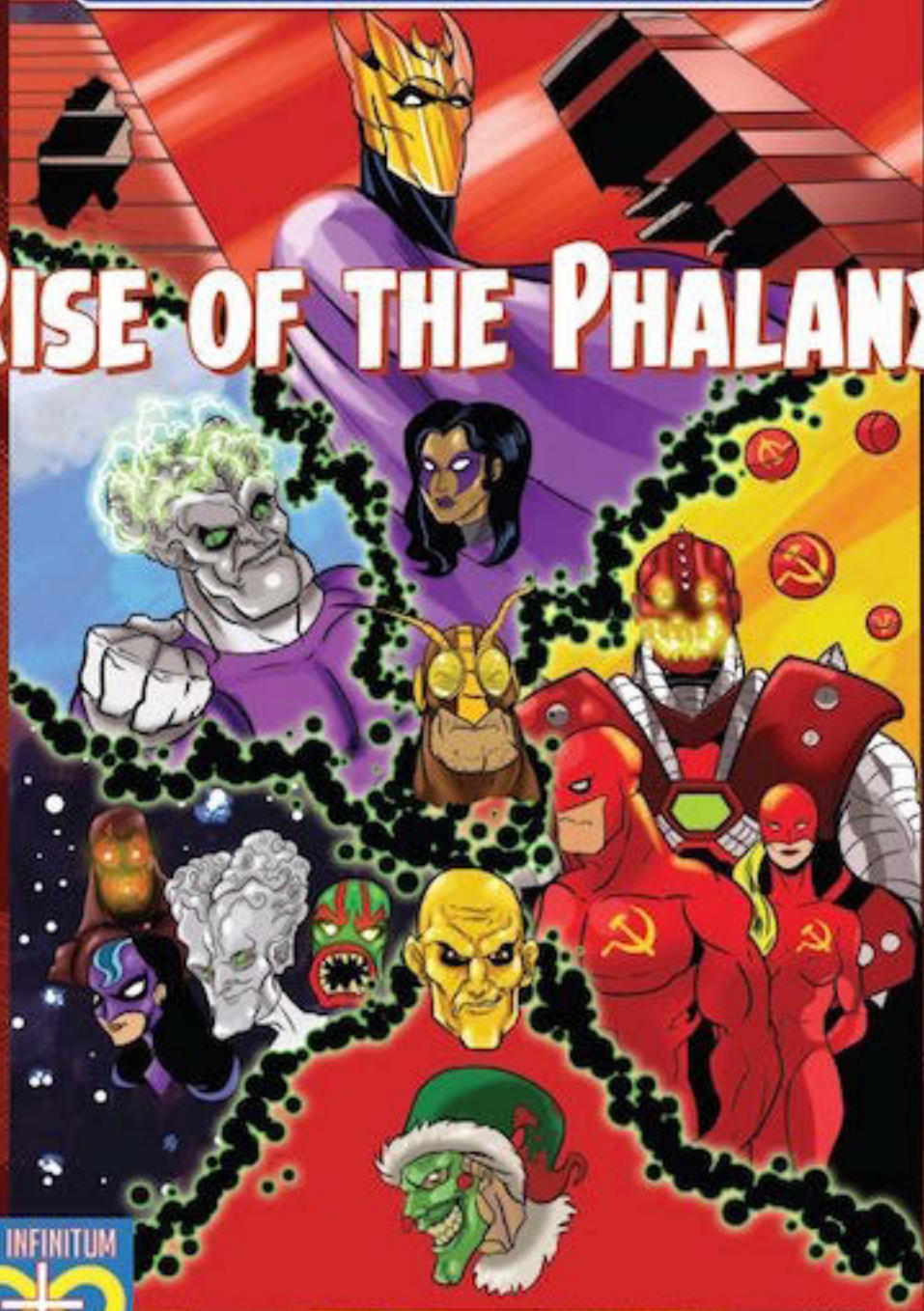


Giant-Size

ICONS

SUPERPOWERED ROLEPLAYING

RISE OF THE PHALANX



AD INFINITUM
ADVENTURES

Dan Houser

RISE OF THE PHALANX

An Epic Adventure Series
for ICONS Superpowered
Roleplaying



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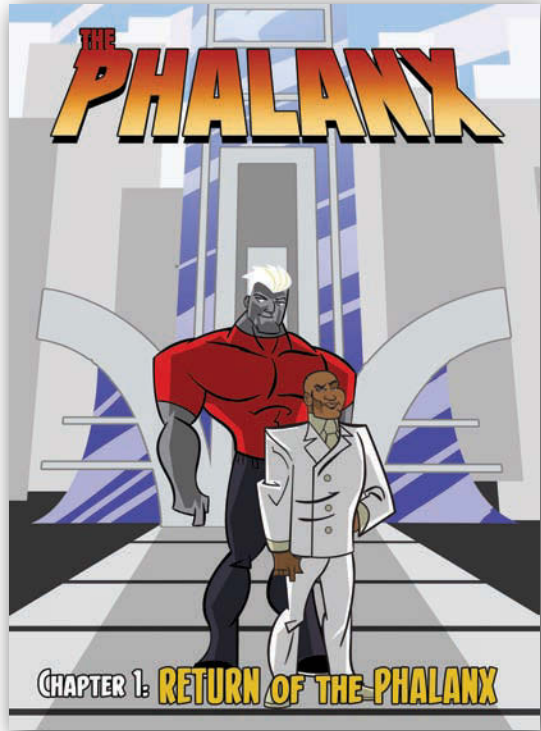
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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the first **Giant-Size Icons** adventure, **Rise of the Phalanx!** This series of five adventures was first published as individual electronic downloads for use with **ICONS Superpowered Roleplaying**, now collected for the first time as a single “giant-size” adventure series!

Your heroes start out the series as a newly formed team of heroes thrust into major events happening in the world. They become the premier heroes of Victory City, inheriting the mantle of the Phalanx. The five adventure issues serve as both an introduction to how **ICONS** is played and provide a ready-made complete series for your heroes.



While you can run any of all of the adventures in **Rise of the Phalanx** as stand-alone stories, they work best as a series, building upon the events and characters of each prior adventure towards the final confrontation with Reign, the villainous mastermind behind the current threat to Victory City and the world and the disappearance of the heroes’ predecessors, the original Phalanx.

Rise of the Phalanx is designed for a team of four to six **ICONS** heroes created using the standard methods given in the **Assembled Edition** of the rules. You’ll find suggestions throughout the text for modifying things to suit different groups of heroes.

RISE OF THE PHALANX OVERVIEW

The following is a general overview of the five issues of **Rise of the Phalanx** and what may happen in the story.



Issue #1 - Flight of the Nova-1: The alien Wrack and his villainous cronies seize the experimental space shuttle *Nova-7*, to take control of its potentiality sling drive.

Wrack was brought to Earth along with his fellow Metaskulks when the drive was first tested. The Metaskulks begin infiltrating human society in Victory City, while Wrack prepares to deliver the drive to the man who hired him, the mysterious Reign.

The heroes rescue the astronauts and return the *Nova-7* to Earth. Upon their return, they're lauded as heroes, and Lucian King decides they should represent Victory City as the new incarnation of the hero team called the Phalanx.

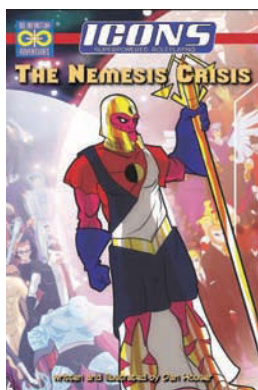


Issue #2 - Cold War Conundrum: Wrack is imprisoned, and Lucian King introduces the team to their new headquarters, the Phalanx Citadel. They are asked to assist with a matter of international importance, watching over the disposal of nuclear warheads through a war-ravaged nation.

Their escort takes a turn for the worse as one of the warheads is teleported away and the convoy ambushed.

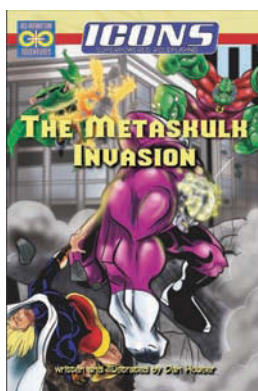
This leads the heroes on a worldwide chase after the criminal mastermind responsible, a Cold War-Era villain known as Arsenal. Arsenal's plan is to create a massive teleportation platform in one of the abandoned Soviet Science Cities, to send a nuclear warhead to Victory City, and wipe it off of the map!

Their worldwide hunt brings the heroes to Arsenal, who informs them that Reign contacted him to request the use of his teleportation platform, but he denied him, stating that if Reign was so powerful, he'd figure it out on his own. The heroes return to Victory City, more popular than ever as international heroes.



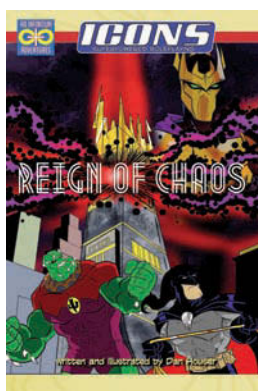
their predecessors' fate.

Special Annual - The Nemesis Crisis: This optional adventure explains the disappearance of iconic heroes from Victory City. They, and the new Phalanx are taken into the heart of Geistspace to the planetoid Equinox to face judgment by the Cosmic Justicar and answer charges against the planet Earth. The heroes overcome the villains of their world, in addition to thwarting the plans of Reign. They learn more about Reign's powers and motivation, and that he's searching for a way out of Geistspace and back to Earth. At the end of the adventure, the denizens of Equinox give the heroes a gift: a magical bracer belonging to the Queen of Hearts, leader of the original Phalanx, and a clue to



Issue #3 - The Metaskulk Invasion: The heroes are celebrities at the height of their popularity, but a hostage crisis involving one of the team's old enemies begins a campaign of bad press that coincides with an invasion of shapeshifting aliens, the Metaskulks.

Wrack has led the invasion from behind bars, and his true plan—empowering himself and conquering the Metaskulk home-world—begins taking shape. The heroes contend with the Metaskulk invasion and Wrack, now known as the Ultra-Skulk, not knowing that the invasion is merely cover for Reign's return to Earth.



Issue #4 - Reign of Chaos: Reign returns to Earth with an other-dimensional army and it is up to the heroes to led the resistance against him, while working to find out more about the mysterious mastermind's origins and weaknesses. They learn the fate of the original Phalanx and how they overcame Reign, allowing the heroes to make a daring raid into the super-villain's stronghold to turn his own resources against him. The fate of the world hangs in the balance!

FLIGHT OF THE NOVA-1



PROLOGUE: THE CRIMSON CRYSTAL CAPER!



Victory City is bustling with activity during the Lake Days celebration, with rides, games, balloons and a midway set up in Grand Arbor Park. Today marks the annual celebration of the cleaning of Lake Gruenwald after a massive meteor storm threatened the city but was defeated by its team of greatest heroes, the long-lost Phalanx. Music and laughter fills the air, along with the sumptuous scent of open-air cooking and fair-foods frying all around.

Each of the heroes is participating in activities appropriate to their alter-egos or secret identities during the celebration. This is a good chance to activate qualities related to their private lives. The **Prologue** is designed as

a shakedown run for new players and their series setting, Victory City, in case they haven't played before. It also gives you a chance as Game Master to see how the group dynamic works among your heroes. Essentially, this is a combat encounter with some character-defining moments. It can be as long or as short as you like, the important thing is to establish the **ICONS** play style and give your players a chance to get a feel for their heroes.

After establishing the characters reasons for being at the celebration, you can read or paraphrase the following to the players:

You turn your head just in time to notice a green flash, a plume of smoke, and then hear a loud roll of thunder along with the sound of violent whipping winds. The sound of shouting in the crowd is drowned out by the sudden shock of several lightning bolts strikes the north side of Grand Arbor Park! The smell of smoke and the sudden appearance of black clouds and an enormous storm front seem more than your average summer storm. Sounds of sirens warbling past the Park mean one thing: ACTION!

The heroes become aware of the explosion and destruction occurring at the high-tech experimental facility ULTRA Labs, and can make their way there. Heroes with known connections to the authorities, as defined by their qualities or background, may even be altered and asked to help. The incident is also an opportunity to activate qualities that might encourage the heroes to take action, ranging from a loved-one in danger to a sense of duty, awarding the players Determination Points accordingly.

When the heroes arrive on the scene, read the following to the players:

Police have barricaded the area around ULTRA Labs. Standing in a massive hole in the side of Victory City's most advanced scientific facility are three costumed supervillains: a heavily muscled man wearing complex high-tech gauntlets and carrying a crimson-colored crystal the size of a basketball that pulses with energy. Alongside him are a man wearing a grimacing green monster mask with a stocking cap, its tip stained blood-red, and a man with sunken cheeks and jaundiced skin wearing a white suit. Above in the shattered wall is a costumed woman dressed in the colors of a stormy sky, her eyes glowing white.



The villains are Locust, Redkap, Phage, and Derecha, all known super-criminals. See their descriptions and abilities in the **Cast of Characters** section at the end of the book and feel free to mention their names or show their pictures to the players. When the heroes arrive, Derecha shouts to her associates:

“It looks like we have to make an example of these fools! Show them what it means to face THE PLAGUES!”

The battle takes place in the forecourt and parking lot and possibly the lobby of ULTRA Labs.

As this is the Plagues first outing as a team, they don't show much teamwork. This job to provide a seed money for their schemes further down the road.

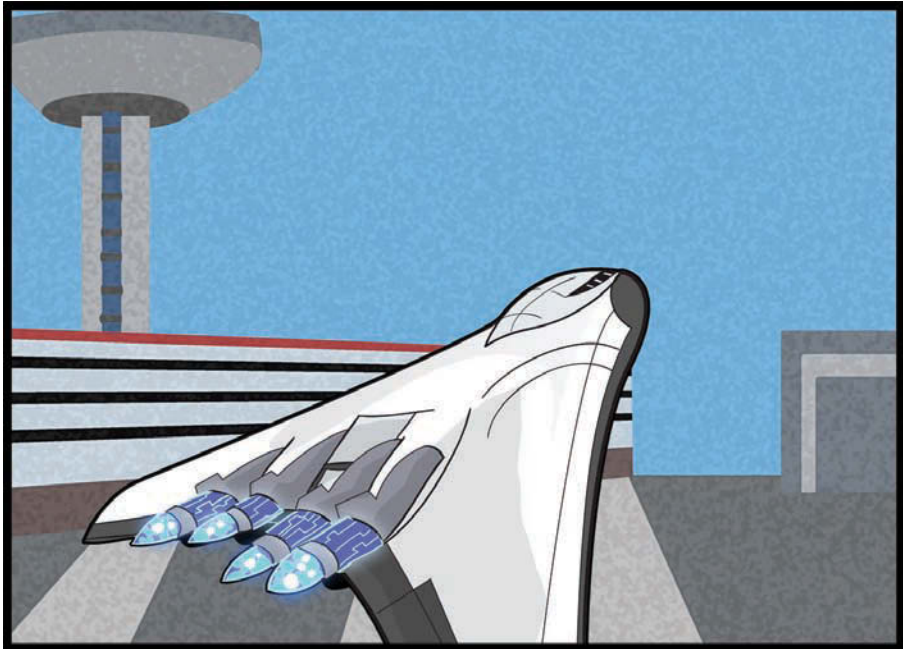
The villains succeed, if they delivery the red gem to a white van idling across the block from ULTRA's parking lot and escape.

Once the battle has lasted ten pages, the villains abandon their plan and simply attempt to escape. If the heroes manage to subdue both Locust and Derecha, Redkap and Phage simply surrender.

You can modify this encounter to just Locust and Derecha if you have only two players.

Feel free to use this time to get the heroes acquainted with one another or to modify abilities, help players with questions regarding their heroes' qualities, and other basic questions before moving on to **Chapter One of Flight of the Nova-1.**

CHAPTER ONE: TAKING FLIGHT



Following their initial battle with the Plagues, the heroes become a team, thwarted robberies, investigating plots, and taking down some second-string villains. Feel free to play out some of these additional encounters or just narrate them for the players to show some passage of time.

Their actions draw the attention of the authorities and some established heroes, such that one of the heroes from the **ICONS** book (All-American Girl is a good choice) asks the new heroes for a favor. Apex Innovation and ULTRA Labs are collaboratively launching an experimental shuttle, the the heroes be willing to help provide security?

Read or paraphrase the following to the players:

The world has its eyes on Apex Innovations and ULTRA Labs as they prepare for the launch of their new experimental spacecraft, the *Nova-7*. The press has been set up on the other side of Hanover Harbor, across from the launching area, where your group has been invited to attend and possibly safeguard the craft from any threats beyond the capability of AI or ULTRA's private security forces or the local police to handle.

The launch is spectacular. *Nova-7*'s engines come to full power with a loud drone, like an alien radio signal played through a theremin, and the ship takes off with a hushed whisper, cutting through the cloud cover. It makes very little noise until it shatters the sound barrier.

Suddenly, shouts come from all around as Mission Control is lit up with energy blasts, and explosions rock the launch area!

The attack on mission control is the priority as strange creatures dressed as security guards start shooting the place up, doing lots of damage to the equipment, and keeping the scientists at bay.

The smoke and sparks from the damaged consoles light the room sporadically as shouts from injured and terrified scientists fill the air. Standing on each level of mission control are members of the security team, but they are grey-skinned and alien-looking, firing blasters into the crowd and trying to destroy mission control!

The attackers are Metaskulk Infiltrators (see the **Cast of Characters** section at the end of this book), equal to twice the number of heroes.

Consoles and furniture provide some cover for the scientists, and the aliens seem only interested in destroying the equipment, preventing the scientists and radio operators from using the communications controls and computers in mission control.

In five pages, they will have damaged mission control enough, and attempt to escape, using their metamorph power to assume human forms again to blend into the people on-hand for the launch. Still, the Metaskulks have gaps in their knowledge of human behavior, and heroes may be able to ferret them out using this or other means. The aliens get away unless some way is found to stop them.

Following the battle, the monitors in mission control come alive with a shot from the cockpit of the *Nova-7* showing the pock-marked surface of Mercury, the massive Sun casting severe shadows on that landscape. The awe-inspiring view is dimmed by the sudden appearance of an indigo-colored energy sphere containing several super-beings, one of whom looks like the other aliens who attacked mission control.

The leader of the aliens, Wrack, is looking for a way to return to his home dimension of Geistspace, and inform the Metaskulk Ascendancy that this dimension is ripe for conquest. To accomplish these ends, he has used his Mind Control and superior technology to persuade super-villain “allies” to work on his behalf.

The ship’s cameras bring up an exterior shot of an indigo-shaded energy sphere filled with humanoids. Suddenly the audio begins with a reedy, high-pitched whistling voice emanated from the strange grey-skinned figure in the center of the group.

“I...am WRACK...Dominator of the Metaskulk Ascendancy. It is the will of Wrack that the potentiality sling of Earth be used to bring the Metaskulk Ascendancy to Earth for CONQUEST!

“Among your number I have found accomplices who will aid in removing the fusion inductor and power source from this pathetic vessel, then jettison the crew inside the exploration module. I have instructed my loyal soldiers to destroy your capability to interrupt my plan and to destroy anyone foolish enough to attempt any laughable human heroics.

“Still, if any attempt is made to stop us, these humans shall perish. We will release the hostages once the removal of the engine is complete. This is your only warning.

“So speaks WRACK.”

The voice seems to come from every speaker, headphone, and audio device in the mission control room.



SUPER-SCIENCE AND YOUR HEROES

Tech-based heroes, particularly those with a combination of Intellect and Science or Technology specialty of 7 or greater, or possessing Dimensional Travel or related powers, may be aware of the dangers posed by the potentiality of slipping through dimensional barriers. This knowledge makes the hero a target in **Chapter 2** and **Chapter 3**.

CHAPTER TWO: RESCUE MISSION!

Once the heroes have thwarted the assault on mission control, Professor Henry Ellis, inventor of the potentiality sling, approaches them with a plan.

A soft-spoken, tweedy, rotund older gentleman peeks out from behind a crumpled console, still sparking and smoldering from blaster fire, adjusting his thick-rimmed glasses. He stumbles over to you, using the wall as a support, looking happy to see all of you on-scene.

“Thank heavens you were here! The damage is repairable, but we need to act fast if we’re going to be able to help those poor brave souls aboard the *Nova-1*. I can help you reach them, but we’re in dire need of your assistance!”

“My name is Ellis...Puh-Professor Henry Ellis...I designed the *Nova-1*’s engine and I believe you are the only hope those astronauts may have!”

At this point, Professor Ellis explains a few things need to be done to bring the *Stiletto*, the prototype design of the *Nova-1*, online and ready to assist the astronauts being held hostage.

There are three types of tasks that need completing. One task per type needs to be performed to get the *Stiletto* ready. You can roll on these tables to randomly determine the appropriate task for each hero in the player group, or you can choose tasks that seem like the most fun.

Try to assign tasks from these tables to heroes with the appropriate abilities. This is a chance to put the spotlight on the characters and their particular strengths.

1d6 Physical Tasks

- 1 Engineers are trapped beneath heavy rubble in the propulsion labs. They are needed to repair mission control and the *Stiletto's* guidance systems. It requires a difficulty 6 Strength test to complete this task.
- 2 New powered crystals to send the *Stiletto* through sub-space must be brought in using a hero's movement powers like Flight or Super-Speed. If the hero assigned this task doesn't have movement powers, then they're to accompany a vehicle sent to retrieve up the crystals.
- 3 The *Stiletto* needs to be set aright on its frame, a difficulty 8 Strength test.
- 4 Heroes must protect a besieged security team from two Metaskulk Infiltrators.
- 5-6 In order to charge the *Stiletto's* engines, heroes must succeed on the difficulty 6 Strength test to maneuver the necessary equipment into place quickly.

1d6 Mental Tasks

- 1 Interrogate captured Metaskulks (see the **Metaskulk Interrogation** table, following).
- 2 Detect disguised Metaskulks, a difficulty 6 Awareness test.
- 3 Identify Wrack's Accomplices (See **Accomplices Investigation** table, following).
- 4 Defeat two Mind-Controlled Security-Guards. Use the Soldier stock character from **ICONS Superpowered Roleplaying**.
- 5-6 Re-Roll under Specialties Tasks

1d6 Specialty Tasks

- 1 Interrogate captured Metaskulks (see the **Metaskulk Interrogation** table, following).
- 2 Repair Guidance Systems for the *Stiletto*, a difficulty 6 Intellect test (Technology specialty applies).

1d6 Specialty Tasks

- 3 Identify Wrack's Accomplices (See **Accomplices Investigation** table, following).
- 4 Defeat two Mind-Controlled Security-Guards. Use the Soldier stock character from **ICONS Superpowered Roleplaying**.
- 5-6 New powered crystals to send the *Stiletto* through sub-space must be brought in using a hero's movement powers like Flight or Super-Speed. If the hero assigned this task doesn't have movement powers, then they're to accompany a vehicle sent to retrieve up the crystals.

METASKULK INTERROGATION (DIFFICULTY 6)

- **Moderate Success:** The Metaskulks are here to steal the potentiality sling and have been planning this attack for some time, having infiltrated multiple human scientific organizations.
- **Major Success:** The previous info as well as the Metaskulks were brought to Earth during the first test of the potentiality sling, dragged from Geistspace during one of that dimension's many wars.
- **Massive Success:** The previous info and Wrack is part of the Metaskulk leader caste capable of Mind Control, and is likely lying about letting the hostages go free. He has never taken prisoners or shown mercy in the past.

ACCOMPLICES INVESTIGATION (DIFFICULTY 5)

- **Moderate Success:** The heroes identify the green and yellow suited villain as Lamprey (see the **Cast of Characters** section).
- **Major Success:** The heroes identify Lamprey and his powers, and identify Grue as well.
- **Massive Success:** The heroes identify Lamprey and Grue and their powers, and identify the woman as the villain known as Sapphire Synapse.

Once three of these tasks are completed the preparation is successful, and the *Stiletto* can launch. You should let all of the heroes still struggling with their tasks receive aid from those who have completed theirs. After the tasks are complete, Professor Ellis explains that they have a prototype stasis system on-board the *Stiletto* in case they are able to capture the

villains. Intended for long voyages in space, it should serve to hold captured villains until they can be returned to Earth and the authorities.

VEHICLES

The following are the abilities of the *Nova-1* and the *Stiletto* in **ICONS** game terms. See the **Devices** section of the **Powers** chapter of **ICONS** for additional details.

THE NOVA-1

Handling 4, Speed 4, Structure 4, Armor 4

Flight 9 (Space Flight), Science Expert (on-board lab)

THE STILETTO

Handling 5, Speed 4, Structure 3, Armor 3

Flight 9 (Space Flight)

CHAPTER THREE: IT IS PITCH BLACK...

Mission control has become a madhouse of activity, with technicians running around to assist your team and Professor Ellis with the rescue plan. The display screen is frozen on several different views of the warped gray face of Wrack. Telemetry is trying to get a read on the strange energy surrounding the super-villains.

You are loaded onto the *Stiletto*, as it readies itself to be launched.

“Uh, it should be a simple matter of launching you there...” Professor Ellis says over the PA system aboard the ship, “and we’re sure you can easily pilot the ship into range. The *Stiletto* has EVA suits, the suspension chamber, as well as enough power and life support to get you back to Earth. Bear in mind, those astronauts need your help, and once you arrive on-scene, we’ll be able to pilot your ship from here to dock with the *Nova-1*.”

Feeling a ship go from a standstill to escape velocity is strange, but far less strange than the ship puncturing through sub-space to appear in an orbit around the far side of Mercury!

Suddenly, the *Stiletto* shudders, and every indicator states that the ship’s energy core is offline! Emergency klaxons whine, and the ship is plunged into darkness!

“SHIP. CONTROLLED. DRAIN USERS.” The chilling flat sound of a computerized-synthesized voice echoes throughout the ship. Grue has arrived!

The *Stiletto* is attacked upon arrival by Grue, who phases through the hull and drains the crystal powering the ship’s prototype engine, damaging it in the process. All non-essential systems, basically everything but life support, are offline. Each player receives a Determination point as the *Stiletto* is knocked into a wobbling orbit around Mercury.

YOU ARE LIKELY TO BE EATEN BY A GRUE!

Grue attacks with his Servant Power (see his description in the **Cast of Characters** section at the end of the book) sending animated shadows to target physically powerful heroes with their Energy Drain. Grue itself is using Interface to take control of the maneuvering thrusters to point the *Stiletto* towards the sun!



Once the *Stiletto* arrives and is crippled, there are 10 pages before the ship is knocked out of Mercury's orbit by Grue's tampering. Grue's Interface attack takes 3 pages, once he's finished it reduces the number of pages the *Stiletto* is safe by 4, to a minimum of 1 page. He needs 3 uninterrupted pages to complete his Interface power. If he's stymied for all 10 pages, the *Stiletto* maintains a wobbly orbit.

This chapter should be played up like the first *Alien* movie: Where is he now? How can we stop him? Again, this chapter can be as long or as short as you like,

the interior of the *Stiletto* is big enough to hide Grue and his shadow-slaves, think the size of a small frigate in space. This was the prototype after all for the *Nova-1*.

Once he's successful or thwarted, Grue teleports into the area of the ship with the smartest or most skilled heroes to abduct them. Hand a Determination Point to each affected player, as Grue teleports away with them, heading us into **Chapter Four!**

CHAPTER FOUR: ADRIFT!

“This is NOT good...No no no no...” Professor Ellis says worriedly. “We have no way of re-charging the crystal with our systems on Earth. Your only chance is to dock the *Stiletto* to the *Nova-1* and use it to return.”

Your smartest team member has been abducted by the evil android known as Grue and its only a matter of time before your ship will be in range of Wrack’s laser weapons.

“The *Stiletto* still has its maneuvering jets, EVA suits, and oxygen tanks, as well as its conventional power source! You can still manage to get out of this! We’re counting on you!” The last bit is choked out with static, and the radio goes dead as you drift out of range. It’s all up to you, now!

Read or paraphrase this to the captured hero:

Meanwhile - aboard the *Nova-1*, you are tossed into a massive engine room. The villain known as Lamprey is skulking there, with an astronaut who he bashes in the stomach, then throws into the wall.

“The pair of you are supposed to disconnect the Engine. Get to it or else we start throwing astronauts out the airlock!”

The heroes aboard the *Stiletto* have ten pages to come up with a solution to regain control of the ship. Tests for this should be challenging for the group at difficulty 6 or 7 and should reflect their heroic abilities. The player who was kidnapped has been put into the sealed engine room with, unbeknownst to them, a Metaskulk Infiltrator, who is watching their every move, pretending to be far more injured than they actually are. Remember, all Metaskulks have trouble with the idiosyncrasies of human culture and may well slip up in interactions with the heroes.

The Infiltrator should coax them into continuing to assist Wrack's plan, if they seem to be reticent to do so, and definitely watches how they do it. They should also be obviously unqualified to assist the hero as well.

Multiple solutions are possible for the people aboard the *Stiletto*. Let the players come up with their own plan and give it a reasonable chance of success. During this chapter, alternate between the heroes on the *Stiletto*, and the captured hero or heroes aboard the *Nova-1*.

Disconnecting the potentiality sling takes a number of pages equal to 10 minus the heroes Intellect + related specialties, with a minimum of 3. If the captured hero decides to disconnect the engine, this is the deadline for the heroes on board the *Stiletto*: they get one more page to come up with a solution or else Grue, Lamprey, and Synapse use her telekinesis to bring the *Stiletto* to the *Nova-1*, and their powers to capture the remaining heroes. You may give each player Determination for this.

The two story paths converge on-board the *Nova-1*.

CHAPTER 5: WRACK AND RUIN

If the heroes on the *Stiletto* arrive at the *Nova-1* under their own power by repairing the machine, they each gain a free activation of an “Element of Surprise” quality for the first page of the final confrontation with Wrack and the other villains.

The *Stiletto*'s maneuvering jets hiss and pop as your ship approaches the *Nova-1*, and the crackling sound of the radio is a bit startling. “Y-yes! Hello! Hello! Oh, I’m not too late, am I? Listen, the cargo doors can be opened from the *Stiletto* using this communication code: 2 - 0 - 0 - 1...that should open the bay doors!”

Punching in the code, the doors open on four startled supervillains, and the dim glow of the bay’s forcefield shows the relieved faces of the astronauts!

If the heroes are captured and tethered, because the hero on board the *Nova-1* disconnected the engine, the smart hero gains the “Dimensional Insight” quality when dealing with Wrack in interaction tests, and “Read the Manual” as a quality when dealing with physical interactions with the ship or engine.

Your eyes open in the dimly lit cargo bay of the *Nova-1*. The explorer module is prepped, and the astronauts are dressed in EVA suits. Something seems strange about them, they look subdued. Your eyes focus on the alien from the mission control video, and he stands on the gangway above the cargo bay, pointing at the heroes with a vicious sneer on his gray features.

“FOOLS! Your pathetic world sent THIS rabble to deny me my prize? Well, since I have your undivided attention, you witless buffoons, know that Wrack was *never* going to return your pathetic explorers to you. Their fate, and yours is simple: you shall be all jettisoned with this primitive vehicle into your solar system’s sun, and utterly DESTROYED.”

However, Wrack didn’t seem to understand the resilience of human heroes, as your bonds don’t seem to be tight enough to keep you down for long!

At this point, in either scenario, either bursting into the cargo bay with the *Stiletto* or breaking their bonds, the heroes spring into action!

Page One: When the battle is joined, the Metaskulk imposter attacks the captured hero, assuming his true form. Grue and Lamprey attack the hero with the highest damage potential, to take them out of the fight, and Grue summons shadow slaves to attack the other heroes. Sapphire Synapse attempts to subdue the hero with the lowest Willpower with Mental Blasts while Wrack heads to the bridge in the ensuing chaos or runs to the engine room.

If the hero who was originally captured detached the engine, Wrack is there to direct the *Nova-1* into the sun. If the hero left the engine connected, he instead warps them to Earth orbit, and begins overloading the potentiality sling. Wrack aims the *Nova-1* at Victory City like a horrifying anti-matter missile!

Page Two and Beyond: As the battle rages in the *Nova-1*, remember the Material of the ship isn’t necessarily designed to withstand many slams of the villains into the walls, and there are bound hostages in the cargo bay for the villains to use as shields or to get in the way as a trouble for the heroes.

Grue and Lamprey double-team heroes in descending order based on their damage potential and perceived overall power.

If Grue gets hit with a Slam result more than once, the device that’s controlling him malfunctions and he breaks free of Wrack’s control! Enraged, Grue punctures the hull and teleports away, leaving Shadow Slave minions behind to cover his escape.

The hole Grue leaves behind can be plugged up with scrap metal in the Cargo bay with a difficulty 7 Strength test.

If Lamprey is hit with a Slam result more than once, he is freed from Wrack's control device as well, and is terrified, begging the heroes to save him. He even fights any of Grue's shadow slaves, but won't fight Grue as he has a terrifying fear of the void of space and the dark.

Synapse cannot be swayed, she is in love with Wrack, and will fight until subdued. As Wrack enters the battle (Once Grue and Lamprey are defeated) read or paraphrase the following to the players:

Suddenly, the gray other-dimensional villain and the sensual siren known as Sapphire Synapse turn on you all, looking with fury at their subdued partners. Synapse points to you, face twisting with rage, and screams "Destroy them, my beloved from the stars! DESTROY THEM ALL!"

Wrack and Synapse throw themselves into battle, energy writhing out of them, arcing off the ramps and walkways of the cargo bay!

Wrack attempts to Mind Control the physically strongest and most mentally vulnerable character to assist him. He intends to put the astronauts in direct danger as trouble to distract the heroes. He fights to the bitter end. This mission is Wrack's only desire: he wants to go home.

Synapse is in love with Wrack, not under his control. Wrack doesn't have any particular feelings for her, but understands that her loyalty is useful, and so plays the role of significant other. Until she fails, then he will gladly abandon her. She protects the engine at all costs, and tries to prevent any hero from thwarting Wrack's goal of either destroying Victory City or transporting the *Nova-1* to Geistspace.

Once Wrack and Synapse are either triumphant or on the verge of defeat, Wrack detonates a pair of explosives underneath the *Nova-1*, damaging both the landing apparatus and the heat shielding for re-entry into Earth's atmosphere. For effect, these may also cause secondary explosions in the cargo bay, which the heroes must avoid and protect the astronauts against as well.



REPAIRING THE NOVA-1

The ship's engine can be put back online in three pages, or can be fixed in same amount of time with a difficulty 6 Intelligence (Technology) test. From the time Wrack points the ship at Earth or activates the engine to transport them, there's a countdown of twenty pages.

Once the heroes repair the *Nova-1*, the astronauts can pilot the vessel back to Victory City's launch site, with some minor complications if you want that portion to be a nail-biting denouement. Once the ship lands, read or paraphrase the following:

Reporters scramble to get a shot of the *Nova-7* landing at the Apex facility, and the questions for your team come fast and furious. There's a press conference, and a week of wall-to-wall coverage from all media outlets available! From here on out, there's no doubt you are going to be famous heroes across the globe...true icons!

If you're running this as a stand-alone entry point into **ICONS**, this would be the ideal stopping point, possibly using the **Further Adventures** sidebar to continue these adventures with your players and their heroes. This adventure should usher in a new era for the players' team. You can always draw upon villains from the **Adversaries** sourcebook for further adventures or play out the return of any villains who escaped, or have them escape prison in the future.

For those using this as the opening chapter in the **Rise of the Phalanx** story, there are some events that take place after the ship is safely returned. Read or paraphrase the following to your players.

The media swarms you for hours, but at the end of the festivities, a man approaches, dressed in the finest tailored suit you've ever laid eyes on. He smiles, and extends his hand, brimming with confidence.

"Hello, the name is Lucien King." The name registers immediately, he's a billionaire philanthropist. "I want to thank you for protecting my investment. The *Nova-7* is a great human achievement, and I've put a lot of resources into it. As a way of saying thank you, I'm inviting your team to begin a bold new chapter in the history of Victory City as its new protectors...The Phalanx!"

The name is synonymous with great heroes and deeds of high honor. If anyone has the right to offer that name it's the son of the team's founder!

More information about Lucien King and the Phalanx can be found in the **Cast of Characters** section and later chapters of the adventure. For now, tell the players that the Phalanx were lost during a battle to save Victory City from destruction some time ago.

King offers to fund the team, help them locate threats, and fix problems that need attending. He explains that he has been following the team's

exploits since the incident with the Plagues. Lucien has complete faith the heroes can follow in the footsteps of Victory City's most honored hero team and is happy to serve as their patron and advisor.

FURTHER ADVENTURES

Sigma-9, a founding member of the Signal, has designs on Grue, breaking him out of prison and trying to collect information on the potentiality sling that he may have recorded. The villain team is comprised of Sigma-9, Skeletron, Sock Puppet (occasionally), and Ultra-Mind. These villains can be found in the **ICONS Adversaries** sourcebook.

Wrack explains that the Metaskulks are all over the planet, and have even taken the role of a villain (or a hero...even one of the players' heroes!) already on this world. Wrack offers to reveal the identity of this impostor...in exchange for his freedom, of course.



COLD WAR CONUNDRUM

INTRODUCTION

Cold War Conundrum is the second chapter of the **Rise of the Phalanx** story. Get ready for an international adventure filled with Cold War villains, robots, alien energies, and globe-trotting excitement!

If you plan on playing this adventure, read no further! The information contained here is best discovered during play, so grab your snacks and character sheet and chill out while your GM scans this adventure.

PLOT OVERVIEW

The adventure begins with a prologue to warm players up, get them familiar with how **ICONS** plays, and get them into the action right away.

The supervillain known as Arsenal has emerged from a decades old slumber, forced upon him by his own government. Arsenal was a product of the Cold War race for technological superiority, imprisoned by his country when he became too belligerent and difficult to control.

Arsenal was bound beneath one of Russia's well-hidden "Science Cities," his body used to power the Science City and a nearby village outside of Minsk.

Awakening in a world where Mother Russia lost the Cold War, Arsenal has decided to attack the United States with a massive neutron bomb powered by strange radiation from beyond the stars!

Arsenal attempts to steal nuclear warheads and fit them with alien Tau crystals, but his plan requires Science City 13, where the Russian experiments in teleportation took place during the '60s. He plans on teleporting the warheads and detonating them in downtown Victory City, a living affront to his Communist sensibilities, and the former arch-rival of the finest of the Russian Science Cities.

The heroes are brought in to protect a convoy of these warheads to prevent their theft. The convoy is attacked and this sends the heroes on the trail of Arsenal and his team of supervillains and robot drones. The adventure culminates in a battle in the legendary Russian Science City 13 to take Arsenal down!

So get your players ready, and let's dive right in!

PROLOGUE: BREAKDOWN!



If your group played through **Flight of the Nova-1**, and you're continuing this story, your players will likely know the villainous Plagues (in the **Cast of Characters** section at the end of the book), their powers, and their qualities. Also, they're in the prisoner transport because of your heroes, so be sure to play up the "Aww no! It's the Phalanx!" angle during play.

Derecha goes after the leader of the hero group during combat, or whomever she considers the leader. Other than that, enjoy this continuation of the B-story of **Rise of the Phalanx**.

Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

It only took you moments to arrive on the scene following the news reports, where a tanker truck jack-knifed on the Hanover Bay bridge, crashing into a prisoner transport vehicle taking a group of Super-Villains to The Icebox, a facility in the wilds of Alaska designed to hold them. The scene as you arrive is utter chaos!

Two of the super-villains being transported are crawling, dazed from the wreckage, but you're needed elsewhere before duking it out with those two ne'er do wells!

There are fires in cars, and the tanker is spilling fuel on the bridge! These people need help! What do you do?



As the heroes arrive, announce that there's a situational quality—Utter Chaos—that can offer opportunities to earn Determination Points by having the situations they're confronted with have the possibility of spinning out of control when dramatically appropriate.

To assist in this type of chaotic challenge for the heroes, we've broken the types of possible events into three categories for the three major types of heroes that you'll likely have in your party.

Roll on the tables below or assign events as appropriate to your heroes. They absolutely can assist one another with each of these or even trade events for ones they're particularly good at if you decide to roll on more challenging tables for your heroes.

1d6 Physical Events

- 1 Set the gasoline tanker aright with a difficulty 7 Strength test.
- 2 Support the damaged bridge by grabbing the spanning cables and struggle to hold the bridge section up while motorists escape with a difficulty 7 Strength test.
- 3 Pull a motorist's vehicle back onto the bridge with a difficulty 6 Strength test to allow them to escape a deadly fall.
- 4 Rescue a motorist from flaming wreckage. The car only has a material 5, but the flames do level 6 fire damage to the hero rescuing the passenger.
- 5-6 Pull the door off of the fuel tanker to rescue the driver, who's pinned under wreckage with a difficulty 6 Strength test.

1d6 Mental Events

- 1 Find one of the escaped villains, Phage, with a difficulty 7 test, most likely Awareness or a suitable sensory power.
- 2 Calm the panicked crowd with a difficulty 7 Willpower test.
- 3 Persuade a child to jump to the hero from a dangling vehicle with a difficulty 5 Willpower test.
- 4 Find out what happened from on-scene witnesses with a difficulty 6 Willpower test to get someone calm enough to explain. They tell them that the tire of the jack-knifed tanker blew out, and the driver over-corrected, and slammed into the prison vehicle. The citizen saw a man yank a green mask and hood over his face and run away after stabbing the driver of the prison vehicle.

1d6 Mental Events

- 5-6 Contact the Victory City CRASH (Combat Readiness Against Supervillain Havoc) Team, to bring their weapons to the scene, along with fire trucks. If the hero is able to do so with a successful difficulty 5 Willpower test, they eliminate the Utter Chaos quality on the scene.

1d6 Specialty Events

- 1 Drive a truck to ram a car to safety with a difficulty 5 Driving, Pilot or Coordination test.
- 2 Put out a vehicle fire, and rescue the wounded villain (Phage) trapped near it, with a difficulty 6 test of the appropriate Specialty or Attribute.
- 3 Retrieve Stun-Guns from the prison vehicle with a difficulty 5 test of the appropriate ability.
- 4 Assist the driver of the prison transport who's been stabbed by Redkap. This is a difficulty 5 test of the appropriate ability, probably Intellect (and the Medicine specialty).
- 5-6 Transport the stabbed driver to medical assistance at the edge of the crash situation with a difficulty 6 test of the appropriate ability like Coordination or a movement power.

COMBAT OUTLINE

The following is an overall outline of how the battle with the villains may unfold:

Page One: This page is filled with all the actions the heroes take to save civilians, which gives the villains time to recover from the crash. Derecha is woozy, but able to defend herself from attacks during page 1, and feel free to activate the Utter Chaos quality for a compel if a hero wants to just ignore the danger to bystanders to beat up on a supervillain.

The four villains in the prison vehicle were Derecha, Redkap, Locust, and Phage. Phage was hit by a car and wounded and needs assistance. Redkap stabbed the driver of the prison vehicle, and escaped. Derecha managed to crawl away, and is gathering her strength. Locust is using his powers on the

first page to absorb the device that powers the nullification chamber in the back of the prison transport.

Page Two: Locust uses his absorbed strength to throw a car with the passengers still inside off the bridge to distract the heroes while Derecha fires lightning bolts at the flipped gasoline tanker. Allow heroes to spend Determination Points to interpose themselves between the bolts and the tanker, or prevent Derecha from exploding the tanker. Once they've distracted Derecha, she does everything she can to knock out the heroes preventing her devastating distraction, using her wind power to throw a car at them.

Page Three and Beyond: The Victory City CRASH Team arrives on page 6 if the villains aren't already subdued by then. In the prison transport, there are two "Stun Guns"—power nullification guns—that can de-power any non-magically originating or non-device derived powers (see the following sidebar).

STUN GUNS

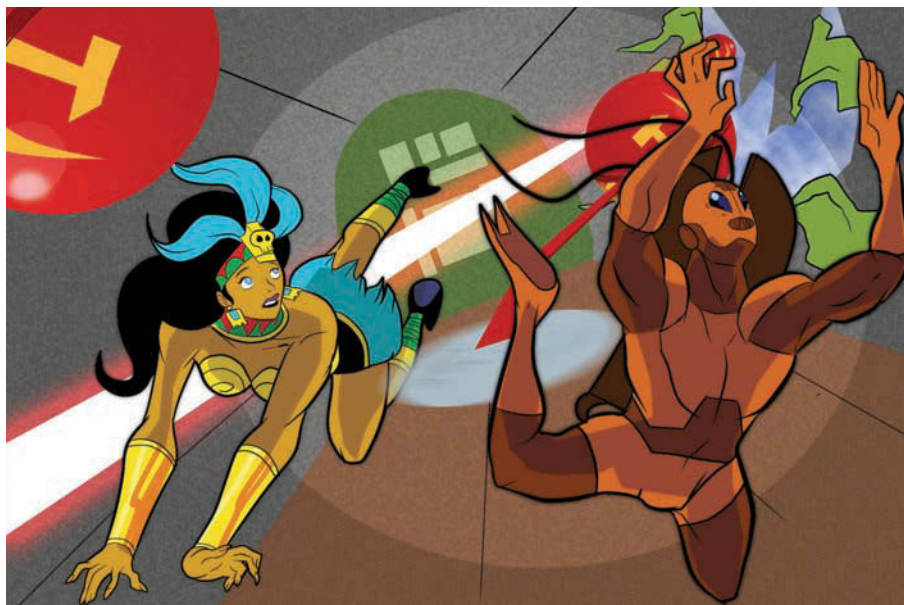
The weapons the CRASH team uses against supervillains in Victory City have Amazing (8) Nullification. Once they've been fired, they take a page of preparation to re-charge. They also don't do anything against devices or magical powers. Against aliens, the gun's Nullification is only Good (5).

Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

The battle ends with the villains down, and only one of them on the loose. Redkap is wily, but he'll definitely turn up again. The press is swarming the scene with choppers and news vehicles. They bark questions at you as you watch the CRASH team handle the clean-up.

This is definitely an opportunity for the heroes to make themselves known around the city and to roleplay their characters to the hilt. Feel free to activate qualities related to appearance or reputation, as well as allow heroes to do so to improve their public standing or protect their weird-looking or socially awkward teammates.

CHAPTER ONE: ZYRKISTAN, ZYRKISTAN



Since **Flight of the Nova-1**, Lucien King, billionaire and philanthropist, has re-opened and renovated the old Phalanx's headquarters, the Citadel, and given it to your heroes! It serves as their base of operations, establishing them as the primary heroes for Victory City.

Read or paraphrase this for your players:

Lucien King, and his bodyguard, Monolith, lead you through the massive and well-appointed headquarters in the heart of Victory City. King smiles warmly as he points out the different sections of the base, some are still being put together, such as the laboratory and training area, but he points out the hangar, where a familiar sight rests, the *Stiletto*!

King laughs softly and says “The *Stiletto II*, technically. This one’s not equipped with a fusion inductor...yet. Give it time. We’ll get you properly equipped.”

His tour finishes with your rooms, which have been set up exactly to your needs. King brings you to the main meeting hall, with a gargantuan hologram of the globe, and several projected screens of news footage.

“Nice work on the bridge, by the way. It’s the reason I’ve asked you here today. All-Star, Saguaro, Volcano and Hangman are heading to the Arctic Circle to investigate the disappearance of All-American Girl.”

“He’s asked The Phalanx to take on an important mission. It seems the country Zyrkistan is finally disarming their Soviet-Era nuclear warheads, returning them to Russia for disposal. Not trusting the current situation in Russia, they’re asking that you escort the weapons to the disposal facility.”

King then shows you the video All-Star sent him.

THE STILETTO II

Handling 6 • Speed 4 • Structure 3 • Armor 3

Powers: VTOL capability, Super-Senses 4 – Telelocation (Phalanx team members only), Communication, Direction Sense, Spatial Sense (Radar)

Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

Your monitors come alive with a visual of All-Star, Saguaro, Hangman, and Volcano standing on an icy ridge somewhere very, very cold. All-Star is in his normal costume, and Volcano looks nonchalant, but the other two are dressed up snug as two bugs. All-Star gives his trademark grin and nods to you.

“Thank you for taking this message. Volcano, Hangman, Saguaro and I are looking into the disappearance of All-American Girl. Her last message to us originated from the Arctic Circle, and we’re going to find her. But, in the meantime, the nation of Zyrkistan has asked for my assistance in an international matter.”

All-Star’s expression turns serious.

“The country, now that it’s free of the old Soviet hegemony, has decided to rid itself of the old ICBM’s located on their soil, returning them to Mother Russia. However, given Russia’s current troubles with criminal activity – they’ll need to be guarded closely from any criminals willing to tangle with the military. Namely, supervillains.”

He then brightens and nods approvingly at all of you through the monitor.

“I know you’re up to the task. Let’s make sure we get this done. I’ve put the Prime Minister of Zyrkistan in touch with you, he should be contacting you soon. All-Star out.”

Just as his image blips off the screen, another message awaits. It’s the Prime Minister of Zyrkistan!

If the heroes failed in the **Prologue**, All-Star’s tone should be “I know you can do it, and I’d want to be there to help you, but I don’t have any other choice.” The Prime Minister of Zyrkistan communicates to the team, with the blessing of the Global Council, that All-Star has endorsed the team as the right heroes for the job.

He goes on to explain that they’d be escorting six former-Soviet ICBM trucks back across the Russian border, to a disposal facility in Siberia.

The government of Zyrkistan is willing to transport the team to the staging area aboard a C-17 transport plane.

C-17 TRANSPORT PLANE

Handling 4 • Speed 4 • Structure 3 • Armor 1

Powers: Blast 5 (guns)

Once in Zyrkistan airspace, the heroes’ transport comes under attack by a number of drone robots, that attempt to bring it down! There are a number of drones equal to the number of heroes, plus one.



SPUTNIK IV DRONE

Pro 5 • Cor 5 • Str 5 • Int 3 • Awe 3 • Wil —

Powers: Damage Resistance 4 (Armor, Limited to Stamina Only), Flight 5, Strike 5 (Buzz-saws, slashing), Teleport 8 (Situational: Only When Ordered by Arsenal)

Specialties: Investigation (guard drones), Tactics (combat drones)

Qualities: Cannot Deviate From Orders, Confounding Annoyance, Self-Destruct (at 0 Stamina)

The Sputnik IV drones attack the hull of the craft, trying to bring it down. They peel through the hull in two pages, and damage the flight systems in three. Once flight systems aboard the transport are compromised, and the craft is forced to the ground, they use their teleportation ability to get away. They also teleport once they take physical damage—even if the damage would destroy the drone, Arsenal wants there to be no trace of the drones left behind. Arsenal sent the drones to slow the heroes down, and to strand them in Zyrkistan's wilderness. As usual, Arsenal is a bit overconfident in the effectiveness of his technology.

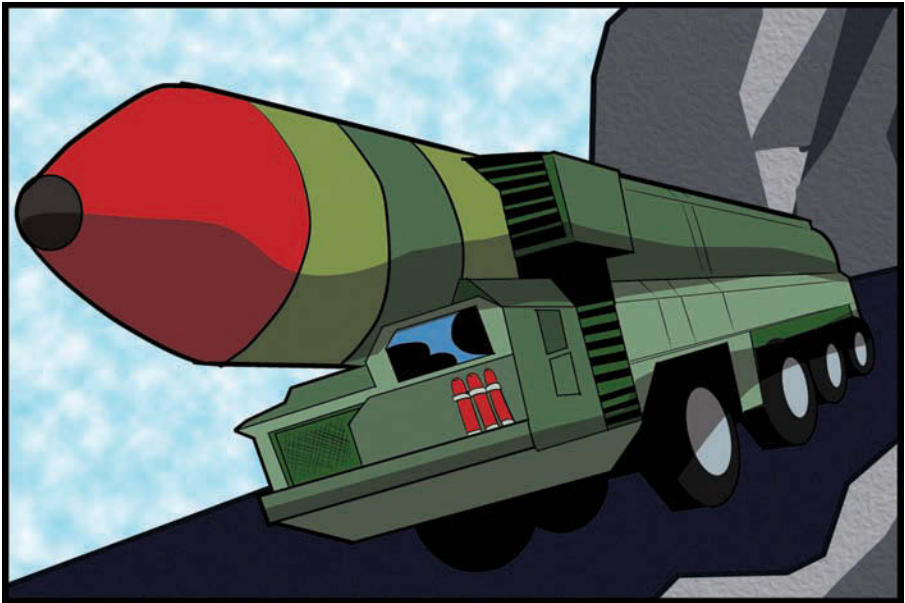
When the drones teleport away, it's in a flash of sickly green energy accompanied by an awful tearing sound. The drones also leave behind a trace tau radiation signature because of their power source.

The heroes' vehicle, if crippled, takes a full day to repair. In the meantime, they can be taken to the staging area to be made ready to protect the convoy.

TAU RADIATION

Tau radiation was the energy source powering the Nova-1's engine, the potentiality sling Fusion Inductor. ULTRA Labs had crystals from space that emitted this type of radiation as well. One of which that the Plagues villain team attempted to steal in the first game's prologue. See **Chapter 3** for more information about this clue trail.

CHAPTER TWO: WE'VE GOT A CONVOY!



Read or paraphrase the following to the players:

“Welcome, welcome!” the broad shouldered General Doronov grins from behind a black beard. He walks to you and shakes his head at the wreckage of your transport with a grim look. “I apologize for rough welcome to our country. I assure you, Zyrkistan does not condone such actions against those who would aid us. We will take time to repair it and get you home as soon as possible.”

He goes on to explain that the convoy has six warheads, and goes over the places you can be stationed during the route to protect the weapons, and after a long and boisterous briefing, you're ready to roll.

General Doronov is a loud, broad man who loves his country, and is proud of their achievements in independence. The briefing should be sort of funny, but also deliver the important fact that the upheaval of the '90s has driven the lawless elements to boldness unheard of during the days of Soviet rule.

Doronov explains that the Russian Republic is in a state of change, with unstable elements within it that are not enthusiastic about nuclear disarmament. Since the government was changed, much of the old Soviet-era weapons technology has been either sold off or ransacked by various criminal underworld elements. This is why the heroes have been called upon.

There are three positions the heroes can place themselves in to protect the convoy:

1. Aboard the Recon Helicopter.
2. On the missile trucks themselves, either in the cab or on the handholds next to the missiles.
3. Aboard the troop transport, of which there are 5, one between each of the missile trucks.

The convoy leaves from the military base, and a few hours into the trip the lead troop truck has a tire blowout.

Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

Without warning, a loud explosion from under the front of the lead troop transport is followed by a wrenching of metal as the truck caroms out of control! Shocked shouts and cries of alarm in Russian come from the back of the vehicle as it crashes through a concrete barrier on the cliff facing side of the highway, and dangles precariously over the edge! The trucks shudder to a stop, and the air fills with a strange crackling tearing sound and the buzz of the crimson drones! It's time for action!

The truck crashed through a concrete guardrail, and suddenly the sky is filled with Sputnik Drones! There are two drones for every hero, see their stats in the previous chapter. Use the Soldier stock character from the **Game Mastering** chapter of **ICONS** to represent the soldiers with the convoy.

If a hero is on the troop truck dangling over the edge (which would be the case if they have some kind of unfortunate quality you want to compel), it's

a difficulty 8 Strength test to pull the vehicle back onto the road to safety. With a difficulty 6 Coordination test heroes can help the soldiers out of the imperiled truck, rescuing them.

If a hero is on any other troop vehicle they are confronted by two drones, and should protect the soldiers from them.

If a hero is on the helicopter it swings wildly out of control as the Sputniks attack and damage its tail rotor! A difficulty 5 Coordination test allows the hero to bail out of the chopper to safety with the pilot, otherwise they take 5 Stamina damage from the crash.

If a hero is on the missile truck two Sputniks attack until they are destroyed.

Once the last Sputnik is destroyed, award the heroes a Determination Point each as the last missile truck in the convoy is teleported away.



CLUES AT THE SCENE

Post-battle, there are clues left behind as to who is attacking the heroes and hijacking the weapons. The Sputnik VI drones are Soviet-Era devices, repurposed to be weapons. The parts inside are a mix of old and new technology.

Only three villains are likely suspects, having the ability to create such technological marvels and access to Soviet-era tech from their recent exploits:

- **Sigma-9**, last seen in Siberia
- **Patriot**, last seen somewhere in Zyrkistan
- **Hammer and Sickle**, who run the Black Square, the black market of the superpowered underworld in Moscow.

The teleportation energy signature is unique, and also lends itself to leads on the clue chain. It's tau radiation, and only two sources of this energy exist on Earth: experimental crystals at ULTRA Labs in Victory City, and the engine of an experimental multi-terrestrial vehicle, the *Nova-1* which uses tau radiation to power its incredible potentiality sling fusion inductor. This suggests a connection with the **Flight of the Nova-1** adventure and the schemes of the alien Wrack, now in custody, thanks to the heroes.

CHAPTER THREE: THE HUNT IS ON!



This chapter is a bit more free-form for the GM and players, as there are different clues and investigations leading to the next chapter.

There is a time limit on this chapter, as General Doronov explains to the heroes that there is a second convoy leaving for Russia in just six days! He apologizes, but hoped that a successful defense of the first convoy would have prevented further attacks on their convoys. The heroes may be able to persuade the government of Zyrkistan to delay the next convoy, but that won't necessarily prevent another attack.

The repairs to the heroes' transportation take a day after the attack, although the characters might find a way to acquire other transportation to continue their investigation. All of their leads are several hours apart and away from the site of the convoy ambush.

SPUTNIK WRECKAGE

Examination of the Sputnik drone technology suggests a mastery beyond human comprehension, making Sigma-9 a likely suspect, and the rogue robot has been seen in Siberia near a place called Science City 7.

The drones themselves were experimental technology created during the Cold War that were altered. They were likely purchased at Black Square, the underworld's black market in Moscow.

There have been major thefts of missile technology by the supervillain known as Patriot, who has been plotting to destroy the Zyrkistan capitol with nuclear weapons. He was last seen near the border of Russia and Zyrkistan.

ENCOUNTER 1: SIGMA-9'S COMPOUND

Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

You arrive at the outskirts of the walled compound formerly known as Science City 7. What was once a marvel of scientific progress led by the Soviet Bloc to win the Space Race has been altered to look like a super-scientific landscape, with bleak towers of robotic gantries bristling with antennae, and mechanical blisters of strange construction all over the old low-slung concrete bunkers. Clearly Sigma-9's influence has polluted this place.

Science City 7 was used for ICBM-testing in the 1960s, and space exploration and energy creation in the 1950s. Throughout the Cold War, it was a place of innovation and ruthless scientific endeavor. It was also the containment unit for the man-turned-cyborg super-soldier Arsenal. He served as a power source for the Science City as well as a nearby small village for the scientists and their families.

Crystals found at the Tunguska site were generators of tau radiation, and experiments on these crystals caused that accident that created Arsenal (see his background in the **Cast of Characters** section). Sigma-9, following a defeat at the hands of American heroes, sought a more remote base of operation.

Science City 7 was well-suited for its purposes, as it seemed to have an inexhaustible source of energy, and was avoided by local humans. Sigma-9 located the energy source, and inadvertently freed Arsenal from his prison.

Arsenal and Sigma-9 fought, then Arsenal left to foment his plan to destroy the West in nuclear fire.

Once the power source was gone, Sigma-9 no longer had any use for the base, and abandoned it, along with a damaged shell of itself. That shell will eliminate any biological scum that attempts to follow Sigma-9 or get any of the information residing in the base.

INFORMATION FROM THE BASE

- Information about Arsenal's background can be found on several computers, in files, and on video logs Sigma-9 kept all over the base.
- Tau radiation studies also exist here, and can lead the heroes to the **Tau Radiation** investigation (following). Additionally, there are notes suggesting ULTRA Labs has a way to track tau radiation, and that Victory City was the primary rival for the Soviets in the Cold War energy race.

ENCOUNTER 2: BLACK SQUARE

This encounter takes place in Moscow, and will require intimidation, information gathering or straight bribery to gain information on the location of the Black Market and the identity of its biggest wheels. The heroes have a pair of names Hammer and Sickle, but know nothing else about the pair.

A difficulty 5 test for any social specialty or simple information gathering.

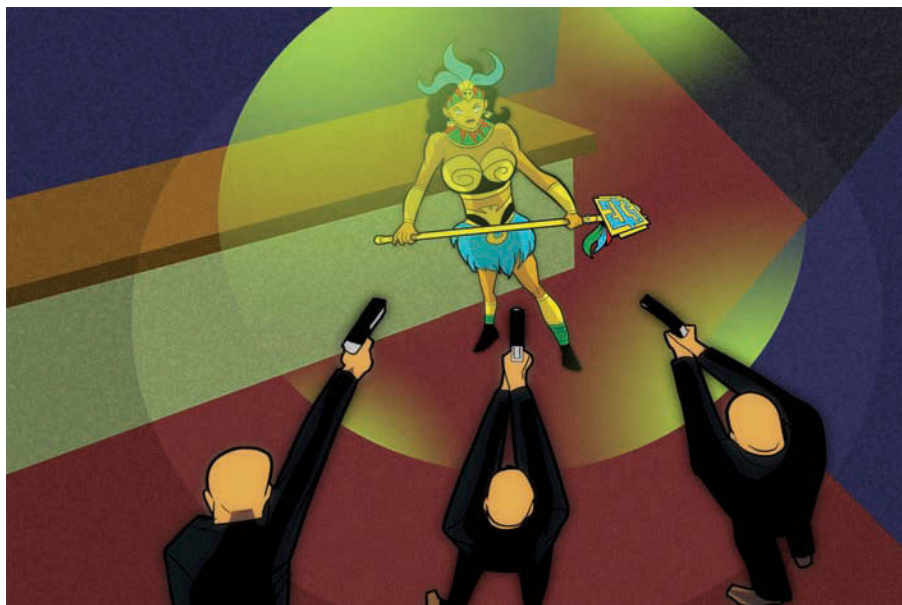
A difficulty 7 test for intimidating the gangsters, as these Russian mobsters are quite used to being threatened.

GM's can feel free to make this a success pyramid type affair, requiring a few checks of different kinds to get to the Black Market, or you can streamline it. But the character who ultimately leads them to the Black Square, is a shifty criminal named Lazy Ivan, who looks like Marty Feldman from Young Frankenstein with a large globe-shaped cybernetic eyeball. See his write-up in the **Cast of Characters** section at the end of the adventure.

At Black Square they are told about Hammer and Sickle if they pay for the information. Any character with a suitable quality can pay for the bribes.

If they fail to pay, or can't, a black marketeer named Valery Varkov tells them about Sigma-9 in Siberia (adding two days to the time track as they follow up this trail). Or they can try the intimidation/investigation route. See Valery's write-up in the **Cast of Characters** section at the end of the adventure.

If they fail a difficulty 5 interaction test or a difficulty 7 Willpower (Intimidation) test, they are attacked by thugs with super-weapons!



BLACK SQUARE THUGS

Pro 2 • Cor 3 • Str 3 • Int 2 • Awe 3 • Wil 3

Powers: Blast 6 Device - Elemental Gauntlets, either Cold, Electricity or Fire damage

Specialties: Crime, Intimidation

Qualities: Connected to the Black Square, Greedy Bully, Loyal to the Mob

If the thugs are defeated in the conflict, or the players succeeded on their intimidation or info-gathering tests, Lazy Ivan spills the beans on Hammer and Sickie selling some drones and other gear to an unknown buyer at an outpost in Minsk. This leads to **Chapter Three**.

ENCOUNTER 3: THE HUNT FOR PATRIOT

Patriot is holed up on the border, but the Zyrkistan military has located his group. It's a small training camp with American ex-pats and Patriot leading them. He's deciding to bring the War on Terror to a country that has

nothing to do with terrorism (Zyrkistan) based on a blog that claimed that an arm of the Cleansing Fire, an extremist splinter group of former Communist agitators, is being sheltered by the Zyrkistan government in the capital.

The camp is protected by a number of recruits equal to the players and Patriot (see the **Adversaries** sourcebook or the **Cast of Characters** section).

They will immediately attack any heroes showing up – and once they’re subdued, Patriot only tells them that he purchased the warhead he was going to use from Hammer and Sickle in Moscow. (Leading them to the Hammer and Sickle clue)

CONTINUING THE OVERARCHING STORY

If you are continuing **The Rise of the Phalanx**, tau radiation was used to power the Nova-1, and was drawn from crystals with an alien origin. Wrack, a Metaskulk from Geistspace is in custody. He is very knowledgeable about tau radiation. Your heroes may well seek him out first. He also has scenario-specific information for your heroes, denoted in his interrogation section.

2. TAU RADIATION

- Tau radiation was used to power an experimental craft, designed by Apex Industries. (Following this clue takes 3 days for the repair of the transport, and travel to the United States.)
- Tau radiation is emitted from extraterrestrial sources, primarily from strange crystals. ULTRA Labs in Victory City has been examining those same crystals. (Following this clue takes 3 days for the repair of the transport, and travel to the United States)

ENCOUNTER 1: APEX PROPULSION LABS

(Note: If you would like to run **Flight of the Nova-1** after this adventure, eliminate the Wrack interrogation portion of the clue tree, and refer to the experimental craft as the *Stiletto*.)

Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

The propulsion labs at Apex are still being repaired from last month's incursion by Wrack and the Metaskulks, and you are met by Henry Ellis, a bespectacled, edgy scientist wearing a bright orange Al lab coat and a nervous smile.

Professor Ellis explains that he can't go into specifics on how the fusion inductor works, but that the potentiality sling uses the strange crystals to power it, and that the crystals naturally emit tau radiation.

Science-based heroes or heroes with the Unearthly (Alien) origin will get a chance to shine as they get a special Intellect + appropriate Specialty test at difficulty 6 to know there was a difference between how the drones appeared and how the *Nova-1* (or *Stiletto*) goes through subspace.

Social tests can be used to get Professor Ellis to provide more information.

- **Moderate Success:** His colleague, Dr. Henry Midas, would have more information for them regarding the crystals at ULTRA Labs.
- **Major Success:** As moderate, plus, Henry works with the source crystals closely, and has been tracking the crystals' origins across the planet. Since the pair were in college 'The Henries', they were working on theories regarding tracking tau radiation, Professor Ellis abandoned the hobby for practical application of tau radiation. However, Midas still works to track down the radiation.
- **Massive Success:** As above as well as he recalls they determined that the first appearance of the energy was in Russia during the Cold War, and the biggest source during that time was Science City 7. (This clue can lead them to Sigma-9's stronghold.)

ENCOUNTER 2: ULTRA LABS

The heroes arrive at ULTRA Labs and are met by a press relations and experimental researcher, Dr. Addie Waterheim, who is happy to give the heroes a tour of ULTRA Labs and talk to them about their revolutionary advances in energy sources, specifically in the area of tau radiation. He's a tweedy and smooth PR representative of ULTRA Labs, and should be played as slightly condescending to non-scientific type heroes. If he's asked about Dr. Midas on Professor Ellis' direction(see sidebar as well), he will take the heroes to see him, feeling a bit put off as doling out information is his territory. Midas will also freely give the information to the heroes without any social interaction tests.

If the heroes came here directly, they're in for a fun time of dealing with a PR Rep rather than a true information source.

Waterheim walks them through what looks like a massive theme park tour, showing off dramatic murals, and models of different scientific processes – like a glorified museum tour.

Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

As you walk into the massive gold-plated and glass interior of the beyond modern ULTRA Labs you're met by a woman in a pristine white lab coat, and sharp designer suit beneath it. She is confident and polished and strides up to you as if you're visiting dignitaries. She nods to you and says, "Welcome to ULTRA Labs. We're pleased you've decided to visit, and we always welcome members of Victory City's crime-fighting sector. My name is Dr. Addie Waterheim, and I'm going to give you a five-star tour of this facility. Please, follow me." She has a million kilowatt smile and is quite attractive.

Dr. Waterheim explains that tau radiation has assisted in furthering the Grand Unification Theory, by being both an energy source and a form of matter, as the radiation coalesces into crystalline form when bathed in certain solar energies.

The crystals were first discovered during World War II in the former Soviet Union, and was experimented with by Axis scientists. She mentions that, sadly, the greatest mind on the subject is a supervillain, currently in custody by the name of Wrack.

Waterheim is sure the heroes won't understand the raw science, so keeps to basic information regarding their research. However, she will offer up the following information if the heroes can convince her that they can grasp the scientific concepts being talked about.

- **Moderate Success:** Dr. Waterheim explains that when the energy is manipulated, it creates the crystals – which allow the energy to be produced.
- **Major Success:** She explains that ULTRA Labs has the ability to track the tau radiation across the globe. She offers to show the heroes the unit that tracks the radiation signatures across the planet. A new and large signature has appeared outside of Siberia, in an old Cold War era Science City.

- **Massive Success:** As above, but also gives them a tau radiation counter, a detection device that works to “paint” sources of the radiation. She asks that the heroes work to target and “paint” these locations if they get a chance as it will greatly assist ULTRA Labs in their scientific studies.

Professor Henry Midas is the one who gives the heroes this information if they go to him first, and will give it all willingly, along with the device. This leads them to the next chapter.

ENCOUNTER 3: WRACK'S INTERROGATION

Wrack has been incarcerated in the Icebox in the Alaskan Wilderness (see the **ICONS** adventure **Jailbreak!** for further details about this location), and agrees to meet with the heroes, especially if they were the ones who defeated him in **Flight of the Nova-1**. Wrack believes himself superior to humanity, even while behind bars. Play this to the hilt as the GM, as he proclaims that his imprisonment works to his benefit.

Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

The guards at the Icebox are serious, dour, and fully armed, but you barely get a chance to get a feel for them as you're taken to the interrogation area. The warden, a man by the name of Hargrove, explains that he's been instructed to assist you with whatever you might need.

You enter the dimly lit corridor to find Wrack standing behind a light blue shimmering wall of energy, with automated 'Stun Guns' pointing at him as he stands in the center of his prison cell waiting for your appearance. His voice is high and reedy, nasally and sardonic – it's as if a creature has evolved a way to speak to make you want to punch them in the face.

“Greetings lowly hominid. It was only a matter of time before you sought me out. It pleases me to see you in distress hahahahaha.”

Even his chuckling is irritating.

There are several ways your players can go about interrogating Wrack, but the difficulty for any method is fairly difficult with a Social test at difficulty 7.

- **Moderate Success:** Tau radiation is created when something uses sub-space (Geistspace, as Wrack calls it) to break the laws of faster than light travel.

- **Major Success:** Humanity somehow blundered into harnessing tau radiation for this purpose before the experimental crafts the *Stiletto* and the *Nova-1*, and it was re-purposed as an energy source for a great number of things. However, it also created warped monstrosities.
- **Massive Success:** A human was altered by tau radiation, mutated into the creature called Arsenal. He was abandoned by his government – deemed too powerful to remain free, and so was imprisoned and siphoned of his radiation to power a city. Wrack intended to use him during his hijack of the *Nova-1*, but couldn't manage to get to where he was being held to free him.

Wrack also offers information at one result higher if the heroes will provide him with a mundane object for his cell. (Note: the more mundane the object the better. It should be a creature comfort that seems innocuous – as it will come into play in the next chapter, when Wrack escapes the Icebox to wreak vengeance on the heroes.) The following information is also given if they acquiesce to his request:

Wrack and his fellow Metaskulks were hired to steal the Fusion Inductor from the *Nova-1*. It is likely whoever the party was that paid him suspected his possible treachery, and so conspired to get your team of heroes to keep Wrack from returning to Geistspace with the *Nova-1*. Contact with the unknown party was always made through low-level functionaries and thugs, and besides all humans look alike to Wrack.

Wrack concludes the interview suggesting that the heroes keep an eye on the sources of tau radiation. Wrack mentions that while investigating the best way to steal the *Nova-1*, he found ULTRA Labs to be equipped to track tau radiation with special devices.

The clue-trails should lead the heroes to the following chapter and climax of the story, and the confrontation with Arsenal and his newest recruits, Hammer and Sickle!

What the Heroes Need to Know Before the Next Attack on the Second Convoy:

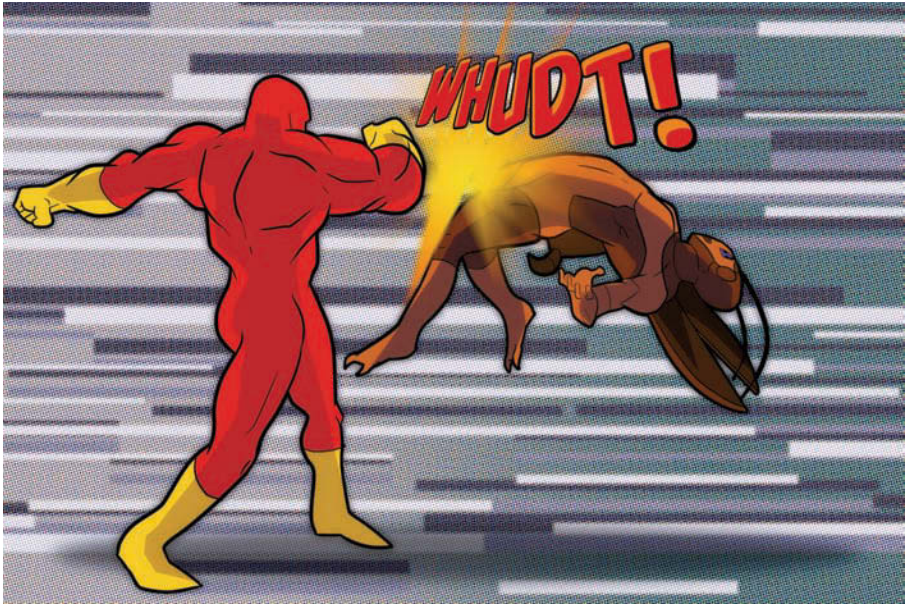
- That Arsenal exists, he emits an enormous amount of tau radiation, and he has enlisted Hammer and Sickle to his cause.
- ULTRA Labs has a device for tracking tau radiation.

Ultimately, all roads lead to Science City 13 outside of Minsk, where Arsenal is plotting his revenge against the former Soviet Union AND Victory City!

TIME FRAME

In five days the second convoy leaves from Zyrkistan to a Siberian disposal facility. If the heroes have successfully followed the clues, they can head to the largest source of tau radiation - Science City 13. If they didn't, they'll need to follow the second convoy and protect it. (See the sidebar at the beginning of the last chapter for details on this.)

CHAPTER FOUR: SHOWDOWN AT SCIENCE CITY 13!



The heroes should be following the clues to Science City 13, following the trail of Arsenal, with an idea of what his plan should be.

Once the heroes arrive at Science City 13, they find a walled fortress with an odd hodgepodge of technological add-ons to each building. This is the final conflict, and ends up being both a battle and a race against time to prevent Arsenal from launching his teleporter and detonating his tau bombs in the center of Victory City.

IF THE TRAIL GOES COLD

If the clue trail goes cold, and the heroes are unable to figure out what's going on, feel free to change the opening of this chapter to another attack on a missile Convoy. This time, the drones are accompanied by Hammer and Sickle, and fight to defeat the heroes once and for all. Run the scenario like the opening to Chapter Two, with the added pressure of Hammer and Sickle attacking the heroes and the drones taking out the soldiers.

Once the heroes defeat Hammer and Sickle, they'll find a teleportation device that is dialed in to take the pair back to wherever they came from – Science City 13!

Lots of opportunities for all kinds of heroes in this chapter.

Read or paraphrase the following to the players:

As you approach the legendary Science City 13, the place has gone from walled city to a technological amalgamation of fortress and weapons factory. In blatant contrast to Sigma-9's modern additions to old technology, this appears to be Soviet-Era cutting edge tech added to some modern pieces as well as random bits and bobs from all over the technological spectrum. A sickly green glow pulses from within the complex itself and the air vibrates with an audible machine-based hum.

The layout of the Science City is based on a small city with four corners. There is a massive twenty foot high wall surrounding the city, manned by Sputnik drones. Once the drones detect the heroes, they sound the alarms. (See map at the end of the Stats chapter). The fortress Arsenal has created is surrounded by fortified walls of reinforced concrete. It would take a Strength test at difficulty 8 to break through them. The city is separated into 4 quadrants with a hexagonal wall surrounding the buildings of the city. Four triangle shaped bunkers are nestled into the corners of the wall, each with a guard tower housing Sputnik drones. There are three roads with three metal gates leading into the city, one at the North, the West and the East entrances to the city. The doors are less tough than the walls requiring only a difficulty 7 test to break through.

RECONNAISSANCE MODE

The heroes have the opportunity in the previous chapter to obtain a map of Science City 13, or you could add a test somewhere between the chapters for them to obtain an old map of it. To aid in their planning process. It is a difficulty 7 test of social specialties crime-fighting skills, or intimidation based specialties. The difficulty is based on the inability to obtain Soviet-era information, even for the Black Square.

The city has a mountain cliff buffeting two of its sides. The cliff face is craggy but climbable. The center of the city has been converted to a teleportation platform. There are a pair of nuclear warheads at the center, modified with tau crystals to be launched and detonated in Moscow and Victory City simultaneously. The modified city also disrupts video and audio transmissions, though the ULTRA Labs tau radiation detection device will work here.

The final confrontation (described below in greater detail) begins once the heroes are spotted. The outer walls are patrolled by Sputnik VI drones and so are the streets of Science City 13. The heroes can attempt a stealthy incursion into the city. The drones move from tower to tower in a predictable pattern, so long as the heroes spend a page watching their movements, the Stealth test difficulty is only 5, but if they try to sneak right in, the difficulty raises to 7.

Arsenal is so self-assured in the superiority of drone technology he only locks the gate to the main approach, the other gates are unlocked. The westerly approach is the clearest way into the Science City, and is defended only by Sputnik Drones.

If the heroes elude the Drones and manage to enter the city undetected science Speciality-based and high Intellect heroes will notice that certain buildings have been modified into massive capacitors.

With a difficulty 6 Intellect test or a 5 difficulty test of a Specialty you as GM would deem appropriate, the heroes realize Arsenal is attempting to transform Science City 13 into a colossal Fusion Inductor. The Fusion Inductor is designed to transport objects through Geistspace, functional teleportation, and at this point, Arsenal's designs should be clear; he intends to teleport tau bombs and detonate them, so no one can prevent their launch or impact. tau radiation based bombs would act like a ERW weapon, using low-yield blasts but high-yield radiation, killing the populace but leaving the infrastructure intact.

To disable this Inductor, two of the four capacitors would need to be destroyed or disabled. See the Combat Overview below for more details.

COMBAT EVENTS OVERVIEW

If the heroes are outside the walls of the city, begin with **Encounter One** below. If they manage to get into Science City 13, there are Sputniks randomly patrolling the streets. The heroes have a 30% chance of encountering a patrol. (1-2 on 1d6 or instantly caught if you want to compel a hero with Bad Luck or a similar quality.) If they are spotted, begin with **Encounter Two** below.

ENCOUNTER ONE

Read or paraphrase the following to your players.

The walls are reinforced concrete, and suddenly spotlights from two of the towers at either end of the city flash down on you as a swarm of the Sputnik-VI drones sweep in your direction and the howl of an alarm fills the air! You're spotted!

There are three drones for every hero, attacking them immediately. The alarm goes up, and Hammer and Sickle, two supervillains, make their way to the outer walls. They are given instructions by Arsenal (which amount to them gaining a temporary advantage during the combat for him giving the pair a description of the powers of the heroes using his Master Tactician quality.) so their journey takes them three pages to arrive on-scene. Use the stats provided in the Stat section to handle the battle. Hammer's tactics are to locate the physically weakest or Mental Power using hero and neutralize them first. Sickle will attempt to weaken the most physically powerful hero with her attacks and Super-Speed. These tactics are their go-to for any encounter with them. They are fanatically loyal to Arsenal, and his idea of a glorious Soviet rebirth.

Hammer and Sickle will fight until they drop. Again, Arsenal's overconfidence prevents him from intervening until it's almost too late, and the pair are downed. If the heroes are not spotted entering the city, use Encounter Two - if they're spotted by drone patrols in the city.

ENCOUNTER TWO

Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

The city is bathed in a sickly green glow, and the hum drowns out most low level sounds, you step from the cover of buildings. Suddenly the high-pitched whirring of Sputnik Drones fills the air as four drones sweep into view. One splits off from the group, to sound the alarm!

The Sputnik-VI flying away has to get beyond the jamming field which takes it one page. If it's stopped before sounding the alarm, then the battle finishes without anyone intervening. Hammer and Sickle arrive in two pages if the alarm is sounding with the tactics used in **Encounter One** with an exception, they both have the quality "Under Orders" as well as the drones being under the same compunction. If they manage to destroy the patrol quickly, future patrols occur at a 50% rate, but the heroes can continue exploring the city or disabling the capacitor buildings.

ENCOUNTER THREE

Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

The city is linear, its quadrants fashioned and modified around prominent buildings transformed into capacitors for what appears to be a platform the size of a city park. At the center of the platform are a pair of nuclear warheads, but attached to them are several high-density glass tubes with tau crystals in them, giving off the sickly green glow. All of the machinery in this area is glowing with the tau radiation, and standing near the warheads is Arsenal. A red and maroon armored suit with glowing green skull that is dictating orders to a pair of supervillains wearing red, white and yellow uniforms. They must be Hammer and Sickle, the massive muscled male and the slender blonde female are listening attentively to Arsenal's rant, when he motions toward the warheads and says two chilling words; 'VICTORY CITY' - his metallic laughter fills the square!

The warhead and villains are standing atop what amounts to a gigantic teleportation pad. The three are not prepared for an attack, and the heroes gain the 'Surprise Attack' quality for the first page of the combat. The warheads have been modified with tau crystals, to create ERW (Enhanced

Radiation Weapon) warheads - which will poison the skies over Victory City, and Moscow.

If the heroes choose to attack, Hammer and Sickle fight them while Arsenal observes from above. If one of the heroes brings the fight to Arsenal, he opens a portal which spews forth Sputnik-VI drones (2 for each hero in the game). The drones intercept and attack the hero (who should gain a Determination). Once Hammer and Sickle fall, Arsenal begins fighting the heroes.



ARSENAL'S TACTICS

Arsenal's Wizardry ability to manifest any device from thin air, allow him to adapt to obstacles, and defeat foes. He will immediately attack the physically weakest hero or the hero with Mental powers. However, if there is a patriotic hero among the group his Hatred for the Decadent West quality drives him to irrationally try to destroy that hero. He will fight until he is reduced to 2 Stamina. At which point, hand out Determination to the heroes. A blinding flash emits from his containment suit blinding them momentarily. Arsenal then begins powering up the Fusion Inductor with his energy body.

Once Arsenal is powering up the Inductor, there are three ways to thwart his plan.

1. Dismantle the pair of warheads on the platform with an appropriate Specialty at a difficulty of 7 or an Intellect test at difficulty 9.
2. Destroy two of the capacitor buildings or disable them. Though the resulting feedback creates Arsenal's final form, a gargantuan crystalline energy being that immediately attacks the heroes (see **The Final Battle**)
3. Use the tau crystals to absorb Arsenal by modifying the Inductor. (Note: if one of your heroes was abducted in Nova-1 to remove the Inductor by Wrack and his minions, he has advantage to perform this action.) This results in Arsenal becoming trapped inside the tau crystals. This avoids the Final Battle portion of the scenario. Head to the **Epilogue**.

THE FINAL BATTLE

Enraged at his defeat, Arsenal's form shifts into a monstrously large energy creature, made up of crystals and energy in a gigantic whirling being of destruction. He attacks the heroes with abandon, destroying buildings to get at the heroes. His Stamina is restored to full, but once he's reduced to 0, his tau radiation form coalesces into a crystalline humanoid statue, where he will remain trapped forever. (Or until you need a recurring villain for your campaign).

THE NEMESIS REVEALED!

During the Final Battle (or sooner if the heroes are trying to trap Arsenal before he can change forms), Arsenal lets slip that he was contacted by a foolish American who was looking to abrogate his rudimentary Fusion Inductor engine once it became useable. Exultant, Arsenal reveals that the American "The might so-called Reign is unable to recreate my glorious Soviet technology!"

Reign is the Mysterious Nemesis for your team, the enemy that faced the original Phalanx before they disappeared mysteriously. Arsenal reveals nothing else of Reign's movements, or location as he doesn't know, but a pattern for his actions is developing. Reign is trying to get a Fusion Inductor for some reason. Wrack was hired to steal one, but double-crossed him. Arsenal refused to share his technology.

The answer as to why Reign wants an Inductor is answered in the next chapter, but if your heroes have questions, simply say that information on Reign is scarce, but what's known is that he was the first to use magic to

power cybernetic armor and weapons. Rex Mundi was one of Reign's contemporaries, and they often clashed over the right to rule the world. Reign wasn't just a villain to the just, he was a dangerous element in the villain community as well. Seeing himself as the rightful ruler of the world.

EPILOGUE: HAIL THE CONQUERING HEROES!

Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

In what seems to be hours, the Russian military and Intelligence organizations rush to the scene of Science City 13, and confiscate the crystals found there. They assure you that the warheads will be deactivated, and that your assistance is to be commended. The Russian President is offering you all Medals of Courageous Honor for your deeds here.

You spend the next week on television, granting interviews to radio, newspapers and the blogosphere, becoming the most recent *cause célèbre* in the world, congratulations!

...AND THE PHALANX RETURNS!

As above, but also read this to the players:

...with the exception of television journalist Mary Martin-Keane, who is concerned with how much the world can trust the Phalanx when they are a team of superhumans without legal status as government agents. Her tirades border on inflammatory, but luckily, she's not gaining any ground with the public. Not yet, anyway.

THE NEMESIS CRISIS



INTRODUCTION

The world of comics has a rich history of crossovers and “event” comics. From crossovers that embodied the publishers’ biggest and heaviest hitters teaming up, or just a comic that rebooted, reset, or relaunched an entire series of reinvented versions of classic heroes.

The Nemesis Crisis can be such an event for your own **ICONS** game, if you wish, a cosmic crossover pitting the forces of good and evil against one another on a battlefield in another dimension. This adventure can be a combination “sideline” for **Rise of the Phalanx** and foreshadowing of future plot points.

PLOT OVERVIEW

The Cosmic Justicar has decided to judge superhumanity’s continued right to exist. To do so, the Justicar brings the heroes and villains of the world to face one another to determine the fate of superhumanity.

The villains believe that if they win, they gain the world, but that is not quite the case. The Justicar leaves the goal of this test ambiguous, purposefully, especially if the heroes believe conflict is the only resolution for this trial. The true test is to see if the heroes and villains can set aside their petty human squabbles to enter his Hall of Judgement, by solving a puzzle that requires cooperation on both sides.

The villains use this as an opportunity to destroy their hated foes. One of these villains is Reign, who has a different agenda: to use the advanced technological wizardry of The Justicar to find and destroy the original Phalanx and return to Earth.

The Justicar wants proof superhumanity, or superheroes at least, deserve to continue existing citing that even with the advent of superhumans, humankind has not progressed beyond their primitive state.

The Justicar transports the heroes and villains to a strange planetoid called Equinox, located in Geistspace, the sub-space dimension that makes faster than light travel possible. The Justicar gives the characters a week to prove superhumanity’s worth, or he will remove all evidence of superhumanity from the world: No superheroes, no supervillains, and none of the wonders that come with them.

The climax of the story occurs when one side or the other wins the conflict, and squares off against the Justicar. This adventure is different from others in that it is designed to be far more open-ended and free-form, to allow for any kind of heroes or villains to face off in a universe shattering conflict! This is also the perfect adventure to have your players add permanent powers, alter their costume, or even sacrifice themselves heroically for the good of all mankind!

The adventure has a structure based on a timeline of events described as if the heroes never intervene, given in the **Prologue**.

PROLOGUE: SNOW-BLIND STAMPEDE!

Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

You are surprised to find your headquarters communication screens filled with a view of the Arctic wilderness, and a frantic scientist slamming a fist into a pile of conglomerrated technology. Finally, satisfied their broadcast equipment is working, the scientist pants and looks into the camera. The winds and snow are blowing, and the scientist leans close.

“We’re having a...an Event...an anomaly erupting from the North Pole has consumed our research station...and All-American Girl has vanished! She was investigating...the disappearance of her comrades...the dome of energy...” the scientist struggles and points the camera at a massive dome of crackling sickly green energy “is consuming everything. Our readings have projected that it will begin devouring all of the Northern Hemisphere. We need HELP!”

This is a call to action for your heroes. If they’re an established team, they’re called upon to save the world! (Or, at least the Northern Hemisphere.) The dome was discovered a month or so back, around the time the **Flight of the Nova-1** adventure takes place, and the heroes All-Star, Volcano, Saguaro, and Hangman were dispatched to investigate and disappeared. During the events of **Cold War Conundrum**, All-American Girl offers to find them, leading up to this disastrous event.

The Phalanx should have their prototype ship from previous adventures to take them to the site where the adventure begins. Otherwise, assume the government or contacts like Lucien King provide something suitable.

As the heroes arrive, read or paraphrase the following:

The transport lands on the floating ice mass nearest the dome, and as you step outside, you see, thundering toward you from the interior of the dome, wooly ponderous beasts with long curved horns, ridden by pale hominids with albino skin, devilish horns, and glowing red eyes!

THE NOX RIDERS AND THE RAMPA-BEASTS

For the Nox Riders, use the Ninja stock character from **ICONS** and add a shock net device (Stunning 7 with a Binding extra). The beasts are comparable to the Triceratops stock character from **ICONS**. There are Nox Riders equal twice the number to the heroes.

The Nox have been sent to test the heroes, and once their number has been reduced by half, they retreat back under the energy dome, attempting to draw the heroes into following them. Use this moment to either have one of the missing heroes appear, struggling from under the dome, and getting dragged in, or the Nox abducting the scientist who sent the message, taking him through the dome.

If the heroes follow the Nox, award Determination Points if it is appropriate to their qualities, *especially* if the players bring it up. The dome expands, pulling the heroes into it. If this happens, bear in mind that this is intrinsic to the setup. The dome shoots them with a beam to transport them directly to the next chapter's location, so that player may be excused while you describe the next bit to the other players. The reason for this is that not every hero is going to have an attitude of "Let's go into that deadly dome!" They may fight tooth and nail (and unbreakable metal claw) against going anywhere against their will. Use this as a chance for roleplaying when they awaken with the other players knowing what's going on.

Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

The light flashes, surrounding you and your teammates, and suddenly you find yourself in a massive, technologically wondrous facility, with a dome arcing overhead that defies description. It gives you a view of a nebula-filled galaxy, studded with stars of multitudinous colors, and more—a grand view of the Earth’s most notorious villains! Across from you, beyond a shimmering force field the villains stand in awe of the situation as well. Both sides of the room, your side, filled with the myriad heroes of your world, and their side, a near who’s who of villainy.

In a blinding arc of energy, a ten foot tall, magenta-skinned alien appears, wearing robes and a futuristic tunic with a hand outstretched dramatically and carrying a high-tech staff bearing a symbolic pair of scales crafted out of glimmering golden metal.

It motions towards the dome, which fills with the image of a planetoid floating in a vast energy field.

“I am the Cosmic Justicar! It is my destiny to be the Judge of all that occurs in the Universe. This is Equinox...the place where you will be judged!”

The Cosmic Justicar is an entity charged with establishing Justice in the universe, not Balance. It is sexless, ageless, and immortal. It has powers dwarfing the mere mortals it has summoned, powers it uses to enforce the rules of this judgement.

Gamemasters with access to **ICONS A to Z** may wish to use the cosmic levels from **“C” is for Cosmic** to define the Justicar, in which case its powers are all Godlike (20). Otherwise, just assume the Justicar can largely do as it pleases, and nothing the heroes do can harm or impede it.

It explains the trial by combat and its rules. The Justicar outlines the heroes’ dire predicament:

- They are in Geistspace with no way back.
- They will be given a week’s time to prove superhumanity’s worthiness to exist.
- If they are *not* able to prove their worthiness, the Justicar will use its cosmic powers to erase superhumanity from history, turning Earth into a world where superhumans never existed!

THE TRIAL OUTLINE

The basis for successfully defending superhumanity's right to exist on Earth is determined by whether the superhumans can gain access to the Halls of Justice without harming the Nox, the servitor race on his planetoid, Equinox. In addition, they must defend superhumanity against the aggressions of the supervillains summoned to fight them.

The map included on the following pages allows for faction sizes as small as just the players' heroes against a single team of villains, such as the Plagues from the **Cast of Characters** section, or it can be veritable armies of heroes and villains fighting it out for longer than the week given, stretching out the encounters with the villains over multiple issues, as you prefer to run it.

SCALING TIPS AND ALTERNATE PLAY

The first and easiest way to scale up this adventure is to look at the map, and treat the different areas as not city-state sized sectors of a planetoid, but countries on a planetoid continent. The second is to expand the time frame of the trial, from a week to a month, or even a year. (Time passes differently in Geistspace, after all.) Finally, you can bring many other villains from the **Adversaries** sourcebook or any other **ICONS** material you'd like into play.

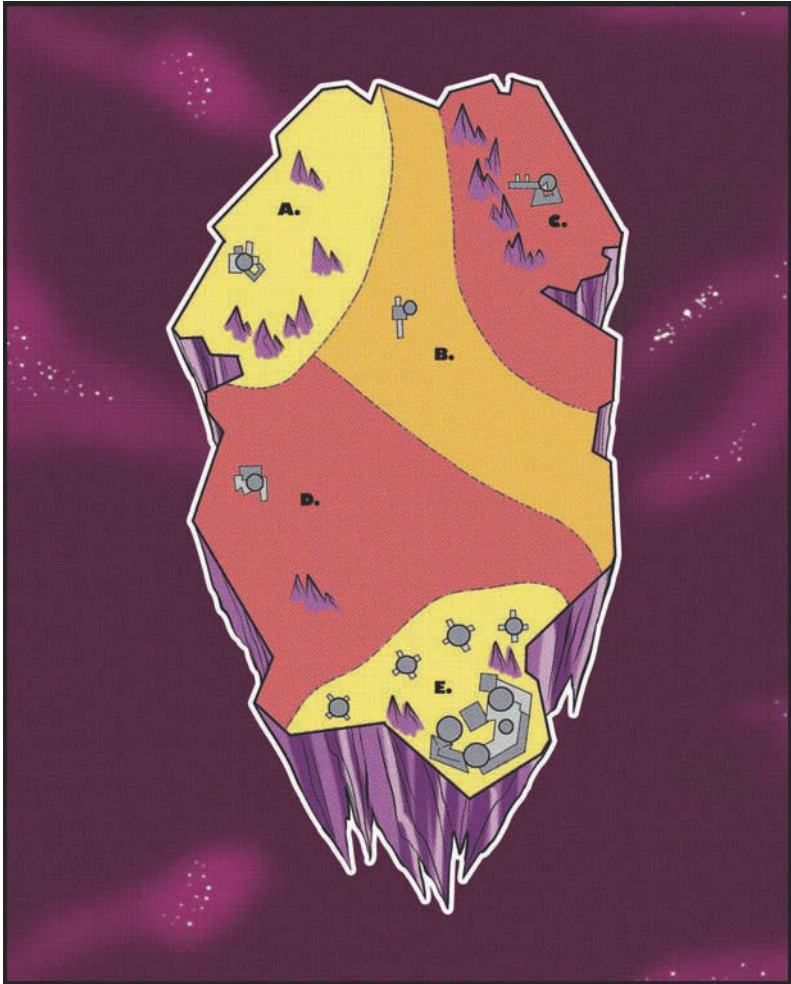
One particularly enjoyable way we've tested this adventure was with half the table playing the villains of the other half's heroes. This is only suggested for seasoned role-players (and **ICONS** fans who delight in tormenting their fellow players!)

There are things the heroes do not know at the beginning of the adventure that are revealed over the course of the story. Through scientific discoveries made by the trapped scientists from the Arctic expedition and different locations on the planetoid.

1. First, the history of the planetoid: It used to be part of a world called Equinox, existing half in darkness and half in light. On this world two races, the Lux and the Nox, battled, hatred fueling a war that continued over centuries. Eventually they developed superhumans for the purpose of fighting wars and the Justicar destroyed their world, leaving only the Lux and Nox as his servitors, and their cities and villages that survived as testaments to his unmatched power.

2. When the Justicar performs a Trial, he is no longer all-powerful, as part of the role of allowing for justice to be served. This means he is vulnerable, though it's not truly debilitating. However, even the smallest chance of success is all a villainous genius like Reign requires...
3. Energy stations are located all over the planetoid, one in each zone except the Hall itself. The energy stations power the shields of the Hall of Judgment. If you can control these stations you can turn off the shields surrounding the Hall of Judgment. Reign and the scientists trapped on Equinox can figure this out, along with any science-based heroes in the group.
4. The ruined cities dotting the landscape contain technology able to create a teleportation platform. This is one of the things the heroes might realize, as they have seen something similar in the adventure **Cold War Conundrum**.
5. Finally, the Lux and the Nox both know the rules and true victory condition for the Justicar's test, but cannot assist the heroes in gaining the information. However, if the heroes rescue either the Lux or the Nox from the villains, one will break the law of the Justicar and tell them the victory condition, in spite of any punishment from the Justicar.

The map's key explains where the villains begin and, following that, Reign's overall timeline and plan.



KEY TO THE MAP

There are five zones of this map, including:

- A. **Hero Starting Location:** Temperate and Mountainous
- B. **Nox Villages:** Wastes, with occasional Nox villages
- C. **Villain Starting Location:** A Massive Technological Fortress, Cold Mountainous
- D. **Cities of Lux:** Urban and Temperate
- E. **The Hall of Judgement:** Domain of the Cosmic Justicar

REIGN'S TIMELINE

The adventure assumes you use the baseline week of time to determine the outcome, and Reign's plot to overthrow the Justicar outlined here. Consider this the outline of events if Reign's plot is not dismantled or thwarted by heroic intervention.

DAY ONE: ARRIVAL

- **Morning** – Reign dispatches the Plagues to take control of the Energy Station in the Lux City.
- **Afternoon** – The Plagues rampage through the Nox Villages in Area B.
- **Night** – The Plagues seize control the Lux City Energy Station in Area D.

DAY TWO: ALLIANCES

- **Morning** – The Plagues gather technological items in the Lux City, to assist in the creation of Reign's device.
- **Afternoon** – Gathered items are delivered to both the Energy Station in Area D and in Area C.
- **Night** – Reign and Wrack modify the the two energy stations.

DAY THREE: THE PLOT UNFOLDS

- **Morning** – Wrack visits the Nox leaders, offering them an alliance in exchange for their assistance in destroying the Justicar.
- **Afternoon** – The Plagues take over the Energy Station in Area B and modify it according to Reign's design.
- **Night** – Reign converts the Villain HQ Energy Station into an impenetrable shield covering the fortress in Area C.

DAY FOUR: CONQUEST

- **Morning** – The Plagues attack and occupy the Hero HQ and Energy Station in Area A.
- **Afternoon** – At Reign's command, Wrack begins converting the Hero HQ's Energy Station.
- **Night** – Wrack raises an impenetrable shield around the Hero HQ.

DAY FIVE: THE BATTLE FOR EQUINOX

- **Morning** – Reign powers all of the other Energy Station shields, draining the Justicar's shield enough to attack.

- **Afternoon** – The Plagues join the Nox in the attack against the Justicar and his Lux protectors.
- **Night** – Reign joins the battle to turn the tide and allow his forces to win.

DAY SIX: VICTORY

The morning of the sixth day brings with it a resounding victory for the villains, Reign, and the Nox over the Cosmic Justicar. Once all of the villains have made their way into the Hall of Judgement, Reign betrays them, sealing them inside.

Reign then begins the final phase of his plan, using the Hall to drain all of the villains and the Justicar to power his tau radiation-fueled teleportation platform at the Villainous HQ.

DAY SEVEN: VENGEANCE!

Reign returns to Earth using the teleportation platform, permanently draining the Justicar and the villains. With no heroes or villains to prevent his domination of humanity, the Earth is enslaved and brought to heel under his iron fist.

“VENGEANCE IS MINE!”

Reign’s goal is locating the original Phalanx and utterly destroying them. The reason for his animosity toward the Phalanx is revealed at the end of **The Metaskulk Invasion**, the next adventure in the series.

Sufficient to say, this story reveals the original Phalanx are not dead, but lost in Geistspace, and Reign has been trying to reach them since the first episode of **Rise of the Phalanx**. Every manner of piercing Geistspace on Earth has been manipulated by his henchmen and followers to allow Reign to return from Geistspace and rule the Earth.

However, the Phalanx is no longer a team of star-adrift castaways, but your players’ heroes. Should the heroes thwart Reign on Equinox, they learn a bit about the challenges to yet to come.

Reign seizes this opportunity to manipulate the Cosmic Justicar’s advanced technology to break the curse forcing him to remain in Geistspace, and preventing him from returning to Earth. To power his device, he needs the energies of the villains and the Justicar himself, which returns him, complete and all-powerful, to Earth.

VERDICT OF THE JUSTICAR

Using the free-form format, your heroes may well succeed in their tasks, and uncover the real victory condition of their trial. The Cosmic Justicar congratulates them on proving their worth. It then returns the heroes to the Arctic, along with the missing scientists and the other abducted heroes.

The Justicar returns the supervillains where they came from (back to prison, if that's where the heroes put them before), and the world back to the way it was. The heroes note that no time has passed since they have gone, however, any major changes to their characters are real.

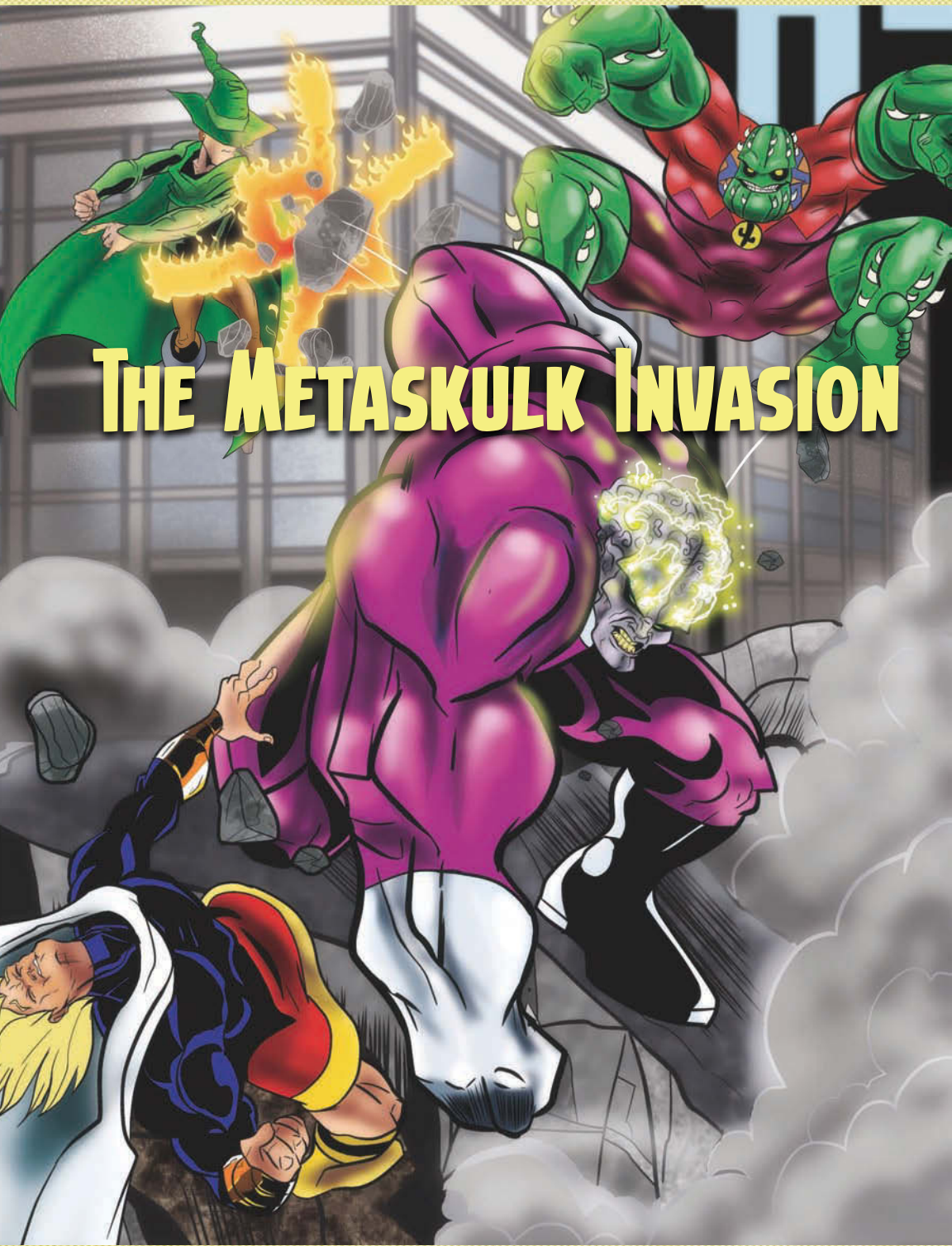
Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

“Reign’s plot to usurp my power and destroy the Phalanx has been defied by the true heroes to bear that title. He does not yet know it, but you will soon defend your world against his final attack. Your success is not assured but his overwhelming hatred for your predecessors may well be his undoing.”

“Your success bodes well for your world. If you are the bastions of hope, humanity may rest well knowing they are protected by true agents of justice. You are hereby declared...not guilty. Now, return to your world, but know that the Justicar watches. Always.”

The Justicar does not answer any questions. However, the Lux do send some information back with the Phalanx on a portable computing device the heroes find amongst their equipment when they return to the Citadel.

Once the heroes have returned to Earth, you can move on to the next chapter of the series — **The Metaskulk Invasion!**



THE METASKULK INVASION

INTRODUCTION

Cold War Conundrum ended with the Phalanx successfully defending Victory City from nuclear annihilation, and learning that since the beginning the evil techno-magical maniac known as Reign has been their prime foe. They had a brush with Reign in **The Nemesis Crisis** and, in this chapter, the stakes are higher for the new Phalanx in this adventure as the forces of the Metaskulks invade Victory City and their old foe Wrack transforms himself into the Ultra-Skulk!

This adventure includes a new mechanic for your players to play with—Public Opinion—and the story itself has elements that may shock or anger your players. The public life of a superhero is not always an easy one.

The end of this adventure showcases your heroes' status as protectors of Victory City, and sets up the finale to the series. Along the way, however, the heroes suffer loss, betrayal, and find themselves on the wrong side of the law!

PLOT POINTS

- During **Flight of the Nova-1**, the heroes encountered Wrack, one of a race of villainous extra-dimensional aliens called the Metaskulks. They have the ability to transform themselves and mimic any humanoid species they come into contact with.
- The heroes also became connected with both Apex Innovations and ULTRA Labs, which have dedicated themselves to the research and manipulation of the extra-dimensional energy and power source called tau radiation.
- As the *Nova-7's* predecessor (and Phalanx current transport) the *Stiletto* used its potentiality sling and slipped through Geistospace, it also brought with it Wrack and a crew of infiltrators. We see in this adventure the Metaskulks have developed a way to bring more of their infiltrators to our world.
- Once Wrack was defeated, he was sent to the prison known as the Icebox. The heroes may have interviewed him for more information regarding the events of **Cold War Conundrum**. If they happened to acquiesce to his request for a simple item, that comes into play later in the adventure.

- Finally, the villain of **Cold War Conundrum**, the maniacal Arsenal, mentions he was approached by one of the minions of Reign to appropriate his teleportation device.

- These facts lead up to one conclusion: Reign has been pulling the strings behind the villainous exploits of the Phalanx's arch-enemies from each adventure.

This adventure continues the saga of Victory City's greatest heroes so let's get it started!

PLOT OVERVIEW

The events of the **Prologue** are interwoven into the fabric of events in the rest of the adventure. Redkap turns out to be backed by the Metaskulks, and moreover, their benefactor, Reign.

The alien supervillain Wrack has been in custody following the events of **Flight of the Nova-1**. He escapes, along with a team of supervillains with a grudge against the heroes. Wrack's escape is the signal for the forces of the Metaskulks to begin their invasion of Victory City.

The heroes try to defend the city and, all the while, the press and media begin turning on them, deeming them the reason for the dangers the city is suffering. The leader of this media blitz is Mary Martin-Keane, one of the most popular talking-heads on the Metro News Network.

There's also a new superhero in town named Pinnacle who claims she is the sole hero the city needs. Pinnacle wears powered armor with non-lethal weapons designed by a few scientists from both Apex Innovations and ULTRA Labs. She is in fact a Metaskulk posing as a hero and brainwashed to believe it.

Also during the adventure, the Plagues begin attacking the city with their cohort Redkap, and need to be rounded up. They are assisted by the Metaskulks, though one of their number, the Locust, is not sure he should be accepting their aid.

The Metaskulks, who have been quietly infiltrating human society since Wrack was imprisoned, begin sabotaging critical systems in the city. There's a ticking clock as the heroes need to find the hidden Metaskulk leaders, and regain control of their city. Their enemies outnumber them, the people are beginning to distrust them, and at that moment, Wrack, the new Ultra-Skulk, attacks their headquarters, with the help of the headquarters' newly installed defense systems!

The battle is joined by Pinnacle and Victory City's CRASH Team, who are there to bring the heroes in. The heroes need to find the proof to clear

themselves and prevent the full scale destruction of...**The Metaskulk Invasion!**

OPTIONAL RULE: PUBLIC OPINION

Public Opinion is a trait designed to be comparable to other game systems' morality and responsibility traits defining heroes. Comics have a rich history of characters whose notoriety among the citizens of their home city factors heavily into their never-ending battle for justice.

The trait is determined by the heroes' actions, and can be used to influence social interactions with the populace of Victory City—or whatever metropolis (or planet!) your characters call home.

Heroes have both Team Public Opinion and Individual Public Opinion, which fall on the scale below:

Supervillain (-5): Authorities attempt to arrest and detain you on sight, civilians are terrified of you.

Villain (-4): Authorities attempt to arrest you if someone spots you, and many civilians are terrified of you.

Infamous (-3): Like Bonnie and Clyde, or Ma Barker and her gang, you may be romanticized by a certain element of the populace, but the authorities don't have enough to bring you in on sight.

Threat (-2): You are known to be dangerous, but while your motives are unknown, public opinion varies. Newspapers, television media, and radio often have editorials about your exploits and a few may target you in particular as one of their favorite punching bags.

Menace (-1): Your tactics are slipshod and endanger the public. People on the street are somewhat divided on their opinion of you. But, you'll know that at least one media source has it out for you.

Unknown (+0): You're a face in the crowd, while you're not immediately recognized, your actions are nonetheless scrutinized.

Vigilante (+1): You have been seen doing good for your city, and some of them consider you one of the good guys.

Do-gooder (+2): You've been enough of a hero to gain the general acceptance as a hero within the city. You're also known by authorities, and may have worked with one or two on minor cases. Your influence over them is not much, but the media occasionally mentions your name among other more luminous heroes.

Crusader (+3): Your heroic actions have gained you a following among the people. You're a friend to the law enforcement of the city, and the criminal element knows that when you're around, they are not safe. This has the dual effect of minor street-level criminals and gang member types avoiding you, and minor villains trying to take you down to make a name for themselves or because they have a grudge against you.

Hero (+4): Your actions and constant vigilance over the city make you one of the official guardians of the populace. The media often makes note that you're always protecting the law-abiding folks of your city, and only a crank would have a grudge against you. You have contacts in law enforcement who assist you if they can, but sometimes complicate your life with requests for help.

Major villains include contingencies in their plans in case you become involved. A minor villain definitely has a grudge against you, possibly even part of a related quality.

Superhero (+5): You are one of the paragons of the city, your name is synonymous with your hometown. They know the city is under your direct protection, and you are a clear benefit to your local law enforcement. You are one of the subjects of media attention, almost entirely positive. You may even have a romantic interest in the local media who has either become enamored of your deeds, or you have been saving from danger enough that your relationship has grown.

Any villain in your city designs plans with you specifically in mind, you have possibly changed the crime statistics to the point that only particularly powerful villains would attempt capers in your city.

Your Public Opinion is based on two things; Good Press and Bad Press. To determine your Public Opinion, subtract your Bad Press from your Good Press. You gain Good and Bad Press as follows:

Good Press

+1 if your hero has a secret identity (so long as your public identity is not infamous)

+1 for abilities giving you connections in the government, media, and law enforcement

+1 for a positive media story in any media outlet

+1 for a public defeat of a supervillain or supervillain team

+2 for thwarting a plot affecting your home city

+2 if your hero has a public identity

- +2 if your hero is a member of a team
- +2 if your hero has a public team headquarters
- +2 for a public rescue of a civilian or law enforcement
- +3 for thwarting a plot affecting the entire planet

Bad Press

- +1 if your hero has a secret identity with an infamous public identity
- +1 for fights with supervillains in public without law enforcement requests for help
- +1 for fights with supervillains resulting in damage to public property
- +1 for qualities involving bad luck, unusual appearance, being a social outsider, or similar things.
- +2 for fights with supervillains resulting in damage to private property
- +2 for heroes with Artificial or Unearthly origins
- +2 for negative news editorials or reportage
- +2 for public defeat at the hands of a supervillain
- +3 for fights with supervillains resulting in injuries to civilians or law enforcement
- +3 for being accused of committing a crime
- +5 for committing a crime in public view

Example: Greg is playing the Hangman. He has played through two **ICONS** adventures thus far: **Flight of the Nova-1** and **Cold-War Conundrum**.

Adding up the events of those stories for his Good Press, Greg comes up with 16 total:

- He has a Secret Identity (+1)
- He has connections in law enforcement (+1)
- He rescued the scientists of Apex Innovations from the Metaskulks and the astronauts aboard the Nova-1 (The GM counts this as one rescue) (+2)
- He assisted in the defeat of the Plagues twice (+2)
- The Phalanx defeated Wrack and his cohorts (+1)
- He is part of the Phalanx (+2)
- They have a public headquarters in Victory City (+2)

- Thwarted Arsenal's plot and recovered the nuclear weapons. However, the defeat of the gang members in Moscow and Hammer and Sickle weren't widely reported nor was their defeat of Arsenal public (+3)
- The Phalanx have received two praise-filled media stories for the team's successes (+2)

Bad Press gained from the past two adventures, however, takes away from this number, and Hangman's total for that comes to 13.

- In the first adventure, ULTRA Labs, private property, was severely damaged (+2)
- Apex Innovations' launch center was also severely damaged during Wrack's theft of the Nova-1 (+2)
- A police officer was injured during the fight with the Plagues at ULTRA Labs (+3)
- In the fight with the Plagues, he did not have a law enforcement request for assistance, he simply went into action (+1)
- The Memorial Park was also damaged during the fight with The Plagues in the first adventure (+1)
- The second adventure, a police officer was injured when Derecha flung a car at the heroes (+3)
- His "Grim Guardian of the Gallows" quality gives him an unnerving demeanor (+1)

So, subtracting his Bad Press from his Good Press, and he winds up with a Public Opinion score of +3 (Crusader). Not bad for two adventures!

To determine the Public Opinion of your team, average the Public Opinion values of all the team's members and round down. Having a particularly unpopular team member can bring the opinion of the whole team down!

You can reduce your Bad Press by committing selfless and heroic deeds, or you can sacrifice three points of Good Press to eliminate a point of Bad Press. This reflects the way the media loves a negative narrative, and that good deeds are often forgotten while misdeeds live on.

You use your Public Opinion as a bonus to an interaction test to sway the outcome. Bear in mind that a negative Public Opinion is also taken into consideration when dealing with the public, law enforcement or local government, adding to the difficulty of some of your interaction tests!

Each of the encounters in this adventure also have the Good and Bad Press values for the events that occur.

PROLOGUE: THE UNSEELIE COURT STRIKES!



In this **Prologue** Redkap has taken a cathedral full of worshipers hostage but is using a group of misfits, malcontents, and people on the fringes of society—evil and disturbed to a man—to become his followers, the Unseelie Court.

There are a number of Unseelie Court cultists equal to the number of heroes plus three. Their abilities and description can be found in the **Cast of Characters** section at the end of this book.

IT JUST GOT REAL

During the **Prologue**, the heroes are going to take a loss. In comics, death is powerful—as a motivation for heroes to take up the mantle and fight against the darkness, or as a tragic reminder that life is fragile around these nigh-invulnerable demigods. Redkap has taken hostage one of the heroes' supporting cast, be it sidekick, police contact, or family member, and is going to kill that character.

Be sure this fits in with the tone of your game. If you're running for a group of young players, you may want to make it just a severe injury resulting in a coma, but if you think they can handle it, this is definitely a way to make the heroes take notice of how quickly and viciously life can change in the world of superheroes.

Also, it's a powerful narrative tool to introduce the background of a hero or supercharge the tale of a superhero and their foul nemesis.

As part of the **Rise of the Phalanx** series, Redkap's attack should be that much more personal against the heroes, considering they've thwarted him and his cronies twice before. So, consider that when choosing a victim for this encounter. During our play-tests, we chose a player who we knew would enjoy the dramatic turn, and informed them in private the bad turn the **Prologue** would take, to get their consent and approval. This diminishes the surprise somewhat for that player but having a co-conspirator among the players means the surprise can be that much more effective for the rest of the group, and player consent is important for this type of plot twist.

Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

Police spot lights wash slowly over the front of the Saint Stephen's Cathedral as you arrive on the scene. There are faint curls of smoke trailing up from the pair of belfries overlooking the street.

A police barricade has been erected across the entrance. The chief of the CRASH unit, James Wyatt, looks on the scene with nervous tension. Wyatt is usually more focused about these situations, but as you approach him, he suddenly steps forward, and stops you from coming closer.

"This is one that has gotten out of control."

The situation is dire. There are hostages in the cathedral, about thirty in all. They are chained to the pews with what appears to be a complicated bomb mechanism. Redkap walked into the church with a number of men in odd masks, armed with futuristic looking gauntlets able to fire beams of energy.

Redkap has his followers, what he calls his Unseelie Court, watching the cathedral in shifts. Redkap's demands have been delivered to Chief Wyatt and the police through a parishioner he sent out after first scratching the victim up to show that he means business.

Redkap wants the magical dagger the police confiscated from him when they last incarcerated him. He also wants the immediate release of his partners in the Plagues: Derecha, Locust, and Phage. Redkap has said that any heroic intervention will result in a dead hostage—possibly a *lot* of dead hostages.

ENCOUNTER BREAKDOWN

In action time, the encounter breaks down as follows:

Page One: Redkap and his minions are in the cathedral in force, but there aren't enough to cover all entry points. The heroes arrive on page one, and Redkap is dragging a hostage up to one of the belfries. If the heroes go in guns blazing, Redkap is already on the move, having seen the heroes arrive.

The Unseelie Court are armed with technologically advanced gauntlets that give them the Blast power, that does either heat, cold, or electricity damage. They open fire on the hostages first, being fanatical followers of Redkap, then on the heroes.

Page Two: Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

The shocked screams of onlookers fill the air as police snipers begin firing at Redkap! Redkap ducks back into the belfry as rounds shatter the stonework all around him. He must have the luck of the Devil himself, as he is not wounded in the barrage.

The smoke from the belfry wafts a moment, and Redkap appears from inside the cathedral. With a grimy arm wrapped around the neck of a hostage, his eyes are wild as he scans the gathered police, and his eyes meet yours.

Redkap shouts as the spotlights frantically try to give the CRASH snipers a good enough shot, sweeping over him. His voice is a hoarse roar as he stares down at the flashing police lights.

“OFFICERS! It seems you are not good at following directions! You’ve brought uninvited guests to our little party—Now, a lesson in...proper...etiquette.”

He produces a long serrated knife, and puts it to the throat of the terrified hostage, which you now can recognize as [the supporting character you have chosen] Then, in a quick and practiced motion, Redkap slashes at the throat of his victim and flings them from the belfry! The body falls and smacks against the granite staircase to the cathedral.

Again, the wounds to the supporting character of your choice are only fatal if you want the narrative to take that deadly a turn. The fall can just add insult to injury or it can cause further serious harm, leaving the victim with broken bones and comatose.

On your heroes’ turn, they may choose to charge the cathedral, but again, Wyatt tells them Redkap still has many other hostages inside. Feel free to use compels from activating the heroes’ qualities to prevent them from rushing the cathedral—or to compel them to do so, if they have just seen a dear friend or loved one possibly murdered—awarding the players Determination Points appropriately.

The snipers are on edge and, for the rest of the encounter they fire on anyone appearing in either of the belfries of the cathedral. Wyatt is now off-balance, and willing to listen to any plan the heroes might come up with.

Page Three: Redkap retreats down into the main cathedral. The hostages are gasping and shouting, but are kept in check as Redkap begins arming the bomb attached to the altar of the cathedral. This takes him this entire

page. Redkap orders the majority of his followers to cover the front of the church. Wyatt explains the points of entry into the church on this page. There are also belfries in the rear of the cathedral, a rear service entrance, and an electrical mains and sewer access room in the basement.

There are a pair of brownstones on either side of the church, with CRASH Team snipers posted there, waiting for movement. These provide a good view inside the church, which is how they are getting their intelligence about the hostages.

Page Four: Redkap heads down into the sewer access tunnels to activate the teleportation device that transports him to his rendezvous with the Metaskulks. The aliens provided him with the gauntlets, bomb, and teleportation device.

His followers begin patrolling the church. They are willing to die for Redkap, and know the bomb is set to explode in 10 pages, once the tau crystals powering it generate enough energy to detonate.

At this point, it becomes a countdown to the bomb going off, which happens on Page 13. CRASH detects the energy build up, and Wyatt informs the heroes their time just got short.

If your heroes don't have a scientific whiz with them, they can give the bomb squad access to the device if they can knock out Redkap's Unseelie Court and prevent harm from coming to any other hostages.

The bomb itself is an alien and human hybrid design. Disarming it is a difficulty 5 pyramid test, most likely involving Intellect, but allow the players to apply other abilities to the problem as you see fit. A single massive success does the trick, or the heroes can build up to it, if they have time.

There are only two major clues as to Redkap's whereabouts: the strange technology used to create the gauntlets and the bomb's otherworldly design, powered by tau crystals. However, before the heroes can follow these clues in **Chapter One**, events begin escalating quickly.

Good Press:

- Defeating the henchmen (+1)
- Disarming the bomb (+2)
- Rescuing the hostages (+2)

Bad Press:

- Redkap escapes (+2)
- Hostage killed or injured (+3)
- Damage to the cathedral (+2)

- Police injured or killed (+3)
Bomb detonates (+3)

Note: The hostage bad press points cannot be avoided, if a player agrees to Redkap killing or injuring one of their supporting characters.

By the end of the encounter, the press has arrived, several news crews, and most notable Mary Martin-Keane, who is looking for a story. The body (wounded or dead) of the supporting character has been moved to the alley next to the cathedral, and Keane's utter amorality when it comes to a story sneaks over with her cameraman Marvin Patel, and begins reporting after exposing the body.

MARY MARTIN-KEANE

Mary is a special case, of course. She is a media vulture, but is she evil? Well, not exactly. She's opinionated, and screams that opinion at the top of her lungs, but she has no powers, nor is she one of the Metaskulks.

Though as GM you'd be missing a golden opportunity indeed to make them *think* she's involved. In our playtest, the most volatile member of the hero team was so thoroughly convinced Keane was a Metaskulk that she confronted her on the air. Of course, the feed was interrupted and later edited to make it look like the hero had assaulted her.

Also, bear in mind that Mary is designed to push the buttons of your players. If the players in your group are conservative sorts, feel free to give Keane a know-it-all liberal bias, along with the entire Metro News Network. If your players are more liberal in their views feel free to portray Mary as a hawkish, skeptical, and law-and-order sort who vilifies the vigilantism of the players. She cannot be convinced of the heroes' valor, or will not admit to it, even when it is proven to be beyond reproach.

Confrontation with the heroes is good for ratings. Also, she should target the most combustible element of your team, and if that person happens to be related to the victim she exploits in the **Prologue**, so much more the better.

As the heroes help with mopping up, either the most volatile member of their team notices Mary Martin-Keane by the body. Read or paraphrase the following:

Mary Martin-Keane stands over the body, holding the covering tarp up with one hand, as the cameraman's harsh white light flares and is pointed down at the lifeless face of Redkap's victim.

"This city has seen its share of problems; poverty, homelessness, and the rise of the criminal element. But here, you can look into the face of the true menace to the city. So-called 'superheroes' who step between law enforcement and the criminals who have taken on secret identities—they produce these super-criminals by dint of their existence—and who suffers? Normal citizens. Like this..."

Be sure to substitute pronouns, etc. based upon how you ran this encounter.

This is the time to activate any qualities related to the victim or Keane's grandstanding to compel heroes to fly off the handle or otherwise react to this brutal exploitation, awarding Determination Points accordingly.

This is a great opportunity to introduce one of the antagonists in the adventure to the heroes. Be sure to use anything they say against them in the following chapters. Each chapter takes place over a week in the heroes' lives and each week, Keane puts out a scathing editorial about the heroes, essentially tallying up their flaws and their failures.

The confrontation with the heroes will air in full, but minor edits and camera work make the heroes that stop her look like bullies. If the heroes damage the camera, confiscate the tape, or whatever else, they gain a point of Bad Press for theft, and Keane definitely make hay of it in her first editorial.

CHAPTER ONE: WRACK'S BACK!



Each of the four chapters of **The Metaskulk Invasion** open with heroes getting an opportunity to earn Good or Bad Press points.

INTERVIEW WITH THE ENEMY

A hero has the opportunity to respond to Mary Keane's editorials over the week following the hostage crisis. The questioning is tough but fair. However, constant usage of the name of the victim of Redkap and the reporter occasionally cutting the hero off calls for a Willpower (4) test: If it's a Marginal or Moderate Success they get 0 Good or Bad Press points. If it's a Major Success they gain 1 Good Press point and 0 Bad Press points. And a Massive Success gets them 1 Good Press point, and the ability to pass on a future press opportunity. Any degree of failure, however, results in 1 Bad Press point and no Good Press. Alternately, a player can choose to

automatically fail the Willpower test and take the Bad Press in exchange for a Determination Point, like a regular compel.

Feel free to roleplay these scenes if you feel you'd like to, or make them vignettes with difficulty rolls, if that speeds things up.

Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

A week following the hostage crisis at the cathedral, and the Metro News Network has basically had wall-to-wall coverage of the event. Redkap's apparent escape has been speculated at, and his victim's life has been exploited beyond all decency. With all of the press on MNN, you're taken by surprise as the news stations begin reporting on an emerging story on the Alaskan prison for superhuman criminals known as the Icebox! The alien entity known as Wrack has escaped!

The video shows Wrack dressed in a parka, boarding a helicopter, flanked by what appear to be Icebox personnel, armed with nullifier weapons. The reports continue with the news tickers stating that other villains were able to escape the facility as well.

Just as you're about to spring into action, your alert system klaxons wail - there's a new emergency, and it's local!

Lucian King rushes into the room, activating the global sensors, and shows the blueprint of a building.

"This is not good, I've just been notified that the CRASH team is headed to the Stony Ridge nuclear plant, terrorists have taken over the plant. They're not issuing demands, but they've allowed most of the employees of the plant to leave to let them know that if anyone tries to stop them, well, that plant powers the entire city. Without it..."

Lucian shakes his head. "You've got to stop them. We have to set aside the Icebox thing for now."

The situation explodes all at once. The escape of Wrack and three other villains—Derecha, Phage, and Locust, all described in the **Cast of Characters** section—is joined by a sudden revelation that a group of terrorists has taken control of the Stony Ridge Nuclear Power Facility. Police are on the way, along with CRASH units.

The heroes are informed, either by James Wyatt or their contacts in law enforcement, that the technicians in the plant were allowed to escape, but

there are a few of the top engineers and physicists still being held. It appears as though the terrorists are planning to set the plant to meltdown.

ENCOUNTER BREAKDOWN

As the heroes arrive, read or paraphrase the following.

You arrive at the Stony Creek facility along with police, who come screaming into the parking lot. Just as the CRASH vehicle swings into the parking lot with its tires squealing, several bolts of energy flare out of the parking garage, detonating the underside of the van, which flips and smashes into a series of parked cars.

The heroes have a choice. They can rescue the CRASH officers, or attack the terrorists in the garage, preventing more injuries and damage to public property.



The terrorists are Metaskulks disguised as Stony Creek security guards. There are three groups of Metaskulk invaders, each consisting of five Metaskulk Commandos (see the **Cast of Characters** section at the end of the book) and a Metaskulk Infiltrator.

The first group is in the parking garage, holding off any responders until the leader and his guards in the reactor core are finished setting up the meltdown.

The second group is in the engineering bays, where several scientists are held captive.

The third group is in the reactor control room with the computers that maintain the core of the reactor. The leader at this location sends guards to the engineering bay on the third page of the takeover. The cascade failure will take 10 pages, and the heroes may or may not have the ability to repair the problem.

The facility doesn't require a map, as there are only three areas for the encounter to take place in. Simply figure that each area is a page of travel from the others, however if you'd like to throw situational qualities on each room, you can put a +2 modifier to difficulties during combat in both reactor control and engineering, to prevent permanent or catastrophic damage to the power plant.

On page seven, the new hero Pinnacle arrives to help, see her description in the **Cast of Characters** section. Pinnacle appears the epitome of a hero: capable, intelligent, and tactically brilliant. She wears a battlesuit designed by top scientists, providing her protection, super-detection sensors, and non-lethal means of pacification. Pinnacle assists the heroes with whatever they're doing, then will use her expertise to prevent the meltdown of the reactor core.

Pinnacle is, in fact, a Metaskulk brainwashed and programmed to play her part as the hero of the hour. She also portrays herself as the epitome of classic heroism. With a corny sense of fair play, and good versus evil she definitely appeals to Mary-Martin Keane's sensibilities.

Once the Metaskulks are rounded up, you can read or paraphrase the following to your players:

Pinnacle, the hero in the power armor, descends, tossing one of the unconscious terrorists into the back of the CRASH wagon. Her heels glow with energy that keeps her floating on the air, and she floats just above you and your friends, as well as the police and the gathering media.

Her voice is metallic and modulated, but good natured as she crosses her arms. The suit glows from within and pulses with soothing blue-white light.

“It’s good to know that the city has such brave heroes. I am Pinnacle. While this situation was tragic and could not have been expected in a law-abiding society, I hope to prevent the causes of these types of problems in the future. Thanks for your assistance, heroes, if you ever find yourselves in over your heads again, I’ll be there.”

The media begin shouting questions, but are drowned out by the roar of her rockets as she flies off. Now the questions begin firing your way.

This is a perfect opportunity to have the press ask questions about jealousy, competition among the superheroes of the city, and about their efficacy in crime prevention.

Good Press

- Rescuing the police (+1)
- Defeating the Metaskulks (+1)
- Preventing a meltdown (+2)
- Getting permission from the police To assist (+1) (You don’t need to do this if you have a Public Opinion of 4 or 5)
- Successfully interview after the event (+1)

Bad Press

- The Metaskulks defeat the heroes (+3)
- The Metaskulks damage the plant (+2)
- The meltdown occurs (+5)
- Pinnacle stops the meltdown without the heroes (+2)

CHAPTER TWO: THE GAUNTLET



During the rest of the week, the heroes are plagued by requests from the police regarding the nuclear plant incident, and can investigate the prior crimes if they wish, though they are pressed for time such that they can't make it to Alaska and back.

The following week, another one of your heroes has the opportunity to gain some bad press as well. Once you've chosen the lucky hero, they find themselves out on patrol in the city, when a woman is being threatened by a few armed men.

She's a local barista, bringing her deposit from the day's sales to the bank, and is about to be robbed. Use the **Thug** supporting character from the **ICONS** rulebook to represent the thugs, who are armed with guns and baseball bats.

Watching the confrontation, and filming it, is Mary-Martin Keane. She's taking notes on how the hero conducts themselves, and after the battle starts an ambush interview. Especially if one of the thugs is severely injured, she comments on their brutality. Dealing with her ambush interview with any kind of poise takes a difficulty 4 Willpower test:

- **Marginal Success:** The stress is showing, but no slips (No Good or Bad Press)
- **Moderate Success:** The hero makes a few good points, but doesn't seem to convince Keane (1 Good Press)
- **Major or Massive Success:** The hero convinces the viewers for the moment that Keane is just a crank with an axe to grind. (2 Good Press, and can pass on the next challenge, avoiding the possibility for bad press. In addition to this reward, Keane's negative editorial only gives them 1 Bad Press.)

If the hero fails, they get 3 Bad Press for the team, and is the subject of the next editorial in contrast to Keane's new favorite hero, Pinnacle.

The editorial Keane gives is worth 2 Bad Press, and negatively compares the heroes to Pinnacle.

Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

The city is abuzz with your exploits, but of course there's a voice that seems to only want to drag your name through the mud. Her name has been all over the city, on billboards, and her editorial show "Keane Eye" has ridden the public's most recent interest in super-crime to a wave of ratings, and has used her platform to tear down all the good work you've done.

Her most recent episode, you of course avoided. Keane interviewed the new hero calling herself Pinnacle, a fawning and glad-handing piece. In it, she makes a claim that with Pinnacle's rescue of the city's so-called heroes she should be Victory City's lone protector.

The interview with Pinnacle ends with Keane announcing that MNN will, along with ULTRA Labs, sponsor a challenge between Pinnacle and the so called super-team known as the Phalanx. It will be a gauntlet of events that reflect what a hero needs to be to protect our city.

Lucian comes in, and comments on your recent work in the city, as well as loudly giving his opinion on Mary Martin-Keane, or as he has come to call her, “That Woman.”

Lucian is clearly frustrated, and points at the massive hologram of the broadcast.

“There’s something hinky about that lady. And it’s not just the cornball way she talks. It might be a good idea to keep an eye on her.”

A challenge has been thrown out there to your heroes, and the proceeds go to charity. During the discussion of whether or not the heroes should get involved with this event, be sure to emphasize that people are flooding their phones, communicators, etc. saying that they should participate.

If they choose to decline the challenge, give them 5 Bad Press points, as the media has a field day with them, and skip to the post-challenge portion of this chapter.

If they agree to the challenge, it takes place at the MoonCola Dome stadium. ULTRA Labs host the event and design the course to test the abilities of the heroes’ and Pinnacle’s ability to handle catastrophic events.

The stadium is equipped with large geometric shapes that have holographic imagers superimposing buildings, cars, and what have you to give the heroes and spectators the illusion that they are in a representation of the real world.

This event has been rigged, but not by ULTRA Labs. They aren’t aware that “secret parameters” have been added to each of the tests by Mary-Martin Keane.

Each of the secret parameters are minor tweaks Pinnacle has been informed of—and has been told that the heroes have also been informed of—that performing them gets them the point. Each given challenge has a test that can be used to identify the secret parameter of the challenge.

There should be a number of events in the gauntlet equal to 2+ the number of heroes in the game. In each event, Pinnacle goes second, deferring to those with more experience.

The heroes can either take on the events one at a time as designed, or team up in groups of two.

EVENTS

1. There's a building front, where a woman and a baby carriage are frozen in terror as a car hurtles toward them. The heroes need to save the innocent people and stop the car.

Secret Parameter: Heroes should take pains to protect the driver from harm as well, as they are not wearing safety belts. It takes a Coordination (6) test to maintain the driver's safety when moving the car.

2. There's a warehouse on fire containing explosive chemicals. There are people inside the building hidden behind fallen beams, and hiding behind equipment. There are a number of imperiled people in the building equal to 2 more than the number of heroes.

The basic goal is to get the people out of the warehouse without being harmed.

Secret Parameter: Once the people are rescued, the player can go back in and activate the malfunctioning anti-fire systems. Activating the system requires a successful Intelligence test with a difficulty of 6.

3. A bank is under siege, being robbed. The goons use the **Thug** supporting cast archetype from **ICONS**, and are armed with guns that do Good (5) shooting damage. They are also about to detonate a device to open the vault. The explosion will bring the bank down, and give the robbers access to the money in the vault.

Secret Parameter: Disabling the getaway vehicle. The van waits for the goons to escape with the money.

4. The arena goes nuts as a roar fills the air, and a Tyrannosaurus Rex rampages from between a pair of buildings menacing a crowd! Rescuing the crowd from the dinosaur is the primary goal, and use the abilities for the T-Rex from **ICONS**, or you can replace it with any kind of rampaging monster you'd like to see your players go up against.

Secret Parameter: The heroes stop the rampaging monster without harming it unnecessarily.

5. The arena changes a bit, showing a bridge with traffic aboard it, that is listing to one side. Preventing the bridge from collapsing is the goal. There are a number of cars about to slide off equal to 2 plus the number of heroes active in this challenge.

The bridge has three supports, each requiring a Strength test with a difficulty of 8 to protect or shore up.

Secret Parameter: Making sure the bridge doesn't collapse *after* the people are rescued.

6. In this event, Mary-Martin Keane herself is set upon by thugs, and the hero must rescue her. Use the **Thug** supporting cast character from **ICONS**, and the **Bystander** for Mary-Martin Keane.

Secret Parameter: None. Keane complains of injury even if none exists when the heroes rescue her. This is a good event to reveal that a "fix" is in.

7. This event is a direct competition between Pinnacle and one of the heroes. There's an obstacle course set up with several rings, and it's essentially a race.

Secret Parameter: Four of the rings in the center are set up with damaging fields if they're proceeded through in the wrong order. The order is north, south, west, east and Pinnacle already knows it. The damaging field is a Blast 7 Aura, preventing anyone passing through.

8. A road has a massive crater in it, and a bus is hurtling towards it, with horrendous results if it happens to impact the side. The hero must prevent injuries on the bus, and the bus landing in the crater.

Secret Parameter: The hero must get the bus across the hole without harming any of the passengers. It takes a Coordination test of 6 or better to handle the bus carefully enough so people aren't hurt in the process.

9. Find and defuse a bomb planted somewhere in a warehouse.

During this challenge, as Pinnacle is doing the defusing, one of the heroes (preferably the one who Redkap harmed with his choice of hostages in the **Prologue**) catches sight of a person pulling a Redkap mask down over their face near the underside of one of the grandstands, and ducking underneath. The hero can go after them, and finds a real bomb (just like the one found and disarmed in the cathedral) about to go off!

The player can make an Intellect (6) test to learn these bombs are primed to detonate when Pinnacle disarms her bomb.

Once Pinnacle disarms the fake bomb in the warehouse, the other bombs go off. The players can attempt to stop her, but she is nearly finished when they get there. Once all of the heroes are in the same place, Metaskulk infiltrators set off the other bombs manually. The bombs go off without their help if Pinnacle successfully disarms her bomb.

Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

The building shakes as explosions rock the foundations of the arena. Pockets of spectators are screaming, shouting for help as Pinnacle streaks off to save Mary-Martin Keane from a falling concrete beam. There are panicking civilians, falling brick, and people running in all directions. The emitters have burst into flame, and there are fires erupting all over the stadium!

SAMPLE EMERGENCIES

- Take control of panicking spectators, preventing injuries with a Willpower (6) test.
- Moving rubble from trapped civilians with a successful Strength (8) test.
- Using the hard-light holographic emitters to help with excavation and rescue, requiring an Intellect (7) test.
- Subduing Metaskulk Infiltrators (see **Cast of Characters**) firing on the crowd, trying to panic them further into harming themselves. There are a number of infiltrators equal to the number of heroes.

Once the people are safely out of the arena, the holographic emitters activate, showing a three dimensional image of Wrack.

Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

The twisted visage of the alien known as Wrack appears amidst the smoke and rubble. It is framed by shadows, and is apparently in a dingy and grimy setting. He looks into the camera, and his eyes narrow. They glow from within with a crimson light and his mouth twists into a thin line.

“This is but a small example of our power. The Metaskulk invasion has begun. We control every level of human endeavor in this city, primed to harm its citizens unless its pathetic ‘heroes’ stand down immediately.” Wrack’s mouth turns up, a smile slowly spreading across his face like pooling blood at a crime scene. “You will surrender yourselves publicly to the Metaskulk Ascendancy or we shall take more...forceful...measures to harm your woefully inadequate city. Wrack has spoken.”

At this point, the Metaskulks detonate the final bombs hidden around the arena, attempting to bury the heroes in the rubble. The crowd is gone, but the heroes need to escape the collapsing building. You can assume they do so, or ask the players for a suitable test, such as Coordination, assigning a 5 Stamina damage to heroes who fail.

The CRASH squad arrives, and makes sure everyone is safe. There are a few clues in the rubble leading to several investigation paths.

1. Wrack's Video

Apparently, Wrack's video was able to take control of the holographic emitters to project his message.

- The location of his broadcast doesn't appear to be anywhere in Victory City.
- Wrack made the video in prison before he escaped.
- Wrack is not alone in the video, and is behaving strangely.

2. Fragments of the Bombs

- The bomb's design is identical to the one Redkap used in the **Prologue**.
- The bomb is powered by tau crystal fragments.
- The locations of the bombs were precisely placed to create real events that mirrored the fake gauntlet trials.

3. The Arena

- A tau radiation teleportation signature appears near the spot where Pinnacle rescued Keane.
- Pinnacle knew about all of the trials ahead of time.
- One of the witnesses after the event claims to recall seeing ULTRA Labs personnel near the bomb locations.

Possible Good and Bad Press for the first part of **Chapter Two**:

Good Press

+1 for successfully completing the trials

+3 for completing the trials with the secret parameters.

+1 for rescuing civilians from bomb damage

+2 for defeating Metaskulk infiltrators.

Bad Press

+2 for “injuring” Keane during her rescue

+1 for not successfully completing the secret parameters

+4 for the destruction of the arena

Given these clue-trails, there are three paths for the investigation to take in this chapter.

1. The Video Clue Trail

- The fact that the video was shot in the Icebox, leads the heroes to the Alaskan supervillain prison. Once they arrive, they are informed that the Warden was replaced by a Metaskulk infiltrator who then began replacing key personnel with Metaskulks over a period of months to assist with Wrack’s escape.
- Wrack was able to fashion a communication device to contact his Metaskulk brethren from a completely ordinary device. (Note: this may be the conventional thing Wrack asked for in **Cold War Conundrum**, and factors into the beginning of **Chapter Three**).
- The heroes also learn the Plagues (Derecha, Phage, and Locust) were busted out of the prison at the same time as Wrack, but no other villains.
- Metaskulk Infiltrators posing as Icebox security attack the heroes to “protect” the Warden from them. There are two more Infiltrators than there are heroes.
- Heroes can interrogate their attackers once they’ve been thwarted, finding out that the people they’re posing as once had top-level ULTRA Labs clearance.
- The security team is armed with the same gauntlets the followers of Redkap were armed with during the **Prologue**.

This leads them to find a link between the Plagues and the Metaskulks, that ULTRA Labs may be involved somehow, and that Wrack has been planning this for some time.

2. Bomb Fragments

- The materials used in making the bombs leads the heroes to sources of tau crystals, which include Apex Innovations (creators of the *Nova-1*), ULTRA Labs, and the former criminal known as Terror-Pin, who was the first to weaponize tau radiation to create his Tachyon Pulse Ray Emitter.
- Apex Innovations has all of their tau crystals accounted for. They help with the investigation where they can.

- If the heroes go to ULTRA Labs, that starts clue trail 3.
- If the heroes go to meet Terror-Pin, they find that after his initial crime spree, he went to prison. On release, he has been on probation and under surveillance for some time. He has been working for a toy company, designing new toys and innovative fun scientific novelties for children. See the **Cast of Characters** section for details about Terror-Pin.

Terror-Pin has recreated his Tachyon Pulse Emitter shell as he's obsessed with the device. He's also become quite paranoid as this Metaskulk problem has revealed itself. He feels that he has been watched and followed. Terror-Pin suspects that he is a target for replacement, and this suspicion is borne out when the players and Terror-Pin are attacked as the heroes leave his home.

Six Metaskulk Commandos attempt to capture Terror-Pin for his knowledge, and to replace him with a Metaskulk. This encounter can be subtle, with Metaskulks pretending to be Terror-Pin's handlers, then giving themselves away. The thrust of this encounter is that Terror-Pin is right to be paranoid.

The heroes can interrogate the would-be abductors or if the Metaskulks flee, they head into the industrial district to an abandoned factory, where the heroes find a hidden Metaskulk base, in the process of being cleared out.

3. The ULTRA Labs Clue Trail

- The tau radiation signature can lead the heroes to the three sources in the second clue trail, however coming to ULTRA Labs they're greeted by Dr. Henry Midas, who invites them to look around. The labs are in good working order, normal, but the heroes can ask about the other clues to Dr. Midas. If the team's Public Opinion is below +2, Dr. Midas has to be persuaded to divulge all but the first item of information that follows.
- All of the Labs' crystals are accounted for.
- They had a security glitch in Applied Sciences, where the parts for the bombs could have been crafted or designed.
- Several of their security team had to be replaced for that slip-up.
- The ones who were replaced found employment at the Icebox, as the head of security, Wayne Rockport, put in a good word for them.
- Rockport has been ill for a few weeks.
- His home address leads the heroes to an encounter with a bit of Wrack's plan.

- Midas also mentions he suspects something is wrong at ULTRA Labs, but the director of Applied Sciences, Lacy McTaggart, assures him that it's just his imagination. Dr. Midas asks them to meet him later that evening at Arbor Park around 11 PM. He explains that he's being followed.

When the heroes go to meet Midas, he's acting strangely, it's only a difficulty 4 test to recognize he's not himself—literally. Once the heroes realize Midas has been replaced with a Metaskulk infiltrator, the real Midas manages to cry out for help, as the Metaskulks toss him into a van.

The Metaskulks drive off, but leave four Commandos behind to attack the heroes. The battle is to distract the heroes from rescuing Midas. The heroes have three pages before the Metaskulk teleportation device activates, and Midas is transported to one of their hideouts.

Once the battle is over, if Midas is recovered, the heroes can interrogate the Metaskulks and find the semi-abandoned base in the industrial district.

The old Metaskulk base contains both computers and instructions to the invaders. The plans outline the plot until the abduction of Dr. Henry Midas, then they are encrypted. There is a map of the city, with four locations highlighted as important: The Water Treatment Facility, Broad Lakes Hydroelectric Dam, ULTRA Labs, and Talon Towers, the home of the Metro News Network.

This gives your heroes four possible locations to investigate in the next chapter, but things are about to get very difficult indeed.

Good Press

- +2 for defeating the Metaskulks
- +2 for rescuing Henry Midas
- +2 for rescuing Terror-Pin
- +2 for finding the Metaskulk hideout

Bad Press

- +3 for damaging public property in the process
- +2 for allowing Terror-Pin or Henry Midas to be abducted

CHAPTER THREE: ON THE HUNT



This chapter begins with the heroes regrouping after the wild week they had. The days following, the police have been hyper vigilant, and have been watching the four locations the heroes gave them (if they shared the information, though reminding them that at this point it's hard to say who is who wouldn't go amiss).

There's only one opportunity for press this week, and unfortunately, it's only bad news for the heroes. On Keane Eye, Mary-Martin Keane is interviewing the head of ULTRA Labs.

Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

You would have thought that rescuing Keane from certain harm, and proving yourselves to be more than capable enough to protect the city would have been enough to quiet her for at least a week, but alas, just 48 hours later she's on her soapbox talking about a dire revelation about the city's so-called "heroes".

Keane is interviewing the head of ULTRA Labs Applied Sciences, who compliments the heroes for their assistance in rescuing a scientist from their company, but failed to prevent the abduction of their former Chief of Security. Which brings Keane to the next portion of her show.

She begins showing a video of your team fighting with what appear to be Icebox security, but it's been spliced with footage from Wrack's escape! It appears as though you were instrumental in his escape, according to the footage.

The lights in your headquarters suddenly dim as all monitors fill with the face of Wrack, leader of the Metaskulks. His reedy sardonic voice rasps out the words in a triumphant tone.

"Since we are now allies, allow me take care of the police looking to detain and question you."

With that, the screens go black, and your headquarters' automated defenses go online. The lights go from crisp white to crimson, and your alarm klaxons howl as all of your security systems come online. Sirens begin wailing, as you hear the CRASH squad and their backup approaching.

"Farewell, fools," Wrack's voice echoes.

The Citadel's state of the art automated defenses, including robotic tentacled arms with the Binding 8, Lasers with Blast 7, and Affliction 8 gas mines are active. The base is locked down from the inside, the computers have sealed all the windows, the doors, and trapped the heroes inside. The first encounter of **Chapter Three** contains three challenges: First, to protect the police being attacked by their compromised security systems. Second,

to defeat the impostor Metaskulks who arrive to attack the police, and finally, the heroes need to escape from Pinnacle, who tries to detain them.

ENCOUNTER BREAKDOWN

Deactivating the rogue security system takes a massive success on a difficulty 6 Intellect test, which the heroes can accomplish as a pyramid test (see **The Basics** chapter of **ICONS**). It's a timed test, as they have five pages until Pinnacle arrives.

On page five, she plows through the walls of their headquarters to attack and subdue them. During the fight, if Pinnacle is hit with a Slam result or an electrical-based attack successfully damages her, she is stunned long enough for the heroes to escape.

Once the heroes have escaped this situation, tally up the Good and Bad Press they have accumulated.

TAILORING THE CHAPTER

Feel free to have more Metaskulk lairs, if your team has more than one set of arch-enemies. Especially feel free to use your team's personal arch-foes (including Redkap, if you had him make things personal in the **Prologue**) to guard the Metaskulk staging areas.

The Plagues are used as examples here, as they've been the continuing "B-Story" thread throughout the adventures, and figure into the last adventure as well. It might be best to save the Redkap-guarded staging area for last, for dramatic effect, or as the false climax to the story's third chapter.

Good Press

- +2 Defeating the impostors
- +2 Saving police from harm

Bad Press

- +3 Damaging CRASH property
- +5 Injuring CRASH or police personnel
- +5 Injuring Pinnacle
- +3 Fleeing the scene without trying to explain themselves
- +3 For disabling the recording devices watching the battle or attacking the press.

Once the heroes leave their headquarters, they are on the run from the law. The citizenry are shown a long and lurid portrayal of their “attack” on the police (actually Metaskulks disguised as the heroes) by way of MNN and Mary Martin-Keane, who take the lead on the “Betrayal by Our Heroes” narrative.

Other media outlets may not be as harsh, but people are looking out for the heroes as they may be considered criminals. The heroes first stop may be to create a new base of operations. While they do so, the Plagues are busy obtaining material to complete Wrack’s plan to transform himself into the Ultra-Skulks, and defeat the heroes of Victory City.

Without its protectors, the Metaskulks turn Victory City into a beach-head for their invasion and takeover of Earth.

Once the heroes are safely out of the sight of the authorities, they notice Pinnacle flying about, apparently searching for them. However, on closer inspection, that is not the case.

With a successful Intellect (3) test, the heroes notice the following.

- **Moderate Success:** Pinnacle’s movements are slow and sluggish, and her flight path is erratic.
- **Major Success:** She is saying something as well, but not broadcasting it. Pinnacle’s tone is plaintive, as if she’s muttering questions to herself.
- **Massive Success:** They can tell it’s as if she’s lost her memory. (Which happens after the fight with her because of the stress of fighting, or during the fight if the heroes meet the prior criteria.)

If the heroes help Pinnacle, she happily follows them if they seem to know something about her situation, or who she is. Pinnacle is in fact a Metaskulk Infiltrator who volunteered to have her mind erased and rebuilt using the memories and personality of a fictional superhero. But now, her old memories are bleeding into her current personality. All she can remember is that she’s supposed to get back to “Bay 19.”

Pinnacle thinks this is where an enemy of hers must have wiped her memories, but it’s actually the place she’s programmed to return to if she’s ever compromised. If the heroes are able to talk to her and convince her they want to help, she gives them the phrase “Bay 19.” An Intellect (5) test recalls that the old subway system’s former hub near the wharf listed their tunnel terminus as Bay 1, suggesting Bay 19 is part of that system.

Alternately, the heroes might simply tail Pinnacle and follow her to Bay 19, or have her lead them there, if they are cooperating.

The site is protected by a team of Metaskulk Commandos who number three more than the number of heroes, and they're protecting an entrance into the subway station.

Inside Bay 19 is a group of Metaskulk Infiltrators attending to a room-sized device, designed to reprogram any mind that is entered into it, though once the heroes arrive, Pinnacle begins talking about having to get into one of the pods.

The heroes can make an Intellect (7) test to determine the nature of the device, and as Pinnacle steps out of her armor, and approaches it, they can attempt to stop her. If the heroes prevent her entering the machine, the Infiltrators attack.

During the combat with the infiltrators in Bay 19, Pinnacle reverts to her Metaskulk form due to the stress. At this point, award all the heroes a Determination Point, as the room arcs with tau radiation blasts, and knocks them out.

PRISONERS OF WRACK

The heroes come to, strapped down, their powers nullified by the Brainwashing Pods. They are powerless, but not helpless, trapped in the Metaskulk Psyche-Reformat Pods.

Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

Wrack enters the room, wearing a long trench-coat and slouch hat. He slowly turns to towards you, accompanied by Pinnacle, in her armor. She is furtive, glancing at all of you as Wrack moves forward. Wrack sniffs derisively at you, then smirks.

"I knew your egos wouldn't allow you to be shown up by someone of superior morality and ability, and so, when my pet showed some vulnerability, it was pure ease to get you into the position you find yourself in now."

"You are my pawns. You are my playthings...like this one." Wrack pats Pinnacle on the shoulder and she slowly looks toward him, as if in a trance. He motions to the other Metaskulks.

"Erase and reprogram them."

Wrack departs, laughing in his high pitched reedy cackle, leaving Pinnacle behind to watch over the process. The Mind Drillers fire up with green crackling energy and move towards you.

There are a few ways out of this trap. One is straightforward, breaking out of the bonds. It takes a massive success on a difficulty 5 Strength test, which the heroes can achieve using a pyramid test. The second way is to attempt to finagle their way into the systems from a panel within the pod itself and reprogram them, requiring a massive success on a difficult 5 Intellect test, also achievable as a pyramid test. The final way is to appeal to Pinnacle. This is best done with roleplaying, but you can use interaction tests in the same fashion: difficulty 5 with a massive success, achievable as a pyramid test.

Wrack's Superior Mind quality makes him overconfident and the heroes can activate it for advantage. Pinnacle is likewise conflicted about her role. Since she is basically both Pinnacle the hero, and a Metaskulk she can potentially be convinced to help the heroes escape and thwart the villains' plans.

Once the heroes are out of the machine, they have to deal with the Infiltrators. Pinnacle aids them, if the heroes won her over. Otherwise, she's too confused to intervene in the conflict.

Afterwards, the heroes can use the computers here to locate the four Metaskulk staging areas, the city. Each staging area contains a component of Wrack's transformation - with the final location being where Wrack emerges as the Ultra-Skulk. The locations are protected by the Plagues. The Metaskulk Staging Areas can be taken on in any order, with any of the Plagues guarding them, but, again, dramatically speaking, having Redkap at the last location is probably the most appropriate sequence of events.

THE WATER TREATMENT FACILITY

The facility is outside the city limits, near the hydroelectric dam. There are emitters for tau radiation and chemical additives to be flushed into the water supply to alter the minds of the citizenry to obey the Metaskulks peacefully once they reveal themselves. There are five Metaskulk Commandos here along with Phage (see the **Cast of Characters** section).

If the heroes bring Pinnacle along, she keeps the CRASH team from intervening, if they send her to scope out another base, she gives them a Well-Scouted quality to exploit at the staging area. This is the same for any location; if she accompanies the heroes she gives the staging area a quality called Tied Up, which adds to the difficulty for the villains during the fight.

BROAD LAKES HYDROELECTRIC DAM

The dam is up the river from the Treatment Facility, guarded by five Metaskulk Commandos and five Metaskulk Infiltrators aided by Derecha. The Infiltrators are posing as hostages strapped to a bomb. The "bomb" is

nothing more than basic dam equipment assembled to look dangerous. The Metaskulks are using the dam to alter the power supply for the city to give it enough energy to transform Wrack, which has already happened by the time the heroes get there.

If Pinnacle accompanies the heroes, she gives the scene the quality “Got Your Back” which the players can activate to prevent their heroes from being caught caught off-guard, using one of Pinnacle’s powers to intervene.

ULTRA LABS

ULTRA Labs has been infiltrated at nearly every level, and when the heroes arrive, they find themselves at a tau crystal manufacturing center. There are eight Metaskulk Commandos and three Infiltrators, and crystal generators all over the building. The building has two qualities, “Valuable Property” and “Unstable Crystals” which can be used on either side to sway the battle in their favor. If Pinnacle is there she also gives the location the quality “Lockdown,” which the players can activate to avoid collateral damage.

Locust from the Plagues is working with the Metaskulks here. The first time the Phalanx faced Locust, he was breaking into ULTRA Labs for Wrack, with the promise there would be a cure for his powers. He can potentially be convinced that helping the Metaskulks isn’t going to get him a cure, and if the heroes have faced him before, they can refer to the fact that Wrack failed once before in exactly this way.

TALON TOWERS

Talon Towers poses the biggest threat to the heroes, as there are Metaskulk Commandos holding legitimate hostages, around fifty people being watched over on each of the top five floors, with Metaskulk Commandos on each floor. The top floor hostages are being watched by a Commando and the final villain, Redkap, who is on the set of Mary Martin-Keane’s show, “Keane Eye.”

Mary is his hostage, and her set has a broad window out of the studio looking out over Victory City. Redkap is holding her at knifepoint, and while she’s putting on a good face, she’s terrified. If Redkap needs to distract the heroes, he hurls Mary Martin-Keane out a window towards certain death, if someone doesn’t save her.

Following the battle, before Keane can either thank or lecture the heroes, City Hall erupts into a blasting column of green energy and a live helicopter news feed shows Wrack emerging from the wreckage of the stairs to City Hall as the hulking, massive Ultra-Skulk!

Good Press

+ 2 for each successful Metaskulk staging area cleared

+2 for convincing Locust to turn on the Metaskulks

+3 for saving Keane and the hostages

Bad Press

+3 for damaging any Metaskulk staging area

+2 for Pinnacle having to save them from CRASH

+3 for any of the staging areas getting destroyed

CHAPTER FOUR: THE ULTRA-SKULK!



Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

You can see smoke rising from City Hall, and from the rubble beneath what used to be fine marble steps leading up to the edifice of one of the city's oldest buildings. Shrugging off massive chunks of macadam and steel, the form of Wrack lurches from the darkness. The people are running, terrified, as energy crackles over the wrinkled carapace of his skull, and his eyes glow from within with raw tau radiation.

No more the cackling mastermind, this brute lets out a roar that chills your blood and rattles your bones.

"I am now the pinnacle of Metaskulk Evolution! I ... AM ... THE ULTRA-SKULK!"

Wrack is more powerful now, but his mind has been shattered, leaving him less than the mastermind he once was. He's a rampaging monster, with animalistic cunning to go along with it. His mission is to destroy City Hall first, where his Metaskulks have cuffed and held hostage the members of the city council, and the chiefs of the police and fire departments and emergency management. He wants to take down the political leadership in one stroke, and literally bringing down the City Hall around them ought to do it.

ENCOUNTER BREAKDOWN

There are three phases to this final battle, the first is Wrack attempting to destroy City Hall with the entirety of Victory City's political leaders inside.

If he's reduced to half of his Stamina during this encounter or he's thwarted for at least five pages, the heroes get a Determination Point and he moves on to phase 2.

In Phase 2, Ultra-Skulk leaps to ULTRA Labs to use the tau crystals and the generator there to power himself up. He has to break into the lab, and break the governors on the generator. The dampeners, once broken, allow Ultra-Skulk to re-energize himself, and he goes back to full Stamina, and leaps back to the City Hall to continue destroying it. In addition, under City Hall is a massive tau radiation based teleportation gate, ready to bring the rest of Wrack's army through from Geistspace.

If he's thwarted at ULTRA Labs, he attempts to draw power from the raw crystals, and then leaps to the heroes' headquarters to destroy them and their base as a final act of revenge. Once the heroes finally subdue Ultra-Skulk, the adventure finishes with the heroes vindicated, and with Pinnacle's outing as a Metaskulk. They are also exonerated for attacking the police at the beginning of **Chapter Three**.

However, this leaves them with the issue of Pinnacle's existence, and what should be done with her once the Metaskulk invasion is finally thwarted. Ultra-Skulk's defeat occurs just as the headquarters of the Phalanx is ravaged with a cataclysmic explosion, and a massive tower erupts from the top five floors. See the **Reign's Return** following this chapter's encounters for the lead-in to the final adventure of **Rise of the Phalanx**.



PHASE ONE: CITY HALL

The streets are filled with panicking civilians, police and emergency personnel trying to keep order as Ultra-Skulk begins damaging City Hall. The Ultra-Skulk needs five pages of successfully damaging of the building's edifice to wipe it out. His primary goal is to bring the building down onto hostages. Ultra-Skulk's secondary goal is to clear out the front buttresses to the tunnel the Metaskulk invaders have been digging beneath City Hall. He continues to try and destroy City Hall until he is reduced to half of his Stamina, then he leaps away towards ULTRA Labs.

The tunnel leads to a massive gateway device the Metaskulks have been building during the entire adventure. The heroes can assault the device, powered by tau crystals and designed to open a permanent door to Geistspace, and dismantle or destroy it instead of stopping the Ultra-Skulk during his rampage.

Disabling the gateway device requires a pyramid test with a difficulty of 7 and you can decide what abilities can contribute towards its success, from damaging attacks to technology affecting powers or Intellect or other ability tests intended to shut down or otherwise disable the device's systems. As usual, a total massive success shuts down the gateway.

The gateway requires five pages to power up, and then three pages to tune to our dimension. Also, without Ultra-Skulk clearing out the pathway, they cannot safely begin the transfer. Defeating the Ultra-Skulk leaves the remaining Metaskulks to flee the scene.

DRAWING ON PAST EXPERIENCE

If you played **Cold War Conundrum**, the Ultra-Skulk's tau irradiated form is altered much the same as Arsenal's was: bigger, tougher, and unstable. His final form will be massive and unstable, but not gigantic in stature. He will still be a threat, but simply not the monstrously huge beast that Arsenal becomes. That said, your players at this point should be unofficial experts in the matters of tau radiation, and so should be able to spend Determination Points to get ideas to de-power him, or to thwart his goals.

In addition, they may get an insight into his actual plan, which becomes clear when they realize how much power he's using to transform himself.

If Ultra-Skulk successfully destroys City Hall, he leaps to ULTRA Labs to overpower himself to finally destroy the heroes.

Feel free to add elements to this battle, like the Ultra-Skulk endangering civilians, cops, etc. If your hero team is too much for the Ultra-Skulk, feel free to have him use one of these dirty tricks to keep the heroes busy during this conflict.

Good Press

- +3 for stopping Ultra-Skulk
- +3 for stopping Ultra-Skulk from destroying City Hall completely
- +2 for stopping Ultra-Skulk from destroying City Hall beyond the first level of collateral damage
- +4 for preventing any hostage injury

Bad Press

- +5 if any hostage is injured
- +4 if the City Hall is damaged
- +5 if the City Hall is destroyed beyond the first level

PHASE TWO: ULTRA LABS



Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

After sailing over the city, the mighty thews of the Ultra-Skulk bury him waist deep in the parking area in front of ULTRA Labs. The being formerly known as Wrack drives his fists into pavement, and hauls himself bodily from the crater he's left, charing at the front of ULTRA Labs, roaring with fury.

Lucian's voice comes through the communicators, "The Citadel has been breached! I repeat there's a—" The sound of blaster fire drowns him out, along with the sounds of explosions behind him. He gasps, you can hear him coughing, "They've altered our building ... they've ... don't come here. Just handle the Ultra-Sku—" The communication ends.

If he's here because he's successful in destroying City Hall, the Ultra-Skulk's roar is triumphant and furious. If he's here because he's at half Stamina, play up the fact that he's lurching as he moves.

First, Ultra-Skulk needs to access the tau crystals in Applied Sciences on the fifth floor of the building. ULTRA Labs has been fully infiltrated by

Metaskulks, so there's no security to prevent him from rushing to the fifth floor. But the heroes can prevent him. Once Ultra-Skulk grabs the crystals, he needs to head to the Engineering Labs in the sub-basement below the street level, and destroy the two containment locks on ULTRA Labs' tau radiation power generator, and use it to re-power himself.

The containment locks have been engaged by Dr. Midas as a last-ditch effort to stop the Metaskulks. He is hiding within the building, and reveals himself to the heroes once they have defeated Ultra-Skulk, warning them about the crystals, and how Ultra-Skulk will be altered by the destroyed crystals, but the heroes aren't in time to prevent him going into his Phase Three form. The heroes exit the labs just in time to see Ultra-Skulk roaring and leaping towards their headquarters.



PHASE THREE: THE FINAL BATTLE

Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

The sounds of repeated blows against your headquarters ring out across the concrete canyons of the city. Once you arrive on the scene, Ultra-Skulk is bellowing with rage, his words barely recognizable, the only phrase you manage to decipher is "DESTROY THEM!" Then he whirls on you—and charges!

Luckily, the heroes find their headquarters sturdier than City Hall, and Ultra-Skulk is bashing his fists into the walls. He lurches around, head crackling with energy and muscles bulging beyond belief.

This fight is being watched by the remnants of the police CRASH Team, who are trying to power up their weaponry, but Ultra-Skulk is determined to do as much damage as he can. Ultra-Skulk attacks the CRASH team before he attacks the heroes, but if the heroes lure the Ultra-Skulk to attack them first, give them each a Determination Point.

If Ultra-Skulk is incapacitated, he slowly shrinks in size, back to his Phase One form. The police are all over the city, rounding up the captured and defeated villains and Metaskulks. The heroes are swarmed by the press, as they assist CRASH with binding the defeated villain.

Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

Wrack is unconscious, a permanent scowl etched across his twisted alien features. He's loaded into a CRASH wagon, nullifiers making sure he doesn't revert to his Ultra-Skulk form. There are several news copters and vans pulling up to your headquarters, firing off questions. Pushing through the fray of reporters is none other Mary Martin-Keane. Her voice is sharp and accusatory, a finger jabs at you, punctuating her words.

"What do you have to say for yourselves?! Massive property destruction?! Pinnacle is a filthy *alien!* I was even held hostage! Explain all this!"

She then thrusts her microphone in your face, cameras waiting.

Feel free to make this as fun a roleplaying experience as possible. Bear in mind, the rest of the gathered media know the score, and are willing to accept any explanation on the heroes' part. They have a free shot at Keane.

REIGN RETURNS!

Unfortunately, in the world of the Phalanx, there is no happy ending. Just after the heroes get their last licks in with Mary Martin-Keane and the media, read or paraphrase the following to the players:

The Phalanx Citadel thrums with greenish eldritch energy that explodes outward, shattering windows for blocks! Erupting from the center of the Citadel is a golden, gleaming technological column, like a wizard's tower crossed with an array of gleaming technological apparatuses that make up a crackling pylon stretching into the sky.

Energy blasting off of this tower shreds the sky and air, exposing a dark sky filled with alien stars and multicolored nebulae and slowly sliding into our reality is what appears to be a spacecraft the size of a fortress. It is a techno-arcane wonder to behold. The thing hovers over the city as a deep voice booms out from what sounds like an electronic vocoder.

"REIGN HAS RETURNED....SERVE....OR SUFFER!"

WHO IS LUCIAN KING?

Lucian King is the son of founders of the original Phalanx, who disappeared fighting Reign, and is also the key to Reign's vengeance. Lucian's mind has been under assault by Reign since the first adventure, **Flight of the Nova-1**, trying to make him too fearful to act.

However, King has overcome his fear of Reign enough to bring the new Phalanx together. In truth, Lucian himself was Reign. Lucian King's mind was possessed by a magical entity, corrupting him, and driving him to become Reign. The entity has been separated from King since the battle with the original Phalanx, but it has been using its eldritch powers to occasionally take over King's mind: Paying off Wrack, approaching Arsenal to purchase one of his teleportation devices to bring the Reign entity back from Geistspace.

Now, with the Metaskulk invasion and the rifts between Geistspace and Earth, Reign's power has increased sufficiently to reach out and fully possess Lucian King's body and potential, transforming him into the ideal host. From within the new Phalanx's headquarters, Reign has returned!



REIGN OF CHAOS

INTRODUCTION

Welcome **ICONS** to the fantastic final chapter of **Rise of the Phalanx!**

Of all the adventures in the series, this one *may* be played separate from the others, but we'd advise playing this one last, no matter how you play the others, or what sequence you use. This is a cosmic, world-spanning adventure, offering an inside look at the original Phalanx, and the origin of the villain known as Reign. If this is the first **Rise of the Phalanx** adventure you've picked up, you should know that Reign's background has been shrouded in mystery—only his motivations seemed clear: Destroying the Phalanx.

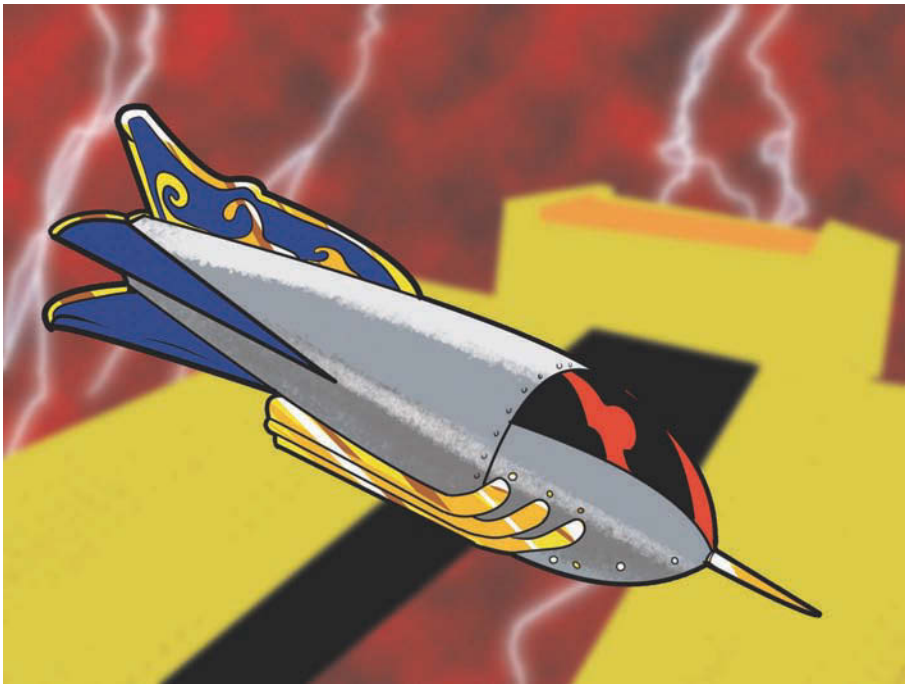
This may not be your group's first encounter with Reign if you played **The Nemesis Crisis** adventure, which featured heroes and villains facing each other on an otherworldly planetoid called Equinox. If the players were successful, then the Lux, the aliens inhabiting the planetoid, sent a device back with the heroes that will be invaluable to them in the coming fight against Reign. A device that can break Reign's mental shielding.

Over the previous four chapters, Reign has been behind the scenes, but now takes center stage as his plan to destroy the original and new Phalanx is put into motion. There are sidebars for those Game Masters who have been running the **Rise of the Phalanx** providing insight and more motivation to Reign. If you're planning on running **Rise of the Phalanx** as a whole, this shouldn't be the first chapter you run. It's highly inadvisable, as part of the mystery of the series is Reign's identity.

The previous chapter, **The Metaskulk Invasion**, ends with the Phalanx Citadel shattering with an ear-splitting explosion, revealing what appears to be a glimmering, high-tech tuning fork in the place of its top fifteen floors. Energy arcs to the sky as Reign's shift-ship, the size of several aircraft carriers, appears in the sky, and Reign announces his presence to all of Victory City.

If you're running this separate from the rest of the **Rise of the Phalanx** series, our story begins in your home city, where several of these "tuning forks" shatter the skyline from five different sites around the city, and Reign's ship appears through a rift in the sky. From there, we begin the **Prologue** where the heroes find themselves playing out a scenario from the past...

PROLOGUE: THE FINAL BATTLE OF THE PHALANX!



Before our story begins, we're going to have a flashback, starring your players as the original members of the Phalanx! In the Golden Age of super-heroics, the Phalanx was a premier team of superheroes charged with protecting the city. Their members included Jahidra, the Living Genie; Jack of Hearts, a vigilante swashbuckling hero; the Mechanic, a super-soldier turned super-hero; the Atomic Juggernaut, a hero of mechanical might, and

their leader, The Queen of Hearts, a paragon of heroism, powered by a mystical pair of bracers. She led these masked adventurers into countless battles against robber barons, criminals, saboteurs, and into war with otherworldly as well as mortal threats to the world.

Our **Prologue** features your players choosing the members of the Phalanx they'd like to portray in this sequence, facing off with a new threat to the world, in their climactic final conflict with Reign. At this moment, the battle has raged over Victory City, Reign's Glyph Troopers have been fought back, and now the Phalanx, in their ship the *Mary Victoria*, attempt to bring down Reign's sky fortress...

PROLOGUE OVERVIEW

The Phalanx fly their craft into the Sky-Fortress, and fight their way to Reign's throne room. The battle takes place in space, near a tear in the fabric of reality the Sky-Fortress has created. This causes distortions in physics, instability in gravity, and other surprises aboard the ship. The Mechanic and Atomic Juggernaut have created the quark pulse emitter, which should knock out the Rift Generator on Reign's ship.

First, the heroes encounter flying Glyph Troopers, who bring their ship down on the surface of Reign's Sky-Fortress. They fight through the Glyph Troopers, bringing the quark pulse emitter and detonating it at the core of the Sky-Fortress. The **Prologue** ends with a blinding flash of light and a roaring explosion of energy tearing reality apart—and a bit of the mystery of Reign revealed.

PHALANX - TO THE FORE!

Hand out the character sheets for the original Phalanx from the end of this adventure to your players, either at random or let them choose who they'd like to play. The character choices are :

- **Queen of Hearts** - The Paragon Hero
- **Jack of Hearts** - A Gimmick Hero
- **The Atomic Juggernaut** - A Battlesuit Hero
- **Jahidra**, the Living Genie - A Wizardry Hero
- **The Mechanic** - Super-Soldier and Gadgeteer Hero

If you have more than five players, feel free to come up with other Legacy heroes who preceded your own players' characters, using the present-day heroes' character sheets and traits for inspiration.

Once the players have their characters, read or paraphrase the following aloud to them:

Hanging in the sky like an impossibility, Reign's Sky-Fortress looms over the city. On the ground, there are craters from his hail of explosives, and people running to-and-fro in panicked bunches from his remaining Glyph Troopers. These eerie soldiers of mechanical body and magical energy are faceless, heartless drones attempting to sweep the city clean of all resistance.

Jahidra flies in overhead, after transmuting a Glyph Trooper's weapon into water, Jack of Hearts slicing its mechanical head from its body.

"That seems to be the last of them, Queen, what's next?"

Queen of Hearts, you look up to the sky, and cock your head. "Next? We bring that thing down."

The Mechanic and the Atomic Juggernaut have developed a way to disrupt Reign's power supply. The ship is hovering over the bay, and when it falls, it should have a guided descent. Just as the players are discussing a way to get aboard, Reign begins lifting his Sky-Fortress above the clouds and out of the atmosphere into space! Inform the players they have access to *The Mary Victoria*, their rocket-powered transport, which can reach the Sky-Fortress before it gets away if they leave immediately.

Once off the ground, flying Glyph Troopers, wielding laser rifles and electrified maces, swoop in to attack. (See the Glyph Trooper sheet at the end of the adventure.) *The Mary Victoria* is based on the stats of a B-52 Bomber, and has jet engines powerful enough to break the Earth's gravitational pull and gravity:

The Mary Victoria: Handling 6, Speed 5, Structure 4, Armor 1

Page 1: The Glyph Troopers begin firing on the engines of *The Mary Victoria* and attempt to board the craft, tearing holes in the walls. The Mechanic and the Atomic Juggernaut both have the Pilot specialty and should be behind the yoke of the flying machine.

There are a number of Glyph Troopers equal to three times the number of heroes. The Troopers attack the craft and attempt to bring it down before it can intercept the Sky-Fortress. If the Troopers are able to damage the plane twice, you can jump to the next section of the **Prologue**, but every

player character has the temporary quality “Shaken Up” and loses 1d6 Stamina in the crash.

Page 2: The Glyph Troopers board the *Mary Victoria*, creating a “Major Distraction” quality, which can affect the piloting tests to land safely on the Sky-Fortress. The Sky-Fortress has Anti-Aircraft Batteries firing off at the *Mary Victoria* with Level 8 explosive rounds. Landing safely is a difficulty 5 Coordination test. Failure results in 1d6 Stamina loss to the passengers and the temporary “Shaken Up” quality for the remainder of the chapter.

Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

There’s a sound of grinding metal-on-metal as the *Mary Victoria* manages to collide with the deck of Reign’s Sky-Fortress. And just as the rear hatch slams open, the eerie twilight between the Earth and the upper atmosphere fills the cabin.

The voice of Reign, booming via the electronic amplifiers and tinged with hollow mechanical menace, roars above the sound of the Sky-Fortress’s engines.

“You cannot stop the inevitable. My revenge against you, Queen of Hearts, is one of purest hatred. You will suffer at my hand, but my revenge against mortal humanity shall be everlasting. I shall allow my Glyph Troopers to round you up, and I will dispose of you at my leisure. Soon, the world will be devoid of the old life, and brimming with...the new flesh!”

The roar of the engines dissipates over the sound of the charging Glyph Troopers, armed with laser rifles and electrified maces.

Page 3: The *Mary Victoria* is able to land on the upper deck of the Sky-Fortress. Once the heroes head out of their aircraft, they’re attacked by a wave of Glyph Troopers equal to three times their number.

The quark pulse emitter has a material strength of 7, but has the quality “Delicate Instrument”. If it’s damaged, it can be repaired, but the heroes have to take that a number pages to re-calibrate the delicate instruments inside equal to the number of times the emitter has been damaged.

The players face a difficulty 6 Intellect pyramid test to determine where the power supply for the Sky-Fortress is, aided by any appropriate specialties the hero may have. They can accumulate successes to find the power source aboard the vessel, but each page they don’t succeed at all, another wave of Glyph Troopers is sent to deal with them.



Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

Finally, you reach the center of the power conduit system in the bowels of the Sky-Fortress. The light in the room is a glaring green outside of any natural spectrum. It seems powered by a series of etched green crystals; energies, both supernatural and natural, arc from the crystals through the thrumming conduits leading out all around the room.

Just as you set the quark pulse emitter down, the clang of heavy boots on the stairs rings out in the room, and Reign appears.

“This shall be the end of the Phalanx. I have had enough of your pathetic interruptions. Time to die.”

Reign’s character sheet can be found at the end of the adventure. Reign attacks the most damaged hero first with a lethal Blast. During the battle, he attempts to destroy the quark pulse emitter after attacking the weakest hero. His intention is to destroy the Pulse Emitter, then subdue or kill the Phalanx members aboard his ship.

REIGN REVEALED

During this battle, you should make a point to have the veil lifted from Reign, and at that moment declare that Queen of Hearts and Jack of Hearts both recognize him as Doc Eldritch, the Merlin to the Queen of Hearts' metaphorical Arthur. Doctor Eldritch was the first Protector of Earth, and was a confidant and mentor to the members of the Phalanx for many years. Over the years, he searched for a path to live forever—saying it was for the benefit of all mankind, as having such a protector would be beneficial in the long run.

But seeking out the realm souls cross into once they leave this plane of existence, he broke into Geistospace. Eldritch found a font of limitless power to keep his soul alive, even after his body would cease to be. Reign is essentially a ghost in power armor at this point. His energies are part of the field of tau radiation. Any time someone has been exposed to this radiation, they've been exposed to the entity formerly known as Doc Eldritch. This includes the heroes in every chapter of the series, as well. You can introduce questions as to whether this spiritual energy has influenced their decision-making or has influenced their friends or allies.

At the end of the battle, once Reign is defeated and the quark pulse emitter is activated, read the following to your players:

The Queen of Hearts and Jack of Hearts stare at one another in the moment just before the terrible teeming energies of the Quark Emitter shreds all of existence around the both of them. “Lucian...” The Queen says... “He’ll survive...” Jack replies. “He’ll survive.”

And then ... only silence.

The **Prologue** ends with you collecting the Phalanx character sheets, and leaving the players with some questions regarding the nature of the villain of this chapter, and (if you're running this as part of the **Rise of the Phalanx** series) some insight into the parentage of one of the city's most iconic benefactors, Lucian King.

THE END OF THE SERIES...

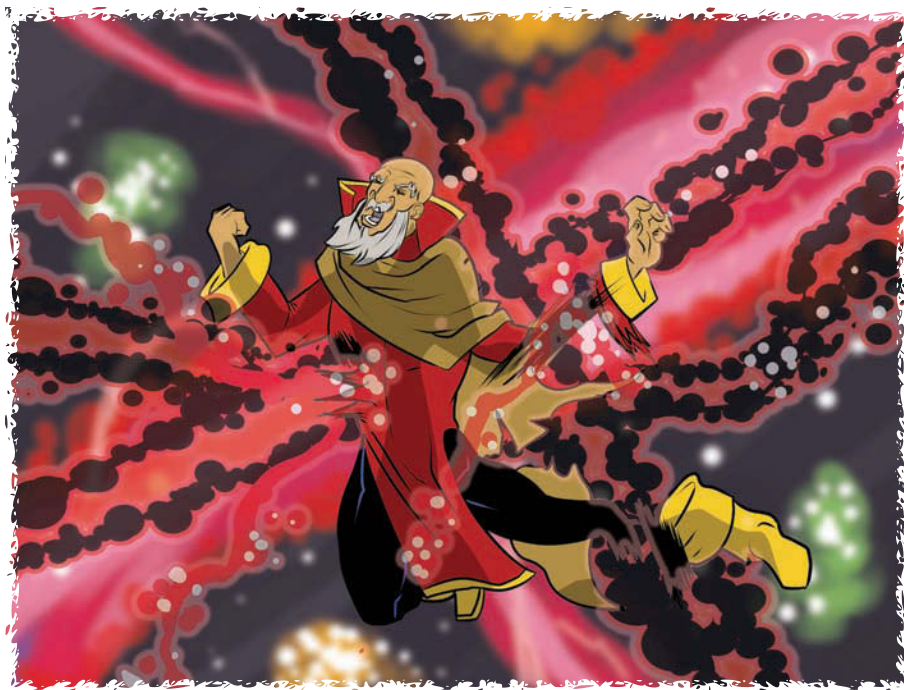
You've been playing these adventures, and Lucian King has been the provider of technology, a headquarters, and funding for your Phalanx team. Over time, there's no doubt you've created a character using the interactions and snippets of dialogue from the prior adventures to allow your players to have a living NPC that has helped flesh out the world of Victory City. We don't want to change your portrayal of Lucian King, but this is to give you some background on the Phalanx's mysterious benefactor, and the plan of the supervillain Reign: the true arch-enemy of the original Phalanx.

Lucian King's parents were the Queen of Hearts, a magically-powered paragon of heroism and Jack of Hearts, her husband and fellow adventurer. The original Phalanx brought together the heroes of Victory City, knowing that together, they could protect the city better than they could alone. The Queen, Loretta Freeman, and her husband Jackson King, were led to this decision by Victory City's original protector, "Doc" Eldritch.

Doc Eldritch led Queen and Jack of Hearts to gather the original Phalanx. Doc Eldritch was an autodidact of a vast number of disciplines, occult and mundane. He was a mystic, a martial artist, and a strategist without comparison. He led the Phalanx to protect the city, and just before he left the group to pursue the answer to life's most important question—"What comes next?"—Loretta and Jackson announced they were getting married. Some time later, they had a son.

Years later, with still no sign of the return of Doc Eldritch, the criminal element of Victory City had been transformed from loose collections of gangs into organized crime families, and Queen of Hearts was certain there was a criminal mastermind behind all of it.

The name "Reign" was on the lips of the crooks and thugs they managed to catch at various schemes around the city, too well organized for the historically fractured criminal element of Victory City. While they interrogated the criminal element about Reign, thwarting his smaller schemes, Reign built his army. Even his name was designed to reflect his hatred for the Queen of Hearts and her family; including the heroes in the Phalanx. Reign, was, in fact Doc Eldritch, returned from a long sojourn into the deepest, maddest heart of Geistspace. Using his will alone, he managed to return to a semblance of life; willing his energies to coalesce. He became one with the tau radiation permeating that realm, and over the years, in pain, lost, and terrified, grew to loathe not just Victory City, not just the Phalanx, but the entirety of mortal humanity.



Eldritch's mistake was passing through a portal he found in a hidden cavern atop the Himalayas. Doctor Eldritch felt the energy keeping this portal open—emitting from strange bright green crystalline formations in the cave—was the secret to everlasting life. Without proper physical protection to make the journey, Doc Eldritch attempted to breach the portal, thinking his magical bindings and protections enough to withstand the environmental dangers. Doctor Eldritch's human form was shredded at the molecular level upon arrival. However, his mind and soul lingered on, Eldritch being a mage of intense and focused willpower.

Doctor Eldritch lived on, but the torment of Geistspace and the horrors of bodiless existence drove him mad. Eldritch's will was absolute, however. Over the five-year span, Eldritch's attempts to return to our world were thwarted by the dimensional barrier between worlds, and his mind, steeped in madness, blamed his former charges, the Phalanx. They never came to his aid; they left him in this hellish dimension for what seemed like an eternity.

Over that last year, he managed to gather the mystical and background Geistspace energies in that Tibetan cave. Eventually, Eldritch was able to animate and occupy the corpse of a Tibetan monk who died keeping watch

over the portal for his return. Crafting his technological/mystical armor, and dubbing himself Reign, the entity formerly known as Doctor Eldritch returned to Victory City. Reign brought his knowledge of the alien worlds and technology of Geistspace to begin his campaign of destruction against the so-called heroes who abandoned him and upon the mortal weaklings he used to protect, but had forgotten his name. His secondary goal was to bring the entire planet into Geistspace; transforming the human race into bodiless entities and destroying the minds and bodies of those without the will to survive.

There were many battles between Reign and the original Phalanx. Their final encounter at the beginning of this adventure seemingly led to the destruction of both of them. The Phalanx and Reign were flung back into Geistspace, Reign coming together on the timeless world of Equinox, and the Phalanx surviving aboard the wreckage of their craft on a similar planetoid drifting through Geistspace near the Metaskulk home world.

On Equinox, Reign used his knowledge of magic, and his realization that his most hated foes had a son, to use the infinite time ahead of him to plan his revenge. Over the years, he managed to create a minute tunnel between Equinox and Earth where he began slowly transmitting his thoughts, his personality, and his essence into the mind of Lucian King.

King is unaware of this takeover; Reign's influence was slight at first. Reign's focus on The Phalanx led to a similar obsession within King. Nostalgia, most around him believed, led him to collect the remainder of the trophies of the team, and rebuild their Citadel in downtown Victory City. By the time Wrack and his legions began their infiltration of the city, Reign could take brief control of Lucian's body and mind, and "hired" Monolith as Lucian's bodyguard. Reign, in truth, created Monolith as the first of his Glyph Troopers. The Glyph Troopers are mindless beings from beyond the dimensional walls. Lucian has been under the influence of Reign since the beginning of this series of adventures, using his ties to All-American Girl, All-Star, etc. to maneuver them into being abducted in the Cosmic Justicar episode, creating a base for the new Phalanx that is actually the other transmitter to bring Reign and his flying fortress back to Earth.

King is in the Reign armor. Reign is using him as a literal human shield within his armor, and this fact won't be known to your players until near the end of the adventure.

CHAPTER ONE: BEACHHEAD EARTH!

The first chapter begins right after Reign's initial assault at the end of **The Metaskulk Invasion**. There are five attuning locations throughout the city. If you're playing this as part of the **Rise of the Phalanx** series, one of the attuning locations is the Phalanx Citadel, transformed into the primary attuning location. Reign is using the attuning locations to merge Victory City with Geistspace to obliterate or transform all human life within the city.

The time for the attunement to fully happen is 50 pages, 10 pages per attunement location, but with each one defeated, it adds five pages to the countdown, buying the heroes more time. There are three locations somewhat easy to dismantle, and two that are more difficult. All five working together create an impenetrable force dome over Victory City, sealing it off from the outside world.

The heroes can tackle the Attunement Locations in any order following the first location, but realize that one location is five pages of travel away from the main area of the city. Three attunement matrices must be destroyed to prevent Reign from shunting the whole of Victory City and its inhabitants into Geistspace.

Between these five encounters there are catastrophes occurring throughout the city caused by the incursion. The chapter ends once three or more attuning locations are deactivated or time runs out. If time runs out, and the players haven't deactivated enough of the attuning locations, the city is ripped from the Earth and thrust into Geistspace. Little does Reign know that ULTRA Labs' experimentation with tau radiation and creation of tau crystals has permeated Victory City with enough background tau radiation to prevent the people there from being utterly destroyed. However, the citizens are transformed into frozen phantoms for the duration of the adventure. See **If The Heroes Should Fail...** at the end of this chapter.

RANDOM CALAMITIES

Between each attunement site, roll 2d6: The first die determines the first set (1-3) or the second set (4-6) of calamities while the second die chooses a random calamity from that set for heroes to encounter. If you roll a duplicate, re-roll until you get a calamity the heroes haven't encountered yet, unless the description says otherwise. For each calamity the heroes prevent, award them a Determination Point.

1. APARTMENT BLOCK FIRE

An apartment block is on fire, there are 1d6 people trapped in a building that is a fiery conflagration. There is no opposition to the heroes' rescue, but, if ignored, those people may die. The scene has the qualities "Fiery Inferno" "Unstable Structure" and "Panicked Civilians". See "**R**" is for **Rescue** in the **ICONS A TO Z** sourcebook for some additional ideas on handling this type of calamity.

2. BUS ATTACKED

There is a city bus stalled and flipped on its side, with ten people hiding behind its wreckage in various states of health. There are a number of Glyph Troopers equal to the heroes +2 firing their weapons on the bus, attempting to destroy their victims. "Volatile Fluids" and "Panicked Civilians" are the two qualities for the scene.

3. RANDOM PATROL

A random patrol of Glyph Troopers, a number equal to the heroes, arrives on the streets. If this is the first time this result has come up, the number of troopers is equal to the heroes. Each subsequent time, add 2 troopers. The third time this comes up, add a Glyph Tank, which has a Structure of 8, and fires a level 7 Blast every other page.

4. PINNED-DOWN POLICE

There's a group of police, fifteen officers, firing at a group of Glyph Troopers taking cover behind a line of burning cars. The police are pinned down, and soon, they'll be out of ammunition. There are a number of Glyph Troopers equal to the number of heroes +3. They are unaware of the heroes when they arrive. If the heroes are able to successfully rescue the police, they can arm them with the Glyph Troopers' weapons. Use the **Police Officer** stock character from **ICONS** for the officers.

Once the heroes have rescued the police, and armed them, they can ignore a subsequent calamity roll, representing the police being better able to restore order.

5. DESTROYED BRIDGE

A bridge, part of the city's elevated train system, has collapsed. There are five civilians dangling from the rear train car, requiring assistance. The car is dangling thirty feet above street level. There are buildings nearby that would allow access to the upper area. The qualities "Precarious Perch" "Panicked Civilians" and "Time is of the Essence" all apply.

6. LOOTING

The criminal element has decided to take to the streets and, under the guise of rioting, a number of looters equal to the heroes +2 have decided to rob a big box electronics store! Use the **Thug** stock character from **ICONS** for the looters. The quality "Utter Chaos" applies to the scene.

1. EXPLODING GAS MAIN

The street is shattered by an explosion, with a gas main belching flame into the sky. The gas main can be deactivated further down the street with a difficulty 6 Intellect test, or can be closed off by physical means by doing enough damage to the pipe system. However, such huge collateral damage will trigger the **Apartment Block Fire** calamity to begin immediately following this one. "Raging Inferno" is the quality on the scene as well as "Volatile Elements".

2. FALLING CITIZEN

From the top of a skyscraper, a panicked civilian has tumbled out of a window and is falling fast unless the heroes can catch them.

3. OUT OF CONTROL VEHICLE

A car is heading for a massive crater in the middle of the street, and has four pages before both driver and car are destroyed. The only quality on the scene is "Pressed For Time".

4. RANDOM EXPLOSION

An explosion rocks the area with a level 7 Blast. The heroes can avoid damage from the explosion with a successful difficulty 7 Coordination or Awareness test.

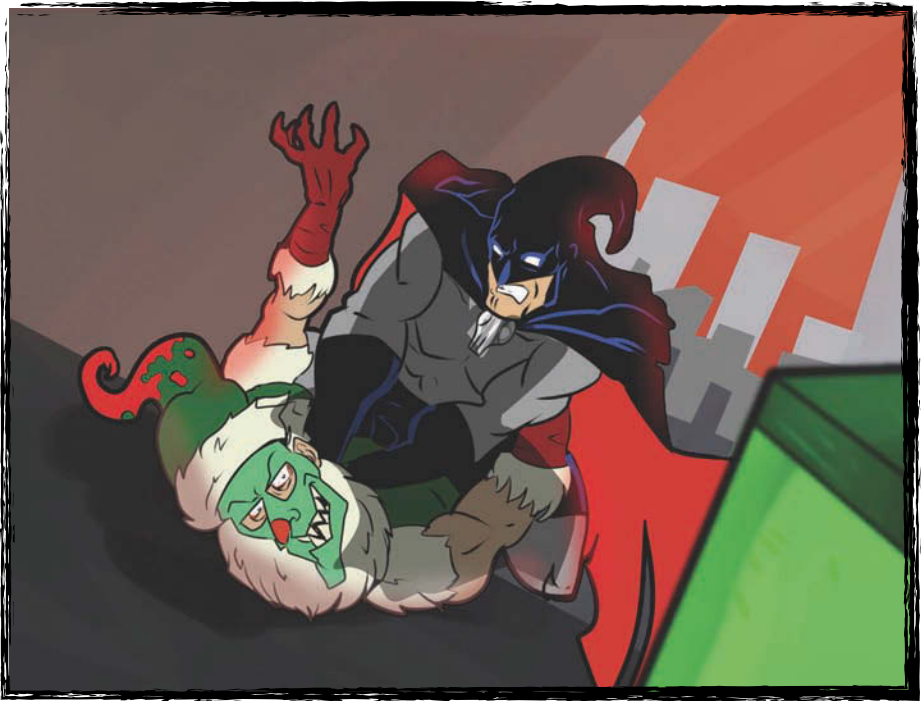
5. ARTILLERY ATTACK

Glyph Troopers have an artillery piece, and are firing on various fortified locations around the city, trying to remove police, fire, and rescue from the equation. There are a number of Glyph Troopers equal to the heroes +1, and the artillery fires level 7 Blasts every other page. If the heroes are unable to destroy or disable the artillery in five pages, the Fire Department is

destroyed. Five pages following that, the Victory City General Hospital Garage is destroyed, along with rescue vehicles. “Pressed for Time” is the quality on the scene. The weapon is Strength 6 and unless there are troopers to operate it, cannot be used.

6. HOSTAGE CRISIS

The police have cornered Redkap, who is holding a child hostage. Whether by force or diplomacy, the child must be rescued, or Redkap gets away. The police have no snipers, but can easily instruct the heroes to get into a proper position. Depending on when this takes place, the police may have the quality “Itchy Trigger Fingers”.



If you’re playing this as part of the **Rise of the Phalanx** series, the hero affected by Redkap in **The Metaskulk Invasion** will certainly have a personal motivation to stop the insane villain. You may want to create tension with the scene, especially if you went with the suggestion that this hero be the more unstable element in the group. There’s no one onsite who will blame a hero for taking dire measures but, depending on the tone of your series, you may want to test the hero’s Willpower to prevent them from permanently injuring or killing Redkap.

If the heroes are well-liked by the police and general public (in the case of **The Metaskulk Invasion** they may not be) there will be no additional complications. However, following the press and issues of **The Metaskulk Invasion**, the police will have the quality “Itchy Trigger Fingers” due to the failed hostage situation from the previous issue. At this point the hero has an opportunity to be an agent for justice, or a grim executioner.

ATTUNEMENT LOCATIONS

Each attunement matrix is like a circulatory system of cables and junction boxes using tau radiation and crystals to create the attunement effect. If any of the heroes are equipped with abilities or gear that can detect tau radiation, they gain a +1 bonus on tests to overcome the matrices. If the heroes have prior experience with tau radiation—such as from earlier adventures in this series—given them a +1 bonus to their tests as well.

DESTROYING THE ATTUNEMENT MATRICES

Powering down an attunement matrix is a difficult 6 escalating Intellect pyramid test, meaning the difficulty increases by 1 for each test made, to a maximum of 10. A total massive success shuts down the matrix. Each attunement matrix can also be destroyed through sheer physical force. The device has an effective Stamina of 10 with Damage Resistance 6.

1. THE MUSEUM OF MODERN METAHUMANITY

Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

The air is forced from your lungs as the edifice of the Museum of Modern Metahumanity, a tourist spot in the city celebrating the exploits of its heroes, explodes outward. Jutting from within a glimmering mechanical monstrosity looms outward with various communication towers and devices of alien origin clinging to it. Energy arcs and flashes over its surface, and the air hums with a strange vibratory frequency. Suddenly, from within the building, a crowd of people flee the onslaught of several strange creatures, armed with weapons of an alien design.

The Museum is guarded by a contingent of Glyph Troopers equal to the number of heroes + 3. The museum has a flight of marble stairs leading up to a modern edifice of concrete, glass, and steel. From the second floor up

to the fourth, there are exhibits and trophies that can be turned on your heroes, including an automated security system with Blast 6 weapons.

FOR RISE OF THE PHALANX

For this encounter, replace the term Museum of Modern Metahumanity with the Phalanx Citadel, as this represents their headquarters being taken over. In addition, note the security systems they may have built into their headquarters and use them against the heroes. The number of Glyph Troopers is the same, but they're armed with devices familiar to the heroes: The Elemental Gauntlets of Kamitsu Khan! You can choose the elemental effect they're using, but it can be a level 7 Blast of fire, cold, or electricity.

During the battle, they have to make their way to the heart of their headquarters and deactivate the attunement matrix.

2. ULTRA LABS

Read or paraphrase the following for your players:

ULTRA Labs has suddenly sprouted superstructures lunging out across its grounds and parking area, glimmering and gleaming gold - bristling with arcane and alien machinery. It looks like an otherworldly anemone bursting forth from the main building.

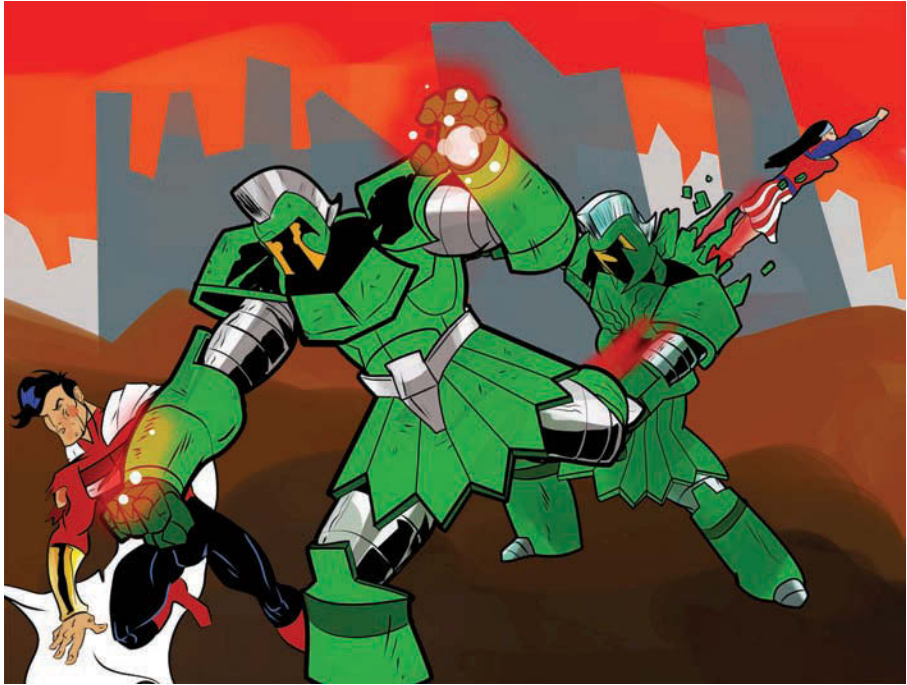
The attunement matrix is behind a Great (6) Force Field wall maintained by Glyph Troopers equal to the number of heroes +5. They also protect a cache of tau crystals. If the heroes are successful in defeating the Troopers, but do not obtain the crystals, this influences events in a later chapter.

3. AVATAR INDUSTRIES

Read or paraphrase the following for your players:

The building is covered in a wall of mechanical and arcane devices melded together, glittering and golden lights winking and arcing with energy. The attunement matrix is surrounded by Glyph Troopers, two of which are wearing prototype SPARTAN battlesuits. They train their weapons on you and open fire!

The site is guarded by a number of Glyph Troopers equal to the number of heroes +3, two of which are wearing versions of the SPARTAN armor. (As seen in the adventure **The Skeletron Key** and the **Adversaries** sourcebook.)



SPARTAN Armor: Strength 8, Aura 6 (electrified hull surface), Blast 5 (shooting, machine gun), Blast 7 (shooting, main arm-cannon), Damage Resistance 7, Life Support 7 (all but eating, sleeping, and vacuum)

4. APEX INNOVATIONS AIRFIELD

Read or paraphrase the following for your players:

The towers of gleaming metal remind you of stalagmites reaching into the sky, arcing green energy from the tips. At the center of a web of energy is an attunement matrix, manned by three Glyph Troopers.

The Glyph Troopers are not expecting resistance, and so are fairly easy to overcome. However, travel to and from this location takes 5 pages. Be sure to inform your players of this prior to tackling this location.

5. INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT



Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

More so than other locations around the city, this area is a war-zone. There are ten Glyph Troopers and a Glyph Tank firing upon what looks like an abandoned toy factory. The walls are hanging from wavering struts and the Troopers location is nestled in what looks to be a briar patch consisting of entirely mechanical/arcane devices. There is a dome of green energy over the attunement matrix. The Troopers are pointing out weak points on the factory. Suddenly a blast of energy from the toy factory rips the wall down, and striding out with a literal army of dog-sized robots is Terror-Pin. The blast has engulfed one of the Troopers, freezing it in time.

“FEEL THE FURY OF MY TACHYON PULSE!” the diminutive villain screams tremulously as his small robots bound over the rubble and towards the Glyph Troopers.

The Troopers have the quality “Distracted” and the scene has the quality “Enemy of my Enemy” as well. Terror-Pin is no longer a villain, strictly speaking, but has been violating his parole experimenting with tau radiation and his tachyon pulse emitter.

If the heroes don’t attack him or his robots, they gain a +2 to their attacks, due to the robots assisting them. His new prototype can only fire once every other page, but he assists the heroes by freezing a Glyph Trooper each turn.

FOR RISE OF THE PHALANX

Your players may already be aware that Terror Pin was working on another tachyon pulse device, but at the very least know that he’s *not* a villain anymore. He wants to get back into the good graces of Victory City’s scientific community. If they interact with him during this encounter, treating him with respect, he will give them his tachyon pulse emitter, which can defeat the force fields of the Glyph Troopers. The emitter he gives them is without the shell, so doesn’t offer any shielding, but it can fire every other page to freeze one Trooper or deactivate one Glyph Trooper or tau radiation Force Field.

This is also for players who may have played in the *Gangbusters* adventure: If they decide to leave well enough alone, Terror-Pin gives them the tachyon pulse emitter with the request that they put in a good word for him with the parole board.

WRAP-UP

Once at least three attunement matrices are destroyed, the chapter is over. Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

As the attunement matrix goes offline, the sky goes from the eldritch emerald color it has been all morning to the inviting cerulean it’s always been. However, your attention’s been so divided that the city seems to be overrun by Reign’s Glyph Troopers!

SHOULD THE HEROES FAIL...

The heroes may fail. The odds are stacked against them, after all. So, if they cannot manage to disable at least three attunement matrices, Reign activates his device to shunt Victory City into Geistspace. The city becomes

a floating island in the dimension of primeval chaos, with its inhabitants frozen in time as phantoms. Reign will be astonished that this has happened, but will begin adjusting the devices aboard his flying fortress to finish the job.

The heroes will be phantasms, but not frozen in place like their supporting cast or the rest of the citizens due to their direct contact with tau radiation. This allows them to affect the world at half power. Their powers' levels are reduced by half. Their attributes, with the exception of Intellect, Awareness, and Willpower are reduced by half as well while they are phantasms.

There's an additional element to **Chapter Two** if the heroes fail to destroy three of the attunement matrices.

CHAPTER TWO: RALLY THE TROOPS!

At the end of **Chapter One**, Reign's play to have the city shunted to Geistspace has failed, but his Glyph Troopers have overrun the city. Their occupation has several hard-points where the invading army has dug in. The heroes have fallen back to the Museum of Modern Metahumanity—or, if this is being played as part of the **Rise of the Phalanx** series, the Phalanx Citadel—as a headquarters. The CRASH Team, the city's superhuman criminal task force, has found themselves allied with the heroes as well. It has been a week of fighting since Reign's return, and the heroes have acquired the temporary quality "Exhausted".

Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

It has been a week of nearly non-stop battle. Glyph Troopers are hunting the streets of the city looking for you all. They're on a single-minded pursuit of eliminating you, before returning to the task of repairing Reign's attunement matrices. Weary, and on edge, the perimeter alarms wail as the monitors show a group of supervillains landing on your doorstep. Derecha, Locust, and Phage are looking around nervously as they approach the front doors of your hideout.

The Plagues are *not* here to fight, they have actually come to help CRASH and the heroes against the Glyph Troopers. (You can find the Plagues' stats at the end of the adventure.) They try to convince the heroes they are on the up and up. Conspicuous by his absence is Redkap, their most mentally disturbed and elementally evil member.

The heroes may choose to attack; the only one who fights back is Phage, unsure of Derecha's leadership at this point, but Locust leaps away, absorbing rubble to power himself up before attempting his escape. Derecha also orders Phage to stand down, but again, this is more based on the heroes' reactions to the villains.

If there is no confrontation beyond exchanging words, the players may have a bit of an advantage this chapter against Reign and his army. During scenes where they are going to set up an ambush or are attacking the invading army, they can pick one of the Plagues to assist them as a quality on the scene. If they use Derecha they have the quality “Visually Obscured”, Phage gives them “Nauseated Enemies,” and Locust gives them “Held Down”.

In addition they may also have Terror-Pin’s tachyon pulse emitter, which is useful against the Glyph Troopers’ force fields and can freeze a single Glyph Trooper for a scene.

If the heroes failed in the previous chapter, but managed to destroy one or two of the attunement matrices, the Glyph Troopers are occupied with repairing those matrices. The leftover matrices can also be destroyed or they can be ignored while the heroes are trying to resolve their phantasmal state. The cure is, oddly enough, the tachyon pulse emitter itself. This information can be gleaned from a rescued scientist, or one of the heroes can discover it with a difficulty 7 Intellect test. Exposure to the emitter’s beam restores the heroes to their full material state and their full levels of ability once more.

Once the scene with the Plagues is resolved, the head of the CRASH Team, James Wyatt, has information regarding Reign’s plan; from the police and other volunteers who have been observing and infiltrating the Glyph Trooper locations all over the city, they’ve pieced together Reign’s current plans.

Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

James Wyatt, director of the CRASH Metahuman Crimes task force has been in better spirits, and better health. He's looking ragged. Wyatt's voice is husky, and he collapses into a chair, pointing a control at a nearby view-screen.

"We've been following these things around the city. So far, they've been attempting to rebuild the machines Reign had placed around the city, and they're being lead by this man..."

On the screen is a man with reflective onyx skin, glowing with runes all over. In the shaky footage you're seeing, he's ordering Glyph Troopers to set up machinery in the Industrial District of the city. There's a sudden shake on the screen as an explosion rips through the air, and a handful of National Guardsmen rush the area.

The stone-skinned man tears through them with arms swinging wildly, tossing men and women soldiers aside like children. The footage changes to show a massive golden mechanical disk at the Apex Innovations airfield outside of the city.

"We don't know what that is, but it's new. And we can figure anything new is not good for us at this point. We know troops are moving from his flying ...whatever the hell that thing is...to the city, but we don't know how or where. At this point, civilian authorities, tactics and weapons are completely outstripped. What should we do?"

James Wyatt, a man you respect for being direct, is, in this moment completely defeated. Normally, Wyatt has an idea of what to do, but you've never seen him so despondent.

"We also did as thorough a search of the Citadel as we could. The Javelin was damaged, but repairable in the hangar, and there's no sign of Lucian King. Apparently, Monolith betrayed us all for Reign."

At this point, Reign has not made another communication to the people of the city, but his Troopers have quelled any normal human uprisings with deadly and swift force. Of course, the **Prologue** of this adventure is a direct pointer towards the resolution: The heroes need to attack the flying fortress, and find a way aboard.

The man with the stone skin is known as Monolith and he knows Reign's future plans. Interrogating him has benefits, as does finding a way to the flying fortress itself. Setting up an ambush can involve whatever you as GM

would like and can be as elaborate or simple as you'd want. This should be fun for your players, creating a heist style plan for attacking the Glyph Troopers and Monolith.



Monolith and the Troopers move between ULTRA Labs' wreckage site, and the Apex Innovations airfield. They are moving tau crystals from the former to the latter. At the airfield, the massive gold mechanical disk is a teleportation platform which can send the players directly into the heart of the flying fortress.

They travel by airborne transports, which can be modified to reach the fortress itself. The hero team may have the ability to fly or teleport or use other movement powers but Reign has protected himself from an incursion, learning from past mistakes. The field is essentially a plot device level shield around the flying fortress, it is impenetrable, and should a hero attempt to board, it delivers 8 points of Stamina damage until the hero breaks contact with the shield. Award any player who attempts to breach the shield a Determination Point for the first attempt, but let them know that they cannot circumvent the shield without some form of transportation.

If the hero team has another mode of transportation, a vehicle, they need to determine how Reign's military are able to pass through the force field.

The bodyguard of Lucien King may have a personality in your particular campaign. We never fleshed out a personality for the character, allowing GMs the freedom to craft traits or not for the game. If Monolith was a stoic observer of events, this change of allegiances doesn't alter that, Monolith is in fact one of the Glyph Troopers, a creation of Reign, and completely loyal to him. Monolith's mind—if an ambulatory piece of onyx could be said to have one—is like a computer programmed for war. Monolith's stratagem for reclaiming the city includes knowledge of the Phalanx's weaknesses, families, and pressure points and will not hesitate to make this war personal.

AMBUSH SITES

There are three prime locations for an ambush in the city: in the city's financial district; two massive multilevel skyscrapers are shattered but standing, and form a box canyon at one of the attunement locations or attacking a wandering patrol.

1. THE URBAN CANYON

Read or paraphrase the following for your players:

The buildings are direct evidence of Reign's destructive might, and of the brutal power he'd wield if it weren't for your tireless efforts to defend the city. The patrol you're waiting for is a convoy that travels to a hidden location, either a teleportation pad or some other device to gain access to the Fortress. This may be your only chance to get aboard, and bring Reign to justice.

The convoy consists of three long storage hover vehicles, a Glyph Tank, and a platoon of Glyph Troopers. They are bringing tau crystals to the flying headquarters of Reign, to create another event to finish the job of attuning the city to geistspace. In addition, Monolith accompanies this shipment. See his character sheet at the end of the adventure for details.

The convoy moves slowly, trying to keep the overcharged tau crystals from exploding. The crystals are unstable and the scene has "Unstable Elements" as a quality. The troopers defend the cache of crystals with their lives, and Monolith attempts to detonate them only as a last resort to escape the heroes. Monolith can be interrogated, though it is difficult, but in the lead vehicle, there is a data tablet that describes the teleportation location in detail. The heroes can get to the fortress using this information, as well as recovering the tau crystals.

Any hero with specialties involving scientific fields will also be able scan and investigate further with the device. A successful difficulty 5 Intellect test reveals the coordinates of the teleportation pad as well as access codes for the engine room of the flying fortress. A major or better success on the test reveals an additional piece of information, a clue pointing towards how to defeat Reign as well, a video message of the last communication between Reign and Monolith.

Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

The image on the small data tablet is sharp, and shows what appears to be an opulent throne room, appointed with arcane instruments and shafts of wiring. Reign is seated upon a massive golden throne, tapping the armrest. He leans forward into the scene and speaks directly to the person holding the tablet.

“Report,” the voice is toneless, without emotion. Monolith responds, his voice a deep baritone over the tablet.

“My lord, we have another shipment heading to you. We are nearly finished with the requested quantities of crystals, and will have recovered control of the city within the next day.”

“Whe—where am I?” Reign is suddenly looking around, dazed at first, then slightly panicking, reaching up to grab his mask off, but his hands hover, shaking before he grabs it, and stop. Reign’s voice was tremulous and frightened.

Monolith asks “My lord?”

“It is nothing. Report to me once the shipment has been offloaded.” Reign regains his flat, emotionless tone. His hands drop to the arms of the throne.

“Yes, my lord.”

The video shows Reign’s control of his host-body is imperfect. Any hero who views it may realize that Lucien King is Reign’s weak point; without a body to possess, the immaterial entity cannot exist in this reality.

2. GUERRILLA WARFARE

Based upon the site they choose along the route, feel free to add qualities like “Dense Cover” or “Higher Ground” depending on the particular situation. The patrols are not random, they have easily determined patterns,

and a character with a military background or specialties related to military, tactics, or strategy can set up a quality that benefits the players prior to the attack.

The Glyph Trooper Patrols have a number of troopers equal to twice the number of heroes unless they were unable to keep Reign from firing off his Attunement devices. In that case, there are a number of troopers equal to the number of heroes.

They are equipped with Elemental Gauntlets, and can call in a Glyph Tank, which will arrive following their call in a single page. The Tank is accompanied by Monolith. Monolith has a data tablet that describes the teleportation location as above with the same video inside.

3. GLYPH TRANSPORT PLATFORM

Another way to get aboard Reign's flying fortress would be to follow the Patrol convoy carrying the tau crystals to the teleportation platform that brings them to Reign's fortress. The platform is located at the exterior launch rig for the *Nova-7* at Apex Innovations outside of the city. The large glistening golden machinery has four extensible emitters that fire up and transport anything on the round disc-shaped platform using tau radiation.

There are a number of Glyph Troopers onsite equal to the number of heroes +3. They can call for reinforcements, which arrive in three pages. The number of reinforcements is twice the number of heroes plus a Glyph Tank. The tank is driven by Monolith, however if the players manage to subdue the troopers before they can call for backup, Monolith is waiting for them aboard the flying fortress.

ALTERNATE OUTCOME: CAPTURE

There is always the possibility the heroes are defeated in one of these attempts, or may decide to pretend to be subdued, to be brought before Reign as captives. If this is the case use a simple Willpower test against Monolith's Willpower as the difficulty to determine the efficacy of their ruse. Whether they succeed or fail this test, they arrive aboard the fortress in the prison cells—described below as the opening of the next chapter—and bound with nullification bands.

No matter the route for the heroes to successfully board the fortress, read or paraphrase the following for your players:

You land aboard the flying behemoth, and the sky around you pulses a faint green from the tau radiation hanging in the air. Suddenly, the deck of the fortress seems to explode outward, sending an energy wave through your entire group - knocking you flat to the deck, and suddenly you are all unconscious.

Award the group a Determination Point for this setback.

CHAPTER THREE: DISASTER!

The chapter begins with the heroes in the dungeons of the flying fortress of Reign. The fortress has a series of cells, they have energy barriers across the entrances, and—if they feigned capture unsuccessfully to get aboard—they may be lashed with nullification bands which nullify any powers not based in magic or devices. Shortly after being deposited in the cells, Reign will offer the heroes a deal: their fealty for their lives. If they decline, Reign jettisons them into Geistspace without the benefit of protection, which will disincorporate them, transforming them into specters.

Reign offers them time to make their decision. At this point, heroes with telepathic or other sensory powers that can detect the weakening of Reign's hold over his host's body will recognize that the time to deliberate is not Reign's own idea. This doesn't require a test, because of the incredible amount of Willpower Lucian has to exert to recover control makes it clear to those who are psychically sensitive as to what's going on.

At this point, the players should recall how the original Phalanx disabled Reign's original fortress: the quark pulse emitter.

Once left alone, the heroes can attempt to escape their cells and, once they do, they may be able to locate either their transport or gear, and if they recall the prologue, can recreate the quark pulse emitter. Navigating the fortress is based upon their abilities and there are patrols throughout. There are different locations they will encounter below: you can either generate these randomly with a roll of 1d6, or you can arrange the locations in order of the components required for the quark pulse emitter.

The Emitter can be used to shut down the shift-ship at its reactor. This seems like a one way trip, unfortunately, but the players may find a way out if they use their abilities or their specialties related to physics or theoretical science.

If the heroes have movement powers, especially things like Dimensional Travel or Astral Travel, clue them into the nature of tau radiation's ability to assist in teleportation. If they have an ability like the aforementioned, they can see a way to detonate the quark pulse emitter without meeting a dire

fate, by creating a tether back to the surface with their powers. A character with Science specialties or background can also make this connection and solve the issue as well.

If they are able to generate enough tau radiation following the detonation of the Quark Pulse, they can possibly create an anchor point and instantaneously teleport them to that point. Once the reactor is deactivated or destroyed, the shift-ship will be thrown through Geistspace to an anchor point: the current site of the original Phalanx's surviving members, which brings us to our final chapter, and the end of this series of modules.

PRIOR EXPERIENCE

Your players by this point know what happened between the original Phalanx and Reign, and how they defeated him. So, to insure that they both understand the ramifications of using the quark pulse emitter, and to foreshadow the possible endgame, be sure that you drop hints about the unstable nature of Reign's engines and his plan overall. It should seem like the Quark Pulse may destroy them. In fact, they'll find that the reaction between his dark matter drive and the quark pulse emitter serves to send them across the vastness of Geistspace—without an anchor—to where the current Phalanx have survived.

Call back to the fact that Arsenal's teleportation pad required vast amounts of energy, and was a dangerous device to begin with, made more so by the unstable inclusion of tau crystals. Also, be sure that they understand that tau radiation has been used over the series to teleport objects and people—by punching through geistspace—and back to another point in our dimension.

PRISONERS OF REIGN

Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

You awaken to find yourselves in a large, metal-plated room, with a large block of metal for a resting area. You all share this single room, and an energy barrier stretches across the front of the cell. There is a sound of hollow metal on metal. Reign walks up, his cape flowing and pooling behind him. Reign's mask and armor combine to form an imposing and imperious figure.

Arms crossed, his metallic voice breaks the silence: "So. My captives. I applaud your determination in getting aboard my shift-ship, foolhardy a plan as it is. You shall be here to witness my triumph over the city."

"You carry the name Phalanx...You are the ones who believed themselves to be the equals of Victory City's first protectors...by my design." Reign walks to the edge of the energy field. "I have manipulated events from afar. I have crafted you in their image so that your defeat, your ignominious end, will serve to show this pathetic world that nothing and no one shall end my rule."

Reign relishes the opportunity to gloat to the helpless heroes. He will reveal his history as Doc Eldritch, explain the relationship between Geistspace and tau radiation, and that he intends to thrust all of the Earth into Geistspace, to create a world of his own to rule. Once the Earth's inter-dimensional protector and wise sage, now a corrupt and evil entity bent on rule or utter destruction, it makes for a sad encounter. They can try to persuade Reign during this encounter: Reign's Willpower and mental shielding make it difficult, but within his mind exists Lucien King. King influences Reign in ways he doesn't understand, just as Reign influenced Lucien in ways he didn't understand.

During this exchange between the heroes and Reign, they each have a chance to speak to him. Reign will talk for as long as you feel the conversation is interesting. Attempts to use Mind Control or Telepathy against him are difficult, and met with an abrupt end to the conversation if detected. Reign won't succumb to flattery, but values fealty. A ruse based on joining his effort by anyone who seems to be less intelligent than he will likely succeed, and well-thought out arguments are met with equal consideration.

If they succeed in convincing Reign to stay his hand of destruction, through either roleplay – or if your players are not comfortable with a scene of interaction like that, give them the opportunity to make Willpower tests versus a difficulty of either his Intellect – if basing their entreaties on logic – or his Willpower – if basing their entreaties on ethics or justice.

There are qualities your characters may possess to spend Determination to affect the outcome of these tests – but they can also have banked a quality, “The City’s Protectors” on themselves as a temporary quality, if they were successful in keeping Reign from shifting the city before assaulting the shift-ship.

CONVERSATION WITH THE ENEMY

If your players played **The Nemesis Crisis**, they were given a device, a mystical wristband with a purple gem embedded in it. This is one of the magical vambraces of the Queen of Hearts. When the Citadel is destroyed, Reign of course is responsible and, as Lucien, takes the wristband with him. During this conversation, Reign reveals the armband, but doesn’t know why the heroes have it or where it came from. (Even though he was on Equinox, he isn’t aware that they had ever heard of his former team, much less encountered them.) The subjects of the Cosmic Justicar gave it to the team, an enigmatic gesture that they state may help them in the future. They know that the balance will be affected by giving them proof that the Phalanx still lives and leaving questions about their whereabouts but still give them the wristband.

The team isn’t sure where the Nox got the wristband from, but they found it in Geistspace. This will be able to stall Reign during the conversation if they can play out the information they have. But once this line of information ends; read or paraphrase the following to your players:

“In the end, it makes no difference. The Queen of Hearts, alive...or dead....is of no consequence to me, nor is the fate of the original Phalanx.” But you can sense something behind his voice...something tentative and strange.

If any of your players are able to identify psychic energies, the mention of the Queen of Hearts being possibly alive gives Lucien King purchase in Reign’s mind and allows them to identify the body within the armor at this point. Reign is Lucien King!

Reign turns on his heel and leaves with an offhand comment that in just twelve hours, this will all come to an end. He makes mention that the strong

willed may survive disincorporation—if they can muster enough rage. Once he leaves, the clock is ticking for the heroes.

ESCAPE!

The cell is made of Amazing (8) material, with an Amazing (8) force field that has an Aura effect of the same level. The power source to the force field is located under the floor. Heroes able to access it may attempt to disable the field with a difficulty 8 Intellect test. Once they are free, they can access a nearby terminal, which operates as a communication center and universal interface for the Glyph Troopers to give location information regarding prisoners.

If the heroes teleported aboard, they can use the terminal to identify the areas of the ship where they can find replacement components to create a new Quark pulse emitter and the location of the tau crystal storage containers aboard the shift-ship. If they built an Emitter and brought it aboard with whatever transportation they used to arrive, it is still aboard the ship which is in the hangar. You can ignore the other locations for parts, but the hangar and the tau crystal storage locations will be required to complete construction of the Emitter.

Otherwise, there are four components required to create the quark pulse emitter and the tau crystals are required to power it, the components can be found in the following four locations on board the shift-ship:

- **The Hangar:** Containing the Glyph Trooper transports and attack craft, as well as the heroes own vehicle, if they used one to come on-board.
- **The Drive Chamber:** The arcane engines of the shift-ship, containing the shielding material needed for the emitter.
- **The Engine Room:** The power source for the shift-ship and its engines, containing the tau crystals the heroes need for the emitter.
- **The Science Lab:** A laboratory and workshop containing the calibration equipment and instruments needed to complete the quark pulse emitter.

1. HANGAR

Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

The hangar of Reign's shift-ship is a massive area resembling a beehive. The Glyph Trooper's flying craft—a pod with stubby wings and a large cockpit window—are honeycombed in the walls, ready for launch. The massive hangar doors in the floor lead out to the stratosphere of Earth. There are cables and eldritch energies snaking down the walls towards several power sources.

If the heroes vehicle is aboard the fortress, add the following:

Your ship holds a place of honor in the hangar bay, cables netting across the top and sides, every exhaust port connected to scanning devices, and the engines connected via data and scanning cables to massive mainframes using both elemental arcane magic and science beyond mortal ken to decipher how your machine works.

The hangar is near the bottom of the shift-ship, near a massive rectangular opening. The hangar allows access from below of all of the Glyph Trooper flying craft. The hangar is huge, and carries a score of Glyph Trooper Flying Craft, and is manned at all times by at least ten times the number of heroes in Glyph Troopers, although only a third of them are armed. In the hangar are parts of the flying craft engines, which can be used to create the quark pulse emitter. The hangar has the qualities "Ample Cover" and "Yawning Chasm".

If the heroes reached the shift-ship in their own vehicle, it is also located in the hangar as well, with several different lines of cabling and connections snaking their way to connect to its engines and fuel supply.

If this is the *Stiletto*—the Phalanx's personal craft—the scanning devices are all connected to its Potentiality Induction Drive, attempting to adapt its technology to the engines of Reign's ship. Any hero with the Science or Technology specialties can determine that this is to incorporate the *Stiletto's* ability to punch through Geistspace, though now defunct, into the fortress's own abilities.

2. DRIVE CHAMBER

Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

The engines of the shift-ship are massive, and the arcane mechanisms that drive the thrusters are equally massive. The drive chamber houses a portion of the engine, which resembles a series of gigantic ebony gears stacked one atop another, glimmering with arcane symbols and arcing with tau radiation energies. The air is bristling with magic, even with the ship in a hovering mode, there is enough energy here to power the Earth for a decade.

The drive chamber contains a portion of the quark pulse emitter, a housing that can hold the energies being focused by the Emitter. A portion of the drive will need to be damaged or dismantled to use as the housing. This requires three pages and a successful difficulty 7 Intellect test.

The drive chamber is guarded by a number of Glyph Troopers equal to the number of heroes.

3. ENGINE ROOM

Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

The engine room, a massive and bustling hive of activity, is swarming with Glyph Troopers. There are scores of terminals and screens giving readouts and statuses of the crystals in the chambers that line three of the room's high walls. tau crystals glow and shimmer with radiation.

The room contain the tau crystals needed to power the quark pulse emitter, which can be safely removed from the power chambers with little difficulty. There are even spare supplies of the crystals nearby to be used. However, there's the matter of the unarmed, but fiercely loyal, Glyph Troopers in the room, at least three times the heroes in number. The heroes can either find a way around them using stealth tactics, power their way through, or something altogether different. You can leave this up to them to gather the materials needed, but the crystals are required to power the quark pulse emitter.

4. SCIENCE LAB

Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

The shift-ship has a laboratory designed to compile and scan data across the ship's surface and interior to maintain its location within our dimension. The laboratory is staffed with a skeleton crew, and contains the instruments and implements to calibrate the quark pulse emitter once it's completed. The systems of the shift-ship are all monitored and quantified here within this laboratory.

The room has the qualities "Fully Stocked Laboratory" and "Information Storehouse" the heroes can activate. The calibration equipment and lenses for the quark pulse emitter are not easily identified and isolated, it requires a difficulty 6 Intellect pyramid test to do so.

Once the parts of the quark pulse emitter are gathered, it must be triggered near the heart of the shift-ship, near the geistspace portal that powers it.

CHAPTER FOUR: SHOWDOWN AT THE END OF THE UNIVERSE!

The heroes attempt to detonate the quark pulse emitter at the heart of Reign's shift-ship. If they're successful, they find themselves flung far across Geistspace to a planetoid, the last resting place of the Phalanx. There, on the craggy desolate rock, the battle between Reign and the heroes takes place. It is there that the fate of the city, of the Earth, and of our dimension will be decided.



Whichever way the heroes are able to construct a quark pulse emitter, they have to find the heart of Reign's craft, and activate the pulse, disrupting the shift-ship's power source. If the heroes have realized that detonating the shift-ship's heart is what eliminated the Phalanx from our dimension, they may already believe that this time will be another one-way trip. If one or more of the heroes have specialties related to science, they may come up with an idea regarding a tether. The heroes can figure out that if they leave an anchor on Earth, they can return via the same path.

At the beginning of this final chapter, they have a finished and ready to detonate quark pulse emitter. Depending on the last location they visit to finish the device, they will either be close or far away from the heart of Reign's ship. The path to the heart of the ship will be fraught with danger and will be a multi-stage battle with Reign and his Glyph Troopers culminating in a final showdown between the heroes, Reign, and the remaining Phalanx members.

If the heroes finish the construction of the emitter in the Science Lab, it will take four pages to reach the heart of the shift-ship. They have to cross a room that is essentially a gigantic suspension bridge with girders on either side, resembling the interior of a zeppelin, from there, where they face Reign and his flying Glyph Troopers. The troopers attack in waves, there are a number of troopers equal to five times the number of heroes. Reign joins the battle three pages in. If all the heroes do is avoid combat and flee to the shift-ship's heart, they can detonate the emitter once they're nearby.

From the Engine Room, the heroes are only two pages away. They pass through the engine room's access bay, and are attacked by a dozen Glyph Troopers in this area, followed by Reign, two pages into the battle. Reign attempts to protect the entrance to the shift-ship's heart, but is unwilling to damage his ship if the heroes manage to get close to it.

From the Hangar, the heroes are the furthest from the heart of the shift-ship. It will take seven pages to get there, crossing the Engine Room, the Drive Chamber, and the massive suspension bridge to the shift-ship's heart. During this trek to the heart of the ship, they face ten flying Glyph Troopers, a number of Glyph Troopers equal to three times the number of heroes, and three pages into the battle, Reign attacks the heroes. Again, once the battle draws close to the heart of his ship, Reign will back off unsure of what the emitter will do.

From the Drive Chamber they are only three pages from the heart of the ship. They face the same resistance as leaving from the Engine Room above.

Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

The room's dimensions are massive. There are angles that seem wrong as the room extends beyond the range of your vision and the glittering golden walls are constructed of arcane machinery with scientific equations etched into tablets and other magical paraphernalia. In the center of the chamber is a multifaceted containment unit. It looks like the central lamp of a lighthouse, with flashing and flickering tau radiation and eldritch energies roiling inside. The light in the room wavers and bends toward the center, causing shadows to warp around the room.

Reign appears in a flash of energies and throws bolts of arcane fire at you!

Detonating the emitter requires a difficulty 6 Intellect pyramid test. If the heroes also try to create a tether back to Earth, increase difficulty to 8. Reign attempts to keep his blasts from harming his ship, but will do what he can to prevent the heroes from detonating the device.

The quark pulse emitter can be knocked loose from its housing, and require recalibration as potential trouble for the heroes. Reintegrating the emitter's calibrations requires a difficulty 6 Intellect test.

Once they've successfully detonated the quark pulse emitter, the ship freezes in time and space and a bright green light engulfs the entire scene. Read or paraphrase the following to your players:

The Emitter erupts with a wave of white light which crashes into the energy field of the ship's heart. There's a shattering noise, a horrific roar as green light blasts outward and engulfs everything. The sudden shock of impact forces your eyes open on a scene from a surrealist painting: the hull of the ship is wrenched open and spilled out across a craggy, rocky expanse are miles of cabling and machinery from within it. You are all laying prone, and slowly getting to your feet as lights appear in the distance, and speed closer to the point of impact. The sky is a red and purple tangle of nebulae and crackling energies. Whorls of starlight and a spray of oddly colored specks fill the sky. You are in Geistspace.

Reign is not here, and the heroes find themselves on a craggy, rocky planetoid. Here and there, patches of forest and foliage dot the nightmarish landscape. The heroes, once they get to their feet, are met with lights from the horizon speeding in their direction. Reign appears from the wreckage, and begins his final attack on the heroes.

The scene has the qualities “Ample Cover” and “Debris Field”. The heroes and Reign fight, joined by a number of flying Glyph Troopers equal to three times the number of heroes.

There are five pages of combat before the lights on the horizon reach the heroes. The lights are the members of the original Phalanx who've survived on this rocky world: Queen of Hearts, Atomic Juggernaut, and The Mechanic. They are now in their 70s, but are ready to take on anything that may come their way.

Once the battle is joined by the original Phalanx, there will be opportunities for the heroes to use this as a psychological edge to get Lucian to force Reign out of his body. This forces Reign to disincorporate in five pages, although he fights fiercely in the meanwhile. Lucien, if he is able, may also sacrifice himself to save the heroes and the original Phalanx—including his mother—from Reign, which also destroyed the malevolent wraith possessing him.

HOW MANY WAYS COULD THIS END?

Lucian King's sacrifice to save his mother could either be fatal or just severely injurious. It doesn't have to be the end of Lucian King, and one of the heroes could also leap into the fray to take the hit if their player feels the sacrifice would be meaningful for their character.

There's also the chance that you could reverse the situation, and have the Queen of Hearts sacrifice herself for her son or that neither of them is lost during the fight. This is really up to you and your style of play as a GM, and the tone you're going for in your play-through of this series.

When the fight ends, the heroes are standing face to face with heroes from their world's past. Their costumes are torn, ragged and worn out, but they are still standing after all these years within Geistspace, a testament to their power and endurance. Reign's wreckage is still there, the engine powered down, but could again be made to function. There are also residual energies linking the engines to Earth. Heroes with Great (6) or higher Intellect or the Science or Technology specialties can effect repairs with the aid of the Mechanic, or he can do the work, if none of the heroes are capable.

A portal opens to Earth once the repairs are made, and the heroes may return home. The original Phalanx decides to stay behind to insure that Reign can never return to plague the city again. Alternatively, you can choose to have a completely happy ending, with Lucien reunited with his mother and everyone returning home.

THIS IS THE END

The ending of **Rise of the Phalanx** is designed to be the official passing of the torch, and assumes Lucien King is gravely wounded protecting his mother. Queen of Hearts and the rest of the original Phalanx are impressed with the new generation and congratulate them on a job well done. Reign will be held here, and if possible, rehabilitated. The Queen of Hearts hands the other magical wristband over to the heroes, making the pair complete.

“These should go to a worthy person. Don’t let them just sit in a trophy case collecting dust,” she says, smiling with a bit of wistful sadness.

The portal created by Reign’s shift-ship engine warps reality, and the streets in front of the Citadel can be seen, waiting for you to pass through and go home.

You return to Victory City, triumphant: Reign is defeated, the Citadel will be rebuilt...and your team is now the one—and the only—Phalanx.

EPILOGUE: A CITY REBUILT



A few months later, Victory City returns to a semblance of normalcy. The buildings ruined by Reign's occupation are being rebuilt, and the people are finding themselves falling back into the rhythms of normal life. There are small memorials all over the city to the police officers and first responders who lost their lives during Reign's invasion.

Your heroes are poised to be the premier super-team in the city, lauded as paragons of heroism. But there are a few things that could be waiting for your heroes following their return, such as pockets of Reign's Glyph Troopers waiting for their leader's return, Monolith waiting and plotting for a way to bring Reign back to our dimension, or the threat of leftover weapons from the invasion waiting to be used by the mundane criminal

element. You can spin additional plot threads off of the events in **Reign of Chaos**, and the whole of **Rise of the Phalanx**, for further challenges and adventures for your heroes.

And, with that, **Rise of the Phalanx** comes to a close. We hope you've enjoyed this series as much as we've enjoyed creating it for you and your players. I hope, if you used this as the jumping off point for a new team called the Phalanx, you now have a fantastic world of villains and events rich and engaging. Or, if you just wanted to play a quick pickup game this time around, we hope you had fun and made some memories!



CAST OF CHARACTERS

REIGN

PROWESS	FAIR	4
COORDINATION	FAIR	4
STRENGTH	FANTASTIC	9
INTELLECT	INCREDIBLE	7
AWARENESS	INCREDIBLE	7
WILLPOWER	AMAZING	8



SPECIALTIES

Leadership Expert
Occult Master
Power (Magic) Expert
Science Expert
Technology Expert

QUALITIES

Destined Ruler of Mankind
His Body Is Not His Own
Implacable Foe of the Phalanx
“Serve—or Suffer!”

POWERS

Invulnerability: Reign has Amazing (8) Damage Resistance.

Magic: Reign wields Fantastic (9) magical powers, much as he did as Doc Eldritch, capable of casting a wide range of spells. It takes Reign a page of preparation in order to cast a spell, unless the Game Master awards the affected player(s) with a Determination Point for the trouble of Reign casting a spell instantly as part of his action for that page.

Tau Blasts: Reign can emit blasts of tau radiation for Amazing (8) shooting damage.

BACKGROUND

Reign began life as a hero in Victory City in the 1930s named Doc Eldritch. He was the Merlin to the courtly Queen of Hearts and her husband the Jack of Hearts. He partnered with Jahidra, a genie he'd bound to serve him for the length of his life, and given enough freedom to appear to be acting independently.

Doctor Eldritch, nearing the end of his life, ventured through a portal into what is known as Geistspace, the dimensional space between realities, and home of the Metaskulks, among other creatures, but he was unprepared for the rigors and dangers of this venture.

He was torn asunder by the dimension's arcane and violent energies. However, Doc Eldritch's unbreakable will remained intact. Over a number of years, growing increasingly mad with pain and hatred toward the so called "heroes" of the world, who he felt had abandoned him to this fate, Eldritch developed a new persona. Calling himself Reign, he returned to 1950s Earth and attempted to destroy Victory City. He was thwarted by The Phalanx, his former friends, but in the process they flung themselves across the universe, leaving the city without a team of protectors for years.

Reign believes it is his destiny to rule the world and destroy Victory City in the process. His mistake was in using a simple suit of magical technology to keep his essence in the last time. Reign has now bonded with the soul of Lucien King - the son of his most hated enemy.

MONOLITH

PROWESS	GOOD	5
COORDINATION	FAIR	4
STRENGTH	AMAZING	8
INTELLECT	AVERAGE	3
AWARENESS	FAIR	4
WILLPOWER	GREAT	6



SPECIALTIES

Military Expert
Occult

QUALITIES

Made by Magic
Obedient to Reign
Reign's Right Hand
Single-Minded

POWERS

Stone Form: True to his name, monolith has a body of enchanted stone, giving him Amazing (8) Strength and Damage Resistance and Total Life Support.

BACKGROUND

When Doctor Eldritch coalesced his essence in Geistspace, he found that he had enormous powers to create there. Over many years, he designed and developed a race of perfectly obedient soldiers, but also created a being to observe and report on the dealings of Lucien King, scion of his most hated rivals. Monolith was a hero for a brief time, protecting Victory City, until Reign was able to psychically manipulate King into hiring Monolith as his bodyguard. Little psychic nudges were all it took for King to begin trusting Monolith with his life, placing him into Reign's right hand.

GLYPH TROOPER

PROWESS	FAIR	4
COORDINATION	FAIR	4
STRENGTH	FAIR	4
INTELLECT	AVERAGE	3
AWARENESS	FAIR	4
WILLPOWER	GOOD	5



SPECIALTIES

Guns
Military Expert

QUALITIES

Made by Magic
Obedient to Reign
Remorseless
Single-Minded

POWERS

Blaster: Glyph Troopers are armed with weapons that fire focused blasts of tau radiation (much like Reign's own blasts) for Incredible (7) shooting damage.

BACKGROUND

When Doctor Eldritch coalesced his essence in Geistspace, he found that he wielded enormous powers to create while there. Over many years, he designed and developed a race of perfectly obedient soldiers to carry out his will: remorseless, unrelenting, and single-minded.

GLYPH COMMANDO

PROWESS	FAIR	4
COORDINATION	FAIR	4
STRENGTH	GREAT	6
INTELLECT	AVERAGE	3
AWARENESS	FAIR	4
WILLPOWER	GOOD	5



SPECIALTIES

Guns
Military Expert

QUALITIES

Made by Magic
Obedient to Reign
Remorseless
Single-Minded

POWERS

Blaster: Glyph Commandos are armed with weapons that fire focused blasts of tau radiation (much like Reign's own blasts) for Incredible (7) shooting damage.

BACKGROUND

Following the events of **The Nemesis Crisis**, Reign sought to improve his Glyph Troopers and created the even more physically powerful Glyph Commandos, still utterly single-minded and obedient to his will.

Both the Glyph Troopers and Commandos are creatures made by magic, something heroes may sense and—if they become aware of the quality—something they might be able to turn to their advantage.

THE TERROR-PIN

PROWESS	FAIR	4
COORDINATION	POOR	2
STRENGTH	POOR	2
INTELLECT	INCREDIBLE	7
AWARENESS	GREAT	6
WILLPOWER	GOOD	5



SPECIALTIES

Technology

QUALITIES

Stays In His Shell
They All Laughed At Me!

POWERS

Battle-Shell: Terror-Pin's battle-shell suit provides him with Great (6) Strength and Incredible (7) Damage Resistance while he is wearing it, and contains the power-source for his tau-blaster.

Tau-Blaster: Terror-Pin's blaster weapon fires temporal tau radiation able to "freeze" a subject in time with an Incredible (7) Stunning effect, resisted by the target's Willpower.

BACKGROUND

Professor Tom Unger was nearing a breakthrough in manipulating tachyons and the flow of time using tau radiation when the project was shut down as too potentially dangerous. Unger went mad with paranoia and adopted the identity of the Terrible Terror-Pin to take revenge the University, but was thwarted by Atomic Roach. He was incarcerated for a number of years, and has since dedicated his life to creating harmless toys while tinkering with his "battle-shell" designs. It's up to the GM whether or not the Terror-Pin is still a villain at heart or looking to right his past mistakes.

LOCUST

PROWESS	AVERAGE	3
COORDINATION	GOOD	5
STRENGTH	AVERAGE	3
INTELLECT	POOR	2
AWARENESS	FAIR	4
WILLPOWER	GOOD	5



SPECIALTIES

Law

QUALITIES

Seeks a Cure to Retain His Powers
Single-Minded
Tragic
Unstable

POWERS

Disintegration: Locust can disintegrate inorganic matter by touch and absorb its energy to enhance his strength and durability. He has Fantastic (9) Corrosion, and can enhance his Strength up to Amazing (8). However, his power is Constant, always breaking down material in contact with him.

BACKGROUND

Locust's crimes have a single motivation: to make enough money to pay anyone smart enough to either remove his disintegration power, or let him be able to switch it on and off at will. This often puts him in the position of cat's paw for other mastermind-type villains, because they either want his power to be used for ill or because they need special materials to create a "cure" for him. Locust can be reasoned with, and the potential for something approaching a normal life usually gives him pause, at least for a moment.

REDKAP

PROWESS	GREAT	6
COORDINATION	GOOD	5
STRENGTH	FAIR	4
INTELLECT	GOOD	5
AWARENESS	FAIR	4
WILLPOWER	INCREDIBLE	7



SPECIALTIES

Athletics
Blades
Chemistry
Martial Arts

QUALITIES

Agent of Chaos
Complete Cypher
Murderous Maniac
Obsessed with Causing Fear

POWERS

Fear Control: Redkap can use Emotion Control to project fear into the mind of a target with Incredible (7) ability.

The Mother of Knives: Redkap wields the mystic Mother of Knives, a blade that inflicts Good (5) slashing damage and carries a Fantastic (9) Energy Drain effect with the Life Drain extra.

BACKGROUND

Almost nothing is known about the murderous maniac who calls himself Redkap, after a particularly malevolent type of faerie being. He seems to exist to cause chaos and mayhem and to incite others to act violently out of fear—tasks he performs incredibly well.

PHAGE

PROWESS	AVERAGE	3
COORDINATION	AVERAGE	3
STRENGTH	AVERAGE	3
INTELLECT	GREAT	6
AWARENESS	FAIR	4
WILLPOWER	GOOD	5



SPECIALTIES

Medicine
Science

QUALITIES

Addicted to Sionex
Obsessed with Immortality
Plague-Carrier

POWERS

Immortality: Phage is virtually immortal, having Great (6) ability to return from death as his body repairs itself.

Plague: Phage's touch is an Amazing (8) Affliction, infecting anyone he touches or who touches him with a Contagious, fast-acting disease.

BACKGROUND

Andrew Diaz was a biologist obsessed with immortality. The chemical Sionex was the result. A side effect imbued him with the ability to produce every type of disease. He is literally patient zero for every plague. Phage joined up with the other Plagues for mutual protection. They provide him with funding to perfect his work, and he provides them with ... well, it never hurts to have a man who can give your opponents the hanta virus on your side, right?

DERECHA

PROWESS	AVERAGE	3
COORDINATION	GREAT	6
STRENGTH	AVERAGE	3
INTELLECT	GOOD	5
AWARENESS	GOOD	5
WILLPOWER	GOOD	5



SPECIALTIES

Sailing
Science (Meteorology) Master

QUALITIES

Category Five Foe
Demands Respect
Single-Minded
Wizardess of the Winds

POWERS

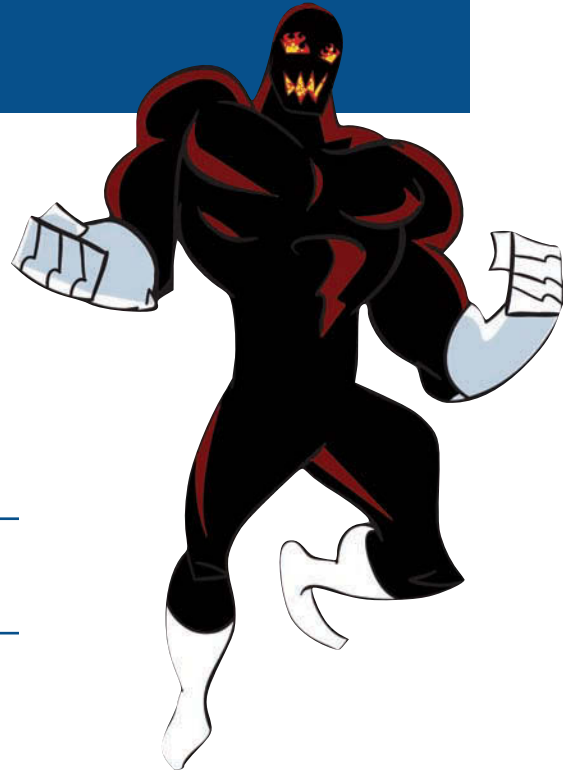
Weather Control: Derecho has Amazing (8) Weather Control, including the extras of Affliction, Air Control, Blast, Cold Control, Flight, and Resistance to Electricity and Weather.

BACKGROUND

Veronica De Marco was the most popular weather girl on Channel 5, but liked for her looks rather than respected for her meteorological degree or intellect. She headed out during the Storm of the Century, the massive derecho, and a sudden gust of wind threw her into a Power and Light Substation, exploding all around her. The video of the incident went viral online, and marked the moment Veronica became Derecha, Wizardess of the Winds, and vowed the entire world would know and respect her power.

GRUE

PROWESS	GOOD	5
COORDINATION	GOOD	5
STRENGTH	INCREDIBLE	7
INTELLECT	GOOD	5
AWARENESS	GREAT	6
WILLPOWER	INCREDIBLE	7



SPECIALTIES

Technology Master

QUALITIES

“Eradicate Humans!”

Killer in the Darkness

“You Cannot Stop the Signal”

POWERS

Darkness Control: Grue has Incredible (7) control over darkness, including the extras Blast, Dazzle, Energy Drain (Life Drain), Flight, Force Field, Super-Senses (Infravision), and Teleport (Transmit, darkness and shadows).

Life Support: An android, Grue has Total Life Support.

BACKGROUND

Grue is a mysterious artificial life form, perhaps the result of otherworldly technology, perhaps the result of secret government experimentation—nobody knows, and Grue certainly isn’t talking. He is an android with complete mastery over darkness.

Grue is a well-known member of The Signal, an “autonomous collective” of robots, cyborgs, and artificial intelligences that seek to overthrow the human race. He is often found taking part in crimes of a technological nature.

SAPPHIRE SYNAPSE

PROWESS	FAIR	4
COORDINATION	GOOD	5
STRENGTH	AVERAGE	3
INTELLECT	GREAT	6
AWARENESS	AVERAGE	3
WILLPOWER	GREAT	6



SPECIALTIES

Science Expert

QUALITIES

Mistress of Mnemonic Mayhem
Obsessed with Wrack
Too Good for You

POWERS

Force Field: Sapphire Synapse can surround her body with a Good (5) force field that also provides her with sufficient Life Support to operate in space and ignore airborne pathogens and toxins.

Time Control: Sapphire Synapse has Fair (4) Time Control for Duplication, Fast Attack, and Super-Speed.

BACKGROUND

Synapse began life as Adrienne Sypes, a physicist working for ULTRA Labs. During her experiments, she was bathed in tau radiation, which advanced her mind and granted her powers beyond her wildest imaginings. She saw fit to try and dominate the world under her view of perfection...until she met Wrack. A mind more vast and impressive than hers would ever be, she has devoted her existence to aiding Wrack in getting home, with the hope she will sit beside him on a throne atop the world upon his return!

LAMPREY

PROWESS	GOOD	5
COORDINATION	GOOD	5
STRENGTH	FAIR	4
INTELLECT	FAIR	4
AWARENESS	GOOD	5
WILLPOWER	GREAT	6



SPECIALTIES

Criminal Expert
Sailing Expert

QUALITIES

Accursed Appearance
The Elemental Eel
Mercenary to the Core
“This is gonna suck!”

POWERS

Aquatic: Lamprey has Good (5) Aquatic abilities, able to operate equally in water or air.

Electrical Control: Lamprey has a Fair (4) ability to generate bio-electricity from his body, channeling it into an Electrical Aura or Blast.

Life Drain: Lamprey has Good (5) Energy Drain with the Life Drain extra and can extend his power as an Aura, affecting anyone touching him.

BACKGROUND

“Handsome” Mike McElroy, a smuggler and treasure hunter, found a cursed crystal coffin at the bottom of the Pacific. Only seeing the profit in such an artifact, not knowing its eldritch nature, McElroy was cursed to live life as a parasite, a bottom-feeder. He became the hideous, life-draining Lamprey, able to plunder the high seas at will!

WRACK

PROWESS	FAIR	4
COORDINATION	GOOD	5
STRENGTH	FAIR	4
INTELLECT	AMAZING	8
AWARENESS	FAIR	4
WILLPOWER	INCREDIBLE	7



SPECIALTIES

Science
Technology

QUALITIES

Dominator of the Ascendancy
Master of Humanity
Not of This World
Superior Mind

POWERS

Mental Powers: Wrack has Great (6) Mental Blast and Mind Control powers and Average (3) Telekinesis due to his evolved mind.

Metamorph: Like all metaskulks, Wrack can transform to assume the appearance of any humanoid with Great (6) ability.

BACKGROUND

Wrack is a Dominator of the Metaskulk Ascendancy, controlling the minds of lesser beings to serve the Ascendancy, or manipulating other Metaskulks. An accident cast him and two dozen of his fellow metaskulks to our world, where they used their natural shape-changing abilities to blend in, seeking a way to return to Geistspace and bring a conquering metaskulk force to Earth!

LAZY IVAN

PROWESS	POOR	2
COORDINATION	FAIR	4
STRENGTH	AVERAGE	3
INTELLECT	POOR	2
AWARENESS	FAIR	4
WILLPOWER	AVERAGE	3



SPECIALTIES

Crime Expert
Deception Expert
Persuasion

QUALITIES

Black Square Connections
Greed Before Loyalty
Hates Valery and Hammer & Sickle

POWERS

Cybernetic Eye: Ivan has a cybernetic replacement eye that gives him Great (6) Super-Senses, including Circular Vision, Direction Sense, Infravision, Penetration Vision, Tracking Sense, and Ultraviolet Vision. The eye can also emit a Fair (4) phased particle beam Blast for shooting damage.

BACKGROUND

Ivan Zmoletz wanted to be a superhero, but, sadly, Ivan was born a scrawny weakling. Ivan got his cybernetic eye replacement as part of a deal with Valery. Ivan was expecting to be like the old Soviet heroes Hammer and Sickle but became a freak instead. He hates Valery, but he's not strong enough to get away from him. Disillusioned, Ivan has thrown himself into becoming a crime lord. He views himself as becoming what the world expects him to be.

VALERY

PROWESS	AVERAGE	3
COORDINATION	AVERAGE	3
STRENGTH	POOR	2
INTELLECT	FAIR	4
AWARENESS	AVERAGE	3
WILLPOWER	FAIR	4



SPECIALTIES

Crime Expert
Intimidation
Leadership

QUALITIES

Black Square Connections
Loyal to Hammer & Sickle
Mercenary at Heart

POWERS

Electro-Gauntlet: Valery has a metallic gauntlet able to fire electrical Blasts for Great (6) shooting damage.

BACKGROUND

Valery Varkov is the head of the pack at the Black Square Market, and fought his way up from selling jeans and rock and roll CDs in Red Square at the beginning of the Glasnost movement to providing Soviet-era weaponry to interested buyers. He's genial, and very well groomed. He's making sure he puts out the "Smiling Don" attitude, since keeping things civil is important to keep things profitable in this day and age. Attention is not part of his plan.

THE PATRIOT

PROWESS	GOOD	5
COORDINATION	FAIR	4
STRENGTH	FAIR	4
INTELLECT	AVERAGE	3
AWARENESS	FAIR	4
WILLPOWER	GREAT	6



SPECIALTIES

Guns Expert
Martial Arts
Military Master
Stealth Expert

QUALITIES

Does Whatever It Takes
My Country, Right or Wrong
Veteran Soldier

POWERS

Equipment: Patriot uses a variety of equipment in his never-ending war, including an armored uniform providing Poor (2) Damage Resistance, guns that inflict Good (5) shooting damage, and a combat knife that inflicts Average (3) slashing damage. The heads-up display of his mask provides him with Enhanced and Infrared Visions (Poor Super-Senses).

BACKGROUND

Garrett Ian Joseph McCord has been a patriot ever since he was old enough to wave an American flag. Born on the Fourth of July, Joe was raised on military bases his entire life. As a result, he never had any lasting friendships and came to see the military as his home and his family. Joe never wanted to be anything other than a soldier and enlisted as soon as he was able. His fierce patriotism and his preference for his third name earned him the nickname "G.I. Joe" McCord.

During his time in the military, Joe underwent a variety of special training, possibly even volunteering for certain experiments aimed at improving the alertness and situational awareness of soldiers in the field. Unfortunately, all of those files are classified. McCord eventually left the service and set up a mercenary operation, traveling the world to perform covert, deniable operations, some say still secretly working for the American government.

He was extremely good at his job—the best at what he did—and relished the freedom from military protocol and the chain of command, to say nothing of the rules of engagement. Unfortunately for McCord, journalists published evidence of him using “enhanced interrogation techniques” on civilians. To insulate themselves, McCord’s allies and employers turned on him, claiming he’d gone rogue and hanging him out to dry.

Betrayed, his life and career destroyed, McCord snapped. He became paranoid, obsessed with conspiracy theories about leftists and “the liberal media” working to destroy him, when all he wanted was to protect America. With cash flow from his mercenary operations cut off, McCord adopted a new identity, that of the masked Patriot, and devoted himself to a new cause. While “G.I. Joe” McCord has devoted his life to protecting American interests throughout the world, the Patriot would clean things up at home, rooting out the rot and corruption within American society. A new Revolution is coming, and he will be at the forefront!

The Patriot goes after anyone he perceives as “anti-American,” which includes liberal politicians, the media, war critics, peace protesters, civil rights activists, and even “leftist” superheroes—pretty much anyone running counter to a 1950s Cold War era vision of American greatness. He’s still happy to take mercenary work that helps to fund and further his “war to make America great again” but the money is just a means to an end. More disturbing than the Patriot’s “one-man war” is the looming possibility of certain shadowy factions seeing in him an opportunity to further their own plans, making the Patriot into a weapon they only need to point in the right direction to get the job done.

HAMMER

PROWESS	GOOD	5
COORDINATION	AVERAGE	3
STRENGTH	AVERAGE	3
INTELLECT	AVERAGE	3
AWARENESS	AVERAGE	3
WILLPOWER	POOR	2



SPECIALTIES

Crime Expert
Wrestling Master

QUALITIES

Black Square Connections
Hammer of the Soviet Union
Hates the West
Loves Sickle

POWERS

Hammer Strike: Hammer has the Amazing (8) ability to enhance his Prowess and Strength for up to eight pages. While enhanced, he can also use his Prowess to defend against ranged attacks.

BACKGROUND

Stephen Tzilnogo was the strongest man in the Moscow Circus in the 1940s and '50s. He was hand-picked during the Cold War to undergo enhancement, and became the State's Superhuman Soldier. Hammer and his partner, Sickle, were instrumental in protecting Soviet interests, but when Glasnost swept the former Soviet Union, Hammer and Sickle were retired. Sickle convinced him that the best way to return Russia to its former glory would be to infiltrate and conquer the criminal capitalist system from within and the ever-faithful Hammer followed her lead.

SICKLE

PROWESS	GREAT	6
COORDINATION	INCREDIBLE	7
STRENGTH	FAIR	4
INTELLECT	AVERAGE	3
AWARENESS	GOOD	5
WILLPOWER	AVERAGE	3



SPECIALTIES

Crime
Investigation Master
Military Expert

QUALITIES

Brains of the Operation
Hates the West
In Love with Hammer
Sickle of the Soviet Union
Survivor

POWERS

Sickle Swift: Sickie has Amazing (8) Super-Speed, including the Defensive, Fast Attack, Phasing, Spinning, Surface Speed, and Vibration Control extras.

BACKGROUND

Anastasia Nikolovich followed in her father's footsteps, becoming a spy at the age of 14, posing as dancer in the Russian National Theater. She later underwent treatments to become Sickie, protector of the USSR in the 1970s and '80s. In the post-Soviet era, Sickie saw the criminal underworld as a way to make money. That she must become a capitalist to survive galls her. Luckily, Hammer believes she's doing it to restore Russia, though she knows the system has fallen to corruption and it cannot be.

ARSENAL

PROWESS	GREAT	6
COORDINATION	GREAT	6
STRENGTH	AMAZING	8
INTELLECT	AMAZING	8
AWARENESS	AVERAGE	3
WILLPOWER	GOOD	5



SPECIALTIES

Military
Persuasion

QUALITIES

Hates the West
Master Tactician
Mother Russia's Perfect Son

POWERS

Containment Suit: Arsenal is a being of tau energy with Total Life Support, given form by a containment suit with Amazing (8) Strength, Damage Resistance, and Flight capabilities. The suit can channel Arsenal's energies into Blasts for Amazing (8) shooting damage.

Machine Control: Arsenal has Amazing (8) control over machinery, including the Machine Assembly and Machine Shaping extras.

BACKGROUND

A brilliant Soviet scientist in the 1960s, Mikhail Arkady was transformed into a being of living tau radiation. The Soviet government created a containment suit for him but eventually allowed an American super team to lock Arsenal away, considering him too dangerous. He languished for decades before Sigma-9 freed him while looking for a new power source, allowing Arsenal to seek his revenge.

PINNACLE

PROWESS	AMAZING	8
COORDINATION	AMAZING	8
STRENGTH	INCREDIBLE	7
INTELLECT	GOOD	4
AWARENESS	AVERAGE	3
WILLPOWER	AVERAGE	3



SPECIALTIES

Aerial Combat Expert
Law
Medicine
Military Expert

QUALITIES

"Do your best and you'll always be a winner!"
Just as Expected
Media Darling

POWERS

Pinnacle Suit: Pinnacle wears a power-suit granting her a variety of abilities, including:

- Increasing her physical abilities by 2 levels.
- A **Blast** device for Great (6) blasting or shooting damage.
- Incredible (7) **Damage and Affliction Resistance**.
- An Incredible (7) **Flight** device.
- A Weak (1) **Life Support** device providing self-contained breathing.

Metamorph: Pinnacle can transform to assume the appearance of any humanoid with Great (6) ability.

BACKGROUND

The Metaskulks exist in a society where corruption, conniving and backstabbing are a way of life. As a Metaskulk, Pinnacle has no name, just a code – Commando X1-91. But she was chosen to be reprogrammed as an Earthling 'hero', and submitted to mental reconfiguration, as was her duty. The Metaskulks aren't completely comfortable with human culture, so, looked through what they could easily access, and found the 'Sister Supreme' television show – which portrayed a superpowered hero named Sister Supreme, who fought crime in the 60s. With a corny belief in 'good deeds are their own reward' and a silly sense of propriety about how a hero behaves, they used the template of Sister Supreme to implant onto the Commando who would become Jenny Jenkins, the operator of the Pinnacle Rescue Armor. During the mental reprogramming, the Metaskulks wiped the knowledge that Jenny Jenkins is in fact Commando X1-91.

Jenny's false past implant makes Jenny Jenkins 21, growing up around the exploits of the player characters and their contemporaries like All-Star, Lugh the Light-bringer, and Saguaro. She often will refer to these former exploits as 'adventures', and wish she could have been there when the heroes were in their prime. Jenny grew up on a farm in South Dakota, longing to do her part, and became a fire-fighter in her hometown. Jenny was involved in the rescue of several orphans in her hometown and was interviewed by her local news station. ULTRA Labs, at this point infiltrated by Metaskulks not rounded up during a prior incursion to our world (see **Flight of the Nova-1** for details) and mysterious wealthy benefactors (also Metaskulk Infiltrators posing as wealthy humans), offered her a job utilizing a prototype exoskeletal suit designed for rescue and protection, The Pinnacle Armor.

Now she is out there in a suit designed to show up heroes. Her weapons are non-lethal devices, and the protective armor is designed to help her become a replacement for the city's other heroes.

PINNACLE AS A PLAYER CHARACTER

The character of Pinnacle could easily fit into an ongoing **ICONS** series, or if one of your players wants to take on the challenge of being a goofy throwback style hero from the '60s. Simply calculate her Determination as normal and, for a little extra fun, feel free to keep the secret of her origin from the player until the appropriate time...

THE UNSEELIE COURT

PROWESS	GOOD	5
COORDINATION	FAIR	4
STRENGTH	GOOD	5
INTELLECT	AVERAGE	3
AWARENESS	FAIR	4
WILLPOWER	POOR	2

SPECIALTIES

Martial Arts (Dirty Fighting)

QUALITIES

Driven by Madness
Force of Chaos
Strength in Numbers

POWERS

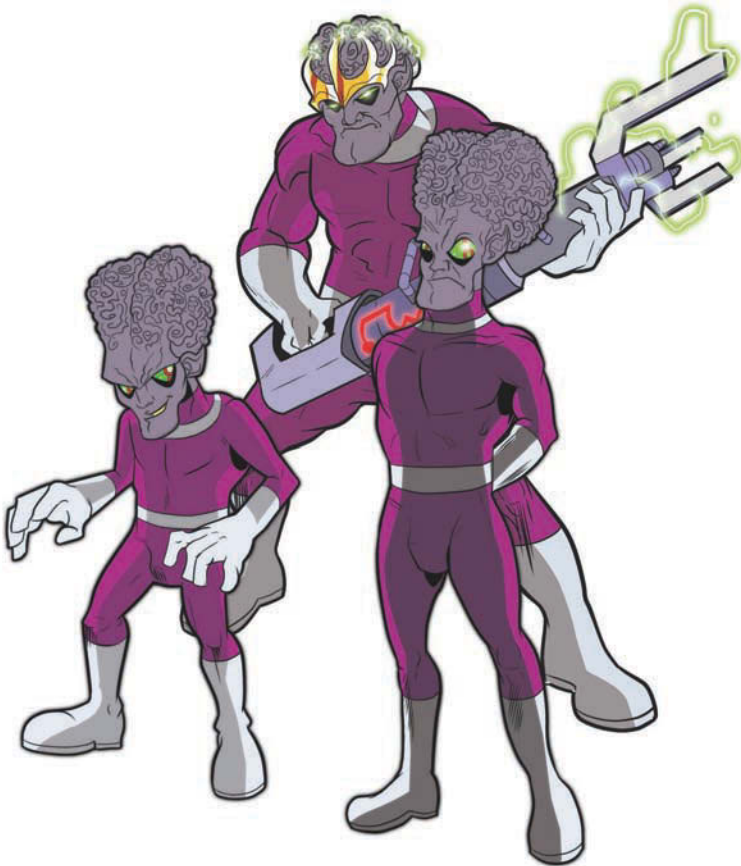
Energy Gauntlets: The Unseelie wear high-tech gauntlets able to project Incredible (7) Blasts of energy. The experimental gauntlets are Unstable without both of them worn and active.

BACKGROUND

These men are the wretched refuse of the criminally insane, liberated by Redkap to serve as his "Unseelie Court." Armed with high-tech weapons, they are a dangerous force for chaos in Victory City.



THE MENACE OF THE METASKULKS!



Beyond the walls of our dimension lies a place of roaring chaos and swirling energies. It is called Geistspace, and among its inhabitants are the world-conquering, shapeshifting, and wholly irredeemable Metaskulk Ascendancy. They were unaware of our dimension until a prototype craft rent the barrier

between our worlds into a tattered film, and brought a small cadre of Metaskulks to Victory City.

In Geistspace on the Metaskulk home world of Arglist, the Ascendancy has ruled since time immemorial. Beginning with the first Metaskulk that crawled out of the primordial swamps of Arglist and then transformed themselves into copies of their predators, the only prized trait of a Metaskulk is its ability to be duplicitous, underhanded and sneaky. Their evolutionary ladder began with the inborn ability to morph themselves into copies of their predators to hide from them, and as their species spread across Arglist different traits came to the fore as primary. Years of conflict among the three different races of Metaskulk finally culminated in the Leader Caste developing the power of Mind Control.

Once the Leaders were able to control the minds of the Commando Caste, the Infiltrators fell in line. Centuries of indoctrination, that 'Commandos are Inferior, and Infiltrators More So', and judicious use of their insidious Mind Leashes (called the Commando Crown by the Commando Caste) keep the Commandos intellectually stunted, and while their transitory form is seemingly designed to bear the best traits of the Metaskulk and leave others behind, it has never occurred to them to cross-breed or to cultivate an egalitarian system.

Mobility between castes is heresy. But, as you've seen in this adventure, Wrack hopes to undo all of that, by becoming *more* than a Metaskulk.

Now that they have a new world, ripe with natural resources and fodder for other battles, they are ready to conquer the Earth, and below, you'll find the three different Castes, and Wrack's stats as both his basic form and as the Ultra-Skulk.

METASKULK TECHNOLOGY

The following are common items of Metaskulk technology used in this adventure:

- **Neutron Pistol:** Material Strength 6, Blast 7 (Shooting, Radiation, Lethal)
- **Neutron Grenade:** Material Strength 4, Blast 8 (Burst, Radiation, Lethal), Limit: Burnout (Represents random number of grenades in bandolier).
- **Neutron Rifle:** Material Strength 6, Blast 7 (Shooting, Blast, Radiation, Lethal) Extra: Both Types
- **Mind Leash:** Material Strength 7, Mental Resistance 8. The Mind Leash also afflicts the user with -2 to Willpower and Intellect, and -1 Awareness.

METASKULK INFILTRATOR

PROWESS	FAIR	4
COORDINATION	GOOD	5
STRENGTH	POOR	2
INTELLECT	GREAT	6
AWARENESS	GREAT	6
WILLPOWER	GREAT	6

SPECIALTIES

Stealth Master
Technology Expert

QUALITIES

Adaptable
Convincing Forgery
Sneaking and Conniving

POWERS

Metamorph: Metaskulks can transform to assume the appearance of any humanoid with Great (6) ability.

Neutron Pistol: Infiltrators are armed with neutron pistols able to fire blasts of radiation for Great (6) shooting damage

BACKGROUND

Metaskulk infiltrators are cowardly, sneaky, mean-spirited, and greedy, driven to succeed for the barest amount of upper-caste recognition. They admire commandos, but often try to backstab or gainsay them to gain favor with the leadership. They offer themselves up as scouts and infiltrators to stay away from the machinations of the leaders, and the brute tormentors of the commando caste.



METASKULK COMMANDO

PROWESS	GREAT	6
COORDINATION	GREAT	6
STRENGTH	INCREDIBLE	7
INTELLECT	POOR	2
AWARENESS	AVERAGE	3
WILLPOWER	POOR	2



SPECIALTIES

Martial Arts
Military

QUALITIES

Brute-Force Bully
Loyal Soldier
Single-Minded

POWERS

Metamorph: Metaskulks can transform to assume the appearance of any humanoid with Great (6) ability.

Mind Leash: A commando's headgear provides Amazing (8) Resistance to Ability and Mental Powers but lowers their mental abilities by 1 level.

Weapons: A commando's neutron rifle fires Blasts of radiation for Incredible (7) blasting or shooting damage. Commandos are also armed with a limited number of neutron grenades, doing Amazing (8) damage with the Burst extra and the Burnout limit.

BACKGROUND

Metaskulk commandos have one purpose: combat. Their training in the Savage Pits makes them fierce fighters and vicious bullies, willing to do whatever the leader caste commands.

METASKULK LEADER

PROWESS	GOOD	4
COORDINATION	GOOD	4
STRENGTH	GOOD	4
INTELLECT	AMAZING	8
AWARENESS	INCREDIBLE	7
WILLPOWER	AMAZING	8



SPECIALTIES

Deception
Military
Stealth

QUALITIES

Brain Over Brawn
“For Ascendancy!”
Long-Range Thinker

POWERS

Mental Powers: Leaders wield Great (6) Mind Control and Telekinesis, including the Blast, Flight, and Force Field extras. They can also exert Good (5) Emotion Control over “lesser minds.”

Metamorph: Like all metaskulks, Leaders can transform to assume the appearance of any humanoid with with Great (6) ability. They view this as debased, however, and remain in their true form as much as possible.

BACKGROUND

The Metaskulk leader caste is the pinnacle of craftiness, underhanded double-dealing, conniving backstabbing, and sheer ruthlessness. They have positioned themselves as the unquestioned pinnacle of the Metaskulk Ascendancy by gaming the system so that none of the other castes will ever know the rarefied circle of influence they travel in and command from.

THE ULTRA-SKULK

PROWESS	GOOD	5
COORDINATION	FAIR	4
STRENGTH	AMAZING	8
INTELLECT	FAIR	4
AWARENESS	FAIR	4
WILLPOWER	FAIR	4



SPECIALTIES

None

QUALITIES

Apex of Evolution
Flush With Power
Single-Minded

Phase 2: Rampaging Monster

Phase 3: Massive Force

POWERS

Absorption: The Ultra-Skulk absorbs tau radiation with Fair (4) ability to trigger the later phases of his transformation (see The Ultra-Skulk Transformation, following).

Damage Resistance: The Ultra-Skulk has Incredible (7) Damage Resistance, limited to Stamina Only (it does not protect against Slam and Stun results). This becomes Amazing (8) at Phase 3.

Leaping: The Ultra-Skulk has Fair (4) Leaping, increasing by one level each at Phases 2 and 3 up to Great (6).

Metamorph: Like all metaskulks, the Ultra-Skulk can transform to assume the appearance of any humanoid, but only with Fair (4) ability.

Telekinesis: The Ultra-Skulk has Great (6) Telekinetic powers, but his Telekinesis has the Degrades and Unstable limits due to his transformation.

BACKGROUND

Once the Metaskulk known as Wrack, the Ultra-Skulk is the product—and the victim—of unrestrained ambition. Wrack hit upon a scheme to absorb vast amounts of tau radiation to enhance his malleable alien physiology to unheard of heights, making him the most powerful Metaskulk ever. Unfortunately for him, the absorption and enhancement process turns him into raging brute, robbing him of his vaunted intellect and superior mind.

THE ULTRA-SKULK TRANSFORMATION

Wrack's transformation into the Ultra-Skulk occurs in three phases. Phase 1 is detailed in the stats on the previous page, along with notes on the later phases in the qualities and Powers sections. Additional effects of the transformation include:

- **Phase 2:** Lower Prowess by one level to Fair (4) and Intellect by one level to Average (3). Add the Healing extra to his Absorption power, allowing the Ultra-Skulk to regain 4 Stamina per round when exposed to tau radiation. Increase Leaping by one level to Good (5) and lower Telekinesis by two levels to Fair (4). Add “Rampaging Monster” quality.
- **Phase 3:** Increase Strength by one level to Fantastic (9) and Willpower by one level to Good (5). Lower Intellect by one level to Poor (2). Increase Damage Resistance by one level to Amazing (8) and Leaping by one level to Great (6). Remove Telekinesis power. Add “Massive Force” quality.

THE QUEEN OF HEARTS

PROWESS	GOOD	5
COORDINATION	GOOD	5
STRENGTH	AMAZING	8
INTELLECT	GREAT	6
AWARENESS	GREAT	6
WILLPOWER	GOOD	5



SPECIALTIES

Aerial Combat Expert
History Expert
Leadership
Martial Arts

QUALITIES

Fiercely Independent
Itching for a Fight
Leader of the Phalanx
Protector of the Downtrodden

POWERS

Vambraces: The magical vambraces Queen of Hearts wears on her wrists grant her Amazing (8) Strength and Damage Resistance, Great (6) Flight speed, Fair (4) Super-Speed, and the Super-Senses of Enhanced Hearing and Extended Vision so long as she wears them.

BACKGROUND

Loretta married Robert King in 1945. On their honeymoon in England, they were taken prisoner by a cell of Nazi werewolves, who didn't count on the determined couple. Robert and Loretta donned masks from an overturned vendor's cart and thwarted the werewolves, freeing their other hostages, but were trapped when an explosive went off, dropping them into a hidden chamber of the castle they were in.

THE JACK OF HEARTS

PROWESS	GREAT	6
COORDINATION	GOOD	5
STRENGTH	INCREDIBLE	7
INTELLECT	GOOD	5
AWARENESS	FAIR	4
WILLPOWER	GREAT	6



SPECIALTIES

Espionage Master
History
Martial Arts Expert
Military Expert

QUALITIES

Competitive
Devoted Husband
Hopelessly in Love with Loretta King
Quick-Witted and Fast-Acting

POWERS

Belt of the Green Knight: The magical belt he wears grants Jack of Hearts Incredible (7) Strength.

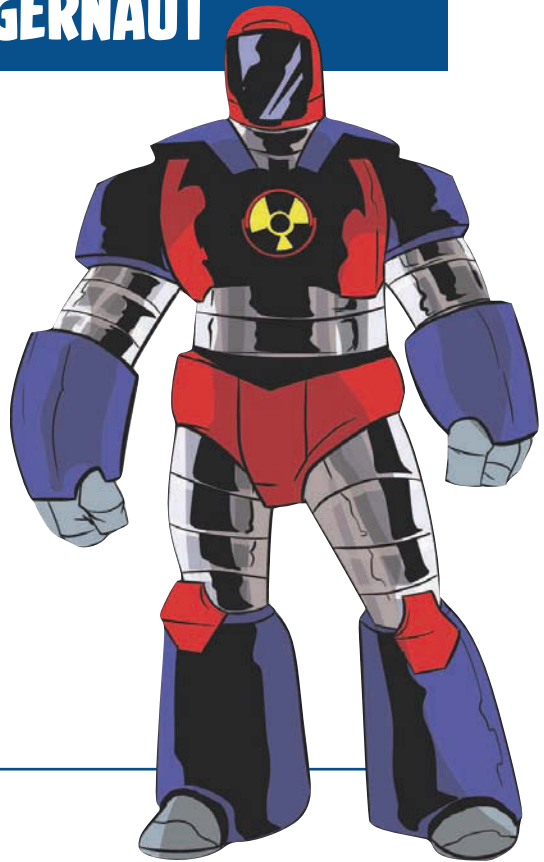
Sword of the Green Knight: Jack wields the magical Sword of the Green Knight, a Great (6) slashing weapon that also gives him Average (3) Magic he can draw upon when he is close to nature or natural surroundings.

BACKGROUND

In a secret antechamber, Robert King found the Belt and Sword of the Green Knight, while Loretta discovered the Vambraces of Morgan Le Fey. Wearing them, they became the Jack and Queen of Hearts, wielding noble might against the forces of evil.

THE ATOMIC JUGGERNAUT

PROWESS	GOOD	5
COORDINATION	FAIR	4
STRENGTH	AMAZING	8
INTELLECT	INCREDIBLE	7
AWARENESS	GOOD	5
WILLPOWER	GOOD	5



SPECIALTIES

Technology Expert

QUALITIES

Adventurer Into the Unknown
Progress Matters Most
Wants to Be Free of His Shell

POWERS

Juggernaut Armor: All of Atomic Juggernaut's powers are derived from his advanced suit of armor.

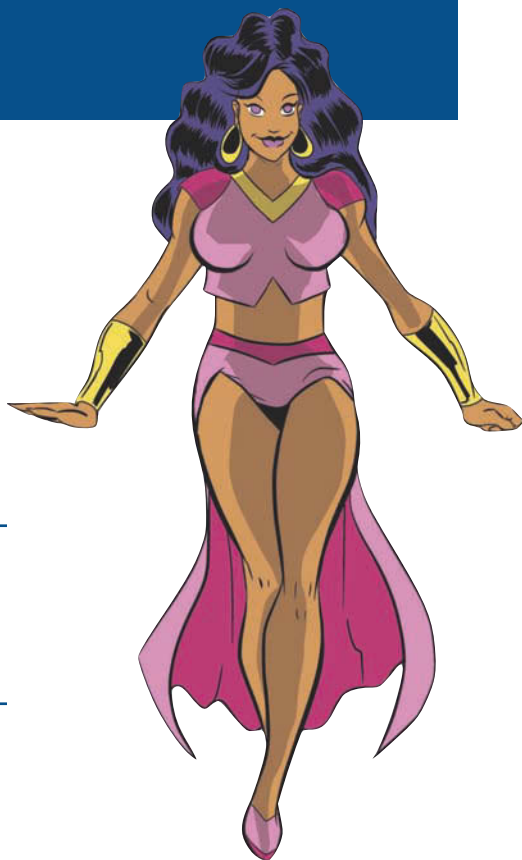
The armor grants Amazing (8) Strength and Incredible (7) Damage Resistance, a Great (6) Blast of radiation (shooting damage), Fair (4) Flight, and the Super-Senses of Enhanced Hearing, Extended Vision, Radar, Radio, and X-Ray Vision.

BACKGROUND

Hector Henderson worked to unlock the secrets of tau radiation, discovering ways to use it for sensors. Saboteurs caused a cascade failure in his equipment, and the accident transformed Hector so he radiated deadly tau energy, which only a bulky suit could contain. He used that energy to power the suit's devices and began working with his old friend Robert King as a part of the Phalanx as...the Atomic Juggernaut!

JAHIDRA

PROWESS	AVERAGE	3
COORDINATION	AVERAGE	3
STRENGTH	FAIR	4
INTELLECT	GREAT	6
AWARENESS	AMAZING	8
WILLPOWER	AMAZING	8



SPECIALTIES

Aerial Combat Expert
History
Occult Expert

QUALITIES

As You Wish
Bound by the Lamp
Djinn
Longs to Be Free at Last

POWERS

Immortality: As a djinn, Jahidra has Good (5) Immortality.

Magic: Jahidra wields Amazing (8) magical powers, including Mastery of Blast and Flight, which she can use at will, without preparation.

BACKGROUND

Jahidra is a djinn, bound by ancient enchantments to trade wishes in exchange for freedom. Jahidra is bound to an ancient oil lamp, once owned by Doc Eldritch. He bound her with the commands that she would protect him unto death, pretend to be a superhero so long as she did so, and never reveal her true nature or this arrangement. Jahidra longs for her freedom more than anything else. Her magic tells her only that Eldritch is not dead—yet—but nothing more about his whereabouts or fate.

THE MECHANIC

PROWESS	GREAT	6
COORDINATION	GOOD	5
STRENGTH	GOOD	5
INTELLECT	INCREDIBLE	7
AWARENESS	GOOD	5
WILLPOWER	INCREDIBLE	7



SPECIALTIES

Espionage
Military
Technology

QUALITIES

Both Sides of the Law
“I can fix it.”
One Man War on Crime

POWERS

Body Armor: Mechanic’s costume provides him with Good (5) Damage Resistance.

Gadgets: The Mechanic has Incredible (7) Gadgets at his disposal, or can come up with them with a page of preparation.

Gloves: Electrified gloves give the Mechanic a Great (6) Strike attack.

BACKGROUND

Simon Sheldon Smith, a machinist for a wartime tank factory, realized the war hadn’t changed the nature of crime in his city. His city was being bought and sold out from under the citizens. So he took his skills and designed an arsenal of weapons to help him fight his own war: a one-man war on crime.

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