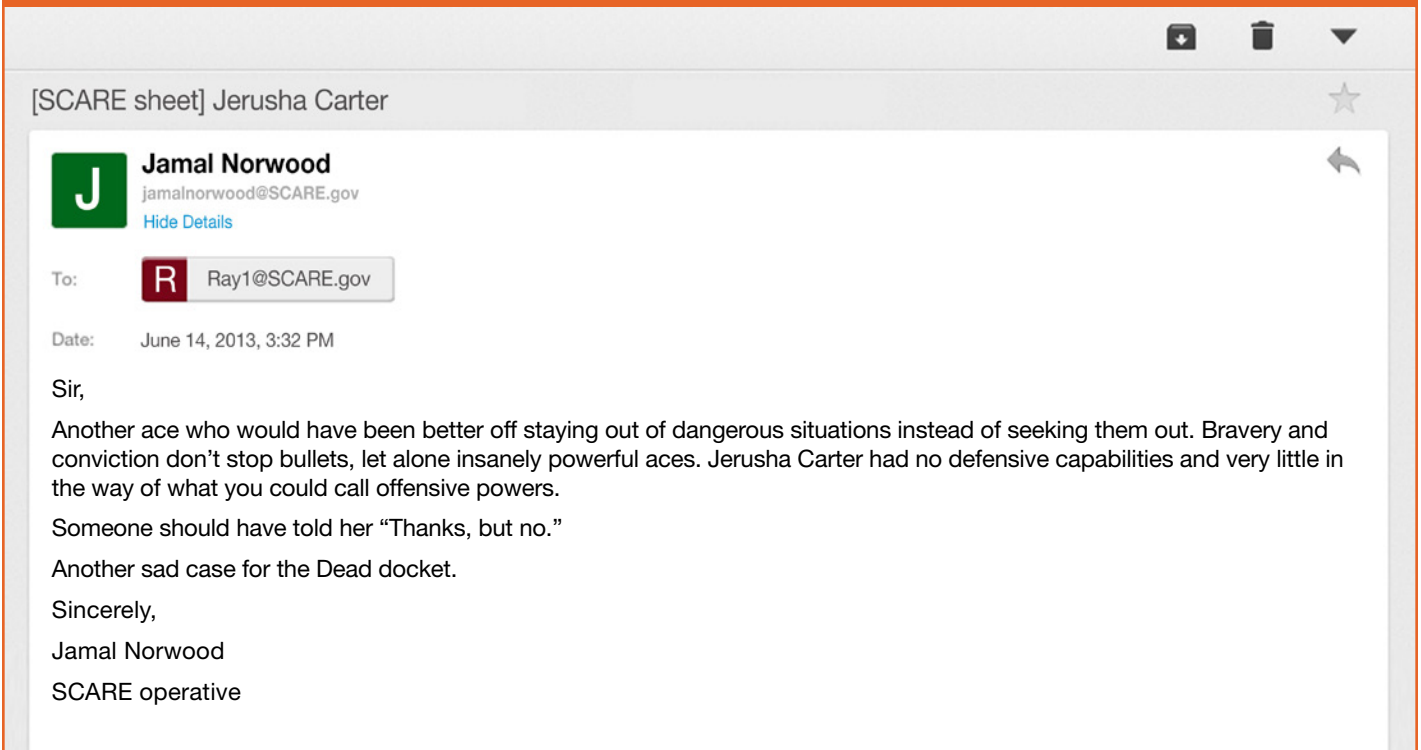


SCARE SHEET: GARDENER



HISTORY

Jerusha, from Jackson Hole, Wyoming, is a slim, intense African-American woman. Her parents work for the National Park Service, and she spends much of her early life learning to love and care for the natural world. A quiet (though not shy) person, she remains largely in the background during the first season of *American Hero*, though she is well-liked by most contestants and does fairly well in the competition.

She isn't a part of the ace battles in Egypt, but she joins the Committee soon after its formation. She distinguishes herself during the New Orleans affair, using her powers to build and stabilize levees against the series of natural disasters that pile on the city, planting and raising to instant maturity countless cypress, oak, and magnolia trees whose roots bolster existing earthen dams, saving the city from untold damage.

She undertakes various projects for the Committee, but largely finds herself back in New Orleans helping to restore the natural landscape to buffer the city against future catastrophes. Along the way, she finds a battered old fedora that turns out to be Nick Williams's, and sends it off to Cameo.

Wally Gunderson (Rustbelt) comes to New Orleans and tells her of his plan to journey to Africa to find out what happened to his young pen pal Lucien, who he was fostering but who had

suddenly ceased writing. She realizes the good-intentioned but slow-witted ace wouldn't last five minutes without help, so she agrees to accompany him. Their African trek is long and arduous, as they travel to Tanzania, and then by small plane and boat around Lake Tanganyika, finally reaching the village of Kalemie in the former Congo, where Lucien lived.

They discover it's been destroyed by People's Paradise of Africa soldiers. A survivor tells them Lucien had been taken off into the jungle with the village's other children, taken to a bad place where they'd be changed. Gardener and Rusty follow the trail to a lab where children are injected with the wild card virus as part of the Nshombos's brutally insane plan to assemble a cadre of child aces to fight in the PPA's wars. It's guarded by a contingent of Leopard Men, who Wally quickly subdues.

Wally keeps calling for Lucien, and a joker child points the way to the edge of the compound's clearing, where there's a large mound of fresh dirt, a backhoe, and the stench of death. Wally opens the tomb, and finds his little friend dead among scores of other children. He personally digs separate graves for all, burying them with quiet dignity.

Meantime, Jerusha has been looking through the papers they recovered from the lab, and discovers that this isn't the Nshombos's only installation. She also learns that all the labs receive their supply of wild card virus from a facility in the

village of Bunia. The virus is delivered by a barge that travels up and down the river distributing its deadly cargo.

Wally realizes they have to split up: Jerusha to take the children (some of them in poor health or with restricted movement capabilities) they'd just rescued to safety; he (whose only real talent is busting things up) to go to Bunia and destroy the lab supplying the wild card virus.

At first Jerusha resists his suggestion. She realizes she's starting to have feelings for the big-hearted ace, but also knows the safety of the children has to come first. Jerusha and Wally say heartfelt goodbyes, and she leads the kids into the jungle.

Of the fifty-two children, twenty-nine had yet to be injected with the virus, eight had been given the virus but hadn't turned their cards, and fifteen were jokers. Jerusha and the older children carry those who can't walk. It's only a matter of hours before a blind joker named Waikili, who has a blank expanse of skin where his face should be, reveals he has mental powers that tell him someone is on their trail.

And he's right. Weathers has sent Leopard Men, and the aces The Hunger and Leucrotta after them. Over the course of several days they fight off multiple



NAME: JERUSHA CARTER	WC NAME: GARDENER
OCCUPATION: REALITY TV SHOW CONTESTANT; MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE	BASE: AS COMMITTEE MEMBER, NEW YORK CITY
WC STATUS: ACE	ETHNICITY: AFRICAN-AMERICAN

attacks, as Leucrotta dogs them unmercifully through the jungle, snatching terrified victims from their line of march. Jerusha finally manages to engulf him in one of her fast-growing thorn bushes and as he dangles naked and badly wounded, one of the children uses a captured rifle to put Leucrotta out of his misery.

The Hunger strikes next, with Gardener as his target. At first she thinks she's only superficially wounded by his bite on her arm, but soon Jerusha is filled with a hunger nothing can sate. Worse, she grows thin and tired as her body slowly eats itself, burning fat and muscle to keep going.

After several nightmare days in the jungle, they finally reach Lake Tanganyika. Gardener takes a baobab seed from her pouch and tosses it into the vast lake, creating an unwieldy raft that the children swarm onto.

Halfway across the lake, with the raft foundering, they're spotted by a Tanzanian patrol boat that takes them to safety. Gardener borrows a satellite phone from a crew member and calls Lohengrin, informing him of the situation, adding that all are on the verge of starvation. Lohengrin gets on the line to Noel Matthews, who agrees to help. He knows there are too many children for him to teleport, so he takes the ace called Tesseract to the Jokertown Clinic in New York City, where she opens a gate and a team of doctors and nurses rush through to rescue Gardener and the children.

All recover at the Clinic, except for Gardener. She is slowly starving to death, and nothing can be done to halt the process. Jerusha is down to skin and bones when she decides to release herself. Dr. Finn, the head of the Clinic, tells her she'll die if she leaves the hospital. She knows, but she wants to do some good with what time and energy she has left.

Lohengrin informs her that Rustbelt is apparently leading a popular uprising against the Nshombos and his crusade has reached their main lab outside of Bunia. Matthews, as Lilith, agrees to transport Gardener to his side, along with Cameo and Buggy.

Rusty is right outside the lab's perimeter when they arrive. Jerusha half cries, half laughs in relief when she sees him. She starts walking toward him, haltingly, like an old woman; he barely recognizes her. They have time for only a brief reunion before they assault the lab.

GARDENER

POWER LEVEL 6

STRENGTH	STAMINA	AGILITY	DEXTERITY
0	2	1	2

FIGHTING	INTELLECT	AWARENESS	PRESENCE
1	1	2	1

POWERS

Plant Growth: Create Plants 12, (4,000 cft.), Continuous, Innate • 37 points

SKILLS

Expertise: Botany 6 (+7), Insight 2 (+4), Perception 4 (+6), Persuasion 2 (+3), Stealth 2 (+3), Treatment 2 (+3)

ADVANTAGES

Defensive Attack, Languages (French, English native)

OFFENSE

INITIATIVE +1	
Unarmed +1	Close, Damage 0

DEFENSE

DODGE	4	FORTITUDE	5
PARRY	4	TOUGHNESS	2
WILL	7		

COMPLICATIONS

Motivation—Acceptance: Jerusha enjoys silence and solitude as much as the company of her friends, but she still wants to belong to the group, to contribute, to have people notice her without her having to make a fuss about it.

Power Loss: Gardener has to actually have the seeds she sows, so she carries around a pouch full of them. The supply and variety of seeds carried is limited.

Abilities 20 + Powers 37 + Advantages 2 + Skills 9 + Defenses 14 = 82

Jerusha sends a phalanx of vines out to rip down the chain link fence protecting the lab, then more to explode the minefields Bugsy's wasps discover. The lab building itself is called the Red House, an old red brick Victorian monstrosity. Gardener uses her two last baobab seeds to smash through it. It also takes the last of her strength and she collapses against a tree trunk, too tired to move.

In the ensuing battle, as the other aces fight Tom Weathers, a small boy, the child ace Wrecker, approaches her. His expression tells her that he's one of the dangerous ones, like Leucrotta. He explodes a brick a foot away from her. The shards of it rip into her abdomen, and it's the end.

Her last thought is of Wally.

In the months following Gardener's death, a group of trees springs up in the ruins of the Red House where the collection of seeds spilled out of her pouch were soaked in her dying blood. Trees, flowers, grasses of all sorts thrive, even when the Congo climate would normally kill them. And in the center of the grove is a pair of intertwined baobab trees the locals call The Lovers.

PERSONALITY

Intense but forthright, Jerusha lacks the back-biting and scheming nature of some of the *American Hero* contestants. She has a good sense of humor, but doesn't feel the need to constantly wisecrack her way to the center of attention like, say, Bugsy. Jerusha often finds herself set apart from those around her, spending more time in the garden behind the Discard Pile than inside playing to the cameras while on

American Hero or staying to perform solitary restoration and protection work in New Orleans after the flashier heroes have moved on to other missions.

POWERS & ABILITIES

Gardener plants things. They grow, really fast and really big. She can't animate them, but she *can* direct their growth so certain branches extend in certain directions, or encourage a vine's natural twinning activity to enwrap a particular object or person. Treat this as a Snare power stunt of her Plant Growth power (see the *Hero's Handbook*, page 131). She also occasionally used the stunt of throwing a seed for a *big* plant (like a baobab tree) causing it to grow in midair to drop on something (see **Dropping Objects** under **Create**, *Hero's Handbook*, page 102).

ALLIES

All of Jerusha's fellow contestants on *American Hero* and fellow members in the Committee were either friendly or at least neutral toward her. She and Rustbelt had an evolving relationship that ended up being love.

ENEMIES

Gardener didn't make enemies over her career, but in the end she and the aces and rulers of the People's Paradise of Africa died at each other's hands.

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