

# DIGITAL HERO

# #1

JUNE 2002



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Issue #1 (June 2002)





# HEROglyphs by Steven S. Long

## PLANS, SO MANY PLANS...

Welcome to the first of what will hopefully be many installments of *HEROglyphs*, a forum in which I can pontificate about the *HERO System* rules, discuss rules alternatives and options, and otherwise analyze the heck out of our favorite RPG system.

Before I proceed, I should give credit for the name of the column to my good friends Tim Binford and Andy Mathews. They thought of it first, I gleefully stole it for my own fiendish purposes.

Anyway, back to business. The intent behind this column is to delve into *HERO System* rules issues that are too big or too complex for easy discussion on the message boards or in e-mail. At least, that's the idea. Of course, if I get desperate, I may resort to talking about almost any rules issue, no matter how simple, to fill up page space every month. But it shouldn't come to that for a long while, at least. Take a look below for just a few of the ideas I plan to write about.

My hope is that this column will spark some discussion of these issues on the message boards, once I've drawn the topics out into the open and gotten the ball rolling, and that those discussions will, in turn, spark further ideas for columns. With luck, it becomes a self-perpetuating cycle. On the other hand, with Unluck, it could become a big mess. The potential danger here is that I might start a lot of pointless arguing and flame-wars in our little virtual world (and some of those flames might even be directed at me, perish forbid!). But, like every other online community, we tend to get our fair share of such brou-ha-has anyway, so I'm willing to risk a few more in the interest of starting some genuinely cool and useful conversations.

## SEND ME YOUR POOR, YOUR TIRED, YOUR QUESTIONS ABOUT FRAMEWORKS...

Since I want *HEROglyphs* to be of some actual use to you folks out there, feel free to send me questions and ideas for the column at [SteveL@HeroGames.com](mailto:SteveL@HeroGames.com). Because the column's supposed to address large, complex topics, try to pick issues that I can sink my teeth into. If it's a question I can answer in a sentence or two, post it on the message boards and I (and/or others) will get back to you pretty quickly.

To save you a little trouble, here's a list of a few of the subjects I plan to write about in the coming months (in no particular order):

- A Fine Grain (the *HERO System*'s granularity [or lack thereof], and what to do about it)
- Zap! (creating a "magical missile" in the *HERO System*)
- The Casual Approach ("Casual" Characteristics other than STR)
- Now I've Gotcha! (customizing Entangles to prevent escape)
- The Need For SPD (optional changes or replacements for the SPD Chart)
- And I'll Form The Head! (creating "combination" characters in the *HERO System*)
- Portmanteau Powers (a discussion of Powers that combine one or more abilities)
- A Minor Adjustment (dealing with some issues about Adjustment Powers)

Some of my ideas for columns are pretty simple and easy to address — a page or two of writing ought to cover it. But some, like "A Fine Grain," will require multiple columns to discuss in full. Long or short, hopefully each one will have something of use for you. So stay tuned, Hero fans! There's plenty of interesting discussion in store.



# When Last We Left Our Heroes...

by Steven S. Long

## “AND NOW, FOR THE NEWS.”

What would a Hero Games magazine be without a short column telling you some of the latest news about the company? In that spirit, welcome to *When Last We Left Our Heroes...*, a monthly column in which I'll discuss some of the goings-on here at the company. Since I already post weekly updates on the website every week, WLWLOH will focus more on long-term news and plans. For that reason, there may not be a news column every issue; sometimes there just won't be much to say, other than, "We're writing some books." Contrary to what you may have heard, working for a roleplaying game company isn't all big money and fast living; occasionally, there's some actual work involved, and that doesn't make for good news.

## HERO GAMES LAUNCHES MASTER PLAN, FILM AT ELEVEN

I guess the big news for this first issue is: "We're back!" After a long period of torpor, Hero is rarin' to go and ready for action. Evidence of that you hold in your hands (or see on your computer screen) right now — *Digital Hero*, our monthly e-zine, ably managed by New Wave Dave Mattingly so I can go on developing books and responding to questions online.

We here at the all-new, economy-sized Hero didn't jump into this for the heck of it. No, sir! That's not the way we do things. Our unofficial motto is: "Hero Games: We've Got A Plan For That." So, with that in mind, I'd like to start out this series of columns by giving you a glimpse of what's in store over the next few years. This isn't a detailed, month-by-month review, but more of a "big picture" concentrating on our main game lines as a whole.

The basic premise behind all of this is simple. We start with a *genre book*, which defines a particular genre (fantasy, superheroes modern-day action-adventure, westerns, or whatever). A genre book doesn't include a setting, or a bunch of enemies, or anything like that; it just shows you how to apply the *HERO System* rules to create and run characters and campaigns for that genre. The genre book becomes the basis for a whole product line ("the *Champions* line," "the *Fantasy Hero* line," and so on). Product lines include setting books, enemies books, equipment books, powers books, subgenre books, and other supplements like that.

Our first genre book, due out this summer, is *Champions*. Written by Aaron Allston, it's going to tell you everything you've ever wanted to know about creating superhero characters and

campaigns to run them in. We'll follow it up with a *New Champions Universe* book that provides a ready-made setting for gamers who don't want to create their own (and modular "bits" you can pull out and use in your own campaign, if you prefer). Next comes *Conquerors, Killers, And Crooks*, a big book of villains. After that, we have lots and lots of *Champions* supplements planned.

At the end of 2002, we'll launch our second product line with the arrival of *Star Hero*. Written by Campbell Award-nominated science fiction author and talented game designer Jim Cambias, it will do for science fiction gaming what *Champions* does for superheroes. A *Terran Empire* setting book, an equipment book, and plenty of other sourcebooks will follow. In fact, given the breadth of the science fiction genre, we can produce *lots* of setting books, with appropriate supplements to support each one, if the fans want that.

In 2003, we're going to limit ourselves to one genre book, but it's a big one: *Fantasy Hero*. The definitive guide to fantasy gaming using the *HERO System*, it will contain more ideas, suggestions, and tips than you can shake a +3 bastard sword at.

In 2004, we'll probably get back to a two-per-year routine. Early in the year, we'll debut the new *Dark Champions*, with all the vigilante coolness you could possibly imagine. Toward the end of the year, we plan to release another genre book, though we haven't made up our minds which one it will be yet. The front-runner is probably the pulp-era genre book (whether we call it *Pulp Hero*, or *Justice Inc.*, or something else). But a revamped *Cyber Hero* or *Western Hero* could easily take its place. Whatever gets passed over will most likely slip onto the 2005 or 2006 schedules, but that's so far in the future, and so many things could happen, we don't have any definite plans.

Because we're essentially starting the Hero product lines over from scratch, it's going to take us a while to roll them all out — the most popular ones, or the ones deemed most important from a strategic or marketing standpoint, have to come before the ones for the less popular genres. They're such major undertakings that we can't just write them all real quick, slap 'em between two covers, and publish them; we want to take our time and do them *right*. So, have patience! It may take us a little while to get to your favorite genre, but we *will* get to it.



**THE MAN WITH  
THREE BRAINS?**

...then you hear Robert Johnson; some of the rhythms he's doing and playing and singing at the same time, you think, "This guy must have three brains!"

— Keith Richards

**You Gotta Have Character** by Jason Walters

*"Life is lived forwards, but understood backwards."* — Kierkegaard

Greetings Digital Hero readers and welcome to this first installment of the *You Gotta Have Character* column, where each issue I shall take some poor soul who is far too deceased to defend himself, stand him on his historical head, and spin him around a few times until a useful Hero character falls out. Some of you, being overeducated in addition to being generally contrary, will undoubtedly notice several potentially objectionable things about this column after you've read it a few times; so let's clear them up before the e-mail starts to fly. For starters, I am *uninterested in absolute historical accuracy*. It is my intent to capture the *spirit* of a variety of interesting and controversial historical figures while, at the same time, converting them into useful Hero characters suitable for many different game settings. To that end, it's pretty likely that I'll mix actual history with dubious speculations, half-truths, malicious lies, and slanderous gossiping. Heck, I might even behave like a classical historian and *make some stuff up* while I'm at it! So file that pedantic e-mail containing all of those article corrections under "delete." Because if you don't I certainly will.

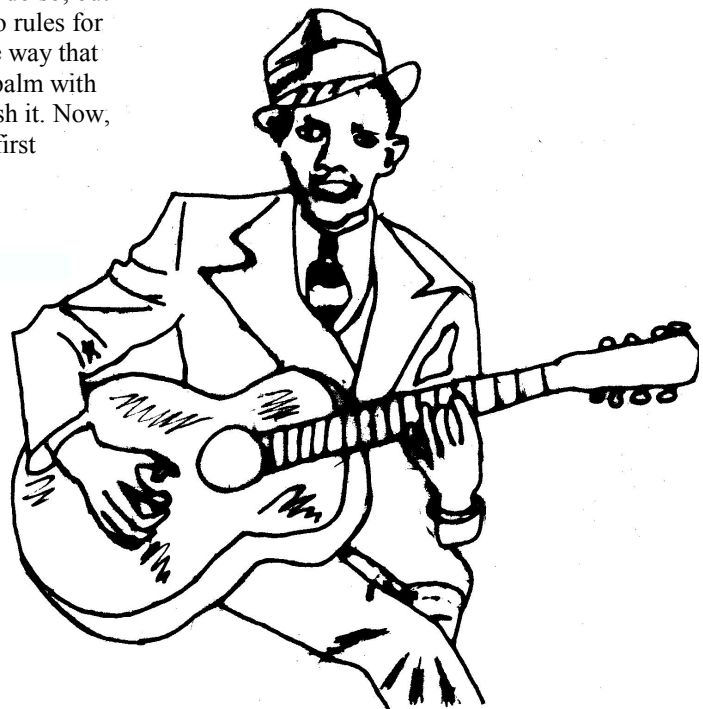
Now, with that unpleasantness taken care of, feel free to e-mail your constructive criticism, helpful suggestions, additional information, and, most importantly, *generous praise* to me at [jasonwalters@herogames.com](mailto:jasonwalters@herogames.com). If you would like to write up and submit an article of your own for *You Gotta Have Character* feel free to do so, but please follow the standard Digital Hero rules for submission (man, I've always liked the way that sounds). If we like it we'll cross your palm with some small amount of silver and publish it. Now, for your revisionist pleasure, onto the first victim.

*It's a humid summer's midnight somewhere in rural Mississippi — the kind of night that makes frogs sweat and catfish crawl out of their creeks. Down at the unmarked crossroads outside of town, a handsome young man strums his guitar and waits patiently for a tap on the shoulder. When he at last feels that cold touch, the young musician hands his beloved guitar over without ever looking behind him. The Devil takes it, plays a couple of tunes, and hands it back. Now the handsome young musician has the ability to play anything he wants... but at a terrible price!*

*His soul.*

**Robert Johnson**

On November the 23<sup>rd</sup> 1936 a young and relatively unknown blues musician arrived at the San Antonio, Texas studios of the American Record Company to record his songs for the first time. This first of what later turned out to be two sessions was unceremoniously squeezed between W. Lee O'Daniel & His Hillbilly Boys the day before, and Hermanas Barazacon Guitarras the day after. When he was done, Robert Johnson collected his money and disappeared once again into the wilds of the Mississippi Delta. Yet out of these modest recording sessions came a powerful and unique sound which forever changed music in America.



art by Jason Walters

## DIGITAL HERO #1

**Background/History:** Robert Johnson was the archetypal bluesman and drifter. Born out of wedlock and raised in the harsh environment of southern migrant labor camps, Robert was destined never to once meet his own father nor ever know any permanent home. As he drifted from place to place, sometimes with his mother and sometimes with an aunt, he gained a great love for music, and sometime in the early 1920s he began to play the guitar. Early results were not very promising, but Robert made friends with several popular blues musicians (including the very talented Willie Brown and the famous mulatto bluesman Charlie Patton) who provided him with all the help and inspiration the young man could handle.

Robert was extremely handsome and charismatic, so he had little problem making himself popular with the young ladies. Actually, his difficulties were pretty much in the opposite direction. Namely, he had a big difficulty keeping his hands off of them, his arms from around them, and himself away from them. At this stage in his life most of his lady friends were single, so it wasn't too much of a problem. Later, that would all change... and it would be his downfall.

Eventually, after Robert managed to get his roving eye more firmly planted in his head, he met and married Virginia Travis in February of 1929. Settling down for the first time, Robert became a proud expectant father when his wife became pregnant later that year. The young couple moved onto the Klein plantation near Robinsonville, Mississippi. Robert took up farming for a living and, although he continued playing actively in his spare time, he began to consider himself a farmer with a hobby.

This happiness was to be short lived.

In April of 1930 both Virginia, still nearly a child herself at age 16, and Robert's baby died during childbirth, completely destroying whatever hopes and dreams he may have had for a family. In his grief, he threw himself into his music but was to find no solace there. Events were conspiring to bring him to a crossroads, both literally and figuratively.

In June of 1930 Paramount recording artist Son House came to live in Robinsonville at the request of his (and Robert's) friend Willie Brown. House, a bizarre combination of preacher and bluesman, had a raw intensity to him that no other musician in the Delta at the time could match. This was the purest expression of emotion Robert had ever heard. He longed to embrace the power of this style of the blues. There were four "jook joints" in town at the time and he would show up every time his new "hero" played one of them. But one night when it came time for Robert to play, House didn't even want him on stage because he felt the Robert's guitar

playing was about the worst he had ever seen. "Don't do that, Robert," House scolded him. "You drive people nuts. You can't play nothin'."

Heartbroken, Robert disappeared completely for one year. No one knows for certain where he went or what he did with himself. Some say that he and bluesman Ike Zimmerman played the circuit of crude jook joints and migrant work camps that had sprung up as the WPA built a highway across the Delta, sharpening their skills on the rough edged men who made their living building that highway through the Mississippi swamp. Some say he went to the town of Hazlehurst, got drunk on whisky, and stayed that way for a year. Others say he moved to the lumber town Martinsville to live off of an older woman while he practiced his playing. Still others say that at some point during that lost and desperate year he sold his soul to the Devil, down at the crossroads at midnight on a hot Mississippi summer's eve.

Let's say, for argument's sake, that's just what he did.



One year later a very different Robert returned to Robinsonville. He had become not only a master of the guitar, but had written a series of songs so powerful and disturbing that House could only stand back and blink in amazement. House realized, and admitted, that he had been eclipsed in both ability and appeal. Robert then began the wanderings which would occupy the rest of his short life.

He traveled throughout the Mississippi and Arkansas Delta areas, playing for levee camps,

road gangs, and in the claptrap jook joints which dotted little southern towns back then.

Eventually he would even play in Canada and New York. For the most part, though, people simply knew by word of mouth when and where Robert Johnson was going to play. They knew that they'd have a good time and hear some fine music if they went where he was.

They were right and, in a small way, Robert became famous. He began to love travel for its own sake. It has been said that awake or asleep, night or day Robert was ready to go anywhere, even if that was back where he just came from. He moved around the Delta like a haunted man. Because he traveled so much, or so they say, he soon developed an unusual talent. He could hear a piece of music once — *just once* — and play it perfectly forever thereafter. In addition to his own material and all the popular blues tunes of the day, he could play hillbilly tunes, polkas, square dances, and ballads.

As soon as Robert hit a town he'd find the homeliest woman he could lay eyes on. He generally said a few kind words, sang a few songs, and almost always had a place to stay. His reasons were threefold: 1) she probably wouldn't have a man; 2) no one was likely to be after her or upset if he was after her; and 3) just a little attention would generally bring him anything he wanted. It was said that Robert could be the nicest guy in the world to the ugliest witch in town.

While this plan was great in theory, Robert still loved his women and that got him into trouble now and again. He had a bad habit of being overly friendly with other men's wives. More than a few times he found himself in a scrape and, being small and generally not much use in a fight, had to rely on his friends to get him out of trouble. He loved gambling, smoking, and booze as well, although Robert couldn't really handle his liquor. More than a few times he got drunk, loud, and angry, cursing his maker and getting his friends into fights. They say that Robert often seemed deeply angry about something he wouldn't, or couldn't, talk about.

Then one fateful night in 1938, Robert and his friend Sonny Boy Williamson were playing at Three Forks, a country roadhouse outside of the town of Greenwood. Robert had previously struck up a lively friendship with a young woman whose husband just happened to be the bartender. As the evening progressed it became more and more obvious that Robert was playing less to the audience at large and more to an audience of one: the bartender's wife.

During a break, someone brought Robert an open bottle of whisky which he quickly knocked back - against the warning of the more observant Sonny Boy. It was filled with the poison strychnine. The bartender had poisoned his

whisky! By the end of the night Robert was vomiting and raving with poison induced madness. Sonny Boy took him to a friend's home and together they attempted to save the poisoned bluesman but, the following day, Robert Johnson died. His death certificate was filed on August 16, 1938, forever ending his story and silencing his voice.

Or so he wanted you to believe. The real story is quite different.

Robert Johnson never died; not on that day nor any other. Over time he had come to realize that his Faustian deal at the crossroads had been a double cross. He had become the greatest bluesman the Delta had ever known but he still couldn't find the happiness which he had once found in his long dead wife's arms. No amount of fame, pleasure, or appreciation could ever bring back to him what he had lost. Now he simply wanted his soul back. He wanted his soul back, but The Devil would have none of it. So he faked his own death and disappeared into urban America in search of redemption. He's there still, immortal and un-aging, playing for coins on street corners as he looks for some way to reverse his deal with The Devil, get his soul back, and live out his days as a normal man.

But Robert can never stay in one place for too long. The Devil and his minions are always close behind... and old temptations are never far away. He has to keep moving if he's going to be safe. He got to keep moving if he wants to find the key to his own redemption. He's got to keep moving... *got to keep movin' / I've got to keep movin' / blues fallin' down like hail / blues fallin' down like hail / there's a hellhound on my trail / hellhound on my trail...*

**Personality/Motivation:** Robert still has all of the same old vices that he's always had, but he's a good deal more careful about them. He will help the PCs only if he thinks that there is a chance that they can help him get his soul back. If not, he will try to get away from them at the first opportunity.

The Devil and his various minions really are after Robert. Part of the Faustian deal between Robert and the Devil involved using music to usher in a new age of decadence and self-indulgence. It could be argued that, with the vast influence Robert Johnson's work has had on popular music through such bands such as the Rolling Stones and Beatles, he has succeeded in doing just that... but apparently the Devil had something more direct in mind. The Devil, being devilish and all, is not feeling very forgiving on this front. Robert is incredibly frightened of a confrontation with the Devil at this point in time (they used to be a bit more intimate), and will do his best to avoid one *unless* it somehow helps him get his soul back. Then he will do what he



## DIGITAL HERO #1

has to do.

Robert is a charming, good looking, and charismatic fellow with the haunted look of a man who is doomed and knows it. He's very bright, very capable, and very flawed. Robert just can't seem to conquer his desire to wander, to chase married women, and to get depressingly drunk. He's wise but seemingly unable to practice the wisdom he has acquired over his long, weary life. On the outside he's convinced that his bad habits are caused by his current soulless condition and that the only way for him to change is to reverse his pact with the Devil, thereby retrieving his own soul and regaining his humanity. Deep inside he's terrified that his condition has nothing to do with being soulless and everything to do with just being Robert Johnson.

**Quote:** "I got stones in my passway and my road seem dark at night. I have pains in my heart they have taken my appetite."

**Powers/Tactics:** Robert really doesn't want to fight anyone. If pressed into combat, he will play certain songs to produce certain moods in his opponents. For example, *All My Love In Vain* makes opponents want to weep uncontrollably to the exclusion of anything else, while *Hellhounds On My Trail* will make them run away from unseen opponents and *Drunken Hearted Man* will send them off looking for a liquor store. Robert will then use his Stealth to get away.

**Campaign Use:** There are a couple of ways an enterprising GM could introduce Robert Johnson into a game. In a modern-day *Champions*-based setting, Robert could be one of those minor characters the GM uses to make the downtown of a big city just a little more interesting. Have him give the characters a little down-home wisdom about love, life, and loss now and again (your players could probably use it anyhow), then allow them to find out more about him if they care to look. After all, why have a nameless street musician playing Robert Johnson songs when the characters can discover that it's actually *Robert Johnson playing his own songs sixty-four years after he supposedly died?* Perhaps the heroes are on the trail of some seemingly demonic supervillain, only to stumble into Robert and find out there is nothing "seeming" about the villain being demonic! That way his unique plight could be used as a convenient tool which allows the heroes to come in contact with the world of demonic magic for the first time. In a *Horror Hero* campaign, Robert's story could be used as the very beginning of another one of those long strange trips into "That Which Man Should Not Know" which the characters always seem to find

themselves thrust into. Perhaps Robert's now infamous story of demonic temptation was just the beginning of a massive takeover of the record industry by the forces of evil from outside of our world! In a *Cyber Hero* campaign Robert could serve as a contrast, a symbolic "last leaf on the tree" from the old America still left. Maybe Robert only thinks he was tempted by The Devil but really is a mutant of some sort. The whole Faustian pact he remembers is nothing but self-delusion, his subconscious mind's attempt to help him get through a very long and very lonely existence

The above version of Robert's life and abilities operates on the basic assumption that GM's game world allows both magic of some sort as well as a Devil real enough to sell one's soul to. Or, at the very least, that there is "something out there." In a Depression-era *Pulp Hero* setting, Robert could be played without allowing any of that by lowering his SPD to 3 and by removing LS (Longevity: Immortality) and the Mind Control 12d6 (you can leave the hellhounds on his trail because he seems to think they are there). Then Robert becomes a marvelous background character you can insert anywhere you like. He could be playing in a nightclub the characters are in or they might stumble into him while traveling the back roads of the South or Midwest. He could help them out of a tight spot... or, more likely, get them into one!

**Appearance:** Although he is pushing 93, Robert still appears to be a hauntingly good-looking young black man in his late twenties or early thirties. What most people notice, however, are his sorrowful looking eyes which seem to hold all of the weariness of the world within them. Robert generally dresses in shabby black or grey suits and carries a carpetbag as well as his guitar in its case. He sometimes wears a beaten-up fedora.

### **Bibliography and Discography:**

Robert Johnson: The Complete Recordings CBS Records Inc. 1990  
Searching For Robert Johnson by Peter Guralnick E.P. Dutton 1989  
Little Blues Book by Brian Robertson Angonquin Books 1996  
Robert Johnson album article by Stephen C. LaVere Columbia Records 1990

**Robert Johnson**

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
10	STR	0	11-	Lift 100 kg; 2d6 HTH
15	DEX	15	12-	OCV: 5/DCV: 5
10	CON	0	11-	
10	BODY	0	11-	
15	INT	5	12-	PER Roll: 12-
21	EGO	11	13-	ECV: 7
25	PRE	15	14-	PRE Attack: 5d6
20	COM	5	13-	
8 PD				6 Total: 8 PD (0 rPD)
8 ED				6 Total: 8 ED (0 rED)
4 SPD				15 Phases: 3, 6, 9, 12
8 REC				8
40 END				10
35 STUN				15

- 20 Psychological Limitation: Code Versus Killing (Common, Total)
- 20 Psychological Limitation: Loves Gambling, Women, And Sin (Very Common, Strong)
- 10 Unluck 2d6
- 88 Experience Points

**Total Disadvantage Points: 268**



**Total Characteristics Cost: 111**

**Movement:** Running: 6"/12"  
Swimming: 2"/4"

Cost	Powers	END
5	<i>Immortal:</i> Life Support (Longevity: Immortal)	0
66	<i>Overpowering Blues:</i> Mind Control 12d6, Area Of Effect (11" Radius; +1), Personal Immunity (+1/4), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +1/2); Gestures (play guitar; -1/4), Incantations (sing; -1/4), No Range (-1/2), Set Effect (limited possible commands, see text; -1/4), Does Not Affect Deaf People Or People With Heavy Ear Coverings (-1/4)	0
10	<i>Hard To Hurt:</i> Physical Damage Reduction, Nonresistant, 25%	0

**Talents**

- 3 Perfect Pitch

**Skills**

- 10 Gambling (Card Games, Dice Games) 15-
- 9 KS: Acoustic Guitars 18-
- 9 KS: The Blues 18-
- 9 KS: Liquor, Women, and Sin 18-
- 5 Oratory 15-
- 12 PS: Musician 21-
- 5 Seduction 15-
- 9 Stealth 15-
- 5 Streetwise 15-

**Total Powers & Skill Cost: 157**

**Total Cost: 268**

**100+ Disadvantages**

- 20 Distinctive Features: Has No Soul (Not Concealable, Noticed And Recognizable, Detectable Only With Unusual Senses)
- 20 Hunted: Hellhounds On His Trail 11- (Mo Pow, Kill)
- 5 Physical Limitation: Poor Eyesight (Infrequently, Slightly)



# Diceless Hero

by Bob Greenwade

One of the best things about the *HERO System* is that characters don't result from random rolls of dice. Proponents of game systems with random character generation sometimes like to claim their method is "more realistic," but they miss a very important point: *games simply aren't about real life*. They're about *drama and storytelling and adventure*. When you sit down to play a role-playing game, whether it's using the *HERO System* or another system, the typical goal is to emulate your favorite fiction — in the case of *Champions*, superhero comic books (and movies, and television shows).

Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuster didn't roll dice to see if Superman was strong; Bob Kane didn't get Batman's brilliance from the roll of dice; Spider-Man isn't super-agile because Stan Lee got a lucky roll on the dice. These characteristics all resulted from their creators' concepts, and gamers expect to do the same with the characters they play. That's why Immobilon is both strong and intelligent, Vroom is fast, and Bombshell is incredibly good-looking but not very bright (to say the least). It's also why Captain Photon flies and shoots energy blasts, Captain Glory knows five different martial arts styles, The Creature has four arms and blue fur, and Phantoma can walk through walls. These things were beyond the characters' control (except for Captain Glory's martial arts; he learned those) — but you, as their creator, have control over it all.

There's one other matter in fiction games don't match. When Batman takes a swing at the Joker, or when Wolverine tries to slice up Sabretooth, whether the hero hits or misses doesn't depend on a roll of dice any more than his agility did to begin with — it depends on the writer's plot decisions. Shouldn't combat in a game designed to emulate the comics follow the same principle?

Well, yes and no. If the player (speaking for his character) says, "I swing at him," the GM shouldn't just decide whether the character hits or misses based merely on whim. Characteristics, Powers, and Skills are there on the character sheet for a reason. Besides, players should have some sense of achievement from beating the bad guys. But having the plot depend on dice rolls can be just as frustrating, especially when the rolls happen to go the way the GM doesn't want them to — never mind the drama-killing time and effort it often takes to tally up rolls, figure BODY, and so forth. A diceless combat system for the *HERO System*, while probably not everyone's cup of tea, can solve some of these problems.

If you adopt (or adapt) this system for use in your games, you probably shouldn't use it in every situation. For example, if two hero teams decide to play softball, you should probably roll dice to evaluate the quality of the pitching and hitting. Still, for cases of good guys versus bad guys, diceless combat and task resolution offers some intriguing advantages.

## THE BASIC SYSTEM

Diceless Hero depends on the accompanying *Diceless Combat Table*, which you should use to resolve most combat situations. Here's how you use it.

First, take the attacker's OCV and defender's DCV and calculate the roll the attacker would need to make to hit the target in normal *HERO System* combat. This becomes the *Hit Result* (see the first column in the table). Treat a Hit Result of less than 3 as a 3, and a Hit Result of more than 18 as an 18 (though the GM may decide to simply extend the chart to a more preferred limit, or impose no limit).

From the Hit Result column, read across to the other columns to determine how much damage (if any) the defender takes. If the result is "0," the attack missed altogether (or otherwise had no effect). If the result is a number, multiply the Damage Classes in the attack by that number.

The "Normal STUN" and "Normal BODY" columns are for determining the STUN and BODY caused by Normal Damage attacks. Similarly, the "Killing BODY" and "Killing STUN×" are for determining the BODY and STUN caused by a Killing Damage attack (multiply the BODY by the listed STUN×; the actual minimum is 1, as always, though the numbers in brackets are the base numbers for applying the *Increased STUN Multiple Advantage*).

For special attacks — such as Adjustment Powers, Mental Attacks, AVLDS, NNDs, and so forth — use the Normal STUN column. Flashes, Entangles, and other Powers for which you count the BODY should use the Normal BODY column.

Optionally, Hit Results of 4 and 5 may give penalties to the character's DCV for the remainder of that character's Phase. A Result of 5 gives a -1 penalty; a Result of 4 gives a -2 penalty. (This rule is recommended only if the GM uses critical hit/failure rules.)

Hit Results of 8 or 9 are considered glancing blows.

DICELESS COMBAT CHART					
Hit/Skill Result	Normal STUN	Normal BODY	Killing BODY	Killing STUN×	Skills
3-	0	0	0	0	You Broke It!
4	0 [-2]	0	0	0	Unsuccessful, -2 Later
5	0 [-1]	0	0	0	Unsuccessful, -1 Later
6	0	0	0	0	Unsuccessful
7	0	0	0	0	+2 on Time Chart
8	1	0	0.5	1	+1 on Time Chart
9	1.5	0.2	0.65	1	Normal Success
10	2	0.4	0.8	1	Normal Success
11	2.5	0.6	0.95	1.5	Normal
12	3	0.8	1.1	2	-1 on Time Chart
13	3.5	1	1.25	2.5	-1 on Time Chart
14	4	1.2	1.4	3	-2 on Time Chart
15	4.5	1.4	1.55	3.5	-2 on Time Chart
16	5	1.6	1.7	4	-3 on Time Chart
17	5.5	1.8	1.85	4.5	-3 on Time Chart
18+	6	2	2	5	Instant Success!

The numbers given in the Killing STUN× column are the numbers that should be used when adding Increased STUN Multiples; as always, the actual STUN Multiple should be a minimum of 1 (as indicated by the numbers in brackets).

### SPECIAL CASES

For Autofire attacks, the first shot hits with the full Hit Result, the second at -2, the third at -4, and so on until one misses completely.

A Block with a Hit Result of 11 or better succeeds; 10 or lower fails. Optionally, Hit Results of 9-11 can mean the defender only takes half damage, or the weapon used for the block takes the damage. The GM may also rule that every +2 the Block is made by gives the character +2 Lightning Reflexes against the attacker (and, conversely, every -2 the Block is missed by gives the attacker +2 Lightning Reflexes against the defender).

For Grabs, a 9 or better succeeds, but uses the Normal BODY column to see how good the Grab is. A 60 STR character who grabs a high-DEX, low-STR character with a Hit Result of 9 only has 2 BODY to hold the normal with — something the low-STR character can overcome with just a little extra effort.

Of course, there are certain things (referred to generally as Events) which require their own methods. These Events, along with other special circumstances, are discussed below.

### AREA OF EFFECT AND EXPLOSIONS

Resolve Area Of Effect attacks and Explosions as standard attacks. Since a hex has a DCV of 3, just compare the attack as a regular Hit Result (though you may also want to consult the discussion later in this article about adjacent hexes).

For reduced damage from Explosions, simply assume the center hex takes full damage as determined by the Hit Result, and each hex out from there (or more, if the Explosion's radius has been increased) takes one DC less damage.

### DAMAGE WITHOUT ATTACK ROLLS

Some types of damage (and other effects) do damage without an Attack Roll. In these situations, if you can find a way to determine a Hit Result — as in the following examples — use it. Otherwise assume a Hit Result of 13.

- **Absorption:** Use the Hit Result of the attacker, if any. If the character intentionally grabs something to Absorb its energy, use his own Hit Result.
- **Damage Shields:** Use the Hit Result of the attacker. (If the character Grabs or hits someone to cause his own Damage Shield to activate, use his own Hit Result.)
- **Disarm:** To determine how many inches a Disarm knocks a weapon away from its holder, divide the BODY by which the attacker overcomes the defender's STR in a STR Versus STR Contest by two.
- **Falling damage:** Falls generally take a fixed Hit Result of 13, but the GM may adjust them upward for particularly hard and/or rough ground, or downward for unusually soft and muddy areas.
- **Healing:** Use a Hit Result of the "attacker's" DEX against the target's CON (either as Skill Rolls or CVs, depending on the GM's preference). You can also use this method for some forms of Aid.
- **Knockback Damage:** If the character is Knocked Back into an object which takes up less than a full hex (such as a mailbox, lamppost, or telephone pole), there really is a Hit Result to evaluate: the moving character's OCV of 0, plus any levels the original attacker put into knocking the character into the object, versus the object's size-based DCV.
- **Susceptibilities:** A Susceptibility against being hit by a certain special effect or type of non-damaging attack (such as being affected by magic, or being Teleported) uses the Hit Result of the attack.

Examples where you should normally assume a Hit Result of 13 (unless you can come up with a way to find a variable Hit Result) include most forms of Aid (especially versus self), Area Of Effect attacks with the *No Range*

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Limitation, Bleeding, Dependence, Drowning, EGO Rolls versus Psychological Limitations, Knockback, most Knockback damage, Presence Attacks, STUN used as END, and most Susceptibilities.

### HIT LOCATIONS

Perhaps the most difficult thing to simulate with a diceless system is Hit Location rolls. These are optional in the *HERO System* anyway, but sometimes the GM may want to simulate Hit Locations without using dice. After all, in typical hand-to-hand combat, few blows are so wild they could land literally anywhere on the target's body. In the real world, combatants usually aim for a particular location (most often head, chest, belly, or groin).

A character may also aim for a specific location. Compare the success on the Skill Result column separately from the regular Hit Result. A "Normal" or better result is a hit against the desired location; an 8- hits another location, up or down (GM's choice, possibly depending on the type of maneuver or attack) by 1 for every point below 9. Hit Results above 11 add +1 to the final Hit Result for every 2 points over 11 (rounded down).

Special Hit Locations are harder to simulate. Apply the OCV modifiers as normal, of course, to determine whether the attack hits the desired location. Assume the normal roll for the Location is 3 (a High Shot would normally hit the arm, for example, and a Low Shot would normally hit the vitals). However, a character may also apply any bonuses to the Hit Result to increase or decrease the Location Result, limited to the scope of the type of attack.

Naturally, if a character uses a Martial Maneuver that targets a specific location (such as a Choke Hold), it automatically targets that location without bonus or penalty, as in the regular system.

If the opposing character Aborts to a Dodge or some other maneuver providing a DCV bonus, he may use the bonus for that maneuver, plus any Combat Skill Levels that apply to DCV, *against that attack only* to move the hit up or down the Hit Location chart. For each +1 DCV the maneuver gives, the defender may *instead* move the hit up or down by 1. The character does not have to use all of his DCV bonus in this manner; a character performing a Martial Dodge (+5 DCV) may, for example, move the Hit Location down two steps while keeping +3 DCV from the maneuver.

When using Hit Locations under this system, use damage modifiers (whether the damage is Normal or Killing) from the Hit Location Table in the rulebook rather than that from the Diceless Combat Table.

For hits that are not naturally specific to nor aimed toward a particular area of the body, the GM should use the Hit Result from the Diceless Combat Chart and determine the location based on the STUN for Normal damage or the BODY for Killing damage. For example, if the Hit Result of a Normal damage attack is 14, then the Normal Stun multiple is 4, which would indicate that either the Stomach or Vitals (GM's choice) was hit.

### Diceless Skill Resolution

You can also use the Diceless Combat Table to resolve normal Skill use. The Hit Result column doubles as a "Skill Roll" column. The "Skills" column indicates how much time it takes to achieve the desired result. The minimum time needed to perform most tasks is a Half Phase (the GM may allow resolution of some tasks as a Zero Phase Action in the event of extremely high Skill Results). The GM may elect to give the characters other forms of increased success than this. For example, an exceptional Skill Result for Interrogation might get not only the location of the enemy's base, but the commander's name, the number and armament of its contingent, weaknesses in the security perimeter, and the enemy's upcoming plans.

At the other end, if the character cannot perform the task in the extended period of time (such as allotting five minutes to attempt Lockpicking because a guard is coming around in fifteen, but the Skill Result says it's done in an hour), he cannot succeed at all; a simple failure (with no further penalty) is assumed.

A Skill Result of 4 or 5 results in a penalty (as shown on the chart) the next time the characters attempt the same task — even if another character tries it. A Skill Result of 3 means the attempt is "broken" — an effort to disarm a security system sets off the alarms, a lockpick breaks off in the keyhole, a Persuasion attempt closes off the target's mind to all further conversation, or the like. Neither the character who made the attempt, nor any other, may try this task again (until they somehow "fix" what was broken).

The Skills column also applies to Characteristic Rolls and similar functions.

### PUTTING SKILLS TOGETHER

The chart does not take into account such things as Skill Versus Skill attempts. Nor does it address Complementary Skills.

In Skill Versus Skill Contests, whoever gets the highest Skill Result wins. In the case of a tie, the acting character beats the reacting character, though the reacting character may attempt another Skill Versus Skill Contest (at -1 for every step on the Time Chart that goes by) in an attempt to undo the damage.

## DNPCS AND HUNTERS

Generally, the appearance of a DNPC or Hunter should depend on the plot. An 8- Roll means the DNPC or Hunter shows up about 25% of the time; 11- means about 60%; and 14- means about 90%.

If you prefer random determination, start the Event Result at 18. Subtract 1 for every Experience Point the character has earned since the last time the DNPC or Hunter was involved in an adventure. When the Event Result is at or below the occurrence of the DNPC or Hunter, the DNPC or Hunter becomes involved in the character's life again, and the Event Result for that DNPC or Hunter returns to 18.

If more than one character has the same DNPC or (more likely) Hunter, use the highest Event occurrence of any character, +1 for every additional character with that Event at a frequency of 8-, +2 for every one at 11-, and +3 for every one at 14-. This is the overall frequency of the Event. (If this results in a 17 or greater total, then the DNPC or Hunter automatically appears,

STR Versus STR contests take place when a character tries to (for example) Escape being Grabbed, Resist being Shoved, or Disarm another character. In this case, the attacking character uses the BODY value based on his Hit Result, and the defending character uses the BODY based on a Hit Result of 13 (or, at the GM's option, on his Hit Result versus the attacker's OCV).

When handling Complementary Skills, for each applicable Skill that would succeed based on its own Skill Result, add +1 to the character's Skill Result before resolving the actual task.

## Other Situations

### LUCK AND UNLUCK

It may seem logical to leave Luck and Unluck alone, even in a diceless system; after all, their very names suggest an element of chance.

On the other hand, the GM may simply apply levels of Luck when the character falls behind (adding a +1 to OCV, DCV, Lightning Reflexes, or Skill Rolls as needed for each "die" of Luck on the character sheet), or similar levels of Unluck when the character pulls ahead. Other incredible events may happen to such characters as the GM feels are appropriate, based purely on the amount of Luck the character has and the amount of help (or hindrance) he needs.

### ACTIVATION ROLLS

The rolls discussed so far all involve outside modifiers — the defender's DCV at the very least, and often many other factors. However, not only Activation Rolls, but Accidental Change rolls, Berserk and Enraged rolls (recovering as well as getting there), Contact and Favor rolls, Danger Sense rolls, Reputation rolls, and similar rolls don't require such modifiers. There are several options for resolving these situations without dice.

First, there are some cases where you can invent a modifier (as with DNPCs and Hunters; see sidebar). For example, if a character has an Accidental Change when he takes BODY damage, then the amount of BODY damage he takes can serve as a modifier (say, +1 for every 2 BODY taken). As a counter-modifier, the character may attempt a CON Result (at -1 for every 2 BODY taken) in a sort of Skill Versus Skill Contest against the Accidental Change. (A Berserk under the same circumstance might instead use an EGO Roll.) If you use this system, the character should also take a +1 for every consecutive time the Result fails, or a -1 for every consecutive time the Result succeeds. A final Event Result of 11 or better constitutes a successful "roll."

When developing this kind of modifier for an Event Result, be sure there's a way to modify it upward as well as downward.

If this Skill versus Skill method won't work, do as specified above — assume a +1 for every consecutive failure, or -1 for every consecutive success, with an Event Result of 10 or more being successful. This results in 14- rolls working about five times out of six, 11- rolls working two times out of three, and 8- rolls working once out of four — a 90%, 66%, or 25% chance of success, respectively. To create some variety (and keep the player from thinking, for example, "since my 11- weapon failed last time, it'll work this time for sure"), you can invent some kind of occasional modifier that changes the odds under certain circumstances.

## What Can't Be Done

These rules can't simulate everything in the *HERO System*. Impairment and Disabling effects, vehicle ability losses, left versus right choices (such as for Hit Locations), direction of a miss from an Area Effect or Explosion attack, and damage type and amount for teleporting into a solid object are among the things you must either ignore, determine by rolling a die or dice, or derive by some other means. Essentially, whenever there's an equal chance to achieve one of several results, each with more or less equally good or bad effects, you simply cannot resolve things with Event Results. (If some other means is found for these things, it should preferably be affected by surrounding events.)

Sometimes, an event you'd normally determine with a Hit Result should be determined by the interests of the story. For example, if the Hit Result of a rifle shot against an NPC would normally kill him outright, and the GM wants that NPC to provide important information, then the injury should still be mortal, but just not instantly so.

## Combat Example

Here's a sample combat to show how a combat using these rules might actually run.

Using the statistics from *Watchers of the Dragon*, suppose Seeker was caught in an alley by Iron and Gold. Seeker has a DEX of 29 and a SPD of 7; Gold, a DEX of 25 and a SPD of 5; and Iron, a DEX of 22 and a SPD of 5. For the sake of simplicity, nobody is surprised, and Iron and Gold have their swords ready (as they always do when they're working or expecting a fight) but Seeker doesn't have his (one of the problems one faces when one's Powers are bought through a Focus).

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For simplicity, Hit Locations will not be used.

On Segment 12, Seeker goes first, but Holds his Phase; he doesn't really want to fight right now (he has better things to do with his time). Gold and Iron both take their Phases to activate their Array. The GM rules that their Array uses a PER Roll of each other as their Hit Results. Gold's base PER Roll is 13, and Iron's is 12; since they're standing right next to each other and aren't making any wide, obvious moves, no modifiers are applied. Since each sibling has a 2d6 Aid to DEX, the GM consults the Hit Result Table and finds that Gold gets 7 character points of DEX, and Iron gets 6. Each sibling actually gains 2 points of DEX to aid CV, and Gold has a leftover point for her next Array attempt.

Seeker goes on Segment 2, but again Holds his Phase. He's not sure what the siblings are up to, but he wants to be ready for anything.

On Segment 3, the siblings again activate their Array; they want the maximum possible advantage against Seeker. Iron gets another 6 character points for 2 points of DEX (only for OCV/DCV), and Gold gets another 7 points for the same purpose, though she's limited to 5 because of the maximum on her Aid. Both siblings, have now achieved their maximum of 12 character points, or +4 DEX. Gold is now at 29 DEX, and Iron at 26 DEX, for the purposes of determining CV.

Seeker again goes on Segment 4, again Holding his Phase. He only now starts to wonder if this may have been a mistake, but he wants to see what his two opponents are up to.

On Segment 5, Gold may either Hold her Phase to Coordinate with Iron, or try some other maneuver. She chooses to use the Light of Gold, a power of her enchanted Sword of Gold and Blood, to Flash Seeker and hopefully set the hero up for an attack from her brother. Her base OCV (with her Aided DEX) is 10, and she has +2 Levels with her Multipower for a total of 12. Seeker uses his Held Phase to Dodge; with his base DCV of 10 and two applicable Levels (his two Combat Skill Levels with Hand-to-hand Combat don't apply against ranged attacks) in addition to +5 DCV from this maneuver, he has a total DCV of 17. Gold's Hit Result is 6; she misses.

Iron, seeing Seeker easily avoid his sister's attack, decides to try the Reaping Technique from Red Banner Kung Fu (a Sacrifice Throw). His base OCV is 9; he gets +2 to that for the maneuver, for a total of 11. Against Seeker's current DCV of 17, this gives Iron a Hit Result of 5. He misses badly; because of the nature of the Reaping Technique, he also falls to the ground.

Now, on Segment 6, it's Seeker's Phase. The twosome seem dependent on their swords,

so he decides to try to Disarm them both at the same time with a Sweep. He has four Combat Skill Levels he can put into this. He puts them all into OCV. With a base OCV of 10, -1 for the Disarm maneuver, and -2 for Sweeping the attack against two characters, he has a total OCV of 11. Gold's DCV is 10, making Seeker's Hit Result a 12; since his Disarm has 50 STR, he gets 8 BODY to Disarm her, compared to her 3 BODY to hold on to her weapon. Iron's DCV, because he is prone, is halved from its base of 9 down to 5, +1 for his maneuver for 6, giving Seeker a Hit Result of 16. Seeker gets 16 BODY to Disarm Iron, who defends with 5 BODY. Both siblings are now disarmed, and their swords go flying -- using the alternate rule for distance, the Sword of Iron and Blood goes 5" away, and the Sword of Gold and Blood 2" in the same direction.

On Segment 7, Seeker goes again. Evaluating the situation, he knows Gold is probably the greater threat, but Iron is at enough of a disadvantage that he should be able to make short work of him. Again putting his four CSLs into OCV, he performs a Kick against his fallen opponent. With a -2 penalty for the maneuver, he has an OCV of 12. Iron Aborts to block the blow with the Placid Stream of Kun Lieh (a Martial Block); with a base OCV of 9, +2 Skill Levels, +2 for the maneuver, and -1 for being prone, he gets an OCV of 13, barely enough to successfully Block Seeker's attack.

On Segment 8, Gold runs the 2" to where the Sword of Gold and Blood has gone down, and retrieves it. (Iron has already Aborted his Phase.)

On Segment 9, it's Seeker's Phase again. Since Gold isn't even nearby, he chooses Iron as his target again, this time Punching him, again putting all four of his CSLs into OCV. This time, since there's no OCV penalty for the maneuver, he gets an OCV of 14; Iron again Aborts his Phase to block, but this time it isn't enough. Iron's base DCV is 9, +2 for his maneuver for 11, but halved because he's down for a final total of 6. Seeker's Hit Result is 19 -- a critical hit! His 10 DC attack does 60 STUN and 20 BODY. Iron has 18 PD (including his armor), so takes only 42 STUN and 2 BODY. He also takes 11" of Knockback, sending him 6" past his own sword and doing 5 DC of damage when he hits; this comes to 19 STUN and 5 BODY, of which only 1 more STUN gets through. Now at -8 STUN, Iron is Stunned, groggy, and unable to act, but not completely unconscious.

On Segment 10, it's Gold's turn. (Her brother's Knockback puts him out of range for the Array she had with him, so her DEX goes back down to 25.) She runs back to Seeker, swinging her sword in the Hammering Fist of Sun Peng (a Martial Strike). To her base OCV of

at least peripherally, in every adventure.) Use the average of the "leftover" Experience Point totals since the Event's last occurrence.

### FIND WEAKNESS

Find Weakness may appear at first glance to fit in the category of Activations, but it doesn't really. It is modified not only by Lack of Weakness, but by many of the same things that can affect regular Skills as well.

### CHARACTER SHEETS

The statistics used from *Watchers of the Dragon* can be found beginning on page 10 for Seeker, and page 46 for Iron and Gold.

**SEEKER'S CHOKE HOLD**

On Seeker's character sheet as published in *Watchers of the Dragon*, the damage for his Choke Hold is listed as 2d6 NND. This is an error which does not take into account the extra Damage Classes for his Martial Arts. The 3½d6 NND given here is correct.

8, she gets +2 Skill levels, for a total of 10. After his own Martial Punch maneuver, Seeker's DCV is 12, giving Gold a Hit Result of 9. Gold's sword, with STR and extra DCs from her maneuver added in, does 10 DC Killing Damage (3d6+1 in the old system), doing 6 BODY and 6 STUN. Seeker has no resistant defenses, and so takes full damage. (His Pain Resistance [Damage Reduction] would normally reduce the STUN to 4, but he must take no less STUN than BODY damage.) Though Seeker is badly cut, the pain from the cut is minimal, and he's able to go on normally.

When Iron's Phase comes around, he Recovers from being Stunned, and takes a Recovery. With his 10 REC, he's at 2 STUN, and 2 END to match. He's still groggy and unable to act in this Phase, but he is aware enough to know that Gold has injured Seeker, and conscious enough to be fully aware of what's about to happen.

Segment 11 is Seeker's next Phase. Trying to end this quickly, he puts all his Levels into OCV for a Punch against Gold. To his base OCV of 10, he adds his 4 Skill Levels for a total of 14. Gold tries to buy some time by Aborting her Phase to Dodge (since Red Banner Kung Fu has no Martial Dodge, she has to use a conventional Dodge), making her DCV 11. Seeker still has a Hit Result of 14, which gives his attack 40 STUN and 12 BODY; after Gold's defenses (including Armor), she takes 22 STUN and no BODY. This is enough to Stun her.

Seeker gets another Phase on Segment 12 and, noticing Gold's status, decides to dispatch her quickly with a Choke Hold. He puts two of his Levels into OCV and two into DC. His base OCV of 10 is modified by -2 for the maneuver and +2 by his Levels, leaving it at 10; Gold's DCV, since she is Stunned, is at half her base value without bonuses for Levels and her last maneuver, which gives her a 4. Seeker's Hit Result is 17. His Choke Hold would normally do 3½d6 NND (he applies his Extra DC to increase the damage, rather than the STR of the Choke Hold's Grab). Since he's put two Skill Levels into increasing damage, he gets 4 dice, which totals 22 STUN against Gold. She doesn't have the needed defense, so she goes to -14 STUN and passes out.

Also on Segment 12, Gold and Iron get their Phases. Gold Recovers enough to be no longer fully unconscious (she's now at -6 STUN); Iron Holds his Phase, not wanting to spend the END that an attack or other major activity would cost but at the same time not wanting to drop his guard to take another Recovery.

Everyone gets their Post-12 Recovery. Seeker gets back all the END he's used; Gold gets enough to be actually awake, with

2 STUN (and 1 END to go with it); and Iron gets 10 more STUN and 10 END back, now having 12 of each.

On Turn 2, Segment 2, Seeker goes first. Since Iron is too far away for him to attack, he makes sure Gold is completely out, continuing his Choke Hold against her immobile form, putting all of his Skill Levels into Damage Class. Since her DCV is 0, he gets full damage with 4½ DC, for 27 STUN. She's out, but good.

In Iron's eyes, Seeker is abusing his sister, but since she isn't really badly hurt, he doesn't check to go Enraged (mere infuriation is enough). Instead, when his Phase comes around on Segment 3, he Leaps to where his sword lay -- about 6" from his current location, and about 5" from where Seeker is -- and picks it up.

This puts Iron in range for Seeker to attack when his Phase comes around on Segment 4. Seeker runs to Iron (exactly a Half Move for him) and attempts to Throw him to the ground, using his own velocity plus Iron's leaping velocity. To his base OCV of 10, Seeker adds all four of his Skill Levels, for a total of 14; Iron's DCV is 7, but he (like his sister did before) attempts to Dodge, giving him a total DCV of 10. Seeker's Hit Result is 15. His own 10" of movement is added to Iron's 7", and the whole is divided by 3 for a final result of 6 DC, plus 8 DC for the base damage for a total of 14 DC. He does 63 STUN and 20 BODY, which gives (after Iron's defenses) 45 STUN and 2 BODY; this knocks Iron fully unconscious as well as to the ground. Seeker is then free to apply some first aid to his injury, call the police, tie up the siblings, and so on.

**Proportional Hits**

Some GMs may not want to use a diceless method for combat as a whole, but may like the idea of a better Attack Roll resulting in more damage. After all, how often have you seen someone roll an exact hit ("Barely got him!"),

PROPORTIONAL HIT TABLE				
Roll Made By	Normal STUN	Normal BODY	Killing BODY	Killing STUN×
-3	1	0	0.5	1
-2	1.5	0.2	0.65	1
-1	2	0.4	0.8	1
0 (Exact)	2.5	0.6	0.95	1.5
1	3	0.8	1.1	2
2	3.5	1	1.25	2.5
3	4	1.2	1.4	3
4	4.5	1.4	1.55	3.5
5	5	1.6	1.7	4
6	5.5	1.8	1.85	4.5
7+	6	2	2	5



## DIGITAL HERO #1

only to roll in the upper 25% of possible damage? Or rolled a solid hit, only to roll near the minimum damage? The accompanying Proportional Hit Table is based on the Diceless Combat Table.

A miss by 4 or more is an actual miss; misses by 1-3 are glancing blows. The other numbers on the Proportional Hit Table may be applied just as the numbers are on the Diceless Combat Table. Also as with the main chart, the GM may choose to extend the chart up and/or down (especially down) as desired.

### Consequences

Any wholesale change to the *HERO System* has consequences, whether intended or unintended, and the GM should be aware of what might happen before he introduces a new way of doing things. Here are some things to consider before adopting these rules.

### MENTAL POWERS

Most Mental Powers not only operate against ECV, but also use a character's EGO to determine their effect. Thus, if the target has a low (or even average) EGO, it's relatively easy for a powerful mentalist to completely dominate him. And, in many campaigns, most non-mentalist PCs have EGO scores of 10 or so.

One thing you can do is encourage your players to take higher than average EGO scores. Superheroes typically have stronger wills than the average person anyway; after all, most people, even given special equipment and/or superhuman powers, wouldn't go out and fight crime, especially if the criminals had similarly powerful (or even more powerful) equipment and/or powers. It really does take a special kind of person to do that, and even if the character doesn't have that kind of will to begin with, he'll learn it quickly enough.

Another question to ask in this regard is, "How often do the PCs go against mentalist villains, anyway?" If every other supervillain team has a mentalist, the PCs should eventually develop at least a *little* Mental Defense, if only from the practice of resisting those mentalists. If you want to use these rules but are concerned about Mental Powers being too powerful, accept any good justification for a character to have (or develop) Mental Defense. The same idea goes for increased EGO; characters may develop stronger wills just by being exposed to Mental Powers, or at least learn some 5-point Skill Levels with DECV.

*The Ultimate Mentalist* has rules for "incremental" versions of some Mental Powers (Mind Control, Mind Scan, and Telepathy). These increase the ability of a mentalist who "misses," but decrease the ability of one who hits, and hits (if only glancing blows) are much

more frequent using this diceless system than in the standard combat system. You might consider integrating those rules with the ones in this article.

If you really want to, you may develop a separate combat chart for Mental Powers, narrowing the field of success. Success could start at 11 in this case, and increment until 18 for maximum effect. Alternately, simply assign a -3 to the Hit Result of all Mental Powers.

Then again, some GMs may feel Mental Powers aren't powerful enough. If you agree, use the Diceless Combat rules exactly as written.

### AREA OF EFFECT AND EXPLOSION ATTACKS AGAINST ADJACENT HEXES

In the *HERO System*, hexes have DCV 3, unless it's adjacent to the attacker's own hex, in which case a hex has DCV 0. Under the Diceless System, Hit Results are almost always at or near the maximum damage when used against adjacent hexes (unless, of course, the attack is also has the *No Range* Limitation; those are declared as Hit Result 13).

In most cases, this is of relatively little consequence. Most Area Of Effect and Explosion attacks affect the attacker as well as the intended targets, unless the Power also has the *Personal Immunity* Advantage. Even so, if that Advantage is on the Power, it may mean the number of dice in the attack so low it won't be nearly as strong as it seems.

There are some exceptions to this. It's true Radius is the most common form of Area Of Effect, and the target hex for such an area is almost always the center hex. However, other forms of Area Of Effect — and sometimes even Radius, with the GM's permission — may be built to allow the attacker to target an adjacent hex without including himself in the affected area.

The GM should consider (based at least in part on the Special Effect) how to handle this situation. He may declare, either for all Area Of Effect and Explosion attacks or only for those that can target an adjacent hex without affecting the character, that all hexes — including the one the character is standing in — have DCV 3 for an attack like this, or declare that the attack always takes a Hit Result of 13.

### COMBAT SKILL LEVELS

Increasing damage based on accuracy (whether with the full diceless system or just the proportional hits table) tends to mean skill has as much effect on the damage a character inflicts as his raw power does. You may or may not find this desirable. After all, a single 2-point Combat Skill Level with a single attack can lead to causing more damage than adding 5 points to increase the attack's DCs. Moreover, more

expensive CSLs can add to multiple forms of attack, increasing their utility (and the character's effectiveness). GMs should consider this issue carefully, and perhaps impose limits on the number of CSLs a character can have, or how he can use them.

For example, you might rule that a +1 OCV requires *two* Combat Skill Levels instead of just one (at least, beyond a certain point). You could also make all CSLs cost END, or disallow the application of Skill Levels for increased damage, even for hand-to-hand combat. You could also restructure the cost for Skill Levels altogether, either giving a flat cost increase or increasing the cost just for Combat Skill Levels.

The GM should *not* allow a player to try to spend just enough Combat Skill Levels on accuracy to reach an 18 Hit Result against the target, and then apply the rest in increased Damage Classes. Short of having special senses specifically for the purpose, the character would have no way to know how skill he needs to guarantee a maximum Hit Result against a particular target. Characters with CSLs should declare how they want to apply them *before* consulting the Diceless Combat Table.

### **EXTREME DCV-OCV DIFFERENCES**

The basic math behind it is both sound and undeniable: if an attacker's OCV is four or more points less than the defender's DCV, then the defender is effectively untouchable. Take, for example, a "slow" brick with a DEX of 18 (for an OCV of 6) fighting a truly fast martial artist with a DEX of 30 (for a DCV of 10, *not* counting any bonuses for Martial Arts maneuvers). While the brick could get in a lucky punch under the traditional system, there is no way for him to make contact with the martial artist under this diceless system, at least with the basic rules as described above.

This is where the brick's player has to get creative. After all, even in the comics (on which the *HERO System* was originally based, in part), those slower, high-strength super-types rarely get in even a "lucky" shot against opponents that are considerably more agile. More often, they have to rely on clever tricks to make contact, and that's what's recommended here.

Some "brick tricks" and other tactics that can neutralize, or minimize, this "weakness" are:

- **Teamwork:** Since role-playing games are (generally) a group activity, some teamwork should be in order. For example, an energy projector or gadget-user could Flash the brick's foe, or even trade opponents altogether. In fact, this should be the first thing that occurs to your players!
- **Weapons of Opportunity:** Super-strong characters are infamous for using items in the landscape as impromptu weapons, such

as throwing cars or swinging telephone poles. This can often provide OCV bonuses and/or the equivalent of the *Area Of Effect* Advantage to STR attacks.

- **Combat Modifiers:** There are certain things that even a brick can do, such as take a Phase to Set, that can increase OCV. (Granted, the Set maneuver only increases OCV by 1, but in this case every little bit helps!) Slower non-brick characters in this type of situation can do this trick as well.
- **Fake-Out:** The disadvantaged character can always attempt a feint, pretend to be knocked out, or do something else to set up a surprise attack. This can give an OCV bonus or sometimes even trick the enemy into dropping his guard altogether.
- **Shockwave:** Some GMs may allow, either as a universal "brick trick" or as a separately-purchased Power, a "shockwave" effect in which the brick character strikes the ground to knock over everyone standing nearby — and a prone target is an easier target.
- **Victory by Attrition:** If the brick is tough enough, he could just let his foe attack, doing all he can to soak up damage and Recover it. He could even use Acting to make it look like he's trying to make contact with the martial artist, while he's actually conserving END. This will wear the martial artist out, hopefully making him an easier target.

In short, if a player with a brick (or otherwise slow) character gets pounded this way, suggest that he use some creativity. If he fails to do so, he probably deserves what he gets!

### **Conclusion**

Obviously, not everyone wants diceless combat rules. Many gamers love rolling dice, and there's certainly nothing wrong with that! Whether your goal is ease of use, speed, simpler math, realism, or something else, only you can know whether these rules will help your group.

The bottom line, of course, is that you should use this system (and modify or adapt it) only if it helps you have fun. After all, that's what gaming is all about!



# Science Hero: Clinging

by Jeff Kesselman

## Science!

Scientific phenomena are all around us and effect us all the time in our daily lives. Without the force of gravity, our soda would not pour out of its can. Without the rules of balance, we could not walk. Without friction, car wheels would just spin in place without moving anywhere.

As GMs, we are called upon to simulate a believable world. When the hero tips over a can of gasoline and expects it to pour out, he is counting on us to understand the physics inherent in that action. The better we understand the science of the real world, the more exciting, vivid, and realistic we can make our fantastic game worlds.

This article series examines the scientific implications of various *HERO System* powers. This is certainly not the only way to view them. In some cases, there may even be reasonable, conflicting scientific interpretations. The idea of all of this is not to tell the GM what he should do, but just present another way of looking at gamemastering that may enrich your play.

## Gravity and Forces in Opposition

Sir Isaac Newton first enumerated the basic laws of motion in everyday life. Those laws are:

1. An object in uniform motion remains in that uniform motion until acted on by an unbalanced force.
2. The relationship between an object's mass  $m$ , its acceleration  $a$ , and the applied force  $F$  is  $F = ma$ .
3. For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.

The first law means that it takes the application of a force to change the motion of an object. If you threw a ball in a vacuum with no gravity or other forces acting on that ball, the ball would continue forever at the speed and in the direction with which it left your hand. (The vacuum is necessary because anything rubbing against the ball, even air, produces the force commonly known as friction, which will slow the ball down.)

The second law describes how forces affect the motion of an object. Acceleration is a measure of change in the speed and/or direction of motion of an object. The most interesting part of this for us is just the fact that the function is multiplicative. This means that if you double the mass, it takes twice as much force to produce the same acceleration. This is why a massive slow moving object can be harder to stop than a light fast moving one. Although there is more acceleration in the light object, there is more

mass in the big one, and force is the product of both of these quantities.

The third law means that as you push forward on the ball, the ball pushes backwards on you with the same force. Because your mass is so much larger than the ball, the force does not produce nearly the acceleration in you that it does on the ball, but the effect is always there. If an astronaut in a weightless vacuum throws that ball, you can see a slight backward motion of the astronaut in response. This fact will become important when we examine Flight.

Newton also identified the force of gravity in everyday life. This is the force that keeps us on the planet, and keeps the moon in orbit around us. Newton's Universal Law of Gravitation is:

Every object in the universe attracts every other object with a force directed along the line of centers for the two objects that is proportional to the product of their masses and inversely proportional to the square of the separation between the two objects.

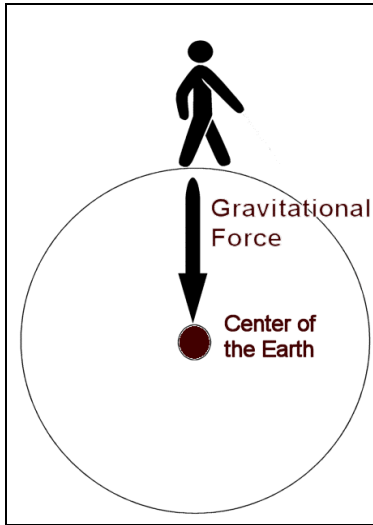
This means that big objects attract things strongly, small objects attract them weakly, and big objects attract big objects stronger than they attract small objects. Additionally, this effect falls off quickly the further you get from the other object. This is why we are attracted to the surface of the Earth when standing on it. (Actually we are attracted to the center of the Earth, but the surface stops us. This seemingly trivial point will come up again when examining Desolidification.) It is also why the Moon is still attracted enough to the Earth to stay in orbit when astronauts much closer to the Earth are effectively weightless. The Moon is **much** more massive than the astronaut.

These four basic laws of physics will prove key in the analysis of many *HERO System* powers.

## CLINGING

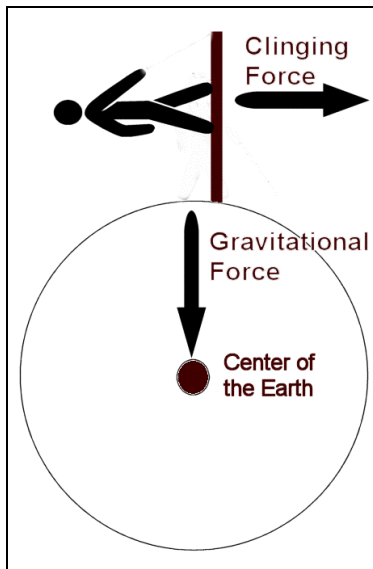
The Power *Clinging* is described as allowing a player to “cling to walls and sheer surfaces and move on them as if they were level.” What does this really mean?

Normal folks like you and I are acted on primarily by the force of gravity created by the mass of the Earth. It always pulls us towards the center of the Earth, but we stop when we hit the solid surface. As a result we seem to “stick” to the ground and will fall towards it if we are lifted above it.



This is something we all assume in our daily lives without thinking much about it. But now lets look at the situation our “clinger” is in.

In his case, he has a force attracting him to the surface he is Clinging on. This is true whether he is a gecko using minute forces related to charges on tiny objects, or a cat burglar using suction cups to harness the forces of air pressure.



Note however that the Clinging force is perpendicular to the force of gravity. As such, neither directly affects the other. The Clinging force keeps the figure against the wall but does nothing to stop him from being pulled down towards the center of the Earth. How then does the gecko or cat burglar climb?

The answer is a third force, the force of friction. Because the figure's feet are pulled against the wall, friction is created between the figure and the wall. The force of friction is along the line of contact — where his feet meet the wall. In other words, along the same line as the gravitational force.

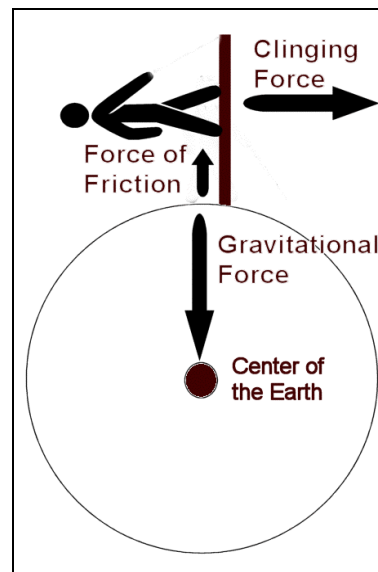
If the Clinging force is sufficient, and the surface not too slippery, the friction generated is

enough to counteract the force of gravity. This friction force also adequately explains the reduced Knockback a clinger experiences. Just as the friction counteracts the force of gravity, it will counteract some of the force of a Knockback, which also generally occurs along the plane of contact.

Unfortunately this alone does not quite explain the power as described. Remember that the power description says the clinger may “move on them as if they were level.” The problem is that, while the force of friction applies a counteracting force to gravity at the clinger's shoes, this force does not effect the rest of his body. Thus the clinger must either exert physical strength to keep his body upright or cling close to the wall in order to decrease the mechanical leverage effect of his body on his Clinging feet. This is why geckos are built low and long, and why cat burglars use hand and foot suction cups and stay as close to the wall as possible.

It simply is not possible for someone with Clinging as we have so far described to move as a normal person. To create that effect we need either another force that counteracts the effect of gravity on the rest of the clinger's body, or the ability to nullify the force of gravity directly.

How Clinging actually functions is up to you as a judge but keep in mind that, for it to work as described takes more than simple suction cups or other devices to make the clinger's feet stick. It actually takes two forces, one effectively neutralizing gravity and another pushing the clinger's feet against a surface, to produce some measure of friction.



# The Care and Feeding of Pregens

by Rodney Ruff

## The Case for Pregens

One of the great things about the *HERO System* is that players can create the characters they want to play without the element of chance. The arrangement of Powers, Skills, and Talents in a point system allows them to build characters without relying on random dice rolls. This allows for greater character development, as it is possible to begin with a character's origin and develop the abilities that go with it instead of receiving them randomly and creating an origin to justify them.

The downside is the amount of time it takes to choose a character's Powers, Skills, and Talents. Building a character from scratch may require as much as an hour for experienced players, and even longer for new players. After creating the character, further modification is often necessary to fit the GM's rules and scenario, requiring still more time. Neither situation encourages players new to the system or those eager to start playing without a lot of waiting around.

One way around this problem is to use pregenerated characters, or pregens. These are characters supplied by the GM for the players' use in his adventure or campaign. Pregens let players start playing the game as soon as they familiarize themselves with the characters and the scenario they will be played in. New players learn the rules through playing the game, so they can then create more playable characters of their own.

The biggest advantage of pregens for the GM is convenience. The process of creating adventures, especially for relatively inexperienced GMs, takes a lot of time and research. Like his players, the GM expects a certain amount of success from his efforts; he should enjoy running the adventure as much as his players enjoy playing it. If a PC stomps his well-crafted idea into the ground in the first five seconds or gets iced just as fast, he isn't likely to have a good time. The use of well-designed pregens can avoid this.

Probably the biggest use of pregens occurs in convention games. Usually, a GM running an adventure at a con has to schedule a table in advance for a fixed length of time and then clear out for the next GM's game. Time spent in creating and approving characters cuts into the amount of available playing time. Furthermore, at conventions many players play a new role-playing game for the first time; they can't create characters if they don't know how to create them.

Even when the players do know how to create characters, hastily created and approved characters are likely to have 20d6 Energy Blasts and only a 4 PD and ED, or a slew of Advantages and Limitations which neither the player nor the GM immediately understands the consequences of. Having an assortment of pregens available gives the GM a group of characters who will each contribute to the adventure and give each player a chance to contribute to the group's overall enjoyment through the character he plays.

Pregens have several other advantages:

### ALLOWING NEW PLAYERS INTO A CAMPAIGN

Even among an established group of players, regular infusions of new blood are needed to keep a campaign going strong. New players can bring enthusiasm to a tired campaign, or they can just as easily bring ruin to a well-established campaign. Pregens let players who show up for just one night's play get into the scenario and have a good time; those who don't like it can back out without having risked very much. Those players interested in playing on a regular basis get to try out the scenario before committing to it, while the GM gets to see whether those players will fit in with his group or not.

### TRYING OUT NEW SCENARIOS

Sometimes, the GM and players need a break from their regular campaign. Perhaps the serious tone of the campaign has been wearing on the players, or the players just need a vacation from the campaign city. Maybe the GM has a scenario idea outside the purview of his current campaign that he just can't wait to try out, or maybe one of the players in the group would like to try his hand at GMing for the night.

If the new scenario is a one-shot idea that the players' current characters won't fit in with, it isn't fair to expect them to create characters they'll use only once and discard. Providing the players with ready-made characters lets them try out the new scenario without a lot of preparation; if the scenario works, they can either adopt the pregens as their own characters or create ones more to their liking.

## **TRYING OUT NEW RULES**

This goes hand-in-hand with trying out new scenarios, as many of them, such as underwater combat or travel to the spirit plane, require special rules. Other settings, such as a Golden Age or futuristic campaign, use the same basic rules as a modern-day campaign, but may interpret them differently. In such cases, it's often easier for the GM to provide pregens for the players to get them into the game than it is to impose unfamiliar rules on them and expect them to create effective characters under those rules.

This also relates to bringing new players into a campaign, as each player and GM has his own interpretation of the *HERO System* rules. Playing pregenerated characters lets new players become familiar with the GM's house rules and also lets them decide after a night's play if they're comfortable with those rules or not. If so, they can later create their own characters under the house rules; if not, they can simply move on to another group they're more comfortable with.

Sometimes, the GM may want to try out a new player's ideas in an adventure. Here again, the use of pregens can give the other players in the group a chance to try out the new rules without requiring them to commit to any more than a night's play session.

## **TRYING OUT NEW GAMING STYLES**

One piece of advice given in the original Hero writer's guidelines was "Don't assume everyone plays *Champions* the same way you do." Playing with a number of different gaming groups reinforces how true that statement is. Each gamer I've met has a different take on the *HERO System* rules, and I try to learn something from everyone I play with. I'm not always able to use every new idea or approach myself, but I can put some of those I like into my pregens and let my players try them out for me.

## **Sources for Pregens**

Where do you get pregenerated characters from? There are two places: anywhere and everywhere. In practical terms, there are five sources, listed below.

## **YOUR PERSONAL COLLECTION**

Nearly every serious gamer has accumulated a large number of characters he has created and played at some time in the past. Any of these characters can become a pregen for someone else to play, depending on the character and adventure in question.

## **OTHER PLAYERS' CHARACTERS**

As imaginative as any gamer might be, there are always character conceptions he may not have thought of but someone else has. GMs who routinely obtain reference copies of the player-made characters in their campaigns have a ready-made stock of pregens to draw from for future adventures. (These characters can also be played as NPCs if the players who created them aren't able to attend a session or two.) GMs who don't get reference copies can either rely on other players to provide pregens for a night's adventure or ask friends who have characters they particularly admire for copies in advance.

(Of course, when using someone else's character as a pregen, it's only right to give that person credit for the original character, either verbally or in writing somewhere on the character sheet.)

## **PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED HERO CHARACTERS**

Hero Games has published a considerable number of supplemental modules for its gaming system, with several hundred characters either ready-to-play or easily modified by changing a few Powers, Disadvantages, special effects, or details of the character's origin. In a pinch, character stats can just be photocopied out of the book, names changed, incompatible Disadvantages struck out, and handed to the players as pregens.

Even when a set of stats can't be readily modified, the rest of the character write-up can form the basis of a usable pregen. For example, a Golden Age American Eagle can readily be created by changing a couple of Powers and special effects in the write-up of the modern-day version in *Champions Universe*. Although no stats exist for his sidekick Winger, the write-up of the modern Eagle provides enough information about his days as Winger to produce a credible character: he was a foolhardy dreamer lucky enough to have his hero come to his rescue and adopt him.

Using this information, I built Winger for my World War II adventure Operation: Catapult, giving him 3d6 Luck (since scaled down to 2d6) with Regeneration linked to it to represent his foolhardy nature. For offensive abilities, I gave him a scaled-back version of the Hand-to-Hand Attack and Missile Deflection with batons that I gave to American Eagle I, along with generic Martial Arts skills to represent his lesser abilities and quick training. (I also gave him a crush on another pregen, Victory Girl, a Golden Age throwback of Victrix from *Champions Universe*.)

## DIGITAL HERO #1

### CHARACTERS FROM OTHER SOURCES

This includes both characters converted from other game systems to *HERO System* rules and characters from such other media as books, comics, movies, television, radio, and video games. This category forms the backbone for such games as my friend Jon Burleson's "Big Brawls" competition, where characters from various genres meet in a battle royal to determine the victor.

This category is a convenient source for pregens when the players are new to the *HERO System*; however, among more knowledgeable players, disagreements are likely to occur about how to write up a non-Hero character under *HERO System* rules. My own approach to this problem is to create knock-offs of familiar characters I particularly like, but to make them different enough from the original character to prevent any arguments about faithfulness to the genre.

### YOUR OWN IMAGINATION

Sometimes, the right kind of character for a scenario has to be created from scratch. However, your imagination is likely to be influenced by one or more of the above sources, as well as your interests outside of gaming; the more knowledge you have in these sources, the more you can shape them to your own ideas.

Here is a partial list of sources of inspiration for my "original" pregens: Jon Burleson, the *Champions* 4th Edition hardcover, *Champions Universe*, the movie *Chandu the Magician*, Cliff Christiansen (co-author of *VIPER* and *Murderer's Row*), *Classic Organizations*, *The Coriolis Effect*, country music, DC Comics, Doc Savage, *Enemies for Hire*, *The Fly*, *Golden Age Champions*, Greek mythology, the APA-zine *Haymaker!*, *Heavy Metal*, Robert Heinlein's *Time Enough for Love*, Marvel Comics, *Phantom 2040*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, Jack Vance, and the World Wrestling Federation.

### **Creating Pregens**

Creating pregens is really not much different than creating either player characters or NPCs. The process is the same; the only difference is that pregens are created for someone else to play. Pregens should be simple enough for the person playing the character to understand the game mechanics but interesting enough to give the player a starting point to role-play the character to the best of his ability. In short, create the kind of characters to play as pregens that you would play yourself.

Powers should be fairly straightforward, but not to the point where all the pregens are carbon copies of each other. Powers should be geared to the level you are most comfortable with as the

GM and should be roughly equal in damage class among the characters. Any Powers you don't feel comfortable with or would seriously disrupt your adventure should not be used; those that might be disruptive but also interest you can be given sufficient Limitations to restrict their effectiveness.

Powers can be "flavored" with Advantages and Limitations, but neither should be overused. I restrict myself to no more than three Advantages or Limitations on a given Power for my own characters, and for pregens, two is probably a better maximum. Limitations should be limiting, but should also be playable. Certain combinations of Limitations, such as extra END and Activation rolls, should be avoided if they limit the character excessively. Many Limitations can be replaced with more playable Limitations that retain the character's basic flavor even though they increase a Power's Real Cost, such as putting a Burnout roll on DEX bought through a Focus to represent the Focus' clumsiness instead of making it cost extra END.

Give each pregen a fair amount of Skills for its conception. Allow a certain amount of overlap — two characters with Paramedic on the team are better than one — but don't outfit everyone with the same Skills. Likewise, don't give all the game-critical Skills to one character — and certainly *not* to an NPC hero. Be prepared to be flexible with the Skills the characters possess if no one in the party has the precise Skill needed at a given moment.

Defenses and movement should be character-appropriate. As a general rule, I make the character's Physical Defense and Energy Defense the same for simplicity's sake (laziness), so that the player subtracts the same amount from either a physical or energy attack. I went one step further with my World War II adventure pregens and made the DEF values (including Mental Defense) divisible by 5 to make the subtraction even easier.

Some GMs present their pregens as "works-in-progress," either providing an unfinished template for the player to add Powers and Skills to, or allowing the player to make minor changes to a completed character. This approach works best for pregens with Variable Power Pools, but the GM should also provide a "standard" pool for players who wish to play such a character "as is." Less-experienced GMs who don't wish to take the time involved in approving modifications to pregens should not use this option.

Try to use as few abbreviations on the character sheet as possible (e.g., write out "Energy Blast" instead of abbreviating it "EB") and be ready to explain the abbreviations you did use. It also helps to write out the special effect next to the Power; "Blinding Visage" is a lot

## CHARACTER TRIVIA

One of the things I do with my pregens is to include a trivia question related to the character at the bottom of the character history. At convention games, if a player answers his character's question correctly, I give him a token prize. (If the player misses the question, I give him an even cheesier token prize.)

easier to understand than “Sight Group Flash 2d6, Explosion, Damage Shield.” If you use Hero Creator to create your characters, you can use either the Label or Notes features to describe the Power's special effect.

A written origin should accompany the character sheet; a page is sufficient to communicate the character's background to the player and provide the basis for role-playing. A visual depiction of the character is nice, too, as many players, such as myself, like to envision the character in action as they play. If you don't have the skill as either writer or artist to do this, enlist the help of someone in your gaming group who does have those talents. (This is another way to make the “buddy” player in your group a more active participant.)

Last and most important of all, put yourself into your pregens. If you like a certain character type and it's appropriate to adventure, write it up as a pregen. If you have an interest in a particular subject, work it into the pregen's background; chances are one of your players shares that interest. If you're of a satirical bent, let it come out in your character origins and in the way you run the adventure. By sharing yourself this way, you draw the players into your campaign world; if you're having fun, you're inviting them to have fun as well.

## Running Pregens

Pregens can help to simplify the running of an adventure. Although creating them requires more work up-front for you as the GM, they let you do much of his preparation work to run the adventure sooner. If you already know the DEX and SPD of all the characters in your adventure, you can prepare the combat record sheet as soon as the characters are created instead of filling it out at the start of the game.

You can further design your pregens to make running combat easier. Most GMs I've played under prefer to establish which of two or more characters with the same DEX gets to go first on a given Phase once at the outset of combat instead of each and every Phase those characters act on. I went a step further when I created my pregens for Operation: Catapult; no more than two characters each have the same DEX (except for DEX 18, where I have four), and I used SPD as a determining factor when two characters with the same DEX had different SPDs. If I used all 20 heroes and villains in the game, I'd only need four DEX roll-offs to resolve the order of combat.

Also, since you built the characters, you should know them well enough to build in opportunities for them to either shine or screw up during the adventure. One of the pregens I used in Operation: Catapult is an adaptation of Martin

Maenza's character Flame of Justice. Based on Martin's original write-up, I decided that the Flame of Justice should experience a flashback of the Hindenburg disaster every time he heard an explosion, causing him to lose control of his powers.

When I ran the adventure several years ago at a gaming convention in Omaha, this happened while one of the character's teammates was carrying the Flame of Justice and two other teammates groundward under cover of a bombing run. Flame heard one of the bombs explode, triggering his no-range Energy Blast, which singed his teammates into unconsciousness before he finally calmed down. To make matters worse, the team's mystic, Chandella, who was being carried along with him, tried to quiet him with her STUN Drain kiss and failed her attack roll, hitting the third teammate being carried and draining him instead.

However, while you can provide plenty of opportunities to challenge your players through their characters, remember, *they* are the ones playing the characters, not you. You can gently reprove a player playing a character outside of conception (*e.g.*, “Sorry, but Star Mangler just wouldn't do that”), but you should never dictate how any character should be played. As long as the player's approach isn't totally out of line, let him role-play as he sees fit.

The players should also have free choice of which character of the available pregens they play. It's all right to ask a player to play a character you consider important to the adventure or to stretch himself by playing a type of character he's never played before. It's also all right to design a pregen with a particular player in mind whose playing style fits the character. It's not all right, however, to give a player a character he has no affinity for; if a player doesn't want to play a particular character, you can always bring it in as an NPC if it is truly necessary to the adventure.

To allow everyone a choice, there should be more pregens available than there are players. This will also de-emphasize the importance of a particular character to the adventure and encourage a better balance between characters.

The creation and use of pregens requires more work initially on the GM's part in creating interesting and effective characters as well as designing the adventure to put them in. The rewards that the GM and players reap from good pregens justify the effort. They can provide a learning experience for new and long-time players alike, a chance to present and exchange character ideas, and simply a lot of fun — which is what a good game should be.



# DIGITAL HERO #1

## American Eagle I

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
20	STR	10	13-	Lift 400 kg; 4d6 HTH
24	DEX	42	14-	OCV: 8/DCV: 8
28	CON	36	15-	
13	BODY	6	12-	
13	INT	3	12-	PER Roll: 12-
14	EGO	8	12-	ECV: 5
20	PRE	10	13-	PRE Attack: 4d6
18	COM	4		
10	PD	6		Total: 20 PD (10 rPD)
10	ED	4		Total: 20 ED (10 rED)
5	SPD	16		Phases: 3, 5, 8, 10, 12
11	REC	2		
56	END	0		
44	STUN	7		

**Total Characteristics Cost: 154**

<b>Movement:</b>	Running:	6"/12"
	Leaping:	6"/12"
	Gliding:	20"/40"

Cost	Powers	END
6	<i>Baton</i> : HA +4d6 (8d6 total); OAF (-1)	1
9	<i>Baton</i> : Missile Deflection (arrows/projectiles), +4 OCV; OAF (-1)	0
20	<i>Armored Costume</i> : Armor (10 PD/10 ED); OIF (-1/2)	0
13	<i>Glider Cape</i> : Gliding 20"; OIF (-1/2)	0
3	<i>Eye Shields</i> : Sight Group Flash Defense (5 points); OIF (-1/2)	0
4	<i>Eye Lenses</i> : Telescopic Sense (Sight Group), +4 to PER versus Range	0
20	<i>Trusty (If Foolhardy) Kid Sidekick</i> : Follower (Winger), 100-point base	0

### Martial Arts: Commando Training

Maneuver	OCV	DCV	Notes
3 Aikido Throw	+0	+1	6d6+v/5
4 Boxing Cross	+0	+2	8d6 Strike
5 Choke	-2	+0	3d6 NND
4 Judo Disarm	-1	+1	40 STR
5 Kick	-2	+1	10d6 Strike
4 Kung Fu Block	+2	+2	Block
1 Use Art with Clubs			
8 +2 Damage Classes (already added in)			

### Skills

16	+2 with All Combat
1	WF: Rifles

**Total Powers & Skill Cost: 126**

**Total Cost: 280**

### 150+ Disadvantages

15	Hunted: Arson Annie, 8- (Mo Pow, Capture)
20	Hunted: Doctor Qual, 8- (Mo Pow, NCI, Capture)
10	Hunted: U.S. Army Research (More Powerful, NCI, Watching)

20	Psychological Limitation: Code Against Killing (Common, Total)
15	Psychological Limitation: Overprotective of Winger (Common, Strong)
15	Psychological Limitation: Patriotic (Common, Strong)
10	Reputation: patriotic hero, 11-
10	Rivalry: Professional (any flying hero, especially one with wings; Rival is in Superior Position)
15	Social Limitation: Secret Identity (Frequently, Major [if discovered, character will be inconvenienced and exposed to great danger]) (Roger Carter)

**Total Disadvantage Points: 280**

**Background/History:** Roger Carter was among the first to be drafted into the Army in World War II. Shortly after completing basic training, he was assigned to the Nighthawk Project, which was to develop a compact delta-wing glider that could be used to drop men at low altitudes behind enemy lines instead of more visible parachutes.

Unfortunately, funding for the program was cut after an accident in which Roger crash-landed, breaking his ankle and earning himself a medical discharge. However, Roger was convinced that the program had merit, if not as a covert operation, then as the gimmick for a symbol of American morale in the war against the forces of evil. When his ankle healed, he approached his former superiors with his idea and adopted the identity of the American Eagle, perfecting the glider and adapting it into a cape.

In 1943, Roger became the guardian of Steve Hall, whose attempt to duplicate Carter's glider cape almost cost him his life. Steve then became the American Eagle's sidekick Winger. Learning of the armored hero Knight Owl, whose suit included a huge set of powered wings, Roger became obsessed with the idea of developing a lighter, more practical set of wings for his own use and spent his spare moments designing a set of his own. Lacking Knight Owl's technical skills, he never got the idea off paper until long after the war, and tragically, when he did, he severely injured himself, bringing his career as the American Eagle to an end.

**Personality/Motivation:** Although Roger Carter has been taken out of the Army, the Army hasn't been taken out of Roger Carter. He remains as disciplined a man and as dedicated a patriot out of uniform as he did when in uniform. He tends to order his sidekick, Winger, around like a buck private, but is in fact, mainly (and overly) concerned with his charge's welfare. This approach will lead to the eventual dissolution of their partnership during the 1950s.

**SECRET ORIGIN**

American Eagle I is derived from information presented in *Voice of DOOM* and *Champions Universe*, both copyright by Hero Games. The stats for American Eagle I given here differ little from those for American Eagle II on Page 96 of *Champions Universe*, except that Gliding replaces Flight and Missile Deflection is bought through his baton instead of his wings (and accordingly reduced in effectiveness). Roger Carter's military background was created to explain both his having the Martial Arts style of Commando Training and how he acquired his glider cape.

The name "Roger Carter" was chosen to follow the modern Eagle's secret identity of Steve Hall being a corruption of the respective secret identities of Captain America and Hawkman, Steve Rogers and Carter Hall, the heroes the character is a cross between. The description of Roger's physical appearance is intended as what Steve Hall probably looked like in his prime and to allow for the fact that most heroes and sidekicks of the Golden Age looked like father and son, even though most of them weren't.

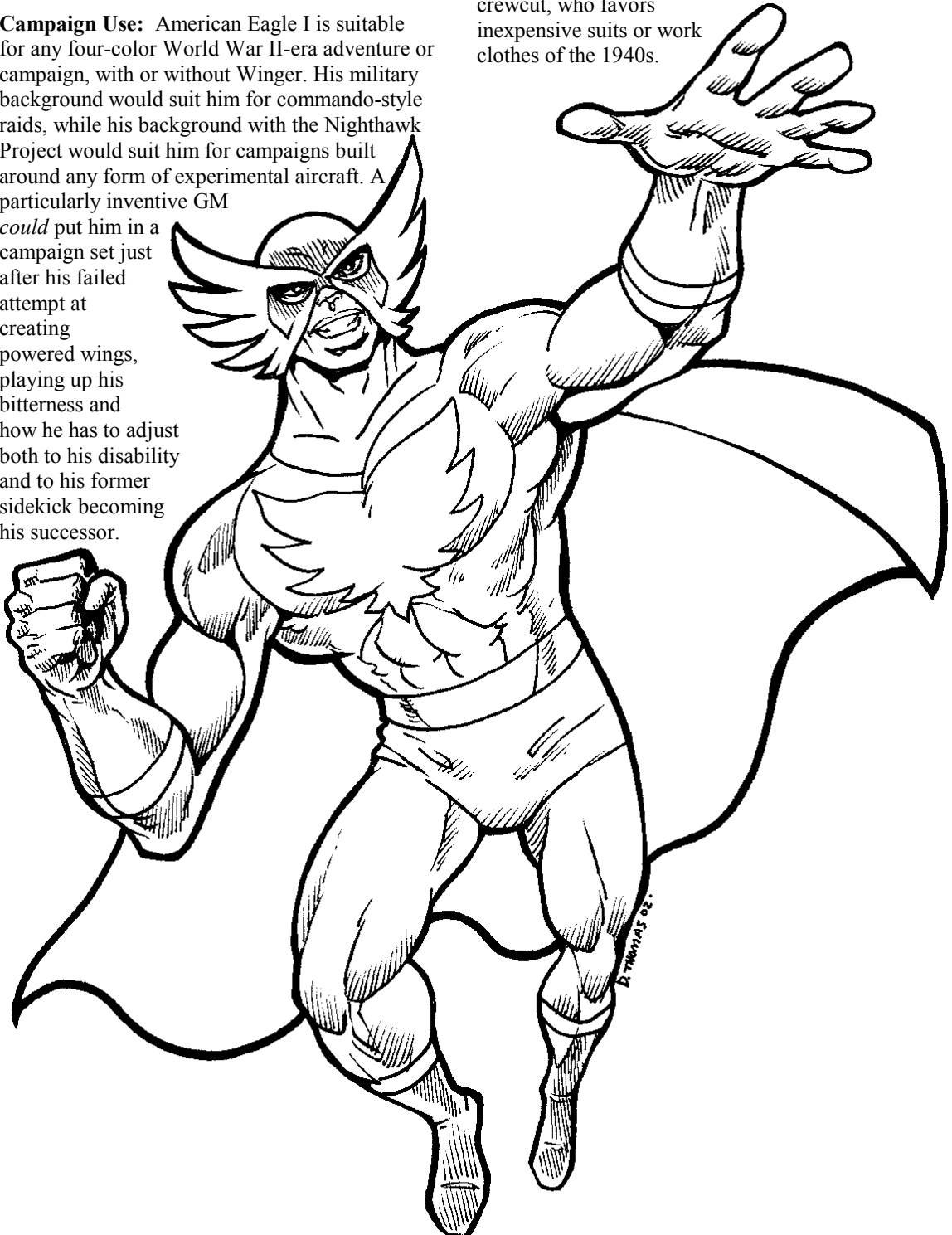
**Quote:** "You can always tell the hero from the villain by his methods."

**Powers/Tactics:** The American Eagle relies on his glider cape for maneuverability and to scout an area from the air before engaging in combat. Once in combat, he will try to soften an opponent up with a Move-By with his batons before relying on his commando training to take them down hard and fast. When Winger is present, however, he will try to shield the boy from deadly attacks, particularly those involving gases.

**Campaign Use:** American Eagle I is suitable for any four-color World War II-era adventure or campaign, with or without Winger. His military background would suit him for commando-style raids, while his background with the Nighthawk Project would suit him for campaigns built around any form of experimental aircraft. A particularly inventive GM could put him in a campaign set just after his failed attempt at creating powered wings, playing up his bitterness and how he has to adjust both to his disability and to his former sidekick becoming his successor.

**Appearance:** The original American Eagle's costume is not much different from that which Winger later wore when he assumed the mantle of his mentor, except that it has an attached collapsible glider cape instead of functional wings. The costume consists of a blue bodyshirt and trunks with a white featherburst on his chest, blue gloves and boots, and red sleeves and leggings. The costume is complemented by a blue helmet-like hood with white wings projecting from it to cover his ears.

Out of costume, Roger is a tall, well-conditioned man with ice-blue eyes and a blonde crewcut, who favors inexpensive suits or work clothes of the 1940s.



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### Winger

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
15	STR	5	12-	Lift 200 kg; 3d6 HTH
23	DEX	39	14-	OCV: 8/DCV: 8
18	CON	16	13-	
11	BODY	2	11-	
13	INT	3	12-	PER Roll: 12-
11	EGO	2	12-	ECV: 4
13	PRE	3	12-	PRE Attack: 2½d6
12	COM	1		
10	PD	7		Total: 20 PD (10 rPD)
10	ED	6		Total: 20 ED (10 rED)
5	SPD	17		Phases: 3, 5, 8, 10, 12
7/12	REC	0		
36	END	0		
28	STUN	0		

**Total Characteristics Cost: 101**

Movement:	Running:	6"/12"
	Leaping:	6"/12"
	Swinging:	14"/28"

Cost	Powers	END
3	<i>Baton</i> : Hand-to-Hand Attack +2d6 (5d6 total), OAF (-1)	1
7	<i>Baton</i> : Missile Deflection (arrows/projectiles), +2 OCV; OAF (-1)	0
15	<i>Armored Costume</i> : Armor (10 PD/10 ED), OIF (-½); Activation Roll 14- (-½)	0
7	<i>Wrist Reel Swing Line</i> : Swinging 14"; OAF (-1)	0
3	<i>Eye Shields</i> : Sight Group Flash Defense (5 points); OIF (-½)	0
13	<i>Teenage Self-Healing</i> : Healing 2d6 (Regeneration, 2 BODY per Turn), Requires a Luck Roll (one level; -½)	0
7	<i>Teenage Recovery</i> : +5 REC, Requires a Luck Roll (one level; -½)	0
10	Luck 2d6	0

#### Martial Arts: Comic-Book Style

Maneuver	OCV	DCV	Notes
4 Block	+2	+2	Block
4 Dodge	+0	+5	Dodge
5 Kick	-2	+1	9d6 Strike
4 Punch	+0	+2	7d6 Strike
3 Throw	+0	+1	5d6+v/5
1	Use Art with Clubs		
8	+2 Damage Classes (already added in)		

#### Skills

5	+1 with Hand-to-Hand Combat
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**Total Powers & Skill Cost: 99**

**Total Cost: 200**

#### 100+ Disadvantages

15	Hunted: Arson Annie, 8- (Mo Pow, Capture)
20	Psychological Limitation: Code Against Killing (Common, Total)

15	Psychological Limitation: Patriotic (Common, Strong)
10	Psychological Limitation: Showoff In Combat (Common, Moderate)
5	Psychological Limitation: Crush on Victory Girl (Uncommon, Moderate)
5	Reputation: foolhardy kid sidekick, 8-
5	Rivalry: Professional (with Vanguard Jr.; Rival is As Powerful)
15	Social Limitation: Secret Identity (Frequent, Major) (Steve Hall)
10	Vulnerability: 1½× STUN from Gas Attacks (Common)

**Total Disadvantage Points: 200**

**Background/History:** Steve Hall was the typical teenager of 1943 Chicago, a patriot who led the other boys at the orphanage in mock battles against imagined Japanazi legions. He also idolized the American Eagle, papering his room with drawings of his favorite hero and schematics he had worked out of the Eagle's glider cape. He made his own version and one night decided to test it, climbing to the orphanage roof and jumping off, only to have the cape's support struts break as he leapt, sending him hurtling to certain death.

Fortunately, the American Eagle had decided to patrol the area around the orphanage that night and saw Steve plummet from the roof. Swooping down, he caught the lad just before he hit the ground. Although he gave the boy a stern lecture, he was impressed with Steve's foolhardiness, and on learning how Steve idolized him, had himself made the boy's legal guardian.

Being taken in by his hero sounded like a dream at first, as Steve became the Eagle's trusted sidekick, Winger, but there was a down side. The Eagle trained Steve as hard as he had been trained in the military, and fearful that Steve would try the cape stunt again, refused to give him his own glider cape and insisted he use a swing line to maneuver around. Nonetheless, the American Eagle was a more than adequate father figure to the boy.

**Personality/Motivation:** Winger chafes under his mentor's overprotectiveness and takes advantage of every possible opportunity to show off his still-developing crimefighting skills. Also, Steve is at the age where he's just discovered girls and will try to impress them at every opportunity, especially if they are superheroines. He is fondest of Victory Girl, three years his senior, and clumsily tries to make passes at her in between action sequences.

**Quote:** "Hey, Victory Girl — watch this!"

**SECRET ORIGIN**

Winger is derived from information presented on American Eagle II in *Voice of DOOM* and *Champions Universe*, both copyright by Hero Games. His characteristics were derived from those for Vanguard, Jr. from *Golden Age Champions*. I created Winger to have a sidekick character for Operation: Catapult closer in style to Robin than to Bucky Barnes. (I also didn't think much of "playground wrestling" as a martial art style.)

American Eagle and Winger were intended to be played as a set. I gave the player choosing to play American Eagle the option of also running Winger or not. If the player chose not to play Winger, and no one else wanted to play the character, I allowed him to give the American Eagle a limited number of additional Skills appropriate to the Eagle's background.

**Powers/Tactics:** Still fairly new to the world of superheroics, Winger isn't much for subtlety. His usual approach is to swing into the middle of a fight and kick and punch his way to victory. He becomes even less cautious when there's a teenage girl around. He's been exceptionally lucky, and unfortunately tends to rely on that luck instead of skill.

**Campaign Use:** Winger is intended as comedy relief for a four-color World War II-era adventure or campaign, albeit *competent* comedy relief. His mistakes should come primarily from taking on more than he can handle, not from failing to handle the things he is quite capable of dealing with. He isn't the most powerful character in terms of points, but his budding attraction to the opposite sex makes him a fun character to role-play in the right player's hands.

**Appearance:** Winger wears a sleeveless red tunic with a featherburst pattern similar to that on American Eagle's chest, blue ankle-length boots and domino mask with white feather trim, and a white cape with blue trim. On his left wrist is a compact reel containing his swing line. Out of costume, he looks like a junior version of his guardian, with a blonde crewcut but eyes of a lighter shade of blue.



# Elizabethan Hero

by Lisa Hartjes

*"I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too."*

Elizabeth I, Speech, 8 Aug 1588, to her troops on the approach of the Spanish Armada.

One of the greatest things about the HERO System is its flexibility. One can play games of any genre and any time period. The aim of this article is to provide players and GMs with the information they need to explore England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. The first part of this article contains the background information needed to get a feel for the time period, and perhaps some ideas for character backgrounds. The second half of the article, to be published in a later *Digital Hero*, will have all the information you need to create characters and design adventures and campaigns in the Elizabethan era.

## Why Play a Game in the Elizabethan Era?

Elizabethan England was a time of greatness for England, and has the potential to offer adventures to suit just about every taste. For people interested in political intrigue, life at Elizabeth's court was rife with it. If exploring the frontiers of civilization you're after, this was the time of the founding of the Virginia and Ulster colonies. Finally, if you seek adventures upon the high seas, Sir Francis Drake made a name for himself by being so successful at attacking the Spanish gold ships that his own vessel was barely afloat because it was so laden down with stolen gold when it arrived in the harbor.

## A Brief History

The reign of Elizabeth (1558 - 1603) saw England emerge as the leading naval and commercial power of the Western world. Elizabeth I's England strengthened its position with the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, and firmly established the Church of England. Sir Humphrey Gilbert and Sir Walter Raleigh sent colonists westward in search of profit. In trade, might, and art, England established an envious preeminence.

London was the heart of England, reflecting all the vibrant qualities of the Elizabethan Age, and became a leading center of culture and commerce. Its dramatists and poets were among the leading literary artists of the day. This was

the environment in which Shakespeare lived and wrote.

The 16<sup>th</sup> century was also a time of great change for London. From AD 1500 to AD 1600, London's population had grown by 400%, swelling to nearly two hundred thousand people in the city proper and outlying region. A rising merchant middle class was carving out a productive livelihood, and the economy was booming.

Marlowe, Greene, Lyly, Kyd, and Peele produced new dramas and comedies using the blank verse and defined the London theatre in the 1580s, but Shakespeare outdid them all. He combined classical sources with the best traits of Elizabethan drama, and enriched the whole with his imagination and wit.

## Government

Elizabethan England was an absolute monarchy — Elizabeth held all the power, and she ruled the country. Everyone else who lived in England was a subject, and civil servants reported to the queen. The concept of being a citizen, and indeed, the idea of the "state" as we think of it in modern times, didn't exist much before the 1540s. England claimed Ireland as a part of its lands (Henry VIII gave himself the title of King of Ireland, although previous governors had been appointed to rule Ireland), and Scotland was a separate nation until after 1603. Only in Wales was there uncontested rule by the English monarchs.

Next to the queen, the most powerful governmental force was the Privy Council. It was a group of advisors, chosen by the queen, who were experts in their field. In addition to the Privy Council, four departments handled government business for the queen:

- The Chancery, which was in charge of drafting royal grants, appointments, acts, and treaties, was led by the Lord Chancellor. The Lord Chancellor also acted in a number of other important roles, such as Speaker of the House of Lords, head of the law courts, and sometimes the Keeper of the Great Seal.
- The Privy Seal office drew up instructions for the royal officers, and sealed them with the Privy Seal.
- The Signet office was in charge of the monarch's personal correspondence, and the Signet was held by the principal secretary.
- The Office of the Exchequer handled royal revenue and taxation.

Offices in the departments were assigned by the monarch through a system of patronage. Elizabeth had some 2500 offices she could fill.

Parliament also existed, but was summoned and dissolved at the whim of the monarch, usually when the monarch needed to have them approve taxes, legislate a specific topic, or to advise the monarch on policy. Under Elizabeth's rule, parliament was called thirteen times; one of these was to declare Elizabeth had supreme authority on all ecclesiastical matters.

## The Peerage and the Gentry

The number of peers (nobles) was relatively small during Elizabeth's reign. There were 57 in 1558, and the queen created or restored only 18 during her reign. Elizabeth was even more reluctant to grant land along with the new titles.

The gentry included all other landholders who were not nobility. For the most part, these were knights and their descendants, called esquires. It should be noted that knighthoods were not hereditary, but coats of arms were. They were granted as patents (a government grant). During her reign, Elizabeth created 878 knights.

## Elizabethan Life

There were three basic "social classes" during the Elizabethan era, and it affected everything in their lives, from where they lived to what clothing they wore, to the food they ate. The lowest class was made up of the peasants -- agricultural workers and their families. They lived in one place their entire lives, and worked the land for the landowners, with little leisure time and even less money.

The middle class consisted of artisans, craftsmen, servants, and merchants. How successful these people were in their trade influenced how much leisure time and money they had to spend on things. Many of the gentry fell into this category.

Finally, the upper class was made up of high status knights and the peerage. These people by far had the greatest amount of leisure time, but many of them had their money tied up in the running of their estates and to pay for the fashionable (and very expensive) clothing they were expected to wear at court.

The Elizabethans believed in the tenet "a place for everything and everything in its place," and this applied to people as well as things. Movement between the classes was rare, and those who attempted it were considered to be upstarts — unless it was a woman marrying someone of a higher class.

There was no such thing as the "idle rich" in the Elizabethan era. Many of the high offices were unpaid, so all of the expenses had to be

borne out of the nobleman's own pocket. Nobles were expected to act as host to foreign nobility at the English noble's expense. Being appointed as ambassador to a foreign nation was also a serious financial burden, as ambassadors were expected to maintain a staff of up to 100 servants.

The most expensive "honor" of them all was to be a stop of the "progress" of Queen Elizabeth I. Elizabeth found a way to keep the expenses of her court down — by traveling around England and having the nobles pay all her bills by staying with them for a period of time. It was so expensive that many of the nobility begged not to be accorded the honor of her visit.

The Tudor era (the reigns of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I) as a whole saw an increase in the size and wealth of the merchant middle class, due mainly to the wool trade. This prosperity led to building sprees in areas where wool was the main industry.

## LIFE AT COURT

The term "the court" was used to describe the area in a ten-mile radius around wherever the monarch was living at any particular time, or the official residences, such as Whitehall, Richmond, or Greenwich. Most of the year, the court moved around the country, especially in the summer, if only to allow for the adequate cleaning of the residences. Elizabeth's court numbered between 400 and 800 people, and most of these people also had personal retinues that moved around with them.

Since most of the closest advisors and companions to Elizabeth were women and were unable to hold offices in the Privy Council, the Privy Chamber lost much of its political importance after 1554.

## REPUTATION

Elizabethans considered reputation to be all-important, and everyone around them reflected and influenced it. Servants gained a measure of their own status from the status of their master. If a master was a drunken boor, it reflected badly upon the servants if they allowed him to be seen in public in such a state. Likewise, if a nobleman's servants acted poorly, their behavior tarnished the nobleman's reputation as well.

## EDUCATION

A gentleman's education would begin at the age of five, when he would learn to read using the catechism, psalters, and the Bible. Other books they would read would include non-religious texts such as translations of Aesop's fables and retellings of the stories of Robin Hood and King Arthur.

However, much of the population had very little opportunity to go to school, especially if

## DIGITAL HERO #1

they were the children of farmers or laborers. One group of people that tended to be well educated were “upper” servants. These servants included chaplains, stewards, secretaries, and waiting gentlewomen, any of whom could be called upon by their employers to write letters. Some businessmen, such as merchants and grocers, generally knew how to read by the 1580s.

Once a boy reached the age of seven, he would move on to grammar school, which would be the equivalent of modern day secondary school. There they would learn Greek and Latin. Latin was considered to be very important, as it was the language used by clergy and scholars, and was the language in which the laws were written. Other subjects included ciphering (basic mathematics), composition (writing of prose and verse), geography (a mix of fact, fiction, and a lot of other things), history, and map drawing. Little or no time was spent teaching students how to read or write, as it was expected they could already do those things when they entered grammar school.

Foreign languages were generally not taught at school, and those who wished to learn them either taught themselves, or hired tutors. Of the foreign languages spoken by the Elizabethans, French was the most common, as it was the language of diplomacy.

Home schooling often occurred amongst the nobility, with a nobleman hiring a Master of Grammar to teach his children, along with any boys that were being fostered in his household. It was uncommon to provide an education beyond the age of seven for girls, but when Henry VIII arranged for his daughter Mary to be educated, a number of peers and gentlemen followed his lead and began to educate their daughters as well.

Girls were not allowed to attend grammar schools, though schooling did continue in private homes, under the guidance of chaplain-tutors. By 1581, it was becoming more and more common to find women who could read and write. In fact, there was a higher degree of literacy among women during this era than in any other until the end of the nineteenth century.

### **HOMES AND GARDENS**

Gardens were vital features in Tudor life. One of the aims of garden design was to try and have color in the garden for as much of the year as possible, and to make it an extension of the house. A basic ground design consisted of four parts — the house would be in the center, the kitchen garden to one side, an orchard to the other, and the garden at the back of the house, where it would be seen from the important rooms.

By 1580, formal gardens were an expected and required part of any new house being built.

Pleasure gardens (that is, gardens without a specific purpose such as a kitchen garden that grows herbs and vegetables) were usually surrounded by a high, thick hedge, into which rosebushes, sweetbriar, and other shrubs might be interlaced. A square or circle would be the center of the garden, usually containing some focus point, such as a statue or fountain. Other elements in the garden could include raised flowerbeds, small grassy areas, walkways and paths, and mazes. It was also during the Elizabethan era that topiary first started to appear.

Orchards were usually surrounded with walls of brick or stone, or with a low hedge of fruit-bearing bushes. Typical trees found in an orchard were apples, apricots, pears, plums, and cherries.

Houses built during the Tudor era became more balanced and symmetrical in design. E and H shapes were common, possibly as a tribute to Elizabeth and Henry VIII. More importantly, house design itself became more focused on the comfort of the inhabitants, and less on defense. Battlements fell out of use, arches flattened, and the bay and oriel windows increased in size. Houses were also often built around an inner courtyard.

Tudor homes were for the most part timber framed, and the oak timbers were left to weather rather than tarred black as is commonly seen in modern restorations or imitations. During this era, a new feature appeared in manor homes: a long gallery that usually ran the full length of the upper floor. This room was used for walks, games, and to display artwork. There were also few passageways and corridors in Tudor homes; one room usually opened directly into the next. Houses also were being built with many more windows. For example, Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire became known by the rhyme “Hardwick Hall, more glass than wall.”

The main hall was still the center of life in an Elizabethan home, but space was now made in lofts for the servants to sleep. The winter parlor — the forerunner of the modern dining room — began to appear, and as privacy was becoming more highly prized, it became the family retreat. The walls were usually decorated with linen fold paneling and accented with freshly cut boughs to scent the room.

Other rooms that were typically found in an Elizabethan home were music rooms and libraries (though fewer than a dozen non-clergy are believed to have owned more than 100 books during the 16<sup>th</sup> century), and most of these book collections came from tomes owned by monasteries when the monasteries were dissolved. For an example of a Tudor home from the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, visit the *Life in Elizabethan England: A Compendium of Common*

*Knowledge* to see the floor plan of Ingatestone Hall at <http://www.renaissance.dm.net/compendium/map-ingatestone.html>.

Elaborately carved oak staircases started to be featured in houses and replaced the traditional circular stone stairwells. The use of decorative artwork became a major theme in the Tudor era, starting with church screens, stalls, and pulpits. By Elizabeth's time, the use of carved wood had spread to the home. Walls were heavily paneled, and though furniture was heavy and sparse by modern standards, it grew more and more elaborate. Sideboards became a fashionable way to display plate (household articles, such as hollowware, covered with a precious metal, such as silver or gold).

Elizabethans used stools as chairs to sit on, so chairs with backs and/or arms were few and far between. Floors were covered by rushes, either loose or plaited, to create a rug. In early Tudor times, they were swept or replaced haphazardly at best, accumulating layers of filth and fleas over the years. However, by the end of Elizabeth's reign, things had changed and Elizabethans gained a reputation for cleanliness.

The greatest attention, however, was paid to their beds. It was during this era that the feather bed first appeared, replacing the straw mattress. Elaborately decorated and carved four poster beds were the fashion, and they became so highly prized that they were listed specifically in wills during that time period.

## CLOTHING

Clothing in Elizabethan England served a very important social function — it identified a person as belonging to a certain social class, and in some cases, a person's profession or the noble's household to which they were attached.

The most notable item worn by men early in Elizabeth's reign was the codpiece. A separate piece of clothing, it was a cloth pouch that covered the genital area. Prior to 1575, the codpiece was padded, elongated, and highly decorated, but as Elizabeth's reign continued, they gradually became flatter and plainer. Sometimes the codpiece doubled as a pocket where a nobleman would keep a handkerchief and other small items. The codpiece was attached to the rest of the nobleman's clothing by buckles or "points" — ties which attached pieces of clothing together. These ties were made of linen, silk thread, or ribbon for nobles; strong cord or leather for the poor.

Apart from the codpiece, the most fashionable and noticeable piece of clothing worn by a man was the doublet, and it was usually the most expensive article as well. It was worn like a jacket over a shirt or waistcoat, and was fitted to the waist. Doublets were worn in a number of different styles during Elizabeth's

reign. One notable fact, however, about the doublet was that the sleeves were never sewn in — they were a separate garment and were attached to the body of the doublet with points.

Having the sleeves being a separate item allowed for the nobleman to remain in fashion for a much longer period of time, simply by changing the sleeves. The attachment of the sleeves to the body of the doublet was hidden by a padded roll of fabric, or by a series of tabs in one or two rows, called "pickadils."

The wealthy wore doublets made of brocade, satin, taffeta, and velvet. The doublets of the poor were made of canvas, fustian, and leather.

The female version of the doublet — sometimes called by that name as well — was a bodice or "pair of bodies." There were two parts to it: a triangle-shaped piece at the front called a stomacher; and the bodice proper. The stomacher attached to the bodice using hooks and eyes, ties, or pins. Like a corset, the stomacher was stiffened with thin pieces of wood or bone, inserted in pockets, called busks. The neckline of the bodice varied greatly, and at times would reveal the woman's underclothes or bare skin. Sometimes, the neckline would be filled in by a partlet, a piece of cloth that parted the little round face ruff. It could be opened or closed using aglets laced through eyelet holes, or hooks and eyes. If the partlet had sleeves, the sleeves were not sewn to the partlet, but attached using points. After 1550, bodice necklines either had a ruff or collar attached to them, and towards the end of the Elizabethan era, very low necklines were appearing.

The term "dress" was used to describe an entire outfit, such as "court dress," not an individual article of clothing. What modern people would call a dress was a "kirtle" in the Tudor era, and by 1545 referred only to the skirt portion of the garment (which had become two separate pieces — the bodice and the skirt). Early versions of the kirtle had an opening at front of the top piece to allow the stomacher to be seen, and an opening at the front of the bottom piece to reveal the "forepart" (an underskirt). Petticoat was also a term used, and applied to any skirt or underskirt, and several of them would be worn at one time.

As with the men's doublet, sleeves for women's clothing were separate articles of clothing, and attached using ties, pins or hooks and again, with the attachments being hidden by a stuffed roll of fabric, called "wings." A ruffle or cuff ended the sleeve, and matched the ruff or collar of the bodice. The sleeves might be made in two parts, with contrasting colors, and came in a variety of shapes.

The main undergarment Elizabethan women wore was an ankle-length chemise, usually made



## DIGITAL HERO #1

of linen. Often, the neck of the chemise would be gathered to form a small ruff at the neck. This would then be seen through the bodice, rather than a partlet. It is believed that during this era in England, women did not wear panties or underdrawers. As late as 1617, English travelers considered the Italian and French practice of wearing long, trouser-like underpants to be strange.

Stays were an early form of corset, and were made from heavy canvas, boiled leather, or even iron. Sometimes, more than one would be worn at a time, and trim on the stays could sometimes be seen peeking out over the neckline of the bodice. The busks used to stiffen the stays were made of wood, steel, and cane until 1600, when whalebone became popular.

The other item of clothing typically worn by an Elizabethan woman was the farthingale. A type of hoopskirt, it came in three basic styles: Spanish, which was bell shaped; French, which was a padded roll worn around the hips to create a cylindrical effect; and the cartwheel, a disk of canvas stiffened with hoops of cane, with a hole for the waist, and tied around the woman's waist with tapes.

People would pose in portraits wearing their finest clothing, so those pieces of art would not give an accurate depiction of everyday clothing, except, perhaps, at court. Around the house, women's clothing was generally made of simpler fabrics and styles. It was unlikely that a woman would wear a farthingale while cooking in the kitchen; it was more likely she would wear an embroidered petticoat and bodice, with an open gown over top.

In cold weather, people simply wore more clothing, such as a fur-lined cloak, boot hose with long boots, and extra petticoats and skirts. Both men and women wore scarves, mittens, and mufflers.

Golden blonde hair was considered to be very fashionable, and women dyed their hair, bleached it in the sun, and washed it with alkalinized water in attempts to obtain that color. Auburn and all shades of red also found favor at court (not a surprise, considering Elizabeth I's hair color), even though very little hair was actually seen because of the various headwear at court. Starting at about 1560, women's hair was curled and pulled back from the forehead, arranged over a stuffed pad, and interwoven with pearls and other jeweled ornaments. Sometimes, women wore wigs.

During the Elizabethan era, most men wore their hair short (or a bit longer on the sides), with a mustache or a beard. Men did not wear wigs.

For beards, it was often the king who set the style. As there was no king on the throne, but rather a queen, there was no predominant beard style. Some of the styles that appeared were the

bodkin beard (long and pointed, in the center of the chin only), the Cadiz beard (wild and untrimmed), and the spade beard (cut into the shape of the ace of spades, and popular with soldiers from 1570 to 1605). After 1550, it was never fashionable to have a mustache without a beard. The clean-shaven look came back into style, though the Vandyke beard (a carefully trimmed mustache and pointed chin beard) was not popular until the reign of Charles I.

The Puritans frowned upon the use of cosmetics, and the poor simply could not afford them. Women who could used them to achieve the standard of beauty of the time: very white skin, red lips, and lamplike eyes.

## HYGIENE

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Dental care was very primitive, and at the most was characterized by scrubbing the teeth with mixture of white wine, vinegar, and honey. Toothpicks and toothcloths were very popular gifts.

Both clothes and bodies were infrequently washed, so to cover up unpleasant smells, Elizabethans used perfume. Everyone, men and woman alike, wore some kind of scent. Things like rose water and lavender water could be distilled at home; more exotic scents were imported.

The Elizabethans also scented their clothing, by applying perfumes directly to the fabric. Scented gloves were a popular gift in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

## FOOD & COOKING

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Most food was prepared over open fires. Meat was cooked on a spit, set to turning either by a servant, or by putting a dog on a circular treadmill attached to one end of the spit. Baking was done either in a baking oven built into the fireplace, or by putting the items to be baked into iron boxes and laying the boxes directly on the fire.

Meals were often large and elaborate. Breakfast was usually just a light snack, but the main meal of the day was dinner. Dinner started at 11 o'clock and traditionally lasted for three hours. Supper was eaten at 6 o'clock and was smaller in size. The lower classes ate dinner at noon and supper at 7 or 8 o'clock in the evening. The poor ate off wooden or pewter dishes, the rich off silver, glass, or delft from Holland. China dishes, as we know them, were unknown.

People who could afford them — usually the rich — had tablecloths and napkins on their tables, and provided the diners with spoons, while guests provided their own knives. Forks did exist, but were rarely used as an eating utensil, and until the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the use of them was considered a foreign affectation.

For cleaning one's hands after the meal, finger bowls were provided.

Food was dry-salted, pickled, or smoked to preserve it for the winter. A light dry-salting was also used for short-term preservation, and meat would be dipped in vinegar. Coloring was also added to food to make it more appealing, such as adding sandalwood (turns things pink), mulberry juice, and saffron.

Scurvy was a problem due to a lack of fresh fruits and vegetables containing vitamin C. Fresh lemons were considered to be a luxury only the rich could afford, and oranges from Spain were a seasonal item only.

### **ENTERTAINMENT & PASTIMES**

By far, the most common pastime of nobles was hunting, but courtiers had many other ways to entertain themselves.

Gossip and flirting were very popular, and it was something that they could do anywhere, at any time.

Other popular pastimes included gaming (gambling), bowls (lawn bowling), tilting at quintain (an object mounted on a post), billiards, shuttlecock (like badminton), wrestling, horseback riding, bull- and bear-baiting, and cockfighting. The traditional medieval tournaments were replaced by masques, a kind of play full of mythological or allegorical characters. Fireworks, a recent invention, were sometimes part of the masque as well.

Paume, the ancestor of tennis, was popular and was played indoors or in high-walled outdoor courts. Grass courts didn't appear until 1591. The ball was made of leather and stuffed with hair, and players hit the ball over a tasseled rope stretched across the center of the court with the palm of their hand.

If you wanted to go out for a drink, you would go to taverns, alehouses, or *tippling houses*.

Whorehouses were called *stews*, or a *bawdy house*, *leaping house*, or a *shugging den*. A *drab* was usually a woman of low character or a prostitute, while a *punk* was a whore who may work in a stew. Prostitutes in Southwark (in the domain of the Bishop of Winchester) were called *Winchester geese*, and men who spent far too much time with such women were called *drabbers*.

Archery, specifically that with a long bow, was still encouraged despite the advent of gunpowder and the cannon. Henry VIII decreed that no one 24 years old and older should shoot at a target less than 220 yards away. Early guns at this time were incredibly slow and proved useless in wet weather, so bowmen could afford to laugh at them.

### **LITERATURE & THE THEATER**

Latin was still the language of choice for literacy, despite the success of Chaucer and his works. It wasn't until Spenser published the *Faerie Queen* that people became aware of the possibilities of the English language in writing.

After 1580, plays became more common. They were originally performed in the courtyards of inns. It was the galleried designs of the inns that influenced the design of theatres such as Shakespeare's The Globe, built in 1599. These theatres were open air in the center, an area called the pit. Performances were always given during the daytime, due to the difficulty of lighting the stage properly, and the general danger of traveling at night. A different play was performed every day on a rotating schedule, with four to six plays offered each season.

For an extra fee, noblemen and women could have their chairs put up front, closer to the stage. Noblewomen, when they attended the theater, would usually go veiled or wearing masks, as it was not always socially correct for them to be seen at the theatres.

### **MONEY AND WHAT TO SPEND IT ON**

All coins during the Elizabethan era were made of silver or gold, including pennies, and there was no such thing as paper money. The basic denominations were *pounds*, *shillings*, and *pence*. There were 12 pence to the shilling, and 20 shillings to the pound. In writing, the abbreviation for the penny is *d*, for shilling is *s*, and for the pound, *£*. The *guinea* did not yet exist, and would not be minted until the late 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Another monetary term the modern person might be familiar with is the *mark*. The mark was never minted as a coin in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but was used as a value for very large transactions, such as selling land, figuring out fins, or calculating dowries, and had a value of 2/3 of a pound (13s 4d).

During the Tudor era, there were two mints in the Tower of London, and other mints operating out of several other cities. Counterfeiting of any coin was considered to be high treason, and punishable by death since the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Clipping, culling, melting, and exporting English coins was also illegal.

For smaller, everyday items like food and drink, think about pennies. A loaf of bread shouldn't cost more than a few pence. Also, a typical tip (or *vail*) for a servant was 3/4d (or three farthings).

If you're trying to buy a favor or information from anyone other than a servant, give them gifts. If you're trying to bribe a servant, you offer them money. In fact, this kind of behavior was expected and part of the system.

## DIGITAL HERO #1

The practice of giving or receiving gifts (never money amongst courtiers) in hopes of gaining someone's favor, or in payment of a service done, was common practice in court, nor was it considered to be corruption — it was just the way that things were done.

A person could always send another, more important person a gift, without asking for any specific favor or request in mind, and that person would consider themselves to be in the sender's debt. The most common things used for this type of gift, also called a *douceur* (or sweetener) are: game (most often quail or deer), wine, birds (good hawks or songbirds in cages), hunting dogs, rare or special books, and homemade items such as beer, honey, or marmalade.

Servants were paid annual wages of £2 to £5, and were paid quarterly (on Quarter Days). These wages did not include extras from vails or losses due to fines. More information about what servants a nobleman would most likely have in their household, along with what their wages would have been, please refer to the excellent work known as "Life In Elizabethan England: A Compendium of Knowledge," available online at <http://www.renaissance.dm.net/compendium/home.html>, or for download in PDF format from that same web page.

Usury, the lending of or taking money at interest, was made illegal in 1472, but by the Elizabethan era it was being regulated. In 1572, it was declared that the maximum interest that could be charged was 10 percent, but the lender had no recourse under the law if the borrower refused to pay back more than the exact amount he had borrowed. Banks didn't exist as we know them. Many businessmen included currency exchange and loans as part of their services to their customers.

The Elizabethans had their own equivalent to the modern shopping mall. Built by Sir Thomas Gresham and opened by Queen Elizabeth on January 23, 1571, the Royal Exchange was located between Cornhill and Threadneedle streets in London. It consisted of three wings built of brick, each four stories high, and housed approximately 100 shops. The shops included apothecaries, armorers, goldsmiths, milliners, haberdashers, and booksellers. In the evenings, the shops were lit with candles.

### Crime and Punishment

During the Elizabethan era, people went to court over the slightest thing. There were also an astonishing number of lawyers (simply put, people who handled the legal affairs of others, regardless of professional training). It is estimated that there were 1400 lawyers practicing in 1574.

In 1580, there were 13,500 cases being heard in the courts of the King's Bench and Common Pleas, just two of the three central law courts housed at Westminster.

The King's (or Queen's) Bench dealt with common law and handled criminal cases. It also reviewed the assizes (court sessions from each county dealing with felonies, held twice a year in each county) and quarter sessions (court sessions dealing with everything else, held every three or four months). Quarter sessions usually lasted three days and were presided over by two justices of the peace. Though most of the crimes seen by the quarter sessions were minor crimes, theft of property worth more than a shilling was a felony and punishable by death, so they did order many executions. Most of the cases they heard, however, were "administrative" crimes, such as running an unlicensed alehouse. After 1590, all capital crimes were referred from the quarter sessions to the assizes.

The Court of Common Pleas held jurisdiction over debt, trespassing, and other personal offences. The Court of the Exchequer was the royal accounting department, and had a small common law jurisdiction.

### The Military

The English army maintained a presence in Ireland, as support for the English-born Lord Lieutenants who governed Ireland. The army stationed there was destroyed in 1599 at the Battle of Yellow Ford, during one of the many religious-based revolts.

The Royal Navy was the crowning jewel of the Elizabethan military might. When Elizabeth came to the throne, the navy had only 26 ships. By 1588, she had increased that number to 197, and it was those 197 ships that faced down the Spanish Armada. It must be said, however, that most of the damage to the Armada was done by the horrific weather conditions during their retreat.

### Pirates and Privateers

The difference between a pirate and a privateer was mainly based on England's foreign policy. A privateer was a pirate who operated with a letter of marque or commission of reprisal, which basically made it legal for the pirate to attack certain ships — usually of a specific national origin. Without the permission of the crown (which could be withdrawn at a whim), piracy was illegal and punishable by death.

During the Elizabethan era, organized bands of pirates operated along the coast near Dorset, Cornwall, Wales, and Ireland. In some areas, piracy was a major source of income for families, especially among the nobility, as they

would have places to hide stolen goods for extended periods of time before they could be sold.

One of the most famous pirates of Elizabeth's reign was a woman. Her name was Gráinne Ni Mháille (anglicized to Grace or Grania O'Malley) of Ireland. More information about her can be found on the Pirates and Privateers web site at <http://legends.dm.net/pirates/grainne.html>. It is important to note, however, that remarkably few English pirates fit the stereotype of the black-hearted villain. One exception was Stephen Heynes. He was known to have used torture to exact information from his captives, and his crew went down on the knees, begging him to allow them not to watch.

How did one become a pirate? More often than not, it was simply a case of finding a bunch of other people who felt the same way, stealing a ship, and setting sail. And there was much for poor sailors to get excited about during the Elizabethan era. The West Indies had become a veritable gold mine for pirates and privateers, who preyed upon the Spanish ships.

That was not to say, however, that the open seas were the only place where pirates plied their trade. The Thames was navigable by merchant ships for sixty miles up from the coast, all the way to London Bridge, and acts of piracy occurred there too.

Another area that was popular for pirates was the Mediterranean. Based out of Tunis, these pirates would convert to Islam to increase their chances of advancement within the Barbary pirates (pirates that operated out of the north coast of Africa, also known as the Barbary Coast.) The Barbary pirate's heyday was 1592 to 1609, and after that time, English piracy was in a general state of decline.

## The Status of Women

Women were considered to be the property of their parents until married (which every woman expected to be), and then the property of their husband. However, this does not mean that they were treated poorly as a general rule. In fact, men were admonished to treat them well and give them respect. Women also expected to depend on their husband and their male relatives for support for their entire life.

Widows were allowed to own property and run their own businesses. If her husband had heirs, the widow was entitled to 1/3 of the estate (after all bills and taxes were paid). If the husband had no children, the widow would inherit the entire estate. Most widows did remarry, if only for their own protection. There was some debate as to whether or not a woman's word or signature was legally binding.

It is also important to note that men generally wanted to get married as well. Unless you were a noble, you could not be considered the head of a household if you were not married. If you weren't the head of a household, you couldn't hold public or ecclesiastical office, or other positions of civic responsibility.

This is not to say that women could not find themselves in unofficial positions of importance. For those who were close to the Queen, there was a lot of money to be had from people who wanted their suits presented to the Queen. A whisper in the Queen's ear, either for or against someone, could aid or ruin someone's attempt at advancement in court. One of the unofficial advisors to Elizabeth was known to have turned down a bribe because the amount of money offered was too small.

## Magic and Superstition

The Elizabethans believed in magic, witches, and necromancy. There were three basic types of magic: natural (or elemental), celestial (based on the influence of stars), and ceremonial magic (appeals to spiritual beings). During the Renaissance, the use of magic to expand one's knowledge was respectable, despite the danger of prosecution in ecclesiastical courts.

"Cunning" men and women were people who used magic in healing or divination, and most often they were consulted to find lost objects. These people were rarely accused of witchcraft. In fact, if someone believed he had been bewitched, he went to the local cunning woman for protection from the spell.

Belief in the power of magic was widespread through all classes of society, and conjurers and other cunning men and women made large amounts of money providing people with protective amulets and talismans.

Sorcery and necromancy were not considered to be witchcraft, though the use of sorcery was a punishable by a year in prison, and four appearances in the pillory for a first offence. Conjuring spirits, however, was a felony and punishable by death.

Astrology and watercasting were used as diagnostic tools in medicine, and the Royal College of Physicians could discipline unlicensed practitioners.

England had its share of witch trials, but they did not become religious in nature until the "witchfinders" in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century started to create connections between witchcraft and the Church.

Elizabethans were also very superstitious, and believed that the world was inhabited by supernatural creatures such as fairies, sprites, and ghosts.

# Xergon's Optics

by Rob Bose

## Arcane Artifacts and Endless Enchantments

Deep within the City of Secrets, shrouded by sorcery and hidden from the casual observer, lies the notorious Circle of Enchantments. This fantastic collection of shops surrounds an open-air market dedicated to providing many sorts of mystically imbued items. From the most common to the highly exotic, artifacts from the entire realm and beyond can be purchased by those with the appropriate resources.

## Xergon's Optics

The bright red sun bored its way through the haze that perpetually cloaked the Circle. Shading my eyes and attempting to ignore the uncomfortable glare, I took refuge under a nearby awning. The storefront beneath contained a pair of wide windowless black oak doors emblazoned with a large stylized eye. Inscribed around this symbol were a number of exotic runes and sigils. A simple translation revealed that the shop was known as Xergon's Optics.

Needing an excuse to get out from under the sun I opened the door and ducked inside. It turned out to be delightfully dim and cool, and I stood there for a second to let my eyes adapt. The shop itself appeared long and narrow with walls containing a number of partitioned shelves. Hundreds of small wooden cases dominated those near the front and I could see a number of more ornate metal-clad cases further to the back. About this time I also noticed an odd, almost acrid, smell in the air.

A presence touched my mind as a shadowy form detached itself from the back and floated towards me. At first I wasn't sure if I believed what I was seeing, but a comforting mental touch assured me it was so. I never believed I would be face to face with a legendary Eye of Xul-Zin, but here appeared to be a fully functioning unit in the flesh (so to speak). There was a surge of energy from the sentient glowing sphere and an expensive looking box floated out of the back and opened in front of me. Inside was a pair of black steel spectacles with abnormally dark lenses.

"Fashionable and practical," the sphere seemed to chuckle, "especially for someone of your unique nature."

A large floating silver sphere may not seem a likely merchant, but anything is possible on the Circle. Xergon possesses a keen intellect and an unflagging entrepreneurial spirit that transcends his current physical condition. While he is unable to physically craft the merchandise he

sells, he has formed a partnership with some local artificers who are more than happy to fashion the items he comes up with.

While his prices are high, Xergon knows the value of his products. He will make it clear that he accepts all forms of payment and is especially fond of unusual crystals. The GM, in keeping with his current campaign, should set the actual prices.

## The Establishment

There is not much to be said about this shop except that it is stark and simple. Sandwiched between two older, more established businesses, its narrow confines do not provide a lot of space for the fairly extensive variety of merchandise that is available. Numerous shelves, cubbyholes, and drawers are packed with padded boxes containing an assortment of goggles, spectacles, and glass lenses.

With the actual fabrication facilities located off-site, the back room is used by Xergon for reflecting and designing. It contains a wide collection of optical devices with a central padded ring used by Xergon to 'rest' in.

## The Merchandise

Xergon keeps his shop well stocked with a variety of optical devices. He takes custom orders and can have items constructed quickly as long as the raw materials are available. What follows is a small sample of his potential inventory.

### GOGGLES OF SUPPRESSION

Xergon has taken traditional metalworking goggles and adapted them for defensive use. While worn they provide some limited protection from harmful flares generated through both mystical and mundane means. The effect is achieved through an enchantment on the goggle lenses whereby the lightly smoked glass will instantaneously polarize when exposed to bright light.

*Goggles of Suppression: Sight Group Flash Defense (5 Points); OAF (-1), Independent (-2). Total cost: 1 point.*

## MESMER LENSES

The Powers that govern the City of Secrets are loath to interfere in the general operation of the Circle's shops, but they do keep a list of items they feel are exceedingly dangerous. Near the top of this list are the infamous Mesmer Lenses. These finely crafted spectacles grant the ability to influence the minds of others. The enchantment is activated when an unsuspecting individual makes eye contact with the wearer. The face of each lens begins to swirl and twist in hypnotic patterns, and if the wearer wins a battle of wills they are free to control the individual in subtle or even extreme ways.

This is not the sort of merchandise the Powers want disrupting the marketplace or the City. Xergon has been restricted from creating and selling them, but he will not hesitate to let one go if the offer is good enough.

Mesmer Lenses: *Mind Control 10d6, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); Eye Contact Required (-½), OAF (-1), Independent (-2). Total cost: 17 points.*

## MONOCLE OF DISCLOSURE

This pretentious seeming eyepiece may look like just another bit of window dressing, but it serves an important purpose. Typically used by foreign ambassadors, merchant princes, royal viziers, and affluent spies, it bestows the ability to decipher any written text viewed through it.

*Monocle of Disclosure: Universal Translator (written content only -1); OAF (-1), Independent (-2). Total cost: 5 points.*

## OPTICS OF SUBSTITUTION

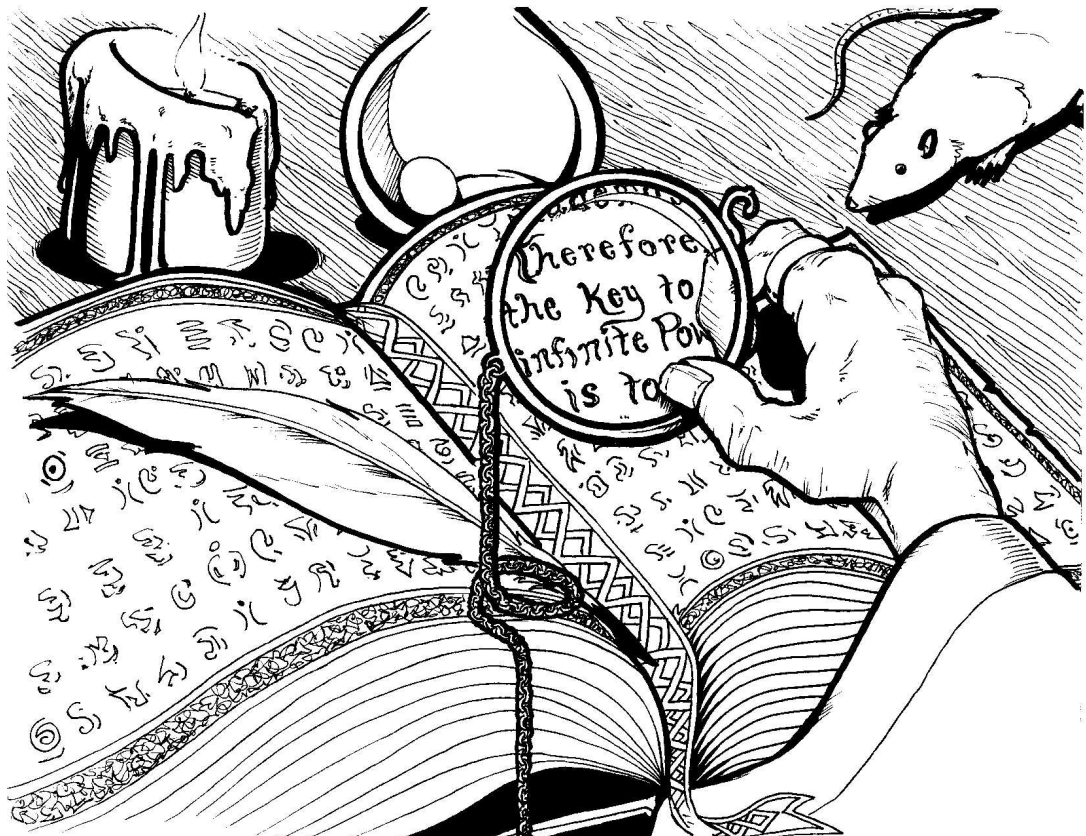
Although Xergon has never been known to give a sucker, I mean a patron, an even break; his exchangeable lens system is the closest thing to a good deal that anyone has ever gotten from him. See in the dark, examine tiny objects, or scan the horizon just by swapping in a new set of glass disks at his shop, for a mere fraction of the original cost. As long as the original lenses are in good condition, an even swap can be made. Many different enchantments are available and others can be custom made.

Here are a few of the most basic types.

*Starlight Lenses: Ultraviolet Perception (Sight Group), OAF (-1), Independent (-2). Total cost: 1 point.*

*Far Sight Lenses: +4 versus Range for Sight Group, OAF (-1); Independent (-2). Total cost: 1 point.*

*Focus Lenses: Microscopic Vision (×10); OAF (-1), Independent (-2). Total cost: 1 point.*



## DIGITAL HERO #1

### REFLECTING SPECTACLES

There are many tales told of great heroes who braved the den of a fearsome gorgon only to be added to the creature's growing collection of statuary. The days of polished shields and blindfolds are at an end thanks to Xergon's Reflecting Spectacles. These amazing lenses possess a mirrored surface that turns aside hazardous gaze effects. Not to be taken for granite (bad pun), they are a must for any serious adventurer.

*Reflecting Spectacles: Power Defense (20 Points); OAF (-1), Independent (-2), Only Works Against Flesh to Stone Transforms (-1). Total cost: 4 points.*

### VANITY SHADES

Many Circle patrons are well known for their wealth and narcissism. In an effort to cash in on their extreme vanity, Xergon crafts distinctive smoked glass eye ware guaranteed to increase the patron's good looks and charm. The current rage in elite circles, these dark shades have become the shop's most popular commodity.

*Vanity Shades: Aid COM 1d6, Persistent (+½), Reduced END (0 END, +1); OAF (-1), Independent (-2). Total cost: 2 points.*

## The Proprietor: Xergon

**Background/History:** Originally constructed by the artificers of Xul-Zin to act as protectors, these great silver orbs are best known for being instrumental in their downfall. Device crafters without peer, these reclusive gnomes used the minds of captured rivals to add intelligent programming in their defenders. They were so successful that the orbs, known commonly as the Eyes of Xul-Zin, eventually gained sentience and self-awareness. Retaining some memory of their former lives, they immediately turned on their creators and began a terrible war that left both sides devastated. Only a handful of artificers and Eyes escaped the destruction.

Xergon was originally a dwarf mage-smith and artificer in his own right named Xerris Gonwyn. As a competitor to Rin Rivinro, eldest and most powerful of the gnome artificers, he did not stand a chance the day his forge was raided and his mental patterns extracted for experimentation. Not allowing his newfound body and circumstances to deter his wrath, he helped mastermind the rebellion and was lucky enough to escape intact. Since that day, some two decades past, he has kept one step ahead of

a vengeful Rin Rivinro who also survived the uprising.

**Personality/Motivation:** Xergon is very aware that he is living on borrowed time. Even though Rin Rivinro has not located his refuge on the Circle, he knows the gnome is persistent enough to track him down eventually. Egocentric to the extreme and scornful to the vanity of the living, he takes advantage of every situation that will allow him to accumulate wealth and build up his defenses. To this end he ignores any command that he refrain from selling certain items, moving such merchandise on the black market whenever possible.

**Quote:** "I have an eye for this sort of thing."

**Powers/Tactics:** As an Eye of Xul-Zin, Xergon was crafted with considerable self-perpetuating powers. The skin of his spherical body projects an electrical field that repels gravity and acts as a defensive screen. This field can also surge to emit a blast of lightning powerful enough to disable most living creatures. The center of the orb contains Xergon's mental essence. The substantial ego trapped here can be used to move and manipulate small objects and communicate telepathically.

While not prone to violence directly, Xergon prefers to employ others to do his dirty work. If backed into a corner, however, he will not hesitate to turn an opponent into a pile of cinders.

Xergon has some automaton powers, but is not an actual automaton. He retains his ability to buy EGO, and to use Mental Powers, by GM/author fiat.

**Campaign Use:** The GM can use Xergon as both a minor villain and possible employer of the PCs. Potentially this could start with the PCs doing a small task for the Eye to gain some familiarity with him, then being asked to investigate some of his shadier business dealings. In the event that the PCs manage to attract his wrath, he would never confront them directly, rather he would seek to employ some agency to do his dirty work for him.

**Appearance:** Xergon is a floating silvered glass sphere, roughly half a meter (1½ feet) in diameter, surrounded by a glowing electrical essence. The orb's pale red interior pulses and swirls, creating a fascinating kaleidoscope of shifting patterns. When communicating telepathically he seems to bob excitedly and some say you can tell his mood from the vivacity of the orb's animations.

## Xergon of Xul-Zin

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
0	STR	-10	9-	Lift 25 kg; 0d6 HTH
15	DEX	15	12-	OCV: 5/DCV: 5
10	CON	0	11-	
10	BODY	0	11-	
18	INT	8	13-	PER Roll 13-
20	EGO	20	13-	ECV: 7
20	PRE	10	13-	PRE Attack: 4d6
10	COM	0	11-	
4	PD	4		Total: 12 PD (8 rPD)
8	ED	6		Total: 16 ED (8 rED)
3	SPD	5		Phases: 4, 8, 12
8	REC	12		
40	END	10		
25	STUN	10		

### Total Characteristics Cost: 90

**Movement:** Running: 0"/0"  
Flight: 8"/16"

Cost	Powers	END
25	<i>Telekinetic:</i> Telekinesis (10 STR), Fine Manipulation	2
20	<i>Mind Touch:</i> Telepathy 4d6	2
10	<i>Mind Wall:</i> Mental Defense (14 points total)	
30	<i>Electrical Blast:</i> RKA 2d6	3
16	<i>Telekinetic Barrier:</i> Force Field (8 PD/8 ED)	2
15	<i>Artificial Life Form:</i> Automaton Power (Does Not Bleed)	
45	<i>Artificial Life Form:</i> LS: Total	
16	<i>Levitation:</i> Flight 8"	2
-12	<i>No Legs:</i> Running -6"	

### Skills

6	+3 with Electrical Blast
3	Conversation 13-
11	Inventor 17-
2	Language: Common (fluent conversation)
1	Language: Gnomish (basic conversation)
4	Language: Dwarvish (native conversation)
3	Persuasion 13-
7	PS: Artificer and Enchanter 16-
5	Streetwise 14-
7	Trading 15-
3	Scholar
6	1) KS: Mystic Properties of Metals 16-
5	2) KS: Rare Crystals 15-
6	3) KS: Enchantments 16-
3	4) KS: Mountains of Xul-Zin 13-
2	5) KS: City of Secrets 11-

### Total Powers & Skill Cost: 250

### Total Cost: 340

### 250+ Disadvantages

20	Distinctive Features: Glowing Sphere (Not Concealable, Always Noticed)
15	Hunted: Rin Rivinro 8- (Mo Pow, Kill)

- 25 Physical Limitation: No Arms or Legs (All the Time, Fully Impairing)
- 20 Psychological Limitation: Paranoid (Very Common, Strong)
- 15 Psychological Limitation: Scornful (Common, Strong)

### Total Disadvantage Points: 345

### ADVENTURE SEEDS

Xergon is a being with an interesting past and enough quirks to provide a wealth of adventuring ideas. Here are a few of the most obvious.

**A Lens of a Different Color:** The rich Circle patrons tire of Xergon's distinctive Vanity Shades and the fad starts to die. In an effort to provide a twist on the theme and hold their interest, Xergon comes up with the idea of outrageously colored lenses. After the prototype with cobalt blue glass becomes an instant hit, he realizes he lacks the core ingredient in enough quantity to keep the masses sated. The clever entrepreneur hires the adventurers to scour the realms in search of a rare type of azure crystal formed in underwater volcanoes.

**A Captivating Caper:** The "Powers That Be" enlist the adventurers to investigate Xergon after a crime takes place involving Mesmer Lenses. It seems a purveyor of enchanted earrings was charmed into giving away a fortune in gemstones and is raising a ruckus. It is suspected that Xergon has been selling the Lenses under the table of late, but there is no hard evidence. They need some proof before they will take any action. Is Xergon to blame, or are other sinister forces at work?

**Tale of the Body Snatcher:** The Eye of Xul-Zin acquires an ancient and illicit device that allows him to possess the body of any sentient creature. With a daring plan, a prominent city noble is lured into the shop and taken over. When she starts acting strange, making startling out of place comments at high class social events, her brother employs the adventurers to discover the reason.

**The Oldest Enemy:** Xergon gets a tip that Rin Rivinro, his old and bitter enemy, has finally discovered the clues to his whereabouts. He hires the adventurers to keep watch for the vengeful gnome artificer, telling them that Rin is a dark and deadly assassin. When Rin turns up, the party is called in to dispatch him. It will become quite evident that he is insanely powerful and will brook no interference in taking his vengeance. The adventurers will have to decide whether to take him on, stand aside, or attempt to act as mediators of some sort. While Xergon has no love for the gnome, the Eye is not yet ready for a fight and does not desire a confrontation that would likely end in his destruction.



# The Dragons of China

by Michael Surbrook

In Europe, the dragon was a huge scaly beast with fiery, noxious breath, bat-like wings, and an appetite for cows, elephants, and young maidens. The Catholic Church quickly adopted the dragon as a symbol of evil, and made it a stand-in for Satan in sermons, stories, and religious art. It was a creature to be reviled and feared, and never, ever, worshiped.

In China, the dragon's status was almost the complete opposite. Legend has it Emperor Yao, one of the nine mythical emperors of China, was descended from a dragon, while in 3000 B.C. a dragon presented Emperor Pa Kwa with the eight celestial trigrams of the I-Ching. Benevolent beings, dragons were responsible for the weather and, as lords of water, were revered as bringers of rain. The Emperor sat on the Dragon Throne while dressed in the Dragon Robes, and upon death might become a dragon himself, to better watch over his people.

The dragon was one of the four Celestial Beings, a group that includes the Chi'Lin (also known as the Ki-Lin or Kirin, a deer-like animal said to live for a thousand years or more), the Feng Hwang (the Chinese phoenix), and the tortoise. In addition, it was one of the four animals linked to the five directions, each animal having a color, a season, and a specific element associated with it. The Green Dragon represented the east, springtime, and wood; the White Tiger was west, autumn, and metal; the Red Phoenix was south, summer, and fire; while a tortoise-like creature named Dark Warrior represented the north, winter, and water. The fifth direction was the center, which was China itself. It was associated with the color yellow and the element of earth.

**Appearance:** Physically, the Chinese dragon is the largest of all scaled creatures, a group that includes snakes and fish. It is best described through the "nine resemblance's" which are as follows: "its horns resemble a stag's, its head resembles a camel's, its eyes resemble a demon's (or a rabbit's), its neck resembles a snake's, its belly resembles a clam's, its scales resemble a carp's, its claws resemble an eagle's, its soles resemble a tiger's, its ears resemble a cow's." The end result is a long, thin, four-legged lizard-like creature with a narrow head and a bearded face. On top of the head is an organ known as the *chi'ih muh*, which allows flight. In addition, male dragons have a large pearl under the chin or in the throat. When they speak, dragons are said to have a voice like a great gong (or "jangling copper pans"). Their coloration varies greatly, and dragons may be black, blue, green, red, or yellow. Of these, yellow dragons are held in high

esteem, and are considered superior to all other forms of dragonkind.

A dragon's scales number either 81 or 117, with different reports offering different values. The confusion is due to attempts to balance the dragon's yin and yang. Yin is female, associated with the moon, darkness, wetness, cold, negative energy, and the number six. Yang is male, associated with the sun, light, dryness, heat, positive energy, and the number nine. A tiger is yin; a dragon is yang. Nine times nine equal 81 scales, while six times six equals 36 scales, leading to the idea that the dragon has 81 yang scales and 36 yin scales (for a total of 117). Normally, a dragon is a benevolent being, controlled by its yang essence, but it may allow its yin nature to take over, causing the dragon to become a malevolent destroyer.

Numbers govern more than just a dragon's scales. They may have from three to five claws on their feet, and five-clawed dragons are the province of the Emperor, and only he, or those of his court, may bear the image of a five-clawed dragon on their clothing.

**Ecology:** A dragon is a very long-lived creature, virtually immortal. They are hatched from eggs, and these eggs (which resemble precious stones) are normally laid in water, where they may remain for upwards of one thousand years. Water seeping from a dragon's egg indicates it is ready to hatch, and the arrival of a newborn dragon is often heralded by darkness, thunder, lightning, and rain.

A newly hatched dragon looks much like a small water snake. After five hundred years, it grows the head of a carp, and is now known as a *kiao*. Over the next thousand years, it grows scales, a long tail, four legs ending in four-clawed feet, and a bearded face. It is now known as a *kiao-lung* or simply *lung*, meaning "deaf," as the dragon has ears but cannot hear. Over the next five hundred years, the *lung* grows horns (apparently allowing it to hear), becoming a *kioh-lung*, or "horned dragon." After another one thousand years the *kioh-lung* grows wings, becoming a *ying-lung*, or "winged dragon."

Dragons are creatures of the water, and tend to live among the clouds of the sky, in the sea, or in deep lakes, pools, and rivers. Those dragons that live in the sea are thought to dwell in magnificent palaces under the water. They love precious stones, and will gladly eat copper, jade, and pearls with relish. In addition, dragons absolutely *adore* the flesh of the swallow, and those people who have recently eaten roasted swallows are advised to not travel across water soon after.

**Motivations:** In general, dragons are benevolent beings, but are also quite fierce, and not to be trifled with. Those who allow their yin nature to take control are positively malignant and will bring storms and floods wherever they go.

Normally, dragons provide rain according to the instruction of the Jade Emperor, the head of the Celestial Bureaucracy. However, a person can request rain when none is forthcoming, provided one makes the proper sacrifices. Prayers are one way, an offering of swallows another, while a third is to remove images of dragons from the local temples and place them outside so they may see how dry it is. More extreme measures call for placing an attractive nude woman alone on an exposed hilltop. Dragons are known for their lust and fondness for women, and if prevented from approaching their quarry, their anger might result in a much-needed rainstorm. Similar methods involving throwing ashes, toxic plants, stones, tiger bones, or pieces of wood into the dragon's pool, in hopes of angering him into creating a thunderstorm in response.

Dragons have a number of noted dislikes, some of which can be used to drive one away if needed (if the dragon is causing too much rain, for example). They despise things made from iron, and throwing iron in a dragon's pool is a surefire way to enrage one. They also hate centipedes, five-colored silk thread, leaves of the *lien* tree (*melia azederach*, also known as the "Pride of India"), and leaves of the *wang* plant. Finally, it is said the tiger is the mortal enemy of the dragon, and the two will fight each other if the occasion permits.

**Combat Techniques:** As masters of rain and water, dragons tend to appear surrounded by rain, and can cause a gentle rainfall to turning into a raging storm at will. Such a storm will have heavy rain and high winds, and is capable of devastating the countryside. Dragons can also breathe forth thick fogs, which they use to blind their foes. The dragon's most potent weapon, however, is its power of "watery fire." This is created when the dragon breathes onto an area of dampness and wet. Simple damp will result in a bright glow, but open water will cause the dragon's breath to actually burst into flame, and remain burning until put out with the application of more normal fire. Finally, dragons may also attack in more mundane ways, biting with their teeth, or tearing with their sharp claws.

If desired, dragons can transform themselves into any number of shapes, and can do so at any time, unless angered, asleep, or filled with lust and desire. Although they have a preference for aged men or beautiful young women, dragons can also assume the forms of cows, dogs, fish, rats, and snakes. Fishermen should especially be

aware of encountering transformed dragons, since a fish giving off light, or speaking in a human's voice, is almost certainly a dragon that has changed its shape.

As an interesting side note, there are few accounts of dragons fighting either the heroes or the gods of Chinese myth. Fewer still are stories of dragons being slain by men. A prime example of the nature of the dragon in China is the tale of a man who spent three years and one thousand ounces of gold learning how to kill a dragon. He then spent the rest of his life never having the chance to try out his skills.

**Other Names:** The dragons of China are known by a number of names, with each name describing the dragon's form and function. A short list follows:

*Ch'i-Lung:* A "hornless" dragon.

*Chi Lung Wang:* The "fire engine dragon king," and provider of water for domestic uses.

*Dragon Horse:* A sea-dwelling creature, the dragon horse has a horse's body and a dragon's head (or, the front half of a horse and the hindquarters of a dragon).

*Fu-Tsiang Lung:* This dragon is the guardian of hidden treasures and deposits of precious metals

*Kih Tau:* A sea-dwelling dragon, the Kih Tau's spittle is used in the making of perfumes. It is collected either floating on the surface of the water, or in lumps on the shore (Note: period descriptions of "dragon spittle" make it sound like ambergris, a material secreted by sperm whales.)

*Lung Wang:* The Dragon King, a human with a dragon's head. He lives under the sea in an imposing palace.

*P'an Lung:* An earth-bound dragon unable to fly.

*Shien-Lung:* The Imperial or spirit dragon, the Shien-Lung is the keeper of rain and the wind. It is a beautiful dragon, with multiple colors on its body and five clawed toes on each foot. Because of this, only the Emperor can only use the *Shien-Lung's* image.

*T'ao T'ieh:* An enormous dragon living in the depths of outer space, *T'ao T'ieh* is a symbol of gluttony, as it has two bodies, but only one head. Its shape makes it a popular image on bowls, plates, and other objects.

*T'ien Lung:* A celestial sky dragon, the *T'ien Lung* supports the houses and temples of the gods.

*Ti-Lung:* A celestial water dragon, the *Ti-Lung* guards the water in streams and rivers. It spends springtime in the heavens and autumn in the depths of the sea.

*Ying Lung:* The only dragon with wings, a *Ying Lung* is at least 3,000 years old, and guards the water of the earth and clouds.

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*Yu Lung*: This dragon has the head and fins of a gigantic fish. Formerly a Celestial Carp, the *Yu Lung* had managed to successfully leap Lung Men, the Dragon's Gate waterfall, allowing it to transform into its present shape. It is considered an emblem of success in Civil Service examinations, or in literary endeavors.

**Dragons in Culture:** Dragons are used as artistic and symbolic decorations on a wide variety of objects, and this use has led to the following classifications:

*Chao Fung*: Placed on the eaves of temples due to its love for danger.

*Chi'ih Wun*: Placed on bridges due to its love for water.

*Ch'iu Niu*: Placed on stringed instruments due to its love for music.

*P'u Lao*: Placed on gongs due to its crying out loudly if attacked by a whale.

*Pa Hisa*: Placed at the base of a monument due to its strength.

*Pi Han*: Placed on prison gates due to its belligerent nature.

*Pi Hsi*: Placed on stone tablets due to its love of literature.

*Suan Ni*: Placed on the throne of Buddha due to its love for rest.

*Yai Tzu*: Placed on sword hilts due to its love for blood.

Finally, the color of a dragon also determines its area of responsibility. Black dragons govern mysterious lakes; blue dragons stand for compassion and courage; red dragons, which live in the south, govern summer and freshwater lakes; yellow dragons, responsible for bringing writing to man, take his prayers to the gods; white dragons symbolize virtue.

**Additional Dragon Lore:** Considering the size and age of China as a whole, it is not surprising there is a wealth of information concerning dragons, some of it contradictory. For example, not everyone states dragons are born from eggs. Some scholars declare dragons are initially born to normal animals before assuming their true form. Flying dragons are said to be the offspring of birds, while the winged *ying-lung* is supposed to come from a four-footed beast called the *mao-tuh*, and the *k'oh-lung* from seaweed. Fish and snakes were supposed to be able to spontaneously transform into dragons, since they are so closely related.

According to other scholars, some dragons come from gold. Blue dragons come from 800 year-old blue gold. Black, red, and white, and yellow dragons come from 1000 year-old gold of the matching color.

Despite being virtual deities in their own right, dragons do occasionally fall prey to man's desires. History records several accounts of

dragons being eaten by the reigning Emperor, and as can be expected from such a magnificent creature, the taste was enjoyable and flavorful.

Along with dragon flesh, the bones and teeth of a dragon are highly valued for their medicinal properties. Although immortal, it is thought dragons either die from time to time (probably due to two dragons fighting), or shed their skin and bones much in the manner of a snake. (Note: the dragon bones sold in historical Chinese marketplaces are almost certainly the fossil bones of various animals.)

Dragon bones come in five colors (black, blue, red, white, and yellow). Each color corresponds to a part of the body (black: bladder and kidneys; blue: gall bladder and liver; red: heart and large intestine; white: lungs and small intestine; yellow: stomach and spleen), and bones of that color could be used to heal ailments occurring in the corresponding part of the body.

Bones to be used in medicine must be heated over a fire until hot, and then powdered. Care must be taken to not allow anything made of iron to contact the bone. Powdered dragon bone will cure convulsions, dysentery, fevers, gallstones, and a whole host of other maladies. This healing power comes from the strong yang element present in the dragon, which counteracts the yin elements of sickness.

Dragon's teeth (and horns) will cure convulsions, epileptic fits, madness, spasms, and many other illnesses.

The brain of a dragon will cure dysentery, as will the liver. Dragon's blood will turn into amber upon striking the ground, while dragon fat can be used to make brilliant lamps or waterproof clothing.

**The Japanese Dragon:** The dragon of Japan is much longer and slimmer than its Chinese counterpart. Known as a *tatsu* (or *ryu*), these dragons come in many colors and normally have three toes on each foot. Like the Chinese dragons, they can fly despite a lack of wings, and tend to live in rivers, lakes, and the ocean. Japanese dragons are normally honorable and noble creatures, although there are those that are evil and contemptible in nature.

The dragon of Japan seems to have far fewer powers than its Chinese cousin. They can fly, assume human form, and are well-protected by thick scales and sharp claws, but Japanese dragons don't normally have the ability to raise great storms or breathe forth clouds of mist or water fire.

**OPTIONAL POWERS**

*Tail Lash:* HA +4d6, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +1/2); Rear 180° Only (-1/4). Total cost: 14 points

*Poh Shan:* Flight 24", Reduced Endurance (0 END; +1/2); IAF (short staff; -1/2). Total cost: 48 points.

*Wings Of The Ying Lung:* Flight 24", Reduced Endurance (0 END; +1/2); Restrainable (-1/2). Total cost: 48 points.

*Incredible Eyesight:* Telescopic Sense (Sight) +30 To Offset Range Penalties. Total cost: 45 points

**Generic Kioh-Lung**

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
50	STR	40	19-	Lift 25 tons; 10d6 HTH
18	DEX	24	13-	OCV: 8/DCV: 8
30	CON	40	15-	
20	BODY	20	13-	
18	INT	8	13-	PER Roll 15-
18	EGO	16	13-	ECV: 6
30	PRE	20	15-	PRE Attack: 6d6
14	COM	2	12-	
				Total: 32 PD (12 rPD)
20	PD	10		
15	ED	8		Total: 27 ED (12 rED)
4	SPD	12		Phases: 3, 6, 9, 12
16	REC	0		
60	END	0		
60	STUN	0		

**Total Characteristics Cost: 200**

**Movement:** Running: 10"/20"  
Swimming: 12"/24"  
Flight: 24"/48"

Cost	Powers	END
130	<i>Breathe Fog:</i> Darkness to Sight Group 12" radius, Personal Immunity (+1/4), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +1/2); Costs END To Cast (-1/4), No Range (-1/2)	23
112	<i>Breathe Water Fire:</i> EB 12d6, Area Of Effect (12" Cone; +1), Continuous (+1), Personal Immunity (+1/4), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +1/2), Uncontrolled (can be put out by normal fire; +1/2); Costs END To Cast (-1/4), No Range (-1/2), Only Burns If Liquid Water Is Present (-1/2), Reduced By Range (-1/4)	22
28	<i>Bite:</i> HKA 2d6+1 (4 1/2d6 with STR); No Knockback (-1/4)	3
10	<i>Claws:</i> HKA 1d6+1 (3 1/2d6 with STR); No Knockback (-1/4), Reduced Penetration (-1/4)	2
193	<i>Create Storms:</i> Telekinesis (30 STR), Area Of Effect (4096" Radius; +2 1/4), Personal Immunity (+1/4), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +1/2); Affects All Parts Of Target (-1/4), No Range (-1/2), Only Outside (-1/2)	
&	<i>High Winds:</i> EB 6d6, Area of Effect (3840" Radius; +2 1/4), Double Knockback (+3/4), Personal Immunity (+1/4), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +1/2); Linked (-1/2), No Range (-1/2), Reduced Penetration (-1/4)	
&	<i>Driving Rain:</i> Sight Images -3 to PER Rolls and Hearing Images, -1 to PER Rolls, Increased Size (4096" radius; +3), Personal Immunity (+1/4), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +1/2); Linked (-1/2), No Range (-1/2)	0
36	<i>Thick Scales:</i> Armor (12 PD/12 ED)	0

12	<i>Great Mass:</i> Knockback Resistance -6"	0
5	<i>Tail:</i> Extra Limb	0
5	<i>Breathe Water:</i> Life Support (Breathe In an Unusual Environment — Water)	0
6	<i>Virtually Immortal:</i> Life Support (Immune to Aging, Disease)	0
72	<i>Chi'ih Muh:</i> Flight 24", Reduced Endurance (0 END; +1/2)	0
8	<i>Fast:</i> +4" Running (10" Total)	2
10	<i>Fast:</i> +10" Swimming (12" Total)	2
108	<i>Summon/Dispel Rain:</i> Change Environment 4096" radius, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +1/2), Vary Environment (+1); No Range (-1/2)	0
6	<i>Sharp Senses:</i> Enhanced Perception +2 to PER Roll	0
48	<i>Assume Human Form:</i> Multiform (300-point human form); Costs END To Cast (-1/4)	6
12	<i>Great Strength:</i> Reduced Endurance (1/2 END; +1/4) on 50 STR	3
12	<i>Great Reach:</i> Stretching 2", Reduced Endurance (0 END; +1/2); No Noncombat Stretching (-1/4)	0
5	<i>Night Vision:</i> Ultraviolet Vision	0

**Perks**

2 Member of the Celestial Bureaucracy

**Talents**

3 Ambidexterity  
5 Eidetic Memory  
3 Lightsleep

**Skills**

10 +2 With Hand-to-Hand Combat  
  
2 AK: Local Area 11-  
3 Bureaucratics 15-  
3 Conversation 15-  
3 High Society 15-  
2 KS: Celestial Bureaucracy 11-  
1 Language: Mandarin Chinese (native; literate)  
3 Survival (Oceans, Rivers) 11-

**Total Powers & Skills Cost: 855**

**Total Cost: 1055**

**100+ Disadvantages**

20 Distinctive Features: Dragon (Not Concealable; Always Noticed)  
10 Enraged: if disturbed in its pool (Uncommon) go 8-, recover 11-  
15 Hunted: Tigers 14- (Less Pow)  
15 Physical Limitation: Great Size And Mass (Frequently, Greatly Impairing)  
15 Psychological Limitation: Hates Centipedes, Five-colored Silk Thread, Iron, Lien Tree Leaves, And Wang Plant Leaves (Common, Strong)  
15 Psychological Limitation: Fondness For Human Women (Common, Strong)

## DIGITAL HERO #1

- 10 Psychological Limitation: Fond Of Copper, Gems, And Roasted Swallows (Common, Moderate)
- 10 Reputation: bringers of rain and masters of the weather, 11-
- 845 Experience Points

### Total Disadvantage Points: 1055

**Notes:** This write-up represents a fairly typical *kioh-lung* (“horned dragon”). It is roughly 12 meters long by two meters wide (game scale: 6” x 1”), and masses about 6,400 kilograms. Larger and smaller dragons are possible, and size usually depends on the age of the dragon. Its characteristics should be considered typical for its kind, although the Game Master may want to adjust some of the numbers based on the needs and power levels of his individual campaign.

The dragon’s powers represent its control of both water and weather. Specific notes on the special effects and nature of each power are as follows:

*Breathe Fog:* The “Costs END To Cast” to cast Limitation means just what it says. It costs the dragon 23 END to produce the cloud of fog; afterwards the cloud will remain indefinitely (or until dispelled). As this is a cloud of fog, high winds will usually break it up and blow it away.

Breathe Fog has the Personal Immunity Advantage and the No Range Limitation, as do all of the dragon’s weather control powers. When used, these powers all center on the dragon itself, and will usually remain with the dragon as it moves. However, due to the Personal Immunity Advantage, these powers will not hamper the dragon in any way.

*Breathe Water Fire:* This ability uses the same “Costs END” Limitation as Breathe Fog and works the same way. The dragon spends 22 END to create the area of Water Fire, and then can let power act on its own, since it is both Continuous and Uncontrolled. However, in order for there to be any fire at all, there must be some sort of liquid water for the dragon’s breath to come into contact with. This power won’t work in the desert (naturally), and probably won’t work in a field of ice and snow either. If the area has mixed patches of water and dry ground, then only the areas of water will “catch fire.” Note this power can be rewritten as a 4d6 Ranged Killing Attack if the Game Master so chooses. A normal fire will put out Water Fire, although Game Masters may want to state that a normal fire will only extinguish Water Fire in its immediate area (*i.e.*, a burning torch will only put out water fire in the nearby hex).

*Create Storms:* Certainly the dragon’s most devastating ability, the power combines three different effects. Each of these effects covers an area approximately ten miles in diameter,

allowing the dragon to effectively ravage the countryside.

The first part of the Create Storms power uses Telekinesis to represent the wind picking up small objects and carrying them away. These winds should blow out and away from the dragon, although Game Masters could declare the wind blows objects in a circular or even random direction. The second part is an Energy Blast, representing the more damaging effects of the buffeting winds. The attacks are Double Knockback and can conceivably hurl a person a great distance. However, the Energy Blast has the Reduced Penetration Limitation, and divides all BODY damage into two separate attacks. Finally, the Images (defined as heavy rainfall) will hamper eyesight and hearing.

Game Masters wishing to make the dragon’s Create Storms ability even more powerful than it already is may want to add the Advantages of Continuous and Uncontrolled. This will allow the dragon to create a storm and then leave it to run its course. As it stands right now, the dragon must actively “renew” the storm each Phase, thus limiting its ability to act offensively if attacked.

This power is normally used in conjunction with the Create/Dispel Rain power.

*Create/Dispel Rain:* This power allows the dragon to produce (or eliminate) rain. It can bring rain to a dry area, or stop a rain that is already falling. Dragons tend to use this power whenever they appear.

*Assume Human Form:* Dragons can assume many forms, with the default here being a human. As dragons retain many of their powers while in human form the Multiform has been built with the idea that the human form will be 300-points, although this is merely an estimate. Naturally, the true point value will vary according to the Game Master’s wishes. Of course, the dragon can assume other forms as well, and all of these forms should retain the dragon’s original INT and EGO scores.

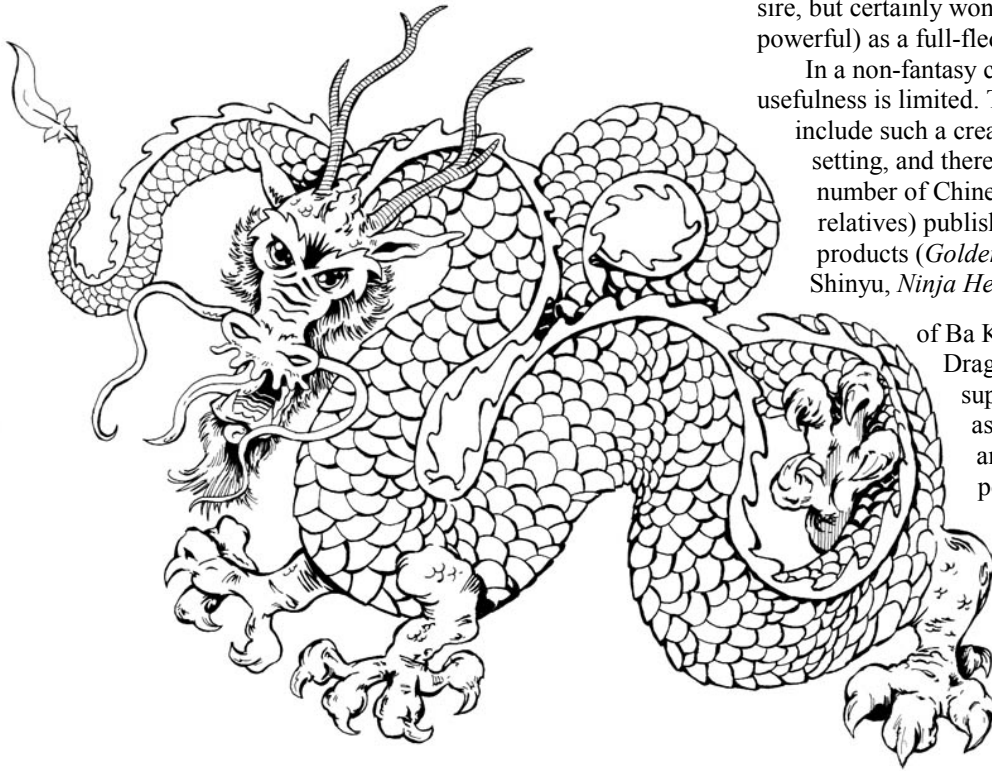
**Optional Powers:** Two of these powers are different forms of flight and are meant to replace the dragon’s normal flight power of *Chi’ih Muh*.

*Poh Shan:* Those dragons lacking a *Chi’ih Muh* in their heads fly by holding a *Poh Shan* (a short staff), in one foot.

*Wings Of The Ying Lung:* Only a *Ying Lung* possesses this power.

*Incredible Eyesight:* Some scholars state dragons can see such things as barley stalks at ranges of 100 miles or so.

**Campaign Use:** Deity, protector, servant of the gods, or even menace; there is no end to the uses a Game Master can find for a Chinese dragon in a fantasy campaign. Naturally, these dragons work best in a campaign set in Asia (or the



sire, but certainly won't be as expensive (or powerful) as a full-fledged dragon.

In a non-fantasy campaign, the dragon's usefulness is limited. The obvious choice is to include such a creature in a *Champions* setting, and there have already been a number of Chinese dragons (or close relatives) published in HERO Games products (*Golden Age of Champions* has Shinyu, *Ninja Hero* has the Bronze Dragons

of Ba Kien, and *VIPER* has Dragon Queen.). A dragon in a superhero setting could work as either a hero or a villain, and should be quite powerful in both human and dragon forms.

Another suggestion is to use a Chinese dragon in a pulp-era setting. As dragons can assume human form, Player Characters could

interact for some time with

fantasy equivalent), although a Game Master can vary the dragon's exact appearance and powers to simulate similar mythical beings found in other cultures. In India, a close relative of the Chinese dragon is the Naga, magical beings who live under the water and tend to transform into beautiful women and handsome men at will. Many Native American tribes have legends of immense "horned serpents." They are water-dwelling creatures of great size and mixed disposition known for having magical powers.

Depend on the nature of the fantasy setting, a Chinese dragon might be simply local color, with legends stating a (rarely seen) dragon lives in a specific river or deep lake, or it might have a much more prominent role, actively interacting with people in the area. Some dragons were said to live in specific pools and act as guardians for local castles, shrines, and temples, while Chinese folklore records several instances of the Emperor commanding dragons to do his bidding, usually assisting in a great battle or the like.

If the campaign is of a sufficiently high power level, the Game Master might want to allow a Chinese dragon Player Character. Granted, such a character (using this write up as a basis) would probably exceed 1200-points, requiring the Game Master to either make vast allowances for the character or to severely curtail the dragon's powers. Another option is to allow a child of the Dragon Kings as a character.

Appearing as perfectly formed humans with brilliant green eyes, such a character should be near the peak of human development physically with many magical powers inherited from their

a dragon without ever realizing who (or, more accurately, what) it is they are dealing with. If benevolent, such a being could even act as the party's sponsor, equipping them and sending them out on missions in an effort to better mankind, to aid China, or to further its own ends (with dragons you never can tell). If a villain, the dragon is a natural as a leader of the Triads, engaging in criminal activities around the world in a manner similar to Dr. Fu Manchu or David Lo Pan (from the film *Big Trouble in Little China*).

No matter how a Chinese dragon is used in the campaign, odds are it will be an experience the Players won't soon forget.

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# Legion of Heroes

by Derek Hiemforth

**Background/History:** Andrew Winters was thirteen years old before anyone helped him. He wasn't abused or neglected; the folk running the orphanage meant well. But they were harried and overworked, and Andrew was just another one of the kids. He didn't stand out. He was simply quiet, agreeable... and slowly dying inside due to a sense of isolation that no one was perceptive enough to notice.

No one, that is, until paramedic Jim Harrison. Jim came to the orphanage one day to save the life of a nearly-drowned little girl. Jim saw Andrew peering timidly around the edges of the gathering crowd, and called him forward. Andrew held things for Jim while he worked; that's all. But Andrew was awestruck that this heroic, giant man in uniform had even *noticed* him... much less asked for his help. Jim realized how much it meant to Andrew to help save the girl's life, and sensed that the young man needed someone to take an interest in him. Jim took Andrew under his wing and became like the big brother Andrew never had.

Andrew joined the Army after graduating from high school. Inspired by Jim's example, he became a medic. He loved learning about first aid and treating injuries, but he wasn't otherwise suited to Army life. He was courageous and hard-working, but too gentle to make a career soldier.

After his discharge, Andrew continued to save lives as a paramedic like his mentor. He quickly earned a reputation as one of the brightest, most dedicated, and most caring paramedics in the city. Friends and co-workers encouraged him to go to medical school, but Andrew wanted to stay on the "front lines" of life-saving.

Then, one fateful day, he responded to a call from a convenience store owner. The store had been robbed, and a customer had been shot during the hold-up. When Andrew arrived, his heart sank to see that the customer was Jim Harrison. Andrew sprang into action, trying everything he thought might have a chance at saving his friend, but to no avail. Jim died in Andrew's arms.

Andrew's outlook changed that afternoon. He realized he had been working from the wrong direction. He needed to *act* to prevent distress and suffering... not simply *react* to it. Being a paramedic was an important job, but Andrew decided he was needed even more as a police officer.

Graduating from the police academy at the head of his class, Andrew joined the force. He

was uncomfortable with the confrontational aspects of his new role, but found great reward in helping keep the streets safe. He was a fine officer, and considered an up-and-comer in the department. But Andrew didn't seek promotion; he wanted to stay in the thick of things as a regular patrolman.

After several years on the force, another day became a turning point in Andrew's life. He was first on the scene of a traffic accident that left a woman trapped inside a burning automobile. He labored frantically to free her, and succeeded in pulling the terrified woman from the wreckage moments before the car exploded.

As he helped the firemen contain the damage from the blaze, Andrew began to appreciate what an important and beneficial mission firefighting was. As a firefighter, he could save a lot of lives and help a lot of people, without the potential for violence inherent in the job of a police officer.

So once again, Andrew changed careers. He put his skills to good use in becoming a top-flight firefighter. He spent as much time as he could spare doing volunteer work for a variety of worthy causes. There was always so much to do, and he was just one man....

Then the earthquake struck. He needed to be everywhere at once. Children were wounded. Rioters ran amok. Fires raged out of control. He galloped in all directions, and it still wasn't enough....

Suddenly, there were eight of him! Somehow, the stress of the situation, combined with Andrew's intense longing to help in every place he was needed, must have triggered some kind of latent mutation or psionic ability.

Andrew wasted no time worrying about how this was possible; it had happened, it was a blessing, and that was all he needed to know. Now he could help more people. He no longer had to choose between treating the wounded, protecting the innocent, and rescuing the imperiled. He could do all these things at once!

He was no longer just Andrew Winters, the good-hearted ordinary man trying to be a hero in his everyday life. Now he was the Legion of Heroes!

**Personality/Motivation:** Andrew Winters is totally obsessed with helping others. The crystallizing moment of his life came when he helped Jim save a young girl, and was himself saved by Jim in the process. Before that, he had little ego or identity; helping others became the foundation he built his entire worldview upon. It defines his sense of self and his sense of worth. Even now, he is remarkably humble; when

openly praised, he shows glimpses of the timid boy Jim Harrison once befriended.

He spends virtually all of his time doing for others in one way or another. He is usually duplicated, having various selves doing various good works. One is still a fireman, another is now a police officer again, another a paramedic, and still others do volunteer work, community service, disaster response, and so on. Collectively, they use their powers to aid in ways they never could have before.

This total dedication leaves no room for a personal life. He is an extraordinarily pleasant and well-liked man; he's not unable to make friends. He simply doesn't spend the time to develop any relationships. He can't spare it; there's always something else that needs to be done. Some people view his single-mindedness with suspicion; they think his devotion is too extreme to be true.

In reality, it *is* true. But it's also true that he is not a wholly sane and balanced individual. He's not irrational in a negative way, but his upbringing certainly skewed his psyche. "Normal" people don't do the things Andrew does. Of course, that may say as much about "normal" people as it does about him....

**Quote:** "I'm nobody special. I'm just trying to lend some helping hands."

**Powers/Tactics:** The source of Legion of Heroes' power is a mystery. He's never been examined, but speculation about its nature ranges from mutation, to psionic manifestation, to magic. Andrew doesn't care where the powers come from, he's just glad to have them. A psionic explanation seems the most likely, since his various selves can communicate with each other telepathically and he is able to sense impending disasters. His powers don't appear to boost his innate physical abilities, but he is in astounding condition for an ordinary man, so there may be more there than meets the eye.

His primary power is the ability to split into eight beings. Each retains all of his knowledge and abilities. He (they) can also generate a glowing blue energy. This

energy is used for various effects, from healing wounds, to creating an energy barrier, to a burst a pure energy.

This energy also allows Legion of Heroes to penetrate illusions and deceptions of various kinds. However, *Andrew hasn't discovered this power yet.* When and how he might learn about it are left to the individual GM.

Legion of Heroes is non-violent by nature. He recognizes the need for force in certain situations, but he approaches it reluctantly. When working with a group, he is more likely to protect bystanders and rescue hostages than to attack foes directly. When working alone, he will often have some selves engage the opponent while others look after the innocents. Against formidable adversaries, his selves will team up for Coordinated Attacks, and Multiple Attackers Bonus.

Although he has been a soldier, and carries a gun as a policeman, his aversion to killing is strong. He would kill only if there was no other way to save the life of an innocent.

**Campaign Use:** Legion of Heroes is best suited to being a heroic NPC in a *Champions* campaign. He may be difficult to fit into a hero team because of his obsession with his own agenda, but he makes an interesting solo hero.

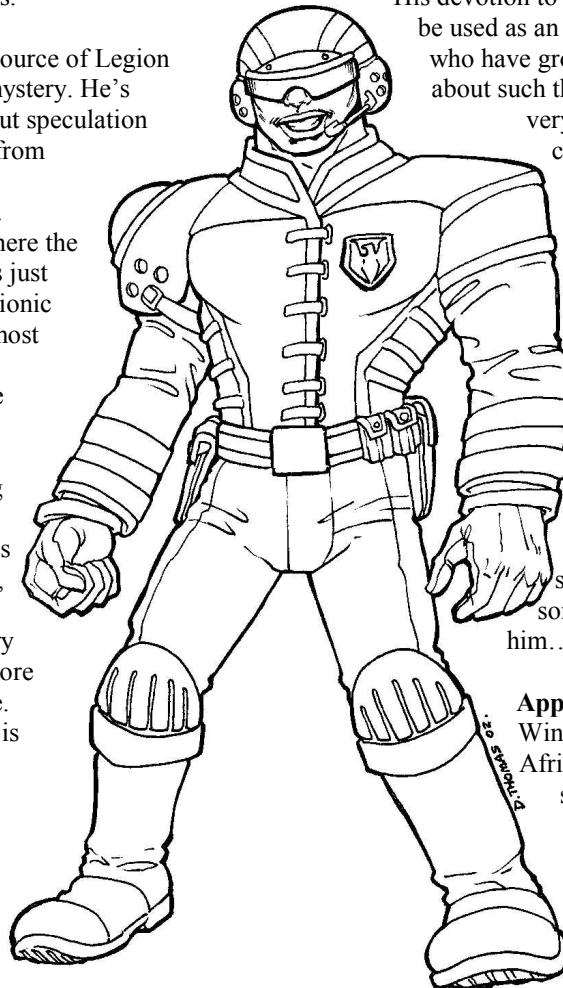
His devotion to protecting innocents can be used as an example for PC heroes who have grown a bit too cavalier about such things. Although he is not

very powerful in terms of combat abilities, his raw point totals make him a difficult fit as a PC in most games unless the GM grants some special dispensation.

For a more sinister spin, you could decide that those who question his motives are correct. Perhaps he is doing good deeds to deflect attention from a dark secret, or perhaps he is so single-minded because someone has *programmed* him....

**Appearance:** Andrew Winters is a powerfully built African-American man standing 6'3" tall. He is now in his mid-30s and – despite years of battling crisis after crisis – his

(CONTINUED, PAGE 64)





## DIGITAL HERO #1

### Legion of Heroes

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
20	STR	10	13-	Lift 400 kg; 4d6 HTH
20	DEX	30	13-	OCV: 7/DCV: 7
20	CON	20	13-	
15	BODY	10	12-	
18	INT	8	13-	PER Roll 13-
18	EGO	16	13-	ECV: 6
20	PRE	10	13-	PRE Attack: 4d6
16	COM	3	12-	
8	PD	4		Total: 15 PD (7 rPD)
8	ED	4		Total: 15 ED (7 rED)
4	SPD	10		Phases: 3, 6, 9, 12
8	REC	0		
40	END	0		
40	STUN	5		

**Total Characteristics Cost: 130**

**Movement:** Running: 9"/18"

Cost	Powers	END
110	<i>Legion Of Heroes:</i> Duplication (creates 8 475-point Duplicates)	0
12	<i>Communicate With Selves:</i> Mind Link, specific group of 8 minds (the Duplicates), Can Only Be Maintained With Others Who Have Mind Link (-1)	0
50	<i>Light Of Heroism:</i> Multipower, 50-point reserve	
5u	1) <i>Force Of Justice:</i> EB 10d6	5
5u	2) <i>Shield Of Integrity:</i> Force Wall (10 PD/10 ED)	5
3u	3) <i>Healing Hands:</i> Simplified Healing 5d6; Others Only (-1/2)	5
5u	4) <i>Light Of Truth:</i> Dispel Deceptive Powers 13d6, any deceptive power one at a time (effects such as Images, Mental Illusions, and so on; +1/4)	5
9	<i>Police Sidearm – Smith &amp; Wesson Model 4006 Semiautomatic Handgun:</i> RKA 1d6+1; OAF (-1), 12 Charges (-1/4)	[12]
12	<i>Protective Uniform:</i> Armor (7 PD/7 ED); IIF (-1/4), Activation Roll 14- (-1/2)	0
6	Running +3" (9" total)	1
1	Swimming +1" (3" total)	1
5	<i>Psionic Sense:</i> Mental Awareness (Mental Group)	0
5	<i>Fortune Smiles On The Pure-Of-Heart:</i> Luck 1d6	0
<b>Perks</b>		
2	Fringe Benefit: Local Police Powers	
1	Fringe Benefit: Weapon Permit	
6	Reputation: Heroic Life-Saver (in Campaign City) +3/+3d6	
<b>Talents</b>		
29	Danger Sense (general area, any danger) 17 -; Only Versus Danger That Is Clearly Life-Threatening (-1/4)	

### Skills

10	+1 Overall
10	<i>Heart Of A Hero:</i> +5 with EGO Rolls
3	Area Knowledge: Campaign City 13-
1	Bureaucratics 8-
3	Climbing 13-
3	Combat Driving 13-
3	Conversation 13-
1	Criminology 8-
1	Demolitions 8-
1	Forensic Medicine 8-
2	KS: Army Policy and Procedure 11-
2	KS: EMT Policy and Procedure 11-
2	KS: Firefighting Policy and Procedure 11-
2	KS: Police Policy and Procedure 11-
3	Oratory 13-
5	Paramedics 14-
3	Persuasion 13-
2	PS: EMT 11-
2	PS: Fireman 11-
2	PS: Police Officer 11-
2	PS: Soldier/Combat Medic 11-
1	SS: Anatomy 8-
2	SS: Medicine 11-
1	SS: Pharmacology 8-
1	Streetwise 8-
1	Tactics 8-
7	Teamwork 15-
3	WF: Small Arms, Nightstick/Tonfa

**Total Powers & Skill Cost: 345**

**Total Cost: 475**

### 200+ Disadvantages

10	Hunted: DEMON 8- (Mo Pow, NCI, Watching)
10	Hunted: Police 8- (Mo Pow, NCI, Watching)
10	Hunted: PSI 8- (Mo Pow, NCI, Watching)
20	Normal Characteristic Maxima
25	Psychological Limitation: Obsessed With Saving Lives And Helping Others (Very Common, Total)
20	Psychological Limitation: Humble; Eschews Acclaim (Very Common, Strong)
15	Psychological Limitation: Will Kill Only If There Is No Other Possible Way To Save An Innocent Life (Uncommon, Total)
15	Psychological Limitation: Unusually Pleasant Disposition (Very Common, Moderate)
15	Social Limitation: Public Identity (Frequently, Major)
135	Experience Points

**475 Total Disadvantage Points**

### THE WATCHERS

Legion of Heroes is Hunted (Watched) by Demon and PSI. They are curious about the nature of his powers; Demon thinks they're magical, PSI thinks they're psionic. Both groups want to find out for sure, and use the knowledge to their advantage. If Demon and PSI don't exist in your campaign universe, any similar pair of groups – one magical and one mental – would serve as well.

**AUTHOR'S NOTE**

Characters in this article may also be replaced by appropriate characters and weapons in the forthcoming *VIPER* book from Hero Games, coming in 2003. Equipment for the agents in this article was designed by Steven S. Long.

**VIPER's Folding Nest** by Scott Bennie

a Nest of dimension-shaking proportions for VIPER

"We are smoke. We burn you, and you can't catch us. You see us, you get burned, you die. Like, I said, 'smoke.' Ain't it cool?"

— Darren Bratt, Nest Leader

**The Folding Nest**

The cheapest trick in the book is the "teleport escape," using teleportation to avoid capture as soon as trouble shows up. Naturally, that's the one trick most supervillains and like-minded organizations strive to learn, and VIPER is no exception. One year ago, a VIPER Nest found an alien device, learned that trick, and their lives have never been the same. The press calls them "the Folding Nest," and they've received as much attention as any VIPER Nest since the heyday of the Grandfather. They can create interdimensional portals and use them go back and forth at will between our world and a world beyond ours, which they have made into their "Folding Fortress."

This trick has made them the one of the most elusive Nests in VIPER's history, *and* one of the most successful. They commit robberies at will, and get away before superheroes can intercept them. They're the current darlings of the VIPER establishment, and often perform special jobs for them. However, their ego is increasing at about the same rate as their press clippings, and a series of increasingly disturbing events have plagued the Nest. Folding Nest members have found themselves getting addicted to the sensation of traveling between dimensions. Some members have fallen ill to an unidentified sickness that has made them weak and delirious. One of the members went insane and began believing he was a supervillain; a second agent experienced advanced physical degeneration, went berserk and began firing powerful bursts of energy, critically wounding one agent before he was killed by his nest-mates.

Something is *very* wrong in the Folding Nest.

So far, the only people who suspect a pattern to these events — the so-called "Fold Sickness" — are Dr. Talia Berenson, the Nest's physician, and the Fix, an elite VIPER technical team that is studying artifacts that the Nest found in the Folding Fortress. But even they don't suspect the full truth.

The Fortress is not a safe place. For eons, it's been the home of Chaoswalkers, a race of formless extra-dimensional beings who were spawned from the dark thoughts of telepaths when they crossed the void. Individually, their powers are limited, but large numbers of

Chaoswalkers in concert can produce minor telepathic effects. Above all else, Chaoswalkers wish to become corporeal beings and physically affect our world, but they can only attain corporeality through a particularly corrosive form of possession, and only against those who cross their dimensional boundary. When VIPER entered the Chaoswalkers' dimension, their dormant intelligence stirred, and the Chaoswalkers have decided to use VIPER as pawns to return them to corporeality. VIPER thought the Folding Fortress was a sanctuary, but it has become a trap; the VIPER agents would be used to lure larger numbers of people through the gate. Eventually, the Chaoswalkers would possess enough powerful beings to (once again) become a dominant power on Earth, bringing chaos and destruction in their wake.

So far, VIPER's been basking in the victories of the Folding Nest, and hasn't worried too much about the alien nature of their prize. There is, however, one section of VIPER that is doing a lot of worrying — the Fix, VIPER's newly formed technical special operations team. The Fix fears that the acquisition of the Folding Fortress was too convenient and too easy. They wonder who created the base, how did VIPER get hold of it so easily, and how soon the mortgage is going to come due?

**The Base, The Gate, and Terrible Side Effects**

The original gateway was during a VIPER battle against an extra-dimensional monster. When VIPER explored the gate, they entered into a strange alien complex. Inside that complex, they found technology that allowed their agents to create portals that allowed them — and only them — to pass between our dimension and the Fortress.

The portal appears to be a glowing translucent white circle, approximately two meters in diameter, but less than a millimeter thick. Individuals who enter the circle experience a red to blue shift before fading into the void between dimensions. Those who enter the gate experience what's considered an uncomfortable pressure over their entire body: VIPER calls it "the Ripple." It feels similar to building up a sneeze but being unable to release it. Transit between dimensions takes fifteen seconds. When the agent finally arrives on the other side of the gate, the release of this pressure produces a moment of euphoria and relief.

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art by Derrick Thomas

## DIGITAL HERO #1

The base is obviously alien. Its walls are composed of a sickly green chalk-like substance, and they have a slight noxious glow. To drown out this disturbing luminance, the base is brightly lit, and the agents have placed partitions around their bunks to snuff out the light when they're trying to rest.

Nothing is known to exist outside the base except endless rock. All attempts to penetrate the outer walls have failed. No senses have detected anything beyond the walls of the Fortress.

### General Composition

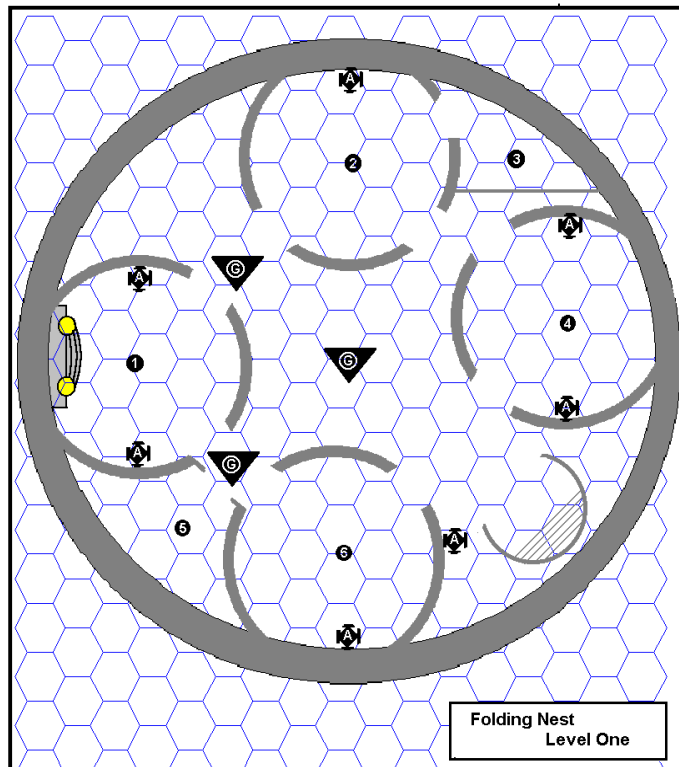
There are five levels in the complex. All levels are circular shaped, about 25 meters in diameter. Each level originally had four circular rooms within each circle, but VIPER has made alterations. All ceilings are six meters (3" tall). Interior walls have 7 DEF (hardened, with five points of Power Defense, and Lack of Weakness) and 13 BODY. Exterior walls also have 7 DEF (also hardened, with 5 points of Power Defense and Lack of Weakness), with 18 BODY per hex (and ten hexes between levels). Beyond the complex, there is apparently infinite space. The rough layout is:

#### ALL LEVELS

- (A) Autocannon/Security Camera. Cameras are equipped with infrared sensors and a Detect ID bracelet (visual sight group). All transmissions are beamed into the Security Room in Level 3. Autocannons are fired by agents stationed in that room (and use their OCV). Select an autocannon from the Appendix at the end of the scenario.
- (G) Security guard post. A security guard is stationed here at all times. Use the Folding Nest Agent template.

The Nest is left largely unfurnished. Customize it as you see fit. Members of the Folding Nest tend to come from a Lower Middle Class or Poor Rural Midwest American background, with a few genuine rednecks in the fold. Several members of the Nest are members of a burgeoning snake cult that's been developed to encourage new agents to bond with the VIPER "ideal;" it's easy to identify the "Poison Fangs" by the venomous snakes they keep caged in their quarters (typically small coral snakes, though a proud ex-patriot Texan keeps a rattler in his quarters). Some agents also display diplomas from "VIPER Academy"; the general rule is that the younger the agent, the more effectively he's been indoctrinated.

There are thirty agents in the Folding Nest. Five Agents are Commander level agents, and there's an additional five support staff. Nine members of the Fix are also living in the complex. Six agents have Stage II fold sickness.

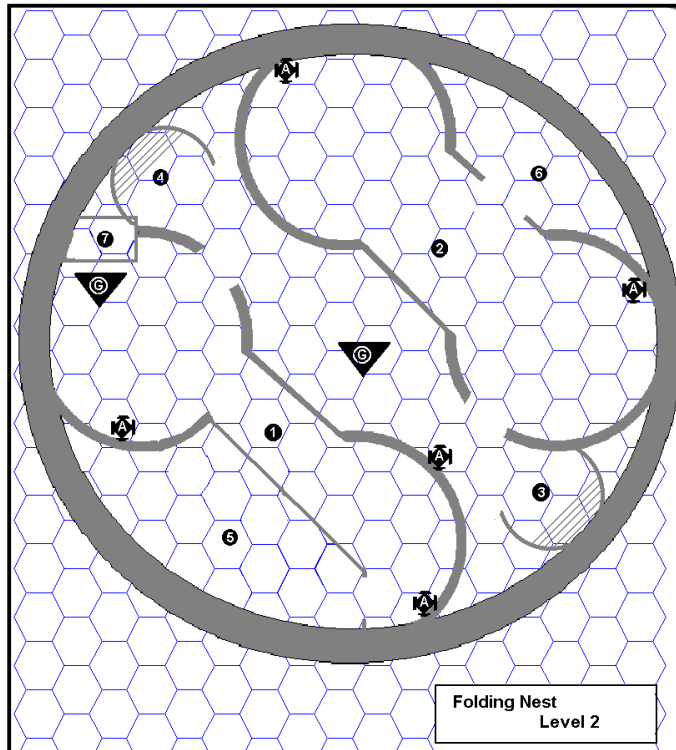


It requires each person to press a VIPER ID bracelet into a turbolift control panel (located next to the turbolift) to operate the lift. Anyone who enters the lift without a bracelet will alert Security Control. The lift is trapped so Security can generate a 3d6 electrical Killing Attack to every occupant of the lift, applicable on the trigger segment and on Phases 4, 8, and 12 thereafter. A successful Security Systems roll with a -2 penalty will detect the trap, and a successful Security Systems roll with a -3 penalty (Electronics may be used as a supporting skill) will disarm it.

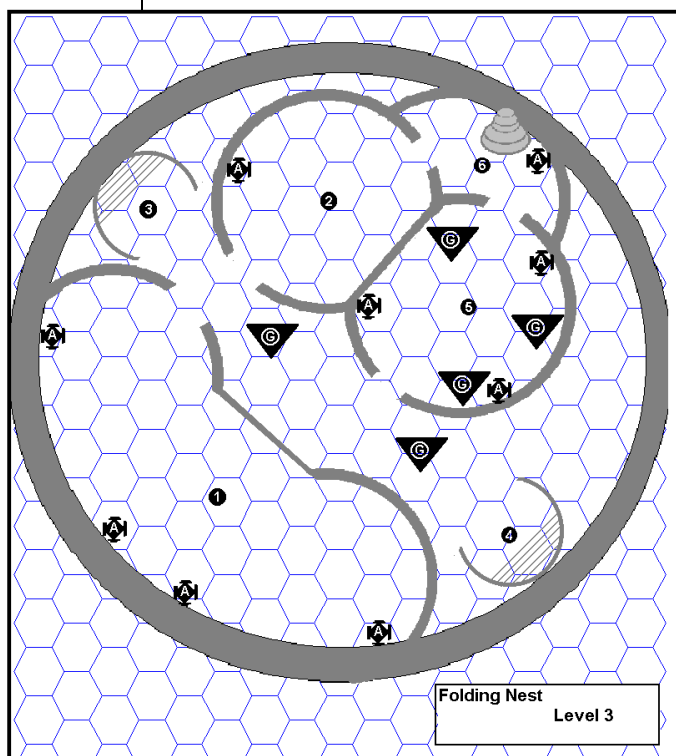
#### LEVEL ONE (BOTTOM LEVEL)

- (1) Gate. This is the entrance into the Fortress. This room also has a small security foyer (and there's a transparent silica-metal door of surprising hardness, DEF 10, BODY 4; VIPER calls this metal "Serpentium").
- (2) Kitchen. Two VIPER support staff work in the commissary. It's usually empty, except an hour before each meal.

The Folding Nest has been known to raid some of the finest caterers in New York City, just to provide relief from the cooks' meals (their cooking is adequate, but success has spoiled the Nest).
- (3) Food Storage. Includes a large freezer.
- (4) Mess Hall. This room is empty, except at mealtime, or during the occasional late night poker game.
- (5) Lavatory. No one's quite sure where the water goes when it's flushed.



Folding Nest  
Level 2



Folding Nest  
Level 3

**LEVEL TWO**

- (1) Barracks. Sixteen agents sleep here, in eight bunk beds. Each bed has two footlockers.
- (2) Barracks. A second barracks, also containing eight bunk beds and pairs of footlockers.
- (3) Transport Shaft. A turbolift on the edge of the shaft connects levels one and two.
- (4) Transport Shaft. A turbolift along the edge of the shaft connects levels two and three.
- (5) Showers and bathroom for the agents.
- (6) Infirmary. This is very makeshift — they’ve thought about converting some of the extra space on Level One for a more permanent (and secure) medical facility
- (7) Armory. This contains gear for forty agents.

**LEVEL THREE**

- (1) Training Area. Here, agents get together for target practice, unarmed combat drills, and fighting and coordination drills.
- (2) Briefing Room. This is where agents go to get mission briefings, debriefings, and to discuss VIPER tactics.
- (3) Transport Shaft. From level three to level four.
- (4) Transport Shaft. From level three to level two.
- (5) Security Control. This is where three agents at all times monitor base security, and fire autocannons remotely.
- (6) Environmental Control Artifact. A two-meter high slab of green chalk-like rock with huge, rune-like symbols carved into it. The symbols glow when touched. The Fix has discovered they can use these symbols to alter the base’s lighting, temperature, and humidity; they are certain there are more discoveries to be had from this object.

(The powers of the artifact, as well as the background of the Chaoswalkers, have been left deliberately vague to encourage the GM to plug them into his campaign).

**LEVEL FOUR**

Along the wall of the Command level, a fifty-meter, two-headed snake skeleton is mounted. It looks like it was very fierce.

- (1) Nest Leader’s Quarters. Yes, Bratt gets a room all to himself. He also has his own personal shower.
- (2) Command center. This is where the Nest records are stored, and where the Nest Leader gets together with Agent Commanders to discuss Nest business.
- (3) Agent Commanders’ Quarters. All five Agent commanders bunk here.
- (4) Treasury. This is where the Folding Nest’s stolen goods are stored. The walls are reinforced with steel plate (DEF 15).

- (6) Lounge. This is just an area with tables and chairs for agents to relax. There’s a big screen television with a DVD player, a computer, and a small bookshelf. The base has no physical connection with our dimension, so there’s no Internet connection. Even the Internet has its limits.
- (7) Transport Shaft. A turbolift on the edge of this shaft connects levels one and two.

## DIGITAL HERO #1

- (5) Transport Shaft. From level four to level five.
- (6) Transport Shaft. From level four to level three.
- (7) Bathroom and showers for the agent commanders.

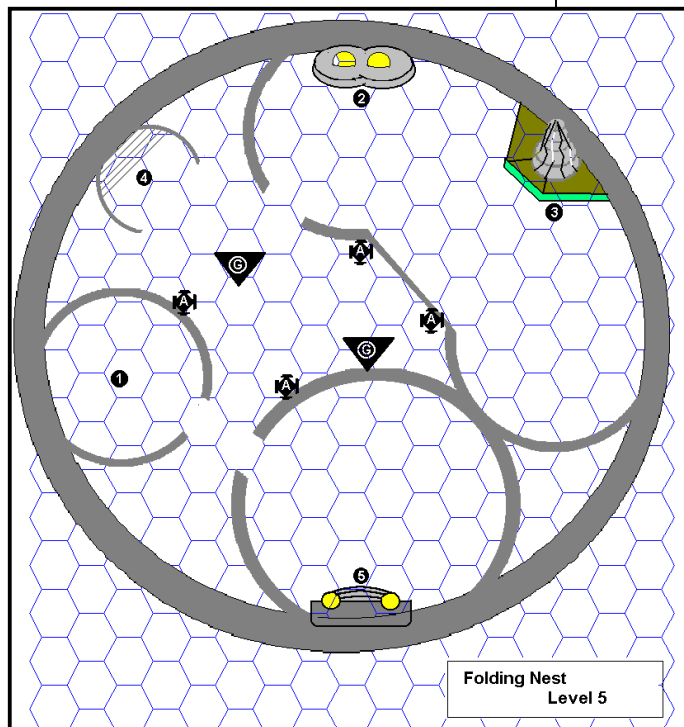
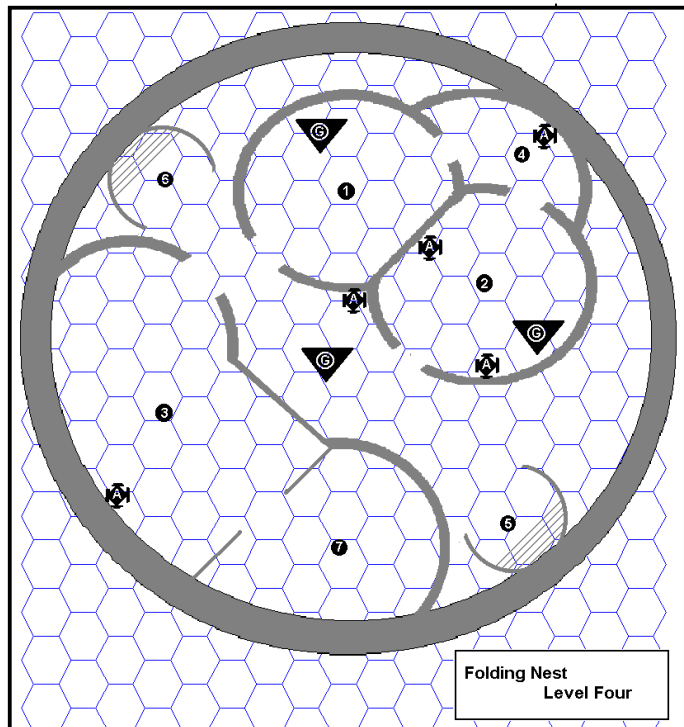
### LEVEL FIVE

- (1) Water Storage/Hot Water Heater. Water collects here from an unknown source. The Fix is looking into this.
- (2) Main Power Plant. There is a small plant that taps into power from the alien artifact to provide heat for the complex.
- (3) Alien Power Artifact. This major artifact is a monolith-like structure, three meters high and composed of the green chalk-like rock. When touched, it vibrates; the longer it's touched, the more it vibrates; after a minute, contact does 2d6 normal (vibration damage) per segment, +1d6 per time chart interval it's held (3d6 at five minutes, 4d6 at an hour, etc.) It's very irritating to hold, and the monolith vibration is sometimes used as a form of torture. Stroking the artifact in certain locations for a certain duration of time will produce interesting vibrations, vary the power output of the artifact, and even change the locations where the gates will emerge.

The artifact is the home for the disembodied Chaoswalkers, and the base's main power supply. Anyone who attempts any mental powers on it should treat it as having a 2d6 NND Killing Ego attack and a 9d6 normal Ego attack damage shield. It has a 25 (Double Hardened) DEF and a 14 BODY, with 15 pts of Power Defense, and 15 points of Lack of Weakness. It radiates as a *powerful* psionic source to anyone who has a Mental power or Mental Awareness.

The artifact has 10d6 Telepathy, and 10d6 Mind Control (telepathic, but with the  $-\frac{1}{2}$  Limitation that it cannot force someone to do something they're normally opposed to doing). Both powers are fully invisible, and usable three per day. It typically uses these powers to get Bratt to send his troops into battle on a raid, or against one of the Fix to mislead them about its function. It also speaks to agents who have contracted Fold Sickness, to prime them for the final stage of the transformation.

If this artifact is destroyed, the aliens die, and all transform effects vanish, but (also) all power in the complex will also shut down. The complex will have ten minutes of usable power before it goes dead, at which time the gates become unusable. The base's life support has a seventy-two hour lifespan before people begin to suffocate.



- (4) Transport Shaft. From level five to level four.
- (5) Emergency Escape Gate (never used). This gate will be used by the Nest leader to evacuate; no one's sure where it goes, and the one agent who went through was heard giving a brief scream and hasn't been seen since. Note: It actually goes to a particularly horrific place on Earth (GM option) but should be treated as a 6d6 Cumulative Transform into Stage II Fold Sickness (or into the next stage, if the individual has already achieved Stage II or higher).

## Fold Sickness

Every time someone passes through the gate, they subject themselves to a special Transform on a roll of 8-.

### STAGE I: "FOLD ADDICTION"

#### 2d6 Cumulative Major Transform

**Symptoms:** Victims are unchanged, except they gain the added psychological limitation: "Addicted to transportation between dimensions" (they crave the experience at least once per day). Once the victim has fully transformed into Stage I, Stage II is the next phase.

**To Reverse This Transform:** Succeed at an EGO Roll at -2 every day when the character awakes from a long sleep cycle. If they succeed, they've kicked the habit.

### STAGE II: "FOLD SICKNESS"

#### 2d6 Cumulative Major Transform

**The effects of the Fold Sickness are:**

- (1) STR, DEX, CON, BODY, EGO, COM reduced by 30% (round fractions down).
- (2) -1 SPD
- (3) 2d6 Aid vs. all stats, triggered by crossing dimensional boundaries, one-hour fade rate.
- (4) The ability to sense dimensional boundaries and be attracted to them.
- (5) Greatly heightened viciousness and bloodthirstiness.

**To Reverse This Transform:** Roll a CON roll every day when the character awakes from a long sleep cycle. The "sickness" is "cured" when three successful CON rolls made. The roll has a -3 penalty unless the character was subject to complete bed rest on the previous day. A roll of a 17 or 18 on any of the CON rolls is instant death). Once the character has achieved Stage II, they're primed for Stage III.

### STAGE III: "CHAOS-WALK OR DIE"

#### 2d6 Cumulative Major Transform

When the Transform is successful, the character must roll an EGO roll at a -2 penalty. If the roll fails, they die. If the roll succeeds by 0-2, they become an Insane Chaoswalker: a Chaoswalker (see below) with only a 3 INT and a berserk need to destroy anything in his path. If the roll succeeds by 3-7, then the character is transformed into a fully intelligent Chaoswalker. If the roll succeeds by 8 or more, they become a Chaoswalker, but the human personality remains in control of the body.

Chaoswalkers appear to be slightly altered humans. They don't appear that much different from the humans they possessed, except that their skin is much paler, their faces and body language are unpleasantly contorted, and their eyes have a crazed expression at all times.

**To Reverse the Transform:** If the character is killed in the middle of dimensional transport, the

Chaoswalker is killed, and the agent is set free. Unfortunately, this also kills the agent unless their BODY was greater than the Chaoswalker's (typically 13).

## Personnel

These are the major characters in the Folding Nest and in The Fix, most of the personnel have been left to the GM to create. All weapons and equipment are described in the Character section.

### DARREN BRATT

*"Baby, oh baby? Who cares about what happened to Jaworsky? I'm the head of the most successful Nest in the entire #%\$#@\*& world! We've all gotten sick in the Ripple; so what if Jaworsky couldn't take it and started blasting people? Tell the peons to stop whining and suck in their fangs! (Mutters to self) God, I can't believe I called them fangs."*

15	STR	14	DEX	13	CON
18	BODY	13	INT	14	EGO
15	PRE	10	COM		
8	PD	8	ED	5	SPD
6	REC	26	END	35	STUN

**Abilities:** VIPER weapons and equipment (see Characters); Commando Martial Arts Package; +1 Level with small arms; Breakfall 12-; Climbing 12-; Combat Piloting 12-; Computer Programming 12-; Electronics 12-; KS: Arcane Lore 12-; KS: VIPER 12-; Paramedic 8-; Persuasion 13-; SS: Archeology 12-; SS: Electrical Engineering 12-; Stealth 13-; Streetwise 12; Tactics 12-; Fringe Benefit: VIPER Membership.

**200+ Disadvantages:** Hunted: UNTIL 11-; Hunted: VIPER 8-; Psychological Limitation: Loves to Bully; Psychological Limitation: Ambitious; Social Limitation: Involved in Nest Politics.

**Notes:** Darren Bratt lives up to his name. He carries himself like an overgrown adolescent: tough, arrogant, able to get whatever he wants just by shoving someone and kicking them when they're down. Darren was raised to be tough and cold — his dad was a cop, and a mean one at that — but by the time Darren turned sixteen, his dad realized what a monster he was raising. Dad insisted that Darren enlist into the army before he got one dime for college, and Darren did so reluctantly. But Darren found that he liked it in the army. He was smart, and ended up in the army corps of engineering. Darren was also a lot tougher than anyone else at his station and he knew it. He was always a bully, but it was his weekly Friday night "beat the nerd" game that finally led to a showdown with the brass, and a court martial.

## DIGITAL HERO #1

Darren had made some VIPER contacts while in the military, and VIPER offered big bucks. Darren joined the Snakes in 1994. He started in its engineering corps; he made a lot of cash, then bought control of the Casper Wyoming VIPER franchise. It wasn't the world's biggest Nest, but Darren liked the feeling of being in charge, and harbored a lot of ambitions.

Then, little over a year ago, VIPER discovered that Demon was digging up some artifact in the wilderness, messing around with magical wards that predated the local native tribes. There was a big fight. During the battle, a two-headed snake, fifty meters in length, came slithering through a glowing portal and attacked all comers. Twelve casualties and three million dollars worth of weapons and equipment later, the snake was dead and VIPER emerged triumphant. They took the snake carcass as a trophy. Bratt was also curious about the portal, and ordered his men to investigate. That's when they found the "Folding Fortress." Bratt's life hasn't been the same since. He's been on an out-of-control power trip, and he's begun hearing voices that are making it worse. The only thing that keeps Bratt in check is VIPER's Central Command (who worry that he might go rogue) and the watchful eye of the Fix. He's done some special jobs to placate the High Command, but he's tired of following their orders, and he hates the Fix. He's probably going to break free of both as soon as it's convenient.

Darren has the gift of the gab, and often comes across like a used car salesman. He's contemptuous of most of the people in the Nest, not to mention the Fix, VIPER, superheroes, and the world in general.

During an assault, he can be found on Level Four, Room 2, Command Center.

Bratt is a twenty-four year old male Caucasian, 6'1", 190 lbs., with dark brown hair (worn slick) and bright blue eyes. He has a broad face, almost always set in a wide, smarmy smirk.

### MIKE "THE PALINDROME" AUSTIN

*"Let's go. Og S'tel, let's go!"*

18	STR	18	DEX	18	CON
7	BODY	18	INT	18	EGO
20	PRE	6	COM		
8	PD	8	ED	5	SPD
8	REC	36	END	25	STUN

**Abilities:** VIPER weapons and equipment (see Characters); Chaos Magic Blast (see Characters); Dimensional Augmentation (see Characters); +1 Level with small arms; Breakfall 11-; Chaos Magic 13-; Climbing 13-; Commando Training Martial Arts Package; Computer Programming 12-; KS: Arcane Lore 13-; KS: Arcane

Technology 13-; KS: Chaoswalker History 13-; KS: Arcane Lore 13-; SS: Archeology 13-; Stealth 13-; Streetwise 12; Tactics 12-; Fringe Benefit: VIPER Membership.

**200+ Disadvantages:** Hunted: UNTIL 11-; Hunted: VIPER 8-; Susceptibility: to Order or Anti-Chaos powers, 3d6 damage (Uncommon); Psychological Limitation: Bloodthirsty; Physical Limitation: Memory Lapse.

**Notes:** Mike was the person who made the big mistake. He was the leader of the Five-Team that went through the portal. Mike was a big guy from the wrong side of the tracks, led astray by bad companions, had no strong father figure, and so forth; you know all the clichés, this time they were true. But nothing prepared him for what he found behind the Gate.

Mike's mind made first contact with the Chaoswalkers, and bore the full brunt of their desperation. It was a measure of Mike's personal strength that he was only driven temporarily insane. He thought he had experienced a *superhuman conversion*, that he had become a supervillain. Mike took on the identity of The Palindrome, the supervillain who speaks the same backwards and forward. The Nest found that as long as they didn't challenge the delusion, Mike stayed sane enough to lead a Five-Team into battle. As long as he could still do that, Bratt didn't care if he wore a tutu. So Mike continued to serve VIPER.

Eventually, the Chaoswalkers completely took over Mike's mind, and converted Mike to their side. Sort of. This particular Chaoswalker didn't like its fellows, but it liked VIPER. So Mike Austin decided he'd keep an eye on the other Chaoswalkers, pretend to be their comrade, but secretly help VIPER when the time is right. That time is getting close.

In the meantime, maintaining the pretense of being the Palindrome has proven to be a useful way to hide changes in Mike's physical appearance and alterations to his memories. So the Chaoswalker who inhabits Mike's body has kept up the appearance of being a crazy, superhuman mutant. Indeed, given the impressive attacks Mike's now capable of generating, the Nest believes he really did become a crazed superhuman when he passed through the gate, and they're very happy to have this bizarre supervillain on their side, even if his palindromes often freak them out.

During an assault, "the Palindrome" will fall back to the entrance to Level Four with as many VIPER agents as he can spare, and make his stand there.

Austin is a twenty-seven year old male Caucasian, 6'1", 190 lbs., with blond hair and blue eyes. He has a broad face; he often appears confused in times of crisis.

**“PANAMA JOE” FUENTES**

*“I think I was more comfortable in the jungle than in this high-tech nightmare.”*

15	STR	14	DEX	13	CON
12	BODY	13	INT	14	EGO
15	PRE	10	COM		
8	PD	8	ED	5	SPD
6	REC	26	END	29	STUN

**Abilities:** VIPER weapons and equipment (see Characters); Commando Martial Arts Package; +1 Level with small arms; Breakfall 12-; Climbing 12-; Combat Piloting 12-; KS: Agriculture 12-; KS: VIPER 12-; Paramedic 8-; Stealth 13-; Streetwise 12; Survival (Jungle) 12-; Tactics 12-; Teamwork 13-; Tracking 12-; Contact: Colombian Drug Syndicate 13-; Fringe Benefit: VIPER Membership.

**200+ Disadvantages:** Hunted: UNTIL 11-; Hunted: VIPER 8-; Psychological Limitation: Greedy; Psychological Limitation: Hatred of the Authorities; Social Limitation: Involved in Nest Politics.

**Notes:** “Panama Joe” Fuentes is Darren Bratt’s right hand man, a former captain in the Panamanian army under Noriega, and a drug trafficker. Fuentes spent several years as a mercenary before tiring of the harsh conditions in Central America, and VIPER brought him Stateside. He was imprisoned when local superheroes busted VIPER’s Houston Nest, but Bratt heard about him and helped him escape from jail. The media has used his escape as a warning against foreigners coming into the States to become VIPER agents, which has given this rather obscure man a much higher profile than he warrants. Otherwise, Fuentes is an unremarkable man known to his subordinates as the Nest’s biggest “yes-man” and bootlicker. Recently, Fuentes has noticed a lot of bizarre changes in his agents, but his response is to bury his head in the sand and hope they’ll go away. Joe is a complainer (he misses his mercenary days, and often tells long, boring, anecdotes that inevitably becomes whinefests), but doesn’t complain in front of Bratt. Fuentes doesn’t have much concern for his agents, and female agents usually end up with the (justified) impression that he’s one of the biggest pigs they’ve ever met.

In the event of an assault, he’ll be defending Security Control on Level 3 along with his five-team.

Panama Joe is a thirty-nine year old male Caucasian (Latino), 5’9”, 160 lbs., with dark brown hair and brown eyes, and his stare is so intense that even a casual glance looks like he’s trying to burn a hole through you. He has a narrow face, sometimes moustached.

**WILL “RONALD GIBBS” HACKER**

*“Yes sir. Anything you say, sir... [Mutters under voice]... Idiot.”*

13	STR	14	DEX	13	CON
9	BODY	10	INT	11	EGO
13	PRE	10	COM		
6	PD	5	ED	3	SPD
6	REC	26	END	23	STUN

**Abilities:** VIPER weapons and equipment (see Characters); Commando Martial Arts Package; +1 Level w/small arms; +2 Levels w/Perception (all senses); Breakfall 12-; CK: Millennium City 12-; Climbing 12-; Combat Driving 12-; Computer Programming 11-; Criminology 11-; KS: Police Procedures 11-; KS: VIPER 11-; Paramedic 8-; Stealth 12-; Streetwise 11; Tactics 11-; Teamwork 11-; VIPER Membership; +1” Running, 3d6 Luck.

**200+ Disadvantages:** Hunted: UNTIL 11-; Watched: VIPER 8-; Psychological Limitation: Vengeful; Psychological Limitation: Excessively Self-Reliant.

**Notes:** Will Hacker is a former Millennium City police officer, and the white sheep of his family. Will’s brother Steven, on the other hand, joined VIPER and became one of their best agents.. Will was a highly decorated officer, while Steven belonged to Darren Bratt’s Nest and featured prominently on PRIMUS’s Most Wanted list. The two men didn’t speak for years, but in 1998, a fellow agent and friend of Steven’s named Andrew Hawke was murdered. Steven turned to his brother for help. Will persuaded Steven to go to the authorities, but the agent never made it. His body was found in a ditch two days later.

Will decided to quit the force, infiltrate VIPER, and learn the truth about his brother’s death. He took on the identity of Ronald Gibbs, a two-time loser, and managed to hook up with VIPER and join Bratt’s Nest. He’s still investigating the murder, but has now become swept up in the bigger matters of the Folding Nest, and he’s turning his attention toward the odd behavior exhibited by several agents. He himself contracted Stage II Fold Sickness, but received enough bed rest to make a recovery.

The only people who know his secret are his former police captain, and Dr. Talia Berenson, the Nest medic (Berenson was a friend of his brother’s and has agreed to hide his secret, provided he does nothing that brings down the entire Nest. Will made the “devil’s bargain,” albeit reluctantly, and when push comes to shove, he probably won’t keep it – likewise, Talia may decide to blackmail him when the time is right.)



## DIGITAL HERO #1

“Ronald” can usually be found at a monitor in Security Control (Level Three) when attacks occur.

Ronald Gibbs/Will Hacker is a thirty-two year old African-American male, 6’2”, 220 lbs., with dark brown hair and brown eyes. He has a broad, handsome face, which is usually twisted into a frown or a scowl.

### RICK WIEBE

*“He’s bleeding. Somebody make it stop... yes, please make it stop....”*

13	STR	14	DEX	13	CON
9	BODY	10	INT	11	EGO
13	PRE	10	COM		
6	PD	5	ED	3	SPD
6	REC	26	END	23	STUN

**Abilities:** VIPER weapons and equipment (see Characters); Find Weakness with blades 12-; Aid STUN 2d6, only vs those being interrogated (-1) (*i.e.* he knows how to keep torture victims awake for long periods of time); +3 Levels with knives; +1 Level with small arms; Acting 13-; Breakfall 12-; Climbing 12-; Interrogation 13-; KS: Automobiles 12-; KS: Serial Killers 13-; KS: VIPER 11-; Mechanics 12-; Paramedic 8-; PS: Mechanic 11-; Stealth 12-; Streetwise 11; Teamwork 11-; VIPER Membership.

**200+ Disadvantages:** Hunted: UNTIL 11-; Hunted: VIPER 8-; Psychological Limitation: Sadistic; Psychological Limitation: Loves to Betray People.

**Notes:** Rick Wiebe is a simple country mechanic from Cheyenne. Who came from Minneapolis. Who came from Wisconsin. And New Jersey. And Pennsylvania. And whenever he leaves town, he always leaves something behind. Dead bodies. There’s something about killing a brother and a sister that really gets inside him and excites him, but Rick isn’t always that picky.

Rick began to worry when the FBI got on his trail, so he joined VIPER. Most people think he’s a pretty regular guy; a quiet man who likes to hit the weights a lot, but doesn’t really live “the body beautiful lifestyle” 24/7 like the other Nest muscleheads. He has a reputation for being one of the more squeamish members of the Nest but it’s all an act. Only Fuentes knows he likes to torture people, but that’s a quality he respects, and hasn’t investigated him further.

However, Wiebe has continued his serial killing career while a member of the Nest; he’s responsible for three agents who disappeared (the Nest thinks they’re deserters), and one agent who was found dead in a dumpster (Steven Hacker). Every few months, Rick likes to sneak out on his own and kill someone. Since he’s traveled through the portal, he’s heard voices. He

likes the voices. The voices like him – it appears he’s attracted the voices of those who like the things he does. And all he has to do is sneak out a few more times, and the voices will speak to him very, very clearly...

Nobody suspects what Rick truly is (either serial killer or soon-to-be pawn of greater extra-dimensional evils). He’s attached to Fuentes’ Five-Team, and will be defending Security Control in the event of a security breach.

Rick Wiebe is a thirty-four year old Caucasian, 6’0”, 205 lbs., with dark brown hair and blue, shifty eyes. He has a narrow face, and a very muscular build.

### DR. TALIA BERENSON

*“VIPER agents are human beings... the last time I checked... so get off your %\$##@! ass and apply some pressure to the wound – here!”*

10	STR	11	DEX	10	CON
9	BODY	18	INT	14	EGO
20	PRE	10	COM		
5	PD	4	ED	2	SPD
4	REC	20	END	19	STUN

**Abilities:** VIPER Technician Field Kit, VIPER Technician weapons and equipment (see Characters); +1 Level w/small arms; +1 Level w/Sciences; Breakfall 12-; Climbing 12-; Forensics 13-; Inventor 13-; KS: Medical World 13-; KS: VIPER 13-; Paramedic 12-; Scientist; SS: Anatomy 14-; SS: Mathematics 14-; SS: Medicine 14-; Persuasion 13-; SS: Psychology 14-; Stealth 12-; Streetwise 13-; Teamwork 11-; VIPER Membership.

**200+ Disadvantages:** Hunted: UNTIL 11-; Hunted: VIPER 8-; Psychological Limitation: Scientific Curiosity; Social Limitation: Woman in a Man’s World.

**Notes:** A crime of passion put Dr. Talia Berenson in prison; she killed her husband (and the woman with whom he was having an affair) with a big, big meat cleaver. Talia would have gotten the electric chair, but VIPER, realizing her technical expertise would be an asset to them (and her death sentence would make it virtually impossible for her to run), broke Talia out of death row and assigned her to the Wyoming Nest. It was not a good fit – the Casper Nest was all male, and most of them were testosterone addicts, chauvinists, and worse. But Talia was a tough, hard woman and managed to survive through a combination of manipulation, intimidation, and threatening to kill people when they got hurt. Through judicious use of these methods, Talia won the respect and friendship of half the Nest. The other half hates her guts. Talia is concerned about the outbreaks of Fold Sickness, and has tried to persuade Bratt not to

send agents through the Ripple so often. Bratt's response has been to openly question her sanity.

Berenson is friendly toward most of the members of the Fix, and has made a pact with Yarbrow to share information so they can figure out what's really behind the Fold Sickness. But behind her offer of friendship, Berenson is a smart, devious mind who may decide she can use that information for personal advantage, perhaps making a deal with the Chaoswalkers in exchange for power and Bratt's head.

Berenson can almost always be found at the infirmary on Level Two.

Talia Berenson is a thirty-two year old female Caucasian, 5'4", 120 lbs., with red hair and green eyes. He has a pretty face, and a nice smile on those rare occasions she uses it.

## The Fix

*"There are some things that Man was never meant to know. Everything else, we're gonna find out sooner or later."* – Cassidy Yarbrow

One of the major recent programs of VIPER's High Command was to put together a special school to train VIPER agents and elevate them to the "next level." But within the "Top Snake" school, there was a second academy, a program to identify VIPER's best field technicians and form a special squad. These wouldn't just be scientists and eggheads; they'd be field agents capable of handling trouble and defending themselves in a firefight.

Cassidy Yarbrow, an amateur archeologist, won the initial competition, and was put in charge of putting together a team of troubleshooters. He chose seven men and women to join him as members of "the Fix," the people that VIPER brought in when everything went to hell and they needed a repairman really bad. The team's initial outings were a success. They managed to foil the security system of a major superhero team and feed them false data on a VIPER Nest. They helped gather data on the Miami superhero Sunburn that allowed VIPER to negate his solar power collector technology and kill him. They joined with the Capital Patrol to stop the "Seven Days of Demon," a plot which would have turned everyone in Washington DC into demonic entities.

The media knows about the existence of the Fix, but not its membership. VIPER has managed to feed them enough misinformation that the general public thinks it's led by a supervillainess named "The Iris." The only members who are known to the general public or the authorities are "X-Oks-V'km" and "Black Visor"; the others are unknowns or believed to be faceless flunkies. Supervillains attract more attention than normals, and make a great

distraction.

The general template for Fix members is the VIPER technician, but some of them (Yarbrow, Zhilin, Pritchard and Grant) have physical stats equal or better than that of an average VIPER agent, and the Fix is looking for higher physical qualifications in their future candidates.

During their three-year history, the membership of the Fix has evolved into their current nine-person roster.

### (1) Cassidy Yarbrow, leader.

Cassidy is an archeologist/occult specialist. He's also the son of a PRIMUS commander, with whom he hasn't spoken in years, due to conflicts during his wild teen years. Cassidy worked in Boston's Nest as a five-team commander while working as an MIT Grad student. He's one of VIPER's brightest and best: tough as nails, with an exceptional record and the respect of his crew. He's also an avid student of the occult, which is beginning to take him down some dangerous paths.

### (2) Patrick O'Neill, chemist.

Patrick is an ambitious networker who was once second-in-command of the now defunct Savannah, Georgia VIPER's Nest. He longs to return to those "glory days" when people showed him respect. He has no loyalty to the Fix, but hopes that through hard work, he can once again attain a position of power. He's a very good chemist, but is considered to be lazy by the other members of the Fix. He also has a little bit of interest in the occult – he thinks alchemy may be the key to getting rich quick.

### (3) Anatoly Zhilin, computer specialist.

A former hacker for the Russian Mafia; Anatoly maintains strong ties to Russia's organized crime. He's a lying, cheating, sadistic opportunistic bastard. He's tolerated because he follows orders well and doesn't show his less desirable traits to his teammates (with the exception of Kripalani). He's a physical fitness junkie, and has enhanced his impressive physique with cyberline that he stole from PRIMUS.

### (4) Manisha Kripalani, geneticist.

Manisha is originally from Delhi, India; she's a young student whose intelligence was mutated by contact with an alien computer. She has inhuman perception and intuitive abilities and low-grade telekinesis, but has to go into a trance for several hours to exploit them. She's easily the brightest intellect in the Fix, and the strangest to the rest of the team. She and Zhilin had a failed relationship that's left him very bitter – he's pretending that he's over it, but he's actually waiting for the right moment to take his revenge.

### (5) Rodney Pritchard, cyberneticist.

## DIGITAL HERO #1

No one in the Fix is more ambitious or zealous than “Mad Boy” Rodney Pritchard. He believes that cybernetics is The Future, and whoever has the best battlesuit is going to rule the world (Dr. Destroyer and Professor Muerte notwithstanding). Rodney is only seventeen; he’s a criminal prodigy who actively sought out VIPER and the Fix when word leaked of their existence. It’s pretty obvious to everyone that he’s a supervillain in training. He’s even been weighing a number of supervillain code names (“The Future” is his current favorite.)

Rodney has a small, but very annoying robot toolbox named “LBJ”; it’s a walking action figure that’s made to look like President Lyndon Baines Johnson. The robot walks around, and whenever the head is removed so Rodney can grab its tools, it starts talking like a tough Texan and spews vulgarities (choose ones appropriate to the campaign tone). Any significant attack can break LBJ into pieces - he’s meant to be a minor annoyance at best.

(6) *Kathy MacCleod*, physician/disease specialist

Revenge led this medical student to VIPER; her brother was an UNTIL agent who was killed accidentally in wargames held between PRIMUS and UNTIL. She wants to do as much damage to both organizations as possible – she’s starting by producing a version of cyberline that will drive whoever takes it insane (not a hard trick with cyberline in the first place). She plans to replace PRIMUS’s supply with her own concoction. Unbeknownst to the rest of the Fix, she’s started using a couple of agents in the Folding Nest as guinea pigs. She and Berenson have a good relationship, but that’s almost certain to sour at some point in the near future when the Nest doctor discovers what she’s doing.

She keeps a private stash of cyberline in a small safe that’s hidden in her quarters.

(7) *Rusty Grant*, security specialist.

Rusty Grant learned the art of breaking and entering when he was twelve, when he helped his brother commit a long series of robberies. Grant learned his trade well; he’s the team’s security systems specialist (he’s also the newest member of the Fix, replacing the previous specialist, who was killed by a booby-trap set by the supervillain Trapmaster). He’s a nineteen-year-old adrenaline junkie with nerves of steel – a very dangerous combination. He and Rodney Pritchard are inseparably close friends – at some point, he wants Pritchard to make him some battle armor so he can have some *real* fun.

(8) *X-Oks-V’km*, xenotechnology

Also called “Zok’s Victim,” X’Oks is an alien scientist whose mating period has led him to become hopelessly bonded to Kathy MacCleod for the next twenty years. Kathy has an enthusiastic master/slave relationship with him, and manipulates him shamelessly. X’Oks is a xenotechnology specialist (the GM should match him with an appropriate alien race in the campaign and then determine his stats and abilities).

(9) *Paolo Patrao*, bodyguard

A low-grade supervillain in power-armor *Viseira Preto* (“Black Visor”), is the Fix’s official bodyguard (use any low-powered Power Armor Goon). He’s also a cybernetics specialist-in-training, and an excellent metallurgist. Paolo really likes the Fix and hopes to be assigned to the team permanently.

The Fix is typically deployed in small teams, usually when VIPER activities uncover a scientific superhero or supervillain’s experiment, or when they uncover alien wreckage or possible magical artifacts. The team is brought in as a free “service” to Nests, and is paid directly by VIPER’s Central Command, who commands their complete loyalty.

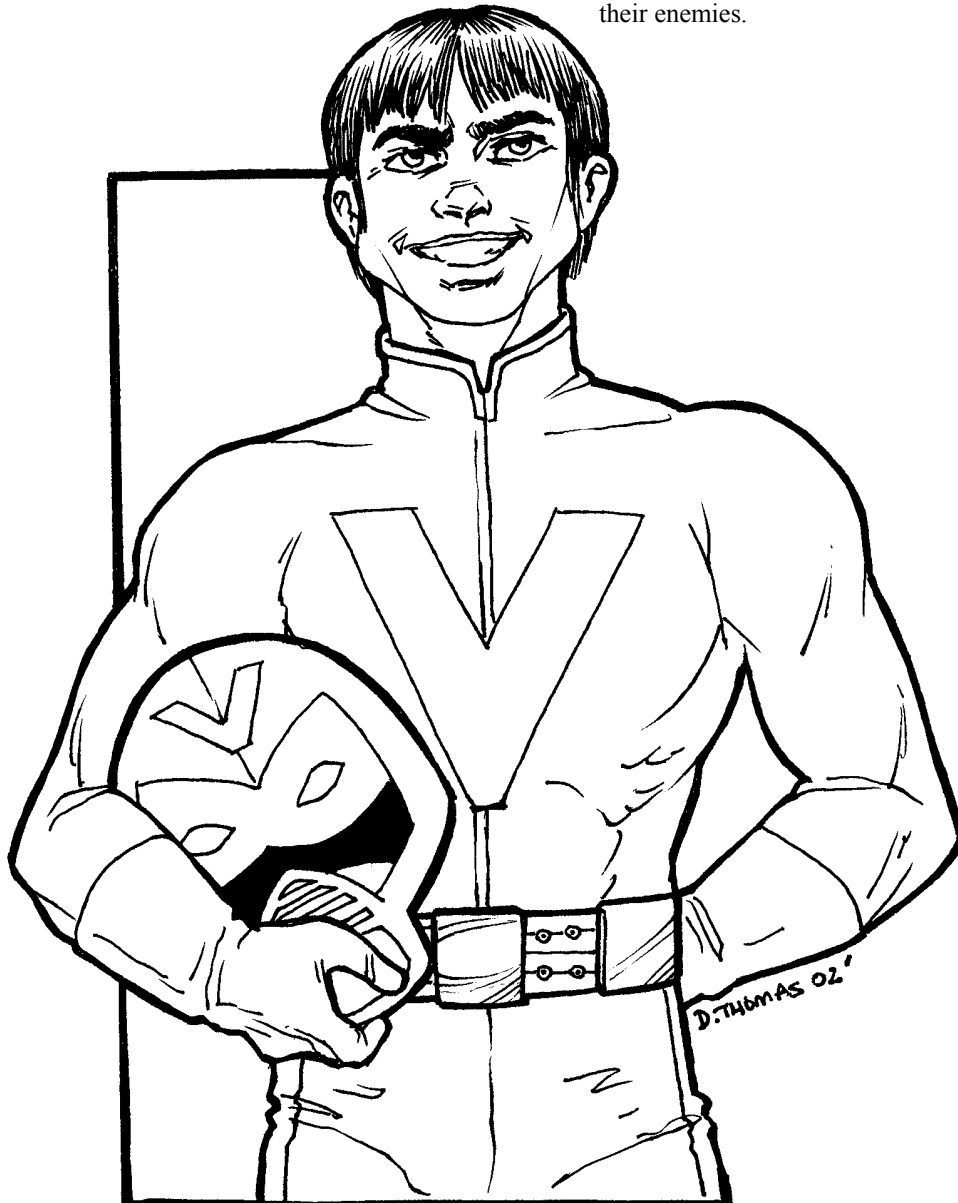
The Fix was originally brought to the Folding Nest at the request of Darren Bratt, to study the base’s artifacts. But the Fix have stayed a lot longer than Bratt expected (or wanted). All members of the Fix have experienced Fold Sickness, but not as severely as the members of the Nest. Relations between Bratt and Yarbrow got off to a disastrous start and rapidly went downhill. Only the voice which tells Bratt “to keep your enemies close” has prevented him from going to the Serpent-General and demanding the Fix’s expulsion — but he’s becoming more and more convinced that Yarbrow is due for an accident. For his part, Yarbrow thinks much the same thing about Bratt — he knows Central Command won’t punish their most recent successful Nest based on his suspicions alone, so he may attempt to engineer a situation where Bratt gets captured by superheroes and the Fix gets awarded custody of the extra-dimensional base.

(Note: The Fix may have contacts with the PCs in their secret IDs, or prominent NPCs – use them to get the PCs involved with the Folding Nest and its personalities. William Hacker/Ronald Gibbs is a second possible PC hook, and vigilante PCs who pursue serial killers may be directed to Rick Wiebe).

## General Use of the Folding Nest

The Folding Nest does not include specific advice for running scenarios; rather, it's meant to be customized and used as the GM sees fit. However, here's some general advice.

- (1) The Folding Nest is a specialized VIPER encounter, designed to last two or three sessions (where the players do little but fight this menace), or to be interwoven into a campaign over the course of a dozen sessions (where you start with a few minor encounters and build to a climax).
- (2) Start with a few robberies. Do your best to let the Folding Nest crew make a clean getaway. The dimensional transport is a dirty trick that's meant to be frustrating to the players, at least initially.
- (3) Have Bratt gloat a lot. Make him as obnoxious and childishly petty as possible. Make your players hate his guts so much that they can't wait to knock his teeth down his throat.
- (4) Introduce the Chaoswalker influence about two-thirds of the way through the run but keep it mysterious unless the PCs *really* give it their full attention.
- (5) Getting There. Once the player characters get their hands on one of the wristbands, let them consult experts to figure out how to get to the Nest, give them an opportunity to knock out one Folding Nest agent and take a wristband each, then let them enter the Nest.
- (6) If the PCs seize control of the Folding Nest without realizing the threat of the Chaoswalkers – well, there are precedents for old supervillain bases being “too good to be true.” Living in the midst of dark chaotic powers should be a curse. The same goes for using it as a “storehouse” in which to place their enemies.



# Characters

## VIPER Fold Agent

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
13	STR	3	12-	Lift 150 kg; 2½d6 HTH
14	DEX	12	12-	OCV: 5/DCV: 5
13	CON	6	12-	
9	BODY	-2	11-	
10	INT	0	11-	PER Roll 11-
11	EGO	2	11-	ECV: 4
13	PRE	3	12-	PRE Attack: 2½d6
10	COM	0	11-	
				6 PD 4 Total: 14 PD (8 rPD)
				5 ED 3 Total: 13 ED (8 rED)
				3 SPD 16 Phases: 4, 8, 12
				6 REC 0
				26 END 0
				23 STUN 0

**Total Characteristics Cost: 47**

**Movement:** Running: 6"/12"

Cost	Powers	END
	<i>VB-A1 "Striker" Blaster Rifle</i>	
32	Multipower, 52-point reserve, 32 Charges for entire reserve (+¼); OAF (-1)	[32]
2u	1) <i>Basic Setting</i> : EB 8d6; OAF (-1)	
3u	2) <i>Autofire Setting</i> : EB 7d6, Autofire (5 shots, +½); OAF (-1)	
6	<i>Club</i> : HA +3d6 (5½d6 Total); OAF (-1), Hand-To-Hand Attack (-½) VIPER Melee Weapon	
6	<i>VIPER Fang (Gauntlet Spring-Sheath Variant)</i> : HKA ½d6 (plus STR) (10 Active Points); OIF (-½), Real Weapon (-¼)	
18	<i>VIPER Jetpack</i> : Flight 9", Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), OIF (-½)	0
16	<i>VIPER Basic Combat Uniform</i> : Armor (8 PD/8 ED); OIF (-½)	
27	Helmet <i>Protection</i> : Armor (4 PD/ED) (12 Active Points); OIF (-½), Only Protects The Head (-1) <i>Communications System</i> : HRRP (12 Active Points); OIF (-½) <i>Nightvision System</i> : Nightvision (5 Active Points); OIF (-½) <i>Flare Shielding</i> : Sight and Hearing Group Flash Defense (8 points each); OIF (-½)	
	<i>Mandatory Training</i>	
3	+1 Level with Small Arms	
3	Breakfall 12-	
3	Climbing 12-	
3	KS: VIPER 12-	
3	Stealth 13-	
3	Streetwise 12-	

- 2 Membership: VIPER
- 3 Other Skill:  
*General Agent*: +1 Perception  
*Archivist*: (increases to KS: VIPER to 15-)  
*Computer Tech*: Computer Programming 12-  
*Covert Operative*: Streetwise 12-  
*Demolitions Specialist*: Demolitions 12-  
*Infiltrator*: Disguise 12-  
*Logistics*: Tactics 12-  
*Marksman*: +1 with Ranged Levels  
*Security Specialist*: Security Systems 12-

**Total Powers & Skill Cost: 133**

**Total Cost: 180**

### 100+ Disadvantages

- 20 Hunted: UNTIL 11- (Mo Pow, NCI, Capture)
- 10 Hunted: VIPER 8- (Mo Pow, NCI, Capture, Watching)
- 10 Psychological Limitation: Greedy, Vengeful, Loves to Bully, or Vendetta Against the Authorities (Common, Strong)
- 10 Psychological Limitation: Monomaniac, Scientific Curiosity, or Ambitious (Common, Strong)
- 5 Social Limitation: Dark Secret ("Mom, I'm a VIPER Agent!") (Infrequently, Major)
- 30 Experience Points

**Total Disadvantage Points: 180**

**VIPER Fold Agent  
(Stage Two of Transformation)**

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
10	STR	0	11-	Lift 100 kg; 2d6 HTH
11	DEX	3	11-	OCV: 4/DCV: 4
11	CON	2	11-	
7	BODY	-6	10-	
10	INT	0	11-	PER Roll 11-
8	EGO	-4	11-	ECV: 3
13	PRE	3	12-	PRE Attack: 2½d6
8	COM	-1	11-	
6	PD	4		Total: 14 PD (8 rPD)
5	ED	3		Total: 13 ED (8 rED)
2	SPD	-1		Phases: 6, 12
4	REC	0		
22	END	0		
18	STUN	0		

**Total Characteristics Cost: 1**

**Movement:** Running: 6"/12"

Cost	Powers	END
31	<i>Dimensional Augmentation:</i> 2d6 Aid vs. all stats (+2), only when crossing dimensional boundaries (-1), lasts 5 minutes (+½), self-only (-¼)	
10	<i>Dimensional Senses:</i> Detect Dimensional Boundaries or Disruption (sense, discriminate) <i>VB-A1 "Striker" Blaster Rifle</i>	
32	Multipower, 52-point reserve, 32 Charges for entire reserve (+¼); OAF (-1)	[32]
2u	1) <i>Basic Setting:</i> EB 8d6; OAF (-1)	
3u	2) <i>Autofire Setting:</i> EB 7d6, Autofire (5 shots, +½); OAF (-1)	
6	<i>Club:</i> HA +3d6 (5½d6 Total); OAF (-1), Hand-To-Hand Attack (-½)	
6	VIPER Melee Weapon <i>VIPER Fang (Gauntlet Spring-Sheath Variant):</i> HKA ½d6 (plus STR) (10 Active Points); OIF (-½), Real Weapon (-¼)	
18	<i>VIPER Jetpack:</i> Flight 9", Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), OIF (-½)	0
16	<i>VIPER Basic Combat Uniform:</i> Armor (8 PD/8 ED); OIF (-½)	
27	Helmet <i>Protection:</i> Armor (4 PD/ED) (12 Active Points); OIF (-½), Only Protects The Head (-1) <i>Communications System:</i> HRRP (12 Active Points); OIF (-½) <i>Nightvision System:</i> Nightvision (5 Active Points); OIF (-½) <i>Flare Shielding:</i> Sight and Hearing Group Flash Defense (8 points each); OIF (-½)	
	<i>Mandatory Training</i>	

- 3 +1 Level with Small Arms
- 3 Breakfall 12-
- 3 Climbing 12-
- 3 KS: VIPER 12-
- 3 Stealth 13-
- 3 Streetwise 12-
- 2 Membership: VIPER
- 3 Other Skill:  
*General Agent:* +1 Perception  
*Archivist:* (increases to KS: VIPER to 15-)  
*Computer Tech:* Computer Programming 12-  
*Covert Operative:* Streetwise 12-  
*Demolitions Specialist:* Demolitions 12-  
*Infiltrator:* Disguise 12-  
*Logistics:* Tactics 12-  
*Marksmen:* +1 with Ranged Levels  
*Security Specialist:* Security Systems 12-

**Total Powers & Skill Cost: 174**

**Total Cost: 175**

**100+ Disadvantages**

- 20 Hunted: UNTIL 11- (Mo Pow, NCI, Capture)
- 10 Hunted: VIPER 8- (Mo Pow, NCI, Capture, Watching)
- 5 Physical Limitation: Memory Lapse (occasional, severe)
- 10 Psychological Limitation: Bloodthirsty (Common, Strong)
- 5 Social Limitation: Dark Secret ("Mom, I'm a VIPER Agent!") (Infrequently, Major)
- 10 Vulnerability: 2x Effect from all powers used with the Transdimensional advantage
- 5 Experience Points

**Total Disadvantage Points: 175**

# DIGITAL HERO #1

## Chaoswalker (Stage Three of Transformation)

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
18	STR	8	13-	Lift 300 kg; 3½d6 HTH
18	DEX	24	13-	OCV: 6/DCV: 6
18	CON	16	13-	
7	BODY	-6	10-	
18	INT	8	13-	PER Roll 13-
18	EGO	16	13-	ECV: 6
20	PRE	10	13-	PRE Attack: 4d6
6	COM	-2	10-	
12	PD	8		Total: 20 PD (8 rPD)
12	ED	9		Total: 20 ED (8 rED)
4	SPD	-1		Phases: 3, 6, 9, 12
8	REC	0		
36	END	0		
25	STUN	0		

**Total Powers & Skill Cost: 73**

**Movement:** Running: 6"/12"

Cost	Powers	END
41	<i>Chaos Magic Blast:</i> 13d6 EB, Variable Special Effects (any) (+½), 44" line AE (+1), No Range (-½), full phase plus one segment required (-¾), chaos magic skill roll required (-½), -3 to roll after 5 hours without crossing a dimensional boundary (-¼), 6d6 NND Body Damage taken when roll fails (-1)	16
62	<i>Dimensional Augmentation:</i> 4d6 Aid vs. all stats (+2), only when crossing dimensional boundaries (-1), lasts 5 minutes (+½), self-only (-¼)	
32	Multipower, 52-point reserve, 32 Charges for entire reserve (+¼); OAF (-1)	[32]
2u	1) <i>Basic Setting:</i> EB 8d6; OAF (-1)	
3u	2) <i>Autofire Setting:</i> EB 7d6, Autofire (5 shots, +½); OAF (-1)	
6	<i>Club:</i> HA +3d6 (5½d6 Total); OAF (-1), Hand-To-Hand Attack (-½)	
6	VIPER Melee Weapon <i>VIPER Fang (Gauntlet Spring-Sheath Variant):</i> HKA ½d6 (plus STR) (10 Active Points); OIF (-½), Real Weapon (-¼)	
18	<i>VIPER Jetpack:</i> Flight 9", Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), OIF (-½)	0
16	<i>VIPER BCU:</i> Armor (8 PD/8 ED); OIF (-½)	
27	Helmet <i>Protection:</i> Armor (4 PD/ED) (12 Active Points); OIF (-½), Only Protects The Head (-1) <i>Communications System:</i> HRRP (12 Active Points); OIF (-½)	

*Nightvision System:*  
Nightvision (5 Active Points); OIF (-½)

*Flare Shielding:*  
Sight and Hearing Group Flash Defense (8 points each); OIF (-½)

10 Detect Dimensional Boundaries or Disruption (sense, discriminate)

*Mandatory Training*

3 +1 Level w/small arms

3 Breakfall 11-

3 Climbing 11-

3 KS: VIPER 11-

3 Stealth 11-

3 Streetwise 11-

2 Membership: VIPER

3 Other Skill:

*General Agent:* +1 Perception

*Archivist:* (increases to KS: VIPER to 14-)

*Computer Tech:* Computer Programming 11-

*Covert Operative:* Streetwise 11-  
*Demolitions Specialist:* Demolitions 11-

*Infiltrator:* Disguise 11-

*Marksman:* +1 w/Ranged Levels

*Security Specialist:* Security Systems 11-

7 Chaos Magic 15-

**Total Powers & Skill Cost: 253**

**Total Cost: 316**

**100+ Disadvantages**

20 Hunted: UNTIL 11- (Mo Pow, NCI, Capture)

10 Hunted: VIPER 8- (Mo Pow, NCI, Capture, Watching)

15 Susceptibility: 3d6 when hit with Order or Anti-Chaos powers (uncommon)

10 Psychological Limitation: Bloodthirsty (Common, Strong)

5 Physical Limitation: Memory Lapse (occasional, severe)

146 Experience Points

**Total Disadvantage Points: 316**

**VIPER Fold Agent Commander**

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
15	STR	5	12-	Lift 200 kg; 3d6 HTH
14	DEX	12	12-	OCV: 5/DCV: 5
13	CON	6	12-	
10	BODY	0	11-	
13	INT	3	12-	PER Roll 12-
14	EGO	8	12-	ECV: 5
15	PRE	5	12-	PRE Attack: 2½d6
10	COM	0	11-	
8	PD	5		Total: 16 PD (8 rPD)
8	ED	5		Total: 16 ED (8 rED)
3	SPD	16		Phases: 4, 8, 12
6	REC	0		
26	END	0		
25	STUN	0		

**Total Characteristics Cost: 55**

**Movement:** Running: 6"/12"

**Cost Powers** **END**

- 56 *VB-A4 "Jackhammer" Blaster Rifle:*  
Multipower, 90-point reserve, 32  
Charges for entire reserve (+¼); all  
OAF (-1) [32]
- 3u 1) *Basic Setting:* EB 12d6 (60 Active  
Points); OAF (-1)
- 4u 2) *Autofire Setting:* EB 12d6,  
Autofire (5 shots, +½) (90 Active  
Points); OAF (-1)
- 6 *Club:* HA +3d6 (5½d6 Total); OAF  
(-1), Hand-To-Hand Attack (-½)
- 20 *Dimensional Travel:* Multipower,  
50-point reserve
- 2u 1) *Outer Dimensional Travel:* Extra  
Dimensional Transport (Portal) (-½),  
x16 Mass (+20) only usable by those  
who are carrying Mind Link device  
(-¼), Horrific Side Effects on any  
who pass through on a 8-, (-¼), 1  
continuing charge (10 seconds) (-1),  
OAF wristband (-1)
- 2u 2) *Inner Dimensional Travel:*  
Teleport 5", x16 Mass (+20) only  
usable by those who are carrying  
Mind Link device (-¼), 1 Floating  
Fixed Location (+5), Area Of Effect  
(one hex; +½), Continuous (+1),  
Usable Simultaneously (target and  
owner can use Gate; +½); Gate (-½),  
Horrific Side Effects on any who pass  
through on a 8-, (-¼), 1 continuing  
charge (10 seconds) (-1), OAF  
wristband (-1)
- 6 VIPER Melee Weapon  
*VIPER Fang (Gauntlet Spring-Sheath  
Variant):*  
HKA ½d6 (plus STR) (10 Active  
Points); OIF (-½), Real Weapon (-¼)
- 18 *VIPER Jetpack:* Flight 9", Reduced

- Endurance (0 END; +½), OIF (-½) 0
- 16 *VIPER BCU:* Armor (8 PD/8 ED);  
OIF (-½)
- 27 *Helmet*  
*Protection:*  
Armor (4 PD/ED) (12 Active Points);  
OIF (-½), Only Protects The Head  
(-1)  
*Communications System:*  
HRRP (12 Active Points); OIF (-½)  
*Nightvision System:*  
Nightvision (5 Active Points); OIF  
(-½)  
*Flare Shielding:*  
Sight and Hearing Group Flash  
Defense (8 points each); OIF (-½)

*Mandatory Training*

- 3 +1 Level w/small arms
- 3 Breakfall 12-
- 3 Climbing 12-
- 3 Combat Piloting 12-
- 3 KS: VIPER 12-
- 3 Stealth 13-
- 3 Streetwise 12-
- 3 Tactics 12-
- 2 Membership: VIPER
- 3 Other Skill:  
*General Agent:* +1 Perception  
*Archivist:* (increases to KS: VIPER to  
15-)  
*Computer Tech:* Computer  
Programming 12  
*Covert Operative:* Streetwise 12-  
*Demolitions Specialist:* Demolitions  
12-  
*Infiltrator:* Disguise 12-  
*Logistics:* Tactics 12-  
*Marksmen:* +1 w/Ranged Levels  
*Security Specialist:* Security Systems  
12-

**Total Powers & Skill Cost: 172**

**Total Cost: 227**

**100+ Disadvantages**

- 20 Hunted: UNTIL 11- (Mo Pow, NCI,  
Capture)
- 10 Watched: VIPER 8- (Mo Pow, NCI,  
Capture, Watched)
- 10 Psychological Limitation: Greedy,  
Vengeful, Loves to Bully, or  
Vendetta Against the Authorities  
(common, strong)
- 10 Psychological Limitation:  
Monomaniac, Scientific Curiosity, or  
Ambitious (Common, Strong)
- 10 Social Limitation: Involved in Nest  
Politics (Frequently, Major)
- 72 Experience Points

**Total Disadvantage Points: 227**



## DIGITAL HERO #1

### VIPER Technician

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
10	STR	0	11-	Lift 100 kg; 2d6 HTH
11	DEX	3	11-	OCV: 4/DCV: 4
10	CON	0	11-	
9	BODY	-2	11-	
18	INT	8	13-	PER Roll 13-
14	EGO	8	11-	ECV: 5
15	PRE	5	12-	PRE Attack: 3d6
10	COM	0	11-	
5	PD	3		Total: 11 PD (6 rPD)
4	ED	2		Total: 10 ED (6 rED)
2	SPD	-1		Phases: 6, 12
4	REC	0		
20	END	0		
19	STUN	0		

**Total Characteristics Cost: 26**

**Movement:** Running: 6"/12"

**Cost Powers** **END**

- 45 *Field Lab*  
Gadget Pool (30 pts, no skill roll (+1), may include enhanced senses with a maximum allowable +4 perception bonuses) (+½); only OAF gadgets (-½), only changeable at base (-½)
- 15 Primary VIPER Weapon  
*VB-SI "Shorty" Blaster Pistol:* EB 7d6; OAF (-1), 12 Charges (-¼)
- 6 VIPER Melee Weapon  
*VIPER Fang (Gauntlet Spring-Sheath Variant):* HKA ½d6 (plus STR); OIF (-½), Real Weapon (-¼)
- 18 *VIPER Jetpack:* Flight 9", Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), OIF (-½) 0
- 9 *VIPER Combat Vest:* Armor (6 PD/6 ED), Only protects the chest, upper arms, and abdomen (-½); OIF (-½)
- 27 *Helmet*  
*Protection:*  
Armor (4 PD/ED); OIF (-½), Only Protects The Head (-1)  
*Communications System:*  
HRRP; OIF (-½)  
*Nightvision System:*  
Nightvision; OIF (-½)  
*Flare Shielding:*  
Sight and Hearing Group Flash Defense (8 points each); OIF (-½)  
  
*Mandatory Training*
  - 3 +1 Level w/small arms
  - 3 +1 Skill level w/sciences
  - 3 Breakfall 12-
  - 3 Climbing 12-
  - 3 Forensics 13-
  - 3 Inventor 13-
  - 3 Trained Skill in chosen major science (any major skill such as Computer

- Programming, Electronics, Mechanics, Paramedics, or Security Systems) 13-
- 3 KS: Scientific World in chosen major science 13-
- 3 KS: VIPER 13-
- 3 Scientist
- 3 1) SS: Major 14-
- 3 2) SS: Mathematics 14-
- 3 3) SS: Minor 14-
- 3 Stealth 13-
- 3 Streetwise 12-
- 2 Membership: VIPER

**Total Powers & Skill Cost: 123**

**Total Cost: 170**

#### 100+ Disadvantages

- 20 Hunted: UNTIL 11- (Mo Pow, NCI, Capture)
- 10 Hunted: VIPER 8- (Mo Pow, NCI, Capture, Watching)
- 10 Psychological Limitation: Greedy, Vengeful, Loves to Bully, or Vendetta Against the Authorities (common, strong)
- 10 Psychological Limitation: Monomaniac, Scientific Curiosity, or Ambitious (Common, Strong)
- 5 Social Limitation: Dark Secret ("Mom, I'm a VIPER Agent!") (Infrequently, Major)
- 15 Experience Points

**Powers Note:** The +½ Advantage on the variable pool allows the character to construct devices that have enhanced senses (which is normally against the rules). This should only allow devices feasible within the technology of the campaign.

**Total Disadvantage Points: 165**

### VIPER SKILL PACKAGES

#### Arcanologist

(Major): Magic  
(Minor): Alchemy  
(KS): Mystic Artifacts  
(Skill): Systems Operation (magical artifacts) or Weaponsmith (arcane weapons)

#### Archeologist

(Major): Archeology  
(Minor): History  
(KS/Language): Ancient Language  
(Skill): Bureaucraties

#### Botanist

(Major): Botany  
(Minor): Pharmacology or Biology  
(KS): Plants  
(Skill): N/A (choose any)

#### Chemist

(Major): Chemistry  
(Minor): Biochemistry  
(KS): Chemicals  
(Skill): Demolitions or Paramedic

#### Computer Scientist

(Major): Computer Science  
(Minor): Hacking  
(KS): Computer Languages  
(Skill): Computer Programming (magical artifacts)

#### Cyberneticist

(Major): Cybernetics  
(Minor): Anatomy  
(KS): Power Systems  
(Skill): Electronics

#### Electronics

(Major): Electrical Engineering  
(Minor): Physics or Computers  
(KS): Power Systems  
(Skill): Electronics

**Engineering**

(Major): Engineering  
 (Minor): Physics  
 (KS): Structural Engineering  
 (Skill): Demolitions

**Geneticist**

(Major): Genetics  
 (Minor): Biology  
 (KS): Genetically Engineered Creatures  
 (Skill): N/A

**Physician**

(Major): Medicine  
 (Minor): Pharmacology or Biology  
 (KS): Anatomy  
 (Skill): Paramedics

**Psionics**

(Major): Psionics Science  
 (Minor): Neurology  
 (SC): Psychology  
 (Skill): Paramedics

**Psychologist**

(Major): Psychology  
 (Minor): Sociology  
 (KS): Phobias  
 (Skill): Conversation or Persuasion

**Robotist**

(Major): Robotics  
 (Minor): Metallurgy  
 (KS): AI  
 (Skill): Electronics or Computer Programming

**Security Systems****Expert**

(Major): Electrical Engineering  
 (Minor): Physics (or Optics)  
 (KS): Sensors  
 (Skill): Security Systems

**Appendix: VIPER Autocannons**

Here is a list of some of the weapons that may be plugged into VIPER bases.

**KR-CUTTER DEFENSE CANNON**

**Weapon Type:** Pop-up Autocannon  
**Base Attack:** 2d6+1 AP RKA, Autofire, 10 shot  
 Trigger (someone in the security room sends a signal, signal is negated by Darkness vs. Radio Group) (+½), 120 charges (+¾)  
**Scope:** +2 Range Modifiers, +1 OCV  
**Limitations:** OAF (-1), Base (-1)  
**Damage SFX:** Big Gun, Bigger Ammo  
**Active Points:** 138  
**Real Points (including +1 base modifier):** 46  
**Notes:** This is VIPER's heavy defense cannon. It's used more on the lower levels of a base than on upper levels, as it tends to make a real mess of the surroundings.

**QN-MESH CANNON**

**KR-CUTTER DEFENSE CANNON**

**Weapon Type:** Pop-up Autocannon  
**Base Attack:** 5d6 Entangle, DEF 7, Trigger (someone in the security room sends a signal, signal is negated by Darkness vs. Radio Group) (+½), 10 shots (-¼).  
**Scope:** +2 Range Modifiers, +2 OCV  
**Limitations:** OAF (-1), Base (-1)  
**Damage SFX:** Wire Mesh  
**Active Points:** 114  
**Real Points (including +1 base modifier):** 38

**TR- VERTIGO DEFENSE CANNON**

**Weapon Type:** Pop-up Autocannon  
**Base Attack:** 3d6 EB NND (defense is not being affected by the Transform or 5 pts Flash Defense vs. Hearing Group), Linked (-½) to: 9d6 Minor Transform (A healthy, Standing person is transformed into someone who's Prone and Stunned), AE 12" radius (+1), Trigger (someone in the security room sends a signal, signal is negated by Darkness vs. Radio Group) (+½), 3 charges (-1)  
**Scope:** None  
**Limitations:** OAF (-1), Base (-1)  
**Damage SFX:** Sonic Signal  
**Active Points:** 275  
**Real Points (including +1 base modifier):** 68  
**Notes:** Perhaps the most devastating dirty trick of all VIPER autocannons is the Vertigo, which causes extreme dizziness and will send all but the hardest individual hurtling to the ground. Typically, VIPER agents are stationed behind doors, which open as soon as the opposition falls. This is an expensive weapon that only the biggest Nests can afford. This weapon is sometimes called the "Deus Ex Machina," for its ability to knock the stuffings out of entire superhero teams.

**VF- FLASH DEFENSE CANNON**

**Weapon Type:** Pop-up Autocannon  
**Base Attack:** 3d6 Flash vs. visual sense group, Linked to 4d6 EB NND (defense is not being affected by the flash), Trigger (someone in the security room sends a signal, signal is negated by Darkness vs. Radio Group), 20 charges (+¼)  
**Scope:** +2 Range Modifiers, +2 OCV  
**Limitations:** OAF (-1), Base (-1)  
**Damage SFX:** Laser light targeting the eyes, followed by intense light pulse.  
**Active Points:** 137  
**Real Points (including +1 base modifier):** 46  
**Notes:** No, a flash "defense cannon" not a "flash defense" cannon. This cannon sends a painful laser signal that can blind its target if it makes contact with their retinas.

**XJ- MAGNUM DEFENSE CANNON**

**Weapon Type:** Pop-up Autocannon  
**Base Attack:** 10d6 EB, Autofire, Trigger (someone in the security room sends a signal, signal is negated by Darkness vs. Radio Group), 60 charges (+½)  
**Scope:** +2 Range Modifiers  
**Limitations:** OAF (-1), Base (-1)  
**Damage SFX:** Superheated Plasma Shot  
**Active Points:** 140  
**Real Points (including +1 base modifier):** 47  
**Notes:** This is the basic VIPER blaster cannon. 90% of the blasters that will be encountered in a VIPER base will be this one.

**(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 46)****LEGION OF HEROES**

features show few signs of worry or woe. He smiles perpetually, reassuring those in need as much by his sure manner as by his heroic actions. His "costume" is in the style of a uniform, blending elements of garb from paramedics, policemen, and firemen, but not exactly a copy of any of them. When he splits into the Legion of Heroes, his eight selves each retain the same outfit, but in different colors: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet, and white.

His powers generate a pure ice-blue light when in use. The exact appearance of the light varies... from a soft glow surrounding the area of his Healing Hands power, to a brilliant flash accompanying his Force Of Justice power.

