Capes!
Super Roleplaying

by Tony Lower-Basch

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Preface

Roleplaying games, like the one you hold in your hands, have a mixed pedigree. They are both storytelling and gaming. They are mutts, not one thing or another but a vigorous, quirky hybrid.

It's no great surprise that so many fans of comic books are also drawn to roleplaying. Super-hero stories are also a form of hybrid art. Half high-minded philosophy, half visceral escapism, the genre has been invented and reinvented for decades. Serious people with serious concerns have discounted it for all that time. The argument is that such a hodge-podge of different goals cannot match the achievements of thoroughbred, unified art forms like writing and painting.

The point is simple, but is it true?

I believe that comics and roleplaying both survive, not in spite of their contradictions but because of them. I don't love super-hero stories because I am too *lazy* to read a tract on moral philosophy and then watch a high-kicking kung-fu movie. I love them because, at their best, these stories touch the heart in ways that neither philosophy nor escapism can do alone. The super-hero genre is at its best when it embraces both halves of its crossbreed legacy, not as separate goals but as parts of a single whole. It succeeds precisely by embracing what it is, rather than pretending to be something else.

It's no coincidence that sounds like the corny tag-line of a four-color comic book. Comic book writers aren't stupid. After more than sixty years of wrestling with their own quirky medium, they know the nature of what they're attempting.

Roleplaying games need to take the advice of this (slightly) older sibling. Anyone who plays a roleplaying game believing that they have to **choose** between making serious, moving stories and having a fun, challenging game with clear-cut rules is missing the point of the medium. It's not this or that… it's this **and** that. I don't love roleplaying games because I'm too lazy to tell a story and then play a game of chess. I love them because, at their best, these story games touch the heart and stir the blood in ways that neither stories nor games do alone.

In playing this game with experienced roleplayers I have heard the same comment over and over: "I feel bad about how much I get into the rules of the game. I don't understand how the stories turn out so good when we're letting the rules have so much impact." Even when I explain that they *should* enjoy the game as a game, the guilt persists.

If you worry that you're having more fun than you should, or the wrong type of fun, that's probably a good sign. Fun is the point.

ROLEPLAYING ON PURPOSE

Roleplaying should be fun. And it should be serious. Doing both at the same time is a challenge, but well worth the effort.

You won't lack for examples from other parts of your life. If you play on a committed baseball team then you show up on time, practice hard and play hard. All of that effort is to help you and your team-mates have fun. Serious fun.

A group playing Capes will benefit tremendously by bringing the same focus on serious fun to the table. Little things like starting on time, ending on time, and concentrating on the game rather than diversions send a subtle but definite signal that everyone is there to play. They have a purpose.

JUST THE BEGINNING

This book contains what you need to play. It doesn't contain everything you might *want* in order to play. That would require a much larger book. Instead of crowding your bookshelf with things you may or may not want, we've put it on a web-site:

http://www.museoffire.com/Games/

Head right on over for character sheets to simplify tracking your many characters, introductory rules-sets to entice your friends to play with you, and a community of like-minded players with stories and advice to share.
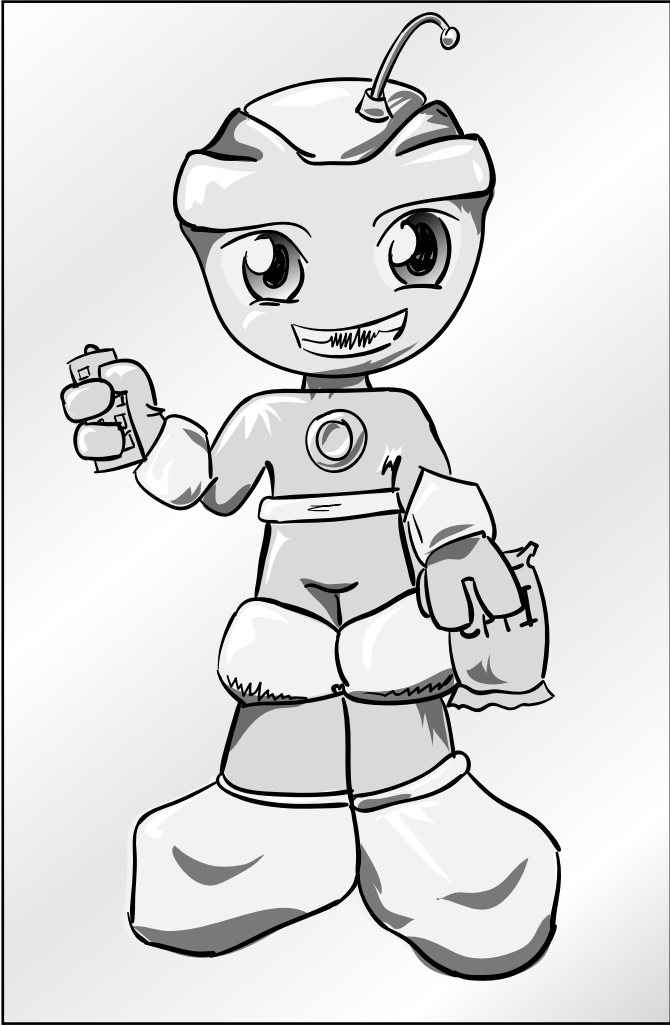
Chapter 1

CORE RULES

What would you do if you could fly?

If you would stay on the ground for fear that something bad might happen if you flew, then Capes is not the game for you.

If you would watch sunrises from the stratosphere, have lunch on the backs of statues forty stories up, and race jet-liners for the sheer exhileration of speed then you've come to the right place.

POWER IS FUN...

Superheroes soar through the sky and leap across city landscapes. They reshape the course of mighty rivers. They dance untouched when the bullets fall like rain and sift moon-dust through their bare fingers.

It's the ultimate thrill ride. Don't let anyone tell you differently.

Players in Capes take on many roles, but playing superheroes and supervillains is what sets the game apart. And what sets supers apart is their power.

Powers are, quite simply, for enjoying. If you feel like using one, don't think twice. That's what the game is about. Lift buildings, dodge bullets, work miracles.

Superheroes (particularly) have lives with a potent mix of joy and hardship, and very little in between. Get your joy while you can. Be a little childish about it. Children know how to have the best fun.

... BUT DO YOU DESERVE IT?

You've been given a gift the rest of the world cannot share. No matter how often you save the city, or the world, you still owe a debt you can never repay.

Playing Capes you take on the role of a superhero. You'll tell a story and pursue two goals. First, enjoy your heros powers....

...Second, show that your hero deserves them.

You may, quite reasonably, want to play a character who has hard times and difficult choices to go along with the childish glee of super-powers.

Maybe you want this out of a sense of what is dramatically appropriate. Maybe you just want to make sure that you're not having more fun than you're supposed to. Not to worry. The game system keeps things balanced. It calls your debts due.

But it makes you pay them **later**. You get a nice hefty line of credit. That way you can use your powers to their utmost, knowing that the rules will make sure you earn them.

HOW TO PITCH THE GAME

If you have a group of players already itching to play *Capes*, great! But if not, your players may be looking for a little bit of a sales pitch on why they should dedicate several evenings to playing this game rather than another. Here are several tested ways to pique players' interest. Pick the one best suited for the person you're trying to rope in.

Superheroes sell themselves: Point out the fun of super powers. Remind prospective player that they are not only allowed but *required* to use those powers in the most escapist, wish-fulfilling ways possible.

Great power, no responsibility: Point out that *Capes* allows any player to control most anything. If your prospective likes the power of being in charge of a game but doesn't like the responsibility then Capes offers them the chance to have power when they want it, then to relax and let someone else run the show when they want to.

Constant involvement: Show the prospective how *Capes*, where players can always pick up any character that's handy, keeps every player involved in every scene, often in surprising and exciting new ways.

New ways of playing: Pitch the many powerful ways that the prospective can author the story, from creating Conflicts to writing up new characters to suit the needs of the moment.

Escape from Tyranny: Explain that there is no Game Master. The players are at nobody's mercy but each others, and the only way for a player to gain more power to influence the story is by helping other players to tell their own stories.

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WHAT YOU'LL NEED

To play Capes you need two or more Players. You will be cooperating to create a comic-book story. You will be competing to have the most influence on how that story turns out.

The group will need some physical props. You will need a good handful of dice (of the sugar-cube shaped, six-sided backgammon variety), in two distinctive colors. At least eight of each color.

You will need a pack of three-by-five index cards. These will be used to track the various Conflicts that the heroes and villains vie for control over. You'll need room to lay out four or five of them at any one time.

You will need some small tokens to track how endebted your heroes are for their spectacular power. Poker chips are ideal. Pennies are good. Small candies are better, if you can resist munching on them at inappropriate times. These will be called Debt Tokens, and (later) Story Tokens.

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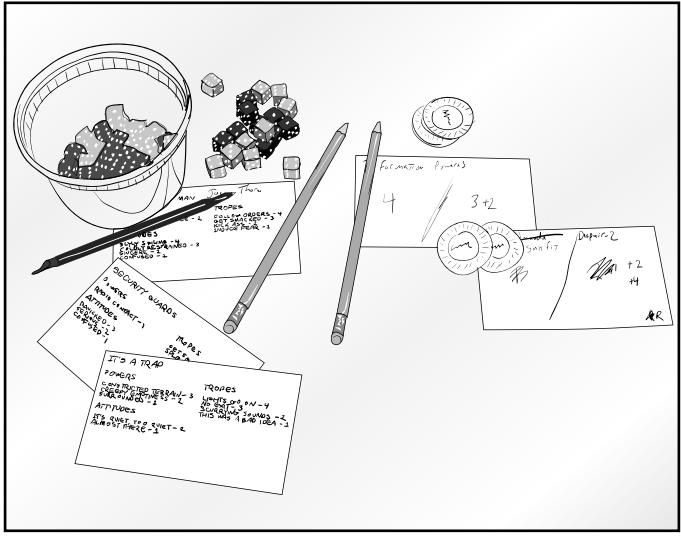
WHAT YOU'LL DO

As you play Capes you will try to tell a super-hero story. In fact, if you've got an idea for a story already worked out in your own head you should probably try to tell that one.

Here's the catch. Everyone else is trying to tell a story too. You get to tell what happens when it is your turn to narrate, but when it is their turn the other players will pursue their own agendas. And they're probably not trying to tell *your* story. The greatest random factor in Capes is always the other players. Your ability to tell your story will depend on how well you can adjust to their contributions and incorporate them into the shared story.

Who is in charge?

If you have played roleplaying games then you've probably met (and may have been) a Game Master. The Game Master is a player vested with authority over everything in the game-world except the other player's characters. They are often also expected to take the lead in telling the story.

Capes has no Game Master. The rights and responsibilities of that role are shared among the players. Everyone can narrate things beyond what their character does. Everyone is responsible for telling the story. This sharing is structured by the rules system.

It's like playing volleyball. You can have a plan for how to play, but if your plan is "I will stand right here until the ball comes directly to me" then you're going to lose. You have to **move**. You have to react to what the other players are doing, and do your best to get back toward your own plan. Flexibility is key.

The same principle applies in Capes. Nobody is going to entirely control the story. Everybody is going to partially control the story. You'd better get used to the notion of reacting to what other players add to the story.

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HOW THE RULES HELP YOU

If you can narrate absolutely anything then you can very easily narrate something that another player thinks is unfair in some way. To maintain any sort of harmony you need to agree to some limits on what you can narrate, and when.

The rules of Capes help you reach that agreement. Players introduce **Conflicts**, which are parts of the story that have been referred to the rules system for arbitration. Only the person who wins the Conflict may narrate its conclusion. If something is not covered by a Conflict then it can be narrated by anyone.

The rules also determine when players narrate. Players play the game in turns, always going clockwise around the table. When it's your turn you speak. When it's not you listen. Turns go very rapidly, so you'll get another turn (of some sort) soon.

One of the resources a player can acquire in the game is a pile of Story Tokens. These allow the player to take more control of the turn order. In most situations where each player gets to do something once (i.e. gets a turn) a Story Token can be spent to do it again. In this way, Story Tokens give increased authorship.

Terms you are about to read

Scene: Like a scene in a movie or play, this is a place and time that something happens. Players choose their roles for the Scene, and may change them every Scene.

Page: A unit of narration inside a Scene. Each page consists of many actions, at least one per character.

Action: A player using their character to influence the course of the game. Often an attempt by the character to control the course of a Conflict.

CAPES RULES MADE EASY

SCENES p.20

A new scene is declared by the player to the left of the one who declared the previous. Starting with that character, going clockwise, players choose a character to play for free. They may then buy more characters for a Story Token each.

PAGES p.22

At the start of each Page, going clockwise around the table, players may add Free Conflicts and Claim one side of a Conflict. They may add or Claim more Conflicts for a Story Token each. In the same order, they get an action for each of their characters. Players may then buy more Actions for a Story Token each.

ACTIONS p.25

In their Action a player may either use an Ability or create a Conflict. Before and after, they may Stake Debt, Split Dice and/or spend an Inspiration to raise a die to the Inspiration's value.

CONFLICTS p.26

Conflicts start with a die for each side. These start at 1 and change through play. The highest side controls and narrates the Conflict.

EVENTS p.28

By declaring an Event you say what will occur in the future. The Resolver narrates how it happens, when it Resolves.

GOALS p.29

By declaring a Goal you say some characters are trying to do something. The Resolver narrates whether they succeed.

RESOLVING p.30

After actions, once again in turn order, players look at the Conflicts they claimed. If the side they claimed Controls a Conflict then they Resolve it. Losers get back double the Debt they Staked. Winners give away their Stakes as Story Tokens to the losing characters. Claimant matches winning and losing dice and gains an Inspiration equal to the difference for each pair or excess die.

RESOURCES

Debt: Gained by using Powers, or losing Stakes. Spent to Stake.
Story Tokens: Gained by losing Conflicts. Spent for extra roles and actions.
Inspirations: Gained by winning Conflicts. Spent to increase dice.

DRIVES/DEBT p.32

Debt Tokens go on Drives. Each Drive has a numeric Strength. If it has more Tokens than Strength it is Overdrawn. At the start of each Page, for each Overdrawn drive, the player rolls the highest die the character owns, accepting only lower rolls.

STAKING p.36

Players Stake by moving Debt onto Conflicts. Each character may Stake one Drive per Conflict, no more Debt than Drive Strength.

SPLITTING p.37

Players may evenly split any die they own into dice totaling the same value. A side may split to as many dice as it has Stakes.

ABILITIES p.38

A super-ability earns a Debt Token each time it is used. Other abilities are used only once per Scene, but effect no resources.

The ability either raises an Inspiration by a point or rolls any one die on a Conflict. The ability score must be at least the value of the Inspiration or die. If they roll a Conflict die then they choose whether to accept the roll or turn the die back to its original value.

REACTION p.40

Any time a roll is accepted, any player (not just the acting one) may roll that die again by using an Ability of equal or greater value as a Reaction. No player may React twice on the same action.

GLOATING p.41

If Resolving would violate the group Code the Claimant instead Gloats. Starting with their highest die on the Conflict they may turn dice to 1. For each die turned the Resolver earns a Story Token.
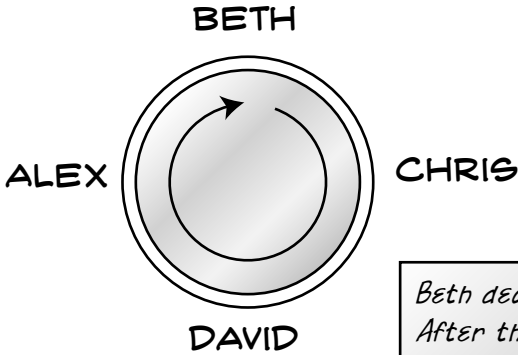
SCENES

A new scene is declared by the player to the left of the one who declared the previous. Starting with that character, going clockwise, players choose a character to play for free. They may then buy more characters for a Story Token each.

Many roleplaying games assign authority to play a particular role once and seldom change it. Players get one character each, and only influence the story through that character's actions. A designated Game Master gets every other character, as well as the responsibility of setting the scene and situation.

Capes is more fluid. Any player can play any character (unless your game group sets a House Rule **119** that some characters belong to particular players). They can certainly choose to create and play any type of character on the spur of the moment. Players can end up playing one, two or five characters in a scene. They can play a hero, a villain, a bystander, or all three at once.

The authority to create a scene also rotates among the players. When the game begins, someone will just volunteer to be first. After that the opportunity passes to their left. They can define the scene as anything they want. If they want their character to be fighting crime then there's some crime out there for them to fight. Someone might choose to play criminals, or the criminals might be just window dressing to the real Conflicts **26** of the scene. Those Conflicts are always between the characters that the players choose to portray.

Players choose characters in order. The scene creator chooses the first character, and then other players do so proceeding clockwise. If someone has chosen a character you want to play before it gets to your turn then you are out of luck.

BETH

ALEX

CHRIS

DAVID

Beth declares the first scene. After that plays out, Chris is the first to have a chance to declare the next scene. He declines to do so, and the opportunity passes to David. David declares a scene. After it plays out, Alex is the next to get a chance to declare. Chris does not get special consideration because he had a chance and didn't use it.

Alex declares that he will play Captain Liberty at a charity event. Beth takes on the role of Police Chief Mannelli. Chris wanted to play Mannelli. He takes ace reporter Liz Livingstone instead. David chooses to play arch-villain Professor Grim. Alex declines to spend a Story Token. Beth spends a Story Token to also play Grim's lackey Brunt. Chris spends a Story Token and rapidly writes up stats for a group of Goons, to fill out the villain force. David declines to spend Story Tokens. The group agrees they have chosen enough roles and the scene starts.

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PAGES

At the start of each Page, going clockwise around the table, players may add Free Conflicts and Claim one side of a Conflict. They may add or Claim more Conflicts for a Story Token each. In the same order, they get an action for each of their characters. Players may then buy more Actions for a Story Token each.

Each Page tells a distinct chunk of the story, in which characters try to resolve one or more Conflicts.❷❻

Each Page also has a different person lead it off. This player is called the ***Starter***. The Starter will always get to do things first. Everyone else acts in turn, clockwise from them.

The role of Starter shifts one player clockwise with each new Page. The Starter for page 2 is the player to the left of the Starter for page 1.

At the start of the Page, clockwise from the Starter, each player may put their marker on the side of a Conflict ❷❻ that one of their characters is Allied ❷❻ with. If they have no character Allied (particularly for a new Conflict where sides are not yet defined) they may put the marker on any side. Placing that marker is known as ***Claiming*** the side. At the end of the Page players may Resolve ❸⓿ Conflicts they have Claimed. A second player may not Claim a side already Claimed this Page. Opposing players, however, may both Claim opposite sides on the same Conflict. The first time around the table each player may Claim once for free. After that it costs a Story Token per extra Claim.

Before or after Claiming, a player may introduce new Conflicts. If a character and their Exemplar ❼❺ are in the scene together, the player of either the character or the Exemplar may add the Free Character Conflict ❼❻ between the two for free.
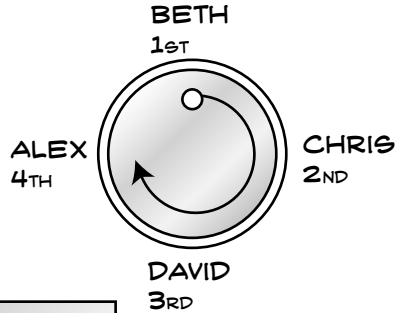
The player of a non-person character may add that character's Free Conflict ❿❸ for free.

A player may spend a Story Token at this time to add a Conflict.

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If this is the turn order
on Page #6

BETH
2ND

ALEX
1ST

CHRIS
3RD

DAVID
4TH

Then this is the turn
order on Page #7
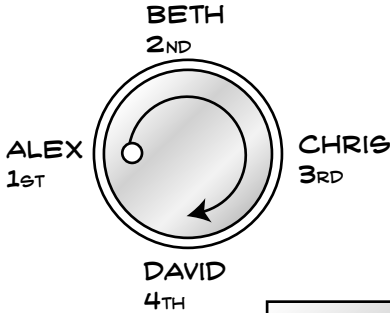
BETH
1ST

ALEX
4TH

CHRIS
2ND

DAVID
3RD

Overall Order

Alex, Beth, Chris, David
Beth, Chris, David, Alex

In Page #6 (above), Alex, on behalf of Captain Liberty, claims the heroic (i.e. opposing) side of "Goal **29** : Terrorize Bystanders". Beth spends a Story Token to add the Conflict "Event **28** Someone gets to the diamond," and Claims a side for Chief Mannelli (unofficially marking that as the "hero" side). Chris, on behalf of lackey Brunt claims the other side of that same Event. David, for Professor Grim, claims the villain side of "Goal: Humiliate Captain Liberty". Alex spends a Story Token, and claims the hero side of "Humiliate Captain Liberty", in addition to his previous Claim.

PAGES

In the same order, they get an action for each of their characters. Players may then buy more Actions for a Story Token each.

After all players have had a chance to Claim, there is a period of free narration. Anyone can narrate, just as they would using an Ability, ㊳ so long as it does not require rules arbitration. This is a good time for characters to have conversations, and other tight interactions that can be slowed by turn order.

The Starter ends free play at any time by taking Actions for each of her characters. Other players do the same, clockwise.

Once all players have had their free actions, any further actions in that Page cost a Story Token each. The order is still clockwise around the table, but many players will (probably) decline their chance to pay for an action.

There is no limit to how many more actions a player can buy. When the opportunity has gone around the table once, it goes around again. Anyone may still buy Actions, both those who bought the previous round and those who declined.

This phase of the Page ends when a whole round occurs in which no players wish to buy more actions.

Because many Pages will have no Story Tokens spent for extra actions, all of the above is often streamlined. Players can agree informally who wants more actions, and then have those players act in clockwise order.

> Alex uses his Action ㉕ for Captain Liberty to save some Bystanders. Beth has Mannelli run toward the diamond. Chris acts for two characters, having Brunt reach for the diamond, but Livingstone distracts him. David acts for Professor Grim, controlling "Humiliate Liberty". Alex spends a Story Token and acts for Captain Liberty again, taking back control.

ACTIONS

At any time in their Action a player may spend an Inspiration to raise a die to the Inspiration's value. Before using an Ability a player may Stake Debt and Split Dice. One time in their Action they may either use an Ability or create a Conflict.

For each Action, a player may create a Conflict ❷❻ or use an Ability. ❸❽ They may only do one of these things, and may only do so once per Action.

Immediately before and after doing this, the player may do a number of things. They may use any number of Inspirations (gained when they Resolve ❸⓪ a Conflict). Each Inspiration is for a particular character or group (e.g. "For the villains", "For Liz Livingstone") By using their Inspiration the player may raise one die on that characters side to the value of the Inspiration.

The player may Split ❸❼ Dice on their side of any Conflicts with enough Staked Debt. They may Stake ❸❻ Debt on any number of Conflicts that provoke the character to prove themself in the relevant moral Drive. ❷❻

Before his Action, Chris Stakes three Debt, ❸❻ Splits ❸❼ one die into two dice, uses an Inspiration on one of the dice. He uses his action to roll the other die. After his action he Splits another of his dice in two (for three total) and uses an Inspiration on the lowest. He also Stakes Debt on an unrelated Conflict, and Splits it.

The player may do any of these things, in any order, as often as they can afford to. They may do so before their Action, or after, or both. They may not do any of these things during the Action itself, or during any Reactions.

CONFLICTS

Conflicts start with a die for each side. These start at 1 and change through play. The highest side controls and narrates the Conflict.

A Conflict is a situation where things could turn out (at least) two different ways, and characters are vying to control the outcome.

Index cards with the name of the Conflict on them are used for tracking them and providing a place to keep the dice. Each Conflict starts with two dice. Before being rolled the dice don't represent any particular side. Once someone rolls one, it now represents *their* side. Any character that has tried to roll up a die on a side or roll down a die opposing the side is **Allied** with that side until they ally with another side in the same Conflict.

No player may narrate how the Conflict turns out in the story until they have successfully Resolved ③⓪ the Conflict in the rules. This is called the **"Not Yet" Rule**. If a player is about to violate this rule other players can remind them with a gentle "Not Yet".

Whichever side has the highest total has Control of the Conflict. This lets them take advantage of the **"And Then" Rule**. Any time anything is narrated about the Conflict, the narration must be finished by someone allied with the Controlling side. If the character who acted is not on that side then at some point the player must say "And Then..." and invite a controlling player to end the narration. That second player narrates what happens *after*, that sours earlier efforts and makes the situation worse.

Whenever a player tries to control a Conflict they will narrate what their character does, and may, if they choose, narrate how well they succeed. The only limits on what they can narrate are the rules above. If a player wants their character to lift a building then they can lift a building. Nobody has to debate with them whether the building is too heavy, unless it's relevant to a rule above. Players are free to have their characters **do** absolutely anything, but not to **achieve** absolutely anything.

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Roger Rocket is trying to restart his spaceship. He creates an Event conflict, "The ship is a bare second from crashing". If it turns out in his favor than he restarts the engines at the very last moment and soars off to further glory. If not, he fails and nose-dives into the planet. Until that Conflict is resolved, the ship cannot be turned away from the planet and cannot crash.

Sylvia, occult bounty-hunter, is in combat with a Demon Dog. She creates a Goal conflict, "Beat down the dog". On her action she narrates drawing a huge revolver while she dodges the beast's jaws, and filling the infernal canine with bullets containing holy water. She doesn't have to check whether she can hit the dog, or dodge its blows. Anything she wants to do she can do. But that doesn't mean the hell-puppy is down for the count. Only when the Conflict is resolved will it be clear how badly the dog has been beat down.

CLOBBERING

Grey Control

CLOBBERING

White Control

CLOBBERING
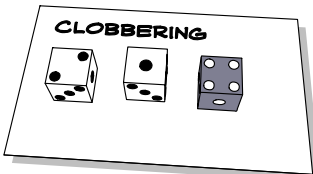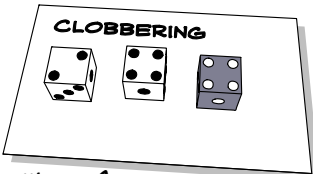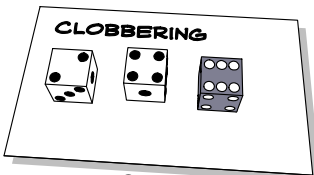
Tied

Captain Roscoe, Subterranean Pirate, tries to control the "Take over Gopher-Man Galleon" Conflict. He fails to gain Control. His player describes how he swings from the rigging, and fights ten Gopher-sailors single-handedly. "And then..." the player says, and gestures to Bob, in the role of the Gopher-Captain. Bob describes how Captain Roscoe bravely leaps onto the cover of a cargo hold, which collapses under his weight, dumping him unceremoniously into the depths of the ship.

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EVENTS

By declaring an Event you say what will occur in the future. The Resolver narrates how it happens, when it Resolves.
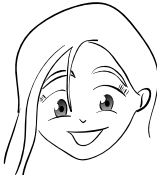
Events are one of the two types of Conflicts. ㉖   When a player declares an Event they establish something that will happen in the future of the story.   Any player may veto any Event for any reason, or for no reason at all.   The player may not declare an Event that has been vetoed, but they may offer another Event or do something else with their Action.   The best way to get an Event accepted is to make it so vague that either side of the Conflict could take advantage of it.

Once an Event is declared it absolutely, positively, *will* come to pass. What players fight to influence are the details. The player who controls it and resolves it gets to narrate how it comes to pass and what the consequences are, but no player may decide that the Event doesn't happen as described.

A player Resolves ㉚ a "Building Collapses" Event.   They do not decide whether or not the building collapses. It has to collapse. But they decide who it collapses **onto**.

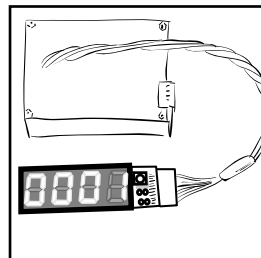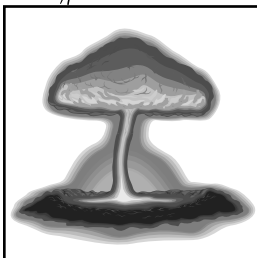DECLARING AN EVENT. *"THE BOMB EXPLODES."*

VETO.

OKAY... HOW ABOUT *"THE COUNTDOWN GETS TO ONE SECOND REMAINING"*?

AND THEN THE BOMB EITHER EXPLODES OR GETS DISARMED? COOL.

Goals are one of the two types of Conflicts.❷⑥ When a player declares a Goal they state something that someone is trying to make happen in the future of the story. If that side

GOALS

By declaring a Goal you say some characters are trying to do something. The Resolver narrates whether they succeed.

resolves the Goal then the character or group succeeds, otherwise they fail. Failing in a Goal does not mean that anyone else gets to achieve anything against the character. It only means that their attempt has been thwarted. That character may not attempt the same Goal again in that Scene.

A player may veto a Goal only under specific circumstances. They may veto the Goal if it is being declared for a character they are currently playing and they don't want to pursue that Goal. And any player may veto a Goal that is very prone to Gloating, ④❶ if a Gloat-worthy Conflict for that side is already active and unresolved. Otherwise, if they want to prevent the Goal from being achieved then they should work through the rules to oppose the Conflict and resolve it.

Technically there is no such thing as a "for" or "against" side of a Conflict. The sides are defined by who rolls which dice, and what narrative goals they pursue in doing so. A Goal could easily have two sides, both of whom wanted the Goal to succeed, but who had two very different ideas of **how** it should succeed.

However, in the normal course of things, one side will want the Goal to succeed and one will want it to fail. Players commonly refer, in such a case, to rolling "For" or "Against" the Goal.

RESOLVING

After actions, once again in turn order, players look at the Conflicts they claimed. If the side they claimed Controls the Conflict then they Resolve it. Losers get back double the Debt they Staked. Winners give away their Stakes as Story Tokens to the losing characters. Claimant matches winning and losing dice and gains an Inspiration equal to the difference for each pair or excess die.

Note that players may never keep Debt Tokens ㉜ from one of their own characters as Story Tokens, even if they also played a different character on the losing side of the Conflict. ㉖

If the character who created the Conflict is on the losing side, and they are being played by someone other than the Resolver then the first Story Token must go to that player.

In the rare case that no player except the Resolver has a character allied with any losing side, Story Tokens cannot be awarded. Instead the Tokens are discarded.

When a losing character must take back Debt, all the Debt they take back returns to the Drive from which it was Staked.

When the Resolver matches one of their dice against a greater opposing die, the result is not a negative Inspiration. It is a positive Inspiration *for the opposing character or group*. The Resolver chooses which character on the opposing side receives the Inspiration. They may award it to themselves if they played characters on both sides of the fight.

Matching exactly equal dice creates no Inspiration.

If a Conflict is tied, and no means is available in the rules to break the tie in future Pages (i.e. nobody can spend more Debt, and the dice are all sixes) then it is ***Deadlocked***. Players collaborate on narrating the resolution of a Deadlocked Conflict. All Staked Debt (on all sides) is treated as having lost. All dice are converted to Inspirations directly, without matching.

30

Metamorph and Doctor Phantom are contesting an Event "Peggy Sue falls toward the active volcano". Metamorph stakes three Love, Doctor Phantom stakes two Despair. Both Claim their sides of the Event.

At the end of the page, Metamorph has dice of 6, 4 and 2. Doctor Phantom has dice of 4 and 2. With a total of 12 to 6, Metamorph Resolves the Event. Peggy Sue falls toward the volcano, only to be saved mere inches above the bubbling lava by the flying hero.

Doctor Phantom takes back four points of Debt for his Despair Drive. Metamorph takes his three Staked Debt Tokens and gives them to the Doctor as Story Tokens.
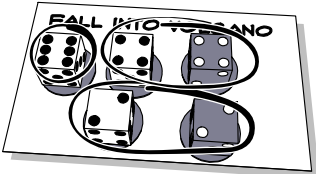
A single, six-point, Inspiration for Metamorph.
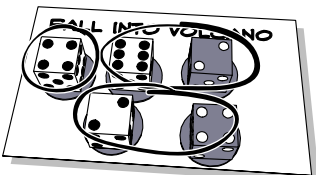
Two 4-point Inspirations for Metamorph, and one two-point Inspiration for Doctor Phantom.

31

DRIVES/DEBT

Debt Tokens go on Drives. Each Drive has a numeric Strength.
If it has more Tokens than Strength it is Overdrawn. At the start
of each Page, for each Overdrawn drive, the player rolls the
highest die the character owns, accepting only lower rolls.

The Premise of Capes is "Power is fun, but do you deserve it?"
Debt measures the gap between how much a character needs
to prove his worth and how much he has done so. As you have
fun with your power you accumulate Debt. As you prove
yourself in morally charged situations you lose Debt.

Players may put Debt they earn from Abilities on any Drive, no
justification needed. But when they Stake Debt, **36** it must be on
a Conflict that is morally charged for that particular character
and Drive. Story descriptions of the Drives are on the following
pages.

Debt Staked on a Conflict **26** is not counted as being on a Drive.
It is on the Conflict, and not counted toward Overdraw.

When a character is Overdrawn their doubts are strong enough
to effect performance… they may even start to act in a self-
destructive or irrational manner.

Iron Gauntlet uses his "Steam-Strength" to lift a building. He takes the Debt in Hope, just because. Later he Stakes two points of Hope on "Goal: Find who framed us for murder", reasoning that his reputation is a vital part of his connection to the common man.

Magnet Master, heavily overdrawn in Fear, rolls down the die on a Clobbering Conflict his side controls. His minion was on the edge of beating Captain Liberty. "No!" Magnet Master cries, slapping the minion aside, "It must be ME who defeats him! I will make him know the meaning of fear!" Captain Liberty takes advantage of this confusion to get the upper hand.

HEROIC DRIVES

Justice

How much the hero's story revolves around laws, codes of conduct and rebellion

Truth

How much the hero's story revolves around identity, honesty and secrets

Love

How much the hero's story revolves around friends, rivals, and romance.

Hope

How much the hero's story revolves around the safety, needs and doubts of the common man

Duty

How much the hero's story revolves around the responsibilities that they alone can and must fulfill

VILLAINOUS DRIVES

Obsession

How much the villain's story revolves around a single plan or theory they keep harping on.

Pride

How much the villain's story revolves around proving their superiority.

Power

How much the villain's story revolves around dominating and being dominated.

Despair

How much the villain's story revolves around destroying the hope of others.

Fear

How much the villain's story revolves around fear and bravery.

35

> ### STAKING
>
> Players Stake by moving Debt onto Conflicts. Each character may Stake one Drive per Conflict, no more Debt than Drive Strength.

The Premise of Capes is "Power is fun, but do you deserve it?" As characters (heroic and villainous) use their powers they feel more drawn to prove themselves. In this game that is a law of nature.

They prove themselves by showing that their philosophy (whether heroic, like "If you're good to people things will turn out alright" or villainous, like "All that matters is power, and getting more of it") is borne out by actual events.

So the hero wants to prove that being nice to people turns out all right in the end. If it does, he feels vindicated. If it doesn't, his doubts are redoubled. Literally, since he gets back twice the Debt Tokens ㉜ if the Conflict ㉖ is Resolved ㉚ against him.

When a character Stakes Debt, it must be on a Conflict that can be morally charged for that particular character and Drive.

Debt currently Staked on a Conflict is not counted as being on a Drive.

Solar Huntsman has a Duty Drive of Strength 3. On his Action he Stakes two points of Duty Debt on "Goal: Track Prey". In a later action he Stakes one more point of Duty, bringing his total on the Conflict to 3. He could not Stake either two more points of Duty or any tokens from a different Drive.

Nocturne has a Pride Drive of 2. She has four Tokens on that Drive. It is Overdrawn. ㉜ She Stakes one point of Pride on "Goal: Humiliate Kid Swift" and two points of Pride on "Event: Nocturne Activates the Lunar Agitator". Without those three points, she now has only one on the Drive. It is not Overdrawn.

SPLITTING

Players may evenly split any die they own into dice totaling the same value. A side may split to as many dice as it has Stakes.

The main reason to Stake Debt **36** on a Conflict **26** is to Split the dice. Two dice can roll from two to twelve, while one can roll only one to six. When one side has more dice than the other they have a statistical advantage.

So long as they end up with no more dice than they have Stakes, a side can split a die into two (or more, if they've got a lot of debt) dice. This split must be done as evenly as possible.

The other use for Staking is that if you disagree with the side you've been supporting so far, you can split off and form your own side. Players may not split dice on a side with no Debt, or only one Debt Staked. But by Staking a single point of Debt a character may choose to create an entirely new side. They split a die from the side they're leaving, and leave one of the resulting dice (usually the smallest) on that side. The other die or dice go to found the new side the player is creating.

Maximus has a die currently at a five on the "Event: A Champion is chosen". He Stakes two Duty tokens. He now has one die and two tokens staked. He splits his five into a two and a three. He cannot choose to split either into a 4 and a 1 (too uneven) or into a 2, a 2 and a 1 (that would be more dice than Stakes)

Zero-G and Jetstream are both rolling up their chances to catch spunky love interest Rachel when "Event: Rachel falls from balcony" Resolves **30**. They have a 5 on their one die. The villains have only a 4.

Zero-G decides that he'll only be happy if **he** is the one to rescue Rachel. He Stakes a point of Love Debt and splits their 5 into a 3 and 2. He takes the 3, leaving the 2 for Jetstream. Now, at 4, the villains Control **26** the Event.

> ## ABILITIES
>
> A super-ability earns a Debt Token each time it is used. Other abilities are used only once per Scene, but effect no resources.

Each ability has a cost for using it. It either gives you a Token of Debt **㉜** (which can be a good or a bad thing) or the Ability "Blocks" for the rest of the Scene **⑳** . Once a Blocking Ability has been used once in a Scene it cannot, under any circumstances, be used again. Abilities that give Debt may be used Page after Page, for more and more Debt, though each Ability can only be used once on any given Page.

Players can put their Debt in any Drive **㉜** they want, without need for justification. A Power need not be used in pursuit of Justice to put Debt on a Justice drive, for instance.

> ## ABILITIES
>
> The ability either raises an Inspiration by a point or rolls any one die on a Conflict. The ability score must be at least the value of the Inspiration or die. If they roll a Conflict die then they choose whether to accept the roll or turn the die back to its original value.

The Player may roll any die, on any side of a Conflict. They will generally accept rolls that raise their dice or lower their enemy's.

Whether the player accepts the die they rolled or not, they always narrate what happens. The Ability they used must be central. They can add anything else as well, so long as the one Ability that they used has a position of importance. The player can (and often should) tell not only what they're *trying* to do, but whether and how they succeed or fail. This will often involve a response from other characters (if only "Ouch!") The narrator may choose either to have the player of the effected character narrate (under the original narrators direction) or to momentarily take on the role of the character in question themself.

Players have complete freedom to narrate, except where the Conflict **㉖** rules override that freedom.

38

Flare uses her Laser Eye Beams. It is a super power, so she takes a point of Debt. **32** She puts it in Love, because she's already got one there, and two are more cozy.

Flare's side has a two on their die in a "Clobbering" Goal. **29** Flare rolls a one. She wants a high number, so a one is no use to her. She picks up the die and turns it back to a two.

She tells what happens: "Flare's eyes glow. A bolt of blazing energy leaps from them and strikes Prang the Indomitable dead center. He is flung back through three buildings, landing in a heap of rubble."

And Then **26** , since Prang's side controls the Conflict he narrates: "Prang stands, brushing rubble off himself. 'Is that the best you can do?' he asks with a smirk."

Prang has a level 3 Inspiration from beating Flare previously. He uses his Level 5 Obnoxious ability to raise it. It is now a level 4 Inspiration. He narrates further mocking Flare's weakness.

Flare pays a Story Token **22** for another Action. **25** She wants to roll the four on her opponent's die in "Clobbering". She's used her level 4 Laser Eye Beams this Page and may not use them again. She'd like to use her level 3 Super Speed, but needs an Ability of 4 or more. She uses her Level 5 "Arrogant" Attitude. Now she can't use that again in this Scene. Rolling the die she gets another one. This time she keeps it. She wants her enemy's dice low.

The player narrates: " 'The best I can do is way more than you could survive! But try this on for size!' Flaree says. She fires a blast so powerful that nearby onlookers are temporarily blinded, and the entire city is lit with blazing light." Her side now Controls, so Prang gets no "And Then" response.

39

REACTION

Any time a roll is accepted, any player (not just the acting one) may roll that die again by using an Ability of equal or greater value as a Reaction. No player may React twice on the same action.

Reaction is the player's chance to try to fix a roll that didn't go the way they wanted. Any time an initial Ability **38** roll is accepted, every player gets a chance to use a Reaction for a second roll on that same die. If the first roll in an Action is not accepted, nobody gets to React. As with an Action, the Ability used must be at least as high as the value of the die.

The acting player has first chance at a Reaction, and then the opportunity passes around the table clockwise, as many times as needed. If a player foregoes their right to React at first they may still React later, after other players. But once they React they cannot React again.

Reactions do not interrupt or replace the narration that the acting player has already said. They happen in addition to the narration of the action, not instead of it.

After Flare rolls one of his dice down to a one, Prang uses his "Invulnerable" (level 2) Power as a Reaction. Because he is using a Power he takes a Debt Token. **32** He rolls the die, getting a 3. "When the light fades away, Prang is still standing there," he narrates. "His steel-tough skin is a match for any damage Flare can dish out."

Flare uses her level 3 "Mock Innocence" Attitude as her own Reaction, after Prang's. She rolls a four, and does not accept it. "Flare flashes Prang an innocent look and a cute little good-bye wave. Then she blasts the support columns of the building. It collapses on him." Prang's player narrates "And then **26** he rises from the rubble and throws a huge block of concrete at Flare."

GLOATING

If Resolving would violate the group Code the Claimant instead Gloats. Starting with their highest die on the Conflict they may turn dice to 1. For each die turned the Resolver earns a Story Token.

Each group has a set of guidelines, often unstated, about what lines will not be crossed. For instance, villains can (and should) try to destroy the world, but it makes for a strange game if they actually do it. The Comics Code,[113] created jointly by the group, tries to get these assumptions out into the open. The Gloating mechanic rewards villains richly for being villainous, while guaranteeing them that doing so will not ruin anyone's fun.

A game's Comic Code includes "The world will not be destroyed". Joe, playing Tyranor, intergalactic warlord, prepares his battle-fleet to fire on Earth, reducing it to drifting rubble. He creates the Event "Battle-fleet Fires", and Stakes three Power.

Tyranor Resolves "Battle-fleet Fires Weapons" with a 6, 4 and 1 on his dice. He chooses to reduce his six and 4 down to ones, taking two Story Tokens. He now has a total of three on three dice. The Event stays on the table. Joe narrates how Tyranor Gloats about how helpless the heroes of Earth are against him.

Next turn, the heroes Stake a whole lot of Debt. They control and resolve "Battle-fleet fires" by undermining the computer tracking system. When Tyranor gives the order to fire the battle-fleet, instead of targetting earth, blasts itself to space-dust. In addition to the two earlier Story Tokens, Joe now receives their Staked Debt as Story Tokens. Tyranor takes back six points of Debt in Power from his lost Stake, and is immediately Overdrawn.

41

Chapter 2

EXAMPLE OF PLAY

What does a game of *Capes* look like, anyway?

Every game will look different. Each group will use the rules to achieve different goals and tell different stories. But the rules lend themself to certain patterns and strategies. This chapter will follow a fictional group of players as they play a few scenes.

SPOTLIGHT CHARACTERS

The players decide they would like to each have a Spotlight Character **119** that is distinctly their own. These characters are super-heroes, and are expected to be the main focus of the story.
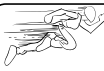
Captain Liberty

POWERS
Super-Strength   4
Flight   3
Liberty Shield   2
Crime-vision   1

ATTITUDES
PATRIOTIC!   5
Angry
Perfectionist   4
Self-righteous
Tense   2
Friendly   1
Confident   3

STYLES
Throw Shield   3
Personal Glory
Heroism by the numbers   1
Inspire Patriotism   2

Alex creates a hero with the Freeform system. **72**

It takes a long time, and he has to make sure the character works as a whole. But he has total control.

Chris creates a hero using the Click and Lock system. **79**
It's quick and easy, but he sacrifices some control.

Zip!

SPEEDSTER
Super-speed   4
Accelerated Reflexes   3
Rapid recovery   2
Do many things at once
Faster than the laws of physics   1

Move someone out of the way   1
Trustworthy   2   ☒
Trail of disruptions
Desperate Effort   3   ☒
Fast enough to try another plan

ANGSTY NICE GUY
Shy   3   ☒
Selfless   5   ☒
Sincere   4   ☒
Wry humor   2   ☒
Secretly hurting   1   ☒

Beth combines elements from several Click and Lock modules, and adds her own. She uses Click and Lock ❼❾ as an initial inspiration, then finishes the character in the Freeform System. ❼❷ This lets her get a quick start, but also personalize the end result.
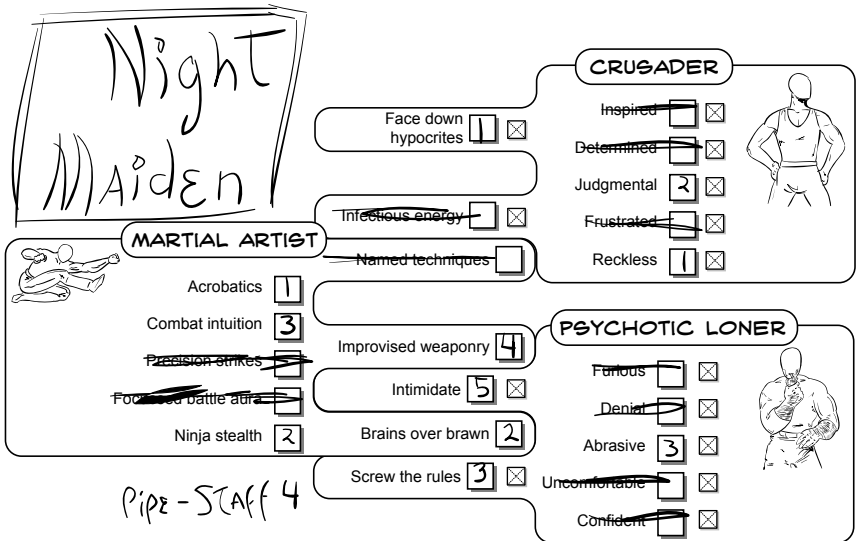
The players next define Drives ❼❹ for the characters. Alex chooses three Justice, two Love, two Duty, one Hope and one Truth for Captain Liberty.

Alex gives the Captain a Love Exemplar ❼❺ Liz Livingstone, with free Event "Liz is about to die". Zip also chooses a Love Exemplar, Jenny, with free Goal "Be on time to mee with Jenny". Beth creates Captain Foster, a policeman enraged by her methods.

Chris wants a second Exemplar. He asks Beth whether they can share ❼❼ Foster. Beth agrees, and Foster becomes Zip's Duty Exemplar as well as her Justice Exemplar. Beth can now create a different character to act as her one unshared Exemplar.

45

Alex: Who should set the first Scene? ❷⓿

Beth: Who's got an idea?

Chris: Start of the game, we need to use some super-powers.❶❸⓿ I'll play Zip, training in the Freedom Society gymnasium.

Turn Order

2
Alex

Chris
1
Beth
3

Beth: Night Maiden will be there too.

Alex: Captain Liberty too. We're just narrating ❷❷ until Chris takes first action.❷❺ Captain Liberty is bench-pressing massive bars of depleted uranium.

Chris (Zip): Zip is blazing through the drills Liberty assigned him. "Come on, come on!" he says as the robotic obstacle course takes a whole second to set itself for his next sequence.

Beth (Night Maiden): "Where's the fire, squirt?" Night Maiden says as she uses her staff to beat the stuffing out of yet another training-droid. "Late for a hot date?"

Chris (Zip): Hey, that's a good idea! Let me see... "No! Well, sort of... well Jenny said she might be going to see Return of the Slime Ninjas and it starts in ten minutes." Introducing my Free Exemplar Goal ❼❻ of "Be on time to meet with Jenny".

Beth: You don't get it for free if she's not in the scene, do you?

Chris: Oh, right. Okay, I'll start the Actions, ❷❷ and use my Action ❷❺ to declare a Goal ❷❾ of "Get out of practice early".

GET OUT EARLY

HEROISM
BY THE
NUMBERS

GET OUT EARLY

Alex (Captain Liberty): Captain Liberty scowls. "Dates with... girls... are all very well, but your training regimen has been calculated to maximize your ability as a crime-fighter. That has to come first." I'm using his "Heroism by the Numbers" Style ❸❽ to roll, oh... the black die on "Get out early". I get a four.

GET OUT EARLY

SUPERSPEED

GET OUT EARLY

SUPERSTRENGTH

GET OUT EARLY
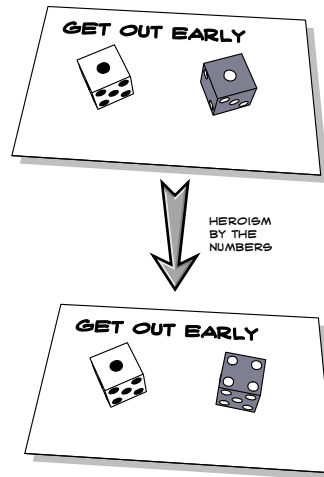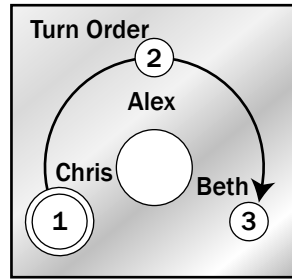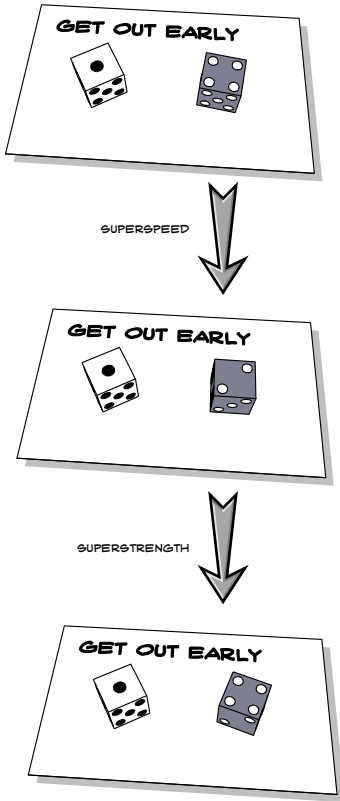
Chris: I'm going to use Zip's Super-Speed to React ❹ to your four.

Alex: Where are you putting the Debt ❸❷ for using the power?

Chris: Hope. ❸❹ I roll a two. You still Control. ❷❻ Zip runs three sets of obstacle courses before even replying. "I've already done, like, two thousand repetitions. Another couple of hundred won't make any difference!" *And then....* ❷❻

Alex: Captain Liberty turns and gives him The Look. "It might be the difference between life and death for an innocent in need."

Chris: Nobody does guilt like the Captain.

Alex: Okay. I'm using Super-strength to React.❹ Debt in Justice. Cap bench-presses the weight of a dozen cars, and says "We all have different strengths... you must learn to hone yours." I roll a four.

Chris: Ouch!

Beth: If you two are done reacting... Night Maiden says "What's with all this 'must' talk? We're volunteers, remember. Who appointed you head of training anyway?" I'd like to create a Goal ❷❾ of "Assert authority" for Captain Liberty. Any objections, Alex?

Alex: Nope. Sounds like just what he's trying to do. Nice Preventative Goal. ❶❷❻ Now I'll have to fight for it. There's nothing to Resolve, so that's pretty much the Page.

ASSERT AUTHORITY

47
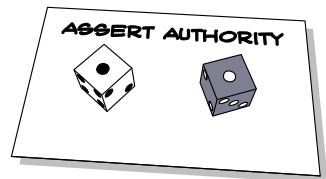
Beth: Chris was Starter last page. So Alex is Starter on this one. **㉒**

Alex: Yep. I'm Claiming **㉒** the black side in "Get out early".

Beth: No claims for me, thanks.

Chris: I'll claim the white side in "Assert Authority".
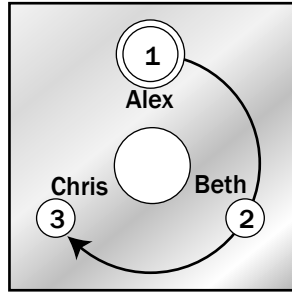
Alex: Arghh.... and you act last, **⑫⑦** so you can choose whether to defend "Get out early" or to rebuke Liberty on authority.

Chris: Poor you. Decisions, decisions. In the meantime, Zip is cocking his head and looking at Liberty funny. "Yeah," he agrees, "who **did** appoint you to be the boss of me, anyway? I come in, I work out, I save lives, same as you!"

Beth: "You'd think that'd be enough."

Alex: I can see I'd better declare an action **㉔** , before you guys totally double-team me. Captain Liberty rises quickly, tossing aside the massive weight as he paces over toward the other two. Super-strength on Assert Authority. **㊳** I roll a two.

Chris: I'm Reacting **㊳** with Rapid Recovery. Zip is intimidated, but gets over it quickly. Debt **㊳** in Hope. I roll a five, which I will not accept. Back to a two. **And then... ㉖**

Alex: Liberty is close enough to loom physically over the smaller Zip. The teen can almost hear the Star Spangled Banner playing   I'm reacting with "Inspire Patriotism". Debt in Justice. I get... a four, which I will accept. Beth? Any reaction?

ASSERT AUTHORITY

PIPE-STAFF
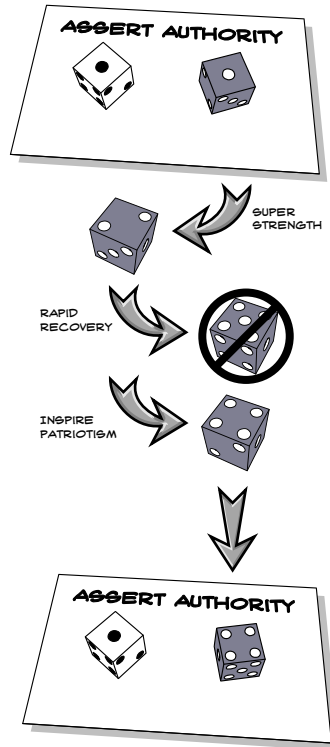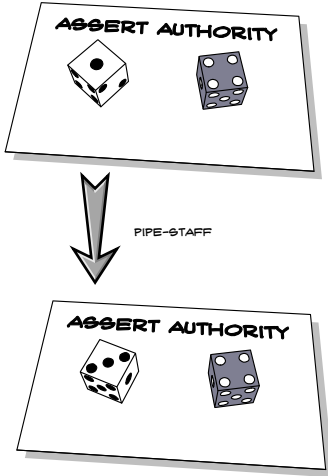
ASSERT AUTHORITY

Beth: No thanks. You guys want to drown yourself in debt, go right ahead. I'll catch up later. I'm using "Pipe-staff" on the opposing die of "Assert Authority". Debt in Duty. Night Maiden whips the staff around in a vicious circle that decapitates one of the combat droids. Its head arcs over to land in the Captain's hands. "You're right," she says, "We've all got talents. And we all know how to practice them. Maybe the kid doesn't need your help." I roll a three... so... *And then....*

Alex: "Well that's up to Zip to decide, isn't it?"

Chris: Oh, hey, leave me out of this.... Oh... my action. Right. Uh... "Look, I don't have any problem with someone giving orders. But at the same time... well, what you're asking is wrong! We shouldn't be just hiding here. We need to be out there too, with normal people." Staking ㊱ my two Hope tokens on "Get out Early", and rolling it with Sincere. I get... a three, which is not enough. *And then...*

Alex: "Are you saying going to the mall is a moral imperative?"

Chris: Okay, Reacting with Desperate Effort. "Well... yeah! Morality isn't all blowing horns and waving flags! Sometimes it's about getting out there and not being scared to be human!" I roll... phew! A six!

Alex: Well, I can't react to that. My claim doesn't Resolve. ㉚

Chris: Mine either.

GET OUT EARLY

SINCERE

DESPERATE
EFFORT
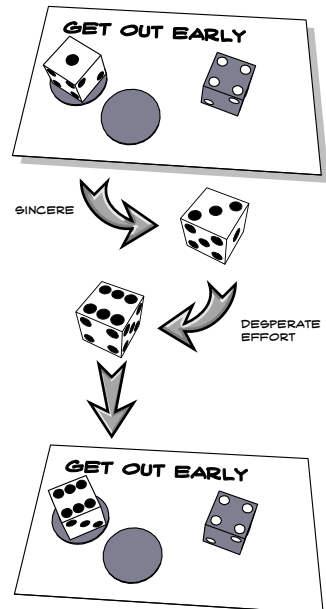
GET OUT EARLY

Beth: My turn to Start a page! I claim the opposing side of "Assert Authority".

Chris: I'll claim my side in "Get out Early".

Alex: Claiming Liberty's side of "Assert Authority". He says. "I'm not afraid to be human. Is that what you think of me?" He looks confused, and a little hurt.
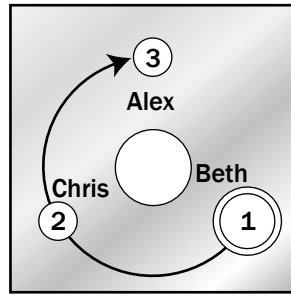
Chris: "I...uh..." Beth! Save me! I'm floundering!

Beth: Oh fine. Staking 🟤36 a point of Duty in "Assert Authority". Rolling with "Abrasive", I get a five! "Hell yes!" Night Maiden says. "Nobody else has the guts to tell you to your face! I've never met anyone so committed to throwing away their own happiness and everyone else's in the quest for perfection!"

Alex: Aggh! That begs a Reaction with Perfectionist, but it's only a level four Attitude. I'll let it go.

Chris: Thank you! Splitting 🟤37 my six into two threes, and rolling one of them with Accelerated Reflexes. Debt in Love. Zip picks up on his chance to skeedaddle instantly. "Well, you two have a lot to discuss, I'll just be going!" And I roll... a five!
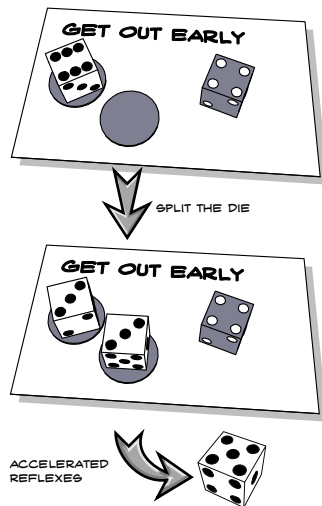
Alex: Time to assert my authority. I'm Staking 🟤36 two Justice in Assert Authority and Splitting 🟤37 my four into two twos. Rolling one of them with Tense, I get a one.

Beth: Fortune frowns on you.

Alex: I'll accept that and React, but narration first. Captain Liberty snaps back at Night Maiden "I am not afraid of being human. I have to stand apart because more is expected of me! I'd gladly go mix with the common people, if I could." *And then....*

ASSERT AUTHORITY

TENSE

PATRIOTIC

INTIMIDATE
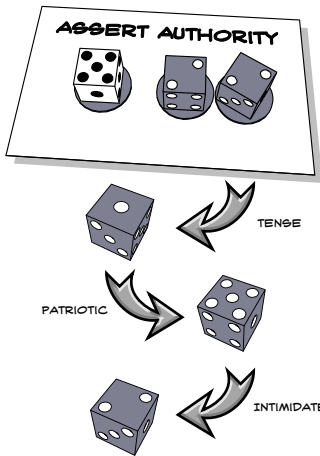
Beth: "So do it! What's stopping you?"

Alex: Reacting 40 with Patriotic. Oh yeah! A five!

Beth: Nice roll!

Alex: "Just a little thing called... The American Dream!" Liberty intones. "I guard Millenium City so parents can raise their kids and dream of a future without crime and hate!"

Beth: Very stirring. Night Maiden Reacts 40 with Intimidation, at 5. I roll... a two.

Alex: No! I was so close!

Beth: Well, you're toast now. "I am sick of you dodging your own problems with platitudes. You get your red, white and blue backside out into the city, and you find someone to spend time with who isn't a criminal, a victim or a cop. And you don't give any orders around here until you have!"

Alex: I already Reacted. I can't do it again. 40 Chris, will you save me? You know it's the right thing to do.

Chris: Cap's on his own. I think Night Maiden's got a point.

Beth: So it Resolves 30 for me. Three point Inspiration for Night Maiden, two point for Liberty. Alex, you also get the Duty Token I Staked as a Story Token. Enjoy it in good health.

Alex: While I take back four Tokens in Justice. Overdrawn.

Chris: I Resolve 30 "Get Done Early". Match the three with the four, for a 1-point Inspiration for Liberty. Here you go, Alex. And the unopposed five is for Zip. Alex, you get the Inspiration and two more Story Tokens from me.

Alex: Captain Liberty says "I see I'm not wanted here," and flies out the sky-light.

Chris: "Maybe you were a bit hard on him..." Zip says. " We should... Whoa! I'll be late for the movie!" And he dashes out.

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SCENE 2: BATTLE ROYALE

Alex: Well that hurt.

Chris: You got two Inspirations, three Story Tokens and four Debt. Mucho resources! What are you complaining about?

Alex: Oh, I don't know, maybe the abject humiliation.

Beth: Well Chris defined the last Scene ❸❻ so it's your turn. Make something where he can prove himself. I'm eager to get my hands on some of the Story Tokens you'll be giving out. ⬤132

Alex: You're not even trying to hide your selfish motive! No easy Story Tokens for you! I'm going to play Cap's Love Exemplar, ❼❺ Ace Reporter Liz Livingstone. Give me a minute to assemble some Click and Locks.

JOURNALIST

Fast-talk ☒
Photograph ☒
Write 1 ☒
Investigate 4 ☒
Interview 2 ☒
Notice 3 ☒

Face down hypocrites 3 ☒
Pointed question 4 ☒
Infectious energy 2 ☒
Press Pass 1 ☒

CRUSADER

Inspired 1 ☒
Determined 3 ☒
Judgmental 2 ☒
Frustrated ☒
Reckless 4 ☒
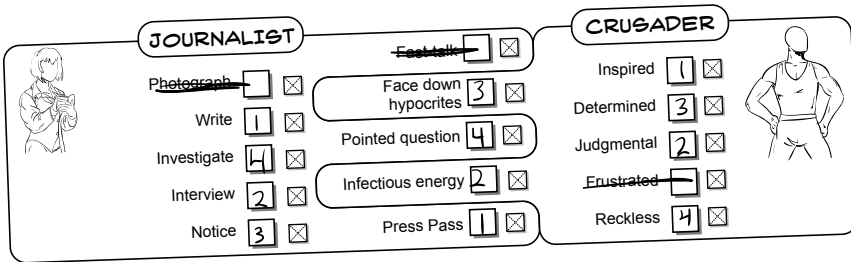
Alex: Here we go. She's interviewing eccentric millionaire... uh... Henry Harrison, about the... Egyptian artifacts his archaeology teams uncovered and brought back. Who wants to play Harrison?

Beth: No thanks. Chris, what d'you think? Magic villains?

Chris: Magic-based origin anyway. You first.

Beth: Okay... let's call him... Black Scarab. This'll...

Alex: Wait! What's with the villains? I didn't order any villains!

Chris: No, you didn't, and yet you get to benefit from our selfish creativity anyway. We want Story Tokens. Liz doesn't have any Debt, and she never will, so we won't get them from her. We're making a situation where Cap will get involved.

Beth: And my villain's done! Black Scarab...

MASTER OF NATURAL FORCE
- Magnetic blast 5
- Move metal 2
- Become magnetism 4
- Force Field 3
- Metal shapes 1

The example is written for a master of magnetism. With slight modification it fits those who control Fire, Ice, Weather, Technology, Air, Electricity, and so on.

- Trap opponent 4
- Thrill Junky 1 ☒
- Control everything at once 2
- Escape without a scratch 3 ☒
- ~~Indirect action~~

HOTSHOT
- Joyful 2 ☒
- Unflappable 1 ☒
- ~~Bored~~ ☒
- ~~Rebellious~~ ☒
- Talkative 3 ☒

Chris: But you're not using Magnetism, right?

Beth: No, his natural force is Bugs. Blasts of Bugs, turn into a swarm of Bugs, have hordes of bugs pick things up, like that.

Alex: Wow... major ick factor. Very nice.

Chris: And, lacking any better idea, I'll play a mummy. Pharoah Ahkten-Hod, Hod to his friends, not that he has any.

BRICK
- ~~Super-leap~~
- Titanic Punch 4
- Invulnerability 3
- Super-strength 2
- Great leverage from tiny handhold 1

- Massive property damage 3
- ~~Misunderstand~~ humanity ☒
- Hit 'em with the scenery 2
- ~~See the big picture~~ ☒
- If it doesn't fit, force it 1

INHUMAN
- Curious 2 ☒
- Confused 1 ☒
- Logical 3 ☒
- Cold 5 ☒
- Superior 4 ☒

Alex: Okay, now I'm all curious about why these guys are even here. I'll pay a Story Token ❷⓿ and play another character.

Beth: Captain Liberty?

Alex: Not yet. I'm playing a Situation, ⓫ Mystery.

MYSTERY   Free Event: Answers are Revealed
- Obvious Untruth 3 ☒
- Apparent Lead 2 ☒
- Two facts are connected 1 ☒
- ~~Contradiction~~ ☒
- ~~Theory proven wrong~~ ☒
- Talkative 5 ☒
- Desperate 4 ☒
- Reluctant 3 ☒
- Wary 2 ☒
- Evasive 1 ☒

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Alex: I'll add the Free ⑩② "Answers are revealed" Event on the Mystery, and Claim the white die. Harrison is taking Liz on a tour of the artifacts.

Beth: "... and, of course, apart from their beauty these artifacts tell us many new things about the reign of the little-known Pharoah Khuffi in Ancient Egypt."

Alex: Acting for Liz, ㉒ rolling "Answers are Revealed" with Interview. "How do you respond to rumors that Khuffi was a dark sorceror, and that the curse on these items caused the death of Doctor Standish?" I roll a three.

Chris: You're going for the Inspiration? ⑬④

Alex: As long as you guys are making your own plans, I might as well do myself some good. Reacting off of Mystery, using "Obvious Untruth". Harrison replies "I haven't heard anything about a curse," but his eyes dart toward a jeweled scepter in the shape of a jackal's head. I roll a two, which I won't accept.

Beth: Reacting off of Liz?

Alex: Can't. One Reaction ④⓪ to a player, not one to a character.

Beth: Ah, right. My turn then?

Alex: I still have an Action off of Mystery. ㉒ Rolling up with "Reluctant". Liz looks at him skeptically. "You haven't read the news about your own artifacts?" Harrison backpedals "I meant to say I hadn't heard any reliable research on the Staff of Souls. I don't listen to every rumor printed in the papers." I roll a four.
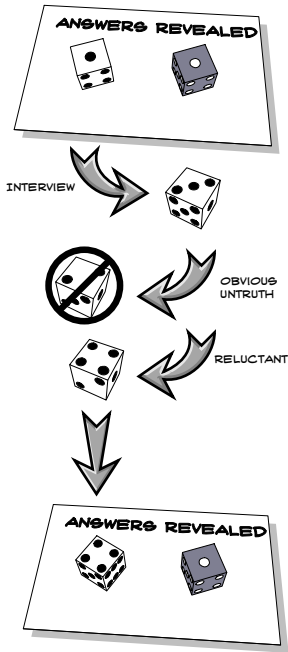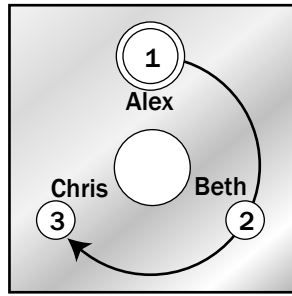
Beth: My turn at last! There is a buzzing, rattling sound coming from outside the doors of Harrison's little trophy hall. The doors burst open, and a swarm of flying locusts fill the room. Slowly they resolve into a tight swarm near the door, next to a... Chris, how would you describe your villain?

Chris: Shambling, dessicated, linen-wrapped corpse.

Beth: Yeah. Next to that, the bugs form into a mass, then a man-like shape, and then a man in a stylish suit and sunglasses emerges from the mass. "About that Sceptre," he says "We'll just be taking that, if you please." Creating "Goal: Get Sceptre".
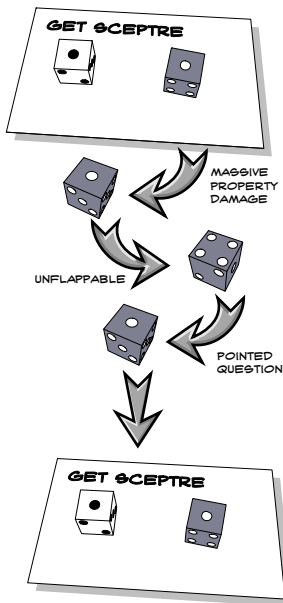
Chris: And for my action I'll roll up our side of that. "Enough talk!" Ahkten-Hod rasps. He grabs a display cabinet and throws it across the room, destroying millions of dollars worth of artifacts. "We take the Sceptre, and fulfill the curse!" Rolling with Massive Property Damage, and taking the Debt on his Undifferentiated **74** stack. I get... a one.

Beth: Not a problem. Reacting with Unflappable. In the midst of all this destruction, Black Scarab just sighs. "My friend Hod is used to the whole grovelling bit. You might want to get to that, right quick." I get a four.

Alex: Reacting the four with Liz's "Pointed Question". "But you plan to kill us either way, right?" I get a one. Take that!

Chris: I'm not Reacting. Hod bellows "Yes! All who violate Khuffi's laws must die!"

Alex: And I Resolve **30** "Answers are Revealed"... which we pretty much just narrated anyway. I subtract the one die from the four, and it's a three point Inspiration for Liz.

Beth: And now I get to Start. ❷❷ I'm not claiming Get Sceptre... got to have something to entice the Captain in with.

Chris: Likewise. No Claim. The mummy staggers forward, toward the Sceptre.

Alex: I'll claim my side of "Get Sceptre". Liz says "If we're going to die anyway, I'd rather go out fighting!"
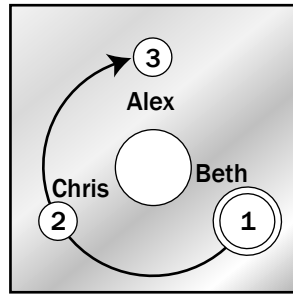
Beth: Taking my action. "Darling," Black Scarab says, looking pityingly over his sunglasses, "You don't stand a chance. Best to just give up. There are things worse than death, if you make us angry enough." Adding "Goal: Crush Liz's Defiance".

Alex: Oh, that is so totally never going to happen.

Beth: We'll see.

Chris: And while you're adding Conflicts left and right the corpse has to do all the heavy lifting. Hod comes up to the display case, reinforced steel and heavy glass and all that. I'll Stake a point of Debt on it. Using Superstrength he rips it apart. I replace my spent Debt, and roll a... four. Much nicer.

Alex: Reacting with Liz's Reckless. I roll.. a five, which I won't accept. She leaps forward and plucks the sceptre off its stand. "I bet you won't risk hurting me when this might fall and shatter!" *And then....*
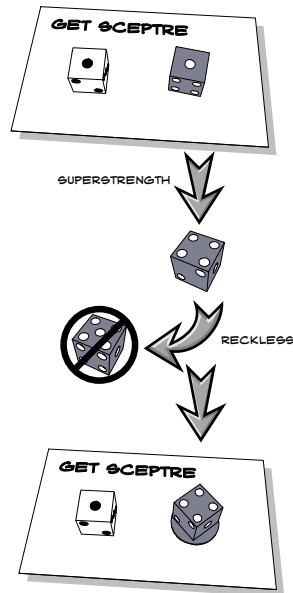
Chris: Hod grabs her by the throat and hefts her into the air. "It's well made," he says simply.

GET SCEPTRE

"ANSWER"
INSPIRATION
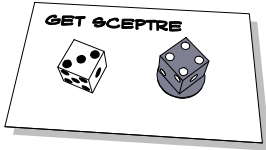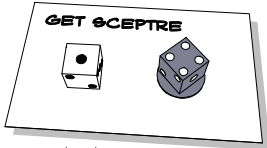
GET SCEPTRE

Alex: "If that were all there was to it," Liz gasps, "You'd have taken this when you killed Doctor Standish." Using my "Answer" Inspiration ㉕ to raise my die in "Get Sceptre" to a 3.

Beth: Tightens things up, doesn't it?

Alex: "What's more, I've seen the translation of Khuffi's curse! It falls on *anyone* who would steal the Sceptre... and right now that would include you!" Harrison owns it now! You need to bluff him into giving it to you!" Rolling your four with Investigation. I get a two!

Beth: I've got first shot at our villainous reaction. "Standish thought the same way," Black Scarab drawls, "and look where it got him." He gestures, and clouds of insects rush to every door, slamming them shut. "Sure you want to follow in his footsteps?" I'm rolling with "Control Everything at once." I get a three, which is enough to tie.

GET SCEPTRE

INVESTIGATION

CONTROL
EVERYTHING
AT ONCE

DETERMINED

HIT 'EM
WITH THE
SCENERY

GET SCEPTRE
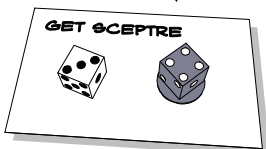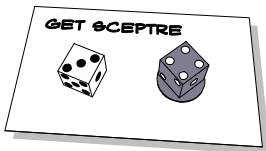
Alex: React with Determined. "I say you're bluffing!" she replies. I roll... a one.

Chris: She is very good at what she does, isn't she? I'm reacting with "Hit 'em with the scenery." Hod throws her into the wall. "Give Sceptre!" it snarls. I roll a four. Nice try, no cigar. The Sceptre pops free of her hands. Harrison scoops it up and says "Please, just take it! Take anything you want, just let me live!"

Alex: That IDIOT! Was he not listening? Them getting Sceptre equals us being dead! Stupid!

Chris: And on that high note the Page ends.

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Alex: Okay, fine. I clearly need a second character to compete. I'll spend a Story Token ❷❷ and bring in Captain Liberty.

Chris: I knew you'd come around. Now roll for your Overdrawn Drive ❸❷ on him.

Alex: Rolling the three in "Get Sceptre". I get a four. That would raise it, so I can't accept. It stays a three. And I'm adding the free Exemplar Event ❼❻ between the two of them. It's "Liz is about to die". I figure we can manage to fit that in somewhere.
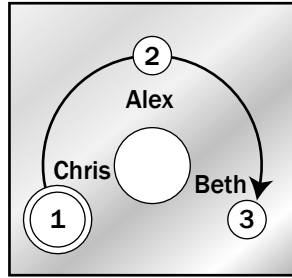
Chris: I'll claim the black side of that.

Alex: Duh! I should have waited until my own turn to add that. Then Chris couldn't have claimed. I'll claim the other side.

Beth: And I'll claim "Get Sceptre" for us.

Chris: First action. Hod picks up Liz once more. "Don't need you now," it says, and flings her through the bay windows of the high-rise, toward the fall outside.

Alex: "***Not Yet...***" ❷❻ right? That would be making her about to die, which can't occur until the Event is Resolved.

Chris: That's true. How about she catches the railing, and is dangling over the street far below. All of that was rolling "Hit 'em with scenery" again. More Debt for me, and I get a five. Woohoo!
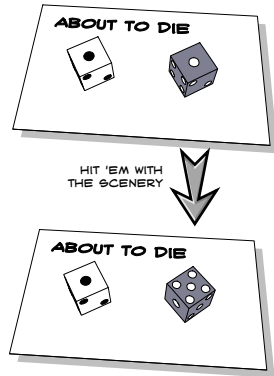
Alex: Liz rolls up her side of "About to die" with "Judgmental". "I'm not letting a pile of bones be the end of me," she snarls, trying to climb in the window. I get a two. ***And then***....

Chris: The mummy reaches down to grab her throat, pushing her inexorably back away from her handhold.

Alex: Liberty reacts with "Liberty Shield", Debt in Love. Four. Spang! The shield flies in and smacks Hod in the face. "Have no fear!" he yells, "I will save you!" ***And then***...
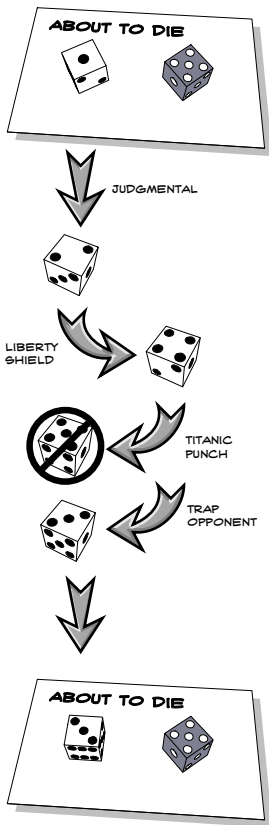
Chris: Liberty flies in to try to capitalize with a surprise attack, but the mummy is ready, and punches him across the street. Reacting with Titanic Punch, I get a five, which I won't accept.

Beth: I'm on it. Reacting with Trap Opponent. "What's this, a champion?" Black Scarab says. He walks over to the broken window. A cloud of insects flies out and surrounds Captain Liberty. They drag him away from the building. "I hope you'll prove a worthy challenge!" I get a three.

Alex: Wow, lots of reaction on Liz. Now Captain Liberty. Rolling up "About to Die" with Super-Strength, Debt in Duty. And... I get a two, which I won't accept. "So... many... bugs! Can't... break... free!"

Beth: Scarab grabs the Sceptre from Harrison. "Thank you," he says. Then a swarm of bugs descends on the millionaire. Creating "Goal: Kill Harrison". That would be our second Gloat, so you can veto.

Alex: You fiend! No, I won't veto. Evil, though.

Beth: Unless you plan to take more actions, "Get Sceptre" resolves, for a one Inspiration to me and a Story Token to you.

Alex: That's fine. Story Tokens are what you get when you don't get what you want.

Chris: Then "About to Die" *would* Resolve, except that the Comics Code ⑬ forbids killing off Exemplars. So instead I Gloat! ㊶ "Muahaha! You are powerless to save her! Pitiful mortal!" I turn our five down to a one, and I get a Story Token.
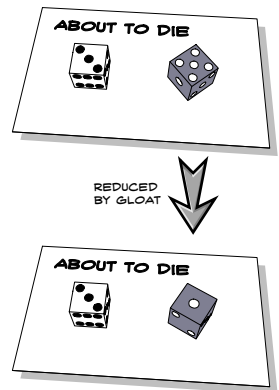
Alex: Claiming "About to Die".

Beth: Claiming "Kill Harrison".

Chris: I'll take "About to Die" again. And don't forget you're still Overdrawn. **32**

Alex: Ah, man, I meant to Stake last turn.
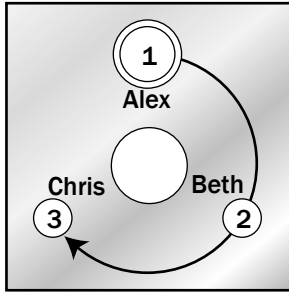
Okay, rolling my three, I get... a one! Which makes it impossible for me to Stake and Split **37** immediately. But that's later. Right now I'm spending the Story Token from losing the Sceptre to Claim **22** "Kill Harrison." Liz will use Inspired to get the Inspired idea of taking her Zippo lighter to the nearby wrappings of the mummy's foot. I roll... a two. Not much, but more than your one. She almost loses her grip and is dangling by one hand. But the fire catches rapidly. Scarab sends some bugs over to extinguish the mummy.

Beth: No reactions here. Keep going.

Alex: Okay. Cap Stakes two Justice on "Kill Harrison" and two Love on "About to Die". Now I can Split **37** Liz's two into two ones. On the Captain's action I roll one of them with Tense. "Must break free while he's distracted!   Won't get a second chance!" I roll... a three. Reacting that with Super-Strength, debt in Duty. A five! He bursts from the bugs, to the rescue!

Chris: Reacting with Cold.   Slightly charred Hod steps out to heartlessly place his bony foot on the hand Liz still has a grip with, and grind. I roll... a four. ***And then....***

Alex: Cap sends the rotting beast flying with an old fashioned American upper-cut!
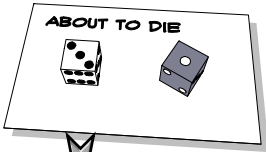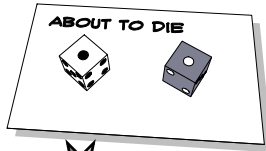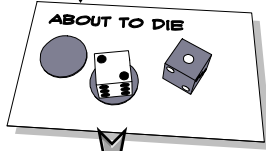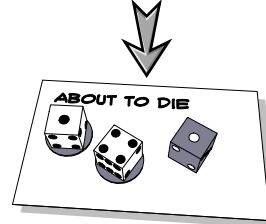
Beth: "None escape the curse!" Scarab declares. Rolling up our side of "About to Die" with "Blast of Bugs". Now Liz is dangling by one bruised hand, over a massive drop, surrounded by chewing insects. Oh, and one of her high heeled shoes falls off... down, down, down. I roll... alright! A six!
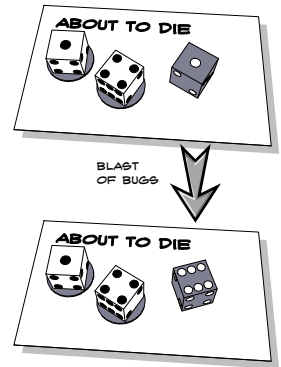
Alex: Ah! Not good!

Chris: "Such power!" Hod marvels, looking at Captain Liberty as it puts its jaw back in place. "Lord Khuffi will desire this one's Ka! We must bring him to our Lord!" I'm creating "Goal: Capture Captain Liberty".
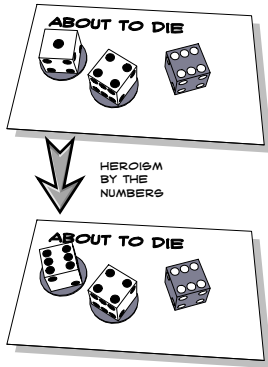
Beth: Very cool!

Alex: Spending my last Story Token for another Action. ㉕ No more Gloating ㊶ for you. I'm rolling up my other one with "Heroism by the Numbers". "Maneuver 37-alpha," he mutters. "Two foes, bystander, falling victim. Go!" I roll... a six! Sweet!

Beth: So that resolves for you. Narrate!

Alex: First I spend my two Inspiration from having been stung by Night Maiden against "Kill Harrison." "He'll just have to save himself... I can't be everywhere!"

Beth: Big admission for Cap!

Alex: Liz loses her grip, falling with a scream out of the cloud of bugs. "Eeeee!" Just as she is About To Die, he swoops in and catches her, lifting her up and away to the applause of the crowd. I'll match ㉚ the four with the six. Two point Inspiration for Black Scarab, and a six pointer for Liberty. And each of you get one of the Story Tokens ㉚ from that. Then I also Resolve "Kill Harrison". While the villains are watching Liberty's heroics, Harrison slips out the side door and runs for it. One point Inspiration to me, two Story Tokens to you, Beth. End of Page.

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Beth: And I get to Start again. Claiming "Crush Liz's Defiance!"

Alex: I told you, it's not going to happen.

Chris: Whatever. I'm claiming "Capture Liberty".

Alex: Claiming the failure of "Crush Defiance" for Liz. Free narration time. Liberty drops Liz off at a convenient balcony and says "You'll be safe here!"

Chris: "No way! I can help you!"

Alex: Liberty cows her with a glance. "This is too serious for your recklessness."

Chris: *"Not Yet..."* **㉖**   Nobody can Crush her Defiance until the Conflict resolves.

Alex: Oh... Right... so now I have characters on both sides of the Conflict. Tricky. Okay.... But she can defy him from across the street, because he's flying back to the fray!

Beth: And I'll start out our actions. Scarab creates a convenient giant hammer of bugs, and slams Liberty to the floor. I roll a four.

Alex: On Capture Liberty?

Beth: No, on Crush Defiance. "Dammit!" Liz whispers sadly, "You need my help!"

Alex: Ouch! No Reaction here.

Chris: Hod's rolling "Capture" with "Titanic Punch". Just as Captain Liberty gets up off the ground, the mummy slams him back down again. I roll a five!

Alex: Double-ouch! No reaction. Liz rolls her side of "Crush Defiance" with "Infectious Energy". "We can do it together!" she calls. I roll a three. *And Then*...

CRUSH DEFIANCE

STAKE

CRUSH DEFIANCE

SPLIT A
NEW SIDE
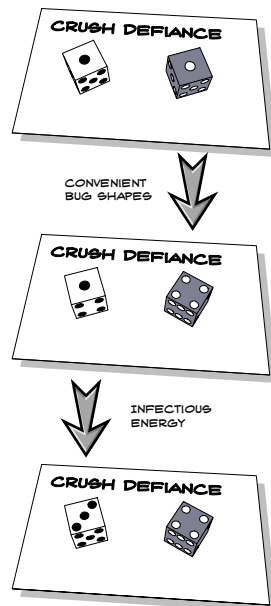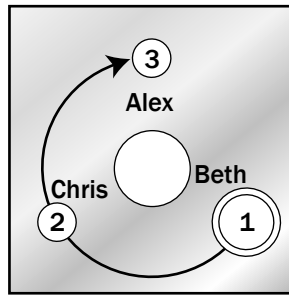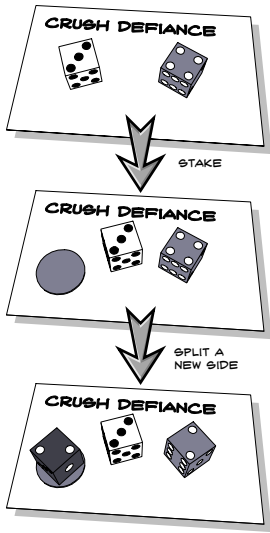
CRUSH DEFIANCE

Beth: Liberty is flung across the room by a horde of bugs. "Give up, mortal pest!" Scarab yells at her. "You're useless!"

Alex: Okay, Liberty is rolling Perfectionist in support of the villains on "Crush Defiance." A three, which I won't accept. Now that he's Allied ㉖ he's Staking a point of Justice on "Crush Defiance" and Splitting ㊲ his own side off of Scarab's.

Beth: Why you sly dog!

Alex: Liberty smacks Scarab across the room. "You don't get to talk to her like that," he says simply. "I can **do** this," he shouts to her, "If you will just stop **distracting** me!" *And then...* uh, me playing Liz, I suppose. "Captain Liberty, you are the most aggravating man I have ever met!"

Chris: Wow, you guys need counselling. Spending a Story Token. Staking three in Capture and Splitting 2/2/1. Roll the one with Great Leverage from a Tiny Handhold. The next time Liberty punches, Hod just catches the fist and slams him against the wall. Six! "You were a worthy opponent."

CAPTURE LIBERTY

THREE-WAY
SPLIT

CAPTURE LIBERTY

GREAT LEVERAGE
FROM A TINY
HANDHOLD

CAPTURE LIBERTY

Alex: Triple ouch! I'm so done!

Beth: Crush Defiance Resolves for Liz.

Alex: Yep! Cap gets back two Debt in Love, as is only right and proper. Match Liz's die against yours, and I get a one point Inspiration for Liz, two point for Cap.

Chris: I get 1, 2 and 6 Inspirations off Capture and give Alex three Story Tokens.

Beth: And that's the scene. I guess Liz, defiant to the end, watches a limp Cap being carried away by a cloud of locusts.

Alex: Who knows what manner of fiendish torture awaits him?

63
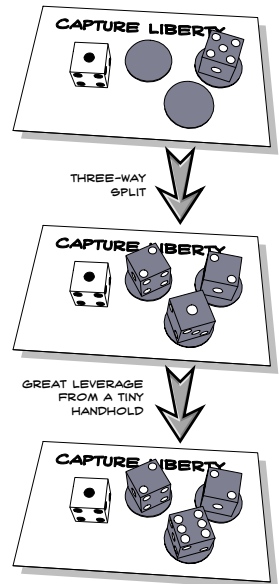
SCENES 3+: RESCUE

So what happens next? Liz has the motive to arrange a rescue for Captain Liberty. Harrison owes them big, and probably has much more information than he's spilled so far.

Zip and Night Maiden presumably get dragged in to grill the sleazy millionaire, and then try to rescue the Captain from Khuffi's secret pyramid.

And what does the Staff of Souls do? Why would Khuffi want the Captain's "Ka"? Is that the same as his super-powers?

Mechanically, Captain Liberty is just rolling in Debt... enough so that he's starting to be hampered about how many powers he can safely use. What he really needs is some more Inspirations to balance out his resources. He might well play Pharoah Khuffi as an arch-villain, and arrange to have Khuffi steal Liberty's powers with the Staff.

Then he could spend some scenes trying to get along in the "real world" as just a normal joe. This would let him work off some of his Debt in ways that people would enjoy watching. Player interest joined to their desire for his Story Tokens would probably mean he'd win most Conflicts without much opposition. That would let him stockpile strong Inspirations. These scenes would also give him a chance to address the issues raised in the first scene.

Once he'd racked up enough Inspirations, there clearly needs to be a climactic scene between Liberty and Khuffi, where the Captain proves that the measure of a super-hero is not the extent of his powers or training, but the strength of his heart.

Or, you know, something like that. At best this is a rough plan, because along the way you'd have other things come up. Does Khuffi object to Scarab's thoroughly modern sensibilities? Does Hod feel honor-bound to treat the Captain with respect as a formidable foe? Those are the considerations that emerge to make a story come alive.

Or, to be more accurate, those are the considerations that the players use to take control of the story. In the example so far, Alex has done a spectacular job of keeping the spotlight trained on his character. By taking a beating he has consistently given himself the resources to push his own agenda.

But that time is pretty clearly reaching its end. Both Chris and Beth have substantially more resources than Alex now. They have more Story Tokens, more Inspirations and much better managed Debt.

They may choose to go back to their spotlight characters, Night Maiden and Zip. Or concentrate on the villains for a while. Or something else entirely.

The tug-of-war between Captain Liberty and Liz Livingstone would have been difficult to predict before it happened. In the same way, unexpected things are likely to come of Beth and Chris's new power over the story. The only thing that is predictable is that they will have to emerge and evolve from where the story is now, and what tensions the players have to work with.
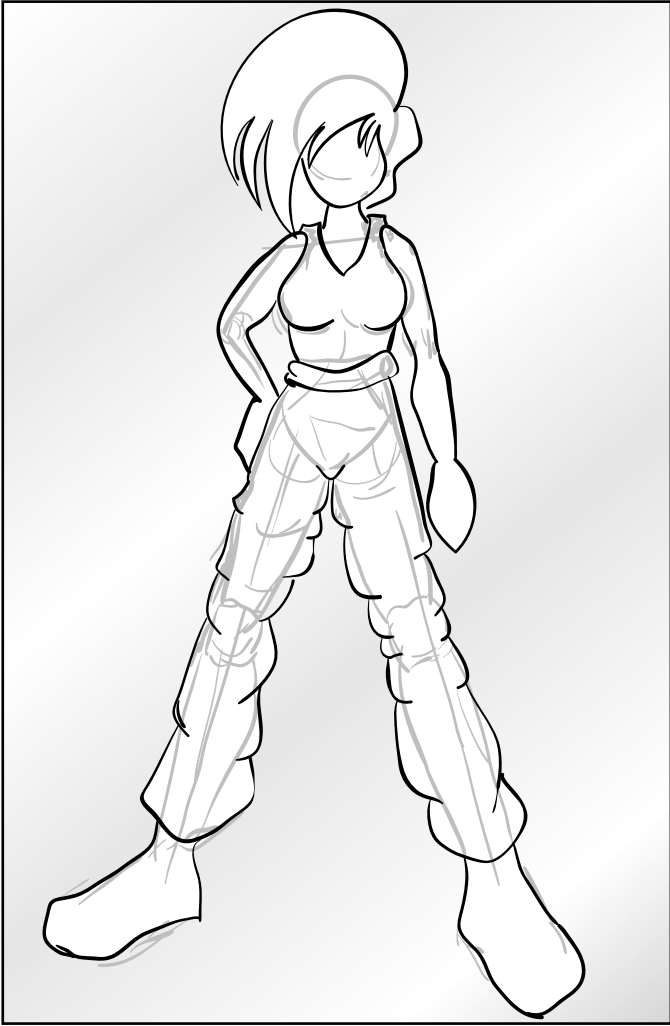
Chapter 3

ASSEMBLING A CHARACTER

Characters, their abilities and their concerns, are the fundamental building block of a Capes story. The game runs on Conflict, and there is no Conflict that is not between two or more characters. This chapter will give you an overview of what it takes to create a character in Capes.

Each character is described in up to three sections.

Any character that can be played must have **Abilities**. These are the ways that they can try to change the world.

Super-powered characters can have **Drives**. These are the ways that they try to prove themselves worthy of their power.

Super-powered characters with Drives that get a lot of attention (particularly the protagonists of the main story) can also have **Exemplars** for those Drives. These are other characters that embody those moral issues in a concrete form in the character's life.

When you create a character, you can choose how much of this detail to create. A character without Drives or Exemplars is less detailed, but no less able.

If you decide you'd like to elaborate on such a sketched-in character at a later point in the game you should feel free. You can add detail, clarify Drives, add Exemplars, and so on.

In fact, any time that you want to change any character between sessions, you can do so, as long as you end up with a character that still adheres to the character creation rules.

ABILITIES

Abilities are the things that the character can be or do that will have an impact on Conflicts, ❷⑥ and by extension on the world. They come in four flavors (though any particular character will have only three of them): Powers, Skills, Styles and Attitudes.

Powers and Skills are things the character can do, like fly, or shoot a gun, or integrate mathematical functions. A super-powered character will have only Powers, not Skills. A normal character will have only Skills, not Powers.

Attitudes are ways the character feels, like happy, or sad, or scornful. All character will have Attitudes.

Styles are the particular ways that a character often uses their other Abilities. So they might have "Fly" as a Power, and "High speed aerial maneuvers" as a Style. Or they might have "Confident" as an Atttiude and "Screw the rules" as a Style. All characters will have Styles.

Powers are super-powered. Skills and Attitudes are mundane. Styles may be either, as the player chooses when they create the character.

Super-powered Abilities have a different cost for using them than mundane Abilities ❸⑧ . The Abilities should be labelled in a way that will make clear to you which category they fall into. If you are using the Click and Lock ⑧⓪ method then all of the Abilities in your Power-Set are powered, and all Abilities from a Persona or Skill-Set are mundane.

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WHAT ABILITIES AREN'T

Abilities do not represent objective limits on the power of the character to address individual tasks. What the characters can do is limited only by what their player chooses to narrate. And the player's narration is limited only by the Conflict rules.

There is nothing in the game mechanics that says "Your character can or cannot do this particular thing." Characters in Capes can **do** anything their player wants. But that does not imply that they can **achieve** anything the player wants.

So if your goal in making a character is that they be able to do certain spectacular things... rest easy. They will be, no matter what numbers you assign. If your goal is that they should have a certain style, maybe even a lower-powered style than the characters other players are making... rest easy. They'll be equally effective, no matter how you describe their Abilities.

Dawn wants to create a hero, Rocket-Girl, who flies as fast as a speeding car. Flying is central to this hero's style. Dawn gives her Flight at level 5.

Eddie wants to create a hero, Moonbeam, who flies around the world in an instant. It's not a big part of the hero's style. Eddie gives him Flight, Level 1.

Felicia wants a hero, Galactic, who can fly between planets faster than light. But it's just a way to get around. She does not give him a Flight power at all.

WHAT ABILITIES ARE

Abilities and their values track how much impact a given Ability has on the Story. This is less about the cause-and-effect outcomes of using the ability than it is about judging how central the Ability is to the concept of the character, and how reliably they can get good results with it.

A numerically strong ability will let you influence the game by winning Control in Conflicts. Since that gives you the right to narrate, you'll always be able to find some way to make the hero successful.

If you describe their powers as comparatively weak, and you win a Conflict where (objectively) you should have lost, then you get to narrate how their cleverness overcomes the power gap.

If you describe their powers as awesome in scope, and you lose a Conflict where (objectively) you should have won, then the other players will get to narrate how bad luck intervenes.

Rocket-Girl is chasing a faster-than-light spaceship. She wins the Conflict: when it launches she manages to "surf" its warp field, and keep pace.

Moonbeam tries to catch a getaway car. He loses the Conflict. The car gets away, because his speed is so great that he overshoots and loses track of the villains.

Galactic chases a man on foot. He is about to lose the Conflict. Felicia spends a Story Token for more actions and wins, because she doesn't want to invent an explanation.

FREEFORM METHOD

Because different Abilities at different levels can all represent the same character, the system doesn't need complex rules to govern what you can and cannot pick for Abilities. You pick whatever you want. This is called the *"Freeform"* method of character creation. It still has a few rules, but not many.

- A character may have up to twelve abilities in three categories: Attitudes, Styles and either Powers (for super-beings) or Skills (for mundane characters).

- No category may have more than five or less than three abilities.

- Within each category, Abilities are numbered sequentially starting from one. You may have four abilities at levels 1, 2, 3 and 4. You may not have four abilities at levels 2, 6, -4 and 37.

Five Sight

POWERS   ATTITUDES

See The future   3   Resigned   4
See The past   2   Sarcastic 3
Time Travel   1   Bitter   2
                            Suspicious 1

STYLES

(powered) Retroactively correct a mistake 5
(powered) Predict enemy plans 4
          "Some things are inevitable" 3
          Tout his Insight 2
(powered) Ignore Trivia 1

Crimson

ATTITUDES   STYLES
4 GLEE!   P 4 FLY THROUGH WALL
3 POUTY   P 3 OUTRUN ANYTHING
2 SLY   2 TEASE
1 BORED   P 1 LIGHTSHOW

POWERS
4 FLY REALLY FAST
3 INTANGIBLE "LIGHT FORM"
2 LASER ZAPS
1 SUPER REFLEXES

DRIVES

A super-powered character that is going to play an important role as protagonist or antagonist should have detailed Drives. To assign these you do the following:

- Take five Heroic or Villainous Drives

- Assign each a Strength between one and five.

- These five numbers must total exactly nine.

For a character filling a bit-part ("super-powered lackey of the arch-villain") it may not be worth filling out values for different Drives. Such characters are called ***Undifferentiated***. An undifferentiated character keeps their Debt in a single stack. They are overdrawn when they have more than five Tokens in that stack. They may Stake as many as three tokens on any one Conflict. Their personalities tend (in play) to be somewhat one-dimensional.

Drives are not codes of conduct. Two characters with high values in the same Drive are, in fact, more likely to argue about it than to agree. Drives are parts of the moral universe that the character thinks seriously about. They are questions, not answers.

An anarchist, who has strong opinions about the role of law and order in society, is just as much invested in the Justice Drive as a by-the-book stickler for the rules. What the Drive means to a character is something that players will have to invent and, often, discover through play.

Drives should have a constant presence in the life of the character. The best way to assure this is by assigning the Drive an Exemplar. An Exemplar is another character whose relationship with the first embodies their issues with the Drive.

EXEMPLARS

Any character with Drives may choose or create one Exemplar for free. For a second (or third, or so on) Exemplar, two players must collaborate on Sharing the Exemplar (see page 77)

There must be a "root conflict" in the relationship between the character and her Exemplar. This is some fundamental way in which they are forever at odds. That, in turn, spawns many trivial, solvable, conflicts. It is often easiest to invent the root conflict by creating a sentence of the form "This good thing, but that bad thing." For instance:

> **Justice**: "I respect Lieutenant Gerard, *but* he thinks I'm a criminal and wants to put me in prison."
> **Truth**: "Aunt Sylvie is great, *but* she'd be scared silly if she knew I risked my life as a super-hero."
> **Love**: "I love Julie, *but* her family and mine are long-time rivals, and would never accept our being together."
> **Hope**: "I keep kids like Jimmy safe, *but* I can never really belong in their carefree world."
> **Duty**: "Black Snake is a great mentor, *but* I can never live up to his expectations."
> **Obsession**: "My research could give my daughter back her sight, *but* she fears what my obsession might cost us both."
> **Pride**: "I am superior to Morality Man in every way, *but* he refuses to admit it!"
> **Power**: "Doctor Kill is a great man, *but* he often punishes me severely for no reason at all."
> **Despair**: "Charles wants me to have hope for the future, *but* I cannot forget the atrocities I have seen."
> **Fear**: "My ex-partner Volcanus believes in me, *but* I don't believe in myself."

Characters create minor conflicts whenever they can't address the root conflict of their relationships. If Doctor Swift could convince Lieutenant Gerard of his innocence then there would be no need for all of the narrow escapes. If Johnny could reveal his alter-ego to Aunt Sylvie then there would be no need for all the deceptions. But they can't, and so the close calls and guilty lies keep on coming.

EXEMPLAR CONFLICTS

The idea that these same Conflicts keep arising in slightly different forms isn't just subjective. It is written into the rules. Each Exemplar has a permanent Free Conflict attached to their relationship to the primary character. That Free Conflict can be played once in any Scene where both characters appear. Either the player of the character or the player of the Exemplar may play the Free Conflict. It may be played many times, in many Scenes, in the same story. Although it must remain the same Conflict each time, it can be resolved in many different ways.

Sparky, young protégé of hero Firestorm, has Firestorm as his Duty Exemplar. Their associated Free Conflict is "Event: Firestorm judges Sparky's worth". Firestorm and Sparky are both in a bank-robbery scene. Sparky introduces the Event, Controls and Resolves it. Under the direction of Sparky's player, Firestorm praises Sparky for his accomplishments. Their relationship improves, and Sparky's player has the Inspiration to prove it.

Later, Firestorm is captured by villains and Sparky goes to the rescue.

Firestorm introduces the same free Event, and this time the villain Controls and Resolves it. At a crucial moment, Firestorm intercedes, holding Sparky back rather than let him take the risks that go with being a grown hero, and the villain escapes. Distrust is sown between hero and sidekick.

SHARING EXEMPLARS

To have more than one Exemplar for their characters, players need to agree on one they can share. This will require three characters: Characters A and C related to Character B, and Character B related to both of them. Character A should have been made or played mostly by one player, and Character C by another. Obviously, given the rules, it can be hard to say for certain which character "belongs" to which player, but the shared Exemplar relationship should be of interest to both players.

To construct a shared Exemplar in a hurry, each player can choose one click and lock module, then combine them. So if Hero A needs a spunky Love Exemplar he might choose the Crusader Persona. If Hero C needs a Hope Exemplar who can stick up for the hero's maligned reputation he might choose the Journalist Skill-set. Together they make a spunky Crusading Journalist with connections to both heroes.

The shared Exemplar can represent the same Drive for both sharing characters. For instance, if she is Love Exemplar for both characters you have a classic love triangle. Or, the Exemplar can represent different Drives for the two sharing characters. For instance, Hero A can have younger sister B as his Duty Exemplar (since only he can make sure she has a happy and productive life), while Hero C can have hot young girl B as his Love Exemplar.

However the relationships pan out, the sharing of an Exemplar creates a *de facto* relationship between the sharing characters. They are vying with each other for influence over and attention from the Exemplar.

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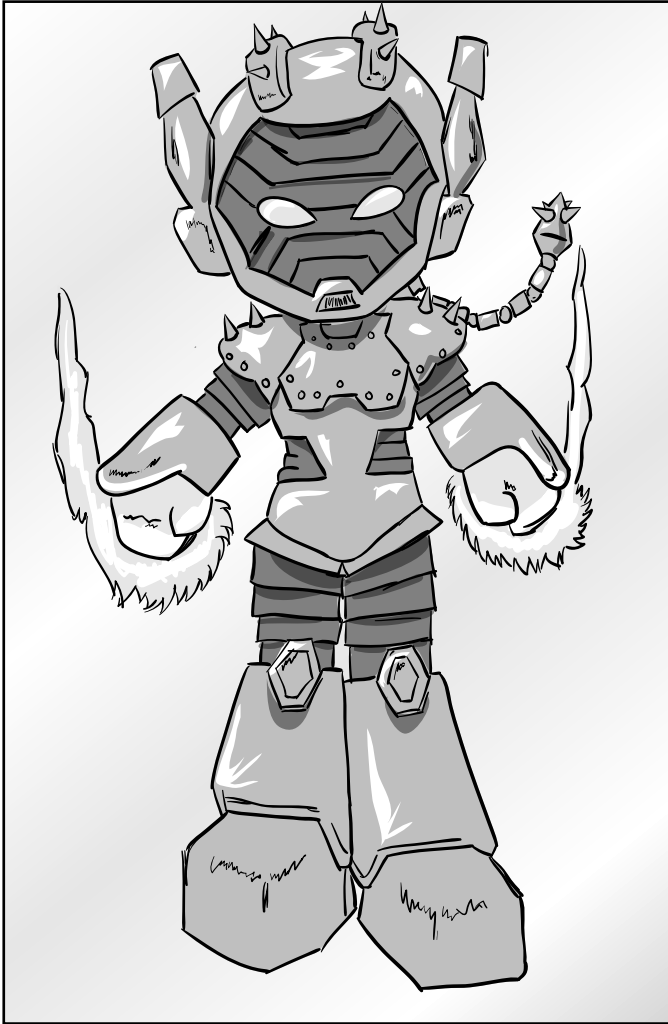
Chapter 4

CLICK AND LOCK

So you need Abilities for a character, and you need them in a hurry. It would take too much time to think over every possibility, and make up the perfect description for each Ability.

This chapter is made up of lists of partial sets of Abilities. They can be recombined, and modified to quickly make a variety of characters off the cuff for immediate inclusion in a scene.

CLICK AND LOCK METHOD

Character fragments are presented as Power (or Skill) Sets and Personae. Power Sets include a list of Powers and some Styles. Personae include a list of Attitudes, and some more Styles. To make a character with these, you do the following:

- Choose a Power (or Skill) Set.

- Choose a Persona.

- Combine the Styles of the two parts into a single list.

- The character now has five Powers, five Attitudes and five Styles. Cross out the three you like least (but not all from one column).

- Number each category from one up, depending on how you value the abilities. Note that low-level abilities will be used most often for raising your own dice in the early stages of a Conflict. High-level abilities will often be used later, or defensively, reacting to a good roll of your opponent.

Building a character in this way is called the ***Click and Lock*** method. Once you have that base character you are (as always) free to change any of the Abilities as much as you want. The Click and Lock method is not a rule, as such. It is a mental tool to help players get past the writer's block associated with the Freeform method. So remember that the Power Sets and Personae are just starting points, meant to inspire your creativity.

Choose Powers

GODLING

- Super-strength
- Super-speed
- Invulnerability
- Laser Eye-beams
- Flight

- Casually overpower mortals
- Inspire Awe
- Divert large flying objects

Choose Persona

SEDUCER

- Pout
- "You know you want to"

- Sensual
- Understanding
- Vindictive
- Sly
- Greedy

Combine

GODLING

- Super-strength
- Super-speed
- Invulnerability
- Laser Eye-beams
- Flight

- Casually overpower mortals
- Pout
- Inspire Awe
- "You know you want to"
- Divert large flying objects

SEDUCER

- Sensual
- Understanding
- Vindictive
- Sly
- Greedy

Cross out three

GODLING

- Super-strength
- Super-speed
- Invulnerability
- ~~Laser Eye-beams~~
- Flight

- Casually overpower mortals
- ~~Pout~~
- ~~Inspire Awe~~
- "You know you want to"
- Divert large flying objects

SEDUCER

- Sensual
- Understanding
- Vindictive
- Sly
- Greedy

Number

GODLING

- Super-strength 4
- Super-speed 1
- Invulnerability 2
- ~~Laser Eye-beams~~
- Flight 3

- Casually overpower mortals 1
- ~~Pout~~
- ~~Inspire Awe~~
- "You know you want to" 2
- Divert large flying objects 3

SEDUCER

- Sensual 5
- Understanding 4
- Vindictive 3
- Sly 2
- Greedy 1

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POWER SETS

Making a quick super-hero or -villain starts with picking out a Power Set. Once you've chosen one of these, you'll know what your character can do and how his super-powers can change the world.

Power Sets consist of a full assortment of Powers, and half a set of Styles. All of these (both the Powers and the Styles) are super-powered, and cost Debt to use.

Any Power Set will benefit from being customized. Looking at the Gadgeteer, for instance, it's clear what purpose her Repulsor Beams serve... ranged attack. Replacing those with Magentic Bolo Launchers serves exactly the same purpose and lets you put your own distinctive stamp on the character.

"NORMAL" SUPERS

Some super-beings don't have explicitly 'super-human' powers at all. They rely on human abilities, honed and perfected to an inhuman extent.

GADGETEER

Co-opt enemy systems ☐

Technical Genius ☐

Techno-armor ☐

Improvise a gadget ☐

Repulsor beams ☐

Sensor systems ☐

Know weak points of any system ☐

Flight-pack ☐

MARTIAL ARTIST

Named techniques ☐

Acrobatics ☐

Combat intuition ☐

Improvised weaponry ☐

Precision strikes ☐

Focussed battle aura ☐

Brains over brawn ☐

Ninja stealth ☐
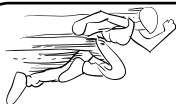
HUNTER

Perch in a high place ☐

Tireless stamina ☐

Ensnare ☐

Predict prey's next move ☐

Wrestle ☐

Razor-keen senses ☐

Find weaknesses ☐

Exhaust your prey ☐

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INTERNAL POWERS

Some super-beings have spectacular abilities in terms of their own body, but have to apply those abilities in the old fashioned, hands-on way.

SPEEDSTER

Super-speed ☐

Accelerated Reflexes ☐

Rapid recovery ☐

Do many things at once ☐

Faster than the laws of physics ☐

Move someone out of the way ☐

Trail of Disruptions ☐

Fast enough to try another plan ☐

BRICK

Super-leap ☐

Titanic Punch ☐

Invulnerability ☐

Super-strength ☐

Great leverage from tiny handhold ☐

Massive property damage ☐

Hit 'em with the scenery ☐

If it doesn't fit, force it ☐

ANIMAL AVATAR

The example is written up with a shark's teeth and swimming, but is easily changed to a wolverines claws and tenacity, a hawk's talons and flight or a spiders webs and wallcrawling.

Shark Telepathy ☐

Frenzy ☐

Big shark teeth ☐

Swimming ☐

Shark sense of smell ☐

Surprise Attack ☐

Tooth-shaped gouges ☐

Ominous Circling ☐

EXTERNAL POWERS

Some super-beings have abilities that manifest entirely outside of themselves, often with no visible connection.

MASTER OF NATURAL FORCE

Trap opponent ☐

Magnetic blast ☐

Move metal ☐

Control everything at once ☐

Become magnetism ☐

Force Field ☐

The example is written for a master of magnetism. With slight modification it fits those who control Fire, Ice, Weather, Technology, Air, Electricity, and so on.

Metal shapes ☐

Indirect action ☐

MIND READER

Know what they're planning ☐

Read minds ☐

Project sensations ☐

Subtle influence ☐

Ascend to mental plane ☐

Manipulate memories ☐

Mind control ☐

Mass crowd influence ☐

MAGICIAN

Dramatic incantation ☐

Bind forces/things ☐

Wards and shields ☐

Mythic resonance ☐

Summon forces/things ☐

Unleash Artifacts of Power ☐

Know hidden nature of the world ☐

Runes and Sigils ☐

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GENERALISTS

Some super-beings have a huge array of abilities, seemingly a new power for any new situation.

GODLING

Super-strength ☐

Super-speed ☐

Invulnerability ☐

Laser Eye-beams ☐

Flight ☐

Casually overpower mortals ☐

Inspire Awe ☐

Divert large flying objects ☐

SHAPESHIFTER

Change Shape ☐

Change Size ☐

Change physical state ☐

Strengths of current form ☐

Resilient body ☐

Reach inaccessible places ☐

Shift out of danger ☐

Surround an area ☐

ROBOT

Gigantic Size ☐

Armor ☐

Rocket Feet ☐

Tranform into Machine ☐

Missile Swarm ☐

Devices pop out from under skin ☐

Computer Brain ☐

Massive Property Damage ☐

SPECIALISTS

By contrast, some super-beings have a single ability that they use in creative ways to address different challenges.
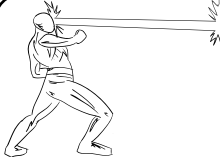
TELEPORTER

Appear ☐

Disappear ☐

Teleport someone else ☐

Appear, act, disappear ☐

Teleport a piece of something ☐

Appear behind someone ☐

Impossible to target ☐

Look at situation from many angles ☐

MIMIC

Imitate Something ☐

Mindset of form ☐

Strengths of form ☐

Weaken what you imitate ☐

Absorb attacks ☐

Mix and match forms ☐

Camouflage ☐

Adapt to changes ☐

SHOOTIST

Shoot ☐

Rapid fire ☐

Ricochet Shot ☐

Pinpoint accuracy ☐

Extreme range shot ☐

Chain reaction ☐

Shoot equipment ☐

Do other things while shooting ☐

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PERSONAE

A Persona gives you a set of Attitudes, and the other Styles needed to fill in the gaps in either a Power-set or Skill-set.

There is a surprising amount of flexibility in what you eliminate and what order you put Abilities. An Angsty Nice Guy with a high "Shy" score is a whole different creature (often) from one with no "Shy", but a high "Wry Humor".

INNOCENTS

These characters are defined by their sincere, open, way of dealing with the world. They are natural magnets for heartache and misery.

INGENUE

Miss the subtext ☐ ☒

Smile lights up the room ☐ ☒

Shocked ☐ ☒

Kind ☐ ☒

Trusting ☐ ☒

Curious ☐ ☒

Confused ☐ ☒

ANGSTY NICE GUY

Trustworthy ☐ ☒

Desperate Effort ☐ ☒

Shy ☐ ☒

Selfless ☐ ☒

Sincere ☐ ☒

Wry humor ☐ ☒

Secretly hurting ☐ ☒

WALKING WOUNDED

These characters have more defense mechanisms than any ten normal people. Memory and fear haunt them, and make it difficult to open up and share themselves with others.

GUILT-RIDDEN

Brood ☐ ☒

Doubt yourself ☐ ☒

Doubtful ☐ ☒
Remorseful ☐ ☒
Kind ☐ ☒
Impatient ☐ ☒
Distant ☐ ☒

NEUROTIC

Plan ahead ☐ ☒

Worst Case Scenario ☐ ☒

Nervous ☐ ☒
Apologetic ☐ ☒
Desperate ☐ ☒
Understanding ☐ ☒
Witty ☐ ☒

EX-VICTIM

Reminders of the past ☐ ☒

Snap without warning ☐ ☒

Grim ☐ ☒
Quiet ☐ ☒
Melancholy ☐ ☒
Untrusting ☐ ☒
Angry ☐ ☒

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IDEALISTS

These characters are strong at presenting and defending a case on principled grounds. They are more comfortable and effective debating abstracts than expressing their emotions.

OLDER BUT WISER

Understand your limitations ☐ ☒

Dire Prediction ☐ ☒

Insightful ☐ ☒
Preachy ☐ ☒
Judgmental ☐ ☒
Ironic ☐ ☒
Disappointed ☐ ☒

CRUSADER

Face down hypocrites ☐ ☒

Infectious energy ☐ ☒

Inspired ☐ ☒
Determined ☐ ☒
Judgmental ☐ ☒
Frustrated ☐ ☒
Reckless ☐ ☒

CURMUDGEON

Scoff ☐ ☒

Brutal realism ☐ ☒

Honest ☐ ☒
Aggressive ☐ ☒
Put upon ☐ ☒
Demanding ☐ ☒
Sarcastic ☐ ☒

ACTION ORIENTED

These characters prefer deeds to words. They are more comfortable doing things than discussing them. Indeed, they can be outright anti-social, with the proper treatment.

PSYCHOTIC LONER

Intimidate ☐ ☒

Screw the rules ☐ ☒

Furious ☐ ☒
Denial ☐ ☒
Abrasive ☐ ☒
Uncomfortable ☐ ☒
Confident ☐ ☒

HOTSHOT

Thrill Junky ☐ ☒

Escape without a scratch ☐ ☒

Joyful ☐ ☒
Unflappable ☐ ☒
Bored ☐ ☒
Rebellious ☐ ☒
Talkative ☐ ☒

SPUNKY KID

Exceed Expectations ☐ ☒

Point out the obvious ☐ ☒

Optimistic ☐ ☒
Embarrassed ☐ ☒
Childish ☐ ☒
Reckless ☐ ☒
Decisive ☐ ☒

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INCOMPLETE

These characters have some inner lack that they try to compensate for in their interaction with others. Frequently such characters will attach to those who have what they lack.

SYCOPHANT

Toady ☐ ☒

Apologize ☐ ☒

Spiteful ☐ ☒
Remorseful ☐ ☒
Sly ☐ ☒
Enthused ☐ ☒
Nervous ☐ ☒

SIMPLE SOUL

Simple Solutions ☐ ☒

Cut to the chase ☐ ☒

Happy ☐ ☒
Sad ☐ ☒
Angry ☐ ☒
Loving ☐ ☒
Slow ☐ ☒
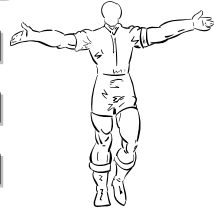
INHUMAN

Misunderstand humanity ☐ ☒

See the big picture ☐ ☒

Curious ☐ ☒
Confused ☐ ☒
Logical ☐ ☒
Cold ☐ ☒
Superior ☐ ☒

MANIPULATORS

These characters have honed their ability to influence other people. They are comfortable when they are in charge of a situation, less so when they have to respond to others.

CHARMER

Fast-talk ☐ ☒

Upset people's plans ☐ ☒

Selfish ☐ ☒
Flexible ☐ ☒
Reluctant ☐ ☒
Confident ☐ ☒
Friendly ☐ ☒

PUPPET MASTER

Trust your lackeys ☐ ☒

Don't trust your lackeys ☐ ☒

Demanding ☐ ☒
Forgiving ☐ ☒
Stern ☐ ☒
Upset ☐ ☒
Proud ☐ ☒

SEDUCER

"You know you want to" ☐ ☒

Pout ☐ ☒

Sensual ☐ ☒
Understanding ☐ ☒
Vindictive ☐ ☒
Sly ☐ ☒
Greedy ☐ ☒

93

SKILL-SETS

Skill sets represent the mundane skills that non-super characters use to get through their daily routine.

Because people with common skills often work in groups, a single "character" (according to the rules) can represent more than one person in the story. For instance, a gang of thugs could be run as a single Mook character, or a pack of papparazzi could be a single Journalist.

ON THE STREETS

These characters are adapted to a mean and often desperate life on the streets. They can be ideal sources of information for superheroes in a gritty story.

HOMELESS

Social invisibility ☐ ☒

Scrounge ☐ ☒

Accost ☐ ☒

Know hidden face of city ☐ ☒

Rant ☐ ☒

Obsess ☐ ☒

Lament ☐ ☒   Intuition for survival ☐ ☒

PETTY CROOK

Deceive ☐ ☒

Connections ☐ ☒

Information ☐ ☒

Wheedle ☐ ☒

Run ☐ ☒

Hide ☐ ☒

Streetwise ☐ ☒   Try for the Big Score ☐ ☒

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POSITIONS OF POWER

These characters are well equipped for influence in the mundane world. They are accustomed to deference, and may either help or hinder heroes who need their aid.

C.E.O.

Thrive on stress ☐ ☒

Delegate ☐ ☒

Glare ☐ ☒

The buck stops here ☐ ☒

Multi-task ☐ ☒

Negotiate ☐ ☒

Command ☐ ☒

Authority ☐ ☒

POLITICIAN

Pass the buck ☐ ☒

Lead ☐ ☒

Anticipate ☐ ☒

Inspire Action ☐ ☒

Simplify ☐ ☒

Organize ☐ ☒

Weasel ☐ ☒

Connections ☐ ☒

GENERAL

Chain of Command ☐ ☒

Command ☐ ☒

Strategize ☐ ☒

Call in a favor ☐ ☒

Attack ☐ ☒

Delay ☐ ☒

Decide ☐ ☒

Diagrams on maps ☐ ☒

95

LAW AND ORDER

Depending on your game, the police may be either constant allies or frequent opposition. Whatever their role, so long as there are characters who need to spend Justice Debt, there will be a place for the police in your game.

POLICE

Repeat yourself ☐ ☒

Communicate ☐ ☒

Cuffs ☐ ☒

Shoot ☐ ☒ "Freeze!" ☐ ☒

Crowd control ☐ ☒

Fist-fight ☐ ☒ Cordon off area ☐ ☒

DETECTIVE

Put two and two together ☐ ☒

Follow ☐ ☒

Notice ☐ ☒

Tactics ☐ ☒ Regulations ☐ ☒

Shoot ☐ ☒

Investigate ☐ ☒ Dogged persistence ☐ ☒

SPOOK

Resources ☐ ☒

Authority ☐ ☒

Secrecy ☐ ☒

Shoot ☐ ☒ Contacts ☐ ☒

Intimidate ☐ ☒

Deceive ☐ ☒ Surveillance ☐ ☒

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CRIME AND VIOLENCE

Low-level criminals are like popcorn for super-heroes. They can't stop munching them. One such character can often represent (in the rules) a gang of similar goons.

MOOK

Shoot ☐ ☒

Rough-house ☐ ☒

Boast ☐ ☒

Steal ☐ ☒

Outnumber ☐ ☒

Improvised Weapons ☐ ☒

Obedience ☐ ☒

Alpha Male ☐ ☒

HIGH-TECH MOOK

Armor ☐ ☒

Blast-gun ☐ ☒

Jet-pack ☐ ☒

Boast ☐ ☒

Preparation ☐ ☒

Endanger innocents ☐ ☒

Team tactics ☐ ☒

Cut your losses ☐ ☒

KUNG FU FIGHTER

Punch ☐ ☒

Kick ☐ ☒

Philosophy ☐ ☒

Wire-Fu ☐ ☒

Reflexes ☐ ☒

Rain of Blows ☐ ☒

Shrug it off ☐ ☒

Named Styles ☐ ☒

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WHITE COLLAR

These characters keep the information age running. Apart from their value to heroes who need information, these types of skills work wonderfully for Exemplars.

JOURNALIST

Fast-talk ☐ ☒

Photograph ☐ ☒

Write ☐ ☒

Pointed question ☐ ☒

Investigate ☐ ☒

Interview ☐ ☒

Notice ☐ ☒

Press Pass ☐ ☒

LAWYER

Books full of precedent ☐ ☒

Argue ☐ ☒

Advise ☐ ☒

Loopholes ☐ ☒

Recite ☐ ☒

Bargain ☐ ☒

Interrogate ☐ ☒

Paperwork ☐ ☒

SCIENTIST

Propose Theory ☐ ☒

Invent ☐ ☒

Research ☐ ☒

"That can't be right" ☐ ☒

Science ☐ ☒

Analyze ☐ ☒

Experiment ☐ ☒

Examine sample ☐ ☒

BLUE COLLAR

These characters keep tabs on the regular world of people and machines. With a solid, simple feel these characters provide perfect Exemplars, particularly for Hope.

BARTENDER

Another customer ☐ ☒

Insight ☐ ☒

Be silent ☐ ☒

Clean Glasses ☐ ☒

Serve Alcohol ☐ ☒

Folk Wisdom ☐ ☒

Ask ☐ ☒ Non-verbal cues ☐ ☒

GREASE MONKEY

Unnecessary improvements ☐ ☒

Fix-It ☐ ☒

Invent ☐ ☒

Bang it with a wrench ☐ ☒

Improvise ☐ ☒

Analyze ☐ ☒

Reverse Engineer ☐ ☒ Have tools handy ☐ ☒

DOCK HAND

Camaraderie ☐ ☒

Lift ☐ ☒

Throw ☐ ☒

Rumors ☐ ☒

Seamanship ☐ ☒

Carouse ☐ ☒

Stamina ☐ ☒ Machismo ☐ ☒
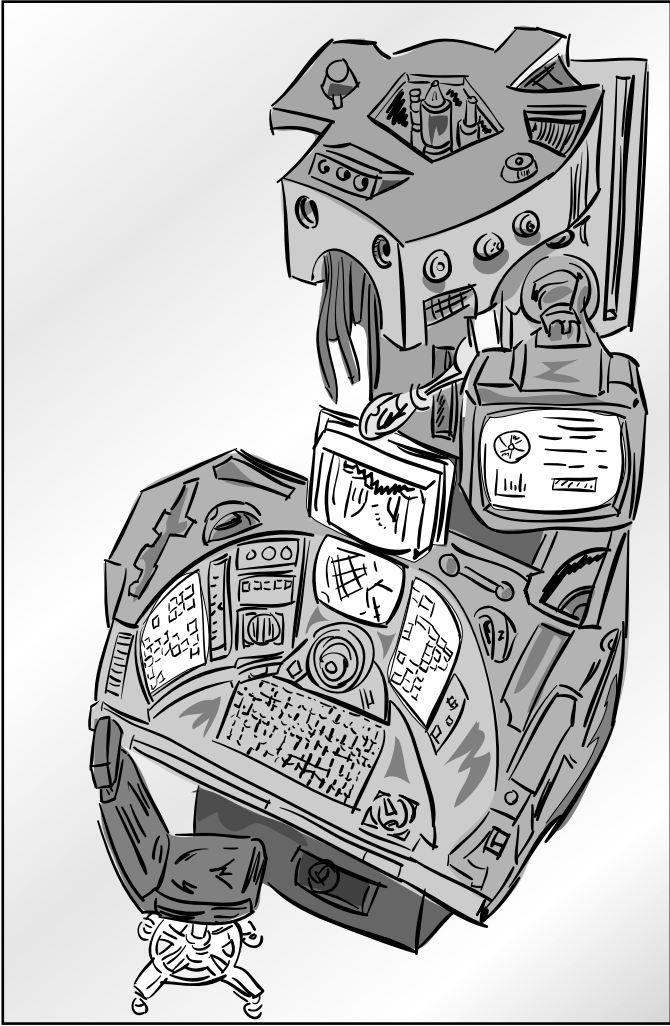
Chapter 5

EXTENDED RULES

Capes is played through the use of characters. Characters can be compelling, and win the affection of the players. But from the perspective of the rules system, a non-powered character is no more than a bundle of Abilities to be tapped. It doesn't matter whether they're old or young, male or female, human or alien.

In fact, the rules don't require that a character be a person. This chapter will outline a few of the most common ways that you can use non-person characters in your stories.

To play a non-person character, a player has to get away from thinking that the actions of the character come from their inner motives. A bomb doesn't have inner motives. It has a place in the Scene, and things that it does to further the goals of the player who put it there.

Non-person characters can, however, have Attitudes. As human beings, we attribute human emotion to many inhuman processes. A Deathtrap can be eccentric. A computer virus can be relentless. Luck can be perverse or generous by turns.

Non-person characters have the same type of abilities as a non-powered human character: Skills, Styles and Attitudes. As always, the needs and desires of the player are the key to using those effectively.

As with Click and Lock Modules, part of creating a non-person character is eliminating the Abilities you like least. If the character has three columns of Abilities, remove three (not all from the same column). If it has only two columns, remove two Abilities. Then number the Abilities in each column according to how you want to prioritize them.

CHARACTER CONFLICTS

Some non-person characters are tightly bound to a particular Event or Goal. For instance a Chase has to involve people in flight and pursuit. In most action genres, the penultimate moment is when the two participants are neck and neck. So resolving a "Neck and Neck" Event is the natural story outcome of introducing a Chase.

When constructing a non-person character, you may choose to equip it with a Character Conflict, in exchange for removing one type of Ability, and the four Abilities of that type. A character so modified will have only two columns of Abilities, and those will either be distributed four and four, or five and three.

The player may introduce their character's Character Conflict any time Free Conflicts can normally be introduced. However, when that Conflict is Resolved, the character is removed from the scene. The object or situation that it represents in the story may continue, but it exerts no direct pressure on the dice.

Objects are the easiest of the non-person characters. They're right there, with physical existence (at least in the imaginary game-world) and behaviors. Some are even self-directed.

There are so many kinds of possible objects that this book cannot do more than offer a few evocative examples. Designing and playing characters, even inanimate characters, is part of the fun of the game.

SPACE BATTLESHIP

Shoot	☐ ☒		Massive	☐ ☒		Certain	☐ ☒
Orbit	☐ ☒		Only one weakness	☐ ☒		Grim	☐ ☒
Loom	☐ ☒		Overkill	☐ ☒		Smug	☐ ☒
Fighters	☐ ☒		Extreme range	☐ ☒		Ominous	☐ ☒
Shields	☐ ☒		Sizzling energy	☐ ☒		Violent	☐ ☒

SUPER-COMPUTER

Analyze	☐ ☒		Patterns	☐ ☒		Logical	☐ ☒
Search	☐ ☒		Rigid program	☐ ☒		Literal	☐ ☒
Calculate	☐ ☒		Models	☐ ☒		Smart	☐ ☒
Simulate	☐ ☒		Ask for clarification	☐ ☒		Stupid	☐ ☒
Plan	☐ ☒		Databases	☐ ☒		Coy	☐ ☒

DOOMSDAY DEVICE — Free Event: "00:00:01"

Booby traps ☐ ☒		Relentless ☐ ☒	
Hard casing ☐ ☒		Ominous ☐ ☒	
Elaborate wiring ☐ ☒		Mocking ☐ ☒	
Requires great finesse ☐ ☒		Stubborn ☐ ☒	
Energy surge ☐ ☒		Unpredictable ☐ ☒	

DEATHTRAP — Free Event: Trap is Sprung

Needles Elaboration ☐ ☒		Clever ☐ ☒	
Contingency Plans ☐ ☒		Spiteful ☐ ☒	
Peculiar Style ☐ ☒		Eccentric ☐ ☒	
Chain of Events ☐ ☒		Teasing ☐ ☒	
"Tick, Tock" ☐ ☒		Arrogant ☐ ☒	

CURSED OBJECT — Free Goal: Claim another victim

Bad Luck ☐ ☒		Capricious ☐ ☒	
Good Luck ☐ ☒		Driven ☐ ☒	
Distort Perceptions ☐ ☒		Spiteful ☐ ☒	
Entice ☐ ☒		Domineering ☐ ☒	
Bad Dreams ☐ ☒		Selfish ☐ ☒	

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LOCATIONS

Locations are nearly the same as objects, but they are more likely to have a social context that pulls people into fitting roles. Because of this, the Attitudes and Styles of a Location are often expressed through the actions of characters in that location, rather than through the location itself.

The location can be thought of as adding a new set of Abilities to the characters there. You can say "Let's split up!" anywhere, but it has special, genre-specific meaning, in an abandoned amusement park.

ABANDONED AMUSEMENT PARK

Conceal ☐ ☒	"Let's Split up!" ☐ ☒	Spooked ☐ ☒
Confuse ☐ ☒	"Just the wind" ☐ ☒	Relaxed ☐ ☒
Surprise ☐ ☒	Mirrors ☐ ☒	Amused ☐ ☒
Lull ☐ ☒	Rides ☐ ☒	Lost ☐ ☒
Disorient ☐ ☒	Rickety ☐ ☒	Lonely ☐ ☒

CHURCH

Awe ☐ ☒	Doves ☐ ☒	Reverent ☐ ☒
Shame ☐ ☒	Crucifix ☐ ☒	Determined ☐ ☒
Inspire ☐ ☒	Pews ☐ ☒	Desperate ☐ ☒
Soothe ☐ ☒	Candles ☐ ☒	Calm ☐ ☒
Comfort ☐ ☒	Rafters ☐ ☒	Afraid ☐ ☒

ANCIENT TEMPLE) Free Event: Treasure is in hand

Skulls	☐ ⊠		Afraid	☐ ⊠
Chasm	☐ ⊠		Fascinated	☐ ⊠
Dead Languages	☐ ⊠		Greedy	☐ ⊠
Hordes of deadly critters	☐ ⊠		Cocky	☐ ⊠
Roots and Vines	☐ ⊠		Cautious	☐ ⊠

VOLCANO) Free Event: Someone falls toward lava

Burn	☐ ⊠		Noxious Fumes	☐ ⊠
Smoke	☐ ⊠		Hot to the touch	☐ ⊠
Crumble	☐ ⊠		Shifting shadows	☐ ⊠
Shake	☐ ⊠		Honey-combed with tunnels	☐ ⊠
Stifle	☐ ⊠		Bursts of lava	☐ ⊠

COURT ROOM) Free Event: Shocking new evidence!

Gavel	☐ ⊠		Outraged	☐ ⊠
"Order! Order!"	☐ ⊠		Surprised	☐ ⊠
Bailiff	☐ ⊠		Confident	☐ ⊠
Court Recorder	☐ ⊠		Crying	☐ ⊠
Jury	☐ ⊠		Furious	☐ ⊠

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PHENOMENA

Phenomena are overarching issues that, by player agreement, are beyond the scope of what the characters are dealing with right now.

If you want to play a scene where you sneak around in an oppressed society then you want a phenomenon (Martial Law, for instance) to represent the troubles of that. If, for a later scene, you want to lead a rebellion and free the people then you are dealing with a different question. Then the phenomenon ceases to be an established feature, and becomes a set of Conflicts that you can try to change through your actions.

MARTIAL LAW

Oppress	☐	☒	Authority	☐	☒	Paranoid	☐	☒
Shoot	☐	☒	Surveillance	☐	☒	Afraid	☐	☒
Betray	☐	☒	Police Presence	☐	☒	Arrogant	☐	☒
Arrest	☐	☒	Silence	☐	☒	Loyal	☐	☒
Threaten	☐	☒	Sirens	☐	☒	Resigned	☐	☒

PUBLIC OPINION

Orate	☐	☒	Catchphrase	☐	☒	Enthused	☐	☒
Speculate	☐	☒	Snap Judgment	☐	☒	Worried	☐	☒
Cheer	☐	☒	Headline	☐	☒	Proud	☐	☒
Watch	☐	☒	Arguments	☐	☒	Loyal	☐	☒
Judge	☐	☒	One-sided	☐	☒	Fickle	☐	☒

VIRUS · Free Goal: Contain the infection

Contaminate	☐	☒	Panicked	☐	☒
Transform	☐	☒	Confused	☐	☒
Lie Dormant	☐	☒	Confident	☐	☒
Weaken victim	☐	☒	Distressed	☐	☒
Consume	☐	☒	Frustrated	☐	☒

MURPHY'S LAW · Free Goal: Keep your spirits up

Add Insult to Injury	☐	☒	Unsympathetic	☐	☒
Worst Possible Time	☐	☒	Angry	☐	☒
Opportunity	☐	☒	Resigned	☐	☒
"Of course"	☐	☒	Bitter	☐	☒
Irony	☐	☒	Impatient	☐	☒

DISASTER · Free Goal: Save lives

Chain Reaction	☐	☒	Desperate	☐	☒
More problems than people to solve them	☐	☒	Panicked	☐	☒
Massive Scale	☐	☒	Fascinated	☐	☒
Moment of Truth	☐	☒	Selfish	☐	☒
Ominous Cracking	☐	☒	Grateful	☐	☒

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Situations differ from phenomena in that they are almost entirely structural. There is no physical reality in the game-world to the situation. It is a pattern of possibilities and likelihoods that condition what people can and will do.

The trickiest of the non-person character types, Situations can help to give form and structure to a story. They can also confuse the dickens out of people trying to use them. Handle with care.

SOCIAL FUNCTION

Mingle ☐ ☒	Alcohol ☐ ☒	Antsy ☐ ☒
Dance ☐ ☒	Speeches ☐ ☒	Happy ☐ ☒
Eat ☐ ☒	Three's a crowd ☐ ☒	Loud ☐ ☒
Talk ☐ ☒	A little drunk ☐ ☒	Annoying ☐ ☒
Posute ☐ ☒	The kitchen ☐ ☒	Shy ☐ ☒

SNEAKING

Sneak ☐ ☒	Alcove ☐ ☒	Tense ☐ ☒
Hide ☐ ☒	Inching Closer ☐ ☒	Patient ☐ ☒
Search ☐ ☒	"Shhhh!" ☐ ☒	Curious ☐ ☒
Notice ☐ ☒	Something makes noise ☐ ☒	Rushed ☐ ☒
Overhear ☐ ☒	Distraction ☐ ☒	Relieved ☐ ☒

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CHASE) Free Event: Neck and Neck

Accelerate	☐ ☒		Obstacle	☐ ☒
Swerve	☐ ☒		Technical Difficulties	☐ ☒
Improvise	☐ ☒		Straightaway	☐ ☒
Skid	☐ ☒		Narrow Confines	☐ ☒
Lose Control	☐ ☒		New terrain	☐ ☒

MISPLACED IN TIME) Free Goal: Blend in

Culture Shock	☐ ☒		Nostalgic	☐ ☒
Anachronism	☐ ☒		Frustrated	☐ ☒
Foreknowledge	☐ ☒		Confused	☐ ☒
Ignore taboos	☐ ☒		Amused	☐ ☒
	☐ ☒		Incredulous	☐ ☒

MYSTERY) Free Event: Answers are Revealed

Obvious Untruth	☐ ☒		Talkative	☐ ☒
Apparent Lead	☐ ☒		Desperate	☐ ☒
Two facts are connected	☐ ☒		Reluctant	☐ ☒
Contradiction	☐ ☒		Wary	☐ ☒
Theory proven wrong	☐ ☒		Evasive	☐ ☒

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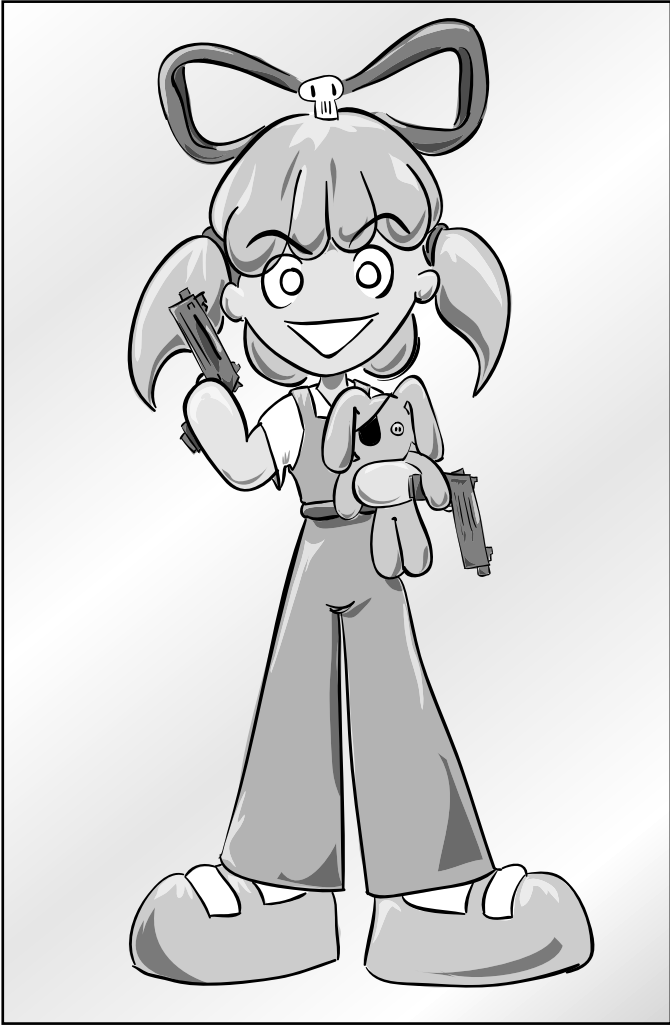
Chapter 6

PERSONALIZING THE GAME

There are things players agree to simply by agreeing to play Capes. They agree to the rules, and to some extent they agree to deal with the Premise.

But there are sections of the superhero genre that vary from book to book. The Capes rules strongly encourage players to communicate exactly what type of game they will be playing together. Doing so makes the game unique to that group.

COMICS CODE

In some comic books it would be inconceivable for a hero to kill a villain. In some comic books it is standard operating procedure. There's nothing artistically better or worse about either choice. But they do lead to different stories.

Once upon a time, comics were governed by a Comics Code that said what they could and could not do. The code was external, enforced by various authorities. Writers couldn't violate it, even if they wanted to. That restriction, as restrictions often do, prompted a lot of very interesting creativity. Enough so that the genre conventions fostered by the code have survived the original code by quite a stretch of time.

The Capes rules are built to accommodate an absolute Comics Code written by the players. This provides two types of comfort zone for the players. First, and most obvious, it allows players to declare the type of stories they want no part of, and be sure those stories will not appear. It is totally legitimate for a player to declare "I don't want my hero to have the deaths of innocents on his conscience", and add a line to the Comics Code that declares "Innocents cannot die due to any failure or choice of the heroes." Similarly, a player may feel freer to risk life and limb in a game which states explicitly in its Comics Code "super-heroes will not die."

Once again, just to be clear: The things that are forbidden by the Comics Code can never, ever, happen. Any time that Resolving a Conflict would make them happen, the Resolving Player must Gloat **41** instead.

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The second comfort zone that the Comics Code provides is the comfort to be a **really** villainous villain. This is a far more subtle effect, and a more powerful one. It is easier to explain by comparison with a game that has no Comics Code.

When a player takes on the role of a villain, their goal as a player is still to have a good time. Most people won't have a good time by getting the other players furious at them. If they really do their best to be terrible and villainous, there is a real possibility that they will succeed. If they set out to kill a hero (as villains should) and by some fluke of the dice they actually do it, where does that leave them? The players who valued that hero are angry to be robbed of her presence in the game. And they will rightly blame the player whose actions caused the situation. Rather than risk that, players in the role of villains will aim for less frightening goals, which in turn robs everybody of really intense conflicts.

In a game with a Comics Code that includes "super-heroes will not die" the player can feel free to create a "Goal: Kill Comet-Girl," and to work hard to Control it. They cannot, by doing so, take the game to a place where Comet-Girl is dead. The Comics Code has rigid borders that cannot be crossed. It protects players from the possibility of accidental success.

Indeed, the rule system strongly *rewards* players who run their villains smack dab into the restrictions of the Code. Villains should be threatening to do things that nobody wants to see happen. That's why they're **villains**. So every time they get to the verge of something horrific, the Gloating mechanic gently pulls them back and rewards them for doing their best on the side of evil. Smart players will use every opportunity to take advantage of the Gloating rules, for precisely that reason.

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The Comics Code encourages players to consistently attempt what it forbids. This makes it a level more complicated than a simple list of "Thou Shalt Not" commandments.

By banning, for instance, killing Janey Jones, love interest, the players don't say that Janey will never be put in danger. On the contrary, they assure that Janey will **constantly** be in danger! Any player in need of Story Tokens can earn them by Gloating on a Conflict that could end in Janey's death.

NEGOTIATING THE CODE

All the players in the game should get together and reach a consensus on what they want to have in their Comics Code. Sometimes it is easier to do this after playing a few sessions without a Code and without Gloating. By then the players have a good sense of what they are actually looking for, and how to get it through the mechanics of the rules.

As with everything in the game, the Comics Code can be changed as the needs of the players change. But a large part of the Code's power is that it is absolute. Under no circumstances should the Code ever be altered *during* a session of play. The confusing and dynamic feeling around a table during play is the polar opposite of the careful consideration that players should bring to anything as major as a change to the Comics Code.

If a situation comes up that prompts the players to think that the Code needs to be changed **right now**, they should play it through as best they can, then talk about changing the Code between sessions. Nothing that happens in the story can be so absolute that it can't be corrected next session. The comic book genre is flexible. If (for instance) the heroes are all killed off, and then have to be brought back next session, they will join the ranks of many, many teams of superheroes who have gone through exactly the same thing.

Example Code, modeled roughly on a 1950s sensibility:

Super-heroes never die

Exemplars never die

Super-villains never die

Good people are never responsible for anyone's death, even by omission

The Root Conflict between characters and their Exemplars will not be resolved
  Corollary: The Secret Identity of the hero will not be exposed
  Corollary: Unspoken love cannot be either revealed or abandoned

The course of history will not diverge from real-world history
  Corollary: Superheroes can solve big fictional problems (like alien invasion) but not big real problems (like starvation in Africa).

HOUSE RULES

The Capes rules are a tool. Every group is going to use that tool differently. As part of developing their own style, the group will create a set of social rules for what players are expected to do. When these social rules are unspoken it runs the risk of confusion and aggravation. For instance, the hosting player could get angrier and angrier, week after week, that nobody pitches in money to pay for snacks. But if he's never asked anyone for money (because, after all, the rule is unspoken) then how are they supposed to know what is expected of them? Life gets so much simpler if, some time in the first few sessions, someone says "Hey, how are we covering the cost of snacks?"

In just the same way, the Capes system gives people a degree of power that they may not be comfortable sharing with every player around the table. To ease their worries, players create social rules about how that power can be applied. Disagreements about those rules usually center around the two big sticking points of roleplaying: Story and Characters.

Capes gives any player the right to prepare Story-Threads (see chapter 8) and to introduce them into the game. Some groups will embrace that power, discarding the idea that anyone should be assigned to make the A-Plot, much less the various B-Plots that orbit around it. Some groups will want to rotate the responsibility of creating the A-Plot, so that only one player each week has to put in a large amount of preparation effort. Some groups will want to assign that responsibility to one player (almost always the one who organized the game) forever.

Any of those are legitimate, so long as they are clearly communicated. A game group where four players think that the fifth is making the story, but the fifth thinks that they're all taking it in turns is going to be a game group with a lot of confusion and few solid stories.

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SPOTLIGHT CHARACTERS

The question of characters is even more contentious. Roleplaying gives players the chance to identify with a character in a way that few other media do. Players speak, in apparent seriousness, about *becoming* their character during the game.

In deference to those feelings, many groups permit or require each player to create one or more characters that are theirs and theirs alone. Throughout this text these are referred to as ***Spotlight Characters***. The game mechanics treat them no differently than any other character, but the social rules give them an exalted place.

Many groups rule that no player may play the Spotlight Character of another, or forcibly narrate events in their past. In some groups, even the Exemplars of the Spotlight Characters are off-limits, available only to the players who created them.

As with the question of story preparation, there are no right or wrong answers to the question of what rights players have to monopolize characters. What is vital is that everyone is in agreement on those rights, so that they know what they can do and what they cannot.

Finally, though, there is something that you can do to personalize the game that is fun, easy and rarely causes confusion. You can figure out how, precisely, you're going to make the rules clear to everyone around the table.

Different groups will show thing different ways. Index cards and dice, or their equivalent, for Conflicts are pretty much a given, but beyond that you can do a lot of wild things.

Players who want more convenience for minimal effort can go online (http://www.museoffire.com/Games/) and print out the letter-sized versions of the Click and Lock pages, then cut them into their individual modules. That removes the hassle of copying information from the rulebook onto a sheet of paper. Then it's a breeze to create new characters and a tactile experience as well, as you riffle through the Powers and Personae looking for the ones you want.

With a bit more effort players can go to a board-game store and pick up some spare colored pawns. Then players can Claim Conflicts just by placing their color on the appropriate side of the index card. This speeds the start of the Page and, again, makes for a very tactile approach to the rules. A larger pawn (or a crown, or a gavel, or any prop that works for you) can be passed around to show who is the current Starter.

And for any player who wants to go absolutely nuts on making the game a little quicker, I have just one word: "Lamination." Laminate the Click and Locks, the character sheets, even the Index cards. China pencils do a grand job of making temporary marks on laminated paper. It's easy to keep track of which Attitudes and Styles you've blocked… then with a wipe of a tissue you clear the slate for the next scene.

NARRATIVE STYLE

Another thing your group can usefully discuss is what style they want to take toward the narration rules. Specifically, what should players be encouraged to narrate when they are on the losing side of a Conflict.

If you agree that the player should narrate their own loss then the use of the **And Then** ㉖ rule will be a minor factor. Players will provide their own trouble, and their own constraints. Such a game will usually be marked by a feeling of slow struggles for domination, punctuated by sudden reversals.

If you agree that the player should narrate what they'd like to see happen, even if it means temporarily gaining the upper hand in the story then the **And Then** rule will be getting a constant workout. Such a game will produce stories with unending back and forth conflicts, with each side gaining and losing apparent superiority many times in the course of events.

On the opposite side, the group can discuss how much a player can narrate when they are winning. Particularly, how does a player control the actions and effectiveness of losing characters played by another player.

Some groups will have the winning player narrate for all the characters, whether he's playing them or not. Some groups will allow the controlling player to tell other players generally what to narrate, then let them decide the details of how to describe it in their characters own style.

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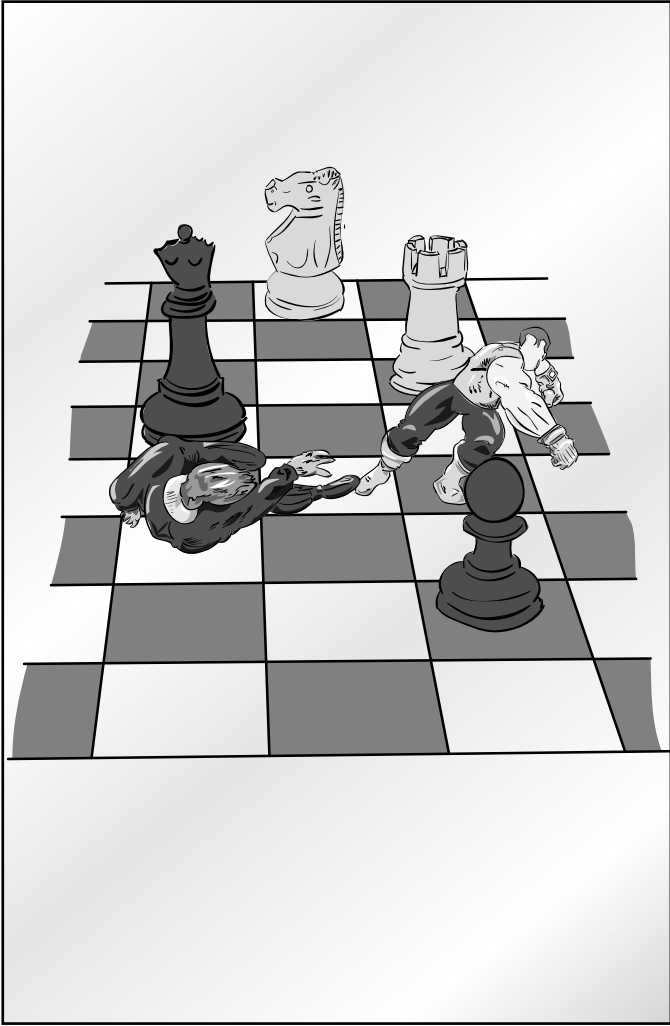
Chapter 7

STRATEGY AND TACTICS

Capes is made up of simple rules that interact in sophisticated ways. First-time players, particularly, can be overwhelmed. They need a good grasp of the Tactics of combining simple rules properly to achieve a short-term goal, and the Strategy of which short-term goals to pursue in a long-term agenda. The longer it takes them to feel comfortable, the longer it will be before they are fully enjoying and contributing to the game. This chapter aims to shorten that learning time as much as possible.

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There are many possible tactics that can work brilliantly in very specific situations. Fortunately, only a few are both effective and reliable on a routine basis. The trick to mastering them is to realize that having your character win a Conflict is only one of several equally valid short-term goals.

The flow of in-game resources is the most important factor in the Capes mechanics. You gain Inspirations by winning Conflicts. You gain Story Tokens by losing Conflicts. Sometimes you will want Inspirations more than Story Tokens, and set out to have your character win. Sometimes you will want Story Tokens more than you want Inspirations, and set out to have your character lose. Letting another character defeat yours in the story is the opposite of being defeated in the game. You are gaming the system to get the resources you need.

Some of these tactics will help you to win Conflicts. Some will help you to lose them. All will help you to control the resources coming to you.

INSTANT-SPLIT

Risk level: Medium
Move: Before the first roll on your side of a Conflict (i.e. when the die is still one) spend a level-2 Inspiration to raise the die to a two, Stake two Debt and Split into two ones. Now roll one of the ones, just as you would have before the Instant-Split. This is a great way to use team-work on a Conflict, if you can count on your team-mates

SPLIT/INSPIRE/ROLL TRINITY

Risk level: Medium
Move: You need a Conflict where you have a die greater than one, but not much greater. Stake two Debt. Split the die. Use an Inspiration to raise one of the resulting dice. Roll the other die. If the die you start with is too high, or your Inspiration too low, this may end up being a net loss after other players React.

BREEDING DEBT

Risk level: Very low
Move: Stake Debt on a Conflict that you know you are about to lose. It costs you no moves (you roll on a different Conflict) and will return twice the Debt as soon as the Conflict resolves. If you split your die you may also get a small Inspiration out of it.

BREEDING INSPIRATIONS

Risk level: Medium
Move: Introduce and Claim a Conflict nobody else needs. Instant-Split for Control. If you Resolve the Conflict that Page then you should end with as many Inspirations as you spent Debt, most fairly small, but one possibly quite respectable.

SPITEFUL SCHISM

Risk level: High
Move: Stake a point of Debt on the side you want to see **lose**, roll on their side (to become an Ally 26) then Schism off your own side from their highest die to reduce its value. The risk is that you roll so high that even splitting leaves them in Control.

MASSIVE SCHISM

Risk level: High
Move: In a Conflict Claimed by an ally, manufacture an excuse to debate exactly how you are going to win. Stake two Debt. Split the highest die three ways and take the best two for your own side. Complete the Trinity maneuver (page left) to gain control. Resolve it yourself next Page.

MULTI-GLOAT, AMATEUR

Risk level: Low
Move: Requires an opportunity to Gloat. Before the Page ends (and you Gloat) spend a Story Token for another turn. Stake Debt and split your winning die into dice, no more than one of them reading "1". A three or four may be split twice, a five or six three times. Roll the lowest die. Instead of turning down one die you now turn down as many as you Staked Debt. Returns double Debt, eventually.

MULTI-GLOAT, PRO

Risk level: Very High
Move: Execute the Multi-Gloat, Amateur (left). Next Page, claim the same Conflict. Use small Inspirations on every die on the Gloat. Your total must be at least seven. Other players are now faced with either Staking to beat your Gloat (and give you those Staked Tokens as Story Tokens) or letting you Gloat again and winning the Conflict next Page when the dice are turned back to ones.

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DECLARING CONFLICTS

The most confusing thing for most new players of Capes is the ability to declare Conflicts. They think of declaring Conflicts only as a way to influence the story. That ignores a powerful tactical tool. Conflicts are the battlegrounds upon which the game is played. There are several ways to choose them to your own advantage.

PREVENTATIVE GOALS

In the absence of a Conflict, anyone can narrate achieving anything. Suppose a villain is losing a battle. They can just narrate that they escape, to fight another day. If you see this coming and want to stop it, you declare **"Goal: Escape to fight another day"** for the villain. Now the player of that villain cannot have them escape until they win that Goal.

DISTRACTION CONFLICTS

It is easier to win when there's no competition. The best way to encourage someone to let you win Conflict A is to make Conflict B that they find more important. A villain who wants to escape to fight another day can create **"Event: Headquarters Self-Destruct."** While the heroes are fighting to save the innocents, the villain has a clear field to effect his escape.

STAGE-SETTING EVENTS

Say your character has abrasive Attitudes, but everyone is being polite. That places you at a disadvantage. Declare **"Event: An argument erupts"**, and make it resolve quickly. Other players may want to control it (to control who blows their top and why). You only care about the inevitable argument, and how it will let you bring your character's abilities more easily into play.

STORY TOKEN CONFLICTS

Sometimes you will create Conflicts that you have no interest in, yourself, but which you know other players will hotly contest. Whenever Story Tokens are earned off of that Conflict, you will get the first one. Consistently being the one to declare Conflicts that seem implied by dramatic necessity will help you reap a small but constant profit in Story Tokens.

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PAGE ORDER

Your place in the order of how things happen during the Page is a subtle but powerful influence on what tactics you can pursue. Since that place changes each Page, and is predictable, you can factor it into your plans, using different tactics when you're at different points in the page order. This section will discuss the three possible positions in a three-player game.

STARTER

You have first choice at absolutely everything. That is your only advantage. Everyone else will act after you and can respond to your actions. And on the next Page they will get yet more actions to respond to what you did, before you take up your action third.

In Starting position you should be capitalizing on the groundwork you laid in the previous Page. You will often want to restrict yourself to low-risk tactics.

SECOND

Second is the most flexible position. You don't get prime pick of Conflicts, but can generally get something good, and you have only one person acting after you, so you can probably Resolve it.

Don't let this power go to your head, though. Remember that you'll be Starter next page. If you want groundwork to capitalize on then, you'd better start laying it now. Creating a juicy Conflict that you can claim next Page is well worth your action.

THIRD

Third position is the most reactive. You'll get to claim only left-over Conflicts. On the other hand you have final action, for the best chance to gain something for minimal effort.

You benefit most by claiming something you already control. If you lose control by the time it gets to your turn then you can spend the energy to try to get it back. Otherwise you can apply your energy elsewhere. Third position is also the best place to execute high-risk tactics, as other players have the least opportunity to react.

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USING AND ABUSING SYSTEM

The Capes rules have been carefully codified. Different people can each read the rules and then agree on what they are and are not allowed to do with the game mechanics. But there are some basic ground-rules to using the system that are different enough from other roleplaying games that they merit specific mention.

First, Capes is **competitive**. Players are expected to play with common respect and good sportsmanship, but they are also trying to win out over each other, to gain more influence over the story than the other players.

But roleplaying is also a social activity. Many of us are taught that competition isn't friendly. People are tempted to do less than their best, so as not to offend.

In a sport it would be obvious that this is undercutting the fun of the other players. They are playing, as much as anything else, for the challenge of a fair conflict, hard fought. Giving them a victory out of charity or a sense of obligation is robbing them of that enjoyment.

Players should do their best to take advantage of the rule system in any way they possibly can. They should use both tactics that are tried and true and radical new ways of using the same old rules.

If a player discovers a gimmicky little rules technique that lets them sieze an advantage over the other participants, they should be congratulated. They haven't *abused* the system (as the accusation sometimes goes) they have *used* the system as it is designed to be used.

Second, Capes is often **unequal**. The only guarantee is that everyone will start with the same opportunity to use the rules. Some players will do a better job than others. They will have more fun and more control of the story as a result. That is how it is supposed to work.

That is, in fact, the only way that people can be encouraged for doing an exceptional job. If everyone is rewarded equally by the system, enjoying the same right to influence the plot, then really nobody is being rewarded for what they do. They are receiving the same treatment, no matter how good or bad their play is.

As with competition, some of the thrill of the game is that you can change your fortunes through your own actions. That means that you can screw up and miss opportunities just as much as it means that you can achieve great things. Many players, when asked, are willing to accept the risk of the one in exchange for the chance of the other.

RESOURCES

There is a lot of randomness in Capes. Dice are rolling all the time. But the actual outcomes are not as random as they appear. They are the result of what resources players have, and what they choose to spend. When a game has hit its stride, the person who most wants to win a Conflict almost always does, and the losers make a conscious choice to let it go. Only the players who have a good balance of resources will get to play that way. Everyone else is at the mercy of fortune.

DEBT MANAGEMENT

Debt is the most basic resource, and the only one that you can gain at will. You gain it every time you use a Power or powered Style. Because a character can do this both in her action and in each reaction, she can generate a number of points of Debt each Page equal to the number of characters plus one. That's a lot of Debt in a short period of time.

It is possible to have too much Debt. All told your character's Drives cannot hold more than nine debt, and getting them that perfectly spread out is rare. More than that or an uneven distribution means you're Overdrawn. If you have a lot of Debt you have less flexibility. You'll need to Stake, and can't afford to take back doubled debt from a lost Stake. The imbalance takes away your freedom to lose Conflicts.

It is possible to have too little Debt. While characters can earn it quickly, they can spend it even more quickly. Staking it provides a big boost to your success, and will often imply an easy win in a Conflict if you Stake more than your opposition. When you set out to take charge of the story, and have your character achieve things, you'll often find your Debt dwindling away. If you run low on Debt you have less flexibility. You can't afford to Stake on important Conflicts. You can't afford to win your own Stakes. The imbalance takes away your freedom to win Conflicts.

Everyone will have a different balance with which they're comfortable. Many players try to have between four and six Debt on hand at any time, with at least two on a single Drive. They create more quickly whenever they Stake and win. This leaves them enough room to absorb an unexpected loss, while giving them enough Debt to Split Conflicts where they need an extra boost to win.

The key to gaining Debt is to get yourself into a mindset where you don't have to strain for reasons that your character would use their Powers (particularly on Reactions). The Premise of Capes starts with "Power is fun". If you play a character who loves showing off, and being super-human, and does so at every opportunity then you'll have plenty of Debt. If you play a character who is conflicted about their powers, and uses them only when absolutely necessary, then you will never have enough Debt for your purposes.

The key to eliminating Debt is to remember that other players want to take it away from you. If they can live with the in-game consequences then they will happily let you win Stakes, so that they can secure Story Tokens. Since you can shed Debt on minor victories as easily as major ones, you should make sure there are some Conflicts that are vitally important to your character, but not that big a deal to anyone else. A player running an arch-villain will probably fight you tooth and nail on a Conflict like "Hold city hostage", but let you have "Prove myself to Mary Sue".

STORY TOKENS

You will earn almost all your Story Tokens by losing Conflicts where your opponent Staked Debt. To earn Story Tokens, you need to put yourself into a situation where that can happen. That means you have to find a player who has Debt to Stake, and put yourself on the opposite side of the Conflict they're going to Stake on.

In many ways you are giving a sales pitch. Your target, whom we shall call "the mark," is holding Story Tokens that are rightfully yours, in the form of Debt. Your job is to separate him from those Tokens gently but earnestly, in a way that leaves him happy with the exchange and eager to do it again as soon as possible. The good news is that you're selling victory, which everybody wants. The bad news is that, first, you may not be selling the particular brand of victory your mark is looking for and, second, he may try to get it without paying you the Story Tokens you deserve.

To sell the one precise Conflict that your mark will pay anything to win you need to understand him. You need to know what he's looking to achieve right now. The most important skill to help you in this is empathy. Passive empathy is the gentle method of observing the cues that the mark is deliberately giving off. When he cheers, you note that what just happened makes him happy and excited. When his eyes narrow you note that what just happened makes him sad or angry. When he looks aimlessly around the room, or goes to get a drink, you note that what is happening does not interest him. You remember these cues, and try to figure out what things in the game elicit what response from him… even when he doesn't know himself.

Passive empathy is powerful, but slow. Aggressive empathy requires more energy, but is often much faster. Aggressive empathy is passive empathy plus actively testing your theories. Say you notice that your mark sits up straighter and leans forward with interest when an explosion occurs near Love Exemplar Polly Trueheart. *Theory: He is interested in protecting Polly.* How do you test that? Endanger Polly, of course! Goals like "Kidnap Polly" or Events like "A huge statue is about to fall on Polly" are easy to introduce. You can tell objectively whether they attract his interest. If he's interested then he'll spend his actions to control the Conflicts. Maybe he really is interested in protecting Polly, and will resist both these Conflicts. Maybe he's interested in Rescuing Polly… so he'll oppose her being squashed by a big statue, but will support her being kidnapped, since it gives him the opportunity to rescue her later. These are the things you find out by experimentation.

There is a set of objective indicators in the system to help you make your way. The Debt your mark has accumulated will tell you what he's most inclined to Stake. So if he's got a lot of Hope, you throw him a bunch of common people in need of rescue. If he's got a lot of Love, you throw him a close, personal friend (or better yet, a romantic interest).

To force the mark to pony up the Tokens you want, you have to create a convincing, sincere threat. The higher you raise the opposing side, the more your mark is forced to Stake in order to win it. Nobody needs to Stake to beat a two, but Staking is almost required to beat a six.

Part of being convincing as an antagonist is to occasionally show that you're willing to force people to lose Stakes, foregoing the Story Tokens for the sheer glee of handing them back double their Debt. Of course, that doubled Debt makes them an even more attractive mark.

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INSPIRATIONS

Inspirations are the portable form of victory. They let a player carry over their victories (and even the minor moral victories amidst crushing defeats) to spend on later parts of the story.

To get the most benefit from Inspirations, remember that there is no such thing as an unimportant victory. All Inspirations are created equal. You can get them by defeating the villain's fiendish plan or by talking to the lackey who feeds you slop in the dungeons. They're exactly the same as far as the rules are concerned.

As with giving away Debt, the trick to gaining Inspirations without a big fight is to figure out the small ways in which your opponent is happy to lose. A player with a cackling arch-villain is not going to mind losing a Conflict about how well their minions are treated. They don't want to treat their minions well. By spotlighting the minion-misery, you are helping them tell their story. Then you subvert it into *your* story by using the Inspiration to later play the minion's sudden but inevitable betrayal.

STRATEGY

Strategy in Capes is about resource flow. A player with a good sense of how to get and spend resources is close to having a winning strategy. They just need a good sense of what they're accumulating these resources for, and when to spend them. The rule of thumb is not "Save whatever you have too little of," but rather "Spend whatever you have a lot of."

Scenes will create different sets of resources, depending on what type of scene they are. A short, interpersonal scene (often "an aside") will tend to consume Debt while creating Inspirations and Story Tokens. A long scene, particularly super-powered combat, will consume Story Tokens and Inspirations while creating Debt.

In the early stages of a story, short scenes will be the rule, and players will constantly be scrambling for Debt and Story Tokens. Losing Stakes in a Conflict, particularly if there are Stakes on both sides, is a winning strategy in this phase. The loser gets both Story Tokens (from the winner) and Debt (from the doubled Stake).

At the climax of a story, long scenes will be the rule and players will be working hard to get rid of Debt, and trying to figure out how to spend Story Tokens. They probably can't afford to lose many Stakes at this point. A winning strategy in this section is to spawn many minor Conflicts to stake Debt on, and then use Story Tokens to Claim several of them each Page, resolving as many as possible. This burns through Debt at a spectacular rate, so that players can avoid ending the game ridiculously Overdrawn. Playtesting games have ended (more than once) with characters twenty or more points Overdrawn.

SETTING SCENES

As with creating Conflicts, many players overlook the tactical significance of setting a Scene. Long scenes create Debt at the cost of other resources. If you have enough Debt, but lack other resources, you would be foolish to create a long scene just because it is the next logical step in the story. Narration need not proceed by unexamined plodding to the "next step". When it is your turn to create a scene, you should make the kind of scene that will benefit you.

Once you know what type of Scene you want, you can get your mind working on how to justify it in the story. Perhaps, before going off to the climactic fight with Professor Dread, Valiant finally works up the nerve to make his feelings known to Jenny Goodwright. Or maybe there's time for one television interview in the midst of an alien invasion, where the hero can give hope and inspiration to the oppressed human race.

You can use flash-backs to events decades ago, or dream-sequences of nonsensical events that never could happen, or alternate futures only vaguely glimpsed through the powers of super-science. A Scene need not be happening "right now" for you to spend Debt in the scene, or earn Inspirations. Those things most naturally occur in narrative time, not the fictional time in which the story itself is ordered.

You are not the slave of the overall story. It is the servant of your needs and wishes. The big events of the story will get along just fine without you. There are other players out there ready and waiting to take advantage of the type of scene you don't (currently) have any use for. The alien invasion will wait while you deal with the things that are important to *your* character and the story *you* want to tell.

CHOOSING CHARACTERS

In every Scene you will have a choice of what character to play. Don't let this choice fly by you unexamined. You may really love your chosen super-hero, and in many scenes they may be the natural choice. But if they don't have a natural place in this scene then you're going to twiddle your thumbs and watch other players with better-chosen characters accumulate resources.

Have a strategy for what you want to accomplish, and then choose the best character to do that. If you are looking to earn Story Tokens from a particular mark, for instance, you cannot do better than to play the Exemplar of the mark's most Debt-laden Drive. If you are in the market for Story Tokens generally, playing a villain is a pretty sure way to get them.

Look, also, for the character that can really increase the tension in a given scene. If two players are finally bringing their characters close to a stable romantic relationship then it's time to dig through the group file of old characters and bring back the crazy bad-boy that one of the lovey-doves had a fling with many episodes ago. Rocking the boat gives you plenty of opportunity to profit, one way or the other.

Chapter 8

PREPARING A STORY-THREAD

The trouble with preparing for Capes is that you can't simply outline a story that you will tell. One player rarely has enough influence in the game to tell more than the most trivial story alone. The best way to make a story happen is to draw other players into helping you to tell it.

By sharing the power to tell your story with the other players, you recruit their help in making it a reality. Your goal is not to tell the story alone. It is to encourage *others* to tell it with you.

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A-PLOT AND B-PLOTS

Television scriptwriters talk about A-Plots and B-Plots. The A-Plot involves all of the main characters of the episode, while a B-Plot can involve just a few, or just one. It has been argued that A-Plots are the "real" plot and B-Plots are just a sideline, but those are arbitrary terms even in the scripted structure of television. The distinction vanishes entirely in roleplaying. The "real" plot is whatever is happening right now.

The distinction between A- and B-Plots is useful though, because it lets you judge how big a task you are setting yourself when you prepare a story. B-Plots are by far the easiest to prepare. Often you only need the cooperation of one other player to make them work. A-Plots are much harder. You need to assure the cooperation of most, if not all, of the other players. It's not impossible, but it's a tremendous challenge. We'll discuss the preparation of a typical B-Plot first, and then talk about how to expand that preparation to create A-Plots.

THE BIG QUESTION(S)

Sometimes you'll create a story thread just because you've got some ideas that you'd like to throw into the game. Maybe you've thought up a really great villain and want to introduce him. Maybe you think it would be fun to have a fight in the caldera of an active volcano.

Sometimes, though, you'll be using the story as a venue to ask some questions. For instance "Who would win in a fight between Ultimate Woman and Major Machismo?" or "How would the heroes deal with a story of creeping, supernatural horror?" What you can't do effectively in Capes is to plan on getting across any one, pre-determined *answer*. You can ask a question, but if you already know the answer then there's nothing left for the other players to contribute. Which means that your story thread is likely to self-destruct from player rebellion or disinterest.

Chris has noticed that Beth's character, Night Maiden, is ludicrously cold and arrogant, even in her secret identity as Donna Tombs. He wonders how long she's been like that. So he decides to plan a B-Plot thread to examine the question "What was Night Maiden like when she was young?" He decides that Donna's parents from Kansas will come to visit their daughter in the big city.

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WORKING BACKWARD

To prepare a Capes story, it helps to start at the end and work to the beginning. That way you can identify the selling points of your conclusion, and use them as a lure to draw players through the earlier scenes needed to get to that conclusion. Literary authors refer to this as "foreshadowing". In Capes it is aggressive advertising. You know the other players will find this story interesting. So give them the information, right up front, to realize how cool it's going to be.

Start your planning with the scene of your conclusion. Of course, you cannot know what will be *happening* when the story concludes. You'll only know that after everyone has gotten together and played it. But you can quite easily imagine a lot of the scene and situation in which the conclusion will probably play out. If the arch-villain's base is in an abandoned amusement park then that's where the heroes will end up, whether they're captured and thrown in a death-trap or hot on the heels of the defeated bad guys.

> Chris decides that the scene where this B-Plot thread concludes should be at a cozy dinner at home, with Donna and her parents. He decides it would be much more fun to have more of the Spotlight characters there, so he makes a note to create an explanation for more team-mates to be present if they want to. So far this scene isn't dripping with interest or conflict. Maybe if Donna were forced to wear an impractical dress, just rife with the sort of girlish formality that Night Maiden detests? Chris changes the dinner venue from a comfortable home meal to a stilted affair at an expensive restaurant.

THINGS GOT WORSE

Somehow or other you hope the story will get to the gruesome conclusion. It will have to start off as mere potential… a problem not yet fully exploded. So now that you have a sense of the conclusion, think about the sort of scenes where things got worse.

Usually you will have several scenes of this type. As best you can, make them each independent, so that they can happen in any order or (if necessary) several can be skipped entirely.

This is also the time to look carefully at the notes you made in the prior section (the conclusion). These will tell you the sort of things you need to be advertising to draw the players on toward the conclusion.

Chris figures there will be no problem drawing Beth into a conflict between Donna's need to guide her parents around town and Night Maiden's need to fight crime. The A-Plot (whatever it turns out to be) will probably provide evil in need of pummeling.

Reading his previous notes he sees that he also needs to lay the groundwork for more characters being present at the conclusion dinner. He thinks it would be funny if Donna grabbed another character to pose as her boyfriend, for yet another layer of confusion and lies. He decides that Donna's mother (who he names Fay) is trying to set her up with a handsome, obnoxious and boring friend of the family, Max Morgan. Chris notes the need to establish Max as a fate worse than death, to establish that Fay is trying to fix the two up, and to establish the possibility of a fake boyfriend as an excuse to duck the obligation. That might be a scene all on its own, with Max showing up with the parents in tow. Chris notes the need to establish this possibility earlier.

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THE TEASER

When you have a few "Things got worse" scenes, you've probably got enough material to craft the Teaser. The Teaser is the first scene, or scene fragment, where you make your big sales pitch for how interesting the story thread will be. Everything that you think is cool about the thread should be shown in microcosm in the Teaser.

The Teaser is not aimed at the character. It won't do any good if the character is interested in addressing your story, but the player is not. The Teaser must arouse the interest of the players, not by forcing them to be interested (by, for instance, threatening their character) but by showing them the many options that they will have to control the outcome of the story.

Trailing the Teaser in front of the other players in a way that will interest them is a challenge to even a seasoned performer. You need to quickly get across your excitement about the story, but in a way that promises the players involvement. Writing up a speech can help, if you remember that the speech is just a guideline. If, on the other hand, you just take a sheet of paper and read it as a monologue, you probably won't make anyone's heart beat faster at the prospect of further monologues to come.

> Chris decides on a phone call from the parents. He hopes to insert it at some humorous juncture... for instance in a scene where Night Maiden is fighting villains. Looking over his notes he sees several fun things that he wants to sell people on as quickly as possible: The difficulty of maintaining secret identity with the parents visiting, the long-term possibility of Donna in a slinky dress, the unpleasantness of Max, Fay's desire to see her daughter romantically attached, and the notion of having somebody fake the role of her boyfriend.

Chris writes up a speech, to remind him what he wants to cover (though he's very unlikely to get all that out without having to modify it for the responses of other players): "Donna, dear! Well, I know, I shouldn't call you on this number, but it's so hard to get you at your apartment. You keep such strange hours. I keep telling your father that there's some young man you're keeping a secret from us. No? Ah well. But Donna, wonderful news! Your father has a conference in Millennium city... a last-minute thing, you know how the company works. So we'll be coming to see you. I absolutely want to take you out to La Bergerie. I've heard such good things. It will be nice to see you in a gown again, you dress like such a tom-boy. And since you don't have a man in your life, I thought we'd invite Max Morgan. He lives right in town, and he complains that you never even try to meet with him. I remember how much he doted on you when you were both young. He would spend just hours and hours chasing you with slugs. It was so very darling. Good memories, oh yes. Don't bother picking us up, I know how busy you are. Max has offered to drive us from the airport, anyway. So, we'll all see you soon!"

WORKING FORWARD

Once you have the story thread plotted out from end to beginning, it's time to work it forward from beginning to end and fill in all the details that you'll need in order to actually help it run smoothly. At a minimum, you should write up interesting Attitudes and other abilities for the major supporting characters you intend to introduce. Look over your notes to see what sort of Abilities would help to reinforce the points you want to convey. Remember that, if you do your job right, you will not be playing these characters much. You will be handing them off to other interested players. Designing them correctly from the beginning will make it more likely that those players will work toward the ideas you've imagined.

> Chris starts designing characters. He gives Fay "Subtly hint about grandchildren", and "Assume the worst". He gives Max "Ingratiating," "Egotistical" and "Rich".

This is also the time to start writing up the Conflicts that you expect to use throughout the thread. Having these right to hand (perhaps even written on index cards) will help you to remember to introduce them at the proper times. Conflicts are absolutely essential to giving the other players a reason to get involved in your story. These are the things they can immediately start rolling (and, if you're lucky, Staking) on. And once somebody wins them, the Inspirations earned are their reason to connect back to the story in later scenes. Conflicts are the literal rules representation of the player's right to get in there and tell the story. Always make sure you declare as many as your story can comfortably support.

The Conflicts you establish in the Teaser are particularly important. If they don't attract the players' interest then you probably will not get a second chance. All of the tricks that are detailed in Chapter 6 will serve you well here. Every Conflict should, ideally, be carefully considered and perfectly matched to the players you want to involve.

The further you get from the Teaser, the more the situation is going to diverge from your original plan. So at some point you just have to stop writing up Conflicts and decide that you'll go with the flow once you see what happens.

> Chris feels strong opening with "Goal: Finish phone conversation without worrying mother," and possibly following with "Goal: Make sure Max doesn't pick up parents at airport".

"THIS CHANGES EVERYTHING!"

In working forward through the story, you should try think like the other players. They'll be thinking about how to improvise an unexpected story from the elements already present. Everything you provide will be viewed as an opportunity. Players will look, particularly, for ways that they can link your plot with another plot (either the A-Plot or their own B-Plot).

Again, you can't tell for sure how the story is going to evolve, so you can't know how players will try to link to your story. But the superhero genre has a few common plot revelations that are used to weave stories together. It's worth examining those.

- A valued character is endangered or kidnapped
- A mundane character turns out to be the alter-ego of a super-powered character
- A coincidence turns out to be conspiracy

As you consider these options, try not to invent ways to stop players from taking over your story. If they decide to twist your story elements that's a **good** thing! It means they're fully engaged helping to tell the story.

> Chris looks over his story. He notes that Fay is ripe for being kidnapped. Max looks like he might be the secret identity of a villain or an obnoxious hero. And why was Donna's father called to the city so suddenly? That's suspicious, and may mean that he has some shadowy connection to what's going on... whatever that turns out to be. He decides to write up the father, just in case, and to add some provocative abilities like "Quiet" and "Martial Arts".

It may seem to you that such huge changes in the detail surrounding your story will make it impossible to get to your conclusion. But if you've properly tracked the things you actually need, from Conclusion back to Teaser, then everything you need should already have been established. It is virtually impossible for players to invalidate what you've created. As they add to it they have to respect the facts already set out.

Often the added elements will turn a scene that was mediocre as planned into a truly great one as it plays out. A scene where Jenny Swift and Dana King vie for the affection of hunky grad student Hugh Nelson is… well, sort of plain. Now imagine Swift has discovered that King is secretly Hooded Viper, the deadly supervillain, but can't yet prove it. It might seem that the romantic conflict can't occur… but, really, how can it not? Nothing has changed about their conflicting desires. All that has changed is that the stakes have been secretly raised. The romantic set-to becomes more than an isolated encounter. It is another battlefield in the ongoing conflict between the two. The same scene can play out, with a richer subtext.

Take the time to consider how such changes can improve your story. Once you overcome the reflex to resist changes then you'll be ready to capitalize on these new opportunities.

> Chris considers how the dinner will play out if Max is a super-villain. It would be more interesting, he thinks, if the characters were secretly in conflict during the dinner. Max has developed some way to have a perfect alibi by being seen in public while his crimes are being committed. They know he's going to commit a crime across town while also being present at the dinner. The conflict will be Donna trying to figure out his trick, while he tries to pull it off right under her nose. And, of course, Donna has to deal with her parents at the same time.

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WEAVING A WEB

As you think about linking your small plot-thread into the story in various ways you'll see opportunities. If you decide that your thread works better if, say, Billy Bob is held hostage by an arch-villain you may find yourself reluctant to just sit back and hope that the other players think to kidnap him. You'll want to do some preparation on a story thread of him getting kidnapped.

Preparing your second story thread follows all the same guidelines as the first. It is doubly important that you enlist the aid of other players. You've got twice as much story that you now might try to tell, and still the same amount of power you always had.

The first benefit of working up multiple, interweaving threads is that they strongly draw players in. If a player gets interested in even one of the threads, the links to other potential story threads will help interest them in those as well.

The second benefit is that once you have two story threads in hand, you can afford to let one lapse if nobody gets excited about it. You'll still have the second thread to spend your energy on, and you won't have to face the uphill battle of trying to foster interest where it didn't immediately spark.

The part that hurts is that some portion of your effort is almost certainly going to be wasted. The more story threads you prepare, the more likely it becomes that one or more of them will never see more than a brief glimmer of screen time.

Chris likes the idea of Max as super-villain so much that he decides to work it up as a separate story thread. He envisions a conclusion in an abandoned church, built on pilings over the river itself, with bats in the rafters and holes in the floor over rushing water. The restaurant scene he envisioned as the conclusion for the "Parents Visit" thread is the final "Things get worse" scene for this thread. Chris works backward from those points, deciding what he'll need to establish to make Max a reasonable candidate for secretly being the super-villain of the week, then works forward filling in that independent story thread.

SUPPORTING YOUR A-PLOT

However, if you are interested in creating and fostering an A-plot, this type of over-preparation is often exactly what you need. Remember that, to make an A-plot sing, you'll need the cooperation and interest of many or all of the other players. Offering a player a B-plot centered on the characters they enjoy playing is a good way to get their interest. If that B-plot has clear points of attachment to the A-plot that you're trying to sell then they can regard it as a package deal. Helping you tell your A-plot will in turn help them to tell their B-plot.

Often players will come to the table with their own ideas for B-plots. You're not likely to persuade them that your idea is better. You'll have a choice between working with what they offer or trying to force them to your bidding. And, of course, forcing them into being interested just isn't possible.

Usually you'll have to discard the B-plot you figured out, and decide how to use the same points of attachment to latch on to their offering. This sounds complicated in theory but is usually simple in practice. Say you were planning to foster a romantic B-plot, then kidnap the character's girlfriend. Instead the player creates a B-plot centered on their family and the rough relationship with the character's little sister. Kidnapping the little sister probably fills all the same needs in your A-plot. And it does so in a way that draws on the preparation the other player has put in, and respects their role as co-creator of the story.

Gina decides she'd like to try to present an A-Plot. Her group tells stories about the Dark Squad, secret agents charged with ferretting out supernatural threats to national security. She wants to dig deeper into the questions of secrecy, and how much lying is justified by a noble goal.

She creates an A-Plot around a young occult researcher (Brad Pace) who learns too much. A dark cult and its unnatural servants target him for assassination. While it will seem natural (at first) for the good guys to defend him, even they will have to worry at the end about whether he can be allowed to go free, knowing what he knows.

The final conflict will work better supported by a B-Plot. Gina sets up a conclusion where one of the Dark Squad has to choose between their friendship and/or love for Brad and their duty. She leaves that open, ready to tailor it to any player who seems interested at the time.

Howie's character, Johnny Graves, has had previous difficulties concealing his activities from his younger sister. Gina preps a B-Plot of the sister possibly getting involved in the trouble.

Gina also wants to intimate some secrets within the Dark Squad organization. She prepares a thread for Jack's character, Quickdraw, that will imply that the organization knows more than it's telling about his bloody origin. Brad is on the verge of learning more, if given the chance.

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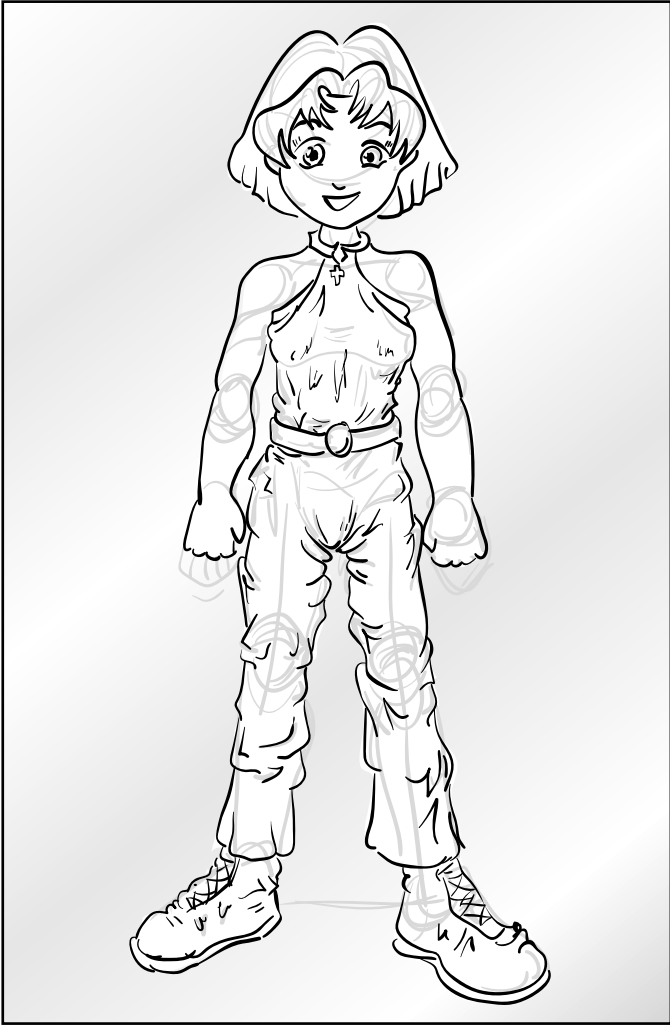
Appendices

You can spend a huge amount of time picking the perfect name for your hero's secret identity, or the perfect words to make up your mad scientists invention.

But if you don't have that sort of time, or doing it is not a happy labor of love for you, just pick and choose from pre-chosen elements out of the appendices.

MUNDANE NAMES

Pick a first name and a surname. The nearer the rows the more the names will alliterate (e.g. "Veronica Valentine")

MALE			FEMALE			SURNAME		
Adam	Alex	Alfred	Alice	Elizabeth	Evelyn	York	Olsen	Ilyan
Eddie	Eric	Arthur	Annie	Angela	Iris	Hart	Osborne	Harper
Hugh	Henry	Holland	Audrey	Yvonne	Holly	Hayes	Hunter	Hood
Nick	Norman	Noel	Nina	Nicky	Nikita	Knight	Nelson	Noble
Max	Michael	Monty	Mary	Maggie	Michelle	May	Morgan	Moon
Bruce	Peter	Brandon	Betty	Becky	Bonnie	Black	Banner	Bishop
Bill	Bobby	Brent	Paula	Peggy	Polly	Pace	Parker	Powers
Frank	Phillip	Felix	Fay	Felicia	Phyllis	Frost	Foster	Faust
Victor	Vincent	Vance	Vicky	Vanessa	Vivian	West	Watson	White
Will	Walter	Wayne	Wendy	Veronica	Wanda	Wayne	Wagner	Valentine
Dan	Dave	Dennis	Tina	Theresa	Donna	Tate	Doyle	Drake
Tim	Douglas	Terry	Dana	Diana	Dawn	Duke	Tucker	Tombs
Tom	Tony	Dale	Doris	Dorothy	Trudy	Troy	Tesla	Trueheart
Kurt	Kevin	Kirk	Kim	Kathy	Kelly	Kent	Kirby	King
Glen	Gordon	Guy	Gwen	Christine	Grace	Grey	Griffin	Queen
Carl	Calvin	Clark	Carol	Claudia	Constance	Cross	Gardner	Graves
Jack	Charlie	Chester	Jill	Jackie	Charlotte	Giles	Jenkins	Chase
John	Jimmy	Charles	Jane	Jenny	Jean	James	Jackson	Jordan
Steve	Stanley	Sidney	Sarah	Sandy	Sylvia	Stark	Stacey	Savage
Scott	Stuart	Cecil	Sue	Susan	Sharon	Snow	Santiago	Strange
Rick	Richard	Reed	Rita	Rebecca	Renee	Roy	Richards	Rasputin
Rex	Robert	Roland	Rose	Robin	Roxanne	Rush	Rogers	Rook
Lance	Leo	Theo	Lois	Lana	Lilith	Lane	Logan	Love

SCIENTIFIC GADGETS

Pick one term from each column. The higher it is in the column, the more modern the terminology. Lower in the column are more antiquated terms.

So, for example, selecting from high in the table will create modern devices like a "Proto-quantum Inertial Flux Discriminator". Selecting from low in the table will create old school gadgets like a "Micro-Hydraulic Steam Wave Bomb".

Meta-	Quantum	Resonant	Flux	Oscillator
Proto-	Nucleic	Intrinsic	Probability	Discriminator
Quasi-	Temporal	Inertial	Asymmetry	Capacitor
Hyper-	Dimensional	Harmonic	Spin	Accelerator
Inter-	Spatial	Proton	Polarity	Stabilizer
Mono-	Molecular	Vibration	Field	Scrambler
Mega-	Atomic	Gravity	Particle	Anchor
Anti-	Magnetic	Energy	Wave	Scope
Micro-	Electric	Fluid	Beam	Cannon
Super-	Hydraulic	Steam	Pulse	Bomb

MAGICAL INCANTATIONS

Pick one term from each column. Combine any which way to make up something that a sorceror can swear on (or at, or about). Using the same row will produce heavy alliteration ("By Merlin's Mystic Might!"), while mixing it up will reduce the effect ("It's more fearsome than the Gruesome Fangs of Legba!") You can also go through the second and third column of the table more than once ("I swear upon Akhenaton's Awesome Crystal Circle Divine Mystic Virtue Dance Ordeal Portal!")

Akhenaton's	Awesome	Ankh
Baldur's	Bristling	Beard
Cuchulainn's	Crystal	Circle
Durendal's	Divine	Dance
Eris's	Enticing	Exorcism
Fenris's	Fractured	Fangs
Gilgamesh's	Gruesome	Glare
Hoggoth's	Hoary	Hosts
Isis's	Immutable	Illusion
Jove's	Jewelled	Judgment
Kali's	Kindred	Killer
Legba's	Legendary	Lore
Merlin's	Mystic	Might
Nebuchadnezzar's	Nefarious	Needle
Odin's	Onerous	Ordeal
Perseus's	Princely	Portal
Quetzacoatl's	Quivering	Quills
Ra's	Raging	Rod
Sibyll's	Soothing	Shield
Titania	Trusty	Titan
Uriel's	Unstoppable	Uprising
Vishnu's	Vast	Virtue
Wakanda's	Wasted	Weaving
Yggdrasil's	Yearning	Yell
Zoroaster's	Zealous	Zombies

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