCs go beyond the wall, Boomslang orders two of them, the ones directly east and west, to fire at will. (If the PCs ignored the seismic cannon, Boomslang orders those two to fire also.)

Unless the superheroes discover them, Boomslang holds the two agents to the north in reserve.

Cybermind (DEX 15)

Cybermind finds the remote control to an R/C car long ago lost and a white rag. He then ties the rag to the remote control's antenna and, crouched to the side of the door, waves the white flag in surrender.

SUBSEQUENT TURNS

The agents with the seismic cannon continue to fire; if the PCs disable the cannon or move out of range, they abandon the cannon and use their blasters.

The agents inside the warehouse do one of two things. If the PCs haven't entered the warehouse yet, they rush inside Cybermind's hideout. One Covers Cybermind with his blaster. The other three open fire on Cybermind's work station, effectively destroying it. If the PCs have entered the warehouse, two agents fire their blasters at them. The other two ignore the superheroes and throw COIL Concussor Grenades into Cybermind's hideout. (Cybermind Aborts his Action and Dives for Cover, leaping out of his hideout.)

On their next Phase, after receiving orders to kill the hacker, the agents inside the warehouse fire on Cybermind. If superheroes are inside the warehouse, two agents fire on them while the other two fire on Cybermind (if possible).

The snipers move to fire on any PCs that remain outside the warehouse. If all the PCs go inside the warehouse, the snipers remain in position, Hold their Actions, and wait for them to emerge. Their first target is Cybermind; with the PCs' arrival, Boomslang has made killing the hacker the top priority for this mission.

All of the agents keep in continuous radio contact, informing the others of what they're doing and what's going on around them. The agents have orders to avoid capture at all costs — including taking their own lives! Once Boomslang has escaped (see below) they first attempt to kill any unconscious agents nearby, then split up and run away. If cornered, an agent either uses a COIL Concussor Grenades to blow himself up or commits "hari kari" with his COIL Machete.

Cybermind

Unbeknownst to Boomslang and his agents, Cybermind can listen in on their radio transmissions and has heard their communications during the entire assault on his hideout.

If the superheroes rescue him, Cybermind tells them what's going on outside. He also refuses to go outside: he heard Boomslang tell the agents killing him was their first priority. Finally he knows the person in command is called Boomslang, but he can't tell how many agents are outside. (And, yes, he

gladly hands over any and all files once the superheroes rescue him. If the COIL agents destroyed his computers, he does *not* mention that the files are destroyed too until afterwards.)

Boomslang

Boomslang only reveals himself for one thing: to take a shot at Cybermind if the PCs bring the villain out of the warehouse. First he Braces, then he Holds his Action. On the Segment before his next Phase, Boomslang makes a Placed Shot at Cybermind's head using an Armor Piercing Round. He gains any modifiers for Surprise as appropriate. Then, on his next Phase, he flees.

Ordering the other agents to cover his retreat, he runs through the second story of the building he's in, leaps out the back window, and falls through the open manhole in the alley behind the building. Grabbing the edge of the manhole, he stops his fall, swings over to the nearby ladder, and slides down into the sewers below. Assume he makes his Break-fall roll to catch the edge of the manhole and his Climbing roll to slide down the ladder. If the PCs are in pursuit, proceed to Chapter Three, *The Race Through The Sewers*.

If confronted by the superheroes before Cybermind leaves the warehouse, Boomslang flees, following the same actions as above. If necessary, he uses his Flash Rounds to cover his retreat, but he never stops moving toward the window in back — his first priority is getting to the sewer entrance.

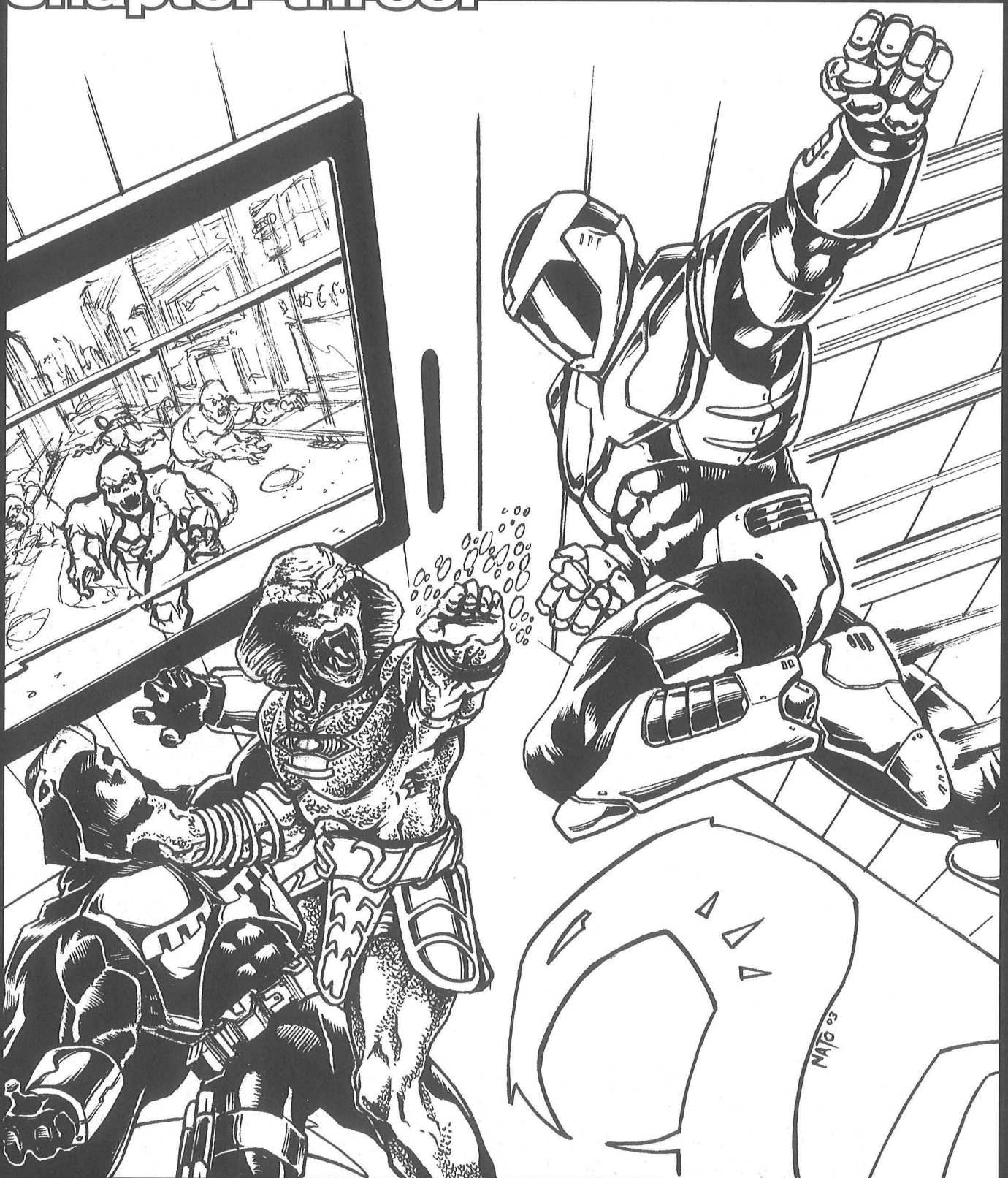
Wrapping Up

The scenario is effectively over when Boomslang retreats or the PCs capture him, and you should consult Chapter Three for what happens next.

Cybermind knows very little about what's going on. Several months ago, he was approached via the Internet by a person who called himself "KingCobra57" about programming a virus for use against VIPER's computers. He took the job for bragging rights about hacking VIPER and fifty thousand dollars, paid to his Swiss bank account. (Cybermind takes great pride in his Swiss bank account — it makes him feel like an international man of mystery.) KingCobra57 paid him half up front and half on delivery of the virus... and promised revenge if Cybermind betrayed him or the virus didn't live up to expectations. Obviously, KingCobra57 keeps his promises.

Cybermind has the files on his hard drive and gladly hands them over to the PCs if they rescue him (assuming the COIL agents don't destroy the hard drive). If the PCs try to bring him in, he asks snidely what the charges are — hacking an evil criminal organization's computer system and betraying the evil mastermind who engineered the Ophidian Plague, maybe? He claims the PCs don't have a case and should just let him go. If that doesn't work, he begs them to reconsider and asks for mercy — after this fiasco, VIPER is going to be out to get him, and if the superheroes throw him in jail, he'll be a sitting duck for whatever "ninja serpent-men assassins" VIPER sends to kill him.

chapter three:



THE COILS OF THE COBRA

INTRODUCTION



The Ophidian Plague still rages, but the time for investigation is over — now it's time for action! The heroes must find a cure or the plague, only barely contained by hard-pressed emergency teams, will cause the city to crumble and make a quick recovery impossible. Hot on Boomslang's heels, the PCs pursue the villain through an abandoned section of sewers. At the end of those sewers is King Cobra's hidden lair — an abandoned VIPER Nest called the Hothouse. Inside the Hothouse the heroes can find not only King Cobra, his inner circle of serpentine villains, and the makings of an epic battle they'll never forget, but also the dearly-needed cure for the plague.

CHAPTER ORGANIZATION

After the introduction, this chapter divides itself into four sections. The first, *Race Through The Sewers*, details the chase after Boomslang and how the PCs can discover the entrance to King Cobra's hideout, the Hothouse. The second two sections, *The Jungle Hothouse* and *The Downward Spiral*, take place inside the Hothouse. The first of these describes the immense artificially-created jungle that takes up the first level of King Cobra's hideout. It also describes how COIL agents defend the place against intruders and what kind of surprises lurk in wait for the PCs, from the monstrous Gorgon prowling beneath the waters when the PCs first enter, to the gigantic serpents that roam free through the jungle.

The Downward Spiral concludes the adven-

VIPER BITES: MORE VILLAINS

Chapter Four describes the villains used in this part of the adventure. If you think you need to bolster King Cobra's forces with more supervillains — maybe because the PCs captured Boomslang and/or Slither in the last chapter — there are several villains who gained their powers via Project Mendel described in *VIPER: Coils Of The Serpent*. It's not too much of a stretch to imagine Blank, while laying the groundwork for the COIL organization, implanted in these supervillains the genetic hooks that make subjects of the Coil-Gene Touch loyal to him, and has now called them to the Hothouse to join his inner circle. (Alternately, he may now have the ability to re-create those villains using other humans as subjects.) Listed below are the appropriate villains; the page numbers all refer to *VIPER: Coils Of The Serpent*.

Villain	VIPER Page
Boa Constrictor	137
Diamondback	139
Sidewinder	152

ture portion of *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth*.

It describes the rest of the Hothouse and details COIL's battle plans for the place's defense. It ends with a climactic fight against King Cobra and his inner circle as the master villain makes ready his escape. When the PCs burst on the scene, COIL agents are loading a maglev train with important supplies from the Hothouse... including the cure for the Ophidian Plague. The PCs must prevent King Cobra's escape to save the city. Chapter Three wraps up with a brief discussion of how the PCs can distribute the cure and some plot seeds for further adventures stemming from the events in *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth*.

KEEPING IT URGENT

Intended to be fast-paced, this part of the adventure might slow down if the PCs don't chase after Boomslang at the end of *Serpents And Cybermind*, if they catch Boomslang too quickly, or if they reach the portal at the end of the sewer system and decide to hold off before moving forward. If your PCs begin to lay siege to the Hothouse or otherwise start to concoct plans that require an extensive amount of time, you can use a few plot developments to keep finding a cure for the Ophidian Plague urgent:

- First and most simply, remind the players the plague has shut down the economic heart of the city (and perhaps the world). While the authorities have contained the hot zone, they're in no position to start pushing into the area and rounding up plague victims, and so long as the downtown area remains quarantined, the city and its local businesses lose millions of dollars each day. The same is true of every other city affected by the plague; this is an economic catastrophe that, if not stopped soon, will have far-reaching consequences. While the plague victims are the immediate sufferers of the Ophidian Plague — and surely the most tragic — if not cured soon, the plague's pernicious impact will adversely affect the lives of every citizen in the country.
- Plague victims begin to die. Authorities find deceased victims at the edges of the hot zone. Medical personnel suspect the cause of death is heart failure due to the changes to the victim's metabolism brought on by the Ophidian Plague.
- Plague victims enter stage two of the plague. The initial symptoms were only the beginning of the transformation. Now the victims become more serpentine. Multiple reports

have come in about victims with snake-like bifurcated tongues and scaly skin — not just dry skin, but actual scales revealed when the dry skin peels away. More important, to the police officers manning the barriers at the edges of the hot zone at least, these stage two victims are incredibly strong and tough, bordering on the superhuman.

- A hero infected with the plague begins to have a harder time retaining control of himself.

History Of The Hothouse

VIPER during the 1960s and '70s was a different organization than the modern-day masterminds of terror quietly moving behind the scenes to increase their control over the world. Back then, it was an organization with a penchant for grandiose plots — doomsday devices and world-conquering plans intended to bring the world's governments to their knees in one fell swoop. One of these grandiose plots was Project Terrorsaur.

Stealing a page from the alien Qularr, a race of extraterrestrials who tried to conquer the Earth with an invasion force of monstrous beasts, VIPER determined to create its own monsters for use in world-conquering plans. The world's governments had relocated the monsters that remained on Earth to Monster Island, an isolated locale in the Pacific Ocean east of Japan.

In 1969, VIPER agents snuck onto the island and stole blood samples from those monsters, then delivered them to the head of Project Terrorsaur, Dr. Dino Demogaard. A palaeontologist and card-carrying mad scientist, Dr. Demogaard irradiated the blood samples and injected them into every reptile he could get his hands on — from Komodo dragons and caimans to everyday toads and box turtles. No matter what sort of reptile he experimented on the result was total failure. The overgrown reptile first became incredibly lethargic, then died a few days later.

Project Terrorsaur was astoundingly expensive and a large part of that expense was the underground facility called the Hothouse, which served as living quarters and research laboratory for Dr. Demogaard and the other scientists. The first level

of the Hothouse encompassed an immense amount of area — the room had a diameter of over 500 feet and its domed roof was more than 100 feet at its apex. The space housed an artificially-created and maintained tropical jungle, a habitat for the monsters that would soon help VIPER conquer the world. The water and electricity required to maintain the humid and moist environment was a staggering expense, and after two years of abject failures, VIPER leadership cut the project's funding, ordered the Hothouse abandoned, and executed Dr. Demogaard for his folly.

Such was the state of things for nearly three decades, during which time VIPER's leadership experienced great upheavals and changes. By the end of the century, the organization's leaders had forgotten about the Hothouse. (And admittedly they had no desire to recall the atrocious waste of money, spent on what was likely a bad idea from the get-go — after all monsters hadn't helped the Qularr conquer Earth, why should they help VIPER do the same?) Then Dr. Blank, just beginning with Project Mendel and researching VIPER's past efforts into the field of reptilian DNA, stumbled on the files for Project Terrorsaur.

Blank was aghast at the poor documentation and pitiful research conducted by the project's scientists. Doctor Demogaard's obvious lunacy and lack of insight disgusted him. However one item about Project Terrorsaur fascinated him: the Hothouse and its artificially-created jungle. The jungle would make a perfect habitat for a wide variety of snakes difficult to keep alive in captivity, the immense space was especially suitable if his experiments in ophidian gigantism were successful, and last but not least, the grandiosity of the place appealed to Blank's megalomania. When the time came to secure locations for COIL's use, Blank ordered Krait to travel to the Hothouse and see if it was still in working order. After slogging through the sewers for several days, Krait finally discovered the place and found that it was almost perfectly preserved. When Blank prepared to leave VIPER, he ordered Krait to make the Hothouse ready for the arrival of King Cobra!

RACE THROUGH THE SEWERS



RECOMMENDED READING

Much of the action in this section involves vehicles. You should re-read the rules for vehicles on pages 321-324 of *HERO System 5th Edition* before running it (or, if you have *The Ultimate Vehicle's* more advanced vehicular combat rules, you can review those instead). Also read the rules for Movement on pages 237-242, paying especially close to Segmented Movement on page 239. This is an optional way of treating moving objects and might be appropriate here.

When last we saw our heroes, they had just rescued Cybermind from COIL. The villainous Boomslang, leader of the COIL agents, had fled the scene and was racing toward the underground entrance to the Hothouse. If your PCs pursue Boomslang, proceed to *In The Sewers* below and get the adventure moving! On the other hand, if your PCs did not chase Boomslang, continue reading...

The simplest and most direct way to find the Hothouse is to chase after Boomslang — but that's also the most dangerous way! If your PCs have cooler heads than that, you have a few ways of getting them on track to find King Cobra's lair:

The Sewer Entrance: If the PCs discovered Boomslang, but didn't chase him, later they can find the open manhole which obviously served as the villain's escape route. If they wait too long, however, COIL agent have returned to pick up the abandoned jetskis and pontoon boat (see below), and they replaced the manhole cover.

Captured COIL Agents: The agents don't reveal the Hothouse's location willingly or while under Interrogation, but a successful use of Telepathy or Mind Control makes them spill the beans. Because revealing the Hothouse's location goes directly against King Cobra's orders and the Coil Gene Touch's genetically-inspired loyalty, the PC needs an EGO + 40 Mind Control result (or EGO + 10 Telepathy result) to achieve the desired effect. (The same applies to mentally interrogating a captured Boomslang.)

Pilfered VIPER Files: This involves a little bit of retconning, but you can include a brief description of the Hothouse in the files. The PCs merely overlooked the name among the other keywords if they successfully deciphered Cybermind's computer virus. (And if they didn't discover Cybermind's virus, they never know the difference.) The description is brief — let the PCs know a little about its history as described above, but omit the part about the jungle habitat so that comes as a shock later in the adventure — but the file does indicate the place is in the sewers below the city.

Uh-Oh: If none of the three options above work for you — maybe the PCs don't examine the alley until hours later, didn't capture any COIL agents, and the VIPER files were destroyed — then go back to Chapter Two and run one of the other encounters with COIL agents described in *COIL's Activities* and put Boomslang or Slither in charge of the agents. From there the PCs can chase a COIL agent or

villain into the sewers and you can proceed with Chapter Three.

IN THE SEWERS

Beyond the open manhole near Cybermind's hideout, a rusty ladder bolted to the wall leads 10" (65 feet) down into the sewers. The ladder ends at the cement platform described in 1. *The Starting Line*.

Some general information concerning the sewers. Made of poured cement covered with cracked and dirty ceramic tiles, the sewer walls are DEF 6 and have BODY 11 for a section .5" (3.25 feet) deep; add 2 BODY for every additional .5" of thickness. The sewer tunnels are a uniform 3" (19.5 feet) in diameter. Through the middle of the tunnels runs dingy water 1.5" (13 feet) deep and 2" (13 feet) wide that flows sluggishly to the southeast (the whole system slopes downward in that direction). Along either side of the stream runs a walkway. Each walkway is .5" (3.25 feet) wide and covered with muck and slime. Any Agility Skill that requires movement along the walkway (i.e., Acrobatics or Breakfall, but not Lockpicking) suffers a -2 penalty. The sewers have a foul smell; treat it as a Change Environment that imposes a -4 to all Smell/Taste Group PER Rolls.

Since it was abandoned years ago, this section of the sewers lacks working lighting, but the pontoon boat and jetskis have headlights. This doesn't help a PC without Enhanced Senses who decides to fly through the tunnels.

Running The Scenario

Running a chase scene is a challenge for a GM. Not only is keeping track of the action and movement difficult, but so is keeping it as fast-paced and exciting as a chase should be. One piece of advice: don't use a battle map for the entire sewer system — only draw out sections when movement stops and the PCs fight agents.

If a PC travels through the sewers at high velocity, he doesn't have time to examine his surroundings, and by not pausing the game to draw the entire sewer system or the sections as the PC enters the location, you can better replicate the fast pace of the action. Not providing the *player* with a map helps re-create his character's experience of the confusing twists and turns that occur during the chase (not to mention the utter darkness of the tunnels). The character is zipping through twisty

tunnels, quickly making decisions to turn left or right, and if he lacks some kind of sensory power, he might not know what direction he's going in or coming from.

Whenever the PC comes to an intersection or fork in the tunnel, simply ask what direction he goes. If he doesn't have Bump Of Direction, ask him left, right, or straight rather than referring to points of the compass. If a character asks for a detailed description of the area or anything more than "Do I hear anything in either direction?", then ask the PC if he stops moving to look around. (If the PC asks if he hears anything, let him make a PER Roll. At your discretion, he might hear something if he fails his roll — sewer tunnels tend to echo, after all.)

If you choose to go this route, photocopy the map of the sewer system. For your own reference, keep track of the movement of both PCs and agents with chits. If you discover you made a mistake about where a character is and when — maybe the PC turned down a tunnel that doesn't exist — don't worry about it. Just keep on with the action, adjusting as necessary behind your GM's Screen to get the PC back on the map. If you haven't drawn out the entire sewer system, chances are the player will never notice.

Boomslang's Head Start

Boomslang's distance from area #1 when the superheroes arrive on the scene is left in your capable hands and obviously depends on the PCs' actions at the end of *Serpents And Cybermind*. If the PCs make an attempt to keep right on Boomslang's heels — even if their attempt isn't very well thought out or otherwise less than effective — keep Boomslang within 40' of area #1. Maybe he had to pick himself up after the fall or had trouble starting his jetski — whatever your reason, keeping him close provides the PCs with an incentive to chase after him.

If the PCs are *right* on his heels — meaning one or more entered the sewer system on the same Segment as Boomslang or on the next one — have two COIL agents waiting below. The agents use a Held Action to immediately enter Hand-To-Hand Combat with the PC, in an attempt to give Boomslang the time he needs to get on a jetski and head off.

The scenario works best if Boomslang can at least make some progress toward the Hothouse, if not reach it. If necessary, arrange events so he can keep moving — have COIL agents slow the PCs down and so forth. However, the PCs may have powers, such as Teleportation, that give them the chance to catch him. If so, let them; that's what they paid points for. Then they have to devise their own means of finding the Hothouse....

Features Of The Sewer System

The sections below describe the features of the sewer system; each number or letter marks the feature's location and some appear at multiple places in the sewer. Before running this part of the adven-

ture, you might want to add some features of your own. Depending on the tone of your campaign the PCs might witness first hand that figure out of urban legend — the crocodile flushed down the toilet and grown huge. Or you can add other security measures implemented by COIL to protect the Hothouse — maybe an electrified mesh attached at the bottom of the tunnel that turns a section of the water into a high voltage death-trap when Boomslang triggers it.

1. THE STARTING LINE

The ladder leads down to a cement platform jutting out into the sewer waters. Anchored beside the platform is a slow-moving, small pontoon boat and five jetskis (six if the PCs captured Boomslang before he could escape). A single tunnel leads off to the south. If the PCs are right on Boomslang's heels, they can hear the echoes of his jetski's engine revving to the south.

Tracking Devices: COIL has equipped all of its vehicles with tracking devices. Each vehicle has a monitor showing the relative location of other COIL vehicles. The monitor doesn't show the sewer; it only shows the vehicle at the center of the screen, placing red dots around the center to represent other vehicles.

Unless disabled, these tracking devices allow Boomslang and the COIL agents waiting in ambush to track the PCs' position as they move through the sewer. Finding and removing the tracking device requires 1 Turn and a successful Concealment roll at -3 or PER Roll at -5; Electronics is a Complementary Skill. The device emits a radio signal, so it's detectable with the appropriate senses. The PCs can use the devices, too, by making a Systems Operation roll to determine how to operate it.

Keeping track of multiple blips requires some clever thinking on the part of the heroes, since they all look the same. Here are some general tips. First COIL agents travel alone, so multiple blips bunched together are the PCs. Second, once a PC makes visual contact with a vehicle, he can figure out which blip corresponds to him by matching the blip's movements to the vehicle's; this doesn't require a roll (but does require the PC to maintain visual contact).

COIL JETSKI

1	Size	10	STR	18	DEX
8	BODY	4	DEF	4	SPD

Abilities: Swimming +18" (20" total), Surface Only (-1); Ground Movement -6" (0" total); +2 with Swimming.

Disadvantages: None.

Notes: With seats for two, the COIL Jetski is a high-speed, maneuverable water vehicle. To increase the excitement of the chase and because of the vehicle's simplicity, a PC can use Combat Driving to the pilot the jetski with a -2 penalty even if he doesn't have TF: Jetskis.

TUNNELING AND OTHER SORTS OF DIGGING

As stated elsewhere, the walls of the sewer tunnels are DEF 6 and have BODY 11 for a section .5" (3.25 feet) thick, +2 BODY for every additional .5". At several places in the sewer system a PC knocking his way through walls can provide a definite advantage for the superheroes. A character with the Power *Tunneling* can have a field day with this sort of thing.

However, a character using STR to punch his way through walls doesn't have it so easy. For every .5" of wall he punches through, ask for a STR Roll (or, if the character has it, a Power: Brick Tricks roll at +1). If he succeeds, the ceiling does *not* collapse. Apply a cumulative -1 penalty for every .5" after the first along the same passage (i.e., 3" thick section of wall results in a -5 penalty). Any character caught in a ceiling collapse takes 10d6 Normal Damage.

OTHER JETSKI GADGETS

In addition to the monitor and button to activate the net trap, here are some other ideas you can use for jetski gadgets that the PCs can learn about *after* Boomslang uses it on them. (Treat it the same as discovering the net trap activator button.)

Napalm Slick: Nozzles at the back of the jetski and just under the water line spout flammable liquid out onto the surface of the water, then a small igniter lights it. (A PC can avoid this trap the same way as the net trap; if leaping a jetski onto the walkway, he suffers an additional -3 penalty — one for each 1" traveled — to his Combat Driving roll.)

RKA 1½d6, Area Of Effect (3" Line; +1), Trigger (button on handlebar; +¼) (56 Active Points); IIF Bulky (-¾), No Range (-½), 2 Charges lasting 1 Turn each (removed by anything that would extinguish fire; -1). Total cost: 17 points.

Jetski Scythes: Small but sharp blades protrude from the jetski on small shafts. The blades whirl at high speeds causing damage to anything that tries to ram or hit the jetski and driver. Also effective when performing a Move By on another jetski.

HKA 1d6, Continuous (+1), Damage Shield (does damage in HTH Combat; +¾), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), Trigger (button on handlebars; +¼) (52 Active Points); OIF Bulky (-1), No STR Bonus (-½), Requires A Combat Driving Roll (no Active Point penalty; -0). Total cost: 21 points.

COIL PONTOON BOAT

4 Size	25 STR	10 DEX
14 BODY	4 DEF	2 SPD

Abilities: +7" Swimming (9" total), Surface Only (-1); -6" Ground Movement (0" total)

Disadvantages: None

Notes: Slow and ponderous, the pontoon boat is used by COIL to transport heavy objects (like seismic cannons) from place to place. The boat consists of a flat platform set atop two pontoons, open to the air and surrounded by a low, three-foot-high rail; it can fit six people. An outboard motor with a pull start set at the back of the boat propels the vehicle, and the pilot sits at the front on the left side.

2. GARBAGE DAM

At these parts of the sewer, large branches and other debris got wedged between the two walls, and over the month's garbage and other filth collected to dam the sewer. All of the dams are conveniently sloped to form a ramp, and a character on a jetski can jump a dam if he's travelling faster than 20" a Phase. To land the jetski requires a successful Combat Driving roll. Failure means the jetski tips in the air and dumps the driver, or the driver went too high and got "scraped" off the vehicle by the ceiling (and took 5d6 Normal Damage to boot!). The pontoon cannot get past the dams. The dams are DEF 3, BODY 8 and .5" (3.25 feet) high, leaving a 1" gap at the top of the tunnel.

3. TUNNEL BREAK

In the southeast quadrant of the sewer system the level of the sewer dropped after it was originally built (either because of an earthquake or other natural disaster, or maybe after a mighty bout of superhuman fisticuffs on the surface). This part is .5" to 1" below the level of the rest. Both the jetskis and pontoon can fit through. Those on jetskis only need duck their heads (assuming of course they aren't Flashed or otherwise blinded). Those on the pontoon need to crouch below the level of the boat's rail. Drivers of jetskis traveling over 20" a Phase must make a successful Combat Driving roll, or else lose control of the jetski and fall off when it lands after the leap over the ledge.

SEWERS MATERIALS SUMMARY

Here's a summary of the DEF and BODY of objects in the sewer area:

Object	DEF and BODY
Garbage Dam	DEF 3, BODY 8
Iron Portal	DEF 16, BODY 10
Jetski	DEF 4, BODY 4
Ladder (1" section)	DEF 5, BODY 3
Manhole	DEF 9, BODY 5
Net Trap, Fence	DEF 8, BODY 4
Net Trap, Pole	DEF 8, BODY 6
Sewer Wall (.5" deep)	DEF 6, BODY 11
Pontoon	DEF 4, BODY 14

This assumes the vehicle goes from the higher area to the lower. If vice versa, the pontoon boat cannot pass a tunnel break other than by portaging. For a jetski to get up over the break, the driver must make a successful Combat Driving roll to "hop" up over the ledge. Failure means he rams into the ledge, stopping the jetski (and maybe ruining it depending on his velocity), and he must succeed with a STR Roll or else he flips over the handlebars and off the jetski.

4. NET TRAP

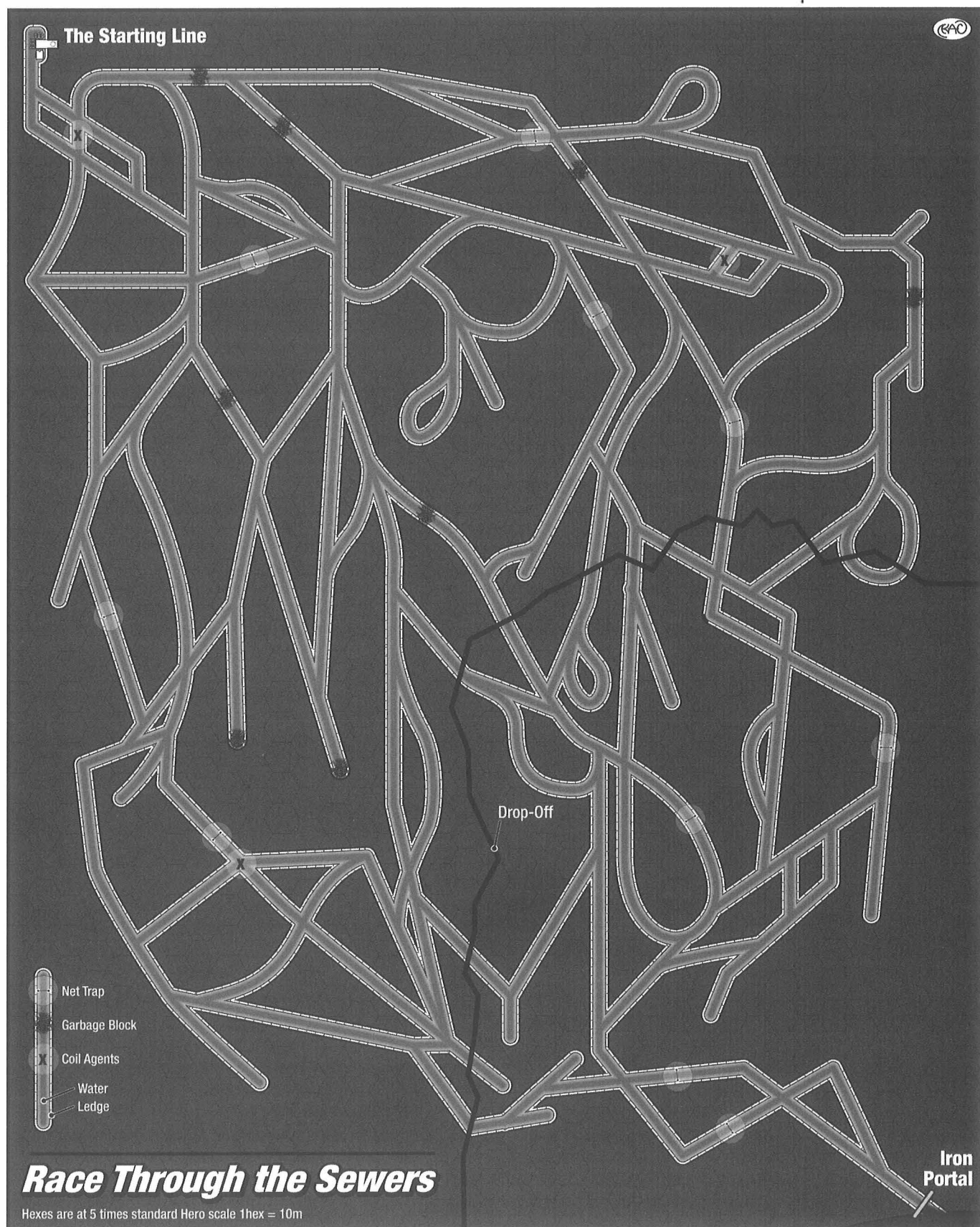
At these areas, COIL has erected traps to catch intruders. The trap is a net made of chain link set between two steel poles. Hidden under the water, the trap springs up to catch those on the surface or flying above the water. Boomslang can raise and lower the net from his jetski by pushing a button on the dash panel — and so can the PCs if he has TF: Jetskis and makes a successful Systems Operation or Deduction roll *after* seeing a net trap sprung. (In other words, if the PC riding a jetski is close on Boomslang's heels and sees the net trap spring up between him and his quarry, ask him for a Deduction roll. If successful, he notices the button in time to lower the net trap and avoids being caught.)

The net is 1" (6.5 feet) high and 2" (13 feet) wide; it leaves a .5" (3.25 feet) gap at the top and doesn't extend below the surface of the water, nor does it cover either walkway. (A quick thinking PC can ride his jetski up onto the walkway, slide along the slime-covered surface past the net, then leap back into the water with a successful Combat Driving roll — remember though that he suffers a -2 penalty to Agility Skills because of the slickness of the walkway.) The poles are DEF 8, BODY 6. The fence is DEF 8, BODY 4.

5. THE IRON PORTAL

The chase through the sewer ends here: a black iron portal with a the head of cobra, its hood flared and fangs bared, embossed on its surface. Until Boomslang passes through, the portal remains open, raised into a recess in the ceiling. Once the villain passes through, it starts to close on the next Segment. It moves slowly though, requiring 6 Segments to close completely, lowering .5" per Segment. The portal is the width of the tunnel and has DEF 16, BODY 10. The portal has the same special properties as the outside walls of the Hothouse (see the sidebar, *Features Of The Hothouse Jungle*, on page 72). It's sealed against liquids passing back and forth but not fully sealed against air, so a PC that has a gaseous form or the like can pass between the cracks and beyond the portal.

Hidden behind a small, square section of wall to the left of the portal is the mechanism that opens the door. Pushing on the top of the square causes that section of wall to swing up and back, revealing a camera. To open the portal, one puts his eye to the camera. If the camera reads the unique retinal pattern caused by the Coil-Gene Touch (meaning the eyes with slit pupils), it opens the portal. Successful use of Security Systems can also trigger the mechanism to open the portal; this requires 1 Turn and a



TROUBLESHOOTING: BOOMSLANG IS TOO VULNERABLE

Ideally his Agility Skills (like Combat Driving), his jetski's speed, and his high DCV are Boomslang's best defense in *Race Through The Sewers*. But if your PCs will find the scenario too easy because Boomslang is vulnerable to a particular power — maybe one of your PCs is a speedster that can move faster than 20" a Phase, or has Desolidification, and easily gets ahead of Boomslang to blast him or his jetski. Here's a few things you can change to increase the challenge:

- Increase Boomslang's SPD to 6 (or have him take super-drugs that temporarily boost his SPD).

- Give Boomslang Physical and Energy Damage Reduction, 25%, to make sure he can withstand a couple of good hits from the PCs.

- Increase his inches of Swimming (or give him an "underwater impeller" device). Thus, if the PCs blast his jetski out from under him, he can still move a good clip toward the entrance to the Hothouse.

- Provide him with slots on his VRG-5X Mini-Railgun Multi-power that affect the PC — for example, an explosive round that sets off a vibration that disrupts Desolid characters (Suppress Desolidification) — or that he can fire into the walls of the sewer to Trigger as the PCs go past.

- Give his jetski DEF +8, Ablative (-½) to increase its durability.

- Give him Mental Defense (12 points total); OAF (helmet; -1).

roll at -3. Failure means the characters trip an alarm.

If he heroes Knock Out or capture Boomslang during the chase through the sewers, the portal is still open. If some or all of the PCs rush to the end of the sewer system they come to the open portal. Once the agents on duty in the Hothouse's control room see one or more PCs come through the portal, they rush to close it so no one else can get in; the portal begins to close on the Segment after the PC enters.

Splitting The Party

Right on Boomslang's tail, the hot-headed PC slides his jetski under the ponderously closing portal... and finds himself alone in the Hothouse where Gorgon lurks under the muddy waters waiting to pull him down to his death.

It's not a pretty picture.

In the transition from *Serpents And Cybermind* to *Race Through The Sewers* you run the risk of splitting the party... and at this point in the adventure, you run the risk of *really* splitting the party if the portal cuts off some members from the rest. The portal takes time to get through and this makes it very difficult to get the team back together.

So long as you keep the action moving from one group to the other, this can lend some serious urgency, as well as drama and suspense, to the situation as one part of the team struggles to defend themselves from the twin threats of Gorgon and Boomslang, while the others rush to open the portal and come to their teammates' rescue. But if you want to avoid splitting the party like this, simply have the portal slam closed before the PCs go through it.

X. COIL AGENTS

Eight agents on four jetskis wait at various points throughout the sewer to cover Boomslang's retreat. One agent pilots the vehicle while the other fires at the PCs. You should provide them with blaster rifles as you see fit, but definitely choose some of the non-standard rifles to add to the excitement. For instance, a successful hit with the COIL Tangler Rifle will cause a PC piloting a jetski to lose control of his vehicle; and an agent can put the COIL Thunderclap Rifle to good use right before a PC turns the corner leading to one of the tunnel breaks (area #3). Both of these can prove much more effective in this situation than a simple EB or RKA. For some more fun, you can also provide each jetski with the following harpoon gun:

COIL Harpoon Gun: The COIL Harpoon Gun is a long tube with a grip and reel of steel cord set at the back. The RKA of the attack is the harpoon itself; the Stretching the cord. If the harpoon sinks into the target (*i.e.*, does BODY damage), the agent can use his STR to pull the target closer. The COIL agent targets either the driver or the jetski, whichever he thinks he's more likely to damage (*i.e.*, if he's firing at Iron-clad, a superhero with metal skin, he targets the jetski instead). Then he yanks on the cord to pull the driver off the jetski or make the jetski spin out of control. In the latter case the driver needs to make a Combat Driving roll to maintain control of the vehicle. (Of

course, the cord is a two-way street — a quick-thinking PC might turn the tables on the COIL agent.)

RKA 2d6 (30 Active Points); OAF (-1), Limited Range (5"; -¼), 1 Recoverable Charge (-1¼) (total cost: 9 points) **plus** Stretching 5" (25 Active Points); OAF (-1), Only To Pull Objects Closer (-¾), Only Works If RKA Does Body (-½), Linked (-½), Always Direct (-¼), No Non-combat Stretching (-¼), No Velocity Damage (-¼), 1 Recoverable Charge (-1¼) (total cost: 4 points). Total cost: 13 points.

Generally, the COIL agents wait with engines idling and lights off as they monitor the PCs' progress through the sewers. After a PC passes by, the agents dash out behind him and the one in back opens fire. For PCs "dead in the water" and moving along the walkways, the agents perform drive bys and try not to let themselves get pinned down to one position. The shooter uses the harpoon gun to pull a PC from the walkway and drag him behind the jetski. These agents can also activate the net traps (and if you choose to equip the jetskis with other gadgets as described in the sidebar on page 68, they also have those).

Boomslang's Tactics

Boomslang maintains a constant 20" per Phase on the jetski. He only accelerates to Non-combat velocity if he needs to ramp a garbage dam or outpace a PC for a specific reason (such as reaching an ambush spot, passing a net trap so he can spring it on his pursuer, or escaping a PC who's attacking him).

Boomslang doesn't like being hunted — he much prefers being the hunter — and he continually monitors the PCs' progress as best he can. (If the PCs are the only ones who started from area #1, he should be able to track them easily, at least for a while.) If one or two PCs get well ahead of the group — especially if some of the group is on jetskis, the rest on the pontoon — he doubles back and tries to get behind the ones ahead of the rest, then he opens fire. (Definitely have Boomslang double back to attack if the PCs become complacent or defeatist).

Boomslang's familiar with the sewer system and the locations of its various features. If a PC is in close pursuit of him, he turns down a tunnel with a garbage dam, hoping the PC loses control of his jetski when he tries to ramp it. If nearing one of the tunnel breaks, he slows down slightly to fire off a Flash Round or two. He makes extensive use of the net traps until the PCs figure out they can lower them from their jetskis. And if a PC finds himself alone and removed from his vehicle by one of these ruses, Boomslang doubles back to finish the job.

Throughout this part of the adventure, Boomslang maintains radio silence unless he loses his jetski. Then he informs the agents lurking in ambush of his situation, orders them to converge on his position, and starts to swim for the portal. When agents arrive, he commandeers their jetski. If in the water and under attack, his first goal is to take the jetski away from a PC.

COIL ON GUARD

If the PCs don't immediately chase after Boomslang when he retreats from Cybermind's warehouse, you should change a few things about the above encounter.

- Add motion sensors and similar alarms throughout the sewer system. The PCs can find these with a successful Concealment or Security Systems roll at -2, or PER Roll at -4. You should add plenty of sensors — at least one near the ladder leading down from the manhole and another at each of the tunnel breaks (area #3).

- If enough time has passed, COIL agents have removed the pontoon boat and jetskis from area #1.
- The agents located at the Xs on the map are still there, standing guard; they attack the PCs using the tactics described above. When they spot the PCs, they inform the agents in the Hothouse's control center.
- Boomslang leaves the Hothouse riding a jetski (and accompanied by four agents on two jetskis to help guard the sewer system). His basic tactic is to get behind a PC, fire his rail guns, then speed past the PC in an attempt to lead the superhero into an ambush.

THE HOTHOUSE JUNGLE



The portal slowly opens and the superheroes find themselves looking out across a small lake of murky water. Ahead of them is a jungle thick with trees tangled in blossoming vines and an undergrowth of broad-leafed ferns and knotty bushes. Through the mists that swirl above the jungle canopy, they catch glimpses of a metallic domed ceiling shining bright with burning lights. The only sounds they hear are the calm waters lapping on the nearby shore where two piers thrust out into the small lake, and moisture dripping from green leaves and lush foliage. Somewhere in this man-made jungle are their enemies — King Cobra and the rest of his serpentine minions — but where?

Running The Scenario

This part of the adventure is a hard slog through an inimical environment, where the PCs face ambushes and other obstacles — including finding the exit — before moving on to the rest of King Cobra's hideout.

Be sure to describe the scene in detail before moving on with the adventure. It's important that the players realize the Hothouse isn't just a big room with a few well-tended potted trees here and there — it's more like someone cut out a 500-foot-wide section of the Amazon rainforest and transported it here to a chamber a hundred feet under the campaign city.

Chances are the PCs encounter Gorgon immediately after they enter the Hothouse jungle, so you likely begin this part with the fight described below in 1. *The Lake* on page 76.

Survival (Tropical Forest): While in the Hothouse jungle, the PC can use Survival (Tropical or Tropical Forest) as a Complementary Skill for the following: Concealment, Shadowing, Stealth, Tracking.

Walking Through The Jungle: The Skill *Survival (Tropical or Tropical Forest)* is also handy if a PC decides to move off the trails and try to hack his way through the underbrush. With a successful Skill Roll he can move in whatever direction he wants. Otherwise, without the Skill or if the PC fails his Skill Roll, there's only a 2 in 6 chance for every 4" traveled he moves in the chosen direction. With a result of 1 or 2 on a 1d6 he moves accurately. On a 3-6 he drifts off his desired path, the higher the number the more drastic his divergence (which can add up quickly to becoming incredibly lost). On a roll of 3 or 4, he moves 1" to left or right, respectively, of his chosen direction. On a roll of 5 or 6, he moves 2" to left or right, respectively. Of course, characters with Bump Of Direction needn't worry about this. Remember, there's no sun in the Hothouse; the light radiates uniformly from all parts of the ceiling.

With or without Survival (Tropical or Tropical Forest), a PC can only move at half his normal Movement through the underbrush — in game terms he must take a Half Phase Action to clear a path — unless his STR is 30 or greater. Visibility for Normal Sight in the jungle is reduced to 2".

Swinging: In the jungle, a character with Swinging can move anywhere in the Hothouse at normal speed except across the middle of the lake. Trees and vines do hang over the 2-3" nearest the shore.

WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE

Below are two sections describing the features and locations in the Hothouse jungle. On the map, icons represent immobile features like hollow trees, and a number shows a location. Like the sewers above, you should add any features or locations you feel increase the challenge of this scenario. The goal of this part of the adventure is to thrust your

OUTSIDE WALLS OF THE HOTHOUSE

The outside walls of the Hothouse, including the iron portal and all the walls in the jungle except the observation center, are heavily fortified and protected against many different powers. They are DEF 18, BODY 18, and possess the following qualities: Mental Defense (20 points) and Power Defense (20 points), as well as the Advantages *Hardened (x2)*, *Affects Desolidified*, and *Cannot Be Escaped With Teleportation*. Finally it interferes with radio communication; characters who want to broadcast or receive any signals through the walls to the outside world must make Systems Operation rolls at -5 or (to receive) PER Rolls at -8.

What can't the wall do? It doesn't block non-psionic forms of Clairvoyance (e.g., magically seeing through the eyes of others or peeping through two dimensional portals) or Extra-Dimensional Movement. If you feel this detracts for the adventure, provide it with means of stopping these also.

RECOMMENDED READING

Here are some rules you might find useful to re-read before running this part of the adventure. All page references are to *HERO System 5th Edition*.

Drowning on page 285 and Grab on pages 256-257. In the fight with Gorgon both of these rules are likely to apply.

Environmental Conditions for fighting in water on page 250. Another rule that comes into play while fighting Gorgon.

Concealment on page 37, Shadowing on page 48, Stealth on page 49, and Tracking on page 51. All four of these Skill might come into play while traveling through the jungle, especially if Boomslang remains at large.

PCs into an unfamiliar environment and challenge them to use their powers in new ways or call upon infrequently used skills to overcome the obstacles presented. Adding challenges that are both suitable to the locale and a specific challenge for your PCs' powers helps customize the adventure to your campaign. When adding something, remember that you don't necessarily want to stop the PCs in their tracks. A satisfying challenge is oftentimes one that requires the PC use a common power or skill in an unconventional way or gives a PC the opportunity to use a power or skill not normally used over the course of a campaign, not one that simply Knocks them Out.

Features Of The Hothouse Jungle

The Hothouse jungle is 80" (520 feet) in diameter. The ceiling is 16" (104 feet) high at its highest point in the center, and slopes downward from there to the perimeter of the circular area. The moist, black soil for the jungle is 10" (65 feet) deep descending straight down from the perimeter of the dome. (The cross-section of the Hothouse jungle appears as a half-sphere set atop a cylinder wider than it is tall.) 7" (45 feet) below the surface is a strong metal mesh (DEF 10, BODY 4) to keep tree roots from damaging the slender, perforated water pipes that criss-cross the bottom 3" and help keep the soil moist.

THE JUNGLE'S CEILING

The ceiling of the jungle is a large dome that possesses several unique features. At its highest point is the observation center, all but invisible to the PCs because of the mists that fill the air, the glaring lighting that radiates from the ceiling, and the observation center's Concealing Mist (see 2. *Observation Center* on page 78).

Automated Tranq Guns: Guns set on spherical swivel mounts line the domed roof, 11" (71.5 feet) above the floor of the jungle and 1" (6.5 feet) above the jungle canopy. Placed in a circle, one gun approximately every 4", the guns fire tranquilizer darts intended to stun flying monsters — and more than strong enough to stun the average flying hero. About the size of small spike, the "dart" is only really a dart when compared to a pterodactyl.

When turned on, the automated guns use motion sensors to aim at any target larger than a small bird that breaks through the jungle canopy (i.e., they fire if a gigantic head emerges from the trees or a flying superhero takes to the air to scout around). The COIL agents leave the guns activated since none of the creatures *intended* to be in the Hothouse can break through the canopy, so the guns are active when the PCs enter the area.

Because of the bright lights, uniform metallic color of the ceiling, and drifting mists, the PCs do *not* notice the guns upon casual inspection. To have any chance to notice them, a PC must state that he's looking for something suspicious about the ceiling, or at least that he's studying the ceiling. In that case

he can make a PER Roll at -6 to spot them. If a PC can see through the canopy (or has climbed a tree) and studies the situation for a Turn or so, ask for a Deduction roll. If the PC succeeds, he notices that birds fly around without triggering the guns.

The five guns nearest the target fire tranq darts. There are twenty guns total, so they can only fire at four targets in a Segment — if there are more than 4 targets, randomly determine which targets the guns fire at. In game terms, this is bought as four guns, each with 5-shot Auto-fire. Since the guns have thousands of rounds of ammunition, they're not bought with Charges — if you wish to reduce their effectiveness, remove the *Reduced Endurance* Advantage and add 30 Charges to the Power.

Note that the Tranq Guns have Delayed Return Rate and the Gradual Effect on the Drain to better model the purpose and effect of a tranq gun. If you think the Delayed Return Rate might seriously cripple the PC and thereby weaken the team, remove it. If you think the Gradual Effect is too much trouble to keep track of, remove it, too — but allow the tranquilized PC to land woozily on the ground as he slips into unconsciousness, rather than simply plummeting from the air, as a part of the weapon's special effect.

The guns are SPD 3, OCV 8, DCV 3; each has DEF 8, BODY 4. The same Segment a target breaks through the jungle canopy, the guns fire. Treat them as using a Held Action to do this.

Cost Power

- 62 *Tranq Gun:* RKA ½d6, Penetrating (+½), Autofire (5 shots; +½), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +1), No Range Modifier (+½); OIF Immobile (-1½) **plus** Drain STUN 3d6, Ranged (+½), No Range Modifier (+½), Autofire (5 shots; +1½), NND (defense is Life Support [appropriate Immunity]; +1), Delayed Return Rate (5 Character Points per 5 Minutes; +½), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +1); OIF Immobile (-1½), Only Works If HKA Does Body (-½), Linked (-¼), Gradual Effect (1 Minute; -½)
- 15 *Tranq Guns:* 3 more Tranq Guns (total of 4)
- 16 *Motion Sensors:* Detect Physical Objects In Motion 17-, Discriminatory, Increased Arc Of Perception (360 Degrees), Range, Sense, Targeting (+10 versus Range Modifier); OIF Immobile (-1½)
- 15 *Motion Sensors:* 3 more Motion Sensors (total of 3)

Total cost: 108 points.

Sprinklers And Lighting: Alternating tracks of fluorescent lights and water sprinklers run across the ceiling, starting at sixty feet high and arching from east to west. The lighting doesn't replicate the sun rising and setting; instead it radiates uniformly from all directions at once, growing brighter from dawn until noon then dimming until it fades to the intensity of moonlight at night. The lights also radiate considerable heat and keep the ambient temperature of the room at a steady 80-85 degrees Fahrenheit. The sprinkler system can reproduce



everything from a torrential downpour to a light, steamy mist. Between the heat from the lights and the sprinkler system, the Hothouse jungle remains moist and unbearably humid, almost perfectly recreating the climate of a tropical rainforest. The only thing lacking is a breeze — which makes the heat and humidity even more unbearable.

Surveillance Cameras: Studding the ceiling are small, recessed surveillance cameras — one for every forty square feet of the dome's surface. Characters cannot spot the cameras unless they closely examine the ceiling. The cameras use infrared to generate a three-dimensional model of the jungle in the control center, so the agents have little difficulty monitoring the PCs' progress.

JUNGLE FLORA AND FAUNA

The flora in the Hothouse jungle is most similar to that of the Amazon rainforest: mango, guava, and rubber trees grow from the jungle floor; blossoming yucca and birds of paradise abound; and samambaia ferns, papaya plants, and stinging nettles make passage through the underbrush difficult. The only unusual feature of the jungle — a PC can spot this with a successful Survival (Tropical or Tropical Forest) or SS: Botany roll — is that the trees consistently only reach a height of sixty feet, and some trees known for their great height, like Brazil nut trees, aren't present. (COIL scientists have genetically engineered the trees to stop growing at sixty feet so they don't outgrow the Hothouse.)

Small mammals inhabit the jungle. Rodents like the capybara and small monkeys like the tamarin are found here, as well as birds like toucans and macaws. With a successful Survival (Tropical or Tropical Forest) roll, the PCs realize none of the large mammals native to a rainforest inhabit the place. COIL agents introduce these animals monthly as food for the giant snakes — King Cobra

doesn't allow larger mammals for fear of injury to his "pets."

Giant Snakes: King Cobra has used his Coil-Gene Touch and various techniques developed during Project Mendel on more than just humans. The cobra from his ophidiary at Snake Gulch was merely the first subject; he's perfected the process since then. A snake subjected to his processes grows huge in size, and if venomous, its venom becomes preternaturally virulent. The mutated snake also displays heightened aggressiveness — after continued observation King Cobra believes the giant snakes now hunt for, as he puts it, the joy of the kill. Thanks to the Coil-Gene Touch, King Cobra need never fear attack by the snakes — they treat him as a pet dog does its master. The serpentine villain has even trained them to not stalk his COIL agents. (They recognize the agents by the distinctive serpent-like smell caused by the Coil-Gene Touch's transformation.) Despite this training, the giant snakes have killed a couple of agents — but in this adventure, unless you need them to provide a distraction so the PCs can escape an ambush or other attack, the giant snakes would much rather kill your PCs!

A snake tends to move alone through the jungle or suns itself on the two skeletons of giant monsters. If the PCs are tracking Boomslang and he knows it, he leads the PCs into an encounter with one. Otherwise you can just use them however you see fit — they are mainly meant to lend ambience to the setting.

The HERO System Bestiary provides character sheets for giant venomous snakes on pages 116 and 117. King Cobra currently keeps three of these unnatural serpents in the Hothouse jungle. All of them are king cobras, the longest of which is an astounding 52 feet long.

The Jungle Canopy: From the ground within the jungle and even on the trails, the canopy is so

dense as to be nigh-impenetrable. It's a consistent 9" (approximately 60 feet) high. From the air, the canopy cuts off sight of everything but the lake, the watering holes, and the locations of the monster skeletons — the trails, only .5" wide and overhung with wide branches, are *not* visible from the air.

Hollow Trees: Doctor Demogaard, the scientist in charge of Project Terrorsaur and the Hothouse during the seventies, wanted his monsters to have as natural environment as possible. He didn't want them stumbling upon humans as they went about their business, since it would taint the results of his observation. Thus, he put in place a means of traveling underground. The entrances to these underground tunnels are concealed in hollowed-out mango trees. The mango trees are real, though dead; through the middle of the wide trunk runs a tunnel that leads below the surface. The concealed entrance into the hollow tree is located in its branches 6" (39 feet) above the jungle floor; it looks just like any other section of the tree, but one small area of bark pivots aside to reveal a handle used to open the entrance. A PC can find the entrance with a successful Concealment or PER Roll and a close examination of the area (which means climbing the tree).

From the entrance wooden rungs inside the tree lead down 10" (and 4" below the surface of the jungle). At the bottom is a passage, .5" (4 feet) in diameter, that leads in two directions. Each hollow tree connects to two other hollow trees, whichever are nearest. The passages are not marked on the map, but if you need to find one (*i.e.*, a character is tunneling through the earth and you want to know if he stumbles on the underground passage) take a straight edge and lay it between the two nearest hollow trees. The system of passages is self-contained and does *not* lead to the secret entrance to the control room — although one of the hollow trees comes out very close to that.

During the adventure, COIL agents lurk in the branches of the dead mango trees and ambush the PCs as they travel through the jungle. Not all the trees hold agents; you should decide which do

as the adventure progresses. The COIL agent sits concealed, waits for the PCs to pass, and then opens fire. Once the PCs have spotted him, he retreats into the tree and changes location.

A variation on this sort of ambush takes place at area #3 and should hopefully help the PCs realize that the secret entrance to the control room — and exit from the jungle — is hidden in a tree as well.

MONSTER SKELETONS

The skeletons of Dr. Demogaard's last two reptilian subjects in Project Terrorsaur remain in the jungle: an overgrown chameleon and alligator. Because the irradiated blood samples from the monsters on Monster Island infused their bones with radiation and turned the skeletons into emitters of hard radiation with a half-life of fifty years, no fauna grows in the area. All of the bones are hot to the touch and emit slight greenish glow visible in the dark.

5" (32 feet) from its bony snout to the last vertebra in its tail, the chameleon lays half-sunk in the loamy earth. Only the top of its skull, vertebrae, and ribs remain visible above the surface of the jungle. The clearing occupied by the gigantic chameleon looks like a scar from the air, 7" long and 2" wide.

Only the alligator's skull, lower jaw, and all of its sharp, yellow teeth remain above the earth. Judging from its skeletal remains, the alligator was close to eighty feet long in life not counting its tail. The skull is 2.5" (16 feet) wide and 4" (26 feet) long. The clearing around the skull is 3.5" wide by 6" long.

All three snakes enjoy "sunning" themselves on the remains of past monsters — whether because of the heat from the radiation or that from the sun, who can tell? — and they can often be found in these clearings.

TRAILS

Trails .5" (3.25 feet) wide wend their way through the jungle. Characters can move at normal speed over the trails.

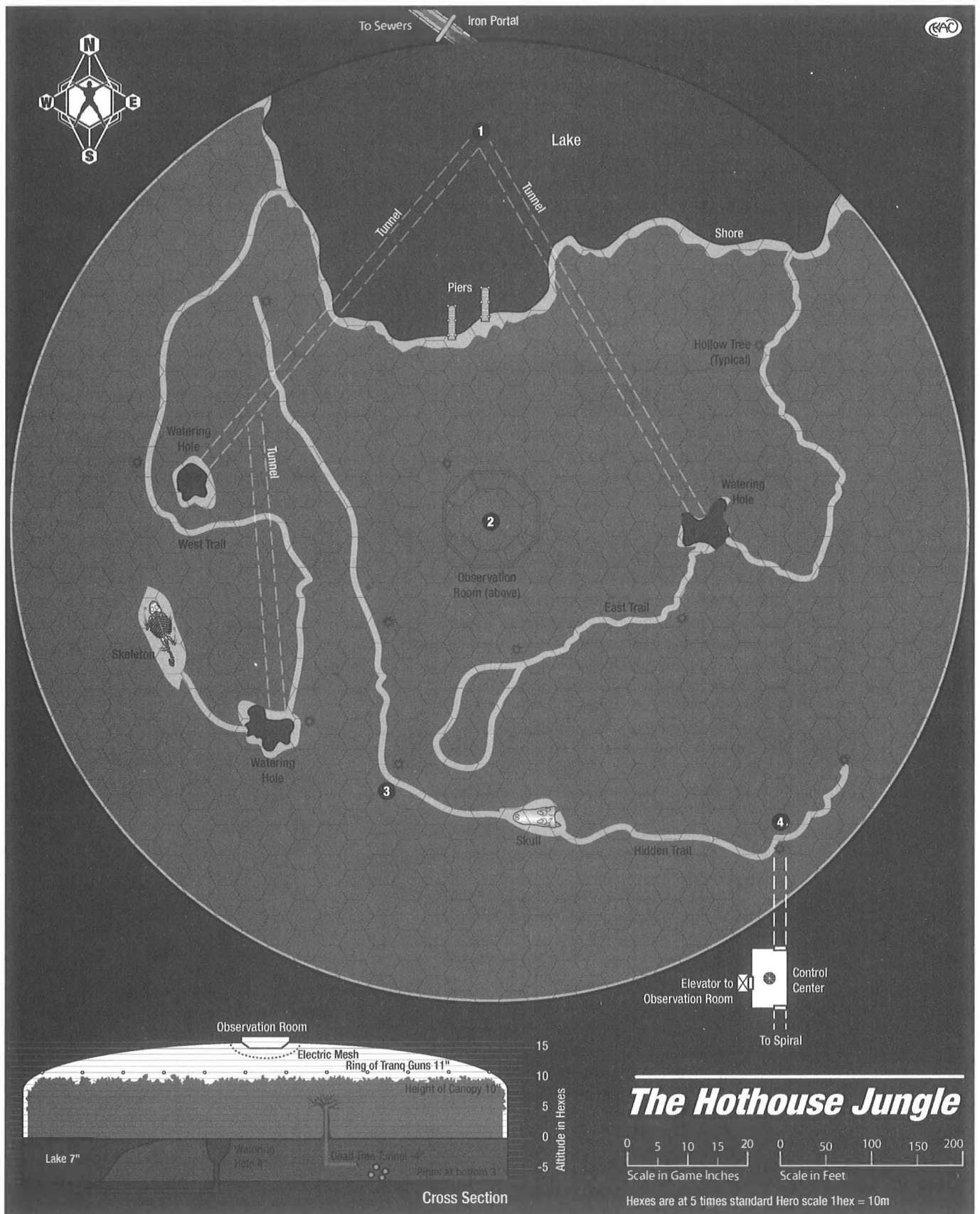
Party Order: When the PCs start out on the trail, you should ask for "party order" — in other words, which PC is in front, who brings up the rear, and so on. This becomes important later at area #3. The trail is only wide enough to allow a single file of man-sized PCs easy passage. PCs can walk abreast, but that slows the group down just like walking through the underbrush would.

Tracking: If a PC uses Tracking to examine the trails, he spots tracks with a successful roll. Success by 3 or less means he finds that plenty of booted feet have moved on the trails — the boot-prints are similar to those that a COIL standard-issue boot would leave. With success by 4 to 6, he identifies strange slithering tracks crossing the trail. These tracks rarely follow the trail for any distance — rather they come out of the jungle then soon return to the jungle. If the PC has encountered Gorgon, he isn't sure if Gorgon caused the tracks... but he is certain the monstrous villainness would cause tracks similar to these. With success by 7 or more, he knows the tracks come from both Gorgon

JUNGLE MATERIALS SUMMARY

Here's a summary of the DEF and BODY of jungle objects:

Object	DEF and BODY
Control Center Door	DEF 12, BODY 8
Dirt (per hex)	DEF 0, BODY 10
Hollow Trees	DEF 5, BODY 8
Elevator	DEF 8, BODY 12
Elevator Door	DEF 8, BODY 8
Iron Portal	DEF 16, BODY 10
Monster Skeletons (1" section)	DEF 5, BODY 8
Observation Center Window	DEF 8, BODY 4
Observation Center Wall	DEF 13, BODY 8
Observation Center Hatch	DEF 13, BODY 8
Pier (per hex)	DEF 4, BODY 5
Tranq Gun	DEF 8, BODY 4
Tree	DEF 5, BODY 11



TROUBLESHOOTING: TO KILL OR TO CAPTURE?

In the right circumstances — a hot-headed superhero who isn't a brick or martial artist with a chance of escaping Gorgon's grip, entering the Hothouse alone — Gorgon can kill a PC. If it comes to that, you should consider the tone of your campaign and decide whether a PC dying in these less-than-heroic circumstances is appropriate to your game. After all, though the task of defeating King Cobra is a heroic one of epic proportions, drowning while trapped in the crushing grip of the master villain's minion isn't the same as sacrificing one's self to save the city.

If such a death is appropriate to your campaign, you've nothing to worry about; continue the fight to its fatal conclusion. If it's not, simply adjust the back story so that King Cobra has ordered Gorgon to capture the PCs, not kill them. He wishes to subject them to his Coil-Gene Touch and add them — and their powers — to his newly-born COIL organization. Gorgon only keeps the PC underwater until he passes out from lack of oxygen, then deposits him at one of the watering holes, safely away from his teammates, and returns to the lake to deal with the other trespassers. (Some COIL agents travel through the jungle from the control center to pick up the unconscious hero and bring him into the Hothouse.)

This same back story can apply to other encounters with COIL in *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth* — although, admittedly, becoming one of King Cobra's fanatically loyal minions might be a fate worse than death...

and some other gigantic snake — some of them are bigger tracks than Gorgon would leave.

UNDERGROUND WATERWAYS AND WATERING HOLES

The jungle has three watering holes, each roughly 4" (26 feet) in diameter and visible from the air. The greenish water is murky, its bottom invisible through the slime-covered surface, and 4" deep at its deepest. At the bottom of the watering hole is the entrance to a pipe, 2" in diameter. The pipe descends 8.5" into the earth, below the steel mesh that separates tree roots from the system of water pipes, then bends horizontally. All of the pipes originate at the lake; their locations under the surface are marked on the map with a dashed line. Gorgon uses them to travel through the jungle... and potentially drag her prey away from his teammates at the lake.

Jungle Locations And Encounters

There are four areas on the map marked with number. Two of these offer ways of departing the Hothouse jungle... the other two offer ways of departing from life!

1. THE LAKE

A small body of water, called a lake for ease of reference, takes up about a fifth of the jungle's surface. At its deepest in the north, the lake is 7" (45 feet) deep; its bottom slopes steeply upward from there until it reaches the shore. The two pipes that lead to watering holes let out at the deepest part of the lake. The water is murky, and its surface covered with slime, so the depths of the lake aren't visible from the surface. Jutting out into the lake from the southern shore are two short piers. Depending on when the PCs arrive, there are either one or two pontoon boats moored to the piers, and up to ten jetskis dragged up on the shore. Clear of foliage, the shore is sandy and about 1" wide. Two trails lead from the lake, one to the west, the other to the southeast.

The north edge of the lake abuts the wall of the dome. Located here is the iron portal used to enter the Hothouse (area #5 in *Race Through The Sewers* above). And this is where the action picks up with Gorgon.

Gorgon

Gorgon, one of King Cobra's inner circle described on page 101, lurks under the still waters guarding the entrance to the Hothouse. She attacks any and all PCs that come through the iron portal from the sewers.

First Segment: On the same Segment a PC comes through the iron portal Gorgon rushes up from the depths, long tail whipping behind her. She emerges in a spray of water, rising several feet above the surface, taloned fingers bent in claws and arms spread wide to embrace the PC. (Be sure to describe Gorgon in all her monstrous glory.) Then she wraps

her arms around the superhero and plunges back into the water, pulling him under into the depths.

In game terms: Gorgon lurks in the water 4" deep and has a Held Action. When she spots the PC, she makes a Half Move to the surface. If he's in the water, whether swimming or on a jetski, she sees him without needing to make a roll. If the PC is flying, she requires a successful PER Roll. Then she makes a Grab on the PC and benefits from an OCV Bonus for a Surprise Move, from +1 to +3 at your discretion. Even if the PC is flying she performs a Grab. The portal is only 1.5" high so the superhero isn't much higher than that, and Gorgon can easily leap that high out of the water to perform her Grab.

Remember that a character who cannot breathe underwater gets no Recoveries, not even in Post-Segment 12, and expends a minimum of 1 END per Phase.

Later Segments: It's safe to assume the PC did not get a deep breath before going under the water, so at this point it's time to figure out how long before he drowns. Gorgon maintains her Grab and squeezes. If she feels the PC is strong enough to escape, she shifts the Grab to her tail for the extra STR; otherwise she continues with her arms.

If the PC was with other superheroes, she also moves toward the pipes that lead off to the watering holes. Once there, she slithers into the water-filled pipe in an effort to separate her prey from his teammates. (Depending on how deadly your campaign is, you might want to do this if the PC is alone, too.)

If the PC escapes from her grasp and from the water before she can Grab him again, Gorgon spends a Phase circling under the water and changing position. Spotting her — a green-skinned villain 4" deep in greenish waters — isn't easy; PCs suffer a -4 penalty on their PER Roll to do so. On her next Phase, Gorgon heads for the surface and attempts to Grab again. She continues with this tactic until all of the PCs have moved out of reach. Then she comes up on the shore and continues the fight.

Gorgon fights until Knocked Out or the PCs are nowhere to be found. She has orders from King Cobra to kill the superheroes and carries out those orders with the fanaticism that comes with the Coil-Gene Touch. She cannot leave the jungle and enter the rest of the Hothouse, since she's too large to fit through the passage to the control center.

Boomslang

If Boomslang made it safely to the Hothouse, the PCs see his jetski lying on the shore to the west of the piers. He's moved into the underbrush, circled around, and now lurks several inches to the east of the shore, waiting to see if the PCs follow him. He has used Tracking to cover his tracks (have him engage in a Skill Versus Skill Contest with PCs who have Tracking, if necessary).

A PC on the lake can spot the hidden Boomslang with a successful Skill Versus Skill Contest, his PER Roll versus Boomslang's Concealment roll; both parties can use Survival (Tropical or Tropical Forest) as a Complementary Skill. All of this assumes the PC isn't distracted by the monstrous

Gorgon — and unless the player specifically states his character is looking for Boomslang hidden somewhere in the jungle, the PC can't see him.

If only one or two PCs are on the lake, the portal closed behind them to separate from the rest of the team, Boomslang waits for Gorgon to strike. Once she emerges, he also attacks. If more PCs come through the portal at one time, he waits to see how the battle progresses. If Gorgon seems to be winning or he thinks he can turn the tide, he joins the fight. If the battle moves into the jungle, he follows, continuing to watch. If Gorgon seems to be losing the fight, Boomslang quietly retreats — another Skill Versus Skill Contest, this time Boomslang's Stealth versus the PCs' PER Rolls (again, assuming they're not distracted and think to look).

What he does next is entirely up to you. Boomslang knows this jungle like the back of hand, and has enough skills as a hunter and high enough STR to move at will through the underbrush. He can set up his own ambushes, gathering COIL agents scattered throughout the place for fire support. He can join the ambush at area #3. He can go to the control room (possibly providing a way for the PCs to follow his tracks to the exit) and wait for the PCs there. Or he can even go report to King Cobra and take part in the final battle at the end of *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth*.

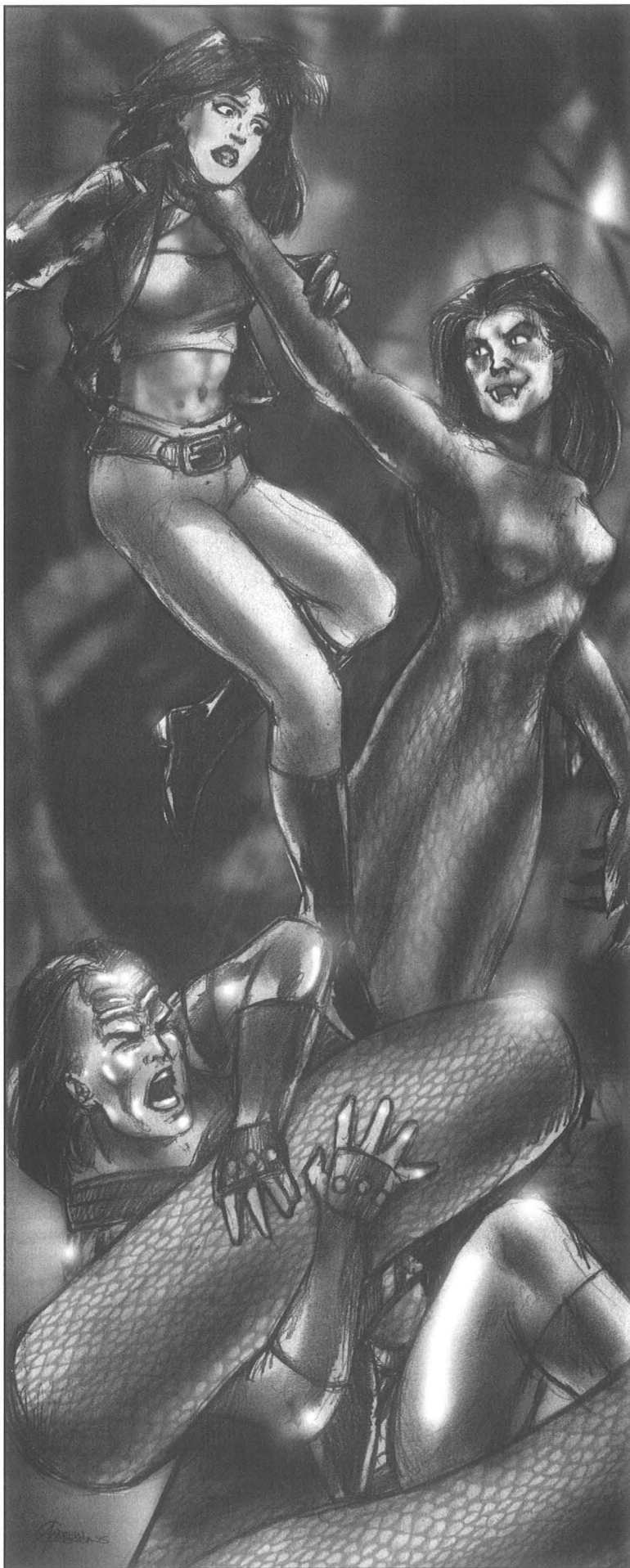
After The Battle

Once the PCs have defeated Gorgon and moved off the lake onto the shore, you should ask for a Survival (*Tropical or Tropical Forest*) roll. (Unless, of course, they're beating a hasty retreat from Gorgon and don't have time for a calm contemplation of their surroundings.)

If the roll succeeds, the PCs realize the jungle is far too quiet. With a quick glance, they can see fauna — harmless rodents and other small mammals — native to this sort of environment lurking in the trees and watching them. This sort of absolute quiet usually indicates that a large predator is on the move.

The Hidden Trail: Set back 4" south from the western trail, hidden behind underbrush and trees, is the trail that leads to the control center's secret entrance. If the PCs take the western trail, as they walk by the area ask them for Tracking rolls. If the roll succeeds by 3 or more, the PCs notice the tell-tale signs that someone left the trail here and went south. If a player states his PC is looking for tracks leading off into the jungle while the team walks the trail, a simple success spots the tracks here. With further examination, it becomes obvious that many people have left the trail at this place.

If the PCs miss this or don't walk down the western trail, you can give them another opportunity to spot the tracks leaving the trail they're on and heading off into the jungle at places where their current trail runs closest to the one that leads to the control center. These are less frequently traveled, so they require success on the Tracking roll by 6 or better to spot in passing, or by 3 or better if actively searching.



TROUBLESHOOTING: CONVINCED THE EXIT IS UP

If the players become convinced that the exit is at the top of the dome despite the Concealing Mist and a lack of visual evidence, and they refuse to budge an inch until they figure out a way for their characters to find it, and you find this disappointing because the PCs will miss out on all the "fun" to be had in the jungle, here's two ideas to get them moving.

First, simply have a COIL agent ambush them from a hollow tree (if you need one nearby, add it to the map). This might lead the PCs to the conclusion that there are secret tunnels below the jungle.

Second, and a little more tricky, you can ask for Deduction rolls. If any roll succeeds, remind the PC that neither the COIL agents, Booms-lang, nor Gorgon has shown the ability to fly, so the exit must be at ground level.

2. OBSERVATION CENTER

High above the jungle at the center of the dome is an observation center Dr. Demogaard used to watch his monsters and show off the Hothouse jungle to visiting VIPs. The observation center is octagonal in shape. Each of its eight walls has a large rectangular plexiglass window that slopes outward to allow a better view down below. The plexiglass is DEF 8, BODY 4. The bottom and other metal parts are DEF 13, BODY 8.

Doctor Demogaard worried that his creations might attack the observation center and hurt themselves, so he installed two defenses: the Concealing Mist and Electrified Mesh.

Concealing Mist: Nozzles at the corners of the octagonal structure emit a cloud of mist that blends in almost perfectly with those mists and streamers of water vapor that rise up from the steamy jungle. Before the PCs enter the Hothouse, agents in the control center have activated the mist. You should also remember to apply appropriate Range Modifiers if a PC attempts to peer through the mist.

Sight Group Images, -10 to PER Rolls, Increased Size (4" radius; +½), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½) (80 Active Points); IIF Immobility (-1¼), Set Effect (hide observation center and Electrified Mesh; -1). Total cost: 25 points.

Electric Mesh: A mesh woven of material as thin as fishing line but as strong and conductive as steel hangs from the dome and covers the observation center. The mesh hangs a uniform 1.5" (9.75 feet) away from the walls and a powerful electric current runs through its strands to dissuade flying monsters from coming too close. Spotting it under normal circumstances is difficult (requiring a PER Roll at -5); when the Concealing Mist is in operation, it's virtually impossible to spot. The mesh is DEF 8, BODY 4; anyone touching it suffers the following attack:

Energy Blast 5d6, NND (defense is an ED Force Field; +1), Continuous (+1), Damage Shield (+½), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½) (100 Active Points); IIF (-¼), No Knockback (-¼). Total cost: 67 points.

Spotting The Observation Center

During normal circumstances the observation center is nearly impossible to spot — the mists that conceal it blend perfectly with those rising from the jungle and drifting through the air. But when the agents in the control center shut off the lights, like they do during ambush at area #3, the Electric Mesh glows slightly with electricity. At this time any PC breaking through the jungle canopy, whether he flies or climbs to the top of a tree, easily spots an electric blue glow coming directly from the middle of the dome.

Inside The Observation Center

The observation center is a single room. A ladder runs up from the middle of the floor to a hatch in the ceiling. The hatch battens down from the other side with four locks, similar to a door on a

ship, and is impassable to liquids (but not gases). It requires a STR Roll to burst open; the PC suffers a -9 penalty on the roll. The hatch is DEF 13, BODY 8.

Beyond the hatch is a long hallway that ends at an elevator. The elevator goes down to the control center. The agents in the control room have shut off the elevator, so the PCs must force open the doors — STR Roll with a -6 penalty to open the DEF 8, BODY 8 doors — and then climb down the shaft. The shaft is 16" long; a simple Climbing roll suffices to make it down. However security cameras, concealed at the top of the shaft, look down on the location. The agents in the control room allow a couple of PCs to climb into the shaft, then send the elevator hurtling upwards. The elevator is DEF 8, BODY 12. It has STR 20, SPD 2, and moves 6" a Phase. Cutting the cables (DEF 6, BODY 3) stops the elevator — emergency brakes prevent it from crashing to the bottom — but to get past it, the PCs have to blast through the floor.

While the PCs deal with the elevator, the COIL agents in the control room set up an ambush. See *Inside The Control Center* on page 79 for more details.

Getting Monsters Out

The observation center contains an old control panel that no longer seems to function. This control panel used to cause the observation center to rise up beyond the dome and then slide to the north. Above the center is a wide passage that leads up to the surface and formerly into a warehouse. This provided a means of lifting monsters out of the Hothouse. The city long ago demolished the abandoned warehouse, replacing it with an apartment complex that blocked off the passage. The machinery that lifts the observation center has rusted and no longer works.

3. AMBUSH!

In addition to whatever ambushes you add to this part of the adventure, COIL agents definitely arrange an ambush along the trail leading to the control center at area #3 on the map. The sections below detail the agents' tactics.

Agent Set-Up

One agent, armed with a Standard COIL Blaster Rifle, sits in the branches of a hollow tree 2" to the south of trail. He is concealed and has his rifle trained on the trail. Via radio transmissions, agents in the control center keep him apprised of the PCs' progress along the trail. (Radio transmissions from the control center run along a hard line to a transmitter placed on the dome; this allows communication without suffering the penalty caused by the thick walls of the place. The PCs cannot pick up these transmissions with Enhanced Senses.)

On the opposite side of the trail four more agents lurk in wait. All four are on the ground, also 2" back from the trail. One group of two is 4" northwest of the hollow tree; the other group is 4" northeast of the hollow tree. In each group, one agent has a COIL Thunderclap Rifle, the other a Standard COIL Blaster Rifle. All agents crouch

behind tree trunks and the like, benefitting from partial Concealment. Attackers suffer a -2 OCV to hit them.

Because of the dense foliage the PCs suffer a -4 penalty to their PER Roll to spot the concealed COIL agents. In addition to their standard equipment, the agents wear infrared goggles:

Infrared Red Goggles: *Infrared Perception (Sight Group) (5 Active Points); OAF (-1). Total cost: 2 points.*

Agents' Tactics

The goal of this ambush is to separate the superheroes. Hopefully one group goes chasing after the agent in the hollow tree, then the four to the north of the trail hope to subdue those who remain behind.

First Segment 12: The ambush begins when the agents in the control center turn out the jungle's lights and set the sprinkler system to start pouring down rain. Visibility for Normal Sight is 0".

- The agent in the branches of the hollow tree takes a shot at a PC walking in the middle of the line. He uses Autofire to hit as many times as he can. If the agent Surprises the PCs, finding him requires a Half Phase study of the trees and a successful PER Roll that suffers a -4 penalty. (Assuming of course the PC can see in pitch black and through the rain.)

- The four agents Brace and Set, taking a bead on the first and last PCs in the line.

First Turn, Segment 3: The agent in the tree ducks into the secret entrance and closes the hatch behind him.

- The four agents Hold their Action.

First Turn, Segment 5: Hoping that they've given the PCs enough time to convince themselves no other COIL agents lurk in the area, the agents fire on the first and last PC in line. The COIL agents with the Thunderclap rifles fire on DEX 16. Those with the standard blasters fire on the same target on DEX 15.

Subsequent Turns: The four agents continue to fire on the PCs, working their way toward the middle. They fight until Knocked Out. If a PC closes to HTH Combat range, both agents drop concussion grenades at their feet and continue to do so until someone falls over.

The agent who started the ambush moves away from the scene through the underground tunnels. He's heading toward the hollow tree nearest the entrance to the control center (area #4). If he makes it there, he conceals himself in the tree's branches and prepares to fire on any PCs that get that far.

4. ENTRANCE TO THE CONTROL CENTER

The secret entrance to the control center is inside the hollow tree marked area #4 on the map. This hollow tree is just like the others (described on page 74) except the tunnel at the bottom of the ladder only runs in one direction and doesn't connect with any other hollow trees — it leads to the control center. At first the passage is the same as the

others, 5" in diameter, but it quickly widens to 2" after passing beyond the edge of the jungle above. The total length of the passage is 5" (32 feet), the first 3" run under the jungle, the next 2" beyond it, and the passage ends at a set of sliding metal doors which are probably closed when the PCs arrive. Once the PCs reach this point, proceed to the next section, *Inside The Control Center*.

Finding The Entrance: The hidden trail runs past this tree, then continues on for several yards to the west before coming to an end. When the PCs come to the area, ask for Tracking rolls. With a success, the PC notices a large number of boot-prints in the soil as he walks by. With success by 3 or more, the PC realizes the tracks indicate COIL agents waiting around the tree, all of them facing toward it. This is because only one person can fit through the entrance at a time, so each agent must wait his turn.

INSIDE THE CONTROL CENTER

The sliding metal doors from the passage into the control center are DEF 12, BODY 8, and the agents inside have deactivated them (-9 penalty to the PC's STR Roll to force them open). Beyond the closed door the PCs can hear a loud alarm sounding.

The room itself is rectangular, 5" long by 3" wide, with a 2" high ceiling. In the northwest and southeast walls are sliding doors, the northwest set opening onto the passage to the jungle, the other opening to the passage that leads to the rest of the Hothouse. The control panel for each is on the wall to the right of the door. In the southwest wall, slightly recessed at an angle, are the sliding doors that open to the elevator running up to the observation center (described in more detail in 2. *Observation Center* on page 78).

Wall monitors show scenes from the security cameras located throughout the Hothouse. Also on the walls are dials, buttons, gauges, and other diagnostic tools for measuring conditions in the jungle. All of these have a Sixties/Seventies "science fiction" feel to their appearance. On one of the monitors, the PCs can see King Cobra, Slither, Krait, and Firedrake in his human form standing outside what looks like a train. You should describe the villains' appearance rather than naming them, though the PCs quickly realize King Cobra is in command. There's no sound for the monitor, but it's obvious King Cobra is supervising the evacuation of the Hothouse. COIL agents run into the scene to put crates and other supplies on the train, then leave.

Set in the floor at the center of the room is a circular panel of black glass, 1" in diameter, etched with white lines that divide its surface into quadrants. Primitive lasers, sometimes flickering red when they hit dust particles, shoot up from below the glass to form a holographic display of the jungle. The PCs can see small red blobs (COIL agents), a larger, longer red blob (Gorgon), and long bluish-green blobs (the giant snakes) moving across

TROUBLESHOOTING: FINDING THE ENTRANCE WITH MENTAL POWERS

The PCs may try to find the entrance to the Control Center via Telepathy or other Mental Powers. This directly disobeys orders from King Cobra, so the PC requires an EGO + 40 (base of EGO + 30 for violent opposition, +10 for contradicting a Psychological Limitation) Mind Control result, or EGO + 10 (deep hidden thoughts) Telepathy result, to achieve the desired effect. Furthermore, Gorgon does not know the precise location of the exit. She only knows it's somewhere to the south of the lake. Finally, while the PC learns the entrance is hidden in a hollow tree to the south, he doesn't necessarily know the precise location of the tree — it's not as if he studied a map implanted in his target's memory.

One other piece of advice: to prevent weak-willed COIL agents from falling into the PCs' hands, don't have any ambushes occur until they are on the path to discovering the entrance in the hollow tree.

the glass in and out of quadrants — assuming of course these are still moving. Directly southeast of the display is a control console and crouched behind the console are two COIL agents

The COIL Agents: As soon as the door opens (or comes flying into the room!), each agent pulls the pin on a concussor grenade with his sharp teeth and tosses it through the door. They continue throwing grenades, even if they're caught in the Explosion, until Knocked Out. The console gives them partial Concealment, so the PCs are -2 OCV to hit them.

If the PCs come down the elevator shaft, the agents use the same tactic but don't have cover behind the console.

Moving On: A PC can open the door leading to the rest of the Hothouse simply by pushing the green button on the control panel (or they can knock it down too — it has the same characteristics as the door on the opposite wall). Be sure to describe the scene showing King Cobra evacuating the Hothouse — this should provide the necessary motivation to get the PCs moving forward (especially if the PCs realize the crates being loaded onto the train probably contain the cure for the plague).

THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL



Down a spiral ramp, past four floors guarded by fanatical COIL agents, the heroes must rush to the bottom of the Hothouse. Here, deep in the heart of COIL's hideout, King Cobra and his inner circle attempt to make good on their escape... but in his supreme arrogance the villain chooses to take the time to have his minions remove vital equipment from the base. Can your PCs turn King Cobra's arrogance into his downfall? Can they quickly overcome his minions to reach him and prevent his escape? Can they defeat the powerful villain and his inner circle after all the obstacles they've overcome to reach this point?

Or will they suffer defeat at the hands of the serpentine menace called King Cobra?

These questions and more are answered in *The Downward Spiral*, the climactic conclusion of *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth*.

Running The Scenario

If the last few scenarios were fast-paced, this one should move at a hyperkinetic pace. From the monitor in the control center, the PCs know King Cobra is attempting to escape and should realize they need to move through the Hothouse as quickly as possible.

That said, no time limit is given for how long it takes the COIL agents to load the train, and as long as the PC keep moving forward King Cobra should remain on the train platform supervising the agents. If the PCs stop, then use your discretion. Maybe King Cobra sends some of the supervillains up to deal with the heroes, or merely gets on board the train and departs... taking the cure for the Ophidian Plague with him!

How Many Agents: Before running *The Downward Spiral* you need to determine how many agents

remain to impede the PCs' progress. The text places 5 agents at the bottom of the Hothouse, all of them loading equipment and crates onto the train, and these five take part in the final battle. The number of agents on the four preceding levels is up to you. Before deciding on a number, you should keep in mind any agents bypassed by the PCs make their way to the train platform to carry on the fight. COIL agents do not retreat when their leader is under attack. No matter how hopeless the odds, they fight until the bitter end.

The way the scenario is set up, the PCs face off against one or two agents at a time as they make their way down. For a group of 350-point heroes, this makes for little more than a speed bump on their way down and shouldn't cause any problems. And once the PCs Knock Out an agent, you shouldn't give him a Recovery — just remove him from the fight. But if the PCs speed by the agents, not taking the time to attack them, those agents follow behind them to attack at the end, catching the PCs between a rock and a hard place.

The PCs As Prisoners: If the PCs fell to Gorgon and the COIL agents in the jungle and are now King Cobra's prisoners, don't worry! They can still save the day.

The COIL agents lock the captured superheroes, bound in chains, in one of the empty rooms on the first level of the Hothouse. King Cobra intends to subject them to the Coil-Gene Touch — and for a twist to this plot, maybe he already has subjected one or two PCs to his terrible power! — but first he must deliver his demands to the world: crown him emperor or suffer his wrath! He promises more outbreaks of the Ophidian Plague, as well as COIL agents marching in the streets, if humanity denies him his due. The PCs must somehow escape and stop the serpentine madman from carrying out his threats.

THE SPIRAL

From the control center the passage, 2" wide and 2" high, runs straight for 4" before coming out into the spiral.

A cross-section of this part of the Hothouse looks like an 8" high cylinder with a 4" diameter. Radiating from the cylinder are rectangular rooms, 2" high and of various lengths and widths; these are living quarters, an armory, a mess hall, and the like. The entire cylinder is set upon a larger rectangular area; this is the fifth floor where King Cobra keeps his quarters and laboratory; it's also the location for the train platform and maglev train.

The Lift: At the middle of the spiral is a circular lift platform that travels between all four levels and stops on the bottom level. The lift itself has a 2" (13 feet) diameter and is open with a .5" (3.25 feet) high rail around its perimeter. A .5" (3.25 feet) wide opening in the rail allows passage on and off the lift, and directly to the right of this opening, attached to the rail, is the control panel for the lift. The two buttons on the panel, one for up, the other for down, operates on a dead man switch — the PC must keep the button depressed to maintain movement. This panel overrides the call buttons on the passage — in other words, so long as the button stays depressed, the lift continues in a given direction. Thick metal poles run from the bottom of the lift to the bottom floor; these raise and lower the lift, rising out of or sinking down into the circular depression at the bottom depending on whether it's traveling up or down. The lift is SPD 2 and moves a maximum of 4" a Phase — it takes a total of two Phases or 1 complete Turn to go from the top of the spiral to the bottom. When the PCs enter this area the lift is at the second floor, 2" (13 feet) from where they stand.

The Spiral Passage: Spiraling around the circular lift shaft is a single, downward-sloping passage. The passage is 2" (13 feet) wide and leads down through the four levels, ending on the bottom level near the train platform. The passage has a wall on the right-hand side going down, but is open to the left and looks out onto the lift shaft. Like the lift, a .5" (3.25 feet) high rail runs along the left-hand side of the passage except at points where the lift lets out onto the level — here, there's a .5" gap in the rail. To the right of this gap is the control panel with a call button for the lift. Placed at regular intervals in the single wall, sliding doors open onto the rooms radiating from the spiral. The distance from the floor of the spiral passage to the ceiling (or in other words, the floor of the passage above) is 2" (13 feet). The passage's floor is coved with textured rubber; between this and the gentle slope the PCs have no trouble moving along the passage. From all points along the passage, so long as the lift doesn't block his view, a PC can see across the shaft to the other levels, up or down, except for directly above and below.

ROOMS ALONG THE SPIRAL

The doors along the spiral passage lead to various rooms. Because COIL is a relatively small organization, many of these rooms are empty. And because COIL agents serve King Cobra out of genetically-induced loyalty, the rooms are incredibly spartan. COIL, unlike VIPER, doesn't have to worry about satisfying its agents' desire for creature comforts and the like to keep them loyal, so there are no recreation rooms and the like.

Because of the high level of trust between COIL agents and King Cobra, no one locks any of the doors. Each door opens by pressing a button on the control panel set to the right of the door.

A. Empty Room: Some of these rooms hold boxes of food. A COIL agent takes his meal in his assigned barracks.

B. Barracks: The barracks for COIL agents are harsh and this room is crowded with simple metal bunk beds like one would see in a jail cell. On each bunk, a slender mat lays atop the metal springs of the bed. There are no pillows or sheets. At the end of each bunk is a locker of thin, dented metal where agents store their personal gear and uniforms. At the back of the room is an open doorway to a bathroom used by those assigned to the barracks. Despite its shabby furnishings, the barracks is spotless (with the exception of the occasional dried piece of shed scaly skin under a bunk bed or in the corner).

C. Armory: Set on metal racks inside this room the PCs can find at least one of each piece of equipment for those listed for the COIL Agent on page 108. Actual numbers are left to you. Each armory also has a workbench where agents can repair broken equipment and mend armor.

D. Training Room: Unlike a training room in a VIPER Nest, this looks less like an upscale men's health club with high-tech equipment and more like a room where individuals learn how to kill. At the center of the room outlined in red paint is a fighting ring; inside the ring, bloodstains cover the bare floor. Against the far wall are three wooden training dummies that have obvious hack marks all over them but especially at the neck; here COIL agents train with their machetes. (They take their target practice in the jungle, shooting at tropical birds.)

AGENTS

As stated previously, you need to decide before beginning *The Downward Spiral* how many agents are present here. When the PCs arrive on the scene, the agents are on various levels going in and out of rooms, carrying boxes to the lift or down the ramp to the train platform. As soon as they spot the PCs they drop what they're holding and attack.

To better illustrate their fanaticism (and make no mistake: they do everything in their power to stop the superheroes from getting to the bottom floor where King Cobra is), here are some actions they can take during the fight:

TRAIN SUMMARY

Size	7
STR	60
DEX	20
BODY	22
DEF	10
SPD	4
Ground Movement	10"/200"

- An agent the superheroes passed by pulls out his machete and leaps from an upper platform, across the lift shaft, to the lower platform where the PCs are. Or, alternately, he jumps into the shaft and falls however many feet to the lift platform.
- An agent charges up the ramp at the PCs, and too late they see the grenade in his hand. (Of course, the PCs might be used to this by now.)
- An agent Holds his Action. When the PC attempts to go by him, he Grabs hold of the superhero's legs and refuses to let go — even if he's being dragged along for the ride. You can combine this with the "ground-zero" grenade attack.
- Any flying character who attempts to fly down the lift shaft had better prepare himself to dodge leaping COIL agents.

LAST TRAIN OUT

Down at the bottom of the spiral, King Cobra stands supervising his agents as they load the last of the crates aboard the maglev train. The cure for the Ophidian Plague, safely stored in a metal travel case kept frigid with dry ice, is already aboard. Soon he'll depart the Hothouse and continue his quest for the world domination elsewhere — far from these troublesome and impudent heroes! — unless the PCs stop him.

Maglev Train And Platform: The spiral passage downwards ends at the western edge of the maglev train platform where the villains stand supervising the evacuation. The platform is 8" (52 feet) long by 5" (32.5 feet) wide with two cement pillars located 1" from each edge. When standing on the last turn of the spiral, a PC can see the entire platform and the train. (At this point, the PC is standing 2" above the bottom level.) Anywhere above the last turn, the ceiling that covers the 3" (19 feet) of the platform nearest the train cuts off his view of the platform. Like the rest of the Hothouse, the ceiling here is 2" (13 feet) high.

5" long by 1" wide, the maglev train — one car attached to a single short driver's compartment

and engine — is at the platform facing to the west. The door on the side is open and the PCs can see that it's filled with containers and boxes. The train has DEF 10, BODY 22; a character can blast open a 1" hole in the side by doing 1 BODY past the DEF. The doors on the train, one on either side and one narrow door on the back, are DEF 6, BODY 6. The windshield of the driver's compartment at the front of the train is also DEF 6, BODY 6.

When in operation, the train levitates above the rail. It creates a electro-magnetic charge, the same as the one in running through the track, and the repulsion propels the train forward. Because this form of motion is frictionless, the train can reach speeds topping out at just under 300 miles per hour. To stop the train by destroying a section of rail ahead of it, the PCs must destroy a 3" long section. The train is SPD 4 with Ground Movement 10"/200", so accelerating 10" each Phase, it requires a minimum of 5 Turns (1 Minute) to attain top speed. It has STR 60.

Guided by an advanced computer, the train is voice-activated and operated, and its piloting system only responds to King Cobra's sibilant words... or so King Cobra believes! Krait, who obtained the train from ARGENT, has programmed its piloting system to respond to his voice if he speaks the codeword "Riki Tiki Tavi." Once Krait speaks the word, the train no longer responds to King Cobra's commands. A PC can determine the train is voice-operated with a quick glance at the console and a successful Systems Operation roll.

Where's The Cure?: Placed in a metal carrying case, well protected against bumping around and packed in dry ice, the cure is located at the front of the train — off by itself and conspicuously away from the rest of the freight on the train.

ROOMS ON THE BOTTOM LEVEL

At the eastern end of the platform and opposite the spiral passage, a single passage leads to the north. The hallway runs straight for 4" before stopping at a T intersection. To the west are King Cobra's laboratories. To the east are the living quarters for King Cobra and COIL's inner circle.

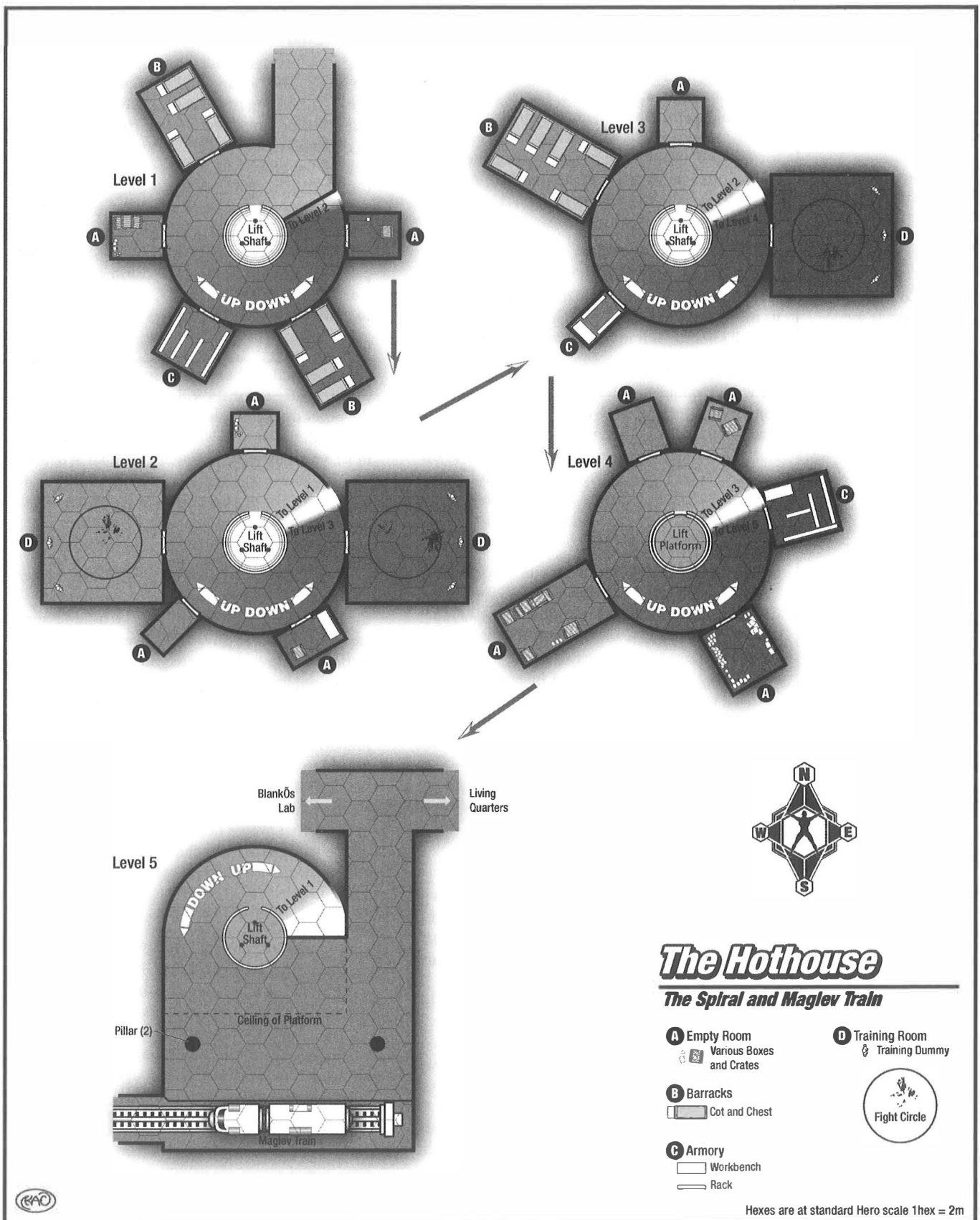
The descriptions below are brief, just enough to provide you with a general idea of the room's contents. All of these villains were once VIPER agents, and much of the place resembles a VIPER installation (particularly because COIL stole material from VIPER). If you need more details you can consult Chapter One and the room descriptions for the VIPER Nest at Snake Gulch.

A. King Cobra's Laboratory: This suite of rooms serves as King Cobra's laboratory. Though the physical dimensions are different, the arrangement is exactly the same as at Snake Gulch, right down to the ophidiary and radiation projectors. If the PCs don't realize that King Cobra and Timothy Blank are one in the same, a PC with SS: Biology or the like can figure it out with a quick glance at the lab and a successful roll.

SPIRAL MATERIALS SUMMARY

Here's a summary of the DEF and BODY of materials in the spiral:

Object	DEF and BODY
Door	DEF 12, BODY 8
Lift (per hex)	DEF 10, BODY 10
Maglev Train (total)	DEF 10, BODY 22
Maglev Train Back Door	DEF 6, BODY 6
Outside Wall	DEF 18, BODY 18
Passage Floor	DEF 13, BODY 8
Rail (per hex)	DEF 6, BODY 12
Regular Wall	DEF 13, BODY 8



RECOMMENDED READING

Below are some rules you should look over before beginning the epic fight at the end of *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth*.

Acceleration on page 238 and Movement And Strength on the same page. Both of these can come into play when the PCs attempt to prevent King Cobra's escape.

Dive For Cover on page 260. Agents use this Combat Maneuver to dive in the way of attacks against their beloved leader, King Cobra.

B. Living Quarters: These rooms serve as living quarters for COIL's inner circle (except Gorgon who remains in the jungle). Except for a small bathroom, they're exactly the same as the barracks at Snake Gulch right down to the furnishings.

C. Rec Room: Although the members of COIL's inner circle are just as loyal as the agents (or so King Cobra thinks...) and would serve him regardless, King Cobra grants them the privilege of watching television. (On occasion, if an agent performs a particularly difficult task or the like, King Cobra gifts him with TV privileges also.) Against the wall opposite the door is an entertainment center. In front of that are a couch, two recliners, and a coffee table.

D. Mess Hall And Kitchen: In this room is a long table with eight chairs where the inner circle takes its meals. Off this room through an open doorway is a small kitchen with modern appliances circa 1970.

E. Meeting Room: Here King Cobra discusses plans for world conquest with his inner circle. The room contains a long table with eight chairs. On the table is a laptop hooked to a projector that displays the computer screen on the west wall. The chair at the head of the table and facing the door is upholstered in red velvet. Cobras carved into the mahogany slither up the chair's legs and over its arms, rising up from its back with broad hoods flared.

F. King Cobra's Chambers: This suite of rooms serves as the living quarters for King Cobra. The door opens from the hallway into an antechamber strewn with cushions and hung with expensive tapestries. Beyond a doorway covered with a curtain is King Cobra's bedroom. A huge canopy bed of black wrought iron dominates the middle of the room; the canopy is of red silk and embroidered with golden cobras. *Objets d'art* with a cobra motif — candelabra, lamps, sculpture, and others — clutter the tables and shelves in the room. A single curtained doorway leads to the north and a bathroom.

In Battle

Once the PCs move past the lift stopped on the second level, they can see down to the bottom of the Hothouse from the spiral passage. And unless the PCs keep out of sight, those at the bottom can see them!

Though King Cobra, caught in the grips of his megalomania, has yet to worry about the super-heroes thwarting his plans, Krait isn't so confident and keeps an eye on the passage leading downward. Even if the PCs do a good job hugging the wall as they travel downwards, Krait still notices things like COIL agents leaping across the lift shaft with their machetes out and screaming in rage, so he has some sense of the PCs' progress if this sort of thing occurs. If a PC pokes his head out over the edge or otherwise exposes himself, Krait attacks with his Neural Surge power, activates his Quicken Nervous System ability to increase his DCV, and warns the others of the PCs' presence.

King Cobra orders Firedrake to help Krait prevent the PCs from reaching the platform. Firedrake steps into sight and takes a Half Phase Action to change into his draconic form. On his subsequent Phases, the reluctant villain continues to put up walls of fire in front of the PCs.

The four agents loading the train continue to do so. King Cobra and Slither remain out of sight under the ceiling of the train platform. Slither hides behind the western pillar. He uses Shape Shift to make himself slightly smaller so he fits easily behind the pillar, and activates his Chameleon Camouflage to color his skin a dingy gray that matches the cement. Finally he exudes a single long tentacle from his chest.

Once the PCs reach the last bend in the spiral passage (2" above the train platform and with a clear view of the area), King Cobra decides it's time to make these vexatious heroes suffer....

OPENING SALVO

The sections below suggest some opening tactics you can use for the villains once a PC reaches the point described above.

If all the PCs arrive at the same time (or close to it), you may want to "restart" combat at Segment 12. This allows you and your players a breather to prepare for the big fight scene and gives the PCs a quick Recovery before starting the battle.

King Cobra (DEX 30)

King Cobra orders the agents to drop what they're doing and attack the PCs. He stands in the hex immediately in front of the train's door and only moves to Dive For Cover. He Holds his Action. At the end of the Segment if he still has an Action, he fires a Bioenergy Blast at a PC, preferably the leader. If a PC has moved into HTH Combat range with him, he attempts a Grab in preparation for delivering a Bio-Energy Sapping Touch on his next Phase.

Instead of the Bio-Energy Sapping Touch, you can have King Cobra use his Coil-Gene Touch instead. That power takes time to work and may not be the best tactical choice... but who said genius megalomaniacs always make the best tactical choices?

Krait (DEX 30)

Krait uses Sensory Shutdown on the PC who has shown himself the fastest. If all of the PCs have moved at a normal pace, he uses Neural Streamlining on himself and activates Deadend Pain. If he has already depleted a considerable amount of END while attacking the PCs as they came down the spiral passage, he turns off Quicken Nervous System.

Slither (DEX 24)

Unless a PC has made it obvious he's spotted him, Slither Holds his Action until the end of the Segment. Then if the PCs have moved onto the train platform, he peeks out from behind the pillar and sends a tentacle hurtling forward. His first choice of target is the PC closest to King Cobra (especially if that villain has Grabbed the hero). If

the PC doesn't have obvious rigid mouth covering, he attempts a Tentacle Choke by thrusting the tentacle between the target's lips and down his throat. Otherwise he activates his Damage Shield and batters the PC with a tentacle. He gains a bonus from performing a Surprise Move at your discretion. (Remember, he still stands behind the pillar and is pretty hard to spot; chances are the PCs only see a tentacle come out from behind the pillar and not the source of that tentacle.)

If none of the PCs stand on the platform, Slither continues to Hold his Action until one of the superheroes has moved off the spiral passage.

Firedrake (DEX 18)

If a PC attacks him, Firedrake moves into HTH Combat with that PC. He takes a Half Move to Leap to where his target stands if necessary. He then *punches* his target. Be sure to describe his long, sharp claws and teeth. If his target has Tactics, ask for a Skill Roll. If successful, the PC realizes that either Firedrake is trying to *not* to kill him or else he's an extremely inept combatant.

If some of the PCs haven't reached the train platform yet, he puts up yet another fire wall ahead of them.

If no one attacks him and no one stands on the spiral passage, Firedrake Holds his Action and desperately tries to look like he's waiting for an open shot. He only takes this Action if someone attacks him.

COIL Agent (on the platform; DEX 16)

If a PC stands on the platform or near the end of the spiral passage, an agent unsheathes his machete and charges into HTH Combat. He moves so that he stands between the PC and King Cobra.

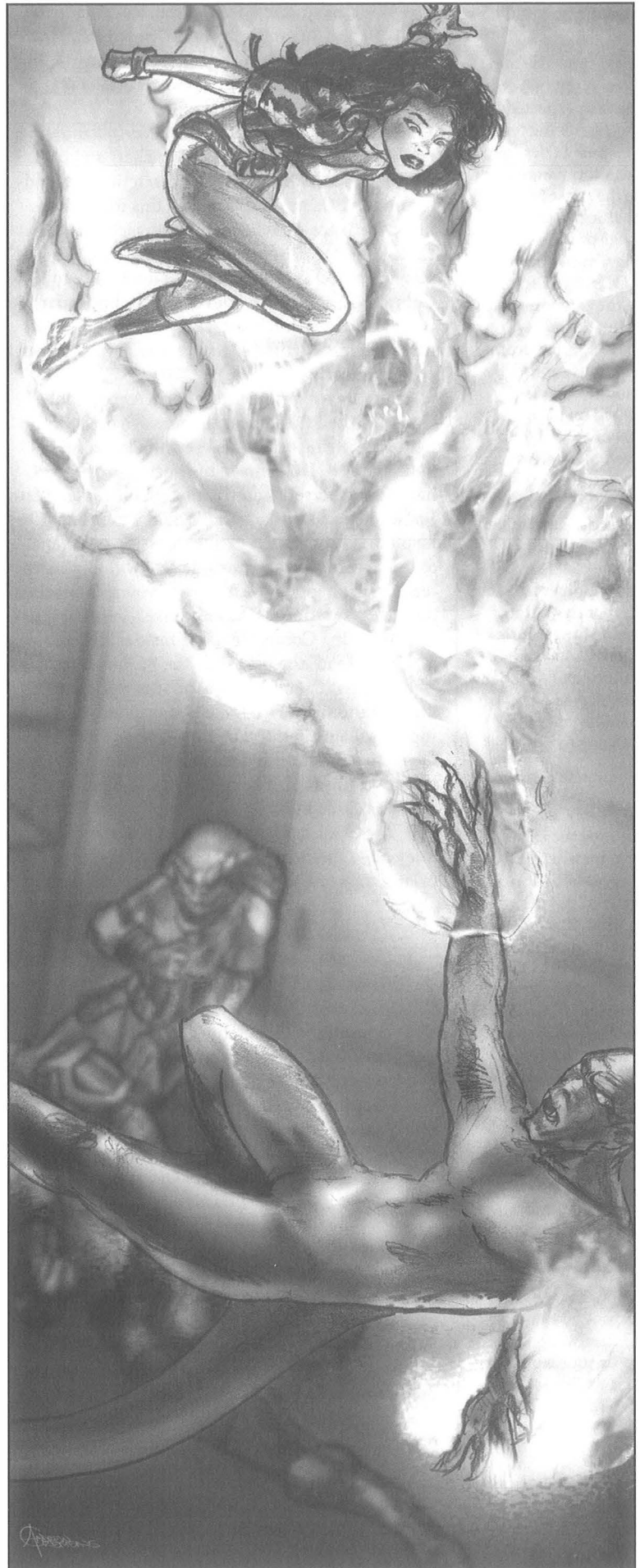
The remaining agents form up in an arch around their leader. Then they Hold their Actions. If a PC moves toward King Cobra and enters the hex adjacent to the agent, he moves between the two and enters Hand-To-Hand Combat. If a PC fires an Energy Blast, the agent Dives For Cover to interpose his body between the Energy Blast and King Cobra.

COIL Agent (on the train; DEX 16)

The COIL agent on the train charges out in front of King Cobra and forms up with the other agents in an arch around King Cobra. He does the same thing they do. But if a PC has somehow made it on the train, the COIL agent unsheathes his machete, yells out a warning, and attacks the PC.

SUBSEQUENT TURNS

King Cobra continues to stand in the hex before the train's open door. He either Grabs and attempts the Bio-Energy Sapping Touch, or he fires Bioenergy Blasts at a PC. If a PC has somehow entered the train, King Cobra steps onto the train, attacks the PC, and orders his agents to do the same. If the PC doesn't immediately drop from his blast, on his next Phase he orders the train to shut the door and depart the station.



DOWN IN THE HOLE

If the chase scene from the train platform takes longer than expected, and you think the train has reached its destination or simply want to move the chase to a new battleground for a change of pace — or if King Cobra captures the PCs and you want to make the escape attempt more interesting — you can have a tunnel from the Hothouse connect to the complex described on pages 97-109 of *Champions Battlegrounds*. Once the hideout for the supervillain Interface, the complex has been taken over by King Cobra — an especially sensible plot development given COIL's penchant for co-opting the resources of other villains and organizations. (And who knows? Maybe Krait was the one who recruited the henchmen for Interface.)

If you merely want to continue the chase scene somewhere else, this is a good opportunity to re-use the maps from *Champions Battlegrounds*. If COIL has captured the PCs and you have yet to run the scenario *Down In The Hole* simply replace Interface with King Cobra, and the Guardbots with COIL agents. Then start the scenario with the PCs coming to in the specially designed trap rooms. Even if you have already run the scenario, you can still use the scenario... won't the PCs be shocked when they recognize the traps used against them? And won't King Cobra be shocked when the PCs easily escape the trap rooms because they've seen it all before?

With the quickest PC neutralized, Krait performs Neural Streamlining and Deaden Pain. In subsequent Phases, he uses Sensory Shutdown on a martial artist or brick, then moves into HTH Combat.

Slither steps out from behind the pillar and reveals himself, tentacles from his chest and back writhing around him. (At your discretion, depending on the PCs' past experiences, this might warrant a Presence Attack on anyone nearby.) His first choice of target is someone attacking him. His second choice is a battle between his loyalty to King Cobra (*i.e.*, attacking whoever attacks his leader) and his sadistic streak (attacking whoever appears most helpless; victims of Krait's Sensory Shutdown are particularly tempting.)

Firedrake continues to punch. As the fight wears on, the PC can hear the massive draconic figure muttering under his breath, "Please stop fighting." and "Don't make me hurt you." If the PC hasn't gone berserk and tried to kill him, after a few Phases Firedrake asks him: "Would you promise to help me if I surrender?" His expression is as earnest as possible for a scaly draconic face with big sharp teeth. What happens next is up to you and depends on the PC's response, but Firedrake doesn't agree to attack King Cobra. He offers instead to lie down and "play dead" the next time the PC hits him — a man has to cover his bases, after all. If the PC loudly announces Firedrake is surrendering, revealing the villain's betrayal of King Cobra, Firedrake flies into a rage and attacks that PC with everything he's got — his fear of King Cobra and death overrides his Code Versus Killing.

The COIL agents continue as described above. They Hold their Actions to protect King Cobra even if they risk losing those Actions.

Escape!

When King Cobra reaches half his starting STUN, he steps onto the train, orders the door to close behind him (which they do at the end of the Segment), and orders the train to leave the platform. The train departs the platform on its next Phase.

Once it leaves the platform, the train accelerates 10" a Phase until it reaches its maximum velocity of 200" a Phase. The tunnel is 2" in diameter and there's a .5" gap along the sides and at the top a PC can squeeze into if need be.

If a PC stands in front of the train, it has STR 60. If this still isn't enough to push the PC out of the way, King Cobra orders the train to back up, then ram the PC. (And, in lieu of any other opponent regardless of circumstances, the agents and Slither attack the PC who prevents the train from departing.) King Cobra tries to ram twice. If that doesn't work, he blasts out the window at the front of the train, then blasts at the PC while continuing to order the train to ram him.

Escape... But Not King Cobra's!

As stated in the description of the maglev train on page 82, Krait has a codeword that allows him to override King Cobra's control of the train.

Krait wishes to avoid capture at least as much as King Cobra, and he doesn't have any loyalty toward the leader of COIL. Chances are the PCs fully expect King Cobra to step on the train and retreat once the battle turns against him. What they might not expect is Krait pushing King Cobra out of the way, fleeing on the train... and taking the cure for the Ophidian Plague with him!

To make things even more unexpected, Krait is an expert tactician and exceptionally cunning. He doesn't just push King Cobra out of the way and run. Instead he whispers to a PC that he's secretly a double agent for UNTIL. Then he attempts to convince the superhero to work with him to take King Cobra down, telling the PC the cure for the Ophidian Plague is on the train. If the PC needs a little more convincing, Krait points out that (a) he doesn't have scaly skin and fangs so he isn't loyal to King Cobra like the others and (b) he hasn't used any lethal attacks on the PCs.

If the PC agrees, the plan is simple: the superhero hits King Cobra with his biggest attack while Krait, Aided by Neural Streamlining, rushes past the villain and secures the train as well as the cure. And everything goes perfectly... except once the door closes behind him, Krait starts up the engine and takes off with the cure, leaving the PC to tell his teammates that wasn't a part of the plan (and deal with an enraged King Cobra).

Ending The Fight

Once King Cobra flees (or Krait does!) the fight likely moves into the tunnel and becomes a chase after the speeding train — at least for those PC fast enough to keep up with it.

For those left behind on the platform, Slither and the COIL agents continue to fight until Knocked Out. Their first goal is to interfere with any pursuit of King Cobra. Firedrake simply turns back into his human form, throws his hands up in the air, and surrenders — unless, for whatever reason, he doesn't think the PCs will allow him to live. In this case he simply flees up the spiral passage, leaving walls of flame in his wake.

Krait also flees, but his first choice is to chase after the train using his Burst Of Speed if necessary. Once on the train, he punches his way through the back door and helps King Cobra fend off the PCs. If for some reason Krait can't reach the tunnel, he instead flees up the spiral passage in an attempt to make it to the iron portal in the Hothouse jungle. If none of the PCs have realized the cure was on the train and still stand on the platform, Krait shouts this out to them in hopes of diverting their attention while he escapes.

As for King Cobra, he fights until the bitter end, certain that no matter how desperate his plight, he will vanquish the heroes. The train takes 6 Turns to reach its destination. If the battle still rages after that time and you wish to go with option discussed in the sidebar *Down In The Hole*, then get out *Champions Battlegrounds* and go from there. If not, the train lets out in a section of the sewers under the hot zone. King Cobra, the cure in one

taloned hand, climbs up a ladder to the surface. There he continues the fight, using the victims of his madness to best advantage.

KING COBRA LIVES!

Want King Cobra to survive, still at large and free to work his wicked will on the world? A big explosion is always a good time for the master villain to make his escape. If you want King Cobra to get away from the heroes while they still save the day, try this:

More than just planting the command to override King Cobra's control of the train, Krait left a parting gift for his erstwhile ally: a bomb concealed

under the control panel of the train. King Cobra's voice not only activates the train, but also triggers the countdown on the bomb. During the fight with the villain, one of the combatants falls into the control panel, knocking off a panel and revealing the bomb. The countdown reads: "3... 2... 1..."

Enraged at the betrayal and knowing who the perpetrator is, King Cobra screams, "Krrrrraaaaaaiiiiit!" And while rage consumes the villain, will one of the PCs remember to grab the cure before he leaps from the exploding train?

And, of course, after the explosion while sorting through the charred remnants of the train the PCs can't find the body...

CONCLUSION



With the cure secured, the long chase that started at Cybermind's warehouse far above in the city comes to an end. Assuming the the PCs obtained the cure, only one challenge remains for them to overcome. The section below, *Administering The Cure*, deals with this last challenge.

But what if the PCs didn't get the cure for the terrible Ophidian Plague?

You're left with a few options. If King Cobra escaped, the PCs can continue the hunt and when the villain delivers his demands to the plague-stricken areas of the world — crown him emperor or else — they have a second opportunity to stop him. You can also involve VIPER in this hunt.

A simpler, but anticlimactic, solution: as the PCs stand on the platform, contemplating their failure and deep in throes of despair, one of them notices a computer hard drive the COIL agents dropped when they rushed to defend their leader. Unlike Blank's computer at Snake Gulch, this isn't a dummy terminal. After cracking the files' security (perhaps with help from Cybermind), the scientist on the team or an NPC realizes the formula for the cure is in the files. Though King Cobra escaped to threaten the world another day, the PCs thwarted his plans and found the cure for the Ophidian Plague.

ADMINISTERING THE CURE

The problem of administering the cure to tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of victims still remains, since it's unlikely the berserk plague victims simply line up to get their shot.

If your players don't seem interested in the details of this part of the conclusion, don't force them to come up with a solution. In this case, the authorities get hold of tranquilizer guns and load the tranq darts with the cure, then send out police snipers and SWAT team members to shoot the cure into plague victims.

If the players do think of ways to administer the cure, this is an opportunity for the scientist in the group to shine. Maybe he concocts, with successful Skill Rolls as appropriate, a formula for the cure that's absorbed through the skin; then low flying planes spray the hot zone with this cure. Or maybe he makes the cure communicable by touch and former plague victims, now cured of the virus, reverse the original process.

Whatever the players' ideas about administering the cure, be sure to give them the opportunity to participate if they're interested. They've fought the plague and its spread since the very beginning; it's only appropriate they're there at the end too.

THE FURTHER ADVENTURES....

The sections below describe several plot seeds stemming from the events in *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth* you can use for further adventures involving King Cobra, COIL, and the Ophidian Plague.

Aftershock: If a PC suffered prolonged exposure to King Cobra's Coil-Gene Touch, he wakes up one day and as he shaves, he scrapes away the skin to reveal glistening red scales. Could this be some delayed reaction to King Cobra's touch? What will happen when the transformation is complete? Experts consulted are at a loss. They all say the same thing: there's only one scientist who could possibly reverse the effects... and his name is King Cobra!

Latent Genes: An unusual story comes out in the aftermath of the Ophidian Plague. It seems a group of teenagers proved immune to the virus. Researchers have been unable to find a cause and the teenagers are unrelated... except for one thing, unknown to all but a handful of souls. Once the serpent-god Xoruba ruled humans and from these she elevated a select few to half-serpent, half-men servitors. These teenagers are the descendants of those men and women, and the Ophidian Plague

has awakened a latent gene. When the teenagers begin to transform into their ancestral shapes, will the PCs think King Cobra is the cause? And what will they do when the teenagers form a strange cult of serpent-worshippers and terrorize the city?

Payback: The events in *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth* hit VIPER hard... and the organization's leadership doesn't believe in turning the other cheek. The Ophidian Plague means war. Open battles between VIPER and COIL agents spill out into public, putting innocents in harm's way. VIPER has the edge in manpower and resources, but the organization is rife with COIL infiltrators willing to sacrifice themselves to hurt the enemy. And between them both are the PCs. How will they stop the war? Will they engineer a truce? Or will they decide that compared to King Cobra, VIPER is the lesser evil?

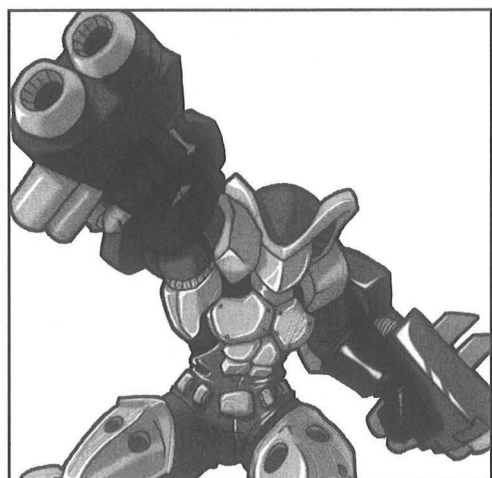
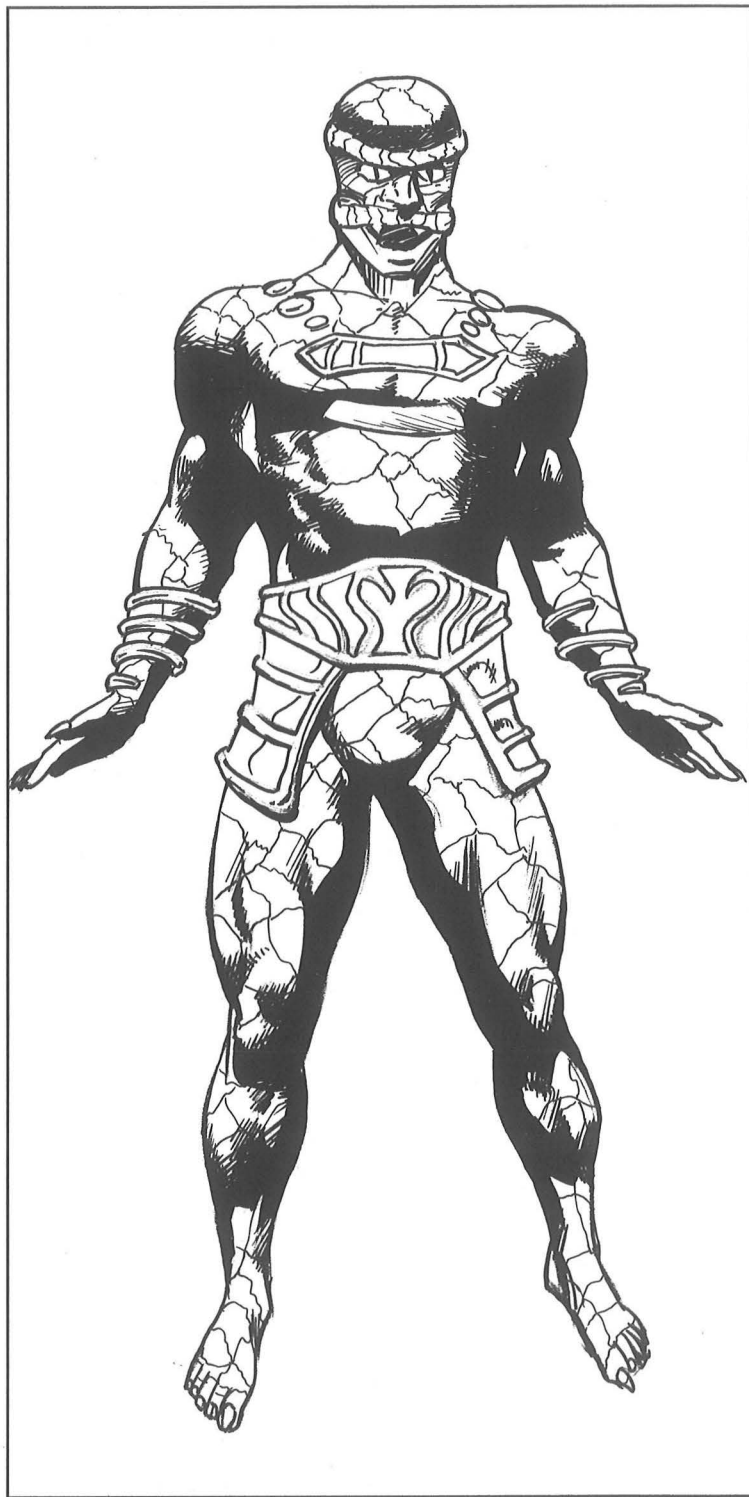
Ultimate Prisoners: The Ultimates stand trial for past misdeeds and the judge sentences them to use their powers to help with the reconstruction effort after the ravages of the Ophidian Plague. The PCs are asked to oversee these superpowered prisoners, and the Ultimates seem content to do their time. But why does a superhero keep seeing out of the corner of his eye two sharp fangs poking against the mask of Radium's radiation containment suit? The villain was given the cure wasn't he? When the

work crew comes down with a new, mutated strain of the Ophidian Plague, it becomes very obvious the cure didn't work on Radium and now the villain radiates uncontrollably the same energy as he uses with his Infection Blast!

Project Terrorsaur: The PCs return to base one day to find it broken into. After a lengthy examination, it turns out the only items missing concern the Hothouse and Project Terrorsaur. Days later a monster emerges from depths to terrorize the city. The two events must be related, but how? Could it be King Cobra and a new plot to conquer the world? Is Teleios, master of genetics, behind the monster? A new, unknown villain? Or could Dr. Demogaard, somehow still alive, be up to his old tricks... but this time more successfully?

Double Blind: King Cobra is cunning in the extreme, and the events in *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth* were only the set-up for his true plan to conquer the world. What the PCs found in the Hothouse does indeed cure the Ophidian Plague. How does it do this? It inserts the Coil-Gene into the subject's genome! Now every one of the former plague victims is loyal to the evil mastermind. The heroes must face thousands of King Cobra's fanatic followers, who have taken over the city to prepare the way for the emperor's coming!

chapter four:



KING COBRA AND COIL



Subversive, insidious, and lethal — all words that fit COIL, the criminal organization King Cobra created to help him become emperor of the world. The acronym stands for COBRA Imperial Legion, a name that reflects King Cobra's ambitions and self-view as rightful ruler of all mankind. Its agents are the victims of King Cobra's mutagenic Coil-Gene Touch. The Coil Gene, King Cobra's greatest discovery and the source of his powers, causes its victim to take on serpentine features that vary in extent from one individual to another. But all of the victims have one feature in common: fanatic loyalty, bordering on unholy adulation, toward King Cobra, resulting from genetic "hooks" placed in the victim's DNA and completely unshakable. An agent does not betray his leader... or even consider betraying him. Neither interrogation nor torture can make a COIL agent turn against King Cobra. It's this loyalty that King Cobra exploits to further his goals, makes COIL so dangerous, and serves as the foundation for the entire organization.

GOAL AND METHODS

Unlike many other criminal organizations, such as VIPER or ARGENT, COIL has a single, concrete, easily articulated goal: to make King Cobra ruler of the world. There are no plots within plots, secondary goals, or tertiary objectives. If COIL is involved in a situation, somehow and in some way that involvement furthers King Cobra's quest to conquer the world. COIL personnel aren't concerned with accumulating personal wealth and don't have personal vendettas they use the organization to carry out. They have one overriding desire: to obey the commands of King Cobra, who wishes to conquer the world.

COIL's methods for accomplishing this goal vary, but tend to have two aspects in common: co-opting other organizations for its own use; and threatening the lives of as many innocents as possible.

Once COIL identifies a member of a target organization, agents abduct him and bring him to their leader. King Cobra uses the Coil-Gene Touch on him, making his loyalty to COIL absolute and beyond question. If the serpentine features caused by the mutation are slight, the new agent is taught how to disguise them and sent back to infiltrate his former organization. These agents are COIL infiltrators, perhaps the organization's most valuable resource. With infiltrators in place, COIL has a fifth column within the target organization ready to

mobilize at any time.

When COIL rears its serpentine head, authorities and superheroes know whatever the plot, it's potentially catastrophic. COIL won't commit petty crimes. Thanks to the Coil Gene, it doesn't have a payroll to maintain and doesn't need to satisfy its agents' worldly desires. It has infiltrators in many of the world's major banking institutions and corporations, and these divert funds to COIL when the need for money arises. Similarly, much of COIL's equipment comes from subverted organizations, including VIPER, ARGENT, and world militaries and security organizations. If the authorities catch an infiltrator, COIL simply abducts another member of the same organization and soon a new infiltrator takes the former one's place.

COIL's plans to make King Cobra emperor of Earth are usually designed to evoke terror and helplessness in the legitimate governments of the world so they'll surrender and bend the knee to King Cobra. With only about 300-400 agents and infiltrators worldwide as of the time of *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth*, COIL cannot face an army on the battlefield. Nor does it have the equipment to confront even a small, well-equipped military division from a First World army. Instead it must use the tactics of terror to kill as many as innocents as it can, thus showing both citizens and leaders that the government is helpless and they all must bow to King Cobra... or suffer his wrath.

King Cobra is genius in the fields of genetics and biology, and COIL's weapons of terror tend toward the biological: plagues and viruses; mutagenic clouds; infected foods and beverages; poisoned drinking water. Because of the subtlety of these weapons, it's often difficult to ascertain that COIL's behind a given plot — until an infiltrator is uncovered and bares his retractable fangs.

ORGANIZATION

COIL is small and tight-knit. Only those subjected to the Coil-Gene Touch are allowed in its ranks, and for the time being that means King Cobra has to use his power on the new recruit. To make the change permanent, he must then expose the agent to radiation. The process is time-consuming and limits COIL's recruitment, but it's also the organization's greatest strength.

Due to Coil-Gene loyalty, COIL doesn't have to worry about turncoats, double agents, and the like, and its structure reflects the absolute confidence it has in its members. COIL is a rigid hierarchy with King Cobra at the top, an inner circle

of highly skilled individuals and supervillains just below him, and the agents and infiltrators at the bottom. Members don't need to be recognized for their personal accomplishments, so there are no ranks in COIL. King Cobra or one of his inner circle says who's in charge of a mission or facility, and that's the end of it.

Similarly, COIL doesn't have to worry that infiltrator agents may betray it or defect. Its infiltrators are unquestionably loyal to the organization. Their loyalty more than makes up for the fact that physical evidence — serpentine features which they must disguise — can reveal them. Similarly, unlike most ordinary double agents, COIL infiltrators won't hesitate to risk or sacrifice their lives on COIL's behalf.

One of the organization's initial weaknesses was the quality of its personnel. Many of the agents came from VIPER and were originally exposed to the Coil-Gene Touch through their participation in Project Mendel. Commonly VIPER only sent troublemakers and ne'er-do-wells to Dr. Blank, because they were expendable and often lacked the competence the organization expected of its agents. The Coil Gene and its genetically-inspired loyalty toward King Cobra corrected many of the faults possessed by these dregs of VIPER, but it didn't make them any more skilled or well trained. Thus, COIL had a dearth of technicians and other highly-trained personnel. Since breaking from VIPER, King Cobra has done as much as he can to correct this problem, but it still exists to some extent.

BASES

As of the time of *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth*, Krait, the inner circle member in charge of operations and procurement, has secured four bases for COIL's use. One is the Hothouse described in Chapter Three, and until its discovery, it serves as COIL's central headquarters (and King Cobra's dwelling). The other bases are located worldwide; the Hothouse is the only one in the United States.

All of the bases are abandoned complexes once used by other organizations. COIL does not (at least at this stage) build bases — it moves into ones built by other entities after they abandon them or COIL kills the current occupants. In the future, King Cobra expects to build bases of his own, but for now that can wait.

One base, innocuously named the Weather Station, is located in the Amazon rainforest. Built twenty years ago by a coalition of wealthy financiers, the Weather Station is a large geodesic dome far from civilization. Its publicly-stated goal was to study the problem of global warming by conducting extensive research into the effects of the rainforest on the ozone layer. In truth it was a front for the now defunct Terror, Inc. and its deceased leader Professor Muerte (who planned to take control of the world's weather). The Weather Station supplies the mammals that fill the Hothouse jungle.

Another, located in southern Egypt, is called Cleopatra. The base has few personnel and serves mainly as a bolt hole in case things go wrong elsewhere. Cleopatra's original function is unknown. Krait heard about the underground complex through a mercenary contact in Africa and investigated. There he found non-functioning machinery and robots, seemingly of inhuman manufacture judging by their ceramic exteriors and "crystal circuit-boards" (as one scientist he consulted called them). All signs indicated no one had used the base for decades, so Krait took it over for COIL's use. He continues to investigate the original inhabitants and their abandoned technology.

The final base, called the Temple, is located deep in the jungles of Cambodia. Here King Cobra has conducted tentative research into how he might infect the drug trade with a mutagen. Located in an ancient and abandoned temple for a divergent sect of Buddhism that somehow associated the native king cobra with Siddhartha, the base once housed some superhumans who served Pol Pot... until they ran afoul of China's Tiger Squad. The Temple supplies King Cobra with many venomous snakes.

EQUIPMENT

COIL obtains its equipment from whatever suppliers it can; as of the time of *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth* it does not create its own blasters, armor, and the like. For example, the armor worn by COIL agents in this adventure originally came from VIPER, and their blaster rifles were manufactured by ARGENT under contract from Krait. Despite the variety of suppliers, King Cobra demands that his agents have a uniform appearance, so reworking, retailoring, and retooling are often necessary. In the future COIL hopes to establish its own manufacturing facilities, but that will take time.

This means that for a supervillain organization, COIL is behind the curve in technology that's not related to genetics or biology — it must rely on other organizations to make the advancements, then purchase the equipment or steal it. Also, unlike VIPER, it can't depend on vehicles, artillery, and other heavy equipment to level the battlefield with superheroes. The inner circle serves that purpose.

THE INNER CIRCLE

An inner circle of supervillains serves as King Cobra's seconds-in-command; each oversees an aspect of COIL. In brief: Boomslang commands the agents and combat operations performed out of the Hothouse. Firedrake does very little; King Cobra keeps him around for further study, since the Coil Gene expressed itself strangely in his case. Gorgon is King Cobra's favorite and acts as his personal bodyguard and muscle. Krait, as stated above, is in charge of operations and procurement, as well as the only COIL member not subject to the Coil-Gene Touch. Slither is in charge of intelligence

KING COBRA

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
40	STR	30	17-	Lift 6,400 kg; 8d6 [4]
30	DEX	60	15-	OCV: 10/DCV: 10
30	CON	40	15-	
20	BODY	20	13-	
25	INT	15	14-	PER Roll 14-
20	EGO	20	13-	ECV: 7
30	PRE	20	15-	PRE Attack: 6d6
6	COM	-2	10-	
20	PD	12		Total: 20 PD (20 rPD)
20	ED	14		Total: 20 ED (20 rED)
7	SPD	30		Phases: 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12
14	REC	0		
60	END	0		
55	STUN	0		Total Characteristics Cost: 259

Movement: Running: 11"/22"
 Leaping: 8"/16"
 Swimming: 6"/12"

Cost Powers **END**

87	<i>Bioenergy Powers:</i> Multipower, 87-point reserve			
9u	1) <i>Bioenergy Blast:</i> Energy Blast 14d6, Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼)			3
5u	2) <i>Bioenergy-Sapping Touch:</i> Energy Blast 7d6, NND (defense is Force Field; +1), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼); No Range (-½)			3
1u	3) <i>Coil-Gene Touch:</i> Major Transform 1d6 (human being into Cobra-mutate, heals back normally unless victim is subjected to elaborate genetic treatments, then the cure is known only to King Cobra), Continuous (+1); No Range (-½), Limited Target (humans; -½), Lockout (must maintain contact with victim for Continuous effect, and cannot use other Multipower slots during this time; -½)			3
	<i>Martial Arts: Generic Plus</i>			
	Maneuver	OCV	DCV	Notes
4	Block	+2	+2	Block, Abort
5	Cobra Grab	+0	+0	Grab Two Limbs, 60 STR for holding on
4	Dodge	—	+5	Dodge, Affects All Attacks, Abort
5	Kick	-2	+1	14d6 Strike
4	Punch	+0	+2	12d6 Strike
3	Throw	+0	+1	10d6 + vel/5; Target Falls
8	+2 Damage Classes (already added in)			
10	<i>Clutch Of The Constrictor:</i> +20 STR; Only To Grab/Squeeze (-1)			
10	<i>Cobra's Fangs:</i> HKA ½d6 (1d6+1 with STR)			
10	<i>Scaly Skin:</i> Hardened (+¼) for 20 PD, 20 ED			
25	<i>Scaly Skin:</i> Damage Resistance (20 PD/20 ED), Hardened (+¼)			
5	<i>Underwater Adaptation:</i> Life Support (Expanded Breathing: Breathe Underwater)			
10	<i>Serpent's Speed:</i> Running +5" (11" total)			
4	<i>Serpent's Speed:</i> Swimming +4" (6" total)			

6	<i>Serpentine Perception:</i> +2 PER with all Sense Groups	0
5	<i>Serpentine Eyes:</i> Infrared Perception (Sight Group)	0
3	<i>Serpentine Form:</i> Stretching 1"; Extra Time (Full Phase; -½)	1

Perks

15	Money: Filthy Rich
----	--------------------

Talents

9	Ambidexterity (no Off Hand penalty)
15	Combat Sense 14-
4	Double-Jointed
5	Eidetic Memory
3	Lightning Calculator
3	Lightsleep
3	Simulate Death

Skills

20	+2 Overall
3	Acrobatics 15-
3	Breakfall 15-
3	Bureaucratics 15-
3	Climbing 15-
3	Computer Programming 14-
3	Contortionist 15-
3	Deduction 14-
3	Electronics 14-
3	Interrogation 15-
3	Inventor 14-
3	KS: The Superhuman World 14-
3	KS: VIPER 14-
3	Paramedics 14-
3	Stealth 15-
3	Streetwise 15-
3	Tactics 14-
3	Scientist
2	1) SS: Anatomy 14-
2	2) SS: Biochemistry 14-
2	3) SS: Biology 14-
2	4) SS: Chemistry 14-
4	5) SS: Genetics 16-
4	6) SS: Herpetology 16-
1	7) SS: Physics 11-
2	8) SS: Zoology 14-

Total Powers & Skills Cost: 367**Total Cost: 626****200+ Disadvantages**

30	Hunted: UNTIL 14- (Mo Pow, NCI, Capture)
30	Hunted: VIPER 14- (Mo Pow, NCI, Kill)
25	Psychological Limitation: Megalomaniac; Determined To Rule The World (Very Common, Total)
20	Psychological Limitation: Casual Killer (Common, Total)
20	Reputation: world-threatening master villain, 14- (Extreme)
15	Social Limitation: Secret Identity: Timothy Blank, Ph.D (Frequently, Major)
286	Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 626

Background/History: How does it feel to wield true power? To unleash a blast of energy from your hand, powerful enough to knock holes in a stone wall? To crush a man's throat in one hand with barely a fraction of your strength? To create a legion of fanatically loyal followers with the merest touch? To look upon those perfect ranks of faithful subjects, hear their adulation, and know they go out into the world to work your will?

For Timothy Blank, it feels good.

After a lifetime of consoling himself with the cliché "knowledge is power" while those stronger yet less intelligent than he dictated what he would do and how he would do it, Blank finally understands the truth about power. Knowledge might lead to power, but knowledge doesn't equate to power. As King Cobra, Blank now possesses true power.

He finally understands what temptation the serpent offered Eve in the Garden of Eden, and why a wrathful God expelled those first humans from the Garden. The serpent didn't offer knowledge; it offered power. God feared the power that Adam and Eve might come to possess. The same sort of knowledge transformed the impotent Timothy Blank into the powerful King Cobra.

Blank spent a lifetime working for others — first his thesis advisor in graduate school, then the department head when he was a professor, still later for VIPER's Council Of Thirty and Supreme Serpent. Bad enough he worked for their benefit rather than his own, but to add insult to injury, the presumptuous imbeciles had the audacity to tell him how to conduct his research. At the university, they told him he couldn't experiment on human subjects and tried to punish him when he did. VIPER's leaders cancelled his funding for important projects because Phillippe Moreau advised them Blank's goals were dead-ends.

His research a dead-end? King Cobra will prove them and their lackey Moreau wrong. He will show VIPER the fruits of his labors — the potential of those "dead-ends" they unknowingly funded. Soon, King Cobra will show the world the meaning of true power... and, more importantly, who wields it.

Personality/Motivation: Timothy Blank, before becoming King Cobra, had an insane lust for power and a sheer disdain for his fellow man. The dramatic physical and genetic changes Blank inflicted on himself have only increased his megalomania. He no longer wonders why people don't obey him — now he makes them obey him. He uses his Coil-Gene Touch to force people to follow his commands and worship him as a god.

Blank's fascination with snakes goes back to his earliest memories of childhood, when one Sunday morning during church the preacher told the story of the Serpent and the Apple. Later that same day, a garter snake bit him as he tried to catch it. He held the snake by the tail and watched it bend upwards, defying gravity, to bite him on the finger and make him let go. He remembered the sermon about how the Serpent tempted mankind and gave him knowledge of Good and Evil. These events left

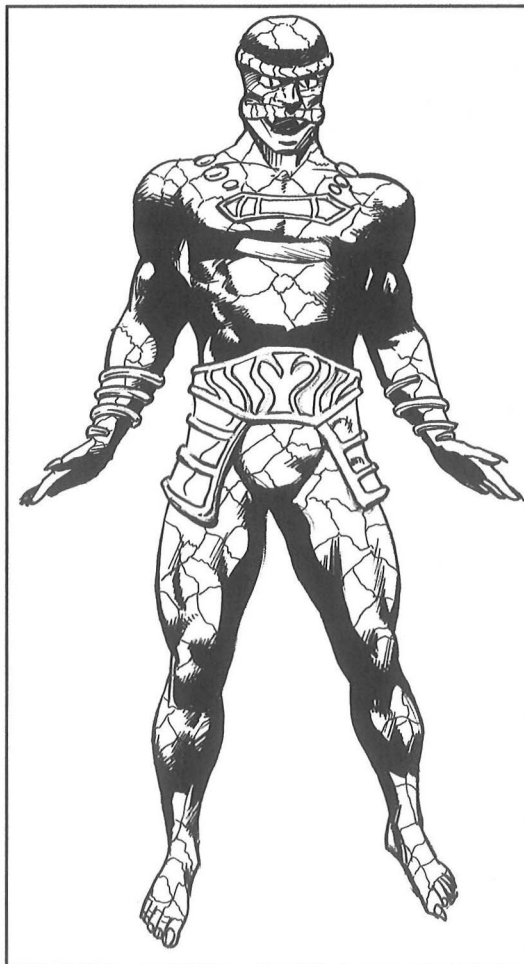
an indelible mark on his memory and motivated his researches into ophidian genetics as much as any scientific interest. As King Cobra, Blank's fascination with serpents has only grown. He considers them his brethren and nearest equals — or at least far superior to humankind.

King Cobra no longer answers to the name Timothy Blank — but he responds to the name with a fit of rage and threats of death. In his mind, Blank is somebody else; as time passes, Timothy Blank becomes almost a different person entirely. Blank was weak... intelligent, almost as intelligent as King Cobra, but still a weak man who knuckled under to those in power. King Cobra would rather forget the indignity of having served other, lesser men.

Quote: "Ever since Eden, it's the Serpent who's held true power."

Powers/Tactics: King Cobra's powers stem from his mutated genome and his ability to generate bioenergy. As of the time of *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth*, he's new to his powers and can only use them in limited ways. He can project reddish-brown energy from his hands with explosive force or draw off another's bioenergy, causing a severe shock to the target's system.

His most fearsome use of bioenergy is the Coil-Gene Touch. This attack radiates bioenergy that seeps into his target. The invasive energy causes a change on the cellular level, inserting a



KING COBRA PLOT SEEDS

As stated in his description, King Cobra is new to his powers and might continue to mutate. When his arms and legs wither away and he grows into a fifty-foot-long cobra, he begins to call himself Beda. Could he truly be the brother of Nama, the great serpent-god behind VIPER? And can the Earth survive the war between these two ancient creatures?

Imprisoned after the events in *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth*, King Cobra continues to gain control over his Coil-Gene Touch until the effect is permanent. Somehow free of the power dampeners — perhaps he's also developed Power Defense — he begins to subvert the guards. Once in control of the prison, he turns his attention to the superhuman prisoners....

After escaping at the end of *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth* (or from prison thereafter), King Cobra decides that the superheroes who pose such a threat to him must serve him instead. He begins infiltrating and subverting fan organizations and civic institutions with the eventual goal of luring heroes to award ceremonies and speaking engagements so he can inflict the Coil-Gene Touch upon them.

mutated gene into the target's DNA. The change is quick; it's only seconds until the target's appearance — and his very being — transforms into a half-serpent, half-man wholly loyal to King Cobra.

By some process only King Cobra understands — and since he's never explained the process, it could simply be an accidental discovery that Blank in his pride refuses to confess to — the mutate is tied to King Cobra by bonds of loyalty far deeper than those brought on by belief in a cause or a leader's charisma. The genetic "hooks" implanted in the mutate's genome — at the heart of each one of his cells — somehow makes him instinctively subservient to the villain. It's almost impossible for him to question an order from King Cobra, let alone disobey.

The Transform caused by the Coil-Gene Touch heals back normally, but King Cobra has discovered that exposure to radiation makes the mutation permanent. If he exposes a victim to radiation — and that's always the first thing he does unless some event intervenes — then only elaborate gene therapies known only to him can reverse the transformation. King Cobra has currently assigned "highest priority" to research into increasing the power of the Coil-Gene Touch so the change is permanent without radiation.

(After the events in *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth* and extensive research, some scientists believe King Cobra's bioenergy has a psychic component and this is what inspires such fanatic loyalty in his victims. But this is mere speculation.)

Despite his considerable power and the dramatic physical changes caused by his mutation, Blank is not yet tactically adept. To make matters worse his megalomania often overrules his common sense. His basic tactic is to Grab a foe, then use the Coil-Gene Touch to turn him into a mutate (though he's not stupid enough to do this if he's facing multiple foes, since the Touch takes time). If attacked from the air, he blasts away with his Bio-Energy Blast. He never "cowers" behind cover. He also has a tendency to ignore active opponents if a foe who insulted him — which, given King Cobra's arrogance, doesn't take much — is down and helpless. In these cases, he kills the downed opponent with a dramatic proclamation about what happens to those who defy King Cobra.

Campaign Use: A master villain of the second water, King Cobra's use in your campaign is best illustrated by *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth*. COIL is smaller and less well-equipped than the likes of VIPER, but it's more insidious and its fanatically loyal followers unhesitatingly sacrifice their lives for King Cobra. King Cobra is less powerful than evil masterminds like Dr. Destroyer or Mechanon, but his science and Coil-Gene Touch allow him to create supervillain allies that more than make up for this. He's less intelligent and resourceful than Teleios, but smart enough to engineer grave threats like the Ophidian Plague. Further adventures involving King Cobra should focus on all three of these aspects.

As a Hunted, King Cobra is a severe threat

to a superhero's life. Many heroes are Hunted by VIPER, but since that organization is so large and has so many plans and plots going on at one time, it doesn't focus all of its attention on killing the hero. COIL functions differently. If King Cobra and COIL Hunt the hero, he focuses the full attention of his organization and its resources on destroying the superhero's life and killing him. The hero finds those close to him mutated by the Coil Gene and suicidal assassins threatening his life at every turn. And the megalomaniac King Cobra does not accept failure. VIPER might decide to cut its losses after several catastrophic failures deplete its resources. King Cobra doesn't care about resources or risk. No matter how many agents the PC captures and locks away, a new agent is only a single touch away. That said, King Cobra looks down on and hates *everybody*. It would take a lot for him to divert his attention from conquering the world to Hunting an individual hero.

To increase King Cobra's personal power, add the Advantage *Penetrating* to the Coil-Gene Touch so it's a threat even to heroes with Power Defense — in other words, the superhero knows if he doesn't free himself from King Cobra's grasp soon, he will become a loyal follower of the villain. You can also add slots to his *Bioenergy Powers* Multipower as he gains increased control over his new powers. Energy Blasts with Area Of Effect, Damage Shields, and Killing Attacks are all possibilities. Furthermore, as of the time of *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth*, the mutation is new... who's to say King Cobra doesn't continue to mutate, his physical abilities increasing accordingly?

To decrease King Cobra's powers, add Gradual Effect to his Coil-Gene Touch so a mutated PC doesn't become a loyal follower until after the fight, and/or decrease the Transform dice. But don't remove it entirely — the whole COIL organization rests upon King Cobra's use of the Coil-Gene Touch. Alternately, you can keep the Coil-Gene Touch as is but reduce King Cobra's Characteristics and other bio-energy powers.

Appearance: Six and half feet tall with muscles bulging under his scaly skin, King Cobra is an imposing figure — one even more impressive because of his serpentine features and flaring cobra-like hood. His eyes are golden with slit pupils, devoid of any expression but that of a hunter considering its prey, and never seem to blink. The scales that cover his body are reddish-brown, the color of dried blood. Usually King Cobra wears only a loincloth, so that his followers may admire his physique; his taste in ornamentation runs to the grandiose, such as gold bracers and legbands worked with embossed cobras.

BOOMSLANG

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
30	STR	20	15-	Lift 1,600 kg; 6d6 [3]
24	DEX	42	14-	OCV: 8/DCV: 8
18	CON	16	13-	
18	BODY	16	13-	
10	INT	0	11-	PER Roll 11-
10	EGO	0	11-	ECV: 3
15	PRE	5	12-	PRE Attack: 3d6
6	COM	-2	10-	
12	PD	6		Total: 20 PD (20 rPD)
10	ED	6		Total: 18 ED (18 rED)
5	SPD	16		Phases: 3, 5, 8, 10, 12
12	REC	4		
40	END	2		
45	STUN	3		Total Characteristics Cost: 134

Movement:	Running:	10"/20"
	Leaping:	8"/16"
	Swimming:	10"/20"

 Cost Powers END

58	VRG-5X Mini-Railgun (Right Arm): Multipower, 87-point reserve; OIF (-½)			
5u	1) <i>Armor Piercing Round</i> : RKA 2d6+1, Armor Piercing (+½), Autofire (3 shots; +¼), Penetrating (+½); OIF (-½), 16 Charges (-0) [16]			
5u	2) <i>Stun Round</i> : RKA 2d6+1, +2 Increased STUN Multiplier (+½), Autofire (3 shots; +¼), Penetrating (+½); OIF (-½), 16 Charges (-0) [16]			
3u	3) <i>Bolo Round</i> : Entangle 4d6, 8 DEF, Entangle And Character Both Take Damage (+¼); OIF (-½), Cannot Form Barriers (-¼), Can Be Escaped Automatically With Modified Contortionist Roll (-½), 16 Charges (-0) [16]			
5u	4) <i>Flash Round</i> : Sight Group Flash 6d6, Autofire (3 shots; +1¼), Area Of Effect (One Hex Accurate; +½); OIF (-½), 16 Charges (-0) [16]			
5	VRG-5X Mini-Railgun (Left Arm): Another VRG-5X Mini-Railgun (total of 2)			
	<i>Martial Arts: VIPER Brawling</i>			
	Maneuver	OCV	DCV	Notes
4	Block	+2	+2	Block, Abort
4	Dodge	—	+5	Dodge, Affects All Attacks, Abort
4	Punch	+0	+2	8d6 Strike
3	Throw	+0	+1	6d6 + vel/5; Target Falls
10	<i>Serpent Fangs</i> : HKA ½d6 (1d6+1 with STR) 1			
11	<i>Scaly Skin</i> : Damage Resistance (12 PD/10 ED) 0			
12	<i>COIL Combat Armor</i> : Armor (8 PD/8 ED); OIF (-½), Activation Roll 14- (does not protect Hit Locations 3-7; -½) 0			
3	<i>COIL Helmet Protection</i> : Armor (4 PD/4 ED); OIF (-½), Activation Roll 8- (only protects Hit Locations 3-5; -2) 0			
6	<i>COIL Helmet Communications System</i> : HRRP (Radio Group); OIF (-½), Affected As Sight And Hearing Group As Well As Radio			

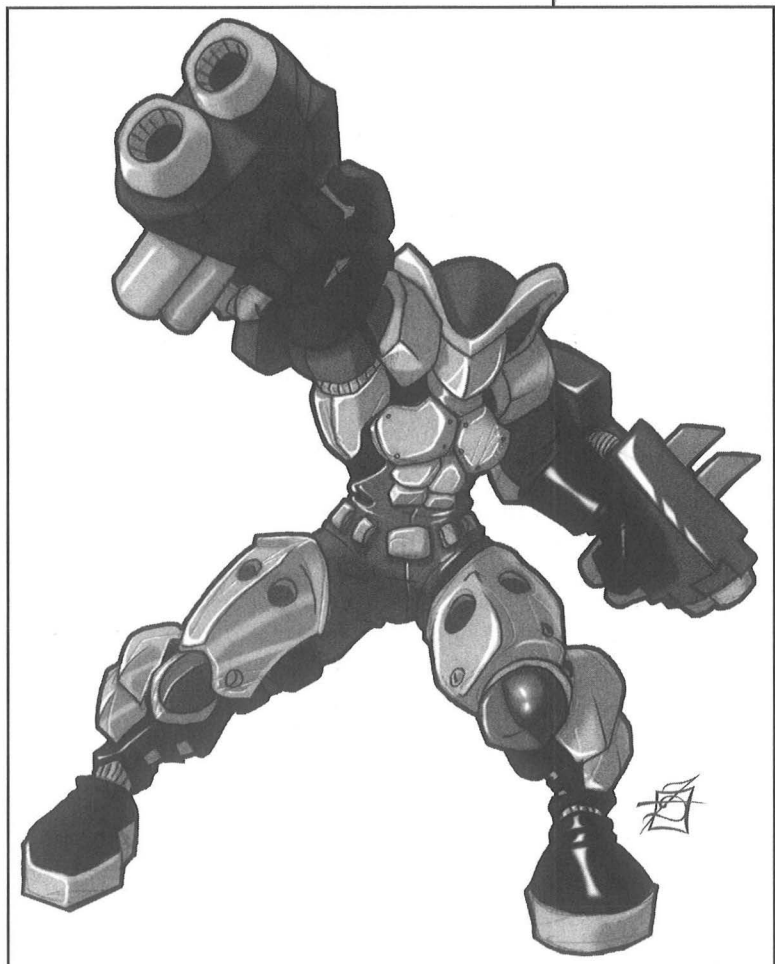
	Group (-½)	0
3	<i>COIL Helmet Nightvision System</i> : Nightvision; OIF (-½)	0
5	<i>COIL Helmet Acoustic Shielding</i> : Hearing Group Flash Defense (8 points); OIF (-½)	0
5	<i>COIL Helmet Flare Shielding</i> : Sight Group Flash Defense (8 points); OIF (-½)	0
7	<i>COIL Helmet Oxygen Supply</i> : Life Support (Self-Contained Breathing); OIF (-½), 1 Continuing Fuel Charge (1 Hour; -0) [1cc]	
6	<i>Serpentine Perception</i> : +2 PER with all Sense Groups	0
8	<i>Serpent's Speed</i> : Running +4" (10" total)	1
8	<i>Serpent's Speed</i> : Swimming +8" (10" total)	1
2	<i>Serpent's Speed</i> : Leaping +2" (8" total)	1

Talents

9	Ambidexterity (no Off Hand penalty)
6	Lightning Reflexes: +4 DEX to act first with All Attacks

Skills

15	+3 with Ranged Attacks
12	+4 versus Range Modifier with All Attacks
10	+2 DCV
3	Acrobatics 14-
3	Breakfall 14-
5	Combat Driving 15-
5	Combat Piloting 15-
7	Concealment 13-
3	Contortionist 14-
3	Fast Draw (Small Arms [including his Mini-



BOOMSLANG PLOT SEEDS

The changes to Boomslang's physiology wrought by the Coil-Gene Touch are more advanced and pervasive than normal, and King Cobra doesn't know why. In an attempt to discover the reason, the villain begins abducting Hamiltons. Boomslang doesn't know about the abductions, but what happens when he finds out? Will loyalty to his family override his fanatic loyalty to King Cobra? And can the PCs track the abductions back to King Cobra's current whereabouts?

Boomslang wasn't really discharged from the Marines — in truth, PRIMUS hand-picked him to infiltrate VIPER. Using hypnotism and psychotropic drugs, they buried his true personality deep in his subconscious. When someone accidentally speaks the trigger word and Zeke Hamilton's former personality emerges, this spy wants to come in from the cold. Now he's on the run and only the PCs can save him! But King Cobra's control over his agents is genetic... has Boomslang really betrayed him?

Slither's sadism, thought to result from his beating at Durak's hands, perhaps is actually a side effect of the Coil-Gene Touch. Now Boomslang has turned just as sadistic. King Cobra humors his minion's desires and allows Boomslang to hunt a new prey... the PCs! When they wake up in a isolated forest with power dampening collars locked around their necks, will they figure out the rules to Boomslang's "most dangerous game" before it's too late?

- Railgun)) 14-
- 2 KS: COIL 11-
- 2 KS: Military/Mercenary/Terrorist World 11-
- 1 KS: The Superhuman World 8-
- 2 KS: VIPER 11-
- 7 Mechanics 13-
- 2 PS: COIL Agent 11-
- 7 Shadowing 13-
- 3 Stealth 14-
- 3 Streetwise 12-
- 6 Survival (Temperate, Tropical) 12-
- 5 Teamwork 15-
- 7 Tracking 13-
- 9 TF: Common Motorized Vehicles, Two-Wheeled Motorized Ground Vehicles, Tracked Military Vehicles, Wheeled Military Vehicles, Small Planes, Combat Aircraft, Helicopters, Small Motorized Boats
- 4 WF: Common Melee Weapons, Small Arms
- 6 Weaponsmith (Firearms) 13-

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 328

Total Cost: 462

200+ Disadvantages

- 10 Distinctive Features: serpentine skin and features (Concealable With Difficulty; Noticed And Recognizable)
- 5 Distinctive Features: COIL uniform (Easily Concealed; Noticed And Recognizable)
- 10 Hunted: COIL 11- (Mo Pow, Watching)
- 30 Hunted: VIPER 11- (Mo Pow, NCI, Capture/Kill)
- 25 Hunted: UNTIL 8- (Mo Pow, NCI, Capture)
- 15 Psychological Limitation: Overconfidence (Very Common, Moderate)
- 25 Psychological Limitation: Utterly Loyal To King Cobra (Very Common, Total)
- 20 Social Limitation: Subject To Orders (Very Frequently, Major)
- 15 Social Limitation: Public Identity (Zeke Hamilton) (Frequently, Severe)
- 107 Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 462

Background/History: Born and raised on a farm in northern Arkansas, Ezekiel "Zeke" Hamilton can barely remember a time when he didn't have a gun. He had his first BB gun at seven, then a lady's rifle at ten, and he graduated to his father's hand-me-down hunting rifle the same year he entered high school. Zeke didn't care much for school — each year he passed on to the next grade, but he wasn't a good student, didn't even attend most of his classes. At home, he didn't care much about farming — three older brothers helped their father around the farm, and Zeke was left to wander the woods with his BB gun or rifle, hunting squirrels or doves or whatever else might cross his path.

At sixteen, Zeke had his first brush with the authorities when a game warden caught him shooting ducks on the water in a baited area. Zeke had ten ducks in the bag and sack of grain right by his side. The game warden let him off — the boy was young, maybe he didn't know any better — but he made Zeke come out on weekends to learn about

hunting rules and regulations. The more Zeke learned about hunting, the more stupid he thought it was. What did the warden mean, it was unsportsmanlike to shoot ducks on the water? Shooting them on the wing was a pain. Why couldn't he set out bait? What was he supposed to do? Place decoys, crouch in the reeds, make stupid noises, and hope the ducks came to him?

Zeke kept his comments to himself and spent his weekends nodding his head while the game warden taught him the sportsmanlike and legal ways to hunt. A year later the same game warden caught Zeke, now seventeen and still a minor, dragging a dead buck with less than three points on an antler through the woods out of season. The game warden recognized a bad seed when he saw one and gave the Hamilton family two choices: pay the boy's fines or ship him off to the military after he graduated high school. Everyone agreed the military seemed like a good place for Zeke. Zeke couldn't care less, so he enlisted in the Marines.

The Marine Corps wasn't a good place for Zeke either. He'd never faced strict discipline and a regimented life before, and had never been under the constant scrutiny of ever-present authority figures. Now that he was, his insubordinate nature came to the fore... and there was always a higher-up around to notice. In high school and with the game warden and his parents, he could merely nod his head, pretend he was paying attention, and then go about his business. The military offered no such luxury. Zeke didn't backtalk his superiors or cause problems with his fellow enlisted men — he just didn't do what he was told. Because of the quiet, non-confrontational nature of his insubordination, Zeke lasted two years before he received his dishonorable discharge.

Out of the service, Zeke drifted through Little Rock and then down to Vibora Bay before VIPER finally caught up with him. The criminal organization closely monitored military discharges and someone flagged Zeke for recruitment. Rated an expert sniper with a discipline problem, he seemed the perfect fit for VIPER. He accepted an offer to join the Vibora Bay Nest with a shrug. But he didn't make a good VIPER agent. The same problem Zeke had in the Marines — not doing what he was told when he was told to — followed him into VIPER. So long as he was with fellow agents on a mission, he was a fine addition to the Nest. But when it came to routine chores and training, he was absent more often than not. When a call came around for subjects for Timothy Blank's experiments in genetic manipulation, Monique Fontaine was happy to get rid of the incessant and quiet challenge to her authority. After some initial experiments, King Cobra's Coil-Gene Touch cured Zeke of his insubordination by turning him into the fanatically loyal Boomslang. Equipped with two experimental man-portable railguns stolen from VIPER, he became King Cobra's combat commander.

Personality/Motivation: Before he was transformed by the Coil-Gene Touch, Boomslang was a drifter and a loner, not much interested in belonging to

a group or succeeding in life. He did what he was told only when he was in the mood, and most of the time he just did what he felt like doing. He answered questions with a noncommittal shrug and spoke in a slow drawl no matter how urgent the situation. He didn't last in the Marines because they valued discipline over Zeke's marksmanship. He survived in VIPER because he was the best shot in the Nest, but eventually his disrespectful attitude and laconic disregard for authority got him in trouble with the Nest Leader.

The Coil-Gene Touch changed Zeke, not just physically but psychologically: it transformed his disregard for authority into a fanatical loyalty to King Cobra. Now Boomslang lives to serve King Cobra, who's fanned Boomslang's hunting instinct into near bloodlust and honed him into a cold-blooded killer. Boomslang's fanaticism is only apparent when it concerns King Cobra or while carrying out his orders — otherwise, he's the same shrugging-and-drawling Zeke Hamilton as ever. Some of his COIL peers, especially Krait and Slither, can't stand him and sometimes refuse to work with him.

Quote: "Boys, this is goin' to be easier than shootin' ducks on the water."

Powers/Tactics: A crack shot and excellent hunter, Boomslang's main powers involve the mini-railguns strapped to his arms. The VRG-5X Mini-Railguns failed their experimental testing phase with VIPER — they were too heavy and unwieldy for normal humans, and designers were unable to streamline the weapons — so King Cobra, via Krait and his contacts, had no trouble getting hold of the prototypes. Boomslang uses the weapons easily because of his enhanced physiology.

The railguns fire a variety of ammo. The armor piercing rounds are small flechettes designed to cut through armor. The stunning rounds are similar in appearance to lead shot but bigger; they flatten when they hit the target, and despite their name can kill a man easily. The bolo rounds are two small spheres connected by a coiled length of high-strength steel wire; when fired the spheres spin apart, stretching to the length of the steel cord and wrapping around the target. Similar in design to VIPER flash grenades, the flash rounds explode in blinding light upon impact.

Boomslang avoids both taking on multiple opponents and HTH combat. If outnumbered, he sprays the area with flash rounds and retreats. Though skilled in brawling and stronger than any normal human, he knows he isn't a match for many superheroes. He prefers to strike from ambush, preferably a considerable distance away from his target, and sometimes uses a vehicle such as a motorcycle or the like to increase his mobility.

Campaign Use: Boomslang's roll in COIL is to lead agents on missions; in effect, he's the chief combat officer and the agents' immediate superior. Because commanding COIL agents is part and parcel of serving King Cobra, Boomslang performs this task well and certainly much better than any of the other's King Cobra's inner circle of supervillains — Firedrake is too remote, Gorgon too monstrous, and Slither too sadistic. Krait, who is in fact a better leader than Boomslang, tries to keep a low profile in the organization, and King Cobra doesn't trust him completely.

Boomslang makes an unlikely Hunter — he doesn't have a vengeful streak and rarely takes the initiative. If King Cobra Hunts a team of heroes he probably sends Boomslang, acting as leader for a group of agents, after them. (For a lone hero, King Cobra sends Slither to assassinate him.)

To make Boomslang more powerful, increase his SPD to 6 and give him Find Weakness with his railguns. To make him less powerful, reduce his *VRG-5X Mini-Railguns* Multipower to 60 or 50 Active Points and the slots to fit.

Appearance: Boomslang wears a silver breast plate over red scale mail armor. His helmet has a cobra motif, similar in design to the standard one wore by a COIL agent with a hood and face plate obscuring his features. Strapped to each of his arms is a railgun, and four long curving magazines protrude from each side of a gun. Under his armor, the COIL-Gene Touch has had a dramatic effect on Zeke Hamilton's features, giving him a forked tongue, long incisors, and scaly skin.

FIREDRAKE Human Form

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

Movement: Running: 6"/12"

Cost Powers END

25	<i>Fire Powers:</i> Elemental Control, 50-point powers	
14	1) <i>Fire Bolt:</i> RKA 1d6+1, Area Of Effect (20" Line; +1¼), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼); No Range (-½), No Knockback (-¼)	2
13	2) <i>Pyrokinesis:</i> Telekinesis (28 "STR"), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼); Only Works On Fire (-1)	2
27	3) <i>Fiery Aura:</i> HKA 1d6+1, Continuous (+1), Damage Shield (does damage in HTH combat; +¾), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); No STR Bonus (-½)	0
18	<i>Fiery Protection:</i> Force Field (6 PD/6 ED), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½)	0
40	<i>Fiery Protection:</i> Damage Reduction, Resistant, 75%; Only Works Against Limited Types Of Attack (fire; -½)	0
2	<i>Fiery Protection:</i> Life Support (Safe Environment: Intense Heat)	0
71	<i>Dragon Form:</i> Multiform (assume 533-point dragon form; true form is 271-point human form); Reversion (-½)	0

Skills

3	Electronics 11-
2	KS: COIL 11-
2	KS: VIPER 11-
5	Mechanics 12-
4	PS: Building Maintenance 13-
3	Security Systems 11-
3	Teamwork 11-

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 232

Total Cost: 271

200+ Disadvantages

15	Accidental Change: when takes damage from fire 14- (Uncommon)
10	Distinctive Features: Mutant (Not Concealable; Always Noticed; Detectable Only By Unusual Senses)
20	Hunted: Institute For Human Advancement 8- (Mo Pow, NCI, Kill)
20	Hunted: VIPER (Mo Pow, NCI, Kill)
10	Hunted: COIL 11- (Mo Pow, Watching)

- 20 Psychological Limitation: Code Versus Killing (Common, Total)
- 15 Social Limitation: Secret Identity (David Green) (Frequently, Major)
- 20 Social Limitation: Subject To Orders (Very Frequently, Major)

Total Disadvantage Points: 330

FIREDRAKE Dragon Form

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
45	STR	35	18-	Lift 12.5 tons; 9d6 [4]
18	DEX	24	13-	OCV: 6/DCV: 6
25	CON	30	14-	
25	BODY	30	14-	
10	INT	0	11-	PER Roll 11-
12	EGO	4	11-	ECV: 4
20	PRE	10	13-	PRE Attack: 4d6
6	COM	-2	10-	
14	PD	5		Total: 24 PD (24 rPD)
18	ED	13		Total: 28 ED (28 rED)
5	SPD	22		Phases: 3, 5, 8, 10, 12
20	REC	12		
70	END	10		
70	STUN	9		Total Characteristics Cost: 202

Movement: Running: 12"/48"
Leaping: 18"/36"

Cost Powers END

47	<i>Fire Powers:</i> Elemental Control, 94-point powers	
36	1) <i>Fire Blast:</i> RKA 2½d6, Area Of Effect (20" Any Area; +1½), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼); No Range (-½), No Knockback (-¼)	5
23	2) <i>Pyrokinesis:</i> Telekinesis (50 "STR"), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼); Only Works On Fire (-1)	4
36	3) <i>Fiery Aura:</i> HKA 2d6, Continuous (+1), Damage Shield (does damage in HTH combat; +¾), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), Persistent (+½), Inherent (+¼); Always On (-½), No STR Bonus (-½)	0
30	<i>Sharp Claws:</i> HKA 2d6 (4d6 with STR)	3
40	<i>Fiery Protection:</i> Energy Damage Reduction, Resistant, 75%; Only Works Against Limited Types Of Attack (fire; -½)	0
30	<i>Fiery Protection:</i> Force Field (10 PD/10 ED), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½)	0
16	<i>Scaly Hide:</i> Damage Resistance (14 PD/18 ED)	0
2	<i>Fiery Protection:</i> Life Support (Safe Environment: Intense Heat)	0
17	<i>Strong Legs:</i> Running +6" (12" total), x4 Noncombat	2
9	<i>Strong Legs:</i> Leap +9" (18" forward, 9" upward)	2
12	<i>Tail:</i> Extra Limb (1), Inherent (+¼); Limited Manipulation (-¼) plus Stretching 2"; Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); Always Direct (-¼), No Noncombat Stretching (-¼), No Velocity Damage (-¼), Limited Body Parts (tail; -¼)	0

Skills

- 6 +2 with Sweep, Grab, and Punch
- 3 Electronics 11-
- 2 KS: COIL 11-
- 2 KS: VIPER 11-
- 5 Mechanics 12-
- 5 Power: Fire Powers 14-
- 4 PS: Building Maintenance 13-
- 3 Security Systems 11-
- 3 Teamwork 13-

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 331

Total Cost: 533

200+ Disadvantages

- 20 Accidental Change: when Temperature Level drops below 1 Always (Uncommon)
- 10 Distinctive Features: Mutant (Not Concealable; Always Noticed; Detectable Only By Unusual Senses)
- 20 Hunted: Institute For Human Advancement 8- (Mo Pow, NCI, Kill)
- 20 Hunted: VIPER (Mo Pow, NCI, Kill)
- 10 Hunted: COIL 11- (Mo Pow, Watching)
- 20 Psychological Limitation: Code Versus Killing (Common, Total)
- 15 Social Limitation: Secret Identity (David Green) (Frequently, Major)
- 20 Social Limitation: Subject To Orders (Very Frequently, Major)
- 198 Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 533

Background/History: Born a mutant, David Green has known of his power over fire since his early teens, but for many years hid his abilities from everyone (including his family). He was no hero and had no desire to become one regardless of his powers. He didn't want to wear a costume, fight supervillains, or put his life on the line. For the similar reasons, he didn't want to be a supervillain either; he lacked the ambition and greed to take the risks. He hadn't asked for power over fire, and as far as he was concerned, he would pretend he had no such ability. He just wanted to live a normal life.

His career as a building maintenance engineer in Kansas City, Missouri came to an end when his apartment building caught fire one night in May, 2000. Awakened by the smoke alarm, David easily made his way through the fiery halls and smoke-choked stairwells, emerging unharmed much to the astonishment of the firemen on the scene. As he stood on the street and watched the building go up in flames, a young girl and her mother leaned out from a window on the top floor and yelled for help. David didn't think twice. He rushed back into the building, using his pyrokinesis to cut a path through the flames, and rescued them.

The next day an article entitled "The Super-hero Next Door" ran in the paper with a photo of David, the girl in his arms and the mother right behind him, as flames bent unnaturally away from him. The article praised David for his heroics. The day after that article ran, an op-ed piece mused on whether David Green might have set the fire

himself — perhaps he lost control of his dangerous powers during his sleep. Maybe he was a menace to anyone and everyone around him. Controversy erupted in letters to the newspaper. And behind the scenes, the Institute for Human Advancement worked hard to vilify David with a letter writing campaign by anonymous "concerned citizens."

Uncomfortable with being the center of attention, David retreated from the public eye until finally he just disappeared entirely. Most assumed he'd picked up and moved elsewhere. The truth was the IHA abducted him and imprisoned him in a secret concentration camp in the Dakotas. David spent almost a year there. During that time he was subjected to numerous tests and cruel experiments, most of which concentrated on discovering mutant weaknesses for use in Minuteman technology. Finally, David and three others escaped from the concentration camp. Once outside, they split up and went their separate ways, hoping that would help them evade pursuit.

Wandering through Bismark, North Dakota, David came up with a plan. As a prisoner, he'd occasionally glimpsed visitors to the camp and recognized some of them as important politicians. Knowing the IHA had such influence, he felt he wouldn't be safe going to the authorities or super-heroes. Left with no other choice, he joined VIPER. David read the papers — by all reports, VIPER was a powerful agency that could surely protect him from the IHA. The organization welcomed him with open arms, excited to add him to Dragon



FIREDRAKE PLOT SEEDS

A mayoral candidate give a speech that lauds the Institute for Human Advancement's efforts to protect "everyday people." His own everyday life ruined by the IHA, Firedrake snaps and appears at the candidate's next public appearance with a bone to pick. The PCs must protect the candidate... and then King Cobra dispatches agents to return Firedrake to headquarters. And what will the PCs do if, during the fight, Firedrake makes some incisive points about the IHA's activities?

Firedrake has seen one murder too many, and now he wants out of COIL no matter how high the risk of being re-captured by the IHA. He contacts the PCs and asks for their help... but he's much more valuable as a mole in King Cobra's organization. Can the PCs convince him to do the right thing... to be a hero?

Like the monstrous Gorgon, King Cobra discovers Firedrake's dragon-form is continuing to grow... but for some reason David Green remains unchanged. The villain hatches a plot. He keeps David Green in his human form for months, then sends him out into the middle of crowded downtown. Then he orders him to change into his dragon-form — now grown to thirty feet tall! And David's lost somewhere in the gigantic body, unable to control his bestial form and change back....

Branch, and promised to protect him from the IHA. But during training it quickly became obvious David was not suited to life as a supervillain. In the words of one trainer: "He lacks the killer instinct."

Right around the time David was failing out of Dragon Branch, Dr. Timothy Blank sent a request for mutant test subjects. For VIPER, mutants with superhuman abilities were a precious commodity, but David Green was the exception to the rule. Dragon Branch volunteered him for Blank's experiments. Shortly before his defection from VIPER, King Cobra subjected David to the Coil-Gene Touch, but the genetic hooks allowing King Cobra to control his victims mingled strangely with David's mutant genome. David underwent a startling transformation and gained the ability to change into an eight-foot-tall draconic humanoid with greatly increased powers over fire. But unbeknownst to King Cobra, David was *not* fanatically loyal to the leader of COIL. He was the same old David Green, longing for a normal life with no desire to fight superhuman battles, but seemingly without a way to safely return to his old life.

Personality/Motivation: David Green is an average joe. He doesn't want to hurt anyone; he just wants to live a quiet and peaceful life. That being said, he's not going to throw his life away, and in his mind only organizations like VIPER and COIL can protect him from the IHA. He's seen first hand that the human supremacists have far too much influence with the authorities for him to trust anyone on the right side of the law.

Though he does a good job acting completely loyal to King Cobra, he isn't. He dreads the day when King Cobra orders him to kill someone — David knows he won't be able to obey that order and fears the consequences of disobedience. Unable to reconcile COIL's agenda with his conscience, he purposefully turns a blind eye to King Cobra's more murderous activities. He may not be a supervillain at heart, but he doesn't have the strict moral code of a superhero either. He knows COIL involves itself in some heinous crimes, but doesn't want to think about it. As long as he's not directly involved, he doesn't feel personally responsible and considers his own safety more important (although a guilty conscience nags at him).

Before gaining his Dragon Form ability, David had little confidence in his powers — compared to those of many superheroes, they seemed weak and nearly useless — but now he thinks differently, and there's a noticeable change in his attitude. He has yet to be backed into a corner, and there's no telling what he might do if that happens.

Quote: "Don't get up... Just stay out of the fight. I don't want to hurt you. Honest."

Powers/Tactics: Firedrake's powers stem from his mutant ability of pyrokinesis. Before experiencing the Coil-Gene Touch, he possessed minor abilities: he could control existing flames, but not create them, and was practically immune to fire. The mutation caused by King Cobra's genetic meddling has greatly increased his powers, in both human

and dragon form. While he's in human form, his powers remain limited, but his control is greater. In dragon form, he wields great power. It. His draconic body flickers with burning flames, and he radiates considerable heat. In combat, Firedrake changes into his Dragon Form as soon as possible. He tries to choose an opponent he's certain can take the punishment of his flaming body. He usually opens by Sweeping his opponent with his tail, then moves into HTH Combat and Grabs him. Unless backed into a corner, he strikes with his fists rather than his claws.

Many COIL combat operatives loathe working with Firedrake. Because he lacks fine control over his powers and radiates intense heat, agents must always be on guard against getting caught in one of his flame blasts or moving too close to him. Generally Firedrake is ordered to the far side of the battlefield or otherwise positioned out of the way.

Campaign Use: Firedrake is a severe liability to King Cobra and his fanatically loyal agents. His resistance to the Coil-Gene Touch leaves him with his free will intact, and if the PCs discover this, they can use it to their advantage. When roleplaying Firedrake you should hint at his lack of loyalty. To a mentalist scanning his mind his doubts and conflict are readily apparent and at the foremost of his thoughts — especially during combat as he attempts to stun opponents even though King Cobra and other COIL agents go for the kill. During fights, he often pleads with his opponent, asking him to surrender, flee, or at least lay down and play dead — even if King Cobra shouts orders to kill the do-gooders. That being said, convincing Firedrake they can keep him safe from the IHA is no easy task for the PCs. He pretty much believes the organization is a covert government agency, and PCs with known ties to government officials will have an especially hard time proving their good intentions.

Unable to ignore his increased powers, Firedrake is growing more confident with his pyrokinesis and Dragon Form. While in the past he would never consider Hunting a superhero, if he has reason to believe a hero or public figure has contacts with the IHA, then he might just Hunt that hero and try to strike back at his former tormentors.

To reduce Firedrake's power, decrease his Multipower reserve and slots. To increase his power, raise his STR, CON, and BODY to make him more of a traditional "brick," and give him Combat Skill Levels with HTH Combat.

Appearance: David Green is a slightly overweight man of medium height in his early thirties. Because his transformation destroys his clothes, he often wears inexpensive shirts and polyester slacks with tennis shoes. In his Dragon Form, Firedrake stands seven-foot-tall with a toothy maw, long claws and arms, a long, spiked tail, and dog-like legs. Flames flicker on his claws and teeth and the air ripples around him, like pavement in the desert, because of the intense heat he radiates.

GORGON

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
60	STR	50	21-	Lift 100 tons; 10d6 [6]
21	DEX	33	13-	OCV: 7/DCV: 7
30	CON	40	15-	
25	BODY	30	14-	
10	INT	0	11-	PER Roll 11-
8	EGO	-4	11-	ECV: 3
25	PRE	15	14-	PRE Attack: 5d6
6	COM	-2	10-	
35	PD	23		Total: 35 PD (20 rPD)
35	ED	29		Total: 35 ED (20 rED)
5	SPD	19		Phases: 3, 5, 8, 10, 12
24	REC	12		
80	END	10		
80	STUN	10		Total Characteristics Cost: 265

Movement: Running: 10"/20"
 Leaping: 12"/24"
 Swimming: 12"/24"

Cost	Powers	END
16	<i>Tail:</i> +20 STR; Only With Tail (-¼)	2
30	<i>Claws:</i> HKA 2d6 (4d6 with STR)	3
15	<i>Fangs:</i> HKA 1d6 (2d6 with STR)	1
20	<i>Thick, Scaly Hide:</i> Damage Resistance (20 PD/20 ED)	0
10	<i>Unique Physiology:</i> Power Defense (10 points)	0
10	<i>Alien Psyche:</i> Mental Defense (12 points)	0
10	<i>Thick, Scaly Hide:</i> Lack Of Weakness (-10) for Resistant Defenses	0
20	<i>Heavy:</i> Knockback Resistance -10"	0
4	<i>Strong Lungs:</i> Life Support (Extended Breathing: 1 END per 20 Minutes)	0
8	<i>Swift:</i> Running +4" (10" total)	1
10	<i>At Home In Water:</i> Swimming +10" (12" total)	1
15	<i>Long, Serpentine Body:</i> Stretching 3", Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); Always Direct (-¼), No Noncombat Stretching (-¼)	0

Talents

3 Environmental Movement: Aquatic Movement (no penalties while in water)

Skills

6 +2 with Tail
 10 +2 with HTH Combat
 14 *Tail Slam:* +6 OCV with Sweep; Only With Tail (-¼)
 2 Language: English (fluent conversation; Greek is native)
 6 Survival (Tropical) 13-
 5 Tracking 12-

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 214

Total Cost: 479

200+ Disadvantages

25 Enraged: in combat (Very Common), go 11-, recover 11-
 10 Hunted: COIL 11- (Mo Pow, Watching)
 20 Hunted: VIPER 8- (Mo Pow, NCI, Capture/Kill)

10 Physical Limitation: Enormous (8m; -4 DCV, +4 to PER Rolls to perceive) (Frequently, Slightly Impairing)
 5 Physical Limitation: Tail Instead Of Legs (Infrequently, Slightly Impairing)
 25 Psychological Limitation: Utterly Loyal To King Cobra (Very Common, Total)
 15 Psychological Limitation: Thinks She's A Reincarnation Of Gorgon (Stheno) From Classical Mythology (Uncommon, Total)
 15 Social Limitation: Secret Identity (Zanita Stefanos) (Frequently, Major)
 20 Social Limitation: Subject To Orders (Very Frequently, Major)
 134 Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 479

Background/History: An orphan raised in Athens, Zanita Stefanos spent the first fourteen years of her life in an orphanage. An outstanding student of exceptional beauty with a passion for the classics of ancient Greece, she was often used as a "poster child" for orphanage fundraising campaigns. During one of these fundraisers she came to the attention of Duchess Henrietta von Drotte, a European corporate mogul well-known for her philanthropy... and less well-known as one of VIPER's secret leaders. The Duchess was exploring the possibilities of a new operation code-named *Generation Viper* recently submitted for her consideration by a team of sociologists and cultural anthropolo-



GORGON PLOT SEEDS

Gorgon hears of the woman Medusa, a member of PSI. She slithers out from where ever she's hiding to investigate — could it really be her former sister reborn? What happens when the two meet? Does Gorgon punish the woman who's usurped her sister's name and battle the rest of PSI? Or does Medusa cunningly convince Gorgon she truly is her sister reborn in modern times?

A PC stumbles upon a photograph of a recent find outside Athens: an ancient shield of bronze with a gorgon's face embossed on its front. And the face is the spitting image of Gorgon. Could she really be the reincarnation of a mythological figure from ancient Greece... and if so, what does this mean for her powers, and for COIL?

A PC's relative disappears. She was last seen visiting a penpal in the Swiss Alps. The PC stumbles on information about Generation Viper, but can only find one clue: the woman who later became Gorgon. Can the PC abduct Gorgon from King Cobra's clutches? And then can he help her regain her memory?

gists in her employ. The idea behind Generation Viper was to recruit prepubescent children, preferably those without family ties, and groom them to become the next generation's cultural icons and pop stars. They would only have the most tenuous ties to VIPER itself; their purpose was to subvert the *zeitgeist* of Europe's next generation, infecting it with attitudes and beliefs that would make their fans and admirers more open to VIPER recruitment: greed, lust for power, and open contempt for legitimate authority. With its opportunity for good public relations and very limited exposure of her criminal connections, von Drotte gave the go-ahead for the project, and though Zanita was a little older than the researchers recommended, the Duchess chose her for the project.

With thirty-three other children, mostly of Eastern European extraction, Zanita traveled to a remote chateau in the Swiss Alps, where VIPER had established a school called the Institute for Advanced Children. The children were divided into classes based on talents and predilections: pop musicians, television personalities, supermodels, artists, writers, and movie stars. In its own way, the training was grueling... yet slowly but surely many of the children were transformed into darlings of the media and youth culture. Only a handful either refused or were unable to conform, and among these was Zanita. She was homesick and had become a poor student. She refused to learn proper etiquette and alter her accent to something more acceptable, more "cute" than her heavy Greek one. She found frequent opportunities to rebel... and she was a bad influence on her peers. After two years her instructors deemed her too old and too set in her ways to mold into the type of person required by Generation Viper.

All of which left von Drotte with a problem, since she needed a way to remove Zanita and other failed candidates from public scrutiny and none of them were suitable as VIPER agents. Project Mendel seemed the perfect solution; it had a high casualty rate, and Snake Gulch was far from Europe. At the age of 16, Zanita found herself along with five others on a plane headed for New Mexico.

The rejects from Generation Viper were the first teenagers Blank had the opportunity to experiment on. He wondered how the pubescent metabolism coupled with future physical changes would affect the outcome of his experiments. The other five died, but by the time he experimented on Zanita he had isolated the lethal anomalies in his subjects and had high hopes for the girl. He put off his final work until he defected from VIPER and transformed himself into King Cobra. His patience was well-rewarded. First injected with discrete amounts of irradiated serpent venom, then subjected to the Coil-Gene Touch, Zanita underwent a dramatic change. Some would consider it a monstrous and horrible transformation; King Cobra considered it magnificent, his greatest accomplishment. The beautiful young woman became the terrifying Gorgon: half-woman, half-snake. Strong, fast, and brutal, she was a glory in King Cobras eyes and a testament to his superior intellectual

prowess. In her own eyes she had become a gorgon from mythology; Zanita Stefanos disappeared and Stheno took her place.

Personality/Motivation: A dramatic physical transformation, such as the one undergone by Zanita Stefanos, can't help but have psychological consequences. Add to that the mental changes wrought by the Coil-Gene Touch and she is hardly the same person at all. She's forgotten her entire past and even her name. She believes herself to be the reincarnation of the Gorgon from Greek myth, Stheno (whose name means "strong"), and King Cobra does nothing to dispel this delusion.

Quote: "A hero once slew my sister. You will be less fortunate."

Powers/Tactics: A combination of strength and size is Gorgon's primary power. Her upper body is enormously strong, on par with bricks like Ironclad and Black Diamond. The strength of her lower body — a twenty-foot long tail — is only exceeded by some of the strongest in the Champions Universe. Once caught in Gorgon's coils, few superheroes can escape by main force. When Grabbing an opponent, she typically attempts a Sweep to Grab both the arms and legs and uses her Levels to offset any penalties. Once she has successfully Grabbed her foe, she simply squeezes until he expires.

When faced with multiple opponents, she opens with her Tail Slam (a straightforward Sweep to do damage), then Grabs a Stunned opponent. Against flying opponents, she coils her body beneath her and leaps, attempting to Grab the opponent in the hope her weight drags him down to the ground.

Gorgon can remain underwater for a long time. If possible, she often takes to the water in combat, using it to hide from and surprise her opponents, and perhaps drown them.

Campaign Use: Gorgon serves as King Cobra's muscle; he revels in the horror she creates in his foes. Though she wouldn't Hunt a hero on her own, King Cobra might send her after one of his targets, or to intimidate or coerce someone.

King Cobra suspects that Gorgon is not finished growing yet — after all, Zanita is only 16 and some girls continue grow after that age. To make her more powerful, increase her Strength and size as she enters adulthood. To decrease her powers, eliminate her extra STR with her Tail and make her susceptible to unusual attacks like Ego Blast and Drain by decreasing or eliminating her Mental and Power Defense.

Appearance: Gorgon has a woman's upper body covered with green scales and snake's lower body. The snake-like portion of her body is long, a little over 20 feet, and she often keeps it coiled under her. Her hair is black and straight; it reaches her mid-back. She has long black talons at the tips of her fingers, yellow eyes with slit pupils, and long fangs in a thin-lipped mouth.

KRAIT				
Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
20	STR	10	13-	Lift 400 kg; 4d6 [2]
30	DEX	60	15-	OCV: 10/DCV: 10
24	CON	28	14-	
15	BODY	10	12-	
15	INT	5	12-	PER Roll 12-
15	EGO	10	12-	ECV: 5
20	PRE	10	13-	PRE Attack: 4d6
16	COM	3	12-	
10	PD	6		Total: 20 PD (10 rPD)
10	ED	5		Total: 20 ED (10 rED)
6	SPD	20		Phases: 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12
20	REC	22		
60	END	6		
50	STUN	13		Total Characteristics Cost: 208

Movement: Running: 12"/48"
 Leaping: 8"/16"
 Swimming: 12"/48"

Cost Power **END**

110	<i>Neurokinesis</i> : Multipower, 110-point reserve			
8u	1) <i>Neural Overload</i> : Drain DEX and SPD 3d6, two Characteristics simultaneously (+½), BOECV (Mental Defense applies; +1), Limited Range (25"; +¼)			8
7u	2) <i>Neural Streamlining</i> : Aid DEX and SPD 4d6, two Characteristics simultaneously (+½), BOECV (Mental Defense applies; +1), Limited Range (25"; +¼); Costs Endurance (-½)			11
7u	3) <i>Sensory Shutdown</i> : Sight, Hearing, Smell/Taste, Touch, Radio, and Mental Sense Groups Flash 5d6, BOECV (Mental Defense applies; +1); Normal Limited Range (25"; -½)			10
5u	4) <i>Neural Surge</i> : Ego Attack 7d6; Normal Limited Range (25"; -½)			7
	<i>Martial Arts</i> : VIPER Brawling			
	Maneuver	OCV	DCV	Notes
4	Block	+2	+2	Block, Abort
4	Dodge	—	+5	Dodge, Affects All Attacks, Abort
4	Punch	+0	+2	10d6 Strike
3	Throw	+0	+1	6d6 + vel/5; Target Falls
8	+2 Damage Classes (already added in)			
20	<i>Body Suit</i> : Armor (10 PD/10 ED); OIF (-½)			0
34	<i>Deaden Pain</i> : Physical and Energy Damage Reduction, Resistant, 50%; STUN Only (-½), Costs Endurance (only to activate; -¼)			6
15	<i>Shielded Neural Paths</i> : Mental Defense (18 points total)			0
15	<i>Shielded Neural Paths</i> : Power Defense (15 points total)			0
17	<i>Evolved Physiology</i> : Running +6" (12" total), x4 Noncombat			1
27	<i>Burst Of Speed (Running)</i> : Running +20" (32" total); Increased Endurance Cost (x2 END; -½)			8
15	<i>Evolved Physiology</i> : Swimming +10"			

	(12" total), x4 Noncombat	1
13	<i>Burst Of Speed (Swimming)</i> : Swimming +20" (32" total); Increased Endurance Cost (x2 END; -½)	4
4	<i>Evolved Physiology</i> : Leaping +4" (8" total)	1
35	<i>Sense Neural Activity</i> : Detect Neural Activity 15- (no Sense Group), Discriminatory, Increased Arc Of Perception (360 Degrees), Range, Sense, Targeting	0

Perks

30	Contacts: 30 points' worth of Contacts in the mercenary/criminal world	
----	--	--

Talents

4	<i>Quicken Nervous System</i> : Lightning Reflexes: +4 DEX to act first with All Attacks; Costs Endurance (-½)	1
6	Simulate Death 15-	

Skills

6	+2 with COIL Blasters	
6	+2 with VIPER Brawling	
6	+2 with Neurokinesis Multipower	
13	<i>Quicken Nervous System</i> : +4 DCV; Costs Endurance (-½)	2



KRAIT PLOT SEEDS

PRIMUS surveillance photos show Krait meeting with VIPER-X... or at least, a man who looks like Aziz Singh meeting with one who looks like Kevin Armstrong. What game could possibly be afoot? Could the animosity between Krait and VIPER-X be some kind of elaborate plot? Is VIPER-X a victim of the Coil-Gene Touch? And when the PCs corner both villains and they claim to be working for PRIMUS, who's telling the truth?

The PCs have captured King Cobra, but COIL remains active — and amazingly it seems content to let its leader rot in jail. Could Krait be running COIL now? And if so, how does he control the agents? Is he merely lying to them about King Cobra... or is some deeper power at work?

After the events in *Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth*, the PCs decide to eliminate COIL once and for all while it's still relatively small and weak. But to do this, they need insider information on its activities and hideouts. Captured in the Hothouse, Krait is in jail with all the knowledge the PCs could ever want about COIL locked in his head... are they willing to make a deal with a devil to stop a greater evil?

- 1 KS: The Pilot World 8-
- 3 KS: The Superhuman World 12-
- 3 KS: Supervillains 12-
- 3 KS: VIPER 12-
- 3 Linguist
- 3 1) Language: English (idiomatic; Punjabi is native)
- 3 2) Language: Urdu (idiomatic)
- 1 3) Language: German (fluent conversation)
- 1 4) Language: French (fluent conversation)
- 1 5) Language: Chinese (fluent conversation)
- 3 Mechanics 12-
- 7 Persuasion 15-
- 3 PS: VIPER Agent 12-
- 7 Shadowing 14-
- 3 Stealth 15-
- 3 Streetwise 13-
- 7 Tactics 14-
- 3 Teamwork 15-
- 6 TF: Common Motorized Ground Vehicles, Small Planes, Large Planes, Combat Aircraft, Helicopters
- 8 WF: Small Arms, Blades, Vehicle Weapons (5 vehicles)
- 2 Weaponsmith (VIPER Vehicular Weapons) 12-

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 533

Total Cost: 741

200+ Disadvantages

- 10 Dependence: must drink neural dampening serum once a day or suffer 2d6 Normal Damage (Uncommon)
- 30 Hunted: VIPER 11- (Mo Pow, NCI, Capture/Kill)
- 25 Hunted: UNTIL 8- (Mo Pow, NCI, Capture)
- 10 Hunted: COIL 11- (Mo Pow, Watching)
- 10 Psychological Limitation: Hatred Of VIPER And VIPER-X (Common, Moderate)
- 15 Psychological Limitation: Self-Centered (Very Common, Moderate)
- 15 Reputation: traitor to VIPER, 11- (Extreme)
- 15 Social Limitation: Public Identity (Aziz Singh) (Frequently, Major)
- 20 Social Limitation: Subject To Orders (Very Frequently, Major)
- 15 Vulnerability: 1½ x STUN from Electricity (Very Common)
- 376 Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 741

Background/History: Born and raised in poverty in the Punjab region of Pakistan, Aziz Singh enlisted in the Pakistani army as soon as he was able, joining his cousin and closest friend, Kalat Barkhan. He was under his cousin's command when Kalat brutally tortured and murdered several Indian soldiers. Facing court-martial, Kalat fled into the arms of VIPER, and Aziz joined him. VIPER split them up and sent them abroad.

Aziz had always lived in the shadow of his cousin, but now he came into his own and his natural talents as a tactician and leader came to the fore. He trained as a Vehicle Combat Specialist, then after two years of impeccable service

cross-trained as a Scarlet Serpent. During this time he came to the attention of Kevin Armstrong — VIPER-X, the leader of VIPER Mobile Squadron-Alpha. Aziz joined VMS-Alpha, taking the codename Krait (a deadly serpent indigenous to the Indian subcontinent).

Despite his membership in VMS-Alpha, Aziz was discontent. Ambitious and hungry for power, he felt his career in VIPER had stalled. The focus of his anger became Kevin Armstrong himself — the all-American “golden child” of VIPER. Aziz hated everything about him: his enhanced physiology, his status as a former Silver Avenger for PRIMUS (and how important that made him to VIPER), his condescending nobility (and, in Aziz's mind, racism), his ridiculous code of honor.

During this time Aziz's cousin, Kalat, came into command of the Sand Castle, an important VIPER base in the Thar Desert in Pakistan that focused on studies into superhuman mutation. Aziz wanted to remove Armstrong from VIPER — permanently — but he needed an edge. He convinced Kalat to allow him to be a test subject in a new project. The project's goal was to activate the gene sequence that led to the birth of a mutant. The scientists determined Aziz was a viable candidate with the latent potential for superpowers. They subjected him to a series of DNA-altering retroviruses and growth hormones, and after several weeks his latent ability, termed *neurokinesis* by the scientists, became active. He could manipulate the electrical impulses produced by the human nervous system. The scientists thought he could only do this to himself, thus speeding up his reflexes and reaction time; Aziz kept his power to control others' nervous systems a secret. Although he experienced side effects from the process — without a neural dampening serum, his nervous system grew overloaded with sensations, and jolts of electricity severely disrupted his ability to concentrate — Aziz soon rejoined VMS-Alpha.

Then Aziz put in motion his plan to discredit Armstrong. He leaked Armstrong's name and history to the media. When the media began to question how it was possible that this all-American boy could betray his country, Aziz planted evidence that Armstrong hadn't betrayed his country at all — he was a PRIMUS undercover agent! The leaders of VIPER bought the story hook, line, and sinker — the idea of a Silver Avenger defecting never sat well with some among the Council Of Thirty — and Armstrong fled for his life.

Now the leader of VMS-Alpha, Aziz enjoyed the next few years as one of the most respected agents in VIPER, but events outside of his control eventually derailed his rise to the top. The intervention of the Serpent-God, Nama, brought Armstrong back into the organization... and this time, it was Aziz's turn to escape VIPER's vengeance.

Like Armstrong before him, Aziz disappeared into the mercenary underworld, where he made contacts with various criminal organizations like ARGENT. Still operating under the name Krait, he spent several years working for whoever paid him the most. Due to his extensive contacts, he soon

became as much a go-between and supplier of manpower and high-tech gear as a field mercenary. When Timothy Blank contacted him about a weapons purchase, Krait quickly deduced what Blank was up to. Intrigued by the idea of toppling VIPER once and for all, he became closely involved in COIL, and is now one of King Cobra's most important followers.

Personality/Motivation: Krait is as cold-blooded as his namesake. He cares nothing for anyone but himself, and tends to view anyone who's not obviously less powerful or influential than he as a rival. His experiences with VIPER have left him with a bitter hatred of that organization in general, and VIPER-X in particular; he could easily develop a similar hatred of PCs who thwart him. In short, there's almost nothing likeable about him.

Quote: "The venom of the krait... first it makes you blind. Soon you can't hear or feel... can't even smell. Then you're at my mercy."

Powers/Tactics: Krait's main power is neurokinesis — the mental ability to control human neural pathways. He uses this ability on his own body to permanently give himself superhuman speed and endurance, and he can augment those qualities even further on a temporary basis. He can also affect other people, either to enhance or impede. He can even completely shut down another person's senses for a few seconds, or cause brief, painful seizures.

In battle, Krait opens with Sensory Shutdown against a martial artist or speedster, then uses his fighting skills to pummel his opponent into unconsciousness. He tries to limit his use of Neurokinesis to where it is most effective — the powers are a considerable drain on his END and he tries to conserve his strength. He always keeps one eye on potential escape routes; with enemies like his, he has no desire to be captured, and so he saves enough strength to get away if the battle takes a turn for the worse.

Krait only uses Neural Streamlining on his allies when the target is integral to a given battle or tactical goal — he trusts few people and has little desire to help others, but he also has a good head for tactics and won't let his distrust interfere with winning a fight against someone who wants to capture him.

Campaign Use: Krait's job in COIL is to oversee operations: obtain supplies, keep open lines of communications with various underworld contacts, find locations for safehouses and bases, and so on. As the organization's link with the rest of the crimi-

nal underground, he's vital to the smooth functioning of COIL. King Cobra long ago attempted to use his Coil-Gene Touch to make Krait unquestionably loyal to him (claiming it was only to ease some of the side effects of Krait's neurokinesis), but Krait knew what was going on and used his powers (claiming it was an instinctive reaction he had no control over) to prevent King Cobra's touch from taking effect.

For the time being, King Cobra and Krait share a similar goal, but each prepares for the day when it's time to betray the other. Currently, Krait enjoys the upper hand since COIL is in "startup mode" and King Cobra badly needs Krait's contacts. King Cobra's one bargaining chip is the neural dampening formula that Krait requires to keep his powers in check. The formula is difficult to distill, but not impossible, and King Cobra knows it provides him with only limited influence over Krait. King Cobra has spent much time wondering how he can negate Krait's immunity to the Coil-Gene Touch by doctoring the neural dampening formula. But in this game of cat and mouse, Krait remains ever-wary of such a trick....

Once COIL is firmly established, the balance of power will shift and Krait will find himself less and less invaluable. Krait has several contingency plans in the works, but will stick around as long as possible since COIL seems his best hope of striking back at VIPER and Armstrong.

To weaken Krait, reduce his SPD to 5 and the points in his Multipower reserve to 90, or even 80, Active Points. To make him tougher, increase his Multipower reserve and add the Advantage *Reduced Endurance* to his Multipower slots.

Krait makes for a deadly Hunter. First he attempts to discredit the superhero (as he did with Armstrong) and separate him from anyone who would offer protection. Once the quarry is on the run, Krait uses his extensive contacts to make his life extremely difficult. His experience with Armstrong taught Krait an important lesson: don't leave a job unfinished. Once he has the superhero cornered, Krait doesn't stop until he's dead.

Appearance: A leanly-muscled Pakistani man, Krait wears a black body suit with red wavy lines running up the legs and arms. He wears a black mask over his nose and mouth, leaving exposed his brown eyes and long black hair. Krait speaks quietly, slowly, precisely, and without an accent. Even in the midst of battle when he must shout to be heard, he rarely sounds flustered or panicked — mainly because he never feels either of those emotions.

SLITHER PLOT SEEDS

Slither decides it's time to get his revenge on Durak and Eurostar... and his actions lead to a war between those villains and COIL. Europe barely survived the VIPER-Eurostar War, how will it fare this time? And is there anything your superheroes can do to stop it?

Slither's transformation continues and soon he finds himself taking on the shape of all the people he's killed. To see one of his victims in the mirror each morning, a different one every day, is more than he can handle and he snaps... breaking free of the Coil Gene's influence. Or at least this is the story Slither tells the heroes! Do they dare trust this sadistic murderer even if he is offering COIL on a silver platter?

Slither begins contacting old comrades from the Stasi and KGB. In return for joining COIL, these former spies, now old men, will receive renewed youth and physical prowess. The PCs learn of this, but are they in time to stop it? And what does COIL want with old Warsaw Pact intelligence agents anyway?

SLITHER				
Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
20	STR	10	13-	Lift 400 kg; 4d6 [2]
24	DEX	42	14-	OCV: 8/DCV: 8
30	CON	40	15-	
15	BODY	10	12-	
12	INT	2	11-	PER Roll 11-
12	EGO	4	11-	ECV: 4
20	PRE	10	13-	PRE Attack: 4d6
6	COM	-2	10-	
20	PD	16		Total: 20 PD (10 rPD)
20	ED	14		Total: 20 ED (10 rED)
6	SPD	26		Phases: 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12
12	REC	4		
60	END	0		
40	STUN	0	Total Characteristics Cost: 176	
Movement:		Running:	6"/12"	
Cost	Power			END
37	Battering Tentacles: HA +4d6, Continuous (+1), Damage Shield (+½), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼); Hand-To-Hand Attack (-½)			2
33	Tentacle Wrap: Entangle 6d6, 6 DEF, Entangle And Character Both Take Damage (+¼), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼); Feedback (Slither takes all damage done to Entangle; -1), No Range (-½), Cannot Form Barriers (-¼)			3
36	Tentacle Choke: HKA 1d6 (2d6 with STR), NND (defense is rigid mouth covering; +1), Does BODY (+1); No Knockback (-¼)			4
Martial Arts: VIPER Brawling				
	Maneuver	OCV	DCV	Notes
4	Block	+2	+2	Block, Abort
4	Dodge	—	+5	Dodge, Affects All Attacks, Abort
4	Punch	+0	+2	6d6 Strike
3	Throw	+0	+1	4d6 + vel/5; Target Falls
10	Resilient Skin: Damage Resistance (10 PD/10 ED)			0
25	Regeneration: Healing 3d6 (Regeneration; 3 BODY per Turn), Can Heal Limbs, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), Persistent (+½); Extra Time (1 Turn; -1¼), Self Only (-½)			0
4	Tentacles: Extra Limbs (up to 20); Limited Manipulation (-¼)			0
30	Stretching: Stretching 6", Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); No Noncombat Stretching (-¼), Limited Body Parts (tentacles; -¼)			0
23	Malleable Form: Shape Shift (Sight and Touch Groups, any humanoid shape)			2
Talents				
9	Ambidexterity (no Off Hand penalty)			
4	Double-Jointed			
Skills				
6	+2 with COIL Blasters			
10	+2 HTH			
7	Concealment 13-			

5	<i>Chameleon Camouflage:</i> +4 to Concealment; Self Only (-½), Costs Endurance (to activate; -¼)	1
7	Contortionist 16-	
5	Demolitions 12-	
9	Disguise 14-	
5	Interrogation 14-	
2	KS: Military/Mercenary/Terrorist World 11-	
1	KS: The Superhuman World 8-	
2	KS: The Local Underworld 11-	
2	KS: VIPER 11-	
2	Language: English (fluent; German is native)	
2	PS: VIPER Agent 11-	
3	Security Systems 11-	
3	Shadowing 11-	
3	Stealth 14-	
3	<i>Chameleon Camouflage:</i> +2 to Stealth; Costs Endurance (to activate; -¼)	1
3	Streetwise 13-	
3	WF: Small Arms, Blades	
5	Tactics 12-	
5	Teamwork 15-	

Total Powers & Skills Cost: 319

Total Cost: 495

200+ Disadvantages

25	Enraged: when he takes BODY (Common), go 11-, recover 8-	
10	Hunted: COIL 11- (Mo Pow, Watching)	
30	Hunted: VIPER 11- (Mo Pow, NCI, Capture/Kill)	
25	Hunted: UNTIL 8- (Mo Pow, NCI, Capture)	
15	Psychological Limitation: Sadistic (Very Common, Moderate)	
25	Psychological Limitation: Utterly Loyal To King Cobra (Very Common, Total)	
20	Social Limitation: Subject To Orders (Very Frequently, Major)	
15	Social Limitation: Public Identity (Uwe Meyer) (Frequently, Major)	
130	Experience Points	

Total Disadvantage Points: 495

Background/History: In 1989 most Germans celebrated the destruction of the Berlin Wall — but among those not rejoicing was Uwe Meyer, an agent for the *Stasi*, the East German secret police. Soon East and West Germany were reunited, and many *Stasi* agents (including Uwe) disappeared into the criminal underground to avoid prosecution. This was a recruiting bonanza for VIPER, and the resourceful and devious Uwe, a specialist in assassination and border penetration, was one of the organization's prize acquisitions.

In 1994 Uwe's handler ordered him to infiltrate Eurostar. VIPER leadership wished to gather intelligence about Fiacho and his comrades before launching what would become known as the VIPER-Eurostar War. Using his credentials as a former *Stasi* agent, Uwe got in touch with the Whip. He gained Eurostar's trust, first as just general muscle, then as a demolitions expert. All the while, he remained faithful to VIPER.

But no one told Uwe about VIPER's planned ambush. Afterward, Fiacho searched his organiza-

for spies... and one he uncovered was Uwe Meyer. Fiacho's punishment for these spies was severe: beatings from Durak, followed by mental torture from Mentalla. Eurostar dumped the broken men and women outside a VIPER Nest in Munich to, as Fiacho phrased it, "foreshadow the fate of VIPER in Europe."

Uwe survived the ordeal with his mind intact, though he lost an arm, leg, and most of the use of his remaining hand. VIPER transferred the crippled Uwe out of Europe and into Asia to train new recruits in intelligence and covert operations. Discontented with his new job, when he heard rumors of Project Mendel, specifically about Blank's sideline research in reptilian regeneration, he volunteered.

Blank accepted Uwe and had him transferred to Snake Gulch. Through pre-experiment interviews, Blank discovered Uwe nursed a grudge against VIPER for leaving him out in the cold during the war on Eurostar... thus making him a perfect COIL recruit. After subjecting Uwe to the Coil-Gene Touch, Blank injected him with a retrovirus engineered from lizard DNA. Uwe gained the ability to not only regenerate lost limbs, but also healed at a rate much faster than other men. Furthermore, he gained conscious control over his body mass — the ability to change his appearance and to extrude scaly tentacles from his body. The process mentally unhinged him, making him totally sadistic, but to King Cobra this was a boon. He named his newest subject Slither and put him in charge of infiltration and covert operations.

Personality/Motivation: Before becoming Slither, Uwe Meyer was a talented intelligence agent perfect for infiltration and assassination: self-reliant, cunning, cool under pressure, and cold-blooded. He had little in the way of personality, so personal issues never got in the way of accomplishing his goals or carrying out his orders. He performed his mission and never flinched from the deeds, however heinous or violent, required of him.

As Slither, he's grown increasingly sadistic and takes great pleasure in others' pain. This could become a liability if his sadistic side were to overrule his reason and make him kill someone better left alive, or if it caused him to expose himself to take advantage of an enemy's weakness, but for the time being his absolute loyalty to King Cobra keeps him in check. King Cobra knows he has to give Slither precise instructions, but if he ever forgot to do so or if Slither encountered a situation outside his orders, who knows what might happen?

His beating at Durak's hands has left an indelible mark on Slither's psyche. He quickly goes berserk if he takes BODY damage.

Quote: "Du! Komm hier!"

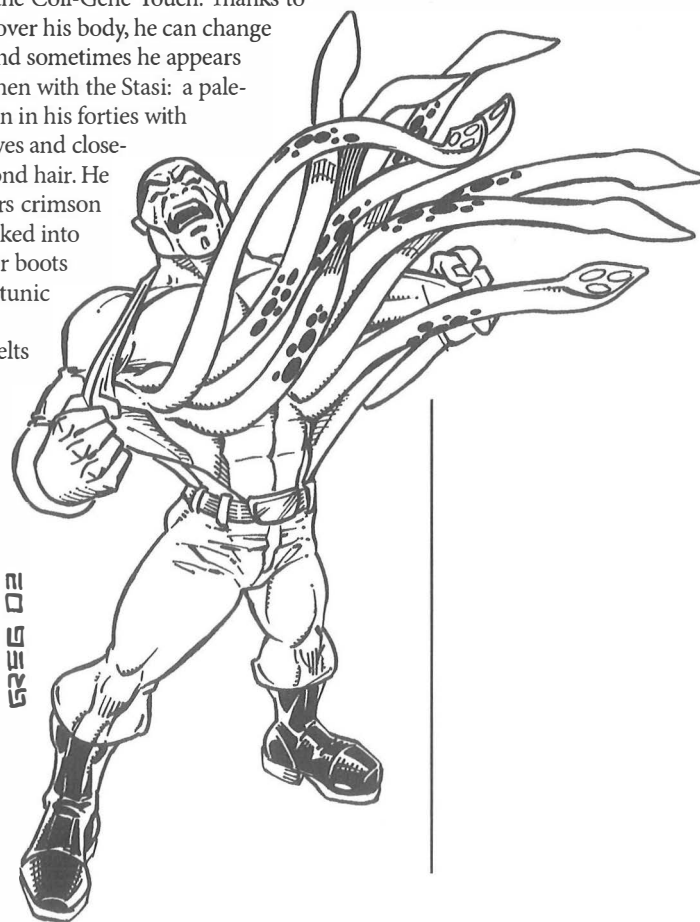
Powers/Tactics: Slither's powers involve his ability to control and shape his body mass, as well as regenerate damage done to him. He can extrude up to twenty scaly tentacles from his torso. Each can reach nearly forty feet away. In combat he creates many of these tentacles, both from his chest and back, and whips them around so that anyone who comes close gets pummeled.

Tactically Slither usually reaches for an opponent, Entangles him, and then drags him in close. He cares very little about taking hits, trusting in his Regeneration and toughness to keep him standing. While the opponent is Entangled, Slither attempts his favorite attack, the Tentacle Choke: he extrudes a single tentacle, then forces it between his opponent's jaws and down his throat. Even most superhumans have a difficult time surviving such an attack for long.

Campaign Use: Slither's role in COIL is to oversee intelligence and infiltration operations. He also serves as King Cobra's personal assassin. Slither is most likely to Hunt King Cobra's enemies as a part of COIL's plans. His Shape Shift ability allows him to infiltrate (though not to precisely imitate others' features); his experience with intelligence operations gives him the tools necessary to make his infiltration highly damaging to his target. He prefers to engineer circumstances that allow him to personally slay whomever he Hunts, usually with his Tentacle Choke after a period of torture.

To make Slither more powerful, change his Battering Tentacles to cost zero END and increase his STR by 10-15 points. Also increase the dice in his Tentacle Choke. To make him less powerful, decrease his SPD to 5 and lower his PD and ED to 15, thus forcing him to spend more time taking Recoveries and healing damage.

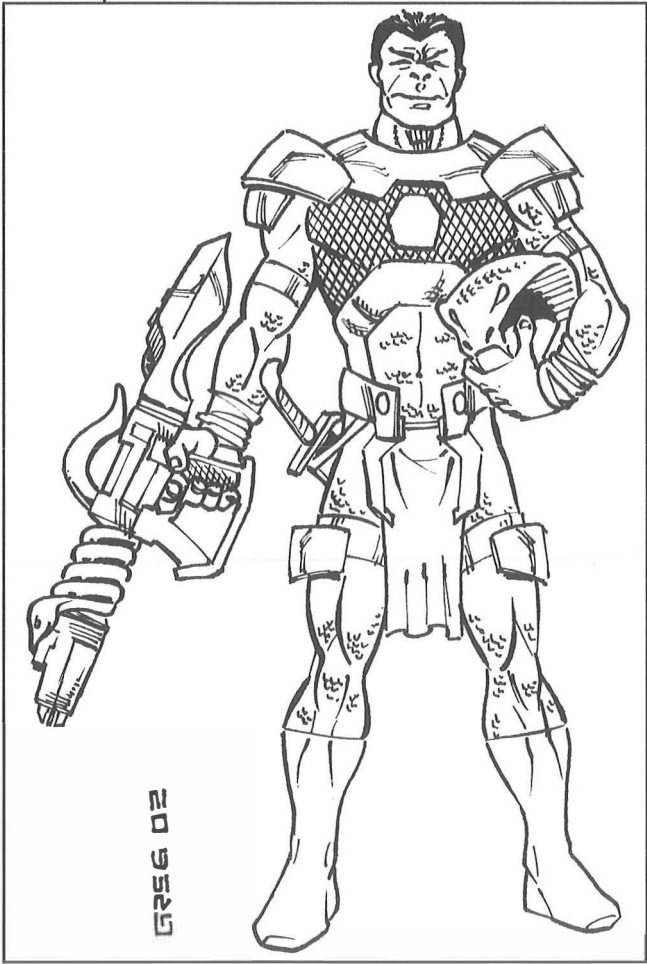
Appearance: Slither has extremely ophidian features: scaly skin, two slits for a nose, no hair, and yellow eyes with slit pupils. On the whole, his features are more snake-like than those of COIL agents and other subjects of the Coil-Gene Touch. Thanks to his control over his body, he can change his shape, and sometimes he appears as he did when with the Stasi: a pale-skinned man in his forties with hard blue eyes and close-cropped blond hair. He usually wears crimson trousers tucked into black leather boots and a loose tunic of the same color that belts around the waist; in combat he shrugs out of his tunic to unleash his tentacles. He speaks with a heavy German accent.



COIL AGENT				
Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
15	STR	5	12-	Lift 200 kg; 3d6 [1]
16	DEX	18	12-	OCV: 5/DCV: 5
16	CON	12	12-	
12	BODY	4	11-	
13	INT	3	12-	PER Roll 12-
11	EGO	2	11-	ECV: 4
15	PRE	5	12-	PRE Attack: 3d6
8	COM	-1	11-	
6	PD	3		Total: 12 PD (8 rPD)
6	ED	3		Total: 12 ED (8 rED)
4	SPD	14		Phases: 3, 6, 9, 12
8	REC	4		
32	END	0		
30	STUN	2		Total Characteristics Cost: 74

Movement: Running: 8"/16"

Cost	Powers	END		
26	COIL Blaster Rifle: Choose one of the options listed below	var		
20	COIL Concussor Grenades: Energy Blast 8d6, Explosion (+½); OAF (-1), Range Based On STR (-¼), 6 Charges (-¾)	[6]		
7	COIL Machete: HKA 1d6 (2d6 with STR); OAF (-1), No Knockback (-¼)	1		
Martial Arts: Generic				
	Maneuver	OCV	DCV	Notes
4	Block	+2	+2	Block, Abort
4	Dodge	—	+5	Dodge, Affects All Attacks,



5	Kick	-2	+1	7d6 Strike
4	Punch	+0	+2	5d6 Strike
3	Throw	+0	+1	xd6 + v/5; Target Falls
1	Use Art with Blades			
2	Scaly Skin: Damage Resistance (2 PD/2 ED)			0
9	COIL Combat Armor: Armor (6 PD/6 ED); OIF (-½), Activation Roll 14- (does not protect Hit Locations 3-7; -½)			0
3	COIL Helmet Protection: Armor (4 PD/4 ED); OIF (-½), Activation Roll 8- (only protects Hit Locations 3-5; -2)			0
6	COIL Helmet Communication System: HRRP (Radio Group); OIF (-½), Affected As Sight And Hearing Group As Well As Radio Group (-½)			0
4	Swiftness Of The Serpent: Running +2" (8" total)			1

Perks

- 2 Membership: agent of COIL

Skills

- 16 +2 with All Combat
- 1 KS: The Superhuman World 8-
- 2 KS: COIL 11-
- 2 KS: VIPER 11-
- 2 PS: COIL Agent 11-
- 3 Stealth 12-
- 3 Streetwise 12-
- 3 Teamwork 12-
- 3 WF: Small Arms, Blades
- 15 15 points' worth of Skills from the following list: Combat Driving, Combat Piloting, Combat Skill Levels, Computer Programming, Concealment, Deduction, Demolitions, Electronics, Fast Draw, Forgery, Gambling, Interrogation, Lockpicking, Paramedics, Persuasion, Security Systems, Shadowing, Survival, Systems Operation, Tactics, Teamwork, any Background Skill

Total Powers & Skills Cost: 150

Total Cost: 224

50+ Disadvantages

- 10 Distinctive Features: serpentine skin and features (Concealable With Difficulty; Noticed And Recognizable)
- 5 Distinctive Features: COIL uniform (Easily Concealed; Noticed And Recognizable)
- 20 Hunted: VIPER 8- (Mo Pow, NCI, Capture/Kill)
- 10 Hunted: COIL 11- (Mo Pow, Watching)
- 25 Psychological Limitation: Utterly Loyal To King Cobra (Very Common, Total)
- 20 Social Limitation: Subject To Orders (Very Frequently, Major)
- 84 Experience Points or Disadvantages specific to the individual agent

Total Disadvantage Points: 224

COIL BLASTER RIFLES

Cost Power

- 26 *Standard COIL Blaster Rifle:* Energy Blast 7d6, Autofire (3 shots; +¼), 32 Charges (+¼); OAF (-1)
- 26 *Enhanced COIL Blaster Rifle:* RKA 2d6+1, Autofire (3 shots; +¼), 32 Charges (+¼); OAF (-1)
- 26 *Augmented COIL Blaster Rifle:* RKA 2d6+1, +2 Increased STUN Multiplier (+½); OAF (-1), 16 Charges (-0)
- 26 *COIL Laser Rifle:* RKA 2d6+1, Armor Piercing (+½); OAF (-1), 16 Charges (-0)
- 25 *COIL Tangler Rifle:* Entangle 5d6, 5 DEF; OAF (-1), 16 Charges (-0)
- 25 *COIL Thunderclap Rifle:* Sight and Hearing Group Flash 9d6; OAF (-1), 16 Charges (-0)

Description: As members of COIL — the COBRA Imperial Legion — these agents have undergone King Cobra's mutagenic process. This makes them significantly stronger, tougher, and faster than the average human, or even the average well-trained human, but also gives them disturbing serpentine features: finely-scaled skin; eyes whose pupils have a somewhat more snake-like appearance (though they're not fully snake-like); a disturbing tendency to sniff the air; and so forth. Some agents develop even more serpentine features, such as forked tongues or fully ophidian eyes.

Personality/Motivation: Whatever their background, whatever their life experiences, whatever their training, COIL agents share one overwhelming personality trait: absolute loyalty to King Cobra. This is something he's instilled within them at the genetic level as part of the Coil-Gene treatment; it's easier for one of them to commit suicide than betray his master.

Given the extremes an agent will go to to protect King Cobra, many superheroes underestimate their intelligence and cunning, but in truth they don't lack either.

Powers/Tactics: COIL agents are well-trained and work together well in the field. King Cobra has equipped them with various types of energy rifles (the mix depends upon a squad's mission and the opposition it expects to encounter), as well as grenades and a long, machete-like blade. Typically they team up in twos and threes to watch each others' backs and concentrate fire on specific targets. Since many of the agents and the members of the inner circle came from VIPER originally, they often employ tactics similar to VIPER's.

Appearance: A COIL agent wears a red armored body suit, scaly in appearance. Over this he wears a white loin cloth and bracers reminiscent of King Cobra's. His helmet is gold and in the shape of a stylized cobra's hood. He's usually armed with a blaster rifle; twisting around the barrel of the rifle is an embossed cobra whose head fits over the end of the barrel. Hanging from a wide, leather belt around the agent's waist is a machete. Two bandoliers, hung with grenades, cross his chest.

COIL INFILTRATOR

The character sheet describes a COIL agent, one on whom King Cobra's mutagenic touch has caused a dramatic change in physical appearance. The other type of COIL agent is the COIL infiltrator. These agents can disguise their features and infiltrate organizations to subvert them to COIL's purposes. You can apply the following changes to an appropriate character sheet to create an infiltrator (e.g., use the character sheet for the standard VIPER agent to create a COIL infiltrator created by applying the Coil-Gene Touch to a member of that organization). This set of abilities assumes COIL has trained the infiltrator in the arts of subterfuge; obviously the Coil-Gene Touch does not, by itself, give someone a Skill like Disguise. The infiltrator carries equipment appropriate to his cover.

Cost Abilities

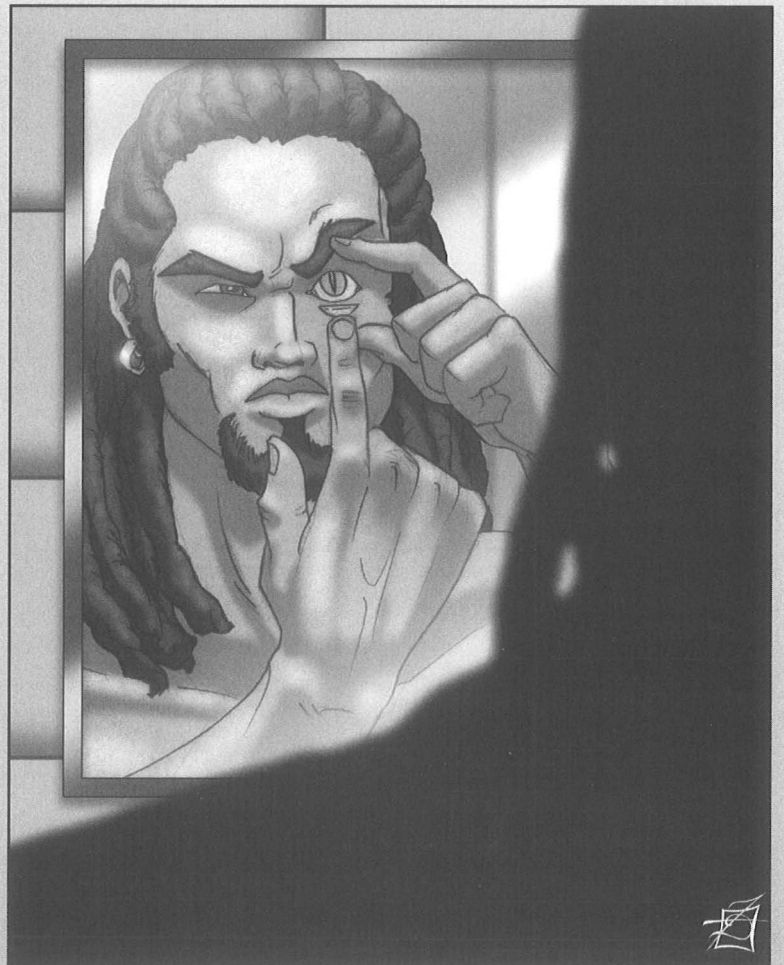
- 2 +2 STR
- 9 +3 DEX
- 4 +2 CON
- 10 *Retractable Fangs:* HKA ½d6
- 5 Disguise (INT/5+1)
- 2 KS: COIL 11-
- 3 Persuasion (PRE/5)

Total Abilities Cost: 35 points.

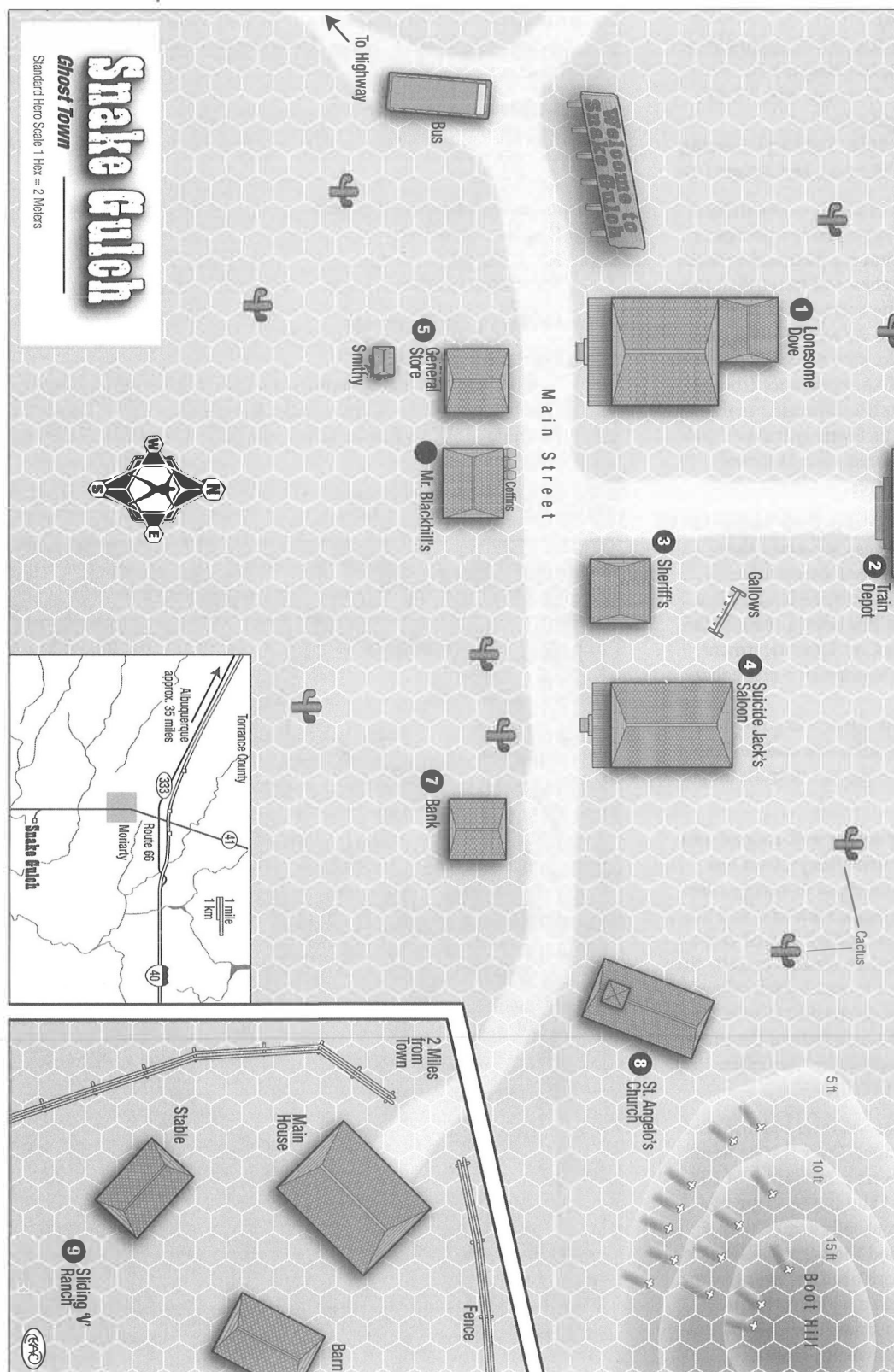
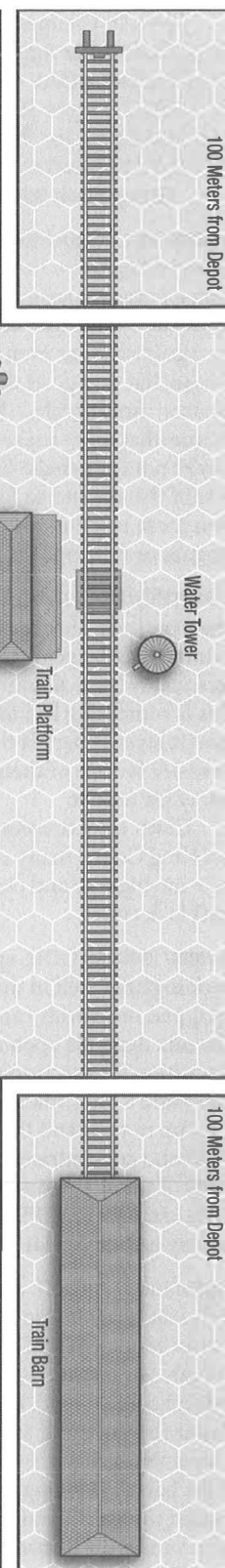
Value Disadvantages

- 10 Distinctive Features: serpentine eyes, retractable fangs, patches of scales (Easily Concealable; Causes Major Reaction)
- 25 Psychological Limitation: Utterly Loyal To King Cobra (Very Common, Total)

Total Disadvantage Points: 35



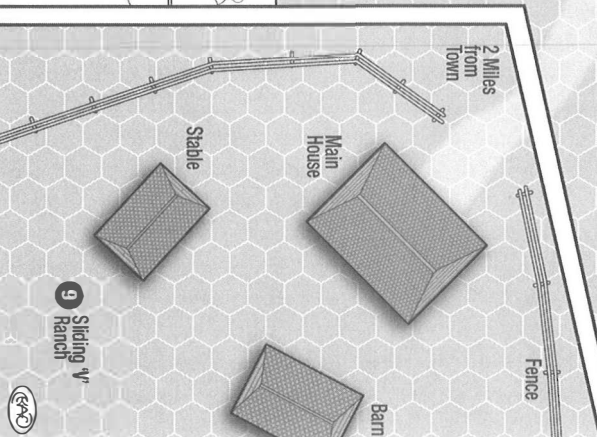
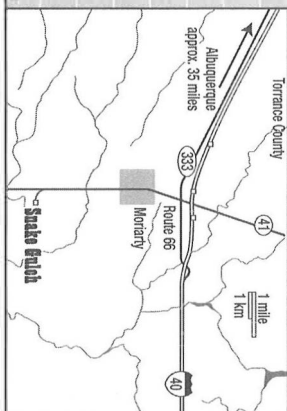
APPENDIX: MAPS



Snake Gulch

Ghost Town

Standard Hero Scale 1 Hex = 2 Meters

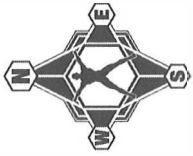
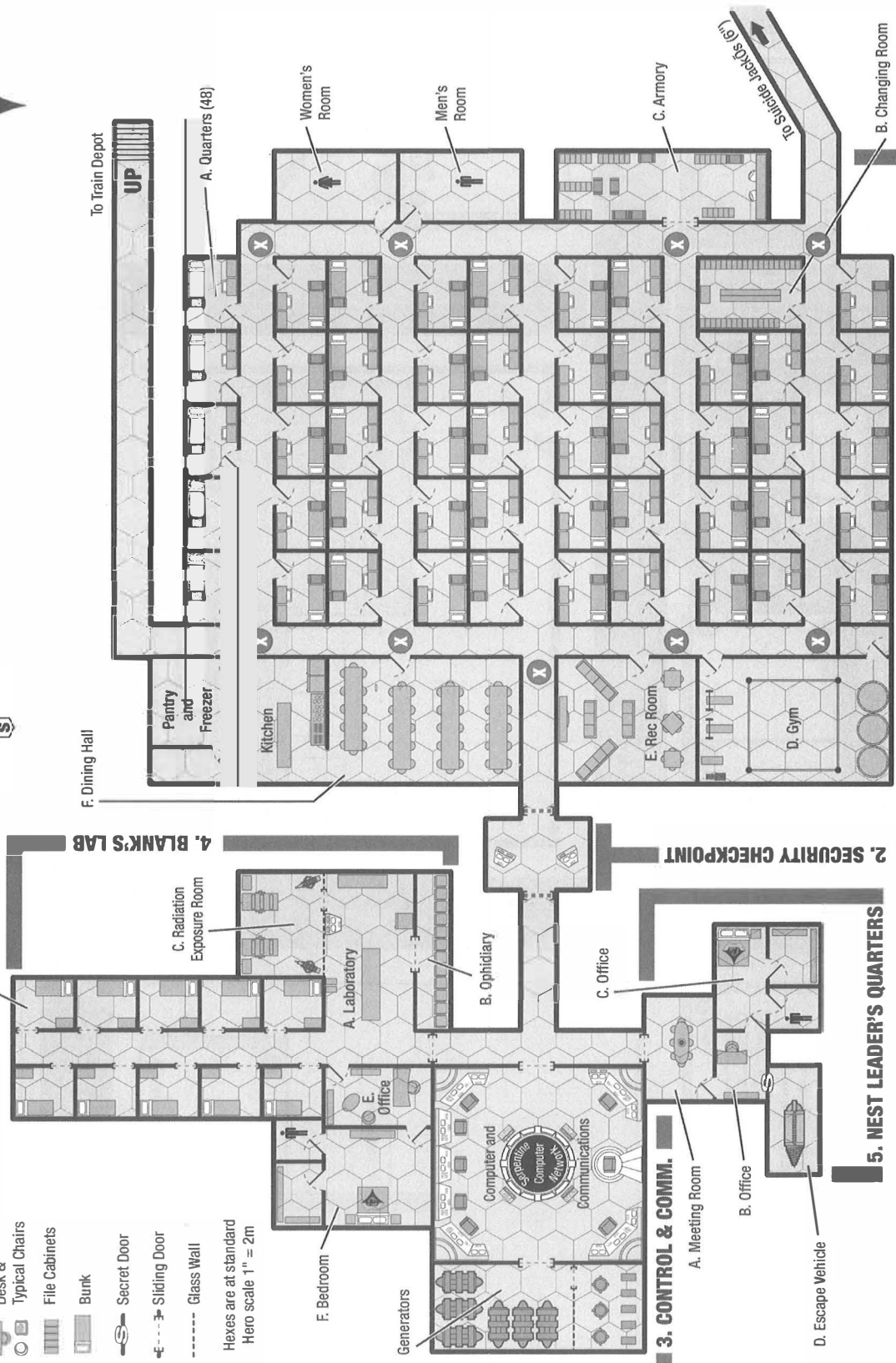


Snake Gulch Nest

New Mexico VIPER Nest



Hexes are at standard
Hero scale 1" = 2m



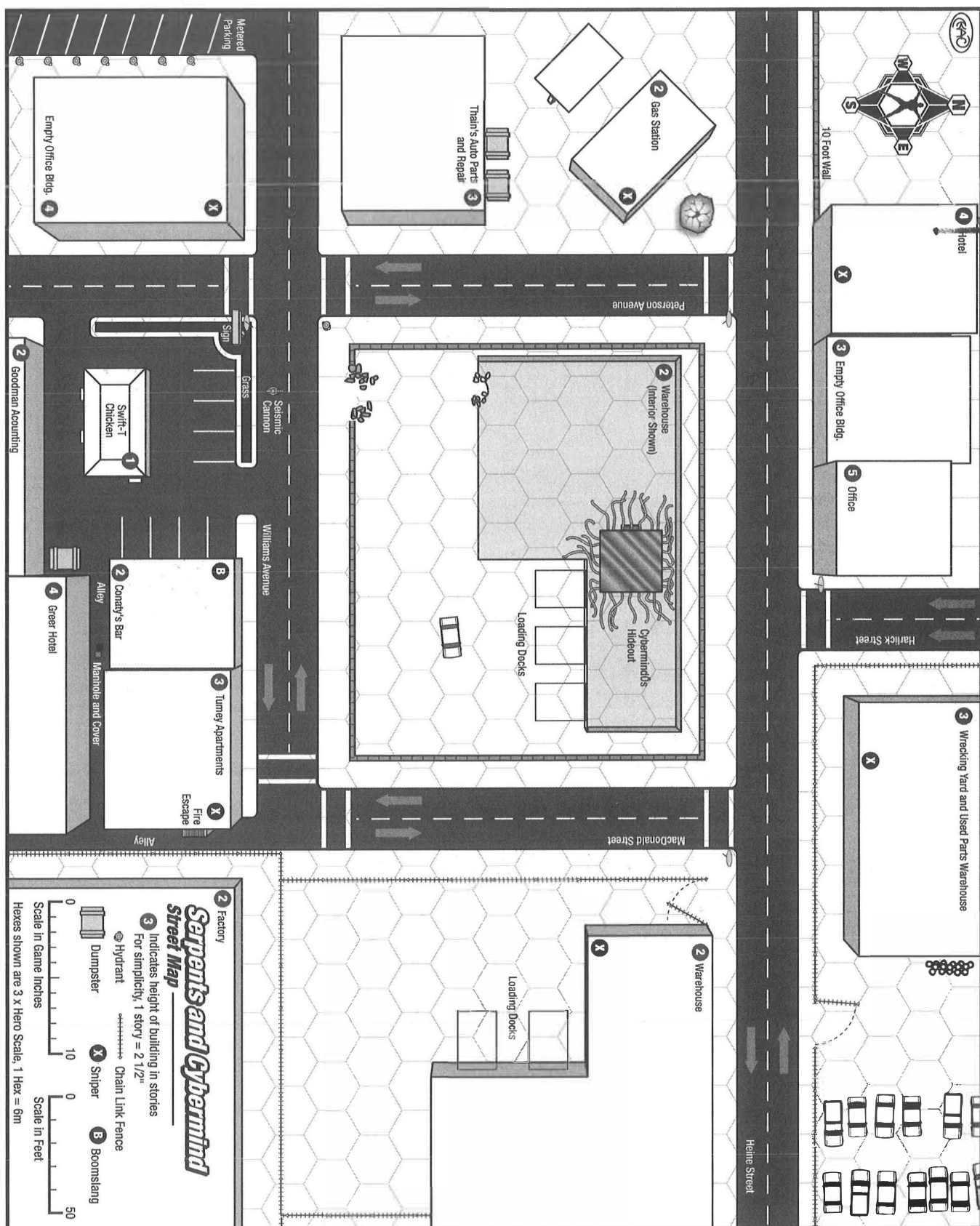
1. LIVING QUARTERS

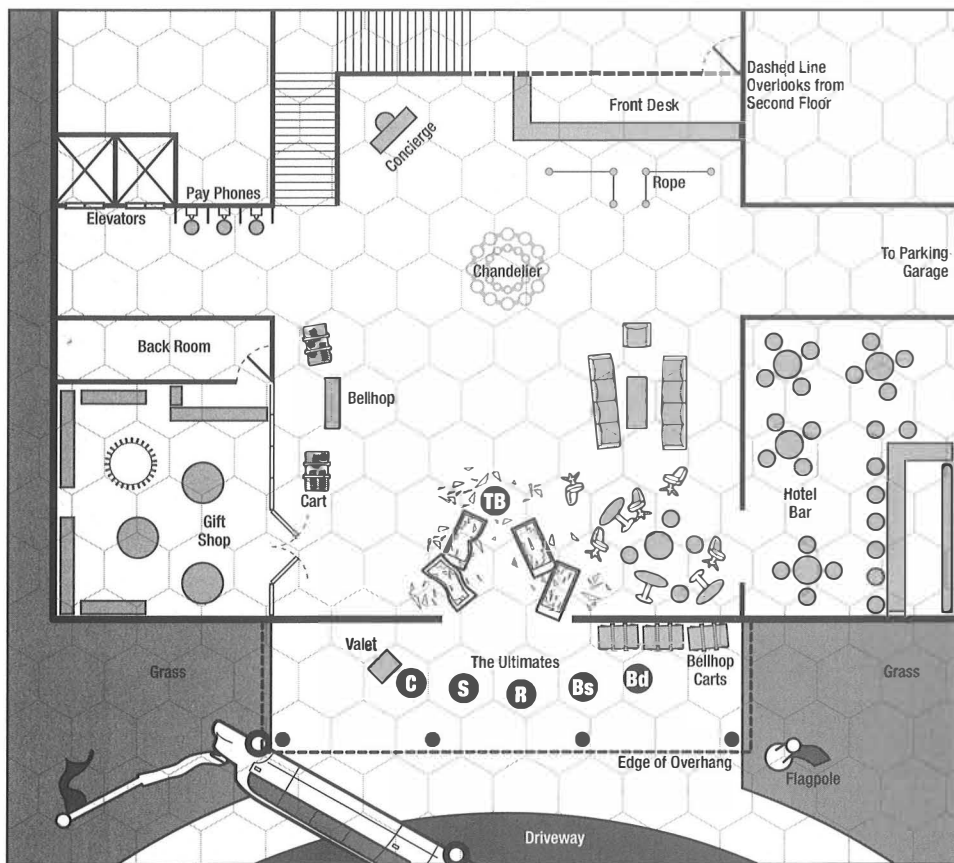
2. SECURITY CHECKPOINT

3. CONTROL & COMM.

5. NEST LEADER'S QUARTERS



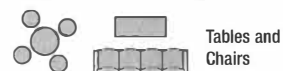




Ultimate Serpent-Men

Lobby

- TB** Thunderbolt
- C** Cyclone
- S** Slick
- R** Radium
- Bs** Blackstar
- Bd** Binder



Standard Hero Scale, 1 Hex = 2m

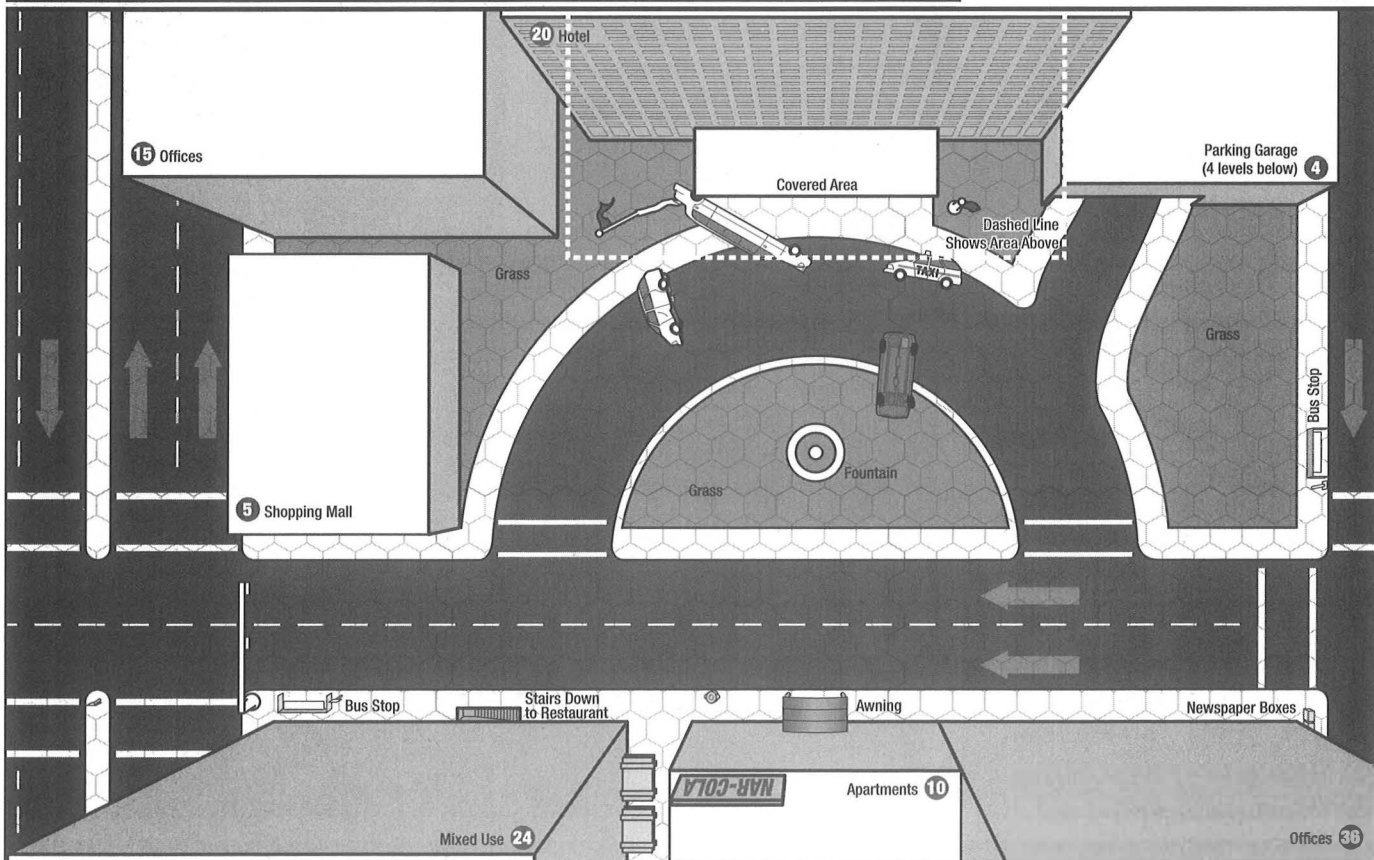


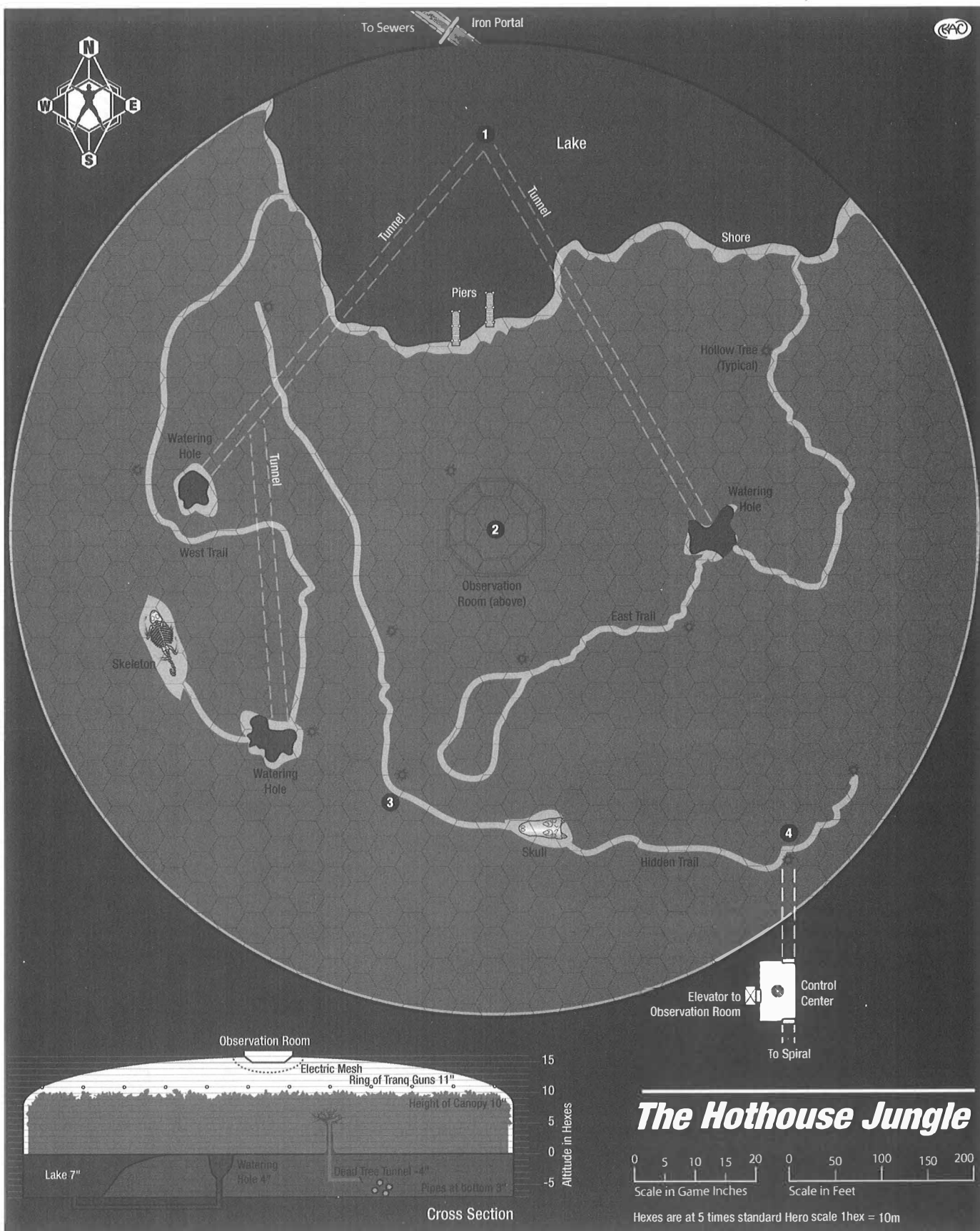
Street Map

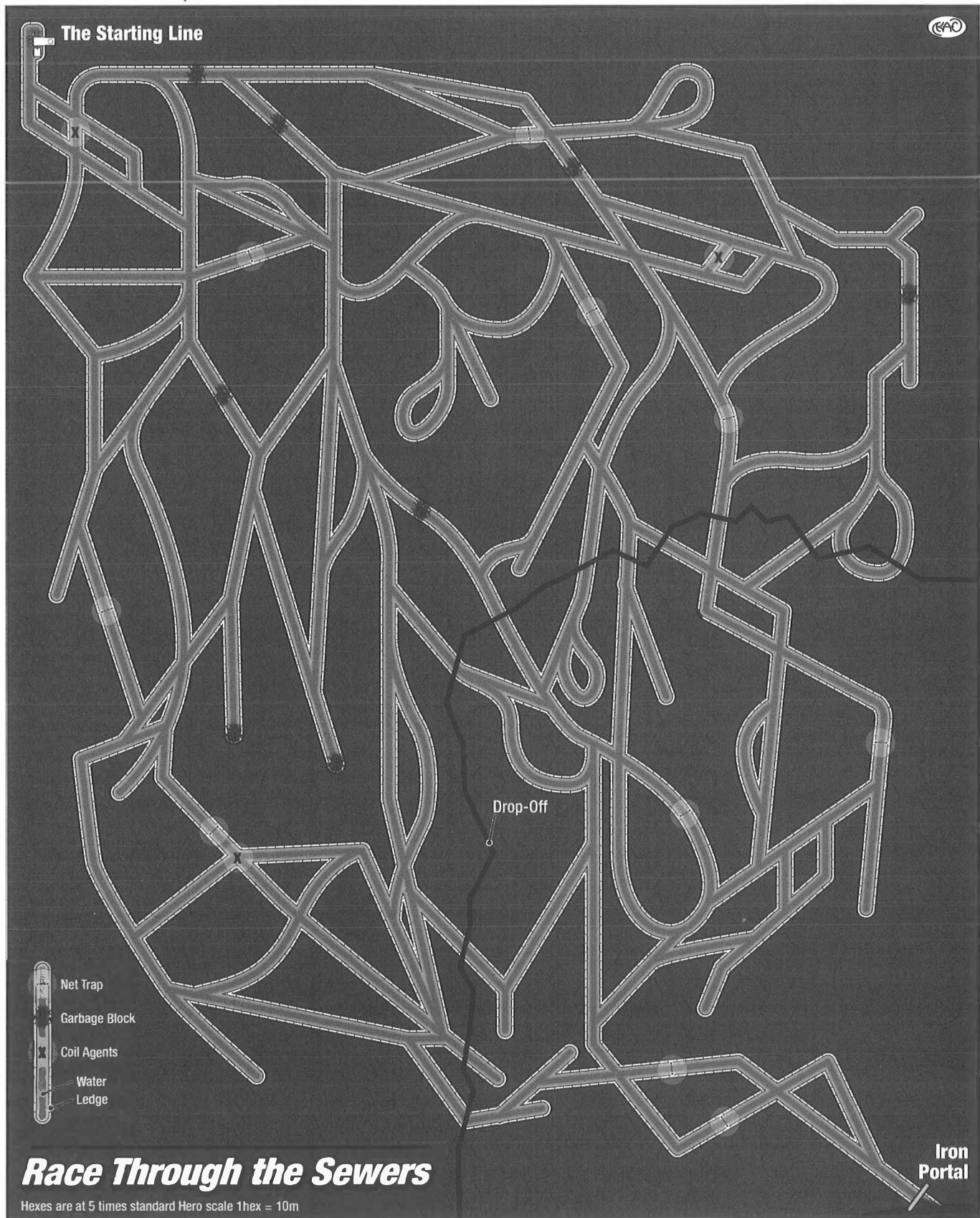
- Dumpster
- Hydrant

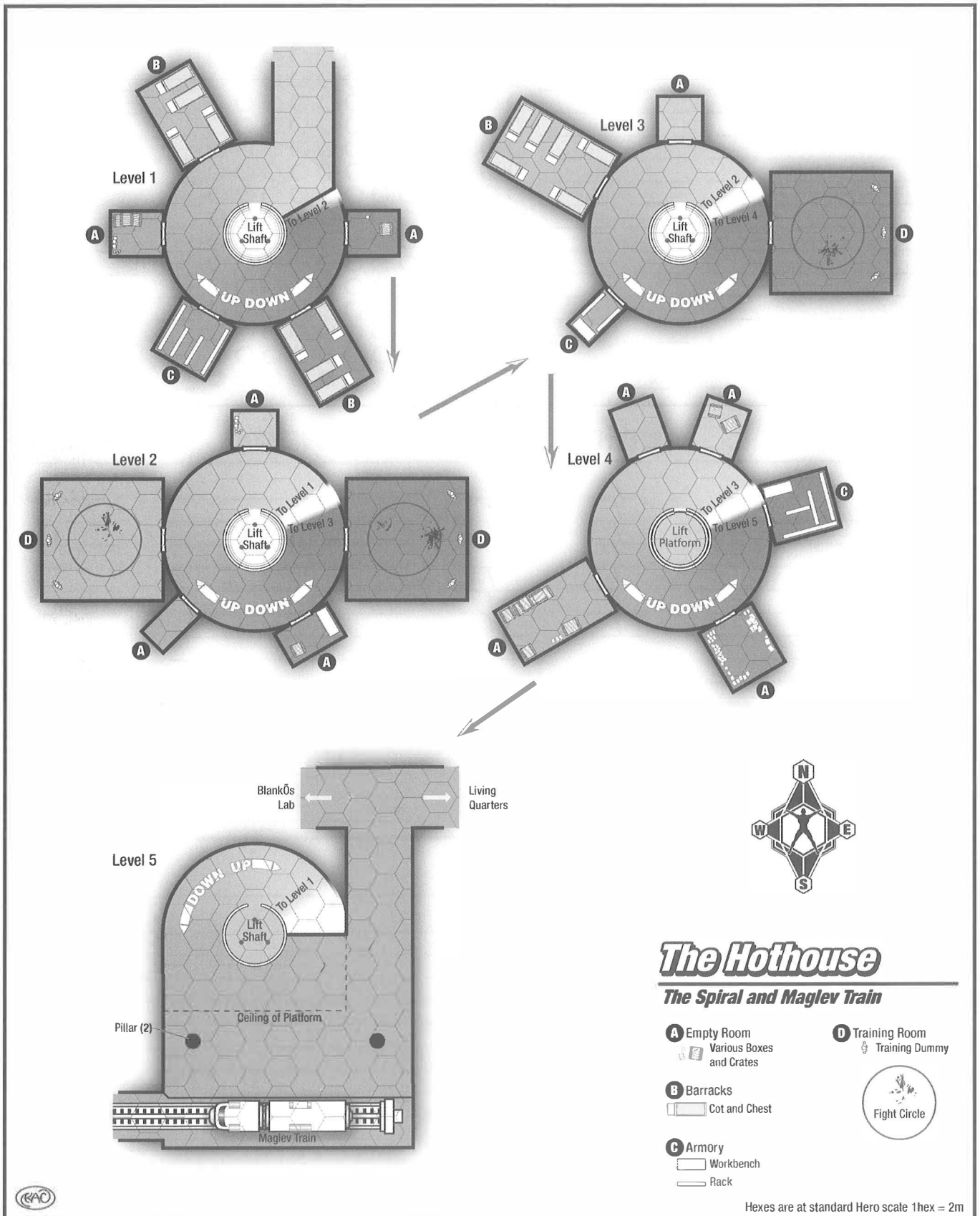
- 5** Indicates height of building in stories
For simplicity, 1 story = 2 1/2"

Standard Hero Scale, 1 Hex = 2m









COMBAT RECORD SHEET ■ THE GHOST TOWN																	
CHARACTER	DEX/ Levels	SPD	PHASES												OCV	DCV	ECV
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12			
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			
VIPER Agent	14	3	○	○	○	●	○	○	○	●	○	○	○	●	5	5	3

CHARACTER	tPD/rPD	tED/rED	MOVEMENT	PER Roll
	/	/		
	/	/		
	/	/		
	/	/		
	/	/		
	/	/		
	/	/		
	/	/		
	/	/		
	/	/		
	/	/		
	/	/		
VIPER Agent	4 / 0	4 / 0	Run 6"	11-

CHARACTER	NOTES
VIPER Agent	+2 with VIPER Blaster

[illegible][illegible]

	/	/		
	/	/		
	/	/		
	/	/		
	/	/		
	/	/		
	/	/		
	/	/		
	/	/		
	/	/		
	/	/		
Black Snake Jack	11 / 6	11 / 6	Run 6"	11-
COIL Infiltrator	10 / 6	10 / 6	Run 6"	11-
	/	/		
	/	/		
VIPER Agent	10 / 6	10 / 6	Run 6"	11-

[illegible]

[illegible]

Mental Defense (15 points), Only Versus Mind Control And Telepathy

COMBAT RECORD SHEET ■ ULTIMATE SERPENT MEN

CHARACTER	DEX/ Levels	SPD	PHASES												OCV	DCV	ECV
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12			
Slick	28	7	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	9	9	4
Cyclone	25	6	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	8	8	4
Radium	23	5	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	8	8	3
Thunderbolt	23	5	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	8	8	5
Binder	20	5	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	7	7	5
Blackstar	18	4	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	6	6	3

CHARACTER	tPD/rPD	tED/rED	MOVEMENT	PER Roll
Slick	18 / 8	18 / 8	Run 32"	11-
Cyclone	22 / 15	22 / 15	Run 6", Fly 24"	13-
Radium	18 / 12	24 / 12	Run 6"	11-
Thunderbolt	25 / 15	40 / 25	Run 6", Teleport 40"	12-
Binder	17 / 9	17 / 9	Run 6", Fly 18"	14-
Blackstar	24 / 24	24 / 24	Run 6"	12-

CHARACTER	NOTES
Slick	+3 with Friction Control, +2 with Running, +2 DCV, Mental Defense* (15)
Cyclone	+2 with Compressed Air Weaponry, +4 with Flight, Mental Defense* (15), Flash DEF (10)
Radium	+4 with Radiation Powers, Mental Defense* (15)
Thunderbolt	+2 with Electrical Attacks, Mental Defense* (15)
Binder	+4 with Glue Gun, Mental Defense* (15), Flash DEF (10)
Blackstar	+4 HTH, Mental Defense* (15)

* Only Versus Mind Control And Telepathy

COMBAT RECORD SHEET ■ SERPENTS AND CYBERMIND

CHARACTER	DEX/ Levels	SPD	PHASES												OCV	DCV	ECV
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12			
Boomslang	28	5	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	8	8	3
Boomslang	24	5	○	○	●	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	8	8	3
COIL Agent	16	4	○	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	5	5	4
Cybermind	15	4	○	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	5	5	8

CHARACTER	tPD/rPD	tED/rED	MOVEMENT	PER Roll
Boomslang	20 / 20	18 / 18	Run 10", Leap 8", Swim 10"	11-
COIL Agent	12 / 8	12 / 8	Run 8"	12-
Cybermind	10 / 6	12 / 6	Run 6"	15-

CHARACTER	NOTES
Boomslang	+3 w/ Ranged Attacks, +4 vs. Range Mods, +2 DCV, Sight/Hearing Group Flash Defense (8)
COIL Agents	+2 w/ All Combat
Cybermind	+3 SPD, Only To Use Mental/Telekinetic Powers

COMBAT RECORD SHEET ■ RACE THROUGH THE SEWERS

CHARACTER	DEX/ Levels	SPD	PHASES												OCV	DCV	ECV
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12			
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			
Boomslang	28	5	○	○	●	○	●	○	○	●	○	●	○	●	8	8	3
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			
Boomslang	24	5	○	○	●	○	●	○	○	●	○	●	○	●	8	8	3
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			
COIL Agent	16	4	○	○	●	○	○	●	○	○	●	○	○	●	5	5	4
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○			

CHARACTER	tPD/rPD	tED/rED	MOVEMENT	PER Roll
	/	/		
	/	/		
	/	/		
	/	/		
Boomslang	20 / 20	18 / 18	Run 10", Leap 8", Swim 10"	11-
	/	/		
	/	/		
	/	/		
	/	/		
	/	/		
	/	/		
COIL Agent	12 / 8	12 / 8	Run 8"	12-
	/	/		

CHARACTER	NOTES
Boomslang	+3 w/ Ranged Attacks, +4 vs. Range Mods, +2 DCV, Sight/Hearing Group Flash Defense (8) (continued) Swim 20" (Jetski)
COIL Agents	+2 w/ All Combat, Swim 20" (Jetski)

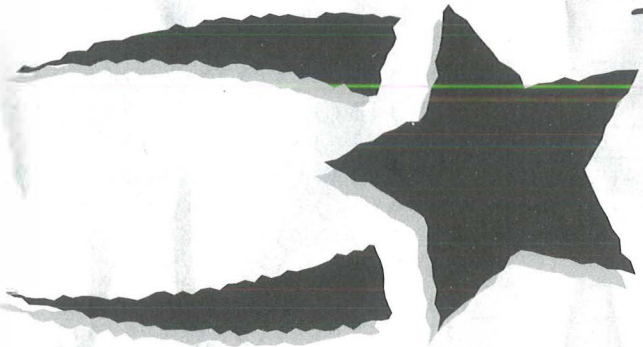
COMBAT RECORD SHEET ■ THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL

CHARACTER	DEX/ Levels	SPD	PHASES												OCV	DCV	ECV
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12			
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○				
King Cobra	30	7	○	●	○	●	○	●	○	●	○	●	○	10	10	7	
Krait	30	6	○	●	○	●	○	●	○	●	○	●	○	10	10	5	
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○				
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○				
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○				
Slither	24	6	○	●	○	●	○	●	○	●	○	●	○	8	8	4	
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○				
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○				
Firedrake	18	5	○	○	●	○	●	○	●	○	●	○	●	6	6	4	
			○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○				
COIL Agent	16	4	○	○	●	○	○	●	○	○	●	○	○	5	5	4	

CHARACTER	tPD/rPD	tED/rED	MOVEMENT	PER Roll
	/	/		
King Cobra	20 / 20	20 / 20	Run 11', Leap 8", Swim 6"	14-
Krait	20 / 10	20 / 10	Run 12", Leap 8", Swim 12"	12-
	/	/		
	/	/		
	/	/		
Slither	20 / 10	20 / 10	Run 6"	11-
	/	/		
	/	/		
Firedrake	24 / 24	28 / 28	Run 10", Leap 18"	11-
	/	/		
COIL Agent	12 / 8	12 / 8	Run 8"	12-

CHARACTER	NOTES
King Cobra	+2 Overall, Combat Sense 14-
Krait	+2 w/ COIL Blasters, +2 w/ VIPER Brawling, +2 w/ Neurokinesis, +4 DCV (Costs END), (continued) Mental DEF (18), Power DEF (15), PD/ED Reduction, Resistant 50% (Costs END)
Slither	+2 w/ COIL Blasters, +2 HTH, Regeneration 3 BODY/Turn, Stretching 6"
Firedrake	+2 w/ Sweep/Grab/Punch, Energy Damage Reduction, Resistant 75% (Only Against Fire)
COIL Agent	+2 w/ All Combat

THE SNAKE GULCH



ounded in 1875, Snake Gulch has a short — but colorful! — history.

The McClane family was the first to settle the area, and many others followed on their heels. The family's patriarch, James "Patch" McClane, had it on good authority that the railroad was coming through and when it did, he stood to make a mint! It's said that Wyatt Earp and his family stayed in Snake Gulch on the way to Tombstone, and that Doc Holliday shot the local saloon keeper for cheating at cards. Some folks claim Billy the Kid robbed the Snake Gulch Bank not once, but twice! And those are just the famous *out-of-towners* who are a part of Snake Gulch's rich history.

Twenty years later, the railroad hadn't arrived, would never arrive, and Patch McClane's good authority didn't look so good anymore. Many of the folk picked up and left for Alaska — there was gold to be had up north, and those folk who missed out on the get rich quick days in California weren't going to miss out this time! Some moved on to Santa Fe or Albuquerque. And some of those of cowboys and showgirls and all those other colorful characters just kind of faded away into the badlands.

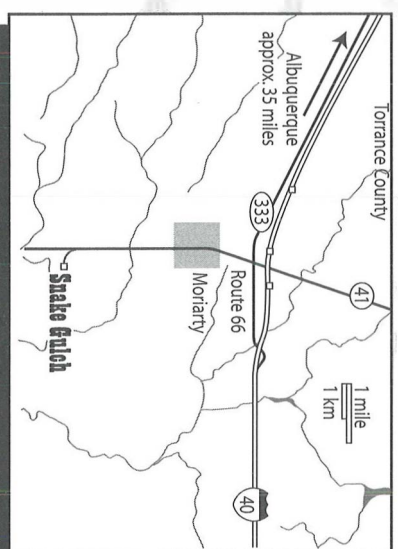
Snake Gulch stood abandoned for close to 80 years. Only the local high school kids ever visited — and we don't want to think about what

they got up to! Then my folks, Mr. and Mrs. Gerald McClane, whose great-great-granddaddy was ol' Patch McClane himself, came to visit their family roots. Well, they saw the buildings and had a mighty good idea. They thought, "Why don't we refurbish these buildings and put on a show for visitors. Folks love the Old West and we'll give them a taste of what life was like back then."

And that's what we've been doing ever since.

So come on down to the heart of New Mexico and pay us a visit. Take a gander at what life was like back then. Visit the Sliding V Ranch and watch some cowboys break broncos. See a showdown at High Noon. And maybe if you're lucky, you'll get to see bank robbers and even a trial with Judge Jebediah "Hard Justice" Smith.

Open five days a week. Call for prices and reservations. Discounts available for groups.



This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

HERO VEHICLE SOURCEBOOK



KICK THE TIRES AND LIGHT THE FIRES

The **HERO System Vehicle Sourcebook** is a comprehensive resource on vehicles for all **HERO System** games. No matter what genre, setting, or time period your campaign features, the **HSVS** has just the vehicles you need! Whether you want a World War II-era tank or submarine, a supersonic jetfighter, ships from medieval times and the Age Of Sail, super-cycles, attack helicopters, sportscars, or pulp-era autogyros, this is the book for you! In addition to full **HERO System** writeups for the vehicles, the **Vehicle Sourcebook** contains fascinating historical, technical, and performance information for the cars, planes, and watercraft it describes.

Late January 2004
DOJHER0105

\$26.99 US

A COBRA AMIDST VIPERS...

From within the heart of the insidious organization VIPER, a new evil has arisen... one that wishes to conquer both VIPER and Earth! Can your heroes survive the challenges to come and save humanity from the clutches of **King Cobra** and his minions of **COIL**?

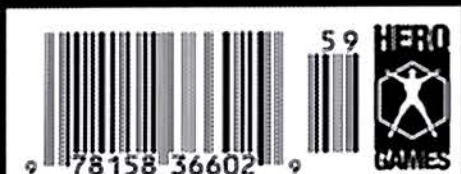
In **Showdown At Snake Gulch**, the heroes receive word that all is not as it seems at a tourist attraction in New Mexico. Investigation uncovers a VIPER Nest where a fiendish plot has been put in place to cripple VIPER and launch a scheme of world conquest.

Clues gathered at Snake Gulch lead the heroes into **The Ophidian Plague**, in which **King Cobra** unleashes a virus that turns people into serpent-men. As they struggle to contain the plague and keep the violent serpent-men from destroying the city, the PCs have to track down the villain who helped **King Cobra** defect from VIPER.

An encounter at the end of Chapter Two starts the events of **In The Coils Of The Cobra**. The heroes chase **King Cobra's** minions through the sewers to the Hothouse, an underground jungle and **King Cobra's** lair. There they must find and confront the master villain and his followers and recover the cure for the plague!

This adventure also includes complete details on **King Cobra**, his superpowered inner circle, and the agents of **COIL** — an all-new master villain and criminal organization!

Stevens'03



ISBN: 1-58368-025-9 DOJHER0209 \$24.99 US
www.herogames.com

Uses characters from **Champions Universe** and **Conquerors, Killers, And Crooks**. The **VIPER** sourcebook is helpful, but not necessary.

