

ICONS

SUPERPOWERED ROLEPLAYING



CASINO OF CORRUPTION



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INTRODUCTION

A string of robberies, committed by a gang of gambling-themed supervillains, attracts the heroes' attention. Cardsharp, Roulette, Snake Eyes, and Poker Face are obviously powerful, but have never been seen before! Anticipating the next heist, the heroes ambush the villains. Once captured, it is revealed that until recently, all four were ordinary people—until they gambled in a secret underground casino. There, they lost everything, including their souls! They were offered a chance to “buy back their markers” by the mysterious Mr. Jack, owner of the casino, by committing crimes. On the hunt for Mr. Jack, the heroes go to the secret casino. Confronting him requires that they participate in his otherworldly games of chance, gambling their powers, convictions, and perhaps their own souls against this darkest of supernatural foes in...**The Casino of Corruption!**

HEY, PLAYERS...

If you are not planning to act as Game Master for this adventure, **read no further!** You may spoil some of the surprises in the story for yourself and your fellow players by doing so. Game Masters should familiarize themselves with the entire adventure and its contents, particularly the capabilities of the main villains, before running it.

Start off the adventure by reading the following aloud to the players:

“This is Bozz Phillips with the Action 6 News Team, bringing you breaking news about a disturbing trend: We’re getting reports that the McKenzie Company, dealers in fine jewelry and gems, is being robbed by costumed criminals—making the third such incident in this week’s sudden crime wave! The Metropolitan Bank and Trust, Gonsalvo Brothers Gold and Coin Exchange, and now McKenzie jewelers; all three targets of daring daylight robberies by a new team of super-powered thieves. Now over to Caitlin Browne, at the scene...”

“Thanks, Bozz. I’m here at McKenzie—you can see behind me the Metro PD are putting up a cordon around the building. We’ve only just arrived; Captain Burtell of the police stated that a 911 call was received from an observer on the street, who claimed to have seen four costumed individuals enter. So far, there have been no reports of anyone leaving the building. The situation here is tense. Captain Burtell is concerned that it might turn into a hostage crisis...”

CHAPTER ONE: OPENING HAND

The heroes have only minutes to respond to this crime. Ask the players where their characters are and what they are doing when they hear the news report. This is a chance for the players to explore their heroes “off duty” lives a bit, and show off their Aspects.

Players who frame their characters conveniently close to the crime scene gain a few pages worth of actions before the other heroes arrive.

- Heroes who regularly monitor the news and the police radio bands hear the report, and may have movement powers that can get them to the scene almost as fast as the police.
- A hero who regularly patrols the city might be in the neighborhood of the McKenzie Company, and spot the villains entering the building, or spot the police cars and the Action 6 News van as they pull up outside.

Players who place their characters in situations that create temporary complications for themselves should be rewarded with Determination. Suggest one of the possibilities below to any character with an appropriate Aspect:

- Heroes with secret identities might be shopping in the area (possibly accompanying a friend, family member, or other Connection). They might even be in the McKenzie building, looking at jewelry...
- A hero with a Connection to someone who might plausibly be in the building (working for or shopping at the McKenzie Company) might get an alarming text message or call from inside the crime scene.
- A hero in civilian identity could be practically anywhere; at work, on a date, having a business lunch, or coaching a Little League team, and catch part of the news report on a conveniently-located television screen.

Heroes with a friend or loved one in danger should get a point of Determination. Heroes busy with their ordinary lives when the emergency arises can also get a point of Determination by finding a way to duck out of their current commitments in order to respond.

Inside Job

The villains use the same plan here that they have used for their previous crimes: Cardsharp leads the way, using her throwing cards to destroy something and make a scene, attracting attention and frightening the workers and customers. Roulette uses her Probability Control to cause the security cameras and alarms to “unfortunately” fail. Snake Eyes rapidly disarms or knocks out any guards.

Cardsharp orders everyone to lie face down on the floor and remain still. Roulette strips the display cases, shoving all the jewelry into a black nylon gym-bag. Once the situation on the sales floor is under control, Poker Face rips open the vault, and Snake Eyes fills the remaining bags with the loot. Cardsharp and Roulette enter the vault, pulling the door closed after themselves. Inside the vault, Poker Face uses a stunt of his super-strength to Burrow through the floor, first into the basement, then into the city’s storm drain network. Once below ground, the villains split up; Cardsharp and Roulette change out of their costumes (stuffing them into the gym-bags with their shares of the loot) and exit the drain system separately, blocks away from the crime. Snake Eyes teleports from a sewer drain grating into a waiting (stolen) vehicle with his bag. Poker Face simply reverts to his human form and saunters out of the tunnels through a maintenance exit, carrying a bulky gym-bag like any workman getting off shift might carry.

Thus far, each robbery has been based on inside information: Metropolitan Bank & Trust was the bank Snake Eyes used to manage, Poker Face did business with Gonsalvo Brothers, and Roulette’s husband works at the Mckenzie Company.

The Getaway

Heroes who arrive on the scene quickly find four police cars and the Action Six news van parked in the street, forming a rough semi-circle around the entrance to the McKenzie building. Eight police officers are securing the area under the command of Captain Kevin Burtell. The driver of the news van, a TV cameraman, and reporter Caitlin Browne are directed by the officers to a safe distance across the street.

Heroes who have to extricate themselves from their normal lives before responding arrive at the scene ten minutes or so later – long enough for the villains to have completed their plans, and just in time for the first of the hostages inside the building to realize that the villains have gone. Three of the sales staff, Dolores Gonzales, Susan Wyatt, and Ronald Knapp, will herd the half-dozen customers out through the main doors.

Any hero who speaks to the escaping staff or customers can get a basic description of the four villains who committed the robbery and a description of what they each did before entering the vault and closing the door. Heroes with a positive relationship with the police who speak to Captain Burtell can get the information

that previous robberies by this crew have included a hole in the floor of the vault, leading down into the city's storm drains.

During the getaway, the villains potentially square off against one or more heroes. Refer to the write-ups at the end of this adventure for notes on their general tactics. Each villain also has one or more ways to throw the heroes off their trail:

Cardsharp attempts to evade a single hero who spots her, using Power Nullification to remove movement powers, or ranged attacks that might harm her. She uses Reflection against any attacks thrown at her, but beyond that, she simply runs. If she spots her pursuers early, and it seems as if she is going to be cornered, she drops the gym-bag and performs a stunt with her Wizardry to throw a card at it and make it invisible. No loot in her possession and no witnesses who can identify her out of costume means no arrest.

Snake Eyes flees the scene in a stolen car. He is not above rolling down the window, tossing the Skull Dice into (or *through*) the window of another vehicle, and teleporting across! This leaves his original car careening out of control down the freeway, endangering everyone nearby. He might do this several times, creating a chain of hazards in order to make good his escape!

Poker Face, if he is stopped and questioned in human form, attempts to brazen it out, denying every accusation and claiming to be an off-duty sewer worker at the end of his shift. "The gym bag? Those are my work clothes—you don't want me to open that up, the smell is bad, you know?" The problem is, Theo ironically hasn't got much of a poker face. Normally, a hero might have to test Awareness against someone else's Intellect to notice a lie, but Theo doesn't have a chance. As soon as he realizes the heroes are on to him, he transforms into Poker Face to slug it out. If more than one hero is at conversational distance, Theo takes the -4 modifier to attack multiple targets on his first panel as he grows to full size.

Roulette utilizes the terrain to her advantage. If the heroes catch up to her in the storm drains, she telekinetically pulls bricks out of the arched roof to throw at them, then uses Probability Control to retcon a roof collapse. Not only do the heroes have to get past the rubble filling the tunnel, there is be a car-sized hole in the city street above with a mini-van headed straight for it!

Outside the drains, Roulette uses a Telekinesis stunt to leap away from her pursuers, twirling like a ballerina. Then she uses Probability Control to create a distraction to keep them off her tail. Possibilities include a traffic-signal malfunction causing green lights in both directions and potential collisions, the sudden failure of the brakes on a nearby city bus, or a gas-main break that floods the area with volatile and hazardous fumes.

Given their head starts, it is unlikely any of the villains will be captured at this point, but this first skirmish should give the heroes some idea of the villains' powers and abilities.

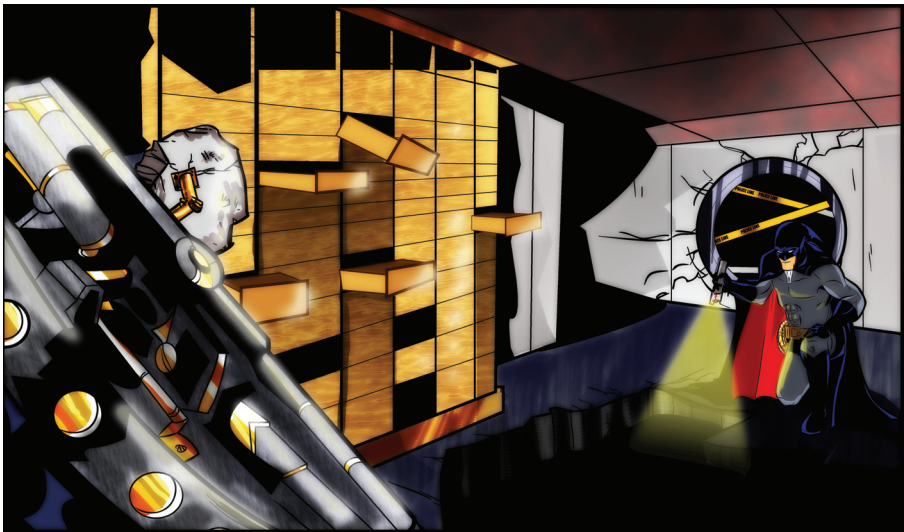
Investigation

There is no indication that the villains' crime spree will stop at three robberies, so it is likely that your players will begin to wonder about their foes' next target.

The heroes can learn a lot by checking out the reports of the previous robberies, or by visiting the scenes of those crimes.

At the Metropolitan Bank and Trust:

The bank manager, Neville Hanson, disappeared two weeks before the robbery. His assistant, Caroline Pulaski, has taken over in his absence. She is the official contact for any heroes who inquire about the robbery. The bank is still closed, since the vault has to be completely re-built. Ms. Pulaski is happy to show any heroes with positive reputations the damaged vault; its door has been ripped half-off its hinges. The locking pins, each a steel bar as big around as a soda can, are bent and mangled where they were pulled out through the armored face of the vault. "We've already had the floor replaced, but you should have seen the hole they left—eight feet across, and twenty feet deep! The vault sits on a reinforced foundation, all concrete and those re-bar things, but the hole went all the way down into the city storm drains."



Inquiries about the missing manager elicits the following. "I don't know Mr. Hanson that well... He's a very private man. He wasn't married, or dating, at least as far as I

know. When he took vacations, it was always to somewhere sunny – he'd come back sun-burned, but vacations didn't seem to relax him at all. He always seemed to be under stress, but when he disappeared, no one thought that he might have, well, you know..." Ms. Pulaski doesn't want to say that she suspects, now, that Mr. Hanson killed himself. "Officially, the police still list him as a missing person, but they say they don't suspect kidnapping; there wasn't a ransom demand or anything..."

A Moderate Success or better on a Willpower test is required to convince Ms. Pulaski to let the heroes examine Mr. Hanson's office, which has been locked since he was reported missing. Inside, among the usual papers, is a folder of travel brochures in a bottom drawer, for places like Las Vegas, Lake Tahoe, Atlantic City, and anywhere else that legal casinos might be found. A check of Mr. Hanson's computer reveals his browser history has records of visits to a number of internet gambling sites... something definitely against company policy, and indicative that Mr. Hanson suffers from a desperate addiction.

At Gonsalvo Brothers Gold and Coin Exchange:

Jorge and Hector Gonsalvo have operated the city's largest retail gold exchange for over a decade. Their storefronts are found in strip-malls and shopping centers across the city, but the robbery occurred at their main facility, located in an industrial office park. Their business has two sides; one dealing with collectible coins and gold bullion, the other with gold jewelry and reclaimed "industrial" gold. There is a smelting furnace at the central facility, where reclaimed and scrap gold is melted into small ingots which are then stored in a very modern high-tech vault.

If the heroes ask permission from the owners to inspect the damaged vault, they get it. Jorge Gonsalvo shows visitors around the facility, keeping up a steady flow of nervous chatter about the reclamation process. Hector does his best to ignore the heroes' presence, hiding out in the main office until the heroes have gone.

The vault shows the marks of forced entry, similar to the vault at the bank. There is a nearly-identical hole in the floor, leading down through the facility's basement and once more into the storm drains.

Allow heroes to test Awareness when speaking with either of the business' owners. Specialties in Investigation or Business apply. Heroes with at least a Moderate Success realize the Gonsalvo Brothers don't look too deeply into the origin of the gold they buy. They melt most of it down anyway, so they have no particular reason to worry about whether it was stolen or not...

Attempts to pressure one of the brothers into revealing the identities of the criminals they fence gold for will require Intimidation tests against Jorge's Willpower of 3 or Hector's Willpower of 4. Jorge will cave easily, and start listing names. Hector can

be intimidated into giving up the information, but will be outraged all the same. “I’m just trying to run a business here! We were the victims of a crime, remember? Why are you coming after us?”

The probably-illegal source of some of the Gonsalvo Brothers’ reclaimed gold is a potential red herring for the heroes. It’s a (pardon the expression) gold mine of information relating to low-level crime in the city, but it has nothing further to do with the adventure at hand.

CHAPTER TWO: AMBUSH!

With three successful daylight robberies under their belts, the villains will certainly strike again. The problem for the heroes is to determine where and when...

The heroes can call upon their various resources and contacts to get information about possible targets. A check of the local business news sources shows that a large quantity of cash is scheduled to come into the city. Because of the recent high-profile bank robbery, there have been runs on banks as nervous patrons withdraw their cash. The Federal Reserve is transferring several million dollars in an effort to ensure a ready supply of cash and to shore up consumer confidence in the banking system. The Guardian Armored Truck Company transports most high-value shipments in the city, and this one is no exception.

Heroes in good standing with the local business community, or who have cultivated a positive relationship with Captain Burtell of the Metro PD, can find out the route taken by the armored truck. With that information, they can formulate a plan to stake out the route and ambush the robbers.

The villains, of course, have their own means of finding out the route the armored truck will follow, it will also leave a clue behind. A hero with the Occult Specialty who visits the Guardian Armored Truck Company will certainly sense something amiss—the faint scent of brimstone in the air for those sensitive to it. This might hint to the heroes that there is something serious going on beyond just a string of robberies.

THE HEIST

The villains have developed a successful method of conducting a robbery, so they stick to what they know. They include slight variations to account for the mobile target. Roulette uses her powers to stop traffic, causing a couple of large vehicles (such as tractor-trailers or city busses) to suffer catastrophic mechanical breakdowns at an intersection the villains have picked out in advance.

As soon as the armored truck comes to a stop on the selected mark, Poker Face strikes from below, burrowing through the street and ripping open the underside of the vehicle! Snake Eyes teleports himself and Cardsharp into the rear compartment, and disables the guards. They break through the bulletproof glass viewport into the cab, and disable the driver as well.

They move quickly, and Poker Face immediately starts dumping bags of loot down through the hole he created. As soon as the guards are out of commission, Snake

Eyes and Cardsharp assist him. They have bags and packs waiting below to help them move their haul.

Hitting the Streets

Here's where the villain's plan meets the heroes: Depending on where the players have positioned their characters along the armored truck's route as they follow the target, the fight may be at close range or spread across a city block.



FOILED!

The villains have an exit strategy, in case something goes wrong during the heist. As soon as it looks as if the heroes might prevent the robbery, they fall back on their getaway plans: Roulette uses her abilities to cause any equipment, gadgets, or gear carried by the heroes to malfunction, preferably in a way that endangers nearby civilians. Poker Face exits the armored truck by bursting out through the back doors, then throws the truck at the toughest-looking hero! Cardsharp and Snake Eyes engage any heroes who are threatening their escape route. After two rounds of combat, Cardsharp makes a run for the hole in the street, attempting to exit the

fight with at least some of the loot. Poker Face burrows a new hole, and Roulette does her best to vanish into the gathering crowd of gawkers. Snake Eyes, always unpredictable, either tries to teleport away, or take a civilian hostage to use as a human shield. If the heroes have a good plan and stick to it, they will most likely prevail against at least a couple of the villains this time around.

CHAPTER THREE: LIAR'S POKER

Once at least two of the villains are incapacitated, bring on the Metro PD. Several squad cars and a SWAT van arrive on the scene, reinforcing the heroes and helping to corral any fleeing villains. Captain Burtell takes a personal interest in capturing these criminals.

Ordinarily, once villains are in custody, the heroes' job is done. In this case, however, there is still an outstanding question: What did they do with the money, gems, and gold they've already stolen? Captain Burtell wants answers, and he's willing to let the heroes assist him in questioning the prisoners.

LAWYERED UP

Cardsharp tries to prevent her compatriots from answering any questions, ordering them to shut up if any of the heroes attempts to question them. She knows the team won't be spending much time in custody: Mr. Jack will "call them home" before long.

It's not difficult for her to prevent Poker Face from telling his story, at least so long as he stays in his villain form. Roulette barely speaks English, so getting anything out of her is a challenge. Telepathy, the ability to speak Russian, or extreme patience is required. For her part, Cardsharp waits quietly until she is at the police station downtown, then she demands her one phone call. She'll call the Fishhook Casino and, within the hour, her attorney shows up. Cardsharp refuses to say anything without council present, but her call itself is a clue pointing toward the casino, if the heroes follow up on it.

The most likely source of information for the heroes is Snake Eyes. He rolls the dice to decide whether or not to answer questions. (Go ahead and roll a pair of dice for each question; it's one of the few times in a game of ICONS that you'll get to do so!) On an 8 or better, he answers a question truthfully. On a 2, he goes into a violent frenzy. On any other number, he lies, and the lies he tells will not be consistent with each other. Let the players see the rolls, and try to figure out the pattern for themselves.

When he's truthful, he explains that he gambled at the Fishhook Casino, lost everything he had, and was given a marker by the owner, Mr. Jack. When he lost the money he had been loaned, Mr. Jack called in the marker, and wanted his soul,

payable immediately. There was, however, one other possibility: Mr. Jack offered him a job, of sorts. He was granted superhuman powers, so he could get the money he needed to buy back his soul—but there was a catch; it had to be cash, or gold, or jewels, and it had to be stolen, not earned.

ESCAPE!

Cardsharp was right; Mr. Jack won't allow his catspaws to be incarcerated for long. As soon as the captured villains are alone, they vanish! Handcuffs, strait-jackets, or other restraints are left behind, but the villains and their costumes and props blink out of existence so quickly that even the video security systems at the police station show only that they were there one frame, and gone the next.

Heroes with appropriate powers (magic or psychic, for example) may be able to track the villains back to their source based on the mystical residue or emanations their vanishing act left behind. In that case, mention the impression of a faint stench of brimstone left behind in their cells.

CHAPTER FOUR: HIGH ROLLERS

Armed with the information they have learned from the captured villains, the heroes can now seek out the mysterious source of their transformations.

GOING UNDERGROUND

The Fishhook Casino is a private, underground club. No one seems to know just when it opened, or who owns it. Any hero with underworld contacts or connections can find out the Fishhook just seemed to appear one day, a few months ago. Technically a private club, the casino welcomes anyone with money to gamble, so long as they can find the place. It seems popular with a certain crowd; members of the city's wealthy elite who enjoy a certain illicit thrill to their entertainment.

The casino is located in the city's warehouse district, in what appears to be a dilapidated and disused building, most likely a former warehouse.

THE NEW PLACE IN TOWN

If your game takes place somewhere there are legal casinos, the Fishhook is instead a newly-constructed venue that seemed to go up almost overnight, on the edge of a bad part of town. Everyone in the business is speculating about the "new joint," but no one has any real information. The rumor mill can tell heroes with connections in the industry this: At the Fishhook, they aren't hiring, they aren't advertising, and they haven't made any effort to poach patrons from the established casinos in the area. It makes people wonder how the owners of the place intend to stay in business.

On The Hook

The Fishhook Casino, on the inside, is as opulent and tawdry as any casino anywhere. A pair of enormous letter J's, outlined in blinking chase-lights, hover over the main entrance. They are shaped rather like fishhooks, but that is the only "nautical" element to the décor. Raucous slot machines fill the main room, surrounding the central gaming pit. Scantily-dressed cocktail waitresses circulate with drinks, and a crowd of zombie-like patrons fill the main floor. A wide marble staircase with gold-plated nude statues on the bannisters sweeps upward at the opposite side of the casino from the entrance. At the top of the stairs are a set of

carved mahogany doors, flanked by two burly bouncers in pinstriped suits. Beyond the doors is the exclusive High Limits room, where Mr. Jack's "select customers" are permitted to play.

The dealers, waitresses, and bouncers are dressed in a retro-1940's style, almost like parodies of gangsters. All the female staff wear the same shade of bright crimson lipstick. Allow any hero who examines a member of the casino staff closely to make an Awareness test, on a Major Success or better the hero notices the staff member seems to have tiny devil-horns on his or her forehead, partially concealed by their hairstyle. Any hero with the Occult Specialty or the ability to Detect magic immediately feels something is Not Right about the Fishhook Casino, Awareness test or no. There is evil at work here.

LET THE GAMES BEGIN

While exploring the casino (presumably out of costume), heroes who play the table games or slot machines feel a powerful draw... The games have an almost mesmerizing effect.

Allow any hero who spends a little time nosing around, and who has a plausible reason to know the casino business (or who has the Business Specialty), to test Awareness. On a Moderate Success or better, the hero realizes this isn't a real casino; it's just a façade that looks like a casino. Real casinos have Count Rooms for handling money, break rooms, rest rooms, dining areas for the staff, and business offices full of office workers handling paperwork about everything from purchasing to payroll. There should be maintenance people, housekeepers, and technicians handling the details behind-the-scenes that make everything on the gaming floor run smoothly. The Fishhook has none of these; it's all front with no back, no more real than a Hollywood set.

Attempts to interact with the staff, or try to get into the High Limits room, are quickly rebuffed. Questions directed at any staff member receive a polite but negative response, followed by an offer of a drink or a suggestion for a game of chance to try. Persistent badgering of a staff member draws the attention of the bouncers, who intervene.

The crowd of players, mostly well-dressed members of the city's wealthy elite, move in a slow but constant swirl of activity between the rows of slot machines and the gaming tables. They exhibit an air of languid glamor, sipping champagne and gambling with hardly a murmur of conversation. Any hero making at least a Moderate Success on an Awareness test notices something strange about how the players are acting—they seem completely self-involved, paying attention to whatever game they are playing, and nothing else. A normal crowd would include at least some people who are socializing with one another in search of companionship,

camaraderie, or sex. These people act as if each of them is alone in the casino; nothing attracts their notice except the games.

Heroes with links to the local community recognize some of the important people among the zombie-like patrons. Any hero with a positive relationship with city government or law enforcement spots the Mayor or District Attorney. Bozz Phillips, the news anchorman, is recognizable by any hero who keeps an eye on the local TV news. Most importantly, any heroes with connections to particular wealthy or influential individuals recognize their friends among the crowd! This counts as a temporary Challenge, worth Determination to the affected heroes.

Attempts to interact with the patrons, especially celebrities or their own acquaintances, result in a disturbing discovery: those people barely recognize or acknowledge the heroes presence. They are all caught up in the mesmerizing snare of the casino.

Any hero scouting around for the villains finds no direct evidence of their presence —but a Moderate or better success on an Awareness test allows a hero to notice that the dealers at the Fishhook Casino are uniformed in a style very similar to Cardsharp's costume.

CASINO DENIZENS

Treat the gamblers as Bystanders (**ICONS**, p. 116), the various dealers as Cultists (**ICONS**, p. 116), and use the following for the bouncers.

DEMON BOUNCERS

PROWESS 5 • COORDINATION 5 • STRENGTH 6

INTELLECT 3 • AWARENESS 3 • WILLPOWER 2

STAMINA 8

SPECIALTIES: Wrestling

POWERS: Invulnerability 3

The Fishhook Casino bounders are hellish parodies of Mafiosi; thuggish brutes in ill-fitting pinstriped suits, with slicked-back hair that barely conceals tiny horns on their foreheads.

CHAPTER FIVE: JACKS OR BETTER

By now, the heroes have drawn the attention of Mr. Jack himself. He strolls down the stairs from the High Stakes room, making a grand entrance, and introduces himself to the heroes. He's already been informed by the villains that local superheroes have gotten involved. Even without his arcane sources of knowledge, he can put two-and-two together when strangers show up at this place asking questions. He singles out the heroes, glancing over the crowd and zeroing in on them at once.

After a brief bit of banter, during which he reveals nothing and implies a great deal, Mr. Jack offers a “sporting proposition:” The heroes engage him in a little game of chance, playing for the souls of their celebrity friends (and perhaps the souls of the villains, if the heroes have realized they aren't entirely villainous). If the heroes accept, they're whisked into the High Stakes Room. If they decline, they're whisked out onto the street. In either case, the effect is all but instantaneous, a use of Mr. Jack's Wizardry and Time Control powers. The open use of abilities inside the casino signals that from this point onward, the kid gloves are off; Mr. Jack is no longer interested in keeping up a façade of normalcy.

THE HIGH STAKES ROOM

The private High Stakes Room at the Fishhook Casino is decorated in a more classical yet even-more-overwrought style than the rest of the property. The woodwork and furnishings are 17th Century Italian, and the floor gleaming marble. The walls and ceilings are painted with Renaissance frescoes—the ceiling is a reproduction of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, albeit with certain impious modifications. Enormous statues, all tasteful Grecian nudes, flank the heavy mahogany doors.

There are slot machines here, of course, but the primary draw of this room are the high limit tables – Blackjack, Baccarat, Roulette, Chemin-de-Fer, and Craps to the right of the entrance door, and high stakes Poker to the left. One poker table is separated from the others behind a crimson velvet rope.

Inside the High Stakes Room the dealers, both male and female, are more attractive, the cocktail servers more scandalously dressed, and the pinstripe-suited bouncers even more muscular. There are four of these obviously-demonic

bouncers, two flanking the entrance doors, and one each on either side of the velvet rope surrounding the exclusive private poker table.

The heroes will see local celebrities, members of the city’s “jet set,” and any influential friends they noticed earlier gathered around the High Limit games. In here, their faces seem pale and haggard. Their eyes shine with a feverish light, but they seem to be drained—their vitality and their hope for the future siphoned away.

The Final Table

With a flourish, Mr. Jack opens the velvet rope barrier, and seats himself at the private table. “Ladies and gentlemen, I won’t insult your ‘virtue’ by offering to play for the same stakes as my other guests. Your souls are, undoubtedly, off the market.” Mr. Jack has a more interesting game in mind—he intends to offer the heroes a chance to win back the souls of those he’s already hooked, but they will have to risk something they might consider even more precious.

The final gamble will be no-limit poker. Mr. Jack will have Cardsharp sit down as the dealer, and provide her with a fresh deck of cards, ice cold and razor edged. Roulette, Snake Eyes, and Poker Face will be directed to seats alternating with those taken by the heroes.

As soon as they sit down, each participant in the game finds a pile of tokens has suddenly come into being in front of them. The tokens are all different, symbolic of that person’s powers, identity, and beliefs. It is up to the GM to define what tokens are provided for the heroes, but keep in mind that Mr. Jack runs the show here, and he will create tokens that somehow “cheapen” their references, if at all possible. For example; a



character with Flight might find a set of brass pilot's wings or a single pigeon feather among his tokens. Someone with ice powers might find a thermometer, someone who controls light might find a 40-watt bulb. Heroes with gadget-based powers will find cheap toy versions of their gear. A cop might have a tin sheriff's badge, a photographer a toy camera, and so on. Tokens symbolic of beliefs are a bit harder to come up with; someone who values justice might have a tiny set of scales, a patriotic hero might have a toy flag, etc. Each hero should have between two and four tokens, each one associated with a Power or Quality.

Roulette's tokens are a toy top (representing her spiraling Telekinesis), a Russian 10-kopeck coin (representing her Probability Control), and a small round bell on a cat-collar (representing her Danger Sense). Poker Face has only a chunk of granite (representing his Strength), and a small white replica of a frowning theatrical mask (symbolizing his emotionless transformation). When Snake Eyes sits down, no tokens appear—his bone dice represent both his Teleportation and his Blast attack powers. "I'm not much of a card player, anyway." He'll quip, rolling them onto the table. Alone among the villains, he seems unconcerned about sitting in on this game.

Mr. Jack places a stack of thirteen red-tinged gold coins on the green felt in front of him. "If wishes were fishes," he murmurs with a chuckle, riffling through the stack with a trill of atonal clinks.

THE TURN OF AN UNFRIENDLY CARD

Mr. Jack explains his little game. "Ladies and gentlemen, the game is no-limit Texas Hold-'Em. If you can win these wishes from me, you can use them to satisfy your heart's desires. If you want to waste them reclaiming the souls of your friends over there..." He languidly waves at the zombie-like leading lights of the city. "Well, that's your affair; I won't stop you. I am a great believer in free will, as you well know."

Poker is a game of skill as much as chance. Both Intellect and Awareness play a part; Intellect to judge and calculate a player's chances, and Awareness for reading an opponent.

Each round is simulated by a set of die rolls. Everyone in the game antes a token of their choice, forming a pot in the center of the table, beneath Cardsharp's watchful eye. Have each hero describe the sort of strategy they wish to use, then Test Intellect combined with Awareness (**ICONS**, p. 57).. The villains at the table don't roll; just calculate their Intellects combined with their Awareness, modified by any Specialties that apply (see below). The totals for all participants are compared, and the highest total wins the round, raking in all the tokens. If the highest total is a Major Success against anyone, the hand was so masterfully played that those players were bluffed into betting (and losing) an additional token.

A hero (or villain) might have Specialties that can be applied to the Test, depending upon the character's specific background and their poker strategy. A Specialty in Business or Computers implies ability to accurately calculate odds. Psychiatry can give an edge in detecting an opponent's tells. Sleight of Hand applies if a hero decides to cheat, or tries to detect Cardsharp cheating. Finally the Occult Specialty is very useful to someone attempting to "read" Mr. Jack. Allow and encourage players to be creative in the application of their heroes' Specialties.

The first time a hero loses a token, he or she feels a terrible wrenching deep inside. Instantly, the hero will become aware of the true meaning of the token that was lost: Each is a Power or Quality, and when they are lost, they can no longer be used. Likewise, anyone winning a group of tokens feels an intoxicating rush of energy, as new and possibly confusing abilities are bestowed upon them.

Anyone who loses their entire "bank" of tokens is out of the game—unless, of course, they wish to accept the same deal from Mr. Jack the villains all took. Heroes who do so will find that their lost traits instantly return, along with a new Challenge: "In Debt to Mr. Jack".

Showdown

Initially, the game isn't rigged – but Mr. Jack holds a significant advantage. The second time a hero scores a Major Success at the table, Mr. Jack signals Cardsharp to begin cheating; she uses her Sleight of Hand expertise to give Mr. Jack a +2 bonus or to give a -2 penalty to a hero who is "all in" on a round.

Sooner or later, it will come to a fight—a fight the heroes are likely to lose! Even if they have managed to gain some powers from the villains, chances are they've lost more to Mr. Jack. The fight can start for any of several reasons. Perhaps one of the heroes realizes they are losing the poker game, and are facing the complete loss of their powers. Mr. Jack can't help but gloat a bit as he rakes in the tokens, and he's absolutely willing to risk taunting the heroes into a fight they can't win. Alternatively, if the heroes refuse to be provoked, one of the villains comes to a similar conclusion; Mr. Jack is taking away the only things they have left, the powers they sold their souls for. Poker Face is the most likely to act out of desperation, but Snake Eyes is the most volatile; one or the other will crack under the pressure, and desperately attack the hero who has the biggest "bank".

The fight won't last long—only long enough for every character to get a chance to use the powers they have won, and to miss the powers they have lost. If a hero starts the fight, the Demon Bouncers join in immediately. If a villain starts the fight, the Bouncers hang back for a round or two, until Mr. Jack gestures for them to get involved. Before any hero is reduced to 0 Stamina, Mr. Jack shouts "Enough!" and transforms! His massive, red-tinged musculature and great dark wings fill the High Stakes Room, scraping the Sistine Chapel ceiling. The poker table goes flying, tokens scatter across the carpeted floor—then vanish!

The heroes may continue to fight, but against Mr. Jack's fearsome demonic form, they have little chance of success in a physical battle.

TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES

The heroes best chance to overcome Mr. Jack is to trick him, using the wishes they won during the poker game. Heroes can use the wishes they possess to force Mr. Jack to swear something, but they should be very careful; he is under no obligation to free the souls of anyone in his power, and won't do so unless a wish is used: one wish per soul. Especially dangerous is a wish used to make Mr. Jack "leave this place" or "never come to Earth again." Such a wish will be honored immediately if Mr. Jack still has souls in his possession—and he'll vanish laughing with his prizes!

The riskiest method for the heroes is to use their very limited supply of wishes to constrain Mr. Jack's actions, then verbal trickery to get what they want from him. He is the Lord of Lies, but he prides himself on always including a modicum of truth in his deceptions. Further, he is bound by his own oaths: If he swears to do (or not do) something, he can't go back on the deal, no matter what. Moreover, Jack *can* be bluffed; he can't read minds or control the mind of anyone who hasn't willingly lost to him.

Play Mr. Jack as supremely over-confident in this scene; he is a master of contract negotiations, and certain that he is smarter than the heroes. That may become his downfall. He won't make foolish mistakes, but he also won't think too far ahead in his verbal fencing with the heroes; he doesn't respect them enough for that. He wants to keep control of the city's leading citizens, and he also wants to continue snaring ordinary people and turning them into chaos-creating supervillains. Still, Mr. Jack always takes the long view: If the heroes get the upper hand, he will abandon his current scheme without remorse. While he may be willing to admit that he's been beaten, he is certainly a sore loser. Unless the heroes have protected themselves via the use of verbal logic or wishes, he will make some sort of angry final attack before vanishing in a cloud of brimstone stench, or warn the heroes to look over their shoulders because, one day, he'll be back...

EPILOGUE

With the defeat of Mr. Jack, the Fishhook Casino disappears as well. The entire place was created and maintained by Jack's power. The heroes, the other villains, and the zombie-like casino patrons are left standing in a dank and dusty warehouse. Any power losses, gains, or swaps are undone as well—they were all effects of Mr. Jack's Transformation Ray power, and thus no longer valid. In fact, the powers granted to Mr. Jack's villains are gone as well, as they soon discover.

It's up to the heroes whether the former villains should be returned to custody or not. They are technically escaped fugitives, and guilty of three robberies and one attempted robbery, but the players might view the "big-picture" events surrounding their crimes as extenuating circumstances, and allow them to go free. In the event that the heroes don't immediately try to re-capture them, Cardsharp takes advantage of the moment and orders the others to scatter! If the heroes pursue, the villains' attempts to use their powers to cover their escape prove fruitless, revealing their abilities vanished along with Mr. Jack.

The casino patrons begin to blink and awaken from their stupor—and most feel immediate shame and embarrassment at being caught in such a situation. They all remember the drive or desire that first led them to the Fishhook Casino, even if they are a bit hazy about exactly what happened once they entered.

EXTENDING THE ADVENTURE

Cardsharp, Roulette, Snake Eyes, and Poker Face might return in a future adventure. Their initial empowerment at the hands of Mr. Jack left a latent mark upon their psychic and genetic structures. As time passes, each of them could slowly regain powers similar to those bestowed by Mr. Jack. What they might do with them is up to you...

Mr. Jack might make a future appearance as well, to "bedevil" the heroes again. The casino motif of his initial appearance was simply a method of attracting people whom he wished to "hook." His next attempt might be to appear as a self-help guru, a motivational speaker, or any situation in which he can easily dupe vulnerable people into compromising their beliefs for personal gain. His true appearance (monstrous as it is) won't change, but his outward seeming will suit his assumed identity. Self-help guru Harry Smoke appears healthy, tanned, and dressed in eco-friendly tie-dyed shirts and Birkenstocks. Motivational speaker Byron DeVille, on the other hand, is charming, gray-haired, immaculately dressed in a three-piece suit, and wears a gold Rolex.

APPENDIX: CASINO LINGO

Casinos are a world apart; places where (people hope) what happens in the casino stays in the casino. That illusion of separation is maintained, in part, by the use of special jargon and slang terms. Here are a few pieces of casino slang to pepper the speech of the NPCs in this adventure:

All In: A term used to indicate that someone has wagered his or her entire bankroll on a single event of chance, such as a single hand of cards or a single throw of the dice.

Cage: The cashiering area of a casino, where the patrons can go to exchange money for casino checks, and vice-versa.

Checks: In a casino, gamblers play with little round pieces of clay and plastic instead of cash – what other people call “poker chips.” Casino employees and frequent players call them “checks.”

Comp: Short for ‘compensation’, comps are freebies and other benefits given to players who spend a lot of time and money in the casino. The word can also be used as a verb; to comp someone something is to give it to them for free.

Dealer: Any casino employee who runs a table game—including Craps and Roulette games, even though there are no cards to “deal.”

Flea: A player who spends very little money in the casino. Sometimes also used to refer to an annoying player. Also see **Whale**.

High Roller: A player who wagers a lot of money in a casino. It doesn’t necessarily have to be on a dice game. See **Whale**.

Pit: A pit is a cluster of table games. A “pit boss” is a supervisor in charge of the dealers within a table games Pit.

Pot: In a Poker game, the pot is the accumulated wagers and raises of all the players. Generally, the winning hand takes the whole pot.

Push: Any wager which neither wins nor loses is referred to as a “push.” A pair of wagers which mutually cancel one another out can also sometimes be referred to as a “push.”

Tell: Any mannerism, reaction, or sign of emotion that betrays whether or not a gambler has a good hand can be referred to as a “tell.” Poker players, in particular, learn to read one another’s tells in order to detect whether someone is bluffing or not.

Whale: A player with a big bankroll, or one who spends a lot of money in the casino. Whales are cultivated by casino hosts, and encouraged to stay, play more, and come back often. Also see **Flea**.

CARDSHARP

| | |
|--------------|---|
| PROWESS | 5 |
| COORDINATION | 8 |
| STRENGTH | 4 |
| INTELLECT | 4 |
| AWARENESS | 5 |
| WILLPOWER | 5 |
| STAMINA | 9 |

Specialties

Acrobatics
Power (Blast)
Sleight of Hand Expert

Powers

Blast Device 6 (Shooting): Deadly razor-edged throwing-cards

Wizardry 5 (Cosmic Power – Awareness): Card effects:

Absorption: “Catching” an attack in a card, then throwing it at a target.

Power Nullification: Powered-up card that “cuts” a targets power.

Qualities

Catchphrase: "Dealer's choice!"

Identity: Blackjack Dealer turned career criminal

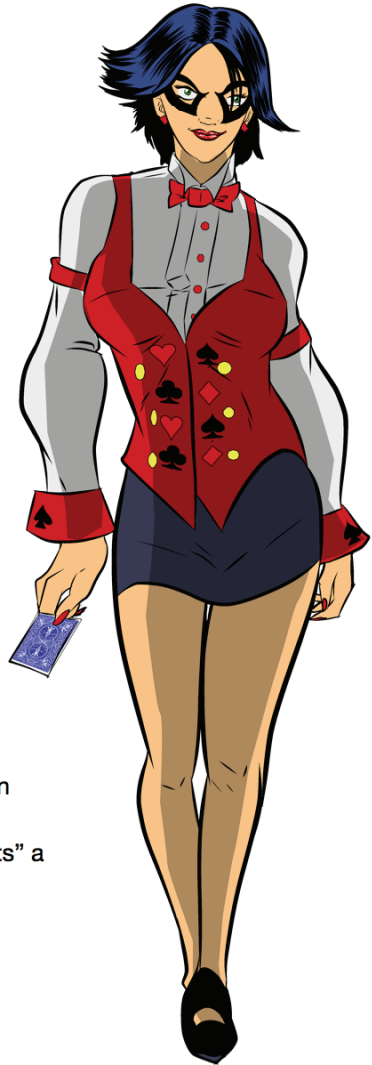
Challenges

Personal: Won't harm a woman

Social: Vanity (easily swayed by flattery)

Background

Belinda Bernardi is the only member of Mr. Jack's team of villains who was not a patron of the Fishhook Casino—she applied for a job as a blackjack dealer there. Once, Belinda worked in Vegas, honing her card-handling skills. Then she decided to help rob the casino she worked at. It didn't turn out well. After five years in



prison, Belinda found herself blacklisted in the casino industry. It was some sort of miracle, she thought, that the Fishhook Casino was willing to hire her. That hasn't turned out well, either.

Cardsharp can turn any deck of cards she touches into a deadly weapon, but if the cards are knocked from her grasp, her powers are severely curtailed, at least until she can get her hands on another deck. Her Wizardry power represents the ability to add extra effectiveness to cards before she uses them. She can power-up a card to nullify a particular power of a target she hits with it. She can "catch" an incoming attack by holding a card up in front of it, and absorbing the attack into the card. On her next panel, she can throw the card at a target, delivering the absorbed attack. With stunts, Cardsharp can attach virtually any power to a card; Power Theft is a favorite, blending her Nullification and Absorption abilities, but Belinda has also tried Alteration Ray (Invisibility) to make objects invisible, and the Images version of Illusion to cause cards to appear to be something else entirely. She might also Bind targets by pinning their clothing or costumes to a wall with thrown cards, or use Fast Attack by riffling off a number of cards at the same time.

Years of tolerating the sexist comments of drunken blackjack players have made Belinda sympathetic toward other women, and cynical toward most men. Cardsharp avoids harming women; but she is perfectly willing to disorient, confuse, or restrain a woman who is causing her grief.

ROULETTE

| | |
|--------------|----|
| PROWESS | 6 |
| COORDINATION | 3 |
| STRENGTH | 5 |
| INTELLECT | 6 |
| AWARENESS | 7 |
| WILLPOWER | 7 |
| STAMINA | 12 |

Specialties

Power (Precognition)
Power (Telekinesis)
Stealth

Powers

Danger Sense 8
Telekinesis 5
Defending
Probability Control 5 (Bad Luck)

Qualities

Epithet: Hard luck woman
Motivation: "Now my bad luck belongs to you!"

Challenges

Personal: Fear of living in poverty
Social: Speaks haltingly in English, with a thick Russian accent

Background

Alina Lebedeva was born in Russia, and dreamed of being a ballet dancer. Unsuccessful in her ambitions, she became despondent, and decided to make a change in her life. She contacted a "placement agency" in Moscow and emigrated to the U.S. as an internet "mail-order bride," hoping to marry a rich American.

Unfortunately, her husband Ron was not the wealthy and handsome man he had pretended to be online. He didn't own a diamond mine, he worked in a jewelry store; he wasn't 6'2" with six-pack abs, he was 5'6" and built more like a keg. Alina's dreams had once again been dashed. Desperate to change her fortune, she



found her way to the Fishhook Casino, and gambled everything she had on a single spin of the roulette wheel.

Roulette's telekinetic power mimics the spinning of a roulette wheel; it is always composed of circular motions. In defense, Alina twirls on her toes like a ballet dancer; attacks and projectiles are swept aside by her power. When she telekinetically moves or throws objects, it is always along a curved path. Because of her Danger Sense, Alina is usually a step ahead of any opponents, and difficult to hit in a fight. If necessary, she can use a Stunt to combine her telekinesis and her dancer's leg muscles to make a balletic Leap to anywhere within visual range. Alina generally reserves her Probability Control to retcon devices, weapons, or vehicles malfunctioning. She might also use it to retcon a weak pillar collapsing a ceiling or a faulty gas-main springing a leak; creating temporary Challenges for any heroes in the area to distract them and cover her escape.

SNAKE EYES

| | |
|--------------|---|
| PROWESS | 8 |
| COORDINATION | 5 |
| STRENGTH | 4 |
| INTELLECT | 5 |
| AWARENESS | 4 |
| WILLPOWER | 3 |
| STAMINA | 7 |

Specialties

Acrobatics Expert
Martial Arts

Powers

Blast Device 3 (Shooting): Skull Dice thrown as a weapon

Fast Attack Device 6

Teleportation Device 4: Teleports to where the Skull Dice land when thrown

Qualities

Catchphrase: "Let's roll the bones!"

Identity: Gambling addict

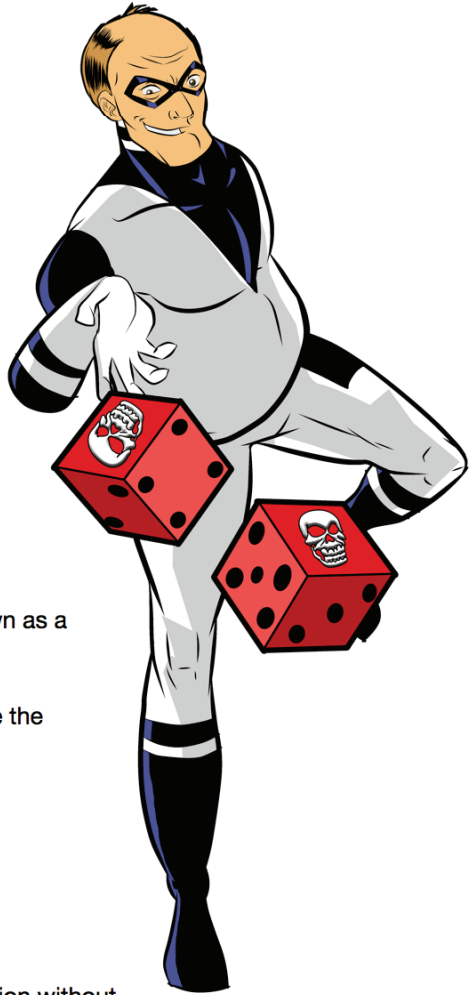
Challenges

Weakness: Indecisive - can't make a decision without rolling the Skull Dice

Weakness: Teleportation limited to locations the Skull Dice can reach - not through solid barriers

Background

Neville Hanson was an ordinary man, a branch manager for a local bank who fought middle-age spread by practicing karate. But Neville had a secret vice: gambling. Neville's passion for craps led him to the Fishhook Casino, and the clutches of Mr. Jack. When Neville lost everything he had to lose, Mr. Jack offered him a marker for his soul. When he lost even that, Neville was given one last gamble—a chance to "buy back" his soul committing crimes as the villain Snake Eyes!



The cursed dice Mr. Jack gave to Neville are made of bone—probably human—and marked with skulls in place of the 1 pips. When thrown, they are deadly weapons which teleport back to his hand after striking; alternately, they can magically carry Snake Eyes to the spot where they land, returning to his fist as he appears. With three attacks per panel, Snake Eyes can throw a die at two separate targets, and still make a melee attack.

The Challenge limiting his teleportation means he cannot teleport through barriers he can't break with his Blast attack, and includes the fact that he has to use both dice together to teleport. Any attacks he makes in the same panel he teleports must therefore be melee attacks.

As Snake Eyes, Neville is increasingly erratic. The stress of losing his soul and becoming Mr. Jack's slave is causing him to act irrationally. He has developed the nervous habit of rolling the Skull Dice in order to make decisions—and when he rolls snake eyes, his decision is always to go for the *kill!*

POKER FACE

| | |
|--------------|----|
| PROWESS | 6 |
| COORDINATION | 6 |
| STRENGTH | 7 |
| INTELLECT | 3 |
| AWARENESS | 5 |
| WILLPOWER | 6 |
| STAMINA | 13 |

Specialties

Mental Resistance
Wrestling Master

Powers

Density 5
Growth 2

Qualities

Epithet: Faceless Giant
Slow but solid

Challenges

Lousy liar
Weakness: Cannot speak or show emotion when Growth & Density are activated
Weakness: In human form all Abilities are their normal level or 5, whichever is less.

Background

Theo Butler had always been a lousy Poker player. He just couldn't keep the truth off his face. Regular losses at the table meant that he often had to look to...irregular...sources of income. Theo became a petty criminal, doing whatever it took to support his gambling habit.

Then, it all changed; Theo actually won, for once. He had gambled at a new place, the Fishhook Casino, where things were supposed to be a little special. He wound up losing all his cash, but winning one of the owner's special chips—a chip that was supposed to be worth an actual, just-like-from-a-genie-in-a-bottle wish! Theo saw an opportunity, and took it; he was a good player, he could beat any poker player



alive, if only he had a decent poker face... Theo learned a hard lesson that day; be careful what you wish for. His wish was more like a curse. He was now a living statue, faceless, silent, and completely under the thumb of the mysterious Mr. Jack.

Theo spends most of his time in his villain form; huge, faceless, and silent. He seldom transforms back into Theo Butler—maybe he is slowly forgetting how, or maybe it's just that he can't bear to look himself in the face any more... In combat, Poker Face moves in close to wrestle opponents into submission. He sometimes utilizes stunts related to his superhuman strength, size, and density, such as Burrowing through barriers or punching the ground to create a shockwave, but Theo isn't very creative on his own.

MR. JACK

PROWESS 6
COORDINATION 6
STRENGTH 6
INTELLECT 8
AWARENESS 8
WILLPOWER 10

STAMINA 16

Specialties

Occult Mastery
Business Mastery

Powers

Emotion Detection 6
Invulnerability 5
Time Control 10
 Freeze Time (Paralysis)
 Suspended Animation
Transformation Ray 9
Wizardry 10 (Magic—Willpower)
 Elemental Control (Darkness)
 Extra Body Parts (Wings, Tail)

Qualities

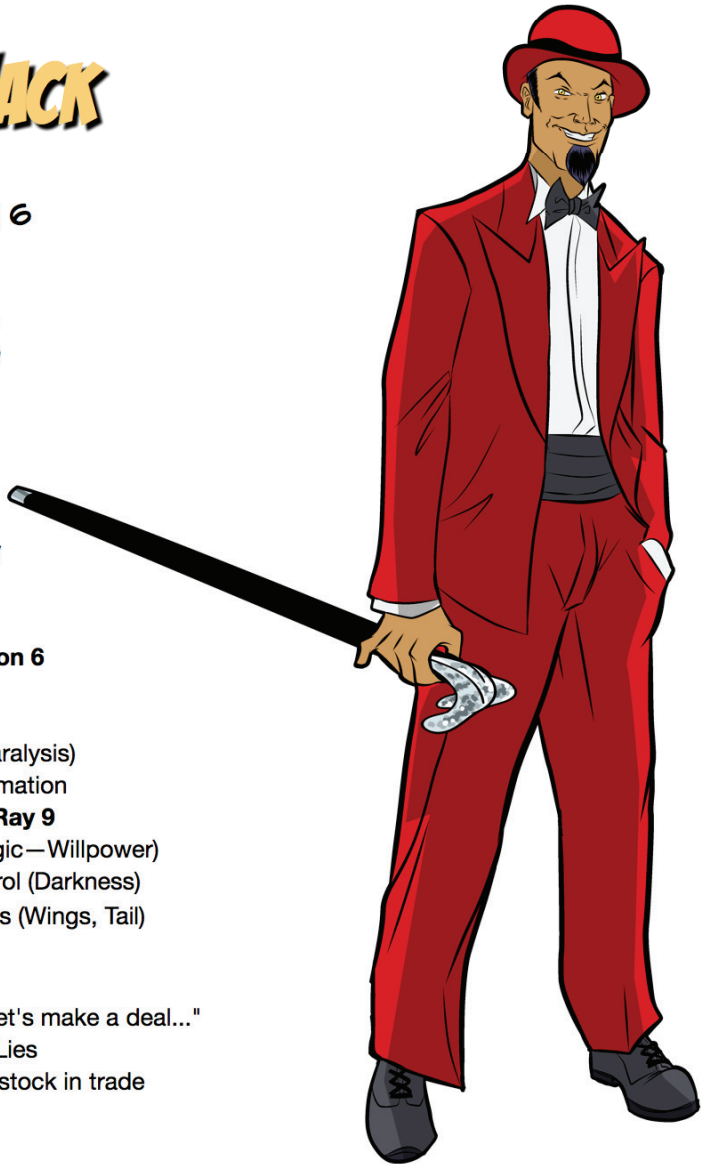
Catchphrase: "Let's make a deal..."
Identity: Lord of Lies
Temptation is his stock in trade

Challenges

Enemy: All that is Holy
Weakness: Bound by his own oaths

Background

Is Mr. Jack the Devil himself, or just a powerful cosmic entity that gets its kicks being mistaken for Lucifer? That is for you, the GM, to decide for your game. He peppers his speech and manner with obscure references to the Adversary, but it might all be an act, in the end.



An example of this is his answer to anyone who asks about the peculiar name of his establishment. “Both sides of this eternal struggle can be ‘fishers of men,’ can’t they? The other side fishes by casting nets, gathering people indiscriminately—but I prefer to get them by hook or by crook. I catch a few—a select few—but once Old Jack’s hook is in them, they *don’t* get away.” His current pseudonym, “Mr. Jack,” derives from the same source as the casino’s name. Card players have referred to Jacks as “fishhooks” because of the shape of the letter, for almost as long as playing cards have been around.

Mr. Jack is cosmically powerful, and as such is more of a plot device than an opponent. Direct confrontations, particularly on his “home turf” are inadvisable. Heroes need cleverness—and a fair amount of Determination—to beat the Devil at his own game

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