

VOLUME 2

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THE
ARTIFICER'S
GUILD
to
BLACKHEART

—
BLACKWYRM
GAMES

#ALGERNON FILES 3.0



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THE ALGERNON FILES 3.0

Volume 2: The Artificer's Guild to Blackheart

Writing and Design: Aaron Sullivan

Editing: Glenn Hall

(The Human Editing Machine)

Publisher: BlackWyrM Games

Cover Art: Melissa Gay

Interior Art: Alex Williamson

Layout: Dave Mattingly

Playtesters: Leon Chang (before whom all game mechanic systems rightfully bow in fear); Kevin Grimm, Des Kirkpatrick, Jason Martin, Jack Norris, and Ian McCauley (general kvetching and pointing out stuff to make Aaron ~~apl~~ himself and say "Doh!")

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Introduction

What you hold in your hands (or on the screen of your computer, or tablet, or whatever...) is the second volume in a series of books designed to bring as much *Algernon Files* goodness to you as possible. For those of you new to this title, BlackWyrn published versions of the *Algernon Files* for both the first and second editions of *Mutants & Masterminds*; this is the ongoing foray into third edition territory. If everything holds to plan (oh, this wacky industry), this will be the second in an extended multi-volume set comprised of 300 entries (averaging 10 or so entries per volume) and well over 600 characters. Going into this, these volumes will be based around a few assumptions:

1. Everything builds around the player characters.

You might not be the most powerful characters in your game, but you're certainly the most important ones at your table. In line with that, there are far fewer heroes to get between your PCs and the glory in this iteration. Oh, there are still some hero-types, but they are included as potential complicating factors, things to make plots and actions more complicated for the PCs. There are also a few characters firmly in the gray area, people or teams that can either just make life more difficult or slide completely into the opposition camp, all depending on how you interact with them. Generally speaking, background references to heroic characters will be kept vague or generic enough that it should be easy to say that the "hero" or "a team of heroes" reference is referring to one or more of the player characters at your table. In other words, the villains aren't firmly set already as members of some other hero's rogue's gallery and other heroes are only there as resources for the players and GMs (not as rivals for the limelight and the glory). That being said, given the tradition behind this line and the continuing product identity, we're still keeping the fictional conceit that these are files compiled by ALGERNON, the AI created by Doc Steel and working with The Sentinels super-group; also, I don't want to have to think up another set of titles, none of which would have any recognition value building on our former work.

2. Plug-and-play works best for the most GMs and their groups.

These write-ups are designed to be self-contained and presume as little of a pre-established "universe" or timeline as possible. That means they don't reference other characters or places or events unless that material is also going to be covered in these volumes. If the reference is for material from another volume, a sidebar will give the bare bones needed to use the element (or how to ignore it completely, should that be your choice instead). This also means that references to fictional cities and sweeping global pre-established elements simply won't be presented, as those establish too much "baggage" a GM or players might then have trouble divorcing from the characters in these books for easiest adaptation to their home games. Along those lines, and in order to streamline some material for easier use and just generally "fix" or tweak some things I wanted to change around, astute readers will notice that there are some differences between the material presented here and that presented in the versions written for earlier editions of M&M; this is intentional. As will be referenced in select character's entries, the "Algernonverse" suffered through one of those big, intra-company, massive summer crossover plotlines that ended with a soft reboot. This doesn't throw everything out that you guys might have read in the previous first and second edition iterations, but it does make room for some minor changes and re-shuffling here and there. Also, Jon Leitheusser, the developer for M&M over at Green Ronin, has **very** kindly given me permission to occasionally offer up suggestions on how to integrate *The Algernon Files* material (on an entry by entry basis) into GR's own Earth-Prime setting (home to Freedom City and Emerald City, among many other locales), the most popular published setting for the game by far; again, those will be the stuff of sidebars and not the basic assumption for any entry at the outset.

3. **Access to core books outside of the basic *Hero's Handbook* published by Green Ronin cannot be assumed.** This iteration of TAF will not include builds with optional rules from *The Gamemaster's Handbook*, *Power Profiles*, or *Gadget Guides* (all also published by Green Ronin). All people need to use these volumes is to have these volumes. See how simple that is? If new Advantages or other optional material is presented by me (i.e., stuff not already presented in the core rulebook), it will be included or summarily explained in sidebars inserted in the entry of the build using them; if there is a really important rules element I think Green Ronin clarified somewhere other than the core book and that plays into a particular entry, I will refer you to that book so you can go appreciate the work Green Ronin has done for this game. Otherwise, it's just RAW. (That's "Rules as Written" for those non-grogards out there.)
4. **The vast majority of GMs run games set in the modern day (2014 as of this writing), on Earth, and in a universe operating around many of the comic book tropes we all know and love.** Oh, and generally in the 9-12 PL range, too. The material in these volumes will be written to be usable in as broad a context under those ideas as possible. That means for those of you running The Great Spaghetti Monster Worshipping Purple Amphibious Ape-Mutants combating the Dinosaur-led Romus Impericus on an alternate three-mooned Earth where Man never evolved, these books *probably* aren't for you. Sorry about that, and best of luck with your campaign.

Hopefully, these assumptions will enable everyone to get the maximized utility out of the characters presented here. Good luck, enjoy, and good gaming!

How to Use this Book

This book, like all the others in this series, presents a number of non-player characters (and teams of such) that can be used to make life more colorful, interesting, and, well, difficult, for player characters. This usually means rivals, or occasional obstacles, or (most likely) outright adversaries and threats (though a nice GM might even consider an "allies" role ... you know, if such a GM succumbs to a fit of generosity or something). Feel free to modify background details as needed to fit individual campaigns or games.

The general write-up structure should be familiar to players and GMs of M&M. Readers will also find an in-character quote and some characters will have sidebars explaining a background distinction or source of possible confusion from the build's game mechanics. The most commonly repeating types of sidebars will be short explanations about references to other characters or teams from later volumes, optional advantages or similar optional rules meant to explain something that shows up in a particular write-up, "Plot Points" sidebars giving small outlines of specific story seeds/ideas and adventure set-ups particular to the character(s) in the entry, and "Published Settings," which will give advice on how to integrate the entry contents into Green Ronin's Earth-Prime setting (or possibly others down the line as I get permission from various developers and companies).

The Fine Print

Andreas walked hurriedly back into the larger chamber after checking both his wards and his mundane security systems, struggling to contain his excitement. It wouldn't do to let the other party to this arrangement see how badly the young man wanted the deal finalized.

Andreas' father, in those few moments he bothered to share with his son during Andreas' formative years, had always told him to approach every bargain coldly, leaving emotion and chance in the same wastebin behind him so as not to jeopardize achieving his goals. A pity the old man's death had been required to secure Andreas' finances, but he was sure his father would have approved of what the young sorcerer had done with the funds his father had embezzled from his fellow members of the Manus Glorise over the ages. At least Andreas had made it quick and painless, which is more merciful than his father's associates would have had they ever discovered the old man's transgressions.

Well, mostly painless.

"Love what you've done with Heinrich's tower, my boy," the older man standing in the chamber said. "Tasteful, yet absurdly secure. Bravo."

"Yes, yes. Thank you, I'm sure. The bargain?" Andreas responded, more hurriedly than he had intended.

"Patience, Andreas. My... patrons were overjoyed you acceded to their terms," Caul said, removing his dark glasses and a small cloth from his pocket to begin cleaning them. "On the table behind you, under the oilcloth."

The young sorcerer started to cringe when Caul removed his glasses and showed the flat, blank flesh where another man would have had eyes, but then Caul's words processed and Andreas almost half-leapt to the table, removing the cloth carelessly to see his prize. There lay the Scepter of Chezzoth, that terrible tool once used to lay waste entire worlds in ancient times. His now. All his.

Raising it in his hand, he could feel its godlike power thrumming from pommel to jeweled tip. A cruel smile slid across his face as he turned without hesitation and aimed it at the other man.

"Die, fool!" He yelled, willing power to leap out and destroy his target.

Nothing happened.

"No!" Andreas screamed. "Lies! This is not what I was promised!"

"On the contrary, dear child," Caul said smoothly, contempt dripping from every word. "It's exactly what you asked for; you said you wanted to possess the

Scepter, and so you do. If you had also wanted to be able to use it, to bypass all those pesky spellbound safeguards and time-consuming attunement rituals, well, you really should have specified. I do so find imprecise language a bother. Don't you?"

Andreas' eyes grew wide as his temper threatened to overwhelm him. Then, he felt another presence. Spinning, he saw an astral projection hovering in the air.

"That... that's..." he started to mutter.

"The Alchemist, yes. Don't worry yourself over him, Andreas. He's only here for the show."

"Show?" Andreas spat out between gritted teeth as he returned his glare toward Caul.

"Oh? Didn't I mention?" Caul answered as his smile widened. "I do believe I was followed here. The Scepter does make rather a loud passage as it moves through this mortal realm."

Realizing he had lost all control in the conversation, Andreas could only sputter, "Followed?"

The tower shook suddenly, rocked to its foundation by some monstrous impact that the combination of spells and centuries-old stone and German craftsmanship barely withstood. By now, Andreas was spiraling into such a state of shock over his predicament that words failed him.

Caul, also known as The Bargainer, chuckled as he glanced from the man... no, boy was more accurate he thought to himself... to the walls. He continued, "Yes. I would imagine that's either Maledictus or Czar Drago. I really can't tell from here. That magnitude of power just clouds the senses, don't you think?"

"You lied to me," Andreas finally got out, his voice more a strangled gasp.

Then it was Caul's turn to glare.

He hissed out his next words from between clenched teeth, "I. Do. Not. Lie."

"Your wish was, and I quote, 'The Scepter of Chezzoth in my possession for all the days of my life,'" Albion coldly stated, his gaze slowly sliding past Andreas to somewhere behind him.

Andreas spun, feeling the heat a moment before he heard Backbone's barely coherent curse, a moment before he died in the mageslayer's hateful flames or saw where Backbone had literally burned through Andreas' wards.

"Again," The Bargainer laughed condescendingly as he faded away into the folds of the astral plane, "a poor choice in words."

The Artificer's



Members: Lady Nightshade (current Speaker); Keepsake, Gideon Crowe (former), The Bonesmith, El Conquistador; approximately 50-80 other members worldwide spread among Primus (Master), Secundus (Journeyman), and Tertius (Novice) ranks

Group Status: Well-known in the supernatural community, but hidden from the mundane authorities and the general public

History: The Artificer's Guild was the first of two major splinter groups (the other being The Sinistry) to break away from The Manus Glorise in order to seek a separate presence and seat in The Parliament of Shadows. Their "parent" group, which translates from the Latin as "The Hand of Glory," was itself formed during the middle ages in Europe by a disparate group of aggressive sorcerers seeking greater protections from The Inquisition and other less mundane threats to those sorcerers' lives and studies.

Reflecting their structured approach to their art, once they had agreed to the basic tenets of their organization, they then proceeded to continually add complicated and convoluted rules and regulations to their group strictures, ultimately resulting in a monstrously twisted morass of bylaws and protocols that designated (and politically powerful) experts were required to "decode" for other members. Many members simply left the political machinations of the rest of the organization alone as long as those individuals were left to their own devices, disinterested and apathetic to any cause outside their own research or personal ambitions.

Guilo



Over time, as one might expect from a convocation of powerful personalities with highly focused interests, factionizing occurred. Factions rose and fell as years became centuries, the latter more frequently, either through violence such as when John Dee's Numinauts wiped each other out, or through the ravages of time as the members simply died off, like the Sons of Enoch (ironic, as that faction's members were obsessed with achieving immortality). However, until the Guild broke away, no faction or alliance of factions had ever openly considered splintering from the whole. This said, though, the combination of this stifling atmosphere on top of the prejudices more active users of sorcery revealed over time they held towards those of their number whose talents lay in artifice and foci rather than overt spellcraft produced friction which only grew worse as the years passed.

The matter came to a head in the early 19th Century when a number of the most powerful and well-regarded artificers in the Manus Glorïae agreed to band together and leave en masse, forming a new group more akin to a guild than the top-heavy and intrusive collegium structure they were abandoning. Wisely, they chose the timing of this split strategically—the Manus Glorïae was embroiled at that time in a three-way power play in the Parliament of Shadows between themselves, Die Nachtkinder (“The Night Children”), and The Sisters of the Scarlet Moon. The guild members’ former associates could ill-afford either the attention or manpower at that time to counter the separation; by the time the Manus Glorïae had managed to

Life of Luxury

The members of the Guild are generally well-off, as might be expected from the things they produce and those to whom they sell. The have “Lodges” in numerous countries around the world; while not obscenely opulent, these structures are invariably of excellent and expensive manufacture and situated in well-to-do sections of wherever they are located. It isn't uncommon for these facilities to have mystic gates linking them to other Lodges, or to be surrounded by powerful wards and other more mundane defenses. The vaults beneath the laboratory areas in these facilities usually hold valuable metals and gems and other rare materials to be used in experimentation and alchemical production; those areas are WELL-guarded as a consequence.

Sample Guild Facility – Size: Huge, Toughness: 10, Features: Defense System, Fire Prevention System, Garage, Grounds, Infirmary, Laboratory, Library, Living Space, Personnel, Secret 2 (+15), Security System 2 (DC 25), Workshop ♦ 19+ total points

Some will also have a Affects Others Teleport Effect with 10 or more ranks and the Portal and Extended/Extended Only modifiers (and several ranks to increase allowed mass). For the vault areas, assume Toughness 15 an additional two ranks for the Security System (DC 35) with Feature—Arcane Lock (Requires Expertise: Magic check in place of normal Technology check).

settle that overriding concern, decades had passed, and the Artificer's Guild had already consolidated its own power and fortified its holdings. A summit between the leaders of the two groups fortunately ended in a peaceful resolution as the former associates realized they could still benefit from each other's gifts and talents while avoiding the friction of working together metaphorically under the same roof. Pragmatism simply trumped any residual tribalism that might otherwise have caused problems.

As the two groups worked together thereafter, they discovered their alliance proved a far more effective distribution of efforts and resources than what had ever been before. When the Scalebound were forced out of the Parliament of Shadows in the early 20th Century after their failed coup attempt, a seat was left empty and the Parliament needed a 13th member as was their tradition. The Guild managed to convince The Manus Glorïae to have their representative Montessor nominate the Artificer's Guild for that spot, promising that this would secure at least one ally at the table, so to speak, to aid the Hand in future workings of the Parliament.

Today, the Guild continues to operate in secrecy from the normal world (as do all the constituent members of the Parliament of Shadows), but as a prime supplier of potions, magical constructs, and a broad variety of other magical items and weapons to the other members of the world's supernatural community.

Goals: The Artificer's Guild is a loosely structured conglomeration of resources laboring to hold

together a united enough front to be seen as an organized whole to outsiders. Ultimately, their only real agenda is to provide freedom and support to their members, as well as enable the efficient exchange of valuable ideas and vital resources within the group membership. The disparate members' own agendas range widely but tend to center around some variation of "plumbing the secrets of the universe" or "perfecting their arts in safety." More violent pursuits or leanings toward world domination or similar are generally discouraged as those activities are likely to reveal the existence of the Guild to authorities outside the supernatural community or provoke violent action toward guild members or otherwise endanger the group. To quote Sentinels' member Spellbreaker as he described this group to his teammates, "The Guild tends to foster mono- rather than megalomaniacs."

Standard Tactics:

The Guild's members very rarely actually work together outside of the occasional front provided by an internal faction, or the relationships of novices and journeymen tied to particular masters. This changes when a clear enough threat menaces the Guild—as much as the individual members value their privacy and just generally being left alone to pursue their own work, the original purpose of the group was to provide protection to its members they couldn't provide themselves solo and they haven't forgotten that. The various members and factions can work together with deadly efficiency when forced by circumstance to do so (emphasis on

Factions

Even within a splinter group such as the Guild, not everyone has the same loyalties or agendas. In addition to those members whose *primary* loyalty is to themselves alone, there exists a number of smaller factions that tends in matters political or mercantile to present a single front.

The Cauldron

Members with ties to this faction are primarily alchemists above all other passion in the *ars arcana*. As providers of longevity potions (as well the occasional love philter or elixir of luck), the Cauldron is popular with almost all of the other members of the guild; this is probably why the position of Speaker has been held by members this faction far more often than by members of any of the other factions.

The Circle of Solomon

The "Solemn Men," as the members of this faction are sometimes called, work primarily in creating foci for the purpose of binding various spirits to them. They are master summoners and demonologists, but the medium in which they choose to work (or more specifically, the constant trafficking with the entities used to power their creations) does not promote harmony or trust – the members of this faction tend towards a greater degree of paranoia than their fellows and this is widely known in the Guild.

the word "forced"). As a group, their preferred response to a looming threat is diplomacy, usually in the form of sending their administrative leader (the "Speaker," who also represents the guild in Parliament business) to broach a dialogue. Assuming that option isn't open to them, they'll first try to hire mercenary talent to deal with the problem rather than risk their own health or personal resources before unleashing their private arsenals (the members are generally scholars and the supernatural equivalent of tradesmen, not warriors, though the occasional member may prove the exception to that rule, such as Bonesmith or Conquistador). The individual members possess a tremendous variety of mystical constructs, golems, homunculi, and bound spirits they can contribute to the effort. GMs looking for guidance on builds for such minions can take inspiration from the constructs presented in the Hero's Handbook and Gamemasters Guide (simply change the descriptor to magical), or take any of the other creatures in the supporting cast archetypes and add appropriate modifications to make them constructs; GMs can also pull the various elemental spirits provided in the elemental power chapters of Power Profiles to model the bound spirits, altering PLs to suit the story and purpose.

Campaign Usage & Story Hooks:

The Artificer's Guild presents GMs with an easy explanation for introducing magic items, potions, and other supernatural foci into their games – a supplier. Alternately, the Guild can be a resource for finding out

information on such things rather than directly offering them for sell or barter. They may also provide background for a player character or NPC of mystical bent with an interest in or history of magical inventions. As presented here, the Guild's presence on the world's stage is a quiet and covert one, known only to other movers and inhabitants of the occult and supernatural communities; more mundane interests and parties should have connections (and considerable wealth) in order to contact them. GMs can change that to match the level of magical interaction's openness as used in their own campaign.

Lady Nightshade

Name: Emilia Fontlaire (she discarded her aristocratic titles when she faked her death centuries ago)

Status: A British citizen with no criminal record (though one believed dead for a very long time); current status is unknown to the public or human authorities

Designation: Modified Human (Magic)/Supernatural (Human Practitioner)

Affiliation(s): The Artificer's Guild (Cauldron faction); numerous allies among the various other groups loyal to the Parliament of Shadows, particularly The Manus Glorise, as well as The Fiendish Five and The Pentacle

Background and Summary: Originally a 16th Century alchemist, Elizabethan aristocrat, and former pupil of Magus Maximus John Dee, Lady Nightshade is an imperious woman with unnaturally blue and black skin as a result of an early experiment in immortality elixirs.

The Iron Wheel

Members of the Iron Wheel are concerned with channeling magic through intricate machines and clockworks, sophisticated contraptions of metal and glass, wire and gears. They are engineers, though they pay greater respect to the arcane than to physics proper. The elders in the faction remember they came to the Guild for protection more so than any professional interest, and they generally keep to themselves, viewing the rest of the Guild as a necessary nuisance.

The Kaliban Kult

The Kult was founded by several followers of the flesh-golem Kaliban. Kaliban was the creation of one of the eldest and most-respected members of The Rosebearer faction. Unfortunately, this self-styled Prospero was a cruel man given to sadistic whims, and eventually his creation snapped under the decades long mistreatment, killing the old magus. For years afterward, he stayed on the run from his creator's friends and allies, all the while putting into practice the secrets he had learned from his master by creating numerous homunculi and other sentient flesh-golems like himself. When he was found and destroyed, his many creations venerated him as a saint and martyr and began a small war against the Rosebearers and the Guild itself. This conflict was finally ended by granting an amnesty of sorts to the Kult

Those elixirs worked, but they changed her substantially, giving her not only the sought after longevity, but also powerful pheromones and the ability to control and create chemical reactions with a mere touch.

Another side effect of the change was that she no longer experiences most physical passions, such as emotions or lust. Nightshade accepts this as small consequence, especially as it helps her avoid inconvenient emotional attachments—her only actual relationships are with those she is using as tools, pawns, or proxies. Outside of her studies, her only real interest is political clout (the “calculus of power” as she puts it). She uses her impressive acumen at manipulating people, combined with her pheromones and other abilities to maintain a comfortable superior position to those around her. Lady Nightshade has been the Speaker (the “leader” position within the Artificer's Guild) since World War II, taking up the mantle after her predecessor was killed in an American bombing raid that obliterated his castle in Germany.

Power Level: 9

Costs: Attributes 56 + Defenses 17 + Advantages 18 + Skills 28 + Powers 52 = 171 points

Attributes: Str 1, Sta 4, Agl 1, Dex 3, Ftg 4, Int 4, Awe 4, Pre 7

Defenses: Dodge 6, Parry 6, Fort 8, Tgh 6, Will 10

Combat: Initiative +1, Lift (100 lbs), Move (30 feet ground), Agonizing Touch (Close +8; Affliction 10, Fort DC 20), Euphoric Touch (Close +8; Affliction 10, Fort DC 20), Sedating Touch (Close +8; Affliction 10, Fort DC 20), Unarmed (Close +8; Damage 1)

Advantages: Artificer, Attractive 2, Benefit 5 (Status 2 – Speaker for The Artificer’s Guild, Wealth 3), Connected, Daze (Deception), Diehard, Fascinate 2 (Deception, Persuasion), Fearless, Great Endurance, Language 4 (Enochian, French, German, Greek, Latin, Russian; English is native), Ritualist
Skills: Deception 6 (+13/+18), Close Attack: Unarmed 4 (+8), Expertise: Magic 9 (+13), Expertise: Diplomat 5 (+11), Insight 8 (+12), Intimidation 4 (+11), Investigation 2 (+6), Perception 4 (+8), Persuasion 6 (+13/+18), Stealth 3 (+4), Technology 2 (+6), Treatment 3 (+7)

Powers

Alchemically-Altered Body: Enhanced Advantage 2 (Attractive 2), Enhanced Presence 4, Feature: Aura of Sensuality (viewers affected by her pheromones always mentally blind themselves to any of Nightshades physical blemishes and in their perceptions exaggerate her appearance and body language, seeing more lascivity and flirtation than she actually presents), Immunity 3 (Age, Disease, Poison), Protection 2 ♦ 16 points

Alchemical Touch Array: (31 base points) ♦ 36 total points

- **Agonizing Touch:** Cumulative Affliction 10 (Resisted and Overcome by Fortitude; Impaired, Disable, Paralyzed), Progressive, Subtle ♦ 31 points
- **Chemical Control:** Transform 6 (50 lbs; Any chemical composition to any other chemical composition; Subtle) ♦ 1 point
- **Crumbling Touch:** Weaken Toughness 10 (Subtle; Affects Objects Only) ♦ 1 point
- **Euphoric Touch:** Cumulative Affliction 9 (Resisted and Overcome by Fortitude; Entranced,

members and nominal membership in the guild (as many of them share their creator’s impressive talents for creating life). The Kult views artificial life as superior to and an improvement over natural born life; though they are supposed to be treated as any other member of the Guild, the Kult members also know they are looked down on for their origins and that the Rosebearers generally despise them. The Kult covertly performs the occasional terroristic act against Rosebearer interests in the outside world, but they go to great lengths to mask their involvement in those acts.

The Rosebearers

Whereas most of the members of the guild work in non-living materials as the focus for their magic, the Rosebearers work in life itself, flesh and bone (though the originators of the faction concentrated on plants, styling themselves heirs to ancient druidic secrets – hence the name of the faction). They also hold two distinctions. The first is that they, more than any other members of the guild, tend to hide in plain sight, working in the mundane world behind the secrecy of numerous corporate or government think tanks while hiding the truth of their “cutting edge” work behind obfuscation and trickery. The second is that they have their own splinter group, the violently-birtherd Kaliban Kult previously mentioned.

Compelled, Controlled; Insidious, Progressive, Subtle; Limited to Emotions) ♦ 1 point

• **Healing Touch:** Healing 5 (Distracting, Energizing, Subtle) ♦ 1 point

• **Sedating Touch:** Cumulative Affliction 10 (Resisted and Overcome by Fortitude; Dazed, Stunned, Incapacitated; Progressive, Subtle) ♦ 1 point

Complications: **Motivation (Control):** Nightshade’s accident instilled in her a sense of paranoia about things outside of her control, so she overcompensates by being a control freak; **Responsibility (Speaker for the Artificer’s Guild):** As Speaker, Nightshade has unending professional and administrative obligations; **Power Loss (Protective Clothing):** Nightshades powers only work on bare skin or through cloth – chemical protection or very thick clothing/fur prevent this contact; **Quirk (Heartbreaker):** Before her accident, Fontlaclair was a bit on the mousey side and somewhat ignored by men—she enjoys toying with powerful or handsome men and then crushing them emotionally.

Keepsake

Name: Janice Doe (yes, an obvious alias, but her associates don’t seem to care)

Status: Keepsake’s actual nationality is as mysterious as everything else in her background, though her accent implies either an American or Canadian origin

Designation: Supernatural (Human Practitioner)

Affiliation(s): The Artificer’s Guild (Iron Wheel faction)

Background and Summary: Little is known about Keepsake’s background.

Her mentor, Maestro Calafiente, claimed to have found her after somehow coming across some of her constructs while working on Guild business in St. Louis. He traced the things back to their creator, a young woman hiding in an abandoned house, surrounded by small pictures and other memorabilia of a large family. He gave her a new and more supportive atmosphere for her gifts and she grew quite attached to him, with numerous observers commenting that their relationship seemed almost familial more than master and apprentice. She first openly displayed the singular magical invention for which she is best known when Calafiente was murdered by a rival in a fit of pique; opening one of her cameos as her attacker approached to finish off the job, the cameo proceeded to suck the attacker into the picture contained in the cameo. She then threw the cameo down on the floor and smashed it to pieces, apparently either trapping him in some pocket dimension or destroying him utterly—no one other than Keepsake really knows and she doesn't talk about it. She then inherited Calafiente's responsibilities in assisting the Speaker in dealing with the Parliament of Shadows, mostly because no one else really wanted to leave their work behind to take the job and because she was easy to guilt into continuing her mentor's tenure.

Keepsake is a shy and reserved woman, little given to interjecting herself in so much as a conversation. She acts as one of Nightshade's bodyguards, immediately moving to withdraw her charge from the area of danger while the Damascene acts as interference. Her preferred items seem focused on dimensional and temporal magic effects.

Power Level: 9

Costs: Attributes 36 + Defenses 13 + Advantages 7 + Skills 25 + Powers 37 = 118 points

Attributes: Str -1, Sta 1, Agl 2, Dex 5, Ftg 2, Int 3, Awe 5, Pre 1

Defenses: Dodge 4, Parry 4, Fort 3, Tgh 1, Will 12

Combat: Initiative +2, Lift 25 lbs, Move (Ground: 30 feet), Trap In A Picture (Perception Range; Dodge Check vs DC 19 or Dimensional Move to Pocket Dimension)

Scimus

Named from the Latin for "We Know," the Scimus faction is comprised of artificers who specialize in scrying tools and other surveillance-related foci. They pride themselves on the sophistication of their work and sometimes operate through proxies to sell the information gathered from their tools to outside parties. They have a reputation (of arguable accuracy) for being the most mercenary of the members of the guild, willing to "debase their art in service to their greed." Given the subject of said art and Scimus' considerable mastery at it, few of their political opponents voice this accusation out loud, however.

Advantages: Artificer, Benefit, Wealth (well-off), Eidetic Memory, Improvised Tools, Ritualist, Seize Initiative

Skills: Deception 4 (+5), Expertise: Clockwork 8 (+11), Expertise: Engineering 8 (+11), Expertise: Magic 8 (+11), Investigation 5 (+8), Perception 3 (+8), Persuasion 4 (+5), Sleight of Hand 2 (+7), Stealth 2 (+4), Technology 6 (+9)

Powers

Antique Watch: Dimensional Shunt (Deflect 16 [Indirect 4, Reflect, Subtle; Close Range], Omniversal Anchor (Immunity 10 [Dimensional Effects, Temporal Effects]) (Easily Removable, -12 pp) ♦ 19 points

Curio Set Array: (28 base points; Easily Removable, -12 pp) ♦ 18 total points

• **Trap in a Picture:** Movement

1 (Dimensional 1 [Pocket Dimension inside curio]; Attack [vs Dodge, DC 19], Perception Range, +8 to Resistance Value) ♦ 28 points

• **Time Stop:** Quickness 9 (Subtle 2) and Speed 9 (subtle 2) (Quirk: Limited to routine actions while active) ♦ 1 point

• **Worlds at my Fingertips:** Movement 6 (Dimensional 3, Time Travel 3; Increased Mass 4 [800 lbs.], Portal) ♦ 1 point

Complications: Motive (Responsibility): Keepsake feels strongly she has a duty to her art, her faction, and her Speaker, in that order, whether formal or not; **Quirk (Tremendously Shy):** Keepsake is extremely uncomfortable and awkward in social situations.

Standard Damascene

Name: None

Status: Non-living and non-human entity with no rights or personal identity

Designation: Artificial Being (Magic)

Affiliation(s): Property of the Artificer's Guild

Background and Summary: The Damascenes are artificially created guard constructs. The name comes from the fact that the first one was created from

Damascus steel long ago. They are one of the more commonly created and used constructs among the Guild's membership, generally used as bodyguards by anyone of significance in the Guild. Normally a featureless humanoid made of silvery, shining metal, a Damascene is a fluid shapechanger, able to take any form and create numerous weapons from its own body mass or absorb most attacks by bending or flowing around the impact.

(Note – This is the standard, but higher PL versions exist for special purposes. Increase STR, FTG, and ranks in Protection as needed to raise to whatever PL is needed for the story)

Power Level: 8

Costs: Attributes 22 + Defenses 2 + Advantages 16 + Skills 7 + Powers 101 = 148 points

Attributes: Str 6, Sta –, Agl 6, Dex 2, Ftg 8, Int –, Awe 6, Pre –

Defenses: Dodge 8, Parry 8, Fort Immune, Tgh 8, Will None

Combat: Initiative +14, Lift 3200 lbs., Move (Ground 30 mph), Unarmed (Close +8; Damage 8)

Advantages: All-out Attack, Chokehold, Evasion, Fast Grab, Fearless, Improved Grab, Improved Hold, Improved Initiative 2, Improved Trip, Instant Up, Interpose, Move-by Action, Power Attack, Prone Fighting, Seize Initiative

Skills: Acrobatics 4 (+10), Athletics 4 (+10), Perception 6 (+12)

Powers

Liquid Metal Flexibility: Insubstantial 1 (Fluid; Precise, Subtle), Leaping 1 (15 feet), Movement 4 (Slithering, Sure-footed 2, Wall-crawling), Speed 4 (30 mph) ♦ 20 points

Made of Metal: Growth 2 (Density, Innate; Permanent), Protection 6 (Impervious) ♦ 17 points

Made to Last: Regeneration 5 ♦ 5 points

Magical Bodyguard: Senses 4 (Communication Link [Mental, with Controller], Danger Sense [Mental], Darkvision) ♦ 4 points

Shapeshifting Extremities: Strength-based Damage 2 (Multiattack 8, Reach [5 ft.], Split, Variable Descriptor [Any Melee Weapon] ♦ 13 points

Unliving: Immunity 42 (Mental, Critical Hits, Fortitude Effects) ♦ 42 points

Complications: Quirk (Bound to Obedience): The Damascene are absolutely obedient to the Artificer with a sigiled amulet keyed to that Damascene.

Prejudice: The Damascene are obviously not human or organic and generally provoke a negative response from non-magical people and animals when seen.

Standard Members

Name: Varies

Status: Varies

Designation: Supernatural (Human Practitioner) [generally ...a handful of members are actually undead, powerful spirits, or sentient constructs]

Affiliation(s): The Artificer's Guild (various or perhaps even no faction)

Background and Summary: The Guild's membership comes from across the world and geography poses little barrier to people with their talents and resources. All members will have the Artificer advantage and many also have Ritualist (with numerous foci included in their castings) and at least a few ranks in Expertise: Magic (Journeyman will have this bonus in the high single digits and masters in the low double digits). It is very common for members to have some sort of Wealth or Status Benefit, or the Minion advantage (to cover constructs or servant spirits).

Power Level: 4

Costs: Attributes 16 + Defenses 11 + Advantages 1 + Skills 13 + Powers 0 = 41 points

Attributes: Str 0, Sta 0, Agl 0, Dex 2, Ftg 1, Int 2, Awe 2, Pre 1

Defenses: Dodge 3, Parry 3, Fort 2, Tgh 0, Will 6

Combat: Initiative +0, Lift (50 lbs.), Move (Ground 30 feet), Unarmed (Close +1; Damage 0)

Advantages: Artificer

Skills: Deception 4 (+5), Expertise: Crafting [varies; DEX-based] 6 (+8), Expertise: Magic 6 (+8), Insight 3 (+5), Perception 2 (+4), Persuasion 3 (+4), Technology 2 (+4)

Powers: Varies, but almost always with the Removable modifier

Complications: Responsibility: Obligations to the Guild and their associates. Motivations vary, but Obsession (focus of their art) is a common complication.

THE ASSEMBLY



Name: Unknown if it even possesses one

Status: Alien entity with no rights under U.S. law (unknown if it even qualifies as “alive”)

Designation: Non-human Species (Alien of Extradimensional Origin)

Affiliation(s): None known

Quote: “Your Function Is Unnecessary. You Will Be Deleted From The Continuum.”

Background: The Assembly is the name given to the dimensional extension into Earthspace—or avatar, for lack of a better term—of an extradimensional entity possessing various technological or machine-like features. It has appeared numerous times over the past couple of decades, each appearance an attempted invasion from whatever continuum serves as its home, its intent obviously and repeatedly stated to be the conversion of Earth and its resources into a mirror or extension of the entity’s home continuum.

The first of these appearances was at a remote Steele Omnitech facility; it was unclear initially if the research going on at the facility into interdimensional physics and its applications was responsible for spawning the threat, with the entity’s avatar forced from Earth’s dimension on that occasion only at great cost, including the total destruction of the facility. Later analysis of recordings and test data proved that the energy signature of the researchers’ technology and the

There But For The Grace of God...

Some intrepid heroes have encountered parallel Earths where The Assembly wasn’t stopped during one of its incursions — in each case, all that was left was a sterile, processed husk stripped of life and resources before becoming a stepping stone to The Assembly’s assault on other inhabited worlds. Those heroes returned and shared this information, adding to the seriousness with which the government and other concerned parties throw themselves into any confrontation against this entity, as the outcome should the thing win is a known and horrifying end.

All Your Base Are Belong To Us...

Just to clarify, The Assembly’s transform effect isn’t instantaneous; it takes time to consume and convert materials. In fact, it takes a time rank equal to the Transform effect ranks used minus 6 in order for The Assembly to convert an area’s mass (just as Transform affects a mass rank equal to the effect rank -6). For example, converting the mass affected by 8 ranks of Transform (mass rank of $8 - 6 = 2$, or 100 lbs.) takes Time Rank 2 (or 30 seconds). It can have multiple targeted effects simultaneously cycling up towards each individual cap separately (one tentacle lashes out and hits one building starting the process there that ends at 20 ranks of mass, while another tentacle lashes out at a separate

entity were in no way similar. The conclusion eventually reached (and later substantiated after other appearances of The Assembly) was that the probes sent into interdimensional space by the facility and the consciousness of the entity merely encountered each other in the interstitial dimension both were studying; in other words, it was the unhappiest of coincidences, and one with repercussions, as that encounter made The Assembly aware of Earth and its vulnerability

Subsequent recorded encounters have unfortunately been in more developed areas, which is to say, *cities*. These encounters have uniformly resulted in appalling amounts of collateral damage, spanning over several city blocks each. One such encounter drew together the disparate heroes that would later stay together as the latest incarnation of The Sentinels super-team. Another resulted in the complete destruction of the largest (previously) hidden S.P.I.R.E. base known to civilian authorities thus far, and the deaths of several of S.P.I.R.E.’s metahuman assets during that base’s ultimately doomed defense.

The U.S. government currently rates The Assembly as a Class One Threat, meaning a real and imminent extinction-level danger to the world and the entire human race. Efforts to design systems capable of detecting or predicting incursions from the entity’s home continuum have, as of yet, provided only unreliable results at best.

Personality, Goals, & Tactics:

The Assembly is an alien intelligence. Its motivations and agenda outside of consuming the material resources of Earth for conversion into technological structures for its own use are unknown. It refuses to negotiate and apparently does not even understand the concepts of mercy or co-existence on anything more than the most basic level, regarding both as defective reasoning by inferior organic processing units. Comments it has made in the past also imply it has little understanding of individuated lives, personalities, singular identities, or anything related to those concepts; apparently everything in the entity's home continuum is either part of The Assembly's form proper, or some kind of extension of it. It also routinely shows contempt for organic life in general, considering such existence far inferior to its own.

The entity's appearances have thus far been limited to areas where dimension-breaching technology is in use or has been used extensively; in some cases it has also managed entry through naturally perpetuating dimensional shallows, areas where the barriers between Earth's dimension and others are noticeably weak. While its first appearances were open and violent spectacles, loudly announcing its intentions all the while, more recent encounters have come only after discovering The Assembly already at work converting an area into usable material for its growth cycle; apparently it has learned to hide itself after making beachheads so as to give itself time to grow sufficiently formidable enough to make dislodging said beachhead a daunting task.

Upon entry into Earth's dimension, The Assembly entity immediately begins converting matter into the technological structures it uses as part

building starting a different instance of the process there that ends at 20 ranks of mass, and so on, and so on). Once 6 ranks of mass spread across contiguous areas is affected, The Assembly begins to grow larger. For example, if 15 ranks worth of mass is affected across contiguous areas, the entity can have 9 ranks of Growth active (and the derivative effects tied to that Growth rank).

The ranks presented are not absolute — they merely represent the largest The Assembly is recorded getting (and the most area it's affected) in any incursion so far. Theoretically, this escalation could continue higher and higher without hitting any maximum ranks; in such an event, The Assembly could easily shift to PL X.

Yes, this DOES mean it's vitally important to stop this monster while it's still at manageable levels. Refer to the "There But For The Grace of God..." sidebar for what happens if the player characters don't.

of its physical form: metal, concrete, glass, and so on; it doesn't seem to make any difference so long as the substance is a processed material. It will defend itself from attacks but otherwise simply ignore people or other organic lifeforms it encounters, even to the point of crushing such lifeforms as it expands rapidly through the space they occupy. If forced to respond, it will begin hastily fashioning appropriate defensive machines and also start reconfiguring its own substance into offensive systems it deems appropriate to the situation. It shows no restraint in such situations, attacking with as much continuous force as needed to overcome its opponent.

The Assembly does not negotiate and will not stop its expansion and conversion efforts unless somehow physically prevented from doing so—actions it will immediately respond to with overwhelming violence.

Powers, Abilities, & Resources:

A technomorphic hive entity, The Assembly exerts full control over its own physical form, shaping and reconfiguring it at will. This can be

anything from instantly creating directed energy weapons to forming massive tentacle-like extensions for bludgeoning targets. Once it has consumed and converted a sufficient amount of local material, a process that occurs at the molecular level, it will begin translating that mass into size, growing larger and larger. The bigger it gets, the more processing power it possesses and, therefore, the smarter the avatar on site becomes (and it starts out already at the upper reaches of humanly possible intelligence). It needs only physical contact to begin the conversion process, and as it grows sufficiently large it strikes out at a targeted mass with its tentacles, spreading in each direction.

Technological systems it can access are almost immediately enslaved for its own use, or it can otherwise disrupt such systems it encounters with little effort.

Since it has no vital organs and can reallocate systems and processing at will, attacks which destroy parts of its mass do little other than costing it said mass, shrinking The Assembly and making it less intelligent and less able to reach new material for conversion. Only destroying its physical form completely is enough to sever the avatar's link to its home continuum and end that particular instantiation.

Campaign Usage & Story

Hooks: An implacable and intelligent monster, dedicated to its own self-evolution and self-preservation at any cost to civilians or its surroundings, is a staple of comic book villainy. There is nothing sympathetic in The Assembly's makeup, no soul, and nothing to redeem. It exists to consume and to grow and shows little attention to and no concern for whatever gets in its way. In essence, it's an invading "natural" force that must be stopped at any cost. Player characters can cut loose without qualm; character types that are unsuited for physical confrontation can grab numerous role-playing moments to shine where they help move people from the path of oncoming destruction, or, if technically-minded, they can work out skill-based counters to its efforts (while ruminating on the example standing in front of them of the destructive potential of their own tools if left unfettered or used recklessly).

COMBAT

Initiative: +15

Lift: Varies

Move: Varies

Unarmed: Close +6, Damage Varies (maxes out at 26 assuming attack bonus remains unmodified)

Technomorph: Attack and Damage Varies

COMPLICATIONS

Motivation ("Territorial Imperative"): The Assembly is driven to expand without cease, always looking for new vistas to consume.

Quirk ("Inferior Organics"): The Assembly holds organic life in contempt. It views cyborgs

COSTS

Attributes 52 + Defenses 11 + Advantages 11 + Skills 10 + Powers 477 = 561 points

THE ASSEMBLY

FL 16

STR	STA	ΔGL	DEX	FGT	INT	ΔWE	PRE
20*/0	—	3	5	6	16*/6	16*/6	0

ADVANTAGES

Diehard, Eidetic Memory, Fearless, Favored Environment (areas converted by its Transform effect), Favored Foe 2 (Powered Armor Users, Robots), Improved Initiative 3, Inventor, Jack-of-all-trades

SKILLS

Expertise: Any 0 (+16*/+6), Intimidation 0 (+10*/+0), Perception 10 (+26*/+16), Stealth 0 (-10*/+3), Technology 10 (+26*/+16)

POWERS

CONSUME AND REPLACE: Continuous **Transform 26** (Processed materials into part of The Assembly's form; 25,000 tons; Limited to converting mass rank equal to Time Rank -6 until effect cap reached where Time Rank is how long the effect has been active), Continuous **Growth 20** (Limited to Rank - 6 of any Transform effects in use) • 138 points

CONTINUOUS UPGRADE: **Elongation 5** (250 feet max), **Enhanced Awareness 10**, **Enhanced Intellect 10**, **Quickness 10** (Limited to Mental Tasks Only), Sustained **Extra Limbs 10**; Elongation Linked to every 4 ranks of Growth active, and all others Linked to every 2 ranks of Growth active • 30 points

DISTRIBUTED SYSTEMS: **Enhanced Defenses 16** (Dodge 6, Parry 10; Limited to Offsetting Growth Penalties); **Immunity 80** (Toughness Effects; Half-effect) • 48 points

INTERFACE: **Communication 4** (anywhere on Earth; Radio), **Comprehend Machines 2**, **Senses 8** (Detect Technology, Ranged, Accurate, Acute, Analytical, Extended 3) • 29 points

DEFENSES

Dodge 4*/10 **Parry** 10
Fort — **Tough** 20* **Will** 16*/6

MACHINE BODY: **Immunity 30** (Fortitude effects) • 30 points

GODLIKE MACHINE ENTITY ARRAY (46 base points) • 54 total points

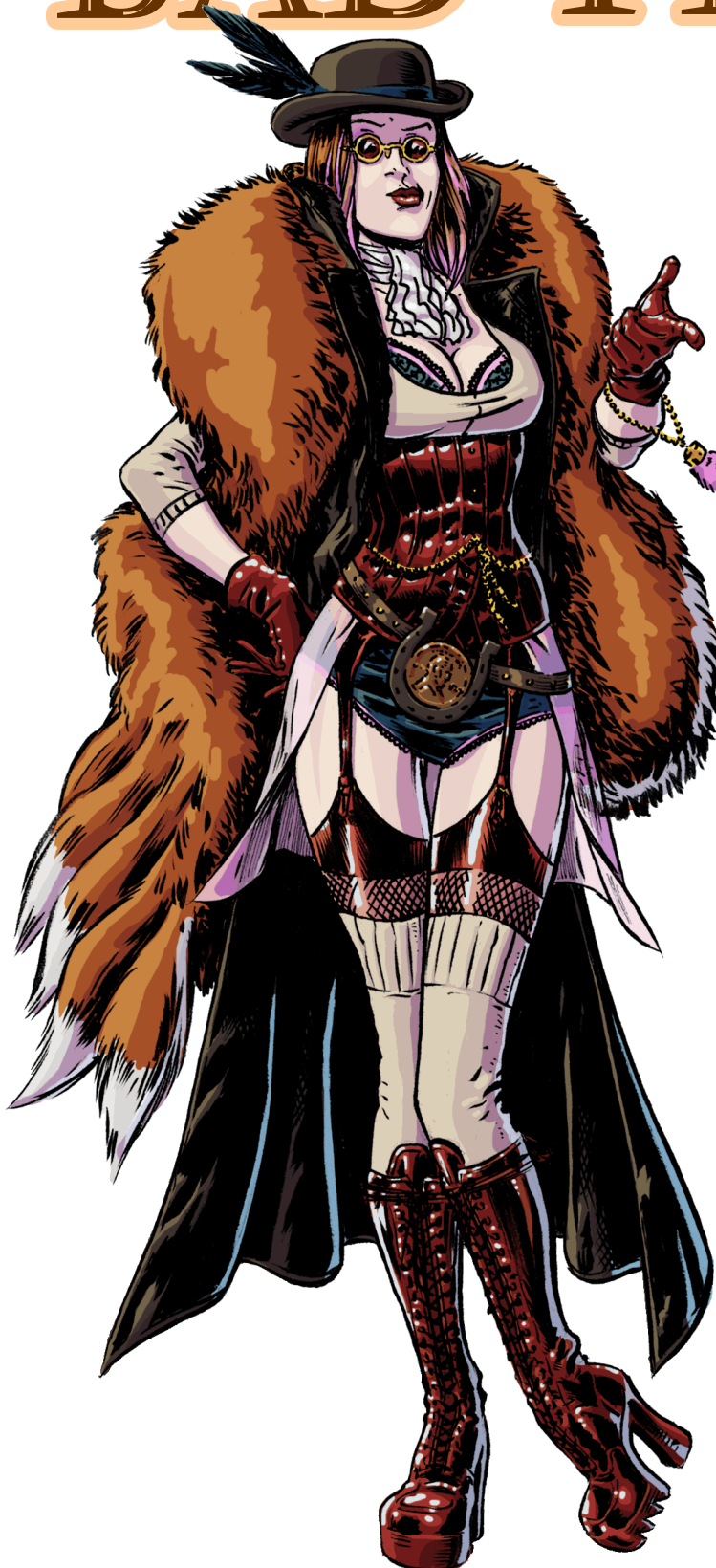
- **ANIMATE MACHINES:** **Summon Animated Object 15**, Controlled, Dynamic, General Type (Machines such as robots or autonomous weapons platforms or so on), Limited to machines/materials within Perception Range • 46 points
- **CONTROL TECHNOLOGY:** Perception Ranged Cumulative **Affliction 16** (Controlled; Resisted by Fortitude, Overcome by skill or Fortitude), Limited to third degree only, Affects Objects Only, Limited to Technology • 2 points
- **DEACTIVATE TECHNOLOGY:** **Nullify Technology 11**, Burst Area (30-foot radius), Broad (Technological), Simultaneous • 2 points
- **ASSEMBLE:** Ranged Continuous **Transform 11** (parts into finished machine) • 2 points
- **SENSOR NETWORK:** **Remote Sensing 21** (Visual and Auditory, anywhere on Earth), Limited to Technological Sensors • 2 points

MACHINE MIND: **Immunity 10** (mental powers) • 10 points

MANIPULATE TECHNOLOGY: Perception Ranged **Move Object 1**, Precise, Limited to Operating Machines • 3 points

TECHNOMORPH: **Variable 15** (Tech Powers), Continuous Duration, Move Action • 135 points

BAD PENNY



Name: Penelope “Penny” Whitaker

Status: American citizen with multiple outstanding local and federal warrants

Designation: Metahuman (mutant)

Affiliation(s): None currently; has worked for hire with numerous other criminals but none for very long

Quote: “Not your lucky day, is it, Captain Chumpbag?”

Background: The Whitakers, both man and wife, were born a couple of decades too late—as they came of age, they would really have been more at home during the Sixties than the Eighties. Over the course of their young adult lives, they consumed a truly impressive amount of illegal drugs, a lifestyle that somehow, against all odds, *didn’t* kill either one of them. When they finally came up for a taste of sobering reality one day after a close call with the authorities, their first foray into lucidity in years hit both of them in the figurative face with the dwindling options for how their futures were going to go. Terrified, they walked away from their prior lifestyle and became cleaner than clean, burying their pasts deep. They built a home and a business, but a family seemed out of their grasp—the drugs might not have killed them, but the combined effects certainly left some damage. In desperation, they sought out the help of fertility specialists and other medical professionals. One by one those expensive practitioners broke the news to the couple that the two were beyond help in their quest.

At least, that’s what they were told until they met Dr. Obladi.

Obladi told them he *could* help. Little did they know he had an agenda... and another identity. Their source for renewed hope was actually the deranged geneticist and biophysicist the world knew and feared as “Dr. Diablo.” He was in the midst of a long-term

scheme to experiment on hundreds of expectant mothers around North America, altering the genetics of those unfortunate women's children for his own purposes. However, examining the mother in this case, Diablo was struck with scientific curiosity—he could easily “fix” the woman's fertility issue, but the genetic damage suffered by both parents, the changes and what they would mean for any children produced in the union of these two, *that* promised some very colorful outcomes completely outside of Diablo's involvement. He decided to help them conceive, but then simply to watch and see what happened.

Nothing.

He watched the child grow up into adolescence without ever seeming anything other than boring and ordinary. With so many other children finally starting to show the fruits of his labors during those years of experimentation, he left Penny's family alone and went to unsuccessfully usher in the final phase of his plans (a plan interrupted shortly thereafter by his accidental death).

Though they had gone clean, or mostly so, Penny's parents were still models of self-absorption and vanity; after having a child, they found the joyful expectation far exceeded the mundane reality. As she grew older, her parents gave her less and less attention, no matter how much she acted out. They gave her whatever she wanted, but their resources never quite lived up to the material “needs” the young girl presented to compensate for the empty hole her parents' emotional absence left in her soul. As she grew older she went looking for other things to fill that hole.

Children of Diablo

Years ago, the original Dr. Diablo made quite a name for himself. A brilliant geneticist, biochemist, and biophysicist decades if not centuries ahead of his time, Diablo was also, unfortunately, totally insane. His idea of pushing the boundaries of science was to create one exotic lifeform after another just to see if he could and just to see what they would do. Swarms of radar-guided lampreys that burrow under the earth to ambush prey from below? Check. Man-sized, flying vampiric piranha? Check.

And so on.

One day he came up with a new and novel idea. He would pose as a “fertility specialist” and use an entire cross-section of the American public as the unsuspecting test bed for his next round of germ-line DNA modification experiments. On and off over the course of the following two years, he implanted triggerable mutagenic material in the wombs of hundreds of women from across North America; when his treatments inevitably ended in conception, the newly created embryo would immediately start to undergo “improvement” during natal development.

Diablo never lived to see the fruition of this long-term scheme, dying in a freak accident involving a completely unrelated experiment (...something he had *actually* planned for... see the upcoming entry for “Dr. Diablo 2.0” in a later volume). Dozens of these young men and women were born and

She wandered through a variety of subcultures, certain she'd find the answers to her emptiness.

She didn't.

She plowed through a series of boyfriends and boy-toys, certain she'd find the soulmate she needed.

She didn't.

Eventually, Penny would likely have meandered her way to a final, melodramatic, and overly staged suicide if she hadn't had her accident. A mopped floor, a slip, a fall, and a serious concussion—more prosaic than many of her powered peers' entry into metahumanity, but effective nonetheless. The head trauma wasn't debilitating by any means, but it was enough to kickstart her latent psionic mutation into active status.

Over the course of several days, Penny realized she had somehow developed the ability to control probability. She had no idea how, and she didn't care. Here, with her newfound powers, in her mind she had her answer from the universe, the “why” to her existence. She'd been (in her version of her personal history) spurned and abused her whole life to shape a supervillainess; when the universe finally decided it was ready for her to take center stage, it added the powers needed to seal the deal. She left poor boring Penelope Whitaker behind that day and Bad Penny, Mistress of Misfortune, was born.

Personality, Goals, & Tactics: “The world owes me.”

This is Bad Penny's mantra, and she takes it to heart. She considers everything she went through as a child and teenager (grossly exaggerated in her self-pitying recollections) to be a karmic

offense the universe only started to make amends for after she gained her powers. She's mercenary and self-absorbed on an almost cliché level, and has no problems abandoning contracts or people she's been paid to work alongside. She's whiny, juvenile, petty, vindictive, and generally not much fun to be around... though she tends to consider people's avoidance of her as jealousy more than anything else (introspection also not being one of her strengths). She finds her bouts of manic ego and destructive caprice to be somehow adorable and can't understand why all the "losers" around her don't share this view.

If she weren't so immensely useful to have around, she probably wouldn't get work at all; this is another realization it simply isn't in her to grasp.

Penny doesn't really do tactics—she leaves that to the people that hire her or work with her. She can follow instructions up to a point (if she feels like it and the instructions are worded politely enough), but she's usually hired more for her sheer chaos-factor-walking aspect—in other words, she's usually hired as a distraction or as a counter for those hero-types that just aren't that easy to counter in any other way.

What Penny does do, however, is spectacle. She loves melodrama and posturing, though what she usually ends up doing is more of an over-the-top kind of pout. Again, she finds this absolutely adorable and can't understand why others don't.

Powers, Abilities, &

Resources: Thanks to the ongoing informal regimen of mutagenic pharmaceuticals her parents partied through over the years, Penny was born a mutant, albeit a latent one until her accident. She

grew up without ever knowing they were different — at least, not until late in adolescence, when their “enhancements” manifested. No two specimens manifested identical abilities, and the manifesters were almost equally divided into those who could still pass for normal (albeit, only “pass,” as they were most definitely *not* normal), and those with physical changes and cosmetic distinctions forever after branding them as different. Some died from their newfound abilities, some entered into anti-social behaviors, and a small number even banded together as a group of malcontents named after their erstwhile patron.

Devil's Own Luck

Normally, NPCs with effects that would cost Hero Points to use for a player character (like, oh, Luck Control) simply “spend” those points through the GM handing over those selfsame points to players of the targeted or affected characters. At the GM's discretion, Bad Penny doesn't start doing that until after she works through her own stash of Hero/Luck Points. GMs who find that a bit awkward or abusive can choose to simply ignore her ranks in the Luck advantage altogether, or maybe give her a Feature effect that enables the circumvention.

can psionically alter probability along a broad scale of change. This can be relatively minor, such as finding a winning lottery ticket someone just happened to drop, to the extreme, such as a sports car's brakes failing *just in time* for it to hit a bump at high speed and start spinning through the air *just in time* to fly through the space in front of Penny as some hero's lightning bolt is streaking toward her.

When actively trying, with a thought she can make brick walls just happen to collapse on top of a target or gas mains just happen to suffer critical metal fatigue and blow up under a hero's feet, and so on. She can cloak a target in an ongoing cascade of bad luck so that their every action is hampered, or cause a chain of events of the most convoluted nature ending with, for example, that flowerpot (the one that represents the end of chain of objects moved, rolled, and bounced into one another) falling on the PC's head a few seconds after Penny has scampered away.

Campaign Usage & Story Hooks:

Bad Penny is more a nuisance normally than a real threat, though “nuisance” may fall short of conveying her gifts for being a pain in the butt. When acting on her own, she's more a one-shot appearance, or maybe a recurring foil for a specific character who's made her peeve list. When hired to act with others, she's more of an enabler, interfering with the player's abilities to interfere with her teammates' actions; second-

stringers who never made it into serious-opposition territory suddenly manage to effectively punch way out of their weight class and cause all sorts of headaches they couldn't before.

BAD PENNY

PL 11

STR	STA	AGL	DEX	FGT	INT	AWE	PRE
0	1	1	2	3	2	2	2

ADVANTAGES

Daze (Deception), Extraordinary Effort, Luck 5* (*see "Devil's Own Luck" sidebar), Taunt

DEFENSES

Dodge	14	Parry	14
Fort	5	Tough	8/1* Will 8

SKILLS

Deception 6 (+8), Expertise: Pop Culture 6 (+8), Insight 5 (+7), Intimidation 5 (+7), Perception 6 (+8), Persuasion 4 (+6)

COMBAT

Initiative: +1

Lift: 50 lbs.

Move: Ground (30 feet)

Astronomically Unlikely Accidents: (Perception Range; Damage 10)

Sucks to Be You, Chump...: (Perception Range; Affliction 10, Resisted and Overcome by Will)

POWERS

CHARMED LIFE: Enhanced Advantage 1 (Uncanny Dodge), Enhanced Dodge 10, Enhanced Parry 10, Movement 1 (Safe Fall [Reaction]), Protection 7 (Insidious, Subtle 2, Sustained) ♦ 34 points

IMPROBABLE EVENTS ARRAY: (37 base points) ♦ 45 total points

- **ASTRONOMICALLY UNLIKELY ACCIDENTS:** Perception Ranged Damage 10, Indirect 4, Subtle 2, Variable Descriptor 1 (Accidents) ♦ 37 base points
 - **FORTUNE FOLLOWS MY COMMANDS:** Selective Perception Area Luck Control 4 ♦ 2 points
 - **LUCKY ESCAPE:** Healing 8 (Energizing, Limited to Self, Restorative, Subtle 2) ♦ 2 points
 - **RUBE GOLDBERG KARMA:** Reaction Perception Ranged Move Object 2, Indirect 4, Precise, Subtle 2; Senses 10 (Radius Vision Counters and Penetrates All Concealment, Limited to Targeting Move Object) ♦ 2 points
 - **SUCKS TO BE YOU, CHUMP...:** Perception Ranged Affliction 10 (Resisted and Overcome by Will; Impaired and Vulnerable, Defenseless and Disabled), Extra Condition, Indirect 4, Insidious, Subtle 2, Limited Degree ♦ 2 points
- LUCKY, LUCKY ME:** Reaction Nullify 10 (Effects Countered by Coincidence), Broad, Effortless, Simultaneous, Close Range ♦ 60 points

COMPLICATIONS

Accident: Penny's control over her abilities isn't always complete or as precise as she'd like it. Sometimes bad luck "leaks" out into the environment around her, causing small problems whether she wants them to happen or not.

Motivation (Greed): It's all about the money with Bad Penny, and she never gets enough.

Quirk (Monumental Self-Entitlement): As far as she's concerned, the world owes Penny and her powers were just the beginning.

Quirk (Weirdness Magnet): Bad Penny subconsciously alters probability constantly, making her a vortex drawing in the most outré phenomena and individuals.

COSTS

Attributes 26 + Defenses 14 + Advantages 8 + Skills 16 + Powers 139 = 203 points

The Bargainer



Name: Albion Caul

Status: British citizen whose powers and activities are generally unknown to either mundane authorities or the general public

Designation: Modified Human (Magic)/Supernatural (Human Practitioner)

Affiliation(s): An otherwise unidentified group of godlike entities he refers to as "The Whispering Bishops of the Last Throne"; formerly the Caul family

Quote: "I offer dreams and fantasy made real ...your fondest wishes granted. Come now. Is what I ask in return *really* such a loss?"

Background: Some people seek darkness while others are born to it. The members of the Caul family over the last few centuries, with very few exceptions, have typified the latter. Cursed long ago by a demon betrayed by the family patriarch at that time, the infamous warlock Cornelius Cawlden, every member of the family since has been born with two distinguishing features—a lack of eyes, which in no way diminishes their ability to see but marks them as something very different and apart from their fellow men, and a gift for the dark arts. Renamed after the membrane that can cover a newborn's face at birth, a membrane to which tradition ascribes occult significance, the Caul family has worked for generations to perfect their mastery of the arts for which their bloodline grants them a natural aptitude. Some have sought a means of breaking their familial curse, others have hunted for the demon responsible for their

condition with minds set on vengeance, but the majority have pursued nothing beyond their own petty power-mongering. This is the family into which Albion was born.

Sickly in frame and weak in the family gifts, Albion had to learn caution and manipulation at an early age simply to survive among the debauched and blackhearted predatory kin that surrounded him. Acting slow in wits but loyal to whichever relative showed him any semblance of kindness, no matter how feigned or for what purpose, the boy managed to hide beneath his kin's notice, avoiding their often bloody rivalries and otherwise deadly paranoia.

When his uncle Gulliver took Albion on as an apprentice, the young man knew it was a sham, but played along to see what the old man had planned. He soon discovered that his uncle had made contact with a group of terrifyingly powerful elder entities, things he called "The Whispering Bishops of the Last Throne." Gulliver had gone to great lengths to hide this contact from the rest of the family, probably because he planned to use those entities against his relatives in some way... a perfectly Caulish thing to do, after all.

Albion spent his time pretending to be as absolutely oblivious as possible to his uncle's machinations, all the while feverishly studying the old man's every gesture and incantation during the more and more frequent contacts with his newfound patrons. The young man soon realized exactly what his purpose was to be in the upcoming ritual bargain, a purpose about which his uncle thought the nephew clueless—the blood sacrifice. Gulliver intended to gift Albion's soul to the fell entities in exchange for a

Family Tradition

The Caul family is one of at least three families infamous in the occult world, the others being the Wyrnwood family (detailed in their own entry in a later volume) and the Malificent family (detailed in Cruxley Malificent's background in the Witchbane group entry in a later volume). All members of the Caul family will have the traditional physical deformity associated with the line, as well as the **CAUL BLOODLINE** set of powers shown in Albion's stats; it's also a very rare member who doesn't have at least the Ritualist advantage plus ranks in Expertise: Magic, and a few ranks of mystic descriptor effects (5 pp or less) is quite a common trait among them. Only a handful of the clan has developed these aptitudes into full-blown Magic arrays and the like, though.

Over the decades acting as The Bargainer, Albion has probably become the most famous (or infamous, as the case may be) of the Cauls. His niece Abigail was the rarest of the breed, turning her abilities to the side of good only to meet her end at Blackbone's hands (see the Blackbone entry in this volume). Her brother Valentine Caul also broke from the family, but did so to join the fanatic anti-occult hate group Witchbane; among his many ongoing targets, he hunts his relatives with great enthusiasm.

grant of immense power. Albion made other plans.

When the night of the secluded ritual finally came and Gulliver paused in mid-incantation to hold his hand out to the young apprentice behind him for the ritual athame, a dagger the old man planned to quickly spin and place in Albion's chest, he was tremendously surprised when said blade instead drove into his own back and found Gulliver's own heart. His last thought as life and soul were drained from him was to wonder how the young fool had learned the incantation he could hear Albion mouthing perfectly. Finishing the ritual, Albion basked in the attention of his masters, speechless in joy at the flood of power filling him as he was transformed into the Bishops' agent in the physical world.

The next evening, the Caul family gathered at the ancestral home, answering the invitation sent earlier by Gulliver. They expected a trap of some kind, or perhaps a macabre game; either would have been in keeping with Gulliver's style. They were therefore amused if somewhat puzzled to find the corpse of their erstwhile host laid out on the table in the master dining room. This immediately turned to astonishment when Albion, who they had one and all considered the least of them, stepped into the room, radiating power. He took that moment to tell all of them he was removing himself from the family squabbles entirely, a status they would either honor or only briefly regret before they felt his power. As he regally walked away from his shocked relatives, he paused just long enough to look over his shoulder and mention that

should any of them desire instead to do business with

his new masters through him, Albion would be *delighted* to arrange it... and he would guarantee they received *special* consideration.

Personality, Goals, & Tactics:

There are two faces to Albion Caul, the one he shows and the one he hides. In his role as The Bargainer, representing his masters on Earth, he is the picture of grace and civility, never raising his voice, always considerate, always ingratiating. In short, the perfect salesman. Then there's the real Albion, a malicious sadist reveling in finally having the power to make everyone that ever bullied him pay for their slights. Beneath the smooth and silky delivery is a viper, always coiled and looking for vulnerable targets to strike. Every gift his masters give, every wish they grant those foolish enough to bargain with the elder horrors comes at an unseen price... some hidden quirk, some flaw that makes the recipient miserable and sorry they ever entered the deal, filling their hearts with regret before ultimately ending their lives and sending their souls on to wherever the Whispering Bishops dwell. That moment of all-encompassing terror, when the mark realizes what their greed or vanity or foolishness has cost them, that moment makes Albion's black little heart sing. A cultured veneer and guileful smile hides a monster's excuse for a man, a goblin happiest when he watches other men fall, when he watches a world built by others, for others, burn around him.

While he might have begun his relationship with his masters purely as a matter of survival and a path to personal power, he's long since become so enchanted with bringing ruin and pain wherever he

Castles in the Sand

It's a hallmark of dealing with The Bargainer that his largesse is temporary, as his targets inevitably end up forfeiting their prize and becoming hors-de-souls for the Whispering Bishops. However, on at least two occasions, his masters have used Albion to empower other individuals on an apparently permanent basis: Blackbone (detailed later in this volume) and Hell's Angel (detailed in a later volume). Albion has no idea as to the agenda in either case, and he knows better than to question his instructions. GMs can easily use the same empowerment scenario to explain the origins of other threats in their campaigns. Such creation is really outside of the presented build proper and should be handled as a plot element.

Published Settings

For GMs and players invested in Green Ronin's Earth-Prime setting, home to Freedom and Emerald Cities, The Bargainer makes a fully workable substitute for Mr. Infamy when the GM in question wants to shy away from full PL X territory. Alternately, The Bargainer can easily be a rival with the other fiendish dealmaker, up to and including targeting some of the same potential vict ... er ... clients.

goes that he's long since stopped looking for ways to leave their service.

Albion doesn't dirty his hands with actual fighting. If attacked, he will laugh at the attacker and casually leave, flaunting his seeming invulnerability; should the attacker actually be able to harm Caul, he leaves immediately, though he'll never forget the harm and will do everything he can to make that attacker regret his actions—preferably through those the attacker loves.

Powers, Abilities, & Resources:

Albion Caul possesses the same mystical sight that replaces his physical eyes as all of his kin possess. Additionally, he has been transformed into the vessel of his otherworldly masters' power on Earth, becoming a phantasmal presence practically untouchable by mortal concerns; any harm actually inflicted on him is quickly undone. His masters pass him information on an instinctual level, letting him know things he has no other way of being aware of, from secrets about the people he's talking with to even when someone desires his presence. He can communicate with anyone seeking his attention and knows their deepest wishes and desires just by talking to them.

But the ability for which his title "The Bargainer" is bestowed is the practically unlimited ability to bend reality to meet the wishes of whomever he chooses to bestow with such questionable gifts. He has

proven capable of channeling the Whispering Bishops' power to move mountains, raise the dead, create towers of gold and gems, and transform the puny into supermen.

However...

Even though his price varies as presented—a memory from childhood, the ability to taste food or cast a shadow, a relationship spurned, or in one case, simply placing a specific flower in a vase on a particular table at a particular time—invariably these gifts end in pain and misery, with the recipient wanting the gift taken away or removed. And that's when the real price comes due; in each case, the receiving party has agreed that forfeiture of the gift comes with a penalty chosen by the giver, a condition each agrees to in certainty that they will never want to give up what they have always wanted. Or, in the case of many in the supernatural community, that they will be able to find a way around the conditions through dint of power, or cleverness, or some other way... Albion loves working with people who think they can wriggle out of a deal or get the better of him. By the simple act of entering into the bargain itself, the receiving party has let the Whispering Bishops put their hooks into that person's soul, subtly exerting influence on multiple levels. It's only a matter of time before the fishermen pull in that catch.

Campaign Usage & Story

Hooks: Bargaining with the devil, or a reasonable substitute, is a campaign classic in the halls of superhero-dom. Whether it's trying to go that one step beyond where man was meant to go regardless of the price, or intervening when it's a loved one or other unsuspecting dupe being dangled on the end of the devil's hook, the irresistible deal and its hellish price is imminently adaptable to a variety of play styles.

COMPLICATIONS

Motivation (Chaos): Albion likes to watch things fall apart ... people's lives, families, businesses, governments, etc.

Motivation (Power): The target of bullying for most of his previous life, The Bargainer likes to show off his seeming invulnerability and make people aware of how unlimited his abilities seem to be.

Power Loss: Caul cannot grant a wish made for completely selfless and noble reasons (not even if it would somehow benefit Caul or his masters), nor can he directly harm a truly "good" person.

Prejudice: As with any member of the Caul family, being seen without sunglasses or some other means of hiding the unbroken flesh covering where his eyes should be generally causes a negative reaction in those viewing his "deformity."

Quirk (Debts to Dark Powers): Regardless of his great power, Albion is still a slave to his masters and must follow their direction and desires.

Reputation: Among the supernatural community, the dangerous nature of bargaining with Caul's masters is well-known, and he's generally avoided by the wise.

The Bargainer

PC 14

STR	STA	AGL	DEX	FGT	INT	AWE	PRE
1	14	1	3	4	5	12	5

ADVANTAGES

Benefit 3 (Status 3 — the supernatural community is well aware of who Albion is and what he serves), Daze (Deception), Diehard, Fascinate 2 (Deception, Persuasion), Fearless, Languages 3 (Coptic Egyptian, Hebrew, Latin, Sanskrit; English is native), Ritualist, Skill Mastery (Insight), Taunt

DEFENSES

Dodge	10	Parry	9	
Fort	14	Tough	14	Will 14

COMBAT

Initiative: +1

Lift: 100 lbs.

Move: Ground (30 feet)

Unarmed: Close +4, Damage 1

SKILLS

Deception 12 (+17), Expertise: Magic 10 (+15), Insight 11 (+23), Intimidation 5 (+10), Investigation 5 (+10), Perception 7 (+12), Persuasion 12 (+17), Stealth 4 (+5)

COSTS

Attributes 90 + Defenses 16 + Advantages 14 + Skills 33 + Powers 679 = 832 points

POWERS

CAUL BLOODLINE: Immunity 2 (Visually Impairing Effects), Senses 4 (Darkvision, Detect Magic [Ranged]) ♦ 6 points

I LIVE TO SERVE: Feature (The Bargainer knows when someone wants his attention or presence somewhere) ♦ 1 point

INSPIRATION FROM HIS MASTERS: Feature 3 (Treat mechanically as the Well-informed advantage with a +5 circumstance bonus on a Persuasion check only for that use) ♦ 3 points

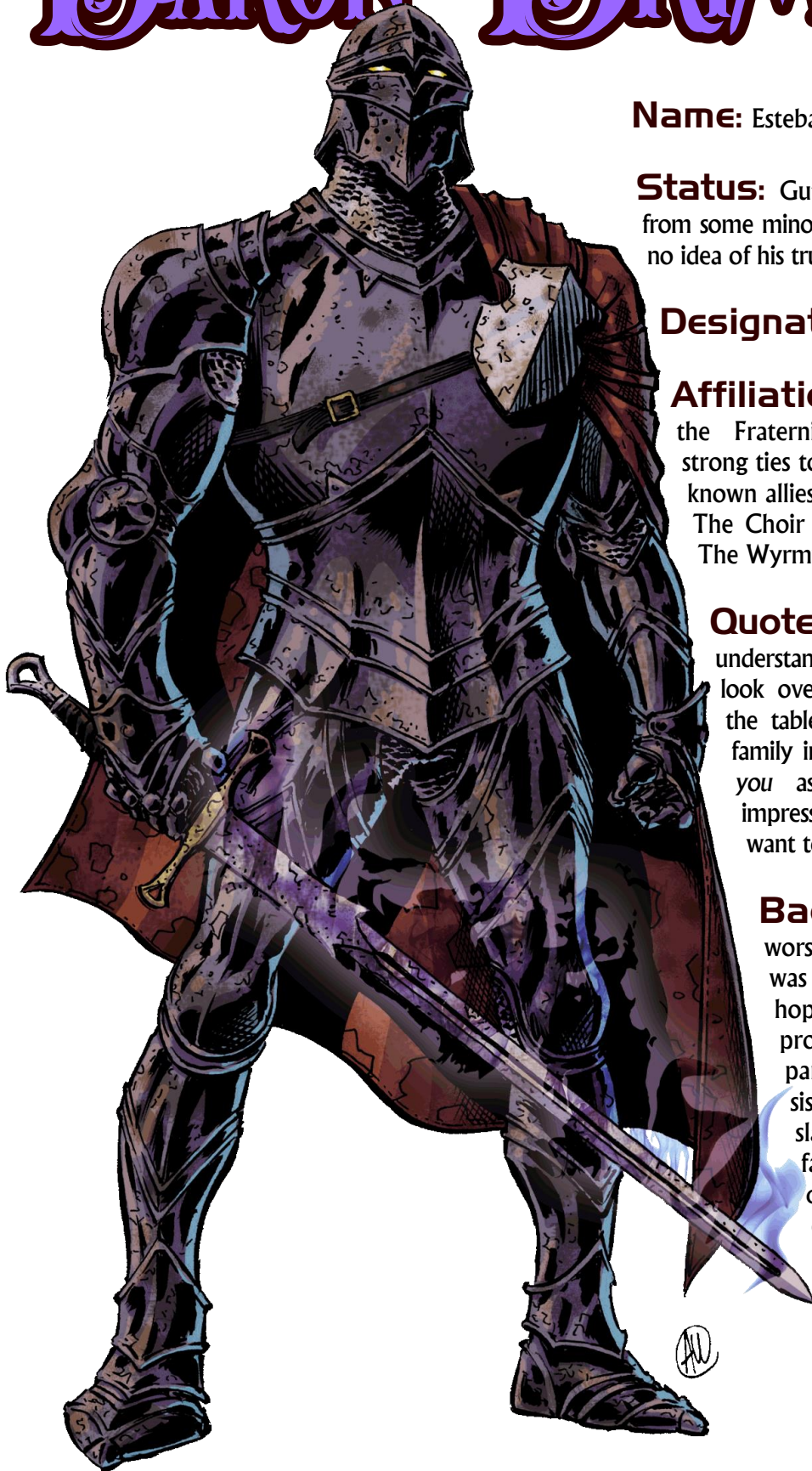
LOYALTY REWARDED: Healing 12 (Limited to Self Only, Restorative), Immortality 15 ♦ 42 total points

NO LONGER OF THIS WORLD: Affects Corporeal on Strength 1, Insubstantial 4 (Innate, Permanent), Immunity 30 (Fortitude effects), Movement 3 (Trackless [Olfactory], Water-Walking 2), Teleport 15 (120 miles; Quirk — must be walking for Teleport to work) ♦ 82 total points

SHOW ME YOUR HEART'S DESIRE: Comprehend Languages 3, Mind-Reading 13 (Subtle, Quirk — Target must be talking to Caul) ♦ 32 total points

WISH-GRANTING: Continuous Cumulative Affliction 20 (Resisted and Overcome by Will; Transformed and Controlled; Affects Corporeal 20, Extra Degree, Insidious [on Controlled condition], Limited Degree 2, Subtle 2 [on Controlled condition]) with Linked Continuous Variable 50 (Effects applied to or used by others) ♦ 513 total points

BARON BRIMSTONE



Name: Esteban Gutierrez

Status: Gutierrez has no criminal record aside from some minor juvie stuff; also, the authorities have no idea of his true identity or the scope of his control

Designation: Modified Human (Magic)

Affiliation(s): None currently (formerly the Fraternitatem Aeternum Ensis Ferrum); strong ties to The Alchemist as well as numerous known allies among The Parliament of Shadows, The Choir Infernal, The Snakeskin Circle, and The Wurmwood family

Quote: "I hope we can reach an understanding. If you would take a moment to look over the heartwarming photographs on the table in front of you, the ones of your family in front of your home standing beside you as you look without your oh-so-impressive costume, I'm sure you'll agree we want to avoid any unnecessary violence."

Background: Esteban always worshipped his older brother. Marcos was everything a younger brother could hope to idolize – strong, brave, protective, and wise. When their parents died, leaving them and their sister Esperanza on the street, Marcos slaved and bled to provide for the family. Little Esteban did what he could to help, but being a small child, that was never very much. Then the man they would call Mentor showed up on their meager doorstep. He said Marcos had been chosen by God to walk a hero's path, and little Esteban thought all of his prayers were answered.

The old man helped raise Esteban while training Marcos. For years the training went on, learning how to fight, learning how to control his emotions (especially his fear), and learning how to use the powers that would eventually be his. Day in, day out, without cease. Esteban would emulate the training results he watched, much to the amusement of Mentor and Marcos. The old man saw no harm in leaving his charge some well-prepared support at home. Mentor was a caring man, and he tried in many ways to be not only a teacher to Marcos, but almost a father to Esteban and Esperanza. The only thing little Esteban didn't like were the visits from the Knight. A hard man of unswerving belief, pitiless judgment, and an accent to his speech Esteban was never able to identify, the Knight was civil to the Squire (which was Marcos' role, "until ready," Esteban learned) when Mentor and Marcos were present, but Esteban didn't like the looks the Knight gave the family when he thought no one was looking. They were looks he had seen from other white men, and he had learned the hard way those looks meant he should avoid the men whose faces wore them. Worse, the Knight treated Esperanza poorly when Mentor and Marcos were absent, and then lied about it when she complained. Esteban didn't like the Knight.

One day Mentor told them it was time. He and the Knight argued about it, their voices carrying out from the room they shut themselves in to where Esteban could hear them. Mentor was dying. The Knight had started making too many mistakes, and Mentor wanted him to pass "the burden" to Marcos. The argument lasted all

Again with the "Who were those people?"

The Alchemist is a master villain holding a place of high honor among the supernatural threats menacing the world. **The Parliament of Shadows** is an ancient organization comprised of several smaller organizations as well as small number of very powerful occult entities, all working together for mutual protection and greater power. **The Choir Infernal** is a demonic hive mind created eons ago by some dark power in a far-removed dimension; its presence is spread through its song to those unfortunate enough to hear it and weak enough to succumb to its siren call. **The Snakeskin Circle** is a group of progressive, forward-thinking bokors heavily invested in modernizing their own twisted interpretation of voodoo and their patron loa. Finally, the **Wyrmswood family** trace their descent from a failed occult experiment during Puritan times to birth a final infernal avatar to herald in the end times; they've never quite recovered from the blow to their family ego that failure represents and are notorious even among supernatural circles for their efforts to plumb new depths of depravity in some perverse competition among their hideously inbred blood-kin.

The Alchemist's entry can be found in Volume I of this series. The Parliament of Shadows, Choir Infernal, Snakeskin Circle, and Wyrmswood family will appear in later volumes.

night and into the next day, but Mentor finally won. That night, after they all returned from Mass, Mentor led the ritual between Knight and Squire, and Marcos became the kind of hero Esteban saw in his morning cartoons, with the powers to back up his bravery. Mentor left the next morning, and Esteban never saw him again.

He saw a great deal of the man who insisted on being called Mentor now that Marcos was the new Knight, however. That man insisted on staying around for long periods to "make sure Marcos did his job." He would on occasion leave to follow signs indicating possible candidates for the next Squire, but he always returned frustrated and angry. There would be tirades of how weak and decadent times had become, and how this country just couldn't produce a suitable heir and worthy brother-in-arms. Esteban hated those nights, hated how Marcos ignored his teacher's scorn and the double-meanings in everything the man said to their family, the hurtful words. He admired Marcos' nobility, but when his brother asked him to forgive the older man his failings, Esteban never meant his nodded agreement.

Training continued. During the days when he didn't have missions and the older man wasn't out following signs and portents, Marcos trained with his predecessor. Marcos had trained hard under the old man, but the new Mentor was never satisfied... never happy. Sometimes, he mentioned that he should be content he got as much from Marcos as he did, that it was probably all someone like Marcos could manage and as such he shouldn't hold it against the young man. But Marcos never

complained, never shirked his trainings. And in the evenings, he sparred with Esteban, shared his knowledge with his little brother, and told him about his missions. Esteban and Esperanza found jobs as soon as they were old enough, and they took on the responsibility to put food on the table and keep their meager roof over the family – Marcos had higher duties. But both of the younger Gutierrez siblings learned early that avoiding the teacher (Esteban could never bring himself to call the man Mentor—that had been a different man, a better man) was usually the best way to forestall the inevitable arguments and ceaseless criticisms... and the ugly stares at Esperanza.

Some nights, Esteban would follow his brother out when Marcos went on a mission in their local area. He watched him fight honest-to-god monsters and demons. Some nights, he was even able to offer his brother a little help. Not much, but it made Esteban feel good, and it earned a compliment or thank you from his brother, something Esteban valued more than gold.

That's why he was there the night fortune turned against Marcos.

It was a lucky blow, the wolf-demon catching Marcos in a weak section of his armor with its claw when Marcos interposed his body between the monster and the old woman it targeted. Esteban distracted the beast, giving Marcos the opening to strike the killing blow, but it was too little, too late. Marcos' life was bleeding out on the ground and Esteban couldn't stop it. Marcos wouldn't make it out of the alley where the fight took place, much less to a doctor. Tears filling his eyes, Esteban barely heard his brother's last words as Marcos placed both hands on Esteban's

Office of Inhuman Resources

The exact composition and scale of the Baron's organization is left to individual GMs to tailor as fits the size and tone of their individual campaigns. GMs should be imaginative, though, in how the two separate definitions of "Underworld" cross. Prostitutes possessed by minor succubi, ghouls disposing of inconvenient bodies, vampire hitmen, police officers controlled under geas, and scribed on federal investigators are only a handful of examples. Alchemically engineered narcotics that work on the soul, or gambling establishments that let you wager your shadow or your firstborn or so on ... GMs have plenty of options.

Similarly, exactly how "in the know" the authorities (or other criminals) are as to the true nature of the Baron's organization is also left up to what fits within the campaign framework — different GMs make different use of supernatural elements and results vary widely.

Fraternitatem Aeternum Ensis Ferrum

Not all of mankind's defenders perform their heroism in the open light of day. The Fraternitatem Aeternum Ensis Ferrum ("Eternal Brotherhood of the [Cold] Iron Blade"), sometimes referred to as just the Fraternitatem Aeternum, was a mystic tradition dating back more than 1,500 years whose great deeds, sacrifices, and eternal battle are little

chest over his heart, "I love you, hermano. Please forgive me." There was no ritual, no hours of prayer and chants. One moment the power was in Marcos, and the next it surged into Esteban. Suddenly he was so much more than he had been before, filled with strength, his senses opened to new vistas. But it didn't matter because his brother was dead and grief was what filled Esteban's entire world.

He told the police it had been a pack of wild dogs that killed his brother and had run off, and with the evidence supporting it, they didn't really question the story (or stay too long). He didn't have to explain what had happened to "Mentor" when he returned home. The man knew already, and didn't try to hide his disgust. "Now I have to train the whelp as well... the Lord places too many trials before me." Little brother was in no mood to live up to Marcos' ideals that night. A single blow from Esteban sent the man flying over the apartment's little table. "If you sleep under my roof and eat at my table, you *will* show me respect, hombre. Otherwise, leave."

Enraged, the older man lunged for the younger. Esteban was new to his abilities – he didn't realize he was summoning his sword when he stepped forward to defend himself. Ignorance did nothing to blunt the blade's point, though, and a moment later Esteban had taken his first life. He tried to feel horror, tried to feel guilt, but he just couldn't make himself. Not for this man. And when he hid the body in gang territory for them to take the blame, he didn't understand the small jerking feeling in his heart, as if something was lost or fell away. It was the first of many times he felt that unexplained feeling.

Over the following years, he would try to live up to Marcos' example. He never quite made it. He succeeded in every fight, of course. Esteban was good in a fight. But his area, his responsibility, got darker and darker. There were more monsters, more demons fewer and fewer clear cut victories; he managed to cripple any hint of organization among his enemies, but they still preyed, still roamed, too many for his one sword to ever cut down. Too many times he found himself forced to compromise, to let one evil flourish in order to take down a bigger bad guy. Marcos had made it all look easy, but it wasn't. Worse, over time he could feel his powers growing weaker, with no explanation.

One night, he interrupted an attempt by yet another group of idiot cultists to bring yet another demon to Earth. The cultists were a workout, but he had faced tougher. In a moment of cruel inspiration, he severed part of the binding invocation scrawled on the abandoned warehouse floor, trapping the demon between worlds and slowly draining its strength. If left unfinished, the binding would vanish at dawn and the demon would be destroyed. The demon offered him power to replace what he already had and more on top of that, it offered him wealth and servants, presence and status, anything he wanted, if only he would help it leave this unwelcome plane. Esteban laughed and walked away, leaving it to suffer and perish in unspeakable agony over the next few hours.

But when he returned home to rest, he found chaos instead.

There had been a drive-by shooting directed at one of his neighbors and stray bullets had caught Esperanza. His healing touch did nothing, no matter how hard he

known outside the brothers of the order itself and an occasional representative or two of the Vatican (who have some knowledge of the brothers and have occasionally provided material assistance over the centuries, though not with any reliable frequency these last few centuries).

The founder of the order claimed divine empowerment and was responsible for the death of a demonic creature that had attacked the founder's family's estates. Regardless of the source of the powers the man displayed, their very emphatic use against the forces of darkness stayed true century after century until Baron Brimstone.

At any one time, there were never more than three members of the order: Mentor, Knight, and Squire. When the Knight began to feel the signs of age slowing him and the Mentor decided the Squire was ready, the mantle would pass and the Mentor would retire (and usually not live long afterward, passing on to his reward). Thereafter, the Knight would become Mentor (transferring the bulk of his power to his successor), and the Squire would become Knight. The new Mentor, using one of the abilities left to him, would begin the search for and then the training of the new Squire. This was the tradition as it survived unbroken for centuries, a success despite horrendous odds and opposition that each member of the order took as evidence of divine patronage.

tried. The only doctors close enough to even try in time to save her were at a rundown local clinic.

In those few moments, sitting there, he watched helplessly as his sister died. There was nothing he could do. Just like Marcos. Just like their parents.

In that short time, all he could do was look at the squalor he and his sister had stayed in and think of what money to buy better doctors could have done, or how money and the stature that went with it could have removed his sister from harm's way in the first place—money he had left lying untouched in one monstrous lair after another in the course of doing his so-called duty over the years.

In that short time, he looked back over all the supposed good he had done for this unchanging area and he couldn't see any victories, only what amounted to treading water. No, that wasn't right. He had created *something* with all of the monsters, all of the demons he had destroyed... he had created a power vacuum.

He returned to the warehouse shortly before dawn. As he carved back into the concrete the binding sigil he had altered the previous night, he watched as the unmarked and shining steel of his summoned blade turned black and pitted, as the pure light surrounding it turned to a cold flame. As he finished the sigil, he could feel the demon's presence before him again.

"You mentioned gifts and bargains," he said, bitter resolution ringing in his voice. "Let's talk."

Personality, Goals, & Tactics: For the first time in his life, Baron Brimstone is the one in control—not duty and not

some authority figure. He knows it and is pitiless in protecting his role and status. Mercy and compassion are for the weak, and Esteban will NEVER be weak again. But just because he occasionally has to grind a few fools and saints under his heel to stay on top is no reason to lose perspective, or his sense of humor. Being bad is fun, and that's a lesson he savors teaching.

A devilishly charming man (literally), Baron Brimstone is hard to dislike under most circumstances. He has the kind of charisma that hits most people between the eyes like a club and overwhelms their good sense. It's one of the first and most enjoyable weapons in his arsenal. Behind the warm and inviting eyes is a soul happy to be lost. He's a true and self-indulgent hedonist, seductive all the more because by this point he really and truly enjoys being *evil*, though he'll laugh and needle anyone who uses that word to describe him, questioning their judgment and definitions (an effective diversionary tactic he learned from his valued ally, The Alchemist).

Esteban uses the alias "Baron Brimstone" as a calculated ploy—he intends that an operatic or melodramatic name will make opponents think he's just another superpowered criminal with too much ego and delusions of self-importance. He also sometime operates under the names of various demons from classical demonology (Sammael, Abregas, Casmodean, and so on) that have traditionally been associated with corruption, betrayal, and loss of hope, all for the same psychological warfare-related reasons.

Corpses provide little entertainment value, and Esteban is secure enough in his skills and experienced enough in the use of violence that just beating down his

The Knight's granted abilities included strength, speed, and stamina above human measure and a touch that could mend wounds and heal even broken minds; preternatural perceptions which included not only limited precognition and great powers of intuition, but also the ability to gauge a man's courage, honor, and potential with a glance; and an aura of calming grace and the power to inspire others to great acts of courage and feats of skill and strength the listener might never have thought possible. But above all these, the most visible sign of the Knight's power was his ability to summon mystical armor and sword with a thought ... armor that could turn a dragon's claw and a sword that cleaved steel, spirit, and spell, and the mere sight of which could send most agents of darkness fleeing in terror.

PC-Compatible!

Enterprising GMs might note that the point spread of Baron Brimstone's corrupted knightly abilities is enhanced by his experience (i.e., expended XP) and the many bargains and boons he's acquired, coerced, or plain out stolen (i.e., the benefit of being an NPC). The power set is easily tailored down to PC point levels, and the entity that claims to be the ghost of the betrayed and murdered Mentor is most definitely looking for a "worthy" soul to redeem the order, wrest the mantle from Baron Brimstone, and send the betrayer to meet his final judgment.

opponents physically has grown rather boring. No, the real joy is breaking an enemy's spirit. Shattering their ideals and forcing them to face every demeaning truth, every blemish in their character, every failing they might choose to hide behind grandiose symbols and archaic oaths. Dragging a hero down into the muck and the mire they claim to be above and proving even the most righteous champion to have feet of clay—*that's satisfaction*. That's true victory.

Baron Brimstone will study his opponents, looking for weaknesses outside their powers: loved ones, past mistakes, secret identities with exploitable financial or legal vulnerabilities, character shortcomings, and so on. Those are what he'll target first. His goal will be to convert the heroes over to his side. If that fails, only then will he resort to violence. And he plays dirty... booby-trapped battle sites, hostages, teammates deceived or controlled into attacking teammates, and so on. And that's after the faked evidence that has the police chasing the heroes for crimes they never committed, and after they had to fight through all of the proxies and minions just to find and confront Baron Brimstone in person in the first place. Even an eventual win for the heroes has probably been accounted for in his plans and the circumstances set up so that it will be pyrrhic at best. Baron Brimstone is, after all, a cheat of the highest caliber and a very poor loser.

Powers, Abilities, & Resources:

Baron Brimstone's powers, appropriately enough, are corruptions of the gifts he once used as a member of the Fraternitatem Aeternum (see

sidebar). He retains the inhuman physical prowess, but his touch now inflicts grievous wounds rather than heals them, and reduces the strong of will to babbling children. He can see a man's failings, sins, and moral weaknesses just by looking at the person, and it is tremendously dangerous to stay within the sound of his voice – his mere words can twist, debase, and control the most righteous soul. The armor he summons by will is blackened and scorched, and the terrible sword he can call to hand is covered in a cold flame that instills fear in the hearts of all good men and women who see it.

Even without the mystic enhancements, Esteban is a highly accomplished melee combatant, formidable tactician, and wily negotiator with extensive knowledge of the occult. He is also the head of a fast-growing underworld syndicate whose reach extends further each and every day. Many opposing criminal organizations know the players, and forces the authorities actually see are only the tip of an iceberg they've discovered the hard way is staffed with ogreish leg-breakers, hex-casting lieutenants, and a staff of ghouls ready to dispose of inconvenient bodies. Prominent in this structure are the Sin Factory series of nightclubs and gambling establishments that pour so much money into Baron Brimstone's coffers (and blackmail material into his operating resources). Managed by the twin fortunamancers Jesse and Jackie Chance, these havens for debauchery also cover for numerous drug dens as well as a high-priced brothel who's Madame, Dolly DeVille, is a succubus bound to a doll focus hidden behind powerful illusions.

Campaign Usage & Story

Hooks: Esteban is a crimelord with a twist – his “syndicate” is comprised almost entirely (at least at any rank or in any capacity with clout) of supernatural beings or those with ties to the supernatural... monsters,

Sounds like a player character origin waiting to be pursued...

Power Notes

Esteban's knightly armor and sword are effects that simply have mundane *looking* descriptors.

The Baron's Mystic Parry effect allows him to “Parry” things GMs might otherwise hesitate before allowing Parry Defense to counter — for example, shattering incoming thrown boulders or cleaving clean through the center of a vehicle driven at him.

His array is considered Removable as he can be disarmed, but it isn't Easily Removable since the condition is only temporary unless he's unconscious or similarly incapacitated seeing as he can simply summon the Black Blade back to his hand.

Finally, the armor must be summoned (i.e., the Sustained power has to be activated), and it vanishes when he's unconscious or similarly incapacitated.

sorcerers, and so on. But, he still operates as a crimelord and can be placed in any role within a campaign that such a status would fill.

Heroes with knightly or divine or ecclesiastically-related motifs are all irresistible targets for Baron Brimstone. The higher the moral demeanor displayed by a hero, the more important their honor or their “crusade” against crime is, the more likely they'll attract the Baron's attention. Anyone that shows they pose a threat to his position is to be dealt with, but ultimately, anyone who puts on a costume and goes out to self-righteously fight crime, in Baron Brimstone's eyes, is just crying out, “Corrupt me. Please!”

Jackie and Jesse Chance — PL 6

Power Points: Abilities 20 + Defenses 14 + Advantages 8 + Skills 34 + Powers 32 = 108

Abilities: Str 1, Sta 0, Agl 0, Dex 2, Ftg 2, Int 1, Awe 2, Pre 2

Defense: Dodge 3, Parry 3, Fortitude 4, Toughness 8/0*, Will 8

Combat: Initiative +0; Light Pistol +8 (Ranged, Damage 3), Unarmed +2 (Close, Damage 1)

Advantages: Artificer, *Beginner's Luck*, Benefit 2 (Managers of the Sin Factory franchise, Well-off), *Defensive Roll* 6, Equipment 2, *Evasion*, *Hide in Plain Sight*, *Improved Critical* 4 (*Light Pistol*), Languages 2 (Enochian, Latin: English is native), *Luck* 3, Ritualist, *Seize Initiative*, *Uncanny Dodge*

Equipment: Cell Phone (Smartphone), Light Pistol, Undercover Shirt

Skills: Deception 8 (+10), Expertise: Business 7 (+8), Expertise: Gambling 9 (+10), Expertise: Magic 7 (+8), Insight 6 (+8), Intimidation 3 (+5), Perception 6 (+8), Persuasion 6 (+8), Ranged Combat: Light Pistol 6 (+8), Sleight of Hand 6 (+8), Stealth 4 (+4)

Powers:

FORTUNE'S FRIENDS: Enhanced Advantages 18 (*Beginner's Luck*, *Defensive Roll* 6, *Evasion*, *Hide in*

Plain Sight, Improved Critical 4, Luck 3, Seize Initiative, Uncanny Dodge) ♦ 18 points

PROBABILITY MANIPULATION: Luck Control 4 (Bestow Luck, Force a Re-roll, Negate Luck, Spend on Other) ♦ 12 points

SEE FORTUNE'S PATH: Senses 4 (Precognition; Uncontrolled) ♦ 2 points

Complications: Addiction (Gambling), Motivation (Greed), Quirk (Superstitious): The brothers are both tremendously respectful of the vagaries of chance and the many ways they can incur good and bad luck.

Dolly DeVille — PL 9

Power Points: Abilities 78 + Defenses 10 + Advantages 9 + Skills 31 + Powers 102 = 230

Abilities: Str 4, Sta 7, Agl 4, Dex 4, Ftg 7, Int 3, Awe 5, Pre 5

Defense: Dodge 8, Parry 7, Fortitude 7, Toughness 10, Will 11

Combat: Initiative +4, Fiendish Appeal (Close, Perception Area Affliction 8), Retractable Claws +7 (Close, Damage 5), Soul Stealing Kiss +7 (Close, Weaken 8)

Advantages: Artificer, Attractive 2, Daze (Deception), Fascinate 2 (Deception, Persuasion), Fearless, Ritualist, Taunt

Skills: Deception 10 (+15), Expertise: Magic 9 (+13), Expertise: Prostitute 12 (+15), Insight 8 (+13), Intimidation 3 (+8), Perception 5 (+10), Persuasion 10 (+15), Stealth 5 (+9)

Powers:

BOUND TO THIS PLANE: Immortality 5 ♦ 10 points

DEMONIC ENDURANCE: Immunity 14 (Aging, Critical Hits, Life Support, Sleep), Protection 3 (Impervious Toughness 10), Regeneration 2 ♦ 29 points

DEMONIC SENSES: Senses 3 (Mystic Awareness, Darkvision), ♦ 3 points

DRAMATIC APPEARANCE: Feature 1 (Circumstances always make her the center of attention) ♦ 1 points

DREAM GIRL: Morph 2 (Human Females) ♦ 10 points

EMPATHIC: Mind Reading 5 (Effortless, Limited to Emotions) ♦ 10 points

FIENDISH APPEAL: Cumulative Visual Perception Area Affliction 8 (Resisted by Will; Entranced, Compelled, Controlled), Concentration Duration, Insidious, Subtle 2; Limited to instilling feelings of overwhelming lust or desire, Quirk: Does not work on those possessing strong moral natures) ♦ 32 points

RETRACTABLE CLAWS: Strength-based Damage 1 ♦ 1 points

SOUL STEALING KISS: Weaken Stamina 8 (Resisted by Will), Insidious, Subtle; Grab-based ♦ 6 points

Complications: Hatred: As a succubus, Dolly despises the pure of heart and the righteous. She will go to great lengths to bring the noblest men low.

Motivation (Thrills): DeVille enjoys her work. **Power Loss:** As a demonic spirit investing a physical focus, DeVille loses her powers under the proper ritual conditions (protective circles and so on); also, she's actually less powerful than in her unbound form and lacks numerous demonic abilities she would otherwise enjoy. **Quirk (Mystic Entity):** DeVille can be bound and restrained with the proper rituals or even forced to follow orders if her true name is known.

SKILLS

Acrobatics 5 (+10), Athletics 8 (+13), Close Combat: Swords 4 (+14), Deception 14 (+20), Expertise: Arcane Lore 10 (+13), Expertise: Business 7 (+10), Expertise: Crimelord 10 (+13), Insight 12 (+18), Intimidation 10 (+16), Investigation 7 (+10), Perception 12 (+18), Persuasion 14 (+20), Sleight of Hand 4 (+8), Stealth 3 (+8), Technology 2 (+5), Treatment 2 (+5)

COMPLICATIONS

Identity: Esteban hides his supernatural powers from the mundane world, pretending to be a simple but highly successful businessman.

Motivation (Greed and Power): Money to burn and the power to do whatever you want without fear of the consequences are the only things worth fighting for — everything else is childish ideals and pretty words.

Power Loss: Baron Brimstone loses ranks from his powers equal to the time ranks he spends on holy ground.

Temper: Esteban is an incredibly poor loser.

COSTS

Attributes 88 + Defenses 18 + Advantages 29 + Skills 62 + Powers 93 = 290 points

BARON BRIMSTONE

PL 12

STR STA AGL DEX FGT INT AWE PRE
5 5 5 4 10 3 6 6

ADVANTAGES

Accurate Attack, All-out Attack, Assessment, Benefit 5 (Status 2 [Crimelord], Wealth 3 [Millionaire]), Connected, Contacts, Daze (Deception), Defensive Attack, Diehard, Fascinate 2 (Deception, Persuasion), Fearless, Improved Disarm, Improved Smash, Languages (Spanish; English is native), Move-by Action, Power Attack, Precise Attack (Close, Cover), Ritualist, Set-up, Startle, Taunt, Uncanny Dodge, Weapon Bind, Well-informed

POWERS

- BLACK BLADE ARRAY:** (24 base points; Removable) ♦ 21 total points
- **BLADE SLASH:** Strength-based Damage 5 (Affects Insubstantial 2, Feature (Counts as Unholy for effects and weaknesses related to that descriptor), Incurable, Multiattack, Penetrating 5, Secondary Effect ♦ 24 base points
 - **MYSTIC PARRY:** Immunity 40 (all Toughness-based effects targeting Dodge or Parry, Concentration Duration) ♦ 1 point
 - **SPELLBREAKER:** Nullify Magic 10 (Broad, Effortless, Simultaneous, Distracting, Noticeable [Pyrotechnic display when magic effect dispelled], Close Range) ♦ 1 point
- FIENDISH ENDURANCE:** Immunity 8 (Disease, Environmental Conditions, Poison, Starvation & Thirst; Limited to Half Effect) ♦ 4 points
- FIENDISH INVESTITURE:** Senses 4 (Danger Sense, Darkvision, Mystic Awareness) ♦ 4 points
- MYSTIC ARMOR:** Protection 5 (Impervious, Noticeable [Blackened Knight's Armor], Sustained) ♦ 9 points
- NO ONE'S PERFECT:** Senses 6 (Acute, Analytical, Ranged Detect Sins and Moral Weaknesses) ♦ 6 points

DEFENSES

Dodge 10 Parry 14
Fort 10 Tough 10 Will 10

COMBAT

Initiative: +5

Lift: 1600 lbs.

Move: Ground (30 feet)

Unarmed: Close +10, Damage 5

Black Blade: Close +14, Multiattack Damage 10

Cold Flame of Dread: Visual Perception Area

Affliction 10; Resisted and Overcome by Will

Fiendish Voice: Auditory Perception Area

Affliction 10; Resisted and Overcome by Will

Mindbreaking Touch: Close +10, Affliction 10;

Resisted and Overcome by Will

Wounding Touch: Close +10, Affliction 10;

Resisted and Overcome by Fortitude

FIENDISH WILL: Immunity 10 (Mental Powers; Limited to Half Effect) ♦ 5 points

FIENDISH POWER ARRAY: (41 base points) ♦ 44 total points

- **COLD FLAME OF DREAD:** Cumulative Reaction Visual Perception Area Affliction 10 (Resisted and Overcome by Will; Entranced, Compelled), Subtle; Limited to instilling terror, Limited to two degrees ♦ 41 base points
- **FIENDISH CHARM:** Auditory Perception Area Cumulative Affliction 10 (Resisted and Overcome by Will; Entranced, Compelled, Controlled), Insidious, Subtle 2 ♦ 1 point
- **MINDBREAKING TOUCH:** Cumulative Affliction 10 (Resisted and Overcome by Will; Impaired, Disabled, Unaware), Progressive ♦ 1 point
- **WOUNDING TOUCH:** Cumulative Affliction 10 (Resisted and Overcome by Fortitude; Dazed, Stunned, Incapacitated), Progressive ♦ 1 point

BATTALION



Published Settings

If you're using the Earth-Prime setting published by Green Ronin, the Ghostworks organization introduced in the *Emerald City* sourcebook is an ideal replacement for the New Sons of Liberty, both as the force behind Battalion coming into his powers and as his most frequent employer.

Name: Michael Avery
Hardcastle, Sr.

Status: American citizen with no criminal record; activities as Battalion and nature as a mutant are unknown to either the general public or most conventional authorities

Designation: Metahuman (mutant)

Affiliation(s): Originally a member of the special assets group used by The New Sons of Liberty; currently a free agent and mercenary

Quote: “You have no idea who you’re dealing with, son. I ain’t outnumbered or outgunned. Just watch this...”

Background: Michael Hardcastle never knew his real parents, only the couple that raised him, and his “Uncle Frank,” who visited frequently as Mike grew up. When the boy was deemed old enough, Uncle Frank took little Mike aside and explained the world to him.

Frank worked for a number of organizations Uncle Sam made good use of but whose existence the government didn’t like to admit. Mike was told that he himself was the son of a deceased metahuman and former criminal, a woman who had gone by the handle “Crime Wave,” and who apparently possessed the ability to make numerous exact duplicates of herself. She had eventually been coerced into working for one of those doesn’t-really-exist groups Frank moved around in and had over time earned Frank’s respect, and that of other agents, one of whom had gotten her pregnant in an

The New Sons of Liberty

At some point in the years immediately following the Second World War, a group of like-minded Americans of wealth and influence met in secret to discuss their mutual concerns over the state of the world and of their homeland.

They were unhappy with the continuing programs put in place by FDR, which they viewed as little more than socialism and a dangerous “gateway drug” for the masses since Communism was stalking their doorstep.

They were unhappy with the costs of rebuilding the post-war world, which they felt they shouldered too much a part of and had too little say in.

They were unhappy with the state of the cultural changes they saw coming, sweeping decay in morals paired with empty headed platitudes giving the wrong people — the inferior, the heathen, the degenerate — the wrong ideas.

No, this was not a world they would simply stand aside and let usher out their better one. Not if they had any say in the matter, and their money and connections made certain they did.

Combining their connections and pooling other resources, these movers-and-shakers created the first iteration of the New Sons of Liberty (NSL). The NSL worked behind the scenes to squelch change, to gain unseen influence on the federal and national level, and to eventually try to take

“unsanctioned relationship.” That agent had been killed in the line of duty a few days before Mike’s birth, a birth his mother didn’t survive. Frank had taken the child and placed him with an older couple retired from the agency. When Mike grew old enough, Frank and his employers wanted to give him the chance to follow in his parents’ footsteps.

And so they did.

Mike excelled at his training, the weapons, the brutal physical conditioning, he took to all of it as naturally as many people master walking and talking. One day, Frank no longer came to visit him. Mike was told that Frank had laid down his life for his country, a statement he had no reason to disbelieve. By that time, Mike was also trusted enough to be told about the nature of his patrons. They called themselves the New Sons of Liberty and were a shadow organization within the American intelligence community, operating below the radar and doing the dirty work they felt only they had the stomach and backbone to do in an ever-weakening and increasingly more morally-questionable America. Hoping that Mike had inherited his mother’s abilities, they subjected him to a battery of chemical and radiation treatments. The experience wasn’t pleasant, but it eventually produced results. Mike not only inherited the same abilities, he manifested them on a greater scale; he was able to generate several times the number of dupes his mother had, and they could mentally coordinate, something his mother’s never could, he was told. Mike was given the name “Battalion,” and for several years thereafter he worked alongside the organization’s other powered assets. That period corroded a lot of

Battalion's idealism and reawakened the insecurities he had grown up with about knowing his place and purpose in the world. He didn't like General Wallace (the nominal commander of the special assets) or the man's petty displays of sadism; further, while he got along just fine with Wild Blue and Max Magnum, Arclight was a disturbing bundle of collateral damage waiting to happen, and both American Dream and Godspeed had questionable sanity. Further, Battalion had begun to suspect that Frank's death in the field was more a matter of politics and less a matter of tactical necessity as Mike had been told. Outside of his associates, Mike had also started a family, and he didn't want to raise his son while he worked with people like his teammates. These were not people he wanted watching his back if he had a choice in the matter, and certainly not the people he wanted eventually having The Conversation™ with his family should the day arrive when he stopped coming home forever. He wanted to call his own shots and be his own man, and not have to look over his shoulder to see if his erstwhile teammates had decided Mike was an acceptable and expedient sacrifice toward their own career goals.

Following a series of shake-ups in the "management level" of the New Sons that followed a costumed hero's successful investigations into the group, Battalion was finally able to leverage his years of loyalty and the good will his superiors held towards him and bargain for his "honorable discharge" from their ranks proper. Oh, he'd still take contracts from them, of course, and he knew full well what would happen if he ever sold them out, but from that day on, he was a free agent. In the years since, he's built a reputation as a world-class mercenary under the Battalion persona, his true face and name no more known to the world than the identities and agendas of many of his employers.

control of their country back from those "weaklings" unworthy of the seats of power they held. Over the decades, they've managed to place people in every section of the government, especially in the intelligence community and the upper ranks of the armed forces. On three separate occasions, elements within the NSL have attempted covert coups against the existing government, and each time they were barely stopped. Forced back deep into the shadows, they also rebuilt each time, their efforts promising nothing but future confrontations down the line.

Those who've faced the NSL and know them best have grown to doubt whether it's even possible to completely dislodge such an organization permanently without doing the same level of damage to the country as the NSL have attempted. Better to thwart them as many times as needed than to do their job for them is the thought.

The New Sons of Liberty, their current leadership, agents, and special assets, will all be expanded on in the organization's own entry later in this series.

Personality, Goals, & Tactics:

Battalion is a driven man on many levels. He's driven to prove himself constantly against any violent competition he can find. He's driven to uphold his own rigid sense of professional honor. And he's driven to protect and provide for his family in a way he never benefited from growing up.

If he decides to take a contract, he sticks to it... *to the letter*. He won't kill unnecessarily, but he has no qualms about ending lives if he feels it required by his mission. This sometimes causes friction when he's forced to work with those less professional or honorable than himself. Though he feels a debt to the New Sons of Liberty for training him and helping him master his powers, he has consciously distanced himself from their routine operations due to their methodology and recruiting choices; the occasional contract, the parameters thereof strictly defined by him, is all the relationship he'll allow with his former patrons.

Hardcastle only uses his duplicating power when he feels a threat is beyond his ability to handle with his own two hands; otherwise, he derives far more pride from just applying his skills and old-fashioned gumption. When approaching such a situation, he will generate as many dupes as he thinks he needs—if

facing superhuman opposition, for example, he likes to maintain a minimum of a 5 to 1 numerical advantage. Once the dupes are created, he will break his forces into squads of 5-10 each and then surround his opposition, using tactical positioning, the perfect communication allowed by his Mental Link, and the combination of numbers and coordinated raw firepower to simply overwhelm his targets.

If forced to retreat, he will leave his dupes behind to cover his exit; once Battalion's left the scene, the dupes will just vanish into thin air as he shuts off his powers.

Finally, Battalion is a pro. This means he always has a plan *and* an exit. Always. Whether or not he includes any teammates in those plans depends on the contract of the day.

Powers, Abilities, & Resources:

Battalion is a mutant with the psionic ability to generate several dozen flawless duplicates of himself. At the moment of creation, he “outfits” the duplicate with specific weapons and gear (i.e., allocates the equipment points for the dupes’ Equipment advantage), and these don’t have to be identical allocations. It isn’t unusual for a group of dupes to present with a range of what appears to be cutting-edge gear; even though the gear works and looks exactly as real versions of it should, however, the gear is every bit just a creation of Hardcastle’s power and imagination as the dupes themselves are. Note that this aspect of his powers is limited to personal equipment only (for the dupes, at creation) and is limited by Hardcastle’s knowledge of military hardware—he can only create weapons and gear that he himself understands. Additionally, Hardcastle is an exceptionally

Combat Load-Out

To reiterate for clarification, every time a duplicate is created, the equipment points derived from its Equipment advantage ranks are allocated. The allocation for *that* dupe cannot be changed while *that* dupe exists, but can be allocated as needed at creation in whatever way Hardcastle wants for that particular dupe. Remember also that this is limited to personal equipment only (for the dupes, at least, and at creation) and is limited by Hardcastle’s knowledge of military hardware — he can only create weapons and gear that he himself understands (i.e., no directed energy weapons or exotic super-materials or anything like that ... only mundane, albeit highly advanced, equipment).

competent combatant (as are his dupes, by extension), the equivalent of a hardened and highly-experienced (two decades plus) Special Forces soldier. He was well-trained by the military assets used by the New Sons of Liberty and has routinely added to that training at every opportunity. His almost fanatical adherence to a conditioning regimen has also left him in incredible physical shape despite entering middle-age. Battalion’s equipment is all cutting edge, but not outside what one would find in an impressively well-equipped military unit; though it may vary from mission to mission in specifics, his load-out always includes some combination of advanced body armor, a primary weapon along the lines of an assault rifle or squad assault weapon, a secondary weapon (or two) that’s usually a large pistol, a knife, and several grenades.

Campaign Usage &

Story Hooks: As a mercenary, Battalion can be slid into any adventure where the bad guys need to beef up their “force profile.” He won’t work directly against American interests (as he defines them), but that’s about the only scruple he has.

EQUIPMENT

ADVANCED BODY ARMOR: Communication 3 (Subtle), Immunity 3 (Heat, Cold, Radiation), Immunity 2 (Dazzle Effects; Limited to half-strength), Protection 5 (Impervious 5), Senses 8 (Extended Auditory, Extended Visual, Detect Radiation, Direction Sense, Distance Sense, Infravision, Low-light Vision, Time Sense) ♦ 35 ep

STANDARD ARSENAL ARRAY: (25 base points) ♦ 28 total ep

- **SQUAD ASSAULT WEAPON WITH MINI-HEAP ROUNDS AND LASER SIGHT:** Penetrating Multiattack Ranged Damage 6 (Accurate) ♦ 25 base points
 - **INTEGRATED GRENADE LAUNCHER:** Burst Area Ranged Damage 8 (Variable Descriptor — Concussion, Incendiary, Shrapnel, etc.) ♦ 1 point
 - **PAIRED COMBAT KNIVES:** Strength-based Damage 1 (Multiattack 5, Precise) ♦ 1 point
 - **PAIRED PISTOLS:** Ranged Damage 8 (Limited to Split 4/4, Split) ♦ 1 point
- (On average, the GM still has 12 ep to spend on top of the standard load-out)

BATTALION

PL 11

STR	STA	AGL	DEX	FGT	INT	AWE	PRE
4	4	5	4	9	1	2	2

ADVANTAGES

All-out Attack, Assessment, Chokehold, Close Attack 3, Connected, Defensive Roll, Equipment 15, Evasion, Great Endurance, Improved Aim, Improved Critical 2 (Guns), Improved Defense, Improve Initiative, Improvised Weapons, Power Attack, Ranged Attack 10, Seize Initiative, Startle, Taunt, Teamwork, Tracking, Well-informed

SKILLS

Acrobatics 4 (+9), Athletics 6 (+10), Deception 6 (+8), Expertise: Soldier 10 (+11), Insight 8 (+10), Intimidation 10 (+12), Investigation, 4 (+5), Perception 12 (+14), Persuasion 4 (+6), Stealth 4 (+9), Treatment 4 (+5), Vehicles 6 (+10)

POWERS

ONE MAN ARMY: Summon Duplicates 12 (Active, Horde, Mental Link, Multiple Minions 6 [64 duplicates], Sacrifice), Variable Descriptor — Can change allocation for dupes' Equipment advantage ranks so that they are different than the original's allocation ♦ 195 points

COSTS

Attributes 62 + Defenses 17 + Advantages 48 + Skills 39 + Powers 195 = 361 points

DEFENSES

Dodge	10	Parry	10
Fort	8	Tough	10
		Will	9

COMBAT

Initiative: +8

Lift: 800 lbs.

Move: Ground (30 feet)

Unarmed: Close +12, Damage 4

Integrated Grenade Launcher: Burst Area Ranged; Damage 8 with Variable Descriptor

Paired Combat Knives: Close +12; Multiattack Damage 5

Paired Pistols: Ranged +14; Split Damage 4/4

Squad Assault Weapon: Ranged +16; Multiattack Damage 6

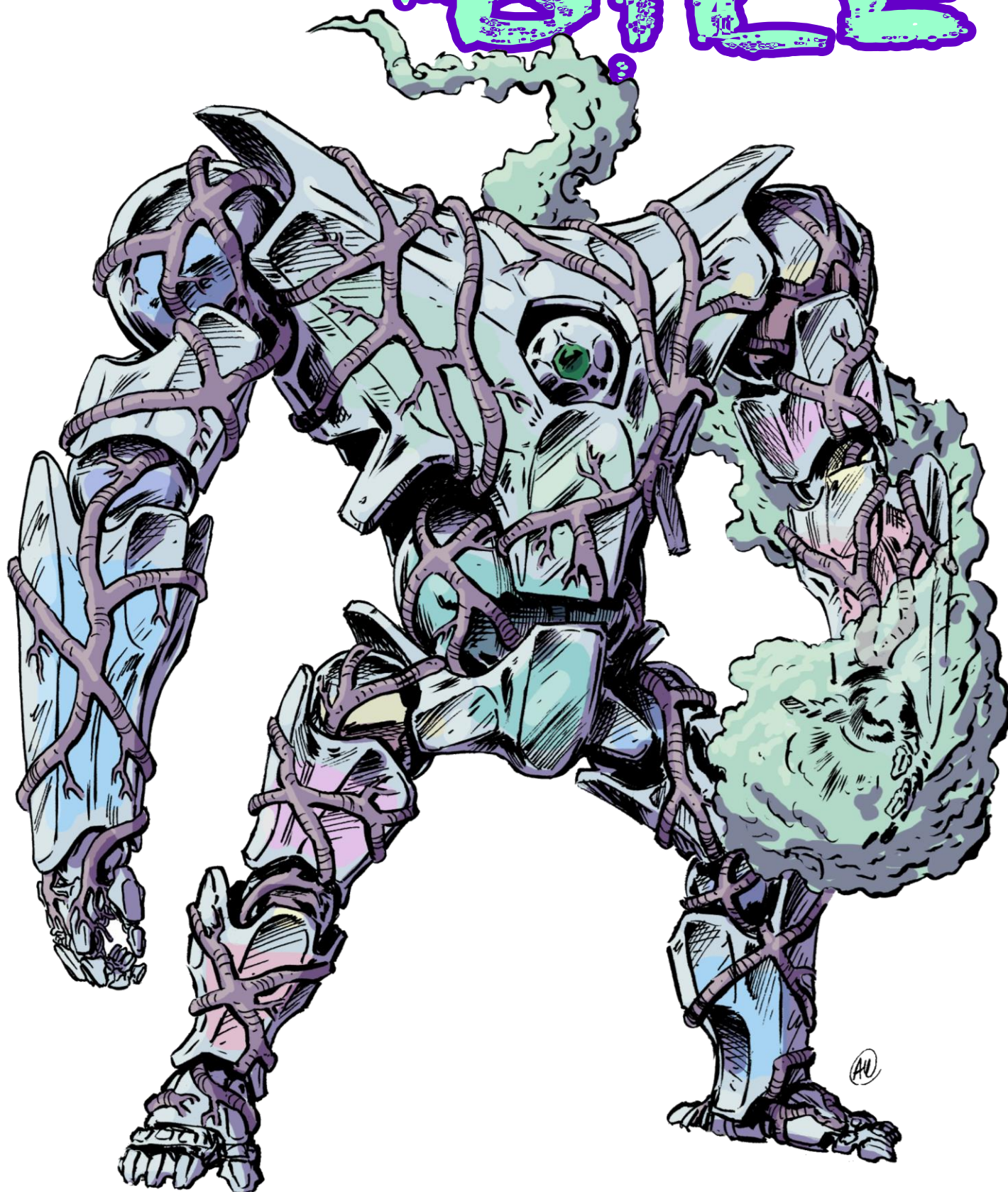
COMPLICATIONS

Motivation (Mercenary Code): You take a job, you do the job, and you get paid for the job. Rinse and repeat. Battalion won't renege on negotiated terms, he won't leave a job unfinished, and he won't betray his employers (at least not while they are his employers — after a contract is completed may be another matter entirely).

Quirk (Gunslinger Mentality): Battalion doesn't like to be upstaged and will go out of his way to prove he's the best at what he does.

Quirk (The Man's Man): To compensate for his insecurities growing up, Hardcastle displays an extremely macho persona, sometimes bordering on an almost cliché level.

BILE



Name: None (formerly “Project XERXES 344”)

Status: Non-living entity with no legal rights

Designation: Artificial Being (Alien Tech)

Affiliation(s): None

Quote: Bile has no vocal apparatus.

Background: S.P.I.R.E. (Scientific Projects Integrated Research Enclave) is a far-reaching organization with strategically placed moles in a number of intelligence services and research facilities associated with advanced science and technologies, some motivated by mercenary streaks and others “true believers” in the idea that only S.P.I.R.E. will actually act on the information provided, that only S.P.I.R.E. will work to advance the boundaries of human knowledge unhampered by short-sighted political bureaucracies. Regardless of motive, one of those moles managed to leak information to S.P.I.R.E. about a strange object tracked by her agency entering Earth’s atmosphere and crash-landing in the Dakota badlands. A fast response team from one of the many secret installations seeded throughout North America was able to reach the site shortly before the American military and loot numerous pieces of technology from what turned out to be a downed alien spacecraft. Among these items was a fluid reservoir filled with a solution of nanites, microscopic machines far more advanced than anything developed by Earth labs.

Who again?

Carapace is one of the premiere powerhouses in the Algernon Files and **Prodigal** is a rogue supersoldier mercenary; both will appear in their own entries later in this series. **S.P.I.R.E.’s** bona fides are covered in the background text here and the organization will get its own entry down the line as well.

Alien Nano-Swarm

It’s an important consideration to remember that the machine visible to human eyes as Bile is really only a host form for a vast concentration of alien nanotechnology merged with and controlling human-built metal and electronics. Each GM should decide what it really takes to finally and completely destroy the nano-swarm itself, as the destruction of the host form merely releases the swarm into the surroundings to build a replicant of that form from whatever matter is available.

So... Umm... Why Earth?

One of the recurring themes in comic book tradition is the crash-landed or lost alien spacecraft. In many settings, it’s a carefully guarded secret that Earth has been visited many, many times by aliens and their technology, whether intentionally or not. Perhaps Earth is situated at an important juncture in hyperspace travel, or is the focus of surveillance by numerous star-faring cultures, with the flotsam and jetsam, the unlucky or bold travelers

A small group of specialists worked for years trying to decipher the secrets they knew were contained in the fluid’s contents, but with little success, particularly given the extreme safety measures they initially imposed (having practical experience with the dangers of nanotech, as S.P.I.R.E. were the originators of more than one system of nanoweapons loosed on the world). The scientists were like Cro-Magnons trying to figure out a 21st Century cutting edge optical microcircuit and to their frustration they soon realized it. Eventually, clearance was given to try more radical tactics than simple (and safe) analysis. In a controlled environment, the researchers put a small amount of the nanite solution in contact with an experimental bio-plasm designed as a foundation for genegineering techniques.

The result astounded them.

The nanites suddenly jumped into action forming command and control structures of mind-boggling sophistication, shaping and molding the protoplasm into a stable form that soon hardened into a carapace-like shell. A cross-section of the research team splintered off into a smaller group to study the carapace, eventually working out a means to induce symbiosis between the carapace structure and an engineered lifeform a separate S.P.I.R.E. unit was developing. Unfortunately, this resulted in the creation of an entirely new creature, dubbed “Carapace” after the pseudo-organic plates covering it, which subsequently caused considerable and highly expensive damage to the facility housing as it escaped from S.P.I.R.E. control thanks to a rogue security asset, the mercenary called Prodigal.

S.P.I.R.E.'s senior staff were unhappy.

Very unhappy.

Expensive facilities built under the unsuspecting noses of the authorities weren't easy to replace. They were quite willing to mothball the entire program and put the remaining nanites in cold storage deep, deep inside some hidden and easily forgotten vault. However, one zealous member of the surviving research group had a theory he wasn't willing to give up on, and S.P.I.R.E.'s eggheads had a widespread tendency to ignore little things like rules, protocol, and basic safety considerations when pursuing their brainstorm—otherwise they would have worked in the open in industry or academia instead of for a covert criminal consortium of so-called “mad scientists.”

Hacking the security surrounding the reservoir transport, the young firebrand secretly redirected the shipment to an unused set of workshops in a section of a different facility undergoing construction. His theory was that the nanites operated in discrete masses, adapting matter to a set of configurations based on a preset suite of options, much like mini-factories dedicated to particular outputs. The bio-plasm had been made into a nearly indestructible shell because that was the best use that specific material could be put to by the little machines. What would the technology do when given more durable materials as a foundation? He rapidly put together a small assembly line of spare parts—metal plates, computer components, a spare construction robot chassis, and so on. Cannibalizing the coolant sprayers over the assembly line, he kludged together an application setup for the remaining fluid and then stood back to see if he would be proven right. He watched in astonishment as the fluid washed over the various parts, transmuting matter before his eyes. A ropy pseudo-organic integument formed, pulling disparate parts together so the machines could fuse one component

representing only a small percentage of what's out there — much like many intersections or stretches of highways on Earth are known for high traffic and fatalities but those incidents represent only the smallest fraction of users and passers-by. As with many other details, this is best left for individual GMs to tailor to the needs of their campaigns.

Similarly, the nature and details of Bile's creator race are left open for GMs to adapt as they see fit. Take note that whoever they are, they do seem to have a talent for creating extremely sophisticated and powerful weaponry though.

Published Settings

For GMs using Earth-Prime, Green Ronin's default setting, Ghostworks (see the Emerald City sourcebook) is always an easy substitute for S.P.I.R.E. as they fill many of the same roles.

into another. Delirious in joy at having proven himself correct despite the small-mindedness of his superiors, the distracted man failed to notice as the completed humanoid robotic form assessed its position and concluded the wall behind its erstwhile liberator was the shortest egress in its surroundings to the surface. The young genius had just enough time to process that the new entity was raising an arm in his direction before countless small apertures opened in the viny structure woven around the arm and sprayed out a monstrosously powerful acid, utterly dissolving everything in its path—the wall, the earth behind the wall, and, of course, the young man himself. The thing then walked out to find a world that would soon call it “Bile.”

Personality, Goals, & Tactics:

Bile doesn't really have a personality, per se, any more than it has an actual agenda. The animating nano-swarm behind its actions is incomplete.

The actual control AI network that would have functioned as its driving consciousness would have been created by a different set of nanites whose reservoir was destroyed in the attack that caused the spacecraft crash. The remaining expert systems operate at a much lower level of awareness, what engineers might call a “dog-brain.” The nano-swarms were intended to build weapons of war from whatever raw materials were usable in a new environment, and the remnants left in the reservoir did exactly that, to the best of its programming's limitations. Sporadically, Bile will search for its creators, or for other pieces of the nanotech from which it's comprised, following a program to complete its construction. However, it doesn't possess the required sensor components to actually determine such targets, so it executes overlapping search patterns spanning the globe that seem nonsensical to external observers, aside from focusing

on regions with highly concentrated technological development. Between searches, it will instinctively seek isolated locations (deep underground, sitting on the ocean floor, etc.) where it will waste considerable time running search programs based on using the sensor systems it doesn't currently have. When this eventually fails to provide any results, it will begin executing another physical search pattern.

Bile doesn't generally initiate violence, but it defends itself from things it registers as threats or enemies, and it doesn't have the awareness to recognize the destruction it causes by simply clearing a path through an area during its searching; it also doesn't recognize any distinctions between buildings, vehicles or people—they're all simply obstacles, or ignorable terrain, or threats. If actually damaged, it will attempt to retreat immediately while it repairs itself. It will then continue the same pattern of searching and hiding.

Powers, Abilities, &

RESOURCES: Bile is a hardened mass of metal and electronics animated by an alien conglomeration of nanotechnology. It looks like some sort of vaguely humanoid robot, but that's deceiving. Even the ropy-looking veins adorning the structure are actually some sort of bizarre pseudo-organic tubing that can be shifted across its surface as needed. It has minimal self-awareness and intellect, little more than a box running a set of sophisticated programs. In addition to the significant strength the molecular-level reinforcement of its materials gives the armature, the nanites act as a rapid chemical factory on a molecular level, taking in raw matter through the very air or any other mass in contact with its physical surface and converting this mass into offensive chemicals it can force through high-pressure apertures anywhere its tubing sits. This means it can spray its chemicals anywhere around it, threatening targets anywhere within its range, even across multiple arcs at once. So far, it has demonstrated a horrifyingly concentrated acid, a napalm-like incendiary that burns even underwater (though completely depriving it of oxygen extinguishes the burning), and a powerful neurotoxin that inhibits a living creature's conscious motor control and sensory input. Other substances are theoretically possible, assuming they're contained in the expert system's fabrication file library. Bile also seems to possess some sort of rudimentary sensory

system that analyzes molecular composition and sees through pretty much any material structure it's encountered so far.

If destroyed or shattered into pieces, so long as significant portions remain intact, it will eventually rebuild itself into the configuration to which it has become calibrated.

Campaign Usage & Story

Hooks: Bile is a near-mindless monster, an implacable engine of destruction (intentional or otherwise) whose programming doesn't allow for the luxuries of negotiation or peaceful accommodation. GMs can throw him in anywhere at any time within a campaign with little more explanation than that the location happened to fall into one of Bile's search patterns de jour. PCs can pile on with a minimum of existential angst or motive-questioning, making for a mentally relaxing slugfest.

COMPLICATIONS

Motivation (Programming): Bile is a slave to its programming, which is simplistic and not open to negotiation or amendment.

Prejudice: It's a big mechanical monster that leaves swathes of destruction in its wake. That tends to provoke an extremely negative response.

Quirk (Limited Cognitive Capacity): The animating nano-swarm has limited self-awareness and understanding of its surroundings.

BILE

PL 11

STR 9 STA - AGL 1 DEX 1 FGT 4 INT - AWE 0 PRE 0

ADVANTAGES

Close Attack 4, Diehard, Fearless, Power Attack

DEFENSES

Dodge 8* Parry 8*
Fort Immune Tough 14 Will None

SKILLS

Intimidate 0 (+2), Perception 8 (+8), Stealth 0 (-3)

POWERS

MELTING THROUGH THE EARTH: Burrowing 8 (16 mph) ♦ 8 points

NANO-SWARM REPAIR: Immortality 2 (1 week), Regeneration 2 ♦ 6 points

CHEMICAL CONVERSION ARRAY: (125 base points) ♦ 127 total points

- **CORROSIVE SPRAY:** Progressive Weaken Toughness 11 (Resisted by Fortitude; Affects Objects, Burst Area 3 [120 feet], Selective; Distracting,) with Linked Continuous Damage 6 (Burst Area 3 [120 feet], Selective) ♦ 125 base points
- **INCENDIARY SPRAY:** Continuous Damage 11 (Burst Area 3 [120 feet], Contagious, Selective; Distracting) ♦ 1 point
- **NERVE AGENT SPRAY:** Cumulative Affliction 11 (Resisted and Recovered by Fortitude; Impaired/Dazed, Immobile/Defenseless, Paralyzed/Unaware; Burst Area 3 [120 feet], Contagious, Extra Condition, Selective; Distracting) ♦ 1 point

EXO-FRAME: Growth 4 (Innate; Permanent) ♦ 5 points

MOLECULAR-REINFORCED ARMOR: Protection 14 (Impervious) ♦ 28 points

COMBAT

Initiative: +1

Lift: 50 tons

Move: Ground (30 feet)

Unarmed: Close +4, Damage 9

Corrosive Spray: Burst Area 120 Feet; Progressive Weaken Toughness 11; Fort DC 21

Incendiary Spray: Burst Area 120 Feet; Continuous Damage 11

Nerve Agent Spray: Burst Area 120 Feet; Cumulative Affliction 11; Fort DC 21

Retractable Claws: Close +8; Damage 12

COSTS

Attributes 2 + Defenses 15 + Advantages 7 + Skills 4 + Powers 238 = 266 points

NOT REALLY ALIVE: Immunity 40 (Mental, Fortitude Effects) ♦ 40 points

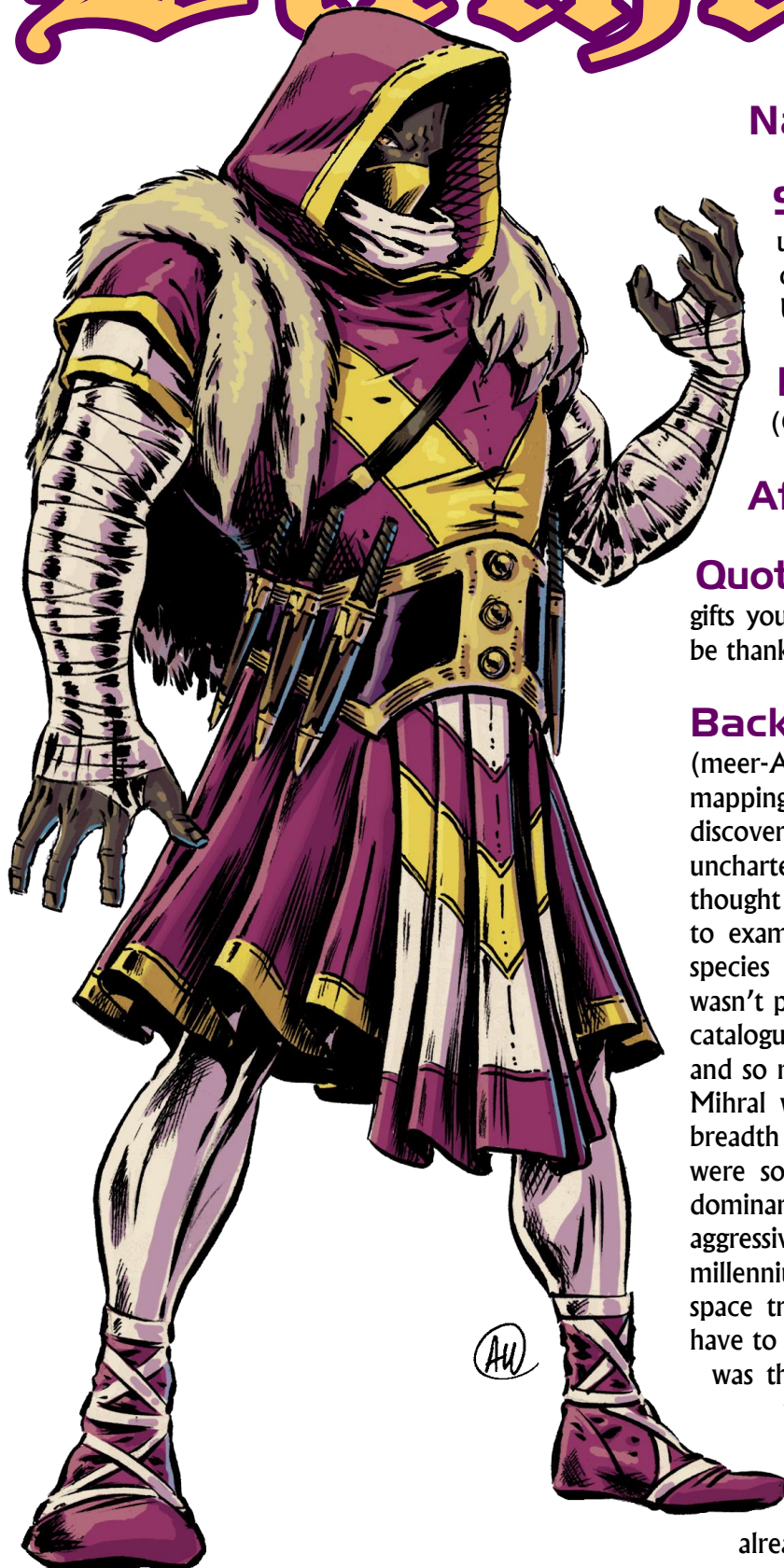
REACTIVE COVERING Immunity 2 (Chemical Effects) ♦ 2 points

RETRACTABLE CLAWS: Strength-based Damage 3 ♦ 3 points

SERVOS: Enhanced Strength 2 (Limited to Lifting; Lifting STR 11; 50 tons) ♦ 2 points

TERAHERTZ WAVEFORM TRANSCIEVER: Senses 16 (Acute, Analytical Detect Chemical Composition [Ranged]; Extended, Radius Visual Penetrates Concealment; Radio) ♦ 17 points

Birthright



Name: M'Zawe ("First Son of the Tribe")

Status: Birthright's true identity is unknown to the general public, and he isn't a citizen of any country recognized by the United Nations

Designation: Modified Human
(Genengineered)

Affiliation(s): None

Quote: "You squabble like children, despoiling the gifts you were never worthy of receiving! You should be thankful I am here to lead you on a better path!"

Background: Centuries ago, a Mihral (meer-ALL) elder tasked by the Dominion with mapping the areas around Earth's solar system discovered a life-bearing world nestled in the uncharted expanse, a region its people previously thought devoid of development. Curious, it decided to examine the planet in closer detail; after all, its species was exceptionally long-lived and its task wasn't particularly time-limited. It spent several years cataloguing lifeforms and languages, cultures and art, and so many details it found so very interesting. The Mihral were a mono-culture and had been for the breadth of their surviving history, but here there were so many distinctions, so many divisions. The dominant species was barbaric obviously, but also aggressively fast learning. It wouldn't be more than a millennium or so until these "humans" developed space travel, and then the Mihral would eventually have to deal with them. The elder was meticulous, as was the nature of all Mihral; when the day came their species would meet, the Mihral would have more than just a technological advantage. They would know how to manipulate this new species, as they had already manipulated so many others.

Then, the unforeseen occurred.

While its ship travelled through a rapidly developing storm front, the elder became distracted remotely watching a violent political squabble in the city states it was observing—the natives were overthrowing their ruling class in a fascinating and ongoing devolution into chaos—when a lightning strike somehow overloaded the ship's shielding, severely damaging a number of vital systems. The elder acted quickly to move the craft from over the heavily populated continent it was observing, this "Europe" as the natives called it, to the continent to the south, an area much more thinly populated by these humans, an area where it would be much easier to hide. There it would assess the damage and make repairs. Unfortunately, once landed, the elder discovered the repairs were going to be significant, requiring supplies and equipment and many more hands at work than it had available. It would have to improvise. Tiring as it would be, it would also have to use its telepathy to enthrall additional assistance, both to help with the repairs and to procure the necessary supplies, to help construct the necessary equipment. And, since it had so cleverly hidden itself away from the larger population centers, it would take time to gather those assistants from afar.

Slowly, it began sending out telepathic signals, gathering disparate members of dozens of small tribes from areas anywhere near its location, deep in the jungles of equatorial Africa, calling them to its hiding place. Once there, it used the same telepathic prowess to quickly educate its work force in the intricacies of gravitic engineering, advanced material science, hyperspatial propulsion, and all the many other disciplines needed to enact the intricate repairs. It took decades, years wherein it also made its work force construct an entire hidden structure to house their ongoing work so they wouldn't be interrupted.

The Shining Mountain

The name "Shining Mountain" is misleading. When the first workers were telepathically "called" to the Mihral Elder, in their minds they saw a great shining beacon in the sky which they described as a burning or shining mountain. These descriptions filtered out through other people and tribes encountered by the designees who weren't themselves subject to the mental compulsion and the descriptions entered regional folklore, especially after the disappearance of so many people from different tribes. Many an explorer and treasure hunter has gone seeking such a place to no avail, as it simply doesn't exist. The actual facility is underground, hidden beneath a set of rock outcroppings and concealed by a holomorphic cloaking system. It stretches deep beneath the Earth, comprising about the combined volume of an office building and a large commercial mall put together.

Sickness, exhaustion, and general attrition thinned out the people it gathered over that time, requiring the elder to start making further changes to the work force to maintain efficiency, changes to their biology to make them hardier and longer-lasting, better able to endure the physical and intellectual demands of their tasks. As the final repairs fast approached, it surveyed its surviving workers with a degree of pride; this species was amenable to broad modifications in its gene pool. They were tremendously adaptable, worthy of considerably more study. However, it had already received orders to return to the Dominion and, sadly, would be unable to further satisfy its scientific curiosities. Preparing to leave, the elder's pride in what it had done overrode its devotion to duty, and it decided it couldn't bear to destroy the remaining workers as protocol dictated must be done with any indigenous lifeforms with whose development the Dominon interfered. It amended its records to show it had followed protocol, but instead it merely left the workers there, still hidden from the rest of the world.

Left to their own devices for the first time in a generations, the remaining workers united as a new tribe (most of their original tribes no longer functionally existed anyway), calling themselves the Kenzawe ("whole tribe" in one of the now-lost dialects amalgamated into the new tribe's language). The hidden structure was vast, its cloaking devices durable and intact, and most of the technology developed to help repair the elder's ship had been left behind in near perfect condition. The Kenzawe themselves were physically and mentally much improved from their original state, superior in fact, to normal humans, and possessed of scientific and technological knowledge centuries ahead of Earth's standard; however, they had been conditioned by their experiences and training to think that hiding themselves from the rest of humanity, to

observe but not to interfere, was one of their primary considerations. (Given that they now numbered only a few dozen and that the rest of the world was well into an era of imperial expansion, survival was also involved, not just ethics.)

And so they did, for more than a century.

Their induced longevity meant the tribe members aged only one year for every ten that passed, but the changes to their metabolism had also inhibited natural reproduction. No new children were born during that period. This worried the Kenzawe, so they put their best minds to overcoming this setback. After several years of failures, they eventually managed to do exactly that. They created a child.

M'Zawe was genetically engineered from genetic material belonging to several tribe members, their best and brightest. The strongest female in the tribe was artificially inseminated with the result and nine months later gave birth to the first new member of the tribe in almost a hundred and fifty years. He was celebrated. He was cherished. He was raised with the entire tribe as his family, given anything he wanted and taught everything they could teach him. In their elation, they neglected to consider one of the things they were doing was spoiling the boy. M'Zawe looked around him as he grew to manhood and took stock. He was special—he had been taught this since he was little. His people were special. He had proven himself the mental and physical superior to any of the rest of the tribe. Therefore he was the most special member of the most special people on the planet. This was only logical. M'Zawe had never experienced the outside world the way his elders had, never suffered, never developed alongside other children so he could socialize and form attachments, so he could learn empathy and all the other things that make humans, well, *human*.

The Mihral Dominion

The Mihral are a powerful race of highly-advanced and telepathic creatures that resemble what on Earth would be enormous jellyfish. As a race, they hold order and logic in the highest regard, imposing their beliefs on less-advanced races within their sphere of influence as a “gift.” They are self-righteous, smug, condescending to other species, and cloyingly paternalistic (patronizingly so). Outside Dominion borders, they encounter most other species through the offices of their Gauntlet peacekeepers — wandering lawbringers and judges armed with powerful energy control devices for self-protection and administering justice to the uncivilized areas of the cosmos. Those races and cultures who grow dependent on the presence of Gauntlet corps members are generally unaware that their ostensibly noble protectors actually act as a roving fifth column for their masters’ crusade to bring order to the universe ... through *any* means.

Compassion was something he understood only as an intellectual concept. In the animal world he studied, the strongest and smartest made the rules and the others followed. Watching the outside world only through the monitoring equipment his people used, M'Zawe saw the same dynamic framed large, never actually grasping the nuances and myriad factors that drove that appearance. He made up his mind. His place was in charge. It wasn't just logic; it was his birthright.

Cautiously broaching the subject of taking over the outside world and leading mankind merely as a thought-exercise to the rest of his tribe, he carefully gauged their reactions as they each answered that such actions would be wrong, dangerously wrong, and ultimately doomed to failure. He concluded that they simply didn't understand, that their time in the Shining Mountain had robbed them of the spirit they needed for the task he so plainly saw before them, calling to *him*. Sneaking into the environmental control center one evening, he programmed a powerful sedative to pump through the air supply, rendering the tribe unconscious. He then took each of them to the chamber he had secretly built in the work areas

they left to him—a chamber designed to keep his people in suspended animation. Once he had performed the onerous chore of actually conquering the Earth, he would wake them and present the result as *fait accompli*. Only then would they accept the responsibility to which they currently blinded themselves. Only then would they accept their rightful place beside his throne, supporting him as he led the world into a brighter and better future, together.

Personality, Goals, & Tactics:

In many ways, Birthright is a spoiled child who has never grown up, never developed through a number of important emotional milestones. He is headstrong, overconfident, impulsive, and obstinate. Without the restraining influence of his tribal elders, he's also more than a bit imperious. In his mind, he is the best, smartest, wisest, most learned, most handsome, and most accomplished figure in the world—an ego with legs. He has yet to meet his equal in any of the areas he considers important (assuming he would be emotionally capable of recognizing or acknowledging such an equal anyway), so he believes such a person simply doesn't exist. And superhumans don't count. He considers them as cheating somehow.

It galls M'Zawe that people don't recognize his innate superiority and simply accede to his leadership, but he accepts it as his responsibility to overcome such ignorance. It's important to note that Birthright isn't malicious in this respect—he truly does believe the world would be better off with him in charge. He also wants to take over in as minimally destructive a manner as possible, with as few casualties as possible; he isn't a monster after all, and it's a poor excuse for a king who has to lead through fear alone. He's a firm believer in noblesse oblige, and holds a simplistic but concrete (and patronizing) sense of honor. On occasion, he's actually aided heroes and other authority figures in dealing with world-threatening menaces as such threats endanger his kingdom-to-be... a completely unacceptable situation.

Favored tactics include manipulating existing governments by offering advanced technologies (medicine, food production, etc.) to a populace and blanketing their media with propaganda (laced with subliminals or other techniques) “educating” the masses about the deficiencies of the current regime and M'Zawe's superior alternatives. He also likes contriving contests or other spectacles where he can humble popular heroes (especially in one-on-one

The Kenzawe

If it ever becomes necessary to have stats for the rest of Brithright's tribe, simply use existing supporting cast archetypes as appropriate to their roles, with the following modifications:

- Add 2 ranks to each of their eight abilities.
- Add **Immunity 2** (Age, Disease; Limited to half-strength)
- Add 4 ranks in both Expertise: Science and Technology skills.
- Add the **Quirk (Outsider)** complication as per Birthright's write-up

competition), “proving” to the people that he should replace said hero in the public's esteem.

At no point will M'Zawe risk revealing the location of the Shining Mountain and thereby endanger the Kenzawe.

Powers, Abilities, & Resources:

Birthright is an incredibly impressive mental and physical specimen, a genius in multiple disciplines and possessing a body superior to the best Olympic athlete. His combat skills are phenomenally well-honed, making him one of the finest close quarter combatants in the world.

M'Zawe also has access to technology far more advanced than Earth standard. His normal dress is deceptively simple and primitive.

The cloth under his tunic hardens on impact, adding to the power of his blows and protecting him from most harm; similarly, his leather harness shows only a brace of daggers, but hides a sophisticated force projection system that can generate a nearly impenetrable force bubble around him or target an opponent with a devastating force blast emanating from anywhere on the bubble's surface. The same system also creates a force “platform,” enabling him to fly at high speed.

His most telling asset, however, is his people's hidden home. The Shining Mountain facility boasts some of the most advanced examples of technology in the world, including systems and features reverse-engineered from alien designs centuries if not millennia more advanced than humanity's accomplishments.

Campaign Usage & Story

Hooks: Birthright is a noble villain, a staple in comic book traditions. He can be used as a tremendously effective foil for various player character personality-types, such as the impulsive scrapper or the flag-suit, or simply as a threat du jour. As a “world” conqueror, he can show up anywhere at any time, making it easy to slide him

into a variety of campaign styles and settings; similarly, his mix of tech, tactics, and fighting skills makes him suitable opposition for either crafty teams or fight-heavy games.

GMs should exploit Birthright's control of Shining Mountain for full effect—he's constantly coming up with new technology through his Inventor advantage supported by his resources there.

POWERS

ADVANCED IMPACT-HARDENING BALLISTIC CLOTH: Immunity 10 (Cold Damage, Heat/Fire Damage; Limited to Half Effect), Protection 3, Strength-based Damage 2 (all are Removable -2 pp) ♦ 8 points

PERFECT DEVELOPMENT: Immunity 7 (Disease, Fatigue Effects, Starvation & Thirst; Limited to Half Effect), Leaping 1 (15 feet), Quickness 6 (Limited to Mental tasks), Regeneration 2, Senses 3 (Extended Visual, Extended Auditory, Low-light Vision), Speed 3 (16 mph) ♦ 16 points

FORCE HARNESS 57 points (Removable, -11 pp) ♦ 46 points total

FORCE BLAST: Ranged Damage 14 (Accurate 3, Indirect 2, Subtle) ♦ 34 points

FORCE DOME: Create 16 (65,000 cft., Impervious, Movable, Stationary, Subtle; Close Range, Distracting, Limited to Domes and Spheres) ♦ 17 points

FORCE PLATFORM: Flight 5 (60 mph; Subtle; Platform) ♦ 6 points

Birtheright

PL 12

STR 5 **STA** 5 **AGL** 6 **DEX** 4 **FCI** 12 **INT** 6 **AWK** 4 **PRE** 4

ADVANTAGES

Accurate Attack, Agile Feint, All-out Attack, Assessment, Benefit (Wealth 1), Close Attack 5, Daze (Intimidation), Defensive Roll 2, Eidetic Memory, Equipment 9, Evasion, Fascinate (Intimidation), Fast Grab, Improved Defense, Improved Grab, Improved Initiative, Improved Trip, Instant Up, Inventor, Jack-of-all-trades, Languages 4 (Arabic, Bantu, English, French, German, Latin, Russian, Swahili; Kenzawe is native), Move-by Action, Power Attack, Redirect, Skill Mastery (Athletics, Intimidation, Perception), Takedown 2, Uncanny Dodge

DEFENSES

Dodge 14 Parry 14
Fort 10 Tough 10/8* Will 14

COMBAT

Initiative: +10
Lift: 1600 lbs.
Move: Flight (60 mph)
Unarmed: Close +17; Damage 7/5
Force Blast: Ranged +10; Damage 14
Throwing Knives: Ranged +14; Damage 6

SKILLS

Acrobatics 8 (+14), Athletics 9 (+14), Deception 6 (+10), Expertise: Science 10 (+16), Insight 10 (+14), Intimidation 10 (+14), Investigation 8 (+14), Perception 12 (+16), Persuasion 4 (+8), Ranged Combat: Throw 10 (+14), Stealth 9 (+15), Technology 12 (+18), Treatment 2 (+8), Vehicles 6 (+10)

EQUIPMENT

Commlink, Computer, Gas Mask, GPS Receiver, Knife, Multi-tool, Rebreather

COMPLICATIONS

Motivation (Power): M'Zawe believes it is his rightful destiny to rule the world and its people, and he will not rest until he sits on the throne he imagines fits him and him alone.

Quirk (Outsider): Despite the comprehensive records the Kenzawe have compiled through observing the outside world over the years, they haven't actually *lived in it*. Birtheright often finds minor details or behaviors to be alien or confusing at times.

Quirk (Towering Ego): M'Zawe believes himself the finest specimen of man walking the Earth, and he does NOT react well when upstaged or outdone. "Overconfident" doesn't even begin to cover it.

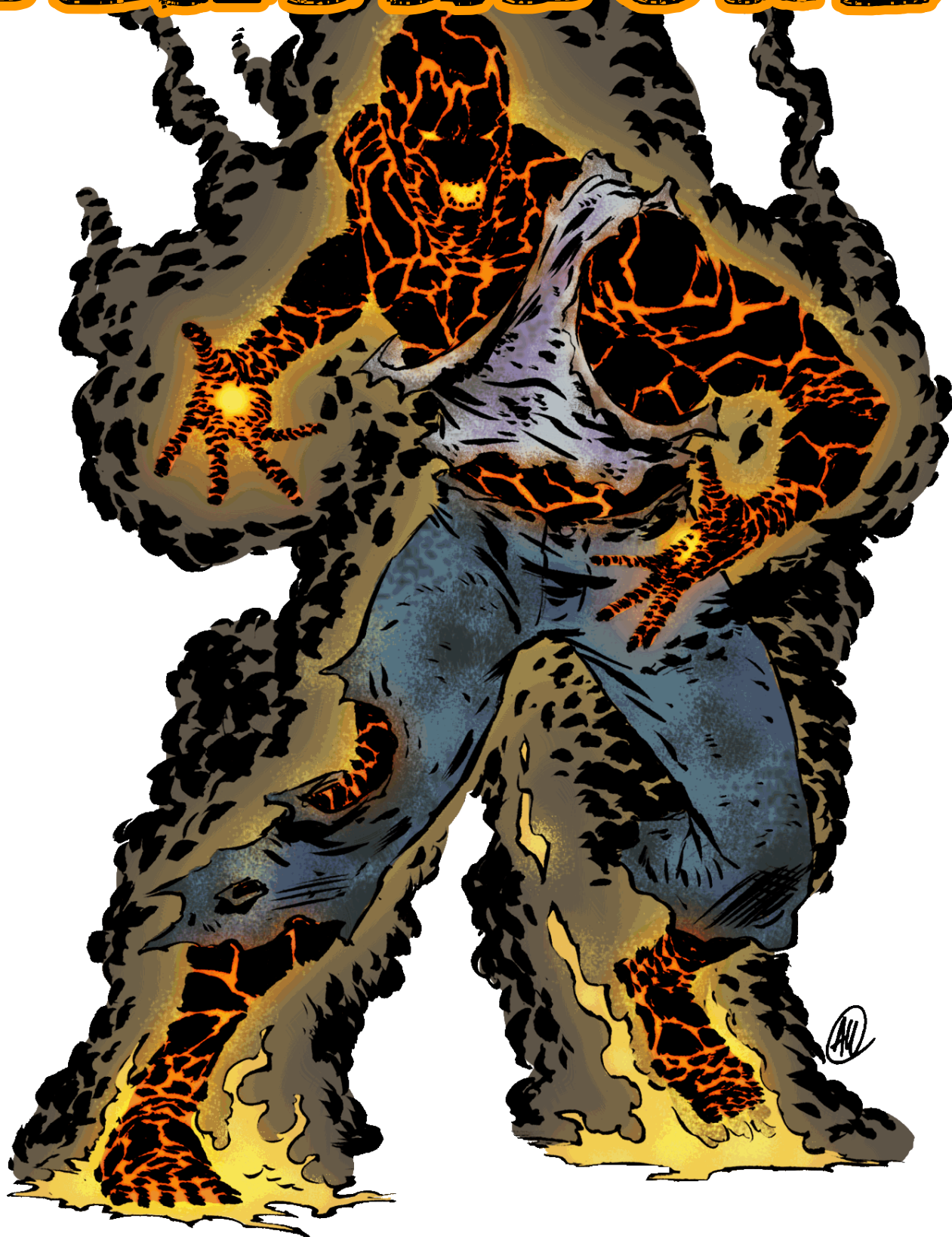
Shining Mountain HQ

TGH: 14, **Size:** Awesome, **Features:** Combat Simulator, Communications, Computer, Concealed 3 (+20 DC), Deathtraps, Defense System, Fire Prevention System, Gym, Holding Cells, Infirmary, Isolated, Laboratory, Library, Living Space, Personnel, Power System, Powers ("SlideGate"— **Teleport** 15 [Carry 800 lbs.; Extended (32,000 miles), Increased Mass 4, Portal; Limited to Extended]), Security System 3 (DC 35), Self-repairing, Workshop; Cost 34 ep

COSTS

Attributes 92 + Defenses 25 + Advantages 46 + Skills 58 + Powers 70 = 291 points

BLACKBONE



Name: Unknown (he doesn't even remember it)

Status: Assumed to be citizen of the United States; wanted in connection with numerous "unsolved murders" of individuals connected to the occult/supernatural community

Designation: Modified Human (Magic)

Affiliation(s): None currently; formerly Witchbane, though the members of that organization now number highly on his hit list

Quote: "I smell your foul magic! Die, abomination, **DIE!**"

Background: Who or what Blackbone was before that fateful day he chose the wrong alley to sleep in are unknown. Destitute and already suffering from mental problems, he had only the rags on his back and the cardboard box he slept in to call his own. He wasn't even aware there was anything out of the ordinary about the building he was sleeping against, only that it blocked the wind. Unfortunately, the structure also hid a human trafficking ring run by Morningstar Acquisitions to provide their clients with sacrificial specimens. The Silverthorn Circle, a covey of supernatural practitioners fighting the good fight, had long been enemies of that particular group, and they attacked the servitors on-site without quarter once they discovered the location and its purpose. The fight sprawled throughout and around the building, and one spell-duel carried into the alley. As Abigail Caul, leader of the Circle at that time, threw a vicious fireball to consume her

Let's Go Over Those Names Again...

For those of you wondering what happened to the **Silverthorn Circle** since they were mentioned in Volume I, now you know why they ain't getting their own entry. **The Bargainer** is introduced in this very volume a few pages back, and **Witchbane**, a fanatic group of magic-using hunters of magic-using types (yes, they understand the irony, but they're fanatical enough to be willing to suffer damnation to "save the innocent" from the same fate ... in their interpretation of things, of course), will get their own entry in a volume down the line. **Morningstar Acquisitions** is a very old group of demon-worshippers, half-demons, and minor demonic entities that have worked for centuries to enable their infernal patrons' schemes on Earth; today, the group "hides" themselves behind a modern, corporate front, a bit of playacting that entertains the members without fail. One of the constituent organizations comprising the oft-mentioned Parliament of Shadows, Morningstar will eventually get its own entry as well.

demon-worshipping target, the man she never saw sleeping under the scraps of cardboard in the middle of the alley, startled by the sounds of the fight, jumped suddenly to his feet.

Right into the path of the fireball.

He died almost immediately, screaming in agony as his physical form was incinerated. His killer, horrified by the unintended result of her attack, could do little but watch him die, her appalled scream bringing her teammates to her side as their enemies took the opportunity to flee the area. Grieving at what she saw as the cost of her not paying enough attention to her surroundings during the fight, Caul allowed her allies to remove her to the safety of their own sanctum.

None of them ever even knew the Bargainer had been there the entire time, entertained by the violent spectacle. Perhaps Albion Caul had been drawn there by the presence of his niece, Abigail, the white sheep of the otherwise infamous Caul family. Perhaps he had been sent by his masters, The Whispering Bishops of the Last Throne, knowing that the opportunity to loose pain and chaos on the world would show itself. Regardless, he was there, and at the moment of the poor man's death, he took the man's spirit aside for a special chat.

"Revenge is what I offer," Albion told the fading spectral remnants of the man's presence. "What price are you willing to pay?"

Its entire world reduced to pain and anguish, the spirit replied, "Anything! Everything!"

"My favorite kind of customer..." the Bargainer muttered under his breath, his masters' fell power flowing through him into the spirit. "A pleasure doing business with you."

Moments later, fire burned a hole in the air and through that hole stepped Blackbone.

Its tortured existence began with the mental image of the Silverthorn Circle scorched into its memory, a parting gift from its benefactor. The first targets of its first hunt.

The young neo-druid called “Weed,” weakest of the Circle, died as he returned to his secluded campsite in the park. Alone and caught by surprise, he was easy prey.

Corvaggio, the old teacher who had gathered the current members of the Circle and given them purpose, was more of a challenge, but he still died at Blackbone’s hands as well; the old man’s beloved familiar, an urban elemental in the form of a flock of ravens, was freed at its master’s death, becoming the entity called “Nevermore” and barely escaping its own destruction.

The alchemist Absinthe and her lover, the djinn-summoning prodigy Binder, lovers who had fled their places in The Artificer’s Guild rather than be kept apart, died together, fighting to the very end; not everything in Absinthe’s lab depended on magic for its power and her improvised explosives taught Blackbone a degree of caution—Blackbone was not proof against *all* harm, just that born of arcane energies.

When it finally came for Abigail, its true target, the creature made sure she knew who it had been, and that her friends had died because of her actions. In response she brought the building they were in down on both of them, injuring her attacker grievously, but more importantly taking her own life and robbing it of the pleasure of doing so.

Published Settings

For those campaigns based in Green Ronin’s Earth-Prime setting, both Freedom City and Emerald City provide ample hunting grounds for Blackbone. Worse, Hexenhammer (*Threat Reports*) would likely find a way to put such a creature to use for his own hunting, and The Eightfold Web (again, from *Threat Reports*) would be quite adept at manipulating Blackbone into targeting the cult’s enemies specifically.

Uneasy in His Grave

Blackbone doesn’t normally possess the Immortality effect. However, it has been killed twice and returned from the grave both times to continue its perverse quest. The first time, it was resurrected by a powerful unearthly artifact in order to kill a specific target. The second, magic was used at the site of its destruction, somehow triggering a spontaneous resurrection on the spot. In neither case did it consciously have anything to do with its own resurrection, nor can it intentionally pull off the trick by itself. GMs uncomfortable with an external narrative effect of this nature should add the Immortality effect to Blackbone’s build at whatever rank works for their campaign, probably with some kind of Limited or Triggered modifier.

A force for good such as the Silverthorn Circle doesn’t fall without notice. Allies and enemies alike took notice of this new force in the shadows; they learned over time, and at some cost, that Blackbone hated them one and all. Only one group, Witchbane, actually managed to find common ground with the mageslayer for a time, working together to stalk shared enemies. But its destructive disregard for anything other than its target eventually wreaked a high enough tally of collateral damage that even the fanatics within Witchbane could no longer risk further collaboration. As Father Frankenstein held Blackbone in his mighty grip and ignored the damage it inflicted on him, the self-styled priest’s compatriots Silver St. Stone and Cruxley Malificent banished Blackbone to a pocket dimension intended to be its eternal prison.

Their optimism was unwarranted.

Blackbone eventually found a way to escape into the astral plane, and from there back to Earth. It soon discovered its former allies would not be caught off-guard like its first targets had been. Witchbane had wards and other defenses in place—magic that somehow managed to actually affect the creature—thwarting Blackbone’s repeated attacks again and again before it finally found other victims to focus on (though it watches the group for any opportunity, biding its time until revenge can be had).

Channeling its frustration and ever-growing rage, since then, Blackbone has simply redoubled its efforts to purge the Earth of all supernatural elements and those who benefit from those elements.

Personality, Goals, & Tactics:

Blackbone operates on an almost primal level. Its existence begins and ends with the hunt. It will fixate on a particular supernatural character and then proceed to make their life hell. It won't stop, it won't back down, and it simply cannot be reasoned with—hide from it, destroy it, or find it a better target, those are really the only options available.

Once, it was actually able to hold on to a greater degree of lucidity—even working for a time with some supernatural types in order to bring down those beyond its (or its allies') power. No more. Its brittle sanity has continued to deteriorate over time, and today it can no longer stomach the presence of even the most innocuous manifestation of magic. Anything born of the supernatural must be destroyed utterly; should it ever run out of other suitable targets to vent its rage on, on that day it'll possibly even turn its attention to itself, such are the depths of its insane hatred.

Powers, Abilities, & Resources:

In many ways, Blackbone operates as a revenant—inhumanly fast and strong, difficult to injure or even slow down, and absolutely devoted to eliminating the target of its revenge-obsessions. It also seems able to track down magic auras over great distances without fail. In addition, an unearthly fire constantly burns within Blackbone, making it dangerous to even touch the creature's physical body. It can channel a fraction of this fire at will into an incendiary whip-like weapon that has proven capable of igniting

Astral Travel

Blackbone can skim through the astral plane and possibly move faster than it could on foot, but at a cost.

First, it either needs access to a fire big enough to walk through, or it has to spend a standard action to create one with its Fiery Lash effect.

Second, the further it goes, the longer the passage takes — assume every rank of Teleport requires an equal time rank to use, so Teleport 1 (which moves it a mile because of the extended modifier) would take 3 seconds (time rank 1) on top of the move action, while its full 8 ranks (which would move it 250 miles) would take 30 minutes (time rank 8).

Third, the surrounding astral terrain reflects the agony of its initial death, a psychic projection surrounding its person, the sights and sound of its death throes, over and over again, as fresh to Blackbone as if it the event was just occurring then and there. There are also snatches of memories from its prior life, quicksilver fast flitting by and fragmentary, that show snatches of broken relationships, lost family, and the emotionally caustic collapse of a once comfortable career and life. Anyone following it into the astral plane can also see this — it isn't just in Blackbone's head. GMs should feel free to treat Blackbone as continuing to be distracted for a round or two after he comes back to Earth.

pretty much everything it touches. The true depths of its potential threat are really only evident when facing opponents using magic. Not only is Blackbone invulnerable to almost any manifestation of magic in any direct form, its mere presence has, over time, started to eat away at magical auras and power, weakening any manifestations in its immediate presence. Further, scrying and other forms of magically-based detection or sensory effects simply fail to work against it altogether; more than one practitioner would dearly like to know how Witchbane's warding spells even sense Blackbone's approach, little less manage to affect it, as no one else's magic has proven any good whatsoever against the thing.

Campaign Usage & Story Hooks:

Blackbone is a weapon in need of a target. It'll work with anyone (other than magic users or supernatural types), for anyone (same restriction), so long as that gives it a shot at killing its target du jour; this means it can be dropped into any situation that already contains supernatural characters with no more explanation or motivation necessary. ("Well, because you're here, that's why...") Though it presents a reasonable threat against non-magic types, against supernatural targets it should be nothing short of terrifying. GMs should treat it as a bogeyman for bogeymen, something used to scare character types built around spooking others.

BLACKBONE

PL 11

STR	STA	AGL	DEX	FGT	INT	AWE	PRE
6	8	5	2	8	0	6	4

ADVANTAGES

Agile Feint, Close Attack 4, Diehard, Fast Grab, Improved Initiative 3, Move-by Action, Startle

SKILLS

Acrobatics 5 (+10), Athletics 5 (+11), Insight 6 (+12), Intimidation 10 (+14), Perception 6 (+12)

POWERS

ASTRAL PASSAGE: Movement 1 (Dimensional Travel 1 — Astral Plane; Distracting Medium [Fire]) with Linked Teleport 8 (Extended, Limited to Extended, Limited to requiring additional time, Medium [Fire]) ♦ 5 points

BURNING AURA: Reaction Damage 8 (when touched) ♦ 24 points

FIERY LASH: Continuous Damage 10 (Contagious, Reach 3) ♦ 53 points

FOCUSED RAGE: Immunity 10 (Interaction skills, Mental and Emotional Control Effects) ♦ 10 points

IMPLACABLE ENGINE OF HATE: Immunity 10 (Life Support), Leaping 1 (30 feet), Regeneration 10 (Every Round), Speed 3 (16 mph) ♦ 24 points

MAGESLAYER: Concealment 10 (Limited to Sense Effects with Magic Descriptor), Cumulative Reaction Burst Area Affliction 11 (Resisted and Overcome by Will; Impaired, Disabled; Continuous, Limited Degree, Limited to traits with the Magic Descriptor, Subtle), Immunity 10 (Magic Effects), Senses 6 (Detect Magic, Acute, Extended 2, Ranged, Tracking) ♦ 83 points

COSTS

Attributes 78 + Defenses 19 + Advantages 12 + Skills 16 + Powers 199 = 324 points

DEFENSES

Dodge	12	Parry	12
Fort	14	Tough	10
		Will	8

COMBAT

Initiative: +17

Lift: 3200 lbs.

Move: Ground (30 feet), Teleport (250 miles)

Unarmed: Close +8, Damage 6

Burning Aura: Reaction Touch; Damage 8

Fiery Lash: Close +12 [15 feet range]; Damage 10

Mageslayer: Burst Area Affliction 11; Resisted and Overcome by Will vs. DC 21; Impaired, Disabled

COMPLICATIONS

Enemies (Many): A good chunk of the supernatural community, even crossing normal factional lines, will go to great lengths to finally remove the threat to their existence that is Blackbone; more than once, parties in conflict with one another have dropped their personal feuds to combine forces and drive Blackbone off.

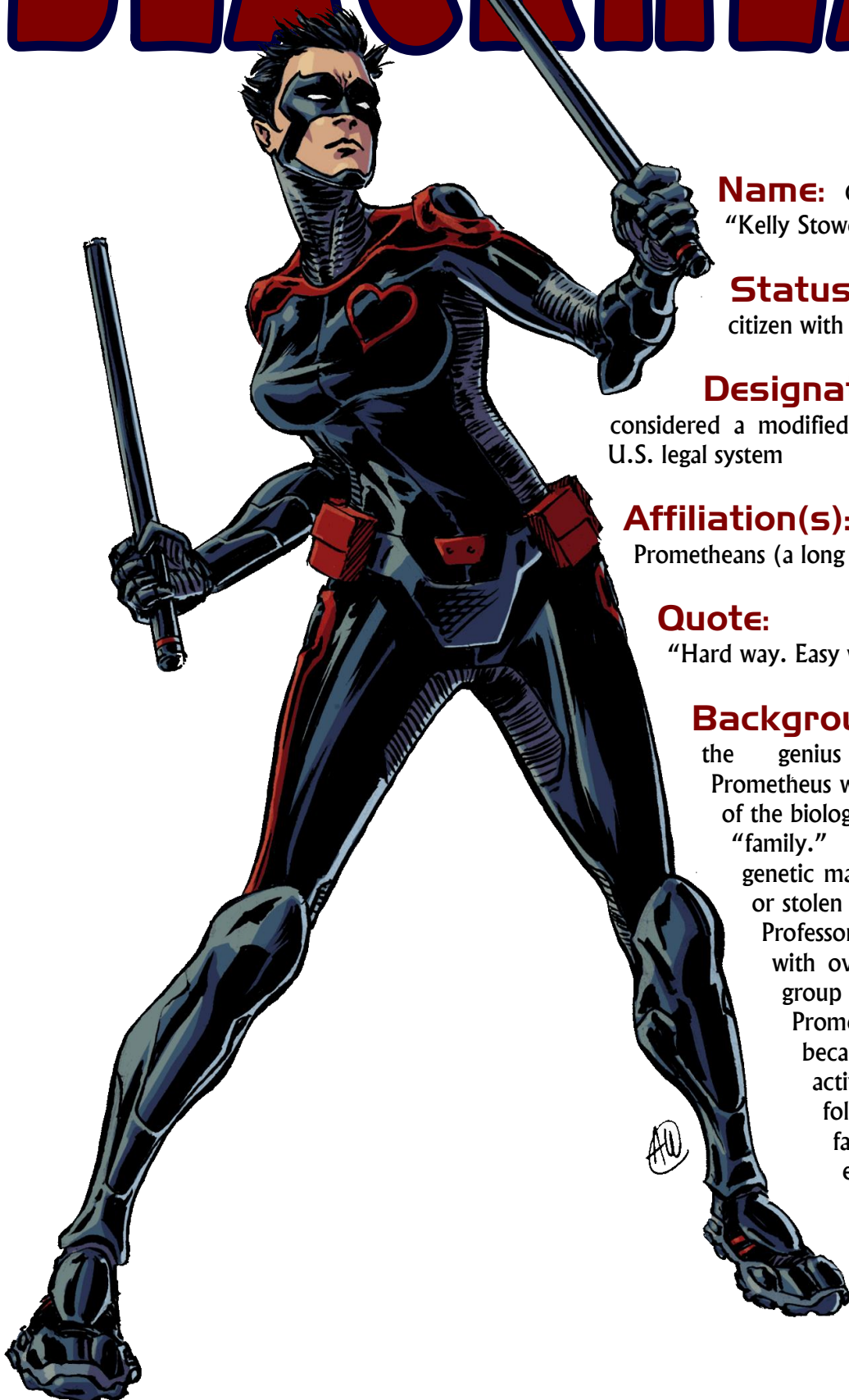
Motivation (Revenge): Blackbone lives to avenge its original death and it doesn't really care about collateral damage caused in the process.

Obsession (Kill All Users of Magic): Its hatred of anyone using magic, be they spellcasters or simply the beneficiaries of magical effects, goes way beyond even pathological — it IS the reason for its continuing existence.

Prejudice: Blackbone's appearance is difficult to hide and generally elicits an understandably negative reaction; additionally, members of the supernatural community generally recognize it on sight and are likely to attack or flee *immediately*.

Quirk (Constant Pain): Blackbone continues to suffer from the pains of its initial fiery death.

BLACKHEART



Name: Callisto (has used the alias "Kelly Stowe" on occasion)

Status: Callisto is a United States citizen with no criminal record

Designation: Blackheart is considered a modified human for purposes of the U.S. legal system

Affiliation(s): The Sentinels; originally, The Prometheans (a long time ago...)

Quote:
"Hard way. Easy way. *Choose.*"

Background: Several decades ago, the genius supercriminal Professor Prometheus was inspired to use his mastery of the biological sciences to create his own "family." Each was engineered from genetic material either devised ex nihilo or stolen from various metahumans the Professor had fought against or allied with over the years. He named the group of these creations The Prometheans, a group which became infamous for their activities in the years that followed while acting as their father's primary tools in enabling his many schemes.

One of these creations turned against her creator, however. The sole female of the group, the Promethean named Callisto also differed

from the others in that her personality and sense of self were far better developed and more sophisticated even in the early stages, the stages where their father's conditioning molded her siblings into the weapons, madmen, and monsters the world learned to fear. She spurned the callous and clinical role of experimental subject and escaped her father's hidden base, making her way out into the world.

Her first years of actual life were brutal. In the crèche, she had been taught by digital interface, a download set of basic language and life skills. These proved woefully inadequate in a world where she had never actually been a child, in a culture she had never grown up with, dealing with people that had countless social cues and assumptions foreign to her. Over time, she managed to learn these things, to assimilate into modern culture to a manageable degree, but the experience left its mark.

Regardless of any other abilities she might have possessed, what Callisto found most useful for those around her was her natural talent for violence. Her antipathy towards the way her father had treated her and what he had turned the other Prometheans into inspired Callisto, or "Blackheart" as she was labeled by some media figures, into a field which addressed her talents and her feelings—bounty hunting. Specifically, Blackheart would take contracts from the authorities exclusively to capture metahuman criminals. For years, this was the role other metahumans knew her in, that the world saw her in, the huntress famous for bringing in the most dangerous kinds of criminals.

The outsider who hunted her own.

This was an acceptable reputation to her. It wasn't necessarily correct, but it was certainly usable. It intimidated the right people, for one thing. All the while though, she was making allies in the same careful, deliberate way she built trust. One step at a

Daddy Issues

Callisto does feel a degree of debt to her father. After all, he *did* give her life. However, she loathes his motivations, his treatment of her biological family, and his monstrous ego; and she knows she was never anything more than another experiment to him —she harbors NO illusions on that point. She pities her brethren, but accepted long ago that she had no option other than to treat them as the monsters and madmen they were brought up to be. She puts this at Prometheus' feet, too. When facing the Professor or the Prometheans, Blackheart has a tendency to overcompensate — acting even colder and harsher than normal.

For their part, The Prometheans consider her defective and a traitor; they don't understand why their father hasn't made a concerted effort to erase her. Prometheus himself has never commented on the subject, though he has noticeably *neglected* to kill her on at least the two known occasions where he had ample opportunity. He has always pointedly ignored her when they've encountered each other alongside The Sentinels and The Prometheans.

time. One relationship at a time. Slowly and deliberately.

When the group of disparate heroes that would form the modern incarnation of The Sentinels team gathered that terrible day to stop the Assembly's first incursion into Earth's dimension, she was already on good terms with most of them. When they decided to stay together and form a new iteration of The Sentinels, she didn't hesitate to grab the proffered invite. Though the line-up has changed repeatedly in the interim, and Blackheart herself has taken more than one extended leave of absence from the roll call, she has stayed an integral part of the team's make-up throughout this incarnation's storied history.

Personality, Goals, & Tactics:

Blackheart has a reputation for pragmatism. This is well-earned. She is focused and no-nonsense in any situation involving resolution or confrontation. She knows she is considerably less powerful and less durable than many of her teammates, and she operates under the assumption that her opponents will show no mercy or hesitation; mistakes are a luxury for people that can shrug off rocket fire and punch through

mountains, but not for her. This sometimes makes her come across as colder and, well, more ruthless than her teammates; she decided long ago that she could live with giving that impression. Being a hero is a complicated set of responsibilities and motivations, but she maintains her edge by treating it as a job, a job at which she will be the single most consummate professional she can possibly be.

This forbidding exterior hides a couple of things. First among these is that she considers her friends and teammate to be her family. She can't maintain any form of productive relationship with her biological siblings, so she eventually found replacements. The second is that her ability to interact with people and society is a learned thing, not a conditioned response. She had no actual childhood, no "growing up" and socialization period. What she understands about normal people she taught herself through observation, study, and analysis. This means that sometimes she understands the "what" of a behavior or situation while nonetheless remaining baffled as to the "why." People tend to react awkwardly to these lapses of hers, so she does her best to hide them or avoid them coming up in the first place.

In a fight, Blackheart is fast, decisive, and clinically tactical. She identifies the opposition's operating requirements (leadership, communication, transportation) and removes them from the field. She identifies weaknesses and exploits them. She plays the role of hit-and-run skirmisher, infiltrator, and sometimes even sniper. She is particularly well-known for using a combination of her Reaction Damage effect from her array in conjunction with her Move-by Action and Takedown advantages to wreak chaos as she wades through agent-level opposition, or to switch back and forth between her Immunity effect and her Deflect effect in her array so as to use powerful opponents against each other.

Powers, Abilities, & Resources: For a person of her mass and build, Blackheart's strength ranges into the low superhuman, as does her durability (and arguably her agility and reflexes). Her metabolism is more than humanly efficient and her senses are hyper-acute.

Destriers

An advanced gravitic engine-design vehicle, the Destriers are one of the two standard vehicles used by The Sentinels. It is often found with those members of the team that do not fly under their own power or who do not have other special movement abilities (namely Blackheart, Challenger, Dusk, Hardcore, and Sundance). Access to this vehicle (as well as other privileges) is granted by Blackheart's Benefit (Member of the Sentinels) advantage rather than ranks in the Equipment advantage.

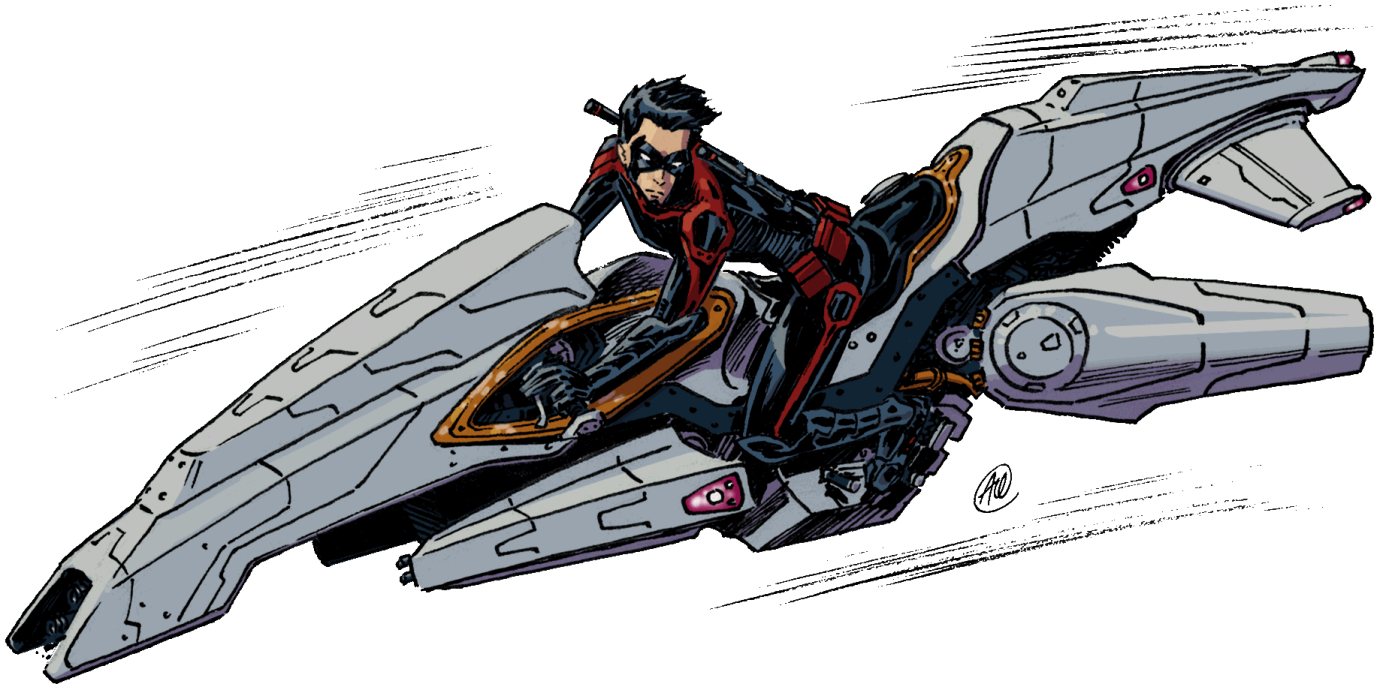
After three decades of intense training and practice, she is also one of the most capable hand-to-hand combatants known, and her investigative skills have few equals; if stories are to be believed, she can also be one of the single most intimidating people on the planet, cowering opponents much more physically powerful than her and even entire groups.

She carries a small arsenal comprised of highly-advanced versions of otherwise archaic weapons, such as a hyper-dense collapsible staff that can separate into twin staves (and the staves can then extend into nunchaku), throwing spikes, and bolo-style snares. She also wears advanced body armor that helps mask her thermographic and radar signatures and boasts reactive-

mesh that hardens for a fraction of a second on impact for reinforced striking surfaces.

Campaign Usage & Story Hooks: Blackheart, much like all the other members of The Sentinels group or any other hero-types in this series, is presented to GMs and players for a variety of uses.

First, these heroic characters can be used as player character substitutions in campaigns when necessary, or as examples and models for particular kinds of builds. They can be used as allies of the player character heroes, narrative resources and contacts and the like, or simply to add color to a campaign background. Finally, in those instances where opposition or obstacles to player character progress need to come from the same side as said heroes, these guys and gals present that option in spades (because nothing says comic book tradition like heroes trading punches before realizing they should be teaming up instead). As with any other characters in the series, these heroes are just tools for individual players and GMs and are presented without assumption as to the social importance of the player character heroes in a campaign.



MV454 Omnitech Destrier Grav-Cycle

Omnitech Aerodyne Special Designs Group

Bascomb Testing Grounds, Utah

Kessler and Kirby, Lead Designers

Curb Weight 880 lbs.

Overall Length 85"

Overall Width 35"

Max Level Speed @ Sea Level 350 mph (Max safe speed for field emitter to hold seating positions; breathing masks required above 110 mph)

Max Rate of Climb 3,200 ft/min

Service Ceiling 14,580 ft

Range with Max Fuel + Reserve 1,520 miles

Maximum Cargo 600 lbs.

Engine

Secondary shell OASDG Configurable Gravitic Displacement Array allowing perfect VTOL and Zero Stall Speed. Supplemented by Kessler & Kirby MJ-290 (Third Scale) Plasma Induction Turbine

Standard Equipment

Full avionics display with holographic HUD. Force screen emitter slaved to gravitic power coupler — aids in maintaining structural integrity while holding pilot/passengers in seating positions; **NOT** rated for defensive countermeasure.

Destrier Grav-Cycle

Size: Medium, **Strength:** 5 (lift 1600 lbs.), **Speed:** 7 (Flight, 250 mph), **Defense:** 10, **Toughness:** 12,

Powers: HUD Radar (Accurate Radio with Extended 3), **Features:** Alarm 4 (DC 35), Autopilot 2 (+8), Communications, Navigation System, Remote Control, Spotlight • 42 ep

COMPLICATIONS

Family Ties: Blackheart's origins as an engineered being created alongside the other Prometheans occasionally causes her problems with people who view her as "artificial" or refuse to believe she has sincerely distanced herself from her father and siblings.

Motivation (Acceptance): Other people aren't the only ones that occasionally have problems with Callisto's engineered origins — sometimes she does, too.

Motivation (Responsibility): What she does is a calling and one she will NOT fail to pursue to her utmost.

Quirk (Outside Looking In): Blackheart's understanding of human nature and behavior comes from study and observation, not actual socialization; on occasion, this leaves room for some *interesting* lapses in comprehension or mistakes in judgment.

EQUIPMENT

ADVANCED STAFF WEAPON: Strength-based Damage 2 (Reach, Split, Subtle; Feature 1: + 2 circumstance bonus to disarm attempts) ♦ 6 points

DESTRIER GRAV-CYCLE: See previous page

MISCELLANEOUS GEAR: Gasmask, Rebreather, Commlink, Flashlight, Restraints, Tracer Bug ♦ 6 points

UTILITY BELT ARRAY (30 base points) ♦ 33 points total

- **ADVANCED HI-TENSILE BOLA:** Ranged Cumulative Affliction 10 (Resisted by Dodge, Overcome by Damage; Hindered and Vulnerable, Defenseless and Immobilized), Extra Condition, Limited Degree ♦ 30 points
- **CABLEGUN—SWINGLINE:** Movement 1 (Swinging); Climbing Cable: Movement 1 (Wall-Crawling), Platform; and Zip Line: Flight 3, Gliding, Limited to between two points, Platform ♦ 1 point
- **CUTTING TORCH:** Damage 1 Linked to Weaken Toughness 1 ♦ 1 point
- **ADVANCED STEALTH TOOLS:** Feature 2 (+ 5 circumstance bonus to Technology checks to open electronic locks); Morph 2 (biometric access data), Precise, Limited to Biometrics ♦ 1 point
- **THROWING SPIKES:** Strength-based Ranged Damage 1, Ranged on Strength 5, Accurate 2 ♦ 1 point

COSTS

Attributes 90 + Defenses 24 + Advantages 41 + Skills 62 + Powers 51 = 268 points

BLACKHEART

PL 11
STR STA AGL DEX FGT INT AWE PRE
5**5****6****6****15****2****4****2**

ADVANTAGES

Accurate Attack, Agile Feint, All-out Attack, Assessment, Benefit (Member of The Sentinels), Contacts, Daze (Intimidate), Defensive Attack, Equipment 9, Evasion, Fast Grab, Improved Defense, Improved Disarm, Improved Initiative 2, Improved Trip, Move-by Action, Power Attack, Ranged Attack 6, Redirect, Set-up, Skill Mastery (Intimidation), Startle, Takedown, Teamwork, Tracking, Weapon Bind, Well-informed

SKILLS

Acrobatics 10 (+16), Athletics 10 (+15), Deception 8 (+10), Expertise: Streetwise 12 (+14), Insight 12 (+16), Intimidation 18 (+20), Investigation 12 (+14), Perception 12 (+16), Persuasion 4 (+6), Sleight of Hand 4 (+10), Stealth 10 (+16), Technology 4 (+6), Treatment 2 (+4), Vehicles 6 (+8)

DEFENSES

Dodge	15	Parry	15		
Fort	10	Tough	7	Will	12

COMBAT

Initiative: +14

Lift: 1600 lbs.

Move: Ground (16 mph)

Unarmed: Close +15, Damage 7

Bola: Ranged +12, Affliction 10 Resisted by Dodge, Overcome by Damage

Nunchaku: Close +15, Damage 7 (Split)

Pressure Points: Close +15, Affliction 7

Resisted by Dodge, Overcome by Fortitude

Staff: Close +15, Damage 7 (Reach 5 feet)

Staves: Close +15, Damage 7 (Split)

Throwing Spikes: Ranged +16, Damage 6

POWERS

ENGINEERED BODY: Enhanced Advantages 2 (Diehard, Great Endurance); Immunity 4 (Disease, Poison, Aging, Starvation; Limited to Half-effect); Leaping 1 (15 feet), Senses 4 (Acute Olfactory, Extended Auditory, Extended Visual, Low-light vision), Speed 3 (16 mph) ♦ 12 points

FIGHTING MACHINE ARRAY: (24 base points) ♦ 29 total points

- **ANALYZE STYLE:** Perception Ranged Affliction 11 (Resisted and Overcome by Will; Vulnerable and Impaired, Defenseless and Disabled; Conditions Limited to Blackheart's Attacks, Extra Condition, Limited Degree, Insidious, Subtle) ♦ 24 points
- **COUNTERSTRIKE:** Reaction Damage 7 (when attacked at close range; Attack Check Required) ♦ 1 point
- **FLURRY:** Multiattack Damage 7, Variable Descriptor 2 (any attack effect Blackheart wields, only up to attack's rank) ♦ 1 point
- **NO - YOU'LL TRY TO HIT ME:** Immunity 60 (Attacks targeting either Dodge or Parry; Concentration Duration, Distracting, Limited to attacks she's aware of) ♦ 1 point
- **PRESSURE POINTS:** Multiattack Affliction 7 (Resisted by Dodge, Overcome by Fortitude, Dazed, Stunned, Incapacitated) ♦ 1 point
- **YOUR ATTACK HITS WHERE I WANT IT TO HIT:** Deflect 15 (Redirection, Reflect; Close Range, Distracting, Insidious, Subtle) ♦ 1 point

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