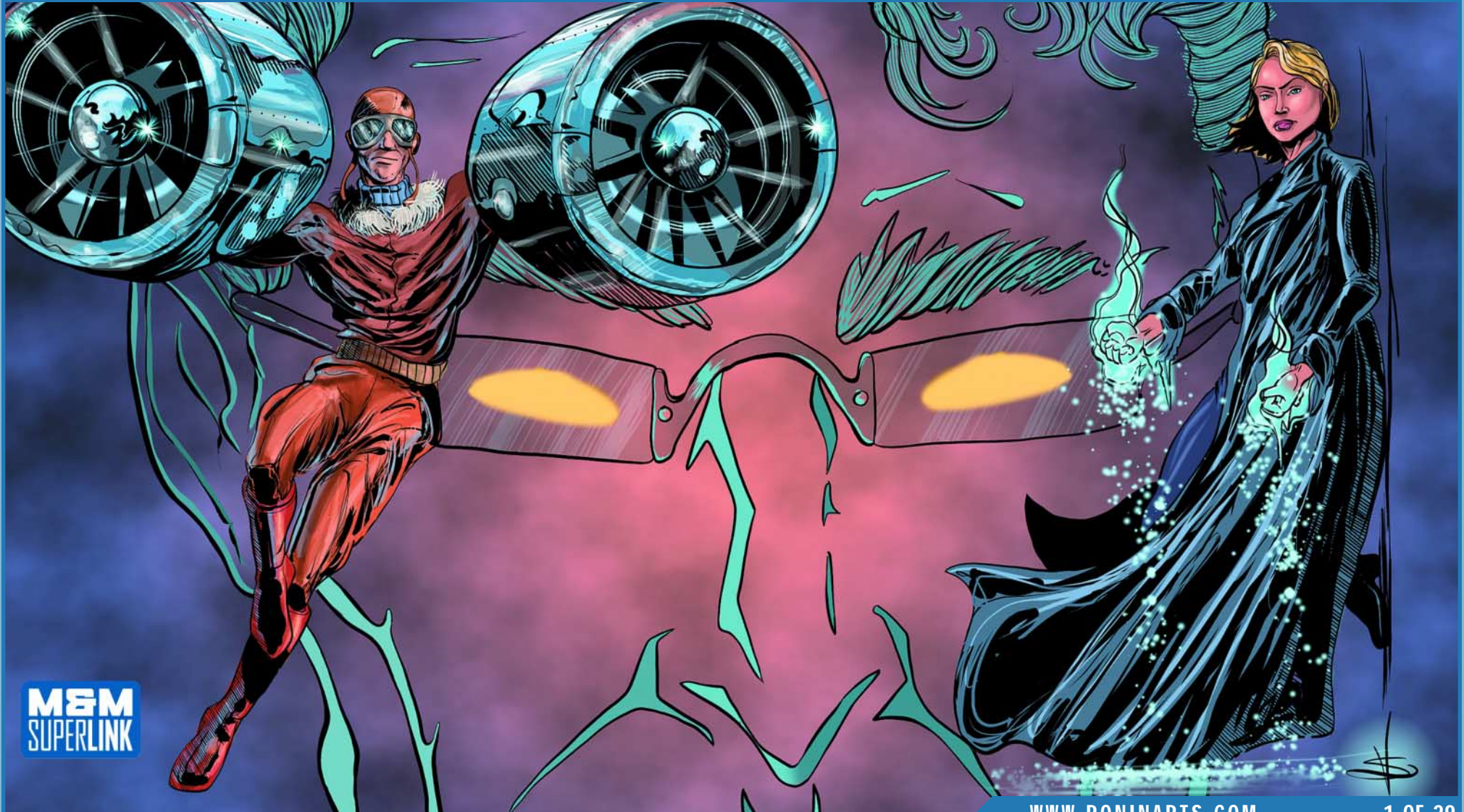


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A MATTER OF FAMILY

A BLUE VIAL COMICS ADVENTURE BY CHRIS AYLOTT



M&M
SUPERLINK

“How should we term your dealings to be just,
If you unjustly deal with those that in your Justice trust?”
– Hieronymous in *The Spanish Tragedy*

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INTRODUCTION

There's nothing easy about being a super-powered bodyguard. Anybody who needs your help needs it bad, and there's no telling what sort of maniac will turn up wanting to kill the person you're trying to protect. Guarding a powerful Mob boss like Lorenzo Maggio is even more difficult, especially when he has decided to turn state's evidence against some of the most powerful mobsters in the city.

"A Matter of Family" is an *M&M Superlink* adventure for three to five PL10 characters. There are several combat scenes, but the heart of the adventure lies in an investigation that – if successful – will lead the player characters to a decision that can affect their entire city.

If you're a player and your gamemaster is planning to run this adventure, you probably want to stop reading now. You can read up on all the secret stuff after the game, so why spoil the fun of finding out most of it for yourself?

NEED HELP?

Here at Blue Vial Comics, we're always happy to answer questions and help you make the most of our adventures. Email our Help Center at adventures@chrisaylott.com and we'll do whatever we can for you. We also love comments and war stories, so drop us a line!

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

After a decades-long career as the second-most-successful mobster in the city, Don Lorenzo Maggio has had a change of heart. He's retiring, and he intends to shake up the criminal structure of the city by revealing evidence of his many rivals' activities. The Don will then vanish into a witness protection program, leaving the other Families in disarray and giving his own organization a chance to grow and prosper under its next leader.

Of course, for this plan to work, the Don has to stay alive until he can testify. DA Robert Malina has convened a grand jury, but he needs to protect Don Maggio for two days. The Don can't be certain that his own men won't turn on him for violating the Mafia code of silence, and the stakes are so high that the even the traditionally powers-averse Families might call in a super-assassin. Maggio needs super-protection, and that's where the player characters come in.

What nobody knows is that DA Malina has a secret agenda. Many years ago, he fathered a son while dating an exotic dancer. Malina never publicly acknowledged that he was the father of Charlie Willis, who grew up to be a troubled young man and fell in with the Cesario crime family. Charlie died five years ago, a casualty in a mob war started by Don Maggio, and Malina secretly swore revenge. Since then, he has decimated the local mobs with a string of brilliant prosecutions, but now the man responsible for the death of his son is about to slip away forever. Malina's desperate thirst for revenge has led him to cross over the line of right and wrong.

Maggio first approached the district attorney's office ten days ago. Malina told him to sit tight while the grand jury was convened, then spent his life savings to contact and hire a hit man named the Spectre. The Spectre had arrangements of his own to make, though, and had not yet done the job when Malina's superiors told him to bring in as much protection as necessary for Maggio.

After contacting the Spectre and stalling for a day or two, the district attorney went out and found the least experienced superteam he could justify recruiting for the job – the player characters. He then provided the Spectre with a complete dossier of the PCs' strengths and vulnerabilities. Meanwhile, the Spectre hired some reinforcements – a flying villain named Buzzbomb and a cold-using speedster named Ice Tease. Malina hopes that the Spectre can kill Maggio without harming anybody else, but deep down he knows he's fooling himself.

After they take the job, the PCs spend some time getting to know Don Maggio at his penthouse apartment on top of the luxurious Swan Hotel. Within a few hours they are attacked by Buzzbomb and Ice Tease, who the Spectre has sent out to help him study the PCs' strategies and weaken their defenses. They also receive anonymous phone calls urging them to give up their defense of "that cold-blooded killer."

The players must juggle an investigation of who's behind the hit with the continuing defense of Don Maggio, especially after the Spectre launches his own assault upon them. If they follow the clues, they can uncover the DA's involvement, find his old lover and learn his motivation. Then they must decide what to do with that information: should they turn in a man who has devoted his life to making the city better? Dare they ignore the deeds of a public servant who has ordered a terrible crime? What happens if the public finds out that the District Attorney has taken "justice" into his own hands?

ADVANCE PREPARATIONS

"A Matter of Family" can be the first adventure of a new team, but it has more resonance placed a few sessions into a campaign. Here are some things you can do to set up the adventure in the sessions before you run it.

- *Introduce District Attorney Malina.* One way to do this is to drop his name into news broadcasts heard by the PCs. The DA has enjoyed spectacular success prosecuting members of the Maggio and Cesario families, and each trial victory gets plenty of attention. If the PCs have regular dealings with the legal system, they may well encounter Malina, or hear about him from one of his employees. The city police is also well aware of the DA's "by the book" reputation, and some cops have been known to grumble about the extra work they have to do making sure every bit of evidence is properly tagged and accounted for.

If you already have a District Attorney in your campaign, then you could assign Malina's story to him, or give Malina a similar position in another court. Malina could be a County Prosecutor or a United States Attorney working in a federal Circuit Court.

- *Introduce Don Lorenzo Maggio.* The Maggio family specializes in "sin crimes" such as gambling, prostitution, drugs, and smuggling legal goods like alcohol and tobacco past the tax authorities. Any hero devoted to "cleaning up the streets" is sure to have butted

heads with the organization, though as mobsters go they're less evil than most. Lorenzo tends to stay in the background, though a determined PC may find opportunities to confront him. He is well-known to anybody interested in crime, and has a reputation for being both genial and ruthless.

Lorenzo's decision to retire is driven by the recent death of his son, Francis, who was caught in the middle of a drive-by shooting. This event is sure to have made headlines, and a vigilante PC may have been present or involved.

- *Rumors of the Spectre.* The Spectre arrives in town the day before the adventure begins, and begins preparing for his attack in the week prior to his arrival. Any character searching for rumors in the criminal underworld that succeeds at a Gather Information check (DC 20) learns that a super-powered hit man is hiring assistants for "an entertaining and profitable adventure".

Any character that succeeds by five or more also gets the email address (*helloworld@fearful.death.com*) that the Spectre is using to interview prospective help. Tracing the address requires a day of searching and a Computers check (DC 25), which if successful leads to a island cottage in Maine. (The Spectre will have left by the time the PCs arrive.) The PCs may also try to convince the Spectre to hire them so they can expose his plans, though this will require skillful bluffing. Any character that convinces the Spectre that she is a skilled assassin gets directions to a third-rate hotel in the city, where a room has been reserved for her and further instructions will be given.

- *A Test of Fire.* One of the plot points of this adventure is that the District Attorney has given the assassins a dossier providing information on the strengths and weaknesses of the player characters. It's assumed that this has been compiled from news reports and other public records, but another possibility is that a supervillain has been gathering and selling dossiers on superheroes. If so, you can get a good subplot out of a villain doing research on the PCs by stalking them and observing how they use their powers.

THE MAGGIO FAMILY

The Maggio Family has over a hundred members and associates, most of which are simple gunsels and bagmen. The lowest-ranking members are known as *piciotto*, enforcers, or “button men”, and are typical PL1 Thugs. The next rank is made up of “made men”, known as *sgarrista*. These foot soldiers are PL2 Elite Thugs. The Maggio Family has about 60 *piciotto* and 40 *sgarrista*, most of which are not “loyal minions”. See below for more details.

Piciotto and *sgarrista* usually operate in crews of about ten members, with each crew led by a *caporegime* or lieutenant. Lieutenants are smarter (or at least more cunning) and more vicious than the men they lead, and always have an eye on rising further in the organization. There’s not much room at the top, so each *caporegime* wants to be the most trusted and respected of his rank should Don Maggio need a new underboss.

Don Maggio’s most important minions are his financial advisor, known as the *contabile*, and his *capo bastone* or underboss. Both are extremely loyal to Don Maggio, being related to him by blood or marriage. Lorenzo’s younger brother Salvatore serves as his underboss, while his uncle Vincenzo Spero has been hiding away the Family finances for decades.

Salvatore and Vincenzo are unlikely to appear in this adventure. If game statistics are needed, then both characters can be described using the *caporegime* character below and making the following minor changes. Salvatore has a Wisdom score of 13, while Vincenzo has an Intelligence score of 14.

A MATTER OF LOYALTY

Don Maggio’s loyalty score is only 20, which means that only some of the members of the Maggio Family are completely loyal to him. The rest serve him only so long

as it is in their interest to do so, and are likely targets for bribery or subversion. The loyal members are as follows: 50 of the *piciotto*, 5 of the *sgarrista*, 3 of the *caporegime*, as well as both Salvatore and Vincenzo.

A TYPICAL CAPOREGIME

PL 3; Init +1; Defense 13 (12 flat-footed); Spd 30 ft.; Atk +5 melee (+1S, punch), +3 ranged (+3L, pistol); SV Dmg +1, Fort +1, Ref +1, Will +0; Str 13, Dex 13, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 13. *Skills*: Bluff +3, Drive +2, Intimidate +4, Listen +3, Spot +3. *Feats*: Accurate Attack, Leadership, Point Blank Shot. *Equipment*: handgun (+3 lethal damage)

DON LORENZO MAGGIO

PL 6, Init +1; Defense 13 (12 flat-footed); Spd 30 ft.; Atk +3 melee (+0S, punch), +4 ranged (+3L, pistol); SV Dmg +0, Fort +0, Ref +1, Will +2; Str 10, Dex 13, Con 10, Int 14, Wis 11, Cha 17. *Skills*: Bluff +12, Diplomacy +12, Drive +3, Gather Information +8, Intimidate +12, Sense Motive +9, Spot +5, Taunt +8. *Feats*: Connected, Infamy, Iron Will, Minions, Leadership, Point Blank Shot. *Powers*: Super-Leadership +6 (Source: Training) (*Equipment*: handgun (+3 lethal damage))

NEW POWER: SUPER-LEADERSHIP

Cost: 1

Action: None

Range: Personal

Duration: Continuous

Whether it’s due to your charisma, your position, or that indefinable “it factor”, you attract loyal followers like flies. Each level of Super-Leadership raises your leadership score by 1.

Extras

Coordinated Action: Once per day, you may give one or more allies a bonus to a die roll. You may apply the bonus to a single die roll or divide it up as desired among rolls that round. You may not give the bonus to yourself, and the total bonuses given must be equal or less than your Super-Leadership power rank.

Fanatic Minions: Your minions are so inspired by your presence that it is difficult to frighten or suborn them. Any minion within (5 times the power’s rank) feet of you gains Amazing Save (Willpower) at the rank of the power. You must have the Minions feat to use this extra.

Rally: As a half action, you may remove stun hits from your minions. You can affect a number of minions equal to your power rank, each of whom must be within (5 times the power’s rank) feet of you. You may remove up to your power rank in stun hits from each minion. You must have the Minions feat to use this extra.

DESCRIPTION

Don Lorenzo Maggio is a vigorous man in his early sixties. He has well-tanned skin, jet black hair (dyed), and his eyes are crinkled with laugh lines (real). He dresses expensively and well, favoring a dark sports coat over tan pants and a polo shirt. There’s a hardness to his eyes that belies his cheerful exterior.

Maggio can be friendly, but he is used to people doing exactly what he tells them to. Disobedience and insolence annoys him, and he has killed people for doing that. Like many old-guard mobsters, he is suspicious of superbeings, though he tries to keep this attitude in check while they’re protecting his life.

- “In Our Next Exciting Issue...” Some gamemasters like to end each game session with a teaser for the next adventure. If this appeals to you, then you can read this short scene out to your players.

Late that night, a phone rings in an almost deserted office. The man snatches it up in his meaty hand, then cradles it gently against his ear. He asks, “Did you find the people you need?” and seems pleased by the response. “How about the dossier? Have you reviewed it?”

He nods to the voice on the other end of the line. “Good,” he says. “You know what to do, then. Don Lorenzo Maggio testifies before the grand jury on Friday. I want him dead.”



START IT UP

This adventure begins with a simple hook: Assistant District Attorney Daniel Sissman calls up the player characters and asks for a meeting in the DA’s office. It’s unusual for Sissman to place the call himself rather than delegating the job to a secretary, and he is cagey about the purpose of the meeting. “It’s a big opportunity,” he says if pressed, “but it’s dangerous to talk too much about it. Come over as soon as possible.”

Almost any kind of superteam is appropriate for this adventure, especially since District Attorney Malina is setting the player characters up to fail. If the PCs are a powerful or famous superteam, then Malina’s stated reason for calling them in is because he wants “the best.” If, as is more likely, the PCs are newcomers or less powerful superheroes, then Malina says he wants them because they are “lower-profile” than the city’s more famous teams. Those justifications will work for almost any superteam except outlaws or superkids, and even then Malina can almost get away with telling the characters that this job is a chance for them to prove themselves. (This last justification stretches plausibility to the breaking point, and any player who has trouble with the idea should be reassured that it seems strange to his character as well.)

If the PC’s are not a formal superteam, then Daniel calls up the most famous of the characters and encourages him to bring along “those friends of yours.” If they don’t know each other at all, then Daniel calls up each of the characters in turn and they are introduced to each other in Malina’s office. This last possibility is another big stretch for plausibility, and should also seem unusual to the PCs. In this situation, it’s a good idea to start the adventure in Malina’s office rather than run through several repetitive phone scenes.

MEETING WITH MALINA

District Attorney Robert Malina has a corner office on the top floor of the Ellsworth Building, a five-story-tall office building near the courthouse that holds most of the city’s legal offices. It’s the kind of office that previous occupants have made into testaments of wealth and power, but Malina’s furnishings are so spare that the room almost seems empty.

The windows are wide, and there's plenty of light streaming into the office. There are no curtains, however, and Malina's old desk is a size too small for the room. His chairs are straight-backed, and look uncomfortable. There's a city map on one wall, law books on another, and on the third wall a collection of file cabinets with an old black-and-white portable television. A few framed newspaper pages of famous arrests and trials are scattered around the room. (Any PC that makes a Spot check (DC 15) notices that all the headlines are more than ten years old, even though Malina has had much bigger successes in the years since.)

Malina's desk is strictly business. The only things on it are legal files – plenty of those – and a phone. There are no family pictures, no office toys, not even a nameplate. Behind the desk is a worktable with a computer that seems to have been collecting dust for some months. The only truly personal item in the room is a small picture tucked into the shadow of the computer. Inside the intricate silver frame is a faded snapshot of Malina, smiling in a restaurant with a beautiful blonde on his arm. They're dressed up for the evening, and the clothes and Malina's age suggest that the photo is thirty to forty years old.

Any PC that is over the age of forty or who takes a serious interest in local history has a chance to recognize the scene by making a Knowledge (local) check (DC 25). The restaurant is Salvatore's, one of the best places to be young and beautiful in the mid-1960s. The Salvatore in question is Salvatore Maggio, a leader of the Maggio Family and the father of Lorenzo. This is a coincidence – Salvatore owned a lot of restaurants then, and Malina did not know any members of the Maggio family at the time.

The young woman in the picture is Julia "Boom Boom" Willis, an exotic dancer. She was obscure even then, and the PCs have no reason to recognize her until they do some research later on in the adventure. If asked about the picture, Malina grunts, "It's the past."

When the PC's arrive, Malina is sitting at his desk looking through notes and paperwork. After taking a minute to finish this task, he rises and converses with the characters while pacing between his desk and the window. Assistant DA Sissman quietly listens from the back of the room. A third figure sits in one of the DA's chairs – Don Lorenzo Maggio.

AN OFFER THEY SHOULDN'T REFUSE

"Thank you for coming," Malina begins. "This is Lorenzo Maggio, head of the Maggio crime family. A few days ago this... gentleman... contacted this office and offered to provide evidence documenting many of the Mafia crime operations in this city. He is supposed to testify before the grand jury on Friday, and we've been making quiet preparations for that, but we can't keep this secret any longer."

"I need you to keep Maggio alive until he can testify and disappear into the Witness Protection Program. Can you do that?"

After this introduction, the players gain control of the conversation. They'll probably have some questions, most of which will be simply and honestly answered by Malina (who is brusque), Maggio (courteous), or Sissman (nervous). Possible questions and answers include:

- *Why us?* According to Malina, they're the best team available for the job. If the team is relatively inexperienced, then Malina suggests they will be able to provide some surprises to anyone who attacks.
- *What do we get out of this?* If money isn't important to the characters, then Malina offers the gratitude of his office and help with any problems the characters may be having with the city government. If money is important to the characters, then Malina offers them \$3000 plus expenses. A successful Diplomacy check (DC 20) bargains him up to \$6000 and expenses, which is all the city can afford.
- *Are we going to get any help?* Malina says that the wide-ranging influence of the Mob means that neither the police nor Maggio's men can be trusted, and that the PCs are going to have to guard Maggio on their own. This is true, but the real reason is that Malina wants to leave Maggio as vulnerable as possible while keeping the city's cops out of danger.

DISTRICT ATTORNEY ROBERT MALINA

PL 6, Init +1; Defense 13 (12 flat-footed); Spd 30 ft.; Atk +3 melee (+0S, punch); SV Dmg +0, Fort +0, Ref +1, Will +3; Str 10, Dex 12, Con 10, Int 14, Wis 13, Cha 13. *Skills:* Bluff +10, Diplomacy +10, Drive +3, Gather Information +6, Knowledge (local) +8, Intimidate +8, Profession (lawyer) +11, Sense Motive +11, Spot +5 *Feats:* Connected, Iron Will, Talented (Sense Motive and Profession). *Equipment:* a Mindscreen 500 Telepathy Jammer (provides Mental Protection +5)

NEW DEVICE: TELEPATHY JAMMERS

Telepaths make dangerous enemies, and many normal humans know things that they'd rather not share with casual peepers. The Mindscreen from Psychguard Industries is an expensive but popular protective device used by businessmen, government officials, and high-ranking military officers. The 500 model looks like a credit card and provides 5 levels of Mental Protection to the person carrying it. The jamming system uses a subtle frequency algorithm so that any telepath not actively trying to penetrate the user's defenses perceives it only as ordinary background "noise". *Cost:* 2 points per level of protection provided.

DESCRIPTION

Malina is a heavy-set man in his late fifties. He has a jowly face, short grey hair, and brown eyes. He wears shapeless suits, and his shoulders slump. Fading nicotine stains on his fingers suggest that he recently gave up smoking.

- *What's the testimony about?* Maggio tells them that he has collected documents that provide information about the activities of rival Mob families like the Cesarios. His information will expose drug supply chains, front businesses, and city officials on the take from the Families.

- *Why is Maggio violating the Mob's code of silence and testifying?* "I'm tired of it all", Maggio says. "I just want to go sit in the sun, but before I go I want to leave the city a little better than when I started." If pressed, he admits that the death of his son has caused him to lose interest in "the business". He's also willing to admit that his testimony does no harm to his own Family, which is likely to prosper if the other mobs suffer.
- *Do we have to follow orders?* "Not if you don't want to," says Assistant DA Sissman. Malina explains that the operation is in the hands of the PCs, and that how they do the job is completely up to them. Don Maggio harrumphs at that statement, since he intends to have some say in how the PCs do their job.
- *Do you have a secure location?* The city doesn't have anything available. Don Maggio has a penthouse at the top of the Swan Hotel – it's both secure and comfortable, and he'd like to stay there. The PCs are also welcome to take Don Maggio to their headquarters or another location, but they'll need to make a Diplomacy check (DC 15) to get him to come willingly.

Some characters may be hostile towards Maggio and dubious about protecting a lifelong criminal and killer. If verbally attacked, the don remains calm but unapologetic about his past. "I've done what I've had to do and some of that wasn't good," he says, "but at least I've never done it from behind a mask." This is unlikely to go over well with the PCs, and Daniel Sissman steps in to calm things down.

"We're not comfortable with this deal either," he tells the heroes, "but Don Maggio can do a lot to help us clean up the streets. We think that good is worth the price." If any character is paying attention Malina when Daniel says this, then that character sees a shadow of anger pass across the district attorney's face.

When the player's questions start to wind down, Malina declares that they are now in charge of Don Maggio and begins looking through his legal papers again. The interview is apparently over. Don Maggio suggests that the PCs return with him to his penthouse, saying, "If

we're going to sit around waiting to be attacked, we might as well sit around with brandy and old movies". How the characters get to the penthouse (or whatever location they may go to) is up to them – they can fly across the city, run through the streets, borrow a car from the DA's office, take Don Maggio's limousine, or use any other form of transportation they feel comfortable with.

As the PCs leave, Sissman gives them a scrambled mobile phone and asks them to call him or Malina with it if they need assistance or change locations. "If something goes wrong," he points out, "we're going to need to know where to find you." The phone has secure numbers for both men programmed into it.

TROUBLESHOOTING

It's possible that the characters will turn down the job offer, or even refuse to show up at the meeting at all. If they turn down the offer, then the next day's papers are full of headlines about the shocking murder of Don Lorenzo Maggio. Depending on how long you want to make the chain of investigation, Don Maggio can be dropped off a building by Buzzbomb, spiked through the heart by Ice Tease, or scared to death by the Spectre. Malina can hire another (preferably less powerful) superteam if you'd like to introduce some eyewitnesses, or you can simplify matters by deciding that Malina left the don unprotected while pretending to search for a replacement team.

If the PCs never go to the meeting and never hear the offer, then connecting them to the story becomes a little more difficult. One good explanation is to bring in a friend on another team or a loved one who gets badly hurt or killed in one of the attacks on Don Maggio. If the PCs want to bring in the villain responsible, they'll have to investigate the crime, which should lead them up the chain to the man who ordered the hit in the first place.

If your players are the sorts who have no allies on other teams, no friends or loved ones to threaten, and refuse to stir out of their headquarters — you've got bigger problems than running this adventure. Email our Help Center and we'll see if we can come up with a solution for you.

DON MAGGIO'S PENTHOUSE

The characters arrive at the penthouse without incident. Once they are there, Don Maggio takes on the role of host, offering the characters food, drink, and a chance to tour his apartment.

The Swan is one of the older hotels in the city. Built in 1884, it stands 12 stories tall and crowds into a small block on the edge of a large city park. Its outer walls are worn brownstone, but it retains a sense of dignity and luxury. Inside, the walls are high and frequently covered with paintings from the hotel's impressive art collection. Rooms rent for \$250 to \$350 per night, and the people who occupy them expect quiet elegance and comfort.

Don Maggio has rented the penthouse on the hotel's top floor for thirty years, and the space fits him like an old shoe. The hotel is surrounded by taller buildings on three sides, and most of the windows in the penthouse look out upon the park. The rooms are decorated in bright colors to make the most of whatever light makes it past the other buildings, but most of the rooms retain a sense of shadow even on the brightest days.

The elevator leads up to a foyer, which is filled with a mix of painting and sculpture. The Don likes beautiful women as subjects, and his taste favors pre-20th-century Italian artists. He likes to show people his collection, speaking knowledgeably and – for those characters who like art – entertainingly about each of his pieces. He is especially proud of his painting of Melpomene, Muse of Tragedy, done by 17th-century artist Elisabetta Sirani.

The foyer leads to a living room, which is the largest room in the penthouse. It's really two rooms in one, and stretches across the park-facing side of the penthouse. When characters enter from the foyer, they find themselves in a largely open space used for entertaining. A formal dining table seating eight is placed near the windows, and the walls are lined with bookcases mostly filled with popular fiction. The other half of the room is a sunken conversation pit equipped with top-of-the-line stereo and television equipment. A well-stocked bar partially divides the two spaces. Outside the living room is a patio, Jacuzzi, a small lap pool, and a garden.



On the south side of the living room are two comfortable guest bedrooms connected by a bath. They're decorated with paintings and other mementoes of Italian life. On the east side of the living room, north of the foyer, is a short passage leading to the penthouse's kitchen and Maggio's master suite. The kitchen has everything needed to prepare a formal meal, but is messy with coffee cups and dirty dishes. (The Don has been preparing his own meals for several days.) The Don's bedroom is dominated by an antique four-poster bed and a ratty old armchair with a reading lamp.

The décor is expensive but outdated; the Don has lived alone for many years, and his sense of style stopped changing sometime in the late seventies. The carpet is shag, the wallpaper is in floral print patterns, and there are several pieces of low-slung furniture made out of "space-age" plastics. The rooms have a kind of retro charm, however, and Don Maggio moves around them confident that everything is precisely where he wants it to be.

NICE PLACE, LET'S TRASH IT

Once everybody has inspected the penthouse to their satisfaction, the Don settles down in the conversation pit with a drink (Campari and soda), pulls out a pack of cards, and suggests a game of poker. He has a bad habit of cheating when he deals – something that is noticed by any character that succeeds at a Spot check against his Bluff check. If caught and confronted, the Don admits nothing but stops cheating.

After an hour or two – exactly when isn't important, so give the PCs time to finish any activity or errand they want to take care of – a phone rings. It can be the penthouse phone, but it may be more unsettling to the players if the phone belongs to one of the characters. Especially sneaky GMs can step out of the room for a moment or have a co-conspirator call one of the **player's** phones.

Any character that answers the phone hears a distorted voice say, "The man you're guarding is a killer. Don't try too hard to protect him." The caller then hangs up. The caller is District Attorney Malina, of course, and he knows that the best way to avoid being identified is to keep his call as brief as possible. The voice sample is so short that it's impossible to identify by ear alone. If the PCs are able to record the voice and subject it to analysis, then a Computers check (DC 35) suggests that the speaker is an older male with a deep voice.

For more on how Malina is calling the PCs and how they can find him, see the Investigations section below.

ENTER THE BUZZBOMB

As the PCs puzzle over the phone call, they hear a droning noise to the north. It gets louder and louder until the characters are assaulted by a deafening scream of jet engines. Then a figure in an orange suit appears in front of the living room windows and shatters them with a wave of the jet engine in his left hand. The supervillain known as Buzzbomb has arrived.

IT'S ALL IN THE FILE

The Spectre has received a dossier on all the heroes protecting Don Maggio, and has shared it with his assistants. All three villains know all publicly available information on the PCs, and intend to use that information to minimize the heroes' strengths and exploit their weaknesses.

If you're looking for a little bit of comedy to drop into the fight scenes, it can be fun to have one of the facts in the dossier be wrong. If this is the case, then one or more of the villains can try to exploit a weakness that a hero doesn't actually have, only to be very confused when the trick doesn't work. If you want to turn this into a running gag, you can decide that the dossier has been shared among the rest of the villain community, allowing the piece of mistaken information to come up whenever it's funny.

Buzzbomb acts immediately, defending himself while using the wind from his engine to pull Maggio into the air with him. While doing this, he shouts, "Come along quietly, now, and this will be over quick and easy." Many of the PCs may not be able to hear him, of course, though they can understand him with a Read Lips check (DC 10). They may think he is trying to capture the mobster, but Buzzbomb plans to fly high and drop Maggio on a suitably hard piece of pavement.

Unless the players take events in an unusual direction, the scene that follows is a straightforward combat. Buzzbomb tries to get to Maggio and attacks any characters that get in his way. As a GM, your goals are to keep the environment exciting – the penthouse is full of heavy, precious, or dangerous things like tables, pieces of art, and building edges to fall off of – and get the players to spend as many hero points as possible while spending very few yourself. The Spectre doesn't expect Buzzbomb to succeed, and is hoping that this attack will soften up the heroes with fatigue and injuries.

Buzzbomb's signature battle tactics are listed in the next column.

- *Deafening Noise:* Buzzbomb's turbines are so loud that it's hard to hear when he's around. If a character moves within 80 feet of Buzzbomb (or vice versa), that character must make a Fortitude save (DC 18). Any character that fails is deafened while Buzzbomb is within 80 ft. Deaf characters cannot hear and suffer a -4 penalty to initiative checks.
- *The Big Scoop:* By spending a villain point for the Area extra, Buzzbomb can pick up a lot of characters at once and move them to a variety of dangerous or inconvenient places. Keep in mind that any character he doesn't specifically target and hit gets a Reflex save (DC 20). If successful, Buzzbomb only adds half his power rank to the check to overcome that character's Strength. On the plus side, everyone within area of effect has to make that power vs. Strength check to resist Buzzbomb's Telekinesis.
- *Knocking Heads Together:* Buzzbomb enjoys picking up a character with Telekinesis, then throwing that character at another character the next round. This is a ranged attack with a maximum range of 50 feet; if Buzzbomb hits, then both characters must make saves against a +10S damage bonus.
- *The PC Hits the Fan:* In addition to using Telekinesis to slam characters into walls and teammates, Buzzbomb can put an already-grabbed PC into the blades of one of his jet engines. This takes a half action to pull the PC towards him (the Telekinesis), and then another half action to make the melee attack.
- *Ram Attack:* By charging 70 ft, Buzzbomb receives a +7 bonus to his damage as well as the usual +2 to attack and -2 to Defense. To avoid damage from the ram, Buzzbomb would normally have to make a Damage save (DC 22), but the protection of his body armor allows him to avoid damage without a save.

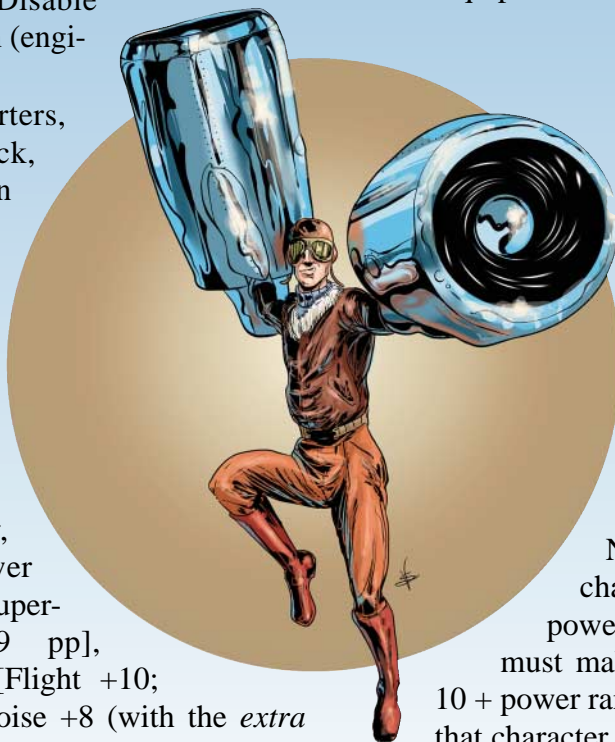
BUZZBOMB

PL 10; Init +1; Defense 21 (20 flat-footed); Spd 30 ft. (fly 50 ft.); Atk +11 melee (10L, turbines of doom), +11 ranged (telekinesis vs. Strength); SV Dmg +4, Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +3; Str 12, Dex 12, Con 10, Int, 16, Wis 12, Cha 10.

Skills: Computers +5, Craft (mechanics) +10, Disable Device +5, Profession (engineer) +7, Repair +5

Feats: Headquarters, Move-By Attack, Talented: Profession (engineer) and Craft (mechanics)

Equipment: Body Armor [Armor +8; *Extras:* Amazing Save +2 (Damage, Fortitude, Reflex, Will); *Power Stunts:* Durability, Toughness, Power Immunity; *Source:* Super-Science; *Cost:* 19 pp], Turbines of Doom [Flight +10; *Extras:* Deafening Noise +8 (with the *extra* Area and the *flaw* Permanent), Deflection (with the *extra* Reflection and the *flaw* “physical objects only”), Super-Flight +2, Telekinesis, Weapon; *Source:* Super-Science; *Cost:* 50 pp]



NEW POWER: DEAFENING NOISE

Cost: 2

Action: Free

Range: Personal

Duration: Continuous

This variant of Dazzle represents characters or equipment that are so noisy it's impossible to hear anything while near them. It can also be used to represent blindingly bright aliens, super-stinky skunks, or anything else that can block the senses of anybody unlucky enough to be nearby. Any one sense may be chosen, and additional senses may be chosen as extras.

When Deafening Noise is activated, any character within (5 times power rank) feet of the source must make a Fortitude save (DC 10 + power rank). If the check is failed, that character loses the use of the sense or senses affected by the power. If the check is successful, the character is unaffected by the power for the rest of the encounter.

If a character loses the use of one or more senses due to Deafening Noise, then that character recovers those senses when she is no longer in an area affected by the power. The character recovers her senses at the beginning of her turn. If that character then returns (or is returned to) an area affected by Deafening Noise, that character must make another Fortitude save. Again, succeeding at the save protects the character for the rest of the encounter.

Any character trying to be sneaky while using this power is wasting his time. Any character that takes this power without also taking Power Immunity will be affected by it.

Extra

Intimidating Noise: In addition to making a Fortitude save, any character within the area of effect must also make a Will save (DC 10 + power check). Any character that fails becomes shaken and suffers a -2 penalty to attack rolls, saves, and skill checks while within the area of effect. The rules for succeeding at the save, and leaving or returning to the area of effect are as above. This effect can be used as the main effect for the power – just remove the Dazzle effect above and substitute this effect instead.

Continued on next page . . .

BUZZBOMB (CONTINUED)

BIOGRAPHY

Seven years ago, Richard Fairfield was an up-and-coming engineer at Boeing. His specialty was engine design, and there was nothing he loved more than to find ways to make engines lighter, more powerful, and more efficient. He worked late every night with formulas and computer models, and soon he was designing prototypes that were years ahead of their time. A shy man, Richard shared his designs only with his friend and mentor, Virgil Constantine.

Virgil's all-but-inevitable betrayal came as a complete shock. One day, Richard arrived at the office to find that an all-hands meeting had been scheduled of the design staff. As Richard looked on in horror, Virgil unveiled the "Stratozen A Engine System" – an early design of Richard's which Virgil had secretly presented to upper management. Virgil got the credit, a Westervelt Innovation Award, and a promotion with a hefty raise attached. Richard got to go around the bend.

Rushing back to his office, the engineer discovered that Virgil had cleaned out and hidden away all the designs in their shared workspace. The only thing Richard had left was a small prototype of his latest design, which he had been tinkering with at home. Grabbing the pistol-sized turbine from his

briefcase, Richard ran back down to the auditorium, arriving just as Virgil was finishing a long and self-congratulatory speech. Screaming in rage, Richard used the turbine to pull the award away from Virgil, then fired the Lucite cube at the treacherous designer's throat. He collapsed gurgling, and Richard fled the building.

Since then, Richard has created a secret design lab in the Cascade Mountains where he constantly refines and tinkers with his engines. He always needs money to continue his work, which he gains through theft, committing crimes for hire, by and by selling technology to other supervillains. He tells himself that his criminal activities are a necessary evil, but he takes pleasure in flouting the law and endangering others. Richard feels that being a "nice guy" ruined his life, and every evil deed he does gives him a bit of revenge on the world.

BATTLE TACTICS

Buzzbomb's chaotic combat style uses lots of found objects and causes as much collateral damage as possible. He loves shattering windows, lifting characters up and dropping them from great heights, and throwing heavy objects or people around. His powerful hand turbines allow him to fly at respectable speeds, and he can use the sharp fan blades as

a devastating melee weapon. The engines are also deafeningly loud, and Richard has built noise-cancelling equipment into the body-armor of his flight-suit.

DESCRIPTION

Buzzbomb wears an garish orange flight suit under a World War II bomber jacket and aviator's helmet. He holds an outlandishly big jet engine in each hand, a feat made possible by cunning gyroscopes within the engine itself.

STORY SEED

Virgil Constantine survived Richard's attack, though his crushed windpipe required a tracheotomy and he now speaks with a mechanical voice. He has continued to advance his career by presenting Richard's designs as his own, but is running low on fresh material. He may go looking for a gullible superteam to find Buzzbomb's hideout, apprehend the supervillain, and bring the designs back to him. (Virgil will claim that Richard stole **his** designs.)

WHAT IF THE PCs DON'T GO TO THE PENTHOUSE?

It's okay if the PCs choose another location to guard Don Maggio. Presumably they'll be going to their headquarters or some other familiar location where they feel safe. If you don't already know what this location looks like yet, your players will probably be happy to describe it to you. As long as the characters keep the DA up to date on where they're going, he can pass that information on to the Spectre, which means the plot moves forward without interruption.

If your players are feeling frisky, they may try to conceal their location from the DA's office. Try to avoid this if you can – the best way to do so is to have Assistant DA Sissman beg and plead for their cooperation. (This has the advantage of setting him up as a suspect later, even though the only thing he's guilty of is an inexplicable fondness for the albums of Mojo Nixon.) If that doesn't work, then either Ice Tease or the Spectre can follow the PCs from the DA's office to their hiding place.

Who attacks the hiding place depends on where it's located and how it's defended. Buzzbomb is going to have trouble assaulting an underground bunker, for instance, though if he teams up with Ice Tease the two of them can be a potent combination even with limited flying space. (Ice slicks + jet engine pushes + walls = “that's gotta **hurt!**”) The Spectre can get through almost any defense, though he'd prefer not to show himself until the PCs are worn out and vulnerable. If he has to go in, he'll let the others wreak havoc while he stays out of sight and looks for an opportunity to strike a decisive blow.

- *Right Back Atcha:* Buzzbomb will encourage characters with physical ranged attacks to attack him, then try to use Deflection and Reflection to reverse their attack.
- *That Sinking Sensation:* Telekinesis is also great for dropping people off buildings. If Buzzbomb tosses the character off the side, the character falls 120 feet to the street, hitting at the end of the round. Falls do lethal damage, with a base damage bonus of +1 per 10 feet fallen.

Buzzbomb is reckless but not foolhardy. He'll keep fighting even if he takes two or three hits, but he'll flee when it becomes clear he cannot win. The characters do have a good chance of capturing him, especially if they have a flyer who can fly faster than Buzzbomb's maximum speed of 90 miles per hour. Buzzbomb's equipment is also his greatest vulnerability – the usual rules for attacking objects apply to it, and he is powerless without it.

If the PCs are having too easy a time with Buzzbomb, however, you can raise the stakes by sending Ice Tease to join the attack. She can race up the side of the building by using extra effort (or a villain point) to add the Wall Run power stunt to her Super-Speed, then use most of the battle tactics described in her fight scene below.



MOVING TARGETS

If Buzzbomb does his job well, there won't be much left of the penthouse. It certainly won't be comfortable, and it may well be uninhabitable. Unless the player characters are feeling stubborn, they'll want to move to a more secure location. After the near-miss of Buzzbomb's attack, Don Maggio isn't going to have many objections to leaving.

The most likely place for the PCs to go is their own headquarters, but any location they choose works for the purposes of this story. The Spectre can get into almost any hiding place the heroes choose, and it's easy for Ice Tease to ambush them before they get there. Stealth isn't much help to the characters either. As long as they check in with the district attorney's office, the villains know where they are at all times. Even if they don't check in, it's easy for Ice Tease or the Spectre to follow them as they leave the penthouse.

If the heroes travel along the ground, the Ice Tease attacks them in between the penthouse and their destination. If they fly, she'll hit them as they arrive. Either way, her basic modus operandi is the same – sweep through the area at high speed launching deadly hit-and-run attacks.

Some of the stunts that Ice Tease may try include:

- *Advance Warning is for the Birds:* Ice Tease is not a great melee fighter, so she tries to surprise her opponents and catch them flat-footed whenever possible. This lets her charge and put her Surprise Strike feat to work.
- *Annoying People is Good Too:* Once she's lost the element of surprise, Ice Tease uses the taunting rules to knock her opponents off-balance and leave them flat-footed again.
- *Hard Candy Shell:* In a pinch, Ice Tease can use extra effort (or a villain point) to prepare her Energy Absorption to absorb a physical attack. If you need a pseudo-scientific explanation for this, she surrounds her body with ice and then absorbs the kinetic energy of anything hitting the ice.

THE INEVITABLE TWO GUYS WITH TOMMY GUNS

If the heroes are having **too** easy a time with Ice Tease, send in some hit men from the Cesario family. All they have to do is pull up, fire a few dozen rounds through their car windows, and drive away. The distraction should give Ice Tease a chance to gain a combat advantage or escape.

If the PCs investigate the mobsters, then you should quickly establish that the mob attack has nothing to do with the hired supervillains. One way to do this is to tell any player whose character was paying attention to Ice Tease that she was as surprised by the attack the heroes were.

CESARIO FAMILY HIT MEN

PL 3; Init +1; Defense 13 (12 flat-footed); Spd 30 ft; Atk +4 melee (+1S, punch), +5 ranged (+4L, submachine gun); SV Dmg +1, Fort +1, Ref +1, Will +0; Str 13, Dex 13, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10. *Skills:* Drive +3, Intimidate +4, Listen +2, Spot +2, Taunt +4; *Feats:* Attack Focus (ranged), Multishot, Point Blank Shot, Rapid Shot. *Equipment:* submachine gun (+4L, *Extra:* Autofire, *Flaw:* Uses),

CESARIO FAMILY DRIVER

PL 3; Init +2; Defense 14 (12 flat-footed); Spd 30 ft; Atk +2 melee (+0S, punch), +4 ranged (+3L, pistol); SV Dmg +1, Fort +1, Ref +4, Will +0; Str 11, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10. *Skills:* Drive +8, Listen +2, Spot +2; *Feats:* Lightning Reflexes, Skill Focus (Drive). *Equipment:* black Lincoln Town Car (*Size:* Large, *Tactical Movement:* 35 ft. per round, *Hardness:* 10, *Armor Bonus:* 5), pistol (+3L)

- *They Can't Hurt You if They Can't Reach You – Or if They're Too Busy:* Ice Tease's Snare and Ice Slick attacks are area effects with a radius of 40 feet. She can only use them a few times per day, so she looks for opportunities to make the most of them. Catching lots of heroes in the effect is always good, but a well-placed Ice Slick can also cause a hero-distracting traffic catastrophe.

ICE TEASE

PL 11; Init +12; Defense 29 (even when flat-footed); Spd 70 ft.; Atk +6 melee (+8L, ice strike), +6 ranged (DC18 Reflex save, snare); SV Dmg +0, Fort +0, Ref +8, Will +6; Str 10, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 16.

Skills: Bluff +8, Taunt +9

Feats: Attractive, Improved Initiative, Move-By Attack, Power Immunity, Surprise Strike

Powers: Amazing Save (Will) +6 [Source: Training; Cost: 6 pp], Energy Absorption +11 [Extra: Energy Blast; Flaw: 4 uses of Absorption per day – Energy Blast doesn't count as a use; Source: Mutation; Cost: 22 pp], Ice Slick +8 [Extra: Snare, with an Area extra upon it; Flaws: 4 uses of Ice Slick or Snare per day, plus Ice Tease is restricted to an area of effect that is on a surface that she is also touching – this is usually the ground; Source: Mutation; Cost: 8 pp], Superspeed +8 [Extras: Combat Sense, Ice Strike (lethal); Source: Mutation; Cost: 64 pp]

BIOGRAPHY

Mary-Ann Lawson has always had her looks, but she's never had anything else going for her. The daughter of a Tuscaloosa steelworker, she cruised through high school leading cheers and attending parties. Then her father lost her job in the economic upheavals of the mid-1990s, and times got hard for the Lawson family.

Some people discover inner strength in adversity, but Mary-Ann grew brittle. She withdrew into herself, grew sharp-tongued, and methodically drove away her friends. The last straw came when her football team-captain boyfriend broke up with her over the phone. He told her, "You've become so cold... I just can't take being around you any more."

Mary-Ann vanished into her room for days. Her father left meals by her door and hoped for the best, but as Marilyn sat on her bed starting at the wall, she noticed her breath frosting the humid Alabama air as it left her mouth. *Cold*, she thought. *I'll show them all cold.*

Football is a religion in Alabama, and thousands of fans turned out to view the Central High Falcons that night. What they saw instead was the first appearance of Ice Tease as she skated through the stadium and left most of the football team writhing with broken arms and legs. Then she turned north and disappeared over the horizon. After supporting herself for a few weeks with a series of convenience store robberies, she made a few contacts in the underworld and began a career as a supervillain for hire.

Now 25, Mary-Ann is starting to wonder what's wrong with her life. She never has enough money, especially since she sends what little she saves home to her father. (He needs the money but refuses to spend it, which drives her up the wall.) She's a party girl when she's not running from the law, and both activities are losing their appeal. So far she's too selfish to make the tough choices needed to turn her life around, but that could change.

Despite her current assignment, Mary-Ann is not a killer by nature. She has no qualms about hurting or disabling the heroes, but she's not going to try very hard to kill Don Maggio.

DESCRIPTION

Mary-Ann Lawson is blonde and blue-eyed, with a figure that is marathon-runner slim but attractive. However, her face already has a pinched quality to it reflecting the many disappointments of her life. She does not wear a costume, but instead dresses in the style of a fashionable city professional, usually wearing a black leather jacket over a nice blouse and charcoal slacks. She doesn't wear much jewelry, but one notable piece is a small and rather cheap-looking silver-colored pendant around her neck. It's got her initials ("MAL") on it.

BATTLE TACTICS

Ice Tease fights fast and dirty. She can absorb energy attacks but can't take much physical punishment, so

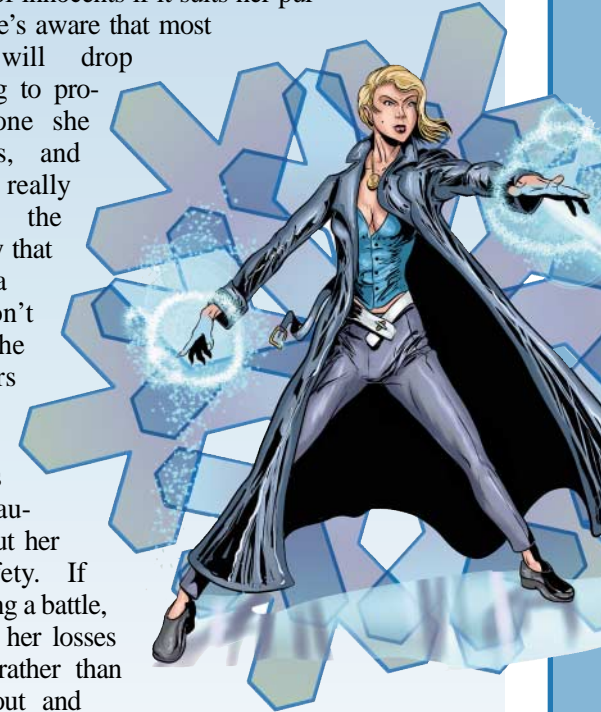
she makes maximum use of her speed and ability to reach cover. Her Ice Slick and Snare abilities are useful for putting her opponents off balance so she can try to pick them off one at a time.

She does not try to kill, but she casually threatens the lives of innocents if it suits her purposes. She's aware that most heroes will drop everything to protect anyone she endangers, and doesn't really consider the possibility that someday a hero won't rescue the bystanders in time.

Ice Tease is more cautious about her own safety. If she's losing a battle, she'll cut her losses and run rather than stick it out and risk being captured.

STORY SEED

Shortly after the events of this adventure, Ice Tease decides it's high time she retired. What makes this complicated is that there are people in the supervillain business who don't want her writing any tell-all books in her retirement. Seeing the PCs protect Don Maggio has given her an idea: she'd like them to help her fake her own death.





- *Walls are Just Floors at a Ninety Degree Angle:* By spending a villain point, Ice Tease can use the Wall Run power stunt to reach seemingly inaccessible places.

As was the case with Buzzbomb, the Spectre doesn't expect Ice Tease to succeed. It should be easy for the heroes to fend her off with some clever tactics and a few well-spent hero points, especially since Ice Tease is a cautious fighter who will retreat if she is in serious danger. The Spectre is using her attack as a distraction so that he can infiltrate the heroes' new location, and if she inflicts some damage along the way then so much the better.

THE SPECTRE STRIKES!

While Ice Tease is distracting the heroes, the Spectre takes the opportunity to examine whatever location the heroes have chosen for protecting Don Maggio. If they've chosen to remain at the penthouse, then there may not be much for the Spectre to do or see. If they have chosen a new location, then he moves through the walls disabling security systems and defenses.

If the adventure is drawing to a close, then the Spectre can attack immediately after Ice Tease is defeated. However, it's likely that the players will have things they want their characters to do after the attack. If this is the case, then the Spectre can lie in wait for the "perfect" opportunity (which will show up when the players have done whatever they want to do).

When he does attack, the Spectre focuses his attention on killing Don Maggio. He attacks any characters that get in his way, but turns away from them as soon as they cease to be a threat. (A character may be able to gain an advantage by pretending to be incapacitated – if she succeeds in a Bluff check against the Spectre's Sense Motive check, then she can catch the Spectre flat-footed.) If unopposed, the Spectre will disable Maggio with his Fear attack or Phasing attack, then kill him with a coup-de-grace attack. The PCs must keep him busy to prevent this.

Some of the Spectre's favorite battle tactics are:

- *Bring the Lights Down:* If cutting off the lights reduces visibility, then the Spectre will blow the fuses, cut the power lines, or just flip off the switch. His Darkvision allows him to act normally while benefiting from the concealment of darkness.
- *Fear and Loathing:* By using extra effort (or a villain point), the Spectre can add the Intimidating Presence extra to his Cause Fear power. Normally a Super-Charisma extra, this half action forces opponents within 30 feet to make Will saving throws (DC 20). Those who fail are shaken and suffer a -2 penalty to attack rolls, saves, and skill checks for two rounds.

THE SPECTRE

PL 14; Init +3; Defense 27 (24 flat-footed); Spd float 50 ft.; Atk +10 melee (+10L, phase attack, use Fort save), +13 ranged (DC20 Will save, drain); SV Dmg +2, Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +4; Str 10, Dex 16, Con 14, Int 16, Wis 14, Cha 14.

Skills: Computers +10, Disable Device +10, Forgery +10, Hide +6, Intimidate +12, Knowledge (supers) +10, Read Lips +10, Sense Motive +6, Spot +6.

Feats: Cape Follower, Darkvision, Identity Change, Immunity (suffocation), Improved Critical (Cause Fear), Indomitable Will, Iron Will, Penetrating Attack (Cause Fear), Penetrating Vision (blocked by living flesh), Startle

Powers: Cause Fear (Drain Will) +10 [*Extras:* Range, Slow Recovery; *Flaw:* Limited – One Attribute; *Source:* Mutation; *Cost:* 30 pp], Incorporeal +10 [*Affected by:* unarmed melee attacks from living beings; *Extras:* Float, Ghost Touch, Phase Attack; *Source:* Mutation; *Cost:* 50 pp]

Weakness: The tightly-wound Spectre is Vulnerable to any mental attack that affects his emotions.

NEW FEAT: CAPE FOLLOWER

Your mind is a treasure trove of facts and trivia about superheroes and supervillains. If you know who you're facing – not difficult given the average villain's fondness for announcing his identity in CAPITAL LETTERS – then you may remember something useful.

Benefit: Once per encounter, you may choose a “super” character – heroes and villains without powers are still “super”, but ordinary folk like “the third

mobster on the left” are not – and make a Knowledge (supers) check. The DC is equal to 30 minus the power level of the character you chose. If the character has the Fame or Infamy feats, then the DC is further reduced by 3.

If the check succeeds, you remember a useful fact about the character you chose. You gain a +1 bonus to any roll that directly affects that character for the duration of the encounter. You may share this bonus with any other characters that you communicate the fact to. Telling other characters is a free action, and the other characters must be able to understand your communication to benefit from the bonus.

This bonus does not stack with itself, and the feat is useless when encountering a new or especially mysterious super character that nobody knows anything about. The GM's discretion applies here.

BIOGRAPHY

Matthew Lovell grew up paralyzed by fear. The slightest shadow made him jump; meeting a new person gave him nightmares. His parents offered therapy, meditation, and Prozac, but nothing seemed to work. In the end, Matthew found he had nothing to rely on but himself. He turned his thoughts inward,

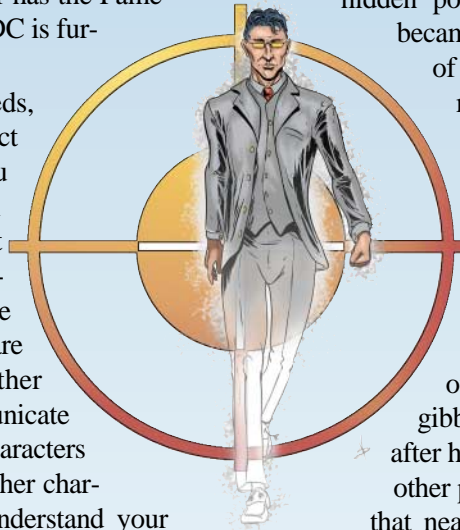
confronted them head-on for days, and in the end mastered them.

While defeating his fears, Matthew unlocked the hidden potential of his mind. Always bright, he became super-intelligent, aware of the workings of every cell of his brain. He found that his mind could hold sway over matter, allowing him to look through walls, pass through objects like a ghost, and even turn things that he touched insubstantial for brief periods of time.

He also learned how to project his ongoing nightmares – still present, just under rigid control – into the minds of others, an experience that usually left them gibbering on the floor for several minutes after he let them go. He found he liked watching other people break under the weight of the fears that nearly broke him. After a series of experiments with animals and relatives, he set off to learn how far his powers could take him.

Fortunately for the world, the ability to walk through walls and cause terror is a little too personal for grand plans of conquest. They are perfect super-powers for an assassin, however, and Matthew quickly made a reputation for himself as the Spectre. He lives well, and he gets to do work that he enjoys. Matthew usually charges much more for his jobs than the \$50,000 that Robert Malina was able to offer, but the challenge sounded interesting and the idea of knocking off a retiring Mafioso amused him.

Continued on next page . . .



THE SPECTRE (CONTINUED)

DESCRIPTION

Matthew is a thin, well-muscled man with dark skin, a little under six feet tall. He has black hair, yellow eyes, and sharp, hawk-like profile. He wears an expensive, pale grey Italian suit and tasseled loafers. He is normally incorporeal, but can become solid at will.

He also maintains a secret identity, and can change his appearance at will to that of a 6'4", blond-haired man who usually wears a T-Shirt and jeans. He currently has papers identifying this version of himself as "J. Wentworth Day", a vacationing businessman from Portland, Oregon. (Maintaining this mental image of himself requires a great deal of the Spectre's concentration, and he has no access to his other powers while in this form.)

BATTLE TACTICS

The Spectre relies on stealth and the ability to incapacitate his foes with fear. He can't win a fight by trading blows, so he ducks in and out of fights, striking when he has the opportunity. His most lethal attack is his ability to pass his hand through a character's head and scramble her brain, but getting close enough to touch somebody leaves him vulnerable to that character's melee attacks. This makes the brain scramble more of a finishing move than a primary attack.

Whenever possible, the Spectre avoids physical contact with living beings. Their life energy disrupts his thought processes, and he is unable to maintain his incorporeality and move through their bodies. Unarmed living beings can hit him, and he can't move or see through them. (He can do the hand-through-the-head trick, but only because he does it quickly. It's also quite painful for him.)

STORY SEED

Matthew Lovell has lost control of his inner demons, and they're tearing his mind apart. Depending on the tone of your campaign and the availability of "transportation to the mindscape" plot devices, his mental problems could be confined to his own head or taking over the city. Either way, somebody has to go into the darkest recesses of his mind and slay the monsters within. A dungeon would be a great metaphor for Matthew's thoughts, and especially brave GM's might even put a dragon at its heart . . .

■ *Getting Steamed:* The Spectre can create environmental hazards by turning water and steam pipes insubstantial, or cause a short circuit and fire by removing the insulation from an electrical wire. Another good destructive trick is to reach into a lit fireplace, pick up burning logs, and toss them through the walls into adjoining rooms.

■ *Now You See Him . . . :* By stepping through a wall and attacking, the Spectre sometimes find a foe who's not quite ready for him. To determine this, both the Spectre and the foe make opposed Reflex checks. If the Spectre wins, the foe is flat-footed for the rest of the Spectre's action. If the Spectre makes a charge attack, he gains a +2 bonus on the Reflex save.

■ *. . . Now You Don't:* The Spectre also loves to launch an attack against a character, then use his remaining half action to move to the other side of a wall, ceiling or floor. Keep in mind that the Spectre's Penetration Vision lets him to keep track of what's going on in the rooms around him.

The Spectre will retreat if he is outmatched, but is more likely to step away from a battle for a moment and then attack from an unexpected direction. He is confident that he can avoid most harm, which means that he is likely to stick around long enough for the PCs to incapacitate and capture him. (It's convenient if they do capture him, since he has valuable information that he can trade to them for his freedom.)

If the heroes defeat the Spectre, then no more attacks will be launched against Don Maggio. If they like, the players can sit back, let the characters protect the mobster, and collect some experience points. By now, however, they should have at least some interest in who ordered the hit, an interest you can play on if necessary by having the Spectre offer up information. For more information, see the Investigations section below.

INVESTIGATIONS

Sooner or later, at least one PC is going to want to take a more proactive approach and protect Don Maggio by finding and stopping whoever is sending the hit men. This investigation can be conducted in between action scenes or it can take place after the attacks on Don Maggio have been dealt with. Either approach to the adventure works, but weaving together action and investigation is more satisfying.

As the GM, you control the action scenes of this adventure. The villains attack the heroes when and where they want to, and the players must react to each situation as you present it. For the investigative scenes of the adventure, that control should be reversed. You should encourage the players to investigate where and how they like, even if it means improvising because they're pursuing a possibility not covered in this adventure.

(I like to think we've covered all the likely possibilities, but if they decide to investigate Buzzbomb's childhood you're on your own. Perhaps he grew up in a small town in Indiana, and his parents still live there. Maybe they'll know something useful, like where he's been staying in the city. That's the sort of improvisation you'll have to do – something that rewards the players

for looking where they did with information that leads them back to the clues you're sure about.)

Encouraging the players means providing them with opportunities. After each action scene, give them at least a couple of minutes to collect themselves and figure out what to do next. Have a clue ready so that if they start looking around you can quickly reward them with information. The information you give should suggest the possibility of further information, and provide hints about how to find it. Your clues should be breadcrumbs leading the characters forward a step at a time.

At the same time, don't force them to investigate. If they just want to sit back and fight bad guys, that's okay. They don't have to figure out Malina's behind the hit to succeed at the adventure. Let their enthusiasm guide the pacing – don't rush to the next action scene if they're excited about following the trail, and don't hesitate to send the next bad guy through the door if they're not interested.

The sections that follow detail groups of clues that are available to the player characters, along with suggestions about where and how to present them.



CLUES FROM BUZZBOMB AND ICE TEASE

Buzzbomb and Ice Tease know that the Spectre hired them, but do not know who hired the Spectre. Since last night, they have been staying in adjoining rooms at the Monarch Arms, a third-rate hotel about ten blocks north of the Swan. If either of these villains flees a fight, the PCs can follow them back to the hotel by letting them think they have escaped. If captured, they give up this information easily.

The Spectre rented their rooms a week ago, paying cash in advance through Saturday. The clerk that handled this transaction has a vague memory of a good-looking man with long blond hair. While not very useful, this memory is accurate, and a skilled telepath or post-cognitive may be able to recover a much better image.

While staying at the hotel, Buzzbomb and Ice Tease have received instructions through letters left on their bed. (An easy trick for an incorporeal villain.) The text of the letters is unremarkable, but examining the paper reveals that it is Secolo XIII stationery made by Fabriano. This hand-made cotton paper is one of the most exclusive and expensive writing papers in the world – a box of 50 sheets costs \$100, and only 3 stores in New York sell it. One of them is in the building next to the Swan Hotel.

The sales clerk at “Mightier than the Sword” remembers the man who bought the Secolo XIII stationery well. He describes him as big, tall, and blond, with a hook nose and glittering blue eyes. The clerk has seen the man pass by a few times in the days since he bought the paper, and thinks it is quite possible that he is staying at the Swan Hotel.

CLUES FROM THE SPECTRE

If the Spectre has been captured, then he’ll cheerfully trade the identity of his client for his freedom, making the offer more appealing by revealing he was hired by an important city official. If the PCs have not turned him over to the authorities, then it’s easy enough for them to let him go. (The Spectre will watch their behavior carefully, though, and will refuse to give the name if he suspects a double-cross.)

If he is already in jail, then the heroes will have to make some arrangements for release with an authority figure such as the police chief, the mayor, or the governor. This is relatively easy to do, assuming the

characters have the right connections or are willing to spend a hero point to edit the right connections into a character’s history. Whoever the PCs contact is eager to root out possible corruption in the city government, and will authorize the release of the Spectre in the hopes of catching a bigger fish.

The PCs can also force the answer out of the Spectre via telepathy, mind control, or some kind of trick. Any well-thought-out plan should succeed, because the information the Spectre has to share has one important limitation: as discussed below, it’s worthless as evidence.

If the Spectre has not been captured, it’s harder to get useful information out of him. As noted above, Buzzbomb or Ice Tease provide a trail that leads back to the Spectre’s hotel. Contacts in the underworld might be able to provide part of the money trail between the Spectre and Malina. Getting this information requires a Gather Information check (DC 20). Once that part of the money trail is uncovered, the PCs can follow it back to Malina with a Computers check (DC 25) or the help of a sympathetic friend in the banking business.

Another approach the PCs can take is reviewing security camera footage to see if they can spot the Spectre. They can search footage of the lobby and halls of the Swan Hotel, either in the hopes of finding him scouting the building or because they’ve guessed he might be staying there. They can also check airport and train footage, since it’s well-known that the Spectre is from out of town.

Both jobs are made more difficult by the fact that the Spectre’s secret identity looks very different from his “working” face. If the players know what the secret identity looks like, then they can find him on airport security tapes – where he’s seen taking a cab to the Swan – and on the hotel tapes, where he checks in and goes in and out of room 1138, which is registered to “J. Wentworth Day”. If they don’t know his secret identity, they can spot him when he gets distracted for a moment and accidentally walks **through** the side of a potted plant. Noticing an error like this is automatic if they think to look for it, and requires a Spot check (DC 20) if they don’t think of it.

(Going through the tapes is a long, detail-filled task that’s as boring as a Yanni concert. Put the speedster on it.)

If the heroes locate and search the hotel room, they find the usual luggage and clothes of a well-to-do businessman. The hotel room also has a safe in the closet, which is locked. Opening it requires a Disable Device check (DC 15), and reveals a laptop stored within. Getting past the laptop's password programs requires a Computers check (DC 20). The laptop's hard drive is mostly empty, but there are a few computer games, the beginnings of a not-very-good novel about Jack the Ripper, and a file full of emails about the hit.

The emails have been anonymized, though a Computers check (DC 30) will trace them back to a computer in the offices of the district attorney. The correspondence begins nine days ago, and most of the early emails involve sending payment to an off-shore Caribbean bank notorious for catering to supervillains. The most interesting email is one confirming that the PCs have been put in charge of protecting Maggio – a dossier detailing the PC's strengths and weaknesses has been included as an attachment, and the email itself is dated just minutes after the heroes accepted the job. Only someone working in Malina's office would have known this fact so quickly.

CLUES FROM THE MAN ON THE PHONE

There's a part of Malina's personality that regrets involving the PCs in his schemes, especially since there's a real possibility they'll get hurt defending the man he's trying to kill. He also knows that the Spectre has a better chance of killing Maggio if the heroes aren't trying too hard to defend him. With that in mind, he's decided to try to influence them with a series of phone calls reminding them of Maggio's dark history and the foolishness of trying to protect him.

RED HERRINGS

There's a lot going on in this adventure already, and some tough decisions for the PCs at the end of it. Unless you like long play sessions, you should avoid sending the characters down too many blind alleys. However, there are a couple of red herrings that are worth spending time on, especially if the players enjoy investigative adventures.

The other Mob families have an obvious motive for offing Don Maggio. In fact, there's no reason they can't be trying to kill him too, and you can always throw in some drive-by hits and bombings if you need more action. (If you need game statistics for the mobsters, you can use the stats for the Maggio Family listed above.) The mobsters don't have to be innocent; they're just not responsible for hiring the Spectre.

If you already have mob characters in your campaign, then it's easy to make them the primary rivals of Don Maggio (or whatever you call him in your version of this adventure). If you haven't established this information yet, then the Cesario family is the most likely suspect. Don Julio Cesario and Don Maggio have been struggling to control the city's underworld for years, and Maggio's most damaging testimony is aimed at the Cesario family.

Any underworld contacts the player characters have come up dry on this one. They know a hit is on, but there's no sign the Families are involved in hiring the Spectre. If any of the PCs are brash enough to confront a mob boss and demand information, the boss cheerfully admits that he'd love to see Maggio dead, but insists he isn't paying any supervillains to do the job.

If you need to get the PCs back on track, the mobsters can volunteer to help track down the money spent on the hit. (After all, anybody that determined to kill Don Maggio might also be a danger to them.) Some of the money for the Spectre did move through mob-controlled banks, giving the PCs a lead they can track back to Malina.

Assistant DA Daniel Sissman is another likely suspect, especially if the players remember that one of the traditional rules of the mystery genre is that the killer always hides in plain sight. Daniel has the opportunity to be the killer – he has all the information he needs available, plus he's from a wealthy family and can afford to pay for a hit – and you can highlight the possibility if the PCs are getting too close to Malina too quickly. When you look at him more closely, however, the scenario falls apart. He's good at his job, he has a happy family life, and there's no sign he's corrupt. He simply has no motivation to kill Maggio.

To this end, a few days ago he purchased a voice distorter from a mail order spy gizmo store. When he has the opportunity – i.e. when the action is running a little slow and you need to goose the players a little – he slips out of the office and places a call to the mobile phone that Assistant DA Sissman gave to the PCs earlier. He makes the calls from one of three stolen mobile phones procured for him yesterday by the Spectre. To preserve his anonymity, he keeps the conversations short and discards each phone as soon as he’s done with it.

Like most mobile phones, the heroes’ phone records and displays the number that’s calling it. That’s not much use, since the numbers in question belong to three careless students at a nearby university. Like most mobile phones, though, the stolen phones have a small GPS unit in them that can be used to determine the phone’s location. Tracing the phone requires a Computers check (DC 15). Tracing the phone before Malina has left the scene requires a Computers check (DC 30).

There is another, sneakier solution to this problem. The heroes can put a trace on the secure number for Malina that Sissman gave them along with their mobile phone. If they track **that** number and go to his location when the next phone call comes in, they may well catch him with the stolen phone in his hand. It’s a big leap forward in the investigation, but PCs still have to figure out what to do about Malina, and this is a good time for the Spectre to launch an all-out attack on Don Maggio.

CLUES ABOUT THE DA’S MOTIVATION

Getting Malina’s name is an important step forward in the investigation, but it’s not the whole story. The district attorney is one of the most respected officials in the city, and nobody will take allegations against him seriously without some kind of proof. If the PCs want to do anything about the situation, they’ll need to know how and why Malina ordered Don Maggio’s death.

One useful clue can be the absence of clues. If the PCs investigate the district attorney’s office, they find nothing amiss in the department’s finances, policies, or prosecutions. Malina runs a tight ship, and there’s simply no sign of corruption in the department. Whatever is going on, it has nothing to do with Malina’s work.

If the PCs investigate Malina’s personal history, they discover another absence. The man’s work is impeccable, and he seems to have no life outside it. He is a lifelong bachelor, doesn’t socialize outside of work, and has nothing but commendations on his employment record. His only hobby seems to

be racquetball games at a fitness center near his office. He lives in a small house on the east side of town – the security system is excellent, requiring a Disable Device check (DC 25) to bypass – and there’s almost nothing incriminating to be found there. His neighbors say he is quiet, that he works late often, and that he spends most of his time at home reading on the porch or tending the small garden behind his house.

That’s the Robert Malina of the last 30 years – a skilled, dedicated, rather boring civil servant. The Robert Malina of the mid-to-late 1960s is quite different, and he turns up in an unexpected place – the gossip and society pages. Any character looking through old newspaper records of the time finds mention of “the dashing young lawyer” recently hired to work for the city. There are plenty of pictures of a tall, thin, devilishly handsome young man enjoying all of the best parties and nightclubs, usually with at least one admiring young lady in tow. Some of his companions are debutantes, others are showgirls, and there’s one girl who turns up over and over again in photos from 1967 and 1968. She is identified as “dancer Julia Willis”, and one of the last photographs of her and Malina together is the photograph that Malina keeps in his office.

The newspaper records can be found by any character that thinks to look for them, and hints to Malina’s past can also be turned up with a successful Gather Information check (DC 20). An older neighbor or office worker may remember that Malina was once “quite the rake”, or an underworld contact may hint that the now-sedate lawyer once ran with a more dangerous crowd. If the heroes want to know more, the character dropping the hint can then suggest checking out the newspapers.

The last likely area for the PCs to investigate is Malina’s finances. It doesn’t take more than looking around to see that the district attorney does not spend more than a small fraction of his substantial salary on himself. Finding out what he’s done with the rest may take social engineering (going to the bank and talking your way into a look at his accounts), hacking (into the bank’s computers), or outright burglary (breaking into the DA’s house and going through his personal papers). All of these actions are fairly difficult, requiring relevant skill checks around DC 30, but they all yield up a useful fact: Malina has saved \$50,000 over the last year, and he sent it all out in a series of online transactions earlier this week. The trail has been broken up so that it does not draw legal attention, but it’s obvious to anyone who chooses to look for it.

CLUES ABOUT JULIA WILLIS

Julia Willis is a crucial link in the investigation, and you should highlight her importance by encouraging the players to follow up on any mention of her name or involvement with Malina. If the players don't remember (or didn't look for) the picture in Malina's office, then ask them to make an Wisdom check (DC 10) for their characters after they've seen Willis's picture in the papers. Any character that succeeds remembers seeing the photograph of her with Malina in his office.

If the heroes question other characters about Malina's past social life, those characters should remember his relationship with "that dancer, Julia somebody or other." Older characters remember the relationship from the papers or from knowing Malina at the time, while younger associates of Malina remember being told by older friends that this was the only serious relationship the district attorney has ever had. Exactly what the PCs hear depends on who and what they're asking, but any answer should make it clear that Julia was a unique part of Malina's life.

It's also possible that the players will pursue another avenue of investigation that will have little or nothing to do with Malina's personal life. If this happens, then Julia can be brought into the picture as a possible source of information. Whomever the PCs are seeking information from can remember that she is an old friend of his and suggest interviewing her.

Any character reading further in the newspapers of the time discovers more information about Julia. In particular, it becomes clear that "dancer" refers to "exotic dancer." "Boom Boom Willis" receives prominent billing in ads for several gentlemen's clubs, and the items about the couple in the gossip columns have a distinct wink-and-a-nudge phrasing to them. Further study also yields an interesting absence – Julia and Malina both vanish from the newspapers at about the same time in early 1969. They're no longer mentioned on the social scene, and Julia's name stops showing up in the gentlemen's club advertisements.

Another clue takes more careful reading to discover. Any character who makes a Knowledge (local) or Knowledge (history) check (DC 15) remembers a fact about all of the gentlemen's clubs that Julia danced at: they were all owned by the Cesario crime family.

After learning these facts, the players should want to talk to Julia Willis, if only to learn a bit more about Malina. She's easy to find – the phone book lists a "J Willis" living at 2237 Baldrige Avenue, and any routine search through official records like mortgage documents or the registry of motor vehicles turns up the same address. There's even a small fan website to be found on the net – it's mostly old publicity stills and a few digitized files of grainy 8mm film, but the fan running the site has met Julia. If the PCs send him a polite email with their contact information, he passes it on to Julia, who then calls the PCs.

(The fan's name is Toby Holderman. He wasn't even born when Julia retired from dancing, but his father was a fan of Julia's, and Toby discovered some pictures and programs while cleaning out the attic one day. He got interested, did some research, and another website was born. Toby has eclectic interests, and might be a useful contact in future adventures.)

No matter how the PCs locate Julia, she's home when they call or visit. She's happy to speak with them, and invites them over or in for tea. The scene that follows is detailed below.

TEA WITH JULIA WILLIS

Julia Willis lives in a three-room apartment on the first floor of an old brownstone. There's a buzzer with her name on it by the front door, and if the players press it their call is immediately answered with a cheery "Come in! Come in!" The front door lock clicks, and Julia meets the characters at the door of the apartment, shifting from foot to foot to prevent an inquisitive ginger tom cat from slipping out the door.

Julia is a comfortably proportioned woman in her mid-sixties. She has curly gray hair, and the eyes behind her spectacles are hazel. She wears a sensible skirt and blouse in a not-too-fashionable style, and the blue Wal-Mart vest hung up by the door hints that she may have bought her clothes there with her employee discount. Her face is just a little bit too made-up, a last hint of glamour in a now-ordinary life. She smiles easily, and repeats herself occasionally, and seems genuinely enthusiastic to have company even on a serious matter.

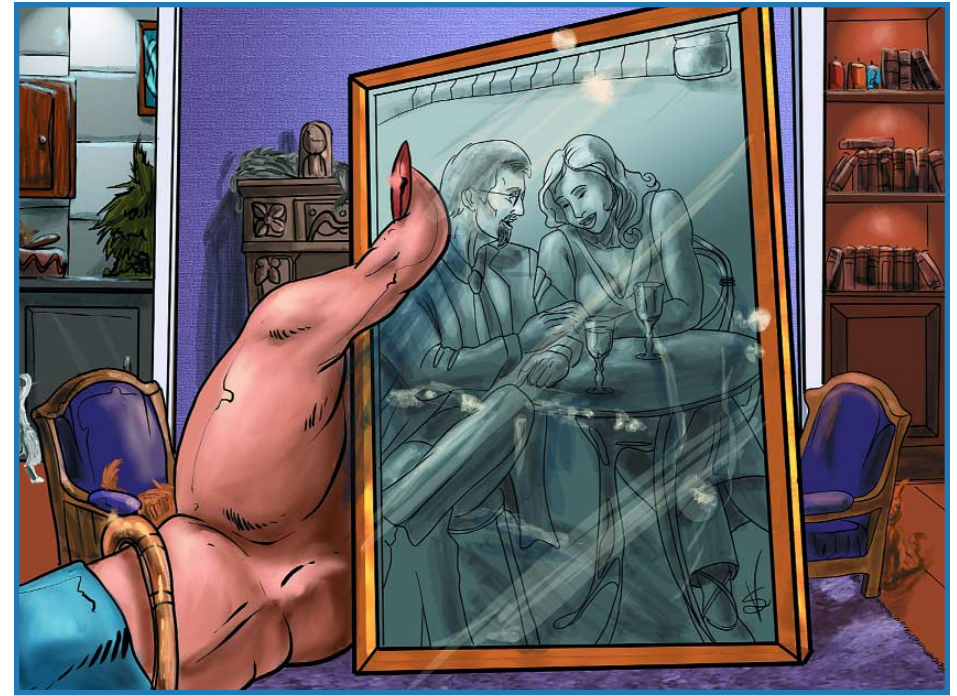
The living room of her apartment is full of memorabilia and cats. At least three of the cats are draped over each other on a carpeted window sill over the radiator, and over the course of the conversation three or four more wander into the room to befriend or sneer at the player characters. Scattered around the walls of the room are playbills, programs, and publicity pictures. Most of them are for exotic dance shows at various clubs of the 1960s, and some of the photographs must have been quite risqué in their time. If asked about her career, Julia cheerfully gives a tour of her collection, taking as much pleasure in showing her memories as Don Maggio did in showing his paintings.

“It was the last days of burlesque and we all knew it,” she says, “but we still had a great time with it. Jennie Lee, Dixie Evans, we all had our acts and let me tell you, we were good. The strip-tease was an art back then, and we were good.”

Not all of Julia’s photos are from the days of burlesque. There are quite a few photos of her holding a young boy, walking through the park with him, helping him blow out candles on a birthday cake. In other photos – which can be dated to the seventies and eighties by styles of clothing and changes in backgrounds – the boy grows up to a young man. He’s his mother’s son, energetic with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes.

If asked about these photos, Julia grows more serious. “That’s my Charlie,” she says. “He was a good boy, but he ran with the wrong people. The Cesario family, I used to work for them, and they always looked after their girls even after the burlesque acts closed down. He ended up working for them too, but he died in one of those gang hits a few years ago.” There are no tears in her eyes, just a touch of sadness.

There’s one last photo, the final piece of the puzzle. It’s the photo of Robert and Julia at the restaurant, sitting on the mantelpiece where Julia can see it from her favorite chair. If asked about it, Julia’s face lights back up again, albeit in a wistful way. She tells the PCs, “That’s my other boy, Charlie’s dad. We had quite a thing going back then, but when we found out Charlie was on the way we knew he couldn’t marry a girl who used to work for the mob. He had his career to think of, so we made do as best we could. He was always a good dad to Charlie, took proper care of us both, came over whenever he could. He took it hard when Charlie died, very hard.”



That should be all the players need to put the pieces together, but Julia or the newspaper records can fill in the details if necessary. Charles Willis, *piciotto* of the Cesario family and unacknowledged son of District Attorney Robert Malina, died on May 5, 1998 in a drive-by shooting during a war between the Cesario family and the Maggio family. Since the summer of 1998, DA Malina has been on a crusade against the Families in general and the Maggio family in particular, doing tremendous damage over the years with a series of successful investigations and prosecutions.

Given enough time, Malina might have been satisfied using the law to destroy the Maggio family – but two weeks ago the man responsible for his son’s death decided to retire and disappear into the witness protection program. By hiring a hit man to assassinate Don Maggio, Robert Malina is trying to gain vengeance once and for all.

Julia knows nothing of Malina’s plot – in fact, she hasn’t spoken to him in months. She is an innocent party in this affair, and if the player characters are kind they’ll leave her that way.

A DECISION TO BE MADE

After talking to Julia, the player characters should have everything they need to take action. They should know who ordered the hit, why, and how it was paid for. Most of their evidence is not strong enough for a court, but it's enough to start an investigation that will uncover the evidence needed for a conviction. The players have everything they need to ruin Robert Malina and probably send him to jail.

As the GM, your job is to sit back and see what happens next. It's the players' dilemma – let them tackle it without any steering from you. All you need to do is make sure all the viewpoints are heard and that the players don't forget any facts or possibilities they'll regret forgetting later.

The heroes have three likely courses of action. They can:

■ **Do nothing.** It's not like Don Maggio is a saint. He may be genial, but he's been killing people for decades and he's about to get off scot-free for it. There's a case to be made that killing him is justice.

Unfortunately, that doesn't change the fact that Robert Malina has committed a crime. He's also abused his power by using his position as district attorney to improve his chances of success, and he has placed the PCs and innocents in harm's way by hiring a bunch of vicious super-criminals to do the job. Furthermore, if the PCs let him get away with it, they become accessories.

By most standards, this is probably the wrong thing for the heroes to do. This doesn't mean that you should punish the players for choosing this option, but it's a choice that's likely to spawn future complications. If the Spectre knows that the PCs covered for Malina, that knowledge is likely to get out into the underworld, and an enemy may use it to blackmail or embarrass the PCs. A nosy reporter could uncover the truth, or Assistant DA Sissman may figure out what events were happening around him. In any of these cases, the PCs may face with the choice of revealing their action or taking steps to conceal it.

■ **Set the law on Malina.** For all the reasons above, this is the most obviously "right" choice. If the heroes turn Malina in, they will have done their duty in the eyes of the law, and he'll receive the justice

he deserves. This option is likely to be a favorite for characters who believe in law and order above all.

That said, there's some downsides to this choice too. Arresting the DA for attempted murder will cause a gigantic scandal, one that will shake the entire city government and cost the PCs some allies. Savvy defense attorneys will reopen every case that Malina has been involved in for years, and a number of the city's worst criminals might end up back on the streets as a result.

There's also a smaller, more human consequence to be consider. Robert Malina has done a terrible thing, but it's one terrible thing in a life devoted to public service. He's not by any definition a bad man, and even though he brought his fate upon himself his arrest should be more tragedy than triumph.

■ **Confront Malina, and force him to resign.** This is the middle course, the gray path between the black and white solutions above. It acknowledges that turning Malina over to the law does more harm than good, but it also makes sure that he has no further opportunities to abuse his power.

The advantage of this approach is that it avoids most of the consequences of the previous choices. Scandal is avoided, and while it's still possible for somebody to uncover the cover-up, there's a lot less incentive for them to do so. The misdeeds of a now-retired attorney aren't really going to be of interest to anyone – what would have been headlines is now simply history.

The disadvantage, of course, is that there's no justice to this solution. Two men do evil; both get away with it and (potentially) live happily ever after. It's a choice that'll drive some player characters – and even some players – up the wall. If the players come up with it themselves and choose it freely, though, it's the most appropriate ending.

There are also extreme options, such as killing or blackmailing Malina, or letting Maggio and Malina shoot each other. How well these possibilities work depends on what kind of tone you want for the campaign – they may be appropriate for a grim'n'gritty game, but aren't usually an option for conventional heroes.

THE FINAL CONFRONTATION

Unless the player characters do nothing, they should have a final meeting with Malina. This kind of scene plays best as a quiet confrontation, just Malina and the PCs. However, this is another situation where what happens is in the hands of the players. If they turn their information over to the police, their only contact with Malina may be seeing him perp-walked out of his offices and packed into a squad car. If so, so be it; that's not a bad image to end the adventure on.

Most players like more closure than that, however, and will arrange it for themselves by asking to meet with Malina personally. If you can, set the scene at night – it makes a nice contrast with the daylight meeting that began the adventure. As with the previous meeting, Malina is sitting at his desk, but this time it is empty of books and papers, and he slouches in his chair.

WHAT IF DON MAGGIO TAGS ALONG?

It's possible that the PCs will bring Don Maggio to this scene. If so, let him fade to the background and observe. Bringing him into the scene risks turning it into a one-man show instead of a showdown between the player characters and Malina. You want the players speaking to you, not watching you contort yourself between two characters speaking to each other.

Should the players be curious what Maggio's reactions are, describe him as cold, emotionless, reptilian. The don knows better than to speak up and draw attention to himself, but he's dropped his mask of geniality and stares at Malina with no sign of guilt or remorse for the events of the past. Maggio feels no need to justify himself, to the PCs or anyone else. Mob wars happen, Charles Willis died in one, he's all but forgotten now.

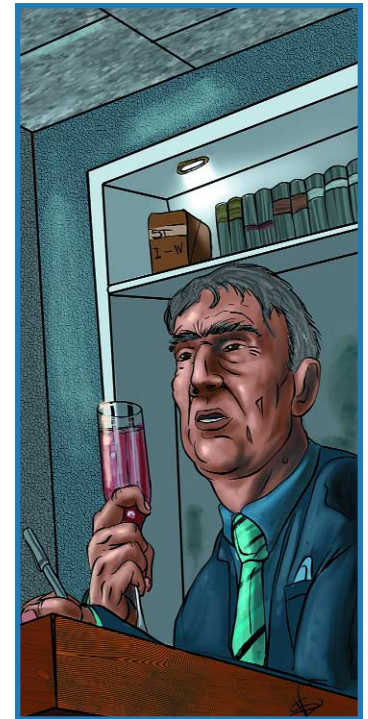
Neither Malina nor Maggio take action against each other. They're two normal humans surrounded by superheroes – violence is pointless.

As the heroes come in, he says, "I know why you're here." He then remains silent, waiting for the PCs to talk.

Of all the scenes in this adventure, this one is the most dependent on your acting skills. There's no action or revelation to drive the scene, so it depends on your ability to deliver an emotional punch. Most of that comes from putting yourself in Malina's shoes for a few minutes. You're exhausted after days of stress. You've just thrown away your career and your life savings. Unless the PCs have failed, the man who killed your son is going to live comfortably in retirement for years to come. You've risked everything, come up with worse than nothing... and you'd probably do it again if you had the chance. You feel bitter despair and rage, and an iron will is the only thing that is holding it back. With this emotional context in mind, listen to what the PCs say and respond as you think Malina would.

The heroes will almost certainly have some demands for Malina, whether it be turning himself over to the police, resigning, or another option. If the demands are at all reasonable, and if the players present them well, then Malina accepts them. He's a broken man, and he doesn't really have much choice. If the demands are completely unreasonable – "shoot yourself" would be an example – or the players present them lifelessly, then whichever PC is talking the most should make a Diplomacy or Intimidate check against Malina's Will save. If Malina loses, then he agrees to the heroes' demands. If not, he defies them and suffers whatever consequences follow.

If it's at all possible, end the scene on this line from Malina: "So. I guess it's over. Saturday morning he gets on a plane and retires to a new life of sunshine and deep sea fishing. Who says there aren't any more happy endings?" Pause a moment, then move on to the aftermath.



TIMING ISSUES

If the Spectre is still at large, he should make his final attempt at the same time the heroes are confronting Malina. It's difficult to match up the pacing between a slow, quiet scene and an fast-paced "final attack" scene, so don't try it unless you have a lot of experience at running two scenes at once. You're better off running one scene and then the other.

If you think the battle with the Spectre will be short or anti-climactic, then run that scene first. If you think the Spectre has a good chance at succeeding and the battle will be exciting, then run Malina's scene first. This lets you add a bit more tragedy by having Malina try to call the Spectre off and fail. (The Spectre's policy is not to quit on a job just because the person responsible for the hit has had second thoughts. The way he puts it is, "I don't like people getting casual about murder – so I never accept cancellations.")

AFTERMATH

Assuming he survives, Don Maggio testifies before the grand jury, pointing out where many of the mob's bodies have been buried over the last few years. The Cesarios and most of the other Mafia families take big hits – a lot of people go to jail and those that don't decide to lie low for a while. The Maggio family expands its influence, and newer gangs from China and Vietnam gain a foothold in the city. Don Maggio does indeed go on to a pleasant and uneventful retirement.

If captured, Buzzbomb is likely to go straight, at least for a while. He may genuinely regret what he's done, but it'll only take a few sharp knocks to his psyche to send him over the edge again. Ice Tease is incorrigible, and will wheedle and scheme her way into an escape as quickly as possible. The Spectre is almost impossible to hold unless he's kept unconscious or his powers are neutralized. If neutralized, he will not try to escape, but will make the most of any opportunity that arises. All he needs is a power failure or a prison riot to be on the loose again.

Robert Malina stays or goes based on the actions of the PCs. If he goes, then Daniel Sissman is promoted to district attorney. In time, he can become a staunch ally of the player characters, especially if they avoid a scandal in removing Malina. The heroes are also likely to attract some positive publicity for their role in protecting Don Maggio, especially if the darker sides of the story never come to light.

A CHANCE MEETING

There's one last event that's worth saving for another session – preferably one weeks later during which everything is going wrong for one or more of the heroes involved in this story. Use this if the heroes force Malina to resign but do not reveal what they know to anyone else.

A few weeks or months later, one of the characters runs into Julia Willis on the street. She's pleased to see the PC in question, asks after all the other heroes on the team, and passes on the news of her life. She's well, and has been seeing Robert Malina regularly since he retired. Much to both of their surprise, the old flame of their youth has been rekindled, and they're even talking about getting married.

"Who could imagine it?" she says. "Us, getting married, at our age! Who says there aren't any more happy endings?"

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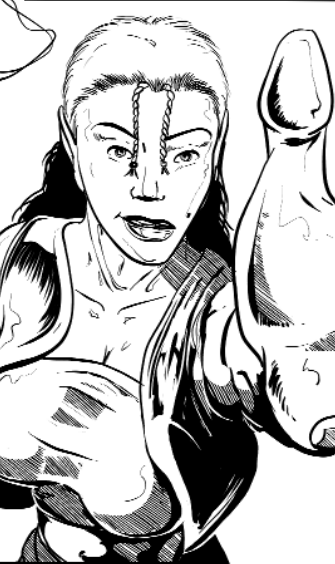
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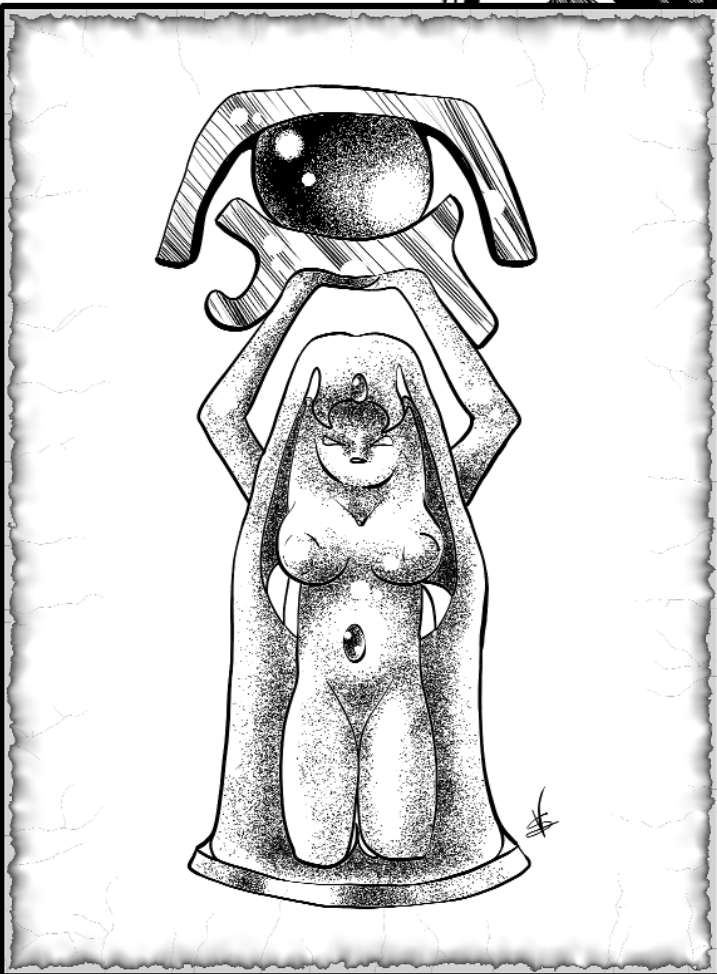


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