Four Colors
Gamemaster's Guide by Cynthia Celeste Miller

Section One:
Rules and Stuff

Issues and Series

Just like with the comicbooks, the Four Colors game is organized by Issues and series.

An issue is one complete story, often referred to as a adventure or module in other games.

A series is the ongoing chronicles of one or more particular hero(es). This means that the same main protagonists will appear issue after issue. This is a great way to develop the characters personas as well as their abilities.

A series can last for as long as you and the players wish to carry it on weeks, months, even years!

Awarding Experience Points

The old saying, practice makes perfect is absolutely true. If a character goes out there and does his thing, fighting evil (or being evil, if we re talking about a villain), he s bound to improve his abilities.

At the end of each issue, the characters should be awarded Experience Points, based on several factors.

Action......	Experience Point Award:
Base Reward! Every character gets this reward for participating in the issue.	5
Good Roleplaying Award! Characters who were roleplayed true to character receive this award.	5-10
Great Moment Award! Characters who did something extremely clever, inventive or appropriate in order to further the story receive this award.	1-3*
Victory Award! Characters who contributed to defeating the bad guy receive this award.	5-10

* This award can be given more than once per issue if the appropriate.

Character Advancement

Experience Points can be spent between issues to increase the character s abilities.

This isn t an overnight thing, however, as it realistically takes time to improve one s capabilities.

Improving....	Experience Point Cost:
Traits	Trait ratings can be improved by 1 by spending 60 Experience Points. Note: the character s Wound Points will increase if Body or Willpower is improved (see the rules for creating characters in the Player s Guide). A Trait can not go from 4 to 4 (2) without express permission from the GM, not to mention a darn good reason.
Powers	Power ratings can be improved by 1 by spending 80 Experience Points.

Likewise, characters can actually learn new things as well.

Buying a New...	Experience Point Cost:
Trait	You can purchase a new Trait (i.e., one that you had at 0 rating) by spending 60 Experience Point. This Trait has a rating of 1. Note: the character s Wound Points will increase if Body or Willpower is purchased (see the rules for creating characters in the Player s Guide).
Powers	To purchase a new power, figure it up as if you were creating a power for a new character, working out the CP cost. Multiply the CP total by 2 and add it to 100 to determine how many Experience Points you must pay in order to obtain the power. You must also have permission from the GM (and a good rationale, too).

CHASE SCENES

Chase sequences have been a staple in the comicbook industry since it s inception. And for good reason. They offer a bit of spice and variety to any story, adding tension galore.

Chase scenes in Four Colors are best handled using a narrative approach rather than adhering to a mound of rules. Drama is the key to an exciting, pulse-pounding chase sequence...and there s nothing exciting about wading through charts, diagrams and rules.

So, what you ll find here are suggestions about how to handle pursuit, while using minimal rules.

Turns? Bah!
Using turns in a chase scene will most likely bog down game play. Describe what s happening and maybe ask for a Luck check or two along the way to see if any hazards present themselves.

Hazards
If a hazard pops up, you can improvise something interesting, such as an out of control car heading toward the character, an ambush, a dead end or something else that fits the bill.

Does he Get Caught?
During a chase, ask for an opposed Athletics vs. Athletics check from the pursuer and the pursued, from time to time.

Generally, if the pursuer wins 2 or 3 of these Athletics checks in a row, he catches up to the pursued character.

If the pursued character wins 2 or 3 of these Athletic checks in a row, he manages to lose the pursuer.

WEALTH AND MONEY

In a game such as this, there s little reason to keep track of every dime a character has. That would be pointless and silly, since Four Colors isn t an explore the dungeon, kill the monsters and grab the gold game.

This isn t to say that money won t come into play, though.

For the most part, you can use common sense to judge what a character can and can not afford to purchase. Just look at his Wealth Trait rating and make a judgement call.

Or if you really feel the need, have the player make a Wealth check. The Difficulty Number should reflect how expensive the object he wants to buy is. If he succeeds, he can purchase it. If he fails, he just can t afford it.

If a character purchases something that would realistically hurt his bank account (or wallet), feel free to temporarily lower his Wealth rating.

INVENTIONS

Many characters try to build things. Gadgets, vehicles, armor, weapons, etc. There are three things that must be done before a gadget can be made.

Make a Wealth Check
Using the rules given above, the player must make a Wealth check in order to have the materials at your disposal.

Make an Inventor Check
The character will need to make a successful Inventor check to see if he can build it. If the character is hiring someone else to build the object for him, then the hired character must make the check instead.

The Difficulty Number should be dependent upon how complex the object is to create.

If the check is successful, the character builds it, though you can dictate how long it takes to build.

Pay Experience Points
You must have enough Experience Points to purchase the item as if it were a power.

FALLING

A character who falls from any decent height will take damage.

Distance Fallen:	Damage:
0-8 feet	No Damage
9-20 feet	1d12
21-41 feet	1d12+6
42-62 feet	2d12+6
63-83 feet	3d12+6
93-113 feet	4d12+6
per 20 feet	add extra d12

DROWNING

A character can hold his breath for a number of turns equal to his Body rating (adding the super-rating to this number,

if applicable). Every turn he s submerged
after this, he loses 1d12 Wound Points.
Protection powers offer no assistance
here, except force fields.

FIRE

Every turn a character is exposed to fire,
he suffers 1d12+4 damage. This goes
down to 1d12 damage per turn if the
character has a gas mask or similar
device that prevents harmful inhalation.

EXPLANATION

This section of the book is not a how to run a game affair. Rather, it s erves to help you run games that accurately reflect the comicbooks of that bygone era.

Another thing that needs to be mentioned is that this information is not based so much on the real world in the 40's, but the comicbook world of the 40's. Big difference.

So, you won t find ultra-detailed military information, a timeline of world events or other such real world information on the 1940's. The reason for this is that this stuff was never brought up in the comics. Oh sure, World War II provided a backdrop for the genre, but specific things just didn t get mentioned.

CONVENTIONS OF THE GENRE

The comics from the 1940's had an entirely different atmosphere, pacing and feel than those that are currently on the market.

Morality

Morality in the comicbooks was, for the most part, black and white. The good guys were good and the bad guys were insidiously bad.

Sure, there were vigilantes who sometimes operated on the outer-fringes of the law, but they were hardly the vicious killers that permeated throughout the pulps.

Using it in the Game:
This is mostly done by encouraging the heroes to be good . Likewise, your villains should be extremely bad . Don t create villains the players will feel sorry for...create ones that they want to deal out a sound thrashing to.

Optimism

Even the more grim comic series had an over-all optimistic approach. No matter how dark and seedy the setting was...no matter how gritty the mood was, good always triumphed over evil in the end.

In many titles, this optimism spilled over into patriotism. Comics were used by publishers to gain support for the Allied cause during the war by having the heroes fight Axis villains or by having the heroes advertise and encourage war bonds and stamps.

Using it in the Game:
Should you let the heroes succeed all the time? Well, that s really up to you. But you should, at the very least, let them win nearly all the time. But throughout the story, you shouldn t hesitate to allow the villain to get the better of the heroes from time to time. It builds drama for the big climax.

Exaggerated Action

Heroes (and often villains, too) pulled off incredibly unlikely stunts that have little basis in realism. If, for example, a hero was standing outside a window on a narrow ledge while a man was being thrown out that window by mobsters, the hero might very well be able to reach out

and grab the man by the arm to prevent his fall….without falling off the ledge himself!

Could that happen in reality? Not likely! But the comics of the Golden Age had a rather odd sense of logic, all for the sake of an exciting story!

Using it in the Game:
Encourage the players to engage in over-the-top derring-do. Let them swing from chandeliers, leap from building-top to building-top, and jump onto the villain s get-away car as it roars away. It will serve to make the game more true to the source…..as well as more enjoyable for the players.

Theme Villains
A common type of bad guy was the classic theme villain. In case you aren t familiar with the term, it s a villain who chooses a particular motif (often an animal, insect or quirk) and bases his entire modus operandi on it.

For example, let s say there s a villain called The Black Buzzard. He might wear a costume fashioned after a buzzard or he might have a large hook-nose and bald head that naturally resembles a buzzard. And his crimes are somehow related to buzzards (he robs a new restaurant called The Bird s Nest , Steals a priceless sculpture of a buzzard, etc.). He might even have his henchmen dress up in buzzard costumes.

That s a theme villain.

Using it in the Game:
This is really kind of a no-brainer. By creating your own theme villains, you ll truly be reinforcing the genre. And don t be afraid to get a little absurd. I mean, look at one particular white-faced clown-like villain! That s pretty wacky! Develop a motif and stick to it like glue.

Outlandish Costumes
The heroes and villains of the day weren t usually content with fighting crime (or committing crime) while wearing mundane attire.

Almost without exception, the characters donned flashy, flamboyant outfits. Some were darker and more somber, but still extravagant (ala a certain pointy-eared, caped crusader).

There were certainly exceptions, especially in the villain department. After all, the heroes regularly went up against normal mobsters, nazi s, thugs and mad scientists.

Using it in the Game:
Another no-brainer. Help the players design costumes if they aren t too familiar with the Golden Age. On the other end of the spectrum, you can design loud costumes for your baddies.

Coincidence
One extremely popular convention was the use of unlikely coincidence. The hero is in the right place at the right time or things always happen while he is nearby.

For example, the Masked Dynamo comes across a villain and his goons pulling a protection racket. He busts it up, sending the cretins scrambling back into the dark alleys from which they came. The next day, while visiting his best friend (out of costume, I might add), he learns that the friend is being squeezed for protection money. Guess who s responsible? Yep, the villain from the night before.

This affects how you craft your issues, really. Try to interweave events and occurrences so that it s all nice and tidy. Allow the heroes a chance to go to that art show, so that they re present when the ne er do-well crashes in to steal an expensive masterpiece.

Narrative

You see em all the time---the little text boxes in the panels of the comic page that help set the scene and (or) create a certain mood. Sometimes, these were redundant, but it helped define the comicbook story-telling of the day.

Using it in the Game:
When describing a scene, use a deep announcer s voice (or whatever voice works for you) to narrate the situation. Avoid over-doing it though. Just do it from time to time to add some spice things. If you do it too often, you ll most likely annoy the hell out of the players.

Example: And so, within a few days, the city is shaken by a series of bold robberies. Finally, the heroes are on the scene as one of these crimes take place!

Recurring Villains

They ll be back. You know they will. Even after the most obvious deaths (falling from a sky-scraper, burning up in an inferno, etc.), villains usually find some way to survive and plague the heroes in a later issue.

Using it in the Game:
Do your best to make the villain s demise vague or uncertain. Falling is a great stand-by for this purpose. They fall off the bridge into the murky water or off a craggy cliff-side or off a building or into a deep dark crevice.

Of course, the villain can always make a hasty get-away if things start looking too bleak. Or he could be captured and sent to prison, where he can later escape.

Sidekicks

For awhile, it seemed like every superhero had a tag-along neophyte hanging around.

These sidekicks were both an advantage and a hindrance. On one hand, the sidekick could come in handy when the hero gets in a tight spot. On the other hand, the sidekick would often become a liability.....they always have a tendency to get captured by the bad guys.

Using it in the Game:
Sidekicks are best when a player takes on the role. This is recommended only for players who care little for being the biggest, baddest hero around, because sidekicks are anything but the biggest, baddest hero around. This means that playing a teen companion can be something of a challenge. A fun challenge, but a challenge nonetheless.

Another option is for you, the GM, to take on the role. This is best suited for a series that involves only you and one player.

In any case, sidekicks should generally be created with roughly ½ the amount of Character Points as the main hero(es).

Setting Up the Series

Before you can start working on individual issues, you need to plan out the series itself. Not long-term planning, but a smattering of ideas for what the feel of the stories will be, what kind of villains will be utilized and so forth.

The Premise

What s the series about? Is it about a band of patriotic superheroes fighting the Axis threat over in Europe? Is it based around a small group of crime-fighters in a dark, shadowy city of corruption? Is it centered on a few heroes who defend the earth from space aliens and inter-dimensional beings?

It s a good idea to discuss this with the players before deciding on the concept. If the players had their hearts set on playing star-spangled avengers and you devise a series that revolves around mysterious urban crime fighters, then there might be problems.

Hero Requirements

Once the concept is in place, you ll need to give the players a list of requirements that must be met when they design their heroes.

One of the things that should be addressed is how many Character Points they ll receive. The standard amount is 60 CP s, but this isn t carved in stone. If you d like more powerful heroes, try giving them 80 CP s. Or if you d like the heroes to be more realistic, try giving them 40 CP s.

Another thing that should be considered is superpowers. Are there any types of powers that would disrupt the series? For example, if you re planning a series that has the heroes solving a lot of mysteries, you might ban powers that allow heroes to read people s minds, see into the past and travel through time.

Just try to cover all the bases. If a problem arises that you didn t think of previously, just explain to the offending player that he will need to alter the character to fit into the series.

Supporting Characters

Interesting supporting characters can enrich any series, so be sure to create a few good ones. You needn t stat them out (unless you really want to)....a few lines of notes should suffice.

These characters can play pretty important roles in the scheme of things too, such as a police commissioner, a newspaper editor, a private eye...or whatever.

Plus, supporting characters can be used as plot devices later on in the series. After all, what hero would refuse to rescue his best friend who has been kidnaped by the bad guy?

Expectations

Allow the players to write down a few different things that they would like the series to feature. You should write down a few too.

These should be fairly generalized, like a little bit of romance , getting to fight Nazi villains , lots of mysteries to solve , and so forth.

Once everyone has their expectations written down, collect them all and read them aloud. This will give everyone a good idea as to what all of you are wanting from the game.

CREATING AN ISSUE

Creating an issue for Four Colors isn t all that different from creating adventures for other roleplaying games.

Here are some suggestions to give you a running start....

Tidy Plots

Golden Age comicbook stories were very neatly plotted out. Everything that happened somehow tied into the storyline. If it happened, there was a distinct reason for it to happen. If a nice lady came up to the hero and said hi, you can bet the mortgage that she ll be seen again before the story is finished.

Obviously, this can t be duplicated exactly in an rpg. Players have their own whims that are beyond your control. If the player wants his hero to go into a café, let him. That s the beauty of roleplaying. But, you shouldn t feel pressured to tie it into the plot-line if you don t wish to. If you have a great way to tie it in, then by all means do it. If not, there s no need to lose any sleep over it. Just create an interesting unrelated encounter instead.

As long as the majority of the events are directly related to the plot, then it ll still feel like a Golden Age story.

Do your best to keep the story on a nice, steady path without railroading the players.

Variety

Comic stories featured a great deal of variety. This kept the reader from getting bored and gave the stories an aura of excitement.

You can do this in your issues as well. Don t create an issue that features nothing but combat.

A typical issue should have;

" 3 or 4 scenes that let the characters interact with characters you control. This could be interrogating a captured goon, talking to the police chief, dining with a romantic interest, etc.

" 3 to 4 scenes with some form of combat taking place.

" 1 or 2 chase scenes. These could be on foot or in vehicles.

" 1 or 2 scenes that make the heroes think their way out of a situation. Getting out of a deathtrap, solving a riddle, figuring out who killed the famous actress.

" 1 to 4 cut-scenes that show the villains doing their thing. These scenes can not be acted upon by the characters in the game, since they didn t actually witness the scene. The players witnessed it, not the characters.

The info above is hardly the be-all-end-all authority on the matter...just guidelines.

Idea Sources

Some of the greatest ideas for plots are accessible to everyone.

" Newspapers provide gripping true stories that can be altered and switched around for your purposes.

" Movies and television shows can provide you with very nicely laid out stories. Doctor them up a bit or maybe combine ideas from multiple movies or episodes and voila! Instant plot!

"   The internet has everything you could ever want when it comes to plot ideas. Crime sites, rpg sites, news sites, history sites   you can t go wrong. Find a search engine and knock yourself out.

"   Comicbooks are the most obvious choice when it comes to source material. Especially, you guessed it   Golden Age comics.

The Master-Villain

Every good superhero story should have a master-villain or perhaps an entire team of master-villains.

The master-villain is always the most evil, most diabolical and most despicable bad guy in the story. This goes without saying.

Concept
Before you even sit down to create a master-villain for the issue, take a few minutes to figure out some things about him.

First off, you need a central concept. This core idea can be anything that makes the villain distinctive, interesting and memorable.

"   Peculiar appearances can suggest an awful lot about the bad guy. Use this to your advantage.

"   A gimmick/motif is a splendid skeleton upon which you can build the rest of the character. Go wild with it!

"   A personality trait or mannerism can function as a hook as well.

"   A name is quite a popular starting point for kick-starting your villain. After all, a bad guy is only as good as his name.

Character Points
How many Character Points should you use to construct your master-villain?

There s no absolute answer to this. It really depends on how much of a tussle you want to give the heroes.

One good rule of thumb, though, is to add together all the characters Character Points. Then, add to that ½ the characters Experience Points (rounding up). The total is the amount of CP s the master-villain should be built with.

If there s more than one master-villain, divide the total up between them.

Of course, that s just a guideline. Many master-villains aren t as powerful as the heroes....they re just exceedingly cunning! This was often the case with villains of the Golden Age.

Action Checks

Roll 1d12 and add (or subtract) the appropriate Trait rating to the result. If the total is equal or

higher than the Difficulty Number, the character succeeds.

Difficulty Number:	Description of Task:
2	Almost anyone should be able to do this most of the time.
4	Most characters should be able to do this most of the time.
6	The action requires skill and effort. It's very possible for the average character to fail, though most highly skilled characters will accomplish it.
8	The task is difficult and normal characters only succeed every so often. It takes a lot of skill and a bit of luck, too.
10	This is a very difficult feat. Even professionals have a hard time pulling this off. Only the highest skilled characters accomplish this with any regularity.
12	This action is extraordinarily hard and even the highest skilled professionals often fail.
14	This task is nearly impossible to succeed at! Hardly anyone can pull it off and even then, it's by the skin of their teeth.
16	Only a massive amount of skill, a lot of effort and extreme luck will enable the character to succeed at this task!

Rolling 1

Anytime a 1 is rolled for an action check (before any modifiers are added to or subtracted from it), the action is automatically a failure.

Rolling 12

Whenever you roll a 12 during an action check, you may immediately add the character's Oomph score to the result!

Super-Ratings

If the Trait has a super-rating, roll a number of d12's indicated by the super-rating when making an action check using that Trait. Once rolled, you choose the highest roll to be your result for the check.

Actions

An action is considered something a character can do rather quickly, such as;

"   Move! A character can move a number of yards equal to his Athletics rating +10 (add super-rating to this if applicable).

"   Attack! Make one attack.

"   Full Dodge/Block! By taking a full dodge/block action, you may add +4 to the Difficulty Number (for the attack check) of anyone who attacks you this turn.

"   Partial Dodge/Block! By taking a partial dodge/block action, you may add +2 to the Difficulty Number (for the attack check) of anyone who attacks you this turn. You may also move at ½ the normal amount or make an attack at -2 to the action check roll or make a miscellaneous action at -2 to the action check roll.

"   Miscellaneous Action! This can be any reasonable action not listed above.

Ranged Combat

The attacker uses his Ranged Combat rating.

Difficulty Number:	Range:
2	Point Blank! Within 2 yards.
4	Short Range! Between 3-10 yards.
6	Medium Range! Between 11-50 yards.
8	Long Range! Between 51-100 yards.
10	Very Long Range! Between 101-150 yards.
12	Extremely Long Range! Between 151-200 yards.
14	Nearly Impossible Range! Between 201-250 yards.
16	Ungodly Range! Between 251-300 yards.

Close Combat

The attacker and target must make an opposed action check.

Attacking with:	Opposed Check:
fists, feet, or other body part	attacker's Unarmed Combat vs. defender's Athletics
sword, knife, club or other close combat weapon	attacker's Armed Combat vs. defender's Athletics